Written by David A. Avila
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Knight (left) and West smiled after, but during the tussle, there was no time to grin. (Katherine Rodriguez)

PICO RIVERA-WBO bantamweight titleholder Kaliesha “Wild Wild” West looked to avenge an earlier defeat to Ava “The Lady of Boxing” Knight by changing speeds, and had to settle with a split draw to retain the championship on Saturday.

Can everyone say rematch?

A crowd of more than 1,500 at the Pico Rivera Sports Arena saw West (13-1-3, 4 KOs) and Knight (6-1-3) headline a historic and lengthy fight card that included boxing, mixed martial arts and Muy Thai for first time in California. International Fight Showdown promoted the card.

West and Knight were the main event and both electrified the crowd with their blend of speed, power, skill and guile on a very cool night outdoors.

Knight started slightly quicker with some combos to the head, but West countered with some quick jabs to keep Knight from attacking freely in the opening round of the outdoor arena.

“She had a good jab in this fight,” said Knight regarding the difference from their first encounter in November 2008 and this one. “It was a real good one.”

West got her jab going and fired a quick double left hook that landed in round two and sparked a smile from Knight. A right hand by the Oakland fighter was immediately countered by a left hook and a right hand from West as if punctuating a point.

“Kaliesha never used her jab in the first fight,” said Juan West, her dad and trainer. “That was the plan.”

The third round saw Knight land a pretty counter right hand. But West found the range for some quick left hooks that kept landing repeatedly in the round. Even at the bell a left hook landed to end the stanza.

“I thought I stunned her, maybe hurt her twice in the fight,” said West. “One time she smirked after I hit her.”

West’s quick left hook counters were causing Knight to pause. Her right hands landed but West countered with several left hooks and some stiff jabs in round four. Still, Knight was never humbled and continued to press forward.

Several left hooks by West stunned Knight though she never seemed hurt by the blows. A one-two combination started the big round for West who won her most convincing round in the fifth behind stiff jabs.

Round six saw Knight jump on West with a barrage of body shots and kept throwing. West retaliated with some left hook counters and snapping right hands that caught Knight but she returned with yet more body blows. A big left hook by West ended the round as Knight landed another shot to the body.

“That was our plan to attack the body,” said Ben Bautista, who trains Knight. “We knew we could hurt her to the body.”

After several snapping left jabs from West and some unsuccessful jab retaliations by Knight, the Oakland boxer dropped her hands either from frustration or tiredness. West immediately landed a one-two that seemed to show she was not suffering from the same problems.

Round eight was Knight’s best round so far as she dug in with some riveting body shots and big right hands to the head. West countered with some digging left hooks but Knight wouldn’t let the advantage slip and added some jabs to punctuate the round.

“I didn’t listen to my coach,” admitted Knight. “I was supposed to work the body and didn’t do it till later.”

Jabs turned the fight again in West’s favor in round nine as she used it to get in close then unload with her other punches. Two jabs and two left hand counters followed every power right fired by Knight. Both lit up the round with combinations and kept it going until referee Ray Corona called it over.

West and Knight seemed to both feel the fight was up for grabs and looked to jump forward to gain the momentum. Body shots by Knight were met by neck breaking jabs from West as each sought to win the round without sacrificing the advantage. The short peace was erased by a savage exchange of blows that ended at the final bell. Both fighters hugged each other and walked around the ring.

One judge scored it 96-94 for West, another 96-94 for Knight and the third tabbed it 95-95 a draw for a split draw. West keeps the WBO bantamweight title.

“I thought I won the fight,” said Knight. “Of course I want a rematch.”

West smiled when asked if another fight was mandatory.

“It’s in our contract,” said West.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Wow! A pretty girl cannot get a break! Suckas keep robbin' K West because she is the best. But she is gorgeous, and ugly judges just believe a gorgeous gal has too much going for her, so she should not be taking over a sport where a lot of the _____ are good-looking-in-da-face challenged. Ain't sayin' dat the other girl was ugly. But K West won this bout. And I do believe that judges are taking fights from her because of her angelic looks. Holla!

the Roast says:

I have just about given up on the return of Eggs.