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SLAM! Wrestling chats with Ted Dibiase

By JOHN POWELL -- SLAM! Wrestling



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Dishing out hundred dollar bills faster that the mint could print them. That cruel, unforgettable laugh punctuating every misdeed. During the wrestling boom in the 80's when Hulk-A-Mania ran wild and the World Wrestling Federation reigned supreme, he was the baddest of bad. Ted Dibiase, wrestling's Million Dollar Man. He coined the phrase "Every man has his price" and throughout the years certified it by purchasing and corrupting the souls of weak. That was what Ted Dibiase the character was paid to do and he did it well. Reality mirroring fantasy, the real Dibiase found his Million Dollar dream of being a professional wrestler also had a dear price.

In SLAM! Wrestling's telephone interview with Ted Dibiase, the wrestler, manager and author talked about his book, the wrestling lifestyle and his new mission in life.

Q: What inspired you to write Every Man Has His Price and how long did it take to put to paper?

- John Powell (SLAM! Wrestling).

Dibiase: The book was a long time in coming. Actually, a very good friend of mine who lives in the same town, who went to church with me, asked me to write a book about my life. I kinda put that on the back burner. I kept talking to people and they kept saying "Ted, wrestling is not the most usual of occupations. Gosh, you have an interesting story. You should write a book". At the same time, as most fans know who've followed my career, I've had a real switch in my life over the last six years. That would be my relationship with God. My spiritual life. It's come to the



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forefront of everything I do.

So, the book was written with a two-fold idea. Number one: I wanted to enlighten the average wrestling fan or for just the guy who knows nothing about wrestling and has preconceived notions of what it's about. One of those preconceived notions being it isn't a legitimate competitive sports and therefore it's easy. Wrestling's been knocked around, made fun of and joked about for a long time. I wanted to address some of those things and give people a little insight into what it's like. I wanted people to come away from the book with a better appreciation for the amount effort we put into what we do and the sacrifices that come with this job.

Of course the title of the book is also a play on the motto of the Million Dollar Man. But in a more real way it was the truth. Every man, every woman, every child does indeed pay a price for whatever it is they choose to do in life. There are a lot of sacrifices to be made in reaching the top of this business.

There are a lot of athletes who come up to me from time to time and throw out that question: "Gosh, I watch wrestling all the time. How do I become a wrestler?". What they don't realize is that when they say that to you, it's almost an insult. Because it's like walking up to Michael Jordan and saying the same thing about basketball. Sometimes these guys are - excuse the terminology - big fat dumpy guys. That's what I wanted to address. This is a business and it's an art form. A combination of sports and entertainment. You have to be good at both to be successful. Then, you have to be the right guy in the right place at the right time.

Q: In the book, you of course express some of your religious beliefs but I felt you did so in a very take-it-or-leave-it tone? You mentioned that you also talked to other wrestlers about your beliefs so much so that they call you 'The Reverend'. For the most part how has the reaction been to the book from other wrestlers?

- **John Powell (SLAM! Wrestling).**

Dibiase: It's been very respectful. A number of guys have come up to me and said "I read your book and it was like reading my own life story". We all deal with the same hardships. We all deal with the same temptations. Over all, the guys have been very good and supportive. Some of them are still with the World Wrestling Federation and were surprised because they expected me to blast and knock the WWF. I didn't do that. A matter of fact, I did just about the opposite and for good reason. I can't knock them for what Vince McMahon did for me. Whether you like the guy or not, he is the guy who first had the vision and the guts to take wrestling and change its face forever. With my life turnabout in mind though, I have to say that although I give McMahon and the WWF full credit for giving me the biggest break in my life, I am disappointed in the programming that they are airing now and I DO NOT want to be associated with what you are seeing in the World Wrestling Federation currently. You know, to each their own but I don't agree with it. It's not in line with what I believe in. It is a program that I can no longer let my children watch.

Q: So basically, if they offered you a job based on their current content, you wouldn't accept the opportunity?

- **SLAM! Wrestling (John Powell).**

Dibiase: I would have to tell them 'No'.

Q: Could you tell us a bit about the ministry you have started and where that has taken you?

