

Hopkins, Taylor—age vs. youth in title fight

Bernard Hopkins, the current holder of all the middleweight championship boxing belts, stated earlier this week that challenger Jermain Taylor had better be prepared for a lesson in the art of self-defense when they meet at the MGM Garden Arena on Saturday.

Already in tip-top condition before the weigh-in Hopkins, who was once called the "Executioner" early in his career, put on an exhibition for the media with a towel, "It will be the matador and the bull... First he's over here, then he is over there," he mimicked. Hopkins was the matador and Taylor, 26, the bull.

After handily defeating "Golden Boy" Oscar De La Hoya last year with a punch to the solar plexus, the 40-year-old champion told the media this was definitely his final year as a professional boxer.

Taylor, a bronze medalist at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games had been primed as the heir to Hopkins' throne when he hung up his gloves. But rather than rise up through the ranks against others like Felix Sturm and Howard Eastman, Taylor's advisers wanted to go straight to the top — Hopkins.

Hopkins, who also promotes bouts under Golden Boy Productions as De La Hoya's partner, said he understood why the Taylor camp wanted the two to meet.

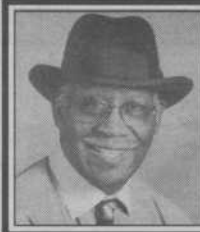
"They will be receiving \$1.8 million, and that is a lot of money for a young man who is from Arkansas," Hopkins said. "I'm not in it for the money. I have had a Hall of Fame career, and I think I am currently the best fighter, pound for pound, at this time."

Hopkins said he will not only win the bout, he doesn't expect it to go the whole 12 rounds. "Be sure to bet it won't go 12 rounds."

In a town where there have been at least two matches already that have been judged as Fights of the Year, there are a few experts who think this bout between the old man and the young man could be another thrilling contest.

The defending IBF, WBC, WBA, WBO champion Hopkins said he has cleaned his division from top to bottom, and after he finishes with Taylor, he is looking to take on Antonio Tarver, the current light-heavyweight champion.

"After all, I knocked out the other champion, Glenn



SPORTS PACE

By Huel Washington

Johnson; so, a fight between me and Tarver would be a good fight for boxing fans," he said.

Besides being a boxer, Taylor has also become newsworthy because of his wife Erica, who played basketball at Louisiana Tech last winter. She returned to sports after having a baby and is now playing in the WNBA.

The young couple will have plenty of support from their home state, Arkansas, because there haven't ever been any prominent fighters from the state. More than 500 supporters are expected to come to Las Vegas for the battle on Saturday.

"We are definitely different," said Hopkins, "and you will see that in the ring. I like hip-hop, R&B, and jazz. Jermain likes country music."

Hopkins has held the title 10 years and said he will give it up when he wants to and that will not be this weekend.

"I have had as many title defenses as he has had fights," Hopkins said. "It won't go 12."

Taylor said that's right, but claims he will be the "New Middleweight champion" when the verdict is announced."

May We Have Your Attention: Women

Athletes Make History
If you failed to see the Los Angeles Sparks Lisa Leslie's dunk for the West's final points in last week's WNBA All-Star Game at Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Conn., then you missed the most historic basketball play of the century.

After taking an inbounds pass in the last 17 seconds, with the West up 120-99, Leslie could have bounced out the remaining seconds, but the East players cleared a way to the basket and the Sparks center dribbled in and accented her team's sixth straight victory over their opponents with the first dunk in a women's professional All-Star game.

The play would have been more emphatic if Leslie's hands had been the size of LeBron James' or Carmelo Anthony's, because to really dunk the ball, the athlete has to be able to grip the ball as well as leap up.

Earlier in the game, which the West dominated, Deanna

Norman, a 6-foot guard from the East's Detroit Shock, twice attempted a dunk on breakaways, but her hands slipped, and she just failed to make the necessary height needed to throw the ball down in the basket. Leslie, at 6 feet 5 inches, had the

height to do it on the final play.

Just recently back in her own team's starting lineup, Leslie, wasn't at full strength, but the raucous crowd on its feet cheered her on. Nothing beats a try but a failure; so she tried, and made history. Leslie, who several seasons ago became the first woman to dunk the ball in a regulation game, now adds the historic All-Star dunk to her legend.

Leslie is a fine example of the determination to compete

which the female athletes are displaying to the sports world. A graduate from the University of Southern California, Leslie, and Ruth Riley, from Notre Dame now with the Shock, same height, they were the main reasons the United States 2004 women's team went undefeated in last year's Athens Olympic Games. They got the rebounds.

While being added to Summer Saunders' plays of the century, the former All-Star MVP, who was injured

early in the season, was not voted the starting center. Last week's MVP was Sheryl Swoopes, a Houston Comet, also a 34-year-old Texas Tech graduate. She hasn't let motherhood or injuries disrupt her game or enthusiasm. She finished with 15 points, four rebounds and two assists.

The 13 team hybrid of the WNBA and the ABL (American Basketball League) is the leader in emphasizing the athletic abilities of today's (See Sports Pace, Page 15)

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