

**Wrestling Safety in Manitoba  
Study Report**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On June 13th, 2003, Broad Range Alternative Talent was contracted by the Minister of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism to conduct a review of safety standards and practices in the wrestling industry in Manitoba, and to bring forward recommendations.

The scope of our study was directed in the following areas:

### **Performer preparation, training and qualifications**

- age and health status
- drug and alcohol use
- preparation and training
- performance requirements relative to skill levels
- fatigue levels and recovery times

### **Venues and equipment**

- security and crowd control
- crew training and qualifications
- set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance
- on-site medical services
- safety and contingency planning

### **Event programming**

- risk assessment procedures
- risk containment strategies
- contingency planning

In examining the above, the study identified:

current standards and practices  
current roles and responsibilities  
issues and shortcomings  
remediation strategies

The Manitoba wrestling industry has existed in various forms since the 1920's and is currently comprised of approximately a dozen promoters, who hold their events on a varied schedule ranging from a few times per week to only a few events per year. There are about 120 individuals who perform as wrestlers, referees or in other roles; a few are nationally recognized talents. The majority of current performers have entered the industry since deregulation and many are still learning their craft.

In 1996, the switch from regulation to deregulation impacted an entire generation of experienced wrestlers. Many left Manitoba or quit the business due to concern over declining standards. A

new generation of wrestlers and promoters emerged after deregulation, significant in numbers but less grounded in the traditional standards and practices of safety from earlier years.

Our study has found that the vital traditional professional wrestling culture of mentorship and safe practices passed down from veterans and experienced promoters to new participants has eroded. What is left is a downward spiral regarding safety standards in performer qualifications and training, and in event management.

More disturbing is the appearance and popularity of what is known as "backyard wrestling" whose culture of dangerous stunts and thrill-seeking is seeping into wrestling promotions and blurring the distinctions between those who are qualified to perform in a professional wrestling match in a ring, and those who are underqualified.

Many of the issues identified have contributed to a situation where third party liability insurance is becoming unobtainable or unaffordable for many promoters, thereby threatening the future of the sector and the safety of venues including community centres and bars, of performers and of spectators. The adoption of standardized safe practices by the industry may be key to easing the concerns of underwriters and ensuring promoters can access affordable policies of insurance in the future. Part of this process may also involve determining the circumstances under which underage performers are used on live events, and the overall quality of training and risk management.

Injuries in training and bouts are part of the profession. Ensuring the fitness of participants through an annual medical examination, and enacting response and treatment protocols can serve to protect the industry and prevent a tragedy in the future.

Provincial and Municipal legislation may have impact on the conduct of event and match safety and venue operations, and on the conditions of employment for underage performers. At present the wrestling industry may be operating beneath the radar of some agencies, particularly those who are complaint-driven.

Regulated jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S.A., which utilize Boxing Commissions to supervise pro wrestling, do not generally address the serious safety concerns which the industry is currently facing, or address the questions of proper training or safe ring technology. Promotions elsewhere tend to rely on experienced professional personnel to guide match content and event operations.

In Manitoba, professional wrestling is operated as an entertainment production. The safety standards and practices of the broader entertainment community such as stuntmen and theatre, is geared to protecting the performer and minimizing the risk of an insurance claim. This culture of safety awareness may be adapted to the wrestling industry.

Our study group has put forward 27 recommendations for implementation by the pro wrestling industry, the province of Manitoba and municipalities. The majority are in areas of training and event safety standards and practices, promoter and performer licensing, safe ring specifications, mandatory valid third party liability insurance, underage performers, and government oversight.

Foremost is the recommendation that the wrestling industry develop self-regulation through an inclusive and democratically elected Safety and Standards Council within 12 months, which could enact many of the study recommendations. There are recommendations for interim measures including the formation of a volunteer Council with the Province's assistance.

As well there are recommendations for the Province to circulate our findings with the Federal and other governments, to resolve the patchwork quilt of regulation which results in inconsistent safety practices being imported and exported between provinces.

## **INDUSTRY OVERVIEW**

### **Background**

The professional wrestling industry in Manitoba has operated since the early 1920s, changing in style and popularity with the times. The Manitoba Boxing Act regulated the conduct of wrestling starting in the early 30's, even though this was a period when the performance of pro-wrestling was becoming more and more choreographed. Even at this early time the lumping-in of prize fighting with the theatrical art of pro wrestling was seen by many as inappropriate and was criticized in the major newspapers.

As major out-of-province touring groups emerged and competed for the larger audiences in the 1950's and 60's, a Winnipeg club scene formed a feeder and development system. The American-based operations came to dominate the arena market and drew thousands, while the locals barnstormed at smaller venues and drew hundreds. However by 1992 the Canadian regional promotions and the U.S. company that ran Manitoba as part of its Midwest territory were all out of business.

The gentlemen's agreements of the 1950's that underpinned the territorial system gave way to US national touring groups that took over the arena venues, bought TV time and offered guaranteed contracts to talent, in an effort to monopolize the high end of the industry. National touring resulted in a reduction in the number of "major league" appearances in Winnipeg, going from 12 in 1985, to perhaps 2 or 3 by 1995. This reduction of live events fueled the perception within the local industry that there was an unmet demand for fans to see live, rather than TV, wrestling. "As true wrestling fans know, the essence of professional wrestling is the live wrestling show".

In the present day, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) of Stamford, CT, draws huge weekly television ratings, and is the "brand name of pro wrestling" in North America, attracting audiences to its 3 or 4 annual Manitoba live events that rival attendance at NHL hockey games. At the local level there is fierce competition between about a dozen locally-based independent promotions for slices of a relatively small regional pie. They also provide practically the only opportunity for aspiring Manitoba performers to learn their craft, to network with Canadian wrestlers passing through Manitoba, and to gain experience.

Many WWE performers who are now worldwide stars, such as Chris Jerico (Chris Irvine, of Winnipeg), Edge (Adam Copeland), and Lance Storm (Lance Evers), spent crucial stages of their early careers on the Manitoba "indy" scene. As well Manitoba-developed wrestlers are stars in Japan, Mexico and Puerto Rico and occasionally return to appear on local shows. Others local wrestlers headline independent productions across Canada. Of all the Manitoba wrestlers, the most famous is Roddy Piper who has headlined Pay per Views for all the major US companies and has starred in action films. It is clear that the Manitoba industry can provide a genuine opportunity for dedicated individuals to achieve success at various levels of the

wrestling and entertainment business.

In 1991 a Provincial Auditors Report into the Manitoba Boxing and Wrestling Commission's (MBWC) financial, regulatory and licensing practices resulted in the Manitoba government removing professional wrestling from the Boxing Act , eliminating MBWC authority over the wrestling industry. The decision to deregulate pro wrestling eliminated all entry requirements, licensing and other government oversight of the wrestling industry.

To allow for a better understanding of the general structure of a wrestling promotion, we have provided the following synopsis of the job titles involved and their responsibilities.

### **Roles in pro wrestling events**

Owner - this would be an individual who owns, either in its entirety or a majority of, a wrestling promotion company. An owner identified solely as such may be responsible for business operations such as paying bills but is generally NOT involved in day to day decisions about personnel, booking (scripting) decisions or wrestling/in-ring matters.

Promoter - there are two kinds of promoters. Occasionally a "*mark*" promoter, that is an individual who does not come from within the locker rooms of the industry, may find a venue, arrange for advertising, etc., and put on a wrestling event. They may either contract an established promotion to find wrestlers and then leave the direction of them to a booker at the event.

More commonly, a promoter will be a former wrestler or referee who will be more "hands-on" in hiring and firing, directing talent and storylines, dealing with the venue and placing advertising, paying for or owning a ring, as well as being the owner in whole or in part of the company. As veteran wrestlers these kinds of promoters often take charge of training their crew and new aspiring talents.

Booker - Usually this will be a wrestler, referee or manager, who directs the performers in accordance to story lines ("*angles*"). The booker will lay out a desired outcome as well as guide interviews and hype to heighten interest in the story lines. Depending on the style of the promotion and the experience of the crew, the booker may give intricate detailed directions to the performers. Traditionally in a professional level promotion, they will schedule the event (which match is presented when, length of segments, etc.) and give only a basic finish to the performers. Occasionally the booker may leave it up to the performers to agree on an ending which will satisfy those involved.

Venue management - in a licensed premises this will be the bar manager, in a community centre or private venue a designate, to whom the promoter or performers turn to for supplies, to verify timing of the event, etc. The venue management also may direct seating, provide security and otherwise maintain order. A venue may also hold a financial interest in a show by having paid a



set fee (guarantee) to the promoter, as opposed to renting the hall to a promoter.

Referee - unlike in boxing where the referee is responsible to the authorities and enforces safety and health issues, in wrestling the referee is "part of the act". They will know the desired finish of the bout and will ensure the match ends according to the promoters' satisfaction.

Manager/Valet - A manager is a ringside role traditionally played by a wrestler, to help a performer get "heat" or audience reaction designed to heighten the drama of a bout, as well as to hype story lines in interviews and monologues. The use of female valets at ringside is a relatively new phenomenon, driven by copycatting popular TV wrestling shows, and is geared more to adding sex appeal and jealous rivalries to story lines. Occasionally these story lines will build to requiring the physical involvement of the foils.

Wrestler - An experienced trained wrestler will be able to arrive late at a show, hurriedly get their gear on, enter the ring and pull off a match without necessarily even having an exact finishing sequence described to them by a promoter or booker.

To get to that professional level, a wrestler has to learn how to "work", an art of improvisation designed to elicit responses from and in responding to an audience, that mostly involves getting the crowd to engage in the willful suspension of disbelief. This is accomplished by making the impacts seem hurtful, the competitions seem "real", the emotions seem heartfelt.

In his formative stages, a wrestler will learn the basics of holds and reversals, bumping (falling onto the mat or floor) and ring navigation techniques, industry etiquette which includes insider language and cues, and how to follow the lead of a more experienced opponent and the directions (staged or legitimate) of the referee. He will then move on to develop the style required to be effective in either of the traditional roles, that of a fan favorite (*babyface*) or of a villainous opponent (*heel*).

