

Andre Ward Shines in Super Six Tournament

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Tuesday, 24 November 2009 13:00

Andre Ward was supposed to have at least been tested by WBA super middleweight champion Mikkel Kessler as the two completed round one of Showtime's Super Six World Boxing Classic. But Ward 20-0 (13), fighting before an enthusiastic hometown crowd at the Oracle in Oakland, California, made everything look easy, sweeping virtually every round, outboxing, outmoving, and, when necessary, outfighting the befuddled Kessler 42-2 (32). The win not only gives Ward his first world title, it also moves him close to favored position in the tournament. For the defeated Kessler, there is a lot of ground to make up; this loss exposed many exploitable flaws that future opponents are sure to take advantage of.

Here's how the fight went:

Round one: Both guys throw hard jabs. Both are wary, maintaining their distance. Ward (166 ½) is clearly faster and lets Kessler (167) move him into the corner. Andre is switching between orthodox and southpaw. They're each trying to find their range. 10-9 Ward.

Round two: Ward scores with a good four punch combination. He's using his legs. Kessler is pressing him, but not throwing anything. He scores with a clubbing right to the back of the head. Ward exhibits good ring sense, and makes Kessler look clumsy. Kessler tries to cut off the ring, but he's not doing much. Ward ends the round with a double jab, uppercut, and right. 10-9 Ward.

Round three: Ward lands a quick six punch combination that gets Kessler's attention. He's just too fast for Mikkel. As always, Kessler neglects the body. He'll need to land body shots if he expects to have a chance. Ward catches him with a sneaky right, moving in and out well. Follows with a hard lead right. Kessler tries to rough Ward up at the bell. 10-9 Ward

Round four: Ward has success backing up. Lands a good combination to the body. Kessler looks discouraged already. He's shaken by a left. He came into the fight with a swelling under his right eye, and it's starting to get worse. He manages to land a solid hook, but is then hurt by a quick right. Kessler holds. Ward lands a series of rights followed by a good left in a one-sided round.

10-9 Ward.

Round five: Ward is fighting more aggressively now. He's alternating between moving forward and backpedaling. His speed is just too much for the mechanical Kessler. The fighters exchange jabs. Ward scores with a good left. I wonder if he's becoming too relaxed though. 10-9 Ward

Round six: Whenever Ward chooses to move forward, Kessler foolishly backs off. The guys are a little sloppy now. Ward might be overconfident, but Kessler does nothing to keep him honest. I think he's going through his owning crisis of confidence. Ward hooks to the head.

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Kessler lands a right lead. Kessler tries to jab, but stops the moment Ward moves forward. Ward lands a right near the bell. 10-10

Round seven: Kessler is getting busted up. The fight has degenerated into further sloppiness. Mikkel gets in a hook and a right. Andre answers with a left. They take turns jabbing. Lots of clinching. Kessler lands a right uppercut. Ward steals the round with late jabbing and a hard right. 10-9 Ward

Between rounds, Kessler tells his corner that he can't see. He looks very discouraged, like he might quit.

Round eight: Ward has refocused. He's looking to land a big right hand. Kessler is the physically stronger, but it doesn't matter. Ward is picking his shots more, putting more power into his punches. He has Kessler backing up. Mikkel now initiates clinches to buy time. He's hurt by a right, left combination. Kessler fights back, but does no damage. Ward scores with a combination at the round's end. Kessler has a cut above the left eye sustained from a head butt earlier in the round. 10-9 Ward

In the corner, Kessler looks confused and demoralized. He complains that he can't see. His cornermen ask if they should stop the fight. Kessler wants to continue. They stupidly tell him, "Keep your defense now." Bad advice. Kessler needs to go for broke.

Round nine: Ward comes out looking to end things. He throws flurries, landing frequently. Referee Jack Reiss takes a look at Kessler's eye. Mikkel is reduced to desperate flailing. Good right by Andre. I think that if he went to the body now, he could end the fight. He now does throw a left to the body. The fighters again look sloppy. Kessler finally puts together a combination, but it's not enough to win him the round. 10-9 Ward

There's some arguing in Kessler's corner. They ask him about his eye.

Round ten: Ward is content to pick his spots, using his legs and all of the ring. The fighters bang heads hard. Reiss looks over both for damage. Ward hurts Kessler with a left, as Mikkel holds on. Andre backs him onto the ropes, works him over there. He's measuring Kessler, but can't find the big punch. He scores with a one-two at the bell. 10-9 Ward

Between rounds, Kessler is again asked if he wants the fight stopped.

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Round eleven: Strangely, this round begins much like the first, with both guys exchanging jabs. Ward then lands three consecutive solid rights. The ref brings Kessler to the corner so the doctor can look at his right eyelid. The fight is stopped at 1:42 of the round. Because the cut was caused by a head butt, they're going to go to the scorecards.

Ward wins by unanimous technical decision. The judges have it 98-92 (twice) and 97-93. I actually think Ward was further ahead, 100-91. No matter; the fight wasn't close.

Jim Gray talked to both fighters.

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Ward said, "It was my time. I wasn't intimidated by Kessler's record. He kept doing the same thing over and over again."

Kessler, although thoroughly outfought, was surprisingly whiny and petulant in defeat.

"I'm not used to the referee not stopping the fight when he holds me. And he was using his head butt all the time. Every time we got in there, he head butted me. I got out of rhythm. It was unfair. He's going in with his head on purpose. I could not see."

Apparently there were a lot of things Mikkel Kessler couldn't see tonight, the most important of which was that he got his arse kicked by a better fighter.

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