

# Local News

THE PEOPLE'S CHAMP

## New Canaan trainer bridges boxing and fitness

By Justin Papp

NEW CANAAN — Adam Colberg doesn't like being hit in the face — an odd trait for a man who has made a living in the boxing ring.

"Everyone has a plan until they get hit in the face. That's not me, that's Mike Tyson who said that," said Colberg, seated in the cafe of New Canaan's Oxygen Fitness, where he works. "I dabble with fighting, but I would never consider myself a fighter. Even though I can move better than a lot of pros, I don't like getting hit. So I realized at one point I shouldn't fight, I should train people."

Colberg, who was born in Pennsylvania and grew up in Westport, is one of the country's premier boxing and fitness trainers and has been featured in Men's Fitness and Healthy Life Magazine and on HBO, MTV and the History Channel.

Like countless others, Colberg was introduced to the sport as a child watching the flash and footwork of Muhammad Ali in his prime.

"My dad was a huge fan of Ali. We used to sit around and watch his fights, so then I became a huge fan of Ali," Colberg said.

But Colberg's early exposure to boxing was confined to the television set. As a practitioner, he devoted himself early on to martial arts, and earned three black belts. It wasn't until he was an adult that Colberg forwent the belts and karate and stepped into the ring.

"The very beginning was when I was in the Marines. I



Justin Papp / Hearst Connecticut Media

**Dave Koch, owner of Oxygen Fitness, works out in his gym with trainer Adam Colberg.**

was a club boxer, more or less," Colberg said. When he got out of the service, he sought out professional instruction, ultimately finding South Florida Boxing, in South Beach, where he started training under Luis Lagerman.

"Ali's coach was Angelo Dundee. Luis Lagerman is an Angelo Dundee protege. So I'm a third generation Angelo Dundee trainer," Colberg said, happily emphasizing the few degrees of separation between himself and his childhood hero.

Colberg learned all his mittwork from Lagerman at South Florida Boxing — where all-time greats like Roy Jones Jr., Roberto Duran and Oscar De La

Hoya trained — and then sought out another of the sport's most famous venues: Gleason's Gym in New York City.

"That's where I made my resume and got my experience training professional fighters, like (former light welterweight champion) Vivian Harris. I fell in love with the sport at Gleason's Gym," Colberg said.

He recalled fondly one episode that helped initiate him into the fraternal culture of the boxing gym.

Colberg, at that time a hot-headed newcomer to the sport, once brought his girlfriend to the gym to watch him train. As his session drew to an end and

his trainer began removing Colberg's gloves, he noticed a man loudly flirting with and dancing around his girl.

Feeling disrespected, Colberg told his trainer to put the gloves back on and prepared to challenge the man to a bout. Knowing better, his trainer informed Colberg that the man was, in fact, the fighter Hector "Macho" Camacho, a seven-time world champion, and that a fight was inadvisable.

"I thought, 'Oh, he can hit on my girl any day he wants,'" Colberg joked. "The boxing gym is full of a lot of love and trash talk and fun. You have to take it with a grain of salt. I learned that quick."

But more than just the culture, Colberg was attracted at Gleason's to the freedom of movement that boxing permitted, as opposed to the rigidity he associated with martial arts.

"It's not like karate, or pressing weights. Boxing is very loose, almost like kung fu," Colberg said of the fluidity of motion, the push and pull, that he's found wins out in the sport. "Good movement makes good fighters. If your style looks awkward and ugly, it's not good movement. If it's pretty and sweet looking, usually it's all right. Your movement should flow. It's like dancing."

After his time at Gleason's, Colberg decided he wanted to dedicate himself to boxing. But when he also decided to settle down with his girlfriend, he realized he'd need to do more than just train fighters to pay the bills.

"I got married and my wife was like, 'You've got to make a

### Oxygen Fitness

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living doing this.' To make money as a trainer you have to have big fights all year round, and even then there's not much money because the fighters get to keep most of the purse. So I had to be smart," Colberg said.

He decided to open up his own boxing gym in Westport and set up a personal training business in Fairfield County that catered not just to professional boxers, but to a swath of clients ranging from high school students to professional athletes to stay-at-home mothers.

"My Wall Street guys are my best clients because they're totally intense. They're up at three in the morning ready to go, waiting for me," Colberg said. He splits his time between Oxygen Fitness and private clients in Greenwich and elsewhere in Fairfield County.

With all of his clients, Colberg said he stresses the fundamentals of boxing, using the movements more as a fitness tool and less as a form of combat.

"We kind of wrap boxing up in a gift. I package it differently depending on the client, but still give them what they would get at Gleason's. They all learn the real boxing skill set," Colberg said.

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