

PACQUIAO MADE RETIREMENT U-TURN TO CONTINUE HIS 'JOURNEY'

BEVERLY HILLS: While Manny Pacquiao's political career became a priority after he announced his "retirement" from the ring in April, he says the lure of continuing his journey in boxing ultimately led to his comeback. Seven months after defeating American Timothy Bradley in Las Vegas in his much trumpeted farewell to the sport, the Filipino southpaw will return to the same city in November to challenge World Boxing Organisation welterweight champion Jessie Vargas. Though Pacquiao is an eight-division world

challenge for me to get back in the ring again and to prove that I can still manage serving the people and also be a successful boxer." Pacquiao (58-6-2) was elected to the Philippines' senate in May. Asked what had prompted his decision to come out of retirement, Pacquiao smiled: "The main reason is because when I hung up my gloves, I realised that the sport that I loved, I was no longer active with that. "And then I realised that boxing still liked me and I liked boxing so why am I not continuing my journey in boxing? So

I changed my mind and decided to continue my journey. "I want to fight more fights after November. I am already satisfied and happy with what I have done in boxing. Now I want to continue and give honour to my country." For Pacquiao's experienced trainer, Freddie Roach, the Filipino's abrupt U-turn on his retirement decision was always likely.

"Manny still knows what he does best, and that's boxing so him making a comeback this quickly wasn't a big surprise to me," the bespectacled Roach told Reuters. — Reuters

champion and one of the greatest boxers ever, the whole experience of preparing for that Nov. 5 fight feels strange as he will be competing for the first time as an elected senator in his homeland. "This is very different," a smartly dressed Pacquiao, 37, told Reuters after holding a joint news conference with American Vargas in the chic surrounds of The Beverly Hills Hotel. "This is my first fight since I was elected as a senator and it's a big challenge for me to try to get the belt and become a champion again, to win the fight as a senator. "It's also a big



LONDON: Britain's Kell Brook, IBF welterweight champion, right, and WBA, WBC and IBF middleweight champion Gennady Golovkin of Kazakhstan pose during the weigh in at the O2 Arena in London, yesterday, ahead of their WBC and IBF middleweight title bout today. — AP

GOLOVKIN EYES MAYWEATHER MANTLE IN BROOK BOUT

LONDON: Gennady Golovkin's career has run a hypnotic and grimly relentless course for boxing fans worldwide and evidence suggests that will not change today.

Viewers in over 100 countries are expected to tune in live to see the Kazakhstan punching machine defend two of his three world middleweight titles against British challenger Kell Brook.

Despite Golovkin being heavily favoured to retain his WBC and IBF belts, there is still great interest in the fight at the O2 Arena in London. For many, the 34-year-old is the most exciting boxer in the world, who is rapidly becoming the sport's biggest global superstar following the retirement of Floyd Mayweather Jr.

This fight represents the biggest threat to Golovkin's run of 22 consecutive knock-out wins, according to the champion himself. Brook, the reigning IBF welterweight champion from Sheffield with an unblemished record, is stepping up two weight divisions and Golovkin considers him his toughest test yet.

"I understand it's not an easy fight for us so I'm more serious and more focused," he said. "He's my biggest fight and my biggest challenge. It's my biggest step. I have a different plan and a more serious plan. Right now it's my biggest fight." California-based Golovkin is the biggest overseas boxer to fight in the United Kingdom since Russian-Australian Kostya Tszyu lost to Ricky Hatton in 2005.

Earlier this week, his presence at a public workout brought London's busy Covent Garden to even more of a standstill than usual. That is because Golovkin, known as 'Triple G', arrived in London with a reputation of producing exciting knockouts in an unbeaten career that has seen him stop 32 of his 35 opponents.

It has made him the most feared fighter in the world and none of his world title fights since 2010 have gone the distance.

Rival champions such as Mexican Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez have declined the chance to fight the world middleweight number one. The Kazakh's promoter, Tom Loeffler,

believes Golovkin's appeal is also down to his personality and friendly image outside the ring.

