

Canelo Has No True Style Identity

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Tuesday, 15 July 2014 12:38



This past weekend's junior middleweight bout between top contenders Saul "Canelo" Alvarez 44-1-1 (31) and Erislandy Lara 19-2-2 (12) has created quite a stir regarding the split decision that went in favor of Alvarez by the scores 115-113, 117-111 and 113-115.

However, there's more to glean from the fight than who you actually thought won it. And briefly, judge Levi Martinez who scored the fight 117-111 Alvarez, is either blind or inept.

Takeaways from the fight:

For starters, there's been a lot of chatter since the fight that goes something like this: "If you prefer the fighter who fights more as the boxer who hits and moves, you probably saw it for Lara." On the other hand, "If you like the aggressor who lands the harder punches, you most likely think Alvarez deserved the decision." Sure, that's fair, but Lara was really underwhelming with his low punch output. If you're the boxer you better be getting off. And Alvarez was very sub-par regarding his effective aggression. For the record, I had a family emergency Saturday night that prevented me at the last minute from seeing the fight live. As I always say, if you didn't score the fight live and in the moment, your score doesn't count. I found that when watching a fight that goes the distance and knowing the result, we usually favor the "boxer" whereas when watching it live more often than not the "bigger puncher" usually looks more effective than he really was.

Knowing that the fight went the distance going in, I scored it 6-5-1 / 115-114 Lara. No, I don't

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think Lara ran, I think he moved left to right in order to befuddle and force Alvarez to have to reset, which is now the book on how to fight him. At times Lara was on his bicycle a little too much, but if you want to see ineffective aggression at its best, watch Alvarez pursue Lara, which I'll touch on more.

The one common theme during the fight was, Lara was fighting the fight he planned to going in, Alvarez wasn't. Canelo had so many gaps where he couldn't touch Lara, who is no Hector Camacho when it comes to movement. You can count on one hand how many clean shots that Alvarez landed to Lara's face. It's amazing that he managed to cut him and if it weren't for his terrific body work in spurts, you wouldn't have even known he was there. And it's not like Lara was moving and hitting him so much that it was a task for him to get inside and work him over, which he obviously intended and needed to do in order to execute his fight. Had I seen the fight live I think there's a good chance I might have had it for Alvarez by a point because I'm sure his big shots to the body would've looked a little more impressive live than on replay. Either way it was close and it could've gone to Alvarez or Lara by a point or two.

My takeaway is, Lara didn't get off enough as a boxer to really seal the deal and left too much to chance. Had he let his hands go a little more, and he could've, there would be less fuss about the decision in the aftermath. And that's on him because Alvarez sure wasn't making him pay for his inactivity. In regards to Alvarez, he has no style identity. He was not an effective aggressor and if he could cut the ring off even a little bit, he would've forced Lara to fight more than allowing him the room to pick his spots and box.

Think about all of the upper-tier boxers today. They all have an identity when it comes to their fighting style. Wladimir Klitschko is a boxer-puncher who pushes the fight behind his strong jab in order to set up his right hand and left hook. Andre Ward is a counter-puncher who manipulates his opponents into counters. And you know if they move away, he'll go get them, if they try to bring it, he picks them apart on the way in. Gennady Golovkin is an attacker who applies bell-to-bell pressure looking to get his opponent against the ropes and work them over. Floyd Mayweather is a boxer/counter-puncher who will box and pot shot from outside and beat you inside if you try and push the fight. Guillermo Rigondeaux is a smooth boxer, who if you try to impose your will on him, he'll also sharp shoot you in a vital spot with something that'll discourage you from trying it again. Manny Pacquiao is an attacker, although he boxed smartly in his last fight against Timothy Bradley.

Canelo doesn't have a defined style. He's not a life-taker regarding his power, nor does he cut off the ring or apply constant effective pressure. He follows and comes in straight without letting his hands go. When it comes to making opponents who can really box, fight, forget about

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it. When it comes to doubling up his jab to set something up, if it happens, it's by accident. On the plus side he is a great body puncher and has a sturdy chin. But move on him, keep him having to regroup, jab him, and he turns into a robot. And I haven't seen that desperate urge to win or kick it up a gear.

