

Lopez wins belt, Conlan avenges Olympic defeat

Crawford stops Kavaliauskas to defend welterweight title

NEW YORK, Dec 15, (AP): Terence Crawford's latest opponent had not only never been knocked down, but Crawford couldn't recall seeing him even hurt.

Then again, he'd never been in a ring with a fighter like Crawford before.

Crawford dropped Egidijus Kavaliauskas three times before stopping him in the ninth round to remain unbeaten and defend his welterweight title at Madison Square Garden.

"I wanted to give the crowd a knockout," Crawford said. "When I started letting my hands go, I started landing more fatal shots."

Crawford knocked down the challenger once in the seventh round and twice more in the ninth before referee Ricky Gonzalez stopped it at 44 seconds of the round.

Crawford (36-0, 27 KOs) absorbed perhaps more shots than usual but seemed to enjoy getting to show he has power, too, letting out a big smile as Kavaliauskas returned to his corner looking frustrated after one round late in the fight.

"I thought I had to entertain you all for a little bit," Crawford said. "He's a strong fighter, durable, and I thought I'd give the crowd something to cheer for."



Terence Crawford, (right), punches Lithuania's Egidijus Kavaliauskas, knocking him down for a TKO in the ninth round of a WBO welterweight boxing match, on Dec 14, in New York. (AP)

Kavaliauskas (21-1-1), a Lithuanian who was the mandatory challenger for Crawford's WBO belt, had some good moments in the first few rounds before Crawford took control midway through

the fight and then poured it on late.

Crawford fought cautiously at the outset and Kavaliauskas showed why there was reason to when he landed a big right early in the third round and

then a couple more punches inside as Crawford tried to hold on. Crawford ended up going to a knee but Kavaliauskas wasn't credited with a knockdown, the referee apparently determining Crawford had been pushed down.

Crawford said afterward he wasn't hurt by that shot and it wasn't long before he was the one doing more damage.

BOXING

Kavaliauskas kept throwing big punches that drove Crawford backward when they landed, but Crawford used his speed advantage to slip out of the way of many of them while landing his own combinations.

Crawford took a hard shot early in the seventh but then began answering and finally caught Kavaliauskas with a looping right near the ear that sent him to the canvas.

Crawford finished it two rounds later, first using a three-punch combination to set up a right uppercut that sent Kavaliauskas to the canvas. He got up but Crawford then threw a right hook that returned the two-time Olympian to the canvas and the fight was immediately

waved off.

The 32-year-old Crawford bristled this week when asked if getting in tougher fights would earn him extra appreciation, saying all that mattered was winning. But this fight certainly appeared harder than the skilled Nebraska native's first three after moving up to welterweight, all stoppages, after he won all four major belts at 140.

He's still searching for better opposition in the deep 147-pound division and promoter Bob Arum indicated Crawford may look next to veteran Shawn Porter, who is coming off a competitive loss to Errol Spence Jr. in a unification bout in September.

A Crawford-Spence bout would likely be the most attractive possible, but Spence was injured in a car accident and it's unknown when he can fight again. That could leave Porter as the next choice.

"Porter is the next best guy," Arum said. "He proved himself with Spence."



Lopez

Crawford said he's ready for whichever fighter is next.

"I'll fight anybody. I've been saying that for I don't know how long," Crawford said.

Earlier, Teofimo Lopez won a light-weight belt with a second-round stoppage of Richard Commey, and Michael Conlan beat Olympic rival Vladimir Nikitin.

Lopez (15-0, 12 KOs) was spectacular in his first title fight, wobbling Commey with a left hand early in the second round and then flooring him with a hard right hand.

He finished the fight with a barrage of punches in the corner and perhaps next moves on to a 135-pound unification bout with two-time Olympic gold medalist Vasiliy Lomachenko.

Conlan (13-0, 7 KOs) had lost to Nikitin twice as an amateur, including in the 2016 Olympic quarterfinals. He blasted the international boxing federation for being corrupt after the decision was announced and extended his middle finger to the judges at ringside.

He had also lost a close fight to Nikitin in 2013 but the judges saw this one as no contest, giving Conlan a lopsided decision by scores of 100-90, 99-91 and 98-92.

Woods & US team rally to win Presidents Cup again



The US team hold their trophy after they won the Presidents Cup golf tournament at Royal Melbourne Golf Club in Melbourne, on Dec 15. (AP)

Kuchar delivers clinching putt for Americans to beat Internationals

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 15, (AP): High emotions, fierce hugs from Tiger Woods, this time as a winner both ways in the Presidents Cup.

Woods capped off a big year that began with his 15th major at the Masters by playing and leading his US team to another victory in the Presidents Cup on Sunday at Royal Melbourne.

The first playing captain in 25 years, he opened the 12 singles matches by beating Abraham Ancer to set the Presidents Cup record with his 27th match victory, and set the tone for the rest of his team.

The scoreboard was filled with American red scores all day as they rallied from a two-point deficit to win the Presidents Cup for the eighth straight time against an International team that faltered at the worst time.

