

## How You Scored It Live Is Your Real Score

Written by Frank Lotierzo  
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You only get one shot, that's right, just one. With the controversy over the judges' scoring in the eyes of some in the Cotto-Clotey WBO welterweight title bout last month, many boxing aficionados have gone back and re-watched the fight several times. This is a great concept and it helps one make their case for whatever side they happen to come down on regarding the fight and who should've been awarded the decision.

There's only one problem with that, and it's a rather huge one. The judges scoring the fight as it happens live only get one shot. They don't get the option of going back and re-watching it to check and see how cleanly Clotey's uppercuts were landing or by how much they may have missed by. The replay is something that the three judges scoring the fight didn't have the luxury of benefiting from as they were scoring the fight on June 20th. They had one shot and one shot only.

The judges must block out the crowd noise and make sure they score rounds/fights on what they saw and aren't influenced by the crowd and don't submit cards reflective of such or they'll end up sitting amongst them. This is something I tend to beat to death sometimes. It's just that I believe some opinions are wrong and some rounds in boxing can only be seen one way, right or wrong. Scoring a fight like Chambers-Dimitrenko a draw as did judge Paul Thomas did is dead wrong -- end of story.

I hate to break the news, but whatever you score any fight as you're watching it live is your real score. Whatever you changed after the fact doesn't count. Sure, it may be a more realistic score of how the fight should've been scored, but it doesn't count because it took you at least two screenings to derive at that final score.

What's important to keep in mind when scoring a fight live that is drastically different from watching the tape is you know the result when you watch the tape. So that big right hand that you saw watching the fight live, that looked like it did damage, you realize when watching the tape that it didn't do all that much. And that perception definitely affects how you see and score the round/fight.

Since I have been obsessed with the sport of boxing, my all-time favorite fight is the first fight between Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali. The reason I bring this up is because Frazier vs. Ali I is the fight that I have watched more than any other fight in my life. In fact, I must embarrassingly admit that I have watched the closed circuit broadcast in its entirety over 500 times. To this day I can tell what round it is by just watching no more than 15 seconds of it. I only reveal this because it came from watching this fight so many times that it taught me a lot about scoring a fight and why the first score of the fight on the night it happens is the only one that counts.

From hours and hours of watching the closed circuit copy of SuperFight I, there were two rounds that stood out to me every time I watched it regarding how they were officially scored

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and how I saw them. Rounds three and four were all scored in favor of Joe Frazier by judges Artie Aidala, Bill Recht and referee Arthur Mercante. However, when I watched these rounds reviewing the tape of the fight, I always score them for Ali. Not once in a while or most of the time, every time.

During rounds three and four, Ali dominates Frazier for at least the first 2:20 of them, so much to the point that Frazier doesn't land a clean punch during that time. Even blow-by-blow commentator Don Dunphy says during the fourth round, "These are big rounds by the ex-champ." However, in both rounds Joe finally catches up with Muhammad and lands a couple of big left hooks to his chin during the last 30-40 seconds of the round. In the fourth round, Frazier lands three big hooks spread out over a 10-15 second gap on Ali that have the crowd at the Garden on their feet oohing and ahing. When the round ends, going by the crowd noise you get the impression that Frazier has Ali in trouble. But he really didn't.

So what gives here? How can an opinionated writer such as myself be so emphatic that in the "Fight of The Century," Muhammad Ali clearly won rounds three and four against Joe Frazier, yet not have the slightest bit of an issue with the three officials who scored both rounds for Joe Frazier?

The reason for that is simple. Being at the fight that night I remember the crowd being in an uproar. The noise was deafening and I have no doubt that Frazier's big hooks that landed flush on Ali's jaw gave the perception that it was impossible for him not to have been shook at the end of the round. This excitement and anticipation of the moment caused the crowd and the judges to forget the going over Ali had just administered to Frazier for more than two minutes prior to Joe's nailing Ali with his signature punch a few times.

I'll go one better. Forget the fact who was there at the fight watching it live. Just go by the tape. The crowd noise stimulated by Frazier's massive left-hooks gives the impression that he has seized control of the round. Despite the fact that I don't have a morsel of a doubt that Ali won both the third and fourth rounds, I also don't have an issue with them being scored in Frazier's favor, simply because I believe had I been a judge that night, I would've scored them the same way, for Frazier.

See, on Monday night, March 8th, 1971, I didn't know nor did the officials that Ali would be tagged with bigger hooks from Joe Frazier even more flush and he wouldn't be stopped. Watching the fight live that night as an official, I might have thought Frazier had Ali in real trouble. Only in hindsight did we learn after the fight that Ali was only in trouble and close to being stopped during the last minute of the 11th round.

This is why my watching the fight and scoring it 500-plus times is irrelevant. Most likely in the moment I would've seen those rounds as Frazier's just as those working the fight that night did. That cannot be adjusted or changed after viewing the tape. That's why your first score of the fight while watching it in the moment is how you saw the fight. Whatever you pick up or realized you missed doesn't factor in to what you scored it that night.

I'd be willing to bet had Artie Aidala, Bill Recht and Arthur Mercante not worked Frazier vs. Ali

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and watched the tape of it in my living room, all three would score rounds three and four for Ali. But that ain't how it works. The judges only get one shot to decide and score it. Just as they are held to their score in the eyes of history, so should we.

The next time you score a fight that you're watching on TV as it's happening, save your score sheet. Go back a week later and score the fight again. No doubt your second score of the fight will probably be more accurate and a better indication on how it went, but your first score is how you really saw it.

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