

A Contender, If Not Star, Is Born On FNF

Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 08 August 2008 19:00

Perhaps a star was not born at Chicago's Aragon Ballroom on Friday evening, but at the very least, a solid light heavyweight contender was unveiled in the main event of ESPN's Friday Night Fights. Tavoris Cloud, a Florida native who has been fighting out of Illinois for two years, stopped credible vet Julio Gonzalez at 2:50 of the tenth, by TKO, and is now supposed to get a crack at the IBF light heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver.

The Mexican-born Gonzalez (age 32, 174 pounds, 41-5 coming in) came off a loss to Reggie Johnson, while Cloud (age 26, 174, 18-0 coming) was making his FNF debut.

Cloud's statline was 280-696, while Gonzalez' was 161-867.

In the first, the former WBO 175 pound champ Gonzalez ate heavy shots from Cloud. It was all he could do to escape the first. A lead left hook, and a nasty right follow stunned Gonzalez badly. In the second, Gonzalez moved more, as he respected the youngsters' power. But Cloud has good balance, and accuracy, and instincts, and desire, and he impressed the crowd with his zest. In round three, Gonzalez tried to control the pace better with a jab but it was sloooooow. Still, he weathered the storm, maybe, you had to think, he could take Cloud into deeper waters. But Cloud banged him with uppercuts, and took the round.

In the fourth, Cloud slowed some. He'd never been past five as a pro, so we watched the fifth round with extra scrutiny. Gonzalez only just survived a fierce assault, as a left hook to the body and then up top hurt him. A right, and a left hook both nearly dropped Gonzalez. Shannon Briggs rightly pointed out that no doctor looked at Julio after he absorbed some hard, clean shots. In round six, Gonzalez looked sapped. He ate a mean right, and jabbed back timidly. A vicious left hook landed, and he was caught on the ropes. "Punch back," the ref yelled. He didn't. He then ate a right, and somehow stayed on his feet. Too brave! His punches had nothing on them, and no one would've howled at a stoppage. "What is he made of?" Briggs asked. "Julio's a hell of a man, a tough dude," Briggs said.

In the seventh, Gonzalez again rose off his stool, God bless him. Cloud pulled off the pedal some. In the eighth, Cloud landed right hands with regularity. In round nine, Cloud was backing up some, as he searched for his second wind. In the tenth, Cloud bounced, and his output dropped off more. Then he'd fire a mean right, just to remind Julio he was losing. Joe Tessitore said that he worried that Gonzalez was taking so much punishment, and I agree, fully. Again, too brave for his own good. A big right landed with 12 seconds to go and the ref stepped right in, even though Julio didn't fall. From the sidelines I'd like to recommend rigorous brainscans and neuro testing for Gonzalez.

SPEEDBAG Teddy Atlas is working in Beijing, so Shannon Briggs sat in for him. He made one of the sharpest points I've heard from any analyst in some time, when he said that the conventional wisdom we hear, that it is wise for a righty to fire a straight right, a lead right, to combat a lefty, is a new strategy. That came about in the 80s or early 90s, he said. Before that,

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the old school trainers would tell fighters to pop lefties with their jab, because the left hand was close to a lefty's head.