Matt Kuchar delivered the clinching putt, a 5-footer for birdie that assured him a halve against Louis Oosthuizen and gave the Americans the 15 1/2 points they needed to win.

GOLF

"For us to be in a hole, to come back and win this thing ... to win it as a team, but to do it with Tiger Woods as our captain was just a huge thrill," Kuchar said.

They result was 16-14, and at least this one was a contest. The US victory two years ago at Liberty National was so resounding that it nearly ended on Saturday.

International captain Ernie Els was determined to turn it around. He created a new logo for the International team. He relied heavily on analytics. It still wasn't enough.

Els thought back to Friday, when the Americans won two matches with birdies on the 18th hole and rallied to halve another to keep the International lead from growing.

On Sunday, all he saw was US momentum that couldn't be stopped. "We gave you everything we had," Els said to Woods at the closing ceremony. "You were the better team."

Woods hugged everyone hard, players and vice-captains alike, wearing a smile not seen since he walked off the 18th green at Augusta National after be-



US team player Matt Kuchar chips to the green on the 11th hole in their foursome match during the Presidents Cup golf tournament at Royal Melbourne Golf Club in Melbourne, on Dec 14. (AP)

coming a Masters champion again after injuries that nearly ended his career.

"We relied on one another as a team, and we did it - together," Woods said, his voice choked slightly with emotion. "This cup wasn't going to be given to us. We had to go earn it. And we did."

Els fashioned the youngest International team from a record nine countries from everywhere outside Europe and took a 10-8 lead into the final day, the first time it had the edge in 16 years.

It wasn't enough. Patrick Reed, whose caddie was benched for showing a fan who had cursed Reed from close range Saturday, built a 6-up lead through seven holes before eventually putting away C.T. Pan to win for the first time this week.

Webb Simpson, who played with Reed as they lost all three team matches, never trailed in beating Byeong Hun An. Everyone on the US team contributed something.

With so much red on the board, Tony Finau might have been his team the biggest boost. He was 4 down through 10 holes against Hideki Matsuyama, won the next four holes and earned a half-point.

It came down to the final hole in South Korea four years ago. This time, the Americans were assured of a tie if the Internationals were to win the last three matches, creating at least a little drama.

But it was a familiar ending. The Americans now are 11-1-1 in an event that began in 1994.

S. Africa down Fiji, US to reach home 7s quarters

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Dec 15, (AP): South Africa blasted into the quarterfinals of its home Cape Town Sevens by knocking off 2018 finalists Fiji and the United States.

Fiji, the Cape Town champion last season, was overcome 26-14 and the US held off 21-15.

South Africa will meet Kenya in the quarterfinals on Sunday. The winner will play France or Argentina.

Ireland won a pool for the first time, in only its second series tournament, and drew Fiji in the quarters. That winner will face New Zealand or Scotland.

Fiji took advantage of a yellow card to South Africa's Seabelo Senatla to jump ahead 14-0 on tries by Jerry Tuwai and Vilimoni Botitu.

Rosko Specman's try just before half-time boosted South Africa's confidence. They dominated the second half with tries by Senatla, Ruhan Nel's go-ahead score, and Justin Geduld's clincher which he converted.

The South Africans enjoyed more control against the US, leading 14-5 by halftime. Selwyn Davids made it 21-5 before the US hit back with two late tries with 30 seconds remaining. But failing to convert them was costly, whereas Geduld converted all three of South Africa's. After taking the Dubai title last weekend, South Africa was on a nine-match winning streak to start the world sevens series.

Kenya upset Australia 12-7 after Alvin Otieno's try was the only score in the second half, and drew with Ireland 24-24.

New Zealand won its pool from Argentina by scoring first in each half against the Argentinians through Joe Webber and controlling proceedings.

France was the only other three-for-three pool winner beside South Africa and New Zealand, and prevented two-time champion England from reaching the quarterfinals. France lost to England in the Dubai quarterfinals last weekend.

FC Goa beat ATK 2-1 to go top of ISL standings

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: FC Goa made it to the top of the table with a 2-1 victory against ATK in the Indian Super League at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, Fatorda, Goa on Saturday.

Following a barren first-half, three goals in six minutes after the break tilted the scales in favor of the host. Mouratada Fall scored for Goa with

SOCCER

a beautiful header but ATK soon equalized through Jobby Justin in the 64th and Ferran Corominas (Coro) 66th minute made an impact at the other end two minutes later to restore his side's advantage.

With 15 points from eight matches, Sergio Lobera's team has displaced ATK at the top of the table



Coro goal helped FC Goa beat ATK in the ISL.

pushed the ATK in second place.

Ahmed Jahouh and Lenny Rodrigues dominated the midfield, pushing ATK on the back foot. However, neither team was able to carve

out clear chances. David Williams charged at the Goa defence just before the break, to create an opening. Seriton Fernandes' firm challenge prevented the forward from getting

a shot away quickly before Carlos Pena came around to clear the danger. Goa's dominance was finally rewarded from a set-piece at the hour-mark. Brandon Fernandes picked up his fifth assist of the season by delivering an excellent free-kick towards the far post from the right flank. Mouratada Fall outmuscled Augustin Garcia to head the ball into the net to put Goa ahead.

