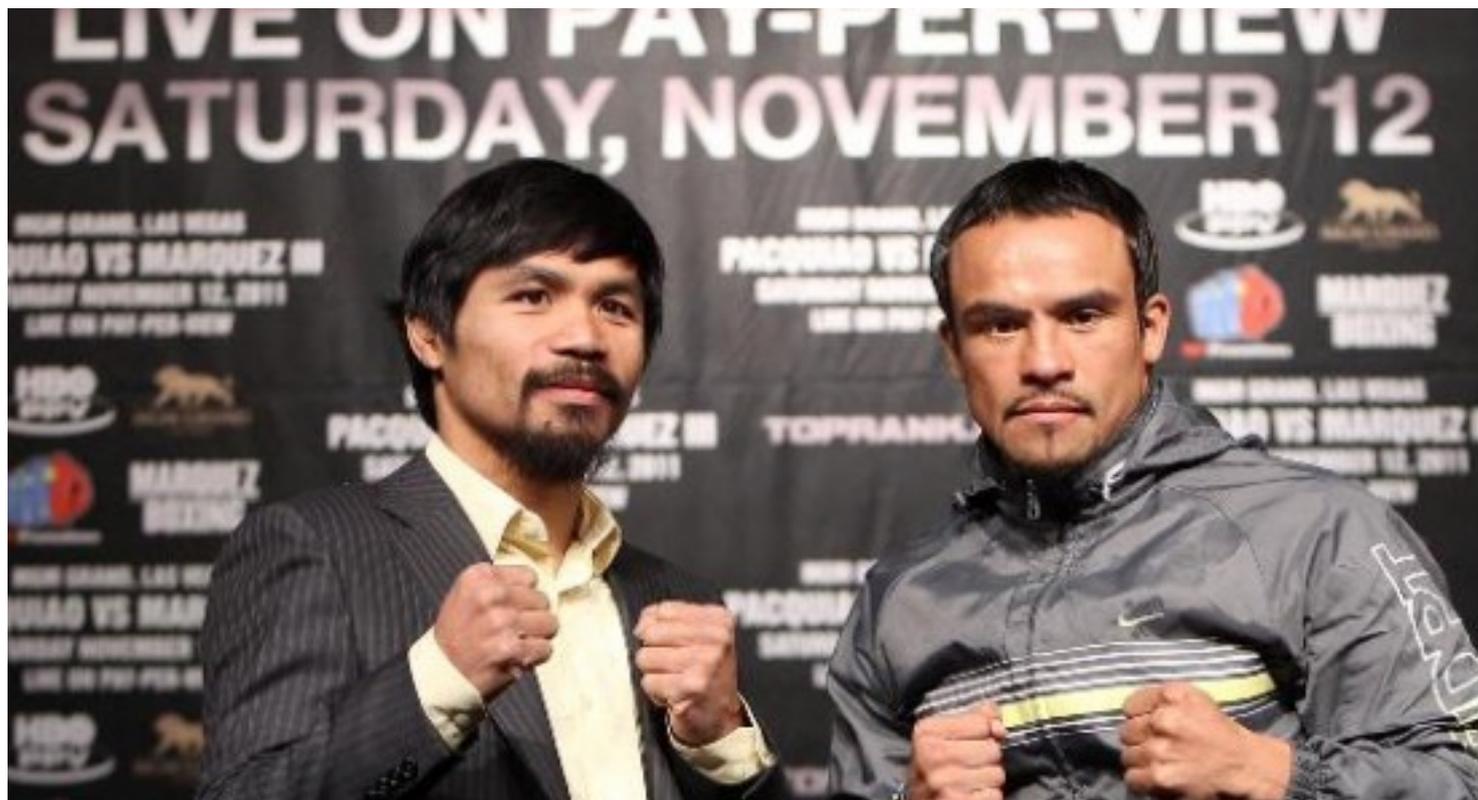


“Money” Markets: How Mayweather Is Helping Sell Pacquiao...RASKIN

Written by Eric Raskin

Thursday, 10 November 2011 17:42



It happened again last Thursday night. I was out to dinner with a group of guys, most of whom I'd never met before, so we were making the usual getting-to-know-you small talk, which inevitably includes the “what do you do for a living?” conversation. I identified myself as a sports writer. “What sports?” one of the guys asked. “Mostly boxing,” I said. I knew what was coming next.

The previous day, Floyd Mayweather had announced plans to fight on May 5, 2012 at the MGM Grand, and every single sports news show or screaming-head show (it's time to drop the inaccurate “talking head” description) made time to ask the question, “Will Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao fight each other?” So I knew exactly what I was walking into when I defined myself as a boxing writer.

