Written by Ron Borges
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Vic Darchinyan's mouth was as big as ever Saturday night but his punching power was not. Where he goes from there it would seem is clear.

If he's a wise man and not just a wise guy, he goes down.

Not down on his back, a fate he managed to avoid while losing his bantamweight title challenge to IBF champion Joseph "King Kong'' Agbeko. Rather, down in weight. Or, more precisely, down to where he belongs.

Heavy-handed fighters often learn that their punching power does not always travel with them as they move up the weight scales. For the former flyweight and super flyweight champion this was not a problem until he advanced to 118 pounds, a jump so slight it would hardly seem to matter but the difference between being heavy-handed at 115 pounds and powerless for all intents and purposes at 118 was evident in the way he blasted Agbeko numerous times with no apparent ill effects.

Darchinyan and the people advising him should not be fooled by the mistaken ruling that a seventh round push was actually a knockdown of Agbeko because it was not. The same was true when he pushed him down in the 10th and 11th rounds, actions more of frustration and bewilderment than anything resembling strategy.

Darchinyan seemed to know both that and the fact that he did not out fight Agbeko even though two of the three judges had the fight far closer (114-113 Agbeko) than it appeared to be because when it was over he was almost gracious, "almost" being the operative word here.

"He's not better than me but he was tonight,'' Darchiniyan (32-2, 26 KO) said cryptically. "I took a different tactic into the ring tonight. I went for the big punch and I lost and I can't say anything about that (except maybe that the big punch got smaller at 118 pounds, perhaps?).

"I was repeating the same mistakes and I was getting upset. It's not an excuse. I took the bad tactic and I wasn't smart enough tonight. He was the better fighter tonight. I will go back and watch the tape and correct my mistakes."

The first thing he should correct is the mistake he made moving up in weight. Although Darchinyan was the definition of a knockout artist at both 112 and 115 pounds, he never seemed to move Agbeko despite the fact the champion will never be mistaken for a defensive wizard.

That Agbeko could not be moved even with Darchinyan often landing clear cut bombs is a signal that at bantamweight Darchinyan makes a good super flyweight but he is not the same devastating puncher he was at flyweight or super fly and hence a decision must be made.

Can he box his way to a third world title in the higher weight class without the devastating knockout power that had made him one of the pound-for-pound best fighters in the world? Or will the absence of that threatening power lead him into repeats of the bloody mess he was by the end of the night after sustaining deep cuts under both eyes, a bloodied mouth and a bleeding nose?

If he cannot out-box the top bantamweights rather than simply out punch them (and frankly I doubt he can), then at 33 he faces a stark choice. He can suffer the pain and pay the price of dieting himself back down to 115 to try and maintain the junior bantamweight (super fly) titles he still owns (which, by the way, are all the ones worth having since he unified those titles a year ago) or take his chance with bigger, stronger men in the hopes they do not all come with the same iron chin Agbeko displayed over the weekend in Florida.

That choice is up to him but if Agbeko is to be believed Darchinyan's future should include Ultra Slim-Fast and a refresher course on the Marquis of Queensbury rules.

"He pushed me (down) in the seventh round and throughout the fight,'' Agbeko (27-1, 22 KO) said. "He is very dirty and rough in the ring. I was fighting two people in the ring: Darchinyan and the referee. But I didn't care if there were five people in the ring, I was going to win and come back out with my championship belt.

"Darchinyan talked a lot before the fight and I turned him into 'the raging b-llsh-tter' like I said I would. I'm still the champion, not the chimpanzee he said I was. I want to be considered among the top pound for pound fighters in the world. I think I have earned it."

Since Darchinyan held a place in most top 10 pound-for-pound lists, Agbeko may have a point but the larger point raised by Saturday night's showdown is where is Darchinayan's place among boxing's little big men now?

He seemed to imply after the fight that he might press on at bantamweight, his manager Elias Nasser immediately saying they would seek a rematch and claiming his fighter's problem was the predictably lame one of "failing to follow the plan.'' Whatever the plan was, it didn't include Agbeko being able to absorb flush shots from Darchinyan with no ill effects but since that's what happened a more logical course of action is clear.

On Aug. 15, the only man other than Agbeko to defeat Darchinyan, flyweight champion Nonito Donaire, will face Rafael Concepcion for the interim WBA super flyweight title that really belongs to Darchinyan. If Donaire wins, logic and good business both would seem to point Darchinyan in the direction of seeking his rematch from Donaire rather than Agbeko.

Frankly, in business terms it would be a bigger fight and it would be against a smaller man. If you just learned what Vic Darchinyan learned about the bantamweight division, what could be better than that?

Frankly, nothing.