

THE GOLDEN YEARS OF WISBECH CORN EXCHANGE (Part the Second)



5) The Story So Far



Dale Martin has pulled out of its monthly shows at Wisbech Corn Exchange amid accusations that they didn't really bring in the big names. 20th Century Promotions were eyeing up the situation at Wisbech, having established a good reputation in nearby March with its independent shows. When DM left Wisbech they moved in and reignited interest with female wrestling and eye-catching gimmicks like The Mummy (left). Their three 1966 shows pulled good crowds and set the scene

for Jack Taylor (below) to take over and kick off a brand new season in January 1967. The Golden Years begin. Now read on

6) The Wrestling is back

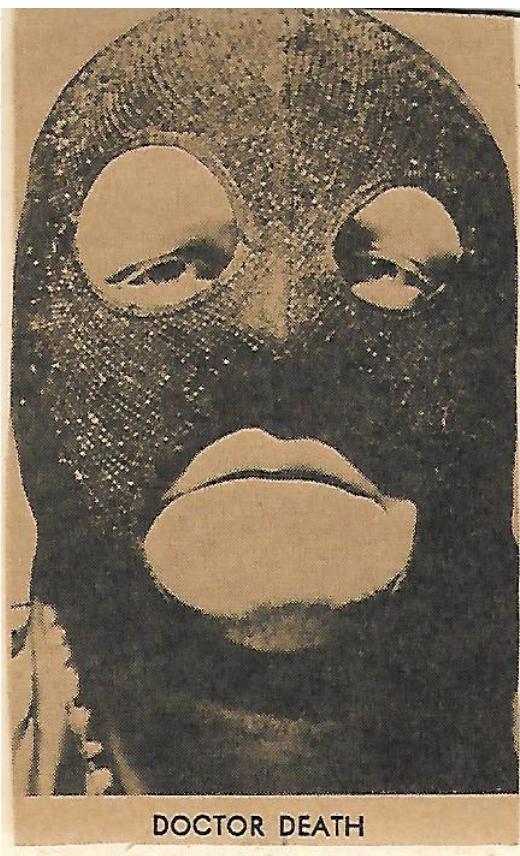
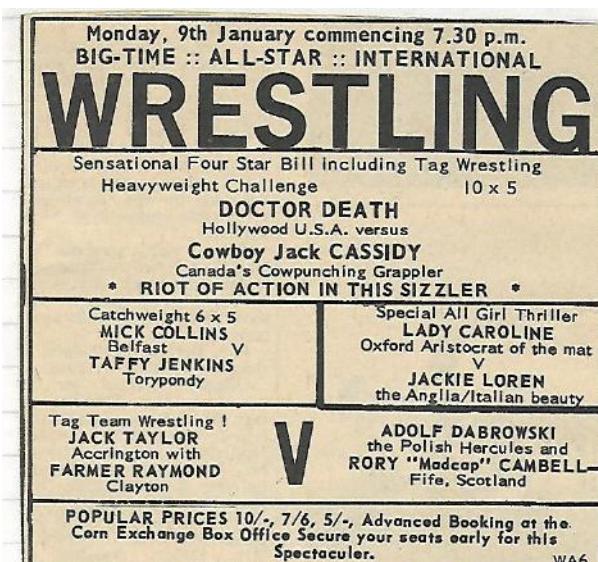


When it became clear that International Promotions were preparing to go for a full season at the Corn Exchange it was big news in the town. The local papers were eager to see if these new promoters could succeed where Dale Martin had patently failed. There were a lot of people rooting for the season to succeed. Jack was to become a regular on the bill, although few in the crowd knew that he was actually the gaffer and calling the shots.

It was around this time I first got to know Jack. I was working for the local paper so could 'plant' stories about upcoming promotions and file reports on the outcome of fights, too. All publicity is good publicity ... apart, of course, from one rather serious aspect. Legitimacy. He was a little wary of letting a pressman close to the operation for obvious reasons. But he soon realised I was a "trusty" and wasn't about to lift the lid on secrets. It was a very enjoyable time for me. Kids and sweetshops come to mind.

