

Pacquiao throws ceremonial pitch at SF Giants Game

by JOSEPH L. PERALTA & MALOU LIWANAG-AGUILAR
AJPress

SAN FRANCISCO—Boxing hero Manny “Pacman” Pacquiao became the first Philippine-born athlete to throw a ceremonial pitch before a Major League Baseball game in the Bay Area as the San Francisco Giants hosted Padres rival the San Diego Padres on April 21.

Pacquiao, who is deep in training in Wild Card Gym in Los Angeles for his junior welterweight bout against England’s Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas on May 2, took time to visit his thousands of fans in the Bay Area during Filipino Heritage Night, an event sponsored by the SF Giants at AT&T Park.

Prior to throwing the ceremonial pitch to Fil-Am pitcher Tim Lincecum, Pacquiao held a press conference in the Giants’ Promoter Room where boxing promoter Bob Arum and coach Freddie Roach joined Pacquiao to answer questions from media.

Being one of the most successful and influential people not only in the ring, but also in the world, the press asked Pacquiao if he feels any pressure living up to people’s expectations.

“That’s what I’m trying to do in every fight, I’m doing my best to make people happy,” he said.

With this, Arum informed the members of the press that Pacquiao is one of the nominees of *TIME Magazine’s* 100 Most Influential People in the World. “Now you can vote, you can go online and vote,” he said but added, “I’m really disappointed in the Filipinos. Two weeks ago, Manny was tied with Barack Obama. And now he’s nine places back.” So he is encouraging the Filipinos to go online and vote to push Pacquiao on top of the list.

Still, popularity is the last thing on Pacquiao’s mind as his motivation is thinking about the people he truly cares about. “I think what gives me inspiration is my family, and the Filipino

people for their support,” he said and added, “I would like to think that I am the most popular boxer in the world, but what I’m trying to do is give good work and train hard for the fight and give the fans what they want.”

Roach, who has been Pacquiao’s trainer for the last few years, is confident about his ward’s chances. He was also coy on what their strategy is for the May 2 fight.

“Hatton’s a rough guy. We’re working on dealing with that. Manny will show our game plan on May 2. Manny is sparring with fighters who have the same style as Hatton’s. So far, of the seven sparring partners he’s had, Manny has knocked down four of them,” Roach said.

“Manny is an easy guy to train. I even have to slow him down. Like today, for instance, I said ‘Let’s do one more round, get out of here and have an easy day.’ But Manny kept saying, ‘one more round, one more round.’

He’s one of the most dedicated fighters I have worked with, and one of the hardest workers in this sport,” Roach added.

Arum, for his part, said that the focus right now is on this fight and not on who’s next.

“This will be a difficult fight,” Arum stated. “I hope that Manny wins this bout. Whoever wins will have a lot of time to decide the next fight.”

“I don’t know what will happen on May 2,” Pacquiao said, “but I am prepared.”

Pacquiao’s other appearance around the ballpark was at Seals Plaza near the San Francisco Bay where he greeted the thousands of Filipinos enjoying the festival atmosphere.

Prior to Pacquiao’s ceremonial pitch, the pre-game homeplate ceremony included Hydra Mendoza and other community leaders honoring several Filipino American World War II veterans, the handing of a check donation to a few Filipino nonprofit organizations by the SF Giants organization, and a number by the Likhá Pilipino Folk Ensemble.

This is the third Filipino Heritage Night conducted by the SF Giants organization. According to Al Perez, Filipino American Arts Exposition president, about 11,000 Filipino



Top Rank promoter Bob Arum and Manny “Pacman” Pacquiao trying on the jerseys given to them by the San Francisco Giants during the Filipino Heritage Night press conference.

AJPress Photo by Malou Liwanag-Aguilar

Americans bought tickets to this heritage event, exceeding the combined Filipino Heritage Night events total of 6,500 in 2008.

