



A Brutal Legacy of Unbridled Entertainment

by Sam Sullivan

"It's one thing to talk the talk; it's another thing to walk after getting whacked with a coconut"

-"Rowdy" Roddy Piper

This article is dedicated to my friends,
an unconventional, elongated ode to their craft.

An introduction to a sports article (*and yes, the upcoming text is technically a sports article*) is probably a little excessive, but to preserve my role as friendly confidant to the subsequent beloved company, I am compelled to provide a few introductory remarks.

In all due honesty, I knew I would never be fully satisfied with my attempts to grammatically capture the essence of these guys, let alone capture it within the bounds of a few crummy opening paragraphs. Paragraphs that I've, no doubt, meticulously picked apart over and over and over again, and have reconfigured them probably a few dozen times, yet I still consider their composition somewhat crummy. I couldn't quite formulate the proper adjectives I felt that these guys are due, at least while writing about them in this genre. The **sports article** really isn't the most appropriate place for sentimental details and though it's the place I've chosen to examine these fine gentlemen, I am forced to omit certain thoughts, no matter how profound. Instead, I am purely focused on a single aspect of their complex lives. And like my wife has said so many times before, at the tail end of so many of our late night talks, "people aren't just *one thing*." But here I will be treating them as if they were just *one thing*, not to limit my understanding of them, in fact to do the opposite, to magnify a specific part of them in hopes to develop an even *deeper* understanding. So before you critique my POV, please thoroughly consider these restrictions that I have placed upon myself.

At any rate, I hope you'll still enjoy the following crummy paragraphs that I've somehow managed to be at peace with having created. Afterall, you can't really harp on this stuff for too long or else it will never get the chance to fully exist.

Here's to fully existing.

Let me tell you something, brother! There's something extreme about my friend Michael. There's something extreme about *all* my friends, really. All my friends being two other guys named Zack and Josh. But I've chosen Michael as my entry into their world of madness. And I suppose with my proximity to these fine fellas, with my close connection, that I too, must be considered somewhat extreme, extreme by association.¹ These apparent radical friends of mine are all, oddly enough, each individually affiliated with the Sports Entertainment Industry; the wild, rowdy world of Professional Wrestling.

This is really what makes me consider them Extreme People, you see. They are perceived cartoon characters brought to life, human action figures created to satisfy a crowd's childish desire for action, the people's undying hunger for exhilaration, for entertainment. All those drooling, hypnotized spectators, stuck in hypnotic trance, wiping the drool from their chins and doublechins as they boo and cheer and whistle and clap, calling out outrageous pleas for violence, spitting

¹ Extreme by Association would be a great name for a band.



mouthfuls of spit and peanuts and popcorn in between belting out things like: "Whoop his ass!" or "Kick his ass!" or "Twist him up! Twist him up into a Chinese pretzel!"

Imagine absorbing all of that intense anticipation, all while being belligerently bashed and clobbered by some big sweaty macho man or being entangled in the sweaty limbs of some big sweaty macho man, grappling with him intimately, twisting and turning his arms and legs, twisting him up into a *Chinese pretzel*, or giving him a piledriver, or a suplex, or a choke slam, or putting your hands all over his face, putting him into a chinlock or an inverted facelock, or giving him the ol' brainbuster, or the ol' power bomb, or hitting him with the ol' single knee facebreaker. Imagine doing any one of these very specific, choreographed maneuvers, very dangerous, *extreme* maneuvers,² over and over and over again, night after night, show after show. The force of being slammed against the bouncy but durable plywood platform of a wrestling ring, the sheer force of confronting gravity, constantly and repeatedly, is enough of an aching, bruising burden to make any normal person give up on their blossoming Sports Entertainment career. Yet the *bump*, as they call it, is fundamental to the life of a pro wrestler. It's like the linebacker's relationship to the solid green grass of God's green earth. They just simply have to get used to the pain.

