

A JuanMARVELOUS Win; Lopez Beats Courageous Penalosa In PR

Written by Michael Woods
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Juan Manuel Lopez was the winner in the main event of a card at the Ruben Rodriguez Coliseum in Bayamon, Puerto Rico on Saturday night but equal, or perhaps more congratulations has to be showered upon the man who cannot by any means be called a loser, Gerry Penalosa. JuanMa, as he's been tagged by fight fans who see him on the short list of next gen superstars, threw power shots like he was getting a bonus for every one hurled, but the Filipino refused to buckle under. For nine rounds, the 36-year-old former super flyweight and bantamweight titlist swallowed JuanMa bombs, 444 in total, and he didn't hit the floor, or look for a soft place to land. Lord knows, he had every right to, as the Puerto Rican crusher unleashed 1,020 punches enroute to a TKO win after nine round had elapsed.

Penalosa was told by trainer Freddie Roach that he needed to knock out JuanMa in the ninth, or Freddie would stop the scrap. The Filipino had a decent eighth, but Roach stayed true to his word. He asked Penalosa his permission to pull the plug, but his eyes pleaded with the vet to give in. Penalosa didn't want to accept the humane gesture on his trainer's part, but thankfully, his pride receded long enough for his logical self to take a stand. He nodded his head, almost imperceptibly, and Roach told the ref that his man was done for the night.

But let us reiterate, Gerry Penalosa cannot be labeled the loser on this night. "After a magnificent effort, Gerry Penalosa unable to continue, the bout comes to an end..." said emcee Michael Buffer after the ultra-gutty outing. But in case you joined the show at that juncture, we must correct Buffer. Penalosa was ready, willing and able, who knows how, to continue to test himself against a younger, stronger, harder-punching, but by no means tougher or more courageous foe.

The WBO featherweight crown, taken from Daniel Ponce DeLeon in June 2008 by JuanMa, was up for grabs. Lopez (from Caguas, Puerto Rico; age 25, 121 ½; 25-0, with 23 KOs; coming in with three straight round one KOs) was accompanied by Tito Trinidad to the ring. Penalosa (from the Phillipines; 121 ¾; 54-7-2, 34 KOs), trained by a now shaved-headed Freddie Roach, had never even been off his feet as a pro.

In the first, the two lefties sized each other up, and JuanMa looked a little wetter, and more ready. His right hook to the body is a rib-crusher, but Gerry took it well. He has some of the Willie Pep in him defensively. The Filipino also dispatched a few right hooks of his own. In the second, a right hook buzzed Gerry early, but it was a momentary sensation. A one-two had him tasting some more of that. Would Gerry start to separate himself some more, get some distance from JuanMa? In the third, Gerry didn't move more; his guard high, he stayed in the pocket, a vet confident in his radar, confident he'd see and sense the youngsters' salvos. Bless him, he slugged it out at the end of the round, and the crowd roared at his courage and probably gasped at his temerity. Perhaps he was desperate, and knew that his time would be limited if he allowed himself to be ground down.

Viewers saw a graphic, labeled Punch Zone, which broke down how many landed punches

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landed on what portion of Gerry's body. His chin area was tagged thirteen times through three, the most of any section.

In the fourth, JuanMa landed 34 punches, 30 of them power shots, and Gerry's odds of going the distance got slimmer. In the fifth, Gerry did move more, as Roach told him to use angles more. Then he reverted to form, and hung inside. His sneaky right hook landed, and he earned points for ample testes, if not for winning rounds, on the TSS card. "You got to get off the ropes," Roach reminded Gerry afterwards. Good advice, but no matter where Gerry was, JuanMa was throwing grenades at him.

In the sixth, Gerry was in trouble at the 1:20 mark. Yes, he was on the ropes. Was Roach cringing at the sight of a brave man eating those grenades, as he had done decades before? Yet Gerry kept hurling his own returns when he got a chance, and after the round, he bounced on his feet, telling JuanMa that he was still there, and still peppy. Did I compliment Gerry's guts supply yet? In the seventh, JuanMa landed short shots, and some longer javelins as well. He is Mr Inside, Mr Outside, maybe the busiest bomber in the sport today. "I need more head movement, I need more angles. How do you feel? Talk to me," Roach said after. "Are we winning?" JuanMa asked after the round. Often, a fighter just can't properly divine the momentum during the battle.

In the eighth, analyst Max Kellerman said, "Gerry Penalosa is not human." Au contraire, Maxie, he's a fine example of a most willful, superbly stubborn pugilist; you had to admire his determination, but also wince at his refusal to shrink back in the face of such relentless artillery. "You go and knock this guy out, otherwise I'm gonna stop the fight. I'm gonna give you one round," said Roach after. "The last round, if you don't knock him out, it's over."

In the ninth, Gerry kept chopping, with hooks mostly, but he is a man in a weight class a bridge too far. JuanMa was slower, though, and the sliver of a possibility that Gerry could pull off the comeback of the year (decade?) grew a morsel. He didn't win the round, maybe, but Freddie would let him continue, right? Nope. Freddie asked his permission to stop it, and Penalosa hesitated, but gave his assent. God bless Freddie for sticking to his word, and Gerry for his immense heart. TSS tosses Penalosa props galore for his ultimate professionalism.

Lamont Peterson (26-0) took on Willy Blain (20-1) in the TV opener, a scrap between junior welters. In the first round, the lefty Blain was cut over his left eye from an accidental clash of heads. He looked to counter, as Peterson pumped a long jab, stalked him, and got warm. In the second, Peterson worked the torso, and you had to like his left hooks to the body. In the fifth, Peterson blasted to the body, and we knew that Blain wouldn't be able to summon enough power to put Lamont off. In the sixth, there was a pause as Blain hurt his right hand, the ref stopped the fight, because he stopped fighting....and then he allowed Blain to confer with the doctor, and the doc looked at him. "He's alright?" the ref asked the doc. And Blain continued. The rulebook does not allow for a pause in the action in a case such as this for the doctor to assess the fighter, after a fighter hurts himself, and no foul has occurred, but I really have no problem with it. The fans have paid money, the promoter has paid money to the fighter, no harm, no foul. It was all immaterial, anyway, as Peterson stepped on the gas in the next round. He went at Blain, and hit with a left hook, maybe on that pained right hand. Blain backed off,

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turned away, and this time the ref waved the fight off, and meant it. The loser was clearly irked, as he cursed his fortune, and his right thumb, which he stated was the dented digit. The time of the stop was 1:11. Lamont went 126-406, Blain was 53-394. Some organizations interim belt was up for grabs, but I think interim belts are stupid inventions, and won't publicize them unless there is a compelling reason for a title being an interim title.

SPEEDBAG The ten second warning before a round was to end was a really loud whistle, which confused the fighters a few times, as they are mostly used to a more subtle thumping sound.

---What's next? Vazquez? Marquez? 126? JuanMa said he'd likely go to 126 in December, or January 2010, but he'd like Vazquez or Marquez first.

---Roach said JuanMa was too strong. "Gerry was taking too much punishment," he said after the bout. He said he thought Gerry might be able to swing the momentum if JuanMa got tired, but Lopez never slowed down too much.