

UFC 98 Brazil's Lyoto Machida KOs Rashad Evans

Written by David A. Avila
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LAS VEGAS-It had to happen some day, a karate master finally won a major mixed martial arts championship and the biggest title of all when Brazil's Lyoto "The Dragon" Machida knocked out Sugar Rashad Evans for the Ultimate Fighting Championship light heavyweight title on Saturday.

"Karate's back!" shouted Machida.

With the look of confidence Machida (15-0) proved to Evans (18-1-1) before more than 16,000 at the MGM Grand that his style of fighting could be the future at UFC 98 and also proved willing to be the aggressor.

Boy was he aggressive.

"Now the Dragon is champion," said Machida.

The first round was spent with both fighters circling each other and unwilling to make the first move. With almost three minutes gone Machida used long leg kicks to score points and prove he did not need to counterpunch to win. A left leg kick and punch dropped Evans for a moment but he survived.

"I was just going in there to try and make him throw strikes," said Evans, who had captured the title by knockout over Forrest Griffin last year. "He has excellent timing."

While Evans seemed hesitant, Machida decided to take the initiative and attacked the champion with kicks and punches. A left hand to the chin dropped Evans to a knee and Machida followed up quickly with more strikes. The American fighter got up but was met with a right hand and another blistering left hand to the chin that floored Evans again. Referee Mario Yamasaki waved the fight over at 3:57 of the second round for a technical knockout victory for the Brazilian karate master.

"I try all my life to be a champion," Machida said after the fight. "Now I want to keep this belt for a long time."

Evans was disappointed but philosophical about losing the title.

"The only thing you can do is go forward," said Evans. "It's the first time I've ever been inside on the part of losing."

Other bouts

The battle of words between former UFC welterweight champions between Matt Hughes and Matt Serra (16-6) almost ended in a stalemate in the Octagon with each fighter having moments

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in the three rounds. First Serra used his lethal right hand to stun the Illinois grappler, then Hughes rebounded with some vicious take downs and pummeling. All three judges scored it 29-28 for Hughes.

After the conclusion both hugged and congratulated each other. For more than a year both had a running verbal battle that led to this confrontation.

"It was really a factor of what he said about me," said Hughes (44-7), who traded barbs with Serra during filming of the reality TV show The Ultimate Fighter in season six.

New York's Serra forced a take down of Hughes in the last minute of the last round, but it wasn't enough to convince the judges that he captured the crucial last round.

"As a fighter I kept him in the highest respect. He's a Hall of Famer," said Serra of Hughes. "He hung in there."

A battle for the right to face the UFC lightweight champion ended by decision with Frankie Edgar (10-1) using his boxing skills to win a standup game against former champion Sean Sherk (37-4-1) after three rounds. All three judges scored it 30-27 for Edgar who stands first in line to fight current champ BJ Penn.

American Drew McFedries (8-6) gave French fighter Xavier Foupa-Pokam (20-11) a very rude welcome with thunderous right hands that dropped the tall and lanky fighter and ultimately forced referee Yves Lavigne to stop the middleweight fight 37 seconds into the first round.

"I come in ready to throw down," said McFedries.

Veteran Chael Sonnen (24-10-1) of Oregon showed newcomer Dan Miller (11-2) what UFC is all about as he manhandled and routed the New Jersey fighter all three rounds in winning by unanimous decision in a middleweight contest 30-27 on all three cards.

In another match between a veteran and a youngster Brock Larson (27-2) found a mistake in Tennessee Mike Pyle's (17-6-1) game and made him pay for it with a submission by arm triangle at 3:06 of the first round.

Canada's Tim Hague (10-1) withstood a stinging kick to the head by Pat Barry (4-1) and turned things around by taking it to the ground. A guillotine choke forced Barry to tap out at 1:42 of the first round of a heavyweight fight.

Temecula's Krzysztof (19-9-1) "The Polish Experiment" Soszynski was a late insertion against Brazil's capoeira expert Andre Gusmao but entered the Octagon with confidence. After many handshakes the former The Ultimate Fighter finalist used a slew of right hands to knock out his opponent at 3:17 of the first round in a light heavyweight bout.

"I was hoping for a knockout," said Soszynski. "The boy hits hard but I hit harder."

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Japan's Yoshiyuki Yoshida used his all-around skills to quickly submit Brandon Wolff with a guillotine choke at 2:24 of the first round.

George Roop edged Dave Kaplan by split decision after three rounds in a lightweight bout. The high energized fight was closely contested in the Octagon and on the score cards 30-27 twice for Roop and 29-28 for Kaplan.

In a bout featuring former a finalist for The Ultimate Fighter television reality show from last year, Phillipe Nover got no breaks from the referee Yves Lavigne when he was dropped by a Kyle Bradley punch. He lay flat on his stomach for a micro second then resumed fighting but that was all the time it took to convince the referee that the fight was over. Despite repeated contest the decision stood and Nover lost by knockout at 1:03 of the first round in a lightweight match. The crowd booed the somewhat hasty stoppage.