



Friday Night Fighter: Gaspar "Indio" Ortega and the Golden Age of Television Boxing

Troy Rondinone

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Friday Night Fighter relives a lost moment in American postwar history, when boxing ruled as one of the nation's most widely televised sports. During the 1950s and 1960s, viewers tuned in weekly, sometimes even daily, to watch widely-recognized fighters engage in primordial battle, with the Gillette Cavalcade of Sports Friday Night Fights being the most popular fight show. Troy Rondinone follows the dual narratives of the Friday Night Fights show and the individual story of Gaspar "Indio" Ortega, a boxer who appeared on primetime network television more than almost any other boxer in history. From humble beginnings growing up poor in Tijuana, Mexico, Ortega personified the phenomenon of postwar boxing at its greatest, appearing before audiences of millions to battle the biggest names of the time, such as Carmen Basilio, Tony DeMarco, Chico Vejar, Benny "Kid" Paret, Emile Griffith, Kid Gavilan, Florentino Fernández, and Luis Manuel Rodríguez.

Rondinone explores the factors contributing to the success of televised boxing, including the rise of television entertainment, the role of a "reality" blood sport, Cold War masculinity, changing attitudes toward race in America, and the influence of organized crime. At times evoking the drama and spectacle of the Friday Night Fights themselves, this volume is a lively examination of a time in history when Americans crowded around their sets to watch the main event.

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