Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 14 March 2008 19:00

Let the debates begin, and rage on.

Four years after they battled to a draw, Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez fought another tightly contested scrap that could have rewarded either man.

But it was Pacquiao, who showed himself to be a smarter, more technically refined boxer since that first tangle, who earned the judges nod, in a split decision, at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas, Nevada on Saturday night.

Marquez' WBC 130 pound title was on the line.

Judge Jerry Roth scored the 115-112 for Marquez, but was overruled by Duane Ford, who had it 115-112 for Pacquiao and Tom Miller, who saw it 114-113 for Pac Man.

HBO's Harold Lederman scored it 115-112 for Pacquiao.

Pacquiao landed fewer shots 157 to 172, but threw more, 619 to 511, according to CompuBox. Certainly, pro Marquez fans will point to the edge in punches landed to bolster their stance that their man got robbed. "The people know who really won the fight," Marquez said afterwards.

The 12th was tight, as neither fighter, in a close contest, wanted to take undue risk at getting dropped. Pacquiao looked to be the more energized fighter.

Pac Man was cautious in the 11th, not wanting to get caught trying to do too much.

Pacquiao landed sharp lefts in the tenth, but he took care not to press the action too much, understanding that Marquez' countering is superb against an overeager foe. The slice on Marquez' eye, by this point, was wide open. Pacquiao's right eye, though was also damaged, but was not swollen enough to bother him.

Referee Ken Bayless paused the action to look at Marquez' right eye, to assess the bleeding, in the ninth.

Marquez landed a straight right that cut Pacquiao's right eye in the eighth, but it didn't diminish the Filipino's energy. As he did repeatedly on this night, Pacquiao lifted his gloves, and gestured as if to say, Bring it on, I love it.

The two men banged heads in the seventh, and a little slice opened on Marquez' right eye.

Marquez picked up his accuracy at the midway point and a viewer had to wonder if, as in their initial 2004 encounter, Marquez had deciphered Pac Man after a scoping-out period.

Pacquiao scored a knockdown at the end of the third, with a short left hook, and had the Mexican hurting on the ropes as the bell sounded.

Marquez buckled Manny with a left hook at the end of the second, and the ultra-hot crowd went up a decibel notch.

Pacquiao, the revered icon of the Philippines, came in with a 45-3-2 mark, while the Mexican Marquez came in at 48-3, with all three of his losses being of the disputed variety.

Please check back for David Avila's comprehensive ringside coverage.

SPEEDBAG Did you guys catch Michael Buffer saying, "It's time for the most famous phrase in boxing history" before he let loose his trademark "Let's get ready to ruuuumble." Has he prefaced his bellow like that before?