

## Hopkins Wins Psy-Ops Skirmish at ESPN Zone

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 06 June 2006 19:00

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Buddy McGirt swears that Bernard Hopkins did him a favor when he got under Antonio Tarver's skin at the tail end of their Tuesday press conference at the ESPN Zone in Times Square.

Because when Hopkins brayed, "Be a man, don't apologize," and "You got to be out of your mind, that's nerves, I know the psychology of nerves," it definitely got to Tarver.

His eyes bulged a bit. And Hopkins, unequivocally comfortable in his element, bore in.

"He can't walk the yard," Hopkins stated. "He'd never leave his cell."

Tarver's eyes bulged more and his tongue got a bit tied.

The two men then came together for a photo op, and it looked a bit precarious that this completely professional promotion, which has been almost too business-y, and lacking a needed charge of emotion and passion, would quickly deteriorate into a typical scrum that has become almost the norm in the last 10 years.

"Be Hollywood, that's you," said Hopkins.

"I ain't going to hit him unless I get paid," Graterford Penitentiary's most notable alumnus promised.

Hopkins smiled, his eyes beaming a gleam that burns bright when he's winning a psy-op showdown. Tarver looked unnerved. His ever-present grin vanished in a blink.

But Buddy's his trainer, and of course has to know him better. So when Buddy says that Hopkins' Oz-talkin' rant helped his man's cause, I'll strongly consider the trainer's stance. But Tarver looked frustrated, like he was slightly out of his league as he went to toe-to-toe in debate with Bernard, who gets off on the verbal pugilism as much (or more than?) the fistic variety.

"Bernard's plan is going to backfire," McGirt said as Tarver processed the beef for the assembled media for another 25 minutes, long after Hopkins had left the room, and departed to do his own thing.

McGirt provided a historical parallel that girded his wisdom. "I knew Hopkins was going to win against Trinidad," he said, "when they stood face-to-face at the weigh in and Trinidad took a step back. Antonio didn't budge."

True enough. He didn't budge.

But Hopkins got under his skin.

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Like cayenne pepper sauce, his words seeped into Tarver's head, got him sweating a bit. It got him pissed off. It got him thinking, not about his gameplan and conserving needed energy for the Saturday beef, but about Hopkins' punkass tendencies, which have been mothballed for half a year.

Tarver dismissed the prison references, but there's a proven method to Hopkins' smack talk. He earns cred points with his pen stint and the broadside at Tarver, saying he'd be a wallflower in the joint, someone who'd be too timid to leave his cell, earned him the win at the press conference.

McGirt whispered in Tarver's ear. Don't let him get under your skin, the handler counseled.

F-that, Tarver told the trainer.

When Tarver unleashed the eff bomb, McGirt said, he further knew that his fighter wasn't going to be undermined by Oz talk.

"Antonio doesn't cuss," McGirt said. "When he starts cussing, it's smoke in the city."

The rest of the yapfest was relatively uneventful. Tarver's \$250,000 wager that he wouldn't let Hopkins get out of the fifth round was referenced. "I hope I don't send him to bankruptcy," Hopkins cracked.

Hopkins made it clear that if we were to put his resume and Tarver's together, and compare and contrast, it would be no contest. "You're judged by that," he said. "Anybody can talk a good game. Your record reflects your credibility."

Hopkins closed his set with a zinger that drew the biggest laugh of the show. "Before you spend your mortgage money you better look at the resumes, then place your bets...only at the Borgata," he said.

Promoter Joe DeGuardia feels strongly that the two graybeard pros are going to get into rock 'em sock 'em robots mode early on, and it will bring back memories of Hagler/Hearns. Tarver echoed that sentiment when he got to the dais. "Bernard Hopkins won't see the sixth round," he promised. "He will be history, it won't be history. It's my legacy. You ain't in my league."

And that's when Hopkins started the cayenne chatter that made Tarver hot.

But if Tarver has more mileage on his motor Saturday, if his comfort level at 175 is a difference maker, then this press conference and Hopkins' masterful verbal pugilism won't even be a footnote...

SPEEDBAG

This cracks me up. Boxers with bodyguards. What's up with that?

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So after Hopkins and Tarver finished their pose-off, and Hopkins jetted, I looked for other newsmakers to interrogate. Oscar was quickly surrounded by the hordes, and there wasn't an inch of free space around him, as he softly spoke to inquiries about his future.

So I stood behind him and craned my neck to make out his sharing. A bulky fellow, late 40s, with Village People mustache, went into protection mode, put out his right arm and redirected me away from the Golden Boy. "Don't stand behind him," the hired muscle said, menace fairly dripping off his mustache.

Now, apart from my wife, I'm not a big fan of being touched. If you are going to touch me, please be PC, and ask me first. The bulky goon didn't ask...

I flared up, internally, but since the terms of my probation prohibit me from engaging in any altercation not sanctioned by a state athletic commission, I said nothing, and moved to another vantage point away from the goon. But it got me thinking.

First, why does a man with lethal hands need a bodyguard? Maybe there's been a stalking threat that I'm not aware of. Then there's a valid reasoning for hiring a goon...

But since it was clear that I was working press, and have no interest in hooking up with ODLH, I am at a loss to explain Stache's action. Was he thinking I was a disgruntled PPV patron who thought Oscar quit against Bernard, and I was going to register my dismay by gutting ODLH with my ballpoint pen?

So word to Stachey – my wife can touch without an invite, everyone else asks...Earn your keep putting your hand on some overeager autograph hound or something, not a pressman trying to do his job, OK?

---Arum ranted during a recent conference call about HBO stepping into his turf, and rudely booking a promotion on a day he said he had dibs on, June 10. A reporter asked Bob what HBO's motivation was? Ask them, Arum said. So I asked one HBO exec about the dueling date... The suit explained that from HBO's perspective, Arum most certainly did not have ownership of the June 10 date.

Miguel Cotto was set to fight Gianluca Branco on March 4, and to HBO's understanding, Arum was going to match Cotto with Jose Luis Castillo, if Castillo were to defeat Diego Corrales in February.

But then word came on Jan. 13 that Corrales/Castillo III was postponed, because Corrales suffered a rib injury.

So, the HBO exec said, Arum didn't know what he would do with Cotto regarding a viable opponent. Arum, meanwhile, thought the June 10 date at MSG would be held for him, and whatever match he could make. But, the HBO man said, the network was holding June 10 for themselves, not for Arum.

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So HBO went ahead and hashed out the Tarver/Hopkins promotion. Richard Schaefer was in NY in or around Feb. 1 trying to get everyone on the same page for that bout. Word that bout was a go leaked out on or around Feb. 9.

On March 2nd, Arum released word that he had finalized a deal for a June 10 for Cotto, against Paulie Malignaggi. The promoter, however, stubbornly clung to the June 10 date and rather than taking the largest licensing fee HBO had ever handed him, and putting on an HBO show on Friday, June 9, he dug in his heels, and wouldn't budge.

Bottom line, there was a classic failure to communicate. Hey, like Tony told Phil "The Shah of Iran" Leotardo on Sunday, there's more than enough to go around. I think both promotions will do well, and though there will be some cannibalizing, everyone will make some dough. And of course, if it makes sense down the road, Arum and HBO will focus on business, and the scars from this episode will fade.

Hey, second thought, I think I have hit on a true heel in this scenario. Let's blame it on Castillo!

(To see [photos of the final pre-fight skirmish between Tarver and Hopkins](#) )