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Monday, 27 August 2012 15:03

Saturday night in Fairfield, California, Solo Boxeo Tecate featured two young local prospects, welterweight Alan Sanchez and featherweight Manuel 'Tino' Avila. At the end of the night both fighters advanced their careers, Sanchez through showing patience and maturity in the ring and Avila by showing fire.

The night also provided to those present the best of regional boxing. The event center was filled nearly to capacity. All but a few fighters had their own section of fans. There were lots of young men in their black Alan Sanchez t-shirts with the healthy glow and confidence of time spent in a boxing gym. There were also the dignified groups of older people for whom a night at the fights is as special as a night at the opera. Despite the presence of dangerous looking men, this was a family affair. The deejay quickly switched the reggaeton to ranchero.

The first fight of the evening featured cruiserweights Joe Gumina, 2(1)-1, of San Bruno, Ca. versus Payton Boyea, 0-1, of nearby Sacramento.During the introductions the long limbed Boyea looked more a boy anxiously awaiting the first day middle school than a professional fighter. Self doubt did not appear to be part of the shaved headed muscular Gumina's emotional registry. He looked like an eighth grader ready to take Boyea's lunch money.

Anxiety can sap the verve and energy of many fighter. Gumina's bull rush at the bell followed by some huge overhand rights and full power left hooks robbed Boyea of what was left along and his coordination to boot. For most of the first, Gumina stalked his rubber legged prey with a sadistic grin on his face, the type of grin that portends a future in a correctional facility equally comfortable on either side of the cage.

In the second, Boyea reminded the crowd that they were in fact watching boxing and not thoughtless thuggery. For in boxing, a well placed jab, however weak, proper circling, however shaky the legs, and a duck and a hug can negate wild left hooks and wide right hands regardless of the murderous force and power of which they are thrown. Boyea boxed away Gumina's exertions and Gumina's smile disappeared.

Unfortunately for Payton Boyea, Gumina had corner men. Gumina started the third with several hard straight jabs that melted Boyea's legs and his desire to win. Gumina cruised to victory with a grin. Payton's place may not be in a ring.

The second fight featured junior welterweights Jonathon Chicas, 5(3)-0 and Jose Mendoza, 7(3)-5. Both fighters were coming in on 5 fight streaks, Chicas a winning streak and Mendoza a losing streak. Both fighters continued their respective streaks. Mendoza suffers from the affliction of being a counter-puncher who has no punch. Chicas came forward strongly, but besides a few hooks to the body was not landing much clean for he was loading up and throwing from distance while Mendoza kept taking half steps back. Still Mendoza had no answers for Chicas until he switched to southpaw. This move seemed to befuddle Chicas and stifle his attack. In the third, just as I thought Chicas may remain perpetually confused, he burst forth with a series of fluid, quick, short, fast combinations that rocked Mendoza into the ropes. These were the type of combinations Chicas will need to put together to continue his streak.

Middleweight Paul Mendez, 7(2)-2-1, entered the ring to great applause. Mendez fights for Garcia Boxing of Salinas, Ca. Garcia Boxing and its supporters may be single handedly responsible for whatever profitability remains of professional boxing in the Northern California region. Garcia Boxing folks filled up six ringside rows with its fighters, coaches, their parents, friends, several babies, grandparents, and what appeared to be an entire preschool.

Mendez faced Loren Myers, 8(2)-16-1, of Fresno, Ca. Myers had the wide face, chest and shoulders of a successful high school offensive lineman and fought with the nuance of a slowly swaying heavy bag.

Mendez has what I would call a pretty jab. His pretty jab complements his light, graceful feet. Mendez added some rights and even a few hooks as his dance progressed. After three rounds of witnessing Mendez's beauty bouncing off his face and before that beauty turned terrifying,

Loren Myers sat in his corner and with a smile decided he had enough of Mendez's delicacies. Mendez TKO 3.

