

Gary Damron

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Gary Damron (b. 1976, Logan, WV) is the owner and promoter of the independent professional wrestling company ASW (All Star Wrestling), operating out of the Madison Civic Center in Madison, WV.

This interview is part of a series of interviews with independent professional wrestlers in West Virginia.

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GD: Gary Damron

EH: Emily Hilliard

00:00

EH: Okay. Why don't you introduce yourself and tell me your name and when you were born and where you're from?

GD: My name is Gary Damron and I was born on December the 20th of 1976 and I'm from Logan, WV.

EH: How did you first become interested in wrestling?

GD: When I was a young kid, it was kind of one of those things where you're flicking through the channels and you see all this stuff going on that looks you know, you see these big characters on TV and that kinda got me hooked and then of course back in the 80s Hulk Hogan had a cartoon on Saturday morning. And I was a big Saturday morning cartoon watcher. So I would always watch the Hulk Hogan. So I got to know the characters from his cartoon, so it kinda worked out like that too.

EH: Tell me about your journey to become a wrestling promoter, going from a kid who was a fan to promoting and producing shows.

GD: I actually started out in 1995 promoting southern gospel music. And I did that for about 9 years and again I was a big fan of southern gospel when I was a kid growing up in church and stuff, I loved the music--still to this day do. And then southern gospel kinda got to where it just wasn't as popular as what it used to be because you know, more people now listen to more contemporary music and so that kinda faded away. And so I got ahold of, I actually was watching an episode of TBN, the Christian Broadcasting Network, Ted Dibiase, The Million Dollar Man--he's a preacher now. And he was in there talking about how he was doing appearances, and I thought, well how cool would it be to bring him in for something, you know, somebody that I grew up watching on TV and so I brought him in for one of the gospel shows. And he was telling me about, oh a lot of the old wrestlers from the day does appearances and does shows, and I was like I'm familiar with promoting you know, this, you know, so how different can it be, since really there's not much difference. But yeah, started it that way.

EH: So what are the similarities between promoting southern gospel and wrestling?

GD: Well, you're having to book a building, you have to book, of course in gospel you just book the bands and the building and you advertise and you go out and you promote, hang posters and stuff. But in wrestling you of course have to book a ring, you have to book all the different wrestlers, you have to book referees, you have to book ring announcers, I mean there's a lot more in wrestling but the similarities are still there, you know.

EH: Is the audience the same?

GD: You know there are some people that used to come to some of the gospel shows that do come to wrestling. You know, and what we try to present, we try to present a family oriented--you know a lot of these wrestling shows that you see on Facebook and the internet and stuff today, it's, a lot of it's a lot of garbage. We try to keep ours a clean show and a family-oriented, where you could bring the kids.

EH: So do you have rules for the wrestlers, like they're not allowed to curse--that sort of thing?

GD: Oh yeah. Yeah, we have a sign hanging up in our locker room that says you know, no cussing, no doing this and that, no doing anything vulgar, you know, no--there are certain guidelines they have to go by with that.

EH: I read in Zack Harold's piece that you were initially thinking about doing a Christian wrestling promotion? Could you tell me what you were thinking for that and why you went this direction?

GD: We were gonna do--the very first show I ever did was supposed to have been a gospel. And, like a Christian-based show is what I meant. And we just kinda got to thinking--we was like well, we've got all these legends here, and people may get confused if they like, well we're gonna go this direction with it, we'll go this direction. He said, well we'll just--and I said, yeah, let's just make it a regular show and kinda do it that way. So... you know, we have done, we actually did a show in a church once up in Ceredo, WV. And I forget the name of the church, but we actually did a Christian show there once and we had Ivan Koloff who was a wrestling legend--had him come in. He's a Christian now, a minister, which now he's deceased but he came in and did a ministry. He got up and spoke and it was a nice, it was a cool thing.

EH: So are there a lot of wrestling legends who have become ministers and who have gone on that circuit?

GD: There's a few. Nikita Koloff, Ted Dibiase, Tatanka, Tully Blanchard, you know, some of those guys, they're now in the ministry, so you know, it's kind of a cool thing to get to see them doing what they're doing and then they're still big wrestling stars.

EH: Did the church show go over well? I sort of am trying to envision what that was like.

