

THE WYLIE PICK: Dawson By Decision..But Don't Count Out Hopkins

Written by Lee Wylie
Tuesday, 24 April 2012 09:24



Bernard Hopkins-Chad Dawson:

**in Atlantic City, on HBO
12 rounds, for Hopkins' lineal light heavyweight title**

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Bernard Hopkins has been here before. As we head into Saturday night's light heavyweight title showdown, the 47 year-old Philadelphia native finds himself in the underdog role yet again. It's not difficult to see why. At 29 years-old, Chad Dawson is eighteen years Bernard's junior - an unbelievable age deficit between two competitors in a world title bout of this magnitude. Not only that, but you can also throw in the fact that Dawson could also be the more skilled fighter. Dawson's athleticism along with his technical skills are what made Floyd Mayweather Jr once declare that Chad Dawson, not Manny Pacquiao, was the best fighter on the planet, pound for pound [during Floyd's exile of course]. At 6 '1" - although he seems taller - and with a 77-inch reach, Dawson possesses the type of physicalities that would be problematic for any light heavyweight, let alone for a light heavyweight like Hopkins who has almost outlasted the twilight of his career. At his absolute apex, Dawson is able to sync all of his talents together, combining his southpaw stance, speed and length, to keep his opponents on the end of his offense by throwing jabs and combinations without putting himself at risk. Should his jab be breeched, he is more than proficient on inside fighting - his lead hand work to the body along with his defense in close are of the highest order.

During the last fight between Hopkins and Dawson, there appeared to be a pattern emerging, despite the bout lasting a little over the first round. From the opening bell, Dawson was the fighter who looked the more assertive. Bernard was backing up early as Dawson, using long strides, stalked Hopkins around the perimeter of the ring. Even though there were not many punches thrown and landed from either fighter, it was Dawson who appeared to be the busier {Hopkins was 11/29 and Dawson was 7/55 in total punches} and it was Dawson who appeared to have gained the upper hand in ring generalship. I was actually amazed at how much bigger Dawson looked next to Bernard, who at 6-1 and with a 75-inch reach, is actually of a similar size to Dawson.

In the ring, not only does Hopkins pride himself on being the superior technician, but he also takes great pride in being the more positive minded fighter. It has to be said, Bernard looked a little pensive by Dawson's demeanor during the opening stages of their first fight. On the other hand, Hopkins, who is a thinking fighter, may have intended on using those early rounds merely to analyse his opponent.

While I think there may have been a pattern emerging during the very early stages of Hopkins' last fight, there is already a definitive pattern that already exists with regards to Bernard Hopkins career as a whole. Every time Bernard has been the heavy underdog - like he is again with Dawson - he has somehow managed to produce a display for the ages. Heading into his bouts with Felix Trinidad, Antonio Tarver, Kelly Pavlik and Jean Pascal, many thought Hopkins was in well over his head. The final outcome? Some of the finest systematic deconstructions of a fighter you are likely to see - courtesy of Bernard Hopkins. That's the thing with Hopkins, there always seems to be the questionable performance - Talyor, Calzaghe, Jones 2 -before the great

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performance. Last time out, Hopkins probably put in his most questionable and controversial performance to date - many claim Hopkins was faking it when he was unable to continue because of a shoulder injury - against Dawson. If history were to repeat itself, we can all anticipate something special from The Executioner this Saturday. After all, Hopkins may be 47, but he is still an elite level fighter.

Hopkins' best asset may well be his ability to take his opponent's best asset away from them. Everything starts with defense for Bernard, which he uses to set up his counters and to smother on the inside. Bernard is also a master at laying traps for his opponent. Using his brilliant sense of distance and timing, he drops his lead hand to draw leads from his opponent - he did this repeatedly against Jean Pascal, setting up his counter right hand. His encyclopedic boxing knowledge and supernatural conditioning, along with his solid fundamentals, have lead to him remaining relevant for far longer than anyone could ever have imagined. There is no doubting Bernard's credentials going into this fight. Chad Dawson maybe the betting favourite going in, but Bernard is not here to merely make up the numbers.

Having said all this, I'm not sure that Hopkins will be able to dominate Dawson like he has with some of his more transparent opponents in the past. Let's take a look at the very fighters who Hopkins has prospered against. Felix Trinidad, Kelly Pavlik and Jean Pascal {Pascal may be more layered than Pavlik and Trinidad, but in reality, he can only fight one way} could be all put in the same category - aggressive, one dimensional punchers who are not able to adapt in the ring. If there is an obvious weapon in an opponent that can be exposed, rest assured, Hopkins will find it and neutralize it. {Hard to imagine now, but all of these one dimensional opponents were the heavy betting favourites against Hopkins.}

Contrast this with the type of fighter that Hopkins has somewhat struggled with; Roy Jones, Winky Wright {Hopkins did struggle with Wright's southpaw angles and defense), Jermain Taylor and Joe Calzaghe. The commonality among those fighters? Mobility, speed and volume. Wright and Calzaghe, like Dawson, are also southpaws. Missing in these fighters repertoire? An obvious offensive tool that could be taken away - Dawson fits perfectly into this, the more versatile category of opponent who Bernard Hopkins has not thrived against.

