

BORGES: Marquez Didn't Get What Was Fair

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 15 March 2008 19:00

The next time Juan Manuel Marquez appears in a boxing ring, instead of having the Mexican National anthem played he should import Three Dog Night to sing what has sadly become his personal anthem – “One Is The Loneliest Number.”

After 24 rounds of boxing with Manny Pacquiao, that is what stands between him and the victory he watched bitterly slip away Saturday night in Las Vegas, just as it had four years earlier. In both cases many at ringside and many more around the boxing world believed he had done enough to win yet that opinion was not shared in either case by enough of the judges who carried his fate to deliver on what his performances had fairly earned him.

In the first instance, Marquez got off the floor after three first round knockdowns and fought back so brilliantly he was awarded a draw. One more point and he would have been given a decision he felt he'd earned the hard way after being down by four points after that calamitous opening three minutes. He did not get it and thus lived the next four years in the shadow of Pacquiao, Erik Morales and Marco Antonio Barrera, long suffering with short money and little public acclaim.

Saturday night he again scrambled off the floor after being dropped in the third round by a solid left cross from Pacquiao and not only boxed effectively once again but survived a nasty cut over his right eye, only to stand stunned in the ring at the Mandalay Bay Events Center as he learned he'd lost a split decision, again by a single point, in a fight he felt he'd surely won this time.

Judge Tom Miller proved to be the deciding vote after Jerry Roth saw Marquez a 115-112 winner while Duane Ford had the same score in the opposite direction. That left Miller as the swing vote and he favored Pacquiao, 114-113, meaning that 10-8 third round had been the difference between them in a fight Miller scored 6-6 in rounds. Or was that really the deciding factor?

My Sweet Science card was the reverse of Miller's, tipping toward Marquez 114-113 in points and 7-5 in rounds. Twice in the days leading up to the fight I watched Marquez-Pacquiao I. Both times my card came out 113-112 Marquez in points and 8-4 in rounds, same as it was four years earlier at ringside. So it goes in boxing but Saturday night's decision was, to me, a reminder of how difficult it is to win a close decision these days if your opponent is the larger name on the marquee.

All three judges gave the first round to Pacquiao Saturday night, a round that seemed to me to be as significant as the third, when Marquez was knocked down. I did not give Pacquiao that round. Neither did two of boxing's best ringside observers, ESPN.com's Dan Rafael and Yahoo.com's Kevin Iole. Yet somehow it seems automatic these days that the first round on the judges' cards goes to the fighter who produces the most revenue, as it once supposedly went to the champion unless the challenger had a clear edge.

BORGES: Marquez Didn't Get What Was Fair

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 15 March 2008 19:00

Had the latter been the case Saturday night then Marquez would have won what was a close and cautious round not dominated by either man. Although Pacquiao landed that round's most powerful punch, Marquez controlled the distance, dictated the way the round would be contested and landed more sharp punches in those three minutes. Yet that was all for naught because the guy who had a June 28 fight for the WBC lightweight title already set for this same arena, Pacquiao, got the nod from all three judges.

This is not to say corruption was involved. What is more likely is that judges, like everyone else in boxing, are human. They know which way the wind is blowing and can be swayed unknowingly by it. Pacquiao was younger at 29 than the 34-year-old Marquez, was far more popular world-wide and in the U.S., where the big money is made, from a business standpoint clearly had more upside going in and was a better than 2-to-1 betting favorite.

Whether that's why he got the opening round on those cards will never be known but it, and that third round knockdown, certainly cost him a decision that left Marquez bitterly complaining after it was announced.

"That knockdown, he caught me cold but then I adjusted my game plan and I thought from then on I dictated the rest of the fight," Marquez (48-4-1, 35 KO) said. "I thought I fought a great fight and still feel like I'm the (WBC super featherweight) champion. I don't like the decision."

Disgust was written on Marquez's face as he spoke, his right eye still a bloody mess from the effect of an accidental head butt early in the fight and a clean punch that later opened it up much wider. He handled that cut far better than Pacquiao did a smaller one that seemed to cause him to unravel in the middle rounds. Had those cuts been reversed who knows what would have happened but it seemed clear Marquez was better able to handle the problem of seeing his own plasma.

"The people know I won this," Marquez continued. "I haven't lost anything at all. The knockdown did not affect me. Just like the first fight, it is not based on one round. I connected with more punches and I feel like I won. The people are the best judges and they were booing him."

Actually, nearly all the fans among the sold out crowd of 11,061 were cheering both men. The judges were a different matter but no matter whom you thought won, the clearest fact is the fight was deathly close, as was their first meeting, because there is little that separates these two men. Pacquiao is the more powerful puncher but Marquez is the technically superior boxer and a more versatile opponent who can change approaches and fight effectively on both the inside and the outside.

What they did in these two fights was good for the sport and cries out for a rubber match even though Pacquiao's promoter, Bob Arum, wants no part of it for now at least for obvious business reasons.

It was telling, in fact, that when the match was negotiated a rematch clause was insisted upon if Marquez won but there was no such clause in the event the decision went to Pacquiao. This is

BORGES: Marquez Didn't Get What Was Fair

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 15 March 2008 19:00

another example of who had the upper hand in the negotiations and Pacquiao made clear after the decision that the closeness of their two fights convinced him what he should do next.

“This business is over,” he said. “I’m moving to 135.”

That is where he and Arum believe David Diaz has been holding the WBC lightweight title for him. Diaz fought a non-entity on the undercard in a non-title fight specifically for the purpose of setting up the Pacquiao match. Not even a Marquez victory might have affected that but no one was taking any chances – round 1 to Pacquiao.

One can certainly make a case for a Pacquiao victory in both fights, although not as easily as one could for Marquez. Illustrative of the problem of mindset though came when respected HBO commentator Larry Merchant said as the final round began that he had the fight even. He then joined his colleagues Jim Lampley and Emanuel Steward in conceding Marquez won the final round but added, “Let’s call it a draw.”

Huh?

This is not meant as a criticism of Merchant as much as it is a comment on the mind set that seems to take over too many of these type fights. It seems like the lesser light, which in this case was Marquez, has a hard time getting the decision if it’s close. It would be akin to saying you can’t win a one-run game from the Red Sox or the Yankees. That applied even in a fight in which according to CompuBox statistics Marquez threw fewer punches but landed more, a testimony to both his skill and his accuracy.

To his credit, Pacquiao seemed to indicate the real truth of the matter about the razor-thin margin between them going into the final round when he was asked after the fight if he felt he needed the 12th round to win.

“I wasn’t sure but I always treat the final round as the most important,” Pacquiao said. “I wasn’t going to take any chances.”

Problem was all three judges had given that opening round away without much thought. When that was coupled with the knockdown, it meant without a knockdown in round 12 it didn’t matter if Marquez won the round or not. Had Marquez avoided that third round knockdown the fight would have ended the same as the first one – in a draw – of course and who knows? In the end, maybe that would have been the fairest score of all but for the second time Juan Manuel Marquez didn’t get what was fair. Or, more importantly, what was right.