05:39

GD: It did go over okay. Of course, a lot of the basic fans I don't think were there. It was more of the church people that belonged to that church. But it was, it turned out okay. It was something different. It was something that you'd have to appreciate to be able to, 'cause after the matches he got up and he spoke and so it was a cool thing. I thought it was very cool.

EH: Aside from being a family-oriented show, how else would you describe the vibe of ASW and what you try to present?

GD: One thing that I'm always told is that the fans that come to our shows, they feel like they're a part of our family. Not just me, but the wrestlers too. We try to connect with people like through social media, if they send us a message we always--and I treat each person...as a matter of fact, at my shows, I stand here at the door while people are coming in and I greet every person. Because you want them to feel welcomed and you want 'em to feel like hey, I'm appreciated for going to that. And you know, when I'm not there they realize I'm not there, and I send a lot of messages out to people, like, "Hey where were you last time?" or you know. So I think that helps too. But that's the one thing that I think is a great compliment, is people say, "Well, we come to your show and we have a good time, but we feel like we're a part of your family." And I think that's a good, great thing.

EH: And what's the audience--the numbers and how old they are, men, women, are they local?

GD: You know, it varies. The ages are just everywhere on the chart. We have old people, we have young people, we have young kids. Boys, girls, women, men. It's just all across the board. But that's what makes wrestling so cool is it's not just focused on one certain you know, sex or whatever. It can be for anybody and it's a family fun type thing, because anybody can get into a wrestling match.

EH: And would you say they're mostly from Boone County?

GD: No, we have a good portion of our fans from Boone, but where I bring in the legends, we actually draw people from good distances. We have people that come in from sometimes Lynchburg, VA, we have people that come from all over the Carolinas, we have people come from Kentucky, Ohio, just different places. As a matter of fact, the show you came to with Jim Cornette and The Midnight Express, that was a big deal. That was, those 4 guys being together--we had people from Michigan, had people from Oklahoma, I mean it was crazy. We drew a good--so that's a cool thing for us. That's what sets us apart from other companies in the state is where we're bringing in rare guests. Where they don't, we do. And they may average 80-100 people and we average 400, you know, sometimes 300-400, whatever. So...

EH: What do you think the importance of this event is to the Madison community you know where there's maybe not too much going on and it's hard to find money to pay for a ticket--that sort of thing?

09:30

GD: You know, I think that that is, even the people that work in the city have told me, said you know, thank you for bringing this to this small town. These people have got nothing to look forward to here, cause they don't. They don't have, they don't even have a movie theater here. And so you know, they're like thank you for bringing a show here where the people can come out and have a good time. And you know, you speak of money, and that is a true thing, there's people come, as a matter of fact, the Christmas show we did, people were coming in and paying for their tickets with change. So you know that they're raking what they got. And you know, that's why every year ASW puts on a free show where we let the community come in for free. So it's kinda like we're giving back to them. And I think that that kinda shows them that we care and they in return respect us for it and want to support us more. So you know, I think that it's a win-win for everybody.

EH: Nice. So how do you come up with storylines and craft the direction of things narratively?

GD: Mostly it's based on the guys--how they get over with the crowd. You know, when you have a guy go out and they work one or two of your shows and you see the reactions from people, then you know, okay, we could do something with him. Let's maybe have one of the bad guys go out and beat him up real bad, and kind of get sympathy from the people that--but that's pretty much how storylines are based.

EH: And are you kind of crafting that or is it a collaboration with the wrestlers or how does that work?

GD: It's a little bit of everything. Me and my buddy that kinda works with me, me and him talk a lot, and then too like I say, the wrestlers have input too. They'll say, well hey, why don't we do this, I wonder if we could do this. So it's kind of a mixture of everything together.

EH: What have been some of the most successful storylines?

GD: The most successful storyline we've ever done here was with a guy named Rocky Rage and Shane Storm, and it started out back years ago. We had Rocky had a valet, which is a girl manager, and she went out with him, and of course, in wrestling you kind of portray that as oh, that's his girlfriend. And Shane one night she turned against Rocky and went with Shane. Well that same night, she also cost Rocky his belt. You know, he was a champion at the time. So that really got over. Well then years later, you know we kinda stopped that and went a different direction with both of the guys. Years later we decided to rekindle that but this time Rocky's wife was involved. And he had gotten married through that time. And we did a thing where they had a match and Rocky's wife went out to check on him and while he was--she

was in the ring checking on him, Shane Storm went up behind her and kicked her in the face, and it was so real, it felt so real that even the police went after Shane. They ran after him, 'cause they thought, hey, you just kicked a lady in the face, we're gonna arrest you. And so they--and I had to stop 'em and say, "No, no, no guys, it's part of the show." And they got mad at me, they said, "Well you need to tell us anytime you do something like that, 'cause we were gonna go after him." Said, "You gotta tell us. We saw that." And the way the crowd reaction--it was just an amazing feeling. It was like here we are making these people believe what we just did was real. And that was something we had talked about for weeks and weeks and weeks leading up to that. But that was one of the coolest things that we've ever done.