Traditionally, a professional match was rarely scripted move for move, as the idea was to look like the action was spontaneous and improvised ("called in the ring") and not staged. (In fact even when laid out meticulously, a physical script is almost unheard of). Another reason for this is that if the art is learned solely by sequences, when the performers mistime or forget one spot, communication problems can result in a match "falling apart", and an injury could occur. Most territories still rely on the performer being able to *work* a match rather than plan it out step-by-step. A very important part of becoming an accomplished performer is learning to call the match in the ring and to listen when their opponent is directing the pace.

At the beginning levels, the promoter or booker may lay out a match hold for hold, move for move, along with the desired ending. As wrestlers get more experience they can be granted more autonomy in developing their own style and signature sequences. During the course of a match, due to timing problems, a sense the crowd is either "with it" or "not buying the act", an injury, direction from the referee or other official at ringside, or other factor such as an opponent

simply not being accomplished enough to complete the match as planned, the wrestlers may, as in football, call an audible and add, alter or eliminate certain sequences. Rarely and with only very good reason will wrestlers change the winner as decided beforehand.

### **Size of the industry**

The professional wrestling industry in Manitoba consists of about a dozen promotion companies, ninety or so male and female wrestlers and twenty or so characters such as managers, authority figures, valets, referees and ring crew. Our estimate is that 120 individuals identify themselves as part of the industry. Additionally retired performers (est. 20) occasionally make appearances and/or consider themselves friends of the industry.

The City of Winnipeg is the busiest of all Canadian wrestling centres.

The entire province of Ontario holds about 130 domestic cards annually as well as numerous "hot" or unregulated events. Edmonton has 17, Calgary 35, the Lower Mainland of BC and Vancouver Island holds about 60. By comparison Winnipeg alone hosts up to 130 events (up to 60 in community centres), and the province of Manitoba has about 170 cards per year.

During the course of a year up to a dozen promoters in Manitoba hold events in Winnipeg and centres including Brandon, Lac Du Bonnet, Beausejour, and Reserves across Manitoba, and into Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwestern Ontario.

Events take place in community centres, bars, legion halls, in schools, on reserves, and as add-on entertainment for hockey and baseball tournaments, etc. In some cases a group or venue may pay a guarantee and "rent" the show, or may have an arrangement with regards to revenue with the promoter.

Our review indicated approx. 20 wrestlers from BC, 20 from Alberta/Saskatchewan and 20 from Eastern Canada have performed here since deregulation, and so Winnipeg by virtue of central location and volume of events is a hub nationally for indy wrestling.

There are 3 individuals identified as experienced wrestlers actively training prospects and are referred to as trainers amongst wrestlers. At least 2 promotions conduct ongoing training of their crew directly, and 2 other promotions solicit for new trainees with no trainer or curriculum being publicly identified.

## METHODOLOGY

*Consultations with local industry* During the course of the study the group canvassed the industry as follows.

3 Public meetings - June 24th (1), August 12 (2)

Newspaper advertisement

Internet announcements

Attended Live events in Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lac du Bonnet

Flyer handouts at live events

Email & phone calls

Performer and promoter surveys

Personal meetings and other communications with promoters and wrestlers

Venue interviews in Brandon August 27

Newspaper advertising, Internet announcements and word-of-mouth resulted in over 40 people from the industry attending a public meeting in Winnipeg June 24. This meeting was held at a venue that restricted admittance to those over age 18. At least 9 attending were past or current promoters. At that time, surveys for performers (wrestlers, managers, valets, referees) were distributed and collected. Subsequent to the meeting surveys were also distributed to wrestlers at events or mailed, with a return envelope. Two additional meetings were held on August 12th in Winnipeg attended by about 35 people.

Between June 14th - Sept. 1st there were 36 known events held in Manitoba, conducted by 9 promotions. Two identified promotions did not operate events in Manitoba during this period. The consultants attended 14 events conducted by 7 promotions, traveling to 3 different municipalities. We met with the other 2 promoters who held events that we did not attend. We also met with one of the non-operating promotions and inspected their ring and equipment. In total we had discussions and input from all but one identified promoter.

A total of 30 of the 36 events were held in Winnipeg. One promoter, a number of wrestlers and a ring are located in Selkirk. None of the industry is based in the rest of rural Manitoba.

At these live events the consultants distributed performer and promoter surveys and flyers for the public meetings, held discussions with performers and promoters in attendance, observed the event and venue operations, evaluated rings and equipment, and fielded questions about the Study.

We identified 11 different rings in use in the province and the Occupational Health specialist examined 3 rings, and viewed 2 more on videotape. (In total the group viewed 9 rings and is familiar from past experience with the other 2 which have been offered for inspection).

***Consultations with government regulatory bodies*** Meetings were held with the Director of Workplace Safety and Health and staff; staff of the Employment Standards Branch; Director of Inspections and Licensing, Manitoba Liquor Control Commission; risk management of the City of Winnipeg; phone conversations with staff in Lac Du Bonnet, Beausejour, Selkirk, Regina, Saskatoon, the states of North Dakota and Minnesota; phone conversations with Nanaimo, Edmonton and Calgary Boxing and Wrestling Commission officials.

***Industry consultations outside Manitoba*** Conversations and correspondence with WWE; a consultant and promoter in Ontario, a promoter in BC, wrestlers in BC and Alberta who had performed in Manitoba; a promoter in California, and a former commissioner in Oregon who had wrestled in Manitoba;

***Consultations within the broader entertainment sector*** Meetings were held with officials of Manitoba Theatre Centre, a stunt coordinator for films and stage, a circus performer, a Fringe Festival official, and former wrestlers employed in media.

## **SECTION 1**

### **Analysis of Wrestling Study data: Practices of the local industry**

#### **A.) Performer preparation, training and qualifications**

##### ***Age and Health Status***

Quantitative surveys returned by wrestlers indicated that performers ranged in age from 18 to 39. The average age was 24. However, study members attended 14 shows and 3 training sessions, and personally talked to or are familiar with 10 performers under the age of 18.

The vast majority of wrestlers and promoters said there were currently no age restrictions exercised for anyone to train or to wrestle on shows. The matter of age was discussed at the first public meeting. Subsequent meetings and discussions with individuals simply expanded on issues raised at that initial meeting. There was no consensus on a minimum age. Some wrestlers and promoters wanted the minimum performing age to be 18, because they felt teenagers did not have the maturity to make decisions affecting the safety of a match; others felt that teens with natural talent that showed itself in training should not be denied an opportunity to wrestle in shows. This, in turn, led to a discussion of the insurability of an incident if a minor was involved.

Promoters received qualitative surveys to use as a basis for follow up interviews and the majority were personally interviewed during the course of the study. On the subject of age, to an extent, they took a different stance than wrestlers. They were less likely to support a minimum age but felt that proper coaching would evaluate the maturity of a teenager to train or participate.

There was no current standard to assess the health of wrestlers-- through annual medicals, for example, but the majority of wrestlers seemed to be in favor of such a precaution.

None of the promoters we interviewed required an annual medical. Some felt that the training process would weed out the weak, without risking anyone's health. One promoter supported a maximum age to train, saying the risk to health was high for anyone starting wrestling in his 30's.

There was no consensus on whose responsibility it was to assess the health and maturity of wrestlers and trainees. Some said it was trainers, some said promoters and some stated that the wrestlers themselves should be held accountable.

No venue operators raised the age or health of wrestlers as an issue. The only concerns about age were about ensuring the exclusion of under-18's at licensed premises.

##### ***Drugs and Alcohol Use***

Only one wrestler admitted using performance enhancing drugs such as steroids. At the first public meeting a few wrestlers acknowledged seeing or knowing of wrestlers drinking before matches and occasionally smoking marijuana. Drinking during a particular promotion's events was reported by concerned performers and observed on-site. There was consensus that this was no longer an acceptable practice and that it would stop if promoters, or even referees, made this clear to everyone in the industry.

Promoters, in private conversations, acknowledged that wrestlers sometimes drink before matches. One promoter said he specifically tells his performers that this is forbidden, but he said he had no way to enforce that rule; if he tried to suspend or fine a wrestler, the person could, and, in the past had, simply gone to another promotion.

Venue operators, if they addressed the issue at all, were firmly against any drinking or drug taking before or during the matches. They felt it was the promoter's job to make sure it doesn't happen but at least one venue was reported to honor coupons given out to performers by the promoter, prior to their bouts being completed. Although wrestling events in licensed premises take place on the assumption that the liability insurance of the premises covers the activities of the event, antics that violate The Liquor Control Act and result in an incident and litigation may invalidate the insurance paying the claim.

### ***Skills, Preparation and Training***

Based on local industry consultations, training was the single most important safety issue raised during the study.

Of the 25 wrestlers responding to the question, only 4 began training before 1996 (when wrestling was deregulated), 17 of the respondents attended wrestling school, 12 learned in a one-on-one setting, and 7 were trained "informally". Two-thirds did not receive a written curriculum or have their performance reviewed on video. After initial training, the vast majority of new skills were learned from other performers, or were self-taught, in some cases from TV. Less than half of the respondents were taught about ring construction and safety.

There is a great range in the type of training available in Manitoba. It ranges from a course that offers the basics of professional wrestling through informal sessions after the ring is set up before events, to a trainers who uses an extensive written curriculum and video review over the course of about 6 months. The cost of training ranges from \$50 for a few hours of ring time (but the free labour in ring set up and tear down is assumed to count for some value) to \$2500 or more for a 75-100 hour 5 week course that included mat wrestling, weight training and conditioning, nutrition, ring psychology and safety and an in-ring component.

Wrestlers that had taken or were taking serious training programs were unanimous that proper training is the keystone of safety in the professional wrestling world. They said that training had

to go beyond just the physical toughening and knowledge of the routines that a wrestler needs, to include an understanding of the culture and how wrestlers interact. The latter was something only imparted through a careful training program with a veteran trainer. Much has to be learned through a slow controlled introduction onto live events. These respondents felt that poorly trained wrestlers should not be allowed to perform on shows.

The majority of wrestlers and promoters we have heard from felt that proper gear is a necessity. We heard many first hand accounts of wrestlers who were cut by footwear that were not regulation wrestling boots, that is a flat shoe without any dangerous buckles, clips, etc on the boot that could cause harm. It was also felt that proper gear is correlated with training and professionalism and showed commitment to being a serious rather than a hobby participant in the industry.

