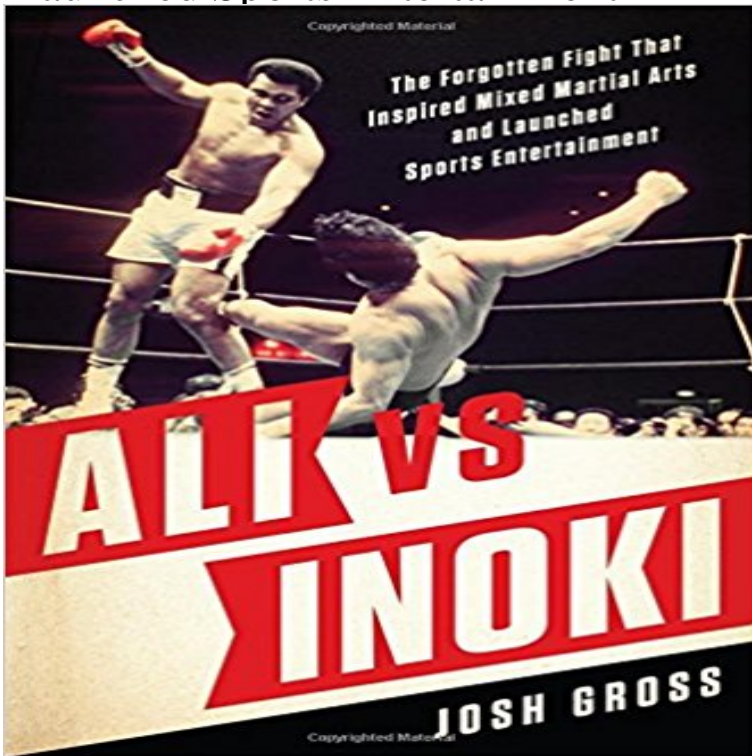


Ali vs. Inoki: The Forgotten Fight That Inspired Mixed Martial Arts and Launched Sports Entertainment



“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 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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