EH: So when the people really start to believe that it's real.

GD: Absolutely. And there are some that still believe there is. They still believe what we're doing...and I think for the most part, most people just get lost in the show. Like when you watch a TV show that you love so much, you know okay, well we know it's a show, but we're still gonna have a good time with it. But there are some people that really get upset and leave here, every show like mad, because they think what they just witnessed was a legit thing. So that's a good thing--that shows you you're doing your job when you do that.

EH: And you have the police station right next door. Do they often come to the matches?

GD: They're here usually every time. Which we love that because if there's ever a problem, they're here and they can deal with it. But they're cool, they enjoy coming over and they got to where they know a lot of the guys, so that's a good thing. That's good to have access to that.

EH: Let's see. How much are storylines crafted by fans? Have you ever had to scrap something because it just didn't work with fans?

GD: Oh yeah, yeah that happens quite a bit. You'll do something, you're like, okay, let's try this and then you'll do a match or two with the guys and the people just don't seem to be getting into it and you're like, well we can't keep--we got 3 more shows scheduled with that same match in between those guys. If people aren't getting into it, you don't want to bore them. So it's like well, let's make that happen, maybe go away and maybe go a different direction. So yeah, that does happen quite a bit.

EH: What type of gimmicks for wrestlers do you see being the most popular?

GD: Oh gimmicks as far as like...

EH: Like their persona.

GD: You know, I have always been a fan of characters. People that go out with kind of what you say, a gimmick. Because I think that makes them stand out. Too many guys now a days, they just want to call themselves a name and go out and they have no character, no--and it's hard for fans to really get behind these guys 'cause it's like, well what about you makes me want to cheer for you? So you've either gotta go out and do something or you've gotta go out and show people, "Hey look, I'm gonna work my hind end off here to put on a good match for you." And that does help, but I've always been a fan of guys that want to be characters and have like a persona or whatever.

EH: What are some examples of some of those characters that work really well you think?

GD: Well in the big time, you know like WWE, of course the most successful characters was like The Undertaker, 'cause he was just different than anything anybody else had ever done. I'm trying to think--

there is a guy who does a character in Ohio and he sometimes comes around locally. His name is Jock Sampson. And he plays like a dirty redneck cowboy. So that--that kinda...and then I met a guy a couple months ago that I really enjoyed watching and I thought he was a cool character. He plays an Amish guy. And he lived that character. You were there!

EH: Yeah, I was there.

GD: ...at that show. Yeah. And I thought man, that is cool. I really like that because that's different. That's not something that you would see. And he looks like a real Amish person. I mean if you saw him out somewhere you would think he was--so that was a cool thing. Yeah, stuff like that is stuff I'm a fan of.

17:29

EH: Yeah he really has to commit with the facial hair.

GD: Yeah, yeah exactly. And he even came out with that--what was it, the butter?

EH: Yeah, the butter churn.

GD: Yeah. So I told him, I said dude, you got it going on. I said that's awesome.

EH: And I think the cops were called for that too.

GD: They were. What had happened is where it was an outdoor show, and we were right there on the streets of Charleston, probably in the bad part of Charleston, I'm not sure. But the guys were fighting out into the crowd, you know, just to kinda get a reaction and people driving down the street wasn't paying any attention, and was looking over at the fight and smashed into the back of another car and so there was like a little car accident in the street. So that was a wild day (laughs). And it was raining. Pouring the rain.

EH: Right.

GD: The guys was out wrestling. Yeah, it was definitely a nasty wet day. (laughs)

EH: What about characters that kind of have a cultural stereotype. I was here for the Sheik and then The Cuban Assassin. Do you think that those are still popular? What's your thought on those type of characters?

