

It's hot in the auditorium. Cigar smoke slowly waves in blue layers under the white lights. Centered in the lights is the green matted ring. It's empty now, but the edgy crowd eyes the ring in anticipation. Soon a pair of professional wrestlers will step through the ropes and face off in an exhibition of brute strength, agility, and animal theater.

"This is a sport," says Elton Owen, of Wrestling Promotions, and promoter of Friday night's triple card at the Lane County Auditorium. "Don't knock it till ya try it."

## Pro wrestlers: Big guts, no glory

The card tonight features three matches. The preliminary match pits Tommy Rodgers against Mike Miller. The second match has the "British Champ" Chris Adams battling Dizzy Hogan. These matches are just the build-up to the main event — a tag-team bout with Hack Sawyer and Steve Pardee going against the likes of Rip Oliver and "Playboy" Buddy Rose.

Pardee is the last minute replacement for Sawyer's original partner Rocky Johnson. Owen announces that Johnson had some family problems and had to return to Samoa.

"If ya want your money back, come and get it," Owen says.

Two hundred or so wrestling fans paid \$4.50 and \$5.50 for ringside seats. Nobody leaves.

"I came all the way from Roseburg," an old man says to the old man next to him.

The fans are a mixture of elderly couples, adolescents and young kids. Well-bellied men swagger and send sidelong glances as if walking through an unfriendly bar,

spoiling to fight. The older women tend to be amply-hipped. There's a docility about them. They cling in quiet obedience to their men.

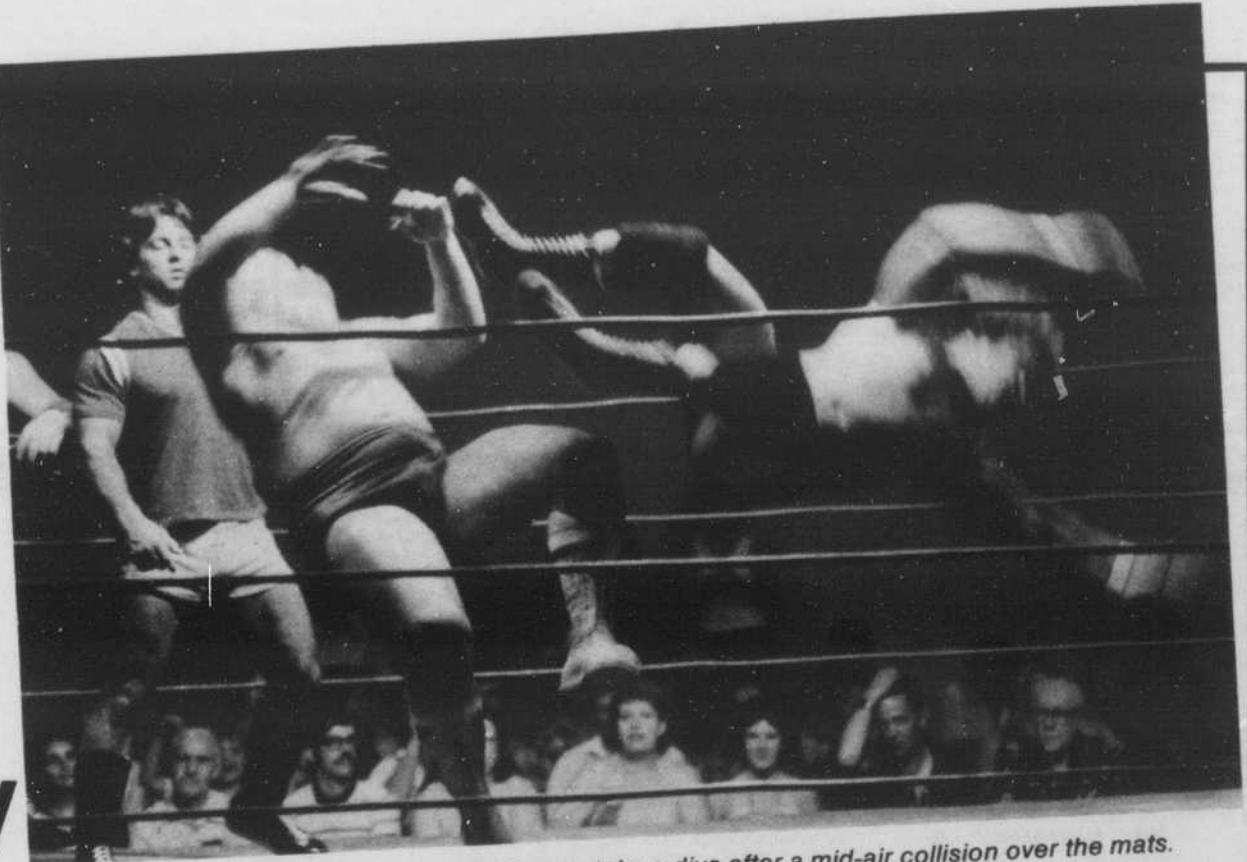
The adolescents appear to be early teens — 12 to 14 years old.

