

## LOTIERZO: Curses To The Catch-Weight!

Written by Frank Lotierzo  
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Manny Pacquiao 49-3-2 (37 KOs) and Miguel Cotto 34-1 (27 KOs) are two of the easiest fighters in boxing to root for and no one minds putting their money down to buy a ticket to see them fight. Both Pacquiao and Cotto are real fighters and have always sought to fight the best fighters available. They've both shown incredible heart and fortitude and really are at their best and most dangerous when they are faced with adversity.

As of this writing it looks as though it's only a matter of time before a bout between them is finalized. At stake will be Cotto's WBO welterweight title. However, instead of the 147 pound limit that both Cotto and his last opponent Joshua Clottey had to make when they fought this past June, it will be fought at a 143 pound catch-weight insisted by the Pacquiao faction.

This fight on paper is a terrific matchup. If Cotto wasn't forced to come in below the maximum weight the welterweight division allows, it's one of the best fights boxing could realize in 2009. Since that's not the case it loses some of its luster in the eyes of this spectator.

The catch-weight nonsense is as old as boxing but became more of a staple after November of 1988 when Sugar Ray Leonard forced WBC light heavyweight title holder Donny Lalonde to come in at 168 so their light heavyweight title fight could also be for the super middleweight title, not that Lalonde cared about winning the lighter weight title. What he did care about was the five million dollars he was making for fighting Leonard. Once again the superstar was appeased. Now in retirement, Sugar Ray Leonard can lay claim to winning world titles in five divisions, which enhances his legacy. If Ken Norton is the only heavyweight champ who never won a title bout, is Ray Leonard the only light heavyweight title holder who never fought at light heavyweight?

Professional boxing is sometimes more about superstars and money than it is finding out who really is the best fighter. Look at De La Hoya vs. Pacquiao. Freddy Roach spouted how bad Oscar looked in his previous fight before Pacquiao and said that's why he agreed to the 147 pound limit. That I'm sure had something to do with it. But De La Hoya was the draw and Pacquiao and Roach had to accept Oscar's terms or no lottery payday or chance to transform Manny into the star fighter he's becoming. And this is exactly what's happening now with Pacquiao. Now he has the power and represents the money fight for his opponents. So he and Roach are only doing what's been done by others in their position. Remember, the fight between Pacquiao and Cotto is intended to make Pacquiao into a bigger star than he already is. In order to do that he must beat Cotto. In order to give him the best chance to do that, they'll attempt to weaken his supposedly stronger opponent taking away his only advantage.

This is also about helping to insure Pacquiao gets that fifth title. That's not a shot at Manny or an insinuation that he's afraid to fight Cotto or even Shane Mosley at 147, it's just that there's too much money and legacy riding on the outcome. If Roach could force Cotto to have to cut his leg off in order to make weight, he'd do it. Whatever it takes to give his fighter the best shot and bring both men the most money is what it's mostly about.

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It does however get tiresome hearing that Pacquiao isn't a welterweight and is at a monumental disadvantage fighting a strong one like Cotto or Mosley. Some like to champion how Pacquiao started at 106 and moved up, something I too have been guilty of, but let's not forget that he was only 17 then and hadn't nearly filled out nor was he an adult. At age 17 Cassius Clay was fighting as a light heavyweight. Pacquiao won his first title and lost it via knockout at 112. Mention that and you'll hear how he wasn't fully matured and he hasn't been stopped once since he's filled out. Okay, that's fair. So let's say as an adult at age 24 he's a junior featherweight weighing about 122. Even still, fighting 25 pounds higher as a welterweight is an off the chart accomplishment, but let's not act as if his life is more on the line than other fighters moving up.

When Michael Spinks challenged Larry Holmes, Holmes weighed 46 pounds more than any other opponent he ever fought, and if we go back as far as Spinks' debut weight of 165, we're talking 56 pounds. Spinks was outsized by Holmes more than Pacquiao is by Cotto or Mosley, but never once suggested that Holmes had to come in lighter than what he'd been weighing for any of his previous title defenses. He just wanted to be the legitimate heavyweight champ if he won, and he was. Roy Jones made the same jump fighting John Ruiz and didn't stipulate that Ruiz had to weigh in at a specified weight. Before Spinks and Jones, Sugar Ray Robinson challenged light heavyweight champ Joey Maxim. Again, no catch-weight, Robinson weighed in at 157 and Maxim was 173. Robinson didn't win and the weight had a lot to do with it, being he collapsed due to the heat they fought in that night. Robinson, who was known for being a shrewd businessman wasn't quite as astute as he thought. Today, Maxim would have to come in at 168 and Robinson would be a four-division champ.

Just to be clear -- this isn't an admonishment of Pacquiao. He's being told by Arum and Roach what's going to happen, I believe. The only thing Manny has to do is take care of the fight in the ring, they'll take care of the one outside it. Because they've probably changed his way of thinking and shown him that it's great to be a warrior, but your career lasts longer and you make more money being a smart warrior. Although I know it's business, I think it's ridiculous to fight the title of a champion, Cotto, where he can't weigh up to the maximum weight allowed for the division. As was Leonard's light heavyweight title tainted, so will Pacquiao's by some boxing observers, if he manages to beat Cotto.

As far as the actual fight between Pacquiao and Cotto, it's a fascinating matchup from a style vantage point. Both guys can hit with either hand and both have shown they're versatile and can press the fight and attack, or step back and counter. The problem again comes back to the weight. If Cotto is weak and dehydrated which he will be more than likely, then he'll be fighting with diminished reflexes and skills, not to mention less pop in his punch. And if Cotto can't hurt Pacquiao and make him do physically what he doesn't want to do, he has no tools at his disposal to hope to beat him. In this fight it will be imperative for Cotto to carry his punch because if he can bang Manny to the body and slow him down along with causing him to fight in more measured fashion than he normally does, he'll nullify his hand speed and southpaw style. A slowed Pacquiao will be vulnerable to Cotto stepping on it and pushing the fight as he attempts to impose himself physically, something that he'd have a better chance doing weighing 147 opposed to 143.

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If anyone thinks the Cotto who fought Mosley, Margarito and Clotey is who we'll see fight Pacquiao on November 14, 2009, you're wrong. A week or more before he weighs in for the fight Cotto will kill himself and tear down his body trying to make 143, something that won't be undone in a day of eating and drinking after the weigh-in. To those who think the four pounds isn't a big deal and Cotto won't be severely compromised by sucking down to 143, ask yourself why it's the make or break stipulation in the fight being realized. If Pacquiao wants to fight Cotto at a catch-weight of 143, fine, but the title shouldn't be on the line. I can't blame Pacquiao for making the demands he has and Cotto has accepted to being bought off. Sure, Cotto will try and convince himself that it won't deny him victory, but fighters lie to themselves all the time, especially for more money than they've ever made before.

If I were a Pacquiao fan I'd see this only from his side and the same if I were a Cotto fan. However, I'm a boxing fan more so than any particular fighter. As a boxing-purist I don't like the catch-weight stipulation in this fight or any other fight. I know Michael Spinks legitimately beat Larry Holmes and Roy Jones did the same to John Ruiz. Just as I know as great as he was Sugar Ray Robinson couldn't quite move up from welterweight and beat the light heavyweight champ Joey Maxim.

On the other hand I have to be honest, if I were Pacquiao/Roach I'd do the same thing looking for every possible advantage I could get, and if I were Cotto I couldn't walk away from the money.

I don't know if Pacquiao can beat the real Cotto who fought Mosley, Margarito and Clotey, but I believe he can and will most likely beat the empty package version of him who we'll see this coming November.

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