

### Fighter of the Year

In 2008, Manny "Pac Man" Pacquiao accomplished something that was last seen in October 1937 to October 1938 when the great Henry Armstrong won the featherweight, lightweight and welterweight titles in a year's span. Pacquiao won junior lightweight, lightweight world titles and beat an elite welterweight boxer all in the same year.

Many said that Armstrong's feat would never be repeated, but Pacquiao came very close to the feat, though not in the same weight divisions. All that was missing was a world title in the welterweight bout.

The super charged Pacquiao last fought as a featherweight in 2004 and had been residing in the junior lightweight division for the last several years. Earlier this year he beat Mexico's Juan Manuel Marquez in a fierce battle for the WBC junior lightweight title that ended in a split decision win. He then dominated David Diaz for the WBC lightweight title in June and finally capped the year with another dominating win over a former Pound for Pound champion Oscar De La Hoya several weeks ago.

It may be another 70 years before you see someone duplicate Pacquiao's feat.

A few other candidates should be mentioned in this category. Welshman Joe Calzaghe had the best year of his career when he beat Bernard Hopkins in a close battle last April. He followed that win with a one-sided beating of Roy Jones Jr. last November in Madison Square Garden. Though Jones is not nearly the fighter he was before 2004, you can't say Calzaghe had youth on his side. He's 36 and Jones is 39.

Mexico's Antonio Margarito also had a pretty good 12 months. The Tijuana Tornado collided with Kermit Cintron again and stopped the power puncher a second time and won the IBF welterweight belt. Proving he wasn't concerned with keeping a belt, he lit after Miguel Cotto, the WBA welterweight titleholder, and beat him up in 11 rounds. Fans could never call Margarito's style pretty, "brutal" might be a more appropriate word.

And finally there was Australia's Vic "The Destroyer" Darchinyan. After getting knocked loopy a year ago, the Armenian slugger returned with knockout wins over Russia's Dimitri Kirilov and Mexico's Cristian Mijares. He also showed he could box very well in dominating Mijares in his last fight. A very impressive showing for Darchinyan.

All of the aforementioned fighters had a great year, but Pacquiao's year will go down in history as one of the all-time great 12 months.

### Fight of the Year

## Avila's List Of Boxing's Best In 2008

Written by David A. Avila

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Without a doubt Israel Vazquez-Rafael Marquez III is the Fight of the Year. Their third encounter proved to be the best of the trilogy that began in March 2007 and ended in March 2008. In my eyes the only trilogy that matches it would be Tony Zale-Rocky Graziano's three middleweight encounters in the 1940s for sheer mayhem.

The Mexico City warriors lit up the Home Depot Center with 12 rounds of fury that held the crowd in awe and ended in a split decision. A left hook from Vazquez that sent Marquez reeling into the corner (and correctly ruled a knockdown) in the final 10 seconds of the last round, proved the deciding factor and the coup de grace for the three epic battles. Boxing fans will be talking about these three collisions for decades. It was pure and scientific violence at its best and exemplified why boxing is called the "Sweet Science."

Other candidates for Fight of the Year were Pacquiao's return match with Mexico's Juan Manuel Marquez last March. A fifth round knockdown of Marquez proved to be the deciding factor in this nip and tuck battle between two remarkable fighters.

In third is Antonio Margarito's bludgeoning win over Puerto Rico's Miguel Cotto. When they entered the ring Cotto was the 3-1 favorite and undefeated. It was a classic Mexico vs. Puerto Rico war and it did not fail to incite the fans present at the Las Vegas fight this past summer. In the end, Margarito proved he would walk through fire to win the fight and did in bludgeoning fashion.

### Round of the Year

The rematch between Kendall Holt and Ricardo Torres for the WBO world title was held in Las Vegas in front of a small number of journalists at the Planet Hollywood Hotel and Casino. Many fight reporters were busy attending a mixed martial arts fight card across the street and missed one of the most electrifying matches in years. The two junior welterweights tore into each other with homicidal punches and no jabs. Holt was dropped twice but recovered and ultimately knocked out Colombia's Torres with a right hand and a simultaneous accidental head butt. All this took place in a mere 61 seconds. It was one of those fights that if you blinked too much, you missed the fight.

