

# The Art of War—Rodriguez and Hackett Explode!

The Mouthpiece

La Pelea del Año

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By: **George Hanson Jr., Esq.**

Date: Friday, July 29, 2011

Venue: The Asylum Arena, Philadelphia, PA

Promoter: Andre Kut, KEA Boxing Promotions ([www.kea-boxing.com](http://www.kea-boxing.com))

Matchmaker: Renee Aiken

Ring Announcer: Henry Hascup

Referees: Hurley McCall & Gary Rosato

Photos: [www.christoneyphotography.com](http://www.christoneyphotography.com)



Greg Hackett ready for war!

**Chapter One** – Laying Plans: It would be reasonable to assume that Greg “Hot Shot” Hackett read *The Art of War*—the ancient Chinese military treatise, devoted to strategies and tactics, by Sun Tzu, a high ranking general in the late sixth century BC. Hackett is somewhat of a boxing savant whom history tricked and delivered 100 years late, transporting him to reality in 1986 instead of 1886. There’s no doubt he should have been riding shotgun with heavyweight champion Jack Johnson and middleweight champion Stanley Ketchel as they barnstormed and wildcatted throughout the early 1900s. At Tuesday’s press conference Hackett began laying his plans to defeat Juan “The Beast” Rodriguez by questioning the legitimacy of his boxing dossier. Glib, jovial and brutally honest, Hackett intimated that Rodriguez had been fed a steady diet of

handpicked opponents from the pugilistic graveyards—bowling pins with gloves that fell with the slightest pressure. None of Rodriguez’s six opponents had a winning record and in totality were dismal: 6 wins – 17 losses – 4 draws – 4 kos. Hackett, to his credit had faced 10 fighters, three of them undefeated, with a combined slate of 29 wins – 11 losses – 0 draws – 18 kos. Equally important, the majority of these fights were contested at the middleweight and super-middleweight limits.

Rodriguez (6 wins – 0 losses – 0 draws – 3 kos) of Union City, New Jersey is the first welterweight that the Philadelphian Hackett (2 wins – 8 losses – 0 draws – 0 kos) would be facing. Giving Hackett a microphone at a press conference is like playing rap music to deter dancing. It was show time and he was going to perform as he went on to make a few promises to Rodriguez that he was confident would be fulfilled come Friday night. Sitting at the dais next to his boisterous rival, Rodriguez, cool as Johnny Cochran during closing arguments of the Simpson trial, flashed a wry smile, his countenance in sync with his persona. Call it gamesmanship or strategy, but one had to believe that Hackett’s revelation weighed a tad bit on Rodriguez’s psyche. It is one thing to be calm, but you have to reach another stratosphere of iciness not to be affected. Rodriguez’s moniker was “The Beast” not “Iceberg Slim.”

**Chapter Two** – Waging War: The crowd gathered on their feet as Hackett made his way to the ring decked out in a black mask with the words “Art of War” emblazoned on the front, his eyes eerily peering were slits of cold blooded purpose. Rodriguez made his entrance with much fanfare as his fans, including his pregnant wife, due any day now, made their presence felt in the City of Brotherly Love cheering passionately as though President Obama had just said “Yes we can!”



Rodriguez (L.) landing the straight left.

Referee Rosato gave the instructions and the fighters retreated to their respective corners anxiously awaiting the bell like Al Gore hanging on for the results of the 2000 Florida recount. The gong sounded and Hackett, dome shaven clean glistening like it had been waxed and spit-shined—looking like a miniature version of Jack Johnson—glided to the center of the ring with the alacrity of a cheetah meeting his opponent. There is no doubt that he had punished his body, which had risen to as high as 200 pounds a year ago, for this fight. Hackett was in shape as torquing above his belt line was a six-pack replacing what previously was thought to be the remnants of several six-packs of hops and barley. The war was on as the southpaw Rodriguez

worked behind his jab and Hackett held his hands high like a praying mantis about to intercept a cricket.

Rodriguez never wavered, working the jab to the head and body, launching a straight left that grazed Hackett's chin in the midst of him returning jabs. It was the traditional "feeling out" round with the slight edge going to Rodriguez who was the aggressor bringing the fight to his adversary's doorstep.

