Written by Ron Borges
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LAS VEGAS – How long of a shadow can a man standing 5-feet-6 ½ inches cast? If that man is Manny Pacquiao and you box for a living it is apparently a long, dark and foreboding one.

Even when faced with a formidable challenge and an earnest opponent like Miguel Cotto, Pacquiao is never far from Floyd Mayweather, Jr.'s mind it seems, the latest example of that coming over the past two days when Mayweather has been obsessively talking about a guy he seems to have no intention of fighting.

Tomorrow, Mayweather will challenge the WBA's junior middleweight champion at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. The fight is expected to do big business, pay-per-view sales already projected at well over one million and perhaps, some claim, possibly challenging the all-time record of 2.4 million buys set by Mayweather and Oscar De La Hoya nearly five years ago.

Unlike others in his powerful position (including Pacquiao), Mayweather has not used his influence in the marketplace to demand Cotto fight at a catch weight below the 154-pound limit, thus having to weaken himself to make the $11 million he's guaranteed to receive for facing Mayweather. Mayweather could have done that, as Pacquiao has on numerous occasions of late, but he opted instead to fight at the division's weight limit because, he says, he doesn't believe catch weights are a fair way to operate. In a sense, it is that view of the marriage between boxing and fair play that keeps coming up whenever Mayweather speaks of Pacquiao, whether the world is listening to what he says or not.

"I've never fought a guy at a catchweight,'' Mayweather said recently. "I don't fight guys at catchweights. I don't put plaster in my gloves (alluding to the disgraced Antonio Margarito, who was found in just such a circumstance before facing Shane Mosley several years ago and is suspected by Cotto of having done the same thing to him when he gave him a beating so severe Cotto quit by taking a knee late in the fight). These are things I don't do because I'm not that type of guy.

"What I do is dedicate myself when it's time to fight and that's what I can say I do do. To each his own.''

Fairness and boxing are two words not often mixed, especially at the sport's highest level where leverage and power at the box office often allow one fighter to dictate to his opponents not only the site and time of a fight but also the size gloves used, the size of the ring and, too often, the size of his opponent regardless of what the rules of the sport allow.

What brings this all up when talk should be revolving around fighting Cotto, is Mayweather's Tuesday afternoon rant in Las Vegas when he met with a small group of boxing writers and launched into a 15-minute soliloquy about not Cotto but Pacquiao, or at least his clearly held fear that Pacquiao may have used at some time or other some form of performance enhancing drugs.

At the moment Pacquiao has a pending defamation lawsuit against Mayweather, arguing that he has never tested positive for any form of PEDs and that Mayweather's sometimes veiled and sometimes not so veiled accusations that he is suspect amount to his being defamed.

Perhaps he has, but it was Pacquiao who long refused to agree to random blood testing for PEDs as a condition of fighting Mayweather, although to be fair of late he has said he would agree to random testing up to the day of the fight. This was a problem because the only test able to discover use of human growth hormone and certain other PEDs is random blood testing. Refusal to agree to such testing, which is not mandated by most state athletic commissions, is not an admittance of anything to be sure but Mayweather argues PEDs have infected most of professional sports, including boxing, and he and others should stand up to assure as best they can that it not continue in a blood sport where the first aim is to render your opponent unconscious.

This is not a sport like baseball, where a juiced player simply hits a ball farther or throws it faster. It's not even like football, at least in cities outside of New Orleans, where the aim is not to hurt the other opponent but rather to score more points that he does.

Only in boxing is the first aim to hurt your opponent. That being the obvious case, a strict effort to rid boxing of PEDs seems logical and frankly far from controversial. Yet because it has stood in the way of a Mayweather-Pacquiao fight it seems to have been twisted into a discussion of whether or not Mayweather is "afraid'' to face Pacquiao.

This is ludicrous because, frankly, if he believes Pacquiao is using PEDs he damn well should be afraid of facing him. Second, Mayweather has for the past two years made it a condition of fighting him that both he and his opponent agree to random blood and urine testing right up to the fight. Mosley, an admitted former user himself, Victor Ortiz and now Cotto agreed and did so without incident. Mayweather beat the first two easily and is expected to do the same to Cotto Saturday night.

Yet the issue of Mayweather's alleged "fear'' of Pacquiao sent him into a rage on Tuesday when he told a small collection of writers in Las Vegas that, "Health is more important than anything because guess what? When my career is over, if I'm hurt because of something that has happened in a fight, I can't come to you and say, 'I need (money).'

"People say, 'We don't give a f--- if he's taking or not; we just want to see the fight. We don't give a f--- about your health and we don't give a f--- about your family.' I care about my family. I love my family. They're going to be there when no one else is there. When my career is over, you're all going to move on to the next one."

Mayweather is sadly right about that, just as he was about the way he views promoters like Bob Arum and Don King, who agree a Mayweather-Pacquiao fight would be the largest grossing event in boxing history.

"Don King and Bob Arum don't see out the eyes of a fighter because they're not a fighter," Mayweather said Tuesday. "All they care about is some f------ money. I care about a fighter's well being because I am a fighter. I know how it is to have a broken rib the rest of your life. I know how it is to piss blood. You all don't know nothing about this."

