

WHERE'S THE FIRE, MATT? Godfrey Wins FNF Snoozer

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 09 July 2009 19:00

Feel free to treat this “wisdom” like a used Kleenex if you like, Matt Godfrey. But I must offer my take to you, after watching you in action at The Arena in South Philadelphia, PA on Friday Night Fights.

Fighters are entertainers. Of course, they are athletes, but if they want to go far in the world of pugilism, make some solid money, then they'd be well advised to understand, deep down, that they are entertainers.

When I watch a boxing match, I am not doing so out of habit, or because I am forced to do so. I am watching because I find the practice, usually, to be an enjoyable way to pass some time. I watch boxing to be entertained. Same goes for the people who ponied up \$50 to watch the card at The Arena on Friday night. They paid their money to be entertained, same as if they were at their local multiplex, or a musical venue. And what I find most entertaining, and I dare say the same can be said of most fight fans, is watching a pugilist showing strength, and skill, and will and fire and fury. But watching you against Shawn Hawk on Friday, Matt, I found myself, to be honest, bored for too many minutes of too many rounds. Half hearted jabs. Perfunctory hooks and crosses. A “gonna get some rounds in” attitude.

Not entertaining.

Not 45 minutes of my life particularly fruitfully spent. Not the right way to fight, in my opinion, if you truly fancy yourself the best cruiserweight in the world not wearing a title belt, and want to convince others of this distinction.

You could have bore down, and sat down on your shots, and taken out the green Hawk in a couple rounds if you wanted to, Matt. You are a skilled technician, and even if Hawk showed the beard from hell, at the very least you could have shown all those people tuning in and buying tickets to the bout that you wanted to win, and wanted to give them a good bang for their buck. Not to mention, letting a guy like Hawk stick around, and maybe land that Hail Mary hook, isn't smart strategy, sir.

Hey, you might say in response, I moved my hands. I wasn't just doing the Moonwalk in the ring. I was working.

Fair enough. You were moving your hands. But most of the time, you did so with the intensity one sees from a boxer coming back after a lengthy hiatus, in the gym, as he looks to get rid of some rust. In the gym, that guy doesn't have to impress anyone. Hey, no one is putting any money in his pocket at the gym, so his duty is to himself, and really no one else. But on Friday Night Fights, it's a different story. In front of the fans at The Arena, it is a different story. Viewers and fans at the arena are your customers, and your customers were not treated all that well in your bout against Hawk. And off that performance, truth be told, how many of them came away saying, Man, that Matt Godfrey, I gotta keep my eye on that kid? How many of them said,

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instead, Dang, that's 45 minutes of my life that mighta been better served by watching NYC Prep, or playing some Fight Night Round Four!

Not to single you out, Matt. Maybe you were under the weather, or maybe you had a beef with your girl, or your dog is sick. I'm not being flip here. I respect anyone, ANYONE, that gets in the ring and gives max effort. But I do not believe what I saw in that ring in Philly against Shawn Hawk was max effort.

It was not an entertaining fight, and perhaps you'll consider my take as you move forward as a pro. I don't mean it in a mean-spirited way, or aim this message solely at you. The same message goes out to any and all fighters who want to get some rounds in, or play it safe because a title shot is in the cards in the near future.

No, feel free to ignore the message, because after all it is your career, and your life on the line when you glove up, Matt. But if you want to make your decade of boxing most worthwhile, and maximize your earning power, please comprehend that you are an entertainer, and if people watch you fight and are not entertained for lengthy stretches, then there is a strong possibility that they will not make an appointment to watch you in your next scrap. Hey, maybe you'll watch the fight on your TiVo. See how Alexis Arguello boxed? The passion, the power, the stubborn insistence of intensity? Show 60% of that, sir, and you will do yourself and your IRA account justice.

End respectful rant.

Godfrey (18-1 entering; from RI; 200 pounds entering; age 28) and Hawk (a Native American from ND; age 25; 198) were scheduled for ten. Hawk hadn't been past eight coming in, and he hadn't been in with anyone above C level prior to this scrap.

