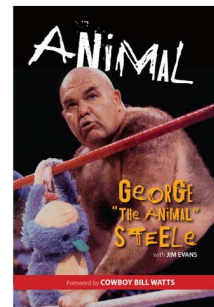




THE REAL DEAL *on* THE MAN OF STEELE

For three seasons out of the year he was known as Jim Myers to the students and faculty of the suburban Detroit high school where he taught and coached. But when summer vacation started, he unleashed "The Animal," becoming one of the most feared, despised—and eventually—loved WWE Superstars. Here, the green-tongued Hall of Famer (and author), opens wide about what turnbuckles taste like and which Superstars would be tough enough to make it in his day.

BY JOHN MIHALY



You might have the all-time most perfect name in wrestling with George “The Animal” Steele. Was it easy coming up with it? Were there any names you rejected before that?

When I first went to the Northeast to work for Mr. McMahon’s father, they called me George the Destroyer and George the Bruiser. And I didn’t like either one of them. First of all, I knew two other guys with those names. So, because of my hairy body and the way I came out and wrestled, people started calling me an animal. I’d get on the microphone and say, “I’m not an animal, I’m a people.” And the more I did that, the more they called me “Animal,” so—after the second year, they said, this guy’s “The Animal.” The people were really part of my creation team, which is pretty neat. And then everything I did, everything we did, the whole persona all the way through, came about by accident. It was the same thing with [tearing up and eating] the turnbuckles. I never sat down and said, “OK, we’re going to eat turnbuckles.”

So, what do turnbuckles taste like—and how did you start making them part of your in-ring diet?

They’re better if they’re sautéed, at this point in my life. What happened was, during a TV taping in Pittsburgh, they used to give away little promotions. This particular time, they gave away stuffed pillows. And a lady in the audience got mad at me and threw a pillow at me. So, I figured, if I picked it up and threw it back at her, I’d get bombed with pillows. But if I sit on it, it’s boring. So—I bit into it; I threw it in the air, and the stuffing started coming down like snow and sticking to my head like I’m the Abominable Snowman. Then, I took it and I put it over my opponent’s head. When I pulled it off, he was blue. He was eating all the stuffing, and it almost choked him. I went back to the dressing room, and all the guys were laughing, saying, “You almost killed that guy.” About two months later, I’m working with Chief Jay Strongbow and the match was just not getting it done, and with Jay Strongbow, he *always* got it done, but this match wasn’t. So I looked at the turnbuckle, and I remember taking a snap out of it. The thing tore easily. I ran his face into it, and we had a riot.

Another trait you were known for was your signature green tongue. How did you get it, and how long did it usually take for it to go away?

It was usually done by the time I was showering. I used to chew Clorets gum—if I was doing interviews, I had to do it every single time, and I might get an hour out of it or so. They don’t make that kind anymore. So my “magic” now is Green Apple Now & Laters. I started with Laffy Taffy, but that gets too gooey.

Reading your book, *Animal*, we were really surprised to learn that you spent the majority of your years as a schoolteacher, and that you were only in the ring during your summers. Did that make it much more difficult coming back to school every fall?

In some ways it was very, very easy, and in other ways it was very, very tough. The guys on the road back in those days lived a pretty rough life. Two and a half months was plenty of that, so I was ready to go back and teach after. But at the end of the school year, I was ready to go back out. It was pretty perfect for me.

Your students obviously knew about your alter ego, right?

You’ve got to remember the time—we’re talking back in the territory days. The Northeast television broadcasts did not come into the Detroit area. We had our own television, so when I worked in the Michigan region, I had the mask on. What happened was, kids would move in from the Northeast, and they would see me, and then a day or two later, you’d see them with a magazine.

And then, did you start getting nervous that the secret would get out?

No, you’d get used to it. It would happen every three months. So, they’d bring

it over to me and say, “That’s you,” and I’d look at it and roll my eyes and then look at them and say, “Do you really think I’m that ugly?” You can picture what happened after that. And then I would say to them, “My name is Coach Myers and that’s George Steele, but I guess we do look a little bit alike.” So it was kind of tongue-in-cheek both ways, I think. My co-workers weren’t really aware of it, either, except that I was driving a nicer car. They didn’t have a clue.

Were you ever able to apply the lessons you learned from becoming a wrestler to your day job?

Absolutely! I had a learning disability growing up. I talk about all that at the beginning of *Animal*. I became very good, and this will sound egotistical, but I became a very good coach and teacher, as my confidence rose with wrestling. And that’s what made me a better person. You get street smart; you get all this other stuff, but more importantly, in my case, you gain self-confidence. You feel great. That’s the part that people really miss. I can’t tell you how important my wrestling career was to my whole life and to my family life.

Do you watch much WWE these days?

I watch a lot of it. It’s very interesting...I’m always asked about the Superstars today. I think the athletes in WWE are so superior to what we were that it’s unbelievable. On the other side of the coin, I’m not giving everything away to them; we might have been a little tougher. That’s kind of the way I look at that. There are two guys right now who I think would have been really good in my time. One is Randy Orton. He’s third-generation—what can I say? I think he’d have been fabulous back then. Of course, his dad was and his grandfather was, as well. And then, there’s the new guy on the block, Curtis Axel. I see more of The Ax in him than I do Mr. Perfect. I think he is phenomenal. So yeah, if you go back to the old days, I think both of them could have made a fortune.

We talk a lot about Randy Savage vs. Ricky Steamboat at *WrestleMania III*, but people often forget that you were part of that historic event. When you saw that match, did you know it was that special?

Well, you’re crossing wires of old school and new school in that match. I’m looking at it from a totally different perspective. First of all, I didn’t even want to be there. I wanted to be in the ring wrestling somebody, because the Silverdome was 15 miles from my home. So I didn’t want to stand there in somebody else’s corner. I hated that. I did it, but I didn’t like it. Secondly, I had to sit and listen to them talk about this particular match for almost a month!

Do you think a character like “The Animal” could exist today?

That’s a very good question. Yes I do, but it would take a character who knew what he was doing. I’m talking about once it turned into a cartoon character. I think the sympathy factor would definitely work. But you know, with regard to the specifics, I think everything should stay in the past.



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