

What's Manny Pacquiao Fighting For?

Written by Aaron Lowinger

Wednesday, 12 March 2014 19:10



At the end of the first installment of NBA great Steve Nash's fascinating film project to document the end of his career, the 40-year old two-time NBA MVP says something truly special: "Every athlete, when they lose their skill, they lose a big part of themselves. A part they've built their life around and that's been a huge part of their purpose, self-esteem, identity; so when the skill or ability goes, it's like there's been a death."

As a boxing fan, it's impossible to follow the Nash story and not think of the similar struggle facing aging boxers, who in most cases have more concerning adverse health effects to deal with a basketball player. Although stars like Mayweather, Sergio Martinez, and Bernard Hopkins are all older than Manny Pacquiao, because of the attrition from his long and violent career, he's the first boxer I put in the Nash category.

I'm not here to announce that Manny Pacquiao is done or that he should retire. But you have to wonder, what else does he have to prove?

He's beaten everyone he's been matched against (ahem, C.J. Ross) from flyweight through welterweight, he's a surefire Hall of Famer and a former number one pound-for-pound, he's launched a successful political career in his homeland of the Philippines, and most importantly, on the strength of his high-beam smile, he's achieved the impossible of becoming an Asian superstar that has crossed over into worldwide celebrity. Even if recent reports about Pacquiao's financial troubles are true, he has the profile and brand to always make a robust living without getting punched in the brain by naturally bigger men.

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After Juan Manuel Marquez finally bested his long-time rival with a perfect, hidden right to the advancing Pacquiao's chin in December 2012, there was instant speculation that he may soon retire. Lying nearly motionless in a heap on the canvas for several minutes will do that to any boxer, let alone a champion just handed his second consecutive loss. His wife Jinkee joined the chorus of cautious observers and urged him to retire, telling reporters "there is nothing to prove, he already has eight belts." More concerning was the credible medical speculation (<http://www.badlefthook.com/2013/1/3/3831828/manny-pacquiao-early-signs-parkinsons-alzheimers-filipino-doctors-worry-boxing-news>

) coming in after the knockout, that Pacquiao was showing early signs of Parkinsons and serious brain injury.

So why in the world is he still here? The easiest answer lies within the Steven Nash quote above, the bit about identity. Absorbing punishment and punching the other man in the nose has brought attention and fame beyond what any malnourished child in Sarangani province could have possibly dreamed. There has to be a fear, even if a subconscious one, that if he walks away from boxing the changes he's marked in his own life would crumble back into the dust of home. It's amazing to ponder that a boxer might have more fear over leaving the ring than entering it, but that's where Pacquiao has to find himself these days.

Let's not forget we're talking about the thirteen year old kid who tattooed himself a boxing glove over his heart after becoming hooked on the sport in General Santos City. Boxing defines him as much as he has defined boxing as the most electrifying performer of his generation. Perhaps he's become more motivated since the knockout, that he looks at himself in the mirror and sees a fit and strong 35 year old dude who wants to prove that he's not done. He sees an opportunity to augment and deepen his legacy.

Another possibility is that he is, in fact, readying himself for retirement and wants to gain some fairy tale-like closure and go out as ring king. There's only one way for him to really achieve that kind of closure and that would be to beat Tim Bradley definitively next month, and then finish his contract with Top Rank with one more fight in 2014 so that he could free himself from Bob Arum and better position himself for a showdown with You-Know-Who in May 2015. They won't be as old as Stallone and DeNiro, but the grudge match between the aging Mayweather and Pacquiao would smash any Hollywood box office and give fight fans their own sense of closure after the five years of bullshit that have prevented the sport from its best potential showcase.

If that's the goal, his work is cut out for him. Sure he looked good against Rios (for whom else is Brandon Rios just a tune-up fight?), but he was supposed to look good against Rios. An early kayo would have done wonders. There's a reason why Coach Roach has been beating the

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knockout drum around Manny so loudly.

Knocking out the man who remained upright amidst the hell-fire from Ruslan Provodnikov will go a long way in restoring the Pacman's luster. It's a tall order, but why would he duck a tough assignment now? After all, that's been the abiding joy in following Pacquiao's career, his ability to consistently step up and face bigger and badder opposition from 112 all the way to 147 and find different and brilliant ways to win.

No one has ever doubted his courage and heart in the ring, but courage and heart won't make his feet and hands any faster. How long will it be until we see him run on fumes? There's nothing sadder than a boxer fighting past his prime, milking the sport for every drop of money and attention it can provide.

Underneath the smile and resiliency that have made him great, Pacquiao, like Steve Nash and Beowulf before him, has to be facing his own mortality.

Steve Nash is lucky in this regard. Boxing is a far more cruel sport to get old in, it only takes one punch for the years to instantly show, for a career to irrevocably end in a beating where years of fighter's life are mercilessly excised. I'm still not convinced we haven't already seen Pacquiao take that punch.

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the Roast says:

Radam knows. Please tell us RG. With or without rhymes.

