

Will Hopkins FINALLY Act His Age?

Written by Michael Woods

Sunday, 12 October 2008 19:00

Let the record show that on Oct. 8, 2008, Bernard Hopkins promised, on a conference call to hype his Oct. 18 showdown with middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik, that he **WOULD NOT** be fighting in 2013, when he is 48 years old.

"No," Hopkins said, firmly, when asked if he'd be gloving up at 48.

Of course, he'd previously promised the fightwrite fraternity that he wouldn't fight past 40, and that statement stemmed from a promise he'd made his mother, Shirley.

In 2004, Hopkins went on the Tonight Show, and told Jay Leno that he intended to honor his late mom, and not fight past 40. 40 turned to 41 for Hopkins on January 15, 2006, and he did indeed stay in the sport as an active participant. In fact, he holds a 1-2 mark as a 40-year-old, a 1-0 record as a 41-year-old (he beat Tarver), and a 1-0 record as a 42-year-old (he beat Winky Wright). If he beats Pavlik, he'll be .500 as a 43-year-old. Not too shabby.

Really, if he keeps fighting, that's his business, of course. Depending on your belief system, and where you think people end up when their bodies stop working, Bernard may or may not have to answer to his mom on that matter, of course, so he may well have a much higher power to answer to than a mere fightwriter.

On Saturday, in Atlantic City, Hopkins will be 43 years old, and shortly after we flip our calendar, he'll be 44. As far as 43 ½ year old fighters go, he's a rare breed. How many others were plugging away, and competing with the fight game's top tier at this age?

Now, Hopkins doesn't really care to hear critics opine that he shouldn't be gloving up for real, and his point is well taken. However, when regular critics like me hear someone like Freddie Roach weigh in, and state that he thinks it might be wise for Hopkins to hang 'em up for good, and concentrate on the next phase of his life, our ears perk up. It's one thing for someone who hasn't toiled in that arena to share an opinion, it's quite another for someone like Roach, who toiled, and stayed too long, long after wise and kind souls told him to walk away, to give his two cents.

"I'm a little bit worried about that fight," Roach admitted to our Ron Borges on July 31st. "Bernard is my friend. I asked him to retire after the last fight (against Joe Calzaghe). 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."

This subject was broached with Hopkins on the call, and we waited for him to tear Freddie

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another orifice. Didn't happen.

"I heard the comments... Maybe one time when I got spinned around by being broken by the referee and, you know, being caught up in the fight and zoned out or zoned in, you know, I seen myself going to the wrong corner," Hopkins explained. "That happens in boxing. It happened not only to me, it happened to many boxers. But I didn't count four, I didn't count two and I don't know if you seen something that I didn't see but I didn't see that I went to the corner two or three times or whatever. Freddie Roach to me is a guy that is in the top three trainers of the year. I've got mad respect for Freddie Roach. And, you know, you're dealing with a guy (Pavlik) that's 34 with 30 knockouts. I mean, Freddie's concerned about me. And there's a lot of other people concerned about Bernard Hopkins that really care about me. But I will be okay. I'm not a fool. I am a thinker and I am a guy that will take the big challenges and show people I've been down this road before."

Fair enough. Hopkins didn't make half a fool of himself in his last fight, against Calzaghe on April 19. One judge gave him the bout, and while I thought Calzaghe had it with a couple rounds to spare, Hopkins didn't perform in such a manner for anyone to tell him to quit. But, Roach has walked in Bernard's steps. He used to tell those who counseled him to step away the same thing. "I will be OK." "I'm not a fool." So we listen to Freddie, and we will watch Hopkins that much closer on Saturday, dissecting his performance, watching like a hawk to make sure he knows where his corner is.

But it must be said that the Creator didn't make 100 boxers as canny as Hopkins in the realm of defense. He knows how to clutch, and grab, and maul, and dip, and slip, and do what needs to be done to avoid leathered missiles to his noggin.

"People are going to come to Atlantic City, they're either going to watch it on HBO pay-per-view or they're going to come to Atlantic City and they're going to see an expert at his craft doing what he do best and it's going to expose a lot of things that Kelly Pavlik's going to have to work on," Hopkins said. "And hopefully he'll be ready to pick his career back up (after I beat him). But in the meantime Bernard Hopkins will show that not only am I ready for this fight and there are no problems with me physically, Bernard Hopkins is going to show that he has a lot left if you want to continue to go forward. But I will beat this fight and I will beat it impressively and I will show the world that Bernard Hopkins is one of the greats."

And if you are out there wondering why Hopkins is still putting his body through the wringer, why he broke the promise to his mom, why he does that annoying roadwork when he has enough money to buy a small island in the Caribbean, let Hopkins spell it out for you, in big, green letters.

"My motivation (to keep fighting at this age) is back pay," he said. "And I'm a late bloomer and I'm a late start in everything in boxing. As you look at my history for years, the last five years has been a blessing for Bernard Hopkins and my family and it reflects that and I've done well. I've done well in the ring and I've done well in financing and dealing with Richard Schaefer who comes from the financial banking industry. I've made some great investments. But in saying that, I am a late bloomer. I can tell you for years that I didn't get the chance to shine."

This could be his last chance to shine. He might act his age in AC. The pep might have left the

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building. Canny might not be enough. His reflexes might have deteriorated just enough for a Pavlik slingshot right to dent his chin, send his brain pain rattling, send him to the mat, prove Roach right. But he doesn't think so, and the oddsmakers give him a decent chance to hand the Ohioan his first pro loss.

"If you're coming in there with one bullet or two bullets in your chamber it doesn't matter," Hopkins said. "You've already lost the fight, Kelly Pavlik. You need more than that. And I'm going to prove it."

Can he? Can he do what Jermain Taylor couldn't, and Edison Miranda couldn't, and that is give Kelly Pavlik his first loss as a pro? I'm not betting against him, though I like Pavlik in this one, because of his youth, his strength, the lack of miles on his tires as compared to Hopkins. And while Pavlik has fought stronger men than Hopkins, and harder punchers than Hopkins, he hasn't fought anyone as clever as Hopkins, and that could count for a whole helluva lot in Atlantic City on Saturday.