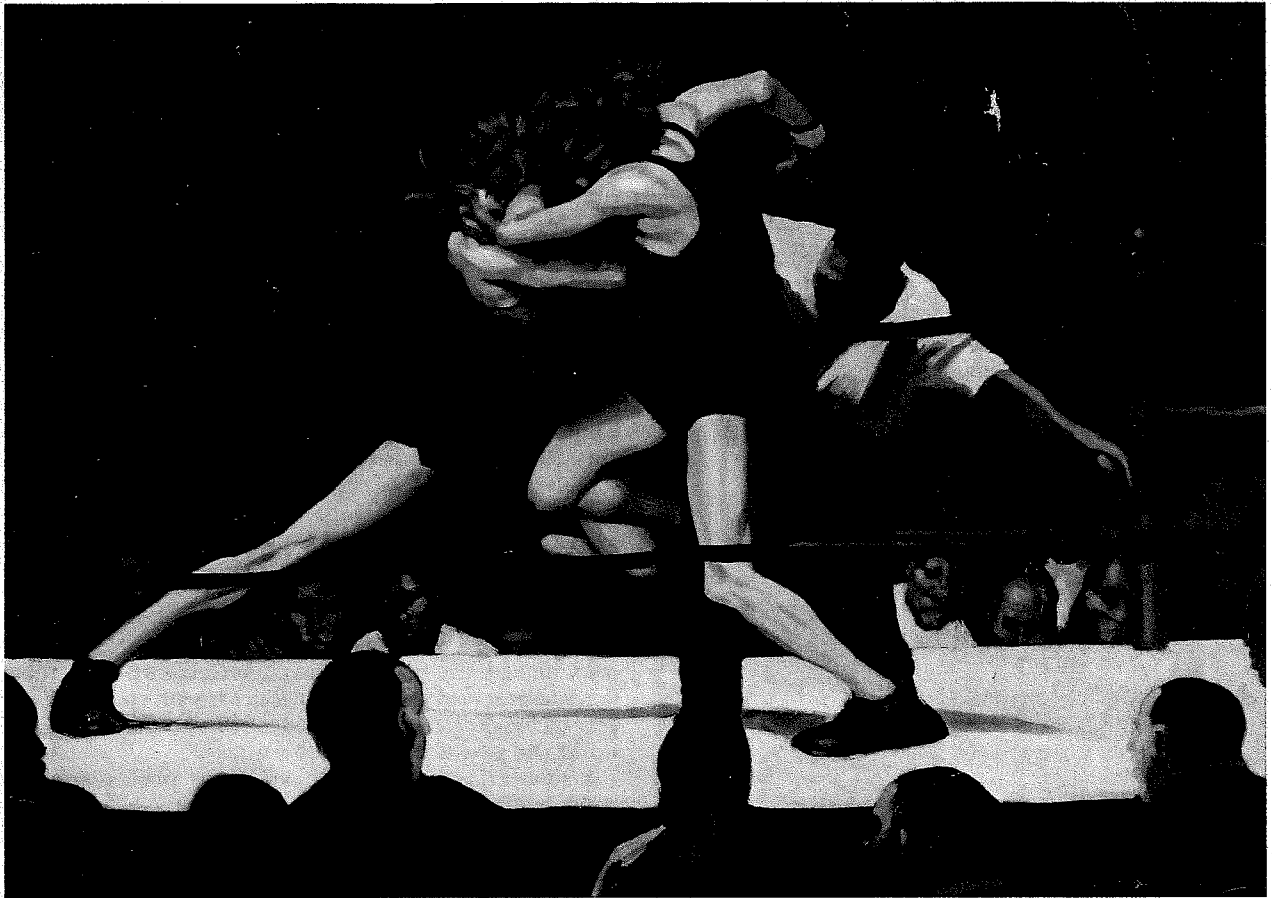


# Women **BOXING**



women are going to war in the ring. why do they brawl, and why do guys watch?

article by **AMY HANDELSMAN**

I HAD CRUISED by the place a thousand times on my way to work, and I was always put off by its garishness. And no matter how late I drove home it was open. Twenty-four hours a day? It had to be nefarious, illicit. One night, stopped at a traffic light, I glanced up at the third-floor windows, where a neat row of red leather gloves beckoned. When the light changed I pulled over and parked.

