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MARIUS BUGGE



While they inhabit the same locker rooms every week, you'd have better odds beating Andre the Giant in a Battle Royal than getting **The Miz, Dolph Ziggler, Kofi Kingston, Antonio Cesaro, Jack Swagger** and **Bad News Barrett** to sit down at the same table. But *WWE Magazine* did just that, asking these grapplers about their workplace and how they navigate the ins and outs of WWE Stardom. The biggest surprise? Not a single punch was thrown (even at The Miz). What follows are highlights from this unprecedented backstage conversation.



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R O U N D

1 With *WrestleMania XXX* fast approaching, does the atmosphere backstage and around the locker room change as everyone competes for a spot on the card? And how cut-throat does it get?

JS: I always look at *WrestleMania* as the end of our season—it's really the championship round. The Road to *WrestleMania* is the final push toward the end of the year: it's crunch time, period. This is when everyone takes it up a notch and tries to raise the bar even further than we already do. There's always this unspoken competition among us in the locker room to go out there and contest the best match—to steal the show. This only heightens everything—whether it's a promo, whether it's a match. On The Road to *WrestleMania*, you either pick your game up and run with the ball or someone takes it from you and you're back sitting on the bench.

KK: Last year I was left off the card at *WrestleMania*, and while it was cool to do the Pre-Show Panel with Dusty (Rhodes) and J.R., I would have much rather have been competing in the event. We work hard year-round for that moment, for just one moment at *WrestleMania*—so to be shortchanged makes you that much hungrier. And I think many guys who are left off the card feel that way, so things do ramp up when this season rolls around, but it's not much different than every day back here. I know that I will be doing everything possible to get on the card, and we all feel that way. It's not just me, so it does breed a competitive atmosphere. But the smart guys know that you should be on top of your game all year round.

DZ: It doesn't become pressure-filled, because it already is. Every single day—and I'm speaking for myself—whether it's a live event, *Raw*, or building up to *WrestleMania*, I want everyone to remember me. I want everyone to remember what I did because I have such a big ego to be the best at this. ...I'll go out there and steal the show. And it's not a catchphrase; it's real. I need to do this or I won't sleep at night. Will I be in one of the high-ranking matches? It sure as hell doesn't seem like it right now. But no matter what match, I always try to make the crowd remember, "Wow, it may not be the last match, but we remember Dolph Ziggler."



“ANYTIME YOU SEE ANY SORT OF WEAKNESS IN WWE, IT’S LIKE A SHARK SMELLING BLOOD. I SWIM WITH SHARKS.”

-MIZ

2 What would you say your weaknesses are? And how do you handle being told what they are? Is it difficult to deal with the constructive criticism?

KK: I'm always open to criticism and suggestions. I consider myself to be a student of the game. We have a lot of people here who have done some pretty incredible things. For example Arn Anderson and Dean Malenko, just to name a few, who if they give you advice, you'd be foolish to not at least consider it. ...As for my weakness, I'm a constant work in progress. Every week I'll watch all my matches and look at them to just see where I can improve, how I can do better, and how I can bring the crowd in a little bit more. They say if you're not getting better, you're only getting worse.

AC: I don't have one, and if I did have one, I wouldn't share it with *WWE Magazine* for everyone to read about later. That's a mistake many people make around here, and it's not going to be one I make. Most weaknesses are things you can't see, so you have the advantage of keeping it to yourself. If you reveal, even for a second, what could bring you down, that's what they'll do, they'll take you down. Not just the WWE Universe, but your peers.

MIZ: I work as hard as I possibly can to get over any weaknesses. I think that's what everyone does. Whenever someone sees

“I’m not very good at making friends with people... I’ve always had a lot of difficulty in dealing with other human beings.”

-BAD NEWS BARRETT

a weakness in another person, they'll try to call it out there and tell everyone what it is, whether it's on Twitter, Facebook or on YouTube, people love to blabber about it. That's one of those things that give me incentive to work hard and prove them all wrong. Most people can sit there and rattle off a bunch of weaknesses, but I kind of don't want to tell you any of my weaknesses because then people will know about it. And then they'll come at me! Anytime you see any sort of weakness in WWE, it's like a shark smelling blood. I swim with sharks, so you're getting nothing out of me!

DZ: My greatest weakness is that I'm barely six-foot-tall. I'm serious. If you can find a weakness, then I would honestly love to hear it. Feel free. I'd love to hear it. No, seriously, if you've got one. I'm dead serious. If you've got a couple in mind, lay them on me and I'll refute them for you. How do you think I feel? If you can't find one and every day I'm out perfecting and doing what I need. My weakness is I'm too good for what I do.

BNB: I'm not very good at making friends with people. I've never really needed someone to tell me that. I've always had a lot of difficulty in dealing with other human beings—be it my peers or especially people who are more senior to me. I've never felt comfortable with having a boss or a manager or someone who really is in a position to talk down to me. So that's definitely my biggest issue.

3 Superstars often get labels when they debut, like the next Shawn Michaels or Ricky Steamboat. Are these an honor or a curse?

JS: To be called that in an interview or to be mentioned with them in a conversation is one thing. That's definitely an honor, because honestly, we're all trying to be great. No one is in this business to be mediocre and to just get by. We all want to raise the bar as far as WWE can take us. But certain people, Ryback, for example, sometimes we go into a certain market and they chant, "Goldberg!" That sucks. I don't think he's anything like him, but that label got put on him early. That's where the curse aspect comes in.

