

WRESTLE ME!

THE PAT PATTREONSON'S MONTHLY FANZINE

No.24 – April 2022



Gran Naniwa (1977-2010), the Japanese wrestler with a crab-themed mask. And yes, he performed with the mannerisms of a crab. This is the first time Pete will ever have seen or heard of him, but I can guarantee Pete is now OBSESSED with him. As everyone should be. The mannerisms of a crab.

Hello and welcome to the *Wrestle Me!* newsletter-fanzine-Sniffin'-Glue-but-for-wrestlers-mag for April! I know it's May, but this one is about a million pages long. As canny writers say when you give them a job, you have to think of job as a triangle that has the words GOOD, QUICK and CHEAP on it - and you can only have two of them. It can be good and quick, but it won't be cheap. It can be cheap and quick, but it won't be good. And it can be cheap and good, but it won't be quick. Well, I've managed to invent a new one: it can be expensive, and take ages, and be OK, I guess. So, there's exciting new ground being broken here, pals!



As you might have heard, the WWE have announced a stadium show in Cardiff in September, so we've been trying to sort a venue for a live show at the same time and city. How's that going? As the Welsh say, 'not well'. We've not got one yet – the one I wanted and would be perfect was all up for having us, but couldn't do the right day, so that wasn't ideal. They did offer us something a week later, but I think that's pushing the limits of how long people might be willing to delay their train

home. But, as the Welsh also say, 'we'll sort one out, I'm sure.' So, don't get the top priced tickets for the WWF show, as you'll need about twelve quid to come and see me and Pete too. Reckon we'll be doing one of the UK exclusive PPVs to get into the

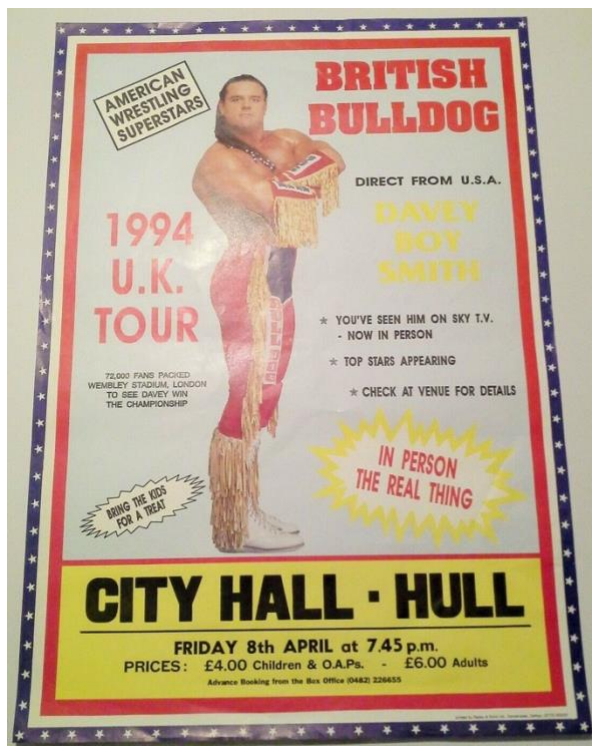
mood. *One Night Only* is the front-runner, but I cannot wait for Pete to see *Insurrextion 2001* for the appearance by Eamonn Holmes, which might be the single least-expected cameo in the history of WWE.

And, of course, the annual show at the London Podcast Festival is rapidly approaching, and this year, we will be demanding the same size room as George The Poet (and undoubtedly not getting it, as wrestling is undesirable in what's otherwise billed as a celebration of the arts). Last year's show sold out¹, but they'd given the dressing rooms to a series of unfamous American podcasters with middling ticket sales, and so Pete and I had to get changed in an unlockable room where all the tables are stacked. We were proud to do it, and it made me feel like a genuine indie wrestler (which was also helped by the fact I was dressed as a knock-off Big Boss Man and am not in shape.) Anyhow, more on that when the dates get sorted.

Before you get stuck in to this quite-frankly absurdly long newsletter this month, a proper thank you from me and Pete – there's about 1.1K of you who are proud Pat Patreonsons, which is the most we've ever had, and it's MAD that you're all there. So thanks, we really appreciate it. And if you're interested in 1994 wrestling tours of Britain that no one else really cares about, then here's your reward.

We love you! Take care! And don't listen to the Undertaker's podcast when it comes out, as it will make you right-wing!
Love Marc and Pete xxx

NATIONAL HERO'S EUROPEAN VACATION



This month, I bought one of the posters that I've been after for a while. It's from the British Bulldog's 1994 UK tour, a time where British wrestling was on its knees and, for a brief moment, the promoters had found the man they thought could fix it. There's a fair few of these posters around, but they tend to be thirty quid – this one I picked up for a tenner, which slightly suggests no one but me is actually interested in buying one. Or you've all got one, one or the other.

Unlike a lot of British wrestling at the time, this *was* the genuine British Bulldog, something which the poster really goes to town with: "Direct from USA! You've seen him on Sky TV – Now in Person! 72,000 fans packed Wembley Stadium, London to see Davey win the championship! In Person! The Real Thing! Bring the kids for a treat!"

¹ I mean, it's not just last year's. The last three have all sold out. Can George the Poet say that? No. No he can't.

This over-the-top stressing that this was the *genuine* British Bulldog was partly a result of British wrestling having spent years using people in the gimmicks of better-known American performers, in the hope that consumers would mistake these bootlegs for the real deal.

By late 1993, British wrestling was deep, deep, deep in the doldrums. The only wrestling on television was American – either WWF (which was all over Sky) or WCW (which appeared in a constantly shifting slot on late night ITV.) To most youngsters, there was no such thing as British wrestling – there was only what they saw coming out of America. As a result, Joint Promotion's head Max Crabtree (the brother of Big Daddy Shirley Crabtree) did the only thing he could to try and attract a crowd: pretend that British wrestling and American wrestling were the same thing.²

He did this by using a handful of the remaining talents who had stuck around in an industry that was on its knees, and slotting them into the cards as a cross between a tribute and a blatant fraud.



From 1991 onwards, many bills featured a big American gimmick that had been copied by a British performer, clad in low-budget costumes and deliberately ambiguous names. These names were designed to cause confusion and attract people who mistook them for the actual WWF stars, but the character's names had subtle (and often witless) small tweaks so Joint Promotions didn't have to return anyone's ticket money if they fell for the scam.

While it would reach epidemic proportions in the 1999 boom period in US wrestling – and hundreds of shows took place with fake Kanes, illegitimate Undertakers, knock-off Rocks and shonky Stone Cold Steve Austin's, particularly under the watch of Joint's long-time rival All Star Wrestling – 1993 saw the first comprehensive attempt by a dying industry to trick people into

coming to see their shows by pretending their stars were someone else.

If you were a kid, you probably wouldn't ask why the Undertaker was suddenly appearing at the Redhill Leisure Centre in Arnold – you'd just think you were the luckiest kid in Nottingham, and the granddad you pestered into spending three quid to take you there on a Saturday afternoon (and mutter about this new lot not being a

² Joint Promotions was one of the two main wrestling promotions in England at the time, along with Merseyside's All Star Wrestling. Joint was formed back in 1952 as a cartel of promoters from all over England, controlling the champions, venues and ticket prices. In the early 1970s, Joint was purchased by the bookmakers William Hill, who drafted in Max Crabtree (one of the few wrestling bookers still working) to run the company they couldn't make head nor tail of. From 1955 until 1985, Joint provided all the wrestling for ITV's *World of Sport*, but when that was taken off air and replaced with a weekly wrestling show, they were forced to rotate with the upstart All Star Wrestling and the WWF. In 1986, Crabtree became the owner outright, two years before wrestling on ITV was finally cancelled for good. He limped on until 1995, the only bright spot in that decade being this short-lived tour with the Bulldog.

patch on Mick McManus) certainly wouldn't have known any better. But even the stupidest kids might have wondered why the Undertaker looked a slightly different shape, hobbled because of gout, stank of Rothmans and had an accent suggesting he'd spent many years living just outside Huddersfield.

They're retrospectively called 'tribute acts' these days, but they weren't actually tribute acts, in the same way that misrepresentation isn't a tribute. If you went to see a Tom Jones tribute act, the poster would say "A Tribute to Tom Jones by top crooner Henk Barbasso." Wrestling tribute acts were more like you'd see a poster for Tom Jones performing live, buy your ticket, and only when you arrived did you realise it was actually an act calling themselves "Tom. J. Ones" and you'd been fooled by calligraphy.



One of the original rip-offs (and one of the most enduring) was the Legend of Doom. The man behind the trademark-dodging face-paint was veteran Mancunian grappler Johnny South, who debuted in 1965, so he was nearly a thirty-year veteran when he started his hooky gimmick in 1994. He cut his thinning hair like Hawk, placed a pair of spiked shoulder-pads onto his arthritic shoulders, and an entire decade tricking nine-year-olds into thinking they were seeing someone who was (a) famous and (b) good. He was helped in this that, facially, he did look very much like Hawk, even if he was considerably shorter, had a slight gut and there was more than a touch of the Bushwhacker about him. He used two different names with this gimmick – The Legend of Doom and the British LOD, the latter

suggesting even more inaccurately that he was a whole tag team and not just a man who'd seen Sky TV and decided to commit fraud.

In one of those things that if he told you, you'd slap him and call him a bullshitter, South even performed for the WWF. In their first tour of the UK in April 1991 (they'd had a show at the London Arena back in 1989, but it wasn't a nationwide tour), the WWF opened the shows with six-man tag matches featuring British grapplers – if they thought this was something the British fans would like as an appetiser, they were wrong. Most of the people who watched the WWF had any idea who these fat, smelly and/or pasty men were, and they largely performed to silence.

I say this from experience, because when I went to that tour in April 1991, I had no idea who the British men were. I just knew they weren't proper WWF stars and thus had no interest in them, like most of the crowd. I wanted to see Hacksaw Jim Duggan, not Danny Collins, Dave Taylor and Tony St Clair against Chic Cullen, Skull Murphy and a pre-Legend of Doom Johnny South.³ The next match was Koko B. Ware against the Brooklyn Brawler, a match that wouldn't have generated any interest in America, but which was greeted by the Wembley crowd like it was Stone Cold against the Rock.⁴

³ I would now happily watch Danny 'Boy' Collins, Tony St Clair, Dave Taylor and Chic Cullen at any point in their careers. Skull Murphy less so, as he was a big, slightly melancholy-looking lump, although the name was very good. And as for Johnny South, I'm alright, thanks. I'll probably just nip to the bar before it gets rammed.

⁴ The actual Stone Cold and the Rock, not the knock-off versions that you'd see in Borehamwood in 2000.



Incredibly, Johnny South's wrestling career lasted four decades (of which he spent a lot of it in Germany, although he also had a run in Japan's UWF in 1985) and he only retired in 2005. Here he is in the early-1990s performing as Legend of Doom in Wales for Orig Williams. Williams had a show called 'Reslo' on S4C for years, and here LODish takes on Raging Bull – the former PN News. The only person who wasn't

pretending to be a famous American wrestler in this match is the one who actually *was* a famous American wrestler, who's taken a name that doesn't have anything to do with his old gimmick.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kE5zSbh_35g

At the time, you could have seen the Legend of Doom, the UK Undertaker⁵, Dunk the Clown, UK Earthquake (the late Scrubber Daly, who didn't actually dress or look like the American version), the British Bushwhacker (a comedy wrestler called Frank Casey who did dress up as the originals), Rock 'N' Roll Express (not a tag team, just one bloke), 'UK Sgt Slaughter' (who was around in 1996) and 1-2-3 Boy (the British wrestler Justin Starr, who's pictured here and who would later go on to become 'Big Red Machine', a Kane rip-off that he performed from 2000 until 2002, and - even better - a character ingeniously called 'UK Chris Jericho'.)



Here's a 17-minute match featuring the British Bushwhacker vs Spinner McKenzie in Bath in June 1993. I think I've linked to this before, and although I've not watched it this time, I seem to remember there was something very inappropriate about it last time I did. I think he licks some kids, which is weird when the famous Bushwhackers do it, let alone when it's a strange imposter in a British holiday venue.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Isw-pT5FO4s>

Ironically, one of the most common 'misconceptions' in British wrestling at the time was the billing of the Dynamite Kid as "WWF superstar British Bulldog". While Dynamite *was* a British Bulldog, the billing at the time was clearly attempting to jump on the popularity of the WWF superstar Davey Boy Smith. But more on that specific scenario to come.

So, how did Davey Boy Smith end up back in the cooling ashes of Joint Promotions in 1994? Unsurprisingly, it was because everything had gone wrong in the last couple of years.

For the previous two years, the British Bulldog had become a household name in Britain, perhaps even more famous than Hulk Hogan. Whether they knew about wrestling or not, most people in the country would have been able to have named three wrestlers: Big Daddy, Giant Haystacks and the British Bulldog.

⁵ In 1995, All Star booked a dream match – the UK Undertaker against Gladiator Shadow. I bet that shifted some tickets in 1995. I mean, not enough to do more than break even, but *nothing* drew for British wrestling at this time. The UK Undertaker was also billed as Imposing Undertaker, which sounded like it was a description, but was actually his full name. "No, you can't have a refund. No, we never said it was the Undertaker, did we? Look at the poster. It's the Imposing Undertaker, and you saw the Imposing Undertaker."



In August 1992, the British Bulldog main-evented *Summerslam* 1992, winning the IC title from Bret Hart at Wembley Stadium in front of some 79,127 fans.⁶ Here's that match – I was there, you won't see me, I was a long way back, even though it was the most expensive ticket I'd ever bought up to that point (if memory serves, it was about £35). As Shakespeare wrote in *Sports Review Wrestling*, age cannot wither this tussle, nor custom stale its infinite variety.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahSZxdpxsxo>

But things started to go wrong for Smith within weeks of his victory. When Vince McMahon was indicted on counts of steroid distribution in late 1992, he had to swiftly rid his company of anyone who was still using, and Bulldog was one of the many stars whose body was clearly not 100% natural. When the DEA discovered that the Ultimate Warrior was receiving shipments of Human Growth Hormone from a chemist in England, Warrior and Bulldog (who'd been implicated in the deliveries) were fired, despite being absolutely huge stars at the time.⁷

In October 1992, less than two months after the high point in his career, Smith was out of the WWF, losing the belt to Shawn Michaels on an episode of *Saturday Night's Main Event*.⁸

After two dates in ECW which absolutely no one remembers (he beat Jimmy Snuka and Masked Superstar, who was most famously portrayed by Ax from Demolition, in matches that sound dreadful)⁹, he was swiftly snapped up by WCW, who realised Smith's massive popularity could be the thing that helped them break the UK and Europe. They'd done a short tour of the UK and Ireland in 1991, but with the British Bulldog on board, they could guarantee more than healthy live show sales.¹⁰ There was one issue, which was he couldn't use the British Bulldog name that had made

⁶ Surprisingly, this figure is the actual attendance. Despite this, the WWE still inflated it, and today they claim it was 80,355. They're demented.

⁷ Diana Hart's book *Under the Mat* claims that Davey wasn't involved in the steroid deliveries, but that the Warrior had ratted him out to the DEA (and the fact the HGH came from England certainly suggests a link with him). Bulldog *had* failed a drugs test in the wake of his *Summerslam* win, but it was for Ecstasy and he vehemently denied he had anything to do with the Warrior's steroid connection. A rattled McMahon said he had to let the Bulldog go, but promised he'd bring him back if everything settled down in the future. Within months, Davey admitted to his wife that, yes, he'd given Warrior the phone number of the English dealer, knowing full well that the bloke was selling steroids.

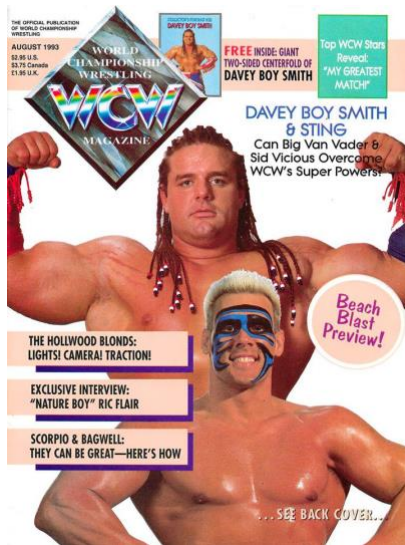
⁸ In one of those strange quirks of kayfabe booking, the Bulldog lost the IC title to Michaels on the 27th October 1992, but the title change wasn't being shown on TV for another fortnight. So, even though he'd lost it, he continued to defend the belt on house shows until *Saturday Night's Main Event* was broadcast. He beat Michaels (the actual title-holder) by count out in a defence of the IC title he had already lost ten days before. His final match before he was fired was a successful defence of the IC belt against Papa Shango at a house show in Portland on the 7th November 1992.

⁹ Yep, not good. But it's not even Ax, it's just some rip-off Masked Superstar.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI-usYUHNMU>

¹⁰ Diana Hart claims Davey took WCW from selling "700 seats in the King's Court in London" (she means Olympia at Earl's Court, I was there) "to selling out the Royal Albert Hall twice in one day." Smith was definitely a needle-mover for live wrestling in the UK in this period. I saw WCW in Wembley Arena in 1993 after his signing and that was packed. Smith took on Rick Rude in a match that I recall as being not nearly as good as you'd think it would be.

him world famous – from now on, keen to avoid any lawsuits, he was simply Davey Boy Smith.



It was a good time financially for Smith – not only had he signed a new contract with WCW, his wife mentioned that for two years after leaving the WWF, he was still making “a small fortune on British Bulldog bedding, wallpaper, teddy bears, videos, Super Nintendo games, running shoes, coffee cups, action figures, night clothes, boxer shorts, watches, playing cards, TV trays, birthday cards, lunch boxes, scarves, Halloween marks, calculators, T-shirts, hats, ice cream bars, foam hands, wall clocks, poster, windbreakers, umbrellas, erasers, paper dolls, slippers, pin, badges and backpacks.” Windbreakers and umbrellas. It’s hard to imagine there was any form of merchandise that the WWF didn’t put out. And following a long, protracted and expensive legal suit against WWF,

Smith ultimately managed to take ownership of the ‘British Bulldog’ trademark within a wrestling context.

But Smith wasn’t particularly happy in WCW. He didn’t feel they saw him as a top star outside of Europe, he was moving out of the main event picture, his body was battered and worn (he had a series of matches with Vader where he felt he was being stiffed throughout) and he felt the management reneged on the promises they’d made to him.



It didn’t help that in July 1993, he’d been involved in a fight in a bar, after a drunk had made a crude pass at his wife Diana. Smith slapped a front-facelock on the man, who passed out and fell backwards, cracking his head onto a load of broken glass from beer bottles on the floor, some of which embedded into his skull. Smith was charged with aggravated assault, which carried a seven-to-fourteen-year jail sentence if convicted (he was entirely cleared three years later.)

By the end of 1993, Smith was accusing WCW of not paying him a promised bonus for the European tour. Shortly after, he was fired after failing a steroid test and refusing to enter rehab. It’s impossible to say whether WCW management used the drug test failure as a way to fire him for being annoying, but either way, Smith gave them enough rope for them to hang him.

So, with his WWF and WCW careers seemingly over, Smith returned home to the United Kingdom in January 1994, and moved back into his mum and dad’s house in Golborne, Lancashire. It was a natural place for him to head to when the chips were down: it was the first prolonged period of freedom he’d had in years, and one of the only times where he would get to spend a decent period of time with his parents since he was a teenager. Britain was both the place that viewed him uncritically as a

megastar, and, of course, the home of Joint Promotions, the place where his career had begun back in 1979. Here he is as a fifteen-year-old in his first televised match on *World of Sport* as Young David.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NaAznfHdsk>



With his huge popularity in his homeland, he wasted no time in planning a UK tour with the promoter Max Crabtree (pictured to the right of his colossal younger brother). Symbolically, the timing couldn't have been better – the tired old king, Big Daddy, had finally retired a few months before, having suffering a stroke in December 1993. While Joint Promotions were still running numerous shows across the country every week, the sole headliner they'd pushed for the last twenty years had suddenly gone (I

mean, I say 'suddenly' but it had been clear for years that Daddy was inept and could barely move, so the pig-headed decision to build everything around him was, and remains, an absolutely fatal decision). With the British Bulldog back on the scene, maybe a new era was about to begin in British wrestling: one that people actually wanted to pay money to see. While a lot seemed to have happened in the Bulldog's life, it had still only been eighteen months since he'd main evented *Summerslam* 1992 and become the most famous wrestler in the country.

But British wrestling wasn't just welcoming back one British Bulldog (although legally speaking the other one couldn't call himself that.) All Star Wrestling were also booking Dynamite Kid, who had returned to England from Japan in the exact same month that Davey arrived back from the USA.



While the match listings site Cagematch (which does more to preserve the history of professional wrestling than any other site before or since) doesn't have anywhere near a complete listing of the matches of either Bulldog in this period¹¹, they state that Dynamite Kid's return to the UK for All Star Wrestling was in January 1994, where he beat Jimmy Ocean in Leeds (which had often been cited as the Bulldog's hometown while they were in the WWF.)

It was a card filled with the wrestlers who plugged away at the tatty, fading British wrestling scene of the day – the big-bellied Scottish brawler Drew McDonald (who was then doing an absurd comedy gimmick as 'the Ultimate Chippendale'), the dynamic but slender Liverpoolian Robbie Brookside, his tag team partner Doc Dean, and our old pal The Legend of Doom (who was basically cosplaying a man who the Bulldogs knew and had worked with for years.)

¹¹ Davey Boy's wife Diana Hart doesn't mention this British tour at all in her book. There's no footage of it online, and I haven't seen any photos of any of the matches anywhere either. No one cares.

The next night, Dynamite beat Ocean's tag team partner Ricky Knight (the father of future WWE star Paige) in Hanley. Later in the week, Kid beat Drew McDonald in Manchester.¹²

Here's a match that looks like it was recorded on the 29th December 1993 against the very capable Danny 'Boy' Collins (and which doesn't feature in any of the match lists I've found for Dynamite). Judging by the sponsor W&H Fabrications on the ring canvas, this happened somewhere near Morley, just outside Leeds. Danny has an eerily similar name to Davey - I should imagine Dynamite didn't hold back all of his punches as a result.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxUqWZAt6Cg>

It was a homecoming for Dynamite after years in America and Japan – but one which he must have found fairly dismal. The last time he'd stayed in England and worked there for any length of time had been back in 1991, which he recalled in his autobiography, *Pure Dynamite*.

The standards of wrestling [in England] in 1991 were worse than ever. They were terrible. The first thing I noticed were the gimmicks. The WWF was being shown on television in England, and most of the English wrestlers were nothing but poor imitations of the Americans.

While working as a headliner for Orig Williams in Wales¹³, Dynamite was billed “as the British Bulldog, with the name Dynamite Kid underneath in very small writing”. He was selling-out every night – “you see, by this stage, Davey Boy Smith was appearing on TV with the WWF every week as the British Bulldog.”

And it caused a bit of trouble with somebody from the Trade Descriptions Office, who turned up the arena one night asking to speak to me and the promoter. Somebody had reported me for using a wrestling name without permission; according to them, I was an imposter. It was Davey Boy Smith's parents, Sid and Joyce, my aunt and uncle, who had seen me billed as the British Bulldog on a wrestling advertisement. They called Davey in Calgary and he'd got onto the officials to try and stop me using the name.

Orig Williams, the promoter, pointed at me and said “There's the original Bulldog there.” The man ignored him and said to me, “You can't use that name. If you do, we'll have to take matters further.” I said, “I've been a Bulldog all my life. You sue me, and I'll countersue the fuck out of all of you.”

The same thing happened at a show in Belfast; two complete strangers telling

¹² Really annoyingly, in their list of All Star Wrestling cards, WWFOldSchool lists Davey Boy Smith as being the person who beat Ocean, Knight and Drew McDonald on those dates at those locations – which contradicts what's listed on Cagematch, who say it was Dynamite. I think this stems from the confusion of Dynamite being naughtily billed as ‘The British Bulldog’ in the very same month his hated partner returned and reclaimed that name. WWFOldSchool have also got confused between ASW and Joint Promotions, because there's a load of both cards on their ASW list. I don't blame them in the slightest - I've redrafted this whole thing about a dozen times because it took me days to unravel it all.

