ATLANTIC CITY --- Chalk up another one for The Punisher.

Pierre (The Punisher) Benoist, that is.

Saturday night's fight was less than three minutes old when Paul Williams discovered that 12 rounds with Sergio Martinez was not going to be the walk in the park many had expected, but someone forgot to pass the information along to Benoist. Operating on what must presumably have been advance intelligence, the ringside judge returned a 119-110 scorecard that not only misrepresented what had taken place before his eyes, but was at significant variance with both of his colleagues.

For the record, Williams captured a majority decision over Martinez in an intriguing and at times spectacular fight at Boardwalk Hall to extend his professional record to 37-1, but for most of the evening he did not much at all look like a candidate for anybody's pound-for-pound list, with the possible exception of Pierre Benoist's.

Only in the opening minute did things look as if they were going to go according to plan: Wielding his right-handed jab like a rapier, Williams drove Martinez into a neutral corner, and then dropped him with a left -- although replays would later suggest that the knockdown punch actually caught Martinez high on the scapula, and hence could conceivably not have been a knockdown at all.

Whether it was or it wasn't, Martinez at the very least evened the ledger when, just before the bell ended the first, he floored Williams with a hard right hook. This essentially set the tone for the balance of the evening: Williams was more mobile, more active, and landed marginally more punches. (299-254, according to CompuBox.)

Martinez, on the other hand, landed by far the harder punches, many of them delivered in the form of that same right hook with which he tormented Williams all night long. If Williams had a small edge in volume, Martinez had a big one in accuracy, connecting at a 43% rate to Williams 28%.

"He is supposed to be the most feared man in boxing?" shrugged "Marvavilla" after the fight. "I did not fear him at all."

That is almost certainly true. Suffice it to say that no one, including Carlos Quintana, the one guy who beat him, has ever treated Williams this way -- with what, on this night, anyway, bordered on disdain.

Martinez (44-2-2), had stepped into the breach six weeks earlier after Kelly Pavlik had pulled out of what had originally been intended as a middleweight title defense. The 34 year-old Argentine, who has lived in Spain for the last seven years, even offered to bring a title of his

own, but Williams, who had been training for a 160-pound bout, wasn't interested.

(Martinez had won the WBC's interim 154-pound title by beating Alex Bunema last year, and then retained it in February after battling to a draw with Kermit Cintron. His championship was subsequently promoted to the full monty when Vernon Forrest was unable to meet his obligation to consolidate the WBC versions.)

A son of the south who has done most of his fighting on the Left Coast, Williams (38-1) had burst into the national consciousness two years ago when he defeated Antonio Margarito to win the WBO welterweight title. In his first defense he suffered a shock loss to Quintana, but redeemed it in a rematch by scoring a first-round knockout.

Williams' strategy, he would say later, was "to keep making him fight and making him feel uncomfortable," though it was unclear that he truly succeeded in either. Although Martinez did appear weary before the fight was one-third over, he battled on throughout the evening.

"I know he's a good boxer, but I was never hurt," insisted Martinez. The Argentine's right cheekbone was slightly discolored for much of the night, but Williams incurred even more damage. A cut had sprouted above his left eye even before a clash of heads late in the third opened another. (Williams was taken to a local hospital to have the cuts attended to, and skipped the post-fight press conference.)

The appreciative crowd loudly applauded both fighters at the bout's conclusion. Things didn't get ugly until they announced the scores.

For the record, The Sweet Science-GK had Williams in front 115-113, the same total as judge Lynn Carter. It was a close fight, and we'd have had absolutely no problem with the same score in the other direction. Benoist's version, on the other hand, was so preposterous that he had to make a quick exit from the ring and take refuge behind the commission table -- whether from the fans or from Martinez' promoter Lou DiBella remains unlearned.

"I thought my guy won by a point or two, and I could have lived with a close decision," said DiBella, "But when I heard that 119-110 score I wanted to hit the effing guy."

Put it this way: The third judge, Julie Lederman, who had it even at 114-114, came a lot closer to being on the money than did Benoist. On the other hand, his card was so laughable that he could in the end serve DiBella's purpose as this fight's Gale Van Hoy, should it be determined that it was rotten enough to warrant a rematch.

Martinez, in any case, said he'd welcome one.

"A rematch?" said Williams before leaving for the emergency room. "Hey, if HBO wants it, I'm all in."

The paying customers and the HBO audience got an unanticipated bonus from a co-feature that turned into a Pier Six brawl. It was hard to escape the feeling that Cristobal Arreola may have

been in a few of these before, and while In the end it was a gritty Brian Minto who went out on his shield, it was not without dishing out all his more accomplished street-fighting adversary could handle over the first three rounds.

Spotting Arreola 45 pounds, an undaunted Minto was a gutsy aggressor through those early rounds, even though his his discolored left cheek had swollen to the size and approximate hue of a large eggplant. Minto was pressed forward, winging combinations, body shots, and right-hand leads that kept Arreola ducking, but there was the overwhelming sense that danger was never far away, as Arreola's lethally-aimed counter shots repeatedly whistled past his head.

