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WORKS FOR ME JACK WILLIAMS

A street-savvy program

Krav Maga and CrossFit have given Bobbi Salvini good health and self-confidence

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Her son's words caught Bobbi Salvini with her guard down.

"Mom, let's do sparring," 14-year-old Kevin said.

Her reaction, once the initial blow had worn off: "Well, uh, maybe there's a gym somewhere in the phone book."

Salvini's idea of exercise at the time began and ended with a tap dance class at Balboa Park. But she wasn't averse to trying something else that would keep her on her toes, sort of. Moreover, she wasn't about to disappoint her son.

"When your children grow up, if you don't show an interest in what they want to do, you grow apart," she said. "There's no basis for a relationship."

Next thing she knew, Salvini, 48, was practicing full-body contact sparring and grappling and learning the fundamentals of Krav Maga, an Israel military defense discipline. All this at her local neighborhood gym in Ramona, Brand X martial arts school. For good measure, she added CrossFit, a closely supervised conditioning program that features drills with names like pain storm.



JOHN GASTALDO / Union-Tribune

Bobbi Salvini has lost 40 pounds with a regimen of Krav Maga, an Israeli self-defense discipline, and CrossFit, a conditioning program with drills.

"You can be in the gym an hour and a half, all the time working your fanny off," Salvini said. Rope climbs, sprints and firefighter's carries (hoisting people on your back) are interspersed with Olympic lifts, push-ups and sit-ups.

Salvini, a senior civil engineer with the city of San Diego's Metropolitan Wastewater Department, is 10 months into her martial arts/CrossFit regimen.

"When I started CrossFit, I could do 20 crunches, two push-ups on my knees, and I thought I was a star being able to do 30 squats," she said. A recent workout: 300 lunges, six 80-meter sprints, 63 box jumps (jumping on and off a box), 20 full push-ups balancing on her toes and 90 more on her knees, and 20 ring push-ups (using suspended, oversized rings for resistance).

"I feel like a 350-pound person struggling to stay in a smaller body," she said. "When I first looked at the weight chart for my height (5-foot-10), I thought I should be at 153. But I've gained so much muscle on this program (about 15 pounds, she estimates) that may not be right."

For now, that's 185, with a goal of 20 percent body fat.

In dropping four dress sizes, from 22 to 16, Salvini has sort of rearranged everything. "Now I have shoulders," she said.

PROTEIN POWER: "I used to be hungry most of the time, and if I tried to deny myself food, it was total torture," she said. Not so with Barry Sears' Zone Diet, which disdains simple carbohydrates and is designed to avoid soaring insulin levels. "Spikes in insulin were making me hungry," she said.

She starts the day at 6 a.m. with a hearty breakfast, often microwaving a pre-cooked steak, complemented by nuts and fruit. At 11:30, she snacks on cottage cheese, fruit and nuts (almonds, walnuts, pepitas with chili powder or cashews).

For dinner, she might barbecue steak, fish or chicken over hickory chips, aiming for 3 ounces of "quality protein." She'll have a protein snack before bed. By the end of the day, she will have consumed a gallon of water.

"After a really hard workout, I allow myself a pint of chocolate milk, which compares to whey powder in promoting muscle recovery," she said.

RIGOROUS ROUTINE: After taking Sunday and Monday off, Salvini walks and jogs around Balboa Park at noon Tuesday. In the evening, she hits Brand X for a full-body sparring and grappling class. On Wednesday, she takes a rhythmic tap dance class. She'll shadow box at noon Thursday, then work out in the gym in the evening – at least a half hour of CrossFit, followed by kickboxing and Krav Maga. On Friday, she'll work out on her lunch hour. Saturday finds her at Brand X for an hour of Krav Maga and at least a half hour of CrossFit.


CONFIDENCE BUILDER: Assaulted at 14, Salvini has felt vulnerable and insecure for years. "My self-defense was to stay overweight," she said. Her training, which she describes as a "street savvy, down and dirty, no rules self-defense program," has imbued her with a sense of pride and power. "I have built my confidence, and I no longer worry about being attacked in ordinary places," she said.

■ Do you have a personal health and fitness success story to share? Do you know someone who does? Let us know how you've achieved your goals or overcome physical or psychological obstacles. E-mail: jack.williams@uniontrib.com.

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