

Trainer Hunter Works Psychological Warfare On Green...And Ward

Written by Raymond Markarian
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For all of the time that I have known him, Andre Ward has prided himself on being a classy professional. He attempts to stay away from the trash talk and come fight night, let his work do the talking. This humble trait is being taught by his long time trainer and godfather, Virgil Hunter.

Although Hunter has tried to instill in Ward the importance of humility, he is also a master of psychological warfare. Now, he's been working that angle on Allan Green, Ward's next opponent in the Super Six Tournament on April 24, and also on his own fighter. Green replaced Ward's original opponent Jermain Taylor in the tournament. In a press release this week, Green stated that he could beat all the fighters in the tournament, including Ward.

"I'm one of the best super middleweights in the world and the tournament rules allow me to come in and be in the mix with a chance to advance and ultimately win this thing. I just don't see anyone that could beat me," Green said.

Hunter has nothing against Green's skills and thinks it is his moment in the sun--to a degree.

"He is a hungry fighter that is getting his opportunity," Hunter said. "We take that into full account. And he is being prepared for seriously, just like every other opponent that we fought. No shortcuts, no letup, it's full steam ahead," Hunter said. "It is like the Bible says; 'The time of chance comes upon all men.' I don't knock him if he wants to talk and make the most of it."

Hunter also went as far as rating Allan Green above his long time pupil.

"I rank Green ahead of Andre at this point," he said. "He has been in the top ten longer than Andre. He has more pro experience. You know, he is a big puncher, and he is confident. So I rate him above Andre. I don't rate Andre above anybody he hasn't beaten yet."

Meanwhile Andre Ward, who was close by as I conducted the interview, broke out in a smile when he heard his mentor show love for his future opponent. The three of us sat at the far end of the Kings Gym in Oakland, Ca. This prompted Hunter to take his point even further.

"It is true. He (Ward) hasn't beaten him yet," Hunter said. "Green has been ranked in the top ten longer than we have. And Green also says that he is the best. So I take him at his word. That is the real reason. He says he is the best. He says that he will knock out everybody in the tournament. So I believe him, I take him at his word. So at this point, just based on what he is saying, I rate him above Andre."

Sounding somewhat provoked, Ward broke in. "I really don't have a comment on anything like that," Ward said. "That is the coach's decision. He is making sure that I am motivated, so I am going to continue to work hard and stay ready."

Hunter noticed Ward get irritated and went even further with his point without hesitation.

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Hunter continued in his dissection of Allan Green while Ward prepared for his day of training. The trainer thinks that Green's greatest asset is his punching power. But Hunter also feels like Ward has a weapon that not many people truly understand.

"I will say that he has good punching power. But there is a difference between Green's power and Andre's power. As he was maturing at the professional level, I did not ask Andre to deliberately go and knock someone out. I know he has the ability to do that. But I took the reverse approach. I taught him to get some rounds in and understand the business, because you really can't consider yourself a person that could truly knock out somebody until you knock out the best."

After winning his last two fights against Edison Miranda and Mikkel Kessler, the undefeated Ward has earned recognition as one of the top super middleweights in the world. Hunter feels like Ward baffles his opponents to the point of shock and confusion. According to Hunter, opponents still can't figure him out, and really don't want to for that matter.

"You see to the untrained eye what Andre is doing looks like finesse. But you get your honest answers from opponents. You get your honest answers from fighters. Andre is one fighter that I have never had anybody push, request, or ask me for a rematch. Even in the amateurs nobody had requested a rematch. I have also heard them (Ward's opponents) say countless times that, 'I have never seen anything like this before. I do not understand what is going on. What he did to me I have never thought anybody could do it.' It is hard to explain."

Ward defeated the heavily favored Mikkel Kessler in November of last year to win a portion of the super middleweight championship. But Hunter was not surprised of the outcome. Although Ward only had 20 fights going into the bout, Hunter knew from the jump that his fighter had too much experience for Kessler.

"It is estimated that Andre is at least 150-0 since he last lost a fight in the amateurs. I mean, people lost count. Even though Kessler had 43 fights and ten title defenses, he did not have more experience in fighting than Andre had. Andre has been battle trained since he was nine years old. His opponents look slow motion to him. Andre's ability is about confusing his opponent. Kessler just could not prepare for it. That is why he could not cope with what Andre was doing to him."

Hunter claims that the Allan Green will be equally disorientated when he jumps into the ring with Ward on April 24th.

"Green cannot prepare for Andre. He is going to find out that he is going to be in a situation where everything that he thought is not true. I respect Allan Green's ability. But Andre's skill is such that Green's ability will be in compliance to what Andre wants him to do. This is a fighter of sleight of hand. You thought you saw an Ace but it really was a Queen. You thought it was a Heart, but it really was a Club, uh oh."

The Kessler camp complained that Ward used illegal head butts to cause cuts over both of Kessler's eyes. Hunter acknowledges butts but states that the butts were caused by fault of

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both combatants. For instance, Hunter says that on the second head butt incident in the middle rounds, it was Kessler coming forward, and Ward pulling away. Be as it may, Hunter has his own theory on why the fight was stopped.

"I think Kessler quit. You know they say it was because of the head butts. But he was no worse for wear because of the head butts in the ninth round. I think Andre was ready to knock him out. He was real close to getting him out of there. But when the doctor came in and they were debating on whether or not to stop it, Kessler did not protest. So to me, he gave a concession. He did not verbally protest at all. He did not say 'hold it man please, it is just another round and half left.' He did not protest. To me, that is a concession."

Now that Ward is a champion, Hunter advises us to look for more excitement to come from the Bay Area kid.

"I am looking for Andre's fights to terminate inside the distance. I am not pushing for the knockout. My first preference is that the fighter quits, or that the corner or doctor stops it. Hitting you with a punch and knocking you out is on my last preference point. I really like you to quit. I really like it when they just say enough," Hunter said. "His ability to set you up for the knockout is there, and it going to surprise a lot of people. They don't know that he possesses this ability. I want to unveil it on the best. That is where the problem is going to be for Allan Green."

Hunter has nothing but praise for the Green camp. And for Ward and Hunter, the best Allan Green is the only Allan Green that they want to face.

"I particularly like his coach. John David Jackson was a good, competitive, champion. He is somebody that I admire. I like his brain trust. The good thing about it is that we know we are going to fight against a guy that is fully prepared to beat us. So it eliminates excuses. He has a world class trainer. He has world class training facilities. He has been ranked in the top ten for several years. He has a good record and he is confident. All those ingredients make it real nice because when you get the victory, you don't have to worry about someone tarnishing your victory with excuses. 'Oh, he did not do this, or he did not do that.' We will know that we beat the best Allan Green. We want to beat the Allan Green that everyone believes in."

There is no word on where Ward will hold his training camp for the Allan Green fight. He usually stays close to within the home base of Oakland. But Hunter says that things are being discussed and they will make a decision in due time. "Either way it goes, it is going to be a great camp," Hunter said.

As far as sparring is concerned, the Ward camp is in discussions to call in Danny Jacobs, a highly touted middleweight prospect, to lace them up against Ward in the coming weeks.

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