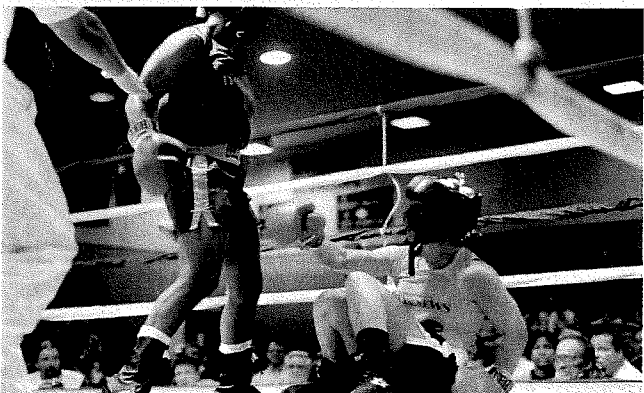
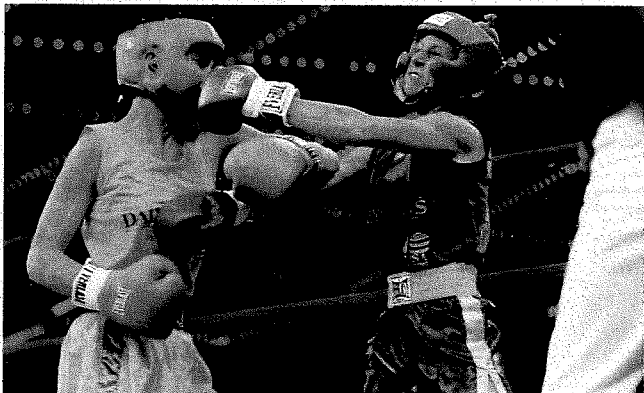
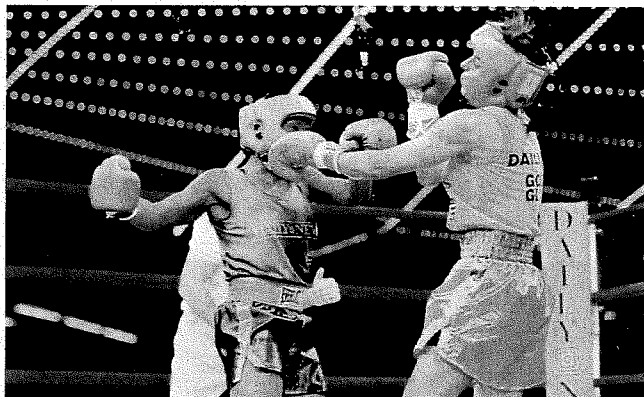
The Hollywood Boxing Gym is a large, mirrored, one-room arena, airy and bright—a world apart from the tattooed, muscle-bound weight lifters who grunt below. It is run by Terry Claybon, master charmer and motivator, whose sly blend of jive, affection and discipline has won him a large and loyal following. I didn't know that then, of course. I knew only that I stepped into the room and was greeted with, "What is really goin' on," and felt that I had found a home.

An unlikely home, to be sure. I'm a writer and produc-

er, a former development executive. I have a degree from Harvard in art history. My first and only brush with boxing had been 12 years before at the old Gramercy Gym in New York, a third-floor walk-up just off Union Square. Saturday mornings Norman Mailer rented the place for himself and a coterie of disciples, down-at-the-heels, overeducated types somewhere along in their first novels who were relieved to be doing something so concrete.

That was the Eighties. Twelve years later I was in between sports, past my obsessions with running, horseback riding, hip-hop dance classes and Rollerblading. I was getting jittery and fat. I was ready for something new.

With Terry as tutor I boxed three times a week, at seven in the morning. My friends were astonished. In the past, only an early morning flight could get me up at that hour. I'd have gone every day, if I could. I was hooked. I got sleeker and stronger. The blinding headaches from overexertion stopped. I worked harder at this sport than I had at any other, and it required more, in terms of



Women battling women: The two-day final of the New York Golden Gloves at Madison Square Garden (top three photos) featured 21 women in 11 weight classes. This was only the third year women fought alongside men. At the first-ever Women's National Championships in Augusta, Georgia, 66 boxers competed. The winners (bottom) flaunt their belts. Says Garden referee Danny Gant: "Women are the most dangerous things in the universe."

power, coordination, speed, stamina, timing, rhythm and balance. And because of Terry, it was more fun.

Terry gives his advanced students monikers like real prizefighters'. We were Speedy, Smiley, Tiny, Hercules, Pit Bull, Slasher, Big Bad Dan and Wonder Woman. My friend Jordan was Mr. Clean. He wore a bandanna and hoop earrings, and washed out his wraps every night with rubbing alcohol. The boy who teased me unmercifully was Mr. Cool. Fast, clever, elusive, stylish, I became Miss Slick. No pet name sounded sweeter.

When the rest of my life—career, romance—got bumpy, I took great comfort in boxing's rituals: the careful wrapping of the hands, the manners and sportsmanship of the ring. The routine of the workouts, from jumping rope to shadow-boxing to working the heavy bag, double-end bag and speed bag to doing sit-ups, saved me from having to plan or think. Time was clearly marked, in three-minute intervals. I could always count on a one-minute rest. As strenuous as it was, it was also simple and direct, which are values in short supply in Hollywood.

I became a student of the game, devouring books, watching fight films, collecting magazines and catalogs. I pored over old boxing photographs as if they were ancient runes, startled by my deep longing and nostalgia.

Last spring I timed a long trip to my native New York to coincide with the finals of that city's Golden Gloves, the nation's largest regional amateur tournament, sponsored each year by the *Daily News*. I wanted to see where I fit in this new world and who else had my obsession.

A smattering of women have boxed professionally for years, but it wasn't until 1993, when 16-year-old Dallas Malloy of Bellingham, Washington sued U.S. Amateur Boxing, that women were accepted into the amateur ranks. More than 800 women are currently registered with the association, which is the national governing body for Olympic-style boxing. Across the country, women are moving into sweaty gyms for the real deal. Among the finalists in the 1997 New York Gloves were an accountant, a dancer, a grammar school teacher, a corrections officer, an attorney, a bus driver, a photo-lab operator and a nurse.