¹³ ‘El Bandito’ Orig Williams’ promotion was officially called the British Wrestling Federation (BWF), but almost no one ever refers to it as such. It's always “when he was working for Orig Williams in Wales” or “when he appeared on *Reslo*”, which was the name of the BWF's TV show that ran during the 1980s and 1990s on the Welsh language Channel 4, S4C. Calling it ‘the BWF's TV show’ is, to my knowledge, the first time anyone's ever referred to the BWF by its actual name.

me I couldn't use my own ring name, telling me I couldn't be a British Bulldog.

So, while Davey Boy Smith was making \$20,000 for one-night's work on a WWF pay-per-view, I was making £130 – which, by English standards, was great – but for some reason, that bothered him.

As a result of this dispute (amongst other reasons), Dynamite absolutely loathed his former tag partner in the Bulldogs. And within days of his return to the UK in 1993, he was about to be joined by the person he hated most in the world.

Even worse for Dynamite, Davey Boy didn't just come back as a wrestler. Coming back with an international profile guaranteed to sell-out venues, he would be returning as a promoter, ensuring he was paid considerably more than if he was just a grappler on the card. The subsequent 'British Bulldog Comeback Tour 1994' saw Smith promoting alongside Max Crabtree. It was under the name RSW (Ring Wrestling Stars) – a name that Joint Promotions had taken on in 1991, as they formerly lacked the catchy three-letter synonym that all successful wrestling companies must have, by law.¹⁴



While his daughter Georgia later stated that Davey ran the promotion of these shows from his parent's front room, I should imagine it was more like the scenario when you see some celebrity's name listed as an executive producer, like Tom Hiddleston in the *Loki* TV series: the star doesn't do any of the work beyond the big performance but, because they're the headliner, everyone likes to make them feel like they're the boss behind the scenes too, even though they wouldn't have a clue about accounts, couldn't book a venue if his life depended on it, and don't understand any health and safety requirements. As much as like the Bulldog, I don't think I'd trust him to work out ticket-sale percentages after tax, or work out what time the St John's Ambulance volunteers need to arrive for.

While Joint Promotions had been struggling to get anyone to watch their shows, by all accounts the Bulldog's return was a huge ticket seller. The medium-sized venues would accommodate somewhere under 1000 people, but the tour was said to have filled venues which had struggled to sell more than a few dozen tickets in the weeks before. From this tour, Davey most likely made more money than any other wrestler working in Britain in living memory, even if it wouldn't have been anything like he'd been making for the big American companies.

For the entire series of dates - starting in January and going through to August 1994 - you can see the uninspired heavy hand of Max Crabtree on every single match. An unadventurous promoter, Crabtree had stuck to a tried and tested formula with Big Daddy for years, even when it was clear it wasn't working any more. Because he was fat, immobile and not good at performing in the ring, Daddy was always paired in a

¹⁴ So, just to recap: the famous Joint Promotions is renamed RSW in 1991 until it closes for good in 1995. As the name change came in the last years of its existence and was used at a time when no one was interested in the product, the RSW name is almost never mentioned and is largely forgotten. I've continued to refer to the promotion as Joint throughout the rest of this for the sake of some sort of clarity.

tag with a younger star, who could take all the opponent's moves, drop the pinfalls and be in peril before Daddy charged in and beat the villains in under a minute. Smith would have been more than familiar with this set-up: after all, he'd performed the role of Daddy's younger partner back in the late-1970s.¹⁵

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSvwOs3aFok>

Like Daddy had been, Smith was already the star attraction and the most over man in the building – he didn't really need to anything more than just appear. This type of tag match meant he didn't have to exert himself, wouldn't get hurt, and didn't need to sweat – the fans had paid to see the British Bulldog and that's what they got. Every night, Smith would have raced in during the final minutes of the match, got the pin with his powerslam, signed autographs and sold merch, and the crowds would have gone home ecstatic. Why do more?

For the whole of the 1994 tour, the Bulldog teamed with a young Irishman called Tony Stewart. Like Smith, Stewart had also been Daddy's young boy, teaming with the huge egg-shaped egg in his final years – Stewart took part in Daddy's final match on the 29th December 1993, when they beat the Undertakers, Doom and Gloom.¹⁶

But Stewart, despite his potentially star-making position in the Bulldog's tour, is largely an enigma. He was said to be Dave "Fit" Finlay's younger cousin, but he's one of the minority of wrestlers not to have an entry on Cagematch or the UK specific site Wrestling Heritage (you'll notice I couldn't find a photo of him to slip in here). He was, however, more exciting to watch than most of the elderly overweight men who made up Joint's roster and he'd clearly watched some WWF shows, although he seemed unsure how to neatly incorporate the high-emotion and dramatic acting into the world of British wrestling, which was primarily about holds and shouting at pensioners.

Here's one of the handful of matches online featuring Stewart, here against Danny Boy Collins (who in 1990, after years of being the big British babyface and teaming with Big Daddy, is working as a heel here). One thing you notice is that Stewart is quite small, which would fit Crabtree's classic formula of the Big Star and His Little Weak Boy Partner – Collins was listed as standing at 5'10", and while Stewart isn't much shorter than that, he's about half the weight of Collins. Proper Slenderman.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ure23MR9rwk>



And here's Stewart teaming with similar Celtic young boy Geraint Clywd against the Bulldog's first two opponents, Jimmy Ocean and Ricky Knight, in 1990. Ocean and Knight's team was called the Superflys, and while it had nothing to do with Jimmy Snuka, they probably wouldn't have minded if you bought a ticket thinking it did.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1erKrkcKYQ&t=60s>

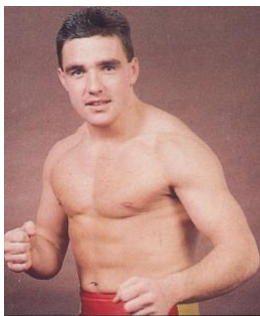
¹⁵ Another of Big Daddy's young boy partners had been Dynamite Kid when he was just starting out in his career. "What did I think of him?" ponders Dynamite in his autobiography *Pure Dynamite*. "Well, I'll say it. I know he's dead, bless him, but he was a load of shit."

¹⁶ An October 1993 match with Daddy and Stewart taking on the Undertakers in Aberdeen was recorded for broadcast on Grampian, but it seems to have disappeared. I shouldn't think it was a lost classic.



In February at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon, the first recorded match of the Bulldog's return tour took place. Smith and Tony Stewart beat Karl Krammer (a large Hampshire man called Carl Davis who had a German gimmick and was a frequent tag opponent of Big Daddy in the late 1980s, so he knew how these matches went down)¹⁷ and The Masked Destroyer (who was the wrestler Johnny Angel, who, like Stewart, had also taken part in Big Daddy's final match, as Undertaker Gloom. Angel's partner, Undertaker Doom, was played by Angel's father, who also wrestled as Pitman's Hercules and 'Crazy' Dave Adams.)

Throughout March, Bulldog and Stewart beat Krammer and Kamakazi (who, from the spelling, wasn't the 1970s and 1980s well-known British wrestler Kamikazi, who appeared on *World of Sport* a lot. But again, madam, the name was written right there, so any confusion when buying tickets is not Joint Promotions' responsibility). While there's no result for the match they did in Hull in April (the one I've bought the poster for), they did the exact same match in Worthing, Bridlington and Alton, so it's likely Hull had the same.



It's worth saying these were obscure opponents for Smith, even by Joint Promotions' standards of 1994. With the exception of McDonald, they had virtually no profile even within wrestling. But that's not to say there was no talent in Britain at the time – the legendary Johnny Saint was working for All Star, along with Marty Jones and Danny Boy Collins (pictured here), and youngsters like Robbie Brookside and Doc Dean were very capable, athletic performers. While he couldn't do much, Giant Haystacks was still knocking around and would have been a marquee attraction for a poster, if not for a quality match. On the non-British side, American Avalanche was a decent performer, who was well-known from his previous WCW gimmick as PN News. Any of them could have had a decent match with Smith, had that been the plan (which it clearly wasn't.)



And, of course, everyone must have pondered whether Smith would either face or team with his old partner Dynamite at some point in the future. Most were unaware that the two couldn't be in the same room together, let alone work a programme.

But, worse than that, there probably wasn't much of an appetite for that match internally due to Dynamite's increasing physical problems. With terrible back and spine damage, his body was breaking down and his in-ring ability was beginning to become limited. His body no longer looked impressive, as he'd also stopped taking the vast quantity of steroids he'd used throughout his career,

¹⁷ Krammer is often spelt 'Kramer' but I think he's on Twitter as @barbarian67, and if it's him, then he spells it 'Krammer', so that's the version I've gone for. He's only tweeted once, back in August 2012, when he wrote "chillin after a long weekend 12 hours, 3 hours sleep in 24 good times." Karl Krammer only follows four people – LDN Wrestling, wrestler Stu Bennett, Chris Moyles and the Paralympics.

primarily because he could no longer afford them.¹⁸ He didn't look like the Dynamite Kid people knew, and he didn't wrestle like the Dynamite Kid they'd heard about. Putting him in the ring with the jacked and tanned Davey Boy would make Dynamite's pitiful physical condition all the more apparent.

For reasons I don't fully comprehend, it seems that neither Joint nor All Star had many cards that were recorded as taking place throughout the summer. When the Bulldog's tour resumed in July, it was a busy couple of months. Bulldog and Stewart started off beating Drew McDonald and Kamakazi in Cramlington, Northumberland¹⁹ and Black Bart (not the American one) and Johnny Angel in Southport, before besting Angel and Dale Preston in Southport.

Smith wrestled at least six times in August, facing various uninspiring combinations of Drew McDonald, Kamakazi, Johnny Angel and Iron Duke Lynch.

But there are weeks where there's no records, and that's because there's no definitive list of where Smith went on his tour. I've used results from WWFOldSchool.com (which lists some detailed ASW cards) and from Cagematch (some of which are wildly different to the first source), and have seen posters advertising dates at the Reading Hexagon, Percy Main in North Shields and Hull City Hall, none of which feature in either set of results.

But it suggests like the Bulldog was performing all over the country and presumably bringing in a lot of fans and ticket money. Along with the event posters, the Bulldog was selling his own self-produced T-shirts, and signing countless copies of his WWF VHS (which came out in 1992 and were probably the one bit of merch he signed the most of in his lifetime).²⁰

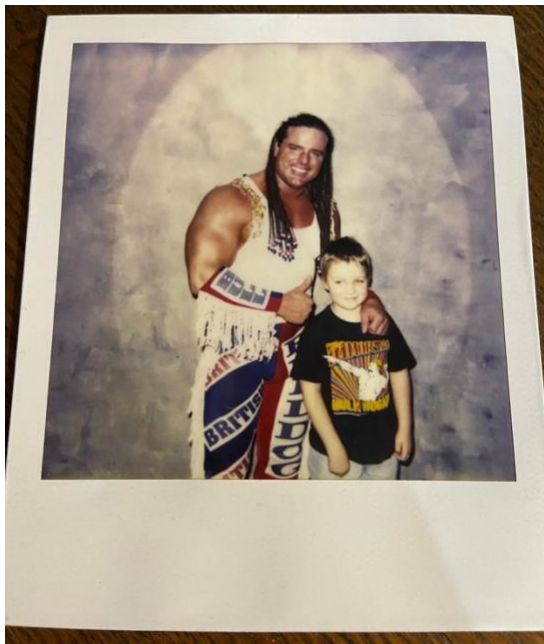


¹⁸ When he was fired from the WWF in 1992, Diana Hart claimed the Ultimate Warrior was spending some \$10,000 a week on steroids. That sounds like quite a lot.

¹⁹ That doesn't sound like a big town. Six miles outside of Newcastle, it has a current population of 30,000 people. From 1974 to 1976, the musician Sting was a schoolteacher at St Paul's Roman Catholic First School there. Wrestling may have taken place at the Nelson Miner's Welfare Club or the Concordia Leisure Centre. We just don't know.

²⁰ A number of Twitter responders recalled that they were disappointed that there wasn't any Bulldog merch at the shows they attended – instead, like the massive ghost at the dog-based feast, Big Daddy was sat at the table selling his tat, which I imagine would have been signed photos, the remains of a huge Lancashire hotpot that he'd had for breakfast, child-sized plastic top hats he'd sprayed with glitter and glue in his garage, and his expired diabetes medication.

Also available from the Bulldog was the chance to have a Polaroid taken with him. And judging by the number of photos that people sent in after I asked for information on the tour sent, boy, did that ever do some heart-lifting business.



Here's Sam Wingrove with the Bulldog at Gravesend, in a snap dated 12th January 1994. As you can see, Sam is proudly "mugging off the big man by wearing a Hulk Hogan T-shirt". This is a month earlier than the first recorded date that Smith wrestled, but Sam recalled that "my 8-year-old memory seems to recall a tag match." You can see here that the Bulldog still has nice-looking braids here. That will become important later, as it proves *beyond a shadow of a doubt* that it was indeed taken at the very start of his largely unrecorded UK run. Don't worry, I'll explain at the end.

Twitter user @UpperGwladysBlu "attended the show at the St Helens Theatre Royal in February 1994 and had my Polaroid photo

taken with the big man himself backstage afterwards. Remember him being huge! Was a nice guy though - in the brief minute I was with him, he asked if I'd enjoyed the show and what my name was. Doesn't sound much but I've since had meet & greets with people who don't even look at you, never mind speak to you." Honestly, UpperG, you should have met Onita at *Wrestlecon* this year. The man looked at me with genuine and undisguised contempt that I paid \$40 for his autograph.



Here's a snap from Al (on Twitter as @HamishMcGonagal) when he was a tiny boy at the Borough Hall, Hartlepool (a previously unrecorded date). Davey Boy Smith's huge tanned tan looks capable of breaking Al's shoulder with just an accidental nudge.

On the 8th August 1994, Ben (an essential wrestling tweeter as @BritWresAwayDay) headed down to the Ocean Rooms at the Spa in Scarborough to see Smith wrestle Johnny Angel and Iron Duke Lynch. It was Ben's second live show and he wrote about it in thrilling detail 25 years later.

Bulldog was on second, teaming with Tony Stewart ("representing the WWF" ...according to the ring announcer) to face 'Iron' Duke Lynch & Johnny Angel ("representing the WCW". Yes). This was on before the interval, presumably so Bulldog could sell Polaroids at half-time.

They put on a good, long match going all 3 falls. Heat on Stewart most of the way and heels cheating before hot-tagging Bulldog. Davey did all his trademark moves we wanted to see, like the stalling vertical suplex and the running powerslam, so that was very cool to me.

During the interval, we queued up to get our polaroid photos taken with Davey Boy over at his table. I remember him being really friendly, really warm, really tanned and really, well, solid. He shook my hand and signed the photo for us. Not gonna lie, this made my summer.

Even more excitingly, Ben *took his camera*.



But our deepest understanding of Smith’s mindset at the end of his 1994 tour comes from Lionel Cosgrave (who’s on Twitter at @painfulbusiness.) His mum wrote a newspaper article in August 1994, at which point Smith’s “working holiday” had reached Blackpool and Fleetwood. It mentions that “touring with him are his mum and dad, Sid and Joyce Smith, of Golborne, near Warrington, his Canadian wife and their children Harry, aged nine, and Georgia, six.” Well done to Mama Cosgrave for absolutely nailing the Bulldog’s hometown in what might be a first for anyone covering wrestling, and for writing about the show with delight.

The audience at the Tower Circus arena lapped up the spectacle of muscle meeting muscle – every clap and boo orchestrated by the players in the ring. I went along to keep the kids happy. I thought I’d be bored, but I wasn’t. It was a laugh a minute. There’s no doubt the wrestlers have tremendous skill and athletic ability. They weigh a ton yet move with the fancy footwork of a ballerina – ducking and dodging body-slamming blows. There are fancy

costumes to match the fancy names, music and drama. It's a big-money business. Kids love it – and so, it seems, do the big kids, too.

And then young Lionel²¹ got to interview the British Bulldog. It's SO PURE.

LIONEL: How tall are you?

BULLDOG: 6ft 1in.

LIONEL: How much do you weigh?

BULLDOG: 18 ½ to 19 stone.

LIONEL: How old are you?

BULLDOG: 31.

LIONEL: Who is your favourite wrestler?

BULLDOG: It has to be my brother-in-law Bret Hart.

LIONEL: Which opponent do you most fear?

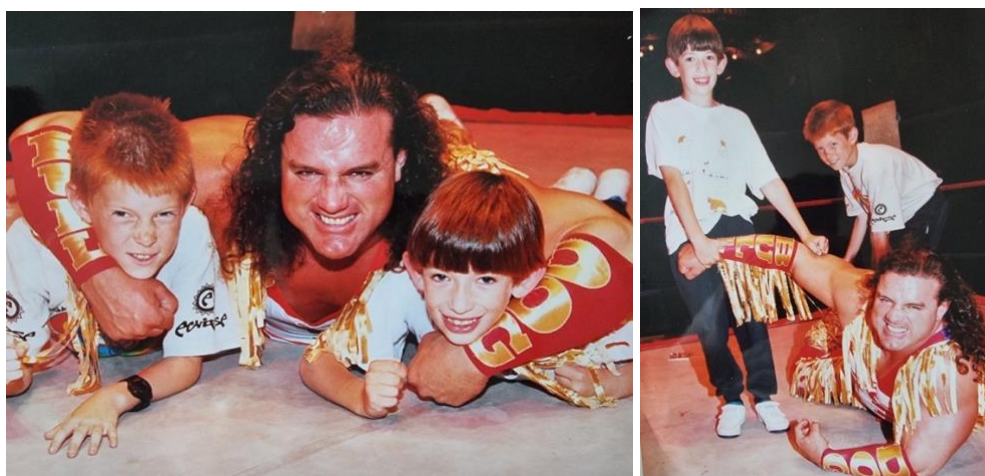
BULLDOG: The Undertaker – he's mean.

LIONEL: Do you ever get hurt?

BULLDOG: Sure, lots of times. Especially my knees.

LIONEL: What kind of food do you eat?

BULLDOG: Lots of high protein, low fat. Chicken, fish and vegetables.²² But I do have a sweet tooth and I love lemon meringue pie.



²¹ Lionel's name isn't actually Lionel, that's just his nom-de-biff (as Johnny Kwango once put it) on Twitter. We respect kayfabe here at *Wrestle Me!*

²² If you added a handful of ash, this is the basic ingredients of standard dog food.

Of course, one person would have been spitting feathers at this press and popularity: Smith's former partner, Dynamite Kid. He'd continued to perform with All Star, but as soon as Davey Boy reappeared, his bookings seem to have largely dried up. While this might have been for a number of reasons – his body was collapsing, his performances weren't what they'd been, and he was a pretty awful person to be around – he must also have wondered whether this wasn't a direct result of the Bulldog stealing all his thunder. The two didn't end up on any of the same cards during 1994 - the closest they came was Dynamite Kid working for All Star in Croydon on the 5th July; Davey then worked the 6th, a safe distance away in Southport.

So, if that fookin' arsehole who owned the trademark to the name 'British Bulldog' wasn't going to come to Dynamite, then Dynamite would have to go and see him, as he explained in *Pure Dynamite*.

When I heard that he was appearing on a card in Howe Bridge, a small village not more than a couple of miles from Wigan where I was living, well, I couldn't resist. I had to go.

Davey was wrestling a tag match, and the first thing I saw when I walked in was a table full of his pictures. So, I tipped the thing up, and the pictures flew everywhere. Max Crabtree came over, trying to calm things down, but in the middle of all this, somebody opened the doors to let the fans in. Max was shouting, "Close those doors."

Then I saw Davey's dad. My uncle Sid. I said, "All right, where is the fat bastard?" He said, "He's not here yet." I said, "If you're here, he's here. Where is he?"

While all this was going on, somebody called the police and eventually about eight of them came. They arrested me, handcuffed me and led me out of the building. I found out later that Davey Boy Smith had locked himself in a private dressing room.



It was the last time they'd ever be in the same building together, and the last time All Star would have anything to do with Dynamite. As a clear 'fuck-you' to Smith, a few months later Dynamite formed a tag team for one night in Germany with Danny Boy Collins, which he called – without any care for anyone's trademarks, regardless if they were Smith's or the WWF's - The British Bulldogs. Four months after his last match for All Star, Dynamite Kid's career was all over – bar an ill-advised comeback match for Michinoku Pro in Japan in 1996, where it was clear his body and career had come to the end of the road.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSLQxy3zLY8>

For Smith, things were also coming to an end. As August got underway, he received a phone call. Vince McMahon had won his grand jury case, the steroids purge had all

gone away, and Smith was being rehired by the WWF.²³ In exactly two weeks, Smith went from wrestling in Skegness to being back in the WWF, beating Barry Horowitz at a TV taping in Milwaukee.



A month later, in September 1994, Smith was back performing in Britain, although this time he was teaming with Bret Hart to beat Owen Hart and Jim Neidhart at the Wembley Arena and the Birmingham NEC – venues that held 12,500, compared to the 700 or so who could fit into Southport’s Floral Hall. From this point on, Smith would only ever wrestle in the UK again as a WWF superstar.

Here’s that return match with Horowitz, which shows that whatever the UK tour was like, Bulldog was in sensational physical nick for it (although he does slap on a chinlock after three minutes, which suggests he could be blowing up from the brief exertion). It’s from German TV channel RTL2, which brings back memories for

me of watching WCW PPVs, which went out for free on German channels that you could find if you had satellite TV and were willing to spend enough time flicking endlessly through German channels the day after the big shows were broadcast. Youngsters will never know how thrilling it was when, after cycling through a load of channels featuring German news bulletins and adverts for sensible Teutonic trousers, the face of a Nasty Boy suddenly appeared.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJsF3M1CETw>

But there was one lasting legacy of his time in the UK. When he returned to the WWF, Smith no longer had the famous braids that he’d worn for the last three years. In an interview with his daughter Georgia on daveyboysmith.com, she explained why he’d changed his hair: because when he’d done this UK tour, there was no one in Lancashire who could do his braids for him.

It was difficult to find a person convenient to where he lived who knew how to do the corn rows/braids the way Davey needed them (lots of them, tight, and with the red, blue and white beads). His mom and sister and my mom (Diana) tried but it wasn’t quite the same, so he just went without after a couple of months. And when he returned to WWE for *Summerslam* ‘94, his hair was long, healthy and full of natural curls.

²³ In his local newspaper interview with Lionel Cosgrave in August 1994, Smith was asked “are you still in WWF?” which most of the time would be the innocent question from a child that made any former WWF wrestler tense up. But it turned out, surprisingly, that Smith was. “Yeah, I’m going back for the 26th of this month in time for *Summerslam*,” he replied. “I’m not taking part this year but I will be having something to do with it.”



And as for British wrestling? Well, All Star's dream that the Bulldog would be the saviour of the UK wrestling business ended the instant he got back on a plane bound for America. What had seemed like a glorious future swiftly turned into nothing more than a heart-breaking glimpse of what might have been.

Having been going since 1952, and with nothing and no-one on the horizon coming to turn their fortunes around, Joint Promotions/RSW closed down for good in 1995.

BRITISH BULLDOG UK TOUR 1994 (RING WRESTLING STARS – FORMERLY JOINT PROMOTIONS)

Note: while the results for many of these matches aren't confirmed, the Bulldog's team would have won every single one of them.

- January 12 – Gravesend (date given by Sam Wingrove on Twitter)
- February 15 - teams with Tony Stewart to beat Karl Krammer and The Masked Destroyer, Fairfield Halls, Croydon (CM)
- February (unknown date) – Hexagon, Reading (poster exists)
- February (unknown date) – Theatre Royal, St Helens (venue given by @UpperGwladysBlu on Twitter)
- March 31 – teams with Tony Stewart vs Karl Krammer and Kamakazi, Pavilion Theatre, Worthing, West Sussex (WWFOS.com/CM/poster exists)
- April 4 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Karl Krammer and Kamakazi, Bridlington (WWFOS.com)
- April 18 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Karl Krammer and Kamakazi, Alton (WWFOS.com/CM)
- April (unknown date) – City Hall, Hull (poster exists)²⁴
- July 4 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Drew McDonald and Kamakazi, Cramlington (WWFOS.com)
- July 6 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Black Bart and Johnny Angel, Southport (WWFOS.com)

²⁴ Thanks to Geordan Moody (@geordanUK on Twitter), we know that this show did indeed take place as Geordan's dad "definitely served [the Bulldog] a pizza afterwards, as it was a bizarre claim to fame he frequently told me when I was young."

