

...including the people who said he'd never make it to the top! The man who's been called a "goat" just might turn out to be the "greatest of all time."

What does it mean to potentially be poised to be the new (hirsute) face of WWE?

It's funny, because I don't see myself as the new face of WWE. Maybe that's a problem, but I still see John Cena as the face of the company, until somebody unseats him. That doesn't mean just beating him—it means changing what people think of as the face of WWE. If you talk to casual people, he's the face. He's been that for at least the last six or seven years. It'll take time for anyone to unseat him.

Is that something you want? It's a pretty big role. Do you think that you could handle that?

That's definitely something I would like to do. I want to be in that spot. If you get into this business not wanting to be in that spot—now, I'm not saying you shouldn't do this if that's not your thing, because some people just like wrestling. But for somebody like me, my goal is to always be the best, and the best isn't about just being the best in the ring. For me, I've always aspired to be that wherever I worked. When I worked in Ring of Honor, I aspired to be the man in Ring of Honor, and I became that. In Japan, you only get limited opportunities, but you want to be that and always want to be the guy they rely on. When people think of that company, you want them to think of you. Sometimes you try and sometimes you fail, but if you don't try, then you are never going to be there.

How would you describe Daniel Bryan to someone who's unfamiliar with WWE?

That's very difficult, because I've had people say, "Oh, you're a wrestler? What's your character?" Well, I'm an eccentric, small guy. I think of myself as a bearded, hippie-anarchist-Napoleon-complex-

type character. That's pretty much what I think. I don't know what you guys think. How people perceive themselves is always different from how others perceive them, so I don't know what other people think when they see the Daniel Bryan persona. I also think a very interesting part of it is that often what you see is just the real me.

Have you changed much in the past year or so?

There are things that I have to do at this stage that I've never had to worry about before. I've never really had to worry about protecting myself. So I have to be a little more assertive with that stuff. I've also tried to dress a little bit nicer. And that's going incrementally, just to kind of fit the spot. It's like, "Hey, you're becoming the top guy here in WWE, you need to not show up in a T-shirt." So that's a work in progress. Most of my life hasn't changed, though. Everything still feels kind of the same. Nobody's treating me differently. I don't feel like all of a sudden I'm the star. It doesn't feel like that at all. I still feel the same way I felt two years ago.

Many recent events led to your rise, but which do you think was the most effective?

I think it's the "Yes!" chant getting a life of its own. There was no way of knowing that was going to happen. That certainly wasn't the plan when I started doing it. But the momentum just kind of carried that over, and here we are, more than a year later, and people are still doing it. Also, the tag team combination with Kane was never supposed to take off the way it did—and we just clicked. That made me into a very likeable personality for many people, I think—somebody viewers wanted to see on their TV screens. I really became a fun personality to watch.

What's the harshest critique you've heard about yourself since you've been in WWE?

It really depends on your definition of harsh. For me, the harshest thing, and it may be the truest thing, and the thing that may affect me more than anything else with regard to getting where John Cena is, is the idea that when somebody who looks like me comes on TV, the casual viewer is just not interested. The idea is that, "Oh, a big, jacked, tough guy is walking down the ramp, this guy's going to go beat somebody up." Then, somebody like me comes down, or even if you see me in the ring, I'm

5'8". I'm small, and, regardless of the beard thing, the casual viewer, who doesn't care how good a wrestler I am, and doesn't care how entertaining I am, they're just flipping through the channels, and they'll stop here or there. Those more casual viewers aren't interested in someone like me. That's one of those things that I don't know how to change. Because that's putting a limit on the extent to which you can go and there's nothing you can do to change it. That, to me, is the harshest critique. I can take any critique and work on it to try and make it better. I can't grow inches. That's one of the things to me that seems very harsh.

Perceptions can certainly change, though, especially when people are looking for something different to entertain them, right?

The problem—and this has been pointed out to me—is that patience, sometimes, is not always there. For example, for Shawn Michaels to become Shawn Michaels, that took a lot of patience. In 1996, WWE wasn't doing the best, and he was the guy on top. And WWE wasn't doing that well for a while; it was getting to the point where by the time he was contesting matches with Undertaker, he was the draw. If you put him on TV, people would want to keep the channel there. But I'm not convinced that kind of patience exists here in today's WWE.

So when do you think you'll be able to breathe and finally enjoy this ride you've been on?

Here's the thing: You need to enjoy *all* of it. And you need to be able to breathe and appreciate it while it's happening. If I'm waiting for a time to ask, "Oh when can I just relax?" well, that time, that mythical time in the future when I can relax and enjoy my life—that doesn't exist. Most people work, work, work, thinking, "I can't wait until I retire," or, "I can't wait until I get that little vacation time." And I don't want to live my life so that in five or 10 years I can sit back and not do anything. I want to enjoy what I'm doing now. And so it's all about being able to relax and enjoy the moment. Sometimes things are stressful, but most of the time it's a good kind of stress. I'm still relatively young at 32, but I enjoy the challenges. I enjoy thinking how do I make this work? The only thing that wears you down is the travel. And that's just something during the past eight-to-10 years I've gotten used to.

DANIEL
BRYAN
IS MAKING EVERYONE
SUBMIT...

10 TAP-OUTS THAT CHANGED THE GAME

In an age when every single surrender can be recorded, replicated and remixed, nobody wants to be known forever as the guy who quit when it counted. These 10 iconic matches that ended in submissions prove why a tap-out is one of the rarest wins a Superstar can earn.



Bret Hart vs. Bob Backlund
Survivor Series 1994



CM Punk vs. Undertaker
WWE Breaking Point 2009



Ric Flair vs. Dusty Rhodes
August 9, 1986



The Iron Sheik vs. Bob Backlund
December 26, 1983



Undertaker vs. Edge
WrestleMania XXIV



John Cena vs. Triple H
WrestleMania 22



Shawn Michaels vs. Kurt Angle
WrestleMania 21



Bret Hart vs. Mr. Perfect
SummerSlam 1991



Triple H vs. Brock Lesnar
SummerSlam 2012



Bret Hart vs. Stone Cold Steve Austin
WrestleMania 13