



Ali vs. Inoki: The Forgotten Fight That Inspired Mixed Martial Arts and Launched Sports Entertainment

By Josh Gross

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“Inoki can use his bare fists. He can use karate. This is serious. There’s \$10 million involved. I wouldn’t pull a fraud on the public. This is real. There’s no plan. The blood. The holds. The pain. Everything is going to be real. I’m not here in this time of my life to come out with some phony action. I want you to know this is real.”

—Muhammad Ali, June 14, 1976, *The Tonight Show*

On June 26, 1976, Muhammad Ali fought in a mixed-rules contest against iconic pro wrestling champion Antonio Inoki for the so-called “martial arts championship of the world.” Broadcast from Tokyo to a potential audience of 1.4 billion in 34 countries, the spectacle foreshadowed and, in many ways, led to the rise of mixed martial arts as a major sport.

The unique contest was controversial and panned by wrestling and boxing supporters alike, but the real action was behind the scenes. Egos, competing interests, and a general sense of apprehension over what would happen in the ring led to hodgepodge rules thrown together at the last minute. Bizarre plans to “save” Ali if the fight got out of hand were even concocted.

In *Ali vs. Inoki*, author Josh Gross gets inside Ali’s head leading up to the match by resurrecting pre-fight interviews. Gross also introduces us to Inoki, the most famous face in Japan who was instrumental in shaping modern mixed martial arts.

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Editorial Review

Review

"It's only fitting the Josh Gross—an early MMA adopter and as fine a writer/reporter as the sport has—gives us this dispatch of an original boxer-versus-grappler contest. Our only question: when's the movie coming out?"

—**L. Jon Wertheim, executive editor, *Sports Illustrated***

"If you're interested in Muhammad Ali, the history of combat sports or pro wrestling, this book is a must-have in your collection."

—**Denny Burkholder, features writer for CBS Sports**

About the Author

Josh Gross is considered a pioneer of mixed martial arts journalism. His reporting spans MMA's shift from an underground, counterculture free-for-all to a multibillion dollar industry regarded as one of the world's fastest growing sports today. During 15 years in the business, Gross can claim to be the only reporter who covered MMA full-time for *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN. Josh is known for investigative works, and he hosts a popular podcast, *Gross Point Blank*.

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