Written by Ron Borges
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Perception is reality everywhere except in a boxing ring, where reality is often harsh and difficult to argue with. For Jermain Taylor this morning it's as hard to avoid as the right hands of an Englishman named Carl Froch were.

Not long after Taylor's friends had picked him up off the floor Saturday night, his crestfallen promoter, Lou DiBella, said of the man who had just knocked the former middleweight champion out 14 seconds before their fight was set to conclude, "He's very beatable. He's wide open and amateurish but he's strong as an ox.

"He keeps coming. He's not as good as Taylor but he won. He outlasted him. I respect him.''

He should respect Carl Froch but he should also understand something about the WBC super middleweight champion from Nottingham. He is better than Jermain Taylor where it counts most in a sport as savage as boxing. He is stronger mentally by an appreciable distance.

That is why he won and it is why Taylor has lost three of his last four fights and is 3-3-1 in his last seven. One man was strongest where the other was weakest and both reaped what that difference sows in boxing.

Froch made that difference between them clear when he got off the floor himself after being dropped in the third round by a series of three stinging right hands, the last of which spun him around and sent him tumbling to the canvas for the first time in his career.

At that stage of things, Taylor appeared faster, more confident and a fighter on the cusp of becoming a world champion for the second time in his career. Froch, on the other hand, looked like what many believed he was before the fight began - a European fighter unsure if he belonged on a stage as big as the one he'd chosen to ascend to.

Had Taylor been willing to press that point he might have gotten Froch out of his face right then or in the next round because the unbeaten WBC 168-pound champion was not only hurt but clearly daunted. Now was the moment for Jermain Taylor to press that point, attacking him until he broke his will and convinced Froch that the doubters were right about him.

Instead, Taylor was not up to the task. Rather than closing the show he was unwilling to take the calm, calculated risks necessary to do it, the same mistake he made against Kelly Pavlik after he sent him to the floor early in a fight that would end as Saturday night's did – with Jermain Taylor in the protective custody of the referee.

"I didn't see it coming," Froch said of the punches that sent him sprawling. "He hit me with two right hands. I didn't see them coming. That's boxing. I got my composure."

He did and slowly he began to work his way back into the fight until, over the final three rounds,

he overwhelmed a tiring Taylor by pressuring him relentlessly until, frankly, Taylor wore out mentally more than physically.

"The last round I was hoping that my intuition was right that Jermain Taylor was tired," Froch said. "He was badly hurt and not defending himself. He was not even looking at me.''

When Taylor went down in a neutral corner after being battered across the ring and then nailed with several stinging right hands in the final round, his face was bloodied and his eyes looked clear but panic stricken. He stared in the direction of his corner, seemingly trying to decide if getting up was the wisest course.

At the last second he pushed himself up but was soon trapped inside a buzz saw when Froch pummeled him in a way Taylor seemed unwilling to do when the champion was hurt. Taylor put his hands high and Froch drilled him to the body. As those hands sagged, he nailed him with a string of unanswered punches until his gloved fists sagged to his sides and he was left standing but defenseless.

At that moment referee Michael Ortega did the right thing. It was the only thing he could do in good conscience. He jumped in and saved Taylor from potentially permanent damage and stopped the fight. Yet the damage he suffered was the kind that will be difficult for him to erase from a mind that seems already shattered by the ravages of defeat.

Jermain Taylor is no longer the fighter who fought back so feverishly against Bernard Hopkins in their first fight to grab victory just when it appeared to be slipping away from him. That night he managed to do it but when faced with similarly desperate straits since he has not been able to dig that deep again.

That is not to say Taylor (28-3-1, 17 KOs) didn't have his moments after Round 3. His jab was often stiff and powerful, as it often is when he properly uses it, which is usually early in fights before fatigue helps breaks him down mentally.

He stunned Froch at the end of the eighth with another right hand and seemed to wobble him slightly at the end of an 11th round that was an angry tumult of stiff blows, the worst of which were absorbed by Taylor rather than launched by him. By that point Froch (25-0, 20 KOs) was coming on and Taylor was most often in retreat, his hands held high to protect a chin whose resilience he's grown to doubt and his offense becoming more like the occasional pawing of a kitten trying to dissuade a pursuing German Shepard than anything resembling a real attack.

The attacking, in those final rounds, was done mostly by Froch, who said before the fight that he felt, "I think Taylor's a sportsman but he's not in love with the sport he's in. I don't think he actually likes to fight. I don't think he's got that in him.''

If one saw the way Jermain Taylor fought after Pavlik hurt him or after a well-shot Jeff Lacy dropped him in a fight Taylor would eventually win (which was mostly to hold and seek safe havens) it was certainly an arguable point. After the way he imploded in the last round Saturday night the debate on that point seems over.

Jermain Taylor is a gifted athlete, pleasant fellow and someone who can still make some money in boxing. He fought well enough long enough and in an aggressively pleasing fashion against Froch that people will still want to watch him. But one could not leave the arena at Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut Saturday night concluding he was unlucky.

He wasn't unlucky. He was mentally weak, unable to fight off Carl Froch, who as DiBella said, lacked the physical gifts of Taylor but was blessed with the gift of steely resolve and a willingness to keep pressing someone who had once hurt him with a finisher's deadly ruthlessness.

Before the match, Froch said of Taylor, "Whether he's got a stamina problem or a psychological problem I can't say.''

What he declined to add was that he believed the former champion had one or the other. Saturday night, sadly, he had both and Carl Froch had neither which is why Taylor's loyal promoter was wrong about one thing. Jermain Taylor may be a better athlete than Carl Froch but he's not a better fighter.