



**PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING  
STUDIES JOURNAL**

**VOLUME 2  
ISSUE 1  
APRIL 2021**

# PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING STUDIES JOURNAL

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

APRIL 2021

---

## CHIEF JOURNAL EDITOR

**MATT FOY**

UPPER IOWA UNIVERSITY

## REVIEWS EDITOR

**CHRISTOPHER A. MEDJESKY**

UNIVERSITY OF FINDLAY

## MANAGING CO-EDITOR

**AARON D. HORTON**

ALABAMA STATE UNIVERSITY

---

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**DAVID BEARD**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH

**DARRIN COE**

NORTH CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

**ADAM NICHOLAS COHEN**

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

**MARIO ALONZO DOZAL**

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

**ROBIN HERSHKOWITZ**

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

**JOHN F. HOOKER**

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

**EERO LAINE**

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO,  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**CHRISTIAN B. LONG**

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER, AUSTRALIA

**BROOKS OGLESBY**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

**TYSON L. PLATT**

ALABAMA STATE UNIVERSITY

**CENATE PRUITT**

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH GEORGIA

Cover designed and PWSJ logo created by Mario Alonzo Dozal

**PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING STUDIES JOURNAL**  
**VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, APRIL 2021**

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 1 – 24      Samoan Submission Machines: Grappling with  
Representations of Samoan Identity in Professional Wrestling  
Theo Plothe
- 25 – 46      Facing the Heels: Fannish Producers Constructing an  
Alternative “Shoot” History of Professional Wrestling  
through New Media  
S.M. Walus and Connor D. Wilcox
- 47 – 60      AEW and WWE’s Wednesday Night Wars: An Early Analysis  
Vincent Smith
- 61 – 74      Legdropping the Iron Sheikh: An AutoEthnographic  
Performance Selection from *Burnt City: A Dystopian  
Bilingual One-Persian Show*  
Josh Hamzehee

***REVIEWS***

- 75 – 77      Edwards, Douglas. *Philosophy Smackdown*. Polity Books,  
2020  
Kristopher G. Phillips
- 77 – 79      Laine, Eero. *Professional Wrestling and the Commercial  
Stage*. Routledge, 2020  
Rebecca Steiner

## Editor's Note

Welcome to the second issue of the *Professional Wrestling Studies Journal*, the official scholarly publication of the Professional Wrestling Studies Association. One year ago, the *PWSJ* entered the arena as the first scholarly publication dedicated to furthering scholars', fans', and professionals' (and all betwixt and between) shared understanding of professional wrestling as a cultural, historical, and economic institution.

Our inaugural issue coincided with what has been beyond comparison the strangest year in the history of pro wrestling (and think of the ground that covers). One year ago, I wrote in this space:

the developing COVID-19 pandemic has forced a radical restructuring of professional wrestling as we know it with live shows delayed indefinitely or recorded in empty buildings.... All we know about wrestling in 2020 is that there's so much we don't know.

And so it was that seemingly each worst-case scenario came to pass. Live audiences, the lifeblood of the industry and artform, disappeared. Wrestling organizations big and small scrambled to adapt and survive. We tuned in to wrestling in empty arenas, with sparse audiences, and with virtual audiences. In the oddest year in wrestling history, Verne Gagne's "Team Challenge Series" being the link to wrestling's past that protected its future ranks right up there.

Major promotions canceled or dramatically scaled back live events. House shows ceased to exist. WrestleMania 37 is scheduled to be the first WWE event with a live audience since March 2020 ("Stephanie McMahon Says"). Independent promotions were forced into hiatus; without WWE's deep pockets, many are still struggling to make up the momentum lost in what had been a boom of fan interest in independent wrestling (Barrasso). Unmoored to a live audience or linear progression of time, both WWE and All Elite Wrestling leaned into cinematic wrestling. Both companies garnering accolades for their triumphs (The Boneyard Match; Stadium Stampede) and scorn for ultimately riding the trend into the ground (or into the swamp ... or into a dumpster ... or down to its final beat). Time will tell if the trend endures or will become a footnote to the strangest period in wrestling history, but for fans interested in the ever-fluid relationship between wrestling and reality, this year foregrounded a compelling, or confounding, aberrant approach to in-ring storytelling.

Despite the heartbreak and anxiety, there was good news in wrestling this year. AEW continues to thrive as a strong number-two U.S. promotion, accumulating talent, putting on scintillating fast-paced matches, and pulling out what appears at press time to be a narrow victory in the winding-down Wednesday

Night Wars with NXT (but don't take my word for it: read on). And even in a midst of a global pandemic characterized by hunkering down and keeping to our own, AEW tantalized wrestling fans by opening the fabled *forbidden door*, forming and flashing an alliance with New Japan Pro-Wrestling. And as of this writing, there are reports that the forbidden door might open further still, as WWE announced that AEW's Chris Jericho is scheduled to appear on Steve Austin's WWE-affiliated "Broken Skull Sessions" (F4WOnline). In the ring, professional wrestling adapted and survived, building new stars and putting on great matches, making us love it and miss being there in ways we couldn't have predicted a year ago.

