

ESPN WNF Recap: Oliver Stunned In Boston

Written by Ron Borges
Tuesday, 06 May 2008 19:00

BOSTON – John Scully had no idea how right he was when he counseled undefeated super bantamweight contender Mike Oliver that Wednesday night's fight was a title eliminator even though the IBF insisted it was not.

Like the old TV detective Joe Friday, Scully knew what was important to Oliver's future and to his fighter. Just the facts. That's all that was important. So when Scully learned what he thought was to be a IBF title eliminator at the Roxy had been downgraded to just another fight he let his fighter know what the real facts were.

"Details don't work on Mike," his trainer explained. "I just told him, 'It's still a title eliminator for you. You lose and it's over.' He understood what that meant."

What that meant was Oliver could not afford a mental letdown born from the apparent refusal of Julio Zarate to face the IBF's No. 2 contender to decide who would be belt holder Steve Molitor's next mandatory challenger. Instead he faced two-time world title challenger Reynaldo Lopez in the main event of ESPN2's Wednesday Night Fight, a well-worn former title challenger who in his most recent fights had begun to look every one of his 34 years.

Unfortunately for Mike Oliver, looks can be deceiving and his trainer's words were prophetic because Oliver didn't face Lopez for long.

Lopez, who lost a 12-round decision to WBC super flyweight champion Cristian Mijares two years ago and was stopped in five rounds by WBO super bantamweight title holder Daniel Ponce De Leon last September, was the kind of guy most dangerous to a young fighter like Oliver – one who had been around and squared off against the best competition but appeared to be less than he once had been.

Perhaps he is but he didn't seem that way when he exploded a sweeping overhand left that cracked Oliver in Round 2 and shook him. Although there was no lasting damage that turned out to only be a warning of what was to come, which was exactly the same punch crashing home early in the third round just as Oliver began to throw a jab. Lopez slipped to the side and forced Oliver to follow and when he did he turned right into the punch that would end his night's work early.

That shot sent the soon-to-become previously undefeated Oliver spinning around and then tumbling to the floor, his face pinned to the mat as if it had been nailed there. Which, to be frank, it had been.

Referee Dick Flaherty began his count and Oliver did not move as a highly partisan sellout crowd hollered madly for him to come to. He finally did at the count of nine and a half, and began the slow process of collecting his senses from the various corners of the building where Lopez had sent them, a process that appeared to last longer than Flaherty's 10-count.

ESPN WNF Recap: Oliver Stunned In Boston

Written by Ron Borges
Tuesday, 06 May 2008 19:00

Oliver (21-1) pushed himself upright just as Flaherty began to wave his arms though and, for an instant, it appeared he would give the IBF's No. 2 ranked super bantamweight a chance to collect himself and save what only hours earlier he seemed to think was his right to fight for a world title.

But as Flaherty looked into Oliver's eyes he saw two vacant lots. Empty and dilated lenses stared back at him and he quickly thought better of it and waved the fight over as Lopez (28-6, 2 NC, 20 KO) fell to his knees in joy at a career at least momentarily reborn.

"I was surprised he got up," Scully said. "That was a veteran move by Lopez. He made him turn right into the punch."

When Oliver snapped to several seconds too late and realized what had just happened he was irate, pulling himself away from Flaherty and viciously shaking his head as he returned to his corner. Part of the reason he was probably shaking his head so violently was that inside he was hearing wind chimes hand delivered by Lopez's sweeping left to the face.

Although Oliver had been cautioned about the danger Lopez posed the day before the fight all he could talk about was IBF champion Steve Molitor's apparent reluctance to face him. This was understandable because Oliver had won an IBF title eliminator last year when he easily outpointed Cruz Carbajal only to be told later, in typical boxing fashion, "Only fooling."

"He don't want to fight me," Oliver said of Molitor. "I should have already had a shot at him (after widely out pointing Cruz Carbajal last July in what the IBF said at the time was also a title eliminator but which in the end only seemed to eliminate Oliver despite his lopsided victory). "The IBF people don't want to see me beat him. They're keeping him away from me as long as they can. Who would want to fight me? If I wasn't me, I wouldn't want to fight me."

Lopez didn't seem too bothered by the concept. Although he ate some early jabs from the quick-handed Oliver he consistently got inside and far too regularly landed that overhand left until it finally did the damage he intended all along.

"Molitor was out there for Mike if Mike kept winning," a downcast Scully said. "As long as he kept winning they had to give him a title shot. That's why a fight like this one was an eliminator in a sense, too. They'd love to see us lose."

Whether true or not, that's what happened, changing both the arc of Oliver's career and the short-term future for Molitor, who may very well now have to deal with the heavy-handed Reynaldo Lopez rather than the quick-handed but light hitting Mike Oliver.

On the undercard, Antwon Smith (10-1-1, 6 KO) stopped Aaron Torres (16-7, 6 KO) at 2:35 of the third round. After dropping Torres in Round 2, he sent him to one knee again late in the third round and Torres chose to squat on one knee staring at his cornermen as he was counted out. (EDITOR NOTE: Torres, it seems, should think long and hard whether or not this game is for him. He seemed unconcerned about quitting, and the loss, and analyst Teddy Atlas questioned his heart.) Sean Ecklund, nephew of one-time ESPN fixture Micky Ward, won a four-round

ESPN WNF Recap: Oliver Stunned In Boston

Written by Ron Borges
Tuesday, 06 May 2008 19:00

decision from hose Velasquez (0-3). It lifted Ecklund's record to 6-2. Middleweight Eric Caminero (4-0, 4 KO) continued his undefeated ways, stopping Ardrick Butler of Philadelphia in his pro debut in round three of a four round preliminary bout.