

Avila's Fighter of the Year: Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero; Plus Other Best Performances

Written by David A. Avila

Tuesday, 18 December 2012 19:05



Everybody has their personal choice for Fighter of the Year, but I just can't imagine any of those others doing what Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero did in 2012. No doubt in my mind Guerrero is the Fighter of the Year in 2012.

A number of other categories are on this list including Prizefight of the Year, Knockout of the Year, Round of the Year, Upset of the Year, Comeback of the Year, and several others,

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including this year's top ring officials. We'll start off with the Fighter of the Year.

When Guerrero was injured during training almost two years ago, he was still a 135-pound lightweight who had defeated Michael Katsidis. An injury to his shoulder forced him to cancel a fight and the world did not hear about the Gilroy, California fighter until last summer. That's when he told Golden Boy Promotions he was ready to jump back in the ring. They offered a tune up fight, he shook his head and demanded the best fighter available. No one at lightweight or junior welterweight accepted an offer to fight Guerrero.

Instead of waiting, Guerrero jumped two weight divisions and told Golden Boy he would fight anyone in the welterweight division. Anyone. Still, there were few takers and we're talking about going down the list of boxing's most talented weight division. Only one fighter accepted the match and it was an undefeated welterweight named Selcuk Aydin.

Aydin had been training in Las Vegas and allegedly sparred with Floyd Mayweather. According to some sources Aydin was a handful and everyone that stepped in the ring with the heavy-handed prizefighter did not want any more. Though boxing fans did not know Aydin, the fighters, trainers and promoters knew all they needed to know. Many predicted Aydin would knock out Guerrero. Golden Boy signed Aydin to a contract.

Guerrero was offered a fight with Aydin and didn't hesitate to accept the challenge. Despite the fact he had never fought as a welterweight, and was coming off a 15-month layoff, the Northern California southpaw eagerly accepted the fight. Aydin promised to break Guerrero's jaw. The Ghost replied to bring it on.

After 12 tumultuous rounds on July in San Jose, Guerrero proved he could bang with the bigger 147-pounders, including the much feared Aydin. Guerrero won by unanimous decision and asked his promoters, who's next?

Two-time world champion Andre "The Beast" Berto accepted the fight and Guerrero didn't hesitate to sign the contract. Because Berto is managed by Al Haymon the match was shown on HBO and held at the Citizens Business Bank Arena in Ontario, California.

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Fans and experts were split down the middle on who would win between Guerrero and Berto. Sure, the Ghost had defeated Aydin, but Berto was a different fighter altogether. Most cited the former champion's athleticism as a distinct advantage, ignoring Guerrero's own athleticism. It was kind of comical to hear the reasons many felt Guerrero was out of his league.

From the opening bell Guerrero dominated the fight and floored Berto twice in winning a brutal 12-round welterweight fight by unanimous decision. Berto recovered from two knockdowns to put up stiff resistance but never really could hurt Guerrero. Even after the impressive performance HBO commentators were still not convinced though they were ringside and could clearly see Guerrero dominated.

Now think back and remember Guerrero began his pro career as a 122-pound junior featherweight. Could you imagine any 122-pounder today competing as a 147-pound welterweight?

Guerrero is the clear cut Fighter of the Year for 2012. It was an amazing performance when you consider he jumped two weight divisions without a tune up fight. Not even the great "Hands of Stone" Roberto Duran or Sugar Shane Mosley had jumped from lightweight to welterweight without a tune up fight or two.

Honorable mention: Brandon Rios, Danny "Swift" Garcia, Timothy "Desert Storm" Bradley, Abner Mares, Andre Ward, and Nonito Donaire.

Best Prizefight of the Year – Marquez vs. Pacman IV

The fight that nobody wanted to see turned out to be the most amazing fight of the year. The number of people who say they were present at Juan Manuel Marquez and Manny Pacquiao's fourth fight will grow over the years.

Best Prizefight of the Year must go to Juan Manuel Marquez vs. Manny Pacquiao IV.

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Pacquiao and Marquez lit up the MGM Garden Arena in Las Vegas in a fight that saw both elite fighters aggressively attack each other with a fury that exceeded all previous encounters put together. It was a surprising fight that saw each hit the deck until the fight was ended by a Marquez right cross in the sixth round. Few had expected the fight to develop into this firefight. It was like concentrated napalm. Explosive is the word best describing the fight that took place on Dec. 8 in Las Vegas.

Other fights deserving mention were Brandon Rios vs. Mike Alvarado, Mauricio Herrera vs. Mike Alvarado, Josesito Lopez vs. Victor Ortiz, Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez vs. Juan Francisco Estrada, and Orlando Salido vs. Juan Manuel Lopez II.

