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ig Bear Sports Promotion had a way of torching Ontario wrestling audiences with such a primal heat that fans would rise off their seats like scraps of ash into a chimney. It's gone now, like other genuine performances.

That show was not made for television. The wrestlers were behemoths of another

age. No one now would make glossy pictures of these bulging bodies snorting grime for prizes inside Hostess chips. They had nothing of the whitewashed hygiene slick of fast food packaging. They belonged to wrestling's roots, inside smoky cinemas and small town arenas, inside the country potencies along with a meat-and-potatoes morality that stokes a working man's instinct for passing judgment. Wrestling used to make its way along the blacktop roads from towns to fairs with carnivals and patent medicines and now this show, the real wrestling show, the original, is stored away in worn out panel trucks, victim of new age wrestlemania promoters who manufacture culture and politics for witless consumers.

Big Bear Sports Promotion never played downtown Toronto. The big Toronto promoters, Tunney's Queensboro Sports Promotions, had a deal with the Maple Leaf Gardens that held exclusive rights to the use of its facilities. The same was true for Montreal's Main Promotion and the Forum. To see the old-time wrestling show, to catch the outlaw Big Bear wrestling show that operated on the fringe of bigger cities, you had to go to Simcoe, Kirkland Lake, or Barrie or beyond.

One of the first times that I saw the Big Bear show was in Wheatley - almost five years ago - on a Monday night after the annual summer weekend fishing festival. I was there to find an all-out wrestling performance, undiluted by the manufacturers of media and tastes. Fans said the Big Bear shows were best. That night was the beginning of an exploration into a brand of pure-bred pro wrestling, and it was so compelling that I stayed. I took the show to heart, to understand why it worked so well. The promoter took me in, and a few months later I stood inside the ring clutching a microphone giving weights of wrestlers and taking paper cups on the backside of the polyester suit I wore to announce his shows.

Wheatley is Perch City. The population is 1600 and 700 of them came that night to see the wrestling. One hundred migrant workers from Mexico brought the gate up to over 800. The main event had Luis Martinez, a Mexican, wrestling against the Bull Dog from Detroit, Don Kent. And what an asshole Bull Dog was. The fans made barking noises at him to throw off his composure. They chanted Martinez's trade name, ARRIBA, a name with magic that swelled Luis's chest and gave him strength. Luis lived to hear the fans proclaim ARRIBA.

"Who am I?" Luis said to the fans before the match.

"ARRIBA," they spoke in unison. "ARRIBA, ARRIBA."

The two wrestlers fought hard. They meant business. Bull Dog seized Luis's wrist and flung him meanly in the corner so hard it made the whole ring move. Again he wound him up and whipped him with the wrist, but this time Bull Dog founq him harder, and Luis split through the ropes onto the floor.

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# The Last Real Wrestling Show

*Jim Freedman*

Martinez was stunned. He rose slowly and fell to his knees. In that half a minute that it took Martinez to fall, rise and fall again, the half of Wheatley at the wrestling show puffed and rose in judgment from their seats in the stands and condensed around the ring as Bull Dog made to exit, fighting off two small boys throwing paper products at his heels. The crowd drew together like a posse.

One corner of the crowd around the ring ruffled and rent apart to make a momentary space, and through that space rushed a stout boulder of a guy in street clothes to the apron and through the ropes mad as hell. It was the Wildman. I would come to know him well in the next two years. He is the inspiration, the hum and burn for the whole show. He owns Big Bear Sports Promotions, and he had seen the whole thing. He grabbed Bull Dog and threw him down and swept the cursed chain from his hand to hold it up before the referee's face. He displayed it to the crowd. The referee agreed it was illegal and reversed the decision, but by this time it didn't matter. The Wildman grabbed Bull Dog and tossed him from the ring, pursued him as he stumbled and picked him up again and heaved him on the concrete.

The smooth unyielding texture of the cement floor. The heavy brownskin breathing of the migrant Mexicans mingling with the shuffling of the other fans as they made a ring around Bull Dog the wrestler-man they hated. Martinez was out cold too, only ten feet away. Blood trickled from Martinez's skull. The tale of two men's character and fate fixed in crystalline opinion for Wheatley's experience. The ebb of bodies flowing from the stands to ringside in a tightening band of judgment around the silence of two metaphors reeking in the flesh, such a rich commotion.

