

D-Hop Still Fighting Way Out of Uncle Bernard's Shadow

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Friday, 16 November 2012 09:39



Four years after an unsuccessful title shot against Holt (left), Demetrius craves another shot. His uncle can help set the table, but D-Hop needs to get cookin' to secure the opportunity. (Hogan)

It is one of those perplexing questions that does not have one absolutely correct answer. Does being the relative of a famous person help or hinder one's individual development? Is it better to

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bask in another's reflected glory, or to try to make your own mark in the world?

For comebacking junior middleweight Demetrius "The Gladiator" Hopkins, his response to the complexities posed by his special but hardly unique circumstances has been to sample bits from both Column A and Column B. For the moment, he again has cast his lot with his Hall of Fame-bound uncle, Bernard "The Executioner" Hopkins, whose tough-love approach to his nephew's boxing career has occasionally been the source of friction between the two.

"I'm OK with Bernard," Demetrius said. "I respect and appreciate what he's accomplished, and what he's trying to do to get me back into a position where I can fight for a world championship. I'm a Hopkins; nothing can change that. I'm proud to be a Hopkins. But I'm older, and I've learned from some of the things that have happened in the past. It's time for me to really establish my own identity as a fighter, my own legacy."

The younger Hopkins, who once was the IBF's second-ranked junior welterweight contender, is now 32 and again bidding to regain a measure of relevance at a higher weight, albeit with somewhat lowered expectations. D-Hop (31-2-1, 11 KOs) takes on 36-year-old journeyman Keenan Collins (14-7-3, 9 KOs), of York, Pa., in a non-televised eight-rounder Saturday night in Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall, on the undercard of an HBO World Championship Boxing doubleheader headlined by the matchup of WBC lightweight champion Antonio DeMarco (28-2-1, 21 KOs) and Adrien Broner (24-0, 20 KOs). The co-feature pits heavyweights Seth Mitchell (24-0, 20 KOs) and Johnathon Banks (28-1-1, 18 KOs) for Mitchell's NABO title as well as the vacant WBC International belt.

The card is being staged by D-Hop's once and perhaps future promotional company, Golden Boy, in conjunction with R&R Promotions and Gary Shaw Productions. And if you think that Bernard Hopkins' position as a Golden Boy executive is mostly responsible for Demetrius getting what is tantamount to another tryout for a regular gig with GBP, you'd be correct.

"There's a lot of people that gave me second chances," Bernard said of Demetrius' second bid to become part of the Golden Boy stable, the first being sandwiched between stints with Duva Boxing and Main Events. "There are people that gave me third, fourth and fifth chances. You can't walk around with the cancer of bitterness."

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“Boxing is open to redemption and forgiveness. Haven’t I preached that? Haven’t I *lived* that? I got Demetrius on board after five years of not being under Golden Boy’s banner, although he’s not there yet.”

Demetrius’ former manager, Cameron Dunkin, said he believes D-Hop – who lost a split decision to then-WBO junior welterweight champ Kendall Holt on Dec. 13, 2008, in what has been his only shot to date at a world title – has retained enough of his skills to mount another bid at serious contention. But much depends, Dunkin said, on whether Demetrius exhibits the sort of personal and professional discipline for which his uncle is renowned, and which the nephew has too often lacked.

“I got Demetrius a pretty big signing bonus (with Top Rank),” Dunkin recalled. “One fight we scheduled for him, when he got there he was, I don’t know, maybe eight or nine pounds overweight. The fight was canceled and we had to pay the opponent something like \$12,000. So things started off kind of rough.

“But he still got that title fight with Holt. After that, though, it never really got going again. It wasn’t all Demetrius’ fault; things just never fell into place like we all thought they should have. You have to remember, though, that he took the Holt fight on short notice. He had to drop a lot of weight fast. Who knows? If he had beaten Holt, this might be a completely different conversation.”

