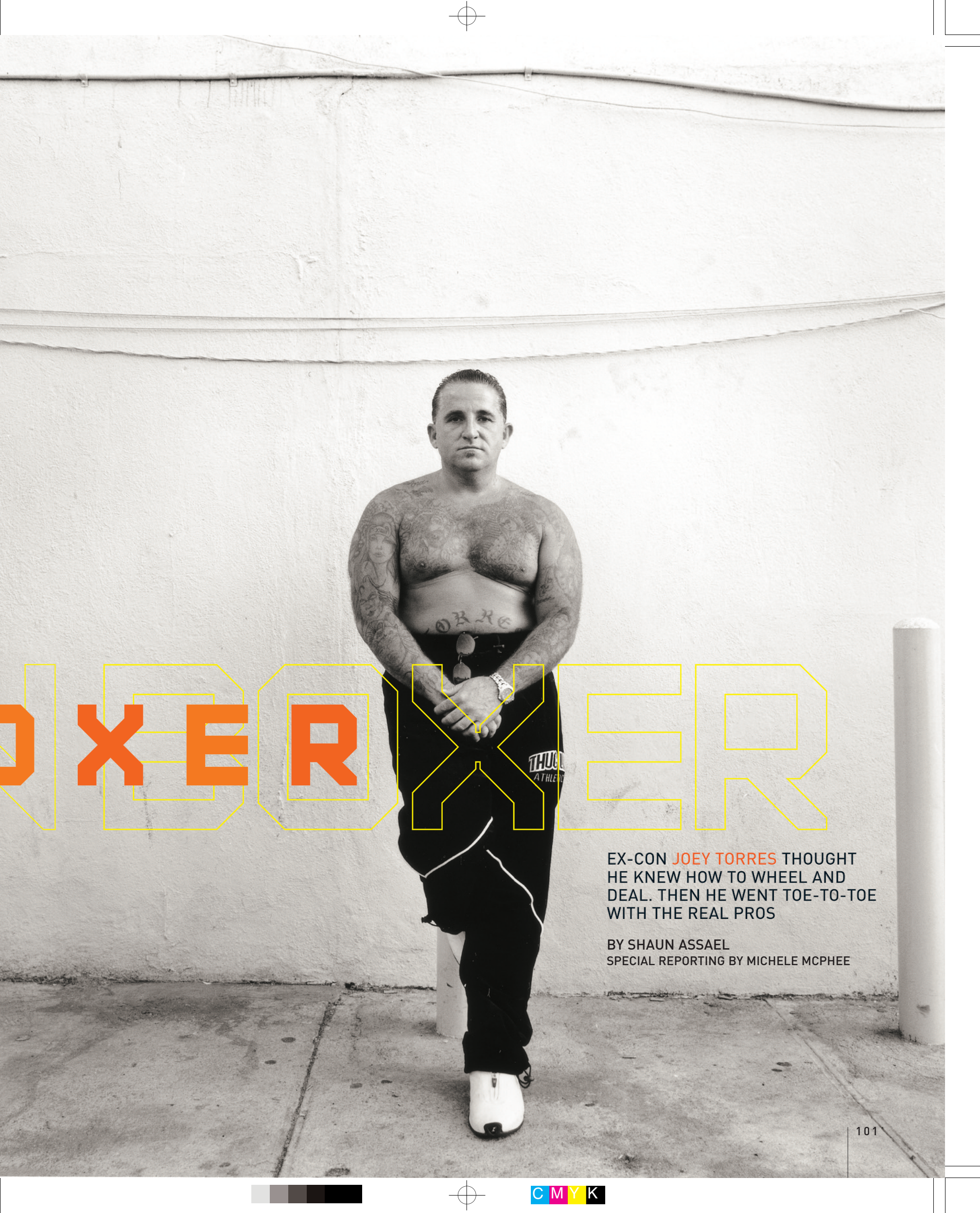


SHADOWBOX



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DOXER

EX-CON **JOEY TORRES** THOUGHT HE KNEW HOW TO WHEEL AND DEAL. THEN HE WENT TOE-TO-TOE WITH THE REAL PROS

BY SHAUN ASSAEL
SPECIAL REPORTING BY MICHELE MCPHEE



JOEY TORRES fights through traffic on the Vegas strip, rushing to a meeting at the Suncoast Hotel. He isn't as famous as the faces that stare down at him from the billboards. But after spending half his life in prison, the 41-year-old is about to get his shot.

