

## Erik Morales Schools Manny Pacquiao

Written by Matthew Aguilar  
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After one of the greatest 130-pound fights in boxing history, Erik Morales proved he's one of the game's great warriors.

The Tijuana tornado waged an incredible war with Manny Pacquiao Saturday, using his trademark attributes - resiliency, smarts and especially heart - to earn an upset 12-round unanimous decision over the Filipino superstar at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

"El Terrible" used his superior height and reach advantages to keep Pacquiao at bay, utilizing a stiff left jab and quick straight rights to frustrate his opponent. It paved the way for power punches that cut "Pac-Man" badly above the left eye and bruised and battered his face.

Pacquiao was game and dangerous the whole way, but Morales' experience in these grueling battles, with the likes of Marco Antonio Barrera, proved the difference in a great night of boxing.

All three judges - Chuck Giampa, Dave Moretti and Paul Smith - had Morales winning 115-113.

"We wanted to bob and weave, while carefully using the jab," Morales told HBO's Larry Merchant after the thrilling bout. "He was a tough guy. I hit him with everything I had. We had to work hard for everything."

The difference was the Morales jab, which connected at 32 percent, as compared to 10 percent for the shorter, stockier Pacquiao. Pacquiao did his best work when he was in close, and he hurt Morales several times with his vicious left hand.

One left to the body in particular made Morales double over in the first round.

Once again Morales' recuperative powers proved to be perhaps the best in the sport, as he weathered all of the Pacquiao assaults and returned the fire - making for breathtaking exchanges.

Pacquiao found that Morales' physical advantages made him a trickier proposition than Barrera, whom "Pac-Man" dominated in 2003. He indicated that Morales' straight punches were difficult to negotiate.

"It was hard for me. Morales was a different style (than Barrera)," Pacquiao said. "Morales is a boxer. (But) his size wasn't a problem. This is a comfortable weight for me."

Pacquiao said the cut, suffered in the fifth round after either a clash of heads or a Morales left hook, was the real issue.

"It affected me," he said. "I could not see."

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The two combatants wasted no time in getting down to business, producing an electric first two rounds that saw both fighters land their best punches. But Pacquiao was hesitant to rush his opponent, as he did against Barrera, since Morales jab was so effective.

By the third round, Morales began to take control with ring generalship, picking his spots and dictating the pace. Pacquiao seemed suddenly exhausted by the fifth, and after the head butt/hook produced the cut, it seemed the end was near for Pacquiao.

Referee Joe Cortez summoned the ringside physician, and it momentarily appeared as if the fight would be stopped. But the pride of the Philippines gamely continued, though he appeared to be fading.

Pacquiao staged a comeback in the late rounds, however, hurting an exhausted Morales with power punches. He appeared to take the final two rounds, but Morales' early lead was too much to overcome.

Pacquiao said he would have knocked Morales out had they used the Reyes-brand boxing gloves, but the contract dictated that the boxer use the Asian-produced glove that is preferred by Morales.

When asked, Pacquiao said, "Yeah, I want a rematch."

That rematch may happen, since Morales is probably not very interested in a fourth showdown with his nemesis Barrera. Morales did indicate, however, that he could be convinced.

Two of the three Morales-Barrera fights were classics. Barrera holds a 2-1 advantage and is the recognized 130-pound champion.

"It's hard to say," Morales told Merchant, "but if the public wants a fourth fight, I'll give them a fourth fight."