

## GEORGE KIMBALL RETURNS TO TSS!

Written by George Kimball  
Friday, 20 March 2009 19:00

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DUBLIN – Trailing by margins of six and seven points on two scorecards, Ireland's Bernard Dunne rallied to knock out Ricardo Cordoba with a second remaining in the 11th round to win the WBA 122-pound title before a delirious crowd of his countrymen, touching off a night of wild celebration in his native city, where a sellout crowd of over 9,000 had packed the O2 Arena to christen the new venue with its first-ever boxing event.

With the three-knockdown rule in effect, Dunne had earlier barely survived the fifth, in which Cordoba had twice leveled him, but the Irishman was able to survive by clinching his way through the final minute of the stanza.

Dunne had scored a flash knockdown of his own in the third, but still faced a significant deficit on the scorecards prior to his late-round rally against the badly-tiring champion. Dunne had already put Cordoba down twice in the 11th before administering a flurry that served as the coup de grace. Although Cordoba's final trip to the canvas was preceded by two right hands and a left hook, none of the punches landed with particularly lethal force. ("I think he was more exhausted than anything else," said Dunne.) In any case, the instant Cordoba crashed to the floor, Hubert Earle immediately signaled the bout at an end.

As it turned out, the Canadian referee's intercession was somewhat superfluous, since the spent Cordoba spent the next several minutes on the canvas and was in the end taken out of the ring on a stretcher, hooked up to an oxygen mask. Dr. Jack Phillips, the attending neurologist, reported that the Panamanian had regained consciousness and that there was no evidence of brain damage, but Cordoba was nonetheless transported to Dublin's Beaumont Hospital and held overnight for observation.

Dunne, who also appeared to have been vitiated by the ordeal, also had oxygen administered in his dressing room. Both combatants will likely face some stitchery as well: Dunne bled from the fourth round on from a nasty cut above his left eye, while Cordoba was cut at the corner of his right eye late in the fifth.

It was Dublin's first world title fight in 14 years, and the first ever in which a Dublin native had won a world championship in his hometown. The title, in this case, was the WBA's "regular" version, since the organization recognized Cordoba's countryman Celestino Cabellero as "super champion," but in this particular instance the distinction was somewhat ameliorated by the fact that in their only head-to-head meeting (in 2004 in Panama City) the "regular" champion had knocked down the "super champion" on the way to a convincingly one-sided win.

Dunne's victory came just hours after Ireland's national rugby team had defeated Wales in Cardiff to claim its first Grand Slam in sixty years, but within the confines of the O2 the euphoria of that victory had all but evaporated when Cordoba scored his two sixth-round knockdowns.

Although Cordoba, a southpaw, is normally a counterpuncher who prefers to sit back and wait

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for his opponent to make a careless mistake, the memory of Dunne's ignominious first-round TKO loss to Spain's Kiko Garcia two years ago resonated strongly with the Panamanian's camp, who made a collective decision to test the Irishman's chin early with a display of aggression – and it almost paid dividends.

"I had a bad round," conceded Dunne. "He's a tough son of a bitch, but I was all right when I boxed."

Indeed, Dunne (27-1) climbed back into the fight by patiently wearing Cordoba down by boxing behind his jab.

With his gritty come-from-behind win, Dunne not only banished the lingering stigma of his loss to Martinez in that European title fight, but marked him a major player in the junior featherweight division. Saturday night's events also justified the faith of Irish promoter Brian Peters, who had signed Dunne as a young amateur eight years ago, packed him off to America for a four-year apprenticeship under Freddie Roach, nurtured him through a series of European bouts, stuck with him after the Martinez debacle, and ultimately lured the title fight to Dublin by outbidding all competition for what Cordoba and his handlers undoubtedly expected to be a relatively effortless defense.

Cordoba, whose only previous loss had been a split decision to Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym in Bangkok, dropped to 34-2-2. The losses and the draws (both to Wladimir Sidorenko in Germany) all came in road games. He had never before been knocked out.

