

## We Need To Know, Who Is The Best Fighter In The World Today

Written by Ron Borges

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Manny Pacquiao, like everyone else, is once again fighting for second place in boxing.

When Pacquiao squares off with welterweight champion Miguel Cotto on Nov. 14 in Las Vegas the winner will emerge as the next viable opponent for Floyd Mayweather, Jr. What he will not emerge as is the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world.

After a 21-month layoff, Mayweather needed only one boxing match to reassert his claim to that mythical title. Although Pacquiao quite rightly ascended to that imaginary throne when Mayweather announced his "retirement" after outboxing Oscar De La Hoya and destroying the myth that proved to be Ricky Hatton, he vacated the room the minute Mayweather was finished with Pacquiao's great nemesis, Juan Manuel Marquez.zq

Pacquiao was life and death with Marquez twice, earning a draw and a split decision victory that many boxing observers and knowledgeable insiders would argue he did not deserve. Whether he did or did not, the more salient fact is that these were two mighty struggles for Pacquiao, whose aggressiveness was used against him by one of boxing's best counter punchers.

Mayweather, on the other hand, destroyed Marquez, not losing a round unless you are an exceedingly kindly judge of boxing. This brought no dishonor to Marquez, who I would argue remains No. 3 on the pound for pound list despite that defeat because if Pacquiao is No. 2 behind Mayweather (and who would argue otherwise?) how can the guy who twice pushed him to his limits be anything less than third just because he lost so one-sidedly to the boxing world's most superior boxer?

If Pacquiao can defeat Cotto, which is not a given because of the size difference even though there's an uneasy feeling here when one watches Cotto that he is a shadow of what he was before Antonio Margarito began to hit him with brick bats, this matter could all be settled in the only place where it really can be – inside four ropes.

That eventuality probably became more difficult after Mayweather's fight with Marquez reportedly did over one million pay-per-view buys because both he and Pacquiao seem likely to believe they would be the star of the show in any confrontation and hence would demand the larger percentage of the profits. The likelihood either would cede more than 50 per cent of the take to the other seems unlikely.

Although both could argue the merits of their pay-per-view powers and have the numbers to back them up, the fact is each needs the other to maximize their purse and to settle what should be the more important issue to each of them – who is the best fighter in the world.

Prize fighting is a business of course and so attention must be paid to who earns what but if Pacquiao prevails against Cotto one must hope both fighters will want to settle the fistic issue

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between them at a price which would be fair to each which, frankly, seems like a 50-50 split. To insist on anything more would be silly because both would likely earn the biggest paychecks of their career while also getting the kind of fight the sport is built upon.

If they want to add an upside for the winner, that's fine and fair and would make things a bit more interesting perhaps but the driving force behind such a match would be to decide, at least for the moment, who is the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world.

Until they square off or something more revealing happens however, that issue has been settled. Once again Floyd Mayweather, Jr. is the best boxer in the world. Yet there is another point that is just as important. Unlike many of his predecessors in that position, Mayweather has a viable challenger who many fight fans will argue is his superior. To meet him is to meet both destiny and history.

This is not something for either Mayweather or Pacquiao to lament. It is a state of affairs to rejoice over because every great fighter needs a great challenger to maximize not only his income but also his reputation and his standing in boxing's long history. Ali would be less without Joe Frazier. Robinson less without Jake LaMotta. Leonard not the same without Duran and Hearn.

While today's heavyweights languish in deserved obscurity, ignored by not only the larger sporting public but even many fight fans, there remains a burning question advocates of boxing want answered and the world would find compelling by the time it happened. Who is the best fighter in the world today?

Is it the Phillipines' most popular athlete, a man who has reached a godlike status in his homeland? Or is it Mayweather, who inside a boxing ring is always on the money even if the IRS has seen fit to lay claim to a sizeable portion of what he just earned?

If fistic aficionados are fortunate, it is an issue that will be determined some time next year. Until then, Floyd Mayweather, Jr. wears the crown of the world's best fighter, pound-for-pound, but lurking on the doorstep of that throne room stands young Cassius, whom Shakespeare once said "has a lean and hungry look."

His name is Manny Pacquiao and he is a man who believes he's the once and future king of boxing. Maybe he is but he'll need a chance to prove it and the only one who can give it to him is Floyd Mayweather, Jr.