The crowd, conservatively estimated by my untrained eye as 80% Mexican-American, largely met Myers' quitting with indifference. Perhaps the gap in class was so wide that no one felt the need to witness the inevitable or perhaps the expectation that a fighter should 'die' in the ring is not as high for a white kid from Fresno as it is for boxer coming from Tijuana or Culiacan. That said, the man sitting next to me did mutter to himself in disgust that he didn't need to drive from Salinas to see some sparring.

Featherweight Manuel 'Tino' Avila 7(2)-0 training out of Fairfield, CA, against Vincente Alfaro 5(1)-1, traveling from Northfield, MN, was co-feature of the evening. Alfaro entered the ring clad in a poncho while Avila came in dressed in crisp, sharp white. The fighters had a long wait in the ring for the T.V. production to begin. At first intense, Avila took time to wave at some of his fans including two sweet little five or six year old girls whose faces smiled and beamed seeing their 'Tino' up their in the ring with the T.V. cameras and everything.

Avila, a highly touted Golden Boy prospect, has had pedestrian T.V. appearances where he still looked to be adjusting to the pro game. He looked good, not amazing. Saturday night, he stepped up his game.

Avila is blessed with the balance and the speed that are the stuff of a trainer's pleasant night sleep. Avila spent the first working behind a sharp, committed jab and a straight right hand. He deftly cut the ring off and used his feet to keep his range so he didn't smother his punches.

The action picked up decidedly in the second. Alfaro found success with his overhand right, but Avila dropped him after Avila quickly stepped out then back in with a one-two. Alfaro responded to his knockdown like an insult and came at Tino rapid fire. By the end of the round Avila was in firm control spending the last 40 seconds of the round behind a very hard jab and counter crosses.

Thirty seconds into the third, Avila caught Alfaro with a hard counter right causing Alfaro to make a desperate stand that ended when Manuel Avila dropped him with a left hook. Alfaro got up and Avila looked to finish.

With Alfaro exhausted, mouth open, and taking punishment, trainer and renaissance man Gordon Marino threw in the white towel, an act Marino, who knows the steep cost of the loss of man's dream, did not take lightly.

Vincente Alfaro was a willing opponent. Just this Saturday night Manuel Avila decided to debut a personal blitzkrieg that fans will want to see again.

Hometown boxer, Alan Sanchez, 10(4)-2-1 entered the ring to raucous cheers and chants. His cornermen implored the crowd to cheer louder. The crowd obliged. A member of his opponent's team crossed the ring to insult the rooting section. He got such a good reaction he returned to do it a second time.

Sanchez is a young, 21, fit, tall welterweight at the height of his speed and reflexes. Manuel Leyva, 21(12)-7, is not. Leyva is 29, 10 pounds over his ideal fighting weight and on the tail end of his career. Leyva is the type of fighter that prospects like Alan Sanchez need to beat to progress.

Leyva is a southpaw with a good chin, solid fundamentals, a depth of experience to draw on and enough veteran craft to require Sanchez's full respect and focus.

Sanchez showed Leyva his due respect and kept his focus. Sanchez used his speed advantage to stay out of danger while periodically strafing Leyva with hard crosses. Sanchez survived a body blow induce scare in the sixth to gradually wear down Leyva. Sanchez punished him in the 9th and finished him in the 10th. The crowd erupted.

Manuel Leyva may be the type of fighter that boxing needs for its young prospects. After viewing the battered pulp of Manuel Leyva as he slowly made his way to the dressing room like a man thrice his age one, one is left to wonder if Manuel Leyva still needs boxing.

Whether in eight years Alan Sanchez becomes another Manuel Leyva or even maybe a name

that boxing fans everywhere remember remains to be seen. What we do know is last Saturday night, while the clean-up and T.V. crews were dismantling the event around them, Alan Sanchez was a shining young local hero posing for pictures with ecstatic groups of his family and friends in the ring.

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