LAS VEGAS – It's Hype Day of Fight Week, the final big day of tub thumping before Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao fade from view until Saturday night's concussive encounter between the two of them at the MGM Grand Garden Arena.

Pacquiao showed up at the final press conference looking like an investment banker, sporting a blue tie and dark suit. De La Hoya showed up looking like a fighter in a grey sweatsuit with The RING logo on his chest and back. His cornermen wore similar outfits, all walking billboards for the boxing magazine De La Hoya bought over a year ago and is trying to resurrect. So while Pacquiao was dressed like an investment banker, De La Hoya was acting like one, advertising his product, which is still himself most of all.

De La Hoya is the kind of conglomerate that seldom comes along in sports. His holdings are bigger than Michael Jordan's and rival those of Tiger Woods' despite the fact he practices a dying sporting art – he boxes.

In the past two months two pay-per-view shows have done disappointing numbers, both Kelly Pavlik vs. Bernard Hopkins and Joe Calzaghe vs. Roy Jones doing less than 200,000 buys. That is a worrisome thing because while those shows struggled, a recent UFC mixed martial arts show did 850,000 buys, an omen some feel does not bode well for boxing's long-term health.

But none of this seems to affect De La Hoya. The press conference is jammed with reporters from newspapers that haven't covered a fight since, well, the last time De La Hoya entered the ring in Las Vegas, which was a year ago against Floyd Mayweather, Jr.

There are television crews everywhere and languages being used that range from English to Spanish to French to German to Japanese to Tagalog, the most widely spoken language in Pacquiao's native Phillipines. Boxing may be struggling in the U.S. but internationally it seems to have reached a high note, a point Pacquiao's promoter, Bob Arum, made clear.

"Boxing is not as vibrant as it once was in the United States but it's not out-rating soccer in Great Britain,'' Arum said with a straight face. "It's competing with the Bundesliga (Germany's major soccer league). My hope is we can get boxing back where people can see it where it belongs – on free TV.''

This from one of the guys most responsible for taking it off free TV. Promoters like Arum, Don King, the late Dan Duva and now De La Hoya have all conspired against the long-term health of the sport by focusing on events like Saturday night's – pay-per-view shows that limit the audience for the biggest fights and best advertisements for the sport.

Go figure.

De La Hoya may be only a fighter Saturday night but Wednesday he was a salesman first, which seems right when you consider that his company is the lead promoter of what is expected to be the highest grossing fight of the year.

In the midst of a discussion about the fight, De La hoya broke into an infomercial for people on the fence about ponying up the $54.95 fee (and possibly $5 or $10 more to see it in HD depending on your individual cable system's policy).

"We know it's a tough economy,'' De La Hoya said. "For a lot of fight fans it's difficult. They have to pick and choose what fights to watch. They've picked and chosen this one (with a projected number of buys in excess of one million).

"One thing I pushed for as hard as I could with the sponsors was rebates. You buy a 12-pack of Tecate (beer) that you're going to do any way and you get $20 back (in a rebate on the pay-per-view purchase of the fight).

"You move on and buy the Cazadores (tequila). You get $20 back. After the tequila some of you get happy, some of you get aggressive. To have that hype (before the fight) buy a Coca Cola Full Throttle (energy drink). You get $10 back. That's $50 off so you watch the fight for free!''

Unless, of course, you consume those 12 bottles of Tecate and that bottle of Cazadores tequila first. Do that and you'll need more than one Full Throttle to be awake for the fight, whose main event figures to start around 11:30 p.m. East Coast time.

Pacquiao's promotional team began a Mexicans for Manny campaign, listing Julio Cesar Chavez and his son, Julio, Jr., as well as welterweight champion Antonio Margarito and Jorge Arce as Pacquiao backers. De La Hoya's associate, Golden Boy Promotions CEO Richard Schaefer, countered by parading out a who's who of retired Mexican champions to stand with De La Hoya.

