

Is Pacman The Next Henry Armstrong?

Written by David A. Avila

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Boxing experts say a good big man always beats a good little man when you get down to the root of analyzing a fight between champions. Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao are going to vigorously test that theory.

East L.A.'s De La Hoya (39-5, 30 KOs), a winner of world titles in six weight divisions meets lightweight champion Pacquiao (47-3-2, 35 KOs), a Filipino superstar, at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on Saturday Dec. 6. The fight will be shown on HBO pay-per-view.

De La Hoya stands five inches taller and has fought in the 160-pound middleweight division. But Pacquiao has captured world titles in the flyweight, junior featherweight, junior lightweight and lightweight divisions.

Can the smaller Pacquiao beat De La Hoya?

Since the Filipino prizefighter erupted into the American consciousness in 2001 with a one-sided beating of South Africa's Lehlo Ledwaba in Las Vegas for the IBF junior featherweight title, he's proven to be equal to any challenge so far.

Pacquiao, 29, has combined speed and power in his diminutive size to form a potent fighting machine that has only gotten better the past seven years.

But can he beat De La Hoya?

Since De La Hoya entered into pro boxing he's captured the junior lightweight, lightweight, junior welterweight, welterweight, junior middleweight and middleweight titles with his own combination of polished fighting skills, speed and a deadly left hand.

At 35, the East Los Angeles prizefighter known as the Golden Boy has amassed more money from boxing than any other in the history of the sport, including Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield.

He's a money making machine and that's why this fight is happening.

"It's not for the money," argues Freddie Roach, who trains Pacquiao. "It's because I think Manny can beat him."

The Filipino star is poised to make near \$20 million. That's more than all of his previous fights combined. For De La Hoya, it's just another \$20 million dollar payday. But it's also a welcome fight for the health of the boxing scene and both Golden Boy Promotions and Top Rank, who are promoting the fight.

Dollars

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Experts say that Pacquiao is fighting De La Hoya because “if it makes dollars it makes sense.”

De La Hoya is in a class by himself when it comes to generating money. No other present day boxer commands that kind of box office appeal, whether it's pro boxing or mixed martial arts. Against Floyd Mayweather Jr. in 2007 that fight attracted a record 2.2 million pay-per-views.

“Everybody wants to fight my brother,” said Joel De La Hoya, older brother and assistant trainer to Oscar De La Hoya. “They know it means a big payday.”

Others theorize that Pacquiao's trainer Roach saw that his protégé could easily lose to the other 135-pound lightweights such as WBA titleholder Nate Campbell, former champion Juan Diaz or Joan Guzman. All have the speed and boxing prowess to give anyone problems in the ring, including Pacquiao.

“Nate would have loved to fight Pacquiao,” said John David Jackson, who trains Campbell.

Floyd Mayweather Sr., who recently prepared Great Britain's Ricky Hatton for his victory over Paul Malignaggi, said Guzman was the perfect fighter to dethrone Pacquiao.

“Guzman would give Pacquiao fits,” said Mayweather.

Still, in the last three years, it's been Pacquiao who has succeeded in every challenge, including a whitewash over Mexico's featherweight triumvirate of Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales and Juan Manuel Marquez.

It's because of these victories and his last knockout win over Chicago's David Diaz for the lightweight title that some are calling “Pacman” one of the greatest fighters of the current era and possibly capable of doing what no other fighter has accomplished in nearly 30 years.

Duran and Armstrong

Back in 1980, then lightweight Roberto “Hands of Stone” Duran moved up to the welterweight division and beat the seemingly unbeatable Sugar Ray Leonard to capture the welterweight world championship.

Perhaps the greatest feat of all time in pro boxing occurred in the 1930s when Henry Armstrong held the featherweight, lightweight and welterweight championships simultaneously in 1938.

Is Pacquiao another Armstrong?

“I saw a lot of fighters and Henry Armstrong was one of the best of all time, including Muhammad Ali,” said Sun City, California's Bennie Georgino, who saw Armstrong fight many times at the Olympic Auditorium. “He was a perpetual machine and would throw so many punches.”

Armstrong began as a rough and tumble featherweight who would fight anywhere regardless of

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the opponent. He fought in dozens of fights in the nearby Olympic Auditorium against unknown but extremely tough Mexican fighters.

Sound familiar?

Pacquiao is an aggressive pressure fighter who is making a jump in weight to prove his mettle against the bigger De La Hoya.

Roach attended De La Hoya's fight against Steve Forbes and theorized Pacquiao could win a match with the East L.A. boxer.

Forbes, who fought De La Hoya several months ago in May, said that comparing himself to Pacquiao is unwise.

"I'm a slick defensive fighter. Manny Pacquiao is an aggressive fighter who jumps in and out," said Forbes, who lost by unanimous decision after 10 rounds. "Oscar is too big for him."

Bob Arum, whose company Top Rank promotes Pacquiao, said in his experience he's never seen anyone as capable of beating a bigger man.

"I can see Pacquiao beating him to the punch and just punching him at will," said Arum. "Speed kills and Manny is definitely the faster man."

If you ask the boxing trainers and fighters, most disagree.

"Oscar is too big, too fast, and he's just a better fighter," said Forbes, who has never been knocked out and wasn't dropped by De La Hoya when they fought. "De La Hoya has one of the best jabs I've ever seen."

Roach, who trained De La Hoya for his fight against Mayweather, thinks his former pupil has lost much of his fighting skills.

"He can't pull the trigger," said Roach. "Manny will knock out Oscar."

Many boxing fans are split down the middle on who will win the fight. Las Vegas has De La Hoya tabbed as a slight 2-1 favorite.

Georgino, who has managed many world champions in the past, including Danny "Little Red" Lopez, Jaime Garza and Alberto Davila, said there are many factors to consider.

"There has never been a good small guy that could beat a good big man, but De La Hoya has been around a little bit. It's pretty hard to say who," Georgino said. "There is the weight situation. That will be a big difference. If this guy is smart enough to not stand in front, then he stands a chance. But if De La Hoya catches up to him he will be in trouble."

Can Pacquiao be that good little man that can beat the good big man?

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De La Hoya said it's a motivating factor.

"I'm oozing with motivation, that's for sure," De La Hoya said.