

Atlas Maps Out Grant's Future

Written by Steve Kim

Wednesday, 22 January 2003 21:00

This Friday night former heavyweight challenger Michael Grant takes on journeyman Carlton Johnson. Outside the couple of thousand that are to show the First Center Union in Philadelphia, many others not too will be able to see Grant riding fight streak) (currently a five winning back in action.

It's a long way from the bright lights and the exposure that Grant once fought under on a regular basis. Remember, it was just a couple of years ago that Grant was HBO's the hulking heir apparent and was hailed as 'the heavyweight of the new millennium'. That is until he was rushed into a fight with Lennox Lewis and stopped short in two rounds. Like a piece of fine china, he was dropped and shattered into a thousand little pieces.

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More than a year later, those thousand fragments would be pieced together and put back into the ring against Jameel McCline, in what was thought to be a comeback fight on his way to bigger and better things. This time he would be armed with a new trainer, the esteemed Teddy Atlas. But he wasn't as Grant much help was dumped to the canvas than 15 seconds with the solid first punch fracturing from McCline, his ankle in the process. In two fights, faster than his stock plummeted Enron. Grant had hit rock bottom-twice. But he decided to give his career one last chance at legitimacy and after recovering from his fractured ankle, he would embark on a series of comeback fights. We would say that some 'gimme's' he took but the fact of the matter is, we're not sure state in his mind that there was any

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fight that could
be considered one for
an easy him. But slowly he has started
to climb out of his hole;
and this past August
he took a decisive step
up in class by knocking
out fringe contender Robert
Davis in three rounds
in front of a national audience
on ESPN.
For Grant, it was
a significant
step in the right
direction.
So now they move
on to bigger
and better things
right?
Actually, they took
a step back by
fighting James
Walton in
early November
in Washington D.C.,
stopping Walton
in four.
And now, they're
taking on Johnson, another unknown
and relatively safe fighter.
And it's just
the way Atlas planned it.
" You gotta be honest,"
he says." I think we dropped
back a lil' bit but not
by accident.
What I really felt like after
the Robert Davis fight was that
I wanted to evaluate
what I saw.
And I

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saw some good things, but I also saw
need tightened inconsistencies, I thought wrong ahead . I believe
towards this it and my philosophies business; and you have to if you're the
it." one who's leading
Atlas, after the knockout in his first Grant, took
loss to McCline, bout training over the decision matchmaking Craig
Hamilton from managers and Jim Thomas. Atlas, very beginning,
that his from the had doubted new fighter for a of McCline's
so soon. was ready fighter caliber And Atlas even now the
envelope is hesitant to push looking ahead.
" With his lack of background, a title fight,
devastating and moving to and then the two losses in I feel Michael
in the gym to a row and everything; needs time obviously develop and

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then develop in proper fights. Off of
the Davis I thought took a forward he
fight, that he nice step from where he
was. But
there were some things see better, consistent with."
I wanted to become more
The word 'consistency' is used over by Atlas in
and over again talking about his fighter.
wants more of In short, he it from him his performance
and even in with Davis, quite enough
he didn't see of it. After a strong one against he
would listlessly focus second- a loud earning
reprimand trainer- stopping in the Davis next
round. It was round Atlas with
the second that made proceed
caution.
" I felt, let a little bit," of his thoughts said Atlas, after the Davis
in the gym again win." And work and see if I to be more consistent
can get him

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and add to the areas that I saw were good and the areas that I thought he drifted a little bit and that he could at. See if he can be consistent before he gets next level. To me, that's the way you the way I feel do it. That's comfortable developing a training a fighter." fighter and So next came a fight off of TV against Walton. " We had the fight in Washington. I felt that I was right, inconsistencies there was still some Atlas says." in that fight," Now, we're gonna fight we got where a game front guy in of him, who's gonna come forward a level but he's below Davis. And now, I'm gonna see- and just care I don't about but I winning- want to see how he wins. I wanna see how he looks, I wanna see the things we've if he shows been working on in the gym."

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And Atlas insists that he will not move up to the next level just based on wins. He must see development and of course, consistency.

" It's always about the fighter getting better to me. My bottom line is being a teacher and the most important thing is your fighter getting better," said Atlas, who's currently got some from his gig on ESPN2 'Friday Fight' series in the midst of a three week hiatus." Look, I know I don't have forever to do this, he's 30 years old, I got him at a certain point in his career, I know that.

" But I'm still not going to ignore the fact that there are still certain areas that he needs time to develop. I'm going to give much time as I can in practical terms and then I still understand that I need to step forward and be

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able to apply certain I understand
it within time frames- that."
" But my first and foremost going to be
priority is my fighter being consistent
in he needs to the area's that be, becoming can become.
as good as he Forget the
styles about of the there, pick spots with
guys out I can out there but I himself as solid can
guys, want Michael to become as he become a certain term of
possibly within practical time."
Ok, but where does he see in six months?
his fighter
" I'm looking at stepping fight," he answers."
up to an ESPN-type I'm looking the summer, fringes of the the kind of
for him, by to be on the HBO-fights, guys you gotta kind of spots.
fight in those To be able to show that he on
that level." can be consistent

FRIDAY NIGHT

FIGHTS

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Also on that card with Grant is Anthony Thompson, a young welterweight out of Philly, and considered who is now 7-0 one of the best prospects in boxing.

THUNDER CLOUDS

The IBF in their latest ratings has placed Arturo Gatti as it's welterweight, top ranked jr. which perhaps brings us a step closer to a bout with undisputed champion Kostya Tszyu.

But then there's again, no way this bout ever goes to a purse bid and the question would there be if is enough either money from Showtime HBO or to satisfy both sides.

SUGAR FIX

Bob Arum has put out an ultimatum to Shane Mosley to officially sign on the dotted line for his September 13th rematch with Oscar De La Hoya, or they will proceed to go through with a return bout with Fernando Vargas.

Why the rush to make Mosley sign? Well, it seems

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that Mosley, who's
a bit
unhappy with the
\$4 million he is
set to receive
against Hoya, De La
has made overtures
to Don King,
setting off alarms
with Arum
and anyone else involved
in De La Hoya-Mosley
II.