

Written by Joel Stern
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This past Saturday at the Cache Creek Casino, operated by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, Don Chargin Productions and Paco Presents put on a card highlighting five of Northern California's top professional prospects. In the main event, Salinas based middleweight Paul Mendez battered his opponent for a six round KO victory. In the co-feature, junior bantamweight Bruno Escalante, training out San Carlos, garnered an eight round majority decision over game Texas veteran Joseph Rios.

The evening's boxing took place in the casino's 600 seat upscale theatre, Club 88. With the ring up front on a stage that will later this year burst with the likes of Brandy, Wayne Newton, and Y&T, and a large bar in the center of the room whose top shelf carried dozens of colorful, artistically shaped and surely expensive bottles of liquor, this was not the typical local community center venue that has played host to many of the area's recent cards. There is something to be said about the energy of the crowd coming from all four sides of the ring, but there is also something to be said about watching boxing in style and comfort. Regardless, the ring was the same and the intensity of the action inside of it was no different than any other solid night of professional boxing.

In the first bout, junior welterweight Darwin Price, 2(1)-0, cruised to a four round unanimous decision over professional opponent Johnny Frazier, 2(2)-20-4, of Las Vegas. Price, originally from St. Louis, was a track scholarship athlete at Grambling St. and a nationally ranked amateur boxer with the unfortunate luck to be in the same weight class as U.S.A. Olympian Errol Spence, Jr. Darwin has the makings of a pure boxer with straight punches thrown from long arms, quick feet on the end of lanky legs, and a temperament that avoids unnecessary risks. His style makes his decision to train with Salinas' Garcia Boxing (not to be confused with Oxnard's Robert Garcia) seem a wise one. Max Garcia, his son Sam and Dean Familton teach a Midwest, hit and not get hit, style of boxing that is often at odds with California's prevalent come forward and bang-it-out philosophy. Darwin responded to Max and Dean's relaxed and measured ringside instructions calling for patience, feints and working off the jab by doing each of those things. The fight highlighted Price's jab, a jab as smooth and sparkling as his bright white trunks with gold sequins. Darwin Price's jab was quick and extremely accurate. Using primarily feints, jabs and the double jab followed by the right hand, Price was able keep his opponent on the defensive through much of the fight. Frazier was first looking to counter Price, a fighter too quick for him hit. Later, Frazier was just looking to survive, though he did shock Price with a last second one-two that drove the off balance Price to the canvas and was ruled a slip. Johnny Frazier had the unfortunate task of being an opponent - the boxer brought in by the other side's management for various purposes, winning not being one of them. I am not even

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sure if Frazier got to pick out his ring walk music, some 1970's Trans Am muscle car rock song. At 2-20-4 and having only been stopped twice, he knew his role well. Fortunately, for the rest of the evenings' fights, the opponents were not so accepting of their fates.

In the second bout, San Jose's Andy Vences, 4(2)-0 defeated fellow lightweight Matt Flores, 0-3, via four round unanimous decision. From Twin Falls, Idaho, Flores entered the ring with black trunks and shoes, a shaved head and a chip on shoulder. Andy Vences, a Northern California successful amateur, carried the day with a decent jab, good hard body work, his left hook and superior defense. Flores never wavered and tried to make a fight. Vences seemed a little slow, looped his right a bit and got caught repeatedly with an unconventional lead right-left jab combination. But, Vences was never in trouble and was the clear victor.

The third fight brought the upset. Junior middleweight Eric Mendez, 3(1)-1, of Hawaiian Gardens, Ca., scored a 2nd round TKO over favorite Ricardo Pinell, 5(4)-1-1, of San Francisco, leaving the legion of Pinell fans who made the hour and half drive to Cache Creek silent. Pinell, a southpaw, began the first round beautifully out boxing the orthodox Mendez. While Mendez plodded forward throwing a slow hook that Pinell easily avoided, Pinell circled in both directions, tripled the jab, created angles for his cross and followed in for quick flurries of hooks to the body, then circling out before Mendez could respond.

The second round began with much of the same until Mendez proved that in boxing a gulf of superior speed and skill can be bridged in an instant. Pinell lingered a bit too long and a bit too close in the space where a southpaw's face is lined up with an orthodox fighter's right hand. Mendez did not let the moment go to pass and fired a short hard right cross that landed flush on Pinell's chin. Mendez followed with several hard hooks that one did not need to see to know they landed. The sound of meat being struck with a mallet is unmistakable. Pinell went down hard. He quickly got up on wobbly legs and eyes that spoke of a consciousness not quite present in the here and now. He recovered enough by the count of eight to convince the ref he was not finished. Mendez proved otherwise, quickly landing another cross, followed by a flurry that Pinell could no longer defend. The referee stepped in and stopped the fight with Pinell out standing on his feet. When the ring announcer announced the result, Mendez jubilantly yelled out, "Hawaiian Gardens, baby!" Eric Mendez represented.