By and large the idea of storylines, whether we are talking about Dale Martin, TV or the independents, did not really exist in 1967 apart from the eponymous return grudge match. My newspaper articles could address that by putting little tit-bits and background information in articles to boost interest in forthcoming shows. As it turned out, the first season of International promotions at Wisbech produced one storyline that wasn't just about return grudge matches. It ensured the crowds flocked in. And who was at the centre of it all?

7) The Doctor Is In The House



Jack wanted a stand-out colourful bill for the first show ... and he certainly managed to put one together. Two no-shows took the edge off things a little, and no-shows would in fact plague Jack's tenure at Wisbech.

Anyway ... top of the bill sees the first appearance at Wisbech of Doctor Death. Never seen on TV but possibly the most talked-about heel operating in the sixties. His opponent was to be Cowboy Jack Cassidy. But Cassidy had "cut his leg badly the previous Saturday" and had to pull out. So Heine Von Schulz stepped in ... as the man who had "put Cassidy out of action". That was a clever move by Jack Taylor. Getting the fans on his side by being 'honest' about the no-show but securing the man who injured Jack and who did not want to let the fans down. It worked a dream. Jack would often level with fans – sometimes with more regard to facts than at other times. He would put notes in the

programme if there had been a change, explaining for instance how the non-appearance of someone is down to being abroad in a tournament - and doing better than expected. We would all want him to stay and win the tournament, wouldn't we? He helped to create a 'family' feel for the fans. That was made an easier proposition given that the Wisbech crowd tended to operate with one voice!



Ladies were on the bill in the shape of Lady Caroline (left), who featured on many of Jack's shows across the region, and Jackie Loren (right). They had faced each other many times and put on a good show. As did Mick Collins and Taffy Jenkins who knew each other's moves inside out and produced a fabulous opening bout which ended in a draw .. and the approval of the crowd. Yes, wrestling was back.



well be) I am sure the '67 season at Wisbech saw Ed Wensor doing Jack a favour and taking the black hood. He was a tremendous Doctor Death. A real pro who paid attention to all the right character traits. But enough of spoilers, from now on I shall just refer to this good doctor as Doctor Death.

Once tuxedo-bedecked M.C. Russell Plummer had explained the switch from Cowboy Cassidy to Heine Von Schulz the lights dimmed amid an eerie silence. Then the crowd erupted as down the aisle came a chunky figure in black leotard and mask. Slowly. Very slowly. Arrogantly. Very arrogantly. Not for Doctor Death dressing gowns or jackets or outfits divested once in the ring. Just a rolled up towel in his hand. He meant business. Real business. This was not just another wrestler. This was THE wrestler. To generate so much heat from a slow, sinister walk, was a master-class in performance. By the time he reached the ring the crowd were raising the roof. Who would want to be Heine Von Schulz?

The way the Doctor stalked his opponent in the ring was so distinct and threatening. The air of invincibility was palpable. Nerve holds. Strangle holds. Tough-guy stuff and with no consideration of the rules. While the crowd bayed for a disqualification the Doctor unceremoniously dumped Mr Von Schultz out of the ring for a knockout win.

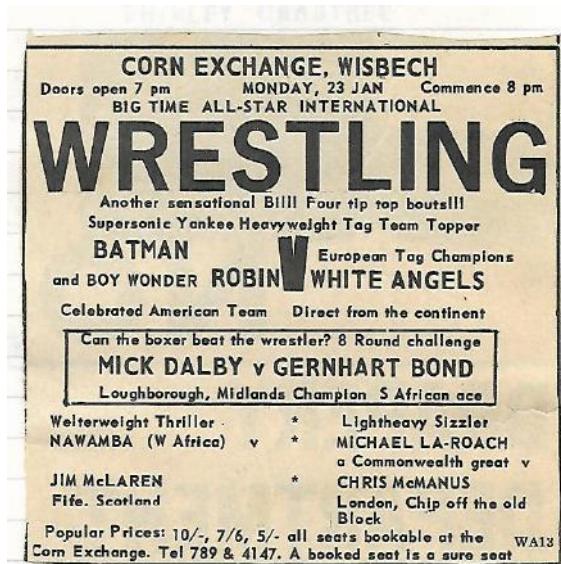
Without waiting for announcements ... who needs them ... he clammers from the ring and saunters back through a hail of screaming and hand-bag swinging. Wisbech knew it had seen a real top-of-the-bill fighter.