KK: To be mentioned in the same sentence as Ricky Steamboat or Shawn Michaels is definitely an honor. But realistically, there will never be another Shawn Michaels or another Ricky Steamboat. People who have been diehards and members of the WWE Universe over the years can't help but compare certain things that the Superstars of today do, to the Superstars of the past. There's a reason that it can be easy to do, because most of us have watched WWE back in the day. We can't help but emulate the people who have come before us.

MIZ: I can see why some people might look at it as a curse because you're set up to fail. If you're anything less than Shawn Michaels, then you're going to be a failure. But it also gives you an incredible opportunity to shine and get in the spotlight. Whether you succeed after that is on you.

"MY GREATEST WEAKNESS IS THAT I'M BARELY SIX-FEET-TALL. I'M SERIOUS."

-DOLPH ZIGGLER

AC: You almost don't have the chance to forge your own identity and become your own character, so to speak. You're labeled from the start and it's a lot to ask to live up to guys like that, who have come and gone and now are mostly looked at positively in hindsight.

DZ: If you weren't a fan of this business, you at least needed to watch some things and absorb how the Legends did it so subconsciously you would pick up some of their traits. So being compared to other people is great. They might say, "Oh he reminds me of a young Shawn Michaels." That's great, but now you have to live up to that—the greatest Superstar of all time. Next they're saying, "Well, he's not as good." If you remind them of someone awesome, that's good. Now go out there and make a name for yourself. Be the first you instead of the next somebody else.

BNB: It's meant as a compliment, but if it goes to a Superstar's head—especially if he hasn't been around very long—it can become a bit of a crutch. At the time, The Nexus was labeled as the "new nWo," but there wasn't one of us who really thought we were anything like The nWo, and we didn't want to be anything like them. They were something completely different. We were simply having a lot of success and making some good TV—just like The nWo were. So if that's the comparison people were making, we'll take it.

4 What do you think is the main thing that can hold a Superstar back from reaching that next level?

MIZ: I probably can't say it, right? So I'll have to go with themselves. Superstars can get too into themselves or become too mentally drained from all the pressure that, after a certain point, there's just no coming back, and nothing can save them then.

AC: It is a mix of outside influences, and then yourself. I'm always trying to find ways to better myself, and that is what I try to focus on because I can't make decisions for other people, and I can't control what happens except for what I do. If I'm doing my best, then I know I can walk away later on and feel no regrets. If I don't reach a certain point, I'll know that it doesn't have anything to do with me.

JS: That's tough to say. It's all about being in the right place at the right time...The tough part about this is, those characters that people grow to love don't happen overnight. Rome wasn't built in a day in WWE. When I first came up here, Randy Orton pulled me aside and we got to



"There is so much talent on the roster that it's unfortunate not nearly enough opportunity is given to them."

-ANTONIO CESARO

talking. He said how it took him eight years to find The Viper character that he's now known for and will forever be known as. It's constantly evolving...I've been here five years, so hopefully in another three years, I'll have my Viper character.

KK: There are a lot of things. It has a lot to do with luck, connecting with the crowd at the right time. From the political aspect, impressing the right people. You can also hold yourself back by not being ready when the opportunity is finally given to you. You can hold yourself back by being negative, depressed, and angry. I always tell people that I can only control my in-ring ability. I can control going out every night and trying to have the best match on the card. I can only work with that I'm given. There's a whole lot of stuff to get you to that next level, and a lot of stars have to align for that to happen.

BNB: Everybody who sits at this table is very talented and could quite conceivably be the top guy in WWE. The only thing that's holding any of those guys back is opportunity. As a performer, you might need a helping hand to give you those opportunities to stand in the spotlight and shine. Literally the only difference between the guys who are around the table and the guys you might see higher up on the card is the level of opportunities they're getting.

DZ: Seriously. Give me a guy and I'll try to think of something for him. Barrett? He's tall, so he should be OK. He talks cool. I honestly don't know what's holding him back. I feel like maybe that's one of those things where everybody can't be on the show at the same time. But also to me, I like that guy. Just watch when he's beating you up. When he gets the right chance, he'll make it.

5 What do we need much more of and what do we need much less of on the current WWE roster?

KK: It's very easy to get cyclical and do what works, instead of doing something different and controversial. ...For example, a lot of people refer back to The Attitude Era, because you see a lot of things you wouldn't see now. We try to walk that line and to be different. As a company, we should always be striving to try new things and as a company compete with ourselves. It's hard to outdo WWE!

BNB: We need more Bad News Barrett and we need less of everybody else. To be honest, at times the good guys do a little too well in WWE. You need to chalk up a few more wins for the bad guys.

AC: The champions are champions for a reason, and I'll never dispute that, but there is so much talent on the roster that it's unfortunate not nearly enough opportunity is given to them. We don't need less of anything, more is always better.

MIZ: Most people would say we need less Miz, but I actually want the entire three-hour show to revolve around me. But that's just me being conceited and arrogant. I think we do a pretty fine job of keeping everyone entertained every week, and we do it live!

DZ: We have a couple backstage segments. A few people talk in the ring and then there's a bunch of matches. If I had to think of something, I would say more alternative segments—not just talking, or wrestling, or being backstage. Something different; something on the road; someone sending in a social media or an iPhone video. Some different character development would go a long way.

JS: What we're trying to do is tell stories. The more stories you have, you would think the better your product would be. But it's tough to do every story the right way and build it the right way. Different stories have different priorities. That's one thing we can definitely do a lot more of. That and heighten the presence of the Divas Division in general. I might be a 30-year-old guy with a 30-year-old man's opinion, but that's just me.



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