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SPORTS



Grant Roberts, co-owner of Pitt Meadows Athletic Club, helped Hilary Swank gain 20 pounds of muscle for her role in Clint Eastwood's new movie Million Dollar Baby, where she plays an up-and-coming fighter. Roberts, who was sought out by Eastwood to help train Swank, was also given a cameo role in the movie where he plays the cornerman for Lucia Rijker, one of the top female boxers in the world. Million Dollar Baby opens in select theatres this weekend, with the wide release set for Jan. 28.
Michael Matsumaru/TIMES

A fine body of work

Local man trains Oscar winner for new movie

Academy award winner Hilary Swank definitely needed her ego stroked after her first meeting with personal trainer Grant Roberts in New York.

Roberts, who is co-owner of the Pitt Meadows Athletic Club, had been asked by Clint Eastwood if he would be willing to train Swank for an upcoming role as a boxer in Eastwood's movie Million Dollar Baby.

Roberts had never heard of Swank before but agreed to take on the project because it was Eastwood, after all, who put forth the request.

A business man who owns fitness clubs throughout Western Canada and a fitness equipment company in L.A. called Apex USA, Roberts happened to be in New York at the time and so he met Swank in person at the Warner Brothers building.

"To be honest, I'd never heard of her before," said Roberts.

After greeting her, he threw out the question, "So you're an actress?"

She was a bit taken back by the question, however she was kind enough not to rip into him for his ignorance and explained that she was an Academy Award-winning actress.

It didn't take Roberts long to realize who he was dealing with: one of People magazine's 50 most beautiful people and the star of several lingerie ads for Calvin Klein this past summer.

"It didn't deter me from wanting to train her," laughed Roberts.

Eastwood, who directed Million Dollar Baby, was already an acquaintance



of Roberts, who had helped set up a gym at his home. Robert's business partner Mike Hamill had introduced him to Eastwood a few years back so it wasn't a complete shock to hear that Eastwood wanted Roberts to help whip his main star into shape.

It was still an honour, though.

"You don't get much more major than Clint," said Roberts, who makes his home in Vancouver when he's not busy travelling across North America. "I've done fitness videos and TV shows but this was my first grand-scale project."

His task was to turn the model-thin Swank into a muscular, top-flight boxer within a couple of months. He had only nine weeks before she would step in the ring with the actual 140 pound champion, real life women's boxing star Lucia Rijker.

Swank only weighed 110 pounds and had never boxed before so legendary boxing trainer Hector Rocca spent two hours with her each morning developing her boxing skills and Roberts spent about an hour and a half each day with weight training to help her bulk up.

"She ended up putting on 20 pounds for the role without gaining any body fat," said Roberts. "It was very scientific as far as making her gain lean muscle mass without gaining any body fat."

While Roberts pushed Swank to the limit in her weight training, he also designed her diet, which was constantly changing to ensure that she would not accumulate any body fat in the process. The key was loading her up with a substantial amount of essential fatty acids (ie. flax seed oil) and plenty of protein. He also put her on a restricted carb diet for five days a week.

By the time the nine weeks were up, Eastwood was so impressed with Swank's physique that he gave Roberts a cameo in the movie. He served as Rijker's cornerman, a role that took three days to film. He only gets about two minutes on screen and the few lines he did have weren't included in the movie but Roberts wasn't at all disappointed.

"I'd love to do more acting but that's not up to me. I don't think there's a calling in Hollywood for someone like me right now," said Roberts.

That may not be the case though, as Roberts got his start in a similar fashion to former Hollywood action star Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Roberts opened his first gym at the age of 17 and became a Canadian heavyweight champion in the sport of body building at the age of 19. He's taking a break from competition to focus on his business ventures but back in his prime he once bench pressed 635 pounds in competition. At the time, he was training with Ted Arcidi, the first person to officially bench press 705 pounds, back in 1985.

These days, Roberts is in the process of writing his first book, which will be released this summer and is called the Unified Diet. He says he's read every health and diet book out there and is ready to offer his take, "a compilation of everything I've learned."

He says one of the keys will be helping people understand and comprehend the effects of what they're eating and why it makes sense, as opposed to just taking his word for it.

"It's all about understanding the elements of nutrition and being able to apply them to your field," said Roberts.

- For more info check out www.meccafitness.com.

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