

Hopkins/Wright: Are The Styles Too Similar?

Written by Michael Woods
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It could be a stinker, an cautious dance-off between two immensely talented, but frequently contemplative boxers whose abilities make them full fledged sweet scientists.

Bernard Hopkins versus Winky Wright, which takes place on July 21st at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas isn't a tasty match that lies atop most hardcore fans' wish list.

Half a year ago, Hopkins (47-4-1, 32 KOs) figured he might try his luck forty pounds north of the stomping grounds he ruled for 13 years, get a crack at Maskaev maybe, but that grand vision went the way of federal aid for the Katrina zone.

And Wright, well, who wants to sign on the dotted line to try and crack that turtle defensive shell, and risk looking foolish against the fighter who should be sponsored by Trojan, he's so impregnable? Mostly, boxers who have exhausted Plan A; if the middleweight division were littered with marketable names, think Taylor would have gloved up against the 35-year-old Winky (51-3-1, 25 KOs)? And Ike Quartey, at 37, back from a long layoff, didn't have the luxury of calling his shots...

So Bernard couldn't figure out how to make the leap to the plus-sized division, and Winky didn't have suitors knocking down his door--thus, we have the July 21 scrap pitting two of boxing's most skilled and savvy practitioners. That's all well and good for them, they'll make some solid dough, but what about us? Will their styles make for a pleasing clash, or will this be boxing's version of Kasparov versus Karpov, two oldish guys in a chess match?

To the credit of those putting forth the promotion, the prospect that this fight is more a marketer's dream than a fight fan's, was put on the table at the press conference at ESPN Zone in New York's Times Square on Tuesday afternoon.

Chris Lighty, who runs Winky's promotional outfit, "went there" when he hit the mike after Richard Schaefer, the Golden Boy honcho, and Mark Taffett, HBO's PPV genius.

"We won't see a boring fight. I'll embrace the horror and say it," Lighty said. "Everyone was afraid to say it. We'll see a brutal beating in July."

Another Wright associate, Damian Ramirez, continued the theme.

"They say Winky's a defensive fighter," he said. "That he's not exciting. They say Bernard's a boring fighter. On May 5 we had a good fight. July, we'll have a great fight."

Wright, too, promised bountiful action, not contemplation and prophylactic-type defense. He also admitted that this match came about because there was a dearth of other logical names out there.

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"Junior middleweights ran from me, I beat the middleweights, the only thing left was Bernard," Winky said. "July 21 is going to be a fight. I come to win...I'll be in his ass from round one." Um, OK, but that's not a PPV I'm going to be paying for....

Then, the main event of mouthiness, Hopkins, took to the podium. He, too, earned points for addressing the obvious concern, that he and Winky might be too similarly styled to make a dynamic clash.

"It's going to be a fight," Hopkins, age 42, promised. "I'm a late bloomer."

The Ring Magazine belt is at stake, which I'm curious about, because the contracted weight is 170 pounds. Did Nigel and Company invent a new weight class?

Hopkins said that Wright isn't as prone to go into turtle mode as in his "last three or four fights, he's come out of his shell." And, he reminded the assembled media, "they said Tarver/Hopkins would be boring. I'm entertaining, I come forward, I'm not scared to get dirty, in the mud. Styles make fights, but in this fight, I'm in his face. I'm there but I'm not. It will be an illusion that I'm there."

Hopkins (whose losses came to Clint Mitchell, Roy Jones and Jermain Taylor x 2) also noted that he's 10-0 against lefties, with nine KOs.

"I love to beat on Florida boys," he said, "because they're spoiled with the son."

He also promised that he will defeat Wright, who's lost to JC Vasquez, Harry Simon and Vargas, in conclusive fashion.

"I guarantee you this," he said. "You didn't hear from Tarver since Rocky. You won't see Winky after July. I talk it and walk it and I ain't a politician.

"It's a big deal in 2007, a man 42-years old. You're going to see a 42 year old man whip his ass," Hopkins continued. "I want you to keep that in your mind."

Hopkins punctuated his remarks by popping a package of Twinkies, the creme-filled sponge cake made by Hostess, saying, "Winky Twinkie, popped Twinkie. There's cream coming out. This is what's going to happen to him. Breaking through the turtle shell."

Hopkins said he would be the first man to knock out Wright. Let us all hope, after we heard PBF say he'd go toe to toe and then be the same old Floyd, that Hopkins looks to make good on this prediction on July 21. It will be hard, as he has been fighting since he was 22, and his style is deeply ingrained. And why shouldn't it be, it has worked well enough to make him a Hall of Fame shoo-in? But as always, I'm thinking about the fans, the paying public. They, we, deserve Bernard and Winky at their least cautious on July 21.

SPEEDBAG Hopkins' trainer, Nazim Richardson, had a stroke three weeks ago, but the fighter, who will have John David Jackson overseeing him, said Richardson is on the mend, and will

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help in strategic prep.

---Hopkins is pumped up that because the Ring belt is on the line, he'll save on sanctioning fees.

---Wright is listed at 5-10 1/2, Hopkins at 6-1. Standing face to face, jawing quietly for the photogs, that looked to be about right.

--Hopkins offered a \$250,000 side bet to Winky but Wright said he's quite gambling. Hopkins took credit for Winky's seeing the light.