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**FLYING HIGH** Mickey Rourke was nominated for a Golden Globe award for best actor in a motion picture drama for his role in *The Wrestler*. The awards show airs Sunday at 7 p.m. on Channel 5.

## Rourke fights his way back

*Scrappy actor unearths gem of a role in 'The Wrestler'*

### The Wrestler

Mickey Rourke plays the down-on-his-luck titular character hoping for one last shot at a return to glory, while Marisa Tomei plays an aging stripper. Also starring Evan Rachel Wood. Directed by Darren Aronofsky. R. 105 min. Dallas and Plano Angelikas.

**I**t's a good thing Mickey Rourke didn't meet director Darren Aronofsky (below) 15 years ago.

"I would have told him to [expletive] off or kicked him," says the gravel-voiced actor, talking about the director of his comeback movie, *The Wrestler*.

That's not just bravado; Rourke probably would have done it. Back in the '90s, the once-acclaimed star of *Diner*, *Angel Heart* and *Barfly* was in a rut. He was living hard and had a penchant for trouble. That alone didn't cost him acting gigs, but his reputation in Hollywood as "difficult" eventually did. He would have clashed with a demanding filmmaker like Aronofsky, the genius behind such films as *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*.

With few good scripts coming his way, Rourke scaled back to get away from Hollywood and fight his demons. He became an amateur boxer and then a professional one. Getting knocked around in the ring may have awakened him. That and the encouragement of a few good friends who helped him overcome his self-destructive ways.

"I'm lucky," he says with a smile. "That change took place over a long period of time."

He mounted his Hollywood comeback a

### Painful prep work

The role's physical demands were extreme. Rourke prepped for six months, training with actual wrestlers. At Aronofsky's insistence, he did his own fight scenes and added about 30 pounds to his athletic 195-pound frame. Though he already was in great shape from his boxing days, Rourke worked closely with a physical trainer to create Randy's very unusual body — which had to be strong and athletic, yet wearied and worn.



couple of years ago with small but memorable performances in Robert Rodriguez's *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, followed by Rodriguez and Frank Miller's critically acclaimed *Sin City*. With *The Wrestler*, Rourke is back on top. He not only has star billing, he's also racking up accolades

The drama, in which he plays a washed-up wrestler in search of redemption, won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and was the talk of the Toronto Film Festival in September. For his performance, Rourke has garnered a Screen Actors Guild nomination and is considered a frontrunner for an Academy Award nod.

"I didn't know it would go this far," he says modestly.

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