

My Wrestling Journey



The travels of Our Man from Down Under

John Shelvey

Part 12: I stickup for the Killer, plus The Redhead, the Bulldog and the Italian.

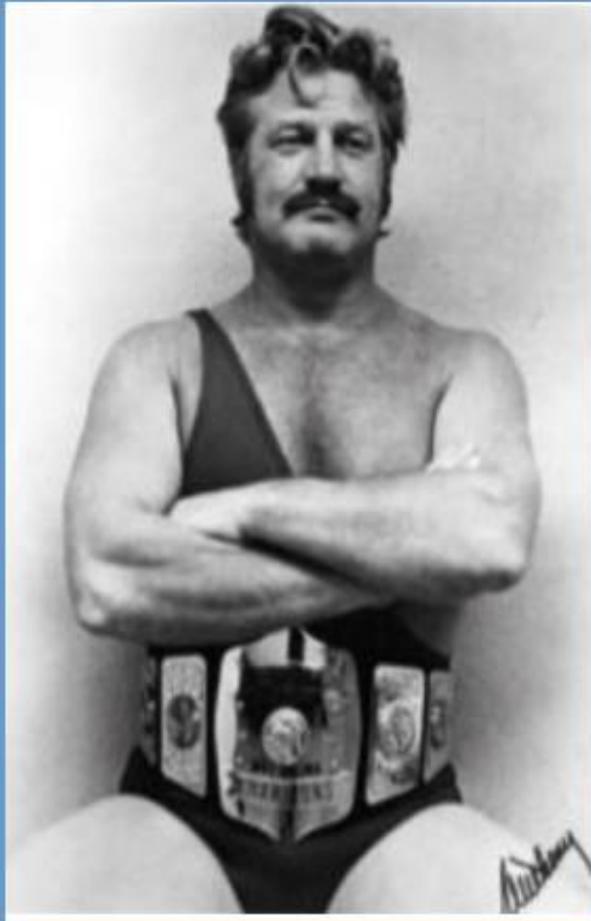


Red Bastien.

I can't give him a higher accolade, than to say he would have been a main eventer in the U.K.

"I am the MOST HATED MAN in SYDNEY"!

A group of us were standing on the factory floor, being harangued by our Commander in Chief, a nasty piece of work named Cyril. Tall with dark brilliantined hair, he wore a perpetual scowl and looked like the sort of guy who would on-sell dodgy cars to Arthur Daley. I had never been introduced to him, or even locked eyes, in the year I had worked for him. I had often been witness to his temper tantrums either around the factory or emanating from his office upstairs. On one occasion, in the period before I became an apprentice, I sometimes went out with one of the carpenters (to help install bench tops, windows or kitchen tops) and there was Cyril loudly berating a builder, using very Anglo Saxon language, while young mothers were passing by taking their infant children to school. So?, NO CLASS CYRIL! Anyway, back at the factory, I had quickly tuned out of his latest tirade as I felt his subject matter, had nothing to do with me.



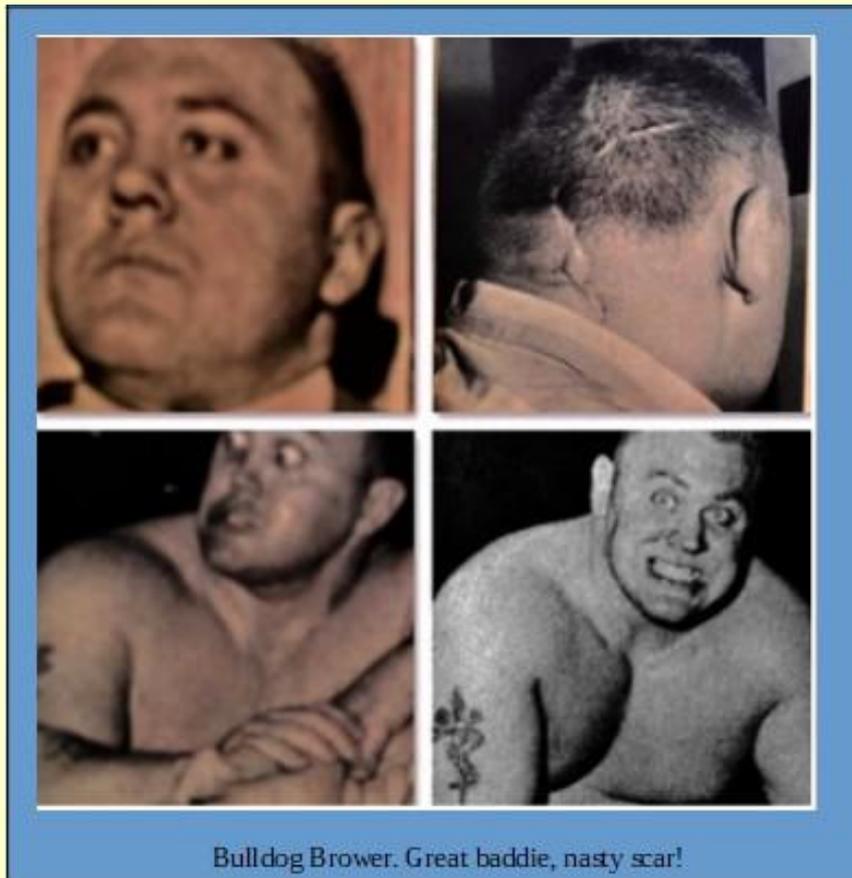
Although he won several tag titles Down Under as well as the New York version of the World Tag Team title, plus the AWA World tag title among others, Red also held regional belts as a singles performer.

