

DO WRESTLERS WRESTLE?

A Sports Commentator Is Provoked

To the Editor of "The Listener,"

SIR,—“If you can't convince by honest criticism, never resort to ridicule.” When first I took to sports writing, many years ago, I was given that piece of sage advice by an old-time champion, and throughout my association with sport, I have always endeavoured to live up to that standard. I have criticised—and strongly, too—but at all times I have tried to be scrupulously fair with it. For that reason I crave space to take up the case for the defence when an ancient and splendid sport is attacked in a manner that makes me wonder what motive the writer had in view.

Your contributor “S.B.” devoted a page to “Thoughts from a Ringside Seat at the Wrestling,” and then proceeded to illustrate to readers who know anything about sport that he did not have the slightest knowledge of the sport he so cynically criticised. To give but two examples of what I will term “shallow thinking.” He “wonders” why the hard pointed bone of an elbow does not cut the skin of a man's face. Might the reason be that the “elbow jolt” is not used? Perhaps “S.B.” might understand why the skin is not broken (outwardly) when it is pointed out that the attack is made by the forearm—not the elbow. Let him try to hit with the elbow and he will realise why I suggest that his knowledge of wrestling is not even superficial. I used the term “outwardly,” for the reason that the inside of a wrestler's mouth after a match is often lacerated because of forearm jolts, although the effects are not seen by the ringsiders.

Clamp And Crab

“S.B.” also exposes his ignorance of wrestling—and in no uncertain manner this time—when he refers to the octopus clamp in slighting terms and then, in what may be termed a “kindergarten” manner, proceeds to describe a totally different hold, a hold known as the Boston Crab!

Many people wonder how it is that wrestlers are able to withstand terrific strain and yet not show the effects. The answer is quite simple—a system of training, muscular development, and continued application. One need only take football as an example common to New Zealanders. At the start of the season there are many injuries brought about when players are tackled, or do the tackling, before their muscles are fully prepared to withstand the shock. After a few games the body readjusts itself to take the bumps and jolts and little or no harm is done. So it is with the wrestlers. Their sport demands strength—mental as well as physical—and when it is realised that the wrestlers we see in New Zealand are the results of years of hard work in the gymnasium and wrestling ring we may have a better appreciation of the sport.

Wrestlers' Characters

It was unfortunate that “S.B.” should conclude an attack on wrestling by referring to cheap and dirty literature, smutty stories, and bad gin. I have met most of the wrestlers to visit New Zealand in the past twelve years, and with



LOFTY BLOMFIELD
He also had his leg pulled

the exception of perhaps five, I would personally vouch for their characters. The exceptions are wrestlers who came many years ago, and didn't last long. Most of the type of Earl McCready, Paul Boesch, Pat Fraley, Rollend Kirchmeyer, Lofty Blomfield, Pat Meehan, Joe Corbett and Ray Steele are typical examples of a sport that has long been adopted by the universities in America. They are typical of the sport which has many of New Zealand's most prominent business and professional men on the executive, committees throughout the Dominion.

“Many Have Been Injured”

I could quote many wrestlers who suffered injury in matches in New Zealand. Earl McCready, when he tried to outlast Kirchmeyer's clutch and had to rest-up for two weeks; Blomfield, who had one leg an inch shorter than the other after resisting Forsgren's Boston Crab; Woods, who had to have his face lanced and then stitched when he was on the receiving end of Savaldi's drop-kick; Paul Boesch, out of action for a full year, and Jack Kennedy with a broken bone in the arm after a jolting affray with Andy Moen. These are but a few.

Personally, instead of attacking a sport that has taken a firm grip on the sporting folk of New Zealand, I consider “S.B.” would have better employed his time had he set about showing the good done by wrestling in recent years.

Recently I saw a young Wellingtonian—now a member of the Royal Navy—competing in an amateur wrestling match. This lad is not yet 17 years, but he weighs 12 stone and is a perfect physical specimen. He is but one of hundreds, nay thousands, of young New Zealanders who, inspired by such men as Earl McCready, Paul Boesch, Lofty Blomfield and Pat Fraley, have taken to wrestling as a means of improving their physique.

The other night I went to the pictures and saw how wrestling is now being taught to the “shock” troops in the British Army—to men who are being trained to carry the fight to the enemy. The film showed these men dis-

arming—and disabling—the “enemy” by means of wrestling holds which would not pass muster with your contributor.—WALLIE INGRAM (Sports Commentator, 2ZB).

