

Los Angeles Times

CALENDAR

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My Favorite Weekend: Mario Lopez

A dancer with the heart of a fighter

HE'S dodged the hook on ABC's "Dancing With the Stars," he's hooked on with FX's "Nip/Tuck," and now there are reports he's hooked up with Eva Longoria. It's a great time to be Mario Lopez, even if that last item is merely a tall tabloid tale ("Yeah, funny, huh?" he says of the stories). Regardless, the "Saved by the Bell" alum, 33, has graduated to a whole new level.

Going with the flow

On a Friday night I'll get some friends together and go to a great place in Hollywood, El Floridita. It's got nice Cuban food, and then it turns into this hotspot with a live band and salsa music.

I like the garlic chicken smothered in onions, and after dinner, with the sangria flowing and some great mojitos, the

place really gets going. I usually just like to listen, but I'll dance too if I feel like it. I really haven't been out too much since "Dancing With the Stars" has been on, so no one really has asked me to get up and show what I can do, but I've been known to shake a leg or two there.

Knocked around

After a late night at El Floridita, I'll sleep in as late as I can on Saturday and then go to breakfast at the Griddle Cafe in Hollywood. They have great waffles, but I like to order the Incredible Hulk power omelet scramble, which has about 22 eggs. I'll go across the street to the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf for a super-large vanilla ultimate, which I like better than milkshakes.

Then I'll let my food settle for a while before I go to my favorite place in the world, the Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood. During the week you go there to train, and you can be working out with a world champion on one side of you and a homeless

guy on the other side. You get people from all walks of life there, which is why it's so great. But Saturdays are for sparring.

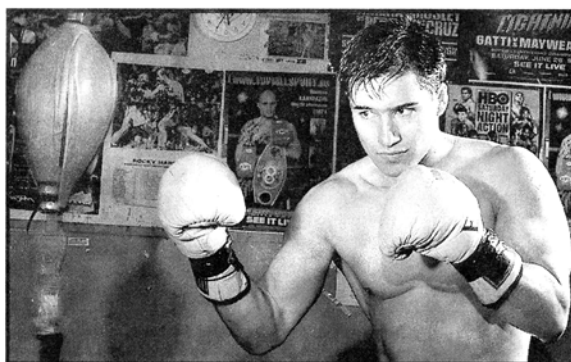
Some people may think I'm just this actor fooling around, but I've got as many knockouts there as anyone. It's also just a great social place to hang out, like the movie "Barbershop," but with boxing going on instead of haircuts.

Later in the day, I'll go to Crazy Fish on Olympic and Doheny for sushi that's really reasonable, and with great portions. The spicy albacore rolls are as big as burritos, and they have this incredible special sashimi tempura sauce, but they won't tell me what's in it. I love that sauce.

Then I might stop off at Hyde, or whatever the club of the week is in L.A., because it changes all the time.

Burgers, prayers

On Sunday I'll wake up and



Jeffrey Vogeding Photography

BOXER: Mario Lopez reserves Saturdays for sparring. The Wild Card Boxing Club is where he works out and make friends.

go for a little jog and then plop back down on my couch at home and watch the NFL games all day with friends. I'm a big grill guy, so I'll cook up some steaks, *carne asada*, chicken, everything. I'll whip up some frozen margaritas. So we'll hang out there all day, but I have to make 5 o'clock Mass near my house in Burbank.

After church, I might go to In-N-Out for some burgers and then to a movie, or go to this hole-in-

the-wall karaoke place in Koreatown. I think it's called something weird like the Western Music Factory. It's a dive — you'd swear you're walking into a brothel. But it's got private rooms and it's fun to go there with friends, because you just sing in front of them, not a bunch of strangers. I'll do everything from Frank Sinatra to Bob Marley.

— MARK SACHS

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Mario Lopez and Eva Longoria at El Floridita, 2006