Written by Michael Woods
Monday, 02 November 2009 19:00

Examining HBO's 24/7 for clues which might affect the outcome of the upcoming fight is one of the most enjoyable aspects of watching the expertly crafted infomercial. In the second installment of the Pacquiao-Cotto docudrama miniseries, TSS played PI, and looked for anything in the fighters' actions, physiques or behaviors that might inform a fight fan what is likely to unfold on Nov. 14, when Manny Pacquiao tries to secure a seventh title in a seventh weight class from WBO welterweight titlist Miguel Cotto in a 145 pound "catchweight" clash.

In the previous installment, we saw Cotto mixing business with pleasure; it looked like his training camp in Florida, away from distractions in his native Puerto Rico, took a load off the fighter with the frequently furrowed brow. In contrast, Pacquiao's camp was a picture less tranquil. He chose to stay in Baguiao, a region beset by severely foul weather, causing his trainer Freddie Roach to firmly request that the fighter switch up his plans, and decamp to a safer spot, free from typhoons, and perhaps, leeching politicians hoping to get a bump in the polls with a endorsement from Manny.

In the second episode, viewer saw a previously perturbed Roach in Manila, having made the eight-hour trek from Baguiao without Pacquiao. They hugged it out, it was made clear, and got back on track preparing for Cotto. Or, they got back on track as much as Manny's demigod status allows—fans clamor to touch the fighter whenever he exits Gerry Penalosa's gym. But Pacquiao seems to be able to clear his mind of distractions. And Roach makes sure of it, offering a $1,000 bounty to any sparring partner who dumps Manny on his can. So far, Shawn Porter and Jose Luis Castillo haven't been able to get that extra spiff in their envelope, but the added impetus gives Pacman more reason to stay on message in training, and tells viewers that at this juncture, at least, it certainly appears that all the money and adoration he enjoys hasn't swelled his head, and won't pave the way for a fall to Cotto.

Back to Cotto—the Puerto Rican hitter welcomed Miguel the 3rd to Tampa, for a week-long visit to see pop do his thing. That includes pre-dawn workouts at a local track. Perhaps the "stamina thing," Cotto's supposed tendency to fade in the last third of fights, will not be an issue come Nov. 14, if these track workouts have been installed, or modified, to speak to his gas-tank woes? Team Cotto did manage to get some chill-time in, going golfing, and viewers with old-school values might wonder if Miguel is splitting his focus too much, taking too much time with his son, instead of eating, breathing and sleeping Pacquiao 24-7.

Then again, Manny does manage to have a varied life during training camp. Witness Pacman's duet with a female vocalist on the 1977 Dan Hill classic "Sometimes When We Touch," which he filmed for a Filipino TV network as part of a farewell concert. That went swimmingly, but there was still the matter of the conflict within his crew. Fitness coach Alex Ariza and advisor Michael Koncz haven't been getting along, and snipe at each other in front of Manny, who stays above the fray, seemingly untouched by the chaos. Can Manny truly be as unruffled by the beefing as he appears?

A viewer watching this installment might wonder whether Cotto's sparring partners are of a lesser breed than Pacquaio's and be left to think that Pacman's camp is that much more effective than Miguel's. Cotto gets work in with 9-3-1 southpaw Kenny Abril, from Rochester, NY, and 7-1 Georgian lefty Fred Tukes. Contrasted with Pacman's crew, which included 26-1 Mexican Urbano Antillon, 10-0 Shawn Porter from Ohio and former lightweight champion Jose Luis Castillo (60-9-1), it does seem like Cotto's getting gypped in this department. Perhaps the time spent studying films of Pacquiao on the part of Miguel's dad Miguel Sr. and 32-year-old trainer Joe Santiago will compensate.

At Roach's Wild Card Gym, Pacquiao looks trim and on message. He doesn't seem put off by the absence of Michael Moorer, who helped Roach while Manny got ready for Ricky Hatton, and rubbed Manny the wrong way with his brusque manner. The Wild Card looks cramped but homey, while Cotto's training zone in Tampa looks roomier, but more complicated. Viewers see his wife Melissa, who he'd been estranged from, is back in the picture. She comes to the gym, with two more kids, and Miguel's mom, who wears an expression none too joyous. Perhaps those relationships don't siphon an ounce of Cotto's mental energy, perhaps he is relieved to be unburdened from the presence of his uncle Evangelista, who he split from in the spring. But we saw Miguel's dad admit he and his bro have severed ties totally, one wonders if having all these sticky family issues in his face benefits Cotto two weeks before his big bout.

Viewers-readers, feel free to share any insights you've picked up watching 24/7 in the comments section.