

Bruising Waltzes, Holiday Class and Diamonds in the Desert

Written by Phil Woolever

Monday, 11 December 2006 19:00

TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION—Being the favorite didn't keep a strong trio of marquee fighters from feeling heavy heat last Friday, December 8, as Desert Diamond Casino closed out the year with another high note in their thriving boxing series.

A standing room only swarm of around 2,000 saw quality in each of seven bouts. Much of the action was world-class. Oscar de la Hoya and Shane Mosley added star power to the slugout sparks.

It was no shock that Golden Boy Promotions and Telefutura brought in another fine production, but many fans got quite a surprise in how much trouble nearby Tucson's local hero Norberto "Nito" Bravo had against Michael Lucero of West Linn, Oregon.

Bravo, a semi-finalist from last season's "The Contender," got a rejuvenating career boost when he emerged from the second season's installments as one of the most enduring, popular participants.

On paper it looked like 5-foot-8 Bravo was getting a relatively easy assignment against 5-foot-3 Lucero, now 10-11-1 (2), but Bravo, 23-13-3 (12), got all he could handle, maybe more.

It was a decent battle overall, but somewhat anticlimactic after Bravo's TV drama and some of the evening's previous slugfests. Many ringside observers, including this one, felt Lucero had landed enough punches to win.

Lucero certainly earned a rematch, but from a risk reward basis it's probably not the safest managerial move for Bravo.

"He's a tough kid but I thought I was ahead and the knockdown sealed the deal," said a bruised but unfazed Bravo. "He gave me a run for my money. I had to lose weight after The Contender and it affected my stamina. I thought my overall performance was good."

Bravo's eight-round adventure may have been scheduled for last on the card, but no one left for this "walkout" bout. The crowd stayed on their feet screaming for Bravo's entrance. Soon after that Lucero made them sit on nervous hands.

Bravo scored a knockdown in the second session that made the place loco again, but the anxious general silence for much of the rest of the contest spoke softly but definite volumes on the visitor's behalf.

Referee Ray Scott had his hands full during give and take flurries, then sporadic hug and slug clinches.

Bravo was winded by the seventh round but kept throwing. The look from his weary

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countenance indicated he understood how much was at stake, as the beer baptized faithful kept up a hopeful yet muffled chant.

Inspired for a big finish, Bravo scored well and almost gained a grand finale. He rocked Lucero repeatedly in the last two frames and teed off to close the show with a bang, seemingly just a punch or two away from another knockdown.

Official scores: Joe Garcia and Chris Wilson 78-73, Dennis O'Connell 76-75 all for Bravo.

"I kept landing the left hook but it didn't have the extra sting to put him out," said Bravo. "I give him all the credit in the world."

Lucero also deserves credit for maintaining his very positive composure after losing a probable career advancing decision which numerous fans and media felt should have gone his way.

Jose Angel Beranza, 121, 28-9-2 (25), from Mexico City upset former WBO Super Flyweight titlist Ivan "Choco" Hernandez, 123³/₄, 23-2-1 (13), in a true whapathon.

Both lanky technicians landed good shots. Hernandez rocked Beranza early with right hands over the top, but the price Hernandez paid to stay within firing range got too steep. Beranza kept punishing pressure on behind looping hooks.

By the 4th round it looked like Hernandez's left hand really gave him problems. By the middle frames Hernandez looked the worse for walloping wear. Beranza's left eye was damaged and Hernandez's puffy face was cut on the bridge of his already bloodied nose.

Many rounds were hard to call. Both men wailed away full tilt to gain back and forth rounds by just a few punches.

Hernandez made a late surge in the 8th and the bout was still up for grabs going down the stretch.

Beranza dodged a steady stream of shots and pressed more of the finishing action, before an appreciative audience.

All judges (Gerald Maltz, Chris Wilson, Craig Harmon) saw it 96-94 for underdog Beranza.

Hernandez was taken to the hospital to assess the damaged hand.

It's a good thing that slick stinging Daniel Jimenez, 16-1-1 (10), San Juan, PR, was ready for top competition, scheduled against Javier Jauregui. When Jauregui pulled out with a nagging injury a day before showtime, late substitute Angel Recio provided just that.

The last day fill in was ready for almost anybody, and charged with thumping aggression until

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the cupboard was bare.

Previously undefeated Recio, now 10-1 (2), from Santo Domingo, DR, came mighty close to pulling an upset of his own on this night of no quarter close calls.

Recio threw an impressive pile of punches and made Jimenez dance backward for much of their bruising waltz. Recio sprang in and scored whenever Jimenez waited for openings.

Recio got too cute too early after initial success, and learned something about both his more experienced foe's patience and power.

Jimenez did cumulative damage with short left hooks and Recio's eyes grew puffy.

Recio mugged confidently but paid for it with a huge right that kept his respect from then on as Jimenez found the range.

Recio showed he could counter and hung tough with left hooks. Each man landed whaps that drew deep "oohs" from the crowd.

Jimenez blocked more and more as the fight and Recio's vision problems progressed. A short left blast dropped Recio flat on his back, to stare up blankly at the Diamond Center's unique turquoise/aquamarine lighting pattern in dreamland, as if he'd never get up by New Year's.

But in fistic glory, he did.

Most of the roaring crowd was on their feet as Jimenez stalked and walked him down. Jimenez landed around half a dozen vicious right uppercuts without resistance. Referee Bobby Ferrara waved it off after Recio was backed full circle around the ring, swallowing heavy leather.

Official time of the TKO was 0:36 of the round nine. Recio was ahead on one judge's scorecard at the mooted moment.

Prospect Craig McEwan, 3-0 (2), looked strong enough, but his power might be questioned after some of the huge shots Valentino "The Eagle" Jalomo, 2-1-1, took without flinching in their middleweight meeting. Jalomo kept rushing inside and landed more than a few decent punches of his own. It got sloppy, but the crowd loved the two way brawling. There were lots of boos at the unanimous nod to McEwan.

Wonder if McEwan asked trainer Fred Roach to wear a kilt like his other cornerman.

Overmatched Ramiro Rivera, 4-3 (3), Phoenix, wasn't intimidated during exchanges with talented Gabriel "El Rey" Martinez, 11-0 (6). They traded at roughly an even rate in numbers, but Martinez simply had too much power. Rivera was getting knocked around the ring by the climax. He fought back all the way but protected himself less and less until ref Nico Perez properly stepped in at 1:46 of the 3rd.

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2004 Puerto Rican Olympian Super Heavyweight Victor Brisbal, 6-1 (4), pounded out a rugged six-round unanimous decision over game Robbie "Crazy" McClimans, 4-3-1 (2). Brisbal towered over McClimans but couldn't discourage the tough Texan, who rumbled on to humorous chants of "Let's go Crazy."

In the afternoon appetizer, Leon Green took a split decision over Eddie Vega that drew some boos.

With Nacho Beristan (Beranza), Roach, and Miguel Diaz in camp, you could have microphoned the ringposts for a clinic on corner work and trainers.

Area fans deserve another year's worth of credit. Once again the bar and beer stand lines stayed busy but there were no apparent buttheads or amateur drunks to contend with.

In a night full of first-class acts from top to bottom, hard luck Lucero gets our MVP (Most Venerable Puncher) holiday toast.

"It was a good, close fight," said the humble visitor. "I'm OK with that, and I'd like the chance to come back and do it again."

All night long, brother.

All night long.