

Campbell Loses To Scale, Beats Funeka

Written by Michael Woods

Saturday, 14 February 2009 19:00

The scale hated Nate Campbell's guts on Friday, but the judges smiled at him at the BankAtlantic Center in Sunrise, Florida on Saturday evening. They awarded Campbell a majority decision win over solid South African Ali Funeka, who hit the deck in the second and 11th, but still managed to make it a squeaker, in a card that headlined HBO's Boxing After Dark.

Campbell huffed and puffed for much of the bout, which will be his last scrap in the lightweight class, but Funeka didn't have the power to exploit Campbell's condition, though he exhibited some decent skills and will sandwiching his knockdowns.

The HBO tripleheader will be remembered as a wacky card, even by boxing standards, which are strange standards indeed. The main event featured a champion losing his belts on the scales, the co-feature was stopped and then re-started by a ref who didn't signal his intention to stop or let the fight continue clearly, and the third leg of the night featured a late-inning foe who stepped in for a man who was supposed to headline the card, Ricardo Mayorga. Theater of the unexpected, indeed.

Judge Deon Dwarto, Michael Pernick and Benoit Roussel, none of them big names, scored it 113-113, 115-111 (Campbell), 114-112 (Campbell), respectively in the feature, and Campbell raised his hands high and proud, as the crowd threw him cheers and boos in return. No doubt he was pleased to exit this division with the win, and his paycheck, though those belts would've been some tasty gravy. For the record, Campbell's body didn't have the look of someone who'd shed every milliliter of fat in trying to make weight. Of course, people are built differently, and that may simply be because he has a certain body type, but doubts about his desire will linger.

The punch stats backed up the judges, as Campbell landed more (197 to 143), though Funeka tossed more (481 to 398). That, combined with the knockdowns, gave Nate a decent Valentine's Day after his dreadful Friday the 13th.

The WBO, WBA and IBF lightweight titles were up for grabs, for the South African Funeka, because the champion Campbell (from Florida; 137 ½; pounds; 32-5-1 (25 KOs)) vacated them when he couldn't make weight on Friday. Funeka was 133 ½ pounds on Friday, and had a 30-1-2 (25 KOs) mark coming in.

After, Campbell gave Funeka props, as he called him an "outstanding" fighter. "His day will come," he said to Max Kellerman. He admitted that his weight woes sapped him, in round five, six, and seven. He said he was hurt that he dropped the belts at the scale, and he apologized to the fans and supporters. TSS still likes Campbell, for the record. This is a nasty business, and we often judge the pugilists too harshly. He put on a good show on Saturday, even if he dropped the ball on Friday.

In the first, the 5-7 Campbell punched up at the taller Funeka. He answered with hooks. In the second, Campbell threw a bomb of a right, an overhand on the temple, and the 6-1 Funeka was

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hurt. He hit the deck, off another right, with 35 seconds left in the round. He rose at nine plus. Funeka held on, as Campbell took out his weight woes on Funeka, and the bell rang. A cut on Campbell's right eye didn't seem to phase him. Campbell dug to the body in the third, and went back with the right, as he noticed Funeka always moved to his left, into that right hand. Trainer Vuyani Bungu needed to demand that Funeka switch it up. In the fourth, Campbell stalked Funeka, but wasn't able to land that harsh right.

In the fifth, Funeka was coming forward more. Was the fight changing directions? It figured that a depleted Campbell might have more trouble the later the fight went, right? In the sixth, Funeka landed more hooks, and was getting something done inside, too. Campbell swung wildly in the seventh; he looked pretty beat. Would Funeka have the pop to make him pay?

In the eighth, Campbell was more energized. His right was reawakened, and he trapped Funeka on the ropes late, and launched down low, as well. Funeka hit with his hooks, too, though. After the round, Campbell didn't look fresh on his stool. In the ninth, Funeka piled up the jabs. He landed a body shot, which Campbell dismissed, but it had to sting. In the 10th, the two banged at each other inside. Who was busier? Funeka. In the 11th, Campbell smashed Funeka with a right, the same overhand right that worked in round two. He went down, as the two got tangled up. He was up quickly, but was he woozy? Did Campbell have enough powder left? 55 seconds remained. Yes and no, was the answer. Funeka made it to the 12th, by the skin of his teeth. In the last round, Campbell launched that overhand right. He dug to the body, as a vet would, and waited for the hands to drop. Both men were huffing furiously. Both men threw at the 30 second mark, as each tried to summon a few drops of gas. The judges would make the final call.

Max Kellerman chatted with Campbell before the bout. Campbell said he was thinking about going to 140 during camp. He said he will turn 37 in three weeks, and it is now too hard for him to make 135. He said he was on target to make the weight, 4 ½ pounds over to start the week, as he typically is, but this time his body didn't comply down the stretch. "I wanted to make weight, I wanted to defend my title," he said. He said he didn't want to make excuses, but he's older, and besides, he was supposed to be retired by now anyway. Not sure what he meant by the last reference. His head was obviously still spinning, and he was still spinning with his explanations.