And to be able to endure this kind of pain, this numbing self-destruction, I'd say you'd have to be pretty damn extreme. I often wonder what it is that motivates these people to wrestle, to undergo so much pain and humility. *Is it all for the sake of entertainment?* And I am just so damn compelled to shed some literary light on the subject, to give Pro Wrestling the ol' *thinking treatment*, as I feel it is my duty to support my friends and fellow artists. And yes, I do consider the wrestler an artist, if a misunderstood one. When I see guys like *Macho Man* Randy Savage, I see a walking, talking, breathing work of art. I see *Apollo Belvedere*, I see Marvel Comics made flesh.

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All My Rowdy Friends Have a *Wrestling Match Tonight*⁴

Michael Eugene Welch. Mikey Welch. Mike E. Welch is not only an exceptional athlete, he is a multi-talented creative, a true *sensitive artisté* and at the same time, a man who could probably crush you with his bare hands if he really wanted to. Whenever he stands up straight, light fixtures have been shattered and bulbs will need replaced, which is just a cute way of saying he's tall. He's somewhere around 6'6, clocking about 200-something lbs on the scale. Let's just say he's a *tall glass*. Let's just say he's physically capable of picking me up over his head and throwing me through a big glass windowpane, or throwing me through something else, anything really, he could just as easily throw me through a poorly constructed brick wall. I say this, not as a sadistic fantasy, but as an innocent bystander, a casual spectator of the nonsyndicated *Mike Welch Show*. I say this as an objective observer of his life; he's like three different people all-in-one.

² Extreme Maneuvers would also be a great name for a band.

³ I hope that part of this next section will read like a children's storybook (i.e. *Mike played with the big red ball*). Also, I'd like to normalize putting footnotes in random places, like in the blank spaces between paragraphs.

⁴ A rip on the classic Hank Williams Jr. song, "All My Rowdy Friends Are Coming Over Tonight" (1984). This may seem like a random country music ref. but I think it will make sense later that I've ref.'d a honkytonk classic.



Then there's my good friend Zack. Zackary Scott Swann. Z. S. Swann. Zack is like ten different people all-in-one. Under the flamboyant guise of the fast-talking, cigar smoking, loud-mouth; a zany character named *Black Jack Zack Jack*, Zack brings a level of theatrical intensity to the ring that is just simply unmatched. He's a dramatic powerhouse. I've seen the shift in Zack's eyes, I've seen him blink and turn into another person.

Zack used to wrestle, long before I knew him, under the moniker Zack Zero⁵ but after his kneecap was temporarily dislodged that one time, he has since been seen within the four corners. His participation now is mostly ringside, as he plays the role of *the manager*, whose purpose is to hype up their fighter and piss off their opponent. He pisses off the crowd too. Basically Zack's job is to piss everyone off. Zack's pretty good at that.

And then there's Josh. Joshua Thomas Holman. J. T. Holman. Josh. Out of all my pals, Josh is the most prominently rooted in the wrestling business. He regularly trains with Dustin Rhodes at the Rhodes Wrestling Academy in Leander, Texas. To those unfamiliar, Dustin Rhodes, son of "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes, made his mark in pro wrestling as Goldust, The Bizarre One, a guy who wore a silky golden robe over a golden latex suit, stomping around in golden lace-up boots and whose skin was painted with, you guessed it, *glittery golden paint*, of course. The ol' color gimmick.

Josh's gimmick is a character named Chad Lennex, who is really just a cocky bastard that thinks he's better than everyone else. Chad isn't too far from the real Josh. Josh is really just a cocky bastard that thinks he's better than everyone else.



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Not to tiptoe around this thing too much, but with having such close ties to the Extreme, I will try my best throughout this article, not to make fun of Pro Wrestling too much, because I really do truly admire the cojones it takes to step in between the Four Corners. But regardless of the severe reverence I so clearly have for these guys, I am bound to blurt out a few *derogatory remarks* and

⁵ The names of these guys is like half the fun.



harsh criticisms along the way. In fact, I will go ahead and blurt these out in the following detailed and organized bullet points:

List of Derogatory Remarks and Harsh Criticisms:

