

Pascal-Hopkins Face Off: The Bonus Commentary Track

Written by Eric Raskin
Wednesday, 18 May 2011 15:50



Two months ago, Max Kellerman appeared on my podcast, Ring Theory, and was buzzing with his uniquely Kellermanian energy about an episode of the HBO prefight program “Face Off With Max Kellerman” that he’d recently shot. The combatants for this verbal joust were Jean Pascal and Bernard Hopkins. “I can not wait for people to see this Face Off,” Max insisted, saying it was the best episode they’d ever done.

As Kellerman elaborated for several minutes, it began to reach the point where the actual show couldn’t possibly live up to his hype. And Kellerman sensed that he was flirting with setting the bar too high. “Now that I built it up, it’ll disappoint,” he backtracked.

Fear not, Max. The final edit of the episode began airing this month (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7llp_L-riVM), and it did NOT disappoint. In 12 minutes of talking, we got more action and entertainment than 12 rounds of fighting frequently provides.

It was as advertised: Tempers flaring, scabs picked at, Hopkins running his mouth as only Hopkins can, and Pascal putting in a damned admirable effort to keep up with an all-time-great trash-talker. Both fighters heard an imaginary bell ring while the makeup was still being applied, Kellerman had to interrupt them just to intro the show, and then Pascal and Hopkins went at it for the next two hours. The final cut was a nonstop barrage of insults, indignation, and

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intimidation tactics.

There was name-calling: Pascal labeled Hopkins a baby and then swung the other way on the age spectrum and called him a stubborn old man; Hopkins dubbed Pascal a coward, a fool, and a four-round fighter. B-Hop should have brought an egg and a frying pan as props because he busted out “this is your brain on drugs” to describe his rival. Pascal stood up and performed an impression of Hopkins’ defensive technique that brought to mind a man whose inability to swim is topped only by his inability to hug. And all the while, the steel table between the two men showed a hell of a chin.

That steel table, and the steel chairs, and the Face Off concept, are the brainchild of director David Roofthoof, who pitched Kellerman on the idea back in '09. Max recognized instantly that it was a can't-miss.

“David said, ‘Listen, I have this in mind for you, this is what the concept is, would you be interested in something like this?’” Kellerman recalled. “And I thought, This is brilliant. It’s a steel table with two steel chairs and the fighters facing each other. With that setup, if they want to avoid the tension, they have to actively try to avoid it. Otherwise, they’re staring at each other. So the tension is building organically.”

Still, Kellerman acknowledged that for many Face Offs, teeth need pulling. The fighters are not always natural trash talkers, or natural talkers at all, and it’s the host’s duty to instigate.

With Hopkins and Pascal, there was no need. It was all Kellerman could do sometimes to get a few words in. Taking TSS readers behind the scenes of this particular Face Off taping, Kellerman said he didn’t remember specific moments that ended up on the proverbial cutting-room floor, but that he knows a lot of what got edited out involved Hopkins’ mouth motoring.

“My impression after we finished the shoot was that they were going to have to edit a lot of Hopkins to make sure that Pascal has something close to half the air time,” Kellerman said. “It’s not like we can show you a 15-minute piece, and 14 minutes of it is Hopkins talking. They had it edit it enough so you could hear from Pascal. Hopkins was dominant, because he speaks English—and because he knows how to talk in any language. I was impressed that Pascal was

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able to fend Hopkins off as well as he did, considering the disadvantage of English not being his native language. Of course, even if they'd spoken the same language as kids, Hopkins would be at an advantage."

I asked Kellerman if he thought at any time that the confrontation was becoming so heated that it might turn physical.

"No, I did not," Max said bluntly. "These guys aren't fighting for free."

Maybe not, but they have been known to put their hands on each other at press conferences from time to time. Still, Kellerman was right in between them, feeling the vibe of the room, and if he says it never seemed as if it was going to get violent, I believe him.

I suspect that when it does get violent this Saturday night in Montreal, it will be Hopkins' goal to draw out that same emotion that his opponent showed during the Face Off. I think B-Hop wants Pascal fighting mad. He wants Pascal throwing punches designed to knock him out—punches that can either be countered by Hopkins or that will deplete the energy supply of a man dubbed a four-round fighter by B-Hop.

