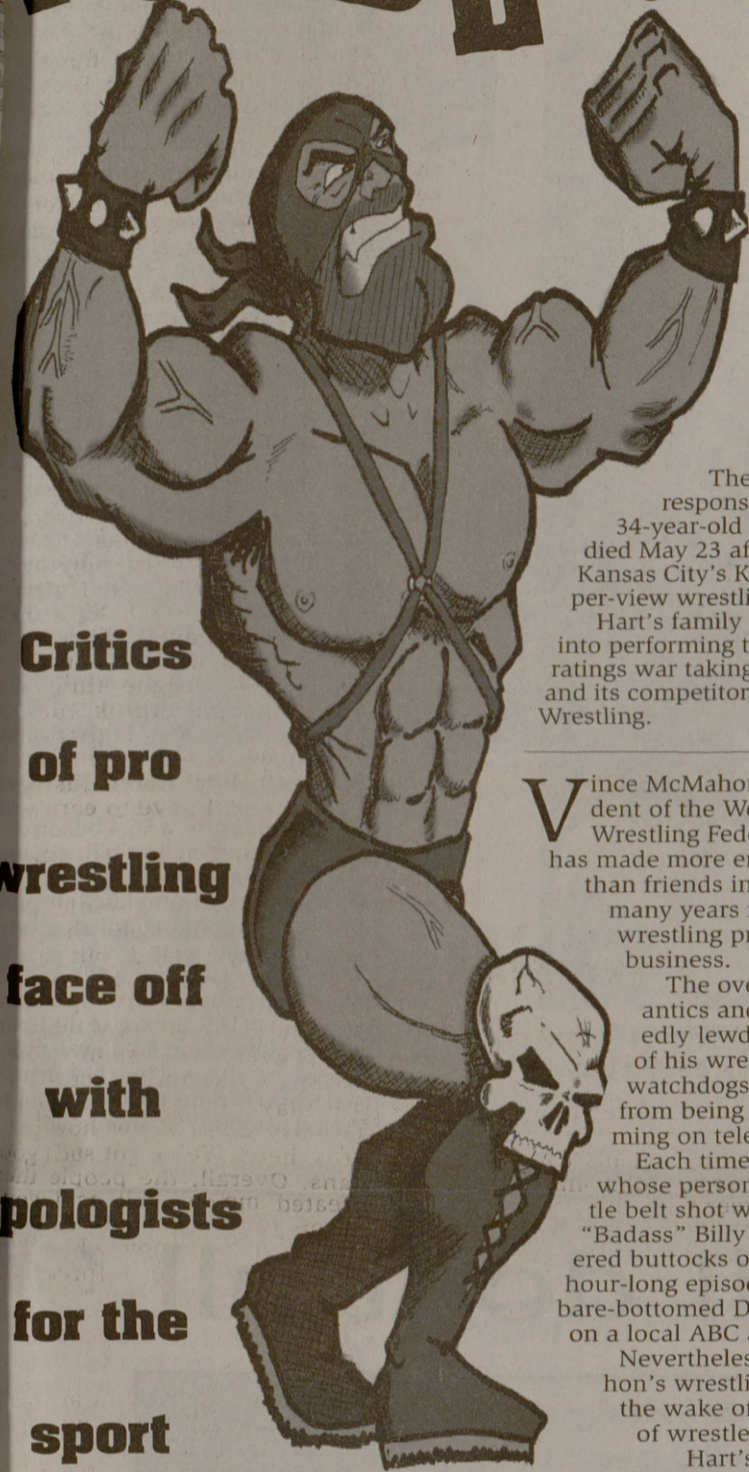


OPINION

Let's get ready to ...

RUMBLE!



Critics
of pro
wrestling
face off
with
apologists
for the
sport

GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

One grieving family may finally accomplish what USA Network standards and practices executives haven't succeeded at doing in the past year — restraint on the professional wrestling industry.



