The Mouthpiece

No Laughing Matter—Dhafir “No Fear” Smith Decisions Rankin
Saunders Dominates Morrison.

By: George H. Hanson Jr., Esq.

Date: Saturday, January 28, 2012
Venue: First District Plaza - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Promoters: Percy “Buster” Custus & The James Shuler Memorial Boxing Gym
Announcer: Henry “Dis-com-bob-u-lating‖ Jones
Referees: Eddie Cotton Jr. & Hurley McCall
Photos: www.christoneyphotography.com

It has to be a special night when homage is paid to two Philadelphia ring greats—James “Black Gold‖ Shuler and Smokin’ Joe Frazier. Tonight promoter Percy “Buster” Custus reminded everyone that the legacy of James Shuler, who died tragically in 1986, is still intact as the eponymous gym is now the epicenter of the sweet science in the City of Brotherly Love. Custus opened the gym in 1994, a living monument to his friend and one of my favorite fighters. There were many moist eyes in the venue as Judge Jacqui Frazier-Lyde joined Custus in the ring to honor her father and one of the greatest heavyweights of all time—Joe Frazier on this glorious night of the sweet science in the Capital of Boxing. Adding to the momentous occasion was ring announcer Henry “Dis-com-bob-u-lating‖ Jones decked out in his signature black & white two-tone spectator shoes taking us back in time when they were commonplace. His delivery and colorful introductions made every bout a main event keeping the audience on the edge of their seats in anticipation of what was about to “go down‖ adding texture and flare to this wonderful event.

(L-R) Frazier-Lyde, Stowe and Custus

Storming out the ring after Henry Jones announced the decision, light-heavyweight Quentin “Renegade‖ Rankin made his way back to the dressing room and slammed his fists on a table. It never ceases to amaze me that the combatants in a fight oftentimes have
a different perspective of what transpired than the audience. Yes, Rankin, despite only five fights (4 wins – 1 loss – 0 draws – 3kos) handled himself remarkably well, had his moments, against Smith a 53-fight veteran who in 2010 upset Jeff Lacy, former IBF super-middleweight champion in winning a unanimous 12-round decision. But for Rankin to believe that he was cheated out of victory borders on heresy or delusion beyond comprehension. In the word of the esteemed philosopher, Michael Gerard Tyson, “that is ludicrous!”

Rankin, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis, made the trip all the way from Charlotte, North Carolina as a last minute substitute to face Smith. North Carolina, South Carolina or any Carolina is not what we would call a hotbed of the sweet science. Thus, it was somewhat surprising to witness in the opening round of the scheduled six-round main event that Rankin can actually fight! He circled well using his jab and matching Smith—a slow-starter who doesn’t get warmed up until about the fourth round. Unless the heavens opened up and the Lord gave me an edict—I would never ever put Smith in a six-rounder or have him face a southpaw!!

There wasn’t much to distinguish the two in the first three rounds, which had Smith pressing the action with his jab and Rankin showing good technique and great lateral movement. The action reached a boiling point in the fourth stanza when Rankin stood toe-to-toe with Smith and made it a dogfight. They continued to get down and dirty after the bell with Referee Cotton having to break up the ruckus and point them back to their respective corners. Smith was upset and you sensed that the tide was turning as I scored the round for Rankin. However, the Philly war horse regained his composure and continued to work his jab and was credited with a knock-down, an apparent slip by Rankin that Cotton miscalled. The last round could have been scored for Rankin who used his legs in sticking and moving. Most of press row had Smith victorious winning four rounds.

It was no laughing matter when Rankin came out of the dressing room still in his trunks and asked the videographer when and how he could get a tape of the fight. He went on to make reference of how he was “tired of getting robbed.” Allow me to mount my soapbox—Roy Jones Jr. got robbed against Park Si-Hun in the 1988 Olympics; Floyd Mayweather Jr. was fleeced in his bout against Serafim Todorow in the 1996 Olympics;
Rankin fought well and shocked everyone. Nothing was taken from him except the pre-fight perception that he was just another down South fighter brought in on the cheap to fill the card. This guy can fight and has a bright future.

Had Dr. Frankenstein gone to his lab focused on creating the perfect physical specimen for a female pugilist, he would have emerged with Althea “Lady Thunder” Saunders. Saunders (2 wins – 0 losses – 1 draw – 0 kos) has the legs of a 100-meter sprinter and the upper body symmetry and strength of a professional swimmer. Her orbs are set perfectly in her cranium to garner maximum peripheral vision. Beautiful, lithe, powerful, alert and quick as a cat watching her you get an eerily titillating feeling that visitors from another world left her in Roswell, New Mexico programmed for destruction and mayhem in the squared circle. I spoke to Saunders in the dressing room as she went through the motions of loosening up for her scheduled four rounder, jabbing, stutter-stepping and feinting punches towards an imaginary foe. Saunders looked like a racehorse in the gates as she went through the motions while letting me know that Muhammad Ali is her favorite fighter and that she loved how he fought backing up. The irony of the comment didn’t go unnoticed because the one time I saw her fight in Atlantic City, I can’t recall her ever taking a backwards step. Saunders is a heat-seeking missile who has one gear—forward—she is genetically predisposed to search and destroy.

Earlier, I had the opportunity to interview Saunders’s opponent, Davrene Morrison (2 wins – 11 losses – 0 draws – 2 kos) of Montana. A Native American and member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, Morrison started boxing ten years aback and “jumped” into the professional ranks after compiling a 22 wins and 6 losses as an amateur. The good looking, tall and slender boxer admitted that she is a brawler who is learning how to box. Immediately, I knew that she and Saunders were going to set off the sprinkler system in the building with their fistic fireworks. Only in America that one can witness two gorgeous women pursuing their passion for the sweet science while trying to give new meaning to the word annihilation!

