

The Most Dangerous Game

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 12 March 2012 09:18



Jack Dempsey would have approved of the work of both Salido and ref Ramirez on this night in Puerto Rico.

By stopping Juan Manuel Lopez in a sequel to their first thriller in April 2011, Orlando Salido gave Mexico yet another victory over national nemesis Puerto Rico. He did it in San Juan while 10,000 Puerto Rican fans surrounded his wife, and three judges were on schedule to rob him of a decision.

He did it after unhinging Lopez from his senses in the eighth round.

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Somewhere up there, Jack Dempsey dropped a harp and burst into applause. Dempsey correctly believed that punchers are made, not born. His theories were published way back in 1950 in a book that explained just how it was that he demolished 49 men and toppled a giant off the heavyweight throne. No mention was made of iron bolts or plaster of Paris and none was necessary; Dempsey's secrets were of the scientific, not the criminal type. Much of them were written in longhand on 384 pages when he was a half-starved journeyman in fleabag hotel rooms. With *Championship Boxing: Explosive Punching and Aggressive Defense*, Dempsey proved that he was serious about self-improvement long before he began attending tea parties with Hollywood dandies.

Real power —the kind that dents chins and topples giants— is a product of “fast-moving body weight.” Gravity, Dempsey theorized, not only gives motion to weight by causing it to fall, it increases its force. He came up with something called the “falling step” where a boxer becomes a puncher by using forward motion and gravity to increase the force of a blow in much the same way that small objects become lethal when dropped from a building.

Salido put these theories into practice on Saturday night. I know not whether Dempsey's book was translated into Spanish and found its way into his training camp, but I know of what I see and I saw Dempsey's theories applied in blazing color.

“The hook is the perfect whirling punch,” said Dempsey, “it's pure.” He distinguished shovel hooks (where the elbow is held tight to the body to shoot upwards in close) from the usual outside hooks. Salido did both. In fact, his left shovel hook was a potent counter against Lopez's jab while his outside hooks came from not only the left, but the right, which is unusual for an orthodox fighter. In fact, three right hooks were landed one after another in the second round and the last one was enough to convince Lopez to back off.

Dempsey backed off from Sam Langford. Like Dempsey, Langford had his own theories of pugilism though his were of the down-home variety. How to win? “Whatever that other man want to do, don't let him do it.” So, even as Salido used physics to increase the force of his body-head combinations, he confused ‘that other man’ with strange sights like counter-uppercuts and right hooks. Lopez wasn't allowed to do much of anything because his head was ringing.

Had Lopez recognized his true enemies through the fog, he might have cursed the memory of Dempsey and Langford. Instead he placed his faith in a more recent ring general and mirrored

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his style. But Floyd Mayweather couldn't help him. Mayweather weathers storms and looks for counter shots, but it's hard to weather a storm that whirls in from both sides and throws unexpected shots; and it's hard to counter a man whose torso is a helical spring. What's more, Lopez insulted Mayweather by being offensive instead of defensive when his back was on the ropes, and so demonstrated the vanity of students who try to amend tried-and-true theories of their betters.

Then came that check hook in the fifth round that dropped Salido and almost made a jerk out of Dempsey.

There was irony in it. Lopez only landed it because he momentarily forgot himself and began to think strategically, like a Hollywood dandy working the floor. Instead of meeting the rushing Salido like a blood-stained warrior, he stepped back and off the perimeter. As Salido's slashing hooks whizzed by, he countered with straight lines and moved. It was a short right hook that caught Salido blind; and things were suddenly looking up, including Salido.

Former welterweight king Felix Trinidad watched what had happened from ringside and tried to explain it to those around him. Finally, he began tapping the left side of his chin. It takes patience to explain to Boricuas how a man moving backwards can accomplish anything at all.

In rounds six and seven, his tormentor was whirling again and Lopez was spending perilous moments on the ropes. Mayweather's dirty tricks—an elbow to the face and a forearm on the back of the neck proved useless. Lopez was scurrying backwards with a glove pressing down on Salido's onrushing head but could hold him off no more than a pedestrian can hold off a pit bull. By round eight, Salido was feeling safe enough to get conventional. He began fighting the southpaw like the textbooks say he should, with lead rights.

