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Foley: No Love lost for Austin

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SLAM! Wrestling



How does "Ice Dagger"
Steve Austin sound? Or how
about...And that's the bottom
line because Frosty
McFreeze said so?

According to Mick Foley (aka Mankind, Cactus Jack and Dude Love), those were some of the suggestions made by the WWF head office when Steve Austin chose to abandon his Ringmaster gig.

"This is a little known fact but when "Stone Cold" was the Ringmaster and he wanted to change his image, he expressed his desire to be a cold-hearted person and they took that word "cold" literally. He was getting a list from the office that had names like..Ice Dagger. Frosty McFreeze and Baron Von Ruthless," said Foley in an interview with SLAM! Wrestling and Virtually Canadian's Law Internet wrestling program.

Out of the blue, Foley (as Dude Love) is the top contender to Austin's WWF heavyweight title. Playing into the imaginary conspiracy, many fans credit Foley's over night rise in the rankings as a scheme by WWF Vince McMahon to dethrone Austin, the working man's champion. The fix may be in but Foley, known by fans as a hardcore wrestling legend due to his "devil-may-care" style, has personal reasons in challenging the WWF rattlesnake and revealing the "truth" about him.

"It's like the "toughest S.O.B." thing. When I see videotape of "Stone Cold" in bed of nails, thumb tacks, barbed wire and C4 explosive matches then I'll say okay, he has a claim of being the toughest S.O.B. Until then, it's copyright infringement," said Foley referring to some of the bizarre and truly dangerous matches that have shaped him into an infamous competitor.

The McMahon - Austin fictional storyline was a godsend for Foley. As he was not sure what the future would hold after his and Terry Funk's loss of the WWF Tag Team championship to the red hot New Age Outlaws. Truth be told, his tag belt didn't go far as Outlaw member Road Dog is his next door neighbor in sunny Florida.

Rumors of a Mankind - Marc Mero feud concocted by the WWF bookers had Foley down for the three count. "I had a bullet with my name on it and a gun to my head then the phone call came. It was just in the nick of time. I was about to fire the damn thing," he chuckles.

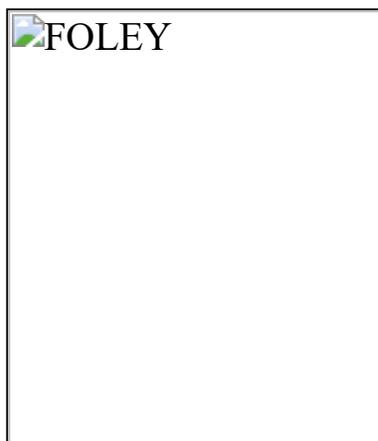
Thankfully, the WWF offered him an on-going rivalry with "Stone Cold" playing the role of Vince McMahon's chosen one. It was music to Foley's ear and a chance for him to haul in a bigger pay cheque. The catch was that Foley had to assume his Dude Love personality. Some thought a Mankind or especially a Cactus Jack feud with Austin would detract from the champion's planned post-WrestleMania push. To be the one making Austin even more popular than is all in a day's work for Foley. Even if he vowed many to deep-six the Dude Love character.

"I went out there on Raw Is War and there was three things I swore I wouldn't do. One is to suck up to a guy like McMahon. Two is to make my family watch me dance with a couple of second-rate

strippers. And three was to become Dude Love again. By the end of the second hour I was gleefully doing all things I bloody swore I'd never do," Foley explains.

Dude Love, the retro sixties character inspired by the ring moniker a teenage Foley gave himself while practicing in a makeshift ring located in his backyard, has offered something virtually uncommon to the squared circle veteran: a chance to wrestle without chancing an injury. While as Mankind or Cactus Jack, Foley portrayed a break neck, kamikaze-style of wrestling which saw him crash through tables, careen off ladders and absorb wicked chair shots. Horrendous bumps, hits and falls which took a devastating toll on his body.

"The Dude is good and should not be overlooked because he taught me that you don't necessarily have to be in pain to entertain an audience," explains the former high school track star and lacrosse player who got involved in amateur wrestling as way



to keep himself in shape. "The hardcore wrestling fans can say what they want but the fact is the Dude entertained a lot of people last year and didn't get hurt".

Formerly employed with Extreme Championship Wrestling recognized for its graphic content, Foley left the federation when it became apparent to him that the fans were "dictating the matches" demanding more and more outrageous stunts to the point where Foley was convinced that they really didn't care about the physical well-being of the wrestlers. Following his departure some fans labeled him a "sell-out" for softening his technique. Foley makes no apologies.

