

FIGHTING SPIRIT MAG

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WHOSE TIME IS NOW?

AS JOHN CENA TAKES A LEAVE OF ABSENCE, WHO WILL BECOME THE FACE OF WWE?

KRIS TRAVIS

Why "The Shooting Star" has been forced to give up the sport he loves

THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF WRESTLING

20 tropes you witness every Monday night

- BROCK LESNAR >
- SETH ROLLINS >
- ROMAN REIGNS >
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EDDY GUERRERO

WHY PRO WRESTLING STILL MOURNS "LATINO HEAT" 10 YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH

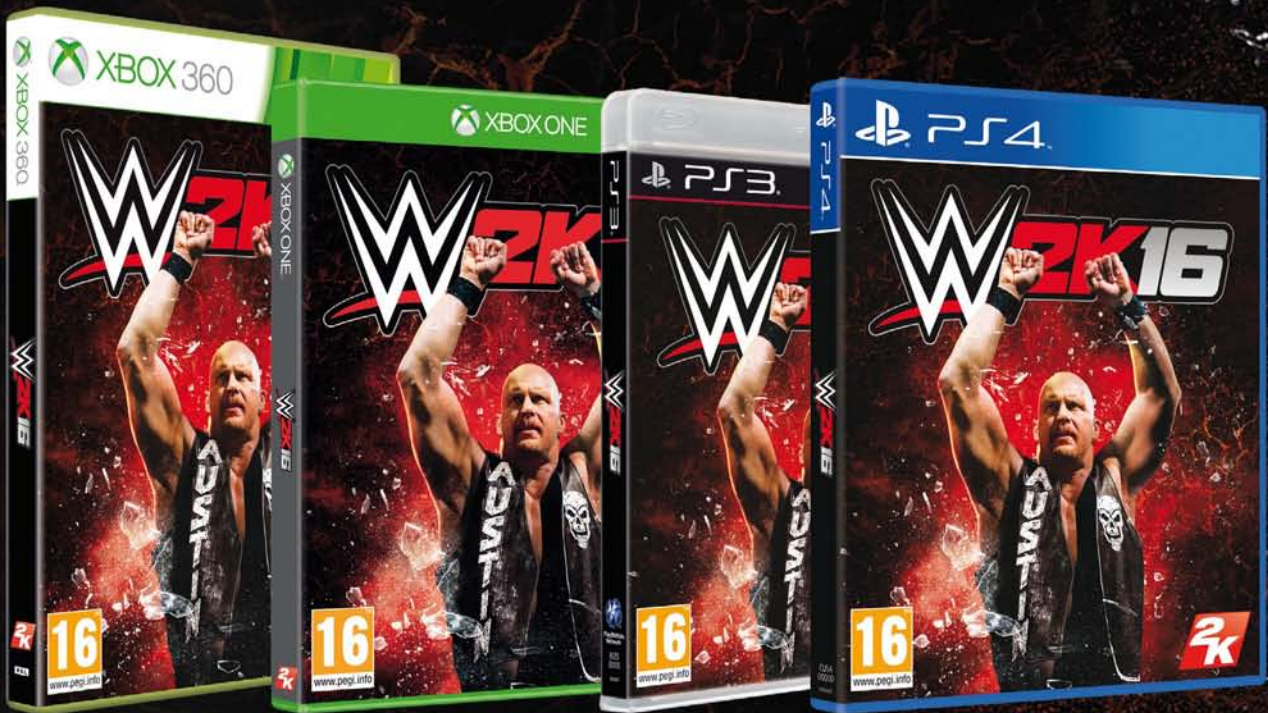


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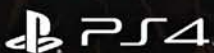
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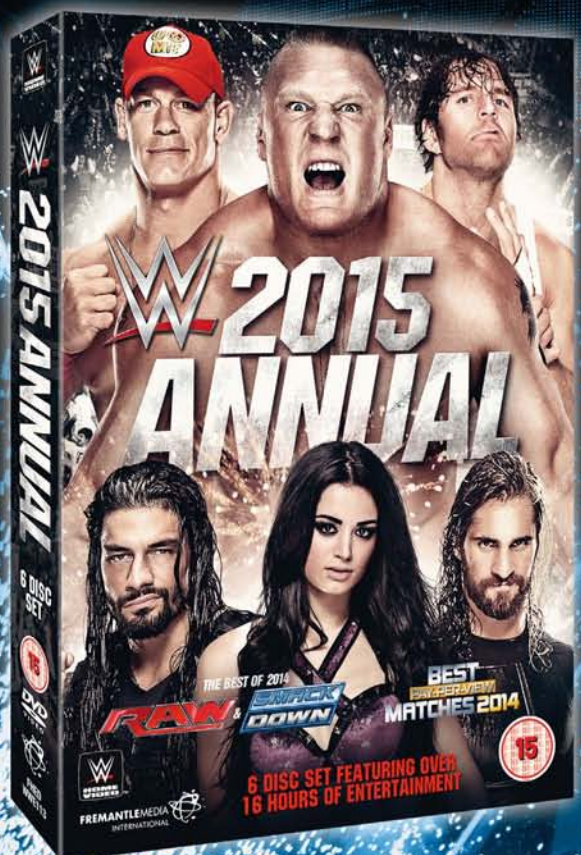


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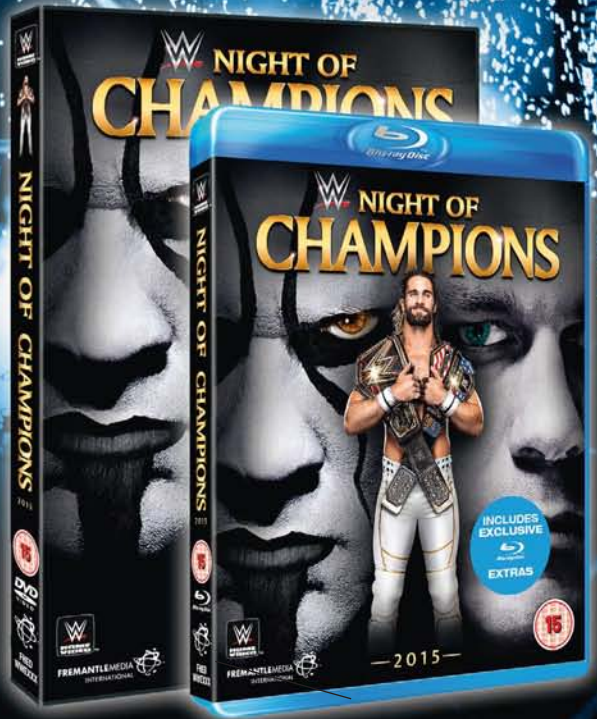
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FSM Welcome



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“When you’re in any organisation, you have to look as far down the road as you can. Every game requires 11 starting players and seven substitutes, and our whole organisation was designed to produce them. I always wanted to know what the pipeline of players looked like for the team we would like to select in three years’ time...”

“It’s so much easier to produce a consistent level of high performance when you nourish youngsters, help them develop and provide them a pathway to success. Youngsters can inject a fantastic spirit into an organisation and a youngster will never forget the person or organisation that gave them their first big chance.

“They will repay it with a loyalty that lasts a lifetime.”

I could get used to this; Sir Alex Ferguson writing a chunk of my editorial for me. It just so happens that at a time that the former Manchester United boss is releasing a book on leadership, WWE needs Vince McMahon to show many of the same qualities that brought Ferguson 38 trophies in 27 years, and made the Old Trafford outfit one of the world’s biggest sporting franchises.

WWE’s crisis is two-fold, at least in the short-term: firstly, ratings for *Raw* are at an 18-year low, and secondly, the star that McMahon has failed to replace, John Cena, is off to film another television show. You might think that the football analogy doesn’t transfer from sport to entertainment, but even if you can’t see how the above quotes could apply to WWE, McMahon has every advantage he could ever need: he doesn’t have to share wrestlers with his rivals, he can call on legends long after their athletic prime, and no matter who’s in the ring, the result is always as he decrees it.

What exactly is holding WWE back is discussed in virtually every issue of **FSM**, but this time we get to offer some suggestions about how to cover for the absence of Cena, reverse the ratings trend, and put some life back into WWE. Long-term, there has to be a change in philosophy to get the company back to its previous best, which inevitably means a handover from Vince McMahon to Paul Levesque.

The latter, I have no doubt, is no David Moyes.

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“MODERN DAY FANS WILL COMPARE JOHN CENA TO HULK HOGAN OR STEVE AUSTIN, BUT HOGAN OCCUPIED WWE’S TOP SPOT FOR AROUND EIGHT YEARS, AND ‘STONE COLD’ ONLY STOOD ALONE AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN UNTIL THE AUTUMN OF 1999”



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Following Hell In A Cell, John Cena was set to take a sabbatical from WWE, for approximately two months. Michael Campbell explains why this can be a positive, and considers who should bridge the gap, at least until Cena returns.

CENA CHANGE

SCENE OF CHANGE

As a consequence of the combined effect of the WWE Network's existence and *Raw* growing to a bloated three hours, WWE's core product has rarely seemed colder. Meanwhile, and conversely, other WWE assets have never appeared hotter, with the better material often found on Network-only specials or what is technically still the "developmental" brand. One positive for *Raw*, however, has been the necessity for lengthy matches contested by established stars, trusted to deliver the goods on a weekly basis, helping to fill the duration.



When it comes to the latter, no-one has worked harder than John Cena.

No matter what your pro wrestling preferences, there's little doubt that the 38-year-old has enjoyed the finest in-ring year of his career, despite starting 2015 ready to step to the side to allow Roman Reigns to flourish as WWE champion. That, of course, did not happen, and in his position as United States titleholder, Cena has worked numerous Match of the Year contenders. While Seth Rollins' reign as WWE kingpin has only allowed him to show a fraction of his true capability, Cena has stood tall.

Thus, when the news emerged that Cena would be taking a leave of absence after *Hell In A Cell* on October 25, it dawned on even more casual viewers: Cena was still the foundation on which WWE is built. Despite the crowning of new champions, and the immense presence of Brock Lesnar, *Raw* in particular could be a sorry homestead once he's gone.

While Cena's absence may only be for two months, the problem is clear: how will WWE fill the spot that he has again made his own?

GIVE A GUY A BREAK

John Cena has been a main-eventer in WWE for a full decade. On April 3, 2005, he dethroned JBL at *WrestleMania XXI*, raising the WWE championship for the first time. The duration of that tenure has exhibited both positives and negatives, many of which are still visible today. Indeed, Cena's incredible run at the top harks back to Bruno Sammartino, who maintained a stranglehold over the top spot for much of 1963-1977, although Sammartino's appearances on television were limited, to say the least. Modern day fans will compare Cena to Hulk Hogan or Steve Austin, but Hogan occupied WWE's top spot for around eight years, without even considering his absences and reduced role from 1990 onwards. Thanks to injury, meanwhile, "Stone Cold" only stood alone at the top of the mountain until the autumn of 1999, sharing the spotlight with The Rock for the remainder of his career. This, after he first won the WWF championship on March 29, 1998.

Much like Austin, Cena has had a healthy supporting cast at times, but rarely has it been presented as strongly as The Rock, Mankind, Triple-H, or The Undertaker between 1998 and 2001. That WWE never felt it necessary to develop a new crop as an alternative to Cena is shocking, though the company is more apt to blame fans than it is itself.

It seems John Cena himself is asking the question: who is ready to replace him at the head of WWE?

During his career rebirth from 2002 to 2010, Shawn Michaels was continually convinced by the McMahons to step into main events, help carry weak cards, and provide a Teflon-like loser to top prospects. He did so for Cena in 2007, staring at the lights for him at *WrestleMania XXIII*, and even went to extremes to put him over when winning, such as in the case of the 45-minute *Raw* bout in London three weeks later. Having not moved Cena into that role until this year, WWE has since never quite managed to replace "The Heartbreak Kid".

Cena's U.S. title win over another wrestler with a big upside, Rusev, at *WrestleMania* on March 29 cemented his new position on paper: he would take a back seat while remaining a large part of the product, content to main-event the first half of shows, add weight to house show line-ups, and increase the prestige of the secondary strap. The latter goal was quickly achieved by placing Cena in new and exciting match-ups with Neville, Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens, to the extent that Cena's matches have been the most anticipated on many WWE shows.

2015 has been an enormously rewarding period for Cena creatively, but this personal leave of absence – whether it be to heal injuries, or as is believed, to film a TV show – will allow him to recharge physically and mentally. Despite the great matches, it also affords fans some breathing room; in terms of audience reaction, the lack of weekly television time has been a godsend for veteran stars such as The Undertaker and Chris Jericho, and now even the over-exposed Triple-H character can feel fresh if he's actually endorsing a newcomer. Brock Lesnar's sporadic appearances, combined with his considerable aura, have helped him feel more special than anyone in years.

It may be counter-intuitive, but time off is good.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

The big concern for WWE is, of course, TV ratings. Lately, they've been appalling, with *Raw* hitting a record non-holiday low on October 12. The viewership had been under 3.4 million for the month prior, and it seems like a matter of time before the third hour of the show drops to less than 3.0 million viewers. The company is rightly worried, and there are no signs of a reprieve.

In the autumn of 2013, WWE teased change, with Daniel Bryan main-eventing *Night Of Champions*, *Battleground*, and *Hell In A Cell*. His popularity was genuine and his connection with audiences extremely strong, but this run was really an attempt to get fans to go cold on him before *WrestleMania* season, and when the pay-per-view numbers came in lower than they might have done, the company used them to "prove" that it was right. Only when fans ruined the 2014 Royal Rumble and the subsequent build to *WrestleMania* – even after a Bryan heel turn – did WWE have to acquiesce. Of course, everyone knew what would happen when Bryan's WWE title first programme was with Kane.

Bryan's injury and subsequent problems returning to full-time action are, of course, no-one's specific fault. After he was stripped of the belt on June 9, 2014, John Cena picked up the title in a Ladder match at *Money In The Bank*, before he fell to Brock Lesnar



at *SummerSlam*. Lesnar himself then went down to a Rollins cash-in at *WrestleMania XXXI*.

The ratings, though, tell quite a story: the day after Bryan won the title at *WrestleMania*, *Raw* drew 5.15 million viewers, while the day after this year's *SummerSlam*, it drew 3.7 million viewers, despite the presence of The Undertaker, Brock Lesnar, and John Cena both in key feuds, and in person on television. Tellingly, they have not been held accountable for the drop.

"What WWE will probably do is reach out to superstars with big fan appeal that have left the business and gone onto bigger things in Hollywood to come back for an extended period of time," former WWE writer Dan Madigan told *FSM*. "It will be homecoming of sorts, but does this bode well for the long-term goals? The Rock and Batista will have Hollywood obligations to fulfill, and will probably leave their spots to a limited basis.

"This is the time to push all those wrestlers that are standing on the periphery of potential. There is a lot of green talent in the locker-room, various viridian hues that need to be seasoned, and this is the time to bring them to harvest. What WWE should do is listen to the fans; the fans know what they like, and who they like. It's the fans that carry the business, so it's the fans that need to be heard.

"This may be the post-Punk, post-Bryan, soon to be post-Cena era, but the pre-next superstar period is up for grabs."

Of course, that superstar could well be in waiting, but even as recently as September 20, WWE turned to the past instead. In the oddest piece of business it has conducted lately, the title bout for *Night Of Champions* between Seth Rollins and Sting boasted the hook of being the first time "The Icon" had a shot at any type of WWE gold. Unfortunately, he walked into the bout an unjustified contender, whose only previous WWE in-ring appearance was his sacrifice to Triple-H at *WrestleMania*. He lost again at *Night Of Champions*, after the cowardly Rollins had already endured one epic championship bout. WWE's

Even when Daniel Bryan broke the mould in WWE, the company couldn't bring itself to believe in him

Cena's U.S. title defences against the likes have Neville have elevated everyone involved



"Modern day fans will compare John Cena to Hulk Hogan or Steve Austin, but Hogan occupied WWE's top spot for around eight years, and 'Stone Cold' only stood alone at the top of the mountain until the autumn of 1999"

WWE's answer to recent ratings was to call upon the services of 56-year-old Sting



Criminally, WWE still doesn't see the appeal in Cesaro

“The timing is ideal, with upcoming pay-per-views including Survivor Series, TLC, and The Royal Rumble that stray away from the usual WWE formats”

thinking was that the Sting character was able to provide a one-off novelty main event, rather be an attraction over time.

It was another supposed short-term fix to a long-term problem. And, sadly, it failed, too.

MID-CARD MIRE

It's often joked that in WWE, there is John Cena, The Undertaker, and Brock Lesnar – with a view to include Roman Reigns – and then there is everyone else: that quartet (and to a lesser extent, the coasting Randy Orton) is protected and focused upon as top talent, while the entire remainder of the roster is the faceless mid-card.

Although WWE has long buried its head in the sand at the thought of a Cena-less product, it has done little to ensure it has cover for any such absence. The last genuine attempt to change that was with Reigns, but when fans noted that he was now Vince McMahon's teacher's pet, he crashed and burned. Ten months later, WWE's backlash strategy has been to push the same buttons harder, leading to promos such as an interminable October 12 *Raw* monologue, where Reigns drew heckles and “What?!” chants. It was clear that this charismatic athlete was desperate to tell the fans where to stick it, which only compounded the problem.

“WWE should, on paper at least, have a plan laid out for the eventual post-John Cena vacuum that will happen once he steps down,” explained Madigan. “Unless he is sidelined through an unexpected injury, John's absence should be figured out months in advance. Whether Cena goes on sabbatical or into semi-retirement, it is up to the remaining roster to step up now. The chance is there: it is up to the hungriest, most talented and most dedicated wrestlers to break ahead of the pack.”

Despite Vince McMahon's Grampa Simpson-esque complaints about “millenials”, there is no doubt that much of the roster has that desire, but as is the case with Reigns, their lives are hardly in their own hands. The spring months saw Dean Ambrose battle Seth Rollins over championship gold, culminating in a brutal but overly long Ladder match at *Money In The Bank*, but prior to that June 14 card, Ambrose had failed to win on pay-per-view between

September 15, 2013 and April 16, 2015 – a staggering record for a grappler who has connected vividly with crowds, drawn to his wild antics and expressions.

Kevin Owens could also yet be another option to fill the void. Versatile, believable, and with cocky mannerisms that many fans can't wait to cheer, a sustained focus on him could be very exciting, particularly as he is now in possession of a championship belt. It's easy to forget how quickly he got over battling Cena at *Elimination Chamber*, even if he did conclusively lose the feud in less than two months thereafter.

Dolph Ziggler has indicated his dissatisfaction with WWE on multiple occasions. The October 5 *Raw* positioned him alongside Cena, hinting towards a feud, especially given Ziggler's storyline pursuit of Cena's real-life girlfriend, Nikki Bella, on *Total Divas*. This was followed by a dazzling battle between the pair on October 12, but the downside to a Ziggler push is that it has already been teased to death, including prior to a momentum-halting concussion in May 2013. Another opportunity was spurned when Ziggler triumphed in the main event of last year's *Survivor Series*, saving his team-mates from being fired, but given a fresh angle and more concentrated character work, he has the experience and the ability to elevate himself.

In that sense, the case of Cesaro is remarkably similar. In an era in which WWE wants you to know that it is steroid-free, he has an outstanding look, and resonates with audiences everywhere on work alone. Where his promo skills aren't up to the level of John Cena, a little forgiveness is due; English is, after all, only the fifth language he speaks fluently. Only in WWE could such a skill be considered a fault, and one can only imagine where “The Swiss Superman” would be if he was booked by someone who understood the concept of accentuating positives.

On the horizon is the return of Sami Zayn – a genuine world-class talent who has an innate ability to convey emotion, albeit with a different cadence than WWE is used to offering. If ratings are in the toilet with the old guard all present and correct, what's to lose by giving this former NXT champion an enormous push? He is, after all, one of the few talents not already broken by main roster booking.

FRESH PERSPECTIVE

If WWE does believe that nobody can truly step up to the plate, it could also do worse than to cast the net further, and utilise the opportunity to make more of someone from NXT. Samoa Joe and particularly Finn Balor may well be names that are invaluable to WWE's most satisfyingly handled brand, but that isn't to say that one of them could not help bridge the gap between now and Cena's return, shining a star for the near future.

Though there's more chance of Dixie Carter beating Charlotte for the Divas title in an FMW No Rope, Exploding, Barbed Wire, Fire Death match, if WWE felt particularly fruity, it could go all-out to provide something unique, and renew the New Japan association that allowed Jushin Liger to work the *Takeover: Brooklyn* event on August 22. Bringing in a top Japanese star for two or three pay-per-view matches would undoubtedly spike interest, and

WWE could easily look to either Finn Balor or Kevin Owens for both short-term interest or long-term value



would do business the power of good at a time when *Raw* needs a *Nitro* more than it ever knew it would.

In more general terms, WWE could also redirect the focus away from a singular top star, or a top couple of feuds, and concentrate more time on recent mid-carders. Instead of hot-shotting anyone in higher positions, creative could rotate focus among a litany of underdeveloped talents, helping build stronger foundations. A groundswell of approval for a particular wrestler will beat an all-too-obvious promotion and inevitable demotion upon Cena's return, and there's already a base on which a push of the popular U.S. title could prove fruitful.

The timing is ideal, too, with upcoming pay-per-views including *Survivor Series*, *TLC*, and *The Royal Rumble* that stray away from regular formats. The 2003 *Survivor Series* is a prime example of making it work; while then-WWE champion Brock Lesnar had spent months feuding with a fragile Kurt Angle, the company was busy preparing for *WrestleMania*, and instead of basing the card around yet another championship bout between the two decorated amateurs, the pair captained opposing teams in a traditional Elimination tag bout. Angle then took a back seat in the contest, enjoying a brief spell in the ring and a couple of significant eliminations, before he himself was taken out in definitive fashion by his arch rival. The focus instead shifted to getting Chris Benoit over as a top contender, and ironically, John Cena as a babyface. Despite being a multi-man Elimination curtain jerker, the scrap was masterfully booked to progress characters and build future main events. Elsewhere on the show, Triple-H challenged Bill Goldberg in a poor headliner for the World heavyweight title, but overall, it was refreshing to see so many stars engaged in something different.

That's the key, of course; ensuring that everyone has some sort of focus and goal. NXT's Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic was a hit with wrestlers, critics and fans like, as it felt important, and had both a competitive and emotional hook. These sort of tournaments could easily be introduced on an infrequent basis, either offering fresh pairings, novelty teams, or healthy combination of both.

"Unfortunately, I think the company's focus will simply be in popping a rating, and not on the

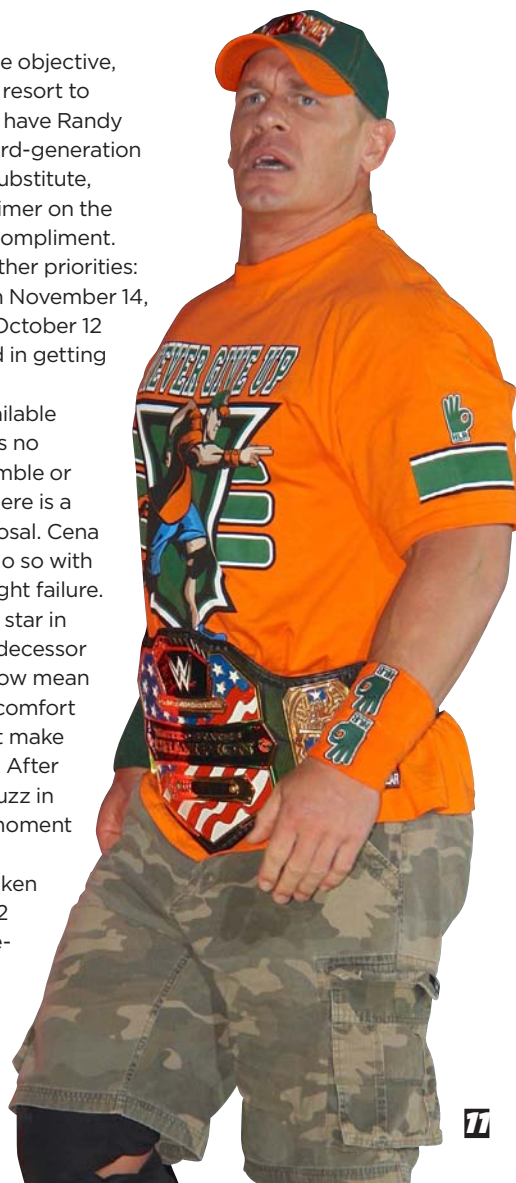
long-term," former creative team member, Matt McCarthy, told **FSM**. "That's not to say they don't have long-term plans, but the real problem is how much those plans change. Then again, they have been pulling 2.5 [ratings] on *Raw* with Cena there, and I don't imagine it'll make much difference with him gone, so really WWE's focus will be what it always is every week: filling three hours of TV time any way they can."

COMFORTABLY NUMB

If merely filling time is indeed the sole objective, the obvious short-term solution is to resort to what the company has always done: have Randy Orton take John Cena's spot. The third-generation star has always been the preferred substitute, and right now, is as over as any full-timer on the roster, even if that is a backhanded compliment. Unfortunately, however, Orton has other priorities: he's marrying for the second time on November 14, and as he specifically stated on the October 12 *Raw*, these days he's more interested in getting to sleep in his own bed.

No matter how long Cena is unavailable or Orton's focus is elsewhere, there is no need for an intelligent WWE to scramble or fluster, as with a simple stocktake, there is a supremely talented roster at its disposal. Cena cannot be cloned, and attempts to do so with Roman Reigns have resulted in outright failure. With almost no exception, every top star in pro wrestling has succeeded his predecessor by being different to him; this may now mean Vince McMahon stepping out of his comfort zone, but it is a move he simply must make either now or in the very near future. After all, such a natural switch created a buzz in 2011 with CM Punk, and provided a moment to remember in 1998 with Mankind.

And, of course, if WWE had not taken a chance back in the autumn of 2002 with a green, awkward looking white-meat babyface, letting him freestyle and apply his own personality, the group would not have a 15-time World champion to begin with.



THE NEWS

DANIEL BRYAN MAY LEAVE WWE TO WRESTLE AGAIN... SUMMERSLAM WEEKEND HEADING BACK TO BROOKLYN... JAMES STORM ON THE VERGE OF SIGNING WWE DEAL... WWE UNDERSTANDING WITH WWN CONTINUES TO INCREASE...

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Shinsuke Nakamura at *Uprising*, it was still an excellent contest, brought to an end by Tanahashi's frog splash. O'Connor versus Nakamura proved to be a tremendous bit of storytelling, as the crowd witnessed Damo kick out of Nakamura's Boma Ye at a count of one, before Nakamura managed to get "The Beast of Belfast" up for a frighteningly high-angled back suplex for the pinfall.

Nakamura was the one who took the beating in Reading, however, as he was legitimately knocked out during his match with Marty Scurll. "The Villain" made sure to let people know he was irked about being unable to recapture the RPW title the night before, but Nakamura recovered to get the pin with the Boma Ye.

It was East End versus Far East in the opening contest of the weekend, as Sha Samuels and James Castle issued an open challenge that was answered by New Japan legends Tenkoji (Hirooyoshi Tenzan and Satoshi Kojima), though shenanigans were afoot as a low-blow and belt shot by The Revolutionists got the job done. Current IWGP Tag Team champions Doc Gallows and Karl Anderson took on Samuels and Castle the following night, but the Londoners managed to escape with only a disqualification loss.

Tetsuya Naito had a successful UK debut, defeating the exceptional Mark Haskins after hitting the Destino reverse DDT, the next day using the same move in an entertaining three-way opener opposite Martin Kirby and KUSHIDA. Kirby was part of one of the best matches at *Uprising*, taking on ROH star ACH and beating him with a Famoser. KUSHIDA faced another ROH stalwart in a re-match of the *Best Of Super Juniors* final, as Kyle O'Reilly gained revenge for that loss with a triangle choke in a remarkable display of athletic, counter-based wrestling.

Josh Bodom squared off with Jimmy Havoc in a Hardcore match at *Uprising*. Bodom got the pinfall after a Sha Samuels spinebuster onto thumbtacks, but not before Bodom had launched Havoc head-first through an flatscreen TV.

Styles, Okada and Tanahashi meet the best of British talent

IT ALMOST FELT like IWGP heavyweight title contender AJ Styles was lost in the shuffle as big-name Japanese talents took centre stage at Revolution Pro Wrestling's New Japan weekend. That was, however, until "The Phenomenal One" defended his RPW title in a stunning three-way main event at October 2's *Uprising*, then beat a legend at the following evening's *Global Wars*.

On the Friday night show at a buzzing York Hall, Styles overcame two outstanding British talents in Marty Scurll and Will Ospreay. It looked like Ospreay had the three-way won, but he fell victim to a Styles Clash after hitting a springboard Stunner on Scurll, in a match that will feature heavily on **FSM** readers' UK Match of the Year ballots.

Styles' belt was not scheduled to be on the line at Rivermead Leisure Complex in Reading on October 3, but the occasion of a contest with Jushin "Thunder" Liger was enough to urge the champion to offer a title shot. Liger came up short in a bout perfectly worked to pay homage to him, even though he lost out to another Styles Clash.

It wasn't an entirely bad trip for Liger, as he joined forces with Hiroshi Tanahashi to get the better of Kazuchika Okada and Gedo at York Hall. The match was incredibly basic by their standards, with the focus fully on any exchanges between long-time rivals Okada and Tanahashi. Gedo was painted as the only real villain, and it was he who took the pin thanks to Tanahashi's frog splash.

Despite this tag match getting rapturous pre-interval applause, fans of Okada and Tanahashi would have to wait until the next day to see them at their peak. Okada's bout with Ospreay was almost as good as the York Hall main event, and would've been welcome on any card, anywhere in the world. It was another gallant failure for Ospreay, however, as Okada won with The Rainmaker, but his performance was impressive enough to garner a round of applause from the IWGP heavyweight champion and New Japan booker Gedo.

Damian O'Connor stood in Tanahashi's path in Reading, and while the 23-stone brute seemingly had more chemistry with

THIS MONTH'S...



WOMAN OF THE MONTH

This month's Woman of the Month goes to someone working behind the scenes in WWE, **Sara Amato**. The former Sara Del Rey has been instrumental in both developing, advising and producing the NXT women, and has gained the trust of people in power, being promoted to the role of Assistant Head Coach at the Performance Centre. The female NXT stars deserve all the credit they get, but Amato's methods have produced results.



MATCH OF THE MONTH

For the second issue running, the Match of the Month goes to the same two participants. The 30-minute Iron Man bout between NXT Women's champion **Bayley** and **Sasha Banks** on October 7 was quite amazing. A compelling in-ring story was told by two performers blossoming into excellent pro wrestlers, and the hope is that someday, this kind of true Match of the Year candidate can take place on the *WrestleMania* or *SummerSlam* stage that it deserves.

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UK NEWS

LASHLEY WHISTLES DIXIE IN PCW TITLE CHALLENGE

Former World champion is sent packing by Dave Mastiff

PRESTON CITY WRESTLING enjoyed a busy September, running two shows in successive weeks. The first took place at the 53 Degrees nightclub, as part of Freshers week for university students. It was a showcase for the promotion, reaching out to potential fans while putting on an entertaining event.

A couple of hundred fans witnessed several good matches on this September 18 date, the pick of the bunch being the club-wide brawl in which Charlie Garrett teamed with The UK Hooligans to beat Bubblegum and Team Single. All six competitors coped well with the unusual setup of the ring being on a platform that was a foot lower than the ringside area. At one point, Bubblegum had the contents of a bin emptied over his head, while The Hooligans burst through a fire exit and brawled outside with T-Bone and Rampage Brown.

Former Futureshock champion Xander Cooper made his PCW debut, in a losing effort against El Ligero. To no surprise, however, "The Man for All Seasons" impressed management so much that he was booked the following week.

In a rare comedic misfire, Joey Hayes and Martin Kirby defeated The Gzrs, in a surreal encounter that featured virtually no wrestling, but rather baby oil used to create pratfalls, and an in-ring booze-filled slide that positioned Sebastian and Tom Irvin in ways that made them seem like more than just tag team partners. Indeed, the biggest cheer of the night came afterwards, when The UK Hooligans returned and beat The Gzrs in an impromptu main event brawl.

The promotion returned to Evoque nightclub on September 25, for a show entitled *Heroes*. Heel General Manager Joanna Rose's quest to cost Dave Mastiff the PCW title led to her bringing in Bobby Lashley to challenge everyone's favourite "Bastard". Lashley was heavily booed in an unspectacular bout filled with numerous anti-TNA chants, which Mastiff won via

Drew Galloway smashes Noam Dar into the turnbuckle during their bout at Heroes



© PCW / GORDON HARRIS

pinfall. After the match, Rose's Friends With Benefits faction hit the ring and put the boots to the champion, leaving him injured on the mat. This in turn led to PCW Money in the Bank briefcase holder Martin Kirby running out, ready to cash in his title shot. However, in a strange turn of events, Joey Hayes persuaded him not to do so.

The Hayes and Kirby combination was at the centre of one of the night's most memorable bouts, a hilarious win over Irish newcomers, Luther and Sandy Ward. The Wards – doing a non-PC Irish gypsy gimmick – came to the ring with a black labrador on a lead, with Sandy claiming it was a killer dog. Kirby fed the canine what appeared to be a pasty, causing Luther to berate his younger sibling for misleading him over the viciousness of the dog. He then auctioned it off to fans in the crowd, with one man supposedly buying it for £100.

