

Professional Wrestling

controversy isn't fake

It's a proven formula in professional wrestling: Sell prearranged matches as being real, and let the viewers argue over their authenticity.

In fact, when wrestler Owen Hart fell from the rafters in a botched stunt and died last May 23 in Kansas City, many at sold-out-Kemper Arena reportedly thought the tragedy was a put-on.

What is very real is the foul language, sexual overtones and promotion of violence that stretch the limits of good taste but produce gigantic television

A May 16, 1999, U.S News and World Report article described a popular Monday-night wrestling show. "Raw is War." as "filled with lewdness, simulated sex, prostitutes and profanities."

The article cited an Indiana University study of 50 "Raw" episodes that "reported 1,658 instances of grabbing or pointing to one's crotch, 157 instances of an obscene finger gesture, 128 episodes of simulated sexual activity, and 21 references to urination."

It's this kind of activity that has made Bryan Asposto begin to sour on the World Wrestling Federation and its promoter, Vince McMahon Jr.

"They're swearing constantly and girls in bikinis are running around. I just stopped liking it," said Bryan, 14, a parishioner at St. James Church in Irondequoit.

Not everyone agrees with Bryan, apparently. According to the U.S. News story, WWF's "Raw" was the No. 1-rated show on cable television. Overall, wrestling shows by WWF and its main competitor, World Championship Wrestling, fill 15

hours of weekly air " time and draw 35 million viewers.

Bryan said that he prefers the slightly milder WCW with such stars as Diamond Dallas Page, Hulk Hogan, Sting, Kevin Nash and Goldberg. Marie Peterson, 16, said she favors WWF because it's more violent. Her favorite wrestler is The Rock

"He's got an attitude. I love it," said Marie, 16.



DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NY

Gates, said he's intriqued by matches where wrestlers "attack" each other with folding chairs, barbed wire and baseball bats. Joe noted that in one recent match, one wrestler threw a soda machine on top of his foe.

"I think they're going a little overboard, like with the language. I'm not offended, but I think they're getting out of hand," Joe said.

Does professional wrestling corrupt teens, as its many detractors would argue? Seemingly not in the cases of Bryan, Marie and Joe, who are all active members of their parish youth groups.

"Wrestling is just entertaining and exciting." Bryan said. "Some nights I'll fall asleep watching baseball, because it's so boring."

Marie watched an Aug. 22 WWF pay-per-view "Summer Slam" with six other teens from her youth group. (The Summer Slam featured Minnesota Gov. Jesse "The Body" Ventura, a former professional wrestler, as guest referee.)

Marie said that her friends imitated the wrestlers' moves during the Summer Slam but did not go out and practice violent behavior.

"After we watched it, we left it in the house that's it. We're intelligent enough to know it's fake. We yell, 'He missed him by three inches!" said Marie, pointing out that feigned "punches" in professional wrestling often miss their marks by noticeable margins.

Bryan does believe, however, that wrestling can potentially influence some teens toward violent behavior.

You have to know the difference between real and fake. Some people don't know the difference," Bryan said.

Marie said that she doesn't think professional wrestling's content is appropriate for children "under

Joe, for example, acknowledged that when he was younger, he tried out some professional wrestling moves on his younger sister.

"I stopped. I didn't want to hurt her; I gu wasn't mature enough then," he said. Bryan's father — who often watches wrestling

As long as the people support it, it'll get wilder and wilder," David Asposto said. "My concern has been, 'Does (Bryan) realize this is put on as a show?' If you hit somebody with a chair (for real), believe me, they're not going to get up.

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Story by

Marie said that parents who disapprove of professional wrestling are hopefully practicing what

"You can't say 'You can't watch this TV show because there's swearing' and then go around the house using that language," Marie said.

Marie's mother asserted that professional wrestling isn't necessarily worse than other diversions available to youngsters.

"It's rough and tumble, but it's entertainment. GI Joe is violent. Soap operas have sex," said Kitty Peterson, who is youth minister at St. Patrick's. "I want the kids to enjoy wrestling. But I also want them to realize this is not a lifestyle to emulate, like crotch-

Joe currently competes in scholastic wrestling. He said that many boys who joined last year's squad were influenced by professional wrestling but hit the highway when they found that amateur wrestling is grueling, not a showy production.

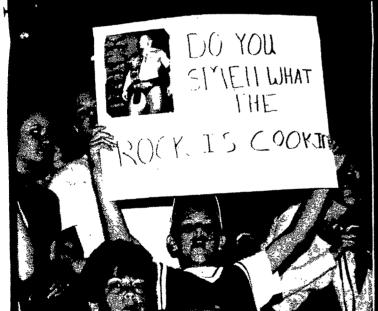
"Half of them quit after Christmas break," Joe said. He plans to wrestle again this year for Gates-Chili Middle School, where he's beginning eighth

Joe said that few amateur wrestling moves are ever seen in professional wrestling. He also noted that amateur wrestling is available to participants of all sizes, as opposed to the musclebound giants who dominate professional wrestling.

Joe noted that professional wrestling matches are often "disrupted" by wrestlers jumping into the ring to defend their "friends." Such activity is not the case in scholastic wrestling, he said.

"You're wrestling with your team around you, but they're not going to go out and smash guys with a chair when you're in trouble," Joe said.

> **COMING NEXT WEEK Eating habits**



Top photo, "The Rock" slams WWF "HHH" Sept. Rochester's Blue Cross Arena. Above, Alex Plumadore raises a sign in support of "The Rock" with his mom I inda at his right, watching the action

from St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls.

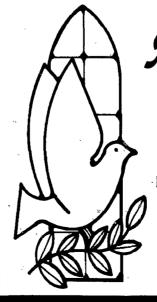
I your Mother, am coming to visit you as

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