

Evans Proves To Be More Valid At UFC 78

Written by Michael Woods

Friday, 16 November 2007 19:00

UFC gets a clap on the back for tagging UFC 78 "Validation," basically acknowledging that the two men in the light heavyweight main event, Michael Bisping and Rashad Evans, had somewhat sub-flawless reputations entering the featured bout at the Prudential Center in Newark, NJ on Saturday evening.

Exiting the cage, Evans showed himself the more valid of the two fighters, as he took a split decision, by scores of 29-28 (Evans), 29-28 (Bisping) 29-28 (Evans) in a fight that left the fans hungry for two more rounds, and more closing skills.

Did Evans achieve total validation? Probably not, as he finds himself without an overwhelming MO when he takes his man to the floor, but in the end, he simply does win, so maybe that speaks louder than any perceived hole in his game.

Afterwards, Evans (16-0-1) gave Bisping credit for a solid fight. Both men talked trash coming in, but Evans said all is forgiven after the tussle ended.

"I controlled the pace of the fight," he said, explaining his edge.

"Hats off to Rashad. I proved I did belong in there," Bisping said, before thanking UFC for putting him in a main event on the PPV. He then said he thought he won the fight, and cancelled out Evans' takedowns.

Evans, 28-years-old, from New Mexico, living in Michigan, weighed in at 204 pounds, while the Brit Bisping (15-1), age 28 as well, weighed 205 on the dot .

The third round saw Evans take Bisping down, but he couldn't capitalize. Bisping then looked like he could sink something in, as he had Evans' back, but the wrestling expert spun out of danger. Evans went back to rasslin, and carried the last round, on my card, with his edge in aggression.

In the second, Evans scored with a slam, which Bisping partially diminished with a free arm. Bisping continued to be in "respond" mode, and needed to get into gear. Evans outboxed his man in the middle of the road, but Bisping did find a tactic, the knees, which suited him. Still, Evans' boxing took the round. Neither man wanted to close the distance though, showing regard for each others' inside games.

In the first, Evans looked to smother Bisping. He pressed him against the cage, and was more aggressive in the striking department. He notched two takedowns, and while he didn't overwhelm the Brit on the mat, he was the more effective fighter in the first. Generally, he showed the judges he wanted it more.

Evans had won the second season of The Ultimate Fighter reality show on Spike, while Bisping

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won the third season. The Brit came to ring, all swagger, not ready to admit that he by all accounts didn't deserve the win that the judges gave him over Matt Hamill at UFC 75 on September 8. Evans didn't draw more than 50% of the buzz that Houston Alexander did in the fight before his, with the fans understanding that the jury was still out on his all-around skill set, submission skills and overall aggression.

Fan fave Houston Alexander (8-1), a 35-year-old from Omaha, Nebraska, took on 25-year-old Thiago Silva (11-0), from Brazil in a light heavyweight faceoff.

The joint was on steroided up amphetamines when Houston came to the cage.

In the first, Houston was put on his back, and Silva looked to drop elbow rain. He pounded away, in conquering mount position, and Houston blocked some but not for long. Silva wouldn't be denied. The ref stopped it at 3:25 of the first, TKO, after giving Alexander ample time to toss the Brazilian off him. He was almost in total la-la land. The crowd booed, as they took the fan fave's loss to heart. Alexander left the cage, shaking his head, without commenting to Rogan. Not sure why he left like that, the people would have liked to hear from him.

Silva will get a title shot, sooner rather than later.

Karo Parisyan, age 25, has been fighting pro since he was 16. He came to Newark with a 25-4 mark, and came to the cage with a cocky grin, to George Thorogood's "Bad To the Bone." Randy Couture gave him a few wake up, go out and get 'em slaps before the start. Thirty-one-year-old Ryo Chonan of Japan, with Chris Leben-red hair, owned a 14-7 mark. Karo owned the ground in the first, and one had to wonder what strategy the Japanese fighter would/could uncork to get the nod.

He came out throwing in the second, and tried some kickwork to decent effect. There were some "boring" chants to close the second, as Parisyan was dominant on top, but wasn't able to press his advantage.

In the third, it was more sub scintillating action. The crowd was sitting on their hands and booing occasionally. Neither man looked in top form, and the energy was lacking. Karo didn't act like he was demanding a title shot. It was mostly standup in the final round, but of the fairly desultory variety. The judges spoke: 30-27 across the board, for Karo. There was half hearted claps to greet the decision. "I apologize to my fans," Karo said to Rogan. He cited some personal life woes that affected him. The Thorogood song wasn't a fitting song choice, sadly.

The Ultimate Fighter alum, 27-year-old Ed Herman (entering at 15-4 from Vancouver, WA., sporting the best sponsorship of the night, CondomDepot.com) met 30-year-old Canadian Joe Doerksen (39-10) in a rematch from a 2004 squareoff. Herman lost that one, on a triangle chokeout. But he came in to this one looking at easy and ready to rock. He owned the ground in the first. He also cut the Canadian on his eyelid with a strike. The second started slow, with Herman atop Doerk. Things perked up when it looked like Doerksen met wrangle another submission win, but Herman wriggled free. Not so at the end of the round, when Doerksen locked on a triangle choke to armbar, but the horn sounded to end the period. Lucky Herman.