- Wrestling, for the most part, is made *for redneck trailer trash by redneck trailer trash*. People that don't know the difference between their cousin and a damn stop sign. *This isn't necessarily a bad thing* and besides, *I'm affiliated with the Redneck Trailer Trash of America*. I was born, raised, and currently reside within their invisible borders, for god's sake. *Hell, I'm basically one of them for god's sake*. At any rate, I do believe it's important to know your target audience. You gotta know what you're getting into before you go shoveling cash into their pockets. This ain't no Broadway show, people. This ain't your everyday, ordinary, live entertainment, folks.
- Wrestling advertisements, especially the local mom & pop promos, belong to a subcategory of shitty graphic design akin to the ridiculous, laughable flyers seen all throughout the South, particularly in the Memphis and Atlanta areas. Flyers you see taped to the counter at the gas station, flyers promoting local rappers and local rap concerts, flyers that look like they were designed on Microsoft Paint by fifth grade crackheads (i.e. stretched and skewed imagery that has been resized and over-edited and is really blown out of proportion). A lot of wrestling flyers have that same amateur quality about them, which can make it difficult to take the event they are promoting very seriously. I suppose some of these things are just doomed from the start, killed by their own crummy marketing. *I keep saying crummy for some reason*.
- Low budget shows are full of low budget performers. Meaning some of these guys haven't quite mastered the art of public speaking, let alone have that "X Factor" that's necessary to keep the crowd fully engaged. Part of the problem is just the Age we live in, where anyone and everyone seems to be involved in the Entertainment Industry. It seems anybody can be a wrestler nowadays. Shit, I can't tell you how many wrestling promos I've seen dimly shot on iPhones in the corner of someone's bedroom, or from the driver's seat of their parked car, or who knows it could even be their idling car, idling in line at the drive-thru at Wendy's. The point is, they aren't really using all the tools in the Performer's Toolkit. Instead of a powerful speech that evokes us, that actually compels us to tune in, we are presented with a half-assed and totally unbelievable bullshit spiel, a shy, quiet attempt at a threatening monologue from some guy who looks like he works at Tractor Supply, which he probably does. These types of amateur performers, the part-timers as I call them, or the half-assers, can't even talk-the-talk, so how can they really expect us to expect *them* to walk-the-walk? This lazy portrayal of excitement and false aggression can really taint the whole show with second-hand embarrassment, which really kills the suspension-of-disbelief. Or it fuels an already aggressive audience, *there's nothing that fuels an aggressive audience more than a phony performer*. I suppose this doesn't necessarily *hurt* the show, afterall, it just proves how riddled with phonies the industry is. But then again, I suppose every industry has its share of phonies...
- Just as every industry has its illusions of success, wrestling is no different. Wrestling is no different than your average office job in that way, constantly alluding to the next level of success. The *carrot-on-a-stick gimmick*. The almighty golden buckle, the Championship Belt is wrestling's version of Employee of the Month. It's the thing that every guy who steps into the squared circle puts it on the line for. The belt serves as both Carrot and is also treated as the MacGuffin of the wrestling industry. (A MacGuffin is a storytelling device, typically an object, that serves no *real* purpose other than to move the story along. It gives the characters something to chase after, something to fight over, something to obtain. The Ring from *The Lord of the Rings* is a MacGuffin.



The Maltese Falcon from *The Maltese Falcon*⁶ (1941) is a MacGuffin.) But it gets to a point where, after you hear about the *Fill-in-the-Blank* Championship Title Belt so much that the title itself seems to lose its value; what purpose does it truly serve apart from decoration? Apart from bragging rights? It just becomes a blatant advertisement for the next big wrestling event. Everything is just a commercial for the next thing. *The never-ending, ever-expanding ad campaign.*

- Much like several other mediums of entertainment, the Golden Era of Wrestling seems to be long gone. You just don't get guys like Macho Man anymore, or Rowdy Roddy Piper, or Ric Flair, or Stone Cold Steve Austin, or Hulk Hogan, or Mick Foley (aka Cactus Jack aka Dude Love aka Mankind), to name a few. You just don't have that colorful cast of characters that you used to have. A similar comparison could be made with modern Country Music Stars. There just ain't guys in Country Music like Waylon or Willie or Johnny or Merle these days. There just simply isn't that same voracious appetite on either end anymore. Those of us who have been around since the 1990s have all been witness to the fizzling, drawn out death of Pro Wrestling. *They seriously just don't make guys like Billy Bob Fairbanks or Lean Gene McClean or Eric the Engine or Pat the Prowler or George the Grappler*⁷ anymore. And that's that...



