



# EXCELLENCE

LIVES FOREVER

Bret "The Hitman" Hart speaks to *WWE Magazine* for the first time in five years, and shoots from the hip about that night in Montréal, his renewed relationship with Shawn Michaels, and what made him love the business again.

**Q** You've been away from WWE for more than 12 years, and out of the ring for nearly a decade. What did The Hitman learn during all those years?

I learned a lot about trust and a lot about myself. Just the little things—like who I really am and what I'm all about. I set high goals for myself, and I usually complete them. I take great pride in my goals. As for this latest chapter in my life, a lot of good things have come out of it, more so than people ever would have believed. I thought a lot of people wouldn't have liked me coming back. Time changes things, but I'm pretty content with my life and the way things are now.

**Where does The Hitman persona stop and Bret Hart the man begin?**

It's different for me than for other Superstars—maybe that's what sets me apart, but I don't know if there ever was a difference. When you go back through the problems that I had with Vince and *Survivor Series*, it was a personal wound that happened that day. You had to be in my shoes to understand it. I think growing up in wrestling and being involved in it my whole life made me different from everyone else. I still don't know any wrestler that ever quite had to mesh his real life and his persona together as much as I did.

**Of all the changes in WWE since you left, which do you dislike the most?**

I think they've changed the turnbuckles. I know that's a small thing, but I don't like the turnbuckles much. They're the same, but there's no give in them anymore, and they're so tight that you can barely get in and out of the ring. I suppose that's to accommodate the lighter wrestlers. In WCW, they used to do a lot of highflying, and you could climb those ropes like they were steps. That's great for them. For guys like me who launch themselves to and from the ropes and the turnbuckles, the way the ropes used to be is much better. They wouldn't help a Bret Hart, but I'm sure someone like Rey Mysterio loves them.

**Something else that has changed during the years is Shawn Michaels. Was your reconciliation with him all that you hoped for?**

I think it turned out to be more than I wanted it to be. I just wanted to bury the hatchet with

him, and give him peace of mind knowing that he didn't have any more issues with me. I sensed for both of us it was a lifting of a huge weight. I hadn't been around Shawn for 12 years and I didn't see him until that day in Dayton. I think he's grateful for it and genuinely surprised. We both sort of realize now that once upon a time we were pretty good friends, but we had professional differences. There was a lot of tension; it was a very competitive time. I'm glad for both of us.

**Shawn whispered something in your ear, but he wouldn't tell us what it was. What was your response to him?**

I told him not to worry about it, and let's have some fun.

**Was there any truth to what Shawn once said about you both being united by the fact that you were smaller guys living and excelling in a big man's game?**

I can remember the night I won my first WWE Championship. Actually, it was the day after. We had finished the second day of TV in Regina, Saskatchewan. I won the title in Saskatoon the night before, and I spent the evening in the hospital. I had broken my finger, so there was no celebration the first time. It was all pretty quiet for me. The next night in the hotel, my dad was there. And I remember Shawn Michaels was there, and he specifically said to me that this was a big thing

because I "opened the door" for guys like him and me. I think those were his exact words.

**If you could return to that fateful evening in Montréal, what might you have done differently a second time around?**

I think I would have just gone home. I had to work maybe 120 dates in my contract at that time, and I'd already worked 134. I could have just missed the show. I was also taught to be a professional, that you can't let the fans or the company down. This is why it was a shock to me that things happened the way they did. I always thought there were lots of ways to make everybody happy.

**Does working it out now change anything?**

There was a time when it was all about the business and about the wrestling itself. What happened a few weeks ago wasn't about the company, and it wasn't about Vince McMahon—it was about human beings finding forgiveness in the world today. I think this is more important. And I know that Shawn has gone through a lot of changes. He's had a great career. I was so proud of Shawn and Undertaker when they wrestled last year. I think that over the years, out of respect for Shawn and the company and the real leaders of the wrestling industry, a great fondness for the art form itself has developed. Watching Shawn and Undertaker brought back the love I always had for the business.

## HIT LIST

### THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME?

The Hitman picks the best there is, the best there was and the best there will ever be.

#### The Best There Was?

Mr. Perfect, Curt Hennig.



#### The Best There Is?

Randy Orton.



#### The Best There Will Ever Be?

There are so many Superstars to fill those shoes, from Cody Rhodes to Ted DiBiase.

