

WOODS: I Think Pascal Will Beat Hopkins...And Hopkins Couldn't Be Happier

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 19 October 2010 19:00

Critics being what they...OK, we are..OK, I am, we tend to look for things that someone could do better. We watch a fight, and may well be naturally disposed not necessarily to marvel at the superlative display of physical derring do, but instead, ponder and dissect the things that went wrong.

It can be an annoying tendency, both for those of us whose minds work in that fashion, and frankly, to the athletes who give so much of themselves, and feel, quite rightly, that they have truly excelled, and deserve high praise. Only to log on to the computer, and read that Joe Fightwriter thinks they didnt use the jab enough, neglected to go to the body as much as the situation demanded, and furthermore, why didnt he go for the knockout?

Bernard Hopkins (51-5-1 with 32 KOs), our generations ageless wonder of pugilism, who could well surpass Archie Moore and George Foreman as the gold standard among pugilists for whom age is merely a number to be scoffed at if he beats young Canadian gun Jean Pascal, the WBC light heavyweight titlist on December 18 on Showtime, has something of a love hate relationship with us critics.

We eat up his top tier trashtalk prior to his bouts, hang on just about every word as the best orator in the business delivers his sermons/legacy bolstering lobbying/psy-op messages/inspirational pep talks/comedy routines. But he gets that, and I think appreciates it. But he also gets irked that we dont truly give B Hop his earned props. The critics often deride the Philly legend because he does what he has to do to win the fight, to maximize the style advantage he brings with him to the ring, and doesnt bend over backwards, or frankly, at all, to fight in a fan friendly manner. He clutches, grabs, stalls, fouls, uses his version of the slowdown offense to frustrate his foe. Thus, Hopkins fights arent barnburners. They are best appreciated by true fans of the sweet science side of our sport, the folks who truly prize ring generalship, and defensive wizardry.

But yet the critics still have the temerity to pick the other guy when the other guy is a young gun, a chosen one. We did it before Hopkins, then 43, met Kelly Pavlik, then 26, then undefeated, in a catchweight bout at 170 pounds. Pavlik was the 4-to-1 favorite in the eyes of the oddsmakers, who thought hed have an edge in power and volume.

Were they wrong. Were we wrong, those of us that thought the old man would finally get old, look old, get beat. Many fighters knew better--Jermain Taylor, Oscar De La Hoya, Vernon Forrest, and Shane Mosley all liked the Philadelphian, but others, like Ricky Hatton and Joe Calzaghe, liked the kid.

Me, I dont look back on my take and cringe.

Can he? Can he do what Jermain Taylor couldn't, and Edison Miranda couldn't, and that is give Kelly Pavlik his first loss as a pro? I'm not betting against him, I wrote on October 13, 2008,

WOODS: I Think Pascal Will Beat Hopkins...And Hopkins Couldn't Be Happier

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 19 October 2010 19:00

though I like Pavlik in this one, because of his youth, his strength, the lack of miles on his tires as compared to Hopkins. And while Pavlik has fought stronger men than Hopkins, and harder punchers than Hopkins, he hasn't fought anyone as clever as Hopkins, and that could count for a whole helluva lot in Atlantic City on Saturday.

I sort of hedged, didnt I? I thought it would be tight, but finally, the gray would show through the dye job, so to speak, and the torch would be passed.

The torch continued to burn, though. It burned Pavlik, as he grabbed for it and found out he wasnt crafty enough to hang with Hopkins.

Now, here we are, two years later. Some of us have seen what we think are signs of physical deterioration in Hopkins. In his last two bouts, he has looked a bit more like a fortysomething hitter than Archie or George or himself against Pavlik. Against Enrique Ornelas, the reflexes maybe looked a notch off. Against Roy Jones, he wasnt very busy, was content to counterpunch while Jones waited himself to counter a strike that rarely came.

So, here I am, the critic, once again trying to decide if the old man can do it, can shrug off constraints that hamper all mortals, but that havent yet touched him irreparably.

Til now, Hopkins has been able to, by and large, make up with guile what he has lost physically. This time, I do not hedge.

I am going with Pascal.

I am firmly saying that Hopkins lease on that fountain of youth will run out, that the man who will turn 46 on January 15 will simply not be able to carry the day with his excess of smarts and his bulging bag of tricks. No, I say the man born in Haiti, who will enjoy a homefield advantage at the Pepsi Coliseum in Quebec City on December 18, will simply have more energy and a bit more in the power department. Forgive me for stealing from myself: I think Pascal, who comes off the signature win of his career, over Chad Dawson on Sept. 14, will win because of his youth, his strength, the lack of miles on his tires as compared to Hopkins. Same things I said about Hopkins and Pavlik...

And guess what? Hopkins is pleased as can be that folks like me are picking against him. He prefers it that way.

Im hoping Im a 4 to 1, or 3 to 1 or 2 to one underdog, he told the media at a press conference Wednesday at Planet Hollywood in Manhattan. I function better being in someone elses home.

Damn it, I cant help myself. I have to hedge slightly. I do think there will be periods when Bernard is The Befuddler, that he yanks Pascal into his world, and mystifies him. There will be Hopkins rounds, when he craftily lulls the tempo to fit his gameplan. But I still say that December 18 is the night when finally, fairly conclusively, an ageless wonder shows his age. He wont go out on his shield, hes still got too much savvy, and is still one of the best defenders in the sport. But age plays cruel tricks on all us. You are reading the words of a man who

WOODS: I Think Pascal Will Beat Hopkins...And Hopkins Couldn't Be Happier

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 19 October 2010 19:00

experienced triple hernia surgery on May 3. Come Dec. 18, welcome to my world Hopkins, LOL.

Yes, I believe---not firmly, as I wrote a few paragraphs before, Im hedging like a Goldman Sachs trader as I tap this keyboard-- Hopkins will come up short, and will not break George Foremans mark, and win a major title at 45 plus. Foreman beat WBA, IBF heavyweight champion Michael Moorer on Nov. 5, 1994. He would turn 46 67 days later. If Hopkins beats WBC light heavyweight champ Jean Pascal on Dec. 18, he would own the belt and turn 46 29 days after. I see Pascal as being hungry enough, and strong and energized enough, to get the decision in Quebec.

Will Pascal do enough to dissuade Hopkins from continuing to do what he loves best, challenge himself and all us doubters? I doubt it. Hopkins has proved too many times that it is not wise to doubt him. I do so at some peril to my reputation, such as it is. But I do see Pascal as being hungry enough, and strong and energized enough, to get the decision in Quebec.

Detailed look at todays NYC press conference to follow....