

## Gamboa's Performance Invites Comparison To Lopez

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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One of the biggest questions HBO Boxing After Dark's viewers wanted answered Saturday night was how WBA featherweight champion Yuriorkis Gamboa 17-0 (15) would do against the tough Tanzanian Rogers Mtagwa 26-14-2 (18). In his last MSG outing two months ago, Mtagwa, brought in as an easy opponent for WBO super bantamweight champ Juan Manuel Lopez, wound up pushing the budding superstar to the limit, nearly knocking him out late in the fight. The quick turnaround against Gamboa was promoter Bob Arum's thanks to Mtagwa for a job well done. Since the point of highlighting Gamboa and Lopez on Saturday's doubleheader was to build up a showdown between the two, Mtagwa's performances against each might be seen as a comparative barometer.

As it turned out, there was no comparison in how Rogers Mtagwa fared against the two opponents: Yuriorkis Gamboa was simply too fast, too strong, too big, and too good for him. The fight lasted two rounds and Mtagwa wasn't in it for one second of them. But it might be wise not to read too much into the difference in how he did against both guys: As Gamboa , and later in the night Lopez himself, were quick to point out, styles make fights. Fighter A blowing out a fighter, who Fighter B struggles with, doesn't guarantee that Fighter A beats Fighter B. In this case, Gamboa is a mercurial fighter, often responding instinctively to opportunities, whereas Lopez is a methodical pressure fighter, more given to systematically breaking down his opponent. It's not unreasonable to surmise that Lopez's fights might run a little longer than Gamboa's. And it's important to take into account that Lopez didn't have any size advantage over Mtagwa when they fought; he may even have felt the pinch of making 122. Against Gamboa, coming in barely over the super bantamweight limit, Mtagwa looked vastly outsized.

The Gamboa-Mtagwa fight turned out to be the star-making vehicle for the champion that Mtagwa's previous fight was supposed to be for Lopez.

Mtagwa jumped in with a good right. Both flurried and are a little wild with jabs. Gamboa scored with a good jab, then followed it with a great right to the head. Gamboa got in a quick one-two. He repeated it, and hurt Mtagwa. Gamboa's hand speed was making this look easy. He was able to land consistently, using the ring well. Mtagwa was unsuccessfully trying to jab with the champion. With about thirty seconds left in the round, Gamboa dropped Mtagwa with a sharp left hook to the top of the head, securing a 10-8 round.

Mtagwa came out aggressively in the second, but the champ is ready for him, landing a left-right combination. He hurt Mtagwa with a hard hook--just too fast a fighter. He was also patient, using distance to get leverage on his punches. He scored with a hard combination. A moment later he repeated the same thing, but harder. Mtagwa was hurt. Another hard right put him in real trouble. Sensing the end was near, Gamboa scored with a blindingly fast five punch combination, dropping Mtagwa at the two minute mark. After the count, the champion was all over the challenger, catching him with a barrage of hard shots. Gamboa floored Mtagwa again with a clubbing right, and referee Steve Smoger immediately and correctly stopped the fight without issuing a count. The round had gone 2:35. The fight was a total mismatch.

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After the fight, Gamboa told HBO's Max Kellerman, "I gave it everything. I wanted the fight to go four rounds to show people what I had. I've been trying to work on my deficiencies and improve."

It looks like Gamboa has, in fact, been working very hard. Saturday's win could hardly have been more impressive. Lopez later did his part to make the proposed unification fight a much anticipated matchup. In his own way, he was just as impressive in breaking down and stopping WBO featherweight champion Steven Luevano in seven rounds as Gamboa had been getting Mtagwa out of there in two. A Yuriorkis Gamboa-Juan Manuel Lopez match shapes up to be a really intriguing pick-em contest.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at [GlovedFist@Gmail.com](mailto:GlovedFist@Gmail.com)