

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Big John McCarthy's Ultimate Training Academy

Becca Borawski

A dream gym. That is what Big John McCarthy opened earlier this year in Valencia, CA. Opening a gym had long been a thought in John McCarthy's mind, and in March of 2006, at the urgings of close friends and his wife, he decided to go for it. Just six months later Big John McCarthy's Ultimate Training Academy opened its doors.

For a mixed martial artist seeking a gym, the Ultimate Training Academy has everything (including new CF affiliate CrossFit Valencia). When McCarthy's wife first discovered the warehouse space it was dirty cobweb-ridden space that had been left vacant for a year and a half. Today the gym is an impressive sight and a veritable martial arts playground.

The facility itself is 14,000 square feet of floor space, with an additional 2,000-square-foot mezzanine overlooking the training area. With thirty foot ceilings, the atmosphere is very open and inviting. A full-sized Octagon and a 24' x 24' Pride-sized ring are the focal points of the gym. These are flanked by a 32' x 16' space holding approximately twenty heavy bags. Beyond this is a 3,100-square-foot mat area. In addition, there are two 400-square-foot matted rooms for private training. A 1,500-square-foot free weight area sits at the back of expansive space below the mezzanine, and yet another area holds stationary bikes and rowing machines.

McCarthy's staff and class schedule draw on the gamut of mixed martial arts and fitness. Brazilian jiu-jitsu (both with and without gi), wrestling, boxing, kickboxing, kettlebells, mixed martial arts (MMA), and kids'

programming all fit into the gym's broad curriculum. McCarthy's goal was to create an environment where parents dropping a child off for a class would find things to occupy themselves as well, whether another class, a session with a private trainer, or self-guided time in the free weight area.

With longtime friend and former LAPD partner Joe Hamilton, McCarthy added CrossFit to the schedule. McCarthy found CrossFit's unique approach intriguing. "They look at things totally differently than the standard weightlifting workout that is out there," he says. Joe adds, "CrossFit's attention to training energy pathways as opposed to training body parts makes it most beneficial to combat athletes."



Felicia Oh (in center) instructing women's jiu-jitsu class

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Big John McCarthy's Ultimate Training Academy (continued...)

To best mimic the feeling of an MMA fight, Hamilton prefers to use primarily anaerobic pathways in an interval setting. "I like to incorporate quick, powerful, and intense movements that are mixed and repeated over the course of three to five minutes, followed by either relatively less intense ones and/or movements that impact a different energy pathway, or by allowing a thirty to sixty second rest period between the three-to five-minute cycles," he says. Using this method, Hamilton feels he can prepare athletes for the intense yet sustained pace of MMA.

McCarthy concurs: CrossFit is "the same as a fight, those incredible times of pure output. You're going, and then all of the sudden it slows down, but—boom—it's back up again and you're going. I think it matches fighting really well."

Hamilton teaches group classes every Saturday at the

academy and posts daily workouts on a weblog (<http://www.crossfitvalencia.typepad.com/>). Hamilton and McCarthy are making plans to put on CrossFit workshops and seminars at the academy starting in the new year. Says Hamilton, "I want to teach as many athletes about CrossFit as I can. I want them to get hooked like I did, and realize that they will be able to train harder and more often at their MMA than they would without a CrossFit strength and conditioning routine."

In addition to offering instruction, the Academy is also a bit of an MMA museum. McCarthy spent years collecting memorabilia and finally found an outlet to display it. The walls are adorned with Octagon canvases and posters. Backstage passes, tickets, referee jerseys, programs, autographed photos, and many more items are also framed and on display. For the clientele it adds a bit of history and prestige to the environment.

Big John McCarthy's Advice for Fighters:

- If you want to fight, do it because it's what you want to do, not what someone else wants you to do.
- If it's what you want, then don't sit there and put yourself into bad positions. Don't let other people put you into bad positions. I'm not talking about while you're fighting—I'm talking about if you're looking for a fight and you can set it up where you're gonna fight on this date and you're gonna fight against this opponent, and that's what you want to do. That's great. But do not have someone come to you three days outside of a show and you say you'll do it because you think it's your only chance. You're letting people put you in positions where they're not giving you the proper opportunities to be successful.
- Get used to whatever type of conditions you're gonna fight under. There are so many different rules and ways promoters do things. If you're going to fight in a cage or fight in a ring, is it different? It's different. If you're gonna fight in a cage, you've got to practice in a cage. You've got to get used to it. It can affect you in a fight if you're not practicing in that type of environment. Whatever you're going to do, if it's in the cage or if it's in a ring, you need to be practicing in that environment so when you get put into a position it's not something that you haven't been in.
- If you're going to fight don't think that winning fights at your gym is important. It's not. Winning comes in the event. Training is putting yourself, or having people put you, in bad positions and getting yourself out. Training is not you never being put into a bad position and being able to control people. Eventually someone is going to put you in those bad positions and if you've never been there before, you're going to be in a world that you're going to have a hard time getting out of and you're going to lose. Have somebody as a trainer with enough knowledge and common sense to train you the right way.
- If you are going to fight in a show, wherever it's at, go there early. Go to the venue you're going to fight at. Go into the cage or ring. Sit there. Look around. Get used to it. Feel it out. Do your morning workout in it. Grapple in it. Pummel with someone. Work up a sweat and get used to being pushed off the cage and used to looking around the environment. It's easy to get overwhelmed when the stands fill up. Fighters come out with their heart rates already through the roof before the fight starts. A lot of guys who are really good fighters lose to themselves before the fight ever happens because of the mental aspect.

Big John McCarthy's Ultimate Training Academy (continued...)

The future of the Ultimate Training Academy seems promising. In the first three months, McCarthy has enrolled several hundred students, and classes continue to grow as word spreads. McCarthy envisions a gym where everyone can come—whether they are fighters, folks who want to be fit, or someone who just wants to gain confidence through martial arts—and no one's ego will override anyone else's needs.

For more information about the Academy, visit www.bjmuta.com and www.crossfitvalencia.typepad.com.



Big John McCarthy has been the preeminent referee of the Ultimate Fighting Championship since UFC 2. He has refereed matches around the globe and is well-known for his trademarked phrase, "Let's get it on!" A member of the Los Angeles Police Department since 1985, McCarthy currently serves as a tactical instructor at the police academy.

Joe Hamilton is a licensed Physician's Assistant working primarily with injured firefighters and police officers. Previously, Joe spent ten years working as a police officer and another ten as a firefighter/paramedic. Most of his law enforcement years were with the Los Angeles Police Department, where he met and was partners with Big John McCarthy. Joe also spent three years working as a UFC referee.

Becca Borawski teaches and trains at [Petranek Fitness/CrossFit Los Angeles](#) in Santa Monica. She has a master's degree in film from the University of Southern California and a background in martial arts training. She has blended these skills together to produce DVDs and build websites for professional fighters. Her main job is as the music editor on the TV show *Scrubs* and she currently trains jiu-jitsu under Eddie Bravo at 10th Planet Jiu-Jitsu in Hollywood.