Diego “Chico” Corrales will be buried today at the Palm Green Valley Mortuary in Las Vegas.

Known for taking part in a scintillating struggle with Jose Luis Castillo that many call the greatest boxing match they’ve ever seen, Corrales made his mark. Ironically that fight took place two years to the exact day before he died while racing a motorcycle at high speeds on the streets of Las Vegas.

Born in South Carolina but raised in Sacramento, Corrales was half African-American and half Mexican. When Castillo chided before their second fight that Corrales only had a Latino surname but not the spirit, Corrales let everyone know that he was both ethnicities and proud of it.

Castillo backed off almost embarrassed. He hadn’t known Corrales was so fiery about his Latino roots as well as his Black roots.

It was a simple mistake but one most people made about Corrales. He was a complex man with a combustible temperament if someone accidentally lit the fuse. But outside of confrontations, the lanky lightweight prizefighter smiled easily and generally loved people.

The first time I met Corrales was in 1999. He had beaten a couple of really talented fighters from the Southern California Inland area and nobody knew what he looked like. So I went on a hunt to find out who this Corrales kid was. We finally caught up to Corrales during a Las Vegas fight card and there he was in a tan sports coat looking like anything but the 130-pound marauder who terrorized the junior lightweights.

We called our photographer to get some photos of Corrales. While we waited I asked if we could get him anything while we waited.

“Can I have a pop?” asked Corrales in a high-pitched tone.

“A what?” asked my editor who was with me for the fight card.

“A pop. A soda pop,” said Corrales.

We all laughed simultaneously because here was this feared fighter with devastating power in each hand who called soft drinks “soda pop” and seemed rather meek and timid.

“Why are you guys laughing?” Corrales asked.

My former editor, who is joker at hand, mocked him and advised Corrales that he should be a little more intimidating.

“Now Jesus, you better cut that out?” Corrales said to the editor named Jesus.

From that time on I got to know Corrales pretty well. It wouldn’t take long before he rose to the top.

Former Palm Springs prizefighter Steve Quinonez recalls meeting Corrales in the ring for the first time.

“I had been training for a long time and Lee Espinoza (his trainer) told me to stay in shape. He called Top Rank and they told us they had somebody named Diego Corrales. Nobody had ever heard of him. They said he was real skinny,” said Quinonez about agreeing to fight Corrales on April 4, 1997 in Las Vegas. “The guy was just overwhelming.”

Corrales stopped Quinonez in four rounds with his usual firepower. The Palm Springs fighter felt maybe boxing wasn’t his calling. A year later Quinonez was in Las Vegas training in the Top Rank gym when Corrales showed up.

“He was saying I was the best fighter he had ever fought and that I taught him a lot,” recalls Quinonez about Corrales conversation. “I told him: ‘what did I teach you?’ How to put your combinations together?”

After cleaning out most of the competition in the 130-pound junior lightweight division Corrales was given a shot at the IBF title against its champion Robert “Grandpa” Garcia from Oxnard. Corrales was six inches taller and seemed much too big for Garcia.

Despite the size disparity, Garcia was a technically proficient boxer with pretty good power too.

“Robert was a great fighter. I loved that fight,” Corrales told the Press-Enterprise two years ago. “He was such a warrior. I kept hitting him and he kept hitting me. That guy just wouldn’t quit.”

Garcia, now retired as a fighter, recalled facing Corrales in Las Vegas on October 1999.

“Losing to Diego was losing to a great champion,” said Garcia, who now trains fighters in Oxnard and recently sent several of his fighters to spar with Corrales. “He was always telling my fighters how good I fought. He didn’t have to do that.”

During their fight Garcia was able to move and set traps for Corrales. But little by little the distance was diminishing and Corrales dropped Garcia several times. Each time Garcia got up wobbly but determined to go on. Corrales admired him for that.

“Up until he knocked me out, the judges had me winning,” said Garcia who was eventually knocked out in the seventh round. “It makes me proud that I gave up my title to a great fighter. Not just any fighter.”

Corrales defended his world title successively four times winning three by knockout. Then he agreed to meet Floyd Mayweather in a unification bout for the WBC junior lightweight title. He

also faced charges of attacking his common-law wife. It was a bad situation for Corrales and ultimately he lost to Mayweather and lost the court case. Off he went to jail for two years from 2001 to 2003.

When Corrales returned to the ring he seemed a little more somber as if he wanted to strike back at the world. He met four fighters in the ring and annihilated all of them within five rounds. Then came Cuba’s slick southpaw Joel Casamayor and the world got a glimpse at what Corrales was capable in getting up from two knockdowns and knocking his opponent silly. A bad mouthpiece caused a severe cut inside Corrales mouth and the fight was stopped. A technical knockout victory was given to Casamayor. Corrales was enraged.

“You have to kill me in the ring,” Corrales said after that fight and continued to say and believe in that philosophy.

A subsequent rematch with Casamayor ended with a decision for Corrales. He was then matched with Brazil’s undefeated Acelino Freitas on August 2004 and he caught up to the swift Brazilian with a two-fisted attack that produced four knockdowns. Freitas quit.

The following week as I walked inside the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino with Maxboxing.com’s photographer German Villasenor, Corrales was walking along and surprised by all of the autograph seekers. I told him that his days of anonymity were over after he stopped Freitas.

We all went for a buffet lunch and sat and talked about boxing for about an hour. Meanwhile Corrales kept excusing himself as he ventured to the dessert section for cakes, cookies and pudding. He must have gobbled down about eight of them and would have continued except for the autograph seekers.

“Where do you put all of that?” I asked Corrales.

He just shrugged and said: “I’m hungry.”

Hungry for boxing is best how to describe Corrales.

Jin and Shane Mosley became fast friends with Corrales and his wife Michele two years ago.

“We automatically liked Diego from the beginning,” said Jin Mosley who remembers having dinner with Corrales and wife at a Las Vegas restaurant. “I remember Diego telling me his dream of retiring at 30 and opening up a roller rink arcade fun zone.”

Both fighting families spent time together and had much in common.

“I loved Michele and we bonded very quickly,” Jin Mosley said of Diego’s wife. “Shane and Diego both had so much in common with boxing of course and snowboarding. They would spend hours talking about boxing and went on snowboarding trips.”

Corrales also had many other friends. During his epic first contest with Castillo in Las Vegas, calloused prizefighters like Winky Wright and James Toney could be seen yelling out instructions and encouragement during the encounter. And when Corrales seemed just about finished from a second knockdown but returned to win by a shocking knockout, both Toney and Wright jumped up and down. You would have thought their baby brother had won.

So inspiring was that fight that the New York Jets football coach used a tape of the fight to inspire his team.

For many, Corrales was like a baby brother. A real human being who made costly mistakes but refused to quit under any circumstance.

“Those fights with Jose Luis Castillo, I’ve never seen any fights better than those,” said Garcia. “I’ll miss seeing him around the fights. It really is sad to know Diego is gone.”