

Boxing Superpowers Meet in Pacquiao vs. Morales III

Written by David A. Avila

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When it comes to professional boxing, Third World nations like Mexico and the Philippines are world superpowers and Manny “Pac Man” Pacquiao and Erik “El Terrible” Morales are its weapons of mass destruction.

Morales (record) and Pacquiao (42-3-2, 33 KOs) are nuclear powerhouses in the ring and have stopped 77 opponents between them. Fistic power and precision is their trademark.

Attempting to tip the balance of power, Pacquiao and Morales meet for the third time in two years on Saturday, Nov. 18, to decide the fate of the much-awaited grudge match at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas. The fight will be shown on HBO pay-per-view and is promoted by Top Rank.

The two most feared fighters in the junior lightweight division twice collided in furious engagements. Morales captured the first meeting with a display of cold calculating tactics on March 2005 and Pacquiao won the second with a blitzkrieg of punches for a 10th round knockout on January 2006.

The loss by Morales left the normally cocky Tijuana warrior humbled and unsure.

“I made too many changes in my last fight,” said Morales (48-4, 34 KOs), who fired his father and had other personal problems to deal with during preparation for his rematch with Pacquiao. “Now the reporters are saying bad things about me. It’s not nice what they are saying.”

Before the loss to the lightning Filipino, the Tijuana fighter had that cock of the walk attitude that showed in his hawk-like gaze. But after the bludgeoning by Pacquiao, the intensity in his eyes changed to moroseness.

At the first press conference held in Las Vegas last August, a bloated-looking Morales appeared before a stunned congregation of boxing writers. He barely resembled the fierce featherweight warrior who tore into Marco Antonio Barrera, Paulie Ayala and Bobby Boy Velardez.

Despite moving up to the 130-pound junior lightweight division, losing weight has remained a tremendous task for Morales. He contracted a Santa Monica-based fitness company called Velocity to help melt the excess weight. They began in August.

“I always had trouble making any weight. I’ve always been aware of it, that as I get older, I probably have to do more and be more conscious of it. That’s why I’ve taken so much time to get ready,” Morales, 30, said during a telephone conference call.

Morales signed an agreement that insured he be at 130 pounds for the weighing or lose \$500,000 for every extra pound over the limit.

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“It’s a very critical fight for me,” Morales said.

Superstar

Pacquiao’s scintillating performance vaulted him to superstar status. The entire Philippine nation stands still whenever their Filipino hero fights on television. He works doggedly hard to maintain his image.

“Manny always looks terrific to me,” said Arum, who is promoting the fight. “To fight Manny Pacquiao you have to be in top condition.”

The left-handed Filipino bomber works in a frenetic pace in nonstop action on a daily basis. Though dozens of other prizefighters work through their routines simultaneously, they seem to be at 40 miles per hour while he’s doing 70. It’s a dizzying sight to see at the Wild Card Boxing Gym in Hollywood.

“I’ve never had a fighter who trains harder than Manny,” said Freddie Roach, who tutors numerous elite boxers like James Toney and Israel Vazquez to name a few. “He never slows down.”

One thing Pacquiao never lacks is quality sparring. Opponents step into the ring like a moving conveyor belt of a who’s who in boxing. Names like Vicente Escobedo, Victor Ortiz, Orlando Salido and Miguel Garcia provide Pacquiao with sparring you can’t buy anywhere else in the world. It’s the reason Pacquiao moved to Southern California.

It was three years ago when Pacquiao first told the boxing world his Napoleonic designs of world domination. His primary target: Mexico.

“Because all of the good fighters in my weight are Mexicans I want to fight them all,” said Pacquiao, 27. “There are no better fighters in America or any place else than Mexicans. They are good tough fighters.”

His personal war ledger against Mexican fighters reveals an impressive reading. Pacquiao has beaten Gabriel Mira, Emmanuel Lucero, Marco Antonio Barrera, Hector Velazquez, Oscar Larios and Morales. Only Juan Manuel Marquez was able to avoid Pac Man’s hit list and he did it by the skin of his nose in a fight resulting in a draw. Marquez was dropped three times in the first round but rebounded and provided Morales with a blueprint against the heavy-handed Filipino southpaw.

But in the second match between Morales and Pacquiao, the Filipino boxer with speed and power added two more dimensions to his arsenal: a wicked right hook and a vicious body attack.

“He’s very intense inside the ring,” said Escobedo, who provided the main sparring for Pacquiao early. “If you lose concentration he can overwhelm you in a hurry.”

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Pacquiao believes the best Morales will show up for the pivotal third meeting.

“I know Morales is still a good fighter and he trained hard for this fight. I trained hard for this fight too and I’m not overconfident,” Pacquiao said. “I’m sure his preparation and conditioning is going to [result in] a good fight. The people will love it.”

Both Pacquiao and Morales own a win over the other. Now it’s time for the third superpower showdown.

“You know, anybody can write or say whatever they want. It is just words,” said Morales. “That’s why we go up in the ring, to prove our worth.”

The Cold War is over.

Other world title bouts

Also on the same Morales-Pacquiao fight card will be Colombia’s Ricardo Torres (29-1, 27 KOs) vs. Mighty Mike Arnaoutis (17-0-2, 9 KOs) fighting for the vacant WBO junior welterweight title abdicated by Miguel Cotto.

In a WBC junior flyweight world title match, Brian “Hawaiian Punch” Vilorio (19-1, 12 KOs) attempts to regain the title he lost to Mexico’s Omar Nino (24-2-1, 10 KOs) last August.

“I really took him lightly,” confessed Vilorio at the Wild Card Gym. “This time I’m going to pressure him until he breaks.”