Freddie Roach fears that he knows where Bernard Hopkins is going because he's been there himself. He fears he's going too far.

That is often a boxer's fate when his shadow has grown long and age is upon him. In a sport that is ruthlessly honest, self-delusion takes hold of the aging fighter and blinds him as surely as a badly swollen eye. No longer can he see what the rest of the boxing world can see. He cannot see who he is any more, only who he was.

For most of his career, Bernard Hopkins has been a realist. He always saw boxing in its harshest light. He took few things for granted, prepared relentlessly for every opponent and trusted no one but himself and the few people he allowed inside his tight circle. Although his career has not been without its ups and downs he understood the business side of boxing well enough to end up breaking the record for middleweight title defenses while earning enough money in the past few years to live out the rest of his days in the lap of luxury. Perhaps just as important, as he likes to point out, he still has his Costco card in his wallet, a sign that he has not allowed success to overtake clear thinking.

Yet when Roach heard that Hopkins had agreed to face undefeated middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City Oct. 18 at a catch weight of 170 pounds he thought of what he had seen from Hopkins' corner in his last fight, a loss to Joe Calzaghe that Roach had helped him prepare for.

What he saw were signs he had ignored himself, signs his own trainer, Eddie Futch, had tried to point out to him 23 years earlier after a young and undefeated Greg Haugen had stopped him in seven rounds. They were signs he not only could not see, they were signs he would not see and he paid dearly for ignoring both them and the sage advice of a man who had his back even when Roach thought otherwise.

"Eddie told me it was time to stop,'' Roach recalled. "I wasn't ready to listen. I was 27. I told him he was old. I wasn't old. I fought five more times after that without Eddie in my corner. I lost four of them. The last time was back home (in Massachusetts) against David Rivello. After a couple of rounds I was walking back to my corner asking myself, 'What the hell are you doing in here?'"

Roach concedes that his decision to ignore his trainer's advice contributed mightily to the Parkinson's disease he now battles with every day. Perhaps that is why he is sensitive to the plight of the aging fighter, especially one with the skills Hopkins has for so long possessed.

Therein lies the danger as Roach sees it, a danger he feels is now lurking not only in Atlantic City but in a hard scrabble gym on the south side of Youngstown, Ohio, where Pavlik is preparing like a beast to beat down a legend. That is something Roach does not want to see but fears may be unavoidable.

"I'm a little bit worried about that fight,'' Roach admitted. "Bernard is my friend. I asked him to retire after the last fight. I saw some things I didn't like and I told him that.

"Four times in that fight he walked to the wrong corner after the end of the round. One time they showed it on TV and made a joke about him looking for the ring card girls but it happened four times. Why do you go to the wrong corner four times? Something's not right because Calzaghe hadn't buzzed him. Calzaghe couldn't hurt Bernard but Kelly is a big puncher. He's a different cat. He's a young, strong, hungry guy. Timing-wise this is not right.''

Roach has told Hopkins how he feels and has said he will not train him for a fight he doesn't believe he should take at this stage of his life but like so many fighters before him, the former middleweight and light heavyweight title holder is deaf to such a discussion. His long-time co-trainer, Nazim Richardson, said in the wee hours of the morning after the Calzaghe defeat that he had not counseled Hopkins to retire but had told him, "There's only one thing in boxing you haven't experienced and that's a beating.''

While Richardson said then that he felt Hopkins was too slick to have a beating put on him by today's less well schooled champions his rueful smile seemed to belie his words. Yet it has been announced that Hopkins will face Pavlik in the same place where, ironically, he once claimed he had fought his last fight. If there is one thing that remains unchanged about Bernard Hopkins it is his stubbornness.

On June 10, 2006, he dominated Antonio Tarver to claim the light heavyweight title in a fight that was supposed to be his fistic farewell. He had promised his mother he would not fight past the age of 40 and he was nearly 41 at the time and saw the end was near. He was brilliant that night but because of it he could not convince himself it was time to stop.

He has fought twice since, outpointing another faded fighter named Winky Wright before losing to Calzaghe on a night where he uncharacteristically faded badly himself in the final few rounds. He has lost three of his last five fights, albeit by close and hotly disputed decisions in several cases, and will be 43 when he gets in with Pavlik, an undefeated power puncher (34-0, 30 KO) who would very much love to be the fighter who retires a legend for good.

"Of course, Pavlik is moving up in weight so we don't know how that will affect him but he's a dangerous puncher,'' Roach said, adding that Pavlik had no problems moving up to 168 when he beat the man he first dethroned by knockout, Jermain Taylor, in a rematch. "Nazim knows how heavy handed Kelly is. He saw him grow up in the amateurs. We've talked about it.

"So why fight him? Bernard had a great career. I don't think he needs the money. But boxing is hard to give up. I know.

"We don't listen to our peers. I didn't listen to Eddie. Bernard won't listen either I'm afraid. Bernard doesn't want to hear it but my concern is those four times that night he went to the wrong corner. I know he had some problems with a hyperactive thyroid that the doctor told me he had to take care of that. Maybe that had something to do with it. But this is just not a good fight for Bernard.

“Is Pavlik in any danger in this fight? No. People say if Bernard can lull him into a slow pace he can out box him but that’s not going to happen. Pavlik’s not like that.

“Bernard is crafty enough to box him but not the way he looked his last two fights. Kelly Pavlik is an up and coming guy. He’s strong. He’s busy. He’s aggressive. He backs people up so well. I picked (Edison) Miranda to beat him but Pavlik was too strong for him. He backed up that animal with ease. If he puts that pressure on Bernard…’’

Freddie Roach chose not to finish that sentence. Kelly Pavlik, he fears, won’t be as reticent.

“Would I train him for this fight?’’ Roach said. “I don’t think I can do that. I don’t think I can help him win that fight. I think if he asks I’ll say no.’’

Freddie Roach is hoping against hope that Bernard Hopkins will do the same but he’s not counting on it. He’s been where Hopkins is right now and he’s seen many other fighters there as well. None he could think of left the stage until somebody else turned out the lights.