

'AQUATIC FLAME' WILL ALLOW OLYMPIC TORCH TO VISIT GREAT BARRIER REEF

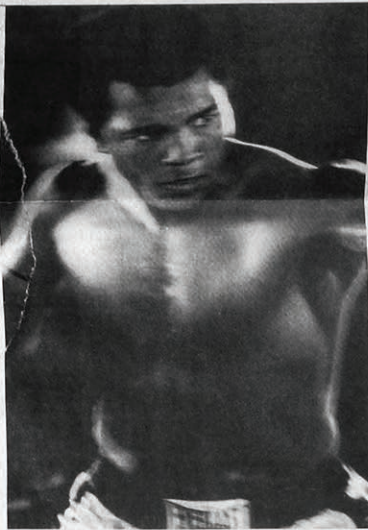
SYDNEY • The torch relay leading up to the Sydney Olympics later this year will feature the first ever underwater leg through the Great Barrier Reef. And even underwater, the Olympic flame will burn on. A trial of aquatic flame technology has been successfully completed to allow the underwater leg to go ahead on June 27, a spokeswoman for the Sydney Olympic organizers, Di Henry, told ABC news. A local scuba diving marine biologist will swim the torch, burning at 3,500 degrees, on a three- to four-minute journey through the reef. Pyrotechnic technology has been developed to make a "ferocious flame" too powerful to be drowned out by water, creators of the torch, Melbourne-based Pains Wessex Australia, said. The underwater leg would showcase Queensland's Great Barrier Reef, a leading tourist attraction for environmentalists and fans of marine biology, Henry said.

AVENUE

Arts, Culture & Society

SPRING FORWARD? MEXICANS AIM TO PUT AN END TO DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

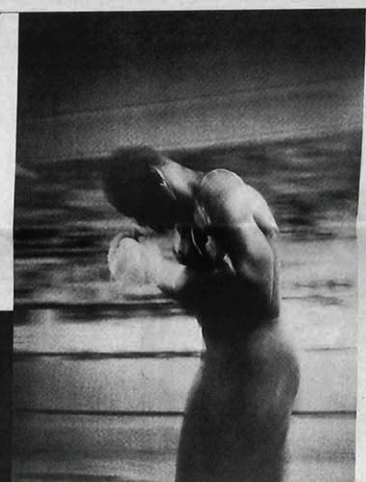
MEXICO CITY • A campaign to end Mexico's annual shift to daylight saving time gathered pace this week after a dozen more states jumped on an opposition-led bandwagon, arguing that advancing clocks by an hour puts lives at risk. A total of 16 of Mexico's 31 states, plus the Federal District where Mexico City is located, voiced their opposition to the so-called "Summer Timetable." In Congress, meanwhile, the opposition leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution and conservative National Action Party lobbied a motion to cancel the time change, hoping to beat the clock with a vote on their proposal by today. Popular opposition to summer time is widespread. Mexicans complain their children face dangers going to school in the dark, while moving clocks an hour ahead puts their metabolisms out of whack. The government argues the measure saves energy and brings Mexico into step with its most important trading partner, the United States.



PHOTOGRAPHER JOHN GOODMAN TOOK THESE PHOTOS AT THE TIMES SQUARE GYM IN NEW YORK OVER THE FINAL YEAR AND A HALF OF ITS EXISTENCE, ENDING IN 1993. THE PICTURE OF MUHAMMAD ALI AT THE GYM, AT LEFT, IN HIS PRIME, IS AN OBVIOUS EXCEPTION. ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE TATAR ALEXANDER PHOTO GALLERY

THE ROCKY ROAD

ONCE THE REVERED CATHEDRALS OF THE SWEET SCIENCE, OLD-STYLE BOXING GYMS LIKE TIMES SQUARE'S ARE BEING SQUEEZED OUT OF THEIR URBAN HOMES. THE NATIONAL POST'S BOXING REPORTER LOOKS ON WITH REGRET



BY CHRIS JONES

The Times Square Gym, a rough but esteemed school as well as the occasional home of Muhammad Ali, was a dump. It was dank and tiny. It was lit—dimly—by exposed fluorescent bulbs. The air was thick with the smell of the deli downstairs. The front window was made opaque by carbon outside and perspiration inside.

