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Jason Robertson's CWF, 1995

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Jason Robertson's CWF, 1995

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Lords of the ring
You wanna play? You gotta pay.
As a professional wrestler, they say you can make \$75,000 a year. But it will cost you \$3,500 to learn at the Canadian Wrestling Federation's training centre, deep in the bowels of an old warehouse in northeast Hamilton. One of your teachers is the son of The Missing Link. The other has a steel plate in his head. They're not fooling around.

WADE HEMSWORTH
The Hamilton Spectator
Thursday, February 16, 1995

Go north on Sherman Avenue. Way north. Down to where the wind whistles between the factories and warehouses. Look for the maple leaf on the home-made sign outside one of the warehouses: Canadian Wrestling Federation Training Centre.

Go around back of the building and in through the pale green door, the one that looks like a service entrance. Go up three floors of paint-speckled stairs and follow the sounds of yelling and loud crashes.

Inside, it's a little too cold to be comfortable, and the air smells of stale sweat, cigarettes, and coffee. It ain't pretty, but it's real.

"This is where we learn, and we don't want spectators here while we practice," says Doug Lawson, who for the last month has been running the training centre with his partner Jason Robertson, son of wrestling star The Missing Link. "If we had big signs and windows on King Street or Main Street, there'd be kids and fans in all the time."

Wait. Before we go any further with this, let's get the most-asked question out of the way. Is pro wrestling all fake or what?

"I don't talk to people who think wrestling is a big show and just a bunch of actors. It takes a serious person to take wrestling serious. Wrestling is 99 per cent real," says

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Robertson.

"As my dad says, 'Wrestling might not be on the up and up, but don't bet on it.' There are politics in every sport: baseball, football, hockey - everything."

The federation, as it calls itself, is in its very young stages, but the partners have big plans. They're going to Timmins next week for a local match, and they plan to do the southern Ontario fall-fair circuit this year. They'd like to specialize in charity fundraising matches, and eventually get themselves a TV contract. They know they're a long way from the World Wrestling Federation, but that's fine with them.

"We won't be no billion-dollar corporation," says Robertson. The school is taking on students at \$3,500 a head, which gets you a pair of boots, your first uniform, your first professional match and a videotape to prove it. If you're accepted as a student, that match will happen sometime between two months and two years after you start. You can make as much as \$1,000 a show on the circuit and, Robertson claims, up to \$75,000 a year.

He says wrestling has become too expensive and too slick for its own good. WWF tickets go for \$20, but he says he can put on a good, old gritty wrestling match for half as much.

The classroom is the ring, where eight-by-four sheets of plywood rest on metal frames, 16 square feet in all, covered by carpet and sheathed in canvas. So far, the school is booked to about three quarters of its 40-student capacity.

Between the yelling and the thundering planks of the ring, you have to yell to carry on a conversation.

But yelling is part of the lessons. Not only do they teach their students about wrestling techniques and safety, but they help them develop and stay in their characters. ("I don't like to say gimmick," Robertson says. "I like to say image.")

Having an image means being "on" all the time you're in or near a ring, whether or not there is a camera or an audience around, and Robertson and Lawson, the Chancellors Of The Mat, are there to make sure you stay in character.

When they talk - or yell - students listen. They've paid their dues.

Robertson has been around pro wrestling all his life. He has been in the ring 12 years, since he was 16, wrestling and teaching throughout the United States and Canada and touring Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

Once, before he broke his arm six years ago, he was a World Light Heavyweight Champion.

During his recovery, he realized Canada wasn't pumping out the stars like it used to. He wanted to make a place that could produce another Missing Link, Rowdy Roddy Piper or Adonis.

Lawson, his partner, has been around wrestling only two years, but he knows better than most how to recover from a hard shot. Ask him, and he'll show you the dented scar in the left side of his shaved head where they put the metal plate into his skull.

On October 21, 1991, he got off the bus at Main and Carrick and started to cross the street for work. A pickup truck slammed into his body and a metal rack shot from the roof and into his brain. For a while, it looked like he might die. After months of physiotherapy and learning to talk all over again, Lawson was ready to chase the dream he'd always had: becoming a pro wrestler.

"The way I look at it, I died four years ago," he says. "This is a dream I have and I'm going to go through with it."

