

Calendar

Triple Threat

Mixed Martial Arts

It's not yet a legal sport here in California, even though you could call this state its Mecca, says Eric Delfierro. Officially the sport is called mixed martial arts. Among the guys who train for it — at the San Diego Fight Club in El Cajon (where Delfierro works out), at 5150 Fight Club in Imperial Beach, and at City Boxing downtown — it's known as MMA.

"It's huge in Japan, where it fills stadiums with 70,000-plus people," Delfierro, a 33-year-old firefighter, says by cell phone early one morning just as he ends his shift. "At the MGM in Las

Vegas last weekend, they sold out a 13,000-person arena. So it's slowly but

surely becoming a mainstream sport here."

Delfierro, a part-time promoter of the sport, adds that it's legal in other states besides Nevada — naming Florida, Colorado, New Jersey, and Arizona. It's also legal on Indian reservations. California just needs to spend the money to set it up, he says.

The sport got its first exposure in the United States in 1993 with the birth

country of origin, Thailand; and jujitsu, which originated in Japan, then migrated to Brazil. "And the true athlete of this sport is the one who practices all three," says Delfierro.

When to use which style of fighting — that's what competitors must decide. "It comes down to a chess match," he says. "It's a thinking man's game. If your opponent is a better boxer, you better try taking him to the ground for 'ground-and-pound,' where you're just basically on top of the guy landing strikes. If he's a better wrestler, you'll want to keep him standing. The game is about imposing your will on the other guy. You want to make him fight in the style that favors you."

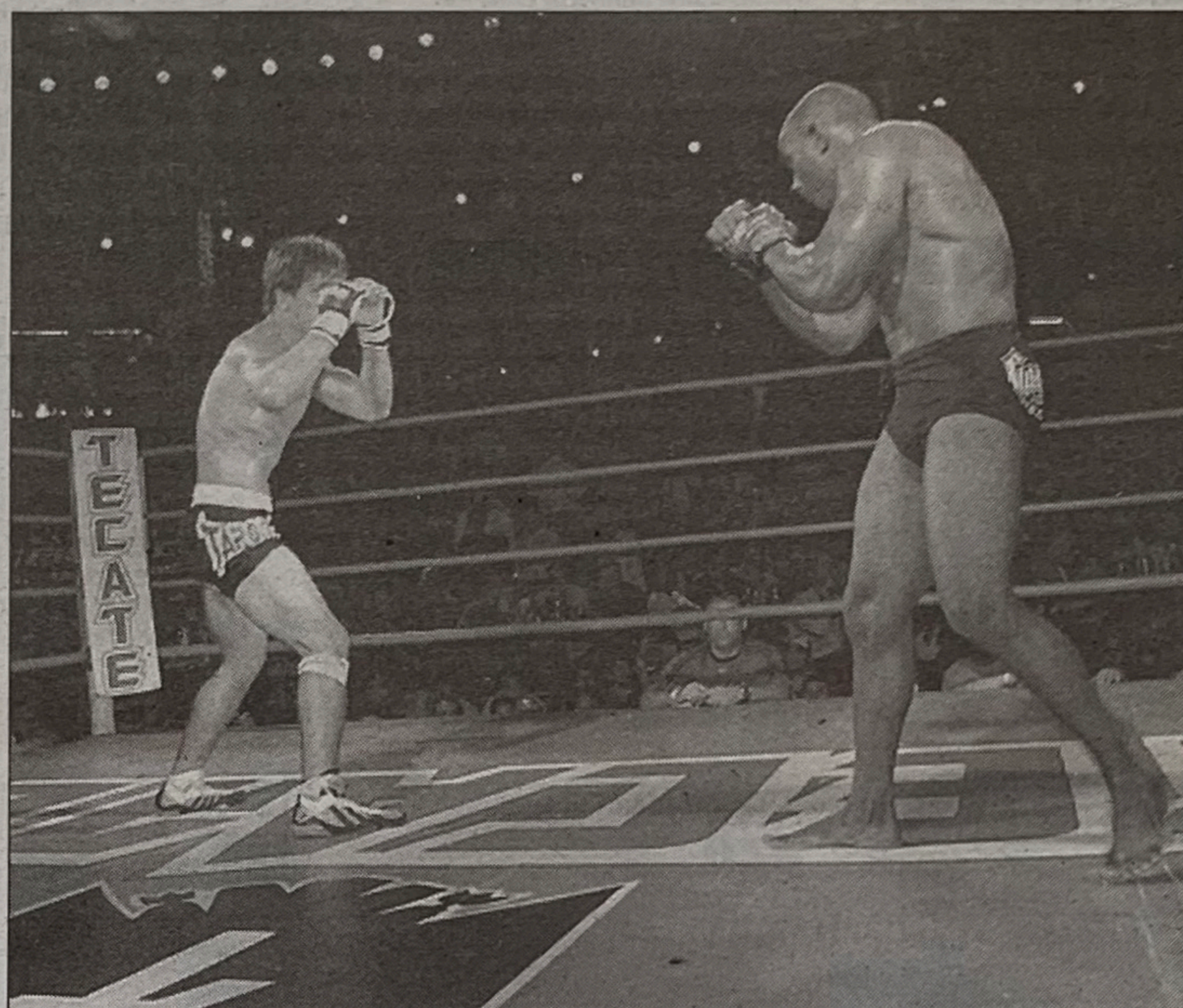
Competitors wear the now-official gloves of the sport, which weigh four ounces. By way of comparison, most pro-boxing gloves are eight or ten ounces. The only other protection: mouth guard and cup.

