



## HAS IT REALLY BEEN 20 YEARS SINCE MANNY PACQUIAO'S U.S. DEBUT?

**HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA (July 19, 2021)** -- Tuesday will mark the second anniversary of eight-division world champion and boxer laureate **Senator Manny "Pacman" Pacquiao's** dethroning of then undefeated WBA welterweight "super" champion **Keith Thurman**. Manny, at age 40, became the oldest man to win a welterweight title. But it was 20 years ago -- June 23, 2001 to be exact -- that Manny made his U.S. debut as a professional fighter. Following a sixth-round knockout victory of Kumanpetch Kiatvoraph to retain his WBC International super bantamweight title, on April 28, 2001, in the Philippines, Manny and his manager traveled to San Francisco for a vacation. In early June, they took a Greyhound bus down the coast to Hollywood in search of a gym and some ring work to stay in shape -- literally a busman's holiday!

Below are the recollections of Manny, Freddie, Hall of Fame broadcaster **Jim Lampley**, who called the fight from ringside for HBO, and **Ross Greenburg**, the executive producer of that HBO PPV telecast.

### **MANNY PACQUIAO**

"We were staying in a small apartment in Hollywood, near the Denny's On Sunset Boulevard, not far from the highway (Highway 101). The Denny's and the apartment building are still there," said Manny. "We wandered over to a gym that had been recommended to us -- Wild Card Boxing Club -- and my manager introduced himself to a man in the gym and told him he was looking for a trainer to work mitts with me. That man turned out to be the gym owner, Freddie Roach, who agreed to work with me. After the first round, I returned to my corner and said I just found my new trainer. Freddie was great with the mitts and as I soon found out, great with instruction too. Suddenly, as I was preparing to go back to the Philippines, we get an offer to challenge IBF junior featherweight champion Lehlo Ledwaba. I was the No. 3-rated contender and the two fighters ahead of me couldn't, or wouldn't, take the fight. Freddie and I had trained together about two weeks and now I'm walking into the ring at the MGM Grand to fight Ledwaba on HBO Pay-Per-View. It was crazy! That fight changed my life."

## **WORLD-FAMOUS FREDDIE ROACH**

"I opened up Wild Card in hopes that one day a new Muhammad Ali would walk in looking for a trainer. And then, in 2001, he did. Only he was nearly a foot shorter, weighed 122 pounds and spoke very little English," said Freddie. "I remember the first time we met. He came in looking for a trainer to work the mitts and after the first round I went back to my corner and said this guy is sensational. We have a new fighter. Soon Manny gets the call offering him the Ledwaba fight. He was getting ready to go back to the Philippines. If that call comes a day later, Manny misses out on that fight. We trained for two weeks and every day I'm falling more and more in love with his boxing skills and power. He was that good. So now it's fight week and I'm going to every casino trying to lay a bet on Manny. Unfortunately, the fight was considered such a mismatch that no casino would post odds on it. The guys at Top Rank were really giving me the business, saying that Manny didn't stand a chance and I'm trying to convince them that Manny is going to do a number on Ledwaba. Top Rank was promoting the show and Manny's fight was the co-main event to Oscar De La Hoya vs. Javier Castillejo, and Ledwaba was considered the class of the division. Manny jumped on Ledwaba from the start and finished him in the sixth round. It was brutal. But what a night. I remember we all went to dinner to celebrate at some small restaurant near the MGM Grand. Manny and I went from strangers to a world championship team in about two weeks. It sounds like a movie, doesn't it?"

## **JIM LAMPLEY**

"Larry Merchant and I had both seen Ledwaba for the first time with our own eyes on April 21 USA, April 22 South Africa when he defended his title against Mexican contender Carlos Contreras on the undercard of Lennox Lewis vs. Hasim Rahman. That night Ledwaba looked immaculate in easily handling Contreras. He showed balance, timing, skillful craft, and to our eyes seemed pretty clearly to be the best 122-pound fighter in the world. He was 33-1-1 against a pretty representative assortment of contenders from varied geographic bases. We were pleased to learn he would be back on HBO exactly two months later.

"On the day before Ledwaba vs. Manny Pacquiao (Pock-Yow, we had to practice it and not everyone in the room was having an easy time of it), we met a young Filipino who looked like an unlikely challenger. Not a lot of experience, seemingly a bit wide-eyed, and a little short of the necessary English language base to explain to all of us non-Tagalog speakers exactly what he was about. I leaped to the inner conclusion the experienced and confident Ledwaba was likely to school him. Why not??

"The following evening Ledwaba was swept away by a furious storm of power punching activity, and so were we. Ledwaba was never in the fight, and by the time Pacquiao had finished him off, in round six, we were well aware that if the world's best junior featherweight was in the ring

in Las Vegas, that was the unknown Filipino, not the skilled South African to whom he had laid waste. It was the beginning of HBO's lengthy and colorful journey with one of the greatest and most exciting prizefighters in the history of the planet, and the fact that the story—twenty years later—HASN'T ENDED YET is simply mind boggling. Mind boggling."

## **ROSS GREENBURG**

"What I remember vividly about Manny's arrival on HBO PPV was the two-week notice to face Ledwaba, and our announcers at ringside -- Jim Lampley, Larry Merchant, and George Foreman -- being given a crash course on his history and his ring acumen. The fight began with Jim asking the audience to excuse him as he tries to pronounce his name, in the second round Larry Merchant said that coming into the fight people were "wondering if this fight would catapult Ledwaba to superstar status, and now they are wondering if the same can be said of Manny Pacquiao." By the end of the fight Larry Merchant said, "I didn't know anything about Manny Pacquiao before the fight, and I was very impressed with what I saw during the fight, and now I want to see him again." It was clear to all of us at ringside and in the truck that we were about to go on a ride of a lifetime with a transformational boxing superstar."

Manny's victory over Ledwaba was also the start of arguably boxing's longest and most successful partnership. With Freddie in his corner, literally and figuratively, Manny won world titles in seven different weight divisions in a career of firsts that not only defines the champion he repeatedly became, but the Filipino spirit which has been embraced by the world. Over the past 20 years, Manny has played David to a roster of Hall of Fame Goliaths, scoring the most impressive victories of his era against the likes of **Erik Morales, Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Manuel Márquez, Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton, Miguel Cotto, and Shane Mosley**. In his last three fights, which took place during a 12-month period, from July 15, 2018 through July 20, 2019, Manny ran the table, winning welterweight world title fights against **Lucas Matthisse, Adrien Broner**, and Thurman.

Manny (62-7-2, 39 KOs), the one-time Boxing Writers Association of America Fighter of the Decade and three-time BWAA Fighter of the Year, hails from Sarangani Province in the Philippines. He faces his biggest professional boxing challenge when he takes on undefeated unified WBC/IBF welterweight champion **Errol Spence Jr.** (27-0, 21 KOs), of Desoto, Texas. Spence is 11 years younger and over four inches taller than the amazin' Manny. Would Manny have it any other way? The Pacquiao-Spence world championship event, which headlines a **FOX Sports PBC Pay-Per-View, Saturday, August 21** from T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada, is promoted by TGB Promotions, MP Promotions and Man Down Promotions. The pay-per-view will begin at **9 p.m. RT / 6 p.m. PT**. Remaining tickets can be purchased through [t-mobilearena.com](http://t-mobilearena.com) and [axs.com](http://axs.com).

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