'BIGGER THAN TURPIN'

"It's the Mike Tyson effect. Fans just want to see him," Loeffler told AFP. "A lot of great boxers aren't that likeable, but Gennady is exciting inside the ring and he's likeable outside the ring."

"A big part of it, even if he doesn't speak perfect English, is his personality and respect for opponents and the sport. It's why people generally like to cheer for him."

The odds and statistics are stacked against Brook, who is unaccustomed to the role of underdog after stopping 25 of his 36 opponents and completing three low-risk defences of his IBF belt.

Brook, 30, believes beating Golovkin would surpass any achievement by a British boxer, including Randy Turpin's 1951 points win over the great Sugar Ray Robinson for the world middleweight title. — AFP

UFC CHAMP MIOCIC BEGINS CLEVELAND'S TITLE RUN

CLEVELAND: If not for the likable local hero who dethroned a champion a few months ago, Cleveland's sports title drought might not be over. Stipe Miocic beat LeBron James to the punch.

In May, Miocic went to Brazil and knocked out Fabricio Werdum in the first round to capture the UFC heavyweight title. The victory triggered a run of championships for Cleveland as the AHL's Lake Erie Monsters won the Calder Cup and James led the Cavaliers to an historic comeback over the Golden State Warriors in the NBA Finals, ending a title dearth stretching to 1964.

For Miocic, a Cleveland native who works as a fire fighter and paramedic, starting the string of titles for his hometown was special. "Cleveland needed it," he said. "For 52 years, man, we had nothing. It's something to be proud of. You can say I broke or I didn't break it, I really don't care. I'm just happy we have something to be proud of. Nothing is better than that." Miocic will now become the first Cleveland champion to defend a title as he'll face Alistair Overeem in the main event tonight in UFC 203, which will take place in sold out Quicken Loans Arena, giving the 34-year-old Miocic a distinct home-octagon advantage.

QUICK SMILE

Also on the card is the long-awaited UFC debut of former pro wrestling superstar CM Punk, who at 37 is attempting a transition few would dare attempt. Punk will take on Mickey Gall, a rising 24-year-old welterweight who wanted to fight Punk and will now get his chance. Werdum gets back in action as well for the first time since losing to Miocic against heavyweight Travis Browne, who had some salty words for his opponent during Thursday's news conference.

Miocic has gotten a sampling this week of what he'll experience today. The 6-foot-4, 240-pounder's workouts have drawn big crowds and hundreds of fans were at the news conference, with many of them shouting out encouragement to Miocic, who responded with a quick smile and clenched fist. It's been a whirlwind summer for Miocic, who in addition to taking batting practice with the Cleveland

Indians, riding in the Cavs' downtown parade attended by nearly one million people, got married. His engagement this weekend with Overeem has some parallels to his fight against Werdum. In front of 45,000 of his countrymen, Werdum came out aggressively and was off balance as he chased after Miocic, who landed a right-handed punch to the Brazilian's chin. Werdum may have been slightly overconfident on his home turf, and he paid for it.

Miocic promises he won't make the same mistake. "It doesn't matter where I fight," he said. "It could be Cleveland. It could be Brazil again. I'm here for business. I'll walk into the octagon and all I'll think about is me and Alistair, and that's all I care about. No one else is getting in there with us, so I'm going to come out the winner and that's the way it's going to be."

Overeem has spent the past few days saying he's hungrier than Cleveland's champ and feels Miocic may be distracted by being home. A former kickboxing champion, Overeem says fighting on familiar ground can be helpful - and a detriment.

"It does give you a little extra boost," the Dutchman said. "It does give you a little more shivers. On the other hand, there's the extra appearances you've got to do and everyone wants a piece of you. It depends on how you handle it. I think with my 86 fights and my 22 years of training, I've been able to handle it very well. It's going to be curious how Stipe handles it. Stipe seems very professional, but we'll see how he handles it today." — AP