

2010 HAS TO BE BETTER! Pavlik Pleased As Punch To Wave 2009 Goodbye

Written by Rick Folstad
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If a guy ever needed a win so he could sleep better, it's Kelly Pavlik. His career started out pretty much on the high side until he ran into Bernard Hopkins, got a staph infection in his hand and was accused of ducking Paul "The Punisher" Williams. He went from the "Ghost" to the "Forgotten" in a span of 18 months.

So his fight with WBC super-welterweight champ Sergio Martinez on Saturday at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall (HBO) holds more than a little importance for Pavlik. He loses to Martinez and he's back to that point where you look long and hard at your career and you wonder if you're still a legitimate contender or just a step on the ladder for someone else climbing up.

As for Pavlik ducking tough fights, don't buy into it. Just take a quick look at Martinez (44-2-2, 24 KOs), a world champion who, in his last fight this past December, gave Williams all he could handle before losing by a majority decision. Some guys - including Pavlik - thought Martinez did enough to win.

"I thought (Martinez) had Williams by a round or two," Pavlik said on a recent conference call promoting Saturday's fight. "I thought if he had finished strong, it would have been a definite win, but he didn't. I was impressed and I wasn't impressed. Martinez got hit with a lot of punches. If Williams had a little more pop, it would have been a different fight.

According to Pavlik, Martinez does good things and bad, though his bad can sometimes turn out to be good.

"He's awkward and punches from different angles, Pavlik said. "That sometimes helps him and sometimes, that could leave him wide open and he can get caught coming in. I didn't see anything overly impressive.

"Impressive, is what Pavlik is shooting for. He needs a good win.

The staph infection caught him in February 2009 right around his fight with Marco Antonio Rubio. He said during training camp he had a small cut on his knuckle but didn't think anything of it. Two weeks later, playing basketball, he felt a little pinch on his knuckle. Then he saw pus on the cut and knew it could be serious. He went to the doctor and was told he had a staph infection. He had surgery to make sure it didn't reach down to his bone. Two weeks later, the cut opened again and he began taking antibiotics and was bedridden. And disappointment moved in.

"It was a frustrating 2009," he said. "But there wasn't much we could do about it."

He said he feels good and strong now and he's anxious to get back in the ring, prove he's the old Kelly Pavlik, the one who beat Jermain Taylor twice in five months and who stopped Gary Lockett in the third round of their June 2008 fight.

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Which takes us to the Hopkins fight in October 2008, the only loss on Pavlik's fight record.

"Against Hopkins, it wasn't a Kelly Pavlik night, said Pavlik (36-1, 32 KOs), who was fighting about 10 pounds over his normal fighting weight. "I was not 100 percent. There were things I wanted to do in that fight and I just couldn't do them. From the mind to the hands, I just couldn't let go. Hopkins didn't move much, but I was so lethargic, he didn't have to move. But I think I proved that on a bad night, being two weight classes above mine, I could take (Hopkins') punches. He's not a knockout puncher, but the guy can still punch. He's dropped a lot of fighters."

So has Pavlik.

"(The Hopkins fight) is in the past," he said. "It happened two years ago and I can't let it bother me. A lot of great champions have had four or five losses. You just have to bounce back.

Still, Martinez might have the right style to upset Pavlik. Being awkward, he's hard to hit at times. He also has a lot of heart and he's a southpaw. But he's naturally smaller than Pavlik, and like they say, a good big man is usually going to beat a good little man. If Pavlik lands one, everyone goes home early. If he doesn't, it could be a close fight and a long night for the Ghost.

"There is definitely pressure, like there is in any fight, Pavlik said. "Martinez has made a name for himself. Everyone I talk to has seen his fight with Williams. People know he's a dangerous fighter and when I go in there and dominate and win, I'll be right back on track.

No more sleepless nights.