

Will Lightweights Be Kryptonite To Pacman?

Written by David A. Avila
Thursday, 26 June 2008 19:00

If ever a fighter has looked more like Superman than any other on the planet, it has to be Manny Pacquiao.

For more than a decade Pacquiao has been invulnerable to junior featherweights, featherweights and junior lightweights. The punches just bounce off him.

But now he's entering the realm of Kryptonite. Not the green variety, but more so the red kind when he fights WBC lightweight titleholder David Diaz (34-1-1, 17 KOs) on Saturday June 28, at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. It will be televised on HBO pay-per-view.

"It's going to be a great fight," says Pacquiao (46-3-2, 35 KOs). "The style of David Diaz is very accurate to my own style."

Pacman has been flying above the rest of the competition with a smile and lightning fast reflexes that make normal human beings look normal. He's taken out an entire country's heroes one by one like pieces on a game of checkers.

Now he's ready to be kinged, but it's a dangerous realm he now enters.

"This is not an easy fight," said Freddie Roach, trainer of Pacquiao. "Diaz is a strong guy."

Roach has trained many a prizefighter in his career from heavyweights like James "Lights Out" Toney to bantamweights like Roger Gonzalez. He knows when a fighter moves up a weight division the chances of getting beat also increase.

"These guys punch a lot harder," said Roach of boxers in the 135-pound limit lightweight division. "Plus, he's a southpaw."

Pacquiao is a southpaw too. But for many left-handers, whenever they are forced to fight another lefty it can be very perplexing.

Not for Pacquiao.

"I fight with a lot of southpaws in my country," said Pacquiao. "I don't have a problem fighting southpaws."

Whether he's pro boxing's Superman or Bruce Lee, Pacman doesn't shy away from challenges. It's one of the reasons many consider him the most exciting fighter in the world, if not the best.

Bob Arum of Top Rank Promotions, who promotes Pacquiao, said the last fight against Mexico's Juan Manuel Marquez set a pay-per-view record for fighters below welterweight at 400,000 buys.

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“Manny Pacquiao is a bonafide attraction,” said HBO’s Tony Walker, who administers pay-per-views. “He’s beaten some of the best fighters in the world.”

The road to super stardom began at age 17 for Pacquiao. In those days he weighed a scant 112 pounds and only had one knockout in his first five pro fights. He was a wet noodle but still growing.

Two years after his pro debut he captured the OPBF regional flyweight title. That set him up to fight for the WBC flyweight world title against Thailand’s Chatchai Sasakul in Dec. 4, 1998. He knocked out the champ in eight rounds.

From then on, Pacquiao left the Philippines and landed on American shores hungry for a chance to fight in the United States and hungry to learn from American trainers. It was meeting Roach that put the pieces in place.

Under Roach’s guidance, Pacman began refining his already potent punching skills and establishing defensive boxing tactics. At first they didn’t take, but after nearly losing a fight to Juan Manuel Marquez in 2004, after knocking down the Mexican featherweight three times, slowly the Filipino slugger began to use his defense more often.

Now many consider Pacquiao a complete fighter. But don’t expect a defensive fight against the aggressive Diaz.

“It’s going to be more action than Juan Manuel Marquez and (Marco Antonio) Barrera fights,” said Pacquiao, who seems truly excited about facing a boxer who is not defensive-minded. “Because he’s a good fighter and he wants to go toe-to-toe.”

Diaz grabbed the WBC interim lightweight title by surviving nine rounds of pummeling by California’s Jose Armando Santa Cruz, who was leading on all three judges score cards to that point. Then the Chicago-based fighter rallied and stopped his opponent at 2:26 of the 10th round.

It was a shocking end for the 12,000 fans watching who thought the fight was all but over for Diaz.

“I believe in myself,” said Diaz, who was bruised and bloodied but not bowed.

Next he fought Mexico’s great Erik Morales and survived a knockdown to win by unanimous decision. Now he faces a fighter who is proclaimed the top professional boxer in the world.

“Manny Pacquiao is one of the best in the world. I know a lot of haters don’t believe in me,” said Diaz. “But I believe in myself.”

But though Diaz holds the WBC lightweight title, he’s only red Kryptonite in a division of green Kryptonite. If Pacquiao can pass this test a whole set of green Kryptonite guys await, like Nate Campbell, Joel Casamayor or even the guy who dispatched of his brother with ease, Urbano

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Antillon.

It's a dangerous realm he's entered. But he likes it.

Expect about 12,000 people to attend the Pacquiao-Diaz fight in a frenzy. Since winning the flyweight, junior featherweight, featherweight and junior lightweight titles, fans from the Philippines, Filipinos living in America and just plain old boxing fans have saved their money to watch the dynamic style of Pacman.

"People who know boxing know this will be the fight of the year," said Arum during a recent press conference. "Manny is a nonstop fighter. He keeps coming and coming and coming."

But can he survive in the world of Kryptonite?

Luevano defends title

WBO featherweight titleholder Steve Luevano (35-1, 15 KOs) defends his title against hard-hitting Mario Santiago (19-1, 14 KOs) of Puerto Rico in the semi main event at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. It's Luevano's third title defense.

Every time Luevano steps in the ring another set of fans are bewildered that this soft-looking boxer with choir boy looks is a world champion. But as soon as the fight begins, within four rounds, his boxing prowess begins to show and he becomes this fighting machine.

Luevano faces a tough task against Santiago, first because the Puerto Rican has knocked out 14 of 20 opponents. Second, this fight pits southpaw versus southpaw. Anything can happen.

So far the fighter from Ontario, California, who was an alternate on the 2000 Olympic team, has proven to be quite a surprise.

Nevada heavyweight

Heavyweight prospect Tye Fields (41-1, 37 KOs) steps up in class against perpetual contender Monte Barrett (33-6, 19 KOs) in a 10-round bout.

Fields, a former college basketball player, has slowly developed into a curiosity. He's knocked out his last three opponents. But the southpaw heavyweight will be fighting a true contender.

"He's ready for Wladimir Klitschko," said Arum.

Barrett had two bad years, but now he's back on track with consecutive knockout wins over Cliff Couser and Damon Reed.

Fights on television

Fri. ESPN2, 7 p.m. Bredis Prescott (18-0) vs. Juan Carlos Rodriguez (55-21-2).

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Fri. Telefutura, 8 p.m., Abner Mares (16-0) vs. Kermin Guardia (37-8).

Sat. HBO pay-per-view, 6 p.m., Manny Pacquiao (46-3-2) vs. David Diaz (34-1-1); Steve Luevano (35-1) vs. Mario Santiago (19-1); Tye Fields (41-1) vs. Monte Barrett (33-6).