

The Philippines vs. Mexico: A Prelim to War

Written by Benn Schulberg

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A boxer named Pacquiao lost Thursday night but the Philippines isn't in mourning just yet. That's because it was their favorite son's younger brother, Bobby Pacquiao (27-11-3), who was disqualified by referee Kenny Bayless in the waning seconds of the eleventh round after landing the last of numerous low blows against Mexican veteran Hector Velazquez (45-11-2) in their super featherweight bout. Billed as the main attraction for a chance and given center stage on Versus television, Pacquiao disappointed his fans by using dirty tactics and ultimately embarrassing himself.

From the opening bell at The Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas, Pacquiao went after his opponent's midsection with abandon, but seemed unable to keep his punches from straying south of his opponent's beltline. After flooring Velazquez with a hard right uppercut against the ropes in the third round, Pacquiao inexplicably landed a low blow that resulted in a one-point deduction. As the fight went on, so did the fouling. Round five saw Velazquez crumple to the canvas after being hit with another shot below the belt and the referee once again deducted a point from Pacquiao.

The fight was close-fought throughout with Pacquiao pressing the action and Velazquez fighting back with equal resolve. After another low blow in round ten, referee Kenny Bayless warned Pacquiao that one more foul and he'd be disqualified. Apparently, Pacquiao didn't get the hint because with seconds left in the eleventh round his right hand smashed into Velazquez's cup one last time, sending him to the canvas writhing in pain and putting a disappointing end to a rough, exciting battle.

Pacquiao seemed miffed by the disqualification, languishing on the ropes and pointing to his beltline with a smile as if to say the punch was legitimate. With his opponent still lying on the ground in agony and the fight over, Pacquiao stood anxiously awaiting more ring action, seemingly unable to grasp the reality of what he'd done. Even after seeing the replay of the eleventh round low blow in which he blatantly fouled Velazquez, the Filipino still didn't understand the problem with the disqualifying punch. If that's the case, then maybe Bobby Pacquiao and Andrew Golota should get together for a sparring session and teach each other what a low blow is.

At the time of the stoppage it was anybody's fight as evidenced by the judges scorecards (95-93 and 94-93 for Pacquiao, 94-93 for Velazquez). Both fighters rocked each other, with legal punches that is, and despite Pacquiao's fouling clinic, the bout was an intense in-fight brawl that seemed appealing to the packed ballroom crowd.

The drama came early for Bob Arum as he looked to add extra intrigue to Saturday night's showdown between Manny Pacquiao and Eric Morales by pitting stablemates of those fighters against each other in a Filipino vs. Mexican match-up. With Freddie Roach manning the elder Pacquiao's corner and Fernando Beltran managing Velaquez's, you couldn't help but to think of Thursday night's fight as a small battle that helps ignite the big war to come. Beltran seems to

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be the Mexican version of Shelley Finkel and he will head back to Morales' corner where he's been throughout his career.

With the proud Filipino and Mexican flag-bearers waving their respective colors around the ring before the opening bell, we got a taste of what's to come Saturday night when the ardent fans from each nation will converge with fistic spirit on the Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas and collide in competition to cheer on their respective heroes.