Miguel Cotto turned pro in 2001. And since his debut he's been the ultimate pro and has never cheated himself or the boxing public once when he's stepped into the ring. He's constantly sought to fight the best of the best and never left any piece of himself in the dressing room on fight night. Yet since the moment he agreed to put his WBO welterweight title on the line in a 145 pound catch-weight bout versus Manny Pacquiao, his accomplishments and professionalism have been the back story.

And that's because Pacquiao may be on the verge of officially taking the baton from Oscar De La Hoya as boxing's marquee attraction with a victory over Cotto, bar none. Therefore Cotto has been in some ways wrongly reduced to playing the role of the opponent and spoiler tonight. However, a victory over Pacquiao would be the ultimate redemption for Cotto and the signature win of his career.

Tonight the boxing world and perhaps maybe even the entire sports community anxiously awaits to find out the answer. Answer to what? To just how special a fighter Manny Pacquiao really is.

Before touching on that, first Pacquiao must be given all due props for the infusion of excitement he's injected into professional boxing over the last six months. His catch-weight bout with WBO welterweight champ Miguel Cotto is by far the most anticipated and comprehensively covered fight since part-time promoter/fighter Oscar De La Hoya took on Floyd Mayweather Jr. in May of 2007.

More accurately, Pacquiao-Cotto is the biggest non-heavyweight fight of the decade (2000-2009). And that's because Pacquiao's caused quite a stir since moving up from junior lightweight and winning a world title at lightweight and junior welterweight.

No, Pacquiao is not the global super-star that Oscar De La Hoya was. And forget the corpse of De La Hoya that he pummeled last year, because Oscar was never really a great pound-for-pound fighter. He was more of a star and personality. However, Pacquiao does have one advantage over De La Hoya pertaining to the promotion of a fight which is beyond reproach, and that is his fights can be counted on to provide more action and drama than Oscar's ever did. And that's why Pacquiao-Cotto is a legitimate super-fight -- whereas De La Hoya-Mayweather was more of a promotion with the sole intent being to make a lot of money. And it achieved that, of course. But most informed boxing observers knew going in that the odds of De La Hoya-Mayweather actually being a memorable fight were nonexistent.

The unfortunate reality is boxing like most other professional sports is superstar driven. Pacquiao is just now on the cusp of becoming a worldwide superstar. Beating Oscar De La Hoya is the fight that most assume vaulted him to super-stardom, but that's not the case. Felix Trinidad, Shane Mosley and Bernard Hopkins beat Oscar when it meant something, and they didn't become superstars. Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao beat Oscar when he was a

part-time fighter/promoter and didn't become anything close to the mega-star Oscar was.

After beating De La Hoya, both Mayweather and Pacquiao fought and stopped Ricky Hatton in their next fight. Mayweather retired after stopping Hatton because Mosley, Margarito, Cotto, and Williams had to be addressed next. Pacquiao beat Hatton more convincingly than Mayweather and then agreed to fight Cotto at a catch-weight.

Miguel Cotto is not considered the best welterweight in the world by anyone at this time, let alone when coming in at a mandated 145. But that cannot dismiss a Pacquiao victory tonight, especially if it's impressive. Due to his one-punch mutilation of Ricky Hatton in his last fight, Pacquiao has become almost a super-nova in the boxing universe. It's almost as if anything other than a picturesque knockout of Cotto like the one he produced versus Hatton will be seen as underwhelming.

Tonight most eyes watching the fight will be looking a punch or two ahead in anticipation of that missile like left of Pacquiao's to dart in out of nowhere and separate Cotto from his senses. That would launch Pacquiao so far ahead of Floyd Mayweather on the "must see when he fights" Richter scale - it'll require a telescope to see him.

On the other hand if Pacquiao struggles and has a tough time beating Cotto and only wins by decision, his super-stardom will stagnate a bit. But that's fine because if he chooses to defend his WBO welterweight title against a couple top welterweights, even if they're not named Mayweather, he'll remain boxing's biggest and brightest star.

And if Manny Pacquiao doesn't try and mickey the system in an attempt to gain the junior middleweight title by beating Cory Spinks at 150/151, it'll be forgotten that he won the welterweight title at 145.

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