

Daniel in the Lions' Den

Written by Thomas Hauser

Wednesday, 18 September 2013 17:46



Fights don't always follow the script in boxing. They have a story of their own to tell. Such was the case when Danny Garcia squared off against Argentinean Lucas Matthyse on September 14th in a much-anticipated semi-final bout prior Floyd Mayweather vs. Canelo Alvarez at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

Garcia-Matthyse didn't come cheaply. The official bout contracts filed with the Nevada State Athletic Commission listed Garcia's purse at \$1,500,000 and Matthyse's at \$800,000. There was a school of thought that the actual numbers were higher.

That said; matching Garcia against Matthyse energized boxing fans and helped build momentum for the pay-per-view promotion. It also freed up the license fees that Showtime would otherwise have been called upon to spend had Garcia and Matthyse fought on Showtime Championship Boxing this autumn. And Garcia-Matthyse increased the value of the thousands of tickets that those involved with the promotion had retained for resale on the secondary market.

Garcia, age twenty-five, is softspoken and likable with little bravado about him. "I work hard and I believe in myself," is as far as he goes in extolling his own virtues as a fighter.

He came into fight week with a 26-and-0 record and 16 knockouts. But most of his fights had been against has-beens and never-weres. The most notable names on his ledger (Zab Judah, Erik Morales, Kendall Holt, and Nate Campbell) were past their prime when he fought them. The exception was Amir Khan, who Garcia knocked out in four rounds in July 2012. But Khan had been putting a beating on Garcia before a single left hook changed the course of the action.

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Matthysse sported a 34-and-2 record with 32 knockouts. His two losses were to Judah and Devon Alexander. In each instance, the Argentinean knocked his opponent down but came out on the short end of a razor-thin split decision. His most impressive victory was a third-round devastation of Lamont Peterson earlier this year.

Under normal circumstances, Garcia (as the unified WBA-WBC 140-pound champion) would have been the center of attention during fight week. But this particular week was hardly normal. Danny was the odd man out; overshadowed by Mayweather, Alvarez, and Matthysse.

Golden Boy was grooming Matthysse for the role of a future Floyd Mayweather mega-fight opponent. Garcia, the undefeated champion, was a 5-to-2 underdog.

“On closer inspection and perhaps with a jaundiced eye,” Jimmy Tobin wrote, “Garcia-Matthysse looks like a sanctioned [mob] hit.”

Zab Judah, who'd fought both men, was reluctant to pick a winner. But he did note, “I hit Danny Garcia with my best punch and hurt him. I hit Matthysse with my best punch and he smiled.”

Garcia's biggest booster in the build-up to the fight was his father, Angel, who also trains him. When Danny was a boy, Angel served two years in prison for cocaine distribution.

Angel has a confrontational, conspiratorial, us-against-them view of the world and the habit of speaking his mind in a way that often leads to the threat of violence. In a combustible situation, he's likely to light a match.

“I let him be him,” Danny says of his father. “And I'm me.”

Angel has Danny's back. That's his number one priority. It's also numbers two and three.

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“He’s the star,” Angel says. “I’m just a bum. But I’m his father.”

Angel knows a thing or two about boxing. He was aware that Matthysse has a much better chin than Khan or Judah and hits harder. But he also knew that Lucas wasn’t as fast as Amir or Zab.

“Underdogs that win are the true champions,” Angel said two days before the fight. “Danny will win.”

One gets the feeling that Danny has saved his father’s life. Without the mission of caring for his son, where would Angel be?

There were heightened expectations for Garcia-Matthysse. If Mayweather-Alvarez was The Event that people wanted to be seen at, Garcia vs. Matthysse was the fight that people wanted to see. Some members of the media jokingly referred to Mayweather-Alvarez as the evening’s walk-out bout.

Garcia-Matthysse began with Lucas as the aggressor, trying to work his way inside and engage. His punching power had been advertised in pre-fight publicity to the extent that, each time he landed a blow, the crowd “oohed” whether he was doing damage or not.