Before the co-feature and the main event began, former WBA junior welterweight champion Loreto Garza was honored for being the only world champion to come from the nearby city of Woodland, Ca. Woodland, an agribusiness town of 50,000 is the home town of Vicente Escobedo, and home to Paco Damian (the event co-promoter), a city run gym that consistently produces nationally ranked amateurs, and a citizenry with a high percentage of people who

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know the difference between an overhand right and a right hook.

In the co-feature dynamic junior bantamweight Bruno Escalante, 10(5)-1-1, out of San Carlos, Ca. scored a majority decision over San Antonio's Joseph Rios, 13-9-2. Coming in from Texas, Rios has always been matched tough. Over his 7 year pro career, the 31 year old has faced 11 undefeated boxers. If you want to know where your prospect stands, you match him with Rios. Rios entered the ring with red trunks that advertised the Knock U Out barbershop. I will assume they are responsible for his tight fade topped by spiked, gelled and blonde dyed hair. Bruno Escalante immigrated from the Philippines to Hawaii as a child. The 'Aloha Kid' is an explosive southpaw sharp shooting counter puncher who uses his hand and foot speed to strike quickly and evade even faster. Balanced and athletic, often playing matador to the bull, Escalante has become a regional favorite. After a feel out round, the 2nd, 3rd and first two minutes of the 4th round saw Escalante doing most of the scoring with single shot crosses and lead right hooks. Both fighters employed lots of feints and level changes looking to open up opportunities, but Escalante was the one landing clean. While only landing single shots, Escalante's punches were quick enough and thrown with enough force to disrupt Rios' advances and allow Escalante to jump back at an angle and/or circle away to reset the action. The last minute of the 4th saw a change in the tenor of the fight. Rios started to read Escalante's movements and was able to force himself inside before Escalante could get off his counter punches. When inside, Rios would employ uppercuts and hooks to Escalante's body. Escalante mostly looked to hold until the referee broke the fighters.

Rios began the 5th as he ended the 4th, forcing his way inside and hitting hard to the body. Rios' corner implored, "Stay on him." Rios dictated the entire round. Escalante was physically strong enough to stay inside, but he was unable to get off his own punches, something Escalante will have to improve on as he develops. In the 6th round Escalante changed tactics and had a nice comeback round. His corner instructed, "Back him up with the jab." Escalante by coming forward with the jab opened Rios up for the cross that landed cleanly several times. The 7th saw Escalante backing Rios up to start, but Rios started to slip Escalante's cross. Rios landed a clean cross, hook combination that drove the Aloha Kid to the ropes. Escalante appeared rattled and Rios looked for the KO. Escalante dropped his hands and Rios put him to the ropes again with a cross followed by left and right hooks. Escalante's corner yelled for him to get his points back. The round ended with both fighters exchanging to the crowd's pleasure. Escalante looked to counter and spin off in the 8th with Rios closing the gap and pounding Escalante on the inside. Both fighters gave what they had left. When the bell rang, the boxers, whose faces had been masks of concentration broke into deep smiles, laughed and hugged. The judges saw the fight 76-76 draw, 78-74 and 78-75 for Escalante.

Standing in front of IBA middleweight champion Paul Mendez's, 13(5)-2-1, chance at an October television appearance on FoxSports1 was Rahman Mustafa Yusubov, 9(7)-12. And

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stand in front of Mendez is what Yusubov did, allowing Mendez to pound him with the 1-2 combinations repeatedly until finally retiring in the corner after six rounds. At 6 foot 1 and with a 76 inch reach, Paul Mendez has won all six of his fights since moving his training to Salinas, Ca. and Garcia boxing. Slowly developing into a Don Familton boxer (the late Don Familton was an Los Angeles based trainer whose work is fundamental to the Garcia's training), Mendez is looking to step up from a regional headliner to a national prospect. Mendez has been sparring with middleweight world champion Gennady Golovkin. Yusubov was here to provide Mendez the opportunity to sharpen up his learning before performing under the television's bright lights and in front of the watchful eyes of the big match makers. The 5 foot 7 inch Yusubov could take a punch and had plenty of heart, but not much else. He took a lot of clean punches. If Mendez, in his gold sequined trunks, learned anything from this fight, it was his range where he could land the end of his straight punches as hard as he can.

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