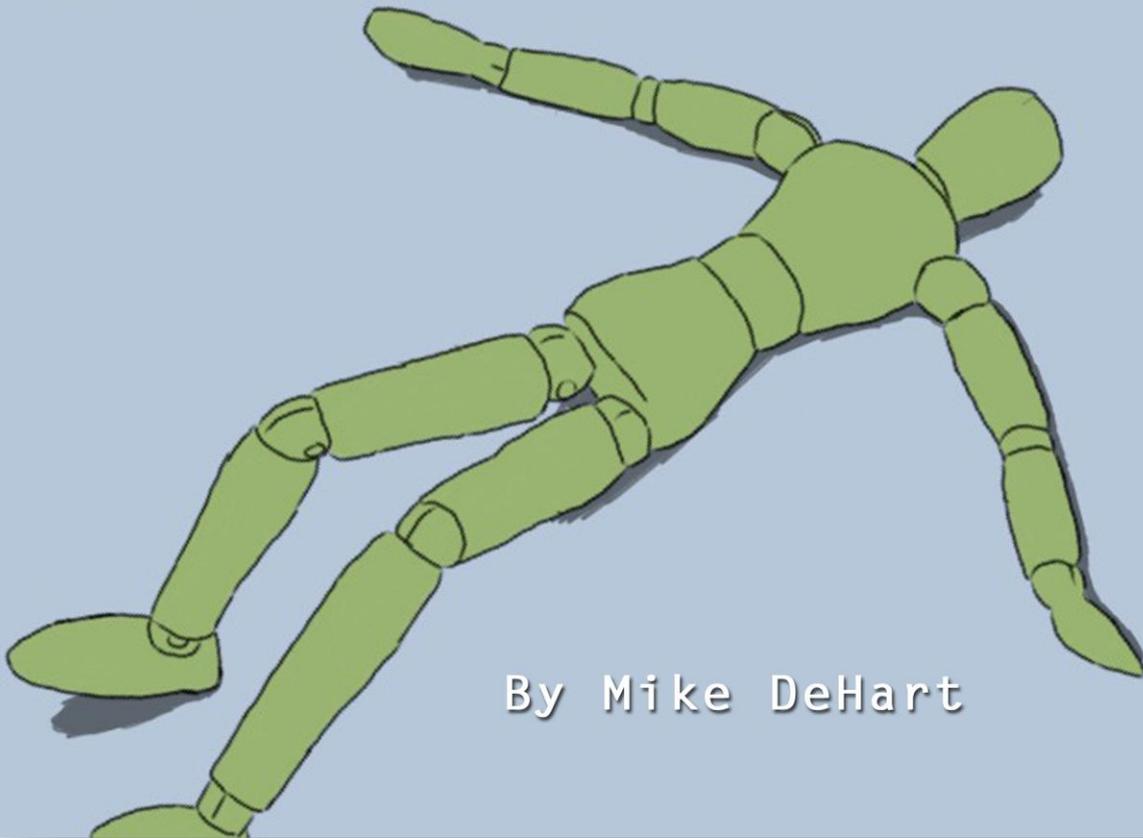


Treatise On Being
A 21st Century Jobber:
My Pro-wrestling Experience

Winner of the
Pretentious Title Award



By Mike DeHart

**Treatise On Being
A 21st Century Jobber:
Winner of the Pretentious Title Awards
By
Mike DeHart**

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License.

Preface

These are my actual experiences in the world of professional wrestling. Many of the real names are not used because I never learned them. That's not as uncommon as you may think in those circles. Furthermore, I will not be using the acronym WWE. It was called the WWF at the time of my wrestling "career" and there shouldn't be any confusion with the World Wildlife Foundation due to the context.

Introduction

When I was a kid, I loved professional wrestling. It was the '80s and practically all kids were. at the time. Weekdays were taken up with school, so the weekends were the time for things you enjoyed and wrestling was a staple of the weekends. Saturday morning was for time cartoons and Japanese monster movies. Sunday morning was time for wrestling followed by Star Trek. I didn't get Star Trek back then, but I couldn't get enough of wrestling. My brothers and I would watch what was then the WWF and it's regional competition, USWA.