On the first night of the finals, I sneak through the back corridors of Madison Square Garden and linger at the threshold of the locker room, peering in at my heroines. Eleven women, ages 20 to 33, are perched on top of a long serving table, waiting for their weigh-in. They are of various shapes—sleek, stocky, rangy, squat, willowy, fat—and are lined up from smallest to largest. They sit in their underwear. Some wear white cotton briefs pulled up to their waistlines, others wear lacy bikinis or thongs.

Their feet dangle from the table. This is the last time they will all be together, and they speak softly to one another. They shouldn't—it's bad luck—but the fight doctor is late for their exams and they are curious and bored.

For some, tonight's will be their first bouts in the tournament. With so few women registered in the Gloves, those in certain weight classes have advanced untested past the quarterfinals and semifinals. One is Laura Schere, a gamine, 112-pound editor and Ph.D. candidate in cultural studies. Laura



Annie Vitiello, an HBO administrator, won the 1995 New York Golden Gloves in the 112-pound division.

(continued on page 122)

## Women BOXING *(continued from page 118)*

*"What is it like to be in love with someone who's a warrior? It's beyond my wildest dream."*

is with Danna Scott, one of the few licensed female corners. Danna tells her to "take deep breaths and feel your feet in your shoes."

Danna handles her fighter like a trainer with a thoroughbred. She massages Laura's hands to warm them, then wraps them with tape and gauze. She never breaks contact. Her hand is on her fighter's shoulder as she leads her from backstage, up the aisles, past noisy fans and into the ring. "You have to let them know that you will take them there, that they don't have to figure that out," says Scott. "The only thing they have to do is fight."

The Garden's Theater feels more like a high school gymnasium than Las Vegas. Amateur boxing is a team sport, and local clubs come out to support their fighters. The fans are rowdy. Turf wars erupt, but are quickly settled.

The women's bouts are sprinkled between the men's, who outnumber them two to one. The crowd has favorites, women they've followed since their first appearances two years ago. Laura's cronies on the lobster shift of the law firm where she works wave giant claws as she beats an attorney in a hyped grudge match. Denise Lutrick, a soccer coach from Westchester, is cheered by her varsity squad in uniform. They unfurl a banner that says PUT THE BODY IN A BAG. Evelyn Rodriguez, a 5'8", 156-pound bus driver, stalks dancer Meagan McBain and puts the mojo on her with a red-rimmed stare.

The fight of the tournament is between two 165-pounders, Tanya Dean of Gleason's Gym versus Susan Gadomski of the New Bed-Stuy Boxing Center. It is a classic matchup: Dean, a southpaw boxer, and Gadomski, a brawler inspired by Dean's fight two years ago in the Gloves. It doesn't figure to be much of a contest. Dean has trained corrections officers in defensive tactics, while Gadomski has lost 40 pounds and quit smoking for the fight. Dean is a seasoned competitor; Gadomski is a virgin.

Dean comes out swinging. Within ten seconds, Gadomski is down, and struggles through the first two rounds. But Gadomski hangs in and takes her beating with an iron chin. In the third and final round she has Dean on the ropes and the crowd on its feet. Tanya wins—in a 3-2 decision—but if the fight had gone a few seconds longer, Susan might have taken it.

They embrace, and the badly bruised Gadomski is led toward the dressing rooms by her second. He is a tall, regal man with dreadlocks to his waist, and had been whispering to Susan throughout the fight. I trail behind them, an eager fan. More than that, I need someone like him in my corner, and want to have her heart.

A few days later I catch up with Susan and her cornerman boyfriend, Randy, in Bedford-Stuyvesant. This is one of the toughest neighborhoods in Brooklyn, and they volunteered to meet me at the subway. She waits at the turnstile as I exit, and we drive in his new red Plymouth Neon through rain-slicked streets to the gym.

New Bed-Stuy is a family place, lovingly decorated with murals of its trainers and former champs (Riddick Bowe, Mark Breland). Except for Faber (Susan's sometime sparring partner) and Harry Keitt (her trainer), the gym is empty. It is early yet. Faber mans the door, Randy slips out for coffee, and Susan, Harry and I pull up three metal folding chairs to discuss her fight with Tanya Dean.

Harry has a unique perspective, because the first woman he ever trained was Tanya. He knew she would come out swinging, but he also knew she would tire. "Tanya is a nervous fighter. She works off adrenaline," Keitt says. Adrenaline, like anger, is your enemy in the ring. Susan has the opposite problem—she's a slow starter. That's a liability when you have only three two-minute rounds to fight.

Harry likes training women. "They go toe-to-toe," he says. "They don't quit. They don't complain." He finds them more dedicated, more disciplined than male boxers. They come with less baggage and learn faster than men. Harry's teaching methods are the same for both sexes: "They get hit by the same punches, so I train them the same way."

Randy returns and we get on the subject of his romance with Susan. Randy is a martial arts instructor who met Susan in his kickboxing class. (Many female boxers start out kickboxing and switch.) The couple now lives in East New York. I ask Randy what it's like to be in love with a warrior. He smiles a Cheshire cat's smile.

Although Randy and Susan had

been together almost three years, he didn't meet her folks until the Gloves. Like a lot of the women I interviewed, Susan kept her plans to compete from her family until right before her first fight. Her father and sister attended her preliminary bout, which she ended up not having to fight. But her mother decided only the night before to go to the finals. At first she had refused to attend—"That's the last place I want to see my baby"—and Randy feels she blames him for Susan's involvement in the sport.

