

Johnny Bratton vs Kid Gavilan II No Rope A Dope In This Fight By Bobby Franklin

Recently, I received an email from my friend boxing historian Mike Silver, the author of *The Arc Of Boxing*. Mike included a link to a Youtube video of the second Kid Gavilan vs Johnny Bratton fight. He described the bout as one of the best he has seen and commented emphatically, "This is BOXING." After that ringing endorsement I had to take a look for myself. Mike certainly was right. The fight was indeed entertaining as well as a textbook example of how much boxing has devolved over the years.

Kid Gavilan and Johnny Bratton fought three times during the period from 1951 to 1953. In their first fight Gavilan won the NBA World Welterweight Championship from Bratton. In their third fight the Kid defended the title against Johnny. Their second fight was a ten round non-title affair.

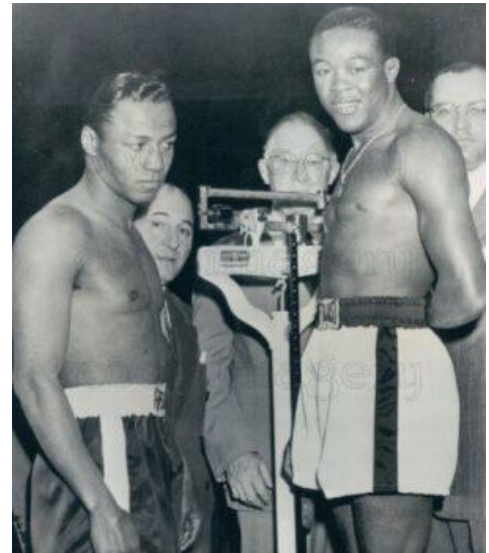
Rare today, non-title fights were not unusual years ago.

They would take place when the fighters would come in over the weight limit of the division the title holder was in. This was prearranged and the fans knew they were not going to see the champion risk his belt. It was a way for a title holder to stay busy without risking his title. It was also an opportunity for someone not rated high enough to get a chance at fighting a champ and, even in losing, be able to enhance his reputation by showing he could stay in there with the best.

The second Gavilan/Bratton fight was a bit unusual as the two had fought for the title just six months earlier. In that fight, held on May 18, 1951, Bratton fought with a broken jaw from the fifth round on but lasted the full distance while losing a decision. Just six months later on November 11, 1951 the two would meet again, this time in a non-title fight. And what a fight it was.



Bratton Lands A Left On Gavilan



Johnny Bratton and Kid Gavilan Weigh In For Their Third Fight

You might think Bratton would have been a bit gun shy after having taken such a licking in their first encounter, but at the opening bell he came out with guns blazing. Of course, Gavilan was there to meet fire with fire, and this led to a very "entertaining" fight. It also was a display of two ring wise boxing veterans plying their craft.

For the first three rounds Johnny tried matching Gavilan's speedy combinations. This led to some great exchanges but The Kid was getting the best of them. In the 4th round Bratton changed tactics and started looking to counterpunch. He had more success with this strategy. Gavilan was a very rhythmic fighter and Johnny was trying to break that

rhythm by making moves to throw the Champ off his game. Bratton even mimicked Gavilan's trademark bolo punch in an effort to rattle him. In the seventh round the two tried to outdo one another while digging into their bags of tricks. Gavilan used head feints and a shuffle (yes, this move was around long before Ali trademarked it), and Bratton at one point pointed to the crowd in order to distract the Kid. Neither fell for the tactics but it is fun to watch them trying to one up each other.

There a few things that really stand out in this fight. Things that you will not see today or for that matter ever again in boxing. In the entire 10 rounds the fighters only clinched two times, and neither of these was a hug fest. They also went to the ropes on just one occasion. This fight, like so many from the age of boxing when it was an art form, took place almost entirely in mid-ring.

It was in the eighth round when Bratton was stepping back from Gavilan that he went against the ropes. He immediately responded by neutralizing a left hook the Champ was throwing by placing his right hand on the inside of Gavilan's elbow as he stepped away from the ropes. This was one of two times that the referee intervened, and even that action by the third man was not needed as the two were breaking on their own.



Gavilan lands a right counter on Bratton



Gavilan beats Bratton to the punch

It is also a pleasure to watch how these two artists used their left jabs. Today, most fighters hold their hands up against their faces in what makes them look like they are wearing ear muffs. It is impossible to throw a decent jab from that position, not that any of them seem interested in throwing jabs anyway. Both Johnny and the Kid used a classic stance where the left hand is held low and out in front of them while the right hand is kept open and held high in order to parry the opponent's punches, their chins stay tucked into the shoulder. Having the left in this position allows for the punch to travel a shorter distance while also leaving the option of turning it into a hook or an uppercut, and for the real masters, a hook off the jab. It is also a great defensive position as Bratton

showed in the 8th round when he was able to disarm Gavilan by grabbing the inside of his elbow and walking him away from the ropes. The left can also be raised in a stiff arm fashion to deflect a punch. They both employed feints in an effort to get the other to lead, knowing that a fighter is most vulnerable when he is throwing a punch.

It's funny, but at one point the referee took a round away from Gavilan for holding and hitting. This was odd as I wasn't able to see anything close to holding and hitting. I think the ref was feeling unneeded and wanted to justify being paid.

At the end of the ten rounds the decision was announced as a draw. If not for the referee taking away the round from Gavilan, the champ would have won the fight.

The two would meet one more time in November of 1953, this time for the title. Gavilan won a one-sided decision over fifteen rounds. The press reported that Bratton was thoroughly beaten by the 12th round but he held on until the final bell.

I highly recommend viewing the second fight between these two excellent fighters. You can watch it a number of times, and as with any great work of art you will notice new things each time you see it. And Mike was right; it is a very entertaining fight.

Bobby Franklin's Boxing over Broadway
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