

## Pacquiao Seals Fighter Of The Decade With Victory Over Cotto

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Heading into 2009 the debate as to who was the "Fighter Of The Decade" was still up for grabs between Manny Pacquiao 50-3-2 (38) and Floyd Mayweather Jr. 40-0 (25) as both had a legitimate claim to the honor. Both Pacquiao and Mayweather captured multiple division titles over the last ten years and were considered the best pound for pound fighter in boxing circa 2000-2009.

Mayweather has remained undefeated since making his pro-debut in 1996 and Pacquiao's only defeat in the last 10 years came in 2005 against Erik Morales who he later defeated in two subsequent rematches. Another commonality that Pacquiao and Mayweather shared during the decade is they both defeated Juan Manuel Marquez, Oscar De La Hoya and Ricky Hatton in three of their biggest and most high profile bouts fought between featherweight and junior middleweight.

This past weekend Pacquiao took apart Miguel Cotto, a fighter many boxing aficionados believe Floyd Mayweather had no intention of fighting since Cotto moved up to welterweight. And it's Pacquiao's victory over Cotto to capture the WBO welterweight title that erases any doubt whatsoever as to who has earned the distinction as the fighter of the 2000's.

No matter how you try to twist and spin it, there isn't one case that can be made favoring Mayweather over Pacquiao for the Ring Magazine award that Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard earned for their body of work compiled during the 1970's and 1980's. Roy Jones was voted the fighter of the 1990's, but the case supporting him wasn't as overwhelming as it was for Ali and Leonard. Although Jones did dominate two undisputed all-time greats when he beat Bernard Hopkins and James Toney, who were a combined 66-1-2 when he fought them.

Boxing fans and observers understand that it doesn't matter how many fights a particular fighter has won, it comes down to who did he/they beat? Nobody goes undefeated if they constantly fight the best available opposition they can once they've achieved the championship/superstar level.

Muhammad Ali lost the biggest and most anticipated fight in history to "Smokin" Joe Frazier and was still voted "Fighter Of The Decade." And that's because he came back and beat Frazier twice, fought Ken Norton three times going 2-1, beat George Foreman for the undisputed title, beat Jerry Quarry twice and also beat Ron Lyle and Earnie Shavers in between 1970-77.

Sugar Ray Leonard defeated hall-of-famers and all-time greats Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns and Marvin Hagler who were a combined 166-3-2 when he fought them. And two of those three losses were Marvin Hagler's and he hadn't lost in 11 years before fighting Leonard.

The same applies to Pacquiao when it comes to beating first tier opposition. Manny is 5-1-1 versus Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales and Juan Manuel Marquez. All three are absolute hall-of-famers along with being great fighters. Add to that Miguel Cotto at 145 and Mayweather's

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resume simply doesn't compare to Pacquiao's as far as depth. Sure they both defeated Marquez, but Pacquiao fought him at his more natural weight and at a time when he was clearly closer to being at his best.

Mayweather also had his share of big wins during the 2000's beating Jesus Chavez, Diego Corrales, Jose Luis Castillo twice and Zab Judah. That said, Mayweather cannot claim a victory during the last ten years over a certifiable great fighter who wasn't past their prime or fighting out of their natural division when he fought them.

During the years 2007-09 both Pacquiao and Mayweather beat Oscar De La Hoya and Ricky Hatton. However, Oscar was an empty package with a big name when they beat him. And beating Ricky Hatton is a wash and doesn't justify "Fighter Of The Decade" for either Manny or Floyd. In order to make the case for Pacquiao over Mayweather or the opposite, it requires going deep into their body of work over the last ten years to build the case.

When all is said and done and in spite of him not going undefeated the entire decade, Manny Pacquiao's body of work is deeper and more impressive than Floyd Mayweather's. Forget about who is the more technically sound and proficient fighter, or who's the most exciting and more entertaining to watch; none of that comes into play for this honor.

Many will argue that Pacquiao's strongest claim over Mayweather is the fact that he won more titles in different weight divisions than Mayweather did. But titles aren't the be all end all to resolve or settle this debate. They both worked the system in some ways to gain a couple of those titles. What carries the most weight and is the truth detector here is, Pacquiao beat better opposition in big fights than Mayweather did.

And if it were close heading into their last fight of 2009, Pacquiao erased all doubt with his dominant performance against Miguel Cotto - who happens to be superior to any welterweight Floyd Mayweather has ever fought.

It's undeniable - Manny Pacquiao is the "Fighter Of The decade" circa 2000-2009.

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