

HOW HE DID IT: Alvarado's Adjustments Gave Him The Win

Written by Lee Wylie
Monday, 01 April 2013 00:00



Mike Alvarado made some shrewd strategic and tactical adjustments that attributed to him defeating Brandon Rios by unanimous decision in their rematch on Saturday night. Although things were reasonably close heading into the final stages of the fight, Alvarado finished the stronger of the two and received the nod on all three of the judge's scorecards. Today, I'd like to highlight some of the key changes that Mike Alvarado made from the first fight that allowed him to reverse the outcome this time.

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Last October, Rios stopped Alvarado in the seventh round after breaking him down in a war of attrition. Although Alvarado (*pictured above, right, with Rios, in Chris Farina-Top Rank photo*) initially came out looking to angle off his jab and keep Rios at bay, it wasn't too long before an inside fight erupted. Here, the physically stronger and shorter punching Rios had a significant advantage over the straighter hitting Alvarado. Throughout most of the infighting, what I found interesting was the way in which Alvarado tried to defend himself by hiding behind his lead shoulder. I believe there was a distinct reason for this. In his previous fight before facing Alvarado for the first time, Rios found himself in with underrated lightweight spoiler, Richard Abril. During that fight, in which Rios was very fortunate to have been given the decision, Abril was able to blunt much of Rios' work because of how effective he was at close quarters using the half-guard defense (Philly shell). Whenever Rios tried to land his right or left hook, Abril would catch the rights on his lead shoulder and roll with them, or he would stuff Rios' left hook to the body or head by jamming the blow with his right glove or elbow. Used correctly, the half-guard defense is incredibly effective at close range.

Unfortunately for Alvarado, he wasn't nearly as effective as Abril was in using the half-guard defense on the inside against Rios.

Here's a look at Alvarado trying to defend against a left hook at close quarters from the first fight.



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Alvarado is attempting to stuff a Rios left hook on the inside. Although his arms are correctly positioned in the first still (left arm acting as a barrier by the waist while the right glove and elbow are protecting the chin and right ribs respectively), notice how Alvarado has broken away from his guard slightly in the second still. In this scenario, the correct procedure for blocking a left hook in close should be either to turn your right side in and toward the blow (the opposite methodology of evading a right hand punch by rolling with it), jamming your lower right arm into the crook of your opponent's left arm, not allowing the hook to pick up a head of steam, or by absorbing the blow on the outside of the right glove. Instead, Alvarado tried to lean away, lowered his right glove and got caught.

Let's now take a look at a similar scenario in the first fight, but this time the threat is coming from Rios' right hand.



Here, Rios lands a right hand as Alvarado attempts to roll with the blow. Notice that instead of rolling, Alvarado ends up bending at the waist and leaning forward. The correct way to roll with a right hand should be to lean back slightly on the back foot, rotating the hips and turning the left shoulder in so as to deflect the incoming blow. Not only has Alvarado failed to defend against the right hand here, but he's also neutralized any chances of him throwing an effective counter.

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Although the half-guard defense is good for narrowing a fighter's profile, it can sometimes cause a fighter to stand too narrowly if they are not careful. For an example of this, you needn't look any further than Andre Berto's recent failed attempt at utilizing the half-guard defense effectively against Robert Guerrero. Not only did he fail to use it for its main purpose, which is to defend, but Berto also failed to mount any real offense from it because he was standing too narrowly. Standing too narrowly in the half-guard defense is especially detrimental to the effectiveness of straight or overhand punches coming from the rear hand as they are forced to travel across the body and from a greater distance.

Although it seems fashionable at the moment, the half guard defense is not for everybody. Last time, Alvarado's defense wasn't quite tight enough on the inside. Therefore, the decision to abandon the half-guard defense in favor of a more conventional guard was a brilliant one. This helped Alvarado in the following ways:

- It gave Alvarado better protection from both right and left handed attacks in close.
- It allowed Alvarado to land his overhand right (his most effective punch during the entire fight) from a more natural angle.
- It provided Alvarado with the room and freedom to side-step around Rios at close quarters.
- It improved his effectiveness at tying his man up on the inside, which Alvarado could not do successfully last time, but did so on more than one occasion this time.

Here are some examples of these points.

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