The Wishmaster Potluck

Earlier this year, at the Exceptional Showcase, I watched from the stands, as a high-flying Mike "Wishmaster" Revick was doing some sporadic aerial move⁸ which ended with him shattering both his ankle and his wrist. He handicapped himself all in one grand maneuver off the top turnbuckle. He was out-of-commission for nearly half the year and during his somewhat bleak interim, on a cloudy Saturday afternoon, me and Zack and my son took over a big potluck to Mike's house, in an effort to keep morale high. A hearty morale boost for us all, not just for Mike. *When Mike was down, we were all down.*



We gorged on honey-glazed ham with slices of pineapple and broccoli salad with maple roasted almonds and we had buttery brown rolls on the side. My wife even made her famous creamy mashed potatoes and sent them along with us. We took everything over in disposable tinfoil containers. We left the leftovers for Mike and his wife. I'm not so sure they were able to eat all of the scraps but we certainly feasted heartily that one memorable afternoon.



⁶ For all those H. Bogart fans out there. (There has to be at least *one* fan of 1940s Hollywood movie-star, Humphrey Bogart out there for god's sake.)

⁷ None of these are real wrestlers, I just made all those names up. See how much fun that is, though?

⁸ Sporadic Aerial Move is yet another, potentially great name for a band.



And so here we are, six months later and Mike E. is healed and getting back into the ring as the new & improved Wishmaster. This whole *Wishmaster* gimmick has evolved over the last six months, shifting aesthetically, but all spawning from Mike's classic freak athleticism and deranged, over-the-top theatrical antics, a performance that could have easily stood alongside the Greek gladiators in the time of the Greek Gladiators (300 BC). But Mike wasn't alive back then, he was alive now, and here he stood before us all, a modern marvel.

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Over the course of the next few paragraphs, I hope to recreate some of my experience at a recent event called the *Day of the Dead*, presented by Music City Pro Wrestling on November 1st @ 7p, Doors opened @ 6p. This particular event held much more significance than the other wrestling events I had been to. Firstly, it served as the highly anticipated return of the Wishmaster, his first big fight since the big injury. And secondly, this night would serve as a bit of an overdue family reunion for me, my brothers, Lucas A. & Jared T. and our father, William Thomas Sullivan III (or just Bill for short) and even my son and one of my nephews were able to tag along. We hadn't all been out together since we went to the Bridgestone Arena to see the Nashville Predators that one night. That was probably like twelve years ago at this point. And thirdly, there was also great significance that lies in the fact that the first day of November happens to be my dad's birthday.

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November 1st 2025, Día de los Muertos

(also Bill Sullivan's 67th Birthday)



The night the stars all fell into alignment and the world seemed to spin slower. The night so many Sullivans could be found in the same place at the same time. It just so happened that this multi-dimensional reunion took place in a wild west-themed theater, a place called **The Troubadour**.

The Troubadour is like a hillbilly's mirage, it's like Dodge City, partially reincarnated. Apart from all the barnwood and a structure that appeared to be the entrance of some old dusty saloon, the building was your standard venue, complete with a full cash bar, M & F restrooms, and a small lobby area, walls full of photographs of various country music stars throughout various eras. I even



saw an 8X10 of Elvis P., circa probably 1967-1977, aka the Fat Era, the decade where the King looked like he swallowed a bag of campfire marshmallows. In the main room there was a big 20ftx20ft wrestling ring surrounded by empty seats, seats that would soon hold an entire row of Sullivans, right after we were each tagged with the little yellow wrist bands that granted us access.

