David Diaz has what it takes to beat Manny Pacquiao. At least the people around him say it's so.

"He's not intimidated (by) whoever it is,'' says the WBC lightweight champion's trainer/manager Jim Strickland. "He has what I call a Holyfield characteristic. A type of determination and confidence in himself that he feels he can beat anybody he gets in the ring with.''

That is a noble trait and a not insignificant tool in a trade like boxing, where your mentality is as important as your physicality. When one studies the facts, Diaz's high opinion of his chances against a super featherweight champion moving up to 135 for the first time is understandable. He is 34-1-1 as a professional, possesses vast amateur experience that ended as a member of the 1996 Olympic team and has proven several times of late that he can find a way to win even when all he seems to have going for him is unquestioned perseverance.

Yet the world strongly disagrees with his assessment of the situation he will face June 28 as Mandalay Bay Events Center. They have consequently installed the Filipino legend as a prohibitive favorite to win his fourth world title not because they devalue confidence and a stubborn refusal to accept the outside world's opinion of you but rather that they believe such things pale in comparison to the importance of speed, punching power and a resume of conquests that has elevated Pacquiao to the mostly ceremonial status of No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter on the planet.

The latter is a mythical title assigned to Pacquiao by boxing aficionados after the recent retirement of welterweight champion Floyd Mayweather, Jr. It is earned in the ring though neither won nor lost there. It is at risk every fight but does not automatically go to your conqueror. It is more myth than reality which, frankly, Diaz does not believe is the case with Pacquiao's hard-earned reputation.

He concedes the obvious, that Pacquiao is one of the best fighters in the world and someone even his own promoter is rooting for. What he won't concede is the outcome of the fight.

"I really don't care who you want to win or if you want Manny to win,'' Diaz said both of the public and of their shared promoter, Bob Arum. "I understand the business aspect of it. That's not my concern. That's not even anywhere near my thoughts.

"My thought is to go out there and retain my title and beat Manny Pacquiao. That's plain and simple to me. We see a couple of things there that we could expose and we're just going to go and try and see what happens. If he does come out crazy then I'll be there to meet him because I can get a little crazy myself.''

Intimidated, thy name is not David Diaz.

Of course boldness and some well-earned self-esteem haven't helped 46 of the 51 fighters Pacquiao has thus far faced. That is especially true of the 34 he's knocked into semi-consciousness while earning world titles from flyweight to super bantamweight to super featherweight.

Diaz does not denigrate such a resume or the man who put it together. In fact, he acknowledges both it and Pacquiao's status as the reasonable man's favorite to beat him. After making those concessions however, he quickly returns to what he believes is the more salient point – boxing is not a sport of reason, which is why resumes do not win boxing matches.

When a recent Hispanic journalist asked him if he was "scared'' of Pacquiao because he has built his reputation in large part by defeating some of Mexico's best fighters to the point that he's now known as The Mexicutioner, Diaz was incredulous. Scared of another man?

"I told him the Lord gave me two hands as well (as Pacquiao) so we're just going to be in the middle of the ring fighting each other,'' Diaz recalled. "Then he asked me if I saw any flaws in the Marquez fight (Pacquiao's last, which was a razor-thin victory over Juan Manuel Marquez). I just said being the aggressor, Manny Pacquiao stops once in a while from going forward. Maybe when he's resting that's when we can attack. Whoever is in top condition is going to end up winning the fight.

"If you keep on concerning yourself with what other people think or do, then you got a problem. Thank God I don't have that problem.''

What he does have is a date with Pacquiao, which is problem enough for a guy considered a pleasant plodder with limited skills and a big heart that have taken him farther than even he believed possible when it all began.

"I'm going to be honest with you,'' Diaz said. "I never seen myself getting this far. I thought I had it made just turning pro. After the Olympics I said if nobody calls me then I'm not going to do it because I didn't win a medal so I figured I wouldn't get no money.''

Since he's still driving a 1991 Honda Accord with no a/c he's been right about that, relatively speaking. While Pacquiao has made millions, Diaz has labored in boxing obscurity. He's won every fight but one and a world title but no real money to speak of, although he will receive his biggest payday on June 28 in exchange, it is assumed, for turning over his title to Pacquiao.

If he does not, however, then the money will begin to roll in as long as he keeps winning. If he does then, as he said recently, "Maybe I can make some money for David Diaz. This fight is for my kids' college funds.''

Yet while this fight will not make him rich it is also for himself. For himself and for a small contingent of loyalists that always believed in him. That is a group led by a Chicago woman named Tonya Quinones who pushed him back into the Windy City Gym in Chicago two years after he'd turned his back on boxing over family concerns and a heavy weariness from the demands of a boxer's life.

“I should have taken a little bit of time off (after the Olympics, which he didn’t) and then I had my Mom who was sick,’’ Diaz recalled. “I had a brother who passed away. All of that just didn’t feel right. My life wasn’t going the way I wanted it to and I just decided to hang it up before I lost to anybody, you know, who was a regular Joe. A guy that I could beat ends up beating me or I end up getting seriously hurt. So I just decided to move back home (to Chicago from Florida) and hang them up.

“I was going out with this one girl, her name was Tonya. She was pretty good and she mentioned ‘Why don’t you try to go back into boxing.’ My parents were always telling me I should go (back) into the gym at least to work out but it takes somebody else from the outside that you might end up listening to. I ended up listening to her and I ended up going back into the gym and then it took off. I found Strick and I ended up marrying that girl.’’

When someone remarked “That’s a great story, David,’’ Diaz, being who he is, replied, “Not a story. True fact.’’

So, too, is his closely held belief that he will upset Pacquiao, and hence Arum, in a week’s time. He will do what they say he cannot because he’s been making a habit of that all his life.

He will silence a crowd of fervent Pacquiao supporters the way he has done everything else in boxing. He will do it with the help of his friends.

“In Spanish there’s a saying – poco pero locos,’’ Diaz said. “It means a few but crazy…and we’re going to be. I’m going to have at least 100 people from Chicago going over there (to Las Vegas) and believe me, 100 people from the Chi can take on 17,000, 18,000 people very easily. So we’ll be very prepared.

“We’re psychologically ready. No fear in the heart, buddy. That’s just it.’’

Whether it’s enough this time we will have to wait and see but one man believes it will be and he’s the only one that matters.