

The New Middleweight Champion of the World!

Written by Michael Woods

Friday, 28 September 2007 19:00

Book the rematch, it was a doozy.

Kelly Pavlik, the newest pride of Youngstown, Ohio, staved off a KO loss with a stunning show of heart and guts in the second round, and soldiered on to notch a stunning KO win over Jermain Taylor in the seventh round at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, New Jersey on Saturday evening. With the win, Pavlik is the middleweight champion of the world, and boxing's newest star.

It was a battle of undefeateds, and it was the Ohio native, and 8-to-5 underdog, who had his hand raised at the finish, as his foe scurried to the dressing room in shock and awe.

The stats showed a close contest, with Taylor landing more blows (182 to 180) and Pavlik tossing more (460 to 369). But the difference proved to be the durability of the chin. While Pavlik, age 25, hit the deck in the second, and looked to be an eyelash away from being stopped, he stayed on his feet and cleared his head. It was Taylor who got cracked and couldn't clear the cobwebs.

Word is that there is in fact a rematch clause in the contract, but interestingly, the contracted weight for that eventuality, as dictated by Taylor's promoter Lou Dibella, calls for the bout to be contested above the middleweight limit. That would seem to indicate that the Taylor people had a gut feeling that 160 was no longer the right weight for their man. Is that why Manny Steward worked so hard in the trash talking war before this scrap, because he knew he needed to carve some sort of edge for his guy?

The end came at 2:14 of the seventh. It was an old-fashioned one-two that wobbled Taylor, and Pavlik, living up to Taylor's nickname, Bad Intentions, went in for the kill. He backed the Arkansan into the corner, and ripped a left uppercut, a right uppercut and a left hook. Taylor was out of it and referee Steve Smoger, who could've halted the bout in the second when Pavlik was in deep trouble, absorbing punishment after being dropped, waved the fight off. The 29-year-old Taylor slumped into the corner, out of it, as the Ohioan exulted in the deed that a select few (including a few TSS writers) predicted he could pull off.

Pavlik is 32-0, while Taylor tastes defeat for the first time as a pro. He is 27-1.

Taylor was ahead 59-54, 58-55, 58-55 on the cards when Pavlik unleashed his fateful barrage. It started with a basic blast, a one-two. The jab obscured the train hurtling towards his face, and Taylor didn't see it coming. He wobbled, Pavlik sensed it, and the end was at hand.

In the sixth round, Taylor's energy looked to be in good supply. He was peppy with his jabs, and even if he was backing straight backwards more than a trainer might like, well, he looked to be in control. Maybe not by much, but he was in control.

The New Middleweight Champion of the World!

Written by Michael Woods

Friday, 28 September 2007 19:00

In the fifth, both men worked the jab. It was a battle of basics, in a good way. Taylor's balance, by the way, looked better than it has in some time. His head movement, to this point, was also superb.

In the fourth, it was Taylor who was grabbing for a rest. Again, he got caught on the ropes, but he still dictated the distance, and showed superb ring generalship.

In the third, Pavlik came out on sturdy legs. He actually ripped a left hook to Taylor's body, signaling that he wouldn't be shut down before the 12 rounds was over. Taylor actually was caught up in a corner, but Pavlik didn't land anything too meaningful. That he was even on his feet, though, spoke volumes.

Taylor looked pumped, maybe too pumped in the second. He was herky jerky with his movement. But then he settled down, and it looked like he was actually pumped and primed to the perfect degree. He dropped Pavlik, who hopped up before referee Smoger could even start a mandatory eight. The Ohioan held on, with a veteran's aplomb, after an approximately 15 punch collection, started by a solid right, put him down. Taylor tried to close it with an assortment of blows, but a weak-legged Pavlik held on for dear life. Smoger took a hard look, but let it ride, fortunately for the Youngstown hero. Taylor, it looked like, shot his wad, and he too held on, to gain a rest. That gave Pavlik time to get his legs back.

In the first round, Taylor announced his intentions with an overhand right at the start. Pavlik didn't look tight or awed at the start.

SPEEDBAG Lennox Lewis worked the show with Jim Lampley and Larry Merchant. Sharp-eared readers may recall that LL has had a hard-time with the Youngstown fighter's name, and has referred to him as "Pelvic" on occasion. I saw Pavlik at the last Boxing Writer's Association dinner and greeted him with the LL mangling of his name. He got it, and laughed.

--The fighters didn't really want to touch gloves at the start.

--Gotta love boxing. Hall of Fame trainer Manny Steward against Jack Loew. Who? The guy who starred on Hawaii 5-0? No, that was JACK LORD. Jack Loew. A guy who paves driveways for a living. Or did, I should say. Beautiful sport, this boxing.

--Move over, Mancini, Lampkin, Arroyo etc. Pavlik has surpassed you all, with all due respect, with that comeback effort. Maybe not Boom Boom, OK. But Pavlik may well surpass Boom Boom when all is said and done. With a will and chin like he has, coupled with that pop, well, Arum wasn't blowing smoke after all when he contrasted The Ghost with Hearn.