GD: I'm still a fan of those type of characters. As a matter of fact, I'm trying to get one of the guys, I'm like you know, go out and buy just a red tights and put on a red mask and call yourself you know, The Masked Russian or something. I like those type of characters, but I think in 2020, I think that's kinda, kinda considered old school. Cause back in the 80s that was the thing. They had course, you know The Iron Sheik, and the people from Russia and Iran and it was always America versus Russia, so in today's world it's a little different, but I'm still a fan of those characters.

EH: They seem to really inspire response.

GD: Exactly. So yeah, everybody can get behind you know, America versus Russia. Everybody can get behind that. 'Cause it kinda instantly puts you on their side.

EH: Yeah, you know who's the good guy and who's the bad guy.

GD: Exactly.

GD: Yeah.

EH: What about like working class/hillbilly characters--there's sort of like the White Trash guy with ASW? Do you still see a lot of that?

GD: You know you don't see it too often much of it. Like I say, the sad part is is guys now, they just want to go out and call themselves a name. You know, "Oh well let's call ourself just, uh..." If their name is say Derek Townsend, "Well let's call myself Thomas..." And it's like why didn't you just call yourself your regular name if you're gonna change it to something weird like that. But you know, that's pretty much the basic of, you know, guys just wanna go out and call themselves their names and be done with it and have no color or have no kinda like hey, look at me, look how bright I am. Look at my outfit or whatever. They just go out and buy some cheap gear and go with it. But I'm still a fan of the characters. I always will be.

EH: Yeah, it seems like in West Virginia and the region there is that particular, like the Jim Cornette type who insults the "rednecks," that sort of thing. Do you still see some of that?

GD: You see some of it. You know, that's what we call cheap heat. It's a way for the bad guy heel to go out and if you want somebody to boo ya, well what's a better way to do that than go out and say "Hey, you're ugly, you're stupid." You know, or "This town sucks." That's an easy way for you to instantly start getting booed. 'Cause sometimes fans are funny, you know. People think, well if I go out and I'm not friendly and I don't smack the hands when I go out, they're gonna know that I'm the heel. But that doesn't mean that they're gonna boo you. You know, they might--it takes a minute. You gotta do something. You have to work as we say. You have to work to get people to either get behind you one way or the other, whether good or bad.

EH: What are some of the crazy fan responses that you've, or some of the more extreme fan responses you've seen?

22:12

GD: Oh my gosh, we had up in Gilbert, West Virginia--have you ever been to Gilbert, West Virginia?

EH: Where's Gilbert?

GD: You don't want to know! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

GD: It's up in Mingo County.

EH: Okay.

GD: It's like you know, I'd have to draw you a map to get there, with stick figures. But it was a really small, and we loved going there because again, it was a town that had nothing. And they treated us like we were the WWF, you know, WWE. They thought we were the big time. You know, coming in there, so that was a cool thing. And we always drew great crowds and the building we rented was a wonderful building. We had some coal miners that came one night and we brought in a tag team called The Nasty Boys. And they Nasty Boys went out and they were good guys for the night 'cause they're wrestling

legends. They went out and if you remember when the mine disaster had just happened and some of the coal miners had gotten killed? Okay, well they went out and they did a thing where they're like, oh you know, our hearts and prayers are with the families of the...and you know, that was a cool thing and everybody kinda got behind that. Well then they brought up 2 guys that were sitting ringside that were coal miners. And they said hey, we want to give these guys a hand for all the hard work they do for y'all's state. So it kinda gave a sentimental moment. Well then later in the night, the heels came out and they were just doing their regular heel stuff, you know. They didn't say anything about coal miners or anything, but because these 2 guys had been brought in the ring earlier, they felt now they were a part of the shows. And so one of the guys got up and the guy kinda made a gesture at one of the heels, and the heel was like, oh well won't you get in here and do something about it. The boy jumped in the ring before we even knew what was going on, and anytime that happens, that's critical, because it's like okay, you just crossed the line. You come into our world, we have the right to beat you legitimately. And it all happened so quickly, I mean it's how it was like, oh my God, we have nobody quick enough to just make a stop. But the guy jumped in the ring and my heel went to--he tried to make it to where like, hey I'm gonna scare you to where you're gonna get out of this ring, and the guy wasn't doing it, so my guy had to run over and legit punch the guy. So that was a scary moment 'cause you never want that to happen.

