For everyone involved with Kelly Pavlik BUT Kelly Pavlik, what is important Saturday night is that he A) get into the ring and B) leave it with his WBC and WBO middleweight title belts still in his possession. Anything else is a bonus.

But for the long-absent Pavlik, who has fought only once in the last 10 months due to an assortment of setbacks, much more is needed. To defeat light-punching Miguel Espino is expected but not satisfactory. This is not a case of following the philosophy of Hall of Fame trainer George Benton, who used to tell his fighters in that Barry White baritone, “Win this fight. Look good next fight.’’

In the end it is winning that is most important in boxing but after a year in which Pavlik has suffered with a bad knuckle and a serious staph infection and been accused of ducking the former welterweight champion Paul Williams winning is only the beginning Saturday night. There is also the question of how he wins.

“Winning is not enough,’’ Pavlik (35-1 31 KO) said this week. “I need to be dominant and I need to be impressive. I know what the mission is and I have every intention of completing it.’’

Top Rank, the Bob Arum-owned promotional company that handles Pavlik, has one mission – which is to get the guy back in the ring before the world forgets his name. Pavlik’s mission is far different. It is not just to win. It is to remind the world of who they thought he was before the night Bernard Hopkins undressed him in public for 12 humiliating rounds, beating him up before beating him down.

There are some in boxing who whisper he has never been the same and won’t be. Among them is someone who knows Hopkins well, his former promoter Lou DiBella. DiBella is no fan of Hopkins but he feels he left Pavlik adrift and caused the long walkabout that has gone on since.

“I think he ruined Pavlik and I know he ruined (Felix) Trinidad,’’ DiBella said. “He took them from the pinnacle and mentally beat them to a pulp. In general, fighting Bernard Hopkins is a career destroyer.

“He embarrassed Trinidad. He had to be saved by his father. He was never the same. He sent Kelly Pavlik back to Youngstown after he appeared potentially to be the next great middleweight champion. Kelly went from having a ton of confidence to having none after what Hopkins did to him. None! It was the kind of beatdown that leaves you confused about who you are…or who you thought you were.’’

Arum hears such things and goes off like a roman candle, insisting Pavlik’s only problems have been the knuckle injury that resulted in a staph infection and the poor way he handled treating it and its rehab. Other than that, Arum says with his usual bombast, he’s FINE!!!

“I don’t care what people think,’’ Arum said recently. “The kid was injured and he didn’t take care of it. It wasn’t some hangover from the Hopkins fight. It wasn’t some fear of Paul Williams. He couldn’t make a fist!’’

Although it is barely two weeks removed from when he was scheduled to fight Williams for a second time and had to pull out, Pavlik now allegedly can make a fist and intends to use it. For Arum and trainer Jack Loew all that is really necessary is that Pavlik get comfortable in the ring again and emerge still the holder of his portions of the middleweight title.

But Pavlik looks at Espino and sees a guy who can’t punch and who although ranked No. 3 in the world should not belong in the same ring with him if he, Pavlik, is who he thinks he is.

“The hand?’’ said Pavlik. “We’ve worked through that and it’s in the past. The problem with the hand was time-consuming. After the first surgery we thought we would be ready to go. After I got the stitches out it opened up again and pus started coming it. They did a re-culture and an MRI and it got worse.

“Finally we were on a new antibiotic and that wasn’t doing the job so we got another surgery. After that everything was fine. After it went away we got a new (bad) reaction from the antibiotics that put me in the hospital for four days with a very serious problem.

“At the end of the day we had two major surgeries within two months and the tendons were coming out of the hand. I had therapy to get movement back in the finger. But we wanted to fight. That’s the main thing.

“People may think I was ducking Paul Williams but that doesn’t bother me because some people know absolutely nothing about boxing. They don’t know how the sport works or what goes on in the sport. We were told we had to defend the title (or be stripped of it). So the people that said he’s now fighting two weeks later don’t understand the story and have no idea what was behind it.

“No matter the talk, I feel I have to go out there, especially after the layoff, and look good. I need a dominant win.’’

Pavlik believes much of the criticism he has recently received are because he is from the Midwest, which in recent years has produced few champions and a lot of guys with inflated records and minimal talent. Many saw him the same way until he stopped Edison Miranda and Jermain Taylor. Suddenly he was transformed from overly protected Midwesterner with a phony record to next great middleweight champion.

After Hopkins, at best it seems the truth lies in between. How far in between is the question, one he intends to try and answer with a “dominant’’ victory over Espino.

But many a fighter has lost himself in the pursuit of dominance, trying so hard for the spectacular that they are undone. That, most of all, Kelly Pavlik cannot afford. A lackluster performance could be explained away by the long layoff and the recent medical problems. But a

defeat would be harder to erase and much harder to overcome.

“It really makes me want to cry,’’ Arum said of the questioning of Pavlik’s heart or desire to face Williams. “They have absolutely no factual basis for what they are saying. Like the genius who trains Williams claiming that Kelly was faking the injury. When I hear that I feel so embarrassed for the sport.

“I’m 78 and I’ve put my whole life into this sport and to hear morons like that talk when they have no basis for what they are saying really makes me sad.’’

Not as sad as Kelly Pavlik might make him if he doesn’t deliver Saturday night.