In a 154 pound clash, former welter champ Kermit Cintron (154 pounds; 30-2; from Pennsylvania) met WBC champion Sergio Martinez (age 33; 153 ¼; 44-1-1 entering; from Argentina) in a tussle scheduled for 12. In a strange bout, with a strange rhythm, and a whacked-out seventh round, it was Martinez who proved to be the superior pugilist. But the judges didn't see it that way, as they called for a majority draw. Tom Kaczmarek saw it 116-110 for Martinez, while Peter Tremeterra and Jed O'Connor had it 113-113, 113-113.

Tremeterra and O'Connor had it wrong, I can say with all confidence. Minor league judging, minor league reffing. At least they were consistent. TSS always tried to look on the bright side.

A point deduction by another official who had a horrid night, ref Frank Santorre, cost Martinez dearly. Garbage work by the Florida officials. Don't believe me? Martinez had the edge in punches landed (151 to 103) and thrown (558 to 534), and power punches (98 to 52) scored a

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knockdown, and busted up Kermit's face big time. I've seen worse decisions, but this one was a baddie.

All eyes were on the 29-year-old Cintron coming in, considering that he'd been in the news, in peripheral fashion, because he'd lost twice to Antonio "The Master of the Plaster Disaster" Margarito. The lefty Martinez isn't a bomber; he works angles, uses distance to his advantage, and has some fast hands. The first two weren't scintillating. The crowd booed after the third, as well. They didn't like the clinches. The fourth was a little better, especially for Martinez. He kept his hands low, and raised them when he got closer to Cintron.

In the fifth, a punch cut Cintron on his left eye. His opponent's mobility was discouraging to him, but he continued to look to land his right. In the sixth, Martinez closed the distance. Was it because he was more tired, or because he was more confident, and felt he could stand Kermit's power? Again, the crowd booed the action, or lack thereof, because of the strange rhythm.

In round seven, Martinez scored a knockdown. He didn't make the ten count, and the ref stopped it, it looked like, a second after the bell rang to end the round. "That was a headbutt," Kermit protested. The ref didn't signal strongly, and the crowd was clueless. Kermit was quite irked. A replay showed it was a short left to the chin. No dice, Kermit, ref Frank Santore was right on. Wait...Hold the phone. The action was then restarted, because the ref said Kermit was up at nine. He was up at 9.75, it looked to me. Santore had not in fact ended the scrap. As we all know, the bell to end the round can't stave off a knockdown, so even if the bell rang, and Kermit didn't rise before the ref counted ten, he would be a kayo victim. That said, after about 2:30, the men continued to fight. Was it round seven continued, or round eight? Round eight it was. Lordy.

Kermit was all clear in the eighth, but he still couldn't touch the Argentine. Martinez tagged him in the last minute, with more lefts, as Kermit's right mostly sat in its holster. In the ninth, Cintron, with a mouse under the right eye, still couldn't land the jab, and really wasn't adjusting, and changing strategy or tactics. In the 10th, Martinez drew a stiff warning for hitting behind the head, in a round that gave Cintron confidence. In the 11th, the Argentine's quick left scored. He'd saved some energy for the close, it looked like. And his face bore no marks from combat, as opposed to the American's. In the 12th, the ref took a point from Martinez, for hitting on a break. Bad call by Santore, who had a bad, bad outing, as Martinez' foul was by no means egregious. Seriously, Santore needs some remedial education. Then, Kermit started running, as an angry Martinez looked to end it with an exclamation. He didn't get a stoppage, but figured to take it on the cards by a decent margin. The judges would have the final say.

Junior middles Alfredo "Perro" Angulo (age 26; 153.5; 14-0 coming in; from Mexico) kicked off the show, taking on replacement foe Cosme Rivera (age 32; 151.5 pounds; 31-11-2 coming in; from Mexico), who replaced Ricardo Mayorga, who jumped ship two weeks ago. Angulo pumped a jab, to the body and head, but also mixed it up, and looked to land a lead right in the first. The two clashed heads, and cut opened on Angulo's left eyelid. It didn't deter him, though it was a nasty gash. The ref thought the gash was from a punch. His cutman closed it up, regardless, and he went to work in two. He threw punches in bunches in the second and third, when he wobbled Cosme. With 1:20 to go, Rivera was in trouble. He was backing up, and

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couldn't put Angulo off. The aggressor went to the body to get Rivera to completely drop his hands. The late-comer went to his corner on shaky legs.

In the fourth, Rivera landed a left hook on the cut, and his legs were back under him. For a change of pace, Angulo went lefty some. His biggest asset is his work-rate, which is stifling. Rivera too went lefty, but that was probably to let Angulo whack the other side of his body. Cosme was almost done in the fifth, but the ref wasn't stepping in. His corner told a commissioner to halt it, though, quite rightly. The official time was 2:38 of the fifth. This was just the second time Rivera, who has a lone win in his last five outings, has been stopped, by the way. Zab Judah did it in 2005.

Bob Papa, Max Kellerman and Lennox Lewis called the action.