Delfierro is the match-up maker for his venue, Total Combat, which takes place every eight or ten weeks in Tijuana. It's he who decides what will make for an exciting fight. A knockout in the first five seconds obviously isn't too swift; guys are matched up on the basis of their level of fight experience and their training. "so they won't just get run over."

Most guys who will be fighting on Sunday are under 25. That's not necessarily because the sport favors young people; it's because, Delfierro says, his venue is "a place to begin." ("My show is a new show, and there are a lot of guys trying to get exposure — trying to move to

the next level.") Some fighters in their 40s are among the most recognizable figures in the sport. Because you need smarts to excel in this? "Exactly."

When mixed martial arts first started attracting competitors and audiences, there were few rules, and it had a reputation for being a bloody free-for-all. (Not until the third Ultimate Fighting Championship, for example, was the referee allowed to stop fights.) Gradually, the rules evolved that



Fred Leavy vs. Dante Cortola

allowed it to go legal. Fouls are now called on fighters who head butt, eye gouge, bite, pull hair, fish hook (finger an opponent's nostril, for example), kick the head of a grounded opponent, knee or stomp the head of same, spit, use abusive language, or attack an opponent during a break. Fighters who are the antithesis of all this — who display timidity, i.e., avoid contact with an opponent, intentionally or consistently drop their mouthpiece, or

fake an injury — are also in violation of the rules.

