

**The Classic
British Wrestling
Foundation**



**I The Revival
of
Classic British Wrestling**

The Revival of Classic British Wrestling

INTRODUCTION

In 1945/6 Admiral The Lord Mountevans RN [with national and international honours too great to mention here] set up a committee to revitalise the sport of professional wrestling after it has fallen into great disrepute after the violence and corruption of 'All In' Wrestling had led to it being banned in many places.

These rules were accepted by the great majority of promoters and formed the basis of the sport for the next forty years, the 'Golden Age' of Wrestling. However, the rules themselves were fairly basic and no provision was made for reviewing and expanding them. In the face of determined [and moneyed] opposition from the more showy, 'fixed' US entertainment style, CBW declined.

In 1985, the death knell was sounded when ITV moved televised bouts from its traditional teatime slot (compulsory Saturday afternoon viewing for many youngsters and adults was 'The Wrestling' - Football Results - Doctor Who), to lunchtime. Although it struggled on for another three years, it never recovered and ITV finished it in 1988.

Today there is a great revival in interest in combat sports. Not only are Mixed Martial Arts and Submission Grappling hugely popular but Wrestling Clubs [albeit of the US variety] are springing up all over the country. It therefore seems a good time [as it is both the 70th anniversary of the publishing of the original rules and the 30th of the start of The Decline to try to revive and reintroduce the Classic 'Golden Age' British Wrestling style, not however with the intention to either replace or supersede any other style of wrestling, but to sit alongside and complement them,

THE AIMS IN OUTLINE

To revive and then maintain the history and traditions of British Wrestling in general and the Classic Style that came from it in particular and to ensure that the legacy of the great wrestlers of the past be not be lost.

To re-establish British Classic Style Wrestling as both an exciting spectacle AND as a genuine and proper sport with both exhibition and competition style bouts.

To provide opportunities for participation in pro-style wrestling for a wide range of ages and especially for those who wish to have real competitive matches.

To create real County, Regional, National and International Awards and Championships to be wrestled for between wrestling schools, clubs and promoters.

WHAT FOLLOWS is intended to be a **discussion** document, addressed to entrepreneurs, promoters, managers, trainers, existing wrestlers, potential wrestlers, fans, together with any other interested parties.

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The object would be for a Committee to emerge and to form a body 'The Classic British Wrestling Association' [working title] which would be set up as a non-profit sharing Community Interest Company [perhaps even a registered charity?] that would regulate and monitor the style, manage titles and trophy competitions and advise and assist any Club/School/Promotion that wish to get involved. It would be strictly independent of any Club/School/Promotion in order to guarantee both its neutrality and the integrity of titles awarded so that they were recognised as genuine sporting achievements, both in the wrestling world and the wider community. Only such a Association, neutral, independent and unbiased could command sufficient respect in order to unite independent and autonomous Clubs/Schools/Promotions to come together in shared and common goals.

THE AIMS IN DETAIL

Our Tradition

This country has a rich wrestling history going back centuries. The sport was considered an important part of every boy's education [along with archery] in growing towards manhood. Royalty itself patronised it, Henry VIII was known as a champion wrestler and, in our own time, Prince Phillip was a keen supporter.

In the Golden Age, wrestlers were household names, the halls were packed and 10 million fans regularly tuned in. That this tradition was allowed to decline and then was broken in the late '80s was a tragedy.

Sport? Spectacle? – or Both?

Let's face it, Amateur Wrestling is, to many, dull and boring as a spectator sport. Even the Olympic President says so, which is why they tried to drop it. But it is a proper sport nonetheless. On the other hand Professional Wrestling has become, on general, an entertainment with scripts. Most matches have pre-determined outcomes. The 'titles' are made up.

One of the great draws of the Classic Style in Britain was that the public believed it was actually real - i.e. that the best wrestler actually won the contest by skill. But there were other aspects as well - showmanship, acrobatics, the division by rounds to build the tension, the scoring system that meant that a bout didn't just rest on 'sudden death' all played their part, but all-important was belief in the reality of what they were watching - that was what attracted the audience.

If CBW is to come back big time, it has to find ways of combining two elements – not necessarily in every bout or in every wrestler – but certainly over all. These elements are a) 'razzle dazzle' - spectacle before bouts as well during them, and b) bouts that are genuinely fought to a 'clean' finish with a real winner using proper wrestling skills.