The two killer matches of the evening saw El Ligero defeat Tommaso Ciampa in a thrilling encounter that the NXT star dominated for long periods before Ligero pulled out the win. Ciampa managed to make a little girl cry at ringside, although he did make up with her thereafter.

Drew Galloway defeated Noam Dar with a Futureshock DDT to even their series at one win apiece, after an all-action brawl saw the pair battle both behind the bar, and Galloway throw Dar through a fire exit. After the match, a large contingent of PCW staff had to separate the pair, with Dar challenging Galloway to a rubber match.

The seemingly unstoppable Sha Samuels racked up another win, choking out Lionheart to win a No Holds Barred contest, while a great bout featuring the excellent Iestyn Rees and Charlie Garrett concluded with a Rees pinfall win after a powerbomb.

In the opener, Bubblegum won a fast-paced four-way over Ashton Smith, Dean Allmark and Xander Cooper. T-Bone also scored a squash win over Dave Rayne.



DCT gets ready to give Lewis Girvan an ICW crash course in the Spacebaws main event

© DAVID J. WILSON

ZERO-G BATTLE ENSURES LIVELY WEEKEND AT BERNIE'S

Stevie Boy retains his title over Lewis Girvan and DCT at Spacebaws

STEVIE BOY ONCE again proved to have too much for the pretenders to his Zero-G throne, as he overcame both Lewis Girvan and DCT in the scintillating main event of *Spacebaws Episode III - Weekend At Bernie's II* on September 20. Both men had had recent singles shots at Stevie's gold, but despite producing yet another top-drawer main event, the outcome of this three-way was the same, as the champion retained via pinfall following a Canadian Destroyer.

Stevie also partook in the opening segment of the show, a birthday celebration for NAK head honcho Chris Renfrew. Neither Renfrew's broken hand nor a surprise appearance by The Gzrs hindered the party, although it all ended in vodka-soaked tears when The NAK turned on Sebastian and Tom Irvin. Their fun was quickly ended, however, when Mikey Whiplash emerged, dressed as Marilyn Monroe, to clear the ring of The NAK, recreating one of ICW's most iconic moments when he launched Kay Lee Ray into the crowd from a powerbomb position.

Spacebaws included the ICW debut of former ROH TV champion Tommaso Ciampa, in an all-out war against Damian O'Connor. Ciampa was eventually pinned after a second Van Damonator attempt, when the first ended with Ciampa firing the steel chair into the crowd. O'Connor urged Ciampa to return to ICW in the future, but he was met with an unreceptive middle finger from "The Sicilian Psychopath".

Red Lightning found his role as General Manager under scrutiny, with ICW owner Mark Dallas giving him a yearly performance evaluation. Lionheart was the first to take the mic, though, airing some grievances amidst a haze of boos and indifference. Red had seen enough, and urged the crowd to show a bit more respect to one of Scotland's best. Dallas broke up the party and scrutinised some of Red's decisions as GM, but he clung on to his job after Dallas decided that he had done more good than bad in the role.

Polo Promotions retained the ICW Tag Team titles in a fairly routine defence against

The Rodgers Brothers, getting the pin with an assisted German suplex. Layla Rose unfortunately suffered a broken ankle during her tournament semi-final against Nikki Storm. The latter will now face the winner of Kay Lee Ray versus Viper to crown the first ICW Women's title-holder.

Italian powerhouse Massimo had far too much for Lou King Sharp, although the Toal Family member may be joined in the stable by his opponent, as Toal slipped him his business card before Massimo tossed his defeated opponent into the crowd.

Joe Hendry debuted another new ring entrance, and even found the time to make his opponent, Michael Chase, a video of his own. Hendry managed to win their bout, too, after putting Chase away with The Dominator.

Solar was able to exact some revenge on Andrew Wilde for leaving him in a heap at *Spacebaws Episode II: Come As You Are* on August 30, making him submit to a single leg Boston Crab.

Joey Hayes won the right to a re-match with CJ Banks after stealing a pinfall over Danny Hope



© TONY KNOX

HAYES MAKES BANKS STATEMENT IN HARD DAY'S FIGHT MAIN EVENT

Former Model will now get his title re-match on October 24

INFINITE PROMOTIONS PRESENTED *A Hard Day's Fight: Round 4* on September 19, and drew a small but enthusiastic crowd to a fine show at Grand Central Hall in Liverpool. The promotion has offered a string of good to very good events in recent months, and has regained some momentum creatively as it attempts to differentiate itself not only in the North West, but also the Merseyside area. The episodic storylines and feuds have been quite believable and easy to follow, with strong performances from all involved.

The story of this card was the developing conflict between the promotion's top two heels, former Infinite champion Joey Hayes and current title-holder CJ Banks. On the previous show, Banks cashed in his title shot against Hayes, who had been the champion for mere seconds. Here, Hayes confronted Banks, demanding a re-match. Executive Administrator Mikey Fitzgerald then booked him to team with Banks and cohort Dean MacManus, to face Danny Hope, Frankie Sloan and Ringo Ryan in the main event, with the person scoring the winning fall receiving any match of his choice on the next show. A heated contest thus ensued, with Hayes, Ryan, MacManus and Sloan all brawling to the back. Banks

got the better of Hope, and was about to score the victory, when Hayes ran in and stole the pin to gain control of the stipulation. Of course, Hayes opted to face Banks on October 24.

In semi-final tournament matches to find a title challenger for the December 5 show, Joel Redman defeated Rampage Brown via disqualification in a great match, which ended when Brown lost his cool and whacked Redman with a chair. Redman sustained a nasty cut to his head during this encounter. In the other semi-final, Dylan Roberts beat Charlie Garrett in a good contest, when Roberts' Welsh compatriot Nixon Newell interfered by low-blowing Garrett behind the referee's back, helping Roberts to win. Redman will now face Roberts on October 24, with the winner earning a title shot on December 5.

In other matches, Nick Aldis defeated T-Bone in a solid encounter. Neither guy played babyface or heel, resulting in a quiet crowd unsure how to react. Nixon Newell beat trainee and local crowd favourite Lizzy Styles in an enjoyable encounter. In an all-action five-man Scramble match opener, Charlie Garrett defeated Ricky J. McKenzie, Nouseva Kotka, Disco Bert and impressive high-flying youngster, Soner Durson.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Daniel Bryan has confirmed that if he is not cleared to wrestle by WWE, he will seek to do so elsewhere when his contract expires. There is currently deadlock between WWE's concussion specialist, Dr Joseph Maroon, and a second opinion from another doctor over his ability to return to the ring... *SummerSlam* drew 123,000 total buys on PPV (36,000 in the U.S. and Canada and 87,000 in the rest of the world). Thanks to the success of the live events, Brooklyn will against host the show, plus *NXT Takeover* and *Raw*, in 2016 and 2017... WWE has come to an agreement with ESPN's *Sportscenter* show to air clips from *Raw*, in addition to other exclusive content. WWE will have to improve markedly to avoid being laughed off the station... James Storm appears close to signing a deal similar to that of Samoa Joe. Paul Levesque likes having experienced wrestlers around the trainees at the Performance Centre... Sami Zayn was in attendance at the EVOLVE Wrestling shows on October 17-18. This is part of the ongoing relationship between WWE and WWN, designed to divert talent to EVOLVE instead of Ring of Honor... Mark Henry has confirmed that he'll retire after his contract expires in April. His faux retirement promo on *Raw* in June 2013 was one of the best in WWE history... Hornswaggle (real name: Dylan Postl) was suspended for 30 days on a Wellness Policy violation on September 28, the first since the July 2, 2013 suspension of Ricardo Rodriguez... Replying to the lawsuit by Dr Chris Amann, CM Punk and Colt Cabana have claimed that Amann is being backed by WWE in retaliation for statements made about the company on the *Art Of Wrestling* podcast. WWE then itself released a statement to say that this accusation was "categorically false"... Keri DeMott, the 20-year-old daughter of former WWE Head Trainer Bill DeMott, was tragically killed in a car accident on October 10, when 22-year-old Keith Pumphrey veered into her lane and hit her head-on. Pumphrey was in critical condition at press time... Tammy Sytch was arrested on September 23 after missing court appearances linked to a May DUI charge. She will have drug and alcohol evaluations before possibly going to trial in December... TNA will next tape TV in India from Nov 29 to Dec 4. The group is being brought in by Sony SIX station, who will finance the shows. TNA will then tape in the UK in January... TNA has been cancelled on DMAX TV in Germany and Austria...

continued...

NEWS IN BRIEF

...continued

The L'Equipe 21 channel in France has become the first to air *ROH On Sinclair* on an international basis... Jeff Jarrett has confirmed that he gave up his remaining 29% shares in TNA in order to promote the GFW brand on *Impact Wrestling*... Lucha Underground has confirmed a second season. While its budgets are being cut, the show will still be taped at The Temple in Los Angeles... Big Daddy Walter & Zack Sabre Jr. won the annual wXw Tag Team tournament on October 4, beating Bobby Fish & Kyle O'Reilly... Jimmy Susumu & Jimmy K-Ness defeated Yamato & Naruki Doi to win the Summer Adventure Tag League on September 27 in Kobe... Atsushi Kotoge & Daisuke Harada won the G+ junior-heavyweight Tag Team tournament on September 22, defeating GHC junior-heavyweight Tag Team champions Desperado & Taka Michinoku at Korakuen Hall. On October 4, they repeated the feat in Nagoya to win the titles... Jun Akiyama won September 26's All Japan Oudou tournament final by pinning Akebono at Korakuen Hall... Go Shiozaki has confirmed that he is leaving All Japan to work as a freelancer... Minoru Tanaka dropped the Wrestle-1 cruiserweight title to Andy Wu on September 23 in Osaka... Japanese women's competitor Mio Shirai has retired at the age of 27. She is not to be confused with her sister, STARDOM's Io Shirai... One of the greatest female pro wrestlers of all-time, Akira Hokuto, had surgery to combat breast cancer on September 24. She is recovering well... AAA held *Heroes Inmortales IX* on October 4, in its annual tribute to founder Antonio Pena. In the main event, Alberto El Patron retained the AAA Mega title over Johnny Mundo. Also on the card, Angelico & Jack Evans beat Pentagon Jr. & Joe Lider and Daga & Steve Pain to win the AAA Tag Team titles... The first WWE Sin Cara (real name: Luis Urive) has mutually agreed to end his contract with AAA, according to the promotion itself. He turned up at CMLL's Arena Mexico on October 9 and will begin working for the group as soon as he gets the legal go-ahead... WWC held its 42nd Anniversary show in Bayamon, Puerto Rico on September 26. In the main event, Universal champion Mr. 450 Hammett beat Carlito in a Cage match... Former UFC fighter Shayna Baszler had her first pro wrestling match on September 26, losing to Cheerleader Melissa...

continued...

Dave Mastiff goes face-to-face with Drew Galloway, in the latter's hometown of Ayr



© DAVID J. WILSON

SECOND COMING STILL NOT ENOUGH FOR NOAM

Grado retains the PWE title over his best friend on September 26

OLD RIVALRIES WERE renewed when Pro Wrestling Elite embarked upon Ayr Town Hall for *Second Coming* on September 26, as Grado once again put his PWE crown on the line against fellow Ayrshire native Noam Dar. There was interference from Iestyn Rees to contend with, as he got involved when the referee was inadvertently knocked down. Rees was out to end Grado's reign, but was fought off by Dar, keen to take the title on merit, before Grado hit the RK-Grado out of nowhere for a near-fall. As time went on, it looked like Dar was going to bring his three-year wait to an end, only for Grado to reverse his Fisherman's brainbuster attempt into a roll-up for the three-count. Despite their heated professional rivalry in PWE, Dar and Grado proved they were still best pals and sent the crowd home happy with a sporting embrace.

The Ayr crowd were also treated to the appearance another hometown hero, as

Drew Galloway renewed his rivalry with the aforementioned Rees. The latter is one of the few UK heavyweights who can come close to Galloway in size, but he still went down to the Futureshock DDT. Galloway's night wasn't over, however, as he was attacked by Dave Mastiff. The pair exchanged blows before being pulled apart, with Galloway swearing through gritted teeth. With Mastiff satisfied that he got the reaction he wanted from the TNA star, Lionheart was urged by both men to make the match for later in the year, and he duly obliged.

The heroic reign of Lou King Sharp as the sole holder of the PWE Tag Team titles sadly came to an end at the hands of Fight Club. Sharp encouraged Lionheart to send out a tag partner for him again, but he was left hanging with Fight Club out for blood. In the end it was Joe Hendry who emerged, but "The Local Hero" couldn't save the belts, as Liam Thomson's Backstabber and Kid Fite's brainbuster were enough to put

The bout between Damian O'Connor and Joe Coffey was typically hard-hitting



© DAVID J. WILSON

Sharp away. Salt was rubbed into the wound when Hendry helped the former champ to his feet, only to brutally attack him.

The conflict between the Coffey brothers continued, after Joe asked Mark to the ring to make peace. Mark seemed unwilling to forgive and forget, suggesting that the only way it would be solved was with a physical confrontation, with Joe insisting that he would never fight him. He then vacated the ring at Mark's request, leaving Mark to have the Match of the Night against Kenny Williams. The two have undoubted chemistry, but it was the power of Coffey that trumped the speed and dynamism of Williams, as he finished him off with a pumphandle slam.

It was then over to Joe to match the feat in a battle with one of the most revered talents in Europe right now, Damian O'Connor. Their bout was predictably hard-hitting, and was fast shaping up to be one of the matches of the year, but Mark once again got involved, distracting Joe long enough for "The Beast of Belfast" to knock Joe's lights out with a lariat.

PWE proved that Ayr is NAK country, when Wolfgang's match with TJ Rage was ruled a no contest thanks to an ambush from Fight Club. Chris Renfrew came to Wolfgang's aid as he threw up the NAK sign as a pro wrestling bat signal, but the numbers game got the better of the NAK brethren, as Fight Club and Rage left them lying in a heap.

NEWS IN BRIEF

...continued

Jersey All Pro Wrestling promoter Frank Iadevaia (known by the nickname Fat Frank) passed away on September 23... Percival A. Friend (real name: Al Friend), a manager in the 1970s in the Central States territory, died on September 23. He was 70. Friend was often in touch with **FSM** to talk about Scottish wrestler Wild Angus, whom he managed in the U.S... The UFC has announced a show at Madison Square Garden on April 23, 2016. However, this is just a manoeuvre in the legal wranglings with the state of New York, as a judge recently told the company that it could not sue for damages unless the state actually blocked it from holding an event... In an interesting development, a lawsuit brought by several former UFC fighters has seen the judge grant the plaintiffs access to the company's financial records, which have previously been private. This will include PPV numbers and details of fighter pay... Jon Jones has avoided jail time for his April 26 hit-and-run by agreeing to 18 months of supervised probation and 72 charitable appearances... Michael Bisping has had elbow surgery and will thus miss his November 15 bout with Robert Whittaker... In a Deadspin.com story by Josh Gross, it was revealed that Vitor Belfort was allowed to fight Jon Jones at *UFC 152* in September 2012 despite having elevated levels of testosterone in his system. Embarrassingly, this was known in the industry thanks to an administrative error that sent Belfort's drug test results to various fighters, managers and trainers three weeks before the bout... Former UFC middleweight champion Rich Franklin has confirmed his retirement. He had not fought since losing to Cung Le in November 2012... The Bellator *Dynamite* show, held on September 19 in San Jose, was not a ratings success, drawing only 800,000 viewers to Spike TV. The show aimed to bring the production values of PRIDE back to the U.S, and while it was arguably successful in doing so, the card was a disappointment. Phil Davis won a light-heavyweight tournament by defeating Francis Carmont (subbing for an injured King Mo), while Liam McGeary tapped out Tito Ortiz to retain the light-heavyweight title... The latest attempt to bring back a Japanese PRIDE FC-esque promotion begins on New Year's Eve, which for a short period became an annual night of various fight cards in Japan. The Rizin Fighting Federation will bring Fedor Emelianenko out of retirement on the event.

THE TROPHY CASE

WWE CHAMPIONS...

WWE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
Seth Rollins

UNITED STATES CHAMPION
John Cena

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION
Kevin Owens

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS
The New Day

DIVAS CHAMPION
Charlotte

TNA CHAMPIONS...

TNA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
Vacant

KING OF THE MOUNTAIN CHAMPION
Bobby Roode

X-DIVISION CHAMPION
Tigre Uno

TNA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS
The Wolves

KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION
Gail Kim

UFC CHAMPIONS...

UFC HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
Fabricio Werdum

UFC LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
Daniel Cormier

UFC MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION
Chris Weidman

UFC WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPION
Robbie Lawler

UFC LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION
Rafael Dos Anjos

ACCURATE AS OF
18/10/2015

UFC FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPION
Jose Aldo

UFC BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION
TJ Dillashaw

UFC FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION
Demetrious Johnson

UFC WOMEN'S BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION
Ronda Rousey

UFC WOMEN'S STRAWWEIGHT CHAMPION
Joanna Jedrzejczyk

JUSTIN SYSUM

Height: 6ft 1in

Weight: 210 lbs

Nickname: "The Hammer"

Has worked for: NGW:UK; Pro Evolution Wrestling; All Star Wrestling; Pro Wrestling Pride; Kamikaze Pro; Legacy Wrestling

Titles Held: Pro Evo heavyweight title

Long gone are the days when athletic physiques and a high standard of professional gear were not requirements on the British scene. In the UK, today's industry boasts a plethora of young talent keen to make their mark, and more performers than ever absolutely look the part.

One such upcoming talent is Justin "The Hammer" Sysum, someone who makes a huge impression in both appearance and how he projects himself. Standout athlete Sysum boasts an awe-inspiring, chiselled physique, honed through the years thanks to both his dedication and his competing in a wide variety of sports. Now 30, Sysum's sound basis for grappling can partially be attributed to the skills he learnt while growing up in Gloucester. His sporting credentials include a background in rugby, cycling, and hammer-throwing - naturally, the origin of his nickname. Most significantly, he was a champion gymnast, and at the age of 11, he managed to earn himself a spot competing in the sport's national championships.

Sysum wasn't a huge fan of wrestling growing up; a studious child, his parents might not have taken too kindly to him staying up on a school night to watch the antics in the squared circle. Nonetheless, he had enough interest to be drawn in, and by the time he finished university, the lure was strong. Still, after attending Pro EVW's school, Sysum wasn't able to properly integrate himself into training until 2012, when he was in a position to learn from the likes of Iestyn Rees, Gilligan Gordon, and T-Bone. He impressed quickly, his gymnastic ability affording him grace and power, as is seen in one of the best dropkicks in the game.

"I first met Justin approximately two-and-a-half years ago at the training centre in Gloucester," Iestyn Rees informed **FSM**. "My initial impressions were that he looked very



© TONY KNOX

© TONY KNOX

Justin Sysum shows off his beautiful dropkick against Marty Scurll at NGW



© TONY KNOX

© TONY KNOX

athletic and had a very positive attitude towards all aspects of training, and an excellent work ethic. Justin analyses his performance and always seeks feedback in order to improve.”

“I first met him when I was going to a training class, as a couple guys had said to come see this guy. Upon arrival, it was obvious ‘this guy’ was a hell of an athlete!” agreed Futureshock champion T-Bone. “After spending more and more time with him, you realise just how much of a good person he is – almost too nice! His positive attitude keeps you wanting to help him, and be around him. His determination to succeed makes you want to make that happen for him.”

An eight-man tag match facilitated Sysum’s debut, for the Pro Wrestling Pride promotion at Teignmouth’s Carlton Theatre. Although obviously inexperienced, the rookie showed plenty of fire, and managed some staggering power moves in his brief spell in the ring. Crucially, he managed to impress the right people, to earn more bookings.

“Justin Sysum was brought to my attention a couple years ago by his original trainers Gilligan Gordon and Iestyn Rees,” said PCW champion Dave Mastiff. “They asked me to take a look at him training with a view to working with him to enhance his development. What I saw that day was an incredible athlete – probably the best natural athlete I’ve dealt with. He’s strong, quick, explosive, agile and flexible.”

While it remains his sculpted appearance that invariably grabs fans’ attention, inside the ring, Sysum backs it up with palpable strength and explosive bursts of high-impact moves. This is epitomised by his finisher, a spectacular 450° splash, delivered with genuine ferocity.

“Justin’s physical capabilities are fairly unmatched in British wrestling,” enthused Rees. “The combination of these two attributes means he has a giant advantage over most of his peers.”

A MIND FOR THE BUSINESS

Obviously, though, natural athleticism and good genetics aren’t everything in a grappling world that requires personality and a keen grasp of psychology. No shrinking violet despite his affable personality,

Sysum has become a keen self promoter. His background in business has ensured a level-headed approach to his work, and an acumen for making the most of his opportunities. Indeed, until recently, he balanced his grappling career with a successful family-run venture supplying artificial lawns.

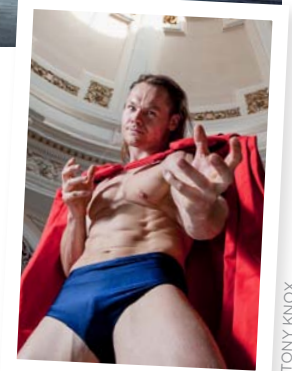
In the ring, he’s barely looked back. Sysum raised the Pro Evolution heavyweight title in June 2013, becoming a regular fixture in the title scene. Highlights included an October 12 victory over Doug Williams, who is exactly the sort of opponent Sysum would need to continue raising his game. Matches throughout 2015 have further increased Sysum’s stock, as in NGW, for example, he teamed with Grado to battle Marty Scurll and Joe Hendry on June 17, before triumphing over Mark Haskins on July 7.

On November 11, 2014, Sysum enjoyed a completely different type of career high. Tagging with the outstanding Nathan Cruz, the duo faced The Usos in a dark match when WWE ran in Liverpool. Not just an essential learning experience, the scrap also helped convince Sysum to take the plunge full-time.

“While he holds great natural physical attributes, he has had to work hard to improve his wrestling IQ,” confided Dave Mastiff. “Justin has supreme confidence in his abilities, and channels that positively, giving him great determination a lot of others lack. This is the attitude he requires in order to improve in the areas he may lack, and he will graft to improve them, no doubt about it.”

Another area in which Sysum differs from many of his contemporaries is in the unusual path he has taken, committing to his dream of giving wrestling a real go a little later than most, and leaving behind a successful business. Realistically, it was a vital step to take; over the course of the summer months, working for All Star afforded him the opportunity to lock horns with some of the finest the UK has to offer.

“Continuing to work full-time will allow him to work a variety of opponents for different companies in front of different types of audiences,” concluded Iestyn Rees. “Hopefully this will lead to him fulfilling his potential, and becoming one of the best all-round wrestlers in the UK.”



© TONY KNOX

“While it remains his sculpted appearance that invariably grabs fans’ attention, Sysum backs it up with palpable strength and explosive bursts of high-impact moves”

UKEVENTS

COMPILED BY DARREN POTTS

FSM SUGGESTS SOME OF THE FINEST PRO WRESTLING TAKING PLACE IN THE UK THIS MONTH



ON THE MAP



SOUTHSIDE

- A** 30/10/15 **GLOBAL FORCE WRESTLING**
Alive Lynnsport, King's Lynn
- B** 01/11/15 **SOUTHSIDE WRESTLING "YOUNG TIGERS CUP"**
Commemoration Hall, Huntingdon
- C** 08/11/15 **FUTURESHOCK WRESTLING "SLAM"**
Rylands Club, Warrington
- D** 14/11/15 **WRESTLING.IE**
Garage Theatre, Monaghan Town
- E** 15/11/15 **ICW "FEAR & LOATHING VIII"**
SECC, Glasgow
- F** 21/11/15 **NGW "AULD ENEMIES COLLIDE"**
Victoria Hall, Keighley

Mick Foley will be the Guest Commissioner at ICW's Fear & Loathing VIII on November 15



- 28/10/15 Global Force Wrestling: Grimsby Auditorium, Grimsby
- 29/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Dudley Town Hall, Dudley
- 29/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Princes Hall, Aldershot
- 29/10/15 LDN: Princes Theatre, Clacton On Sea
- 30/10/15 PCW "Fright Night": Evoque, Preston
- 30/10/15 HCW "Octoberfest": Wolverley Sports & Social Club, Kidderminster
- 30/10/15 Welsh Wrestling: Lyric Theatre, Carmarthen
- 30/10/15 4FW: The Laverton, Westbury
- 30/10/15 ICW "Live Forever": Manchester Academy 2
- 30/10/15 Fierce Females: Walkabout, Glasgow
- 30/10/15 LDN: Rotherham Civic Hall, Rotherham
- 30/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Corn Exchange, Ipswich
- 31/10/15 SWE "Uprising": Ardler Complex, Dundee
- 31/10/15 ATTACK "Goosebumps 3": Trinity Centre, Bristol
- 31/10/15 UKWE "Halloween Supershow": Control, Leeds
- 31/10/15 AWW: Brierley Hill Civic Hall, Brierley Hill
- 31/10/15 ICW "Imaginationland": O2 Academy, Birmingham
- 31/10/15 LDN: Stamford Corn Exchange, Stamford
- 31/10/15 WrestleForce "Monster Mash Halloween Spectacular": Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre, Leighton Buzzard
- 01/11/15 PE "Tickled Pink": Parklands Social Club, Doncaster
- 01/11/15 EWE "St Mary Street Massacre": Walkabout, Cardiff
- 01/11/15 TARGET: The Assembly Rooms, Dumfries
- 01/11/15 ICW "Get My Rocks Off": Rock City, Nottingham
- 01/11/15 All Star Wrestling: Bedworth Civic Hall, Bedworth
- 01/11/15 NGW "Eternal Glory": Liverpool Olympia, Liverpool
- 06/11/15 4FW: Salford Hall, Keynsham
- 06/11/15 WF: Ivy Leaf Club, Maidenhead
- 06/11/15 All Star Wrestling: Fairfield Halls, Croydon
- 07/11/15 Wrestling.ie: Balor Arts Centre, Ballybofey
- 07/11/15 4FW: Thatcham, Thatcham
- 07/11/15 WZW: Stewarts Hall, Huntley
- 07/11/15 WF: The Mill Arts Events Centre, Rayleigh
- 07/11/15 NWA:FN "Modern Warfare": Atlantis Nightclub, Eastbourne
- 07/11/15 SPW "Wrestling Time": Lochside Club, Dumfries
- 08/11/15 HCW "On Clows Nine": Victory Hall, Clows Top
- 08/11/15 TGW "7 Deadly Sins": House of Grit, Wakefield
- 08/11/15 IPW:UK: The Tonbridge Centre, Kent
- 08/11/15 BEW: Tram & Tooting Social, London
- 08/11/15 WrestleForce: The Dovehouse Theatre, Solihull
- 13/11/15 4FW: Exeter Hall, Kidlington
- 14/11/15 BWP "Main Event": Ffrith Beach Arena, Prestatyn
- 14/11/15 PBW: Airdrie Town Hall, Airdrie
- 14/11/15 4FW: Rivermead Leisure Centre, Reading
- 14/11/15 WZW: Bettridge Centre, Newtonhill
- 14/11/15 LDN: Uckfield Civic Hall, Uckfield
- 14/11/15 RCWA: The Chafford School, Essex
- 14/11/15 NGW "Proving Ground 29": Ormskirk Civic Hall, Ormskirk
- 15/11/15 Origin Wrestling: The Devenish Complex, Belfast
- 20/11/15 HOP:E "Evolution 27": Forest Town Arena, Mansfield
- 20/11/15 TETSUJIN: The Black-E, Liverpool
- 21/11/15 FutureShock Wrestling "Underground": Longfield Suite, Prestwich
- 21/11/15 4FW: Emersons Green Hall, Bristol
- 21/11/15 WZW: Arbroath Community Centre, Arbroath
- 21/11/15 DOA "November Reign": Trimley Sports & Social Club, Felixstowe
- 21/11/15 HOPE "Welcome to the Freakshow": Wonderland Xscape, Milton Keynes
- 21/11/15 FHW "Episode 17": Mayors Walk, Peterborough
- 21/11/15 LDN: Featherstone Sports Centre, Southall
- 22/11/15 JDW: Windle Labour Club, St Helens
- 22/11/15 PLEX "Fight For Your Right to Party": Connaught Leisure Centre, Aldershot
- 27/11/15 FCW: Park Sports & Leisure Centre, North Shields
- 28/11/15 RWA: Grangeway Community Centre, Runcorn
- 28/11/15 BWP "Main Event": Wylfa Power Station, Anglesey
- 28/11/15 EBW: Queens Social Club, Sheffield
- 28/11/15 PBW: Meadow Centre, Dumbarton
- 28/11/15 SWE "Uprising": Ardler Complex, Dundee
- 28/11/15 KSW: Mets Aerospace Sports & Social Club, Redditch
- 28/11/15 HCW "Wessex Wrestling": Whisty Hall, Radstock
- 28/11/15 CPW "Wadebridge School Hall": Cornwall
- 29/11/15 PROGRESS: The Electric Ballroom, Camden
- 29/11/15 ICW "Fear & Loathing III": City Nightclub, Edinburgh

ALL EVENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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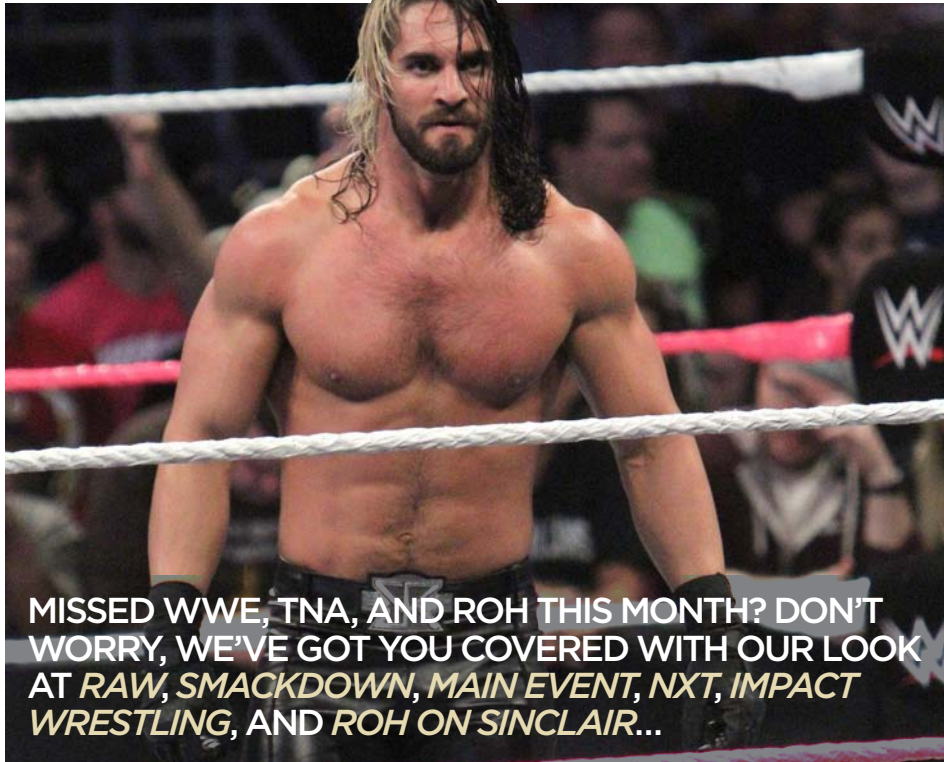
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THE TV LOUNGE

WRESTLING ROUND-UP

*Seth Rollins continues to be haunted
by Kane's split persona on Raw*



MISSED WWE, TNA, AND ROH THIS MONTH? DON'T WORRY, WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED WITH OUR LOOK AT RAW, SMACKDOWN, MAIN EVENT, NXT, IMPACT WRESTLING, AND ROH ON SINCLAIR...

The traditional autumn lull in WWE programming kicked in this month. The awkward last quarter between *SummerSlam* and *The Royal Rumble* has long been a difficult creative period for WWE, with the best ideas saved for *WrestleMania* season, and combined with a reluctance to elevate new stars, the result is laborious *Raw* and *Smackdown* viewing. Key storylines are failing to resonate right now, more so than at any point in the previous 18 years, as can be seen in the ratings patterns.

Seth Rollins remaining WWE champion, moving on from a feud with 56-year-old Sting to 48-year-old Kane has clearly failed to whet the appetite of the WWE Universe. Kane plays his role well, as does Rollins, but a mixture of wacky backstage comedy and B-level Undertaker-esque special effects devastatingly misreads the audience's appetite in 2015. With so many talented players not being given a chance to get over, it is a frustrating time for many, both in and out of the company.

In the main event storyline, Kane now has a split personality, as was amusingly pointed out by Abyss/Joseph Park on Twitter. There is Corporate Kane, a happy-go-lucky office man delighted to work under Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon, carrying around his "World's Greatest Director of Operations" coffee mug. Then there is "The Demon Kane", the masked monster stalking Rollins, intent on attacking him at every turn. Corporate Kane seems unaware that The Demon Kane is his

alter ego. Rollins, playing a chickenshit heel, is scared of The Demon Kane, and suspicious near the babyface-like Corporate Kane. While loosely claiming anonymity, Rollins reported Corporate Kane to WWE Human Resources for misuse of power, only for HR to find Corporate Kane "sound of mind". Demon Kane, meanwhile, came up from underneath the ring and dragged Rollins into the depths below at the conclusion of the September 21 *Raw*, in a scene straight out of 2003, not so coincidentally another era where *Raw* ratings fell drastically.

