

Clichés, Clashes, and Classics: Pacquiao Smashes Morales

Written by Phil Woolever

Saturday, 21 January 2006 19:00

LAS VEGAS – Like all great fighters before them have done after the pre-fight chatter, Manny Pacquiao and Erik Morales let their fists and their hearts make the biggest statement.

The result was another magnificent, mauling spectacle in the annals of pugilism. In other words, a classic. The type effort that elevates both the participants and the game. Pacquiao's convincing, 10th round knockout victory shouldn't diminish Morales's reputation a bit.

Sometimes fighters in the big spotlight utter earnest, honest clichés that may have been heard a thousand times before but still summarize the situation far better than long winded, multi-syllabic paragraphs or pronouncements.

That was the case prior to this rematch, when each man repeated basically the same expressions, or at least their translators did.

"He is a great champion. I am proud to represent my country. I am in great shape and I believe I will win another great fight."

All statements were clear, concise comments, absolutely true going into Saturday night's hot ticket at the Thomas and Mack Center, where the neon strip is always on the horizon.

Now, after thirty more minutes of intense infighting, those words can be carved in stone. Pacquiao and Morales are now one and one against each other in a rivalry that stands among the best in the sport's recent history.

"I thought he was getting tired in the sixth but I had to take my time because he's very tough," said Pacquiao.

Calling either man very tough is an understatement.

It only took a few minutes of their initial encounter last March to see what a great contest was developing. Tonight it didn't even take a minute.

Pacquiao, 128½, got busy with his southpaw jab and kept Morales, 130, from establishing the Tijuana stick that worked so well before. Still, as the fight began, Morales appeared stronger. Straight rights seemed to hurt Pacquiao early, but he never showed signs of slowing.

Pacquiao backed Morales up in the second. A huge left made Morales hang on to the ropes. Pacquiao kept bobbing his way in, but Morales countered with left-rights that landed squarely on Pacquiao's determined countenance. Pacquiao slapped his gloves together and gestured for more.

Morales backed around the ring on his toes but wound up firing back any time Pacquiao moved

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in too close. Big combinations kept Pacquiao from establishing effective early pressure.

Each guy ate plenty of heavy leather by the middle frames. They both caught Hell and gave it right back, many times. Both spent plenty of time shaking their heads to acknowledge each others shots.

Morales's nose looked flat by the fifth. He took serious punishment in the sixth and was in real trouble as the session ended.

Morales came back with huge rights in the seventh, but Pacquiao found the range underneath and erased a five inch reach disadvantage.

There was – what else? – more dramatic give and take in the eighth. Morales's right eye showed increased damage, and he gave ground without any choice. It was still very close.

By the ninth, Morales's eye really seemed to bother him. Pacquiao's advance grew more forceful, and he got the better of more and more exchanges. In round ten it became clear Pacquiao had much more left in the tank.

A short, clubbing overhand left sent Morales sprawling for the first knockdown scored against him in his boxing career. The second would soon follow. Pacquiao pummeling led him back into the ropes, where a battered Morales sagged to the canvas.

Ref Kenny Bayless, who did a good job letting the frenzy flow, waved it off at 2:33 of the tenth.

No matter how they had bet, the crowd was ecstatic.

"I got hit in the head too many times," admitted Morales, stating the obvious. "I felt slow and couldn't do anything about it. I'll think about fighting him again, but I was very weak from making 130 pounds."

Morales, now 48-4 (34), was taken to the hospital for a checkup under new precautionary procedures for any boxer who is stopped.

Pacquiao, 41-3-2 (31), showed up at the press conference grinning like none of the marks on his face hurt a bit.

"I'm very happy to be the first to knock him out, (but) there are no hard feelings," said Pacquiao, "I pray he is in good health. I wasn't hurt in the early rounds. I was in great condition. I thank God for my strength."

There may be questions about a third time around, but it will probably happen.

"The first fight, I thought I'd win," mused Pacquiao, "The second time, I did. I think he'll be back. Maybe we'll fight in three more years."

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Pacquiao was ahead on all scorecards at the time of the stoppage. The judges (Paul Smith, Jerry Roth, and Dave Moretti) agreed on every round but the first. Morales won rounds 3, 4 and 5 on all tabs, while Pacquiao swept the 6th through the 9th.

The spotlighted UNLV arena was a buzzing concrete swarm announced at 14,618 in paid attendance. Disappointed wagers aside, everybody got their money's worth. Sportsmanship extended to the stands as almost everybody seemed to leave the arena happy.

Like the first time around, there was nationalism galore, but no apparent buttheads. When the spirited competition includes class acts instead of amateur drunks, it's always a plus.

While the transplanted Miss America Pageant tried out new digs up the Strip, there were probably at least 20 contenders with similarly endowed qualifications to be found among the casino VIP hostesses ringside.

Pageants and performers come and go in this town. Most don't last too long. With events like Pacquiao – Morales II, boxing will always have a home in Glitter Gulch.

Sometimes clichés are great, time proven capsules. Sometimes it's great to bust 'em up.