The night was rounded off with a tag match that saw Jack take to the ring alongside Taffy Jenkins, who was stepping in for Farmer Raymond, Jack's real-life brother. In the other corner were Adolph Dabrowski, resplendent in black tights, and kilted Rory 'Madcap' Campbell (left). Poor old referee Bob Kilburn got bounced about by the baddies in a free-for-all that saw Taylor and Jenkins grab the winning fall to leave Dabrowski and Campbell blaming each other for the loss and treating the crowd to an extra match as they went at it against each other. Jack could not have wished for a better night. The fans couldn't wait for show number two.

8) Onward ... Ever Onward

Show number two had two special attractions. Firstly there was the top billing tag match between the White Angels, listed as European Tag Champions, and the Dynamic Duo of Batman and Boy Wonder Robin. I can only assume the prospect of litigation and copyright rules put a swift end to the Duo's career because I can find no trace of them after this match. Having said that, the bout was a fabulous spectacle, ending with the defeat of the Angels, a refusal to unmask, and the promise of a return, losers unmask, bout. It never transpired.



The second attraction was a boxer v wrestler bout. Mick Dalby, an ex-pro boxer, did quite a few of these for Jack Taylor. This night he knocked out Les Valentine. Nawamba was disqualified leaving Jim McLaren to take the honours, and Michael La Roache, Ric Charles' son, beat Chris McManus. The promotion attracted a full house. That would mean just under a thousand fans. And again, they went home happy.

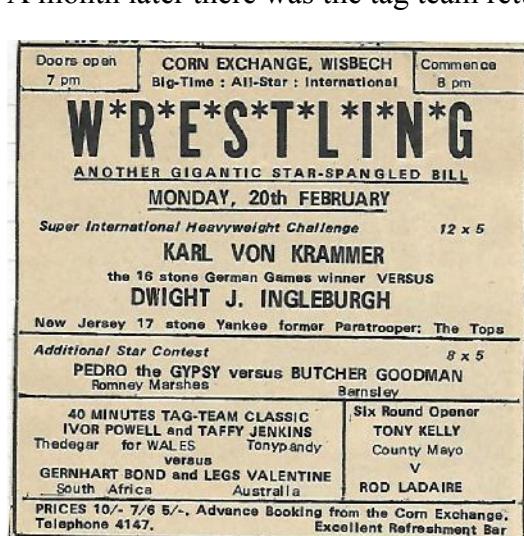
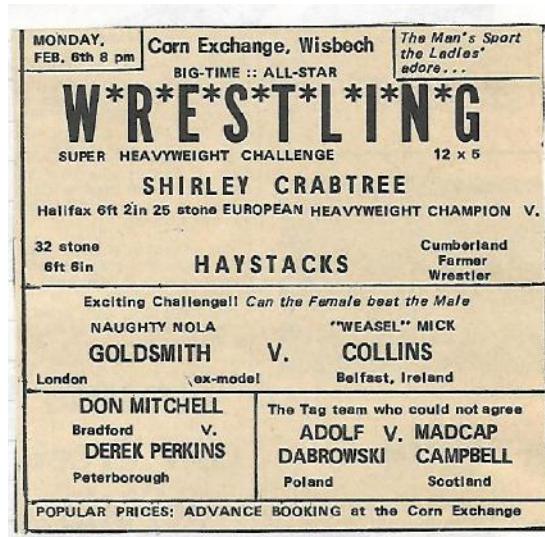
All looked set fair for show number three ... but once again no-shows threatened to test the patience of the fans. However, Jack Taylor had an answer. And it was an

answer the crowd loved. Shirley Crabtree, then billed as European Champion, was to fight Haystacks at the top of the bill. Not Giant Haystacks, of course. This was 1967 and Haystacks was 6ft 6inch 32 stone Ed Bright. This must have been one of the last bookings for Ed. However, that's all a bit academic ... because neither of them turned up! You could feel the disappointment when Russell Plummer took to the mike to apologise for the no-shows. But, wait. To make up for it there will be an additional TWO special matches ... and one will be VERY special. A 'mixed sex' match between

Mick Collins and Naughty Nola Goldsmith was not a roaring success, but Mick did well to keep it going until taking a 2-1 win with falls. Jack Brittain, in for Don Mitchell, beat Derek Perkins, and in the first of the extra bouts Hillbilly Burt beat Ken Motley. Adolph Dabrowski and Rory 'Madcap' Campbell had fallen out after that tag defeat on show one ... and this grudge match was an usual heel versus heel match which exploded with a brawl using buckets and stools and strangle-holds with towels. Once again referee Kilburn was bounced about ... and disqualified them both! Dabrowski joins the Wisbech hate list.

