

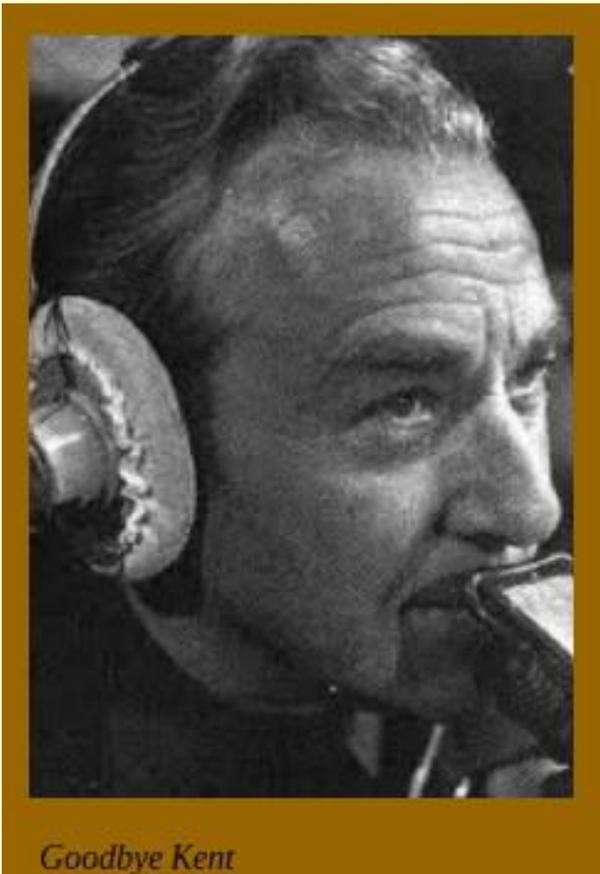
My Wrestling Journey



The travels of Our Man from Down Under

John Shelvey

Part 2 – A Suitcase of Memories



So that was it. The Shelvey family were off to a new life in the sun. I was leaving behind the dulcet, reassuring tones of Kent Walton and taking with me a bag full of memories.

Before we dash down the runway here are a few more memories of those halcyon days:

Another memory for my memory highlight reel took place at the Three Bridges Wrestling Club which used Three Bridges Primary School as its training place. I think there were four of us lads who paid a couple of bob a week to spend a couple of hours performing break-falls and little else, as those were the days when kids were to be seen and not heard. We did get more than our monies worth though, simply by being very helpful and volunteering to put the mats out each time the class was on. What we did, of course, was arrive about two hours early, laid out the long narrow mat we used to fall about on, then lay out the adult mat and then we'd rumble baby! (Of course no one used that phrase back then). Almost a couple of hours of nelsons, hip tosses, head

chanceries, knee lifts, we threw everything at each other apart from body slams (we didn't know the secret of performing a slam) and drop kicks (too dangerous). Forearm smashes were verboten also. At the time we all thought we were getting one over on the guys, but looking back I expect one look at our sweaty, red scuffed bodies gave us away. Or maybe the adults just didn't care!

That wasn't the particular memory I was referring to however. One night, two strangers, Polish, one in his early to mid twenties, the other an older man appeared at the club. Us kids stopped 'break-falling' and sort of worked out that the older guy, in halting English was telling the guys training, that the younger Pole wanted to get on the mat with one or more of 'our guys. Our most promising wrestler was chosen, the Pole stripped and it was on. After a few minutes of pulling and pushing the two protagonists were on the mat Pole on Anlaise and suddenly several of those wrestlers watching, rushed forward and pulled the Pole off our guy and an argument ensued. It became clear that the Pole was being accused of either choking or strangling his opponent. There was a bit of a break, calm was restored and the two went at it again, with the same result! This time, despite the protestations of the two Poles, especially the wrestler, who mimed choking and then vigorously shook his head, they were given the 'bums rush'. Wow, did we kids love that drama!

More memories ...

Joe Critchley (pretty sure it was Joe and not the other prankster Coneely) receiving an Irish Whip. Time stood still, until four or five seconds later Joe somersaulted to the mat, leaving uncle Kent to explain "*That's a delayed reaction from Critchley.*"



Ricky Starr, as if you needed telling.

Frikki Alberta's wife and son being pointed out by Kent and a t.v. camera and with her sitting centre stage of the t.v. audience, we all saw her leave with her son at the conclusion of a round. Coincidentally Frikki was knocked out by Francis Sullivan's drop kick in the very next round! (Was that exit so as to not alarm the son, or had Frikki other plans for the evening and had given the Mrs the 'heads up' for a quick getaway?)

Ricky Starr's controversial first win and appearance on t.v. We had never seen anything like it and we loved it. (I lived in the South, so I am aware now, as an adult, the men folk up North, probably weren't too keen on a ballet dancer going over one of 'theirs'.

Both the McManus Pallo Cup Final clashes were immense. I went for Mick, in those days 'big heads' and 'show offs' were scorned.

