

OPINION & FEATURES



Manny Pacquiao celebrates after Pacquiao defeated Ricky Hatton of Britain with a TKO in the second round in their Super Lightweight World Championship bout at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada, May 2, 2009. REUTERS Photo by R. Marsh Starks

World's best

GOVERNMENT forces and their enemies stopped fighting and the streets of Metro Manila were again free of traffic as Filipinos savored every moment of the fight last May 2 between Manny Pacquiao and his British challenger Ricky Hatton. The brief fight, which saw Hatton being knocked down three times within two rounds, prompted Pacquiao's promoter Bob Arum to describe the Philippine boxing icon as "the greatest."

Pacquiao's victory brought jubilation across the country amid an economic slump and the scare over swine flu. Pacquiao's win is particularly sweet in a nation that has long despaired over the performance of its athletes in other sports. Last year the Philippine contingent in the Olympic Games in Beijing delivered one of the country's worst performances ever. With athletes even from war-torn Afghanistan doing better than the Filipinos and other Southeast Asian contingents reaping a harvest of Olympic medals, Filipinos wondered what had happened to the country's sports program.

Boxing has long been the sport where Filipinos can aspire for international recognition. The athletes who came closest to bagging the country's first gold in the Olympics, winning silver or bronze medals instead, were boxers. This indicates that in competitions where physical size is not an advantage or where the physical requirements ensure a level playing field, Filipinos can excel, such

as in gymnastics and certain water sports events. So why is the country reaping sports honors mainly in boxing?

Pacquiao, like other boxers before him, rose to the top chiefly on his own resources. Boxing champions earn sponsorships and government support only when they have already distinguished themselves in their sport and can afford the financial requirements of sustained, rigorous training.

Instead of dangling rich rewards to athletes who reap honors for the country, reward money and government resources can be poured into the development of world-class athletes. Sports training is difficult, time-consuming and costly. Athletes often have to juggle school work with the demands of sports training. The older ones have to earn a living even as they strive for national glory in their chosen sporting fields. Without the required resources, few Filipino athletes stand a chance of emerging, like Pacquiao, as the best in the world. (*Philstar.com*)

GUEST EDITORIAL

Of flu shots and 'new' viruses

THERE are currently flu vaccines but none of them are effective against the "novel" swine flu virus, which has now been dubbed the "A/H1N1" virus so as not to offend hog raisers and lovers of *lechon*, pork barbecue, pork loin, ham and bacon.

As National Epidemiology Center head Dr. Eric Tayag points out, influenza is the most common illness in the world, and the flu virus the most widespread virus. The World Health Organization issues periodic alerts on the types of flu viruses most common in a certain region at different times of the year, and makes available the appropriate vaccines.

"I would recommend that people still take their flu shots," says Tayag, since the "common" flu still has the potential of causing more serious ailments like pneumonia and causing death among the most susceptible sectors of the population. These would consist of both the very young, meaning infants, and the very old, as well as those individuals whose immune systems have been compromised, such as diabetics, cancer patients and even people living with HIV/AIDS.

But, to reiterate, flu vaccines do not offer any protection against the new deadly mutant virus, and if flu symptoms last longer than a few days, and one has reason to suspect it may be an A/H1N1 infection (such as having just traveled abroad), then one should see a doctor posthaste for the proper tests.

But, to reiterate again, don't take the anti-viral drugs (one of which goes by the brand name Tamiflu) identified as effective against A/

H1N1 unless you're sure it's the new swine flu virus that's brought you down. Ironically, Tamiflu is not effective against "ordinary" flu, and if you abuse its use, your body may prove resistant to the drugs if and when you do fall ill with A/H1N1 flu.

Everywhere people are reacting with panic over this viral mutation. Mexico's president has already complained publicly over the way Mexicans have been "stigmatized" by the disease, simply because the country reported the first cases, and documented the most number of deaths resulting from it.

He was referring to the manner by which Chinese authorities reacted to reports that a Mexican citizen, who had flown to Shanghai, checked into a Hong Kong hospital after he began to feel the symptoms of flu. Chinese authorities took the unprecedented step of quarantining an entire hotel, where the traveler had stayed for a night, and issuing a bulletin to identify and isolate two taxi drivers who drove the man from the airport to the hotel and from the hotel to the hospital.

Despite the Mexican leader's complaints, the WHO has stood behind the Chinese government, saying it acted appropriately and according to internationally accepted protocols.

Perhaps Mexican leaders can for now take comfort from observations of many that the mutant virus seems to be weakening, since no one among the current cases, especially those outside of Mexico (save for a Mexican child who died in Texas) have been killed by the virus. Has the virus run its course? If so, then that's only in keeping



AT LARGE
Rina Jimenez-David

with its natural life-cycle, though we can only say for now that the virus is "lying low." Experts warn of a new upsurge in cases when "flu season" starts again. And for the Philippines, that season will soon be upon us, with the start of the rains.

This Saturday, May 9, the public is invited to "Sharing Day 2009" of Faith and Light Philippines, the local arm of an international ecumenical community and spiritual movement "whose heart is in the midst of persons with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends."