July 20 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Johnny Angel and Dale Preston, Southport (WWFOS.com)

July 21 – Percy Main, North Shields (poster exists)

August 5 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Iron Duke Lynch and Johnny Angel, Blackpool (WWFOS.com)

August 8 – teams with Tony Stewart vs Iron Duke Lynch and Johnny Angel, Ocean Room Suite of the Spa, Scarborough (date given by Ben @BritWresAwayDay on Twitter)

August 10 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Drew McDonald and Johnny Angel, Southport (WWFOS.com/CM)

August 12 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Drew McDonald and Kamakazi, Blackpool (CM)

August 14 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Drew McDonald and Johnny Angel, Morecambe (CM)

August 15 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Iron Duke Lynch and Johnny Angel, Scarborough (CM)

August 16 - teams with Tony Stewart vs Iron Duke Lynch and Johnny Angel, Skegness (CM)

August 20 – Marine Hall, Fleetwood (local paper supplied by @painfulbusiness)

Unknown date: Howe Bridge (mentioned in *Pure Dynamite*)

Unknown date: Loughborough (mentioned by Twitter user @GreatBashHeel)

Unknown date: Rotherham (mentioned by Twitter user @NeilAdshead)

Unknown date: Borough Hall, Hartlepool (mentioned by Twitter user @HamishMcGonagal)

DYNAMITE KID UK DATES 1994 (ALL STAR WRESTLING)



January 14 – beats Jimmy Ocean, Leeds Town Hall (CM)

January 15 – beats Ricky Knight, Victoria Hall, Hanley (CM)

January 19 – beats Ultimate Chippendale (Drew McDonald), Queen Victoria Hall, Oldham (CM)

January 27 – beats Buffalo Breheny in ‘Survivor Series’ tournament first round match, Municipal Hall, Colne (CM)

January 27 – double count-out with Johnny Saint in ‘Survivor Series’ tournament semi-final, Municipal Hall, Colne (CM)

January 28 – teams with Robbie Brookside to beat The Superflys, Jimmy Ocean and Ricky Knight in ‘Survivor Series’ tournament quarter-final (CM)

January 28 – beats The Masked Superstar (apparently

Marty Jones) by DQ in ‘Survivor Series’ tournament semi-final (CM)

July 5 – teamed with 1-2-3 Boy vs Sid Cooper and Karl McGrath in tag team tournament semi-final, London (most likely Fairfield Halls, Croydon) (WWFOS.com)

July 5 – teamed with Legend of Doom vs Skull Murphy and Mel Stuart in tag team tournament final, London (most likely Fairfield Halls, Croydon) (WWFOS.com)

WRESTLE ME! THE MONTH OF MARCH!

1st March – CAIN OF TERROR



After a shooting in San Jose, California, the former UFC champion and one-time WWE Saudi Arabian Supershow main-eventer Cain Velasquez was charged with first degree attempted murder. *TMZ Sports* reported that Velasquez is facing 70 years in prison if convicted, although other sources revised this to “a minimum of 20 years up to life” once the charges were filed.

As more details came out, the entire story was horrific. Velasquez had attempted to shoot a 42-year-old man called Harry Goularte, who had been charged in late February with one felony count of “a lewd and lascivious act upon a child under the age of 14”. The assault was said to have happened at a children’s day care centre owned by Goularte’s mother; the victim who claimed to have been molested by Goularte on “multiple occasions” was a “young relative” of Velasquez. According to MMA fighter Ryan Bader, the victim was Velasquez’s four-year-old son.

Against the district attorney’s objections, Goularte had been bailed and put on supervised release. When Goularte got into his truck to go and pick up the electronic monitoring bracelet that formed part of his parole conditions three days later, Velasquez was waiting outside his house. Chasing Goularte’s truck on an “11-mile, high speed chase” through San Jose, Velasquez ultimately rammed the truck before firing “multiple” shots with a 40-caliber handgun. Goularte wasn’t hit but his mother and stepfather were also inside his truck, and his stepfather (who was driving) was hit once, in his arm and torso. His injuries were not life-threatening.

Velasquez was arrested shortly afterwards, without incident, and charged with 10 offences, ranging from attempted murder and shooting into an occupied motor vehicle to carrying a loaded firearm with intent to commit a felony and wilfully discharging a firearm from a vehicle.²⁵ “The sad tragedy is that Mr. Velasquez chose to take the law into his own hands, endangering the public and everyone in the truck,” Santa Clara County DA Jeff Rosen said in a statement. “This act of violence also causes more pain and suffering to his family.”



Once the background facts of the case were made public, the MMA community quickly and unequivocally jumped to Velasquez’s defence. “You are the man Cain,” wrote Khabib Nurmagomedov, the undefeated former UFC lightweight champion, “We love you and we always stay with you.” His long-time friend and

²⁵ American law often brings multiple, slightly different charges in a way that British law doesn’t. I suppose the thought is if someone manages to be cleared of the most serious charge, you still stand a chance of catching an offender with another nine charges, all of which stem from the most serious act that you weren’t found guilty of.

teammate Daniel Cormier was present at Velasquez's first court hearing, where he was denied bail.

"I feel sorry for him and his family," Dana White said in an interview with Barstool Sports. "It's a horrible thing. I don't know enough details to speak on it, but from what I've heard, you know, we all say we'd do it if that ever happened to us - Cain did it."

Esquire wrote a measured article pondering the complex moral question of how "punishment [should] be meted out to a man who's almost assuredly guilty of attempted murder, but whose situation strikes a powerful sympathetic chord?" <https://www.esquire.com/sports/a39433816/cain-velasquez-mma-shooting/>

In the middle of April, Velasquez released a statement on social media.

To everyone that has expressed your support, my family and I will never be able to thank you enough. From the bottom of our hearts and the depths of our souls, we are forever grateful for your love. Your selfless gestures and kind words have given me strength in my darkest times. This story is complex and slowly unravelling as we speak. To the true victims of this case, may God give you the strength to come forward. Though it is most difficult to relive the pain that has happened to you, in speaking the truth, justice will be served and your own healing will start. I will never stop helping or loving my community and all of you. Thank you for loving me - Cain Velasquez.

Six weeks after his arrest, Velasquez remains in prison. Harry Goularte is still out on bail. What a horrible unimaginable disaster from start to finish.

2nd March – RING OF HONOR PLACED ON NEW FINGER



Having promised a "huge announcement" on *Dynamite*, AEW CEO Tony Khan revealed he had bought the struggling Ring of Honor promotion from its former owners Sinclair Broadcasting. The sale included all of ROH's intellectual property and its entire video back catalogue, which stretches back to 2002.

Unable to celebrate its 20th anniversary last month as it was on a worrying hiatus for "reimaging", having released all of its talent from their exclusive contracts, Khan's purchase of ROH meant that the formerly beloved independent would not just continue to exist, but have a great chance of blooming back into glorious life.²⁶

Following the death of WCW in 2001, the WWE became the only promotion with national television. TNA came along a year later, a cheaper attempt to recreate WWE which was not so much an alternative as a compromise. But there was an alternative.

²⁶ I cheated here, because I'm writing this in mid-April, having been to *Supercard of Honor* and it was great, so I know ROH is going to do well. Tee-hee, what a sneak, eh, readers?



Ring of Honor was the standard bearer of independent wrestling during those lean years, giving a platform to countless names who would go on to dominate wrestling in the 2000s – a short list includes Bryan Danielson, CM Punk, Samoa Joe, AJ Styles, Seth

Rollins (who performed as Tyler Black), Kevin Owens, Sami Zayn (as the masked El Generico), the Young Bucks, Cody (Rhodes, although he didn't use his surname), Kenny Omega, Adam Cole, the Briscoes, Austin Aries, reDRagon, Christopher Daniels, Hangman Page...I mean, you could go on. It seems like half of the main eventers in AEW were also main eventers in ROH, and now AEW owns years and years of their iconic matches.

Even the designer of ROH's original logo, fifteen-year-old competition winner Michael Paris went on to wrestling success – working in IMPACT as Zema Ion and DJZ, he's currently in NXT as the Legado del Fantasma's Joaquin Wilde. It says something when a company is so good at spotting wrestling talent that even the teenage logo designer goes on to win the X-Division title.



I should mention something which I don't think anyone admits, but in my years and years of watching ROH on DVD, I don't actually think there's been a single show where there aren't at least two matches I find so boring that I think I'm going to turn into dust and die. For every classic bout (which is usually the main event), there are countless matches where BJ Whitmer, Alex Arion, Dixie and Matt Stryker wrestle a four-way match, or Xavier (the only ROH champion who didn't make it bigger) takes on Jeremy Lopez, or Chad Collyer and Ace Steel wrestle for a ten minute bout that feels more

like it's being going for three-quarters of an hour. And in recent years, this has been even more pronounced, with matches featuring the likes of Beer City Bruiser, Rhett Titus and long-time ROH champion Matt Taven that are clearly professional wrestling, but somehow zero fun to actually watch.

Somewhat ironically, ROH basically collapsed when most of its main event talent (which included Cody, the Young Bucks and occasional appearances from Kenny Omega) left to set up AEW in early 2019. While ROH had been decimated by WWE buying up independent talent to populate NXT, AEW's successful positioning as the real wrestling alternative to WWE's sports entertainment left ROH completely redundant. Since then, it had struggled to retain its position as a leading American independent promotion.

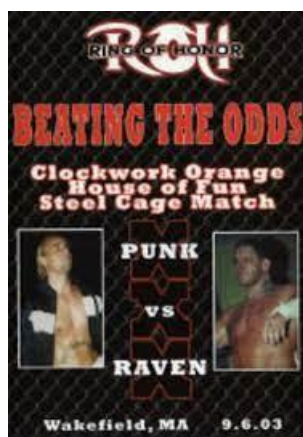
Later in the month, it came out that Triple H had wanted to purchase ROH in 2018, at a time when the back catalogue featured many of NXT's then-current performers. Vince McMahon rejected his idea, as he had wanted to buy a bigger international company in order to push forward the WWE's international expansion – but his attempts and offers to buy New Japan, Stardom, Mexico's AAA and Pro Wrestling NOAH all ended in failure. In retrospect, it's mad to think that any of those sales could have happened, and that today, WWE would be running Stardom. It seems to make no sense.

Here's some fun matches from Ring of Honor's 20 years – first up, it's Eddie Guerrero (who'd just been fired from WWE and been to rehab, but wouldn't be away long thanks to performances like this on the independent circuit) taking on Super Crazy on the debut show in 2002. Muy bueno.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-tZytkodsM>

The ROH champion Bryan Danielson takes on AJ Styles in 2006.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fX9Mvmtimg>



And here's two matches from the CM Punk-Raven feud that ran throughout 2003 and took place not just in ROH, but in IWA-Mid South and TNA. First off, a dog-collar match (which Punk would reference in his phenomenal dog-collar with MJF at AEW *Revolution* 2022, where he came out to his old ROH theme and in his old ROH gear.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyQnrHwYpDM>

And their Clockwork Orange House of Fun steel cage hardcore match from the same year. Raven created this match, and he'd take it to TNA in 2003. I don't think there's been one since.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAzKzUe4pek>

From *Final Battle* 2012, the classic main event ladder match between Kevin Steen (aka Kevin Owens) and El Generico, the generic luchador (aka Sami Zayn.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3f41LEuEUA>

Finally, perhaps my favourite Ring of Honor match of all time – from 2005, it's Samoa Joe meeting the Japanese legend Kenta Kobashi. Beforehand, Kobashi was concerned that the American fans wouldn't know who he was. Oh, they knew.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Whi7usNNd6s>

3rd March – LET ANYTHING SLIP? NO CHANCE IN HELL



Vince McMahon sat down for his first live interview in fifteen years on *The Pat McAfee Show*. It was a fascinating look at what's essentially a mad Roman Emperor who is never contradicted and enjoys people being in awe of him. Setting the tone for where the power lay, McMahon turned up seven minutes late for the live show. He then moved the

microphone, so he was off-mic and, to hear him, everyone had to go completely silent when he was talking. Two classic bits of basic power play from the masterful psychopath McMahon.

While he stands up a lot and shouts like a lot of these modern podcast Americans do these days, McAfee asked some great questions (I say 'great questions' - they were all fairly obvious ones, but McMahon is really intimidating, so asking him them seemed

surprisingly bold on McAfee's part). For McMahon's part, he made no attempt to hide the fact he was both suspicious and angry that McAfee had the nerve to ask him anything, despite the fact this was an interview he'd clearly agreed to do. At points, he looked like he was moments from storming out, even though McAfee had spent most of the hour telling him how brilliant he was.

McAfee asked about Vince hating being mentioned in Hall of Fame acceptance speeches; his ban on the word 'wrestling' (essentially, McMahon said that anyone can do wrestling, but no one else can do what the WWE does); the competition from AEW and TNA (which McMahon instantly looked furious at the very mention of, like the words themselves were offensive); and he not only asked McMahon about the mass firings, but put it to McMahon that a lot of people believe he doesn't care about the people he fires. McMahon's answer was classic McMahon: stick to the company line and never admit that you do or don't have any feelings for puny humans. He answered everything in his whispery old-man voice, which makes it sound like he's got three days to live but urgently wants to start removing children who've displeased him from his will.

I'm always concerned about what's best for the audience. Always. 'What does the audience want?' And if you have dead weight around you—if we have a situation whereby someone not cutting it, where maybe you have a situation for someone else, and then it's like, "ok, it's probably the best thing."



The issue with a McMahon interview is that he's been doing this sort of thing for years, and when you've managed to cope with the US government asking you questions - and the only thing that'll stop you going to prison for years is your answers - having a podcaster ask if you're nice in real life isn't going to trip you up and say something revealing that you didn't mean to let

slip. Like an aging alligator being questioned by a tiny egg, his answers to anything that McAfee threw at him were uniformly corporate and bland. If you watched Pat McAfee's show but didn't know anything about wrestling, you'd think that Vince McMahon was one of the least compelling men you'd ever heard speak.

At one point, McMahon said "it's a surprise I'm still around, I shouldn't even be alive!" which McAfee immediately picked up on and asked what he meant. McMahon completely deflected, to say that the job he does doesn't feel like work to him. There's only one thing worse than old people going on and on about how fucking wild they were back in the day, and that's old people going on and on about how fucking wild they were back in the day but panic when you ask them for details about it. It makes me think he's never even drunk a beer at any point in the last seven decades.

McAfee also asked him about the *Royal Rumble* 2005 where he somehow managed to tear both his quads sliding into the ring. "That takes talent," said McMahon, who

was almost enjoying this impertinent line of questioning, but not quite. “You have no use of your legs at all.”²⁷

Comparing the WWE to *Succession*, where another awful family jostle to inherit a huge business, McAfee asked the boldest question of all: what will happen when Vince hands over power?

I don't think about it a lot. If you built something, you should want it to grow and prosper, with or without a family member. You have to look at it objectively. You have to look at family members just like you would any other employees. You have to do the right thing for the business. So, if that person hasn't worked out, you have to get them out of the company.

It was a chilling glimpse into the mind of a man who seems to be as emotionally detached from his own family's hopes, dreams and future as he was from, say, Luke Gallows (it's worth mentioning that he referred to Linda McMahon as “my first wife”, despite the fact that they've been married since 1966 and he's never been married to anyone else.) The only real emotion he showed in the whole interview was when he revealed he lifts 1000lbs on a weights bar, once a month. This led to bring up his personal trainer Mike, who he's clearly very fond of, and just mentioning Mike's name led him to smile and shakes his head slowly, like Mike is his best friend and he really loves him.

McMahon ended up by asking McAfee if he wanted to perform at *Wrestlemania 38*. I'd argue that if an interviewee ends the hour-long grilling by offering you a million pounds and your childhood dream being granted, you might not have asked hard enough questions. But, fuck it, if it meant having a *Wrestlemania* moment, I wouldn't have mentioned Jimmy Snuka and that briefcase either.

4th March – ANOTHER AWFUL INVASION

A hostile superpower obsessed with expansion at any cost and willing to crush anyone who stands up to their plans for global domination, WWE present wrestling shows. But the Russian invasion of the Ukraine was basically gimmick-theft, and the WWE chose to terminate its Russian TV deals and cut access to the Network immediately.

In a statement, WWE said:

WWE has terminated its partnership with Russian broadcaster Match and shut down WWE Network in Russia effective immediately. The move eliminates access in Russia to any WWE programming, including the company's weekly *Raw*, *Smackdown* and NXT shows, its on-demand library, and all of its premium live events, including *Wrestlemania 38*.

There's a strange tone there, where they shift from announcing they're pulling operations out of Russia to advertising all the great shows they produce.

²⁷ By the time *Wrestlemania 38* Night 2 came round and McMahon had to take a stunner, it's clear that controlling his legs is basically his biggest weakness.

5th March – REGAL JOINS THE REVOLUTION



AEW *Revolution* continued the long unbroken list of tremendous AEW PPVs, but this one is going to be hard to beat because it heralded the return of William Regal to an on-screen role. At the end of a hard-hitting Jon Moxley-Bryan Danielson match, Regal came out to pull the two apart, shout at them, slap Mox, then headbutt him (and get blood on the tip of his nose, which made him look like he'd become a Blood Clown), then slap Danielson. Regal's slaps should be in the British Museum as priceless examples of how a hard slap should be delivered.

At the post-*Revolution* press conference, AEW's Tony Khan spoke about how shocked he was that WWE would have ever released the 53-year-old Regal, and charmingly referred to him again and again as 'Lord Regal'.

I was very surprised to see he had been released and was going to be available. I have tons of respect for his mind. And I think he's going to be a very valuable person here in AEW. Honestly, I think people who followed his career closely know that he has a very long-established connection with Bryan Danielson, and was instrumental in shaping the pro wrestler that Bryan Danielson has become. I think [Danielson] one of the greatest pro wrestlers today, and I also think he's one of the greatest pro wrestlers of all time, I really do. I think Lord Regal had a big contribution to that. So I think when he was released I was first of all very surprised, but also eager to bring him here. I think he can contribute on-screen in a major way to both Bryan Danielson, and also he has a history with Jon Moxley. I think some of the last matches we saw Lord Regal wrestle were against Jon Moxley. They had a great rivalry also, so he's very familiar with both men. They both have a ton of respect for him, and I think we saw after the violence and the way that they bled together tonight, they have built a lot of mutual respect now with each other. So, I think that's very exciting. Also, behind the scenes, I am really excited to have him here. I think Lord Regal can teach all of us, everyone, here a lot. It's going to be great having him here, and I am very excited on-screen and off-screen.

What was unexpected was how many NXT performers tweeted about Regal coming back. Indi Hartwell, Cora Jade and Persia Perotta all chose a way to tweet where they could feasibly deny they were watching AEW if the WWE secret police brought them in for an interrogation later on.



Within weeks, Regal had united Danielson (who'd been the person who legitimately called Regal to ask him to come back) and Moxley in the Blackpool Combat Club. This was, of course, massive news for the *Blackpool Gazette*, who immediately contacted Regal for an interview about his adopted hometown.

Whose idea was it to name the faction the Blackpool Combat Club?

I would love to claim it was my idea, but it wasn't. It was Jox Moxley's idea. I had just come into the company after being asked to come in by Bryan Danielson because it sounded like a lot of fun. I was initially planning to take a year off. I wasn't going to do anything because I haven't done anything other than wrestling for the last 39 years. All of a sudden, I heard Jon's name was involved which piqued my interest even more and it's ended up how it's ended up.

Straight away there was a chemistry there because in real life there's a chemistry there. People know a lot about me and Bryan but they might not know as much about me and Jon but these are stories we can tell over time.

Jon came up to me and said he's got a great idea for a name, because he had come up with different Blackpool things. I told him it's not about me, it's about the two of them, I'm just a spare part here and riding on your coattails. But he insisted we called it this. That meant a lot because Blackpool has given me everything good in my life and I've done everything I can do to make sure that, regardless of where I went, I was always billed from Blackpool.

I moved there when I was 16, I spent time there as a child on holidays, I started my wrestling career there, I lived in Blackpool for 10 years, I had a house for 12 years, I met my wife there, my first two children were born at Victoria Hospital - everything good in my life came from Blackpool. So, Jon and Bryan have always heard me telling these stories and they just wanted to use the name because they feel if it wasn't for Blackpool, I wouldn't be wrestling and I wouldn't be in America.

Bryan has been to Blackpool quite a lot because he wrestled a lot in England for a lot of years, but Jon hadn't. But he just likes the sound of it. I didn't think it would go any further than that conversation but then we get to television last week and he showed me his phone and he's got these designs for different stuff. I replied 'oh, are we actually going to do this then? This is a thing?'

We went out that night and I had no idea he was going to say it on TV, but he said it and the next morning there are t-shirts out, so I ran with it. When you get an opportunity, you run with it. So that was how it happened.

Have you considered inviting Jon Moxley to Blackpool?

He would love Blackpool, he would fit right in. It would be his kind of place, definitely.

Blackpool has never been anything but home to me. This sounds silly, but when I was a child, I always said I wanted to be a wrestler, a clown or a comedian and I was going to live in Blackpool. Any of my family will tell you

that. When I went to Blackpool as a child, I used to see wrestling at the Pleasure Beach, I used to see wrestling at the Tower, but I also saw the circus, shows on the pier and it just seemed like a wonderland to me. It still is. I know everyone has a different view on what goes on in that town but I never had anything but good come out of it.

I went there because I knew it was a great place for me to learn wrestling, because at the time it was one of the few places to get into it because of a wonderful gentleman called Bobby Barron, who used to run the shows at the Horseshoe Bar at the Pleasure Beach. A lot of us young wrestlers at the time got in because of the Pleasure Beach and hanging around and finally Bobby took us in, so we finally became apprentices for him. Unfortunately, it went years ago, I think the last time it was there in 1994 because he sadly passed away, but that was the core of me becoming a wrestler.

I stayed in Blackpool because I loved everything about it, I loved the 10-minute walk to the sea front, 15 minutes to Stanley Park and I could go to a show every night, I could wrestle locally, whether it be Blackpool, Morecambe or Southport. It's still home today. I've lived over here now for 29 years but when I go back, that's where I base myself. My mother-in-law lives there, my wife's family all live there, I've had friends there ever since I moved there and they're all good people who I go and see. Whenever I'm in England, I'm based in Blackpool.

6th March – SHONKY TONK MAN

I don't know if you follow the Honky Tonk Man on Twitter (you don't, why would you?), but quite regularly, he'll link to one of his eBay auctions (where he sells under the name "nobumps"). Honk always chooses to advertise his latest bit of signed merch with some weird sexual statement, as if that's what anybody wants from a 69-year-old Elvis impersonator with damaged hips. And yes, if he was here, he'd definitely do a tweet talking about being 69 and what she said when he told her.



I don't know who positioning Honky Tonk Man as a shagger is supposed to appeal to, but disappointingly, Honky has cleaned his timeline up since I first saw it, and loads of the really stomach-turning ones have gone, which is a shame / not a shame. But Honky remains one of the great carnies, selling anything that he thinks some mark will buy. At the *Wrestlemania 38* Wrestlecon, he was charging an absolutely whopping \$50 for his autograph on an 8x10, or an even bigger \$60 if you wanted him to sign something you'd brought along with you (which means if you *don't* take one of his 8x10s, you end up paying \$10 more.) He also didn't wear his costume (unlike the consummate hero of stolen valour, Sgt Slaughter, who charged \$10 less for a signature) and instead wore a pair of red and white Zubaz pants that made him look like he was awaiting a hospital procedure on his downstairs.

But nothing beats the sheer moxie of Honky's eBay page – while he's selling the usual signed photos (for under half the price of when he does it in person), he's also flogging off ring gear, with prices starting at \$650 for a pair of ring-worn trunks, \$750 for a singlet that's been in contact with his Honky Tonkers²⁸ and \$1450 for a pair of his tights (which look like regular tracksuit trousers with three generic iron-on guitar patterns stuck onto them).



Even better, the accompanying photographs make it look like he's the owner of a swinger's hotel holding up items of used men's underwear that he's hopeful you'll wear. The big scenic painting behind him also makes it look like he might be in a high-security American prison, and this is the wall you go to when you have a photograph taken on your family's annual visit, before they take you back to your cell on Death Row and you get to sit quietly, thinking about all the remaining bodies the authorities didn't find, the fools.

Again, Honky's slightly cleaned up his eBay site too, but not before I saved a photo of the single worst thing he's ever tried to sell – a signed, used insole (right foot). I didn't buy it, but now I wish I

²⁸ Based on nothing but the power of my own imagination, I believe this is what the Honky Tonk Man would call his testicles. His name for his penis? Old Honk.

had, if only to put in a little Perspex museum case, so I could bring it to the live shows and we could all admire it, like a piece of the true cross. But now I'll never have the chance, because *it sold*. Let that sink in. It *sold*. Someone bought this "ring worn boot cushion" which Honky said had been used "for several years." They paid \$24.99 for it. And *another person also bought the left foot version as well*, for the same price. \$50 for a pensioner's insoles.

