**Thursday**

Before leaving for Las Vegas I checked the weather schedules continuously to see if rain or snow was predicted for my journey to and from the city of gambling, entertainment and boxing of course.

It was all clear.

Numerous e-mails sent to me by the various representatives of the two promotion companies spoke of a special TV showing. It was the final broadcast of HBO's 24/7 series leading up to the big fight between Manny Pacquiao and Oscar De La Hoya.

The drive up was pretty uneventful in spite of the dozens of highway patrol officers parked along the way. Speed traps were everywhere so I kept my speed slower than usual on the drive through hundreds of miles of pure desert.

The helicopter flying overhead was overkill. Nobody was driving fast.

A quick stop in Baker took only 13 minutes to grab a tasteless Del Taco burrito and lemonade before proceeding up the pass that was made famous a decade ago by a news article that called the 15 mile slope "the most dangerous stretch of road in America." According to the story more road deaths occur up and down that stretch than any other place in the United States.

As I drove up the pass a few cars were pulled over by the California Highway Patrol.

About 30 minutes later I crossed the Nevada-California border at Primm. Years ago it was called Searchlight because of a red beacon that could be seen coming down the mountain pass. Now it's the wonderful world of Primm.

Once you cross the border there are usually even more Nevada Highway Patrol waiting for the speedy drivers. But not this time. I never saw one of those familiar metallic blue vehicles waiting in the nooks and crannies behind a barricade.

It was nearly 6 p.m. when I exited the I-15 on Tropicana Avenue. I hustled into the MGM Grand parking lot, and headed quickly to the media room where the documentary was being shown.

At the door I was stopped by the security people who would not let me in because I didn't have the proper media credentials. I told them to look for the main guy, Mr. Brenner, but they didn't know who he was. Luckily, a half dozen HBO executives that know me were just walking in and told them to let me in.

Voila. I was inside the belly of the monster covering the fight.

Immediately inside the huge media room I was greeted by the various journalists that I've met over the years like Tris Dixon from Great Britain, Tim Smith of New York, Chuck Johnson formerly of USA Today, and Norm Fraunheim of the Phoenix newspaper. Others, like former world champion Gato Gonzalez walked up to chat and share predictions... and then like clockwork the HBO special began.

It was interesting to watch it with other journalists. You have your usual cynics on one side and your uncaring media types on the other. And of course the one or two people talking loudly on cell phones.

After it was over I was getting ready to head out when one of the Golden Boy Promotions reps stopped me to ask me to have dinner with him, Richard Schaefer and other reporters at Diego's Mexican restaurant, a high priced establishment inside the MGM Grand.

"Sure," I said. I'd been in the place once before with Joel De La Hoya who had bought me a margarita and some tequila shots a few years ago. He even offered to buy me one of the place's $100 margaritas. I declined. Instead I took their low end $28 margaritas that night.

Inside Diego's in the far back room were about 24 reporters, mostly from Mexico. Also inside were Bert Sugar and Angelo Dundee sitting alongside Schaefer. Once everybody was seated a beautiful Mexican woman began giving a lecture on tequila. She represents Cazadores tequila, one of those premium liquors that you see but don't drink because of the price.

Most of the Mexican reporters were entranced by her and ignored Dundee who was giving his pearls of wisdom.

One of the waiters asked me if I wanted a margarita I replied kiddingly that "one of those $100 margaritas sounds good." He said 'right away' and came back with a tray full of the expensive margaritas. MMMmm. Very tasty. I had two.

Soon the talk began about boxing. As various Mexican food dishes were passed, guys like Sugar and Dundee and myself began talking about the finer points of boxing. When you have people like Sugar and Dundee sitting with you it's like opening up a rare bottle of wine. You savor the moment as the two boxing gurus speak about their experiences.

After two hours we all headed out. It was a good night.

How many times do you get to drink $200 worth of margaritas?

**Friday**

Woke up at a decent time to meet with my sister who lives in Las Vegas. Around 1:30 p.m. or 2 p.m. I met with super female fighter Melinda Cooper and her trainer James Pena.

Cooper is one of the most exciting fighters on the planet. She's also one of the few smaller weight prizefighters who can actually deliver a knockout. That's kind of like a female basketball

player being able to dunk. It's very rare.

The last time the petite Cooper got in the ring it was a one-sided win over a woman who usually fights at lightweight. Cooper is a former flyweight world champion and now wants to add a junior bantamweight, bantamweight and junior featherweight world titles regardless of the order.

Hopefully somebody steps in the ring with her before she gets too rusty. She's only 23 but time is wasting.