Authentic, that is the word. But that sounds too much like a word that spent too long at school. How to view this show? Like an ancient zen master making animal sounds. A country preacher stalking a conversion. A blue ribbon spaghetti squash at the country fair. A whoopie cushion. Or an honest fart. Some things are totally irreproducible. Most of these things look funny in the modern world, they're so old hat or decadent or uncommercial or unpredictable that no reproduction, no media treatment of them ever does them justice.

That's why wrestling looks so foolish now on television, starlit bodies filtered through the collander of decorum regulations appealing to anyone who apathetically turns on a switch and settles down inside the constant voltage zone. It takes a monumental stupor to watch one wrestling match following another without the rush of live appeal because wrestling, the original way, should provoke, not entertain, should take its cue from the fans, the town, from living social ferment. But stupor is the secret substance that glues viewers to television's homogenized concoctions. The Wildman saves us from this stupor with his shows. Each of them is one of a kind. They take shape inside the fans' commotion. They work by torching indignations; political fantasies get hot and pretty soon the Wildman has his people dancing like primitives around a boiling cauldron half ready to eat each other live.

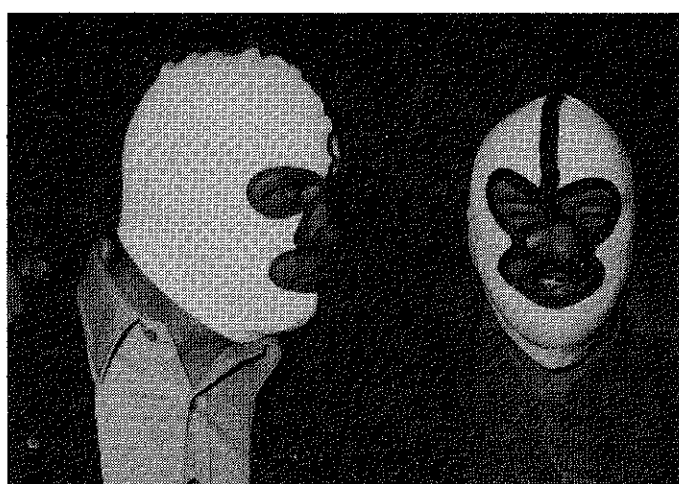
**The Wildman's boys were often over forty without the made-for-TV glaze, nothing to hide the bulge of countless bumps, the cauliflower ears and big faces strung on necks of polar bears.**

Next to the new age wrestling - wrestlemania, the show that comes in tubes of packaged personalities from New York City - the Wildman's Big Bear shows have a heaving thrill to them that wrestlemania lacks. The wonder is what Canadians have lost as wrestlemania takes their own prime time. I wondered what had tricked the sovereignty of Canadian consumers into such a mass-mind preference. I bemoaned the fate of the Wildman who cooked up wrestling out of the uniquely northern spice of Canadian towns. Where had he come from and what would happen to him?

***Wrestling territories spread out*** around big city hubs - Montreal, Detroit, St. Louis, Toronto - where, in the past, one promoter ruled the territory. The mighty original Sheik ruled Detroit for years with his fireballs and his posturing of oriental threats. Sam Muchnick ran St. Louis for four decades with hard-hitting honest shows for the bi-monthly Checkerdom reunion of his fans. Frank Tunney and his nephew Jack ruled Toronto for almost half a century. Some territories had reputations for the hotter shows.

Nashville's Nick Gulas, the black rogue of promoters, never took his town for granted; he moved in long ago from Birmingham and stayed by kicking at the doors and keeping others off his turf.

The secluded valley of Toronto was different. Inside the Queen's dominion, sheltered from a nervous continent of promoters, Tunney slugged along with sober shows. Gulas had always kept pace with outlaw promotions, with aggressive neighbouring promotions. Tunney didn't have to. He owned the contract to the Gardens. He had the athletic commission in his pocket. He had the television. He had connections. But he never seized the pulse of the country. There was one who did. That was the Wildman.



**I saw him once in a mid-size Ontario town chewing up a microphone at the wheel, turning corners, laughing with his trademark twinkle, half-a-laugh around the edges of his eyes talking up the matches on the evening's card.**

While Tunney ran his shows at the Gardens before 10,000 fans, the Wildman borrowed sand-lot houses for his shows circling around Toronto down toward Detroit, up to Sudbury and North Bay, then back around Toronto's metro margins, a different town every night, showing home grown wrestling on the edges of Tunney's turf. If you wanted to see the Wildman's shows you had to see them live. Tunney knew all that: that he was a maverick, an outlaw, that he'd probably never have the capital to pay for big time stars and still, small promoters and pretenders to Tunney's hold on wrestling came and went, all of them in fact gone almost as fast as they came . . . except the Wildman.

