

## Geale-Sturm: Irresistible Objects and a Finally Moveable Force

Written by Phil Woolever

Tuesday, 04 September 2012 09:30

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*If this was Felix Sturm's swan song, it was a doozy. Sturm-Geale was a rock-solid scrap.*

OBERHAUSEN -Perhaps a draw was the most fitting verdict on an evening of cliches both apt and absurd, but Daniel Geale and Felix Sturm had fought far too hard for that, whatever it meant, with sanctions aside.

Rhineland boxing's gloved-up gourmet menu did not have any Deutschland "Hausmannskost" (home cooking) on the bill Saturday night as Geale earned a coin-flip split decision into another pay bracket, just a quick autobahn dash away from Sturm's home town.

Instead, patrons were treated to a big-bang buffet feast of fisticuffs, topped off with generous portions of grace, class, and personal insight for the duking dessert. It was exactly the type of stimulating fight scene, everywhere from the nearby train station to the makeshift smoking areas outside the bleacher areas, that ensures the sport's continued popularity in these parts.

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Alongside emerging Gennady Golovkin's win over commendable Grzegorz Proksa, Arthur Abraham's surprising performance against Robert Stieglitz and the upcoming Andre Ward - Chad Dawson or Sergio Martinez - Julio Cesar Chavez, Jr fiestas, the 160 -168 pound rumbling range is currently the most prime territory in boxing, especially during the present 30 day stretch.

Were those the "boxing's dead" blabbermouths I saw sitting in a ditch with the "rock and roll" and "US world power" nitwit naysayers?

Considering the intense skill level exhibited by each title holder, Geale - Sturm was one of the better fights anywhere this year, and definitely a leader for Western Europe. Joan Pablo Hernandez - Steve Cunningham had wilder whaps, and David Haye - Derick Chisora in London was a bigger spectacle, but Oberhausen saw a near classic through the extended, exhausting best of each man brought out by the other.

Almost all ringside media in my informal postfight poll scored the contest for Sturm, never the case before in his most recent defenses. The trifecta of 116-112 scores by the official judges were too wide, whoever was favored.

Even allowing a discount for my personal bias I gave Sturm the last round, and the fight, 115-114. A one or two punch margin, folks.

"I knew it was very close, but I was never worried about the decision, I knew I had put in the work,(both) in training and tonight," said Geale, gazing like it was all still sinking in as he came down the ring post steps.

The win was Geale's second title winning split decision over a German based fighter in Germany, as he added Sturm's WBA belt to the IBF version Geale took from Sebastian Sylvester.

"I give my congratulations to Daniel for a great fight," said Sturm, "And for his great team. He fought superb and he was very tough. I am, of course, very sad about the decision. But I am glad it was as good a fight as we promised our fans and I wish him the best. Maybe we will have a rematch if he wants one."

Two clinched cliches, "That's boxing" and "No losers", were repeated in multiple languages by both competitors and almost everyone behind a microphone except the beautiful "Sat 1" TV babe who moderated the press conference sitting next to Sturm, her perfect blonde hair and makeup in sharp contrast to the dark bruises of Sturm's slumped profile.

Any boxing fan should want to see Geale - Sturm II. Plenty of carnage, plenty of class.

Almost all available Oberhausen seats were filled in the scaled-down Konig-Pilsner Arena with a somewhat glamorous, somewhat subdued swarm of approximately 7077. You could get a good

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sense of how the fight flowed back and forth through periods of studious silence or screaming in the Sturm stronghold.

For a usually polite German boxing audience to howl in protest after the debatable decision was announced showed both their passion and disappointment.

Geale came in to blaring power chords, fitting his fighting style. No one in the stands made a noise, but Geale was glad to keep them quiet.

Sturm's pyrotechnical entrance to a great intro by Swedish singing star Lykke Li had bizarre, almost scary irony as hundreds captured images with devices held straight up in an unconscious, very eerie one armed salute which hopefully illustrated of how far society has progressed in recent decades.