"NO YOU'RE NOT" a voice piped up, causing previously downcast faces to twist and turn towards the dissenting voice. "KILLER KOWALSKI IS" My voice was surprisingly steady, considering the blistering I was about to receive from Cyril, who having located the source of the mutiny, was now glaring at me with an intent, puzzled look. I'm not entirely sure why I spoke up, maybe it was just that whereas Cyril was a thoroughly awful individual, who no doubt had his enemies due to his very flawed character, he needed to go along to the Sydney Stadium on a Friday night and listen to some fourteen thousand wrestling fans vent their collective spleens at the Killer. Cyril would then have to admit that in the 'Hate Stakes Derby' the Killer would have raced and won, accepted the cup, showered, dressed, gone home, changed clothes and gone out to dinner and was having an after dinner brandy while Cyril was still cursing and kicking his horse in the stalls!

Maybe Cyril didn't recognise me, as after six months of weight training and a year of unloading lorries full of timber, I was much physically

different to the slender fifteen year old I was when I had commenced work. Maybe he thought I was a ring-in, or from parts unknown. Regardless, the anticipated blast, never came. Cyril carried on with his speech and for the rest of his tenure at the factory, always went out of his way to say "Good morning Tarzan, how are you today" or if he was in a conversation with someone and we passed he'd enquire "And what DO you reckon Tarzan"? He would speak, with a slight smile on his lips, however he never once said anything nasty or even gave me a dirty look. So that was a relief! Oh and within my hearing, he never again claimed to be the most hated man in Sydney!

Now, we return to the wrestling. Dick the Bulldog Brower was at it again. Having dispatched Joe Scarpa he was now at loggerheads with a favourite of all Australian wrestling fans, Red Bastien. Red was a small heavyweight, with a big heart, a great drop kick an effortless looking flying head scissors and in case you hadn't guessed, he was also the possessor of a shock of red hair! Because of their size disparity, the Bulldog was about four stone heavier than Red, it was hard to believe that unless the bad guy was disqualified, I couldn't see the crowd going home happy at the end of the evening.



The match saw a first for the stadium, at least for this promotion. It was announced that a 'special' referee had been given the job of controlling the contestants and the man chosen to wear the black and white stripes was Dominic DeNucci, crowd favourite, hot Italian temper and lastly as all fans knew, a good pal of Red Bastien.

Well, I had read about these 'special' referees in the American mags and three names quickly sprang to mind, Rocky Marciano, Jersey Joe Walcott and Archie Moore. These and a couple of others sometimes used on the wrestling circuit, were all

ex-professional boxers and were there as celebrity gimmick crowd pullers, although even as a youth I wondered how much these guys would swell the attendance. DeNucci was a practicing good guy who some thought would show no bias and others were wondering if De Nucci would get into it with the Bulldog. I'd never seen a 'special' before, had Steve Logan refereed a Mick McManus bout, or did Bert Royal once stand in for Lou Marco when brother Vic faced Chic Purvey? I think not!

The match ran pretty much as I thought it would, with Red having to turn back a rampaging Brower, managing to split falls with the much bigger man as the contest raged towards its end. DeNucci had handled his duties competently, however he was becoming annoyed at Bulldog's underhand tactics and flouting of the rules and with Bastien having to throw away the rule book, the big Italian was near boiling point. A disqualification looked to be on the cards, when for the umpteenth time Bastien threw Bulldog into a corner and started to pummel him, with DeNucci trying to break them up, Bulldog grabbed Bastien and swung him into the turnbuckle and laid in big forearm smashes, only to have Red, once more reverse their positions and pinned Bulldog into the corner. The red head laid into his foe, until Bulldog with his back still up against the turnbuckle, threw a big right hand which Red evaded and the crowd gasped as De Nucci felt the full force of the blow.

The Italian shook the cobwebs from his head and as Red looked on and as Brower tried to explain what had just occurred and why, the 'special referee' forgot his gig for the moment and cracked the Bulldog a 'special' Dominic DeNucci forearm smash, sending the big fella through the ropes and to the concrete floor. The Bulldog was on his feet pretty quickly and started towards the ring apron, the twenty count would give him plenty of time to resume the fight, however Dominic DeNucci had had enough. The count went something like 'one, two, three, eight, ten, fifteen, seventeen, twenty, you're OUT!' The truncated count, took all

of four or five seconds, the crowd arose to their collective feet and roared their approval, Bulldog had got his just deserts, he had a big weight advantage and had fought foul for the whole of the contest, so if he had been beaten by a 'slightly' fast count, well they didn't give a hoot, they had seen good triumph over evil!

I was quite happy that the booker had come up with a way for the much smaller man to win, in a manner that didn't leave him looking weak, as it could be argued he was level in the contest and was still holding firm when DeNucci took matters into his own hands. Equally, the finish, while just what the fans craved, would also have them mulling over what the outcome of the match, with a 'regular' referee would have been. Also the Bulldog could, with some credence, complain that he was the loser due to a biased referee. So in a way, there were no losers that Friday evening, Red Bastien got a win, DeNucci saved his pride, Bulldog Brower could say with some merit that he wasn't beaten fair and square and the big crowd did go home happy after all!

Next time... The Good, the Bad and the Cage!



Whilst signing my autograph book (long gone) I enquired about Red's 'half brother' Lou Klien. Red politely replied 'Oh he's fine. I think he's up in Canada at the moment'. End of deep, investigative Q and A!