Of course, there's no guarantee that the anger and frustration Pascal felt in March will still be there two months later, just like there's no guarantee the words "Take the test!" will still be ringing Hopkins' ears at the opening bell. Prefight buildup is often nothing more than prefight buildup. It's just for show.

But what a show the Pascal-Hopkins Face Off was. And according to Kellerman, though it was the best episode yet at the time it was taped, it isn't anymore. That's right, Max says the Wladimir Klitschko-David Haye Face Off, which will air in June, surpassed it.

"The one I just did with Haye and Klitschko will blow your mind," he insisted. "They topped Hopkins-Pascal, not for histrionics, but in terms of the actual tension, and the actual dynamic and interplay of their personalities. This one will have to be edited, actually, to hear from Haye. Haye is the native speaker of English, and Klitschko needs time to filter his thoughts through

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another language, so it takes longer. Klitschko filibusters. It's like, if you kept track of time of possession, Klitschko was way ahead of Haye in that statistic. But Haye had great stuff to say."

Kellerman said Haye was genuinely funny when cracking wise at Klitschko's expense, which put Kellerman in a tough spot as the host.

"You don't want to be sitting there laughing at Wladimir Klitschko, the heavyweight champion of the world. But Haye is being really funny. So you can acknowledge the humor in the remark, but you have to do it without laughing at the other guy. That's a line you have to walk."

When the Klitschko-Haye Face Off airs, we'll have fun watching Kellerman try to walk that line—and watching the two fighters trade barbs in advance of the biggest heavyweight fight in nearly a decade.

Until then, we can keep re-watching the Pascal-Hopkins edition. Their first fight was surprisingly entertaining. Their Face Off was all you could ask for and more. Can this Saturday's showdown make them three-for-three on exceeding expectations?

If we get an "old man" against a "four-round fighter," probably not. But if both men fight with the passion with which they spoke a couple of months ago, those makeup-dusted faces we saw on Face Off could be unrecognizable by the time it's over.

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amayseng says:

HOPKINS 12 ROUNDS TO 0

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as bernard puts on a complete and total clinic channeling the spirit of archie moore

no way bernard lets this opportunity slip by after the robbery in December.

Real Talk says:

This was the best one an a classic! Loved every minute of it and so did my Lady who was laughing at Pascal and kept saying ..what?! when he was talking. She was like I love when foreigners get mad it's so funny! She died laughing when Hopkins was like ... this is your brain on drugs... and laughed when Pascal said ...listen to him,he's got experience. This was the best ever! Hopkins is gem an a great entertainer who crossed the spectrum from the streets to the other side of the Isle. Uncle June watched it.....before he past. Rest in Peace to Johnny Ruffin Sr. from N.C. to the mean streets of D.C. and did 8 years in Lorton behind the wall if I remember correct. It wasn't a game behind that wall. You get shanked you got to ride all the way to D.C. to get sowed up n a lot of dudes didn't make it. Hopkins was Uncle Junes favorite boxer. He felt a kinship with Hopkins because of the way Hopkins came out the Pen and made it to the top of the fightgame and stayed his own man. I remember watching Hopkins vs. Echols wit Unc back in the day all the way up to date. Unc would always tell me with that squint in his eye (one smaller than the other like he got poked in it), an that crooked smile, waving his his hands likenah "I'm tellin youHopkins gon tear that boy @\$\$ up Vel, he gon giv'em them angles. Watch what I tell you! Unc had one of the best pick'em records cuz Hopkins kept getting the W. He looked like he lost his wife when Hopkins got robbed in the Taylor fight. Uncle June watch the sitdown between Hopkins and Pascal and just smiled that crooked smile with the squint an a little more twinkle in his eye. That was his man. That was one of his last moments in this world an the Old Gangsta enjoyed it. I wish he could watch the fight with me physically but I know he's watching. I hope Hopkins wins this fight for my Uncle June. Give'em them angles Hop!!! Dueces

Radam G says:

My condolences to you for the lost of your unc, Real Talk. May he gain great rewards and glory up there being those Pearly Gates. We'll see him at the "Cross Road." Holla!

FighterforJC says:

I hope your uncle had a personal relationship with Jesus.

Real Talk says:

@Radam G, thank you brethren. I appreciate ya. No more worries for Unc. He's at peace but I'ma miss him. He was a classic, spoke what he felt about anything and whoever and didn't care if they liked it or not or was in earshot. Unc June was feared & respected. Peace & Blessings