

HYPE TRAIN

Verdejo exhibits flaws in his armour as he struggles against Flores, writes Jack Hirsch

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO
FEBRUARY 3

★★★☆☆ MAIN EVENT
★★★☆☆ UNDERCARD

ON paper, **Felix Verdejo's** 10-round unanimous decision win over **Oliver Flores** by scores of 99-91, 98-92 and 96-94 did not look bad, but there were red flags in his performance that are reason for concern. Puerto Rican Verdejo, who has been hailed in many quarters as the next Felix Trinidad, now seems destined to have a career somewhere along the lines of Juan Manuel Lopez, who did win a world title, but never fulfilled his island's prophecy of greatness. And with the way that Verdejo faltered in the later rounds against the ordinary Flores, there are no guarantees he will even achieve the heights of Lopez.

Perhaps we are being a bit harsh on Verdejo. It was his first fight in close to eight months after being injured in a motorcycle accident. Even his promoter, Bob Arum, admitted beforehand to not being sure how Verdejo would look. It is also possible that Verdejo just had a bad night. In any event, Felix would no longer be a clear favourite to defeat WBO

lightweight champion Terry Flanagan if they box this June in New York, as has been mooted.

Flores was more inactive than Verdejo, last having boxed 13 months ago when he unsuccessfully challenged for Takashi Uchiyama's WBA super-featherweight title, being halted in three rounds. His only other loss had been to newly crowned WBC super-feather champion Miguel Berchelt back in 2012, when he was halted in two rounds. The Nicaraguan has defeated moderate opposition, but was completely outclassed in his only two contests against world-level foes. And that is how it panned out for the first seven rounds against Verdejo. The man from San Juan did not look impressive, but nevertheless displayed enough ring generalship to thwart southpaw Flores as he moved forward. Flores' aggression was rather tepid, which allowed Verdejo's jabs to look more effective than they actually were. Verdejo targeted the body from time to time, but



never made a commitment to working downstairs.

Verdejo was winning rounds, but showing little spark. By the fifth round, the crowd at the Roberto Clemente Coliseum were getting restless, and in the sixth they started to boo their favourite son. Verdejo tried to respond, but outside

of landing one good sweeping right, simply was unable to pull the trigger on any meaningful punches.

When Verdejo [inset] stumbled a couple of times from mid-ring in the seventh, it was thought that a wet canvas was the reason, but in the following session it was plain to see that Felix's legs were starting to betray him. Flores started to cut the distance between the two and was able to land straight lefts that hurt Verdejo and put him in a survival mode.

Flores did not press his advantage against a tired Verdejo in the ninth, and was hit with a smashing right at the bell. However, in the 10th he wasted no time, going for broke, throwing haymakers soon after the bell rang, resulting in the two getting tangled up and going down. Flores continued to pursue Verdejo and would shake him up with a blow now and then, but Felix wisely held tightly until told to break by referee Jose Rivera. By the end of the fight Verdejo was punching back. He showed the heart of a champion by weathering adversity. Beyond that there were not many positives he could take from this fight.

Christopher Diaz, from Puerto Rico, dropped **Efrain Esquivias** in the third and fourth rounds of a scheduled 10, eventually stopping him at 2-18 of the seventh. Diaz was bigger and much more talented. He worked off the jab, completely controlling the action from long range. If anything, it was a mild surprise that the match lasted as long as it did.

In the seventh, Esquivias desperately bobbed and weaved when he was against the ropes, as Diaz kept punching. Few of the blows landed, but Carson, California's Esquivias, boxing outside of his home state for the first time, had taken substantial punishment throughout the match, making the stoppage by referee Ramon Pena a viable one.

THE VERDICT Warning signs aplenty that Verdejo must not ignore.

Photos: TOP RANK



DISJOINTED: Verdejo [left] does not shine, but gets the job done

Photo: MORNE DE KLERK/GETTY IMAGES



NO LOVE LOST: Veteran rivals Green [left] and Mundine exchange blows

CURIOUS EVENTS

Neil Devey watches Green edge Mundine on a night of controversy

NORTH ADELAIDE
FEBRUARY 3

★★★☆☆ MAIN EVENT

DANNY GREEN took the spoils, **Anthony Mundine** won over the haters, and boxing found another judge whose scoring bordered on the bonkers.

After almost 11 years, Australian sport's bitterest rivals finally had their rematch at the Adelaide Oval, a venue more accustomed to Ashes cricket battles and Aussie Rules ding-dongs.

Fittingly, this grudge match ended in acrimony. While Green claimed a controversial majority decision win in contrast to his more clear-cut unanimous points loss in 2006, Mundine claimed robbery.

