

Hopkins-Joppy: Not A Tough Fight To Handicap

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Friday, 01 August 2003 18:00

Reports are starting to appear that Undisputed World Middleweight Champion Bernard Hopkins is going to fight current WBA Champion William Joppy sometime in mid to late September. Considering Don King promotes both fighters, and Hopkins still has one fight left on his contract with King, it would seem like a fight that's going to happen. I've read where some believe this will be a good competitive fight if it happens, and that Joppy has a chance to score the upset? It may be somewhat competitive but, in my opinion Joppy has no-shot to beat Hopkins.

Yes, I'm well aware of Hopkins advancing age. When fighters are in their late thirties and close to crowding forty, we wait for that night when they show up a shell of what they were at their peak. Taking nothing away from Joppy, who's been a solid fighter throughout his career, that's exactly what it will take for him to beat Hopkins. That's right, the only shot Joppy has to defeat Hopkins, is if Hopkins shows up on fight night as an empty package. A scenario I don't envision happening.

Unfortunately for Hopkins, this is probably the best fight that can be made for him in the middleweight division. Hopkins vs. Jermain Taylor would be a fight that would spark fan interest but, it wouldn't be smart to match the up and coming Taylor with Hopkins. At least not this early in his career. Taylor has shown the potential to become an outstanding fighter and will be a strong favorite in the middleweight division to succeed Hopkins when he's gone. Although, I wouldn't be surprised if we see a washed up Hopkins lose his title to a peaking Taylor down the road. Depending on how long the Executioner continues to fight.

Back to Hopkins and Joppy. Those who are picking Joppy to win, or at least giving him a good chance to upset Hopkins are basically using Bernard's age as one of the key factors. Lets not forget that Joppy is 33 and took a severe beating vs Trinidad, (no way Joppy is the same fighter that he was pre-Trinidad). On the other hand, Hopkins has never been battered in any fight during his career. If I was to bet who was more shop worn, I would bet that it's Joppy. If the Hopkins-Joppy fight does happen in September, Hopkins will be three months shy of turning 39. On the Calender it would appear to be advantage Joppy but, in the ring I say it will be advantage Hopkins.

When it comes to fighters fighting at advanced ages, I don't think I've ever seen a fighter who has maintained their close to peak form like Bernard Hopkins has. Jersey Joe Walcott and Archie Moore are often heralded for how well they fought when they were in their late thirties. However, I think Hopkins may have even exceeded both of them. The one thing in their favor is they fought what might be considered slightly better opposition in their later years. Walcott and Moore are the only two fighters to drop former undefeated heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano. Walcott was 38 when he put Rocky down, and Moore was either 39 or 42, (depending on which one of his birth certificate's you believe) when he dropped Rocky.

Bernard Hopkins is a remarkable fighter. The condition he keeps himself in is nothing short of amazing. He is a natural middleweight and never struggles to make 160. From what I've seen,

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he hasn't eroded significantly enough to be the difference in him losing to Joppy. If age doesn't defeat Hopkins for Joppy, than how does Joppy win the fight?

When handicapping a fight, I look at what each fighter either possess or what he can do to defeat the other. What does Joppy do better than Hopkins? Absolutely nothing. Everything Joppy does well, Hopkins does as well or better. Joppy has no chance to beat Hopkins if they fight it out. He can't out punch him and he doesn't have the chin to withstand an all out Hopkins assault. Joppy doesn't have an advantage in speed or experience, and Hopkins holds the advantage in reach and is the more adaptable fighter along with being the better boxer.

What strategy can Joppy employ? If he goes to Hopkins and fights him, he gets knocked out, if he moves away and tries to out box him, he most likely loses every round. Joppy must hope that he has a career night and Hopkins shows up completely shot.

I just don't see how Joppy can pull this fight out. Hopkins holds every meaningful advantage that one fighter can hold over another. It also must be mentioned that Hopkins is as confident and mentally tough as any fighter in boxing, regardless of weight division. When one fighter is superior to his opponent in every facet of boxing from A to Z, I don't see it as a very difficult fight to handicap. The bottom line is, Joppy is a very good fighter and Hopkins is a great fighter.

Writers Note

Bernard Hopkins is a great fighter who will retire as an all-time great middleweight champion. He can do it all in the ring. Hopkins has won fights by boxing or brawling, he can fight moving towards his opponent or moving away and countering. The "Executioner" has a concrete chin and is as mentally tough as any fighter I've seen. Hopkins has also shown the ability to adapt to different styles during the fight, a trait possessed by an overwhelming majority of all-time greats.