

Undisputed middleweight champ Jermain Taylor is like the guy who starts late, gets lost, takes out a stop sign and still ends up with the best parking space on the block.

Taylor claims he did everything wrong that first time, but somehow, he still got it right.

“In that first fight, everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong,” Taylor said about his first fight with Bernard Hopkins this past July. “I chased him, I wasted punches and I did a lot of things wrong.”

The only thing Taylor did right was win, which counts for everything. It makes it easy to forgive all the bad.

“He brought the best Bernard Hopkins he could bring,” Taylor said about that wild night in July when he won a split decision. “And I learned a lot in that first fight.”

He learned that Hopkins (46-3-1, 32 KOs), like a smart champion, will do whatever he can to get an edge. He learned that the referee isn't always going to see it his way. He learned that it's 12-rounds of serious business and not six. And he learned that an old man like Hopkins knows the tricks and will still be there late in the fight.

But maybe even more important, Taylor (24-0, 17 KOs) learned a little bit about himself.

“I learned I could overcome anything,” he said. “It took all I had, but I'm not a quitter. I'm even more hungry now.”

He better be close to starving by fight night.

As for the learning, Taylor says that should make all the difference in their second fight set for Dec. 3 at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas.

“I feel like I need to fight Bernard Hopkins (right away), while everything is still fresh in my mind,” Taylor said. “He has no power, no speed and he's a dirty fighter. I'm ready for him.”

Dirty fighter? Hopkins?

What Taylor sees as dirty tactics, Hopkins sees as art.

“He head butts, hits behind the head and takes cheap shots,” Taylor said. “The referee warned him, but never took points. Now I know that. I learned it firsthand. But I'm going to beat him fair. I'm a boxer. I'm not going to try to butt someone. If I cut you purposely with a head butt, that's not boxing.”

Lord & Taylor

Written by Rick Folstad

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All this emotion seemed a little out of character for the normally quiet Taylor, who usually comes across as more Opie Taylor than Lawrence Taylor.

“I’m thrilled,” said Taylor’s promoter, Lou DiBella. “I’ve got a fighter who is pissed off. Jermain won a close fight (that first time), but he’s going to put an exclamation point and period on it this fight.”

Taylor again reminds everyone he made a lot of mistakes that first fight, but it won’t happen again.

“I should have stayed on my jab,” he said. “I was not Jermain that night, but I still won the fight. I’m going to be relaxed this time. Everything is going to be totally different.”