

# Border War goes South for Mrdjenovich

by Shawn Roth, FightNews Canada

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Ann-Marie Saccurato walked into Edmonton a virtual unknown and left with a championship belt around her waist.

Saccurato, 29, (12-1-2), who hails from White Plains, New York, scored a split-decision victory over hometown hero Jelena Mrdjenovich, 24, (18-2) Saturday night in the main event of the Larry Fleming Memorial "Border War". With the victory, Saccurato became the WBC lightweight champion.



Saccurato opened the fight with confidence and showed she wasn't intimidated in the least to be in the ring with Mrdjenovich, going right at the Edmonton fighter from the hop. The New York fighter rapped three shots off the back of Mrdjenovich's head near the end of the first, which is about all the action the opening round saw. Mrdjenovich seemed to calm down and looked more composed in the second round where she landed two big left hands that caught Saccurato flush in the chin. Saccurato stood tough and replied with a quick, sharp jab that kept Mrdjenovich alert and on the run.

A right hook from Mrdjenovich opened the action in the third, a round that saw Saccurato begin to tie up Mrdjenovich, but the eventual winner threw a solid right hook of her own that landed well on Mrdjenovich. The brawling style of Saccurato proved problematic for Mrdjenovich, chasing the hometown girl into the corner. Saccurato landed many nice right hooks and stiff jabs in the fourth and fifth round as well as combinations going to the body and finishing with left jabs when Mrdjenovich backpedaled out of trouble. Mrdjenovich landed a hard right uppercut and left hook near the end of the fifth, a nice combo of her own that landed square on Saccurato.

Mrdjenovich had Saccurato reeling through the seventh with nice work from a right jab left hook combo and closed the round with two quality right hands. "A lot of those punches should have put her to sleep, so what can you do?" Mrdjenovich said. "I tagged her I don't know how many times." Fatigue began to show in both fighters as round-eight got underway. Saccurato seemed comfortable holding on and tying up Mrdjenovich in close, where she wouldn't be able to get hurt. The tactic paid off and Saccurato managed to land a nice left, right combo without much in return from Mrdjenovich.

Mrdjenovich came out throwing hard in the ninth, landing her left hand in combination with a solid right hook, but is again met with some holding from Saccurato. Once out of the hold, Saccurato drops two massive right hands that stunned Mrdjenovich as the bell ended the round. In the final round there was little gas left in the tank for either fighter but each still managed to mount some offensive attacks in the hopes of taking the final points in what proved a close contest.

When the scorecards were tallied, Saccurato was the new WBC lightweight champion by split-decision, 96-94, 94-96, 96-94. "I'm surprised by the judging, I felt we had it our way, we felt we had it our way" Mrdjenovich said. When asked of a rematch both fighters said it would be something to think about. "It would be great for boxing," Saccurato said. "It was a great show tonight." "I'll go up (lightweight) to rematch her and then stay down at 130 pounds," Mrdjenovich said. "We'll see what happens next time."

Windsor's Jeanine Garside, 28, (6-0-1) is the new WIBA Featherweight champion after her convincing unanimous decision over Mexico City's Laura Serrano, 39, (16-3-2). Garside thoroughly dominated the fight from the opening bell, punishing Serrano with a relentless left hook that the Mexican fighter could not deal with. Serrano was put to the canvas in the third and tenth round but returned to her feet, a true testament of her toughness. Serrano refused to stay down, shook the cobwebs off and continued to brawl with Garside, which garnered the appreciation of the crowd for her unbelievable ability to take punishment and keep fighting. The judges cards read 98-90, 99-89 and 100-87 for Garside in a landslide majority. "I feel awesome, I felt great going into this fight, going up to 126 pounds, which is my comfortable fight." Garside said following her victory. "There's more to come."

New York's Melissa Hernandez, 26, (6-0-1) defeated Toronto's Lisa Brown, 35, (12-3-3) for the WIBA super-bantamweight belt in a unanimous decision. Both fighters looked fresh and willing to brawl as the fight opened but the youth of Hernandez quickly took over. Brown seemed unable to catch the much more agile Hernandez with any real significant punches in the early going. Hernandez used her elusiveness to duck out of Brown's punches and counter with nice right hand that she used effectively through the match.

Brown caught Hernandez with a good left jab and right hook combo in the third, but Hernandez seemed able to absorb the shots well and keep on moving. Hernandez continued to frustrate Brown in the middle rounds, pinning the older fighter on the ropes and teeing off on her. When Brown was able to muster an attack, Hernandez was able to quickly move from trouble, but Brown did manage to catch the American with a left jab before she could maneuver away from Brown late in the seventh.

The final rounds saw Brown come out looking sharper than the previous rounds as the two exchanged some hard blows while on the ropes. Brown connected a quality left jab on Hernandez in the ninth, but once again, the younger Hernandez responded with a hard right jab. In the end, Hernandez proved too quick and conditioned for Brown to handle. The scorecards read 96-94, 98-92 and 96-94 for Hernandez. "I didn't know I was winning, I was just surviving with Lisa Brown," Hernandez said following her title win. "I just feel crazy right now."

On the undercard, Rakan Khatib (1-0) of Vancouver defeated Richmond's Jamie Henry (0-1) by unanimous decision in their four-round super-middleweight bout. Texas super-bantamweight Jorge De Leon (2-3) won a four-round majority decision over Edmonton's Omar Valdez (0-1). Langley's Todd Gouwenberg (1-0) scored a four-round unanimous decision over Edmonton's Sheldon Hinton (3-3) in the heavyweight division. In a four-round middleweight fight, Edmonton's Kiri Andrews (7-6-2) and Detroit's Kareem Chartrand (7-3-1) fought to a draw.

Questions or Comments, contact Shawn Roth.