It's spring of 2002, and on April 27, the once-promising amateur will be making his pro debut on the undercard at Anaheim's Arrowhead Pond. CNN is covering his comeback. Mike Tyson waves to him when they cross paths at Caesar's. Actor Ed Burns drops by for a photo op. Emmitt Smith and Paul Molitor too. A screenplay about his life lies half-finished in his hotel room.

At the Suncoast, Joey walks into a room on the 10th floor. He knows he has two things to hawk, and he's already sold one: his body, to Top Rank, the star-making machine that is staging his fight. Now he wants to offer his soul.

He doesn't trust Top Rank, one of the nation's two largest boxing promotion companies, or its owner, Bob Arum. Nor does he trust the LA district attorney's office, which wants to throw him back into jail. Joey is looking for protection. "Just give me a wire," he says to the two men in the room. "I'll make a case for you."



His fight with Williams convinced the FBI Joey had something to sell.

The men—FBI agents—consider the offer and the man making it. Joey has prison tattoos covering his flabby body, a nervous twitch, coke-bottle glasses and a case of hepatitis that has turned his olive skin to a pale shade of yellow. A court file quotes his father describing Joey as "a very skillful fabricator of stories who can weave fantasy and fiction together." Then again, there is something magnetic about Joey, a ruthless charm that intrigues. "You prove your fight was fixed," says one agent, "and you'll get what you want."

JOEY PUNCHES the air in a Doubletree Hotel suite in Anaheim, his knuckles bound with yellow

wraps, and stares at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. He grimaces at the gut that hangs over his purple trunks, sad testimony to hours spent at the bar instead of at the gym. A welterweight when he last climbed into the ring, he now carries 199 pounds on his 5'6" frame.

He walks back into the bedroom and looks at his manager, Sean Gibbons, well aware the FBI has planted a recording device in the room. The fight at The Pond is a few hours away but there's work to be done. "They're going to take my blood and find it, the hepatitis," he tells Gibbons, reminding him of what is already public record in his prison file. "No one is going to let me take this fight."

Gibbons, a 35-year-old up-and-coming matchmaker at Top Rank, is calm. "Don't worry, don't worry," he says. "I'll take the tests for you.

pulled over his head. Molitor and Davis, his cornermen, walk behind him. All three drink in the chants: *Joey, Joey, Joey*. Torres climbs into the ring and stares up at the lights. "After 23 years of incarceration for a crime he always maintained he did not commit, he makes his long awaited professional debut. Ladies and gentlemen, *Joey Torrrres*." Tears stream down a face so lined and puffy it looks like it belongs to a man 10 years older than his 41.

The bell rings. Joey lunges at Williams, throwing a roundhouse left that misses badly. Williams' counter doesn't. Five seconds into his comeback, Joey is face-down on the canvas. *Don't black out*, he tells himself. *Stay awake!* He staggers to his feet. "You okay, you okay?" referee Raul Caiz Jr. asks. Joey nods, his eyes glazed.

Williams retreats and covers as Joey moves in,

"JUST GIVE ME A WIRE I'LL MAKE A CASE FOR YOU."

Anyway, it's all taken care of. You can't lose."

Joey's opponent lounges on a couch against the wall. Perry Williams is a 24-year-old Oklahoma kickboxer of marginal skills who has lost his only pro fight. What happens next depends on whom you ask. According to law enforcement sources who have heard what came through that wire, Gibbons was taking no chances with his feel-good storyline. He motions for Williams to get up. After throwing a series of shadow punches, Gibbons turns to him and delivers a body shot. "Then you go down like this," he says. Spokesmen for Top Rank and Gibbons, who has since been dismissed by the company, deny the bout was fixed.