He was around for twenty years, and more years than not he had made good money. In Tunney's territory. He had no contract with big city coliseums, no office, no picture on the Garden walls. What he had was stamina, the art of never slowing down, moving constantly from one town to the next, his office was his truck, his phone, the pay phone in arena offices. He rarely slept. Two weeks before a show he plotted the ads for newspapers, delivered and paid for them himself, laid out the posters for the show, had them printed, tacked them onto empty construction boards and highway poles and storefront windows like campaign throwaways, and all the frenzied while he ran his shows like a juggler on a unicycle tossing pots and pans and frying eggs and bacon at a banquet of his fans. He kept a precious chest of beer in the front seat of his truck so as not to get too dry, to chase away the hum of the engine and the drum of his rapid body's regimen late at night after counting up the till.

And talk about his shows. Tunney's wrestlemania personalities wear sleek young muscle frames and names inspired by the professional diet products. The Wildman's boys were often over forty without the made-for-TEE-VEE glaze, nothing to hide the bulge of countless bumps, the cauliflower ears and big faces strung on necks of polar bears. No practiced grace. The grace they had came from knowing that no pile-driver, no young body slam, was more than their reflex could absorb.

They came from backwoods farms that failed and urban ghettos in industrial suburbs where the Depression took street tough kids and put them behind a set of weights. They got big and they got jobs wrestling in England, and when they came back they roamed the territories, looking for a gimmick, a crack at popularity. Some people say that twenty years ago more wrestlers came from Canada's steel town, Hamilton, than any other town in North America for its size. These men looked to the Wildman's Big Bear Wrestling Show for work. Even though there wasn't much. Chris Tolos, Vic Rositanni, Bull Johnson's son Danny, Johnny Powers.

Tunney's men are stars. The Wildman's boys were bruisers. Tunney's shows glitter with a cast that's bigger and better than real life with cops to keep the crowds at bay. No riots. Peel away the glitter, the programme hype, the soda and the lights and Tunney's show is threadbare, like no-name cola. Like the multi-media glitz conglomerate that now controls a major portion of his business and

rules Toronto wrestling from New York City. What is cola without a pair of lady's legs and chrome-white vaginal fangs offering a dream of something sweet and real? Wet Dream. Now talk about the Wildman's shows. Here was the real, real thing where you hear and smell the smack of bodies going tight and limp . . . all the imagery, the slapstick, foreign objects, breath and grime. His shows shed the sterile blanket of light that parches Tunney's big-city spectacles. The Wildman's light fell dingily down from a few overheads. It was a smoky night light that drew the fans in close, more intimately, more cheek to jowl - while Tunney mined a gulf around the ring with cops to keep the fans away. The Wildman set his shows up anywhere, in old movie theatres, community hockey arenas, municipal concert halls, outside on the trotter tracks. And unlike Tunney, the impresario in the shadow of the shows, the Wildman puffed his energy in heavens right out in front, wrestling, taking charge in teeshirts and a growth of hair uncut for twenty years.

Afternoons before his shows, the Wildman would mount a speaker to his truck and cruise the main street of a town "doing the sound" to tell the people "doing the sound" to show. I saw him once in a mid-size Ontario town chewing up a microphone at the wheel, turning corners, laughing with his trademark twinkle, half-a-laugh around the edges of his eyes talking up the matches on the evening's card. It was raining. He saw some fans on the sidewalk waving, and he curbed the truck next to them. He kept the sound on loud as he talked with the crowd.

"Comin'? Yeah, you're comin'? You wanna see a wrestling show. Big time wrestling. Midgets. We got midgets."

It was still raining at show time. People scrambled inside dripping wet, wiping off their heads and faces on their sleeves. The wrestlers had no precious airs, they walked in one by one through the reeking fans into the dressing room, the cranking tote bags and a case of beer, upper arms like ancient elephant knees, faces glistened from the rain. There he was, baleful and buddhist, the Wildman behind the announcer's table as the first match was begun, gripping an old railroad spike he'd rummaged from the bottom of his truck and using it SMACK to ring the pock-faced bell a dozen times or more.

The main event of the original Sheik in Detroit, now older making his living facing Igor the Pock-faced preened his hair hardened by an hour of labour. Four hundred up before the pros they knew the Sheik from his hell's kitchen lights as he always dressed fans from a size town made money Tunney's thousand arena.