We shuffled past the Guys in Black Polos to our seats in Row A, the Front Row, right behind the guardrails, right up front, right there to see the action up close and personally. Once the show started our row was enclosed by two separate parties of old grey haired drunk rednecks and their redneck companions. We were in good company. We certainly didn't stick out like sore thumbs. We managed to hang in there, rubbing elbows with your average American wrestling fan, as I said, the Redneck Trailer Trash of America. I believe our ability to blend right was partly natural, an organic camaraderie between gathered Southern bloodlines, but I'd like to think it also was partly due to my ingenious sign idea.

I had been to several wrestling events before this one, but this was the first time I fully embodied what felt like the ultimate wrestling fan. I have always been a vocal participant at these events, but I would now step over the threshold into true fanaticism. The *Day of the Dead* marked my debut as a *Sign Guy*. Yeah that's right, brother. That night I became the wrestler's worst nightmare, or their greatest fan, the one who waved the sign.

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The Sign Gimmick

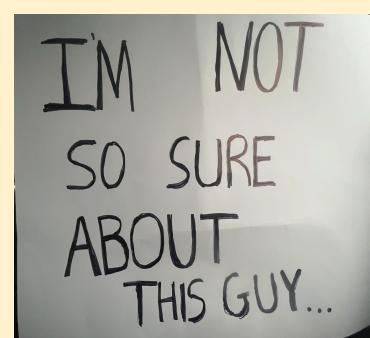
I came up with the perfect phrase to decorate a 14x22 blank space with. A phrase that would be vague enough to use on anyone who stepped into the squared circle, but also powerful enough to get underneath anyone's skin, if they really stopped and took the time to read it. A phrase with just the right amount of skepticism, to upend the phonies, to mentally torment them for not believing in their own delusions.

This was the phrase: *I'm not so sure about this guy...*

This was the concept art for the sign:



This was the actual sign:



The dot-dot-dot at the end of a sentence has been known to cause irrational irritation to its intended audience. So I added the *ellipsis* to leave the reader with a lingering frustration. This sign played a significant role in our night at the Troubadour but we will get to that in a second. First, I must do my due diligence as a writer and specifically now as a sports articleman, and provide some historical details of the venue.

Some Historical Details of the Venue

The historical Troubadour Theater in Nashville, Tennessee opened its doors in 1995, as the new home to America's longest running live radio show, *Midnite Jamboree*. *M. Jamboree* has been on since 1947, birthed by country music legend Ernest Tubb, most known for his hit song "Walking The Floor Over You" (1941) which was a song about walking back and forth across the floor, in response to a failed or failing relationship. E. Tubb was a pretty big damn deal in the world of country music. *Midnite Jamboree* was a pretty big damn deal in the world of country music.

The show hadn't aired since 2015, but has now returned a decade later, November 15th this year (2025). *Talk about a bleak interim*. At any rate, *Midnite Jamboree* can be heard globally on AM radio, station 650 WSM.

On Sundays the Troubadour also hosts something called *Cowboy Church*, which is an informal approach to traditional Christian worship service. A nondenominational church created to appeal to the average cattleman, a funny way to get guys to believe in God and to get them to go to Heaven. *Cowboy Church* was born in the 1970's from the mind of a professional rodeo clown, a guy named Glenn Smith. Imagine that, a rodeo clown propped up at the pulpit, a guy who hides in barrels and jumps out at the last second preaching the gospel, a guy who paints big white circles around his eyes and has red paint smudged around his lips telling the tale of Noah and the ark, ardently retelling the tale of Moses and the burning bush. A dusty ol' cowboy urging other dusty ol' cowboys to give their hearts to Jesus, all while dressed in a bolo tie and Wrangler jeans wearing a damn cowboy hat and damn cowboy boots. *I keep saying damn for some reason.*

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Imagine all that history in one place, the same building that has sheltered all those wandering souls seeking salvation, all those legendary country music stars belting out their greatest hits, and now the place would host a bunch of sweaty guys that beat the shit out of each other while a crowd of rednecks gathered around egging them on, shouting at them, shouting stuff like: "Give 'em a honey bun!" or "check em for honey buns!" which is what we heard repeatedly coming from the south end of Row A. It was during the match between this big burly guy named Huck and another guy named Ray Bruce, who looked like something from American Gladiator from the 1980s.