- SLAM! Wrestling (John Powell).

Dibiase: I have started my own ministry which I have named The Heart Of David Ministry. The ministry is fairly evangelical in its outreach. We go and speak to teenage kids, grade school kids, men's groups and church groups sharing my story and what God has done in my life. I get to go out and speak about two or three times a month right now.

Q: Some of the material, especially the account of the death of your father was very emotional reading? Was it hard going over some of those memories again?

- SLAM! Wrestling (John Powell).

Dibiase: You know, when I started the book and knew I was going to talk about all those things; I really didn't think it was going to be. I thought it had been a long time, I still miss my Dad and everything but when you are writing a book and you put yourself in that place again; it was harder than I thought it would be. Yeah. It was pretty tough.

Q: In the book, you mention a lot about the temptations faced by wrestlers because of the lifestyle they've chosen and considering the recent deaths of Brian Pillman and Louie Spicolli, what it is about this business that can change people?

- SLAM! Wrestling (John Powell).

Dibiase: Whether it's the world of wrestling, Hollywood, professional athletics or the traveling salesman if you will, we are all tempted by the same things. But thrown into the public eye as we are and the celebrity status comes your way, the more that status is lavished upon you with greater temptations. In some cases, you search it out. In some cases, it comes looking for you and is almost thrown in your face. People want to get close to you. They want to get next to you. You've got money. You've got power. You've got recognition. And apparently you can have it all.

What drives people to these things? Of course, as a Christian, the thing that's missing in these lives is Jesus Christ. But at the same time...Why do these people suffer from all these temptations? It is because they are lonely. I am sure some of the people that read this interview will go "What do you mean? How can these guys be lonely?".

The truth is deep down inside, many guys and girls in this business do have an insecurity problem, a self-identity problem. Many over-achievers are driven because of this personality flaw. They've got something to prove. Life on the road is lonely. I can remember I used to hate to go back to my hotel room at night. I was one of the boys. I couldn't drop my bag in that room fast enough and bolt down to the bar. That's where it all starts. What are all those things? The drugs. The alcohol. The addictions whatever they may be. What drives them is that deep down inside these people are lonely.

Q: I heard you were in Israel last year. As an Israeli, I'd like to know what made you come here and how did you like the country?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Arnon Lavie.

Dibiase: I absolutely loved Israel. It was everything that everyone had told me it would be. I fell in love with the country. I fell in love with its people. It's funny, speaking from a Christian perspective, I was told that I would arrive there thousands of miles away from home yet I would feel like I've come home and when I left there I would do so weeping and vowing to return. That's exactly what happened and I can't wait to go back.

Q: Why did you leave the WWF?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Andy Linden.

Dibiase: There are really a couple of reasons. The direction in which they wanted me to go was one. I went back there as a color commentator and the role as a manager. I think Vince was trying to guide me towards an agent type job. I can understand that. He's the boss and he wants to put people in positions that are going to help him the most. He wanted to put me out in the field helping build the talent. But, I've lived twenty years of my life on the road and away from my family. I went through a traumatic experience in nearly losing them also. I put in my time and I don't want to spend more time on the road. So, the opportunity that presented itself with the WCW was a good one. It was one where I'd be home more and the bottom line is Vince McMahon and his organization can't compete financially with Ted Turner. Why are anyone of us in business? To do that best we can do. It was just an overall great deal from the WCW.



Q: How do you feel about being the man to bring in two of the WWF's most popular wrestlers, The Undertaker and Steve Austin (Ringmaster)? How do you think you contributed to their success?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Dorian Hoge.

Dibiase: Well, when both those gentlemen were introduced into the WWF, I just happened to be there. As the Million Dollar Man, I was the catalyst for a number of people. It was like I was the dirtiest character going so if we stick them with Dibiase it will be guilt by association. If they are friends with Dibiase, they gotta be bad news. Both those guys are extremely talented in their own right.

Q: Is it more fun to be an arrogant bad guy or a baby-face?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Pierre Lemelin.

Dibiase: It's always more fun to be the arrogant bad guy because you're playing a character rather than yourself.