Knockout of the Year – Marquez Kos Pacman

Few knockouts end with a single punch in the elite level and it doesn't get more elite than Juan Manuel Marquez and Manny Pacquiao. After both suffered knockdowns in the first five rounds, none of the 16,000 fans at the arena or the millions watching on television expected Marquez to unload a devastating right hand to render Pacquiao unconscious. It was a shocking and almost frightening moment to see Pacquiao lying face down and motionless. One single right cross from Mexico's Marquez ended the fight in the sixth round. It was the perfect punch.

Runner up for knockout of the year goes to Randall Bailey who was losing every round to Mike Jones and ended the fight with a single right uppercut to win the IBF welterweight title in the 11th round.

Round of the Year – Brandon Rios vs. Mike Alvarado round five.

Oxnard's Brandon Rios was already known as a slugger who never met a punch he didn't like. Against Colorado's Mike Alvarado, the former lightweight world champion was meeting a bigger and harder hitting adversary than he'd ever faced before. It didn't matter, Rios and Alvarado fought each other with Rocky film star Sylvester Stallone in the audience and showed how it's

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really done. Almost every round drew oohs and aahhs from the crowd but round five was vicious. Each fighter unloaded with his best and saw the other return fire with a vengeance on Oct. 13 at the Home Depot Center. It was professional violence at its best in round five. Rios ultimately won the fight and said he gets offended if he's not hit by the other guy.

Upset of the Year – Josesito Lopez TKOs Victor Ortiz

Riverside's Josesito Lopez was not even a welterweight when asked to fight former world champion Vicious Victor Ortiz. But the graduate of Rubidoux High accepted the offer to meet Ventura's much heralded Ortiz on June 23 at Staples Center and shocked the boxing world by winning a technical knockout victory at the Staples Center and national television. Few people outside of the Inland Empire gave Lopez a chance, but that victory made Lopez a hero across the country and in Mexico.

Runner up has to be Palm Spring's Timothy Bradley winning a unanimous decision against Manny Pacquiao last June 9, in Las Vegas. It wasn't an upset to this writer but to others in the boxing world, few gave Bradley a chance.

Comeback Fighter of the Year – Randall Bailey

When Randall Bailey was matched against undefeated Mike Jones it was supposed to be a set up fight to hand the IBF title over to Jones. Bailey, a former junior welterweight world champion attempting to win another world title at 37 years old, was not expected to give the bigger and faster Jones much of a challenge. For nine rounds it looked like Jones was on his way to winning the title when a Bailey right hand suddenly floored the youngster in round 10. Then came round 11 and Jones was told to stay away from Bailey's right hand. Caught in a corner, a short right uppercut found Jones' chin and down he went for good. Bailey wept uncontrollably. After 12 years Bailey finally had another world title belt wrapped around his waist.

Inspirational Fighter of the Year – Paul Malignaggi

After years of hearing he couldn't break an egg or other such nonsensical statements, Paul

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Malignaggi accepted a fight against Ukrainian fighter Vyacheslav Senchenko, who held the WBA welterweight world title in his home country. If you know anything about fighting in Eastern Europe, its near impossible to beat a boxer in that area without a knockout. Odds-makers must have tabbed Malignaggi a 12 to 1 underdog but that didn't stop the Brooklyn prizefighter known as "The Magic Man" from accepting the fight. It was one of those boxing moments in time where despite the odds a fighter proves to the world he is under-rated. Malignaggi dominated the fight from the opening round until he stopped Senchenko by technical knockout to win the world title in the 9th round. The boxing world was amazed.

If you think Senchenko was over-rated, the Ukrainian former world champion recently knocked out Ricky Hatton in Manchester to stop the former British hero from a mega payday with Malignaggi. Malignaggi is this year's Most Inspirational Fighter.

Best Prelim Fight of the Year – Derrick Murray vs. Pedro Toledo

Few fans or boxing writers knew much about Derrick Murray or Pedro Toledo. Luckily, I had seen Murray in a sparring session go toe-to-toe with a lightweight and junior welterweight prospect and keep pace with both. So when I saw that the St. Louis junior lightweight Murray known as "Whup Dat Ass" was going to fight Ecuador's Toledo, I made sure to get to the Doubletree Hotel in Ontario early. That night on Sept. 21, the two lit up the arena with their crackerjack combinations and willingness to throw bombs at all price. First, Toledo hit the deck, then Murray hit the deck. Each smacked each other with such force and abandon that the crowd was delirious. After a mere four rounds the fight was ruled a draw. It was the right call and worth every second the fight lasted.

