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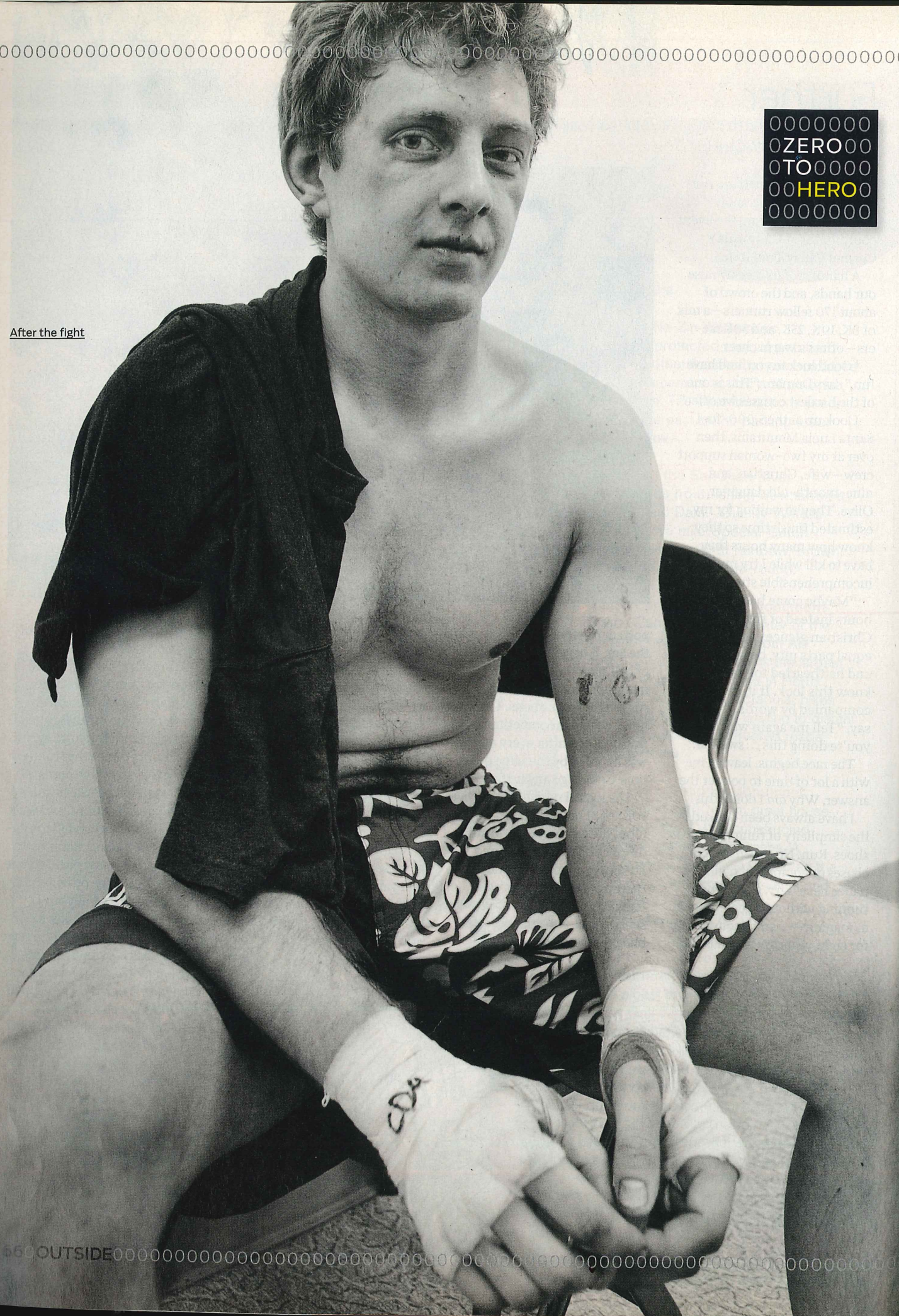
Makes you stronger, smarter, healthier, and—let's face it—more interesting. Just ask research editor Ryan Krogh, who volunteered for a cage fight. Read on for his story (page 66) and 23 other ways to a better you.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN HEFFERNAN

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Krogh enters the cage in Albuquerque.





