

## Trainer of the Year.

Written by Steve Kim  
Monday, 17 November 2003 21:00

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All the precincts have reported, the the ballots have been counted and it's a landslide: Freddie Roach is the runaway choice for trainer of the year.

After Manny Pacquiao's dominating 11th round stoppage of Marco Antonio Barrera this past weekend in San Antonio, Texas, which comes off the heels of James Toney's ninth round knockout of Evander Holyfield in October, it's not even close.

One of the few knocks on Roach as a trainer is that he has never developed a fighter from the beginning. Which may be true, but how can you ignore the reclamation job he's done with Toney and the steady improvement of 'the Pac Man'? If a guy goes in a turns around a corporation that's bleeding in red ink and turns it into a Fortune 500 company, do you hold it against him that he wasn't one of the founding fathers of the business? Of course not.

Perhaps he doesn't get enough credit because unlike other trainers he isn't much into tooting his own horn or prone to self-promoting, that simply isn't his way. But make no doubt about it, Eddie Futch, his former trainer and mentor would be proud. This gutty featherweight of the past is one of the games best cornermen.

And he was the man that laid the groundwork for Pacquiao's scintillating win. But the win itself wasn't the biggest upset, but really it was the sheer dominance showed by his man.

" You've got to be surprised when you beat a guy like Barrera that badly," said Roach, from his Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood." The thing was I really believed in Manny this fight, I even bet on Manny, I bet on Manny to knock Barrera out at eight-to-one. The thing was I thought Manny's speed was going to be too much for him and the power- and it was overwhelming."

Which is true, Pacquiao, simply showed Barrera all the respect of Rodney Dangerfield. He simply jumped him from the opening bell and didn't let up. It was the central component in their game plan.

" It was funny because the guys that he fought in his last fights like 'Prince' Naseem, Johnny Tapia and Kevin Kelley, they all let him be the 'new' Barrera, they let him box and think, set things up and fight at a slow pace," explained Roach." And like I said, Manny's not going to let him do that. We're going to jump on this guy, we're not going to show him any respect at all. Because we're going to take it to him, make this older fighter fight three minutes of every round. And that's what we did. It was easier than I thought, though. I

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expected more difficulties of course, because Barrera is a game guy and I thought he was going to have to suck it up and fight like he did against Morales the first time but he just didn't have it."

Like most fights, they can either be won or lost leading up to it during training camp. And like a lot of camps, they are a team effort.

" He came eight weeks and Justine Fortune did a great job with him, taking him to Griffith Park everyday," said Roach of his assistant, a former heavyweight out of Australia that once battled Lennox Lewis." All the other fights he was running around the neighborhood here in town. So we took him to Griffith Park every morning, we had him in great condition and his stomach was rock hard."

Seeing Pacquiao work on a daily basis, it was as hard as I've seen any fighter prepare for a fight. The sheer enthusiasm and intensity of his work shone through everyday. For him the fight didn't start at the opening bell at the Alamodome, but two months before when he arrived in Southern California.

" He was in great shape and more than physically, mentally, he was prepared," said Roach." He was so happy, two days before the fight he weighed 123 pounds, I gave him two days off before the fight. So we had the luxury of keeping him nice and fresh. I think Barrera had trouble making the weight and suck his weight a little bit.

" Towards the last day, I saw the scale going up to his room a couple of times on the weigh-in day."

Which is a sign that perhaps Barrera didn't have his best camp- or even a good one. Leading into this fight he had been embroiled in a bitter breakup with his former manager and promoter( Ricardo Maldonado and John Jackson), had signed on with Oscar De La Hoya's promotional firm, it was revealed that Barrera had undergone brain surgery in 1997 and had been boxing since then with a steel plate in his head and to cap off this hectic period in his life, weeks before the fight he had evacuate his Big Bear camp because of the forest fires that ravaged the lower part of California.

Even Roach admits that Barrera may have lost a little focus leading into the fight.

" With the problems between he and Maldonado, I'm sure there was some distractions with the story on the surgery on his brain and they thing was he had to break camp and he had to go to San Antonio two weeks before the fight.

" But he didn't make any excuses after the fight. He just said,' Manny was the better man tonight' and we offered him a rematch, if he wants one."

### BARRERA'S FUTURE

So where does Barrera go from here? Already his trainer, Rudy Perez had suggested publicly that his fighter call it a day. After all, he can get out of this game at a relatively young age of 29 with his faculties intact and a Hall-of-Famer career to look back on.

But in many respects, it's an 'old' 29, with a lot of miles on the odometer. Even though he had gone to a safer, more technical approach in recent years, he still had his wars with Kennedy McKinney, Junior Jones and Erik Morales in his past. It looked, at least on this night, that they had finally caught up to him.

Perhaps he himself saw this coming when he remarked to Larry Merchant at the HBO fighter meetings that, " He( Pacquiao) reminds me of myself when I was 24." In other words, he was now facing a young, hungry lion with the passion and commitment to do whatever it takes. Something, that maybe in his own heart, he no longer was.

Sadly on this night, he was out-fought and painfully slow on the trigger. What was even worse is that when the going got tough, he tried to get out of the fight. In the seventh round after an accidental clash of heads, he would basically try to get the ring doctor to stop the bout. But unlike a Julio Cesar Chavez against Frankie Randall in their rematch back in 1994, he didn't have a Flip Homansky to bail him out.

As the one-sided beating continued, Barrera would then try and purposely butt Pacquiao and was even deducted a point for flagrantly hitting his Filipino foe during a break. As he was taking a barrage of punches in the 11th stanza, the fight would be mercifully halted by his corner.

In many ways, it was a fitting conclusion. But the bigger question is, will it be the last we've seen of a great champion?