He's one month shy of turning 39. He just made the 17th consecutive defense of his world middleweight championship. In his last fight he won a lopsided 12 round decision over former three time champ, William Joppy. In that fight, he for filled his last fight of a three fight deal he signed with promoter Don King when he defeated former three division champ, Felix Trinidad. He is Bernard Hopkins.

Bernard Hopkins is the undisputed middleweight champion of the world. Hopkins is also a self managed free agent who is getting on in age for a world champion fighter. Hopkins believes now that he is a free agent, he will have more control over his career, and it will be easier to make a big fight involving him? I hope so, but I'm not so sure.

Unfortunately for Hopkins, he is caught in a Catch-22. He has totally cleaned out the middleweight division. There is no fighter currently fighting at 160 who wouldn't be a big underdog against Hopkins, including former Olympian Jermaine Taylor. Taylor has shown tremendous potential and may even be capable of staying with Hopkins, for a while. However, getting a win over Hopkins is quite a different story. I doubt that Taylor's management team wants to take a chance with Hopkins just yet.

I was ringside for Hopkins' fight versus both Felix Trinidad in September of 2001, and William Joppy in December of 2003. It's amazing how much of his ability that Hopkins has retained. He is no where close to a shot fighter, but he also is not quite the same fighter that took Trinidad apart back in 2001. That being said, he's still too dangerous for Jermaine Taylor. I'm sure the goal of Taylor and his management is to win the title, not just fight for it. They know Hopkins will not be around too much longer. All they have to do is bide their time and Taylor will get his shot to fight for and win the middleweight title.

What middleweight in the world when paired with Hopkins makes for a compelling fight, other than Taylor? And I'm not even sure that Taylor fits the bill? There are just no middleweights of note for Hopkins to fight. This is because of two factors. One, Hopkins is still a great all around fighter. Two, the middleweight division is at the same all-time low that the light heavyweight division is. This is a big problem for the self managed Hopkins. For him to get a big fight, he either has to challenge someone bigger than him, or lure a fighter lighter than him to move up in weight and fight for his title.

The two big names that have been mentioned as possible Hopkins opponents over the last couple years are Roy Jones and James Toney. The problem is they are just too big for Bernard. They are both greatly skilled fighters who are naturally bigger than him. Remember, Hopkins is conditioned so finely that he only has about 2-3% body fat. Bottom line, Jones and Toney are just too big for Hopkins, so forget about catch-weights. And the only way Bernard would even consider taking those fights is if he got purse parity, which will never happen. Why would Jones or Toney split the purse with Hopkins? It's not like they want to be the middleweight champ, something they've both already accomplished. Plus, there are plenty of other fights out there for

both of them that would be worth more than a fight with Hopkins.

If Hopkins looks right above him at Super-Middleweight, there are three possible opponents. Joe Calzaghe 36-0, Sven Ottke 33-0, and Anthony Mundine 19-1, all current title holders. The problem with them is that neither of those fighters are household names, thus not being able to deliver Hopkins the Super-Fight that he so desperately covets. Although in reality, a fight with Calzaghe would generate some fan interest and should be considered a viable option. Calzaghe is undefeated and perceived to be possibly the best of the three 168 pound champs. And the Super-Middleweight title would only add to Hopkins legacy.

The two names that have been most recently thrown out as potential Hopkins foes are WBA junior middleweight champ Shane Mosley, and former champ Oscar De La Hoya. Hopkins has said that he'll put up his middleweight title and meet them at 156, two pounds above the junior middleweight limit. These fights make all the sense in the world for Mosley and De La Hoya. Both of them would be significant underdogs versus Hopkins and not expected to win. So if either Mosley or DeLaHoya beat Hopkins, it would be a monumental achievement for them. Where a loss wouldn't hurt them since they are both moving up in weight, again.

The only thing the names Mosley and De La Hoya could do for Hopkins is provide him a huge pay day. In a fight versus either one of them, does Hopkins have anything to gain other than money. If he won, which I haven't a single doubt that he would, it would be said over and over that he was supposed to. And if he lost, it would be said that he wasn't that great, and dominated a weak middleweight era?

Lets be realistic? Hopkins is too strong and good for De La Hoya. For De La Hoya to risk a shot at Hopkins, Hopkins must erode much more than he has. Mosley and his father know that Shane has nothing for Hopkins, and Mosley-Mayorga is still an intriguing fight. Trinidad says he's coming back, but he hasn't fought yet. Plus, he is too rusty to even consider a rematch with Hopkins anytime soon.

Saturday night I spoke to Tracy Byrd, manager of IBF heavyweight champ Chris Byrd. She said there has been some talk of Chris fighting Antonio Tarver in his next fight. So with fights versus the top junior middleweights and light heavyweight virtually not feasible, who does that leave? Just maybe Hopkins should consider challenging one of the Super-Middleweight champs.

Hopkins has to take a shot. He can't just sit around and fight mandatories every six months. I think Hopkins is a great fighter, and I'm not taking a shot at him. However, time is running out. He has to be willing to bend a little himself in order to put himself in a position to participate in a fight that will spark fan interest. At this time, it seems the only option is to challenge one of the Super-Middleweight Champs?