In second place was Riverside's Chris "The Nightmare" Arreola and Florida's Travis "Freight Train" Walker heavyweight clash. In most heavyweight bouts you can count the number of blows fired on one hand. You can sleep through most of their bouts, but not this one. Walker dropped Arreola in the second round with a perfect right hand to the chin. Then, 30 seconds later, Arreola returned fire and landed a crunching left hook. The crowd went crazy. Arreola proved he could take a punch and come off the deck to win a fight. He's poised to fight Wladimir Klitschko in April or May.

### Knockout of the Year

Venezuela's Jorge Linares has been impressing boxing fans with his fighting prowess and immense physical talent. Against Mexico's iron chinned Gamaliel Diaz he proved he can punch with the best. In the eighth round, after missing with a left, Linares pivoted on his left foot and

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beat Diaz with a right hand to floor the Mexican fighter in crunching fashion. Diaz legs were short circuited by the punch and down he went. It was a decisive victory for Linares who is not as well known as his fellow countryman Edwin Valero. But that knockout woke up the eyes of boxing fans that saw the fight on pay-per-view.

Coming in a second was Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero's right uppercut, left cross combination to turn out the circuits on Jason Litzau in another featherweight contest last February for the IBF title. Guerrero is slated to fight in January 24, at the Staples Center.

Ironically, both Linares and Guerrero are moving up to the junior lightweight division. Will they be fighting each other in 2009? Wow.

### **Upset of the Year**

Palm Spring's Timothy "Desert Storm" Bradley's victory in London against the feared Junior Witter for the WBC junior welterweight title grabs him the honor of being the best of the area for 2008. While other junior welterweights avoided Witter, Bradley traveled to London where he was given a room with no air conditioning, no bed and stalled at the airport, then proceeded to out-box and knock down the feared Witter. It was a fairy tale come-to-life for a boxer who never had fought outside of California. Bradley is set to meet Kendall Holt in a junior welterweight unification bout.

### **Worst result of the Year**

Canada's Lucian Bute retained the IBF super middleweight world title but it really should be in the hands of California's Librado Andrade. If not for a horrible, if not purposeful, mishandling by the Canadian referee, the title should have changed hands by knockout. When Andrade knocked down Bute he looked done. But the referee wasted 17 seconds telling Andrade to go to the neutral corner, though he was in the corner. Bute won by decision, but only because the referee interfered on his behalf.

### **Trainer of the Year**

It's difficult to surmise the best trainer of the year because it really depends on the fighter to win or lose a fight. The trainer can't fight the fight for their charge, but he can prepare someone and give strategy for a fight.

Freddie Roach has to win this year for his guidance of Manny Pacquiao. It was Roach who spotted the weaknesses in Oscar De La Hoya and surmised that Pacquiao could beat the East L.A. boxer. Last summer Roach debated with me the reasons and every point he made came true. Even his strategies worked perfectly.

In second place is Floyd Mayweather. The trainer was perfect in big fights. First he guided De La Hoya to victory over Steve Forbes in May, then, he guided Ricky Hatton to victory in November. Both fighters looked their best in years. Could Mayweather have made a difference for De La Hoya in his fight? Hard to tell.

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### Promoter of the Year

I've got to go with Goossen-Tutor Promotions. The California-based promotion company worked hard in 2008 to find new ways to work for its fighters that include venturing to the Cayman Islands last June to stage a boxing show. They also put on a fight card featuring Paul Williams and Chris Arreola in a brand new venue, the Citizens Business Bank Arena in Ontario, California. Maybe 2009 could be the year for Goossen-Tutor as both Williams and Arreola are primed for major fights. They also signed Olympian Shawn Estrada and lightweight prospect John Molina.

### Best Referees

California's Pat Russell is this year's best referee. He did a masterful job in the Israel Vazquez-Rafael Marquez III fight last March and is always in top form for any fight. He rarely makes bad decisions in the ring and is one of the more respected referees in the world. Those gray hairs don't mean he's losing a step, they're signs of wisdom.

