

THE PROPOSAL Manny vs. Floyd: 45-45 Split, Winner Gets Remaining 10%

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 14 November 2009 19:00

What comes next is obvious, which in boxing is what makes it unlikely.

In most sports you build toward the penultimate moment. The Super Bowl. The World Series. The NBA Finals. The Stanley Cup. As a fan you know what to expect when the time is right. In boxing all you know when the time is right is that something very likely will go wrong.

After Manny Pacquiao's brilliant dissection of WBO welterweight champion Miguel Cotto Saturday night, his next fight is obvious. There is no other fight for him other than a welterweight showdown with Floyd Mayweather, Jr. at a full 147 pounds. No more talk of catch weights and forcing bigger men to diet down. You won the welterweight title now defend it and that means you fight, or at least your opponents do, at 147 pounds.

The next fight for Mayweather is just as obvious. He can talk of this and that and who brings the asses to the seats and all that nonsense but if he is who he says he is – which is the best fighter in the world – then he needs to prove it by facing Manny Pacquiao.

It is so logical it pains you to think the sport might be forced to go in another direction. Could Pacquiao take on his old nemesis Juan Manuel Marquez a third time and get paid for it? He could and the public would be interested because only one point on a judge's card separates the first two fights from going to Marquez, which is a margin so thin as to be nonexistent for all intents and purposes.

Yet it is not as big a fight as it once might have been because Mayweather just destroyed Marquez in a way Pacquiao hasn't been able to do. Mayweather came off a 21-month self-imposed layoff and dismantled one of the most skilled boxers in the world, knocking him down, beating him up and utterly baffling him without so much as a tune-up fight to get his feet back on the ground.

He was brilliant, as brilliant in his own way as Pacquiao was in destroying what was left of Cotto, knocking him down twice early in the fight, taking his best shots at its midpoint and then changing his face into an unrecognizable mess in the second half of what turned out to be a 12th round TKO. It could just as easily have been a ninth round or 10th round or 11th round TKO because by those rounds there was ample reason to step in and stop what had become a mugging, not a boxing match.

So where that leaves the two of them – Pacquiao (50-3-2, 38 KO) and Mayweather (40-0, 28 KO) - is on a collision course. At least that is the case if they want to be considered among the elite fighters of all-time because that is what the best do. The best crave the opportunity to face down a challenge and that is what each of them would be to the other.

It is what made the 1980s one of the sport's golden moments because Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvelous Marvin Hagler Thomas Hearns and Roberto Duran all fought each other. They did it

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not because they welcomed punishment, which each knew was sure to come in those fights whether you won or lost. They did it because they wanted to know.

They wanted to know where they stood among the great boxers of their era. They wanted to know who the best was and they wanted you to know too especially if your opinion didn't coincide with theirs on the subject.

Sure they wanted to get paid fairly and they wanted to get an edge on their rivals and they wanted all the things that come with being a great champion but most of all they wanted to settle the debate the only way you can in sports. By facing your challenger.

In the next few months we'll find out if that's the case today. Hall of Fame trainer Emanuel Steward has said on several occasions, "Little Floyd doesn't want nothing to do with Manny Pacquiao." Others have voiced the same sentiment, including Pacquiao himself and his trainer, Freddie Roach. Mayweather has said otherwise but now it's time for both of them to prove who they are against each other.

Roach has welcomed Pacquiao's decision to take on bigger men like Cotto, Oscar De La Hoya and Ricky Hatton. In each case he predicted blow out victories and in each case he was correct. He believes his man is too much of a pressure fighter for the defensive-minded Mayweather to handle. He does not concede even that Mayweather may be faster, saying his man has the advantage even in hand speed, which if true would be a first for Mayweather.

Mayweather was mum on the subject last week in Las Vegas, refusing to even comment on the Pacquiao-Cotto fight or on what might come after it. He has, however, many times said he believes he should receive the higher percentage of the purse if they do meet, which has always been a problem for Pacquiao and will be more so if the expected pay-per-view numbers for the Cotto fight come in well over the 1 million mark, as HBO executives cautiously said they were tracking around the country.

Mayweather and De La Hoya did a record 2.4 million buys but much of that had to be attributed to De La Hoya, who is the most popular pay-per-view fighter in history. But Mayweather also did over 1 million buys with Marquez, something Pacquiao did not do in two matches with Marquez.

"That's the fight the world wants to see," Roach conceded. "We want the fight but if Floyd wants a 65-35 split (of the purse) he's not going to get it."

What Pacquiao and his promoter, Bob Arum, seem to want is parity or better. There is much bad blood between Arum, who once promoted Mayweather, and the Mayweather camp and that adds to the difficulties. He doesn't like dealing with Al Hayman or Leonard Ellerbe, who advise Mayweather, and he doesn't like Mayweather. So what?

This is not a popularity contest or a battle over leverage. It's a business negotiation and both

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sides need to remember that. What they also need to remember is that their business is boxing and boxing needs this fight to continue what has been a recent revival of interest in the sport everywhere but amongst a few addle-headed sports editors at old line newspapers who decided some time ago that boxing no longer exists in the American consciousness.

If not, why did well over 1 million people pay \$54.95 last Saturday night to watch Pacquiao-Cotto and why did they do the same thing in September for \$49.95 when Mayweather fought Marquez? But I digress.

How to solve what seems sure to be a difficult negotiation, one in which Arum wants to bring in Golden Boy Promotions' CEO Richard Schaefer to mediate, seems simple enough actually. Both guys think they're the bigger star but the fact is neither can duplicate this payday without the other. Both think they are the better fighter as well, even though only one of them can win the fight. (Ed. Note: Unless we get a draw, which would of course set up a compulsory rematch, and another Goldmanesque haul of moolah...)

So why not simply split the purse 45-45 between the two of them, which will probably bring each in excess of \$10 million. Then give both an upside after a certain number of pay-per-view sales, which is standard operating procedure for big fights unless the guarantees are enormous.

Then take the remaining 10 per cent and give it to the winner, whoever that is. That will surely be a sizable number. Not so big that the loser would feel unfairly compensated but big enough that the man who proves his point about himself to the other and the world will have earned a full measure of what he thinks he's worth.

Now, in a real world, you should be able to make this deal with a 50-50 purse split but that's just not likely to be the case this time. The egos are too big, the entourages are too big, the legal and advising teams are too big and, lastly, the fighters' opinions of themselves are too big.

It's not winner take all. It's not 65-35 or something outrageous like that. It's winner take an extra hunk of cash. Who could argue with that kind of deal? Hopefully for boxing, not even Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and Bob Arum.