Suddenly the Sheik ear into the ring and Igor, stunned back with his leg the Sheik's head. tail when he saw punching furious ran from the ring tains of a stage th nearby, and before they both emerge side of the stage Sheik had Igor on two by four by ten guess he found the stage. Igor looked The match was over through the audience overcoats tumbling regained his balance made his way back behind the curtain swinging his ten-pursuit. This time his seat at the arena chase the Sheik behind the curtain them. A bone di Then the Sheik ran the Wildman time the Wildman four and had it prepared for a finish Sheik who dashed entered with fans and ken mirrors and

Up to that point, discerned, wrestling The Wildman and ten changed all that The moment the came the sea-fury behind the curtain lumber at the Sheik with him. Vindict from me in a living The Wildman said what you have to make a wrestling draw heat.

After the show they bled out to peel off the posters advertising the front glass door black, deep green around tormenting

The main event that night featured the original Sheik, the real one from Detroit, now older and overexposed, making his living on his legacy. He faced Igor the Polish Strongman. Igor preened his honest muscles hardened by an honest peasant's labour. Four hundred fans sat straight up before the prospect of a hearty meal they knew the Sheik could bring up from his hell's kitchen of crude delights as he always did. Four hundred fans from a squeaky clean mid-size town made more noise than Tunney's thousands in his metropole arena.

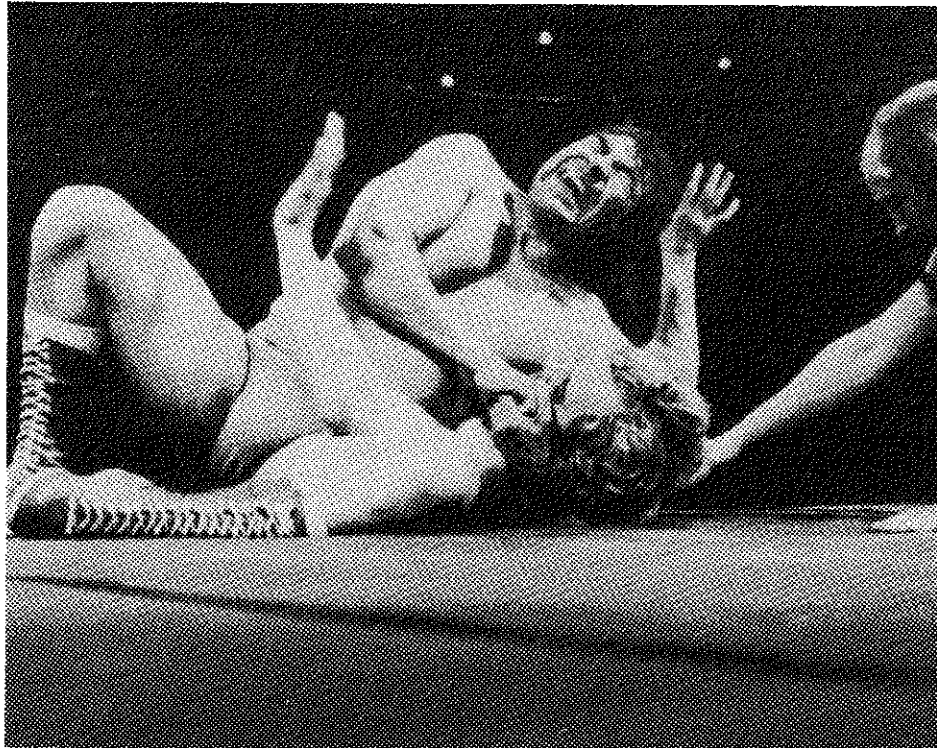
Suddenly the Sheik slammed Igor's ear into the ring post (that was real) and Igor, stunned a minute, sprang back with his legs flying all around the Sheik's head. The Sheik turned tail when he saw Igor on the rebound punching furiously with all fours. He ran from the ring up behind the curtains of a stage that happened to be nearby, and before ten seconds passed they both emerged from the other side of the stage except this time the Sheik had Igor on the run swinging a two by four by ten at Igor's head. I guess he found the two by four backstage. Igor looked truly frightened. The match was out of control. They ran through the audience knocking over chairs and pocket books, sticky overcoats tumbling in the rubble. Igor regained his balance once again and made his way backstage a second time behind the curtain with the Sheik swinging his ten-foot plank wildly in pursuit. This time the Wildman left his seat at the announcer's table to chase the Sheik and disappeared behind the curtain with the rest of them. A bone disintegrating thud. Then the Sheik and right behind him ran the Wildman except this time the Wildman had the two by four and had it poised behind his back ready for a finishing stroke upon the Sheik who dashed into an area littered with fans and chairs and broken mirrors and small change.

