

The Past Week in Action 9 May 2021

Highlights:

- Saul Alvarez collects a third super middleweight belt as Billy Joe Saunders retires after eight rounds due a bad swelling limiting his vision**
- Elwin Soto retains WBO light flyweight title with stoppage of Katsunari Takayama**
- Magomed Kurbanov gets questionable win over Lam Smith**
- Souleymane Cissokho wins again with split decision over Kieron Conway**
- Frank Sanchez gets technical verdict over Nagy Aguilera in another "back of the head punch" incident**

World Title/Major Shows

8 May

Arlington, TX, USA: Saul Alvarez (56-1-2) W RTD 8 Billy Joe Saunders (30-1). Light Fly: Elwin Soto (19-1) W RTD 9 Katsunari Takayama (32-9,1ND). Super Welter: Souleymane Cissokho (13-0) W PTS 10 Kieron Conway (16-2-1). Heavy: Frank Sanchez (18-0,1ND) W TEC DEC 6 Nagy Aguilera (21-11). Welter: Christian Gomez (20-2-1) W TKO 2 Xavier Wilson (11-3-1). Light: Keyshawn Davis (3-0) W PTS 6 Jose Meza (7-5).

Alvarez vs. Saunders

Alvarez now holds three of the four super middleweight belts after WBO title holder Saunders retired at the end of the eighth round due to a swelling severely limiting his vision from his right eye.

Round 1

A cautious first round, Saunders was circling and prodding out his jab but not really committing too it. Alvarez managed to

land three long lefts and a couple of body punches to take the round.

Score: 10-9 Alvarez

Round 2

Saunders boxed well over the first two minutes managing to dart inside to score. Over the last minute Alvarez began to find the range with straight rights which gave him the edge.

Score: 10-9 Alvarez

Alvarez 20-18

Round 3

A close round as there was very little action. Saunders was showing plenty of movement and pushing out punches but coming up short. Alvarez finished the round strong again targeting Saunders with rights.

Score: 10-9 Alvarez

Alvarez 30-27

Round 4

Another close round. Saunders committed himself to coming forward a few times but Alvarez showed some quick defensive skills. Not too many punches landed with Alvarez sneaking the round with a sharp right uppercut that almost dislodged Saunders mouthguard and a couple of rights.

Score: 10-9 Alvarez

Alvarez 40-36

Official Scores: Judge Glenn Feldman 39-37 Alvarez, Judge Tim Cheatham 39-37 Alvarez, Judge Max DeLuca 39-37 Alvarez

Round 5

Slick boxing from Saunders in this one. Plenty of movement and plenty of jabs. Alvarez connected with a couple of rights but Saunders was darting in quickly and scored two strong straight rights and was out before Alvarez could counter.

Score: 10-9 Saunders

Alvarez 49-46

Round 6

Not much between them in this round. Alvarez scored with some rights to the body early but just could not pin Saunders down. Saunders was putting together some quick combinations

and countered well with lefts to the body of Alvarez and just doing enough to edge the round.

Score: 10-9 Saunders

Alvarez 58-56

Round 7

Best round so far for Saunders. He was just too quick for Alvarez regularly slotting punches through Alvarez's guard and scoring with quick one-tvos. Alvarez was always a step behind and at times was forced onto the back foot.

Score: 10-9 Saunders

Alvarez 67-66

Round 8

Saunders started the round well but then it changed. Alvarez upped his pace connecting with hooks to the body with both hands and landing heavily to the head. One of those punches landed near the right eye of Saunders and Alvarez seemed to sense this was a critical moment. Saunders was not moving so much and already Alvarez was raising his hands in triumph as he was able to cut off the ring and land heavily.

Score: 10-9 Alvarez

Alvarez 77-75

Official Scores: Judge Glenn Feldman 78-74 Alvarez, Judge Tim Cheatham 77-75 Alvarez, Judge Max DeLuca 78-74 Alvarez

The right eye of Saunders was almost completely closed and wisely his corner pulled him out of the fight before the start of the ninth round. It was not a great fight with Saunders not looking to trade punches with Alvarez. He had certainly posed some problems for Alvarez before the retirement but Alvarez had upped his pace even before the injury. IBF title holder Caleb Plant looks to be the next step with Alvarez aiming to unify the four titles.