Finally, then, the extra special match to replace Crabtree v Haystacks. What would it be? Into the ring comes Heine Von Schultz, who had been battered by Doctor Death in show number one, with tag partner Bobby Bierne. The crowd had appreciated Von Schultz's performance on that occasion, and were with him. Next into the ring is John Romeiro, a Latin-American looking grappler. His partner? Down go the lights and down the aisle saunters ... Doctor Death! The crowd erupts. Von Schultz gets a chance for revenge in a tag match. Death and Romeiro set the fans on fire with their tactics, but Von Schultz gets his revenge as he and Bierne take the match 2-1. Death does not hide his disdain for his partner. Jack Taylor had pulled out a rabbit and averted what could have been a catastrophe. Another moneys-worth night.

A month later there was the tag team return match. Again, Death and Romeiro had their differences as the match went to a draw. On the same bill, Cowboy Jack Cassidy took on the Giant Hillbilly. In the intervening show Wisbech fans were treated to two old masters going at it hammer and tongs. Karl Von Krammer and Dwight J Ingleburgh (left). They fought to a standstill and a messy conclusion, challenged each other to a return at Wisbech and the fans couldn't wait. The return was a sell-out. On the



undercard Adolph Dabrowski carried on his love-hate relationship fighting Vince Aurelio and then it was time for the headliner. Isn't it strange how a crowd can sense that an MC was going to say one of the participants hasn't turned up? Poor Russell Plummer. Ingleburgh was indisposed. Von Krammer makes chicken movements (it wouldn't have sounded good for the fans to hear him actually shout 'chicken' in a northern accent!)

The fans are not happy. Booing breaks out. Cat-calls rule. Cigarette packets shower the ring. Von Krammer would not get his comeuppance. Suddenly there is a gasp from the fans near the dressing room. Punters start craning their necks to see what is happening. Is it? Is it really? It IS! Doctor Death himself. Who better to take on the German villain than this sinister master of mayhem. You couldn't really say Doctor Death was ever a baby-face or blue eye ... but from this point on in Wisbech, one of the most hated and feared wrestlers was the hero. Never again would he be booed in the Corn Exchange. Jack had discovered a hated giant-killer who would fill the hall with people who wanted to cheer him! That's Wisbech for you.

