

HAUSER: Zab Judah Comes Up Short Again

Written by Thomas Hauser
Monday, 29 April 2013 08:40



On November 3, 2001, Zab Judah fought Kostya Tszyu in a much-anticipated 140-pound title-unification bout.

Judah had turned pro in 1996 as an 18-year-old phenom with sparkling amateur credentials. He was 27-and-0 in the pay ranks with six title-fight victories and ranked in the top ten on most pound-for-pound lists. Power, speed, boxing savvy; Zab had it all. Some experts likened him to

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Pernell Whitaker, only Judah had more power.

“If you come down to 140 pounds, I'll knock you out,” Zab told his friend, Mike Tyson.

Tszyu had some impressive victories on his ledger, but he'd been stopped by Vince Phillips. The assumption was that Judah would be too much for him.

A few fighters at Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn where Zab trained had a contrary view. Local boxers tend to support and believe in their own. But Judah was flawed, those fighters said. When he got hit hard in sparring, he spent the rest of the session on the run. Not just that one round, the entire session.

Sugar Ray Robinson was once asked what he liked least about boxing.

“Getting hit,” the greatest fighter of all time answered.

That said, fighters get hit. It's how they respond that separates legends from also-rans.

“Tszyu will hit Zab with something hard,” those fighters at Gleason's said. “And when that happens, the fight will turn.”

Judah dominated round one. Then, in round two, Kostya hit him with “something hard” and knocked Zab out.

In the eleven years since then, Judah's record has been 15-and-8 with one no contest. During that time, he has lost eight of thirteen title bouts and been a poster boy for unfulfilled potential. When people think of Zab, they're more likely to think of his defeats at the hands of Tszyu, Floyd Mayweather, Miguel Cotto, Carlos Baldomir, and Amir Khan than his victory over Junior

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Witter. He has signature losses, not signature triumphs.

Judah is no longer fighting for greatness. He's fighting for money. He's 35 years old, and boxing is the only job he has ever known.

"I wish things had happened a little different," Zab said last year. "But we can't change the past."

Zab's latest "last chance" to regain a lofty standing in the boxing community came on April 27th against Danny Garcia at Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

Garcia, a Philadelphia native, came into the bout with a 25-and-0 record and a trio of 140-pound belts. He also brought his father, Angel, who has graduated from provocateur to embarrassment.

Angel, who trains his son, has a penchant for making racist comments and engaging in other unsportsmanlike conduct. He shoots his mouth off, and Danny has to back it up.

The low point of the December 1, 2012, kick-off press conference for Garcia-Judah was an ugly pushing and shouting match that ensued when Angel told the assembled media, "Every time Zab has stepped up, he lost. I figure this will go four or five rounds because he's a four-round fighter."

Zab, as expected, took exception.

There were more pre-fight confrontations at various promotional events leading up to the final pre-fight press conference at Barclays Center on April 25th. Then things turned bizarre.

The press conference was scheduled for 1:00 PM and began with the undercard fighters.

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Contrary to the norm, no one from the Garcia or Judah camps was on the dais. Once the undercard fighters had their say, the dais was cleared and Danny Garcia came out with his father.

“I’m going to take Zab into deep water, drown him, and beat the s--t out of him,” Danny proclaimed.

Angel kept saying, “This is bigger than New York or Philly. This is about king of the east coast.”

That said everything one needs to know about today’s so-called “world” championship belts.

Why wasn’t Team Judah present?

Golden Boy (which was promoting the fight and had a vested interest in Danny winning) had made a decision in tandem with the Garcias to present the fighters to the media separately (Danny first) without consulting the Judahs.

After Danny and Angel finished with the media, there was a problem. Zab had left the premises. Twenty minutes later, following some frantic telephone calls, he returned and strode to the dais.

Zab was pissed. He’d been sitting in the basement when he was told that the press conference had started without him and that he wasn’t welcome to address the media until after the Garcias were done. That angered him sufficiently that he’d walked out of the building. Now he was back.

“This is crazy,” Zab declared. “Insane. I’ve been here since eleven o’clock in the basement downstairs, no water, no food, locked in a little room because of Danny Garcia and his insecurities. My call time was eleven. I’ve been in boxing seventeen years and I’ve never seen anything like this.”

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After predicting victory, Judah voiced more indignation and closed with the thought, "Angel Garcia is a dopehead. He must be a dope addict or crackhead because he can't control himself. He's a customer. After he gets his check on Saturday night, they'll be lining up on the street to sell to him."

As for clues regarding the outcome of the fight, Zab's partisans noted that Garcia had a limited resume. Also, Zab's split-decision victory over Lucas Matthyse gave his backers hope. Matthyse is a good fighter who can whack.

But Judah-Matthyse had been thirty months earlier. A more appropriate measuring stick seemed to be how each fighter had fared against Amir Khan.

Nine months ago, Garcia was getting beaten up by Khan. But he kept punching with the faster sharper puncher until he landed a hard left hook on the Brit's neck that led to a fourth-round knockout.

One year before that, Judah had fought Khan, was getting beaten up, and submitted. The Khan fight was a low point for Zab. He did virtually nothing for five rounds before being stopped by what appeared to be a low blow. But he'd fought so poorly that there was little sense of injustice among fans or media regarding the foul.

Judah tends to fade in the second half of fights. And he's 35 years old. The feeling was that Danny could deflate Zab and turn the fight around with one punch. And when it came, that turn would be irrevocable because, once Judah stands down, he doesn't step back up. From that point on, it's just a question of whether he can hang on until the end of the fight.