Up to that point, as far as I was concerned, wrestling had been folklore. The Wildman and the two by four by ten changed all that in an instant. The moment that the Wildman became the sea-fury lashing from behind the curtain swinging a piece of lumber at the Sheik, I went right with him. Vindictives charged out from me in a living river of feelings. That was 'drawing heat', I would hear the Wildman say one day. This is what you have to do if you want to make a wrestling show. You got to draw heat.

After the show the first fans scrambled out to peel off a coveted souvenir, the posters advertising the show, from the front glass doors. Green and black, deep green and deep black type around tormented faces of the

wrestlers in the featured matches, a reminder and somehow an essence of the exhibition. Terry Dart collected them, particularly the Wildman's, which were by far the best. My lucky night, I got one. The next morning I pulled the poster out from among the litter on the breakfast table and scanned its details for a message, for anything more about the Wildman, the enigmatic medicine man who made the wrestling work, who cooked the show while Tunney merely canned it. Could the poster be a subtle guide into this nether world where he took charge? I sat and stared, looking for a sign.

There was a picture of Igor in a simple snapshot on a grassy field with his little girlfriend in a funky Dylan hat and a collie. Above that little family photo an enlargement of his face appeared in outline, a grinning well-fed boy without the slightest hint of treachery. Opposite Igor on the right postured the full-length body of the Sheik with the caption underneath his lone condescending form, eyes covered with a shawl: ON THE RAMPAGE. Great stuff but still no secret to the Wildman's magic touch.



Photos: Terry Dart

Wait. Something odd at the bottom. There the poster returned my stare. Flush with the bottom line of green there was a photo of a front row ring-side line of fans at a match, a photo bordered in black with stars pasted at the corners and this appeal: BE PART OF THE ACTION. A lady in the picture offered her head into her outstretched palms, there was a man his hand outstretched carrying his bile's consignment to the show and some others looked out through the photo right at me. A mutual examination. Hot damn, look at that fat lady with the stockings. And that jerkoff in the

corner with the gums chewing out the referee. This picture, featured centre slate, advertised my friends, the fans. No stars, no personalities, just these dozen or more turbulent anybodies the Wildman fit into the picture who got big billing on the card.

Not a bourgeois face in this picture of the Wildman's crowd. No middle class. These wrestling shows are sacrilege to them.

Middle class America holds the ring in awe, sees in the ring a sacred centre for the cult of competition. It is here, in the compelling knave of an economy of scarcity where successful men have fought to get their spoils. It is here where society gives a gilded frame to winning. To the swelling bosom of success. To the tidy folds of a booming community's industrial smoke filling the skies with dreams of Cadillac Seattles and golf shoes. No wonder then that competition comes to us as a 'spirit' overshadowing the spirit of the church bell spires and no wonder that the ultimate repository of this spirit is the ring. People rise to grand acclaim who have this alchemical perfecter, the coveted body hu-

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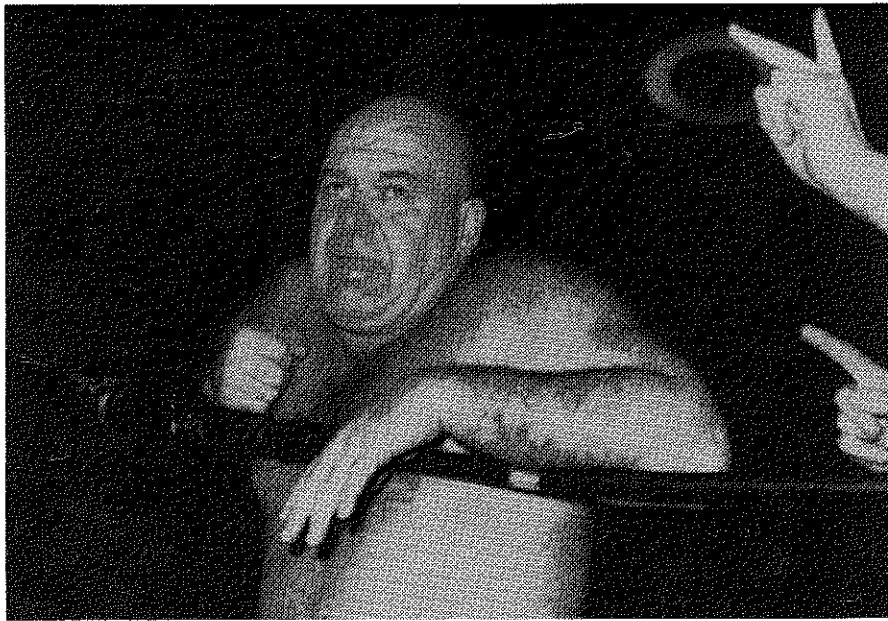
mour that is competitive spirit. How much more important this spirit is than the standard intangibles like cleanliness, good posture, fair play and the right attitude. Self-made men vote for politicians who promise to give them more and more of it. They judge their own lives by it, and stigmatize others for not having it.

