

Nino Benvenuti - Not Good Enough

Written by Jim Amato

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Nino Benvenuti was a celebrated Olympic hero and undefeated as a professional until losing an extremely debatable verdict in Korea. He came to New York and captured the American fans with his suave, arrogant demeanor. He took two out of three against the great Emile Griffith and he was the middleweight champion of the world.

There was an impressive defense against the capable Don Fullmer, brother of Gene, who Nino dominated. There was a questionable disqualification win over Fraser Scott in a fight that seemed to be going Scott's way.

We saw Nino come from behind to salvage his title with a stunning one punch knockout over the legendary Luis Rodriguez. He drew with rugged Doyle Baird in a non-title contest at the Akron Rubber Bowl, but most people thought he lost. He was unable to continue in Australia against under rated Tom "The Bomb" Bethea in another non-title bout. To Nino's credit he halted Bethea in a title fight rematch. He also stopped Baird in a non-title return.

Nino had some ill-advised thoughts about moving up to challenge Bob Foster for the light heavyweight crown. First he had to get by former titleholder Dick Tiger. The stronger Tiger handled Nino with ease, thus ending Nino's illusion of competing against Foster.

It looked like a safe defense when he agreed to meet ranked but undistinguished Carlos Monzon of Argentina. The best thing on the Monzon resume was a draw with rugged American Bennie Briscoe. This fight marked the beginning of the reign of "King Carlos". Monzon out-toughed and outlasted Benvenuti to win the middleweight crown via a twelfth round knockout. Nino would get a chance to regain his former fame but before that happened he lost a decision to another Argentine warrior, Jose Chirino. Monzon-Benvenuti II was a total mismatch. The bout was stopped in the third round. This was the end of Nino's career.

Looking back I remember the Italian boxing heroes... Graziano, Marciano, LaMotta, Basilio and DeMarco. Throw in a clever, but tough Giardello and you can get a picture of what I was looking for. Nino didn't fit the bill. He was not of the same mold. I've never seen a fighter complain to the referee like Nino used to. Hagler and Hopkins would have worn him down and stopped him. Hearns and Leonard would have knocked him out. Toney and McCallum would have out-cuted him. Iran Barkley would have outslugged him.