Jr. middleweight Jermain Taylor is one of the most highly touted and recognized young fighters in the game today. Coming out of the 2000 Olympic Games with a bronze medal, Taylor would sign a lucrative deal with Lou DiBella and quickly become one of the most visible prospects of this last amateur class.

Since beginning his career in January of 2001 on HBO at the Theater in Madison Square Garden, Taylor has notched 12 consecutive victories. And despite being a fledgling prizefighter, his bouts have been televised on HBO, Fox Sports, pay-per-view broadcasts and ESPN2. And those bouts that have not been telecast are usually on the undercard of highly anticipated main events where highlights of his performance are usually shown. His development has been broadcast to a wide- ranging audience.

This Friday night Taylor will be fighting in virtual anonymity in Tulsa, Oklahoma against left-hander Keith Simms. Outside of a few hundred people in the arena, virtually no one will see his performance; as it is, barely anyone knows he fighting at all during the holiday season.

And Taylor's decision makers wouldn't have it any other way.

" It's not on TV, but that's a good thing," said Pat Burns, who trains Taylor." We're fighting a southpaw here and we want to get that experience. If we look bad, it's no big deal; it's a learning process. People in boxing understand that it's not always about exposure because that can be a double edged sword," he points out." If you look bad, people can jump all over you and your fighter can lose confidence. We want Jermain to stay busy and learn."

Taylor is sacrificing a bit in taking this fight, as it is not part of his contracted deal with DiBella. By taking an 'off contract' bout, Taylor will receive substantially less than he usually does for his contracted fights.

" I'm encouraging it," said DiBella, who just recently got his promoters license in several states. "If the kid is willing to fight for less money then I can keep him more active and I'm willing to make an investment occasionally in an off-TV fight. For example, he's fighting a lefty, and he just wanted to fight a southpaw off of television to get some experience versus a southpaw before we step up to a southpaw of quality. I think it's a great thing when a kid is willing to do what it takes to keep himself very active and that's what Jermain's been doing."

The soft-spoken Taylor has no problems with this plan. "I like staying busy," he says." If I could, I'd fight once a month next year. I like being in the gym, working hard and getting comfortable."

But it does take a fighter who can see the big picture to go this route. Not all of his prospects have been willing to take a fight for less than their contracted minimums in non-televised bouts.

" It's really a matter of how often the fighters want to fight," said DiBella." Some of the other

fighters haven't done it simply because of injury; they've been behind the eight ball. Guys who have been healthy and wanted to fight often, have done it."

" Jermain understands that if I'm paying 10-grand to put him onto a show, I'm not making money. I'm doing that and I don't have to do it-he's getting something- which is the ability to fight often and it's terrific for Jermain because I think he's got tremendous potential but Jermain is a guy that needs to fight often."

Burns says that he has discussed this with his fighter on many occasions.

" We've talked about this," explained Burns, who was an assistant coach on the 1996 U.S. Olympic boxing team; "how if he wants to get better and reach his potential as a fighter then he needs to fight often. We're not going to just sit around and only fight when the contract says so. We're going to fight non-contracted fights and take less money. We'll be in a position one day to make a lot of money but only if he becomes a real fighter."

But then, that in itself can open up another can of worms. Once you become a 'real' fighter and get a lucrative HBO contract, activity can slow to a crawl. With HBO having so many fighters under multi-fight agreements, there simply aren't enough dates to keep their fighters busy. Most of the time, those fighters who get into that stratosphere end up fighting about twice a year, three at most.

Such is the case of Floyd Mayweather and Fernando Vargas, two stars of the 1996 U.S. Olympic team that were coached by Burns and Al Mitchell. Both Mayweather and Vargas would win titles within three years of turning pro, and since then have fought no more than three times in a year since 1998; the same year in which they won titles and became staples on HBO. Mayweather fought seven times in 98 (including his title winning performance against Genaro Hernandez in October of that year) and Vargas had six bouts (including winning the title from Yory Boy Campas in November). From that point on, neither 'the Pretty Boy' or 'the Ferocious One' has had a year where they fought more than three times in a calendar year.

Both are just 25, and it's hard to believe that with their infrequent rate of activity that they have truly developed into the seasoned fighters they should be. Also, it's hard to establish a fan base or your marketability fighting just twice a year.

" When we get there, we're not going to let them (HBO) dictate to us that we only fight twice a year" states Burns." We want it, where in addition to those fights, we can take several other fights. It's important to maintain his activity." And Burns points out just how much the game has changed," I mean in the old days guys would have 50,60,70 fights before becoming a contender. But in those days guys would really become well-schooled fighters."

Nowadays, 50 fights and guys call it a career. Where have you gone Archie Moore and Henry Armstrong?

DiBella echoes the thoughts of Burns.

" I would encourage them to take a few hometown fights on local television, to fight an ESPN date, not to take a high risk in those situations but activity is an important thing. Not only from the standpoint of keeping you in physical condition but activity can also keep you in the public spotlight," said DiBella, who has plans to put on his own lower level pay-per-view shows so that he can showcase his fighters with the dearth of available dates on the television outlets. His first show in November featured Taylor on the undercard. "That was the whole point, it's just an opportunity for frequency, it's an opportunity to allow people to fight regularly. I'm now considering doing a Monday night pay-per-view series."

But right now Taylor is just focused on working hard and learning his trade. The sacrifices he makes now will pay dividends later.

" I feel if I work hard now, I can play later. It's like, let me take care of this now and then when I get to 25-0, I can play a little bit. I don't mind hard work."