# Torre’s playbook vs the Dutertes

https://opinion.inquirer.net/185153/torres-playbook-vs-the-dutertes

Two Sundays ago, Gen. Nicolas Torre III taught Filipinos a crash course on “How to Deal with Bullies 101.” Too bad his student, acting Davao City Mayor Sebastian “Baste” Duterte, skipped class and flew off to Singapore instead.

Even so, the big lesson imparted by the chief of the Philippine National Police wasn’t lost on the drama-loving public, and it’s one that political leaders would be foolish to ignore: You don’t have to take the high road when dealing with a Duterte—you only have to call their bluff.

Despite the conspicuous absence of former president Rodrigo Duterte’s son, Torre’s PR stunt turned into a knockout success. Baste’s no-show didn’t spoil the show; rather, it became the whole point of it. Without a word said or a punch thrown, Torre deftly exposed Baste as all bark and no bite.

But there was something else: The police chief showed the entire country that members of the Duterte family do not have a monopoly on political theatrics. And for a change, such gimmickry could be used for something good: The charity match billed as “Boxing for a Cause: Laban Para sa Nasalanta (fight for the ravaged)” raised over P20 million in cash and assorted donations for typhoon victims.

At the end of it, Torre walked away to a rapturous applause carrying a symbolic win that must have felt as gratifying as when he escorted his opponent’s father to that fateful flight to The Hague, Netherlands, in March.

## Another public tantrum

The backstory reads like a soap opera. It all began on July 20 when Baste Duterte, speaking on his podcast, dared Torre to a fistfight, clearly aggrieved over the PNP chief’s role in arresting his father on March 11 on the strength of an International Criminal Court warrant, and pursuing their family’s spiritual adviser Apollo Quiboloy on child sex trafficking and other criminal charges last year.

Anyone else caught in the Dutertes’ crosshairs would have dismissed the challenge as just another public tantrum. But rather than turning the other cheek, the clever Torre turned Baste’s tantrum into an opportunity.

“I responded to him because our fellow citizens’ humanity is being taken away. That’s not allowed. It’s not just because you’re in power that you’re allowed to do whatever bullying you want to do against people with less power,” Torre said, explaining why he accepted the mayor’s dare and upgraded it into a sanctioned 12-round boxing match, complete with licensed referees, medical teams, and even round girls.

Meanwhile, Baste, who remarked at one point that he had been “waiting to beat up a monkey,” prompting Torre to ask if that was a dig at his dark skin, was nowhere to be found when the bell rang at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum in Manila on July 27.

## Not a pointless spectacle

Thousands of spectators, among them Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla, showed up. Torre was declared the winner by default after a dramatic 10-second countdown. The crowd erupted in cheers.

To top it all off, Baste couldn’t hide behind the excuse that it was just a pointless spectacle, because the match, or nonmatch, actually helped people. Torre announced that over P300,000 came from ticket sales alone, while businesses donated more than P16 million in cash and P4.2 million relief goods. Even boxing icon Manny Pacquiao gifted one of his championship belts, to be auctioned off for victims of Typhoons “Crising,” “Dante,” and “Emong.” The proceeds were to be turned over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Philippine Red Cross.

Baste, in damage control mode, had claimed he had secured travel authority from the Department of the Interior and Local Government since July 20. To which Torre replied bluntly: “That wasn’t the condition he gave when we first invited him.”

## ‘The bully ran away’

Then, Baste kept moving the goalposts and adding conditions to the fight, such as a mandatory hair follicle drug test on all public officials, including the President. In a subsequent Facebook Live, Baste proposed new dates for the boxing match, but this time, with “no cameras” and “no gloves.”

Then, in a breathtaking about-face, he claimed he never dared Torre to a fight in the first place: “I never challenged you. What I really said was that if we were in a fight, I would beat you up. I didn’t challenge you, idiot.”

“I have a lot of work, and this is not worth responding to,” Torre said. “We should just let him be in his own world.”

And there it was: a new playbook for dealing with Duterte-style antics. There’s no need to stoop to their level. Stand your ground, meet the challenge, and never interrupt your enemy while they’re making a mistake.

By putting Baste in his place and beating him at his own game, the PNP chief reminded Filipinos that bullies often fold when they’re confronted. As Torre put it: “We stood up to the bully, but the bully ran away.”

For a nation long held hostage by political machismo and authoritarian posturing—by Duterte clan members and others of similar ilk—there couldn’t be a more satisfying punchline.