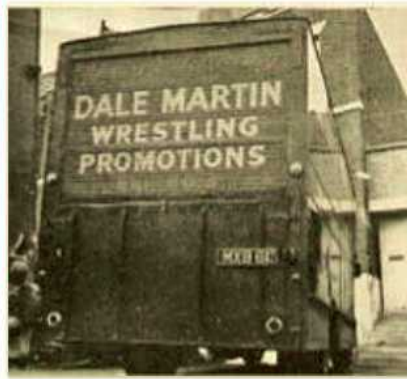


**GREETINGS,  
GRAPPLE  
FANS!**



Wrestling Heritage was launched on 13th April, 2007.  
Our editorial, "Sport or Spectacle - Art of the Spontaneous Kind"  
set out our starting point and what we were striving to achieve.  
We believe the editorial has stood the test of time.

### **SPORT OR SPECTACLE? - ART OF THE SPONTANEOUS KIND**

Widespread internet access in the twenty-first century has allowed like-minded grappling fans the world over to unite in discussion and reminiscences of years gone by.

A surprising number have emerged in the UK alone, still with vivid recollections of the time when a number of wrestlers could truly claim to be household names. This is another such site, with its window of interest firmly fixed in the Golden Years of British Professional Wrestling.

So what identifies this Wrestling Heritage site from the others that are already up and running?

We offer evocative descriptions of those heady days, of the stars that made professional wrestling the enormously successful spectacle it was, of the important lesser lights that helped those stars to shine, and the disciplined management that allowed the whole business to blossom. We hope that our indulgences in the nostalgia from our youth, as we were mesmerised by the skills of colourful and larger than life characters both on monochrome sets and live and sweaty at our smoky local halls, will help preserve, by way of tribute and through adult insight, much of the considerable impact that Grunt and Groan had on the nation. Who knows, we may find or even create more latter day fans, who, like us, want to show some belated mark of appreciation for the years of pleasure and mystery that occupied significant corners of our lives.

Competitive Professional Wrestling. The very words are a contradiction in terms

to most people. Given that Professional Wrestling was one of the most popular spectator sports in the UK throughout the 1960s, both live and televised, it's worth examining the entire phenomenon to see what the fuss was all about and why large numbers of viewers tuned in regularly for their weekly doses on Saturdays at 4 o'clock.

Maybe we should start by asking why we should propose the spectacle as competitive at all. Cynics would argue that it's no more competitive than Swan Lake or circus clowns, or that it's not even as competitive as tiddly winks. You wouldn't ask whether Swan Lake was competitive, would you?

But pro wrestling achieved its most defining accolade when it was included, alongside other popular and undisputed sports such as soccer and horse racing, in ITV's weekly World of Sport. This was an inclusion that brought nationwide publicity to the game and made household names of many of its stars. But those involved now had to strive to maintain the competitive image, ensuring plenty of clean and apparently completely competitive bouts with only occasional and believably limited rule-breaking, enough to create controversy and arouse sufficient interest to raise attendances at the hundreds of venues offering regular wrestling shows nationwide.

It was an inclusion that at the very least served to arouse doubt – or at best removed it. And for many television viewers there was no doubt at all - why would you doubt the competitive nature of a sport included in World of Sport? Years later, irregularities in cricket, snooker, soccer and other sports would lead us to doubt everything, but in the sixties we trusted our broadcasters' and sportsmen's integrity.

Wrestling actually ran along parallel lines with boxing. Dinner-jacketed masters of ceremonies announced rounds, timekeepers rang bells, championship belts and eliminators added structure, and even the ring itself led to the two sports being considered comparable with just differing rules, perhaps like billiards and snooker. Golden boys such as Billy Walker, colourful loudmouths like Cassius Clay, and baddies like Brian London gave a ritzy sparkle to the noble art, wrestling just made sure it had a few more such drawcards. And the dark side of boxers "taking a dive" even seemed to pass below, and elevate wrestling above, such underhandedness.

So the implied competitive nature of the sport, whilst not wholly undisputed,

became central to its being and essential for its longevity. It was therefore up to all involved to fight off outside threats through a strict internal code of discipline. And threats there were aplenty.

Broadly speaking, professional wrestling survived and thrived through the sixties, with only occasional newspaper exposés failing to make any serious dent in the sport's image. These exposés were perhaps digested with a pinch of salt in the same way as many twenty-first century tabloid revelations are. Quite why they had such little impact is anyone's guess. Maybe the bean-spillers were perceived as disenchanting cranks; maybe what they revealed came across as only occasional skulduggery rather like drug-taking nowadays in any number of sports; or perhaps these outbursts were too sporadic to gain any appreciable credence and the very turncoats turned into the ones not to be believed, rather than the sport they were trying to discredit.

Then again, maybe the exposés did make an impact. We will never know how many fans were lost. But it can most certainly be argued that, even in the face of such potential damage, no publicity was bad publicity, and professional wrestling flourished.

