

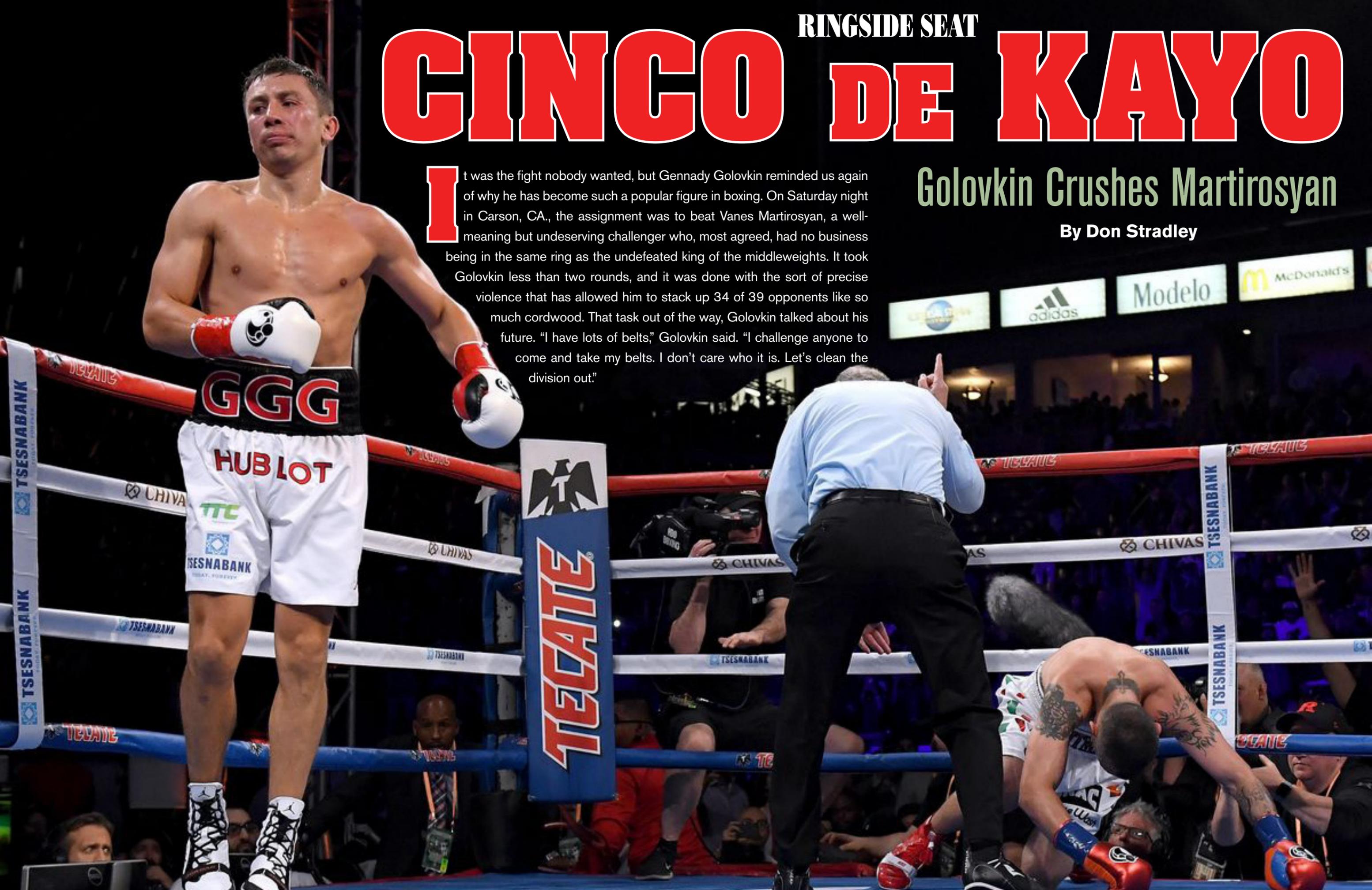
RINGSIDE SEAT

CINCO DE KAYO

Golovkin Crushes Martirosyan

By Don Stradley

It was the fight nobody wanted, but Gennady Golovkin reminded us again of why he has become such a popular figure in boxing. On Saturday night in Carson, CA., the assignment was to beat Vanes Martirosyan, a well-meaning but undeserving challenger who, most agreed, had no business being in the same ring as the undefeated king of the middleweights. It took Golovkin less than two rounds, and it was done with the sort of precise violence that has allowed him to stack up 34 of 39 opponents like so much cordwood. That task out of the way, Golovkin talked about his future. "I have lots of belts," Golovkin said. "I challenge anyone to come and take my belts. I don't care who it is. Let's clean the division out."





