

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: Getting Started with Professional Wrestling	5
CHAPTER 1: The Lowdown on Professional Wrestling	7
CHAPTER 2: Tackling the Basics of Professional Wrestling	17
CHAPTER 3: Identifying the In-the-Ring Essentials	43
Part 2: Appreciating the History of Pro Wrestling	61
CHAPTER 4: Looking Beyond the Ring: Wrestling's Origin Stories	63
CHAPTER 5: Examining the Midcentury Territory Era	83
CHAPTER 6: Going National	103
Part 3: Identifying the Major Promotions	131
CHAPTER 7: Highlighting the Big Three	133
CHAPTER 8: Moving into the 21st Century	149
Part 4: Wrestling Around the World	171
CHAPTER 9: Going South of the Border — Lucha Libre	173
CHAPTER 10: Surveying <i>Puroresu</i> — Japanese Professional Wrestling	189
CHAPTER 11: Touring Pro Wrestling in Europe and Canada	209
Part 5: Meeting the Superstars of Yesterday and Today	231
CHAPTER 12: Supporting Wrestling Outside the Ring	233
CHAPTER 13: Emphasizing the Most Memorable Wrestling Encounters	251
Part 6: The Part of Tens	269
CHAPTER 14: Ten of the Most Watched Matches of All Time	271
CHAPTER 15: Ten Industry-Changing Promos	281
CHAPTER 16: Top Ten Celebrity Crossovers	291
Index	301

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	2
Icons Used in This Book	3
Beyond the Book	3
Where to Go from Here	4
 PART 1: GETTING STARTED WITH PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING	 5
CHAPTER 1: The Lowdown on Professional Wrestling	7
Understanding What Professional Wrestling Is at Its Core	7
Looking at what defines pro wrestling	8
Respecting the physical work	9
What's real	10
What's fake	10
Figuring Out Pro Wrestling's Popularity	12
Getting vicarious thrills and satisfaction	12
Appreciating the drama	13
Recognizing Who's Involved in Professional Wrestling	14
Considering the competitors	14
Refereeing the matches	14
Hearing the announcers	14
Focusing on managers	15
 CHAPTER 2: Tackling the Basics of Professional Wrestling	 17
Mastering Key Jargon Related to Professional Wrestling	18
Speaking in a secret language	18
Understanding kayfabe	19
Getting a gimmick	19
Describing types of wrestlers	20
Explaining action terms	20
Getting a handle on terms of legitimacy	21
Rounding out the wrestling terms	22
Examining the Different Storylines	25
Investing in people	25
Creating compelling characters	26
Crafting the story	27
Putting Together Matches	27
Using a script	28
Calling it in the ring	29

Mixing choreography and improv.	29
Understanding Who Shapes Matches	29
Working with producers	30
Turning to bookers	30
Recognizing the Types of Matches	31
Wrestling in straight matches	31
Getting crazy in gimmick matches	33
Wrestling Under the Bright Lights.	35
Independent pro wrestling.	35
Televised pro wrestling.	38
Making a living in wrestling	40
CHAPTER 3: Identifying the In-the-Ring Essentials.	43
Setting the Stage for a Professional Wrestling Match	43
The ring: Where the action happens	44
Putting them in cages	48
Choosing a Weapon	49
Chairs	50
Tables and doors.	51
Ladders	53
Assorted other weapons	54
Considering commonly gimmicked weapons	55
Getting Gory — Blood in the Ring	57
Using a blade to cause the bleeding.	57
Hiding the blade	58
Banning the blade	58
Strapping on the Championship Belt	59
What they're made of — belt materials	59
Who gets the belt.	60
PART 2: APPRECIATING THE HISTORY OF PRO WRESTLING	61
CHAPTER 4: Looking Beyond the Ring: Wrestling's Origin Stories	63
Examining the Roots of Wrestling in the Ancient World	63
Wrestling in the original Olympics	64
Grappling in 1300s England.	64
Identifying some notable ancient-world wrestlers.	65
Entering the Pioneer Era — Where Pro Wrestling Began	66
Catch-as-catch-can wrestling takes off.	66
Comparing then to now	67
Gambling and side bets	67
Meeting three notable wrestlers of the Pioneer Era	69
Entering the Heavyweight Wrestling Champion Era — Frank Gotch	71

