

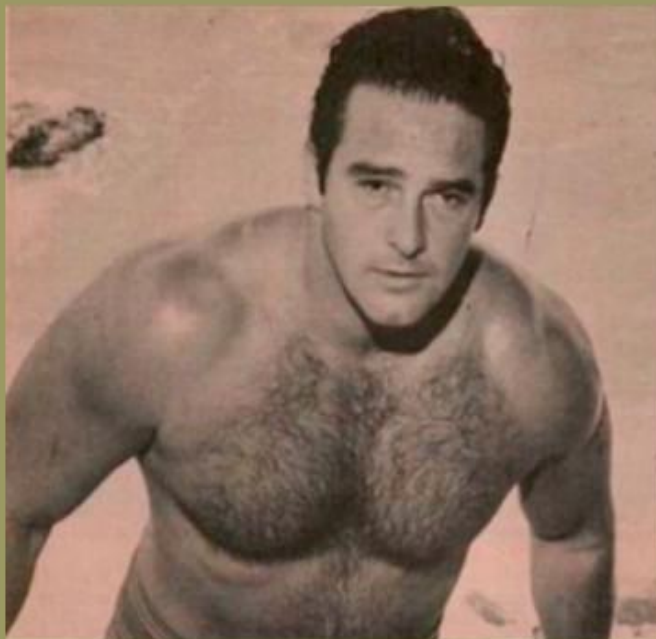
My Wrestling Journey



The travels of Our Man from Down Under

John Shelvey

Part 6: Master of the Sleeper Hold



Mark Lewin, possibly the most popular wrestler to appear Down Under.

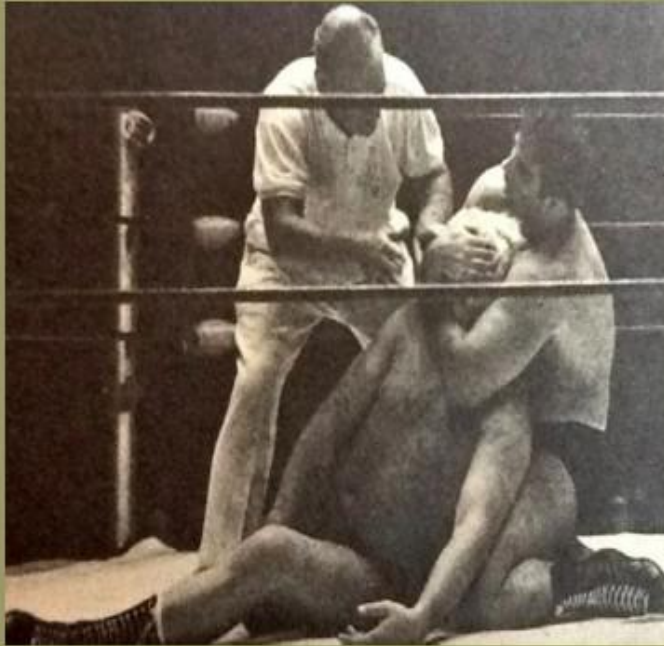
Mark Lewin, a young, handsome athlete, had been in the game for over a decade, having started wrestling professionally as a sixteen year old. I didn't know this in 1965 and I also didn't know until five decades later, that during Lewin's apprenticeship he had met 'Sir' Alan Garfield on at least four occasions and had lost to 'M'Lord on at least three of those occasions! Lewin popped up on the television one Saturday and was an instant hit, particularly with my dad and I. He had matinee idol looks, but when the bell rung, he locked arms with his heel Aussie opponent and dragged him backwards to the ropes. Laying back on the ropes, he held his arms in the air, on the refs call of 'break'. Of course his opponent ignoring the third man's call, belted Mark in the stomach. Now, usually the good guy would take several of these, without responding

violently until he had gained the crowds sympathy, not Lewin. He reached out, grabbed the guy and knocked him on his backside. One of three wrestling brothers, Mark's older brother once said that 'Mark is a rough babyface' and that was an apt description as he only needed to have one illegality performed on his person and the gloves were off!

Mixing the usual babyface technical moves including drop kicks, he also punched, chopped and kneed his way to the point when after using two backdrops, he'd throw his battered foe into the ropes, catch him on his return, in his favourite hold, the sleeper and it was good night Irene (or Buddy, Stomper (Archie) et al). He also had an unusual way of 'selling', instead of grimacing or calling out in pain, his face would remain impassive, blank and he would register the blows, kicks, etc. as if he had received an electric shock, throwing his head back, jolting his body, then staying on the canvas or slumped over the ropes until the next attack.

He also had very good timing, many times he would reel into the ropes under attack from Mitsu Arakawa, Professor Tanaka, Ray Stevens or perhaps Skull Murphy (the original, not Roy's son). With his back to the ring and Mark seemingly comatose, his dastardly opponent would creep up on him, hand or fist raised (judo chop or punch alert) and our hero would suddenly spin around and crack his foe with a forearm to the head. It could be that he was actually laying on the ropes and watching the reaction of the front row audience, who would shout out to him to 'move' or 'watch out Mark', often gals would actually just let out a piercing scream! (Which reminds me of the night, one particular female, was screaming frequently and eventually a somewhat nerdy guy in front of me shouted 'shut up, I'm trying to listen to the wrestling. No he wasn't blind).

