

Hopkins And Wright: Hitting You With Science

Written by David A. Avila
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Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright could easily be professors of physics instead of two of the most scientific boxers in the last 15 years.

But geography plays a big part in a man's future whether it's the cushy well-manicured lawns of Bel Air or the steamy sewers of Washington D.C. Where a person grows up can have a big impact.

Hopkins barely escaped the hard streets of Philadelphia including stints in juvenile detention centers and ultimately state prison.

Wright found himself in St. Petersburg, Florida where the only recreational outlet was a local boxing gym around the corner.

Now after years of exhibiting technical fighting skills with few peers, Wright (51-3-1, 25 KOs) and Hopkins meet for the Ring Magazine light heavyweight title at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino on Saturday July 21. The contest will be shown on HBO pay-per-view.

Hopkins doesn't feel Wright is on equal footing with himself.

"Winky Wright used to be a boxer. Winky Wright used to move from side to side, box you, box you, box you," said Hopkins (47-4-1, 32 KOs) during a telephone press conference. "In the last say, five plus years or whatever, Winky Wright has adopted a (standup) style because of his balance, which is terrible."

On two occasions Hopkins, 42, almost retired, but after dismantling former light heavyweight titleholder Antonio Tarver a year ago he decided he had too much left physically to simply stop boxing.

A fastidious athlete who does not eat junk food, party or let his weight fluctuate, Hopkins looked around for challenges and found Wright who many boxing fans feel is the most scientifically accomplished in the sport.

Hopkins scoffs at those assessments.

"Two people in boxing have the worse balance and the worse stance in boxing where they want to just hit you but not hurt you, and that's why their knockout rates are so low, that is Jermain Taylor and Winky Wright," professes Hopkins. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to look at Winky and see what he does."

For the last month Hopkins has been training at the Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood under the tutelage of Freddie Roach. One other trainer is also helping and that's former foe John David Jackson who fought from a southpaw stance like Wright.

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A slew of southpaw sparring partners have been giving Hopkins round after round of punches coming from a left-hander. The Philadelphia fighter is quite confident that he'll be able to figure out Wright's left-handed style that twice confused Shane Mosley, befuddled Felix Trinidad and dominated Ike Quarthey.

"He's not the slickest southpaw that I've fought, I fought many of them. I think I got nine knockouts out of 10," says Hopkins of his next opponent Wright. "I've got one of the slickest southpaws ever in my camp. He's (Jackson) my second trainer."

Hopkins beat his trainer Jackson 10 years ago winning by TKO in the seventh round.

Wright's right

Florida's Wright has emerged from the dog pile of talented but obscured fighters whose style proves too puzzling for elite fighters to untangle. Now the former junior middleweight champion wants to prove his mettle against another defensive specialist much like himself.

"If I beat all the best fighters around my weight class then you can't say nothing but I'm the best fighter of my own era," says Wright, 35, who claims his true fighting weight remains 154 pounds and he is jumping up to the 175-pound limit for this fight only. "I feel I earned my place in boxing history."

Fighting as a southpaw, Wright's right hand is his true power hand, not his left, and he uses it to ram his jab to the face of his opponents and rattle their thinking processes. Mosley faced that jab two times and made a big adjustment in the second fight but came out a little behind.

"His jab hits you high on the forehead," said Mosley.

The last four opponents have found Wright more stationary than usual including middleweight champion Jermain Taylor who barely kept his title when they fought last year. Instead of boxing and moving Wright simply bored into his opponents behind that stiff pumping jab.

"I just want to change it up and be more forward and an inside fighter so fans can be more excited," said Wright adding that the television networks told him his former style was unexciting. "It (his new style) has enabled me to get closer and hit them to the body."

A battle between two pure scientific fighters is expected. Something akin to Albert Einstein pitting his brain against Enrico Fermi in a battle of big brains.

Hopkins scoffs at any comparison with Wright.

"Winky Wright has the ability to absorb a lot of punishment," Hopkins insists. "I will never stop punching. His face will change from round one, to round two, to round three, to whenever his corner and the referee feels he's had enough."

Wright claims he's heard it all before but one thing keeps him motivated for this and every

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subsequent fight in the future: "It's definitely important for me to be in the Hall of Fame."

The winner of this fight can definitely claim a spot on that geographic location.

Semi-main events

Two other interesting fight cards will also be on display on the July 21st fight card including Australia's hard-hitting Michael Katsidis facing Filipino Czar Amonsot in a lightweight bout for the WBO interim title.

Another feature bout showcases former world champion Oscar Larios meeting Venezuela's young bomber Jorge Linares in a featherweight contest for the interim WBC title.

Also on the fight card will be Demetrius Hopkins, Librado Andrade and Rock Allen. It's a pretty talented bunch of fighters on display.

Andrade meets New York veteran Ross Thompson in a super middleweight bout scheduled for 10 rounds.

"I know he's experienced and a good fighter," said Andrade moments before leaving the La Habra Boxing Club for Las Vegas on Wednesday. "It's a good fight for me and it's on television."