

My Wrestling Journey



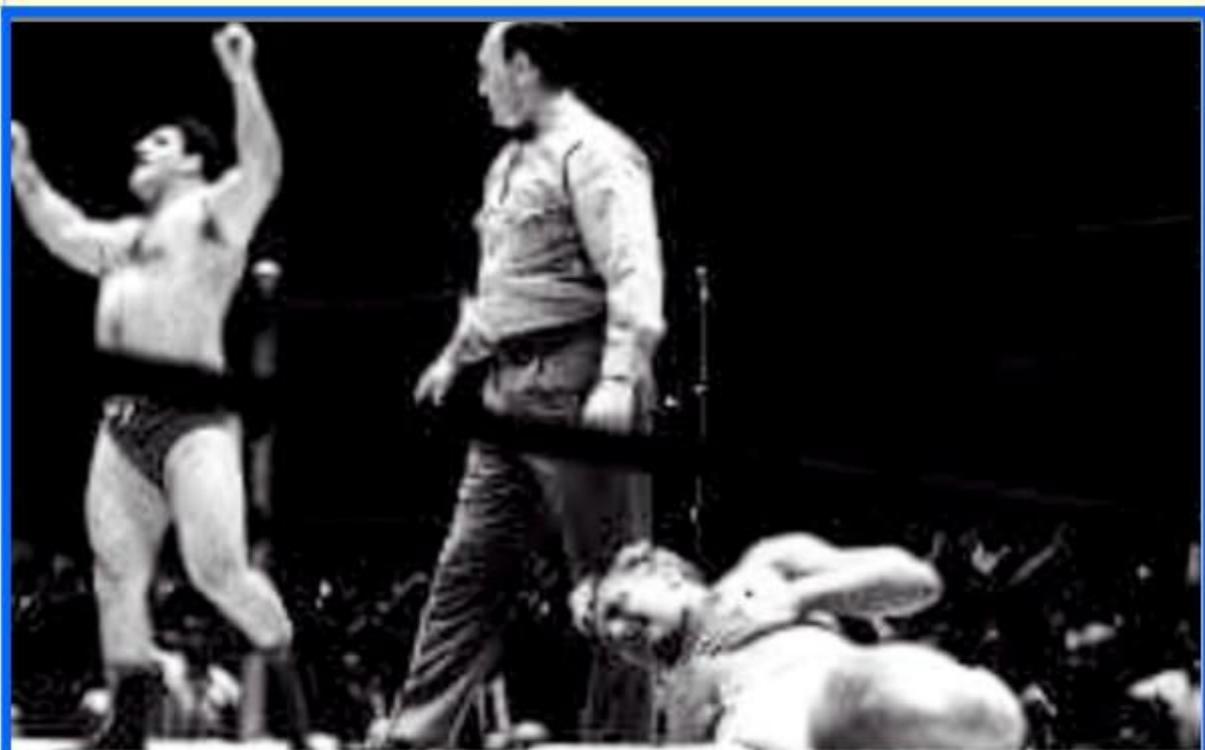
The travels of Our Man from Down Under

John Shelvey

Part 15 Sammartino Lets Me Down and the Destroyer Arrives. Or Does He

Bruno Sammartino did a 'pop in ' staying only for a few weeks between April and May and again for the same amount of time in Sept./ August of 1966. Any wrestling fan knew who Bruno was, the slayer (in) 48 seconds of the 'great' Buddy Rogers for the WWWF World Title in 1964? Idol of New Yorkers, Italians and those of Italian pedigree, his visit was anticipated with great expectations.

I was particularly looking forward to Bruno giving Waldo von Erich a jolly good thrashing! Even though I was no longer a 'mark' Waldo was (portrayed) the sort of guy people of my generation were taught to disdain. Haughty, snivelling, arrogant, he seemed to be happy to hand out a whopping, but not too keen on having to take a long or substantial offence from his opponents. With the Italian's reputation for handling bad guys harshly, I thought I could rely on Bruno to give the 'German' his comeuppance.



One of wrestling's most iconic photos. Sammartino beats Rogers for McMahon's version of the World Heavyweight Title.
Why McMahon didn't have the match filmed for posterity, is anyone's guess.

