



RINGSIDE SEAT

2018 FIGHT OF THE YEAR

Kosei Tanaka W 12 Sho Kimura

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The only thing missing from Kosei Tanaka's win over Sho Kimura in RINGSIDE SEAT's 2018 "Fight of the Year" was the sense of impending calamity that pervades all the great fights. In Ward-Gatti I, in Corrales-Castillo I, in each of the Marquez-Vazquez fights, there was the sense that either man might die in the ring, if not from a brain stem rattled free from its moorings then from exhaustion or blood loss or a broken heart.

When choosing a Fight of the Year we frequently select from those in which each man inflicted on his opponent as much damage as he could without killing him; those in which the athletes brought one another to the very edge of non-existence so that afterward we might say that if we see a fight more savage than that boxing should indeed be outlawed.

There was no such savagery in Tanaka-Kimura – just round after round of picturesque combinations and deftness of foot and punches thrown straight and true, punches thrown round but educated, punches thrown downstairs and up. Tanaka, faster, more skilled but not by much, made proud the ghosts of Willie Pep and Nicolino Locche but Kimura's doggedness and work rate kept it close.

By the end there was no canvas stained with blood, no mouthpieces blasted into the third row, not even a knockdown, for cripes' sake. Neither man needed convincing that he was a fireman or, worse, a "piranha fish."

Injuries? Each man sported a swollen eye. There would be no stitches afterward, no MRI, no wired jaws or purple hematoma. Just two sore flyweights.

Tanaka W 12 Kimura didn't lift you out of your seat or leave you hoarse from screaming. But if you watched closely it left you shaking your head and smiling round after round, marveling at what a beautiful sport this can be when practiced at the highest levels by serious athletes. Sometimes that's enough.

HONORABLE MENTION:

Questionable scoring or not, **Canelo Alvarez W12 Gennady Golovkin** featured high stakes, steady action, world-class skill and just enough carnage.

Oleksandr Usyk W12 Mairis Briedis contained some boxing, some slugging and 12 rounds of fight-fan heaven.

If you expected a stinker, **Jarrett Hurd W 12 Erislandy Lara** came as a big and not unwelcome surprise.



Tanaka's speed advantage enabled him to land repeatedly with straight rights and left hooks (top and above left). Above right: The fighters embrace after 12 ferocious, brilliant rounds of boxing.