The bell sounds three times. Into the ring two wrestlers jump. Owen takes a ringside microphone and introduces Tommy Rodgers and Mike Miller.

The fans applaud Rodgers. He's shorter than Miller, not fat, and wears his hair short. He looks like a clean-cut kid. Obviously Rodgers is the "good guy."

Miller snarls at the crowd when they boo him. He resists letting the referee check the bottom of his shoes. More boos and catcalls from the fans.

The bell sounds once and the wrestlers crouch and advance to the center of the ring. They circle and tentatively grapple. It seems only a pantomime until Miller throws Rodgers to the mat and the whole ring booms and shudders with the concussion.



"Playboy" Buddy Rose and Hack Sawyer take a dive after a mid-air collision over the mats.

Rodgers shakes his head clear and is quickly on his feet. In a flash he has Miller's arm and is slowly twisting it. The pain is excruciating judging by Miller's agonized cries and contorted features.

"Break it — break it — break it," young girls chant as Rodgers twists and twists Miller's arm.

Miller manages to free his arm and the two wrestlers start wailin' on each other — jumping and leaping and crashing to the mat. Miller has a trick, he grabs Rodgers' hair and trips him backwards. An old man is on his feet raving at Miller from the edge of the ring.

"I seen you do it — he's pulling hair, Ref!" the old man yells.

Miller's trick gets him disqualified. Rodgers wins the match even though at the bell Miller was sitting on Rodgers' head, choking him on the ropes.

It's the same "good guy" against "bad guy" situation in the second match Dizzy Hogan vs. Chris Adams. Adams is introduced as the "British Champ." He's clean-cut and slim, with a genuine baby-face. The fans root for him automatically.

Hogan is another story. He is massive, with long flowing blonde hair and a handlebar mustache. He's introduced as hailing from Los Angeles. Any of those factors alone would turn the fans against him.

At the bell Hogan and Adams collide at the center of the ring ferociously wrestling.

"C'mon Dizzy — kill 'em," a boy yells.

Hogan somehow manages to catch Adams and hauls him up across his shoulders. He parades about the ring with Adams writhing in the air.

"Throw him," fans shout.

Suddenly the momentum of the match shifts in Adams' favor. Adams has rendered his massive opponent into a quivering, sweaty mass by bending back one of Hogan's fingers. Hogan is on his knees begging for mercy. The fans are shouting "No!", urging Adams to put it to Hogan. They are only satisfied when Adams body-slams and knee-drops Hogan into submission.

Adams wins to the fans delight. As he steps down from the ring a tiny towheaded boy runs up to him with a pad and pen. The boy looks way, way

up as Adams, drenched in sweat, signs his autograph.

Between matches young girls hover around the dressing room door. Rip Oliver and Buddy Rose are standing outside the dressing room waiting for their match to begin. A blonde cooly approaches. Her girlfriends cluster a few steps away, watching with big eyes of shock and envy. She talks to Oliver and feels his muscles. She runs back to her girlfriends and they all cover their

like a dead fish in Oliver's grasp. It looks bad. He reaches a feeble hand to Pardee in the corner. But Pardee is just out of reach. Then Rose is in the ring. He flings Sawyer out of the ring. Sawyer is face down on the cold concrete. Rose drags him back into the ring. Once again Sawyer's trembling hand stretches across to Pardee. No, he still can't tag his teammate.

Then Rose errs, throwing Sawyer in the corner. Pardee gets tagged and he leaps into



The tag-team duo of Sawyer and Steve Pardee claim their victory after a pro-wrestling bout at Lane County Auditorium.

mouths and squeal together.

The professional wrestlers travel a circuit, usually wrestling five to six nights a week. "We have college champions wrestling here," Owens says.

The fans are hooting and cheering, caught up in anticipation of the monumental clap and crack of the wrestlers hurling their bodies at each other with no thought for safety. The preliminary matches, with the boom of thrown bodies and slap of grabbing hands, were nothing compared to the titanic struggle awaiting only the sound of the bell.

