

LAS VEGAS – A promoter, by the very nature of his job, is an optimist. But Bob Arum seems to be taking that to a new level this week.

Amidst a sagging economy, American consumers putting away their credit cards and reducing their discretionary spending and the oncoming Christmas rush, Arum is trying to help sell this weekend's pay-per-view fight between Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao for a premium charge of \$54.95. In some cases, if a consumer wants the fight in HD his cable company will hit him for another \$5 or \$10.

It would not seem this is the best of economic times to be trying to make such a sale but Arum sees it just the opposite.

"I think this economy is going to help the fight!" Arum said passionately. "In this economy people don't go out. They stay home. The average pay-per-view fight sells to a group of eight people. So if they buy De La Hoya-Pacquiao it's cheaper than the eight of them going out to the movies for \$10 a piece.

"I think this is a good situation for this fight. It's a marquee fight at a time when people are going to be home. That's why it's tracking so well."

How well remains to be seen. When De La Hoya fought Floyd Mayweather, Jr. a year ago their fight shattered all pay-per-view records, doing more than two million buys. Not even Arum is ready to predict that record will be challenged but while some industry insiders are reluctant to predict the fight will reach one million paying homes, Arum insisted it should do in excess of that.

But then again he's not only a promoter but the one who once said in answer to a question pointing out a contradiction, "Yesterday I was lying. Today I'm telling the truth."

Among those on hand at the IBA Gym yesterday watching Manny Pacquiao being put through his paces by trainer Freddie Roach was former undisputed heavyweight champion Mike Tyson.

Once the center of a seemingly endless string of public storms, Tyson appeared a quiet and forlorn figure yesterday as he watched Pacquiao working in the middle of the day.

He stood off to the side, looking loose-bellied and far from in the fighting shape that had once terrorized so many heavyweight challengers.

Roach, who trained him for a time, came over to say hello and inquired into what he was doing these days.

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“Nothing really,” Tyson said with characteristic honesty.

The bulk of the talk the past few days has centered on the size advantage De La Hoya seems to have against his far smaller opponent. Of all those speculating on whether De La Hoya will have superior punching power and hence be dominant, perhaps the man in the best position to know is De La Hoya’s conqueror and business partner, Bernard Hopkins.

Hopkins is the only man to stop De La Hoya, dropping him with a body shot several years ago in the ninth round of their middleweight title fight. After that night De La Hoya returned to 154 pounds and has stayed there until agreeing to come down to the 147-pound welterweight limit to entice Pacquiao into what Hopkins feels will be a similar physical mismatch to the one he and De La Hoya engaged in.

“It will take him a few rounds,” Hopkins said of De La Hoya, “but around the fifth or sixth round a shift will happen. That’s when Oscar is going to make Pacquiao change his style and his thinking.”

It is no accident that that was about the time Hopkins began to close the gap on De La Hoya, finally moving more boldly on his smaller opponent and asserting his will. Hopkins believes the pattern will be much the same Saturday night at the MGM Grand Garden Arena.

At first Pacquiao’s speed will negate De La Hoya’s physical advantages but, Hopkins feels, as the rounds drag on and De La Hoya’s superior strength and punching power surface, Manny Pacquiao will begin to understand why people have long said a good big man beats a good little man.

“Oscar’s going to take a couple of rounds to settle in. The first few rounds are going to be speed, speed, speed. They got to establish who’s going to be on offense and who’s going to be on defense. I don’t think Manny’s going to be on offense.”

If he’s not, then he isn’t going to be winning the fight, either. At least not in Hopkins’ opinion because he has little regard for Pacquiao’s defense.

Always aggressive, Pacquiao does often leave himself open and vulnerable in an effort to be constantly on the offensive. But as Hopkins points out, every time you go on offense you also open up your defense.

“Manny’s got a loosey-goosey defense. He’s all offense. He’ll pay for that. It’s going to be a bad year for Top Rank (Arum’s promotional company which handles both Pacquiao and Kelly Pavlik the middleweight champion Hopkins beat badly a month and a half ago.)”

De La Hoya (39-5, 30 KO) retains an unusual hold on boxing fans. Unlike most of his

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contemporaries it does not even seem to matter any more if he wins or not. His fans remain.

Arguably, De La Hoya has lost all of the five biggest fights of his career – by stoppage to Hopkins and points losses to Shane Mosley (twice), Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and Felix Trinidad. Yet somehow his popularity has remained unaffected.

One man who is not surprised by that is rival promoter Don King, who will not be in attendance but who will be paying attention to the outcome with a professional eye.

“He was a hero of the Olympics and he’s a personable guy,” King said of De La Hoya. “So it don’t surprise me that he’s still a big draw.

“Every now and then he comes away with a victory but he’s got a loyal fan base where victory don’t matter. Usually you got to win those big fights but times and conditions change. Expectations change. Used to be with the networks if you lose they would not give you another date.

“Boxing is the only sport where if you lose they throw you in the incinerator. You can see teams lose eight, nine, 10 in a row. They still go. But boxing is a unique business. You don’t win you out according to them. But not with Oscar. His fans are loyal.”

Thursday trainers Freddie Roach and Nacho Beristain, who will handle Pacquiao and De La Hoya respectively Saturday night, gathered in the media center at the MGM Thursday for a trainer’s round table to discuss the fight.

They didn’t sit at the same table.

There is no love lost between these two for some reason, Beristain taking offense that Roach claims he knows De La Hoya well after only working with him for one fight and Roach still bristling at Beristain’s unsportsmanlike reaction to Pacquiao’s close points victory over Juan Manuel Marquez, whom Beristain also trains, earlier this year.

Marquez, who is part of De La Hoya’s stable at Golden Boy Promotions, made clear yesterday during an appearance in the media center that Roach isn’t the only one who hasn’t gotten over the outcome of the second fight with Pacquiao.

“Officially I lost the fight to Pacquiao but the people know who won,” said Marquez, who is anxiously seeking a third fight with Pacquiao after losing a split decision and fighting him to a draw in their first two meetings.

“After they stole the win from me against Pacquiao I moved on. Beating Joel Casamayor was a big victory.”

Marquez is among those Mexican champions who are backing De La Hoya. Although he’d

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rather be backing himself in a rubber match with Pacquiao Marquez insisted that “I have other options.”

Yeah, watching Pacquiao fight De La Hoya.