



ROTARY

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Manny Pacquiao works to knock out polio once and for all

Boxing legend works through his Rotary club to keep a crippling childhood disease from rebounding off the ropes

EVANSTON, Ill. (Nov. 8, 2011) — As he prepares for Saturday night's showdown with Juan Manuel Marquez at the MGM Grand Las Vegas, Filipino boxing legend Manny Pacquiao also has his sights set on another, far more dangerous opponent: the crippling childhood disease polio.

Pacquiao is an active member of Rotary International, a humanitarian service organization that has worked to eradicate polio for more than 20 years. It's a goal Pacquiao has embraced wholeheartedly by joining a growing roster of celebrities and public figures participating in Rotary's "This Close" public awareness campaign, which carries the tagline: "We are this close to ending polio."

In fact, during his pre-fight workouts in Los Angeles, he wore a t-shirt bearing his "This Close" photo, says Liza Elorde, president of the Rotary Club of Manila 101, which Pacquiao joined in 2009. Sharp-eyed viewers of HBO's "24/7" pre-fight series may have seen the shirt during the latest episode.

"I brought the shirt from Manila and asked him to wear it during his training, and he gladly said yes without hesitation," says Elorde, who recently was sworn in as Rotary club president by Pacquiao himself. She is in Las Vegas because her son, Juan Miguel Elorde, also a professional boxer, is scheduled to fight Friday night at Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino. She says he plans to wear Rotary's familiar gearwheel logo on his trunks for his bout, as will another Filipino fighter, Dennis Laurente.

It's fitting that Pacquiao is active in the polio eradication effort. He was born in 1978, the year before Rotary began its pioneering work in polio prevention with a major project that reached millions of Filipino children -- very likely the future champ himself -- with the oral vaccine.

In 1988, Rotary helped launch the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in partnership with the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since then, the incidence of polio has plummeted by more than 99%, from 350,000 cases annually to just over 500 worldwide so far this year. To date, Rotary members have contributed more than \$1 billion and countless volunteer hours to help immunize more than two billion children. Rotary is currently raising \$200 million to match a \$355 million polio eradication challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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