In the main, Alvarez is a solid boxer with good fundamentals and basics. But he's not going to out-box anybody that isn't a walk-in, take three to get one off mauler. He's not good enough at closing the distance and getting into range without being disrupted by a fighter who moves and throws two or three shots at him. He isn't a big enough puncher to stop real world class guys with one or two shots like a Thomas Hearns, and he doesn't overwhelm his opponents with volume punching and activity. He's also not fast enough via hand or foot to really be a good counter-puncher.

The style best suited for Alvarez is to try and fight as a boxer-puncher. Move in behind multiple jabs, set up the right hands and body hooks. Learn to cut the movers off and not follow them and a little head movement wouldn't hurt. If he can get a fight with lineal middleweight champ Miguel Cotto next, he better do everything in his power to do it. Cotto cannot box and fight him like Mayweather and Lara did. Oh, he might try but once he's tagged real good he'll try and fight Alvarez off and that will lead him into being out-gunned and most likely stopped.

However, if the Cotto fight doesn't come to fruition, Alvarez better stay away from Demetrius Andrade or Gennady Golovkin, because he needs to clean up his style and figure out exactly what he's trying to do in the ring first. The takeaway from the Alvarez-Lara fight is this: they were both average at best. Neither shined but it can be said that Lara fought more of his fight than Alvarez did, which doesn't necessarily mean that he conclusively won. He was also lucky that Alvarez isn't sure who he is as a fighter stylistically, at least not yet.

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Radam G says:

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Wow! I told you dudes, dudettes and otherettes, that arch-master boxing scribe F-Lo was da MAN! A straight-up pugilistic genius.

He bobbed and weaved that copy into a forensic masterpiece. OMG! It was sweet and scientific. He broke down (and always breaks down) the sweet science like Albert Einstein did physics.

Oh, NO, NO, NO, NO! F-Lo doesn't leave you hangin.' He lets you know how it was and could've been bangin!' In the shower, you know how you suckas be sangin' [\$.]. Hehehe! Holla!

brownsugar says:

I watched the fight again. ...without the prefight expectation of Lara exhibiting any dazzling displays of offence..... it was still an obvious 8-4 win for the Cuban defector. Even though he has a propensity to run out the clock in less than entertaining fashion. Lara was the one landing crisp blows to the face while Canelo whiffed at Lara's body with about half a dozen shoe shine combo's and only landing 24 shots total to the head. ... and less than a hundred total punches in a twelve round fight.....that had the nerve to be on PPV.

Canelo still has quite a ways to go.

Skibbz says:

Canelo's problem was distance in this fight. He could never get in range because the Cuban was on his bike. He'd plant and throw 3-4 punches in a second knowing Canelo won't want to take a few to get his in, and then he'd run around left and right with the Mexican, stereotypically, following him around.

Canelo was cautious not to get caught by all the movement, however he was so clever when he worked out Lara's rhythm. So many times he almost got the Cuban with an uppercut or a left hook but he was just out of range, always reluctant to get too close.

His trainers are good, but the building process has been too slow. Improvements should be coming faster and the fact that they're not isn't a good sign imo. Canelo is intelligent, fast and powerful. He needs a world class trainer who doesn't feed him grilled red meat constantly and serenade him at every opportunity. Only problem is that Canelo may not have the strength of character to tell Chepo and his son that it's over.

thegreyman says:

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He was on the edge of getting Lara's rhythm from about round 3 or 4, but he never managed to back it up with accurate punches. He almost took Lara's head off with some of those uppercuts, but they never actually landed.

Meanwhile Lara continued slotting in 1-2's, jabs and lead hooks.

Canelo looked sluggish and slow following Lara down. You can't continue to just follow someone around the ring continually, failing to close them down. It was Canelo's own fault that he couldn't close the distance, and it should be put down to Lara's superior ring generalship in the instance, that he was able to control range for the majority of the bout, even if he was excessive in creating space.

