

## STERN VIEW: Solo Boxeo Ringside Report

Written by Joel Stern

Tuesday, 04 December 2012 11:07

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A relaxed and knowledgeable boxing crowd filed into the Georgie Duke Event Center in Vacaville, CA on a rainy Saturday to witness a pair of prospects, Manuel 'Tino' Avila and Alan Sanchez, who both hail from Fairfield, CA, a tough burb 5 miles down the interstate. Several hours later, the crowd filed out to even harsher weather, but content after both prospects scored KO victories.

The Georgie Duke Event Center is your standard municipal community center. The center houses a small P.A.L gym where main event fighter Manuel Avila trains. The presence of Solo Boxeo Tecate T.V. light towers squaring the ring, the lack of a bad seat, a quality D.J. and waitresses with full trays of beer slowly transformed the sterile main room designed for youth floor hockey, quincineras, and craft fairs into a Night at the Fights.

Preston Freeman, 2(1)-0, and Eduardo Hernandez, 0-5-1, opened the evening with a welterweight bout. Freeman originally from St. Louis, MO, and now training and fighting out of Salinas, CA, entered the ring in crisp white trunks and shoes while sporting a gold mouthpiece. Young, fresh, quick, a powerful and efficient puncher, at ease in the ring, Freeman is a boxer who will be a joy to watch develop. His opponent, not so much.

Even opponents with no real hope of victory want the opportunity to shine in the ring. The only thing sparkling for Eduardo Hernandez were his grey hairs glimmering silver in the lights. A man reaches a certain age where, no matter the quality of his conditioning, his flesh can no longer resist the sagging forces of gravity. Eduardo Hernandez is at that age. (EDITOR NOTE: His Boxrec entry does not list his DOB.)

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After Freeman spent about 45 seconds stepping back and around from Hernandez's slow, wide reaching advances, Preston's corner decided the time had already arrived to take the horse to the glue factory. A shout of "Walk him down," could be heard from across the ring. Preston obliged his corner and finished Hernandez with a series of thunderous uppercuts. No count was necessary though Hernandez needed several minutes and several attempts to rise from his stool before exiting the ring, hopefully for the last time.

Next, James J. "Hollywood" Taylor, 2-0, met Manuel Alejandro Reyes, 0-1, at junior middleweight. Hollywood wore black and white shorts with black stars and a black Chuck Taylor All Stars T-shirt. Taylor is a unique talent, not necessarily a good or successful boxer, but unique nonetheless. Hollywood, with his front knee bent at a 90 degree angle, back leg reaching almost straight back, body and chin upright to the sky, and hands resting close together at the middle of his chest, looked more a praying mantis than boxer.

Reyes, a southpaw counterpuncher, backed straight up all night and could not match Hollywood's speed or power. Thus, he was unable to make Hollywood's chin pay despite the crowd's apoplectic pleas to for him to throw to "los cabeza." Hollywood has a nice cross to the body, commits to every action and good enough timing this night to keep his chin raised in victory.

The intermission between the opening bouts and the televised portion of the card provided time for the beer to take effect and gave the D.J. his opening to switch from ranchero to old school hip-hop. Stoic, middle-aged working men caught unaware in the moment could be seen bobbing their heads, cup in hand.

Welterweight Alan Sanchez, 12(6)-2-1, met Miguel Angel Munguia, 26(22)-26-1, in the co-feature. Mungia wore black trunks and a red Santa Claus hat. A quick glance at his records showed he was here to gift Alan Sanchez a quick KO. Mungia spent his winning years as a featherweight before turning into a monthly opponent. Tonight, giving up 8 inches in height and nine years, he boxed at 149 pounds.

Sanchez received enthusiastic cheers from his numerous friends and fed Mungia a steady diet of long right crosses over Mungia's shoulder roll guard. Sanchez, who can be patient when necessary, sensed no danger from Mungia and was willing to take in order to give back. In the

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second, Mungia went down after a series of 1-2's. He got up, but the referee waived off the fight seconds later when Mungia took a knee after tasting a 1-2 near the ropes.

Alan Sanchez fans have progressed from wearing 'Team Sanchez' shirts to 'Sanchez Mania' t-shirts. If Sanchez mania is to spread beyond Fairfield, he needs to progress to a higher level of opposition like he did early in the calendar year.

The swing bout featured bantamweights Bruno 'The Aloha Kid' Escalante, Jr., 6(3)-1-1, against Pablo Cupul, 6(4)-10. Escalante is trained by by Brian Schwarz of the Undisputed Boxing Gym in San Carlos, CA. Schwarz works closely with Nonito Donaire. Cupul, originally from Merida in the Yucatan province of Mexico, has the high cheek bones and chiseled facial features of the Mayans who once ruled that region.

Escalante, a southpaw, boxed with the hand speed, precision punching, balanced pivots and head and foot movement one would expect from someone who works with Nonito Donaire's people.

Cupul fought with the fearlessness, pressure, and fierce joy of combat one would expect from someone representing a warrior culture. Cupul's pressure forced Escalante to be at his sharpest. Escalante outboxed Cupul for much of the first 4 rounds, landing the cleaner punches and combinations. But, Cupul made him work.

In the fifth and final round, Cupul's relentlessness paid off. He caught Escalante with a hard inside right hand that sent Escalante running and holding and brought the largely Hispanic crowd to its feet. Cupul could not finish him off. Escalante made it to the bell. Cupul did not receive nor deserve the decision, but when the bell rang and he climbed the ropes in each of the four corners to acknowledge the crowd's cheers, he earned that right.

It is a rarity in this boxing age to see two young highly touted prospects meet 10 fights into their careers. The main event featured two former nationally ranked amateurs whose dreams of future championships are not yet foolhardy. Manuel 'Tino' Avila, 11(4)-0 and Ricky Lopez, 9(4)-2, met to prove which super bantamweight was ready to advance those dreams. Manuel Avila passed the test with an 8th round KO.

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The fight was tense throughout. The lively crowd quieted in concentration mimicking the intensity of the fighters. Avila used a sharp disruptive jab, textbook counter rights and hooks and superior reflexes and quickness to keep Lopez from implementing his fight plan. Despite suffering a cut over his left eye in the 2nd round and being forced on the ropes on several occasions, Avila slowly outclassed the Lopez, finishing him in the 8th and final round after Lopez went down first from a counter right and the second time from a left hook at the tail end of a 1-2-3.

Manuel 'Tino' Avila, when on his game like he was Saturday night, shows real promise. One senses there is a cool, cruel killer in him that will allow him to properly utilize his physical gifts and take him as far as he can go in the ring.

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