

Manny Promises Jermain KO of Kelly

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 26 September 2007 19:00

Let's get the kind words out of the way up front, featured prominently, because we admit sometimes we don't do that.

Bravo to Lou Dibella, and Bob Arum, and Ross Greenburg and Kery Davis from HBO, for putting this Saturday's middleweight title showdown, pitting champion Jermain Taylor against Kelly Pavlik, on "free" TV. 'Course, you could argue that Pavlik has never carried a PPV and JT has looked so underwhelming of late that this fight couldn't have landed on pay per view anyway. But, I prefer to accentuate the positive in this instance, and encourage the practice of placing compelling matchups where most fans can see them.

We're wiping little dribblets of drool off our chins as we await this tasty matchup. The beef offers Taylor (27-0-1, 17 KOs), in dire need of a strong showing to stamp out Irish whispers that he's regressed, against Pavlik (31-0, 28 KOs), the pale power-puncher from a Midwest boxing breeding ground (Youngstown, Ohio) who's taken the slow road to this destination, and appears to be confident that he's ready to make the leap from contender to defender of that title belt he aims to commandeer on Saturday in Atlantic City.

The suits could've put this one on PPV, but cue the chorus, shout it to the rooftops, they maybe left a few bucks on the table, and instead widened the amount of people who'll view what I believe will be a multi-knockdown thriller.

The participants, and their entourages and support staff, gathered at BB Kings Club in Manhattan on Wednesday afternoon for a final round of trash talking before heading to Jersey to endure the excruciating countdown to Saturday.

The standout showing that the press conference came not from either fighter, neither of whom is known as a severely charismatic hypemaster, but from Taylor's trainer, Emanuel Steward.

You can add Manny's rep to the list of compelling subplots to this tussle, as the whispers—again, of the Irish variety—are out and about saying that Taylor has regressed since he dumped Pat Burns after the second Hopkins bout, and latched on to the Kronk sage. Steward was heated when he got a turn at the microphone, and he turned in a fevered performance calculated to insert itself into Pavlik's cranium, rattle about, and rattle him.

Steward took to the stage after Arum, who gave his guy Pavlik a mega buildup, calling him "by far the best middleweight and super middleweight in the world."

Arum continued that "nobody can stand up to his power, it's not a debate, you'll see for yourself on Saturday. All due respect to Tommy Hearns, one helluva puncher, Kelly Pavlik is the best puncher I've ever seen in the division and unlike Tommy, he has the chin to go with it."

Yikes, Bob, want to some help getting back to safety from that limb you've crawled out on?

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“All due respect to Jermain Taylor, on Saturday night there will be a new middleweight champion of the world,” Arum said.

Steward took a turn at the mike, and he was breathing heavy, like he'd been sweating it up at the training camp that just concluded in the Poconos, that ranks probably as Taylor's toughest.

“If you all respect me, then you'll respect my prediction,” he said. “Jermain Taylor will knock out Kelly Pavlik. Kelly isn't Marvin Hagler, he don't keep company like that.”

The insertion process intended to have Pavlik second-guessing his worth then commenced in earnest.

“I've never had a fighter in better condition for a fight,” the trainer said. “Chavez, Oscar, Lennox, Wladimir, Holyfield, mentally and physically, I've never seen a guy you'll see on this level on Saturday.”

Pavlik's competition, Steward said, isn't even in the same zip code as Taylor's. Zertuche and Miranda don't hold a birthday cake candle to 24 rounds with Bernard Hopkins, and 12 with Winky Wright, and Kassim Ouma, and Cory Spinks.

“As far as I'm concerned, Miranda's not nothing,” he said. “They say Jermain didn't knock them out, well I say who would've beaten them? He didn't question Dibella or Haymon or Ozell, he said, ‘We'll fight 'em.’”

Come Saturday, he promised, it will be a “different fighter you'll see, no more backing up.”

For Pavlik, he said, it'll be like “jumping junior high to college. Jermain's got too much experience, it'll go one round at most. There's no way Jermain will lose the fight.”

Dibella, in the spirit of the moment, then chimed in with a winning zinger.

“Someone asked me if I was concerned (that my top client might get knocked off),” he said. “I would be concerned, if I were Kelly.”

Taylor himself, rather than slamming his foe's creds, took the opportunity to exult in the fact that he'll be fighting a righty. “He's not a southpaw, that's the best part!” he said. “I see punches coming a lot better now. I've been fighting southpaws for the last year and a half, now I'm seeing what's coming a lot better. He's a strong fighter, but I plan on looking good, and beating Kelly down.”

The media must take care to play up the fact that he's undefeated, he said, after a win, rather than boldfacing how he looked in doing the deed: “I haven't lost, it'll take somebody bad to beat me, and Kelly's not that.”

