

## THE GRADUATE: Ward Makes The Grade, Schools Miranda

Written by Michael Woods  
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Andre Ward probably should've come into the ring at the Oracle Arena in Oakland, CA dressed in a cap and gown, and he should've tossed a mortarboard in the air after earning a unanimous decision win over bruising banger Edison Miranda on Saturday night. Because Ward graduated from prospect to full-fledged contender and player in the 168 pound class.

He probably gave his promoter Dan Goossen a mini heart attack when he came out banging in the twelfth round, instead of playing it safe and protecting his chin and a massive lead. But Goossen was all grins after the scores were announced, and Ward snagged a 116-112, 119-109, 119-109 win in a fight that should force Ward naysayers to back off.

Miranda opened a cut on Ward's eye in the first with a butt, and Ward could've melted down. But he stayed composed, and mixed up his game, going righty then lefty, sometimes moving and sometimes staying in Miranda's face; it was a solid, smart showing, and even though Ward wanted the KO, it couldn't have gone that much better for him and his team.

Showtime televised. The ref was Jon Schorle. Ward after said he wasn't totally enthused with his showing. He didn't stop his man, and he said he put himself in harms way too much. But he did show he can stay cool under fire, and that his beard is sturdy, he said. As the No. 2 ranked super middle in the WBC, he will likely face champ Carl Froch in his next tussle.

Ward (an Oakland resident; 19-0, 13 KOs; 2004 US Olympic gold medal winner; age 25) weighed 167 ½ pounds; Miranda (born in Colombia; 32-4; age 28; ranked No. 5 WBO, No. 7 WBC) weighed the same on Friday.

In the first, both tried to establish the jab. There was an "accidental" clash of heads 1:20 in, and a cut formed over Ward's left eye. Looked like Miranda went into goat mode. Would the less seasoned man get worried, or get to work? Ward went lefty, and his left hand found the target. Stitch Duran worked on the gash, not a hellacious one, after one. In the second, Miranda pressed early, but Ward's movement put him off. Ward took a low blow and protested. The Colombian thumped his chest—bring it on, rookie—after Ward caught him with a one-two. Miranda landed rights, which Ward felt to the core. In the third, Miranda added another foul to his slate, as he hit behind the head. Ward didn't look knife sharp, as he loaded up on shots, telegraphed some, and seemed a tad put off by Miranda's roughhouse tactics. But, Miranda was still losing every round. A southpaw smack with the left punctuated Ward's round.

In the fourth, Miranda's jab was slooower. He looked to change the game with his right, and Ward figured that out. The rhythm of the fight wasn't stellar, to this point, and this was to Miranda's advantage. He didn't want Ward sticking, moving, and getting into a nice rhythm in doing so. In the fifth, Ward went lefty, and his hands were low, even lower than in the previous round. Was he getting too cocky? Miranda landed a counter right hand, but Ward stayed lefty. And his accuracy was more noticeable as he got great angles on Miranda.

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In round six, Ward's movement paid dividends. He was now in a rhythm. He sometimes smothered Miranda's power, getting in his face, and other times spun out, and got some space between he and the Colombian. Miranda landed two solid rights, and the Oaklanders had to acknowledge them. In the seventh, Ward stayed close to Miranda. Were his legs heavy or was he thinking more infighting was to his best advantage now? In the eighth, Ward backed Miranda up even more than before; he looked like the stronger man, as well as the more agile. They were toe to toe for most of the round, stepping on the same Twister circles, battling for the real estate.

In the ninth, Ward stayed on message; he kept his left mitt up high, so as not to get caught with a Miranda right. A Ward left hook hurt Miranda with a minute to go. Would it go the full 12? In the tenth, a left hook launched from San Francisco nailed Miranda. Ward didn't go into the prevent defense, as he could've to safeguard his lead. In lefty mode, his left hand was working oh so well. A frustrated Miranda pushed Ward to the mat. In the 11th, Ward landed lead lefts, and then either jetted, or tied Miranda up. His feints froze Edison, and still moved smoothly late, as his cardio was in fine working order. In the last round, Ward came out banging. Now righty, he stayed smart, not leaving himself open for a late-inning bomb.

In the TV opener, John Molina rubbed out Frankie Archuleta right quick. The end came at 2:06 of the second, and the crowd gave Frankie a hard time, as many decided that he could've continued. Molina was a head taller than Frankie, and had a major reach edge as well. He ate a few shots enroute, did Molina, but he dropped the loser with a minute to go. Archuleta looked at his corner, with a grin on his mug, and then turned and looked into the ref's eyes. The ref saw surrender, and halted the bout.