Written by Michael Woods
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A pretty fierce debate was waged after Jean Pascal sprung a call for pre-fight drug screening on Bernard Hopkins at their March 28th press conference in Montreal, and Hopkins finally snapped after absorbing the Canadian's verbal abuse, resulting in a shoving match between the men who will fight a sequel to their December clash on May 21.

Some folks gave Pascal props for "getting into Hopkins' head," getting under his skin, making the crafty vet, who is 99% of the time the one doing the under-the-skin-burrowing, lose his cool. I myself gave this round to Pascal, as I didn't recall any press conference skirmish occurring when Hopkins wasn't the ringleader, the one responsible for stirring up the pot to a mad boil.

But after talking to the 46 year old hitter on Tuesday afternoon, I've changed my tune, for two reasons.

First, as Hopkins pointed out, nobody should be carelessly throwing around accusations, or insinuations, as Pascal did ("Take the test! take the test!") in Montreal. Without proof--and I mean true proof, not suspicion, based on what one expects a 46 year old man, or a little Filipino chap who has rocketed up the weight class ladder like a Tomahawk missile, should look like in the squared circle--folks would be best served to keep their suspicions to themselves.

"I think it's a copout for guys to say it without having proof," Hopkins told me. "My company is getting sued for it, that's a matter of public record. You can't say it without having proof to say something. My lawyers know how they'll handle (the Pascal accusation)."

So I stand corrected. Even if I think Pascal did well to get under Hopkins' skin, the method he used was foul, and out of bounds.

In chatting more with Hopkins, my take on the Pascal trash talk episode veered even more. Hopkins told me that he intends to pull a Muhammad Ali, and make "Pascal apologize in the ring" for insinuating that he used banned substances to get an unfair advantage. You might recall Ali took his time against Ernie Terrell in the Astrodome in their Feb. 6, 1967 fight. Terrell in the buildup to the fight had continued to call the Greatest "Clay," though he had changed his name to Muhammad Ali three years before. During the bout, Ali kept yelling, "What's my name?" as he raked the 6-6 underdog with snappy pokes. Yes, it appears that while Pascal might have gotten a momentary charge from causing Hopkins' blood pressure to rise, he may just have handed helped Hopkins an extra dose of motivation as he gets into the heart of his training camp.

"He didn't get me heated, he motivated me," Hopkins told me. "He woke the lion up. He was walking past the lion with piece of steak in his pocket. Red meat.

"I'm already in his head. It's reverse psychology. If he thinks I'm on something maybe he's saying it so he can take something himself. He's thinking, 'Is he or isn't he?' He's in denial about how the first fight went."

I mentioned that I've been surprised to hear Pascal defend his outing, that he didn't seem to be questioning his strategy in the first fight, and admitted that if I were a betting man, I'd be leaning that much harder towards Bernard in the rematch, because I need to hear Pascal at least consider that his plan went awry in the middle of the bout. In my inexpert opinion, I told Hopkins that it seems wise to me if Pascal tried to adopt a volume strategy in the rematch, make the older man work his tail off, and hope he acts his age. "If he fights like Calzaghe did, Pascal will get tired in fifth round and get knocked out," Hopkins answered. "He's muscled, built up. His muscles get depleted later in the fight. If I keep pace with you and you do run out of gas, I will beat you down, I will methodically beat you down and take your heart away."

As I told Hopkins, I believe. I will never again predict against him, not even if he decides he wants to test a Klitschko at age 50.

Finally, congrats go out to Bernard and his missus. She is pregnant, and due May 5.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

B-Hop will get more sweat from his upcoming child, than he will get from Pascal. Pascal should have not ever given B-Hop a rematch. Pride! It will take you to doom on a long RIDE! I can see B-Hop winning again EASIER! Holla!

amayseng says:

hopkins is right throwing the steroid card at athletes who have no history or proof of cheating is one of the lowest and classless of all accusations in all of sports...especially in this day and age where MLB got smashed from society for using hgh and where the nfl has had numerous users get suspended the last few years....for hopkins though, a perfectionist of health, diet and discipline, it is the most disrespectful accusation one could place upon bernard.....bernard will come through with even more fire and desire...be prepared to see the oldest champion in boxing history come the rematch...pascal is average at best when it comes to pure boxing skill and ring IQ

the Roast says:

I'm going with 'Nard in this fight. Pascal could not believe that Hopkins could get up from those two knockdowns and dominate the fight like he did. Pascal is speedy but reluctant to get in there and mix it up. Same thing with the Dawson fight. Yes Pascal won it but Dawson was the one coming on at the end. Hopkins by UD.

brownsugar says:

it's got me guessing... can't call it... so Im gonna have to watch.

Joe says:

I'd like to see the Executioner pull it off but the youngster will bring it this time and win a uninamimous decision - especially at home.

FighterforJC says:

Pascal should apologize to Bhop in the ring--on the condition that Bhop apologizes to all boxing fans for all the crapfest he's been putting on as of late.