In what was, in my opinion, a somewhat ordinary fight nine days ago in Las Vegas, one thing clearly stuck out in my mind.

It was the sixth round. And Johnny Tapia, who was obviously behind on the scorecards, was giving the appearance of being very aggressive, and effective in doing so, as he had his opponent, Marco Antonio Barrera, covering up against the ropes.

The crowd, which was decidedly in the Tapia camp, had worked itself up to a fever pitch, as Tapia threw what seemed to be more punches than he had in all previous rounds combined.

I sat there watching his round, on the phone with a matchmaker friend of mine. And we were in agreement on one thing in particular - that even though Tapia was doing a great job of playing to the crowd, demonstrating all of that "fighting heart" that had been hyped so well in the pre-fight buildup, in reality he wasn't scoring a whole lot of points.

After an uneventful first 45 seconds, Tapia forced Barrera back toward the ropes, with what was admittedly a clean-landing right hand to the body. But a subsequent flurry produced very little, and Barrera came away from the ropes with a combination of his own, which included a left hook to the body, a straight right hand, and a right uppercut, all of which seemed to go unnoticed, except by HBO's Larry Merchant.

Another flurry from Tapia at the 1:15 mark produced several rather gratuitous body shots, and one good solid scoring blow - a right uppercut that was almost immediately countered by a left hook by Barrera. But most of Tapia's punches either landed on Barrera's elbows or were picked off by his gloves.

Shortly after that, Tapia actually knocked himself down with a right hand that grazed Barrera's left shoulder. And he later phonied up the claim of a low blow - a move that may or may not have been designed to sway a judge or two, not to mention the referee.

Tapia landed one more punch that could considered substantial in the round - another right uppercut which Barrera actually rolled with. And with about 15 seconds left, Tapia came forward, throwing bombs and missing, while Barrera countered with some more good shots that landed cleanly.

Barrera also connected with jabs. Several hard ones, in fact. Don't they count? They certainly should, considering that it was the jab that had Tapia completely under control up to that point.

One thing characteristic of this round - and in fact the entire fight - was that with every punch Tapia threw, whether it was picked off or not, the crowd reacted. Solid shots landed by Barrera brought little or no reaction, either from the crowd or from HBO announcers Jim

Lampley and George Foreman.

My friend and I concurred that, in point of fact, not only did Tapia NOT get the better of Barrera in the round, it was actually a pretty good round for Barrera - one of his best of the fight.

As it turned out, though, only Chuck Giampa scored the round for Barrera. Two of the three Nevada judges - Bill Graham and Dave Moretti - gave it to Tapia.

And sure enough, when Jim Lampley asked him, Harold Lederman, who keeps a scorecard for HBO, had given the sixth round to Tapia as well.

"In Round 6, for two minutes, Johnny Tapia used his tremendous experience and didn't let Barrera get off the ropes," said Lederman. "No matter what Marco did, he couldn't get off, and Johnny Tapia beat him up on the ropes."

But had he?

To me, this illustrated a point that was detailed, to an extent, in Chapter 67 of this series - not to disparage anyone, but sometimes I'm not sure if the judges - and this includes Lederman - are scoring based on what they are seeing, or on other factors entirely.

To put it as gently as possible, there are instances where something audible can most definitely affect that which is visual. In this case, perhaps the background noise created an "optical illusion".

Interestingly enough, according to the statistics kept by Compubox, in the sixth round, Barrera landed 34 of 56 punches for a 60% accuracy mark, by far his best in the fight. And the 34 blows landed were his most with the exception of the first round and the last round. He was 23-for-30 in the "power punches" category, for an astounding 76%. By contrast, Tapia was just 41% overall in the sixth round (22 for 53), with less power punches landed (21). He was recorded to have landed just ONE jab in the entire round.

Tapia's 22 scoring punches indeed turned out to be the most he chalked up in the fight. Certainly it can be argued that the sixth was his best round of the evening.

Sentimental favorite or not, though, it doesn't provide enough reason to GIVE Tapia that round. Barrera still won it.

I'm not saying it was so obvious, so blatant. You had to watch it closely. It was subtle. But I don't think it's too much to ask that professional boxing judges be able to notice the subtleties. Otherwise, why not just get any three people off the street to judge a fight, kind of like they select a jury?

Here's a scary thought - what if Tapia had summoned up the resolve to do the posturing, exhibit the "aggressiveness", or to paraphrase the way Larry Merchant accurately

described it, had been able to "sell" that he was fighting, over the course of all twelve rounds of this bout, with the crowd more and more solidly behind him as events proceeded? Would we have seen more fights scored like the sixth round was? Could he have actually come out of that fight "stealing" a decision win?

How many times, I wonder, does this happen in club fights across the country, when you have a "hometown" fighter, a "hometown" crowd, and "hometown" judges involved?

More from the Scary Thoughts Department - Chuck Giampa, who scored the round correctly, would have been classified as the "odd man out" in Greg Sirb's system for evaluating officials, in which, for some reason, the judges who vote with the majority the most are considered the most efficient.

We debunked that philosophy in Chapter 67 as well. But if Giampa stepped away from the consensus enough - if he, in fact, exercised different judgment than his colleagues on enough rounds like the sixth round of Barrera-Tapia (oddly, he had the fight CLOSER than the other two in the end, giving Barrera a four-point decision), he actually would DISQUALIFY himself from getting plum assignments, at least outside Nevada, if the ABC were ever to take control of this process and put someone like Sirb in charge of handing out judging duties for title fights.

And another thought crossed my mind - perhaps a little misplaced, but look - Barrera is from Mexico. Tapia is from the United States. All three judges and the referee were from the U.S. HBO, and some of the press, made an issue out of the fact that the "evil" sanctioning bodies were left out of this process. But at least if there were one of the alphabet groups present, someone (if they were following their rules) would have forced the issue of neutrality in officiating, and maybe -although I'm not promising anything - those officials wouldn't have been swayed by the crowd to any great extent.

And you may have had the accurate scoring of the sixth round - a round which, if Tapia had been able to put together more of an effective effort for the other eleven rounds - could have made the difference in the fight.

As it stands, he didn't make it close, and the round DIDN'T make a difference. But next time.....?

Would that be a good thing for boxing?

I'd like to, just once, try a little experiment - put all the judges in a room during a fight, each in his or her own little cubicle - and have them watch the fight on television, all from the same angle, with the sound turned completely off - that means NO hyperbole from announcers, and NO crowd noise.

I'd be curious what kind of verdict they'd have come up with for that sixth round, and for a lot of other rounds.

Can we do it, just once?

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