

Jhonny Gonzalez's Left Hooks Do Job

Written by David A. Avila
Friday, 16 May 2008 19:00

CABAZON, Ca.-It's not fun to be called a former world champion, so when Mexico City's Jhonny Gonzalez and Colombia's former world champion Colombia's Mauricio Pastrana (34-9-2, 22 KOs) met on Friday, you knew it would be cataclysmic.

It was.

Though Pastrana was the smaller man, it was he who forced the issue in the first two rounds. But for those who know Gonzalez, a notorious slow starter, it was just the appetizer for sledgehammer warfare.

Gonzalez did his homework before entering the ring against the former three-division world champion and it paid off.

"I looked at videos of Pastrana and saw that working on the body was the key," said Gonzalez (38-6, 32 KOs). "I think I proved I'm still an explosive fighter."

The Mexico City fighter, who lost the WBO bantamweight title last summer, could have used his long arms, especially the jab, to win an easy but dull fight. That's just not Gonzalez's style, especially in front of a raucous pro-Mexican crowd.

He let the guns blow.

Volley after volley of thundering body shots were unloaded by Gonzalez. Pastrana refused to wilt and fired some right hands off the Mexican's head. But he could never find a way to avoid that left hook.

Realizing the left hook was getting through, Pastrana became conscious of it and suddenly a right cross pummeled his head and forced his legs to wobble. Then Gonzalez fired a right hand and several left hooks and another right hand that drove him to the floor for the count in the fourth round. He got up.

Gonzalez saw that his opponent was still reeling a bit and went after him again. A right hand to the body followed by a left hook to the liver dropped him again, this time for good at 2:32 of the fourth round.

Pastrana was impressed with Gonzalez.

"He caught me with a great shot," said Pastrana. "He's got a great future."

Gonzalez wants one more fight before challenging for a world title.

"I don't care if it's for the 122-pound title or the 126-pound title," said Gonzalez. "And I don't care

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who I fight. I just want one more fight, then a world title fight this year.”

Other bouts

Riverside's Michael “Lil Warrior” Franco didn't know what to expect against Tijuana's Benito Abraham (9-12-4, 6 KOs). As soon as the fight began he had a miniature tornado in front of him, but he quickly found a solution after nearly two rounds in the bantamweight bout.

“I went to the shoulders and the body, not a lot of people do that, but it works,” said Franco (11-0, 8 KOs) who remains undefeated. “I work hard sparring so I wasn't worried about fighting hard right away.”

Franco nearly wound up on his body blows and was landing, but Abraham decided to match blow for blow and paid the price. A series of punches to the abdomen followed by an overhand right dropped Abraham for the first time in the middle of the second round. He got up. Then a right to the body followed by a left hook to the liver floored Abraham again for good. Referee Ray Corona counted out the Tijuana fighter at 2:59 of the second round.

Al Franco, the father of Michael Franco who also serves as his trainer, said they spent weeks preparing for a southpaw and ended up with a right-hander days before the fight. No matter, Franco created openings with his body attack and ended it abruptly.

Another Riverside fighter, Anthony Villareal (8-2, 4 KOs), won by a clear-cut decision after knocking down Mexico's Jaime Gutierrez (3-2) in the second round of a flyweight bout. A left hook did the job for Villareal, who won the four-round fight 40-35 according to the three judges.

Junior featherweight contender Eduardo Escobedo, who lost his title bid by decision last year against Daniel Ponce De Leon, needed only one round to prove that his Puerto Rican opponent Javier Cintron, a junior lightweight, was way out of his league. The fight was stopped after the first round as Cintron stumbled toward his stool during the break.

Antonio Escalante (18-2, 11 KOs), who lost to Pastrana last year, overpowered New Mexico's David Martinez (18-4-1) with three vicious body blows in a junior featherweight fight. The third one dropped Martinez in the third round. Though he beat the count, referee Raul Caiz stopped the fight despite Martinez's protests at 2:08 of the third round.

“I knew he was a boxer. I showed a lot of things today,” said Escalante, who could possibly face Pastrana in a rematch but wants the titleholders. “Whoever my promoters tell me to fight, but I want guys like Daniel Ponce De Leon, Celestino Caballero.”

Oxnard's Daniel Cervantes (10-0-1) returned to the ring against Miami's Alex Perez (23-28-4) and looked sharp despite a two-year absence. But he had been in the ring as a sparring partner for Manny Pacquiao at the Wild Card so he wasn't entirely rusty. After four quick rounds the Cervantes took home the victory by unanimous decision 40-36 by all three judges in the junior welterweight match.