The "Sharing Day," which will be held at Sto. Niño de Tondo Parish and the Holy Child Catholic School, starts with a Mass at 1pm with Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales as main celebrant, to be assisted by Fr. Erick Santos, Fr. Rolly Agustin, Fr. Paul van Daelen, Fr. Andy Lim and other priests. A celebration and merienda among the different Faith and Light communities in the country will follow the Mass.

This year Faith and Light marks its 25th anniversary in this country, when a visit by Faith and Light's founder Jean Vanier inspired a small prayer group led by Annabelle Feliciano to start the first Faith and Light community here. That modest community has since reached out to 12 other parishes in Metro Manila, joining some 1,500 communities in 76 countries on five continents.

Faith and Light was born after a pilgrimage organized by Jean Vanier, a Canadian layman, and Marie Helene Matthieu to Lourdes, France, in 1971, to meet the needs of families of persons with intellectual disabilities. After the pilgrimage, which drew people from different Christian denominations, the families kept on meeting as a community, spreading gradually throughout the world in "friendship, celebration, sharing and prayer." (*Inquirer.net*)

Icon

ANY day Manny Pacquiao fights is a day of national obligation.

On days like last Sunday, May 3, we dutifully get up early, put on our most casual clothes, shadow box a little and report to our preferred public arena, restaurant or cinema to view the fight live. Life stops for a while. The crime rate always drops to zero. Traffic stops.

There are no penalties for not watching Manny fight—only a subtle form of ostracism in the aftermath, when all conversation revolves around what happened. Those who did not participate in the unsanctioned national ritual are viewed as lesser Filipinos.

In the restaurant which is my usual combat posting during Pacquiao fights, the place is always packed ten times capacity. For P600, I get what is effectively half a seat before a grainy big screen in an oxygen-starved room. The ticket comes with what passes off as breakfast: a cold compilation of soggy fried rice, dried meat, a limp omelet and pickled papaya. Oh yes, also a plastic cup with tepid water just warm enough to dilute a pack of instant coffee.

But that is not what one pays for really. Unhealthy as it might be, one actually pays for the atmosphere. Not atmosphere in its usual scientific meaning, because the air there is mainly hand-me-down. Perhaps ambience is more precise.

This is a moment for essential tribal bonding. All unessential identities are stripped off and we are, for that moment, all equal warriors for the nation—or so we imagine. At no other time do I hear the national anthem sung with such fervor as before a Pacquiao fight.

When a panning television camera caught Filipinos in Las Vegas carelessly displaying the flag with the red field up, the crowd I was with cheered lustily. The nation was at war, even if the Pacman was our sole warrior. We were co-warriors only in spirit. Had things gone awfully wrong, he would be the only casualty and all we were expected to do was drink up our beer and mourn.

In my usual combat posting, I jostle with justices in shorts. Only

during such instances can I blow smoke into their nostrils without being cited in contempt.

I run into faces from the past, people who had tried to sell me insurance or who had political underground briefly compare hair with our duties for with the man who has icon for the community his fight to be ours glory as a common I did not know that corporate lawyers, ratively cut throats the Pacman's signa-They did so with tears wolverine eyes. That impressed me.



FIRST PERSON
Alex Magno

When Pacquiao took down Ricky Hatton for the third and final time in only the second round, I thought my eardrums would be permanently damaged. I thought the roof would blow off. The lawyers and the doctors, the salesmen and the ex-cadres were all on their feet, collectively chanting the new pledge of national allegiance: *Mahnee! Mahnee! Mahnee!*

Beer bottles rolled off tables and crashed unnoticed. Filipinos in Las Vegas and in Quezon City were joined, by the magic of modern communications, in simultaneous rhythmic frenzy. This was an ancient tribal war dance, no doubt, reincarnated in this digital age.

There so much human energy unleashed in a second right after Pacquiao's left hook caught Hatton's jaw, I thought the Marikina Fault might give. I feared the older patriots in the crowd might expire there and then. I half-anticipated the earth would roll and the sun dim.

Then, just as suddenly, the crowd calmed down. The burst of cheering dwindled into excited chatter. In another second, there was just cold post-mortems. In another minute, there was just mock whining about how expensive the tickets were and how short the main feature turned out to be.

Soon enough, people were quietly streaming out of the place, pulling out their grocery lists from their beer-soaked shorts or fretting about how much laundry there was to be done. Having performed our patriotic duties for the day, it was time to attend to the other rituals of daily life.

Sports, it has been said, has displaced war as the civilized means for expending pent up tribal energies—although two Latin American nations once sent armored units to their common border after a disputed football match. In Europe, hordes of fans effectively become invading armies, following their teams across borders to brawl in foreign lands.

Sports, in a borderless global economy, have also become the alternative forum for consolidating national sympathies.

When I entered University a few decades back, constructing nationalism was the intellectual fashion of the age. We thought that could be achieved by abolishing Spanish courses and enforcing a national language. We thought that could be achieved by demonizing "US imperialism" and imagining that a rapacious world out there was conspiring to make us miserable.

We thought we could make out people patriotic by making them fearful of alien influences. We imagined some pristine national soul that must be protected by policies of autarky and self-reliance. How futile and ultimately destructive that paradigm was.

The Pacquiao phenomenon now delivers what the anti-colonial intelligentsia so miserably failed to do: an icon that reassures us we are not inferior to others. An icon that tells us we could all triumph by pure grit alone, broken English and all. (*Philstar.com*)



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