

Oscar Dominates In Dress Rehearsal For Floyd

Written by Ron Borges
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CARSON, CA. – Steve Forbes' nickname is 2 pounds because that's what he weighed at birth. Saturday night it was emblematic of the two pounds of welts left on his face after a night spent eating Oscar De La Hoya's stinging left jab.

De La Hoya easily outgunned and outpointed the former junior lightweight champion, winning a lopsided 12-round decision at the sold out Home Depot Center in a fight the six-time world champion used as a training exercise for his scheduled Sept. 20 rematch with Floyd Mayweather, Jr.

One judge, Marcos Rosales, scored it a shutout, awarding all 12 rounds to De La Hoya, which seemed a bit generous although Max DeLuca and Marty Sammon saw it pretty much the same way, scoring it 119-109 for De La Hoya. The Sweet Science was only slightly more generous to Forbes, scoring the bout 118-110 for De La Hoya, who established early that his jab would spend much of the night embedded in the face of Forbes, who was never quite able to time it or find a way to slip it because of the speed and accuracy with which it was thrown.

Although the frequency with which De La Hoya used it slowed in the second half of the bout, it was not as noticeable as the way he – and more importantly it – faded against Mayweather a year ago. According to CompuBox statistics, De La Hoya hammered home 127 of the 407 jabs he threw, connecting 31 per cent of the time with a punch that is essential against an opponent as quick as Mayweather.

“He has a lot of power,” Forbes (33-6, 9 KO) conceded. “He hurt me twice. He's a smart fighter. It was an honor to fight Oscar. It was great to be in there and not go down. I hope I proved I'm a top-level fighter.”

Forbes certainly proved he's got a top-level chin. He has never been knocked off his feet and De La Hoya, despite his dominance, could not find a way to change that. Much of the night he was drilling Forbes with a power jab and some hard body shots and left hooks to the head behind it but never did he manage to get Forbes into any kind of serious trouble.

What he did accomplish though was to win easily a full dress rehearsal for what he expects to be a showdown with Mayweather in five months even though the fight is not yet signed.

“This is how I plan to fight Mayweather,” De La Hoya (39-5, 30 KO) said. “Straight up. On the balls of my feet. Using my jab. This is the way I wanted this fight to go. This is the same style I'm going to use to beat Mayweather because I know I can.”

“This is how I envisioned the fight would go. I'm a little disappointed I didn't stop him or knock him out but I knew this was the way it might go. He's tough. No one has ever stopped him. He's not the two pounds Forbes. He's the 800 pound Forbes.”

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The first three rounds were controlled primarily by De La Hoya's stinging jab and right hands to the body behind it. Forbes had his moments, especially when he landed a solid left uppercut just before the end of the second round but for the most part De La Hoya controlled the action much to the delight of the crowd of 27,000.

Forbes did score often enough inside to cause some slight puffiness underneath De La Hoya's left eye and in close he was somewhat effective at times but De La Hoya seldom let him get there without paying a price, although he paid a larger one when he stayed on the outside and allowed him to slam that jab and short left hooks behind it into his face.

Forbes came on a bit in Round 4, scoring more and even showboating at one point when he went into a duck walk as he came forward. While the crowd laughed. De La Hoya, who now had some puffiness around both eyes, did not. Instead, he jabbed him a few more times in the bridge of the nose, thus ending the duck walking for the evening.

By the fight's midpoint, De La Hoya's attack had begun to slow down, as it often has in the past but this time he seemed to sense it and opened up more in the sixth round, landing one flurry that hurt Forbes for the first time and another that sliced open a small cut along the side of the former junior lightweight champion's left eye.

Blood began to trickle down the side of Forbes' cheek and just as the round ended he was nailed again with a quick flurry that had the crowd roaring and Forbes for the first time looking concerned at the pace of the attack he was under.

De La Hoya continued to carry the action, though at a reduced rate, in round 7. This was partially made possible by the fact Forbes all but took the round off, seldom throwing and spending most of his time trying to avoid De La Hoya's flurries on the two or three occasions he pinned Forbes along the ropes.

Although De La Hoya was winning handily his jab was no longer the multi-headed weapon it had been early in the fight, the same dissipation of his biggest asset that hurt him so badly against Mayweather a year ago. De La Hoya spoke during the week of how he had finally grown more relaxed in the ring and hence felt he would avoid the stamina problems that had arisen in some of his biggest fights but either by choice or by involuntary response he began to do the same things in round eight that began his downfall in his split decision loss to Mayweather.

De La Hoya went back to a power jab in Round 9 though at the urging of his trainer, Mayweather's father and namesake, Floyd Mayweather, Sr. Twice he stung Forbes with it solidly enough that he flinched and quickly looked to retreat. De La Hoya's strength and the respect Forbes clearly had for his punching power kept him constantly moving away but he still began to take a battering late in the 10th round.

Yet just when things looked worrisome, Forbes showed why he has never been knocked off his feet as a professional. Though in some trouble from a string of hard left hands to the head and body, Forbes suddenly fired back a quick, hard flurry of his own just as De La Hoya tried to take a breath before launching another assault. Although they didn't hurt De La Hoya, they did slow

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his attack enough to give Forbes time to regroup.

“I thought Oscar would have more power than he had,” Mayweather, Sr. said. “Now we know we have to work on that more but I thought it went well. He didn’t do as much as I wanted but he did a good job.

“This basically was preparing for my son. Floyd is a better fighter than Stevie but he doesn’t throw as many punches as Steve so if Oscar feints well, uses his jab a lot and counter punches he’ll have a great fight.”

The final two rounds were a repeat of what preceded them with De La Hoya controlling the action and most of Forbes’ moves by making it neigh impossible for him to get into any kind of proper punching range. When he tried, Forbes kept getting drilled by a jab that was too fast and too powerful for him to risk answering it with anything more than a backwards step. Whether that will be the case when De La Hoya tries to use it against Floyd Mayweather, Jr. is a story for another day but as rehearsals go it was one that had boxing’s Golden Boy feeling quite rich.

“Now I feel sharper,” De La Hoya said. “I accomplished the first of my goals (for 2008). Now I’m ready for two more.”

What Steve Forbes was ready for by then was an ice pack.

On the undercard hot welterweight prospect Victor Ortiz (21-1-1, 15 KO) stopped Dairo Esalas (31-13, 25) at 2:35 of the fifth round after dropping Esalas three times and going down once himself. Danny Garcia (6-0, 5 KO) continued undefeated but for the first time was pushed to the distance, winning a six-round decision from Julio Gamboa (26-13-2, 16 KO). Former “Contender” challenger Freddy Curiel (18-7-2, 8 KO) lost a split decision to Italy’s Sven Paris (24-3, 16 KO). Paris dropped Curiel in the second round but couldn’t finish him and went on to win the eight-round decision.