

God and Sports

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

After an excruciating five years, undefeated boxer Floyd Mayweather *finally* agreed to box Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao on May 2, 2015. Both boxers will reportedly make over \$100 million, making it the richest boxing match in history. The pay-per-view price will be a whopping \$89.95 for standard definition and \$99.95 for high definition.

However, Pacquiao, who has a history of suffering from leg cramps, is supposedly not training as hard as he has in the past. For years, Pacquiao, also known as “Pac man,” had been known as an utterly tireless champion. However, recently, he failed to show up for a much-anticipated running session, and some observers are wondering if he is simply too tired at this point in his career.

Manny’s religion might be of greater concern. The Philippines is the only predominantly Catholic nation in Asia. The Spanish ruled the islands for 400 years. However, Pacquiao is now an evangelical Christian. On the other hand, his trainer, Freddie Roach, who is a nonbeliever, is worried that Manny’s religion might cost him his badly needed killer instinct. After all, Jesus was supposedly the Prince of Peace that taught his followers to turn the other cheek. Moreover, Roach seems to believe that it could be that Pacquiao is expecting God to carry the match for him.

To all of this, Roach said, “Manny, God doesn’t give a fuck who wins. He’s got bigger things do.” Furthermore, Roach has been looking for Christian scholars to provide biblical passages that condone aggressive and combative actions.

Perhaps I could be of some assistance in this regard. The Bible not only condones aggressive and combative behavior, but it is much worse than that. Freddie, how about this sexist/genocidal gem? “Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the

women children, that have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.” (Numbers 31:17-18.)

Or how about this murderous mayhem from the Prince of Peace himself? “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” (Luke 19:27.)

In Judges 21:10-22, we read of the murderous brutality of the Chosen people. In Judges, chapters 6-9, we read of the bloodthirsty exploits of the biblical “hero” Gideon. If this kind of biblically ordained mass murder doesn’t get Manny’s mojo workin,’ what will?

Complicating matters is the fact that Mayweather is also religious. If he prays to the same God, who is God likely to side with? Perhaps a Muslim could answer this conundrum. According to his daughter, Rasheda Ali, Muhammad Ali is rooting for Pacquiao. Ali, revered in the Philippines for his Thrilla in Manila against Joe Frazier, has been friends with Manny for years. Aside from the Filipino boxer’s skills inside the ring, the former boxing heavyweight champion likes Pacquiao because of his generosity. However, Mayweather has also been very generous with his money. (In any case, Ali might also prefer Pacquiao because Mayweather has spoken disrespectfully of Ali.)

When I was the executive director of African Americans for Humanism (AAH) and the editor of the journal *The AAH Examiner*, we published an article by a writer named Dexter Martin titled “Asking God to Cheat in Sports.” The author maintained, among other things, that it is unethical for athletes to ask God to give them an unfair advantage over their competitors. Athletes are supposed to compete against one another – not an all-powerful God. Martin noted that spiritual steroids (in the form of divine intervention) are just as unethical as medicinal ones. (Incidentally, there used to be an African American play titled “Your Arms Too Short to Box with God.” Why should any boxer even have to try?)

There are some people that only pray that they are not injured in competition. However, even this is problematic. If your competitor hits you with his most powerful punch and it does not hurt you because you prayed to God, this accrues as an unfair advantage to you, especially if your punches harm your opponent. Of

course, all of this nonsense raises the question: Why not just ask God to stay out of sports so that athletes can compete naturally and fairly?

What happens when athletes pray and lose? Is it not at least conceivable that perhaps God does not exist, or that he is not great after all, as the late Christopher Hitchens contended? It could be that when an athlete is determined and conditioned to win, even God can't do much to stop such a competitor.

In all seriousness, people need to get a grip. As Voltaire wisely remarked: "God favors the side with the heaviest armaments." The best way to win is for athletes to work hard and believe in themselves. Leave the questionable prayers to the gamblers that are intent upon betting their lives away.