

For Hopkins, Things Just Didn't Add Up

Written by Charles Jay
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On this day, Bernard Hopkins is the former middleweight champion of the world, not because the judges bungled it. Not because the entire world is against him. Not necessarily because he came up against an unbeatable fighting machine.

No, Bernard Hopkins is the former middleweight champion today because he made some serious miscalculations. He miscalculated about where he stood in the fight. He miscalculated about his ability to knock out an opponent. He miscalculated about what he had left, which in the end, just wasn't enough.

And he couldn't bring himself to admit it.

There's probably a good reason for that. Veteran champions with twenty "title defenses" under their belt and all the "experience" and "savvy" that are expected to come with it aren't supposed to be making those kinds of miscalculations.

Unless, of course, the guy with all that experience was experiencing something entirely different.

In this case, it was a real, live legitimate middleweight on his way to the top of the ladder and completely unwilling to be intimidated, before or after the opening bell. That was something Hopkins hadn't seen in over a decade.

Don't kid yourself; in what was not the most eventful fight ever contested, Taylor clearly won, and deserved to win. Or to put it more accurately, Hopkins didn't. Just because you're the world champion, it doesn't mean you're automatically going to win the rounds. Whatever Hopkins' strategy was, throwing a few punches per stanza wasn't going to successfully carry it out. That wasn't any secret; Harold Lederman of the HBO crew made reference to it as the seventh round began.

"I can't see how you can win a fight by standing straight up and making funny faces at your opponent," Lederman said as he had given five of the first six rounds to Taylor.

Undoubtedly that reflected what much of the audience had been thinking.

A matchmaker friend of mine said, "Hopkins has always had a little bit of dog in him. If you notice, he didn't start fighting until Taylor *stopped* fighting."

That might be subject to debate, but from my vantage point, if Hopkins won five rounds, that would be a gift. No, I didn't give him the ninth round, nor did I give him any of the first four. He simply didn't deserve them. And frankly, this guy had a lot of nerve complaining about the scoring after the fight. It kind of reminded me of the way Pernell Whitaker was talking after being beaten by Felix Trinidad. That is to say, it was the sound of someone in complete denial.

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It's been a common misconception that Hopkins is a guy who's always operated with a considerable degree of class outside the ring. He's been seen as someone who fought a quixotic battle against a system that was so grossly unfair to him. I praised him for it, in fact, before the fight with Trinidad. But as far as his problems with promoters are concerned, I've since come to the realization that he's brought a lot of them on himself.

Before the Trinidad fight, I asked Hopkins about his relationship with Lou DiBella during a media teleconference. I remember it so well because I think it's the only time I've ever asked anybody anything during one of those calls. Hopkins told me he was overjoyed with DiBella and wanted to work with DiBella Entertainment after his fighting days were over. Then a couple of months later he made the accusatory statements that led to the defamation lawsuit he eventually lost.

Hopkins hasn't cooled his jets; if anything, he's gotten worse. If the quote, "I'm going to make him (DiBella) commit suicide, just like his brother" actually came out of his mouth, well, that would be a real scumbag thing to say.

As for the rematch, I don't see it bringing a much better result for him. While many insiders figured the time may have been just right for Taylor to unseat this champion, this was also Hopkins' best shot to beat Taylor. It was an opportunity for the man apparently considered by many to be "one of the five best middleweights of all time" to take advantage of an opponent who had never seen action against a world-class middleweight at the top of his form. Of course, upon reflection, one might be tagging Hopkins with that designation as well, at least as far as the last ten years of his career is concerned.

And though one could see the rudiments of someone who is going to ultimately blow a lot of people away, Taylor was far from perfect. He lost some steam in the later rounds, and after being implored to throw the jab by trainer Pat Burns, he stood there all too often, as if waiting for Hopkins to come with the right lead. Now he knows what Hopkins has in his arsenal. He knows he can go twelve rounds with a world champion. He will view the tape and see what benefits came from sticking a jab in Hopkins' face. He probably learned more from this fight than he had from his previous twenty-three.

His mind and body can only get stronger from this point forward, which means Hopkins would be in for some trouble. Next time, Taylor might start throwing punches from the outset, and not let up, and if my friend was right, "one of the five best middleweights of all time" may never get untracked.

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