Others, newer to the business, did not put a high value on such all-around training. They were anxious to get into the ring to perform and felt that learning some basics was sufficient.

Promoters, almost all of whom were wrestlers or former wrestlers, agreed on the importance of proper training of wrestlers. Better-trained wrestlers put on better shows which meant the promoters might eventually be able to charge more for their product, they said. But many promoters acknowledged they use under-trained wrestlers on their shows.

Promoters said it was the wrestlers' responsibility to improve their skills. Two promoters said they view their operations as training grounds where younger wrestlers could learn and improve skills "on the job." Another promoter said he ran a training centre and encouraged all his wrestlers to pay fees and attend to improve their training, but that few took him up on his offer. He said he couldn't insist on only using better-trained wrestlers on his events, because his crew would, and had, rejected such pressure by going to other promotions.

Some wrestlers were of the opinion that nobody could judge their qualifications to perform as long as venues were expecting wrestling shows to compete in price and as an attraction to "extreme sports" or other entertainment that did not have any standards for training whatsoever. One such mentioned was girls boxing in bars. It was noted that those events invite untrained female patrons to don boxing gloves and engage in a real fight for prize money wrestlers considered substantial. Rock bands will rent a ring from a promoter and put on hardcore (weapons) bouts between sets. Girls mud wrestling has recently emerged in bars and there is concern about those participants entering wrestling.

Venue operators did not comment about the training of wrestlers.

### ***Fatigue levels and recovery times***

This was not an issue among any of the groups. Wrestlers do not perform often enough in

Manitoba for this to be a factor on safety, according to the wrestlers and promoters that were surveyed.

## **B) Venues and equipment**

### ***Security and Crowd Control***

Of 29 wrestlers who answered this survey question, 12 said they had performed at a venue where they had concerns for performer and audience safety. Over 50%, 15 of 28 respondents, said they were not satisfied with crowd control on cards they had performed on.

Wrestlers at the public hearings said their greatest concerns were the safety of children at ringside. They felt it was the promoter's responsibility to ensure a safety zone.

The promoters at the public hearings said they made conscious efforts to keep spectators a safe distance from the ring on their shows. They did this by using barriers, removing seats around the ring, and having their crews watch for people, especially children, who breached the safety zone. Trainees most often provided security. One promoter indicated that he has had incidents at bar shows involving fans but not at Community Centres. Due to the qualities of being family-oriented, clean and well-lit, and having proper facilities for the wrestlers, Community Centres are seen as safe and desirable venues.

Promoters were not observed at live events providing specific instructions to their security to actively control crowd movement or actions or keep aisles clear.

On site inspections and talks with venue operators indicated they depended on promoters to handle security and crowd control as it affected the wrestling shows. No staff from any venues was observed providing ringside security. One major venue said they relied on their contracted security service to monitor the events, but that venue has not hosted an event recently.

### ***Crew Training and Qualifications***

A few promoters designated ring crew chiefs-- individuals that were more experienced in putting up the ring and on what the ring should "feel" like when it was properly set up. Some promoters relied on underage teens or other trainees to provide free labour and stated that they themselves verify the ring was ready for use.

The referees were to keep an eye or more accurately, a foot on the condition of the ring platform as an event unfolded. Wrestlers were observed communicating ring conditions and issues to performers who were to follow them onstage.

### ***Set-up, condition monitoring, and maintenance***

Of 29 wrestlers who answered a survey question regarding ring set-up, 20 (67 percent) said



they had performed in a ring that they considered unsafe, and 21 said they had performed in a ring that other performers considered unsafe. Yet, asked if they performed in a ring that promoters or bookers warned was unsafe, only six (20 percent) answered "yes." All but two said they inspected the ring before their performance.

Less than half (12 of 27) said their training included how to evaluate ring safety and stability.

Next to training, the issue of safety of rings garnered the most discussion at the public meetings. However despite the high number of wrestlers who said they had been in rings they considered unsafe, at the public meetings there was next to no finger-pointing or blaming anyone for the condition of those rings. Observations were more directed at how rings were set-up and monitored and whether these practices needed improvement. The most repeated story was that everyone who trains learns to set up a ring, that the lowest trainees on the pecking order are assigned the set-up duties.

During the later public meetings, the discussion turned to having the referee designated to be specifically responsible for the ongoing monitoring of ring conditions. At live events wrestlers were observed communicating ring conditions and issues to performers who were to follow them onstage.

Three promoters said they have designated ring crew chiefs, individuals experienced in setting up rings and verifying they are safe for use. Three promoters said they took direct responsibility for verifying the rings were safe for use. Site inspections and talks with other promoters indicated they use trainees, often underage wrestling trainees, for set-up duties and no protocol for ensuring ring safety. We observed no written plans for construction of the rings we saw at shows. No measuring devices were used to determine the tension on the ropes or cables. One promoter said in a sit-down interview that he had colour-coded instructions for his crew. During site visits, rings or components were observed to break or fail on 6 occasions.

Venue operators left the set-up of rings to the promoters although they expressed a concern that aisles and general access to the bar was maintained.

### ***On-site medical services***

Only 9 of 29 of respondents to the wrestler's survey said that on-site first aid or other medical services were available when they performed. Less than 25% (7 of 29) said that there was someone trained in first aid there if needed.

At the first public meeting this was not discussed as a major issue. However by the second and third meetings a consensus had developed that first aid training and presence was a good idea and discussion turned to how to pay for first aid training for at least one member of every show.

The majority of those wrestlers and promoters who spoke to the issue said they supported having referees trained in first aid, and the idea that a course should be available to all was

raised. There was a consensus that trainers should be qualified in first aid as well.

Promoters at the meetings did not oppose first aid training but they were concerned over whether they would be forced to pay for it.

Venue operators did not address the issue.

### ***Safety and Contingency Planning***

The referees were expected to monitor the ring conditions by promoters. During site visits their inexperience was evident as many times the canvas was not even swept off before or between the bouts (a basic courtesy in the industry) and they did not check on or accompany wrestlers to the dressing room when the bout was concluded. Ringside security was often provided by trainees/newer wrestlers or hangers-on who were not familiar with their surroundings or were too absorbed with the bouts.

Some of the buildings came equipped with first aid kits, some did not. Some of the wrestlers were known to have First Responder training but there was no formal protocol evident for sudden incidents that might require care. In the first meeting no one really knew who had final say about safety or contingency planning, but a majority at the second and third meetings began leaning toward having a referee given the responsibility of checking that a ring is safe. In interviews some performers voiced concerns about some promoters not ensuring injured participants received medical treatment promptly, and commented on the responsibility of promoters when injuries occur.

The inability to acquire affordable liability insurance was cited by promoters and wrestlers as a threat to the future of the industry, as venues are increasingly requiring such insurance. One promoter indicated he was only able to acquire coverage with great difficulty and at a cost of \$7000 per annum, which 3 years ago cost \$1000. Another promoter told the consultants he had allowed events, contracted in a venue with which he held an agreement that included proof of insurance, to be operated by a different promoter who had no contract with the venue or policy of insurance. This practice of "lending" or "borrowing" another's insurance and how that may affect the validity of the policy if a claim resulted, was cited as a concern by many promoters and performers.

## **SECTION 2**

### **BURDEN OF INJURY**

33 Injuries resulting in 99 treatments were reported by 29 wrestlers, and there were about 30% more injuries resulting in treatments from training than from matches. Eleven emergency room visits were reported. About a dozen injuries resulted in visits to general practitioners and 6 injuries were treated through chiropractic care. Only 4 injuries were reportedly seen by orthopedic specialists.

Of those who responded to the survey, about the same number of injuries were reported from training (36) as from matches (34). Knee and shoulder injuries and bruising were most common (10 or more), followed by ankle injuries, concussions, wrist and elbow and back injuries. One skull fracture was reported. Injuries to hands, and head and eyes, emerged from matches but none were reported during training.

Our interviews gleaned some significant examples of injuries:

- 1) A very experienced and respected wrestler, 35, took a bad fall over the top rope and hit his head. The wrestler got a concussion, not his first, and was taken by ambulance to an emergency room. This summer he showed no ill effects or resulting nerves, and remains a star across the country.
- 2) An inexperienced teenage valet sustained a cervical fracture and a lumbar fracture. She was 14 at the time. She was asked by a young wrestler to practice a Mexican vaulting leap and head scissors takedown, called a Huricanrana, and the two did not execute the move safely.
- 3) A young wrestler in his 20's sustained a fractured cervical vertebrae in the late 1990's and retired to continue his education. He returned briefly to wrestle in 2003 but upon taking a bump reinjured his neck and has again had to leave the industry.
- 4) Despite all having concerns about a wrestler being under the influence, the promoter, a referee and his opponent allowed a match to continue, and upon the finishing maneuver, the wrestler suffered sufficient trauma to be taken by ambulance to an emergency room.
- 5) At one of the public meetings, a referee cited an incident in which a wrestler was knocked unconscious. Rather than stabilize the performer, other wrestlers and crew carried him from the ring to the dressing room and revived him.
- 6) A newspaper reported that a wrestler confronted a fan who poured beer onto him during a match. Security had already intervened to remove the fan, and the altercation was quickly broken up.

7) At a show held in a bar, a young performer of limited training and experience attempted a flying move off the top rope despite being instructed not to do so by an experienced performer booking the finish of the match. He landed on his head and neck, knocking himself out, and an ambulance was called to take him to the emergency room where X-rays and a Catscan were taken.

## **SECTION 3**

### **ANALYSIS RELATIVE TO PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEGISLATION AND REGULATION**

The professional wrestling industry in Manitoba has operated in a legislative vacuum since deregulation in 1996. No legislation or regulation at either the provincial or municipal levels applies directly to professional wrestling, and any peripheral laws and regulations that could be applied to wrestling have not been employed.

