

Oscar AND Manny's People Both Predict KO!

Written by Michael Woods

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There are those that view the Dec. 6 showdown between Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao as nothing but a freakshow, a cynical cash grab that should not have been made, as it brings nothing to the table for a fight fan, or to grow the sport, but instead exists solely to enrich the participants and programmers. I get that take. So much of what is done in the sport these days is done to enrich a select few, and the fan is left on the outside, looking in, with little but a bloated cable bill to show for his addiction to the sweet science. But, in this case, I am with the contingent that is curious to see what unfolds on Dec. 6 in Las Vegas, curious to see whether Pacquiao can impersonate David and slay Golden Boy Goliath.

One person's opinion on this matter stands out, and that is Pacquiao's stellar guide in the fistic arts, Freddie Roach. Coach Roach chatted in depth with TSS on the way back from a press conference on New York's Liberty Island held on Wednesday morning/afternoon, and TSS came away believing in Manny's prospects a bit more than we had previously.

The ride back was especially illuminating, and TSS enjoyed it thoroughly, if for no other reason that the whole experience had turned into a Gilligan's Island situation. The fighters didn't show up until 12:45, almost three hours after I showed up to board a ferry to the island. The conference finally broke up at around 3:30, and we hit NYC at 4 PM. But, rather than acting like the Skipper, ranting and raving about the semi-interminable experience, I instead chewed on what Roach told me. Coach Roach said that he is "90 percent sure that Pacquiao can beat Oscar." That questionable 10%, Roach said, is mostly tied up in Oscar's left hand, which is the only punch Roach says he is fearful of.

Bob Arum offered some substance, thankfully, after a snooze inducing infomercial session finished. He reminded press and fans that came to the conference that Ray Leonard was coming from a lower weight class to take on Marvin Hagler in 1987, and it worked out for SRL. Arum stated that, "At Top Rank we have one abiding principle, we don't put our fighters into fights we don't think they can win." Arum said he thinks Manny will win, and win "decisively."

Roach followed, and said Oscar is a "great guy." Roach said he learned a lot working with ODLH for eight weeks for his 2007 fight with Floyd Mayweather Jr. "Now I'm using it against him," Roach said. "Can Oscar still pull the trigger? We'll see."

That reference comes from Roach's masterful campaign to lure De La Hoya into this bout; he went on record saying De La Hoya has slipped, and maintains, with deadly earnestness, that he sees glaring holes in De La Hoya (39-5; he turned 35 in February) that Pacquiao (47-3; he turns 30 on December 17) can exploit.

In mid July, Roach appeared on a sports talk show in the Philippines, and sad, "The thing is with Oscar he just has some problem pulling the trigger, he's a little slower than he used to be. If Steve Forbes can hit him as easily as he did, I know Pacquiao will knock him out." I asked

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Roach how much of that was spur of the moment, or whether his statement was calculated to lure Oscar in to taking a Manny fight. Roach acknowledged that he knew what he was doing, and how that slam would get under Oscar's skin, and perhaps tip him towards taking the Pacquiao challenge. I then told Roach that if he were eligible, he'd get my BWAA vote as manager of the year for his slick move. He grinned.

His counterpart in the other corner, this time around, will be Ignacio "Nacho" Beristain, who's guided the Marquez brothers and Ricardo Lopez. The Mexican teacher spoke through a translator. "I'm proud and happy to give the world sixteen world champions, and will be happy to have the seventeenth, which is Oscar."

Pacquiao then took the mike, and spoke in English. He scored points with me by referring to the "distinguished members of the media," and the beautiful people "in the Big Apple." He promised to prove all the critics wrong on Dec. 6 and finished by saying, "I love New York." I swear Lady L turned around and grinned in appreciation at that moment.

Oscar then spoke. He called this occasion one of the "most special moments of my entire career." Oscar then admitted that hearing that Roach said he'd slipped spurred him to make this match. "I felt challenged," he said. "I heard the comments and said, 'OK, then let's make it happen.'" (Freddie works for a straight fee rather than a percentage with Manny now, but I hope he gets a fat bonus whatever the outcome.)

Oscar said he's extra motivated for this challenge, and will be running the mountains, and doing the little things that he hasn't always been doing in recent years, as his empire mushrooms and he has to devote energy to the expansion. Roach no doubt felt a slight sting when Oscar--who has nothing on Sarah Palin with his ability to deliver a verbal slap with a shiny grin--- said, "I have the perfect team now with Nacho." No, Oscar said, he will not go into the bout focusing on the fact that Manny started as a pro in 1995 at 106 pounds. "I know the ability of Manny Pacquiao, I know what he brings to the table. The heart he has is a big threat to me." Oscar also said he hopes that the fight can distract the nation, which has been obsessed with a deteriorating economy as this administration has backed a mindset and practices that have produced skyrocketing income inequality.

In a posedown after the talk session, we got a look at Oscar and Manny's physiques, and the size differential. Oscar is listed at 5-10 ½ and Manny at 5-6 1/2. That looked accurate to me. Manny looks fuller in the face than we are used to, while Oscar looks to be around 155 pound or so. Roach told TSS after that he is dead serious, if Oscar doesn't make 147, the fight is off. Team Manny will not accept a payment for pound arrangement, and will force Oscar to make a weight he has not since 2001.

Afterwards, Arum told TSS that he sees the quicker Manny cutting Oscar, sees Oscar fading late, and sees Pacquiao stopping Oscar. Roach said he thinks a KO win is do-able but isn't all the most likely ending. "A KO, that'll be a bonus."

Asked to offer a percentage of certainty that Manny beats Oscar, Roach answered, "90 percent." And what encompasses that 10%, Coach Roach was asked? "His educated left. He

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can put his right hand in his pocket for all I care." Could Oscar's jab prove a problem? ODLH's jab is too slow to be much of a factor, Roach thinks.

Beristain, meanwhile, will have Oscar being mindful of proper techniques and strategies to employ against a lefty. Of course, he knows Manny inside and out from the two fights with Juan Manuel Marquez. "Nacho" took umbrage when informed that Roach has no respect for Oscar's right hand. "I can't believe Freddie would say that," he said in Spanish. "I thought he was smarter or more professional. He knows Oscar can do damage with both hands. Maybe Freddie doesn't know what he's doing."

Beristain said the bouts with Marquez confirmed what he knew about Pacquiao. "Marquez proved that Pacquiao is not the Mexican Killer." Asked to offer a prediction, Beristain called a De La Hoya TKO, in round 7 or 8. The only chance Pacquiao has is to go inside, Beristain said, and throw punches and then get out of range. If Manny stands in front of Oscar, he will get knocked out in the first minute, Oscar's latest trainer says.