

AVILA RINGSIDE AT PECHANGA-Ruslan Provodnikov TKOs Ivan Popopca

Written by David A. Avila
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TEMECULA-Russia's heavy hitting Ruslan Provodnikov finally cracked through the resilience of Chicago's Ivan Popopca with a counter one-two to win by technical knockout on Friday.

"I'm surprised again and again at some of these Mexican fighter's hard heads," said Provodnikov. "It was frustrating."

The Russian fighter's only loss came against a Riverside County fighter but this time Provodnikov sought the help of trainer Buddy McGirt. It did the trick as he out-maneuvered and out-punched Chicago's Popopca.

Provodnikov didn't waste time and immediately went to the body of Popopca in the first round of a fight which served as the main event of ESPN's Friday Night Fights. The Chicagoan-Mexican landed some combinations but took a lot of counter left hooks during exchanges.

Popopca began finding the timing of the Russian fighter toward the end of the second round with a one-two and an uppercut. But Provodnikov had done more damage to the body with left hooks all through the round.

The tempo increased in the third round as Popopca began utilizing his jab to establish space and disrupt the Russian fighter's timing. Some combinations to the head and body scored but Provodnikov did land a powerful right hand that didn't seem faze the Mexican fighter. It was Popopca's best round.

Russia's Provodnikov returned to the body punch to keep Popopca from using that jab effectively. Body blow after body blow was landed by Provodnikov in the fourth round.

Big left hand bombs rained on Popopca's head in the fifth and Provodnikov went in to finish the fight. Bomb after bomb echoed in the arena but Popopca stood his ground and when the Russian fighter finally tired, Popopca fired a three-punch combination at the bell to let everyone know that he was going to still stick around.

"I was beginning to get worried because he took my best punches," said Provodnikov. "I was expecting a knockout."

It didn't come.

Provodnikov was tired in the sixth round and allowed Popopca to land his combinations to the head. Three punch combinations rained on the Russian fighter who looked like he was trying to conserve energy after the previous round.

Things suddenly changed after that rest.

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A constant steady barrage of well-timed left hooks won the seventh round for Provodnikov. Every time Popopca landed anything the Russian would counter with a solid left hook that seemed to shake the floor.

It looked like Popopca was able to withstand everything Provodnikov fired but in the eighth round, some well placed left hooks to the body began to open up the Mexican fighter's head. A perfectly timed counter right hand decked Popopca with a thud. He beat the count but when the fight resumed the Russian fighter lined him up against the ropes and unleashed a five-punch combination that snapped the head back of Popopca and forced referee Pat Russell to stop the bludgeoning at 2:16 of the eighth.

"I feel I was a little better technically," said Provodnikov, adding that he acquired McGirt a month ago to help him prepare. "He told me to just box and not throw just one punch."

The advice proved rewarding.

Other bouts

Marvin Quintero (22-3, 18 KOs) returned to Pechanga, the site of his first loss in the U.S. and made amends with a third round knockout of Denver's Mario Santiago (13-7-1) in a lightweight bout. Both boxers came out winging big punches with Quintero absorbing some big blows and Santiago losing the last 10 seconds of the first round.

The second round was completely different. Quintero was the crisper puncher and out-boxed Santiago who was caught early in the round and just couldn't regain momentum in the round.

Quintero needed only 12 seconds to catch Santiago with a right hook that stunned the taller fighter. Immediately after that punch the Tijuana boxer unloaded seven quick blows on Santiago and referee Tom Taylor decided to stop the fight in the third round.

A light heavyweight bout saw Mike Gavronski (2-0-1) from Tacoma and West L.A.'s Tyrel Hendrix (5-1-2) floor each other in the first round and it didn't let up. After four rounds of blood and guts the bout was scored a majority draw. Gwen Adair scored it 40-36 for Hendrix, but Max DeLuca and Fritz Werner had it 38-38 for a majority draw.

Riverside's Sindi Amador (3-0) beat L.A.'s Katarina De La Cruz (2-7-1) by unanimous decision after four rounds of a junior flyweight bout. Amador had the speed advantage and seemed to overwhelm De La Cruz. But in the third round she slowed a bit after throwing so many punches and De La Cruz began scoring with some straight right leads. Amador captured the fourth round with her speedy combos to win 39-37 and 40-36 on two score cards.

Dashon "Fly Boy" Johnson (12-4-3) knocked out Willie Walton (4-4) at 1:18 of the first round of a welterweight bout. A right hand floored Walton for the first knockdown. A five punch combination forced referee Russell to stop the fight.

Riverside's Danny Ruiz won his pro debut by unanimous decision against Moreno Valley's

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William Fisher (0-3). Both fought hard and it was too bad somebody had to lose. The scores were 40-35, 38-37, 39-36 all for Ruiz. Fisher fought hard but started slowly.

Undefeated Garrett Simon almost took a loss against L.A.'s David Johnson in a four round heavyweight match. Johnson gives almost everyone trouble and Simon was no exception. The holding and hitting by Johnson proved a big puzzle for Simon who never used an uppercut though Johnson charges forward with his head down. Nevertheless, Gwen Adair scored it 40-36 for Simon but Max DeLuca and Fritz Werner scored it 38-38 for another majority draw.