**The Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health Act** contains definitions of a “worker” and of a trainee which could bring wrestlers under the purview of subsequent sections which define the duties of employers (4(2)) and contractors (7(1)) to keep workplaces safe and of workers to take responsibility for the safety of their jobs. Under 43(1) of the Act, workers also have a right to refuse dangerous work. The definitions also include a “structure” as a workplace and includes a wrestling ring. The Director of Workplace Safety can under 40(1) designate a workplace or class of workplace at which an employer must enable the set up of a safety and health committee.

**The Employment Standards Code** defines a “child” as under 16 and an “adolescent” as aged 16 or 17, then requires a permit for the employment of children. The director can deny a permit if he feels safety, health or the well-being of the child is at risk.

**The Liquor Control Act** has no regulations affecting professional wrestling events in licensed premises other than bans on disorderly persons.

**City of Winnipeg** licensing regulations have 4 standard insurance-related requirements for groups or individuals who wish to rent or lease City venues, with an extra requirement for wrestling events.

In April 2002, the City added the extra requirement of a Certificate from the insurer verifying “(insured) operations to include entertainment style wrestling.” When the City directly inquired about acquiring such a certificate for a promoter who had recently signed a Facilities Use Agreement, the insurer stated that the policy issued to him covered other forms of “entertainment”, but not wrestling, and cancelled the policy due to a material breach. Immediately thereafter the promoter, due to not holding adequate liability insurance, ceased operating in city venues.

These affect the practices of the local industry in the following ways:

#### **A.) Performer preparation, training and qualifications**

##### ***Age and health status***

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations look at the health of wrestlers before, during, or after they are in the ring. There was no indication from wrestlers, promoters or others in the industry that children under 16 currently are used in any capacity although it was done in the recent past, or that they have ever needed permits to work on shows.

### ***Drug and alcohol use***

Not even the Liquor Control Act bans the use of alcohol by performers on a wrestling show. There was no indication that anyone has ever made a Workplace Safety and Health complaint of an unsafe workplace due to use of drugs or alcohol on wrestling shows.

### ***Preparation and training***

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations govern or oversee the training, or lack thereof, for wrestlers in Manitoba.

### ***Performance requirements relative to skill levels***

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations relate to whether wrestlers or referees are qualified to do their roles on a wrestling show.

### ***Fatigue levels and recovery times***

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations deal with the recovery times or fatigue levels of professional wrestlers.

## **B. Venues and equipment**

### ***Security and crowd control***

The Liquor Control Act sec. 96 requires licensed venues to have security measures in place to prevent disorderly conduct. But these measures are a back-up to the crowd control that venues expect to be provided by a wrestling promotion.

### ***Crew training and qualifications***

Under section 87 of the Construction Industry Safety Regulation 189/85R, an employer must ensure an experienced worker supervise erecting a temporary support system.

No other provincial or municipal laws or regulations specifically relate to crew training or qualifications.

### ***Set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance***

Under the Workplace Safety and Health Act, the Construction Industry Safety Regulation (sec. 88) requires employers to provide design drawings and other information for a Temporary Support Structure, to a health and safety officer. The design must be approved and signed by a professional engineer and the drawing shall also include exact specifications as to materials and grades of all components, load capacity, the drawing must be adhered to and must be kept at

the site at all times.

***On-site medical services***

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations require on-site medical services or the knowledge of first aid by anyone in a professional wrestling show.

***Safety and contingency planning***

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations apply.

**C. Event programming**

- risk assessment procedures**
- risk containment strategies**
- contingency planning**

City of Winnipeg through the Facilities Use Agreement requires promoters to hold liability insurance of \$2 Million in civic venues. No other provincial or municipal laws or regulations apply.

**SECTION 3 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION**

- There are no laws currently enforced in the province that affect pro wrestling safety standards and practices.**
- The Workplace Safety and Health Act has not been applied to the wrestling industry since 1997. Prior to that year, the Province regulated wrestling as a sport. The Act does not apply to sports, but the Department has not since deregulation contemplated their role in what wrestling truly is, sports-entertainment.**
- Licensees have no expertise in conducting wrestling events and place trust in the promoters who themselves may not be aware of The Liquor Control Act regulations.**
- Venue operators may not realize they can be held accountable for safety deficiencies during wrestling events. There is a perception in parts of the industry that where wrestlers are contracted or otherwise considered to be self-employed, promoters and venues are not responsible for safety standards. Under the Act, principle contractors may still be responsible for the conditions of the workplace.**
- There are no regulations against wrestlers or other entertainers drinking on the job.**
- One promoter allowed another promoter to operate events under his Facilities Use Agreement and insurance in a City venue, without being present to provide direct supervision or responsibility for the conduct of the matches.**
- The City of Winnipeg was concerned that insurers were not being made aware that the policies of insurance being issued were to cover entertainment style wrestling.**

## **SECTION 4**

### **ANALYSIS RELATIVE TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING INDUSTRY**

**Other jurisdictions** - Regulation of pro wrestling in Canada is contained in one province, and about 10 municipalities in the perceived authority of Sec. 83 of the Criminal Code to empower Boxing Commissions to oversee wrestling. Regulation in the US is similar. Some states (approx. 19) regulate wrestling through Boxing Commissions or licensing authorities and collect fees to subsidize activities. Some American cities have local regulations and Indian Reservations can determine their own rules, although our scan did not find any significant evidence that these 2 systems are impacting industry safety.

#### **Other Provinces**

##### **Ontario**

Professional wrestling in Ontario is under the control of the Ontario Athletic Commission (OAC). Ontario hosts 130 events annually, about the same as Winnipeg alone. Another estimated 40 unlicensed shows are run annually. There are about 25 licensed promoters, although not all are actively running shows.

Ontario requires \$1 million third party liability insurance for shows. Only one promoter has an annual policy and about six pay up to \$550 a show on a per event basis. Promoters pay \$1000 security deposits against projected gate tax of 2%. Wrestlers require a licence which costs \$75.

##### **Saskatchewan**

The Saskatoon and Regina Boxing and Wrestling Commissions have both been abolished since 2000. There are two promotions and about 20 wrestlers in the province, but only about 15 to 20 live shows a year. Manitoba promotions also tour Saskatchewan.

##### **Alberta**

Calgary has a Boxing and Wrestling Commission with 9 members, regulating about 35 shows a year. They do not oversee aspects of safety such as ring specifications, training qualifications or other areas considered by this study. Lethbridge has a Commission but there is not much activity. Edmonton has a more active Boxing and Wrestling Commission. The city has two promoters and about 16 shows a year. The Commission has the following basic rules.



## "Part 9: Professional Wrestling

9.1 No professional wrestler shall make contact with any spectator during a contest.

9.2 The promoter of a professional wrestling show shall ensure that wrestlers do not make contact with spectators during a contest.

9.3 The promoter of a professional wrestling show shall ensure that the show is conducted safely and decently.

9.4 When it appears to him that a wrestler is not in proper physical or mental condition to participate in a contest, the Commission's representative may prohibit a wrestler from taking part in a show. "

Insurance is required in the amount of \$1 Million but they are aware that this is becoming unavailable.

Licensing - promoters pay \$200 per show vs. 3% of the gate but a local group can get a reduction to \$100 per show if they are planning a number of consecutive shows. Wrestlers pay \$30 for a licence and as there is no age restriction minors hold licences.

## **British Columbia**

Boxing and Wrestling Commissions exists in Nanaimo, Victoria, and Prince George. Nanaimo promoters require a \$5 million liability insurance policy. They are licensed for \$15 a year and must pass an RCMP background check. Little activity takes place in the other two cities.

The Vancouver Athletic Commission used to regulate professional wrestling in that community but ended that oversight this year and views wrestling as an entertainment activity.

The British Columbia Liquor Control and Licensing Branch used to ban contact sports, including pro wrestling, in establishments but as of August 2003, allows "live prize-fighting, kick-boxing, and similar contact sports events on premises provided (the licensee) applies to the general manager (of the LCLB) for approval in advance, do not involve patrons, and take steps to protect both staff and patrons." Licensees must also apply to the general manager for a permanent licence change to host such events.

## **National/International bodies**

### **WWE (formerly WWF)**

The only major worldwide touring company in the pro wrestling industry. They refer to their product and presentation style as "sports entertainment". Their revenue in 2002-2003 was \$374,264,000. Their enormous TV exposure drives many of the trends in the industry. They contract almost all established and emerging wrestlers in North America, and also fund a developmental promotion in Ohio.

Based on a year 2000 sample, talent contracts provide guidelines for performers training, match safety and augment company practices in risk management. Rings are specifically manufactured to WWE's specifications. The fact the performers wrestle each other often in the same ring (familiarity) is cited as a safe practice.

This organization promotes major events in the Manitoba market approximately 3 times per year. Some performers in Manitoba have appeared on WWF/WWE television in the past. As a touring company based in the USA, there is no real involvement of the Manitoba industry in their events, although about 6 of their current wrestlers have appeared in local industry wrestling rings since 1996. In some cases local wrestlers may be used to fill out events.

### **NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE (NWA)**

The National Wrestling Alliance is a continent-wide organization of regional promotions in the wrestling industry. The National Wrestling Alliance, and its precedent, the National Wrestling Association was for almost 60 years the dominant organization in the wrestling industry in North America and worldwide. Upon the decline of the territorial system and the emergence of national wrestling companies, the NWA has seen membership drop from up to 35 strong regions in 1980 to about 20 members across North America and the UK, including Manitoba.

The current members are promotions like those found in Manitoba, in that only a few have TV shows or operate regularly. The NWA Board of Directors decides on various champions that members are required to contract a few times per year at a set rate.

A review of the NWA Bylaws as of Feb. 28, 2002 reveals no provisions that mandate any safety standards or affect safety. There are no requirements to qualify wrestlers or certify training; many promotions used the NWA brand to hype their own training schools. There is no NWA standard as to medical exams, equipment, rings, venue management, liability insurance or any other issue that was raised in our study.

A provision added after Feb. 2002 apparently requires that an NWA member be licensed and in good standing with their local Wrestling Commission where one exists, and adhere to the regulations set forth under those laws.

The standards and practices of NWA promotions in BC, California and Manitoba were compared for this study. The promotion in BC did not seem to operate in jurisdictions in the territory that have Commissions, while the promoter in Manitoba is licensed in Ontario where he also operates. Both heavily relied on training facilities for talent development until recently. The promotion in California sub-contracted an existing promotion to provide talent and all 3 promotions often book outside veteran talent as featured performers.

