

BRUTE XVI-Stick And Move

Written by Kaelan Smith
Monday, 20 April 2009 19:00

Brute follows two Sacramento boxers: Mike Simms, a cruiserweight who trained with the Olympic team in 2000, who when I found him had lost five successive fights; and Stan Martyniuk, a young, Estonian-born featherweight, who when I found him had just fought and won his professional debut by decision, despite breaking his right hand in the first round.

I look forward to sharing the stories of these two fighters with the readers of the Sweet Science, and I look forward to hearing from any and all of you.

“Is that Stan?” asked a man near us who knew absolutely nothing.

“You would know if it was Stan,” Gerrell said, not turning completely to answer.

“Stan’s in the semi-final,” I added, though I’d only based that statement on logic.

Whomever the first fighter was (I learned later that he was named Andres Reyes, although perhaps one of the kings in his name was a negative, thus rendering the product so), the man who stepped into the ring next was the great Maximilliano Becerra—or at least by the response he inspired, a neophyte might have thought he was great. Actually, he was making his pro debut. In May in the Red Lion lobby, Sergio Sanchez had introduced Max to me as a rising star, although then he was an amateur, and, as stars tend to be, sitting idly waiting for planets to orbit him. Whether or not he would now, with some deft combination of punches, attract opponents into his modest gravitational field, he’d already established, as I’ve mentioned, a robust system of fans. He came in wearing a red robe, and as the speakers sounded the first bars of his song—a ranchera of brassy trumpets and shouts—the partisans erupted. One man amongst them had a derkach, which is the Ukrainian term for a ratchet noisemaker, and might be appropriately so-called if it had been brandished to celebrate Mr. Martyniuk’s advent. But since it was used to announce Mr. Becerra, let us call it a dercacho. Monikers aside, when the instrumentalist spun it, it sounded as if a string of firecrackers had been set off, or as if a gang of men were firing tiny pistols into the air.

The announcer called the fighter’s names and weights, and Mr. Reyes stood in his corner looking rather daunted. Students of Hemingway will remember that if anything you should never appear daunted, at least not in public. I got the feeling, therefore, that Becerra was on the verge of a grand success. He was, I’d just learned, Maximilliano “El Matador” Becerra, a name that I approve of as long as it isn’t translated into English. I am an ardent fan of the polite, if malicious, bitter scientist, Roger “El Matador” Huerta, whom Kenny Florian recently out-boxed in Minneapolis at UFC 87, and I was therefore prepared to adore his doppelganger.

Before the bell rang, the announcer introduced the timekeeper, who in this digital age is far less important than the round girls, as Stan “The Man” Gordon. The announcer may have said it with

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intentional irony, but I was not with a sardonic group. "There ain't no Stan 'The Man' Gordon," said Derek. Everyone around me nodded in agreement.

The fight started with requisite hesitancy. Becerra commenced the thing with a nervous jab. Someone in the audience yelled out, "Stick and move," and I believe Becerra glanced down at his feet to see if they were getting out of the way when he'd finished punching. His movement was tight and jerky, though there was really no need for him to move as he was forgetting to stick. Reyes didn't seem much interested in engaging either, and they bounced for a while like under-inflated balls until Reyes touched Becerra lightly on the chin. This seemed to upset both fighters because they moved far enough apart that neither was in jeopardy of encountering even the perfunctory jabs that both men continued to toss at each other with all the energy and skill of men scraping platefuls of food into the garbage. I gave the first round to Becerra because when after two minutes the two men found themselves hugging, Becerra tried to punch his way out.

It is always refreshing, but especially after a boring round, to see the girls enter the ring with the cards. In May I'd overheard Mark Wilkie tell two round girls, much to their disappointment and mine, that they wouldn't be wearing bikinis in the ring. But tonight he had apparently instructed them otherwise. A very muscular man in camouflage shorts, not dissimilar in appearance to the man who'd escorted Terrance Jett to the scales the day before, delivered a girl to the canvas porch and held the ropes so that she could enter the ring. She had on a white bikini, secured with one bow in the center of her back and two more on her hips. On her right side she had a tattoo of cascading flowers pouring down her oblique. She walked the first two lengths of her quadrangle facing away, so it was not until she made her second turn that I recognized her as Angela, surname yet undetermined, of Tokyo Fro's. When she'd completed her orbit, she extended a hand to her protector, giving him a false if still provocative smile, and as he led her down the stairs to the floor, I knew that of all the women in the ballroom, she was curing best, as a moist ham does, under that glow of eyes.

The second round, as if the boxers had been reinvigorated by Angela's parade, was more competitive. For one, Reyes led with his head on the first exchange and bumped into Becerra's eye. Nothing bad came of it physically, but it ignited the partisans. Soon after, Becerra got in a solid, straight left. He seemed to be recalling his training out in Vacaville, and used that reacquired knowledge to force Reyes onto the ropes where he slapped him around a bit. To Reyes' defense, he fought off those same ropes, showing as he did that he'd sustained very little damage during his tenure against them. A while later he even landed an uppercut on Becerra's chin, though it wasn't malicious. Then, near the close of the round, they were in each other's arms again, and as in the first, Becerra punched his way out. This time, though, he threw a solid left hook which caught and ripped Reyes' under-lubricated brow. Reyes came away at the bell with blood pouring down his face.

The third, I thought, belonged to Becerra as well, although it was not as pugilistic as, say, a boxing match. Becerra moved deftly, weaving from side to side, proving that he was capable of evading his opponent if necessary. Reyes couldn't track him down, though he stayed on his trail, and the round ended with not much having happened. But the fourth round belonged to Becerra the way the fourteenth belonged to Ali in Manila, except that for Becerra there wasn't a

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fifth. He strung together two expert combinations: one consisting of consecutive right hooks, a jab, and an uppercut; the other comprised of a straight left, a right, two left hooks, and a final, insulting right. During that second arrangement he forced Reyes against the ropes again, but this time when he let him off Reyes was finding it difficult to stand. When the bell rang, Becerra turned with his arms raised and the hysterical crowd cheered him back to his corner.

Around me the consensus was that Becerra had won a unanimous decision, and had the fight been scheduled for six, it would have lasted only five. I had the bout scored 40-36, but thought the judges might have given either the first or the third to Reyes. The announcer took up his microphone and looked at the card handed him. He kept his eyes downcast as he began. "After four rounds of boxing," he said, "we go to the judges' scorecards." Becerra, standing to the right of the referee who separated the two fighters, was nodding his head and smiling. He raised his free hand, and as he lifted it, the collective voice of the audience rose. Behind him the announcer said, "The first judge scores the bout 39-38, Becerra." Someone in the ballroom swung his *dercacho*, and a chorus of men attached to that ratchet clatter a volley of plaintive, high, hard-voiced cries. Reyes, abandoned by his countrymen, hung his head and chewed his mouthpiece. Then the announcer continued. "The other two judges scored the bout 38-38, declaring the bout a majority draw."

The room filled with boos. The referee raised both fighters' arms which, created a rare and displeasing symmetrical shape in the center of the ring. One victorious fighter's arm joined in a peak with that of the referee's, while his opponent's hangs at waist-level, describes in its structure a necessary imbalance, and all observers expect subconsciously to see it. Perhaps that is why we are attracted to the dynamism of asymmetry in all design—because it conveys dominance and submission—though I assume the intemperate crowd was not decrying the aesthetics of the ceremony. They simply thought, as I did, that Becerra had won.