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by lionel martin

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havana, nov 16, reuter -- cuban heavyweight teofilo stevenson's clean, second round knockout of american, tyrell biggs, last saturday in reno, nevada, has sparked hopes among cuban sport's enthusiasts that stevenson will fulfill his aspiration of being the first boxer to win gold medals in four consecutive world olympics.

when the three time olympic heavyweight champion from cuba entered the ring with biggs in the seventh u.s.-cuba boxing competition, cuban sports' fans watching the event via satellite were generally pessimistic about stevenson's chances.

earlier this year in munich at the world amateur boxing championships, stevenson, the favourite in the super-heavyweight division, lost to italian, francesco damiani, who, in turn, lost in the finals to u.s. candidate, tyrell biggs.

biggs, whose style has been likened to that of mohammed ali, went into the ring at reno with the confidence of a world champion. stevenson was under pressure, after a decade and a half in the ring, to show that he was still a champ. +that tension showed in the tense expression of teofilo, in his tight-smile seconds before the match began and in the irrefrangible burst of ecstasy with which his seconds greeted his victory, - wrote cuban's leading boxing writer, olin mendez.

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to keep in-fighters at a distance.

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in the first round, the american and cuban boxers danced around each other, throwing jabs at long distance in search of mutual weaknesses.

in the second round, stevenson hit biggs with a right to the side of his head which sent the present world champion to the canvas, but not for the nine count. biggs, a skillful and powerful boxer rallied while stevenson stalked him. a left-right combination less than 20 seconds away from the end of the second round spelled curtains for biggs.

when biggs was counted out, shouts of joy could be heard issuing from homes up and down the streets of havana.

elio mendez wrote: "stevenson showed that there is no better super-heavyweight in the world and that he will be the first man in history to win four boxing gold medals. when he goes to los angeles in 1984."

in his fight with damiani in munich last spring, stevenson showed that he has weaknesses. his few defeats have come from tough, strong, bull-like in-fighters like igor visotski of the soviet union and damiani of italy. stevenson told reuter after his loss to damiani that he had made the mistake of trying to fight damiani's kind of fight. his trainers have impressed on him the need to use his every long reach and exceedingly effective jab to keep in-fighters at a distance.

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during his long career, stevenson has been offered large sums of money to turn professional. in 1976 he turned down one million dollars to fight the professional, heavyweight champion mohammed ali. turning professional would have required stevenson to leave cuba since there is no professional sport on the island since the aearly sixties. stevenson, now a member of cuba's national parliament, told reporters then: +i don't want to become a commodity. and besides, what's money anyway.+

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