Written by Frank Lotierzo
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This past weekend Bernard Hopkins won a 12-round unanimous decision over top contender Howard Eastman. Although the fight lacked excitement, Hopkins’ decision was decisive, winning by scores of 119-110, 119-111 and 116-112. In methodically breaking Eastman down, Hopkins became only the fourth fighter in boxing history to make at least 20 consecutive defenses of a world title. With a record of 20-1-1 in middleweight title bouts, Hopkins is five wins ahead of legendary middleweight champ Carlos Monzon. Until the ten year reign of Hopkins, Monzon held the record for the most middleweight title bouts won, going 15-0.

Against Eastman, the 40-year-old Hopkins was only dominant from a ring generalship vantage point. He didn't devastate Eastman or give him a savage physical beating. What Hopkins did was slowly draw Eastman into fighting his fight while taking him to school. It wasn't until the fifth round that Hopkins started dictating the fight, and by the seventh round he was in complete control, with Eastman following him around the ring in a trance looking to land a lottery punch. When fighters are reduced to where their only chance to pull the fight out is by landing one big punch, the fight is over. And this applies tenfold if the fighter dictating the tempo of the bout is Bernard Hopkins, who never beats himself and has not been stopped or cut in his previous 48 fights before Saturday’s bout.

The Hopkins-Eastman middleweight title fight took place in the city of Los Angeles in front of 12,828 fans who at times booed the limited action. Ironically, the last time the City of Angels hosted a middleweight title bout was in 1960. In that bout Sugar Ray Robinson fought to a disputed draw with middleweight champion Gene Fullmer. That night Fullmer took the fight to the 39-year-old Robinson by swarming him and applying constant pressure. Although many of the ringside press had Robinson as the winner, Fullmer's forward momentum forced Ray to fight when he wanted to rest.

By Fullmer forcing Robinson to fight every minute of every round, the 39-year-old Robinson had to take rounds off, which allowed Fullmer to land some big shots while Ray waited for his second and third wind. It looked like Fullmer was having his way in parts of the fight and that may have just swayed the judges just enough to earn him a draw. I thought Robinson won 9-6 in rounds.

Against Hopkins, Howard Eastman would have had a much better chance to deny the champ his 20th title defense if he had a little more Gene Fullmer in him. Why would Eastman try to dethrone Hopkins fighting a style that most fight observers know plays to Hopkins strengths? The worst way to fight Hopkins is by moving towards him at a measured pace. Hopkins has carved out a hall of fame career eating up fighters who fight him like that. Instead of forcing Hopkins to fight, Eastman stayed at just the right distance in front of Hopkins while trying to anticipate and react to what he did, while Hopkins took the lead beating him to the punch. Huge tactical error on behalf of Eastman.

The type of fight Eastman fought against Hopkins guaranteed two things: (1) Hopkins retains

the crown and (2) Eastman's name becomes number twenty on his list of successful title defenses. Maybe Eastman saw Hopkins as still being the physically brilliant fighter who took Felix Trinidad apart back in September 2001. It goes without saying he is not. And that's why it's imperative for any fighter who challenges Hopkins to make the fight a physical one fought at a fast pace. Make him demand things of his 40-year-old body it can no longer do because of age. That's the only way Hopkins will leave the ring as a former undisputed middleweight champion.

Hopkins is also too experienced and smart to attempt fighting stuck in-between gears. Any fighter going in the ring with Hopkins must have a sound attack plan, along with a backup plan, because Hopkins will change his tactic in subtle ways to neutralize his opponent’s advantage. Against Hopkins you must be decisive and jump on him at the opening bell, something that would have been suicide five years ago. Since his fight with Trinidad, Hopkins has needed at least three or four rounds to warm up and get into the rhythm of the fight. This is when he is most vulnerable to the type of attack that Glencoffee Johnson surprised Roy Jones with this past September.

Hopkins has lost speed, something always prevalent in older fighters, but he has so much experience and ring savvy that it's not realistic for a fighter to think that Hopkins can be outthought. Hopkins must be outfought. He is susceptible to what other past greats could not overcome because of their age: speed and being forced to fight at a fast pace. It's paramount for Hopkins' next challenger to make him fight. He must force the champ to fight, to literally be forced to fight his opponent off him. As witnessed by Hopkins last four or five title defenses, this is not the way he wants to fight, which is the objective for any fighter. Make the opponent fight the type/style fight that he doesn't want. That forces him to do what are not considered his strengths.

Although attacking Hopkins provides him a bigger opportunity to knock out his opponent, at least his opponent has a chance to get to Hopkins - something that they have no chance of doing by fighting him in-between styles. Either fight him, or try and get him to come after you. But never fight him by moving towards him at a measured pace, which gives him the perfect amount of time and distance to operate. Make his body determine the outcome, because he's too experienced and smart for any other middleweight in the world to try and beat in a chess match.

In my opinion, Howard Eastman couldn't have fought Hopkins more incorrectly, both fundamentally and strategically. I know Hopkins must be credited for lulling him into the same trance that he's induced most of his opponents into. But Eastman did have a choice to at least make it more difficult for Hopkins, to poison him before taking him out to sea and drowning him. By Eastman jumping on Hopkins he could have either prolonged the inevitable or possibly altered the outcome.

The 40-year-old Hopkins is not capable of overwhelming his opponents physically. He now picks his spots and fights in spurts. However, he has that strategy down to a science and gets the optimum out of the diminished offense he now exhibits over the course of a 12-round fight.

Instead of beating his opponents down, he in essence takes the bullets out of their gun. Once

their offense has been neutralized, he picks it up and hits them with more pinpoint precision and accuracy. This causes them to fight with slight trepidation. Once that happens they’re reduced to landing a lottery punch as their only hope to win the fight. And it goes without saying that Hopkins isn't going to lose his title by virtue of being caught with a lottery punch.