Soon after Mayweather questioned Pacquiao's rapid rise in weight classes from the 106 pounds where he started to 154 pounds and now where he stands as the WBO's welterweight champion and questioned not that he could do that but how he seemed to become more dominate as he moved up in weight, which is unusual. Since 2008, Pacquiao has won world titles in five different weight classes and stopped four of the nine opponents he's faced.

Generally fighters who move up in weight may continue to be successful but they usually lose something. They lose most normally punching power and sometimes speed. To retain both is almost unprecedented and seems to have convinced Mayweather that there are reasons beyond Pacquiao's obvious talent and work ethic for his rise.

To be fair about it that seems to be what Mayweather really fears. Not Pacquiao himself but something outside of Pacquiao that could both elevate his performance and threaten the health

of an opponent.

"It took me years to get to here -- years," Mayweather raged Tuesday. "I'm going up in weight but I'm not walking through no damn fighters. (Pacquiao) is 106; now he decides to walk through (Miguel) Cotto? Cotto can't knock down (Shane) Mosley, but can he?

"This is how the world is, you get writers saying, 'Floyd is scared,' " he said. "No, Floyd cares about his family. Floyd is smart. You all know for a fact I'm not scared. You all know that."

Scared is an overused word in sports. Few athletes are “scared’’ of an opponent. The handlers around them might be because they don’t want to see their meal ticket punched to the point where his value in the market place is diminished but elite fighters do not know that type of fear.

What seems to be the case with Mayweather however is that he does fear the power of performance enhancing drugs because, as the name implies, they enhance unfairly an opponent’s ability to perform in the most dangerous sport in the world. That doesn’t mean Pacquiao is or ever has been a user. In fact, he can rightfully argue he’s been tested many times and never been found guilty of anything and has said he’s willing to go along now with Mayweather’s insistence on Olympic-style blood and urine testing.

What Mayweather keeps arguing for however is something different. He’s talking not only about protecting his own health but also about fighters taking a leadership role in a shadowy area of sport that has tainted baseball and the Olympic Games severely and other sports to lesser degrees as well.

“I think since I’m the face of boxing I have totally changed the sport of boxing I’m the reason why they don’t talk about heavyweights anymore,’’ Mayweather said last week. “I’m the one outside the box. I’m doing record turning numbers. So since I’m the face of the sport I should be always trying to change the sport and make the sport a lot better and the best thing is to always put every man on an even playing field.

“Everyone should be on an even playing field. That’s what I truly believe. I think that Manny

Pacquiao has done a lot in the sport but he should also be standing behind me and say, ‘We should clean up the sport because I’m a clean athlete.’ I’m letting the world know Floyd Mayweather is a clean athlete and if you’re the best step up and take the test.’’

Tuesday Floyd Mayweather, Jr. ranted and raged about Pacquiao even though no one asked him about Pacquiao. For Mayweather, his nemesis seldom seems far from his thoughts even days before he will face a different man in the ring.

That may speak to fear, as some believe, but more likely it speaks to obsession and a growing weariness that he cannot seem to shake Pacquiao’s shadow nor convince the general public that he doesn’t need him to prove his own worth in boxing.

“I’m not saying nobody is, or nobody is not doing it,’’ Mayweather said Tuesday. “But my health is more important than anything.’’

Perhaps but soon after Mayweather was suggesting Pacquiao’s head size had increased even though he has no such knowledge but does understand that is one side effect of the use of human growth hormone.

In the end, Floyd Mayweather will fight and likely beat up Miguel Cotto Saturday night. He will very likely do it in one-sided fashion. Yet no matter what he does another man will be lurking in the shadows, peering over his shoulder, standing defiantly in every corner of the ring and in every corner of Floyd Mayweather, Jr.’s boxing life.

“I don’t worry about that at all,’’ Mayweather told me last week when asked if he was disappointed that a fight with Pacquiao had not yet been arranged. “If it really was all about Pacquiao then I didn’t have to fight all 42 (previous) opponents. All I had to do was come to the sport of boxing and fight one guy. Then I would have went down as the best.

“So I guess the 42 guys that I’ve faced didn’t count. All I had to do was come into the sport of boxing and train for just one fight. Just train for one 12-round fight, beat that guy, then I was going down in history as the best. Now all of a sudden a guy comes out of nowhere and they

say, ‘Well, Floyd, you’re not the best because you haven’t beaten this guy yet.’ Like I said before, Floyd Mayweather has to live for Floyd Mayweather and I’m happy. I could care less what Manny Pacquiao is doing.’’

If that’s the case, why’d he bring him up this week in the first place?

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Radam G says:

This copy is out of place, or slow on the gun. Anyway! Lil' Floyd is full of bullsh*t. He does indeed fight at catchweights, or at least sign to do so. Da muthajoker signed to fight Juan Manuel Marquez at a catchweight of 144lbs, but da sneaky cheated and came in as a darn super heavyweight, so that he could have an advantage over the little man. Well, Da Manny is not asking for a catchweight. He'll thrash Money May's scary arse at any weight. Holla!