

Will Jermain Taylor's Real Friends Step Up, And Step In?

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 17 October 2009 19:00

Jermain Taylor is about to find out who his friends are, assuming he has any in boxing.

For the third time in five fights, the former middleweight champion was brutally knocked out, this time by former middleweight champion Arthur Abraham Saturday night in Berlin. After a long evening in which Taylor was not able to keep up with the pace of Abraham's aggressiveness as the fight wore on, Taylor was stunned with a straight right hand that went through his guard and dropped him to the floor with 14 seconds left in the final round. He went down as if he'd been hit with a sledge hammer, his head slamming into the canvas and bouncing off it as if someone had dropped it from a third story window.

Taylor was out in a way that required no counting but it does require much thinking about the need for someone to tell him it is time to stop. Once considered the bright new face of boxing, Taylor has lost four of his last five fights and been savagely knocked out in three of them. Saturday, once he was revived, he asked promoter Lou DiBella several times in the locker room what round he'd been knocked out in. He was told each time. Then he turned and asked his wife the same question...twice more. That is called short term memory loss by some and a warning sign from on High by others.

Soon after Taylor was taken to a Berlin hospital, where tests revealed he had suffered a severe concussion and would remain for observation. The German doctors said he would not be cleared to fly back to America for at least a week because of the seriousness of his situation.

While some debate what steps the SHOWTIME Super Six super middleweight tournament should take to remove Taylor from the competition, the larger issue is what steps DiBella, manager Al Haymon, Taylor's wife and his trainer and surrogate father, Ozell Nelson, are going to take to make Taylor stop before he ends up damaged in ways no one can repair, if that hasn't already happened.

You didn't need a medical degree to realize Taylor had suffered a concussion. You also don't need to be a Hall of Fame trainer to understand there is no coming back for Jermain Taylor. He is shot in a way that can only lead to bad things later in life.

His athleticism allows him to be competitive for awhile these days but as fatigue sets in he begins to fall apart in a way not commensurate with the punishment he is taking. Worse, late in fights, when he gets hit flush he simply collapses, his mind going blank in a way that should be uncomfortable for anyone to watch, most of all the people closest to him.

Taylor's body may still be fit but his head is not. So while Taylor spoke after the fight of winning two more matches in the Super Six series to keep his chances alive in the tournament, the people who have most benefitted economically by being around him should protect him from his worst instinct – which has always been to fight back.

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Jermain Taylor was a brave fighter but he never learned the basic tools of his trade. He prospered by virtue of his athleticism, his size and his heart but once he was exposed by Kelly Pavlik, who was the first man to leave him slumped on the floor like a pile of dirty laundry, he was on a downhill slope that cannot be reversed.

Do not be fooled by thinking that just a couple of fights ago he defeated Jeff Lacy, the former super middleweight champion, because all he beat that night was a fighter even more shot than he is. What was clear in the way he collapsed to the floor after Abraham landed that right hand was that more than ever Taylor needs a friend who will tell him the truth, which is simply this: it's all over.

One should take no pleasure in that. Taylor, many may have by now forgotten, twice fought bravely against Bernard Hopkins whether you think he deserved those decisions or not. He did the same in a draw that should have been a loss against Winky Wright.

His "friends" did him no favors putting him in three such tough fights in a row. Perhaps contractually the rematch with Hopkins could not be avoided (even though in boxing it most often seems you can avoid pretty much anything you want if you are wearing a champion's belt) but Wright should have been. The same people who did that to Taylor now have a chance to do what is seldom done in boxing. They have the chance to do the right thing which will be, as it often is, also the difficult thing.

Taylor's face was a mess after Wright finished with him, just as it had been against Hopkins, damage having been done from which it now seems he never recovered. Soon after came back-to-back losses to Pavlik, the first a brutal knockout in which he lay in the corner wearing the look of a man lost in a fog as he was counted out.

Why the rush to put him back in against Pavlik a second time? Why not finally insist he be given the opportunity to learn his trade, something that really never happened, rather than claiming it was all just a conditioning problem?

It wasn't about conditioning that night and it wasn't when Carl Froch knocked him cold a few months ago and it wasn't against Abraham. It was that he never really knew how to fight and his head has now paid a huge price for that lack of education.

Taylor has now been knocked cold in the final round of back-to-back fights, first by Froch and now by Abraham. Both came in the final seconds and both were not a matter of bad luck. They were the result of a fighter falling apart, piece by piece, in front of his friends' unseeing eyes.

If Lou DiBella, Al Haymon and Ozell Nelson are who they say they are – friends of Taylor as well as his employees – they will tell him it is time to stop. If he refuses to listen, they will walk away after publicly declaring he is endangering himself. Rather than say, as so many people in their position in boxing have done in the past, that they want him to quit but are staying to "protect him," which they cannot do in this sport, they should simply say they can no longer be party to such a criminal act.

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That is what it would be if SHOWTIME or Taylor's management team put him back into the ring against Andre Ward, as is scheduled, or for that matter against Micky Ward, who is long retired. If Jermain Taylor does it to himself there is nothing they can do about that, although certainly there are boxing commissions that could, but if they are a party to this continuing the fact is they never loved him at all.