

Librado Andrade, The Zen Warrior

Written by Ralph Gonzalez

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Librado Andrade fought some of the roughest available competition on the road to getting his most recent world title shot. He put in the right amount of work in the gym and sacrificed more than eleven weeks away from his family to get there. But sometimes those sacrifices aren't enough.

Sometimes you also need some luck. Andrade (27-2, 21 KOs) could've used some in his fight against I.B.F. super middleweight champion Lucian Bute, which took place on Oct. 24 in Montreal and was televised on Showtime.

"I'm not the type of person that gets upset about anything that easy so I'm okay. I learned a lot from that fight," Andrade said after three weeks of reflection on his controversial loss against Bute. "I proved that I can be a world champion. I had Bute knocked out and I made every round a struggle for him."

It was referee Marlon B. Wright's performance that outraged some boxing fans after he applied an unusually long count to Bute who had been knocked down and was sitting on the canvas looking dazed, like a little kid lost at Disneyland. Wright started the count on Bute and then turned and admonished Andrade for allegedly straying from the neutral corner. The respite gave Bute, the home town fighter, some extra time to pull himself off the canvas and to a wobbly standing position against the ropes with only seconds left in the fight. The ten-count turned into a twenty second moment that made all the difference as the fight was sent to the cards and cost Andrade the I.B.F. belt.

"I hit Bute and he went down and the crowd got all quiet. I remember looking at the referee and then looking at Bute, thinking 'He has to stop the fight. I'm a world champion'," Andrade said. "And he (Wright) just kept looking at me. He wasn't looking at Bute, who was out. He just kept looking at me. He was more worried about what I was doing. And then I heard the bell. I was thinking 'what's happening now?'"

Bute had out-boxed the Mexican American for most of the fight and it seemed like Andrade had pulled off a "Hail Mary" knockout in the last few seconds. But it wasn't to be. The final clang of the bell sealed the result as Bute was announced the unanimous decision winner. Andrade's trainer, Howard Grant, was so incensed that he went after Wright and shoved him repeatedly before being restrained by the rest of Andrade's corner.

Wright defended his actions after the fight by declaring on Showtime television that Andrade hadn't followed directions to stay in the neutral corner and that he cost himself the win and the championship.

The La Habra native felt dejected at first then came to terms with the situation. "When I first thought about it, I thought 'I was so close and it didn't happen'," Andrade said. "I was thinking, 'My god, for whatever reason, I was so close and it didn't happen for me that night.' But the

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important thing I learned is that I can become a world champion. With all the limitations that people put on me, I've made two of the best fighters in the world like Kessler and Bute work very hard to beat me."

It was Andrade's second try at a world title. He lost in his first attempt, when he tried to wrestle the WBC and WBA straps from Mikkel Kessler, who boxed his way to a clear unanimous decision win in March of 2007. He'd come back strong since then with three knockouts to earn himself the I.B.F. title shot against Bute.

The I.B.F. and its president Marian Muhammad backed up Wright's questionable refereeing and claimed to see no wrongdoing on his part. "I have carefully reviewed the tapes and that boy (Andrade) did not lose the fight because of anything Marlon did," Muhammad would state to boxingconfidential.com. You'd think Muhammad would take the time to learn the names of fighters disputing the titles of the sanctioning body she heads so as not to refer to a thirty year old man like Librado Andrade as "that boy". Her statements certainly don't help the credibility of her organization.

Andrade and his promoters at Golden Boy Promotions would like an immediate rematch but the I.B.F. has rejected the idea so far. "If I fight him again I know I would win. I feel like I have his number now," Andrade said. "I figured him out late and now it would just be a matter of making some adjustments."

Ultimately, Bute earned Andrade's respect in the ring. "He fought a good fight. He boxes well and he's a difficult and awkward fighter," Andrade said of the slick Romanian-Canadian boxer. "I respect what he's accomplished. I would like him to give me a rematch so there are no doubts. I think boxing fans would respect him more. Many of his Romanian fans told me I was robbed."

Rematch or not, Andrade plans to work his way back up the championship ladder. "I'm not afraid to start over again," Andrade said. "What's done is done. I'm moving ahead."

The bottom line is this: Referee Marlon B. Wright wasn't up to the task on that night of October 24th. Wright was so worried about the reaction of the hometown fans that he failed to do his job and was exposed on national television. Referees are there to make tough decisions like having to stop fights against hometown favorites during the last few seconds of the fight. To make such a call takes guts, cojones, huevos, you name it. Wright didn't have it that night and Andrade paid for it by having his dream swiped away.

Andrade is a better man than most. Other fighters would still be screaming at the top of their lungs that they got jobbed. "What's the point?" Andrade said. "All I can do is count my blessings and be grateful for everything that boxing has brought me. I wasn't supposed to win the world title that night but my day will come. I'll do whatever it takes."

To watch the controversial last round:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVSYKzXmKhI&NR=1>