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Mayweather, Pacquiao on the same card ... 13 years ago

By Dan Rafael
ESPN.com

More than 13 years since they fought on the same card, Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao are getting set to do it again but under vastly different circumstances.

On May 2 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, Mayweather and Pacquiao, boxing's two best fighters and the two

biggest stars in the sport, will finally meet in their long-awaited mega pay-per-view showdown to unify welterweight world titles and to crown the king of the era.

Flash back to Nov. 10, 2001, for a largely forgotten card more than a decade ago. That is when Mayweather and Pacquiao were the featured fighters in separate bouts of the same HBO-televised doubleheader at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco.

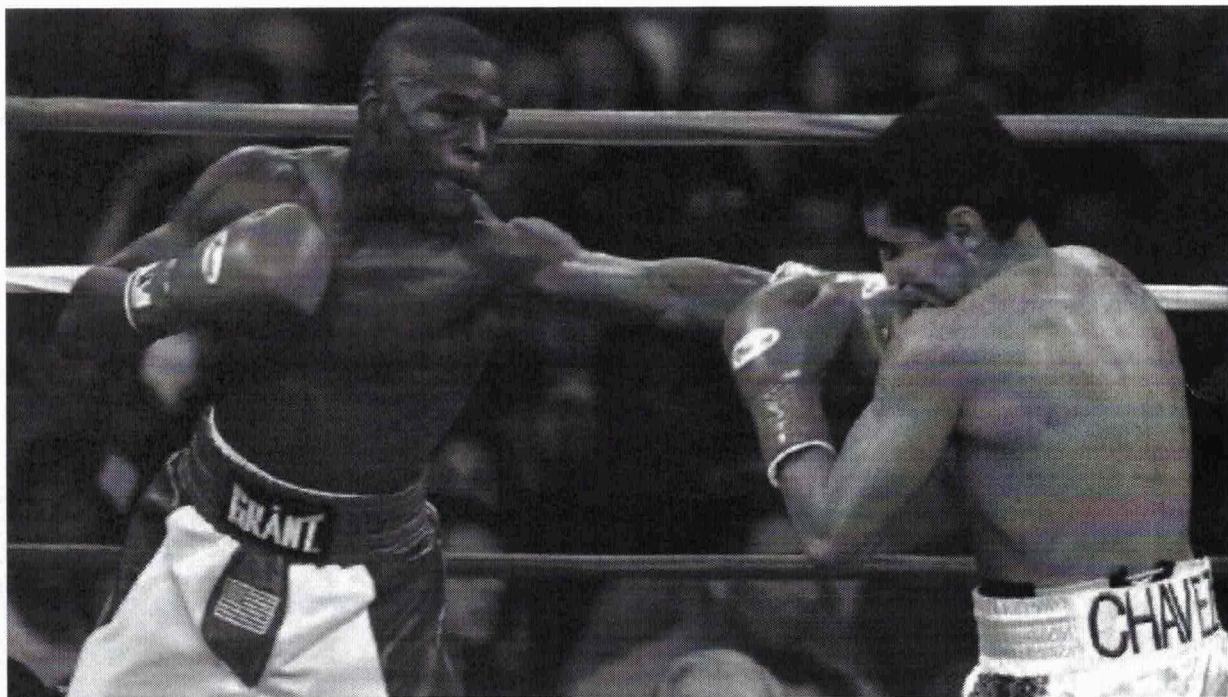
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”- *Bob Arum*

Who could have possibly imagined on that night all these years later they would have become legendary



Floyd Mayweather stopped Jesus Chavez in 2001 to retain his junior lightweight title.

figures atop the sport, put on roughly 20 pounds, set various boxing records and would be days away from fighting each other in the richest fight in boxing history.

It was unfathomable, yet that is what has happened.

"If I had said at the time, that 13, 14 years later they would be fighting each other for hundreds of millions of dollars in one of the most anticipated fights ever, people would have considered me absolutely f----- nuts," said Top Rank chairman Bob Arum, who was Mayweather's promoter at the time and is now Pacquiao's. "Who would have even have thought that? It shows you that anything is possible."

Kery Davis, an HBO Sports senior vice president at the time who was responsible for putting together the network's fights, engineered the doubleheader. But it was not as though he was looking into a crystal ball.

