

Donaire's Confidence Is Sky High

Written by Rick Folstad
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Left hooks like the one that crumbled Vic Darchinyan last year are rare and precious. They should be studied and recorded for future generations, made available for viewing like a huge diamond.

If you didn't see the hook, don't worry. Neither did Darchinyan. The pretty little thing was delivered with malice by Nonito "The Filipino Flash" Donaire, coming out of nowhere in the fifth round of their IBF flyweight title fight. The punch - short, sweet and a party crasher - put a sudden end to a fight that appeared like it might be tight heading into the later rounds.

But it was over in a Filipino flash, or shortly after Donaire launched it. One second Darchinyan was moving forward like he had Donaire right where he wanted him. The next second, he looked like a drunk staggering around trying to find his bar stool in the dark and coming up with nothing but air.

The ref started to count, but realized he was looking silly.

Now, 15 months after that left hook, Donaire is still holding onto his IBF title belt and Darchinyan has moved up and won the IBF super-flyweight title.

They both fight Saturday, but they don't fight each other and they're not fighting in the same town or at the same weight, though you figure each fighter will take a peek later on to see how the other guy did.

Darchinyan fights WBA and WBC super-flyweight champ Cristian Mijares in Carson, Calif. It's a tough fight for the cocky Darchinyan, who has to back up his big talk about how easily he's going to destroy Mijares. Nothing like setting yourself up for a big fall.

Donaire (19-1, 12 KOs), a native of the Philippines who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and speaks better English than most of us, fights No. 1 contender and mandatory challenger Moruti "Baby Face" Mthlale (22-1, 15 KOs) of South Africa at the Mandalay Bay Casino in Las Vegas on pay-per-view. It will be Donaire's first fight with his new promoter, Bob Arum/Top Rank.

Though he's focused on his upcoming fight, Donaire said he would look forward to fighting Darchinyan again. And he knows he would have the edge against the Armenian, who claimed his knockout loss to Donaire was the result of a lucky punch.

It was lucky all right. Darchinyan is lucky he can still hold a normal conversation.

"That's Vic, he just can't accept (getting stopped)," Donaire said. "I took everything away from him that night. Everything. His nose was bloodied up, he got a cut, he was dropped. He had everything taken away from him that night. He's in denial."

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But Flash, would you like to fight him again?

“My promoter will make it happen if they want to. That’s up to them,” Donaire said. “My manager will decide on that. For me, I’m a fighter. That’s all I do is fight. They do their own thing. What they want me to do, I’ll do. I’ll fight who ever is out there. If that fight did happen, that would be good. I think that would really be fun. I figured him out.”

Yeah. Darchinyan is open for left hooks. And his chin is a little suspect.

Donaire, who went into the fight as an underdog, came away from the win believing he can now take on anybody in his weight class. And win.

“In my mind, I know I’m at this (top) level now,” he said. “Everything sky rocketed (after the win). My physical, my mental, everything (is better) because of the confidence level.”

Against the South African, Donaire says he just has to keep his A-game going into the fight, protecting his title with the same intensity he had when he won it 15 months ago against Darchinyan.

“For me to get going, I tell myself this is the title we’re fighting for. This is not my title yet until I really feel that I own this title. That’s why I’m going into this ring as hungry as I came into the ring with Darchinyan.”

Donaire has done his homework.

“The guy can be tough if you take him lightly,” said Donire, who, like Manny Pacquiao, is becoming a national treasure in the Philippines. “We’ve already come up with a game plan that if I throw out this punch and it lands, I know I can take him out.”

Left hooks can be so pretty.