

Hewitt shapes up

leo
schlink



IN A classic example of life imitating art, Lleyton Hewitt has moved closer to his celluloid hero Rocky Balboa by taking up boxing.

Hewitt has been introduced to the sweet science by Sydney personal trainer Nathan Martin to build strength, speed and agility.

"It's fantastic," Hewitt said yesterday. "I really enjoy it."

"I've done a lot of boxing to get fit and it's really helped with the fitness, the agility and my footwork as well as with stamina."

"I've done a lot of different things coming into this season, but boxing has been really good."

Hewitt has been aligned with the against-the-odds Rocky character ever since he revealed the series was the most-watched collection in his video library.

Page 90: Gooch's desperation

Hewitt often urges himself along in the heat of battle with cries of "C'mon Rocky".

The South Australian has no plans to follow Sylvester Stallone's Balboa into the ring, but he hopes the foray into the sport will lay the foundations for a maiden Australian Open title next month.

Hewitt, 26, has regularly used Survivor's Eye of the Tiger as motivational music ahead of big matches.

The song was released for Rocky III and topped the Billboard Hot 100 for six weeks before quickly becoming the adopted anthem of sporting clubs all over the world.

Hewitt said yesterday he hoped to be the fittest he has ever been in preparation for the January 14-27 Australian Open.

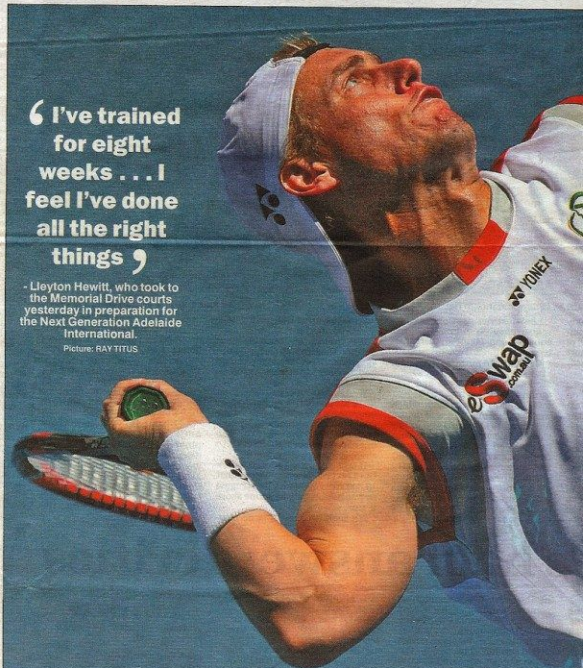
"I've trained for eight weeks for this Australian summer and I feel I've done all the right things," he said.

"I'll be as fit, if not fitter, going into Melbourne than I was in 2005.

'I've trained for eight weeks... I feel I've done all the right things'

- Lleyton Hewitt, who took to the Memorial Drive courts yesterday in preparation for the Next Generation Adelaide International.

Picture: RAY TITUS



"I think the fact I'm probably fitter now than in 2005 because in 2004 I played the Tennis Masters Cup and had a bit of time off afterwards."

"This time, I've trained right through that period."

"I've done a lot of running, which then turned into sprints and footwork. We've tapered now."

"I feel like I've done all the hard work. I just want to get out there and let the

racquet do the talking."

Hewitt follows a well-worn route to Sydney after the farewell Adelaide tournament before transferring to Rod Laver Arena, where his best result so far was defeat in the '05 centenary final to Marat Safin.

Hewitt endorsed Plexicushion after a two-day stint on the surface at Rod Laver Arena last week.

He expects the new Australian Open surface to

prove more consistent in both pace and bounce than Rebound Ace, the surface it has replaced.

In an exclusive interview, Hewitt confirmed he would contest the Beijing Olympics after missing Athens in 2004 because of scheduling issues.

And he declared he is determined to lead Australia out of the Davis Cup zonal wilderness back into the World Group next year.

Hewitt also stridently supported Tennis Australia's no-tolerance stance on match-fixing. TA last week warned rorters could face up to 15 years in jail if found guilty of corruption.

"I think it's a good thing," Hewitt said.

"That sort of stuff shouldn't be going on."

"If there are guys doing that, we don't want them in our sport."

"If someone gets caught doing that, they should be thrown out."