We've had some instances here where there's been a few like, okay, we're afraid what may happen because this fan does seem to be mad. We've got a guy that comes to our show that's you know, kinda slow. And he spit on a wrestler one night. Of course, that made the wrestler furious. I mean he--it's like, okay, I'm playing my character, you spit on me, now I'm breaking character and I'm legitimately pissed, you know. So that was...but you do have sometimes where maybe something is said that strikes a nerve with either or--a wrestler or a fan. You know, sometimes the wrestler could make a comment to a fan, and it's like well hey, that really happened to me, you know, how dare you say that. And we had a boy here years ago that used to come up from North Carolina and he had made some comments to a fan, and the boy had his girlfriend, and you know, you don't want to look bad in front of your girlfriend, so during the intermission, the wrestler was out signing autographs, the fan went over, said something to him, picked up his table, and threw it. So it's like oh my gosh. But yeah, fans can...and wrestlers too. Fans can sometimes be crazy. (laughs)

26:25

EH: Do you have a persona when you get in the ring and talk?

GD: The only persona I try to present--everybody that comes to my show mostly knows who I am. And they know I'm the one that puts the shows on. So I try to portray the owner, or the boss, you know. But the only time that you'll ever see me actually partake in the show is if it calls for it. Like if we have to set up for a match, or if there's a storyline going on where there needs to be an authority figure, you know, I'll play that part. But I try not to get involved to much, 'cause it's not about me. You know, it's about the guys and I don't really want to be seen. The only thing that I do regularly on my shows, is I like to make the announcements. And the reason being is because I found years ago that if you go to an event and the guy that's always in the ring talking--if he makes the announcements for your upcoming events, that's easy for you to let it go in one ear and out the other, because you've seen that guy all night long talking. But if somebody new comes out and says, "Hey, I'm gonna make some announcements," then you might be more inclined to remember that. And that's one thing that I learned a long time ago. It's like well, I'll go out and make the announcements, 'cause that's the most--to me that's a very important thing. If I've got an upcoming show, the people that's already here--those are more than likely the people I need to depend on to come back next month. So it's like hey guys, I'm breaking the monotony of having the same guy you've heard all night long talk, I'm gonna come out and make my announcements and tell you when the next shows are.

EH: So I'm interested in the economics of it, and you don't have to talk specific numbers if you don't want to, but ticket prices are like \$10, \$10-15?

GD: We do ringside \$15 and general admission \$13. And the only reason we started doing ringside for \$15 was--we have a good portion of people that want to sit in the front row. And we thought at first, well what would be a way for us to make this work in a fair way, to where, hey...so we said, well we'll open doors at 5:30 and anybody that bought advance tickets can come in at 5:30 and get what seat they want. Well, that worked for a while. Then we started having people that were showing up at like noon to stand outside.

EH: (laughs) wow!

GD: And that's a great thing, I mean it makes you feel wonderful, but on a day when it was like snowing and raining, there would be people already outside and you're like oh my goodness, you know? Then that became a problem because people were coming in and people were jumping line and getting in front of other people and the people that had been here all day waiting were getting upset, because it's like, well hey he just got here. So it's like okay, we're gonna have to do this another way. We're just gonna have to have ringside seats, \$15, people can pay the extra \$2 to get what seat they want, or they can come at the regular time and sit wherever else they can sit. So that's been working out decently better since we started doing that.

EH: And what about wrestler pay and is it profitable for you and have you seen a rise in what you're bringing in?

GD: We have. And as far as wrestler pay goes, course it's based on how far away they are and it's based on their stature in wrestling as is anything in the entertainment world you know, it's always based on your popularity, how many tickets you're gonna sell, blah, blah, blah. But an independent wrestler really doesn't make a lot of money. You know, they might make 40, 50 bucks at best. And the reason being, it's not that you know, the people are--it's just you have so many people on your, you know. And guys love doing it so a lot of their intake is selling t-shirts and selling...you know, that helps them out. As far as a promoter goes, you know, when I first started it was a lot of--I would spend a lot more than what I would bring in. And it's because you have the love for doing what you're doing. And so, but over the years, and now I've got 3 sponsors that help me out, so that has been a tremendous help.

