

St-Pierre, Liddell, Clementi Win @ UFC 79

Written by David A. Avila

Saturday, 29 December 2007 19:00

LAS VEGAS-A reinvented Georges St. Pierre proved he's ready for the true Ultimate Fighting Championship welterweight title with a dominating win over Matt Hughes and Chuck Liddell returned to the win column in his big showdown on Saturday.

St. Pierre took the final chapter in the trilogy with Hughes and now is the UFC interim champion at the 170-pound division.

Hughes just shook his head after tapping out before a sold out audience at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. It was called "Nemesis" and St. Pierre conquered his nemesis.

"Georges is just a better fighter," said Hughes (43-6) who beat St. Pierre several years ago, but lost two years ago in a title match. "I just don't know how much longer I got."

St. Pierre (15-2) found Hughes using a left-handed stance to change up his attack, but the Canadian quickly adapted and used his quickness, skills and raw strength to take Hughes to the ground.

"If it wasn't for my wrestling training I wouldn't have been able to adjust," said St. Pierre who had been preparing to represent Canada's Olympic wrestling team.

Inside the Octagon the Canadian was never in danger. In fact, Hughes was the fighter teetering for the entire fight that ended in 4:54 of the second round.

It wasn't supposed to be that way.

Hughes, known for his wrestling skills, just couldn't solve St. Pierre's quickness. Every move the Illinois fighter attempted was squashed.

St. Pierre is now promised a fight against the current UFC welterweight champion Matt Serra, who pulled out of the fight with Hughes because of injury.

"If I don't get my belt back, I'm going to consider myself champion," said St. Pierre filled in for Serra with less than a month of training.

After dominating the first round on top of Hughes, the second round was even worse as St. Pierre landed elbows and fists. Though the Illinois fighter escaped from underneath, he was quickly thrown down. Within seconds St. Pierre grabbed Hughes left arm and turned it into an inescapable arm bar.

Hughes screamed out: "I tap!"

St. Pierre now awaits Serra to recover from his back injury.

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The semi-main event was no less intense.

The light heavyweight showdown between Chuck “The Iceman” Liddell and Brazil’s Wanderlei “The Axe Murderer” Silva was a three-round punch out between two famous sluggers. In the end Liddell’s sharper punches in the first and third round decided the fight despite a knockdown in the second scored by Silva.

Silva (31-8-1) dominated the second round for four minutes and 30 seconds but Liddell rallied and took the Brazilian to the ground. Two judges were somehow impressed by Liddell’s last 30 seconds and inexplicably gave him that round.

With both fighters huffing and puffing, and Silva with a bad cut over his right eye, Liddell seemed the stronger puncher and landed a back-handed fist and a right hand that stunned the former Pride FC fighter Silva. But he survived the round.

The judges scored it 29-28, 30-27 twice for Liddell who won his first bout after back-to-back losses.

“I knew it was a big fight for everybody and especially for me to get back on track,” said Liddell (21-5). “He had a lot more than I thought he had.”

Silva, who was making his first UFC appearance, was gracious in defeat.

“He won,” said Silva. “I gave my best.”

Temecula’s Rameau Sokoudjou fell short against Brazil’s undefeated Lyoto Machida (12-0) in their light heavyweight contest. The Cameroon native was unable to use his punching power with effectiveness against the karate-trained fighter. Then, unexpectedly, Machida landed a left hand that dropped Sokoudjou (4-2) and proceeded to gain an arm triangle that forced a submission at 4:20 of the second round.

“I’ve been working on my ground game,” said Machida who wants a world title match. “I beat the Alaska assassin, the African assassin, what other assassins are left?”

A heavyweight bout featured two Southern Californians eager to punch out. But San Diego’s Eddie “Manic Hispanic” Sanchez’s experience proved decisive in beating Temecula’s Soa Palelei (8-2) with uppercuts for three rounds. With his nose bleeding profusely and sustaining three consecutive uppercuts, referee Mario Yamasaki stopped the fight at 3:24 of the third and final round for a technical knockout.

“He was out of gas,” said Sanchez (10-1). “He was always putting his head down.”

Undercard

A grudge fight between two Louisiana fighters ended in a decisive submission victory by Rich Clementi of Slidell over the favored Melvin Guillard of New Orleans. A rear naked choke at 4:40

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seconds of the first round forced Guillard, who had been predicting domination, to tap out. Though the fight was definitively over, Guillard attempted to assault Clementi but referee Herb Dean grabbed the fighter.

“He still didn’t learn his lesson,” said Clementi after Guillard attempted to rush him after the fight. “I validated what he’s known for six years, I’m the better man.”

James “The Sandman” Irvin (13-5-1) was nearly put to sleep by an illegal knee to the eye from Brazil’s newcomer Luis Cane (8-1) in the first round of a light heavyweight fight. Unable to continue, Irvin was declared the winner by disqualification at 1:51. Cane seemed unaware that UFC rules disallow knees to the head while the person is on the ground. Some mixed martial arts organizations allow it.

Former Ultimate Fighter participant Manny Gamburyan (6-3) quickly took his fight to the ground with former boxer Nate Mohr (6-5). Once on the ground the lightweight used his quickness to grab an ankle and twist. Mohr screamed to stop the fight at 1:31 of the first round.

“I’m so sorry for you man,” said Gamburyan who suspects he broke Mohr’s leg. “Nate’s a great guy.”

San Diego’s Dean Lister (10-5) scraped out a unanimous decision win over Bulgaria’s punch-crazy Jordan Rachev (16-2) in a middleweight bout. The judges scored it 29-28 for Lister.