Written by Matthew Aguilar
Saturday, 19 February 2005 18:00

Bernard Hopkins continued his historic middleweight reign Saturday, dominating tough Englishman Howard Eastman with his trademark combination of experience and skill in winning a unanimous 12-round decision at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Hopkins improved to 46-2-1 (32 knockouts) and notched his 20th defense of the middleweight title he won 10 years ago with a seventh round knockout of Segundo Mercado. Saturday night's fight wasn't always thrilling - the L.A. crowd often booed the lack of action produced by the two wiry middleweights - but it was typically brilliant Hopkins, who, according to HBO's Larry Merchant, "identifies where his opponent's weaknesses are and continuously exploits it."

"The Executioner" did just that, limiting the exchanges and showing the taller Eastman plenty of movement and catching the tough contender over and over with his deadly-accurate left hook. Eastman, who fell to 40-2 (35 knockouts), failed to utilize his long left jab and seemed to wait on Hopkins – who counterpunched magnificently late in the fight. Hopkins won by scores of 119-110 (Lou Filipo), 117-111 (Daniel Van de Wiele) and 116-112 (Ken Morita).

"I knew he was tough," Hopkins told Merchant after another impressive day at the office. "He takes a hell of a shot. He gives good shots, too. I give him a B-plus. I know you heard some boos, but you heard some cheers, too. I don't fight (toe-to-toe) like that."

Hopkins beat Eastman an eye-opening 43 percent to 13 percent in the connect category.

"I'm honored to make history," said Hopkins, who invited promoter Oscar De La Hoya to stand with him during the interview. "It's a unique accomplishment."

Now the 40-year-old Hopkins hopes to tackle three more high-profile opponents before retiring at the end of the year: young middleweight hotshot Jermain Taylor, light heavyweight champ Glen Johnson and comebacking Puerto Rican great Felix Trinidad.

Taylor was impressive on the undercard, destroying overmatched Daniel Edouard in registering a third round TKO.

Hopkins said Taylor was next on the "death row list."

"If you're asking whether I'm willing, ready and able to take on a young lion," Hopkins told Merchant, "yes I am."

Hopkins seemed to have some problems with the 6'1" Eastman's height and reach early, as the native of Guyana tried to corner Hopkins. But Eastman's lack of a solid plan hurt his chances against one of the great middleweights to ever lace on the gloves.