

Manfredo's Brain Vs. Jeff Lacy's Muscles

Written by David A. Avila

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Big hitting, big muscles Jeff Lacy steps in the ring against cool thinking Peter Manfredo in a fight that possibly provides the seesaw to who proceeds to the world championship level and who drops down to gate-keeper.

It's up or down for Lacy and Manfredo the two super middleweights who both were beaten by the great Joe Calzaghe. On Saturday at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, one of the fighters will return to the title hunt immediately. The fight will be televised on HBO pay-per-view.

"This is a great opportunity for me to get that title back," said Lacy (22-1, 17 KOs) who lost the IBF title to Calzaghe in overwhelming fashion. "I didn't really know it had great meaning to me."

Lacy ventured to Wales with his pulverizing fists that seemed to intimidate opponents before a punch was ever fired. He had that Mike Tyson-like persona that worked until he met Calzaghe. The Welshman cut Lacy's ego down to flyweight size.

Piston-like jabs, blazing combinations and fleet footwork had Lacy looking for a ghost as Calzaghe used the American bomber's head for a speed bag.

After 12 rounds there was no doubt who was the superior fighter though it didn't end in a knockout. It was a rare display of dominance without a knockout.

Next came Manfredo's turn.

The pride of Providence, Rhode Island had used the Contender reality television show to springboard to a world title fight against Calzaghe. After a solid knockout win over former world titleholder Scott Pemberton, he flew to Wales to match his talent against the Welshman.

The British referee never let the audience get a definitive look at whether Calzaghe was truly the better fighter, though it appeared he was. After Manfredo evaded 11 punches out of a 12-punch combination, the referee waved the fight over.

"I didn't get a shot against Calzaghe," said Manfredo (28-4, 13 KOs) during a conference call. "A lot of people seen the fight."

Though Manfredo would have loved a different outcome, he's not crying about it.

"Calzaghe is just looking on top of his game," said Manfredo after watching Calzaghe beat Denmark's Mikkel Kessler.

The Providence boxer knows he must vanquish Lacy to prove he belongs in the elite of the super middleweight division.

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"I go into every fight as if it's a must win especially with this fight," said Manfredo who fights under the Contender banner. "I'm actually excited about it because I get to be in there with one of the best."

Chavez wins

The son of the great Julio Cesar Chavez knocked out Ray Sanchez to set up a showdown with the Contender's Alfonso Gomez next March and has Mexican fans ballyhooing for the next generation of "El Gran Mexicano."

Is it too much too soon?

"I don't see anything more than an ordinary fighter," said Art Carillo, a trainer from Riverside, California who saw Chavez Jr. and Omar Chavez the younger brother both train before turning professional. "Maybe he can beat Alfonso Gomez but even that might be too much for Chavez Jr."

With a style very similar to his father's, Chavez marched through Sanchez's defense with perfectly aimed left hooks to the body and head. That left an opening for the right cross that Chavez fired to the New Mexico fighter's jaw. Several times during the fight Sanchez was stunned. At 1:33 of the sixth round a vicious combination of hooks and uppercuts floored Sanchez for good.

"Whoever they put in front of me I'll fight," said Chavez, the son of Mexico's great Julio Cesar Chavez.

Carillo sees flaws in Chavez.

"He doesn't throw a jab," said Carillo.

In a junior bantamweight match, Jorge Arce stopped Thailand's Medgoen Sangsurat with a left hook to the rib cage 48 seconds into the first round. The Thai fighter, who has the only knockout win over Manny Pacquiao, was unable to recover from the blow. Now Arce faces former world champion Martin Castillo in late March.

"It's going to be a great match," said Arce.

WBO junior flyweight titleholder Ivan Calderon experienced another close fight. This time the great Puerto Rican boxer used his superior movement to keep Mexico's determined Juan Esquer from mauling him. It was a unanimous decision win for Calderon whose move up in weight has made his fights more competitive.

Esquer, 21, had just beaten another flashy boxer Kermin Guardia in Miami about a month ago. His aggressive brawling style proves pretty effective against the quick-moving boxers that are plenty in the 108-pound weight division.

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Calderon, 32, is getting older and needs to fight the other titleholders in his division before it's too late. A match against IBF titleholder Ulises Solis, WBC titleholder Edgar Sosa and WBA titleholder Juan Revenco would be financially rewarding and give fans a peek at his skills.

Donaire wins too

IBF flyweight titleholder Nonito Donaire showed the boxing world that he wasn't a "flash in the pan" with a dominating performance that saw him hit Mexico's Luis Maldonado with resounding shots from the first round on.

Donaire had knocked out former titleholder Vic Darchinyan with a single left hook last summer, but some people felt the Filipino fighter won by a lucky punch.

Not any more.

The Filipino boxer cracked Maldonado with left hooks, right uppercuts and overhand rights that slowly broke down the Mexican veteran's resilience and opened up cuts early in the fight. By the fifth round it was apparent that the punches were making Maldonado wobbly. A final flurry of blows prompted the referee to stop the beating at 1:16 of the eighth round.

"I want to unify all of the titles," said Donaire. "I want to be the first Filipino to be undisputed champion."

Referee Charles Dwyer did a superlative job of supervising the fight. It's not often that a referee's work is noticeable for keeping the fight going without interfering at the wrong time. Dwyer was extremely capable as the third man in the ring.

Other winners

WBC junior middleweight titleholder Vernon "The Viper" Forrest knocked out Italy's Michele Piccirillo with a right hand blast in the 11th round. Forrest wants a rematch with Nicaragua's Ricardo Mayorga who has two victories over him and recently beat Fernando Vargas.

IBO light heavyweight titleholder Antonio Tarver fired an 11-punch combination that knocked down Danny Santiago for the count in the fourth round. Tarver's trainer Jimmy Williams implored him to attack rather than lay back in counter-punch mode. For the first time since he knocked out Roy Jones Jr. in 2004, Tarver actually looked capable of utilizing a comprehensive attack. His trainer was correct.

"I'll fight anybody," said Tarver after the fight.

WBC light heavyweight titleholder Chad Dawson was in the audience hoping to lure Tarver into a showdown. Tarver was noncommittal in accepting a fight with Dawson.

In Santa Ynez, California Tijuana's Alfredo Angulo was scheduled to fight Texan James Kirkland in a junior middleweight collision of young power-hitters. But their management didn't

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like the idea because both have marketing appeal with their power fists. Angulo demolished Archak Ter-Meliksetian in one round with a vicious right hand followed with three more blows. Kirkland was also impressive coming off the deck to drop his opponent Allen Conyers twice en route to a knockout victory.

Fights on television

Thurs. Versus, 6 p.m., Andrey Tsurkan (25-2) vs. Yuri Foreman (23-0)

Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Enrique Ornelas (25-4) vs. Bronco McKart (51-7).

Sat. HBO pay-per-view, 6 p.m., Floyd Mayweather (38-0) vs. Ricky Hatton (43-0); Jeff Lacy (22-1) vs. Peter Manfredo (28-4); Daniel Ponce De Leon (33-1) vs. Eduardo Escobedo (20-2).