Written by Ron Borges
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Read the body language on display after their 2008 fight. Looks like Marquez thought he won, and Manny doesn't look too confident he'll get his hand raised, does he? But the body laanguage in play today has more to do with weight, and age, quite possibly. (Hogan)

It has been too long in coming and so you have to wonder if it's too late getting here, even though short of one other possibility it's the only fight most people want to see Manny Pacquiao in.

With the stalemate between Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather, Jr. dragging on into its third year, promoter Bob Arum announced as expected last week that he'd reached agreement with Juan Manuel Marquez for a Nov. 12 showdown with Pacquiao at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas that would complete boxing's best trilogy since Micky Ward and Arturo Gatti retired.

Marquez is the one fighter who has given Pacquiao fits, his style sometimes mesmerizing him and often leading him into traps where trouble brewed. The result has been two controversial endings, the first a 2004 draw when both were featherweights and the second a 2008 split decision for Pacquiao when they fought as 130-pound junior lightweights.

In both cases many observers felt Marquez deserved the win, most especially in their remarkable first fight in which Pacquiao dropped Marquez three times in the opening round but didn't win three minutes of the rest of the fight as the remarkably resilient and resourceful Marquez not only fought his way back into the fight but to the point where, in this corner at least, it seemed his hand should have been raised.

The second fight was nearly as debatable, although a stronger case could be made for Pacquiao that time even though it didn't seem from this corner that he'd done enough to win. Or rather, to be fair, it seemed that once again Marquez had done more to win.

That three long years have passed between their last meeting and this one does not bode well for Marquez, however, because while he has remained a lightweight, Pacquiao has blossomed into a full-fledged welterweight who has seemingly retained all the speed and power he brought to the lighter weight divisions while losing nothing, including any fights since adding another 15 pounds.

Equally concerning is the fact Marquez will be 38 by the time they touch gloves (message of Shane Mosley: they'll only once, and barely) and go at each other a third time. Marquez remains in good shape and still among the most skilled fighters in the world but there have been clear signs of slippage in him that have not been evident in the 32-year-old Pacquiao.

He was badly beaten by Mayweather in his only previous foray into the welterweight division –

where to be honest he looked under-sized and over-matched – and has been dropped by Michael Katsidis before giving him a schooling in a TKO victory. One could excuse the Mayweather loss because he may still be the best fighter in the world and one could argue he came back strong to stop Katsidis, stopped the somewhat faded Joel Casamayor and twice beat up Juan Diaz since losing that split decision to Pacquiao so whatever slippage occurred has been slight.

That may be true but any slippage against a fighter as strong, quick and aggressive as Pacquiao could prove fatal for Marquez (52-5-1, 38 KO), especially since he will be forced to fight at a catchweight of 144 pounds.

What that weight means is that Pacquiao is giving away nothing. Despite the fact the welterweight division has a 147-pound limit, he seldom gets much above 143 so he will not be dieting down. Meanwhile Marquez will have to come up nine pounds from the 135 he'll fight in July when he defends the WBA and WBO lightweight titles he holds against former champion David Diaz. Coincidentally, that's the same Diaz Roach saw as the turning point for Pacquiao.

Yet other than Mayweather is there another fighter fans would rather see Pacquiao face? Zab Judah? Timothy Bradley? Selcuk Aydin? Mike Jones? No, no, 1000 times no.

Some floated the idea of Pacquiao moving up to middleweight to challenge Sergio Martinez but trainer Freddie Roach quickly squelched that idea as, to be kind, ridiculous because of the size difference (five inches in height, eight inches in reach, true middleweight vs. junior welterweight at best). That left Mayweather, Marquez and everyone else and with Mayweather still seemingly semi-retired and everyone else of little interest to the public the logical challenge is Marquez, who has always felt he won both of their encounters and didn't get the decisions only because of the greater power of Pacquiao's celebrity.

Whatever the truth or not of that, even Roach concedes no one has given Pacquiao the kind of problems Marquez has in the past.

"One hundred per cent,'' Roach said when asked if he believed Marquez had given Pacquiao more problems than anyone he'd faced since Erik Morales beat him six years ago when he was a one-armed and one dimensional fighter.

