

Chris Algieri: An Unlikely Champion

Written by Thomas Hauser
Monday, 16 June 2014 21:31



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Thus, the shock on Buffer's face was telling as he stood in the ring at Barclays Center and reviewed the judges' scorecards one last time before announcing the decision at the end of twelve rounds of action between Ruslan Provodnikov and Chris Algieri.

Provodnikov, a 6-to-1 betting favorite, had scored two first-round knockdowns and been the aggressor throughout the fight. Algieri had spent much of the evening in retreat as a one-eyed fighter. The widespread assumption at ringside was that "The Siberian Rocky" had retained his 140-pound WBO title by a comfortable margin.

It was the end of a long night. Earlier in the evening, the June 14 card had featured both the good and the bad.

Local favorite Heather Hardy was awarded a horrible decision over Jackie Trivilino in a fight that went to the scorecards after seven rounds due to a severe cut suffered by Hardy as a consequence of an accidental head butt. Fight fans want their fighter to win. But they also have a sense of fairness. There were a lot of boos when Hardy's victory was announced by a 68-65, 67-66, 66-67 margin.

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Then, in round three of a junior-welterweight bout, Fedor Papazov decked Miguel Angel Mendoza with a picture perfect right hand. Mendoza rose on wobbly legs. Everything else about him was wobbling too. It's unclear what referee Gary Rosato was watching at the time. But it didn't appear to be Mendoza, because Rosato motioned for the action to continue. Fortunately, ring doctor Avery Browne climbed onto the ring apron and stopped the fight.

After that, unbeaten light-heavyweight Seanie Monaghan continued his maturation by pounding out a lopsided ten-round decision over 35-year-old Elvir Muriqi. Muriqi is now a respectable 40-and-7 with 24 knockouts and only 1 KO by. But over the course of sixteen years, his career has gone from prospect to journeyman without much in between.

Next up was Demetrius Andrade vs. Brian Rose, another of boxing's unfortunate "mandatory" title defenses (in this instance, for the WBO 154-pound belt).

Andrade-Rose was a woeful mismatch from beginning to end. There wasn't one moment when the outcome of the fight was in doubt. Demetrius circled his opponent throughout the bout, knocking him down in the first and third rounds and pounding on him like he was a heavy bag. Rose wasn't good enough to make things boring (let alone, interesting). It was just plain ugly. The challenger's corner correctly stopped the carnage at 1:19 of round seven when the usually reliable referee Mike Griffin failed to do so.

That set the stage for Provodnikov-Algieri.

Fans want to see exciting fights. Provodnikov, age thirty, is an exciting fighter. He attacks with ferocity, hits and gets hit, and engages in wars of attrition.

"To be honest, I am not one of the most talented boxers," Ruslan acknowledged at a June 7 media sitdown. "But I fight my hardest for every minute of every round."

Provodnikov's non-stop aggression and brawling swarming style had led him to a 23-and-2 record with 16 knockouts. The losses were by decision to Tim Bradley and Mauricio Herrera. His most recent victory was a tenth-round stoppage of Mike Alvarado that brought him the WBO

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Algieri is as different from Provodnikov as Huntington, Long Island, is different from Siberia.

Boxing fans can count on one finger the number of fighters who have an undergraduate degree from Stony Brook College and a masters in nutrition from New York Institute of Technology. Algieri is the one.

“I don’t fight because I have to,” Chris says. “I fight because I want to fight.”

Algieri looks younger than his thirty years and has a nice way about him. He’s articulate and smart and, in addition to pursuing his boxing career, works as a nutritionist.

“The best thing about being a fighter,” Algieri notes, “is the incentive I get to stay fit, work out, focus on what I eat, and stay healthy. I eat the same whether I’m in training for a fight or not.”

In six years as a pro, Chris had posted a 19-and-0 record. But the opposition had been undistinguished and he’d scored only eight knockouts.

“I can beat Provodnikov,” Algieri said at the same media sitdown. “Boxing is a rhythm sport. If I can keep him from establishing his rhythm, I win the fight. I plan to box, use my legs and jab. I’m

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"Home-run hitters strike out more than regular guys," Chris added.

