

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46



Referee Kenny Bayless (center) sends Juan Manuel Marquez to his corner after Marquez knocked out Manny Pacquiao in the sixth round of their WBO world welterweight fight in Las Vegas on Dec. 8. Marquez won the fight by a knockout. (AP photo/Eric Jamison)

Special to the Filipino Reporter

LAS VEGAS — The moment seemed to last forever.

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

As Manny Pacquiao stepped in to throw a double jab-straight left hand combination, Juan Manuel Marquez timed the best right hand punch of his career, landing flush on the jaw and knocking Pacquiao unconscious.

The reported 16,348 in attendance at the MGM Grand last Saturday night all stood in stunned disbelief as Pacquiao fell face-first, remaining unconscious for two minutes.

And just like that, the end of an era in the sport of boxing came as suddenly and as unexpectedly as the punch that ushered brought it a close.

Pacquiao regained consciousness shortly after and was lucid enough to answer HBO Boxing commentator Larry Merchant's post-fight questions, but Pacquiao skipped the post-fight press conference and was sent to University Medical Center for a CAT scan.

Pacquiao was able to walk out of the ring on his own power.

Marquez was also a last-minute decision regarding his presence at the press conference, suffering a broken nose and a possible concussion after complaining of difficulty breathing.

The knockout, which occurred at 2:59 of the sixth round, spared boxing fans the agony of another close, controversial decision that leaves supporters of both to argue for their case.

The first three matchups, which took place in 2004, 2008 and 2011, resulted in a draw, and two close decision wins for Pacquiao.

All three judges had Pacquiao leading 47-46 at the time of knockout.

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

This fourth fight may be the greatest of this contentious rivalry, as Pacquiao, invigorated by suggestions that his lack of a killer's instinct in his last three bouts indicates that he had slipped some, came out blazing in the first two rounds.

Pacquiao found the range for his signature left cross in round two, looping it around Pacquiao's guard several times to set up the straight shots down the pipe.

Marquez (55-6-1, 40 knockouts) of Mexico City, Mexico, fed off the decidedly pro-Marquez crowd that filled the air with chants of "El Rey Marquez" (The King Marquez).

As Pacquiao extended his left to parry what he expected to be a straight right hand, Marquez threw a curveball, looping it around the guard to score his first knockdown of Pacquiao of the series midway through the third. Pacquiao (54-5-2, 38 KOs) of General Santos City, Philippines, recovered quickly enough and seemed clear-headed by the end of the round.

With the fight heating up, Pacquiao, 33, scored a knockdown of his own in the fifth, landing a straight left that caused Marquez's glove to touch the canvas. Marquez survived a violent assault from Pacquiao, having his nose bloodied by left after left that seemed on the verge of ending the fight in his favor.

And just four minutes later, the end came.

The greatest irony of the night is that, despite the conclusion, Pacquiao seemed to be fighting one of the best fights of his career.

Bob Arum, who promotes Pacquiao under the Top Rank banner, dismissed notions that this was the end of the road for the record-setting eight division champion Pacquiao.

"Getting knocked out is not death," said Arum.

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

"Sandy Koufax can get shelled by the Giants and can come back the next time and throw a no-hitter. You lose a fight, it don't mean anything if you give the public what they want and you come back, you should be as marketable as you were before."

Freddie Roach, Pacquiao's Hall of Fame-inducted trainer who guided Pacquiao to the sport's pound-for-pound title, also didn't think this was the last we'd seen of Pacquiao.

"I don't think it's the end of Manny Pacquiao," said Roach.

"I was just talking to him before they took him to the hospital, he's fine. He knows he made a mistake and got careless, that happens in boxing. It's not the first time we've been knocked out and it won't be the first time we'll come back from a loss."

Roach, whose own rise as the sport's most celebrated trainer is due to his success with Pacquiao, said that he and Pacquiao will take time off to put everything into perspective.

"I'm not sure which way we'll go right now. If we do fight again and get back in the gym and I see good things, we'll go on. If we see bad signs, we'll quit."

When asked what he thought would be next for Pacquiao, Roach responded: "Possible retirement, possible rematch."

The following morning, Pacquiao held a prayer service in his 60th floor suite at The Hotel at Mandalay Bay.