“S.B.” REPLIES

IT surely would be nice to know as much about wrestling as 2ZB's sports commentator. Thanks to Mr. Ingram for his enlightening article in defence of the ancient sport. Unhappily I'm still wondering about one or two things.

I can see the mistakes I made, of course. Instead of trying to find out what goes on inside these large persons, I realise that my bosom ought to heave with adoration and my typewriter purr with hero-worship. I can see that Mr. Ingram is the example I should follow.

Some More Questions

I thank Mr. Ingram for telling me about the octopus clamp. That was a slip. But now we've come to the subject, could he also tell me why it is that men who are skilled and quick and strong enough to apply this and similar holds are yet not above performing sometimes as if they were not quite worthy of the serious attention of such a notable sporting commentator as he is? And can he tell me, also, whether he thinks it would be a good idea if his experience in covering wrestling should be used to interest the public in burlesque shows and circus performances as well?

Although I'm very grateful to Mr. Ingram for correcting me about the elbow jolt, I am still wondering how the forearm jolt, as it obviously should be called, leaves its victim with so little outward injury. Maybe, as Mr. Ingram says, it bruises the inside of wrestlers' mouths. I can quite believe that. The insides of people's mouths are very tender indeed. But sometimes I have seen the forearm jolt applied otherwise than against an opponent's mouth, and I have never yet seen it cause either a thick ear or a black eye, much less the skin abrasion that often occurs when a man's bare flesh is struck with the padded boxing glove. I wonder why this is so?

“These Forearm Jolts”

I am very happy to find Mr. Ingram saying that wrestlers have strength—mental as well as physical. This perhaps explains the fortitude they sometimes display when they are attacked by these forearm jolts. Why, I remember lots of occasions when I've seen them stoically standing still, defenceless, while an opponent crept up on them in full view of the public and brutally slashed them with forearm jolts. I'm sure this indicates a very strong character indeed. Still, I can't help wondering if it would not be more profitable for wrestlers to be a little more sensitive. I sometimes think (heresy again!) that it would indicate a greater power of perception if they stepped out of the way of a forearm jolt, or even went to the extreme of putting up an arm to stop it before it arrived.

[Although we have found room for this long letter, and the equally lengthy reply, it must not be supposed that we can normally accommodate correspondents who prove so voluble.—Ed.]

Talking about the amateur wrestling matches that precede the main bouts, and the semi-professional matches, where the boys have the coins thrown into the ring for their reward. I agree with Mr. Ingram that these are fine performances. I have watched them closely. Still, unfortunately as it may seem, they set me wondering again—wondering why the newspapers and the broadcasters and the advertisement columns pay so much attention to the clownish ponderosity of the larger professionals when in these other matches there is so much skill, speed, strength, and cleverness to be praised and observed.

“Stern Training”

I was pleased to see Mr. Ingram praising the stern training methods of these modern Molochs. They must be very good indeed. I remember once asking a wrestler how he trained for the ring. His methods were so good that he would not tell me about them. He said “that would be telling,” so there's another scientific discovery from which the world is unable to profit.

Actually, I do think their training must be simply marvellous. One night I was at a wrestling match and I saw one wrestler put a hammerlock on the other. A hammerlock, I think, is that hold in which A pulls B's arm up behind his back and keeps on pulling. Now, in the case I'm writing about, A applied the hold. He had B firmly by the wrist. Against B's shoulder he placed his foot. He weighed about 17 stone. He pulled B's arm so hard he pulled faces himself. I expected that any minute B's arm would come right out of its socket. B certainly had the appearance of a man under some strain. But the arm did not come out of its socket. I wondered at the time if A were really doing the thing properly. Now, after reading Mr. Ingram's article, I realise that B was in such good training that his limbs are not as those of other men. I suppose when Lofty had his leg lengthened he must have been very sorry indeed that he hadn't trained more. I remember also a nasty-tempered wrestler—one who hadn't, obviously, been to university—who actually broke people's arms and legs. How sorry his opponents must have been that they hadn't spent more time in the gymnasium, or subscribed a bur-sary for the uneducated fellow who damaged them so indiscriminately!

It is indeed very comforting to know that wrestling is now such a finely-developed art that there is so little possibility of injury. Mr. Ingram supports my own suspicions.

All the same, if this is the case, and wrestlers can become so well trained that the full power of a 17-stone opponent cannot break their twisted arms, I wonder why wrestling is being taught the “shock” troops of the army. Surely the enemy will be able to nullify this very easily by putting his troops through a wrestling course, too? In fact, why don't we carry the idea a little

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