But in boxing, it only takes one home run to win the game.

When fight night came, Provodnikov-Algieri appeared to be over in the first round.

Provodnikov came out aggressively, and Algieri simply couldn't keep him off. Just past the midway point of the first stanza, a left hook up top put Chris on the canvas for the first time in his career and raised an ugly swelling around his right eye. Later in the round, Algieri took a knee (scored as a second knockdown) to collect himself.

Thereafter, Algieri fought as well as he could; moving, jabbing, and landing sharp crisp punches. Often, he used his speed and four-inch height advantage to outbox Provodnikov. But Chris's blows lacked power, and Ruslan kept coming forward. It seemed to be just a matter of time before body shots took Algieri's legs away from him and he'd be unable to move out of harm's way.

By the late rounds, the right side of Algieri's face was black and blue, purple, and a few other colors in addition to being grotesquely swollen. His eye was shut and it looked as though an alien creature was trapped inside the mess, struggling to get out. But Chris kept moving and throwing punches. He didn't crumble physically or mentally in the face of Provodnikov's pressure assault. Like Ruslan, he fought the fight he wanted to fight. Pride, guts, courage; Algieri showed them all.

Then came the decision of the judges: Max DeLuca 117-109 in favor of Provodnikov . . . Tom Schreck and Don Trella 114-112 in favor of Algieri.

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Since then, the decision has been widely criticized. I was among the early critics. On fight night, I scored the bout 116-111 (7-4-1 in rounds) for Provodnikov.

After the fact, I learned that CompuBox recorded Algieri outlanding Provodnikov by a 288-to-205 margin. That didn't sway me. Further to that point, according to CompuBox, Algieri outlanded Provodnikov in every round but the twelfth (when Ruslan had a 13-to-11 margin). But "punches landed" aren't dispositive of scoring issues. This is professional boxing, not amateur competition. Like knockdowns, hard punches should be weighted more heavily than pitty-pats.

For example, in round one, Algieri had an 18-to-14 edge in punches landed. And everyone in the arena scored that round 10-7 in favor of Provodnikov.

One of the first people I discussed Provodnikov-Algieri with afterward was Paulie Malignaggi (who'd been at ringside covering the bout for British television). Paulie scored it for Algieri. That wasn't entirely unpredictable. In some respects, the fight had resembled the June 10, 2006, confrontation between Malignaggi and Miguel Cotto.

"Provodnikov won the first round big," Paulie told me. "But after the first round, you can't score the damage on Chris's face. You give Provodnikov credit for busting Chris up and knocking him down twice in the first round, but that's it. After that, you score it round by round, each round individually, as though Chris's face was clean."

Eighteen hours later, I watched a replay of Provodnikov-Algieri on television. This was one of those rare occasions when watching a fight a day later caused me to adjust my scorecard. Viewing the replay, it seemed to me that Provodnikov was less effective after round one than I'd originally thought. I still think Ruslan won the fight. But it was close.

Meanwhile, Algieri came to the post-fight press conferences wearing dark glasses and holding an icepack to his forehead.

"I could see pretty well until the eighth round," Chris told the media. "By the time we hit round twelve, I was blind in that eye. But I was able to anticipate his left hook throughout the fight. I

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Algieri had fought so valiantly and through such adversity that even those who thought Provodnikov had won found it hard to begrudge Chris his triumph.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thausen@rcn.com . His most recent book (*Reflections: Conversations, Essays, and Other Writings*) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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title="Comment" href="forums/newreply.php?do=newreply&noquote=1&p=55722" target="_blank">Comment on this article

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at[[url=http://www.thesweetscience.com/mailto:thauser@rcn.com](http://www.thesweetscience.com/mailto:thauser@rcn.com)]thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Reflections: Conversations, Essays, and Other Writings*) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.[/QUOTE]

Like always T-Ha's words make you see the full visualization of the event. Holla!

