

Jermain Taylor: Did he Win the Battle, but Lose the War?

Written by Marc Lichtenfeld
Monday, 18 July 2005 19:00

*"You Gotta
Fight from the inside
Attack from the rear
Fight from the inside
You can't win with your hands tied"* – Queen

Jermain Taylor probably doesn't want to take boxing advice from Freddie Mercury. However, the last line of the chorus to "Fight From the Inside" is apropos. Taylor fought the last six rounds of his title-winning bout with Bernard Hopkins as if his hands were tied. His trainer Pat Burns begged him in between rounds to let his hands go. Taylor's reluctance is the reason his stock has fallen, despite winning a world championship.

Many experts, myself included, predicted a Hopkins win. The fight went pretty much according to how I thought it would go, except that the ex-champion decided to get busy around the sixth round instead of the third like I assumed he would. However, I wouldn't have been shocked if Taylor came away with the victory. What surprised me was how he won. I figured that if Taylor beat Bernard Hopkins, he would really beat him – make Hopkins age right in front of us. Beat him up with a blazing combination of speed, power, and ability. And end the night with his million-dollar smile.

That wasn't how things went Saturday night. Taylor looked fairly sharp (although still cautious) in rounds one through six. But once B-Hop took charge, Taylor appeared lost. He refused to throw combinations and abandoned the jab that set up his first 23 wins. I'll give the kid credit for keeping his poise when Hopkins tried to bully him, or even when he got rocked and had the presence of mind to hang on until his head cleared. But in the end, this performance was not the one that his fans wanted to see.

Granted, the expectations were high. But Taylor proved his critics right who said he wasn't ready to face someone like Bernard Hopkins. Despite my forecast of a Hopkins win, I disagreed. Taylor pitched a shutout against William Joppy, who was not that far removed from being the second best middleweight in the world. He destroyed top ten contender Daniel Edouard. And while Taylor sometimes beat up on blown up junior middles, they weren't creampuffs. By and large, they were guys who knew how to fight and had far more experience than Taylor. Jermain Taylor's professional debut came against 17-4-1 Chris Walsh. In his 24 fights, his opponents have a record of 450-97-24 for an average of 19-4-1. Only once did the man across the ring have a losing record.

Jermain Taylor did the one thing that could cause his critics to say, "I told you so." He froze. I realize that's a harsh criticism. After all the kid did dominate the first half and showed plenty of heart. But he allowed Hopkins to completely take him out of his game. Had he fired his jabs and power rights all night and then simply gotten caught with a counter and knocked out, I'm not sure if the naysayers would be saying nay. I think people like myself would declare, "there's no

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shame in losing to Bernard Hopkins.” To win ugly the way he did, disappointed a lot of people and planted the seeds of doubt in the minds of the media, fans and a long line of middleweights eager to get a crack at him.

Jabs

- What happened to Kassim Ouma Thursday night? While I didn't think Karmazin was going to be a joke, I certainly didn't expect him to walk away with Ouma's belt. The Dream's trainer, former world champ Johnny "Bump City" Bumphus, told me Kassim "just had a bad night." Bump City insists Ouma was in shape and that they had gone ten and twelve hard rounds in the gym several times. I don't think a focused Kassim Ouma will be beltless for long.
- Great to see Vernon Forrest back. The Viper is one of the classiest guys in the sport and a good interview as well. His presence in the welterweight or junior middleweight division might really mix things up.
- I really enjoyed the Montiel – Berceno bout on the Hopkins – Taylor undercard. Nice job by Berceno for making a fight out of it. The same kudos to Montiel for making the adjustments and fighting like a champion.

Until next time, obey my commands and protect yourself at all times.