

## Hopkins-Taylor and the Passage of Time

Written by Bill Knight  
Sunday, 17 July 2005 19:00

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Time slips in quietly, wearing an invisible cloak. The unseen, ever-present visitor comes in stages of a life, comes in moments, sometimes even in just snippets ... just the blink of an eye.

A fight is sometimes won or lost in just snippets of time.

Saturday night in Las Vegas was all about time. Was it time for the heavy burden of age to catch up with the champion, Bernard Hopkins? Was it time yet for youthful Jermain Taylor to step into the champion's belt?

Every fight has a life of its own. The good ones have ebbs and flows, give and take — all leading up to a suspenseful ending. No one knew for sure who was going to take that joyous walk back to the locker room as a winner when the 12th round bell clanged. No one. Everyone had a good guess. But no one really knew.

Hopkins closed the fight with a flurry, putting himself in a position to at least have a prayer of defending the middleweight title for an impressive 21st consecutive time. He had to believe. Athletes, boxers especially, always have to believe. It is dangerous and health-threatening not to believe.

Taylor won so many early rounds, then seemed to find a second wind as elusive as grabbing smoke out of the air. He was winded and he later admitted as much. But he, too, had to believe. A dream was within his grasp.

The final round was one of those that give boxing fans one of their greatest pleasures: a debate.

Two judges had Hopkins winning the final round. One had Taylor.

In the end, it made for drama ... the kind of suspense movies only hope to copy. Michael Buffer read the scores. Split decision: 116-112 Hopkins; 115-113 Taylor; and, finally, veteran judge Duane Ford saw it 115-113 for Taylor.

It was time. It was a time for youth.

It was not time for age to slip in on the 40-year-old Hopkins ... that freak of nature, the 40-year-old with the chiseled 20-year-old body. To say that age determined this duel would be a disservice to Hopkins and it would also be a disservice to Taylor.

Hopkins appeared a step slow in the early rounds. Taylor appeared fast, very fast.

Taylor's jab was busy and so were his fast feet. He easily won the first three rounds. The fourth round was like the 12th, leaving fans wondering just who had won it. But Hopkins came on late

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in the fight, winning rounds nine, 10, 11 and 12 on two judges' cards, winning the ninth, 10th and 11th on Ford's scorecard.

The champion still had fight. And the champion still had hope.

Taylor appeared to be on the way to a shutout in the early going. He fought and fought well. He owned the ring. It is doubtful he ever hurt Hopkins, but it looked as if he would if he continued. But he ran out of juice somewhere along the way. And on came Hopkins.

And, all of a sudden, a boxing clinic turned into a fight ... turned into some high drama on a sizzling Saturday night in the desert.

"I knew he would come out slow starting," the ever-pleasant Taylor told HBO's Larry Merchant. "I came out with a fast pace. I got a little winded."

Hopkins told Merchant, "From the fifth or sixth round on, I think I dominated the fight. I think I won the fight."

Hopkins also said this was not like his last loss, a dozen years ago to Roy Jones Jr., "where I knew I lost the fight."

In the end, though, it matters little who thinks what. Jermain Taylor won this fight. Jermain Taylor is the new undisputed middleweight champion of the world. And Taylor probably did hold on — just long enough — to eke out that decision.

And, in the end, it was all about time.

Was it time for age to smother the talents of Bernard Hopkins? No. Was it time for youth to be served, for a young fighter to have what it takes to reach out and grasp the dream?

Yes.

But time, our invisible friend/enemy/companion, travels in many different forms, wears so many different cloaks.

This was about those moments, those snippets of time. Maybe, in the end, it was even about the time it takes to blink an eye — or to launch a punch.

Everyone gave Taylor those first three rounds. Round four, though, was close. What could Hopkins have done to own that three minutes? A couple more punches? A little more movement? Maybe even a little more effort?

And then there was that ultimate championship round.

Round 12 was the difference in Hopkins getting a draw and losing. Had he convinced Ford he battled best in the last 180 seconds, it would have flipped the final scorecard to 114-114. Two

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judges saw Hopkins, Ford saw Taylor in that final round. Ford is a veteran of these dramas and a highly respected one.

So, give Taylor credit. He reached back, found enough wind and enough time to battle well enough to hold onto his dreams in the 34th, 35th and 36th minutes of this bangfest of a symphony.

“For the rematch, I’m going to train hard,” Taylor promised.

Most likely, they will do it again.

Was this the fight of the year? Hardly. It did not give us any of the savage, courageous moments of Corrales-Castillo. Not even close. But was this a good fight? Yes. Was it fun? Of course. It had action, it had drama and, in the end, it was suspenseful ... and suspense is always fun.

It was high level boxing and time slipped quietly in, almost unnoticed. A fight was decided. A title was lost. And a championship was won.