

It's finally here. Kelly Pavlik versus Jermain Taylor. This should be an incredible fight. Two unbeaten American superstars, fighting for one of the biggest prizes in boxing - the middleweight championship. Pavlik, a product of Youngstown, is 31-0 with 28 KO's, and is coming off a complete and total dismantling of the heavily favored Edison Miranda on the undercard of Taylor's last fight. Jermain tried to dodge this fight, and he couldn't. Tomorrow, Kelly gets his shot.



I cannot wait for this fight.

Two unbeaten American superstars, fighting for one of the biggest prizes in boxing - the middleweight championship. Kelly Pavlik versus Jermain Taylor.

It's as excited as I've been for a fight in a while. At least since Lennox Lewis dismantled Mike Tyson. It's as excited as I've been for a non-heavyweight fight since Hagler-Leonard.

I think Pavlik is going to win, and not just because I started following his career

through the dismantling of Bronco McKart, Jose Luis Zertuche, and Edison Miranda in his last three fights, becoming a big fan of his in the process. Pavlik is the better fighter in my view. As things stand right now, from what I've seen of Kelly, and with him in his prime at age 25, motivated as any fighter I've seen ... I don't see anyone out there who can beat this kid, including the heavily hyped Taylor.

It's not going to be easy though. Taylor is a talent. And he has the best trainer in boxing, Manny Steward. I was a little confused when I saw the cavalcade of smack talk coming from Steward and the Taylor Camp. These guys aren't idiots. They must feel that their continued talk of how overmatched they feel Kelly is may enter his head if their man Taylor is able to get to him early. They want Kelly to start to get doubts if he gets hurt early on.

They don't know Kelly Pavlik.

Not that I do. I've watched all the specials on him though. I've read every word he's muttered to the press over the last couple years. This is one of those kids that uses every possible thing to fuel his motivation and desire. He's kept his mouth shut while Steward and Taylor have done nothing but drone on and on about how out of his league Kelly is going to be in this fight. Kelly also bit his tongue before the Edison Miranda scrap, a fight he was a big underdog in ... and amid similar talk from the opposing camp. He then went on to take Miranda apart at the seams, shocking most of the boxing world in the process.

Pavlik is a bad match-up for Taylor in my view. In Taylor's last five fights, he's gone the distance in all of them, showing questionable power. He's gotten into trouble by dropping his left hand. He can't do this against Kelly, who has a ferocious right hand that's spelled doom for his last three opponents. Also, Taylor has gotten into a bad habit of backpedaling in his last five fights, and he can't do this either against Kelly, who just presses the action from bell to bell, wearing you out with a variety of different punches from a number of different angles. Taylor also has struggled to get down to middleweight, and insisted that a rematch

clause at super middleweight (168 lbs.) be written into the contract should he lose, proof positive that he's uneasy fighting at 160 lbs.

Pavlik reminds me of another middleweight fighter I grew up watching as a kid. Tommy "The Hit Man" Hearn's. Like Hearn's, Pavlik is tall (6'3), slender, throws a ton of punches from different angles, and has underestimated power. Both fighters don't look like they're hitting their opponents especially hard. Until they're staring up at the ceiling from the canvas in the 7<sup>th</sup> round, with a face that looks like it's been smashed with a sledge hammer.

These are some of the reasons Taylor did not want this fight, and was forced into taking it. All his tough talk aside, Taylor was demanded to fight Pavlik by the sanctioning bodies and cable networks, who refused to televise another fight of his until he took this one. He tried to get out of it. He couldn't.

If Pavlik wins this fight, he has an opportunity to rally this region behind a fighter with a force last seen 25 years ago when fellow Youngstown native Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini burst on the scene in the early 80's by winning the lightweight title with a win over Arturo Frias. Pavlik's promoter, Bob Arum, has mentioned that if Kelly were to win this fight, that he is interested in defending the title here in the Midwest, potentially in Cleveland or Columbus. Ohio State head football coach Jim Tressel, a Pavlik fan, has said publicly that he is insisting on Kelly making his first title defense in the Horseshoe, in front of a throng of fans.

Local fans aside, Pavlik is the type of fighter that has a chance to really help boxing recoup some of the fans they've lost to the UFC should he go on to attain and then successfully defend the middleweight title. He's young, exciting, humble, and is a quality human being. The middleweight divisions are loaded with quality fighters right now, and Saturday's fight could really be the beginning of the creation of a large national following for Pavlik, who is about as easy to like as any athlete I've followed over the last couple decades.

Let's get it done Saturday night Kelly. Cleveland will be pulling for 'ya.