

# DARK SIDE OF THE RING

Claims Department

Chris Benoit was one of the greatest wrestlers who ever lived. He literally changed the business, influenced a generation of stars around the world. The current state of wrestling owes a lot to Benoit, to his work ethic, to his philosophy of intensity of attack. He was a natural, and he could be called the first twenty-first century wrestler.

His legacy is as an abuser, as a murderer.

This is one of the hardest stories to tell, and one that we need to talk about. It's a story of brain injury, a story of drug abuse, a story of steroids, a story of murder and suicide, and domestic violence. It can not be overstated how many different aspects of the wrestling world influenced him, and how absolutely horrid a human being he was, both for his final action, and for how he treated his wife.

This is a tough issue, and in many ways, it is the one area where a lot of wrestling fandom understands it in a way that film fandom hasn't figured out how to deal with Woody Allen, or football fandom with OJ Simpson. Wrestling podcasters and bloggers have decided it's OK to talk about Benoit the wrestler, so long as you do not forget to talk about Benoit the Monster. Both exist, and it's a conflict that needs to be addressed, and a lot of wrestling fandom has done just that.

So, here's my take on the Crime that defined Chris Benoit, and moreso, a look at the Viceland documentary, and the changes that happened because of the murders.



## **The Murder of Nancy Benoit**

There were stories. They weren't widely known among fans, but many wrestlers knew them. The marriage between Chris Benoit and Nancy Sullivan began as an outgrowth of a wrestling storyline. This happens more often than you think. Kevin Sullivan was married to Nancy, and he was also the booker (matchmaker) for WCW. Benoit and Sullivan were also in a hot feud, one of the best in wrestling at the time. It really solidified Benoit as a great brawler, and led to some amazing matches. One, I believe at the Great American Bash 1996, was all over the arena and one of my favorite matches of the year on a show with three matches that were phenomenal. To get the feud over with the crowd, Sullivan started having Benoit hang out with Nancy, pretending that Benoit had stolen her away from Sullivan. They spent a lot of time together, and Sullivan wasn't a great husband, and there were rumors that he was having a torrid affair with Jacqueline, his valet. The stories go that he was abusive, at least mentally, and that there was a lot of drinking and-or drugs. How true are these? Not clear, though it seems that the stories are widely-known in the community.

Nancy and Benoit got together in 1996/7, and it was a volatile relationship. There was fighting, loud and frequent. There was addiction, most notably to pain killers. Nancy was a drinker, and the story goes that she started drinking heavily as a way of dealing with the abuse, largely verbal but occasionally verging into physical. He would toss and break furniture when he would fly into a rage. He shoved her at times.

Nancy gave birth to her first child, Daniel, in 2000. Benoit had other children from his first marriage, including one who is in wrestling today, but it was Nancy's first. She had been working in wrestling since her early 20s, and it's incredibly difficult to have a kid while working as a woman in wrestling. There is the constant travel, not to mention the drugs, drinking, sex, etc..

The abusive relationship continued, and Nancy filed for divorce in 2003. She also got a protection order, but as often happens, she took him back. A number of texts from this period have gone

public. They're pretty damning. They accuse Chris of being abusive mentally, of never making time for his son, of giving so much money to his ex-wife. She was still the beneficiary on Chris' life insurance policy. That's a tough call. For years, Evelyn was my beneficiary for the life insurance, even a year or so after Vanessa and I got married. Once the boys came around, I changed it. Then I got laid off, and no more policy. Sigh.

These texts actually show two things – it's an ugly relationship, but it also shows that they weren't together so often at the time. He was, of course, on the road, but at the same time, he was also up and out of the house when he and Nancy would get in fights. He'd leave and get a hotel for a week or two when they'd have a blow-up. There were a lot of texts about that, too.

Now, this is where I've heard several different stories, the most interesting being delivered by a roadie 'round back of the San Jose Arena before one of the WWE PPVs about 2008. In those days, if you had any sort of access to anyone with any degree of insider knowledge, you brought up Benoit. I got in as the talk went into the area of the relationship between Nancy and Chris.

"Nancy forced him into religious therapy," he said, "and she took him back. It's why he wrote letters to Eddie every day."