"There will be some people out there who'll make valid claims that Cactus Jack isn't much of a scientific wrestler any more. He doesn't do this. He doesn't do that. He doesn't look good in a bikini. But to say that I haven't been involved good matches over the years, I think is just wrong," says Foley who went on to a stint in World Championship Wrestling battling such mat superstars as Sting and The Nasty Boys.

Why then did he leave the lucrative Ted Turner-owned WCW? Foley claims there was no room for him to grow. He wasn't "best buddies" with the bookers. He wasn't a former WWF superstar in the mid-eighties. These circumstances he claims counted as strikes against him stifling his creative control. Then, there was the issue of salaries.

"I am not saying this to put these people down professionally. I'll let you draw your own conclusions. The Shark (Aka John Tenta, Earthquake, Avalanche) is a heck of a nice guy but to pay him twice what Cactus Jack made..I mean... they are paying guys like Horace Boulder what I was making when I was there," he says. "To be a successful wrestler (in WCW) you've got to...One....work your hardest, work hurt, travel 800 miles round trip for ten dollars, sleep in your car, eat peanut butter and jelly for weeks on end...or...Two...be somebody's nephew. There's something missing there and I don't see that going on in the WWF because it is Vince McMahon's company and he wants it to be successful."

With three characters to his credit in the WWF and let's not forget the three royalty cheques they command, Foley appreciates the creative freedom he and others enjoy. Mankind, the crazed Hannibal Lector-like grappler came about through intense consultation with McMahon. Throughout the entire process, Foley says McMahon was supportive

constantly meeting with him to make certain that he was entirely at ease with the changes.

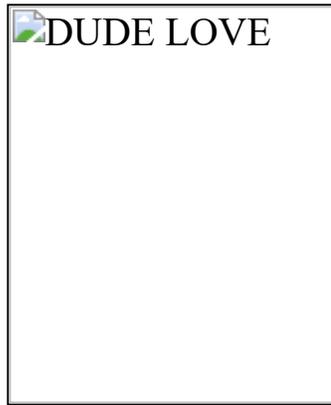
"I'll have to give the WWF a lot credit because they let me do the whole thing. They had a look they were after and they kinda let me fill in the blanks as to what I was most comfortable with," he says. "Not only have I done well financially for the past couple of years but I am artistically pleased. You cannot go out over 200 days a year and go through tables and be hit in the head with chairs. You can't do it. You gotta pick your spots. I'll tell yah, I took a lot of chairs across the back from The Undertaker and that adds up after awhile."

The son of an athletic director, Foley hopes to be remembered by fans for his feuds with other equally rough and tumble hombres such as Eddie Gilbert, Terry Funk, Abdullah The Butcher and The Nasty Boys. But no match ever was a boost to Foley's mystique than a real-life accident in his war against the mastadon Vader. On March 16th, 1994, while wrestling Vader in Munich, Germany, (Foley as Cactus Jack) was hurled into the ropes. and his head got lodged between the top and second ropes. The tension of the combined cables snapped his right ear completely off and ripped the left one in half. Astonishing the fans in attendance, Foley continued wrestling the rest of the match. To this day, he bears no ill will towards Vader for the gaffe.

"He felt bad about it. He may have bragged a little bit on television but in his heart he felt pretty bad. He hurts alot of people and he feels bad about it. Or maybe that's just his cover-up," says the hardcore legend.

Responsible for bringing the high-flying Canadian Chris Jericho to the attention of ECW promoters, Foley has taken another wrestler under his wing and would you believe it's the "mighty" Kurrigan?

"Me and The Undertaker were on a flight and we were talking about Kurrigan in total agreement. We don't know if it's in wrestling but somewhere he's going to make some money. Me and Terry (Funk) used to sit there at three o'clock in the morning and just come up with ideas for Kurrigan. He is our own pet project," states Foley letting it slip that one of the brainstorm sessions yielded an idea which will be used by The Undertaker in a short while. What is the plot twist or gimmick? Foley ain't saying.



Looking ahead to his rematch with "Stone Cold" Steve Austin at the Over The Edge WWF pay-per-view this Sunday, Foley is realistic about his chances. The wide-spread popularity of the "Stone Cold" persona almost guarantees that he will have a long and prosperous title reign. That's of little consequence to the proud husband and father living out his boyhood dream as Dude Love, the character who started it all in that makeshift backyard wrestling ring.

"To me, it's the most fun I've ever had. Now, I get to act like a complete jerk. It's fun," Foley snickers.

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