But when the Times Square Gym closed in 1993—pushed out of New York's heart by rising rents and declining interest—boxing lost one of its premier factories. An admired assembly line, however decrepit, had gone cold. It was as though a great university had shut down because it could no longer afford to keep its ancient campus.

Sadly, the Times Square Gym was not the first New York club to fade away. There were close to 100 clubs in Manhattan at one time. Today there are no more than a dozen, and the survivors are not riding high. Even the legendary Gleason's could not keep its hold on 30th Street. It was forced across the river to Brooklyn, where real estate values have not quite reached the stratosphere but the spotlight is distant.

To think that Manhattan has turned its back on boxing is tragic to me, both as a fan of the fight game and a rookie reporter in the field. Still, boxing clubs are made of more than stone and mortar. The legacy of a departed gym lasts as long as former members continue to ply their dark trade, or fond recollections can be rescued from the fog that time and eight-counts blow in.

John Goodman's moody photographs of the Times Square Gym, on show at the Tatar Alexander Gallery in Toronto until April 20, bring back a flood of memories. But the images do more than save one small corner of boxing's universe. Because all boxing gyms share the same qualities, Goodman's work takes me back to every club I've ever visited.

They all carry similar clutter—heavy bags and medicine balls and n'er-to-be-heroes. They're usually as hot as an oven. The loud slap of speed bags on the ceiling and jump ropes on the floor makes for a familiar symphony. Even the whiff is soothing somehow.

Clearly, boxing gyms are not luxurious places. But I don't look at boxing gyms as dingy. I'd rather think that they've been worked in and made comfortable, like a pair of well-worn gloves you're reluctant to retire. In fact, I would be suspect of a new and sparkling club. I'd worry that the leotard set would soon arrive for their boxercise class, the prospect of which always fills me with dread.

Never mind the sprawl of a Bally's or GoodLife then. The very best boxing gyms occupy either the basement or the second storey of an old brick building. A narrow set of stairs, more often than not lined with fight posters and inspirational slogans—Turn up the heat! No pain no gain!—builds a visitor's ego and swells his chest. Minds drift to a boxer's long walk to the ring. For a few steps we can pretend we're the heavyweight champion of the world.

A creaky door will alert us to hard fact. Fighters of all shapes and sizes will be busy posturing and putting on a show. Some of them will be stiff and slow, doomed to a future of blackouts. Others will show natural talent but not yet possess marketable skills.

A final few—they will stand out immediately—will be the real deal. Their workout will have the cadence of an efficient routine. They will be smooth and graceful. They will possess an obvious capacity for damage.

The lesser boxers will make like dance-floor fluff when the divas arrive. The pugs always defer to the stars—not only because they might get knocked on their ass but because fighters subscribe to an unwritten code of respect. Status equals space.

Again, the same does not hold true for boxing gyms. They must be cramped to be good. The most respected clubs were closets.

My personal favourite, I think, is the Kronk Gym in Detroit's inner city. That particular sweatbox has forged dozens of champions. Thomas Swears called it home. So did Michael Moorer.

I visited the Kronk last October when Prince Naseem Hamed, the flashy English featherweight, trained there for his title fight with Cesar Soto. It consists of a single room in the basement of a crumbling community centre. The neon sign of a liquor store flashes across the street; most of the other nearby buildings are vacant and falling down.

The club was packed with two dozen boxers and as many observers. The furnace was working overtime. The air was as heavy as the rotund Butterbean, and the walls dripped with condensation. It was autumn outside. Inside it was the height of summer.

A ghetto blaster set the workout's rhythm with gangsta rap. The prince shimmered to the beat in the club's single ring. The other fighters either watched or carried on with their own business. One boxer, the dangerous Oba Carr, sparred with his shadow. I liked how he looked. He had pulled the hood of his track

suit over his brow. Sweat and spit flew from his obscured face with every jab and cross.

I was taken with Carr's dedication to himself. He seemed unconcerned with the chaos around him. The prince was nothing to get excited about. There was work to be done.

And the grime helped Carr turn a blind eye to the glamour.

Chris Jones covers sports for the *National Post* and is currently at work on a book about boxing.

National Post

