

Entertainment

Former 'Fat Kid' fights Way to the top as actor

When you want something, you've got to go for it," says Vince Murdocco of Burnaby. The 23-year-old kickboxing champion who has fought his way into the world of acting with his first major film, *Kickboxer II*.

Murdocco appears a Golden boy, a young man who always gets what he wants. Blessed with superior athletic ability, arresting good looks and a smile that radiates positivity and charm, he seems the child of good fortune.

But he didn't always feel so lucky. The good looks, talent and confidence were buried under a weight problem through his childhood and early teens.

Growing up as the "fat kid," he once almost literally got sand kicked in his face. To channel the frustration and mask a poor self-image, Murdocco became the class clown. Unfortunately, his high-spirited antics proved too much for teachers at Notre Dame High School. He ended up graduating from Burnaby North Secondary School.

By then, much of the weight had come off but, like most 17-year-olds, Murdocco was still in the process of deciding who he was and what he wanted to do with his life.

"I was always good at languages," he said. "My father is Italian and my mother is French. I speak both languages. I thought I could be an interpreter or work for the airlines"

Fate had something else in store. While working at his father's Calabria Cappuccino bar, Murdocco met a martial arts expert. In exchange for free meals at the restaurant, the stranger offered Murdocco lessons.

Within five years, Murdocco earned black belts in tae kwon do and karate. But it was in kickboxing that he found his sport. In 1989 he won the Canadian cruiserweight championship.

"I think people were wary because of the violence of the sport." He says of his sport. "People want to see the art but not the violence. But it's like all the martial arts. You need self-discipline. The first thing you learn is to respect other people. You have to be humble."

The awkward kid who had been teased at the beach turned into a powerhouse of strength, speed and agility. He also had confidence, poise and a profile to rival a Calvin Klein model. He didn't immediately recognize his potential for a movie career but others certainly did.

While at a kickboxing competition in Miami, Murdocco met an aspiring actress who later insisted he join her at auditions for *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders*. The directors took one look at the young champion and signed him for the lead role.

JUST DO IT

Murdocco went on to parts in the TV's *Wiseguy* and a Waterfront Theatre play, *World of Beauty*, before *Kickboxer II*.

"When I heard *Kickboxer* was being filmed. I called my agent and asked her to get me an audition. I knew I was right for it. A friend and I made a tape. We had no idea what they wanted - it was very amateur.

The audition process lasted eight months. Flying to L.A. every few weeks meant taking time off from work at the Port of Vancouver — and a roller coaster ride of emotions, high hopes plummeting to disappointment and back.

Directors were torn between Murdocco and another actor, Brian Wagner. They decided on Wagner.

"I'd been waiting for these guys, for eight months," Murdocco recalled. "But my dad had always said that if it was meant to be, it would happen."

It was obviously meant to be, Easter Monday, Murdocco learned the directors were unhappy with their first choice and wanted him. He was asked to fly down to L.A. immediately.

"Everything went crazy. It was a holiday. I had to call my boss at home and tell him I wouldn't be able to work, that I had got the part."

The frenzy didn't let up through two months of shooting, but he handled it with characteristic aplomb and his friendly, outgoing nature made him popular with everyone on the shoot.

"I made friends with the chauffeur who picked me up at the airport," he said. "I had a great time with the extras, with everybody. I never expected special treatment or privileges."

During filming of *Kickboxer II* Murdocco worked with some fairly high profile directors, acting coaches and stunt co-ordinators, but said he wasn't scared or intimidated.

"I'm too much of a ham to get intimidated. Anyway, at the beginning of shooting. I didn't know who was who. If you don't know, you don't have fear."

Murdocco doesn't plan to let fame and fortune change him, thanks to his parents. "They mean everything to me. They know I'm levelheaded, but I'm sure they'll stick me in my place now and then. I like that."

