

THEY DON'T DO IT FOR FUN

Modern Matmen Can Still Hurt Each Other

WRESTLING THROUGH
FORTY-FIVE CENTURIES (No. III)

ABOUT the only limit placed on the ability of a modern professional wrestler to maul and man-handle his opponent is that opponent's ability to prevent him.

He may not gouge an eye, strike with the front of his clenched fist—although he may slap with his fist closed—use his knee against his opponent's face, or strike into the neck with the side of his hand; but

—if the opponent cannot look after himself he may have his jaw, heart, or stomach jolted into kingdom come; he may be picked up bodily and flung anywhere (except out of the ring); he may have his limbs tied in knots until it takes two or three assistants to undo him; he may be bumped and bounced and thrown about, twisted and strained, until his brain and nerves refuse to answer; he may be dashed to the mat until planks are shattered in the floor below; he may be dragged around by the hair or the ears or the eyebrows; he may have his legs tied up in the ropes.

If he cannot prevent these things by his own efforts he will receive no sympathy from the referee, who watches only for the few defined fouls, or from the audience, which watches only for the spectacular; the rage and the agony, real or pretended—anything suitably primitive, whether skillful or not. Actually, apart from the showmanship which seems to be inevitable in any sport in which money has any say, there is a great deal of skill in wrestling.

Since 1934 wrestling in New Zealand has become rougher and tougher. Authority: Alfred M. Jenkins, whose knowledge of the game is out of all proportion to his size. Before 1934, of course, wrestling was hard, but it was about that time that it began to become the spectacle it undoubtedly is to-day. Police supervision has been constant, but lessening in severity as custom has lessened the first effects of each innovation.

Jenkins agreed with "The Listener's" summing up of the position now: wrestlers can hurt each other as much as they like, but they must do nothing calculated to inflict permanent bodily harm.

"Get it right out of your head," says Alf, "that these men go into the ring to play with each other. A lot of people have a phoney idea about wrestling being a ramp and a racket. These men earn their living fighting, and they've got to fight hard to earn it. Do you think a man falls out of a ring on to sharp pointed chairs for fun? Do you think they like being bashed to the mat? Do you reckon they take a jolt with 15 stone behind it to enjoy themselves and pull faces only to amuse the crowd? No, sir. Of course the sport is intended to appeal to the crowd. But I'm telling you it appeals because it is a tough sport with no beg-pardons on either side. People



who say it is built up should ask for a demonstration of a jolt or a dump on themselves. They would be past criticising for quite a time."

This year wrestling in New Zealand is huskier than ever before. Jenkins still thinks McCready is a step in front of all the others, but he takes his British Empire Championship with him every time he enters the ring, and there are half a dozen strong challengers for it. New Zealand's own Lofty Blomfield probably attracts the most interest among them. Cox, with the sweet sounding label of King Kong, is in Jenkins's opinion the wildest wrestler in the country.

"You have to remember I do it for a living," said the little man with the big muscles when he was asked how he liked refereeing. But apart from being paid for it he is interested in it, and not at all put out about the difference between his 5ft. 4in. and 10st. 7lb. and the porky giants among whose flying limbs his job takes him. He gets mixed up with them sometimes, but is usually quick enough to get out of the road; and he says his own self-confidence and knowledge of every move in the game command enough respect to keep the wrestlers sweet as far as he is concerned. He also believes, although he has not put it to the test, and sees no necessity for doing so, that he could do his bit if any trouble arose. "Confidence—that's me," he says.

So much for the wrestlers and the referee. The crowd consists partly of people interested in the sport as an exhibition of strength only, partly of people interested in its engrossing crudity, solely for crudity's sake, and partly of people interested in people who are interested in wrestling. It's much the same kind of crowd as gathers round drunks brawling, dogs fighting, men and women in divorce courts, kings giving their kingdoms away, minorities being persecuted, animals and human beings undergoing mental or physical torture, murderers and felons, and all the other abnormalities which normally attract

the normal interest of the normal citizen, male or female. The crowd might not describe itself in quite such exact terms, and it might contain many exceptions who would strongly object to any of those descriptions; but what else keeps fat men fighting three times a week, what else keeps halls and theatres full, the air busy with frenzied radio commentary, the printed sheets full of hectic gossip, Egyptian tombs and Greek vases plastered with such strange illustrations, and a "Listener" writer in constant doubt about his place in the time scale—whether he should be alive in this civilisation, or carried back on the wings of the Einstein theory and his own uncivilised interest into the simpler preserves of the Neanderthal man?

Miscellany

Programmes in our next issue will give details of the arrangements for keeping New Zealand in touch with the third cricket test between England and the West Indies. Station 2YA will relay commentary on Sunday, August 20, and give results at 10.10 a.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday of the week following.

The representative Rugby match between North and South Island Minor Union teams, at Lancaster Park, on Saturday, August 19, may be the least exciting of the representative fixtures for the week, but it will in some ways be the most interesting. Matches such as this smooth out the path of the country player with ambitions. The best of the selection may have a chance to visit South Africa next year. Other football fixtures are listed in "What Would You Like to Hear" (pp. 28 and 29).

The racing scene shifts from Addington and Riccarton to Ellerslie, where the Pakuranga Hunt Club's meeting will be held on Saturday, August 19. The commentary will come from 1YA, commencing at mid-day. Racing prospects will be surveyed in the session by "The Railbird" from all ZB stations at 9.30 p.m. on Friday.