There are exceptions to the rule of course. Antonio Tarver is one of the better boxers Hopkins has faced, and he, like Dawson, is also a southpaw. However, there is a significant difference between the two southpaws. Against Tarver, Hopkins was able to remain on the outside and fall in with straight, sneaky right hand leads from bell to bell. A look at the punchstats in that fight shows that of 133 landed punches for Hopkins, 123 of those were power shots, namely straight right hand leads. Hopkins didn't need a jab against Tarver [he only landed 7 jabs throughout

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the entire fight]. By staying on the outside, Hopkins could control the pace and distance of the fight, and because Tarver couldn't land his own jab often enough {only 30 jabs landed throughout the whole fight}. Hopkins could afford to focus his entire offense on single power shots - once he took away Tarver's left power hand by moving away from it, the fight was over. Tarver could not adapt.

Dawson on the other hand, is a converted southpaw - his left hand from the southpaw stance has hurt opponents in the past, but his lead hand work {right} may be even more impressive. This is the dilemma that Hopkins faces. The key to fighting a southpaw is knowing which way to move. Against Tarver, the evasive direction was obvious for Hopkins. The conventional way to move against a southpaw, is to move away from the southpaw's left hand, which means an orthodox fighter should move to their left. But I believe Dawson, who hits harder and has more variety with his lead right hand than Tarver, placed doubt in Hopkins' mind early in their last fight because of this. If Hopkins is moving to his left, then he is walking straight onto Dawson's lead right hand, which will be coming from outside Hopkins' line of vision. One other thing, the Hopkins-Tarver fight was back in 2006, Hopkins had a significant hand and foot speed advantage over Tarver in that fight, which is something he will be conceding against Dawson. We must ask ourselves, can Bernard still fight effectively backing up, using his legs for twelve hard rounds anymore? It takes alot more energy backing up for twelve rounds than it does going forward.

Last time out against Dawson, Hopkins appeared to be employing the exact same strategy that was used in the two Jermain Taylor fights - circling out of range, slowing down the pace of the fight before leaping in with his sneaky right hand lead. The problem here though, is if this shot isn't landing for Hopkins, then he runs the risk of being outworked. This is what happened against Jermain Taylor on two separate occasions. While Hopkins was thinking, feinting, moving and positioning himself, looking to land his right hand, Taylor was jabbing, racking up points and winning the fight.

If we take a look at the moment of the incident in the last fight between Hopkins and Dawson, Hopkins ended up on Dawson's back after a missed right hand lead, which was well scouted and slipped by Dawson. It's hard to imagine Bernard coming in with the same naive tactics that he brought into the last fight. Surely Bernard must realize that there isn't much chance of him winning from the outside, throwing infrequently, in a fight that is likely going the distance, against an opponent who will be pressing the attack behind a persistent jab. If Bernard believes this is the key to defending his light heavyweight crown on Saturday, then Dawson will likely be the one leaving with the gold.

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Alternatively, Bernard must try and get inside of the Dawson jab, where he certainly won't be greeted with open arms - Dawson is very good defensively at close quarters. Hopkins has more things going for him at this range against Dawson, then he would from the outside against Dawson - I'm not sure Hopkins can be the busier fighter from the outside, but he can be the busier and better fighter in close. Dawson's workrate and volume must be restricted in order for Bernard to be in with a legitimate chance on the scorecards {can anyone see Bernard stopping Dawson?}. Although it's not what most spectators will wish for, Bernard has to put some sourness into his sweet science. This means the crafty veteran will have to maul, smother and try and rough Dawson up using every trick he knows. Hopkins is very effective at tying an opponent up in close and nailing them with his free hand - illegally so when the official is blindsided. If Dawson retaliates with anger, Hopkins could take advantage as Hopkins is a master of ring psychology, and there have been occasions in the past when Dawson has appeared to be a little disinterested and lethargic - almost as if boredom has set in. Such emotions against Hopkins will surely be made to pay.

Yes, Dawson has tasted defeat before. But in order for Hopkins to utilise the same strategy that Dawson conquerer Jean Pascal used, Hopkins would have to be someone he is not. Jean Pascal had success against Dawson through exploding in with sporadic bursts at great speed and with variation. Pascal was throwing punches in bunches which is something Hopkins hasn't or cannot do. Besides, Dawson was giving the impression that he had Pascal figured out as he was coming on strong late in the fight and seemed to be in with a great chance of scoring a late stoppage.

This really is a tough fight for Bernard to win. Dawson's blend of fast hands, athleticism, solid technical skills, defense and strength seem to be the very attributes that have been Bernard's kryptonite in the past. I am of the belief that Chad Dawson is a pound for pound talent, in his prime, who possesses a style that does not accommodate that of Bernard's. Also worrying for Hopkins, is the fact that during his last two full outings against Jean Pascal, Hopkins, a defensive master, was hit clean and more often than he has ever been hit throughout the rest of his career combined - maybe a significant sign that his advanced years have finally caught up with him?