In the first, the occasional lefty Godfrey, who I'd like to see cut out the junk food and beef up the intense cardio if he wants to make the most of his talents, worked the jab and sized up Hawk. Godfrey, who fights well backing up, got cooking a bit more in the second and in the third, but not as much as I'd like. Why not turn the gas up on the untested kid? Why so safe? Why not put a stamp on your showing? Why throw that less than halfhearted jab out there, why not rip it, make it mean something? Hawk showed some good things; he moves his head pretty well, and he gets in position to cut his man off. But he doesn't jab on his way in, and once he cuts his man off, he often neglects to do much of anything.

Friend of TSS John Scully, Godfrey's trainer, spoke to Teddy Atlas and agreed with the analyst to an extent, when Atlas asked if Godfrey would be ramping it up, to give the fans something to savor. We need to be safe so we're not sorry, the trainer said. TSS tip of the cap to in studio analyst BJ Flores, who admitted that he and Godfrey have something in common—they both tend to get complacent. Godfrey finally kicked it up a notch in the seventh, but then reverted to form. Godfrey cruised to the finish, and the fans were so lulled that they couldn't even be moved to boo with vigor. The judges saw what all of us did: a boring blowout, by scores of 99-91, 97-93, 98-92. The middle card, a puzzler, came from the normally reliable Steve Weisfeld. Around ten people booed after the decision, and the rest of the people sat there, unmoved.

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Shawn George (from Brooklyn; age 30; 18-2-2; 176 1/2) met Chris Henry (from Houston; 28; 23-2 coming in; 176 1/2--had to lose two pounds to make weight, lost 3 1/2 instead) in the show opener. George is best known for sending a mean message to Chris Byrd last year, putting the ex champion down three times in an upset TKO9 victory. Viewers wondered if Henry, a certifiable slugger with 24-7 evil intent, would be weak, seeing as how he needed to cut last minute.

In the first, George got down to business. A right and a series of lefts had Henry buzzed. His quicker hands stood out, but Henry kept coming forward, against a foe who seemed to be working with superior confidence. In the second, George timed a right as Henry came in, and the crowd Oooooood for about the sixth time. Henry hurt George to close the third and George had to be irked that he didn't finish things off early. George stopped moving as smartly by the fourth, which bolstered the less mobile Henry's chances. The worm turned big-time in the fifth and in the sixth, George went down. A right did it, and his eyes looked cloudy. He was up, barely. Henry went into closer mode. Another right dropped him, as referee Steve Smoger halted it, and George's trainer Tommy Brooks came in waving the white flag. The end came at 1:08, via TKO.

Derek Ennis (age 28; from Philly; 17-2-1 entering; 154 1/2) met John Mackey (from DC; age 35; 157; 11-3-2 entering) in a scheduled six. I liked ref Gary Rosato's Chicago accent and his request for the combatants to, "Touch gloves, bang at the bell" prior to the start. Ennis put the loser down in the second. The lefty got up, and came roaring back. Ennis counters crisply, but isn't busy enough, often enough. In the sixth, Ennis again dropped the loser, from a right to the chin. He barely made the closing bell. No drama going to the decision: the judges saw it 58-54, 59-53, 59-53, Ennis.

SPEEDBAG: Studio head Brian Kenny seemed excited about Showtime's 168 pound tournament, as are just about all fight fans. Bringing structure to this fragmented sport is always a good thing. Hey, who do you like to come out on top in the super middle showdown? We'll delve into that issue more next week...

---Teddy Atlas will be working with heavyweight Alex Povetkin (17-0), he said. Atlas went to Russia last week to see if he and Povetkin would hit it off, and if Teddy could stand the guy and not be put off by any cockiness or 'tude. Povetkin will move to the States in the next two weeks so he and Atlas can get to work. I am guessing they will not divorce, and Povetkin will not bite Atlas in a bad breakup scrap, as Kirk Johnson did in 1999....Povetkin will fight a tune up in September, and then will fight Wladimir Klitschko after that. FYI Teddy wore a Povetkin t-shirt in a fight breakdown video shown before the main event.

---Kenny and BJ Flores insinuated that Bobby Gunn does not deserve a title shot against Tom Adamek. They showed a clip of a Gunn KO loss to Shelby Gross from March 2006, which was changed to a NC after Gross failed a dope test postfight.