Written by Ron Borges
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In his biggest moments Zab Judah was never quite good enough.

There's no shame in that. The shame comes from how he always reacted to that simple fact.

That was the case again Saturday night against young lion Amir Khan, who overwhelmed the 33-year-old Judah, stopping him in five one-sided rounds to retain the WBA light welterweight title.

When it was over Judah did what he had done in the past when things got really tough – he opted out. He lay on his hands and knees clutching his private parts with his head on the floor as his mouth and nose leaked his own blood until referee Vic Drakulich said, "It's over.'' The instant he did Judah jumped up with a pained expression on his face and cried foul.

Not as loudly as he has after past mental meltdowns. Not by throwing a tantrum but by doing something that has become his stock and trade in such situations. He created in his mind an

alternate reality that he thinks gets him off the hook.

The fact of the matter is Judah was hit on the belt line by a Khan uppercut, a punch that may have been borderline low but was not really below the accepted boxing version of the DMZ. Surely it was not pleasant but it was not as debilitating as Judah tried to make it appear.

Tiring badly and unraveling mentally because of the unexpected speed and punching power of Khan, Judah went to his knees and waited. When he got what he wanted – which was a safe harbor from which he could make excuses without having to fight over them – he popped up pain-free enough to make a speech. It was, of course, too late to save his title challenge, but that was the idea, now wasn't it?

There is no shame in being not quite good enough to compete successfully at the highest level. Not everyone can be the best and Judah was certainly better than a lot of people during his 48-fight career. But not quite good enough has been Judah's fate dating back to when Kostya Tszyu knocked him loopy in two rounds. He protested wildly after he woke up.

It was his fate after Floyd Mayweather boxed him silly. He protested so noisily he got himself suspended and nearly started a riot.
It was his fate against Miguel Cotto and Joshua Clottey and Carlos Baldomir and Cory Spinks (although he avenged that loss in a rematch) and now Khan too.
It is Zab Judah's fate to have been born with more talent than he knows what to do with. He is good and has been for a long time but you can go all the way back to the U.S. Olympic team he didn't make when he was one of America's shining amateur stars and you find the same pattern. When the lights are the brightest Judah melts.

Saturday was different only in that Khan was younger, faster and stronger. Judah was no longer a rising star but a fading one who had not one answer to what Khan was doing to him or what Khan's trainer, Freddie Roach, had plotted as a way to defeat him.

He was beaten from the opening bell, a fact it seemed his trainer, Pernell Whitaker, sensed after the first round. When Judah came back to the corner, Whitaker was reprimanding him for not fighting. It was a trend that continued for five rounds in which Judah landed only 20 punches. It lasted until he found a way out.

"All the fans around the world that watched the fight could see it was clearly a low blow,'' Judah claimed. "I thought (Drakulich) was giving me time to get myself together. When he said 'Over!' I thought he was giving me an eight-count.''

Sorry, Zab, you know that's not how it works. Once he heard the number "nine'' he knew he was being counted out. More importantly, after 48 professional fights he knew you don't lie on the floor waiting for the referee to pick you up. You get up and then see what the situation is.
If you want to keep fighting you take no chances with a referee coming to the end of his count. Judah claimed he thought he was getting an eight count. What did he think "nine'' meant?

Judah could have gotten up and protested mightily that he'd been struck below the DMZ. He

hadn't but he could have made his case and bought some precious time. It wouldn't have changed the outcome but it might have changed the way he came off.

But for all his charm Judah has always been an excuse maker when things go bad. It's never his fault and it's never to the other guy's credit. There's always something to complain about.

"In the past when something like this happened, I'd overreact, but this time I'll leave it up to the fans around the world and the officials to take the right decisions,'' Judah said. "Zab Judah's still here.''

The official already made the right decision. He counted him out while he lay on his hands and knees waiting for someone to bail him out.

As for still being here, he may still be around but his days as a legitimate title contender are over. He's a guy you beat on the way up now or a guy who exposes the fraudulent claims of younger men. He's a trial horse with a good resume, a guy who wasn't ever quite as good as he thought he was but good enough to win some titles and make some money.

The sad part is he never lacked for talent. He was blessed with tremendous speed and reflexes and reasonable power for a man his size. What he lacked was something on the inside, the mental toughness not to take the out when it was presented to him.

The mental toughness to stand in there and find a way when things looked bad, as at some point they do for every fighter who ever lived. Mental strength is a gift too and that is something he was neither blessed with nor could find a way to develop.

Sad really but the way it ended for Zab Judah Saturday night was the way it had to end – with a phony claim and another excuse.

Comment on this article

Matthew says:

Good piece. Once again, Zab Judah comes up short in a big fight. He has all the talent in the world, but not the intangibles that make a great fighter. To me, the punch looked a little low, but didn't appear as debilitating as other low blows I've witnessed (see Holmes-Cooney). It also looked to me like Khan got away with holding and hitting, as his left glove was clearly around Judah's neck, but nobody else seems to have mentioned that. In any case, low blow or not, a 48 fight veteran should know firstly, that Nevada doesn't have a standing eight count (key word being standing, Judah wasn't), and secondly, that referees do not issue a count if a punch is ruled low. Like Borges said, if Judah really thought the punch was low, he should have gotten up and tried to plead his case. In the end, we are once again left with excuses, though at least he didn't go after Drakulich the way he did Jay Nady.

Radam G says:

Just a note, Matthew. No Khan was not holding and hitting. And besides, if you're clinching around the neck with one hand, you may hit with the free hand. The problem with the game, is that a lot dumb-a$$ referees have taking away the boxing tool and power of clinching. Clinching is one of the sweet sciences of the old game and old school. Holla!

DaveB says:

I think Sweet Pea did a good job as a trainer. I will be interested in seeing how he does with a "real fighter". I think he has a real future.

Real Talk says:

Nice piece Borges, Amen Radam G. The Real Talk award will be shared between the two of you for this month. Dueces

the Roast says:

Zab let me down. Zab let us all down. I thought Khan would win a close back and forth battle. Maybe 8-4 or 7-5 in rounds. Khan won all the rounds and Zab took the easy way out. For shame Zab, for shame. I want Khan vs Ram Bradley. My early prediction is Khan by technical decision. Thats right. At some point the Ram will bust open Khan's eyebrow and we go to the scorecards.

Radam G says:

Hehehehehehehehe! The Roast is gettin' on his wildin.' Hehehehehehehe! Holla!

estetichzmonec says:

very nice - thanks

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