

Tarver Is Listless, Beats Muriqi, Barely

Written by Michael Woods
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It doesn't happen all that often but it did Saturday night at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford. The stock of the man who won the fight slipped, and the stock of the loser shot up. Antonio Tarver was "the winner," as the former light heavyweight titlist was granted a majority decision over super stubborn Elvir Muriqi, who cannot be rightfully described as "the loser."

The judges saw it 115-113, 116-112, 114-114 in favor of the 38-year-old Tarver, who looked like a man who hadn't fought in a year.

TSS scored it 115-113 for Muriqi.

The Kosovo Kid very nearly got a matchmaker fired, as he pestered Tarver for all twelve rounds, and performed far better than anyone predicted against a boxer two giant steps up from any competitor he'd previously faced.

Tarver left the building with the vacant IBO 175 belt.

In the twelfth round, the 28-year-old Muriqi told the judges that he wanted it more than Tarver did as he went to the body with left hooks. Tarver came out of the slumber at the one minute mark, but Muriqi wouldn't go to the floor if Tarver had a stun gun and slipped him a roofie before the round. Muriqi raised his hands and Ali Shuffled in the last few seconds.

Tarver (25-4, 18 KOs) flurried to begin the eleventh round and Muriqi (34-4, 21 KOs) waved him forward, asking for more punishment. Muriqi, who had never fought past the eighth round in any bout, showed that his cardio regimen was tip top. The action was plentiful for this late juncture.

Tarver put his left to work in the tenth, but that didn't put Muriqi off for long. The New York resident ducked and slipped smartly and landed to Tarver's body with oomph. The round was clearly the Kosovian's. But would the judges see it the same way, and reward the less well known boxer for his effort?

Into the ninth: the Kid kept on keeping on, kept on in Tarver's face, and the ex-champ didn't put his foot down hard on the pedal.

The eighth saw Tarver at his liveliest, for a brief spell: he came underneath with uppers that hit the mark, but he didn't have the juice to sustain that pace, and of course, the stubborn Kosovian pressed forward. Tarver went righty for kicks I guess to close the eighth.

In the seventh round, Muriqi appeared to be lagging some. He was throwing, but pushing punches more than snapping them at times. But hey, throwing's better than posing, which Tarver was doing too much of. Still, Tarver's accuracy probably took the round.

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Tarver came to attention at the start of the sixth, but again, Muriqi sent word that he wouldn't be accommodating. Tarver did take the sixth, on his activity alone. When he stayed busy, with those long limbs, Muriqi couldn't answer.

Muriqi landed a nifty right in the sixth and the sense that a considerable upset could unfold became all the more conceivable. Tarver even flinched when Muriqi teased with a feint right to the body. The former light heavy champ and the Kosovian bumped heads, and a cut formed on Muriqi's right peeper. The sight of the red woke up Tarver, who threw three long lefts after seeing color.

In the fourth round, Muriqi brought the action to Tarver, landing a right upper, and outworking the more heralded vet early. Tarver got more lively in the last third of the round, but not enough to take the round on the TSS card.

The third round, Muriqi stepped up as Tarver stepped back. The younger man, who fights out of the Bronx, NY, showed quite competent skills and a good belt-worth of tools acquired in years of amateur and professional action.

In the second, Tarver perked up. By the way, Buddy McGirt is no longer working with Tarver. His original trainer, Jimmy Williams, is back behind the wheel. He looked confident, perhaps overly so, as he took his jab out of the holster. He landed a counter left a few times against Muriqi, who doesn't have a slippery defense.

The first round saw Tarver, seemingly not under the influence of any foreign substance slipped to him by some shadowy miscreant, size up the Kosovo Kid. Muriqi was active, and effective, and didn't look overmatched.

SPEEDBAG Off the two performances tonight, Dawson is the favorite if his planned bout with Tarver takes place. For Tarver, I got a question. Anyone put anything in your water bottle tonight, Antonio?

--A beef took place afterwards, as Tarver commanded Muriqi possemembers out of the ring. Then, Tarver thundered that the judging was a disgrace, to Jim Gray. He called for the judge who called it a draw to be barred. "That was classic boxing," Tarver told Gray, who did well not to snort derisively. "The man was never in the fight, you had an A dog versus a B dog," he said. Hey, maybe someone did slip something to Tarver, cause he sounded like he was goofed on somethin.'

---Gray chatted with Muriqi, who said the "whole world knows I won the fight."
Muriqi gave a shoutout to trainer Colin Morgan, and then asked for a rematch.