For a fight that amounted to little more than a fierce home-run hitter taking batting practice against a rookie pitcher, there was plenty of good cheer in the audience. In the wake of Golovkin's original opponent Saul Alvarez bowing out after getting popped twice for clenbuterol, this crowd seemed happy enough with Golovkin, chanting "Triple G" and even booing the mention of Alvarez' name. Golovkin was his usual boyish self, and did what he could to give respect to his crushed opponent. "Vanes is a very good fighter. He caught me a couple times in the first round. In the second, I was all business," he said. And so it went, just another successful night for *this* 36 year-old Kazakh with the smile of a choirboy and the fists of a debt collector.

Yet, in the days leading up to the event one would think that Golovkin was taking part in some sort of scandal. Many in the press openly derided the bout as a mismatch, and rumors spread that ticket prices were being slashed to improve slow sales. Former middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins, when asked by a YouTube reporter for his thoughts on Golovkin matching his record for 20 consecutive title defenses, scoffed that Golovkin's ledger lacked great names, and predicted Saturday's bout would be a glorified gym session, "without helmets." Don King, serving as Martirosyan's promoter, gave a long, meandering pre-fight speech about how the fight would "make history," and then invoked such disparate topics as women's rights, and terrorism in France. But not even the presence of King, an 86 year-old man waving flags of Kazakhstan and Armenia, could generate much interest in this bout, which was less than three weeks in the making. Indeed, there was more talk about the suspended Alvarez, and whether he'd comply with a more serious schedule of drug tests in regards to a possible future bout with Golovkin, than Martirosyan, who hadn't fought in nearly two years and couldn't even be considered a live underdog.

When Martirosyan was mentioned, it was usually negative. He was a soft puncher; he wasn't a real middleweight; a columnist from a well-known sports site feared that Martirosyan, who had only 16 days from the time the bout was signed to the moment he stepped through the ropes, was endangering his health. Meanwhile, Golovkin insisted that it was important to keep the Cinco de Mayo date that had originally been saved for him and Alvarez, adding that Martirosyan was a "good test for me," and had a "strong team" behind him. "Every fighter," Golovkin told ESPN, "is difficult." In the end there were enough believers that the fight drew a crowd of 7,837

and allegedly the highest boxing gate ever for StubHub Center.

And for a few moments in the opening round, it appeared Martirosyan might make it an interesting night. He moved well, caught Golovkin with jabs before dancing away, and looked like he knew what he was doing. Why wouldn't he look good? He was, despite those who doubted his legitimacy as a challenger, a former Olympian who had won 36 of 41 professional bouts. But there is something about Golovkin – he walks down opponents the way Godzilla walks down Tokyo - that makes you feel any of his fights can change unexpectedly at any moment. And this one did, early in round two when Golovkin threw a right uppercut from a strange angle. Looking like a man reaching for a difficult shot in a game of Ping-Pong, Golovkin cut through Martirosyan's outstretched arms and connected hard against his jaw. "It was," Martirosyan said, "like being hit by a train."

The impact appeared to freeze Martirosyan, who then leaned against the ropes as Golovkin unloaded seven or eight more punches, all heavy, all on target, including one thrown as Martirosyan was sagging to his knees. Roy Jones, working as an HBO commentator, griped that he'd once been disqualified for such a blow, a long-ago punch thrown in Atlantic City against Montell Griffin. Fortunately, referee Jack Reiss thought nothing of Golovkin's last shot, a punch that would've seemed perfectly ethical to Jack Dempsey, or Rocky Marciano, or George Foreman, or Mike Tyson, any of those man-eaters for whom the knockout was everything. Martirosyan, pounded loose from his championship dreams, fell forward. He lay on the canvas with his face in his gloves like a kid playing hide and seek. That's where he stayed, with Reiss kneeling in front of him and counting, until this unloved bastard of a fight was over.

Was it the mismatch many had predicted? Yes. But it might be the last easy one Golovkin gets. Perhaps this is why he came back to the ring twenty minutes after beating Martirosyan and, in his street clothes, blew kisses to the remaining ticket buyers. After all, southern California was where he first established himself in America. Maybe, before he embarks on a grind of more intense bouts with the top men in his division, Golovkin wanted a last Cinco de Mayo with some old friends. The opponent didn't matter, as long as he ended up flat on his face. ★

Don Stradley is a feature writer for RINGSIDE SEAT. Read his blog [This Dazzling Time](#) where he writes about pop culture, among many other things.