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Muraco, Santana proud to be honoured

By [JOHN POWELL](#) -- Co-producer, SLAM! Wrestling



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Former WWE superstar, Tito Santana.

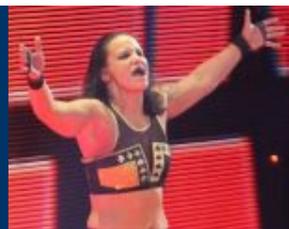
At one time, they were once great in-ring rivals, who laid the foundation for what fans know today as World Wrestling Entertainment.

Now, Tito Santana and Don Muraco share something else in common besides feuding for the Intercontinental Title and being two-time champions. Both wrestling legends will be inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame the night before WrestleMania XX. An honour that many 'old school' fans believe is long overdue.

"I feel very honoured. I have always taken a lot of pride in being in the WWF as a pioneer of sorts," Santana told SLAM! Wrestling upon hearing the news.

Residing in New Jersey, it is not his famous flying forearm smashes or drop kicks that Santana takes great pride in now. Instead, Santana spends his time raising his children as well as teaching and coaching at a local middle school.

"I coach the seventh and eighth grade basketball team and we went undefeated this year! I enjoy coaching a lot," said the proud Spanish teacher.



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Living in Sunset Beach, Hawaii, just as his '80s ring intro stated, 'Magnificent' Muraco was "stoked" about being in such good company.

"The award is a compliment to all the great guys, both living and dead, who I came into contact and worked with," said a humbled Muraco, who now works as a longshoreman and still stays in touch with such stars as Jimmy 'Superfly' Snuka and Maurice 'Mad Dog' Vachon.

Receiving such an award during WrestleMania's 20th anniversary holds a special meaning for Santana who appeared in the first eight WrestleManias and wrestled in the very first WrestleMania match ever when he fought The Executioner ('Playboy' Buddy Rose under the mask) in Madison Square Garden.

"It is good to be part of history and to watch the promotion grow. It is nice to see it doing so well," said Santana.

Muraco and Santana join 2004 inductees [Jesse Ventura](#), [Bobby "The Brain" Heenan](#), [Greg "The Hammer" Valentine](#), Sgt. Slaughter, [Superstar Billy Graham](#), [Harley Race](#), [Junkyard Dog](#), Big John Studd and baseball legend Pete Rose.

Previous inductees include [Andre The Giant](#), ["Classy" Freddie Blassie](#), [George "The Animal" Steele](#), [Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka](#), Captain Lou Albano, The Fabulous Moolah, [Bobo Brazil](#), James Dudley, "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers, "Golden Boy" Arnold Skaaland, [Gorilla Monsoon](#), Chief Jay Strongbow, The Grand Wizard, Pedro Morales, Ivan Putski, ["Big Cat" Ernie Ladd](#), Antonino Rocca, "Baron" Mikel Scicluna, [Pat Patterson](#), Johnny Rodz, Vincent J. McMahon, [Walter "Killer" Kowalski](#), and The Valiant Brothers.

The ceremony will be held on Saturday, March 13th, as part of a WWE Hall of Fame dinner at the New York Hilton.

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Here is a closer look at the 2004 inductees.

Name: [Jesse Ventura](#)

Nickname: The Body

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: One of the best announcers in federation history

While Ventura was a top-level draw during his in-ring career, particularly in the AWA, "The Body" will always be remembered as one of the best colour commentators to hit the airwaves for the WWF, as well as in WCW. Ventura has always been closely associated with wrestling, and has frequently re-appeared on WWF programming since he left the company, including a guest referee job at Summerslam a couple years back.

Name: Sergeant Slaughter

Nickname: 'Sarge

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: Heavyweight Champion

Slaughter has been one of the biggest names in wrestling for many years, and will be remembered by different age groups for different reasons. Older fans will remember Slaughter as the original American hero, a man who fought against foreign wrestlers such as the Iron Shiek. Some younger fans will recall his role as an Iraqi sympathizer during the Gulf War, while even younger fans will talk about his role as WWF commissioner. Still an occasional performer in the ring, it looks like Sarge will be entertaining more crowds for years to come.

