“It’s not hard. I don’t need a manager because I can manage myself,” said Demetrius Hopkins.

The unbeaten junior welterweight had little need for career guidance advice when he made that comment to ESPN in 2006. At the time, Hopkins was contracted to Golden Boy Promotions and his uncle, Bernard, happened to be a partner in the company.

But an apparently personal dispute with the former two-weight champion brought about an end to Demetrius’ relationship with the promotional outfit, ultimately resulting in a nine-month layoff for the 27-year-old.

Having signed a contract with Top Rank, Demetrius will return to the ring this Friday in an off-TV bout on a Telefutura card in Albuquerque against Juaquin Gallardo, 18-7-1 (5). Supporting a main event between Ray Sanchez and Joaquin Zamora is a long way from participating on a pay-per-view headlined by Marco Antonio Barrera and Juan Manuel Marquez in Las Vegas, but Hopkins is just anxious to refocus on his profession.

“I don’t have a problem with Golden Boy,” the Philadelphia native told ESPN.com last February. “It’s just that with my uncle, we have our differences. It’s not going to work between me and him. The man kicked me out of his apartment. He kicked me, my son and my fiancée out [in November]. I was two weeks late [with rent payments]. I was switching bank accounts. He could have told me to pay a late fee. It's not like I didn’t have the money.

“We have our differences. We don’t get along. It’s been like that for awhile. It’s a shame. He’s got to learn how to talk to people and respect people.”

Yet this isn’t the first time Bernard and his sister’s son have been at loggerheads. When Demetrius left Temple University in 2000 to embark on a professional boxing career, Bernard, who is no stranger to promotional wrangling, reportedly advised his nephew to remain a free agent. But Demetrius went against his uncle’s advice and signed a promotional contract with Dino Duva.

After a few years under Duva’s direction Demetrius grew unsatisfied with the setup and was pleased to join Golden Boy Promotions in 2005 after Bernard became head of the company’s East Coast operations.

“It feels good to be with a real promoter now,” said Demetrius after signing with Golden Boy. “Where I was, I wasn’t happy. It was so unprofessional all of the time, a lot of bickering, and a serious lack of organization. With Golden Boy, that’s not an issue at all. I’m staying busy, getting decent paydays and am working my way up. It’s a dream come true.”

Prior to linking up with Golden Boy, Demetrius received little exposure despite his famous surname. At 5’11 he towers over most 140-pound fighters, helping him to employ smooth

boxing skills that keep opponents at a safe distance. At times he has adopted an overly cautious approach, relying on footwork and a quick jab instead of crowd-pleasing power-punching.

“[Demetrius is] not a devastating puncher, not even close to one, but he is an accurate puncher,” assessed Bernard in 2005.

After joining Golden Boy, Demetrius was featured primarily on Spanish-language networks and earned the moniker “Mexican killer” while impressing in solid victories over respect fighters such as Norberto Bravo and Ernesto Zepeda. Thereafter, Hopkins ostensibly discovered one-punch knockout power, scoring highlight reel stoppages over the tough Jesse Feliciano and Michael Warrick, who never fought again after the 2006 bout.

But there was no sign of concussive punching in March last year when Demetrius won a highly disputed unanimous decision over Steve Forbes on the Barrera-Marquez undercard. A win over the veteran Forbes was expected to herald Hopkins’ transition from prospect to world-class contender, but he was outworked for large portions of the fight and only sporadically displayed his sharp skills.

Wrote David Avila: “Hopkins had problems fighting inside with Forbes who knows how to fight at close proximity. This was Hopkins’ first test with a former world champion. And though I had no problem with the final judgment in his favor, it was the margin that the judges gave in his favor.”

Judge Dalby Shirley somehow scored the twelve round contest 117-111, while Robert Hoyle and Glenn Trowbridge handed in bizarre cards reading 118-110.

Demetrius, 28-0-1 (11), had displayed a casual approach in previous outings, even falling behind against relatively ordinary opposition, but was always able to redeem himself before the bout’s end – such as when he scored two late knockdowns against Andre Eason to secure a majority decision win.

But against the wily Forbes the Philadelphian was unable to rally, ending the contest with an inconclusive performance. Supporters can duly claim that Hopkins’ uneven showing was a product of inexperience, and Forbes was a thorny opponent whose stock has risen sharply after defeating Francisco Bojado and lasting twelve rounds with Oscar De La Hoya.

A chance for redemption against world titlist Junior Witter last spring never materialized after Demetrius’ involvement with Golden Boy collapsed, while victories against the overmatched Jailer Berrio and Enrique Colin proved little.

Perhaps realizing he doesn’t possess the managerial tact of his uncle, Demetrius has since forged a relationship with the respected Cameron Dunkin, who has recently helped guide Kelly Pavlik, Nonito Donaire and Steven Luevano to world titles. Having Dunkin on board must be considered a boost for Hopkins and should allow the fighter to concentrate solely on matters inside the ring while his manager and Top Rank handle the external tasks.

Moreover, Top Rank figure to have numerous attractive opportunities for Hopkins, with highly rated junior welterweights Kendall Holt and Ricardo Torres affiliated with the promotional outfit.

Hopkins has expressed an interest in a rematch with Forbes or a shot at Holt's piece of the 140-pound title in the near future, and if he comes through Friday's bout unscathed he will get a chance to showcase his skills on a bigger stage when he fights on the October 18 Pavlik-Bernard Hopkins card in Atlantic City.

Demetrius isn't expected to upstage his uncle that night, but right now he is happy to avoid associations with Bernard.

"I want to stand in my own shoes when it comes to fighting," Demetrius has stated. "I know I can't avoid the comparisons, but hopefully one day people can judge my career on its own merit."