Remember the tale of King Midas? Everything he touched turned to gold, which in a sense was his blessing. But if he touched someone he loved, that person also was transformed into a hunk of shiny, 24-carat metal. And that was his curse.

There are times when undefeated junior welterweight contender Demetrius “The Gladiator” Hopkins must feel as if he, too, is both sides of a Midas golden coin. Because of the Hall of Fame-worthy career crafted by his uncle, Bernard “The Executioner” Hopkins, everyone is aware of Demetrius’ genealogy and fighting heritage. But being the nephew of one of boxing’s more illustrious practicioners has a downside.

Everyone is apt to compare him to his more famous relative, and probably unfavorably at this point. Then there is that little matter of the younger Hopkins constantly trying to establish his own identity, one that isn’t engulfed by the long shadow cast by his iconic uncle.

“I have to walk in my own shoes, build my own legacy, like he did,” Demetrius, 28, said when asked for what must have seemed like the zillionth time about being eclipsed by B-Hop. “It’s good for him to be my uncle, but I always wanted to do my own thing.”

Demetrius paused, for dramatic effect, proving that if nothing else what he has learned from his uncle is the value of a high-quality sound bite.

“When I become the world champion, I’ll finally walk in my own shoes,” he stressed.

Due to weight problems brought on by illness – talk about the horrors of temporary water-weight buildup – Saturday night’s Showtime-televised rubber match between WBO junior welterweight champion Kendall Holt (24-2, 13 KOs) and former titlist Ricardo Torres (32-2, 28 KOs) in Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall had to be revised. According to Top Rank founder Bob Arum, who promotes both Holt and Hopkins, Torres put on more weight than he could take off in time to make the 140-pound division limit because the high intake of fluids he received after taking ill forced him to suspend his training regimen.

With only a week remaining before fight night, Arum needed a replacement for Torres, and pronto. Fortunately, Hopkins (28-0, 11 KOs) was training for a bout with Germaine Sanders (27-6, 17 KOs) on the Holt-Sanders undercard, so he was available for pinch-hit duty. And so what if his fight with Sanders, his first ring appearance in 13 months, was contracted for a limit of 144 pounds? Title shots, even unplanned ones, do not come around all that often. When one does happen by, you grab it.

“I got a call early Sunday morning and was told Torres was having a problem with his weight and did I think Demetrius could fill in for him,” said Hopkins’ manager, Cameron Dunkin. “I said, `I don’t know why not. I’ll call him.’

“I couldn’t reach Demetrius, but I got in touch with Bozy (Derek “Bozy” Ennis, Hopkins’ trainer)

and he contacted Demetrius, who jumped at the chance. Demetrius said, `Yeah. Absolutely. Let's do it.' There was never a moment's hesitation on his part."

The switch in opponents might have been disappointing to Holt, who had split two previous meetings with Torres and was eager to settle the matter of who was better once and for all. But for Arum and Team Hopkins, the Colombian's illness was a blessing in disguise.

Asked for the present whereabouts of Torres, Arum said, "He's in Colombia. As far as I'm concerned, if he stays there, I'm not going to miss him."

Arum also said he believed "we caught a lucky break" in winding up with Holt-Hopkins, which he said should an upgrade over Holt-Torres III. "I think we have a better fight," Arum predicted.

The 27-year-old Holt – a onetime stablemate of Hopkins with Duva Boxing who lost to him in the quarterfinals of the 1999 National Golden Gloves tournament – isn't necessarily disputing Arum's assessment of the circumstances that have brought him together with his onetime amateur rival. It's just that, well, he remembers multifight series like Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier, Riddick Bowe-Evander Holyfield and Arturo Gatti-Micky Ward. Some of boxing's finest rivalries have been forged over the course of three-act plays.

"I was looking forward to having a trilogy," said Holt, who hails from Paterson, N.J. "There's not a lot of trilogies anymore. Most of the legends of boxing that came before me had trilogies.

"Oh, well, champions adapt and overcome. (Hopkins) wasn't preparing for me, I wasn't preparing for him, but we're both good to go. I'm looking forward to seeing how this all plays out."

So is Hopkins, who is ranked No. 9 at 140 pounds by the WBO and No. 12 by the IBF despite his recent inactivity. He firmly believes December 13 will be his personal Independence Day, when he can cinch a world title belt around his waist and announce himself as something more than a fighter with a recognizable name and superior bloodline.

"This is a shot of a lifetime," Hopkins said. "I'm going to show Kendall something that he ain't never seen. I feel good, man. I feel strong. I'm well-conditioned. I should have no problem making 140. I'm excited.

"I know he's got tricks up his sleeve, but I got tricks up mine, too."

Were Saturday's bout just for the WBO junior welterweight title, it would be significant to both combatants. But Arum is dangling a carrot on a stick to the winner, which in turn could lead to an even larger carrot on a stick.

The scenario imagined by Arum calls for the Holt-Hopkins winner to move on to a unification bout with WBC super lightweight champ Timothy Bradley (23-0, 11 KOs), with the winner of that one advancing to a high-visibility, megabucks showdown with the man widely considered to be the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world today, Manny Pacquiao (48-3-2, 36 KOs), who is

coming off his Dec. 6 eighth-round stoppage of Oscar De La Hoya. Pacquiao, who jumped up from lightweight to welterweight to take on De La Hoya, has indicated his preference for campaigning as a junior welter.

Not that he can even dare to look that far ahead, but Demetrius Hopkins has to be at least peripherally aware that three straight victories at this stage of his career would not only have the effect of allowing him to escape from his uncle's prodigious shadow, but maybe even stamping him as the family's foremost fighter. Wouldn't that be something?

"My uncle and I have had our differences," said the younger Hopkins, recalling a rift earlier this year that led him to leave B-Hop's promotional company, Golden Boy, for Top Rank. "He wanted me to do things his way and I wanted to do things my way.

"But we're all right. We're always going to be family. I have no bad thoughts about Bernard, Richard Schaefer or Golden Boy. They're good people. We couldn't see eye-to-eye on certain things, but that's the way it goes sometimes."

The interaction between Bernard and Demetrius is such that it might make for an interesting psychological case study of family dynamics, particularly when that family is so deeply into boxing and the determination of the designation as alpha male.

Before his first fight with Jermain Taylor on July 16, 2005, Bernard Hopkins was training in Miami Beach and, is his wont, was storytelling for an audience that included a reporter. The morning's topics included how Demetrius, the son of B-Hop's older sister Bernadette, came to become involved in boxing.

"I gave Demetrius his first pair of gloves," Bernard recalled. "Demetrius would cry all the time. I'd tell Bernadette that he'd always be in trouble if he didn't stand up to the tough guys who were giving him a hard time. So I took him around the corner to Mr. (Jazz) Jarrett, right in the basement, and put gloves on him.

"Within a month, nobody was picking on Demetrius anymore. Within a year, he was putting combinations together and winning these little trophies, and he was hooked. It was an accident it happened that way, but, you know, he at least had to learn how to defend himself."

As an amateur boxer and even as a fledgling pro, Demetrius routinely acquiesced to Bernard's wishes. Over time, though, he chafed at being told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. He complied when Bernard directed him to drop Ennis as his trainer and work with Bouie Fisher, who at the time was Bernard's chief second. When Demetrius decided to go back to Ennis, it wasn't exactly an act of rebellion, but it sent a signal that he no longer was that sniveling kid who required his uncle's tough love to help him make his way through life's myriad crises.

As the conflicts between uncle and nephew escalated in frequency and severity, Demetrius made a decision that led him to the crossroads at which he now stands.

"Demetrius was very confused and unhappy," Dunkin said of the fighter's occasionally rocky relationship with his uncle and Golden Boy earlier this year. "He read on the Internet about a (USBA junior welterweight) title fight Golden Boy was going to make for him. Look, Demetrius just wanted to know what was going on. He felt like he didn't have any control over his own career."

Ennis spoke to Dunkin, who agreed to manage Hopkins once his contractual situation was resolved.

"I spoke with Golden Boy, Top Rank and Lou DiBella," Dunkin said. "Top Rank came up with the most money and the best deal.

"Golden Boy could have held him for up to a year, but, to their credit, they didn't want to harm the kid at all."

Arum confirmed that his acquisition of D-Hop was relatively wrangle- and lawyer-free. "We liked Demetrius," Arum said. "We thought he was a good fighter. But we made it clear to him that we wouldn't enter into any discussions or talk to him about signing a promotional agreement until he had terminated his relationship with Golden Boy. We didn't poach him. We have a very good relationship with Golden Boy so fights can happen that people want to see. We don't go after each other's fighters."

Nonetheless, Demetrius stood idle until he was free and clear, contractually. He now believes "Top Rank can take me to the top of the world," and Saturday's showdown with Holt will be the first long stride upward.

For his part, Hopkins doesn't think his 1999 Golden Gloves victory over Holt means much. "We're not boys now. We're men," he said. But he convinced that, boy or man, what he brings to the table is more than Holt will be able to deal with.

"I can adapt to any style," Hopkins said is dismissing any potential problems that might arise from switching opponents on short notice. "Come Saturday, I will be the WBO junior welterweight champion of the world."

Holt, while acknowledging that Hopkins "is a good fighter," isn't ready to concede anything. He appears to regard Demetrius as Hopkins Lite, a poser and wannabe who can never be as good as his uncle, no matter how hard he tries.

"I give him credit. He was the better man that night (in their Golden Gloves matchup)," Holt said. "But that was a long time ago. I'm entering the ring with the belt and I'm going to leave with the belt."