Wrestling has to be real sport and real spectacle both at the same time. That was the magic formula that led to its massive popularity, and that combination [with

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the knowledge that competition bouts were genuinely fought matches] could have, once again, the potential to bring in huge audiences.

But how this precisely this could happen is the question at the heart of this document and it is to be hoped that it will stimulate a great amount of discussion. Promoters and Trainers will have to work on the technical detail. It is also hoped that Wrestling and Fan blogs will be alive with opinion and comment.

Could anybody can join in?

In the UK, CBW scores over the US in that it allows wrestlers of all sizes and [within reason] a good range of ages in which to train and/or compete. This means that CBW can reach a bigger client base and, as any businessman worth his salt knows, the bigger and wider the client base, the greater the potential profit.

CBW is not just for a narrow group of big heavyweights with enhanced muscles. It is for everyman, young/old; small/large; male/female. Therefore, those who are keen on wrestling and want to get in the ring should be given every encouragement to do so. The more the merrier in fact.

Rewards and Titles

The £64000 question. Pro Wrestling is a business and has to be about making a profit – bums on seats; DVD's; training fees; selling of gear, etc. and there is, of course, no problem with that. A business that is not in profit is not going to survive. This must be a danger to many small clubs/schools/promotions because there are only so many shows you can put on with the same wrestlers and keep the public interested. So could a revival of CBW make money??

With a genuine titles system, CBW offers any club/school/promotion the chance of competing at a variety of levels right up to real Champions of England, Scotland, etc.

Competition should bring interest and **PRESTIGE**. Prestige attracts **PUBLICITY**. Publicity attracts paying customers = **PROFIT**.

Everybody loves a good feud; everybody loves a good championship/title fight. Joint Promotions failed in this because effectively when you have only got one 'stable', a lot of choice there ain't and so, worked matches using a limited number of fighters was inevitable.

Today, the situation is very different, there are lots and lots of small promotions/clubs/training schools appearing [and disappearing]. So, instead of just one Club/School/Promotion using one set of wrestlers over and over and over again [and creating pseudo titles like 'The Bash Street Promotions HW Champion of England'] think intense competition between clubs right up to International level. Real Champions with real titles- and what could be a better grudge match than England v Scotland?!! [Well Germany or France, obviously, but let us not get ahead of ourselves!].

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Leagues and rankings could be formed. County/Regional/UK Title challenges in all weights set up. Purses [for Adults only] offered with the Championship belts. Associated merchandise sold.

After all, if Boxing/MMA/Muay Thai/UFC in the UK can do this – why not Wrestling?

The Press [free publicity] and regional/national TV should be involved. Think BIG. Every wrestler that joins has family and friends that will pay good money to see them fight, not to mention the fans/groupies that will attach themselves to a successful/popular wrestler.

CBW could also be a way of promoting community cohesion [and boosting audience figures]. Both eastern Europeans and Indians have strong wrestling traditions of their own, but only in competitive styles.

Again, young men in their teens and early twenties, especially, would make a good target group. So many of them have difficulties within family, education, the Law, etc. they have few positive role models. Often natural combative tendencies lead to violent crime with knives and guns. Opportunities for success are few. CBW could offer a way out, mixing glitz and glamour with discipline and achievement. The use of genuine titles would further encourage them to hone their skills, thus improving the quality of the bouts, thus encouraging more people to take an interest in it.

CONCLUSION

Most of the now middle-aged wrestling aficionados grew up with ‘World of Sport’ at 4.00pm Saturday teatime. There is a yearning for those days to return. But, it has to be recognised for that to happen, there has to be change as outlined above. For those still young in body and heart who have an interest in all things wrestling, they should have the opportunity to experience their heritage, not as some scratchy old video recording, but as exciting, dynamic, live action.

A Note: Patronage

It would be a good thing if Patrons from known ‘celebrities’ were invited to support Wrestling. It was mentioned above that Prince Phillip was a fan, could royalty be invited again – one of the Princes, perhaps? They are both extremely sporting, and this venture might appeal to them. Then there would be the current Lord Mountevans, his grandson, and, of course, the famous stars of old [e.g. Rob Brookside; Danny Collins; Skull Murphy?] and the up and coming grapplers of today.

These proposals came from a discussion of the question ‘**Can Classic British Wrestling ever be revived?**’ and the scheme outlined here was the result. However, the authors are not in a position to implement them. They, therefore, waive any right to own the ideas and make no legal claims, considering them to be Public Intellectual Property as stated formally in the declaration below:

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