

WHAT'S WRONG WITH WRESTLING?

Nothing, Says "Thid," But . . . !

JOURNALISTS are really quite normal persons. They like to have opinions of their own. Most of them do. But few of them get the chance to say what they think. Once they enter a newspaper office, many of them begin to suffer a sort of blight that falls gently but effectively upon their ideas. It is an insidious process, rather like dying from the effects of carbon monoxide—the one gas, as you will remember from school-days in the laboratory, which is colourless, odourless, and tasteless.

This blight gradually but inevitably alters their opinions from what they are into the shape of what they ought to be. It is for this reason that the public never really hears the truth about why one side wins a football match, about the failure of so-and-so or such-and-such in a race, or whether wrestlers are just showmen.

Are They in Earnest?

Occasionally, however, one rebels. I am now rebelling. I have been making a study of wrestling. I know as much about wrestling as you do; which is not much. There are moments during a wrestling match when I can recognise such simple holds as a leg-scissors, arm-bar, or even the unavoidable octopus clamp. Elbow jolts describe themselves. Headlocks we all remember from our Rugby days. On these matters I am reasonably well informed. But these are unimportant things. What everyone really wants to

know is whether wrestling is or is not all hocus-pocus.

It is not. Not all of it. Some of it is. I suspect, sometimes, that when champions meet in a title match the result depends, to a certain extent, on whether their match is held at the beginning of the season or at the end. I suspect, more often, that the scowls which precede those primitive exchanges of elbow jolts are just good stagecraft. I suspect, more often still, that displays of temper are manufactured for the occasion. In fact, since jungle methods are not good

quick to apply even the simple hammer-lock. But the point is that the approach of the big men to the moment when the hold can be completed is necessarily slow and careful. Even when they look fast they are not really moving as quickly as younger and lighter men can move.

This does not mean to say that their comparatively ponderous movements are without science or skill. They are not. The clumsiest of wrestlers must plan his campaign and use as much brain as brute instinct in its execution. But audiences, as a whole, are beneath appreciating the

slow evolution of a wrestler's plan of attack, and the other man's counter, and the developments of both. About 25 per cent. of audiences are capable of appreciating that 75 per cent. of good

tricks of the trade should come into their horse-racing, cycling, running, wrestling, boxing, and the rest.

But amateur sport is very much better. There is usually less incentive to put the dirt across, and where there is incentive it is usually better disguised; but the laws of libel and vestigial remains of the old-school-tie make it more difficult to sheet bad sportsmanship home in big-time amateur tennis, for example, than in Madison Square boxing.

Fireworks Preferred

In the circumstances, we can allow the wrestlers a little latitude. We cannot blame them for the 25 per cent. of romancing they write into the drama.

We can blame the audience. Perhaps that means you. Perhaps it does not. At least the accusation will give you a guilty feeling.

Which part of a wrestling match excites you most? The skill or the fireworks? It's the fireworks, I'll bet, 75 times out of a 100.