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The Sign Gimmick, cont.

I actually had quite the back-and-forth with this Huck character, quite the up-close-and-personal encounter with him. Huck, by the way, had the agility of a trained circus bear. At any rate, after the rather slow-paced match between Huck and Ray Bruce, Huck was making his slow, rotund exit from the arena, soaking in his victory over R. Bruce, and he was just a few feet away from me, slapping hands with one of the old-timers at the north end of Row A. I held my sign high and, covering my face, leaned over to my brother, Lucas A., and told him that I really hoped the big guy would notice the sign and get so upset that he would rip it to shreds. It was as if the words went straight from my lips to Huck's ears as the big Circus Bear, himself, yanked the sign from my hands and ripped it to shreds. Of course I jumped up and yelled slanders at him. There is a video of this circulating on YouTube somewhere. It was one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced at a wrestling match.

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The Cheese Pizza Gimmick

About halfway through the show my son was going on about being hungry, somehow, despite the fact that we all had just eaten dinner just a couple of hours earlier, right around the corner from the Troubadour at fucking Cracker Barrel of all places. At any rate, the kid was hungry and I had to appease his endless pit, he is a growing weed, afterall. So I went to the bar, paid like twelve USD and ordered us a small pan pizza, *cheese pizza*. So there we were, a few minutes later, right up front in Row A, passing out paper plates. Midway through the unplanned, impromptu meal, I realized how ridiculous it was to be eating cheese pizza while sitting in the front row at a fucking wrestling match and I couldn't stop laughing about it. I nodded at my son and he couldn't stop laughing about it either. This all transpired during a match between "The Cool Kid" Seth Delay and a guy named Jeremiah Plunkett. The pizza became part of the show, in a way, just like with The Sign. The Cool Kid was in a half-nelson or a headlock or something and was being slammed up against the guardrails, and we offered him a slice of pizza. "Want some pizza?" was what we said. They wrestled around some more and a few minutes later came around our way again, this time the Cool Kid stormed past the pizza and then stopped and turned and pump-faked, like he was about to grab the pizza from my son. And then was knocked over the head by J. Plunkett and they carried on with the rest of the match without a hitch. It was such a small moment that was probably only realized and enjoyed by our little bunch, but it was, yet again, one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced at a wrestling match.

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The Wishmaster's Return & The Anti-Climactic Climax

And so there we were, stuffed to the brim with cheese pizza, throats sore from all that crowd participation, morale at an all-time high in Row A, and we'd finally reached the climax of the night, the final fight, a six-man tag team match between three guys named Johnny Bandanna, LT Falk, "The Deadly Sinn" Se7en and three other guys named Flynn Hendrix, Zack Kennedy Harris, and our man "The Wishmaster" Michael Revick.

The match, like all the other matches I've seen with "The W." M. Revick, was a shining obliteration of all the prior acts of the night. And that's not to disparage all the prior performers of the night, but instead to illustrate just how *X-factor-d* Mike really is, to describe how captivating his showmanship truly is. And tonight's match was no different, even if he was sharing the spotlight with a few other guys. And while it may be rather anti-climactic of me, I'm not even going to try to recreate the experience here on the page, even if it does discredit me as a sports writer. In all due honesty, the whole thing was such a chaotic squabble that I struggled to make the necessary mental notes and my short term memory is not exactly serving me well, with the exception of a few details, which I will list here:

Wishmaster and Zack "The Exception" Harris cringing and oh-ing and aw-ing from behind the ropes, clenching their fists and nodding their heads in disapproval as the resilient, unbroken, unstoppable Flynn Hendrix took bump after bump after bump, bouncing off the mat like a damn bowling ball. (F. Hendrix is such a tough nugget of muscle, he is truly one of the modern marvels, who could have easily stood alongside guys like Rick Steiner or Bam Bam Bigelow in their heyday.)

Wishmaster finally got his time to shine, sliding right in front of Row A yelling at my father "you like that, Bill?!" He was so swift with the slide, like a flash of comic relief, a hyper-realistic animation sliding at the speed of Looney Tunes. Mike is about as expressive as Bugs Bunny sometimes.

