Jermain Taylor's last stand is at hand.

Once the former undefeated middleweight champion was on an arcing trajectory toward heights he could not even imagine. Then Kelly Pavlik brought him down to earth by knocking him to the earth and nothing has been quite right since.

Yet if Taylor can make his hands move fast enough, often enough on April 25, he'll stand to fight again. If not, he knows what's next because he's already living there.

Exile comes next.

"I'll be honest, I didn't know what I had until I lost it,'' Taylor said Wednesday from his training camp in Miami while discussing his upcoming title challenge against undefeated WBC super middleweight champion Carl Froch. "Now I want it back and I'll do the hard work it takes to get it back.

"I know now if you get comfortable you'll lose. That's why there's nothing comfortable about this camp. Every time I get up in the morning I say to myself, 'Let's go get that belt back.'"

Taylor has not worn those belts since Pavlik knocked him cold two years ago and he has not looked good inside a boxing ring since his two fights with Bernard Hopkins in 2005. Since then he suffered two losses to Pavlik, drew with Winky Wright in a fight many ringside observers felt Wright won and defeated a well-used- up Jeff Lacy in his last outing to little public notice.

The latter fight did set up a mandatory challenge of the undefeated British champion however, a man who is coming to America to get what Taylor once had – an expanded reputation at someone else's expense. Taylor's expense.

"He is a big name world-wide and a great fighter who knows his way around a ring,'' Froch (24-0, 19 KO) said from London. "I'm looking forward to going to America and showing to SHOWTIME and the fans what this English guy can do. I feel I am a world star in the making and looking forward to showcasing my talents. Taylor says he is going to take me into deep waters, but I can swim. I like it when opponents come forward and say stuff like that.

"I'm sure he's prepared to fight and I expect to see a lot of movement, but I can adapt to any style. More than anything I box and move and love to counter-punch. I am looking for 12 rounds, in the trenches, going blow-to-blow. I hope he is a very good swimmer.

"Obviously, it is correct that American fans don't know me but I'm a boxing superstar, which is why I am coming to fight on American soil. If British fighters want to become big stars, they definitely need to go to America. It took (Joe) Calzaghe 10-12 years to go there and make a name for himself. I need to do this (now).

“I’m 31 and my best years are now. I could stay in England and fight mandatory defenses but I want to prove to the boxing press and America that I mean business and that I am the real deal. I’m the defending WBC champ. I’ve never had a hard fight, or struggled. He is in for a surprise.’’

If he is it won’t be the first one Taylor (28-2-1, 17 KO) has suffered. That came the first time he met Pavlik, who left him crumpled on the floor with his head slumped to the side like a drunk passed out under a lamp post.

Taylor fought on but at 30 never quite regained the prominence he held before that night. Always affable outside the ropes and often pleasing inside them, Taylor was exposed by Pavlik as less than the world thought he was and ever since, he’s suffered for it.

That can change, at least to the degree a title belt can change anything these days, on April 25. But for it to happen Taylor not only has to outbox a very solid fighter but has to also show he has learned that fights are won not merely on the night they are fought but on many nights before them, when no one is watching you and nothing is pushing you but your own pride and hunger.

“I’ve been waiting for this fight for a long time,’’ Taylor insisted. “I was ready after I fought Lacy but now that I have the opportunity I’m going to take advantage of it.

“To be honest, I didn’t know who Carl Froch was. I would tell people all the time here in the States that I was fighting Carl Froch and everybody was saying, ‘Who?’ It was kind of embarrassing. He needed to come here to make a name for himself, so people would know who he was.

“He can make a name for himself by beating me, or by getting beat up. Froch needs me as much as I need him. This is his way to prove that he’s the best.’’

It’s also the way Taylor hopes to prove he’s a wiser man at 30 than he was at 26. In the heady days after his two close wins over Bernard Hopkins Taylor was universally hailed as the best middleweight in the world.

Perhaps he was, or perhaps the world just got carried away, as it often does. Regardless, he was soon carried away himself and he has yet to come all the way back from that sad night when he was undressed and exposed in public.

“I was hungry for the Hopkins’ fights but I think I got too relaxed and too comfortable after them,’’ Taylor admitted. “I was confident against Pavlik but I did some unnecessary things that I should not have been doing. I didn’t do what I was supposed to do in the gym. In the second fight with Pavlik, I had him ready to go but I was too cautious.

“You learn from mistakes. That makes you a better fighter. This is my way of getting back on track and showing everybody that the fights I lost, it wasn’t me in there.

“This fight means more than the Hopkins’ fights meant to me. I had all the belts. Now this WBC

belt means as much to me as any of the others.''

The comeback often does mean more for the road is harder, steeper, fraught with more problems and pitfalls than the original hard road to glory. The worst of it is that you know where you've been and that there is nothing that can replace what you've lost - nothing but a new championship.

To get that, Jermain Taylor has to beat a motivated champion who has not yet been swept up in the life that consumed Taylor. For Froch this is a first defense of the vacant 168-pound title he won last Dec. 6, when he decisioned Jean Pascal. A title defense here in America, where he knows many fans remain skeptical of him.

Froch will not be a victim of overconfidence or overindulgence as Taylor once was. Not yet, at least. So for Jermain Taylor to insert himself back into boxing's consciousness he will have to do so at the expense of a man who believes this is to be his moment not Taylor's.

"I don't want to sound bigheaded, but I can't see Taylor going the distance with me,'' Froch insisted. "I've been training too hard. He was one of the best middleweights and junior middles, but he fought small men who wouldn't go two or three rounds with me.

"I don't want to disrespect Taylor, but I can't imagine him doing more than he showed against Jeff Lacy, a fight I turned off after seven rounds. By me going to America it shows I want the fight more than him but we'll settle everything in the ring.''

That is true and they will settle more than a championship. They will settle either the fitness of Carl Froch for the hot box that is American prize fighting or the readiness of Jermain Taylor to return to a place he once knew, a place whose value eluded him until he had lost it.

As stakes go, it's a high-risk fight for them both, one in which the loser will never quite be seen in the same light again.