

KIMBALL: Robbery? Tell It To The Judge

Written by George Kimball

Tuesday, 21 December 2010 12:47

The eminent philosopher Leon Spinks considered the draw a fair and honorable result in a close fight.

“Nobody win, nobody lose, and everybody get to fight another day,” explained Neon Leon.

Let’s see: According to a WBC communication which landed on our desk two days after Saturday night’s affair in Quebec City, Jean Pascal is still the light-heavyweight champion and Bernard Hopkins is still the “Emeritus Champion.” (The coveted Diamond Belt presumably remains vacant.)

Everybody ought to be happy, but instead of celebrating the 45 year-old Hopkins’ achievement in pulling out a draw after falling hopelessly behind on the scorecards, the residue of the last big fight of 2010 is a bitter aftertaste. Prompted by B-Hop’s whining, his supporters have embraced the position that the majority draw represents a larceny of the first order and that anyone who disagrees must be a “hater.”

On Monday Hopkins, through his publicist, circulated a press release in which the decision was labeled a “robbery.” (In a fight that was in every estimate extremely close, a win by either man would have been controversial, but it’s hard to understand how anyone can get this worked up about a draw.)

The Hopkins partisans cite the fact that the Canadian crowd booed the decision as evidence of impropriety, but knowing what we do of Quebecois boxing crowds, it seems likely that many of them were booing because they thought it was Pascal, having Hopkins on the canvas three times before their eyes, who had been robbed.

In the rush to jump on the B-Hop bandwagon it has been widely assumed that American judge, Steve Morrow, who scored the fight 114-112 for Hopkins, got it right, and that Claude Paquette (Canada) and Danny Van de Wiele (Belgium), who both scored it even, were guilty of either wholesale corruption or rampant homerism in arriving at their conclusions.

Ringside judges are charged with scoring each round independently. The three officials hand in their scorecards after each round. They don’t maintain running totals. Those are added up by the local commission (in this case the Cousee de Quebec) at the fight’s conclusion. Judges do, of course, have a general idea of how their scorecard stands, but it’s the rare judge who is such a mathematical whiz that he remembers exactly how his scorecard stands, and the notion that Paquette and Van de Wiele decided to play “Switzerland” and deliberately rigged their scorecards to come up with even totals is pretty absurd.

We’re in no position to argue with the decision one way or the other. We weren’t there, and watched most of the fight with the sound turned off. But a post-mortem analysis of the three scorecards is in this case particularly instructive.

Van de Wiele, for instance, probably overstepped his bounds in recording only a 10-9 edge for

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Pascal in the first round, despite a knockdown. That score might be justifiable if Hopkins had literally thrashed his opponent for every portion of the round save the knockdown, but that was clearly not the case. Rather, it would appear that the Belgian judge decided that the knockdown was questionable even though Mike Griffin said it was, and elected to editorially overrule the referee. In doing so he would have been exercising a latitude which isn't supposed to be within a judge's purview. If the ref says it's a knockdown, it's a knockdown.

Van de Wiele, it should be noted, evened things out with a mid-course correction in which he scored the tenth round even.

But in examining the three scorecards, Paquette and Van de Wiele appear to have at least been watching the same fight. The rogue card, if there was one, was actually the one belonging to Morrow, who was all over the place.

All three judges had the same fighter winning in each of six rounds. Rounds One and Three went to Pascal on all three cards; all three judges gave Hopkins Six, Seven, Eleven, and Twelve.

The judges disagreed on the remaining six rounds, and in five of them it was Morrow's card that diverged from those of his colleagues. The American gave Hopkins three rounds (Two, Five, and Eight) the other two both thought Pascal won, but he also gave Pascal two rounds (Four and Nine) everybody else thought Hopkins won.

Had Morrow scored either the second, fifth, or eighth for Pascal (and none of those would have been a stretch), he, too, would have come up with a draw. Instead, by what can only be termed a happy accident, his inconsistent card adds up to 114-112 and he finds himself being praised as the only honest one of the bunch. Does that make sense?

By the way, though it may have only marginally affected the scorecards, it's interesting to note what a clubhouse lawyer Hopkins has become in his old age. Constantly complaining to the referee would have at one time been antithetical to his very nature, sort of the fistic equivalent of running to the cops.

Like the carping of a demonstrative basketball coach, B-Hop's mid-ring pleas for law-and-order can produce its desired effect. In the absence of Hopkins' howling, Griffin might have ruled a third knockdown (in the fourth), which would have put the issue out of reach. On the other hand, if Bernard Hopkins gets rabbit-punched once a week for the rest of his life he'll still be way ahead in that department.

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Isaiah says:

Hopkins was robbed of everything but his personality. Pascal supposedly knocked B-Hop down

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twice, but the first knockdown was a cheap shot to the back of the head and Bernard dominated all the rest of the fight, so how was it a draw? I'll tell you all how. It's because it was in Canada and if the judges dared gave Jean the win, the American fans may have started a riot over the injustice so the next best thing was done. He got an early Christmas present wrapped up in a draw. How do you rob a 45 year old man of the win? The young guy should be ashamed of himself. This is like when Shannon Briggs got the "win" over a 48 year old George Foreman. Yeah, it's that bad! Well, we, the fans, know one thing. Whether it be a rematch with Dawson or B-Hop, Pascal's title reign isn't lasting long.

amayseng says:

even counting that first knockdown, even though it should not have counted, but counting at as i did i had still had hopkins winning convincingly. people, writers on here as well, i think are truly undermining this decision. this draw took the crown away from bernard as being the oldest champion in the history of this great, long sport. that is quite an achievement to have stolen from you. pascal was truly dominated from round 4 and on. people do not see what a special fighter bernard is to be able to dominate at this late age in his career.