

5-7-2005—Like two Roman Gladiators fighting in the Colosseum, Diego Corrales and José Luis Castillo battled in a 12 round lightweight unification bout and gave every spectator something to remember. This type of fight only comes along once in a lifetime.

The full fight can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGuDXciwu-w>

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War of the Wills: Corrales vs. Castillo I

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Few boxing matches ever live up to their pre-bout hype. But on May 7th, 2005, two warriors—Diego “Chico” Corrales and José Luis “El Temible” Castillo—put on a show that exceeded all expectations, producing one of the most memorable boxing performances in the history of the sport. Some boxing analysts say it was the greatest fight of the modern era. Taking place at the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino, located in Las Vegas, Nevada, the fight was a lightweight championship unification bout, with both the WBO and WBC titles on the line, so it was broadcast to millions of fans around the globe, courtesy of Showtime Championship Boxing. The arena at the Mandalay Bay Events Center, a premier sporting and concert venue, was packed to full capacity, with nearly 12,000 rowdy fans screaming and yelling. The atmosphere was electric. Due to the reputation of each fighter, the match was highly anticipated, and both fighters rose to the challenge, leaving everything they had in the ring.

Standing nearly five feet and eleven inches tall, Corrales, hailing from Sacramento California, had an outstanding record that consisted of thirty nine wins and only two defeats, one of which was suffered at the hands of Floyd Mayweather Jr., in January of 2001. That fight

cemented Mayweather's place as the number one ranked pound-for-pound fighter in the sport—a title that he still holds to this day, despite being semi-retired. Thanks to his freakishly tall 5'11" 135 lb frame, Corrales could get incredible leverage on his punches, allowing him to generate massive power from both hands. Pound for pound, he was one of the most devastating punchers the sport had ever seen, so it was no surprise that, coming into the fight, thirty two of his thirty nine victories had been by knockout, many of which were highlight-reel material. Born in 1977, Corrales, the product of a violent Sacramento neighborhood, also had a tumultuous background and was involved with street gangs by the age of thirteen. Through the sport of boxing, however, he was able to bring some stability to his life, and he became a fan favorite. Everyone loves a comeback story.

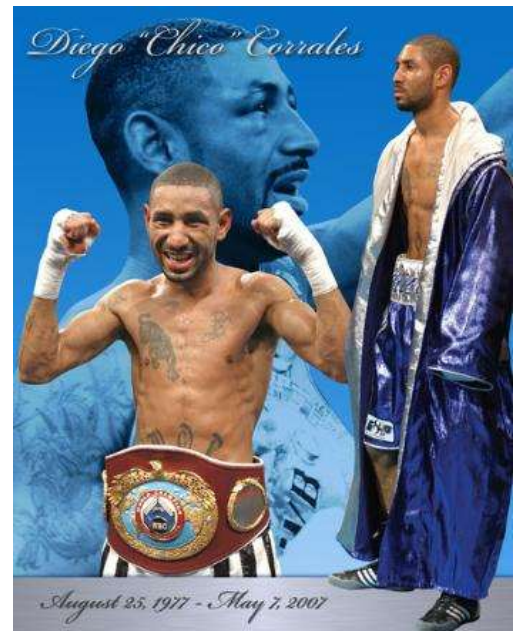


Photo provided by bigtimefighter.com

Fighting out of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, José Luis Castillo travelled to America with one thing on his mind: winning the undisputed lightweight world championship. In



Jose Luis Castillo at pre fight weigh-in

Photo provided by Getty Images

Mexico, they allow boxers to turn professional at the age of fifteen, so Castillo, who was thirty one at the time of the fight, had already amassed an impressive record of fifty two wins and six losses, with most of the losses coming early in his career. One of his most famous losses was a controversial unanimous

decision loss to the aforementioned Floyd Mayweather Jr., which took place at the MGM Grand on April 4, 2002. But many ringside and couchside observers, including me, thought Castillo did enough to win the fight. Harold Lederman, HBO’s unofficial ringside judge, had the fight scored 115-111 for Castillo.

Coming in around five feet and seven inches tall, Castillo definitely was at a height disadvantage. However, he likes to get inside on his opponents, which prevents a taller fighter from utilizing his advantage. Castillo is as tough as they come: in over sixty fights, he had never even been seriously hurt in the ring, much less knocked down. If you’ve ever heard the old boxing cliché he’s got an iron chin, it is describing fighters like Castillo. Known to be kind of a slow starter, Castillo, the prototypical Mexican fighter, puts constant pressure on his opponents, smothering them like a blanket, until he eventually breaks their wills or catches them with a shot. Like Corrales, he is also heavy-handed and can end it with one shot. In his fifty two wins, forty six of those wins came by knockout, yielding a tremendous knockout ratio percentage of almost eighty nine percent.