Referee McCall gave the instructions, the gong rang and they met in the center of the ring. Saunders moving like a modern-day version of the great Henry Armstrong came forward moving her head, side-to-side while pumping the jab, eyes wide open to parry or slip any retaliation. Morrison held her own circling, firing back looking for an opening.
Morrison’s early success was ephemeral as Saunders took control in the second round and never took her foot off the accelerator jabbing, landing the harder shots, perpetual motion, eyes fixated on her target like a hawk zeroing in on an escaping rabbit. Despite the constant pressure and barrage Morrison, her nose bleeding, never showed any signs of surrendering. She came to fight and circled trying to catch Saunders unexpectedly. After four exciting rounds of launching leather – Saunders was awarded a unanimous decision 40-35 twice and 40-36 and left the ring looking like she had just warmed up for a night out on the town.

Philly junior-middleweight Tyrell Boggs (0 wins – 3 losses – 0 draws – 0 kos), returning from a 30-month hiatus, told me that he had taken the fight on short notice and knew nothing about his opponent—Skender Halili (2 wins – 0 losses – 0 draws – 2 kos) of Bronx, New York. Needless to say that they got acquainted quickly as Halili introduced himself by storming out the gate, pressing the action trying to impose his will from the opening bell of their scheduled four-rounder. It was a tactical opening stanza as Boggs defying ring rust boxed nicely, held his own and landed a good straight right counter that was answered likewise by Halili who finished off with a combination downstairs. With his sister, top ranked amateur sensation Kymberli Stowe in his corner yelling instructions, a fading Boggs tried to stay the course as Halili picked up the pace in the second round dominating with good bodywork. Boggs was like the Titanic at sea sinking quickly as the gale force winds of hurricane Halili swept over him with Stowe’s words of encouragement being the only life line that helped the fading fighter make it to the end of the round which was punctuated with a devastating right hand by the marauding man from the Big Apple. Boggs sauntered back to the stool on spaghetti legs as his corner signaled to Referee Cotton that the fat lady had sung and that the Philadelphian was calling it a night. Halili was declared the winner by technical knockout at 3:00 of the second round.
pursuing a professional boxing career. Jesus, whose last fight was in 2009, is now one of his brother’s corner men. In a scheduled four-rounder, the southpaw Barbosa (1 win – 0 losses – 0 draws – 1 ko) started quickly by jumping on Luis “The Wolf” Rivera (0 wins – 1 loss – 0 draws) of Puerto Rico in the opening stanza. He pressed the action working behind a stiff jab throwing punches with bad intentions making the Wolf, who was sporting a six-inch ponytail, look like a Beverly Hills’ Chihuahua. Round after round, Barbosa attacked trying to make a statement in living up to his moniker. Despite being outgunned Rivera was able to nip back at Barbosa with a few combinations while attempting to avoid punishment. All three judges scored it a shutout 40-36—a unanimous decision for Barbosa.

Maybe, he had just watched the first Rocky movie but in the pre-fight interview Allentown, welterweight Joel Nieves sounded just like Sly Stallone’s character with his one-line truculent responses while appearing to be bothered by my questions. At one point I wanted to end our discourse and ask promoter Percy Custus to allow me to replace debuting Kareem “Get Busy” McFarland since I was beginning to believe that Nieves was enjoying being rude. Nevertheless, I quickly brought closure to our repartee and took my ringside seat. Well, Nieves (0 wins – 3 losses – 0 draws) kept his perfect record intact as his dressing room machismo dissipated as the southpaw McFarland lived up to his moniker and “got busy” wailing away with every punch in his arsenal as a cowering Nieves looked like a camel trying to find shelter in a sandstorm. It was the great Joe Louis who said “you can run, but you can’t hide.” At one point it appeared as though Nieves was trying to find safe haven behind Referee McCall who with the alacrity of a world-class matador, side stepped as McFarland punches continued to rain down on the hapless fighter. McCall showed compassion and rescued Nieves at 1:01 of the round—a technical knockout for McFarland.

**Other Results:** The card included four exhibitions. Former IBF junior-middleweight champion Buster “The Demon” Drayton entertained fans with a three-round sparring session against police officer and gym warrior— Richard “Pretty Boy” Floyd. Light-heavyweight contender Yusaf Mack (29 wins – 4 losses – 2 draws – 17 kos) sparred three rounds each with Prince Badi Ajamu (27 wins – 15 losses – 1 draw – 15 kos) and former amateur stand-out Frank Walker. Amateurs and pint-sized pugilists 75-pounders —Rasheen Brown and Tryon Witherspoon displayed their wares over three rounds.
It was an exciting night of boxing as the near capacity crowd reveled in the action. Enjoying the fistic display were Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, Eugene “Cyclone” Hart, Kevin “The Spoiler” Howard – first man to put Sugar Ray Leonard on the canvas; Vinny Burghese, “Terrible” Tim Witherspoon, Pete Lyde, Rick El, Georgiy Guralnik, Robert “Bam Bam” Hines, Jamal “Tyson” Davis, Coach Sharron Baker, Steven Foster Sr. and Steven Foster Jr. Throughout the evening comedian J’Vonne Pearson pushed the envelope in his attempt to entertain. At one point I thought he would need security to leave the venue as he heckled a late comer commenting on her attire which included a coat that showed what can be accomplished with ingenuity, the fur of several dead cats, glue and Velcro. However, it was no laughing matter when I later googled Pearson and was met with a mug shot that appears to be his likeness and name staring back at me ............

Continue to support the sweet science, and remember, always carry your mouthpiece!

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