7th March – THE OVER-SHOOTING STAR



One of the biggest botches in *Wrestlemania* history occurred at WM19, where Brock Lesnar went up to the turnbuckle and prepared to hit a spectacular shooting star press which would have led to the pinfall on WWE Undisputed champion Kurt Angle. It was a move he'd used in OVW, but he'd never busted it out

on the main WWE roster. What a *Wrestlemania* moment that would be! Instead, with Angle too far away, Lesnar ended up spinning, landing on his nose, and his neck took the entire weight of his huge body which was still going in another direction.

In an interview with *The Michael Kay Show* (nope, no idea), Lesnar was asked to remember the time he almost became the star of the world's most spectacular snuff film.

That was foolish on my behalf. You get people, producers, and people higher up in the company; they always want this *Wrestlemania* moment, which would be fantastic. So, I would practice it the night before. I was doing it in OVW when I was being trained. I'm 310 pounds, 6'3", doing a front backflip off the top, hitting guys, and winning matches. Mr. Perfect Curt Hennig, bless his soul, [said to me] 'You don't need to do that. Stop doing that.'

Thankfully, I didn't break my neck or anything. I shouldn't have done it. I finished the match, had a concussion. Thankfully, that was the worst of it. Kurt helped me through and was talking to me. He should have rolled me over and pinned me, went off-script.

Instead, Angle managed to shout loud enough in Brock Lesnar's ear that Lesnar's soul was able to hear him from the cold, dark netherworld, and was able to come alive long enough to hit an F5.



While you could barely tell from his in-ring performance, Angle was in terrible physical condition at the time, and pinning Lesnar to retain the title was the last thing Angle was going to do. He didn't want to have another match under any circumstances. If Lesnar had died as a result of that shooting star press, I think there's every chance that Angle would have manipulated Lesnar's massive pale corpse to make it seem like

the limp arms had slapped a chokehold on Angle, so he could tap out and then go for a long, peaceful rest in a hospital.

8th March – 2K22 IS OK22



WWE 2K22 was released today, not hot on the heels of *2K20*, which had basically derailed the long-running video game series with glitches galore, terrible renders and a reception that made the game developers cancel *2K21* in order to try and get their house in order. The reception for this game was said to be make-or-break for the WWE's relationship with 2K Games.

With a well-received revamp of the controls, great graphics (although there was still criticism that the movement of wrestler's hair is still weird) and a long-awaited General Manager mode, the reviews were good across the board. IGN said it was "by far the most polished and freshest take on the franchise since it began way back in 2013". Within days, sales of *2K22* had doubled that of the maligned *2K20*. It was the second biggest selling game in the UK, behind *Elden Ring*.



Thankfully, the developers had made sure they paid tribute to *2K20* by having a few glitches make a surprise run-in. It wouldn't be a 2K game without wrestlers suddenly floating above the turnbuckle before smoothly lowering to hover four foot above the arena floor, a rope break making the screen go entirely black while the action continues unseen, or characters getting stuck behind the ropes as they step onto the apron, unmoving, static and silent.

9th March – THE SNAKE MISHANDLER

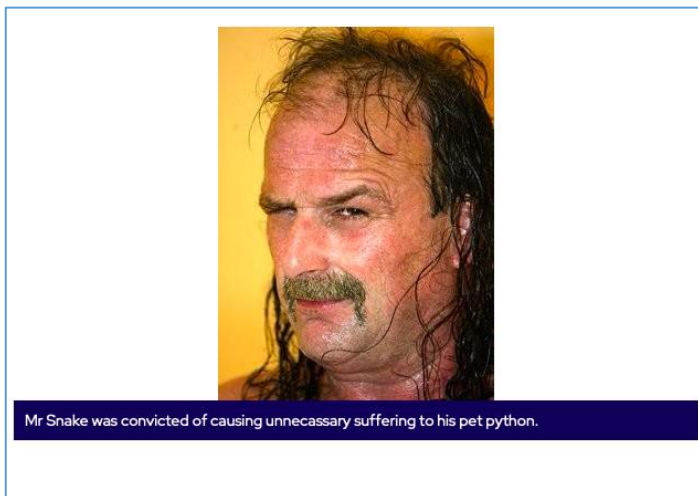
It's the oldest unanswered question in wrestling: if Jake 'the Snake' Roberts wrestled an actual snake, who would win? Well, finally Jake has weighed in with a definitive answer on his *DDP Snake Pit* podcast, where he talked about the time one of his snakes choked him spark out in the middle of the ring.

Ricky Steamboat had to pull one off of me in Indianapolis that choked me out in the match. I collapsed, went down, and Steamboat's seeing that the snake was around my throat and that I was turning and he knew to unwind the snake. You can't break the snake's grip because what happens when you lay across their scales like this, their scales interlock. You can't break that lock. So, you have to either get the head or the tail and unravel them. Well, Steamboat unravelled it then let go because Steamboat is afraid of snakes too.

As I come to, the snake is going into the fourth row and the tail, luckily, is still in the ring. And I lunge and grab the tail and I whip it all back in. It's about a 17-footer. Because the people were starting the Red Sea movement where they're all running and screaming. It was pretty incredible.

We went back to Indianapolis about three months later. As soon as I got there, I thought I was fixing to be arrested because the police were coming and the building manager and I'm like, 'What have I done?' They're like, 'Did you bring the same snake?' I'm like, 'Why?' 'Because, man, everyone called wanting to know if it's the same snake because they want to watch that son-of-a-bitch kill you'. I'm like, 'Oh I love my fans'.

Of course, Jake would get his revenge on the snake world decades later, when he lived in St Albans, took drugs and left a 12-foot python to starve to death "over a period of months." In November 2004, Roberts was convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal (although he was wrongly named as 'Mr Jake Snake' by one local paper.) He had pleaded not guilty, but then didn't turn up at court for any of the hearings.



The BBC News site reported that the snake was Roberts' "15-foot sidekick [who he'd carried] around the ring prior to his wrestling bouts in the 80s and 90s" and that its name was Damien.

This came as shocking news to me, as I'd always thought it was just an anonymous snake that he mistreated, not the most famous snake in wrestling. The fact that Damien died in White Horse

Lane, London Colney (just outside St Albans) meant all the history books would have to be rewritten. You'd just have to rip them up and start again.

But reading more articles, it seems that it was just a British snake that Roberts named Damien, one in a long line of unfamous snakes given the Damien name. Although reading about its fate, I shouldn't imagine that the real Damien had a better time of it, wherever he is (most likely, flushed down a toilet in a process that took hours until he'd entirely disappeared).

10th March – AT LEAST HE'S ONLY ADDICTED TO DANCING THIS TIME



Jeff Hardy made his AEW debut on *Dynamite*, running down to the ring to save Sting, Darby Allin and brother Matt from a savage beatdown. On his urgent race down to the ring to stop the beating however, he briefly paused to do a little fruggy dance to his own theme music. It led to a lot of memes of social media, all along the lines of "when you want to save your friends from a beatdown, but the DJ's just dropped bare phat beatz," or however young people speak these days.

On Matt's podcast, Jeff explained why he chose to dance before intervening.

Matt is saying, like, 'Take your time, go through the juke' [Hardy's entrance gestures]. And I'm like, 'I can't do that, I'm saving my brother!' So, I tried to juke and run at the same time, but I think it worked out pretty perfectly.

Matt was the one who pressed Jeff to somehow both run to make the save, and also do his odd little dance. "Doing the juke on the run was a compromise," Matt explained.

The music is gonna be such a big moment, fans are gonna be out of their mind and I wanted him to do the juke and he's the big star. Do the full entrance, even though they're beating my ass. It wasn't on him. If it was up to him, he would've just run in. It was up to me. He's a big star, dammit, and he's gonna get a big entrance!

11th March – PEPPERTONI STORM



There's very little that the wrestling industry won't make into merchandise (I refer m' noble lords to the story about the Honky Tonk Man). But until now, no one's tried to make wrestling-themed pizzas.²⁹ Until now. *Now*.

Powerbomb Pizzas features "pizza crafted and sold by pro wrestlers," which is not something I've ever looked for in food before, and now I've seen it, I don't like it. Set up by the leading wrestling T-shirt store Pro Wrestling Tees, they say that the profits from each item goes back to the wrestler (or their families) who "specifically crafted" it.

PIZZA

All pizzas comes in sizes Jobber (Small), Mid-Card (Medium), Main Eventer (Large).



THE FOUR CHEESES OF FOLEY

Mozzarella, Parmesan, Provolone, Romano



THE GODFATHER'S PIMPIN' PEPPERONI PIZZA

Pepperoni & Mozzarella Cheese



VADER'S MASTODON MEAT LOVERS PIZZA

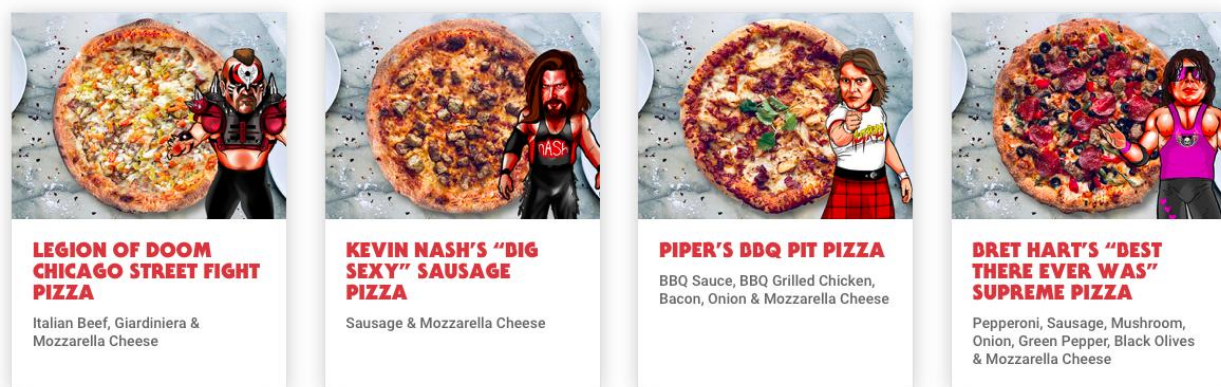
Sausage, Pepperoni, Bacon & Mozzarella Cheese



ROB VAN DAM THAT'S A LOT OF VEGGIES PIZZA

Mushroom, Onion, Green Pepper, Red Pepper, Tomatoes & Mozzarella Cheese

²⁹ "Hang on, I seem to remember, in one of the early *Wrestle Me!* fanzines, you did a big thing about UFC pizzas, didn't you?" Yes, but what's that got to do with wrestling? That's UFC, isn't it? It's not wrestling. "So...so if UFC's not wrestling, then why was it in this wrestling newsletter?" Sorry, can you repeat the question? "Well, I just meant that if UFC isn't wrestling, then why did you..." Look, really sorry, not being rude, but I've got to go. Thanks for the question, it was a great question though, really good. OK, thanks. Thanks.



Weirdly, it's some sort of franchise deal where your order goes "directly to a REAL pizzeria in your area and is cooked by their restaurant." So, it sounds like you contact Powerbomb pizza, say "I'll have the Godfather's Pimpin' Pepperoni Pizza, please!" and they then send an email to some pizza place round the corner from your house, saying "alright, can you chuck this bloke a pepperoni?" and then take the difference in price. Then six months later, the Godfather notices someone's sent him 12p.



Never ones to let the market run away from them, WWE launched their own takeaway food over *Wrestlemania 38*. 'Smackadillas' – the result of not being able to find a workable pun around the word 'quesadillas' – were available on DoorDash, the US version of JustEat. And like those pizzas, they didn't really have anything to do with wrestling beyond the name.

The different types of smackadillas included the not-a-pun The Onion Rumble, where a group of people agreed that, considering they'd come up with nothing better, the word 'onion' sounded enough like the word 'royal' for them to sign it off. But the launch of the Smackadillas was enough to make front page news in Dallas – and they used the word 'stupendous', like with *Wrestlemania*, amazing! - so that's a brief that everyone involved with should be really pleased with.



12th March – DING DONG BUNDY

On the *Two Man Power Trip of Wrestling*, Hulk Hogan spoke about the oft-overlooked King Kong Bundy, who headlined *Wrestlemania 2* with him back in 1986

(in what is definitely one of the weakest *Wrestlemania* main events of all time.) Unusually, Hogan didn't lie and claim that Bundy was 800lbs when he gorilla-pressed him in the ring in front of 100,000 fans, or that Bundy broke Hogan's neck in fourteen places and only his belief in God allowed him to walk once again.



Instead, he perplexingly went on about devastatingly handsome Bundy was.

What I always said about him is when I saw his face, 'That's a good-looking man.' King Kong Bundy was a good-looking guy. A lot of people never saw that because of the shaved head and he was so big, but he was a good-looking man when he was younger. I didn't pay much attention to him when we both got old, but when he first started wrestling. [He was so huge], you couldn't tell he was a good-looking guy. That's how Bundy was. He was always nice to me. He was just heavy-handed as hell.

What a strange thing to suddenly bring up. And with all respect to the late King Kong Bundy, I'm not even 100% sure Hogan is right.

13th March – HOPEFULLY HE WON'T BE SAYING HELLO TO THE BAD GUY

Bad times don't last, but bad guys do. Today, that sadly proved not to be the case.



Scott Hall suffered three unexpected massive heart attacks while he was undergoing surgery on a hip that he'd broken in a fall a few weeks before (horrifically, Hall had been on his own when he fell, and unable to move or reach a phone, had remained lying on the floor for days.) During

the procedure, a blood clot unexpectedly broke away, at which point things went catastrophic. Hall was placed on life support, but the prognosis was bleak. With his family gathered round his bedside, the decision was made to turn his life support off. Somehow, Hall struggled on for six hours before dying at the age of 63.

Hall was many things in the course of his career, both extremely good and very bad. He was a founder member of the nWo, the iconic face and attitude of one of the most successful angles in wrestling history. He was a beloved character in the WWF in the

early 1990s, one of the few gimmicks from that time that became lodged in the popular imagination. He was a compelling interview and a good hand in the ring, who had one of the most celebrated matches in *Wrestlemania* history. He was a gifted raconteur, his shoot interviews showing the charisma, humour and charm that made him popular among many of the boys. He may have been one of the biggest wrestlers never to win a world title, but eventually was so over, he didn't really need any belt to give him a rub.

But he was also an utter car-crash during the 2000s, an unpredictable drunk whose run-ins with the law kept wrestling news sites busy and wrestling promoters uneasy. And, finally, he was a redemption story, a celebrated Hall of Famer who looked to be finally beating his demons, only to fall at an unexpected final hurdle.

A lifelong wrestling fan from Maryland³⁰, who had spent some of his childhood in Germany while his father served in the US military, the 6' 5" Hall³¹ moved to Florida in his early 20's where he began training with Hiro Matsuda (who had also trained rookies Hulk Hogan and Lex Luger).

In 1983, Hall was working as a bartender three nights a week at Thee Original Doll House, a strip club in Orlando (which still stands), when he got into an argument with a customer. The customer left the bar, found Hall's car and smashed all the windows. A furious Hall followed him outside.

As I closed the distance, I remember what he was wearing, what I was wearing, what it smelled like. I mean, it's burnt in my brain. Like, I drilled him, he went down, and his shirt went up, and he was reaching for [his firearm], so I reached for it too. We wrestled around with it. I took it and shot him in the head. You know, a guy pulled a weapon on me, and I took it away and shot him, point-blank. A guy's dead, and I'm the reason. This is bad.

Hall was arrested but the charge of second-degree murder was dropped for lack of evidence. He later said he'd been diagnosed with PTSD, but instead dealt with the trauma by self-medicating and working out – two things he'd continue to do throughout his wrestling career.

His break into the business happened after he bumped into Barry Windham in a supermarket, as he explained to *PW Torch* in 2006.

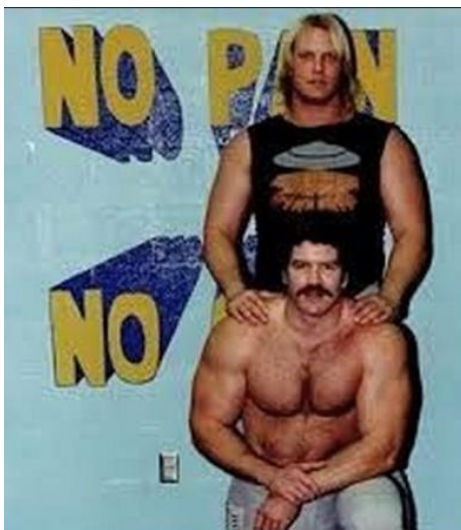
I'm hanging around and trying to get in. But, see, I'm not going to guys, going, "Hey man, how do I get into wrestling? How do I get into wrestling?", because I know they don't want to hear that. So, one day, me and Barry are in Publix and we're both looking at steaks. We're picking out steaks. We're standing looking at steaks and I say, "Excuse me, you're Barry Windham, right?" He says, "Yeah, how you doin'?" Because Barry's cool as fuck. I said, "Hey, I'm Scott Hall. How ya' doing, man?" He says, "Hey." I said, "I know the last thing you wanna be is bothered when you're out on your own time, but I'm really

³⁰ The first match Hall ever saw live was on his eighth birthday, and while he couldn't remember who was in the main event, he did recall it was a hair vs hair match. "I remember I ran down to the ring and grabbed a piece of the guy's hair and it still had a piece of scalp on it" he told *PW Torch* in 2006. "I still have the folder and the hair and everything."

³¹ For the majority of his career, Hall was billed as being a kayfabe 6' 7".

trying to break into your business.” He said, “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m working out with Hiro Matsuda.” He said, “Fuck Hiro Matsuda. He’s going to have you doing Hindu Squats around the building. Meet me at the Sportatorium tomorrow, one o’clock.” I showed up at noon. ‘Cause I know Barry Windham ain’t gonna show up. That’s Barry Windham.

You know who showed up? Barry Windham and Mike Rotundo. You know what they did, too? They didn’t bump me. They bumped each other. They said, “Look, pick him up, slam him like this. Boom boom boom.” Then they had me slam them. I didn’t get bumps, I gave bumps. Then they had to go to a town and wrestle. Barry was really good to me.³²



Hall began wrestling in Florida’s CWF in 1984, where he was shown the ropes by Windham, Rotunda and Dusty Rhodes. After a short feud with Rhodes (which is a hell of a programme for a rookie, considering Rhodes’ stature at the time), he was teamed with fellow rookie Dan Spivey as American Starship – Spivey was Starship Eagle, while Hall became Starship Coyote, and the best way I can describe them is as ‘Road Warriors who ladies might want to fuck’.

They moved on to Jim Crockett’s promotion (better known as the NWA, although it was actually just the biggest of the many promotions nationwide which made up the NWA) where they

had only sporadic matches, beating jobbers but losing to anyone with any sort of name. As Hall put it, “We’re too green to win and too fuckin’ big to lose, so we don’t work much, maybe once every couple of months.”



Here’s American Starship taking on Superstar Billy Graham and the Barbarian in January 1985. The fact that Hall wrestled Superstar Graham is one of those match-ups that smashes what seem like two totally distinct eras together – it’s someone from the NWO wrestling the man who beat Bruno Sammartino for the WWF title in the Garden. In his career, Hall would wrestle both Superstar Billy Graham and Hiroshi Tanahashi. Mind-blowing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoSxyg3T_Vk

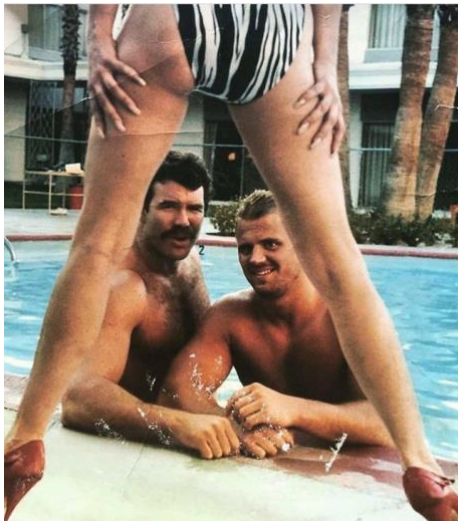
After Spivey left the territory in late 1985, Hall jumped to the AWA, where he received an immediate push, under the names ‘Big’ Scott Hall and ‘Magnum’ Scott Hall (the latter due to his resemblance to Tom Selleck in *Magnum PI*). The owner of the AWA, Verne Gagne,

³² Hall would later repay Windham for giving him his start, when, as a NWO member with a large amount of sway within WCW, he successfully pressed for Windham to be hired by the company. Hall did the same for Larry Zbysko, who had helped him out in his early AWA days.

attempted to push Hall as the next Hulk Hogan (the previous Hulk Hogan having made his name in the AWA before being snatched away by the WWF) but Hall was still obviously green and struggled to get himself over both in the ring and on the mic.

Additionally, Hall wasn't the first wrestling Magnum, and he certainly wasn't the biggest. That was the NWA's Magnum TA, a huge star who was on the verge of winning the NWA title from Ric Flair³³, and Hall later felt that the 'Magnum' nickname he was given had made him look like he was a poor imitation of a genuine star.

I did not pretend to be Magnum. You know who called me Magnum, was [AWA commentator] Lord James Blears. He said, "He looks like Magnum P.I." He put so much heat on me because Magnum T.A. was red-hot in Charlotte, so all this prick did was make me look like I was trying to get rub off of Magnum. I couldn't believe it. You have to remember, you're out in that wrestling ring, you got no idea what these pricks are saying.



In an attempt to paper over the cracks in his performance and have him learn the ropes by osmosis, Gagne decided to pair Hall with one of the great young workers of the day, Curt Hennig (the future Mr Perfect). "Verne [goes, 'He's got the look, but he can't work a lick... just put him with Curt,' Hall said in a shoot for Highspots in 2011. "They put me with the best worker in the business."

"The thing that I always remember about Curt, God rest his soul, is that we were both babyfaces, so, basically, we were competing for the same job... but he went out of his way to help me. He came and picked me up from my apartment and drove me to every town, and he talked to me about the business, about psychology, about how to act in the locker room, everything – his view of the business, which became my view."

What I learned from Curt was, you've got to have *fun* in this business. Because it's your life, y'know? I mean, we're on the road, we're in hotels – this is our life. You can either go [dejected voice] 'Oh, we're going to Boise...' Or you can go: 'WE'RE GOING TO BOISE! WOOO!! We're going to Sioux Falls? YEAH! They LOVE ME in Sioux Falls!'" It's your attitude. He was always upbeat and happy. That helped me a lot.

Curt influenced a lot of guys – Shawn Michaels, me, [1-2-3] Kid – about the way to do business. Like, if you're to going to put a guy over, man, you put him *over* – if a guy is good enough to beat you, man, you make him look like ten

³³ The unstoppable rise of Magnum TA (the TA stood for 'Terry Allen', his real name) was abruptly ended after he crashed his Porsche at high speed into a telegraph pole on a rainy night in October 1986. His C4 and C5 vertebrae "exploded" with the impact and he was paralysed for months. He never wrestled again and his recovery was only partial. He now works as a manager at a network-solutions company (whatever that is, not sure) in Charlotte.

million dollars. Curt was the first guy to take bumps and get a [crowd] reaction from them. Instead of just taking a bump, Curt would do whirly twirls and stuff. Curt was way ahead of his time.

And then having him as a partner...Curt did ALL the work! Curt did everything, then he'd tag me, I'd make the comeback and I'd pin the guy. It got to the point where it was so ridiculous that uneducated fans would go, 'Hey Hall...get rid of Hennig, man! Get a new partner – he's holding you down!' [laughs]. They had no idea I'd be lost without him. He'd always feature me in matches – he always started the match, then he'd go to tag me, and he'd go [to the crowd] 'YOU WANT ME TO TAG THE BIG MAN?' You always feature the big man. That's what Curt taught me.

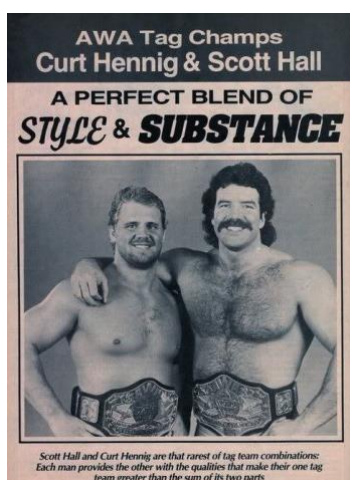
Riding up and down the road listening to Hank [Williams] Jr. and Merle [Haggard]. He was teaching me how to work, and I was teaching him about nutrition and training. I'm eating tuna out of a can. Curt is ordering pizza - Domino's with extra cheese.

