Written by Phil Woolever
Friday, 07 October 2011 11:53

Photo Wende / Winfried Mausolf

NEU BRANDENBURG, ALT STORY - Did Steve "USS" Cunningham get jobbed, or did he fail to do the job in his disputed loss of the IBF cruiserweight belt to Yoan Pablo Hernandez?

Yes, yes. No, no.

Depending on which side of the ring you hailed from, there were opposing, reasonable responses to what ended up as a rather unreasonable result when the match was called due to unintentional headbutt cuts over both Hernandez's eyes. From the broadcast screen, it looked like Hernandez might be slightly ahead, but he was definitely losing steam. Whether that was from losing blood is but one of many ringside riddles the rumble offered.

When it went to the scorecards after a between rounds conference between ref Mickey Vann and the ringside physician, it seemed almost nobody was happy. When the six round, split technical oddity was announced there were many boos but you couldn't tell if the noise was in support or negative reaction as Cunningham walked around the ring with an exaggerated "thumbs down" gesture.

Philadelphian Cunningham, now 24-3 (12), getting torpedoed by Cuban defector Hernandez, 25-1 (13) will doubtless add another cautionary tale to widespread perceptions about foreign fighters, especially USA boxers, getting shafted in Germany.

There were various insinuations of impropriety from both fighters' camps, and especially Hernandez's trainer Ulli Wegner, but the night's main misrepresentation was that there was scandal galore inside the bloody strands.

Scoring, at least from two of the three judges, was quite reasonable, though Pawel Kardyni's tab of 59-54 for Hernandez was a bit much.

I could understand how Dave Paris had it 58-55 Hernandez just as much as I could Howard Foster's score of 57-56 Cunningham. It was an intense contest, but sometimes close only due to lack of action. I had it even at 57-57.

If I had to pick a winner at that point I'd go with Hernandez by virtue of his early knockdown, but it looked like Cunningham was coming on and Hernandez was fading when the bout was halted.

The initial cut, early in the fight, bled freely and was certainly some distraction for Hernandez. Still, after that, the bleeding was contained much of the time. The second cut came in the sixth session, and there were times it looked like Hernandez had blood in both eyes.

No, there was no long count situation when Cunningham got dropped in the opening frame, and it sure didn't look like Nazim Richardson did any outrageous stalling or that any actual, abnormal gain of precious time actually occurred.

Whatever good old fistic fallout followed contrasting perceptions and heated allegations, the southpaw Hernandez established a very strong case for himself with the compact left cross/hook that splattered a surprised Cunningham into a harsh dreamland.

With approximately 35 seconds remaining in a good opening round, Hernandez missed with a

whistling right then stopped for a step-away left that creamed Cunningham down to a knee, then the seat of his trunks. Vann's count reached four as the stunned Cunningham wobbled up on instinct, then lurched back face first to the canvas.

Cunningham moved like melted plastic, but he was clear headed enough to walk away for a few steps during the count and regain further consciousness.

Cunningham's head seemed clear after the break. The fight was a busy, grueling waltz but much of round two was spent parrying jabs while the crowd clapped in unison for more exchanges.

Replays of the clash of heads which caused Hernandez's first cut, on the left side of his scalp, made it look like Cunningham got the worst of the impact by far, without complaining.

Even as Cunningham adjusted his stance and took command of the fight's tempo, Hernandez scored with hard lefts that shook Cunningham. From the looks of tonight, Hernandez may be the division's elite puncher.

The second cut occurred during round six as the fighters ducked forward into heated exchanges. Hernandez's eye socket areas showed lines of thinly streaming blood as Vann studied the situation.

Cunningham scored more and more as the frame ended. It was hard to tell if his improved accuracy was due to emerging speed or Hernandez's handicap.

For a moment it looked like the fight had been stopped in Cunningham's favor, but before the audience of around 5,005 could react, the scoring rule was cited. More confusion followed as the fighters cooled down, heart rates still up.

"C'mon man, that's bull crap," protested Cunningham as he sensed trouble. He had a look on his face like he was back in that old harsh dreamland again.

At a current glance, it does not seem like there was any Deutschland "home cooking" on tonight's meat hook menu. Punch stat type percentages were not available, but it seemed the amount of punches, both thrown and landed, was about even overall. Hernandez definitely landed more power shots. Cunningham definitely looked more ready for the second half.

Sauerland recently signed many of the world's top cruiserweights with designs on keeping the best of that division fighting each other, and have almost created a 200 pound league of their own. With a possible and profitable rematch of Cunningham's victory against Marco Huck (present ringside) on the horizon, there was no reason for Sauerland to do anything but let the chips fall where they may.

Still, it would probably answer some questions one way or the other if we could get a look at Mr. Kardyni's fight related activities and expenses and who picked up the tab.

There was prefight gossip that the 35 year old Cunningham might move up to challenge Universum stablemate Alexander Povetkin. Povetkin's so-called title may be silly but Povetkin is a good fighter and a good draw in these parts.

A rematch seemed possible but not as much probable.

An elated Hernandez was taken to the hospital for stitches and did not attend the post fight conference.

"I've been waiting a long time for this," Hernandez told reporters immediately after the bout. "Cunningham is a great champion, so that makes this victory count even more."

It might mean even more than that if Hernandez could win such a meaningful match without controversy. A lack of satisfaction lingered, especially for Cunningham, who subsequently alleged official misconduct involving the ringside doc.

The biggest disappointment about last Saturday night at the Jahnsportforum in Neubrandenburg was that for a while it appeared we were seeing the two best active cruiserweights going head to head. Unfortunately, the head to head got too literal. Primo potential punching glory turned to scar tissue.

It seemed more like the thickly gloved hand of Fate was at play more than anything, but in this situation the future may tell more than the past.

Cunningham was pretty much the consensus champion overall, and that perception probably didn't change much in either the German or US markets. Cunningham did seem like an outsider when, immediately after the anticlimax, Sauerland moved right along with the announcement that Hernandez's next fight would be against Troy Ross.

The fact Cunningham was coming on strong at the time of the end may serve as a deterrent in regard to a quick rematch. Cunningham's status with the fans may not have dropped, but his bargaining power has. That twist might actually turn out leading to a Huck rematch sooner than expected had Cunningham won the fight.

For now, whatever the language, the official result reads something like: Hernandez TD 6 Cunningham.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

USS Cunningham was sabotaged, but it was his own darn fault. He need to quit thinking that he can continuous go into the house of the opposition and everything is going to be kosher. Enough said. Holla!