Even though you knew it was coming it was sad to watch Kassim Ouma have his pocket picked last weekend in Las Vegas.

When the 31-year-old former junior middleweight champion signed to fight undefeated prospect Vanes Martirosyan you and probably Ouma knew what was likely to happen. Once there was a time when Ouma was a hot commodity in boxing, a young champion with a smile and a compelling story. But that was quite a few defeats ago, too many for it to be true anymore, and so a familiar story was about to be re-written in Las Vegas.

Ouma had lost four of his last five fights and hadn't been a champion for so long most people outside of boxing's true aficionados had forgotten he ever was - ever so briefly - a 154-pound title holder. What he was instead by the time he got into the ring last Saturday night was a stepping stone. By the time he left he was a victim of a sport without a heart.

From the outset Ouma proved more difficult than a Rubik's cube for young Martirosyan to solve. His angles were baffling, his speed unexpected, his understanding of how to go about his business in the ring confusing to someone who had really never been tested by a fighter of Ouma's caliber.

Round after round, Ouma beat the 23-year-old Martirosyan to the punch. Not to every punch to be sure but to enough of them to build up a solid lead.

Along the way he cut and half-closed Martirosyan's left eye and cumulatively put himself far enough ahead that by the time he began to fade in the way guys like him do at this stage of his career, the young former Olympian came on from too far back to catch him if he could just remain standing.

When Ouma caught Martirosyan with a right hand in the ninth round and knocked him to the floor it should have been the final margin of victory. It was not because the margin for error is much greater for a prospect on the rise than for a stepping stone on the slide.

While it is true Martirosyan was not badly hurt by the knockdown, and in fact sprung right back up like it never happened, he'd gone down and in a 10-round fight that Ouma already should have been leading it should have been enough to give a fading former champion what he'd earned.

Then they read the scorecards and what you knew all along was made obvious once again. Short of a knockout Kassim Ouma had no chance, as in NO CHANCE, to win last Saturday night. Although he had come there to do just that, having trained in what used to be Johnny Tocco's old gym in a crumbling part of Las Vegas instead of staying home in Florida until the last moment, the judges were not there to let him win.

That's not to say the fight was fixed because it wasn't. It was just already in the bag, thrust there by expectations for a fresh face, Ouma's recent failures and the fact that in Vegas everybody knows the score but the players. Fading showgirls don't have any more luck in Vegas than fading fighters.

The judges' cards read 97-92 once and 97-93 twice. Not even close according to those judges on a night when it was close. Close enough that Ouma should have won but if you wanted to argue he lost by a round maybe you could make that case. What you couldn't defend was a 97-92 scorecard but in boxing you don't have to. Long before the sweepers were pushing brooms around to clean up the room, the judges had disappeared into the night and Ouma had gone bust even though he'd dealt himself a winning hand.

No outrage would greet the sports world the next morning. No replays of a petty theft would play over and over and over again on ESPN SportsCenter until you thought there was a crime wave in Las Vegas. No one would even mention it outside the small circle that has become the boxing community in 2010.

That's boxing these days. It's what it's always been for guys like Kassim Ouma, which is why it is fitting that Vegas is its capital. It's a town, and boxing is a game, where guys like Ouma should stitch up their pockets because all the odds are stacked against you the minute you get off the bus.