

## How It'll Happen: Pacquiao/Marquez II

Written by John Nguyen  
Tuesday, 11 March 2008 19:00

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Few sports have the potential to be as satisfyingly conclusive as prizefighting. The image of one fighter knocking out their opponent is about as decisive as it gets. The superior competitor is decided without dispute, which is essentially the heart of competitive athletics.

It's for this same reason why boxing can also be so agonizingly dissatisfying. Whenever the fans, as well as the fighters, are deprived of conclusiveness and closure, an unresolved void remains. Boxing craves declarative statements, not interrogative questions.

It is from this vein that the upcoming rematch between Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez springs forth. Since their maddeningly inconclusive first meeting in May 2004 ended in a draw, fight fans have clamored for a definitive ending to a bout that was essentially left "to be continued..." On March 15, the fans and the fighters will get their opportunity for closure when boxing's biggest little men clash.

### **Pacquiao's Gameplan:**

For Pacquiao, (45-3-2, 35 KO), the key is to make the old man work, forcing Marquez into a fast-paced fight. If it comes down to attrition, the smart money would be on the younger, stronger, fresher Pacquiao.

The critical element for Pacquiao is to fight with intelligent, controlled aggression. This is something he failed to do in the second half of his first encounter with Marquez. After bouncing Marquez off the canvas three times in the first round, Pacquiao decided that a blitzkrieg assault was his ticket to success. He was wrong. His recklessness allowed Marquez, one of the best counterpunchers in the game, to play pinball with his head in the middle and late rounds. Even after the draw with Marquez, Pacquiao apparently had not learned to avoid careless aggression, since it was exactly that which cost him against Erik Morales in 2005. In the upcoming rematch, Pacquiao must make his punches both abundant and meaningful. Marquez would be all too happy to pull the trigger if presented with the same gaping holes he saw in Pacquiao's defense the first time around.

The final ingredient to a Pacquiao victory is in his right hand. In the first fight, Pacquiao's offense was stifled once Marquez solved the puzzle of his powerful straight left. Once that happened, Pacquiao may as well have had no arms at all; that was how sharply the dynamic of the fight changed. In the rematch, it's a safe bet that Marquez will have studied tapes of the first fight and will have a plan to blunt Pacquiao's left. Pacquiao needs to respond by utilizing his vastly improved right hand, which he has put on display in recent fights. Pacquiao's newest weapon has added new dimensions to his game, making him more multi-faceted than the one-two puncher he once was.

### **Marquez's Gameplan:**

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No surprise what the primary objective will be for Marquez: counter effectively. At this advanced stage of his career, it is highly unlikely that he will be able to match the Pacman punch for punch. It's also tough to see Marquez keeping Pacquiao at bay for the entire fight. Such a strategy would force him to fight at a tempo for which he is ill suited at age 35. The older, grizzled Marquez, (48-3-1, 35 KO), has made the subtle adjective shift from slick to crafty; he now has to dig deeper into his bag of tricks when his once abundant physical gifts come up a little short.

As a result, timing will be critical for Marquez to be successful. He will have to sit squarely in the eye of the storm against Pacquiao, which is clearly not going to be a vacation. He will be in the line of fire the entire fight. Whether this turns out to be success or suicide rests on Marquez's ability to make Pacquiao miss and, even more importantly, make him pay. As Marquez displayed last fall against Rocky Juarez, he remains a clever boxer. One ounce of over-aggression from Pacquiao will be all Marquez needs to capitalize. Still, this remains a tall order for Marquez, who basically needs to be technically perfect for the entirety of the fight.

Along with effective countering, Marquez will need to work Pacquiao's body, something he doesn't usually focus on. Among his measured, precise punches, Marquez will need to mix in effective body work to sap Pacquiao's strength, which may be especially relevant if Pacquiao has difficulty making the 130-pound weight limit. A compromised, slightly wearied Pacquiao is a much more manageable assignment for Juan Manuel Marquez.

### **The Outcome:**

An examination of each fighter's performance against Marco Antonio Barrera (whom both faced in 2007) might provide the most accurate forecast for how the impending rematch will turn out. While Marquez won a close, competitive, punishing decision against Barrera, Pacquiao managed a dominant decision over the venerable Mexican icon in a fight that grew especially lopsided late. If this serves as an accurate barometer for each fighter, it can only mean bad news for Marquez.

Conventional wisdom is that while Marquez has grown four years older since their first meeting, Pacquiao has grown four years better. Pacquiao has gained patience, maturity, and versatility since the first encounter. As he showed against Barrera, he is now capable and willing to win a fight without the high-risk, search and destroy tactics that characterized him a few years ago. Let's not kid ourselves; Pacquiao is not the second coming of Pernell Whitaker, nor will he ever be. However, he has made unexpected strides in technical savvy that can't be ignored.

Can the same improvement be spoken of in reference to Marquez? Not particularly. As demonstrated in his fights against both Barrera and Juarez, and to a lesser extent against Jimrex Jaca and Terdsak Jandaeng, Marquez is a bit more stationary and a more willing to trade. This makes for more exciting fights but, against a fighter like Pacquiao, could spell disaster for Marquez. Pacquiao's improvement coupled with Marquez's ever-so-slight decline tip the scales in favor of Manny.

The guess here is that the fight will unfold a little something like this:

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A focused and dedicated Marquez fights on relatively even terms early with Pacquiao, landing enough hard counterpunches to keep Pacquiao honest. The ever-determined Pacman will continue to pressure Marquez because he knows no other way. Somewhere in the middle rounds, Marquez will feel the cumulative effects of being 35, being in the twilight of a long and taxing career, and being in the ring with a buzzsaw who is better than he remembered. Pacquiao will continue punching all the while, and soon enough the desire for self-preservation will impose itself upon Marquez. Surviving will sound a heck of a lot more appealing than trading with Pacquiao. Marquez's pride and caginess will allow him to finish the fight in an upright position, but expect this one to be pretty lopsided by the end.

**The Pick:** □ **Pacquiao UD 12 Marquez**