

## BORGES: I'm Tired Of Taylor's Constant Excuses

Written by Ron Borges

Thursday, 15 October 2009 19:00

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No one really believes in Jermain Taylor any more. Why would you?

SHOWTIME'S Super Six tournament, designed to crown one super middleweight champion and create a boxing star in the process, has five of the best fighters in the 168 pound division involved. Then there's Taylor. How'd he get in there ahead of undefeated IBF champion Lucian Bute (24-0)?

The combined record of the six of them – Taylor, WBC champion Carl Froch, WBA title holder Mikkel Kessler, former Olympic medalists Andre Dirrell and Andre Ward and ex-middleweight champion Arthur Abraham, who dumped the meaningless 160-pound title he held for this opportunity - is 161-4-1. Take out Taylor, which most people believe Abraham is about to do Saturday night in Berlin, and it's 133-1.

Only a few years ago Taylor was the talk of boxing, a raw talent from Arkansas with an athlete's agility and a pleasant way about him. Unfortunately, he turned out to be more athlete than fighter and less pleasant than we thought once he began to believe he was a star.

That star went into nova almost the moment it began to twinkle, mostly because of his own arrogance and refusal to put in the time it takes to master as difficult a trade as boxing. In what seems like a century ago but was really only four years, Taylor beat back Bernard Hopkins twice, although many folks would have argued then and certainly now that he was handed those decisions because the sport wanted a new face and he was briefly the Chosen One.

Yet even at his coronation in that first victory over Hopkins, Taylor revealed a fatal flaw for a fighter. He tended to fade like old newspapers. He faded in fights and, soon enough, he faded in his profession.

Taylor has now lost three of his last four fights, is 3-3-1 since beating Hopkins and has been knocked out twice, first by middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik and most recently by Froch. The latter stopped him with 14 seconds left in a fight Taylor had at one point been winning easily.

His conclusion was he didn't lose, he got tired, which is why he will very likely lose again to Abraham, who is smaller and less athletic but hard in places where Taylor is soft.

"The best fighter lost because he didn't train right," Taylor (28-3-1) said in the build up to what will be a SHOWTIME doubleheader with Abraham fighting Taylor at the O2 World Arena in Berlin while Froch (25-0, 20 KO) takes on Dirrell (18-0, 13 KO) in Nottingham, England, not far from his roots.

That was the kind of comment that leads you to have no faith in Taylor. Some guys learn from their mistakes. Others repeat them. Taylor has been singing this song since he first faded badly against a guy old enough to be his fistic grandfather, Hopkins, in their first meeting.

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This did not change except in his first fight with Pavlik. He didn't wait until the end to tire that night, being knocked cold in his corner in the seventh round after seemingly having Pavlik beaten in the fight's opening minutes.

That night he said he got tired because he'd expended too much energy trying to knock Pavlik out when he had him hurt. This all leads you to conclude he gets tired early and he gets tired late. Either way, he doesn't seem to get tired of losing.

Jermain Taylor loses these kinds of fights because he respects neither his opponent's skills or his own. At the age of 30, a professional for eight years, he claimed to have not trained properly for Froch. After they woke him up, Taylor said exhaustion and Big Macs got him not the undefeated WBC champion. Sadly, six months later he's still saying the same thing.

"The only reason I lost to Carl Froch was because I got tired," he said this week.

No, the only reason you lost to Carl Froch was because he's a professional and you're not. He comes to the arena physically prepared, mentally prepared and emotionally prepared. Although he is far less gifted an athlete than Taylor (or even than young Dirrell who is so blessed with speed and movement) but he defeated him because he is a master craftsman who shows up to work every day with his tools sharpened, a proper lunch in his pail and a desire to leave the job at the end of the day having given full measure to the people who pay him.

In this case, that is the fans of boxing, people Taylor has short- changed for some time now. The sadder fact is he's short-changed himself. Perhaps he can turn that around this time. Perhaps he finally understands at 31 that he is at the end of the line if things don't work out for him in this double elimination tournament.

Maybe, most of all, he finally understands very few people believe he can fight anymore, an opinion borne out by his lackluster win over a totally shot Jeff Lacy. But boxing is a forgiving place if you have been given a reputation by powerful entities like HBO, which Taylor has. It gives those few fighters many opportunities to let their supporters down.

So Taylor gets another chance at a second chance Saturday night but Abraham (30-0, 24 KO) hardly sees it that way. He sees it as the beginning of a coronation for him, the start of what is a long, 18-month road which when it has been traveled will crown the survivor a star.

Jermain Taylor has long thought himself a star but he wasn't willing to work hard enough to prove it. Arthur Abraham thinks he's a star too but he has always understood there is a responsibility that comes with that, a responsibility that, if left unfulfilled, will come back to tap you on the shoulder when you're inside a boxing ring. Worse, it may tap you on the chin.

"There is nothing special about him," Taylor insisted this week, as if giving Abraham his due was somehow radioactive. Well, he may not be special but he's 30-0. He may not be special but he not only won a world championship he successfully defended it 10 times. He may not be special but he didn't have to move up to 168 pounds because he got too lazy to stay at 160. He moved up for an opportunity. My bet is Taylor came here for a payday, which is not the same

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thing by a long shot.

“I am sure he will have a different opinion of me once I’ve caught him for the first time,” a surly Abraham said this week. “We’ll find out Saturday night what shape Taylor will be like.”

While Abraham talks with respectful menace in his voice, Taylor kept insisting, “I beat myself in every fight I lost.”

No, actually you didn’t. Pavlik beat you into unconsciousness. So did Froch, leaving you on the floor like a half empty sack of potatoes. Winky Wright beat you but was given only a draw. And if Cory Spinks wasn’t half your size, he would have beaten you too because he, too, is a professional.

For a guy who beats himself, Jermain Taylor has had a lot of help. Yet both he and his enabler, trainer Ozell Nelson, keep singing the same old song, refusing to learn from their mistakes and hence doomed to repeat them.

“I feel like I’m the bigger fighter,” Taylor said. “I’m a lot stronger. As long as I don’t get tired I’m going to win the fight.”

Well, in the long history of boxing there have been few fighters who didn’t get tired. It comes with the savage nature of the sport. It comes with facing a man who keeps applying hard pressure on you, as Abraham tends to do.

Exhaustion, or at least near exhaustion, is inevitable for even the most highly trained boxer when he is facing an opponent of equal or superior skills. So if Jermain Taylor feels he can’t win if he gets tired, he’s already half beaten because Abraham will wear him down. He will wear him out. He will make sure he gets tired. Then what?