God, I miss you, Curt. You impacted this business like nobody else has. You made me better. Everybody who crossed paths with you got better.

But Hennig was also responsible for something less positive.

If you look at Curt when we first started in AWA and how he looked by the time he was Mr. Perfect, it was because he was hanging out with me. I was teaching him about [nutrition]. Well, if you look at my life, I never drank or did drugs until I met Curt. I smoked a little bit of weed and I worked out. All-of-a-sudden...anyway, it was what it was. If I had to do it all over again, I'd probably live the same way.

The pair won the then-important AWA tag team titles from Jimmy Garvin³⁴ and Steve Regal (not that one, another one who wasn't as good but called himself 'Mr Electricity', which is excellent) in a 58-minute match in January 1986. That sounds too long.



Here's the two teams in a match from November 1985, at which time Hall is being billed as "The Coyote" Scott Hall. That nickname really didn't get over, and Hall doesn't seem to quite know how to dress for whatever the gimmick is supposed to be, with his Bruiser Brody fur boots, huge porno moustache, yellow leather jerkin and faint hint of a perm. "It was working," he later said. "I was getting a little bit of ass around Minnesota, OK?"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB1cnrl9gs>

And here's Hall commentating on that very match in 2011 with Larry Zbysko butting in every now and then.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDKm2Nk_L6Q

³⁴ Jimmy Jam.

'Freebird' Michael PS Hayes was a huge star in December 1985, and here he is taking on "the man mountain" Hall, who still wasn't. Considering how supremely confident and casual he'd later become, it's strange to watch Hall at a time where he's still very tentative in the ring, and there are loads of moments throughout this match where Hall looks briefly unsure what to do next.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGsRb-aZ-sg>

And one more singles match from a combined AWA and ICW show in 1986, which I've only put in because Hall wrestles someone called Chris The Greek. And you wonder why the ICW never became as big as the WWF.³⁵

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgIHOEdwq6M>

Here's Hennig and Hall defending their AWA tag team titles against the Long Riders at AWA *WrestleRock* in April 1986. This match is on the Network these days in perfect quality, but who can be bothered to log in when there's a nostalgically fuzzy version here on YouTube? Also, I should imagine the WWE have cut the Long Riders entering to 'Born To Be Wild' for copyright reasons. This is the PURE deep cut, man.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJPvcJC9mQ8>

And here's their controversial tag team title loss to the underrated team of 'Pretty Boy' Doug Somers and 'Playboy' Buddy Rose in May 1986. It was controversial because the match didn't end in a pinfall but a count out, but the belts changed hands anyway. Sensational Sherri is also involved, so you know it's already worth watching before its even started.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IJjVyYIyLY>



With Hennig and Hall splitting up, Gagne once again attempted to push Hall as a singles star, but his AWA title matches against Stan Hansen and Rick Martel were flat, and a 1987 tour of Japan entirely failed to excite crowds in the same way that Hogan had done four years before. This was despite the fact that he won nearly all of his matches ahead of his inevitable loss to the legendary Antonio Inoki. Hall departed the AWA, citing the cold weather in Minneapolis as the primary reason that he didn't want to spend another year there.

In August 1987, Hall received his first unsuccessful WWF try out, as he took part in a house show where he teamed with Jerry O (a jobber) in a loss to Barry Horowitz (a jobber) and 'Iron' Mike Sharpe (a big jobber).

A series of longer Japanese tours at the end of 1987 and throughout 1988 was less successful for Hall, with the losses coming thick and fast to a Hall of Fame list of wrestlers including Inoki, Riki Choshu, Tatsumi Fujinami, Masa Saito, Seiji Sakaguchi and a young Keiji Muto (later the Great Muta).

³⁵ The ICW (and later IWCCW) was an 'outlaw' 1980s promotion based in Boston and run by former wrestler Angelo Savoldi, which hadn't signed up to the NWA cartel. No idea why the AWA's Verne Gagne (who *was* signed up to the NWA cartel) was suddenly working with him, but I imagine it was part of a longer plan to somehow drive Savoldi out of the business.



In June 1989, Hall jumped to the NWA as part of the organisation's attempt to bring in younger talent, but despite some vignettes as Scott 'Gator' Hall, it wasn't remotely a success. Here's that NWA hype video to the sounds of Billy Ocean's *When The Going Gets Tough (The Tough Get Going)*, which was already four years old by the time this rolled around.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvpSncCTWgY>

To show how confident NWA were in their new signing, Hall lost his TV debut match to the Great Muta. In under three minutes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vat2IM6wCL4>

Here's Hall taking on Sid Vicious, who was very much the future of the business back in 1989. Note to NWA promoters of the 1980s: don't match your 6' 10" future superstars against 6'7" jobbers. Match them against jobbers who are 5'6". Makes them look even more impressive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgG-4OEy26c>

And here's Hall tangling with Terry Funk, then on what seemed like it would be his last main event run at the age of 45. It wouldn't be his last. Not by a long shot. God bless Terry Funk.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxKz_KqPD6E

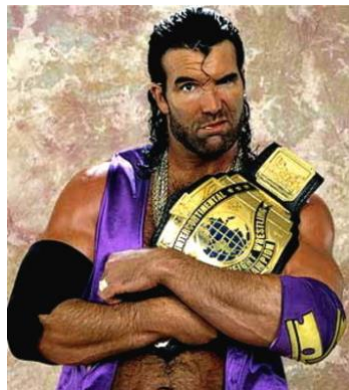
His NWA run didn't last long, and in January 1990, Hall had another dark match with the WWF, losing to Paul Roma at a *Wrestling Challenge* taping in Florida. Whatever the WWF were looking for at the time, it wasn't Hall. From there, he went back to Japan, before heading down to Puerto Rico's WWC and embarking on a tour of Germany for Otto Wanz's CWA as "Texas Scott".



In May 1991, Hall returned to the NWA (now called WCW) in an era where they were attempting to introduce the sort of gimmicks that the WWF were having great commercial success with. Ditching the dated moustache and the Dynasty-era perm and wave, he became the Diamond Studd, a sort of Rick Rude rip-off made less sexy in case any children might be watching. While he scored a number of victories over no-name preliminary wrestlers at the start of his run and picked up Diamond Dallas Page as a manager (at a time when DDP was as poorly regarded as Hall), WCW quickly lost interest in him. The Studd lost match after match to mid-card wrestlers like 'Z-Man' Tom Zenk and the Yellow Dog (a masked Brian Pillman). By December 1991, when I saw him live in London, he lost to Sting.³⁶

³⁶ I think the best ever action photo I've taken at a wrestling show is one of Sting in mid-air about to hit the Diamond Studd with the Stinger Splash. I'm going to check if I've got it somewhere, but if it doesn't appear above, then I couldn't find the bloody thing.

But the Diamond Studd showcased a side to Hall that hadn't been seen before – one where he was full of arrogant attitude, where he swaggered about convincingly and, for the first time, seemed to be a convincing bad guy. It also introduced his toothpick, and his technique of flicking it directly into the camera as he left, which became a trademark of Hall's for the rest of his career.³⁷ Over at WWF, someone took note.



With his one-year contract up, Hall was picked up by the WWF and repackaged into Razor Ramon. Using a cod-Cuban accent, Hall pitched the idea of a rip-off of Tony Montana from *Scarface* to Vince McMahon as an ice-breaking joke, but McMahon (who'd never seen or even heard of *Scarface*) thought it was incredible. He called Hall “a genius”, even though Hall had just quoted lines directly from the film. This one moment of misunderstanding gave Hall a lasting reputation with management as being a smart and clever guy who understood the business (which, to be fair, he certainly proved as time went on, having been the man who first suggested Goldberg's streak and later told Sting that he should watch *The Crow* and steal that look for his new gimmick.)

While the name ‘Razor’ was always in the mix, it was Tito Santana who suggested the surname should be ‘Ramon’. And then it was just a case of say hello to the bad guy.

In August 1992, Hall made his TV debut on WWF *Superstars* against jobber Paul Van Dale (the father of Carmella), where his signature moves included the Razor's Edge (which he'd used in WCW as the Diamond Death Drop) and the fallaway slam.

The Fallaway Slam! Some people started calling [it] ‘Hall-away Slam’, but I actually called it ‘the sack-of-shit’ because I was working with Carlos Colon at the time in Puerto Rico. I told him, “Duck the clothesline, then crossbody,” I caught him and just thinking of cool moves to do, just — boom! — I threw him back over my head. We got back to the locker room and he told me, “Amigo! What the hell? You threw me like a sack-of-shit!” So that's how I named it.

Here's two and a half minutes of Razor delivering the Razor's Edge on people. As Gorilla says, it's a “tremendous move. Forget about it!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tGXwJy5nqw>



Pushed in a way that few people were in early 1990s WWF, Ramon swiftly moved into the main-event scene after a house show feud with Randy Savage (which Hall primarily won, albeit by count out). He main evented the 1992 *Survivor Series* just four months after debuting, teaming with Ric Flair against WWF champion Bret Hart and Mr Perfect

³⁷ Working as the Studd's manager, DDP had said he was supposed to do the toothpick-flick first, but when he came to do it, he found he'd lost the toothpick he'd picked up from the Waffle House, so Hall did it solo.

(replacing the Ultimate Warrior, who'd been fired for importing human growth hormone.) A title match against Bret Hart at the 1993 *Royal Rumble* surprised everyone with how good it was. And, as the months went on, what became apparent is that Razor Ramon wasn't a two-dimensional gimmick character – there was a lot of the real Hall that shone through, helped by his technique of looking directly into the camera and raising an eyebrow or flashing a smile whenever he could.

Vince always told guys to use their face, that's where the money is. You have to keep an eye on the camera, so in my entrance, I'd usually go and look right to the hard-camera side. You could see in the nWo days – I'd just look right at the camera and go, 'I'm the shit!'

But by the middle of 1993, he was slipping down the card. At *Wrestlemania IX*, he surprisingly beat the returning Bob Backlund in just over three minutes, in a match which I remember thinking he'd definitely lose, based on the way he'd been booked in the previous months. The win over the technically-superior Backlund came via a simple but swift roll-up, hinting that there was more to the Razor Ramon character than just toothpicks and sack-of-shit slams.



A month later, Ramon had one of the most important matches of his career. On *Monday Night Raw*, he had a squash match, where he treated his much smaller opponent with barely concealed disdain. Slapping him about, it was the usual Ramon prelim match, but it ended completely unexpectedly, with his opponent getting the pin. That opponent was The Kid (later

to be called the 123 Kid), and beating the disbelieving, shocked Ramon made him a superstar overnight. Even better, the two became lifelong friends.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1_kpRGprSU

As he developed a grudging respect for the 123 Kid, Ramon became a fan favourite, and this parlayed in the first of his Intercontinental title wins in October 1993, beating Rick Martel in a tournament final to claim the belt vacated by Shawn Michaels (who'd been suspended in September 1993 for a violation of the WWF's steroid policy). When Michaels returned, the two began a feud over who was the rightful IC title holder that culminated in a ladder match at *Wrestlemania X*.



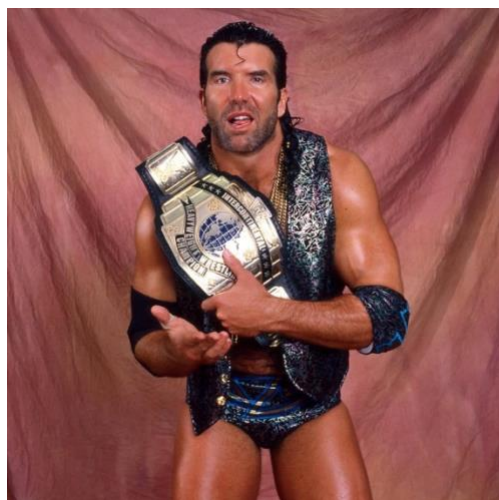
It was the first ever WWF match to receive a five-star rating from the *Wrestling Observer*.³⁸ “We weren't aware, at that time, of what we were creating,” Michaels told *Sports Illustrated* in the days after Hall's death. “We wanted to create something special and tear the house down. But we never had the depth to think it

would be historic or stand the test of time.”

³⁸ Although they're never really mentioned, Ramon and Michaels had a series of ladder matches at house shows across the USA throughout early 1994.

“It was a long time ago, but it paid for my first house.” Hall told the *CCW Podcast* in 2017. “I think it’s really cool that people like it. It was great. I’ve had some good matches since then, but whatever. I’m glad that it’s up there with the great matches in wrestling.” Here’s Shawn and Scott watching their classic ladder match together, a quarter of a century later.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YegEqMalt1Y>



Ramon held the IC belt for over a year, finally dropping it to Shawn Michael’s bodyguard Diesel in April 1994. In June, Ramon made it to the finals of the *King of the Ring*, losing to Owen Hart, before regaining the IC belt from Diesel at *Summerslam* 1994. At the *Royal Rumble* 1995, he lost the title to Jeff Jarrett; won the USWA belt from the very small Bill Dundee in April as part of the WWF-USWA talent swap, before dropping it back to Jerry Lawler; and traded the IC belt with Jarrett in a series of ladder matches on a Canadian house show tour. That win made him the first ever three-time holder of the IC title. He went on to

lose a ladder match to Michaels at *Summerslam* 1994 (not as famous as the first, it’s still excellent) and became the first four-time IC champion when he pinned Dean Douglas (Shane Douglas in some terrible education gimmick) at *In Your House* 4 in October 1995.

But behind the scenes, things were getting a bit tempestuous. Hall was part of the Kliq, a close-knit group of friends including Michaels, Nash and Kid who had consciously formed a ‘top guys’ group to help them consolidate power within the WWF and look out for one another (which, in a business without guarantees or unions, wasn’t the worst idea anyone’s ever had.) The name of the group is believed to have come from Davey Boy Smith, who said they were constantly ‘clicking’ (which seems to be some sort of arcane wrestling lingo for ‘talking’.) They were later joined by Triple H, who had jumped to the WWF from WCW and started off as the Kliq’s designated driver when they were on the road.

Swiftly, the group became both instrumental in WWF booking (their power meant they’d argue their way out of doing jobs to wrestlers they didn’t warm to or which might affect their standing in the business) and notorious for their bullying and ostracising of colleagues they took a dislike to. There were massive egos and presumably a corresponding amount of drugs, something which Hall confirmed in an interview years later.

I literally have shared hotel rooms with Shawn Michaels, [where] on more than one occasion we lay there and I go “Hey Shawn, your heart still beating?”

[IN SHAWN’S VOICE] “Wait a minute... yeah.”

“Here, take half of this.”

More seriously, their high standing within the company meant that they could easily derail careers pretty much on a whim – Vader, Bam Bam Bigelow, Shane Douglas, Savio Vega, Pierre Carl Oulette and Chris Candido³⁹ were all singled out for various forms of negative and damaging attention, which damaged their runs and led to some being let go. Bigelow spoke about the Kliq, saying that it was “a terrible, terrible time. It hurt a lot of people.”

To them, it became a joke because they had control, so it was like, ‘Okay, let’s fuck with this guy now... okay, well we got him out, now let’s go to this guy and let’s ruin his life and get *him* fired. Okay – now let’s go to this guy...’ And that’s what they did - just toyed with people’s emotions and livelihoods.

Years later, Bret Hart labelled the Kliq “a cancer” and specifically laid into Hall, saying “he was a malcontent or a guy that when you were close to him long enough, you start to feel the same way he did; you just felt so self-destructive and unhappy with your life and your job and everything. He was a guy that was infectious with his bad, bad sort of moods and unhappiness in his own life that would spread to all the other wrestlers.”



But amongst all this, you can still see that Scott Hall wasn’t just a bad guy.⁴⁰ In 1996, he appeared on *The Jerry Springer Show*, a surprise guest for two five-year-old children named Hydeia Broadbent and Tyler Small, who had been born with paediatric AIDS, contracted through their mother’s heroin usage. Tyler was a big fan of Razor Ramon and Hall’s appearance

was note-perfect. He was warm, giving the kids a kiss and a hug, and handing them tickets for *Wrestlemania XII* (although Hall didn’t know that he wouldn’t be performing on that show.)

I want Tyler and Hydeia to know this - and I think they already do know this - that where I come from, it ain’t how many times you go down, it’s how many times you get back up. You ain’t beat, till you quit, so if you don’t quit, you never lose.

It was a non-schmaltzy, entirely genuine and loving reaction that probably wasn’t what many people expected from a wrestler on the Jerry Springer Show.⁴¹

³⁹ Candido was picked out as he was engaged to Sunny, who Michaels was having a fling with. While Nash called Candido “a dumb stooge...his girlfriend was sleeping with everyone in the territory, and he was acting like he didn’t know what was going on,” Bam Bam Bigelow said he worried that the Kliq’s treatment of Candido had pushed him deep into depression, and he was genuinely concerned that it could end in suicide: “The depression was because of the Kliq - and they loved it, they were thriving on it. They were like, ‘Okay, let’s see if we can make this kid kill himself,’ you know? It was just terrible.”

⁴⁰ Hey yo.

⁴¹ Both Tyler Small and Hydeia Broadbent (now a leading AIDS activist) are alive today, the advances in AIDS medication and treatment so much further advanced than anyone would have dared to dream in 1996. In 2016, Hydeia told WWE: “I remember that he embraced both of us and was very kind. Even though he had a bad guy persona at the time, he was really cool and awesome. He really seemed to care about our story, and he genuinely wanted to make us happy.” Tyler said, “You grow up and all the doctors are telling you, telling your parents, “We don’t know if you’re going to live a long life, we don’t know if you’re going to have your dreams come true.” There



Hall lost his IC title to Goldust at the 1996 *Royal Rumble*, and was scheduled to meet him at *Wrestlemania XII* in a Miami Street Fight, but he was suspended shortly before for drug use. Hall hadn't liked working with Goldust, with Dustin Rhodes stating in his autobiography that Hall was one of the few wrestlers who was genuinely uncomfortable having to work with him. In a later shoot interview, Hall said he was never homophobic, but did feel deeply uncomfortable about doing an

angle where a male wrestler was in love with him, saying "it just wasn't the way we did business back then."

When he returned from his suspension six weeks later, he lost to Vader at *In Your House* and subsequently lost match after match on the house show circuit. Behind the scenes, things had changed.

With his pay plateauing, on a rolling yearly contract and desperate for some time off, Hall failed to reach terms on a new contract with WWE, and in April had signed instead with WCW (having reached out to his old friend DDP with some feelers). When he found out how much money WCW had offered Hall (which was over seven figures), Kevin Nash then did exactly the same. Whether it was because WCW offered more money (as WWE claimed), a reduced schedule and guaranteed pay which WWE wouldn't (as Kevin Nash claimed), because Vince McMahon wanted to break up the toxic atmosphere of the Kliq without having to fire either man, thereby upsetting his petulant champion Shawn Michaels (which is a possibility) or a combination of all three, two of the WWF's biggest stars were on their way out of the company. But first there was some controversy to take part in.



On his final night in the company, Ramon lost to Hunter Hearst Helmsley at Madison Square Garden. But the big headline occurred after the main event, a steel cage match between WWF champion Shawn Michaels and Diesel. In what became known as "the Curtain Call", Michaels called Ramon and Triple H back to the ring, and the members of the Kliq celebrated Hall and Nash's

departure in the middle of the ring in front of the fans.

was no cure, but the type of cure for us as young kids was the hope and friendship that people surrounded you with. Scott Hall taking the time and showing that he cared was another reason to take your 18 pills a day or go through the pains of the medication and side effects. People like him were the reason that you really fought through it. It was our own personal hope. And if not for that, a lot of things would probably be different." Hall gave Tyler his IC title when the two kids attended *Wrestlemania* – Tyler, now a dad to four kids, still has it.

Filmed by a teenage member of the audience with a camcorder they'd smuggled in and quickly released to wrestling sites, it became the biggest breaking of kayfabe to ever take place in a WWF ring.⁴² As Michaels was champion, Nash and Hall had left, and X-Pac wasn't there, the only person who could be punished was Triple H, whose projected win at the upcoming *King of the Ring* win was scrapped. Instead, his position was given to Steve Austin, whose 3:16 promo after winning created the most financially successful superstar in wrestling history.

With Hall and Nash's curtain call the talk of the business, WCW decided to exploit it. If people loved the backstage business of wrestling, then WCW would set about constructing a storyline for Hall and Nash which suggested that the secretive backstage business was bleeding into the product.

WCW booked an 'invasion' storyline, where they'd play on the animosity between WWF and WCW in a way that the fans wouldn't know if what they were seeing was real or scripted. In recent years, WCW boss Eric Bischoff had been making regular trips to Japan to watch wrestling, and he'd seen the reaction to an angle where the UWF-i (a once red-hot shoot-wrestling promotion that had waned in popularity) had invaded New Japan.

On the initial show at the Tokyo Dome, in front of over 67,000 fans, the New Japan booker Riki Choshu had New Japan talent mainly beat the UWF-i invaders. But seeing the reception and the box office receipts, Choshu realised the angle should continue, and if it was going to do so successfully, the UWF-i wrestlers needed to come back strong. In a rematch from the original show, the figurehead of UWF-i, Nobuhiko Takada, avenged his first loss and won the New Japan's main title, the IWGP belt, from Keiji Muto. When he lost it to New Japan's Shinya Hashimoto, six months after the angle began, the angle had been a huge critical and financial success.

Bischoff didn't have a UWF-i, but he *did* have two wrestlers about to come in who people associated with the WWF. Using Hall and Nash, Bischoff wanted to make it seem like the WWF was disrupting their show and that Vince McMahon had sent Scott Hall to start a full-fledged war on their rival promotion. It was a masterful piece of sleight of hand.



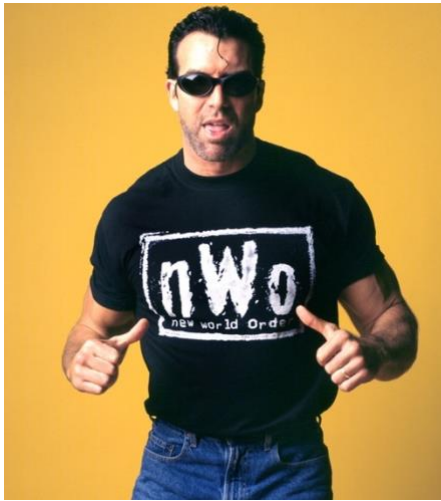
Here's the thrilling moment where the (then-unnamed) Hall debuted from the crowd in the middle of a *Nitro* match between Mike Enos and Steve Doll. "You people know who I am, but you don't know why I'm here," he said. "Where's Billionaire Ted? Where's the Nacho Man?" (which were references to a unloved series of skits that the WWF had been running in an attempt to ridicule their opposition.) The reaction from the crowd is genuinely uncertain whether this is part of the show or something else. "Hey, you wanna go to war? You want a war? You're going to get one!" And that's exactly what they got.

⁴² Kayfabe was flimsy at the time, but the WWF's undoubted feeling at the time was (a) you don't need to ram the fact this is pre-determined down people's throats by saying you and the people you've just wrestled are actually great mates, (b) don't send them home knowing that these stars are leaving for somewhere else, and (c) don't ever go into business for yourself, because this is still Vince McMahon's company and you're just working there.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= TcAfnVxEYo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcAfnVxEYo)

Nash debuted a week later, but it was Hall who gave the pairing the attitude and the sheer sense of chippy cool. Running roughshod over WCW, attacking Eric Bischoff, mocking the company and doing whatever they wanted (and acting out onscreen the insider gossip about the way the Kliq ran the WWF), the two men – collectively called ‘the Outsiders’ - teased that they weren’t the only outsiders coming to destroy WCW. There was a third man, who would only be revealed when they had their first match against Sting, Lex Luger and Macho Man Randy Savage at the *Bash at the Beach* 1996 PPV.⁴³ Just sit back and watch one of the great moments in professional wrestling history unfold.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4jts2o>



The New World Order became a phenomenon. The ongoing storyline took WCW from a failing concern into the biggest wrestling promotion in the world, and with its mix of reality, violence and spectacle, it kicked off the wrestling war and attracted audiences on a weekly basis that would have been unimaginable even six months before.

But, as we all know, the longer the angle went on, the sooner things began to run out of steam. The nWo, the coolest stable in wrestling, started expanding beyond the original three, until pretty much everyone in WCW had been in the group at one time or another. Storylines became hopelessly convoluted, matches ended without rhyme or reason, and Hall and Nash once again became divisive characters behind the scenes for their politicking.