RYAN GARCIA

This much needed check on an industry that knows no limits comes after the family of Owen Hart announced, this month, that they had filed a lawsuit against the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) and 12 other defendants, including WWF president Vince McMahon. The litigants believe the WWF is responsible for the death of Hart, a 34-year-old professional wrestler who died May 23 after falling from a catwalk at Kansas City's Kemper Arena during a pay-per-view wrestling program. Hart's family believes he was pressured into performing the high-risk stunt as part of a ratings war taking place between the WWF and its competitor, World Championship Wrestling.

The lawsuit centers around the belief that the device Hart was using was inadequate for its function of holding Hart. According to CBS News, the release of the safety cable required only six pounds of pressure. Questions remain over whether Hart was properly trained to perform the stunt in the rush to grab ratings.

The Hart family hopes the lawsuit will bring change to an industry they believe is more concerned with ratings than the safety of its performers. With its Jerry Springer-like anything goes attitude, the WWF has, unfortunately, shown a steady progression towards possible tragedies such as the one the Hart family has suffered.

As one of the fastest-growing entertainment industries, the WWF somehow manages to evade any broadcast standards by broadcasting live every Monday night. It's hard to believe WWF writers don't know everything that's going to take place from Stone Cold Steve Austin's choreographed hand gestures to the routine profanity that is a part of every wrestler's image.

What started as a minor expletive every now and then, has turned into wrestlers demanding that their opponents "suck it" and worshipping the occult along with its customary sacrifices. Staged kidnappings resulting in mock crucifixions in the name of a "dark power" are more commonplace now than actual wrestling matches.

Although a large portion of WWF viewers are children with easy accessibility to a popular cable channel, the WWF doesn't hesitate to schedule evening gown matches in which two top-heavy women rip each other's clothes off, exposing more plastic surgery than one might think possible on the human body. If it's not a wrestler with his porn-star theme spouting euphemisms for his sexual prowess before each match, it's the implied seduction and fellatio of one wrestler by a transvestite — and that's only the first hour.

In a recent Spin article, McMahon offers no apologies for the current state of the WWF.

Vince McMahon, president of the World Wrestling Federation, has made more enemies than friends in his many years in the wrestling promotion business.



JEFF WEBB

The over-the-top antics and supposedly lewd behavior of his wrestlers are the target of media watchdogs, but McMahon's WWF is far from being the most offensive programming on television.

Each time "The Godfather," a wrestler whose persona is a pimp, appears for a title belt shot with his scantily-clad "hos," or "Badass" Billy Gunn bears his thong-covered buttocks on the cable USA network, an hour-long episode of realistic violence and bare-bottomed Dennis Franz can be viewed on a local ABC affiliate.

Nevertheless, the fight against McMahon's wrestling empire has resumed in the wake of the recent accidental death of wrestler Owen Hart.

Hart's entrance before a pay-per-view match last month ended abruptly when his harness became detached from the cable that was lowering him.

After an investigation, it seemed Hart mistakenly unhooked the cable when the cape from his Blue Blazer costume became entangled.

Hart completed the stunt successfully in rehearsal earlier in the day, and the same stunt has been pulled

off flawlessly by Sting, a wrestler in Ted Turner's sanitized rival World Championship Wrestling league, during live cable broadcasts in the past.

The Hart tragedy was not an example of wrestling going too far. It was simply an unfortunate accident.

The family of Owen Hart filed a lawsuit against the WWF, in addition to Kempner Arena and the city of Kansas City, for, among other things, negligence.

However, this should not be the catalyst for an attack on wrestling or the WWF. McMahon is forced to defend the WWF in every interview, but his reasoning falls on deaf ears.

At 8 p.m. Monday nights, WWF Raw hits the airwaves on the USA Network with its brand of faux violence and racy subplots.

During the Monday night broadcast, Raw directly competes with WCW Nitro on TNT for viewership.

Undeniably, Raw contains more bikini-clad females, more obscene gestures and phrases.

Accordingly, Raw beats WCW in the ratings worse than wrestler Stone Cold Steve Austin would flatten Bill Gates.

