

Action Was So Hot, No Fights In The Stands

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
Tuesday, 04 March 2008 19:00

This is for all our readers who missed out on a historic Saturday night of boxing at The Home Depot Center in Carson, California. It's for our TSS readers sitting at home in Ohio or Nebraska who aren't as fortunate as I am to live in the middle of one of America's boxing hotbeds.

Here's how it went down:

At 4:30 P.M I reached the Home Depot Center after an hour and a half trip from North County San Diego, California. I drive up to the teenage parking attendant who assures me that there is no media parking. Eventually I find out she's wrong. I cough up the fifteen bucks anyways since I'm not about to argue with a pimply faced girl who's trying to make an extra buck to save for her prom dress. I park and then make my way through the parking lot and on to the will call booth for the always tricky task of picking up my media credential.

Along the way I run into ticket scalpers trying to sell and buyers looking to buy. How they keep missing each other is beyond me.

To my surprise, getting the credential is head-ache free. Poundforpound.com's Will Trillo wasn't having it as easy but he eventually makes it inside the arena. Trillo and Jerry Magee from the San Diego Union Tribune are the first two media members I run into.

At 4:55 p.m. I walked into the tennis arena just as the Tony Demarco vs. Juan Carlos Martinez bout was ending. Demarco is supposed to be a promising prospect out of Tijuana. Unfortunately, I missed my chance to see him for the first time. The arena was half empty but it was still early.

The Boxing Family:

These are the people I see at the fights on a regular basis when in Southern California. Along with Trillo and Magee, I spot and say hello to Doug Fischer of Maxboxing, photographers Joe Miranda, German Villasenor and Paul Hernandez, David Avila of TSS and The Press Enterprise and Carlos Arias of the Orange County Register. On duty as I arrive are publicists John Beyrooty and Marylyn Aceves.

5:11 P.M.

Jorge Paez Jr. dispatches his opponent Tomas Barragan with a brutal combination in the second round that lays out the Orange County fighter in dramatic fashion. The Sycuan Ringside prospect is talented, yet I can't help but feel that a piece of the puzzle is still missing.

5:18 P.M.

Mexican boxing legend Marco Antonio Barrera walks down the stairs into the arena to a huge

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commotion with everybody and their mother trying to get a picture with him. The rumors are that Barrera is planning to take on the winner of the main event.

5:25 P.M.

A first round stoppage by Chris Avalos over the way overmatched Constancio Alvarado gets the crowd riled up. Sure it was a great knock out but come on. This guy was made to order for Avalos. At this point the arena is about 65% percent full and the energy level is beginning to rise.

5:31 P.M.

The arena is now at 75 percent capacity which is already more than the crowd present for the first Marquez vs. Vazquez installment. It's still too early for any fights in the stands, but you can bet I'll be searching for some. If there's one thing I can count on at the Home Depot Center when there's a boxing match in town, it's fights in the stands.

I doubt any fights break out when there's actual tennis being played in the tennis arena.

5:43 P.M.

The party begins at the Home Depot as the smell of cannabis sativa wafts through the air. The smell makes more than a few people turn around looking to find its origin. Looks like the crowd is slowly taking up the few empty seats left.

5:51

Another huge commotion as Mexico's favorite son, Julio Cesar Chavez, enters the Arena. Chavez is here to work as a commentator for one of the Spanish T.V. stations. Chavez walks down the stairs into the television and media area. He embraces Jorge Paez Jr. with a genuine liking for the young man.

5:53

The arena is now at 85 percent capacity. The buzz is starting and by buzz I mean the buzz that people are starting to feel after making several trips to the beer stands. Showtime television is now less than ten minutes away from going live.

5:58

Jimmy Lennon gets in the ring to announce former world champion Vince Phillips, heavyweight prospect Chris Arreola, actress Tracy Ullman, actor Kevin Jackman, wrestler and MMA fighter Goldberg, San Diego Charger Sean Merriman and light heavyweight champion Chad Dawson. The crowd loudly boos Merriman. This is definitely a Raiders crowd.

6:06

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The crowd is mostly Latino but every ethnic group is well represented. People are now getting antsy. Lennon is still in the ring waiting for the signal to start introductions.

6:13

Referee Pat Russell, who will play an important role in tonight's event, makes his way into the ring.

6:15

Jimmy Lennon Jr. makes more celebrity announcements. The crowd boos Mario Lopez vehemently, in contrast, Rocky and Rambo star, Sylvester Stallone, gets huge applause. Actor Jack Nicholson also gets a rousing welcome. The crowd goes wild after Lennon formally introduces Barrera and Chavez.