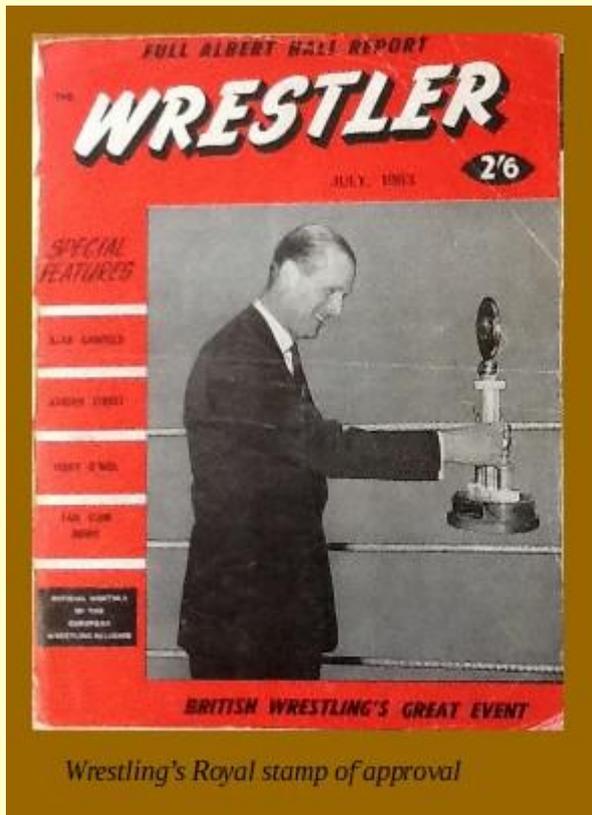
One afternoon in Brighton, we watched as the pied piper himself, Jackie Pallo, sashay down the promenade dressed in a green shirt and tie, green waistcoat, green suit, green shoes and his hair in a bun tied with a green ribbon, being followed by a conger line of children and

adults alike.

That same afternoon, on pointing out to my dad the Donlevey brothers, he suggested to my mum she should look around the shops. We men had detective work to do, dad informing me we were going to tail (he probably said follow) the Irishman. He never said why, but I suspect he suspected, they would lead us to a place where they would rehearse their evenings matches. Doh! If this was his plan, then he must have been disappointed when after twenty minutes of meandering through the Town they entered a cinema, we still on their trail. The cinema turned out to be a 24 hour cartoon cinema and so the boyos sat and we sat, a few rows behind them, until dad grew bored and said we should go and we did. I believe Semus won that night and Mike either drew or lost. I'm pretty sure the Donlevey's wrestled Doug and Ken Joyce. Did they move on from the pics. to a rehearsal room, I don't think so. I do know Pallo won his match.

Stephan Milla losing an opening match, quitting with an injury, some months later I read in The Wrestler magazine he had dislocated his shoulder that night. (I did like a good injury now and again, it proved wrestling was real).

The first match at Brighton between Starr and Garfield. Surely the only time in an English stadium when a capacity crowd booed the guy with the Union Jack and cheered the guy with the American Stars and Stripes.



The Starr, Garfield stouch was only topped by a one night heavyweight knockout tournament. Cornelius beat a rambunctious Lynch who worked on Joe's eye. He then beat Texas Jack Bence after Bence had rubbed resin in the same eye. Garfield beat Yearsley in the other semi and was happy to continue to menace Joe, who's injured eye was now closed, throughout the final. In what I always considered to be a piece of brilliant booking (it may just have been a fluke). with most 'smart' fans in the stadium thinking that one-eyed Joe would make an heroic comeback and defeat the hated music hall villain that was Alan Garfield, Joe did make the valiant, back to the wall, last ditch stand and was then ultimately defeated!

Seeing the documentary 'The Life Of A Wrestler' one night on t.v. Lou Thesz was the wrestler and it seemed to 'legitimise' wrestling even more, to me. (The fact that Thesz accidentally drop kicked Sam Steamboat in

the mouth drawing blood, was yet another pointer of how dangerous the sport could be).

Buying my first issue of 'The Wrestler' in '63. Up until then I bought copies of Boxing Illustrated and Wrestling News and Wrestling Revue. I didn't know the English magazine existed. The eventual collection has travelled from England to Australia on five different occasions.

May 22nd 1963: The night of night, the televised Royal Albert Hall special with his HRH in attendance bringing in millions of casual viewers for the old sport. As a bonus there it was, reported in the first copy of the Wrestler magazine I bought.

Two Wednesday night matches from that period stand out : Johnny Allan beating Zandor Zabo (yours truly gushing to his mates the next day 'Zabo, he had tree trunks like legs')!

After seeing The Great Togo demolish Barry Douglas on the Saturday I was fearing the worst for Geoff Portz. I needn't have, as the powerhouse turned Togo's nerve hold into an aeroplane spin, slammed and pinned him.

I wonder if Geoff ever boasted he softened up Oddjob, for 007?

Hey, I was off to Australia.