But when it came down to it, Susan says, nothing could keep her mother away. "She was a wreck after the fight. She saw me with the black eye. She was standing there with flowers, emotional. She said, 'I think I sat a little too close.'"

Randy has more in common with Susan's mom than either may think. He also gets emotional when he sees Susan in the ring: "It's more than proud. I feel like crying, like a mother with a child. What is it like to be in love with someone who's a warrior? It's beyond my wildest dream."

It takes a while for men to get used to seeing women get hit. If the women are good fighters, the men get over it. It's the same for the participants. Of the women I know, there is a consensus: You feel shock at first. You learn not to let it anger you—you focus and counterpunch. Many say they're nervous in a fight until that first punch, and then they stop feeling anything.

You would think being a part of this masculine domain would make us feel more masculine. In fact, the reverse is often true. Its brutality allows a softer side to flourish.

Some of us cultivate it in the ring. We wear pink shorts; we get manicures and pedicures before a fight. Some of us leave the ring and then transform, wearing heels, stockings, short dresses. The switch comes naturally. We were the tomboys, the ones getting into scrapes with our brothers or the guys up the street. We didn't want to be boys, we wanted to wrestle with them.

Boxing, women actually feel more like women. It tightens your buttocks, narrows your stomach, thrusts out your chest. It enhances self-confidence, which is always a magnet.

There are a few concessions to gender in amateur boxing. Women are required to wear breast protectors and sign waivers attesting they are not pregnant. There haven't been studies done on the long-term effects of boxing on a woman's reproductive capabilities, but there haven't been any documented problems with it, either.

My 86-year-old aunt was horrified by my boxing and begged me not to tell *(continued on page 124)*

## Women BOXING (continued from page 122)

*"Once I'm in the ring, I'm an animal. I see the girl climb in, and I'm like, 'What are you doin' in here?'"*

anyone—especially not any potential suitors. I haven't followed her advice, and I'm glad. Men are intrigued by it, if not charmed. At the least, it helps the conversation.

Randy drops Susan off at her job at a photo lab and me at the subway to East Harlem. I have a date with two champs—the 119-pound fireplug Leona Brown and the 156-pound priestess Evelyn Rodriguez.

The Thomas Jefferson Recreation Center, at 112th Street and First Avenue, is run by the New York City Parks Department. The husband-and-wife team of Mickey and Negra Rosario presides over its boxing programs. They have been in the fight business for more than 40 years; Negra was one of the first female trainers and still trains many children, including her 11-year-old granddaughter, Megan.

Kids are racing around the place, and Leona and I hide in an empty locker room to talk. She is 4'11", wearing denim shorts and a denim vest that shows off her biceps. We talk fight strategy. Because of her height, Leona needs to get inside, and throws lots of punches. When asked about her defense, she says, "My offense is my defense. If you're trying to look pretty, you ain't throwin' no punches."

I was, in fact, disappointed by the level of the women's defense at the Gloves. A good defense (blocking punches, slipping, bobbing and weaving) is an acquired skill, and for novices—both male and female—it's the first thing out the window under pressure. There's also a difference between amateur and pro strategy. A pro fighter gets points for defensive style, and, with more rounds, there's time to move around, to "look pretty." In the amateurs points are scored by blows landed, which can encourage wild haymakers.

Leona quit her job as a school bus driver to devote herself to training. She has no time for dating ("That's another kind of workout at night") and wants to go pro. She seems unstoppable. "Nothing scares me in the ring," she says. "Nothing. Once I'm in the ring, I'm an animal. I transform into an animal. And that's it. I see the other girl climb over the ropes, and I'm like, 'What are you doin' in here? I'm getting ready to tear you apart!"

Leona and Evelyn pass in the halls but do not speak. There's bad blood—a nasty sparring session. (They've since made up.) Every few feet, someone calls out, "Hey, champ!" The girls have done well by Thomas Jeff.

Evelyn and I go sit on the stoop. It is drizzling. I was terrified of her in the Garden, but now she's sweet and girlish. She lives in Flushing but has strong ties to East Harlem. She would like to give back to the neighborhood by opening a gym for battered women.

We talk about her fight with Meagan McBain. It's true, she hypnotized her. "I actually looked through her with my eyes. I was drawing fear out of her eyes." Meagan left the ring with an ice pack on her face. I ask Evelyn if it is hard to reconcile being a woman with causing pain. She tells me that that's her job. But when she leaves the ring, she says, "I'm a whole different person. I'm more humble. I'm more lovable. I'm concerned."

Evelyn asks me if I have Meagan's phone number. We use the Rosarios' office to call. An answering machine responds. Evelyn hangs up. But she makes me promise to deliver this message: "I just want to apologize if I inflicted any kind of damage on you. If you need any help, if I can do anything for you, just let me know. I'm here. Don't hesitate to give me a call. I hope you feel better."

Evelyn and I walk to the subway stop. I ask if she thinks we are stronger than our West Coast counterparts. She says, "Of course. We are New Yorkers. We are the roughest, the toughest. Ain't nobody badder than us." I feel safe, and proud to be with her. She asks if I might like to spar sometime. I look at the six-inch-long scar down her face, remember a different Evelyn in the ring and decline.