Just before 6 p.m., a limo pulls up to the hotel, and Top Rank's latest comeback kid climbs in. He grabs a glass of Courvoisier to get him through the 1½-mile ride. Torres vs. Williams is the second fight of the night. Just before Joey enters the ring, the arena rolls a video for the crowd of 5,000 and the TV audience tuned to KCAL. It's a heart-wrenching story Top Rank is selling. How a promising young boxer fell prey to gangs and drugs. How the police arrested him for a murder he didn't commit. How he copped to five years in juvie to avoid a long sentence. And how, just days before his release, a judge sent him to a state pen for 25-to-life. There, he helped kids on drugs and uncovered an obscure law that got him out after 23 years. The scene cuts to ex-boxing great Carlos Palomino, who confirms Joey's talent, and ex-major leaguer Eric Davis, an old friend, who testifies to his good heart.

Cue Joey, who walks out of the tunnel, through the crowd and up to the ring, a hooded sweatshirt

struggling to land soft body shots. The two slow-dance for almost two minutes, Joey throwing weak hooks, Williams catching them on his arms and gloves. At 1:05 of the round, Williams falls from a glancing blow to his left side, gets up and falls again from a slow-motion punch to the same spot. "You have to wonder if Williams wants to fight at all," the ringside announcer says as the bell rings.

Round 2. Joey throws another series of lunging punches, and 39 seconds in, one catches Williams in the ribs. He slips to the canvas, writhing. The ref counts him out. Joey struts to his corner. Chants of "bulls—, bulls—" echo in the arena as a doctor shines a flashlight into Williams' eyes.

After being declared the winner by knockout, Joey shuffles to the middle of the ring for an interview. Announcer Rich Marotta offers praise for his work and condolences for his not having a worthy opponent. Asked if he thought Williams gave an honest effort, Joey leans into the mike. "I hit him with good body shots," he says. "People don't know what a good body shot can do."

He's out of breath, his chest heaves. "No matter what anyone says, I made it," he says. "I made it."

FOR JOEY, it was always a thin line between making it and making it up. Born Kim Joseph Torrey, he was the youngest of four children raised by a Sicilian mother and Puerto Rican father, a VP for an ambulance company who changed the family name to blend into the middle-class San Fernando Valley community of Panorama City. The family lived in a three-bedroom ranch, vacationed in Europe and attended church regularly.



But Joey never fit in. He stole money from his folks and left home, passing himself off as a leader of a Chicano gang, the 18th Street Boys. "No one ever knew whether to take this claim seriously," a probation officer wrote. "It was highly unlikely an LA gang would even speak to a middle-class Caucasian youth from the San Fernando Valley." He told friends he'd turned pro at 17; he hadn't. He told them he was supporting himself with his boxing; he was actually working in his brother's pizza parlor.

Joey lived two lives: one on the streets of South

a police cruiser rolled past Washington and Rosemead boulevards in East LA and picked up a 19-year-old kid who matched the sketch of a man wanted in an armed robbery. The cops had a lot of questions for the kid known as Boxer, real name Joey. And his pal, Edward Santana, brought in by the cops the same night, was happy to supply answers. Yes, he'd lent Joey a .25-caliber automatic like the one used in a week-old murder. Yes, his pal had confessed to the deed. Santana also claimed Joey told him, "I hope the f—er dies."

But Santana was the prosecution's only witness and the DA was nervous enough about his testimony to offer Joey a deal: five years in juvenile hall.

Joey took the deal. He never imagined he'd be back in court two years later, after his jailers seized a letter of his they claimed contained a coded request for a gun. Just like that, Joey was sentenced to 25-to-life. He was hardly the worst guy on a cell block that included Charles Manson, and he proved it the day he saw an inmate trying to rape a female guard. He pulled the guy away, only to suffer a beating in return before the guards could rescue him. Joey got a commendation for his file and a rep as a stoolie.