And as far as the rise, we have seen a rise--you know, popularity of wrestling right now is pretty good. Wrestling is pretty popular. It goes through that spell where sometimes it'll be slow and not really much is talked about, and then it's like okay, wrestling's hot again. And just like anything else. But the last couple years we've seen our attendance rise and one of the reasons I give credit for that is bringing in the rare guest where people will come. "Hey, I've always wanted to meet this guy, I'm gonna go to that show." They have such a good time, we'll hey, we're gonna come back next month. We're gonna bring our cousin with us next month, or our friend, or our family. We're gonna...so that helps. Anytime you grow with something, that's the kinda stuff that you need.

EH: And the sponsors, aside from Stephen P. New, who are the other 2?

GD: I actually have a church that sponsors us every month. They give us a donation. But they love wrestling and they feel that coming and having a table and passing out cards with their service times on it--they feel that that is kinda like connecting with the community. So that's kinda what they judge it on. It's like well, we're gonna sponsor...people might think, well why is a church wanting to sponsor a wrestling show? I mean what would they...but that's the way the pastor looks at it. 'Cause he's a good guy, he's a young guy and he loves wrestling and he's like, well you know, hey, this is our way of connecting with

the community. And honestly, since they've started coming here, they've gained like 3 or 4 members to their church. So they have, it has been successful for 'em. And then I have a State Farm agent, Scotty Brown, and he sponsors us, and the church is New Haven Church by the way. And the pastor's name is Josh Robinson. But Scotty Brown, you know, he's been a big help to us, so...and again, he came one night, brought his kids, and he's like, "Hey, I want to be a part of this. This is a great thing. Can I sponsor you?" And so that has been a blessing for me, cause it's like, hey, I didn't have to go out and get a sponsor that came to me. So, same way with Steve New. You know, he came to me and he's like hey, I wanna help ya, you know, 'cause he's a fan of what we do. You know, we bring in a lot of guys he likes. He likes the old school type of--and he sees that we're putting on--and again, I know this might sound a little rough, but my show is so different than anybody else's. Because we just have a different feel here. We have a good feel, we have a good vibe, we have structure, we have professionalism. A lot of wrestling, and if you go and see other shows, you'll see what I'm talking about. There's just so much it's like they just don't care. "Oh well we're gonna rent this building and have some matches scheduled, and whatever happens happens." And they'll let the guys go out and cuss and the guys will go out there and say awful things, do vulgar stuff, and it just doesn't turn out too well. And here we really stress you know. So that I think is what people see, and they're like hey--he's--they're putting on a good show there. Hey, I'm gonna...and that's what happened with Steve New. Is he--I knew Steve from back in 2004, so I knew him and I never thought about asking him to sponsor us, you know. 'Cause you don't want to bum somebody for money. That's the hardest thing in the world is to go up to somebody and say, "Hey can you give me some money?" So it's like, he came one night and he's like hey, I'm gonna start sponsoring ya, and I want to be a part of what you're doing. And that was awesome. A great thing.

EH: And yeah, it's probably one of the few big community events here.

GD: It is.

35:43

You know, like I say, when we come to town, people know that we're here. And I hear a lot of people out talking, and they're like oh, when does the wrestling coming back to the Civic Center, when will they--so they know we're here often. And we try to come once a month, but you know, sometimes we do take a month off which is usually good, 'cause a lot of times you need a break, you know? And there are certain months out of the year that I have found that are not successful. You know, the month of July is usually not a good month. People are on vacation. I don't like the month of September and I don't know why but that seems to be the deadest month. I mean it's just like people don't want to come to anything. I work in a movie theater too and that is also a dead month for movies. I don't know if it's where people are going back to school and people just don't wanna, but yeah, month of September's a dead month.

EH: Huh!

GD: (phone rings) Hang on a sec. (talks on phone) How many more questions you got there?

EH: Just 2 or 3.

GD: Okay. (talks on phone) Sorry about that, I should turn off my phone.

EH: Oh (laughs) that's okay. How is live wrestling different from what's on TV? Or how is ASW different from WWE/WWF. What do the wrestlers have to do differently?