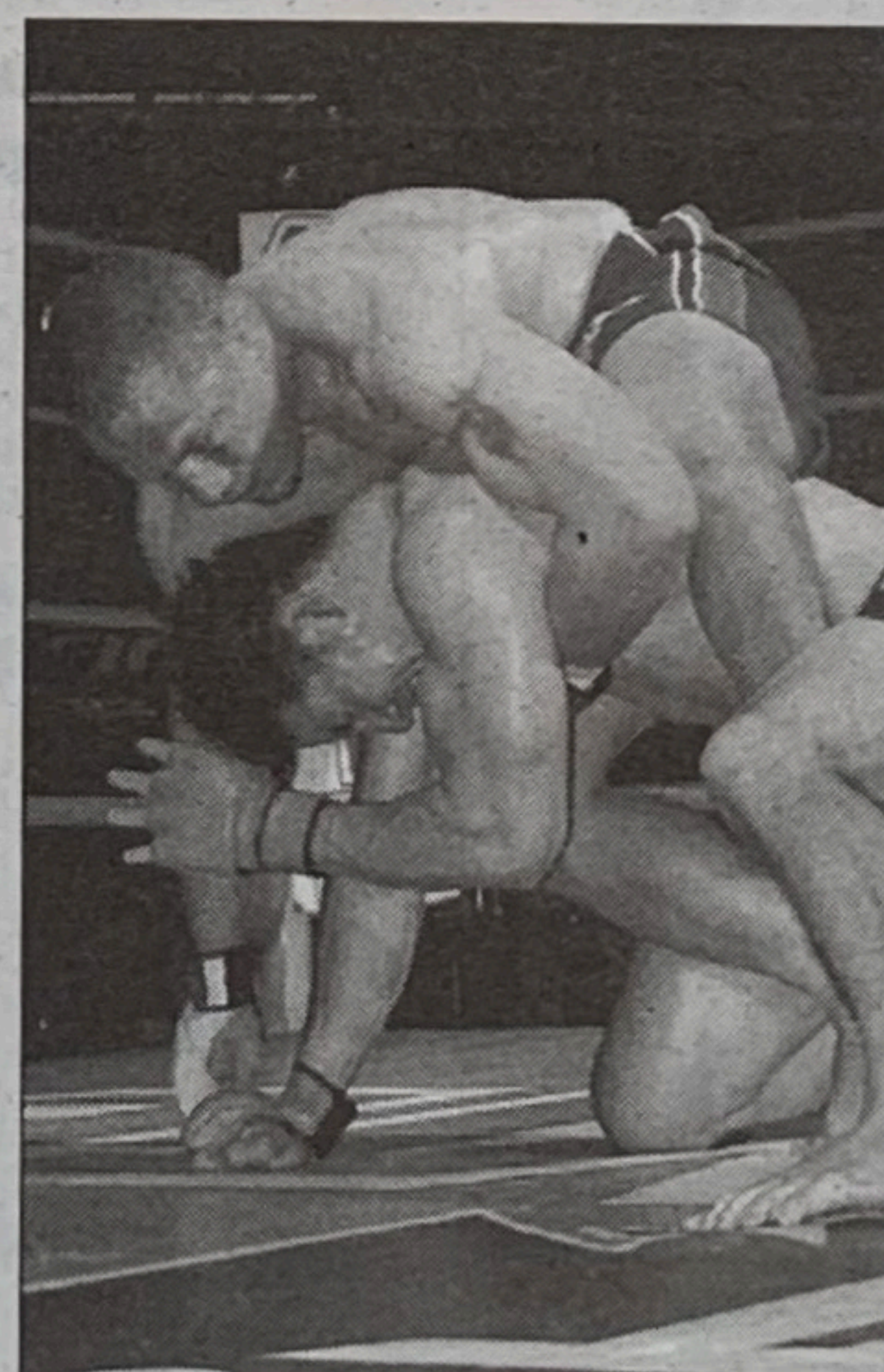
The sport is not restricted to males, says Delfierro, who coaches a female boxer based in TJ as another sideline. But there won't be any women competing this time. Instead, there will be the usual women performing as go-go dancers, the Combat Dolls, in between the fights and at intermission.

Diana Ocampo, the event coordinator, wants people to know that Total Combat has a whole "club vibe." It's not just that you sit there and watch fights, she says. "We have music in between the fights. We have an intermission show of up-and-coming local bands. It's a whole production — entertainment for the non-fans."