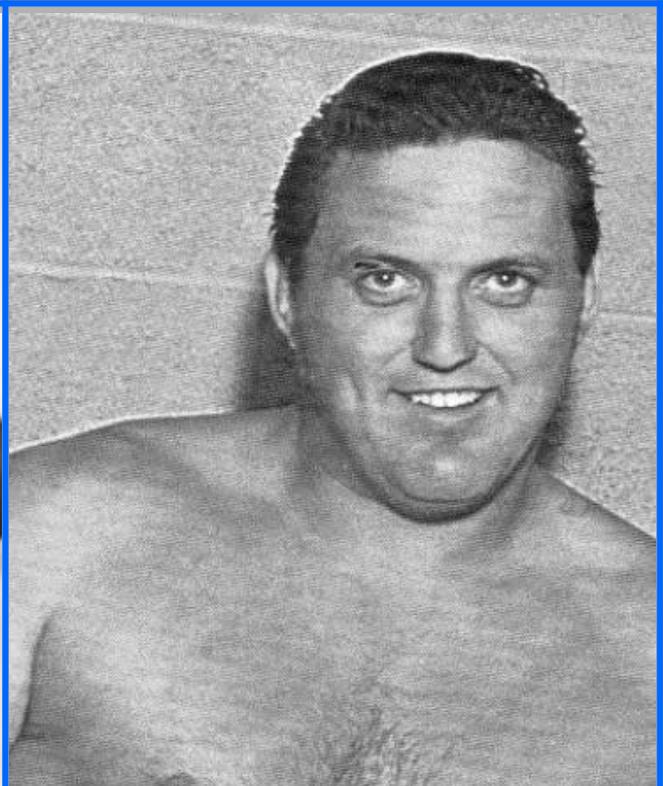
If you had asked members of the audience for their views on the stouch, I'm sure most would have said that Bruno had indeed, cleaned Waldo's clock, however much to my chagrin, I could not concur. Bruno, for his large bulk was extremely light on his tootsies and moved around the ring with speed. He also had a lightning fast arm drag. He used a few standard moves but his forte was punching and kicking, which would have been fine on this occasion, but if you looked closely Waldo, long before Baldrick was thought of, had 'a cunning plan'. He would get in his offence, then when it was his turn to take a shellacking, he'd allow Bruno to set him up in a corner, set his feet out in front of him, go up on his toes, lean as far back as he could and push his shoulders forward. This allowed him, the taller man, to take the Italian's forearm smashes on the front of his shoulders, rather than across his chest. Bruno's

wrist would land on one shoulder and his elbow on the other shoulder, with his forearm barely landing. Bruno got the win, I wasn't happy, the rest of the crowd was. Them's the breaks!

With no prior warning, hoopla or fanfare, suddenly The Destroyer appeared Down Under. This was unusual as the names of the 'coming attractions' were always announced weeks in advance, especially their first appearance would be advised the previous week on the t.v. The Destroyer was a mystery man who had appeared on the Stateside scene sometime in the early 60s and had reeled off a long run of main event wins against some of the heavy hitters of the heavyweight class. I don't remember if I was at The Destroyer's first Sydney appearance, however I do recall that when I laid eyes on him I was sure that he was NOT the Destroyer that was popping up in the available wrestling magazines, enter Super Sleuth (maybe surmiser) Sherlock Shelvey. On several telecasts over a several week period, the name Guy Mitchell had been touted as a soon to be coming attraction, in fact he was supposed to be on the card on the night that the Masked man appeared. Mitchell, if you followed the results in said magazines, was a mid-carder and it's possible that his name only registered with me because it was the same moniker as the popular singer entertainer Guy Mitchell, who I had seen many times on t.v. both in Aus and at home in Sussex. Guy Mitchell the wrestler, was never mentioned again, this Destroyer didn't have the solid physique of the one in the magazines and to me didn't look like a particularly villainous villain. Line up Kowalski, Stomper, Arakawa, the Beast or Firpo and 'this' Destroyer and then was told you HAD to fight one of them, then Guy was the guy you'd choose poste haste! I was sure the Australian wrestling audience had been duped, albeit most would not have known of the Destroyer before he arrived anyway.



This is the Destroyer who didn't make it to Australia.
Missed it, by that much 99!



