

Pavlik-Martinez: Questions and Questions

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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When Kelly Pavlik 36-1 (32) meets Sergio Martinez 44-2-2 (24) this Saturday night, a lot more than just his WBC/WBO middleweight titles will be on the line. Pavlik needs to show that hes fully recovered from the schooling he adsorbed from Bernard Hopkins back in October of 2008. Since the Hopkins fight Pavlik has defeated Marco Antonio Rubio and Miguel Angel Espino in what were two uninspiring showings. After that Kelly had to pull out of fights against Paul Williams and Sergio Mora due to a staph infection on his hand that lingered longer than it was anticipated.

During that time Pavliks heart and courage were questioned by many writers and fans, something thats hard to take seriously by anyone who has followed Pavliks career. Perhaps questioning his heart invokes better conversation than the fact that the guy really was afflicted. Whats even crazier is - those who questioned his character were also the ones making excuses for his loss to Hopkins. So lets clear them both up.

For starters I implicitly believe Pavlik and the only reason he didnt fight Williams was because he wasnt healed and physically fit to go ahead with the bout, not because he was afraid or feared losing to him. Secondly, I dont buy the excuse that he looked so bad against Hopkins because they fought at 170. Hopkins and Pavlik could fight 10-times weighing in between 160-170 and the only way Pavlik wins once is if he lands a lottery punch and knocks Hopkins out. How many times are you willing to bet that happens? From a style vantage-point Hopkins is Pavliks superior. However, Hopkins at his best would never beat up and stop Jermain Taylor the way Pavlik did. Styles make fights and Hopkins - although greater than both Pavlik and Taylor, matches up better with Pavlik where as Taylor matches up better with Hopkins than does Pavlik.

Hopefully, Pavlik has accepted that it was Hopkins that cost him the bout instead of it being him just having a bad night. Sure, it was a bad night, but it was Hopkins who made it a bad night. Pavlik says hes focused on Martinez and that well see the best of him at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City this weekend. The last time Martinez fought he gave Paul Williams life and death for the better part of twelve rounds before losing a majority decision. In fact Martinez was so competitive against Williams that some observers thought Sergio may have even pulled the fight out. And thats why many believe this is an extremely dangerous fight for Pavlik.

Pavlik said, "I thought he won the (Williams) fight too, to be honest with you. I had him by a round or two and if he had finished strong it might have been a different decision. I was impressed, but at the same time I wasn't impressed. He got hit — took a lot of punches. If Williams had a little more pop, that would have been a different fight.

Since the fight with Williams, Martinez has probably become a little overrated. I dont like elevating guys off a great loss. And Pavlik is right, Paul Williams is no life-taker as a middleweight and that along with Martinezs southpaw style really bothered him. But Martinez is no joke and has improved with each fight. He was stopped by the tough Antonio Margarito early

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in his career, but since then the only blemishes on his record are a draw to Kermit Cintron (which shouldve been a decision win) and the decision that went against him in his last outing against Williams. So only the best of the best have handled or stayed with Martinez.

Sergios speed and awkward punching angles will trouble Pavlik, but Martinez is not the hardest guy around to find or hit. And thats what makes the fight interesting. Remember, with the exception of Hopkins, Pavlik has hurt every fighter hes hit. Martinez has never faced a puncher like Pavlik, and Kelly is the type of fighter who applies both mental and physical pressure. Even when hes not connecting, he wears fighters down as they try to fight and hold him off.

If Martinez isnt bothered by Pavliks power and doesnt have to break off the exchange when Pavlik gets close or crowds him, he has a good chance to win a decision. On the other hand - if Pavlik can move Sergio around the ring and force him to rush his shots just to stabilize the fight, Pavlik should win and be seen as the fighter to beat again at 160.

This Saturday night well find out if Pavlik is on his way back or if Martinez is a fighter that is best known for losing tough fights when matched against elite opposition.

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