Something tells me Lara would not have run from GGG in the same way for 12 rounds.

Canelo's got the potential, but his corner's letting him down. How often do you see Canelo make successful adjustments mid-bout? Rarely

I've thought that he needs to ditch his trainer since the Mayweather bout- perhaps he should consider going back up to big bear, joining the crew at the summit gym, and asking Abel Sanchez for a few pointers...

thegreyman says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;58313]I watched the fight again. ...without the prefight expectation of Lara exhibiting any dazzling displays of offence..... it was still an obvious 8-4 win for the Cuban defector. Even though he has a propensity to run out the clock in less than entertaining fashion. Lara was the one landing crisp blows to the face while Canelo whiffed at Lara's body with about half a dozen shoe shine combo's and only landing 24 shots total to the head. ... and less than a hundred total punches in a twelve round fight.....that had the nerve to be on PPV.

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I had the same scorecard brownsugar. Canelo was exposed for a plodding slugger, albeit with powerful combos. And not for the first time.

He can't make adjustments, and he can't control the ring. He didn't land enough clean punches compared to what Lara was doing, in order to win that fight.

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Question.... How long will it take to repair these flaws or is Canelo crystalized in a plodding style?

thegreyman says:

Impossible to say at the present stage, though I believe the longer he stays with his current team the more rooted his style will become.

He can only change his style to an extent, and that extent is limited by his skills. We'll have to see how he develops over the next year or two, and if his team changes at all. If however, he still looks much the same after that period, then I think he'll be stuck where he is in terms of skills and style.

Can't rule out a significant change, though I wouldn't bank on it- he's only 24 this week.

brownsugar says:

True ... Oddly enough the moments he charged in seemed to be his most effective... Although its a dangerous way to get results in the long run.

thegreyman says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;58343]True ... Oddly enough the moments he charged in seemed to be his most effective... Although its a dangerous way to get results in the long run.[/QUOTE]

I agree. He tries too often to box a guy. He can't seem to make up his mind if he's a boxer, a slugger, a boxer-puncher or something else. Again this is an issue his corner desperately need to resolve.

oubobcat says:

Canelo needs to learn from Shawn Porter. Porter did not have a style identity for a long time. He boxed at times and slugged at others. But he found a way to win all his fights. Then along came Julio Diaz. Porter split the whole fight between boxing and slugging. He was often caught in between and seemed confused. He was fortunate to escape that night with a draw and many people thought after that performance that he would never threaten any belt holders at Welterweight.

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Porter learned from that fight and found an identity. He became a much more aggressive fighter who relies on a relentless pressure style. He has stuck to that style strictly since the first Diaz fight. Porter became a world champion and has had several impressive performances since that first Diaz fight. Its like he's an entirely different fighter.

Canelo needs to find his ring identity. I think he'd be better served to become a more aggressive pressure fighter. And the very first thing he needs to learn to succeed at this style is how to cut off the ring. He should be in the gym every day working on this and that should be his primary focus. If he learns how to cut the ring off, an aggressive pressure style would suit him well. He has quick hands and can beat many opponents to the punch. He also gets great leverage on his punches when in position.

If he doesn't find a ring identity, he will continue to struggle against many top level fighters. Its difficult to succeed on a consistent basis not knowing how you will fight when you step in the ring and then constantly changing your style if in a tough fight. He needs to focus on what he can do well and refine his technique from there. And I believe he needs to be more aggressive and put smart pressure on his opponents instead of trying to box from a range or be a boxer-puncher type fighter.

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You're selling him too short Grey. His skills do not limit his ability to change, and his style needs not to change but merely to be built upon. You don't go smashing the foundations when you're adding a new room to a house, you find the most suitable spot and build.

Canelo has skills, Canelo has will, his will is more than his skill and that's a great start. He's fitter now - he can fight for 12 rounds and chase his opponent if he has to.