The Commish says:

Oh, now I understand. The harder puncher is given the advantage in a fight, simply because he/she hits harder. So, if the lighter-hitting fighter lands, say 100 marshmallow shots during a round, and the harder puncher lands even one hard shot, the harder puncher wins the round. Oh, now I get it. Now I understand. Geez, I'm amazed that Paulie Malignaggi ever won a fight where he didn't knock his opponent out.

I interviewed Algieri yesterday. I figured with all those brutal shots he got hit with, his entire body would be sore. The fact is, he wasn't sore anywhere. Why? Those hard, brutal punches many of you THOUGHT were landing were landing only against the air and some dust mites flying around the Barclay's Center.

But, I've learned something here. I have finally, after all these yearsw, learned how to score a fight. All I have to do is find the guy who is the harder puncher and give him the round if he lands even a few solid blows. If he gets hit with dozens of blows but doesn't go down, those blows could not have had any power at all behind them and should not be counted. Only the hard ones count.

Now I understand.

-Randy G.

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-Randy G.[/QUOTE]

Commish, I think it comes down to who deals the most damage, rather than who's punches are harder, at least for me. If a guy hits you 5 times and you're unaffected, but you hit him once and it rocks him, then you win that exchange. I get why you're angry, and I agree to an extent, but for me it comes down to a balance of damage dealt (and I don't judge it on how a guy's face looks, or how his body feels). For the record, it was probably his fighters pride that was telling you that he didn't hurt. Provodnikov landed some killer blows to Chris' body, and they hurt for at least several days afterwards.

At the end of the day, if you're in a fight, and the other guy's not hurting you, and you're really putting the hurt on him with your less frequent shots, then you're winning the fight. Boxing is more than plain fighting though, and there's definitely a level of ambiguity when it comes to this side of scoring a round. After all, that's how guys win an exchange by taking two ordinary shots to deliver a really killer one.

You've can be outworked and still win, if your shots are hard enough. I'm not saying every one of Provodnikov's shots were harder than every one of Chris'- there's only two people in the world that know that, but I am saying that some harder shots are worth more than some lighter ones.

How many hard shots equals how many lighter shots? That's the judges job to decide, and ours to debate.

Skibbz says:

There were times when Algieri got hit to the body and didn't throw for over 20 seconds. He was hurting. There were times when Algieri rocked Ruslan and he didn't throw for over 20 seconds. He too was hurting , whether or not he was smiling and jogging lightly forward, he was still hurting. But this is the business of hurt and you give some and take some. You're right, whoever deals the most in the exchange comes off better.

Ruslan was dealing the more damage throughout the rounds, Algieri was shadow pumping and lightly tapping predominantly but having watched the fight over a second time he certainly did land his fair share of crisp and clean punches. That being said I still believe Ruslan came off the more dominant although in his own mind I'm sure the performance did not 1) go to plan and 2) was harder than he expected. That doesn't mean he failed, it just means it didn't quite follow the script he had in mind - this is the theatre of the unexpected after all.

You see what Algieri failed to do [U]enough[/U] for me is after touching your man with a soft jab or two and getting yourself in position, he didn't spear home the right or smash Ruslan's face with the left hook or uppercut.

There were times he did put force behind his punches but they were after being hit a few times

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with Ruslan's fire. He was fighting back but not enough. It is his style but it is wrong quite frankly. You're in the ring there with a license to rain blows, and hard blow, on your opponent. Even practitioners of the sweet science must put mustard behind their shots. There's no two ways about it.

As for Malignaggi, he did damage to his opponents. He fought with great boxing skill and intelligent but he also put his all behind his punches no matter how little damage they perceivably done to his opponents. You can't get away with soft blows, not in this sport.

Radam G says:

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You killed it! Indeed that is the way to get da punching pay. "DAMAGE!" Not the semantics of heavier or harder shots. The most ferocious damaging punchers, hitters, biters, stickers, stingers, or whatever is your poison, are ants, mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, lice and genitalia crabs to name a few. And they will torn yo' @\$\$ up from da flo' up! You will throw up!

And anybody and dey ally who don't understand abstractions, just maybe you are having contractions. Hehe! Holla!