Another angle on September 28's *Raw* saw Rollins destroy Corporate Kane, injuring his leg to where he was stretchered away. In Superman-like fashion, however, he magically transformed into The Demon Kane behind the closed doors of an ambulance, burst out of the vehicle, adjusted his injured leg, and re-entered the arena to Tombstone the WWE World heavyweight champion. Stephanie, growing tired of such shenanigans, revealed on October 5 that she had booked Rollins versus The Demon Kane for the title at *Hell In A Cell* on October 25, with the stipulation being that if The Demon Kane loses, Corporate Kane will be fired.

Brock Lesnar remained on track to face The Undertaker in what was being billed as the blow-off to their feud at *Hell In A Cell*. Lesnar returned for a match on October 3's Madison Square Garden card, broadcast live on the WWE Network. This was essentially a house show with no storyline development,

but after Lesnar defeated Big Show, two days later on *Raw* he again suplexed him in the ring so that a larger audience could see the feat of strength ahead of his bout with "The Dead Man". Also on the MSG card, John Cena retained his U.S. title, defeating Rollins in a Cage match following Demon Kane interference; in a quite unsatisfying contest, The Dudley Boyz beat The New Day via disqualification in a Tag Team title match, when Xavier Woods interfered; Kevin Owens retained his Intercontinental title, defeating Chris Jericho in what the latter billed as 25 years since his first pro match; Neville pinned Stardust; and the team of Randy Orton and Dolph Ziggler beat Sheamus and Rusev. Rounding things off, the Bellas and Alicia Fox defeated Paige, Charlotte and Becky Lynch, when the latter pair walked out on Paige, leaving her to be pinned.

The New Day has had a significant push on TV of late. Continuing to feud with The Dudley Boyz, they teamed with Rusev to beat Bubba Ray, D-Von and Dolph Ziggler in an entertaining match on September 21. Buoyed by this win, Xavier Woods answered John Cena's U.S. title open challenge on the following week's *Raw*, only for Woods' New Day chums to interfere, setting up Cena and The Dudley Boyz versus The New Day later in the show, with Kingston pinning Bubba Ray. John Cena would go on to beat Big E in the main event of the October 5 *Raw*, only for Cena, Dolph Ziggler and the Dudley Boyz to be attacked by the strangely dominant New Day, closing the show.

In a surprising development, Summer Rae proposed to Rusev on the October 5 *Raw*. After some deliberation, Rusev accepted... but then stated that no ceremony would take place until he had WWE gold back around his waist. Expect this storyline to be dropped entirely now that Rusev and Lana have announced their real-life engagement.

The alleged Divas Revolution continued, with a jubilant Charlotte celebrating her *Night Of Champions* title victory with father Ric Flair and friends Becky Lynch and Paige on the September 21 *Raw*. Paige appeared to turn on Charlotte during this segment, however, when she dropped a pipebomb-esque promo, claiming that the Divas Revolution was a sham, that Charlotte would soon lose her title back to Nikki Bella, that the new champion's success was down to her father's fame and influence, and that Becky Lynch wasn't relevant. Since the promo, however, not only has Paige remained in tandem with her fellow PCB members, but she's been strangely quiet on TV, losing clean to the returning Natalya on October 5, and to Naomi on October 8.

John Cena retained his WWE U.S. title at the live MSG show on the WWE Network



The interminable feud between Roman Reigns and Bray Wyatt has continued, with their apparent blow-off match thankfully set to occur inside Hell in a Cell on October 25. Braun Strowman, the rookie monster accomplice of Wyatt and Luke Harper, has featured in several TV matches, teaming with Harper to defeat The Prime Time Players on September 28, and forming a Wyatt Family trio to lose to Reigns, Dean Ambrose and Randy Orton on October 5. Strowman has stuck to the most basic of sequences, but has performed them well.

Over on **NXT**, the brand goes from strength to strength. On October 7, the group held another tremendous *Takeover* show, this time subtitled *Respect*, again airing live on the WWE Network. The special was headlined by a fantastic 30-minute Iron Man match in which Women's champion Bayley beat Sasha Banks by three falls to two, with the final fall coming via armbar tapout with just three seconds to go. By the end, this was an extremely heated contest, especially after Banks stole the headband of eight-year-old Bayley superfan Izzy, sending the child into floods of tears.

Earlier in the show, Finn Balor and Samoa Joe won the Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic, defeating Scott Dawson and Dash Wilder in the opening semi-final, before triumphing over Rhyno and Baron Corbin. The latter team had earlier defeated rising stars Chad Gable and Jason Jordan in a good match that also managed to elevate Gable and Jordan. Elsewhere, Apollo Crews continued his rapid rise up the ranks with a strong win over Tyler Breeze, while Japanese star Asuka made a terrific debut, defeating

Despite being fine performers, there is nothing to get excited about in the Bray Wyatt vs. Roman Reigns programme



Dana Brooke. Asuka's work was tight, and she looked like a star right off the bat.

A busy month on **Impact Wrestling** saw the TNA versus GFW feud wrapped up, followed by the build to, and fallout from, the promotion's biggest show of the year, *Bound For Glory*. With the future of TNA at stake, Team TNA (Drew Galloway, Bobby Lashley, Davey Richards, Eddie Edwards and Bram) defeated Team GFW (Jeff Jarrett, Brian Myers, Chris Mordetzky, Sonjay Dutt and Eric Young) in a Lethal Lockdown match on September 16. By virtue of the win, Dixie Carter gained full control of Jeff Jarrett's minority shareholding in TNA, and she rewarded the members of Team TNA by putting them in a five-way match, with the winner earning a World title shot against Ethan Carter III. Drew Galloway ended up victorious, pinning Lashley.

As this angle played out, Jeff Hardy was forced to serve as EC3's personal assistant, following brother Matt's loss to the champion on the September 2 *Impact Wrestling*. Three weeks later, Carter defeated Rockstar Spud, with Jeff refusing to attack Spud or help Carter get an easy victory. Jeff eventually quit his role, and supposedly the promotion, rather than suck up to EC3. However, Dixie Carter, furious about her nephew's actions, booked Drew Galloway and Matt Hardy to face EC3 and Tyrus on September 30, with the stipulation that if Galloway and Hardy won, the latter

would be added to the EC3 versus Galloway title match at *Bound For Glory*. Quite how winning this tag team match would help Galloway become TNA World champion was somewhat of a mystery, but when the babyfaces duly won, Dixie added salt to her nephew's wounds by announcing that Jeff Hardy would be the special guest referee for the pay-per-view bout.

The fallout from *Bound For Glory* was unexpected. Matt Hardy won the World title on the show, but EC3 protested the victory, launching a legal challenge that supposedly prevented Hardy from appearing on television as champion. As a result, Hardy reluctantly vacated the title, in order to allow the promotion to proceed as normal. TNA's solution was to launch a 32-wrestler round-robin tournament, patterned after the FIFA World Cup. The tournament commenced on October 7, with Galloway beating Bram and Spud defeating Grado in the UK group; Awesome Kong beating Madison Rayne and Brooke Tessmacher defeating Gail Kim in the Knockouts group (yes, at some stage in the tournament, intergender bouts will take place); as well as Bobby Lashley downing Mr Anderson and Ethan Carter III going to a 15-minute time-limit draw with Austin Aries in Champions group.

However, the reality of the tournament is that all of the matches were taped across four days in July, which explains why several wrestlers are included after supposedly being done with the company.

“Sasha Banks stole the headband of eight-year-old Bayley superfan Izzy, sending the child into floods of tears”

WRESTLING ROUND-UP

Tyrus, Jeff Hardy and Ethan Carter III were involved in the shenanigans surrounding the TNA World title



© GEORGE TAHINOS

Elsewhere, Gail Kim regained the TNA Knockouts title, defeating champion Brooke Tessmacher, Lei'D Tapa and Awesome Kong in a four-way on September 16. Kim then successfully defended against The Dollhouse's Jade on the following week's show. The Dollhouse, now comprised of Taryn Terrell, Jade, Marti Bell and Rebel, continues to be a force. Marti, Jade and Rebel beat Velvet Sky and Madison Rayne in a Handicap match on September 30, with Rebel throwing powder in Rayne's eyes to help her team to victory.

In an angle so embarrassing that it hurts to type, Chris Melendez regained possession of his prosthetic leg, defeating Eric Young on September 23. The Revolution faction is also no more, as following Mahabali Shera's breakaway from the group, Abyss and Manik both left James Storm's tutelage on the September 23 show, having grown tired of his browbeating. Shera defeated Storm in a Hardcore match on September 30, following interference from Manik.

On this month's **ROH On Sinclair** came the build to September 18's *All Star Extravaganza*, along with three standalone shows that contained no storyline follow-up. The September 16 broadcast was headlined by War Machine defeating Mike Bennett and Matt Taven, after which The Young Bucks attacked the Kingdom duo, only to be laid out by Chris Daniels, Frankie Kazarian and Chris Sabin of The Addiction. Kyle O'Reilly and Bobby Fish prepared for

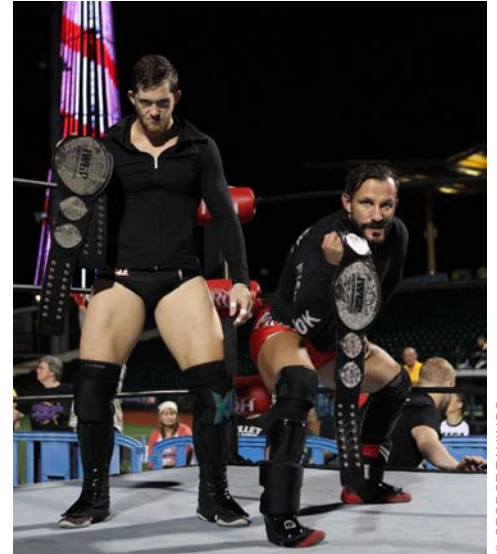
their individual matches against ROH World and TV champion Jay Lethal at the pay-per-view with a win over Lethal's House of Truth teammates J. Diesel and Donovan Dijak. Cedric Alexander scored a pinfall victory over Dalton Castle on the same show.

It was then the turn of New Japan to take centre stage. On September 23, Hirooki Goto teamed with The Briscoes to defeat Kazuchika Okada, Rocky Romero and Trent Barreta, while Michael Elgin beat Silas Young, and ACH overcame Caprice Coleman. September 30's programme was main-evented by a great Shinsuke Nakamura victory over Adam Cole, while Matt Sydal scored a big win over KUSHIDA, and Takaaki Watanabe triumphed in a four-way over Adam Page, Will Ferrara and Moose.

The October 7 show featured matches from the *Field Of Honor* event, taped outdoors at the MCU Park in Brooklyn in August. A terrific main event saw current IWGP heavyweight champion Kazuchika Okada pin Roderick Strong, while The Briscoes beat The Timesplitters, and Takaaki Watanabe went over Cedric Alexander to earn an ROH TV title shot against Jay Lethal on the following week's show. Also set up for that broadcast was Adam Page versus Jay Briscoe, after Page challenged the former two-time ROH World champion.

Shows covered from September 14 to October 9

Kyle O'Reilly and Bobby Fish deservedly remain a huge part of ROH television



© GEORGE TAHINOS

RATINGS REVIEW

The start of the NFL season, in particular with *Monday Night Football* games airing live and head-to-head on U.S. TV, has had a catastrophic effect on the ratings for *Raw*. The September 14 show did a 2.42 rating (3.39m viewers); September 21 drew a similar 2.46 rating (3.34m viewers); September 28 fell to a 2.32 rating (3.32m viewers), making it the lowest rated non-holiday *Raw* in 18 years; and the October 5 programme increased very slightly to a 2.34 rating (3.37m viewers).

The ratings for *Smackdown* have also remained low. On September 17, the show drew a 1.49 rating (2.08m viewers); September 24 increased to a 1.61 rating (2.14m viewers); October 1 hit a 1.57 rating (2.13m viewers); and October 8 achieved 2.147m viewers.

U.S. TV viewership for *Impact Wrestling* on Destination America has mostly risen over the past month. The September 16 programme drew a total of 320,000 viewers; September 23 increased to 394,000 viewers; September 30 declined to a total of 344,000 viewers; and October 7 rebounded to a total of 447,000 viewers.

ROH on Destination America has had an increase overall. The September 16 broadcast scored just 89,000 viewers, ROH's all-time lowest rating on Destination America; September 23 bounced back to 168,000 viewers; September 30 show fell to 127,000 viewers; and October 7 had a big increase to 175,000 viewers.

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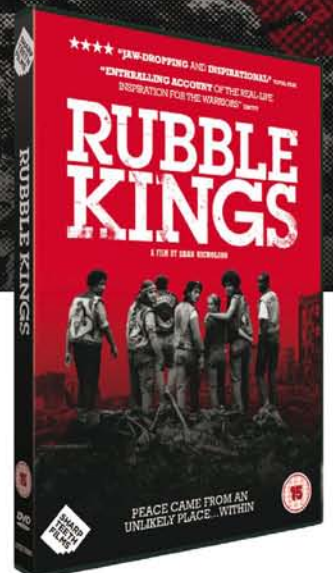
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WRESTLING ROUND-UP

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NJPW KING OF PRO WRESTLING 2015

October 12's *King Of Pro Wrestling* from Sumo Hall was an important card for New Japan, as it cemented the path to January 4's *Wrestle Kingdom*. There was plenty for fans to sink their teeth into on what wound up being a very enjoyable card.

Sandwiched between the usual undercard multi-man tag matches was an tremendously entertaining Tomoaki Honma versus YOSHI-HASHI singles affair, which was one of the highlights of the first half. Honma continued to show that he can't help but have a good match in any situation, doing so en route to a crowd-pleasing victory after a flurry of Kokeshi headbutts. In the first title match of the show, junior-heavyweight Tag Team champions reDRagon defeated Roppongi Vice in what was shaping up to be a very good match before an unplanned finish caused by referee Tiger Hattori counting three on what was meant to be a near-fall.

Matt Sydal challenged IWGP junior-heavyweight champion Kenny Omega in a bout that was dragged down only by the audience not having been properly introduced to Sydal, which had the pair fighting the uphill battle of gaijin versus gaijin. The action and execution was tremendous, however, and approached state-of-the-art at times. While Omega was superb, Sydal - who eventually went down to Omega's One Winged Angel - put in another performance that made a mockery of WWE's decision to release him last year.

Many people groaned at the thought of another Togi Makabe versus Tomohiro Ishii match for the NEVER title. The feud felt played out, and there was really no call for a fourth battle in the series, as Makabe had won all the previous bouts. However, they delivered their best contest yet, and Ishii got his first win. It was the typical bruising slugfest, but "The Stone Pitbull" took it to another level by busting out some new tricks, including hitting Makabe's own King Kong Kneedrop. It was his trusty brainbuster that got him the duke, though, ending an encounter that had Sumo Hall rocking.

Hiroshi Tanahashi's road to the Tokyo Dome main event had one last roadblock, in the form of one of the men against whom he came unstuck in the G1:

Tetsuya Naito. Over the years, the pair have had some thrilling contests, but this match was more centered around Naito's new character. In particular, the focus was on another "Ingovernable" dressed in Naito's entrance attire at ringside. This dampened the heat for the match, as it was fairly obvious it wasn't going to end until the mystery man got involved. He unmasked as former young lion Takaaki Watanabe, fresh off his U.S. excursion, and he proceeded to destroy Tanahashi with the referee down. Hirooki Goto and Katsuyori Shibata made the save in what turned into quite the brawl, and that allowed Tanahashi to regain control and finish Naito with the High Fly Flow. The post-match angle was strong, as Watanabe laid out Goto with a vicious STO.

BATTLE FOR THE KINGDOM

With Tanahashi's spot in the Dome main event locked in, all that was to be determined was whom he would challenge for the title. Thus, Kazuchika Okada and AJ Styles went to battle in an outstanding main event to end the five-match series that began when Styles debuted in New Japan last summer. In a gripping half-hour contest, both competitors showed why they are arguably the best in the world. The highlight was a long sequence centered around Styles' Calf Killer submission hold; Okada's selling was off the charts, and he had the crowd living and dying with his struggle to reach the ropes. One of the champion's more unheralded strengths is his facial expressions, and they were on full display here.

Having fought through the Calf Killer, Okada was a man possessed in the final few minutes. It really felt like both men were leaving it all out there, knowing that this would be their last big match with each other, at least for a long time. The finish, much like that in Okada's 2014 G1 final win, was brutal and definitive: with Styles on the top rope, Okada pulled him down by the arm, straight into a Rainmaker clothesline. From there, he picked Styles up and delivered two more lethal Rainmakers for the conclusive pinfall.



© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

3

1. Kazuchika Okada and AJ Styles showed tremendous chemistry in the main event 2. By beating Tetsuya Naito, Hiroshi Tanahashi was confirmed as challenging Okada on January 4 3. Kenny Omega retained the IWGP junior-heavyweight title over Matt Sydal

RESULTS Justin "Thunder" Liger, Tiger Mask, Ryusuke Taguchi & Mascara Dorada def. Juice Robinson, Yohei Komatsu, Sho Tanaka, David Finlay & Jay White (Pinfall / 8:47) ■ Tomoaki Honma def. YOSHI-HASHI (Pinfall / 8:55) ■ Hirooyoshi Tenzan, Satoshi Kojima, Yuji Nagata & Manabu Nakanishi besiege Hirooki Goto, Katsuyori Shibata, Kota Ibushi & Captain New Japan (Pinfall / 12:12) ■ reDRagon def. Roppongi Vice (Pinfall / 15:21 / IWGP junior-heavyweight Tag Team titles) ■ Kenny Omega def. Matt Sydal (Pinfall / 15:26 / IWGP junior-heavyweight title) ■ Shinsuke Nakamura, Toru Yano & Kazushi Sakuraba def. The Bullet Club (Pinfall / 7:03) ■ Tomohiro Ishii def. Togi Makabe (Pinfall / 17:54 / NEVER openweight title) ■ Hiroshi Tanahashi def. Tetsuya Naito (Pinfall / 19:55) ■ Kazuchika Okada def. AJ Styles (Pinfall / 30:15 / IWGP heavyweight title)

DRAGON GATE GATE OF VICTORY 2015

Kaito Ishida and Takehiro Yamamura – you might want to remember those names. Having debuted in Dragon Gate only a few weeks ago, the pair of promising rookies had their coming out party at Korakuen Hall on October 8, and in a big way, too. As part of a tag team match in which Ishida aligned with Jimmy Susumu and Yamamura teamed with Ryo Jimmy Saito, the youngsters tore not only into each other, but also the veterans with whom they shared the ring. Both showed fire, composure, and the makings of the athleticism and crisp execution associated with the best Dragon Gate wrestlers. Susumu and Saito showcased them so well, too, and certainly got the best out of them.

This 12-minute contest was the show-stealer on what was a storyline-heavy night, before a very hot crowd. The match was not the only highlight for Ishida and Yamamura, as they joined their first faction when CIMA formed a new unit following the main event. Said contest was an Open The Triangle Gate match pitting champions CIMA, Gamma and Don Fujii against the VERZERK trio of Shingo Takagi, Cyber Kong and Kotoka. The match was too goofy to be a Dragon Gate classic, but the crowd was really into it, and popped huge for Fujii pinning Dream Gate champ Takagi for the deciding fall.

The night got off to a hot start with another trios match that was every bit as star-laden, as the Monster Express combination of Masato Yoshino,

Akira Tozawa and new member T-Hawk defeated Dia Hearts' Dragon Kid, Kzy and new partner Flamita. The match had some added comedy due to Tozawa wiping out on his entrance spot, in which he races to the top rope and stands on one leg. It normally looks impressive, but this time, he crashed hip-first onto the steel. All throughout the match, the combatants referenced the incident, and Tozawa's facial expressions were hilarious. It was serious business for the finishing stretch, though, as T-Hawk and Kzy went toe-to-toe, exchanging wicked chops before T-Hawk hurled Kzy up and down with his Night Ride (modified Michinoku Driver) finisher for the pinfall.

The sole singles bout on the show was a grudge match to settle internal Jimmys conflicts between Mr. QuuQuu Tanizaki Naoki Toyonaka Dolphin and Jimmy Kness J.K.S. It was a solid contest, with well-executed wrestling, but it never hit the next level. The post-match angle was fantastic, however, as a bearded Jimmy Kagetora came out on crutches and asked the pair to put their differences aside. They agreed, and all seemed well as they broke out a crowd-pleasing Jimmys Train. But before the music stopped, Tanizaki kicked Kagetora in the leg, turning heel and joining VERZERK in the process.

Gate Of Victory was not a show for first-timers, but those who have long followed Dragon Gate's characters and storylines benefited from it.



© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

1. To later amusement, Akira Tozawa fluffed his entrance at Gate Of Victory

RESULTS Monster Express def. Dia Hearts (Pinfall / 14:22) ■ The Jimmys def. Eita & Draztick Boy (Pinfall / 8:15) ■ Jimmy Susumu & Kaito Ishida def. Ryo "Jimmy" Saito & Takehiro Yamamura (Pinfall / 12:16) ■ VERZERK def. Dia Hearts (Pinfall / 16:07) ■ Jimmy K-ness JKS def. Mr. QuuQuu Naoki Tanizaki Toyonaka Dolphin (Pinfall / 14:46) ■ CIMA, Don Fujii & Gamma def. VERZERK (Pinfall / 20:09 / Open The Triangle Gate titles)

UFC 192 CORMIER VS. GUSTAFSSON

October 3's *UFC 192* will go down in the history books as a strange event. On paper, the undercard was full of important fighters in credible matches, but there was little that the fans truly cared about; Joseph Benavidez, Julianna Pena and Ryan Bader all clearly won against highly-regarded opponents, but none of them put together a performance that persuaded anyone that they would be a true threat to their division's champion. Of the three, light-heavyweight Bader secured the most decisive victory, but that said more about how Rashad Evans' speed and strength had deserted him after two years away from UFC competition.

Worse, in the co-main event, Johnny Hendricks didn't even make it to the Octagon, as a bad weight cut resulted in his body tapping out the day before. His eagerly-anticipated match with Tyrone Woodley was therefore cancelled, and Dana White subsequently told Hendricks that his future rested in a middleweight division full of much larger opponents.

This odd ambivalence continued in the main event. It was a match contested for a title in the week when the undefeated former champion escaped jail for his latest misdemeanour; a bout fought between two of the best light-heavyweights in the world who had both gone 1-1 in their last two

fighters; and a contest booked because it was the most marketable in the division, yet it seems to have failed at the box office.

There was, however, no mistaking the action inside the Octagon, which added up to one of the more thrilling fights in the division's history. UFC light-heavyweight title-holder Daniel Cormier may be the more accomplished fighter, but as a naturally stocky athlete, the height and reach of Alexander Gustafsson presented him with real problems. Cormier answered this challenge with a performance of remarkable bravery, as he was nearly always the fighter moving forward. To a certain extent, this was understandable; someone as tall and long as Gustafsson should strategically seek to fight from distance.

The problem is that the Swede is a naturally offensive fighter who lacks the ringmanship to dominate his bouts off the back foot. Without the footwork or the jab to impose himself from range, as Semmy Schilt once mastered in K-1, he was reduced to repeatedly moving – and, at times, running – backwards.

Late in the third round, he inflicted the most sustained beating of the fight, but despite the split decision, it was never going to be enough to take the title on the judges' scorecards.



1. A battered Alexander Gustafsson simply didn't do enough to wrest the light-heavyweight title from Daniel Cormier

RESULTS Derrick Lewis def. Viktor Pesta (TKO [punches] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Sergio Pettis def. Chris Cariaso (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Sage Northcutt def. Francisco Trevino (TKO [elbows and punches] / R1 / 0:57) ■ Rose Namajunas def. Angela Hill (Technical Submission [standing rear-naked choke] / R1 / 2:47) ■ Albert Tumenov def. Alan Jouban (TKO [head kick and punches] / R1 / 2:55) ■ Yair Rodriguez def. Dan Hooker (Draw [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Julianna Pena def. Jessica Eye (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Joseph Benavidez def. Ali Bagautinov (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Ruslan Magomedov def. Shawn Jordan (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Ryan Bader def. Rashad Evans (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Daniel Cormier def. Alexander Gustafsson (Decision [split] / R5 / 5:00)

WRESTLING ROUND-UP



1



2

TNA BOUND FOR GLORY 2015

Matt Hardy's TNA World title victory at *Bound For Glory*, and subsequent vacating of that title days later on YouTube, helped TNA complete a creative three-month booking plan to dance around months of television recorded earlier this year. When TNA taped dozens of out of context singles matches back in July, the belief was that the bouts were either intentionally devoid of storyline relevance in order to be evergreen for the purposes of fulfilling future contractual commitments, or intended to be used for *One Night Stand* pay-per-views.

The matches turned out to be part of a massive 32-person World Cup-style tournament to fill the gap vacated by a man who wouldn't even win the title with until months later. The tournament will buy TNA time to finalise plans for matches that may never air in North America due to the promotion's unclear relationship with Destination America.

On October 4, Hardy won the title in a three-way by pinning Drew Galloway, which means that former champion Ethan Carter III has still not been pinned or submitted on television. The guest referee was Jeff Hardy, who finally snapped after weeks of being Carter's servant, levelling him with a chair. Galloway then kicked Carter in the head, but before he could make a cover, Matt Hardy hit Galloway with the Twist of Fate for the pinfall.

ATMOSPHERE HALTS THE ACTION

Overall, it was a good show dragged down by a bad atmosphere. Aside from the World title three-way, *Bound For Glory* featured four other title bouts, with all the champions retaining.

Tigre Uno held on to his X-Division title in an exciting Ultimate X match over Andrew Everett, DJ Z, and Manik. In what was the best match on the show, Bobby Roode retained the King of the Mountain championship by pinning Lashley. Both men kicked out of each other's finishers early, and also attempted to beat the other with the other's finisher later. An exciting series of submission

reversals led to Roode switching from a standing Kimura into a Roode Bomb to end the contest.

Gail Kim defeated Awesome Kong to keep her Knockouts title. Kong appears to be at the end of the road physically, but Kim worked very hard to carry the match. At one point, Kim's husband, celebrity chef Robert Irvine, got involved by leaning over the railing to yank a chair away from Kong, but that ended up backfiring, as newly inducted TNA Hall of Fame referee Earl Hebner argued with Irvine, allowing Kong to deliver an Implant Buster to Kim onto a pile of chairs, leading to a count-out tease. Kim eventually battled back and won with a cradle.

The Wolves defeated Brian Myers and Trevor Lee with their superkick/brainbuster combination in an exciting match, in the culmination of a feud that saw the teams trade the Tag Team titles.

Kurt Angle beat Eric Young in a brutal but confusing No Disqualification match. Young hit a piledriver and viciously attacked Angle's neck, leading to a doctor stopping the match. Young then beat up the doctor and the referee, and without explanation, the match then continued. Angle made a comeback and grabbed an ankle lock, but Young made the ropes, though with the stipulation, Angle was under no obligation to release the hold, and Young was forced to submit.

The 12-man Bound For Gold Gauntlet battle royal was a disaster of a match, with Al Snow, Tommy Dreamer, and colour commentator D'Angelo Dinero as surprise entrants. This came across as a poor Royal Rumble rip-off, with an embarrassing sequence in which Mahabali Sheera led everyone in the ring in doing his "Sheera Shake", which drew heavy boos from the crowd. It came down to Mr. Anderson - who had drawn number one and worked the entire match - and Tyrus, with Tyrus ultimately picking up the win.

Tyrus then told his boss, ECIII, that he would be challenging the TNA World champion, no matter who held it come the show's end.



3

1. Matt Hardy emerged from *Bound For Glory* as the TNA World champion, but vacated the title two days later **2**. Though Tyrus has claimed to challenge the champion, Drew Galloway will have something to say about it **3**. While intense, Eric Young's No Disqualification bout with Kurt Angle was tough to take seriously

RESULTS Tigre Uno def. Andrew Everett, Manik, & DJ Z (8:59 / Ultimate X match for the TNA X-Division title) ■ Tyrus won Bound For Glory Gauntlet Battle Royal (24:30) ■ The Wolves def. Brian Myers & Trevor Lee (Pinfall / 14:03 / TNA World Tag Team titles) ■ Bobby Roode def. Lashley (Pinfall / 14:17 / King of the Mountain title) ■ Gail Kim def. Awesome Kong (Pinfall / 10:05 / TNA Knockouts title) ■ Kurt Angle def. Eric Young (Submission [ankle lock] / 13:10 / No Disqualification match) ■ Matt Hardy def. Drew Galloway and Ethan Carter III (Pinfall (Galloway) / 20:04 / Three-way for the TNA World title)

SHINE WRESTLING SHINE 30

October 2's *SHINE 30* was one of the twice-yearly international showcase cards, and the infusion of talent from the UK, Australia and New Zealand helped enhance the quality of the show, while advancing some of the storylines.

Free from the VALkyrie merger, Allysin Kay waged war with Saraya Knight in an Anything Goes Match that went all over the building, resulting in Knight being busted open. Kay won a chaotic bout with a DDT off the venue's bar, and to prove that she has no friends in the locker-room, she gave **FSM's** own Rob Naylor a Stunner when he tried to interview her. A groggy Knight followed this up by kicking poor Naylor low for good measure.

SHINE title-holder Santana Garrett was challenged by New Zealand's Evie, who tested the champion with her famous stiff kicks. Garrett was able to withstand the pressure, however, and she won out with her Shining Star Press in a match that would've warranted more time had the card not been so packed.

Scotland's Kay Lee Ray had the unenviable task of facing an angry Jessicka Havok, still fuming over being dismissed by Vanessa Kraven at *SHINE 29*. Although Ray held her own for portions of the match, a Havok chokeslam would get the pinfall.

Due to Cherry Bomb breaking her collarbone and being ruled out for several months, SHINE stripped

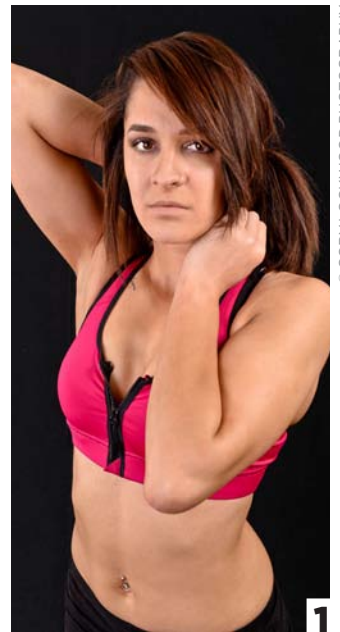
The Kimber Bombs of the Tag Team titles, with a tournament to crown new champions to be held on the December 11 card. Kimber Lee rebounded from the title vacation to defeat VALkyrie's Taylor Made in a good contest.

Talents from Saraya Knight's Bellatrix promotion were featured on this show, with Liberty on the wrong side of a four-way match victory for Australia's Shazza McKenzie, while Bellatrix World champion Sammi Baynz teamed with Rhia O'Reilly in a losing effort to Leva Bates and Mia Yim of The Lucha Sisters.

The standout in-ring contest, as per usual for the international editions, featured Madison Eagles, as the dominant Australian defeated VALkyrie's Su Yung in a bruising match-up, with Eagles using her Hellbound finisher to pick up the win.

Leah Von Dutch earned the right to get Leilani Kai in the ring by defeating Malia Hosaka, thanks to a misfiring chairshot by Thunderkitty, who herself submitted to Ivelisse Velez earlier in the show.

RESULTS Aria Blake def. Aspyr Rose (Pinfall / 04:06) ■ Shazza McKenzie def. Jayme Jameson (w/Andrea & So Cal Val), Kellyanne and Liberty (Pinfall / 07:59) ■ Luscious Latasha def. Andrea (w/So Cal Val) (Disqualification / 03:05) ■ Ivelisse Velez (w/Amanda Carolina Rodriguez) def. Thunderkitty (w/Leilani Kai) (Submission / 09:19) ■ Kimber Lee def. Taylor Made (w/April Hunter & So Cal Val) (Pinfall / 09:59) ■ Leah Von Dutch def. Malia Hosaka (w/Leilani Kai & Thunderkitty) (Pinfall / 11:22) ■ Lucha Sisters (Leva Bates & Mia Yim) def. Bellatrix Female Warriors Contingency (Rhia O'Reilly & Sammi Baynz) (w/Saraya Knight) (Pinfall / 09:06) ■ Madison Eagles def. Su Yung (w/April Hunter & So Cal Val) (Pinfall / 15:08) ■ Jessicka Havok def. Kay Lee Ray (Pinfall / 09:13) ■ Santana Garrett def. Evie (Pinfall / 10:06 / SHINE championship) ■ Allysin Kay def. Saraya Knight (Pinfall / 13:36 / Anything Goes match)



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1. New Zealand's Evie got a shot at Santana Garrett at SHINE 30

UFC FIGHT NIGHT BARNETT VS. NELSON

September was a month in which MMA seemed intent on wallowing in nostalgia for the sport's Japanese heyday. Spike TV made the odd decision to resurrect *Dynamite* (the old K-1 branding for their MMA and kickboxing supershows) and to announce its plan to broadcast former PRIDE FC boss Nobuyuki Sakakibara's New Year's Eve event that will likely be to mid-2005 PRIDE what TNA is to mid-'90s WCW.

Ironically, the promotion that actually held an event in Japan did not join in the party, presenting a card that featured only Josh Barnett as a link to PRIDE's heyday. In Roy Nelson, Barnett faced a tough, durable veteran who in theory had the defensive wrestling skills and knockout power to cause the catch wrestling ace problems. Barnett managed to negate both by focusing on tying Nelson up in the clinch before proceeding to work over the body. Such tactics turned the fight into an endurance test rather than the open slugfest for which fans had been hoping. While both fighters worked hard and maintained a good pace, the stifling tactics of Barnett meant that there were few dynamic exchanges, and instead, a tiring Nelson was ground down until he looked like he could collapse from sheer exhaustion at any moment.