Dunkin’s exasperation with Demetrius owed not only to the fighter’s failure to fully capitalize on his obvious talent, but with out-of-the-ring issues, one of which was his 2009 arrest on a warrant for an outstanding debt for child support.

“Let’s face it, if he had gone with Bernard from the beginning, I don’t think he ever would have come to me,” Dunkin said. “He and Bernard weren’t getting along and he needed someone to try to move him and get him fights.

“Being Bernard’s nephew, I think, was a benefit to Demetrius in a lot of ways. It separated him from the pack a little bit. But Demetrius got caught up in it at times. He thought that having the Hopkins name should have helped him more than it did, but that doesn’t get it done. At some point, you have to show you can do it all by yourself.

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“Which is not to say he couldn’t have gotten it done then, or can’t get it done now. You see guys who are shot at 25 or 26. Bernard is nearly 50 and he isn’t shot. Boxing is a sport where one size doesn’t fit all. Demetrius is only 32. He has so much ability. I brought him out here (to Las Vegas) to camp and he sparred with one of my middleweights, who’s undefeated now. Demetrius just played with him. People who saw that session almost couldn’t believe how good he was. If he really dedicates himself now, I definitely think he can win a world championship.”

Not that total dedication to their craft is necessarily a family trait shared by both fighting Hopkinses.

“I remember Bozy (D-Hop’s former trainer, Derek “Bozy” Ennis) telling him, “You can say what you want about your uncle, but Bernard takes care of himself. He trains, he’s dedicated, he’s a true professional prizefighter,”” Dunkin said. “Bernard lives like that life 365 days a year. There aren’t a lot of those guys around.”

Bernard Hopkins’ adherence to a strict code of conduct, one he constantly tried to impose upon Demetrius, the son of his older sister, Bernadette, at various times spurred the nephew push himself harder. But it also frequently raised the kid’s hackles.

“I gave Demetrius his first pair of gloves,” Bernard said before his 2005 first bout with Jermain Taylor. “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 the 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 he got older, Demetrius sought to assert his independence from Bernard. Upon withdrawing from Temple University in 2000, he signed his first promotional contract with Dino Duva, against Bernard’s advice, and he only temporarily was trained by Bernard’s longtime chief second,

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Bouie Fisher (now deceased), preferring to return to Ennis. (Demetrius is now trained by Danny Davis.) The two also squabbled about other things, raising an already high tension level.

“There is a lot of pressure,” Demetrius said in June 2003. “People always want to compare me to my uncle. It’s like I can’t ever have a bad day or somebody will say, ‘You’re not as good as Bernard.’”

Nor were unflattering comparisons of his ring achievements in comparison to Bernard’s the only source of irritation for Demetrius.

“My uncle and me have our differences,” he said in 2008. “It’s not going to work out between me and him. The man kicked me out of my apartment. He kicked me, my son and my fiancée out.

“We don’t get along. It’s been like that for a while. It’s a shame. He’s got to learn how to talk to people and respect people.”

But time and circumstances, if not healing all wounds, at least provide grounds for uneasy truces. Besides, maybe the old saying really is true that blood is thicker than water.

Demetrius admittedly has much ground to make up. He fought just once in 2011, a 10-round, unanimous-decision loss to Brad Solomon, and once this year, an eight-round, unanimous decision over Doel Carrasquillo in Costa Mesa, Calif., with Bernard at ringside. An impressive showing against Collins could serve the purpose of reminding fight fans that he still is out there, and maybe as a potential factor in his new weight class.

“Demetrius understands that he represents not only himself in the ring, but the legacy of the Hopkins family,” Bernard said in 2005, a fact of life that neither man is apparently unable to overlook even if they wanted to.

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Radam G says:

Now that is how the game of life and the life of the whup@\$\$ game go. You have a hook up to get a look up for the book up. Not bullsyet wishing and hoping from some magical, make-believe' give-me-an-opportunity nook.

Cyberspace is full of wananbe promoters and huffin' and puffin' bullsyetters. Holla!