He sported some bruises on his face, but smiles also.

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

There would be no sour grapes about a so-called "lucky punch."

Neither would there be suggestions that Marquez, who, at age 39, had transformed his body under new strength and conditioning coach Angel "Memo" Hernandez, a former government witness implicated in steroid distribution during the infamous BALCO trial, had used dubious methods to achieve his physique.

"Thank you so much for all your prayers and support. Better luck next time," said Pacquiao.

"That's the sport of boxing. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose."

The audience of about 150 predominantly Filipino supporters cheered wildly, with one female supporter exclaiming, "You are still our hero Manny, forever!"

"Sometimes there are bad things that happen in your life," Pacquiao said.

"It's part of (the road) to becoming successful in life."

Roach also refused to entertain questions as to whether he felt that Marquez, who had brought the most impressive build of his career into the ring on Saturday night, had been using performance-enhancing substances in training.

"I'm not gonna accuse anyone, he won the fight," said Roach, who had earlier told a newspaper columnist that Marquez's physique didn't appear "natural."

"I don't know anything about drugs."

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

Pacquiao began his pro career in 1995, sustaining his first loss 13 months after on a third round knockout that almost mirrored this latest knockout.

Pacquiao would win his first world title two years later in 1998, picking up the WBC flyweight title with a knockout of Thai Chatchai Sasakul.

Pacquiao would add titles at 126, 130, 135, 140, 147 and 154 pounds, earning countless endorsement deals, his own game show and a congressional seat in the Philippine province of Sarangani along the way.

Pacquiao's victims have included many of the greatest fighters of the past 20 years, including Marco Antonio Barrera, Oscar De La Hoya, Erik Morales, Ricky Hatton, Miguel Cotto and Shane Mosley.

With this victory, Marquez cements and furthers his own standing among the greatest fighters in the rich tradition of Mexican boxing.

Marquez, who has won titles at 126, 130 and 135 pounds, now has his signature victory over the man largely considered to be the greatest bane of Mexican boxing.

"I've put this fight as one of my best victories," said Marquez.

"Right now in my future, I don't know what's coming but I'm going to rest and celebrate with my family."

Following their third meeting last November, most observers felt that Marquez got a raw deal.

Marquez had spoken immediately after about retirement, but in retrospect is glad that he stuck

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

around.

"I'm happy that I didn't retire," said Marquez.

"I was going to retire last year but now I'm happy that I won it. I feel great that I left no doubt in this fight against Manny."

If Pacquiao's controversial but official loss to Timothy Bradley in June and the controversial Marquez fight before it hadn't drained all of the interest in the greatest fight that never happened, a bout with Floyd Mayweather Jr., this performance has finished the job.

For years, the two titans of the sport postured in stop-and-start negotiations that had everyone split on who was "ducking" who.

One observer — hip hop impresario turned boxing promoter Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson — had earlier claimed that he could be the one man to finally make that fight happen.

Afterward, he might be the one man who still wants to see the fight.

"I'd still like to see the fight between Pacquiao and Mayweather," said Jackson.

Jackson later took a shot at his former friend Mayweather on Twitter, calling the five-division champion a "fool that lost 100 million last night," referencing the lost payday as a result of Pacquiao's defeat.

Falling from grace in boxing is very different from other sports.

'Lucky' punch closes an era of boxing glory

Written by Ryan Songalia

Sunday, 16 December 2012 08:46

In basketball, when Michael Jordan is no longer the invincible "MJ," his jump shot becomes less accurate and crossover fails to fool younger players.

In baseball, Ken Griffey Jr. might strike out against curveballs that he would've sent into the bleachers in yesteryear.

In boxing, the stakes are greater and so too are the risks.

Despite the loss, Filipinos have taken to social media to voice their support for the man known affectionately as "Pambansang Kamao," or "National Fist."

One phrase that has circulated seemed to summarize the feeling of most of his supporters best.

"He raised our flag. This time, let's raise him."

Ryan Songalia is a member of the Boxing Writers Association of America (BWAA) and contributes to GMA News. He is also a member of The Ring ratings panel and can be reached at ryan@ryansongalia.com. An archive of his work can be found at www.ryansongalia.com. Follow him on Twitter: @RyanSongalia.