

Lopez Is Going To Handle 126 Really Well

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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After surviving a last round flurry by Rogers Mtagwa in October of last year and hanging on to win the fight, Juan Manuel Lopez 28-0 (25) sure came back with a strong showing in his last fight this past weekend stopping Steven Luevano 37-2-1 (15) in the seventh round to capture the WBO featherweight title. Lopez has now won a world title in two different weight divisions since making his pro-debut five years ago, the first being as a junior featherweight/super bantamweight.

Heading into the bout Luevano had successfully defended his WBO crown five times. However, after sharing the ring with Lopez for one round it was easy to see that Luevano is a tier below Lopez fighting at the world championship level. And that's not a shot at Luevano, who tried everything he could to neutralize Lopez from a style and strategy vantage point. The problem he encountered was JuanMa has the superior skill set.

When all was said and done, Lopez possessed the quicker hands, threw the straighter and more accurate punches and his methodical pursuit broke down Luevano. Starting in the fourth round Lopez began to assert himself physically and maneuvered Luevano around the ring wherever he wanted. With Luevano not having much in his arsenal to hold Lopez off other than his right jab and an occasional body shot, the ending was inevitable. Early in the seventh round Lopez struck with a perfect setup right uppercut to Luevano's chin that froze him enough for Lopez to unload with a barrage of hooks and uppercuts forcing the fight to be stopped.

With Yuriorkis Gamboa's two round blitz of Rogers Mtagwa in the bout prior to Lopez-Luevano, there's a great chance we'll see Lopez-Gamboa later this year. At first glance it would appear that Gamboa's performance was more impressive than Lopez's was. But aside from it being more dramatic I can't say it was more impressive. Against Luevano, Lopez showed us a whole range of what he can do. He's probably the more technically proficient fighter and he can hit.

Gamboa was more impressive against Mtagwa than was Lopez, but JuanMa wasn't as prepared mentally for him and was obviously weakened by making the 122 junior featherweight limit. Lopez looked more comfortable at 126 and his huge legs remind me of Manny Pacquiao's. I'd say he's going to handle the higher weight really well.

Mtagwa was used as an opponent for a majority of his career. His double digit losses threw off Lopez whereas Gamboa had his showing against Lopez to help him mentally ready himself for Mtagwa. Mtagwa was managed well over the last few years of his career and was lucky to get two title shots in back to back fights. He's strong and carries his punch and when Lopez tired late in their fight from being overconfident and a little drained from sucking down to the junior featherweight limit Mtagwa came on.

A matchup between Lopez and Gamboa should be very intriguing. Lopez gets hit and Gamboa can punch. But Gamboa's chin has been less than reliable, and Lopez can punch. Lopez has already survived life and death. In the Mtagwa fight it was obvious after six rounds that Lopez

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hadn't trained for a long tough fight. It might be one of these fights that they'd split a series if they thought a number of times.

Both Lopez and Gamboa looked terrific this past weekend. Gamboa turned in the more dramatic showing, and Lopez was more methodical against a better opponent.

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