

Does Winky Think He Can Beat Bernard?

Written by Michael Woods
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So, Winky Wright's the favorite coming in to the Saturday showdown with Bernard Hopkins.

I'm wondering if Winky himself is feeling that way.

Judging by some of his recent comments to the fightwrite media, I do not believe that Wright himself thinks he will beat Hopkins.

Now, Wright has the edge in age, he's practically the puppy in this promotion at 35, to Hopkins' 42 1/2.

And Winky has the edge in the winning department--he hasn't lost since 1999, while Hopkins lost two to Jermain Taylor before his shocking win over Antonio Tarver last June.

Despite that, if you dissect Wright's words to the fightwrite media as we come down the wire, I think he's setting the table to excuse his failure when he gets outworked by the older, but larger, man at Mandalay Bay on Saturday evening.

In the first place, Wright has been perseverating on Hopkins' supposedly dirty tactics. Perhaps he's trying to influence the officials prior to the first bell, and if that is so, it's a wise veteran move. But could it be that Bernard's sneaky Philly tricks and traits have already started paying dividends, before the first bell has rung?

"He's always going to be a dirty fighter, period," Winky said.

He then offered that he feels he's the more skilled fighter, but I'd offer that perhaps playing the "dirty" card here is offering an explanation for a loss in advance. He's explaining to the fans and critics why, if things don't go his way on Saturday, things went awry. Not because Hopkins is better, but because he cheats, basically.

Wright continued to ponder the supposed Hopkins trove of treachery, stating, "I'm going to be prepared for all of that."

All in all, I do believe Mr. Hopkins has taken up residence in Winky's head, and that doesn't bode well for the Floridian, as you know Hopkins ain't paying any rent.

More evidence that Wright is laying the groundwork to explain why Hopkins, who he suggested should go back to the "retirement home," may well get the better of him in Las Vegas on Saturday evening...

Wright seems to be fixated on the weight issue too much. The fight, for Hopkins' light heavyweight Ring belt, will be contested at a contracted maximum of 170 pounds. Probably Ring should be calling their pants-holder-upper the super duper middleweight title, but I

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digress...

Boxrec shows that Wright has never weighed in for a fight weighing over 160 pounds, while Hopkins has never weighed less at scale time than 156 pounds, but has fought the bulk of his fights at 160 pounds. Hey, that four pound spread is one weekend worth of fridge-raiding for me, but for these guys, every pound is meaningful.

"One seventy five, man, way too much weight," Wright said when asked about the contracted max for Saturday's scrap. "I'm not a light heavyweight, I'm not a super middleweight, I'm a middleweight," he stated.

Them's not fightin' words, people.

"I'm a middleweight!!???"

Son, you're a light heavyweight, for this night anyway, so get your brain wrapped around that concept.

Wright doesn't seem overly enthused about doing this Hopkins thing, truth be told.

"Let's do it and put it behind me and move on," he said.

Again, not the words of someone in a proper mindset to foster a winning attitude. That's what the man who's going to the doctor to get a prostate exam says. That's not the optimum phrasing half a week away from what may well be the toughest fight of your career.

Finally, Wright summed it all up, and put in to perspective his view of the importance of the match in the grand scheme of things, vis a vis his legacy.

"This fight don't define my career," he said.

I beg to differ.

You are only as good as your last fight, and every fight for a boxer could be his or her last fight. Critics tend to have short memories and often are unduly influenced by what a boxer does late in his career when summing up a man's total professional worth. This fight will most certainly be one of the most definitively defining bouts of Wright's career.

I've heard boxing described as being anywhere from 50-90% mental. Admittedly, this column's exercise in word parsing is hugely theoretical, and Wright's wording may not be truly indicative of where his head is a day before his fight with Bernard Hopkins. But my gut is telling me that Winky isn't feeling his typical level of confidence before a bout, and if I were a betting man, I'd factor that in when it came to picking a winner.