## **US STATE LAWS**

Among the more notable laws and practices are:

**ILLINOIS** - 2 state legislators and the crime commissioner want to see a disclaimer precede the performances as well as before the popular wrestling shows aired on several networks. They hope Illinois can prompt a federal requirement.

The initiative was prompted by a Naperville teen that was paralyzed after another boy subjected him to a "piledriver", a hold in which a wrestler's skull is driven toward the mat with force.

**LOUISIANA** bans piledrivers and requires that wrestlers sign a form indemnifying the Commission.

**NEBRASKA** - Commission approves all time and dates and the Commissioner must approve all "weapons" for use as well as give prior approval if wrestlers plan to take the match outside of the ring.

**NEVADA** - in 2001 the basic cost to run a wrestling event was over \$1000 a show.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE** requires an 18 foot ring be used and "2 or 3 inches" of padding in a single 18 foot section.

**NEW JERSEY** - deregulated professional wrestling in 1998 but moved to outlaw "EXTREME WRESTLING" in 2000. They defined both activities to illustrate the difference.

"n. "Wrestling" means a bona fide athletic contest in which participants struggle hand-to-hand with the object of winning by throwing an opponent or scoring points and in which any purpose of providing entertainment is secondary.

o. "Extreme wrestling" means an activity in which participants struggle hand-to-hand and cut, slash or strike each other or themselves with an implement to intentionally cause bleeding or perform any intentional act which could reasonably be expected to cause bleeding, primarily for the purpose of providing entertainment to spectators rather than conducting a bona fide athletic contest.

To further such public confidence and trust, the regulatory provisions of this act are designed to extend strict State regulation to all persons, practices and associations related to the operation of any boxing, wrestling, extreme wrestling, kick boxing or combative sports exhibition, event, performance or contest held in this State.

The Legislature further finds and declares that, because its principal purpose is to entertain without injuring or disabling one of the participants, professional wrestling should be excluded from this system of regulation and control.

C.5:2A-18.1 Ringside physicians, ambulance required."

**NEW YORK** - The State Assembly passed the Wrestlers Safety and Health Act on Oct 1, 2002. The State Athletic Commission requires promotions that run more than 6 times a year to have a written drug policy including printed educational material. Drug testing is not mandatory, is at the promoters expense, and no sanctions are included for a failure of a drug test. Furthermore, the bill removes licensing of participants (no more medical exams) and provides only for licensing of promoters.

**NORTH CAROLINA** - The N.C. Boxing Commission, which also oversees kickboxing and "toughman" events, wants to regulate pro wrestling. In South Carolina or Virginia, wrestlers must be at least 18, pass annual physicals and, like promoters, pay a fee. State agents visit matches to ensure participants and promoters are licensed and insured. Wrestlers often move among the three states, working for the two dozen promoters in each. Industry officials say there are more than 200 pro wrestlers in North Carolina, compared with 200 licensed in South Carolina this year and 1,500 in Virginia.

**OREGON** had the most stringent laws, requiring drug tests, defining actual fouls and requiring referees by law to enforce the Commission's edicts. WWE as a result did not operate in the State for over 10 years. Complaints that unlicensed shows outnumbered the legal ones, and the sudden demand to enforce the "rules" on a TV network-sponsored local wrestling program, resulted in an embarrassing uproar and the State reduced oversight to matters of licensing and fees in 2003.

**WASHINGTON STATE** licenses promoters and requires performers to be licensed and provide a medical. It has also required ambulances be present at events.

Some other authorities are located in the states of Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Alaska, Mississippi, and Maryland, and in the cities of Mansfield, Ohio; Baker, Oregon; Cleveland, Ohio; and Washington, DC. There is no regulation regarding professional wrestling in North Dakota or Minnesota, the 2 states adjoining Manitoba.

### **Off-shore industry examples**

Wrestling is more deeply rooted in the cultures of Japan and Mexico and the entry requirements as enacted by the promoters and wrestlers as gatekeepers/mentors are generally more onerous than in North America.

**Japan:** In Japan an apprenticeship-mentorship model similar to Sumo is the norm. It is normal for "young boys" (beginners) to have to do all the arduous tasks including set-up of equipment, carrying bags for the veterans and even washing the back of the owner in the baths. This is meant to instill respect for the effort and tradition that forms the foundation of the wrestling culture in Japan. The conditioning expected of prospects far exceeds that of the typical North American promotion, as illustrated by this example

In public tryouts, 200 applicants were considered and cut down to a field of 23. Then it was narrowed even more down to 6. Those 6 had to complete the following tasks to "make it": 100 Abdominal crunches, 2 rounds or 200 total, 50 leg-abdominal exercises, 100 back exercises, 2 rounds or 200 total, 30 arm & shoulder exercises 3 rounds or 300 total and 300 hindu squats. It was considered a very basic program to test the field's abilities and conditioning level. The promoter expected a good percentage of the participants would complete the program, allowing them to be trained.

Out of the final six applicants, none completed any of the tasks. In other words not one of the tasks above was completed. The applicants were vomiting and giving up prior to completing the tasks. The promoter was shocked that none of the applicants were able to pass any of the physical tests, and said the trainees' standards of physical strength has fallen and he is having a hard time finding young Japanese people who are in shape.

**Mexico:** Lucha Libre is as much a part of life in Mexico as hockey is in Canada. Until the crash of the peso a few years ago the country supported at least 3 major promotions in the Distrito Federal (Mexico City) alone. On Sundays hundreds of cards were held and featured wrestlers would appear at 2 or 3 shows one after another. The northern states (Tijuana and Monterrey) had their own major promotions as well, and North American wrestlers would often commute from California and Texas to appear on events. One Canadian-born performer told a major magazine recently he did up to 7 shows a Sunday. Economic conditions and oversaturation of wrestling on TV led to a decline in wages and jobs.

Lucha style is right hand, rather than left hand based, and has within it set routines such as dives between the ropes, springboard dives over the ropes, and other set bits that all performers are

expected to perform in almost every match. The rings were traditionally stiff ("hard as concrete"), and that meant the correct way to fall in Mexico was more of a roll and not a back bump. The deep cultural roots are such that the matches are almost always "technico vs rudo" (good guy vs bad guy or "babyface vs heel" in North American wrestling lingo). Mexican culture is reflected in rivalries that revolve around the taking of an opponents mask (mascara contra mascara), elevating to haircut matches (hermanos contra hermanos), culminating in title bouts with age-old belts at stake. These bouts require special knowledge and training as to pacing and performance. The emotional attachment of the fans often led to volatile situations and the wrestlers are taught specifically how to deal with riots, debris being tossed and fans wanting to fight (especially the white "gringo" heels).

The individual Mexican states have regulatory commissions and enforce some standards such as honoring match stipulations, styles of bouts and wrestlers' licensing and medicals. There is also a wrestlers' union that holds annual fundraising cards and has made demands upon the promoters and TV networks in the past.

## **Analysis of Standards and Practices**

### **A. Performer preparation, training and qualifications**

#### ***Age and health status***

Edmonton licenses minors to wrestle

WWE has rarely used minors, and those were from families well-established in the industry. Some performers have been up to age 80. Wrestlers have an annual medical, which includes full blood testing. Medicals are filed as required, for licensing in a few jurisdictions.

NWA Manitoba and BC allow minors to wrestle and referee.

South Carolina and Virginia require wrestlers be 18 and pass a medical.

Washington State requires wrestlers to pass a medical.

Japan and Mexico both allow underage trainees.

#### ***Drug and alcohol use***

Edmonton prohibits wrestlers who are "not in proper physical or mental condition"

WWE - Contracts state: "TALENT shall select his own foods, vitamins and other ingested items, excepting illegal and/or controlled substances and drugs, which are prohibited by COMPANY's Drug Policy." As WWE operates events more than 6 times annually in New

York State they also adhere to the requirement of that state.

New York State requires companies that hold 6 or more events per year to have a printed drug policy.

Washington State requires annual drug tests as part of the medical

### ***Preparation and training***

WWE - New performers are schooled in the WWE style at their warehouse gym in Connecticut even if they are already accomplished professionals. An agreement with an Ohio group, OVW, under supervision of very respected industry figures, forms a kind of farm team for wrestlers to be developed or for injured wrestlers to recondition. Many emerging wrestlers have been signed out of a California group as well as from a competing national TV promotion. WWE Contracts state: "TALENT shall be responsible for TALENT's own training, conditioning, and maintenance of wrestling skills and abilities...appropriate to obtaining and maintaining physical fitness for wrestling"

NWA - NWA BC has used backyarders in the past but now requires all wrestlers to be trained by a recognized program, and has booked established/veteran talent for feature bouts at times. Match content was discussed and mimed by talent with direction from promoters and bookers.

NWA California used wrestlers and trainees of an established promotion as sub-contractors and booked established/veteran talent for feature bouts. Match content was discussed and mimed at length before shows by talent under advice of promoters and bookers.

NWA Manitoba has used under-trained performers recently but also has used veteran performers as well. Matches are discussed before the events.

Japan and Mexico have long apprenticeships and physical training to prepare prospects.

### ***Performance requirements relative to skill levels***

Ontario prohibits women from wrestling men on local promotions, but allows WWE to conduct such matches based on their presumed level of professional talent and precautions.

WWE contracts state: "TALENT shall use best efforts in employing TALENT's skills and abilities as a professional TALENT and be responsible for developing and executing the various details, movements, and maneuvers required of wrestlers in a professional wrestling exhibition."

Louisiana bans piledrivers presuming the maneuver is too dangerous regardless of training.

### ***Fatigue levels and recovery times***

No information was found that impacts this area.

## **B. Venues and equipment**

### ***Security and crowd control***

Edmonton requires that shows be run "safely and decently" i.e. -do not incite a riot.

WWE - WWE now books only major venues which monitor their own security needs. Every event has a WWE security chief assigned to ensure the safety of WWE employees.

NWA BC/NWA California/ NWA Manitoba used trainees and wrestlers for security, NWA California also had on-site security staff.