He had a case, too, certainly where judge Hubert Minn was concerned. The Hawaiian astounded everyone by scoring the 10-round 98-90 to Green, giving the Perth man every round but the seventh, where he was deducted a point for twice punching Mundine while holding the back of his head. What fight was Minn watching?

Another judge, Californian Steve Morrow, went 96-94 for Green. Even that was confusing, after he recorded the seventh a 10-10 round despite Green's point deduction. The one Aussie official, Tom Ferrauto, had it 94-apiece.

Mundine, from Sydney, seemed to have done enough in the latter rounds of a scrappy encounter to have narrowly won, albeit after risking being thrown out inside the opening minute. The first of endless tangles saw American referee Frank Garza clumsily try to split them. At no stage did he tell the fighters to break or stop boxing, but he did call out, "Let him go." Green duly released Mundine's head from under his arm, Mundine fired in a short but telling left hook which turned his opponent's legs to jelly.

There was a danger the fight was going to be called off there and then as Green slumped to the deck. Instead, he regained his senses enough to reassure the referee and ringside doctor that he was okay to continue. Mundine had a point taken off and the feud which dates back to when Green turned pro after the 2000 Olympics had another twist.

That two past-their-prime 40-somethings could still attract 27,000 fans for a rematch which belonged in a previous decade, and that Main Event was able to charge \$A60 (a touch under £37!) for pay-per-view, underlined the duo's unique appeal Down Under and their undeniable marketing savvy.

Throw in Mundine stepping up a ludicrous four weight divisions from super-welter for this cruiserweight pension-booster – the two met at super-middle in Sydney first time around – and still the public lapped it up.

UNDERCARD

MIDDLEWEIGHT **Tim Tszyu**, the 22-year-old son of Hall of Famer Kostya Tszyu, stopped fellow Aussie **Mark Dalby**, 38, in the third of a scheduled four-rounder.

Green, 44 next month, had weighed in at 183lbs, while Mundine, 41, had bulked up to 174lbs. Green appeared strong, Mundine, while not flabby, was not as tight. After his early scare, Green tried to use his extra weight to wear down his foe, while always looking for the right hand. Mundine, who appeared nervous at the start, settled from around the fifth and worked his jab. At times he made Green look clumsy, but there was little flow.

As the fight went on, Green's impact was receding. Perhaps Mundine's early foul – described on social media by Aussie heavyweight Lucas Browne as a "massive dog shot" – had taken its toll on the former WBA light-heavyweight champion. More likely, age had caught up with them both. Going into the last, Green raised Mundine's hand in a sign of respect for their shared history. Neither threatened a stoppage, but Mundine finished the stronger.

The general consensus at the bell was that Mundine had got it. Not by much, but enough. I had him up by two. The judges disagreed, and that's when matters took possibly the unlikeliest turn of all.

Mundine, so often portrayed as the villain in Australia, and who had angered many by insisting he wouldn't stand for the "racist" national anthem, received genuine sympathy across the board. People saw a man who had not been given a fair go, definitely where one judge was concerned. As the enormity of the result sunk in, he looked crestfallen and said he would consider an appeal. Green, who had waited so long for redemption, insisted he had rightly been declared the winner, but acknowledged that Minn's scoring was "bulls**t".

The cynics will see the fallout as the opportunity for them to head straight into a third fight. Let's hope not. They pulled this one off, just. The quality was in short supply, but in terms of drama it delivered. There is no need for Green-Mundine III.

THE VERDICT Puzzling scoring and rigours of time blight this sequel.

FULL RESULTS

Danny Green (183lbs), 36-5 (28), w pts 10 **Anthony Mundine** (174lbs), 47-8 (27); **Andrew Moloney** (117 3/4lbs), 12-0 (7), w pts 8 **Renael Pael** (117 1/2lbs), 21-5-1 (11); **Jason Moloney** (121 3/4lbs), 12-0 (10), w pts 8 **Marco Demecillo** (123 1/4lbs), 21-5-1 (17); **Trent Broadhurst** (176lbs), 20-1 (12), w rsf 4 **Nader Hamdan** (173lbs), 44-14-1 (19); **David Aloua** (205lbs), 12-2 (8), w pts 6 **Filippo Fonoti Masoe** (207 1/4lbs), 3-12 (1); **Quade Cooper** (200lbs), 3-0 (3), w rsf 2 **Jack McInnes** (212 1/2lbs), 0-3; **Shane Tuck** (193 1/4lbs), 1-1, w pts 4 **Ivan Kolar** (193lbs), 1-6; **Tim Tszyu** (157 1/2lbs), 2-0 (1), w rsf 3 **Mark Dalby** (158 1/4lbs), 4-13 (1); **Antonio Caruso** (166 1/2lbs), 2-0-1, w pts 4 **Friday Nwaiwu** (161 3/4lbs), 3-8-1.