

## Judges Were Kind, Maybe Too Kind, To Velez And Reile In Costa Rica

Written by David A. Avila  
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Events in boxing where more than 13,000 fans fill one half of a soccer stadium are moments one should savor.

Not last Thursday.

The boxing card held in San Jose, Costa Rica should have been a night for boxing comparable to graduation night. It should have been a moment of celebration, instead it was an evening filled with disappointment and disillusionment for professional prizefighting.

Costa Rica's heroine Hanna Gabriel belted out Melisenda Perez after seven rounds of a back and forth struggle to end the night and retain her WBO junior middleweight title. But a terrible bitter taste from two prior fights probably sent a message to the fans that some things don't add up correctly: like boxing judges' score cards.

A fight for the vacant IBF junior featherweight title between Puerto Rico's Ada Velez who lives in Florida and Nevada's Melinda Cooper left many fans in the stadium puzzled.

Why?

Velez was given the title belt by split decision after 10 rounds with Cooper. Though she fought valiantly and with skill the Puerto Rican boxer did not win the fight in the ring. She was never the aggressor and despite some taps to Cooper's stomach in the first three rounds, and a solid punch or two in the fight, she did not win six rounds in the end.

Velez vs. Cooper

Cooper was introduced to the crowd with the song "Born In The USA" playing and the crowd booed her entrance. It was a long walk of about 100 yards and every step of the way the boos cascaded.

Velez was then introduced, and though the crowd support wasn't great, she wasn't from the hated U.S.A. and had some applause. It was a precursor of what to expect from the judges in the fight.

In the first round Velez shot some jabs to Cooper's body but the best punches were lead rights by Cooper to the head and body. Her quickness was obvious as she beat Velez to the punch.

Both fighters got closer in the second round with Velez landing a good left. During an exchange Cooper landed more than she absorbed. Though both fired, Cooper slipped more than Velez.

A check hook by Cooper landed in the third round but Velez countered with a right hook and clinched. Some right uppercuts and right hooks landed for the Puerto Rican southpaw and gave

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her the round.

Cooper opened up the fourth round with a solid one-two combination. All through the fight Cooper was the aggressor as Velez seldom fired the first punch. Cooper pinned Velez in a neutral corner and fired a volley that snapped Velez's head back and wobbled her toward the end of the round.

Velez tried to rally in the fifth round and landed a few counter lefts. Cooper fired back and both exchanged. The Nevada fighter's punches were much more solid and packed more power, probably because Velez was always moving away and never going forward.

Cooper won the sixth round as Velez refused to initiate any punches. When punches were thrown it was Cooper's that connected.

Velez connected on some counters in the beginning of the seventh round, but Cooper unloaded a four-punch combination and followed that with a three punch combination. A video replay of the barrage was shown on the big screen showing Cooper connecting and Velez wincing from the impact.

In the eighth round Cooper fired a one-two combination and then both exchanged several times. Cooper's punches were coming in with speed and Velez took them and countered with a right hook on the button. Cooper retaliated with two counters then opened up with a three-punch combination.

The last two rounds saw both fighters feinting and circling each other. It seemed Cooper felt she was winning the fight easily and Velez felt she couldn't afford to be knocked down. Few punches were thrown but those that were fired mostly came from Cooper. Velez countered but did not land anything flush.

When the announcer read the score cards he read them backwards so it was confusing for a moment. The American judge scored it 96-94 for Cooper but the Puerto Rican and Costa Rican judges scored it 96-94 for Velez.

Many in the crowd were puzzled when they saw Velez's arm raised in victory.

It was a shocking development but even more so was the fight prior where Florida's Stacey Reile was given the decision over Dominican Republic's Dahiana Santana for the vacant IBF featherweight title.

Reile is a very tough girl with guts to spare, but her technique is poor and she has the worst jab in the business. It's not really a jab. She puts it up high then comes down with it as if she was tagging someone. None of her punches are straight, they all kind of look like girls punching in a cat fight. I hate to say it but she landed few punches cleanly.

Santana boxed and fired straight punches and connected often. Nothing was fired hard but she probably out-connected Reile five to one after 10 rounds. She tired in the middle rounds and

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that enabled Reile to win a few rounds just with activity. But just barely. It looked like the judges would easily find Santana the winner but the Floridian's arms were raised causing the first shock of the evening. Many of the fans in the stands were watching their first boxing card and must have been puzzled by the announcement.

In the end the two Florida fighters were given the wins, the titles and undeserving recognition.

Most fights I attend I score the fights round by round. I assess each fight with no preconceived notion. Whether I know the fighter or not my scores are based in blows landed, the power of those punches and who's going forward and who's going backward. But to make sure I ask bystanders their opinion.

Of the half dozen people I asked no one thought Velez beat Cooper or that Reile beat Santana. For the 13,000 fans in the stadium I'm sure a majority walked out wondering about those decisions too.

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