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It was on July 16, 2005 that the new order in the middleweight division was supposed to have begun. That was the night Jermain Taylor won a 12-round split decision over undisputed middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins, thus ending Hopkins' 10 year reign as champ. Only it never came to be.

The lead up to and fallout after the first Hopkins-Taylor bout had the drama and twist of an Agnes Nixon mid-afternoon soap opera. And that was due to Hopkins' former adviser Lou DiBella, who worked for and promoted Jermain Taylor. In 2002 DiBella filed a defamation suit against Hopkins. The issue was resolved when the court ruled in DiBella's favor awarding him $610,000 a few years later. Taylor, who won a bronze medal at the 2000 Olympics fighting as a middleweight, was the first boxing star DBE signed after it's inception in May of 2000. And it was DiBella's intent from day one to knock Hopkins off his perch with Taylor.

DiBella did a good job bringing Taylor along and getting him in position to fight Hopkins at what seemed like the perfect time. The controversial decision Taylor won over him led many boxing observers to speculate as to how good Taylor was. Jermain quelled that some when he fought Hopkins in a rematch five months later. The debate as to who won the two fights between the two is still fiercely contested today. Taylor is officially 2-0 versus Hopkins but inside the ring it's more realistically 1-1. Hopkins has a better claim to the first fight and Taylor holds the same advantage regarding the rematch.

Here it is four years later and the 31 year old Taylor 28-3-1 (17) is fighting a crossroads fight with Arthur Abraham 30-0 (24) on October 17th, and Hopkins who will be 46 by the time he next fights, has added to his legacy since losing to Taylor. Since his rematch with Hopkins, Taylor has gone 3-3-1. In his three wins he beat Kassim Ouma, Cory Spinks and Jeff Lacy. Ouma and Spinks weren't legitimate middleweights and the super-middleweight version of Lacy that Taylor fought was two plus years removed from taking a one-sided shellacking from Joe Calzaghe, beating that most believe Lacy never recovered from.

On the negative side of his ledger Taylor drew with Winky Wright, lost twice to Kelly Pavlik (once via stoppage) and was stopped by Carl Froch in the 12th round of their WBC super-middleweight title bout in his last fight. Taylor was leading Froch by four points on two of the judges cards before the referee stopped the bout with 15 seconds left in the last round.

Basically, Taylor's record indicates that every time he's stepped up against the elite of his era after dethroning Hopkins, he's come up short. Yet Hopkins went on to beat Winky Wright and took apart Pavlik after going win-less versus Taylor. However, if Taylor doesn't get by the undefeated Abraham in a couple weeks his career as a legitimate title contender could come to an abrupt end.

After beating Hopkins twice Taylor deserved the benefit of the doubt pertaining to what his future might turn out to be. In 24 rounds of fighting, Hopkins couldn't really do much with

Jermain. However, some wrote that off since Hopkins was 40 and thought to be on a steep decline before he fought Taylor. But Hopkins has gone on to win the light heavyweight title since then so it can't be said that Taylor fought a completely eroded and washed up Hopkins.

That said, Jermain's record is what it is and he certainly hasn't been impressive over the last four years. His stamina and chin have been questioned during that time and his offense is not very imaginative. Taylor is pretty much the same fighter every time out and isn't hard to hit. After starting fights strong he's faded and seemed to go through periods of losing concentration and focus. These are things that you'd think would've been addressed and corrected by this point in his career but haven't.

Taylor is a 2-to-1 betting underdog against Abraham but was recently quoted saying, “just because I’ve lost a few fights, I’m not ready to be written off. Sometimes a fighter can lose and get beat up with that loss. That has not happened to me. I beat myself in every fight I lost, but I have learned from my mistakes. I’m a better fighter because of the losses.”

Those words sound good, but fighters lie to themselves all the time. It's impossible to think Taylor doesn't harbor some doubt deep down inside. Couple that with him about to confront a very strong fighter physically who not only has never tasted defeat, but doesn't believe he can lose. And Taylor is a fighter that once he's done in a fight, he's very done and there's no bringing him back. Abraham is a very good fighter for sensing weakness. If he gets a signal like that from Taylor, he'll zero right in on him.

Abraham is very deliberate and methodical. If he sees his opponent is hurt, he doesn't go rushing in, but he exerts a lot of pressure, cuts off the ring very well, places his punches very intelligently, and gets the job done.

“If anyone thinks I’m lacking in confidence or feeling any pressure, they’re dead wrong,” said Taylor. That's simply not true. Even if Taylor is given the benefit of the doubt and truly isn't lacking confidence, there's no doubt the pressure is clearly on him in this fight. It's a must win.

And for that reason Taylor seems to have rededicated himself to his training and preparation. He said he's altered his running and is leaving so much of himself on the road like he used to because he had to lose weight. Taylor has also conveyed that he's a more focused and disciplined fighter in the gym which he'll need to translate into the ring on the night of the fight.

When Jermain Taylor took the middleweight title from Hopkins at age 27, he was supposed to be the fighter to beat in the division. That held form until his next bout six months later when he fought to a draw with Winky Wright. Since then Taylor has been fighting just to get back to where he was four years ago. Today it seems fighters can extend their career and some can fight well into their 30s.

If Jermain Taylor doesn't beat Arthur Abraham in his next fight, he very well may end up as a trial horse for some up and coming younger fighters at age 31.

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