

Taylor/Ouma: Does size matter?

Written by Rick Folstad

Wednesday, 06 December 2006 19:00

You've got to wonder what prankster came up with Kassim "The Dream" Ouma when they sat down to find the next opponent for middleweight champ Jermain "Bad Intentions" Taylor.

If Taylor was a small middleweight just trying to get an easy win after three tough fights -- two against Bernard Hopkins and one against Winky Wright -- Ouma would have been a bad choice. He can fight more than a little.

But since Taylor (25-0-1, 17 KOs) is a tall middleweight threatening to become a super-middleweight, picking Ouma (25-2-1, 15 KOs) to fight is like asking your club hacker if he wants to tee off at Augusta. Of course he does. He doesn't really belong there, but it's too good an opportunity to pass up.

That's Ouma. He might not belong at middleweight, but he's looking at some big money and a possible title. And he just can't pass it up.

They list Taylor at 6-foot-1. And he's a strong, hearty 6-foot-1. At least that's what his trainer, Emanuel Steward keeps telling us.

"He's got these long arms and he's an extremely big man and he's physically strong," Steward said on a conference call promoting Saturday night's title fight at Alltel Arena in North Little Rock Ark. (HBO). "He's got tremendous coordination."

Steward added that Taylor would probably make a great football player.

And then there's Ouma, all 5-foot-8 of him. Or at least that's what he's listed at.

I've seen Ouma up close, stood next to him and watched a fight after shaking his hand in a casino outside Miami. If he's 5-foot-8, I'm suddenly 6-foot-2 instead of 5-foot-10. I'm not saying I towered over him, but I could look down on the top of his head.

So how does a guy just a little taller than some jockeys, who has been fighting at 154 pounds for most of his adult life, get a shot at the middleweight title against a tall strongman who has to work to make it down to 160?

Ask the prankster in the suit.

Or maybe Ouma's people just wanted him to get another shot at a title.

Does Ouma have a chance?

Sure he does. He's a fighting machine, and he's tough. Those guys always have a chance.

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But it's a slim one, only because Ouma doesn't pack a middleweight punch. He's going into battle with a slingshot. Taylor's carrying a loaded shotgun.

Still, sometimes a swarm of mosquitoes can be just as dangerous as a kick from a mule. And Ouma, a southpaw and a former IBF junior-middleweight champ, loves to swarm all over the guy he's fighting.

"Ouma doesn't take any breaks," said Taylor's trainer, Emanuel Steward. "He just keeps going because he doesn't punch with any authority. He'll just keep pushing you with those little punches all night long, and if he can get you out of your rhythm, it can become a nightmare."

Unless you can stun the little guy.

"He does throw a lot of punches," Taylor said. "But I throw mine with a lot more power and a lot more accuracy."

And Taylor likes Ouma's style.

"I have a better chance of knocking a guy out who comes to fight," Taylor said. "He's like me. He's not too worried about defense. He comes to fight."

Steward knows how a busy fighter can drive a guy crazy (see "mosquitoes" above).

"We are not taking him lightly," he said. "It could end up being a barnburner going down the stretch."

Sometimes, size has nothing to do with it.