

How Rubio Can Beat Pavlik

Written by Rick Folstad
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Mexican middleweight contender Marco Antonio Rubio claims to have a “secret plan” to knock out Kelly Pavlik on pay-per-view Saturday night. But most of the betting money is on Pavlik.

Boxing trainer Larry Goossen sees it ending early.

“That’s a great four-round fight,” he said of the middleweight championship fight being held in Youngstown, Ohio. “Pavlik can punch. I’ll call it in four.”

Fighting in front of a hometown crowd, Pavlik hopes to distance himself from his last fight, a one-sided loss to Bernard Hopkins in October. Pavlik moved up a couple weight classes to fight Hopkins, but he’s back down to middleweight.

“With Pavlik, it’s always real simple,” said Goossen, who has worked with fighters like Vernon Forrest, Johnny Tapia, Gabe and Rafael Ruelas, Michael Nunn and Oscar De La Hoya. “You better be ready to fight and you have to fight Pavlik on your terms. Who ever backs up first will lose the fight. When he fought Hopkins, Bernard didn’t let (Pavlik) get settled. Rubio has to back him up and impose his will on him. And don’t give him a sitting target.”

If he was in Rubio’s corner, Goossen said he’d have him go to Pavlik’s body early in the fight.

“Pavlik fights tall,” Goossen said. “But Pavlik is Pavlik. He’s been there. He doesn’t slip a lot of punches. He’s a train. He just says ‘I’m coming.’ Rubio has to keep him back on his heels. If he sees him start to back up, he has to stay on him.

“Bernard was in and out against Pavlik, who looked off that night, but Hopkins had a lot to do with that. He’s a counter-puncher. Against Pavlik, you can’t throw a one-two and just stop. Pavlik? All he has to do is what brought him to the dance. He can punch.”

Trainer Steve Canton, long-time trainer/manager of Freeman Barr and David “Diamond D” Armstrong, said he has seen Rubio fight and he’s a decent fighter.

“But he stands right in front of you,” said Canton, who was a cutman for Tommy Hearn for several years and has worked with Ezra Sellers, Tom “Boom Boom” Johnson and Aaron Pryor. “This should be a stoppage in the middle rounds.”

Against Hopkins, Canton said Pavlik showed a technical flaw.

“He fights with a stiff left leg and his front foot points to the right instead of straight ahead,” Canton said. “Bernard is an old pro and he took advantage of it. He stood to the left of Pavlik’s front leg and Pavlik couldn’t throw his right hand with any power. Pavlik is devastating when someone stands in front of him. But he can’t throw his right hand with any authority if he has to throw it across his body.”

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Canton, who owns and operates the SJC Boxing Gym in Southwest Florida, said he thought Hopkins' biggest concern going into the fight with Pavlik was his conditioning.

"I think once Hopkins knew he was in shape and could go 12 rounds, he figured it would be an easy fight. Hopkins just adapts. Pavlik was taken advantage of by an old pro.

"As for Rubio, he's a good, solid fighter, but Pavlik punches too hard and he's big."

Saturday's pay-per-view telecast will also include the welterweight title fight between Miguel Cotto and Michael Jennings from New York's Madison Square Garden.

ALL HAIL A BLUE COLLAR BANGER

You've got to love a guy like Kelly "The Ghost" Pavlik, middleweight champ and blue-collar hero.

Pavlik doesn't shout or brag or call anyone names. He doesn't make excuses or threats and he doesn't try to beat you over the head with a lot of silly rhetoric.

Pavlik just goes about the serious business of being a prize fighter, which he's very good at. No bells or whistles, no swagger or lip. A nice guy who likes to lace up the gloves and see who can knock who on their fanny first. If Pavlik knocks you down - which he will do - don't take it personal. He'll probably help you to your feet and brush your trunks off for you. Which is why they love him in Youngstown, Ohio. Big talkers don't sell there.

Pavlik (34-1, 30 KOs), who defends his WBO and WBC titles against Marco Antonio Rubio (43-4-1, 38 KOs) on Saturday night from Youngstown on pay-per-view, is probably tired of talking about what happened to him last October 18. But some things just won't go away. Like nightmares.

October 18 is the night an aging Bernard Hopkins pulled another rabbit out of his hat, took Pavlik to the woodshed and spanked him, then gave him some sound advice. It was the kind of thing your dad might do. Scold you, then give you encouragement.

It seems like Hopkins doesn't get older, he just gets smarter.

"You've just got to go back to the drawing board," said Pavlik when asked about the loss to Hopkins on a recent conference call. "There are a lot of things we take from that, a lot of things you've got to work on."

One of the things you work on is mental toughness, which is what Hopkins told the blue-collar hero in the corner that night after their fight.

"You put the loss behind you and move forward," Pavlik said. "A lot of great fighters lose fights and bounce back."

Like Hopkins.

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Pavlik said that at the end of the first round against Hopkins, he came back to his corner and thought to himself that he'd loosen up after a couple more rounds.

After the second round he came back to his corner and reasoned that Hopkins was throwing a lot of punches. Maybe the old man would start to fade and Pavlik would warm up, pick it up a little.

After the third and fourth rounds, Pavlik said he knew he was in for a long night.

"I hit him flush in the 11th round, probably the only flush punch I landed the whole fight," Pavlik said. "When I hit him, I knew right then and there that I just didn't cause any problems (for Hopkins) at all."

None of which means anything to Rubio, a tough, straight-ahead Mexican fighter with a serious punch who says he has a secret plan to spring on Pavlik.

"Not only will (his secret plan) take the world title belt from Pavlik, but it will produce a knockout in front of all his fans," said Rubio, the mandatory challenger for Pavlik's WBO and WBC titles. "I really enjoy Youngstown and I look forward to showing Pavlik and his team around Mexico when they come down for the rematch to reclaim my title."

Pavlik and his team have been looking at a lot of film of Rubio's recent fights. They don't plan on booking any flights to Mexico any time soon.

"Rubio is not going to turn into Bernard Hopkins that night," said Pavlik's trainer, Jack Loew, referring to the ring generalship of Hopkins. "We've watched plenty of film on him and he's stayed true to his game every time. He's a come-ahead fighter."

Which is why Loew says Rubio is the perfect opponent for Pavlik.

"Anybody that's willing to stand in front of somebody like Kelly - that can punch like he can - that definitely plays into our hands. But he's tough."
And he likes to talk a little trash.

So when he's done with the 160-pound division, does Pavlik want to move up a weight class or two? Maybe tinker around at senior middle? It didn't work too well that last time when Pavlik fought Hopkins at a catch weight of 170 pounds.

According to Loew, 28 hours after the weigh-in for that fight, Pavlik still weighed only about 172 pounds. At 188 pounds, Hopkins was flirting with cruiserweight.

But Pavlik knows he's probably going to grow a little. His time at middleweight has a midnight hour.

"It's definitely not out of the question," he said about moving up. "I'm 26 now, but as days and months go by, it's going to get a little harder to keep this scrawny little body scrawny."

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Gotta love those blue-collar heroes.

Along with the Pavlik-Rubio fight from Youngstown, the pay-per-view telecast will feature the WBO welterweight title fight between Miguel Cotto and Michael Jennings from Madison Square Garden.