Added to that, Hall’s abuse issues over the past four years had become ever more severe, and, with numerous arrests, very public. In February 1998, WCW forced Hall to go into rehab. It would be his first stay of many, and coincided with his divorce from his wife Dana, who had finally had enough. “Drugs, alcohol and wrestling – he chose all of that over us,” she explained. “He gave us up. He gave his kids up. I would ask the kids to write [to] their dad. They needed a dad, they didn’t need a wrestler. They never got one [letter] back.”



When he returned in late 1998, WCW decided to throw him into some storylines revolving around his alcoholism, something the readers of the *Wrestling Observer* voted the ‘most disgusting promotional gimmick’ of 1998. Here’s a match with Lex Luger from that angle, where Hall takes one drink and then spends the rest of the match pretending to be drunk. The NWO come down to

⁴³ In one of the most perplexing decisions made by WCW – a company known in the years afterwards for making many, many perplexing decisions – the VHS cover of *Bash at the Beach* 1996 featured a smiling Lex Luger and a happy Randy Savage overlaid onto a cartoon of a beach with the tagline “This is no day at the beach!” The front of tape lists Randy Savage, Lex Luger, Ric Flair and Sting, but there’s not a mention of Scott Hall or Kevin Nash. It’d be like if the cover of a VHS tape for this year’s *Wrestlemania* featured Seth Rollins and Happy Corbin standing in front of a cartoon cattle ranch. It’s absolutely criminal.

try and get Hall to stop drinking, at which point he projectile vomits on Bischoff. It doesn't seem to be the sort of public humiliation an actual alcoholic would benefit from.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZoDLRuGrzk>

Hall spent the next two years swirling around WCW, winning tag belts and the US title, splitting up the nWo in various factions, having Nash turn on him, making up with Nash, helping Nash to end Goldberg's streak – all the usual things that go on when you're working in WCW in 1999. But even though his performances had markedly declined, it was still a surprise when Hall was stripped of the WCW tag team titles due to his unreliability and fired from WCW in early 2000. For the rest of the year, he largely disappeared from wrestling.



In November 2000, Hall made a surprise appearance to wrestle at two ECW house shows. He comes out supremely confident, even though the ECW crowd were so loyal that they were supposed to loathe WWF and WCW talent (they all turned out to be as big a mark as you or me – they'd later go absolutely bananas for Sid, for Christ's sake.) Just listen to the reception he gets when the crowd find out who it is. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS1GgAUS_yo

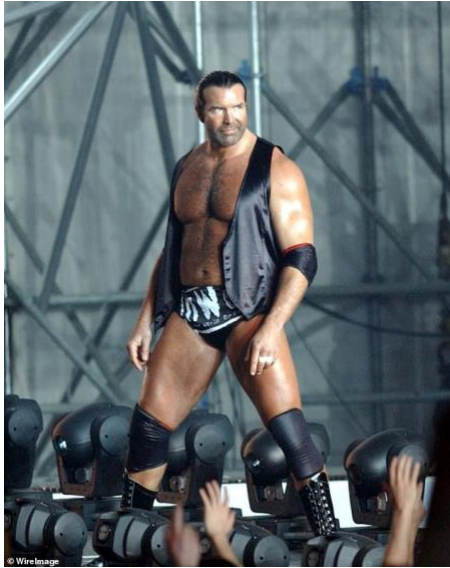
When the WWE bought WCW in March 2001, Hall was in Japan, wrestling as part of Masa Chono's TEAM 2000 stable in a largely forgotten run. Here's a fantastic curio – Hall taking on a Young Lion named Hiroshi Tanahashi in September 2001. Even better, there's a lot of very clear examples of "nani mas" from the commentators. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1YeYXB7g>

Today, Tanahashi is regarded as one of the greatest wrestlers of his generation, and his comments after Hall's death were beautiful in the way that only Japanese translated into English can be.

The match with Mr. Hall had a great influence on my life as a wrestler and my way of thinking about professional wrestling. I think Mr. Hall taught me the answer to the question, 'What is a true professional?' It is an important memory that Mr. Hall invited me to go out for a meal together. I will hold on to and cherish that memory.

Hall's final match in Japan was against the Triple Crown champion Keiji Muto, the man who'd beaten him in his WCW TV debut all the way in 1989. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7tw450>

In February 2002, a little under six years after they'd been on the very top of the wrestling world, Hall, Nash and Hogan returned to the WWE for another main event run as the nWo. It was a short-lived reunion (largely due to the audience's appetite for Hogan to have one last run as a face, which broke the group up), but Hall faced Stone Cold Steve Austin in a high-profile match at *Wrestlemania X8*.



Hall was initially supposed to beat Austin, but turned up hungover after going on a bender the night before, and a furious Austin demanded the result be changed. The nWo felt that they'd lose all their heat with both Hall and Hogan losing on the same night (in Hogan's case, to the Rock in a match that history tells us he actually probably should have won, but no one could have foreseen the audience's reaction to him on the night ahead of time), but the group no longer commanded the sway they once had. With neither Austin nor Hall in the mood for this, the match wasn't very good. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7fa8uo>

On his *Grilling JR* podcast in 2020, Jim Ross spoke about the night:

It was very disconcerting, that Scott would have this great opportunity to come back, and be in play at this level, no matter the finish. It was a tipoff that we're still in choppy waters. Again, holding out hope that Scott, maybe just having a night out, maybe he got over-served, maybe somebody brought in too many drinks, whatever, try to make every excuse you can...but the bottom line was, there was evidence there that Scott still had issues that he was having a challenging time dealing with.



While in WWE, Hall famously said one of the things that shows you what a mischievous imp he was. Meeting the Dudley Boys backstage, he approached Bubba Ray and told him "I love the 3D. What a great finishing move...can't wait to kick out of it." He'd also go up to other wrestlers with the unsolicited advice of "make sure you tuck your chin when you take

my finisher." But, as big a star as he then was, Hall was in a position to make those sorts of joke about winning – he was the one member of the nWo who took the pinfalls, the one member who was never the world champion and the one member who never wriggled his way out of getting pinned. As a man who lost continuously between 1987 and 1992, he knew there was no shame in losing in wrestling. Whether you won or lost was irrelevant. You're still a wrestler and you make money. For someone who always portrayed an egotistical character, the real Hall seemed surprisingly free of ego.⁴⁴

In May 2002, Hall was fired from WWE after the infamous 'plane ride from hell', coming back from London. Before he passed out on a combination of who knows

⁴⁴ It also made him an excellent subject of shoot interviews in later years. He's really warm, witty and fun. Here's a Kayfabe Commentaries shoot where fans ask the questions, but Hall is much more dignified than the witless questions he's asked, and makes what could be appalling into a fun watch. It's only available on YouTube for a couple of weeks, so don't leave it too long. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiID9iF2vWI>

what, Hall made sexually explicit comments to a stewardess, and was so zonked when the plane finally landed that Justin Credible “had to roll him in a wheelchair through customs.” Hall later said that this stint in WWE “wasn’t fun, so the money starts to mean less. It’s like, I can be miserable at home. I don’t need to be on the road and be miserable. That’s the way it ended.” It had lasted all of four months.

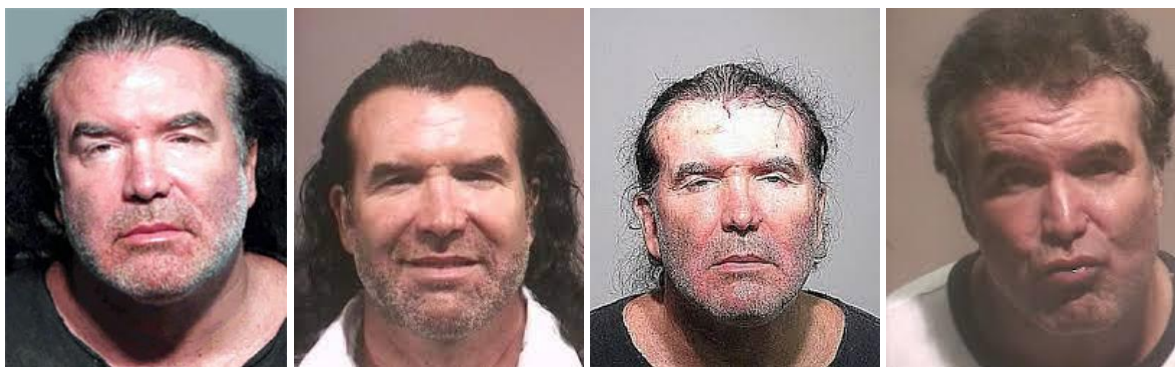


Hall’s increasing issues with alcohol and drugs sadly became the final act of his career. As he put it later on, “I’m all for a drink. I’m just one of the guys who can’t do it successfully.” From 2002 to 2008, he made sporadic appearances in TNA, but his heart didn’t seem to be in it all and it was a case of quickly diminishing returns. He began missing shows (including a PPV match teaming with Nash at *Turning Point* 2007), which would become a frequent occurrence in his career throughout the 2000s. Here’s Hall taking on Kevin Nash in TNA in 2010 – playing on his well-publicised troubles, Hall is in a shirt he’s supposedly made himself, like he’s just a bum.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caqNcHw3dV8>

While he’d win the TNA tag team titles with Nash that year, he was stripped of the belts after he punched out a window of a cab he’d been put into, drunk, by a bartender, and then resisted arrest when the police arrived. With a legal case hanging over him, TNA finally said they would be parting ways with him for good. Hall immediately checked into rehab, where he was found to be suffering from congestive heart failure and ended up having a defibrillator and a pacemaker implanted into his chest. His wrestling career was over, although to all intents and purposes, he’d largely checked out of it five years before.

By the time he left that rehab (again), his life had been chaotic for a long, long time (which makes the fact he managed to have a stellar career an even more remarkable achievement, considering so much time was lost to his addiction). Hall had been arrested on countless occasions over the years, in situations which always had to do with alcohol. There were arrests for disorderly intoxication; groping a 56-year-old woman outside a hotel in 1998; keying a limo outside a nightclub for no reason; attacking a comic for making a disrespectful joke about Owen Hart at a 2008 roast of the Iron Sheik; and an arrest for drunkenly choking his girlfriend in 2012. But he continued to drink into the 2010s and he turned up to a number of independent wrestling shows and signing appearances visibly shitfaced.



As Hall explained on an ESPN documentary about his struggle:

I tell my kids this, ‘I can’t tell you not to drink and do drugs, they are fun. It’s fun. They work. But what sucks is when you want to quit and you can’t, and pretty soon you alienate or you hurt everyone around you. It’s a family disease⁴⁵ and then you can’t keep a promise to anybody. What sucks the most is when you can’t even keep a promise to yourself’.

You can see that ESPN episode about Scott Hall here. I *hate* the intro, where a load of repellent middle-class American mummy’s boys sit round a table artificially pitching ideas to one another like smarmy, self-satisfied bollocks, but get past that and it’s really moving. And the clip from the April 2011 indie show where he turns up absolutely off his box is devastating.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V92Cdjmi4QI>



On that indie show – where he could barely move or open his eyes - Hall claimed it was because he’d come out of hospital after suffering a seizure two days before, but other wrestlers on the card, including Justin Credible and Scotty II Hotty, poured scorn on this excuse. Scotty called it “the saddest, most embarrassing thing in my career. How many guys have to die before some guys learn?” Following the match, Hall checked into hospital where he was treated for an overdose of opiates, which showed his explanation was bullshit.

Hall went to rehabilitation centres on at least twelve occasions during the 2000s. In 2011, Stephanie McMahon confirmed in an ESPN documentary about Hall that WWE had paid for each of these stays, saying “without giving too many particulars, it’s in the six-figures, of how much money we spent sending Scott to rehab. It’s the most amount of money we’ve spent on anyone.”⁴⁶

But even after the heart issues and the rehab, Hall continued to drink. At a terrible low ebb in 2013, Hall told X-Pac he was looking to buy a gun. Deeply concerned, X-Pac contacted Diamond Dallas Page, who phoned Hall with Jake ‘The Snake’ Roberts on the line with him (as Jake had turned his life of addiction round with the help of DDP). Hall accepted an invitation to move in with Page, and later stated that Page’s efforts and invitation turned his life around.⁴⁷

I was worried as I kept relapsing. I don’t remember what happened, but I was sitting at home drinking vodka for breakfast when the phone rang. It was

⁴⁵ In 2011, Hall claimed his parents and grandparents were all alcoholics. His father had told him that it was inevitable that he would become one too, but told him when he inevitably fell, to try and fall forward.

⁴⁶ In a *YouShoot* interview towards the end of his life, Hall clarified that he’d personally paid for the first six, which predated the introduction of the WWE’s Wellness Policy. He wasn’t criticising the WWE in any way, I just thought I’d put it here for the record. That piece of information came in between a torrent of questions from fans asking whether Batista had a big dick (he never saw it), and which Diva he’d most like to rim (he doesn’t really hesitate before saying “Paige. Yeah. Paige”).

⁴⁷ Diamond Dallas Page is one of the most remarkable people in or out of wrestling and I hope he knows that. Kevin Nash also opened his house to Scott Hall at this time, but as Hall acknowledged, “Kev’s a family man, and Dallas was there by himself, so it felt like a better fit.” Sean Waltman also did the same in the year before Hall’s death. Mensches, all.

Dallas. He's obnoxiously happy. The dude, he's so positive, and it's a shoot. He's that way for real. He's like, 'Hey brother, hey brother, hey brother. Hey bro, bro, bro!' You know, he's like, 'Come stay with me,' and everything. I thought, 'Well, I could rehab, or go stay with Dally [DDP].' I tried rehab, and it wasn't working.

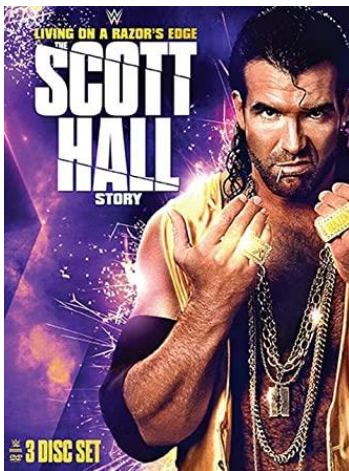


Hall made such good progress with his recovery that in 2014, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame under his Razor Ramon persona (he would go in for a second time in as a member of the nWo in 2021). His acceptance speech was superb – trying to shake off the emotion, he said “in my lifetime, I’ve learned hard work pays off, dreams come true, bad times don’t last...but bad guys do.” It became the final catchphrase of a career littered with them. Hey, yo! Say hello to the bad guy!

Oozing machismo! Survey says – one more to the bad guy! And this one, which I found online under his picture but I don't recall him using much on TV.

One of the biggest insurance mistakes boat owners make is endorsing their boats onto their homeowners policies, which may not cover their losses from a major storm.

Scott Hall



With a retrospective DVD selling well and Hall popping in to work with NXT performers on a couple of occasions, it seemed as if he'd been re-embraced by WWE and was moving in a better direction than he'd done for two decades. In that respect, his death was a surprise, coming as it did during what sounded like a routine operation at a time when he seemed to be gaining more control over his addictions.

But the reality was that Hall - like many chronic alcoholics – was privately fighting a constant day to day battle, and often came out on the losing side. While Hall had the occasional public relapse – in 2015, he went back into a drug detox programme after turning up at a show in a bad state, and a virtual meet and greet was cancelled in 2020 after Hall turned up intoxicated – it came out after his death that things had been getting much worse behind closed doors, with friends feeling that his death was sadly inevitable.



Sean Waltman told the *Wrestling Observer* that Hall had been in “bad shape” during *Wrestlemania 37* (he'd passed out in the bar the night before the ceremony, and he looked suddenly very frail and waxy when he appeared on screen) and while he'd come close at times to kicking his drinking habit, he'd been going rapidly downhill in 2020.

“The pandemic did him in,” Waltman explained. “It was hard enough for him as it was, but he was isolated in his house with no social interaction. He was down to 210 pounds. We called Dally and he went over. It was really bad.”

As Hall struggled on life support, a devastated Kevin Nash posted on Instagram.

Scott's on life support. Once his family is in place, they will discontinue life support. I'm going to lose the one person on this planet I've spent more of my life with than anyone else. My heart is broken and I'm so very fucking sad. I love Scott with all my heart but now I have to prepare my life without him in the present. I've been blessed to have a friend that took me at face value and I him.

When we jumped to WCW, we didn't care who liked or hated us. We had each other and we changed wrestling. We were the ‘Outsiders’ but we had each other. Scott always felt he wasn't worthy of the afterlife. Well God, please have some gold-plated toothpicks for my brother. My life was enriched with his take on life. He wasn't perfect but as he always said "The last perfect person to walk the planet they nailed to a cross.”

As we prepare for life without him just remember there goes a great guy. You ain't going to see another one like him again. See ya down the road Scott. I couldn't love a human being any more than I do you.

After his death, Bret Hart posted on Facebook, admitting he'd not been close to Hall (a result of the toxic environment during the Kliq years), but was mourning him all the same.

I'm saddened to hear of the passing of Scott Hall. I wasn't very close with Scott in his later years, but upon reflection, I can flashback to many happy and fun memories of the days when he was my friend. I think Scott carried many heavy crosses long before I ever knew him. He was a good friend to Owen long before he became Razor Ramon. Wrestling life can be so much fun, and at the same time, it can take all you have at the same time.

I will always remember Scott in the better times with his cool, dry sense of humour while playing gently with my sons. We had many matches and he was a hard worker. I loved my matches with him at *Royal Rumble* and the first *King of the Ring* in 1993. I fondly look back on so many terrific matches he had with Owen, Davey Boy, Sean Waltman (123 Kid), and Shawn Michaels.

We've lost so many wrestlers from my era, and this is just one more to a list that's far too long. I won't blame any one thing, but I do believe that if the days of wrestling 300 days a year had been kinder and more considerate, if we could've been home with our loved ones more, many of my old friends and brothers would still be here. I think Scott would smile to know that so many people really loved him and will truly miss him. One more wrestler. A fine machine gone too soon. My thoughts and prayer go out to his family, friends, and loved ones.

Shawn Michaels revealed to *SI.com* that he and the other members of the Kliq spoke to Hall while he was in the hospital, presumably while he was hooked up to the intensive care machines.

We wanted to let him know that we were there for him. We had the opportunity, one more time, to tell him how much we loved him. A long time ago, we decided that we were going to be there for each other. If we were wrong, then we'd be wrong together. You hear the term 'I have your back,' but when the rubber hits the road, that doesn't always happen. We weren't perfect, but we made that commitment to do it till the end. It was like a marriage, and it stuck. And that's what makes this so hard.

He was easy to love. There was a pure soul there, and I think everybody knows that now. There was an unbelievably wonderful human being inside that big ol' body.

Probably feeling his gimmick is somewhat inappropriate when you see it in headlines for this sort of thing, the Undertaker also paid his respects.

Man, one of the great in-ring workers. He was really gifted, him and Shawn's ladder match at Madison Square Garden was one of those legendary iconic matches. It's just another sad example, we lose and have lost way too many guys, at way too young of age. Some of our choices that we make early on we don't see the ramifications later on in our lives. You can't foreshadow that. But it's just sad to lose a guy that you've been in the trenches with, that you come up with.

The WWE paid tribute to Hall at the start of their shows, and at the beginning of April, the Kliq and DDP went to his funeral to say goodbye to the Bad Guy (the fifth man from the left is Cody Hall, Scott's son who has had a sporadic career as a wrestler). And I downloaded this terrible image I saw plastered all over Twitter as a tribute.



14th March – BIG NECKY



Big E, the most charming, charismatic and beloved pro wrestler currently working in the world, suffered a broken neck during a *Smackdown* tag team match after taking an overhead belly-to-belly suplex onto the arena floor. Here's the footage which someone has slowed down which makes it less horrible to watch, although it's still absolutely horrible.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrR_RDvZeZw

Big E landed right on the top of his head and was quickly taken away on a stretcher. It turned out that Big E had fractured his C1 (which is at the top of the spine, which supports the skull and allows you to move your head) and C6 vertebrae, but thankfully there was no damage to his spinal cord, and the breaks don't require surgery.⁴⁸

As you'd expect from three of the best people in the industry, Kofi Kingston and Xavier Woods went straight to the hospital with Big E, with Kingston telling *Hot 97's Ebro In The Morning* show that it was "the scariest moment of my career".

Obviously, the injury didn't happen to me, but I was on the inside of the ring and I see...that spear that he does. He missed it and he was on the outside there, and then him and Ridge go for that overhead suplex, and I see them go up and it looked a little like...wonky, but I never saw the impact.

I didn't really...I didn't know, you know? I went over there and I was like, 'oh okay, everything looks like, you know, he's done and everything.' And then the match goes on and after everything went down, Jess, the ref, was like, 'yeah, I don't know if E's okay.' And I was like, 'What? What's going on?' And all of a sudden, the paramedics and everything started coming out and...yeah.

It was just, really, really scary because it's a reminder of how quick things can take a turn for the worst, you know? Everything that we do, every move that we execute, there's always an element of danger to it and luckily, for the most part, we come out unscathed. But in those moments...literally looking at my brother in the face as the paramedics are putting the neck braces and everything on. They're putting him on the stretcher. You know, it was very, very, very scary.

The immediate outpouring of concern and love for Big E was immense. "I used to endure difficult things in my life and I felt very alone," he tweeted a few days afterwards. "But I feel so immeasurably loved and supported. I was not prepared for the sheer volume of DMs, calls, texts, visits, etc. I'll never be able to adequately thank you all."

⁴⁸ Breaking his C1 and C2 vertebrae is what left actor Christopher Reeve paralysed from the neck down. Wrestler Tyson Kidd had to retire after having his C1 and C2 vertebrae fused together, the result of a broken neck suffered when taking Samoa Joe's musclebuster. So, but for a couple of millimetres, Big E's injury could have resulted in not just a few months off, but a tragedy.



The British wrestler Ridge Holland, who had performed the move on Big E, wasn't to blame in so far as it was just one of those unfortunate moments where the stars line up in order to break someone's neck – but then, a culture where people are thrown onto their backs outside the ring is one of those scenarios which, if you think about it long and hard enough, seems like the Route One thing to do if you wanted to break someone's vertebrae.

As Wade Keller explained on *PWTorch.com*, “in terms of the spot, it's just ‘accidents happen’ is what I was told.”

That said, WWE probably shouldn't be doing moves like that at ringside with a mat over a cement floor. One wrestler said that it looked like Holland hooked him lower than is wise, in terms of getting the move with the right leverage to kind of fling him so he doesn't end up landing on his head...he might have released him a little early, in other words, stopped kind of throwing him and started worrying about his own bump sooner than he would have in the ring, because he knew he was on the floor. And again, not out of selfishness or recklessness, but just instinct.

Big E is just thick and Holland is really strong but when you're at ringside, a lot can go wrong. Holland is relatively new to doing moves like that, and Big E might have been the biggest guy he's ever thrown, and doing it at ringside just seems like a bad decision. Hopefully, WWE sees this as an opportunity to clean up the style a bit and change the move set. There's just no reason people should be being tossed over their head at ringside in a way where there's a chance they land on their head.

A week later, Big E had “my first doctor's appointment and learning (because of the C1 fracture) I narrowly escaped a stroke, paralysis or death is very sobering. Life feels even more precious and valuable now.”

As Kingston put it, “If he broke his neck in a millimetre in another direction, he would have died. We really lucked out because it could have been a lot worse, and we'd be having a different conversation right now.”

15th March – HALL OR NOTHING (IT ENDS UP BEING NOTHING)

Another name came up in the long list of English sports personalities who WWE looked to sign in 2018, as they plotted entire global domination: the world's strongest man, Eddie Hall.

Ahead of his boxing match against fellow musclehead Hafthor ‘Thor’ Bjornnson⁴⁹, an old interview came up where Hall mentioned he'd been approached by WWE.

⁴⁹ That is one predictable nickname. It's like being called Timothy ‘Tim’ Jacobs. Just call yourself Thor Bjornnson. No one cares whether it's your exact real name. They just want to see you put massive stone balls up on to pedestals as quickly as you can.

We've been approached by them and it's something we'll look at. I'm doing so well with all the appearances, endorsements and all the potential TV work coming my way so I'm just biding my time. Me and my manager are just going to pick the best option and go from there.

Well, reading that back, Eddie's certainly got the raw charisma needed to be a wrestler. It's like listening to someone from *Love Island* explaining to their bank why they should get another extension to their loan.