Pavlik was the most lowkey of any of the talkers. “It's been seven years waiting for this opportunity, it's huge,” he said. “I can't ask for a better, top notch guy. It's been a long wait, I'm

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preparing for the best Jermain Taylor. Critics think he'll come with something to prove. It'll be a good one."

I agree. JT not fighting a lefty will mean SO MUCH to him. He'll look like the guy we used to regard as a future superstar, rather than the one who forced us to question whether the game had ground him down, and sapped his love, or even his like, for the combat. Pavlik simply hasn't been in as tough as JT, and that's no knock on him or his overseers (manager Cameron Dunkin, Arum, trainer Jack Loew), who are to be applauded for bringing him along in slow and steady fashion. But JT has been in with top echelon pound for pounders. But. Big ole J Lo but. Hopkins, Wright, Ouma and Spinks are all prone to slap and pitty pat more than Pavlik, who sets down on his shots, and craves solid connections. He values offense more than defense, which can't be said for any of those guys. Could JT take one on the kisser, and smooch canvas? Absolutely. I give it a 25% chance that'll happen. If I were a degenerate gambler, though, I'd put the kid's college fund on JT, as his rep has slipped more than it should've, because his crew tortured him with shifty lefties.

JT, via UD12, amid multiple knockdowns.

BOXING BLIND ITEM Which fight game biggie did I see at the Steve Earle show on Wednesday night in NYC? He's a semi-commie, a closet lefty who holds his tongue while dealing with CONservative types. He could've been headed down Copperhead Road to Jersey but "John Lee Pettimore" was rockin' and rollin' to acoustic Earle, and I'd venture to say, same as me, pondering how'd that scruffy, portly ex junkie hook up with certified smoker Allison Moorer. My wife explained it to me, actually: Earle writes and sings sweet love songs to her. Duh.

SPEEDBAG It'll be interesting to see the fallout from Stripper/LingerieGate for Goldie. Will those corporations he's managed to lure aboard as sponsors jet, or will they stand in the pocket with the slightly tarnished Golden Boy? And what of Oscar's fans? Judging by some of the mail we get, some fans of Mexican descent aren't too pleased to be linked by ethnicity to someone who is perceived to be dressing in lady's dainty bedwear. Unsurprisingly, it looks like word that the shots were Photoshopped won't spread as widely as the initial hubbub spread. The retraction/correction never does. Me, I'm guessing we'll move on to Britney's next abomination, and Goldie will get past it. What I care about: how he treats his fighters, and us fans, who thought he'd offer more fights on "free" cable. His track record, though, says that he's a lot more like the old guard he rails about than not. Time will tell though. And I reserve the right to change my mind if you log on to this site tomorrow and it's called "Oscar De La Hoya's TheSweetScience.com."

Yuck, that's a hard one for Nigel and Joe and Raskin and them. They want to keep their jobs, right? So what are they supposed to say, we don't like feeling compromised? Want them to admit publicly that of course it'll be hard for them to carry on at their jobs without feeling beholden to the man who signs their paychecks? That they'll have to strain to not bend over backwards and forwards to curry his favor, and keep their jobs? On the plus side, maybe the cash infusion, if the CFO is opening up the spigot a half notch, will result in writers getting more than .18 cents a word...

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--Hey, is Boxing Digest still stuck at the same pay rate they've used since 1981 too? It'd be nice to get my old stomping ground into this century. Have you heard that might be happening, too?

--Damon Dash spoke at the PC. Member how he hooked up with Dibella? And how he was gonna market the Chin Checkers and Berto and all them, and how it was gonna be an inter-tribal marriage? Did I miss Dash's marketing push? Maybe those ads and such flew off my radar screen. I do live in Brooklyn, though, you'd think maybe I would've seen 'em...

--Pavlik's posse in NYC includes cornermen Michael Cox, a 32-year-old cop from Youngstown, and his trainer's son, John Loew, age 21. They weren't worried about the Big, Bad Apple. "Youngstown's one of the most dangerous places in the nation," Cox said. "Manhattan ain't s---." They both also agreed that Pavlik won't freeze on the big stage. They make a good point, that the most was on the line in the Miranda fight. He won that, he got a fat payday, and as long as he gives a good account of himself, even if he loses, he gets to fight another day. If he'd have lost, he might not have ever gotten a title crack, and might've been left wondering what might've been. Now, he'll know, one way or another.

--Come right back here after the fight, I'll be the first to post the results and description of the action. Jay Gon will handle the undercard, and share the scene in AC for us. David A. will write up the Dawson fight, and he files fast, so come back here Saturday after midnight to see how we saw it and leave a comment.