

Bill Rea ? Some fun ring action

It is a question I have asked myself many times over the years, and a couple of hundred times since last Thursday night.

The question is, "How could I have watched this garbage so much when I was a kid?"

What I am referring to is professional wrestling.

And it's not so much a thing that I watched it as a kid. It went for years beyond that.

There was professional wrestling as part of the opening night festivities at Brampton Fall Fair.

And since this community newspaper diligently tries to give full coverage to such events, I, as the local editor, thought I had an obligation to attend and take in as much of the . . . Okay, enough of that kaka! The reality is I wanted to see some good guys and bad guys beat each other up in the ring. And I'm happy report I was not disappointed.

I even asked my wife to go ahead and eat without me while I drove over to the Fairgrounds to cover this event. She kept dinner for me.

I stayed for the first three matches (I did promise Beth I would be home as soon as I could). I saw a heated battle in which the bad guy defeated the good guy (incidentally, the bad guy made a point of thanking me for photographing their contest as he made his way back to the dressing room area). There were two guys who ganged up on another chap in the second match. The solo fellow had two seconds who beat up on one of the attackers outside the ring, then the Gang of Two got mad at each other and went at it, then the guy who was ganged up upon managed to pin one of his foes and win the match, I think. I've seen municipal council meetings go that way over the years, although the visuals weren't quite as impressive, and I've also seen such scenarios watching Jerry Springer. The final match was a brutal encounter between Toro Asiago and Captain Tremendous. The good guy won this one.

Yes, I know it is all acting, although I do have to say the choreography was pretty impressive. There might be something of an actor in me, but my 50-something body is not up to the stunts these people were pulling off.

I have known that about professional wrestling for a long time, but not all my life.

I was watching wrestling one afternoon about 50 years ago, and my mother turned to me and said, "You know this is all fake?"

I didn't believe her.

There was a time when I was a little kid that I would watch wrestling for an hour every Saturday afternoon on the TV station from Hamilton, listening to the commentary of Lord Athol Layton, who tried unsuccessfully to sound objective when describing the likes of the Masked Assassin or the Sheik, accompanied by his manager Abdullah Farouk, who was noted for being a snappy dresser, including his wraparound sunglasses. The late Lord Layton repeatedly referred to Farouk as "a most repulsive individual," using his most refined accent. These people said and did things in those days that broadcasters wouldn't dare try today.

Alas, all the men referred to in the last paragraph have passed on.

For many years, the program would be used as a promo for the serious wrestling that went on at Maple Leaf Gardens, when some hero packing a lot of high hopes was confidently expected to put the Sheik in his place. He never did. These events, promoted by Frank Tunney (whose nephew Jack in time became the figurehead president of the World Wrestling Federation), were held Sunday nights, and usually merited a write-up in Monday's Globe and Mail. In time, I learned there would be some footage on the late Sunday night TV news, and there were a few times in my school days when I was able to catch it before my father realized what time it was and angrily ordered me to bed.

Interests change over time, and I lost track of what was going on in the wrestling world.

Many years later, not long after I got into my current line of work, I was home one Saturday night, and was preparing to watch Saturday Night Live. What I got was Saturday Night Main Event, so I spent the next 90 minutes watching the likes of Hulk Hogan, Paul "Mr. Wonderful" Orndorff, André the Giant and "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, among others, go at it. It was silly, but very entertaining.

So in my late 20s, I became interested in professional wrestling again, as did much of the Western World.

A subsequent Saturday Night Main Event included coverage of a wrestler named Uncle Elmer getting married in the ring (in due time, Beth insisted on a church). I giggled steadily through the whole thing. I was not laughing out loud. It was the steady chuckle of a man who was thoroughly amused by the absolute silliness he was seeing on TV. I have watched many funny movies and TV shows over the years, but in terms of sustained amusement, I'm hard pressed to remember a more entertaining couple of minutes that I have ever spent.

I followed the whole thing for a couple of years, catching up on events every Saturday I could get off.

There are some people who follow soap operas religiously. Beth and her late mother used to swap tapes of General Hospital, and Beth used to confine her binge watching to evenings when I had to work. For me, in the days before we were married, I considered

professional wrestling to be something of a soap opera. It was a question of who was whose buddy, or enemy, that particular week. I started losing interest when the various scenarios started insulting even my intelligence.

There are occasions these days when I'm channel hopping and I might come upon professional wrestling. I might even watch a couple of minutes of the foolishness, and then quickly get bored. I simply can't be bothered with it any more.

That doesn't mean there's not some entertainment value to it all. In the days that followed last Thursday's offering, I mentioned to a couple of people what had gone on at the Fair, and some of them asked me what it was like.

?Stupid, but entertaining,? was the usual reply.

As is often the case, when it comes to professional wrestling, there are a sizeable number of people who want it, and there is a sufficient supply of people willing and ready to provide it. It all works out