It was the fourth round before Arreola finally connected, and when he did it was with a big right hand that dropped the former Slippery Rock linebacker in his tracks. (Asked if he'd ever been hurt, Arreola replied in the affirmative: "Yeah," he said, "I hurt my hand on Minto's head.")

Although clearly hurt, Minto got up, seemingly more determined than ever, and in the exchange that followed Arreola was cut across the bridge of his nose. Alas for Minto, this occurred at roughly the time his hematoma burst. Although he appeared to wing Arreola with an overhand right thrown almost blindly Arreola stepped inside, set him up with a left, and then landed a crunching right that sent Minto down again. Although he was able to arise, Eddie Cotton waved it off at 2:40 of the round.

CompuBox stats revealed that Arreola had not only outjabbed Minto 98-63 but had landed a whopping 34 of 46 power shots in the less than three minutes the fourth round lasted.

"It was a great fight, and my hat's off to Minto," said Arreola, who improved to 28-1 with the win. (Perhaps as significantly, the aggregate record of his last dozen opponents, has been 291-42-9.) Having dominated -- eventually -- a tough and rugged opponent in his first trip back since being stopped by Vitali Klitschko, Arreola seemed philosophical about that loss.

"I lost to Klitschko, but I showed I'm still a legitimate contender," said Arreola. "Besides, who's better than Vitali?"

The 34 year-old Minto's record dropped to 34-3 with the loss, but he left Boardwalk Hall buoyed by a legion of new fans.

Former welterweight champion Carlos Quintana, who authored Williams' only professional loss, bounced back from a second-round knockdown to stop the always-game Jesse Feliciano via a third-round TKO.

"[Feliciano] is a hard puncher, and he caught me a little off balance," Quintana recalled the embarrassing trip to the canvas. Then, less than a minute into the third, a solid left hand from the southpaw Quintana ripped open a gash along Feliciano's right eyelid. Referee Randy Neumann halted action and summoned the ringside physician, Dr. Marc Shaber, who unhesitatingly recommended that the bout be stopped.

"It was a deep cut, and about an inch and a half long," explained Shaber.

The ending came at 0:59 of the round. Quintana improved to 27-2 (the losses were to Miguel Cotto and Williams in the rematch), while Feliciano's record dropped to 15-8-3.

In what otherwise hasn't been a great week for guys named Tiger, Washington heavyweight Tony (The Tiger) Thompson followed eight rounds of hibernation by stirring just enough to stop Chazz Witherspoon at 2:13 of the ninth in their scheduled 10-rounder.

Thompson, TKO'd by Wladimir Klitschko in a Hamburg title fight last year, was the larger and stronger of the two, but seemed unable to put together two sustained minutes, much less two rounds. He and Witherspoon had battled on essentially even terms through the penultimate round, when Thompson rocked the erstwhile Mensa Mauler with a right hook followed by a straight left that knocked him sideways. Benji Esteves, ruling that only the ropes had kept Witherspoon up, administered a count before turning Thompson loose again, but when four punches in succession brought no response, the referee quickly moved to rescue Witherspoon.

Thompson is 33-2 after his latest win, while Witherspoon, whose only previous blemish had been a DQ at the hands of Arreola, dropped to 26-2.

Jorge Diaz, the unbeaten New Brunswick (NJ) featherweight handled by longtime Arturo Gatti manager Pat Lynch, went to 11-0 with a first-round knockout of Puerto Rican Luis Paneto (5-7-2). Paneto went down from a short right to the chin and took Eddie Cotton's count in a neutral corner, stumbling to his feet just a millisecond (Oh, darn!) too late.

The opening act of the six-bout card saw Jeremiah Wiggins (7-0-1) of Newport News, Va. score a unanimous decision over Manuel Guzman (6-9-2) of Lancaster, Pa. There were no official knockdowns, though Guzman caught a breather from Esteves when he spit out his mouthpiece in the final round. Frank Cappuccino had Wiggins by a shutout 60-54, while Debra Barnes had it 59-55 and Hal Bennett 58-56.

* ** *

AT BOARDWALK HALL
ATLANTIC CITY, N.J.
December 5, 2009
MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Paul Williams, 157, Augusta, Ga. dec. Sergio Gabriel Martinez, 159, Buenos Aires, Argentina (12)
HEAVYWEIGHTS: Cristobal Arreola, 263, Riverside, Calif. TKO'd Brian Minto, 218, Butler, Penn. (4)
Tony Thompson, 250, Washington, D.C TKO'd Chazz Witherspoon, 234, Paulsboro, N.J. (9)
JUNIIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Carlos Quintana, 153 1/2, Moca, Puerto Rico TKO'd Jesse Feliciano, 152 1/2, Las Vegas, Nev. (3)
Jeremiah Wiggins, 151 1/2, Newport News, Va. dec. Manuel Guzman, 150, Lancaster, Pa.
FEATHERWEIGHTS: Jorge Diaz, 123 1/2, New Brunswick, NJ KO'd Luis Angel Paneto, 121 1/2, Caguas, Puerto Rico (1)