



Rio 2016™



BLOOD AND GUTS: BOXERS DEALING WITH FACIAL CUTS



BOXING

RIO DE JANEIRO: Olympic boxing is bloody again. Men are fighting without headgear for the first time in 36 years, making the sport debatably safer and undoubtedly more attractive to fans. But the most tangible consequence is gore: At least 10 boxers at the Rio Games have already incurred significant facial cuts in the first five days of the tournament.

Algerian middleweight Ilyas Abbadi was unsure how he got the 1 1/2-inch gash outside his left eye during his victory over Congo's Mpi Ngamissengue on Tuesday, but blood trickled down his face during the bout. The cleaned-up wound still gaped to reveal bloody tissue afterward, and he could only hope his training staff could close it satisfactorily before his next fight Friday.

"Now I know the value of the headgear," Abbadi said through a translator. "I think for the amateurs, that would be better. I would prefer to fight with headgear, but this is how it is." In pro boxing, the sight of blood on a fighter's face and chest is common - and an undeniable part of the sport's primal lure. But that visceral reminder of the sport's inherent violence had been rare in the modern amateur game until the International Boxing Association (AIBA) removed headgear from its fighters in 2013, citing scientific studies claiming protective padding actually increases brain injury.

Although AIBA has worked to improve its boxers' fighting styles to minimize head clashes, cuts have become a steady occurrence at major tournaments ever since, often when two skulls collide in an up-close exchange of punches.

WITHOUT HEADGEAR

The Olympics are the amateur game's biggest showcase by far, and the sport is desperately hoping a major cut won't ruin a fighter's medal hopes through medical disqualification. No fighters' dreams had been ruined by Wednesday afternoon, but the change has already led to some grisly, compelling scenes in preliminary bouts. Russia's Adlan Abdurashidov and Algeria's Reda Benbaziz both were cut Tuesday during their lightweight bout, which was stopped twice in the second round for Abdurashidov to receive medical attention. Blood dripped steadily from Benbaziz's face in the third.

"The guy was using his head a lot, and he received a warning from the judge," Benbaziz said after winning the decision despite a 2-inch cut through his right eyebrow, which was already swelling moments after the bout. "Yeah, it will affect my next fight, but we will have to fight with an injury. I wish I could be using the headguard." — AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: Cuba's Erislandy Savon, right, fights Argentina's Yamil Alberto Peralta during a men's heavy weight 91-kg quarterfinals boxing match at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Wednesday. — AP

CLASSY CUBAN BOXERS LIGHT UP RIO



BOXING

RIO DE JANEIRO: A trio of Cuban boxers put on a masterclass at the Rio Olympics on Wednesday in a throwback to some of the finest traditions of the country's amateur fighters. Light flyweight Joahnys Argilagos underlined his rich potential as he became the first boxer at the Games into the semifinals to guarantee at least a bronze medal, as the boxing approaches the business end of the competition.

The 19-year-old prospect and world champion had Kenya's Peter Warui—who is nearly twice his age—running around in circles on his way to a unanimous points decision, as Cuba extended their ominous perfect start.

Cuba, with its rich boxing heritage that has culminated in 34 gold medals and counting, is among the most successful countries in Olympic boxing history and strongly fancied to do well again in Rio.

Julio Cesar La Cruz, a three-time world amateur light heavyweight champion with

spectacularly graceful movement across the ring, was equally emphatic in a unanimous points victory over the hopelessly outclassed Mehmet Unal of Turkey.

And in the final contest of the day, heavy-weight Erislandy Savon, nephew of Cuban all-time great Felix Savon, showed glimpses of the killer instinct that made his uncle an Olympic legend.

Argilagos displayed the full array of his electric footwork, at one point ducking a haymaker from Warui, whose momentum took him tumbling into the ropes.

The young Cuban merely grinned back at his opponent and later delivered a sucker-punch while appearing to look in the opposite direction.

FAMOUS NAME

Argilagos faces Yurberjen Martinez—who he has trained with in the past in the semis on Friday, after the Colombian defeated Samuel Carmona Heredia of Spain on a split points decision.

"I felt more confident than in my first fight," said Argilagos, after delivering one of the most impressive displays in Rio to date.

"I knew I was going to bring joy to Cuba and I stuck to my tactical master plan." "The

Colombian is going to be a very tough rival," added Argilagos, also a former youth world champion and one of the hottest prospects around. "We have never fought but we have trained together and I know that he has some good weapons."

La Cruz, who turns 27 on Thursday and called his win an early birthday present to himself, picked Unal off at will and appeared to barely break sweat in a one-sided demolition to surge into the quarter-finals.

A quarter-finalist at the last Games in London, he will face home Brazilian hope Michel Borges in the last eight.

Savon, whose features are far older than his 26 years, made it a Cuban hat-trick and another guaranteed bronze when he silenced vocal Argentinians in the arena supporting the limited Alberto Peralta, who hardly landed a single telling blow and was nearly out on his feet by the end.

Savon is aware of the expectation that comes with his famous name and says he has seen all the videos of his uncle's fights.

But he said: "We have different styles. He was a puncher and I'm more a stylist." "This is my moment to win the gold medal and to rekindle the name of my uncle in the Olympics," he added. — AFP

HOMER WINS SILVER IN MEN'S SABRE



FENCING

RIO DE JANEIRO: The United States saw a pair of fencers put themselves in position to win unprecedented gold medals at the Rio Games. Neither came through. But simply getting to the finals helped show how far the Americans have come in a sport where they've long struggled. Third-ranked Aron Szilagyi of Hungary beat upstart US fencer Daryl Homer to win gold in men's sabre

Wednesday. Despite the loss, Homer earned the second silver medal for the American men's fencing team in Rio, joining Stanford's Alexander Massialas.

"We're trying to raise the visibility of the sport," Homer said. "We are very competitive with each other, and it's great. I love that."

Homer's impressive final touch gave him a thrilling 15-14 victory over Iran's Mojtaba Abedini in the semifinals and put him within a win of the first gold for the US men in the modern era. Szilagyi proved to be too much for the 10th-ranked American, who fell 15-8. Still, the Bronx-born Homer finished as well as any US fencer in his weapon ever had. Homer found out about fencing when he

was five by reading his dictionary. He begged his mother, Juliette Smith, to let him try out the sport, and Homer wound up under the tutelage of former American fencer Peter Westbrook

Westbrook's foundation is designed to mentor inner-city youth through fencing. It has also been crucial in the career of Ibtihaj Muhammad - who made history on Monday as the first US athlete to compete wearing a hijab. Homer emerged as one of Westbrook's prized pupils, earning spots on four All-America teams while at St. John's. He also became the first American man to win a medal at a world championship event, taking silver in 2015. — AP