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LIMERICK, Ireland -- A new medical center is scheduled to open at the University of Limerick next year, but it's a pity the facility wasn't available for Andy Lee on Saturday night. In what is becoming a regular occurrence, Lee suffered a nasty cut that will keep him on out of action for several months.

Still, Lee figures the injury was a small price to pay on route to stopping Willie Gibbs in the tenth round of their middleweight contest at the University of Limerick Arena.

Despite carrying an insurmountable points lead into the final round, Lee upped his aggression in the tenth and sought to attack Gibbs with a head-snapping southpaw left cross. The punch eventually floored Gibbs and a follow-up salvo prompted the American's corner to throw in the towel with just ten seconds remaining, rescuing the rubbery-legged fighter.

But by adopting a more offensive approach, Lee left himself open to attacks, and a combination of a head clash and Gibbs' looping right hand saw the Limerick native incur a deep wound on his forehead and a gash above his right eye. Lee's manager and trainer Emanuel Steward had penciled in a fight for Chicago next month, but the fighter's facial damage will result in the postponement of that scheduled ESPN appearance.

The luster had come off the 2004 Olympian's virtuous reputation after a surprising seventh round stoppage against the unheralded slugger Brian Vera in Connecticut last March. The flaws Lee displayed on that night – his propensity to cut and openness to the right hand – were again on show at the weekend, but on a reduced frequency.

The skilful Lee, who Steward heralded as the best middleweight in the world, allowed himself to get drawn into a tit-for-tat brawl with the rugged Vera and eventually ran out of steam. As Ron Borges wrote: "Vera had found a way to lure Lee into a trap by turning what had at first been a boxing match into a slugfest. Once that process began, Lee was fatally drawn to that flame, unable to reassert his dominant boxing skills until he was left burned and beaten."

Many observers questioned the stoppage given that Lee was ahead on points and throwing back punches, but even the fighter himself admitted that "he hit me too much."

In Gibbs, Lee was facing a similarly aggressive fighter to Vera, and was provided with the ideal opportunity to iron out the defects that led to the blotting of his previously unbeaten record.

And while Lee did on occasion get caught by some wild hooks, he absorbed the shots and resisted the temptation to exchange with the hardy Philadelphian. Lee, 24, utilized his long right jab throughout the fight and regularly switched the angles of his attack, peppering Gibbs with an assortment of hooks and uppercuts to head and body.

There were times when Lee had Gibbs in trouble, most notably in the fourth and fifth frames, but

the 32-year-old managed to hang on and respond with enough energy to keep the Irishman honest.

Gibbs exhibited admirable resolve throughout the contest and deserved to hear the final bell, but he had soaked up ample punishment for one night.

“Fair play to [Gibbs],” remarked Lee, 16-1 (13). “He has got a tremendous heart and he never stopped coming forward and I have total respect for the way he performed here tonight and I think that both of us can grow from this.”

Gibbs, a cousin of former two-weight champion Bernard Hopkins, is probably a superior fighter to Vera, having defeated Leonard Pierre and gone the distance with perennial contender Raymond Joval. Yet he was not the “world-class” threat as touted by some sections of the Irish media. Gibbs, 20-4 (16) was brutally knocked out by Edison Miranda and stopped by the ordinary Daniel Edouard. But he does routinely display characteristics that make him an admirable prizefighter.

Throughout the ten rounds of Saturday’s bout, Lee looked stylish in handling Gibbs, but his tendency to cut could become a major hindrance to his progress. Steward’s time is precious and he has invested greatly in a fighter he maintains is among the world’s elite. Lee lives with the renowned trainer in Detroit and partakes in the training camps of the Kronk founder’s other notable fighters, including heavyweight titlist Wladimir Klitschko and welterweight puncher Kermit Cintron.

Yet Steward must decide how to handle Lee’s obvious talent. The hype that surrounded Lee has diminished Stateside, with promotional outfit Top Rank pulling a deal that would have exposed a myriad of valuable opportunities to the Irishman.

In the near-term Lee is aiming to fight in December, but Steward must be aware of the temptation to take a gamble and rush Lee into a high-profile fight; cashing in on the fighter’s marketability instead of risking further losses due his fragile skin or otherwise.

Alternatively, the decreased attention surrounding Lee may boost the longevity of his career, providing him ample time to learn further aspects of the game from one of the sport’s most knowledgeable tutors. And as evidenced by his desire to finish off Gibbs on Saturday, Lee’s ambition remains robust.

“Andy is a student of boxing,” notes Steward. “We sit home in Detroit and watch films of the great fighters. He’s like a sponge. He wants to absorb all the knowledge he can.”

“I definitely feel that I have matured and have learned from the Vera defeat,” adds Lee. “I showed on Saturday that I have learned to be more patient and not to rush things and not to get carried away by the crowd, even though they were magnificent.”