2005 Lightweight Championship Unification Bout Tale of the Tape

	Age	Height	Weight	Reach	Record as of May 2005
Corrales WBO Champ 2004-Present	27	5’11”	135 lb	70”	39-2-0 (32 KO)
Castillo WBC Champ 2004-Present	31	5’7”	135 lb	69”	52-6-1 (46 KO)

The Opening Bell

Round 1

Under the bright lights of the arena, ring announcer Jimmy Lennon, Jr. introduces the fighters and says his famous catchphrase, “It’s Showtime!”—the amped crowd erupts with applause. As the two fighters stare at each other from across the ring, the opening bell sounds and the tension in the air is so thick it hangs over the crowd like a fog. The two fighters waste no time as they start trading big shots in the center of the ring. Castillo, hoping to get inside, gets exactly what he asks for as Corrales is happy to stay in Castillo’s wheelhouse and work on the inside. But is this a tactical error by Corrales? With his wiry frame, Corrales needs a bit of distance to generate power, and Castillo’s game plan is to make it an inside fight, negating Corrales’ height advantage. They trade vicious left hooks, but nothing lands flush. Both fighters are letting their hands go, throwing caution to the wind. As the round progresses, they land some decent combinations, which conclude an exciting first round. That round was too close to call—this fight is going to be a war.

Round 2

In both fighters’ corners, their trainers are giving instructions, adjusting their game plans accordingly. The bell sounds for round two and both fighters meet again in the center of the ring. Corrales, again, is happy to stay on the inside and fight Castillo’s fight. And Castillo lands a thunderous left hook to the body—that one definitely got Corrales’ attention. The fighters, just inches apart, are slugging it out, using faints and head movement, absorbing tremendous shots; there is no running or showmanship in this fight—it’s a throwback to the golden era of boxing. When boxers stood toe to toe and slugged it out. Unlike most sports, boxing is a solo endeavor: there is no team to rely on, nobody to blame if something goes wrong, no time outs or

substitutions. It's just you, your hands, and discovering a way to connect said hands on the opponent in the ultimate test of will and skill. That's why they call it the sweet science. And Corrales closes the round with a monstrous left hook, slightly hurting Castillo. But Castillo shakes it off and throws a counter punch to show he isn't fazed.

Round 3

As we head into round three, the fight looks like a replay of rounds one and two, with most of the action taking place on the inside. They are so close they could be fighting this fight in a phone booth, as another old boxing cliché goes. Castillo lands a flurry of punches and wobbles Corrales with a left hook. Corrales can't absorb many more shots like that—he needs to take a step back and create some distance. They are still fighting at a furious pace, throwing bombs. How much longer can they keep this up?

Round 4

Between rounds, it looks like Corrales got an earful from his trainer, Joe Goossen, because he is staying outside and working that left jab, painting Castillo's face with it. And they trade left hooks again—those punches were thrown with bad intentions. Now it appears that there is a cut above Castillo's left eye. The referee, Tony Weeks, a veteran who has refereed numerous championship fights, has ruled the cut was caused by a head butt, not a punch. This is very important because if that cut causes the fight to be stopped later, the fight will automatically go to the scorecards. However, if the referee had ruled the cut was caused by a punch, it would be an automatic victory for Corrales. Upon viewing the instant replay, we could clearly see a right hand caused the cut, but a referee's call cannot be overturned by instant replay in boxing.

Round 5

As we move to round five, the dynamic has really changed in this fight, with Corrales choosing to stay on the outside. Corrales, flicking his left jab, bobbing and weaving, measures his opponent, hoping to catch Castillo with a big shot. The fight is so close that the unofficial press row scoring, usually a group of sports writers and former judges, has the fight dead even up to this point.



Castillo (left), Corrales (right) in round 5

Eric Jamison, AP

Round 6

By round six, both fighters are starting to show signs of fatigue, but they are still connecting with brutal punches. And the cut over Castillo's left eye is starting to open up. What a way to make a living. The ring doctor examines the cut over Castillo's eye and tells Tony Weeks that he is okay to continue. Both fighters are staggered as they trade shots in the middle of the ring—the action is unreal. We're only at the halfway mark and this fight already has the potential to be a classic. With all of the punishment both fighters have absorbed so far, how will they fare down the stretch?

