

The US Audience Finally Gets a Look At Edwin Valero

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Few fighters have had as many controversies swirling around them going into a fight as WBC lightweight champion Edwin Valero 26-0 (26) had prior to the second defense of his WBC lightweight title, against interim titlist Antonio DeMarco 23-1-1 (17). For starters, opinions varied wildly as to his merits as a fighter. To some, the Venezuelan southpaw was one of boxing's most destructive forces, an all offense machine with highlight reel power. Certainly his record of uninterrupted kayos gives that viewpoint some validity. To others, he was a clumsy beginner with no discernible skill, no balance, a fighter whose knockouts were more a testament to good matchmaking than an indication of what kind of pop his punches have. To further add to the mysteries surrounding him, Valero had undergone a lengthy suspension in the United States after a 2001 motorcycle accident had allegedly caused him brain damage. A DUI in Nevada in 2003 further helped to keep him on the shelf in the US. His Showtime sponsored title defense took place in Monterrey, Mexico. Most of his fights have taken place in Japan, where his promoters and sponsors are based, and in Venezuela.

Antonio DeMarco, on the other hand, was a known quantity: Seen as a solid guy who could fight, he's not a star, but is an honest test for anyone looking to build his reputation. DeMarco is not the kind of fighter that gets beat accidentally by a bum.

A lot of the intrigue leading up to the fight was based on the question of how legit Valero is. If he could beat DeMarco, one of the two camps judging him would, seemingly, be wrong.

It turned out that Valero did beat DeMarco. It also turned out that not one camp was wrong, but both.

For the record, in the second round Edwin Valero overcame a horrendous gash to his forehead, caused by an errant elbow, to completely dominate Antonio DeMarco, forcing him to quit in his corner after the ninth round. Part of the problem with getting an accurate read on Valero is that DeMarco's performance was so lethargic from the start that it's tough to know how much Edwin had to do with it.

Here's what we can say with confidence about Valero: He's not a big puncher. He's a wide-throwing clubber who stays busy and, mostly through body strength, exerts pressure. He makes some serious mistakes, like fighting with his mouth wide open and often neglecting to punch to the body. His balance, once hopeless, has improved tremendously. He's capable of taking a step back when he needs to, either when feeling under attack or when he wants to give himself more punching space. He has a natural gift for moving his head out of the way of punches, a kind of lower grade radar. Although his punches look ponderous, his hands aren't slow. He's neither the next big thing in boxing nor a fraud who doesn't deserve a look on the big stage. Two myths busted for the price of one.

Actually, nothing much happened during the Valero-DeMarco fight. By far the biggest drama was the cut caused by DeMarco's elbow, which caused Valero to fight the entire way with blood

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streaming down his face and body. Between the blood and his snarl, Valero looked like a cinematic version of a prize fighter. Showtime will have him back, of course.

The fight followed a bewildering pattern almost from the opening bell. It was less bewildering from the Valero vantage point than from Antonio DeMarco's. At 24, Tony was already a seasoned veteran, and he'd beaten some decent if unspectacular fighters like Almazbek Raiymkulov, Anges Adjaho, and Jose Alfaro to get the Showtime gig. In the ring before the fight, he appeared to be completely at ease, smiling at people and kissing his baby girl.

That confidence extended through the beginning of the fight, where it looked as if he was waiting to see what Valero had, and for him to make a mistake. Valero would stalk, throwing a steady stream of punches that DeMarco could see coming, and DeMarco would be in a position to counter-punch. But he seldom did. And that turned out to be the pattern of the fight. The only thing that changed was DeMarco's demeanor, as his confidence drained. Valero won every round.

What's hard to determine was how much of this was just the interim champ DeMarco's lousy showing and how much of that showing was caused by Valero's pressure.

Valero's aggressiveness seemed somewhat predictable. He throws his punches like someone throwing an overhand pitch, winging them from the outside. They have weight, but not much power. He keeps his hands near his sides between punches, and looks to be easy to hit. But he naturally knows to move his head from shots (he seldom bothers to block any, and DeMarco ignored his body), and that kept him from being tested. When DeMarco's elbow ripped his forehead wide open early in the second round, Edwin showed real poise, making sure that referee Laurence Cole recognized the cause of the cut, and then fighting on without concern.

So although we now know some things we didn't about Edwin Valero, new questions have opened up. He's probably got the heart of a fighter (although, because he had to face so little resistance, we can't know for sure), but I can't imagine him having the kind of success with Juan Manuel Marquez that he did with Antonio DeMarco. At this point, a fight with Ali Funeka, who got a recent hard luck draw with Joan Guzman, might be a good test. Or he could simply fight Guzman, who seems badly faded. The fight I'd most like to see for him would be against the talented Englishman John Murray. If he could win that one, it would answer the questions that Antonio DeMarco didn't help us figure out.

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