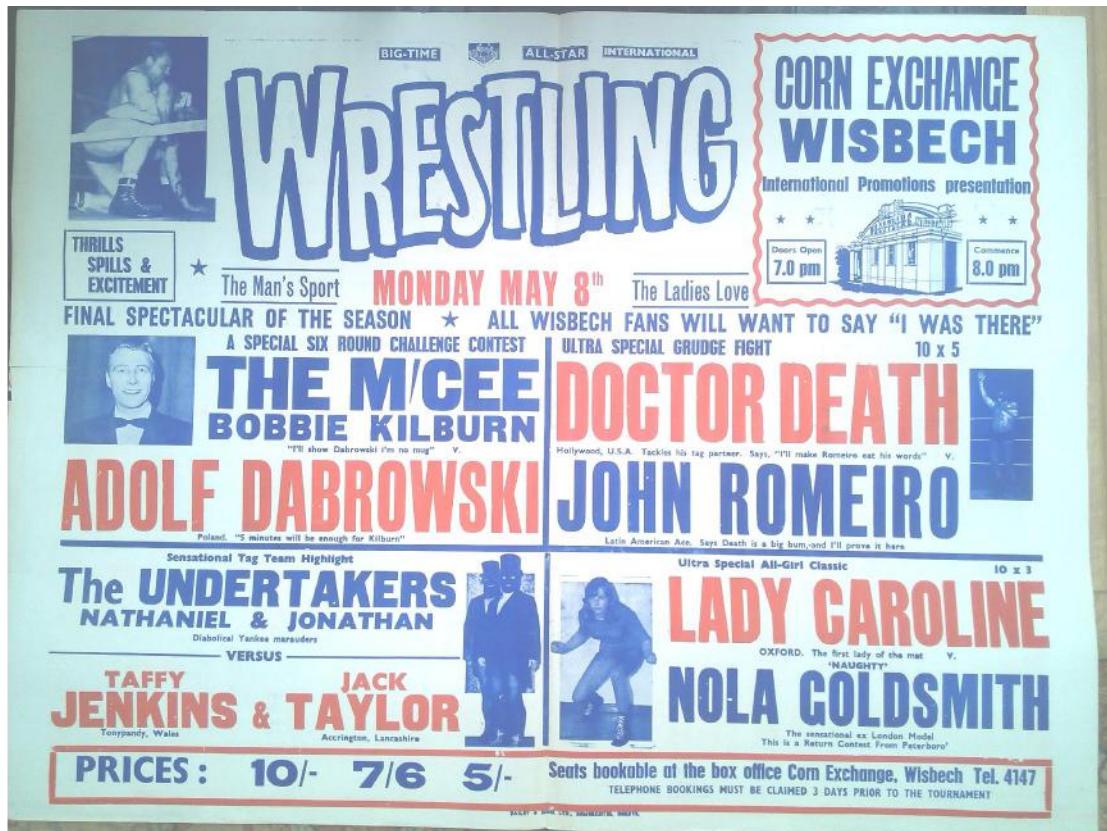
Von Krammer tried to leave the ring. Death got him back in ... and, sure enough, the villain succumbed to a bravura performance by Doctor Death. The season became dominated by appearances every other fortnight of the good Doctor both in tag matches and singly against villains who need to be taken down a peg.



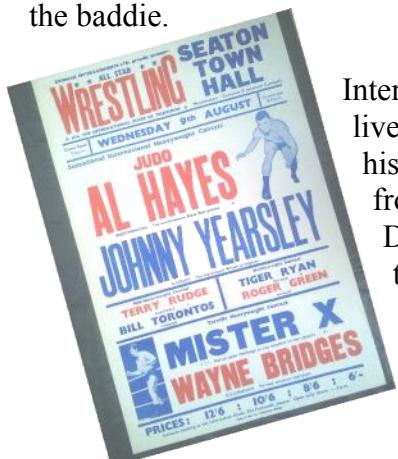
On April 3, Shirley Crabtree faced Mal Kirk. (This is twenty years before their ill-fated meeting in Great Yarmouth). Mal was billed as Val, a male name in parts or Yorkshire, as was Shirley. Shirley vs Val led many fans to think it was female top-of-the-bill match!

9) Out With a Bang

The final promotion in this incredibly successful season was billed as a “spectacular” and the adverts proclaimed “All Wisbech fans will want to say I was there!” And it was true. It merited a double-size poster ... and a double-dose of Doctor Death.



Referee and MC Bob Kilburn had been given a hard time all season by Adolph Dabrowski, and in this final show agreed to take him on one-to-one. Surely it would end in tears! Aha ... there is a special referee for this bout. Doctor Death. Dabrowski complains long and loud, but eventually he does put poor Bob out for the count, although not before the Doctor had handed him the medicine the fans wanted to see. The original Undertakers, Nathaniel and Jonathan, beat Jack Taylor and Taffy Jenkins. Lady Caroline lost in the fifth to Nola Goldsmith. And at the top of the bill Doctor Death took on his former tag partner John Romeiro and knocked him out. (Romeiro was a talented fighter and I've not been able to track down any information about him). So ... the season ended with the country's biggest villain turning hero, packing the crowds in and sauntering off into the sunset. Trust Wisbech to cheer for the baddie.



International Promotions' second season would have a lot to live up to. Ed Wensor (if, indeed, it was he) went back with his unmasked Mr X gimmick for Dale Martin (left, a poster from Seaton). We would not see the likes of his Doctor Death again in Wisbech. It set the hall alight. So season two needed another of Jack Taylor's rabbits to be pulled out of the hat. But the curse of no-shows was to strike early.

..... to be continued