Now, Roadies do have access to a lot of gossip, they also pretty much only have access to gossip. It does make sense, especially since in the filing Nancy had said the marriage was 'irrevocably broken' only to take him back. I've also heard that Nancy's sister was the one who told Benoit to write Eddie letters. Either way. In the texts that were released, she says that Chris needs to get 'professional' and it certainly looks like she meant for him to seek professional therapy. There's a lot of evidence that he didn't, and other than that roadie's claim, and a couple of brief mentions I've heard that he had met with ministers at his local church, I've heard nothing about him seeking counseling.

The order of events in the Benoit house is rather clear, but there are also questions. Something happened on Friday afternoon/evening. Speculation is that they got into a fight, Benoit went into a

rage, beat her, slammed her face into the floor, then used a cord that was entwined with a rope and double-looped it around her neck, put his knee in the small of her back, and pulled back. There was blood beneath her head.

So many questions. The autopsy notes that the rope and the coax were intertwined. That would indicate that both were initially used and not one used to do the actual killing and the second put on later. This is important for later. Then again, the way that the rope is described is that there are two knots on the ends, and then it is tied at the back of the neck. Then the coax is tied around the neck once, and the other ends were tied around her wrists, which were then an S-Video cable was used to tie the wrists together. Her feet were bound with an electrical charger, which I've heard was a phone charger. He then taped it into place. She was covered with a blanket, and a Bible was placed next to her. Toxicology on her body revealed the presence of pain-killers and alcohol. There's some question of the alcohol was a bi-product of decomposition, but she was known to drink. There were no seriously illicit drugs in her system, again within the known habits of Nancy Benoit. She also had Xanax and hydrocodone (Vicodin) in her system.

Now, the questions as to why Chris did it I'll talk about later, but there is a GIANT question in my eyes about pre-meditation vs. rage killing. In favor of a sudden rage killing is the fact that the cable used to choke her to death was native to the room. The bound hands and feet could be one of two things – premeditation or an attempted cover-up. More on the latter later.

What happened next, no one can be sure, but there are ideas. When a parent kills the other parent, often there is a period of choice. In interviews with parents who murdered their partners and then their children, it's often noted that they thought they were doing the right thing, not letting the children suffer by not having either of their parents, because they would either be taken away to jail or were planning on killing themselves. It's a fucked up theory, but it sounds super reasonable. If Benoit had been in a fugue state, then got through it, this makes more sense, as does the time between the murder of Nancy, and the murder of their son, Daniel.

## **The Murder of Daniel Benoit**

Sometime after Chris had killed Nancy, he gave his 7 year old son a large dose of Xanax. It's likely that it was enough to knock him out. There's a theory that he had hoped it would have over-dosed the child, but it did not. Instead, Benoit smothered him, though it seems he used his arm to do so. There is the thought that it was done by putting him in the Crippler cross-face, but it's impossible to tell. He likely did smother him by putting his arm across Daniel's face, smothering him like that, but again, there's a lot of possibilities.

Chris also left a Bible next to Daniel's body.

There are several things. Since there's no way of knowing the exact order of operations, but looking at the levels of decomposition show that Nancy died first, and then Daniel followed, almost certainly on Saturday, likely in the morning. It's possible that he waited until Daniel went to sleep, gave him a shot with the Xanax, and then killed him. Profiling also states that it is far more likely to go with the partner killed first, and then the child. The fact that there is a known stat for that is so troubling.

There was no sign of a struggle, which is rare in smothering cases, and why the Xanax levels were likely high enough to put Daniel under.

It's clear that this was not a sudden process. There was absolutely evidence that this was at least somewhat scheduled. The Xanax alone shows that, and the fact that there was at least some gap between the application of the Xanax and the suffocation also plays along those lines. The knife under his bed could be debated. He may have wanted to stab him to death to speed it up, maybe, or perhaps he had already killed Daniel and then went into the room to kill himself at the site of his worst act, but then couldn't. Who knows.



## **The In-Between**

There is no way of knowing what happened in the Benoit house after the murder of Daniel. In the house, there was a half-empty wine bottle found, though there wasn't any alcohol in his system during the toxicology report. There was an elevated testosterone level, Xanax, and hydrocodone in his system, though no anabolic steroids. That's something that will come up later.

There are a lot of theories. The first one is that he spent the time drinking, coming down, and making phone calls and sending texts. This is a big deal that I'll get to a little later. He may have been trying to come up with a way to cover up the murder. There's more on that later too.