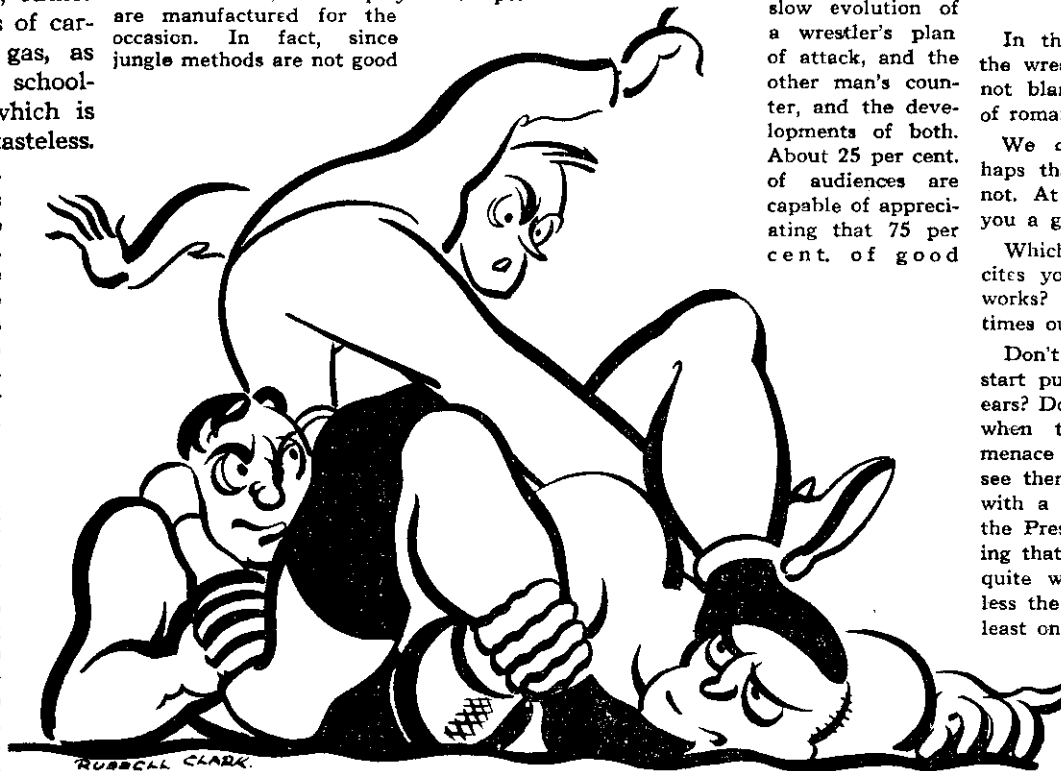
Don't you rise in your seat when they start punching and kicking and pulling ears? Don't you tear up your programme when they snarl at each other and menace the referee? Don't you love to see them roll out of the ring and land, with a proper sense of publicity, upon the Press bench? Don't you get a feeling that a wrestling match has not been quite worth the admission charge unless the referee has to warn the men at least once every second round?

Admit it, and admit also that you get the same sensations whether you are in the cheap seats or at the ringside, except that when you have paid more money you feel a bit more restricted in the way of giving vent to your feelings.

When there is good honest wrestling going on you will find that the crowd watches silently. We might even give it credit for watching appreciatively. But it only becomes vocal when the rules fly out the window and Neanderthal man comes into his own. It is then that the pit stands on its chairs while the gallery leans over the rail.

Whatever is wrong with wrestling is the fault of the people who go to see it, or who stay at home and listen to it described over the air. It is your fault. If you shout for crudity you will get it. It is only when you shout for skill that you can expect to be shown skill. The only trouble is that people who want skill ask for it quietly while the people who want blood yell for it until they hear the demand in Mars.

That is about the truth of the matter. No one asked for it. Probably there are a good many people who will want to complain about it, now that they've been told the truth. Just let them. . .



wrestling, I prefer to give wrestlers such little credit as may be due to them by saying that they reduce themselves sometimes to the status of animals only for the sake of effect.

It's Dull When Good

This is only about 25 per cent. of the game. Seventy-five per cent. of the match is usually honest-to-goodness wrestling, which means a lot of skill applied with a lot of strength.

For the audience the trouble is that this 75 per cent. of good wrestling looks very dull indeed. That, you may say, is a large statement. But then heavy-weight wrestlers are large men and cannot hope to perform with the interesting agility of those lighter wrestlers who so often put on such excellent preliminaries.

The big men develop their tactics more slowly. They cannot afford to make a mistake and hope to slip out of it, as light-weights can. Sometimes they have to act quickly. It is necessary to be

wrestling in the match. The other 75 per cent. of the audience goes to wrestling to see the wrestlers pull ugly faces, scowl and leer at each other, mutter savagely, throw elbow jolts, threaten the referee, and generally pretend to be thoroughly bad sportsmen.

Whose Fault?

It is established, then, and I am sure you will all agree, that one-quarter of wrestling is hocus-pocus.

Where must we apportion the blame?

Not on the wrestlers. As professionals it is necessary for them to earn their living. The marvel is not that very often they appear to overstep the bounds of good sportsmanship, but that in New Zealand wrestling there is, by comparison, very little of that stupid prehistoric crudity which might easily come into a sport where money leads the way.

No professional sport is entirely clean.

Very many professional sportsmen are good sportsmen. It is not their fault that some of them are not, and that

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