

ESPN FNF Recap: Ahunanya Upsets Butler

Written by Michael Woods
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Friday Ahunanya hadn't stepped up and over the hump when presented with step-up fights in the past, but the 36-year-old Nigerian scored the highest profile victory of his career when he did enough damage to Alonzo Butler in the main event of ESPN's Friday Night Fights the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas to come away with a unanimous decision.

The judges spoke after ten rounds, and they saw it, 95-94, 96-93, 95-95 for Ahunanya, who has losses to Alex Povetkin, Sergei Liakhovich, and Mount Whitaker on his resume. This was an upset, but cannot be lumped in with some of the other shockers we've enjoyed this year on ESPN, and neither man is pegged for a title shot in the near future, or seen as a future star.

The 28-year-old Butler (26-1-1) weighed 265 pounds, while Ahunanya (22-5-3) weighed 238 pounds. Butler pegged Friday as a stationary type, and said if he stayed in place, he'd get kayoed. Butler, by the way, contemplated retirement after suffering a detached retina, but had surgery on his left eye, and couldn't shake the boxing bug. But Friday was fortunate to be catching Butler in a rust period; he hadn't fought in a year after his surgery and healing process, and was ripe to be toppled from the ranks of the unbeaten.

Ahunanya had the edge in punches landed 143-101. Teddy Atlas saw it 96-92, Ahunanya.

In the first, Butler, who came in dry, got off to a slow start. In the last ten seconds, the heavies got untracked and threw down but nobody set an impressive tone. Moving forward, Butler showed some solid skills, and glimpses of athleticism that leaves a watcher wanting more. More of a workrate, mostly. If Butler showed more urgency in the ring, he'd be further ahead on the road to a title.

In the fourth, it was Friday who got down to business, as he sent Butler to the mat with a right on the chin. He rose, and his left eye was badly lumped up. He tried to fight back but Friday's eyes got wide, he smelled blood. Then, shockingly, he backed off, and let Butler off the hook. Maybe, off what we know of Friday, that does not come as a shock; he has not answered the call when asked to step up previously. Butler made it out of the round.

Butler came out blasting in the fifth, to show Friday he wasn't still buzzed. Then Butler worked his jab, and mixed in the occasional power punch to decent effect.

But there were more problems in the seventh round for Butler. The left eye didn't shrink and he was caught on the ropes as Friday blasted away. The ref stopped the action and asked the doctor to take a look at him. "I'm good, I'm good," Butler said, after contemplating a No Mas, but thinking the better of it after eyeing a camera. And the action continued. Again, he made it to the end of the round. In his corner, trainer Ace Miller told him to move more, after Butler told him he could not see.

The eighth started, with Butler moving to his left, away from Friday's money punch, the right

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hand. Friday did not press the issue, and there were some boos raining down, from fight fans disappointed that he did not spend some of the capital in his pocket.

Butler was ripe for the picking in the ninth as well, but he managed to stay in the match. In the tenth and final round, Butler, likely needing a KO, had to contend with a jazzed up Friday. Friday winged overhand rights, and hooks, but he was on 'E,' basically, and could not press the pedal to the floor long enough to sustain a lengthy flurry that would force a stoppage.

Butler deserves props to not quitting; all us sideline snipers like to judge those who choose not to continue, even those who've contemplated whether continuing in the ring could lead to blindness, perhaps. Ahunanya deserves a pat on the back for the upset win. Not to throw cold water on his party, however, but Butler's undefeated record was built on a thin foundation.

Marvin Hagler sat in studio with Brian Kenny. We saw clips of Hagler vs. Boogaloo Watts (loss, MD, 1976); Cyclone Hart (TKO8 win, 1976); Willie Monroe (TKO2 win, 1977); Bennie Briscoe (UD10 win, 1978), all in the heart of the city of (not so) Brotherly Love, Philadelphia. Hagler told Kenny that he tries to steer clear of boxing gyms because he might get the urge to glove up again. I don't doubt MMH couldn't give some trouble to some pups out there even today.

Atlas told viewers that he respects Hagler immensely for stepping away from the game after he felt wronged by the decision loss to Sugar Ray Leonard in 1987. "That was my way of showing that it was unfair, that the judges were not correct," Hagler said. He said he gave Leonard a year to get a rematch but SRL didn't come to the table, so he walked away, and stayed away.

SPEEDBAG Atlas sized up the feature bout in the hotel pool before the bell rang. It gave him the opportunity to use the groaner pun about taking a foe into the deep water. Couldn't blame him, for the pun, or the setting. It was 106 degrees out there.

---The card was a mixed boxing/MMA card, and open to the public for free, but those facts weren't focused on by the ESPN crew. Not sure why. Theories, anyone?