

Paradise Theatre Fight Report: Edgar Santana Wins Comeback

Written by Zach Levin SPECIAL TO TSS
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These are sad times if you're a boxing fan living in New York. The club show circuit is lame as can be and Madison Square Garden hasn't been all that committed to putting on cards lately. Of course, this could all change quickly when Golden Boy starts doing their monthly series at the Barclays Center in BK next year. Hopefully, that will create some healthy competition and compel local promoters to step their game up.

Joe DeGuardia (Star Boxing) struck a pre-emptive attack last night, in an attempt to fill this fistic void. He put on his first card in a couple years at the Paradise Theater, which is on the Bronx's Grand Concourse and just a block away from the D train.

The Paradise, built in 1929, was once of the country's great movie theaters. It holds about 4,000 and though high school art history is 20 years in my rearview mirror, the architectural might be described as Moorish Revival. More importantly, the Bronx is a boxing rabid place, probably filled with as many boxing fans per capita as anywhere else in the country. Yet, for some reason, the city offers few worthy outlets for both the fighters and fans.

The gym scene here isn't what it could be. There's no Wild Card Gym, like Freddie Roach's in L.A., that pools the talent and has daily sparring you'd pay to see. Our gyms are vulcanized throughout the five boroughs. After a kid competes in the Daily News Golden Gloves, unless he's that rare, super hot talent (and fighting in an economically desirable weight class), he often decides to hang 'em up and get a real job.

Indeed, boxing was far from Edgar Santana's mind for large portions of time since his last fight, an impressive MD 10 over Joselito Lopez featured on Shobox in April 2008. Since then, the popular Spanish Harlem native found himself in serious legal trouble when he was implicated in a major drug cartel with ties to a barbershop he ran. The charges against him were eventually dropped and he opened up another barbershop, Santana Cut Men, where the barbers where robes that say "We Cut Heads."

No cut man was needed for him in his comeback fight against Robert Jones of Ann Arbor, MI. Santana (now 24-3, 16 KOs) worked a sharp up-jab for the opening round. He slipped Jones' counters with ease. The opponent made the cardinal sin of standing directly in front of Edgar, which is what he likes. He struggles with boxers with good movement, as he needs to be set to get off.

Santana trapped Jones (8-9-1) in a corner in the second and ripped vicious body shots that dropped him. When he got up, he stayed in the same spot and Santana resumed his assault. The ref interceded at 1:20 of round 2.

Santana weighed 147.5 and said he made the weight easy. The former Jr. welter is 32 and might have one run left in him if he can get his weight down and pick his spots.

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Jason Escalera of Union city, NJ was recently signed by Star Boxing and upped his record to 10-0, 9 KOs. He made short work of Mustafah Johnson, stopping him at 1:13 in the first. The aggressive super middle impressed. While Johnson sports a terrible record (8-12-1, 2 KOs) and is now on a six-fight losing streak, he went the distance in his last five fights against respectable names like Elvin Ayala.

In keeping with the night's theme, jr. lightweight Emanuel Gonzalez stopped his man at 1:41 of the first and raised his mark to 8-0, 7 KOs. He's also a new signee of Star Boxing. Jacob Throton (2-4-1, 1 KO), from St. Louis, MO had the unfortunate handle of "Nice Guy." He chose the wrong business—nice guys do social work and volunteer at soup kitchens, not hand out beatings—and apparently the wrong knees; one of them gave out on him within seconds of the bout starting.

Still, I like the way Gonzalez stalks his prey. Tall, strong and streamlined, he wastes little and throws each shot with conviction. He's a former NY Golden Gloves champ with experience on the national level

Albanian-American crusier Stivens "Superman" Bujaj turned heads when he entered his first NY Golden Gloves at 18 and won the 201 novice class. He demonstrated KO power and ring savvy that belied his brief time in the sport. He, too, got rid of his opponent before breaking a sweat, needing only 55 seconds to do the trick.

But opponent Chuck Dillard came to fight and was looked to score an upset. At the bell, he bull-rushed Bujaj into the ropes and opened up on him with all his might. Bujaj obliged him and slugged with his back to the ropes. His punches were cleaner, faster and better timed. One hook to the chops and Dillard was unable to beat the count. Bujaj, now 20, goes to 4-0, 3 KOs, while Dillard falls to 4-8-1, 1KOs.

In what was clearly the fight of the night, welter Stephen Owusu won a UD 4 (40-36 twice, 29-37) over Juan Perez, who was making his pro debut.

Owusu's record (7-6, 4 KOs) is misleading. He's way better than this mark suggests, and I was shocked to find out that he was coming off an 11 year layoff! The 33-year-old came in excellent condition and showed no signs of ring rust. He was slick and relaxed and timed Perez with ease.

Mount Vernon's Perez showed incredible moxie. No matter what he got hit with in the previous round, he came charging out his corner at the bell. No one is babying this kid. This was one of the tougher displays of matchmaking I've seen in a long time, given each fighter's delicate circumstances. Both fighters have ability. And I couldn't help thinking of an Andre Berto or Danny Jacobs that go 20 or so fights into their career before experiencing a war like this.

In he opening bout of the night, Jr welter Issouf Kinda went to 10-0, 5 KOs, in stopping Jorge Diaz at 2:55 of the third.

A great night at the fights? What a club show is meant to be? I wouldn't go that far. But Joe D.

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has got some genuine crowd pleasers to work with, and both they and the fans deserve to have more.