

Wright Decision over Soliman

Written by George Kimball
Saturday, 10 December 2005 19:00

UNCASVILLE, Conn. – If this was supposed to leave the public clamoring for a Jermain Taylor-Winky Wright showdown, it probably won't.

It was somehow appropriate that Ronald Wright, an awkward pugilist who has fashioned a career out of making his artistic superiors look bad, should finally get a dose of his own medicine.

The Winkster won a unanimous decision in Saturday night's WBC middleweight eliminator, but he spent much of the evening being frustrated by Sam Soliman, a 32-year-old Australian who brought a 31-7 record to the bout at the Mohegan Sun Arena.

Although Soliman hadn't lost in over four years in his vagabond career, his No. 1 IBF rating was regarded with some suspicion, and the widespread assumption was that Wright, who had spent the past week decrying Taylor's intention to take a 'breather' fight before hooking up with Winky, was taking something of a breather himself.

That illusion was dispelled at the opening bell. Soliman came roaring out of his corner in a frenetic attack that saw him firing punches at a machinegun pace. Precious few of them were finding their mark, but the display of hyperactivity forced Wright to rethink his game plan, if he had one. He spent so much time covering up to ward off Soliman's random proliferation of punches that he hadn't time to throw any of his own.

The Winkster assumed, as did virtually everyone else in the building, that it would be impossible for Soliman to sustain that pace. (By the fourth or fifth round we fully expected the Aussie to come off his stool and fall flat on his face, but Soliman managed to remain the aggressor, albeit not a particularly effective one, for most of the night.)

By the time the third round ended, for instance, Soliman had already missed 111 jabs, but he continued to fire away at what Compubox guro Bob Connobio assures us was double the normal middleweight pace.

It was a tactic, it turned out, ill-conceived to actually win the fight, but if the intent had been to send Winky's pound-for-pound stock tumbling, it probably accomplished that. By the final bell Soliman had thrown 1260 punches – better than 100 per round – to Wright's 650. The Winkster, nonetheless, had connected on nearly half of his – he hit Soliman an even 300 times – while Soliman landed just 174, leaving Sam's connect percentage somewhat below the Mendoza Line.

Although Soliman remained the aggressor for most of the fight, Wright was able to assert command in several stanzas, most notably the tenth, when he caught the Australian with a straight left followed by a hard right hook that badly wobbled him. Soliman, though badly hurt, did battle back in the final minute of the tenth, enough, in our eyes, to avert a two-point round,

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but not, apparently, in the eyes of Tom Kaczmarek and Duane Ford, who both scored it 10-8.

Soliman was still pumping away at the final bell, and leapt up on the ring rope as if he had adjudged himself the winner. Much of the crowd apparently agreed, but then the allegiance of the audience was suspect, anyway. When ring announcer Michael Buffer had introduced a prominent member of Wright's posse – Yankees' outfielder Gary Sheffield – from the ring, 4,682 voices responded in unison, with boos.

"Sam was awkward," said Wright, stating the obvious. "He came to fight."

That he had. Soliman's reputation, which was admittedly not much to begin with, will probably be enhanced more by what took place at the Mohegan Sun than will Wright's.

On the other hand, in addition to solidifying his position as Taylor's mandatory challenger, Wright will presumably inherit Soliman's IBF spot – meaning that he can fight Arthur Abraham, that organization's newly-crowned champion, if he wants.

Don't bet on that, but after calling out Taylor yet again ("I want Jermain as soon as possible"), Wright allowed that if Lou DiBella persists in his plan to have the WBC/WBA champion fight a nonthreatening opponent in Little Rock, Winky plans to take an interim fight as well.

"I want to stay active," said Wright, but probably not as active as he was on this night.

"I thought (Soliman) would run down," said Wright, "but he was very tough. I give him a lot of credit. He came to win."

Despite Soliman's bad aim, the issue appeared closer to us than the judges had it: Kazcmarek scored it 115-112, Ford 117-110, and Melvina Lathan 1115-113. (*The Sweet Science* scorecard had it even at 114-114.)