Name: Don Muraco

Nickname: Magnificent Muraco, The Rock

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: Intercontinental Champion (2x)

Whether wrestling Jimmy Snuka in cage matches or performing in "Fuji Vice", Muraco was one of the most entertaining wrestlers of the 1980s. The original Rock was just that - a mountain of a man who used his power game to defeat opponents of all sizes. Muraco touched a lot of fans with his hard-hitting style, and was truly one of the best wrestlers of his era.

Name: [Greg Valentine](#)

Nickname: The Hammer

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: Tag Team Champion (2x)

Aptly nicknamed "The Hammer" Valentine was one of the hardest hitters in wrestling history. Most often accompanied by Jimmy Hart to ringside, Valentine was one of the most decorated superstars of his generation, holding the Intercontinental title on one occasion and teaming with Brutus Beefcake and The Honky Tonk Man for Tag-Team Championship runs. Still occasionally active on the indie scene, Valentine is definitely deserving of this honour.

Name: Tito Santana

Nickname: El Matador

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: Intercontinental Champion

Santana was one of the more complete packages of his generation. His move arsenal included the figure-four leglock and the "El Paso De Muerte", better known as the "Flying Jalapeno" thanks to Bobby Heenan. Santana is a rarity in the wrestling world, as he spent his entire career as a face in the WWF. He would always get a pop out of audiences, whether he was flying solo or teaming with Rick Martel in the Strike Force.

Name: [Bobby "The Brain" Heenan](#)

Nickname: The Brain, Weasel

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: Managed several wrestlers to championships

The self-professed "manager of champions", Heenan is a legendary around the ring as he was in the broadcast booth. Many consider his pairing with hall-of-famer Gorilla Monsoon the greatest announcing duo of all-time. Heenan's quick wit and knack for saying the wrong things at the right time made him a guy you couldn't help but love. Heenan's induction is a mere

formality, as many fans already think of "The Brain" as the best manager in wrestling's history.

Name: [Billy Graham](#)

Nickname: Superstar

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: Heavyweight Champion (WWWF)

Graham is arguably the greatest living legend in WWF history. Superstar was one of the flashiest superstars of his time, adorning himself with the kind of pageantry that would later be used by Ventura, Hulk Hogan and Scott Steiner. His wrestling career, which included stints in the AWA and NWA, would be a ten-month title-run as WWWF champion. After his in-ring career was finished, he would manage Muraco and spend time in the commentator's booth.

Name: [Harley Race](#)

Nickname: The King

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: First WWF king

While WWF fans may question this selection, there is no doubt that Race deserves this honour. A multi-time NWA champion, Race is likely best remembered for his numerous bouts with Ric Flair. His WWF stint was brief, though in the time he was in the Fed, he showed fans just how good he was, even though he was already at the tail-end of his career. Following his in-ring time, Race spent time in WCW as a manager. He is still involved in the wrestling business today as a promoter.

Name: John Studd

Nickname: Big John Studd

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment:: 1989 Royal Rumble winner

Few will ever forget the legendary figure of John Studd. In the days of giants, Studd stood amongst the biggest, at times towering over his opponents. While he never held a major title in the WWF, Studd was one of the most hated villains in WWF history. His feuds with Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan are still remembered today, especially his Wrestlemania I "body-slam" bout against Andre. Studd will be inducted posthumously, as he passed away in 1995 due to liver cancer.

Name: [Junkyard Dog](#)

Nickname: JYD

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment::

Some wrestlers don't need a title to get over with the fans. This was the case with JYD, who simply got over by being a strong worker and a fan-friendly likeable guy. The Dog would often fill arenas based on his charisma alone, and his time in the WWF and NWA will never be forgotten. The Junkyard Dog is being inducted posthumously, as he passed away in 1998.

Name: Pete Rose

Nickname: Charlie Hustle

Biggest WWF/E accomplishment::

Banned from Major League Baseball, Rose will finally enter a hall-of-fame. Rose is best known in the wrestling world for three consecutive Wrestlemania appearances, in which he took tombstone after tombstone from Kane as well as a stink-face from Rikishi. The all-time hit leader in baseball has shown himself to be one of the better celebrities who have taken part in WWF events.



-- compiled by [Jon Waldman](#)



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