Wrestling also hurt us, as it so often does. The #SpeakingOut movement of Summer 2020 revealed just how deep harassment and abuse run in the wrestling industry, with no major promotion spared from accusations of horrific misconduct directed toward at least one performer. WWE courted fan outrage by firing vulnerable employees mid-pandemic and seizing performers' third-party social media platforms, stretching definitions of *independent contractors* beyond translucence. And even a year characterized by loss couldn't numb the pain of the tragic deaths of Hana Kimura, Shad Gaspard, and Jon "Brodie Lee" Huber. The cover of this journal, strikingly rendered in Dark Order purple and silver by the PWSA's own Mario Alonzo Dozal, pays tribute to their loss.

As wrestling has been forced to persevere this year, so too have scholars of wrestling. This will come as no surprise to our readers who call the academy home, but the pressures of pandemic living came for us, as well. Some lost their jobs. Some were forced to take on additional duties to cover for others who did. For many, a seemingly endless torrent of Zoom meetings, along with adjusting to teaching from home and balancing family and professional duties in real time, forced scholarship to the backburner. This issue also pays tribute to those who endeavored to find the time, energy, and inspiration to continue their scholarly agendas this year, and to those who will begin again.

The issue of the *Professional Studies Wrestling Journal* before you offers four unique articles, all undertaking the study of professional wrestling from remarkably different methodological approaches. Our first article, "Samoan Submission Machines: Grappling with Representations of Samoan Identity in Professional Wrestling," explores how Samoan identity has been constructed in wrestling, often problematically, through characterization and storytelling. Author Theo Plothe charts the history of Samoan representation (authentic and faux) from High Chief Peter Maivia to the Tribal Chief Roman Reigns, observing recurring tropes, appropriations, connotations, and erasures. With Reigns boldly foregrounding his

Samoan heritage while sitting as the Head of the Table of the world's biggest promotion, the article couldn't be timelier.

Speaking of timely, our second article, "Facing the Heels: Fannish Producers Constructing an Alternative 'Shoot' History of Professional Wrestling through New Media," explores the productive tension between WWE's hegemonic construction of wrestling history and the alternative historical narratives constructed by historians, interviewers, and producers from outside the WWE bubble. At press time, WWE has recently outsourced its streaming library to NBC's Peacock streaming app in the U.S., and fans are up in arms about Peacock erasing controversial moments from WWE's video archives with WWE's cooperation (Cramer). In "Facing the Heels," S.M. Walus and Connor D. Wilcox offer readers insight into the mindsets and practices of six influential producers of wrestling counter-history, helping contextualize their unique roles in wrestling's discursive ecosystem while reminding readers of the danger, to borrow a phrase from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, of WWE's quest to write its own single story.

For over a year, wrestling fans have witnessed the Wednesday Night Wars between *AEW Dynamite* and *WWE NXT*. In our third article, Vincent Smith takes stock of the numbers in the article "AEW and WWE's Wednesday Night Wars: An Early Analysis." The *PWSJ*'s first article to feature AEW, Smith's quantitative analysis translates the AEW-versus-NXT head-to-head battle into hard data, demonstrating how the two programs fared in direct competition while discussing potential factors that influenced the outcome. With *WWE NXT* reportedly moving from Wednesday to Tuesday in the near future (Otterson), Smith's masterful analysis of the numbers is a great way to make sense of a fascinating period in wrestling history.

The issue's fourth article marks another new chapter in *PWSJ* history, as we are thrilled to take our first foray into staged scholarly performance. In "Legdropping the Iron Sheikh: An AutoEthnographic Performance Selection from *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show*," performance scholar<->practitioner Josh Hamzehee employs autoethnographic performance to interrogate family, history, and identity through the lens of the iconic 1984 Iron Sheik-Hulk Hogan WWF championship match. In addition to reading about it in these pages, we invite you to follow the article's YouTube link to a video of Hamzehee performing *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show*. We could not have asked for a more compelling performance to guide us into this new territory.

On behalf of the authors, book reviewers, and *PWSJ* editorial board, thank you for sharing our love of wrestling and scholarship. May the next time we meet come in a new era of sold-out supercards where we can leave the masks to Rey Mysterio or the Lucha Bros.

— Matt Foy, Chief Journal Editor  
Upper Iowa University  
Foym38@uii.edu

## Works Cited

- Barrasso, Justin. "Coronavirus Shutdown Leaves Independent Wrestlers Struggling to Make a Living—and Find Purpose." *Sports Illustrated*, 19 Apr. 2020, <https://www.si.com/wrestling/2020/04/19/independent-wrestling-coronavirus-shutdown>
- Cramer, Maria. "Racist Moments in WWE Catalog Vanish in Move to Streaming Platform." *New York Times*, 27 Mar. 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/27/arts/television/wwe-peacock-nbc-streaming.html>
- F4WOnline. "AEW's Chris Jericho to appear on WWE's Broken Skull Sessions w/Steve Austin: Wrestling Observer Live." *YouTube*, 2 Apr. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGQ-FUE4swM>
- Otterson, Joe. "WWE Renews NXT Deal With USA Network, Moves Show to Tuesday Nights." *Variety*, 30 Mar. 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/tv/news/wwe-nxt-usa-network-tuesday-nights-1234940117/>
- "Stephanie McMahon Says WWE Plans to Have Live Audience at WrestleMania 37." *TMZ*, 19 Jan. 2021, <https://www.tMZ.com/2021/01/19/stephanie-mcmahon-wwe-plans-fans-attend-wrestlemania-37-tampa-raymond-james-stadium/>