To protect him, Joey was transferred to a Nevada prison, then to one in New Mexico. There, he booked bets and covered his torso with ink. But he also began a chapter of Boxers Against Drugs, writing hundreds of letters and using the prison phone to recruit pro athletes for charity events. He was the voice of what-might-have-been calling (collect, of course), reminding the celebs how lucky they were. Joey recruited Davis, whom he'd met back in South Central, and Darryl Strawberry, whom he reached on the dugout phone in Dodger Stadium. Molitor, Smith, Palomino ... they all agreed to help, letting Joey book them at card shows, with some of the proceeds going to BAD.

He also spent hours in the prison library, combing the law books for a way out. In early 2001 he found it, an obscure legal maneuver called a petition for *coram nobis*, which allows for a review if a defendant can prove he wasn't made aware of all possible outcomes before he pleaded guilty. The move worked: a judge ordered a new trial, and on Jan. 6, 2002, Molitor posted the \$100,000 bail that let Joey taste freedom for the first time in 23 years. "He was doing good things in prison," Molitor said at the time. "It was the right thing to do."

Joey spent his first night on the outside in a cheap hotel room in downtown LA, with a steak and a woman. He spent his second with his sister



Top Rank may learn to regret the day they welcomed Torres into their offices.

Central, the other in the gym. Between the ropes, he was good enough to win an AAU junior welterweight title in 1976. But Joey couldn't stay out of trouble. He dropped out in the 10th grade, fathered two kids, racked up a half-dozen arrests, one for assault with a deadly weapon. A probation officer wrote that Joey "demonstrated an ability to play both ends against the middle. He's personable, likable and bright, but ... almost a pathological liar."

Around midnight on June 27, 1979, two cops in

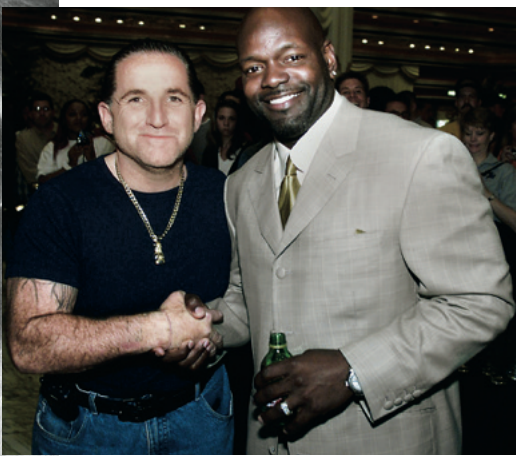
Nissan Frontier "Ultimate Sports Fan" Sweepstakes Presented by Nissan