Also to say he can't make adjustments is short of pulling the wool over your own eyes. He made gifted adjustments against Lara but was just a tad slower than Lara so he was unable to catch him. Lara is famed for his movement - being unable to out sprint a cheetah is no disappointment if you can keep on it's tail.

And the main point that you're so intent on missing is that Canelo will [U]NOT[/U] be fighting fleet footed opponents for the rest of his 10+ year career. Look what he can do to opponents

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who stand with him or he is able to catch.

Look at the power he possesses and the way he applies it so expertly. People call fighter's hype jobs because they have the favour of the suits and promoters, because they think they haven't earned it the hard way - there's no need to resent the guy who has obvious talent and puts in hard work, and has been fighting for almost 10 years already at the humble age of 24.

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You see in my opinion he has a ring identity. He is intelligent and he fights like an intelligent fighter. When his output increases and his engine becomes more finely tuned then the best will come out of him. He throws beautiful combinations at times and he loves to go to the body. He has a strong will to win and doesn't give up for himself, his team, his fans or his country.

Forget about his stardom and celebrity, in terms of a fighter Canelo is working his way up. Bumps in the road are to be expected on the most arduous of journeys and his is one with many bumps to come. His style comes down to intelligently utilising his physical strength and athleticism. He picks his shots, likes to counter and loves to make you pay. All bangers don't have to end the dance in first round.

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mortcola says:

Interesting - I think lot of people were hoping even unconsciously that Canelo would take up the empty spot where JC Chavez Sr used to be. He, too, was not really fast, stayed in the midrange of his foot speed, didn't get you out with one punch, BUT he nearly ALWAYS made whatever adjustment was necessary to neutralize whatever effectiveness the other fighter demonstrated, and then break him down. Canelo's main flaw is that he just doesn't adjust. He is a frontrunner - no Plan B or C - when the other guy can do what he planned to do.

mortcola says:

I just read what Skibbz said. It is too soon to close the book on Canelo's potential. And not being JCC is no crime - very few have ever been in that league. But then again, no one ever did what Lara did to Canelo, to JC....Chavez even had more effectiveness than this against Whitaker, even though the decision was a controversy. Just a point of comparison.

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I agree with you completely Mortcola on Canelo. Many are writing off this young and hard working fighter when they probably haven't seen his progression through the years from a teenager to a young adult. JCC was a special fighter, these fighters came from an era of boxing which seems to have been littered with other shining stars who brought glory to the sport.

It'll always be a hard trail to follow but we can't knock someone desperately trying to stay on that path, who wants glory and wants to build on their predecessors, especially when they've got the skill and will to succeed.

That said, I don't deny that Canelo has much learning to do. He is finally fighting opponents who can make an 18ft ring feel like being out in the open and he must learn new tricks if he's to defeat these opponents. But not every fighter moves like a butterfly..

amayseng says:

I mentioned on numerous occasions leading up to the Mayweather fight that Canelos feet are too slow, he has no foot agility and would therefore be picked a part by Floyd who is a master of spacing and has great footwork. Anyone with these attributes will be a challenge to Canelo.

This is why Pac spanks him like a Red Headed step child for 12 rounds at 154, shoot 158, 160.

thegreyman says:

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All I'm saying is that Canelo, in his present form, is not all he's made out to be.

Sure, his punches are great, as is his will to succeed- but it's nothing I don't see in so many other fighters in so many other weight classes. He's yet to show me anything unique and special enough to mark him out as the super-star he's lauded to be. His performances of late have been unconvincing, and his skill-set is lacking in a couple of key areas, though as I and others have said, he has the time to fix these issues, and I hope he does.

I bear Canelo no more ill will than I do any other fighter, but I do think it would be prudent to wait and see if and how he develops, before we start lauding him with praise.

Time will tell on this one.

One thing I do particularly like in him though, is his pride and his activity rate through the year. Not many fighters at that level look to fight three or four times a year- and I hope he's on a rapid collision course with GGG...