

## Chessmaster Hopkins Talks Art of War & KO Craving, in NYC

Written by Michael Woods

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The old man, and I write that, truly, with the utmost respect, had the room in his thrall, but none more than the boxers who joined him on the stage at BB Kings in NYC, during a Wednesday presser to hype a Saturday Golden Boy card at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, NJ.

As Bernard Hopkins waxed, in something of the same manner in which he fights, flurrying, backing off, pausing, clinching, throwing the odd butt, the young 'uns on the dais, including WBO middleweight champion Peter Quillin--who defends versus Philly's Gabriel Rosado--and heavyweight hopeful Deontay Wilder, who is taking part in what figures to be a stay-busy bout against Ohioan Nicolai Firtha--fixed their eyes on him.

Nobody fiddled with their phone, as Hopkins (*seen above in Tom Casino-Showtime photo*) talked about how too few people respect the brand of pugilistic mastery he's still capable of, a scant three months before he turns 49. He urged the "kids" to learn "chess" ASAP, because your brain cells will thank you later for not settling for being a master at checkers.

"Stick to the art," he said, in closing, after 20 minutes of oratorical sagacity.

The reverence for tradefests, Hopkins said during his time at the mic, could well be blamed on the emergence of UFC, of mixed martial arts, with customers now seeming to crave rock 'em sock punchouts more so than exhibitions of sweet science. Sugar Ray Leonard and even Sugar Ray Robinson wouldn't be so acclaimed and would be dismissed as "boring," he maintained, tossed aside for not being "TV friendly."

Was Hopkins psyching himself up for a test against a B- (C plus?) level challenger, winding himself up by seeing legions of villains chomping at the bit to take him down, when, in actually,

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in most circles he is widely regarded as a most impressive specimen? I have to think he knows that Ray Robinson loved to rip shots, and Leonard had a superior finishing instinct and a knack for flurrying with a blend of speed and savagery that I'm pretty sure would resonate today... Impossible to say, and I wasn't inclined to question Hopkins' methods. He deserves respect for whatever means he employs to stay in such stellar shape, and compete on the highest tier with men young enough to be his son.

Hopkins' parable with the moral of the story being that it is wiser for the wolf to approach a pack of sheep slowly, with patience, rather than surging forward for a quick snack drew appreciative guffaws from the whole room. I suspect also that a couple of the boxers present will be clicking on Amazon to order Hopkins' guidebook, Sun Tszuyu's "The Art of War," which he touted.

"Supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting," is a favorite nugget from that classic. But Hopkins, I suspect, has seen enough of Murat on tape to know that he needn't waste energy on starting a dismantling process before he gets into the ring in AC, so he instead proved other points. Another hint, maybe, that he sees Murat as a hobbled sheep is that he noted that he's enmired in a KO drought. His last stoppage came back against Oscar De La Hoya. 2007, was that, he wondered? 2004, someone yelled, causing Hopkins to chuckle ruefully. Maybe, he implied, he'd look to close the show before round 12 against Murat, and break that streak. "So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong, and strike at what is weak," Tszuyu wrote, without Murat in mind. My prediction: Hopkins breaks the streak and stops Murat in round ten.

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