NWA Manitoba relies on in-house security staff in bar venues.

Nebraska can refuse to license a venue site for an event. As well "the highest level of safety must be maintained by the contestants and spectators at all times."

### ***Crew training and qualifications***

WWE - To ensure rings are set up properly, only experienced technicians handle the ring and referees are part of the ring crew .

NWA BC/ NWA California both used experienced ring crews.

### ***Set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance***

WWE declined to allow examination of their rings as those are manufactured to WWE's specifications and are proprietary information. Referees and ringside officials monitor conditions.

NWA BC/ NWA California each used rings supplied by associated promoters, both had a producer or official at ringside during events and referees were to be aware of conditions.

NWA Manitoba promoter supervises and tests his ring before use and attends at ringside. He has also used another promoter's ring.

New Hampshire requires 18 ft. rings that have 4 ropes at a set distances from each other.

### ***On-site medical services***

WWE - touring groups have their own trainer to treat injuries. A Doctor attends all TV events.

NWA BC had performers on shows qualified in First Aid and carries a kit.

NWA California had staff with First Aid and a kit on-site.



NWA Manitoba relies on the facility having a first aid kit.

New Jersey requires a ringside physician at Extreme wrestling events.

### ***Safety and contingency planning***

WWE on tour meets all standards set out by venues or regulatory bodies for ambulances, EMT's etc. and touring security chiefs review venue layouts during set-up

New Jersey requires an ambulance on-site of Extreme wrestling events

Washington State requires an ambulance at wrestling events

## **C. Event programming**

### ***Risk assessment procedures***

Promoters are licensed in Edmonton, Nanaimo, Victoria, Calgary and Ontario.

WWE - An entire department is dedicated to risk management and event operations. The company employs a stunt coordinator. Very experienced agents (retired wrestlers) go through the desired presentation of the bouts with the participants.

Talent contracts state: "TALENT shall take such precautions as are appropriate to avoid any unreasonable risk of injury to other wrestlers in any and all Events. These precautions shall include, without limitation, pre-match review of all wrestling moves and maneuvers with wrestling partners and opponents; and pre-match demonstration and/or practice with wrestling partners and opponents to insure familiarity with anticipated wrestling moves and maneuvers during a wrestling match."

### ***Risk containment strategies***

Edmonton prohibits wrestlers from engaging fans and makes the promoter responsible for this as well.

WWE - There is an emergency response protocol. In the past five years WWE has seen one in-ring death from a failed stunt and one instance of paraplegia from an errant slam. If a performer gets hurt, the referee, who wears an earpiece to get cues from the production staff, signals "X" and EMT's immediately respond.

Talent contracts state: "In the event of injury to TALENT, and/or TALENT's partners and opponents during a wrestling match, TALENT shall immediately signal partner, opponent and/or referees that it is time for the match to end; and TALENT shall finish the match forthwith so as

to avoid aggravation of such injury."

Nebraska must approve all weapons and plans to wrestle outside the ring

New Jersey tightly regulates Extreme wrestling

### ***Contingency planning***

Ontario and Edmonton require \$1 million third party liability insurance, Nanaimo \$5 million

WWE - carries full third party liability coverage as required by venues.

The City of Winnipeg requires \$2 Million liability policy to operate in civic venues

NWA Manitoba carries a \$2 million liability policy.

## **SECTION 4 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION**

- **Despite exercising the authority to regulate wrestling, Canadian jurisdictions that do so have no rules addressing the training of wrestlers or their actual qualifications to be licensed.**
- **No jurisdiction addresses safe ring specifications, maintenance, or other aspects that truly impact on safety as determined by our study.**
- **There are no standards for on-site or emergency medical services or response protocols.**
- **Other jurisdictions have expressed concern about untrained thrill seekers who engage in backyard wrestling and may enter professional wrestling unchecked.**
- **Extreme wrestling and its emphasis on dangerous stunts are also cited as infiltrating performance wrestling and heightening the danger to wrestlers.**
- **Wrestling culture internationally relies on the mentorship of newer performers by experienced veteran wrestlers to impart a knowledge and respect for safe practices.**
- **The more professional and profitable a wrestling promotion is, the greater the emphasis and spending on safety. This applies to every stage from training to live event performance.**

### ***Comparison to Manitoba***

The national/international wrestling industry generally has more policies and protocols in place than exist in Manitoba:

*Performer preparation, training and qualifications* With one exception, regulated jurisdictions surveyed do not allow the licensing of minors. Many require annual medical exams. Promotions elsewhere exercise judgement on using underage performers and requiring medical exams. Policies to monitor drug and alcohol are in some use elsewhere. No jurisdictions have any regulation about training or qualifications, but some still make determinations about match content (safety). Promotions rely on the industry-based experience of promoters or bookers to determine if a wrestler is properly qualified. Use of untrained backyarders is discouraged by many promotions. (Fatigue levels and recovery times are a non-issue.)

*Venues and equipment* : Crowd control, standards for crew training, ring specifications or maintenance, on-site medical or safety contingency plans.

*Event programming* : promoter licensing or responsibility for risk assessment and stunt preparation, talent responsibility for match conduct, monitoring of an injury or emergency response, Extreme wrestling, or requirements for Third party Liability Insurance

## **SECTION 5**

### **ANALYSIS RELATIVE TO BROADER ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY**

Given the emphasis on the physical aspect of professional wrestling, it's easy to overlook the theatrical elements that give the art its structure. With this in mind, the study examined other branches of the entertainment industry as to how they manage high-risk activities within their crafts.

#### **Stuntmen**

The study interviewed Manitoba's most experienced stunt coordinator, whose work spans both motion pictures and the stage. The stuntman fraternity is a close parallel to the wrestling world. New members bring with them certain skills (driving, diving, fencing) which are honed and enhanced for the movies or stage by more senior stuntmen. Ongoing courses in stunt disciplines are available. Beginners work under the supervision of others until their mentors feel they are ready to undertake progressively more dangerous stunts on their own.

The most significant aspect of the stunt world is the existence of strong safety culture that's drilled into every member. Film Productions cost so much that any delay is to be avoided. Stuntmen are meticulous in avoiding accidents which could result in injury and a costly insurance claim on top of the lost filming time.

#### **Theatre---Manitoba Theatre Centre**

The requirement of wrestlers to portray different characters in their careers makes them actors of a sort. And stage actors are often required to engage in various rough and tumble physical activity as called for by their roles. The consultants looked at how the theatre protects its actors.

MTC tailors its stage stunts around the actor in a role. The stunts are designed by a trained stunt coordinator who adapts the stunts to the ability of the actor. Stunts beyond the actor's capability are performed by professional stuntmen. At all times the theatre is mindful that it's the actor, not the stunts, that makes the play, and the actor must be healthy and available for 29 performances a month.

#### **The circus**

A circus passing through Winnipeg said the only oversight into safety was an annual checking of the rigging, done at home office. We took note of a development within the EU that ordered performers in London, England to don protective headgear if they were to be at a height greater than a stepladder (such as trapeze artists). This rule was developed due to pressure from insurance companies.

## ***Relative Analysis of:***

### **A) Performer preparation, training and qualifications**

#### ***Age and health status***

Ability is more of a factor than age in the world of stuntmen. Because there are few openings for newcomers and the experience that's necessary to start takes years to acquire, it's unlikely that anyone under 18 would be accepted. Casting agents have no problem identifying an available experienced stunt professional in any size or shape who is of legal age.

Health concerns are not an issue with stuntmen. It is assumed that performers are fit and healthy enough to do what is required and if not they decline to do a stunt. The culture of safety would not allow corners to be cut in this respect.

#### ***Drug and alcohol use***

The use of illegal drugs or alcohol by working performers is prohibited by the stunt community, the theatre community, and the circus.

#### ***Preparation and training***

Stuntmen work under a mentor or supervisor at all times. Actors work under a stunt coordinator and director or assistant director, and are not allowed to take risks they're not fully competent to master.

#### ***Performance requirements relative to skill levels***

Stuntmen are constantly being monitored and evaluated by those more senior and experienced. They are allowed to take on more risky maneuvers only when those ahead of them believe they are ready. A growing concern is that independent filmmakers sometimes hire newcomers because they will work cheaper than the unionized, experienced stunt crews, and because they will often do riskier stunts than experienced stuntmen would undertake in order to "prove" themselves.

#### ***Fatigue levels and recovery times***

The safety culture in the stuntman community ensures performers are mentally and physically ready to safely complete the risks they are paid to take.

### **B. Venues and equipment**

#### ***Security and crowd control***

The safety culture that stuntmen live by makes security and crowd control a priority. An injury to a bystander would create as many problems for a film production as would an injury to a stuntman.

#### ***Crew training and qualifications***

Training for stuntmen is extensive just to enter the community. It is bolstered by the constant supervision by the experienced over the newcomers.

#### ***Set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance***

The safety culture of stuntmen makes set-up and monitoring a priority. The involvement of the production crew also provides a layer of protection as scenes unfold.

#### ***On-site medical services***

The high-risk nature of what stuntmen do makes on-site medical services a priority as well. Stuntmen themselves have first aid training.

#### ***Safety and contingency planning***

Stuntmen are extremely detailed when planning a stunt. Every eventuality is run through to prevent an accident.

### **C. Event programming**

#### ***Risk assessment procedures***

Stunts are carefully scripted and planned. Insurance companies review all stunts with the stunt coordinator and must be satisfied they are safe.

#### ***Risk containment strategies/contingency planning***

Film companies carry liability insurance and also post bonds with the performers union. Procedures on treating injury at the scene and getting the injured to a hospital as soon as possible are in place.

Stunt coordinators are specialists in these fields. It is their job to avoid accidents. To do this they do everything they can to assess risk and perform the stunt while minimizing the risk of something going wrong. If there is an accident they take responsibility in any enquiry by the insurance company or officials.

