

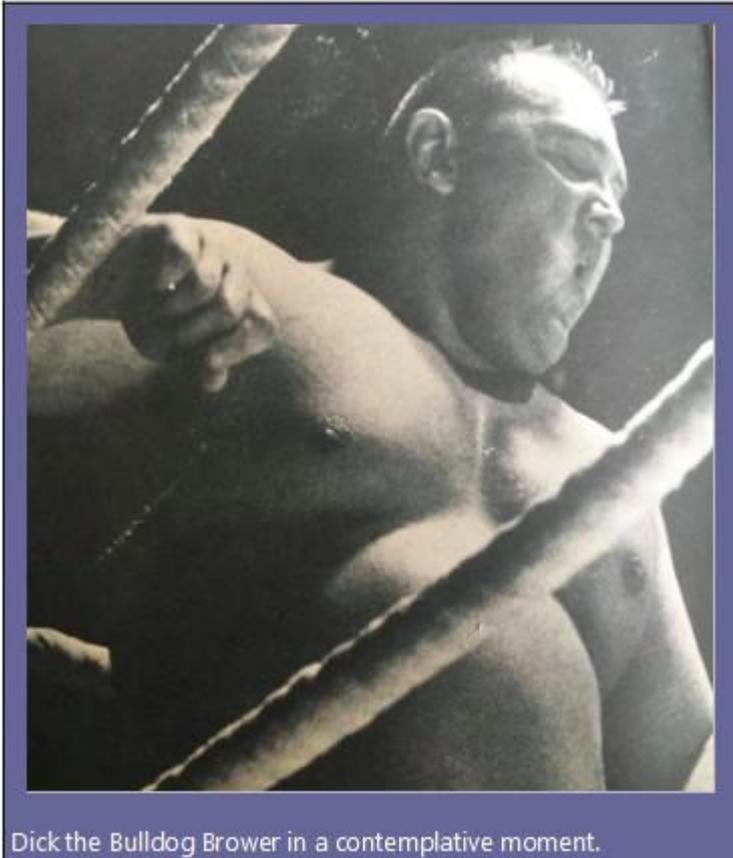
My Wrestling Journey



The travels of Our Man from Down Under

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Part 11: The Bulldog, the Little Girl and the Old Man



Dick the Bulldog Brower in a contemplative moment.

A riddle wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma! Well, no it wasn't quite as poetic as Winston's quote, however it was a small part of a wrestling match that has stayed in my consciousness for over fifty years. Was the match, or rather, the first few minutes of the match between Dick the Bulldog Brower and Joe Scarpa, an unscripted, spur of the moment, piece of genius villainy, perpetrated on a little girl and an elderly man, leading to an attack on an unsuspecting opponent, or just a piece of theatre?

The match was a mid-card one, Scarpa was a good workmanlike wrestler, destined to be positioned mostly in mid-card matches. Brower was a recent arrival, a top of the bill bad guy, who would very soon be appearing in the Stadiums around Australia as a main attraction. To all intents and purposes, this match was to showcase Scarpa's guts, 'Italian' temper when roused and abilities, whilst losing to a rampant

Bulldog. I'm not sure if we had just got through a match, or if it was after the 'interval' that the contest took place, however I distinctly recall that many of the crowd were out of their seats, standing and talking, purchasing refreshments, presumably some would be splashing their way in and out of the Stadiums awful toilets, however as Scarpa made his way to the ring, it occurred to me that many of the crowd were not watching then, or indeed when the Bulldog jived to the ring, bobbing his head and generally looking like a drunk wending his way home.

The scene was now set, with Scarpa in his corner, looking out over a turnbuckle talking to his second and the Bulldog in his, looking out over his corner sneering and snarling into the crowd. The patrons were still milling around, returning to their seats, when a little girl, maybe five years of age approached the ring. She reached up towards the Bulldog, offering him her autograph book. Watching avidly, I thought to myself 'well, she won't be getting that back in one piece' and sure enough the big, very burly Bulldog, reached down, took the book and promptly tore it to pieces (a few weeks later on t.v. someone threw a shoe at Bulldog and he ripped the tongue of the shoe off and threw the shoe back into the crowd). The Bulldog then dropped the remnants of the book on the mat skirting the ring. The little girl looking sad, went to gather up the pieces and as she did, the Bulldog appeared to step on her hand! As the tiny tot started back to her seat crying, an old man, possibly the girl's grandfather, left his ringside seat and approached the ring and remonstrated with the wrestler, shaking his walking cane at him. Bulldog, leaned over the ropes, grabbed the old guy by the shirt front and pulled him over the the top rope and into the ring, then plucked the cane from the man's hand and threw him backwards into the corner where he half sat, half lay. The Bulldog then strode over to Scarpa who was still chatting unaware of what was going on behind him and broke the old man's cane over Joe's neck! From there there was a general melee, with seconds and the referee trying to intervene, only for Scarpa to make a fiery comeback, which quickly led to the Bulldog in his effort to evade the furious 'Italian', climbing a large pole that help support



In headier days, Joe Scarpa prepares to wrestle Dory Funk Jr. for the NWA World Heavyweight Title. Some years later, Joe would become a Native (Red) Indian Chief. (Only in wrestling could that happen).

the ring. The Bulldog travelled a good distance up the pole, before the irate 'Italian' caught him by the trunks and hauled him back down to terra firma. The bell finally rang, heralding the commencement of the match and the pair settled down to a more conventional slug fest.

