Managing fighters is a risky and tricky business not for the faint of heart. A win in a packed venue can induce a surge of adrenaline rivaled by few other events. A loss can be devastating, or at the very least costly, since fighters are an ongoing investment that constantly pulls money out of the manager's pocket.

According to Frank Espinoza, choosing the right fighter to manage is the key to success.

If anyone knows, it's Espinoza. He's been in the management biz for fifteen years with five of his fighters having laid claim to world titles.

"First and foremost I try to find out what kind of person the fighter is. In order for me to sign someone, we have to be able to get along well. I ask the fighter about their goals. I ask them what they want out of boxing," said Espinoza. "The answer I look for is 'I want to be world champion.' I also scout the fighters before I sign them. I follow their progress. I make sure they have a strong work ethic in the gym. I'm looking for guys who aren't willing to settle for anything less than a world title. That's what I saw in Martin Castillo and Israel Vazquez before I signed them."

Vazquez and Castillo are Espinoza Boxing Club's two highest prized fighters. Vazquez is the reigning Super Bantamweight champion and considered one of the game's top pound for pound fighters. Martin "Gallito" Castillo is a former Super flyweight champion who recently lost his title in what Espinoza describes as a fluke. Although Castillo is now belt-less, he's still considered one of the top boxer-punchers in the game. A fight against the extremely popular Mexican champion, Jorge Arce, is currently being discussed with their promoters at Top Rank.

Espinoza's affinity for boxing began early in life when he was exposed to the sweet science by way of his family. "I've been following the fight game since I was a kid. I used to go to the Olympic Auditorium with my father and uncle and I'd see a lot of great fighters," remembers Espinoza. "My favorite was Mando Ramos. I really liked his style. I liked the way he boxed and moved. Every once in a while I see him at the Boxing Hall of Fame events and it's still a big thrill for me. He was my idol even though we were practically the same age."

After achieving success as a retail businessman, Espinoza decided to get involved in the sport he loved in 1991. Among the champions who've been part of the Espinoza stable besides Vazquez and Castillo, were former WBO Flyweight champion Isidro "Chino" Garcia, former WBA Super Bantamweight champ Enrique Sanchez, former WBO Super Featherweight titlist Mike Anchondo and Miguel Huerta who currently holds a minor Super Featherweight world title (N.B.A).

Success didn't come without its lessons. "I made some mistakes as a manager early on but I learned from them. If I could change anything I would've focused more on younger fighters," said Espinoza. "I used to sign fighters that were over their prime. That was a mistake. I turned

that around and started signing younger fighters who I felt had a more realistic opportunity to make an impact on the sport."

After actively seeking new fighters for his stable during 2006, he sees a bright future in two young prospects he currently signed. Manny "Suavecito" Roman (9-0, 5 KO's) and Jesus "Pollo" Hernandez (2-0) joined the Espinoza stable this year. Espinoza sees the same qualities in them that he saw in Vazquez and Castillo.

"There's incredible potential in both Manny and Pollo. I see a lot of talent in them. They both had very good amateur careers and I see hunger in their eyes," said Espinoza. "They want to be something special, they're willing to devote themselves to the sport and work very hard in the gym."

Espinoza is bringing them along patiently as they hone their skills and physically mature. "They're both eighteen years old. By the time they're 20 or 21, their bodies will change as they turn into adults and I think they're going to be even better and stronger. I predict big things for both guys."

If anything, Espinoza has demonstrated a belief in his fighters rivaled by few. During the negotiation phase before the Vazquez-Gonzalez fight, Gonzalez's manager, Oswaldo Kuchle, referred to Vazquez as a "chicken" after negotiations momentarily broke down. Espinoza responded by asking Kuchle to put his money where his mouth was. He showed up at the pre-fight press conference with a giant, symbolic check for $50,000 he was willing to wager on Vazquez if Kuchle could match the bet.

Somehow, Kuchle turned into the invisible man and wasn't heard from regarding the subject. Ultimately it was a good move by Kuchle who would've taken a massive hit as Gonzalez was stopped by Vazquez in a thriller.

One of Espinoza's ambitions is to find boxing's equivalent to a rare diamond. "I would love to find a good Mexican heavyweight to manage. A Mexican heavyweight champion would propel Espinoza Boxing even further. That would be quite a find."

As 2006 ends, Espinoza expects 2007 to be another great year for his stable. "I'm going to look for Martin Castillo to come back and to become a world champion again," Espinoza stated. "I think his loss to Nashiro was a fluke. I feel he should fight Jorge Arce. Arce has never fought anyone like Martin." Castillo lost his title due to some nasty cuts suffered in a hotly contested fight in Japan against Nobuo Nashiro.

Espinoza's stable shined this year with Vazquez's impressive come-from-behind TKO win against Jhonny Gonzalez. It was Vazquez's third straight pay-per-view appearance. "I want Israel to continue his winning streak and to defend his title a couple more times before he moves up in weight to the featherweight division. Eventually he'll move up to super featherweight," said Espinoza.

First, he's aiming Vazquez towards a "battle of little giants" against another top pound for pound

fighter in bantamweight king Rafael Marquez.

"I think that's the fight Israel needs. I also think it's a fight Marquez needs. He's thirty two years old and running out of time. He already beat all the best bantamweights in the world and its time for him to move up and fight Israel," Espinoza said. "They're two of the top fighters in the world and it would make for a memorable fight for the boxing public. The fireworks are guaranteed."

Although a proven success as a businessman and boxing manager, Espinoza wants to ensure he leaves his mark on the sport of boxing, his fighters and their families. "I want them to recognize me as a fair and straightforward person. I want to be remembered as someone who always fought for his fighters and always tried to get them the best deal possible. It's the least I can do for them. They're like family to me. "

For more information on Espinoza Boxing Club: www.espinozaboxingclub.com