Battling George Hackenschmidt	71
Facing the truth about reality	72
The 1920s — The Gold Dust Trio era	72
Entering the Great Depression/WWII	74
Wrestling during the Great Depression — The Jim Londos era	75
Wrestling during World War II	77
Rikidōzan and Japanese pro wrestling	78
Watching the Television Era	80
Making an immediate impact	80
How pro wrestling's presence on TV evolved	82
CHAPTER 5: Examining the Midcentury Territory Era	83
Getting the Lowdown on Territories	83
Identifying the Territories during the Territory Era	85
West Coast	85
Midwest	86
South	87
Texas	88
Islands	88
Creating the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) to Unify Territories	89
Making an NWA World Heavyweight Champion	90
Passing the NWA Championship torch	90
Thesz — A model World Heavyweight Champion	91
Replacing Thesz with a dud	93
Finding some Flair	93
Breaking Away from NWA	95
World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWWF)	96
American Wrestling Association (AWA)	100
Jim Crockett Promotions	101
CHAPTER 6: Going National	103
Delving into the 1980s WWF Boom	103
Introducing Hulk Hogan	104
Taking WWF national	107
Coming up with <i>WrestleMania</i>	107
Hitting the mainstream despite a lawsuit	109
Reaching its peak with <i>WrestleMania III</i>	109
Exploring the Death of JCP and the Birth of WCW	111
Watching Pro Wrestling Decline in the Early 1990s	113
Looking for a replacement for Hogan	113
Dealing with a WWF steroid scandal	114
Starting the Monday Night War	115
Creating <i>Nitro</i> to challenge <i>RAW</i>	116
Moving to the New World Order	117

Ending the Nitro winning streak — “Stone Cold”	
Steve Austin	117
Happenstance begins WWF’s turnaround	118
Getting screwed over: The Montreal Screwjob	119
Adding Some Attitude with The Rock	123
Addressing the Death of WCW	125
Keeping the NWO around too long.	125
Clinging to Hogan	126
Making terrible booking decisions	127

PART 3: IDENTIFYING THE MAJOR PROMOTIONS. 131

CHAPTER 7: Highlighting the Big Three	133
Eyeing World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)	133
Forming the CWC: The beginning days	134
Going out on their own.	134
Getting a new name: The WWF	135
Taking some hits	136
Coming out on top	136
Losing a court battle and going with another name change: WWE	137
Getting fresh leadership.	138
Focusing on World Championship Wrestling (WCW)	138
Eyeing the WCW’s beginnings and struggles	138
Trying to be more competitive	139
Recognizing the beginning of the end	140
Sticking a fork in it.	140
Looking into Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW)	141
A pivotal part in the Monday Night Wars.	141
Seeing where ECW started.	142
Getting extreme.	143
Peeking behind the rivalry	144
Finding success in the Monday Night Wars.	145
Having money troubles	146
Fizzling out	147
CHAPTER 8: Moving into the 21st Century	149
Exploring Total Nonstop Action (TNA)	150
Creating NWA-TNA	150
Becoming TNA Entertainment.	151
Making an impact	151
Innovating and reinventing	152
Competing at the next level — A double-edged sword	153
Becoming a business	154

Entering the Ring of Honor (ROH).....	155
Inspecting the beginnings	155
Going international	156
Giving Sinclair Broadcasting the reins	157
Surviving the pandemic and its aftereffects	157
Going All In at a Pay-Per-View Event: All Elite Wrestling (AEW).....	158
Finding the origins of AEW.....	158
Going double or nothing	160
Returning weekly wrestling to networks	161
Changing of the guard	162
Hitting a bump in the road.....	162
Struggling at the Top: World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE).....	164
Producing the same thing over and over.....	164
Relying on big personalities.....	164
Living through COVID and controversy	168
Following the Bloodline	168
Paving the way for Cody Rhodes.....	169

PART 4: WRESTLING AROUND THE WORLD 171

CHAPTER 9: Going South of the Border — Lucha Libre.....	173
Examining the Roots of Mexican Freestyle Wrestling	173
Discovering the evolution of masked wrestlers	174
<i>Rudos</i> and <i>técnicos</i>	176
Understanding the significance of masks	176
Exploring How Lucha Libre Differs from Other Wrestling Styles ...	177
Using different rules	177
Enforcing rules.....	178
Recognizing the Premier Lucha Libre Promotions.....	178
<i>Empresa Mexicana de Lucha Libre</i> (EMLL)	179
<i>Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre</i> (CMLL).....	180
<i>Asistencia, Asesoría y Administración de Espectáculos</i> (AAA)	180
Lucha Libre AAA Worldwide.....	181
Lucha Underground	181
Exploring Smaller Lucha Libre Promotions.....	183
International Wrestling Revolution Group.....	183
The Crash Lucha Libre	183
Identifying <i>los Mejores Luchadores</i> (the Best Wrestlers).....	184
El Santo	184
Negro Casas	185
Rey Mysterio.....	186
Noting <i>Las Mejores Luchadoras</i> (the Best Female Wrestlers).....	187

