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Las Vegas -- “The Punisher will be reborn on December 5,” declared ring announcer Bruce Buffer before Saturday’s UFC heavyweight championship fight, hyping the movie that was sponsoring the event.

It turned out a new punisher was born on November 15 as Brock Lesnar pounded on Randy Couture to claim the 45-year-old’s title in front of 14,272 noisy spectators at the MGM Grand Arena.

The old adage about inevitability of the result in a fight between a good big man and a good little man played itself out as Couture was unable to bully the mammoth Lesnar, who likely weighed 275 pounds on fight night, against Couture’s scaling of 220.

Couture’s punching skills were expected to somewhat neutralize Lesnar’s size advantage, but a swift one-two combination from the former professional wrestler felled the 45-year-old, with the right cross landing just behind Couture’s ear, robbing him of his equilibrium.

A crude but effective follow-up assault of fists to the head forced referee Mario Yamasaki to stop the bout at 3:07 of the second round.

The disparate force of the two fighters’ punching power was on display throughout the contest, with Lesnar rocking the normally resilient Couture on numerous occasions. The 31-year-old Lesnar began his mixed martial arts career just 17 months ago, but his speed of hand belied his huge frame, while his chin proved solid, withstanding the same Couture right-hands that have felled other exceptionally large foes.

During the event’s build-up Couture insisted his 15-month absence from the Octagon would have no impact on his performance, since he had been grappling at full intensity throughout that period. But the intensity of a boxing match cannot be easily simulated, while little can prepare a fighter to withstand the velocity of Lesnar’s chopping blows.

“Brock’s 85-inch reach surprised me,” admitted Couture. “I couldn’t slip that right-hand.”

Despite entering the bout with a skimpy 2-1 MMA record, Lesnar seemed unperturbed by the magnitude of the occasion as he strode in a business-like manner toward the Octagon while being greeted by a chorus of heckles from the partisan pro-Couture crowd.

The defending champion appeared typically relaxed before the contest, looking jovial as he awaited the bout’s commencement. But when the fight began Couture, 16-9, quickly lost his smile, attempting to crack the onrushing Lesnar with a right cross. The hulking challenger absorbed the blow and soon forced Couture against the side of the cage, initiating a battle of wrestling skills.

Both fighters were highly accomplished amateur wrestlers, and Couture was forced to use all of his expertise to avoid getting trapped underneath Lesnar. When the Minnesota native took Couture to the ground, Couture managed to keep Lesnar in a half-guard position and eventually scrambled to his feet.

“The first round was a feel-out round for me. I wanted to see what [Couture] was capable of doing,” said Lesnar.

Couture sought to focus on boxing at the start of the second round, but it was Lesnar who enjoyed the success, briefly freezing the Las Vegas resident with straight punches. A Couture blow opened a cut near Lesnar’s left eye, but the challenger remained unperturbed, and a quick jab followed by a long right cross saw Couture collapse to the canvas.

Lesnar wasted little time in pressing his advantage and unloaded a sustained series of right handed blows to Couture’s head. Couture struggled to avoid some of the strikes, but the unanswered barrage forced the referee’s intervention.

Now Lesnar wants the chance to avenge his defeat to Frank Mir, who will face Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira in January.

Critics had questioned Lesnar’s merit before the contest, with some labelling him a media creation and liking the former WWE star to the since-exposed Internet sensation Kimbo Slice.

“The only thing that matters is I believe in myself,” responded the new champion. “I don’t even have the Internet and I don’t read newspapers.

“And who is Kimbo Slice anyway?”

Couture refused to clarify his career plans, but said his immediate future will involve relaxing and spending time with his wife, Kim.

“My wife’s fighting on Friday, so I’ll focus on that and make sure she’s ready to go.”

The matchup was billed as the biggest in MMA history and is expected to become the sport’s highest-grossing event by making a projected 1.2 million pay-per-view sales. The event failed to break the gate record, but UFC President Dana White says the sagging economy is to blame.

“It was a very successful event tonight, just shy of a sell-out, but it’s $4.8 million at the gate,” he revealed. “Obviously in this economy that’s considered a home run for us.”

White also heralded the increased mainstream exposure Saturday’s event received, but said the UFC is likely to remain on cable television for the foreseeable future.

“I could have had a network deal a long time ago,” he stated. “Just because you get a network deal, doesn’t mean it’s a good deal. I’m not chasing a deal. When it comes, it comes.”

In the card's chief support bout Kenny Florian positioned himself for a lightweight title shot, submitting Joe Stevenson with a rear-naked choke at 4:03 of the first round. Stevenson, 34-9, was the aggressor early, but Florian showed exceptionally strong ground skills, mounting the Californian and unleashing a series of punches before securing the choke.

Florian, 13-3, now hopes a showdown with 155-pound champion B.J. Penn will materialize. "B.J., you're a master, but it's time to kill that master," declared Florian, after his victory.

In a welterweight bout the UFC billed as a showdown between "untypical-looking fighters" Dustin Hazelett submitted Tamdan McCrory with a painful-looking armbar. Hazelett initially attempted an omaplata on McCrory, but later succeeded in hyper-extending the arm at 3:59 of the first round to gain the win. Hazelett moves his record to 14-4, while "The Barn Cat" McCrory drops to 11-2.

Gabriel Gonzaga landed a sharp right cross to made quick work of Josh Hendricks, stopping the American at 1:01 of the opening round. Gonzaga, 10-3, moves closer toward heavyweight title contention, while Hendricks sees his record decline to 18-5-0-1.

In a middleweight contest, Brazil's Demian Maia moved his record to 10-0 with an impressive first round submission victory over Nate Quarry. Maia used his jiu-jitsu skills to control the action on the ground and ultimately applied a tight rear-naked choke, forcing Quarry, 16-3, to submit at 2:13 of the round.

In a brutal back-and-forth war fought predominantly on the feet, Aaron Riley won a unanimous decision over Jorge Gurgel in the 155-pound division. Both fighters landed a plethora of clean strikes throughout the 15 minutes, with Riley enjoying considerable success in the final round to secure the victory.

Jeremy Stephens scored a spectacular knockout victory over stoppage over Rafael dos Anjos, connecting with a wild right uppercut that sent the Brazilian crashing to the canvas. Dos Anjos showed dangerous ju-jitsu skills, but the Iowan's huge punch, which connected viciously on Rafael's jaw, earned Stephens the win at 39 seconds of round 3 in the 155-pound contest.

Lightweight Mark Bocek utilized outstanding ground skills to control Alvin Robinson, attempting a variety of submission attempts before eventually finding success with a rear naked choke. Robinson tapped out at 3:16 of round three.

Matt Brown executed a textbook arm-bar submission to defeat Ryan Thomas at 57 seconds of the second round in their welterweight bout.