

Can't blame DiBella

Written by Rick Folstad
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Next summer.

That's when Jermain Taylor's promoter, Lou DiBella, suggested that Taylor might be ready to defend his middleweight crown against No. 1 contender Winky Wright.

Maybe.

"It would be a crime to put Jermain in another tough fight without a breather after going 24 rounds with Bernard Hopkins," DiBella was quoted as saying in a press release from Wright's camp, which is doing whatever it can to drum up a fight with Taylor. "We expect a fight with Winky by next summer, but Jermain deserves a rest. I'm going to line up something so his fans in Arkansas can come see him."

Next summer? That's kind of a long time to wait for a title fight, isn't it? Some careers and a lot of marriages don't last that long. Next summer? That's two seasons from now, or three-and-a-half years out of my dog's life.

But Lou is right. Jermain does deserve a rest. So give him the keys to a secluded beach house for two weeks and tell him to get back into the gym right after Christmas. Sure, he went 24 rounds with Hopkins, but that was two fights spread out over six months, and they weren't exactly Ali-Frazier reminders. No one stood up and shouted "fight of the year." In both fights, the judges had a tougher night than Hopkins or Taylor.

Used to be, champions fought more than twice a year. Sugar Ray Robinson fought 11 times in 1951, going against guys like Jake LaMotta and Randy Turpin (twice). In a span of three months, he fought Gene Fulmer twice, going 15 rounds both times. From March 1948 to April 1949, he went 10 rounds seven times and went 15 rounds once.

Then he got busy.

A rest for Jermain? Sure. How about an extra hour of sleep next week.

DiBella isn't suggesting that Taylor take the next few months off, but he is implying he wants Taylor to fight a bum next. What else do you call it? And how do you sell tickets to a mugging?

There's nothing wrong with taking an easy fight now and then, but it shouldn't tie you up for four months.

It's not like Taylor is lazy. He's doing what all champions do today. He fights every four or five months or maybe twice a year. It's a habit no one is trying to cure.

In the meantime, Wright, who is the WBC and WBA's No. 1 middleweight contender, is

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wondering why, as the mandatory challenger to Taylor's crown, he's left standing out in the rain with his hat in his hand, trying to find out what he has to do to get a fight with Taylor before the AARP signs him up.

On top of that, DiBella said he might want to pass on Wright and go with Fernando Vargas if Vargas beats Shane Mosley in February.

Vargas? I don't believe he's the mandatory.

Can't blame DiBella. Wright has ruined more careers than the company snitch at the office Christmas party.

And Winky isn't exactly Mr. Excitement in the ring. It's like watching the Terminator fight. Efficient and cold-hearted, but not a guy to bring down the house. But he is a big name now, and that always fills seats. Besides, it's the only fight out there for Taylor.

Of course, all this might be just premature chatter after Saturday night. Before Wright (49-3) goes on an unofficial Jermain Taylor chase, he has to get past Australian Sam Soliman (31-7) this weekend at the Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Conn. (HBO).

All this talk about Taylor – whose fight with Hopkins will be shown on HBO Saturday night – isn't showing much respect for Soliman, the IBF's No. 1 contender. But that's just the nature of the beast.

Ask Winky Wright about respect.