The next two rounds were fought at closed quarters with Rodriguez committed to the body working downstairs with hooks and uppercuts. Hackett missed badly on numerous occasions with the straight right as he launched it bringing his right leg forward fading in with his bald-pated dome as an offensive missile in case the right never found its target the head would have landed opening a cut or momentarily stunning his opponent. Fortunately, Rodriguez calmly countered each time and was out of harm's way when Hackett's cranium lurched forward. Call me a boxing purist, but I despise this awkward tactic which has become a signature move of Bernard "The Executioner" Hopkins.



Hackett (R.) working the left hook.

Perched next to Rodriguez's mom in the first row catty-corner to my press row seat that I vacated before the conclusion of the fourth bout, I shared with her my mental scorecard of the fight checking with trainer Bozy Ennis two rows behind who concurred. I gave the first three rounds to Rodriguez who outworked Hackett in the second and third stanzas much to the raucous cheering of the crowd split evenly down the middle between the two combatants. This fight was shaping up to be a barnburner as the action in the ring rivaled the fan involvement and everyone shouted, several rising to their feet shouting instructions to the fighters. Seated to my left was trainer and boxing aficionado Hassan Hameed who ventured with me from the concession stands to the first row during Hackett's ring-walk. Hameed, a Svengali of the sweet science, and I have sparred numerous times on Facebook debating a plethora of pugilistic topics. Thus, I could not have found a better boxing mind and comrade to discuss and dissect the action in the ring. We both agreed that Hackett had squandered the first three rounds and needed to change his tactics or lose.

Chapter Three – Variation in Tactics: Hackett came out for the fourth round knowing that he was behind on the scorecards and that he had to turn the tide. Forging forward he engaged Rodriguez in guerrilla warfare by staying close and dipping below his guard to land uppercuts. During an

exchange Hackett ripped a right uppercut that pierced Rodriguez's guard connecting squarely on his chin causing his legs to quiver like a stud dog fastened in the cavernous delight of a bitch in heat. Rodriguez was hurt and Hackett like a shark sensing blood in the water was now hell-bent on terminating the festivities. Instinctively, the wounded pugilist grabbed his oppressor like a drowning man clutching to driftwood in hopes of clearing his head. Referee Rosato pried Rodriguez from Hackett. However, the dance of survival was not over as Rodriguez immediately embraced the advancing fighter, gaining a respite. Hackett never gained separation to land another telling blow as Rodriguez cleared his head. Nobody can question Rodriguez's heart or will to win. In dire straits he demonstrated incredible recuperative powers and was on the attack at the bell trading on equal terms with his opponent.

Much of the crowd was on its feet at the conclusion of the fourth stanza. Sensing the winds of change were blowing in his direction Hackett continued his aggression and stood toe-to-toe with Rodriguez throughout the fifth round. Lightning struck again as he hurt Rodriguez with a hook. However, instead of moving in for the kill and picking his shots, he wasted precious time as Rodriguez was able to stay low and evade danger. Back and forth they went with Rodriguez getting Hackett's attention with a well-placed combination. The gale force winds of hurricane Hot Shot had blown from Round 4 into Round 5 making it 3-2 in favor of Rodriguez as I consulted with Ennis and Hameed who concurred. The sixth and final round opened with Hackett boxing brilliantly on his toes using his jab and stopping momentarily to shoot the straight rights that bounced off Rodriguez's cranium. I counted five consecutive right hands that found their target. For the latter part of the round Hackett returned to earth, abandoning his aerial attack to fight in the trenches. He and Rodriguez reached down into their deepest recesses of intestinal fortitude and closed out the round banging away at each other until the bell sounded as the crowd leaped to their collective feet applauding wildly.