Everyone was familiar with WWF. Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant were in movies while Macho Man Randy Savage was hocking Slim Jims on television. The promotion had the familiar faces for casual fans and it was filled out with cheesy gimmicks and a few top-notch workers. My parents would rent the pay-per-views from the video store once they put them out on tape. We were excited to whatever the main event was, but there were always enough good matches to keep your interest until the end. The Hart Foundation and the British Bulldogs were some of my favorites.

I have to admit I didn't give the USWA the appreciation it deserved at the time. I remember it's show opener with the rotating Greek statue of wrestling set to a jazz version of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the theme from 2001: A Space Odyssey. My main memory of the promotion of course is Jerry "The King" Lawler. He was always there regardless of how many other wrestlers came and went.



"It's so... jazzy."

I realize now that the difference in the quality of the shows was just a matter of budgets. There wasn't any way it could keep up with WWF's money and you could tell from watching their show. Although it had a lot of similarities, USWA was slower paced, the live audience was much smaller, and the way it was announced was generally more "sport-like." That resulted in it being lower energy and harder for it to hold the attention of a child.

Around the time I was around nine or ten years old though, that all came to an end. My mom instituted a house-wide ban on wrestling due to excessive roughhousing. That was also around the time of the WWF steroid scandal. It was unrelated to the ban, but it didn't exactly paint it in the best light either. Before I knew it, I had completely forgotten about any love that I had for professional wrestling or any ban on it. By the time I was in high school, I couldn't have given two shits about it either way.

When my friends started talking about Monday night wrestling shows, I thought they were being stupid. It was bullshit and I wasn't interested. They asked me when the last time I watched it was. I told them it had been about seven years. They insisted that it was different and deserving of another chance. I didn't believe them, but I decided to try it out anyway.

I watched WCW Monday Nitro and I was absolutely amazed. I couldn't fucking believe it. There was something that wasn't there before, Cruiser weights. That's what WCW called them. They were fairly normal sized people, but they were doing things that I hadn't seen and it completely took me in. I can still remember watching the match that grabbed ahold of my mind. It was Dean Malenko vs. Ultimo Dragon. Between the high flying moves and submission holds, it was so fast paced and technically precise there was no way that I couldn't have become obsessed with it all over again.

Within a few months, I was taping the Monday shows because they were on at the same time and I didn't want to miss one of them. I would watch whatever I could find over the weekends. Eventually I even found ECW on a local TV channel. Not having a social life really paid off for finding new wrestling shows. Not long afterwards, my friends and I started going to live events. I have a one track mind. When I find something that captures my attention, it has my full attention. There is no other obsession.

We eventually went to a local wrestling event. The show was put on by Ohio Valley Wrestling, an independent promotion that was in Jeffersonville. They gave out programs with the card and a few ads. One of the ads was for their wrestling school. Suddenly it was as if my obsession sprouted legs. It was a purpose now. I was in my senior year of high school and on my way to college at Indiana University Southeast. It was in New Albany which was only a few minutes away from Jeffersonville. I began scheming the whole thing that day. I only call it scheming because I didn't tell anyone that I wanted to train to be a pro wrestler. I could imagine how that would go and I didn't want anyone planting the seed of doubt in my mind, so I kept it to myself until I was ready to begin.

Before I go any further, I need to define a few words to avoid having to make constant side notes.

- Worker - Any wrestler
- A Work - Anything that isn't real
- The Business - Pro-wrestling
- Gimmick - Character
- Face or Baby - Good guy
- Heel - Bad guy
- Marks - Fans
- Bump - Fall down
- Sell - Act hurt
- Jobber - Worker that loses most matches
- Ring Rat - Like a groupie for wrestlers
- Kayfabe - Secrecy around the business to maintain its own reality

To clarify, writing this is breaking kayfabe which until recently was difficult for me. It was deeply ingrained in my mind for a decade and I followed it to pretty closely. I was taught to never talk about the business to any outsiders and stay in character around marks. It was like a code of honor among wrestlers as silly as that may sound. However things have changed drastically since I began and kayfabe isn't followed. Anyone can get online and be watching a video of someone spilling their guts about every tiny detail. There's no reason for me to keep up appearances for the sake of the business any longer than I already have. With that out of the way, I can tell you the same thing that Vito Andretti told me when I first started training, "Welcome to wrestling in the '80s."

