

Roach To Oscar: Go Over 147, It'll Cost Ya

Written by Ron Borges

Monday, 01 September 2008 19:00

“So do I answer you; The pound of flesh, which I demand of him, is dearly bought; 'tis mine and I will have it.”- Shylock, “The Merchant of Venice,” Act. IV, scene I

William Shakespere was never a boxing writer and Freddie Roach probably hasn't spent a lot of time poring over the pages of his plays and sonnets but buried deep in The Merchant of Venice lies a cautionary warning for Oscar De La Hoya.

The word on the street is that for every pound, or portion of a pound, that De La Hoya weighs over the 147-pound limit he agreed to meet Manny Pacquiao at on Dec. 6 he will be assessed a \$1 million penalty. That money, it is said, will go to Pacquiao, which would make it little more than a bribe to ignore common sense and good conscience.

That may be the plan, or at least the fallback position for the six-time world champion, but if De La Hoya thinks it's a way to buy the opportunity to fight Pacquiao at 150 pounds on Dec. 6, he's in for a big surprise.

“If he's too far over I'll make him make 147,” Pacquiao's trainer, Freddie Roach, warned Tuesday during a break at his Wild Card Gym in Hollywood. “I'll make him make the weight.

“I know I'd be under tremendous pressure (to agree to the overage) and I know my guy will say, 'Screw the weight. Let's fight,' but my job is to protect the fighter. If De La Hoya comes in at 150, I'll say 'No fight!'

“I wouldn't put it past him to try something like buying his way to 150 but three pounds over is a huge difference. When he fought (Steve) Forbes he was supposed to make 150 and he came in at 151 and they gave it to him. I'm not doing that. A contract is a contract. The contract weight is 147. Make it. I want him to work as much as possible.”

In the end, Roach believes, weight is not the real issue for either man but there are limits. A case in point is former junior super bantamweight and super featherweight champion Joan Guzman, who will challenge lightweight champion Nate Campbell on Sept. 13 in Biloxi. Guzman was once known as “Little Tyson” after he knocked out 17 of his first 21 opponents but since moving up to fight at featherweight and beyond he has not stopped a single opponent. Thought still undefeated, Guzman's last knockout came more than four years ago and the reason is, Roach well understands, that there is a point after which power simply stops following a fighter as he moves up in weight.

“The weight limit is 147,” Roach re-iterated. “My plan is for Manny to come in at 142 and by fight time be up to 147. He was 147 in his last fight (when he defeated WBC lightweight champion David Diaz in his first fight at that high a weight). He struggled to make 135. In fact, he had to lose a pound the day of the weigh in and he told me that day he wanted to go up in weight again so we don't have a problem moving up.

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“The fact of the matter is winning this fight is not about size. It’s about speed. That’s what wins it. I don’t think we can knock out Oscar with one punch. He’s the bigger guy. He’s used to being hit by bigger punches. But Manny can break him down by making him work three minutes of every round. If we do that, I don’t think he can stay with us.”

Roach believes if De La Hoya is forced to make 147 rather than be allowed to come in several pounds over that limit, the toll on his nearly 36-year-old body will be substantial. Add to that a high work rate forced upon him by Pacquiao’s speed, movement and relentlessness and exhaustion could set in sooner than the bigger man might expect. It is then that opportunity will knock for Manny Pacquiao, especially if he hasn’t allowed himself to be bought off in exchange for a three-pound cushion.

“He fades in easy fights,” Roach said of De La Hoya, who he prepared for his showdown with Floyd Mayweather, Jr., a fight that ended with De La Hoya abandoning a jab that had been highly effective in the early rounds and being outthustled down the stretch of a split decision defeat. “That’s why I want to keep Oscar looking for us all night. There was a reason why Oscar stopped jabbing against Floyd. I’m not going to talk about it but I know what it was. I pretty much know what Oscar has left.”

What Roach believes he has left, at least if forced to fight at 147 for 12 rounds, is not enough stamina or strength to outwork or out speed Pacquiao. What he also believes is if De La Hoya is forced to come in at the welterweight limit he agreed to fight at, he will be even more vulnerable than he appeared to be in May against Forbes in a fight in which he won every round but from which his face came out bruised and swollen despite his opponent’s well-deserved reputation for floating like a butterfly and stinging like one, too.

“Oscar is an older fighter,” Roach said. “His face is breaking up that much easier. Older fighters don’t take that damage like they used to. Oscar only fights once a year now (twice this year). If you’re not used to fighting your skin gets soft. Fighters who are active aren’t as soft. You add inactivity to age and to having to make a weight he hasn’t made in seven years (seven years, eight months and 12 days to be exact) and you give us an advantage.

“I’m preparing Manny to win. I intend on giving him every advantage. That includes the weight. I look at the tapes every night, especially of Oscar’s fights with (Hector) Camacho and (Pernell) Whitaker. Oscar has always had problems with shorter guys and with southpaws and in Manny he’s got both.

“They say he doesn’t fight southpaws well but we’ll see about that. I know we’ll need a perfect game plan and we’ll have to fight a perfect fight to win so I’m not concerned about what Oscar is doing as long as he makes 147. I’m concentrating on what Manny has to do. I pretty much know what Oscar has. I’m concentrating on getting my guy ready.”

Ready to fight at 147 pounds, give or take not one ounce. That’s the same weight it might be wise for Oscar De La Hoya to focus on making because if he doesn’t it may literally cost him a pound of flesh instead of a fist full of dollars to ever get into the ring with Manny Pacquiao.