There was more excitement on the September 27 undercard, with Diego Brandao calmly walking up to Katsunori Kikuno and knocking him out. There was nothing calm about Gegard Mousasi's shock loss to Uriah Hall, however. The former Strikeforce champion used his rarely seen grappling skills to dominate the first round after securing an early takedown. He tried to do the same in the second, only to be caught by a jumping back kick that badly hurt him. For a fighter that has so often been accused of lacking a killer instinct, Hall showed no hesitation, jumping at Mousasi with a flying knee before finishing him off with a flurry of punches.

Elsewhere on the card, there was the usual spattering of obscure home area fighters, as the UFC hoped that by adding local favourites, it could distract from the lack of true star-power. Most notable was the match between Mizuto Hirota and Teruto Ishihara to determine who would win the *Road To UFC Japan* reality show tournament. After a fun fight, the match ended in a rare draw, due to the judges splitting three ways and the officials forgetting that provision had been made for a tie-breaking fourth round.

The fighters didn't mind the mistake too much, as Dana White confirmed that both would receive a UFC contract anyway.



1. Catch wrestling specialist Josh Barnett had too much for Roy Nelson in Japan

RESULTS Shinsho Anzai def. Roger Zapata (TKO [injury] / R3 / 0:47) ■ Kajan Johnson def. Naoyuki Kotani (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Nick Hein def. Yusuke Kasuya (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Keita Nakamura def. Li Jingliang (Technical Submission [standing rear-naked choke] / R3 / 2:17) ■ Mizuto Hirota def. Teruto Ishihara (Draw [split] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Diego Brandao def. Katsunori Kikuno (TKO [punches] / R1 / 0:28) ■ Takeya Mizugaki def. George Roop (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Kyoji Horiguchi def. Chico Camus (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Uriah Hall def. Gegard Mousasi (TKO [jumping back kick, flying knee and punches] / R2 / 0:25) ■ Josh Barnett def. Roy Nelson (Decision [unanimous] / R5 / 5:00)

NEW JAPAN DESTRUCTION

Held on September 23 and 27 respectively, New Japan's *Destruction* shows in Okayama and Kobe raised quite a few eyebrows from a booking perspective, especially as it pertains to future plans. However, as stand-alone shows, both were strong, with the top matches delivering in spades.

The Okayama card was headlined by two title matches: Togi Makabe's defence of the NEVER openweight strap against Kota Ibushi, and Kenny Omega's challenge for KUSHIDA's junior-heavyweight championship. Makabe versus Ibushi was a fantastic contest, with both men going hell for leather as their opposing styles meshed wonderfully well. Ibushi used his high-flying, but in ways that fit into Makabe's brawling game, including performing a crazy double-stomp from the top to the outside onto "The Unchained Gorilla", who laid prone on a table. Unfortunately for Ibushi's ankles and Makabe's mid-section, the table didn't give way. The finishing stretch was excellent, with a dramatic tussle ending with Makabe hitting the first Spider Dragon suplex (full-nelson German suplex from the top rope) and following up with his King Kong Kneedrop for the pinfall.

KUSHIDA versus Omega was an extremely well-wrestled match that lost some steam at the finish, as interference spots became the order of the day. Up to that point, it was one of Omega's best performances in a New Japan ring, with everything he did looking crisp and fluid. KUSHIDA was his usually excellent babyface self, and had the crowd empathising with him throughout. Omega's One Winged Angel finisher (Electric chair driver) proved the final blow to cause the title switch.

CHAOS AND DESTRUCTION

Of the two *Destruction* cards, Kobe was the bigger show on paper, and it wound up better in execution. The main event Intercontinental title match pitting Hirooki Goto against Shinsuke Nakamura was just fantastic; they've had several great matches this year, and despite the conclusion of the feud frustrating viewers who wanted to move on from Nakamura as Intercontinental champion, this was arguably the finest bout of the bunch, as they found new ways to keep the crowd on the edge of its seat as the series came to a conclusion. An epic submission struggle with both men looking for armbars was the highlight, but Nakamura used his skill on the mat to escape and land the first of several big Boma Ye knee strikes to get the victory.

Supporting this main event were several strong matches up and down the card. Hiroshi Tanahashi got the best out of Bad Luck Fale in a bout in which his Tokyo Dome title shot was on the line. Fale brought a level of aggression to the match that is seen all too rarely from him, as he looked



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like the monster that New Japan needs him to be. Of course, Tanahashi prevailed, as his path to the *Wrestle Kingdom* main event rolled on.

The IWGP junior-heavyweight Tag Team titles were contested between two teams who were very familiar with each other in 2014: The Timesplitters and reDRagon. It wasn't the best match these duos have had, but it was very good nonetheless. After taking out KUSHIDA, Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly isolated Alex Shelley and put him away with the Chasing The Dragon kick/brainbuster combo.

A bout that many fans had circled on this show was Tetsuya Naito versus Katsuyori Shibata, as the feud between them is at boiling point coming off the G1. This was not as great as their bout in that tournament, but you got the sense it was just a sampler of a bigger match for down the road. Naito stole the win after a series of low-blows and his Destino finisher (flipping reverse DDT), but the brawl continued post-match, as Shibata chased him to the back.

As with Okayama, the other matches on the card served their purpose. Overall, the week can be summed up as one where New Japan entertained its fans, but made decisions that may come back to haunt it down the line.

1. Togi Makabe retained the NEVER openweight title over Kota Ibushi in Okayama **2.** Hirooki Goto dropped the IWGP junior-heavyweight title to Shinsuke Nakamura in Kobe **3.** The rivalry between Katsuyori Shibata and Tetsuya Naito appears far from over

RESULTS 1 Katsuyori Shibata, Yuji Nagata, Yohei Komatsu & Sho Tanaka def. Tetsuya Naito, Manabu Nakanishi, David Finlay & Jay White (Pinfall / 7:47) ■ reDRagon def. Jushin Thunder Liger & Máscara Dorada (Pinfall / 8:31) ■ Tiger Mask def. Steve Anthony (Submission / 10:10 / NWA World junior-heavyweight title) ■ Hiroshi Tanahashi & Matt Sydal def. Bad Luck Fale & Tama Tonga (Pinfall / 10:00) ■ Guns & Gallows def. TenKoji (Pinfall / 13:15 / IWGP Tag Team titles) ■ CHAOS def. Hirooki Goto, Tomoaki Honma, Captain New Japan, Ryusuke Taguchi & Alex Shelley (Pinfall / 13:24) ■ Kazuchika Okada & Toru Yano def. AJ Styles & Cody Hall (Pinfall / 9:52) ■ Kenny Omega def. KUSHIDA (Pinfall / 16:26 / IWGP junior-heavyweight title) ■ Togi Makabe def. Kota Ibushi (Pinfall / 18:41 / NEVER openweight title)

RESULTS 2 Yohei Komatsu & Sho Tanaka def. Jay White & David Finlay (Pinfall / 5:00) ■ Yuji Nagata, Jushin Thunder Liger & Tiger Mask def. Manabu Nakanishi, Captain New Japan & Juice Robinson (Pinfall / 8:44) ■ CHAOS def. Togi Mabase, Tomoaki Honma, Ryusuke Taguchi & Máscara Dorada (Pinfall / 7:48) ■ Hiro Yoshi Tenzan, Satoshi Kojima & Matt Sydal def. Karl Anderson, Doc Gallows & Kenny Omega (Pinfall / 10:52) ■ Tetsuya Naito def. Katsuyori Shibata (Pinfall / 11:49) ■ Kazuchika Okada, Toru Yano & Kazushi Sakuraba def. AJ Styles, Tama Tonga & Cody Hall (Submission / 12:18) ■ reDRagon def. The Timesplitters (Pinfall / 16:17 / IWGP Jr. Heavyweight Tag Team titles) ■ Hiroshi Tanahashi def. Bad Luck Fale (Pinfall / 16:37) ■ Shinsuke Nakamura def. Hirooki Goto (Pinfall / 22:56 / IWGP Intercontinental title)



1. By attacking Seth Rollins, Kane became his next challenger at the end of Night Of Champions 2. As expected, Charlotte defeated Nikki Bella to capture the WWE Divas title – but only after Bella had beaten AJ Lee’s record 3. Sting is checked over by the WWE doctor and referee after sustaining a neck injury during his title bout

WWE NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS 2015

For the second straight month, WWE World heavyweight champion Seth Rollins stole the show on a pay-per-view, this time delivering big in two matches at *Night Of Champions* in Houston, Texas on September 20.

After dropping his United States title in a tremendous bout with John Cena that almost topped their excellent *SummerSlam* encounter, Rollins helped carry a 56-year-old Sting to perhaps his best match of the last decade in the main event that immediately followed. In what was hardly a one man show, Sting pulled out all the stops, including hitting a breathtaking crossbody to the floor, in what was surely his last great performance inside the squared circle. In fact, there ended up being some fear that this was Sting’s last match, period, after he suffered a neck injury on a relatively innocuous powerbomb into the turnbuckles. The former WCW World champion seemed to want to hit a flurry of blows immediately thereafter, only for his legs to give out on him.

After initially struggling to get to his feet, Sting did manage to finish the bout. The conclusion came when he attempted to reverse consecutive Pedigree attempts into Scorpion Death Locks; he was successful the first time, but Rollins escaped the hold. Rollins quickly went for a second Pedigree, which Sting tried to reverse in the same manner, but when lowering his head while locking in the move, Rollins countered with a cradle to take the pinfall victory. “The Demon” Kane made his return in the post-match, attacking Rollins and setting himself up as the next title challenger.

After a shaky start to his title run, over the last few months Rollins has settled into his championship role quite nicely, and has been the best match-to-match performer in the company. He’ll have his hands full equalling his recent run of form against Kane, and although it isn’t the most appealing of programmes, in some ways it is necessary in order to tie up the

loose ends from their contentious relationship story from earlier in the year.

TITLE TWIST

The seven-match card featured two title changes, as firstly, in a solid opener, Kevin Owens continued his great year by toppling Ryback for the Intercontinental championship. Owens used an eye rake to escape a Shellshock, and then rolled up the stunned Ryback to get the three-count and the title. In the fourth match of the main card, Charlotte ended Nikki Bella’s record 301-day Divas title reign by submitting her with the Figure Eight. It was a solid match, but the emotional post-match scene, with both Charlotte and her father Ric Flair crying tears of joy, will be what people remember. This is WWE’s last chance to get the “Divas revolution” right, at least with these combatants.

The Dolph Ziggler, Rusev, and Summer Rae soap opera continued without the injured Lana, as Ziggler picked up a win over Rusev after Summer Rae accidentally distracted her charge with a flying shoe that was intended to hit the referee.

The Dudleys defeated The New Day via disqualification when Xavier Woods not so subtly saved Kofi Kingston from a sure-fire pinfall loss after taking the 3D. The New Day continue to be the most entertaining act on the entire roster, with Woods’ antics on the floor taking ringside distraction to entirely new levels. The Dudleys put Woods through a table after the match.

In a heated six-man tag, Bray Wyatt, Luke Harper, and Braun Strowman defeated Roman Reigns, Dean Ambrose, and their mystery partner, Chris Jericho. The latter cost his team the match, tagging himself in when it appeared Reigns was on the verge of finishing Strowman, allowing the newcomer to come back and choke him out with his head-and-arm vice. Jericho then implied a heel turn, barging past the annoyed Reigns and Ambrose as he left the ring to a chorus of boos.

RESULTS Kevin Owens def. Ryback (Pinfall / 9:32 / Intercontinental title) ■ Dolph Ziggler def. Rusev (Pinfall / 13:47) ■ The Dudleys def. New Day (Disqualification / 9:57 / WWE World Tag Team titles) ■ Charlotte def. Nikki Bella (Submission [Figure Eight] / 12:41 / WWE Divas title) ■ The Wyatt Family def. Roman Reigns, Dean Ambrose, Chris Jericho (Submission [head-and-arm choke] / 13:04) ■ John Cena def. Seth Rollins (Pinfall / 16:01 / WWE United States title) ■ Seth Rollins def. Sting (Pinfall / 14:56 / WWE World heavyweight title)

WRESTLING ROUND-UP

CMLL 82ND ANNIVERSARY SHOW

A trilogy of annual mask matches culminated on CMLL's 82nd Anniversary show, with Atlantis taking La Sombra's hood before a joyous Arena Mexico on September 18. Sombra won long-time rival Volador Jr.'s mask at this event two years ago, and Atlantis did the same to nemesis Ultimo Guerrero last year, but the battle to decide the ultimate winner was a bit of a booking surprise, with this year's combatants only starting their own rivalry six weeks prior to the apuesta ("wager") battle.

Sombra has evolved into a skilled all-round luchador, but also employs illegal tactics, and has had help from his Los Ingobernables allies since forming the unit 18 months ago. Sombra and Atlantis are both programmed on the tecnico (babyface) side, but Atlantis is much more of a clean, technical fighter. He was also the clear crowd favourite here, having been near or at the top of CMLL for many different eras of the promotion. Lucha libre fans as old their late-30s have seen him as a star here for as long as they can remember.

Sombra's rudo tactics cost him early, and proved ineffective later. Rush, Sombra's Los Ingobernables ally, pulled out the referee to prevent a possible Atlantis three-count, but this backfired when the referee awarded the fall to

Atlantis, and ejected Rush from ringside. Sombra drew even two minutes later, grabbing a pinfall after his Shadow Driver (gutwrench into a sit-out powerbomb). Rush returned to distract Atlantis in the third stanza, but Atlantis kept surviving Sombra's biggest manoeuvres, while himself being unable to find a way to finish Sombra in a lengthy and dramatic third fall, only finally beating him on his fourth attempt at his La Atlantida torture rack backbreaker.

As is custom, Sombra then unmasked and revealed his name to be Manuel Alfonso Andrade Oropeza. The many members of Sombra's wrestling family carried Atlantis around on their shoulders in a show as respect after his victory.

Atlantis now has 9 mask wins at Arena Mexico, four on CMLL's biggest show of the year. There's no sign of his run stopping soon; his September mask matches have seemingly replaced The Undertaker's *WrestleMania* streak bouts as the most reliable big event matches of the year, and the post-bout gesturing indicated that Atlantis may face a stiff challenge from Rush in 2016.

On the undercard, long-time regular Dark Angel won her final match in CMLL over the woman who unmasked her a decade ago, Princesa Sugehit.



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1. 52-year-old Atlantis won the Luchas de Apuestas match with La Sombra at CMLL's 82nd Anniversary Show

RESULTS Disturbio, Puma, Virus def. Esfinge, Fuego, The Panther (Pinfall / 17:36) ■ Guerrero Maya Jr., Máximo, Stuka Jr. def. Dragón Rojo Jr., Pólvora, Rey Escorpión (Pinfall / 17:31) ■ Dark Angel def. Princesa Sugehit (Submission [La Reínera] / 16:41) ■ Dragon Lee, Mistico, Valiente def. Felino, Mr. Niebla, Negro Casas (Submission [La Mistica] / 11:54) ■ Shocker, Último Guerrero, Volador Jr. def. Marco Corleone, Rush, Thunder (Disqualification / 13:02 / Relevos Increíbles match) ■ Atlantis def. La Sombra (Submission [La Atlantida] / 24:31 / Mask vs. Mask match)

ROH ALL STAR EXTRAVAGANZA VII

Ring of Honor presented its latest pay-per-view on September 18, as *All Star Extravaganza VII* aired from San Antonio, Texas. The headlining matches were dual title defences for ROH World and Television champion Jay Lethal, who faced Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly respectively.

Lethal and Fish opened the show with a tremendous encounter. Throughout the bout, the more senior of the reDRagon duo showed himself to be the superior technical wrestler, and repeatedly had Lethal in submission predicaments. In contrast, the double champion put himself in a bind by looking for his Lethal Injection finisher too early, as he attempted to keep the match brief. The opposing objectives created a splendid narrative of a desperate champion trying to fend off a formidable challenger and having to resort to nefarious means – in this case grabbing the tights – to retain the title in just shy of 15 minutes.

After this first chapter, Lethal's expression told a story of survival, and he appeared frazzled when he emerged to face O'Reilly in the main event. He was hurting from the earlier punishment, too, so even before the bell rang, it was apparent that his desperation was going to reach new levels. Much like in the opener, O'Reilly appeared the better wrestler here, and he had Lethal scampering around like a startled deer. The addled World champion kept going for his security blanket,

the Lethal Injection, but O'Reilly always found a way reverse it.

The only issue with the main event was the unnecessary overbooking. As has been the case with many ROH showpieces, referee Todd Sinclair was incapacitated, allowing Lethal the opportunity to use the belt as a weapon, although Fish thwarted him on this occasion. House of Truth member Donovan Dijak then laid Fish out, and O'Reilly's recent ally, Adam Cole, then evened the odds by taking out Dijak, only to superkick his Futureshock partner and allow the champion to get the pinfall with the Lethal Injection.

Lethal, Fish and O'Reilly deserve praise for putting in the hard work to make the two title defences entertaining. While the booking and in-ring story may have seemed simplistic, the quality of the opponents and Lethal's dishonourable tactics furthered the story of the champion's rise to prominence, and how his arrogance will eventually cause him to fall from grace.

Still, the ending was a major disappointment, given that *All Star Extravaganza* featured several very good matches, including the main event up to the finish. As the group faces increased pressure from WWE's NXT, Ring of Honor should be making fans feel that they're getting more than their money's worth on pay-per-view, something that this screwy conclusion did not accomplish.



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1. Adam Cole turned on recent ally Kyle O'Reilly to keep the ROH World title in the hands of Jay Lethal

RESULTS Jay Lethal def. Bobby Fish (Pinfall / 14:09 / ROH Television title) ■ Silas Young def. Dalton Castle (Pinfall / 12:25) ■ The All Night Express def. The Briscoe Brothers (Pinfall / 8:32) ■ Moose def. Cedric Alexander (Pinfall / 13:08 / No Disqualification match) ■ ACH def. Matt Sydal (Pinfall / 16:28) ■ The Kingdom def. The Addiction & The Young Bucks (Pinfall / 13:50 / ROH World Tag Team titles) ■ AJ Styles def. Michael Elgin, Roderick Strong & Adam Cole (Pinfall / 14:30 / Four-way match) ■ Jay Lethal def. Kyle O'Reilly (Pinfall / 14:00 / ROH World title)

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The family of The Ultimate Warrior was delighted to see Charlotte triumph at Night Of Champions

FACE TO FACEBOOK

THE EVA MARIE DEBATE

Drew Boyd: The NXT crowd is starting to tick me off. Eva Marie is learning, and getting better. Cut her some slack. Isn't this the point of NXT?

Michael Campbell: She's still terrible, though, and absolutely nowhere near ready for TV. They're used to seeing quality women's wrestling and are now being fed a typically WWE Diva chosen for her looks.

Kelly Benston: Let's be real, Michael, all of them are chosen for their looks. It's ultimately the equivalent of people booing Cena: sooner or later, it goes from legit criticism to being the thing to do. They'll boo Eva Marie no matter how good she gets.

Alex Leach: It's a developmental territory, to give ring practice to those who need it. She will have a chance to develop her character here. NXT fans are just lucky to have had such a strong calibre of wrestlers come through at the same time!

Joe Burgett: She still absolutely sucks. WWE had to make a story out of her missed kick-out, because it wasn't supposed to happen. Sorry, but the crowd is right to boo and be angry. She's worse than the 2010 period Divas!



THE WRESTLING CHANNEL 2004-2008

Leo Shepard: Does anyone else have any fond memories of The Wrestling Channel? One of mine has got to be seeing FMW for the first time, and also discovering how many great indy wrestlers / promotions there are in the world!

Louis Kerry: Opened my eyes to a whole new world.

Adam Curtis: It was largely preaching to the already converted, and had very little reach outside of the people who already knew it was there. I barely watched it (and I was hosting a show on the damn channel), but some of that was down to the fact that I'd already seen/imported tapes of the majority of its content.

Paul Murphy: I wish I'd taken advantage of it more when it was there. Only really watched the then-awesome TNA and the odd shoot. I was getting more recent ROH shows imported from the U.S. at the time. Good days.

Robbie Elliott: Saw the early days of TNA and watched CM Punk, Samoa Joe (in his ROH days), Raven, AJ Styles. The very first time I saw British wrestling was Jonny Storm vs. Jody Fleisch; the latter amazed me in the ring. It was a shame it shut down, but if I remember correctly, it started showing martial arts movies over wrestling.

TWITTER TALK

WWE NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS & RAW

@UltimateWarrior Warrior Girls send a big WOOOOOO to @MsCharlotteWWE the new champ!! We believe in legacy daughters, and their ultimate talent! xo #WWENOC

@FearHavok Divas match was sick. I can honestly say there is no-one more deserving of that championship right now than @MsCharlotteWWE #Proud #WWENOC

@ThisIs_PROGRESS Cole: "Owens has been in Ryback's grill." This is like my Dad all of a sudden talking like Snoop Dogg. #NightOfChampions

@TweetPaulOBrien They're making me love Rollins. They couldn't make me root for him any more. #WWENOC

@Maffewgregg Credit where credit is due, I couldn't hear Cena call any spots at Night Of Champions.

@SychoVicious Now that's the Sting I know. #WWENOC

@TheLeeJordan Rollins is going to beat Punk's record. Kane up next for him. Wins that... he has to. #WWENOC

@RealKrisTravis Finally watching Night Of Champions... Owens

deserved that! Xavier Woods is out of this world!

@IAmJericho So the jackass who jumped in the ring at #NightOfChampions got sentenced to jail time. Let this be a lesson to all... stay out of OUR ring!

@VinceNotVance Would you believe that I still haven't finished watching #WWENOC? John Cena won a thing again!

@RealMickFoley One month ago, I asked for a #WomensPipebomb. Last night on #Raw we got one! Thank you @RealPaigeWWE.

@EmmaWWE I know you didn't just forget me @RealPaigeWWE! I have a few thoughts of my own to share about this #DivasRevolution! Wanna chat!? #WWE #Raw

@MelissaJoanHart I'll say it again: I love this Kane! Demon Kane is back! #Raw

@SashaBanksWWE Another win for #TeamBAD, but where's our party? #Raw

@MartyDeRosa It wouldn't be a #Raw after a PPV if someone didn't get their win back. 50/50 booking at it's finest!

@TWMNewsUK All we've seen about Sting is that he's hurt. I think everyone was hoping it would be addressed tonight... Interesting one. #WWE #Raw

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VIDEO VAULT

FSM brings you some of the best pro wrestling videos from around the web

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Bret Hart's take discusses WWE's Owen - Hart Of Gold DVD

For years now, Bret Hart has been regarded as a straight shooter, and in this clip from the annual March Of Dimes Canada - the stroke prevention charity for which Bret is a spokesman - barbecue, "The Hitman" speaks to The Fight Network about a variety of subjects, with brother Owen Hart being most prevalent. In December, WWEDVD.co.uk will release *Owen - Hart Of Gold*, but after being interviewed for that documentary, Bret is perturbed about the limitations put on WWE by Owen's widow, Martha. He does not mince his words in this must-see conversation.

tinyurl.com/BretOwen

Rey Mysterio vs. Batista

Batista's heel run in early-2010 is fondly remembered, but "The Animal" had to turn on one of his best friends to make it work. Rey Mysterio was one of WWE's most popular stars at this time, so booking Batista to lay him out made perfect sense. Subsequent matches between the pair were excellent, such as this satisfying Streetfight from *Smackdown* on December 11, 2009. The finishing sequence, in particular, is a highlight.



tinyurl.com/ReyBatista



Eddy Guerrero vs. The Rock

As far as dream matches go, The Rock has been involved in a fair few. The likes of Hulk Hogan and John Cena have locked horns with Dwayne Johnson, but perhaps only fans with great memories will remember The Rock's WWE battle opposite the late, great Eddy Guerrero. Taking place on *Raw* in July 2002, the bout is a hidden gem. Look out for an appearance from Brock Lesnar near the end!

tinyurl.com/RockGuerrero

Marshall & Ross Von Erich vs. Manik & "Cowboy" James Storm

The tragedies that befell the legendary Von Erich wrestling family have been well-documented, but there's no doubting the incredible effect Fritz, David, Kerry et al had on the city of Dallas in the heyday of World Class Championship Wrestling. TNA has just released this match featuring the sons of Kevin Von Erich, Marshall and Ross, as they face James Storm and Manik in a bout from TNA's *Xplosion* tapings.



tinyurl.com/VonErichTNA

James Mason & Dean Allmark vs. Dave Mastiff & Doug Williams

The sheer variety of matches on these pages shows just how wide the wrestling net is cast all over the world, and All Star Wrestling, for its own part, works a unique style for the audience at holiday camps. Profiled on Page 64 of this issue is James Mason, the master of this and all that is old-school. It's intriguing to see the way each wrestler works the crowd here, and especially how they ramp up the intensity towards the bout's conclusion.



tinyurl.com/ASWrestling

tinyurl.com/AllJapanProWrestling

Kenta Kobashi & Tsuyoshi Kikuchi vs. Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas

In the 1990s, All Japan presented more quality pro wrestling than any company on the planet. Amongst the all-time classics was this bout in which Kenta Kobashi and Tsuyoshi Kikuchi faced Doug Furnas and Dan Kroffat, who eventually made their way to the WWF in 1995. The action is stiff, the drama is intense, and the atmosphere is electric. Don't call yourself a fan if you fail to check this one out.



SPOTLIGHT

DEFENDINDYWRESTLING.COM

tinyurl.com/LouisLyndon

If you haven't yet seen Fort Wayne, Indiana's Louis Lyndon in action, this video will give you just a hint of the spectacular pro wrestling witnessed by fans of AIW, AAW, and even Ring of Honor. The Defend Indy Wrestling grappler mixes spectacular high-flying with crunching strikes and a flipping armbars that even Kendo Ka Shin would be proud of. Don't miss any chance you get to see him perform!



TOP TROPES

THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF PRO WRESTLING

If you've watched as much WWE as everyone at FSM, you can't help but have learnt some of its unwritten rules. Justin Henry offers a sardonic rundown of the repeat offenders...

20 Two wrestlers in the midst of a heated argument will wait patiently for the other to finish so that 15,000 fans can hear their angst clearly.

Such awareness is the mark of a true wrestling veteran. In addition, a further mark of a great pro is getting wronged on one Monday night, and then waiting a full seven days to confront the wrongdoer in front of powerless jury of civilians. Texting your grievances to said person would be an amateur error, one today's smartphone generation may be inclined to make.

19 You simply cannot run in to make a save without your theme music playing as an introduction.

Is your ally being mauled two-on-one? You'd better hope that the production crew cues up your trademark entrance track, or else your friend's dire situation is only going to get worse. A phenomena since around 1999, wrestlers are physically incapable of bursting from backstage unaccompanied by their personalised harmonies. It's a good thing the on-site EMTs aren't so paralysed.

18 At a certain level of stardom, wrestlers can arrive to an event after it's already started.

At a spectacular no greater than *WrestleMania XVII*, the home viewer saw The Rock, Steve Austin, and Shane McMahon arrive sometime after the conclusion of the opening bout. *Raw* hasn't been an exception, with well-compensated union cameramen stationed in the parking garage to document the arrival of such ring royalty. If Vince McMahon used Bill Watts' system of fining late arrivals, he'd have made enough money to cover all the losses from launching the WWE Network.

17 When a wrestler gestures to the TitanTron to show footage that backs up his point of view, said video will be well-edited and produced, and set to music.

Kane gets plenty of use out of this, demonstrating the malffeasance of Seth Rollins not with grainy security footage or a single camera shot, but from a slickly put-together production piece with enough cuts to make Fellini weep. Either "The Big Red Machine" is a dab hand with Final Cut Pro, or WWE employs video editors who hang around just in case someone needs a propaganda tape.

16 Referees have not figured out the whole distraction thing.

Unable to find work as air traffic controllers or heart surgeons on account of the worst Attention Deficit Disorder this side of The Cat in the Hat, professional wrestling referees are diligent in spite of their affliction. Damned hard as they work, they become easily occupied by bystanders around ringside or on the apron, and miss some truly horrific deeds, no matter how many times they're caught in the same situation.

Earl Hebner set an early standard for future officials in 1980, when the novelty of his own multi-coloured shoelaces distracted him from the abject horrors of an entire



One of the first unwritten rules of WWE is that if you have a grievance to air, be sure to speak it clearly in front of thousands of people

Need a high-quality video package on short notice? Have a word with Kane



screening of *The Shining*. "Why are you so fidgety?" he asked his rattled date thereafter.

15 Even trained wrestlers haven't gameplanned for the "unexpected".

It happens so often that you'd think there'd be a Performance Centre course on avoiding the pitfalls of being distracted by the theme music of a rival. Instead, countless wrestlers have hopelessly fallen victim to its sudden blaring, and the several seconds required to work out to whom it belongs makes a flash pinfall loss all but inevitable.

Jim Johnston has written some cracking tunes in his day, but try to concentrate on the job at hand.

14 When returning from a mid-match commercial break, the heel must have a wear-down hold applied.

We all know that heels are more likely to bend the rules, which is why they often control so much of a match before the good guy gets some revenge, but if you've ever been in the arena for a live *Raw* TV taping, you'll know about this all-important credo. Sure, the heel may slip outside the ring for a while, or you might see a barricade spot so that Michael Cole can mention the WWE app, but with 30 seconds to go before the TV audience returns, it's time for the wrestlers to get comfy before restarting the match proper.

13 Speaking of wear-down holds, they only ever serve to give the babyface a chance to make a comeback.

With most people, having a forearm embedded deep into the oesophagus is a hop, skip, and jump from asphyxia. However, seemingly through the rhythmic clapping of wrestling's most optimistic demographic, WWE's red-blooded heroes are always able to summon the power to not only escape near-suffocation at the last second, but rattle off a series of strong clotheslines almost immediately thereafter.

12 In a regular match, elbow drops, clotheslines, and crossbody blocks are benign; in a Survivor Series Elimination match, they're deadlier than arsenic.

How else do you explain featherweight "Rocker" Marty Jannetty holding down barrel-chested Boris Zhukov on one particularly fierce sunset flip on the 1988 card? Voodoo?

11 WWE ladders are really hard to climb.

This is particularly troubling, because you would think these competitors would prepare themselves for the task at hand, especially since there's usually a championship or some valuable reward hanging in the balance. Still, within moments

Sorry, Sheamus; wear-down holds only serve to give the recipient a chance to make a comeback



of the opening bell of a Ladder match, WWE wrestlers develop the coordination of Orson Welles on a treadmill.

No doubt, Ladder matches are arduous affairs, and some of the bumps are really brutal. In fact, such are the mid-match injuries to legs, backs and arms that even when a championship belt or Money in the Bank briefcase would normally be in easy reach, wrestlers are so crippled that they can never quite straighten out enough to reach up and grab it.

10 In Triple Threat matches, it's customary for the competitors to disappear for stretches of time.

The sense of urgency in multi-man matches, where one fall ends the contest, is off the charts. Still, the frenetic pace takes its toll on the participants, who take convenient turns disappearing long enough for the remaining duo to take part in a straight-up singles match... until it's time to break up a pin. At that point, the missing athlete is released from the phantom zone to disrupt the fall, at which time a wrestler is sucked away into the abyss of the ringside area. This continues until there's a run-in or some other infuriating act of skullduggery.

9 When putting your arch-nemesis through the announcers' table, it's good manners to remove the cumbersome monitors first.

"Gentleman" Paul Wight introduced this concept a generation ago out of pure

Thankfully, Finn Balor managed to scale the Ladder to retain his NXT title at Takeover: Brooklyn



altruism. When he elected to maim The Rock, he considered, "I could ravage his spine, maybe even whiplash him by chokeslamming him onto this collapsible desk, but spiking his skull onto these obscenely-sturdy blocks of metal and glass just isn't cricket!" To demonstrate this classy stand, Wight would remove one monitor, and then pause for 10 full seconds before removing the other, in lieu of a full-on public service announcement.

8 Wrestlers who wish to watch WWE matches backstage must not face the display television.

This one is enforced more heavily as time goes on. While most armchair goobers watch their TVs by directly facing the screen, WWE superstars are specifically trained to stand with their bodies facing invisible cameras, while craning their neck in the direction of the backstage monitor. Karl Gotch would surely approve of such neck-strengthening exercises.

7 When a wrestler tries to escape a steel cage by climbing, his opponent will try to halt their ascent, instead of going for the door.

File this one under sportsmanship, like the deadly monitor thing. Sure, you could tuck and do a barrel roll out of the cage door, but that's like counting cards at the casino: lucrative, sure, but the vice act gnaws through your soul. What good is a victory that you don't actually have to earn, anyway?

"If Vince McMahon used Bill Watts' system of fining late arrivals, he'd have made enough money to cover all the losses from launching the WWE Network"

Given the chance, even a wrestler as mean as Rusev will never use a weapon to its most devastating effect

6 Armed with a metal chair when your blood rival is standing there wholly unprotected? Better jam it into his lower abdomen before striking him across the back.

Lifting the veil of winking sarcasm for this entry, yes, we know why WWE no longer allows weapon shots to the skull. However, in storyline context, if Rusev is armed with a chair and Dolph Ziggler can't protect himself, wouldn't the scorned lover try to flatten his skull like raw cookie dough?

