

What Exactly Happened To Jaidon Codrington?

Written by Mitch Abramson

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The sight of Jaidon Codrington lying on the ropes, out cold from a punch, is tough to absorb. After he was rendered unconscious with a right hand in his fight with Allan Green on November 4, Codrington keeled over to one side and fell onto the ropes like a rag doll, his head lying grotesquely on the canvas while his legs were grounded inside the ring. It looked like he was trying to dive through the ropes and got caught.

The picture was frightening and devastating and supported the notion that boxing is a violent sport and everyone is susceptible to getting hit, but fighters like Codrington, who most people thought was as close to a sure thing as there is in boxing, are not supposed to get starched in 18 seconds of the first round.

Codrington was supposed to walk through Green and then raid the super middleweight division in a spastic fit of New York exuberance, the sentiment went. More than a month after he was knocked cold by Green, who was 17-0 (11 KO's) entering the fight compared to Codrington, who was 9-0, all by knockout, Codrington had an explanation for what happened.

"I wasn't warmed up, and I was a little sick anyway, so I don't know if that delayed my reaction time when I got hit," Codrington said in a phone interview. "But all it was – I got caught with a punch. If it happened in the second or third round, I guarantee it wouldn't have had the same effect."

Codrington believes he was in the ring with a scared fighter that night in Oklahoma, and he disputed the notion that he was caught off guard by the enormity of fighting on national television for the first time in his career. The bout was televised on Showtime.

"He was looking in the opposite direction when he hit me," Codrington said. "But scared fighters are the most dangerous fighters – you ever hear of that before? Scared people lift up cars to get their mothers out from under them. Scared people are powerful. That was a scared man that caught me. My trainer told me he's scared, and that he would do one of two things: either he's going to run the entire fight or he's going to run at me and not know what to do. When he came at me, I was expecting it, but at the same time I was kind of shocked because I got anxious. I threw a punch and was about to come back with a left hook, and he landed his first."

At the fighter's meeting, Steve Farhood, a boxing analyst who was working the fight with Nick Charles for Showtime, was struck by the grogginess of Codrington's voice, the result of a sinus infection and by Green's demeanor, which was confident to the point of being in a fantasy state.

"Green walked into the fighter's meetings and said that we were going to be surprised with how he fought," Farhood said. "'I'm going to be in his face,' he said. Then Allan leaves the room and everyone looked at each other like, 'yah, right' because we only knew him from how he fought before which was very cautious. What he did in this fight was shocking."

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The news of Codrington's defeat was met with mostly silence along the gyms and offices that cater to boxing in New York. Perhaps the hushed reaction was a giant sigh of relief.

"I think that most people were just relieved to find out that he was ok," Farhood said.

"When he went down, there was every reason to believe that he may be seriously hurt or could possibly even die, so people were just thankful that he was ok. When I saw him at the airport the next day in Tulsa, he was there by himself, and he said that he shouldn't have taken the fight, not because he was overmatched but because he was sick and wasn't feeling well. I thought that was pretty revealing."

In just nine pro fights, Codrington had risen to the top of most everyone's lists of fighters to keep an eye on. He was a darling of the news media and his 'chin-checkers' nickname that he shared with fellow pro Curtis Stephens, who were both known to wager on who could vanquish their opponents the fastest before fights, made him an instant celebrity within the boxing community.

His impressive stoppage over durable Levan Easley in August confirmed to his handlers that he was ready to move up and challenge some of the other young fighters in the division.

Allan Green seemed an easy mark.

Curtis Stevens had faced him in the amateurs, losing a narrow decision even though he had dropped Green in the match. He reported back to Codrington's manager, Chris Gotti, that Green would be no problem for his fighter. Codrington was such a good amateur that Johnnie Woluewich, the former President of USA Boxing Metro, who died on December 12 from complications of a heart attack, once remarked that if he could invest in one fighter it would be Codrington.

His promoter, Lou DiBella, agreed to fight Green in Miami, Oklahoma, roughly 70 miles away from Green's hometown of Tulsa, a risky concession that DiBella didn't think would influence the fight. Even Andre Rozier, Codrington's austere co-trainer, forecasted doom for Green at an amateur show he put on a week before the fight in Brooklyn when he announced to the crowd with Codrington in attendance that "Allan Green will be destroyed."