The offer seems to have coincided with Hall losing 71lbs and getting shredded, which once again makes me worry that the WWE aren't really interested in anything beyond muscles. I don't think any wrestlers I like have been the muscley ones. The ones I like tend to be the ones who are good at wrestling. If I wanted to look at muscles, I'll just take off my shirt.⁵⁰



I should add, those photos are all in the correct ratio, it's just that Eddie Hall has a very different shape to you and me. The one in the middle is before he lost a load of weight. I'm not sure I'm mad keen on any of his looks, if I'm being honest.

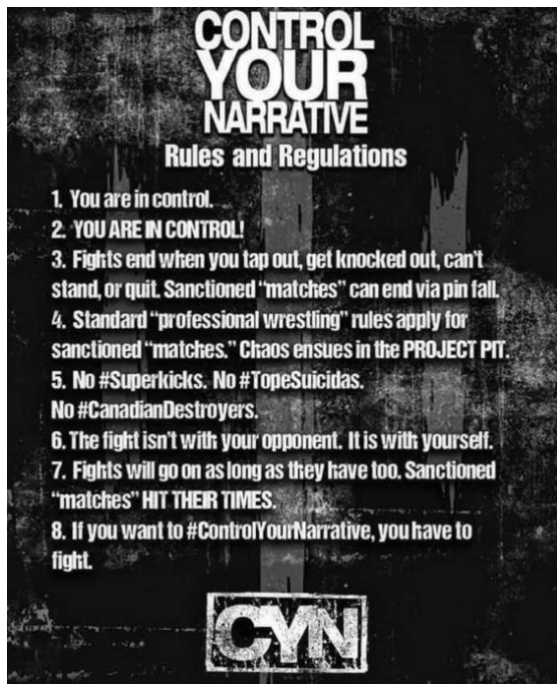
While they were a big draw back in the 1960s and 1970s, strongmen have struggled to adapt to modern pro wrestling in more recent times. From Ted Arcidi to Bill Kazmaier, strongmen have often been brought in because they seem to be what wrestling is all about – Strong! Powerful! Manly! - but then they turn out to be lumbering lumps. Sure, they can lift people up, but they can't really do any of the other eight thousand wrestling moves on offer. Even Mark Henry took a decade to really make the transition from just being strong into becoming a pro wrestler, and he really only managed to get the knack of the sport in the very last couple of years of his entire career.

16th March – CYN ANNOUNCES MATCHES, BANS SUPERKICKS

Get ready to hack an information file from the Dark Web, as Control Your Narrative issue some more truth-bombs to blow the minds of the sheep, the asleep and women (not sure what their deal actually is, but it's vaguely unsettling.) And this time they've got a list of demands! Or rules! But they don't believe in rules, because rules stop you

⁵⁰ I'm wearing a T-shirt underneath with a photo of Chris Masters on it.

controlling your narrative, wouldn't it? So maybe they're guidelines! Nope, it definitely says "rules and regulations" at the top, so, yes, they're rules!



Of course, everyone who hasn't invested time or money in CYN took nothing but delight in this po-faced *Fight Club* cosplaying. Apart from anything, the amount of admin and rules makes CYN seem more proscriptive than any other wrestling promotion in history. No other promotion has a list of eight tedious rules it's shouts at you. It's internal admin you don't need to know about. It's corporate.

The non-sensical speech marks which appear whenever the word "match" is used are especially annoying. There's no need for the speech marks - they *are* just matches. Points 3 and 7 makes it clear that they're also 'sanctioned' matches. You wouldn't sanction something that isn't a match. So it's just a match. They're matches.

Number 5 lists "no Superkicks. No Tope Suicidas. No Canadian Destroyers," which was more puzzling until you realise that neither EC3 or Adam Scherr, the two wrestlers behind the promotion, can do any of those moves. Plus, No.5 ("don't do these moves") seems to directly contradict No.1 and No.2 ("you are in control" and "YOU ARE IN CONTROL!")



The un-fun list came with the announcement of matches for the promotion's show over *Wrestlemania* weekend where there seemed to be an entry requirement of being large and having facial hair. EC3 and Adam Scherr vs Erick Redbeard (the former Wyatt Family member Erick Rowan) and Damo (the former Kilian Dane in NXT), Austin Aries vs Westin Blake (who was Blake Murphy in NXT), Flip Gordon vs Dirty Dango (WWE's Fandango) and Killer Kross (who was in NXT) vs Vincent (who was in ROH.) Everyone's very white. Every single one of the ten names announced: white.

"Ban beards and screaming face pose!" added someone on Twitter, who'd clearly just seen the graphic for the show.

Really oddly, the show seems to have passed almost without any sign that it's taken place. There are no results when you search on Cagematch, and while Googling does show a results page, when you click on it, you get sent to the results of a Florida show from May 1987 with a main event of the Rock 'n' Roll Express taking on Rick Rude

and Manny Fernandez.⁵¹ I can't help but feel CYN are being cyberhacked for LOLs (or whatever the right terminology is, I'm 46 and don't have time to speak to young people.)



The only thing I could find about the Dallas show was a photo on Adam Scherr's Instagram where he's having his match, and he's written "When you can't make them see the light, make them feel the heat!! #RonaldReagan."

I mean, they don't help themselves. What could be less out of step with the times in modern wrestling than starting the hashtag 'Ronald Reagan'? I'm actually pining for the days when he was basically a swamp monster, instead of some massive Republican. And I'd be failing in my duty if I didn't show you Scherr's horrible new hairstyle, which looks like when my grandad did his own with a butter knife to save money. Ye gods.

17th March – WE'LL NEED A Y-SHAPED COFFIN FOR MRS BEARER

I don't know if you know Undertaker and Kane's mum, but I've got some terrible news for you: she was a right goer. At least, that's what WWE told Luke Gallows, who was told he was going to be the third Undertaker brother sometime around 2007.

They told me [I was going to be the third Brother of Destruction] in developmental. Think about that in your mind when you're a 20-something-year-old kid. At first they told me I was going to come out at *Wrestlemania 23*. It ended up being the Boogeyman, but I was going to be the third brother. I'm sitting there at practice like, 'I'm the heir to the big man throne. Shit, I'll be a millionaire this time next year.' I have no idea where all that came from.



It might sound like bullshit, but in early 2005 (around two years before Gallows believed he was going to be the third brother), another wrestler in WWE developmental was also told *he* was being lined up to be the third brother of Undertaker and Kane. Giving an interview to *Wrestling Inc* back in 2017, the 7' tall Matt Morgan was then in OVW and wrestling under a mask as 'the Blueprint'.

The cool part was [what] they were going to turn this into, I was gonna be Kane's brother Abel. And I would've killed for that! I would've worn a hood gladly for that just because I'm a huge 'Taker and Kane fan. What leads to Kane leads to 'Taker, right? Nine-year-old Matt Morgan inside was going bananas!

I believe the only reason neither man was made into the brother of Kane and Undertaker was because of an unfortunate accident which happened to their shared father, Paul Bearer. Sadly, Bearer was encased in concrete by the Dudley Boys at the end of the 2004 *Great American Bash*. They started from the feet up, encasing his groin in concrete, which meant it would be impossible to extract the required Bearer

⁵¹ Even though that Florida show took place 35 years ago, it still has at least four more people of colour on the card than Control Your Narrative managed in 2022.

semen required to impregnate a lady with another Undertaker or Kane brother. To me, that's the most likely explanation as to why this lazy angle didn't happen.

18th March – ALBERTO DEL RIO

In one of those decisions that just reinforces the public perception of wrestling and MMA being seedy and revolting, the former Alberto Del Rio (he now goes by the name Alberto El Patron) signed a contract to be the official Spanish commentator of UFC on ESPN.



“Having recently been cleared of all charge levelled against him for kidnapping and sexual assault,” begins a breezy news story about it, “he is eyeing to get back to the top of his game!” Here's an interesting bit of trivia I've just learned: ESPN don't Google potential employees.

While it had seemed like another one of the grandiose statements Del Rio sometimes makes that come to nothing – he's going back to WWE! He's starting his own promotion! He's heading to AEW! UFC have offered him a contract! – this one did turn out to be true, as he briefly appeared on the PPV broadcast doing his commentary. Sigh.

I'm not one to say people don't deserve a second chance, but I think – if only for purely business reasons - I might draw the line at hiring a commentator for my internationally viewed show who was indicted by a grand jury on an aggravated kidnapping charge and four charges of sexual assault just eighteen months ago, which was dropped only when a witness refused to testify to the court. We all know that makes Del Rio 100% innocent – 100% innocent - of the appalling charges he was facing. That's a fact. 100% a fact. But is there really no one else *in the world* who speaks Spanish, likes MMA but hasn't been charged with kidnapping in the last three years?

19th March – ‘HAHAHA. THE FOOT PEOPLE PULL IT OFF AGAIN!’

In December 2021, Toni Storm requested her release from WWE as she felt burnt-out from working in a company that didn't seem to have any concrete plans for her. “When you're sat in catering, it's not a good feeling,” Storm told an interviewer.

Just sitting there waiting for your shot. Waiting for your big break. Waiting to show everyone what you've worked your life to be good at. I just sat there [asking] ‘When am I next? What's happening?’ Now [when] stuff starts happening, I'm still like, ‘what's going on?’ Oh, my God. What is my life?



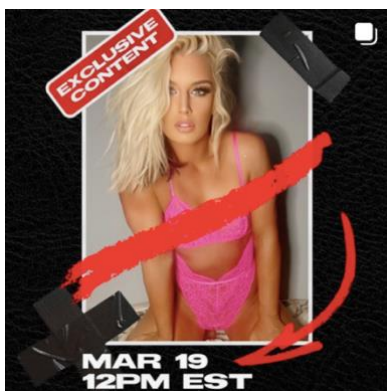
Well, she knows what her life is now: it's buying a bigger ring-light and having to constantly get her hair done. Today, Storm launched an Only Fans site for \$19.99 a month. It was just tasteful underwear modelling, which (aside from the delicacy of the clothing itself) wasn't a million miles away from the costumes that she'd wear in the ring.

And in a little under an hour, she'd made over \$15,000.

This was the best estimate of the amount Storm actually made, as OnlyFans don't reveal the subscription numbers, and so journalists⁵² based the income on the number of likes on her first post, as only registered users can comment. This means \$15,000 is the very lowest estimate of what she actually earned. After two days, she'd made approximately \$33,000.

The *Daily Mail*, spotting a story about an attractive young woman in her bra, immediately jumped into the fray to bring their audience of disgusting old colonels and masturbating rural judges all the news they needed to know. "While it's unclear exactly what type of content lies behind the former NXT UK Women's Champion's paywall," frothed the article, "OnlyFans is commonly associated with softcore porn."

Like the bags of shit they are, the *Mail* knew what was behind the paywall, because they were the only news site I've seen to accompany their article with a load of the images presumably from Storm's Only Fans site. None of the wrestling news sites did that, because it turns out they've got an understanding of copyright and what it means to be a thief.

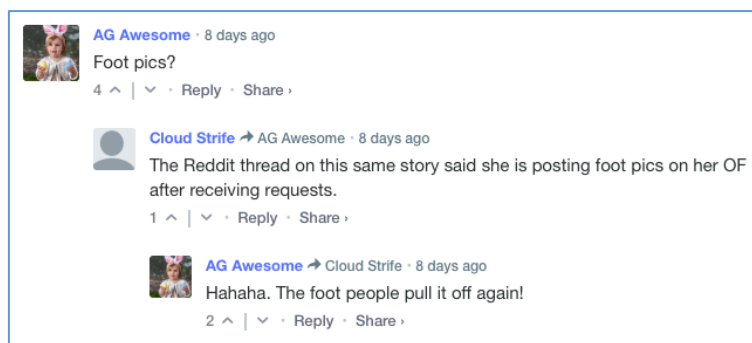


Having been to the Only Fans page (no, I've not got a sub, I need all my money to spend on vintage 1990s All Star Wrestling posters), Storm makes it clear that "reposting pictures will be met with legal action." I'd love it if she sued the *Mail* and they had to close down. That's Only Fans content I'd definitely pay for.

After the huge success of the initial week, Storm later spoke to *Carton & Roberts* (nope, you'll have to google it) about the site, saying "I don't do porn. I take sexy photos and post them at a price...I like to take a lot of photos and share them with my fans. Not that there's anything wrong with being a porn star, but I don't do porn."

I checked to see how many likes she'd had recently, and one post from the 13th April has 1304 likes. That means she's made at least \$26,000 for the month of April too. Good for her. Nice to see people happy. Especially the foot people.

⁵² You might think I'm being silly saying "journalists" worked out how many people wanted to see Toni Storm in her undercrackers, but it was covered by the *Daily Mail*, so incredibly, it was actual journalists. "If you can even call people working for the *Daily Mail* journalists, etc, etc."



20th March – GRESHAM STARTS A NEW CHAPTER



Just ahead of their 10th anniversary show, the Ring of Honor champion Jonathan Gresham surprisingly won the PROGRESS title from Cara Noir at *Chapter 130*. Noir had held the belt for a record-breaking 26 months, most of those comprising the period of the pandemic where wrestling took place in venues without an audience. Gresham is the first American to hold the title.

If you've not watched Gresham before, here's a great match to start with – a Ring of Honor match with Bandido from 2019. They were the two men chosen to close out *Supercard of Honor* over *Wrestlemania* weekend, the first main event of the Tony Khan era.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMzMAQkplcQ>

It was a surprise not from a match standpoint, but a political one. With Ring of Honor being bought by AEW, I'm not sure what that means for PROGRESS's deal to put shows up on the WWE Network – previous appearances from wrestlers working in AEW or Ring of Honor have always seen the matches dropped from the service.

Well, because I'm a leading inwrestigative⁵³ journalist, I just checked on the Network (which wasn't hard, considering I'm on my computer) and the show ends with a tag match, with the main event missing. I guess you have to go over to PROGRESS's site to see the whole thing, which is a clever bit of planning on their part. But oddly, on the next show, the Gresham vs Warren Banks match *is* included. With Gresham signed by AEW the following month, PROGRESS are in a really interesting position going forward as to which US promotion they end up siding with.

21st March – LORD STEVEN R-EGG-AL⁵⁴

In a couple of cracking episodes of Chris Jericho's podcasts, William Regal came along and basically didn't stop talking, which is heaven.

The first one was pretty much Regal just listing all the things that have gone with his body in recent years, and it was a long, long list. Not that he'd be able to read that list

⁵³ This is my word. I invented it. Don't use it. No, you're wrong, it's actually VERY cool.

⁵⁴ Best title yet. I'm genuinely proud of this one. It's shit, it's stupid, it doesn't work, it made me laugh. 10/10.

easily, he's not got much eyesight left, the result of falling down an escalator in a Costa Rican airport.

I just remember being on top of the escalator, this is one o'clock in the afternoon, I am going to watch a South American wrestling tournament for three days or something. I get off the plane, feel a bit not quite right, I go with the bag, and all I can remember it felt like something caught the wheel on the rubber thing.

Next thing I feel is, 'smash,' and that's all I can remember. I fell forward, I fell down the escalator. Luckily, I hit the rubber rail. It completely shattered my left eye socket, knocked me out. I had three weeks of amnesia after that. I have no idea what happened.

I was in hospital for a week in Costa Rica. I shattered my eye socket, had three weeks of amnesia, and lost 40% vision in my left eye, which I still haven't got. Everything is grey. I can see, but it's all grey. Head injury, finally they got me back home, and I was doing some pretty mental things, unfortunately, my wife had to go through. No clue what I was doing. I have no recollection of the next three weeks but doing some really mental things. That three weeks in itself is a full show of insanity. Again, me nearly bleeding to death at one point, losing two pints of blood.

He had also a bad neck, which an MRI showed was "a huge big like baseball-sized ball of calcified jelly stuff holding my neck together." Then his legs started to swell up, and it turned out to sepsis and he nearly had it lopped off to save his life – thankfully, another doctor came in, sorted out a correct course of medication, and he recovered.

The ailment that Pete was most deeply obsessed with was the hard calcified shell that Regal described as a kind of "goose egg" which formed around his heart. Picture a white Cadbury's Crème Egg but instead of crème inside, it's offal. This happened in January 2020.

I don't know exactly the time frame, but it's November, and they send me for a scan because my legs are swelling, and they do a scan of my abdomen. Luckily, again fortunately for me, there is a cardiologist in the room. And this lady saved my life. She went, 'Hang on a minute, there's something above that, that doesn't look right.'

I get a scan that I've never had before, I went home and within an hour of me being in the house, my cardiologist called me going, 'I am sorry, I am sorry, I am sorry.' I am going, 'Why?' He said, 'We should have thought of this years ago,' He's telling me all of these things, 'it doesn't pick up on a regular scan.' He said, 'You've probably got less than six months to live.'

What had happened was this sack around my heart had completely calcified, my heart looked like a goose egg. It was completely constricted - it had just grown into a solid lump of rock. I have the picture which I can show you where they've cut me open and he's wrapping on this goose egg with a scalpel. It's going, 'tap, tap tap'. Then three hours later, you can see where he's peeled it all

off, you can see a completely beating heart. If they didn't take this off now, I would have six months to go.

Regal had a pericardectomy, where the membrane around his heart was cut off, or peeled off like the shell on a hard-boiled goose egg.

The fact that Regal is still walking, let alone slapping people in rings, suggests he might be the hardest man in wrestling today. He's certainly got the hardest membrane sac around his heart.

22nd March – WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION



In a new unveiling of a famous furtive wrestling fan, Roger Federer was outed today as “a huge fan of professional wrestling”. Hahaha, don't you know it's fake m8? And like all wrestling fans, he'd kept it secret until someone he'd mentioned it to blabbed about it to all and sundry. He must be furious.

In a recent conversation on the Tennis Channel, the #23 world ranked tennis player John Isner (who's American) said Federer was the GOAT, and then revealed that he has a deep, dark passion for the Sport of Thieves.

Roger Federer, he's the GOAT, you know. We actually have a lot in common to talk about, we're both great wrestling fans, especially him. Not many people know that.

It turns out this isn't the first time Isner has mentioned that Federer is a big wrestling fan. Back in 2016, he wrote a post for *The Players Tribune* where he mentioned the same thing in much more detail.

Oh, and this might surprise you, but Roger loves WWE. Loves it. He keeps tabs on the storylines. He goes online, goes on the WWE Network, and watches it. We'll pass each other in the locker room, and Roger will give me the ol' “You Can't See Me” hand in front of the face, and shout, “John Cena, baby!” He'll do the whole Randy Orton “Viper” deal. Honestly, he knows it all. It's hilarious.

I guess you could say, when it comes to wrestling, Federer 15-LOVES it. Is that a tennis joke? It sounds like it could be. I don't watch tennis.

23rd March – SPACED MOUNTAIN

Santino Marella was on Rene Dupree's podcast, *Café de Rene with Rene Dupree*⁵⁵, and spoke about his *Wrestlemania* debut (at number 24) where he ended up being clotheslined by Snoop Dogg. But it wasn't the impact that left him reeling. It was the illegal drugs. Oh, Santino.

⁵⁵ 35 episodes since 2021. Two ratings on Apple Podcasts. No written reviews. I don't know if I would be able to keep going, considering the two ratings must be one from Rene himself and one from the co-host.

It was my first *Wrestlemania*, it was a highlighted moment with Snoop Dogg. And, you know he clotheslined me at the end of the divas match and stuff. Anyway, it was awesome. It was great. First *Wrestlemania*, I get there and [WWE]’re like ‘go talk with Snoop Dogg, and go talk about what you’re going to do today.’ So, I get on the bus and he just greets me with a blunt. And you know...obviously I’m not gonna say no right? And be that guy. So, I’m smoking high-quality smiz. It was great.

And then after I leave the bus, I’m like walking around *Wrestlemania* going ‘oh my God, nobody has any idea I’m high as a kite, man’. Straight to catering, man, oh my God, yeah. And luckily, I had something not very complicated to do. I had a very fun first *Wrestlemania*, that’s for sure.

In the old days, before *everyone* started slapping their names on legal cannabis, that would have been a right naughty little story. But smiz taking is so passe now that even WWE Hall of Famers are involved in it, and today Mike Tyson’s cannabis company announced they’d acquired a majority stake in Ric Flair Drip, Inc.



Ric Flair Drip is WWE Hall of Famer Ric Flair’s cannabis company. Goodness me, how much did it sell to Tyson for? Ah. Well, Ric’s cannabis company was set up just four weeks ago by the same businessman who also set up Mike Tyson’s cannabis company. And now Ric Flair’s cannabis company (run by the man who runs Mike Tyson’s one) has partly merged with Mike Tyson’s cannabis company (run by the man who runs Ric Flair’s one). I’m *not* a businessman, but this doesn’t seem so

much like a big merger between two companies (as its presented in the reporting), as two companies that are exactly the same, run by the same person along the same lines, who’s now incorporated one into the other. In both cases, Tyson and Flair are little more than pitchmen for the cannabis products that come out.

“This is set to create a cannabis flower and edible products that will be under the wrestler’s name,”⁵⁶ stated *PR Newswire*, which also saw Flair explain how he and Tyson have many similarities in terms of their lives. No, not their involvement in historic sexual offences, but other entirely positive things.

Thanks to Mike Tyson and Tyson 2.0, I’ve become a true cannabis advocate and enthusiast. I am thrilled to partner with a long-time friend and fellow warrior. Whom I greatly admire and respect. There are a lot of synergies between me and Mike. We’ve both had many ups and downs, but we keep

⁵⁶ One of the people behind this - who are clearly interested in this venture in a way that Tyson and Flair aren’t, beyond the money they get for licencing their names and likenesses - explained: “with flower strains named after Ric’s iconic sayings like ‘limousine riding’ and ‘jet-flying,’ we aim to honour Ric’s energy and share it with his fans.” Honour his energy. Jesus wept.

going at life. With Mike's passion for cannabis...I look forward to creating cannabis products that will appeal to my national fanbase. Tyson 2.0 products make me go 'WOOOOO!' And soon my fans everywhere can get in the Ric Flair state of mind. Limousine riding, jet-flying, feeling good, and 'WOOOOO!'

I imagine Ric Flair not only didn't write this, but hasn't even read it. Do you think Flair would use the word 'synergy' or refer to his 'national fanbase'? I do not.



This whole set-up has the musky stink of the hyena men who buzz around retired sports celebrities and offer to monetise their name with any zeitgeisty modern shit. Flair's had someone flog him as an NFT, he's had someone set up a cannabis line using his face, there was some sort of wine brand he had for all of two minutes – but all of it seems a bit desperate, with Flair constantly pretending he's still really into the things that 20-something douchebags are into, even though the last day of his twenties was back in 1979.

The Tyson-branded products started coming out last year, and the fifteen items in the range have been successful, according to the man who runs the companies, who's called Chad. Tyson's range of edible gummies are called Mike's Bites, and they're in the shape of an ear with a chunk bitten out, paying homage (?) to the time he bit Evander Holyfield's ear. Maybe they'll pick out a similarly undignified moment in Flair's career, and release a gummy in the shape of his helicoptering penis.

But while Tyson has smoked marijuana for years and at least seems to have an interest in the cannabis line, Flair...not so much. Here's *PR Newswire*:

Flair — who had asthma growing up but has since outgrown it — is not a smoker, but now enjoys edibles that help him fall asleep.

“Sometimes you use medication to sleep, especially when you move at the speed of light like I have my whole life,” Flair said. “Sometimes you've just got to get some rest. When the edibles became popular, I've actually tried them before Chad hooked up with me. They work!”

Christ, he sounds every year of those 74 years. “Buy my edibles! They help an old man get his shut-eye! And don't think I'm not hip! I actually tried them! Off my own bat, and not just because I was selling my name and likeness! And I 'tried' them, which suggests I did it once and never again! But I didn't have an adverse reaction! They didn't clash with my medication! I wouldn't smoke it, though, smoking's bad for you! In the 1950s, I had childhood asthma! Buy my dank edibles and head off to bed for some shut-eye without the usual pain! Na'night! Wooooo!”

24th March – PURE SHITE FROM BIG GRAVEY

In a further diss to *Wrestle Me!*, the 9th biggest wrestling podcast on the planet, the WWE decided to give the sole UK exclusive interview with the Undertaker, ahead of

his induction into the WWE Hall of Fame, to the *True Geordie* podcast. Turns out that's still a thing. You live and learn.

Echoing comments made to Joe Rogan a while ago, and not learning anything from the reception they got back then, Taker decided to lay into today's roster for being soft, and not well hard, like him and all his dominos club mates were.