Let's leave it at that before anyone mentions Triple-H using his hand to cover the metal end of a sledgehammer.

5 What separates top stars from career undercarders? The ability to get into the Royal Rumble match before unemployed wrestlers of the past.

Imagine how red in the face Justin Gabriel was this year when the dynamic high-flyer was beaten to the Rumble punch by Bubba Ray Dudley, The Boogeyman, and Diamond Dallas Page. Gabriel could only sulk into his beer alongside Los Matadores and Bo Dallas, before quitting the company in shame. Don't even get started on the tragedy of 2014's event, where Daniel Bryan was late getting in, and could only watch as Kevin Nash, aided by a Segway scooter, took the last number.

4 Wrestlers milling about backstage are oblivious to the cameras recording them, even though everyone else can see the footage.

Chalk this one up to low awareness. Seems like every week, a romantic spat or a cruel-intentioned plan is caught on camera, and the wrestlers seem duly embarrassed later when the world is on to their every move. You'd think The Authority, brilliant masterminds as they are, would see the camera crew trained on them in their nomadic office... but no, they don't.

This could go a long way in explaining the uptick in fans jumping the rail, with some making it as far as the ring – a lack of attention paid from top to bottom.

3 Under no circumstances should you hit Hulk Hogan with your finisher.

Seriously, whether it was Randy Savage's flying elbow smash or The Undertaker's Tombstone, "The Hulkster" would summon the fury of the 300 Army, becoming as invincible as Super Mario upon letting Starman take control of his body. This is the real reason Hogan's been excommunicated from the company: there's a legitimate fear he may challenge John Cena and take the Attitude Adjustment as a power-up.

2 If Cena learnt one thing from Hogan, it's that giants get lighter with every bodyslam attempt.



Sure, the first attempt at lifting Andre The Giant or The Big Show over your head will result in a hernia the size of one of Vince McMahon's grapefruits, but if you try again 10 minutes later, he goes up lighter than a feather. After a house show run, Hogan could throw Andre over the Sears Tower (which is what he told **FSM** he did one day in 1987).

1 From January through March, if two mortal enemies end up in the same ring on *Raw*, not only will they avoid coming to blows, but one will point solemnly at the *WrestleMania* sign. The other is required to narrow his eyes and nod. See you in Texas, brother!



As John Cena has often found out, lifting a heavy opponent is easier as the match goes on

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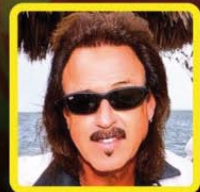
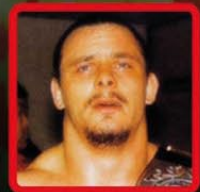
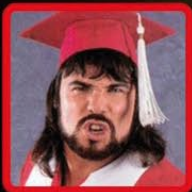
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THE CORNETTE CONCLUSION

IN HIS UPCOMING BOOK, **JIM CORNETTE** NEEDED TO EXPLAIN WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A WRESTLING FAN IN DIFFERENT ERAS. THE BREAKDOWN GOT SO DEEP TO THE CORE OF OLD-SCHOOL VS. NEW-SCHOOL THAT IT HAD TO BE UNDERLINED IN THIS MONTH'S COLUMN.

“Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear...”

I just recently put the finishing touches on the text for my upcoming book, *Tuesday Night At The Gardens – Pro Wrestling In Louisville*, and was ready to hand it off to my co-author Mark James for the prodigious task of adding the hundreds of illustrations when I realized it was missing something. It occurred to me that two different kinds of fans were going to be reading this book: current fans who are into learning about history and the origins of modern superstars, and old-time fans who followed wrestling in decades gone by, but know little or nothing about today's product. Both sides would be surprised at the information contained within, and I felt a preface was necessary to “set the scene” for what, when released – get updates at JimCornette.com – is the most detailed book ever written about pro wrestling in my hometown, both in the ring and behind the scenes.

My column this month is therefore of similar intent: to try to understand the differences in the way wrestling fans think, which is sort of like trying to understand two diametrically opposed political parties. That's because there are two distinct groups of wrestling aficionados these days. The first type is the modern fan, the one who watches current “sports entertainment” fairly closely, either from the industry

leader, WWE, or the much smaller alternatives, like TNA, ROH, or the local independent promotions. Those fans might also monitor the internet for wrestling news, or buy videos and merchandise online. They know – or sometimes *think* they know – everything about the sport, from how it's conceived to how it's executed; who the wrestlers are; where they trained; who hired them to “play the character” they currently portray; how and why the matches are made; who writes the promos the stars give on TV; how they plan their match; what the gate of the show was; even how much the promotion gets paid by the TV network to air the damn thing. Those fans also know the only legitimate thing about wrestling today is the heat between certain stars and promoters backstage.

The other type of fan is the “disenfranchised” wrestling fan, the one who, because of changes in the sport over the past 10, 20, or 30 years no longer watches, or in some cases, cares. I meet them at comic conventions and in real-world appearances all the time, much more often than I meet current fans there, and they all utter some variation of, “I used to love pro wrestling, but I haven't watched it in years. It got so...” at which point the word then varies from “fake” to “silly”, “show-bizzy”, “talky”, “soap-opera”, “put-on”, even “boring”. Most of the guys will admit the top good guy was their hero as a teenager, and the women will talk about which star they had a crush on. If it's an event in the state of Kentucky, the Louisville Gardens and how many times they'd actually been there live will come up.

These people, who watched the TV matches religiously, and went to the regular weekly or monthly live events in their town for years, possibly starting with their parents or grandparents, just quit caring. They mostly didn't leave wrestling, wrestling just left them: the loss of the territories took their local TV show away, as well as their regular social gathering at the live matches. As the business was more and more “exposed”, some folks were upset they had been bamboozled all those years – especially those that had gone to jail to swing at the bad guys.



According to Jim, there are two types of wrestling fan, including modern fans who closely follow WWE



© TONY KNOX

“The modern fan knows the only legitimate thing about wrestling today is the heat between certain stars and promoters backstage”

Having worked as a manager, booker, and promoter during his wrestling career, Jim Cornette would be an invaluable columnist even if it were not for his encyclopedic knowledge of the history of the business. You can read more from “The Louisville Lip” at www.JimCornette.com, where he also sells his personal merchandise, including his book *Rags, Paper and Pins – The Merchandising of Memphis Wrestling*.

To other fans, it seemed the matches and personalities lost the spontaneity and passion. Still others always knew something was going on, but had no idea what, or to what extent. Now when they look at wrestling after being away from it for so long, it's become a bunch of strangers pretending to do the stuff that they grew up watching, but obviously not meaning it. While that fan doesn't know who the current WWE champion is, they recognize the name or photo of every top star in their territory from 30 years ago.

Both kinds of fans are going to learn something from my book. Old-school fans are going to be shocked at just how much of the pro wrestling they grew up watching was, indeed, contrived, manipulated, or as it's called in the business, "worked". Current fans are going to be absolutely gobsmacked at just how *little* was. I think that's why it's so hard for younger fans and wrestlers to understand older fans' – and wrestlers' – perspective on the sport.

This generation thinks the way pro wrestling is done now behind the scenes is the way it's always been done, and a lot of them can't comprehend that most outsiders had no clue what was really going on.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

I was able to write my book from two perspectives: my original eyewitness perceptions of the matches at the time, reinforced by my original notes, and from a modern perspective after over 30 years of actual involvement in both the on and off-camera aspects of the wrestling business. Looking back, I'm now able to see what was being done, and often why, and the glorious and brilliant simplicity of much of it, with 40 years' hindsight.

But to truly understand the popularity of and fascination with wrestling amongst so many fans of bygone eras, you need to understand the eyes with which the fanbase saw it.

Pro wrestling in the 1970s was, and had been for decades, comprised of around 25 regional promotions or "territories". Each of these promotions had TV wrestling shows airing in all their markets, which promoted the regular live events in the various cities and towns. Each promoter had a matchmaker, or "booker", that compiled a roster of wrestlers he believed fans would pay to see, and matched them against other wrestlers with whom he thought they would sell tickets. The booker would decide – except in the case of top, established stars – which wrestlers would be popular and which would be unpopular. He would give them a reason to have a personal issue through a physical or verbal conflict that would lead to a series of matches between them, culminating with the big final match where the babyface would at long last get the last word. Whether the prize of the match was the satisfaction of beating a hated rival, winning money, taking a step up the ladder or, most importantly, becoming a champion, there was some pot of gold at the end of a big match's rainbow.

Past that, in a lot of cases it was up to the wrestlers to sell the fans on coming to see them. The main event stars, especially, did their own interviews off the tops of their heads, selling the match, the grudge, or the stipulation in their own words. When it came time for the match, the booker either told them just who was going to win or gave them a specific way to end the match that would lead to the re-match he had



booked the next week. The rest of the match was pretty much up to the talent, and was mostly improvised, not only because the locker-rooms for heels and babyfaces were often separate, but because you didn't know what a crowd was going to react to until you could feel and hear them.

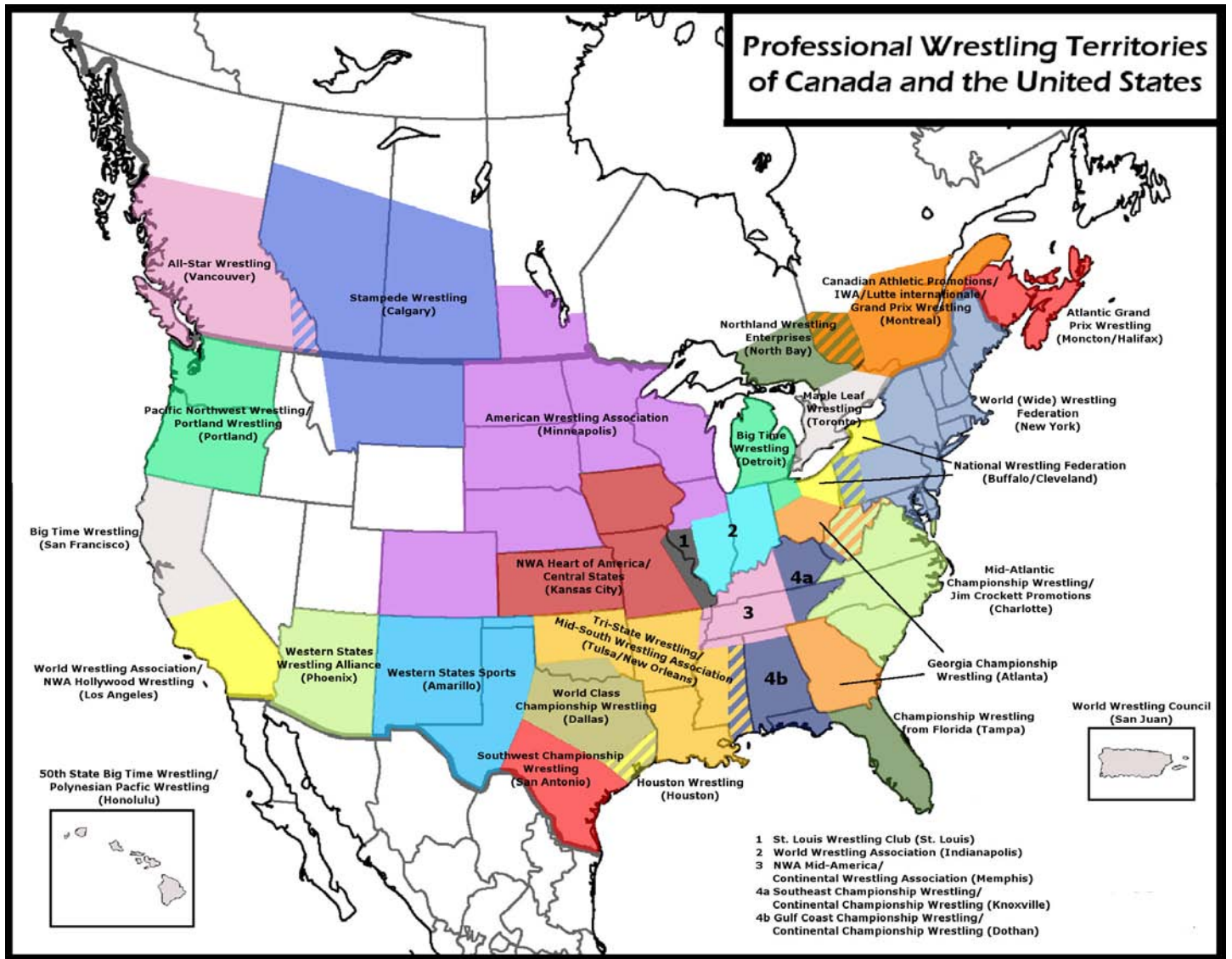
In short, the booker was the puppet master who assembled the right talent, put them in the right combinations, and gave them the right conflicts to spark business. The wrestlers then went out and wrestled and acted as they would if they were really their "gimmick" – what is now called their "character" – and as if whatever was happening to them was real. If the fans believed in them and their issue, and if their performances met or exceeded the fans' expectations, they upped the crowds.

The relationship between the booker and talent was important; if the wrestlers didn't draw money, the booker put other wrestlers in those spots. If the booker didn't draw money even with proven talent, the promoter got a new booker. But if a booker's ideas and finishes drew money for a territory, he would get offers to book other promotions, and often take his trusted top talent with him. If they drew money consistently or in different territories, those wrestlers would establish main event reputations and have their picks of where they wanted to wrestle.

Each territory honored the other promoters' boundaries, and either worked together or, at bare minimum, ignored each other. When promotional wars over a town or territory happened, one side was usually supported by the National Wrestling Alliance and/or the recognized legitimate promoters, and the other side was then termed an "outlaw" promotion, with any talent working for it then blackballed for varying periods of time. Each area presented a different style of wrestling, from brawling to technical wrestling to big men to heavy blood to an emphasis on ex-amateurs and football players, but one principle was the same in every wrestling promotion in the country: kayfabe.

Kayfabe is an old carnival term, which is where much of wrestling's inside language came from. It was uttered whenever someone that wasn't "with the programme" – in other words, a mark – was in sight or earshot. It came to be the overriding principle of pro wrestling: for the business

Unfortunately for WWE champion Seth Rollins, there are many wrestling fans who have no idea who he is



For decades, the U.S. scene was made up of around 25 territories

to be successful, no-one could know that it was a work, or how the work was done.

KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID

From the late-1800s until the late-1980s, this is more or less how business was done in wrestling. As simple as it sounds in today's overscripted, choreographed, overanalyzed world of wrestling, that basically covers it.

That is why you should now go back and re-read the last seven paragraphs, because if this was 1970, that description of pro wrestling was not only impossible to find in writing, especially from someone inside the industry – it would have probably gotten my legs broken – it was more than almost any fan anywhere knew about how wrestling was done.

I can testify from my personal experiences as a fan at the Louisville Gardens in the 1970s exactly what even the most die-hard regulars knew and didn't know about pro wrestling's inner workings. There were a number of factions that would populate the Gardens on any given wrestling night. When you had a group of almost 5,000 people who left their homes, travelled downtown and paid to see live wrestling almost every week, there were a few different subcultures.

There was a group of the most faithful, shall we say, that whether anybody wants to admit it or not, bought everything about wrestling at face value, and believed in its legitimacy pretty much wholeheartedly. This group could well have numbered in the hundreds or even a thousand or more,

depending on the time period. Another, larger group, knew there was something going on, that somehow the wrestlers were told who was supposed to win or to take it easy on each other, but the intricacy of what was arranged and what was not eluded them, and they had no way to separate fact from fiction. I once had a Gardens know-it-all float me the theory that the promoter always told the good guys to win, but the bad guys often cheated and won to screw their plans up.

Another good chunk, maybe half the crowd, knew that what they were seeing was mostly prearranged, but had no idea how and loved it anyway, with a large segment of women in the audience specifically to see the guys in tights. The men in this group, however, could often still lose it for a particularly hot heel or angle: "Say what you want about the rest of it, but those two guys were mad!"

Lastly, there was a very small group in any town, not just Louisville, that knew a little more, and they were generally folks on the periphery, like ring announcers or photographers, building personnel, or someone with enough access to figure out a few things, since even they were generally not smartened up by the promoters. There were also a few smart "arena rats" – the groupies that were in every town – who really got enough access to figure things out.

INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION

The average fan, regardless of his level of knowledge concerning the legitimacy or lack thereof of the athletic

“Pro wrestling was presented, in some cases no matter how implausible the visuals, as a completely legitimate life-or-death struggle between two athletes”

competition, knew very little about wrestling except what he was told by the promotion. In the pre-cable days, the local broadcast station's programme was the only TV wrestling you saw or knew existed, unless you went on vacation to another territory and were shocked to find out there was another promotion besides the one in your town. Your local stars were presented as the biggest in wrestling, and you would argue that with any friend in another territory, even if his stars *were* bigger. Other than TV, the arena programmes were your source of news on your local wrestling.

There were also the newsstand wrestling magazines, but even though I snatched them all up, they didn't sell well in Louisville because they only covered the "New York" wrestlers, not the Tennessee talent we saw. Lots of Gardens fans knew that Christine Jarrett, Jerry's mother, was the Louisville promoter, and she was beloved by the fans as a motherly figure who would take time to speak to them on her way to and from the box office. No-one saw any conflict between her as a promoter and Jerry as a wrestler because, after all, he was a good guy and didn't need to cheat.

No-one knew anything about bookers or programmes or angles or any of the behind-the-scenes manoeuvring. They came to see the fights, whether real or imagined, and watch these larger-than-life personalities have conflicts with each other. Then – except for one hour of the TV show the next weekend, which anywhere from a sixth to a quarter of the whole city watched regularly – they went back to their lives for a week, until the next Tuesday night's match.

With this kind of unspoiled palate to paint on, the bookers and wrestlers put on a spectacle that elicited almost blind loyalty, hysterical passion and violent emotion. It wasn't scripted down to the minutiae by creative teams and presented by promoters that brag about their entertainment empires and starring athletes that play characters and hope to be chosen to star on a hot reality show or for a career in the movies. It was presented, in some cases no matter how implausible the visuals, as a completely legitimate life-or-death struggle between two athletes, with colorful and over-the-top personalities battling for a prize they both wanted; two athletes that would and often did lie in open court on the witness stand as to whether pro wrestling was real or not. Criticism, and occasionally truth, might come from mainstream media, but no one *inside* the industry would ever be quoted, which preserved some element of plausible deniability for the fans who "didn't want to know".



Companies that operated in territories without permission, such as the Poffo's ICW, were "outlaw" groups



© HOWARD BAUM

Once upon a time, fans in the Memphis territory knew only what Lance Russell told them

And the result? They came; they came by the hundreds of thousands, to experience a unique combination of sport and performance art live and in person. They came until the hero got even, no matter how long it took. They came in the rain, the snow, and the storms. They had to be there to see a new champion crowned, someone unmasked, a villain forced to leave town because it was sold to them as the most important thing that would ever happen, almost every week, and they had to find out who was going to win.

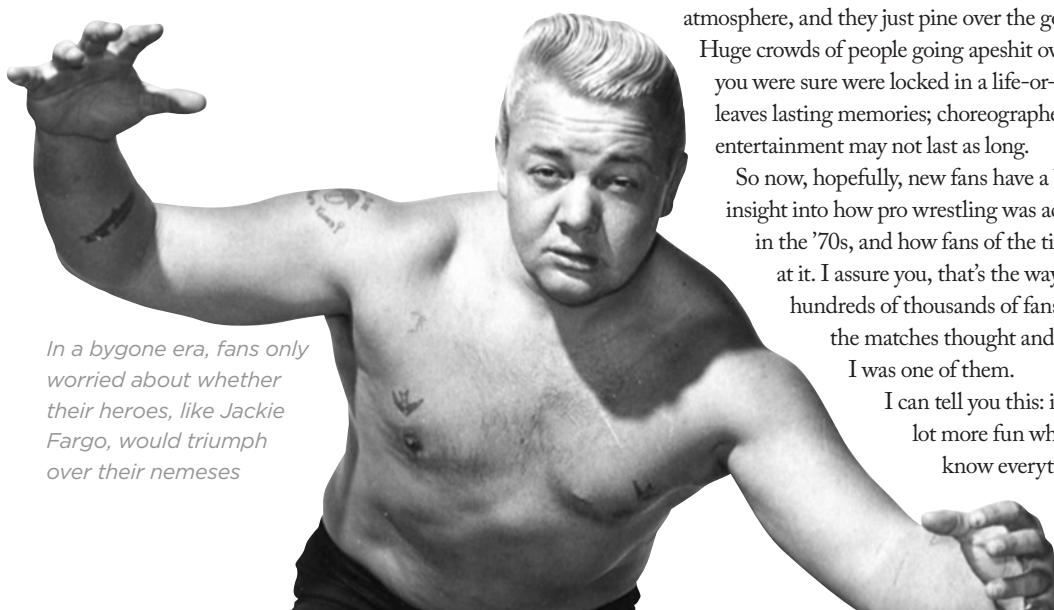
When they left the arena, they weren't dissecting the workrate of the wrestlers. They didn't already know that after tonight's match, the belt would be changing hands next week. And they sure as hell weren't talking about what a better line-up they could have booked. They were either elated that Jackie Fargo had finally beaten Al Greene, or mad as fire about what that dirty Jerry Lawler did to Jerry Jarrett, or still raving about that wild, bloody brawl between Bob Armstrong and The Stomper, or wondering whether if that drunk fan had gotten a good swing at Sam Bass before the cops grabbed him, would it have knocked him out?

That passion and devotion is why, I believe, the new fans can get into the old matches on YouTube, because they always specifically mention "the crowds were going crazy". But conversely, old-school fans often have very little interest in watching the new stuff, because it's an entirely different atmosphere, and they just pine over the good old days.

Huge crowds of people going apeshit over wrestlers you were sure were locked in a life-or-death struggle leaves lasting memories; choreographed sports entertainment may not last as long.

So now, hopefully, new fans have a better insight into how pro wrestling was actually done in the '70s, and how fans of the time looked at it. I assure you, that's the way most of the hundreds of thousands of fans that went to the matches thought and felt, because I was one of them.

I can tell you this: it's a whole lot more fun when you *don't* know everything.



In a bygone era, fans only worried about whether their heroes, like Jackie Fargo, would triumph over their nemeses

LYING, CHEATING AND STEALING HEARTS

Ten years ago this month, pro wrestling lost one of its brightest stars. **David Bixenspan** recalls the brilliance of Eddy Guerrero, and talks to those who knew him best to shed some light on his loveable character.

In November 2005, Eddy Guerrero was arguably the most beloved professional wrestler in the world. Behind the scenes, he was regarded as not only the finest all-round performer in the business, and a locker-room leader, but the nicest human being on the face of the earth. On-camera, fans had latched onto that over the years; early in his WCW run, the group had a research firm try to determine the most likeable wrestler on the roster, and the fans picked Guerrero overwhelmingly, which was no surprise to those who had seen him become the most popular babyface at the *Saturday Night* tapings in Atlanta.



Ten years ago, Eddy Guerrero tragically passed away in Minneapolis, Minnesota

In the latter parts of his WWE career, that charm shined through in a different way. Every time Guerrero tried to turn heel with the “lie, cheat, and steal” gimmick, it didn’t work. First, in 2003, he turned on Tajiri, another one of the most amiable wrestlers in the business, and the crowd still loved him. In the autumn of 2005, a “fake” babyface turn where he was transparently sucking up to his “new best friend” and World heavyweight champion Batista had the same effect; he was just too nice, too charming to be a heel. On November 13, 2005, with Batista needing to take time off for an injury, Guerrero was supposed to “officially” turn on him and take the title.

It probably wouldn’t have worked for the same reasons, but we’ll never know. The 38-year-old suffered a massive heart attack in his hotel room on November 13, dying in front of his nephew, Chavito.

Wrestling fans are all too used to death, but occasionally there’s a tragedy that feels so wrong that it irreparably breaks their spirit.

Eddy Guerrero’s passing was one such moment.

THE GREAT GUERREROS

When it comes to the batting average for producing great workers, it’s hard to top the Guerrero family, and that’s even more the case if you include the extended Llanes family on the side of Eddy’s mother. Eddy’s father, Gory Guerrero, and his cousin, Enrique Llanes, were two of the most legendary technicians in the history of *lucha libre*. Brothers Mando, Hector, and especially Chavo (seen as Chavo Classic in WWE in 2004) were all naturals in the ring, as was their cousin, Javier Llanes. Yet when Eddy broke into the business in 1987, the word was that he was going to be the best Guerrero yet, and that wasn’t hyperbole.

“All of the Guerreros had talent, and you knew they were all gonna be great, and they all *were* great,” remembered Tom Prichard, who saw the brothers going back to his youth in Houston, Texas. “But Eddy certainly had a spark about him that screamed ‘star’. All he needed was an opportunity.

“Eddy was a natural in the ring, but he grew up in a ring, literally – it was in his backyard. He had *it*.”

Scott Norton, who was one of Eddy’s best friends on Japanese tours, remembered just how proud he was of his family.

“[He was an] amazing wrestler, and loved being a wrestler. [He] loved the legacy of his family. Mexican

The youngest boy, Eddy, is here pictured with brother Hector, father Gory, and brother Mando Guerrero

@KingLuchaNYC @SashaBanksWWE
Just listened to your interview with @IAmJericho. It was amazing and Eddy Guerrero would be so proud of you!

wrestlers are very proud, and they work their ass off – they do anything. They're relentless, and that's why they're so good. Eddy didn't miss a beat."

When speaking to **FSM**, Jim Ross seconded Norton's remarks about Eddy's pride in the Guerrero family name.

"Eddy was so competitive and proud of his name and family legacy. I loved that about him."

Not only did Eddy learn how to work in the aforementioned backyard ring, but his father took an old adage and made it reality. The joke may always have been that Ric Flair could have a good match with a broom, but he never actually did it. Eddy did, however, as a training exercise. It was the type of skill that affirmed that anywhere he wouldn't be dismissed as too small, he would be successful. He was barely out of his rookie year when he first made his mark in the business; headlining locally on the Juarez lucha scene, he and a green bodybuilder named Konnan got into a feud so hot that it was actually the last big drawing programme in the glory days of the region where his father had been king.

The work ethic that allowed Guerrero to wrestle inanimate objects without flinching was his trademark as a performer throughout his career.

"He was a proud man, and prideful men generally go the extra mile to stand out," noted Jim Ross, who not only voiced Guerrero's work in WWE, but dealt with him as the Head of Talent Relations. "I had to have a heart-to-heart with Eddy once because he was scheduled to open a pay-per-view. He was irate, and felt disrespected. Bottom line, I told him to stay pissed off, set the bar high, say 'Follow that, boys!' and then come see me when the show was over [because] I had to prep to go be 'J.R.' and do my 'other' job.

"Eddy lit it up that night. After the show, he had gotten it. He hugged me, and with tears in his eyes said, 'Thank you.'"

BECOMING THE BEST

Eddy Guerrero's career had distinct phases. As noted, the first was primarily in Mexico, as well as border towns in the southwestern United States. Even though he was purportedly the best Guerrero yet from very early on, with a seamless blend of sound technique on the mat and impressive high-flying, promoters of American style wrestling wouldn't give him the time of day because he was too small. He had two matches in WCW in 1989 – including against Terry Funk on May 9 – where his work had to impress, but nobody gave any thought to hiring him. He wrestled at Arena Mexico for CMLL, but as more the "little brother" in Guerreros matches than anything else.

Business started to pick up in 1992, when not only did he start working regularly for New Japan, but CMLL gave him a singles push, albeit under a mask. Guerrero didn't like being the original Mascara Magica, but at least the period coincided with Antonio Pena and Konnan breaking away from CMLL to form AAA, with Konnan naturally trying to convince his friend to jump, too. Eventually, he did, appearing in an AAA ring and voluntarily unmasking, announcing in his promo that the son of Gory Guerrero didn't need a hood.



In 1993, New Japan gave him a bigger push as Black Tiger II, the new heel rival for Jushin "Thunder" Liger. In Japan, without the family history, wearing a mask was not an issue, and taking up the role made famous by the magnificent Mark Rocco was a great honour. In Mexico, he soon turned heel, becoming part one of the hottest acts in AAA, La Pareja de Terror with "Love Machine" Art Barr.

The next phase began on November 6, 1994, when Eddy and Art were the standout performers on the *When Worlds Collide* pay-per-view produced by AAA and WCW. In losing their hair to El Hijo del Santo and Octagon, they looked like the best, most charismatic tag team in the world, blending lucha libre with Japanese junior-heavyweight wrestling and Americanised heeling. Paul Heyman made a deal for them to come to ECW, and Love Machine was about to get more New Japan tours. Everything was looking up until November 23, when Barr mysteriously died of heart failure at his home in Oregon. On December 20, the Mexican peso crashed, making it impossible for AAA to afford American talent.

Within a month, Eddy had lost his best friend and his full-time job.

He went to ECW in the spring of 1995, almost exclusively working with Dean Malenko and 2 Cold Scorpio in the mid-card. Paul Heyman had hopes of eventually putting on a pay-per-view headlined by Guerrero versus Chris Benoit, but it wasn't to be, as both went to WCW at the end of August to bolster

As Head of Talent Relations, Jim Ross gave Eddy guidance when he got too competitive for his own good

"Eddy Guerrero was a proud man, and prideful men generally go the extra mile to stand out"

@KIDofXstream One of my all time fav matches was Eddy Guerrero (ECW spelling) vs. Dean Malenko 2 out of 3 falls match

© WREALANO@AOL.COM



Guerrero's career really took off in the U.S. after he became a weekly presence on Nitro

the roster for the launch of *Monday Nitro*. Guerrero was there to have good throwaway matches, but got significantly more over than his push. Surprisingly, he was largely kept away from the cruiserweight division, instead becoming United States title-holder before turning heel in 1997.

And at that moment, something clicked.

As great as Eddy was, and he was an excellent babyface, he got much better as a heel. While he had experience in the role, it was usually as a mysterious masked man or the straight man to Love Machine. When he turned in WCW, he was more animated, more aggressive, and more intense, and for the first time, you could argue that he was the best wrestler in the world. Still, while he showed an ability to get over or get heat as well as anyone in WCW, he never really got a shot. In 2001, he went to the WWF with Benoit, Malenko, and Perry Saturn, and continued to come out of his shell.

In 2003, when he turned on Tajiri, the fans reacted differently when his heel turn failed. It was true of the fanbase at large, but his popularity just

exploded with Latino fans. *Smackdown's* ratings went through the roof in the Hispanic demographic, while the brand's house show attendance popped in markets with large Mexican populations. He was too good, too charismatic, too likeable, and too expressive not to be a top guy – a far cry from his days as a shy but amazingly affable babyface in WCW. The term “Latino Steve Austin” was thrown around for him within WWE, and he eventually became WWE champion, beating Brock Lesnar at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, setting the arena's all-time gate record.

But before long, it fell apart. *Smackdown* was gutted of its top heels by the annual draft, and Kurt Angle needing time off. Business went down, Eddy took it too hard, and it was recommended that he drop the title.

He spent much of the next year as the world's most over mid-card babyface, until he turned on Rey Mysterio. This time, it stuck. Why? He removed everything that made him likeable. “Latino Heat” was gone, and he did awful things to Rey Mysterio, even crudely claiming to be the father of Rey's son, Dominick. While still great in the ring, he was now more of a deliberate, old-school heel. He even “cut a promo” where he just stood in the ring, refusing to speak while staring at Mysterio's mask. After Rey beat him, they went back to comedy, everyone fell in love with him again, and if, as expected, he had turned on Batista to win the World heavyweight championship, he almost certainly would have been cheered.

MR BRIGHTSIDE

Outside of the ring, there were two Eddy Guerreros. One, as noted, was often described as not just the nicest person in wrestling, but the nicest man a lot of people had ever met.

“He was as nice to the TV crew and freelancers as he was to the McMahons,” recalled Jim Ross. “He made time for everyone.”

Indeed, if anyone backstage seemed like they needed cheering up, Guerrero took time out to try and lift their spirits. That didn't end when he left the arena, either; when he was in WCW, he learnt of a young girl from Baltimore – the company's long-time best city – who had terminal cancer, and who wanted to meet him. Not only did he make it happen, but he gave her his cell phone number and they stayed in touch every week until she passed away.

Eddy brought that same spirit to the ring, and how he approached not just his own work, but that of his friends.

“I remember matches where I'd have a pretty darn good match, and Eddy was always fired up about it,” explained Scott Norton. “His [understanding of] psychology of a match was just amazing.”

“You know, he was always there to help you out, too. A lot of guys wouldn't help you; Eddy always helped you. I'd have a couple of title matches, when I was the IWGP [heavyweight] champion or even the tag champ, where he asked if it was okay if he came down [to the ring]. I said, ‘Hell yeah, it's okay!’ I thought that was really cool of him to do that. That was sort of like a support deal. There's times where what we're doing in the ring, nobody really gets it. You wouldn't believe the communication that goes

Both in WCW and WWE, Guerrero had scintillating matches with and against Rey Mysterio

We'll never know what would've happened had Eddy taken the World heavyweight title from Batista as planned

on just by sight, just by looking, when you've got a guy on the apron or standing by the rail, like Eddy would. That was something that always stuck with me about him. It was like with Black Cat, who was at ringside for every match I ever had [there]."

So, what exactly did Eddy do to help besides offer moral support?

"Things you talk about before a match, or how would you go about this match or what you would do... I'm working with guys in Japan who aren't as big as me. I'm a big guy, right? And I'd ask Eddy how he'd go about wrestling this fella - a Nagata or Tanahashi, somebody like that. He'd give me his opinions, and Eddy had a mind that was just unbelievable.