Boxing Ring Officials

Best refs

Referees have a thankless job and there's more than meets the eye when inside a boxing ring. First, the referee has to make sure both fighters are safe and following the rules at all times. Second, a referee has to keep the fight flowing without interfering with the fighters. It's not as easy as it looks. Third, all knockdowns are not easily decipherable. It's difficult to determine if a fighter was knocked down from a blow, pushed down or has slipped. Fourth, a referee has to

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keep moving. If they stand in one place too long there will be plenty of fans, journalists or photographers miffed about somebody blocking their view of the fight.

Here are the best in 2012:

Pat Russell, he's a mainstay in the world of boxing and continues to be among the top five referees in the world. The California based referee has been named in this category many countless times. Many say he's simply the best.

Kenny Bayless has consistently proven to be on top of the action even when immersed in elite showdowns where things tend to get overblown. The Nevada official seldom fails.

Tony Weeks has improved every year that I've covered the sport and we're talking about more than 20 years now. Nevada has two of the best with Weeks and Bayless.

Jack Reiss is another good example of moving up the ladder from satisfactory to exemplary status. In the past three years his performances have equaled any of the best.

Others include: Ray Corona, Tom Taylor, Raul Caiz Sr., Raul Caiz Jr., Benjy Esteves Jr., Robert Byrd, Steve Smoger, Jon Schorle, and Frank Garza.

Judges

All of these selections are subjective but on a consistent basis those selected as the best ringside judges have shown to fit that description.

A judge can ruin a prizefighter's career with the wrong judgment. On so many occasions I've witnessed some horrible decisions. Nobody is perfect, but when it comes to judging a fight there

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must be a pattern shown by judges of consistent scoring. Some judges prefer action fighters, others defense, and still others precision and accuracy. Everyone below has shown to have a consistent method of scoring. A boxing judge does not have an easy job.

Max DeLuca of California is the best judge in my estimation. I've seen him score many fights and he's proven to be the cream of the crop. No prizefighter can get a fairer shake than having DeLuca judge their fight.

Jerry Roth of Nevada has been leading the charge for many years and prefers the action fighter. If few punchers are being thrown then he favors the aggressor. He's always fair and good when it really counts. Roth has been a judge for quite a while now. He's one of the deans of judging.

Lisa Giampa is one of the newer judges in Nevada but I've never seen a bad score on her part in the past three years. There have been fights when the other two judges were off and her scores were right on the mark. She's young and definitely one of the young budding stars of boxing judges.

Julie Lederman has become the best judge on the East Coast. For years she's been shelling out consistently good cards and without a doubt is New York's best judge. Her scoring of the Robert Guerrero and Andre Berto fight was exactly the same as Max DeLuca's and Alejandro Rochin.

Other good judges: Marty Denkin, Alejandro Rochin, Fritz Warner, Pat Russell, Dave Moretti, Duane Ford, Richard Houck, Jack Reiss, Ray Corona, Raul Caiz Sr., and Barry Druxman.

Fights on television

Sat. NBCSN, 6 p.m., Tomasz Adamek (47-2) vs. Steve Cunningham (25-4).

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Sat. Telefutura, 10 p.m., Abner Cotto (15-0) vs. Sergio Perez (27-13).

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Radam G says:

TSS West Coast Bureau Chiefy David-Double beat me to the draw. I was going to throw down my selection for the year. Now I'm curious about whom the other scribes and readers are going to spit. So I'm gonna hold off for minute. Holla!

Avilad60 says:

Radam,

Your comments and recommendations are always on mark. I'm sure whatever you suggest in your Best of 2012 will be valid.

Happy New Year!

ILLINI4030 says:

I agree with all except the Fighter of the Year. Nonito Donaire would get my vote.

Having said that you could give Guerrero the "Comeback Fight of the Year."

I'm probably being picky here but isn't the Adamek fight on NBC not NBCSN??

gibola says:

Fighters of the year. No Carl Froch?

ali says:

Nonito should be fighter of the year..inspirational fighter of the year is Danny Jacobs..

Radam G says:

Wow! SCLA Ali, you're stealing my thunder. I'm calling Danny Jacobs the inspirational pugilist of the years also. JunJun, The Filipino Flash is my honestly clean fighter of the years. EPO doesn't show after 24 hours, especially in Sin City pi\$\$ tests. A lot fighters are on that jive. And prefer fighting exclusively in Vegas in order not to be caught. Holla!