

BORGES: Pac Man Training Like A Mad Man

Written by Ron Borges
Sunday, 02 March 2008 19:00

Respect comes in many forms in boxing. Sometimes it comes in the gym. That is where Manny Pacquiao is giving Juan Manuel Marquez his, and it is respect of the highest order.

Pacquiao has been haunting Freddie Roach's Wild Card Gym in Hollywood, CA. for the past eight weeks preparing for his night with Marquez, which is a marked departure from the way he readied himself for his fights last year with Jorge Solis and Marco Antonio Barrera.

Distracted by weight problems, his lifestyle and by training too long in the Philippines, where he is a superstar whose every step is dogged by an adoring public, Pacquiao seemed not himself in those fights. He won both but had a harder time with the undefeated Solis than anyone expected and was taken the distance by Barrera, a fighter he'd destroyed four years earlier.

So when the 29-year-old Pacquiao decided to forego moving up to the lightweight division to challenge champion David Diaz so he could instead fight for Marquez's WBC super featherweight title despite his struggles to make the 130-pound limit, he re-evaluated his approach and told a thankful Roach he would return to the ways of his early success and train for 10 weeks, the last eight at Roach's gym, far away from the distractions of Manila.

That Pacquiao was willing to do this is perhaps the strongest indicator that he understands the man he is in with remains a force who must be properly – and totally – prepared for. To do less would be to court disaster, a point he never mentions but one he has conceded by his choice of work place.

"I've never trained harder – NEVER," Pacquiao said this week while making a one-day promotional stop in San Francisco before returning to the Wild Card. "Two days ago I hit the mitts with Freddie for 17 straight rounds with no timeouts. I run in the mountains every day. Then I go to the Wild Card to train for three hours non-stop.

"I'm very serious about this fight. I know Marquez is the last great Mexican (for me) to beat. There is no more Barrera or (Erik) Morales."

According to Roach, Pacquiao is training like someone who wants there to be no more Marquez after their March 15 showdown at Mandalay Bay. Nearly four years ago, Pacquiao thought he'd accomplished that in a first round in which he drove a stunned Marquez to the floor three times. That's what he thought but thoughts, like counter puncher, can be deceiving.

Each time he went down in a heap Marquez scrambled back up and by the end of the night it was Pacquiao and the crowd who were stunned. Stunned to have seen a man survive such an assault and then counter punch his way back to a draw that could easily have gone Marquez's way.

It was a remarkable performance, one that cried out for a rematch but it has taken nearly four

BORGES: Pac Man Training Like A Mad Man

Written by Ron Borges
Sunday, 02 March 2008 19:00

years for that to happen because while Pacquiao went on to beat all of the best fighters in his weight class, Marquez and his advisors made a series of poor choices that pushed him into the shadows until he signed with Golden Boy Promotions a year ago and won impressively against first Barrera and then Rocky Juarez.

Those victories made a rematch with Pacquiao inevitable because it is where the money is for both of them. But as Manny Pacquiao's training regimen has shown he knows it's also where the trouble is.

"I have a ton of respect for Marquez," Roach said. "He's a great fighter. He's a counter puncher so sometimes he can be boring to watch but technically he's unbelievable.

"He's the most difficult style out there for Manny and we know that. That's why Manny came to California to train this time and he came early on top of it. That's made a big difference.

"In the Philippines everybody wants a piece of him. There are too many distractions and he wants to please everybody. Here it's only about boxing. He's on fire. I haven't seen him this focused for a fight in a while. He knows why he's here."

He's there to prepare to win against a 34-year-old champion who gave him fits the last time they met. Roach believes Pacquiao was a different fighter then, a 25-year-old kid obsessed with landing big left hands. That worked in the opening round but once the skillful Marquez figured out the timing and where the punches were coming from out of Pacquiao's southpaw's stance, it was a different story.

"A reporter told me later that if you took the left hand away from Manny he wasn't much," Roach said. "That really struck me. We've been working on it ever since.

"I do a lot of things with the mitts that Manny doesn't even realize to make him more comfortable throwing his right hand. I'd say he's a 50 per cent better fighter now than he was the last time they fought. He has better head movement, he's a two-handed fighter now. He understands you won't beat Marquez just throwing the 1-2."

You'll beat him, if anyone does, by going 20 non-stop rounds on the mitts, as Pacquiao did Friday afternoon at Wild Card. You'll beat him with 12 non-stop rounds of sparring, which ended Saturday.

Most of all, you'll beat him by preparing in a way that makes clear to anyone who is paying attention that Juan Manuel Marquez is a well-respected fighter in the eyes of Manny Pacquiao.

"The best thing Manny did was come to the U.S. and train," Roach said. "He's been very tough on his sparring partners. One got hit on the chin, went down, continued but went home the next day. Manny's very serious about Marquez, which he should be. It's a difficult fight. Manny understands that."

Roach believes, in the end, Pacquiao will be too strong and too young for Marquez, who has

BORGES: Pac Man Training Like A Mad Man

Written by Ron Borges
Sunday, 02 March 2008 19:00

seemed to abandon his counter punching style in his last few fights. Some claim that may have been a concession to the demands of the business he's in, one that values engagement over skilled ring generalship when it comes to selling tickets.

Roach concedes that could be the case but says he doesn't expect Marquez to divert much from the counter punching style he used to baffle and batter Pacquiao in their first fight. But, in the end, one of boxing's best and most-sharp eyed trainers believes he is seeing something in the 34-year-old legs of Marquez that he has seen many times before. Those legs are what they are, which is to say perhaps not what they used to be.

"If he wants to fight us it's a mistake on his part," Roach said of Marquez. "I don't think he'll do that. He has been more aggressive lately and maybe it was to sell tickets but it may just be old legs. Old legs go forward real well but they don't go backwards so well. He hasn't been the same since he fought Manny."

Much to the pleasure of Roach, Manny Pacquiao hasn't been the same as he prepared for his return match with Marquez either. He has been the ultimate professional, a man who for the past two months has focused on only one thing - getting ready for the toughest fight of his life.

The fact that he's done that may mean it won't be once the fight is actually upon him but if that's not the case at least he'll be ready for the kind of war it takes 10 hard weeks of lonely work to prepare for. Either way, no one will be surer that the work has been done than Freddie Roach.

"Manny still isn't a complete fighter but he's hungry for knowledge," Roach said. "He had so much success with his left hand when he was younger that he became like Virgil (Hill, another of Roach's former world champions). Virgil's jab was so good he could go 12 rounds without ever throwing his right hand.

"Manny was the same way with his left and you can't do that with a guy like Marquez. He's worked hard on letting his right hand go. We've done a lot of repetitive motion work. Sometimes he has no clue what I'm doing but he does it.

"When I was fighting for Eddie (Futch, perhaps boxing's greatest trainer) he made me use my left hand all the time. He even made me eat with it so it would become second nature. We're doing all those things with Manny and it's paying off.

"I want Manny to start the fight the same as he did the last time. I'm not going to take away his hunger to fight. I want him to put pressure on Marquez for sure but now he'll do it with both hands. He'll be better this time than he was the last time."

If he is, Manny Pacquiao will owe it to an old gym in Hollywood, the town where stars are made. Or, in his case, maybe just burnished up a bit.