Radam G says:

I'm not quite clear on this copy. And I don't want to be sloppy. So I'm gonna keep it cool. Outta Big Foot, big-headed-ramming Bambi Bradley, Da Manny is gonna make into a concussed, pathetic fool. Holla!

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the Roast says:

You know it Radam. I'm still holding out hope for the Floyd-Manny Superfight. I know its well past its due date but I still want it.

Radam G says:

There will be no super fight. Money May has too much fright. Holla!

jzzy says:

The issues raised in this article are troubling to us all. We can understand the reluctance of these boxers to walk away from boxing before its too late, the cumulative damage over a long career is insidious, we can only hope that Freddie is being vigilant of any signs that Manny is showing in camp that something's amiss. This fight with Bradley will reveal where Manny really is at this point. But I'm afraid his financial situation will cause him to stay in the game too long. Sadly, this is the endgame for so many great champions.

Radam G says:

Da Manny is not suffering from Parkinson's syndrome, or showing early signs of _____. That was a bull_____ lie by a quack talking smack.

Proper research, this copy lacks. Dang! One could get better jive out of a box of Cracker Jacks.

Hatin' on Da Manny, ev'ybodee and dey momma is tryin' to rap. So no surprises what dey keyboard tap. Holla!

Grimm says:

Sure, it's about fame and fortune, but ultimately - it's about what made him, and so many others, boxers to begin with. Not champions, but boxers. It's in the blood, in the system, and as such it is as much a need and urge as any drog in the world. Nothing can come close to replace those minutes in the ring, measuring up against another man of the trade, living in the instant of punches thrown back and forth. The rest is just pale days, one after another. Of course it's hard to walk away. It's an addiction.

Carmine Cas says:

[QUOTE=Grimm;45581]Sure, it's about fame and fortune, but ultimately - it's about what made him, and so many others, boxers to begin with. Not champions, but boxers. It's in the blood, in the system, and as such it is as much a need and urge as any drog in the world. Nothing can come close to replace those minutes in the ring, measuring up against another man of the trade, living in the instant of punches thrown back and forth. The rest is just pale days, one after

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Exactly, he fights to fight because that's what is imbedded him. You can't fault him, and he does not have parkinsons, but some cbd oil would help any boxer recover from punishment sustained in each fight.

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Grimm, your comment reveals much insight into a boxers mindset. How could these top fighters walk away from some much fortune and adulation when they believe there's still a good fight left in them. Looking back thru the history of boxing, we see it time and again. Fighting, competing and entertaining is usually all they know, and to be around 40 years old and have to give it up is difficult. But, I really believe, as he's stated many times, that Freddie will tell Manny when its time to hang them up. We now see Marquez hanging around too long, despite his diminished skills for all the reasons you've elucidated in your comment.

brownsugar says:

When the star fades ...its like living another life. Some can make the transition...some can't. But Manny has a few good years left..why not capitalize...Manny is no communist, despising the individually wealthy.

Carmine Cas says:

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Radam G says:

Sorry, Jzzy! But you are wrong on this one. Fighting is not "usually all they know." This dumb@\$\$ stereotype has gone on too long. Eighty percent of the good-money/big money boxers do not stick around "TOO LONG" or keep fighting because they are broke or allegedly in tax troubles. Don't believe the hype. And the TMZ-types of scribes. FYI, 90 percent of boxers have day jobs, side jobs, moonlighting job, whatever you want to call them.

Focus is always on the stereotypes of boxing and the tabloid nonsense of ____ and _____. Then the talking heads need to fill white space and go wilding with this aggavating stereotype of the dumb boxer knowing nothing but boxing and can quit.

"Looking back thru the history of boxing," you will find the most educated athletes in all of sports. And when the eighty percent, not fitting the stereotypes, retire, get out or whatever, they become successful lawyers, bankers, real estate big wigs, politicians, various types of business owners, promoters of big-bucks jive, ministers and what have you.

Even the ones who end up in jail are still making moolah with non-boxing skills. To name one: Holla at the "Black Rhino" Clifford Etienne.

Marquez/Hulkquez is a college-educated accountant for your information. And nobody should try to judge what boxer is hanging around too long. Boxers are grow-@\$\$ moneymakers. As long as they want to, they can throw their haymakers.

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We have one life on this side that we know about. A great, or even good boxer, will take an arse thrashing over doubt. Go for it ALL, before your whole darm body FALL. And I mean FALL completely apart. Boxers have brains and heart.

Only punks go through life: Coulda, woulda, shoulda! Holla!

Radam G says:

Without boxing, just from singing -- forget y'all, Da Manny can sing -- big-movie acting, entrepreneurship, paid appearances and speeches, being a politicians and umpteen endorsements, Da Manny is a megamillionaire in AmerKano dollars and a billionaire in P-Islands' pesos. So all this bulljive about him being broke, is just tabloid-scribbling bullsyet to entertain da haters, posers, racists, vaporers, and punkedified [sic] _____!

Danggit! optical illusions are everywhere. Don't get "concussed" by one. Hehehe! The PacFists are whuppin' arse because they can. And when they cannot, like "The Raven" of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry: "NEVER MORE!" Holla!

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