

BORGES: Pavlik A Harsh Reality For Taylor

Written by Ron Borges

Wednesday, 13 February 2008 19:00

Some guys need a lot of convincing. Jermain Taylor must be one of those guys.

Why else, his conqueror wonders, would he jump back into the same fire that scalded him so completely just five months ago? Why else would he choose to immediately exercise a rematch clause in his contract with Kelly Pavlik to fight again at a higher weight, a choice Pavlik believes will favor him more than Taylor?

Why?

That question has been asked a lot since Pavlik got off the floor after being knocked flat by Taylor in the second round of their middleweight title fight and rendered the previously unbeaten champion unconscious five rounds later?

Why?

Pavlik has no idea why Taylor chose so quickly to get into the ring with him again but he knows why he believes this fight won't end any differently than the last one did.

He's why.

"I was surprised but at the same time it was kind of weird because here is a guy that had been undefeated, who went in there and beat (Bernard) Hopkins twice when Hopkins was 'the man' at middleweight," Pavlik said several days before Saturday night's rematch with Taylor in Las Vegas.

"He beat the fast, elusive Cory Spinks. He beat up (Kassim) Ouma and then he had a draw with Winky Wright, who is still considered one of the top pound for pound fighters. So I think when this happened he was in awe, you know? Shock. I think that's why he's coming back so quickly and I think it could be a mistake.

"I was kind of surprised at first, but at the same time the kid is not used to losing and he beat all these guys - all these top fighters - and I think that he just wants to come back but I don't know how he's going to react from that knockout. It was a pretty wicked knockout and neurologically I don't know how he's going to respond. I don't know mentally if he's going to be hesitant, if he's going to come out firing.

"But, as you know, we prepare for everything Jermain's coming with. We'll be prepared for him to come out banging, prepared for him to come out boxing. That's why we got ourselves in tiptop shape and we brought in strong, very fast sparring partners, and we're prepared for anything that Jermain brings to the table. One thing we do know, obviously, is he took this fight that quick so he really wants to redeem himself. We can't take nothing lightly."

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Pavlik has been doing anything but that, training since December for this second confrontation knowing that if he again destroys a man he has known since they were both young amateurs, he will become the undisputed ruling force in the middleweight division.

Undefeated and perhaps the most powerful punching middleweight in the world, Pavlik (32-0, 29 KOs) will enter the ring with a string of nine straight knockouts, the last two against arguably his most dangerous peers in the division – Taylor and Edison Miranda. He will be facing a champion who now not only knows he can end up on the wrong side of the ledger but can also end up on the seat of his pants if he makes a mistake.

Worse, he knows he's facing a guy who could do what he could not five months ago. A guy who could get knocked down, get up, weather nearly a two-minute assault with his legs addled and recover so quickly he could come back out the next round and throw 100 punches with bad intentions. Throw and keep throwing until he'd thrown Jermain Taylor into unconsciousness.

That is heavy knowledge to carry with you if you are in the assault and battery business, as Taylor is, but it's a light load for the new champion.

As Pavlik reflects on that, he thinks back to the Jermain Taylor he faced last September and remembers perhaps the most significant point of all. He remembers he was the same guy he's always been which, if that continues, has convinced Pavlik it means he'll end up in the same condition he was in the last time they met. Out cold.

"You know, it's hard to remember the first one but I do remember some of the punches and the fight in the amateurs and parts of my fight with him and nothing's really changed at all," Pavlik insisted. "Not at all.

"I mean, the same things he does - his left hand in the same exact place (dangerously low) – he did then. So nothing much has changed. I think that's what made our game plan easier to stay with."

Pavlik has taken comfort not only in that familiarity but also in how he survived Taylor's early assault and came back with a more devastating one of his own and in the former champion's perhaps impetuous decision to return to his amateur trainer, Ozell Nelson, to prepare him this time.

Pavlik's theory, which is shared by his own trainer Jack Loew, is that you don't go back to the guy who taught you your technical flaws and expect him to repair them.

Maybe Nelson will, of course, or maybe Taylor will fight a more cautious, controlled fight, one that plays more to his superior athletic skills and quickness to make life more difficult for Pavlik. Maybe. But Pavlik doubts it.

"Talk is talk and it's not the first time with Taylor and his training camp talking about what he's going to do or how it's going to happen," a clearly miffed Pavlik said of Taylor's loud insistence in the final weeks before the rematch that defeat visited him not because of Pavlik but because

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of his having lost his focus and his respect for the hard work required to become a champion.

“He wrote a book last time on it and we saw what happened. We made a lot of dumb mistakes in that fight (too). We got lazy with our left hand, a couple things with our head leaning in that we’ve worked on the whole training camp. We pretty much picked apart that film and so there are a lot of things more that we can do.

“The main thing going in I think that he wasn’t realizing is I was sparring lot of guys that just had great chins, who threw a lot of punches and powerful punches, and I got into that knockout mode. We kind of got away from our amateur days, so then we brought in guys that were very fast for the first fight and I had to get used to that throughout sparring and training and when we got into that fight with Taylor our hand speed was improved.

“Now we’ve had another seven or eight weeks of sparring with the same guys that are very, very fast and now our hand speed is even double of what it was in the first place. I think that he didn’t expect that. I don’t know what he’s going to expect this time around but I’ve got a better jab than he does and a faster right hand.”

In other words, Kelly Pavlik believes conditioning, or lack of it, had little to do with what befell Jermain Taylor five months ago. That is something he intends to remind him of at some point Saturday night and if he does he expects Taylor only then to finally understand that there is more to winning than changing trainers, which Taylor has now done three times in his professional career.

There is dealing with harsh realities, and that is how Pavlik sees himself. As a harsh reality Jermain Taylor will have to come to grips with after it’s too late to do anything about it.

“We want him to go backwards, and if he doesn’t, we want him to stand right there and catch right hands,” Pavlik said. “Our hand speed is going to be different. You know, those punches coming if we’re stationary or if we’re moving, those punches are going to be coming a lot faster.”

Taylor, of course, insists the same will be true for him because he will be stronger at 166 than he was after draining himself to make 160 and his speed will be on full display.

As he put it, he was “beating him half-assed” meaning that he was nailing Pavlik even though he was not in top condition. Perhaps so, but what will his mental condition be the first time a Pavlik uppercut snaps his head back or a jab rips through his defenses and reminds him of what came before? That, really, is the fight within the fight.

“I expect Jermain to come out, you know,” Loew said. “He wants to fight like we have the target on our back but I agree with Kelly. Neurologically, mentally, how’s he going to react when he gets in there and takes that first shot? You know, flash backs.

“I’m really curious to see which Jermain Taylor shows up but I’m extremely confident in Kelly. We’re coming to fight like we always do and I expect if Kelly sticks to the game plan we’re going

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to have the same kind of night we did in September. I think we should expect to see a better Kelly Pavlik come the 16th. We're ready to go."

What is left unsaid is that Pavlik and Loew believe fervently a philosophy best espoused by one-time welterweight champion Marlin Starling.

"I don't worry about the other guy," Starling once said of an upcoming opponent. "If I'm right, he can't be right."

Kelly Pavlik knows many things can happen in a boxing ring, some of them completely unexpected, but of one thing he's for sure. On Saturday night he'll be right.

If he is, well, Marlin Starling knows what's coming next.