There are times when it seems as though Bernard Hopkins views the past twenty years in boxing as The Bernard Hopkins Story, with all of the promoters, television executives, and other fighters playing bit roles in the drama of his life.

Patrick Kehoe has referenced Bernard's "idealistic glorification of himself as the American Dream" and noted "time itself seems to collapse into the black hole of his insatiable yearning for self-definition."

Hopkins told Tom Gerbasi, "I wanted to be the Bill Russell of my time. I wanted to be the Muhammad Ali, the Jim Brown, the Satchel Paige. I wanted to be a guy known in history."

"Hopkins," Gerbasi wrote afterward, "is an idiot, but he's a smart idiot."

He's also a superbly-talented fighter, who has built a hall-of-fame career on a will of iron, extraordinary conditioning, and remarkable technical skills. Bernard doesn't get hit solidly often.

When he does, he's protected by one of the great chins in boxing.

But if one discounts Jean Pascal as a quality opponent ("Pascal is an ordinary fighter, who's lucky he lives in Canada," matchmaker Russell Peltz says), the Hopkins resume has been thin over the past three years. He has beaten Pascal, Enrique Ornelas, and Roy Jones Jr.

Thus, it has been suggested that two things distinguish Bernard from other fighters: (1) his remarkable performance at an advanced age; and (2) he's one of the few quality fighters in boxing who can't knock Jones out.

The October 15th match-up between Hopkins and Chad Dawson was marketed as the next building block in the Hopkins legend. Bernard thrives against fighters who are mentally weak. At the August 9th kick-off press conference in New York, he declared, "In boxing, either you fight or you quit. What happens in the ring when things don't go [Dawson's] way? Any adversity, he bails out. I just have to give him some problems. We know what will happen. I already diagnosed him."

At the close of the press conference, when the fighters faced off for the ritual staredown, Bernard stood with his hands at his side. Chad's hands were clasped behind his backside.

Ticket sales for the fight were poor. Steve Kim reported that the Staples Center was cold-calling and sending emails to past customers, offering significant discounts. Two days before the fight, Gary Shaw (Dawson's promoter) tweeted, "1st 50 people to email me: gary@garyshawproductions.com, wish Dawson good luck, I'll leave 2 tix @ will call to fight. Must submit full name."

Then the hour of reckoning arrived.

To say that round one of Hopkins-Dawson was "slow" overstates the drama. In round two, Chad picked up the pace, with Bernard trying to blunt the action. One minute 45 seconds into the stanza, HBO analyst Max Kellerman opined, "So far, the fight is a stinker."

Then, with twenty-two seconds left in round two, Hopkins missed with a right hand, leveraged himself onto Dawson's upper back, and appeared to deliberately push his right forearm down on the back of Chad's neck. At the same time, he wrapped his left arm around Dawson's torso to steady himself and apply additional pressure to Chad's neck.

"Bernard was on his back and was more physical than he should have been," HBO commentator Emanuel Steward noted later.

Consider for a moment what it feels like to have Bernard Hopkins climb onto your back and jam his forearm into your neck. The intelligent response is to throw him off as fast as possible, which is what Dawson did. Chad rose up and, using his shoulder, shoved Bernard up and off. At one point, Dawson's left arm was around Hopkins's right thigh. But Chad let it go before shoving Bernard off.

Hopkins fell backward to the canvas, landed hard on his left elbow and shoulder, and lay there in pain. In response to questioning from a ring physician and referee Pat Russell, he said that he couldn't continue unless it was "with one hand."

Russell then ruled that Bernard's trip to the canvas was not caused by a foul and declared Dawson the winner by knockout at 2 minutes and 48 seconds of the second round.

"I do not have a foul," Russell said. "I'm not calling that a foul. He was pushing down on top of [Dawson], and [Dawson] lifted him off. It was not a foul. It's a TKO."

"He ran from me for three years," Dawson declared in a post-fight interview. "I knew he didn't want the fight. He keeps talking about Philly and about being a gangster. He's no gangster. Gangsters don't quit. He's weak physically and mentally. He has no power. I was going to get on him, and he knew it."

If the decision stands, it will be the first "KO by" on Bernard's record.

As for what comes next; there are two threshold issues. The first is whether Hopkins was really injured. The general consensus is that he has employed his thespian talents in the past to feign injury and buy time when he found himself in trouble (for example, against Joe Calzaghe). Dawson, for his part, said flatly after the fight, "He was faking."

According to a spokesperson for the Hopkins camp, Bernard was taken to California Hospital Medical Center after the fight and diagnosed as having a dislocation of the joint that connects the collarbone to the shoulder blade. Presumably, he will waive the confidentiality that attaches to his medical records and allow the examining physician to speak freely with the California State Athletic Commission and the media. That will lay one issue to rest.

The thornier question is whether referee Pat Russell acted correctly.

Section 33 of the Referee Rules and Guidelines adopted by the Association of Boxing Commissions states, "The referee must consult with the ringside physician in all accidental injury cases. The referee, in conjunction with the ringside physician, will determine the length of time needed to evaluate the affected boxer and his or her suitability to continue. If the injured boxer is not adversely affected and their chance of winning has not been seriously jeopardized because of the injury, the bout may be allowed to continue."

Here, Hopkins told Russell and the ring physician that he couldn't continue unless it was "with one hand." Thus, the fight was properly stopped.

