

# Artie McGovern, branding pioneer

Nowadays, when you hear about celebrities turning themselves into brands, it's nothing special. In 1925, it was.

Artie McGovern, pioneer of personal branding, ran a gym for rich people on the corner of New York's 42nd St. and Madison Ave. An enterprising former flyweight boxer who grew up in Hell's Kitchen, McGovern had transformed himself into an authority on physical fitness, and his gym was the place to be seen.

McGovern's philosophy: regular exercise, no excuses. Clients had to hand over their lives to him. He'd send a trainer to their houses for wake-up calls and to make sure that they didn't slack off.

"They just walk right into the bedrooms and yank the covers off the millionaires," McGovern explained. "Some of those big fellows from Wall Street have got a new excuse every morning in the year."

Here's how McGovern took charge of Babe Ruth, who, by age 30 had become a physical wreck: exercise, brisk walks, massages and a diet devoid of red meat and sweets. No medicine. No junk food. The exercise focused on muscles not used in baseball, particularly abs and hips. They worked on his posture.

McGovern proclaimed surprise at how determined Ruth was. At first exhausted after one game of handball, he worked up to playing five or six games in a row. Ruth also laid out all his goals — personal and athletic — in a public list.

In six weeks, Ruth lost 44 pounds and improved his blood pressure and heart rate. He not only restored his former health but improved on it.

**Lesson:** Take a page from McGovern, who used the Babe's success to generate fabulous publicity. Ruth returned to McGovern's gym every winter for the rest of his playing career.

-- Adapted from *The Big Bam: The Life and Times of Babe Ruth*, Leigh Montville, Random House.