Written by Michael Woods
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As far as title shots go, Yuriorkis Gamboa's championship win over Jose Rojas in the ShoBox main event from Buffalo Bill's Star Arena in Primm, Nevada on Friday night was as low-key as they come. Mostly, because Rojas had no business at all being in any sort of title shot, not after being off for 13 months. But also because the notoriously chinny Gamboa didn't find himself on the canvas at any point in his win, which became official in the tenth round, as the ref stepped in to save Rojas, his right eye swollen shut, more abuse.

With the TKO10 (1:31) triumph, Gamboa secured the WBA's interim featherweight crown. Perhaps even more importantly, the Cuban showed that he has finally grown up as a professional. Instead of playing to the crowd, and getting off on his own recklessness, the 27-year-old hitter turned in a smart, comparatively boring showing, as opposed to the Gamboa we've seen on his rise up the ladder, who was a sure bet to hit the mat at least once before he got down to business.

Gamboa (born in Cuba, lives in Miami; 14-0, with 12 KOs entering; 125 ½ pounds; 2004 Olympic gold medallist) and Rojas (from Venezuela; age 37; a lefty; 25-6-1-1 ND, with 17 stops entering; 125 pounds; 0-4-1in title fights, with a loss and a draw to Chris John) were set for 12 or fewer rounds.

In the first, the lefty Rojas moved from the start. But the slinger Gamboa still found him, and the Cuban had the crowd buzzing with a two rights that had Rojas' legs jellified. In the second, the slick vet Rojas stuck out a prim jab, pardon the pun. Gamboa seemed more settled than I'd seen him before. He was more patient, and not prone to leaping in as much, than in previous outings. In round three, the Cuban dropped his hands too much for his corner's liking, but the crowd loved it when Gamboa went all out. Rojas' right eye was swollen, and would need expert attention from Miguel Diaz after the session. In the fourth, Gamboa fought smart, so there was not as much for the crowd to hoot about, but for his long-term prospects as a pro, it's the only way.

In the fifth, Gamboa scored a knockdown, off a push on the neck. In the sixth, Gamboa sensed the time for closure was now. But Rojas is a stubborn vet, he didn't agree. He landed a loooong left, clean, sending a message that he still had some spunk in him. In the seventh, sneaky Rojas still looked to land that quick counter; this more mature Gamboa didn't leave himself open with unfocused rushes, didn't fall prey to the savvy elder fox. In round eight, Gamboa built his advantage, and the doc checked after the round if his vision was too impaired to continue. It was a slit by this point. In the ninth, Mr. Mature Gamboa played it safe, and kept his eyes open for a Hail Mary special. A left hook by Gamboa landed with a heavy thud on that swollen eye. Would the doc let Rojas continue? Did he want to continue? Indeed, the old pro wanted to finish what he started, and we went to the tenth. Gamboa had Rojas caught on the ropes, and the ref stepped in, to save the vet any more punishment.

The judges were Dick Houck, Duane Ford and Patricia Morse Jarman.

I reiterate, Rojas had no business being here. Of his last five wins, three came against boxers without a solitary win as a pro. The fans deserved better, and so did Gamboa; he cannot in good conscience enjoy this title like he could've had the win come over a foe that deserved the shot.

Chris John is the WBA's non interim 126 pound champion, and I like the Indonesian to dissect the Cuban, who isn't as seasoned as John, if they tangle.

BTW, will someone please explain this interim title holder stuff to me?

In the TV opener, Selcuk Aydin (from Turkey, a 2004 Olympian; fighting his US debut; 17-0, with 14 KOs coming in; age 25; nicknamed "Mini Tyson") met Said Ouali (lives in Las Vegas, born in Morocco; winner of 11 straight; age 30; 25-2, with 17 KOs entering;) in a welterweight scrap. The pace was brisk throughout, but Ouali paced himself too much, and spent way too much time in reverse gear. Aydin got the nod, by scores of 114-113 (Ouali), 115-112 (Aydin) and 116-111 (Aydin) but he didn't win the crowd, which booed him with gusto as he celebrated after the final bell.

The lefty Ouali, trained by Roger Mayweather, came out throwing jabs and right hooks. The Turk, trained by Graciano Rocchigianni (former 168, 175 pound champion in the 80s and 90s) came out winging, as he plodded forward, and looked to land heavy thumps in the first. After the second, Aydin shoved Ouali after the bell. He turned pro after slugging a ref during amateur competition, so being a hothead is in his DNA. In the third, Ouali hurt the Turk with a right hook. He was smartly using his reach advantage to dictate the distance between the fighters, but Aydin kept pressing ahead, throwing.

In the fourth, and fifth, Aydin had Ouali on the ropes too much, and the judges had to like Aydin's aggression. Not so in the sixth, when he had a point taken for a low blow. It came with four seconds to go in the round. Ouali ate leather on the ropes in the seventh. He threw crisp counters to the body often, but the Turk didn't seem to feel those blows. The fight evened up some in the eighth, and Ouali used his legs more in the ninth, but still spent too much time with his back on the ropes. In round ten, Aydin blasted with uppercuts, an effective weapon throughout the night for him. In the 11th, Ouali made his foe miss, but he didn't make him pay. In the final round, Ouali backed up, and yes, he did get some angles and score some points, but it was too little, too late, even after he buzzed the Turk with 30 seconds to go. The last 30 seconds of the bout were passionate. The judges would have the final say.