

TORRES: I Hope Holt Won't Run This Time

Written by Ron Borges
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Ricardo Torres has grown a little tired of hearing about the grave injustices done to Kendall Holt 10 months ago in Barranquilla, Torres hometown in Columbia.

The WBO junior welterweight champion is weary of hearing Holt and his promoters drone on and on about how he wasn't slipping and sliding all over the ring in the 11th round because Torres had just exploded a left hook off his face that drove him onto his back but rather because beer and soda thrown into the ring by wild-eyed Torres supporters had turned the ring mat into an ice rink.

If it was that slippery, Torres asks quite logically, why wasn't he stumbling around as if he was on a sheet of ice himself when he was chasing – and hitting – Holt before the referee jumped in and stopped the fight?

Frankly Torres was reeling around in similar fashion in the sixth round after Holt dropped a bomb on him similar to the one Torres used to win the fight. The difference? One guy fought back. The other guy slid back.

"Holt is a sore loser," the WBO champion said this week. "He didn't take advantage of the fight when he could have. I thought I had the fight under control and Holt caught me. I was hurt but I got out of the round. I was behind on points so I knew I had to go for the knockout. I showed I can take a punch and get up and continue fighting. Anybody can get hit with a good shot and go down. It's what you do after getting knocked down that counts."

What Torres did was get up and win the fight, although Holt insists that he was hit in the face with a beer can while Torres was on the floor in the sixth round and that gave him pause the rest of the night.

"From that point on I was thinking, 'If I knock this guy out will I make it back in one piece?'" Holt claimed. "As much as I tried to stay focused, it was hard because I was in another country.

"After that knockdown I went back to the corner and don't remember a word that my trainer said. I was just thinking that I got hit with a beer can and nothing was done about it."

There seem to be differing opinions about that and certainly, in the end, the WBO rejected Holt's 35-page appeal for an immediate rematch. Eventually Torres has granted him one but what he believes he also has given him is something to remember him by.

"The only thing he got hit with was my punches," Torres (32-1, 28 KO) insisted. "That's why he went down. As far as I'm concerned, and obviously the WBO, it was a fair win.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm the champion. I'm out here to face the best fighters out there. They say Holt (23-2, 12 KO) is that right now. I accept that. The opportunity was brought up to

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fight Holt again. I have no problem with that. If that's what needs to be done, that's what needs to be done. I'll fight Holt and move on to even bigger and better fights."

Las Vegas odds makers don't see it that way. They've installed Holt as a 2 1/2 to 1 betting favorite in large measure because Holt is the smoother boxer. Torres, in contrast, is as wild as Columbian politics, aggressive to a fault. That he can punch is clear but he's often so aggressive he leaves himself open to be countered by a quick handed guy like Holt and thus faces the constant threat of unconsciousness himself.

That potentially tragic flaw is what got him in trouble when he was on the edge of his greatest moment – the night he had Miguel Cotto in the biggest trouble of his career.

Little was expected of Torres that night. Cotto's coronation was supposed to continue and appeared to be well on its way when Torres lashed out and wobbled Cotto after getting up off the canvas in the first round, dropping Cotto at the end of an unanswered 12-punch barrage in the second round and shaking him again in round 5 with a right uppercut that had Cotto's legs stiff and his head swimming.

It was a night of high drama in which Cotto went down for the first time in his career and Torres went down four times before finally being stopped by a left uppercut that left him sprawled on his hands and knees, unable to rise, at 1:52 of the seventh round. It was a night Billy Chams cannot forget and Holt would be wise to remember.

"Two times he only needed one more punch (to stop Cotto)," Torres' manager and co-promoter said from his home in Columbia. "Unfortunately for us, that one punch didn't happen but that fight opened the door of opportunity."

Cotto chalked his difficulties up to a bad night born of overlooking a last minute replacement, but Torres believes it was born from something quite different. He believes he lost only because he was not yet mature enough to win, a problem he did not exhibit once he hurt Holt.

"I could have knocked Cotto out but I rushed him when I had the chance to finish him," Torres said. "I was too desperate (to win). I was too hungry. You can't be in a rush. But he felt my power. A lot of people look at me and think I'm just a skinny kid but they change their mind after feeling my punch."

That punch and that fight first brought Torres (32-1, 28 KO) to the world's attention, landing him a WBO title shot 14 months later for the then vacant 140-pound championship. In an oddly scored match, Torres won a split decision from Mike Arnaoutis in Las Vegas with judges Jerry Roth and Harry Davis scoring the bout a tight 114-113 with their opinions split on whose side of the ledger to come down on while Adalaide Byrd saw Torres a fairly convincing 116-111 winner.

Torres has twice defended the title since, although not without further controversy, at least when it comes to last September's meeting with Holt in Barranquilla. If you believe Holt, he was a victim of the biggest heist since the Brink's job. Charming Billy Chams is of another opinion however.

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"For me, the word controversial is only in Holt's peoples' minds," Chams said. "He knocked down Torres. He had the opportunity to win the fight and he lost that opportunity. Then he got knocked out clean in the 11th round."

Well, not exactly clean but stopped nonetheless and so it has come to this, a rematch promoter Bob Arum insists is the only real way to settle these kind of debates.

"When things are controversial in boxing very often lawsuits start," Arum said. "All of this is going to be settled in the ring. I was watching (the first fight) from a tape after the event. I thought the referee stoppage was justified. I thought Holt was really hurt."

"It was very, very difficult for me to see on that tape what the fans were carrying on in the arena. I did see stuff being thrown but you couldn't get the impact unless you were there so it's very, very hard for me to say but I think the stoppage was justified."

"When we got into the picture we figured that the way to solve it was to get everybody together, pay everybody and put the fight on. In boxing disputes should be settled in the ring."

Certainly this one will be. It will not be settled by lawyers or instant replays or odds makers with an opinion. It will be settled in the way Ricardo Torres wants it settled. It will all be straightened out in the ring, very likely with one of them being straightened out in the ring.

"The guy that made the odds is not getting in the ring," Torres said. "The people that are betting on the fight are not getting in the ring. I'm going to prove everybody wrong. I'm prepared mentally and physically for this fight. There is no favorite. We still have to fight."

"I was hitting Holt with a lot of punches at the end of the (first) fight. I was just after him. He was throwing maybe a couple of slap punches at me but the referee did the right thing. His job is to protect the fighters at all times and I think he was doing that."

"I know what I can do against Holt. We know each other very well (now). I don't think Holt can change that much. Without a doubt I know him better. I know what to expect. You'll see me more sure of what I'm trying to do and the things I need to do. I'm ready to go."

At some point Saturday night at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas, Ricardo Torres believes he'll have Kendall Holt ready to go as well, thus ending this whole discussion once and for all.

"I hope Holt won't run away this time (making note of his opponent's constant backpedaling during much of their first match)," Torres said. "I expect him to fight, not run like he did in Barranquilla. I'll beat him in Las Vegas so there won't be any doubt whose the better fighter."