It was a fetish for that spirit that drove the middle-class community into a perverse love affair with Mohammed Ali. He danced in the shrine of the North American way, Muslim or not, Mohammed or Cassius. When he boxed, thinking, talking, reaching into every corner of the rules, the ring, propriety, the body politic and the mind for victory, he became that flicker in the self of every white male that makes him go out and win. Ali talked a lively jive that sounded for some people's money like radical red hype. Huh-uh. It was mid-west sky blue bourgeois all the way. The ring is the shimmering diamond heart in the command centre of every American male who fancies himself the bee with the stinger dancing the do-right in a war zone with a moral pedigree.

The Wildman placed inside this cherished ring barbarians from beyond the fringe territories of decency, men gone bad, graffiti and ayarbs, hairy hippies from the sixties, men who do anything foul to win, useless referees who do nothing to stop them, Khomeini's personal minister of peril. There's the sacrilege. That's the Wildman's wrestling and that's blasphemy as well. The Wildman's image of the ring, this image of society, bears a compelling truth. For the victors in this space are men with special tricks, men who gang up on others, men with connections. There is a terrible lesson here: nice guys finish last.

These subterranean defectors from the way things ought to be perform wrestling's running commentary on society about how opportunity does not exist in equal measure for the common man, for men who work honestly and clean. Labourers and consumers lose daily to monopolies and mind bending advertisements, union busters, politicians, prejudice and favouritism. How does this happen? Just ask the fans. How come the number of good men with good intentions and uncorrupted talents who win are as few and far between in wrestling as in life? It is this. So many men inhaling the ring's mighty ether lose their bearings, take undue advantage, drunk on the power to despoil others and to ascend with an exalted image of themselves. They forget or just don't care that someone could get hurt.

That shatters the conceit of the middle class who applaud themselves for their accumulations, who protect the valour of their careers when they complain that wrestling is phony, when they claim that they did it the hard way and the honest way without the tricks and gags and inside information. They say it's fake. That's not the way they got to where they are . . . by rigging the economy. By taking short cuts, plotting strategies to undermine the plottings of honest men. No, they



say. The true blue claims of the economy are not fake. It's wrestling, they say, that's phony where those who win are those who have or take undue advantage. But the Wildman's wrestling fans know better. His fans are the blue collar victims of the bold prerogatives patricians take. What they see inside the ring is what they talk about in unemployment lines, men drunk on conquest, living on the losses of others.

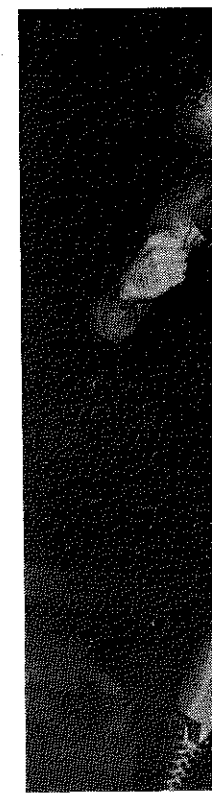
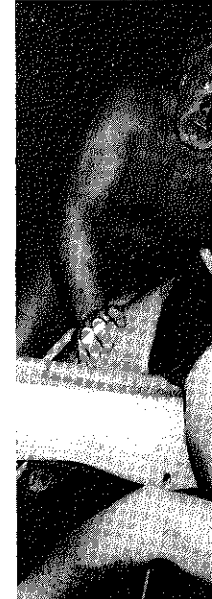
*One of the last times* I saw the Wildman's show, he himself wrestled in a tag team match teamed with Whipper Watson Junior against two villains. By that time - it was just a year ago - I had lived with his show, even become part of it. For two summers I had travelled with the show and announced the matches off and on. The Wildman had made me a part of his family of working fauna. I had a new vocabulary and a different biorhythm of late nights and reclusive mornings. They were visceral changes, a carney's language and a body clock set to a different stylke. The mornings were good for growling, Dave said. He had peppered my speech with lively pacers like BOOM-BOOM, and PIMPING-IT, and G-NOTE. He had also walked me through a status change in the wrestling world from an outsider looking in to an insider looking out. I had witnessed the work of a man without guile, with a message and a heart. This was a memorable night.