They included Ruben Olivares, Carlos Zarate, Pipino Cuevas, Chiquita Gonzalez, Rudolpho Gonzalez, Rudy Carmona, Juan Manuel Marquez and his brother Rafael, Israel Vasquez, Oscar Larios and Daniel Zaragoza. De La Hoya came down from the podium to shake each of their hands before announcing they would sign 50 canvas pieces cut from the ring on which Juan Manuel Marquez defeated Marco Antonio Barrera for $500 apiece.

"One hundred per cent of the proceeds will go to a charity for Mexican fighters,'' Schaefer said. "The first recipient will be the family of Daniel Aguillon.''

Aguillon was a Mexican fighter who died following a knockout loss in Las Vegas last month. He left behind a wife and two children. De La Hoya has agreed to match each purchase with another $500, meaning the Aguillon family could end up with $50,000.

Despite the charitable nature of the presence of those Mexican champions, Arum found a way to turn it inside out, pointing out that most of those champions were “a little bit long in the tooth.’’

“It was very impressive to have all these Mexican champions up here,’’ Arum said. “Great champions with great accomplishments, but most of them are a little bit long in the tooth. It reminds me of the Presidential election. In John McCain you had a candidate who was a man of great accomplishments but he was a little bit slow. A little bit long in the tooth.

“Oscar De La Hoya is a man of great accomplishments but like John McCain. A little bit long in the tooth. A little bit slow.’’

After which Arum compared a 135-pound Filipino boxer to President-elect Barack Obama.

That’s absurd but that’s boxing.

This is a fight that has brought together some of the biggest names in boxing, including 87-year-old trainer Angelo Dundee. Dundee continues to work with young fighters but remains best known for training first Muhammad Ali and then Sugar Ray Leonard for some of the biggest fights in boxing history.

De La Hoya brought him in as a “technical advisor’’ to work with his latest new trainer (No. 7) Nacho Beristain. Wednesday Dundee said he had been studying tape of both fighters and has come to the conclusion that Pacquiao has some fatal flaws, including locking his right leg when he throws, which makes him more vulnerable to being countered, and lunging in and throwing wide when he comes inside.

His prediction, not surprisingly, is that his fighter, De La Hoya, will win because “he’s the bigger man and he’s a better fighter.’’

But he also made clear that, in the end, the people who will decide the fight are not the trainers but rather the men they’ve trained.

“How can you say anything but good stuff about Freddie Roach,’’ Dundee said of Pacquiao’s trainer. “He was taught by my old friend Eddie Futch. But let me tell you I remember once a guy came to my gym, Fifth Street Gym in Miami. He said he was from Las Vegas and fought for Eddie Futch.

“I called Eddie and he said do what you can for him. So we get a fight and the corner guys were me, Eddie Futch and Freddie Roach. You know what?

“He got licked! It didn’t mean nothing who was in the corner. The important thing is the fighter on the stool.’’

Of all the words uttered at yesterday's final press conference and through a long afternoon spent milling around Las Vegas, those few were the whole truth.

"It didn't mean nothing who was in the corner. The important thing is the fighter on the stool.''

Former lightweight champion Jim Watt, a erudite Scotsman who does boxing commentary for Sky TV in Great Britain, looked at De La Hoya and Pacquiao and came to a two-word conclusion on the outcome.

"Too big,'' Watt said, echoing the feelings of many boxing insiders.

Watt said he had looked for many ways to see Pacquiao come out a winner but was unable to do so because he kept coming back to the same conclusion.

"Manny has been a lightweight for one fight so he's not really coming up two weight classes,'' Watt said. "He's coming up three weight classes.

Here is a breakdown of the weight difference between the two dating back to 1995.

1995 27 pounds

1996 27 pounds

1997 32 pounds

1998 34 pounds

1999 31 pounds

2000 27 pounds

2001 33 pounds

2002 33 pounds

2003 30 pounds

2004 33 pounds

2005 De La Hoya did not fight

2006 24 pounds

2007 25 pounds

2008 18 pounds.