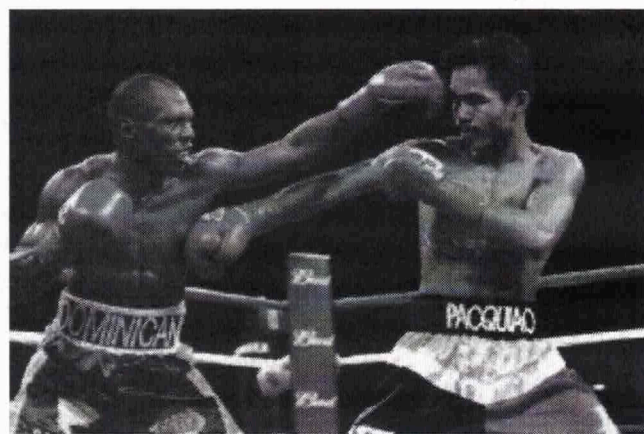
"Sitting in the arena in San Francisco that night and watching the card, if you would have told me that Manny and Floyd would eventually fight each other, I would have said, from a size standpoint, I can see it," Davis said. "They were only eight pounds apart at that point."

"However, if you told me that they would not only fight each other, but they would be the two best pound-for-pound fighters in the sport and the two most popular fighters fighting in the most lucrative fight of all time, I would have said you have a better chance of hitting the lotto."

Freddie Roach, in his second bout as Pacquiao's trainer for that 2001 bout, remembers the card and is as surprised as anyone that Pacquiao and Mayweather are in the position they are in now.

"I would call you crazy if you said it would happen back then," Roach said. "It's just so long ago. It's so crazy. Just so many things needed to happen to make this possible. Never in a million years would I have thought this would happen."

On that 2001 card, Mayweather would make his eighth and final junior lightweight title defense, forcing challenger Jesus Chavez to throw in the towel after the ninth round. From there, Mayweather would steadily rise up the scale from 130 pounds, winning world titles in four more weight classes while becoming the pound-for-pound king, pay-per-view king and earning hundreds of millions of dollars.



Manny Pacquiao, right, and Agapito Sanchez, fought to a bloody technical draw in November 2001.

Pacquiao, still obscure to the American audience, fought in the United States for the first time five months earlier. As a late replacement, the former flyweight champion knocked out Lehlo Ledwaba in the sixth-round to win a junior featherweight world title in an electrifying performance on an Oscar De La Hoya HBO PPV undercard.

Mayweather-Pacquiao a hot ticket

The Floyd Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao fight is looking to generate \$72 million in live gate alone, part of a total package that could surpass \$400 million.

Ticket price Number of tickets*

\$10,000	1,100**
\$7,500	2,500

\$5,000	2,500
\$3,500	4,000
\$2,500	2,500
\$1,500	2,500

* Approximate

** None available for public sale

Davis was so impressed with Pacquiao's showing against Ledwaba that he wanted him on HBO as soon as possible and pushed for him to be on the Mayweather-Chavez undercard.

Pacquiao made his HBO debut that night against the late Agapito Sanchez in a 122-pound title unification fight that was marred by constant fouling by Sanchez. The fight eventually ended in a sixth-round technical draw when Pacquiao was unable to continue because of a severe cut caused by a Sanchez head butt. When the fight was sent to the scorecards, one judge had Pacquiao ahead, one had Sanchez ahead and one had it even. It was certainly an inauspicious start to what would become Pacquiao's glorious run with HBO, during which he would also rise up the scale, eventually win world titles in a record eight weight classes, become a global icon and also earn nine figures.

"They were just kids back then," Roach said. "Manny hadn't even developed yet. He was still a guy looking for a one-punch knockout. Mayweather was still fighting like an amateur. I'd never thought from San Francisco that night that it would be the biggest fight of our lifetime. It's funny how things happen."

As forgettable as the card was in the scheme of things, it did provide the world -- or at least those paying attention -- with a glimpse of the two forces that would eventually come to dominate boxing on the same night.

"I would never even have thought of it being possible," Davis said of the trajectory the careers of Mayweather and Pacquiao took toward each other. "Manny had started fighting at 106 pounds, so the idea he could fight at a much bigger weight, I wasn't even thinking about it. I always thought Floyd would eventually go up to welterweight, but the fact that they would wind up being the two biggest stars in the sports and fighting in the same weight class 13 years later? Forget it.

"I always thought Floyd had the potential to be a great fighter, but there was absolutely no way to predict anyone would capture the American public interest the way Floyd and Manny would. At that point [in 2001], Manny barely even spoke English."

For the fighters' part, they say they never even met each other during fight week -- not at a pre-fight or a post-fight news conference, not at the weigh in and not even running into each other at the fight hotel. They both said they don't even recall the other man's bout.

"I don't remember anything at all aside from a few members of the media mentioning it [the card] to me over the years," Mayweather said. "We'd never met each other before that night where we met for the first time at the [Miami Heat basketball] game [in January] and at the hotel in Miami."

That chance meeting helped grease the wheels for them to get the deal done for the May 2 fight.

Pacquiao also said he has no recollection of Mayweather's bout on that 2001 night because he did not leave the dressing room to watch it after his own fight had ended.