"I've got it all," Zab told the media at the final pre-fight press conference. "Handspeed, style, power, defense. The Zab Judah you guys fell in love with is back."

He didn't mention heart.

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When fight night arrived, a crowd of 13,048 was on hand to witness the proceedings. Because of the bad blood between the fighters' camps, there was a lot of negative energy in the arena. The boos were louder than the cheers during the ringwalk and introduction for each combatant.

The bout began with Judah, a southpaw, throwing jabs but showing reluctance to let his left hand go. Garcia threw occasional rights but had trouble pinning Zab down because of the latter's speed and movement. The champion wanted to mix it up. The challenger wanted to box.

In round three, Garcia took control of the fight. He won the next six stanzas on the strength of his right hand. Too often, he throws it in a wide looping arc. When straightened out, it's effective. Most of the rights that Danny landed were above the belt. But enough of them were low that it was a problem.

Meanwhile, Zab was fighting a safety-first fight, which meant that he wasn't giving Garcia a reason to stop coming forward and throwing punches.

In round five, a big right hand wobbled Judah. That was the point at which he has been known to deflate and mail in the rest of the fight. Garcia knew it and went after Zab, wobbling him twice in round six with big right hands. Judah survived. But one could have made the case that it was a 10-8 round for Garcia. And Zab had six long rounds ahead of him. If history was a guide, he was toast.

Round seven was more of the same. Judah couldn't get out of the way of right hands. In round eight, Garcia appeared to seal the deal. Zab landed a sharp left. Garcia doesn't throw combinations as much as he throws one punch at a time. But there are times when he pulls the trigger quickly, particularly when countering. This time, he fired back with a straight right that deposited Judah on the canvas and opened an ugly gash beneath Zab's left eye.

Then the unexpected happened. Zab, who had come to box, started fighting.

Garcia has a good chin. For the rest of the night, he needed it.

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In round nine, Judah landed some hard shots. Twenty seconds into round ten, a straight left hurt Garcia and forced him to back off. Zab took his time going after his foe; more time than he should have. But a minute later, another straight left wobbled Danny and he was staggered again just before the bell.

Zab was doing something that he'd never done before in a big fight. He was coming back from adversity. He had two round left to knock Garcia out. It seemed possible.

But instead of fighting with the desperation of a man who needed a knockout to win, Zab fought like a man who needed simply to put the last two rounds in the bank. He won the rounds, but it wasn't enough.

The judges gave the nod to Garcia by a 115-112, 114-112, 116-111 margin. This writer scored it 115-111 in Garcia's favor.

And now, one final thought.

In recent years, a culture of disrespect has taken root in boxing at all levels of the sport. Instead of being embarrassed by bad behavior, promoters and television executives have embraced it as a marketing tool.

Because of Angel Garcia's pre-fight antics and the bad blood between the fighters' camps, it was deemed necessary for Garcia and Judah to weigh in separately. On the night of the fight, six security guards divided the ring diagonally to keep the fighters apart before the opening bell.

Can anyone imagine the National Football League saying, "We're going to skip the ritual pre-game coin toss because the coaches and captains might get into a fistfight."

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The fact that it was considered dangerous for the Garcia and Judah camps to be together at the final pre-fight press conference and weigh-in spoke volumes for the idiocy of those involved. If no one else can enforce order, the governing state athletic commission should take the lead in these situations.

Allow the fighters – and only the fighters – onto the platform for the weigh-in. Warn them that any antics will result in a huge fine. Stop allowing thirty people in the ring before a fight.

The pre-fight histrionics before Garcia-Judah tarnished boxing. The fight itself redeemed the sport.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thouser@rcn.com. His next book (*Thomas Hauser on Sports: Remembering the Journey*) will be published by the University of Arkansas Press later this spring.

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dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=Editor Mike;29817]



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No Tom, not the governing state athletic commissions. More times than not they're the problem.

And as it applies to the 30 people who litter the ring before and after a fight? Yes, completely agree. Who are these people anyway? If you served some purpose in getting the combatant prepared, good for you, maybe you're entitled to a paycheck. However, we really didn't tune in to see.[I]you[/I]

tlig says:

I expected Hauser to score the bout a draw seeing as he [I][B]always[/B]/[/I] has fights much closer than the judges do. In any case, his score still wasn't identical to any of the judges'..

deepwater says:

good fight. exciting fight. surprising fight. Zab came on at the end and had a shot if it was a 15 round fight. de la hoya screwed Zab and boxing by pulling that nonsense. all boxers must weigh in and do a face to face. its a gentleman's sport and the traditions must be followed. get all the wanna be, sh7t talking, diamond grill wearing bums out of the ring!. all in all a good night for boxing and Zab can have a few more fights left. Tommy Malloy the best commissionaire down in Fla. The damn democrats run the boxing show in nyc now and I will not do any political work for those guys.

jzzy says:

We hardly saw any right hooks from Zab after his straight lefts?? Garcia appeared very open for this shot after the straight left shook him. Was Zab afraid of being countered by Garcia's left hook? At several points in the fight it appeared worth the gamble.

Raiders says:

I have to give xab

Big T says:

Yes the governing body should be able to control the ring and dictate what should and shouldn't go on. But how can they when most commissioners a want to be seen in the ring as well as at the press conference. They will never do whats right. Their egos are to big