

It's On! Oscar Slams Roach, Roach Counters

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 01 October 2008 19:00

After the fear wore off that we were stranded on Liberty Island, with only a coupon for a free lunch that nobody ate because they were afraid they'd miss the fighters' arrival, the first press conference to tout the Dec. 6 Oscar De La Hoya/Manny Pacquiao bout in Las Vegas yielded some fruit.

Oscar chatted with media in a roundtable format. When asked about Bob Arum's prediction of a Pacquiao KO, he shrugged it off. "Everyone has their Roachown opinion," he said with even temper. "But I ain't going nowhere and I know Manny won't." He grinned widely. Oscar looks in fighting shape now; he said he's been training for 1 ½ months, hit 150 the other day and weighs around 152-153 now. His new trainer "Nacho" Beristain told him to slow down on the weight loss, he said. (Pacman's coach Freddie Roach, when asked about Oscar's weight, said he would have had Oscar taper down more slowly. He is hoping that keeping near that weight for so long will sap Oscar's strength and stamina.)

"I can go lower (than 147 pounds)," Oscar said. (Look out Ricky Hatton at 145?)

As to how many fights he has left, Oscar said he made a mistake bringing up retirement. "The next time I talk about it I'll be announcing my retirement," he said. (TSS Universe, should we hold him to that promise? Charismatic types know that they build interest in an event if they talk retirement. A fan thinks that he better tune in while he can, because the icon is exiting the arena. Cher and The Who have done this masterfully over the decades.)

Asked who might take his torch when he exited, I was shocked SHOCKED when Oscar offered the name of Golden Boy fighter Victor Ortiz (22-1), who, in a massive coincidence, will be fighting on the Dec. 6 card!

ODLH said that Roach's presence in Pacquiao's corner won't be overly detrimental. "He knows my training, knows my training regimen, but he doesn't know everything," he said. Freddie, he said, is a "great guy," but Oscar said he was ticked off when he heard Roach talking trash about his slippage.

Then, in sneaky Palin-esque fashion, Oscar landed an overhand right. "I chose Roach (for the Mayweather fight) to be aggressive. My thought was to be aggressive with Mayweather. That was a big mistake, the incorrect strategy. The strategy Freddie had was the incorrect one."

Beyond this bout, Oscar didn't name check Hatton, but did mention Margarito, and Paul Williams. "I only have two to three fights left in me, that's it."

On the ferry back to NY, Roach and TSS chatted. He delved more into why he thinks Oscar can be beat. He saw one particular thing in training Oscar, he said, that Manny can work off of, but would not specify. "I can tell you closer to the fight, when it won't matter for him," he said, chuckling. I'm just guessing, but I think it's in the realm of defense, not offense. Roach said he

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was surprised at the holes in Oscar's game, considering how much he's accomplished, and the quality of coaching he's had. Again, he chose not to offer specifics.

There is the possibility, Roach said, that the strength/weight gap might hurt Pacquiao. He cited an example from his own career—Roach compiled a 39-13 mark as a pro from 1978-1986—when he tried to go up a division too many, and it hurt. In 1986, in the third to last fight in his career, Roach weighed about 140 to fight Brit Andy Nance. Roach was at his best at around 122 pounds, but he was then 26, and could not make 122 or even 130 without starving himself. Really, his career had jumped the shark; he was a trialhorse now, someone to test a fringe prospect, or a good name on a resume. So he took the Nance bout, and in the first round, when he ate a Nance blow, he had one reaction: Ouch. It is possible, he said, that Manny could have the same reaction. But Dedham Freddie truly feels, after what he saw from Oscar in his fight with Steve Forbes in May, and against Mayweather last year, that ODLH cannot really set down on his shots anymore. He's more likely to flurry, with pitty-pat shots, Roach said, and that won't drop Manny.

Freddie was surprised to hear Oscar mention that it was his strategy that was a major downfall in the Mayweather bout. First, Freddie said, he thinks that Oscar won the fight, or came very, very close. Second, Oscar didn't do what Roach told him to, keep up the power jab and finish strong. He made it clear that he didn't care for this element of Oscar's personality. And we should not forget, there is a history that isn't brought up much with Pacquiao and Oscar regarding promotional issues. In the fall of 2006, Manny's deal with Top Rank was up, and Oscar signed him. Problem was, Manny was counting down to a bout with Erik Morales, and his contract stated that he couldn't do a deal with someone else until his last fight on his current deal was finished. Arum and Oscar battled, lawyers were involved, and Golden Boy tried to stop many from fighting Jorge Solis in April 2007. Accusations were slung back and forth, cash was taken, and returned, feelings were hurt. And while parties are playing nice, when terms like "Nazi banker" are stored in memory banks, nice can go to nasty right quick.

Random bits gleaned on Liberty Island/NYC on Wednesday:

1) Closed circuit will be available in Las Vegas to handle overflow from the MGM Grand. Tix for closed circuit will start at \$60. Yikes. I hope you get some popcorn and soda, too..

2) HBO started shooting their 24/7 show, which debuts on Nov. 16 at 8:30 PM (Eastern). There were around a 150 Manny fans in attendance, whooping for their guy, and they dwarfed the Oscar fans rooting on their fighter. So these diehards hopefully will make the show.

3) Referring back to Oscar's hope that everyone will forget the doom and gloom mood stemming from economic woes, as so many of us worry about inflation and health care bills, while fatcat CEOs giggle their way to the bank after plundering their corporations of capital and reputation... That bold fightwriter Tom Hauser, who must be applauded for consistently speaking truth to power, and afflicting the comfortable, asked Oscar if he'd be utilizing his standing in his community, and offer an endorsement in this Presidential cycle. Oscar begged off, saying he was a fighter, not a politician. This was during a press roundtable at the end of the conference. I looked at Oscar and said, "You're a pretty good politician too." He smiled. Oscar is what he is.

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He's looking to build an empire. It would have been nice I offer if he'd taken the opportunity to plug the party which cares most for Hispanics in the US, and immigrants, the Democrats. But that's not where he's at now. Maybe down the line he will allow his conscience to enter into his empire building realm, that would be cool. Not to single out Oscar, but too many of us have spent too much time attending to our own bottom line, and haven't been bold and courageous in speaking out as a Corporatocracy has taken hold. We can all do better, IMO. End digression.

4)□ HBO's Ross Greenburg got points for directness when he admitted that he be open to putting a Oscar/Pacquiao ad on Lady Liberty. "I guess we can't put one on her, but we would," he said. (From my seat, I looked up and saw Lady Liberty's backside, and admitted that there is a good deal of square footage there to be utilized. Is there any doubt that she will be covered in ads in about five years?)

5) At the conference, I admit I was grumbling some after the fighters arrived, and we sat through about a half hour of blah blah blah from reps from sponsors. One guy repping for a power tool company came off like a power tool when he started blabbing about his family history, and naming relatives that came to this nation way back when. I will say the rep from Tecate, Marta, was sweet, and good at her job, and I promised her I'd plug Tecate, which is offering \$25 off your pay per view bill with purchase of a 12-pack or more.