

We Were Both Part Of A Great Fight

Written by Phil Woolever

Saturday, 01 November 2008 19:00

OBERHAUSEN- Yah, Sturm.

I was hoping on Saturday night to see the kind of contest that would inspire a German fight crowd to behave with a bit less formality than they had at previous cards I'd attended, and thanks to the talents and personalities of Felix Sturm and Sebastian Sylvester, an announced swarm of 9,200 at the Konig-Pilsener got loud and stayed loud.

Sturm used far superior technique to capture an intense unanimous decision, and although it seemed obvious way before the final bell that he'd come out far ahead, every frame was dramatic. Scores were 118-110 twice and 119-109. I agreed with the latter, but it was closer than the numbers until the very end when it appeared Sturm might be able to stop his willing but overwhelmed rival.

"We were both part of a great fight," said diplomatic defending WBA champion Sturm afterward in a brief interview broadcast to the adoring masses. "I had to box him more than I thought I would. I had better hand speed, that was the key. I fight up to the expectation level I have to, and I think I'm getting better and better."

"I never (really) got into the fight," admitted Sylvester with plenty of lumps and dignity. "I respect him for how well he fought, he's the rightful champion. My corner told me to put more pressure on him but that was impossible because of how fast he was."

Both men got plenty of vocal support coming into the ring. The crowd was rowdier during just the video monitor profiles than during any previous actual fight I've seen here. German sound systems sound clearer and cranked up tenfold (think full concert volume) compared to US boxing arenas so they're probably never drowned out, but this swarm gave it a try with entrance ovations like those at the biggest stateside affairs.

Maybe the principals and their patrons fed off each others' energy.

To me, Sturm won the fight within the first thirty seconds when he charged right out throwing hard jabs and follow up hooks that stopped Sylvester in his earliest tracks.

When Sylvester quickly covered up, Sturm came around with progressively wider looping lefts and scored with forget-me-not rights. A big Sturm one-two pushed the crowd closer to loco and I heard the almost forgotten sound of air-horns.

Sylvester was no slouch himself and opened up with combinations. He landed a deep left to Sturm's advertisement-worthy abs and Sturm responded in kind. They might as well have been pounding tractor tires with sledgehammers, nothing was going to give there on either side.

Besides firing with fierce abandon, both men kept their gloves up behind fine defensive skills.

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It was close and hard to call early, but Sturm continued to advance while Sylvester was forced to give crucial ground. As Sturm kept up his torrid tempo, by round four the primary question became whether or not Sylvester was playing a bit of possum to lure him in for the later stages. If not, he was getting into a pretty deep hole by the halfway point.

Sylvester eventually found a better range for short right hooks, but Sturm kept the pressure on as his jab continued paying dividend thumps.

Perhaps the biggest sign of where the fight stood came from Sylvester's legions, who grew less enthusiastic. By the end of the seventh, it seemed Sylvester had to accomplish something big, now.

He couldn't.

It was almost a case of Sturm giving a boxing lesson when he rocked Sylvester with a jackhammer jab to open the eighth, a session it wouldn't be unreasonable to score with a two-point spread for Sturm.

During a telling moment in the ninth, Sturm lost his footing from something on the canvas and inadvertently dropped his hands. Sylvester paused from the heated exchanges without trying to press the opening, through either sportsmanship or fatigue. It could have been both.

Sylvester appeared a bit rejuvenated in the tenth with sturdy shots but he needed a major move and never delivered. By now he was only headhunting.

Sturm remained steady and moved Sylvester around the ring with the jab. At the end of the round the regularly reserved Sturm raised a glove in a victory gesture. He could have done it long before.

The crowd was on their feet while Sturm pounded away during the final frame.

Scoring was apparently academic, but the pumped up crowd was too cruel as they gave Sylvester an "Auf Wiedersehen" serenade. Knowledgeable German scribe Thomas Schlabe, who's graciously provided me with translations and background data for various cards, said the gesture is only used during true debacles.

The truest indication of the fight's implications could have come in the post-fight press room. Sebastian sported a multi-bruised face and waited against a wall speaking to a single reporter while Sturm stablemate and WBO Super-welterweight titlist Sergiy Dzinziruk, who defeated Joel Julio in a high-quality appetizer, finished his interviews from the podium.

Sturm arrived, looking dapper with minor marks under the eyes, and the room's focus immediately shifted. Sturm had a trail of TV crews in his wake that brushed past Sylvester as if they didn't notice him.

"I respect Sylvester like I respect any boxer," said Sturm. "His defense was good so I had to

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change my tactics and go inside more. I wanted to finish like a true champion. In the end I was just putting on a show for the fans."

Arthur Abraham is a force to be reckoned with and gets more stateside publicity these days, but after tonight it has yet to be proved that the long running Sturm isn't still Germany's best pound for pound fighter. Providing the likelihood Abraham gets by Raul Marquez next week, a Sturm-Abraham fight might really be something.

I was beginning to think that "boxen" merely translated out to yet another of the many intellectual pursuits that everyone in the general populace from graying executives to young, multi-pierced laborers seems to indulge in and around Dusseldorf. For me it's unrestrained emotion that makes sport or other art forms special, and that spark had been lacking.

No longer. For the national "All Souls Day" on which almost all enterprise comes to a silent halt, der place was rocking.

Sturm earned the significant spoils, but it takes two to tango and Sylvester has nothing to be ashamed of. Almost everyone I asked in my informal, limited language poll which included members of the media, said it was the best fight they'd been to.

Tonight Sturm and Sylvester, a pair of very heavy middleweight cats, gave German boxing something rare and special indeed.