Nonito Donaire will never fight Manny Pacquiao nor will he ever replace him in the hearts of fanatic Filipino fight fans. This is simply a fact well beyond debate and Donaire knows it yet he doesn't resent it because he believes he owes his own rising career to Pacquiao's unrivaled success.

"Early in my career I could not get a fight,'' recalled the 26-year-old Donaire, who Saturday night will fight Rafael Concepcion (13-3-1, 8 KO) for the World Boxing Association interim super flyweight title. "I was the one that was chosen on two days notice. I never had the chance to make things happen.

"When I tried to sign with managers in the past I was told that Filipinos were not marketable. I was told that Filipino fighters couldn't break an egg but Manny has helped change all of that. We're thankful for everything he's done for the Filipino boxing world.''

Even in a week that belongs to Donaire, the long shadow of Manny Pacquiao is everywhere. Pacquiao (49-3-2, 37 KO) will not enter the ring again until he faces WBO welterweight champion Miguel Cotto (34-1, 27 KO) Nov. 14 but his name is never far from the lips of Filipino fight fans and young Filipino fighters like Donaire, who himself has been a world champion since stopping Victor Darchinyan in five rounds in 2007. Despite this, he has never once thought he might eclipse Pacquiao in the eyes of his countrymen or the boxing world.

Donaire does not bristle at the comparisons with someone he knows he will never outshine in the way some Mexican fighters grew to bristle at the mention of Julio Cesar Chavez's name. Instead, he accepts that his popularity and in a sense his fistic fate are tied to the wildly successful career of Pacquiao, who is not only the mythical pound for pound champion but also boxing's leading drawing card. Because of that success, promoters now look for the next Pacquiao and so they look at Donaire.

"I am most thankful of Pacquiao's achievement,'' Donaire (21-1, 14 KO) said of the five-time world champion who has become a god-like figure in the Phillipines, a place where his charity is as legendary as his boxing skill. "There is not much the rest of us can do because we are overwhelmed by what he has done.

"For me, being a part of it and being a Filipino is something that I have always represented that way. I think that showing my talent and being able to share that with an elite fighter is great.

"He's a great champion and for me it is an honor to be a part of that. I don't worry about being labeled. For me it is a part of what I bring and how I feel when I get into that ring, of being the best I can be like Pacquiao has shown.''

Now promoted by the same company that runs Pacquiao's career, Bob Arum's Top Rank, Donaire has seen the last of the flyweight division. Whether he moves immediately to 118 or

122 or remains a super flyweight will be dictated as much by business considerations as his body but he believes one day he may rise as high as the 135-pound lightweight limit, following in the weighty footsteps of Pacquiao, who began his career at 106 pounds yet eventually defeated former middleweight champion Oscar De La Hoya and ex-junior welterweight champion Ricky Hatton in his last two fights before signing to meet Cotto, another Top Rank fighter, for the welterweight title.

Donaire may never rise that high but Top Rank believes his punching power and his recent struggles to make 112 pounds are signs that to some extent he has the same traits as the most celebrated Filipino fighter in boxing history. He can punch and he can put on pounds.

“There is no question that you want every fighter to establish his or her own identity,’’ said Top Rank executive Carl Moretti. “If you look back over the past 10 years at one point it was Tito Trinidad and another point it was Oscar, then Chavez. The next fighter that comes along of that same ethnicity the media naturally say ‘he could be the next…’ so for Nonito the comparison is going to be there for now.

“I think you’re going to see the emergence of a fighter that has the ability to win titles in multiple weight classes. He moved up from 112 and when you see him in the ring he looks like a big 115 pounder. There are some good names (there) like Concepcion and (Jorge) Arce that all make for interesting fights.

“But you have to continue to beat the drum with the networks to get him on TV. If that doesn’t work we continue with Pinoy Power to keep him busy because he has to fight.’’

Because of his small stature, Donito has had trouble finding network dates despite having destroyed Darchinyan two years ago in the biggest fight of his career. Arum has begun to put together small pay-per-view shows that his company produces, as the Concepcion fight will be, to keep Donaire’s name in the public eye until something bigger comes along.

Now that Darchinyan has also moved up to 115 pounds many have naturally assume a rematch would be fought but Darchinyan’s recent loss to Joseph “King Kong’’ Agbeko has complicated that possibility and Donaire seems as weary as most fighters of Darchinyan and his ceaseless insults.

Business, in the end, will dictate if such a match is ever made but for the moment Nonito Donaire will focus his attention on Concepcion and on the trail blazed for him by Pacquiao.

“Darchinyan only has that one punch and if he can’t land it he can’t beat anybody,’’ Donaire said. “Agbeko had a game plan and he executed it perfectly. Right now I will go wherever my manager and Top Rank lead me. I don’t know anything about fighting Darchinyan again.

“I’m really confident going into this fight. My weight is good. Two years ago I was up to 142. I was not in training so that was my walking around weight. I know that with proper training I think I can go up to 130 or 135.

"I'm looking more to fight the likes of Arce and Fernando Montiel. For me to continue to get down to 112 after this will be difficult. As my body matures it's more difficult to shed the weight.''

Not as difficult as shedding the long shadow of his promotional stablemate and Filipino hero, Manny Pacquiao. Knowing that, Nonito Donaire intends to follow his lead rather than fight the comparisons. To do either successfully Saturday night he first has to fight Rafael Concepcion the way Manny Pacquiao would – fast, furious and with a raw finality. Do that enough times and people begin talking about you, too.