

Saturday Night, Boxing Flexed Some Muscle

Written by Mike Lynch
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This Saturday night boxing flexed some legit muscle. And with any luck, the best is yet to come.

At a teeming Madison Square Garden on Saturday night boxing was more than alive and well. It was important. It was an athletic spectacle. It was a proud display of why there is still no sporting experience like a title fight with two willing warriors.

For a night, there was no talk of the demise of the sweet science during a bloody bout that was heavy on decidedly unscientific action.

There was that inimitable buzz in the air endemic to highly anticipated sporting events. The A-listers were out in full force in MSG and the crowd settled in early and eagerly. During the Bobby Pacquiao/Humberto Soto bout that "feeling" in the air was becoming more tangible, as brawls in the stands began vying with the action in the ring for the crowd's attention.

This was in Judah's native New York. But for all intents and purposes this might as well have been San Juan. On the eve of Manhattan's Puerto Rican Day Parade, at least 15,000 in the crowd were vocal Cotto supporters, many waving Puerto Rican flags. They chanted his name in unison hours before he entered the ring at a decibel level only surpassed by their booing of all things Judah. It was by and large a civil crowd, but the troglodytes in attendance always manage to be at peak performance in tense environs like this.

For Cotto supporters, this was supposed to be a weekend-long celebration. For Judah supporters, he was being dissed on his home turf. Let's not let the knuckleheads distract from a great night for boxing, that was by and large the prevailing sentiment. But let it be said that there was definitely a tension in the air---it wasn't so much if fights were going to break out, as much as where and when...so a smattering of knuckleheads definitely made their mark.

That said, as the final two undercard bouts ended on body blows, the crowd was united in its interest of watching the main event. And neither fighter disappointed.

Cotto's performance reinforced much of what we knew about him. He is without question a relentless warrior and in the later rounds almost seemed as quick as the electric Judah and eventually TKO'd him early in the 11th round.

At several points, he effortlessly switched lefty and confused the southpaw Judah. He worked the entire body (a little too much, with two apparently clear low-blows) and showed off a tremendous arsenal that wore out a refreshingly determined Judah.

However, everyone was certain Cotto would show up. Zab Judah made this fight. It feels odd to thank a tremendously well-compensated man for showing up to work. But thanks, Zab.

Judah was this fight's loser in the literal sense. And at 0-3 in his last four bouts (with a no

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contest), all signs point south for Judah. You could argue that he's no longer a top-rung contender, but the fact remains that he has gone toe-toe with 2 of the top five fighters in the world during that stretch. And he showed a resolve and professionalism that would be a welcome addition to his stocked arsenal. Somehow, he emerges from this a re-validated fighter.

At moments he was able to overwhelm Cotto. This included a stretch in the seventh-round where it felt from the stands like he was about to put him down after losing nearly every round to that point. The tough Cotto held on and was only galvanized by Judah's attack as he resumed his relentless barrage for the remainder.

But Judah was impressive in absorbing a cartell of punishment from Cotto. Equally impressive was how retained his composure despite two early low blows from Cotto. Who knows how damaging they were, but Judah claims they took a severe toll and if that were true a rematch would be great. We all know Judah can box, and if he's willing to be tough and professional, he remains a big-time fighter.

But hold onto that thought.

The most promising aspect of this great bout is what lies ahead. On July 14 Paul Williams takes on Antonio Margarito. The stars are nearly aligned for Cotto to take on Margarito next. But "nearly" is misleading. Paul Williams represents a significant challenge and will surely be favored by many. If that falls through, there is already talk of working a deal with Floyd Mayweather Jr., who most agree is only retired in the Jay-Z sense. That would be a mega-fight and half. Neither has De La Hoya's drawing power, but it would be HUGE. Two undefeated fighters.

At any rate, this is all a no-lose situation for boxing. It says plenty about the prospects of the sport when a rematch of the possible fight of the year is a last resort!

Readers, let's hear it: WHO SHOULD BE NEXT FOR MIGUEL COTTO?

And also, where does this put him P4P?