

Notable Vanier Alumni

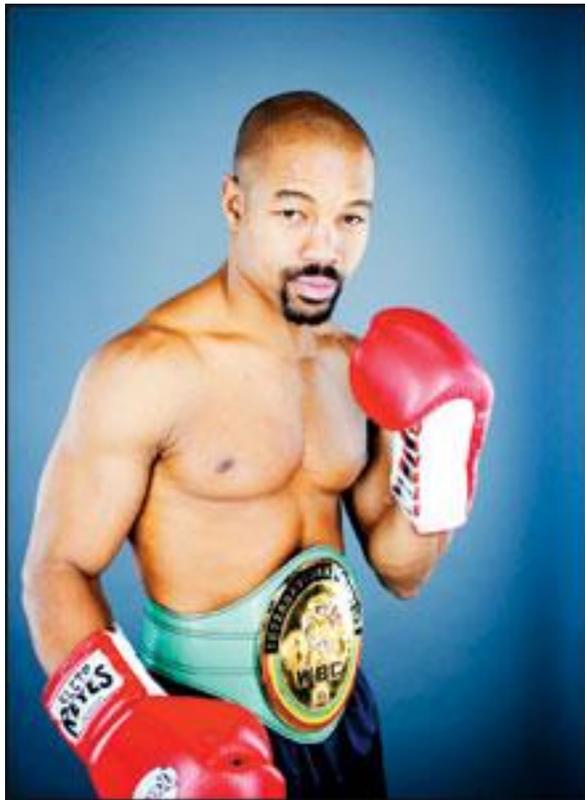
Boxer Otis Grant Comeback Man

Hit me with your best shot

By Richard, Hour Magazine

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Otis "Magic" Grant rises from car-crash coma to become WBC super-middleweight contender.



Driving back home to Montreal on Highway 15 on a hot summer's evening in June 1999, Otis Grant - who'd lost his World a Boxing Organization middleweight title just six months earlier - began the biggest fight of his life the moment a pair of headlights drove straight for his car.

"The car was coming right towards us, going north in the south lane, so I swerved my car so [the oncoming vehicle] wouldn't hit the passenger side where Herc [fellow boxer Hercules Kyvelos] and my daughter [then-six-year-old Alexandria] were," Grant recalls today. "I took the hit."

Grant continues, "When I awoke we were on the shoulder of the highway and I told Herc to get my daughter out of the car. Then he got me out of the car, called 911, and we were put in three different ambulances. I kept asking, 'Where's my daughter?' I remember screaming for my daughter in the [hospital] emergency room. When a nurse told me

my daughter was all right and safe, I let myself go. I woke up seven days later from a coma."

Grant broke five ribs, punctured a lung and shattered his shoulder blade. Doctors said he'd never fight again. But Grant (37-2-1, 17 KOs) surprised everybody by returning to the ring in 2003 and is now just two fights away from completing his unbelievable return to the top of the boxing world, the sport 18th-century British boxing champ James Figg famously coined "The manly art of self-defence."

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Grant's comeback comes as no surprise since the boxer - the first black Quebecer to win a world boxing title - has been a fighter since his childhood in St. Ann's, Jamaica. He moved to Canada in 1977 at the age of 9 and grew up a multi-sport athlete, playing hockey, football, soccer and basketball (his friends and family call him "Magic" after his prowess on the basketball court was compared to NBA great Magic Johnson).

"I began boxing when I was 11," says Grant. "My brother Howard and I trained and became successful at all levels: provincial, national, and then, when we started fighting for Canada, at the international level. After my brother came back from the [Seoul] Olympics in 1988, we decided to turn pro instead of returning to the Olympics in '92. Instead of fighting for country, we started fighting for money."

Settling the cultural debate in the ring

If there's anything Grant likes most, it's a challenge. Now, at the ripe old age of 37, Grant wants to become the World Boxing Council's number 1 super-middleweight champ. As the WBC's number 1 contender, he'll get his shot against German WBC champ Markus Beyer if he wins against former NABF champion Donnell Wiggins this weekend, Oct. 29, at Ottawa-Hull's Lac-Leamy Casino.

"This is a very important fight for me," Grant says. "I really can't afford to lose any more fights, especially after the [Oct. 2005] WBC convention where they ranked me as their number 1 fighter behind their champion."

Grant was originally supposed to fight Cristian Sanavia this weekend to decide who would meet Beyer, but Sanavia got an eleventh-hour injury. The WBC parachuted in Wiggins (24-5-2, 14 KOs), the former NABF and WBC Continental Americas champion who has won all three of his fights in 2005, including two by knock-out. Wiggins, 25, will try to derail the 37-year-old Grant's meticulously laid plans.

Those plans include eventually fighting Montrealer Eric Lucas, who keeps ducking challenges, so much so the WBC last week ordered Lucas to fight Grant. Lucas declined yet again, in the process insulting Grant by claiming he was more of a Montrealer and that the Bell Centre "belonged" to him.

The racial undertones were lost on no one.

"I'm as Montreal as he is," Grant told reporters at last Friday's Montreal Casino press conference. "Last I looked the Bell Centre belonged to the Montreal Canadiens. For him to say he's more Montreal than me, that's just garbage. He was born here, but I was an immigrant who came here and decided to stay here because I wanted to. I'm as Montreal as he is."

Both Grant and Lucas know they could sell out the Bell Centre if they just step into the ring together.

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The day before the press conference Grant tells me, "When I came back I told my promoter Yvon Michel that I wanted to fight serious guys. I told him I won't refuse anybody so I can move up the world rankings as fast as I can. If they want me to fight Lucas, if it gets me one step closer to fighting Beyer, I'll fight whoever they confirm. If we get Lucas, we're both local, there's the French-English, black-white thing. It would be a bigger fight for me financially to fight Lucas in Montreal as opposed to fighting Markus Beyer for the title in Germany."

"Role model" is one title Grant doesn't want

Grant - who has a Concordia University degree in recreation and leisure services and now runs the Grant Brothers Gym with his brother Howard, who is also his trainer - knows how difficult it is to get work as a black man in this city. A recent McGill study concluded university-educated young black men still suffer from an inordinately high unemployment rate because of institutionalized racism.

"Montreal's been very good to me but boxing is what got me a job in my field [outside the ring]," says Otis. "It's not easy being black and anglophone in this city."

Grant, who worked as a special needs counsellor at Lindsay Place High School, still lectures youth about bullying at school.

"I would sit down with kids and say, 'You can't be fighting at school.' For me, fighting is my job. I get paid to do that so I can provide for my family. But fighting in school, fighting in the streets, that's gonna get them into trouble, in prison or even killed. I make sure they understand the difference very clearly. You may think you're a tough guy on the street but there's always someone else tougher. And there's no rules on the street."

Grant has played by the rules ever since he stepped into a ring. Outside the ring, during his five-year hiatus from boxing, Grant - a past winner of the Jackie Robinson Professional of the Year Award - founded the Otis Grant & Friends Foundation, which donates truckloads of food, clothing and toys to organizations that assist the needy in Montreal. The foundation also helps sick children and their families.

But whatever you do, don't call Grant a hero.

"I think it's a lot to ask of someone to be a role model," Grant says. "I hear that a lot and I'm not comfortable with it. I think the best role models should be parents at home. If someone gets something positive out of what I've accomplished in my life, that's wonderful. But set me up as a role model for a

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whole generation of young black people? I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect. I'm human. I've made mistakes and I'll make mistakes in the future."