BOSTON – John Duddy bled for his money Saturday night at The Castle. He's getting used to it.

For the second straight fight Duddy sustained a cut around his right eye but it was nowhere near as severe, or as costly, as the ones over both his eyes in his last outing. That night he won a fight but lost a shot at the middleweight title because of the extent of the damage he suffered. On Saturday, he won a fight and didn't lose a round despite a slight cut along the side of his right eye, the result of an inadvertent clash of heads with Charlie Howe in the ninth round.

That was one of the few times Howe touched Duddy all night. Instead, he was acquiescent in the extreme, allowing the WBC and WBO's No. 2 ranked middleweight contender to control him with a surprisingly effective jab and stagger him several times with sweeping right hooks to the chin. If Howe had been hired to bolster Duddy's confidence he couldn't have been more effective than the role he played at the sold-out Castle – that of congenial sparring partner.

A highly partisan crowd of 1,300 Irishmen roared at everything Duddy did but most especially when he landed what would become a withering body attack that broke down Howe's defenses and allowed Duddy to stagger him late in the second, fifth and eighth rounds after his hands came down.

Howe (17-5-2, 9 KO) never seemed in significant danger but he took a pounding to go the distance. By the time the three judges had all voted unanimously for Duddy by identical 100-90 scores, both of Howe's eyes were bruised and discolored, his nose was dripping red and his face was bruised and puffy. Still he stood up to the end, refusing to fall even after Duddy had done his best to convince him of the wisdom of such an act.

"I caught him with some beautiful shots,'' the undefeated (25-0, 17 KO) Duddy said. "I thought a few times he was ready to go. I was using my jab more to get authority in there but that man has some chin.''

Indeed he does but he didn't have much fire power or much willingness to throw his hands in Duddy's direction after being wobbled near the end of the second round from a left hand that sent him into a shaky half squat. Just as Howe straightened up, Duddy caught him with a beautiful body shot but then the bell sounded to end the attack.

A similar pattern repeated itself twice more, with Duddy hurting Howe late in rounds but unable to finish him. Duddy repeatedly drove Howe into the ropes or the turnbuckles and scored heavily at times after he did but he was never able to push Howe into the grey room that precedes unconsciousness.

Conversely, Howe was unable to test Duddy's chin or the scarred skin around his eyes because he was so often playing defense, and his time on offense was limited to a very few

opportunities. When he got them, Duddy most often refused to do as he has so often in the past. He refused to ignore the fact that, at times, there is more to boxing than offense.

“I stopped being thick headed,’’ Duddy said. “I made a point of remembering you don’t have to be brave all the time. Sometimes I think because I can take a punch I can just get hit. You have to use your brain in boxing.’’

Duddy used that reformed mindset as well as the kind of jab new trainer Pat Burns strongly believes in to maintain control of the fight. Then he followed up with some crisp body shots, even at times slipping to the side to dig them in deeply, and a limited number of right hands behind his hard jab. The latter is something Burns hopes to see on the increase as he continues to work with Duddy but for a shake down cruise, the veteran Miami trainer was pleased enough at the outcome.

“One thing I wanted him to do was really use the jab,’’ said Burns, who replaced veteran trainer Don Turner after Turner was dismissed following Duddy’s last, bloody victory. “That and not let his Irish get up in him. When he gets hit he’s like a guy coming out of a bar. He’s looking for a fight. I didn’t want that.

“He was a little like that in the first round but then he settled down. I put a lot more emphasis on the jab because the last few fights I saw on tape he was brawling. He threw a hell of a lot more jabs this fight than I’ve ever seen before. I thought he hurt him three or four times but the bell rang. Sometimes he smothered himself after he hurt him.’’

All night he smothered Howe by constantly coming forward, often but not always behind his jab. He often established proper punching distance and worked Howe’s body intently. Eventually that slowed him down enough that Duddy’s jab and straight right hand began to get through and do significant damage.

“He hit me a lot tonight,’’ Howe admitted. “He was more patient and more accurate than I expected.’’

Painfully accurate and dangerously patient.

On the undercard, two-time National amateur champion Edwin Rodriguez continued undefeated but showed he has a lot to learn despite earning a unanimous six-round decision over Hector Hernandez (1-3-2, 4 KO). Rodriguez showed he is a heavy-handed super middleweight but one with serious defensive deficiencies and a bad habit of dropping down to throw a wide right hand to the body that leaves him open to a left hand counter from anyone with quick hands and the gumption to throw it.

Hernandez had neither but he held up well enough and was never in trouble despite the constant pressure put on him by the offense-minded Rodriguez (7-0, 5 KO). Going the distance for the second time was a much needed lesson for Rodriguez, who remains a prospect with promise but also one with a lot of work still to do.

Canadian Olympian Donny Orr (no relation to the hockey playing Bobby Orr, who remains a Boston legend 36 years after leading the Bruins to the Stanley Cup) continued his own undefeated streak by winning a unanimous eight-round decision from Roberto Valenzuela (no relation to the baseball pitching Fernando Valenzuela who starred for the Los Angeles Dodgers 26 years ago). Valenzuela was a rough customer from Sonora, Mexico who, according to the fight's promoters, once held the Mexican Pacific Coast middleweight championship. As titles go that's not much but these days everybody seems to have some sort of belt they can lay claim to.

Orr (13-0, 5 KO) didn't leave the arena with it but he did manage to leave with the victory after dropping Valenzuela (44-38-2, 37 KO) with a sweeping right uppercut in the final seconds of the second round and then easily controlling the remainder of the fight. Valenzuela was not happy about being deposited on the seat of his red shorts but scrambled back up, more nonplussed than hurt. He seldom threw his hands thereafter however as Orr won every round according to the judges with little fear that anything he threw would be answered.