I think there are a few things that are pretty obvious. First, I doubt that Benoit put the Bibles next to Nancy and Daniel at the time of the murders, but probably shortly before he set out to kill himself, though it would make sense if he put the Bible next to Daniel right after his murder because he left Daniel's children's Bible. It's also likely that he was putting himself in and out of sensibility. The likely timeline is that he had at least 24 hours to live with himself and what he'd done. There's another possibility, often pumped out by the various conspiracy theory pushers, that Benoit wasn't aware that he had killed anyone. There is no way this is true, because we know that there were messages sent not only from his own phone, but also from Nancy's.

And that's one of the biggest parts of the case. At 3:30, Benoit called Chavo Guerrero on Saturday, after he would have killed Nancy and likely Daniel, and left a voicemail. He said he wasn't going to be making the houseshow; Nancy and Daniel were sick. Chavo was concerned because Chris sounded groggy, disoriented. This wasn't like Benoit. This certainly seems to speak to the idea that Chris was drinking/drugging to avoid actually dealing with the fact that he'd already murdered his family. Chavo called him back about ten minutes later. Chris didn't answer, so he left a message, and Benoit called him back. They talked for a few minutes. Benoit sounded out of it. He said that the family was sick with food poisoning. Chavo was worried and told

Benoit "All right, man, if you need to talk, I'm here for you." Benoit said "I love you."

This freaked Chavo out. It didn't sound like Chris.

This has been a point of contention with things I've heard about Benoit over the years. Supposedly, and I've heard this from folks. Folks say that Chris would tell people like Eddie Guerrero he loved them every time they went their separate ways. I've also heard that he was so very much private. There's another famous private wrestler, Mitsuharu Misawa, who died too young, and arguably one of the few humans who was better in the ring than Benoit, whose death was the first time a number of people who had worked with him for years found out that he had kids. I relistened to the Benoit interview on the famous Eddie Guerrero tribute show, and that wasn't a man who hid his emotions. It's obvious that he was a man who had feelings, and maybe he played close to his vest, but he wasn't exactly closed off

There are thoughts around this one. Some have claimed that the first call was meant to be the one where we confessed to murdering Nancy. When he didn't get Chavo in real time, he hung up, came up with the story, and then, perhaps, murdered Daniel. Daniel most likely had already been dead for a while. It's impossible to tell, though timing could easily be that Daniel was killed near this time. The thing that gets me is that the two of them were in the house with Nancy's decomposing body. Now, her body was not directly in the house, but above the garage in a sort of chauffer's unit, and perhaps it was because the smell was becoming noticeable that Benoit covered her in a blanket. Again, hard to say. If Daniel was alive into Saturday, it would be reasonable to expect Daniel to ask Chris about where his mom was, and that might have set Chris off. For my money, it's more likely that he had killed both Nancy and Daniel, and called Chavo to confess to him, but then lost his nerve.

He made a couple of more calls, sent a few texts over the course of Saturday and Sunday. He told talent relations that he was going to miss the show on Saturday. They apparently rescheduled his flights for the weekend. On Sunday, he sent several texts, some giving

his 'physical address' and that there were dogs that were in the pool area. There were a couple of calls about this time, and a few more texts. Apparently, at the same time, he was on the computer and looked up several things. One search was about Ezekiel, a Bible story in which a father begs the prophet to bring his child back to life, and then it happens. A lot has been made of this, about how it shows that Benoit was completely out of his mind, believing that there was a way to bring his child or wife back to him. Others say it shows at least a little bit of cognition, that he could apply something that he knew and look for a solution to his problem, perhaps finally coming down enough to realise what had happened.

I think it shows exactly how religious he was. Ezekiel isn't exactly the most widely-known Bible story, but he knew to look it up. Sometimes, when things get tough, religious people will instantly get a notion of a story they heard, read once, and then latch on to it as a way to help themselves cope. It's happened to me, and I'm not at all religious, but when I was super-down after the death of my Dad, a Bible story, the Widow's Mite, hit me and helped me out. It was weird.

There are people who knew him for years who thought he wasn't religious, and others who knew he was a Church-goer, but thought it was more for Nancy than a fact of his own faith. Maybe he'd shared the level of his faith with a few people, maybe Eddie or Ray Trayler (Big Boss Man), but as he lost them to time, he had no real outlet. These are all possibilities.

