

Sighs of Relief as Mekhontcev Gives Russia a Gold in Boxing

August 12, 2012



Mekhontcev, right, being declared the winner over Niyazymbetov on Sunday. **Murad Sezer**

LONDON — Egor Mekhontcev made sure Russia would not leave the ring without a gold medal on Sunday when he came from behind to beat Kazakhstan's Adilbek Niyazymbetov to the light-heavyweight title by the tightest of margins.

Russia, whose Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko accused host Britain of using political clout to win medals at the games, won more boxing medals than anyone else but faced the prospect of returning home with three silvers and three bronzes.

Mutko singled out Russia's boxers, saying three of their fighters had been "prevented" from getting to finals, but Mekhontcev was not to be denied when he won by the closest margin seen yet in a deciding bout. After the scores were level at 15-15 and countback could not split the pair, Mekhontcev claimed victory on the judges' individual preference, the only final to be called in the sudden death manner.

Like compatriot Serik Sapiyev who won Kazakhstan's first gold of the games earlier Sunday,

Niyazymbetov hid behind his right jab for the first round and was possibly fortunate to take it by four points to three.

But ex-world heavyweight champ Mekhontcev hit back in the second, clocking the world champ silver medalist with a couple of big rights to level the scores. The long wait for a result after the final round was probably the most engrossing moment in a dull contest that was far less exciting than when the great Muhammad Ali won gold in the same division in 1960.

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