

Fight

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by doing little early and giving away the first half of the fight.

He came on strong in the late rounds, but Taylor had enough in the 11th round to win it on all three scorecards, cementing a win that allowed him to remain unbeaten and keep the titles he won from Hopkins the first time around.

"I give nothing but respect to Bernard Hopkins. He fought very well tonight and he has proven that he is a

tough fighter and a true champion," Taylor said. "But right now, I am the champion and I feel like I am the champion. I knew I was going to win and I thought I won the fight."

Taylor said he learned a lesson from the first fight and he didn't want to waste a lot of energy chasing Hopkins around in the early rounds. In a battle of counter-punchers, he did just enough to hold Hopkins off in the later rounds to get the nod from all of the judges.

Both fighters landed about the same amount of punches, but Taylor may have won the fight by pressing the action in the final seconds of each round.

"I've still got a lot to learn, but I did win it," Taylor said. "The man is a clever fighter. It's hard to hit him. You've got to pull all the tricks out just to hit him."

While Hopkins contemplates retirement, the future is bright for the 27-year-old Taylor, who is now undefeated in 25 fights. He's

hugely popular in his home state of Arkansas, and promoter Lou DiBella says he will probably make his next title defense in front of the home fans.

Taylor looked comfortable as a champion in the rematch, unlike the first fight when he admitted he was

awed by the circumstances and by his opponent. Though the fight was close, he never lost command on the ring as he had in the first fight when Hopkins landed big shots in the final rounds.

"I think I showed that I am a true champion, and my hard work paid off," Taylor said.

Title

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Texas won last season's Rose Bowl with quarterback Vince Young leading the way. As he accepted the MVP trophy he declared that the Longhorns would be back, and he came through on his promise with a brilliant season.

"The problem is (the Longhorns) have a lot of other players that play really well, too," Carroll said.

USC and Texas, two of the sport's most storied programs, have played four times but not since 1967. The Trojans are 4-0 against UT.

Bowden (359 victories) and Paterno (353) have combined for 712 career victories, ranking first and second in Division I-A. They've coached against each other seven times, but only once since Bowden has been at Florida State. The Seminoles beat the Nittany Lions 24-17 in the 1990 Blockbuster Bowl.

When Big Ten champion Penn State (10-1) and Atlantic Coast Conference champ

Florida State (8-4) face off in the Orange Bowl, Paterno will be 79. Bowden will be 76.

"I hope it doesn't come down to where it's Bobby Bowden and Joe Paterno because he can't run and I run slower," Paterno said.

In his rookie season as Notre Dame coach, Weis has the Fighting Irish (9-2) in the BCS for the first time since they lost the 2001 Fiesta Bowl 41-9 to Oregon State. They automatically qualified for a spot by finishing sixth in the BCS standings.

"I think it's a great tribute to our coaching staff and our players that they were able to turn it around that fast," Weis said.

While some complain that Notre Dame has bulked up this season on a weak schedule and gets too much credit for a 34-31 loss to USC, the Fighting Irish are college football's top drawing card.

Ohio State (9-2) out of the Big Ten was assured of an at-large bid by finishing fourth in the final standings released

Sunday.

That left no room for Oregon, which had a better record than both the Buckeyes and Irish and lost only to USC.

"I didn't quite understand the Notre Dame deal. But obviously I have not been a student of the BCS," said Oregon coach Mike Bellotti, whose Ducks will play in the Holiday Bowl.

Last season, California was 10-1 but got bumped out of the Rose Bowl by Texas, a slight that caused an outcry from the Pac-10 and elsewhere.

The Ducks won't get as much sympathy this season.

And for once the BCS gets to gloat.

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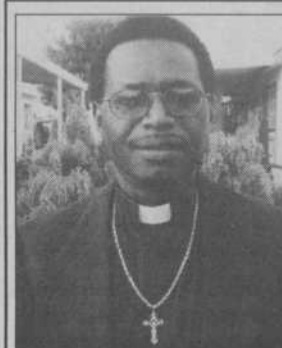
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