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Leo Santa Cruz elevated himself immensely with a stellar showing against rock-solid vet Vusi Malinga, throwing a trillion* punches over 12 rounds at the Home Depot Center in Carson, CA, in a bout which kicked off a Showtime broadcast. He captured the vacant IBF bantamweight title with the win, and then made abunch more fans with his post-fight chat, with Jim Gray, when he showed himself to be over the moon with joy. He thanked his dad for pushing him hard, since he was 8, telling the fans that it was all worth it.

Santa Cruz showed a little bit of everything, hand speed, punch placement, defense, amazing stamina, and movement when he needed it and most noticeably, a wicked left hook to the body. A softer man than the 32 year old Malinga would have made like an accordion, and folded up, as the Mexican-born Californian tried to punch a hole through the South African, who was rated No. 1 by the IBF. The IBF has LSC at No. 4, but as he upped his record to 21-0-1 with 12 KOs, he did something more than send notice to the IBF that they had it wrong. He showed himself to be a fan-friendly hitter who now has to be mentioned when one is discussing bantamweight fights that need to be made. Malinga drops to 20-4-1, and has now lost two of his last four. That he wasn't stopped, as he was three fights ago, in Hozumi Hasegawa, is testament to his will and conditioning.

*=He actually threw an amazing 1,350 punches on this night

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