

## Fernandez Is Again Ready For His Closeup

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 04 August 2010 19:00

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I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille.

Well ... maybe I would be if I had a couple of months to diet, undergo cosmetic surgery and cadge an acting lesson or two from, say, Sir Anthony Hopkins.

Sans all that, I'll have to make do with what's already there when I fly to Detroit on Aug. 15 to join four other boxing writers (the *Boston Herald's* Ron Borges, *Sports Illustrated's* Chris Mannix, the *New York Daily News's* Tim Smith and *Yahoosports.com's* Kevin Iole) to film a scene for a boxing movie set for a Nov. 18, 2011 release, "Real Steel, which stars Hugh Jackman, best known to action-flick devotees as the guy who plays Wolverine in those "X-Man blockbusters.

This is my third movie, which is three more than I ever thought I'd be in. Who knew that snagging the lead in the St. Stephen School second-grade production of "Frosty the Snowman would pay off so many years later? Unlike the Norma Desmond character played so memorably by Gloria Swanson in 1950's "Sunset Boulevard, I'm not a cinematic has-been; I'm a never-was. But there is something to be said for being in the right place at the right time, which has allowed me a fleeting glimpse of Hollywood.

It all started in 1999, when Bill Caplan, a publicist for Top Rank and a close friend of sports-obsessed director Ron Shelton ("Bull Durham, "White Men Can't Jump, "Cobb, "Tin Cup) walked into the Las Vegas press room a few days before that weekend's fisticuffs and asked the writers present, "Who wants to be in a movie? Everyone, of course, volunteered, which is how I first was typecast as a "ringside reporter for "Play it to the Bone, the fight film starring Woody Harrelson and Antonio Banderas.

After its release, I was stunned to learn I had my very own "Filmography on the Internet, which generously stretched the truth in listing me as an actor. It also revealed that I "work often with Kevin Costner, who had a celebrity cameo in the movie, although I've never met the man. But the Filmography noted that I worked frequently with Mike Tyson and George Foreman, which I suppose is true enough.

Seven years passed, whereupon I learned that Sylvester Stallone would return to the screen for the sixth installment in the "Rocky series, "Rocky Balboa. I was slated to snag a tiny role in 1990's "Rocky V, but the scene in which actual Philadelphia media types --Al Meltzer and *Philadelphia Daily News* colleagues Elmer Smith and Stan Hochman-- appeared was shot when I was in Tokyo covering Buster Douglas' colossal upset of Tyson, which I considered to be more than a equitable tradeoff.

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Ruminating on my missed opportunity, I wrote a tongue-in-cheek column for a boxing web site, "Sly, You Owe Me. Imagine my surprise when, a few days later, I got a call from a young woman with a Los Angeles casting agency who said Stallone had read the piece and wanted me to play, um, me. I got some lines, too!

Now I'm getting to emote as myself again in "Real Steel, which envisions the eventual replacement of human fighters with robots. The time frame is said to be in the "near future.

Given the advances in robotic technology, the concept is not entirely implausible. The combined vision, talents and deep pockets of the folks at DreamWorks and Touchstone, a division of the Walt Disney Co., means this is no shoestring-budget affair, as does the involvement of Steven Spielberg and Robert Zemeckis, who are among those listed as executive producers. Being affiliated with the legendary Spielberg, even so tenuously, probably impresses me even more than my grandchildren were stoked to learn that their favorite (I hope) aging relative was going to be in a movie with Wolverine.

What can I say? I already can claim to have a relationship with Oscar... Oscar De La Hoya, that is.