He also search 'the quickest and easiest way to break a neck' at some point. It's likely that that would be the turn; that was the moment he knew he had no other path.



## **The Suicide of Chris Benoit**

He took a towel, wrapped it around his neck and taped it into place. He removed the pull-down bar, and wrapped the cord of

the weight machine around that, with the weight held at the up position with a couple of other dumbbells on-top, adding weight. I've heard that there were two He released the weight, breaking his neck.

He wouldn't be discovered until later. It was obvious that he would kill himself in the weight room, it provided a good and fast way of doing it, but also I believe the weight room was in the basement, putting a fair bit of real estate between himself and the bodies, and almost certainly the smells. I've read that he was strangled, and that his neck was broken. Both are highly possible. Doesn't really matter. He killed himself.



## **Citation Needed**

In the 2007 time-frame, I was checking Wikipedia's Recent Deaths section at least twice a day. I was writing The Drink Tank at least once a week, and needed a lot of content, and obits were always good for it. I logged on and found that Nancy Benoit was listed. It was early Sunday, and I was about to write a piece for [Fanboy-Planet](#), but I found an hour or so later that it was a hoax.

Well, sorta.

Turns out, a Wikipedia editor/troll had been doing stuff like this for a while, and it happened to be true this time. Nancy Benoit was almost certainly been dead for almost 24 hours, but the poster didn't know that.

This was only a part of the story of disinformation, misinformation, and outright obfuscation.

I was in touch with two WWE employees (at least) at the time. Dave Lagana was one, and the other I'm still not 100% sure of.

In the late 1990s, there was a tradition for us AOL users who couldn't afford pay-per-views of hanging out in Chat Rooms. I did it for years, and they were great ways to get to talk with all sorts of people from around the world. In one of the rooms, back about 1997, I interacted with an official WWF screen name. It wasn't illuminating, something like WWF1304, but it was obvious whoever it was knew what they were talking about it. I'm sure that it was Mr. Perfect, Curt Hennig. We talked about our dads, but I think after that it might have been more than one person. At times, they fed me info, far more than Dave did (saving for the time when they had fired Heyman and he funneled me stuff) but at the same time, I knew that at least some of the stuff they were passing wasn't straight dope, but filtered. I dug in a little bit, but I also thought that if I asked, they'd likely clam up. I'd send messages, but once in a while, I'd get a message first.

That Monday afternoon, as the Benoit story started breaking, was one such message.

*You hear about Benoit? Carbon Monoxide poisoning.*

Now, that's a simple message, and he was hardly the only one passing around that story between 5 and 7pm West Coast time. Or perhaps whoever was on the end of that AIM screenname was the one feeding everyone. Dave sent me a couple of messages too, though nothing substantial. He did mention that he had heard it was radon (I think, he might have said CO as well) but ultimately, the one who kept feeding me info, in drips and drabs, was that AIM name.

Who was it? I dunno.

My guess is that it wasn't a top-down call, but the wrestling rumor mill works in an incredibly fast way. The spread of info, even in the old days, was fast. It was sped by texting, instant messaging, and on and on, but the guys all talk, all the time. The fact that a lot of the Benoit evidence is based on text-messages is not surprising. There was, apparently, a message left for Benoit on Monday – "I can kayfabe for you." To the uninitiated, it means that whoever sent the text (it's often listed as a 'Mark' which could mean Calloway (Undertaker) or Mark Henry) would be willing to cover for him. By Monday morning, and actually by Sunday night, it was obvious that something was

wrong, even when the reports (erroneous) of Nancy's death had gone out.

It was obvious that, despite little confirmed info was out there, the Carbon Monoxide story was out there, and perhaps being spread by the company itself. There is a lot of evidence that John Laurienitis, the former wrestler known as Johnny Ace who had become the head of Talent Relations, had a significant inkling, had called Benoit several times, and it's not a stretch to think that he was giving out that story. The question is, of course, did they actually know. I doubt they knew the details, but I'd say they had a strong idea, and the fact that they called in the cops for a welfare check would indicate they were concerned, but there's more to it.

