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Saturday on HBO Bernard “The Executioner” Hopkins puts his WBC Middleweight Title on the line against little known, but a lot dangerous, Howard Eastman. “The Battersea Bomber” sports a solid 40-1 record along with 34 knockouts and packs more punch than Hopkins has likely ever faced.

A solid underdog according to the men who make the lines on these events, Eastman mirrors Hopkins in many ways and has been starving for the opportunity to make his mark in the sport on the world stage. Just as Hopkins complained for years about the lack of respect he received as a top fighter, Eastman now finds himself in a similar position. While Hopkins didn’t get his dues until beating a couple of blown-up welterweights - Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad - Eastman will have to become the man by beating the man.

Born in New Amsterdam, which I assume is nothing like old Amsterdam, the native of Guyana has been facing and beating the best European boxers that are up to the task of fighting the balding bearded one. Eastman lost a 2001 majority decision to William Joppy in a fight that was there for the taking, but Eastman let pass him by. A late knockdown by the resident of Battersea, England, supported the belief by many that Eastman could have starched Joppy at any moment and he just left things too late.

This weekend Howard Eastman finds himself again on the doorstep of a major title with Hopkins’ WBC championship belt on the line. (His WBA, WBO and IBF titles are not at stake). While I can’t say that I have ever seen Eastman put everything on the line and fight using all of his tools and giving 110% of his efforts, the possibility that he might put it all together makes him a legitimate threat to Hopkins.

Unlike the fights against De La Hoya (who has made it known that he fancies a trip back down to welterweight) and Felix Trinidad (a natural welterweight who is likely best suited for junior middle at this stage in his career), Hopkins will be facing a true middleweight and one who can pack a wallop. Eastman has always been right around 160 pounds since he began his professional career back in 1994 and at 5’11” he has a solid middleweight build.

The similarities in terms of their struggle for recognition and desire to make a mark in the history books of the sport is not all that makes these two near mirror images. Both are extreme fanatics in terms of physical fitness and many who will be seeing Eastman for the first time will be duly impressed with his conditioning and strength, and the fact that he doesn’t fade late and keeps his power throughout, which makes him more dangerous as his opponent tires.

Like Hopkins, Eastman works behind a solid jab and sets up his right hand behind it. While Hopkins is rightly considered to be more “crafty” than his opponent, Eastman also has a definite edge - this one in power. The difference in height will be just two inches and should be a non-factor in the bout. Both men can take a punch and it is worth noting that Eastman has never been down in his 41-fight career. Hopkins has been knocked down twice, both times occurring

in the same fight facing relative unknown Segundo Mercado in a 1994 middleweight title bout. Hopkins salvaged a draw in that fight despite being down in two rounds and then won by TKO 7 in their rematch a year later.

At 40-years of age Hopkins has continued to look strong and in fine form while fighting younger opponents and on Saturday he faces a man six years younger. One never can tell when age will creep up on a fighter and it has been said that a boxer can go from “gold” to “old” one fight to the next. Hopkins’ time may come before he leaves the ring on his own terms, but recent form and his excellent conditioning suggest we should expect another strong performance from The Executioner.

The wildcard in this bout is clearly Howard Eastman and what he may bring to the fight at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, California. He has knocked out 85 percent of his opponents, has a rock jaw and is a technically sound boxer. Should Eastman decide to put forth the best effort of his career it just may be enough for us to see a balding, goateed, dyed blond champion at the middleweight ranks.

On paper this fight looks to as good or as bad as Eastman wants to make it. Both boxers have shown a habit of starting slowly and methodically. If the Battersea Bomber decides to buck that trend, the early rounds will be available for the taking. One thing that must improve for Eastman, however, is his defense. In the battle with Joppy in 2001 he did more catching than pitching and against Hopkins the same mistake will be devastating. Joppy managed to land an astounding 55% of his power shots - according to CompuBox - something that is at least partially attributable to Eastman’s supreme confidence in his chin.

Saturday night Howard Eastman and Bernard Hopkins will look across the ring and see similar images to themselves in terms of physical composition. Once the bell rings Hopkins will establish himself as the better tactical boxer with Eastman trying to exert his strength and power.

While the oddsmakers suggest we are unlikely to see the first British middleweight champion in over 20 years - roughly the same length of Eastman has lived in England - it is likely that Hopkins will be tested to the point we haven’t seen before. Howard Eastman is supremely confident, packs a punch, takes a licking and keeps on swinging.

Unlike the majority of Hopkins recent fights this one should be very interesting, and the reason for that is Howard Eastman.