

Jermain Taylor steamrolls William Joppy

Written by Jake Donovan

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Reporting from Ringside

When a young fighter faces the toughest test of his career, the night is supposed to serve as a measuring stick and a learning experience. After 12 rounds, Jermain Taylor learned that he measures up with the best middleweights in the world.

Using his overwhelming size advantage and a right uppercut that could not miss, undefeated middleweight Jermain Taylor (22-0, 16KO) cruised past three time middleweight titlist William Joppy en route to a unanimous decision. The bout was the main event of an HBO Boxing After Dark, aired live (except for the West Coast) from the Barton Coliseum in Taylor's hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas.

Taylor gave the crowd of more than 6,300 plenty to cheer about throughout the evening, as he cleaned out the kitchen over the course of the twelve round bout. To Joppy's credit, he took everything that Jermain had and managed to come back for more as the fight went on. But that was about all the former champ could do, as blocking punches and hurting Jermain just did not seem in the cards. Not tonight, and perhaps not ever again.

"Tonight just wasn't my night," said Joppy (34-4-1, 25KO) at the post-fight press conference. "I'm 34 years old, and I've only been fighting about once a year since the Eastman fight. When you get up there in age, and you can't fight as often as you like... it just wasn't my night."

Such was obvious from the opening bell. Joppy looked to establish the pace and the range by working his jab early, but a straight right from Taylor quickly - and permanently - turned the tide. From there, Taylor was able to walk Joppy down and land as he pleased throughout the round, and pretty much the entire fight. The beat down was punctuated by a right uppercut toward round's end that caused Joppy's head to snap back. The crowd jumped to his feet, and Taylor was all over Joppy, as he attacked until the end of the round.

Taylor picked up exactly where he left off, rocking Joppy with a right hand early in the second frame. Chants of "J-T" filled the Barton Coliseum, and also ran through Taylor's blood, as he confessed afterward.

"Man, people act like they can tune the crowd out and what not," Taylor let on at the post-fight press conference, "but I hear EVERYTHING. I hear my people calling my name, giving me the "Woo Pig Sooy" ("Call of the Hogs") chant... man, it's what makes me love fighting here at my home so much."

Taylor came out for the third looking to establish a body attack. Early and often, Jermain went downstairs, and was able to parlay it into combinations upstairs, most of which ended with a right uppercut. Jermain also exuded excellent defense in the round as well, as he was able to time Joppy nearly every time William started to throw. All a frustrated Joppy could do was eat

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punches for his efforts.

The judges failed to give Joppy a single round, but most in press row were kind enough to score the fourth his way, as William picked up his activity level for the first time in the fight. He seemed to have the round in the bag until a right uppercut rocked him late in the round, which prompted Taylor to flurry late and go in for the kill. The last second flurry was apparently enough to steal the round.

Jermain started the fifth round as if he wanted to end the fight, and it almost happened big time. A left hook midway through the round sent Joppy crashing to the canvas for what would be the fight's only knockdown. Joppy beat referee Bill Clancy's count, but could not escape the ensuing fusillade of punches from the hometown hero. Once again, Joppy managed to end the round on his feet, but once again also took a major beating for his efforts.

Determined to prove that he wasn't as hurt as the knockdown suggested, Joppy jumped off of his stool about fifteen seconds before the start of round six. It was about the only time in the fight that he beat Jermain at anything, as he didn't do much in the next three minutes. Nor did Jermain, who pretty much took the round off, but still managed to be busy enough to take the round.

Taylor would pick it up again in the seventh, and once again seemed on the verge of ending matters early. The crowd once again rained down with chants of "J-T", but Taylor was unable to deliver the one final shot to put away the durable Joppy. More of the same transpired in the eighth, as the fight was now developing into a somewhat monotonous wipeout.

Things got interesting in the ninth, but for all of the wrong reasons. Joppy spent much of the first half of the round posing and dancing, but rarely punching. Taylor was able to close the gap about midway through. The gap became close enough to where Joppy could grab a hold of him, as he attempted to lift Jermain up and throw him out of the ring. As referee Bill Clancy separated the two, Taylor broke free and took about four shots at a defenseless Joppy. After about a minute of confusion and both fighters in neutral corners, Clancy brought the two to center ring. He could have justifiably taken a point or more from each fighter, but instead let them both off with a warning.

Taylor wasn't about to let Joppy off as easy. He proceeded to fight more aggressively in the second half of the ninth and throughout the tenth than he had at any other point in the fight. Again, it was the uppercut that dominated both frames. Taylor hadn't been known in the past to be so effective with the punch, but mastered it after studying previous Joppy fights.

