

Taylor vs. Joppy: A Boxing Tradition

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Tonight in his home town, Little Rock native and 2000 Olympic Bronze Medalist Jermain Taylor 21-0 (16) will take on former three time middleweight champ William Joppy 34-3-1 (25). Taylor is being promoted and groomed as the marquee fighter in the middleweight division once the Hopkins era of dominance is over. Joppy is viewed as a stepping stone for Taylor on his way to middleweight greatness. In fact, Taylor openly said just that at the press conference announcing the fight.

Joppy hasn't fought since losing a lopsided 12 round unanimous decision to undisputed middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City last December. Against Hopkins, Joppy was competitive for maybe the first two or three rounds. Starting from about the fourth round on, he was in full retreat and survival mode as it was all Hopkins. Due to the beating that Hopkins inflicted on Joppy, most fans thought they'd never see him fight again.

The Taylor-Joppy bout is a continuation of what is actually a tradition more so than a trend in the sport of boxing. The tradition just about always follows the same script, and usually ends the same. In one corner you have the fighter who is on the way up, sometimes a former Olympic medalist, who has the money and the establishment behind him. In the other corner is the eroded ex-champ who still has a name, but fighting with diminished skills.

And for the last couple weeks both Taylor and Joppy have been saying what is routinely said by the fighter in their roll. Taylor has said that this is his time and nothing can stop him. Joppy blames his poor showing against Hopkins on the many personal problems he had leading up to the fight, and quickly points out that he finished on his feet versus Hopkins, unlike De La Hoya and Trinidad who were stopped.

In this fight all the attention will be on Taylor. Joppy will only be a factor after the fight if he wins. Taylor will have everything in his favor during the fight. He'll be the benefactor of every close round in the scoring. If either fighter happens to get cut during the fight, you better believe Taylor will have to be cut a lot worse than would Joppy in order for the fight to be stopped, especially if it's close or Joppy is winning.

Make no mistake about it, Taylor will be the beneficiary of every close call. But he also has all the pressure on him as well. Joppy only has to win the fight, decision or knockout doesn't matter. Taylor, at least in the eyes of the fans and media, is expected to win and look good doing it. Everything Taylor does in the fight will be under a microscope. He will be judged on his potential. Most viewers will be looking to see if he has the potential to one day be the next Hagler or Hopkins?

In reality, Taylor is in a no win situation, but he can only lose if he doesn't win the fight. Regardless of how he looks, he can't beat the ghost of Hagler or Hopkins, whom some will be measuring him against. If he knocks Joppy out in a round or two, it will be said that Joppy was shot and was softened up for him by Hopkins last year. On the other hand, if struggles to win a

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close decision, many will ask—how good can he be if he couldn't stop a washed up 34 year old former champ with eroded skills?

Taylor's management team are completely in tune with how boxing and the media work. And you better believe they'll play it the same way if he stops Joppy, quickly pointing out that Hopkins couldn't. The goal for Taylor against Joppy is to win, while gaining some needed experience against a name opponent or former champion in front of a national audience.

This fight serves many purposes for both fighters. For Taylor, it's a way to gauge his progression on the way to what many believe will be a world title. In Joppy's case, his career is on the line. Taylor needs a big name to pad his record and show that he can be a fighter who can compete and possibly win a world title down the road. Joppy can resurrect his career with a win over the younger and undefeated Taylor.

Taylor and Joppy know the score going into this fight. And they should because it is a boxing tradition which brings them together tonight. And would anyone reading this really be surprised if in 2013, Taylor is fighting an Olympian from the 2012 Games?