

FNF Shocker: Andy Lee Upset By Vera

Written by Ron Borges
Thursday, 20 March 2008 19:00

UNCASVILLE, CT. – This time The Contender was no pretender.

Few people gave Contender season 3 graduate Brian Vera much of a chance to last long against highly regarded middleweight prospect Andy Lee Friday night at the Mohegan Sun Arena but he lasted long enough to stop the previously undefeated Irishman at 2:17 of Round 7 after a stunning bombardment of punches left Lee with his right eye badly cut, his face bruised and his mind swimming in a fog.

Lee seemed to have no answer for the right hands that began to rain in on him more and more after the fourth round, one of which landed so squarely it made Lee's body go limp for several seconds in round 7 as Vera backed him up and flailed away. Over the previous two rounds Vera had found a way to lure Lee into a trap by turning what had at first been a boxing match into a slugfest. Once that process began, Lee was fatally drawn to that flame, unable to reassert his dominant boxing skills until he was left burned and beaten.

"I heard what you guys said," Vera (16-1, 10 KO) said after his hand had been raised. "You guys didn't give me a chance but you can't measure this."

As he spoke those words Vera beat his fist against his heart the same way he had been beating it against Lee's face – with stern conviction.

"He drew me into a fight," Lee (12-1) admitted before leaving for a local hospital for stitches and a CAT scan. "It was my own fault. I didn't listen to (trainer) Emanuel (Steward).

"He's a tough guy. He was strong. I thought I could continue but it's the referee's decision. He hit me too much."

Vera did that in large part because Lee allowed it to happen. He refused to use his jab to keep Vera at a distance and despite winning four of the first five rounds on all three judges cards he slowly began to lose control of the night because he lost control of himself.

"He wanted to fight him too much," a disappointed Steward said. "He stayed on the inside too much, trying to fight him and he got tagged. It happens. It happened to Billy Conn, too. We're already trying to set up a rematch in July. Andy just made a mistake. He let Vera turn it into a brawl."

Lee appeared to be in command of the situation when the leather first started flying, repeatedly stopping Vera's bull-like charges with a stinging straight left hand. But Vera kept taking everything Lee dished out, which was considerable, and continued to press forward. As he did, Lee seemed to unravel, more and more giving up the distance he needed to prevent the shorter Vera from getting into punching range and paying a price for it.

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Vera waded forward with admirable resolve from the opening bell to the fight's final moments, rallying midway through the fifth round as the seemingly surprised Lee began to fade. Lee had wasted no time making his point to Vera when he first caught him with a sharp, straight left hand with just over a minute left in the first round. Vera wobbled then and Lee jumped all over him, flooring him with a following flurry of punches. Vera quickly understood he was in with a sharp shooter looking to take advantage of his aggressive style but he also seemed bolstered by the fact he'd taken those punches and been able to get back up and continue coming forward.

That pattern resurfaced in round 2, as Lee consistently caught Vera as he tried to charge forward, mostly with straight left hands that Vera seemed to repeatedly walk into.

But Vera did managed to clip Lee with a sharp right hand late in the round that caught Lee's attention, convincing him he could not simply fire freely whenever he felt like it.

Emboldened, Vera came out trying to pressure Lee early in the third round but Lee caught him with two straight right-left combinations that slowed Vera's approach for a time. When he began to again venture inside, Lee clubbed him twice more with the same combination before slamming another straight left hand right in the middle of Vera's face.

Lee appeared to be repeating the same consistent pattern until midway through round 4 when Vera suddenly lashed him with two left hands and a flurry that had Lee retreating. As he pulled away, blood began to roll down the right side of Lee's cheek from a cut along the side of his eye. Smiling, Vera continued to walk forward looking for an opening but seldom bothering to throw a jab to create one.

Round 6 had so much action the crowd was on its feet when it ended, applauding wildly after Vera consistently was able to get inside Lee's sagging defenses and bang him with right hands. But just when Lee appeared to be letting the fight slip away, he would crack Vera with the same straight left hand that had plagued the former Contender series product all night. Yet by the end of the round Lee looked exhausted and though Vera's mouth was bloody his spirit was revived.

By what would prove to be the final round, Lee was again bleeding freely from the severe cut under his right eye and seemed to be tiring badly as Vera assaulted him again with wild right hands, finally stunning the 23-year-old Irishman with a straight right that momentarily left him limp, his eyes wary and his body sagging.

Vera moved in like a bull who had just nailed the matador when the opposite had been expected and landed twice more as Lee slumped toward the ropes while referee Tony Chiaranto watched him warily. Just as Vera thought his moment had come however, Lee caught him with a quick combination that slowed his attack but only momentarily.

Quickly Vera found the route to get back inside again and he nailed Lee with another straight right and that was all the clearly concerned Chiaranto could take, even though Lee remained upright and willing to try and find his way out of what had become a blind alley in a dangerous neighborhood.

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The crowd was momentarily more stunned than Lee at Chiaranto's decision and then began to boo lustily as Vera ran around the ring with his arm's outspread, a look of elation on his face. Andy Lee neither booed nor protested. He simply staggered to his corner, still unsure what had just happened but well aware that whatever it was had not been what he, or most of the boxing world, expected.