

Witter Upset At Home By Bradley

Written by Michael Woods
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Timothy Bradley's body language spoke volumes before he entered the ring to face off with WBC junior welterweight champion Junior Witter on a ShoBox Saturday night special from the Trent FM Arena in Nottingham, England. Bradley, a 24-year-old Californian who'd been installed as the top contender by the sanctioning body without having faced 'A' level competition, certainly looked confident, perhaps excessively so, as he readied himself to test his mettle against the skilled British veteran Witter.

He smiled, and danced, before the action commenced, and after 12 rounds of boxing, we saw why. His controlled, measured performance was rewarded by the judges, who gave the American a split decision victory in a bout that could politely be deemed forgettable to all but Bradley, and a dejected Witter, whose plans for an intra-national tussle with Ricky Hatton may well have gone down the tubes.

Judge Franco Ciminale saw it 115-112, for Witter; Daniel van de Wiele saw it 115-113, for Bradley; and tiebreaker Omar Linton scored it 114-113, for Bradley, who wept tears of joy at his road win.

Witter (age 34, entering at 36-1-2) came in weighing 139 1/2 pounds, while Bradley (age 24, entering at 21-0), fighting as a pro for the first time outside of Cali, weighed 139 1/4 pounds.

In the first, the righty Bradley bounced in and out as he assessed the veteran, who switched from lefty to righty. Witter cracked him with a left hook with a minute to go, living up to his nickname, "Hitter." A viewer had to wonder if perhaps Bradley was feeling tight on the big stage, as he didn't ever get lubed up.

In the second, Bradley picked it up with a minute to go. The two tied up several times, respecting the hand speed of the other in tight. Bradley, whether Witter was in righty or lefty stance, looked to land his crisp right, and did so with 25 seconds left in the period.

In the third, Bradley went lefty to start off but then switched back. The rhythm of the match was still off, as the two were still figuring each other out. Toward the end of the round, Witter tried to grab Bradley, and the American threw him off, and then went on offense. He served notice then that his strength was an asset. But, on enemy turf, a viewer had to wonder when Bradley would start to take it to the champion.

In the fourth round, the fans were still waiting for a clean, crisp toss from Witter to applaud. Bradley's right looked to be getting closer to Witter's chin. It was another tight round, with little to separate the two in the judges' eyes and cards.

In the fifth round, it was still a defensive contest, if I'm inclined to be generous. There was too little throwing, and too much grabbing, if I'm being honest. Witter scored with two hooks, but really, once again, there wasn't much to cheer about for fans.

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In the sixth round, Bradley left his corner jazzed up, more ready to rumble. Witter, now righty, left his left out in front of him, and waved it, making it dance like a cobra ready to snap. No venom was forthcoming from the Brit, though. Instead, he took an overhand right, and dropped like a shot to the floor. That cobra hand was poised to strike, and Bradley came over the top of it after feinting with a jab. Witter was on his feet with 12 seconds to go. He held and danced to finish the round.

In the seventh, Bradley came out looking to capitalize and Witter ran and held to start. Bradley's left eye looked puffy but he was still energized, still slipping smartly, until Witter scored with a left. He may have taken the round with that smack.

On to the eighth. The combatants continued to overthink, as they eyed each other for long interludes before launching.

In the ninth, Bradley fans had to hope their guy would up his output, as his knockdown alone wouldn't be comfort enough should the bout go the distance. He too often allowed himself to wrapped up in Witter's straitjacket hugs, instead of busting his way out.

In the tenth round, the fight was up for grabs. Bradley landed a left hook. Witter answered with a low blow, and he received a warning. He'd throw one shot, and then hug. He had to be hoping the judges were all John Ruiz fans.

In the 11th round, Bradley was busier early. He hit home with a couple of rights at the midway point, and again scored with a right with 15 seconds to go. How could the judges reward the clutching, grabbing champion?

The crowd was sitting on its hands, unwilling to lend Witter some decibels of encouragement.

They perked up half a decibel to start the 12th. Witter was a bit busier; maybe he thought the judges would give the champ some love, or maybe his tank was just on 'E.' Bradley scored with a right and then a left, and both men raised their hands at the close. There were some boos, and tepid applause for both. Witter tried to get his homies to whoop it up for him, and they wouldn't comply. Couldn't blame them.

WBC No. 1 contender Carl Froch (age 30, 167 1/2, 22-0 coming in) met 15-0 Pole Albert Rybacki (age 37, 168 1/4) in the co-main event, a super middleweight beef.

They both used the first to get warmed up. Froch flurried at the end of the round to insure his edge on the cards. In the second, Showtime viewers heard Nick Charles say that Froch told him that many of his friends put bets on his winning in the fourth or fifth round, so his medium pace was no surprise. His foe took the fight on three days notice, after Dennis Inkin pulled out, and Rubin Williams couldn't lace up, but had been training for a match so he looked fit and trim.

In the third round, Froch began to land basically at will with whatever he wanted. The Pole fought at the level of a sparring partner, and didn't know, or care, to hold on to get himself a breather. Froch's best pals must've tabbed him for a win in the fourth, because he turned up the

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heat, and forced the ref to stop the contest at 2:35 of the round, as Rybacki was neglecting to return fire and was eating clean shots.