Written by Michael Woods
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Straight up, I was prepared to take one for TSS U, make a contribution to Top Rank and Time Warner. I didn't figure it was going to be the best $40 I ever spent, figuring Miguel Espino was going to play the pinata to Kelly Pavlik at the Beeghly Center in Youngstown, Ohio on Saturday night's Pay Per View telecast. Well, my apologies to Top Rank for my cynicism, and Espino, for underestimating the stones on the challenger from California. Lest you get too rambunctious, let me cut to the chase and inform you that Pavlik beat Espino, via stoppage in the fifth round after blasting him with an assembly line of right uppercuts. But Espino, with a noticeable lack of power and size, made the Youngstowner work quite a bit harder than most anyone figured he would.

Espino's trainer John Bray threw in the towel in the fifth, at the 1:44 mark, after his guy went down twice in the fourth and once again in the fifth.

Pavlik (35-1), for a guy who was on the shelf with a staph infection on his left hand, looked sharp and energized, though it must be acknowledged that Espino (20-2-1) is couple of grades below Bernard Hopkins, a Pavlik conqueror, and Paul Williams, who was supposed to meet the Ohioan before his hand forced him to reshuffle his deck.

Pavlik (6-2 1/2; age 27; 160 pounds) put his WBO and WBC middleweight belts up for grabs against Espino (listed at 5-11; age 29; 159 pounds).

In the first, Espino tossed as Pavlik went to touch gloves, so he set a tone from the get go. The challenger looked to do his work inside, and to the body. Pavlik got himself room, trying to use his height and reach edge. He ripped rights to the body and lefts as well in a spirited, fan friendly first. Espino threw after the bell and earned himself a hard and inappropriate shove from ref Steve Smoger. The ref took a point from Espino for that move. The Contender alum smiled as he chatted with trainer John Bray post-round. In the second, it was more toe to toe action. Smoger warned Espino for going low. There was six rounds worth of action in these first two frames. In the third, Pavlik kept on electing to throw power punches, instead of setting things up with his jab and working from the outside. Good for the fans, maybe not good strategy. A right uppercut put Espino on a knee for a nine count in the fourth. The underdog went down again, with a minute remaining, off two more right uppercuts. He was on his feet at nine again. He just barely made it to the bell. Pavlik finally realized that Espino leaned forward, head down, a perfect target for an uppercut.

In the fifth, Espino came out looking to bang. But Pavlik was too large, and too busy, and down he went again, with 1:30 left. Trainer Bray walked up the stairs and signaled to Smoger that his kid was done.

After, Pavlik said, "Paul Williams, you're not the most feared fighter, you got a guy who's standing right here in Youngstown that wants you." The middleweight admitted he was rusty, but was happy he shed rust and that his hand fell up. Espino chatted with Al Bernstein after. He

thanked the fans and Pavlik for being hospitable. He said he was mad at himself that he decided to rumble after he didn't think Pavlik's power was all that. Bernstein read my mind, and asked him if he might consider dropping down a class. No, he said, his body shuts down.

In the PPV opener, the Freddie Roach-trained Vanes Martirosyan (from CA; age 23; 2004 Olympian; 25-0, with 16 KOs coming in) took on Willie Lee (from New Orleans; from age 29; 17-5 with 11 KOs; coming in) in a junior middleweight tangle. The NABF and NABO belts were on the line. The lefty Lee had trouble slipping Vanes from the start. A one-two staggered Lee two minutes in. He was a little wild looking to finish Lee, something Freddie will be looking to correct in the gym. Vanes sent Lee to the mat in the third, from a short right. Lee was up at eight but not for long. Vanes put him on his butt, and the ref saw enough. The ref screwed up, as he called for a break with the two tangled up, but didn't force Vanes to back off. He stepped right in on Lee, and blasted away, finishing off the Lousianian. The time of the ending was 2:13 of the third.

Featherweights (22-12 entering; from Colombia) Yogli Herrera and Miguel Angel Garcia (18-0 coming in) of California squared off. The favorite took care of business, and stopped Herrera in the third. A right put the loser on the mat, and he didn't beat the count. Kid's got heavy hands. He scored a knockdown off a left hook as well. Time was 2:19. It was his 16th stoppage.

Russian Matt Korobov (26; now 9-0 with 7 KOs) notched a win. The middleweight prospect downed Ken Dunham of NC, and the lefty showed gave his fellow southy hell in the second. He was trained by Dan Birmingham and is now overseen by Kenny Adams. Dunham was cut over his left eye, from a butt, not a result of Korobov's increased ferocity. He has upped his power and Dunham didn't benefit. Matt banged to the body, and scored a knockdown in the third. Another knockdown on a deflated Dunham (6-12) forced the ref to halt the tiff.

From Sonora, Mexico, Humberto Soto (age 29; from Mexico; 49-7-2 entering; ex featherweight and super feather champ) met Jesus "El Matador" Chavez (age 37; 44-6 coming in; ex super feather and lightweight champ; from Mexico) in a lightweight-plus tussle. Soto scored a knockdown less than a minute in on a cold Chavez. It was really a flash knockdown and Chavez bounced back to get some good stuff done. He tried to back Soto up, trap him against the ropes. He clanged to the body as Soto answered with some solid counters. His uppercuts hit home in the second. There didn't look to be an age differential, as Chavez impressed with his vigor. Chavez spun Soto and shoved him threw the ropes, onto the photographers in round five, and had a point deducted. In the sixth, Chavez dinged him low, a left hook, and Soto rolled around in agony. He got some extra time and got back to work. This was a full-on war by this time. Soto mostly worked off the ropes, and let Chavez do his ruffian thing. Chavez was a bit wobbly in the tenth, but he kept on steaming forward to the last bell. The judges handed in their cards, which read 100-87 across the board. I think Chavez deserved better, merely for his aggressiveness.

In Mexico, Panamanian Nehomar Cermeno (age 30; 19-0) met Mexican lefty Alejandro Valdez in a bantamweight bout. Valdez went down late in the 11th, and the ref halted the match. The victor Cermeno was told before the 11th that the 12th and final round was up next, and he looked to close the show. A right hand was the capper. The end time was 2:40. Cermeno came

in with back to back wins against Cristian Mijares.

SPEEDBAG Ref Jimmy Villers collapsed, apparently from a heart attack, at Beeghly and was taken to the hospital. The ref is the brother in law of Jack Loew, Pavlik's trainer. He was in stable condition and alert at a local hospital.