

After All-Star Weekend, what's next?

Written by Joaquin Henson
Friday, 29 July 2011 15:15



HOOP STARS IN AWE OF PACMAN: Boxing champion and Congressman Manny Pacquiao (center) is surrounded by NBA players as he visits an exhibition game between the visiting players and a team of top players from the Philippines for the Ultimate All-Star Weekend at the Araneta Coliseum in Manila on July 24. *(AFP photo/Noel Celis)*

MANILA — Those in the know are tight-lipped as to how much was spent to stage the Ultimate All-Star Weekend but whatever the amount, PLDT chairman Manny Pangilinan figured it was worth bringing smiles to thousands of Filipinos who witnessed two games featuring some of the world's best basketball players at the Smart Araneta Coliseum and millions who caught the action on TV.

How much did it cost?

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"Plenty, plenty, plenty," said Pangilinan after the second sold-out show last Sunday.

"I told Polly (PLDT president Napoleon Nazareno) now, we've got to earn back what we spent."

It was typical MVP good-natured humor but there had to be some seriousness in his tone just the same.

The scuttlebutt is the budget for the monumental undertaking was anywhere between P100-150 million.

It was rumored that Kobe Bryant's camp initially asked for an appearance fee of \$1.2 million aside from a private jet fetching him and an entourage of seven in Shanghai and flying him back to keep his promise to his wife and two daughters to be in the Los Angeles airport by Monday morning for a family vacation in Mexico.

Bryant reportedly settled for an amount less than half of what was previously asked because of his affection for his Filipino fans.

Topping the event is a challenge for the MVP Sports Foundation.

The Ultimate All-Star Weekend had to be the most significant sporting event that the Big Dome has hosted since the Thrilla in Manila in 1975.

Pangilinan said what could be bigger would be the showdown between Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather Jr.

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Pacquiao was at the coliseum for the game last Sunday and Pangilinan broached the idea to the world's No. 1 pound-for-pound champion.

"I mentioned to Manny about the possibility of fighting in Manila," said Pangilinan.

"It seemed okay to him. Now the problem is getting Mayweather to agree. I think arranging the pay-per-view satellite feed wouldn't be difficult with our telecommunications facilities."

The Thrilla in Manila was staged late morning in Manila for live beaming to the U.S. on prime time at night.

The same set-up could be arranged for a Pacquiao fight.

Pangilinan said another possibility is to bring over the Real Madrid football and basketball teams for a tour.

MVP Sports Foundation executive director and Talk 'N' Text coach Chot Reyes said the Ultimate All-Star Weekend has put the Philippines on the map as a sports tourism destination.

"Dwyane Wade tweeted his buddy Chris Paul and mentioned he would've loved to come," said Reyes.

"There was extensive foreign media coverage so the whole world knew about the Ultimate All-Star Weekend. From Manila, Chris flew to Hong Kong and will hook up with Wade and Melo (Anthony) on the Jordan Flight Tour."

Paul, Wade and Anthony are Jordan brand endorsers.

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Their four-city China tour officially begins Tuesday in Hong Kong and will move to Chengdu, Hangzhou and Beijing up to Aug. 3.

Reyes said top U.S. athletic agents Aaron Goodwin and Rob Pelinka were in town for the games.

Goodwin represents Kevin Durant, Jamal Crawford, Candace Parker, Matt Barnes, Nate Robinson, Chris Webber and Gary Payton, among others, while Pelinka works with Bryant, Derek Fisher, Derrick Williams and James Harden — all of whom participated in the Ultimate All-Star Weekend.

Others in Pelinka's stable are Corey Maggette, Carlos Boozer, Andre Igoudala, Chris Kaman, Channing Frye, Eric Gordon, Gerald Wallace and Sasha Vujacic. Derrick Rose's agent B. J. Armstrong, a former NBA sharpshooter, was also in Manila last weekend.

Igoudala was initially considered for the Manila tour.

Rose and Durant were late additions to the lineup.

They came to terms only after Bryant signed up.

Four of the visitors left Sunday evening — Bryant, Fisher, Rose and Paul.

Fisher had to return to the U.S. for talks on a new collective bargaining agreement with the NBA as president of the National Basketball Players Association.

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Harden, Durant, JaVale McGee and Williams flew out Monday.

Tyreke Evans is scheduled to depart Thursday after a holiday in Boracay.

Chao Chuatico-Espaldon, chief operating officer of the Cincinnati-based investment and financial advisory company East-West Private, joked that she'll need a vacation after organizing the event on two to three weeks' notice.

"I'm glad no one saw the crazy things that went on behind the scenes," chuckled Espaldon referring to the logistical nightmare of staging the event involving high-profile athletes.

East-West Private negotiated the packages that brought the players to Manila.

East-West Private chief executive officer Patty Scott was in town for the games and left Sunday.

"A Michael Jordan tour?" said Espaldon.

"Yeah, why not?"