Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 03 October 2008 19:00

Tim Coleman battled James De La Rosa at the Normandy Arena in Salisbury, Maryland on Friday evening. It was a back and forth battle, with the harder-hitting De La Rosa having some difficulty getting a bead on the slick Coleman. It looked like De La Rosa had done enough to get the nod, though, and Coleman screamed “What!!??” and let his trainer lift him high in the air when the in ring announcer called out the scores, paused eight seconds and then said “Tim…”

But the elation switched to disbelief when the announcer, whose name I didn’t catch while watching the card on ShoBox, realized he made an error, and called out the wrong fighter as the victor. “James, James De La Rosa,” the announcer said, quickly correcting himself.

Michael Buffer makes it look easy, but it takes more than a booming voice and a tux to do the job, and unfortunately our man in Maryland pulled a major league screwup that left Coleman in the dumps after his second in the sun.

The Texan De La Rosa (17-0, 12 KOs coming in; age 20; 149) and the Baltimorean Coleman (14-0-1, 3 KOs; age 24; 147 pounds) went the full ten, in a closely contested faceoff that is a testament to matchmaker Chris Middendorf’s skills.

The judges spoke after ten completed rounds, and scored it 96-94, 96-94, 96-94, De La Rosa, who did his most telling work to the body.

In the first, neither man off the bat looked to be of a noticeably higher grade. Both have a quick jab, and Coleman looked like his defense would be hard to pierce. In the second, Coleman knocked De La’s head back with a straight right, and DLR had a hard time answering, as Coleman’s head movement made his cabbage a shifting target. In round three, DLR hit home with rights to the body, then absorbed a right cross. Coleman shoved DLR after the bell rang to end the third. In the fourth, DLR put together a three punch combo that took some wind out of Coleman. The Md. fighter’s feet were less active, and that did not play to his strengths. The round was clearly DLR’s.

In the fourth, Coleman again got bulled to the ropes. The body shots he’d been taking had piled up on him. He then got moving in the fifth, but just to avoid punches, rather than as part of a strategy, and to get angles conducive to success. In the sixth round, Coleman got a second wind, until the last ten seconds, when DLR raked him with body blows. In the seventh, there was back and forth drama. “You let him back in,” DLR’s cornerman Danny Smith told DLR, who ate too many rights, because he didn’t bob and weave enough. In round eight, both men were tired (duh) but Coleman’s energy level was higher than it looked like it could’ve been a couple rounds ago. Coleman’s punches had more steam, often. In the ninth, Coleman bounced some, and looked to land showy left hooks. DLR didn’t hit the body as much and that held him back from winning rounds more decisively, but he likely had the edge here. In the tenth round, who would have more energy? DLR, it turned out. He looked for sneaky Coleman counters, making sure he wouldn’t get caught with something foolish, and simply threw…more….punches. Name of the game.

In the TV opener, Dominican Republic native/Salisbury local Fernando Guerrero (9-0, 9 KOs coming in; 159 1/4) took on Pennsylvanian Tyrone Watson (7-0, 3 KOs; 161 ¾ pounds) in a bout scheduled for eight. For the record, it sounded like the majority of the 6,000 plus people in attendance were there for Guerrero—the joint was hot, and loud. The fight started off right for me in the first when Steve Farhood made an ABBA reference. “They’re screaming Fernando, I thought I was at an ABBA concert,” said Farhood. Watson had a humongous reach advantage, while the lefty Guerrero stood flat-footed, looking to set down on his throws as much as possible. In the second, Guerrero ramped it up. He mixed head and body, and his right hooks to Watson’s side took a mean toll. In the third, Watson told Guerrero to bring it on, and the hometowner did. He knocked the mouthpiece out of Watson’s mouth, and the Pa. hitter had nothing to answer Guerrero as he ate cracks. He did well to finish the third. He had to hope the Marylander would punch himself out.

In the fourth, Watson even landed a right as Guerrero charged in. In the fifth, Watson bounced around, with little rhyme or reason. It got ugly late, but Watson got off the ropes and bought himself more time. Was that a good thing? Guerrero had less fire in the sixth to start, but Watson’s tank was bone dry. Hats off to the kid for sticking around, for what it’s worth. In the seventh, Guerrero got jazzed again, looking to keep his stoppage streak alive. He’d have to do it in the eighth. In the last round, Guerrero went all out, impressive considering he turns 22 on Oct. 12th, and had fought 18 total rounds since turning pro last December. But Watson, who deserved a survivor bonus—make it happen, Cap’n!—made it to the final bell. The judges scored it 80-72, 80-71, 80-72, for Guerrero, who is trained by the Peterson Brothers tutor, Barry Hunter.

SPEEDBAG Interestingly, there was an ad for CBS’ Saturday MMA show thrown up there during the first contest. The graphic featured not backyard brawler Kimbo Slice, but Gina Carano, a featured performer on NBC’s American Gladiators.

--Readers, anyone who knows the name of the in-ring announcer who tortured Coleman, send a comment, and fill us all in.