Crowds were down. The Wildman hardly had enough money to put together his shows. Still he did it. He puzzled over his dwindling coffers. He spent long hours in silent dressing rooms looking for an answer. There was only one answer that he knew. Work harder. And no one else could work as hard as he. He would wrestle himself in the way he knew would draw the kind of heat that would bring the crowds back in larger numbers. That night he had

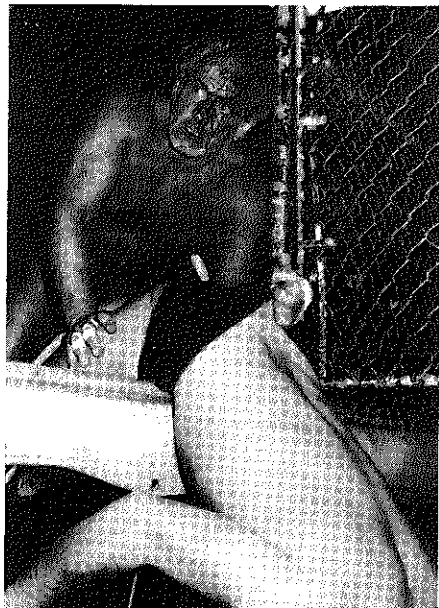
booked himself to wrestle in the tag team. He would take the lead, make it hot, bring them to their feet.

There are rules for tag teams. The villains broke them. The Wildman and his partner stuck close to their consciences and the rules . . . except for once. It was near the end of the match, and Watson and the Wildman had had enough. The two of them illegally entered the ring at the same time to team up on their adversaries. The other team had been doing it all the time, but this time the referee called the infraction, stopped the fight and disqualified the Wildman and his partner. It took a moment for the verdict to sink in. The Wildman and his partner were losers by disqualification. For breaking the rules.

The crowd went wild with anger. One fan worked at his saliva for a wad big enough to issue forth a statement the words would fail to summon. A cloudy message condensed among the fans that said nobody promised you a fair fight. Just a fight, that's all. This is a jungle. You hear the gospel of free enterprise and opportunity . . . that's just a hymn you hum in church one day a week. You read the constitution . . . well, that's politics. You got rights, you say . . . cash them in for a pair of sunglasses. Rights is for the people who play golf, who sell free competition like snake oil. And you bought it.



There it was. The free enterprise p of its own excess in the stands, sh dress in red with bodice. She'd se fight was rigged, point. What she Here was someth know her story, children, her tin welfare lines, ex her face. She ros to the altar of he her folding cha collapsed in mi it and proclaimed the referee: ASS UNIVERSSE. Her miniature, and f into this world an actor, she dic and she got a rou



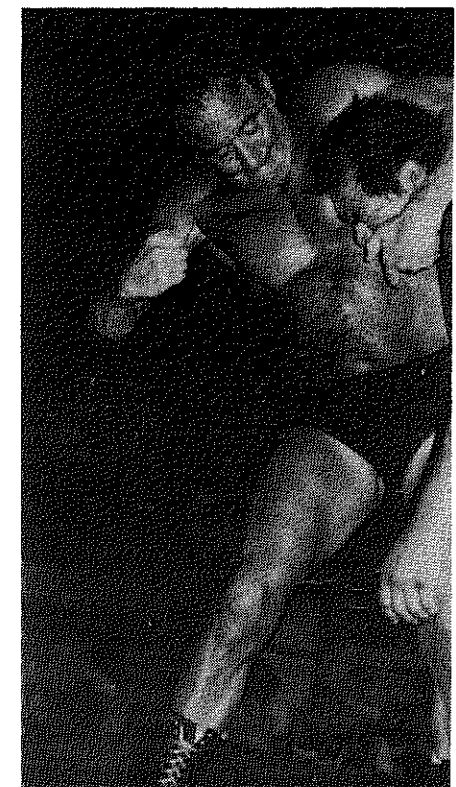
The noise from the crowd was deafening. They were on their feet. They were on their chairs. The Wildman had done what he knew he had to do and what he knew best to do.

