

# Health & Fitness Guide 2007



## Train Like a Fighter

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an extra punch*

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# Health

## Train Like a Fighter

Knuckleup Fitness gives workouts an extra punch



Photos by Marcy J. Levinson

By **JOSH KRAM**  
The Jewish Times

**J**ust walking into Knuckleup Fitness, you cannot help but feel like Rocky Balboa. From the regulation-size boxing ring center-stage to the hulking guys punching and kicking each other, this roughhouse gym in Sandy Springs was just the thing to bring back childhood memories of wearing my American flag designer boxing shorts and oversized Everlast gloves and beating up on my younger brother, David. While I easily won those bouts, I didn't have any illusion that I might walk out of a fight at Knuckleup with any front teeth — yet as I laced up for my two-hour workout, I could almost hear Mick Goldmill breathing into my ear, "Go get 'em, Rock."

Craig Hragyil, my trainer for the morning, described Knuckleup as a "full-on fitness experience." As he showed me

around, he pointed out all of the professional fighters on staff who serve as trainers: a silver medalist at the International Kickboxing Federation's National Championship, a Muay Thai national champion, Brazilian jujutsu national champions — all guys who, Hragyil says, "liked to get punched and kicked in the face."

This gym-cum-fighters' training ground packs quite the punch. A variety of features in this gym set it apart from the LA Fitnesses of the world. Knuckleup brings training and conditioning techniques that professional fighters use to people simply looking to get in shape and have a good time in the process. The gym has all the usual accessories — treadmills, spinning classes and free weights — but it also has dozens of classes on everything from a menu of martial arts to fitness kickboxing.

Knuckleup Fitness represents a grow-

ing trend of gyms that are attempting to develop a niche in a crowded market. The number of health and fitness clubs in the United States has grown by 75 percent since 2000 to about 27,000 clubs, while the number of members has only grown by 32 percent. With more options out there and relatively fewer people joining gyms, exercise gurus and gym owners have had to develop creative ideas to differentiate their product from the lot.

Knuckleup's differentiator is obvious from one of its mantras: Train like a fighter. You may be a burgeoning Muhammad Ali seeking sparring partners or a professional couch potato looking for a change from the usual, mundane routine — either way Knuckleup gives you something to punch on. One of the best features of Knuckleup is its knowledgeable, trained staff who work one on one with clients, help personalize goals and routines, and work you to a pulp.

I think Craig took it easy on me because it was my first visit to Knuckleup, and while he had the upper hand with the gloves, I still had last recourse with the pen. For two hours, he jumped me from exercise to exercise. One moment, I was throwing Craig a medicine ball doing sit-ups, and the next I was sliding into lunge position engaging muscles that I didn't even know I had.

All the while, he made sure that my form was correct and pushed me to work harder than I would have if I had been alone.

Sure, I go to the gym, but I'm usually bored even before the first bead of sweat trickles down my arm. That is a common theme among people who want to stay in shape and genuinely enjoy exercise but are turned off by the typical gym experience.

Knuckleup is a great gym alternative because you're moving so quickly from



Josh Kram (pictured on Page 21 and here in blue shorts) trains with Knuckleup's Craig Hragyil.

one thing to the next that you don't have a chance to get bored. It's actually exhilarating. But you can get personal weight training at any gym. No doubt every gym has a list of trainers who will work you through the weights, but Knuckleup Fitness takes it one step further.

At the end of the workout, I put on boxing gloves and entered the prize ring. Craig taught me four kickboxing moves: two punches, a high kick, and my favorite, a kick move that involves kneeing your opponent in the face, all skills that I wish I had acquired 15 years earlier when I still was battling my brother.

Then I got to use my new moves. The bell rang off in the distance. I danced around the ring, protecting my face with my gloves. I punched. I kicked. I don't think I landed one punch square, and, of course, Craig wasn't punching back, but that's not the point. The point is that I was learning how to box and after two rounds at three minutes each, I was dripping with sweat and had a whole new appreciation for boxing.

Plus, there is nothing like punching something as hard as you can. Maybe it's because fighting is one of those ageless childhood fantasies or because it just feels good. Either way, Knuckleup's program is fun and offers bored gym rats a great work-



out. There are three locations in metro Atlanta — Sandy Springs, midtown and Kennesaw — with two more locations planned in the near future. According to the Web site, future clubs will include "a full-sized Combat Sports Cage as seen on *The Ultimate Fighter* TV Show." Taking it up a notch. So I'm thinking about taking a few more punching lessons and then inviting my brother to join me in the death cage for a rematch of one of our famous bouts.

This time, however, I'm hoping that my mom won't intervene and ground me for a month. □

For more information, visit [www.knuckleupfitness.com](http://www.knuckleupfitness.com).

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