Written by Rick Folstad
Sunday, 12 October 2008 19:00

Rest easy, Youngstown. The left arm of your favorite son is fine. It got bumped and bruised a month ago, but thanks to a little ice, it's healed now and Kelly "The Ghost" Pavlik hardly gives it a second thought.

You shouldn't either.

Pavlik has been sparring eight or 10 rounds while getting ready for this big fight, so the arm must be all right. Has to be. You don't jump without looking, you don't stand in the rain without an umbrella, and you don't fight Bernard "The Executioner" Hopkins with only one good arm.

"There's no problem with the elbow, none at all," Pavlik said on a recent conference call, sounding almost like he couldn't believe they were still bringing it up. "It's fine. No problem."

Whew. Good news for the blue-collar crowd.

That's because we know it's going to require two active, healthy arms to beat Hopkins, who turns 44 in January.

Old man or not, the guy is still slicker than a Times Square pickpocket. Like Pavlik says, Hopkins "has never been beaten convincingly," and that string of strong appearances stretches out for almost 20 years. Hopkins started fighting pro and learning the tricks of the trade back when Ronald Reagan still claimed the softest seat in the Oval Office.

Over those 20 years, the popular consensus is that Hopkins (48-5-1, 32 KOs) has been on the canvas only twice, and both those trips came in the same fight earlier in his career against Segundo Mercado in December 1994.

He's learned a few new steps since that dark night.

But that long history of staying on his feet could be tested when he faces Pavlik on Oct. 18 in a non-title bout at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall (HBO pay-per-view).

A heavy puncher with 30 knockouts in his 34 pro fights, Pavlik knows it would be huge if he could end the fight early.

"(Hopkins) has never fought a big guy like me," said Pavlik, who stands 6-foot-3 and walks around at about 176 pounds. "A lot of the guys he beat were smaller fighters than me."

Polite and sure of himself, Pavlik isn't selling Hopkins short and he isn't boasting about his chances. He doesn't do that. He's just being honest. It sounds easy for him.

Pavlik's promoter, Bob Arum, said he'd be happy if his guy just walked away with a win.

Remember, this is Hopkins. The Executioner. The former middleweight champion of the world who defended his title 20 times. That's a long time spent standing at the top.

"I'm an old baseball man and it's just about winning the game," Arum said, taking the smart road. "A home run is very, very dramatic and a knockout is equivalent to a home run. But I'll take singles and doubles as long as my team scores more runs than the other guys. I just want Kelly to win. If the home run comes, great."

Pavlik, who has been watching film of Hopkins' close loss to Joe Calzaghe in April, said he likes his chances going up to the plate.

"I have a lot of confidence going into the fight," he said. " Especially after watching the Calzaghe fight. I think I can go in there and win convincingly."

It'd be a first.

Asked if he was ready to be roughed up by Hopkins, who has been known to employ a trick or two on the inside, Pavlik says he's ready for any and all moves. And he has a few of his own

"He is going to get hold of me," Pavlik said. "But if you watch the second half of the Calzaghe fight, you'll see that Calzaghe started playing the same game Hopkins was playing. And then Hopkins was the one who was turning to the ref, telling him Joe was being dirty."

It took Hopkins out of his game.

If there is any common denominator here, it's Jermain Taylor. While Hopkins suffered two controversial losses to Taylor, Pavlik stopped Taylor in their first fight and won a decision in their second fight.

But it's never that easy in the fight game. Styles are everything.

"I think I can go in there and win," Pavlik said. "I have a ton of confidence."

Might want to think twice about swinging for the fences.