

Mijares Looked Like A Mexican Willie Pep

Written by Ron Borges
Saturday, 17 May 2008 19:00

Cristian Mijares unified the super flyweight title for the first time in 10 years Saturday night the same way the Baltimore Ravens won the Super Bowl a few years ago. He did it with overwhelming defense.

Boxing like a Mexican Willie Pep, the WBC super fly champion frustrated and bamboozled WBA titleholder Alexander Munoz for most of their 12-round battle in Durango, Mexico. Mijares never hurt Munoz unless he hurt his feelings by so often making him look amateurish but that alone was enough to win a split decision in his hometown as well as half of the existing titles at 115 pounds.

This fight was a contrast in styles from the opening bell to the final one with Mijares (35-3-2, 14 KO) using his boxing skills, quick combinations and the ability to consistently slip out of range to steal the play away from the far more powerful Munoz (32-3, 27 KO) in just about every round but two.

In the opening round Munoz came out in an aggressive crouch, constantly moving forward and attacking Mijares and doing so with consistent success. Yet when he failed to overwhelm him he inexplicably went away from the crouch for the next six rounds and seemed to lose all but one of them as Mijares circled, pot-shotted him and then made him miss an inordinate amount of wild hooks.

The straight right hand is the major weapon against a southpaw like Mijares and Munoz tried to land it but more often than not it struck only the night air in Durango as Mijares would one moment slip under it and another let it shoot wildly by his ear or simply step to the side and avoid the entire situation.

Munoz never could get his rhythm or find any kind of long-lasting answer to Mijares' defense, the likes of which have not been seen in boxing in quite some time. It is those defensive skills and his ability to pile up points with quick if less than heavy-handed combinations that have a growing legion of people in boxing arguing that Mijares may well be one of the top pound-for-pound fighters in the world.

If your preference is power punching, then Mijares is not your cup of tea. But if ring generalship, mastery of distance and timing and defensive skills that are more art than warfare are something you can appreciate than Cristian Mijares is the kind of boxer you would enjoy watching go to work.

Clearly a frustrated and tiring Munoz did not enjoy that experience however. He lost his WBA title by being struck all night with a velvet hammer. It didn't seem to hurt much but it kept him not only at bay but constantly being forced to reload without ever getting to fire his guns.

That was probably a good thing for Mijares because Munoz is not called "El Explosivo" for

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nothing. His 27 knockouts in 32 victories speak for themselves and the Venezuelan had promised before the fight that he would add Mijares to his long list of victims.

He might have, if he could have hit him. But that, Alexander Munoz was seldom able to do, and after the first round he never really landed anything with flush authority because Mijares was too elusive, too technically proficient and too smart to stay for long in harm's way.

Instead he seemed to be constantly in motion, moving away from Munoz's power one time, slipping under it another, blocking it a third and stopping him from launching it the next time by slapping him with enough punches to knock him off his rhythm, even though nothing the WBC champion landed had any lasting effect.

What did begin to affect Munoz though was the number of punches he missed. Nothing tires a fighter faster than missing wildly and that Munoz did often. As the rounds wore on and his frustration grew, Munoz missed more and more and soon he seemed to tire badly. Not from being assaulted but from being unable to assault his opponent.

How the judge from Panama found a way to give the nod to Munoz is difficult to fathom. Not only did he lose at least eight of the 12 rounds but he also had a point deducted for hitting behind the head in the sixth round after repeated warnings to cease his use of his shoulder as a weapon. Munoz won the round with some long right hands that finally found Mijares but with the deduction and two short right hooks from Mijares late in the round he got no better than a draw for his effort.

At least that round he was able to find Mijares, something he did again in Round 7, which was his best round since the opening three minutes. His success that round seemed to come after he returned to the crouch he'd used in Round 1, landing several solid uppercuts and a stiff right hand.

But none of those punches did any significant damage, at least nothing Mijares wasn't able to counter with his quickness and skillful boxing ability. By the ninth round Mijares had again taken the play completely away from Munoz and he never really let him get back into the fight.

The victory opens up a wealth of possibilities for Mijares at 115 pounds. He could pursue WBO champion Fernando Montiel or IBF belt holder Dimitri Kirilov to try and further unify the titles, seek out popular fellow countryman Jorge Arce, who is himself a big puncher with 37 KOs among his 48 victories or chase down somewhat faded Martin Castillo, who is the only man other than Mijares to defeat Munoz.

Whomever he does face next will find himself in the same position as Alexander Munoz did Saturday night – on the defensive because of the defensive master Cristian Mijares has become.

In the semi-main event, Julio Cesar "Pingo" Miranda left Omar Salado with a pinging sound inside his head, stopping him in the fifth round with three stinging left hands. The first sent Salado (19-1-2, 11 KO) stumbling across the ring and into the ropes and the next two convinced

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the referee (although not everyone else in the building) to step in and stop the fight.

Salado had begun to take the play away from Miranda (26-3-1, 19 KO) in the WBC flyweight eliminator after being dropped less than two minutes into the fight by the same left hand that would ultimately end his night early. He seemed to have shaken off the effects of that first onslaught and fought his way back into the fight only to run into the same left four rounds later... and this time he could not recover in time.

By then his nose was bloodied, his right eye had a purple bruise under it and his legs were wobbling like an old picnic bench on uneven ground. When the end came he was not happy about it but his corner did not protest. They were preoccupied working to staunch the flow of blood from his nose and a cut on his forehead while explaining to him what had just happened to him.