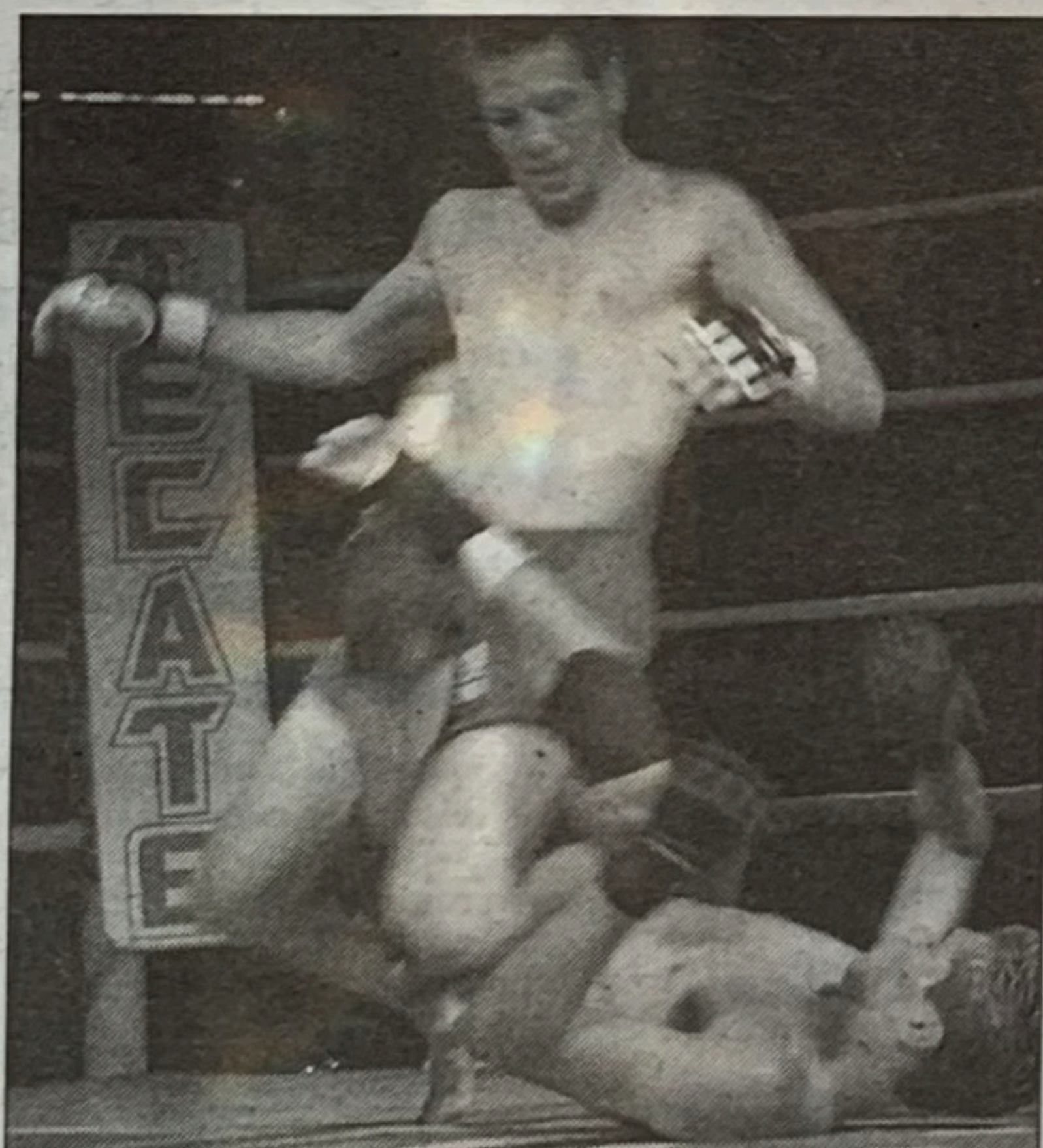
Following the fights, there's an after party at Club Animale (3rd Street and Avenida Revolución), and a Total Combat ticket stub will get you in free.

— Jeanne Schinto

Mixed Martial Arts: "Total Combat 5"
Sunday, September 5
5:30 p.m., doors open;
7:30 p.m., first fight
Baby Rock Night Club
1482 Diego Rivera
Zona Río, Tijuana
Cost: \$30-\$55
Info and reservations: 619-254-6953 or www.totalcombat.org



Charles Diaz vs. Juan Aguilar



Yahir Reyes vs. Chris David

of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, a pay-per-view event that advertised itself as a "style versus style" spectacle. It pitted the champions of various martial arts — karate, jujitsu, boxing, kickboxing, wrestling, sumo, and so on — against each other to determine which styles were the most effective. Since then, three styles have dominated, producing the most wins. They are wrestling; kickboxing, called muay thai in its

Local Events
 page 83

Classical Music
 page 98

Art Museums & Galleries
 page 98

Theater
 page 99

Pop Music
 page 104

Restaurants
 page 135

Movies
 page 150

LOCAL EVENTS