Freddie Roach tried. So did Manny Pacquiao. They couldn't do it for long but you had to give them an 'A' for effort. They both tried to talk about Joshua Clottey.

"He is a very strong guy and he's a strong puncher,'' Pacquiao's trainer said of the man who will challenge Pacquiao March 13 in Cowboys Stadium outside Dallas. "His best punch is the uppercut but we will not fall into that pocket too often to let him use that shot. I do have a lot of confidence in my fighter and the reason why is the way he has been sparring. We have big strong guys that fight a lot like Clottey. Manny has been handling them with ease in sparring.

"Manny is on top of his game and he's got the game plan down and he's very sharp right now. I'm happy where he's at. I think we will overwhelm him and the fight will end before 12.

"I don't care who trains Joshua Clottey for this fight, he can't beat us. He is what he is. Let's face it. He fights the same way in every tape I watch. Whether he fights southpaws or right-handers, he is predictable. He's good at what he does but he does the same thing over and over again and he is very predictable. He's going to try to change for this fight but once he gets in he will revert back to it. We are 100% ready for his style.

"He's resilient. The beginning of the fight is going to be very hard because he is a very good opponent and he likes to fight. We will break him down and I am confident the fight will not go 12 rounds.

"We have watched a lot of tape on Clottey. We know his characteristics, we know his mistakes and we know his habits. I do feel that the way Manny Pacquiao is training for this fight, the game plan and how to beat Clottey is in place. I know Clottey is a big strong guy and a great fighter and we respect him and he's a real tough guy but with Manny Pacquiao I feel that he's going to overwhelm him with his speed and his combinations. I do believe he will be the first person to stop him before the 12th round.''

That was about it for legitimate Clottey talk. After that Roach, Pacquiao and promoter Bob Arum all had a hard time keeping the conversation away from the real reason this fight was made, which is because The Fight was not. That fight was to be the showdown with Floyd Mayweather, Jr., a bout not only boxing fans but general sports fans were buzzing about.

It did not come off because Pacquiao refused to accede to Mayweather's demand he agree to random blood testing for performance enhancing drugs right up to nearly fight time. Although Pacquiao would rather have talked about Clottey, the spectre of Mayweather continues to hang over him and this fight, making it little more than a footnote unless a moment comes when Clottey appears to be competitive against the finest pound-for-pound fighting machine in the world.

Assuming that doesn't happen, and Clottey's resume gives no reason to expect he will be

anything more than stubbornly resilient, the talk remains what it has been for months – who refuses to take a drug test worth $40 million?

This has affected the promotion with Clottey in many ways but Arum did his best when discussing it to turn it into a show of Pacquiao's strength in the marketplace rather than weakness at the doctor's office.

"To be frank, we had to overcome disappointment,'' Arum claimed. "People were looking forward to a Pacquiao-Mayweather fight. That is clear. Our job is to present Joshua Clottey as he is. A bigger guy. A stronger guy. A guy who has never been off his feet. A real test for Manny Pacquiao. That is what will sell this fight.

"You can't say there are two household names fighting on March 13th but Clottey is a well-respected welterweight. He lost a very close decision to Miguel Cotto in his last fight. He won the title by stopping Zab Judah. He is a formidable opponent and I think that the public gets it. The pay-per-view at $49.95 is going to do extremely well and we are very pleased with the ticket sales at Cowboys Stadium.''

Arum has predicted at least 45,000 in attendance, which is a sellout the way they have configured Cowboys Stadium, and whatever crowd they get will be there because of Pacquiao because as hard as Arum tries to sell Clottey, no one's buying. They're buying Manny vs. Whoever and all sides seem to know it.

"He is truly a crossover star,'' Arum said by way of putting the best face on this situation. "That was our goal when we started with Manny was to break him out from the Filipino base that he had. We were able to pick up millions of Hispanic fans and we have broken him in to the general conscience of the people around the world. How many fighters of our time go on Jimmy Kimmel Live and go on Good Morning America and have a big article coming out in Time magazine? I think that is saying something.''

It is but at this stage of things most of what is being said in the days and weeks leading up to this fight is about the fight that wasn't, a fact that grates on everyone involved.

"I don't want to talk about or think about blood testing,'' Pacquiao said. "I want to focus on the Clottey fight. I did take a blood test when I fought Erik Morales. I didn't think I would fight Mayweather because people know Mayweather was not ready to fight me.''

That has become part of the prevailing explanation from the Pacquiao camp even though one could turn that argument inside out and level the same charge at Pacquiao. As Mayweather jokingly said a few weeks ago, "What kind of fight don't take a $25 million drug test (no wonder he had trouble with the IRS)? A guilty fighter.''

Whatever the reason, the failure of the two sides to come to an agreement on a fight the general public badly wanted to see is one both sides will have to live with for some time. How long is anyone's guess.

The prevailing wisdom is eventually monetary pressures will force that match to happen but Roach indicated for him there's a better reason to make the match than the money it's worth.

"We are not happy with his [Floyd Mayweather Jr.] remarks,'' Roach said. "Manny wants to fight him in the future because of the remarks he made. Sometimes when Manny is shadowboxing, he will show me how Mayweather fights and how he will take care of the problem. I've never seen Manny do that before. He was trying to ruin our reputation with those allegations so we do want to fight him and we do want to knock him out.

"I would like to shut him up of course. Obviously he is just going to have to go by the rules. It is like saying we want to fight five-minute rounds. Commissions do that, not fighters. If you let him have his way it's like giving away the first two rounds – it's crazy. I do want Manny to fight him and I know Manny would knock him out and then the whole world will be happy.''

Perhaps so but Pacquiao has said he can live without it, believing his legacy has already been written. Although a win over Mayweather, the best fighter of this era not named Pacquiao, would enhance that legacy he seems well able to go on without it even if the people around him cannot.

"I'm OK,'' he said. "I don't need to fight him. What I believe is Floyd Mayweather is not ready at this time to fight with me. That's why he makes the reasons to cancel the fight. I feel bad and disappointment because he is accusing me of using drugs or whatever and trying to ruin my name in boxing. People know I have been successful through God and hard work.

"I don't really need Floyd Mayweather because what I have achieved in boxing is good enough for me and people know that by comparing my achievements in boxing to his achievements.''

Perhaps but the simple fact is the two of them are involved in something known as prize fighting and the prize is not some alphabet organization's belt. The real prize is the money they pay you to fight for the belt and there's only one way either of them can earn $40 million in one night – if the other is in there with him. Anything else is small potatoes.