“This is the largest ever event of the San Francisco Giants that is a heritage night,” Perez said. “I think they are going to use this as their template for their heritage nights due to the success. The Giants organization is very, very happy, and they are so easy to work with. In fact, during a post-event survey that the Giants conducted last year, it indicated that 30% of the people who bought tickets to Filipino Heritage Night were first-time attendees to a Giants baseball game. They are pleased that we are bringing new patrons to the game.”

What also makes Perez and

other members of the Fil-Am community happy is the fact that Filipino culture is exposed to a wider audience.

“Through events like this, Bay Area baseball fans get to experience and appreciate Filipino culture, and Filipinos who may not have had motivation to go to a baseball game are introduced to one of the greatest American traditions. I am glad that Filipino Heritage Night is a bridge that connects the Fil-Am community to the sports community,” Perez explained.

“Filipino Heritage Night gives us a chance to be proudly both Filipino and American,” Perez added.

Perez also hinted at another Filipino Heritage Night event scheduled for later in the baseball season. ■

Smith no longer in RP—US government

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departure were in compliance with the CA order and the decision should be respected.

“Following the decision of the Philippine Court of Appeals, Daniel Smith departed the Philippines under the authority of United States military officials,” the embassy said in a statement.

The mission also stressed that Smith remained in US custody since 2005 throughout the “long, difficult and emotional case” to comply with the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

The CA ruled that his sexual tryst with “Nicole” was “a spontaneous, unplanned romantic episode,” and that they were “carried away by their passions.”

The court said “the romantic episode” was “only rudely interrupted” when the van carrying them “suddenly stopped to pick up some passengers.”

In reversing Smith’s conviction,

the CA said no evidence was presented in court to show that the American had employed force, threat and intimidation on Nicole.

The CA said it did not consider the reported recantation of Nicole last month, as well as the reported leakage of a draft decision of retired Associate Justice Agustin Dizon, but decided on the merits of the case.

Smith was convicted of raping Nicole on Dec. 4, 2006, and legalities around custody and sentencing have been ongoing for the past two and a half years.

Due to the highly contentious VFA, Smith has been in the custody of the US embassy instead of a Philippine prison.

No appeals on Smith acquittal

The Philippine government has no plans of appealing the acquittal.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez explained that a CA acquittal cannot be subject of petition for review and elevated to the Supreme Court unless grave abuse of discretion on the part of the three lady justices who issued the ruling is proven.

“Showing that there was grave abuse of discretion would be futile because I don’t think there’s any,” he said in an interview.

The CA division that acquitted Smith is composed of three lady justices: Associate Justices Monina Arevalo-Zenarosa, Remedios

Salazar-Fernando and Myrna Dimaranan-Vidal. Gonzalez sees this circumstance with significance.

He pointed out that the decision of the 11th Division of the appellate court was agreed upon by three lady justices,

which should have already dispelled allegation of grave abuse of discretion.

“In this case, they (lady justices) should have been more sympathetic to the Filipino woman. These are three senior justices as compared to the Makati trial court where there was only one,” he said.

Gonzalez shares this belief with Solicitor General Agnes Devanadera and said they would respect the CA decision, which was based on “valid grounds.”

The Justice secretary said he sees nothing wrong with the reported speedy release of Smith, and downplayed possible violations of protocol when the American serviceman was immediately flown back to the US.

Court-martial awaits Smith

However, Smith’s legal woes may not be over yet as he could possibly face court-martial proceedings at the US military base in Okinawa,

Japan, according to Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

DILG Undersecretary Marius Corpus said Smith may still face court-martial, just like his three supposed accomplices who belonged to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Force stationed in the US military base in the southern island of Japan.

“Smith may soon be a free man, but his legal ordeal may not be over yet,” he said.

Corpus was the chairman of the inspection team formed by DILG Secretary Ronaldo Puno to oversee the custody of Smith while detained at the US embassy.

Smith’s co-accused who were earlier acquitted by the Makati Regional Trial Court were US Marine Staff Sergeant Chad Carpentier, who was dishonorably discharged as he was the platoon leader, while Lance Cpls. Keith Silkwood and Dominic Duplantis were less than honorably discharged. ■



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