

Extreme Wrestling Federation School

By David Bischoff

I love movie theaters. My favorite theaters are those of my youth, the old behemoths that were true showplaces. Home to traditional double features, matinees, serials, cartoons, balconies, and the best darned popcorn and pop of all time, these glorious structures are now usually discount stores or churches, victims of the duplexes and quads that started in the sixties as innovative techniques for making money out of first-run cinema. Now these are falling too, as 10-plexes, 12-plexes—heck, 20-plexes—become the rule. However, it does the heart good to hear about an old movie theater rising from the ashes of time and becoming something even cooler:

A wrestling arena.

Yes, you heard me right, sorta-sports fans. In Marion, Indiana a guy has taken an old movie theater, added a ring and, on weekends, puts on live family shows of old-fashioned wrestling. He also tapes a show there for local cable access. And during the rest of the week our guy—Mr. Jason Maples—takes students along the bumpy road to becoming pro wrestlers. What's truly unique about this school, though—besides the movie theater part— isn't that Jason uses his students in real matches in front of real audiences. No, it's that every student whom Jason deems a graduate gets more than a fancy piece of paper to frame. Jason Maples and his Extreme Wrestling Federation—no relation to ECW—hire that student to work wrestling shows.

And people think that only Ivy Leaguers get guaranteed employment!

JASON MAPLES is 30 years old. He's been wrestling for 10 years. He trained under Ivan Koloff in North Carolina, then worked in promotions throughout the Carolinas. He's wrestled for WWF and traveled extensively on the independent rounds. Some of this time, Jason wrestled as The Sandman—before ECW's guy got that moniker, he says. Not only that, he had a surfing theme—he would carry a surfboard down to the ring. Alas, I neglected to ask Jason if he drank a six-pack of beer, too. That was when Jason was a lot skinnier—260 pounds with long blond hair.

Now he's 450 and bald. "I look like a mix between Bam Bam Bigelow and Amish Roadkill." Jason's qualities as a wrestler?

"For as large a man as I am, I can do lots of technical wrestling à la Dean Malenko. I can do stuff off the top rope. Basically, though, I'm a brawler."

"Eight years ago," he says, "I started doing shows once a month here in Marion, Indiana, my home. Two-and-a-half years ago, we started doing them every week. I also started my school. I'd been using the same pool of talent for my shows as the other area promoters, and a lot of them sucked. I found people who wanted to learn how to wrestle and I was training them in a ring in a barn behind my house. When the chance at the movie theater opened up, I started things there."

What does Jason teach his students?



BELOW: EWF graduate Cheez puts a headlock on former classmate Grizzly. RIGHT: EWF Instructor Hurricane presents Capt. Lou Albano with an EWF Hall of Fame award.