Today, Lawson, 25, who weighs 268 pounds and wears a size 54-tall jacket, couldn't be happier about his career choice.

He says his colleagues "respect" his injury and work around it. Besides, having a plate in your head isn't a bad schtick in a business that likes to play up the unusual, especially when your ring name is Sheer Terror.

"The scar adds a nice little touch to the image," he says, grinning.

But hulking around town coiffed for conflict means he must always be in character.

He doesn't mind.

"I welcome the spotlight. I welcome the attention. I like nothing better than to have people ask me: 'What the hell are you?'"

What kind of person is willing to pay \$3,500 to chase a dream like this? Let's take a look around the room on a typical Saturday afternoon, when the advanced wrestlers are heaving and slamming each other around the ring, springing from the ropes and swinging from the pipes. There are half a dozen wrestlers trading spots, and taking turns as referee. Seated in the single row of chairs are two hopefuls.

Steve Brush, 22, of Oshawa, is here for the first time. He's here with his brother and his dad, who are encouraging him to go through with this. He's a big kid, alright - a shade under six feet tall and 225 pounds. He read about the training centre from a "career opportunities" classified. He drives a delivery van for an electrical company, but he'd happily to give it up for this life.

"Who wouldn't want to?" Brush asks. "You get to get into the ring. You get to make money. You get to make people laugh. It's like being a movie star, only it's live."

Dino Pinksen, 20, of Mississauga, is back for the second time. Later this day, he will get into the ring for the first time. He's dreaming one day of becoming Dynamite Dino. At five-foot-eight, and 180 pounds, he's smaller than the other fighters in the room, but he says he's not scared.

"It'll be challenging and hard, but with hard work and dedication, I could be somebody someday," he says.

In the ring, Matthew Butler, 25, is taking his shift as ref. But he'd rather be wrestling. During the week, he's a bouncer at Norm's Pub And Grub in downtown Brantford. By nature, he's friendly and quiet - the kind of guy who would rather prevent a fight than pick one. But when he enters the ring, he's Lone Wolf, wearing a Native headdress, because he's proud of his heritage. Wolf or no wolf, back at home on the Six Nations Reserve, his mom still worries about him.

"My mother thinks it's OK," he says. "Although she does worry about me getting hurt."

There, in the middle of the ring, lifting his opponent high overhead and dropping him to the floor is Nick Nero. Yes, that's his real name. In the ring, he's Iron Man. Nick, 18, was a bodybuilder in Niagara Falls until a couple of months ago. He's 5 foot 8, weighs 278 pounds, and has a chest big enough to rest his dinner plate on. He can bench press 600 pounds.

"I liked bodybuilding, but it was kind of boring. You just go in shows. I want to be an athlete, not just a guy who works out."

"You have to enjoy it. If you don't, then there's no point in doing it."

John Harvey is yelling the most enthusiastically of anyone. The Prince Of Pain, as he calls himself, is a 32-year-old McMaster University English graduate, who works at the university's science stores, providing equipment and supplies to graduate students.



He's been wrestling on and off for about 18 months. So far, he has refereed a pair of pro matches, but has yet to see his own professional fighting debut.

"I don't want to be 60 years old and look back and say I should have given it a try."

As the former singer for a Hamilton music group called The Hated Uncles, Harvey's attraction to wrestling came more from the entertainment end of it.

That's easier to say when you're 6-foot-4 and 240 lbs. Whatever their backgrounds, in the end, it's the same thing that brings them all to the ring.

"I just love the idea of being in front of people," Harvey admits. "I'm a ham. That's

	<p>what it comes down to."</p> <hr/> <p>-----</p> <p>Toronto Wrestling History</p>
<p>AC1Ontario</p>  <p>Posts: 326 (03/18/04 05:03:38)</p> <p>Reply Quote More</p>	<p>Jason #1 [-]</p> <p>Did he also wrestle as Dewey Jr.?</p>
<p>Gary Will</p>  <p>Posts: 267 (03/18/04 09:32:52)</p> <p>Reply Quote More</p>	<p>Re: Jason #2 [-]</p> <p>Yes, he also wrestled as Dewey Robertson Jr. He usually used the ringname Jason Sterling (or Jason Stirling, depending on who was writing the ads).</p> <hr/> <p>-----</p> <p>Toronto Wrestling History</p>

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