Pacquiao's memory from that night was only that "Agapito Sanchez was the dirtiest fighter I ever fought."

So just how did the future Hall of Famers come to co-headline the card in the first place?

At the same time Arum was looking for a place to stage Mayweather-Chavez, Davis knew San Francisco promoter Peter Howes, whom Davis said would call him regularly and tell him if he ever had a fight that made sense to have in San Francisco to let him know.

"He'd say, 'If you ever have a fight that is right for San Francisco, I can sell it out,'" Davis said. "So when Bob told me he was looking for a place for Floyd to fight I put Peter and Bob in touch with each other and they ended up making a deal."

Simultaneously to that happening, Davis was talking to Murad Muhammad, who was then Pacquiao's promoter, about his next fight.

Mayweather vs. Pacquiao

- **WHERE:** MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas
- **WHEN:** May 2, 9 p.m. ET
- **TV:** Showtime/HBO PPV
- **Fight Credential:** Complete fight coverage

"Obviously, Manny was terrific when he beat Ledwaba but he wasn't ready to get his own HBO show, so it was best to put him on an undercard. Peter told me San Francisco had the biggest Filipino population in the country and that was the 'ah hah' moment," Davis said. "We talked to Bob and he was eager to put Pacquiao on Floyd's card because he thought it would help him sell tickets in San Francisco."

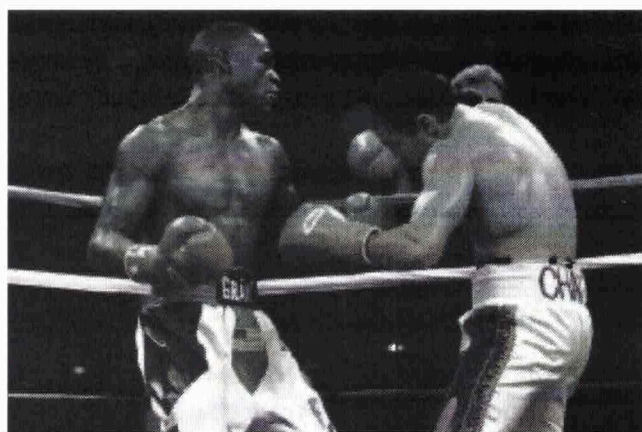
"It was one of those times where people really worked together and it worked out. We had a great crowd that night and the arena was sold out, or close to it."

Arum, who would become Pacquiao's promoter several years later, said Pacquiao's presence on the card ultimately did not help sell many tickets.

"HBO asked us if we would mind putting this fight on our card. They said they had this Filipino kid who looked sensational, and we knew there was a sizable Filipino population in the area, so we said sure, but it didn't help sell tickets," Arum said. "It was a surprise. We sold out, but it wasn't the Filipinos. They had not woken up to Manny Pacquiao yet. They didn't know him then."

Arum said he had no idea who Pacquiao was when HBO approached him.

"None, zero," Arum said. "I just knew he was a Filipino who might sell some tickets in [the Filipino area of] Daly City. I hadn't seen the Ledwaba fight and I had no knowledge of Pacquiao. I knew nothing. I only put



Floyd Mayweather, left, fought Jesus Chavez in the main event, with the Manny Pacquiao-Agapito Sanchez title bout on the undercard in 2001.



him on the card as an accommodation to HBO."

In fact, Arum said he never even met or spoke to Pacquiao during the promotion.

"In retrospect, I think maybe Murad was paranoid about exposing him to other promoters," Arum said. "I never met him, never talked to him then. I watched the fight that night and he didn't look very impressive. It was a terrible fight. This guy, Agapito Sanchez, was the dirtiest fighter I had ever seen. I remember being very disappointed that the fight had f----- up the card because it was such a bad fight.

"I was thinking that all the raves following the Ledwaba fight were misplaced, in effect. I remember saying, 'This is the guy they're really excited about?'"

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Arum was more focused on Mayweather and trying to build him into a star. After the Chavez fight, Mayweather moved up in weight and won the lightweight title against Jose Luis Castillo.

"Floyd was a guy we were looking at for super stardom," Arum said.

Mayweather got there, although he had eventual falling out with Arum, which was one of the hurdles that had to be overcome in order to make Mayweather-Pacquiao.

And now here they are, far removed from the night so long ago ready to face each other with their legacies on the line.

"I think it's one of the beautiful things about our sport that two guys who would ultimately be on a collision course with each other would actually fight on a card that was a relatively random card happening in a place like San Francisco, which is not exactly the mecca of boxing," Davis said. "And here we are 14 years later and they're the biggest fighters in the sport fighting at the sport's mecca, the MGM Grand."
