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(Continued from Page 9)

sional baseball in 1975 to become a wrestler, he said, and will continue the sport until he wins a world title.

"Every wrestler wants to win a world title," said Assassin. "It's just like any other sport. If you have it in your heart, you can succeed."

Ricky Santana is a little easier to talk to. He politely tells a man trying to interrupt our interview to be quiet and wait.

"The more hype I get from the fans, the more I strive for in the ring," he said, hugging his naked shoulders in the nippy outdoors.

Santana, the Northwest tag-team champion along with Brady Boone, is 25 and is originally from Miami. He hopes to wrestle until his body gives out, so he can continue to bring in his average earnings of \$60-\$70,000 a year.

He talks of his fellow wrestlers and the grueling road schedule they undertake together.

"We're professionals — we keep it all in the ring. We're like a family," said Santana.

...

Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation it isn't, but for Eugene it is the best wrestling show in town.

Things have changed. At one time, the only chance you would have to watch this vaudeville act was live — enter Owen and company. Then for \$20 a seat, one

could watch closed-circuit features of the WWF. Now, if you have basic cable, you can indulge in wrestling every night. Buy a satellite dish and it's the entire weekend.

Although many promoters are in the same ring as Owen, one thing has not changed — professional wrestling will attract the same bloodthirsty crowd every time.

Why pro wrestling hasn't drifted into the fads of Christmas past is a question that may baffle psychologists for years to come.

It is a strange sport. It appears in some cases that the match's winner has been chosen prior to the first bell. Some of the moves and grimaces of pain seem like excerpts from the theater of the absurd, but when a body flies parallel into the air and lands on the mat with a resounding thump, reality's sweat will splatter you right in the face.

Then there are guys like Rip Oliver and the Assassin, whose long wishes for murdering each other appear very sincere.

Take a date to a match and the entertainment factor is guaranteed: Whether it be in the ring or the taunting and teasing young housewife in the front row who eventually gets so worked up about the Arab that her veins almost burst through her neck.

Just make sure it's not a first date.

— DENNIS FERNANDES

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