In close second is Nevada's Tony Weeks. In the past three years he's climbed to the top of the ladder with his great handling of prizefights. The only thing Weeks does that can be corrected is his staying in one position too long. But his calls in the ring are right on and always on time.

Third place is a tie between California's Jack Reiss and Nevada's Kenny Bayless. Both are very fair and stay out of the action unless necessary.

### Best judges

Jerry Roth of Nevada has to be on the top of any list of boxing judges. He has a way of scoring fights that is consistent. He likes boxers who throw a lot of punches and make a fight happen. In the past five years he's been the top judge out of Nevada and is a welcome sight for any big fight.

Max DeLuca is another consistent and sharp-eyed judge. In most fights it's easy to judge the winner. But when you have two elite fighters who are good defensively, then you want DeLuca scoring the fight. The California judge can spot who is landing and who is blocking with the best of the judges. There wasn't a fight he scored that could be called a bad decision.

Tom Kaczmarek wrote a book on how to score a fight. It shows. He's very consistent and has that ability to surmise when a boxer is actually landing blows, not just hitting his opponent's gloves and arms. Kaczmarek has been very good for a long time. He's the best of the East Coast judges in my opinion.

### Most Entertaining Fighter

It's always very close but this year it goes to Ricardo "El Matador" Mayorga. The Nicaraguan prizefighter is a massive personality though he doesn't speak English. When he's on the main event there is nobody who can light up a press conference like this former two-division world

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champion. Crowds, journalists and macho Latinos love his persona. Win or lose he's a gracious fighter once the party is over. I'm going to miss Mayorga when his career is over. Another thing, is this guy can fight. He never takes the easy way out. People forget he beat Fernando Vargas and Vernon Forrest twice. And he gave Shane Mosley all he could handle. Don't sleep on Mayorga.

Runner up has to be Emanuel Augustus. When he gets in a groove and starts shaking and baking he's fun to watch and probably perplexing to fight. Too bad he never won a world title. He's now residing in Las Vegas. It's a perfect spot for him.

### **Gutsiest Fighter**

This is a difficult choice. Most prizefighters have guts to spare, but I got to pick Verno Phillips for this category. When nobody wanted to fight Paul Williams it was Phillips who took up the challenge without hesitation. This guy has been fighting for a long time. Heck, I remember seeing him fight at the Inglewood Forum back in 1994. In November, against Williams, the much smaller Phillips took blow after blow and never quit. Man, I was in awe of the kid. I'm glad the fight was stopped because Phillips was not going to surrender. He was intent to go out on his shield. Luckily, he was able to walk out of the ring. And it was his birthday that night.

### **Ready for world titles**

Abner Mares, 23, from Mexico, has a lethal combination of speed, power and boxing skills. The former Mexican Olympian should be fighting for a world title in 2009. In the past 16 months he decisively beat several good fighters in Chino Garcia, Diosdado Gabi and Jonathan Arias. He's ready for anybody holding a bantamweight belt.

Urbano Antillon from Maywood, California has blown through the competition in the last two years. Most people think he's the same young teen who was teetered against Ivan Valles at the Olympic Auditorium. Folks, wake up, you're asleep in class, that was six years ago when he was 19. Now he's 26 and seems to have rocks in his gloves. A lightweight title should be his as soon as he gets an opportunity.

Andre Dirrell from Flint, Michigan has height, speed, and boxing ability. He seldom gets hit so it's difficult to surmise if he has a world caliber chin. But otherwise, Dirrell should have a super middleweight belt wrapped around his waist in the next 12 months.

### **Prospects to watch**

John Molina continues his trek toward becoming a contender in the talented lightweight division. The hard-hitting Covina fighter remains undefeated and recently signed a promotion contract with Goossen-Tutor.

Philadelphia's Danny Garcia a junior welterweight seems to have a lot going on. He's got all the tools. The only thing left to see is if he can take a big punch.