

Hopkins-De La Hoya: It Might Not Be A Mismatch

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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It will be a better fight than most probably think it will be. The Super-fight looks about set between undisputed Middleweight Champ Bernard Hopkins and WBO Champ Oscar De La Hoya. Both fighters took care of business this past weekend when Hopkins dominated rival Robert Allen over 12 rounds and De La Hoya squeaked by Felix Sturm. I don't know what it is about De La Hoya, but in the Big Spot he sure leaves questions as to whose hand should be raised at the end.

As far as Hopkins-Allen, everything went pretty much as expected. Hopkins methodically broke down Allen while taking away his will en-route to a one sided unanimous decision. Although I think Hopkins has eroded slightly, it's not enough for anyone who weighs 160 pounds or less to make him a former champ. Bernard is just too complete and solid for any fighter his size or smaller.

Regarding De La Hoya, he wasn't impressive in his Middleweight debut. He looked heavy and slow along with not having any real pop in any of his punches. He also seemed to tire quickly and fade as the fight progressed. Oscar is lucky that he had an opponent in front of him who had nothing but a jab to offer in return. Had Sturm had any kind of finishing punch, De La Hoya would've been in real trouble.

That being said, I don't think Hopkins is going to mutilate De La Hoya as I'm sure some feel after his showing versus Sturm. Yes, I am confident that Hopkins will beat Oscar. However, I don't think it will be a kill. I say this for a few reasons. When Hopkins and De La Hoya meet in September, I expect De La Hoya to be in much better shape, at least he better be. I also think he is a smart fighter and knows that he can't fight Hopkins like he did Sturm.

Something else that will help De La Hoya survive is the style match up. I have no doubt that Oscar will move away from Bernard forcing him to use his legs and cut off the ring. I know Hopkins is a very versatile fighter, in fact he's one of the best when it comes to adapting to whatever tactic his opponent adopts. As versatile as Hopkins is, there are things that he does better than others. I happen to think he's at his best when his opponent goes to him, just as Marvin Hagler was. Fighters that try and push the fight the way Trinidad did are just setting themselves up to get hit hard and countered. The best way to fight Hopkins is to make him lead and bring the fight to you.

I'm sure De La Hoya will watch and study Hopkins' fights versus Trinidad, Joppy, and maybe even his last one against Robert Allen. He'll see how Trinidad enabled Hopkins to fight his best by going after him. The problem Tito faced was that he had no choice but to be the aggressor. Unlike De La Hoya, Trinidad is a fish out of water if he doesn't push his opponent back. No way Oscar goes to Bernard and tries to make it a fight. He's not strong enough to be successful using that tactic. On top of that he's way too smart.

I see De La Hoya fighting Hopkins close to the way William Joppy did. Why go to Hopkins and

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make it easy for him to pick you apart? Although Joppy took a beating down the stretch, he managed to go the distance and gave himself the best shot to score the upset.

If De La Hoya can some how manage to make Hopkins use a lot of the round to try and track him down, this is good. It will make Hopkins use his legs and limit the exchanges, all which bode well for De La Hoya. De La Hoya's biggest hope is that maybe Hopkins will underestimate him and think it will be easy, although I wouldn't count on it. Another thing De La Hoya may have on his side is the age factor. As I said, Bernard isn't what he was even when he fought Trinidad, but there isn't that much of a drop off. However, at 39 Hopkins can become old during the fight. I wouldn't bet on it, but it can't be totally ruled out.

I see this upcoming fight between Hopkins and De La Hoya as an almost certain victory for Hopkins. It's just that I don't think De La Hoya will be embarrassed or humiliated. I think his style will help him survive late into the fight. And lastly, it must not be forgotten that De La Hoya has a very good chin and is tough with a big heart. It just won't be enough to win. Survive? Maybe.