By turning it into a high-speed chase, Soliman at least had the effect of waking up the crowd; half had been lulled into sleep as eight of the nine bouts on Gary Shaw's card went the distance.

Carlos De Leon Jr., the son of the old cruiserweight champion, escaped with a draw in his six-rounder against Illinois journeyman Ted Muller. Three judges split three ways on the issue, with Don Trella scoring 58-56 for De Leon (13-1-2), Steve Epstein favoring Muller (16-5-2) by a 59-55 margin, and Glenn Feldman deeming it even at 57-57. (*The Sweet Science* thinks Epstein had it right.)

In a scheduled six-rounder that was abbreviated to four after it had commenced, Canadian cruiserweight Anthony Russell (11-1-1) decisioned William Bailey (4-8-1), while former light-heavyweight contender Rico Hoyer hammered out an uninspired decision over Derrick Whitley of Holyoke, Mass. Hoyer, of Detroit, improved to 19-1, while Whitley slipped back under .500 again, falling to 23-24-3.

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The curtain raiser saw veteran Sherman "Tank" Williams (27-10-2) outpoint Mississippi journeyman Willie Perryman (9-10) in a battle of roly-poly heavyweights by scores of 99-91 (twice) and 98-92. In other early bouts New York junior middleweight Jose

Rodriguez (3-0) decisioned Philadelphian Anthony Abrams and Wright stablemate Akinyemi Laleye (3-0) won a split decision over Louis Robinson (2-1-1) in a lively light-heavyweight 4-rounder. Laleye, a Nigerian currently training in St. Petersburg under Dan Birmingham, prevailed by winning 39-37 on the cards of both Epstein and Feldman, while the third judge, Frank Lombardi, saw it for Robinson by a 39-38 margin.

A pair of local favorites both won their undercard bouts, to the delight of the sparsish crowd of 4,682. Hartford featherweight Mikey-Mike Oliver (11-0) easily outpointed his Mexican opponent Gilberto Bolanos (10-10-1), despite having a point deducted (for excessive holding) by referee Ricky Gonzalez in the third.

And Tony Grano, a 25-year-old plumber from Hebron, Conn., who turned pro after winning last year's USA Boxing heavyweight championship in Colorado Springs, won his second bout in as many pro fights when he knocked out Tim Gulley (0-2) of Akron, Ohio. Grano allowed the acrobatic Gulley to cavort about the ring for a minute or so before methodically walking him and fetching his opponent a right hand to the body that left him writhing in agony as referee Dick Flaherty counted him out at 1:18 of the first.

MOHEGAN SUN ARENA

UNCASVILLE, CONN.

DEC. 10, 2005

MIDDLEWEIGHTS:

Ronald (Winky) Wright, 159½, St. Petersburg, Fla. dec. Sam Soliman, 159, Melbourne, Australia (12) (WBC title eliminator)

HEAVYWEIGHTS:

Sherman Williams, 259, Vero Beach, Fla. dec. Willie Perryman, 275, Clarksdale, Miss. (10)

Tony Grano, 212, Hebron, Conn. KO'd Tim Gulley, 202, Akron, Ohio (1)

CRUISERWEIGHTS:

Rico Hoye, 180, Detroit dec. Derrick Whitley, 178½, Holyoke, Mass. (6)

Anthony Russell, 177, Kitchener, Ontario dec. William Bailey, 182, Chesapeake, Va. (4)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS:

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Akinyemi Laleye, 173, Lagos, Nigeria dec. Louis Robinson, 174, Philadelphia (4)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS:

Carlos DeLeon Jr., Trujillo Alto, Puerto Rico drew with Ted Muller, 168, Moline, Ill. (6)

JUNIOR MIDDLES:

Jose Rodriguez, 150, New York dec. Anthony Abrams, 151, Philadelphia (4)

FEATHERWEIGHTS:

Mike Oliver, 123, Hartford dec. Gilberto Bolanos, 124, Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico (4)