Written by Michael Woods
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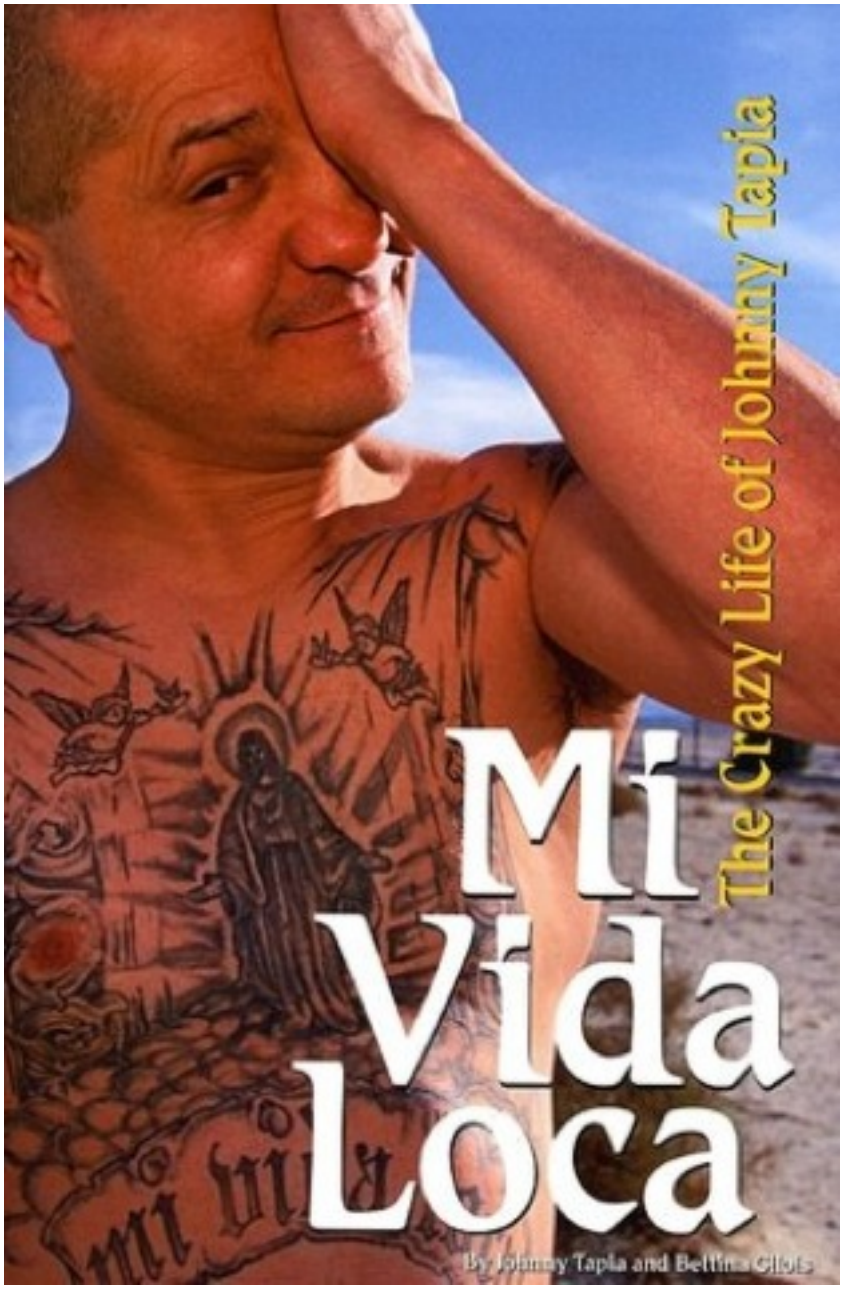

It was good to see Johnny Tapia, one of my all time ring faves, at the Tuesday Ward-Froch press conference in NYC. Tapia was doing interviews for Showtime, asking boldface names what they thought would go down on Saturday in Atlantic City.

Frankly, with his history, it's simply good to see Tapia alive. I'm not being flippant in saying that. He's long had a jones for cocaine, and has had a devil of a tough time kicking the monkey off his back. The former five-time champ admitted he used cocaine back in 1990, two years after he debuted as a pro. The flashy-fisted banger was suspended from the ring between 1990-1994 for testing positive. He then concentrated on his ring work, and became quite the known entity. A rivalry with Danny Romero, and UD12 win over Romero in July 1997, made Tapia that much

more of a buzzed about pugilist.

In June 1999, he fought the fight of the year, with Paulie Ayala, but didn't take the loss, his first, all that well. A bit after the loss, he overdosed, in what was reported as a suicide attempt.

Tapia quickly went back to the ring, the place where he knew he had some measure of control, and purpose. He steered clear of the police blotter for a long spell, until he was found unconscious from a cocaine overdose in an Albuquerque motel in 2007. His last brush with the law came in July 2009, when he violated his parole terms by traveling without permission and getting into verbal confrontation in a bar.

Part of anyone can understand why Tapia has consistently looked to a substance to change his thinking; his mom was kidnapped and stabbed and left for dead in 1975, and little Johnny, then aged 8, saw her strapped to the back of a truck, driven away by kidnappers. He tried to tell his grandparents that night what happened but was told to be quiet. He has said that he feels responsible for his mom's death. So, it is clear heavy burdens weigh him down.

Tapia told me he has been clean and sober for three years, which I was quite happy to hear. No drinking, no weed, nothing? No way, he said. He did the heavy duty stuff, and never was into liquids or whacky t'backy.

He said he is all done with the ring, and at 44, has fought his last bout. That came on June 4, 2011, a UD8 win over Mauricio Pastrana, the ex super flyweight champion. "I'm done, done, done," Tapia (59-5-2) said.

He is looking forward to a film detailing his life story to come out next year, and joked that while doing the Showtime gig, he sees himself as something of a Jerry Lewis, or Gilligan-type jokester.

As for who he likes in Saturday's clash, Tapia said it's a boxer vs slugger clash. "It's a pick 'em fight to me, like me and Romero. Froch might make it a rough fight, do something like hit after the bell." He thinks Ward will try and stick and move, but believes Froch can change the fight

"with one hard shot."

I think that it's good to have this survivor still around, still close to the game that has kept him sane, and alive.

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DaveB says:

Stay strong brother. Even in your crazy days you were one of my favorite fighters, always so colorful. How could anyone not like Johnny Tapia? Good to hear you are on the straight and narrow.