Around 2 p.m. I headed back to the MGM Grand, where more media were converging and people were beginning to fill the streets of Las Vegas. For the past five months the Strip has been rather barren. Not tonight.

Inside the arena, the fighters are being weighed and the place is packed with about 4,000 people. Comedian George Lopez is hosting the event and he's dropping everybody's jaws with laughter. Bob Arum is a favorite target of Lopez who challenges the elderly promoter to a fight on numerous occasions. It was a laugh riot.

A number of the older Mexican greats were at the arena to view the weigh-in, including Pipino Cuevas, Chango Carmona, Gato Gonzalez and a few others. Golden Boy had paid for their trip, hotel and tickets to the event. It was a classy act for the L.A. based company and brought a sense of history to the event. That's what boxing is all about, history.

When Pacquiao weighed 142 there were a few surprised fans, but when De La Hoya weighed 145 there was a mild shock going through the crowd. That's very, very low and almost like the East L.A. fighter is trying to prove that weight doesn't matter.

After the weigh-in the media guys hung around the various bars in the MGM. As I walked through the Rouge bar, someone tugged at my shirt, it was Joel De La Hoya who was sitting down with a group of people. We talked for about 30 minutes on the status of his brother's training, the odds, and how his new trainer Nacho Beristain worked out.

Later, I spoke to Anthony, one of De La Hoya's main security guys and a real good person. Then there was Rolando Arrellano, who also chatted with me a short bit. If that names familiar it's because he used to manage Fernando Vargas. It was Vargas who brought Arrellano into the boxing game. Now he manages Victor Ortiz, another Oxnard product.

Also inside the Rouge lounge were numerous sportswriters like Smith of the NY Daily News, George Willis of The New York Post, Lance Pugmire of LA Times and my good buddy Paul Gutierrez of the Sacramento Bee. We hung out for a short while, then walked over to the other bar near the main concourse. Before walking out I spotted a big guy with a brown cowboy hat who looked familiar. I asked one of the Golden Boy people if that was heavyweight David "Haymaker" Haye who recently knocked out Monte Barrett in his first foray into the big boy division. He might be the savior for the promotion company. They told me indeed it was. He's a big guy and doesn't look capable of dropping down to cruiserweight. But he held three of the cruiserweight world titles before departing.

At the main bar I heard somebody call my name out. It was Michael Marley, the boxing wizard who heads Boxing Confidential.com. Marley is an interesting cat who was a former sportswriter and attorney and now dabbles in promoting and every thing that has to do with boxing. This guy knows just about everything. Earlier in the week I was watching some old footage of the Riddick Bowe and Evander Holyfield fight and there was Marley. Funny, he looks the same but just has whiter hair.

We talked about everything. We had talked the night before but there were other things he wanted to speak on. Also sitting with him was Eric Bottjer, a matchmaker and major expert on the heavyweight division after spending years with Cedric Kushner. I've known him for about eight years. Good guy.

It was getting late so we dusted off her shoes and headed to the parking lot. The people continued to arrive in the Las Vegas casino.

It was good to see.

A few people recognized me from the HBO specials and the Directv commercials pushing the fight. I signed some autographs and took photos with some of the fans and walked to the parking lot and finally drove home.

At the house, we watched a welterweight Roberto "La Amenaza" Garcia of Texas who was fighting in Costa Rica. He and his wife Nana were staying in Las Vegas for a brief while but moved back to California to train with Clemente Medina.

Garcia is a strong looking fighter who to me resembles Pipino Cuevas. He had trained briefly with Roger Mayweather and another Las Vegas trainer but he just didn't feel right with their styles. So back to L.A. he went.

The Texas welterweight is fighting a Costa Rican fighter Roberto Aranda in Costa Rica. That usually means he will lose unless he batters the guy senseless. He battered the guy senseless alright. Garcia knocked down his opponent five times until the referee realized it might be ruled manslaughter if he let it continue. The fight was video streamed on the Internet.

**Saturday**

An early morning press conference for Antonio Margarito and Shane Mosley was postponed. So I was able to wake up later than usual. Where I am staying is a good friend's house. He has some other guests there including a former fighter named Jose Arias who was called by many who witnessed him in the ring one of the best fighters the world never saw. He was a gym legend on the level of L.A. street basketball player Raymond Lewis, a shooter who was unstoppable but never played in the NBA. (Lewis was black balled.) Arias suffered an injury that kept the world from his talent. Now he's training a tall slender kid from Rhode Island named Jesse. I talked to both about the upcoming fight between De La Hoya and Pacman. Both feel that De La Hoya should win easy just with the jab.

Fight time is early today around 3 p.m.

Will it be the greatest fight or will it be a wipe out?