It had all the makings of a major upset.

Green's camp, meanwhile, was somewhat surprised and a little upset that they were being picked to serve as a launching pad for Codrington's career. Their initial reaction to being selected as an opponent was a reluctance to meet Codrington in the ring.

"Allan didn't want to take the fight," said Scott Burnett, Green's trainer. "He didn't want to fight him. He said 'I'm going to hurt this kid. I don't want to ruin his career.' They didn't realize how strong Allan was. He's been fighting all these big guys in his career. We knew that if we could jump on him quickly and get him on the ropes, that he would cover up and we'd be able to land a big punch. Before the bell rang to begin the first round, I told Allan to go get him."

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What happened next was straight from the “theatre of the unexpected” line that Larry Merchant often delivers to describe the capriciousness of boxing. Green, normally a cautious fighter, darted from his corner like a kid running to unwrap his Christmas presents and tracked Codrington down against the ropes, hurting him badly with a left hook that buckled Codrington’s legs. With his hands almost a blur, Green landed a series of punches that ended with a right hand to Codrington’s head.

In the confusion of the melee that followed the fight, the injuries to Codrington were greatly exaggerated to Charles and Farhood who were calling the fight on the air. It was reported that Codrington had suffered a broken vertebrae when in reality he had suffered a concussion. Later that night, Farhood and DiBella emailed the correct medical information to boxing websites to amend the perception that Codrington was seriously hurt.

Now Codrington has to convince himself that he is ready to resume his career.

“I just got to get over this and get back to the gym, get back to the training,” Codrington said. “It happens to the best of them – Zab Judah, Ray Robinson, Lennox Lewis, Ruiz, the list goes on for days [of fighters who have been stopped]. I’ve watched that fight like fifty million times. You never think that you would be in that position, never thought that in a million years. I’ve been on the canvas just once in my career, and it was early on in the amateurs, and it was more because I was off-balance, but I wasn’t shook up or anything.”

The loss came at a bad time for Codrington. His manager was embroiled in a money laundering trial with his brother, and Codrington’s grandfather was sick. Shortly after the fight, Codrington found himself racing back and forth between visiting his grandfather in Bridgeport, Connecticut and being present at the trial in downtown Manhattan. The same day Irv and Chris Gotti were acquitted by a federal jury of money laundering charges on December 1, his grandfather Wilfred Uriah Codrington Sr. died of a heart disease at the age of 78.

“I supported them like they’ve supported me in my career,” he said. “It would have been the worse feeling in the world for me if they had been found guilty or innocent, and I wasn’t there to support or celebrate with them.”

The problems involving his manager and grandfather were distressing, but at least they distracted him from thinking about the fight. Codrington said he is already back in the gym training and anticipates making his return in March or April. He said he visited with three different doctors after the fight and all of them gave him a clean bill of health.

“I believe in myself and a bump in the road isn’t supposed to slow you down too much,” he said. “It’s just supposed to make you put things into perspective and get right back into the grind again.”

Shortly after the loss, a rumor began to circulate that he was retiring from boxing to return to school.

“I’m definitely thinking about going back to school, but I’m definitely not going to give up

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boxing,” he said. “That’s my bread and butter. That’s how I’m going to make my name. School – I’ve been thinking about that before this happened. That has nothing to do with what happened. I have a couple of ideas, nothing carved in stone, but I was in college before and I thought about nursing or being a gym teacher. I thought about being a juvenile probation officer – a wide variety of things.”

As for any lessons he learned from the fight, Codrington promises to tighten up defensively and work on his boxing skills. Burnett, Green’s trainer, who developed a fondness for Codrington and his trainers before the fight, had some advice of his own for Codrington: “He’s a nice kid, but his management and promoters and everyone around him don’t need to sell to the public that he’s the baddest dude on the planet. Jaidon’s a good fighter by himself. He doesn’t need to intimidate anyone. Let his skills do that for him. People once said that Mike Tyson was the baddest man on the planet and a lot of good that did him.”