After the fight

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## Fightin' Words

What can we say about a colleague who became a cage fighter? Nothing he doesn't want us to. BY RYAN KROGH

I STEP INSIDE the cage, or octagon, or what my mother once called "that prison-looking thing," on the floor of the Albuquerque Convention Center. I hear the cheers of 2,500 mixed-martial-arts (MMA) fans, though the stage lights make it impossible to see beyond the black chain-link fencing that surrounds me. They've come for FightWorld MMA 16 International, a night of 13 amateur and professional bouts. I'm in the opening fight. A referee wearing black plastic gloves gives instructions in my ear, but I can't make them out. He steps to the center of the mat and, with no ceremony, yells "Fight!"

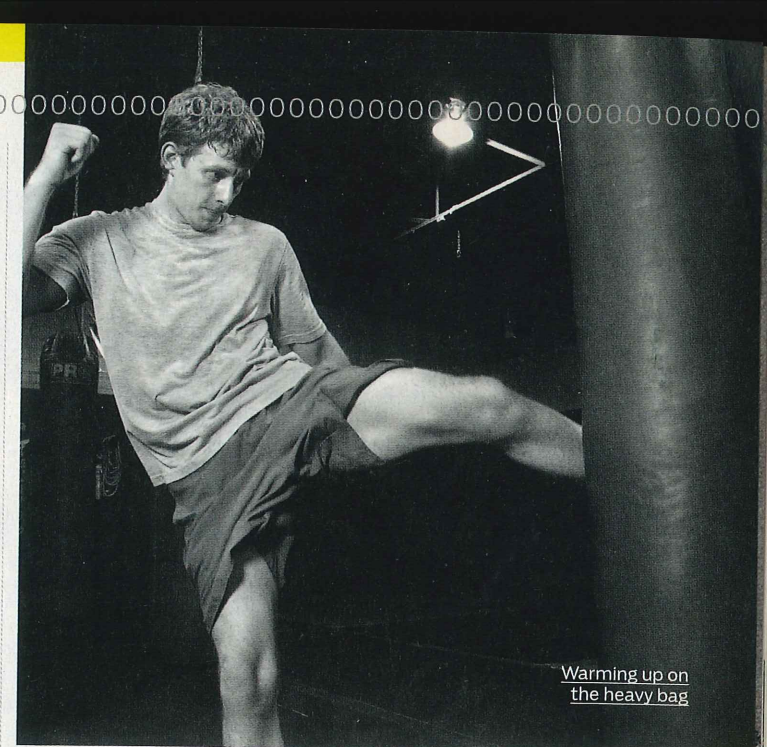
I'd always wondered—and I know I'm not alone in this—how I would handle myself in a fight. The closest I'd ever come was a heated game of king of the hill in sixth grade. As an adult, would I have the balls to repeatedly punch another man in the face or, perhaps more important, be on the receiving end of the same?

Last spring, I explained my ambitions to Tom Vaughn, co-owner of FIT NHB, an MMA gym in Albuquerque, New Mexico, near my home in Santa Fe.

I was 28, moderately active—I hike most weekends—but a decade removed from my peak fitness (high school football) and carrying only that 0–1 fight record from sixth grade. "We'll need to do some work," Tom said, looking me over. But he agreed to train me.

Our first session began with simple chokes and striking, then Tom demonstrated a defensive counter called "shrimping." To practice it, he had me lie on my back and push off with one leg while simultaneously turning on my side. The goal is to recover "guard," a neutral position in which one fighter has his legs wrapped around the other's waist. But with no one on top of me, I flopped around like a fish on the bottom of a boat. After a few minutes, Tom mercifully stopped me. The next day, his wife, Arlene, who is the gym's Thai-kickboxing instructor, had me practice basic kicks on the heavy bags for an hour. I felt on the verge of puking several times.

