

Agbeko Is Really Ready For Rematch, Beats Perez

Written by Michael Woods

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It's not all that often you see a rematch flip flop, with the guy who lost conclusively in the first go round so clearly taking the second. That situation played out bigtime on Saturday in the Showtime bantamweight tourney opener-semifinal, as Joseph Agbeko gained revenge on unbeaten Yonhy Perez, outboxing by a wide margin the man who'd wrested his IBF title from him in October 2009.

Agbeko boxed ever so smartly, and didn't let the Colombian get too many clean looks at him, enroute to impressing the judges by scores of 116-112, 117-111 and 115-113. Now, 28-2, Agbeko will meet Abner Mares in the tournament final, after Mares got the better of Vic Darchinyan in the TV opener on Showtime. Perez looked to be off his game; the 31-year-old bettered Agbeko in a fierce tussle in 2009, then drew with Mares this May. Thirty six rounds of rugged pugilism seemingly left his tank close to E. Perez (20-1) said after the 30-year-old Agbeko, from Ghana, won fair and square by fighting intelligently.

In the 12th at the Emerald Queen Casino, it seemed clear that Perez needed a kayo to win. He'd done that before in the 12th, against Silence Mbuza in 2009, but had he expended too much for too long to repeat the act? Agbeko's defense held up well; he slipped when appropriate, and also simply slid back, or to the side to get out of harms way. His defense held up, and he kept as busy as he needed to be, to get to the cards. In the 11th, Perez kept pressing forward, but he didn't switch up the angle or speed of his advances. Agbeko, who held this IBF strap from 2007 til Perez yanked it away from him, and enjoyed a defense against Darchinyan, threw a lead right that snapped Perez' head back, and it looked like Agbeko would close out the show. In the tenth, the pace was off from the beginning and middle rounds.

In the ninth, the two both had a couple extra gulps of air, maybe saving up for the home stretch. In the eighth, Perez kept wiping blood from his eye. He had to hope Agbeko's legs would start to fail him. In the seventh, Agbeko went back to moving after throwing, instead of waiting for a receipt. In the sixth, the two traded like they were getting paid for punches landed and taken. In the fifth, it looked like maybe Perez was getting a better bead on Agbeko. His right hand scored a few times. Did the momentum shift? In the fourth, Perez looked to score with the left hook. A cut formed on his left eye, though. Agbeko was controlling this exercise, bigtime. "You need to be quick with the jab," Perez' trainer told him after.

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In the third, Perez looked a step behind Agbeko. But could Agbeko do this for the duration? □□ In the second, Agbeko, off for 13 months, had nice moments. His movement and sharp rights confounded Perez.□□ In the first, Perez came out looking to work his height and reach advantage. After the round, they showed Perez' emotional moment in the fighter meeting, when he admitted he found it quite hard to be away from his family in Colombia while training in the US. It was quite poignant.

SPEEDBAG Showtime had a ten bell salute to the wife on Don King, Henrietta King, who passed away last Thursday.

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