

# The Italian Rascalion

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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After 'Star Wars', my second all-time favorite movie saga has to be the 'Rocky' movies. The ultimate underdog story, the 'Rocky' films taught us that no matter how long the odds were against you, if you worked hard and believed in yourself, you could accomplish anything.

My buddy Tree and I used to watch Rocky II before all of our basketball games to get ourselves pumped up. Recently, we were very pumped up to learn that 'Rocky Balboa', the sixth Rocky movie, will be coming to theaters this Christmas.

The chances of this sixth movie being ever made were actually about as slim as a 60-year-old boxer winning the heavyweight championship. It seems that the movie saga's writer, director and star, Sylvester Stallone, spent more time in court preparing for this film than in the gym.

Back in the spring of 2004, Stallone actually ended up suing Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc. and a production company for interfering with his efforts to make Rocky VI and also a Broadway musical based on the legendary boxing character.

According to the suit, Stallone and MGM agreed to proceed with the musical project, but Sly threw in the towel after MGM demanded an unacceptable share of the profits. MGM then threatened to develop the musical without him. MGM's and Stallone's agreement to make Rocky VI was also KO'd after a producer demanded that his son direct the film.

Stallone further alleges that MGM's cooperation stopped after the studio learned Stallone was co-producing and starring in NBC's boxing reality-TV show called "The Contender", where amateur boxers face off against one another and the winner receives \$1 million and a chance to become a professional prize fighter.

The suit claims MGM retaliated by creating its own copycat show called "The Real Rocky" and used Stallone's character's name and likeness without his permission. Thankfully for us 'Rocky' fans, Stallone and the studio came to terms and began production on most likely the final installment in the film franchise. Even better, they tabled plans for the musical.

Once that was resolved, however, Stallone headed back to court when former heavyweight Chuck Wepner sued Sly for failing to compensate him for being the real-life inspiration for the Rocky character.

When Stallone was working on the screenplay for Rocky, he saw Wepner nearly go the distance with heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali in 1975. Promoter Don King gave the unknown Wepner a title shot against reigning heavyweight champion George Foreman. However, after Ali defeated Foreman, Wepner fought Ali and actually knocked him to the canvas in the ninth round before losing by technical knockout 19 seconds before the final bell.

According to Wepner's suit, which he and Stallone settled out of court for an undisclosed amount, Stallone promised to pay him for serving as Balboa's inspiration.

Finally, Stallone just settled a breach-of-contract suit filed by actress Jodi Letizia for failing to include her in 'Rocky Balboa'. Stallone promised Letizia she would reprise her role as street tough Marie that she played in the original installment for the saga's final round. Letizia cleared her schedule so she could appear in the film, however, she filed suit after she discovered another actress was cast for the role.

Tree and I are hoping that Stallone won't have this many legal hurdles while making 'Rambo IV', which is slotted for release in 2007.

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