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Exceptional skills are valuable attributes for a top-level prizefighter. Enduring a torturous training regimen in the weeks leading up to a major bout is a necessity. While Michael Katsidis lacks the former, he makes up for it with a preparation routine that some observers may deem masochistic.

Kevin Mitchell is a boxer of outstanding natural talent. But in the lead-up to his contest with Katsidis he neglected his duties as a promising contender. On Saturday night in London he was dealt a harsh lesson in the reality of his profession.

Katsidis needed just eight minutes to prove that arduous sacrifices differentiate world-class fighters from pretenders. Mitchell sought to use his jab to keep the aggressive Australian at bay, but it was ineffective in preventing Katsidis from landing intense salvos that rattled the exposed neophyte, prompting the referee's intervention in round three of the 135-pound match.

Mitchell, competing in front of 14,000 supporters at the Upton Park stadium, suffered his first loss in a 32-bout career, but will likely learn more from this one defeat than in all his previous fights combined.

"This [loss] is a wake-up call, admitted Mitchell, 25, who had hitherto defeated unchallenging opposition. "There were things I wasnt doing and I was having a few late nights and this has given me a kick up the backside. Ive got to be more professional in what Im doing and take more care of my work and be more aware of what Im doing in the ring.

Conversely, Katsidis is entitled to revel in the fruits of his hard work. He has lost spirited battles to two elite campaigners in Joel Casamayor and Juan Diaz, but proved on Saturday that he has the potential to compete with any fighter in the lightweight division.

"I feel Im the best Ive ever been, weve worked hard and Ive been away from my family and my new baby girl, said the 29-year-old after improving his record to 27-2 (22 KO). "I trained in Thailand; it's a very hard place, it's a war zone. The only two losses I had were when I was training in America. But [in Thailand] there was a line of people at the door waiting to spar me.

Katsidis, a proud admirer of his Greek descent, approached the ring on Saturday to a low-key trumpeted tune and was appropriately attired in a Spartan warrior helmet, which simultaneously symbolized his powerful desire for combat and the austerities of a fighter's lifestyle. In contrast, Mitchell's entrance was accompanied by a live rock band and a flock of glamor models.

When the opening round began, Mitchell immediately sought to establish his jab and enjoyed some success as Katsidis patiently moved forward behind a high guard. Katsidis, who is renowned for reckless attacks, was disciplined in his approach, but when he forced Mitchell towards the ropes midway through the round he opened up with a barrage of winging hooks. Mitchell was noticeably rattled by the Australian's fury.

Mitchell again worked his jab in the second, but Katsidis seemed unfazed and stalked his foe around the ring. Mitchell's low right hand left him open to a thudding left hook that staggered him in the third round. The shaken Mitchell unwisely elected to trade combinations and managed to connect with a variety of uppercuts, but none of the punches had any visible impact on Katsidis. As Mitchell retreated towards the ropes, he was caught by another left hook and Katsidis unleashed a sustained bombardment of crude blows that hurt Mitchell and persuaded referee Dave Parris to rescue the stricken fighter.

Mitchell offered no objection to the fight's stoppage, and seemed overly accepting of the loss; as if aware that he never deserved victory against such a determined opponent.

"I backed up and sat on the ropes like an idiot, admitted Mitchell. He lured me into an attack and bang, he caught me.

The event's promoter, Frank Warren, formerly held high aspirations for Mitchell, and predicted that his charge could develop into a popular local commodity in London; a scenario that would ease the sting of Amir Khan's departure to America. But Warren didn't estimate that Mitchell would discount a rigorous work ethic, and was candid in his assessment of the young fighter after the bout.

"It annoys me hearing about Kevins preparation, revealed Warren. "If Kevin doesnt want to play at this game, Im not financing it. If he wants to be a world champion and play the game Im the person to help deliver that, if he doesnt want to play the game then he should go somewhere else and play around, because Im not in the business of being involved with fighters who play around.

But I dont want to take the slightest thing away from [Katsidis], he came here in magnificent condition and he deserved to win the fight because he put everything into it.

Mitchell is no stranger to hard labor. When a broken hand brought a temporary hiatus to his career he worked night shifts doing construction on the London subway lines, an occupation he may be forced to resume in the absence of a new respect for the prizefighting profession.

"I still say [Mitchell] can go on and do something at world championship level, if he prepares right, said Mitchell's veteran trainer Jimmy Tibbs. "But thats why Michael Katsidis is a great fighter, because of his preparation.

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