Andy Lee, who was added to the Dublin card on short notice after his scheduled fight against Antwun Echols imploded, along with the rest of Irish Ropes' March 16 Madison Square Garden card, had an unexpectedly rough night against awkward German Alex Sipos. Although Lee (17-1) won handily (99-91 on the scorecard of referee Emile Tiedt), he was extended the 10-round distance for the first time in his career.

More ominously, the Emanuel Steward-trained Kronk middleweight was cut above the right eye in the opening round. Lee, who hadn't fought since last July after undergoing corrective surgery which was supposed to prevent a recurrence of precisely this injury, in all likelihood faces another protracted recuperation.

Sipos (19-5-2), who had sparred with Lee at stablemate Wladimir Klitschko's camp in Austria last year, had taken the fight on short notice, and proved to be a troublesome foe indeed in the early going, but the German, who had had to lose a pound and a half at the previous day's weigh-in, appeared to weaken down the stretch.

The turning point in the bout had come in the sixth, when Lee slipped one of Sipos' lunging charges to land a counter left followed by a short right that floored him and brought the Irish crowd back into the fight.

Irish lightweight champion Andy Murray of Cavan won the vacant EU belt in a lopsided decision over Spaniard Daniel Rasilla. There were no knockdowns, but Murray dominated, 119-109 on

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the card of Danish judge Freddy Christensen, and still carried the day on those of Hungary's Bela Florian (116-112) and Poland's Leszek Janowiak (115-113). It was the 14th win in as many tries for the unbeaten Murray, now 14-0, while Rasilla fell to 12-2.

Jim Rock (30-4), the 37 year-old grandfather who has held Irish titles at four weights, ranging from 154 to 175, extended his six-year, nine-fight winning streak by outpointing rugged Italian Alessio Furlan in their super-middleweight 10-rounder. Rock rarely has an easy time of it, and this one was no exception, but he prevailed by a 97-94 margin on referee David Irvine's scorecard. The result gave Furlan (21-12-5), who had earlier lost to John Duddy and Matthew Macklin, a personal Dublin Hat Trick.

Latvian Valentins Morzovs (2-0-1) battled Dundalk's Michael Kelly (7-0-1) to a draw in their lightweight prelim, as Tiedt returned a 38-38 scorecard. In another four-rounder, Morzov's middleweight countryman Janis Chernouskis (3-6) scored what on another night might have been a significant upset with a third-round TKO of Anthony Fitzgerald (2-1).

The inaugural card at the O2 was augmented by a trio of amateur bouts, the first of which saw Paddy Barnes, the Olympic light-flyweight bronze medalist from Belfast, post an 11-1 win in his three-rounder against Jim Linden. Mayo 140-pounder Ray Moylette, the gold medalist at the World Youth Championships, posted a hard-fought victory over Rob Gorman, while in a rematch from the Women's World Championships, Irish lightweight Katie Taylor left American Caroline Barry's face a bloody mess in rolling up a 27-3 win over four rounds.

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JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Bernard Dunne, 121 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, Neilstown, Ireland KO'd Ricardo Cordoba, 124 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, San Miguelito, Panama (11) (Wins WBA Title)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Andy Lee, 162, Limerick, Ireland dec. Alexander Sipos, 163, Munich, Germany (10)

Jim Rock, 163, Dublin, Ireland dec. Alessio Furlan, 163 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, Rocco Canavese, Italy (10)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Janis Chernouskis, 159 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, Tukurns, Latvia TKO'd Anthony Fitzgerald, 160 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, Dublin (3)

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Andy Murray, 135, Cavan, Ireland dec. Daniel Rasilla, 134 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, Santander, Spain (12) (Wins vacant EU Title)

Michael Kelly, 135, Dundalk, Ireland, drew with Valentins Morozovs, 131 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, Olaine, Latvia (4)

(Amateurs)

Light welterweights: Ray Moylette, 139 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, Westport, Ireland dec. Rob Gorman, 140, Balbriggan, Ireland (3)

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Lightweights: Katie Taylor, 135 ½, Bray, Ireland dec. Caroline Barry, 133, Boulder, Co. (4)

Light Flyweights: Paddy Barnes, 106, Belfast dec, Jim Linden, 106, Belfast (3)