

Bernard Hopkins: Age, Joppy, No Problem

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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On Saturday night December 13th, undisputed middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins will fight three time middleweight champ William Joppy. On Thursday January 15th 2004, Hopkins will celebrate his 39th birthday. It's unbelievable that Hopkins has been able to maintain so much of his ability at such an advanced age. Thirty nine years is very old for a fighter, very old.

What makes Hopkins even more remarkable is that he hasn't really shown much erosion. The fact that he is not a heavyweight makes this even more amazing. Heavyweights, usually can fight into their later years more so than non-heavies because they don't have to make weight, and heavyweights don't burn themselves out like the lighter fighters do for all the obvious reasons. Boxing history is replete with many heavyweights who have fought well in their mid to late 30's, and some have done it into their 40's. Looking at boxing history regarding non-heavies, not many have been as successful as Hopkins after age 36. Yes, there are some, but not too many. At least to the degree of Hopkins.

Hopkins is now at the stage of his career, that every time he steps into the ring, many will cite his age as a determining factor as to whether or not he can win. When handicapping a Hopkins fight, the question must be asked, "Is This The Night?" Is this the night Hopkins shows up an empty package, and resembles Robinson in his fourth fight versus Gene Fullmer, or Holyfield in his last few fights? You just know that night looms out there, it's just when will it show up. You know that it will not be announced. In fact we won't even realize it until probably around the third or fourth round of a fight in which Hopkins can't get off and is constantly being beaten to the punch. At that time we'll all nod in acceptance and say to ourselves, it's not there anymore Hop, time to move on and get on to the next stage of your life. Which in the case of Hopkins, I have no doubt will be prosperous and rewarding.

All that being said, I'm here to tell you that night when Hopkins shows up an empty package is not December 13, 2003. That's right, Hopkins will defeat the not so young 33 year old William Joppy and reaffirm that he is still the King of the middleweights.

I don't mean any disrespect to William Joppy. He's been an outstanding fighter and has had an outstanding career, but Hopkins is one of the greats. The last two legendary middleweight champions were Carlos Monzon of the 1970's, and Marvin Hagler of the 1980's. Hopkins must be in the conversation when those names are mentioned. I'm not saying he is better than either of them, but I haven't a single doubt that he could have fought with them and held his own. And if he was defeated by them, it would've only been by decision.

Back to Hopkins and Joppy. I see where some fans and writers have picked Joppy to win. No doubt that it's more of a pick against Hopkins age than it is a pick on who's the better fighter. Lets not forget that Joppy is 33 and took a severe beating versus Trinidad, and hasn't looked the same since. I know Hopkins hasn't looked like Ray Robinson since Trinidad either, but I believe it's more because of him not being totally focused for fighters like Carl Daniels and Morrado Hakkar. Believe me, Joppy will have his full attention.

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In trying to determine the winner of a fight, I look at what each fighter can do to offset the other in order to win the fight. Exactly what does Joppy do better than Hopkins? Absolutely nothing! Everything that Joppy does well, Hopkins does equally as well or better. Joppy can't beat Hopkins if they trade and the bout turns into a street fight. He can't out-punch Hopkins, and clearly doesn't have the chin to withstand an all out assault by Hopkins?

Hopkins also has the advantage in reach and experience, not to mention that he's the better boxer and more adaptable fighter. What strategy can Joppy employ? If he goes at Hopkins and fights him, he'll most likely get knocked out. If Joppy moves away from Hopkins and tries to out box him, he'll most likely lose every round and the decision. Joppy has to hope that he has the best night of his career, and Hopkins shows up totally shot?

When handicapping this fight, I just don't see how Joppy can pull it out. Hopkins holds every advantage that one fighter can hold over another. It must also be noted that Hopkins is as confident and mentally tough as any fighter in boxing today, regardless of weight class. When one fighter is superior to his opponent in every facet of boxing from A to Z, I don't see it as being very difficult to handicap. Joppy is a good fighter and deserves respect as a three time champ, but I think Hopkins still has some greatness left and wins by stoppage. On the Calender it would appear to be advantage Joppy, but in the ring I say it will be advantage Hopkins!