The equation of women and aggression is not easily solved. Johnnie Woluewich, a USA Boxing official and administrator, feels that men box to get their aggression out, while women get more aggressive when they fight. Trainer Milton LaCroix thinks girls can take getting hit more than guys, and definitely slug more. He feels, by nature, women are more vicious than men: "To sit and have a baby, you have to be some kind of vicious person. They can take more punches than we can. I'll tell you that much. I can't imagine no guy having no baby."

Referee Danny Gant, a behavioral therapist, agrees. "Women are the most dangerous things in the universe. Women are mothers, and there's something about being a mother that makes a woman a bitch if she has to be, that makes her an angel, that makes her whatever she has to be. Her job is to protect, period."

To say all women like to inflict damage is facile, however, and misleading. Flyweight Laura Schere feels boxing is less about hurting someone and more about domination, about winning. Even so, she likes "the license that you're allowed in the ring to hit someone, where you're not allowed to anywhere else." Sometimes, sitting on the subway, she imagines what she could do: "I could just haul off and hit someone. I love that feeling that I could just punch all these people in the face and knock them all out."

For Annie Vitiello, it's also about potential. An elegant administrator at HBO who won the 1995 Gloves in the 112-pound division, Annie is a ring strategist who finds boxing "more like fencing or chess than beating somebody up." But she's made the moves to stop someone when she's had to, and feels grateful. "Here's a part of me I never would have discovered. There's a strength and ferocity. Not viciousness, but fierceness. Thank you, universe. Thank you, God. It doesn't mean I have to do anything with it. But I can. It's there."

I go to Rikers Island to pay homage to Tyrene Manson, the 106-pound female heralded as the next Sugar Ray Robinson, who's facing a four- to nine-year term for drug possession.

It starts as something of an ordeal. I nearly miss Friday's two P.M. Rikers Island Express—the last bus before the weekend. And when I board, there's standing room only. The women are all dolled up, with long, polished fingernails, elaborate hairdos and tight clothes. I have dressed down to be inconspicuous. It backfires.

At the holding area before we are shuttled to our final destination, I am handed a form to fill out. What is my relation to the prisoner? Friend? Family? Spouse? I put down: Colleague. Fellow boxer.

I learn that Tyrene has already had one visitor that day, and I am denied. I reason with the guard: I have come this far from California. He wants me to show him a California driver's license. I drop it into the plastic container with the other picture IDs, mostly food-stamp cards.

We unload at a long row of metal  
*(continued on page 180)*

# Women BOXING (continued from page 124)

*She won't have sex with other inmates. "It's weird in here," she confides. "I'm a lamb among wolves."*

lockers. I'm sent outside twice—for keeping my sweater and my cash. They confiscate my pen and paper at the room where I'm inspected. I pull out my pockets, roll down my socks, lift up my tongue.

The visitors' room is loud, filled with low square tables and chairs. Inmates wear tan jumpsuits and paper slippers that they kick off like kids at the shore. They hold hands with their boyfriends on the tabletops. Their hands must be above their knees, in full view.

I wait a long time before anything happens. I think, Maybe they didn't tell her, to humiliate me. Or they did, and she's refused to come. Twenty minutes later, I see a radiant woman bound toward me. We clasp tightly, me more out of gratitude and relief, she out of grace.

She tells me her story. She was sharing a house in Queens with her uncle, a crack addict. It was a sting, the D.A. was involved. They found a tiny amount of crack in her upstairs bedroom, a room

## How Hard Do They Hit?

I hooked up with Johnnie Woluewich at the Elks Lodge in Elmhurst, Queens on Friday, September 5. USA Boxing Metropolitan of New York, of which Johnnie is a board member, was co-sponsoring an evening of bouts that pitted New York Golden Gloves winners against New Jersey Golden Gloves winners.

The air in this fabled venue was acrid with cigar smoke, hot dogs and beer. We were waiting for a substitute fight doctor to arrive (the scheduled one had been in an accident) and had plenty of time to continue our dialogue on women and men and the sport of boxing.

Woluewich had fought 17 professional fights as a superbantamweight—more or less my weight class, so my competitive juices were stirred. I posed a question: "Johnnie, I'm roughly your weight. What are the chances that I could knock you out?"

He laughed and said, "Not much." Woluewich says there's no way a woman can hit as hard as a man of equal weight—at least not yet. Women are not that far along in the sport. He feels that, as in track and field, they're slowly creeping up to the men but will never quite be on a par. Their arm strength could conceivably be equal, but not their pectorals. "Women have breasts and those muscles don't develop as much as men's," he says. "They're all fat."

Still, I was taught that punching power derives not from the chest or arms but from the base of the body. Woluewich concurred, adding, "That's why plyometrics are so im-

portant." Plyometrics are exercises that build leg and hip strength—to allow for short bursts of activity and power. Cuban boxers are plyometric zealots, squatting and leaping for two hours each day before tackling roadwork or sparring. Maybe that's why they're so good: Executed properly, a punch that starts at the toes and travels up the calves and hamstrings and into the pelvic area delivers a wallop. (Technically, my well-muscled gams and Hungarian peasant-stock flanks should help me here.)

Trying to gain some advantage, I pressed Woluewich: "Then what would it take for me to knock you out?" He says that if a man has no defenses, and if he's hit with a number of combinations, he'll most likely topple. Johnnie has a theory: A guy with weak neck muscles is most vulnerable. He tells me there are two ways to get knocked out—taking a direct hit to the skull or getting your neck snapped. The latter cuts off circulation to the head. "Your brain stops for a second. It makes you drowsy and you drop."