Mostly, he was not.

Garcia was wary of his foe’s power and, in the early going, circled out of harm’s way. But he understood that he couldn’t keep Matthysse off or score points by playing defense only. So he looked to counter with left hooks and launched some go-for-broke righthand leads that kept Lucas honest. Danny also went low often enough that it seemed just a matter of time before referee Tony Weeks deducted a point for the infractions.

Matthysse was ahead four-rounds-to-two at the midway point. Then, as expected, the fight turned on one punch. But it was a fluke punch rather than a concussive one.

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Garcia caught a break. And Matthyse caught a bad one.

"I hit him with a jab [in round seven]," Danny said at the post-fight press conference. "I saw him blinking his eye. And forty-five seconds later, the eye was closed."

Matthyse knew then, if he hadn't known before, that he was in for a hard night. He was now a one-eyed fighter. A closed eye affects a fighter's depth perception, balance, and field of vision. Lucas could no longer see Danny's money punch (the left hook) coming.

From that point on, Garcia was able to potshot Matthyse with regularity. Lucas landed some good right hands at the start of round eleven. But a hook to the body (Danny's best punch of the night) drove the Argentinean to the ropes, after which a hook up top deposited him on the canvas.

In round twelve, the referee finally deducted a point from the champion for repeated low lows. But it was too little too late. Garcia prevailed on the judges' scorecards by a 114-112, 114-112, 115-111 margin.

Garcia has accomplished a lot in the ring for a 25-year-old and is developing nicely as a fighter. As an undefeated unified champion with victories over Lucas Matthyse, Amir Khan, and Zab Judah, he's also an increasingly marketable commodity.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thouser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Straight Writes and Jabs: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*) has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

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TH, nice piece. My money was on Daniel kicking that lion's arse. Not only could that lion not roar, it could even meow. Danny G put on a boxing clinic. Holla!

brownsugar says:

No man is invincible in the ring...and yet some of the more vulnerable ones defeat the most dangerous opponents by exploiting a single flaw...which is why the sweet science is such a paradox.

puncher says:

Put on the clinic due to the eye. If eye is open results could have been different. Scorecards till the six were the same as mine. 4-2 in favor of Lucas. Now with that said his eye did swell up due to a punch and that is what closed the deal. I would like to see a rematch!

Radam G says:

If the eye would have been open, it would have been different, Lucas would've been one-brave lion. Thus, "Pretty" Danny would've kayoed the rushing-in, roaring lion. I know everybodee and dey mamma saw how Danny knock dat arse down. Holla!

puncher says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;36984]If the eye would have been open, it would have been different, Lucas would've been one-brave lion. Thus, "Pretty" Danny would've kayoed the rushing-in, roaring lion. I know everybodee and dey mamma saw how Danny knock dat arse down. Holla![/QUOTE]

Arse down is not arse out. 4-2 and landing more punches with authority. Eye open contest is what I want to see...rematch call. Now that Danny G can fight....absolutly and he is a good one. He won this one fair and square!

The Good Doctor says:

[QUOTE=puncher;36982]Put on the clinic due to the eye. If eye is open results could have been different. Scorecards till the six were the same as mine. 4-2 in favor of Lucas. Now with that said his eye did swell up due to a punch and that is what closed the deal. I would like to see a rematch![/QUOTE]

I had it 5-1 for Lucas before the eye. I am not saying Danny could not have come on late but it is a very different fight if there was no headbutt.

Carmine Cas says:

I tip my hat to the Garcia's, that was a great game plan. Danny is a hell of a fighter, one of the reasons why I was hesitant to pick a winner. Lucas will live to fight another day, he needs to add

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more dimension to his game (which is prob way too late now) but you can have all the power in the world but if it doesn't reach the target then it's a waste. I wouldn't mind seeing a rematch either

jzzy says:

Danny is an emerging star. I see no reason for a rematch, both fighters have other options. Depending how much Garcia struggles to get to 140, a move to welter could be premature. He still is no match for Mayweather.