

diversions

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SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

Independent Wrestling League Wows Crowds With In-Your-Face Action, Characters

By BRIAN BEDSWORTH
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A barrage of four-letter words and jeers rains down on the ring as Count Grog, a stocky, grisly man in a black T-shirt, steps over the rope. Big Slam, Juice, Maj. DeBeers, and several other hulking, brute-sized wrestlers are already busy pummeling each other with an assortment of golf clubs, card tables, preschool toys, computer keyboards and a model F-14 fighter jet.

The shouts from the crowd hang as thick as the cigarette smoke in the sweaty air. Grog talks tough to his opponents and even gets a few whacks in on them with a metal folding chair, but it's not enough. Unfortunately for Count Grog and his cohorts, The Brotherhood, they lose this match to their arch nemeses, The Boyz.

"It hurts. My ribs hurt," a battered

and
sweaty

Grog says after the match. But even so, you can bet he'll be back in the action next month.

Count Grog, a.k.a. 39-year-old Greg Mosorjak of Fuquay-Varina, doesn't just wrestle, but also runs Southern Championship Wrestling, an independent wrestling league based in Raleigh.

On the last Thursday of every month a surprisingly diverse crowd crams into King's, a club in downtown Raleigh, to witness a sometimes bloody show of machismo as a colorful cast of characters battles it out for the monthly title. It's all the brutality and pageantry of WWF or

WCW, but in a more intimate setting — a testosterone-fueled soap opera.

"I usually wear a cape and do a kind of vampire thing," said Mosorjak, whose family is originally from Dracula's homeland in the Carpathian Mountains of the former Yugoslavia. Other SCW wrestlers, while less sinister, have Count Grog beat on originality.

Lazarus dons black stretch pants, a bikini top, pigtailed and makeup, because he's convinced he's Britney Spears. Oops, he did it again — drop-kicked someone in the face, that is.

With his tweed blazer, horn-rimmed glasses and suspenders, Mervin Snead (Radford University sophomore Jon Brumberg) is something straight out of "Revenge of the Nerds."

And 320-pound James Ivey, or Poison Ivey, of Henderson, crushes opponents with a special move called the Ivey Enema.

Poison Ivey, Count Grog and the oth-

ers have been beating each other senseless in the name of Southern Championship Wrestling for almost six years now.

Mosorjak, who has wrestled for 22 years, started working as a referee with the Carolina Championship Wrestling Alliance in Smithfield in 1993, but said he felt like there was no room for advancement.

"They had their own guys they wanted to push. It was really frustrating."

In November 1994, he and several other disgruntled wrestlers left the league to start their own. The first SCW match was held at Durham's Bethesda Athletic Center, where the league stayed until 1996. By that time SCW had already expanded to area National Guard armories, other towns like Butner, Sanford and Goldsboro, and Raleigh's Berkley Cafe.

"It really clicked (with the Berkley)," Mosorjak said. "We were packing the crowd in."

But after remodeling last year, the cafe was too small to house SCW's ring and growing legions of fans. King's began hosting the carnage in October 1999. Crowds, made up largely of students from N.C. State University and Raleigh's other colleges, range any-

where from 50 to 500 people at each event, Mosorjak said.

"We're a big hit with the college crowd," Mosorjak said, adding that SCW's high-impact, hard-core style is one of its biggest draws with that group.

"(SCW is) some of the best live wrestling you can see," said Ashley Perry, a junior architecture major at N.C. State who has been to several SCW events. "There's some blood from the wrestlers, but nothing traumatic. It's just spit and sweat flyin' — it's great."

But, as a sign of SCW's universal appeal, college students still don't make up the majority of the crowd. Frat boys rub elbows with blue-collar workers and grandmothers with elementary school children.

"I like it because it's just a good show," said Jon Beecham, a construction worker from Cary who regularly attends SCW. "It gets pretty violent. They kill each other with the weapons," he said, referring to the golf clubs and other makeshift instruments of pain that the wrestlers commonly use in the ring.

But it's crowd participation, even more than the violence, that keeps many people coming back.

"You get a lot more into the action here," said Holland Blake, a UNC Hospitals employee from Hillsborough who has been coming to SCW for two

years.

The crowd yells at the wrestlers, who yell back, making the crowd even more excited. At one point in last month's championship match, Big Slam (a gargantuan, 400-pound wall of pain), threw Juice (the leader of The Boyz) out of the ring and into the seats as the crowd scattered.

And if having a bloody wrestler fall in your lap isn't enough, there's also the appeal of seeing tomorrow's WWF and WCW stars in a smaller setting. Several SCW champs have moved up through the ranks to national recognition, including the Hardy Boys, Joey Abs, Lodi and Steve Corino.

"We have a pretty good track record of sending people up," Mosorjak said.

The league itself is also moving up the ranks, growing every year. Mosorjak said he is always looking for new venues and new towns to expand to.

"Chapel Hill is a place we'd love to go to," he said.

Though he wants to expand westward to Boone, Mosorjak said there's really no limit to how big the league can get or to where it could expand.

"There are still lots of little towns around here lacking in entertainment."

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DTH/MILLER PEARSALL

Hit him, baby, one more time: Britney Spears wannabe Lazarus (above) struts for the crowd at King's in Raleigh before pummeling his opponent. Southern Championship Wrestlers (right) make their way through the crowd on their way to the ring.



DTH/MILLER PEARSALL

Recent UNC Grad Says Sayonara to Science, 'Whassup' to Wrestling

By BRIAN BEDSWORTH
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What will a degree in biology from UNC get you? For one recent graduate, it's brought two concussions and a cracked jaw.

Alvin Herring graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology in 1997. But instead of hitting the books at medical school, he's been hitting the mats (and other wrestlers) with Southern Championship Wrestling.

"My professors all joked about it," said the soft-spoken, 190-pound, Washington native of his choice to pursue a career in professional

wrestling.

Several times a month, Herring leaves his Best Buy day job behind, musses his medium-length blond hair and affects a twitchy, slightly schizophrenic persona to become Wort, his character at SCW.

"He's supposed to be kind of like Brad Pitt in '12 Monkeys,'" Herring said about his in-the-ring character.

"One night at the training center I was acting stupid and that's what I came up with."

Before acting "stupid," Herring was acting pretty smart. After graduating from UNC, he went to North Carolina State University to com-

plete his master's degree in poultry science.

About that time, his friends were getting him interested in professional wrestling on television. After seeing a flier for SCW on N.C. State's campus, he started regularly attending the independent wrestling league's events at King's, a club in Raleigh.

"(Wrestling) kind of fits me," Herring said. "I've always been boisterous. I like to show off a lot."

With qualities like these, it didn't take long for the prospective poultry scientist to make a major career change.

Herring asked SCW Commissioner Greg

Mosorjak for some advice on getting started in the league, and by last December had started training.

"I did a little tryout thing where they beat the hell out of me," he said. "But I passed that and started training. I've picked it up pretty quickly."

Herring is already wrestling in single matches, no small feat for someone still in training.

"I've been lucky so far. God must have some kind of destiny for me," he said.

Herring said he hopes that destiny includes wrestling in main events and working his way up the independent circuit to one of the majors, such as WWF or WCW.

"That's the big goal, to get a contract," he said.

But winning the support from fans and the league is sometimes easier than winning support from family.

Herring said his parents are less than openly enthusiastic about his career choice. To soften the blow, he said he recently brought them a video of several of his matches.

"They say they hate me doing it, but they probably watch that tape four or five times a day."

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