

Joppy a Stepping Stone for Jermain Taylor

Written by Sam Gregory

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Twenty-six year old Jermain Taylor will put his 21-0 unbeaten streak on the line December 4th as he takes a step up the middleweight ranks to fight the former three-time middleweight kingpin, William Joppy. The 34-year-old veteran Joppy, with a 34-3-1 record, has fought the best middleweights the current division has to offer: Bernard Hopkins, Felix Trinidad and Howard Eastman.

Out of the three middleweights Joppy fought he only beat one of them. That was Howard Eastman, the least talented of the three. Joppy won that fight by a close split decision. Judges Bill Graham and Melvina Lathan scored the fight 115-112 and 114-112 for Joppy, while Judge Chuck Giampa had the fight even at 113-113.

As for the Bernard Hopkins fight, Joppy only won a single round on two of the judges' scorecards and two rounds on the third. In the Trinidad fight, Tito scored a fifth round TKO after knocking Joppy down in the first, fourth and fifth rounds of their fight.

Jermain Taylor, the 2000 Olympic silver medalist from Little Rock, said of Joppy, "I respect him, but he's a steppingstone and that's what I'm going to use him for."

Promoter Lou DiBella said if Taylor can beat Joppy he'll graduate to fight top-tier middleweights like Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad and Bernard Hopkins.

When Taylor stopped Rogelio Martinez in seven rounds on the undercard of the first Tarver-Jones Jr. fight a year ago, boxing analyst and world-famous trainer Emanuel Steward said, "Taylor looks like he'll be ready in about three more fights to fight any of the best middleweights out there."

Last June Taylor stepped in the ring with a much more experienced fighter, Raul Marquez. After the fight Jermain said he had trouble landing his left jab – his signature punch – against the very game southpaw. Even though Ronnie Shields called a stop to the fight after the ninth round due to a cut over Marquez's eye, Jermain wasn't satisfied. He told Larry Merchant after the fight that he gave himself an F for his performance.

Taylor was frustrated and felt like he wasn't able to execute his game plan against the most experienced fighter he'd fought to that point. That leaves the question: How will Taylor do against the more experienced middleweight, William Joppy?

If Taylor thinks his jab wasn't working against Marquez, he greatly underestimated himself. By Compubox numbers Taylor landed 101 jabs to Marquez's 11 jabs through the fight's nine rounds. Jermain landed a total of 206 overall punches compared to Raul Marquez's 65 total punches.

In Jermain Taylor's last four fights he landed on average 40 to 45 percent of his total punches

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thrown, always out-landing his opponent with a higher percent of jabs.

In a complete analysis of Jermain Taylor's punch stats, everything works off his jab. In fact, in his 12 round title fight for the vacant WBC belt against Freddie Cuevas, he threw a middleweight record of 677 jabs. Of those, he landed 243. During that August 2003 fight with Cuevas, Taylor didn't lose a single round. All three score cards read 120-108, with Jermain winning the WBC Americas middleweight title.

"William Joppy has proven as a three-time WBA middleweight champion that he is one of the great middleweights of this era," said Joppy's promoter, Don King. He added, flags in hand, "(Joppy) will have another opportunity in the land of opportunity to prove his greatness when he faces Olympic champion and undefeated rising star Jermain Taylor."

A few days after King made that statement, Taylor's trainer Pat Burns drew an interesting parallel. Joppy is represented by J.D. Brown, who was with Ray Leonard during Leonard's Hall of Fame career. Burns trained Hector Camacho as he sent Leonard into retirement when he TKOed Sugar Ray in the fifth round of his last professional fight.

Burns said Taylor would do the same to Joppy.