Training

It took me a couple of months to get everything lined up and build up the guts to get started training. By get started, I mean that when I made the initial phone call to OVW. Two weeks later though, I was in the ring for the first time. It was October 1999 when I signed up for the beginner class at OVW's permanent venue, Davis Arena. It, of course, was named after the promotion owner and retired wrestler, "Nightmare" Danny Davis. It wasn't really an arena though. It was part of an industrial park, all the buildings were joined together in an "L" shape, and Davis Arena was in the middle.

Inside, the ring was in the far corner just a few feet away from the wall. Along one wall was the camera for the tv tapings; on the other was the OVW logo that had the initials OVW arranged top to bottom with flexing arms attached to the sides. The audience seating was on the two remaining sides with four or five rows of folding chairs each and a small set of bleachers. There was a giant support pillar right next to the ring corner between the two halves of the audience. There was hardly any room to move around the ring and it was a pain in the ass. Every room inside the main walls, from the bathrooms to the locker room, was made of cheap wood and spray painted black.

I came in just before things started to change in OVW. I paid \$300 for a year of training. That was a lot of money for me at the time. I justified it to myself by thinking of it as if it were college except I gave a shit about it. Luckily, I joined the class a week before they doubled the price. They had just become a WWF training ground, several of the local workers had developmental contracts, and a decent amount of talent on loan as part of the deal. With all that going on, I can understand how they would think the class would be worth more, but I'm glad I didn't have to pay extra. The promotion's changes didn't change why I was there. I knew where I stood in the bigger picture; at the absolute bottom. I was the greenest rookie in a beginner's class of an indie promotion. The changes going on were far above my level, so it was irrelevant for me. My only goal was to learn.

The only difference that was evident when I started was who the actual trainers were. I was told it was primarily Danny Davis leading the class before I started, but in my time there, he showed up less and less. Instead, most of our instruction was handled by Nick Dinsmore and Vito Andretti. I recognized them both from the OVW event that had come to Scottsburg a few months earlier. They were both on the same page as far as in-ring basics and psychology, but aside from that they were very different people. Nick was a face and he looked the part. Vito was a heel that weighed around 300 pounds and looked vaguely Italian in a New York kind of way.

On my first day, I learn how to take a bump, how to run the ropes, how to lock up, and a few basic moves like hip toss and clothesline. These few things teach you the basis of most other moves. In any bump, you want to land as flatly as possible in one movement. Spreading out the impact over more of your body lowers the amount of force it absorbs. After the bump, you would get up in a clockwise motion. This isn't a universal thing, but it was important at OVW. If you didn't backwards, you would be corrected verbal and physically by whoever was running the class that week. I could explain some of the basic moves, but for the sake of staying kind of on topic, I'll skip it.

The clothesline, however, is part of a unique group of offensive tools in professional wrestling, moves that are for the most part real. There is a little bit of technique to it. Your arm needs to be slightly bent and you aim for the top of the sternum so that your opponents head is lined up with your elbow. This lets you hit them as hard as you possibly can without doing any serious harm. Certain workers will not bump for a clothesline, so you have to knock them down. Forearms to the back and knife-edge chops are the same way. They're little details, but necessary to make it look right. Some wrestlers don't work this way, but it's important that things that can be real are real. Anything short of that is bullshit. It makes you and your opponent look like assholes.

We would have "chop practice" when someone in the class fucked something up and it was horrible. We would each have to give and receive chops in the corner of the ring. This was Vito's area of expertise. He was able to literally break skin within just a few chops. After just one, you would have a perfectly hand-shaped welt that would last for days. When you are taking the chops, your arms would be wrapped around the ropes behind you with your chest facing out. When you're giving a chop, you aim for the middle of the chest, pull back, and let them have it with the inside of your hand. It's important that your hand is relaxed with your fingers together and that you follow through. It turns your hand into a whip. If you failed to hold up your end in either side of this exchange, you could expect Vito to step in and show you the correct technique.

