

Inside Track; Hub road rage primed Donnie for punch-packed `Annapolis'

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NEWS

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Former boy-bander gone Hollywood Donnie Wahlberg plays a naval officer-slash-boxing coach in his new flick "Annapolis." But even though he trained in the ring for two months, Donnie said he learned everything he needs to know about fighting - in Boston traffic!

"In Boston, if you get in the middle of a traffic jam and you start yelling and get out of your car, there's a good chance you'll get a punch in the face, you know?" said the Dorchester homey and ex- New Kid on the Block. "I miss Boston."

In "Annapolis," Wahlberg plays a seasoned Navy lieutenant at the prestigious Maryland Naval Academy who takes a chance on a young boxer from the wrong side of the tracks, played by the up-and- coming cutie, James Franco.

"(The film) reminded me of "An Officer and a Gentleman," and "Rocky," which were my two favorite films growing up," said Mark Wahlberg's older brother.

"I really like (director) James Lin, and between him and James Franco and the script, the whole process was really fun. It wasn't too heavy," the "Saw II" actor said.

Which is surprising considering the heavy hitting that goes on between Franco and Wahlberg. In the film, Donnie's character secretly trains Franco's Jake Huber, who has been banned from the ring, in time for the academy's boxing bout.

"We were landing 40 percent and 50 percent of the punches during filming," divulged Donnie. "Most directors yell `Cut' after each hit, running to the actor to make sure they're all right. But we were hitting each other, hard - which made it more fun."

In other words, just like Saturday night in Dorchester!

"Annapolis," written by Wellesley native Dave Collard, opens in theaters today.

From the Damned By Faint Praise File: When it comes to whipping up Super Bowl advertising excitement, Seattle Seahawks QB Matt Hasselbeck is no Tom Brady!

Pickett Advertising Executive Creative Director Bob Dorfman told SportsBusiness Daily that the former BC/QB isn't exactly making hearts beat faster on Madison Avenue.

"He might not be quite as good looking as maybe a Tom Brady type," said Dorfman. "But certainly with that bald head he could get some Rogaine commercials."

Ah, ouch!

"Tonight Show" announcer "Stuttering" John Melendez is so worried about filling the Comedy Connection at Faneuil Hall for his stand-up gig Sunday night, he worked the box office phones and handed out flyers yesterday!

"Friday or Saturday no problem," Stuttering John sputtered. "But Sunday?"

Jay Leno's right-hand man also made the obligatory rounds of the radio stations to flog his gig but told our spy he was having some trouble convincing WBCN to put him on the air!

Seems the 104.1 bunch isn't exactly rockin' and rollin' to remind listeners of their ex-morning man - Howard Stern. And, of course, Stuttering John got his start - and his name - when he did celebrity interviews for the King of All Media.

As you know, Howard has moved to satellite radio and David Lee Roth is not exactly - how shall we say? - making anyone Jump up and down as Stern's replacement.

We rang up 'BCN to inquire about the Stuttering snub and were assured they were "working on" scheduling Melendez for today.

Do stay tuned.

TRACKED DOWN: Stoneham skating sweetheart Nancy Kerrigan, whose newest gig is interviewing skating celebs for the syndicated TV show "The Insider," chatting up fellow Olympian Dorothy Hamill about her famous hairdo and the Ice Capade's annoying naked weigh-ins. (The interview airs at 7 tonight on Channel 4) . . . "Annapolis" star Donnie Wahlberg, Celtics Paul Pierce, Marcus Banks and Delonte West and Red Sox hurler Craig Hansen tripping the light fantastic with a posse of admirers at The Foundation Lounge . . . Peabody homey Gary Gulman headlining the High Times yukfest at The Improv in La-La . . . Ex-Bruins big guy Cam Neely having a little chin wag with NECN's Chet Curtis . . . TGIF:

** Casting types from "Husband Camp," yet another TV reality show, are hunting for men in need of some fine-tuning and the women who put up with them. The guys will be sent to "Husband Camp" on the Left Coast for two weeks where they'll be drilled on how to become the ultimate spouse. The wives get a weekend in L.A. to see how they turn out. Couples over 25 who are up for the challenge should show up at The Rack from 2 to 4 p.m. tommorrow.

** "Law & Order" D.A. Sam Waterston, a Cambridge homey, will be the special guest at tomorrow night's Max Warburg Courage Curriculum celebration at the Ritz Carlton. The gala will celebrate the 15th anniversary of the founding of the program, named for Warburg, a Massachusetts boy who died of leukemia. The educational program helps Boston Public Schools recognize courage through literature and essay writing.

** Listen to the Track as we dish the dirt with Greg Hill and the boys on WAAF at around 8:20 today - and every Friday. It'll rock your world . . .

Caption: Dorchester homeboy Donnie Wahlberg cheers on the Boston Celtics with season ticket holder Mike Rotondi. Staff Photo By Matt Stone; Stuttering John Melendez of the "Tonight Show" and Howard Stern fame is trying to drum up business for his show at the Comedy Connection on

Sunday. Staff Photo By John Wilcox; Actor Richard Gere, the Hasty Pudding Man of the Year, at The Cooper Union in 2004. Staff Photo By Tara Carvalho; RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: Little Justina Riopelle, 5, of the Boston Medical Center's Grow Clinic for Children, helps Chris Spinazzola and Danny Meyer of NYC's Union Square Cafe rattle the pots and pans for tonight's 21st annual Spinazzola Gala at the World Trade Center Boston. More than 130 restaurants and 90 vintners will be serving it up at the gala, and proceeds from the black-tie event benefit the Grow Clinic, the Greater Boston Food Bank and 20 other food and hunger-related charities. Staff photo by Mark Garfinkel

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