

Is Hopkins Really Older Than De La Hoya ?

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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De La Hoya fight has been announced, the conventional wisdom has been that the only shot De La Hoya has is if Father Time catches up with Hopkins. I too have been one who has endorsed that thought. If you look at Hopkins and De La Hoya as fighters, it's hard to find any significant advantage that De La Hoya holds, other than being 8 years younger and maybe having better mobility.

Hopkins is the bigger and stronger fighter with better stamina. Rarely have we seen Hopkins fade down the stretch in any of his fights. Against De La Hoya, Hopkins can probably fight and be successful adopting any style he wants. He can swarm De La Hoya, applying intense pressure, because he has a great chin and is the stronger fighter who also hits harder. If he wants to be the counter-puncher, he can try and lure De La Hoya to come to him, although I believe De La Hoya is too smart to fall into that trap. Lastly, if Bernard wants to, he can probably just go right at Oscar and try to make it a street fight, which would also favor him.

It seems the one thing that those who want to find a reason for De La Hoya to win, hang there hat on the age disparity. Granted, at age 39 Hopkins is vulnerable to becoming an old man before our very eyes on any given night at this stage of his career. However, the one thing I haven't heard anyone mention is, when is the last time Hopkins was in a gruelling fight where he absorbed a lot of punishment?

Looking over his title tenure, there really weren't many fights where he has taken many big punches over the course of a long, tough fight. Even in the one title fight he lost to Roy Jones back in May of 1993, he didn't take any punishment. Jones just out-quickened and out boxed him, but never hurt him or shook him, not once. Even in the fights involving Hopkins where they became borderline wrestling matches, he didn't take any real punishment. When is the last time we saw his face lumped up and swollen? If you look over his career, he really hasn't taken much abuse, especially in recent fights.

Another thing to consider is the fact that Hopkins has been in supreme shape since about 1990. He has never fought outside of the Middleweight division other than in his first few pro bouts, and he doesn't blow up in between fights like James Toney. By always staying in shape his body has never been subjected to starvation diets and dehydration. This takes a toll on a fighter's body and in that regard Hopkins' physical being has been well preserved.

On top of that, Hopkins had a somewhat late start in Boxing. He also didn't have hundreds of amateur fights before turning professional. If you really think about it, Hopkins' body doesn't have nearly the wear and tear on it you would expect for a fighter who's made 18 successful title defenses and is 39 years old.

Compare that to De La Hoya, who had numerous amateur fights and started fighting at a very young age. Early in De La Hoya's career, he sucked down in weight just to win titles at 130 and 135. He was clearly taxing his body getting down to those weights while he was still growing

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and filling out. Up through 140 pounds, De La Hoya really wasn't pushed or hit real hard. It's when he started fighting at 147 and above where we started to see him take punches and get hit more solidly.

At Welterweight he was first tested by Ike Quartey. Quartey may not have had any big time finishing punches, but his jab was very hard. Ike had success landing his power-jab during the fight and he dropped De La Hoya with a good clean left-hook in the 6th round. This was a fight where Oscar was pushed and was hit pretty good. Had it not been for a furious rally in the 12th and final round, De La Hoya would've definitely lost to Quartey.

In his next big fight he was forced to go the limit against Felix Trinidad. De La Hoya didn't absorb much punishment versus Tito. Oscar moved and Boxed just about the whole fight, never letting Tito nail him with anything big. Following the Trinidad fight, De La Hoya fought Shane Mosley. In this fight De La Hoya tried to walk through Mosley imposing his will. Oscar thought because Mosley was moving up from Lightweight that he could go through him. This turned out to be the wrong strategy, as Mosley peppered De La Hoya on the way to winning the decision over 12 rounds.

A year and a half after losing to Mosley at 147, De La Hoya fought Fernando Vargas for the WBA/WBC/IBA Junior Middleweight titles. Although De La Hoya stopped Vargas in the 11th round, the fight wasn't one sided. Vargas had his moments in the fight and shook De La Hoya during a few heated exchanges. This was a fight where De La Hoya had to reach back and suck it up en-route to stopping Vargas. It was certainly no cake-walk for Oscar.

One year after defeating Vargas, De La Hoya defended his titles versus rival Shane Mosley again. The Mosley rematch ended in controversy regarding what fighter deserved the decision. The fact is, regardless of who you thought won, Mosley finished the fight strong and gave Oscar's body a pretty good going over down the stretch. In fact, Mosley beat up and punched De La Hoya around in the 9th round more so than any other fighter has throughout his career. Mosley actually had De La Hoya's eyes rolling in his head in that ninth round. Only Oscar's big heart and will kept him upright. Conversely, Hopkins has never been knocked around the ring by any fighter in his career the way De La Hoya was by Mosley in that 9th round of their second fight.

In his last fight, De La Hoya fought WBO 160 pound Champ Felix Sturm. This fight was supposed to be a virtual walkover for De La Hoya. The reality was that Sturm had a shot-gun, hard left jab that snapped De La Hoya's head back frequently during the fight. This turned out to be another tough fight for De La Hoya where he had to fight hard for 12 rounds. At the end of the fight De La Hoya's face was bruised and swollen. Again the decision was controversial, but De La Hoya looked like the loser.

The conventional wisdom regarding the upcoming Hopkins-De La Hoya fight is that the only real chance De La Hoya has to win the fight is if Father Time catches up with Hopkins. And realistically, that would be the best case to make for De La Hoya. As young and spry as Hopkins appears, 39 years old is ancient for a fighter, especially one below Heavyweight. There is a real chance that Hopkins can become a shot fighter in front of our eyes during the fight -- in

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an eerie way, almost like Marvin Hagler did in his last fight versus Sugar Ray Leonard. That happens to be the fight that Hopkins-De La Hoya has been often compared to.

The difference is, Hagler fought better fighters than Hopkins during his seven year reign compared to Hopkins nine year reign. Hagler was in tougher and more grueling fights. On top of that, Sugar Ray Leonard fought once in five years heading into the Hagler fight and had not taken any punishment from 1982-87. Other than his first fights with Duran and Hearn, Leonard wasn't really hit hard or forced to absorb much punishment.

Unlike Leonard, De La Hoya has been pushed in his fights and taxed his body more since moving to 147. Against Sturm at 160, De La Hoya looked slow and lethargic at times. He certainly is no big puncher at that weight either. He will have to really push his body again to be in supreme shape at 160.

The birth certificate may point out that De La Hoya is 8 years younger than Hopkins. However, after looking over their careers, it's clear that De La Hoya has been hit harder on a consistent basis over the last five years compared to Hopkins. On top of that, Hopkins is an exceptional fighter/athlete when it comes to retaining so much of his ability and skills at such an advanced age. Maybe it's me, but De La Hoya's edge on the birth certificate may not be quite as monumental as the date indicates.

When it comes to comparing Hopkins and De La Hoya, it's not out of the question that age could just about be a wash on September 18th 2004.