If there is a technically more proficient boxer in the world than Juan Manuel Marquez no one has ever seen him. This is a point Marquez made clear once again last weekend when he methodically dismantled a good fighter named Juan Diaz round by painful round.

To the untutored eye, some of which were working as part of HBO's broadcasting team, it appeared Diaz was bulling Marquez around early in the fight, forcing him backwards and landing many more blows. To those who knew better, no one forces Juan Manuel Marquez to do anything inside a boxing ring he doesn't want to do, except maybe Manny Pacquiao, and he doesn't do it very often or for very long as their first two fights have proven.

All night Marquez was setting up the uppercuts that ultimately left Diaz bleeding badly and flat on his back, dazed and unsure of anything but the fact he had just been stopped by a superior life form. Diaz was warned of this in Round 3 when, after snapping Marquez's head back he ate a right uppercut counter in the center of the ring that should have been a lesson to him. It wasn't and so there were harsher ones delivered six rounds later.

Marquez may not be the best pound for pound fighter in the world but if you believe that man is Pacquiao, there is little or nothing to pick between them at 122 pounds, 126 pounds and now at 135 pounds. Sure, Pacquiao has a win and a draw over Marquez but nearly as many people believe Marquez won both those fights as there are Pacquiao supporters who think otherwise. That is why the direction the two of them should be headed after Pacquiao faces Ricky Hatton on May 2 is toward each other.

Both claim they would prefer Floyd Mayweather under the theory he would bring the biggest payday, even if he would be coming off what is now a 15-month layoff. They might be right about that, but not by much, either in dollars and cents or in common sense because a third fight between Pacquiao and Marquez seems more compelling and a clear case of settling old scores and evening the books… and those are the kind of things fans thrive on.

Truth be told, if Marquez could avoid the knockdowns that probably cost him victories in the first two fights and he wins Round 3 you could put them back in for a fourth time in the way they used to match Sugar Ray Robinson and Jake LaMotta every six months. And who wouldn't cheer that decision? Great rivalries, after all, demand shared confrontations and shared crisis.

As long as Mayweather stays out of the gym, Pacquiao and Marquez are the two best fighters in the world. If you can come up with someone superior in any weight class, please bring him forward. That being the case, why talk about either one of them facing Mayweather next, instead of each other? And why do we hear the suggestion that perhaps Marquez waste a little more time picking up the IBF and WBC belts recently vacated by Nate Campbell and Marquez once those organizations sort out who will be their next beltholder at 135 pounds when Marquez is already the linear champion and the best fighter in the division. So why not get to what would really count – a third showdown with a guy barely able to be more than even with him?

One thing Marquez showed by beating up Diaz was that he has carried his power with him into the 135 pound division, a worry for any puncher when he jumps up in weight. Diaz (34-2) had never been stopped and is not known as “The Baby Bull’’ for nothing. He is arguably the strongest guy in the division, a relentless aggressor who keeps moving forward until convinced to try something else, which takes a lot of convincing.

Add that knockout to Marquez’s concussive debut at 135, when he stopped the slipping but still difficult-to-handle Joel Casamayor, and you have made a strong case for seeing Marquez as nearly as dangerous a puncher as a lightweight as he was at 122 and 126 pounds. Yet after the destruction of Diaz, Marquez (50-4-1, 37 KOs) seemed to dismiss the notion of a third fight with Pacquiao as an impossibility, although not one of his own making.

“I’ve been trying to get a third fight with Manny Pacquiao but he doesn’t want to fight me so I’m calling out the best and that’s Floyd Mayweather,’’ Maquez said. “Who wouldn’t want to see that fight? I’ll fight him at 140 or maybe a little above that. I want to fight the best, the very best.’’

Maybe this was simply posturing to try and lure Pacquiao into a rubber match, but there are more reasons than that for the fight to be made. First off, Mayweather may not be so ready to agree to a fight below the welterweight limit. Although he could make 140 or some catch weight in between, why should he?

His public demand for a payday in excess of $20 million further complicates matters for Marquez, who would be offered far less than Mayweather and far less than he’s likely willing to accept to take the great risk of jumping another 10 or more pounds. Hence it would seem logic, which counts for little in boxing, and common sense, which counts for even less, would bring Marquez and Pacquiao back together, assuming Pacquiao gets the best of Ricky Hatton.

If he doesn’t, a Hatton-Marquez match might make some sense, but of course Hatton will be screaming for a rematch with Mayweather, who knocked him cold when they last met. A beaten Pacquiao might command a bit less than he would want to meet Marquez again, a negotiating mistake Marquez and Golden Boy Promotions should not make if that happens.

Given the opportunity to face Manny Pacquiao a third time, Marquez should jump on it. Pacquiao, win or lose against Hatton, should do the same, because regardless of what else he does in his career unless and until he defeats Juan Manuel Marquez in convincing fashion, which he knows in his heart he has not yet done, there will always be a small hole in his resume.

For all his talk of Floyd Mayweather last weekend, Juan Manuel Marquez knows who he wants to fight and who he should fight and it is Manny Pacquiao. Boxing’s suits who write the checks and make the matches should realize the same. The sport was built on rivalries like this, rivalries that exist through a string of fights and over many years.

Juan Manuel Marquez and Manny Pacquiao remain such a rivalry, one that will not be decided until they do it the old fashioned way – face to face. The night that happens drama will be in the air, millions will be in their bank accounts and boxing fans will be on the edge of their seats,

seats they gladly paid for.

That, in the end, is why they call this sport prizefighting and the biggest prize for Juan Manuel Maquez and Manny Pacquiao is another chance to face each other.