Bernard “The Executioner” Hopkins is likely in his final hour and his seemingly never-ending farewell party was once again spoiled on December 3 by the younger, busier, hungrier Jermain Taylor, and thus the hopes of retiring as undisputed middleweight champion is likely out of reach. It’s time to lead this old workhorse to his stable for the final time and take a look back on his inspiring, combative, and legendary career.

Approaching the age of 41, Hopkins may no longer be middleweight champion, but he will go down as one of the great middleweights in history, the division champ who holds the record for consecutive title defenses at twenty. He may not have beaten the crème de la crème of the division, including the likes of Greb, Ketchel, Robinson, Monzon, Hagler, Griffith, Fulmer, and LaMotta, but Hopkins will leave us as a Hall of Fame fighter who dominated his division for a decade. The lack of stellar competition that Hopkins faced does make you question how he would fare against the elite middleweights who fought before him, but regardless, we cannot take away from his record-setting number of title defenses.

Despite his brilliant career, The Executioner may have executed himself in these last two fights with Taylor, letting the early rounds slip away in accordance with his supposed “game plan,” and then coming on stronger in the second half of both fights. The problem with Hopkins’ strategy of taking time to figure his opponent out was that its success was seemingly molded around a fifteen-round fight, not a twelve-round one. Hopkins made the mistake of taking rounds for granted against Taylor and it cost him dearly. The first time cost him his middleweight crown and the record title defenses along with it and this time he lost his chance for redemption and the opportunity to fly off into the sunset in perfect contentment.

Now Hopkins is left to reflect on what could have been if he fought with just a smidgeon more desperation. But then again, that may be too much to ask for a champion who believes himself to be invincible after so many years of using his Philly-born craftiness to generally dominate his opponents.

Against Jermain Taylor, he needed to be hungrier and he wasn’t. Part of his problem is the fact that his perception seems to be slightly skewed always in his favor. Hopkins’ mind tells him that he can control a round by feinting, circling, ducking, and holding, but the judges don’t generally give style points for those moves; rather, they’re looking to see who lands the more effective punches. Getting inside the fascinatingly complicated mind of Bernard Hopkins is no easy task, but it seems that he truly believes he won most of the rounds against Taylor in which he was so incredibly patient in dissecting his opponent that the bell rang before he could execute.

Ever hear of the Evander Holyfield syndrome? The former heavyweight champion’s affliction in which his perception of reality is so far from the truth that you’d think he had to be making up his story. Thus, despite being banned by New York State’s commission because of his consistently awful performances, we continue to deal with the Holyfield saga as he continues to talk about regaining his glory.

This disease of perception also seems to have been the cause of Hopkins' ultimate downfall. He didn't lose to Jermain Taylor because of his "old age," he lost because he manipulated himself into a false sense of security, believing no one could beat him no matter what circumstance. He was wrong, and in essence, he lied to himself.

B-Hop, as he likes to be abbreviated, will go down in the books, not just as the guy you didn't want to fight because of his old school, break-you-down Philadelphia style. You didn't want to promote the guy either. He calls himself a boxing reformist, while promoters such as Dan Goossen call him a bad person and a nightmare to work with. Whatever you want to call him, Hopkins' unique, enigmatic personality will leave its mark on our sport. Hopkins prided himself on his independence and his ability to change "the system" by eventually promoting himself. He rebelled against the boxing establishment and ultimately won his career-long battle, using his fearlessness and determination to do things his way.

Now, seemingly on the verge of retirement, Hopkins may have lost his middleweight crown, but he will walk away victorious as an already successful promoter, teaming up with his former vanquished opponent, Oscar De La Hoya, as a partner in Golden Boy Promotions.

There's the saying that you can learn a lot about a person by looking into his eyes. That holds true when talking about Bernard Hopkins. When you talk to the man, you can't help but to notice that fire burning brightly in his eyes. It's an intensity that forces you to look away at times just like when you try and stare directly into the rays of the sun. When he walks toward you, it feels as if a powerful storm is heading your way. Fiercely driven, Hopkins' eyes speak of a man on a mission, a man possessed, who will stop at nothing to achieve his goal. I'm still waiting to come face-to-face with a man whose eyes are as haunting in their desperate search for independence and vindication as those of Bernard Hopkins.

"Understand that I'm at my best when it comes to proving a point, not only to show that I'm a better fighter and a better athlete at 40½ years old, but I'm at my best when I know I've got to beat the system again."

Despite his success in freeing himself from the grips of the "evil" promoter, ironically only to become one himself, Hopkins has also lost along the way during his tireless campaign against the exploitation of fighters. Besides driving the obvious promoters away, B-Hop has alienated himself from the boxing establishment throughout his illustrious career, enjoying the role of "the black sheep," and keeping fans at a distance. Considering his record middleweight reign, you'd think his popularity would be monumental. But that's not the case because he combined an unflattering, cautious style with a combative and intimidating personality.

That's why we'll remember Hopkins' courtroom battles with more alacrity than his nineteen title defenses. Just ask Lou DiBella, Don King, Bob Arum, etc. They all became tangled up at one time or another in B-Hop's complex web and they all ended up in the front of the courtroom.

So as we leave this controversial champion for maybe the last time, some may be relieved to see this personality finally fade away, while others will still miss his out-of-the-ring antics. From the rough streets of Philly, to years of incarceration, to the middleweight championship, to

promoting his own fights, Hopkins' legend will be hard to forget.

Complicated to say the least, Hopkins has created a strange aura around him that is shaped both by the old-school tactics he lived by in the ring as well as his own personal liberation movement that sought to shake-up boxing's hierarchal order. His great leadership skills were honed long ago when he made a living in the field of robbery.

"The one thing I've always been is a leader. Even when I was out in the streets doing all kinds of wrong and ended up going to prison, I was never a follower. The guys I rode with looked up to me."

All Bernard Hopkins wanted in his career was to do things his way. That he accomplished, along with the all-time middleweight title defense record in tow. It's time now to say goodbye to "The Executioner," whose bright sun has finally set, yet his imprint has forever been embedded in the history of boxing for better or worse.