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Unlucky Doerksen, then, as the redheaded hitter dropped him with a nighty-night left hook to close the show, and gain his revenge.

The official time: :39 of the third.

UFC threw a hometown boy on the card in the first PPV fight. Twenty-six year old Frankie Edgar (7-0 coming in) of Toms River met up with 31-year-old Spencer Fisher (21-3) of North Carolina, fighting out of Miletich-ville, Iowa in a lightweight attraction.

The respectful crowd didn't hoot or holler as Edgar took Fisher to the floor twice in a row, and looked to pass guard and ground 'n pound. The education level of the watchers has grown a hundredfold since my last live card, in 2002.

The Jersey boy had the edge in strength and technique as he took Fisher to the mat again and again, and sapped his strength. He could probably stand to beef up his submission arsenal, but tell that to Fisher, who had little luck mounting any offense through two.

Same thing in the third. Edgar's favored submission tactic is a choke from behind, but Fisher has too much vet savvy to fall for that.

The judges called it for the local, duh, 30-27, 30-27, 30-26. "Not bad for a Jersey shore kid, huh?" he said afterwards to Joe Rogan.

Chris Lytle, trying to claw his way back into relevance, met Thiago Alves in a welterweight beef scheduled for three. Lytle, of Indiana, came in with a 34-14-4 mark, while Alves, fighting from Florida, was 18-4 . Alves' pacing in the cage before the bout--I saw that look back when I worked in the psych hospital from 1992-1994. It was a locked unit. It usually meant I would be forced to rumble shortly with the pacer.

Lytle was cut over his left eye early in the first, from a right hand. Both men are wide swingers. This was a stand up fest. Lytle, a pro boxer, swings reaaaly wide for a pro boxer. The fight came to a premature halt, as a doctor halted the bout--dare I say it, maybe prematurely--after the second round, and Alves got the TKO nod.

Alves even said after that he thought the bout should have continued. Maybe bone was showing in the slice over the eye, who knows. Lytle wanted it to continue, too. "I'm just pissed it's over," he said.

The third fight of the card had 38-year-old Illini Jason Reinhardt (18-0 coming in) taking on TUF reality show alumnus, massachusetts' Joe Lauzon (14-3), age 23, who holds a win over Jens Pulver. The crowd booed a tiny bit for Reinhardt's entry music, a country tune. The red state/blue state divide stands, eh? I admit I had a small rooting interest for the graybeard, being 38 meself. Was not to be.

Lauzon came out fast and furious. The boys went to the ground and Lauzon cranked on a rear naked choke. Reinhardt tapped out at 1:14 of the first.

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In a lightweight scrap, Florida's Marcus Aurilio met Nebraskan Luke Caudillo. Luke ate too many hammerfists, and the ref hopped in and halted it--TKO, unanswered strikes--at 4:29 of the first round. Caudillo glanced up at the big screens as he went to the dressing room, but averted his eyes in disgust.

Japan's Akihiro Gono met Binghamton, NY's Tamdan McCrory in the welterweight kickoff bout. Gono strode to ring wearing a wig that looks like it was swiped from a demented granny. Solid.

The crowd was at 70% capacity or so at first bell, as all those too-cool city cats must've figured they'd make a grand, late entrance. Gono, the even tempered vet, snagged a tapout armbar win in the second round.

OCTAGONAL ODDS AND ENDS

The Vegas shows usually get some decent celebs. I saw Chuck Zito. He counts in some circles I guess. That Frankie Valle 'do doesn't exactly scream "current!" but at least he wasn't sporting one of those cutoff sweatshirts that scream "80s!"

--It's smart for Bruce Buffer to provide a little info to the crowd, announcing the finishing holds after the bouts ended.

--Hey boxing take note of this...UFC plays little promo videos to whet everyone's appetites in between bouts. Instead of dead air, where you have fans craning their necks for hotties in the crowd, this practice adds to the anticipation.

--BJ Penn was strolling around. He looks fit, not fat. Bad news for Joe Stevenson.

--Joint looked like a Boston Celtics crowd. It was Caucasian Nation in the Prudential.

--This is a brand spankin new building. The home of hockey's NJ Devils, it opened up October 25. Thus, it didn't smell.

--Hats off the the PR crew. They moved the press through to get their pass quickly, unlike the debacle at MSG for Cotto/Mosley. They didn't take my pic for the pass. They don't need a pic for a pass anywhere. What is that for, to stave off an impostor. Or terroristic threats? C'mon...

--OMG, I went off when they used "Baba O'Reilly" in one of their promo pieces, as opposed to the usual angry white boy rap-punk, or whatever the genre is. Classic rock, baby! The lyrics were set to the action perfectly. And Keith Moon, a real MMAer on the drums, bashing cymbals as mat slams were executed...perfect. Well done, editor.

--Off topic plug: please check out my friend Tim Struby's nice piece on Ricky Hatton, which focuses on his efforts to keep his waistline in check, in the next ESPN The Magazine.

--Matt Serra came up on the Jumboscreen. There was a mix of cheers and boos. Lotsa Liddell fans in Joisey, Keith Jardine drew boos.

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--Boxing promoters. Word to the wise. You **MUST** come to a UFC show to see how to produce a live event. The pacing is so spot on, and the use of video and music **BLOWS** away anything I've ever been to boxing wise. I'm just sayin.