6:17

The first sound of mariachis is heard as the challenger, Rafael Marquez, makes his way into the ring along with Nacho Berinstain, Jaime Quintana and the rest of Gary Shaw's Promotions' crew.

At this point, 100 percent of the arena is full and the anticipation is high. With mariachis still playing, Israel Vazquez, trainer Rudy Perez, manager Frank Espinoza and Vazquez's crew from Sycuan Ringside Promotions make their way into the ring.

6:21

The lights go out as Jimmy Lennon starts the introductions and the roar of the crowd grows.

6:23

Rafael Marquez gets a huge welcome from the crowd.

Vazquez gets a decent welcome but interestingly enough, not as big a welcome as Marquez.

6:25

The first bell.

6:29

First round ends. Vazquez clearly hurt Marquez but Marquez was busier. The crowd definitely seems to be backing Marquez.

6:33

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The 2nd round ends and it's almost a mirror image of the first with an edge to Vazquez as he stuns and wobbles Marquez.

6:37

Round three is the hardest round to score yet. What truly surprises me is that Marquez is receiving the majority of the backing from the crowd. Is it because he's related to Juan Manuel who is also a popular figure among Mexican fighters?

6:41

The fourth round is a scorcher as Vazquez goes down and then rises to hurt Marquez repeatedly. The crowd is sensing that another special fight is taking place.

6:45

Vazquez takes the fifth as he repeatedly dazes Marquez who boxes and tries to keep "El Magnifico" at bay.

6:49

The sixth round is another back and forth affair with Vazquez seemingly beginning to make some headway. This fight is easily as good as the first two. The crowd is going nuts. The chanting for Marquez is still surprising to me since Vazquez lives and trains in L.A. It seems like Vazquez is always the underdog.

6:53

The seventh round ends. Vazquez starts out strong but Marquez ends up landing some flush shots. I'm seriously having a hard time awarding rounds. So far a couple of small scuffles have broken out in the stands but nothing major like the ones at the Antonio Margarito-Paul Williams fight. I think the crowd is too much into what's developing inside the ring.

6:57

The eighth is another amazing round. The ebb and flow is constant and there's been hardly a clinch. By this point, Marquez's eye is closing up and Vazquez is taking full advantage by landing some great over hand rights.

7:01

In the ninth, Marquez ends the round with a flurry that hurts Vazquez. Vazquez was very stunned and it made me wonder what would've happened if Marquez hadn't run out of time.

7:05

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The tenth is done and I can't believe the fight is still going. Marquez gets deducted a point by referee Pat Russell for low blows. Marquez ends the round by again jolting Vazquez. Vazquez's face is now an unrecognizable mess.

7:09

Vazquez takes the eleventh but I have to wonder if it'll be enough. Marquez seems to have built himself quite an early lead. Vazquez will have to take the twelfth big.

7:13

Wow, Vazquez comes out like a man possessed and batters Rafa. He dominated every second of the last round and capped it off with a barrage of punches that sent Marquez flying into the ropes. Pat Russell calls it a knockdown which gives Vazquez at least a 10-8 round. Another breathtaking fight ends.

The crowd is sitting and milling around in stunned silence awaiting the decision. It was a fight that was draining to watch. A great story unfolded in front of 8,014 fans and the end was more dramatic and exciting than any play or movie ever made. The unlikely star turned out to be Israel Vazquez who put on an inspiring performance.

When the decision was announced as a split decision there was booing from most of the crowd. The scores were read. 114-111 Vazquez, 114-111 Marquez and 113-112 for Israel Vazquez. The crowd applauded in agreement. Those who formerly cheered for Marquez, recognized Vazquez's superhuman effort and gave him his due credit by putting their hands together in appreciation.

"El Magnifico" paid for it with his face. He looked like he'd gone through a windshield. His lips swollen, his eyebrow's cut up and his nose broken. It reminded me of a picture I once saw of Jake Lamotta after he fought Sugar Ray Robinson.

Finally. The kid that wasn't supposed to make it had made it to the big time. He summoned a level of courage and will seldom seen in any boxing ring anywhere.

Team Marquez was disgruntled. They promised to officially protest the decision at the post press conference. You can't blame them for their temporary anger. What champion wants to lose by one point?

Surprisingly, no major fights developed in the stands.

A boxing match in Raider country without a huge fight in the stands? That's when you know something special happened in the ring.

De La Hoya's homecoming on May 3rd:

Also at the Home Depot Center but on the soccer field... Oscar De La Hoya vs. Steve Forbes fight tickets are on sale now by logging on to www.ticketmaster.com or by calling

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(213)-480-3232, if you want to charge by phone. Tickets will also go on sale at the Home Depot Center box office.

Talk about a tough act to follow.