Written by Michael Woods
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Andre Ward wanted a stay busy fight after a planned fight with Andre Dirrell fell through, because Dirrell still has symptoms from a concussion suffered in his last outing. Sakio Bika filled the bill for Ward, engaging him in a rugged rumble in Oakland on Saturday night. Ward and Bika grappled like they were getting it on in an Octagon, but the more techically adept Ward managed to do his thing enough to impress the judges, and earn a unanimous decision.

The scores to the messy muddle read: 120-108, 118-110 and 118-110, Ward.

The WBA super middleweight champion Ward (from Oakland; age 26; 22-0 with 13 KOs entering) weighed 168, while Bika (age 31; from Cameroon, lives in Australia; age 31; 28-4-2 with 19 KOs entering) was 168 as well. Dan Stell reffed the fight, which was not part of the Super Six tournament.

Bika lost to Joe Calzaghe and Markus Beyer in previous title tries.

In the first, the two roughed it up, and clinched. Bika, a genuine ruffian, whacked Ward behind the head when in close. Ward couldnt get into any kind of flow, and one figured this would be a different sort of test than hed ever had a pro.

In the second, Ward complained of head butts from Bika. The Oaklander worked the jab more, trying to keep Bika from blasting into him. But he seemed off his game, like Bikas tactics were getting to him.

In the third, Ward kept getting tangled when he got close. He didnt know whether to advance, or let Bika come at him, and counter, work off Bikas mistakes. We saw a cut open a cut on Wards left eye, after a head clash.

In the fourth, Bika went down, from a slip, the ref said. He was often first, and never looked too impressed with Wards pedigree. Ward looked like he got a better rhythm in five and six, but Bika was clearly not going to go easily.

In the eighth, we saw more clutching, and grabbing, with Ward out of his comfort zone. Thats not to say he wasnt winning...but why wasnt he keeping the hands free, taking a step back, not allowing Bika to be the octopus? Easier said than done, I suppose, as Bika is no slouch at his fighting style. I need you to rough this guy up, Bikas trainer, Ronnie Shields, told him after the round.

He complied, with a forearm, on the break.

Blood flowed from Bikas left eye in the tenth, after a butt. This one was ugly in one, in five, in the tenth, in the 12th.

Wed go the cards.