Sturm came out quick in round one, didn't land much but threw a lot. Geale looked a little stronger and little more aggressive behind good body shots. Sturm had a better second session as they started to alternate control. The fight was dead even at the halfway point, but Sturm looked much worse for wear. Geale landed bigger shots, Sturm landed more.

During the first half of the fight Sturm slipped most shots. Geale didn't but his aggressiveness proved effective.

It appeared strength would trump speed as Geale roared in rounds 7 through 9, but Sturm proved his championship heart and skill as he rallied back with stirring combinations down the stretch.

From second row center I had the bout dead even going into the final frame, the final minute, the final frenzied exchange.

Round 12 may well be the Round of the Year.

Geale's gritty, granite style and personable manner won him many fans, through a looming local melancholia as long time titlist Sturm was dislodged from the upper stratosphere.

Of more vital relevance for 31 year old Geale and the global boxing community, the result seemed to open the door a bit wider for a series of major middleweight matches. We may never see the "Four King" days of Leonard, Hagler, Hearns, Duran and others like Wilfredo Benitez and John Mugabi, but there are solid heirs to the throne throwing shots these days, plenty of potential punching princes.

It was almost as if the confident Team Geale brought in new addition promoter Gary Shaw to field negotiations for Geale's next giant step. That could mean a match with Golovkin, or the winner of Martinez - Chavez Jr, but realistically not until some softer defenses to build everybody's USA market recognition and purse potential.

Sturm looked much more marked at post fight press conference. Geale was relatively

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unscathed, though he looked just as exhausted.

"Everything went the way I planned it. We knew I had to fight the fight of my life and I did it," said Geale, now 28-1 (15). "I'd be glad to have a rematch because it was a great fight, but I can't really say what's next. I'm happy I get to some rest, then sit down and look at my options. I think I'll have at least a few more big fights now."

All four members of Team Geale that spoke sounded sincerely impressed with how Sturm the promoter treated them. It looked painful for Sturm to raise his shoulders and force a slight smile.

"I've known Felix for a very very long time. He has absolutely nothing to be ashamed of," offered Shaw during a personal display that spoke well for US diplomacy, and of which a dejected Sturm seemed to be taking to heart. "I've been on that side of the table before and I know he's very down right now, but I know he'll be back if he wants."

If it was the venerable, still relatively young (at 33 years old) Sturm's last big stand, it was certainly an excellent end to quite a run.

It's hard to assess how much mauling mileage Sturm has left, but Geale took lots of it.

Sturm's level of achievement is good in global terms, not just European records, but Sturm will always be faulted around North America for remaining inside a perceived protective zone in his adopted German homeland. Sturm still won't have to travel far for work unless he wants, but Australia ain't the worst place for a paid holiday.

Maybe the most obvious move for Sturm, now 37-3-2 (16), would be the huge, German extravaganza that could come with a bout against newly crowned 168 pound rival Arthur Abraham. That could probably provide Sturm with a nice, grand finale payday to his career inside the strands should those welts look a bit too purple for the face of a guy who still models for Calvin Klein underwear.

At this point, both Sturm and Abraham still have enough leverage and options beyond each other to continue their long running, no-budge negotiation stance.

For his part, it looked like Sturm is still one of the top five middleweights in the world, belt or not.

With his hard earned new hardware, Geale may prove to be the very toughest middleweight of them all.

Waning illumination from the remains of a so called blue moon glowed down upon cheerful figures of shadow and light, that hustled noisily to the trains from the arena. Whatever the fans' scorecards read, there was a pervasive sense that somehow, the strands held no injustice.

There was pain, there was glory.

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There were no losers.

That's boxing.

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### **Buzz Murdock says:**

I find Felix Sturm is a sedative hypnotic. I can never stay awake during one of his fights. I think he's seen better days, and his pacing is very predictable....Plus i think he entered the ring to a cello/violin overture, which would make any fighter from the U.S. immediately sleepy.