

Smart Money On Bernard Hopkins To Execute

Written by Rick Folstad

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The smart money is on the guy with the catchy nickname, the 10-year unbeaten streak, the 19 title defenses and the ability to sell you a used car when you just slipped in to use the phone.

Bernard "The Executioner" Hopkins is physically bigger than Oscar De La Hoya, physically stronger than Oscar De La Hoya, and he's a better pitchman than Oscar De La Hoya.

Hopkins has that rare gift of being able to stretch a 10-second answer into a 10-minute sermon.

So it's only natural that he's a 2-to-1 favorite to beat De La Hoya when the two meet Sept. 18 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas for the undisputed middleweight championship of the world.

Still, if the bookies didn't already favor Hopkins, he'd talk them into changing the odds.

For most guys, Hopkins is an easy choice to win this fight. He's been a middleweight since he arrived at puberty and the only things that have threatened him since Roy Jones Jr., are complacency and busy city traffic.

De La Hoya, meanwhile, is still remembered for his Porky Pig imitation against Felix Sturm in June. In that fight, De La Hoya, moving up to middleweight, looked like a guy who just won a beer-chugging contest.

So who would you rather be putting your mortgage payment on, a fast-talking tough guy known as "The Executioner" or a reflective prima donna known as the "Golden Boy?"

Looking at it from a strictly superficial point of view - their nicknames - it's still an easy choice.

"The Executioner?" Makes you think of bloody chopping blocks and shiny blades and large men with black hoods over their heads. It's farmers and peasants milling around the town square, waiting for the ax to fall and the severed head to drop into the wicker basket, later to be stuck on the end of a spear and paraded around town.

"The Executioner" makes you think there's no way out, no chance for parole or a pardon, nothing to do but settle your poker debts, say good-bye to your sweetheart and donate your body to science.

"Golden Boy," meanwhile, makes you think of Ivy Leaguers named Chip or Reggie who are majoring in business administration and hope to someday become chapter president of their fraternity.

They play tennis three times a week at the country club, drive Beamers or Jaguars, and only date head cheerleaders, former prom queens and Tri-Delts.

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They plan to someday take over dad's lucrative business, and eventually get married and settle down in Palm Springs, though they'll keep the condo in Aspen because skiing the Rockies is a chance to get away from the strains of making seven figures.

"The Executioner" has a cold stare, Hitler's heart and the uncomfortable habit of tying loose rope into nooses.

The "Golden Boy" helps old ladies cross the street, volunteers to work the soup line and hopes to someday enter the political arena. He smiles a lot, likes to shake hands and he's never bought a suit off the rack.

Easy choice, right? So why do I have this tiny voice in the back of my head telling me to take the odds and bet on De La Hoya?