Eventually, though, I settled into a routine. Three days a week I drove the 60 miles to Albuquerque and began with an hourlong kickboxing class that often left me bruised and blood-



Warming up on the heavy bag

ied. The final 15 minutes were reserved for conditioning—wheelbarrows, squat-hops, and push-ups. Always push-ups. Next, grappling, which became my preferred style. (MMA fighters are generally either strikers or grapplers.) Tom would demonstrate a move, like an arm bar, heel hook, or triangle choke—each one a submission move that forces an opponent to surrender before a bone snaps or he is choked out—and then I'd practice with a partner. By the end of each back-to-back session, I was spent. After one particularly brutal day, my biceps were so sore that I had to brace one arm with the other just to brush my teeth.

But I was improving. After three months, I'd lost 15 pounds and was holding my own in sparring sessions. I grew more confident. Friends joked about starting bar fights so I could practice. Then one day at the gym, Tom pulled me aside. "I got a fight for you," he said, "in two months."

That had been my goal from the beginning, but suddenly, with the prospect of someone training specifically to kick my ass, it became visceral—*Holy crap, I'm really stepping into that prison-looking thing*. I immediately ramped up my training. Five days a week in Albuquerque. Runs in the mountains. Hundred-yard sprints on a foot-

ball field. Mock fights at the gym. There are plenty of motivators if you need a reason to work out: physical fitness, ski season, vanity. But nothing focuses you like the knowledge that your survival could actually depend on it. By the time fight night arrived, I was in the best shape of my life and, at 167 pounds, nearly 25 pounds lighter than when I'd started.

I met my opponent for the first time at the weigh-in, at a chicken-wing restaurant the day before the fight. Alex Gumaer, 24, from Oregon, was a first-time fighter too, with a chin-strip goatee and a reddish topknot that made him look like an Irish gremlin. Absurdly, I wished him good luck.

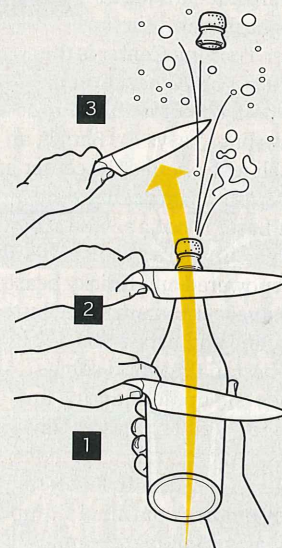
From that point until the start of the fight, a combination of nerves and adrenaline short-circuited my body. I was scared, but more than anything I was excited. Most fighters train for a year or more before stepping into the cage; I'd had half that. My modest goal: survive, and maybe make it past round one.

The first punch hits me with a vicious thud, just one second into the round. I hear it, and the crowd's reaction, but I don't feel a thing. Blood is pouring from my nose, and my eye is swelling up. But I recover and manage to score a takedown. We spend the rest of the three-minute round tied up on the ground, me in the

### STUPID PARTY TRICK

#### Sabre a Champagne Bottle

Remove all foil and wire from a chilled bottle and find the seam running from top to bottom. You're going to use the flat edge of a butcher knife to strike the glass lip right where it meets this seam. Point the bottle slightly up and away from anything you care about, with the seam up. Run the blade along the neck a couple of times to perfect the motion—striking perpendicular to the neck. When you're ready, one forceful sweep of the knife should send the lip—with the cork still inside—flying away cleanly.





dominant top position, scoring hits to Gumaer's ribs. Round two unfolds almost identically, minus the hit to my eye, and by the start of the third I'm ahead on the scorecards. We go to the floor again. But Gumaer gets top position and starts swinging wildly at my head. The first two rounds seemed to be over in a matter of seconds. But now everything slows down. I block with my forearms and try to shrimp my way to safety. I hear the ref yelling, "Get out of it! Get out of it!" But I'm caught against the cage; no room to maneuver. And 34 seconds into round three, he calls the fight.

After the official announcement, I step out of the cage, onto the concrete floor, and see the crowd for the first time. Tom is next to me, his normally intense eyes betraying, I think, a sense of pride. Arlene wipes my face with a towel. "Nice work," she says, and gives me a quick hug. I feel a strange satisfaction rising in me. It's the first emotion I've felt all day.