I made sure to pick up the clothesline and chops as quickly as possible. I think I ended up being one of the best in our class at these two. The only one on my level better at chops than me was a guy named The Amazing Pookie. He was just fucking weird both in the way he looked and in his personality. He was about a shade away from being an albino and was covered with Insane Clown Posse tattoos. Pookie was and to the best of my knowledge still is a Juggalo. He mumbled constantly and spoke in a creepy hick voice. He took a little bit of delight from inflicting pain on people. I consider myself better at clotheslines because I would stick to the correct technique while Pookie didn't really care if you got hurt or not.



Yeah, these guys.

I was very uncoordinated so initially, I sucked at most things we would try. It was a long learning curve for me and being the fuck up that I am, a lot of guys thought that I wouldn't last long. My first few matches were awful. Every few months, we would have an amateur night where we would have to take tickets and sell them to our friends and family. It was so goddamned embarrassing. It makes me glad I had so few friends. The fewer people that saw me and knew who I was the better.

Not being known was an important factor for me so much so that I wore a mask. I didn't want professional wrestling to bleed over into my real world life. It gave me some freedom from being myself which was a relief and being a fan of lucha libre style, masks had this kind of mythos about them that made them seem very cool to me. I imaged my life before I started in the way that El Santo, the legendary Mexican wrestler and movie star/character, was portrayed. His mask was always worn and I thought that was the best idea. I wasn't going to stick to it as strictly as him. I didn't want to be singled out as the freak in a mask, but whenever I was at a show I was going to stick to that.



El Santo and Son: Attorneys at Law

I had another reason to wear a mask though. Before my first match, I decided to have a pair of tights made. One of the guys was called the Swordsman and his wife was making and selling gear for workers so I went to her. The stuff she was making for other guys looked decent so I put in an order for a pair of bicycle-style shorts. She asked for some colors and my size which I gave her. At the time, I thought that I didn't care what they looked like so I told her to just use her judgment. A week later I realized that I really did care how they looked. They looked so bad I could barely believe it. It had the colors I asked for, but there were two black and white side panels, one with stripes and one with polka dots. Also they were baggy which made me look even smaller than I was. Keep in mind that I was 150 pounds, so these tights made me look like a preteen of questionable sexuality at best. They did have my gimmick name across the ass of them. I was the Maniac and those bullshit tights along with my precious mask would be my identity for the next few years.

Before I get too far ahead of myself, the other part of training was acting as slave labor setting up and taking down the ring for shows on the road as well as doing security work during the show. OVW had a few different rings. The one at Davis Arena was left up all the time and there was another left disassembled on a trailer that we would have to put together at different venues. My first time was at St. Teresa's gym in Louisville. Our rings didn't use any permanent fasteners. We'd start with placing the corner posts and sliding in four very large metal girders used to form a square with a metal cable tightened around the bottom. Then, three smaller crossbeams were dropped between in one direction followed by nearly twice as many in the other direction over those. That completes the frame and with that in place, large boards are laid in the opposite direction as the upper layer of the frame. These are covered by a thin pad and the canvas which is bungeed to the cable at the base of the ring. To finish it off, we'd hang the ropes on hoops in the corner and tightened.

Beginners also had to put their time in on security. Most of the time, it was actually like a real job; keeping people on the right side of the barrier and reacting if something crowd-related happened. I learned that the first time I did security there. Some moron thought it was a clever idea to taunt Mark Henry (400 pound black Olympic weight lifter) with a bunch of bananas hung from stick. That's some pretty goddamned racist shit and he took it exactly as you would think he would. He wanted to kill this banana guy, so we had to get him out of there in a hurry.

I met a lot of WWF workers doing the legitimate security. They came in large doses to Louisville Gardens events. Like any other group of people, they are mixed bag. While almost everybody was fairly cool, there was one guy who came in and without saying anything else came up and asked a girl if she gave head. She did, but that's beside the point. It just seems like bad form to me to make assumptions so quickly.