That's why fierce uppercuts and hooks are in the coveted arsenal of the world's most feared boxers. (Remember Mike?) And it's not the blow to the jaw or chin that's so deadly: "It's the head spinning that knocks you out."

For this reason, the all-important "iron chin" is a misnomer. "It should be an 'iron neck'," says Woluewich.

More reasons to do those neck rolls, fellas. —A.H.

she shared with four other people. She had once been part of that life, but had found God and reformed. She was innocent, she'd appeal. She didn't feel resentment about the setup, only sorrow that people couldn't accept she had turned around her life.

Tyrene is a minor celebrity at Rikers—a champion. She keeps up a boxing regimen of sorts—running in place and hitting a metal door with a sock-wrapped hand for bagwork. She is proud of her taut belly and runs my hand up and down it.

She feels above the fray. A devout Christian, she doesn't smoke, drink or swear. She won't have sex with other inmates, though some women try to get her to. "It's weird in here," she confides. "I'm a lamb among wolves."

A guard announces visiting hour is over. Tyrene walks back toward the wings. She stops, pivots and runs to a table near the guard, where she had left something. I go to meet her and get hollered at. She hands me a brown paper bag and asks if I'll take it to her fiancé, a boxer at Gleason's Gym.

There is a feeling of dejection and loss while we wait in a line for the bus to arrive. I squat, braced against the chain-link fence, as if I have done it a thousand times.

I wait until I'm seated at the back of the bus to peek inside the bag: Cradled in clean cotton briefs is a soap sculpture, a figure wearing bag gloves, with the inscription: NO. 1 BOXER. JESUS LOVES YOU.

There's a party at Gleason's Gym for all the female winners of the Golden Gloves. Gleason's is New York's oldest and largest boxing gym, four rings in an industrial loft tucked under the Brooklyn Bridge. It has 62 trainers, and boxers come from all over to work out before a fight. The party is called for six P.M. on Friday night, and the girls troop upstairs, tottering in high heels, as gawky and shy as fillies. Their Golden Gloves pendants hang around their necks and get tangled when they hug hello.

Laid out on a check-in table is a long, white cake and Hawaiian Punch. I feel like I am at my Girl Scouts meeting in the Presbyterian church basement. The champs wolf down their food: They have been pigging out all week on pizza, soda, beer, nachos, ice cream and cookies. Next week they'll go back to training.

Tanya Dean arrives with her five-year-old son, Ricky. The boy beams about his mom's victory and his part in it: "I love her. I love how she fights. She fights good. I told her what she had to do."

The affable owner of Gleason's, Bruce Silverglade, is holed up in his office, on the phone to Denmark, trying to arrange a bout for Jill Matthews, the first woman to win at the finals when the Gloves opened to women in 1995. Four

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**MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

months later she went pro, but with so few women in her division, she's had only three fights. And at 33, she realizes her career is running out of time. She needs this fight.

Jill is a scrappy, 5'3", 106-pound ball of fire with a tumble of strawberry-blonde ringlets. She's a hairdresser and Hunter College student originally from Chelsea. She fronts a punk rock band with her ex-boyfriend on bass and her husband (an attorney and rabbi's son) on drums.

Boxing, she says, is the "punk rock of sports. It's aggressive." Jill has no patience for less-experienced women who hold out for more money before they fight. She gets crazy when people ask, "What's a nice Jewish girl doing in the ring?" While she hopes the day will come when women will be fully accepted, she says that on that day she'll quit: "It won't be cool anymore."

Predictions for the future of women's boxing run the gamut. Mickey Rosario of Thomas Jefferson feels it will always be a sideshow. My trainer, Terry Claybon, thinks there will be superstars in three or four different weight classes, but it won't be widespread. USA Boxing's Johnnie Woluewich, and Bruce Silverglade, promoter and gym owner, are optimistic: They're encouraged by the recent explosion and feel it will continue.

If my experience is any measure, the future looks good. Women like boxing for the physical training. Most of us have been martial artists or have played a rough team sport such as soccer or basketball. We find boxing's mental challenges appealing: the dedication and commitment it commands, the need to outsmart our opponents, the confrontations with our weaknesses. Joe Louis, speaking of his 1946 fight with Billy Conn, said, "He can run, but he can't hide." The same might be said for character: Whatever blocks you have, whatever demons, you'll face them in the ring and they'll be the greater enemies.

We like ourselves better in the ring. We are focused but relaxed. We use strategy but rely on instinct. We are in tune with our own rhythms. We feel both invincible and humble.

We get to ask the larger questions: When weary, can I go the distance? Can I take it on the chin? What happens when my game plan is challenged? If I'm beaten to the punch, do I fold or do I parry? If I'm down for the count, do I get up? Boxing may play on our worst fears of annihilation. But some of us like to be scared. And, in truth, I am less frightened stepping into the ring than I am walking to a meeting on a studio lot. It's cleaner, more honest, more real.

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# Are you ready to box, men?

suck in your gut and read this



Anyone can box," says Terry Claybon of the incomparable Hollywood Boxing Gym in Los Angeles. "You just have to take it at your own pace."

I called Terry, my own trainer, to find out how PLAYBOY's readers might get in shape for a boxing workout. (This is a little like straightening up before the cleaning lady arrives.) What Claybon said surprised me. Apparently, there's no way to prepare, because the training is so different from that required in other sports. His best advice before you get in the ring: Keep an open mind.