I feel like there is a level of grit that is missing from today's product. I don't know that it's anybody's fault - we all aged out and that new group has come up.

Undertaker did say that Brock Lesnar, Roman Reigns and Randy Orton weren't as bad as the others.

When you watch Brock wrestle, you're interested because, you know, he's got this background not only as an amateur wrestler, professional wrestler, mixed martial artist. Brock doesn't do a bunch of crazy moves, Brock manhandles your ass. You get in there and you get thrown around and you get smashed.

You know, and Roman has a little bit of that to him, and, when he wants to, Randy has that to him, when he wants to.

A lot of the younger talent, it's the evolution of that comic-book era, the superhero era, and I think that's their motivation, and that's what their inspiration is, and they didn't have to come up and bust heads in bars, and figure out how they were gonna eat, and things like that.



As *if* the Undertaker was 'coming up busting heads in bars'. He was signed to a WWE contract (that so far has lasted over 31 years) when he was just 26. It's like Mark Callaway has forgotten that he spent the vast majority of his career rolling his eyes, looking at a magical urn, pretending to make coffins, and occasionally sitting up so kids could scream with glee. He was working alongside a man dressed as a tax inspector, a big blue Viking, a clown and Greg Valentine pretending to be Roy

Orbison. There is no-one around today who is as remotely 'comic-book' as Undertaker was from 1991 until 1995. But in recent years, he quite often pretends that his entire career saw him basically shoot-fighting as the American Bad Ass and that the whole Undertaker thing was just him occasionally turning up to *Wrestlemania* in dark tights.

Every old wrestler loves to weigh in with how much tougher everyone was back in their day. Here's former WWWF champion Bruno Sammartino talking on a Prodigy webchat about the WWF product in October 1997, when the Undertaker was top of the card.

When I wrestled...they believed in us. They were extremely responsive during matches, they were into it every minute of every match. They'd be standing and sitting and screaming and hollering...now they just look at it as a show. There is no real feeling towards the individuals.

In my day, if they accepted you, not just me but others, they loved you or hated you and you didn't have to do anything to get the reaction. They were into it and watched it and reacted with their feelings about you. Now they have to put noisemakers for cheers and boos because the audience doesn't respond.

I think the damage is so severe, that to come back to the days where the arenas were full, you would have to have the present companies disappear. Wrestling would have to disappear, and then hopefully some people with the connections and talent could start again with the basics and build the audience and get the bad taste out of their mouths.

I look forward to 2031, when Effy will be moaning on about how no one dresses nice to wrestle anymore and Hook is complaining that people don't brush their hair to go to work these days.

25th March – GAME OVER

Seemingly determined to make this newsletter over 100 pages in length (is there *nothing* he won't stretch out too long?), Triple H announced to ESPN's *First Take* that he was retiring from in-ring competition.



It followed a serious heart attack followed by surgery back in September 2021. At the time, the WWE downplayed the severity of the incident (which came suspiciously soon after his beloved NXT had been snatched away from him), saying Triple H had suffered “a cardiac event” and undergone “a procedure”, but it turned out he was actually worryingly close to dying.

At the tail end of a 12-day road trip in the wake of WWE's *Summerslam 2021*, Triple H began to feel unwell and was diagnosed with viral pneumonia. When he started coughing up blood (I hope he did it like he does with the water when he makes his entrances), doctors discovered fluid in his lungs and around his heart. As his condition deteriorated, his heart began to fail - due in part to a blockage in his left anterior descending artery, known as the “widow maker”. That's not the name you want for a thing you've got inside you.

“I was nosediving and sort of at the one-yard line of where you don't want to be for your family,” Trips told EPSN. “It could have been ‘go’ at any point in time.”

[Stephanie] was a rock, always is for me. Never wavered. We have three young girls, 15, 13 and 11. Suddenly I come home, I'm a little bit sick and their dad, who's always strong, is suddenly in the hospital. I don't know if they understood the consequences of it, but there's moments in there, when they're putting you out for stuff that you wonder ‘Is this it? Do you wake up from

this?’ That’s tough to swallow. It makes you think differently about life. It doesn’t make you any less driven in the things that you, but it certainly makes you appreciate the things you have more, your friends, your family.

As far as in-ring, which I get a lot, I’m done. I will never wrestle again. First of all, I have a defibrillator in my chest, and it’s not a good idea for me to get zapped on live TV. I was already in a place in my career, as far as in ring goes, where I was comfortable being done and being finished. If the right thing came along, and they wanted me to do it, [I would have]. I had a conversation with Vince McMahon about doing something at *Wrestlemania* this year in Dallas, which we had talked about and had plans for. Obviously, when this thing happened, it shut all of that down.

The 52-year-old hadn’t wrestled for three years, his final match being a June 2019 match in Japan where he teamed with Shinsuke Nakamura to beat Robert Roode and Samoa Joe. That’s definitely not the match he’d have wanted to go out on. His three final singles matches had been against the Undertaker (in Australia), Batista (at *Wrestlemania* 35) and Randy Orton (in Saudi Arabia), all of which he’d probably have preferred as his last outings. But, alas, the heart failure wants what the heart failure wants.

As you’d expect with Triple H being a powerful exec, most of the WWE roster put up something about him on social media, although much of it was notable for its lack of passion. It was, however, usually accompanied by a photo of that person being pointed at by Triple H (a photo opportunity that HHH absolutely *adored* over the last five years).



“Thank you, Triple H,” tweeted Charlotte Flair, non-committally. “Thank you, Triple H for your guidance, friendship and the opportunities you gave me in NXT!” said Beth Phoenix, in a way that suggested he didn’t always stop to talk to her. Some of the older talent just posted photos where they were in the ring with Triple H, and didn’t comment one way or another – no one seemed to want to say “best of all time!!!” or “a legend in our business and a GREAT GUY to boot!!!”

Damien Priest tried to start the hashtag #PapaH trending, presumably for the amount of guidance he’d given to those coming through NXT, but it didn’t take, which is unsurprising, considering it was weird.

26th March – GEORGE MICHAEL ISN’T A NEW JAPAN FAN, HE PREFERS FREEDOMS⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It’s not funny, no, but it relates to Freedom, which is both the name of a Japanese wrestling promotion (FREEDOMS) and a 1990 George Michael single (Freedom ’90). So it’s very clever, actually.

For the second time in his career, the exceptional British technical wrestler Zack Sabre Jr won NJPW's yearly knock-out tournament, the New Japan Cup.⁵⁸



Having submitted Ryohei Oiwa, DOUKI, Great O-Khan, Will Ospreay and Shingo Takagi on his way to the finals, he pinned Testsuya Naito in the final – it was Sabre's first ever pinfall in his New Japan Cup history, as he usually makes everyone tap out. The victory won him an IWGP title shot against Kazuchika Okada.⁵⁹

After he thanked Naito, Sabre announced that he had won with “100 percent vegan, George Michael-approved tekkers.” Like Sabre, George Michael was a vegan in later life, but I've absolutely no idea Sabre's why namechecking him now - but if it's good enough for George Michael, I guess it's good enough for me.

27th March – THE TASKMASTER NO ONE WANTS ON TV



Today, two old wrestlers got to show off a Wrestler's Court to the whole world, as former manager of the Four Horsemen JJ Dillon and former Satanic worshipper 'Taskmaster' Kevin Sullivan appeared on *Steve Harvey's Court*, a sort of Jeremy Kyle show with a judge involved (rather than an internal investigation by ITV into the death of a contributor.)

Unexcitingly, Dillon wanted to go on the show in a dispute over some money he lent Sullivan to buy a boat, which Sullivan then didn't pay back. Rule No.1 of dealing with old timey wrestlers, don't lend them any money. Sullivan said there was no paperwork and no timescale for repayment, so he shouldn't have to pay anything.

In the end, Harvey ruled in favour of Dillon (who appeared under his real name of Jim Morrison, which is both a pop star and a younger wrestler), but then said the court would pay the disputed amount as he liked pro wrestling. Mate, that's not how courts worked. I know a lot of judges enjoy sex workers, but they're not supposed to pay their fines.

28th March – REMEMBER HIM AT THE SETTING OF THE SUNNY

Welcome to the monthly crime report featuring Sunny, aka Tammy Sytch. A guaranteed spot in the monthly rundown every single time, this month Tammy and her boyfriend were involved in a three-car pile-up which led the death of 75-year-old

⁵⁸ His first win in 2018 really put him on the map as a semi-main eventer, with a shocking but comprehensive submission win over Hiroshi Tanahashi in the finals.

⁵⁹ Sabre Jr lost that title match, although it was a banger. Okada's very good, Sabre's very good, match is very good, all very good.

Julian L. Lassiter. She's now literally caused someone's death. There's now *another* killer in the WWE Hall of Fame, ladies and gents.

Police reports indicate that Sytch (who was not arrested for her role in the crash, which marks the first time in years she's been in a car and it's not ended with her in handcuffs) drove a Mercedes belonging to her boyfriend into the back of Lasseter's Kia Sorrento, while he was stationary at a red light. She must have been going at a fair lick, because Lasseter died from injuries sustained when he smashed into the stationary car ahead of him, and the occupants of that car also received injuries.

The police said they believed Sytch was under the influence of alcohol at the time, but were waiting for results of a blood test that was taken shortly afterwards. Hmmm, you'd think that should be pretty much instant, wouldn't you? You want to look into that, police.

A fortnight later, Lasseter's family launched a suit alleging negligence on Sytch's part, which seemed to be for an extremely reasonable \$30,000 for medical and funeral expenses. Normally when you hear 'American' and 'lawsuit', you're going to hear the word 'millions' quite soon after. Perhaps they googled Sytch and realised that holding onto money doesn't seem to be one of her strong points (along with repeatedly being unable to not drink-drive, and not contributing to the death of their dad).

Sunny didn't tweet for three weeks after the death, but was back in the middle of April pushing her OnlyFans. "Did you miss me?" she asked. The problem, Sunny, is not so much the missing as the direct hits.

29th March – GARGANO IS A GO



A very good performer who was sold a bum steer by Shawn Michaels to always stare at his own hands in stagey disbelief at the carnage that they had wrought unto his opponent, Johnny Gargano was the headline babyface act in NXT for five years until his sudden departure in 2021. Usually for WWE, Gargano was given a nice and fulsome farewell on NXT TV, even though it turned out he'd decided not to re-sign with WWE.

A new dad (with wife Candace LaRae, who remains signed with NXT), Gargano went onto

Renee Paquette's podcast to explain his reasons for leaving.

I felt like I was in a good place. I felt this way for a while to where I felt like I accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish in NXT.

It's kind of one of those things where I said I'm betting on myself because it is kind of a scary thing to have a new baby on the way and decide I'm going to turn down this new contract, that's a good contract, a safe contract, and you're going to get money every single week coming in to kind of go off to do your own thing. But I felt really good, I felt complete, and I felt that way for a long time...

I know people said, like, 'Oh, Johnny left because NXT changed.' No, I always had it in my mind that I wasn't leaving to go to any particular place. I kind of just felt like I needed to go because I felt like if you watch a TV show, or if you watch anything in general, if you see the same character - and obviously I changed character, I turned heel, I did funny stuff, I did things like that here and there - but if you see the same person on TV for five years, six years, it gets stale. I believe that being off TV and being away makes people miss you. I think people need to have a chance to miss you, and if they don't, then they don't really care in general.

This is very much known as The Drew McIntyre Stratagem and it's never not worked.

But being able to end that story kind of on my own terms, like have that match, and then have like that promo segment where I was kind of able to kind of say goodbye, which a lot of people don't get a chance to do nowadays, like...I was very lucky to be given that chance.

It's so funny because so many people thought I re-signed, obviously because no one gets this treatment to where they're able to do their match, and then come out the next night on live television, which is wild. It's live television. I could have literally said anything I wanted to. They let me say anything I wanted.

I sat down with one of the writers, but all the words that came out were my own. I wrote my own thing. I wanted to thank people and I wanted to do things like that because I feel like I just have such a good relationship and rapport with everyone in NXT, and everyone in WWE in general.

It does seem that the creation of AEW does seem to have meant WWE occasionally has to act nicely to stars who they don't want to lose. It's almost like Gargano wanted time off, and WWE decided that instead of saying 'no' as they would have done in the past, they chose to grant it and give him the sort of send-off that might make him want to return.

30th March – SEND DIG

One of the strangest things about modern WWE is the occasion bouts of renaming people they do, in a unique process that hasn't once created a better name for a wrestler than the one they originally had. Leading with Butch (the former Pete Dunne), Doudrop (Piper Niven) and Gunther (Walter), they're currently ensuring everyone in NXT has a name that sounds like an alien from *2000AD*.

Former NXT producer Ryan Katz talked about the whole bizarre process on the *Handsome Genius Club* podcast.

Ready? Here's the secret. The talent are in on the names. They're in on them. Like, there may be some people who get a list and have to pick something from it, but I would say a lot of times if that's happening then I can't say the talent's not given, because there are times where talent may submit a lot of

names, and then there becomes a mix and match game, and things that happen. But in the end, the talent is involved in that decision.

No one is just given a random gimmick. Like, the talent is involved in creating their gimmick and that's what I talked out with being undeniable is that those talent that show who they are and they express who they are and what they want to be will be that. When you're trying to figure out a gimmick and presenting it, 'What do you think of this?' Then they're going to be like, 'Well, I don't really like it.' But if it's like, 'I'm doing this.' Then it's like, 'Well, yeah. Let's see what you got.' Confidence is king.

I'm actually a fan of weird names. I like goofy things. I like things that just stick out and I don't even mind cartoony names because I'm a firm believer that the talent makes the name, the name doesn't make the talent whether you have a bland name, whether you have a cartoony name, whether you have the coolest name in the world. If you're not cool talent, that cool name doesn't mean anything.

There was a wrestler pitched who wanted the name Diggs or it might've been Dig. Dig, Diggs. It was one of the two and it was hated. Hand across the world. The room just, no one was going to buy into that. Like, I dug it. I thought it was kind of cool. Like, 'Well, whose name is Dig?' It's like, 'No one. *That* guy. That guy's parents called him Dig,' and that kind of helps, to me, form an identity. Those things help make characters.

It's fascinating to think some of my favourite all-time performers went through this process, like Sporge Kleentowser, Fanta Benstanton, Klemato and Ossio Ban Duri.

31st March – CAN WE STOP A KIDNAPPING? YES WE KHAN!



The Great O-Khan is a midcard talent in New Japan, his gimmick a sort of throwback to the 1980s heyday of Killer Khan, who's found it hard to find his feet in the company. This is despite having spent a couple of years working in the UK in order to get some international experience, where he never quite found his feet either. In Rev-Pro, he was bizarrely uncharismatic, his throwback style of chops and nerve-holds actively dull and not at all over with the British fans. He's had a better time in New Japan than Rev Pro, but it's not been a sensation by any means.

Today, O-Khan was enjoying a little pancake (some reports have it as a sandwich, but I believe it to have been a pancake) at the JR Musashi-Kosugi train station in Kawaski City, Japan. It was nearly 9pm, when he saw a drunk man (who turned out to be 61) harassing a 10-year-old girl and attempting to lead her away by her shoulders. When she asked for help, he immediately stepped in, as he told *Yahoo Japan*.

I was going to the restroom at Musashi-Kosugi station after dinner that day⁶⁰ when I heard a strange voice behind me. I turned around to see what it was. When I turned around, I saw a man pulling a young child by the shoulders while saying angrily, 'It's okay, it's okay.' For a moment, I thought it was a fight between father and child, but then the girl cried out, 'Please stop! Stop it, stop it!' And the moment I saw her look me in the eye and say, 'Help me, please,' my body moved off its own accord. It's called a conditioned reflex.



I found myself in between the little girl and the man, holding him by his left side. I have extraordinary reflexes. But when I saw the man, I knew better than to provoke him, so I spoke respectfully to him, 'What are you doing?' I spoke to him in an honorific tone. When he did not answer, I asked the child, 'Is this man your father?' She replied, 'No, he is not my father.' She said, 'No, my mother is in the bathroom waiting for me.' Then I realized that she had been targeted.

The guy was still conscious at the time. He was still conscious at the time, and he said, 'What the hell do you care? Get out of the way!' He was still trying to get close to the little girl. The little girl was able to move and was saved by running into the women's restroom, but the old man and I were [tied up] the whole time. It must have been incomprehensible to anyone passing by, because an ugly man and a drunken old man were hugging each other.

The guy says he was too drunk to remember what happened, and I don't know what he was actually planning to do with the little girl. All I saw was the moment he pulled her by the shoulder, but the little girl also said she was hit. The police who came to the scene later said that it could have turned into a serious incident, so I guess it was all for the best.

It's not a big deal. It happened to happen near me. It's something I do every day, to take down a man.

He calmed the girl down "talking to her about pancakes" (*Tokyo Sports* said he offered her some of his own pancake)⁶¹, before her mother returned from the restroom and was reunited with her daughter. When they asked him what his name was, he replied: "My name is the Great O-Khan of New Japan Pro-Wrestling and you can watch me wrestle if you like."

New Japan Pro-Wrestling has the rules of New Japan Pro-Wrestling, and society has the rules of society. I am fighting to observe my rules. This time, I followed the rules of society and kept my justice.

⁶⁰ I think O-Khan has tried to make his life sound more elegant, but I don't think he'd been out for dinner. The early reports all say that he was eating a pancake outside a train platform toilet at 9pm at night.

⁶¹ The police report says O-Khan asked the girl once he'd subdued the assailant: "Are you okay? I know you were scared. I have pancakes. You want some?" Why would he have a pancake in his hand if he'd been out for dinner that night? He was just eating a pancake on a train station at night, alright? And that's absolutely fine. There's no need to make a big deal about it.

Until then, my way of life will not change. I will continue to slaughter wrestlers from tomorrow, and if anyone asks for help, I will generously lend a hand, because it will expand the territory of the empire. I wouldn't be a person who would normally give my name, and I wouldn't receive publicity, but I thought that if I received it, I would spread the awareness of crime prevention, so I decided to ask for it. It would be more valuable than a championship belt.

The Nakahara Police Station announced they would give O-Khan a letter of appreciation for his actions, which he received the following month. He looks absolutely furious about it. What a dude.



WHAT WE'VE BEEN WATCHING THIS MONTH

A huge show at the time, and largely forgotten today, this is Antonio Inoki's *World Wrestling Peace Festival* show from June 1996. Taking place in Los Angeles, it was a show that Inoki put on with talent from all over the world (some 40 wrestlers from six countries), intended to bring about "world peace and racial harmony" somehow, and involved WCW, New Japan, Mexico's AAA and CMLL (who were then very much at war back home), and the NWA. Talent included Sting, LA Park, Jushin Liger, Chris Benoit, Bam Bam Bigelow, Lex Luger, Bull Nakano and Inoki teaming with MMA star Dan Severn to take on the Russian Oleg Taktarov and Yoshiaki Fujiwara (the inventor of an armbar that bears his name.) The only reason the show is remembered at all these days is because it's the show where Eric Bischoff first saw Chris Jericho, and

subsequently signed him to WCW for their nascent cruiserweight division.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fto5VqBYOgE>



Watching *Wrestlemania 38*, it turned out the match Pat McAfee had with Adam Cole at NXT Takeover 30 no longer seems to be part of WWE canon. It certainly didn't come up as part of the build to his match with Austin Theory, so why not relive McAfee's best wrestling match here. It technically doesn't exist, so you're not doing anything wrong by watching on

Daily Motion. Remember, though, I'm not a lawyer.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7y18a1>

Stan Hansen takes on Dynamite Kid in Japan in 1991. YES PLEASE.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t27CpZoNxIQ>



Ah, the old days, where professional wrestling could have an angle where Virgil takes on someone who has a Ku Klux Klan gimmick (it's very much just a pillowcase with eyeholes in it.) The promotion is the long forgotten NWC, who billed the racist character as 'the Thug', which suggests they while they weren't a pro-racist organisation, but the end where Virgil is hanged over the top rope suggests they also weren't aware of how not to present a product that was overtly racist. Not one of

Jim Neidhart's finest moments, nor Virgil's, nor yours if you watch it. Thank goodness this happened a long, long time ago, and god oh no, it was from 1995.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuXSVnNpaUI>

Also in 1995, here's two youngsters called Matt (under the name High Voltage) and Jeff Hardy (in a mask under his Willow persona) having a match against each other. While both of them also started working as prelim wrestlers in the WWF that year, this match would also take place at *Wrestlemania 25*, where it didn't really click. Funny that this one, in a tiny gym and filmed on a camcorder, is considerably better than the *Wrestlemania* one. Twenty years on from this, they're back together in AEW. Astonishing to think how long they've been going, especially considering everyone thought Jeff would be in a wheelchair before he was 30. Well done, the Hardys.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AugwggFWTQ>

Talked about them above, but what are All Star Wrestling doing at the moment? Here's a 2021 show from Croydon's Fairfield Halls. Nearly 600 views, and it's been up since October. That wouldn't make me feel hugely positive if I was running ASW. The main event is between Danny Duggan ("from Potters Bar!") taking on Sean Kustom, who comes out to the Red Hot Chili Peppers's *Can't Stop*. He's addicted to the shindig is Kustom. Addicted to it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfmPoUEDBlg>



Here's *Southern Discomfort*, a 2000 documentary made of footage filmed in 1994, which showcased the low-budget rasslin' scene in rural Alabama. You might think it's going to be a prurient look at backwards backwoods people, but I found it really charming and sweet – from the promoter looking for abandoned barns in the middle of nowhere to stick his posters on, to the middle-aged man who manages a diner and is proud of his homemade

biscuits but who also performs as the masked Flame and riles up old ladies, it's a glimpse of something which was once ubiquitous but doesn't exist anymore: the local wrestling scene and the forgotten people who performed in it. It's worth watching for 'Bullet' Bob Armstrong's jerking sex-dance entrance alone, and that's before the Iron Sheik makes an appearance saying "don't smoke and don't take the drugs!" Magic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUtHnIP3gHo>

Bit of a British dream match as Zack Sabre Jr meets Tyler Bate in their one and only match. This was for Birmingham's Kamikaze Pro's *Sky's The Limit 3* in 2016, which I think might have been the greatest year in the history of modern wrestling in the UK.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8HMwBs5h40&list=PLxqiAccj01nONT5DiaFjLOnD1gWnV2G5C&index=4>

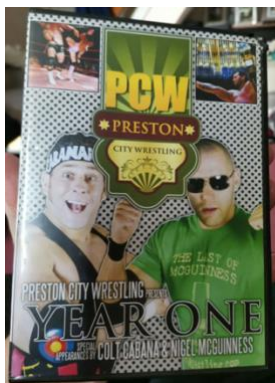
And the other two most important British wrestlers of their generation meet here. It's Will Ospreay vs Pete Dunne in TNT in 2017, which is the second greatest year in the history of modern wrestling in the UK (although it might be 2015, I've not really done much homework.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qhcOvlMOyM&list=PLrTEH-r-eKn-FtUIWDjVvPxX3wFdfuUQk&index=24>

Have you got 90 minutes to watch a classic two-out-of-three-falls match between CM Punk and Chris Hero? Sure you have. I worry that Chris Hero is being forgotten today at exactly the time he needs to cement his legacy. Please can he and Cesaro reform their Kings of Wrestling tag team and start touring the world, please.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxW3Fqdoahw&list=PLrTEH-r-eKn-FtUIWDjVvPxX3wFdfuUQk&index=7>

WHAT MERCH HAS MARC BOUGHT THIS MONTH?



It was a quiet month as I was saving up for *Wrestlemania* weekend (I wasn't, but I *was* anxious that my wife didn't have a go at me for buying stuff online when she knew full well I'd be buying loads of stuff while I was away), but I did pick up a couple of cheap bits and pieces, including a couple of PCW (Preston Championship Wrestling) DVD boxsets which collect the first series of shows that took place in 2011 and 2012. Have I watched any of the previous PCW box sets I bought about two years ago? No, no, I have not. It's a sickness. I need help. And more PCW DVDs so the set is complete.



Davey Boy Smith is looking forward to returning home to the U.K. in October.

Standing in the pissing rain in just his pants, an impatient Royal Mail van beeping its horn on its way to the depot (which is now a fancy housing development), Davey Boy Smith signs for WCW and is pictured standing in the road at the bottom of Charlotte Street. The second floor of that brick building behind him was home to Arlington Enterprises, the first TV agent I had in 1999, who managed (much more successfully) the careers of Alan Titchmarsh, Charlie Dimmock and Jenni Powell. Today, a CEX stands to the left of where the Bulldog is.