## **SECTION 5 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION**

- Stunt performers have a highly developed culture of safety that is self-regulating and works in conjunction with directors, producers and insurance companies to reduce risk to a minimal level.
- The training level and skill development of newcomers is left to the judgement of senior experienced stunt coordinators so that actors or others will not be scripted beyond their capabilities.
- There are concerns about some smaller filmmakers hiring stuntmen from outside the

**traditional training culture, that will do more risky stunts for less money than highly trained, unionized stuntmen.**

**- In theatre, the actor is always protected from risk. This is because actors are valued in productions and are not considered interchangeable or disposable.**

**-Safety in the arts is most effective when internally motivated.**

### ***Comparison to Manitoba***

The Manitoba wrestling industry as a whole, has few effective policies or protocols in comparison to the broader entertainment industry in relation to:

*Performer preparation, training and qualifications* : the development and maintaining of a safety culture through a mentorship/apprenticeship model (that controls entry into the industry including age and health considerations), preparation and training, discouraging alcohol or drug intoxication, providing experienced supervision (direction) and not cutting corners.

*Venues and equipment*: Security and crowd control, crew training, set up, maintenance and monitoring, on-site medical and safety and contingency planning.

*Event programming* : Stunt planning and review by experienced coordinators and production staff, and the presence of Liability Insurance as a monitor of, and driver for, safe practices.

## **SECTION 6**

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **General observations**

In public meetings, survey responses and private interviews and discussions, the pro wrestling industry in Manitoba has identified a number of serious concerns about issues which are affecting the safety of performers, fans, and venues, and have offered perspective on causes and possible solutions.

Pro wrestling is like all stunt work; laden with risk that can never be completely eliminated. The traditional goal of minimizing risk has eroded in Manitoba since deregulation.

Anyone in Manitoba can buy or rent an existing ring or get one built locally, and put on a show. Out-of province promoters occasionally venture into rural areas as well. The demand for talent to fill cards resulted in a rash of training programs. Since new wrestlers were already being featured on events, they were deemed qualified and further training was an afterthought or neglected completely.

Those promoters who have tried to maintain higher standards have been forced to share in the same inadequately trained talent pool, which has diluted their safe conduct of matches. It is felt that the issue of insurance and liability may be resulting in some experienced performers making decisions declining certain stunts, which others who cannot evaluate the risks properly are eager to attempt to gain acceptance with promoters.

In some cases backyard wrestling shows have become a feeder system for promoters trying to find new performers. The lack of experienced wrestlers and promoters meant there was no real guidance for the newcomers who continued teaching each other unsafe attitudes and habits. Promoters are challenged to maintain standards as wrestling talent may jump to other promoters who make fewer demands.

This race to the bottom in skills has been recognized by the insurance industry which has almost completely stopped covering wrestling shows. No insurance means promoters cannot book shows at safe venues such as community centres, so they have turned to bars. Licensees have no expertise in conducting wrestling events and place trust in the promoters who themselves may not be aware of the requirements of The Liquor Control Act.

The bar industry is itself desperate to find new ways of filling their venues at minimal cost, fearing the continuing impact of tougher drinking and driving laws and of the new anti-smoking bylaws. Licensed premises welcome the wider range of potential entertainment, but their lack of experience with wrestling only works to further lower standards.



Professional wrestlers and promoters are forced to compete for bookings with a variety of “extreme sports”.

Extreme wrestling is now being conducted in bars and wrestlers are placed at greater risk, as the matches in that style are wilder by definition, and there are already no adequate safety standards and practices in place. The venues may be of the view that promoters of these events are mindful of performer and patron safety, and that their insurance carrier will agree to honour a claim if one results.

Solutions will generally not be found in the standards and practices of regulated jurisdictions. For example, no regulated jurisdiction in our scan has any real safety guidelines for rings. Several jurisdictions have their own concerns about their capacity to evaluate ring safety and the adequacy of wrestler training.

The safety culture of stuntmen and the mentorship/apprenticeship model closely resembles that previously common in wrestling prior to deregulation. In terms of performer mentality and risk the professions are similar and the reliance of stuntmen on insurance liability is an aspect that could be adapted to wrestling.

#### **Detailed observations.**

##### **1) Do current safety standards and practices within Manitoba’s pro wrestling industry comply with provincial legislation and regulations, and with local government by-laws?**

There are provisions in the Workplace Safety and Health Act that could be applied to enforce standards in the areas of ring safety, structure and stability, and in reinforcing awareness of the greater responsibility of all participants.

Recently promoters have largely discontinued the use of children in events but none had acquired a permit for their participation previously. There is evidence of drinking contests at events, of breaking glass being used as a prop, and of unsafe rings in use. These practices may be in violation of Provincial regulations.

##### **2) How do current safety standards and practices in Manitoba pro wrestling compare to safety standards and practices in the pro wrestling industry as a whole in North America?**

In many instances the situation in Manitoba mirrors the decline of the industry but the pace has accelerated here.

The in-ring experience relied on by larger scale local promotions to evaluate risk and guide performances, has eroded due to disillusioned veterans leaving as described earlier, the entry of inexperienced promoters and performers, and competition between so many promotions.

The competition in Manitoba has resulted in more rings per capita than in other major centres. We saw and heard about problems with local rings, and it is noted that where standards for rings exist elsewhere they are often based on cosmetic issues or boxing standards.

**3) How do current safety standards and practices in Manitoba pro wrestling compare to safety standards and practices in the broader entertainment industry?**

The belief that modern day pro wrestling should be treated or regulated "just like theatre" is not borne out by our comparison. Both the stunt and theatre industries have experienced personnel with structured responsibilities and they are driven by the sense of having something to lose if an insurance claim results from an incident. Mentorship is a strong component in the safety culture of stunt performers which includes comprehensive training and ongoing skill development. These aspects are generally lacking in Manitoba.

Actors are protected from risk but in Manitoba pro wrestling, the attitude often is that wrestlers are replaceable, and wrestlers themselves, especially newer ones, expressed concern of retribution if they refused to do matches that emphasize extreme stunts rather than traditional wrestling holds.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**What steps, if any, should be taken, and by whom, to improve safety standards and practices within Manitoba's pro wrestling industry?**

**In regards to Self-regulation, we recommend:**

*Safety and Standards Council to be established*

**# 1. The Province should immediately call for industry volunteers, that government can assist, to establish an interim safety council for a transition period of not more than 12 months. That group should develop a process that will lead to a democratically elected wrestling industry Safety and Standards Council.**

An elected safety and standards council can act as a self-regulating body to maintain safety standards backed up by minimal provincial rules and regulations. Once safe standards are in place, we expect affordable liability insurance to become available once again. The insurance would open the way to more wrestling again being welcomed in the City of Winnipeg and other venues. Bars would not be able to hire operators who couldn't qualify for insurance, and other forms of wrestling such as backyard and Extreme would be driven to the margins, leaving the field to a renewed, viable industry.

A sizeable number of promoters and performers, including many veteran performers, have voiced their support of some form of this concept. No credible alternative has been identified and a return to a boxing-type authority would be rejected by the industry.

This recommendation is in accordance with the direction in the Terms of Reference as follows: In Manitoba, no formal industry association or professional association currently exists to monitor safety standards and practices within professional wrestling or to hold the industry accountable for adherence to generally accepted standards and practices of safety. In addition to, or as part of, other deliverables, the study being undertaken by the Government of Manitoba is expected to bring forward recommendations to help the industry address this gap.

**# 2 The Council should include democratic and open elections and be representative of promoters, wrestlers and other performers and crew. The Council should also include some representation by individuals knowledgeable in the industry who do not have a vested interest, such as retired wrestlers and promoters, or other parties with expertise and experience in wrestling safety.**

**# 3 By virtue of the recognition granted by the Province to the Council, that body can be responsible for the conduct of the industry and file complaints to authorities if unsafe rings, equipment or uncertified performers are used.**

## *Operation of Council*

**# 4 The Council can assume responsibility for ensuring all industry events adhere to safe practices by developing a checklist of event operations, requiring promoter and performer licensing, establishing ring standards, and accrediting trainers and training programs.**

**We recommend the following guidelines:**

The **checklist** should be completed and signed by the promoter, and filed with the Council and venue. It should include warranting that the ring meets standards (see appendix) and is set up properly; that all equipment is safe and approved for its use; that performers are properly trained and fit to perform: that First Aid and First Responder are on-site; that Third Party Liability Insurance is in place supported by a Certificate verifying that entertainment style wrestling is knowingly being insured; that the venue is being operated safely with proper consideration for keeping fire exits clear; and that the promoter takes responsibility to cooperate with any provincial or municipal inspector, law enforcement officer, or agent of the venue.

\*This recommendation is in general supported by The Workplace Safety and Health Act sec. 4.2 (a)-(g) "Further duties of employer",  
by the Construction Trades Safety Regulation 189/85R Sec 87(a) "Employer to instruct workers": only a worker experienced in the construction of temporary support systems shall supervise the construction, use, erection maintenance and dismantling of...  
and Sec. 88.4 "Employer to construct in accordance with design".

**Promoters** should be certified by the Council upon payment of a fee, passing a background check and will belong to a specific Safety Council sub-committee of all promoters, to help better establish and monitor emerging safety standards and practices.

**All post-1996 Manitoba wrestlers** currently active, that is those who entered the industry after withdrawal of MBWC licensing (estimated Oct 21, 1996), should be certified by the Council upon meeting criteria which include a) providing a medical certificate, b) payment of a fee and c) a reference from their trainer or persons recognized by the Council in talent evaluation, or they can be directed appear for an audition before a committee of the Council.

**All pre-1997 Manitoba performers**, who entered the industry prior to deregulation, upon meeting the criteria a) and b), and other criteria as decided, could in effect, "renew" their old MBWC licence by transferring it to a certification from the Safety Council.

**All out-of province wrestlers and performers** should be certified before being allowed to perform in Manitoba. Upon meeting the criteria, applicants could be certified by the Council , taking into account the applicant's established reputation, video review and/or audition when practical.

**Trainers** should pass a First Responder course and provide a First Aid kit on-site, adhere to the training guideline herein attached, and demonstrate ability in coaching, understanding of industry protocol and safe in-ring wrestling practice, to be certified by the council.

The course curriculum (see appendix) should include written material, video review of trainee performance and progress, ring technology, safe ring practices, proper gear, live event orientation of 100 hours, and preparation for a professional career in the industry. We estimate such professional training to be of approx. 300 hours duration.

