

Ward Krushes Kovalev

By Caryn A. Tate on June 17, 2017



Andre Ward is an all-time great—and there can no longer be any excuses. (Sky Sports)

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While sitting ringside watching Andre Ward in a rematch with Sergey Kovalev, the Johnson–Burns fight came to mind...

"I'm not locked in here with you. You're locked in here with me."—Alan Moore, *Watchmen*

Recently, I wrote about race in boxing and referred back to the historic night when Jack Johnson stopped Tommy Burns—the first time an African American fighter won the heavyweight championship of the world. Once in the ring, Johnson made Burns pay for the abhorrent racism heaped upon him outside the ring.

While sitting ringside watching unified light heavyweight champion Andre “S.O.G.” Ward (32–0, 16 KOs) defend his titles in a rematch with the former champion, Sergey “Krusher” Kovalev (30–2–1, 26 KOs), the Johnson–Burns fight came to mind. The reasons for the animosity between the fighters, as well as the way the fight was won, were eerily similar.

Prior to the bout, Ward addressed the racism briefly by saying, “I’m not going to address him through the media. I’m going to address him face to face on June 17th.”

Address him Ward did. From the first bell, the champion, in red and white trunks fighting out of the black corner, took the fight to Kovalev. The Russian, in black and silver trunks and fighting out of the red corner, started well too, though I didn’t have him win a round in the fight.

The contention between the two fighters was apparent from the get go. When referee Tony Weeks gave his instructions at the beginning, the fighters did not touch gloves. This was uncharacteristic for both fighters, as they both typically do offer this traditional sign of sportsmanship.

The bout started pretty much how the first fight ended. There was some give and take,

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FIGHTER'S INFO

Andre Ward



Origin	San Francisco California USA
Date of Birth(Age)	1984.02.23 (33)
Rated at	Super Middleweight
W–L–D	W28+L0+D0=28
Height	6 feet 1 inches
Reach	71 inches
Trainer	Virgil Hunter

Recent fights:

Date	Opponent	WLD	Result	Rnds.
2015.06.20	Paul Smith	35–5–0		9/12
2013.11.16	Edwin Rodriguez	24–0–0		12/12
2012.09.08	Chad Dawson	31–1–0		10/12
2011.12.17	Carl Froch	28–1–0		12/12
2011.05.14	Arthur Abraham	32–2–0		12/12
2010.11.27	Sakio Bika	28–4–2		12/12

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but overall the rounds went to Ward as he landed the cleaner punches, was busier, and was clearly more aggressive. Kovalev occasionally landed a nice jab, and I counted one right hand, but none of it was enough to mount an assault on S.O.G. Many of the Russian's punches missed, and not just one punch at a time—sometimes combinations he threw missed clearly. Because Ward made him miss.

And he made him pay. Ward was on fire. He threw—and landed—beautiful combinations that were obviously hurting Kovalev. His left hook was particularly effective throughout the bout, but his classic jab to the head and body was a thing of beauty.

As early as round 2, Kovalev complained of a low blow. I didn't see a low blow—what I saw was a legitimate body shot. But referee Tony Weeks, who actually seemed unsure, took Kovalev's word and gave him a break until he was ready to continue. As the rounds progressed, though, Ward landed clean punch after clean punch, and one could see the Krusher weakening. His body was breaking down. As early as round 4, I saw Kovalev breathing through his mouth in the ring. In the corner, when his trainer John David Jackson was trying to give him water, he could barely take it between his deep breaths.

Ward, though, looked energized. He was standing up before the start of each round. He looked confident. He moved beautifully on his feet, much more like his old self. He landed devastating body punches, with both hands, that I could hear ringside like a bell. Once, early in the fight, I saw Kovalev's knees buckle, though he complained to Tony Weeks about the reason (another low blow, maybe, or a clinch?). Kovalev was looking to buy time. Later, Kovalev turned his back during the action. Ward paused, and Tony Weeks stepped in to speak to the Russian challenger, and at that point he turned back to fight. But Kovalev's body language from fairly early in the fight indicated that he didn't really want to be in there anymore.

And Ward knew it. He attacked harder, and his body language indicated he felt more comfortable as the fight went on. By the 7th round, when the fighters tied up, Ward worked to Kovalev's body, while Sergey couldn't figure out how to get in some work from that distance.

When the 8th round came around, it was clear Ward's investments to the body as well as Kovalev's issues that included those of the psychological nature had really been playing into the outcome of the fight. Ward came at his challenger harder, and Kovalev's body language betrayed him yet again—he no longer looked like the Krusher that people had become used to.

The end came when, at 2:29 of round 8, referee Tony Weeks called a halt to the bout. Kovalev had been complaining of more low blows which, even in real time, didn't look at all like low blows—they were simply body shots that landed at or near the belt line. He had backed into the corner, and Andre landed a beautiful, clean right hand upstairs that shook Sergey. His legs looked unsteady. More work to the body from Ward, and with no answers and practically no defense showing from Kovalev, Weeks stepped in and waved it off.

Prior to the fight, Kovalev was widely quoted in the media regarding the power of Ward's punches by comparing his shots to those of a "25-year-old girl I was slapped by once in Russia." That quote seemed even more absurd in light of the result of this bout.

After the fight, Team Kovalev attended the post-fight press conference. Kathy Duva told some non-media attendees to "shut up" if they weren't media, as several attendees were saying negative comments toward Kovalev and his team. This was because, from the beginning of their time on the dais, Duva began making more excuses about Ward's "low blows," and that the end of the contest was unjust. Kovalev added his voice to this excuse when he got on the microphone by stating, "He's really lucky. Son of judges."

Team Ward was, obviously, ecstatic about the result when they took to the podium. When some members of the media asked negative questions about the so-called "low blows," Ward cut them off, saying, "We're not talking about any of that tonight."

Ward was right. He moved up to light heavyweight, took on the Big Bad in that division, beat him once by close decision which was derided by some. So he took him on again, and did the seemingly impossible by stopping the man. But there are still some in the media who refuse to acknowledge what he's accomplished, and strive to find more excuses as to why he's not as great as he seems.

But he is that great. Andre Ward is an all-time great, like it or not—and there can no longer be any excuses

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