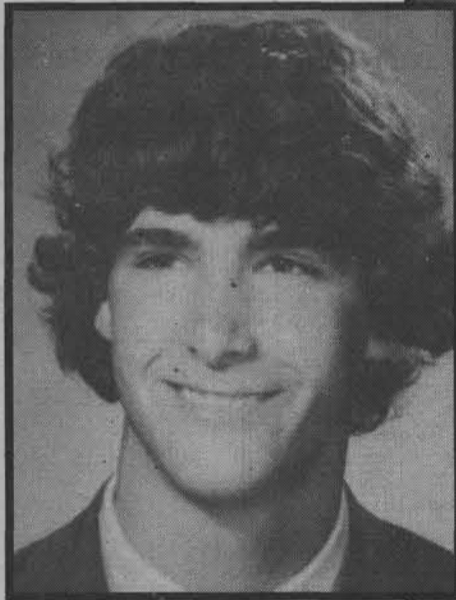
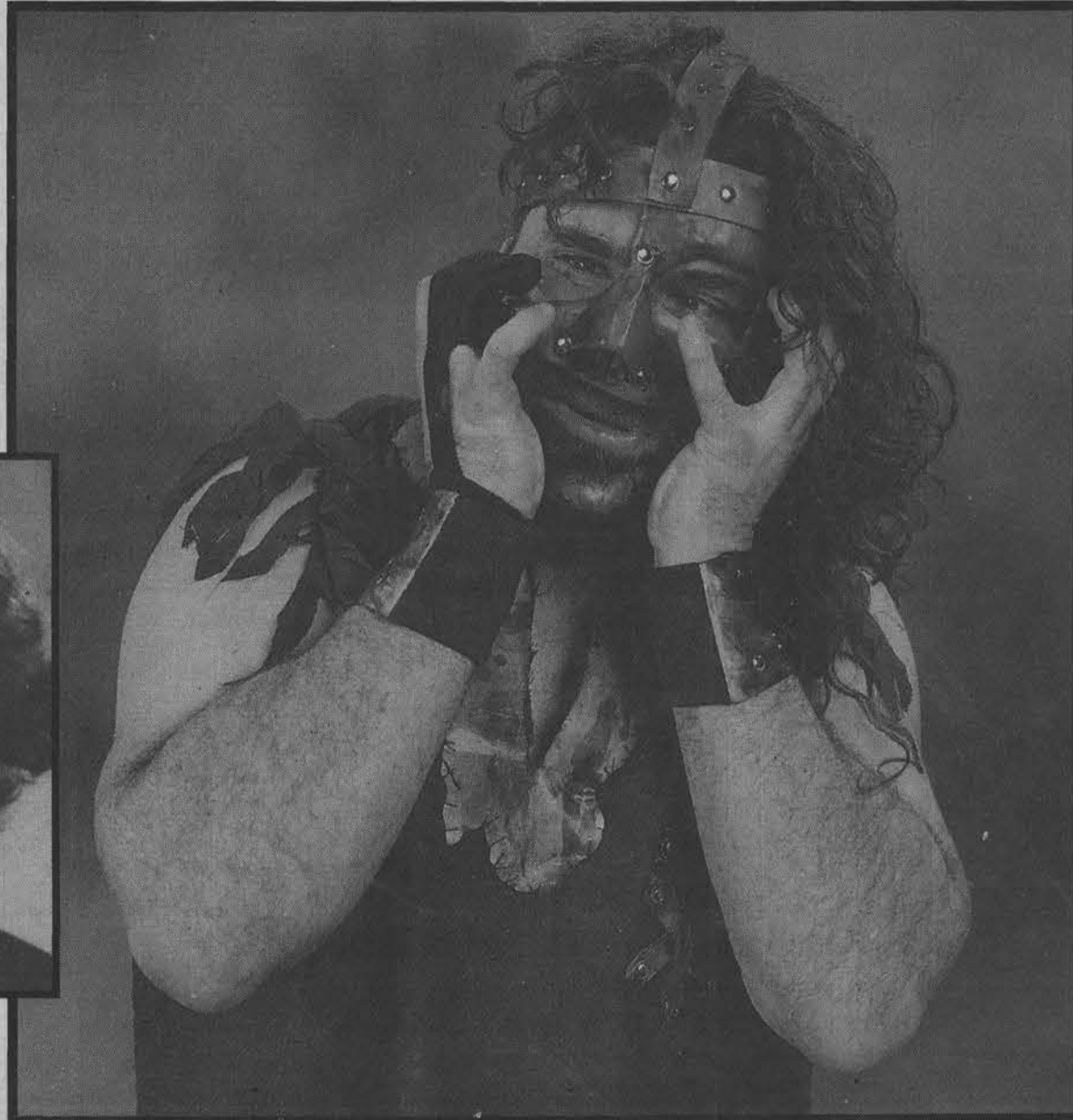


Don't try this at home

But a wrestler's gotta start somewhere by Bill Jensen



Mick Foley then, as an East Setauket High student (inset) and now, as the World Wrestling Federation's Mankind (top).