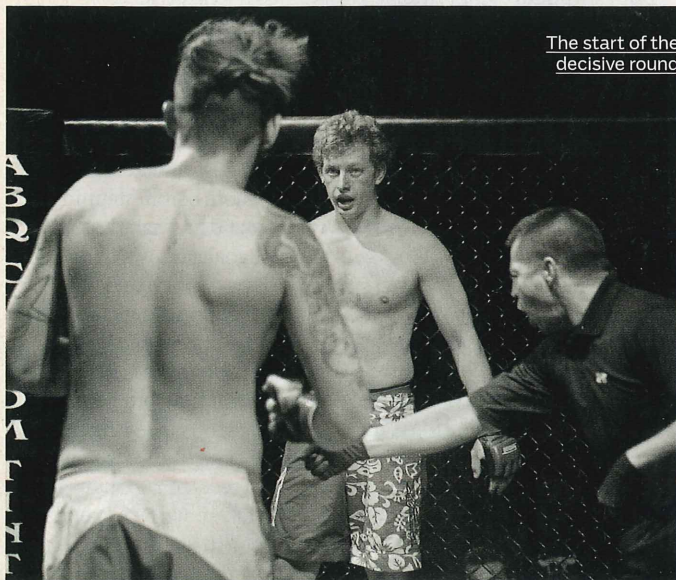
In the locker room afterwards, a doctor comes in to check on me.

"You all right?" he asks, feeling my bruised and bloody cheekbone for fractures.

"Never better," I say.

I mean it.

FIGHTRESOURCE.COM HAS A LIST OF MMA GYMS AROUND THE COUNTRY.



The start of the decisive round



A Laser sailor tries to ride the line between speed and death roll.

## Crew of One

When you race a solo sailboat, no one can hear you scream BY TIM ZIMMERMANN

THE PUFF—20 KNOTS plus—came in hard and fast from behind me. I reacted quickly, arcing my body out farther over the indigo Atlantic water, my toes hooked under the hiking strap as I strained to lever the Laser dinghy upright. I bore off farther downwind, spray smacking me in the face and the planing hull humming the sweet sound of speed. Everything was in perfect balance. Just as I started to mumble self-congratulations, the 14-foot boat snapped back on top of me, and I was underwater.

In Laser-speak, it is called a death roll, and I was sick of my talent for executing it with predictability in strong wind. That's why I was at the Laser Training Center, in Cabarete, a small town off the northern coast of the Dominican Republic. I had started racing the Laser—a popular high-performance dinghy that's been around since 1972—a year earlier on Chesapeake Bay. But I needed some good coaching, and if you are a Laser wannabe in search of technique in the gnarly stuff, the Laser Training Center is the place to go. "Almost every afternoon, the wind fills in and blows hard," says Ari Barshi, an Israeli who opened the center in 2003. "And you get big waves."

A Laser is not a solo dinghy to relax in, like a Sunfish. It's an overpowered and finicky beast that is eager to dump you, hurt you, and embarrass you. Even the best in the world sometimes end up floundering underwater, and to master the boat requires endless practice and a willingness to hike your body out in a continual sit-up that sets your abs screaming and thighs trembling. But when

you get it right, it's a gasping thrill ride. Big wind and waves make Cabarete perfect for learning how to tame the Laser, with a flatwater training area inside the reef break and heart-pumping big rollers on the outside. The conditions are so good that the Laser Training Center is a regular midwinter tune-up for many world-class Laser sailors. Which means that

Javier Borojovich (a.k.a. Rulo), the head coach—who spent five days last February teaching me, a family from Canada, and a couple of curious walk-ons how to

stay upright and sail fast—can pass on all the latest techniques and tricks used by Olympians and pros.

"Don't let the sail out too far, and stay ready to counter-act the roll," Rulo said, slaloming downwind with abandon as he showed me how to throw my weight across the boat to avoid a death roll. Video, good coaching, and day after day of screaming winds worked wonders. I am no longer the death-roll king.

THE LASER TRAINING CENTER (CARIBWIND.COM) HOLDS CLINICS THROUGHOUT THE WINTER.

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