"Dean Malenko had 1,000 moves? Then Eddy had 10,000 in his brain [laughs]. And I'm not saying anything bad about Dean. When I would wrestle smaller guys in Japan, Eddy would be a great help for me. He'd come up with stuff backstage. And all you had to do was ask him once; he'd be thinking about it all week long and telling you stuff.

"When you're going into a big match and got a guy like that... (pauses) He has a big match, too! He would put a lot of effort into helping me, and I would appreciate it so much."

DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN

Unfortunately, there was also the other Eddy Guerrero. His battles with addiction aren't a secret, and when he was intoxicated - but only then - the nicest man on the planet disappeared.

"Here's how much I like Eddy," Norton began. "Me and Hawk are sitting in first class [on a plane to Japan]. The company would fly us business, but me and Hawk were first class, for whatever reason. We're sitting there, and I had a pair of Porsche sunglasses, and Eddy, well, he was drunk, and kind of belligerent. He walked up into first class and said, 'Why are you guys first class?' I would just say, 'Eddy, let it go. Forget it.' Hawk said, 'That's where they seated us. Just plain and simple.' Eddy takes the sunglasses off my face, crushes them into a ball, and throws them on my chest. Hawk says, 'You're not gonna kill that son of a bitch?' I said, 'He's all right. Don't worry about it.'"

It was such moments that earned the 5ft 7in junior-heavyweight the nickname "Eddy The Giant". It's not an exaggeration to say that he was a different person when he was drunk, as Norton explained.

"The plane landed about 10 hours later, and Eddy found out what he did. He apologised to me for about four years! [laughs]

"I knew Eddy, you know what I mean? There was nothing he could have done [to really anger me]. I wish he wouldn't have done that to my sunglasses, of course, but he reimbursed me. Eddy was absolute gold, man. He was a great guy."

That was the real Eddy Guerrero, even if his demons were always a part of him. But he had some work to do before he could keep Mr. Hyde at bay.

CHECKING IN TO SHOW OUT

In 2001, WWE sent Guerrero to rehab when his closest friends in the WWF, like Dean Malenko, decided that hiding him from management would only make things worse. So he was off to the Talbot Recovery Campus in Atlanta, where he and someone



© MATT BALK



he first met 20 years earlier would serve as rocks for each other as they pieced their lives back together.

"I got there two weeks ahead of him," explained Tom Prichard. "I didn't know anybody. I can be a real antisocial guy - I'm still working on that to this day - and I'm walking into a room with people who are just like me... but nothing like me. They had the same issues, but they don't know anything about me, I don't want them to know anything about me, and I don't want to know anything about them."

Another wrestler being in the mix was, in the long run, probably the best thing that could have happened to both of them.

"It was very calming; it was very comforting. I didn't know what to expect. It was pretty scary. I think when Eddy came along, he felt the same way.

"You have a lot of people on you, man, and Eddy especially, who want to talk about wrestling. When you're there, you don't really want to talk about wrestling; you don't really want to talk about that shit. They don't know what it's like, and we have done things they haven't done; not things we're proud of, but they wanna hear war stories, stories about wrestling. Well, you don't want to talk to...

Scott Norton may have seen the darker side of Guerrero, but knew he had a heart of gold

"The plane landed about 10 hours later, and Eddy found out what he did. He apologised to me for about four years!"

Tom Prichard (here with Dusty Rhodes) spent time in rehab with Guerrero



(pauses) I hate the word mark, but there were a lot of marks there. There were a lot of fans there, too, and fans are people who love it and respect it and get it. There were just a lot of marks who didn't really know, and once they found out who Eddy was, they wanted to hear stories, and they wanted to be part of it. And there's no way they can unless they are, and they're not."

That didn't just apply to the pressures of the business. It meant Guerrero and Prichard understood each other on a deeper level.

"Eddy and I could sit there and not talk about wrestling, talk about everything in general, and pretty much have a better connection and a better understanding than they could."

While they had not been close before, a bond was being forged – one that's impossible to understand unless you've been through the same rigours.

"I even said at his funeral, when some people were talking about [overseas tours], 'I've never been to Japan, or Germany, or Mexico on a tour with Eddy. But being in rehab is like being in a foreign land anyway, and you do form a bond there.'

"It was like serving in the military, it was like putting your time in, and that's what we did."

Though he became known as a man who doesn't go to funerals, Steve Austin still travelled to Phoenix to pay his respects



© NAPARAZZI

The 12 steps that most rehab programmes are based around are quite heavily steeped in religion and spirituality. For Eddy, who took that part of his life seriously before he had spun out of control, it was something he could latch onto.

"I think that it was probably part of him before he slipped away from it as much, and being locked away in Atlanta for a while, it gives you time to sit and think. It's a faith-based programme, the 12 steps. A higher power; it doesn't matter what it is as long as you have something greater than yourself, and it's based on that. So if you already had a foundation for that, which Eddy did... (pauses) Some people take it for what it's worth, and other people look for meaning. Eddy looked to it for meaning when he got out. I got a different view of it, but for him, I think it made it a little more accessible. It might have been that one spark he needed to reconnect."

In pro wrestling, with everything that the boys have seen, scepticism is natural. A lot of wrestlers have professed to be born again as little more than a gimmick, but not Eddy.

"Especially in this business, you don't know who's zoomin' who," stated Prichard. "To swallow 'just say no' or 'just pray for it', it was always hard for me to do that. So you really have to have faith, and it has to be strong, and Eddy had strong faith."

Jim Ross concurred with his former WWF co-worker's assessment.

"When he would regress and become the 'old Eddy', I'd ask him if he had read his Bible that day. That brought him back around, because his Christianity was legit."

With conviction in his voice, Scott Norton worded it just as simply if not more impactfully than Ross and Prichard, while echoing those sentiments.

"He was very religious, and he was a good person."

BROTHERS IN ARMS

The story of Eddy Guerrero is one of a man who was so full of love for his friends and his fans that they couldn't wait to return the favour. As much of a sombre affair as his funeral was on November 16, 2005, it was more clear than ever just how much adoration his peers had for him. Dozens of wrestlers from across the country and the course of Eddy's career showed up in Phoenix, so many that mourners who tried to keep track of numbers lost count. Steve Austin, who became well-known as "the wrestler who won't go to funerals" after close friend Brian Pillman passed away, still flew in to pay his respects from outside the church. With Ross at home recovering from major surgery, Prichard read a letter from him.

"I wasn't working for [WWE] at the time," Prichard began, "but I had to be there because Eddy and I had gone through rehab together, and we had gone through a lot of things together, a lot of times together. I think that once you break it down... (pauses) When you work with a guy like that all the time, and he's that passionate, and that genuine, and that good, it's hard to believe he's not gonna be there anymore.

"It's one of those things in life that you only get to do once.

"The guys who could go were there, and it does speak volumes about Eddy."



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NAYLOR'S NOTEPAD

RECENTLY REMINISCING ABOUT SOME OF PRO WRESTLING'S MOST BELIEVABLE COMPETITORS, **ROB NAYLOR** TOOK TO YOUTUBE TO RELIVE SOME OF STAN HANSEN'S GREATEST MATCHES. THIS MONTH'S COLUMN IS A TRIBUTE TO "THE LARIAT", AND A STYLE OF PRO WRESTLING THAT UNFORTUNATELY IS RARELY SEEN TODAY.

In my travels, when I ask my peers about which professional wrestler they feel was most authentic or had the most credibility, the name most brought up is Johnny Valentine. Being born 10 years too late to ever have watched him, I asked myself what wrestler brought the most genuine level of terror to the squared circle, while also employing the most believable offense, and for me that answer was easy.

It was Stan "The Lariat" Hansen.

Hansen was feared the world over, and when I first saw him wrestle in 1985, I knew one thing: he was someone I would *never* want to look at across the ring as my opponent. That's a trait that's a bit lost in pro wrestling these days: a genuinely scary and intimidating force to be reckoned with.

Outside of Brock Lesnar, the days of wrestling stars invoking true fear in the audience is somewhat

lost. Hansen, however, had it in abundance. His "never take a step back" style of offense and his unwillingness to "take it easy" on any strike or movement in the ring made him stand out amongst the pack. Even when watching the awe-inspiring Road Warriors on the same AWA TV show back in the day, they still didn't seem as tough as "The Bad Man from Borger, Texas".

Hansen came up with the legendary Funk family after meeting Dory Jr. and Terry at West Texas State University – a domain that spawned a litany of Hall of Fame talents over the years. Hansen knew only one way, and that was the hard way. "This ain't ballet!" is clearly a mantra he recited on many occasions.

I recall one story told by Leon White, later known as Big Van Vader. White cut his teeth in the AWA, and had undergone rugged training with the legendary Verne Gagne before starting his in-ring career. Among his first opponents were Hansen, Bruiser Brody and Jerry Blackwell, who were all as tough as nails. When White subsequently worked other opponents, they complained to Gagne, "Why is the new kid beating the tar out of all of us?!" When Verne turned the question to White, he was confused; he thought that's how pro wrestling matches worked, since his more established opponents had been beating him up for weeks.

IN MY MEMORY

Hansen was involved in so many memorable moments for me as a kid. From his shocking AWA World title win over Rick Martel in the Meadowlands, using his Brazos Valley Backbreaker (Boston crab) while he leaned on the turnbuckle, to his raucous interview style in noting to Larry Nelson that he needed to win cause he had a "big fat wife and 9 kids at home", to his battles with Jerry Blackwell, Sgt. Slaughter and Curt Hennig, Hansen was a pivotal player in many positive memories for this wrestling fan.

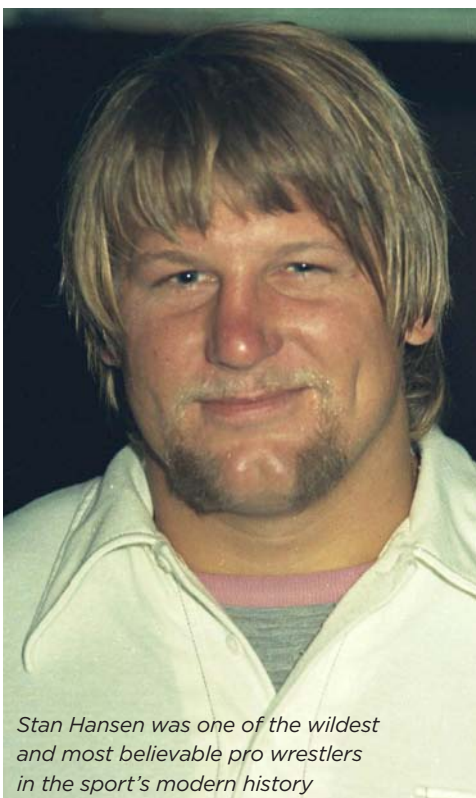
Hansen was also one of the most decorated Americans to ever work in Japan. A top draw



"Make no mistake about it, Stan Hansen's form of roughhouse pro wrestling is a lost art these days. Someone with his exact look may not even get hired after showing up for an NXT tryout"

Rob Naylor is a former WWE Creative Assistant at developmental territory NXT, and is a colour commentator at EVOLVE and SHINE Wrestling. He is a lifelong student of pro wrestling who counts "Raging Bull" Manny Fernandez as his favourite wrestler.

© PETE LEDERBERG



Stan Hansen was one of the wildest and most believable pro wrestlers in the sport's modern history

Hansen (here bloodying Ric Flair) made fans genuinely fear for their favourite babyfaces

"The Lariat" gets ready to thwart Dusty Rhodes' attack on Ole Anderson



© PETE LEDERBERG

© PETE LEDERBERG

from the very start, his no-nonsense style and Western heritage made him *the* greatest drawing foreign wrestler in the Land of the Rising Sun for many years, and the standard by which all who came after him were to be judged.

Though his team with Bruiser Brody was more notable, I always enjoyed Hansen and Terry Gordy as tag partners. I implore everyone to look up their All Japan bout from December 1988, where they take on Genichiro Tenryu and Toshiaki Kawada. It's a true classic of tag team match that all students of pro wrestling need to see.

When all is said and done, Hansen's battles with Mitsuharu Misawa will go down in history as some of the greatest matches of all-time. Despite a reputation for being surly and difficult to do business with, Hansen eating one singular hard elbow to the jaw and just falling limp to the canvas cemented Misawa's top position, as he won the Triple Crown in August 1992. It was as strong a passing of the torch as I've ever seen.

Clashes with Toshiaki Kawada and Kenta Kobashi (particularly in 1993) also deserve note. Both were almost perfect opponents stylistically for "The Lariat"; they were young upstarts who had their eyes on the prize, and just had no quit in them, even when going head on against a wrecking machine.

Hansen's WCW runs were short and sweet, though presumably anything but that for his opposition. In his first go-around in WCW in 1990, Hansen had a series of squash matches that legitimately broke noses, cracked skulls (no, really!) and detached shoulders. Physicality was the name of his game, and no matter what he threw, from kneedrops to elbows, hard kicks, and stiff chops – it all looked great. There was no wasted motion, and nothing looked "off".

When it came to physical contact, there were no holes in Stan Hansen matches.

His bouts with Lex Luger at *Hallowe'en Havoc* and *Starrcade* in 1990 were quite good, and Hansen later went out of his way to say that Luger took it all and never complained, which is a testament to "The Total Package". Back in Memphis, Austin Idol couldn't quite be afforded the same compliment.

Two months after the match in which Luger regained the U.S. title from Hansen, the latter wrestled Big Van Vader at *WrestleWar '91*, which in turn was a year after the most talked-about incident in Hansen's career. On February 10, 1990, he and Vader met at the Tokyo Dome in an All Japan versus New Japan battle. No longer a young buck, Vader brought the fight to Hansen with ferocity, and the blows back and forth elicited oohs and ahhs throughout the stadium. This match got so wild that Hansen actually knocked Vader's eye out of its socket, and when as Vader removed his mask and unveiled a drooping eyeball that was literally hanging out of his face, the crowd reaction was unlike almost anything you've ever seen or heard in pro wrestling.

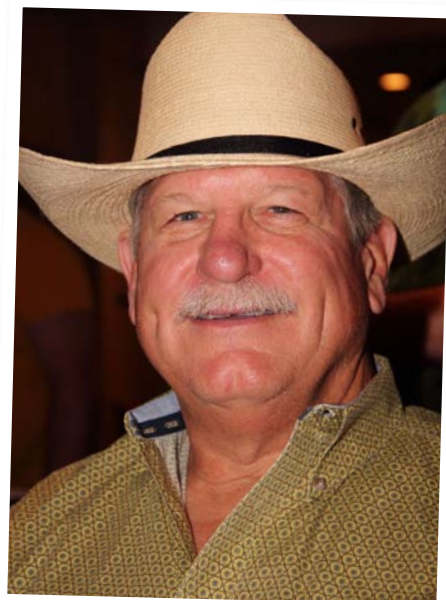
THE CHANGING FACE OF WRESTLING

Make no mistake about it, Stan Hansen's form of roughhouse pro wrestling is a lost art these days. Hell, someone with his exact look – which was itself fearsome, by the way – may not even get hired after showing up for an NXT tryout: "Oh my god – where's the abs?!" That's an unfortunate reality of how modern day pro wrestling leans far too much on aesthetics – seriously, imagine pro wrestling if it never had Adrian Adonis, Dick Murdoch, Buddy Rose or Terry Gordy as stars –

and less on in-ring capabilities. There may have been nothing pretty or "centerfold" when it came to a man like Stan Hansen, but fans the world over liked it that way!

If there's one comfort, it's that I can just hit up YouTube and bask in the gritty, hard-nosed antics of Hansen at any time, just as I did before writing this column. So many of Hansen's matches have that big fight atmosphere, which comes not just from the production or the hype for the show, but the knowledge that you're going to see someone get their ass kicked.

I'd like to see WWE extend an invite to Stan Hansen to be in its Hall of Fame this year, especially since *WrestleMania* is taking place in Dallas. He's more than deserving as a candidate, and it would be a fitting honor to induct him, and allow him "go home" once again.



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KRIS TRAVIS

IN ISSUE 118 OF **FSM**, KRIS TRAVIS DETAILED HIS BATTLE WITH STOMACH CANCER, AND HIS PLANS TO RETURN TO THE RING. HERE, HE CONFIDES THAT HIS SUCCESSFUL COMEBACK HAS PROVED SHORTLIVED.

I chose to make my comeback at Preston City Wrestling for [promoter] Steven Fludder because before I got poorly, he was the guy who believed in me the most, so we pencilled August in with me wrestling Sha Samuels. I just remember I was feeling good at the time: the scans were showing nothing, I was feeling healthy, and I was back at the gym. Body confidence has always been important to me, and with my surgery, I'd lost a lot of weight, so I was training a lot: five, six days a week. I was eating as much as I could even though it wasn't a lot, because of my stomach, but I was in the best shape I could be in, and I think I surprised a lot of people with the shape I was in. I was by no means the person I was before, but I was a shape and size where I wasn't ashamed when I took my shirt off.

On the day of the show, I just remember being really, really nervous. It's weird; I'd not been wrestling for so long that even though everyone was still my friend, it was like walking into a room of strangers. Even though it felt right, it felt really unfamiliar; it was a real shock, and it took a lot of getting used to. I turned up really nervous, found Sha, and we put together what was one of the best matches of my career, before or after the illness, because there was just so much emotion in the room – just raw energy. The match flowed; it went by without us even trying. Although I was really nervous and really, really scared, Sha – the great professional that he is – carried me through. It felt good to be back on top of the world.



Kris Travis takes down Sha Samuels at PCW Showdown, in the build to their August 7 bout

“I KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG”

It was pretty quick after my comeback match that I knew something was wrong. PCW had been on August 7, and the next day I worked for Pro Wrestling Elite, and then the day after that I did Southside, so it was a busy comeback weekend. Everything felt fine; I felt strong, and as good as I've ever been. My body was obviously aching, but it was all normal.

The week after that, I had a full schedule. Then, on Monday, August 17, 10 days after my comeback, I had a hospital check-up for one year after my surgery, and they said everything was fine and looking good.

Only three days later, all of a sudden in the middle of the night, I got massive, massive stomach cramps to the point where they were waking me up. I was in so much pain that I was climbing the walls. That weekend, I did three shows, but I still had the stomach cramps, couldn't eat, and had diarrhoea. It was at that point I kind of thought something was wrong; I half-trusted my instinct, but I also half-trusted what the hospital had told me.

I managed to get through that weekend of shows, but all the next week the cramps got worse and worse. I was going to the doctors, and they said they thought I'd got food poisoning, and because of my operation it would take longer to go through my system, but I was going to be fine.

The following weekend I had to cancel my shows, and the week after I was still really ill, but it was coming up to the PROGRESS Wrestling show, which was a big one for me. I really wanted to have my comeback match there against Marty Scurll, and for it to be great, so even though I was in a lot of pain and I knew something was wrong, I still went ahead and did the match. I got carried a ridiculous amount; Marty did an amazing job.

But I noticed I'd lost a lot of weight even just from when I had my comeback match, so the alarm bells were ringing. This time, I took the initiative more: I told the doctors they got it wrong last year. I was just being pushy with them, saying to please just trust me this time. I phoned my specialist and kept on him, badgering him, and he told me to go to the hospital and just have a scan just in case.

At this point I was just hoping for the best, because the symptoms were nowhere near the same as the first time round; I was holding on to that, even though I knew it was quite bad. I spent a couple of nights



© ROBBIE BOYD

“Not only did I have to take in the shock of being told, ‘You’ve got cancer again’, but they said they didn’t know what they’d be able to do, because it couldn’t be operated on this time”

Kris Travis is a British pro wrestler who has worked for a plethora of organisations, including Preston City Wrestling, PROGRESS Wrestling, and Southside Wrestling. He achieved a hat-trick in 2013 by being voted by **FSM** readers as the UK Wrestler of the Year, one half of the UK Tag Team of the Year (with Martin Kirby) and one half of the UK Match of the Year, in a PCW bout against Chris Masters.

in the hospital, and then I got the news that unfortunately the scan showed cancer on the wall of my stomach. They said that even though it was there, it shouldn't have been causing me any pain, so that's when they looked a bit further and saw a little bit was blocking my bowel. That's what the pain was: all my food trying to rush to my bowel when it was blocked, so my stomach was just contracting and making life impossible.

Not only did I have to take in the shock of being told, "You've got cancer again", but they said they didn't know what they'd be able to do, because it couldn't be operated on this time. That's all the information they had. I just remember being in a big haze and wanting to get out of the hospital, so I went that night; I just went home without speaking to the doctor because I couldn't believe what had happened.

The next day I was still in so much pain that it was stupid for me not to have stayed, and I ended up going back. Because of the bowel blockage, which meant I couldn't get any nourishment, they had to do surgery to create a stoma, which is an opening in my torso. They rewired my bowel to be further up in my stomach, so instead of having to pass through the blockage, it would pass through the stoma into a bag which is outside my stomach, and acts as my bowel. I have to wear this bag all the time now, which basically means I go to the toilet outside of my stomach.

It was quite a big adjustment when they told me, but there was no argument: it was either that, or die.

As soon as I got told the cancer had returned, I was hysterical again; all I was thinking about was dying, and alternately begging that I'd be okay. As soon as I was back in hospital, had the surgery, and calmed down a bit, I realised I'd better make a statement because there's no way I would ever be able to wrestle again. Even in the best case scenario, I've still got this stoma bag, so it couldn't ever work. I knew that straight away, and thought I should announce my retirement.

LEARNING TO ADAPT

There was no hesitation in my mind, but it was so hard to get used to. For example, there's what I wear. There's the whole wrestling mentality of wanting to look as big and buff as you can, so everyone buys clothes that are really tight to show off. Most of my wardrobe was like that, so everything showed the outline of my bag, and made me really self-conscious, so I had to buy a whole new wardrobe.

It's been three weeks as I'm writing this, and I'm finally getting used to wearing it, changing it every day, and knowing what to do and what to wear so that although I'll know I've got this, which is horrible enough, other people don't need to see that I'm walking around with it.



Davey Blaze grounds Travis with a weighty chinlock at WWE on August 8



Travis has continued to receive message of support from around the world, including from one of his best opponents, NXT's Finn Balor

Knowing I won't wrestle again is tough. Just watching any kind of wrestling pulls at my heartstrings, it really does. It makes me anxious to think, "Wow, I'm really never going to be able to do that again." It's the only thing I'm good at in life. Being in touch with everyone from wrestling, fans and friends, means it's not an option to ever lose touch with them – we've been through way too much – but on the flip side it does pull at the heartstrings every time I talk about something on Twitter, or I'm texting my friends and they're talking about what matches are coming up this weekend. It's something I'm going to get used to, and hopefully it'll get easier in time.

As well as my mum, my girlfriend has been with me all through this, helping me out when I can't do things. I've gone from being the strong wrestler who would lift things to the roles being reversed. I couldn't have asked for a better girlfriend, and with the diagnosis this time, we've both realised that life, no matter what, is short,

and we both are with the person that we want to be with forever, so we got engaged.

People on Twitter recently created a Kris Travis Day to cheer me up, and help raise awareness and money for the cancer charity that helped me out. It's funny, because we got engaged on Kris Travis Day, which has got a nice ring to it. We're happily engaged, and hoping to get married pretty soon.

The next step in the treatment – the only step – is another round of chemotherapy. I'm really praying it is going to be the way forward, with surgery not being an option.

Getting back on the road, not to wrestling but back to being normal and being a healthy human being, is all I can hope and pray for.

.....

Please consider donating what you can to Cavendish Cancer Care, a Sheffield charity supported by Kris. Text Trav01 £2, Trav01 £5 or Trav01 £10 to 70070.

STAR STRUCK

To celebrate Kris Travis' career in and out of the ring, FSM asked his peers to share their memories of the time they spent travelling and working with the man known as "The Shooting Star".

THE EARLY YEARS

UK STAR EL LIGERO: Kris was at either the first or second training session I went to, so we worked a lot of shows together in the early years. We'd done one charity show at a fairground where the pay-off was free access to the rides and food, which was okay because we wanted to get as many bookings as we could. When we were booked on another charity show "in a fairground" in Lincolnshire, we thought it would be the same thing, but it took ages to find the place. It turned out to be a little garden sale in what was effectively a big driveway, and we passed all these tables of second-hand books and ornaments to eventually find a tiny 12-foot ring at the bottom. It had been sat there for hours, so the canvas was roasting hot, there were no seats, probably 10 to 15 people watching, and there was broken glass around the ring.

I think that was my first singles match with Kris. We always used to joke with each other that for years we had no chemistry in the ring; we were so obsessed with getting stuff in, and we had a friendly rivalry, doing backflips and trying to outdo each other to the detriment of the match. It was a good few years before it clicked, and we realised we have to work with each other to help the match.

PROJECT EGO

PROJECT EGO PARTNER MARTIN KIRBY: We were never meant to team up. Kris was doing a mystery partner storyline on the next IPW show, but it wasn't supposed to be me. However, on one of the smaller IPW trainee shows, Kris was working with Tracy Smothers, who I'd driven about a lot on a previous visit. Tracy demanded I come in to the ring for a dance-off spot, and Kris and I did such a ridiculous routine that people online started demanding I be picked as his mystery partner.

It's quite often overlooked how much real partnership there is in a tag team. You work together on ideas, your look, your tag team offence, and you have to be on the same wavelength about how the matches will go. It was never much effort with Kris; we were very natural, and hit it off because our characters complemented each other, and the fans could see that.

Some of our best ideas came from stupid jokes we came up with to fill time while travelling.

IN THE RING

REFEREE CRAIG ANDERSON: Kris was in one of the first big matches I refereed. A few minutes in, there was a "double down" (both wrestlers lying hurt on the mat) so I started the count and got to five pretty quick. Then, from the canvas below I hear, pretty loud, "Slow the fuck down!" After that, the counts were very, very slow!

On that first night, I was a nobody and Trav had been around for 10-plus years, yet he made me feel like a superstar. He was excellent and gave me advice I still carry out to this day.

PCW CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION BUBBLEGUM: My best memory with Kris was headlining an NBW show in a Streetfight that had been building for months. We used tables, cooking trays, a Hoover and even an ironing board. Still, to this day, that match will always be my favourite, and the match that brought our friendship even closer.

AOW BOOKER AND PCW COMMENTATOR GREG LAMBERT:

I commentated on his comeback match against Sha Samuels. That night, Trav told an incredible and emotional story, and his selling was exceptional. It was like watching Shawn Michaels when he returned from back surgery in 2002; like Shawn, Trav knew he had physical limitations, and couldn't throw himself around at a non-stop pace like he used to, so he worked smartly with mannerisms, body language, and made every move mean something. The result was a match I will personally never forget.

"Trav told an incredible and emotional story, and his selling was exceptional; it was like watching Shawn Michaels when he returned from back surgery in 2002"



As Project Ego, Martin Kirby and Kris Travis were always clowning around, including in this 2009 photo shoot

© TONY KNOX

THE LIGHTER SIDE

MARTIN KIRBY: Other wrestlers used to joke that no matter how ridiculous an idea was, we were the two guys who could pull it off. We dressed as our opponents or the Ego World Order; we did a match wrapped entirely in bubble-wrap; Kris went backstage during a six-man against Lion Kid and came back dressed as a monkey!

There was always a time and a place. You had to decide if you were going to do the whole match as comedy. With the monkey bit, we did it early in the match so that we could then turn things around and get more serious at the business end. When we worked with Grado and Mad Man Manson, we knew the whole thing would be comedy, so all four of us could start a conga line. You can't turn around and start doing big moves after that - it's past the point of no return!

PROGRESS CO-OWNER JIM SMALLMAN:

Project Ego and T-Bone versus The Bhangra Knights and Grado at a PROGRESS show was one of the funniest matches that I have ever seen live. At one point, my laughter from that hurt me nearly as much as my beating from Jimmy Havoc later on. You could see Trav and Kirby trying desperately to make T-Bone break character and laugh. That match was then eclipsed by the one they had on the next show, against Grado and Mad Man Manson, where every single person in the Garage had tears of laughter streaming down their face.

BEHIND THE SCENES

UK VETERAN RUFFNECK:

Backstage, myself, Kris and Joey Hayes would have this imaginary finishing move called The DNA. To this day, we still don't know what it is or what it looks like, but we knew it sounded great and would be the most awesome move of all-time. If one of us was going through matches backstage, then you can guarantee that Kris, me or Joey would interrupt one another and say, "Stop there, just duck one and DNA!" and then your train of thought was ruined because we would just laugh at our pathetic joke.

MANAGER MELANIE PRICE: You'll get lots of heart-warming stories, I'm sure, but I just want people to know: Kris Travis is possibly the most annoying person I've ever met. Backstage at shows, his antagonising was constant. His favourite party piece was taking my photo when I wasn't paying attention (and usually looking worse for wear). I would only realise when it was too late: when he had uploaded it and tagged me in it on Twitter! My revenge tactics were never as good.

Kris made me laugh, made me furious, taught me a lot, and was there for me in low moments. An amazing wrestler, but more importantly he is a man with so much courage, and a huge heart.

EL LIGERO: Travelling with him was never boring, never dull. With some trips you run out of stuff to talk about after a couple of hours, but that never happened with him, not even on five or six-hour trips.



Martin Kirby prepares to stick the boot in to break up the tangle of Travis, Joey Hayes and El Ligero

KRIS TRAVIS, THE MAN

JIM SMALLMAN: He told me about his illness at a gig in Sheffield, and I remember being gutted, not just because it was happening to a mate but also because it seemed so unfair to be happening to a lad who was in his prime. I recall Trav - this is the kind of lad he is - was worried about telling me because I'd lost my mum to cancer earlier that year. He approached his illness with a bravery and a sense of humour that I certainly wouldn't have been able to muster.

WRESTLER AND PWE OWNER

LIONHEART: His passion for wrestling was matched only by his passion for his friends. I remember when I got injured, Trav - along with a couple of other close friends - fell asleep on the hospital floor because he refused to leave my side. He'll never know just how much that really meant to me.

EL LIGERO: He's just funny. No matter what is going on with him, he has the ability to put a positive and humorous spin on it. There was a time when he had a notoriously short temper in matches if something went wrong, but listening to him rant about it on the way home, it was always done in an upbeat way.

MARTIN KIRBY: Even in the later stages before he first got diagnosed with cancer, he was completely on fire. He had an incredible match with Marty Scurll about a month before the diagnosis, and he was already very ill at that point. Even in the match with Mark Andrews for *British Bootcamp* when he was even closer to being diagnosed, he was so good that he was selected to go to America.

Even in the face of severe illness, he was always someone who was willing to sacrifice his own well-being in the name of entertainment, and looked to put on the best show possible.



© ROBBIE BOYD

MAGNUS OPUS

THE NEXT MONTH IS A BIG ONE FOR NICK ALDIS, INCLUDING THE GFW DATES IN GRIMSBY AND KING'S LYNN. HE TAKES A BREATHER BEFORE IT ALL KICKS OFF TO MUSE ABOUT WRESTLING ALONGSIDE SEAN WALTMAN, STUDYING HIS CRAFT AT HOME, AND A VISUAL ELEMENT OF THE SPORT THAT MAY BE LOST FOREVER.

After a docile couple of weeks focusing mainly on book promotion and managing my responsibilities for Global Force Wrestling's UK shows, I'm getting ready for hectic home stretch of October. I'm excited to be leaving for Hanover, Germany in a couple of days to be part of what I think will be a great weekend for POW (Power of Wrestling), booked by the great Tony St Clair. Then, after a couple of days at home, I head to Las Vegas once again for the third and final show in the *GFW Aaped* series to crown new Tag Team, Women's, Next-Gen and Global heavyweight champions. And, because life is never fair, I have to go straight from the ring to catch a red-eye flight through Toronto to get to London in time to drive to Cardiff to appear at the Cardiff Film and Comic Con – I hope to see you there! There's then a couple of days of preparation before the GFW UK shows in Grimsby (again, I hope to see you there) and King's Lynn (just show up, okay?) before a super-fun PCW Hallowe'en show in Preston (go if you want; just kidding, go!) and then Amsterdam (flights are cheap, go there too) for my first appearance for Dutch Pro Wrestling.

I'm actually grateful for the respite leading up to this, which is not something I usually say; I like being busy,

and I've always thrived in high-demand situations. But in a recent tag team match where I paired up with one of my favourite wrestlers, Sean Waltman aka X-Pac, I jarred my back and neck enough to really bother me for a few days, enough to make a taking-no-chances doctor's appointment to see someone when I get back from Germany. I kept it to myself on the day, as Sean suffered a nasty injury in the match, too, tearing his bicep. He soldiered through the finish like the pro he is, and after a few choice words for our opponents who were, in their defence, very green, he even calmed down and offered some valuable insight to me and all the guys in the locker-room with stories, advice and philosophy. In my humble opinion, if his insight can be utilised effectively, he could be a hugely valuable asset to the business for years to come. He has a brilliant mind for the business and articulates it very well, so I hope that he can become an agent, producer or creative member somewhere, because we (both performers and fans of the business) would all benefit.

THE SNAKE HAS SIX SENSES

Speaking of brilliant minds, if you haven't listened to the "Stone Cold" Steve Austin podcasts with



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“If Sean Waltman’s insight can be utilised effectively, he could be a hugely valuable asset to the business for years to come”



© MIKE KALASNIK

Everyone would benefit from taking heed of Sean Waltman's intelligence for pro wrestling



If it's more of Nick that you're after, you can catch him in action on Challenge TV, where you'll see him as Magnus on Impact Wrestling. Also check out Nick's official website at www.NickAldis.com, find his fan page on Facebook (Nick Aldis aka Magnus aka Oblivion) or follow him through Twitter by searching for [@MagnusOfficial](https://twitter.com/MagnusOfficial).