Before one of these events, I ended up working security for a meet-and-greet. I was towards the end of the line between two tables. Dean Malenko was sitting at one cracking wise with another guy. Not many people wanted his autograph. I assume it was, because they didn't realize how fucking good this guy was. If I hadn't been busy, I would have had to put some effort into not geeking out on meeting him, but I had my hands full on the other table though. Kane was sitting there and everybody wanted to get to his side of the table and snap a picture with him. We were supposed to stop this somehow to keep the line moving and make sure the show could start on time. That wasn't working out though. It was impossible to fans moving when a giant is saying it's ok to come around and get their picture.

Sometimes the security gigs had some involvement in the ring. There was a match at the end of that event when all the security was supposed to hit the ring and separate Leviathan (known as Batista now) and the Big Show. The problem though was for some reason we didn't divide our attention evenly between these two obscenely large guys. I was pretending to restrain the Big Show with only three other guys and meanwhile Leviathan had about dozen guys holding him back in the opposite corner of the ring.

At one of the TV tapings at Davis Arena, I was involved in a disastrous security spot. We were in place as security to set this up. They picked three of us from the beginner class; Booker, Kid Quik, and me which was a good sign for us. If they could trust you with a security spot on TV than you might be trusted with a dark (non-televised) match. It was supposed to work like this. Doug Basham in some kind of masked gimmick was going to interfere in a match, knock everybody out

of the ring, and then we, the fake security guards, would hit the ring one at a time in quick succession. Booker was the closest and was supposed to be first. I would follow him and Quik would come after me. However, when Booker got close to the ring he stopped, turned to the crowd, and asked them if he should go in there. What?! Why would he do that?! A security guard doesn't ask for an audience opinion on whether or not he should do his job or not. It didn't make any sense and it made the other two of us look like idiots because it caused us delay our reactions. It was only a few seconds of seriously fucking up, but that's all we really needed to ruin the whole thing. We took our bumps and we helped out by a ref named Brisco. As soon as we got behind the curtain, he told us to leave immediately. Jim Cornet was there for TV tapings and he was seriously pissed at us. There were several holes in the walls in the back from his temper, so we took his advice and got out of there. In retrospect, I see this is when my fate at OVW was decided.

Traveling

Wrestling is like an old trade in that you need somebody to take you under their wing. For Pookie and me, that was Vito. We were still in the training class when he started taking us along to work in different promotions. They were all in Kentucky, so I had to get a wrestling license. Kentucky is one of the only states that has an athletic commission. It's there because of horse racing and boxing which used to be popular at the Louisville Gardens. Since wrestling is licensed there, intentionally bleeding (aka juicing or getting color) is off limits. Of course, that never came into play in the kind of places we were working.

My first gig away from OVW was in Brandenburg, KY. During the week, the venue was an auction house and was a building only in the very loosest terms. There was a roof and walls with various pieces of junk hanging from them. Truth be told, they were probably all that was holding the place together. The promotion shut down a few months later when the building was torn down. The promoter was a guy named Dave Clark. I never definitively found out if he was in the Dave Clark Five, but that not important.

I only work there a half dozen or so times, but it established a fairly solid template of everything that you could ever expect to find on the road. In the locker room, there was the usual mixed bag of workers. Any gathering of professional wrestlers will have guys of varying degrees of experience and success. Among those there will be druggies, misfits, fuck ups, and true professionals with shades of grey between since they aren't mutually exclusive and are scalable. I consider myself to be about 30 percent fuck up, but I always behaved in the most professional way that I could. That's not to say there weren't any "normal" people. It's just that normal on the outside world is not the norm with the guys in the back.

This place's backstage was a more bizarre than most. It had several folding tables of assorted crap and large racks of second hand clothes. It was understood that we weren't supposed to bother any of this stuff, but that rule wasn't observed in any way. During one show, Vic the Bruiser (a worker well known in the area enough to promote a show with) spent the evening reading aloud from a particularly stupid children's book. I remember Vito going through the clothes racks and pitching gimmicks. Since I primarily worked in a masked, most nights I would have multiple matches. It started there. Vito found a little mechanic's jumpsuit. It matched his gimmick, so I was his partner that night as Little Mikey Andretti. It was cool to be in a tag match with my mentor, but that fucking jumpsuit was way too small. The fucking thing was way the hell up the crack of my ass. Consequently, I just kept it. Who would want it after that.

