Calling Sherlock Holmes

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It is supposedly water under the bridge, but you can say the water underneath continues to boil.

Long after the smoke of battle had cleared, boxing fans from all across the globe continue to shower with catcalls the split-decision American Timothy Bradley received in his 12-round showdown with Filipino boxing star Manny Pacquiao for the World Boxing Organization (WBO) welterweight (147 pounds) championship.

Clearly the beaten fighter, Bradley inexplicably received identical scores of 115-113 from judges C.J. Ross and Duane Ford. The third judge, Jerry Roth, gave the fight to Pacquiao, albeit via the slim margin of 115-113. In the opinion of just about every boxing expert, Pacquiao won by a large margin. This deadline-beater scored it 117-111, giving Bradley only the last three rounds of the fight.
How Ross and Ford came up with a winning tally for Bradley is a mystery only Sherlock Holmes can solve. While displaying only flashes of his old brilliance, Pacquiao still dominated Bradley in the first nine rounds of the contest, wobbling the challenger on several occasions with his pinpoint left straight. In the 10th round, Bradley changed his strategy and started jabbing and moving around the ring. Pacquiao never got to adjust to Bradley’s new style and the fight ended up going to the scorecards of the judges.

While Bradley arguably swept the final three rounds of the contest, it was still not sufficient to overcome the commanding lead Pacquiao had posted. Bradley needed nothing less than a knockout to turn the tide to his favor. No miracle punch came, as Bradley seemed more interested in surviving the distance with Pacquiao.

The decision giving Bradley a split-decision win left the crowd at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, Nevada dumbfounded. It is a good thing that Pacquiao took the “loss” in stride as a hostile reaction from the Filipino could have triggered a riot in the arena. Just about every fan lambasted the verdict. Heck, my neighbor called it the worst decision he has ever seen since he married his wife.

Calls have since been made to overturn the decision. Promoter Bob Arum has asked the Nevada Attorney General’s Office for a full-blown investigation. The WBO and the Nevada State Athletic Commission (NSAC) are also in the process of conducting separate investigations. The WBO is forming a five-man panel that will review the scores of the judges. The WBO will then forward its findings to the NSAC.

The WBO has made it clear that it can only go as far as ordering an immediate rematch between Pacquiao and Bradley. Even without a directive from the WBO, Bradley has a contractual obligation to give Pacquiao a return bout. In a way, the investigation of the WBO is an exercise in futility.

The authority to reverse the decision is in the hands of the NSAC. The NSAC is taking a lot of heat from the controversial decision, and rightfully so. In marquee fights, the NSAC has made it a habit to only pick Vegas-based judges. The NSAC has refused to recognize judges from other states even if they are certified members of the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC). Considering that it was the NSAC which picked the judges for Pacquiao-Bradley, it only follows that the NSAC has the authority to rectify the glaring errors made by its appointees.

It remains to be seen if anything fruitful will come out from the investigations. Decisions are usually overturned in cases where the winning boxer tests positive for banned substances in the post-fight drug test. In most cases, the decision, no matter how controversial, is retained as judgment call. Case in point: In May 2004, Pacquiao knocked down Juan Manuel Marquez three times in the first round but the fight was still declared a draw. Judge Burt Clements admitted that he failed to give Pacquiao an extra point for the third knockdown, a crucial error as the additional point would have given Pacquiao a decision victory. In the absence of any proof that malice or corruption attended the scorecard of Clements, the decision was left untouched.

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