Much will be made the next few days about the brilliance of young British lightweight contender Amir Khan and his esteemed trainer, Freddie Roach, who will be said to have performed flawlessly Saturday night in dismembering three-division world champion Marco Antonio Barrera at the MEN Arena in Manchester, England.

Both did quite well for themselves to be sure but the true brilliance was not theirs. It belonged instead to Khan's promoter, Frank Warren, who once again used a tried and true formula of his to turn Khan from a prospect with many doubters into a world championship contender and national hero without truly putting him at any real risk of defeat.

Warren has become the master of creating the illusion of risk, a promotional art not often done with as much grace in the United States these days. On this side of the Atlantic, promoters like Golden Boy, Bob Arum and Don King simply put their fighters in as many non-competitive situations as HBO and SHOWTIME will allow, doing little to mask the one-sidedness of the match as they try to build up their man.

Warren, on the other hand, has become a master of illusion. He takes a fighter of often flawed talent and maneuvers him safely for as long as he Khan and then seeks out the aging champion who, while clearly peaked, is not yet perceived by the public to be totally damaged goods and leaps upon him with the fever and ferocity of a pack of jackals.

He gives the aged legend an offer to sacrifice himself at the altar of youth that he either cannot afford to ignore or psychologically cannot fathom being the kind of trap it really is until it is too late. Brilliant, as they say in England.

Warren did this with Joe Calzaghe in his first title fight against a faded but still feared Chris Eubank and won the bet although not without a moment or two of worry. He did the same with Ricky Hatton when he put him in against what outwardly appeared to be a dangerous Kostya Tszyu but actually was a faded shadow of who he once had been. That night, in the very same arena where Khan needed less time to expose poor Barrera in the same way, Hatton outhustled and outworked a tiring Tszyu until he made him quit on his stool after 11 rounds.

Still noble in defeat, Tszyu rose up to take the microphone and praise Hatton's performance in one of the nobler moments of fistic sportsmanship seen in recent years before going off to spend nearly three hours in his locker room before he was fit to leave the arena. He never fought again.

Saturday night Warren did the same with Barrera by selling his reputation and resume to 20,000 British fight fans who now believe Amir Khan has had his mettle tested against the once-great Barrera. The truth is he fought a guy named Barrera but not the guy the public thought he was facing. That, frankly, is good management, good promotion and good for business. Whether or not it's good for Khan remains to be seen.

Although I thought it possible Khan's weak chin might conspire against him I also made clear that if it was a bet you wanted to make, take the taller, younger man against the faded Barrera, who has looked worse in each fight since first losing a close decision to Juan Manuel Marquez two years ago.

Part of the brilliance of Warren is that despite back-to-back loses to Marquez and Manny Pacquiao in which Barrera seemed to fade so badly he announced his retirement for a time after the Pacquiao loss, he was able to sell the danger of Barrera off two less than stirring wins against below journeymen opposition upon his comeback.

Because Khan had been knocked cold in 54 seconds by unheralded Breidis Prescott six months ago and had previously shown a bad habit of getting knocked down by less than powerful punchers before rising up to defeat them, Warren knew he had some resurrecting to do if Khan, the 2004 Olympic silver medalist who some boxing skeptics in England call "Silver Boy'' in a less than flattering comparison with Oscar De La Hoya's "Golden Boy'', was to regain his position as one of England's top draws.

So Warren approached his old friend and arch enemy Don King (in boxing both situations are often the norm among promoters) and suggested they overpay Barrera to get him to come to England and face Khan. What Warren saw in Barrera's last three fights (the loss to Pacquiao and the two wins against nobodies) was not a resurrection (which he wanted no part of) but rather an old fighter who could no longer move and whose hand speed had deserted him completely. He not only could not pull the trigger, he couldn't find the trigger.

Saturday night Barrera became what Warren knew he would be for the taller, younger, faster and now better trained Khan – a Mexican punching bag. Had the public realized that, he would have never been able to sell it and that is where Warren's true brilliance comes in.

What he sold was that Khan had never fought anyone close to the caliber of Barrera (which was true), was coming off being knocked out in 54 seconds six months earlier by a far less formidable boxer than Barrera once had been (which was true) and then – drum roll please – reminded that Barrera's two losses had come at the hands of the top two pound-for-pound fighters in the world – Pacquiao and Marquez – (which was true).

Mixed together that created doubt in the minds of the public. Doubt about what Khan was and doubt about what Barrera's two recent losses really meant. What Warren did was allow the mind to wander and soon he had them wondering.

Might Barrera have one solid effort left? If he did, what proof was there that Khan could withstand it off of the people who had already knocked him down and, in one case, out?

Thus Barrera became the betting favorite in some gambling houses even though he was 35, had not looked good in two years, retired once and suffered a serious cut on the forehead above his left eye in a January "tune-up'' fight which nearly tuned him out.

This was promotional brilliance personified and it led to a large crowd and an international TV

audience that watched Khan annihilate an old man, busting open a big cut along his hairline after an inadvertent clash of heads in the first round and then drilling him all night with a jab Barrera seldom saw coming and never could react to or avoid.

The tickets had been sold by then and so had the illusion and so Khan was the next day widely being credited with a brilliant performance in which he retired a legend rather than of mugging an old man whose slowed reflexes coupled with obvious height and reach disadvantages prevented him from ever coming close to testing Khan's chin or his defense.

It is clear Roach did a fine job of improving Khan's defense, especially dissuading him from leaping at his opponent with his chin in the air as he used to do. He also was crisper with his combinations and made a far more patient and persistent use of his jab as the leap weapon in opening up Barrera to assault, which all has to be credited to Roach's preparation of him in the gym.

Yet truth be told, Amir Khan was in no more than another sparring session Saturday night. Marco Antonio Barrera was in the arena in name only. His skills had remained behind in Mexico, where they had once been honed to a sharp edge but had been dulled over time to the point of uselessness.

The true test for Khan, and for Warren, will be what comes next. He is now a mandatory challenger in a division that includes Marquez, hard-punching Edwin Valero, relentless Juan Diaz and underrated Julio Diaz. If Warren puts him in with one of them in the next six months he will be showing his confidence in young Khan.

But don't bet on it. Bet instead on Warren trying to sell the public another aged guy like Joel Casamayor, the former champion, the less formidable Ali Funeka or maybe avoiding even them and seeking out some European or British victim he figures Khan can cash in on.

'Freddie has changed me into a real fighter,'' Khan (20-1, 15 KO) said after the fight was stopped following the fifth round with Barrera covered in his own blood and clearly beaten down. "This fight was make or break for me but I felt so comfortable it seemed like easy work catching him with the jab.''

Work made easy not only by Khan and Roach but by the brilliance of Frank Warren, who knows not only a safe test when he sees one but how to transform it into something his wise mind knew it is not – a real test.