Everyone waited with bated breath as ring announcer Hascup read the scores 60-54, 59-55 and 58-56 all for Rodriguez. Much of the crowd was in disbelief. Call me sarcastic, disrespectful, insouciant, or recalcitrant, but to remain silent would be unjust—tacit approval of the skullduggery that permeates prize fighting. The worst that Hackett could have done was 57-57 a draw—it was clear to most in attendance that he had swept



Hackett (R.) taking command.

the last three rounds. And a compelling case could be made to score one of the first three rounds on his behalf. How one judge tallied a shut-out for Rodriguez has me questioning his eye sight, ability to judge and his morals. The three judges or Three Blind Mice who awarded Paul “The Punisher” Williams a unanimous decision over Erislandy Lara on July 9th were suspended indefinitely by Aaron Davis, the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board’s Boxing Commissioner. Bad decisions aren’t anomalies—they occur with unfettered frequency. When will Pennsylvania take a page out of New Jersey’s book?

Maybe it is good that Philadelphia welterweight Ardrick “The Hitman” Butler (6 wins – 4 losses – 0 draws – 3 kos) is a diligent student of the sweet science. Butler’s journey from professional [basketball](#) in Australia to boxing in his hometown of Philadelphia has been well-documented. He is sedulous in absorbing as much boxing knowledge as possible. In boxing circles there is little or no regard for pugilists who hail from the states ending with Carolina. They are without a doubt the states that most matchmakers look for cannon fodder to build the records of their prospects. However, it is fortunate that Butler doesn’t prescribe to this line of reasoning and thus was prepared mentally and physically for a six-round war. Across the ring from him was William “Country Boy” Wilson (8 wins – 7 losses – 0 draws – 4 kos) of Oxford, North Carolina. Wilson was forthright when he told me that money was his primary motivator for boxing because he has four children and a wife who is battling cancer. You didn’t have to know much else about this man to understand that facing Butler was the least of his worries.



Butler (R.) raging war with Wilson.

Butler captured the opening round working behind the jab, keeping the advancing Wilson at bay. The round was close since nothing consequential landed. However, in the second round Butler’s straight right hurt Wilson early and finally drove him to the canvas with little over 10 seconds remaining in the round. Rising just as fast as he had landed, Wilson was upright by the time referee McCall reached the count of two. He took the eight-count, had his gloves wiped off, but was saved from further damage as the bell rang to close the round. Butler captured the third round by switching to his inside game, raking Wilson with some vicious body shots. But, the man from North Carolina kept moving forward undeterred. I watched the fight near the concession stand with Hameed who asked me what advice I would relay to Wilson if I were in his corner. It was obvious to me that he should use his jab which would make Butler susceptible for a counter right over the lanky fighter’s low left that he brought back to his face slowly after jabbing. Hameed made it simpler by stating that Butler was just too quick for Wilson whose only

hope of winning was to just storm his opponent, turning it in to a brawl and land some big shots. Oftentimes, keeping it simply is the best medicine and I had to agree with Hameed.

Butler captured the fourth and fifth rounds by boxing from the outside and fighting at close range using his hand speed and quick feet to his advantage. It wasn't until the sixth and final round that Wilson decided that attempting to outbox Butler was an exercise in futility—the former basketball player was dominating inside and outside. Like a jealous husband who had just received word that his wife was home with her paramour, Wilson stormed out of the gates and pinned Butler to the ropes and went to work hurting him with a right uppercut. Ahead on the card, Butler wisely clutched to avoid snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Clearing his head, he got on his bicycle and rode the remainder of the round with Wilson in hot pursuit. No surprise when the scores were read: 59-54 and 58-55 twice, all for Butler.

In the opening bout of the evening, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's slick boxing featherweight prospect Josh Bowles (1 win – 0 losses – 0 draws – 0 kos) made the trip down the turnpike with his promoter Nick Payton ([www.paytonpromotions.com](http://www.paytonpromotions.com)) and trainer "Dangerous" Darryl Martin to make his Philadelphia debut—a four-rounder against tough Cyprian Khumalo (0 wins – 1 loss – 0 draws) of Maryland by way of South Africa. The intuitive and likeable Bowles who works full-time as a barber, lists Floyd Mayweather Jr. as his favorite fighter and views himself as a boxer/brawler. Earlier in the dressing room, Cyprian and I became entwined in a discussion about the great Willie Pep, whom he holds in high regard for his defensive wizardry. I didn't know how this fight was going to turn out as we had Mayweather vs. Pep—two pugilists renowned for defenses that were tighter than Fort Knox. Despite my initial inkling, it was a spirited match with Bowles pressing the action trying to separate the elusive South African from his senses. Using a stiff jab to the body like his idol, Mayweather, Bowles demonstrated much poise and patience for a pugilist in the embryonic stages of his career.