On the other side of the curtain, there was the typical scene. A small ring with a dirty mat with a yellow nylon rope strung from one flimsy pole to another surrounding it to act as an imaginary barrier between us and the mob of fans. By mob I mean no more than fifty people and by fans I mean spectators that I assume were only there because there was no other option for entertainment. I never enjoyed the fans in this region of the country. It's not just wrestling fans. It can be applied to generally any type of audience in the Kentuckiana area. Multiple big acts have sworn off coming here due to bad audience experiences. They don't like anyone. The most you have any hope with is a heel with some heat. If you're in a one off match, they don't take notice which makes it hard to put in good work. Or at the very least, it makes it difficult to give a shit if they're entertained or not.

Some guys care. Some too care much. Not really about the fans though. They care about the business. I've heard so many insane tirades from guys about how they love the business. Most times it was directed at one person, but they were always loud and obnoxious enough to draw in anyone unfortunate enough to be around it. I call bullshit on this whole practice. The business is the show and that doesn't add anything to the show. All those speeches serve to do is make other workers (most of which are poorly paid, if at all) not want to be there. That's just my opinion. When everything else is said and done, they're still in it and I'm not so take it with a grain of salt.



I love the business in a loud and overly aggressive manner.

In addition to the stationary little promotions, there were also the occasional one-off shows at places like National Guard Armories or school gyms. The simple fact that they were outside of a controlled environment made those unique. I got my nose broken in Salem, IN at a National Guard Armory and it wasn't even my match. The Andrettis were going out and somebody place the wrong music, so Vito ran back into the locker room and told me to follow him. I didn't have a choice really, because he had grabbed ahold of my head. He lead me out, threw me into the ring, and cut a quick promo about how I was sound guy that fucked up their entrance music. Then the two of them gave me their tag team finish, The Overhaul, which is a clothesline from the front and diving tackle to the knees from behind. Guido was the one giving the clothesline and I took it right in the face. That put me out on my feet. Vito told me later that he knew something was wrong when I just kind of collapsed and then was instantly back on my feet, so he threw me out of the ring. From there, somebody helped me to the back. At the time, I was in denial about my nose actually being broken despite numerous people telling me it was. It wasn't until a few days later when I discovered that I could move to around my face in a way that was previously impossible

that I came to the same conclusion. Of course, I didn't see a doctor which has left my nose vaguely resembling the moon from a box of Lucky Charms.

Being on the road is strange even if it's just for a day. My longest road trip on the way to a gig was to West Virginia. Four other guys and I rented a van, because it would be cheaper to go together and set off early in the day for an over six hour drive. I don't remember the name of the promotion, but now that I think of it, it was the only one I didn't go to with Vito. The matches were alright, no major fuck ups. Afterwards, things got complicated. The two more established guys had this previous connection with this girl with an oddly shaped head that was going to give them handjobs. The oddly shaped head is not the selling point in this situation, just my own interpretation of what I believe was an unusual phrenological specimen. The other two younger guys were married, so they were going to Wendy's. I went with them. What can I say? Frosties are good and she only had two hands.

After our meal, we picked the two older guys and their friend. This began a downhill slide for the trip. She wanted to hit a drive thru and get a ride home which is fair, but not everybody opted for the handjob. We all had to pay the price though. She seemed incapable of being quiet for even a few moments. I'm not sure how we lost so much time riding around town with her, but it was late when we got back on the interstate. Things were calm for the few hours. Some of us were drifting in and out of sleep. There was a Mary J. Blige CD on loop for some reason. There weren't many other vehicles in either direction. Just then, a deer runs out into the road and we plow directly into it. I was awake in the back row of the van and saw the whole grisly event. The driver hit the brakes, but it was too sudden. The van made contact with the deer in the upper portion of its legs throwing it up on the hood, bashing the windshield in a bit. We were still moving in spite of the brakes, but we lost enough speed to drop the carcass. There was still enough momentum to get us over the body we had just lost before coming to a stop safely at the side of the road.

