HIGHLAND, CA.-Lightweight sensation John Molina took another jump up the quality ladder and former featherweight contender Rhonda Luna returned to the boxing wars and both won on Thursday.

At the San Manuel Casino, a crowd of more than 1,000 saw Molina of Covina, California stop Tijuana's Fernando Lizarraga (16-6-1, 12 KOs) on cuts in the main event promoted by Roy Englebrecht Events.

"I know I started slow," said Molina, who captured the San Manuel lightweight title belt. "I saw that he had 12 knockouts so I took my time."

Lizarraga fired awkward looking punches from weird angles, especially a loopy overhand right. The Tijuana fighter was smaller in height than Molina but seemed to have extreme self-confidence in his ability to trade.

"He caught me with a few," said Molina. "After that, I knew I could take his shots."

A few times Molina landed some laser right hands but Lizarraga also showed a good chin and instead of moving away, planted his feet and fired off a few menacing looking punches that did not connect.

The fourth round proved pivotal in the fight as Molina shortened his punches and fought inside. As both fighters exchanged liberally it was apparent that Molina's tight uppercuts and counter rights were catching Lizarraga. A cut over the Mexican's right eye developed as the round ended. A perfect right counter wobbled Lizarraga but Molina's attempt to load up on punches left openings for the Mexican to counter.

"The guy was cagey," said Ben Lira, who trains Molina. "He could take a good punch. He (Molina) was going to beat him through wear and tear."

In the fifth round, short and precise uppercuts opened up another cut on Lizarraga who had no answer for the powerful blows that snapped his head back and nearly toppled him a few times. When the bell ended the round, another cut had formed on the other eye.

Referee Pat Russell stopped the fight due to the severity of the cuts over Lizarraga's two eyes for a technical knockout victory at the end of the fifth round.

"He (Lizarraga) was probably the best opponent I've faced," said Molina. "He was wilting at the end."

**Luna**

Rhonda Luna (13-1) returned to the ring after nearly two years and needed a last round knockdown of Peru's Kina Malpartida (8-3) to win a split decision in a six round lightweight tussle. Judges Tony Crebs scored it 59-55 for Malpartida but judges Alex Rochin and Fritz Werner scored it 57-56 for Luna.

"You take that much time off of course it's going to affect any fighter," said Luna.

Luna and Malpartida started slowly as both fighter's styles were not agreeable. Several right hands by Luna probably won her the first round as the extremely tall Peruvian fighter needed to gauze her jab.

For the next three rounds Malpartida began to find a mark for her long jab and began peppering Luna consistently. At times a right hand to the body or head would land for Luna, but Malpartida began scoring heavily with the jabs and occasional right hands.

Suddenly, Luna seemed to find her footwork and distance in the fifth round. Though neither fighter landed much, it was body work by the Rowland Heights fighter that could have squeezed a point from the judges.

The last round seemed to spark both fighters but it was Luna who landed an overhand right hand to drop Malpartida in the corner. She beat the count but the damage was done. Luna forged ahead with punches from all angles but the tall Peruvian managed to evade too many big blows. It was the sixth round that proved the difference in the fight.

"I knew she was that kind of fighter," said Luna about Malpartida's ability to stick and move. "I give her all the respect."

**Other bouts**

Riverside's Jose Reynoso (10-2) used accuracy to win a split decision over Barstow's Brian Gordon (4-2) in a six round welterweight contest 57-56 twice 55-58.

San Bernardino's Artemio Reyes Jr. (2-1, 2 KOs) was deducted a point for a low blow in the second round and wasted no time in getting it back. A counter right hand dropped Palmdale's David Luna (2-5) who was ruled unable to continue by referee Jose Cobian at 2:36 of the second round of the junior welterweight but.

Carson's Richard Ellis (2-1) knocked down Highland's Luis Cervantes (0-1) twice in the first three rounds of a junior lightweight bout. Then, an overhand right hand dropped Cervantes for good at 31 seconds of the fourth round for a knockout. Referee Pat Russell stopped the fight.

Las Vegas super middleweight Herman Scott (2-0) knocked down Cathedral City's Chris Perez (0-1) three times but the fight went the four round distance. All three judges scored it 40-33 for Scott.