After the stoppage, Max Kellerman muddied the waters when he told the HBO-PPV audience, "It should be something like a no decision or no contest because clearly it was an injury [caused] by a non-boxing move. He was thrown to the ground even if he was on top of Chad Dawson."

But Dawson only did what he had to do to keep Hopkins (who was fouling) from damaging the

back of his neck.

Before the fight, Hopkins proclaimed, “Chad Dawson said I'm dirty. All fights are dirty to me. Some are dirtier than others. The referee is in the ring that will oversee anything that he does or I do. When you're in the fight, things happen he might say is an accident. Things happen I might say is an accident. It's up to the referee. I don't have to be dirty to win a fight, but I'm in a fight.”

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

It has been argued that a title shouldn’t change hands on a ruling of this nature. But it would be wrong to have rules relating to the conduct of a fight that favor a champion over the challenger. Yes, it’s hard on Hopkins for him to lose his title in this manner. But it would be just as unfair to allow him to keep his title and consign Dawson to the wilderness of boxing because of an unfortunate situation that Bernard himself created.

Hopkins will file an appeal of Russell’s decision with the California State Athletic Commission, where his promoter (Golden Boy) has considerable influence. If the outcome is changed to “no contest,” he will retain his WBC and Ring magazine titles. Either way, the WBC can be expected to order a rematch “for the good of boxing” and the lucrative sanctioning fee involved. It will be interesting to see how The Ring (which is owned by Golden Boy) handles the matter.

In sum; there can be no completely satisfactory resolution of the situation that arose in Hopkins-Dawson. But Pat Russell made a reasonable decision. And the view from here is that it was the right one.

Bernard Hopkins was primarily responsible for the injury that he suffered. Is a rematch appropriate? Yes; but with Chad Dawson as the defending champion.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book (Winks and Daggers: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing) was published recently by the University of Arkansas Press.

Comment on this article

mortcola says:

Tom - Love your columns. But you got this one really wrong. Hopkins may have intentionally leaned on Dawson; I don't think so - he landed on top of Dawson after Dawson ducked under a lunging right, and of course Hopkins arm and weight ended up where they did, in a matter of less than a second. No foul there. Dawson then, in the heat of the moment, opted to lift and toss Hopkins rather than let the ref handle it. Dawson did not simply shrug him off; he lifted and tossed a 175lb man; Hopkins didn't just trip. A foul, period, by definition. Hopkins fell and injured his shoulder as a result of an illegal move, whether intentional or not. The result cannot be a

TKO. A non-boxing, illegal move resulted in an injury that prevented the fighter from continuing. The only exception would be if Dawson did not actually throw Hopkins. But he did. Kellerman's point isn't muddying the water; it is the water.

Radam G says:

Ditto mortcola! TH is definitely wrong on this one. It doesn't matter who's fault it was. You cannot lose a bout on a TKO that you didn't get hit in. The correct call, without trickery, would be a retirement -- meaning B-Hop would not or could not fight because of ian njury. No referee has the power to circumvent the rules and stop the bout and call it a whatever suits him. It is up to the commission to abide by the rule 100 percent without any freelancing or hatin.' CSAC is making up Hollywood bullsh*tology again. But in the end, it will rule the bout the correct way. B-Hop is still champion, or the title can be vacated. Pat Russell is a GREAT referee, who just had a foul night. Holla!

FighterforJC says:

@mortcola: wah wah wah wah. This article was spot on. Dawson did the right thing, Hopkins flopped and most likely ended up injuring himself by accident. Good for him.

mortcola says:

[QUOTE=FighterforJC;10063]@mortcola: wah wah wah wah. This article was spot on. Dawson did the right thing, Hopkins flopped and most likely ended up injuring himself by accident. Good for him. Punch or no punch, Hopkins did his version of "No Mas" and the legitimacy of the injury was not verified until after the fight. If hopkins gets gifted the NC, this is great incentive for future floppers who can fake all sorts of "non-punch" injuries at the beginning of each fight so that they get paid and get to keep their titles.[/QUOTE]

Fighter4JC - Every situation needs a fool to lighten things up. Thank you for your steadfast foolishness. Just don't pretend to know boxing. But maybe you're right....maybe generations of fighters are training just to fly through the air and hurt themselves to advance their careers. Oooops, wrong sport. BTW , your sax playing isn't bad. Stick with it, but watch your intonation in the upper register.

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[QUOTE=mortcola;10064]Fighter4JC - Every situation needs a fool to lighten things up. Thank you for your steadfast foolishness. Just don't pretend to know boxing. But maybe you're right....maybe generations of fighters are training just to fly through the air and hurt themselves to advance their careers. Oooops, wrong sport. BTW , your sax playing isn't bad. Stick with it, but watch your intonation in the upper register.[/QUOTE]

Pretty desperate there if you're going for a backhanded compliment on my sax playing (which by the way is a $600 curved soprano saxophone that theoretically is not even supposed to actually be playable). I undestand your blind fanboyism with bernard, the last of the so-called

"old school" fighters. He makes you feel young. He represents your generation, sort of. I'm older than Chad Dawson but he's much closer to my era. Bhop needs to get out. The article was spot on. Hopkins is lucky Michael Moorer is not fighting today as a prime light heavyweight, or even virgil hill for that matter.