



AJ Banal lies on the canvas after being hit by Luis Perez with an illegal punch during their fight on Oct. 30. Banal won the fight. (Photo by King Catriz)

Although AJ Banal registered his sixth straight victory since his only loss in 2008, he isn't feeling much like a winner in the aftermath of his seventh round disqualification "win" over Luis Perez at the Waterfront Hotel and Casino Ballroom in Cebu City on Oct. 30.

The Cebu City native Banal, now 23-1 (18 knockouts), has been sitting at home, reflecting on his most recent fight, where referee Silvestre Abainza ruled that the former two-time world champion Perez of Managua, Nicaragua had hit Banal late as he interceded to break up a clinch, rendering the hometown fighter unable to continue.

Abainza stopped the fight in the 1:47 mark of the seventh round.

Of all of the criticism he has faced in the media, it is one medium in particular that has struck a nerve with Banal.

'I'm upset at those who put comments on YouTube saying that I was just acting,' Banal said. 'They don't know my situation in the ring.'

Banal, 21, had the advantage in the first five rounds, making good use of his edge in speed and age (Perez is 11 years Banal's senior).

The fight turned in Perez's favor in the seventh when a strong straight left cross and a follow-up barrage prompted Banal to hold on.

As the referee stepped in to separate them, Perez threw a right hook that sent Banal down on the canvas.

Despite noticeably struggling to rise and squatting in his corner after the referee called a time-out to assess the situation, Banal insists that he could have continued and wants a rematch with Perez (26-5, 17 KOs).

'I wasn't hurt that bad, I just felt a little dizzy. I was hit by the last punch. That was what hurt me.'

For Banal, the circumstances of the disqualification have done little to quiet the detractors that wrote him off following his 10th round knockout loss to Rafael Concepcion in 2008.

Way ahead in that fight, Banal was dropped by a right hand and remained on his knees while the referee counted to 10.

Critics whispered after the fight that Banal lacked a fighter's heart.

ALA Promotions president Michael Aldegeur was quoted by PhilStar.com's Joaquin Henson as saying, 'It was a sad and disappointing way to win,' adding 'If a title shot comes along, we'll evaluate if he's ready depending on the opponent.'

Perez had lost three of his previous four fights – including two by KO – heading into the Banal fight.

Perez won the International Boxing Federation (IBF) super flyweight (115lb) title in 2003, making three successful defenses in a title reign marred by inactivity.

He won the bantamweight title in 2007, which was followed by his precipitous descent. Though the fight had a contracted weight of 120 lbs, Banal came in at 116, while Perez weighed just a quarter pound under 118.

It was the lowest weight Banal had registered since the Concepcion fight.

On the undercard, junior middleweight Mark Jason Melligen of Bacolod City improved his record to 20-2 (14 KOs) with a third round TKO over Bladimir Hernandez, 18-4 (16 KOs), of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The time was 2:57.

(Editor's note: Ryan Songalia is a member of the Boxing Writers Association of America [BWAA] and a contributor to GMANews.TV. He can be reached at ryan@ryansongalia.com. An archive of his work can be found at www.ryansongalia.com. Follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ryansongalia).