Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez have waged one of boxing's great rivalries. Their first three fights, contested over the course of eight-and-a-half years, showcased two elite warriors with speed, intelligence, power, and skill. Neither man was able to dominate the other. They were equal in the ring, both champions.

Pacquiao-Marquez IV is now part of that history. It began with a dramatic ebb and flow. Pacquiao went down hard in round three when Marquez landed an overhand right as Manny was pulling straight back with his hands down. Two rounds later, Juan Manuel's gloves touched the canvas when a straight left caught him flush. That was followed by toe-to-toe action with Pacquiao getting the better of it. After five rounds, all three judges had the Filipino icon ahead by a 47-46 margin.

By round six, Marquez's face was a bloody mess and his nose appeared to be broken. The scene brought back memories of Chuck Wepner walking back to his corner after a particularly hard round against Sonny Liston.

"I can't breathe," Wepner told his manager, Al Braverman. "My nose is broken."

"You got a mouth, don't you?" Braverman answered.

Marquez could breathe through his mouth. And Pacquiao, more than most fighters, is willing to gamble in the ring. Often, that has been his edge. But sooner or later, most gamblers who come to Las Vegas go home losers.

With seconds left in the sixth round, Pacquiao made a fatal mistake. He overcommitted on a careless jab with his head high and his left hand out of position to block a return counter. Marquez smacked him with a vicious righthand. Manny went down face-first, unconscious.

The punch joins other classic blows that the recipient never saw coming.

Gene Fullmer was dominating every facet of his 1957 rematch against Sugar Ray Robinson. Then, in round five, a counter lefthook stretched him out on the canvas.

“Up to then, I got to thinking I couldn’t be knocked out,” Fullmer said afterward. “And all at once, I realized anybody can. It’s just got to be at the right place at the right time and you’re gone.”

Pacquiao was on the giving end of a similar blow when he knocked out Ricky Hatton three years ago. “That’s what happens when you don’t see a punch coming,” Lennox Lewis (who got whacked by Hasim Rahman in South Africa) said of Hatton’s demise. “Believe me; I know.”

“I got careless,” Manny said after regaining consciousness at the close of Pacquiao-Marquez IV. “I never expected that punch.”

After the bout, Pacquiao made a precautionary visit to University Medical Center for a CT scan that was negative. Then he returned to his hotel suite and watched a DVD of the fight. According to publicist Fred Sternburg, as the bout unfolded, Manny told those in the room, “Spoiler alert. I don’t think you’re going to like how this ends.”

As for what comes next; the assumption is that Pacquiao will keep fighting. He fought at a world-class level against Marquez. The one-punch knockout was shocking and dramatic, but also an aberration. Manny won’t want his career to end on that note. And if the past is prologue, he’ll soon need more money.

“Boxing is not a romance. It’s a business,” Bob Arum (Pacquiao’s promoter) has said.

Marquez-Pacquiao V is one of many options for the future. But whatever comes next, The Pacquiao Era appears to be over. Commercially, a touch of “Pacquiao fatigue” has set in. Manny’s fights still sell out the MGM Grand Garden Arena. But this one sold out later than most. Also, Pacquiao has now cobbled together a string of less-than-stellar performances capped by losses to Marquez and Tim Bradley.

Manny isn’t a shot fighter. He’s still capable of performing at a high level. But in recent outings, he has seemed diminished as a consequence of the natural aging process and, possibly, a loss of commitment and focus in training. One now has to wonder what this brutal one-punch knockout will do to his ability to take a punch?

Some fighters come back from a lights-out experience as good as the were before. Others (like Roy Jones and Jermain Taylor) are never the same again.

Also, in closing, it should be noted that the issue of PED usage hangs over boxing like a black cloud. In the past, there have been allegations with regard to Pacquiao and others. Marquez's associations and the recent change in Juan Manuel's physical condition have the appearance of impropriety. If boxing doesn't address this issue seriously now, the black cloud will turn into a deluge.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Winks and Daggers: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Don't count your balut before you crack that eggshell. Da Manny will be back hotter than fire in hell. The myth of his moola pulling a Houdini is just idle gossip. The top gun in the game, he can still clip. And he will. So you haters need to chill. With Marquez kayoing him, you have gotten your fill. But not the end of the "Pacquiao era" still. Holla!

ali says:

Pac in not done!! Let's remember he was winning the fight before he got scraped. He Should stay away from counter punchers Rios would be somebody he would look great against.

ali says:

Now as far as Marquez he should retire asap his face breaks up way to easy now. This is the Biggest win of his career and he should ride off into the sunset but like Michael Jordan but he probably won't.

tlig says:

[QUOTE=ali;23384]Now as far as Marquez he should retire asap his face breaks up way to easy now. This is the

Biggest win of his career and he should ride off into the sunset but like Michael Jordan but he probably won't.[/QUOTE]

Of course he wouldn't. Boxing is a business remember? He is going to make a mint now and who can blame the roided-up Mexican legend?

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Radam G says:

C'mon, tlig! That was a cheat shot. Marquez's roids didn't help him. He won fair and square with skills. Roids were just for sight -- eye candy for freaks. Holla!

