Miguel Torres and Manny Tapia are puro Mexicanos.

So why are they fighting in mixed martial arts?

“I love boxing,” said Tapia. “I grew up watching Julio Cesar Chavez.”

Torres also admits a great fondness for pro boxing.

They won’t be boxing when World Extreme Cagefighting bantamweight champion Torres and challenger Tapia meet at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino on Wednesday. It’s mixed martial arts at its best. The fight will be shown on Versus live.

Torres and Tapia both live in different parts of the United States, but both are Mexican born MMA fighters. That usually means a historic link to fighting whether its MMA or boxing, fighting is in their blood.

Despite living thousands of miles apart, their stories are quite similar.

Tapia became enamored for the new sport when he saw Royce Gracie plying his skills against bigger and more physically imposing specimens during the early days of MMA. Though he was interested in boxing, he veered toward learning Brazilian Jiu-jitsu.

“I saw Royce choking everybody out,” said Tapia.

Torres said he was interested in boxing first, but it didn’t pan out.

“I was always a fan of boxing but there was no boxing available in my hood,” said Torres who lives in East Chicago, located in Indiana. “The community was giving free karate lessons for a month. I was mystified by MMA.”

The extremely tall bantamweight mystified most experts when he literally crashed on the WEC scene with a total domination over former champion Chase Beebe. Torres was predicted to be a mere opponent that night in Las Vegas. Now many consider him one of the best fighters pound for pound in the world.

“Miguel is the ultimate fighter,” said Tapia, who lives in Rancho Cucamonga a middle class suburb located near Ontario and Fontana in Southern California. “I’m ready for anything.”

MMA has recently seen a number of Mexican fighters emerge on the fight scene and it makes sense that the two best MMA fighters are at the lower weights where boxing has always had more than its share of lower weight world champions from Mexico. Now MMA is seeing the same scenario with Tapia and Torres.

Tapia is a hard-hittting banger with more than capable Brazilian Jiu-jitsu skills. But he will be facing one of the best on the ground.

During a tour of Mexico recently, both Tapia and Torres rode side by side in the streets of Mexico City where hundreds of years ago stood the capital of Tenochtitlan, the home of the warrior Aztec empire.

Slowly, Mexican fans are beginning to appreciate MMA.

“When I first started people would boo when it (fighting) went to the floor,” said Torres who began fighting in underground fights during the early 1990s. “Now they are getting educated.”

Tapia and Torres became friends on the Mexico trip but expect only hostility inside the cage.

“We went on tour together in Mexico City. He’s (Torres) a cool dude,” said Tapia who sports bleached hair in is fights. “We’re friends outside of the ring, but when we step in he’s going to try an knock my head off and I going to try knock his head off.”

Torres whole-heartedly agrees and doesn’t expect a blow out.

“He’s undefeated, a former King of the Cage champion. It’s going to be great to fight somebody from California,” said Torres who has twice defended his title. “Especially because he likes to set up and bang with people. Were gong to be able to showcase our standup skills.”

And, also, because Tapia s a fellow Mexican MMA fighter.

“In this fight we’re going to see who is more Mexican and who will have to eat more beans,” joked Torres.