

John Dominates Juarez, Save For Left Hook In 12th, Gets UD

Written by Michael Woods

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Chris John had no trouble solving Rocky Juarez in the top undercard bout at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, except for in the last 30 seconds of the 12th round. John was in complete control all the way through but he ate a clipping left hook, and stumbled. He managed to stay on his feet, and was aided, it seemed, by a final bell which tolled between three and five seconds early. John's WBA featherweight title was up for grabs, and there seemed to be no doubt in anyone's mind that he'd leave Las Vegas with the strap, until that late-inning Juarez throw. They'd fought in February, and John looked to be the victor but the judges in Juarez' hometown of Houston said differently. No home cooking for Juarez on Saturday, though; John showed that he is indeed one of the top pound for pound pugilists in the game, while Juarez' lack of hand and foot speed once again held him back. The scores: 114-113, 119-109, 117-111 for John. For the record, the 114-113 card was turned in by Glenn Hamada.

The lack of drama in the John-Juarez scrap was noted by the HBO crew, and they talked about the headline match in the second half of the featherweight fight. Until the twelfth round, that is, when a Juarez left hook wobbled John with 34 seconds on the clock. He grabbed on, and pushed Juarez to the ropes. If Rocky only had another 30 seconds...

John had a 189-549 punch edge, to 74-328 for Rocky, according to CompuBox.

John (from Indonesia; age 30; 126 pounds; 135 on fight night; 42-0-2 entering) came out sticking and moving against the Mohawked Juarez (from Texas; age 29; 126; 134 on fight night; 28-4-1 coming in) in the first round. Joe Cortez worked the tussle, for the record. The master defender John is always moving, even as he's throwing, so finding him and tagging him is no easy task. John, by the way, had "Gatti" stitched on the back of his trunks. And we saw him trying to be more of a banger, in the Gatti vein, in fact. In the fourth, John's right did no wrong. The bout didn't take any turns, as John held sway over Juarez to the extent one would think any judge could see it. Right? Right?? John averaged eight landed shots a round through seven rounds; could he somehow change the momentum? One doubted it, big time.

They clashed in Houston in February, and TSS saw John as the victor but the judges didn't: they called it a draw, as we noted earlier. This despite John having a 344 to 208 edge in punches landed according to CompuBox.

In the second TV bout, Michael Katsidis (135 pounds; 25-2; from Australia) showed that he has grown into a more complete pugilist against slick boxer Vicente Escobedo (134 pounds; 21-1, from California). Katsidis' face indicated he got the worst of it, but the judges saw different: they scored it 115-113, 118-110, 112-116, for the Aussie. TSS saw the fight somewhere in between the 118-110 and 115-113 calls. With the split win, Katsidis is now the WBO interim champion. Katsidis' right cheek was puffed up, but if he was in pain, he never let that get him down. Now, Esco really isn't a big banger, with 13 stops on his ledger, so let's not get overly romantic with the notion that Kat has transformed himself into a new being as a fighter; against someone with top level pop, he would've had a harder time getting the nod. In the first, Esco established the

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jab. Kat was a tad busier. He ripped jabs in close, got up in Esco's face, and bullied him in round two. Esco didn't get himself room to work often enough, but he caught Kat coming in several times. Would the judges truly give him credit for scoring while backing up?

Blood streamed from Kat's left eye by the fourth, and Esco was better able to work from the distance most advantageous to him. The slice was on his brow, and is a perennial trouble spot for him. Through four, HBO's Harold Lederman had Kat up, 49-45. But Esco gained confidence; he wasn't letting himself be bullied into submission. But it just didn't seem like he owns the power to put Kat off of him. Kat stepped it up in the seventh, after his corner asked him to. He seemed to have more energy than Esco by the eighth. He was backing up, but without the smooth reserve he had before. Now he was more urgent in retreat. His hands were lower than before, as well. "You want me to stop it?" Esco's cornerman Nacho Beristain asked him after the round. He said no, but without much vigor.

Kat flamed him with cracks to the body in the ninth, but Esco hung in. His legs were fresher than the round before, and he placed some stinging counters. But Katsidis never seem fazed. To the 12th, he kept his concentration up, and while he ate a couple uppercuts, they weren't thrown with enough oomph to change the game. The stats--Kat went 336-889 to Esco's 295-900.

Thought Cornelius Lock got a slot on the PPV because he's a friend of the Mayweathers? That's possible, but he proved his worth with a right hook that forced the ref to stop the minor title fight against Orlando Cruz in the TV opener. The vacant NABO title was up for grabs.

The taller Lock (18-4 entering; from Michigan; 125 pounds) snapped a decent jab in the first round against Cruz (16-0-1 entering; from Puerto Rico; 126), who is about three inches shorter than the friend of the Mayweathers. A right hook stunned Cruz and two left follows sent him down. He grabbed for dear life with 20 seconds remaining. In the fifth, a right hook, delivered quicker than Cruz' right hook, sent him down again. The ref Robert Byrd looked at him as he arose, shakily, and halted the bout. The time of the stoppage was 2:08 of the fifth.

SPEEDBAG Juarez had to have his hair okayed by the Nevada commission. As long is he didn't use too much product on it, so it spiked in dangerous fashion, the commish said go for it.

---Jim Lampley said that Bob Arum insists Manny Pacquiao will never fight Floyd Mayweather. The promoter and Mayweather were a tandem, and split in a harsh manner. Money will of course smooth over hurt feelings, in TSS' opinion.

---Didja know that Jim lampley's son once convinced his dad to get a Mike Tyson facial tattoo?