Written by Michael Woods
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For a few rounds, things looked, if not bleak, then less than stellar for IBF middleweight champion Arthur Abraham. He was fairly flat, and his corner exhorted him to get down to business, and show aggression against lightly regarded foe Mahir Oral at the Max Schmeling Hall in Berlin on Saturday. It took awhile for The King to stir, and get warmed up, but when he did, Oral was no match for Abraham's precision punching. The champion retained his belt with knockdowns in the fourth and sixth, and a surgically efficient tenth, when he put Oral down three times, forcing the loser's corner to throw in the towel.

The end came at 1:23, via TKO, for Oral, who performed with greater skill and guts than probably everyone expected. The win gives Abraham another chip or two in a future if he wants to target Kelly Pavlik, but it seems more likely he'll head north to 168, as making 160 is a dreadful chore for the German. Afterwards, Abraham said he will take the big fight, whatever division makes sense, though he is leaning to moving up. "I will fight in America, it's my dream," he said.

The champ Abraham (age 29; 159 ½ pounds; from Armenia, living in Germany) came in with a 29-0 record while "The Lion" Oral (age 29 also; 158 ¾ pounds; of Turkish descent, lives in Germany) was 25-1-2 entering.

In the first round of his tenth title defense, "King Arthur" held a high guard. He'd never been down as a pro, and Oral looked to pierce his defense with a one-at-a-time jab. The two men had sparred, five years ago, for the record, but the King has separated himself from the pack since then. Oral and Abe both held themselves erect, in Euro style, in a solid first round. In the second, Oral looked to tag Abe's sides. Both men fought in a contained manner; no mad rushes, or psycho flurries in this one. Oral hit with a right before the bell and it was fair to say he'd surprised all with his effectiveness early. After the round, the Abraham corner demanded more fire. In the third, Oral again came out the aggressor. Was Abraham having a flat night, or would he get cookin'?

In the fourth, Abraham did get busier. He moved in, getting in his foe's face, and put Oral down with 40 seconds to go, off a left hook after a few solid rights. A long right almost did it again, and we wondered if Oral would get out of the fifth.

In round five, Oral went down, but it was a stumble. He stood his ground, despite being much less powerful than the champion, to his credit. In the sixth, Abraham took the round off, for the most part. Until the 1:02 mark, that is, when a right sent Oral down. He dipped to his left, the champ timed it, and to the mat Oral went. In the seventh, Oral still hung in there, looking to hit with wide tosses. In the eighth, Oral did well to shrug off a nasty right hand. This fight was a win for him, just in how he performed to this juncture. In the ninth, Abraham had his way and still Oral chugged forward. In the 10th, a left hook put Oral on a knee. The ref looked hard and long at the challenger. He took a knee after a right to the body. Again, he rose. And again he was dropped, this time with a left hook to the body. He was up again, but his corner threw in the

towel.