CHAPTER 10:	Surveying <i>Puroresu</i> — Japanese Professional Wrestling	189
	Examining How <i>Puroresu</i> Compares to Western Pro Wrestling	190
	Recognizing Japan's Most Prominent Pro Wrestling Promotions	191
	New Japan Pro-Wrestling (NJPW)	191
	All Japan Pro-Wrestling (AJPW)	194
	Pro Wrestling NOAH	197
	Focusing on Women's Wrestling in Japan	198
	All Japan Women's Pro-Wrestling (AJW)	199
	Stardom	201
	Delving Deeper into Strong Style	204
	Universal Wrestling Federation (UWF)	205
	UWF, take two	205
	Strong-style promotions after UWF	206
	Universal Wrestling Federation International (UWFi)	206
	PRIDE Fighting Championships	207
CHAPTER 11:	Touring Pro Wrestling in Europe and Canada	209
	Exploring Catch Wrestling in Europe	209
	Creating catch wrestling	210
	Renaming to freestyle wrestling	211
	Seeing catch-as-catch-can live on	212
	Identifying Catch-Themed Promotions	213
	Catch Wrestling Association	213
	International Catch Wrestling Alliance	214
	The Snake Pit	214
	World of Sport	215
	Recognizing Top-Level Catch Wrestlers	216
	The Great Gama	216
	Frank Gotch	217
	George Hackenschmidt	218
	Billy Robinson	220
	Ed "Strangler" Lewis	220
	Examining Professional Wrestling in Canada	221
	Maple Leaf Wrestling	222
	Stampede Wrestling	222
	Lutte Internationale	223
	Naming Notable Grapplers from the Great White North	224
	George Gordienko	224
	Gene Kiniski	225
	Abdullah The Butcher	226
	"Rowdy" Roddy Piper	227
	Bret Hart	228
	"Whipper" Billy Watson	229

PART 5: MEETING THE SUPERSTARS OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY 231

CHAPTER 12: Supporting Wrestling Outside the Ring 233

Naming the Hall of Fame Promoters	234
Wrestling with the McMahon family	234
Creating Tony Khan's All Elite Wrestling	237
Promoting in the 1800s — Harry Hill	238
Creating the world's oldest pro wrestling promotion: The Lutteroth family	239
Watching Antonio Peña start AAA	239
Noting the Crockett family	240
Noting Professional Wrestling's Non-Wrestlers	241
Announcing the bouts — Commentators	242
Authority figures — in and out of the ring	244
Handling wrestlers' affairs — Managers	247

CHAPTER 13: Emphasizing the Most Memorable Wrestling Encounters 251

Exploring Some of the Greatest One-on-One Matches	252
Switching sides: A Canadian Hitman and a Texas rattlesnake	252
Watching the Ungovernable defeat the Ace	253
Going to the extreme	255
Putting a mask on the line	256
Perfecting the Three-Way Match	258
Defending against two challengers	258
Watching three women go at it	260
Wrestling with Multiple Opponents — The Battle Royal	261
Getting lessons in Aztec Warfare	261
Tag teaming, Japanese style	262
Exploring Series Wrestling	264
Battling for New Japan's World Title	264
Following the Flair/Steamboat trilogy	266

PART 6: THE PART OF TENS 269

CHAPTER 14: Ten of the Most Watched Matches of All Time 271

The Most-Watched Match in U.S. History	272
The Most-Watched Match in Cable TV History	273
The Most-Watched Match in WCW History	274
The Most-Watched Match in U.K. History	275
The Highest Live Attendance for a Wrestling Event in Mexico	275
The Most-Attended Match	276

	The Most (Voluntarily) Attended Match	277
	The Most-Attended Show in WWE History.	278
	The Match That Almost an Entire Nation Watched	279
	The Most-Watched Match	279
CHAPTER 15:	Ten Industry-Changing Promos	281
	Dusty Rhodes' "Hard Times" Promo	282
	Ron Simmons, the First Black World Champion	282
	Shane Douglas Ignites a Revolution	284
	Austin 3:16 Catches Fire	284
	Hulk Hogan: The NWO's Third Man	285
	The Montreal Screwjob.	285
	Russo Bashes Hogan at the Beach	286
	Flair Delivers a Eulogy for WCW	287
	The Infamous CM Punk Pipe Bomb	288
	Becky Lynch Becomes the Man.	289
CHAPTER 16:	Top Ten Celebrity Crossovers.	291
	Muhammad Ali Takes on Antonio Inoki	291
	A King Duels with a Jester.	293
	Cyndi Lauper Boosts Women in <i>WrestleMania I</i>	294
	Mr. T Draws Attention to <i>WrestleMania I</i>	294
	When Giants (Proverbial and Literal) Collide.	295
	Feud Moves from the Court to the Ring.	296
	Mike Tyson Coronates "Stone Cold" Steve Austin.	297
	Battle of the Billionaires	298
	Floyd Mayweather Delivers Knockouts	298
	Shaquille O'Neal Was All Elite	299
INDEX		301