Soto vs. Takayama

In an entertaining contests Soto holds on to his WBO title with stoppage of a very active and competitive Takayama.

Round 1

No feeling out time here as they were both letting their punches fly. Soto landed the better punches in the first

exchange but Takayama hit back strongly. A big right to the head saw Takayama buckle at the knees. Soto followed up looking for an early finish but Takayama banged back well until another right had him in deep trouble just before the bell.

Score: 10-9 Soto

Round 2

Soto was looking to build on his success in the first round and landed some hurtful shots early. Takayama was perpetual motion circling Soto and throwing jab after jab and rights to the body. He looked on the way to winning the round until Soto nailed him with some solid hooks and uppercuts.

Score: 10-9 Soto

Soto 20-18

Round 3

Takayama was busy, busy. His punch output was amazing. There was very little power in his punches but the sheer volume was his best defence against the single big shots from Soto and despite Sots connecting with some eye-catching punches late in the round it was the challengers three minutes but you had to wonder how long the 37-year-old Takayama could maintain the pace

Score: 10-9 Takayama

Soto 29-28

Round 4

Takayama was setting a frantic pace constantly moving and pumping out punch after punch. A lot of those punches were wasted being off target or blocked. Soto worked harder in the round and connected with some hard body punches. Takayama chose to stand and trade punches and Soto bossed the exchanges.

Score: 10-9 Soto

Soto 39-37

Round 5

Takayama was Mr Perpetual Motion. He never stopped moving and punching. He even found time to do some show boating. Soto was forced onto the back foot as he was showered with punches and when he staged a late rally he was outpunched.

Score: 10-9 Takayama

Soto 48-47

Round 6

Great action in the round. Soto upped his pace and did a better job of closing Takayama down. Takayama moved less and tried more. That allowed Soto to score with a series of body punches and lefts and rights to the head Takayama's response was to stand his ground and try to match Soto punch-for-punch it was exciting stuff but Takayama took some solid punishment.

Score: 10-9 Soto

Soto 58-56

Round 7

Takayama just kept showering Soto with punches. Unfortunately nine out of every ten were either blocked by Soto or off target. Soto clipped Takayama with a sharp right and landed the better quality and harder punches.

Score: 10-9 Soto

Soto 68-65

Round 8

The pace Takayama was setting was suicidal. He sprayed Soto with a never ending stream of punches. They were not heavy but the quantity was stifling Soto's attempts to counter and it was Takayama's round.

Score: 10-9 Takayama

Soto 77-75

Round 9

The pace and Takayama's insistence of punching with the harder puncher brought the end. He continued to march forward and exchange punches with Soto but he was being rocked by head punches that made him stumble and the referee stepped in and stopped the fight. It looked a much too early stoppage as Takayama had not been down but he was on his last reserves of strength.

Soto, 23, was making the third defence of the WBO title and gets his thirteenth inside the distance win. He is one of the lower profile champions in one of the weaker divisions but he got the job done today. Takayama averaged over 100 punches thrown per round and in the end he paid for that fierce pace. The WBO manipulated their ratings by introducing Takayama at No 11 in March when he had not fought since December. He

certainly made this an entertaining fight but at 37 another title chance must be beyond him.

Cissokho vs. Conway

Cissokho overcomes late shock to win a split decision over Conway in a disappointing fight. Frenchman Cissokho, a bronze medal winner at the Rio Olympics, seemed to have the edge in the early rounds but there was very little to excite the fans with only the odd heavy punch landed. In the ninth a left from Conway rocked Cissokho who dropped top one knee. Conway tried hard to find another punch like that but Cissokho survived and then dominated the last round. He looked a clear winner but the judges scored it 96-93 and 95-94 for Cissokho and 97-92 for Conway. Senegalese-born Cissokho takes Conway's WBA Inter-Continental title. England's Conway was 6-0-1 going in.