37:30

GD: When you come to a live show, of course you can feel the excitement and you can feel the vibe from people, and hearin' the ring hit (slams table), you know, it, in person to me, I always thought that was cool. You watch it on TV and you don't really pay no attention to that, but when you're here and you hear the guys you know, smacking the ring, or their bodies hit the ring, it's like, oh wow, that sounded pretty brutal. You know and again, being around other wrestling fans that love, and the excitement that they're feeling--you kind of, it kinda rubs off and it's like an assembly line or whatever. And I think that's the importance of a live show, is you get more out of it. And as far as ASW and the bigger, like WWE, you know, we--at an indie show like what we do, the fans actually get to go up and meet the guys. Whereas in WWE you know, you're sitting in the crowd, you're sitting up in the bleachers, you see the guy walk out from the back, go to the ring, wrestle, and go back to the back. And that's as much as you see of him. But here you know, we bring in the big names, the legends, former WWE stars. You can actually walk up, shake their hand, talk to them, get a picture with 'em, an autograph, whatever. And our guys the same. They're always out here meeting people, talking with 'em. And that is a big, big help as far as building your popularity, because that makes, like I say, if you go to a show and the wrestler remembers talking to you from the last show, then that makes you feel, well hey, he's not just a wrestler, he's my friend. I think that's an important thing.

EH: Have you seen more interest from women wrestlers here?

39:30

GD: Here lately we have. Like I say, with the popularity of wrestling right now, it's really amazing to see the people that are coming out and wanting to be a part and see. And I've actually had women call me before and say, "Hey, we come to your show because we've had a bad week, we've had a lot of stress and anger, and coming to your show, we get to cuss at somebody," Which, you know, the fans get to do whatever they want--the wrestlers can't do that but the fans can. But I had one lady tell me, she said, "I get to come and it lets off my stress and my anger, I can get up and scream and holler and hoot, bad mouth the bad guys when they come out." And that's a good thing 'cause it's like a stress reliever. So that's a cool thing.

EH: I like that. So what do you think is particular about independent wrestling in West Virginia? The history or why it's so popular--what is unique in West Virginia?

GD: I think with West Virginia, it's where you know, it's a country state, and you know, wrestling is probably something that is looked at as kinda like high school football or whatever. It's something that people love going to and just getting involved with and getting to scream. Like I said, partake in being a fan. And wrestling has always been big in West Virginia. Not just with the local scene but all the big companies come through here. Actually this building we're sitting in right now has got a lot of wrestling history. Back in the day, the early 80s, I'm sure you've heard of Randy Macho Man Savage?

EH: Mmhm.

GD: You know, his family used to run this building. And they would come here on Wednesday nights and they would have--I've got some of the old posters back in the room there. I'll have to show you sometime.

EH: Yeah, that's neat.

GD: But they used to come here and they would run big, big shows. And I think back in those days, tickets was like 4 bucks. And so you know, but guys like Randy Macho Man Savage have been in this building and wrestled and who knew he was gonna go on years later and become a big celebrity?

EH: Oh, so at this point, he was just a local wrestler?

GD: He was just a local wrestler traveling with his family, yeah. His dad used to be a promoter. And he used to run his own company and they would go to West Virginia. They would go to Kentucky, they would go to the you know, the Tri-State areas or whatever you call it, you know the...and Madison Civic Center was one of the stops for them.

EH: Are there some famous wrestlers from West Virginia?

GD: There are a few. Let's see, Jamie Noble from WWE has been in West Virginia, or is from West Virginia. Matter of fact, I think he still lives here. I know he comes home a lot. I know his kids are from here. Heath Slater, who is on TV right now--he's from West Virginia. Trying to think if there's any more. Those are the 2 that comes to mind right off that I know are from West Virginia.

EH: What do you think the future is for ASW?

GD: Well, truthfully, I mean you never know. But I'm just happy doing what we're doing. If it's meant for us to stay here in this community and just run our shows, hey, I'll be the happiest person alive. As long as we can continue running here in this town. 'Cause we love Madison and Madison's been good to us. We enjoy the people and we love the building. This building was made for wrestling. I mean you can just--the way that the back area is, it's just like it was perfect for a wrestling show. So you know, and it's a good atmosphere here and it's a nice clean building. So we love Madison. But you know, if the opportunity ever came where we could get like a TV spot or something like that, that would be wonderful, but you never know. You just never, never know.

EH: Well do you have anything else you'd like to add?

GD: Well, I just, anybody listens or whatever, I hope that they would come out and support us one of these times. We bring in a lot of the big names, a lot of the legends and we've got a great roster of local guys that wrestle for us every month. Come out to see the legends, but get invested and become a fan of our guys. That's what our focus is. We want you to come to meet the big stars, but we want you to leave wanting to come back to see our guys. So that's kinda the key to it.

EH: Great. Thank you so much.

GD: Thank you.

EH: I'm gonna...

44:43

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW