Written by Bernard Fernandez
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The April 28 do-over with Chad Dawson might or might not be one of the more difficult fights for Bernard “The Executioner” to prepare for, but there is little doubt it has placed certain restrictions on Kelly Swanson, Hopkins’ usually harried personal publicist.

In the 47-year-old Hopkins, Swanson and her assistant, Lisa Milner, have boxing’s ultimate Chatty Cathy, a nonstop quote machine that spews opinions and anecdotes like no fighter since

Muhammad Ali was filling reporters' notebooks and tape recorders nearly four decades ago. Hopkins has always responded to even the most innocuous questions with rambling responses that are alternately entertaining and outrageous. Maybe even more so than he busts up opponents in the ring, he filibusters the media during press gatherings.

But in the wake of the Oct. 15 no-decision in his first matchup with Dawson (30-1, 17 KOs) in Los Angeles' Staples Center -- a fight that initially ruled by referee Pat Russell to be a second-round technical-knockout victory for Dawson when Hopkins (52-5-2, 32 KOs) was unable (or unwilling) to continue after injuring his left shoulder upon being picked up and hurled to the canvas -- the WBC and (ital)The Ring(end ital) magazine light heavyweight champion has withdrawn into a self-imposed cocoon of isolation, declining virtually every interview request. He participated in a teleconference yesterday afternoon (Dawson was on earlier) only because his contract obligated him to do so, and his curt demeanor suggested two things. One, B-Hop wasn't enjoying this question-and-answer session even a little, and two, he might not available too often or too long for similar grillings up to and including the night of the HBO-televised fight in Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall.

Make of that what you will. You can be sure that Gary Shaw, Dawson's promoter, does. He regards Hopkins' vow of semi-silence to be an admission of fear, that he faked the shoulder injury to wiggle out of a bout he knew he was destined to lose.

"I just want to say I never thought Hopkins was hurt," Shaw reiterated during the teleconference. "We never heard anything about his rehabbing or anything else. My only fear is that Hopkins will not go through with the entire fight (on April 28), that at some point, when he's taking a beating from Chad, he'll find another way to get out.

"Chad is a much superior fighter. He's younger, stronger, more aggressive and eager, once and for all, to put the legend where he belongs – retired and into the (International) Boxing Hall of Fame."

And what of Hopkins' unusual reticence, or his refusal to go on one of those obligatory press tours with his 29-year-old opponent?

"Hopkins won't even do a real press conference with Chad," Shaw said. "That tells you all you

need to know about this fight."

Shaw also suggested that Hopkins and Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer did everything in their power to avoid Hopkins having to again share a ring with Dawson, and that the only reason he is doing so is because the WBC required that he do so as a condition of retaining his green, bejeweled WBC championship belt.

"They didn't want the (rematch)," Shaw said. "They lobbied against it. The (second) fight was mandated on the floor of the WBC convention. That's why Hopkins is taking it. Without that belt, Hopkins is just an old fighter. He needs that belt to be someone."

An indignant Schaefer reacted to that charge as expected, pointing out that Hopkins "has more belts than people have to hold up their pants. Bernard at 47 doesn't need belts. He could have fought (Beibut) Shumenov for the WBA belt, (Nathan) Cleverly for the WBO belt. This is the fight that Bernard wanted. He never turns down a challenge."

So the war of words continues, with Dawson, Shaw and Dawson's trainer, John Scully, depicting Hopkins as a once-great champion who knows his time has passed and is hesitant, if not exactly afraid, of the beatdown he can expect from "Bad" Chad, and Schaefer offering strong counterpoints in the debate.

"He's beaten pretty much everyone who is anyone in and around his weight class over the last 20 years, from (Oscar) De La Hoya to (Antonio) Tarver to (Felix) Trinidad to Winky (Wright) to (Kelly) Pavlik to (Roy) Jones, and on and on and on," Schaefer said of Hopkins. "Yet there are those are still doubting him! It's amazing. I guess some people never learn."

It was, of course, left to Hopkins to get in the last sound bite. And the words he uttered – defiant, proud, hinting at a dark conspiracy against him by the fight game's powers-that-be – did not sound like something a fearful old man would have hurled at skeptics who, let's face it, too often have made the mistake of writing him off.

If B-Hop is to disappear for a time into another self-imposed media blackout, he made sure his

parting comments repudiated the Dawson/Shaw allegations in the strongest possible terms. He has been written off before against fighters he insists are as good or better than Dawson – Trinidad, Tarver, Pavlik, Wright and others – and exposed them as comparative neophytes unable to cope with his ring genius.

“I will continue to kick the naysayers’ ass,” Hopkins said. “But when I win this fight, they’ll find some excuse to say what Chad Dawson wasn’t.

“When you see me reenact what I did in Oct. 2008 (when he pitched a virtual 12-round shutout at Pavlik, who went off as a 6-1 favorite), but even better, then I’ll think about what I want to do – not what they want me to do.”

The “they” Hopkins refers to are those who want to see him drift away into retirement, either by his choice or in the wake of the type of one-sided drubbing he never has sustained in a 22-year professional career. Of his five defeats, only one – the first pairing with Jones, in 1993 – was on a decision clear enough to be considered controversy-free.

“They want to see me on the ground, like Mike Tyson (vs. Buster Douglas), looking for my mouthpiece,” Hopkins said. “It’s no secret they want to get rid of me. But I ain’t that easy to be gotten rid of.

“People are always going to say something bad about me. `Oh, he only fought small guys.’ I heard that. You hear a lot of stuff. I hear more of it than other guys because I’m still here and still succeeding at 47. (Jean) Pascal tried saying I was on steroids.

“I’m only around because I’m special. I worked hard to be special. So why don’t I get the credit that I deserve? I’m the most underrated fighter to achieve what I have that ever walked on the planet Earth.”

Comment on this article

ali says:

B-Hop ain't no way in hell your beating Chad Dawson you can't get that through your thick a*s head.

amayseng says:

shaw is an idiot and so is dumb chad dawson, who truly is mentally challenged.

no fighter of bernards caliber is scared to fight. and if he didnt want to fight chad he could easily retire with pure respect as the 47 year old lhv champion , or fight for a diff belt.

i like hopkins character, especially this silent one, shaw is not intelligent enough to understand that bernard is pissed off by the disrespect of chad physically lifting and dumping him down in the ring. bernards gift is his care and preparation of his mind and body, and chad injured his body in an illegal and completely disrespectful way, and bernard is gonna make him pay for it.

Radam G says:

SCLA Ali, talking about "thick a$$ head." I think that the pot is calling the skillet black. Holla!

deepwater says:

Gary Shaw is a fat b@st@rd that would sell his mom a full price ticket. "kinda bad "chad would be really bad if he trained in a camp away from his girl and took training a lil more seriously then sparring fat winky wright and the iceman john scully who is a great fighter and person by the way.

Real Talk says:

B-HOP's a bad man, they think they got him in a bad jam. I for one got him executing the plan. He's seen every style in the book an all the looks, worst thing you can do is mistake'em for shook. Dawson better respect the skills, watch what he say and how he moves, Hopkins gon give'em them angles n keep'em confused..... to be continued

Shoulder Roll Defense says:

Hopkins is one of the best fighters to ever lace up a pair of gloves and I don't like the way Chad has disrespected him. Even if he wins, Dawson is classless; Andre Ward is the eventual future

of the Light Heavy Division!