"Marquez is a difficult fighter. Very skilled. Very steady. Very resourceful. But my fighter is a better fighter now than he was then. Manny could only move in one direction and he only punched with the right hand then.

"The (David) Diaz fight (which came immediately after the second Marquez fight) was the turning point. Everything started to fit together. In the Oscar fight it all did. Marquez is a tough guy. A great fighter. But Manny is a better fighter than he was before.''

Depending on how you look at the outcome of those fights two fights and the ravages of age and size on Juan Manuel Marquez, he may have to be.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Da peepee banger gave Da Manny fits because making weight gave Da Manny fits. This time around making weight is Da Manny's friend and da peepee banger's end. Yall betta' listen! A well-fed PacMan is deadly to a well-toxicized on-his-peepee Marquez. Da sucka is a pi$$-drinkin' strange-O! Sippin' on peepee from his Johnson and nibbling on bird raw eggs from a Mexican mountain will give Marquez no upper hand or power. This jive is just a placebo for his fanfaronades and him. Da [now BIG balut-and-rice-fed] Manny is going to kayo Marquez for certain this time around. Marquez will not be able to stand the stinging of Pac-shots and the hailing of Pac-bombs. Holla!

"B" says:

I like juan a lot but I think you are spot on RG. I think if Juan was going to beat manny it would have been at feather 135 or 130 . He is a great fighter and artist in the circle but anything above 135 against manny might be bad for him. I think he has the style to best manny but not the talent. I could see manny stopping him. And that whole drinking pee thing night be the dumbest thing I have ever heard. Its call "waste" for a reason lol . You all be blessed!!!

the Roast says:

End of the line for JMM. Manny by KO in Five. If Katsitis could hurt JMM and if Diaz could rock him like that than imagine what Pac will do.

MisterLee says:

I thought the first fight was overrated. I had manny the first round, one or two middle rounds, and the championship rounds... the second fight was way closer. that's just me. I thought manny outworked him in the last rounds of the first fight. Holler!

FighterforJC says:

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The first fight was definitely overrated. I think that JMM CLEARLY won the first fight, and I'm much happier with a draw than seeing Pacquiao win on a technicality if one of the judges had correctly scored the first round 10-6 in his favor. JMM was the better man that night, still, if you're so good you shouldn't allow yourself to get dropped 3 times in a fight, let alone a single round. Pacquiao CLEARLY won the second fight, as close as it was. There was no controversy, nobody got robbed.

FighterforJC says:

[QUOTE=the Roast;6701]End of the line for JMM. Manny by KO in Five. If Katsitis could hurt JMM and if Diaz could rock him like that than imagine what Pac will do.[/QUOTE]

Normally this kind of logic doesn't work in boxing, kinda like, "If Norton and Frazier rocked Ali imagine what Foreman will do to Ali." But Pacquiao HAS hurt Marquez seriously in both fights. This does NOT bode well for JMM unless Pacquiao just has a complete psychological breakdown in the ring.

Matthew says:

This fight would be competitive at 135 or 140, but at 147 it's a mismatch. Pacquiao will be the bigger fighter, as well as the faster fighter, and Marquez has shown some deterioration since he moved up from 130. While Marquez has a style that has given Pacquiao fits in their first two encounters, Roach is correct in his assessment that Pacquiao is a much better fighter now. Marquez is a great fighter and a pro's pro, but I'm tired of hearing him whine that he got robbed in the first two fights. He lost his right to complain after getting knocked down 4 times in those two bouts. I thought Marquez won the majority of the rounds after round one of their first fight, but it's still a 10 point must scoring system, not a round-by-round system (as Larry Merchant said during the first Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns classic). Pacquiao did enough to win by a point on my scorecard in both fights. This time around, I see Pacquiao giving Marquez a one-sided beatdown, forcing either a referee or corner stoppage in the mid to late rounds.

Real Talk says:

Who's the reall Kenducky.....why it take so long to make this fight....oh because it wasn't safe enough.....nobody says anything when Pac does it. Double standard. Dueces