

Upset Shocker: Ben Dunne Dropped, Stopped

Written by Ronan Keenan
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DUBLIN, Ireland -- Going into Saturday's bout with European 122-pound champion Bernard Dunne, most insiders reckoned Spain's 21-year-old Kiko Martinez was an unworthy mandatory challenger with an overly padded 16 fight record.

But after 86 seconds of the first round Martinez slammed his critics by ripping the title from Dunne with a devastating onslaught that forced referee Terry O'Connor to rescue the helpless Irishman.

The hitherto noisy crowd of 8,000 at the Point Depot in Dublin were stunned into a surreal silence after witnessing the shocking event that ruined the world title dreams of their hometown favourite.

A third defence of his European crown against Martinez was supposed to be the launchpad for Dunne to begin his assault on the world stage, but it was the Dubliner who was assaulted by a ferocious attack from the stocky challenger.

"I don't know what went wrong," said a deflated Dunne, 24-1 (14), after the bout. "I was in great condition coming into this fight. I got caught cold and that was it. There's no excuses, that's just the way it is."

Dunne, 27, began the fight in a rather uncharacteristically aggressive manner, standing directly in front of his shorter opponent. But after just 30 seconds Martinez launched a sharp right-left combination that landed squarely on Dunne's exposed jaw, sending him to the canvas for the second time in his career.

The champion quickly got to his feet and appeared clear-headed, but Martinez was intent on scoring a quick knockout and immediately floored Dunne with a looping right hand to the temple.

Dunne beat the count, but he rose on rubbery legs. Martinez, 17-0 (14), resumed his attack, landing several heavy hooks to the body and head that saw Dunne crumple to the canvas, prompting the referee to end the dramatic contest.

"I'm disappointed for myself, but possibly more disappointed for the fans," said Dunne. "It's moments like this that will show me to be the fighter I think I am."

Dunne may get a chance to quickly bounce back as Martinez' management announced at the post-fight press conference that they would be happy to return to Ireland for an immediate rematch.

While Dunne's supporters struggled to comprehend what they had just witnessed, Martinez' camp were apparently expecting the result after it emerged that his team wagered nearly

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\$14,000 at odds of 66/1 on a first round knockout victory for their fighter.

In the co-feature, the highly-touted middleweight prospect Andy Lee enjoyed a successful debut performance in his native country when Ciaran Healy was retired on his stool after four rounds of one-sided action.

The US-based Lee, 23, used his extensive height and reach advantages to dictate the bout, utilizing a varied attack that kept Healy in a defensive mode throughout the contest.

Few observers expected Healy, 6-6-1 (1), to last the 8 round distance, but his tight guard resulted in Lee focusing on a body attack to gradually break down his stubborn opponent. Lee, 11-0 (8), was characteristically relaxed and seemed content to pick his shots without over-exerting himself.

His right hooks to the body frequently found their target, and by the fourth round Healy was visibly distressed whenever a body shot landed. The 2004 Olympian picked up the pace in the latter stages of the round and a flurry of body shots saw Healy desperately holding on as the bell sounded.

When the shaken Healy returned to his corner his trainer immediately signaled that his fighter had taken enough punishment for one night.

“He was a very awkward fighter to hit cleanly,” explained Lee after the bout. “I’ve been away from home for so long, it’s great being in front of my own people. I hope to come back and fight in Ireland before the end of the year.”

Said Lee’s trainer Emmanuel Steward: “I thought Andy fought a very smart fight. I told him not to get too excited and break [Healy] down with body punches. Hopefully Andy can fight in [his hometown] Limerick on November 17.

“Andy Lee will be middleweight champion of the world at the end of 2008.”

Also on the card, a relieved Tony Oakey retained his British light heavyweight title after a majority draw with Belfast’s Brian Magee in a contest most observers felt Magee deserved to win.