

# Pacquiao, Roach fondly recall 15 years at the Wild Card

By Greg Beacham  
AP Sports Writer

**L**OS ANGELES — Manny Pacquiao was all kinds of hungry when he first walked into the Wild Card Boxing Club 15 years ago. An undernourished and largely unknown 118-pound champion wanted to learn, to grow — to take on the world.

When he walked out of the Wild Card for perhaps the final time this month, Pacquiao stepped onto an enormous bus with his glowering face plastered across its length. He took a four-hour drive to Las Vegas with his entourage of dozens, stopping only to buy mountains of snacks at a convenience store, on the way to a luxury suite and his pay-per-view fight against Timothy Bradley, which he won, knocking down Bradley twice on his way to a unanimous 12-round decision in their welterweight showdown.

Pacquiao found everything he sought from boxing in this gloriously dilapidated Hollywood gym run by trainer Freddie Roach. They've been together since 2001, forming a tenacious partnership that might have met its final test.

"I don't think this is it, so I don't think I'm going to have to get sad or anything like that," Roach said. "If it is it, I will miss him, and we'll be friends forever. But he's always been a great guy to me. It would be different not having him around, for sure, but life goes on. It's OK."

If Pacquiao retires into politics, he has already thrown his final punch at the Wild Card, his training home since 2001. He'll never again take direction from Roach, who nurtured his growth into an eight-division champion and the Philippines' most famous man.

Pacquiao has repeatedly said he could be forced out of boxing if the congressman is elected to a senate position later this year, but he might not have considered the finality of it all until he actually arrived at his last workout in Hollywood. His eyes narrowed while he methodically wrapped his hands with brisk movements.

"I'm thinking about it," Pacquiao said. "I love it here. It's my second home. It's been a long time since I started training at the Wild Card."

Pacquiao has spilled years of sweat and blood on the well-worn canvas in this living monument to the enduring charms of the sweet science.

Roach remembers the earliest months of their relationship with fondness. Pacquiao lived next door at the Vagabond Inn, and Roach would go back to the humble hotel to relax while Pacquiao sang and learned to play the guitar. The Beatles' "Let It Be" was the first song he mastered — to a point.

"I don't know if he's a great singer," Roach said. "But he



practiced, and he tried really hard to be entertaining at that. He was just a really good kid."

The Wild Card has grown along with Roach's career: The second-floor gym has also taken over the ground floor of the battered strip mall on Vine Street. The former laundromat is now used for Roach's top clients, including Miguel Cotto and Pacquiao, whose logo is emblazoned on the ring.

Roach is modest about his contributions to Pacquiao's formidable talent, but he knows what role the Wild Card played in that development.

"It forced him to maybe grow up a little bit faster than being home," Roach said. "I look at pictures from when he first came, and he only had a couple of guys with him. He

**PUNCHING OUT.** Manny Pacquiao of the Philippines fights Timothy Bradley during their welterweight title boxing match in Las Vegas, Nevada. Pacquiao was all kinds of hungry when he first walked into the Wild Card Boxing Club in Los Angeles 15 years ago. An undernourished and largely unknown 118-pound champion wanted to learn, to grow — to take on the world. The boxer's bout with Bradley may have been his last. He won the fight, knocking down Bradley twice on his way to a unanimous 12-round decision. (AP Photo/Isaac Brekken)

was almost by himself."

A loss finally allowed Roach to get the superstitious Pacquiao out of the run-down Vagabond, which was torn down in 2013. The fighter moved to houses in nearby Beverly Hills or Hancock Park, his properties growing along with his entourage.

Even with an increasingly complex home life in Asia, he kept coming back to the Wild Card for work.

Los Angeles embraced Pacquiao during his rise, but its love has faded in recent years. The anti-gay political rhetoric that ended his relationship with Nike also hasn't played well in the progressive town, getting him ceremonially banned from a popular mall and prompting the *LA Weekly* newspaper to ask, "Should Manny Pacquiao Be Run Out of Los Angeles?"

But inside the Wild Card, Pacquiao's oldest American friends are still at his side, even if they disagree with his pronouncements.

And even if he's really done fighting, Pacquiao doesn't think he'll leave the Wild Card entirely.

"I might come back here once a year (after retiring)," Pacquiao said. "Bring my boxers. I have other boxers in the Philippines."

Roach believes Pacquiao's skills and athleticism are still sharp, and he doesn't see any slowdowns that would prompt him to encourage retirement. Although he still sees the hunger in Pacquiao, he developed a slight doubt when Pacquiao did something he never does after a workout.

The fighter gathered Roach and their closest confidantes for a group prayer.

"We'll see what happens," Roach said. "I still can see senator Manny Pacquiao winning a world title, or President Manny Pacquiao winning a world title. He would like to do that."

## My Turn: New 'Voices of Change'

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and displacement issues in the area. Algosio said the JAMS space will eventually be developed and may retain some of the community space on the ground floor with potentially 40 to 60 units of affordable housing above. That's big news for an area without much permanent affordable housing. Algosio thinks it will take at least 18 months before financing is set up for the project. In the meantime, JAMS will continue as a community event space.


"We believe this would be a win for a community facing gentrification pressures," said Algosio, who believes the potential new development will "address a number of neighborhood concerns."

I find inspiration in the youthful energy at APANO, not only in its staff, but with how they offer opportunities for youth and community members to become leaders. This gives me hope for a better Portland and a way

for pan-AAPI communities to have a voice in making decisions about issues such as health equity and livability.

The 2016 "Voices of Change" celebration and fundraiser is scheduled for Friday, May 6 from 6:00 to 9:30pm at the JAMS space. This year's keynote speaker is Miya Yoshitani, executive director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network based in Oakland, California. The admission cost is \$50 per person (\$25 per person for APANO members). To learn more, or to buy tickets, call (971) 340-4861, e-mail <info@apano.org>, or visit <www.apano.org>.

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