

ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND

World champ Mick Foley from East Setauket says: 'Top of the world, Ma!' by Bill Jensen

You think anybody can just jump in the ring and become a pro wrestling champ?

Well, listen to this: In 1989, Mick Foley, aka Mankind these days, was home on Long Island on Christmas break from the WCW circuit when the car he was riding in with some friends on a street in Port Jefferson was struck by a driver heading the wrong way.

"We go to Stony Brook Hospital," Foley's father, Jack, remembers, "and the doctors said he's in the best shape of the three of them, he's gonna make it."

One of Foley's legs was cut down to the bone. One hundred twenty-five stitches later—and minus two front teeth—he was lucky to be alive. But he had a big match in less than two weeks at the Omni in Atlanta—and there was no way he was going to miss it.

"The doctor from the university thought he was out of his mind, but he wrestled as scheduled," Jack Foley says.

Which was no surprise to the family of the wrestler out of East Setauket, who went from jumping off the roof of a neighbor's house as a kid to the gory glory as the King of the Death Matches in a blood-spattered ring in Kawasaki, Japan.

Foley's guts finally have been rewarded with a championship belt, as loyal cable-TV viewers learned Jan. 4 when he snagged the WWF world heavyweight title. The storyline that led to the momentous occasion had the makings of an instant legend.

On the same night Foley's Hannibal Lecter-esque character Mankind lost to wrestler Triple H due to a quick three-count by heel referee Shane McMahon, son of evil WWF boss Mr. McMahon, Foley decided to take matters into his own hands. Grabbing the ring microphone, he yelled to the younger McMahon "I want to show you something Jim McGonigle showed me back at old Ward Melville," and proceeded to put a devastating shoulder-breaker on him.

Jim McGonigle was the man who convinced Foley to take up wrestling in his senior year at Ward Melville High School in Setauket in 1982.

"I had both him and his brother in driver's ed in the summertime," recalls McGonigle, now a phys-ed teacher in Rocky Point. "He hadn't wrestled before, and I said 'Why don't you come out for the team? I think you'd be very successful.' He

gave it a try. At the time, he was a super heavyweight. Then he lost weight and wrestled as a heavyweight, at 217. He was a quick learner and he had a great time."

McGonigle got to see Foley take the title when a student brought in the tape this week.

"Kids were asking 'Do you teach how to break someone's shoulder?' but it's a legitimate move in high school and college," says McGonigle. "It's called a cross-body ride, with a guillotine."

Utilizing the McGonigle hold on Shane McMahon, Foley forced Papa McMahon to come out and give in to his demands—a title shot later that night against WWF champ The Rock.

Amidst the "Foley Is God" signs that pepper WWF arena shows week after week, Foley and The Rock began a classic contest that showcased Foley's incredible, uh, resiliency. Smacked in the head with the ring-side bell, slammed through the announcer's table and crushed by The Rock's signature move—"The

Corporate Elbow"—Foley escaped a pinning again and again.

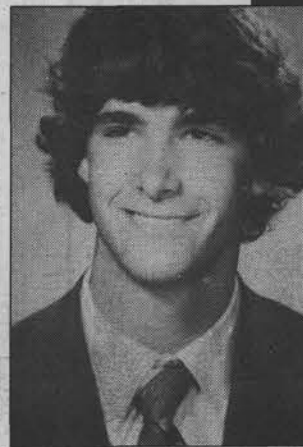
After executing his patented double-arm DDT, Mankind decided to make it interesting. Sticking his hand in his pants, Foley pulled out Mr. Socko (think of Lamb Chop's deranged cousin) and proceeded to shove his puppeted hand down The Rock's throat, locking on his always-devastating "Mandible Claw."

Incredibly, The Rock broke that hold and put Foley down. But WWF hero "Stone Cold" Steve Austin came to the rescue, slamming The Rock in the face with a chair and pulling Foley on top of the faltering champ. The ref counted to three, and wrestling fans across Long Island shed a joyful tear for their hardcore hero.

"I was at a St. John's basketball game," says Jack Foley, who teaches sports management at Adelphi. "My wife had taped it for me. I watched it when I got home and left her a message saying 'You're the mother of the new champion.'"



The faces of Mankind: As student at Ward Melville High School and WWF champ.



As pleased as Foley's parents are to see their son on top of the world, there still are times when they want to look away.

"We're just watching the tape of last night [Mankind's first successful title defense], we've got it on pause," the elder Foley says. "We just got to the part where Kane had just thrown him into the steel stairs, and we both sort of cringed."

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