WWE Wrestles With Gay Issue

March 27, 2011 By Shawn Decker

I am an unapologetic pro wrestling fan. Oh, wait, *sports entertainment* fan. WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) takes great pains in correcting journalists who label their product "professional wrestling", as that is far too limiting in scope when you consider the long line of products (from movies to merch) that the family-friendly company offers.

But I'm not a journalist, I'm just a longtime fan since I was kid. Old habits are hard to break, so I'll just call it "pro wrestling". In fact, one of my dreams is to write for the company down the road, one this little HIV thing is cured. It's nice to keep up with the happenings by continuing to tune, so my transition from talking and writing about AIDS can be as seamless as possible.

Recently my beloved sport has run into a long-running issue: homophobia. A couple of weeks ago, their biggest hero to children, John Cena, raised the ire of GLAAD when he delivered a speech aimed at the Rock. While rapping about his nemesis and his movie career, Cena joked that everyone knows that the Rock is more Brokeback Mountain than Witch Mountain. See what he's doing? He's suggesting that the Rock isn't a real man by insinuating that he is gay.

Aside from trying to diminish the value of a fellow fan-favorite by gay-baiting, Cena also targeted the company's current champion and my 2008 Person of the Year, the purposefully arrogant Mike The Miz. As the Miz stood in the ring with his lackey, Alex Riley, Cena smirked whilst wearing jorts and a trucker hat, telling a live crowd and TV audience of millions that Miz and Riley were partners in more ways than one. Wink wink, nudge nudge. That they shopped together at Bed, Bath & Beyond... I'd estimate that Cena's biggest fans are between the ages of 8-12, what good does this kind of tactic do for them?

WWE issued an apology on Cena's behalf, although the top star himself remained silent. They said they value their gay fans and will work with GLAAD to make sure this doesn't happen again. See, in wrestling stars like Cena get a little more free reign on the mic, so it was a good move for GLAAD to explain to their heroes (and villains) why targeting gay people might make life for gay youth a living hell... because all gay teenagers need are classmates in jorts targeting *them*.

I was quite happy to see the immediate response from WWE about partnering with GLAAD. Whether they took a trip to Bed, Bath & Beyond is unknown.

The honeymoon phase of the new partnership got off to a rocky start. Via Twitter, the company's

top villain/announcer, Michael Cole, struck. In a public message to a fellow broadcaster, he tweeted one word: “faggot”. When TMZ helped to expose the situation, he posted a lame apology and the following, "I was not ordered to apologize I said I am sorry because I am. Now can I get back to being a character again please?“ He deleted this, along with the original post of ”faggot“. It seems to be his way of saying he tweets as his on-air persona, but he’d never dare to utter the word ”faggot" on national television, so it’s a flimsy, thinly veiled excuse.

It’s not known whether or not he would have been forced to apologize. I personally believe that WWE would have made him, as they can’t be pleased with the embarrassing behavior one week out from their biggest event of the year, Wrestlemania. What is known is that, over the course of three weeks, the company’s top hero *and* heel found common ground when it came to stepping on not only their gay wrestling fans, but fans who are straight and get how damaging this kind of language and psychology can be.

Is it grown men pretending to kill each other? Yes. But with most of the onscreen time these days being dedicated to talking instead of wrestling, it’s just as important for the wrestlers and company to choose their words wisely. One mistake in a match injures one or two people, but one mistake on the mic could prove physically harmful to many outside of the ring.

I’m hoping they get this all cleaned up by the time the cure rolls around and I start writing pro wrestling storylines for a living.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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