The van's interior was full of what we thought was smoke, so we got out. It turned out to be from the air-bag. Luckily this was when everybody started to have cellphones, so we were able to get help. One of the older guys stayed with the rental since it was in his name to wait for a tow truck while the rest of us left in a taxi. Now I need to pause a second and clarify. This was not a taxi like you would see on television. This was an independent driver and he was in what I can only guess is his own vehicle. It was one of those glorious land yachts with bench seats like a Buick or an Oldsmobile. I mention the bench seating because he was such a mountain of a man that alone he was occupying half of the front. We rode with him to Cincinnati where we were going to meet up with the wife of one of the younger guys to drive the remainder of the way.

Once we switched vehicles, we all asked each other who was farting for the entire cab ride. It was the driver. I'm sure we all knew, but wanted to get the story straight. This should have been the last part of the trip, but we got pulled over for having the brights on in the passing lane. The cop let us go with a warning.

Personal best and slow fade out

Not long at that trip, Vito took me a few others to a promotion that had just started in Louisville called MWA, Metro Wrestling Alliance. It was on the second floor of a warehouse on 7th Street. The building was run down. It had dirty floors, a few broken windows, and was full of musty air. Most of the building was dark, empty, and smelled of piss. It was not uncommon for someone to wander off into one of its multiple dark corners to urinate. The restroom is for paying customers. The place was always too hot or too cold, but it was my favorite place to work.

My first match in MWA was a triple threat hardcore match. That was huge for me. At OVW, somebody as low on the ladder as me would never get that kind of match. I got to work with two guys that I trained with, Pookie and Chia, and they just let us go for ten minutes or so. We all trained together and were familiar with each other's styles. It was fun and the crowd was into it. It was such a strange experience for me to be in a match where people were interested. We just went with it and everything turned out right.

In somewhat of a rematch the following week, I had a singles hardcore match with Pookie that may have been the best I ever had. I was the heel. I suppose that was the only logical. Neither one of us was very liked, but Pookie was a Juggalo so no matter what other Juggalos would like him. We kept the back and forth going and the fans were excited. At one point in the match, Pookie took a shovel with a plastic head, cracked it across my back, and I went down. This puts a small cut on my elbow that I didn't notice at the time. What I did notice was that he dropped that shovel basically right into my hands, so I grabbed it and crawled over to the corner to get up. He followed me, pulled me in his direction by my mask, and leaned down a bit. It looked like he was feeding for a hit, so I smacked him in the face with the shovel. He swung his upper body between the ropes to the outside of the ring. I thought he was just selling and went to pull him back in.

The ref separated us so he could check on him. In the meantime, I was selling and leaning with my back against the ropes. I happened to notice some blood on the mat and visually following the trail, I realized it was mine. My entire arm was a wet, red mess. When you're in a mask, it's all about big, clear, almost pantomime-like movements to let people know what you're thinking or feeling. From those who saw that match I can say that I was clearly someone who just realized he was covered in blood. When I looked up, Pookie was facing me, his entire face blood-drenched and holding a kendo stick. From there, it was a race to the end of the match. He was beating me unmercifully with that fucking thing, mostly along my left side. I took some kind of splash off the top as the finish and that was that. Everybody congratulated us in the back, and I apologized for all the blood. They said it wasn't a problem because we didn't cut ourselves to do it and fans liked the match.



Good times.

Within a few weeks of that, OVW got rid of Pookie, me, and a few others. That's fine with me. They didn't have anything for us. In MWA, Pookie was getting more into the hardcore matches and doing well. On the other hand, I got saddled with a tag team partner whose name I cannot fully remember. Chris something... I want to Chris D which could be it. D as in Dumbass, Dipshit, or Dickhead maybe... Sounds too much like Christy to be sure. Any way you want to say it, this team wasn't exactly a rocket straight to the top. Being partnered with him sucked, because

he would pitch all these shitty ideas to the promoter, Brian Blade who I am almost positive hated him, and some of his shitty ideas would stick.

