There were plenty of posturing pronouncements about probable pounding, on all sides of the Mississippi mud, prior to Jermain Taylor's disappointing HBO televised defense of his middleweight laurels against Cory Spinks.

When all the boxing business was said and done at the Fed Ex Forum on Saturday night, it was undercard hero Kelly Pavlik who thumped his way to the final word, with a dramatic blastout of Taylor's latest proposed nemesis, Edison Miranda.

Taylor tried to make his own statement, but the slippery Spinks managed to stay out of any trouble or sustained action as Taylor earned a sloppy split decision.

"He ran the whole time," said Taylor, "I couldn't get my punches right. You want to be the champ, fight the champ. You can't take a title fighting like that."

Memphis, the grassroots US town named after an Egyptian site, already has a Pyramid. Tonight the town got it's own version of the Spinx, but when it came down to trading main event leather, fistic fury was a matter of mummification.

One could assume Taylor was well prepared for Spinks's left handed style, since Taylor was coming off successful, successive southpaw bouts against rare talents like Winky Wright and Kassim Ouma.

Taylor heard catcalls for continually facing formerly smaller opponents coming up in weight, so there was pressure to make a show of strength against the big underdog Spinks.

Stylewise, an action filled contest was simply not to be.

Team Spinks, which included Papa Leon, wore hometown St. Louis Cardinals ball caps. There would be no Pujols style lumber slamming tonight. This one was almost a no-hitter.

Spinks kept a smart and safe working distance and looked like he had come to win, but never opened up on offense. Taylor kept up a generally dull pursuit, round after round.

The fighters waltzed in herky-jerky feints during a first half that was up for grabs. Taylor tried to get more assertive but Spinks stared into the eye of the storm and fired multiple counters. The challenger was much busier, but landed little of consequence.

Not much happened in the second half either, as Taylor appeared to pick up points with only limited effective aggressiveness.

Spinks absorbed a few solid right hands along the way and landed a handful of counters. That's about it.

Taylor looked more intense as the fight slowly wound down but it was an exercise in frustration. Spinks never let him look like a primo, undisputed champion.

Announced scoring : Dick Flaherty 117-111 Spinks, Michael Pesnick 115-113 and Gale Van Hoy 117-111 for Taylor.

While some observers justifiably questioned the validity of Taylor – Spinks as a truly legitimate title match, nobody with real ringside rationale could deny that Kelly Pavlik versus Edison Miranda was a worthy pairing of contenders to determine the division's next top model.

The fight itself lived up to sky high expectations as Pavlik won a brutal give and take battle, eventually wearing Miranda down for an impressive stoppage. The colorful Miranda made a lot of noise about facing Taylor next and had Taylor visibly upset by fight night.

Pavlik said he'd let his hands do the proverbial talking. They did, in a series of right hand mortars that dropped Miranda twice in the sixth session before finishing him off at 1:54 of round seven.

"I stuck to the game plan and kept him going backward," said Pavlik, who took a big step up in marketability. "It really surprised Miranda when I took his shots, and when he felt my power he was shocked. I'd love to fight Jermain Taylor, but if not I'm ready for the next guy in line."

"Kelly Pavlik did a great job, I give him mad respect," said Taylor the businessman. "If he's the best fighter out there for the most money, that's the fight I'll take."

Taylor showed more emotion responding to Miranda before his fight with Spinks than after the bell rang. Still, for most fans it was a passionate evening at the dukes.

It wasn't really close talent wise, but Saturday night's bruising bar-b-que land 160 pound quartet brought back memories of the wonderful '80s era where names like Leonard, Hagler, Hearns and Duran appeared on the same marquee.

You can bet that even after the frustrating finale, there was a tantalizingly grilled aroma in the air over Beale Street, and a sweet boxing buzz in the Tennessee sky.

POSTSCRIPT

In 1998 The Rolling Stones performed their "No Security" tour with Jonny Lang the opening act for the show I saw. This being my first time to see the world's greatest ever rock & roll band, their "undercard" featuring the young, barefooted blues man was the perfect time to go for a beer or stand in line for the ladies room. The same was true except in reverse Saturday night in Memphis, as Jermain Taylor and Corey Spinks performed a very undercard type bout and Kelly Pavlik and Edison Miranda were the showstoppers.

Twelve rounds of Taylor/Spinks was the time to discuss past Taylor victories, near victories (Hopkins 1), and recall how Emanuel Steward employed the same foul mouthed tactics with

Lennox Lewis five years ago in Memphis against Mike Tyson to spur his fighter on, but with much more dramatic and crowd pleasing results.

Kelly Pavlik defeated Edison Miranda in spectacular fashion, scoring a seventh round KO. Miranda rose to the occasion every time Pavlik threw a punch and the two fighters traded bombs the entire bout. No boos here- this bout had fight fans cheering and on their feet until referee Steve Smoger finally and mercifully rescued Miranda, and stopped the fight.

My attention never wavered during the seven rounds Kelly Pavlik fought his way to the top of the WBC middleweight division. This was a fight fans enjoyed seeing, with non-stop action, and a knock out ending. Afterwards, a calm and collected Pavlik acknowledged to Larry Merchant yes, he'd like to fight Jermain Taylor. Jermain Taylor in his post fight remarks, claimed to have "mad respect" for Pavlik, but also stated "if he's the best fighter out there for the most money, that's the fight I'll take."

Big money is great, but on the heels of four less than exciting victories, (Bernard Hopkins twice, Winky Wright and Kassim Ouma) can Jermain Taylor afford to ignore Kelly Pavlik? I can hear the boos from the ladies room now if his next opponent is anybody less. ------AMY GREEN

TUESDAY UPDATE The Miranda camp sent out a release to Miranda fans.

"I'm sorry to all my fans for my performance on Saturday night," Miranda said. "I let you down, but know that I tried my best with what I had to win the fight. I thank you for all the support you have given me and I promise that I will return to the top and win a world championship for you."

"I realized the importance of this fight for my career, my fans and most of all, I did not want to disappoint HBO who has been my supporter after the events in Germany. I was faced with adversities that I have never had to deal with in this fight, with my weight," said Miranda. "All during training camp, no matter how hard I worked the weight did not come off like it had before. I did not eat or drink anything Thursday or Friday and still I had trouble making weight but I did not want to let the network down and my fans around the world. I went into the ring weak and ill, but I gave it my best effort!"

"To Kelly Pavlik, congratulations on your win; it was an honor to be in the ring with a warrior who thinks and fights like you do, and I hope we can fight again in the future. As for my immediate future, I'm going to take a little time off from the gym to relax, and after talking with my team, I'll decide what the next step will be. Who knows, the next time you see me I may be chasing after a world super middleweight title.

"Know this though, I will be back and better than ever!"