One minute was left in the round when his punches unhinged Lopez from his senses.

Round nine, they say, is a candidate for "Round of the Year." That may be so, but Lopez won't be talking much about it to his grandchildren because he won't remember it. He wasn't there—he was floating above the ring on Cloud nine watching his automatic arms repeat combinations drilled into him at the Caguas Gym. While Salido was purposefully falling into his punches, Lopez was falling onto Salido and punching with no purpose whatsoever.

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The one-minute rest at the end of the ninth was not enough for Lopez to become whole again. It was just enough for his brain, jarred again in the opening seconds of the tenth, to send a message to his legs. The message said “collapse, because this guy’s pride is gonna kill us both.” But pride isn’t easily swallowed anywhere in Latin America and the only anatomy that matters in the end looks like two boxing gloves.

That’s why Lopez got up.

Referee Roberto Ramirez Sr. had to distinguish between that pride and the very real prospect of a ring tragedy. He had a momentous decision to make and only seconds to make it. Luckily, he understood his responsibilities. He deftly continued the standing-eight count even while side-stepping the stumbling Lopez. He turned a deaf ear to the roaring thousands in the Coliseum and peered deeply into the glazed eyes of a defeated fighter.

Then he stopped the fight.

Somewhere up there, Jack Dempsey dropped his harp and burst into applause again. Like Ramirez, Dempsey was the third man in the ring in over 250 professional bouts. Like Ramirez, he was accused of having an inappropriate gambling interest in the outcome of one of them. And despite his affinity for offense and his brutal past, he didn’t flinch when he stopped 48 contests that had become one-sided beatings.

Dempsey knew what Ramirez knows. No one enters the ring without first suppressing the instinct of self-preservation to some degree, and some are willing to reverse that instinct into something suicidal. The referee protects boxers from their own spirits and reminds us all that boxing is still a sport.

Count on this: Had Ramirez not understood his responsibilities on Saturday night, Salido-Lopez II would have degenerated into an attrition fight —the kind that ends on a stretcher. Roy Gillespie, Jimmy Doyle, Jackie Darthard, Sam Baroudi, Jody White, Duk Koo Kim, and Francisco “Paco” Rodriguez are only a few of the hundreds with spirits that soared so high they went up through the rafters and left loved ones behind to pick up the pieces.

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The good sense of Ramirez would have saved many of them.

You can bet on that.

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Money Jay says:

I'm still scratching my head at the judges scorecards at the time of the stoppage....2 had Lopez winning, and one had a draw??? Really?? That's the one thing a I hate about boxing, is the judges. If this fight would've gone the distance, and they gave it to Lopez, assuming Salido still dominated him for the rest of the fight, it would've been criminal...Good for Orlando, way to take the fight in his own hands!

ultimoshogun says:

I agree with Money Jay. This fight was on its way to being a robbery according to the score cards. IMO its time for boxing to follow MMA's lead and start using tv monitors to eliminate some of terrible decisions.

deepwater says:

hometown fighters always get the hometown dec. accept that. it exists

Radam G says:

Awesome copy. Nuffin' for me to spit. Holla!

ali says:

Highway robbery was about take place there needs to be a way for a fighter to get a fair shake when he's in the other guys hone town.

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brownsugar says:

Enjoyed the article, but when have you ever seen Floyd use his elbow as an impact weapon? Never. He uses his elbow the same way a mechanic uses a block of wood and a "C"clamp to hold a brake caliper in place while he goes to work on it.

Neal Cross says:

By stopping a litany of tepid assessments in March 2012, Springs Toledo gave the sport yet another victory over its nemesis, the lesser informed observer. He did it on The Sweet Science while thousands of boxing fans surrounded him, and various judges were on schedule to rob him of his incomparability.

He did it after unhinging the fight report from mediocrity in this very piece.

Somewhere up there, A.J. Liebling dropped a harp and burst into applause.