With an almost two-point lead over Nitro, McMahon's plea that the more risqué programming is a product of public desire is justified by the numbers his show produces.

However, at this late hour, children under 10 need not apply for viewing. McMahon markets action figures toward children and has provided a television alternative as well.

The USA Network broadcasts two alternative programs for its younger viewers, shows without repeated obscenities, but the same entertaining grappling.

Livewire, a WWF news program, runs at 9 a.m. Saturday, and WWF Superstars, running 9 a.m. on Sundays, is an hour-long show filled with wrestling from

*In this corner,
pro wrestling has
gone too far ...*

He quite candidly admits that everything is done in the name of ratings and carries himself with an arrogance he feels is rightly deserved for resuscitating a once-dead form of entertainment.

McMahon is a shrewd businessman, and if going to church suddenly became the trend, he would have his wrestlers toting bibles and reciting the gospel.

Lest fans begin to get the wrong idea about McMahon and the WWF, they should remember that the WWF's excuse for continuing the program after Hart plummeted 78 feet to his death was that the fans deserved to get their money's worth.

The WWF's show-must-go-on attitude continued the next night when, instead of canceling that night's program, the WWF dressed up a two-hour lackluster program as a tribute to the late Owen Hart.

Nevertheless, the WWF consistently receives the highest ratings on Monday nights and sells out arenas wherever it travels.

It is a veritable juggernaut of sex, corruption and vulgarity. In its wake lies the death of a professional wrestler that could not have come at a worse time for the WWF.

Ryan Garcia is a senior journalism major.

*... and in this corner,
pro wrestling has
served its public*

the prior Monday night performance.

With this milder programming, McMahon proves he is listening to the concerns of parents and the media.

However, it should not be up to the wrestling promoter to be the great moral organ of television.

Parents should be proactive in editing what their children watch if television programming affects their kids' behavior.

However, if children (or college students, for that matter) wish to imitate what they see on television, it might not be a negative experience. After all, a young kid named Mick Foley would never have taken a leap off his roof in a backyard wrestling match if it hadn't been for imitating what he saw on television. Then the WWF's Mankind never would have seen action as a brief Championship title holder.

So the next time Raw is on USA and The Godfather beckons you to take a ride on the "Ho Train," accept it for what it is worth — McMahon, a marketing genius, pushing the limits of what television will allow him to do to entertain the masses.

Jeff Webb is a senior journalism major.

Critics of Jar Jar should back off

I want everyone to know that I am offended. I am offended by George Lucas and his creation, *Star Wars*.

Episode 1: *The Phantom Menace*. The character of Senator — and later, Emperor — Palpatine is a white male, and stereotypes us as evil manipulators with the sole intention of taking over the galaxy.

Wait, it gets even worse. The few white males not intent on doing evil deeds, such as the Jedi Knights Qui-Gon Jin and Obi-Wan Kenobi, are apparently not smart enough to think on their own. They must take their orders from a green, grammatically-challenged muppet. How offensive.

Hopefully, this sounds more than a little absurd. Regrettably, it is the same line of thought of some people who have gone to see *The Phantom Menace* and have come out trying racism.

The horrible creature responsible for most of this outrage? Jar Jar Binks, the computer generated Gungan with the weird speech patterns.

Apparently, being from "a galaxy far, far away" does not prevent Jar Jar from displaying stereotypes offensive to African-Americans.

Michael Dyson, professor of African-American studies at Columbia University, is one of the loudest complainers. Dyson claims "there were some stereotypical elements to his character that suggested black culture," saying his clumsiness and speech patterns were blatantly black.

Dyson goes so far as to say Jar Jar's "meesa" can be taken as "massa."

It must be very slow up in New York in the summer. Has Dyson considered that Jar Jar Binks also sounds like the hork guy in "Laverne and Shirley," and that the clumsiest individual in American history was probably former President Gerald R. Ford—both of whom are white? Closer examination of Jar Jar's speech would also show that "meesa" sounds much closer to "Leeza" than "massa." Perhaps Jenny Jones and Ricki Lake should scream discrimination as well.