The well organised promoters who had caringly built up a respectable post-war image through strict discipline had, by the early seventies, grown old and were less motivated, and, as their sights turned to retirement, new administrators came in, some with novel ideas, some in the fast lane to implement rapid change where gradual development had been the norm. A key downward turn was when the promoters' respect for the fans and the sport itself visibly diminished. Unlikely catchweight bouts pitted opponents of vastly different weights against each other; sixties headliners seemed largely to remain invincible into their fifties and beyond; and rivalling promoters pursued their gimmicky ambitions often at the expense of the sport itself.

More worrying was the seventies arrival of the video recorder. Fans had been used to blink-and-you-miss-it performances, and there were never repeats of tv wrestling broadcasts. There was no way to double-check that dodgy looking throw or whether the ref really did count the winning fall much faster than all the failed attempts that had gone before. When ITV started to include the new-fangled action replay in wrestling shows, it was sparingly used on only the most spectacularly well executed manoeuvres. Certainly never to see whether an inside move had been a punch.

A later small-screen threat to British professional wrestling arrived in the mid-eighties with the bally-hoo of the American version. The novelty value of an undoubtedly fascinating spectacle on a grand scale, with its summit at the 1985 Wrestlemania III, may have been a contributory factor to the eventual death of ITV's patronage three years later, but it is generally agreed that the decline was already well underway due to largely self-inflicted and to a certain extent natural causes.

The most notable threat of all was the rise of the super heavyweight division. The big names here certainly did cause interest but in reality the new division centred around immobile and unfit fat men providing very short performances. Added to this were the repetitive nature of these performances, and an underlying dangerous streak of nepotism. When in 1979 pro wrestling did manage to regain national press coverage through a Wembley arena bout between John Quinn and Shirley Crabtree, prospects looked momentarily bright for a revival. It was a golden opportunity, but the standard 90 second knockout was applied, fans were short-changed, and those millions of curious outsiders who had peeped in quickly turned away again.

These highs and lows scarcely serve to describe the intricate spectacle that is professional wrestling. Swan Lake may be thoroughly rehearsed and immaculately implemented, but a good wrestling bout is art of the spontaneous kind. Two willing opponents taking real knocks, running real risks, but each trusting the other not to go too far – but to go far enough so as to make the show look real. Each has his own repertoire of moves, or more accurately, moves and throws he is willing or able to take. They ensure the variety that is so often lacking during a boxing match. They fight to a pre-determined conclusion, but in most cases no discussion goes into the route they take to arrive there. And they strive unstintingly to make the other's performance and persona however box-office it is intended to be.

They make mistakes, of course. In most bouts once or twice we perceive the two not quite on the same wavelength, one not selling the other's moves. But there is no room for pride, the good of the game always comes first, they improvise and keep going. And sometimes serious injuries do occur. Still there are Knower fans whose extent of analysis is that it is "all fake". But it's not fake at all. There is no trap door, no hidden compartment. Everything is visible before your very eyes, and when done well, which is the norm rather than the

exception, professional wrestling is a fluid and exciting interchange between two master craftsmen, perhaps involving the crowd or external gimmicks, but always maintaining a suspension of disbelief as to the competitive nature of it all. In short, we really believe they are out to win.

And here is the crux of it all, this desire to win that is central to sport. Competitiveness.

We arrive late with our own website. Others go before us with marvellously comprehensive listings of matches and results, collated according to location, date, nationality, wrestler, pairing, tv airing – in short, statisticians are in great supply amongst wrestling fans. We thank and value our quantitatively-minded colleagues, their offerings in some cases form the basis of our observations, whilst at the same time questioning their angle of focusing on results when these results had very little competitive foundation, or none at all. We comment on and record the halcyon days, defined as you wish, perhaps equating to the first 25 years of Her Majesty's reign, but focusing more personally, and we hope appreciatively, on the combined company effort that went into each and every wrestling show to give it balance and variety, forsaking all aspects of competitive superiority, even ability, in the interest of providing all-round entertainment.

The most mystifying aspect of all is perhaps that a handful of aged fans are still able to recall and recount with such detail and dedication the events of decades gone by. Now we want to analyse what we were seeing, we want to dissect the goings on that captivated us, and we want to explore the business organogram that determined who were the victors and losers, the names and the nameless, in the magnificent uncompetitive sport or spectacle that was professional wrestling.

Do not consult us for career records or championship histories. Look elsewhere for details of unbeaten runs and invincibility of all kinds. But stay a while with us here to glory in the performance of each and every wrestler, from the least until the lowest, to see how the collaboration worked and to try to fathom out what non-ability based hierarchy determined poster inches, championship status and regular televised appearances. We offer a modern-day sociological and business perspective on what was a hugely popular spectator sport nationwide.