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Mail the completed Entry Form, with postage affixed, to: Nissan Frontier "Ultimate Sports Fan" Sweepstakes, P.O. Box 745, Georgetown, CT 06829-0745. c) 3" x 5" Entry by U.S. Mail: On a 3" x 5" card/paper, handprint your full name, street address, city, state and zip code (no P.O. Boxes), daytime phone number (with area code), and birth date, and mail it inside a postage prepaid business-size (#10) envelope to: Nissan Frontier "Ultimate Sports Fan" Sweepstakes, P.O. Box 745, Georgetown, CT 06829-0745. d) By Phone: Entrants calling toll-free 888-557-7387 will hear a sequential message; a recorded greeting, abbreviated Official Rules, instructions to participate and tone-signal after which they must record their personal information until 11:59:59 P.M. March 27, 2005. Entrants must speak clearly and provide full name, address and phone number. Entries by any method other than those set forth in this section are void; any use of automated or programmed methods of effecting entry online are prohibited, including but not limited to timed sequential submissions or multiple user name or multiple Internet service provider submissions. No photocopied or mechanically reproduced mailed entries. 4) LIMITATIONS: Each mail-in entry must be postmarked by March 28, 2005 and received by April 1, 2005; and each online entry must be received by 11:59:59 P.M. March 27, 2005. Only one entry per person/household/family/e-mail address (regardless of whether one person has more than one e-mail address or more than one person uses the same e-mail address). 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No prize substitution allowed except, at Sponsor's sole discretion, a prize (or portion of the prize) of equal value may be substituted due to prize unavailability for any reason. The prize will be awarded. Airline carrier's regulations and conditions apply. Trip may not be combined with any other offer and travel may not qualify for frequent flyer miles. Winner and guest must travel together on the same itinerary. Travel companion of the Grand Prize winner must be 18 years of age or older and will be required to execute a Release of Liability prior to departure. Grand Prize winner and travel companion must possess valid travel documents (i.e., valid photo ID) in order to travel. All travel must be completed within one year from the date awarded. Certain restrictions and blackout dates may apply. 6) DRAWING: Sweepstakes begins at 12:01 A.M. February 23, 2004, and ends March 27, 2005. On or about April 11, 2005, in a random drawing, the winner will be selected from all eligible entries received. Odds of winning depend on the total number of eligible entries received. Drawing will be conducted by PHD Marketing Services, LLC, an independent judging organization whose decisions are final on all matters relating to the drawing. 7) WINNER NOTIFICATION: Winner will be notified by telephone and overnight courier (signature required), on or about April 18, 2005. Disqualification and the selection of an alternate winner will result from any of the following: (1) failure of a potential winner to execute and return an Affidavit of Eligibility/Liability/Publicity Release (where legal) within seven (7) days from the date of notification; (2) the return of any notification or prize as undeliverable; or (3) any other noncompliance with the Rules. Grand Prize winner will be required to execute an Affidavit of Eligibility and Liability/Publicity Release (where legal) prior to receiving his/her prize. All local, state and federal taxes on the prize are solely the winner's responsibility. 8) CONDITIONS: Each entrant, by entering this sweepstakes, agrees that: (1) he or she will abide by and be bound by the Rules and the judge's decisions, which are final and binding in all respects; (2) only complete entries are eligible; (3) the entry becomes the Sponsor's sole property and will not be returned; (4) none of the Entities, nor any of their officers, directors, employees, agents or representatives are responsible for claims, injuries, losses or damages of any kind resulting from sweepstakes participation; the awarding, acceptance, use, misuse, possession, loss or misdirection of the prize; participation in any prize-related activity; or from computer downloading any sweepstakes information; (5) winner's acceptance of the prize constitutes the grant of an unconditional right to use winner's name, address (city & state only), voice, likeness, photograph, biographical and prize information and/or statements about the promotion for any publicity, advertising and promotional purposes without additional compensation, except where prohibited by law; (6) in the event the online portion of the sweepstakes becomes technically corrupted in any way, electronically or otherwise, such that it cannot be conducted as originally planned, the Sponsor has the right to cancel, terminate or suspend the online portion of the sweepstakes and, in such event, to select the winner by random drawing from among all eligible mail-in entries received and all eligible online entries received up to and/or after (as appropriate) such time of cancellation, termination or suspension; (7) any portion of the prize not accepted by the winner will be forfeited; (8) Sponsor is not responsible for any inability of the winner to accept the prize for any reason; and (9) CAUTION: Any attempt by an individual to deliberately damage any Web site, undermine the legitimate administration and operation of this sweepstakes or to commit other acts of fraud is a violation of Federal and State Criminal and Civil Laws. Should such an attempt be made, the Sponsor reserves the right to seek damages from any such entrant to the fullest extent permitted by Law and to disqualify such entrant from the sweepstakes. 9) LIABILITY RELEASE: By participating in this sweepstakes or receiving a prize, entrants (and in particular, winners) agree to release and to indemnify and hold harmless the Entities and each of their respective related companies, and all of its or their company's officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the "Released Parties") for any liability, injury, death, loss or damages to entrant or any person or entity (including legal costs and reasonable attorneys' fees, if any, incurred in defense of the same), including without limitation damage to personal or real property, caused in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, by participation in this sweepstakes (or related activities) or the acceptance, possession or use/misuse of a prize (including any travel or activity related to the prize). 10) PRIVACY: Personally identifiable information that is submitted by entrants as part of this sweepstakes will be used to administer the sweepstakes, select prize winner and fulfill prize, and will be treated in accordance with Sponsor's privacy policy accessible on its website at www.newlinks.com/ESPN-NISSANUltimatefan.com. 11) WINNER/RULES REQUESTS: For name of winner (available after April 28, 2005) and/or the Rules, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to (as appropriate): Nissan Frontier "Ultimate Sports Fan" Sweepstakes Winners List, or to Nissan Frontier "Ultimate Sports Fan" Sweepstakes Rules, P.O. Box 745, Georgetown, CT 06829-0745, to be received by April 28, 2005. 12) ADMINISTRATOR: PHD Marketing Services LLC, 54 Portland Avenue, Redding, CT 06896-3113. 13) COPYRIGHT NOTICE: Copyright 2005 Nissan North America, Inc.