We assume you're not 50 pounds overweight and smoking three packs a day. Let's say you're in decent shape and you're ready to begin training. (No more excuses.) Claybon says you must be able to run one to two miles (you can even walk at a fast clip: "It doesn't have to be vicious"), do reasonable abdominal work (100 sit-ups or crunches) and do ten to 20 push-ups.

In the gym, weight training is OK if you're trying to tone, but use lighter weights and do more repetitions. Bulk does not help in the ring. As Claybon says, "You need to be fast and loose."

Terry does pull-ups (for lats and biceps), dips (for triceps), push-ups (for pecs) and natural squats (for legs). Beginners should start out with five to ten repetitions and work up to three sets of ten each.

For machine addicts, Terry likes the Versa Climber, which approximates climbing a ladder in quicksand with a gorilla on your back. Make the resistance higher for a power workout; lower for speed. The Versa Climber also helps develop your cardiac recovery rate. Alternate 30 seconds of work with 15 seconds' rest, building up to five minutes total. This mimics the intense three-minute round and one minute of rest found in boxing gyms everywhere.

While some gym rats prefer to regulate their cardiovascular workouts on a treadmill, Terry favors doing roadwork the old-fashioned way: on the road. He says, "It's more exciting to go freelance—you can move more, react, shadowbox."

Claybon strongly recommends working with a trainer to avoid developing bad habits that are hard to break. His basic ten-round boxing workout goes something like this:

*Stretching:* for at least five minutes.

*Jumping rope:* one round (three minutes). Helps build stamina, leg muscles, coordination, timing. Novice women like it better than novice men—perhaps it's schoolgirls' nostalgia. Some prefer to end their routine with the rope; we use it as a warm-up.

*Footwork:* one round. Sequences of defensive moves: pivots, slips, rows and feints together with a series of basic combinations.

*Shadowboxing:* one round. That cool thing boxers do before a fight. When we do it, we feel like idiots, but it's the single best thing to do for form. And, yes, do it in front of a mirror.

*Focus mitts:* three rounds. You need a trainer for this. He slips his hands into two big pads that he holds in front of you while you practice throwing punches at them. As you get better, he starts tapping you back, to build your defensive skills. One step away from actual sparring.

*Bagwork:* two rounds. The meat and potatoes of the boxer's workout. Done on a heavy bag (or, if you're Rocky, a side of beef) attached by a chain to the ceiling. Used for practicing all combinations. Builds hand speed, stamina and power.

*Double-end bag:* one round. Also known as the crazy bag. A bladder-shaped bulk attached by a cord to the ceiling, and at the other end, to the floor. Used mostly to practice clean, straight punches. A glancing blow causes it to wobble in a loopy arc that makes it impossible to hit (and thus makes you crazy).

*Speed bag:* one round. Pure showmanship, some say. But we love that staccato blur. Helps rhythm, hand-eye coordination, speed and, on a simple level, forces you to keep your hands up.

*Abdominals:* 400—of various persuasions. Old-fashioned gyms still use a medicine ball: Your trainer throws the equivalent of 15 pounds of birdseed at your stomach to toughen you up. It seems dumb until you start to spar and nearly faint when your opponent "goes downstairs." It's the body blows that really slow you down, not the ones to the head.

*Neck rolls:* three sets of ten. To strengthen that thing supporting your head. Right up there with roadwork among boxers' least favorite exercises.

*Push-ups:* 20, minimum. Do them correctly: Slowly, head up, back and legs straight. (Do them on your knees at your own peril.)

## FIGHTING SHAPE

If you can do all this, you're in sparring shape. You'll be in the gym three days a week. To move on to the next stage—fighting shape—plan to spend five days in the gym, and spar every other day for four rounds. I thought I was in shape until I started to spar; then I took to my bed for two days. The ante is ratcheted up by a few things: the weight of the gloves (anywhere from 12 to 16 ounces), your adrenaline level and, mostly, confronting a moving target that's trying to hit you back. Suddenly, everything you've learned goes out the window. You can move, but you can't throw a punch. Or you flail wildly and forget to bob and weave. You finally understand how interminable a minute is, and why there's so much clinching: You would do anything to steal a few seconds of rest.

Sparring is what separates the men from the boys. Unless you're willing to give and take a punch, don't go there. And while headgear is standard, you can still get a black eye or fat lip. So lay off the day before you're getting married or arguing your first case before the Supreme Court.

For extra-credit students only: Fighting trim is as different from sparring as sparring is from training. This is why men have retired to monastery-like camps in the weeks before a fight, refusing mail, calls, wives and girlfriends. The theory that engaging in sexual activity before a bout drains one of vital fluids (or, in the vernacular, juice) is now generally pooh-poohed. It's still the chase that's enervating. So no drinking, no late-night carousing. Everything Aunt Mabel said is true: Early to bed, early to rise. Eat well: Everything should be steamed or baked; no fried foods, no sweets. Drink plenty of fluids. Sleep a full eight hours a night, and whenever you're fatigued, rest. In short, be a good soldier. As Terry says, "Your body is preparing for war." —A.H.

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# PLAYBILL

TRADITIONALLY, December is PLAYBOY's time to reap, to assess and to just plain let it rip. If you're not in a holiday mood now, you will be by the time you finish reading this issue.

