

Pacquiao dominates Rios, eyes revenge bouts with Marquez, Bradley

Written by Ryan Songalia

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Manny Pacquiao punches Brandon Rios during their title fight in Macau on Nov. 24. (Nic ky Loh/Sport/Getty Images)



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MACAU, China — At the end of 12 rounds, Manny Pacquiao raised his arms up victoriously and took in the adulation of the crowd at the Venetian Resort in Macau, China, many of whom had taken the two-hour flight from his native country of the Philippines to witness what was feared could be his final bout.

Many more fans watched around the world, including those who huddled together in evacuation centers in the Typhoon Yolanda-ravaged areas of his homeland, where his victory over Brandon Rios helped them forget about the terrible difficulties that they had endured.

It didn't matter that the fight didn't end in the knockout that many — especially Pacquiao's trainer Freddie Roach — had predicted it would end in.

There were 36 minutes of evidence to support the argument that Pacquiao was back.

It was the first time Pacquiao had had his hand raised in victory since his controversial points decision over Juan Manuel Marquez in November of 2011.

In the interim, Pacquiao lost a controversial decision to Timothy Bradley, followed by a knockout loss to Marquez in their fourth contest.

Pacquiao looked fast, powerful and cunning as he dissected the durable yet predictable Rios, earning the victory by the judges' scores of 120-108, 119-109 and 118-110.

"I'm so happy and thankful to God, he answered my prayer that we will rise again," said Pacquiao (55-5-2, 38 knockouts), a former world titleholder in a record-setting eight weight classes.

"I think I proved it today to all of you and I'm praying that God will guide me and give me

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strength to give more excitement and good fights to all the fans of boxing.”

“Brandon couldn’t handle his speed,” said Roach, who exhibited no signs of ill will towards the opposing camp despite a testy fight week.

“Manny was really quick, we had a great game plan, moving off to the right, under and over to the right all night long. Staying away from Brandon’s right hand and going to his weaker hand, his left hook.

“Manny Pacquiao fought the perfect fight.”

Prior to the fight, Roach had demeaned Rios’ ability, referring to him as a punching bag.

After the fight, Roach was less cynical in his characterization, while saying essentially the same thing.

“I don’t think a lot of people would stand up under the amount of punches [Rios] took. He’s just a tough, tough kid. He took a beating like a man.”

When asked what Pacquiao felt was the toughest part of the fight, he too pointed to Rios’ beard.

“He can catch a lot of punches,” he said with a smile.

Pacquiao’s performance earned the respect of the 27-year-old Rios (31-2-1, 23 KOs), of Oxnard, Calif., and his trainer Robert Garcia as well.

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“He’s more quicker than I expected,” said Rios, who sustained his second consecutive loss.

“I did train for quickness but the best Pacquiao showed up tonight. It just sucks because I really wanted to win so bad. I trained my butt of for this.

“I can say one thing though: I never got hurt in the fight, I never got stunned, nothing. I think the quickness threw me off guard. I had a sparring partner that was very fast, but I think he was faster than my sparring partners.”

Pacquiao admitted that he was stunned at one point in the fifth round — likely by a Rios right hand — but Rios said he hadn’t noticed.

“Maybe that’s why he was hugging on to me,” said Rios.

“There were times when he would be hugging on to me when we’d get close and that’s not the Manny Pacquiao that we’re used to seeing.

“I tip my hat off to Manny Pacquiao. He still has it. I’ll bounce back soon.”

In a sport where people ask “What have you done for me lately?”

Pacquiao’s victory in front of a reportedly sold out crowd of 13,200 — plus sold out closed circuit tickets — reinvigorated talks of facing Marquez for a fifth time or Bradley in a rematch.

There were even quite a few questions about whether the long-overdue fight with Floyd Mayweather Jr. could be made.

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Pacquiao's promoter Bob Arum of Top Rank didn't name any names on the dais at the post-fight press conference, but when pressed for an answer, conceded that Marquez, Bradley and Pacquiao's former sparring partner Ruslan Provodnikov were on the short list of potential foes.

"We'll sit down, all of us, and we'll figure it out," said Arum.

"Generally, if you try to figure something out the night of a big victory, you make the wrong decisions.

"Who the opponent will be will be decided in the next couple of weeks."

Roach said he preferred a fifth bout with Marquez for Pacquiao's next date, which Arum said was tentatively scheduled for April 12 in the United States.

He also admitted that a clash with Bradley, who is coming off a victory over Marquez, is a priority as well.

"I'm not sure if we can get him to agree to that, he wants a lot of money," said Roach of a fifth Marquez fight.

"Bradley is out there. I think Bradley is someone that we have to avenge that loss, even though he won that fight so easily. Mayweather is the number one guy we want, but whoever Bob can bring to the table to bring to the ring with us, I'll be happy with."

When asked why he wanted Marquez so strongly, Roach said it was partially due to personal reasons.

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“I don’t like the way he gloats about how he finally beat Manny Pacquiao and that he got robbed all those other times and stuff like that,” said Roach.

“He turned us down for a rematch but we gave him three rematches. I think he owes us one.”

When asked about a Mayweather fight, Roach said they wanted it, just not next.

“Mayweather would be nice, but I don’t think he’s quite ready for that now,” said Roach.

“Mayweather has a four-fight deal with Showtime and he doesn’t have opponents to fight without Manny Pacquiao being one of them.”

Pacquiao briefly addressed the topic of Mayweather as well.

“I’m willing to fight Floyd but it’s up to him if he’s willing also,” said Pacquiao.

When asked what barriers remained towards making the fight, Pacquiao responded: “I think that question is for Floyd Mayweather’s camp.”

There is no disputing that Pacquiao is still a capable, marketable fighter, but the question of how much remains of Pacquiao is one that hasn’t been fully answered.

Roach admitted beforehand that Rios was selected as an opponent because his style perfectly complimented Pacquiao’s, which deserves partial credit for how impress Pacquiao’s performance was.

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Pacquiao also didn't seem to press for a knockout of Rios, despite having cut one of his eyes and closed the other.

Rios appeared to be ready to be knocked out in the 12th round, but Pacquiao admits that he held back.

"On that last round, on that corner, I know that it's the last round and I don't want to get careless so I backed up a little bit and gave him a chance to finish the fight," said Pacquiao.

"I'm not doing that because I'm tired or anything; I'm doing that because boxing is not about killing each other. Boxing is about entertaining people. I think one to 12 rounds; people are satisfied with my performance. I tried not to be careless like what happened with the last fight with Marquez. That's my thinking also."

After 19 years as a professional boxer, no one can know for sure how many fights Pacquiao has left in him.

On Saturday, nobody in the Pacquiao camp seemed to be worried about that.

They were too busy reacquainting themselves with the sweet taste of victory.

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