

Nino Benvenuti sends a stiff right to the jaw of Emile Griffith during the first round of their middleweight championship contest at the new Madison Square Garden. Nino went on to regain his 160-pound crown via the unanimous 15-round decision route.

# *Griffith, Outfoxed, Not Fighter He Used To Be*

By NAT FLEISCHER

**A** FOURTH meeting between Nino Benvenuti, of Italy, now the world middleweight champion, and Emile Griffith, of the Virgin Islands and New York, whom he dethroned in the new Garden's big double header? Could be. But certainly not in New York. It may be that the replay will be booked for Italy. But the kind of money they would expect is not to be found over there.

The story of the Benvenuti-Griffith fight, preceding the Mathis-Frazier heavyweight bout, plays up the vast importance of the only knockdown in a title bout. Emile suffered that indignity in the ninth round, at a time when he was coming into his own following a poor start.

One round, a crown at stake, and Emile missed the opportunity. He went into the final three of their fifteen rounds with

the vim he displayed when he rewon the crown at Shea Stadium from the same opponent on September 29, 1967, and almost hit the jackpot. Another round and he might have come home the winner and still champion.

Emile had the Italian wobbly as he cut loose in the final session, tossing punches from all angles, forcing Benvenuti to hold often, or to retreat. The pace was too much for Nino at that point, and the final bell was sweet music to his ears. Griffith, sensing defeat, did his best fighting in the last three frames, in the final one of which Nino was hanging on to save himself.

The rally came too late. The early lead gained by Nino, and the ninth round knockdown aiding him considerably in the points tally, spelled defeat for the defending title holder.

From the standpoint of boxing technique, the features of

the fight were as follows:

**1—Griffith, with all his experience, with all of his expert guidance from corner man Gil Clancy, was outfoxed. The Italian made Emile fight the Italian's way.**

**2—Griffith was no more spectacular than he had been in previous showings in New York, and has gone back in vigor and vehemence. He could not command Nino in the infighting.**

**3—Benvenuti is not outstandingly a 45-minute fighter.**

The knockdown was the deciding factor in the final verdict. Even among those in the press seats who figured the fight an even affair in rounds won, Benvenuti was tabbed winner on the basis of the knockdown.

The 29 year old Italian, following an attack against the ropes, nailed Griffith with a beautiful left hook to the mouth as Emile came forward. Then a right and Emile was down on his side listening to the count of Referee Lo Bianco.

It was a shot that brought the huge gathering to its feet, with the Italian supporters yelling "Nino, Nino".

The felled champion struggled to his feet at the count of six, took the mandatory eight count, then held his opponent before regaining his equilibrium. It was a blow that definitely clinched the bout for the European.

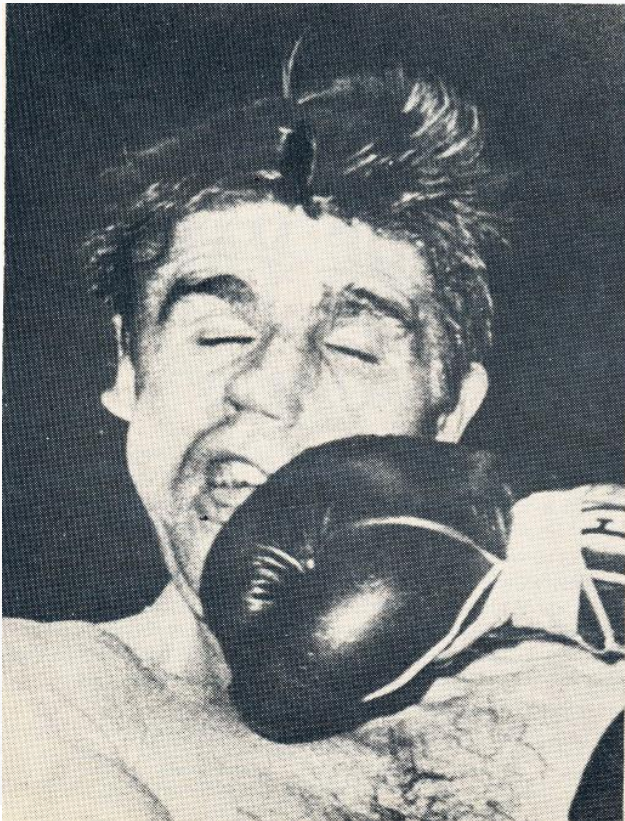
Griffith returned to his corner with a worried look. He was fully aware of the impact that punch would have in the final tabulation. His seconds worked over him feverishly when Emile reached his corner. They urged him to go out and fight in close.

With his height advantage of 3½ inches Benvenuti was able to tag Griffith repeatedly with stiff jabs. When Emile came rushing in for close range battling, he was met with uppercuts and body punches that often caused the champion to retreat or hold.

Griffith ducked, weaved and bobbed to avoid Benvenuti's attack. Thus Nino missed his best chances to follow up his advantages.

It took rounds No. 10 and 11 for Griffith to regain his com-

Benvenuti takes a wicked shot from Griffith in the 13th round. Emile was in the midst of a last-ditch rally which fell short.



posure. In these he frequently tasted the effects of Benvenuti's excellent, well directed jabs. They were tantalizing.

Then followed a revival of the Griffith fighting spirit. He tossed his punches where they would do the most damage. The body was his target and he didn't miss many of his tosses as he had in previous rounds.

"I would like to fight Nino again," said Griffith in his dressing room. "I think I won the bout."

Asked what brought about his defeat, he replied, "It was that right to my mouth that sent me to the canvas."

When several of the newsmen disputed the blow and insisted that it was a left that tagged him and started him downward, followed by a right, Emile replied: "Well I was there. I got the punch. No matter what, it was the first punch, the right, that had the zip to it and the second helped put me down. I know the knockdown cost me the fight, but in my heart I know I won despite that."

When Benvenuti was informed about the dispute in Emile's dressing room, he smiled and said: "It was a left cross."

While Benvenuti was unmarked, his opponent's right eye was puffed and half closed.

Benvenuti admitted that Griffith surprised him with his rally in the last three rounds, especially the fifteenth.

"I didn't think he had that much left", said the new champion. "I was tired from the fast pace and from the number of punches I landed up to that time. But I was the better man and wasn't worried at any time about the outcome."

Benvenuti said he would take a long rest before making fresh plans.

Here are the scores of the officials and that of The Ring:

**Referee Lo Bianco: B B B G G E G G B B B B G B G—8 6 1**

**Judge Al Berle: B B B G G G E B B B B G G G—7 7 1**

**Judge Frank Forbes: B E B G G B G B B B B G G G—8 6 1**

**Nat Fleischer: B B B G B B G G B B B G G G—8 7 0**

Griffith hits the deck after taking a left and right from Benvenuti in the ninth round. Emile took the mandatory eight count.