This model can be explained as follows: *"When you are training you are the responsibility of your trainer. The trainer is responsible to the Council that accredits him. Upon certification as a performer the promoter who employs the new wrestler is responsible for his safety. (In order to train or wrestle you should provide a medical certificate, renewable annually, to be filed with the Council.)"*

**Trainees** who wish to be certified for the first time should appear before the Council with their trainer and upon payment of a fee (as their medical is already on file) pass an audition and/or interview as decided by the Council which may determine a system of graduated introduction onto industry events.

All applicants for **referee** should have First Responder training. If a temporary certificate is required, i.e.- a "special referee", the Council should establish a protocol to allow such activity as long as a certified referee is at ringside.

The Council should determine certification standards for other performers such as **managers and valets**, and can establish standards for ring barriers and other venue issues.

**# 5 The Council should negotiate an out-of-province fee with other operators or national touring groups not located in Manitoba, who upon meeting the basic standard set-out for rings, holding adequate Liability Insurance, and adhering to the event safety checklist procedure, can have their events and performers certified safe by the Council.**

**# 6 The Council can coordinate the offering of courses for members or applicants in First Responder/ First Aid, wrestling promotion, venue and risk management, wrestling or refereeing clinics, etc. in the interest of promoting safety and professionalism in the industry, and can choose to make specific courses mandatory if it sees fit.**

*Industry practices in the transition period*

**# 7 The Interim Council should adopt the recommendations for ring standards, pending an elected Council which will thereafter determine future standards and practices of the wrestling industry.**

**# 8 Wrestling Promoters should receive a proper permit for any child under 16 to work in any capacity in the operation of a wrestling event.**

This recommendation is supported by the Workplace Safety and Health Act definition of a "worker" as including (a) any person who is employed by an employer to perform a service whether for gain or reward, or hope of gain or reward; and (c) any person undergoing training or serving an apprenticeship at an educational institution or at any other place.

This recommendation is also supported by the Employment Standards Code Sec. 83(2): "Employment of individual under 16"- Subject to this section, no person shall employ a child without a permit obtained, on application, from the director and except in accordance with the permit; and Sec. 83(3): " Certain employment of children prohibited"- The director shall not issue a permit under subsection (2) to allow a child to work in a business if, in his opinion, the safety, health or well-being of the child is likely to be adversely affected.

**# 9 Wrestlers and referees should not participate in events with children and minors, until proof is furnished that the Liability Insurance in effect knowingly covers the actions of children and minors in performance style wrestling events. The interim Council should develop and promote a general practice of keeping those under 18 off of live performances and out of locker rooms.**

**# 10 Promoters should ensure that referees and/or 2 parties on their crew have First Responder certification, and that First Aid is on-site, and provide such proof to the venue.**

**# 11 Promoters should adopt a safety checklist including an emergency protocol, review and commit to monitor venue security, meet ring standards as recommended, and file the checklist with the Director of Workplace Safety and with the venue.**

This recommendation is supported by the Act Sec. 12 (a)"Duties of director of division" - The director of the division shall, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act, be concerned with workplace safety and health generally, and with the maintenance of reasonable standards for the protection of the safety and health of workers and self-employed persons in Manitoba"

**# 12 In the event of a serious injury, including emergency room visit or a participant being knocked unconscious, the referee should file an injury report to be attached to the promoter's safety checklist, and to be filed with an elected Council after it is formed**

This recommendation is supported by the Act Sec. 12(e) (the director of the division shall) prepare and maintain or cause to be prepared and maintained illness, death and accident statistics relating to workers and self-employed persons, and do so either alone or in conjunction with The Workers Compensation Board, the Department of Health, or any other department, agency or commission;

**# 13 Until the formation of the elected Council, all venues, particularly bars, should furnish a Certificate that their Liability Insurance knowingly covers performance style wrestling, so that performers have proof they are protected.**

### *Rings*

**# 14 Our recommendations for rings are based on the definition of a "workplace" from the Act as including "any structure... whether indoors or outdoors, in which one or more workers or self-employed persons, are engaged in work or have worked".**

**14.1 Wrestling rings should be manufactured by a reputable wrestling ring constructor; or have a professional engineer's certification on its design that is appropriate for its use; or be manufactured to the exact specifications of an official blueprint from a recognized firm, that warrants that it is appropriate for its intended use.**

**The standards should include ringposts and corner ropes being in vertical alignment; platform should be evenly and fully padded to about 1", and the surface should be clean and sanitary, and free of raised seams causing an obstruction to footing; ring ropes should be properly padded and wrapped with non-rotating sleeves; all corners should have adequate protective padding; all turnbuckles and the top of the ring posts should be adequately padded; all bolts and pins in place and tightened properly; proper rigging hardware and components; no protuberances on the ring posts that may injure performers;**

**14.2 There should be complete documentation accompanying the ring that shows the correct method and sequence for assembling the ring. Attached thereto should be a repair log so that attention can be paid to the integrity of recent repairs and welds.**

These recommendations are supported by the Construction Industry Safety Regulation 189/85R sec. 87 and 88.2 and 88.3 (a)-(d).

**14.3 That the promoter be responsible to warrant that the ring is safe to use after set-up, as indicated on a safety checklist.**

**14.4 There should be a buffer zone of 6 feet distance from ringside and the audience, with barriers appropriate for the demographics of the audience (on sides adjacent to the audience).**

**14.5 Cages and other devices affixed to the ring should have an engineer's certification that it is appropriate for its intended use and properly equipped with hardware to secure said cage or device.**

***Role of the Provincial government***

**# 15 The Province should provide assistance to the concerned wrestling industry members to help form an interim Safety and Standards Council, and should, through the Department of Labour or other body, provide supervision in the organization and conduct of democratic elections within 12 months.**

This recommendation is supported by the Workplace Safety and Health Act sec. 13: "The director, through the division, may, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act, (a) provide assistance to persons concerned with safety and health in the workplace, and provide services to assist workplace safety and health committees, employers and workers in maintaining reasonable standards for the protection of the safety and health of workers;"

**# 16 If the Province, Minister of Culture, Minister of Labour, or Director of the Workplace Safety division, upon notification from concerned workers or promoters, determines that pre-existing industry disputes will prevent the formation of a democratic, representative and effective Manitoba Wrestling Safety and Standards Council, the Director of Workplace Safety should, under the Act sec. 40.1 ("Every employer shall establish a workplace safety and health committee"), ensure such is done, as provided in 40.1(b) ("for any other individual workplace or class of workplace designated by written order of the director.")**

**# 17 Until formation of the elected Council, the Director of Workplace Safety should take steps to ensure that the practices as described in recommendations # 10 and #11 be commenced.**

This recommendation is supported by the Act Sec. 12 (a) and (e).

**# 18 Upon formation of the elected Council, the Province should provide the Council with funding for per diems, supplies, seminars, classes and safety related courses and**



**materials, for a period of 5 years.**

This recommendation is supported by the Act sec. 13: (The director, through the division, may)...(c) encourage, develop and conduct, either alone or in co-operation with organizations concerned with the purposes of this Act, education and information programs for promoting the safety and health of workers and for improving the qualifications of persons concerned with workplace safety and health;

(d) make recommendations to the minister regarding grants of moneys for any of the purposes referred to in this section;

**# 19 The Manitoba Liquor Control Commission should circulate relevant material from this report and the recommendations, among licensees as information, so the licensees understand the complexity of the issues they are liable for when hosting professional wrestling events**

**# 20 The Province should share the study findings with the Federal government as it relates to the state of safety within the domestic pro wrestling industry.**

**# 21 The Province of Manitoba should work with the Federal Government and other governments, to eliminate the possibility of Section 83 of the Criminal Code being a basis for wrestling regulation, and to further resolve the patchwork quilt of regulation which results in inconsistent safety practices being imported and exported between provinces.**

**# 22 The Province should participate in any further regional or national industry studies of wrestling safety issues that may occur, to assist the development of interprovincial and national wrestling safety standards and practices.**

**# 23 The Province should assist the wrestling industry in establishing a dialogue with the insurance industry to begin the process of effecting an understanding of what risk management in pro wrestling means, and of easing the availability and cost of liability insurance to promoters that demonstrate safe standards and practices as outlined in this report.**

#### ***Role of local government jurisdictions***

**# 24 Wrestling promoters should be required to get a municipal business license (in most cases this means from the City of Winnipeg) in their home community, and in any community in which they operate, if applicable. A condition of license should be that a Promoter acquires a policy of Third Party Liability Insurance or be part of a group that is insured, and evidence by way of a certificate that performance-style wrestling is**

being insured under that promoter's care and control, should be provided.

Municipal officials should ensure that wrestling promoters obtain a business license similar in nature to that of a circus, entertainment promoter, or other class from the entertainment sector.

**# 25** Municipalities may evaluate a ring erected in a municipality in comparison to our recommended standards and the requirements of The Construction Industry Safety regulation, and may order a substandard ring disassembled as an unsafe structure, if an approved design drawing and certificate of a professional engineer is not provided, or if it is not equipped according to Recommendation 14.1 -14.5

**# 26** Municipalities should take action to prevent backyard wrestling from charging admission, soliciting for audiences, using weapons/props of any sort, or using homemade or rented rings. These activities elevate backyard operations into the realm of a professional activity which requires safe practices and standards .

### *General*

**# 27** Any provincial, municipal or industry actions with regards to safety standards and practices, should consider and be required of all facets of the local industry - promoters, wrestlers, trainers and venue operators, whether the wrestling promotion or event is operated as a for-profit, non-profit, sole-proprietorship, partnership, co-op, community service, charity, workshop or in any other manner.

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### *Closing comments*

In presenting the above recommendations, the consultants acknowledge that the wrestling industry in Manitoba cannot turn back the clock. The new generation of wrestlers - men and women - have not been immersed in the traditional wrestling culture with its own code of conduct. Nonetheless, there are enough veterans still in the province to mirror the old standards and their expertise can be called on to restore safe practices to professional wrestling in Manitoba.

We are encouraged that three other jurisdictions have expressed an interest in the development of a structure for industry self-regulation in Manitoba, that may in turn help standardize industry safety across Canada.

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