Jake Roberts (here with Bob Orton Jr.) imparts many pearls of wisdom on *The Steve Austin Show*

Jake “The Snake” Roberts, DDP and Scott Hall, you need to. Austin has really honed his skills as an interviewer, and I was so compelled by his interview with Jake and Scott Hall in particular. Razor Ramon was one of my first heroes in wrestling, as were all the members of “The Kliq”, even though I had no idea about that at the time. I got my fix of wrestling study this week mainly by watching mid-'90s Kliq matches; there's a fantastic tag match on YouTube with Shawn Michaels and Diesel taking on Razor Ramon and The 1-2-3 Kid (the aforementioned Sean Waltman). The pace and chemistry is off the charts, and as much as I hate to use the term “workrate”, it is a fitting use of the phrase when referring to the guys in this match, particularly Michaels, who bounces around for Razor and Kid like there's no tomorrow.

One thing that's always been ironic to me is that at different times in their careers, Shawn Michaels and Triple-H have both been bad-mouthed for their attitudes towards others or their alleged behaviour in the back, but from my vantage point, when they were on top, they both spent a lot of their screen-time putting bumps on their bump cards to make others look good. Don't believe me? Go back and watch a few Michaels matches from 1997-98, or Triple-H from 2000-01.

I'll wait. (™ Chris Jericho.)

FLASH IN THE PAN?

Speaking of Michaels and Jericho, unless you just started watching wrestling today, you know that Michaels has had more classics than many of us have had actual matches. But one of my all-time favourite “Heartbreak Kid” bouts is with Jericho at *WrestleMania XIX*. That's a great show all around, and for some reason, I love the visual nature of it; it was a little darker, but still looked so incredibly well-produced. It reminded me of mid-1990s New Japan, in its prime; the show looked like a rock concert.

Watching this match, a thought occurred to me: is it me, or do we not get those great “sea of flash bulbs” moments in wrestling anymore? Is it because 99% of people are taking pictures with their phones or filming? The most iconic one in my mind is Stone Cold's entrance. Is that a part of wrestling that's gone forever?

Am I old enough to start saying, “Remember when...”?

Oh god.

Before I go too far down this rabbit hole, I'd like to thank in advance all the fans who come out to see me in Cardiff, Grimsby, King's Lynn, and Preston, and thank them even more if they buy my book *The Superstar Body*. We're looking ahead to 2016 for Global Force live events in the UK, and hope to bring more of the core GFW roster



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like Sonjay Dutt, Chris Mordetzky (formerly Masters) Brian Myers (Curt Hawkins) and PJ Black with us. PJ, of course, is from South Africa and a big rugby fan, so whatever you do, *do not remind him* about Japan beating the Springboks in the World Cup. He'd really hate that. If you did decide to keep slipping simple Japanese phrases – “Arigato!” – into a conversation with him, that would probably bug him, too.

So I definitely would not do that.
Stay silly, my friends.



*The first Michaels vs. Jericho feud culminated in a classic at *WrestleMania XIX**



© MEGAN ELICE MEADOWS

If you happen to meet PJ Black at a show, definitely do not remind him about Japan's rugby World Cup victory over South Africa



THE WRESTLER'S WRESTLER

Despite not working for some of the more fashionable groups, the name James Mason is one you'll hear in reverence from wrestlers around the country. John Lister finds out more about one of the country's finest talents.

James Mason is a 22-year veteran of British wrestling, widely respected for his work ethic and experience, especially given that he's only 36. Furthermore, despite not featuring for the fashionable groups of the last few years, he's the man to whom many will point when asked about the best grappler in the UK.

Mason (born James Atkins, but renamed after the *A Star Is Born* actor) was once billed as Britain's youngest wrestler, as he started out in 1993, when he was just 14. He was an avid fan as a child, attending several shows a week with his father, and got into the business by helping out with odd jobs before shows and occasionally messing about in the ring, where eventually other wrestlers taught him a few of the basics. There was no formal training, and he learnt on the job, an approach he tells **FSM** made him the wrestler he is today.

"When I started, there weren't any training schools, but there was enough work to do five, six shows a week, so that was your training. I don't believe you learn to work and be a good wrestler by a training school. You can learn all the moves, but it's not about the moves to me; it's all about how you do in the ring, how you entertain and how you perform, so the only way to really learn is actually being in there, working five, six nights a week, wrestling great wrestlers who teach you on the job.

"If I had to get in the job now and go to training schools, I would be a completely different type of

wrestler. I see lads now and they've got the ability - the lads now, ability wise, are better than what the lads were 20, 30, 40 years ago - but there isn't that rapport with the crowd."

TEENAGE KICKS

While some of his early matches were against larger opponents - he had the frightening experience of taking an elbow drop from Giant Haystacks when he was only 15 - Mason soon began working with some of the premier lighter wrestlers from the TV era.

"In my first week I was in with people like Danny Collins - I was thrown in at the deep end. I was there purely to get thrown about, to learn how to sell, to learn the job but not have any prominent role.

"My first year I seemed to wrestle Steve Grey more than anyone else, and what a learning curve it was to wrestle someone like him. I credit him for everything that I do now. He was the ultimate; everyone talks about Johnny Saint and Johnny Kidd, and they're fantastic, I can't take a thing away from them, but Grey was just as smooth, but with this little edge: he snarls, he's got a little niggly with what he does, and to me he makes it look real. Every match I've ever seen Steve Grey in, he was real."

Early opponents Grey, Collins and Mal Sanders had all started as teenagers themselves (Collins described his brutal introduction to the business

He was one of the last trained by that [World Of Sport] generation, by travelling and working with them, but he's still young enough to make an impact anywhere.

- FORMER WWE STAR AND CURRENT ICW CHAMPION DREW GALLOWAY

Some of Mason's first matches were with well-known competitors like Danny Collins

in Issue 108) but Mason says he was well treated as a youngster in both the ring and the locker-room.

"Being 14, I just kept quiet. I said nothing to anyone, and after a year [or] two years these people started giving me a bit of time - they'd sort of welcome me in. I think I was very lucky that I wasn't bullied, I wasn't picked on; you hear stories about what happened [to some people], but nothing happened to me, I was treated okay. Danny knew what it was like to be the young boy on the show, so he looked out for me and thought he could take me under his wing a bit."

That's not to say Mason didn't have his hairy moments. While working for Orig Williams and wrestling on S4C's *Res/lo* as "Jesse James", he had a memorable night on a tour of Ireland when he woke up with a major hangover and a shaven eyebrow.

"We did a TV show for the *Res/lo* on the Saturday, and on the tape you can see that there's half an eyebrow. I had to go back to school on the Monday, so it was a bit of a weird weekend! At the time I wasn't very happy, but I look back now and find it very funny. I was completely drunk that night; I was out drinking with Tony St. Clair, Johnny South, and Drew McDonald - big, well-established wrestlers who can drink and drink. I was a 15-year-old kid that had a few pints when I shouldn't even be drinking, so I suppose that was a little lesson I learnt that night."

LEARNING THE ROPES

Intoxication aside, it only took a couple of years before Mason started to come into his own in the ring.

"About when I was 16, there was a moment I realised I could maybe do the job a bit; I understood the job, I understood what gets the reaction. I was in a prominent place on the show. I wasn't just in the second match to do a straight 20-minute wrestling bout; I was in matches that had a bit of meaning and a bit of presence to them. I was starting to move up the bill a bit, and all of a sudden my name was on the poster, I was doing the gees (angles), I was winning the Rumbles."

That's not to say that Mason had been unhappy in his initial position on the show. Indeed, several promoters who speak highly of him today point to his understanding of how a match fits into a night's entertainment, and that going all-out to steal the show isn't always appropriate.

"I went to so many shows with my dad - three or four shows a week - and I remember the whole show being a package. I remember how the shows were planned out, and I liked how the whole show went. I don't remember leaving thinking, 'Well, that match wasn't good; that one was better; wow - that match was good!' I just liked the whole thing of it, and I believe every match has a place in the show. I know if you're in this particular match, then you're there for that particular thing. Because I was a punter for such a long time, I can appreciate an actual show as opposed to just one match."

Speaking in Simon Garfield's 1996 book *The Wrestling*, Mason recalled wrestling in front of just eight people at a caravan park. Thankfully, that remains a record low in his career, but he remembers such events being a particular challenge.

"It happened regularly that we'd do holiday camps in the afternoon, and there may be 10, maybe 20



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people there. Even those matches were still a learning curve, because I believe that if there's eight people or 8,000 people, they're still expecting to see the show, so they deserve to see whatever you can give them.

"They can actually be harder than doing matches in front of 500 people. In your head, when you see 500 people, you know which side of the crowd is going to be louder. You know what you can do; you know as a rule that 9 out of 10 things you normally do are going to work. A [tiny crowd] is a blank canvas, and you let the crowd dictate where you want to go. Sometimes they sit there quietly, and they're more embarrassed than you are. Sometimes one person there will be having a great time, and you can just work off one person, and everyone else will react because of that one person. It's just pot luck, and you hope for the best, really."

While today's crowds are usually considerably larger, the holiday camp circuit remains a key part of Mason's schedule.

"For me, every holiday camp can be different. We do the Butlins, which are a lot more of a big show with pyrotechnics and they make a real big production of it, and then you have the Haven camps, which are a bit smaller. You can have some that have just a hundred people in. No two shows are the same; you might have the same type of match and be on with the same person, but how that show goes can be different from time to time."

And while a tiny crowd can make for an awkward performance, Mason doesn't believe that bigger is always better.

"I still like doing little community centres in front of 100 people. Some of the shows I do for Welsh Wrestling, the crowds are so grateful that you've

James is one of the best and most hard-working wrestlers I know. I have nothing but respect for him.

- FORMER WCW AND WWE WRESTLER
DAVE TAYLOR

Work ethic aside, his ability in the ring is phenomenal. I've never seen a bad James Mason match, and he has been in there with some rotters... Although he'd never admit it, the man is a true British wrestling legend.

- UK STAR NATHAN CRUZ



During his career, Mason has wrestled everyone from Steve Grey to Gangrel

Frankie Sloan and Mason made the most of a rushed trip to work for TNA

James is somebody that can captivate an audience in any country with the fundamentals of what British wrestling was built on. A class act in and out of the ring.

- TWO-TIME TNA X-DIVISION CHAMPION
ROCKSTAR SPUD



© TONY KNOX

gone to their town to wrestle; they don't see things like this, and they really appreciate what you do.

"It's a lovely feeling to do those sort of shows."

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

At the other end of the spectrum, arguably Mason's highest-profile matches of his career on an international basis, appearing as part of the TNA America's Cup tournament in 2004, were not a particular milestone to him at the time.

"The weird thing about the TNA trip was that we didn't realise TNA was a big thing; it was just a company we got asked to work for. We didn't get asked until the Saturday [before] we left on the Monday, so it was a real rush job. We weren't prepared for anything, and then when we got there, we were on with Mexicans that we hadn't really wrestled before.

"I think they just wanted us to be British. I don't think they wanted the typical Mexican-style match; they wanted a bit of a clash of styles and to see if it worked, and looking back at the matches, I think it did work a bit.

"I think it was only ever a one-off trip, which we knew and were happy with, and we got treated well there. It was our first real taste of getting treated right; we got picked up nicely, we got treated well with money, we got allowances, so I think for us it was a nice thing. But myself and Frankie [Sloan], we sort of ruined it really because we treated it as a working holiday. We went out and had a few too many drinks most nights when we should have been training and getting in early to speak to this person or that person about the night's show. We were just idiots, really, but we had a great time, and I think we knew it was going to be a one-off trip, so we believed we should make the most of it."

That isn't to say Mason has any regrets about the path his career has taken.

"Everyone tells me I could have done this, I'm underrated, I could have travelled here [et cetera]. I'm still not good with computers and the internet, so to try to market myself is not something I've ever been good at. I probably should have learnt a little bit of that. I think there was a time when I probably could have pushed myself, but then I realised there was still plenty of work in this country, and I get three or

four days a week off where I can spend time with my family, and then at the weekends I go to work, so it's a good life for me.

"I could have travelled more, there's more I could have done, but would I have been happier? I'm not sure; I may have had a few more pounds in the bank, but I know at the moment, I'm in a very good place, and I've still got regular work."

CALL IT IN THE RING

Mason also makes guest appearances at training schools and seminars, though he admits it's not his preferred setting for passing on knowledge.

"I don't do many moves. I like to think I'm very good in the ring; I get a good reaction and I know how to work the crowd, but actually move-wise, I'm a simple person. I've got a set few moves that I do, and I believe I do them well. So when I'm doing a training thing, a lot of the moves that I can teach, people can already do them. They can do a lot more moves than me, but where I think I can teach is where I watch them wrestle in the evening, and I can talk them through why they should have done this, why they should have done that.

"I still watch shows - I always have done. I think I'm still a bit of a punter; the wrestlers see that I'm watching the shows, and always seem to ask for advice, and I think I give them a different sort of perspective on it. I don't say, "Well, this move was good, that move was good"; I give them the, "Well, the crowd took to this..." I'm more than happy to talk to anyone, especially if they're new in the job."

That said, Mason does find it just a little odd to be in the veteran position.

"In my mind, I'm still 18, I haven't aged at all, and I'm still a kid. I still believe in my dream. I'm still around certain wrestlers that I'm in awe of, but all of a sudden you turn up at a show and you realise you're in your 30s and everyone else is barely 21, so you realise that you're the oldest on the team by maybe 10 years."

That experience isn't just in years but, thanks to Mason's schedule, in matches as well.

"When I started, we were having 15 shows a week, that was a regular thing, and on a couple of shows you would be working twice, so it would be easy to do 20 matches a week. This summer, on average I was doing 12 shows a week; that was tough, but it was doable. You get in a routine, and you just plough through it. Sometimes it can be easier to do 10 shows a week than doing two shows a week, if you have a good team around you.

"I like money, you see, so the more shows I do, the more money I get, and I can just get my head down and keep going!"

JUST WARMING UP

Perhaps counter-intuitively, Mason finds a busy schedule is easier on his body.

"The only time I have been hurt and aching through wrestling is when I've taken time off. There was one Christmas, maybe 10-12 years ago, that I took six weeks off... Ugh, I felt awful! I just couldn't get back into it. The more I do, the better.

"On the camps this summer, some people were doing 12 shows a week and still trying to wrestle like they were doing one show a week, trying to go crazy,

I've wrestled thousands of opponents in my time, but James Mason is one of, if not the best wrestler I've been in the ring with.

- FORMER NXT TALENT
AND TNA BRITISH
BOOTCAMP PARTICIPANT
RAMPAGE BROWN

I've been lucky enough to be around him on a full-time basis since 2001, and as a 17-year-old there was nobody I looked up to more than James Mason. He was everything that I wanted to become, and the wrestler I modelled myself on most.

- FORMER BRITISH LIGHT-
HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
DEAN ALLMARK

Mason now spends his time working for Brian Dixon's long-running All Star Wrestling



© TONY KNOX

and by the fifth or sixth show they're not the person they started as. You've got to pace yourself; you've got to work differently. I'm not saying give any less to the people, but there's certain moves and certain things you just can't do every day - you have to save that.

"I injure myself less the more I do. I do a different type of match to what other people do. I'm always thinking about the next show, so I'm going to be as careful as I can and still have good matches, but I need to wrestle tomorrow, so I don't want to hurt myself tonight."

Mason also believes that wrestlers who try to do too much in a match can miss out.

"They're so fixated on the match, the moves, what they've arranged. Their heads are so cabbaged and so wound up with everything they're thinking and everything they're trying to do, they forget to enjoy it. The best lesson I ever learnt was to enjoy it, because this is an amazing job: you get to see the world, you get to meet people, you'll never be doing the same thing twice. It's a fantastic job."

While many wrestlers with more than two decades in the profession might consider hanging up their boots, Mason has no intention of doing so soon.

"I can't even think about stopping. I'm 36 now, and people say when you're 40, that's probably time to call it a day, but I can keep going for a while yet. The matches I do, I can keep going. I don't think they're too dated yet; I don't think people are looking at them thinking that I'm an old man.

"A lot of older wrestlers say that you know when it's time because the crowd tells you it's time, and you don't get the reaction anymore. I don't want to be a wrestler that has to go on with this person or that person just to get a good match from me. But right now, I think I can still go on with anyone, and the matches are as good as they ever were.

"I believe I've got another 20 or 30 years, I really do."



© TONY KNOX

James was a natural when he started, and has just got better as the years have gone by; he can wrestle anyone, any style, and it seems effortless to him. There will not be another one like him now.

- UK LEGEND FRANKIE SLOAN

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- How Kane's 2012 has mirrored his 15-year WWE run
- FSM finishes up with Roddy Piper, this time talking of his time in WCW and WWE
- How Brian Pillman overachieved in both sports and pro wrestling
- FSM explores Ken Anderson run in TNA, and suggests a new role



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- Why Randy Orton has been missing from WWE main events, and what it means for his career
- How Paul Heyman came to be one of the great minds in wrestling
- FSM examines Jeff Hardy's options for 2013
- FSM interviews Ricky Hatton, Frank Shamrock and Terry Funk about coming out of retirement



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- Neither babyface nor heel, FSM looks at the role of the tweener
- FSM delves into the career of the one and only Gaît Haystacks



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- In perhaps the most remarkable article in FSM history, Michelle Billington writes a personal account of her life with The Dynamite Kid
- FSM talks to Edge about his new career after WWE
- As British Bootcamp begins, FSM gets to know the participants
- Why is pro wrestling always labelled as being in bad taste?



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- You have your say with the results of the FSM Reader Awards 2012
- How Antonio Cesaro is entirely deserving of his WWE stardom
- On its 25th anniversary, FSM recalls Hogan vs. Andre on NBC
- Why there could never be another wrestler like the original Sheik
- Steve Austin recalls what it took for him to become a top WWF star



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- How the wrestling world reacted to Cena, Rock, and The Royal Rumble
- FSM goes on tour with TNA
- How a deeper understanding of comedy and tragedy can help fans appreciate the art of pro wrestling
- FSM explains why El Generico is one of the sport's top babyfaces
- How Mark Rocco helped to reinvent British wrestling in the 1970s



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- Why a John Cena title win at WrestleMania doesn't have to be a bad thing
- Hulk Hogan sets the record straight on Bret Hart, Randy Savage, and The Ultimate Warrior
- Steve Austin tells FSM about his first WWE title win
- How The Undertaker became the leader of the WWE locker-room
- FSM examines the career of pro wrestling legend, Harley Race



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- All the WrestleMania XXX action
- FSM talks to Goldust about his remarkable career
- How The Shield's booking is sure to make them stars for years to come
- Why NXT stand-out Paige will make a difference to the Divas division
- How Mr Perfect charmed the world as one of its elite pro wrestlers
- FSM examines the difficulties that deal people encounter as workers and fans of pro wrestling



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- With Hulk Hogan a free agent, FSM looks ahead to WrestleMania XXX
- As Magnus wins the TNA title, FSM reflects on British wrestling's 2013
- How Cody Rhodes and Goldust became such a natural tag team
- FSM investigates the problems behind the UK Take Over Tour
- Does WWE suffer from try to fit in with modern pop culture?
- FSM examines the life of the incompatible Mad Dog Vachon



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- Find out who triumphed in the annual FSM Reader Awards!
- As Batista returns to WWE, FSM ponders plans for The Animal
- Wrestlers and fans alike share their memories of The Royal Rumble
- How the WWF national expansion changed pro wrestling forever
- FSM grills Magnus about his road to the TNA World title
- In an incendiary interview, Ryback lays out his plans for 2014



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- FSM looks back at the career of Bray Wyatt, prior to his match with John Cena at WrestleMania
- How pay-per-view may be a thing of the past thanks to WWE Network
- FSM examines the long-forgotten early career of the late Mae Young
- How ECW's The Night The Line Was Crossed was a watershed moment for the Philadelphia group
- FSM profiles the patriarch of the Knight family, Ricky Knight



ISSUE 104 – APR 2014

- FSM explains how this year's WrestleMania is the most risky since John Cena at WrestleMania
- FSM digs into courtroom papers to examine The Ultimate Warrior's relationship with Vince McMahon
- Shawn Michaels chats about the lesser-known stories in his career
- FSM ponders whether TNA can change the fortunes Samoa Joe
- Bret Hart discusses the influence of the British scene on his career



ISSUE 105 – MAY 2014

- FSM examines The Shield and its prospects, both as a group and as future singles stars
- FSM looks at the post-WrestleMania period, in which WWE will bring in fresh talent from NXT
- Talking up the new talent in TNA, and how they've been given the licence to develop their characters
- FSM recalls Spring Stampede 1999, which was arguably WCW's last great pay-per-view



ISSUE 106 – JUNE 2014

- FSM assesses Daniel Bryan's role now that he is finally WWE World Heavyweight champion
- Remembering the late Ultimate Warrior to discover why he remains the personification of sports entertainment
- Paige chats with FSM about her Divas title victory
- Examining The Undertaker's Streak, and how bookers have handled the end of legendary reigns



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- FSM investigates CM Punk's past to explain why he has now retired
- Why becoming the bearer of bad news has finally led to something good for Wade Barrett
- FSM examines the TV persona of Stephanie McMahon-Levesque
- FSM recalls Steve Austin vs. The Undertaker, and their record TV rating of 15 years ago
- Eric Young describes what winning the TNA World title meant to him



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- FSM looks at Rusev, as WWE tweaks the narrative of the Russian heel of the 1980s
- FSM examines The Usos, who have risen up to take to become one of WWE's best babyface acts
- FSM talks to Gunner, who explains what his life was like in the Marine Corps
- "Rowdy" Roddy Piper offers the benefits of his experience to wrestlers starting in the business



ISSUE 117 – APR 2015

- FSM previews pro wrestling's biggest show of 2015, WrestleMania
- On the event's 30th anniversary, FSM counts down the greatest WrestleMania matches of all-time
- FSM investigates the success of Charlotte, and ponders if she'll be brought up to the main roster
- Bobby Lashley tells FSM why he is better than he ever was in WWE
- FSM remembers the late Scottish grappling legend, Drew McDonald



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- FSM examines how Brock Lesnar saved WrestleMania by signing a new deal with WWE
- FSM investigates the crisis in commentary, especially in WWE
- FSM examines the career of Ric Flair to show how he was the archetypal World champion of the 1980s
- FSM offers why ROH is currently the best wrestling show on television
- FSM talks to Dave Taylor, in another amazing Greetings, Grapple Fans



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- FSM charts Seth Rollins' journey to the WWE title, and delves into the psyche of the man himself
- Now training for an MMA career, FSM talks to CM Punk to find out how he's adapted to a new life
- FSM talks to those who know Luke Harper to establish that he has all the tools to make it to the top
- FSM recalls the In Your House series
- FSM examines the hold Jimmy Havoc has on PROGRESS Wrestling



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- FSM ponders Daniel Bryan's future, and what effect his past has had on his well-being
- FSM discovers why Neville is destined for greatness in WWE
- FSM talks to Kurt Angle about some lesser-discussed topics in his career
- FSM strains the language barrier to converse with former IWP champion Kazuchika Okada
- FSM examines the hold Jimmy Havoc has on PROGRESS Wrestling



ISSUE 121 – AUG 2015

- As John Cena elevates the U.S. title, FSM examines the role of the veteran
- FSM investigates Kevin Owens' rapid rise to the top in WWE
- William Regal explains to FSM what it is that WWE is looking for in NXT talent
- Now that he has recovered from injury, FSM ponders the future for ROH star Adam Cole
- In a two-part piece, FSM documents the history of Joint Promotions



ISSUE 122 – SEPT 2015

- FSM polls its readers to discover why they are tuning out of Raw
- With every show on the Network, FSM presents the definitive list of the Top 50 WWE PPVs of All-Time
- FSM asks Eric Bischoff to go into detail on the beginnings of Monday Nitro
- In the last of a two-part article, FSM documents the history of British powerhouse Joint Promotions
- FSM talks to Ricky Steamboat to get his advice for young wrestlers



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- FSM interviews Sting to find out more about wrestling's enigmatic legend
- FSM waxes lyrical about the life of the late "Rowdy" Roddy Piper
- FSM ponders what's next for Hulk Hogan following his racism row
- "The Million Dollar Man" tells FSM how he became the sport's greatest heel
- Nikki Storm serves FSM her diary from three months' living in Japan
- FSM talks to Tony St. Clair about a career that took him across the world



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- FSM examines failures of WWE branding to answer questions about the future of NXT
- FSM uncovers how Sasha Banks has had to fight for her spot in WWE
- FSM chronicles the history of Vince McMahon's World Bodybuilding Federation
- FSM sits down with Bill Apter to discuss his 45 years in pro wrestling
- Saraya Knight offers advice to female hopefuls on getting into wrestling



ISSUE 077 – MAR 2012

- **FSM** interviews the legendary Hulk Hogan
- How television has influenced pro wrestling, and continues to do so
- Why PWG is the most entertaining indie going
- How Hiroshi Tanahashi turned his NJPW career around
- Why PRIDE FC was the true darling of the MMA fan
- **FSM** reviews UFC Undisputed 3



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- How the Miami crowd will decide the winner of The Rock vs. Cena
- Examining the many Halls of Fame for pro wrestling
- Mick Foley talks up a possible role in Hell in a Cell
- **FSM** profiles the former Chris Hero, NUPW career around
- **FSM** examines the career of Bad News Allen
- Looking back on the 10-year history of Ring of Honor



ISSUE 079 – MAY 2012

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- All the action from WrestleMania weekend
- A look at WWE's stars of tomorrow
- **FSM** recalls the scandals that hurt the WWF in 1992
- Looking back on the early career of Fit Finlay
- How James Storm can still be the man to lead TNA



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- England's favourite son, The British Bulldog, gets a definitive retrospective
- **FSM** delves into the history of heels who heard cheers
- How Capitol Sports paved the way for the WWF
- Bret Hart steps in as Guest Columnist alongside Jim Cornette and Nick Aldis



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- How TV history can guide WWE and TNA's next step
- How Vince McMahon changed in-ring wrestling forever in 2001
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- Why Anderson Silva versus Chael Sonnen is the biggest grudge match in MMA history



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- Why WWE and TNA should make better use of wrestling's veterans
- How Christopher Daniels has long been underappreciated in TNA
- On what would have been his 75th birthday, **FSM** looks back at the life of the one and only Pat Roach



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- **FSM** examines a time of positive change in pro wrestling
- Looking back on 10 years of WWE's World Heavyweight title
- Steve Austin lays down the law on what it means to be a champion
- How SummerSlam 1992 was the peak of the UK wrestling boom
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- How pro wrestling sells the sports we all know and love



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- Why Bam Bam Bigelow was the most selling super-heavyweight in pro wrestling history
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- Why the concept of continuity should be embraced in wrestling
- Can WWE convince Prince Devitt to be a part of their revolution?



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- Can WWE keep Brock Lesnar's momentum going til WrestleMania?
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- How Bill Goldberg became a top star of the Monday Night Wars
- **FSM** chronicles the career of the one and only Jushin Liger



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- With his career in limbo, **FSM** ponders the future of Sheamus
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- **FSM** recalls the WWF vs. USA feud that foreshadowed the Attitude Era
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- Cody Rhodes speaks in detail about his next challenge in WWE
- **FSM** examines the career of one of the UK's greats, Mike Marino



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- **FSM** looks at Daniel Bryan's recent character development as he gets set for SummerSlam
- Paul Heyman speaks out on a career of many highs and lows
- **FSM** explains the background of The Wyatt Family
- **FSM** looks at AJ Styles' new role, and asks it benefits TNA
- **FSM** examines the life of Bruiser Brody, who was so tragically murdered in Puerto Rico in 1988



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- As Chris Jericho leaves WWE for the time being, **FSM** examines another amazing year for Y2J
- With the McMahons angle ready to hit TV screens, **FSM** looks back on the family's history of storylines
- **FSM** chats to Lex Luger about his career in WCW and the WWF
- Steve Austin writes about the changes he's seen in wrestling
- **FSM** profiles the one and only murdered in Puerto Rico in 1988



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- Jim Ross tells **FSM** about his career in Mid-South, WCW, and WWE
- **FSM** examines the critically acclaimed Mid-South territory
- **FSM** profiles perhaps the greatest British wrestler of all-time, Mick McManus



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- **FSM** examines what has made Rob Van Dam such a popular performer for almost 20 years
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- Which wrestlers of the past would illuminate today's WWE?
- As Mchinku Pro tours the UK, **FSM** ponders their influence on the sport
- TNA's Mike Tenay offers his advice for rookie commentators



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- The Ultimate Warrior offers **FSM** the most in-depth interview of his career
- How AJ Lee has become the most valued player in the Divas division
- As Hulk Hogan weighs up a move to WWE, **FSM** ponders the legacy he may leave in TNA
- **FSM** examines why WWE 2K14 is more than just a videogame
- As the NWA turns 65, **FSM** looks at the hold it once had on the sport



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- How history tells us that the Daniel Bryan storyline screwjob may not be best for business
- How Damien Sandow's loss of the MITB briefcase has helped his cause
- **FSM** reveals why Vader was a feared competitor even before his full-time US run
- Scott Hall discusses the best way to break into the wrestling business



ISSUE 109 – SEPT 2014

- **FSM** argues the time is right for Brock Lesnar to take the WWE World Heavyweight title
- Why some rulebreakers have adopted babyface characteristics in today's pro wrestling
- **FSM** looks back on the career of Ricochet, who arguably should be starting in WWE today
- Veteran promoter Brian Dixon describes how he broke in to pro wrestling at just 16 years of age



ISSUE 110 – OCT 2014

- **FSM** ponders whether Dean Ambrose will be allowed to out-shine Roman Reigns on WWE TV
- **FSM** explains why Prince Devitt has the aptitude to become a jewel in the WWE crown
- **FSM** considers why Vince Russo has garnered such a bad reputation
- Michael Elgin talks about reaching the summit of Ring of Honor
- **FSM** reviews PROGRESS Wrestling to discover what makes the group tick



ISSUE 111 – NOV 2014

- With the UK launch pending, **FSM** examines the best and worst of the WWE Network
- **FSM** talks to Drew Galloway about his experiences in WWE and beyond
- As The Great Muta gets ready for Bound For Glory, **FSM** looks back on his legacy in the industry
- **FSM** considers the history of pro wrestling and wrestlers in movies
- **FSM** previews the release of 2K Sports' WWE 2K15



ISSUE 112 – NOV 2014

- As rumours abound, **FSM** questions whether Steve Austin could really return to the ring at WrestleMania
- **FSM** talks to Alberto Del Rio, in an explosive interview about racism and poor pay in WWE
- She's the company's best, but **FSM** wonders why WWE doesn't feel as strongly about Natalya
- As PCW gets set to welcome ROH to the UK, **FSM** finds out what makes the group tick



ISSUE 113 – DEC 2014

- As Sting debuts in WWE, **FSM** wonders what it means for both he and WrestleMania XXI
- Rockstar Spud talks to **FSM** about his life in wrestling, and his love for TNA
- After years of plans gone awry, AAA is back in the mainstream. **FSM** examines the group's 1990s peak
- With Brock Lesnar absent from TV, **FSM** finds out about belt-making
- **FSM** talks to Chris Jericho about what wrestlers can learn from rock stars



ISSUE 114 – JAN 2015

- After Survivor Series, **FSM** explores WWE to have faith in Dolph Ziggler
- **FSM** presents the first Fighting Spirit 50 – a rundown of the best pro wrestlers in 2014
- **FSM** suggests 10 ways in which Impact Wrestling can improve on Destination America
- Dixie Carter explains how she is committed to taking TNA to the top
- **FSM** tells the story of how Sami Zayn finally captured NXT gold



ISSUE 115 – FEB 2015

- With the Royal Rumble imminent, **FSM** questions WWE's choice of new star, Roman Reigns
- **FSM** considers CM Punk's chances in the UFC
- The results of the **FSM** Reader Awards are published, highlighting your best bits of 2014
- **FSM** brings you the Alternative Review of the Year
- **FSM** remembers the late Eddie Gilbert – one of the sport's enigmas



ISSUE 116 – MAR 2015

- **FSM** examines the issues plaguing WWE, and argues it would be better off without Vince McMahon
- Daniel Bryan talks to **FSM** about his recovery from neck surgery, and his goal for WrestleMania XXXI
- Now that Shinsuke Nakamura has grabbed worldwide attention, **FSM** examines his life and career
- New fans may know him from NXT, but **FSM** explains how William Regal is the UK's finest all-rounder

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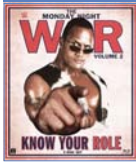
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WWE THE MONDAY NIGHT WAR VOL. 2 - KNOW YOUR ROLE

BLURAY DISC



The second edition of WWE's *Monday Night War* series, as first shown on the WWE Network, features the remaining 10 episodes detailing the incidents that steered the course of the ratings war between the World Wrestling

Federation and World Championship Wrestling. Each episode includes a short analysis from the man who sparked the battle, former WCW President Eric Bischoff.

The first disc includes four episodes, the first of which features Chris Jericho, who went from a highlight of *Nitro*'s mid-card to one of the WWF's top stars, outlining a case of WCW not using talent to its fullest potential. The second episode offers an interesting take from outside the war: the influence of Paul Heyman's Extreme Championship Wrestling, as WCW hired its stars, and the WWF created the Attitude Era off its premise. The Rock is next, as he is offered as an example of a project that didn't work at first, but through various challenges and creative tinkering, ended up becoming one of the greatest wrestling stars of all-time. The final episode on the disc looks at how both promotions featured female talent, with the WWF's provocative use of Sunny, Sable and Chyna prompting Ted Turner to claim that McMahon was winning the war because "they showed more of the tit".