Carmine Cas says:

Pacquiao will be back, time will tell if he'll be the same. But his bargaining power is certainly diminished but he's still a top draw. I want to see him come back, no one should end their career like that. As far as Marquez, lean down a little bit. That extra weight was a gamble, it slowed him down and it didn't knock out Pacquiao for him, the timing did. I wonder who he fights next.

Carvalho says:

Please, this PEDs thing is getting absurd. It depresses me to read that such a brilliant writer allows himself frivolous remarks like that. You haven't tested positive, then you are clean until then. Period. It's not the problem of fighters that boxing is determined not to become a serious sport. Random tests and strong consequences for the cheater, even if it spoils somebody's profits. It was a shame having to watch Margarito lace up again after having tried to murder Cotto. If you are suspicious that your rival could be cheating, just don't accept the fight as Mayweather did -only to be called a coward by some critics who have never risked being punched by an elite professional. If you accept it, take the consequences and shut up. Pacquiao never tested positive. Marquez neither. So why not saving unfounded and rude suppositions until you come across some evidence that allows them to be more than flippant and unscientific gossip?

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ali says:

Carvalho good point if u don't think a fighter is clean and he won'taccept taking random drug testing don't take the fight simple and plain.

tlig says:

[B]CARVALHO [/B]

Are you naive enough to believe fighters would have the opportunity to cheat with steroids and spurn it? Seriously? In a high stakes professional sport (with millions at stake/and to win) you really think guys wouldn't do all they can to win? Especially given the fact boxing doesn't even involve mandatory tests? Get real please.

Carvalho says:

TLIG I don't think I can be particularly naïve being involved in cycling all my life. If you read my post again, I'm just telling that mere suppositions don't constitute evidence, and without it you can find yourself at the wrong end of a defamation suit if you state that Marquez is using PEDs. It's one of the advantages of democracy, you can't be found guilty on unfounded rumours and the system protects you if your rights are attacked. The Inquisition had different ethics, if somebody said you were a witch you could be burnt in case you didn't suceed in proving the contrary. By what you say we have to assume that every elite fighter in the scene uses PEDs? Can you prove it? No? So why don't you talk about something you are sure of and makes some sense and show respect for people like Marquez who risk their life for making yours a bit better?

Carmine Cas says:

You make a good point Carvalho. Although Marquez's new physique raises questions, it hampered his performance more than helped. He was slowed down unable to utilize his superior ring movement against pacquiao has effectively as he has in the past. The fight was close, manny was ahead by 1 pt. Marquez was going to the body opening up pacquiao's guard up top, pacquiao smelt blood got careless and was countered effectively. Tlig, PED's didn't do that, skill and timing did

Radam G says:

Evevybody makes a good point. But, nonetheless, roids aren't illegal in sports or foods. It's just the amounts used and type. Holla!

mortcola says:

1. The obsession with unfounded (i.e. imaginary) PED allegations has got to stop. Test all you want. But the months and months of people wasting time with "IMO he did/didn't" arguments is just a turn-off from intelligent boxing discussion. No facts, no point. Test and find out. Then back to boxing.

2. Pac's loss has nothing to do with deterioration of skills. He was fighting beautifully, and 9 times out of 10, even the great Marquez doesn't land that Michelangelo of a punch. If Pac is OK and willing, then no reason to retire - no reason other than the reason that no one should box a lot of rounds to begin with - it is not a safe sport. Stipulated. Move on. They fight again, and Pac's chin and confidence are not damaged beyond repair, he still wins 50% of the time, maybe more, because, as we saw, apart from TWO PUNCHES, Pac's head work, speed, and punch variation made this the most ONE SIDED Pac dominance in the whole series. So - I don't want to see Pac walking and talking funny ten years from now. But, based on boxing criteria, if he has not been damaged by this loss, he is still the fighter he was, and can do fine moving forward, for a little longer.

Robert Curtis says:

The End?? Come on. Save the drama for your Mama. Pacquiao looked great Saturday. He was faster than Marquez the whole night, outpunching him as usual. The problem with Manny is that he got careless. He made an amateur move in a professional ring and was clocked cold. Manny needs to get crispy critters again. More focus, and less schmoozing with celebs. If Manny can't become master of his bad intentions anymore, well maybe it is the end? But there is nothing wrong with Manny's speed or conditioning. His problems aren't physical. Just look at Marquez's mashed-up face. Anyone who thinks they saw a Manny that has slipped past his physical prime ought to give a biscuit to their seeing eye dog.

Radam G says:

Hehe! Bobby C is back with the comedy. ..."Give a buscuit to their seeing eye dog." Dude is quick on the draw of making your arse laugh like a fool. Haha! Holla!

kidcanvas says:

what a dumb *** statment ,the pacquiao era is over... he will go on to more great things in boxing like duran did after he got stiffed .. the greatest fighters ever got beat and ko'd .. you writers are such a fickle bunch ... its almost a laugh... he was kicking marquez's *** till then ifit wasnt manny it was going to be marquez ...one of them was going and u could tell .. its boxing ...dont count him out fool