It wasn't supposed to go down this way. The little guy who started out as a 106 pounder was supposed to be outweighed by about 15 pounds come fight night. The script, of the Little Guy Fights Hard, Comes Up Short, Is Admired For His Massive Pluck-genre, called for Manny Pacquiao to fight in valiant fashion for a few rounds, and then succumb to his brawnier foe, Oscar De La Hoya. It would be a moral victory for PacMan, and of course he could be consoled by the career-best payday he'd earn for absorbing an excess of telling blows.

But most of us "experts" didn't handicap the fight correctly, as we underestimated the size advantage Pacquiao enjoyed in the heart department.

That's no slight to De La Hoya, who has always fought gamely and sought out the stiffest challengers. But Manny Pacquiao's impersonation of David, as he slayed boxing's Goliath of earning power and iconic status, De La Hoya, earns him the nod as TSS Boxer of the Year for 2008.

There were some other worthy contestants for the prize. A vote for Wales' Joe Calzaghe, who took down two future Hall of Famers, in Bernard Hopkins (April) and Roy Jones (November), would not be scoffed at. And anyone at the arena on the October night Bernard Hopkins showed 43 ain't nothing but a number as he dismantled the favored flavor-of-the-month Kelly Pavlik had to think B-Hop wrapped up Boxer of the Year honors. What about Mexican-American Antonio Margarito, who took a piece of Miguel Cotto's heart in July and rudely thrust loss number one at the Puerto Rican welterweight?

A March win over Juan Manuel Marquez, for the WBC super featherweight crown, was a narrow triumph, but Pacquiao clicked into higher gear when he destroyed David Diaz, the WBC lightweight champ, in June. Those triumphs served as a modest launching pad for his December performance.

One criteria for Boxer of the Year, in our eyes, is the impact that fighter's presence in the game causes. Pacquiao's win certainly did transcend the sport. No, not so much here in the States. My periodic quizzes of non boxing sports fans still show that the name "Manny Pacquiao" has yet to penetrate the consciousness of the non-hardcore fight fans that swarm TSS. But in his native Philippines, where the nation ground to a halt when he stepped into the ring against De La Hoya, that win was probably the athletic event of the century. And that win wasn't just a win.

It was a lesson in perseverance, in defiance against odds and legions of naysayers. It was an affirmation of what any Pinoy man or woman gifted with a bit of talent and even more heart and guts can do.

Pacquiao's win was a rousing reminder of why boxing matters, because more than any other sport, it mirrors the experience that is adult life. We toil, often for nothing more than the promise of better days ahead. We labor, and with the aid and encouragement of a select group of friends

and family, soldier on through illness, and setbacks in the emotional realm. We take on a substantial challenge, perhaps a Sisyphean one, and find ourselves failing, once, twice…can we will ourselves to get off the canvas, and keep fighting? Ideally, we do plod forward, in the fashion of Pacquiao, even if the majority of people view our chance of succeeding as negligible. Along the way, when met with misfortune, we search for role models to emulate, or occurrences that validate our quest. Fight fans saw that role model, Manny Pacquiao, on December 6, and will always be able to draw on that special occasion when David made Goliath quit on his stool in a Las Vegas ring. And his graciousness in victory, as he took time to applaud his foe, and help lessen the sting of defeat by reminding De La Hoya of the breadth of his accomplishments, only cemented the superlative status of Pacquiao's win.

Manny responded to being named TSS top fighter for 2008. "I always try to do my best when I go into the ring," he said. "Oscar was always one of my favorite champions and he still is today. It was an honor to go into the ring and face him. I am very happy to be recognized as the Fighter of the Year by TheSweetScience.com."

Team TSS wishes to thank Pacquiao for his service to the sport and for acting as a superior ambassador for the sweet science.