As he left the ring that night, the Wildman turned around and rushed the other wrestlers who had cut every corner in the book of rules and still come away with a win. One of the opponents bent over to aim his butt at the Wildman's face. The Wildman would plant a heel of anger in that ass. But no, he stopped. The bell had sounded. He turned and walked away. Defender of the moral margin in the back of everybody's mind, he'd lost. He had told the story of the free man's fate.

### *The irony of that moment*

was that he had also told his own story. The audience was loud, but not loud enough. Once he had paid the wrestlers off, paid the boys who put up the ring, paid the manager of the arena, paid for the gas in his truck, paid his taxes and insurance and publicity, the Wildman had nothing left. He had been going out of business for a long time and had hung on, tethering his hopes to dreams. But they were only dreams. More and more, the mix of media and money from New York ran the wrestling business. And that excluded him. He had no clout with the athletic commissioners who took orders from the Tunney operation and took every opportunity to make life difficult for him. The political message that he had used his ring to say to fans for twenty years now spoke his own inevitable fate.

He had a little rhyme he'd say to tell himself the value of hard work, his hard routine: No pain, no gain. He had heard it first when he was pumping iron in the backwater gyms of the Depression where he had learned his tips on life in general from the discipline of body building. No pain, no gain. Without the effort, you'll get no measure in return. And just as true it was the other way around that if you gave enough to make it hurt, you got failure with the same logic. Deadbeats slept in beds of failures that they made themselves. There were no princes ready-made. So how to understand the justice or the logic of the sense of an economy that actually made you pay for the privilege to work? A different, troubled look gripped the Wildman's face in the dressing room that night and stayed there as if he were looking sadly for something he'd done wrong. The more he worked, the more he got behind.



There it was. The ring. The podium of free enterprise preaching the gospel of its own excesses. There was a lady in the stands, she wore a polyester dress in red with a tidy bow on her bodice. She'd seen it all. Maybe the fight was rigged, but that was not the point. What she saw wasn't phony. Here was something real. I did not know her story, her hardships, her children, her time and place in welfare lines, except for what I saw in her face. She rose to her feet. She rose to the altar of her conscience. She bore her folding chair with her. It collapsed in mid-air. She brandished it and proclaimed at the villains and the referee: ASSHOLE OF THE UNIVERSE. Here was her world in miniature, and for once she stepped into this world of right and wrong as an actor, she did something about it and she got a round of applause.

By 1983 wrestlemania had swept the continent. The promotion from New York, hungry for new territories, made their stable of wrestlers into intercontinental images. They put them in the ring with rock stars. On the back of cereal boxes. They made little dolls of them and sold them to ten year olds as action figures. The heroes of the shows were blond good-guys who loved America, wrestling against blacks and gays and foreigners. And they were winning. They were taking back America from the women's movement, from bussing, from falling profits, from communists, and from the terrorists and off-colour populations abroad. Good guys were winning and winning for America. It had a patently middle class veneer. So different from the tales of subtle tragedies in an economy turned against its people that the Wildman told. It was a cover-up for all the ills that the official version of American society and the economy feared might get around. The rhythm was rock instead of country. It had the mindless pitch of modern American politics. That pitch sells anything these days.

Tunney's Toronto operation is nowadays a franchise of New York City's wrestlemania promoters. New York puts together shows for him, New York says who will be his champion, who will take the falls. The strategy from New York is less a strategy for Ontario, or even for the ring, than a strategy for a boardroom in a far off land where silent men in glasses plot jagged futuristic graphs prophesying receipts from stolen markets. Market surveys chart the preference of the fans. And New York owns the information. They said the Wildman had to go.

And now he's gone. Fans no longer come to watch him fry a made-to-order wrestling show on the griddle of the country. The musty, grimy real life parable of the poor man's fate is packed and folded up. The disenfranchised farmers, workers, friends, and fans of the Wildman's show find their politics drowned in the monolithic languages of Hollywood.

*Jim Freedman teaches Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario. He also advises and evaluates development projects in Asia. He has recently completed a narrative on professional wrestling - Drawing Heat - to be published soon by Black Moss Press. He is preparing to undertake a journey up the River Zaire in search of literary and political images for our time.*