BAMBERG - We all know a night at the fights can mean many things to many people. Saturday night, at a frenzied, sold out JAKO Arena amidst a splendid historical setting, it was definitely one of those nights.

For Arthur Abraham, who pounded worthy challenger Raul Marquez into submission after six sizzling sessions, it was the 23rd stoppage on his unblemished 27-0 record. Judging from the loyal fan support Abraham receives in Bavaria, he's easily the most popular fighter in Germany. This was another successful step toward fully capitalizing on the USA market.

For Sauerland Events, it was another night to prove that in the world of professional boxing, they can put on high-scale events throughout the German countryside on a scale with any promotion on the globe.

For the 6,000 or so well lubricated patrons in the only building I've been in so far here that reminded me of a US fight arena, it was further validation to claims that Abraham belongs with the elite in pound for pound rankings.

For Marquez, 41-4 (29), it was the end of the line.

The arena erupted in boos when Marquez retired before the seventh round, but it was not a "No Mas" moment, nor a subdued surrender a'la Sam Peter against Vitali Kiltschko. Since I was the only guy on the floor beside Marquez and referee Wayne Kelly with his hand over his heart during the USA anthem, I feel qualified to say Marquez was no disgrace.

In fact, I think he pointed out that emperor Arthur may have not so many clothes. More on that later.

I've seen many fistic situations where you could tell one man has basically given up trying to win. This wasn't one of those times. It's conceivable that Marquez understood after just a few minutes what was in store. He could have gone into survival mode and lasted the distance, but instead he charged in and traded with Abraham until he didn't have anything left.

I think I saw here in Bavaria (briefly a capitol of Europe), amidst castles and monuments thousands of years old, that it's possible to ride out on your shield without being carried.

The first omen that it would be a tough night for the visitors came when Otis Griffin got overwhelmed by Enad Licina in a bout for the IBF Cruiserweight Intercontinental belt. The engaging Griffin, one of the most literate, well rounded men I've met in the sport usually fights at light-heavy. He showed up to give it a try, but Licina is a naturally bigger tank, and outgunned Griffin in three.

After Marquez entered to Mexican music that had many of the partying crowd dancing

humorous sambas, Abraham came in to a live, loud band (Five and the Red One from Berlin - not shabby) with so many pyrotechnics that residual smoke filled the arena so you couldn't see half the grandstands in any direction.

Arthur, in an Elvis style white fur lined coat and glistening crown, took plenty of love from the crowd. Marquez was merely a bit player in this scene, but the way he silenced the masses for a few frames was evidence of how well he was doing. I don't know how it came across on television, but at the fight itself, Marquez had plenty of scoring moments.

As the fight began, Abraham landed stiff jabs with ease and it looked like it would be a very early night for him. Marquez threw back whenever Abraham attacked, concentrating on the body.

Both men blocked most of the early shots that came their way, and surprisingly, Marquez was moving forward more than the defending IBF champion.

Marquez started to score well to the body from both side in round two, but Abraham looked like a slab of solid muscle as the shots echoed into the arena mist.

Abraham moved side to side and scored with right leads. By the third Marquez's face was marked and swelling, but he was still outworking Abraham, who started to look a little tender around the right eye himself.

Arthur established crucial momentum with a huge, multi punch flurry in the fourth that set the tone for the finish, but Marquez stayed in front of him trading hard shots up and down.

By the midway point, the fight was still very close, though Abraham had a sizeable lead on the scorecards. A huge Abraham jab in the sixth rocked Marquez back on his heels. Maybe that was the punch that did it. Before the bell for round seven, Marquez and his corner signaled they'd had enough.

"I wanted to really get started as normal after round six," said a slightly scuffed Abraham, "But he quit so I'm disappointed I couldn't get a knockout for my audience. What a pity he wasn't strong enough for me. He hit me with some good body shots that I felt, but I'm in good shape so it never bothered me."

"I was doing well but I hit him with my best shots and it was like a brick wall," admitted a bruised, multi-nicked Marquez, "He's surprisingly strong. Very strong. I believe the shots I landed would have hurt most fighters. I tried my best but it wasn't enough, and after a while I knew it. I had some small cuts and the blood kept getting in my eyes. My family was in my corner and we decided there was no point in going on and possibly getting hurt."

In a private conversation just after the contest just outside the ring with his emotionally drained father and brother nearby, TSS asked the still slightly bleeding Marquez if he was looking at retirement.

"Yeah, this is it for me," Marquez responded with a bittersweet smile, "I have a great family and a future as a commentator. I'm thirty-seven and I've been to the Olympics and I've won a world championship. After my fight with Jermain Taylor I retired for a while, but I decided I wanted to try for a middleweight title. I got my chance, there's no need to continue. Why keep going (too long)?"

It was a solid win for Abraham, but not the overwhelming showcase his legions perceived. After seeing both he and Felix Sturm within a week's time, based on how much Marquez landed and dodged, I'd pick Sturm if they'd fought last Wednesday, between title defenses. It reminds me of the first Sugar Ray Leonard - Thomas Hearns scenario.

Though Abraham addressed the adoring masses from the ring after the fight and said he wanted Sturm next, that fight doesn't appear likely any time soon.
It looks like Abraham will make another USA appearance early next year, with possible opponents listed as Winky Wright, Paul Williams, or Vernon Forrest. If all goes well, Abraham is looking for a summer mega-match with Kelly Pavlik after that.

To me, Abraham remains a question mark. One thing is for sure though, he's a class act, and he'll be tough to beat.

My introduction to Bavaria came at The Welcome Kongress hotel complex, next to a river among ancient awe inspiring structures. The hotel is art deco among the old stone. The hotel and it's staff are indeed fit for a king, and sure enough, Arthur and the fight contingent were staying here in dual buildings.

As my family and I played tourist I observed Arthur and a couple team members sitting in a courtyard. I'll admit I find some of the "King" routine a bit over the top, but at that moment hours before the fight, he really did appear like the type of man that could have been sitting there hundreds of years before, contemplating a joust.

Last night, Arthur told a screaming swarm "I love Bamberg and will fight here again. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you." The place went nuts.

How far Arthur's campaign leads remains to be seen, but in Bavaria he is definitely the King.