

ESPN WNF Recap: Whitfield Should Wait

Written by John Nguyen

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The flyweight division has never been one to quicken the pulse of fight fans this side of the Pacific. Watching two men weighing 112 pounds duking it out is more likely to elicit comments like "They weigh how much?" rather than "Those are some bad little dudes."

For this reason, it seemed somewhat strange for ESPN2 to feature flyweights in the main event of their season premiere of Wednesday Night Fights. It helps, though, that the headliner, Rayonta "Stingray" Whitfield, is from Augusta, Georgia, the site for the evening's card as well as the home of the Master's this weekend.

The main event saw Whitfield taking a step up in competition against Manuel Vargas, a fighter who had won twenty-three consecutive fights going in.

The early rounds saw Whitfield, a tall 5'7" for the flyweight division, trying to establish distance against the hard-charging Vargas. Meanwhile, Vargas attempted to wade through Whitfield's jabs and work effectively to the body.

Leading into the middle rounds, Whitfield and Vargas fought on essentially even terms, with the longer Whitfield throwing more punches and controlling range, while Vargas landed the harder shots, picking his moments to be effective.

A subtle momentum shift turned the tide for Whitfield by the seventh, when he began utilizing effective lateral movement to keep Vargas off balance. His spotty attacks growing ever more sparse, the gameplan for Vargas degraded to trying to force Whitfield on the defensive and catch him with his chin up and his hands down. Though it looked promising for Vargas during brief moments, the money punch proved too illusive.

With Whitfield gaining increasing control of the fight, he made the strange decision to engage more with Vargas during the eleventh and twelfth rounds. The Augusta native basically dispensed with his jab and allowed Vargas to walk in though his front door, to the delight of the crowd and to the likely dismay of Whitfield's corner.

During an exciting twelfth round, which was probably Vargas' best frame of the fight, the determined Mexican kept coming forward, coming within inches of landing the kind of punch that could've made Whitfield regret his decision to be brave. However, the final bell rang before Vargas could find the sweet spot.

The victory went to Whitfield via majority decision (Scores: 114-114, 117-111, 116-112), bringing his record to 21-0 with 10 knockouts. Vargas' impressive win streak ended, dropping him to 24-3 with 10 knockouts.

Whitfield, age 26, had prior to the bout been discussed as a potential challenger for a world title in the near future. Judging by his inconsistent offense and defensive liabilities, some fine tuning

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is in order before his ambition gets the best of him.

In other action on the card, fans got the opportunity to see two prospects come out victorious as junior lightweight Mark Davis and middleweight Fernando Guerrero both extended their undefeated streaks on the undercard.

Davis, a 21-year old former two-time U.S. Amateur Champion, defeated Sedot Vasquez, (3-2-1, 1 KO), via unanimous decision (Scores: 60-52, 60-52, 60-52). Davis' quicker hands and sound fundamentals were the difference against Vasquez, who was coming off an 18-month layoff. Davis also scored two knockdowns, though these were the products of balance shots rather than any real damage done to Vasquez.

While Davis benefited from a decent showing in front of a national television audience, he still has much to improve upon. A tendency to keep his head still as he punches allowed the limited Vasquez to land several solid right hands during the fight. Still, Davis, (6-0, 3 KO), looks like a promising prospect who will likely be heard from again.

In the other showcase, Dominican-born Fernando Guerrero scored a fourth round TKO over Valentino Jalomo to move his undefeated record to 5-0 with five knockouts.

The powerful Guerrero showed immediately that he was both stronger and better skilled than Jalomo (2-2-1). Guerrero landed straight, compact counters at will against Jalomo, scoring two standing-eight counts in the first round.

In the second and third, Guerrero continued to land an alarming number of clean punches to Jalomo's head, including several straight lefts that tested the elasticity of Jalomo's neck. Eventually, the question was whether Jalomo's chin was better than his record indicated, or if Guerrero's power was less intimidating than his stats led on.

Finally, in the fourth round, a volley of clean, unanswered power shots by Guerrero prompted another standing-eight, and a follow-up flurry ended matters at 1:18 of the fourth round. The exciting performance by Fernando Guerrero won the hearts of the fans in attendance, and likely gave the fans at home the impression that he is someone on which they should keep a careful eye.