

Written by

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By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – A few years ago I asked Chicago's former world lightweight boxing champion David Diaz why he wanted to go to the Philippines to attend Manny Pacquiao's birthday. Mr. Diaz told this reporter he wanted to find out how Manny rules the boxing world.

Without admitting it, perhaps, Mr. Diaz wanted to sample the food Manny eats, the air Manny breathes, Manny's routine, the works. After his trip, Mr. Diaz has yet to tell me what he found out.

Like Mr. Diaz, three other boxers Manny vanquished are reportedly attending Manny's 32's birthday on Dec. 17 in one of his haunts in Mindanao. They are three-division champion Juan Manuel Marquez, light middleweight champion Miguel Cotto of Puerto Rico, and former five-time world champion Erik Morales of Mexico.

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A source from Team Pacquiao, who is not authorized to talk to the media, told this reporter that Messrs. Marquez, Cotto and Morales made this year's illustrious marquee list to attend Manny's birthday.

When I asked if Marquez' attendance makes him the front runner to face Manny on April 16 at MGM

Grand in Las Vegas, Nevada, the source demurred, saying that an uninvited boxer could likely land the coveted role.

The source intimated that Manny is likely to choose three-division champion Shane Mosley of Pomona

, California

. "Everything is now a done deal," according to the source. The only matter left is its announcement on Manny's birthday.

But the arrival of Messrs. Cotto and Marquez would certainly be a big media event as they could give insights into the minds of the public as to why they accepted Manny's invitation to attend his birthday this time.

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Are they looking for the secret – the Holy Grail – why Manny has become invincible in the ring lately the way Manny's previous opponent David Diaz was trying to figure out?

Only Messrs. Cotto and Marquez can provide answers to this question.

As to Morales? He can always say he is visiting the Philippines for pleasure and business. When he was in the Philippines some years ago, Morales visited Philippines' tourist spots. He must have enjoyed his trip; he is a repeat Philippine visitor.

Mr. Morales even made some money on the side when he appeared in some beverage television commercials with Manny.

So, when Top Rank promoter Bob Arum arrives in the Philippines Tuesday, the announcement will appear to be mere formality. He will be joined in the trip by another future hall of famer, Pacquiao's trainer Freddie Roach and former world flyweight champion Nonito Donaire, Jr.

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Arum was reportedly going to take proposals from three leading fighters, who want to face Manny and leave Manny the difficult task of choosing his opponent. They are from the camps of Sugar Shane Mosley, Andre Berto and Juan Manuel Marquez.

But I have a hunch. My source is on target. Manny will pick Mosley. # # #

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