Justin's maiden ISL goal turned out to be ATK's equaliser. Sehnaj Singh fed Roy Krishna into the box but Fall slid in with a brilliant tackle to take the ball off the striker. A minute after coming on, Justin tapped home the rebound.

Goa, however, regained its lead from a quick counter; Boumoum played a clever ball across the goal from the right for Ferran Corominas who guided it in at the near post.

Nunes defends crown

Usman batters Covington as Volkanovski claims title

LAS VEGAS, Dec 15, (AP): Kamaru Usman sent a bloodied, bleary Colby Covington spiraling to the ground for the second time. Usman then leaped on him and went to work on Covington's badly injured face, battering his dazed opponent with hammer fists until the referee mercifully intervened.

Although he had to wait until the final minute, Usman settled his very personal feud with his sharply divisive challenger in perhaps the most satisfying way possible.

"This one is not just for me," Usman said. "This is for the whole entire world right now."

Usman brutally stopped Covington with 50 seconds left in their bout at UFC 245 on Saturday night, retaining his UFC welterweight belt with a spectacular finish to their grudge match.

Alexander Volkanovski also took the UFC featherweight title from Max Holloway and became the second Australian champion in the promotion's history with a tactical unanimous-decision victory, and Amanda Nunes defended her bantamweight title with a grinding unanimous-decision victory over Germaine De Randamie at T-Mobile Arena.

Usman (16-1) closed out an occasionally slow fight with Covington (15-2) in thrilling fashion, knocking down the

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

challenger twice with right hands and then decisively finishing him on the ground. Although he didn't break his jaw as he feared, Covington couldn't withstand the pressure of Usman, who drew strength from the personal animus he took into the cage.

"He talked a lot going into this, so this was a respect thing," said Usman, who won his 11th straight fight. "I had a responsibility to go in there and teach him a lesson."

The Nigeria-born, Texas-raised Usman made good on his vow to derail the career of Covington, whose grating personality and eager embrace of President Donald Trump have made him a polarizing, widely reviled figure in mixed martial arts.

Covington recently claimed he is only playing a character in the tradition of a classic wrestling heel. UFC President Dana White and a long list of his onetime teammates - including UFC star Jon Jones, Jorge Masvidal and Tyrone Woodley - all say Covington is just a difficult, unlikeable person.

Usman was thrilled to beat up a bully.

Covington and Usman started with two busy rounds of striking in which Covington appeared to be landing more blows, but Covington poked Usman in the eye during the third. Usman responded by bloodying Covington in an impressive third-round flurry, and Covington subsequently told his corner that he thought his jaw was broken - but it wasn't, according to the UFC's physicians.

Usman took control from there, gradually finishing Covington in his first defense of the belt he took from Woodley earlier this year.

Covington sprinted from the cage after the decision, declining to congratulate



Kamaru Usman (left), hits Colby Covington in a mixed martial arts welterweight championship bout at UFC 245, on Dec 14, in Las Vegas. (AP)

Usman.

"I made a lot of mistakes, but I know I hit harder than him," Usman said.

Volkanovski (21-1) picked apart Holloway (21-5) with leg kicks and movement for five frenetic rounds, controlling the bout with style and persistence. The 31-year-old challenger born in a tiny coastal town in New South Wales joins New Zealand-born middleweight Robert Whittaker as UFC's only Aussie champs.

The judges favored Volkanovski 48-47, 48-47 and 50-45. Holloway struggled to land consistent strikes while dodging Volkanovski's barrage of leg kicks, but the long-reigning champ still appeared surprised and disappointed by the judges' verdict in just his second loss since 2013.

Volkanovski became just the fourth featherweight champion in UFC history, joining Jose Aldo, Conor McGregor and Holloway, who had reigned since 2016.

Volkanovski earned his title shot with 17 straight victories, including seven since joining the UFC, capped by a win over Aldo in May.

Holloway said he hasn't decided whether he will resume his career at featherweight or lightweight, but the 28-year-old vowed to come back strong.

Nunes (19-4) earned her 10th straight win and fifth bantamweight title defense over a half-decade of UFC dominance, but the two-division champion had to rely on her wrestling skills to dominate her 135-pound rematch with De Randamie (9-4), the former 145-pound UFC champion.

After Nunes nearly finished in a one-sided first round, De Randamie surprised Nunes with several effective strikes in the second. Nunes wisely landed multiple takedowns to control the rest of the bout, keeping De Randamie on the mat and unable to land a home-run strike.

The judges favored Nunes 49-46, 49-45 and 49-44.

Nunes added the featherweight belt last December with her 51-second thrashing of Cris "Cyborg" Justino, cementing her place among the sport's greats. Still only 31 years old, Nunes has said she will defend that 145-pound belt in her next fight, which would make her the first UFC fighter to defend two titles simultaneously.