Written by Michael Woods
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It was no classic, the Vitali Klitschko-Juan Carlos Gomez heavyweight title bout which unfolded in Stuttgart, Germany on Saturday. But in this diminished era of the heavyweights, one must look on the bright side, or be cursed to wallow in a constant state of disgust and longing. Gomez, the former cruiserweight champion, showed ample heart while suffering three knockdowns as the Ukrainian pounded him with right hands, and forced a stoppage at 1:49 of the ninth round.

Yes, the Cuban didn't impersonate a heavy bag, as Vitali's previous opponent, Samuel Peter, did. With cuts on both his eyes, he certainly earned his paycheck. But we can't let our sunny disposition obscure the truth: Gomez didn't really launch enough of an attack to give Team Klitschko any worry at all.

Vitali (Kiev, Ukraine), age 37, weighed 249 pounds for the contest, while the 35-year-old former cruiserweight champion Gomez (from Cuba) was 230 at the weigh-in. V, the WBC heavyweight champion, came in with a 36-2 mark, while Gomez was 45-1.

In the first, the lefty Gomez, with a temporary tattoo reading "Gazi" on his back, came out and got right in V's face. V kept his left out in front of him to keep Gomez at bay. Gomez did the same with his lead hand, the right. Vitali didn't look as smooth and confident against the lefty as he did against the less mobile righthander Peter. In the second, V scored with some lead rights, and Gomez stuck his tongue out in response. V still didn't get his jab untracked. In round three, Gomez pressed, and V moved more, getting angles and then shoving the Cuban away. V's right had Gomez knowing he was not fighting a cruiserweight.

In the fourth round, Gomez' right eye was a tad puffed. He didn't move his head and torso as much as his corner would like. Gomez slapped some shots, and it didn't look like even his best throws could topple the giant, or even buzz him. Some blood ran from Gomez' right eye, and he got whacked almost whenever he got set to punch. In the sixth, Gomez dropped to the canvas when V leaned on him. Was he ready to go soon? The slapper Gomez was trying, it must be said, but this was no Thrilla In Manilla, in case anyone was wondering. A cut formed on V's head, from an accidental butt.

In the seventh, V perked up. His corner had probably told him to step it up, why suffer any more unneccesary cuts? Stitch Duran did a good job, no blood trickled down. V knocked Gomez down with a right hand. He was up quick. V went back for more. Gomez smiled, but was in bad way. The two went to the floor together after a clinch. The Cuban just made it out of the round.

In the eighth, V didn't press to close the show right away. Maybe he was beat? But he then V hurt Gomez, and the Cuban almost turned his back and quit.

Gomez' other eye was cut in the ninth. Vitali had a point deducted for a butt. He then sent Gomez to the floor again, with a hard right. Gomes got up right away, but he looked almost

done. The Cuban kept coming forward, showing admirable heart. He took more shots, and Gomez turned his back, unwilling to take more smacks. The ref halted the scrap.

This fight was Vitali's second since 2004. He came back from a hiatus and an attempt at a second career in politics, and destroyed underperforming Samuel Peter in October.

There was drama on Friday, when the Gomez team said the ring was four feet too small. Gomez and promoter Universum hate each other. He was a Universum fighter, and it didn't go well. V actually used the space in the ring better than Gomez, so a larger ring might have benefitted him more.

The fight ran on ESPN Classic in the US, with Brain Kenny and Teddy Atlas calling it not from ringside, but from ESPN headquarters in Bristol, CT. Call it a sign of the economic times, the duo not getting a trip to Deutschland.

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