CLANG — and the match is on with a roar from the fans.

Rose, a long-time pro wrestler, has become paunchy. The fans begin chanting "whale on the beach."

It's a seesaw battle, made spectacular by stunts. Sawyer and Rose bounce off the ropes, leap and collide about three feet above the center of the ring. They both crash to the mat flat on their backs.

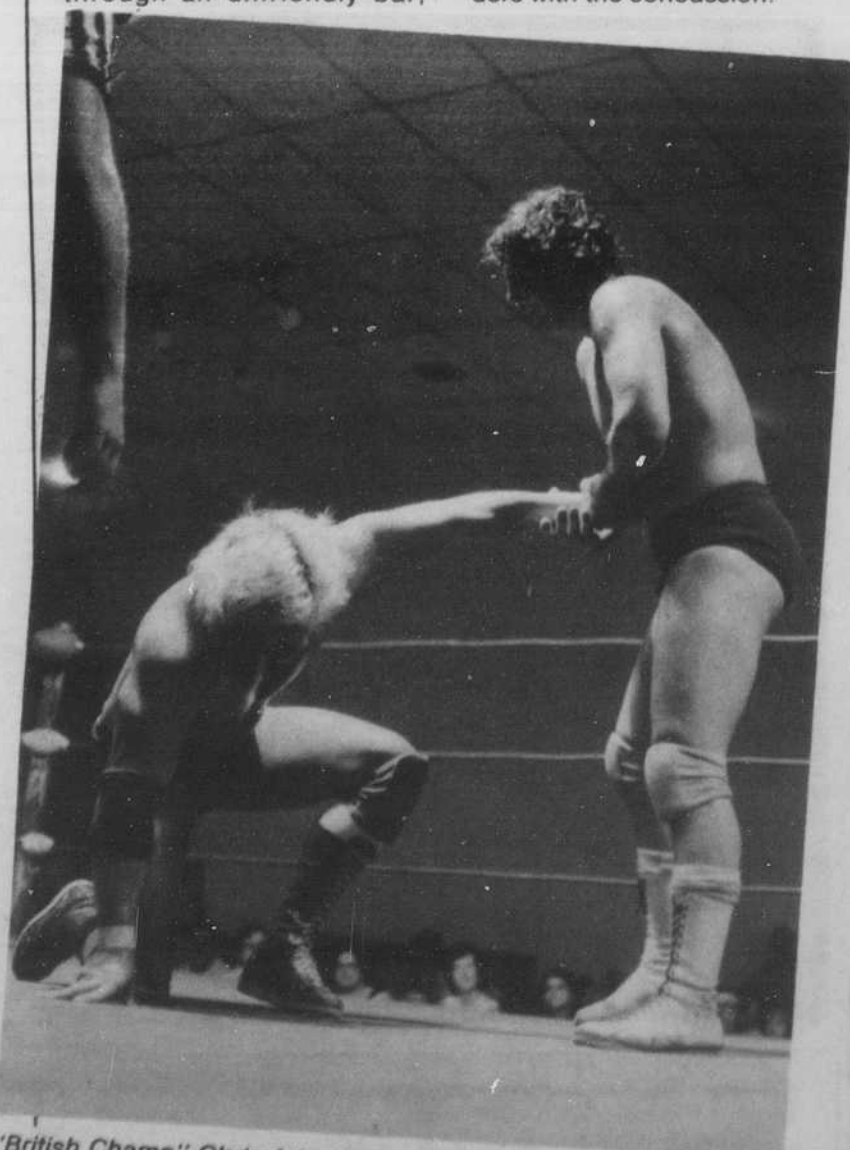
Oliver manages to get Sawyer in a terminal headlock. Poor Sawyer is floundering

the ring. Rose's face takes on a look of stark terror as Pardee lays waste to him. The fans are on their feet shouting wildly as both Rose and Oliver are being thrown all over the ring by Pardee. The bell sounds and Sawyer and Pardee's arms are raised in victory by the referee.

The fans slowly filter out of the hot and smoky auditorium. They talk excitedly about holds and throws. Kids writhe on the grass outside, imitating the wrestlers. Young girls talk dreamily about the wrestler's looks. The elderly couples smile broadly and shamble across the parking lot — reassured by the pantomime of violence that cheaters are always found out and the smaller and seemingly defenseless can triumph over bullies.

The well-bellied men stand taller, sucking in their stomachs, sure they could measure up if only they had a chance in the ring.

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Photo by Mark Pynes



"British Champ" Chris Adams has Dizzy Hogan in an inescapable finger lock!