

Miranda Rocks/Litzau Upset: Just like the BAD old days

Written by Robert Ecksel

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HBO's Boxing After Dark ended its tenth season and the year at the Miccosukee Resort & Casino in Miami Saturday night, not with a whimper but with a big bang, and as predicted, it was just like the BAD old days all over again.

In the main event, Edison "Pantera" Miranda (27-1, 24 KOs), the 25-year-old middleweight knockout artist from Miami by way of Barranquilla, Colombia, still smarting from his controversial jaw-breaking Sept. 23 decision loss to Arthur Abraham in Wetzlar, Germany, took the fight to Philadelphia's Willie "The Gladiator" Gibbs (20-2, 16 KOs) in a scheduled 10-rounder and KO'd Bernard Hopkins' cousin by marriage in the first.

Wearing multicolor trunks and fighting out of the red corner, Miranda, who Jim Lampley described before the bout as a "middleweight who punches like a cruiserweight," turned Lampley into a soothsayer as he turned Gibbs' career around before the Philadelphian even had a chance to get out of the starting gate.

Gibbs, wearing black trimmed with purple and fighting out of the blue corner, spent the first two minutes of round one avoiding the long reach of Miranda. But he threw one lazy jab too many in the Colombian's direction—and Miranda countered with a solid right to the temple which hurt Gibbs, and followed up with a series of blows which put Gibbs to the canvas, where referee Tommy Kimmons counted him out at 2:59.

At the fight's conclusion, Miranda said, "I knew when I connected he wouldn't be able to stand it." When asked who he wanted to fight next, the victorious Miranda said, "Jermain Taylor is who I want." There's little doubt, however, that Taylor wants any part of Gibbs based on Saturday's performance. "It will be a quick night of work," added Miranda, "just like tonight."

The co-main featured a 10-round featherweight dustup between formerly undefeated Jason "The America Boy" Litzau (20-1, 18 KOs), 23, the hard luck kid from St. Paul, Minnesota, versus Jose Hernandez (23-3, 14 KOs), 31, hailing from Round Lake, Illinois, by way of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Litzau, wearing red, white and blue and fighting out of the blue corner, was the favorite in the bout, despite the fact that Hernandez, in brown trimmed with silver, was 15-1 in his last 16 fights.

With the crowd's dueling chants of "Mex-i-co, Mex-i-co, Mex-i-co" and "USA, USA, USA" rocking the Miccosukee, a clean right hand by Hernandez caught Litzau cold and dropped him just 32 seconds into the first round, but Litzau got to his feet and took control of the next two rounds with his superior skills, athleticism and ring generalship, and put a solid beating on his shorter, slower opponent.

During the rest period between rounds 4 and 5, Sam Colonna, Hernandez's trainer, implored his

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fighter, “You gotta mix it up. You gotta start punching. You gotta get off first,” but Hernandez was determined to do it his way.

Litzau continued to pound Hernandez with uppercuts, hooks and rights to the head and body—“long power shots,” Lennox Lewis called them—but the Illinois native was getting his licks in as well. Between rounds 5 and 6, Litzau’s cornerman, Bob Van Syckle, told him, “Don’t play with this guy. He’s too dangerous. This is the big time. This is HBO,” but Litzau, who knows a thing or two about danger, either couldn’t or wouldn’t listen.

Hernandez continued to come on in the sixth. Although Litzau drew first blood from his opponent’s nose, and as Lampley put it, “Increasingly Litzau imposes his strength and will on Hernandez,” it was Hernandez’s best round of the fight, even though Litzau took it 10-9.

Round 7 was Litzau’s, with Hernandez continuing to come on strong, and in the eighth Hernandez punched his way back into the fight, pounded Litzau into the ropes—Lennox said Hernandez was “going for broke”—and dropped Litzau down and out with a big right hand at 2:52.

At the time of the stoppage, all three judges had Litzau ahead with identical scores of 68-64.

In what Lampley described as an “intelligent comeback” which, according to Max Kellerman, “Litzau let happen,” The American Boy drops out of the top-ten, only to have Hernandez take his place as a bona fide contender in the featherweight division.

After the bout, a jubilant Hernandez said, “I told everyone I was coming to this fight to win. He started to fight me and he got caught. He believes in his power, I believe in my power, and my power is better today.”

It was, by any standard, a bang-up celebration of HBO’s Boxing After Dark’s tenth year on the air.