One Saturday, sitting at home watching the wrestling, I was shocked when into the ring jumps Ray Stevens and Mark Lewin. Up until that moment, apart from the very first telecast, all the t.v. matches had been 'squashes', where an American 'star' would take on an Aussie



Night night Ray. Stevens succumbs to Lewin's sleeper hold.

who would put the visitor over in quick time. The victor would then leave the ring to, depending if he was a good guy or a villain, berate the show host Sammy Menacker as well as insult the Aussie men and women and explain how he would be rearranging his opponents features in their meeting that coming Friday, or speak softly and kindly to the viewers while promising to obliterate his next opponent on behalf of the wonderful Sydney public. If the good guys were Greek or Italian they would convey a similar message to their countrymen/women watching the telecast. Now, not only were two of the best wrestlers in the World (I'm using World, as the Americans loved to use it i.e. 'I've fought all over the World! In most cases, World meant USA, Canada and maybe Puerto Rica) straining at the bit, to tear into each other, but looking at the clock on our

sideboard, I saw they had almost twenty minutes to do so! Cut to the commercials! Come on! Eventually they're back on the screen, the Bleached Blonde in one corner and the Dark haired Hero in the other. Another glance at the clock, maybe we are going to get fifteen minutes. They meet the ref in the centre of the ring, Lewin wants to engage, the referee, holds him back, Stevens starts to complain about Lewin's clenched fist. They go back and forth and finally they're off! A third glance at the clock, still around eleven or twelve minutes of viewing time. The two start to knock seven bells out of each other, then suddenly Lewin is down, Stevens climbs to the top of a turnbuckle and leaping off, plunges his knee across Mark's neck. He writhes in agony (well you would, wouldn't you) and falls out of the ring and onto the floor, Stevens gets into Sammy Menacker's face and breathing heavily, hits a promo, which includes name calling and generally abusing everyone within earshot, specifically using the phrase 'Youse Pencil Necked Geeks'. Then Stevens suddenly lurches forward and out of camera range, as Lewin, miraculously recovered from having his Adam's apple smashed to the back of his throat, cracks Ray across the back of the head. They brawl into the first, second and third rows of the tv audience who scatter everywhere and Lewin whacks Stevens over the head with a folded chair, just as the transmission ends.

I look at pater, Dad looks at me, we are both wide-eyed, speechless, WOW! What did we just witness? Sometime later we hear that a Mark Lewin v Ray Stevens match has been signed, (there would be many match 'signings' over the years) for next Friday. Sydney Stadium here we come.

Off to the Sydney stadium we go!

The undercard was a bit thin, however one of the opening matches was surprisingly exciting, albeit after the contest was over. Vince Montana an overweight, rather lacklustre guy billed from San Francisco who was destined to be an easy beat during his three month stay, had beaten Big John Marshall. Big John from Kalgoorlie was actually Arthur Little (I know I said I wouldn't be 'exposing' real names, but it's another good example of names not suiting the character or the profession). Big John limped slowly away from the scene of his demise, only for Montana to attack him from behind and after clipping him a couple of times, picked up



Braka Cortez, said to be from Brazil, Braka lived in a Sydney suburb. Another good Aussie worker who was a regular performer on the box, at the clubs and at the stadiums.

Marshall and body slammed him onto a woman sitting in the front row! Marshall appeared to be hurt, the woman certainly was and was attended to by a St. Johns Ambulance man. I would imagine the promoter may have had to recompense the lady in some way, although there was far less litigation in those days.

As I indicated, the rest of the card was unremarkable, but the main between hero Lewin and bad, bad guy Stevens was action all the way, which if I recall correctly ended when Stevens scored an equalising fall, pinning the handsome one after dropping onto him from a great height, with his patented 'Bombs Away!' The bombs away was a knee drop to the throat, coming down from the top turnbuckle. 'To the throat and the manoeuvre was patented'? Well, it is wrestling after all and I guarantee everyone of the thousands who witnessed the match would have told you breathlessly 'wow, that was real man!' During the break between falls, Mark was still pretty much comatose, so Stevens decided, 'hey I'm ready to go' and so without waiting for the bell to commence hostilities, he launched himself off the top tier, onto his foes neck and throat again! Well, I suppose that's what you do, if you can. The referee disqualified Stevens, who naturally incensed with this travesty of justice, put the boots into his helpless opponent before officials and others pulled him off. Stevens then had to be protected from the madding crowd as he pushed his

way back to the dressing sheds. Our hero lay still after convulsing for a time and eventually was helped back to the dressing room. Much was made of the match, the next day on t.v. with both rasslers giving their version of the match and with Mark promising the fans he would get his revenge and Stevens telling all those 'pencil necked geeks and all the ugly women in Australia to be at the Sydney Stadium next Friday night to witness the destruction, once and for all, of your hero'. Apparently after a glass of water and a rub down with the Financial Times our Mark was fine and ready to 'go' again!

post script:

I was there the following Friday, when the two of them went at each other as if they were being paid to do so! On several occasions they would stand trading punches and forearms, battering each other until Stevens would drop to his knees, but then from that position, bring his arm up between Mark's legs. The women in the audience would scream, the men would wince and cross their legs involuntarily. Mark would sag to his knees and both men would continue in that pose, whaling away at each other until Stevens first, then Mark would fall backwards onto the canvas. After about thirty minutes and with the match tied at one fall apiece, Stevens threw Mark into the ropes and bent over to back drop him, only for Lewin to somersault over Stevens and pin him with the 'sunset flip' which sounds like a martini (maybe shaken not stirred) however uncle Kent would have called it as a 'double leg nelson'. The crowd emotionally drained, went home happy!

So that was nice.