LAS VEGAS – In boxing people often talk as if everything is written in stone even though most things are, at best, written in dust. The latest example of this is Saturday night's WBO welterweight championship fight between Miguel Cotto and Manny Pacquiao.

Although Cotto is a champion who is 14-1 in world title fights with 11 knockouts and 34-1 overall with 27 stoppages, he is being given little chance to hold off Pacquiao, who is widely considered to be the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world.

Pacquiao has made a habit lately of beating up men bigger than himself, which is frankly most everybody in boxing, because of his unique combination of speed, punching power and skill... so Cotto's status as a two-time welterweight champion means little to the oddsmakers who have made him a better than 2-1 underdog.

Although he will fight Cotto at 145 pounds at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, Pacquiao retains the look of the far smaller man he's been most of his career, but so what? When he first turned professional Pacquiao fought at 106 pounds and until a year ago had never ventured above 130 yet since that time he has added titles at 135, 140 and is now trying to win at 147.

This has set the stage for what boxing is looking upon as a coronation. Win Saturday night and Pacquiao will not only have become the welterweight champion of the world but he will also have won a far more important title. He will have officially become The Next Big Thing.

Although Cotto is someone who should at least be respected, there is already talk of what Pacquiao will do next, as if this fight is simply a formality. There are hopes for a mega-fight against Floyd Mayweather sometime next year or, failing that, perhaps a fourth fight (what the WBC would call a super rubber match if they could get a sanctioning fee out of it) with his long-time nemesis, Juan Manuel Marquez.

If neither materializes the sense is the hottest star in pay-per-view boxing will do something else significant in the ring because as long as he's in it what does it matter who the opponent may be? This is a position of disrespect not lost on Cotto.

"Psychologically, in this fight, he is not the star,'' said the promoter of both fighters, Bob Arum, of the WBO title holder he has promoted since he first turned professional nearly nine years ago. "He knows it and I know it. But Miguel Cotto, as Miguel will attest, is the biggest obstacle in Manny's path.''

Cotto sat silently staring straight ahead as Arum said this but his face spoke for him. It was an angry sea of shock and disgust, the face of a man not quite as ready to accept this new position as his promoter seemed to be.

In the champion's opinion, he is still far more than just an obstacle for Manny Pacquiao to

overcome. He is not merely some steppingstone toward brighter days and bigger pay checks for Pacquiao or anyone else. Nor is he a launching pad into boxing immortality for Pacquiao, even though that is what is likely to happen if the odds makers, and Arum, are right, for it will be the seventh different weight class in which Pacquiao has won some form of a title belt.

In this day and age that hardly means what it might once have but it is still a measuring stick for Pacquiao and another selling point for the people who are marketing him around the world as an athlete who has transcended his sport and become what Cotto is not – a personality sponsors as well as fans want to be associated with.

Cotto is just a boxer and one seen now as damaged goods by some. The whisper is that he has never fully recovered from the beating he took from Antonio Margarito a year ago, despite his protestations to the contrary, and that is why he is being looked upon like someone headed to the gallows.

If the skeptics are right, Pacquiao will be further uplifted Saturday night, having now beaten Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton and Cotto in succession, men who had ruled in the 154 pound, 140 pound and 147 pound divisions on the night they got in with a former flyweight champion.

If Cotto pulls off an upset he will not receive the same boost to his reputation. It will be said that Pacquiao finally faced someone too big for him. It will be said Cotto wasn't as shot as people thought. Many things will be said but none of them will be that Miguel Cotto is someone ready to be taken onto the world stage presently occupied by Pacquiao.

There is no Puerto Rican edition of TIME magazine so he will not become its cover boy, as Pacquiao was this week on the Asian edition. There will be no story about his economic power like ones in The Wall Street Journal and Sports Illustrated about Pacquiao, and there will be no Sunday front page story on him in the New York Times, which penned one last week that made Pacquiao sound like the savior of a nation, the typhoon and poverty infested Philippines of his birth.

But Miguel Cotto will surely have become one thing Bob Arum and HBO doesn't want or expects. He will have become a spoiler who derailed the new economic engine of boxing…not that he cares.

"What they say and what they do does not concern me,'' Cotto said. "They know what they have in front of him. He better be focused on what they will have in front of him in Miguel Cotto.

"It doesn't matter if the people want me to win or not. It is just a fight and I have worked to win it so we will see. Forget about Freddie Roach. He can only train Manny the best he can. He may say and think Manny will knock me out but at the end of the day, it is just Manny and Miguel Cotto in the ring.

"It's really not important to me what the boxing world wants to see. Once I beat Manny Pacquiao they can continue their plans and do what they want but I am not going home without winning this fight.''

If he’s right they won’t be able to continue with their plans or do what they want, which is to use Manny Pacquiao to create a new day for boxing. For all his earnest intentions, brave heart and boxing skills, even if he wins Miguel Cotto cannot do that.