Lucasfilm released a statement to confront this "Phantom Menace," trying to politely show there are more holes in this argument than in the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. "Star Wars" is a fantasy movie set in a galaxy far, far



MARK PASSWATERS

away. To dissect this movie as if it has some direct reference to the world [is] absurd," the statement said.

Ahmed Best, the actor who played the voice for Jar Jar, concurred, "I think it's really stupid for anyone to put their own prejudices [on] a complete fantasy movie."

In spite of this, the outrage continues. Dyson claims Jar Jar's Gungan tribe shows stereotypes of an African tribe. Perhaps — but aren't there more than a few similarities that can also be drawn to Native American and perhaps even Scottish tribes?

If everyone was as touchy as Dyson, imagine what would have happened if the Gungans had said the Trade Federation could not take their freedom, like in *Braveheart*? Goodness, what if they had mooned the battle droids? Half of Glasgow would be looking for George Lucas.

This is not to say Dyson or African-American activists are the only ones complaining. Bruce Gottlieb, a writer for the on-line magazine "Slate," said Watto, Anakin Skywalker's owner in the new movie, was a Jew.

"Even in a galaxy far, far away," Gottlieb thunders, "the Jews are apparently behind the slave trade." Scary what sitting in front of a computer can do to your sense of logic. What makes Gottlieb think Watto is a Jew? Because he has a hooked nose? That is grasping at a very small straw.

In a move that should be hailed as eminently logical, the Jewish Anti-Defamation League said there was no basis for claiming that Watto was anti-Semitic.

Dyson and Gottlieb should adjust their priorities. With the recent firebombings of synagogues in California and allegations of prejudice in New York City's police department, there are better, more important issues these gentlemen could spend their time on.

It is a shame that Jar Jar and Watto are being attacked in this fashion, because it is living proof that many Americans are still in desperate need of a hobby. Instead of tackling Industrial Light and Magic creations, there are still real, pertinent issues in this nation that need to be tackled.

If Jar Jar Binks could indeed speak for himself, he would probably say something to this effect: "Meesa Jar Jar Binks. Meesa not real." Hopefully, these people that have "uncovered" the racist underpinnings in *Star Wars* will get back to issues that are.

Mark Passwaters is a graduate student in electrical engineering.

EDITORIAL



The Battalion

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BRAIN DRAIN

University should combat ill-advised visa renewal policy

Thanks to misguided U.S. immigration laws, red tape will unfairly tie the hands of some faculty members at the University this fall.

The work visas of several post-doctoral researchers and one assistant professor will expire at the end of August, and they will not be allowed to work until their renewal applications can be considered for approval on Oct. 1. As a result, these highly skilled University employees will be unnecessarily sidelined.

The policy responsible for this regrettable situation must be revised.

First, it is pointless for immigration officials to set the renewal deadline one month after visa expiration dates.

If the application schedule

were only drafted using common sense, this 30-day lapse could be avoided.

Secondly, an immigration policy which denies visas to highly skilled workers such as professors and post-doctoral researchers needlessly harms our academic institutions.

It is in the country's interest to attract intelligent foreign scholars instead of entangling them in a poorly designed bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, University administrations must do all they can to accommodate faculty members who are penalized by the excessive technicality of the visa renewal process.

Texas A&M University officials could examine the possibility of hiring substitutes for the temporarily unemployed

researchers and professors who are waiting for visas.

If such an arrangement is made, these employees can return to work later in the semester without losing their positions at the University.

Students and other higher-education faculty members around the country should rally to propose and support more sensible legislation that will speedily approve visas for select high-skilled employees.

Otherwise, U.S. universities, like Texas A&M, will suffer a disastrous "brain drain" during the school year as foreign scholars are left without visas and without work. If the University wishes to make its faculty one of the best in the nation, it must attract and keep the best minds in the world.