“So, are they gonna fight?” one of the guys at the table immediately asked, not even needing to specify who “they” were.

As much damage as Mayweather and Pacquiao have done to the public's perception of boxing by not fighting each other, the reality is that neither has damaged his individual marketability yet, as their most recent pay-per-view figures illustrate. Pacquiao generated 1.3 million buys

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against Shane Mosley, a big-name opponent everyone knew was shot going in. Mayweather did 1.25 million against Victor Ortiz, an opponent with almost no mainstream profile before he signed to fight “Money.” In the past two years, since Pacquiao defeated Miguel Cotto and the first round of Pacquiao-Mayweather negotiations began, only one fight involving either of them felt like a superfight, and that was Mayweather vs. Mosley at a time when it seemed Sugar Shane had something left. The others have all been flawed matchups in one way or another. And still the PPV numbers hit seven figures every time.

When Mayweather announced his fight date last week, Pacquiao’s promoter, Bob Arum, railed against the not-at-all-coincidental timing of it and accused Mayweather of trying to steal Pacquiao’s spotlight in the final two weeks before Pac-Man’s PPV against Juan Manuel Marquez. But Arum had it all wrong (at least on the surface; more on what probably lurked below the surface shortly). He shouldn’t have been degrading Mayweather. He should have been thanking him. Mayweather and Pacquiao have been indirectly and inadvertently marketing each other for the last couple of years. When one fights, the other’s name lands in the headlines. When one mentions the other’s name, the PTI types start furiously debating who’s ducking whom.

So when Mayweather and his people claimed he wants to fight “the little fella” on May 5, that little fella got a lot of extra attention in the midst of trying to sell a fight. That guy I was out to dinner with last week who asked if Pacquiao-Mayweather was going to happen? Turned out he didn’t know Pacquiao had a fight coming up on November 12. Now he does. Complain all you want, Mr. Arum, but awareness is a big part of this game, and Mayweather builds awareness within mainstream sports fans a hell of a lot more effectively than Piers Morgan does.

Maybe Floyd Mayweather is a jealous, petty SOB whose intention is to steal Pacquiao’s spotlight. But if that’s the case, the intention and the outcome don’t much resemble one another. Whether he means to do it or not, when he opens his mouth Mayweather makes the spotlight shine brighter on Pacquiao, on the Marquez fight, and on all of boxing.

And say what you will about Bob Arum (I love “say what you will”—it’s such a great way to imply that a guy is an unsavory d-bag without actually putting yourself on the hook for levying such an insult), but the guy didn’t become a multi-millionaire Hall of Famer by being stupid. He’s a sharp guy. He understands that even when Mayweather blames Pacquiao for their fight not happening yet, Mayweather is promoting Pacquiao. That’s why I think Arum’s aggressively outraged reaction is an act. He’s playing along. He figures, if Mayweather gets the mainstream media meter moving by throwing a few daggers at Pac-Man and Arum, then Arum’s job is to keep the temperature rising by throwing something back. The more Arum says, “The fight will never

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happen,” the more it drives the conversation.

And if the conversation starts at Pacquiao-Mayweather, at some point it turns to Pacquiao-Marquez.

With or without Floyd inserting himself, Pacquiao-Marquez is a highly meaningful fight. Any Pacquiao fight is highly meaningful, for obvious reasons. But when Mayweather suggests that a Pacquiao fight is on his mind for next May—whether he means it or not—it makes Pacquiao-Marquez that much more meaningful. A win for Pacquiao keeps the most lucrative fight in boxing history on track (theoretically). A win for Marquez screws everything up. The stakes for the sport of boxing are higher if those stakes involve a certain undefeated, homophobia-spouting, sucker-punching superstar.

Pacquiao vs. Marquez is going to sell just fine regardless, of course. If Pacquiao can get applauded for a duet of a Bee Gees song with Jimmy Kimmel, then it proves people will eat up whatever he’s serving, no matter who his partner is. And Marquez happens to be a worthy partner; he surely fights a hell of a lot better than Kimmel sings.

This fight is going to sell over a million pay-per-views. That’s a guarantee. You could add Bernard Hopkins and Chad Dawson to the undercard at the last minute and I’d still offer that guarantee. But will it hit 1.2 million? 1.3? 1.4?

The more Mayweather talks, the higher it can go. Floyd is a brilliant self-promoter. And whether he means to be or not, he’s doing a solid job as a co-promoter of Pacquiao-Marquez.

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