

## Pacman OK to be poster boy

Written by Special to the Filipino Reporter  
Friday, 26 November 2010 10:46

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**IMMORTAL:** The best boxer in the world Manny Pacquiao, left, at a recent guest appearance on ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" in California. He later sang a duet with Hollywood actor Will Ferrell, who is a huge fan of the Filipino boxing superstar. (Reuters photo)

MANILA — World boxing champion Manny Pacquiao is willing to be the country's poster boy for tourism and has urged fellow Filipinos to make the country beautiful in the eyes of the world.

"As long as I can help the country and our beloved President and the majority, why not?" Pacquiao said in a press conference in Malacañang after a courtesy call on President Benigno Aquino III.

The Filipino boxing icon arrived at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) terminal 2 from Los Angeles, California with wife Jinkee on board Philippine Airlines flight PR 103 at 6:20 a.m. on Saturday. They were met by their children.

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From there, Pacquiao was brought to the New World Hotel in Makati City for breakfast and a brief rest.

Pacquiao attended the traditional thanksgiving Mass at the Quiapo Church at 8:30 a.m. before his courtesy call on the President in Malacañang.

A victory party was at the Mall of Asia at 5 p.m.

In his arrival statement, Pacquiao thanked everyone who supported him and those who prayed for him during his fight with Antonio Margarito at Cowboy Stadium in Arlington, Texas on Nov. 13.

“We should not tarnish the Philippines’ image and we should help make it known before the world because it is our country,” he said.

Pacquiao gave the President a miniature championship belt that he autographed, a t-shirt with his face on it, and DVD copies of his fights.

In return, Mr. Aquino handed a bottle of champagne to Pacquiao.

Pacquiao said he would share his blessings with the people, especially those in need, and focus on his job as congressman of Sarangani.

The President, on the other hand, said he was grateful to hear that the people wanted Pacquiao to be the poster boy for tourism.

“Really, from somebody who had nothing and is now in the pinnacle of success, he should be admired, followed and emulated,” Mr. Aquino said.

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The President said it would be good to share the Philippines' history with the world and how "beautiful, rich and focused on where it should go" the country was right now.

But Mr. Aquino said he was not offering Pacquiao the position of peace negotiator and that he should not be given too much tasks since he also has to attend to his constituents.

Pacquiao said he was willing to help in any way he could for the sake of the country's peace and unity.

He said he would also make some investments in real estate but would have to settle all the concerns first, including opposition to his planned development.

Pacquiao added that he would build a hospital in his province and thanked the President for his support.

"Before, my ultimate dream was just to be a champion in the Philippines. But look at me now. This is because I lifted it all up to the Lord. If you do the same, wonderful things will happen to you," he said in his speech.

### **No retirement yet**

Despite his success, Pacquiao said retiring from boxing was far from his mind yet and that a few fights were still lined up for him.

"I just finished a fight so let us forget about boxing for now. Let us first focus on service because as a congressman, I must be able to fulfill my duty to serve my constituents right," he said, brushing off speculations that he was preparing to run for president in 2016.

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“Like what I said, it’s not in my mind right now. Whatever I have now, I always thank the Lord for them. With my current position as congressman, that’s where I am focused, whatever projects I can bring to my province, whatever service I can render to my constituents,” Pacquiao said.

This early, however, the pound-for-pound king is also being considered for other tasks.

Deputy Speaker Lorenzo Tañada, speaking at the launching of community-led initiatives for climate change adaptations and disaster risk reduction initiatives last Thursday, said the government is considering Pacquiao as climate change spokesman or poster boy or whatever fits the Filipino boxing hero.

Surigao del Norte Rep. Francisco Tinio Matugas (LP) said the idea “will automatically draw needed mass support among Filipinos for the climate change drive.”

### **Lifetime achievement award filed**

At the House of Representatives, Eastern Samar Rep. Ben Evardone has filed a bill establishing the Manny Pacquiao Lifetime Achievement Award, which is projected to be the equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize in sports.

In filing House Bill No. 3681, Evardone said the highest singular honor the whole world can give to the Filipino boxing icon is to institute a system of awarding and recognizing the world’s greatest athletes in his name.

“Just when everyone the world over looks up to him with awe and admiration after his methodical demolition of Mexican Antonio Margarito, it’s high time we come forward as a nation to tell the world that we know how to honor our very own hero before other nations do it ahead of us,” he said.

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“If the Nobel Peace Prize has attained that much adulation and respect through the years, I think an international recognition for the world’s greatest athletes in Pacquiao’s name would be just as prestigious,” he said.

Under the bill, the Manny Pacquiao Lifetime Achievement Award will be administered by an independent body to be known as the Philippine Institute for Sports Excellence (PISE), which shall also be mandated to rationalize a system of reward and recognition for deserving Filipino athletes.

The PISE will be administratively attached to the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) but totally independent from it, and from the Games and Amusements Board (GAB).

It will be headed by a chairman and five commissioners including the PSC, GAB and Commission on Higher Education chairman in an ex-officio capacity.

Initially, the PISE will have a budget of P100 million to be appropriated by Congress, but will be empowered to tap the resources of the private sector to ease the burden on the national coffers as the years go by.

“We never had it so good in the global arena of sports,” Evardone said.

“Imagine if we can put in one stage the likes of Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods in the game of golf, boxer Muhammad Ali, basketball legends Michael Jordan and Earvin Magic Johnson, Formula 1 icon Michael Schumacher, cyclist Lance Armstrong, former world chess champions Gary Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov, tennis superstars Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal and many more standing side by side with Pacquiao,” Evardone said.

Ang Kasangga party-list Rep. Teodorico Haresco, one of the lawmakers who filed resolutions to honor Pacquiao, said the Sarangani representative’s “admirable work ethic, courage, determination and discipline to excel in his profession is something that Filipinos must emulate in order to gloriously overcome the challenges that may come in their respective pursuits.”

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He said over and above the boxing prowess that Pacquiao showed despite the weight, height and reach advantage of Margarito, "Pacquiao showed mercy to his brave but pitiful opponent and chose to coast to victory without going for a final-round knockout.

Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr. conferred on Pacquiao the Congressional Medal of Distinction and hosted a simple victory dinner for him at the grounds of the Batasang Pambansa.

### **Holiday in Sarangani**

Meanwhile, Sarangani province will declare Dec. 17 a holiday for the grand celebration of the 32nd birthday of its lone congressman.

"Dec. 17 is going to be my birthday again and it will be a holiday for the whole Sarangani," Pacquiao revealed.

He said that Top Rank Boxing Promotion president Bob Arum and Mr. Aquino are coming for his birthday.

He will also sponsor a series of tournaments for boxing, billiards and other sports with millions in prizes at stake.

"It's going to be a grand celebration and a big festivity for the whole Sarangani," one of the lawmaker's congressional staff said.