

Paul Williams: A Lot Like Thomas Hearn's But Definitely Different

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Why isn't there more buzz surrounding former welterweight champion Paul Williams? Williams very well may be a once in a generation talent. Couple that with his willingness to fight the best of the best opposition available, he should be a future star. If what he says is true, that being he can still make the welterweight limit of 147 pounds, the possible fights out there for him between welterweight and middleweight are almost mind boggling.

The 27 year-old Williams is listed at 6'1" and possesses an 82-inch reach, which is longer than that of former all-time greats Larry Holmes, Michael Spinks and Thomas Hearn's. Hearn's is the fighter Williams has most often been compared to. The obvious reason for that is basically because of their freakish size and physical stature, and like Hearn's he hasn't struggled trying to get down to the welterweight limit of 147 pounds. The boxing world witnessed Hearn's win titles from welterweight through cruiserweight solidifying his greatness. On the other hand Williams is still in the infancy of a journey to greatness equaling that of the level of which Hearn's reached.

The comparisons drawn between Williams and Hearn's are legitimate. That said, their style and approach to fighting aren't similar. Williams is a southpaw and may actually be more versatile than Hearn's was. Most think of Hearn's as having been a terrific puncher who could really box. Which isn't wrong, but it's different than being the boxer-puncher that Williams is. Hearn's approached every fight with his mindset and intent being to take off his opponents' head. Hearn's was a certified life-taker as a puncher and carried his punch up to light heavyweight. It's a known fact that Hearn's sought the early knockout every time he climbed into the ring, something he was capable of delivering with his right cross or his left hook.

However, once Hearn's sensed he wasn't going to get the sensational knockout, he got up on his toes and boxed. Hearn's' left jab was terrific at setting up his missile like right hand, but when he chose to box he fired it in multiples and looked to occupy his opponent and to score. Rarely did Tommy look to sit down on his punches once he made the transition from life-taker to "boxer." Hearn's the boxer fought moving back and relied on volume more than power as the fight progressed. When boxing, Hearn's seldom used his wicked left-hook to the body nor did he throw many uppercuts other than in an attempt to keep his opponent honest, limitations that led to him not being a very effective in-fighter. Thomas Hearn's was a great puncher who could use the ring and box from the outside if he was fighting an overwhelmingly strong opponent that he couldn't stop or drop. His punch variation was basically limited to straight punches from the outside. What saved him and kept him from being exposed if forced to fight on the inside was, it was tough getting inside against him.

Paul Williams is nowhere near the puncher that Thomas Hearn's was and that may ultimately be the reason he doesn't run through the divisions above welterweight like Hearn's did. However, he is a more versatile fighter than Hearn's was and makes up for his lack of power by averaging 100 punches per-round, which is astonishing for a fighter who isn't much of a jabber or slapper. Williams is a boxer-puncher and is more likely to score stoppage wins later in the fight than we saw Hearn's do. Williams fights pretty much the same every time out. He looks to use his reach

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to set up his power from bell-to-bell during every round.

The difference between Williams and Hearn's is Williams is a much better and more dangerous fighter on the inside. Williams throws beautiful hooks and uppercuts while moving forward or backward. His punch variation is more diverse and sophisticated than Hearn's ' was. He's also great at disguising his uppercut and hook. Sometimes when his motion appears to begin as a hook it becomes an uppercut and viceversa. In his last fight against the defensive minded Winky Wright, Williams fooled him continuously by feinting the hook and coming up between his tight guard with the uppercut, then feinting the uppercut and coming around the side and landing with a left-hook below Wright's right elbow. This was something that no fighter has ever had success doing versus Wright without getting picked apart in the process.

Hearn's had faster hands than Williams, but Williams has exhibited better punch placement. They're both very accurate with the difference being Williams can get through and score with less of an opening. Instead of blasting through what isn't there a la Hearn's, Williams finesses his way through and scores where there didn't appear to be even a slight leak.

It's been discussed and some have referred to Williams as being Hearn's with a better chin; this is a thought I'm not ready to endorse yet, for one simple and obvious reason. I haven't seen Williams in with and touched by a fighter who was as heavy-handed as Iran Barkley or Juan Roldan, nor has he faced a fighter with the accuracy and power of Sugar Ray Leonard, or the combination of strength and toughness of Marvin Hagler.

However, there are plenty of opportunities awaiting Paul Williams to enable him to make his case as being the next Thomas Hearn's, something Vernon Forrest never quite achieved. With strong middleweights like Kelly Pavlik and Arthur Abraham at the top of the division, Williams should get his chance to prove if he can approach the success Thomas Hearn's realized making the jump from welterweight to middleweight.

Paul Williams and Thomas Hearn's share the physical trait of being extraordinarily tall welterweights, but other than their great natural talent, arm reach and willingness to fight anyone, there's nothing to really connect them.

Actually, Williams isn't much like anyone else I can think of and Hearn's wasn't either.

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