

Jesse Feliciano Wins Though He Loses

Written by David A. Avila

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Kermit “El Asesino” Cintron hits hard, real hard.

Jesse Feliciano didn't care.

With more than 10,000 people filling the arena at Staples Center in Los Angeles, Feliciano showed the raucous crowd what it means to fight with heart and soul as he withstood the murderous punches of IBF welterweight titleholder Cintron for 10 rounds.

It was the fight of the night.

Usually winning is the main goal of any fighter, but on Friday night, Nov. 23, several fight cards including the main event between Fernando Vargas and Ricardo Mayorga perfectly exemplified that even losers can be winners.

In the semi-main event big hitting Cintron was looking to add Feliciano to his growing list of scalps in early stoppages. Within the first minute a right hand bounced off Feliciano's head and echoed in the arena, but the Las Vegas fighter was still standing and still moving forward.

Feliciano had the crowd at Cintron's first hello.

Cintron was not amused.

“I hurt my hand the first time I hit him,” said Cintron afterwards.

For the remainder of the fight Feliciano followed instructions and pre-fight plans to stick his head into Cintron's chest and force a toe-to-toe battle with no survivors. It was a gritty maneuver and often resulted in resounding shots that had the crowd gasping and putting their hands to their faces. But Feliciano never wavered.

“Everybody underestimates me,” said Feliciano, whose electric personality and fighting style could be likened to the fictional “Rocky” movie character.

Not Cintron.

Before the fight the square-shouldered pulverizer had predicted a slugfest after watching films of Feliciano's previous fights. He was ready and armed.

“I've watched him before. He's a very hungry fighter and a very dangerous fighter,” Cintron said days before their actual encounter.

For numerous rounds Feliciano moved forward like a rumbling Sherman Tank withstanding the constant shelling from Cintron's quick and precise blows. When a big punch would land on

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Feliciano, he would absorb it like a pillar of marble.

Feliciano won over the crowd in the first round with his refusal to back away and his ability to withstand ringing shots from the power-pumping blows of Cintron. Each round Feliciano seemed to get stronger and more determined as he rained blows on the champion and occasionally was hit with return fire.

Hollywood's Sly Stallone could be seen shouting encouragement to Feliciano as he walked through punches that few others could. Often reality exceeds fiction and this was one of those premium moments.

"I always have wars," said Feliciano before the fight. "I don't like to get bored."

Finally, in the 10th round, Cintron connected blows from every angle that snapped Feliciano's head backwards and forced him on his heels. After several blows landed referee Jon Schorle stopped the fight though the Las Vegas brawler never was dropped.

Feliciano looked at the referee with eyes of shock.

"I felt the referee stopped the fight too early," Feliciano said after the fight. "I was never hurt, but Cintron does punch hard."

Cintron's hand was raised for his ability to force a stoppage by the referee. But he was mindful of congratulating Feliciano on his performance.

When the ring announcer called Feliciano's name the crowd roared its approval. They recognized the fighter's heart and soul and willingness to fight through hellfire to grab the welterweight title. Though he was announced the loser, he smiled as the crowd clapped and cheered for him.

Then came the main event.

Vargas was seeking to go out a winner in his last pro fight and Ricardo Mayorga was intent in proving he still has more to go. No title was at stake but sometimes it really doesn't matter when you have two warriors with intense pride.

The two former world champions had already erupted into blows during the initial press conference in August and Vargas's fans wanted retribution.

From the first round Mayorga let the fans know that he was far from being a pawn for a Vargas victory party. A flurry of blows caused a flash knockdown of Vargas and from then on the two warred for 12 rounds.

Though most of the 10,000 fans cheered in support of the Oxnard fighter, Mayorga also had his followers including legendary champion Robert "Hands of Stone" Duran who shouted instructions and encouragement.

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When the fight ended all the built up anger and fury dissipated as the winner Mayorga humbly walked up to Vargas to beg for forgiveness for his previous mischievousness and taunts. Though he captured the victory, the Nicaraguan boxer who cursed and belittles opponents openly sought forgiveness for his acts.

Vargas hesitated but accepted the apology. It's one of the reasons he has so many fans. He's always credited opponents who beat him in the ring and refuses to denigrate even his enemy's performances. It's one of the traits his fans greatly admire.

"I'm not going to take anything away from Mayorga," said Vargas.

After the fight, Mayorga proved again that his bravado and insults are mainly a way of promoting a fight.

"Part of his (Mayorga's) persona is to sell tickets," said Shelly Finkel who co-manages Vargas. "He's a great salesman and a pretty class act."

Those words are shocking to many fans who remember Mayorga attacking not only Vargas's manhood, but also Oscar De La Hoya, Vernon Forrest and others. But after the fight, all was forgiven.

For the fans watching in person and via television, there were no losers.

"We had a night when we (boxing) looked very, very good," said Kathy Duva, president of Main Events. She also added that the preliminary figures showed that more than 300,000 pay-per-view buys were predicted. More than the total accumulated for Miguel Cotto's showdown with Shane Mosley.

In the end, Vargas was very thankful to the fans that witnessed his last fight and supported him throughout the years through winning and losing.

"I get on my knees and thank God everyday for my fans," said Vargas on Saturday.

It was a night of entertainment where even the losers looked like winners.