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Kurt promises a new Angle

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

This Sunday at the No Way Out pay-per-view, WWF World Heavyweight Champion - Kurt Angle - is facing his greatest challenge yet. A determined and refocused People's Champion in The Rock. You'd assume that Angle would be talking trash and waging psychological



Kurt Angle.

warfare against his erstwhile opponent. Well, in the WWF storylines he definitely is tormenting The Rock at every turn but outside the fictional reality of the squared circle, he has nothing but respect and admiration for his WWF colleague.

"Working with The Rock is tremendous. The guy is definitely one of the best athletes in the World Wrestling Federation," said Angle in a telephone press conference put together by the WWF and Viacom to hype Sunday's pay-per-view broadcast. "There is no doubt he's one of the best entertainers. He can cut a promo like nobody else. I think if you are going to talk about anyone that's made the biggest impact in wrestling, Rock definitely stands up there."

Backstage, Angle and The Rock work closely together. Angle has learned much from The Rock and gives credit to people like him and Triple H who've been essential in helping him make the difficult transition from amateur wrestling to the world of sports entertainment. Angle needed that support badly too. When the Olympic gold medal winner decided to take the WWF up on its offer in 1998 after turning them down two years earlier, he took a lot of heat from the amateur wrestling community.

"At first, they were very bitter. There was a lot of bad press. People didn't think I made the right decision but as time went on and they saw the accomplishments I was making. I get a lot of great response now," Angle said with satisfaction. "I think they are starting to understand what sports entertainment is all about. I think that it's another direction that amateur wrestlers can go to. If you've noticed, the WWF has signed six more amateur wrestlers since me and they are all blue chippers. I think that down the road this is going to give those guys another avenue to go to."

Before joining the World Wrestling Federation Angle had never watched professional wrestling. His peers in amateur wrestling circles looked down upon the larger-than-life athletic soap opera. Angle followed suit. Upon signing with the WWF, Angle began viewing their product on a regular basis to familiarize himself with it and was surprised how hooked he was on the storylines presented and the skill of the performers. All doubt that he had coming in was erased from his mind.

In the short time he has been with the WWF, Angle has accomplished the unthinkable. He's won the prestigious King Of The Ring Tournament, has taken home many titles and is now the reigning federation champion. Though he has put a lot of

hard work into getting where he is today, nobody is more surprised than Angle at his meteoric rise in the WWF.

"I thought it would take me a good three or four years to get to this point. I think Vince (McMahon) and the company had some plans for me as long as I could live up to their standards. Every single week I improved dramatically. I guess with my efforts and their efforts to continue to utilize me, I was able to have a lot more success a lot quicker," Angle said. "I owe that not to just myself but to a lot of people in the company. As you can see in wrestling today or sports entertainment, especially in the WWF, the wrestlers aren't so selfish to the point where they only think about themselves. They think more about the company. I've have some really good relationships with the guys and they respect me for what I've done."

Angle has come a long way to be sure. Any loyal fan of the WWF knows how much he has enhanced his abilities since his debut. He's incorporated some of his amateur wrestling stylings to better his in-ring ability. That alone has catapulted him to superstar status with those fans who appreciate ring psychology and the actual matches themselves rather than the angles they are built around. Drawing from the experience and talent of The Rock, Pat Patterson and others, his promos are superior to what they once were too. Still, the greatest lesson Angle has learned is a respect for the business and his stablemates in the company. He's not about to let his ego get the best of him and is the first one to admit that right now, he is more of a student than a teacher.

"The only way you are going to learn is to go in there and let these guys lead you until you get comfortable. I am not even quite completely comfortable right now. I am still what you would call a follower in that ring," Angle confessed. "I've got guys leading me and they make me look really

good and I try and make them look really good. It's really important to be a great follower. I think when you are a good follower and you are successful at that, one of these days you are going to end up being a good leader. I think that's really important and that where I am looking to in the next couple of years is learning how to have my own psychology in that ring and to utilize that on my own so I can lead other guys."

Another area Angle and the WWF bookers are looking to bolster is his persona. To shape Angle into a serious threat to Austin, Triple H and some of the other WWF hardcases not just a competent challenger or reducing him to portraying that annoying fly in the ointment everyone wants to swat.

"You're going to see Kurt Angle be more aggressive. You're going to see Kurt Angle not get his butt kicked so much all the time," he revealed. "Although I've won a lot of championships and had a lot of success, if you watch Kurt Angle he's usually the guy who gets the heck beat out of him. That's partially because I am the heel and also because I need to pay my dues and make these other guys look really, really good. I think you're going to see a lot more aggressiveness from me and that's not just me talking, that's the agents and the office talking as well. To be up in the main event level, you have to hold your own ground and you have to be very effective."

With No Way Out looming on the horizon, thoughts and talk of WrestleMania, the WWF's annual showstopper, has begun. Not giving away too much of what the WWF has planned Angle says he won't be at all disappointed if he is not in the main event but just on the off chance that he is, the wheels are already turning on how he and Steve Austin can blow the roof off the Houston Astro Dome.

"I am looking forward to performing with "Stone

Cold" Steve Austin at WrestleMania. As a matter of fact, those are my plans right now. I am thinking of good ideas, to put a good match together, to work with him and myself to really put on one of the best matches of the year. If I don't win (at No Way Out), I won't be upset," said Angle. "If it does happen, they (the fans) want to see Stone Cold and The Rock go at it at WrestleMania, it is their time. I am not so sure that it is my time right now. Eventually, some day it will be. We'll see what happens. Hopefully it will be me. If it is not, hey, I think those guys are going to put on a stellar performance".

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