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Gut Busters: Muay Thai with The Meatball Shop's Michael Chernow



Chernow, right, going in for a strike
Photos: James Mulcahy

The Meatball Shop's co-owner and manager Michael Chernow may eat a lot of his Low East Side resto's signature dish, but he doesn't let gorging on meatballs go to his gut. Chernow stays fit with an intense regime of Muay Thai boxing. If you're not familiar with Muay Thai, it's a martial-art that uses punching, kicking and clinching techniques – kind of like that hardcore stuff you see if you ever stumble across an episode of Ultimate Fighter

We stopped by the [Chok Sabai Gym](#) to catch up with Chernow midworkout (yes, we got just watching him). Check it out:

ZB: How did you get into the sport?

MC: I think Muay Thai honestly saved my life. I was going down a path that wasn't so great and that guy right there [motions to his trainer] saw that and brought me into a gym. It became a major passion for me. I started training super-duper hard, and it was my first introduction to focus, training and drive, and it led me to running and a lot of other things that make up my training.

ZB: What do you like about it? The punching?

MC: I think it's a combination of pure adrenaline – I'm a real kind of extreme guy and take everything pretty far. I think this is a great outlet for me. Definitely the punching and the kicking and the getting in the ring with a guy bigger than me pushes me and drives me. I believe that guys that are successful in things that they love tend to push their limits.

ZB: Have you had many any matches?

MC: I had what's known as a smoker two years ago – it's somewhat of a controlled environment. You have pads on. My gym and another gym went head to head. I trained my ass off and did pretty well.

ZB: Have you been injured?

MC: I've never actually been completely knocked out. But I've had a broken nose, over and over again. I've injured my knees and feet. This is a type of sport where, if you actually do it, you get hurt.

ZB: Have you ever knocked an opponent out?

MC: I've never knocked anyone inside the ring in Muay Thai. Outside the ring [laughs] well, let's say I haven't gotten myself into a fight outside a controlled environment since I've started doing this.

ZB: What other training is part of your workout?

MC: I'm a long distance runner, I run marathons. I do Brazilian jujitsu. I've been an athlete since I was kid. My bike is my primary means of transportation. In the morning, every morning, I wake up and do 100 push-ups and 600 crunches. When we were building the shop, I had no time to get to the gym – so I'd do push-ups in the bathrooms. I still do push-ups in the bathroom of The Meatball Shop. It's kind of gross, but I do.

ZB: Do you struggle with attaining your goals when you're surrounded by meatballs all day?

MC: I eat at the meatball shop every day. It can be an extremely healthy place to eat. If you eat beef and pork meatballs every day, you'll probably put on a few pounds. But we built the shop from the idea that you don't have to eat a big bowl of pasta with your meatballs. I coined the meatballs-in-a-bowl thing for the shop because I used to eat that at a restaurant where I worked.

We have healthy options. I pushed to have a vegetarian meatball on the menu, and it just so happens that everybody loves it. Braised lentils, walnuts, mushrooms, carrots, celery, a little Parmesan cheese – it's like a meal in a ball. It's definitely one of the three most popular dishes on the menu. We have hordes of women that come to the meatball shop, literally hordes – so they like to order a lighter dish. So since I eat like a woman most of the time, it all works out [laughs].

