

Cuban boxing sweeps the professional lineup at Night of Champions

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Arlen López

Havana, Aug 28 (RHC) - Two-time Olympic champion Julio Cesar La Cruz closed a perfect day for Cuban boxing in a six-fight professional card held in Havana, in the Night of Champions sponsored by the International Boxing Association (IBA).

In a packed Havana Sports City Coliseum with some 14,000 people, the billboard marked the return of professional boxing to the island after more than six decades.

In the main bout of the evening, agreed to 10 rounds, La Cruz won by unanimous vote against Madiyar Saydrakhimov from Uzbekistan, to achieve his third victory as a professional.

"It was a good fight, I knew how to apply my physique. There is Julio Cesar La Cruz for a while," said La Cruz, owner of two Olympic and five world titles, who won the belt of his division and a prize of US\$120,000.

Also winning the IBA light heavyweight belt (80 kg) was two-time Olympic champion Arlen Lopez, who defeated Dominican Luis Tejeda with a beating that forced the referee to decree a technical knockout in the second round, to win his fourth consecutive victory as a professional, third by knockout.

In one of the most attractive fights of the evening, Erislandy Alvarez, the only Cuban Olympic boxing champion in Paris-2024, was far superior to Colombian José Ignacio Muñoz with an impressive punching rhythm during the six rounds, to achieve his fourth success without defeat as a professional and ratify himself as a great prospect.

With an elegant and precise boxing, the veteran three-time world champion and triple Olympic medalist Lazaro Alvarez (63.5 kg) won by unanimous vote in a six-round fight against Uzbekistan's Mujibillo Tursonov and raised his successes to seven.

In the remaining bouts, world runner-up Saidel Horta beat Russian Ruslan Belousov in a close fight, while two-time Olympic and world champion Roniel Iglesias (36 years old) defeated Armenian Gurgen Madoyan by split vote in six-round fights.

Since 2022, Cuban boxers started to participate in professional circuits outside the country, although Tuesday's was the first time Cuba hosted a card.

Cuban boxing officials, owner of 42 Olympic and 81 world titles, applauded the return of professional boxing to the rings on the island.

The president of the Cuban Boxing Federation, Alberto Puig, considered that events like the Night of Champions can help Cuban boxing, which is not going through its best moment.

"For our Domadores, professional boxing is part of their preparation" and is "an economic benefit for our athletes," said the Cuban federation president.

The Night of Champions in Havana was the third in the Americas, after those held in Mexico and Venezuela, and paid tribute to the First World Championship held 50 years ago in the same venue, on World Boxing Day.

The celebrations were attended by the famous Panamanian fighter Roberto "Manos de Piedra" Durán, and Puerto Ricans Miguel Cotto and José Luis Vellón, the latter a medalist in the first World Boxing Championship in Havana in 1974.

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