"I watched his fight with Howard Eastman quite a bit," Taylor informed the media after the fight. "I noticed that Howard was able to land the uppercut quite a bit. The tape don't lie - if he's open for it there, he'll be open for it in this fight. He was, and I took advantage."

The crowd picked up the "Woo Pig Soeey" chant in the championship rounds, but it was Joppy who fought as if they were cheering for him. For the first time since the fourth round, Joppy outworked - or at least attempted to outwork - his opponent eight years his junior. As with the

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fourth, he managed to win the round in press row, but not on the official cards. He did, however, lose sympathy points as he twice grabbed his crotch as if to say.. Well, whatever he wanted to say. The first time was during the round, aimed toward the Taylor. He did it again at rounds end, jumping on his stool and “signaling” to the crowd.

Perhaps it was his way of signaling the end, as he did absolutely nothing in the twelfth and final round. Taylor stalked, but seemed content with letting the fight go the distance, which it did.

The decision was a formality, as Taylor easily won a unanimous decision and everyone knew it. What was somewhat of a surprise was that all three judges had Taylor pitching a shutout, 120-107. TheSweetScience.com scored the bout 118-109 for Taylor, who wants to get back into the ring as soon as possible. Who against is anybody’s guess, including DiBella.

“We might be looking for him to get back in March or April. We want to let everyone know that his time is now, and he’s ready for the best. No opponent has been mentioned yet, but I can say that we’re not looking to move backward.”

Perhaps not, but there’s not a lot in the other direction. Undisputed middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins is facing either Howard Eastman or Kingsley Ikeke in February 2005. Eastman apparently has promotional issues that may not be sorted out by the time the fight goes to purse bids, and Ikeke would be the next available contender. How he could fight Hopkins is another matter, as Kingsley has four fights remaining with the very banner that Hopkins was just named President of just two weeks ago (Golden Boy Promotions).

But that’s all for the courts to figure out. Whatever is next for Taylor, he’s more than willing to take it on. If he hadn’t proved it in the past, he certainly did so tonight, not only surviving what was supposed to be the toughest test of his career, but steamrolling right through his opponent. With Bad Intentions from bell to bell.

The bout and the entire card was promoted by Lou DiBella’s DiBella Entertainment, in association with Don King Productions.

Undercard results: Undefeated junior welterweight **Paul Malignaggi** improved to 19-0 (5KO) with a seventh round technical decision over Italy’s Sandro Casamonica (34-5, 21KO). The bout was a rough, somewhat dirty affair, as Casamonica seemed more interested in roughing up “The Magic Man” than he did in wanting to defeat him. Old injuries came back to haunt Malignaggi, as he managed to re-injure both hands. After the bout Lou DiBella congratulated him, and then immediately declared him “on the shelf” until his hands are 100%... Local heavyweight **Terry**

Smith

(22-1-1, 15KO) survived a second round knockdown and a ton of right hands to eke out a six round unanimous decision over tough-as-nails Demetrice King (6-5,4KO). Scores were 58-55 (2x) and 57-56... 2004 Olympian Andre Berto made his pro debut a memorable one, scoring a brutal third round knockout over gutty but overmatched William Robinson (2-2, 2KO). Robinson was decked four times before the bout was mercifully halted at the 2:15 mark. Afterward, Berto was more relieved to get the fight over with than he was impressed with the win. “It’s a big relief.

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I was a bit worried about how things would turn out, as I wanted to give the fans a real treat. Now it's over with, and I can concentrate on knocking cats out in 2005"... Undefeated lightweight

Koba Gogoladze

survived a first round knockdown and a much tougher than expected challenge from Roque Cassiani to earn a ten round split decision. Scores were 94-93 Cassiani, and 94-93 and 97-90 Gogoladze. Cassiani lost a point in the fifth round and Gogoladze a point in the tenth round on what seemed to be a clean knockdown. Referee Tim Adams failed to note what were the grounds for the deductions, nor did he care to explain afterward. DiBella was not thrilled with the turn of events, or the ref in general. "This referee is fucking horrible" was how he summarized his performance, shortly before personally breaking up a fight in the stands immediately after scores were read for this bout...

Danny Santiago

opened up the show with a first round knockout of James Brock. A left-right did the trick, as Brock went down, took a knee, and never threatened to beat the ten count administered by referee Bill Clancy. Time of the stoppage was 1:28 into the opening frame.