The one that really sticks out in my mind was this. He talked up this angle for a singles match where the loser wears a dress. They gave in and agreed to let him have his match, but he didn't show up that week. As his tag team partner, I kind of inherited the stupid bullshit he planned. Being his stand-in, I lost. I had to wear a dress, but I just wore it over regular gear until I was able to get out of having to do it.

I did have multiple matches most nights though. It gave me a chance to do some different stuff even if it was still under a mask. I worked a few times under two of Vito's jobber gimmicks that he brought with him, Bad Medicine and Dr. Feelgood. Essentially these were the same character which is a masked wrestler in scrubs. Once I worked in a full body silver leotard and a matching mask as Sparkles the Open Downhill Skier. That was Pookie's stuff. He didn't use it, so I have no idea why he would have it. I'm assuming it would be one of those weirdo reasons that would make me uncomfortable if I thought about it for too long. The bottom of the barrel for those was not a match. It was just me getting beat up as welfare Freddy Krueger in a shitty rubber mask.

There had been a few complaints to various local government officials since MWA started like it was an abandoned building, guys were cutting to get color, and so on and so on. None of it was true, but they did get shut down temporarily for a handicap accessibility violation. It was on the second floor and there was only a freight elevator. It worked just as well for people as did for much heavier freight, but it wasn't zoned specifically for passengers. That was enough to stop the promotion for a while. It took a couple of months for them to move everything down stairs and build out the space.

During this time, I traveled around with Vito more. There were a few consecutive weeks in Bowling Green, KY. One turned out pretty interesting. Vito and Big Jack Black (not of Tenacious D) were the tag team champions in this small promotion under the team name, The Fat and The Furious. They were set to lose the belts, but Jack couldn't make it to the show that night. I was there (which was probably my strongest asset at the time) so I got to step in and fill that role. I went out to the ring with the belt over my shoulder. In a move that I wish I could say was intentional, I went to hold to up, I fumbled around with it and dropped the belt. Dropping the belt is slang for losing the championship. I lived up to both meanings of the phrase. That got a good laugh out of the boys in the back. The way I see the situation, that would count as a negative title reign which has to put me at the worst in history or damn near it. I'm still happy about that.

Without a regular place to practice, I couldn't work on anything new and got bored doing the same stuff over and over. Once I lost that enthusiasm, I started to notice all the dark elements that came with pro-wrestling. Most of the guys I knew were divorced. Some have had life threatening injuries. On top of that, there was the accumulated damage to me and everybody else. It soured my outlook on the business to the point where I didn't care anymore and it showed. My last three years in the ring had fewer and fewer matches until I made it out completely. I'm now a reformed member of society who hasn't had a match in six years.

My tips

I think it goes without saying that if you want to be a professional wrestler, you need to watch as much as possible. Watching old stuff is the best way to see how different matches play out. Pick out someone that you would want to work like and study everything you can find. Check out overseas promotions for different styles and moves. Take all that and practice to learn as many different moves as possible. Once you know the moves, you can pick and choose the ones that suit you and the style that you want to work. Eventually, everything will seem to fit together and become your own unique style.

There are a couple of things I wish I had known about when I was in the ring. One of those things is improv. The ability to roll with whatever happens is really important in wrestling, because there is so much that can go wrong. Whether it's trying to recover after a mistake (which will happen at some point) or needing to stall for something, you need to be able to think on your feet. Improv comedy or music can help get you into that kind of state of mind. The other thing that I wish I would have had a better idea of back then is dungeons and dragons. I'm not a player of pen and paper role-playing games, but I do get why people like them. Why I think it would be helpful to someone starting out in wrestling is that it makes you think about characters. D&D characters have an alignment that the players pick when they create a character that determines how they behave. I think it is a great place to stay when you're thinking about your gimmick. Look up character alignment, think of it in terms of wrestling, and you'll start to see the different groups workers fall in to.

The last thing I would say to someone entering the world of pro-wrestling is to never stop trying to get better. For all the work you put into being able to work in the ring, you have to keep yourself interested. A loss of interest is the first step of it being a burden. Once it's a burden, it's easy to quit. If you want to "make it" (whatever that may mean to you), the biggest part is being there. Thanks for reading.