

A Classic: Contender Bika Beats Codrington

Written by Michael Woods

Monday, 05 November 2007 19:00

Expectations were not really sky high for the finale of the third season of The Contender, which took place Tuesday night at the TD Banknorth Garden in Boston.

The Queens, NY based Jaidon Codrington (168 pounds, 23-years-old), with an 18-1 (14 KOs) record, met Aussie resident Sakio Bika (167 1/2, 32-years-old, 24-3-2 (15 KOs) in the tournament final, a match pitting the prospect with a black-mark KO on his ledger against a wily vet who hadn't been able to lift himself to that top echelon when given the opportunity.

To heck with expectations, because this fight, which featured back and forth knockdowns in the first, was the fight of the year in 2007, an ebb and flow drama from the first to the eighth and final round.

In the eighth round, Codrington ate clubbing rights, and couldn't get off the ropes as Bika threw home run tosses. Codrington was almost out, but held on briefly. Bika shoved him off, and looked to get back to finishing. Referee Dick Flaherty halted the bout as Codrington turned his back and walked away from Bika, and toward his corner, unable to absorb any more punishment.

The official time was 2:18.

Codrington shed tears as he was declared the TKO loser, and realized that Bika would be leaving with the \$750,000 winner's purse.

Think I'm sippin' the Kool Aid, cause I do work for the company? Brian Kenny, a credible voice, said, "It's probably the best fight I've ever seen."

Codrington was classy after, calling Bika a warrior. He said he thought he had Bika out three or four times. You knew he was OK, too, after he managed to toss in a shoutout plug for his vitamin company.

In the seventh round, any viewer had to be leaning forward. Anyone could go at any time, it was clear. Bika was still strong, and Codrington still chose to trade, unwisely so. This was a pretty tight one, with Bika probably the winner here because he had Codrington rattled. "Don't get in a shootout," McGirt told Codrington.

In the sixth round, both men took a breather for the first minute. Then Bika went to the body, twice in a row, and landed a left hook. Codrington had been moving more, but not throwing too. His mouth hung open but he still traded haymakers as the round came to a close.

At the middle point, in the fifth, Codrington landed a left hook that dented Bika. Later, Bika landed a right uppercut that hurt his foe. Codrington was almost out on his feet at the end of the round, his legs were almost toast.

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In the fourth round, Bika trapped Codrington on the ropes, and threatened a stoppage, as he rained punches on the younger man. Jaidon nailed Bika with a short right in tight, but Bika was busier.

The third round saw Bika throwing bombs. Would he punch himself out, or catch Codrington on the end of a fierce toss? Codrington didn't keep the bomber at bay with a strong jab, and looked tentative, like the pressure was weighing on him.

In the second, things stabilized after the wild first. This round was fought more like a typical first round, until the last minute, when Bika started landing some power shots. Codrington looked in a precarious state again at the end of the round.

In the first, Bika scored a knockdown with a smashing right, which tossed Codrington off his feet. He was up, with clear eyes, quickly. Codrington and Bika went at it, with Codrington's back to the ropes, when The Don left rip a nifty left hook that sent Bika to the mat. He got up quickly, but his legs looked jellied. Bika held on for his professional life, and it looked like he might make the end of the round, as Codrington burned out some.

Bika got his legs back enough to land a left hook of his own, and the round came to a close. Codrington did himself no favors by head hunting too much, because Bika still had enough faculties to slip and duck. Bika, by the way, committed an obvious foul when he struck Codrington twice while he was on the floor.

Buddy McGirt worked Codrington's corner, while Pepe Correa worked with Bika in the scheduled ten rounder. Amateur psychologists may have been interested to see Codrington look away from Bika during the stare down.

Hearts had to be on Codrington's side, as the fighter was told his dad Jamsey killed himself was he was filming the show. Bika said he was fighting hard for the grand prize so he could give his son a superb education, and buy his family in Cameroon a home. Harvard, here the kid comes.

In the semifinal showdown, Aussie Sam Soliman (165 pounds, 34-10, 13 KOs) met up with New Jersey's Wayne Johnsen (168, 17-2, 9 KOs). Soliman is a swarmer, with an awkward, herky jerky style. Johnsen looked out of sorts, a bit, as the whirlwind touched down on him. There were some sloppy moments, with some grabbing and grappling. This was Boston after all--I half expected bird of a feather John Ruiz to be working Soliman's corner.

"He does everything but take your wallet," Atlas said of the grabby Aussie. "How do you spell ugly, as in ugly fight?" Atlas asked. "I would say it is S-O-L-I-M-A-N. He makes ugly beautiful, as far as he's concerned."

Watching him, I wonder how the heck, or why the heck, Winky Wright was ever persuaded to give Soliman a shot.

Johnsen's last outing, he was knocked out by Jaidon Codrington in the first round, so he was

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probably happy he was in with a light hitter in Soliman, to look on the bright side. The stats showed Soliman in front, with a 145 to 69 edge in punches landed.

The judges were put to use, and they saw Soliman the winner, 59-55, 60-54, 60-54. Atlas scored it 60-54, Soliman.

The show kicked off with David Banks (163 pounds, 14-3-1, 2 KOs coming in, from Portland, Oregon) meeting Donny McCrary (163, 23-6-2, 13 KOs, from St. Joseph, Missouri) in a six rounder middleweight attraction.

Banks cracked Donny with rights from the start, which made him blink, but McCrary kept coming. Teddy Atlas mentioned that Banks' two wins over Elvin Ayala was perhaps helping him mentally, as Ayala just had a draw with season one winner Sergio Mora.

By the way, these fighters were working with their normal cornermen, not Buddy McGirt and Pepe Correa, the show's helmsmen.

McCrary looked urgent in the sixth, knowing he needed a KO, probably, to get the nod. Banks has the quicker hands, and better footwork, and that spoke to the judges. The crowd was jazzed at the action, and the men hugged hard aft the closing bell. Stat-wise, Banks landed more (167-165) but McCrary threw more (422-399). Atlas had it 59-56, while the judges saw it 57-57, 58-56, 58-56, for Banks.

SPEEDBAG Brian Kenny talked to Pats d-back Rodney Harrison, who gave boxers props. He said he and his wife hit bouts in AC, and said he tried boxing this past offseason. He couldn't last a round in there. You may know that Teddy Atlas has acted as a mentor and motivator to the NY Jets, a Patriots rival. The Jets are having a rough go of it: they are 1-8, while the Pats sit pretty at 9-0. Maybe Teddy can get one of his former clients to whack the Jets around, and help 'em snap out of it.

--Irish Micky Ward took in the action at the Gahden.