Overall, it was quite the spectacle, as usual when it comes to my extreme friend Mike Revick "Wishmaster" Michael Welch, or whatever the fuck you wanna call him, and his extreme performance. I call it extreme, you call it whatever you want to call it, just don't call it fake!

The cynics, the naysayers, those who don't really get *it*, will often throw this word in the face of wrestling fans, *fake*. Such a little word that carries such big contention within the world of wrestling. You really don't want to even mention the word *fake* around these people. Just look at what happened to John Stossel back in 1984, in that interview with "Dr. D" David Shultz at Madison Square Garden. (*Shultz was a big, mean ol' sonofabitch, a fellow affiliate of the Redneck Trailer Trash of America, and also just a menacing, towering muscle of a man.*) He was the perfect specimen to show America, *to show the world*, what happens to guys when they suggest that wrestling is *fake*. An open-hand slap to the face is what happens. *It was the slap heard 'round the world.*



As I watch these colorfully costumed athletes, decorated in their neon spandex, slamming each other against the rumbling ring, I'm not really thinking about whether it's *fake* or not, instead I'm wondering *why the fuck are they even doing this?* Are they selfishly indulging in their own extreme violent fantasies or are they carrying on a tradition, passing down a pastime that they've enjoyed with their parents and their grandparents? And then I consider my own personal fascination with wrestling. A fascination that can be traced back to the GODs⁹, the days of inserting coins, the days spent playing at the arcade, playing *WWF Wrestlemania* in all its digitized glory, or sitting in front of the cathode ray tube in the living room playing *WCW Vs NWO* on the N64, (*it always seems to come back to videogames, anytime there is a link to my childhood, there is a link to videogames*) or watching *WCW Monday Nitro* each and every Monday night and in the summer of 1997 watching the explosive debut of Goldberg, cheering him on from the couch at my mom's mom's house. I can still hear ol' Willie Smullen, God rest her soul, cheering from her recliner, cheering and cackling as Goldberg tackled his way through the dense roster of WCW wrestlers, or when me and the rest of Ms. Kelly's sixth graders recreated Wrestlemania on the playground and I gave John Richards the People's Elbow and then he got up and knocked the wind out of me, or when my dad would do his Razor Ramon bit and flick a soggy toothpick at me or my brothers, or that one time me and my brothers played through "Career Mode" on *WWF Smackdown* and kept the Playstation on for like three days straight because we didn't have a memory card.

Then I think about guys like my friend Mike, who, despite his recent crippling injury, got up and got back into the ring. Despite his debilitations, he healed himself, he reconstructed himself, and then he got up off his ass and back on to the stage to do it all over again. All for the sake of the craft.

These people aren't just actors and athletes and acrobats, they are all of these things all at once, but then they are even more than that. They are traditionalists, they are preservers of the past, continuing the work of the gladiator, the court jester, the thespian, giving intense theatrical performances, performances worthy of the stage, but too dangerous to be confined within those restrictive boundaries. They continue to seamlessly blend fantasy with reality, a *violent, brutal reality*, carrying on such a brutal legacy of unbridled entertainment. There's something very artful and poetic and honorable about it. It's like a modern pianist putting on a big concert at the big Concert Hall, a show that echoes the types of shows that were performed centuries long ago by guys like Ludwig van or W.A. Mozart. It's inspiring to see them continue this ancient art, to refine and revise their craft within the four corners of the ring, just as I refine and revise my craft within the four corners of the page.

I could go on about wrestling, I could probably churn out an entire book on the subject. Because there really is something almost magical to it that captures the spirit of the Olden Days, keeping alive the spectacle of live entertainment, the spectacle of spectacular athleticism, showmanship, and engaging drama, to make us laugh, to piss us off, to wow us, and mostly to make us yell stuff that we would normally never be able to yell in public, stuff like "whoop his ass!" or "kick his ass!" or "twist him up into a Chinese pretzel!" or even "give 'em a honey bun!" or "check him for honey buns!" There just simply isn't anything else like it.

And that's that.

⁹ Good Ol' Day(s)