Q: Remember that kid who was bounced that basketball for you? He had to bounce it 15 times to get paid and he was going to do it but then you knocked it away from him. Why were you such a jerk then?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Brian from Montreal.

Dibiase: That's what I was getting paid to be. That particular incident is the one I'm asked about the most. Everyone wants to know...Did I really do that to that kid? The answer is: No. The boy and his family were pre-picked and placed in the crowd. The kid did get the money afterwards.

Q: Ted, Your former WWF Tag Team Champion partner Mike Rotundo (aka I.R.S.)....are you good friends and do you still keep in touch? Also, how do you feel your old team of Money Incorporated would do against the new teams?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Darrell S.

Dibiase: Yes, Mike Rotundo and I are still good friends. We do keep in touch. I think we would fair very, very well against the teams today. I think there is a lot to be said about the older generation. It's like how would the original Green Bay Packers team do against some of the teams today. Well, I don't know. They're younger. They're faster. But I don't think we (Rotundo and myself) are far enough removed yet that we still wouldn't be able to compete.

Q: Ted, we know it's been awhile since you've wrestled competitively. Do you have any plans or is WCW creating any angles for you to head back into the squared-circle?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Brandon Eversoll.

Dibiase: There's been a big rumor floating around that I would come out of retirement. Never say never is what I learned a long time ago. Never say that you never will. A guy I used to know said...'Every man has his price' and that's all I can say about that. If it were financially lucrative enough and I thought that I could physically do it; I might consider it. The odds are though that I won't.

Q: Is that decision based on the injury to your neck?

- SLAM! Wrestling: John Powell.

Dibiase: I still have the neck injury. It really spooked me. When the doctor tells you that at any given time, if you are dropped on your head you could be paralyzed; it kinda puts a damper on things.

Q: Whatever happened to the Million Dollar belt?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Chris Jauff.

Dibiase: I guess the Million Dollar belt is locked away in safe in Connecticut with the World Wrestling Federation. They are the ones who had that belt made. No, the belt is not genuinely worth a million bucks but it worth a REAL pretty penny. As a matter of fact, it's worth enough that I had to carry a piece of paper around with

me as we crossed the international borders describing what it was and why I had it..

Q: And did you ever have a problem in getting it across the borders?

- SLAM! Wrestling: John Powell.

Dibiase: No, I never did. I had a lot of people who wanted to gawk at it and take pictures with it though..

Q: What do you think of the direction professional wrestling has gone?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: LodiLover.

Dibiase: I have mixed feelings. Obviously, I can't knock it too much because when I thought I was in my prime and Hulk Hogan and WrestleMania were running wild; it was my opinion that wrestling was enjoying its greatest popularity of all time. When that faded, because nothing lasts forever, I believed that would be it or at least I wouldn't see it again in my life. Yet, here it is again. Not only is it here again but it's even bigger! The fact that the Turner organization and the television show are doing ratings that compete with network television is incredible.

Q: And you guys never get the credit you deserve for that.

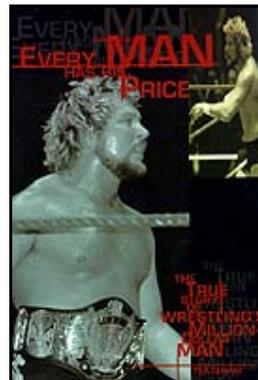
- SLAM! Wrestling: John Powell.

A: You're exactly right. It's almost as if they are saying..."Maybe if we ignore them, they'll go away". It's one of those things that really irritates me and gets right back down to the respect thing. What do we have to do to get respect? They won't give us credit and it's embarrassing to them.

Q: Is there any particular opponent that you wish you could have wrestled, but didn't get the chance to?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Placid Lasrado.

Dibiase: Off the top of my head, I can't think of anybody outside of the newer guys. If you start naming the great names in the business, I've worked with every one of them. I see some new guys who I think have much potential and that I would love to climb into the ring with them in hopes of helping them out. These are people like Diamond Dallas Page. I have much respect for him because he's a guy who started really late in the business and really studied the business. He has earned his position. Other guys I would include are Chris Jericho, Dean Malenko, Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero. These are the guys who wrestle more that style that I was known for years ago. Even a guy like Bill Goldberg. What an extremely great ring presence that guy's got.