This is the Destroyer who did make it and he grasped the nettle well!



Dick Beyer, the genuine article, was hoping to surf Bondi or Bells Beach, but had to settle for Waikiki

The Destroyer was given a huge push, you can't do much better than being made the World

Champeen! He knocked over opponents such as Roy Heffernan, Jim Hady, Vittorio Appollo and Bearcat Wright, workers who would have beaten him had he been wrestling as Guy Mitchell! Eventually dethroned by Spiros Arion who had the honour of also unmasking him, Mitchell seemed to me to be furious that his exit from the ring with his mask intact, was barred by a huge throng of Arion's Greek supporters who were adamant that the mask was coming off on their watch, as per the pre-match stipulation. I've always believed that Guy was hoping he could make the safety of the dressing sheds, mask in place, so as to have at least one more main event match with features obscured.

It was many years later, that I learned through the Internet that the Destroyer the Aussies witnessed was indeed known Stateside as (among other names) Guy Mitchell.

A few years ago, it came to my notice that a couple of wrestling sites (one probably copying the other) that when unmasked it 'was announced 'that the Destroyer was one John Hill', who he indeed was, however no such announcement was made at the Sydney Stadium that night. I'm also sceptical that after his unmasking he was announced as John Hill in his subsequent matches, although it is possible as I don't recall seeing him live after that evening. Why the promotion used another wrestlers working name, I doubt if anyone is around to tell us, however there's more, there's more....

***Dick Beyer, great worker and the REAL Destroyer popped up in New Zealand in 1971.

He was travelling back from Germany, having worked several tournaments there. The story as told by Dick, was that Jim Barnett had indeed hired him to wrestle in Aus but then reneged on the deal due to Mark Lewin's intervention. Dick said that when the two had met in a match Stateside sometime before, Lewin was booked to win the match, however Dick was off to Japan afterwards and thought his hosts to be would worry about business if word

got out he was coming in as a loser, being a perennial winner in the Land of the Rising Sun. The two went to a draw in the match in question, but Lewin still smarting over Dick's behaviour, told Barnett 'it's either me or the Destroyer' and as Lewin was at times a top attraction and booking the matches also, Barnett went with Lewin. Now, had I read that six to ten years ago, I would have thought little of it, however having read a pile of wrestling books in that time, I'm now very cynical***about wrestlers and their claims, so when I read Dick's version in his book (also repeated online) I decided to think more about it. Firstly, having read a fair bit about Barnett, I find it hard to believe he could be manipulated in the way suggested. Secondly, from all I've read, when Lewin went into a territory, he did so with the intention of making money. If he was making good money, then the territory was making money and vice versa and bringing in the Destroyer and pitting him against him and the other top baby faces, would have been guarantee to print money. Thirdly, if Lewin didn't want anything to do with Dick, Lewin could have suggested to Barnett to bring in the masked man when he, Lewin, was back in the States as he frequently spent a few months between the two countries. Finally, surely if Lewin was still harbouring a grudge against Beyer and he had so much sway with Barnett, wouldn't he have welcomed Beyer to Australia and proceed to put himself over him in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and points in between?



Guy, or John.
As Jerry Valiant he hit Gold once again.

So, my opinion is, that it is possible Barnett was talking about bringing in Dick Beyer as the Destroyer and Lewin (or someone connected with the promotion) pointed out that if it was to be business as usual, once Dick's time Down Under was finishing up he would have to go home a loser, as all their villains did. If Dick was losing his last match (or matches) he would also be expected by Australian fans to unmask and that, Dick just would not do! I suspect he may have arranged his New Zealand trip, in the hope that once he was there, Barnett may take the attitude that seeing as a money making main eventer was just 'next door' then he may well reach out to him. Dick is reported to have said he was earning \$1,500 a week in the Land of the Long White Cloud, as opposed to the \$750 a week Barnett had formerly offered him. If that's true, he probably would have bankrupted the small New Zealand promotion.

***I hasten to add, in my experience American wrestlers are far more prone to tell tall tales than our home grown boys, however I once had an hours conversation with a famous British

grappler who as nice as he was, told me some pretty big porkies!

Next time... A familiar face to U.K. fans appears in Sydney and almost ruins his famous opponents tour, before it starts!