

SPORTS & Recreation

For sheer THRILLS

In climbing, man confronts the sublime as in no other sport.

— Sir George Mallory

The English mountaineer was referring to the adventure sport of mountain climbing, and after my euphoric rock climbing experience, I'd have to agree. Mountains and cliff faces are just too majestic for me to conquer.

When told I would be writing a story on indoor rock climbing, my knees nearly buckled.

Not from the terror of scaling a slab of concrete with jutting edges or being suspended 34 feet above ground.

But because rock climbing was on my '100 things to do before I die' list, I was more than pumped to try it.

Thinking of such motion pictures as *Cliffhanger* and *Vertical Limit*, I thought muscle strength, stamina and endurance would be more than enough to get me through my half-hour rock climb at Of Rock and Chalk in Newmarket.

But Bruce Wilkinson, my instructor and "belayer" standing on the ground and



Stefania Rizzi

Been There, Done That

holding the rope to prevent me falling, told me otherwise.

I can do this, I told myself, over and over again as I cracked my knuckles and neck and warmed up my fingers.

"Climbing is all about balance," he said, strapping me into a harness and tying my rope in a figure eight he vowed could hold more than 3,000 pounds.

"That's the most important

part of climbing. If you're off balance, you're in trouble," he added.

"The flatter you are (against the rock), the more weight is distributed to your feet."

OK, balance, I thought. Nothing to it.

I looked at a wall painted with a red setting sun overlooking ripples of water, covered with fibreglass and plastic handgrips.

With those many handgrips — I counted at least 25 — I was confident I could scale it.

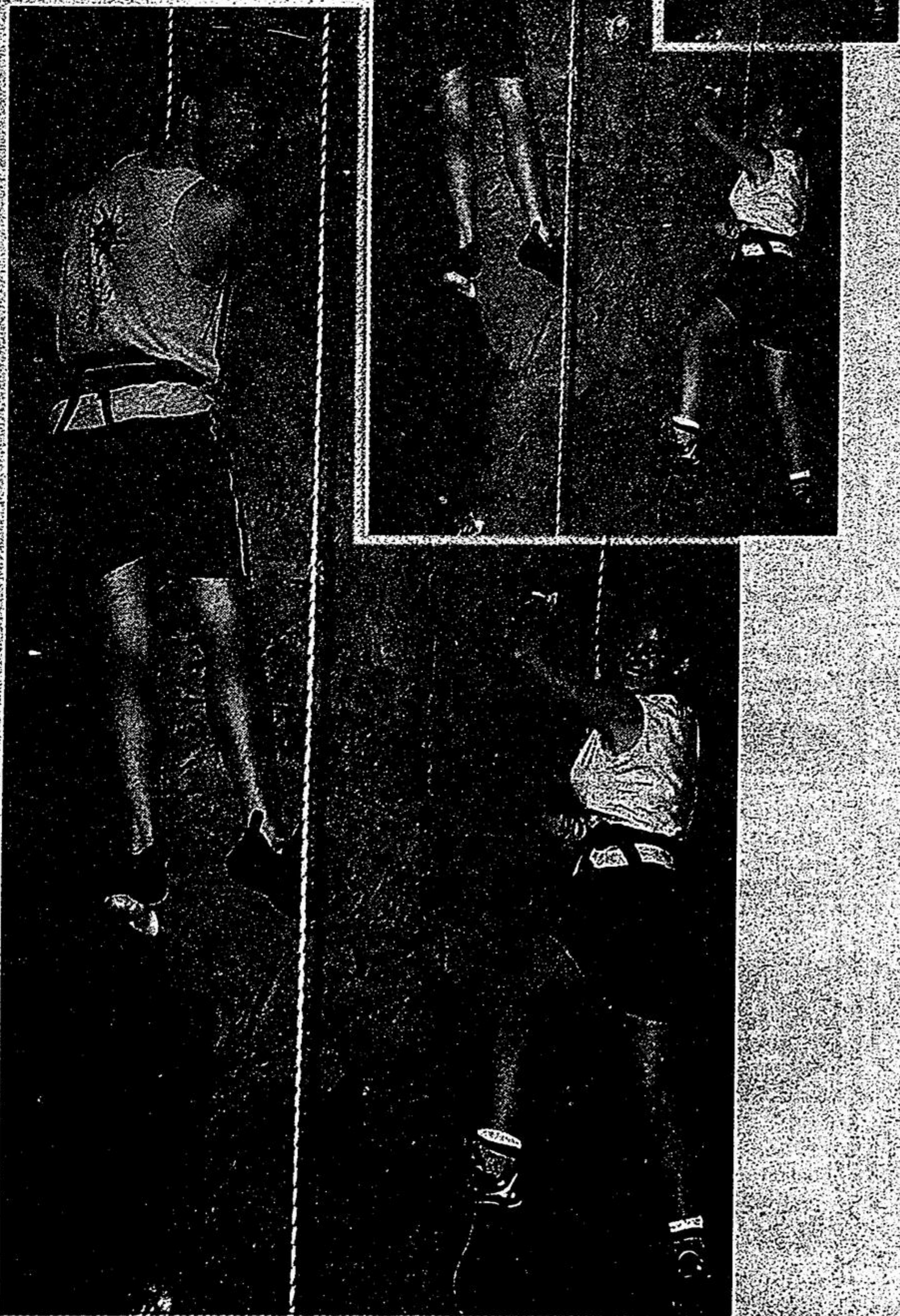
But then I was informed I would be climbing the more narrow wall beside it. A reddish-brown concrete, it had half as many handgrips and edges jutting out.

"You're joking, right?" I asked Wilkinson. He and my newspaper photographer, Rob Alary, chuckled.

Grudgingly, I acquiesced, partly because the makeshift wall had a certain beauty and elegance that impressed me.

I can do this, I told myself, over and over again as I cracked my knuckles and

See EXPERT, page 19.



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Reporter Stefania Rizzi and rock climber Aaron Eden reach for the top at the Rock and Chalk facility.

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