Q: A very good book. Well written and interesting, especially if you are a wrestling buff. As a manager, how many days of work do you actually put in and what influence do you have on the bookings?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: GJP.

Dibiase: Now that I've put in twenty-two years of my life in the wrestling business, I am not required to be at every live event. Therefore, if the television camera aren't rolling...I'm not there. As far as genuine influence goes...Do I really get contracts signed for my guys? The answer is 'No'. I might have influence in terms of submitting an idea. They (the bookers) might listen to me or not. Besides that, I really have no real impact on what goes on.

Q: I have been a fan of yours since your UWF days, but I wanted to ask you a question from your WWF days. To many, the Million Dollar Man gimmick seemed to portray a wealthy white man playing the role of master to a black, slave-like character (Virgil). Did you view your role as the Million Dollar Man this way? If so, did you try to do anything in your power to confront McMahon about this?

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: Juan.

Dibiase: No. I didn't look at it that way at all and nobody ever said anything to me or Virgil about that. The other part of that picture was...I'm the white guy shooting off his mouth all the time with a great big, well-built black guy doing all the dirty work. If you look at the character of the Million Dollar Man, I was a jerk to everybody. That was the whole point. Even my right-hand man who stands by me gets mistreated. That was all done with a specific purpose planned out from Day One. The purpose was that eventually Virgil would get tired of all my crap and turn on me. When he did, it was big business.

Q: The WWF used to give you that roll of cash to push the character of the Million Dollar Man. I was wondering how that worked. Was it money from your own salary or out of the WWF's pocket?

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

Dibiase: That was their money.

Q: Wow.

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

Dibiase: That's exactly what I said. (Dibiase laughs) I told Vince that I couldn't possibly keep track of all this money. And he would always tell me..."Where the opportunity presents itself to get the gimmick over; do it". In another words, if I walk into a bar and the situation's right, I buy a round for the house.

Q: And how did that make you feel?

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

Dibiase: Oh, boy! (laughs) At the same time, I'll say this...I

appreciate the fact that Vince would have the faith in me to do that and realize that I would not abuse the privilege and I never did.

Q: Now, what was the most ridiculous thing you ever bought with that money?

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

Dibiase: Oh, Gosh. I've literally gone in and just picked up a pack of gum and thrown a C-Note down or gone to a quarter toll booth and given them a hundred dollar bill.

The guy goes..."Is that all you got, pal?".
I go..."Yeah. That's all I carry. I'm the Million Dollar Man." (Dibiase laughs).

They always mumble under their breath and then make the change. I'd pick up people's hotel bill and expenses just off the cuff. Many, many things just like that.

Q: I am a high school teacher and I was wondering if Ted would be interested in sharing his story with some high school students in the Kansas City area. I have several kids who are wrestling fans but are high-risk students. I think some words of encouragement and advice from Mr. Dibiase would help a lot.

- SLAM! Wrestling reader: OceanWine.

Dibiase: Sure, that's what I do now. If he really wants to pursue that he can call my agent and book it.

Editor's note: For more information on Ted Dibiase or to arrange a personal appearance please contact:

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Q: Ted, what in the world is going on with the Steiner Brothers of late?

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

Dibiase: Well, Scotty has the big head. I don't know what else to tell you.

Q: Are you guys going to screw his head back on right?

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

Dibiase: We're working on it. We're working on it.

Q: Another question we got from many fans is why you left the nWo?

- SLAM! Sports (John Powell).

DiBiase: Thing's are kinda done on the spur of the moment and when Eric Bischoff decided to jump and join the nWo; we thought it was a great idea. What better guy to have along then the guy really running the company? Once we did it, Eric jumped into my role without realizing it. At the time that was happening, my book came out. We all know that wrestling is theatre. It's like the magic show. You know it's not all real but you don't know how it's done. When I realized the book was coming out and that people would understand that I am not the bad guy I've played for ten years, it made sense to change my character as well. And that's what we did.

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