Round 7

And there's the bell to begin round seven. Corrales is content to stay on the outside and let his jab go. Wait, it appears Corrales has a huge welt developing under his left eye—it might affect his vision if the eye starts to close and create serious problems. The pace is starting to pick up again as Castillo relentlessly stalks his prey like lion in the jungle, putting serious pressure on Corrales. He is a machine. Both fighters must be in tremendous shape to keep up this kind of

pace. As Castillo moves in, he gets careless and Corrales lands a superb left hook, buckling the knees of Castillo. For the first time in his career, Castillo nearly kisses the canvas.

Round 8

As round eight opens, Corrales, with a rabid look in his eyes, charges Castillo and lets his fists fly, trying to finish what he started at the end of round seven. But Castillo comes back with a wicked combination of his own, landing flush shots. And Castillo lands a brilliant right hand that sends Corrales' mouthpiece flying across the ring. My God—I can't believe these fighters are still standing. The crowd is in a frenzy as they begin chanting Corrales' name. Although popular Mexican fighters always pack the arenas with fans, Corrales is definitely the fan favorite in this fight. You have to love the Mexican boxing fans; they take boxing seriously. Regardless of the bout location, if a popular Mexican boxer is fighting in the United States, you can bet there will be a strong Mexican presence ringside, cheering on their hero.

Round 9

In round nine, the pace slows slightly as both fighters try to gather a second wind. It's beginning to look like stamina will be a major factor in this fight. Who wants it more? Since they are both starting to run out of steam, the fight has moved back to the inside, allowing them to lean on one another during the lulls in action in order to catch a quick break. The bell rings, signaling the end of another good round, and both fighters kind of stagger back their corners. Corrales sits on the stool, weary, and his face tells a brutal story—both eyes are almost swollen shut from all of the punishment he has absorbed. The ringside physician will definitely be keeping a close eye on Corrales.



Corrales in his corner after round 9

Joe Cavaretta, AP

Round 10

As both fighters come out for round ten, they touch gloves and continue the action. Corrales drops his hands for a split second to throw a right hand and Castillo connects with a perfectly timed counter left hook, sending Corrales crashing to the canvas. The referee begins his count to ten, and Corrales makes it up at eight. Corrales, in a daze from the devastating punch, spits out his mouthpiece as he tries to get up, which draws a warning from the referee, Joe Weeks. It looks like Corrales is really hurt; we could be witnessing the beginning of the end. Corrales is trying to gather his wits, but, smelling blood, Castillo moves in for the kill and catches Corrales with another vicious left hook, sending him



Corrales spitting out his mouthpiece after the second knock down

Eric Jamison, AP

to the canvas once again. Can he get up? Weeks, standing over Corrales, issues another count. After spitting out his mouthpiece, Corrales barely makes it up at the count of nine. Since Weeks had already given Corrales a warning about the mouthpiece, he signals to the judges and proceeds to take a point away from Corrales, giving him a little extra time to recover. Corrales, a crafty veteran fighter, probably spit the mouthpiece out intentionally, hoping to buy some time.

Upon making it to his feet, Corrales, both eyes almost swollen shut, appears to be a defeated fighter. Sensing that the end is near, Castillo carelessly lets his hands go and moves in—but he walks right into a counter right hand, which backs him up. How is Corrales still in this fight? He must be functioning on pure instinct. They are both swinging for the fences, trying to end it with one big shot. And Corrales lands a huge left hook that sends Castillo reeling towards the ropes—now he is hurt. There's high drama in Sin City! As Castillo backs into the



Joe Weeks (center) jumps between Castillo (left) and Corrales (right) to stop the fight

Matthew Minard, AP

ropes, Corrales unleashes a barrage of power punches, catching Castillo with a right, and then a left, followed by another right, violently snapping his head back, which causes his eyes to roll back in his head. He's out on his feet. And as Castillo's

hands fall in front of him, leaving him defenseless, Joe Weeks quickly jumps in between the two fighters, calling an end to the fight.

What a shocking turn of events. Corrales, through sheer will and determination, managed to get up off of the canvas twice in order to come back and stop Castillo. This fight had everything: two determined, world-class fighters, lots of back and forth action, an unbelievable

tempo, tons of heart, and a definitive TKO conclusion. Indeed, it would go on to win ESPN's fight of the year in 2005. And many hardcore boxing fans consider it to be the fight of the decade, perhaps even the century.