HURRY! ONLY TWO MORE LEFT

The last two of a big litter of kittens at the home of Elmer Gifford, wait patiently for a passing motorist to pick them up and take them to a new home. Gifford had no trouble disposing of the whole family thanks to the sign and the pleading looks on the faces of the kittens.

SPORTS & by A SIXBIT CRITIC

To a greater extent than most athletes, wrestlers have their ups and downs, both professionally and financially. Right now, we are happy to say, some three thousand or so huge men actively engaged in the wrestling game are looking forward to their most profitable season in 20 years. And that "we are happy to say" was not written with fingers crossed or tongue in cheek either, as we are extremely fond of professional grapplers, both individually and as a class, even though we seldom get around to seeing them in action these days.

* * *

Just a few years back you could count the profitable wrestling centres in Canada and the United States on your fingers, and have a few left over at that. But now crowds of cash customers numbering from 10,000 to 15,000 are not unusual, even in comparatively small towns.

* * *

The principal reason for this sudden outburst of popularity seems to be television — for video viewers, who not only get a closeup picture of the grimaces and contortions, but also an intimate earful of the groans and grunts, have gone for wrestlers in a large manner; and it is reported that the perfumed fan mail received by some of the more horrendous performers is coming to equal that of a popular moaning baritone or tearful tenor, radio variety.

* * *

Feature writers for some of the big-circulation magazines have been taking the wrestlers apart and trying to find out what makes them tick — the latest of these being Sam Boal, in the New York Sunday Times magazine. Mr. Boal's picture of the wrestlers themselves is neither intimate or very revealing. "He studied", the editorial blurb states, "wrestlers at ringside and over television at a number of private and public houses." And this, you may take it from one in a position to know, is no method at all of getting the real low-down on the wrestler as an individual.

* * *

However, some of Mr. Boal's observations are of considerable interest. "A wrestling show doesn't reveal a great deal about wrestlers," he states, "but it does reveal a very great deal about the audience. People burst out in real anger as the villain of the piece apparently is crunching the hero's neck to bits. Women who would normally be as and cry out wild curses at wrestlers. gentle as lambs, shake their fists Others mutter at them as they enter and leave the ring. And in homes, families sit before their TV sets, completely enchanted."

* * *

Yet how, Boal wants to know, could anyone over the age of 12 believe in such a figure as Gorgeous George with his platinum hair, scarlet and golden robe, his English butler and the atomizer with which his corner is hygienically sprayed before the show? Or the Gorilla, who is wheeled to the ring in an enormous cage whose bars he rattles with roars of tortured rage? Or the wrestler billed as the Bat, whose wrestling technique consists in flailing his arms up and down like wings and who appears to be about to suck the blood of his victims, as a vampire is supposed to do?

* * *

The article also mentions Mute Mike, who purports to be deaf and dumb and signals to the referee in deaf-and-dumb language, and points helplessly at his mouth to indicate that he cannot howl in protest at the terrible agony his opponent is causing him. Also "Mr. America", a nobly handsome youh, now the reigning favorite with the bobby soxers, who swoon when they meet him, just as they once did on encountering Frankie Sinatra or Mel Torme.

* * *

Boal tells of the two questions continually put to wrestlers by their fans — then, himself, tries to give the answers, the latter making — well, about as much sense as most stuff written about wrestlers. The two questions are: Does all that punishment really hurt? — and — Is every wrestling match fixed?

* * *

In general, those dolorous moans coming from a wrestler are not caused by pain, any more than the moans of an actor playing Richard the Third are caused by real pain. If either wrestler or actor suffered as much as he appears to be doing, neither could last a week. That ghastly thump the audience hears when a wrestler is thrown over another wrestler's head, doesn't kill him, as might seem certain. On the other hand, it isn't exactly a caress. The wrestler simply knows how to hit the deck. His feet hit first, making the principal noise, and then his shoulders hit.

* * *

His head never hits, unless he makes a mistake, in which case he could be seriously hurt. As it is, a broken ankle from just such a performance is by no means uncommon. The fact is that if a wrestler picked an untrained man from the audience and hurled him to the floor, maybe that man would get up again and maybe he wouldn't. Wrestlers do get broken ribs, lacerated ears and other wounds, but these may be regarded as industrial accidents.

* * *

In general, wrestlers do not intentionally hurt each other. They don't try to, moreover, because they can't afford to. Some wrestlers may work as many as six shows a week, so it stands to reason they have to be reasonably certain they will wind up a given show more or less in one piece. Some of the wrestling holds which appear positively gruesome are almost gentle. And if, by chance, a wrestler is really being hurt by another, he uses a signal that is universal in the business. The squeezes his opponent's arm or leg with two rapid motions and the painful hold is relaxed instantly.

* * *

We went along pretty much in agreement with Mr. Boal so far in his article, but when he attempted to answer his second question, we thought he skidded slightly off the rails. "The only honest answer to the question, "Are all wrestling bouts fixed?" he says, is 'Yes and no.' Many wrestling matches are planned, but some are not. The wrestlers in the preliminary bouts get the same money, win, lose or draw. Often they are told who is going to win, and specifically by what hold."

* * *

Then he goes on: "It is in the big bouts, with names that draw crowds, that the fixes do not apply so generally. This is not a moral issue, but an economic one. A case in point is Primo Carnera, who up until a few months ago, made so much money out of wrestling that he cannot be compared with anyone else. Carnera was such a success because of his size and also because of his skill. He drew huge crowds and naturally shared much more of the profits than a less popular man. As of May 20, 1949, Carnera had never lost a show. He had won 321 bouts, an unequalled record. On that night, however, he wrestled with Antonio Rocca — the current sensation of the sport. Rocca beat him. Since that time Carnera's earnings have decreased considerably because fans know he was beaten."

* * *

But in his next paragraph Mr. Boal shows signs that he should have — in order to get a real understanding of wrestling — got a mite closer to the core of matters than a televison screen or even a ringside. "It was obviously to Carnera's disadvantage to lose. Yet he did lose and it cost him a lot of money. Would Carnera have taken orders from somebody to lose when he knew that his position as a drawing card would give him the power to refuse?"

* * *

Mr. Boal obviously thinks that the answer to this is a loud and ringing "No". We would hate to disillusion even a sports expert, but we might just gently hint to him that Primo Carnrera, besides being a wrestler, knows the value of a dollar. And he knows that plenty of bouts, even at a reduced figure per appearance, will buy far more macaroni and spaghetti than sitting idly on the sidelines, getting no bouts at all.

Turnabout — When photographers lined up in the White House to snap President Truman opening the annual Christmas Seal Drive, the President pulled out this miniature camera and focused it on the cameramen. "I can really take care of you fellows now," he said.

Playing In Japan—Frank "Lefty" O'Doul, manager of the San Francisco Seals baseball team, now touring Japan, shakes hands with Prince Akihito and Prince Masahito before a Tokyo game with the Eastern All-Stars of the Japan Professional League. The Seals, who have won every game of their exhibition, shut out the Japanese club 4-0.

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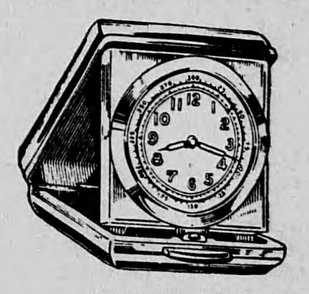

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