At the time and for many, many years since, I would reflect on the match and come to believe that the action was kosher up until after Dick hit Joe with the cane and from then on sanity prevailed and 'it' reverted to being a wrestling match. I came to this conclusion based on the low importance of the contest, the fact that Brower did not have the full attention of much of his audience when he 'kicked off' the incident with the child and also I didn't think the promotion would bother to hire a young girl and an old man just for a couple of minutes of mayhem, that didn't even bring a warning from the referee (let alone a disqualification) plus there was no mention on t.v. the next day, where incidents of note from the live matches, were reported to viewers as precursors for upcoming matches or feuds. I did think it was convenient that Scarpa had his back to the Bulldog as things kicked off, but then the bout hadn't even been announced by M.C. Sammy Menacker and because few were watching as the scene played out, there was no hubbub, or sudden swell in noise, to alert Joe.

However, a year or so ago, I read on a social wrestling media site, that Bulldog had been 'a good father, bringing up two little girls by himself', this sparked a memory of a magazine picture I had seen more than once, of Dick feeding a baby with a bottle. Oh dear, had I been had? Perhaps that little girl at the Stadium was Dick's daughter, maybe the old guy was his dad, who was in Australia as the 'babysitter'? Or was he an ex-worker, one of a few who may have played the part back in the States when Dick had laid out this 'work' before outraged audiences there. I have to concede it is easy to pretend to step on another's hand or fingers, you just put all your weight back onto your heels, while the front of your foot hovers above, not actually touching, we've all seen wrestlers supposedly stamp on an opponent's hand(s). If Dick had been a father of one or both girls at that time, he surely would only be 'working'?



After their bout, Dick would attest that Vittorio Apollo's feet, had an earthy, woodland taste, along with a light, fruity taste.

A guy with a daughter or daughters steps deliberately on another little girl? The old dude with the cane, had to be a ring-in and as for Joe Scarpa, he may have been in on 'it' or not. Still, if I now believe that what I witnessed was just a piece of theatre, a question remains ; did Dick the Bulldog Brower orchestrate that few minutes of mind boggling action himself? See, I still can't put the damn thing to bed!

Does anyone remember the t.v. series *Burkes Law*, where suave millionaire Gene Barry played a detective? Well, series two episode 16, (1965) has the title 'Who Killed the Strangler'. As the episode can be viewed on YouTube (I've just found it today as I was writing this) I won't give away the plot, however I can say I was both pleased and somewhat surprised, to confirm that I had indeed remembered a small part of a show from over fifty years ago. Three cops are speaking about 'the Strangler' a wrestler and one asks another if he remembered when the Strangler was beaten by a particular opponent and the other answers 'yes, it took twenty five fake cops to pull him off of him' the third guy says quizzically 'fake cops'? (Judo Gene LeBell and Billy Varga are in the story, albeit briefly).

Now, anyone who has witnessed more than a few of the WWE over the years, will have seen a plethora of fake police and security guards, however back in the 60's the cops at the Sydney Stadium were the real article. On one occasion, the tag team of Cyclone Negro and The Alaskan, aided by the usual see no evil referee, were beating the life out of good guys Steinborn and Bastien. Into a corner Dickie or Red would be slammed and double teaming would ensue, usually along the lines of, while the guy on the outside would restrain said good guy by wrapping the tag rope around his neck, the partner would be whaling away with closed fists. While the referee remonstrated with the outside man, his partner would add gouging to his misdemeanours and when the referee, having managed a release of the good guy, turned to barter with the second villain, then the outsider would snatch the hair of the release-e, snare him with the rope once more and ad infinitum. All this time, the good guy

who was supposed to be outside the ring, would enter it and desperately try to save his partner, only to be constrained by the referee!

Eventually, the furious and mostly ringsiders could stand no more and made a concerted rush to try and get to Negro and The Alaskan, who carried on with the carnage as Sydney's finest made the save, a whole phalanx of blue barring the mobs access to the ring. No one was hurt, the disqualified Negro and his tag partner made their way safely back to the dressing sheds and the good guys had taken a beaten but had won their match and could look forward to a winning bonus. (Yeah, right)! No fake cops here!

On another occasion, one of the Japanese villains was making his way to the ring with the Sergeant in command of the stadium guardians, walking beside him. Suddenly with little warning, a large woman in a fur coat standing in the aisle let loose with a hard straight right fist, that whistled just under the sergeant's jaw and landed with an audible thud on the side of the wrestler's neck. The Oriental didn't blink and carried on his way to the ring, while the policeman, red in the face, stopped in his tracks, looked as though he was either going to blow a gasket or strike the woman, or both, shouted to two of his guys to take hold of the woman. They led her away and rather than evict her from the venue, they put her in with the asylum that was the fenced bleachers. (I shiver at the thought of ever sitting foot in them thar hills)!

Next time, Red Bastien, Dick the Bulldog Brower and Dominic DeNucci serve up a classic threesome



Five of the best. Gomez, Heffernan, Steinborn, Bockwinkle and DeNucci. (Auditioning for The Full Monte, perhaps?)



HOLD THE PRESSES!

On the face of it, this picture from a 1966 magazine, could prove that the little girl in the Bulldog Scarpa story was not his daughter, as the match took place in '65. However there is a possibility that this was an old picture used for the magazine story. It is also possible that the baby had an older sister who was not available when the photo was taken. Having originally believed the action that night of the match wasn't a work and then changing my mind on learning Dick had two daughters, on seeing that the picture was in a '65 magazine, I'm now leaning toward believing that the little girl was not a plant. and if she wasn't, what about the old guy, was he working?

What do you guys think?