Sanchez vs. Aguilera

Sanchez gets a technical decision over Aguilera in another punch to the back of the head incident. Sanchez was far stronger and the harder puncher and had Aguilera hurt with a right in the second. In the third Aguilera turned to the referee to complain about a punch to the back of the head from Sanchez but the referee took no action and Aguilera paid for being distracted as Sanchez rocked him with a right. Sanchez continued to boss the action scoring heavily in the fourth and fifth. In the sixth a punch from Sanchez landed on the back of Aguilera's head and he went down. He managed to rise but was unable to continue so it went to the cards which all read 60-54 for Sanchez. Not a satisfactory ending for Sanchez who was looking for his thirteenth victory by KO/TKO. He was defending the WBC Continental Americas title and is rated WBO 6/WBC 14/WBA 14. Dominican-born Aguilera was having only his third fight in the past five years.

Gomez vs. Wilson

Gomez moves to 18 inside the distance wins as he stops Wilson in two rounds. After taking the first round Gomez floored Wilson with a thunderous left hook in the second. Wilson beat

the count but the referee stopped the fight despite Wilson protesting he was fit to continue. Fourth quick win in a row against very modest opposition for Gomez since being stopped by Daniel Echevarria in April 2019. Wilson is 1-3 in his last four fights.

Davis vs. Meza

Just a light work-out for Norfolk southpaw Davis as he showcases his massive talent and wins every round. Scores 60-54 for Davis on the judges' cards. Third fight this year for Davis so they are keeping him busy. Mexican Meza did well to last the distance.

7 May

Ekaterinburg, Russia: Super Welter: Magomed Kurbanov (22-0) W PTS 12 Liam Smith (29-3-1). Welter: Eduard Skavynskyi (14-0) W PTS 10 Joel Julio (39-6). Super Bantam: Mukhammad Shekhov (9-0-1) W PTS 10 Evgenii Liashkov (8-2).

Kurbanov vs. Smith

Kurbanov gets contestable unanimous verdict over Smith. Kurbanov did the better work in a quiet first round and also edged the second. Smith picked up the pace in the third which was a close round but Smith was finding gaps and scoring well in the fourth. At that point all three cards had Kurbanov in front 39-37. Smith began to roll. He was slotting home jabs and cracking Kurbanov with rights with Kurbanov's output dropping and Smith took the fifth. Kurbanov did enough to make the sixth close but good work with his jab and accurate rights saw Smith collect the points in the seventh and eighth. The split scoring now had them level at 76-76 on two cards with one judge having increased Kurbanov's lead to three points at 78-75. Kurbanov was showing signs of tiring in the ninth but Smith was still strong and outlanding the local fighter. The tenth was close with both fighters having some

success and it could have been scored for either of them. The eleventh was again a difficult one to score. Kurbanov was more accurate but Smith was landing the heavier punches and they both threw everything into the last with Smith having the narrowest of edges. Scores 115-113 twice and 117-111 for Kurbanov. It wasn't quite robbery but one of those cases where Smith would probably have got the decision if the fight had been held in the UK. Kurbanov, 25, the Russian "Black Lion", collects the WBO International title. He was No 5 with the WBO but more significantly Smith was No2 so Kurbanov can now expect to be sitting right behind No 1 Tim Tszyu and in with a good chance of a shot at the WBO title later this year. Huge disappointment for Smith a former WBO and interim WBC title holder. He had rebuilt since his loss to Jaime Munguia for the WBO title in 2018 with three wins over good level opposition and it might be hard for him to fight his way back into another title shot.

Skavynskyi vs. Julio

Locally based Ukrainian Skavynskyi gets a confidence building win over seasoned pro Julio. Now 36, and a lack of recent activity have drained away much of Julio's ambition and although he showed some of his old skills there was very little fire left. Skavynskyi was able to dictate the pace of the fight and connected with a left hook in the fifth that put Julio on the floor. Julio rallied late but not enough to even see him win a round. Scores 100-89 for Skavynskyi on the three judge's tabs. Skavynskyi has yet to be put in a testing fight. A 34-1 start to his career saw Colombian Julio land a shot at Serhiy Dzhinziruk for the WBO super welter title back in 2008 but he lost on points and in 2010 he was knocked out by Alfredo Angulo for the interim WBO title. Since then he had been largely inactive and this was only his fourth fight in the last ten years.

Shekhov vs. Liashkov

Uzbek-born Russian Shekhov gets an away win as he outpoints Ekaterinburg-based Liashkov to win the vacant WBO European

title. Liashkov took the fight to southpaw Shekhov trying to offset Shekhov's better skills with a more aggressive approach. It did not work as Shekhov outboxed and outscored Liashkov to emerge a good winner. Scores 97-93 for Shekhov from the Judges. Two or three experienced campaigners in Shekhov's list of victims but there are tougher fights ahead. After losing his first fight Liashkov had put together an eight-bout winning streak but this was his first fight scheduled for ten rounds and hopefully he will have learned a few valuable lessons

Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina: Middle: Emiliano Pucheta (14-4) W PTS 10 Nicolas Luques (12-8-1).

Pucheta wins the vacant National title with comfortable victory over Luques. In a fight lacking any real drama Pucheta easily outpointed Luques. Pucheta had the superior skills and was never threatened by a one-paced Luques who showed poor technique and a lack of accuracy. Only Pucheta's lack of power allowed Luques to last the full ten rounds. All three judges had Pucheta winning 99 ½ -91. Pucheta had lost in a challenge for the Argentinian super welter title in February 2020. Luques is 2-2-1 in his last five contests.

Morbihan, France: Welter: Sandy Messaoud (15-6,1ND) W PTS 10 Oliver Mollenberg (7-1-1). Super Welter: Milan Prat (10-1) W TKO 1 Sie Palenfo (10-3-1).

Messaoud vs. Mollenberg

Local boxer Messaoud retained the WBA Inter-Continental title with unanimous decision over Dane Mollenberg. The Frenchman had a good first round showing his strength and connecting with some hard shots. Mollenberg did better in the second round but Messaoud took over from the third dominating the action scoring with uppercuts and left hooks. Messaoud had a good fifth but Mollenberg rebounded to take the sixth and got into the fight more as the 14-year older Messaoud slowed a little but the Frenchman was a good winner. Scores 98-92 twice and 99-91 looked a little harsh on

Mollenberg. The 34-year-old Messaoud has turned his career around with a run of seven wins. Danish champion Mollenberg is just 20 and has had a good amount of experience from his time in the amateurs so can recover and learn from this loss.

Prat v. Palenfo

Prospect Prat blasts out Palenfo inside a round. Prat put Palenfo down with a left hook and although Palenfo beat the count a body punch dropped him again and the towel came in during the count. The tall 21-year-old Prat is a former French Youth and Senior champion and is aiming to fight in the Tokyo Olympics. He has seven wins by KO/TKO and his loss was a disqualification. Palenfo is from the Ivory Coast but is now 0-2 in fights in France.

Kissimmee, FL, USA: Super Feather: George Acosta (12-1) W PTS 10 Gadwin Rosa (11-3). Super Welter: Elvin Gambarov (15-0) W PTS 10 Diego Cruz (21-10-2). Super Light: Mandeep Jangra (1-0) W PTS 4 Luciano Ramos (0-1).

Acosta vs. Rosa

Acosta takes a unanimous decision over Rosa to win the vacant WBA Fedecentro belt. This was a competitive fight largely carried out at close quarters. What boxing there was came from Acosta who when he could create space used his jab well and planted rights on the bulldozing Rosa. It was Rosa pressing the action and Acosta lacked the power to keep him out but he was tying Rosa up inside and although Rosa had the harder punch Acosta was busier. There was too much clinching as they tired over the last three rounds but Acosta was the one scoring more and the landing the cleaner punches. Scores 98-92, 97-93 and 96-94 all for Acosta. This was the fifth consecutive win for Acosta, 24, his second fight in the last nineteen days and also his first fight scheduled for more than six rounds. Puerto Rican Rosa suffers his second defeat in his last three fights.

Gambarov vs. Cruz

Miami-based Azeri Gambarov is the new holder of the WBC International Silver title as he outpoints Cruz. This was a war all of the way. Going the distance snaps a nine-fight inside the distance streak for Gambarov for the 29-year-old Gambarov. Cruz has never failed to go the distance but drops to 2-7-1 in his last ten outings.

Jangra vs. Ramos

After a highly successful time as an amateur India's Jangra turns pro with a win. It was not a smooth transition as a he was on the floor in the first and had to fight hard over the remaining three rounds to just take the decision. Jangra, 27, was a gold medallist at the South Asian Games and won a silver medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games but did not manage to qualify for this year's Olympics. Ramos a total novice having his first fight.

8 May

Warendorf, Germany: Light Heavy: Christian Pawlak (41-8-1) W DISQ 3 Muhammad Oguzhan Arifogullari (6-2).

Pawlak gets disqualification wins over late substitute Arifogullari. After taking a slow first round Pawlak drove Arifogullari to the ropes in the second and Arifogullari sagged to a sitting position on the ropes. As the ropes stopped Arifogullari from falling the referee gave Arifogullari a count. In the third Pawlak put Arifogullari down again with a left to the body. After getting up Arifogullari rushed Pawlak and bundled Pawlak out of the ring and Arifogullari fell through after him. The referee ruled that Arifogullari had deliberately pushed Pawlak out of the ring and disqualified him. Polish-born Pawlak, 41, wins the interim UBO title with his twentieth win in a row. Some achievement to find 20 opponents bad enough for Pawlak to beat. German-born Turk Arifogullari was said to be in training for another fight which allowed him to step in. He

should start a slimming club as he was 195 ³/₄ lbs in a fight on 18 April and presumably had to get below 175lbs for this fight!

Managua, Nicaragua: Super Bantam: Alexander Mejia (17-1) W PTS 10 Aron Juarez (17-9-3,1ND).

Mejia wins the vacant National title with unanimous decision over Juarez. Nine consecutive wins for Mejia. His only loss came in 2017 when he was seriously overmatched in Japan when put in against former OPBF champion and WBO title challenger Hiroshige Osawa in only his eighth fight. He had beaten Juarez on points in 2018. Southpaw Juarez is an experienced survivor with Khalid Yafai the only guy to have stopped him

Malaga, Spain: Light: Samuel Molina (16-0,1ND) W PTS 8 Viorel Simion (22-4). Super Light: Johan Orozco (2-0) W PTS 6 Gadatamen Taylor (2-3-1).

Molina vs. Simion

Molina takes unanimous verdict over seasoned pro Simion. Molina used his longer reach to fight this one at distance. Simion kept rolling forward but smart movement and good countering made it difficult for him to get into the fight. The Romanian put in a big effort in the seventh but Molina boxed coolly and held his own in an exciting last round. Scores 80-72, 79-73 and 78-74 for Molina. The 22-year-old lost his Spanish title in December 2019 after a ban for a positive test. Simion, 39, has won only one of his last five fights. He was close to a world title shot after winning 21 of his first 22 fights but losses to Scott Quigg, Shakur Stevenson and Denys Berinchyk dashed those hopes.

Orozco vs. Taylor

Prospect Orozco much too good for southpaw Taylor. Orozco outboxed Taylor being too quick and too accurate. Taylor bravely walked forward and fought well enough to share a round but there was a big gap in ability. Scores 60-55 twice

and 60-54 for Orozco. The Colombia-born 26-year-old was a top level amateur bring Spanish champion three times and representing Spain at the EU Championships and European Games. Liberian-born Taylor had won his last two fights.

Fight of the week (Significance): Saul Alvarez vs. Billy Joe Saunders as Alvarez takes another step towards unifying the four belts at super middle

Fight of the week (Entertainment): Elwin Soto vs. Katsunari Takayama with Takayama making Soto trade punches for three minutes in every round

Fighter of the week: Saul Alvarez

Punch of the week: Nothing really explosive this week

Upset of the week: None

Prospect watch: French super welterweight Milan Prat 9-1 looks promising

Observations

What goes around comes around. Billy Joe Saunders harshly criticised Daniel Dubois for surrendering to Joe Joyce because his left eye was shut-Saunders retired against Alvarez because of a swelling that hindered his vision and his injury did not look nearly as bad as the one Dubois had

Another controversial ending as a result of a punch to the back of the head. Sanchez had landed to the back of Aguilera's head early in the fight and not been warned-so no reason not to do it again.

French prospect is more than just a very talented boxer.

Cissokho is reported to have a masters degree in economics, is in the late stages of qualifying for a law degree and danced in a ballet with the Paris Opera star Marie-Agnes Gillot.

You lose some-you win some.

Argentinian welterweight Sergio Damian Rosalez fought in a supporting bout on the 7 May show in Villa Carlos Paz and lost on points against Javier Herrera. After the fight Rosalez proposed in the ring to his girlfriend and she accepted. It is not

a rare occurrence but imagine the embarrassment if the lady refuses or says Marry you? Get me the winner!