Bowles (R.) on the attack.

He never deviated from his game plan of attacking the body as the ever-moving Khumalo tried to obfuscate him by switching intermittently from orthodox to southpaw. In the third round, Bowles cornered the South African against the ropes and punished him with some vicious shots to the head and body with referee McCall paying close attention. However, Khumalo's equine stride abdicated him from the corner right before the bell as he was able to land a straight right to Bowles midsection. The final round resembled the first two with Bowles staying true to the fight plan by using the jab and attacking the body as Khumalo avoided danger by doing his best

impersonation of Willie Pep. All three judges scored it a shut-out, 40-36 for Bowles who has to be on everyone's radar as a future star of the division.

Other Results: Philadelphia heavyweight Geogiy "The Chemist" Guralnik (1 win – 0 losses – 0 draws – 0 kos), made short work of rough and tumble Damien Richardson (0 wins – 2 losses – 0 draws) of Washington, D.C., pinning him to the ropes in the opening stanza and whacking away to his left rib cage with right uppercuts and hooks forcing him to stay on the stool for the opening of the second round. Guralnik, who holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Drexel University, was declared the winner by technical knockout at 3:00 of Round 1. John "The Breed" Lennox (5 wins – 0 losses – 0 draws – 2 kos) of Carteret, New Jersey, used a left hook and right hand combination to introduce tough Jason Pauley (5 wins – 4 losses – 0 draws – 1 ko) of Cabin Creek, West Virginia to the canvas in the second stanza forcing referee McCall to call a halt at 2:10 of the round. Heavyweight Jose Luis Roque (3 wins – 0 losses – 0 draws – 3 kos) of Miami Florida by way of Nicaragua, won a four-round unanimous decision over fleet-footed Taffo Asongwed (2 wins – 7 losses – 7 draws – 0 kos) of Montreal, Canada. All three judges had the match 40-36 for Roque, who won the fight with his jab, since Asongwed thought he was at the Penn Relays and ran around the ring for most of the match.

**Chapter Four** – The Army on the March: You have to love promoter Andre Kut who suffered two set-backs with his main event, but nevertheless forged ahead proclaiming "the show must go on!" When junior-middleweight contender Derek "Pooh" Ennis suffered an injury in training it was announced at Tuesday's press conference that his stable-mate, undefeated featherweight prospect Coy "Pretty Boy" Evans, would be filling the slot as the main event in an eight-round contest. However, on Thursday the plug was pulled on Evans, who will be grazing in greener pastures on August 6th in Ohio on promoter Bob Arum's Top Rank card headlined by former middleweight champion Kelly "The Ghost" Pavlik and slated to be televised on Showtime. Thus, Kut elevated Rodriguez and Hackett to headliner status. Despite only a few hundred seats being occupied, we witnessed the leading candidate for 2011 Philadelphia Fight of the Year sponsored by [www.phillyboxinghistory.com](http://www.phillyboxinghistory.com). It is just unfortunate that it was not televised.

At this chapter or stage, like General Sun Tzu, Kut understands that there are different situations in which an army or company finds itself as it moves through new territories. The key is to know how to respond to these situations while staying focused and evaluating the intentions of others. The Art of War, baby! Do your thing, Andre Kut!

Promoter Butch Lewis died at the age of 65 on Saturday, July 23rd at his home in Wilmington, Delaware. Lewis, known for going shirtless under his tuxedo, promoted the 1988 Michael Spinks vs. Mike Tyson match.

Rest in Peace Butch. You will be missed.

Continue to support the sweet science, and remember, always carry your mouthpiece!  
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**Post Script:** On Monday, August 1, 2011 it was announced that Kelly Pavlik withdrew from the August 6th Top Rank show without giving a reason, although it was confirmed that he was not injured. The show has been cancelled and rumors are swirling around Pavlik, who was on the

comeback trail after a stint in alcohol rehab. Sometimes the grass is not always greener on the other side. The Art of War!