

● screen

Off the Bench

A year after his divorce, *The Rookie's* Dennis Quaid rediscovers his good stuff

Quaid (in '00) "believes in second chances," says *Rookie* director John Lee Hancock.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK LIDDELL/ICON

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At a benefit for Parkinson's disease research in Phoenix on March 16, Dennis Quaid sipped water and rubbed tuxedoed shoulders with Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bo Derek and Larry King. But the highlight of the night, he says, was introducing Jack, his 9-year-old son with ex-wife Meg Ryan, 40, to boxing great Muhammad Ali. Says Quaid: "He is my all-time hero."

No surprise there. Like Ali, Quaid knows a thing or two about fighting back. A former cocaine addict who overcame his demons just before marrying Ryan in 1991, the 48-year-old actor saw his marriage disintegrate nine years later amid Ryan's very public romance with her *Proof of Life* costar Russell Crowe. Now, nearly a year after their divorce became final, Quaid is charging back into the ring—with a new movie (the baseball drama *The Rookie*, which made \$15 million its opening weekend), a new band (Dennis Quaid and the Sharks) and, yes, a new love (Texas real estate designer Cynthia Garrett). A new attitude too, say pals. "He's more laid-back now, more fun," says his friend Beau Holden. Adds director Norman Jewison, who worked with Quaid on the '01 HBO flick *Dinner with Friends*: "He seems to have come to terms with his life."

And with his ex-wife. After one of the most civilized divorces in recent Hollywood history, the couple—who agreed to joint custody of Jack and live in the same Los Angeles neighborhood of Brentwood—continue to talk "almost every day," Quaid told *W* magazine in August. Not that the split was painless. "Dennis was devastated," says one friend. As Quaid acknowledged to *W*, "When you break up, your whole identity is shattered. I've been off looking for that new identity, and I think Meg's doing that too." Having Jack has helped. "Dennis is like a kid when he's with Jack," says Jewison.

Outdoorsman Quaid can often be found fly-fishing with Jack near his 100-acre property in Paradise Valley, Mont., piloting business jets and perfecting his six-handicap golf game. But it's belting out rock tunes—a hobby he abandoned after Jack's birth—that gets



ALEX BERLINE/BEI

"Meg and Dennis [in '99] both went through hell," says pal Brett Cullen.

Quaid fired up. "Music is like an old girlfriend that I fell in love with again," he told *PEOPLE* last May. Onstage, says Sharks guitarist Jamie James, "he is all Texas soul." Born in Houston, Quaid is the younger son of William "Buddy" Quaid, an electrical contractor who battled alcoholism and died of a heart attack in '87, and Nita, a real estate agent who divorced Quaid's father while Dennis was in high school. After his brother Randy, now 51, landed a role in 1971's *The Last Picture Show*, Quaid decided to follow him to Los Angeles.

(Quaid also has two half-siblings from his father's remarriage.) In 1978 he married actress P.J. Soles and the following year scored his star-making role as a spirited townie in *Breaking Away*.

By '83 the marriage had fizzled. Five years later Quaid met Ryan on the set of 1988's *D.O.A.* and, just months before their '91 wedding, checked himself into rehab for cocaine addiction. Drug-free since then, he still loves to cut loose—as photos of him dancing atop a bar in New York City's Hogs & Heifers memorably proved last year—but "without all the party supplies," says Holden. Being single has its advantages. "We always joked on him—we had this song by the Doors, 'C'mon, c'mon, now touch me, babe! Can't you see that I am Dennis Quaid!'" Rick Gonzalez, a *Rookie* costar, says of Quaid's luck with the ladies. Months after his fling with

'95 Miss USA Shanna Moakler, 27, ended in December, Quaid was wooing Garrett, 37. "I've never dated a movie star before," says the divorced mother, who met Quaid at a Montana air show last July. "I've never been treated so well."

Perhaps she should stick around. Friends say Quaid, who just wrapped the upcoming drama *Far from Heaven*, in which he plays a married gay man, is over Ryan but reluctant to play the field forever. "In the long run," says his friend Brett Cullen, "he would like to settle down and have another family."

- Michelle Tauber
- Ulrica Wihlborg and Vicki Sheff-Cahan in L.A., Maureen West in Phoenix, Vickie Bane in Littleton, Colo., Amy Bonawitz in New York City and Anne Lang in Austin



DAN HEINRICH/OMNIREX FEATURES

Quaid is "spirited and very deep-thinking and very kind," says girlfriend Garrett (with him in Manhattan March 26).