Disc Two begins with the role mainstream celebrities played in the war, with Hulk Hogan attracting top sports stars such as Dennis Rodman and Karl Malone to WCW, and how the WWF's use of Mike Tyson for *WrestleMania XIV* played a part in the tide turning its way. The next episode looks at how both promotions assembled its rosters, with various moves between the companies, and how key departures to the WWF by the likes of Jericho and The Giant affected WCW. The disc's concluding episode discusses The Kliq, and how Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, Kevin Nash, Scott Hall and Sean Waltman affected both promotions.

The last disc takes the series down the home stretch with three of its most interesting episodes. The first features Eric Bischoff, and lays out some of his key errors towards the end of his reign in WCW, including getting too friendly with talent, and his legal battle with Ric Flair. The penultimate episode documents WCW's dying days, and the disastrous stewardship of Vince Russo, as he adversely affected WCW both creatively and financially. The final programme looks at how the key players handled the period after the war, with some of WCW's major stars finding their way to WWE, with mixed results.

Bischoff's post-episode segments are more brief than the first set's analysis with Sting and Triple-H, but they are a fine insight into how he looks back

© TONY KNOX



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on events many years later, perhaps with a clearer mind. Amongst the many discussion points, Bischoff states how Chris Jericho viewed WCW as a stepping stone to get to the WWF; counters the accusations Paul Heyman made towards him in the ECW episode; how WCW would not have been able to attract the celebrities it did without Hulk Hogan's presence; and accuses Russo of a breach of contract with regards to Hogan at *Bash At The Beach 2000*. Bischoff also defends the charges levelled against him in his episode, admitting many of them to be true, but giving his side of events.

GOING LIVE!

Blu-ray exclusives include Paul Heyman phoning into WWF's *Livewire* call-in show in 1996 under the thinly-disguised pseudonym of "Bruce from Connecticut"; Hulk Hogan's ticker-tape parade through Disney-MGM Studios to sign his WCW contract in 1994; Steve Austin and Mike Tyson's post-*WrestleMania XIV* press conference; a further press conference featuring Hogan, Diamond Dallas Page, Dennis Rodman and Karl Malone to promote *Bash At The Beach 1998*; a Scott Steiner promo burying WCW on *Nitro* in 2000; and the WWF's Tazz returning to ECW to win its World title from WCW's Mike Awesome.

Although there are no full-length matches that put this Blu-ray set over the top, *Know Your Role* is recommended for the input of Eric Bischoff, as well as standout episodes on Extreme Championship Wrestling and the collapse of WCW.

As you'll have gathered from this review, the set is jam-packed with clips, making this second collection really worth your attention, even more so if you're marrying it with the first.

MARTIN BENTLEY



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© MSHAKES

1. Eric Bischoff is the stand-out contributor to *Know Your Role*
2. Vince Russo stands accused yet again, this time regarding his role in the *Bash At The Beach 2000* debacle
3. Scott Steiner cuts a famous anti-WCW promo as part of the Blu-ray extras

"Bischoff's segments are more brief than the first set's analysis with Sting and Triple-H, but they are a great insight into how he looks back on events many years thereafter, perhaps with a clearer mind"

WWE THE VERY BEST OF WCW MONDAY NITRO VOL. 3



BLURAY DISC Since WWE's purchase of WCW in 2001, Vince McMahon and co. have gone to great lengths to make clear their superiority, with Triple-H's baffling victory over Sting at *WrestleMania* being the latest means to do so. However, this has not stopped WWE from also trying to squeeze every last penny out of the WCW library, including dipping into the archive with a third volume of matches from *Monday Nitro*.

The ever chipper Diamond Dallas Page offers a brief introduction before the action gets underway with a fair Randy Savage versus Lex Luger encounter. Despite these being two of WCW's biggest stars, it's Hulk Hogan who dominates the commentary, leaving you under no misapprehension as to who the early editions of *Nitro* were built around. Eddy Guerrero then challenges Johnny B. Badd for the TV title in a bout that highlights the fast-paced action for which *Nitro* gained many viewers. World champion Ric Flair defends his title against Savage in a match described by Eric Bischoff on commentary as "fast and furious", and while that might be somewhat hyperbolic, it's certainly an entertaining contest. Thereafter, Gene Okerlund attempts to interview Sherri Martel, who is attacked by Madusa, leading to a wild brawl. Both women have a natural presence that, despite the best efforts of today's WWE's training facility, cannot simply be taught.

THE NWO YEARS

The nWo years begin with a group beatdown of Roddy Piper, Randy Savage goading DDP by pretending that he doesn't know his name, and a surprisingly entertaining fight between Luger and Kevin Nash. The criminally underappreciated Juventud Guerrera puts in a cracking performance against Chris Jericho, as does Chavo Guerrero as he teams with Dean Malenko against Eddy and Y2J. Further nWo shenanigans continue, such as its takeover of *Nitro* and the bizarre sight of new member Dusty Rhodes, but even the most hardened of New World Order supporters will be tired of hearing the group's music when Scott Hall and Nash make their way out during one of the famed spring break episodes of *Nitro*. The sublime Guerrera at least returns in a sensational cruiserweight encounter with Billy Kidman, before Savage and Hogan roll back the years with a war over the World title. One of WCW's true successes, Bill Goldberg, closes out Disc One with a rough Triangle match against Nash and the vastly underrated Bam Bam Bigelow.

Booker T brings out some of the old Bret Hart in an excellent contest from February 1999, which



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1. In one of this set's finer moments, Bret Hart pops up for an excellent bout with Booker T
2. Shannon Moore appears as a member of the ever entertaining wrestling boy band, 3 Count
3. The absence of performers like Ultimo Dragon is a big surprise

"Eddy Guerrero challenges Johnny B. Badd for the TV title in a bout that highlights the fast-paced pro wrestling for which *Nitro* gained many viewers in this period"



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is followed by a rare Flair versus Goldberg match. The Sandman's brief time as Hardcore Hak offers an ECW-style brawl with Rick Steiner. Hogan and Sting battle Sid Vicious and Nash in a match big on name value but really of little substance. Another letdown comes in the form of Hart versus Sting, although "The Hitman" versus Jeff Jarrett is appreciably better. Mike Awesome makes an appearance in a decent struggle with Booker T, and thankfully, The Yung Dragons versus 3 Count versus Sean O'Haire and Mark Jindrak is a treat.

Of the extras included, Syxx and Hall versus The Steiner Brothers is a pleasing bout, as is Raven against Canyon. Bret Hart has an in-ring discussion with Ric Flair before facing Lex Luger in a so-so contest, before a dream match against Hogan turns into a nightmare, as "The Hulkster" unwisely decides out-wrestle his opponent. Jeff Jarrett closes out the set in average fashion against Sting and Scott Steiner.

Overall, as a standalone collection of bouts, *The Very Best Of WCW Monday Nitro Vol. 3* is perfectly adequate. It does, however, suffer from both an overabundance of nWo, most notably Kevin Nash, as well as a lack of context for some matches. The absence of Rey Mysterio, Psicosis, Ultimo Dragon and "Lord" Steven Regal in favour of more famous names is a shocker, too.

If you are more interested in big names than five-star bouts, this set is still very appealing. WWE may be trying to get the most out of the *Nitro* library, but at least it is doing so to greater effect than with the group's "icon", Sting.

COLIN HOLMES

RING OF HONOR CONQUEST TOUR

1. Roderick Strong appears on all three Conquest tour events
2. Rocky Romero and Trent Barreta have their first match as Roppongi Vice in Milwaukee



Ring of Honor's Conquest tour shows from March and April 2015 take place across the U.S. Midwest region, and feature the return of a legendary figure from ROH's past, as well as one of its best televised matches of the year.

The first show, from Milwaukee on March 13, begins with Roderick Strong taking on Arya Daivari in a solid opening encounter. Milwaukee's own Silas Young doesn't care much for the support of the fans as he faces Will Ferrara, as the former Top Prospect tournament finalist battles one of the promotion's most brilliantly surly competitors. Mark Briscoe is tasked with facing another local, The Beer City Bruiser, who surprises with his agility despite his larger stature.

Rocky Romero debuts a new tag team with Trent Barreta known as Roppongi Vice, and their first bout as a duo is against BJ Whitmer and Jimmy Jacobs of The Decade. Even though Jacobs and Whitmer have the experience advantage, Barreta and Romero click instantly, exhibiting the teamwork that's since proved popular in New Japan. After The Kingdom's Matt Taven has more trouble with Cheeseburger than he anticipates, Michael Elgin takes on a familiar fellow Canadian, Josh Alexander. Some fans' unfamiliarity with Alexander means this is a little slow to take, but by the end, their physical style wins the Turner Hall Ballroom over.

Following his return to Ring of Honor at the 13th Anniversary pay-per-view, former ROH champion Samoa Joe is back in action here against ACH, whose spectacular high-flying abilities keep him competitive against "The Samoan Submission Machine", who looks like he's never been away. The main event pits the promotion's champions against each other, as World champion Jay Briscoe teams with TV title-holder Jay Lethal against Tag Team champions reDRagon. Briscoe and Lethal spend most of the match arguing, which presents Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly with a great opportunity to take advantage, in a great finale.

TOP PROSPECTS TANGLE

The action transfers to Chicago Ridge on March 14, where the House of Truth's J. Diesel seeks revenge against Will Ferrara for defeating him in the aforementioned

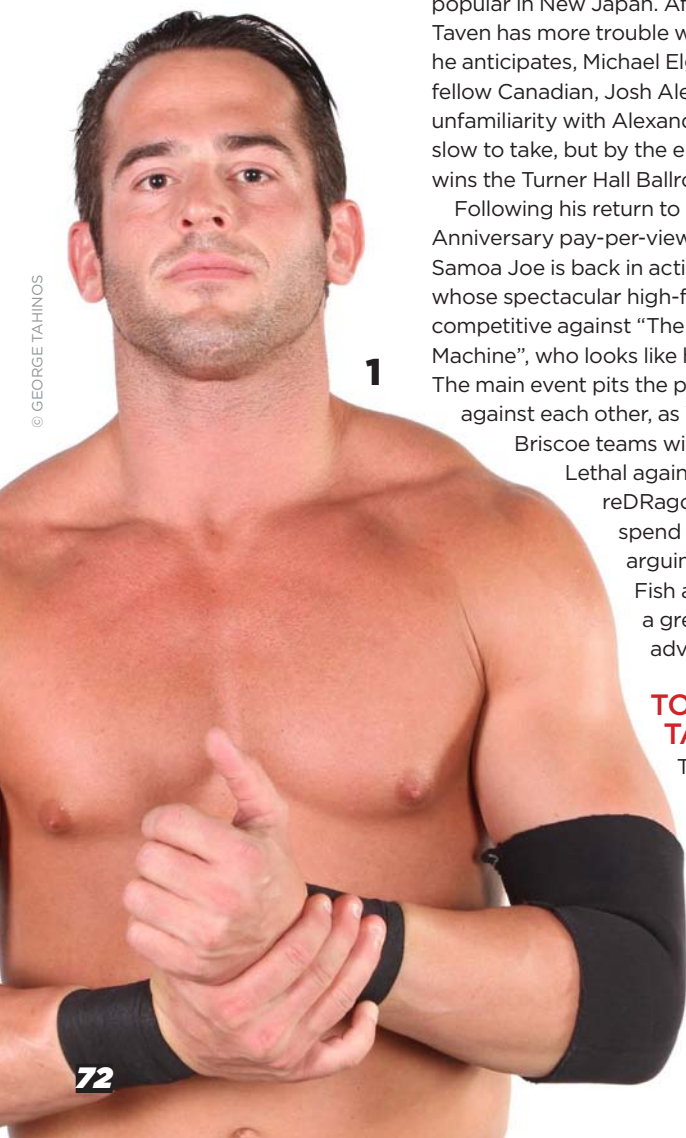


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2015 Top Prospect tournament. From there, Jimmy Jacobs faces ACH in his penultimate ROH match, before leaving the company at *Supercard Of Honor IX* and heading to a position with WWE creative. Jacobs struggles to contain ACH's speed, resulting in tensions between him and BJ Whitmer.

A four-way to determine a number one contender for the ROH World championship pits Roderick Strong, Silas Young, Matt Taven and Mark Briscoe against each other, with Taven and Young frustrating Briscoe and Strong with blind tags and generally sneaky tactics. Jay Lethal takes on Cliff Compton in a Proving Ground Streetfight, where the latter gets an immediate TV title match with a victory. The fight spreads across the Frontier Fieldhouse, and Lethal is gradually stripped of most of his street clothes as part of a fun brawl.

Cheeseburger appears to be out of his element against The Beer City Bruiser, but his spirited comeback gets the fans behind him. This is followed by Jay Briscoe's World title defence against the winner of the four-way, who takes the champion to the limit in a bruising contest. Roppongi Vice enter the Proving Ground with Tag Team champions reDRagon, who battle at all costs to try and deny Rocky Romero and Trent Barreta an instant shot at the titles. Although this is only their second match as a team, Roppongi Vice



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cause a lot of problems for Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly in a very good bout.

Chicago Ridge's main event pits Samoa Joe against another former ROH World champion, Michael Elgin. This is a punishing affair, with Elgin's suplexes and great groundwork more than a match for Joe's strikes and submission skills, in a contest that the Chicago fans can't get enough of. This match sets up Joe's eventual unsuccessful challenge for Jay Briscoe's title at *Supercard Of Honor IX* a few weeks later.

REDRAGON BREATHING FIRE

The scene shifts to Hopkins, Minnesota on April 25, by which point reDRagon had lost the ROH Tag Team titles to The Addiction. reDRagon's Bobby Fish opens proceedings against Arya Daivari in a fun if not totally serious encounter. Cheeseburger, The Beer City Bruiser, The Romantic Touch and Will Ferrara engage in a four-way that's more frantic and exciting than it looks on paper. Michael Elgin squares off with Caprice Coleman in a match that starts slowly, but improves and gets the fans more into it as it goes along.

The Decade's Adam Page is jealous of ACH's opportunities to wrestle figures such as Samoa Joe, leading to their match on this show, which sees Page able to keep up with ACH's remarkable skills,

while producing some fantastic moments of his own, as the match expands their burgeoning rivalry. Minnesota's own Arik Cannon takes on Canadian talent Danny Duggan in a solid contest, before Truth Martini faces up to an Intergender challenge opposite ODB that's far more storyline than athletic endeavour, although ODB is massively popular with her local fans.

Following their participation in Chicago Ridge's four-way, Roderick Strong and Silas Young resume hostilities in Hopkins, and despite a few hairy moments, it's another very good match from two of ROH's most reliable talents. The Briscoes rekindle an unresolved 2014 rivalry with War Machine, with Jay and Mark trading blows with Hanson and Raymond Rowe in a gruelling battle.

The main event is a superb 30-minute encounter between Jay Lethal and Kyle O'Reilly for the ROH TV championship, with O'Reilly utilising headlocks and armbars, and Lethal using every trick in the book to hang on to his title. This is the full version of a match that aired on ROH TV, and is worth the purchase of the DVD alone.

While all three shows have no long-term ramifications towards Ring of Honor storylines, they're an easy recommendation for Samoa Joe's ROH return and the Lethal versus O'Reilly contest.

MARTIN BENTLEY

3. Samoa Joe faces a tough challenge against Michael Elgin in Chicago Ridge **4.** Jay Lethal once again lives up to his championship billing against Kyle O'Reilly in Hopkins, Minnesota

"Samoa Joe returns to action against ACH, whose spectacular high-flying skills keep him competitive against 'The Samoan Submission Machine', who looks like he's never been away"

RING OF HONOR YEAR FOUR



2005 is a fascinating year in the storied history of Ring of Honor. The previous 12 months had concluded with Austin Aries ending Samoa Joe's 21-month reign as ROH World champion, while several of the group's top wrestlers were being linked with WWE and TNA. This year, Kenta Kobashi, Matt Hardy and Mick Foley would make headlines as they appeared for the promotion. All these notable moments, and more, are detailed in this three-disc release.

Foley and Joe begin the set with an entertaining back-and-forth exchange that breaks down into a brawl. Some of Foley's comments regarding Joe leaving ROH for the greener pastures of WWE leave one wondering what might've happened had Joe chosen a different career path at that time. Aries then defends the ROH World title against Colt Cabana in a bloody and dramatic Cage match that proves that when Cabana tones down the comedy, his character has the popularity to add gravitas to big matches. A wild five-team Scramble Cage match featuring Generation Next is entertaining, but does feel like a collection of increasingly crazy spots. Some of the manoeuvres Jack Evans performs, however, are so stunning that they should not be disregarded.

The underrated John Walters and Jay Lethal compete in a more traditional outing for the since discontinued ROH Pure title. It's a wonderful, modern scientific showing, with some great holds and counters. Matt Hardy's debut after his controversial WWE sacking in the wake of the Lita and Edge affair is included, but while the crowd is full of sympathy for his position, the match with Christopher Daniels does go too long, and is dull in parts.

CM Punk's final few months before joining WWE are given considerable coverage. First up is a standard Cage match with Jimmy Rave, after which Punk gets an ROH title shot against Aries. Before this bout, it was well-known that Punk had signed with WWE, so the outcome seemed assured. However, some tremendous booking, including a swerve delivered the right way, ensures one of the most shocking moments in company history. Furthermore, the bout itself is excellent, and truly dramatic throughout.

James Gibson may now be better known as WWE stooge character Jamie Noble, but his ROH run is fondly remembered for a wealth of fine contests, and his shot at Punk is a 25-minute clinic. Another title defence has Gibson, Samoa Joe and Christopher Daniels challenging Punk, and with so much talent in one ring, its quality is never in doubt. "The Summer of Punk" concludes with a fine two-out-of-three falls collision with friend Colt Cabana.

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THE LEGEND OF KENTA KOBASHI

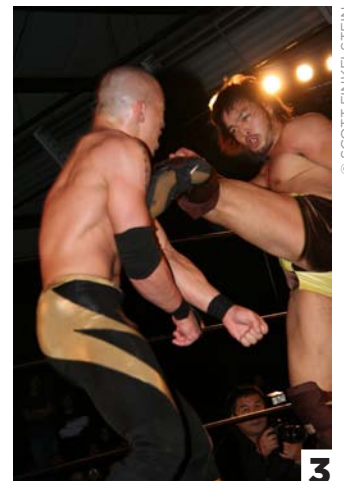
The legendary Kenta Kobashi made a rare trip beyond the borders of Japan for two shows in October 2005. His first match with Samoa Joe is the stuff of folklore, and remains every bit the classic 10 years later. A tag team bout then pits Kobashi and Homicide against Joe and Low Ki, and it's also great fun.

Bryan Danielson's ascent to becoming the main man in ROH gets some time, beginning with a slow-paced technical struggle with champion Gibson, followed by a wild brawl opposite Steve Corino. His final match of the collection is a stunner with Roderick Strong, as both put in typically great performances, with Danielson's believable selling of Strong's backbreakers and submission holds being a delight. It's also obvious why Strong has the reputation of having hands of stone, as his chops leave Danielson with a painfully red chest.

A War Games-style Cage match featuring Aries, Strong, Evans and Matt Sydal against Prince Nana, Abyss, Alex Shelley and Jimmy Rave is a great gang fight. The action is non-stop, and befitting such a heated feud. Current NXT star Hideo Itami, then known as KENTA, closes the set in blistering fashion against Low Ki. They batter each other senseless with a barrage of nasty kicks and chops, taking the intensity and drama to a peak. Some of the strikes are so vicious that few fans will be so hardened as to not recoil when they connect.

The fourth year of Ring of Honor is fondly remembered for both its booking and in-ring highlights. With so many of the roster going on to become enormous stars, this collection catalogues the raw talent they possessed, and in many cases, matches or exceeds their best work elsewhere.

COLIN HOLMES



© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

3

1. Austin Aries began ROH's fourth year as its World champion 2. Kenta Kobashi faced Samoa Joe in an iconic ROH bout on October 1, 2005 3. KENTA vs. Low Ki is one of the hardest-hitting matches in Ring of Honor history

"Kenta Kobashi's October 1, 2005 match with Samoa Joe is the stuff of folklore, and remains every bit the classic 10 years later"

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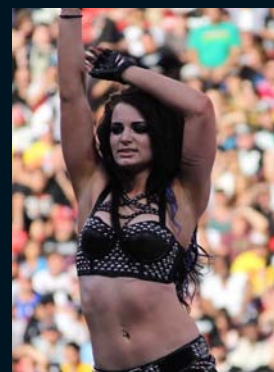
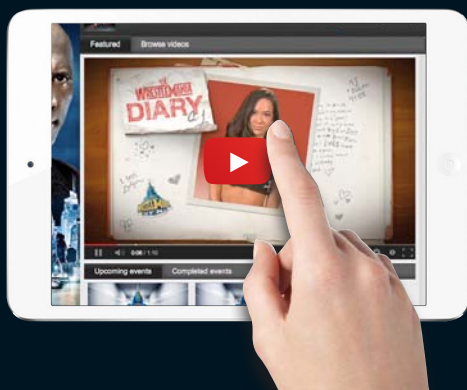
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THE TRAINING GROUND

If you want to be a professional wrestler, there is no substitute for learning your craft at a respected school, but that doesn't mean that you can't pick up some important food for thought right here in FSM. The Training Ground will be here each month to offer you the benefit of the experience of various veterans of the sport.

EIGHT QUESTIONS WITH...

FORMER WWF, WCW AND AJPW STAR, "DANGEROUS" DAN SPIVEY

You didn't make your debut as a wrestler until you were in your early-30s. Do you feel that was any additional challenge for you, given the demands of training?

There were a lot of challenges, yeah. Before I got into wrestling, I was a football player; I played college ball at the University of Georgia, and I was drafted by the New York Jets. The reason I stopped playing football was the fact that I injured my knee; I messed it up pretty bad, and I had severe arthritis. When I was starting out in the wrestling business, because of my athletic background, I was able to overcome that; it only took me two-and-a-half steps to get across the ring, as far as actually running the ropes. I was able to work around my disability, but I do feel I could have been much, much better if I hadn't had the injury.

Given that you were billed at 6ft 8in and were considerably taller than most wrestlers, were knee injuries more frequent

with the constant travel you endured, particularly during your first WWF run?

I really didn't have that many injuries when I first got into the business; my injuries were more of the wear and tear category. I did hurt my neck early in my career, and I had to have neck fusion after I ruptured a disc, so I had to have the sixth and seventh vertebrae fused together. The first three doctors that I had gone to told me I would never work again, but the fourth doctor I went to told me I'd be back in six months. I said, "Well, you're doing the operation, then." And I was - I was back in the ring in six months.

Other than that, it was just the wear and tear on my body, and the fact that I had to have a hip replacement later on, as well as a knee replacement. That was simply because I'd gotten hurt before I was in the business, along with the gradual wear and tear over the years.

Just a few years into your career, you got to work extensively with Genichiro Tenryu on one tour with All Japan. How did you most change as a worker from that experience?

You know, I had no idea who Tenryu was when I'd gotten to Japan. I didn't know any of the Japanese wrestlers, but I learnt really fast that he was a top competitor. He was very good at what he did, and I learnt a lot from Tenryu. The fact that I was able to go over there on my first tour and main event with him really gave me confidence. Giant Baba believed in me to put me in that

position. I was a young guy, at least young as far as being in the business, and the experience gave me a lot of confidence by him believing in me.

When you criss-crossed back and forth between working for All Japan and WCW in the late-1980s/early-'90s, what sort of adjustments did you have to make in your ring work to accommodate the differences between the two promotions?

I had to be more careful with the way I treated the boys in the United States. I'd say only about three or four percent of the guys that worked in the United States at that time could work in Japan, because of how stiff it was over there. I had to really pull back how I worked with the Americans because they couldn't take the pain and punishment; the way we wrestled in Japan was very stiff, but so long as you didn't draw blood or break any bones, it was all good. Most of the guys in the United States just couldn't take it, though.

When working as part of The Skyscrapers, you and Sid Vicious were called upon to destroy enhancement talent in order to put over your power and size. Given the size disparity between you and your opponents, was it much of a challenge making the work look realistic without actually inflicting real punishment?

It was a real challenge because obviously you don't want to hurt anybody. There were so many guys that came into wrestling at that time that were so much smaller, and they probably did feel like Sid and I were hurting them, but it could've been a lot worse. But that was their job, to get us over, so they knew what they were getting into when they signed up for the deal. I don't know of anybody that ended up with a permanent injury, or was even temporarily injured. I know we could be really stiff with them, though; I was really appreciative of the fact that they had the courage to get into the ring with us.

"The way we wrestled in Japan was very stiff, but so long as you didn't draw blood or break any bones, it was all good"



Dan Spivey (right) formed a fearsome team with Sid Vicious in WCW in 1989

Touching upon the Waylon Mercy character, it was clearly based on Robert DeNiro's portrayal of the menacing Max Cady in the remake of *Cape Fear*. How was the Mercy character pitched to you, and what sort of preparation did you undergo in order to assume the role?

I had a meeting with Vince McMahon and Gerald Brisco. They wanted me to come in and work with the younger guys, because they had a lot of very young talent. They said I could come in with some kind of gimmick, and I was very happy to have that opportunity, to be somebody other than just Dan Spivey, because all my career I had just been myself. It came around to Vince, Gerry, and I deciding to do this character because I lived in the south and had a Southern drawl, and that the movie was really hot at the time.

The way I prepared was with watching hours and hours and hours of *Cape Fear* on tape, over and over. There was also an older version of that film with Robert Mitchum [in DeNiro's role] and I even watched that one, spending hours and hours picking up little things. I filled in the blanks, drawing on things from people from the South that I had known in my life. I just had a great time with that character; I really enjoyed doing it.

Bray Wyatt revealed on Steve Austin's podcast that you had visited the WWE Performance Centre and imparted the basis of the Mercy character to him, inspiring the role he plays today. If you were to become a regular coach or trainer at the Performance Centre, in what area do you think you would most benefit tomorrow's wrestlers?

I think I could help them develop characters. It would depend on what they'd want. I have a vast knowledge of people and situations and how people act; I think I could help them develop characters and roles for whatever they're trying to do.

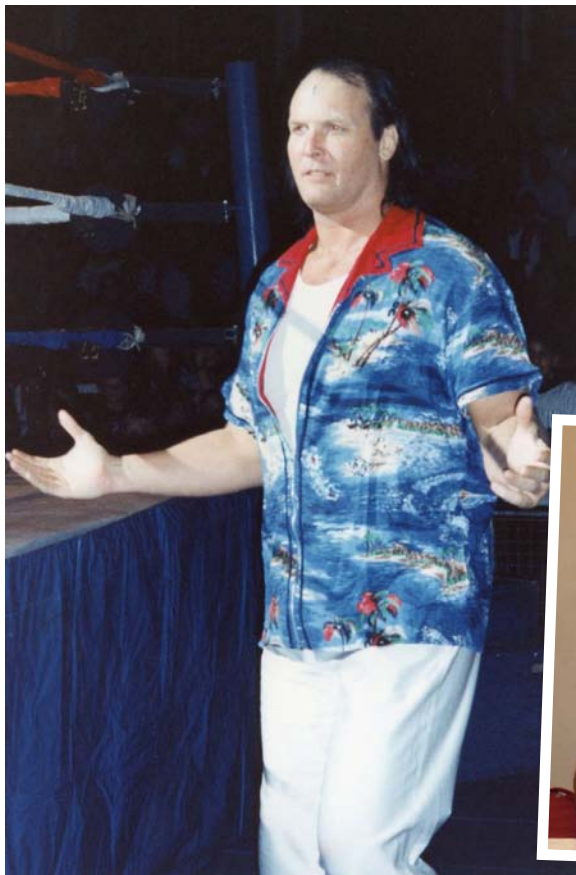
With Bray Wyatt, his father (Mike "IRS" Rotunda) and I were good friends, doing the U.S. Express [tag team] together. Bray came to me and asked about it, and I was all for it. He's done a great job with the character he's developed, and I'm very proud of him.

If you took up wrestling today as a young man, knowing what the landscape of today's business is, would you prefer to try to get into WWE's Performance Centre on your size and athletic merit, or would you rather develop your craft on the indies and build yourself up that way?

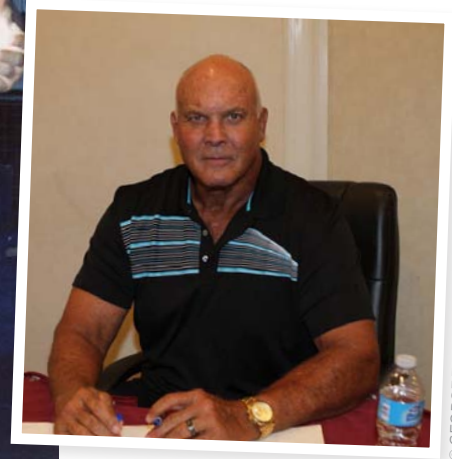
Oh, I would do the Performance Centre - they have an awesome setup there. When



Spivey gets to grips with Hawk during a Skyscrapers vs. Road Warriors bout



The Waylon Mercy character was arguably ahead of its time for pro wrestling



Scott Hall and I broke into the business, we couldn't even find a ring to work in; the Performance Centre has 27,000 square feet over in Orlando. It's state-of-the-art, with seven rings, an interview room, production room - they have it all. And also, they get paid something like \$1,000 a week, so that's

pretty good money considering where they're at now, and where things were over 25 years ago when me and Scott were doing it. It was tough in our day.

To learn a craft and a profession and make \$1,000 a week is a pretty awesome deal, I think, that WWE has put together.

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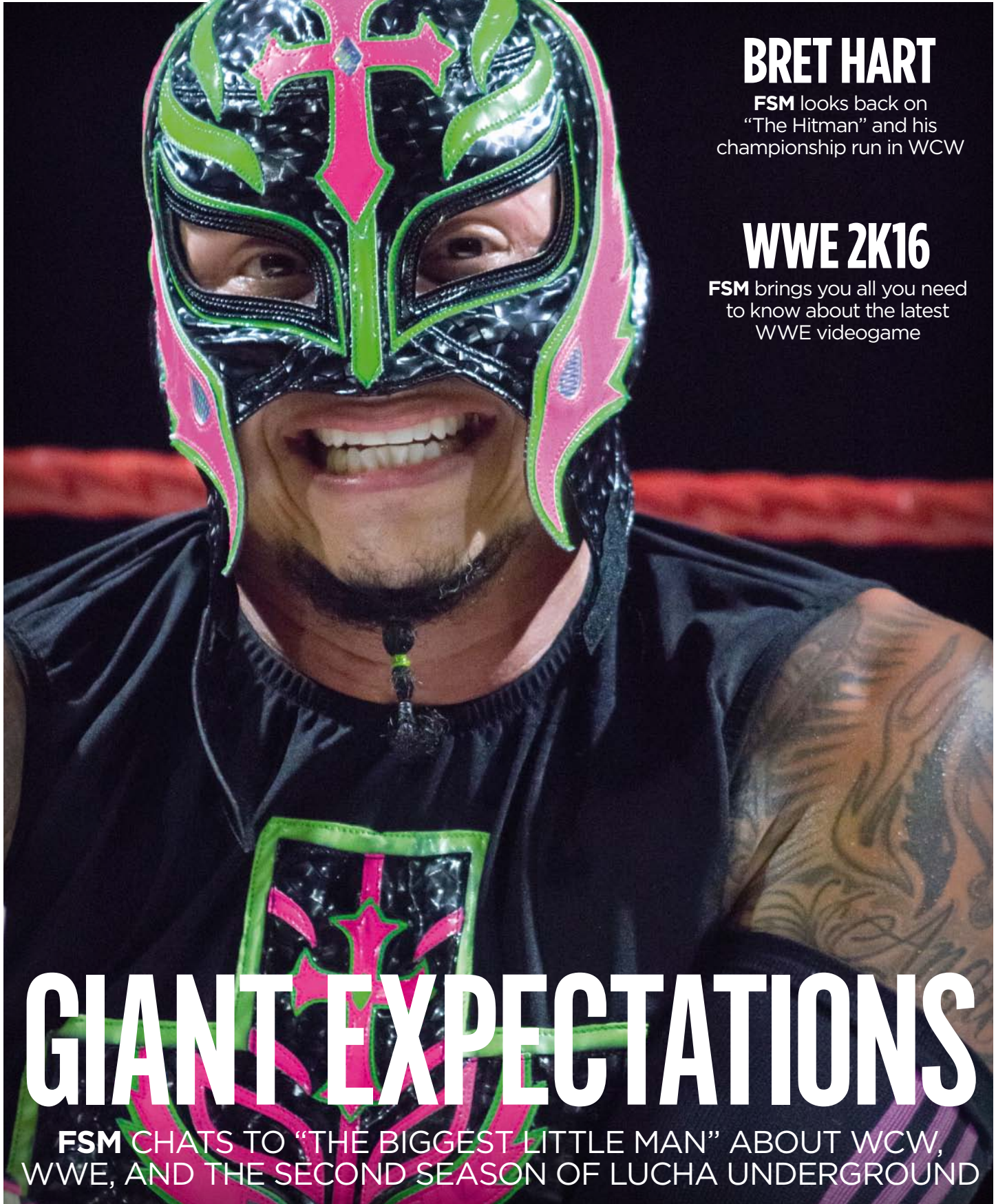
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