

Hopkins: "Now The Light Heavyweight Division Has Life"

Written by Kelsey McCarson
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"It's very hard to discourage me to not be motivated," said Bernard Hopkins, the soon-to-be 49 year old master pugilist. "I dust my pants off, wipe my elbows and keep going. I understand that any time I have an opportunity to breathe and make another go at it -- at anything, whatever it is -- that I have a chance to make a wrong right."

Hopkins faces Karo Murat in a 12-round bout for Hopkins' IBF light heavyweight title belt on Saturday night. The Showtime telecast begins live at 9 p.m. ET.

Hopkins said he believes his bout with Murat will lead to bigger and better things for his campaign in the light heavyweight division.

"You might not have read this quote," said Hopkins. "But I said something yesterday that had even most reporters muffled. I said that saying Bernard Hopkins is getting old. I got some laughs out of it because this is the only sport that if you're on the top level and you're doing what you're doing, which I am, that they will still say why don't you retire? If I was in basketball or any other sport, they would be praising me if I was doing this, especially doing it legally. And this is crazy: boxing is sport that likes to dictate what they want to give to the consumers."

Hopkins believes he has even more to accomplish in his already impressive career. One of the

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greatest middleweights who has ever laced up the gloves, Hopkins has enjoyed incredible success since he turned 40 years old. He's won both the lineal as well as other versions of the light heavyweight title, and he's beaten a litany of great fighters along the way.

At 48, Hopkins became the oldest fighter to ever win a major boxing title when he defeated Tavoris Cloud for the IBF title in March of 2013. It was the second time he achieved such a feat. Hopkins first set the record when he defeated Jean Pascal in 2011 at age 46 for the WBC, IBO and *Ring Magazine* light heavyweight titles.

Hopkins said he'll continue to fight and prove his critics wrong.

"I'm putting up a hell of a fight in my own right to show that they might be right about 99.9% of the people that they are dictating to as dictators, but I'm not going to be the one that they do that to. And let me show you more than I can tell you."

When asked of his bout against the relatively lackluster opponent (Hopkins has been in with the Felix Trinidads and Roy Jones, Jr.'s of the world), Hopkins said it all came down to one thing: business.

"It was a business decision I had to make. I won the belt in March of this year. I inherited Cloud's mandatory defense. That was part of the deal. The IBF gave me the opportunity to fight for the championship only with the agreement that I'd fight the mandatory right away."

Hopkins' bout against Murat was originally scheduled to take place in July at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn. However, the fight was called off in June when Murat was denied a visa by the United States.

Still, Hopkins said he had to stick with the Murat bout afterwards to ensure he had a better seat at the negotiating table with the likes of WBO titlist Sergey Kovalev and lineal champion Adonis Stevenson.

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"Okay, the [Tavoris Cloud] fight took place. I won. I got the mandatory. It had to happen in 90 days. I had a choice to make. Either go to England and fight Nathan Cleverly, which I think is totally absurd. Why would I go to England and fight Cleverly unless there was just so much money on the table that I'd be a fool as a business man not to take it? And there wasn't. So I had a choice to give up a bird in the hand, the IBF title, and go to England and fight an Englishman for the WBO title. I weighed the options, the pros and cons. I kept the IBF title instead of risking going to England and fighting Cleverly and getting robbed."

Ever the strategist, Hopkins said the risk of fighting Cleverly on the road was too great for such little benefit.

"I look at it like this. I haven't knocked anyone out since Oscar De La Hoya in 2004. If I go to England and get robbed or something happens, then I have no title. So what I said is that I'm going to fulfill my obligation."

Hopkins praised Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer for moving quickly on getting the Murat fight signed, sealed and delivered. There was no benefit, he said, to ditching the IBF belt for a chance at the WBO trinket.

"I'd rather fight the mandatory."

Hopkins likes what he has seen happen in the division since. In June, Adonis Stevenson knocked out Chad Dawson in Round 1 to become lineal champion and put his stamp on the 175-pound division. Two months later, Sergey Kovalev destroyed Nathan Cleverly in 4 rounds for the WBO belt. Hopkins believes his strategy of fighting the IBF mandatory defense, Murat, has now paid off with potential opportunities against top up-and-comers.

"Now Adonis Stevenson has knocked out Chad Dawson. Sergey Kovalev has made a name for himself. And now the light heavyweight division has life. Tell me...did I make the right decision?"

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teaser says:

Bernard is like leader of the pack ...getting long in tooth but seeing these younger relatively inexperienced challengers as an opportunity ...none of them have his pedigree and he might just be able to pull off becoming the undisputed light heavyweight champand or a superfight against Dawson