And yet as I write this, there is still a part of me that thinks Bernard Hopkins may actually pull it off. If he did, then it must surely be regarded as the greatest night of his already legendary hall of fame career - a win here for Hopkins would propel him to brand new heights, in terms of his all time status.

Prediction:

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Dawson, via a close, maybe even split decision, in a fight that mirrors the Hopkins-Taylor fights. Hopkins will probably land the cleaner shots, while Dawson will land more often.

It's hard to look beyond a decision win for Dawson. It's not inconceivable to think that he may hold every single physical and stylistic advantage over his older opponent. However, if anyone can pull off the upset, Bernard Hopkins can. He has after all, been here before.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

Atlantic City, NJ, is known for crazy boxing results. B-Hop is going to get into Super Bad Chad's a\$\$ and show him what time it is. And the old, wise, magical, great and powerful Genie Naazim is going to have B-Hop sipping on a secret batch of genie whup-a-young-man's-arse juice. This juice is going to bring all the kick-a\$\$ outta old B-Hoppy and scare the holy hebejeebeez outta SBC.

SBC is gonna be like a squirrel trying to find a nut, but he also is going to be in the majestic world of the wise old Genie and B-Hop -- The Millennial Mongoose. And they are gonna school SBC and embarrass his butt. Hehehehe! Don't you just love the keep-on-surprising doubters' "threatre of the unexpected." Holla!

deepwater says:

not so bad chad refuses to train seriously. he spars an old time fat winky wright and thinks it good work. he wont leave his area because his woman runs chads show. ole hopkins has one more left in the tank and this will be a win for hopkins.

the Roast says:

Tough one to call. Hopkins cant go forever, nobody can. Dawson is an underachiever. Very talented but not many good results. I'll be rooting for B-Hop to win a good fight. I hope Seth Mitchell looks good too.

brownsugar says:

BHop is going for the maximum mental edge by giving Dawson the silent treatment,...

But Dawson wants this bad,... he's been baiting Bhop for years. Now that Bhop's got his groove back after wins over Pavlik, Jones and Pascal, he's ready to overcome his greatest Light Heavy

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Fear and battle Chad Dawson.

(give him credit for that)

I remember when Bhop wrestled, hit on the break, cuffed , slapped, elbowed, and low blowed Winky Wright over 12 rounds to earn an ugly lack luster victory,... Bhop psyched Winky into playing his mauling game while simultaneously forsaking his best weapons in the process.

By the end of the fight, Winky was grinning with Bhop as if he felt honored to have lost a decision against his Big Brother. (one of the most boring non eventful fights ever)

Dawson's not having any of that.... If he never looks good again for the rest of his career,... you'd better believe, he's be ready for this one. Dawson is read to ROCK!!!!

amayseng says:

expect dawson for the first four rounds to come forward and try to out work and smother the old man with that philosophy changing and dawson going back to his natural retreat and boxing demeanor. dawson has never been a stalker or a tyson run them down and kill them fighter, so he wont last with this game plan for long as you noticed in the first fight the first two rounds he chased and tried to track down bernard to land 4 punches in two rounds, why do you think he was soooo frustrated to go to the double leg takedown? in less than two rounds hopkins had dawson sooo frustrated he picked him up hooking his legs and dumped him....that speaks volumes of dawsons weak mind.

chads mind has always been weak, he has always displayed a lethargic and lazy mindset...he just does not have that killer instinct..you are either born with it or you are not...

chad should win this fight, bernard is 47, he is two years and some change away from 50, 50, freaking 50.

if bernard wins this fight i wont be surprised, but bernard has to get old at some point, right?

deepwater says:

dawson refuses to leave home to get away from distractions during training because his girl wont let him go. so he trains with iceman scully who is a good trainer but he spars out of shape winky wright and 3rd tier sparring partners.? chad wont leave his comfort zone and he will pay the price because hopkins might stink the joint out but he knows how to win or at least make it close without taking a beating.

ali says:

B-Hop talked all that sh*t in the first fight now that he's been in the ring with Chad he has STFU. He refused to do a face off with Max that would have been entertaining as hell. I feel like with the BS that happened in the first fight he should have done everything he could to build up this

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fight but instead he's acting like a bitch.

Radam G says:

B-Hop is going upside SuperBad Chad's noggin like Money May does when Money May is beating his babies' momma. Hehehehe! I just hope that they don't try to put B-Hop and the wise, ole Genie Naazim in a Jersey jail for bytch bashing. Hehehe! Holla!

the Roast says:

That was one of the worst fights I have ever, ever seen. Time to go Bernard. Footwork, holding, fients, more holding, use of the head, clutching, stalling, posing, can only get you so far. I started the fight rooting for B-Hop but when it became apparent very early that Bernard had no intention of fighting, I switched to Dawson. At least Chad tried to make a fight out of it. Pure crap.