in Santa Clarita. Then he hopped a flight to Vegas and headed straight for the offices of Top Rank. Its chief matchmaker, Bruce Trampler, was one of the people he'd called from prison. "I want to fight again," Joey said. Trampler looked at the chubby ex-con in an Hawaiian shirt and saw the angle. Top Rank had made Butterbean an everyman star. They could certainly sell this hard-luck fairy tale. After a long detour, Joey Torres had a four-fight deal and a future. He'd made it back.

IT'S ONE week after the bout at The Pond, May 5, Joey's 42nd birthday. He's back in Vegas at the Suncoast Hotel for another meeting with the FBI.



A square-jawed, solidly built veteran agent named Henry Schlumpf has a contract that promises to pay his new informant \$6,000 a month, plus expenses. Schlumpf also brandishes the keys to a leased Camry. Joey rolls his eyes. "Can't you afford something better than that?" he asks. "We don't want anything too conspicuous," the fed replies.

The new scheme is dubbed Operation Matchbook, but the original plan to let Joey infiltrate Top Rank as a boxer is out. The Internet is filled with rumors about his bout being fixed, and California's athletic commission is investigating. No one is going to let Joey put on the gloves. Still, Top Rank's PR machine has made the undefeated boxer an instant celeb, on call to glam up Friday night fights. And Gibbons has taken a liking to Joey, using him as his personal muscle and gofer while Trampler, a wannabe screenwriter, has visions of turning Joey's life into a movie. So Joey will be the FBI's man inside Top Rank's offices instead of the ring.

Schlumpf tells Joey he's setting him up at The Meridian, a low-slung singles complex that is popular with showgirls and, more to the point, just a block from Top Rank's headquarters. His new apartment, which overlooks an hourglass pool, will be decked out with rented furniture, fight posters—and a recording device in a clock sitting on the living room TV.

The Vegas FBI office had recently helped indict a South Carolina promoter for running a fall-guy factory that sent out palookas to pad the records of favored fighters. Schlumpf wants to know if Top Rank is up to the same: are they putting up boxers from Latin America, maybe even illegal immigrants, who fight under fake names, forged medical records and weights fudged by rigged scales? He wants to investigate what he considers to have been intentional mismatches that endangered the fighters and undermined the sport.

Schlumpf is particularly interested in Gibbons. The slick manager, who favors tailored suits and doing business in VIP lounges, made his name lugging a group of fighters across the Midwest in the 1990s. He changed their names so often his fights were thought of as jokes. One boxing magazine stopped recording the results because no one could tell who was actually in the ring. Even Gibbons' crew had dubbed itself the Knucklehead Boxing

exchange his recorder for a fresh one.

He is useful. Problem is, he isn't reliable. He drinks too much Courvoisier, snorts too much coke, chases too many hookers. And he drives Schlumpf crazy when he doesn't show to make a drop. *Sorry, it won't happen again*, Joey keeps promising. But of course it does.

Joey is sitting at The Meridian's pool on an early July day when Schlumpf walks up with a new addition to the operation. He's huge—6'1" and 310 pounds, easy. "Joey, meet Big Frankie," Schlumpf says. "From the NYPD. He's your new partner."

