

STONE COLD REALITY

TOUGH ENOUGH IS BACK AND WWE IS SEARCHING FOR ITS NEXT BREAKOUT STAR

IT'LL BE NO EASY TASK TO IMPRESS THE SHOW'S HEAD TRAINER, STEVE AUSTIN, WHO SPOKE WITH US AT THE END OF THE FIRST WEEK OF FILMING. WHAT DOES HE THINK OF THE CONTESTANTS AND THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE AHEAD FOR THEM? HERE'S THE BOTTOM LINE!



STEVE AUSTIN: PHOTOGRAPH BY PER BERNAL

“I’VE NEVER TECHNICALLY trained anybody before in my life, but I’m overseeing all of this. I’ve always been able to take a great steak and season it up and make it an outstanding steak. This is a chance for me to get back into the business that I love from a different standpoint. I’m not trying to return to the ring and make a comeback, but I can be part of it and put my stamp on a new generation of Superstars. Being able to pass along some of my old-school values and beliefs about the business and what it takes to get to the top, to mold somebody to be successful in WWE—that’s why I’m a part of this. These contestants are extremely serious, and I’m extremely serious about finding a Superstar. I’m looking to weed through the weak and find the strong. It’s going to be a lot of fun for me.

“We’ve been filming now for three days, and I was in the ring the other day. I had my dog, Hershey, with me and I started running the ropes and she jumped in there with me. For the next few months, I’m going to be in the ring, running the ropes, getting back in the mix. I was really excited to be back inside that WWE ring. But when you’ve been away for as long as I have, there’s definitely going to be ring rust. Nothing duplicates being in that ring. You can do all the cardio and training you want, but hitting the ropes, mixing it up, and unloading on an opponent in a flurry of offense while trying to entertain that crowd of 20,000 people is a totally different animal. It’s very specific.

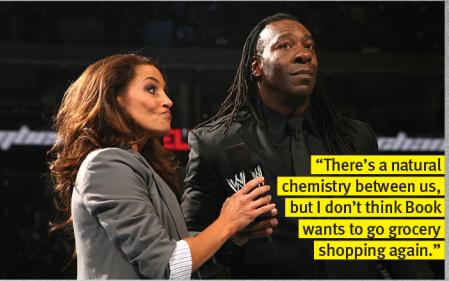
“As for these rookies, I can only tell them what I was told. Dedication and commitment is what I keep stressing right now. You know, it’s going to be one thing to win *Tough Enough* and earn that contract with WWE. It’s a whole other ballgame and whole other stratosphere to be a full-time part of the system. It’s a total commitment. I want them to know what they are getting themselves into. Being able to stay on the road for 300 days a year and take the pounding and the punishment, and to understand the psychology of the business—these are lessons that can’t be taught in one show or one season of *Tough Enough*. It’s a lifelong process. But as soon as they walk in the ring, I’m able to size someone up. This is what I know best; it’s what I feel. It’s in my bones, it’s in my blood, and it’s what I am. So yeah, when someone gets in the ring, I can size them up pretty damn quick.

“Should they be nervous about me? I’ll tell you what, when I broke into the business, if I had a Ric Flair or a Hulk Hogan or a Bruno Sammartino or a Harley Race training me, yeah, it could have been a bit intimidating. But those were world-class talents, and when you’re being trained by someone who is considered one of the elites of the business, you’d better throw feelings of intimidation out the window. You certainly should show respect, but your eyes and ears better be open 24/7, and you better ask a million questions and realize the value that is standing right in front of you. I never like to brag about what I’ve done. I don’t hammer it into people’s heads or beleaguer the point. I am here to help them.

“You’re going to see many different sides of me because in the world of WWE, Stone Cold Steve Austin was anti-system, anti-authority, anti-everybody, and I had one cause, and that was to be the World Champion the way I saw fit. I feared no one, I was a whup-ass machine. This is a differ-



“Hell yeah, I watch reality TV, but I’m not going to tell you which shows.”



Tough Enough premieres on USA on April 4.



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ent element. When somebody rubs me the wrong way, they’re going to get Stone Cold, but there is also that part of me that wants to bring somebody up, talk to them, not yell at them and listen to what they have to say. So yeah, you’re going to see a different side of The Rattlesnake for damn sure. But hell, even crying is allowed on *Tough Enough*. Some of the toughest men I know have cried.

“Man, I’ll tell you what—I’m teaching these cats a lot, but I don’t think I’m going to teach any of them a Stunner or how to take a Stunner. That being said, could I dish out some clotheslines, some right hands or elbows? Damn right. I don’t think any of these men or women has earned the right to receive a Stone Cold Stunner from me. The Stunner is reserved for special people or pieces of trash that are a part of the WWE system whom I see fit to unleash it on. Not just some person on *Tough Enough*. Maybe the winner, if he’s lucky, receives the WWE contract and then a Stunner. But here’s the biggest thing about this show: The winner of this contest has my stamp. And I don’t just stamp anybody—that’s Stone Cold’s stamp. So whomever I stamp, I’ve got high expectations for them. And they damn sure better not let me down. I’m going to drive that one home, that’s what I expect out of them.”

WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING

<p>The Miz Season 4 WWE Champion, all-around awesome dude (or so he says).</p>	<p>Josh Mathews Season 1 Smack-Down commentator, longest-tenured TE competitor in WWE.</p>	<p>Maven Season 1 Eliminated Undertaker from the 2002 Royal Rumble Match.</p>	<p>Nick Mitchell Season 4 One-time World Tag Team Champion, as Mitch of The Spirit Squad.</p>	<p>Jackie Gayda Season 2 Managed Rico, married World's Greatest Tag Teamer Charlie Haas.</p>
<p>John Morrison Season 3 3-time Intercontinental Champion, provider of sunglasses for ringside fans.</p>	<p>Ryan Reeves Season 4 You know him better as Skip Sheffield, founding member of The Nexus.</p>	<p>Christopher Nowinski Season 1 The Harvard grad was a two-time WWE Hardcore Champion.</p>	<p>Nidia Season 1 Managed Jamie Noble, was once blinded by Tajiri's mouth-mist.</p>	<p>Daniel Puder Season 4 Was the third entrant in the 2005 Royal Rumble Match. Never seen again.</p>

Win or lose, all of these former *Tough Enough* contestants made it to the big show, but with varying degrees of success.