

Monster of the Middleweights: Jermain Taylor

Written by David A. Avila

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When you look at Jermain Taylor you see a hint of fire in his eyes that only a few possess in the world of prizefighting. Once the bell rings that hint of fire turns into an inferno.

Middleweight king Taylor, a native of Arkansas, meets Kassim Ouma (25-2-1, 15 KOs) at the Alltel Arena in Little Rock on Saturday Dec. 9. The world championship showdown will be televised by HBO.

The Razorback looks to quench the fire with another victory over a former world champion. Of his last six opponents, five have held world titles. Yet, critics are still not convinced of his talent.

“He has a lot more talent than I thought he had in the past,” said Emanuel Steward, who began training Taylor in his last fight. “He never fluidly put punches together in combinations. But I think he’s doing that now.”

Despite the lack of fluidity and skills, Taylor has used his strength, speed and toughness to maintain his undefeated record against two prizefighters who are sure to be enshrined in the boxing Hall of Fame when they conclude their careers: Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright.

“I learned a lot from fighting those guys,” said Taylor (25-0, 17 KOs), who broke Hopkins consecutive world title defense string at 20. “It’s exciting.”

After the 2000 Olympics, Taylor jumped into the professional ranks and bludgeoned his way through the middleweight rankings with a combination of unrelenting power and verve. Few could withstand the Razorback’s intense will.

“I think Jermain is one of the best athletes in all of boxing,” says Lou DiBella, a boxing promoter who has guided Taylor’s career the past five years.

Now Taylor, 28, faces his sixth world champion in Africa’s Ouma, a quick pressure fighter whose southpaw style gives opponents fits.

“His pressure is all he knows,” said Taylor of Ouma. “Once he feels my power he’s not going to want to do that.”

Power is Taylor’s game at this point of his career. Usually fighters who are power-crazy meet their Waterloo against the more skillful and experienced opponents. But it hasn’t happened yet.

Taylor’s ability to overcome Hopkins and Wright has experts scratching their heads. One can only imagine that the Arkansas fighter who was discovered in a small Little Rock boxing club years ago will only get better.

“His speed and talent are coming out. He’s looking more like a seasoned fighter,” said Steward,

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who's guided fighters to championships such as Tommy Hearns, Hilmer Kenty and Wladimir Klitschko. "I'm very impressed with what I see."

Cotto, Margarito and Winky Too

Middleweights and welterweights took center stage this past weekend with big fight cards simultaneously occurring in Atlantic City and Tampa.

First, the most surprising event was Miguel Cotto conducting interviews in English. He was impeccable. Then, in the ring, he resumed the same impeccability with a five round destruction of former undefeated Puerto Rican southpaw Carlos Quintana.

"I never knew he was that fast," said Quintana who decided at the end of the fifth round that he could not beat Cotto after suffering two knockdowns.

Cotto seemed quicker and stronger than during his junior welterweight ventures.

"This is where I belong," Cotto said.

Tijuana's Antonio Margarito had a rough time with Joshua Clottey until the African fighter injured his left hand in the fourth round. Then he mounted a tenacious attack that did not stop until the final bell rang in the 12th round.

"I was a little off my rhythm," said Margarito who has the WBO welterweight title.

One other thing, he looked very tentative on his right leg. He rarely was able to extend it while punching. He took a big chance in fighting the rough Clottey despite spraining his right ankle a few weeks ago.

After Margarito injured it, his team said he was still going to fight on that bad right ankle. I could see that he couldn't plant it correctly for leverage on his punches. He could punch at close range, but at a distance he was like a man on ice with no skates. All you boxers, or athletes for that matter, know that having a bad ankle can hinder you. It was a big chance Margarito took stepping inside the ropes to face the likes of Clottey. That guy was no joke.

Perhaps Margarito's lukewarm showing will enable him to get the bigger fights.

Down in Florida, Winky Wright fought former stablemate Ike Quarthey and handily beat the former welterweight champion after 12 rounds.

Wright tossed away his defense first armor that has taken him to the top of the boxing world. The southpaw defensive wizard displayed his new offensive style that allowed Quarthey to take free cracks. But the Ghanaian fighter never could hurt Wright.

"People want to see more action they're going to get more action," Wright said before the fight.

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Wright now hopes his co-promoting partner Oscar De La Hoya will accept a fight with him.

“If he beats Floyd Mayweather, then I would love to fight Oscar,” said Wright.