Frank Manzione's back story is good. The undercover vet had recently infiltrated the Genovese crime family, and was such a convincing hood the mobsters he pinched still had no idea he was the law. Joey sees the thick black hair and shiny silk shirt, and hears an accent out of the hardscrabble neighborhood of Red Hook, Brooklyn. "You look connected," he says. "We should use that."

TOP RANK MADE BUTTERBEAN A STAR. THEY COULD SELL THIS HARD-LUCK FAIRY TALE.



Torres convinced Smith (above left) and Molitor that the law had done him wrong.

Club. Now several were fighting for Top Rank. "This guy could be a weak link," the agent tells Joey.

Joey takes quickly to life at Gibbons' side. Together, they party their way through Vegas, throwing around money at The Light at Bellagio, drinking at the Foundation Room atop Mandalay Bay, chowing down at Charlie Palmer's steakhouse. They hang out at The Meridian, then fly across the country to work Friday night fights that Top Rank is producing for the Spanish-language station Telefuturo. Some nights, Joey works as a cornerman, an FBI recording device hidden on his hip capturing the action. Afterward, he slips away from Gibbons long enough to meet a contact and

The three concoct a cover. Joey will introduce Big Frankie as his mob-connected cousin who runs a trucking company back east and wants to get into the fight game. Manzione will have plenty of cash and a heavily muscled driver, another agent. The FBI will rent a warehouse protected by razor wire and filled with swag—cases of vodka, racks of clothes, motorcycles, furs—so local thieves will think he's a fence. Big Frankie calls the front YGJ Inc.: You're Going to Jail.

Frankie quickly bores into Gibbons, who likes the cop's money and flash. Joey loves it too. With Frankie at his side, there's no restaurant they can't crash, no touch too lavish to keep up appearances. One day Frankie pulls up to Top Rank in a canary-yellow Porsche. "Nice," Joey says. "Damn right," Frankie replies. And with a "cousin" in the mob, a whole new range of opportunities presents itself. "The FBI wanted me to be a bad guy, so that's the role I played," Joey will say later. "I was buying drugs, ditching cars for insurance money, threatening people."

Now that Operation Matchbox is up and running, Joey isn't worried when he makes his next bail appearance in August. He's so sure the feds have his back he doesn't even tell his own lawyer he's undercover. (The feds don't either.) When the judge agrees to let him remain free, he laughs to himself, thinking: this is all crap. I ain't ever going back.

the ornate Court of Appeals, dressed in an Armani suit with his hair slicked back, and sees that his lawyer, Verna Wefald, is outgunned. Frohreich and two other prosecutors are hammering away, and the judge is clearly listening: *Didn't Torres already appeal his sentence 20 years ago? Why should he get a second bite of the apple?*

Joey shifts in his seat nervously. This isn't what he expected. "You can never tell," Wefald tells him when the hearing ends, but Joey is barely lis-



tening. He jumps in a rental car and drives back to Vegas, where he finds Frankie sitting by the pool at The Meridian. "You gotta help me, Frankie," he says. "I'm in real trouble here."

"The lady DA f—ed you," Frankie says, playing Joey like he plays the guys at Top Rank. "I'll see what I can do."

Four days later, Joey's fears are confirmed: "The trial court is directed to reinstate defendant's first-degree guilty plea ... and the sentence of 25 years to life," reads the ruling. Wefald insists it's not over; she's uncovered evidence that Joey's chief accuser was also a suspect, something that didn't come out at trial, and gets the court to allow her client to stay out on bail while she works on an appeal. They both know, though, that the clock is ticking.

Joey spends the next few months hanging around Top Rank, but the vibe is different. Frankie is now in so deep, *Boxing Digest* has named him the 24th-most influential man in the sport. Joey knows the FBI would rather he get the hell out of town. All it would take is one coke-filled night for him to get mad at Frankie and blow his cover. But Joey also understands that if he wants that \$6,000 to keep coming each month, he has to stay quiet.

