

Manny and Marco

Written by Joey Knish

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This Saturday Marco Antonio Barrera takes another step through the ropes wearing the uncrowned title of "The People's Champion" at 126 pounds when he faces off against Philippine slugger Manny Pacquiao. Barrera easily dispatched of Kevin Kelley in April and prior to that had carried Johnny Tapia for 12 rounds. Saturday there is little chance that Barrera will give the dangerous Pacquiao any more time in the ring than necessary.

Barrera is best known for his two wars with Erik Morales and for exposing the one-trick pony Prince Naseem Hamed as exactly that, a one-trick pony. In the Hamed bout Barrera boxed like never before, winning the boxing world over and exposing 'The Clown Prince.' Barrera more or less erased Hamed from the boxing map, allowing boxing purists to say "I told you so".

With 40 KO's in 57 wins there is little doubt that the 'Baby Faced Assassin' can lay the hammer down on the toughest nail, but we now know the kid can box a little too. In facing the southpaw Hamed, Barrera was very effective with the jab - a punch that typically does not work well against lefties. If Barrera can establish that punch once again against the hard charging southpaw PacMan, we could see a similar result to the dominating performance Hamed witnessed firsthand.

Barrera's loss to Erik Morales was controversial and the two defeats to Junior Jones proved that one fighter can have another's number, as styles really do make fights. Barrera has never been "officially" knocked out, though he was going, going, gone in the first bout with Jones before being DQ'd as his corner came onto the ring to save their fighter. Still, after his wars with Morales and other heavy hitters (such as Hamed), you would have to say that Barrera has a decent set of whiskers. Perhaps the same cannot be said of Pacquiao.

Manny Pacquiao made a splash when Lehlohonolo Ledwaba splashed to the canvas and left the IBF trinket around Pacquiao's waist. The late sub from the Philippines made his mark on US soil in 2001 with the win over Ledwaba in Las Vegas and has kept the title ever since.

Pacquiao carries sleep drops in both hands, but it will be interesting to see if he is able to find Barrera with his jab to set-up the rest of his arsenal. While it is easy to say that PacMan has yet to fight someone of Barrera's caliber, we must remember that there just aren't many fighters that good. Among the better fighters on the resume of Pacquiao are Jorge Eliecer Julio and . . . no, that's it. Really, he hasn't fought anyone close Barrera's level, and he now takes a step up from 122 to 126 to take on his toughest opponent ever.

Pacquiao's last opponent was the amateurish looking Emmanuel Lucero who fought a poor fight and ended up "pirouetting" away from Pacquiao with little birds singing over his head thanks to a tasty left. If ever a fighter had been knocked onto Queer Street it was Lucero, who eventually found a nice spot to rest at the end of the block. The ropes saved him from the ground but he had already come down to the reality of being out of his league. Note from Knish: Please feel free to send hate mail should I use ballet terms such as "pirouette" in a boxing

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article again.

A big question mark for many in this fight is 'what will happen if/when Pacquiao lands a crunching shot?' For me the real question is 'what will happen when - not if - Barrera lands his hard combinations effectively?' Pacquiao has won 29 of 37 bouts by knockout, but has two losses on his resume that both came by way of KO in the 3rd round. In other fights with respectable Nedal Hussein and the 4-4-1 Serikzhan Yeshmangbetov - no, I can't make names like that up on my own - he was also knocked down.

When a boxer meets a puncher more times than not the 'boxer' - in this case Barrera - beats the 'puncher' - Pacquiao. Adding support to the case for Barrera is that Pacquiao is moving up in weight, though a subtle step up, and that Barrera can bang as well as box. We don't know if Pacquiao can catch as well as he can pitch and the evidence suggests he can't. It says here that a late round stoppage, somewhere between rounds 8-10, has Barrera leaving the ring empty handed, but still "The People's Champion".