

Hopkins Considers Retirement, While Mitchell Edges Up

Written by Bernard Fernandez
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ATLANTIC CITY -- The signs were there for anyone who took the time to notice the deeper meaning of what actually transpired in Boardwalk Hall Saturday night. Change again is in the wind for Golden Boy Promotions, with another iconic figure possibly leaving just as a hot new growth property, flawed but exciting, announced himself to the boxing world.

Thus has it ever been so, and probably always will be as long as fighters fight, fans watch,

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promoters promote and business deals are cut that affect all of the various principals.

Oh, sure, the most obvious beneficiary of a doubleheader televised by HBO World Championship Boxing was former light heavyweight champion Chad Dawson (31-1, 17 KOs), who again rose to the top of everyone's 175-pound ratings by wresting the WBC and *The Ring* championships from the 47-year-old icon, Bernard "The Executioner" Hopkins (52-6-2, 32 KOs), who had held them. By defeating Hopkins via majority decision and possibly sending him into retirement, Dawson at least partially restored the damage done to his laid-back image when he lost to WBC title to Jean Pascal, who in turn surrendered it to B-Hop.

A long, lean southpaw from New Haven, Conn., Dawson, 29, might not be as loquacious as Hopkins or have as extensive a resume, but he reestablished himself as the top guy in the division, at least until further notice. Feel free to get tingly, or not, about his improved circumstances.

Asked if Dawson's victory – he came out on top by 117-111 on the scorecards submitted by judges Richard Flaherty and Steve Weisfeld, but did no better than a 114-114 standoff on judge Luis Rivera's card – had earned him enough fans to finally gain the superstar status he never quite has achieved, "Bad" Chad's promoter, Gary Shaw, acknowledged that has yet to be determined.

"I can't speak to that," Shaw said in response to a question about whether his guy's popularity had just gotten a major spike. "Look, Pernell Whitaker had tons of fans. But in today's day and age, I don't know if Pernell Whitaker could even get on TV. That doesn't mean you can't appreciate his skills. I think Chad Dawson is a very talented fighter. I do believe he picked up some fans tonight, and he'll pick up more as he moves forward."

Added Dawson, whose voice seldom betrays emotion: "I'll fight anybody at 168 or 175. I would prefer not to come out of my comfort zone, which is 175, but I can make 168. I'm just looking for some big fights."

Possibly the biggest moneymaking opportunity for Dawson now is against WBC/WBA super middleweight champion Andre Ward, winner of the Super Six tournament that concluded in December 2011 and earned Ward Fighter of the Year honors from the Boxing Writers

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Association of America, *The Ring* and ESPN.com, among others. It's not Mayweather-Pacquiao, but what is? Fight fans are used to accepting consolation prizes when the big jackpot proves unavailable, as is often the case.

It is reflective of how boxing works that Dawson, even at the moment of his professional redemption, finds himself a less compelling story than the possible end of the Bernard Hopkins saga, not to mention the beginning of a groundswell to anoint former Michigan State linebacker Seth Mitchell as the heavyweight hope America has been desperately searching for since Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield and Riddick Bowe got old and faded away.

Golden Boy Promotions handles the careers of Hopkins and Mitchell, and the outcomes of their respective bouts – Mitchell (25-0-1, 19 KOs), after a shaky first round, hammered fringe contender Chazz “The Gentleman” Witherspoon (30-3, 22 KOs) thereafter to win via third-round stoppage – recalled other nights when one fighter took a long step toward stardom and a more-established stablemate was nudged toward the exit.

“The Klitschkos are willing to face the very best,” Golden Boy president Oscar De La Hoya said of the heavily muscled Mitchell, whose star appears to be in ascendance. “They have their eye on Seth Mitchell.

“We have a plan for Seth Mitchell. We have discussed future opponents. I'll sit down with Eric Gomez (Golden Boy matchmaker) with Richard (Schaefer, CEO). I've thrown out a couple of names of guys we really like. One is Michael Grant, who's 6'7" or 6'8" and is a big, solid heavyweight.”

Neither De La Hoya nor Schaefer mentioned whether they still have a plan for Hopkins, whose marketability might now be such that the seven-figure purses and pay-per-view dates have finally shriveled up. Schaefer had mentioned the possibility of a unification fight for Hopkins against WBO light heavyweight titlist Nathan Cleverly somewhere in the United Kingdom, but that likelihood probably has vanished now that B-Hop, history-maker that he is, no longer has those championship belts to use as bait. The reality could be that Hopkins no longer is the superstar he once was, but is still probably too dangerous for top fighters to consider.

Hopkins himself doesn't appear certain of which side of the fence he'll end up on. “If my swan

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song was sung tonight, I'll say it was great, it was fun," he said. "But I got to look at the whole landscape. I'll talk to Oscar and to Richard, and then I'll decide what I want to do. It all depends on the motivation. If the motivation is (IBF super middleweight champ Lucian) Bute or something significant, I'd have to consider that."

When Hopkins joined Golden Boy in the autumn of 1994, shortly after he knocked out De La Hoya in the ninth round of their middleweight championship bout, he was named president of Golden Boy East, a subsidiary of Golden Boy Promotions. He liked the role of promoter, and in short order GBE had signed such fighters as Rock Allen, Karl Dargan and Demetrius Hopkins, B-Hop's nephew. Monthly shows were staged at the Borgata in Atlantic City.

But Golden Boy East is now an empty vessel, or very nearly so. Rock Allen might never fight again after being involved in a serious automobile accident, and Demetrius Hopkins, who had a falling out with his uncle, is retired. Even newly crowned WBC junior welterweight champ Danny "Swift" Garcia, a Golden Boy fighter and one of Bernard Hopkins' Philadelphia homeboys, has fought mostly out West and under the auspices of Golden Boy proper, not GBE.

So can Hopkins be expected to retain his executive position with the company if he decides he no longer is an active fighter? Other high-profile boxers who had similar positions with Golden Boy, Shane Mosley and Marco Antonio Barrera, have left, which suggests those functions were more figurehead than functional.

Should Hopkins be downgraded as one of Golden Boy's primary assets, the result of advancing age, a low knockout rate and diminishing appeal to his fan base, it makes sense that someone else will have to step to the fore. That person could be Mitchell, who has transferred his dreams of an NFL career to a new vision, of becoming heavyweight champion.

Mitchell is raw, still very much an unfinished product, but he showed heart and resolve, not to mention major power, in overcoming a very shaky first round against Witherspoon. "He hit me hard with the right hand," Mitchell said of the first-round hole in which he found himself. "It was an equilibrium shot. I did the stinky leg a little bit, but I was able to recover.

"I knew that Chazz could box, but I also knew that if he got into a firefight, he'd be open for a lot of shots. When I went back to my corner (after the second round), I was confident I'd finish him

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in the next round. I could see in his eyes that my power was really affecting him.”