

Pacquiao Plays Pacman: How to Catch Back Up to Mayweather

Written by Phil Woolever
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INTHE KINGDOM OF MONEY - Not so long ago, Senator Manny Pacquiao was the undeniable king of the global ring.

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No longer.

Not so long ago, Pacquiao against Brandon Rios (*pictured above, in Chris Farina-Top Rank photo*) would have been a bigger fight than Floyd Mayweather Jr. versus Canelo Alvarez.

Not right now.

Public (as in paying customers) perception could be reaching a point, at least in the US, where Pacquiao's tenure atop the pound for pound rankings fades into memory while Mayweather is still on the rumbling rise.

The Pacquiao - Mayweather rivalry, a pick 'em situation for years, has in recent moons swung so far in Mayweather's direction that now "Money" says the only way a fight between them will occur is if Pacquiao leaves Top Rank and fights with Mayweather as the promoter.

For Pacquiao's loyal legions, it's bad enough that Mayweather has seemingly wrapped up public consensus on who reigns as the superior artist fistique.

Even worse Manny's followers these days, most subject matter relating to Pacquiao concerns his inevitable, and often already presumed, decline from the elite ranks of boxing's top performers. While perspective is bound to get more positive as the Rios promotion spins, it seems like Pacquiao's brand has lost market shares.

Outside Pacland, Alvarez has done an excellent job of replacing Pacquiao as a Mayweather rival in the prevailing public eye of North American fans who, between Mexico and the States, generate most pay per view revenue, the type revenue of which superfights are made.

Understanding today's apparent need for eye-catching, though often misleading, website headlines, Pacquiao's fans still must wonder what's up when primary topics concern trainer

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Fred Roach suggesting Pacquiao will retire if Rios stops him.

If Rios stops him?!?! Maybe Roach can sell a fight with the best of them, but to even mention that possibility seems a bit strange, candor aside. It may say a lot about where Pacquiao is in his own head these days, and about how his inner circle perceives him.

It seems clear Pacquiao needs to shake things up if he's to regain the type status he once held. Not that he has to.

Pacquiao has already earned a rare and coveted existence among that microscopic percentage of humanity who experience life at the very top of our food chain. By most accounts, he's a very decent fellow, an admirable alpha-type who not only achieves greatness and riches, but who shares good fortune to help people beyond just family and friends.

Pacquiao could have retired yesterday with justified pride in well lived life. Still, one trait that makes exceptional people is the motivation in productivity lesser mortals can only gaze upon with wonder.

If Pacquiao wants to bow out at the very top, there are numerous possible routes to that end, starting with the conventional wisdom of beating top contenders until there's nobody else left for Mayweather, or until a fight is mandatory.

Fighting Rios is a decent move, an excellent promotion in terms of risk reward and getting back on track, but not so much in terms of prestige. Many people figure Rios is an obvious foil for Pacquiao's style.

Anything short of a huge win doesn't regain any ground on Mayweather. Pacquiao's work is cut out for him.

Pacquiao must also erase the debacle of his KO to Juan Manuel Marquez, who Roach said is

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Team Pacquiao's priority, but that isn't likely to happen soon, if ever, according to Marquez.

Since the Marquez blast out, Gennady Golovkin has probably seized himself a sizeable share of the mauling market, too. Even (gasp!) the heavyweights Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko are rated above Pacquiao by most rational observers.

Some key factors like promotional tangles or available opponents are out of Pacquiao's hands, but if he's as concerned with his place in history as previously professed, he better make some big moves pretty quickly or he could find it's too late. As ridiculous as that may have sounded two years ago, two years from now it could be a proven fact.

Mayweather's contests are superfights simply by his presence alone these days. It used to be that way for Pacquiao too, before Marquez and Timothy Bradley (whether you think Bradley won or not) harshly reaffirmed Pacquiao's status as a mere mortal.

We hereby offer a road map for Pacman's return to unsurpassed gloved-up glory. The following itinerary, in fights and lifestyle, could vault Pacquiao above Mayweather's elite status.

First, Pacquiao should rebrand like the former "Pretty Boy" did and adapt a new trademark moniker along the lines of "Money."

Manny "Platinum" Pacquiao? Pacquiao could say things like "He was the Pretty Boy, I'm the Pretty Man," but that could be a socio-political minefield.

He could take a leave of his congressional duties, return to Manila's maze of cockfights and betting parlors. Start going to strip clubs, making it rain. Along those trails, he would go by "The Rainman."

On the other hand, if Pacquiao wanted to further embrace a religious theme, he could step up his already reported substantial donations of time and funding. Assume the mantle "Pac-Manna" in homage to that biblical bread. It never hurts to get as many people praying for you as possible.

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If Pacquiao wanted to keep his efforts inside the strands, he could balloon up to heavyweight and call out a Klitschko. Call the fight "The Climb to Conquer the K2 Mountain" and fight in Switzerland, where the brothers have each performed recently. If that sounds too absurd, consider that not far back, David Tua wasn't completely out of the running to meet Vitali. If Pacquiao stuffed 70 more pounds on his frame, he'd look something like Tua.

It could be there's absolutely nothing Pacquiao can do to regain a reputation at Mayweather's level beside winning against him in the ring, so Pacquiao and his fans will just have to accept that.

Not so long ago, Mayweather was vehemently criticized for avoiding a Pacquiao showdown. Maybe Mayweather was simply being correct in demanding top billing, compensation and control, and proclaiming himself the prime attraction.

These days, any concerns about performance enhancement testing have certainly shown Mayweather was not playing paranoid about high tech doping stipulations.

Maybe Pacquiao's time at boxing's summit was really just keeping the throne seat warm for Mayweather all along.

Or, maybe the following, near impossible scenario comes to fruition and Pacquiao is back under consideration as the very best of all time.

First, Pacquiao has to KO Rios within three one-sided rounds, a la Gennady Golovkin, without getting hit in return.

Next, Pacquiao films his own toilet video, and dedicates it to Adrian Broner, dubbing him the "Potty Mouth."

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Then, he challenge Broner to fight immediately, since Broner is probably improving as Pacquiao ages. A win over Broner, more likely the sooner it happens, would put Pacquiao back on Mayweather's playing field, and add promotional fodder if Pacquiao sufficiently silenced Mayweather's protege.

At that postfight press conference, challenge Golovkin, who is also improving and even more dangerous, to a catch weight fight at 152 pounds. Dub Golovkin "The Big Bluff" and announce the bluff is being called, at an exotic gambling site. If Golovkin takes the bait, Pacquiao could leverage himself into unexpected advantages, a la the concessions Sugar Ray Leonard bought, dirt cheap with hindsight, from Marvin Hagler. Even a draw here could put Pacquiao ahead of Mayweather, by virtue of Pacquiao's prior achievements.

The same formula for Golovkin goes for Sergio Martinez, except for Martinez the catch weight could be 155.

Finally, meet and defeat Andre Ward or Carl Froch at a catch weight of 160 for their belts, in their home towns. If Pacquiao pulled off a clean win against either, he'd not only move way up among the Hall of Fame's very best, he'd probably boost his chance at the Filipino presidency.

So, if Pacquiao wants to be considered equal or even superior to Sugar Ray Robinson or Muhammad Ali as the best ever, all he has to do is accomplish each of the previous far-fetched suggestions.

Even if Pacquiao achieved the near impossible, there would be naysayers and nitwits denying his greatness. That's the nature of our beast.

How great Pacquiao is today, or can be tomorrow, is still to be determined.

Whether he was great already is already a pretty stupid question.