

Wright-Soliman and the Frenetic Art

Written by Bill Knight

Sunday, 11 December 2005 19:00

Sam Soliman was little short of amazing Saturday night. He was a human buzz saw, always moving and throwing punches from every angle imaginable. At times, Winky Wright must have thought he was in the ring banging against an octopus — gloves on every tentacle, punches coming from everywhere and all the time.

Soliman was ripped and cut, obviously the special specimen of good health. He was leather tough, battling and banging and offering his own chin for 12 rounds. And the fans in Connecticut loved him. Most likely, the fans across the country watching on HBO loved him.

How could you not love the guy?

He was fun, fast and furious. Did he win the fight? Of course not. Three judges said so and Duane Ford's verdict of 117-110 was probably the most accurate of the trio.

Winky Wright won Saturday night's middleweight duel, earning the right (he hopes) to face Jermain Taylor one day soon ... earning the right (he hopes) for a bigger payday and a bigger portion of a sport's spotlight.

Wright did what Wright always does, showing world-class defense and peppering away with his own punches. He improved his record to 50-3. He landed 300 of his 652 punches. He landed 105 of his jabs.

And for the frenetic Soliman?

He was throwing everything from everywhere, including his head a few times. He was just fighting and fighting and fighting. But he landed just 174 of his amazing 1,260 punch output. He landed just 10 of 333 jabs.

Still, when 12 rounds were put to rest, Wright looked a bit worse for the wear. Some of it was probably from Soliman's hard head (even his head was tough). But some were from punches, too.

The trainer who truly knows his craft, Emanuel Steward, said at one point that this was the most he had ever seen Winky Wright get hit. Soliman was that active, that tricky, that awkward, that wild and that persistent.

When HBO analyst Larry Merchant pointed out to him that he looked as if he had been in a fight, Wright smiled and said, "Oh, I have. I knew it would be a tough fight. He's so awkward. And I knew he would be coming to fight. I'm happy to get this one out of the way and move on to fight Jermain."

Moments later, Wright was shaking his head again.

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“His (Soliman’s) style is so crazy,” Wright said. “Throws punches from either way, comes in with his head. He’s tough.”

And the craziest part is that Soliman just kept coming and kept coming and kept coming. Nothing Wright could offer could dissuade him.

Wright appeared to be on the verge of stopping Soliman in the 10th round. He landed a crushing right hand. Moments later he landed a vicious left. Soliman was reeling ... the ropes his only friend. But only for a few moments. Wright almost wore himself out trying to stop the man who has never been stopped. He had to back off and catch his breath in the final 30 seconds of the round.

Soliman went to his corner, waited for his stool ... a sly smile on his face.

HBO blow-by-blow expert Jim Lampley laughed and said, “Give him a minute’s rest and he can fight for three more months.”

It seemed that way. It certainly must have seemed that way to Wright — especially when Soliman came right back out for the 11th round as strong and wild as ever. He looked as if nothing had happened in the 10th round. He looked as if he were answering the opening bell.

“I thought he would wind down,” Wright said. “That’s why I kept the pressure on him, keeping on beating him to the body. I hurt him with some great body shots. He was tough. I can’t take anything away from him.”

Fortunately for Wright, Soliman’s nonstop, one-man Army assault was not power packed. Wright got hit. But he was able to withstand the Australian’s power. Still, it was fun to watch. It was so much fun that some of the fans in the arena booed when the decision was announced. They were enamored with the effort.

Soliman saw his record dip to 31-8. He also saw his 19 fight win streak snapped.

“I gave everything I had,” he said. “The fight was even until the last few rounds. He has his gloves up but I got through. I got through more than I thought I would.”

Soliman seemed to think he won the fight.

Of course, he did not. He did not really even come close. But he was certainly fun to watch. Again, he is fantastically fit and leather tough and his heart is huge. He did give it his all and he did entertain.

This was a rough night in the life of Winky Wright. He got hit more than he is accustomed. But he won the fight.

And now?

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Now he wants to move on to his biggest of fights, move on to a date with Jermain Taylor.

And soon.

“I definitely want Jermain as soon as possible,” Wright said. “If he takes another fight, I’ll take another fight. But I definitely want Jermain.”

If Taylor takes another fight — you know, one of those breathers ... one of those pay-an-opponent-to-show-up-and-lose affairs — Wright will stay busy, too. It is doubtful, however, that Wright will want any part of someone like Sam Soliman. Of course, there probably is no one like Sam Soliman.

Still, it was an amazingly fun night at the fights ... just watching the human octopus relentlessly throwing punches.