One day in July, Joey is in Gibbons' office when he hears a boxer has dropped out of a match in Utah against Billy Zumbun, a heavyweight Top Rank is pushing up the ladder. "You want it?" Joey is asked. "Nah," he replies. "I'm in worse shape than before." So Gibbons reaches out to one of his best losers, 34-year-old Brad Rone. The gap-toothed, 259-pound journeyman is so beat up after

25 straight defeats—his last to Zumbun three weeks earlier—that he's been barred from fighting in Nevada. But he takes the \$800 and the fight on less than a week's notice—and stays with it even after learning his mom has died. Joey is partying with Gibbons in Vegas when word reaches them: Rone has had a heart attack in the ring. He's dead.

As questions swirl about Rone, Joey feels the walls closing in around Top Rank. He hops in a car to drive cross-country to see a girlfriend in St. Louis. Then he buys a ticket for Mexico and goes swimming with the dolphins in Cozumel. But on Sept. 14, the clock runs out; his motion for a new trial is denied. Joey has to be in LA to turn himself in two days later. When he arrives at the Vegas airport, he looks at the departure board to find his connection. Then he sees another to Costa Rica. Screw it, he thinks, and heads to Central America.

Schlumpf and Big Frankie hear whispers

Rone's ring death is just one reason Joey wants to know why he's the one in prison.



young boy who is visiting a man he barely knows is slapped by his mother and told to behave in front of Daddy. An older woman in a shawl reads the Koran with her husband. Joey walks in, hunched over as if he's just been sucker punched. "That's the way I am now," he says. "Sick. I'm sick. And I got no friends." Once word got out he was working for the FBI, everyone dropped him. Smith, Molitor and Davis don't return his calls or those seeking comment about their long-standing ties. As a girlfriend who asked that her name not be used explains: "You have to understand. He burned a lot of us."

A month after Joey went to jail, the feds pulled the plug on Operation Matchbook. Last January, they raided Arum's office, removing computers, medical records, fight tapes, boxer contracts and financial documents. Gibbons, who was fired later that month, and three others—Trampler, matchmaker Pete Susens and manager/agent Cameron Dunkin—were all named in the warrant.

Torres asks his visitor what has happened since, but there is not much to report. Law enforcement sources say a multicount indictment is being prepared against at least a dozen figures connected with Top Rank and boxing, and could be filed this summer. Rone's death is expected to be the centerpiece of the case, with prosecutors eyeing manslaughter charges. But almost 14 months have passed, and even some inside the Bureau wonder how far the investigation will really reach.

Meanwhile, Senator John McCain continues to push for the Professional Boxing Amendments Act. The bill, which would protect fighters by strengthening safety measures and monitoring medical histories, passed the Senate but remains bottled up in the House. "Frankie and the FBI guys kept telling me, 'John McCain is going to love you for this,'" Joey says. "This isn't right."

"TELL THE FBI, 'THANKS FOR BURNING ME.'"

about Joey's whereabouts. He's in Costa Rica, he's in Mexico, he's in Panama. In late October, they're in Washington, reviewing Operation Matchbook with their superiors, when they get word Joey's back in Vegas. They fly back, but Torres is gone by the time they land. Finally, in December, someone tips the Vegas police that Joey is in town. He's sitting in his room at the Four Queens Hotel when the phone rings. He picks it up, but no one is there. A minute later, a half-dozen Vegas and LA cops break down the door and point their guns at his head. "Tell the FBI, 'Thanks for burning me,'" Joey says.

THE VISITING room of Mule Creek State Prison in Ione, Calif., is full on a recent Saturday morning. A

He shifts in his seat, looking around the room. Asked if he regrets having fled, Torres shrugs. "You gotta understand, I was scared. I didn't think I could do another day." But he has, 15 months and counting. He has a new lawyer and a parole hearing set for April 13. He says he's sold the rights to his life story, and calls the two years spent with the FBI "the most beautiful time of my life."

Visiting hours are almost up. Joey prepares to return to his four-by-six cell, where he spends his time wondering why he's the only player in Operation Matchbook doing time. He begins to say his goodbyes, then leans in and whispers:

"I still can't understand why they're doing this to me." 