One night in his dorm room at Cortland State, Mick Foley of East Setauket set up a Super-8 camera and bright lights to film himself jumping off his bed and onto a stuffed animal—with an obligatory stage-blood capsule lodged in his mouth.

As the blood oozed down his chin after the leap, he heard one of the girls who had gathered in his room exclaim, "That's disgusting." Right then, Foley had declared his new major in life. "I felt like, 'I got to get that reaction more often'... and the wrestling ring was the best place to do that."

Foley kicked around various wrestling circuits as Cactus Jack, a man with a mischievous smile and a reputation for being able to take a lot of pain. Last year, he finally made the big time: the World Wrestling Federation, where he was transformed into the mysteriously deranged Mankind. The arenas were bigger, the fans were

louder and the cheers turned to jeers. But it didn't bother Foley. "I loved it. I took it as a compliment. I wasn't so fond of the spitting, but...there were a lot of nights that I'd get goosebumps just from the reaction of the fans. This is really what I had set out for from the beginning. To be at the top of the card in the WWE, in Madison Square Garden."

Wrestling returns Oct. 24 to the Nassau Coliseum. The main event is billed as an unsanctioned "Long Island Street Fight," pitting Foley—in his good-guy Dude Love guise—and Stone Cold Steve Austin against the villainous duo of the British Bulldog and Owen Hart.

EXIT ZERO

The full-nelson alone no longer packs the fans in: The big draw is the thrilling leap from the top rope onto a concrete floor. Every Monday night, WWF wrestlers brawl for two hours on the USA Network before crisscrossing the country to wrestle four or five nights a week in hockey and basketball arenas. Today's TV wrestling matches no longer feature Special Delivery Jones putting a four-minute headlock on some drunken truck driver. Instead, it's about soap-opera-level drama and increasingly violent action for the pumped generation.

The weekly ratings war with Ted Turner's *World Championship Wrestling* has upped the ante: WWF grapplers have sustained serious injuries in the name of high-powered action. Many wrestlers see the violent trend as a quick way to destroy their bodies, but Foley feels at home.

"When I was a kid," Foley says, "I wanted to see moves that I knew hurt. When the wrestling fans at home would look at each other and say, 'Oh! that had to hurt,' then

you'd look at your video machine and try to rewind to see where the loophole went, and I wanted to create a style that had no loophole. And in doing so, I've been hurt literally from head to toe. Everything from a broken toe to a severed ear. You name it, I've had it."

Foley's head got stuck in ropes that were perhaps a little too tight during a match in Germany. "It was like a case of a wolf gnawing off its own arm to try to get out. If I hadn't pulled my head out of there, I'd still be in there. I got out, but my ear didn't." Evander Holyfield, Mr. Respected Warrior in the United States, had his fight stopped when he lost part of his ear to Tyson. Foley kept wrestling 'til the end.

In front of 28,000 people in Kawasaki Stadium in Yokohama, Foley, as Cactus Jack, engaged in a "King of the Death Match." In the first round, he had to escape the 10,000 thumbtacks and a barbed-wire, baseball-bat match. The second round called for the bed of nails. In the final round, where he faced ageless wrestling legend Terry Funk, ropes were replaced with barbed wire and explosive devices were rigged around the ring.

Foley won the match and became an instant legend in Japan. On the 14-hour flight home, Foley's arm, burned from wrist to shoulder, began turning brown. When he got home from Kennedy Airport, Foley's wife kept asking him what was smoking. "I had to say 'Honey, it's me.'"

That's the kind of effort that turned Mankind into a fan favorite: "I always tried to give people their money's worth, and that's a tough thing to hate after awhile."

Foley had pictured himself as the type of swashbuckling wrestler who got all the girls. In July, he introduced his Dude Love alter ego, revisiting the wrestling persona he used as a teen-ager when jumping off friends' roofs. "I'm learning now that giving people their money's worth doesn't necessarily mean destroying yourself."

Foley says he still loves watching the matches of his fellow wrestlers. "Why leave the arena early?" he asks. "If I leave the arena early, chances are I'm going to go back to my hotel and try and find wrestling on TV. Either wrestling, or the Discovery channel." **W**

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