

**FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ROCKY BALBOA** by Matthew Zeiss



Like so many Americans growing up, every time I caught a glimpse of any Rocky movie, I'd start working out furiously. It didn't matter how, or where, but there was no escaping that undeniable inspiration. Any fan of the series will likely agree, and I've found that it is almost always based upon the same reason. You identify with Rocky's underdog spirit. You are filled with the series' theme that you must never give up, you must never let setbacks and disappointment keep you down. Always try. Always improve. Always move forward.

Sylvester Stallone, the onscreen embodiment of all these qualities was an unknown actor who skyrocketed from nothingness to monumental fame and fortune.

As a professional singer/songwriter, keeping in top physical form is just part of the game. Whether it's the stamina to endure what can sometimes be the grueling side of the entertainment industry, or training your vocal chords to perfection, not to mention the fact that one's physical presence can more often than not make or break a deal.

About two months ago, I decided to completely dedicate myself to getting in shape. I've always enjoyed working out, working hard and keeping fit, but 2009 brought me a newly intensified desire to be at my best. It started by running through the town, weight lifting in the basement, and a bit of physical labor to cap it off. During my daily runs, listening to the Rocky soundtrack (what else?), the thoughts kept popping into my mind. "This is just like Rocky's run...look at that railroad yard over there...that market looks just like the one in Philly...I think I can do this..." That's when it hit me. I decided I was going to run Rocky's Route through Philadelphia. I know what you're thinking - most of the places you see in the films are major landmarks scattered throughout Philadelphia.

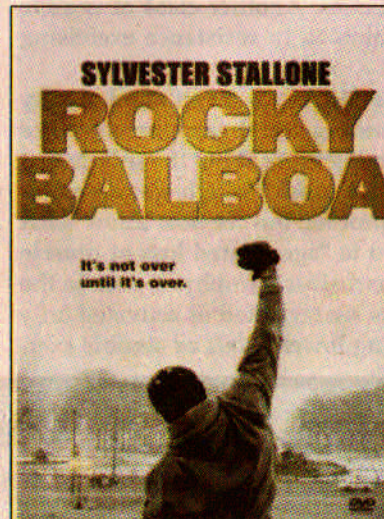
So why not one-up Rocky Balboa himself and retrace the route as best it can be mapped and REALLY tackle it? Seven miles? Eight? No problem. That's when I got winded. It's too far. It's too intense. Maybe even a ridiculous idea.

But Rocky's grasp still had a hold on me. All those years growing up, all that excitement and inspiration to better myself, to try harder, to go one more mile had all been building inside me. It was too irresistible a plan, if only as a competition between me and myself. Could I really do it? I had to find out. The next day, I began to document my experience with a video camera, just so that I could track my progress and have something fun to watch 20 years in the future. Then it dawned on me - why not turn it into a larger experience?

Crazy as it sounds, I hit the yellow pages and then the streets, searching for my own personal "Mighty Mick's Gym." I had to work out anyway, so why not give boxing a try, too? I discovered two exciting prospects...at opposite ends of town. The first, on the far north side of town, was an excellent establishment run by a very nice guy. Problem was, he was intent on taking my simple suggestion to the extreme. It dawned on me when he asked me if I was ok with getting my nose broken. "No, I'm not," I quickly replied. And that was that.

The next day, I made my way to the south end of town to meet with Coach Ray Bettinelli of BCBA ([www.bcba.info](http://www.bcba.info)). BCBA is an immaculate facility and I found Bettinelli to be a terrific guy who had developed an outstanding company mission and outlook on life. He agreed to get onboard and help me with my project, beginning with the basics of boxing. In my mind, what really sealed the deal was the instant reaction I got from the atmosphere in his gym. As Bettinelli was describing possible training programs and showing me around the place, it suddenly hit me - this place was perfect. Behind the coach, like the backdrop of a movie set, was a window facing the railroad tracks, with a picturesque train rambling by - just like Mighty Mick's. I smiled. Afterwards, home and excited, I got in touch with my old stomping ground, All Natural Fitness ([www.allnaturalfitness.com](http://www.allnaturalfitness.com) <http://www.allnaturalfitness.com>).

The owner, Pat Russo, replied a few days later agreeing to assist with my training and sculpting. Pat invited me in for a meeting where we would discuss my new training regiment. Walking back in there was a breath of fresh air, All Natural Fitness is a very manly gym with a great atmosphere! I am documenting my experiences in a new reality TV show that will be aired on national TV. My hopes are that through this miniseries, people will come to understand that you can achieve anything if you just set your heart and mind to it. As I always say, "Aim for the moon and you'll hit the top of a tree; aim for the top of a tree and you'll never get off the ground, so shoot for the stars."



*Singer/songwriter Matthew Zeiss resides in Long Island and is a locally recognized entertainer, having staged live performances and appeared in local TV commercials. He's looking for sponsors to help him on his quest to become the next "Rocky." In his spare time, Matt is a very talented Elvis "interpreter" competing in contests across the country. Matt's currently putting the finishing touches on his first album, Reflectionz, which can be heard on his website [www.zeisslive.com](http://www.zeisslive.com)*