We start off with the ghost of parties past. Despite his Academy Award nomination for *Chaplin* and his impressive talent, **Robert Downey Jr.** is probably best known for the physical comedy of his drug-addled antics. It's a rep he'll never shake and he meets it head-on in this month's *Playboy Interview* with **Michael Fleming**, a columnist for *Daily Variety*. "Downey is not particularly ashamed of or apologetic about his problems," Fleming says. That's an understatement. In a wild, unbridled discussion about his junkie period and his stint in jail, Downey relives his escapes from rehab and tries to remember the details of the "Goldilocks" incident (he was found passed out in the home of a startled Malibu family). Then it's on to how he's rebuilding his life and career with roles in the forthcoming films *One Night Stand* and *The Gingerbread Man*. Whatever you think of Downey, don't call him dull.

At the other end of the speculum, well-rounded physician **Andrew Weil's** synthesis of scientific research and alternative therapies is advancing the field of preventive medicine. His Web site receives 2 million hits a month and his PBS specials seem to run more frequently than the stations' pleas for money. Still, Weil is concerned that men—the half of Americans most at risk from stress—may not be listening. In *Dr. Weil's Rx for Guys* by **David Sheff**, Weil swells our faith in herbs that will stimulate our sex drive. And though he knocks steak, he also explains why washboard abs work only on the covers of silly magazines.

We will never know why **Andrew Cunanan** gunned down fashion designer **Gianni Versace** in Miami. The networks overwhelmed us with a shining moment of TV camera lights, then moved on to the next big story. Initial reports pegged the murderer as an AIDS-riddled serial killer. As it turned out, he was neither sick nor serial material. Writer **Pat Jordan**, a resident of Florida, has seen how the Sunshine State exerts a pull on both the fabulous and the failures. His article *Versace's Paradise* (the artwork is by **Wilson McLean**) is a tale of two cities—seedy North Miami Beach and sex-charged South Beach. Jordan re-creates the comfortable life Versace led in the area around his mansion, then tracks Cunanan's miserable last moments as, his looks and money fading, he sprang for an \$11 haircut.

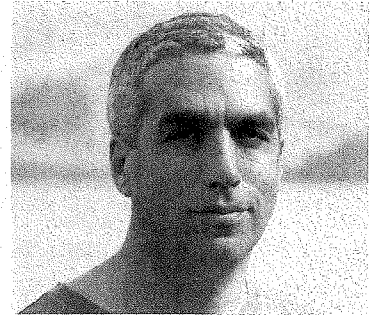
Though the great white north is known for its chilly weather, tempers there can run a bit hot. Within two months of winning the title Miss Canada International, beauty queen **Danielle House** broke her crown when she struck her ex-boyfriend's girlfriend in a bar, which led to a conviction for assault. This month the Newfoundlander sheds all but her tiara in, you guessed it, a knockout pictorial by Contributing Photographer **Stephen Wayda**.

She's not the only woman out there with a good left jab. Golden Glover Jill Matthews says boxing is the "punk rock of sports: It's aggressive and offensive." The number of female fighters is growing, and these sisters are spunkier than ever. According to **Amy Handelsman**, a former movie and television development exec from Los Angeles, training and sparring beat the stuffing out of aerobics and Stair Masters. In her article *Women Boxing*, she reveals how she learned to swing and brings us close enough to clinch her female idols as they square off in Madison Square Garden. Guys may want to check out *Are You Ready to Box, Men?* and *How Hard Do They Hit?* before they climb into the ring with a woman. If women's pugilistic skills ever get as sharp as their tongues, we're in big trouble. **Kadir Nelson's** illustration adds pop to the piece.

We keep things shaking and baking with *Playboy's College Basketball Preview* by our up-front big man, Sports Editor **Gary Cole**. This year's season will delight the speed freaks among



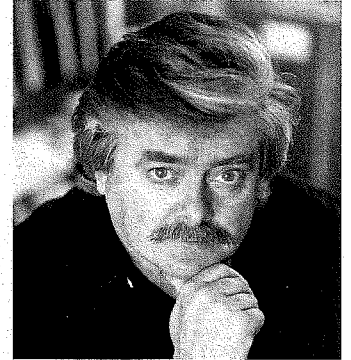
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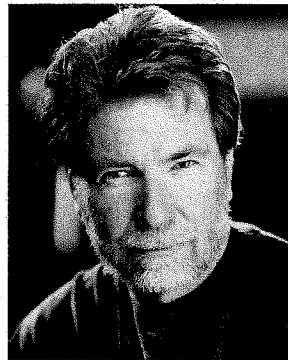
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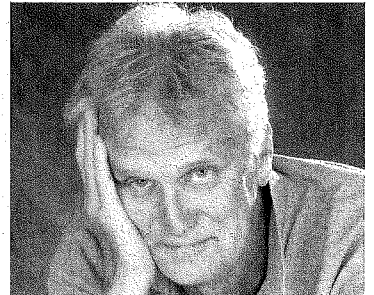
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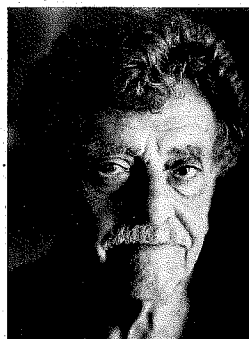
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