Part of it was neither Chavo nor Scott Anderson told the company about the messages. There has always been a code to cover for your fellow workers when there's an issue. It's why Bruiser Brody and Snuka cleaned the hotel room after finding David Von Erich dead. The idea of covering played a big part of the whole story. More on that later.

Benoit had a history, and some folks knew, and it doesn't seem like anyone said much about it other than gossiping.

Dave Meltzer, the leading professional wrestling journalist, has said that the WCW folks who lived in Peach Tree City knew of the volatility in the marriage. The couple would have blow-ups in public, typically after they'd get a couple of drinks in them. The pair would each try to take control of who could interact with who. Chris, in particular, was trying to shut himself off within a group of friends. In particular, Darrin Mathews, aka Steven Regal, apparently knew. When they did a Benoit tribute show, his interview seemed to indicate that he was thinking about layers, understanding what was already starting to get around. He may have known the issues Benoit was having, and he played it close to his vest while still playing along with the company idea that Benoit was to be celebrated.

The company knew at least much of the truth by the time the show started.

The fact is, they went forward for some reason even as the idea that Benoit had killed his family was solidifying. Chavo jr. knew, almost certainly, as did Scott Armstrong, a ref who Benoit had messaged. They must have had an idea, and I'm guessing they were the ones who got the company to call for the welfare check. Around 4:15pm, the cops called John Laurinitis, a WWE higher-up in Talent Relations, and told them that the house was a crime scene. Chris DeMarco was put on-point, or maybe he took it on himself to be the one who interacted with the Benoit family in Canada as he was the head of WWE Canada and a friend of Chris'. There's no way they could deny they certainly knew at 5pm eastern, and that means that they knew, at least the broadest strokes, that they shouldn't have done the tribute show. I don't know the drop-dead time, when they have to have the slot filled with something, but it was likely 7pm Eastern. They certainly knew by then, by at least two hours.

Now, from where I'm sitting, Vince McMahon knew he had to get out in front of things, or maybe more accurately, the Company knew they had to get out in front of things. Putting everything on Vince (or Stephanie, or Shane, or HHH, or any single person) isn't right, and brings to mind the argument about the Princes in the Tower. Richard III might not have ordered the murder of his nephews, but the desire to protect him, or some idea that it had been ordered even with a direct order, is absolutely possible. Let's be very clear about a number of things – Vince made the call. He makes every call. What if he didn't know, if no one had told him specifically to keep him out of the loop until AFTER the show had started. I seriously doubt that happened because firings would have happened in short order.

The idea that the WWE did the tribute episode even after they at least roughly knew it was a crime scene is pretty bad. I honestly think they had to do something, but this was the worst idea. Get one more moment out, pop one big number. It was during the watching of the show that it started getting out into the world, that folks started to know. Meltzer had reported it, and it was a lot of places. De Marco was getting word around.

The buzz around wrestling was hot, too hot, and the next night, Vince had to issue an apology, a distancing, a silencing.

It was to be expected, but still, it was Vince admitting he was wrong.

Vince said that his words were the last time he'd be saying the name Chris Benoit on WWE television. It started the erasing of Chris Benoit, and rightfully so, but also, there are other ways of doing it, and they have ran that back a bit. Still, an understandable stance at the time.



## **Why?**

There are so many possibilities, but several seem to be unlikely. The ones that really pops up a lot, that young Daniel had Fragile X Syndrome and that Chris and Nancy were fighting about it. It doesn't look like Daniel had Fragile X, a disease that stunts growth and is often linked to autism. It's an interesting theory, and there were claims that there were track marks on Daniel that perhaps Benoit was shooting him up with steroids. It seems that was not actually the case. If you look at photos of kids with Fragile X, and I've met a couple when I had to take JP to therapy while Vanessa was recovering, and by looks, and size, Daniel does seem to at least superficially look like a Fragile X kid, but there's no evidence.

The theory that I've heard the most is that Benoit was coming off a roid cycle. There is some thought that the place that a steroid user is the most volatile is when they are coming off a cycle. The toxicology report, which didn't find steroids in his system, but DID find testosterone at highly elevated levels. That does seem to play out the idea of him cycling off. Now, let's say Chris has been in one of his moods, Nancy and him get in a fight, drinks to give her some peace, goes up to the TV room above the garage. Chris fumes, rage building, goes up and kills her. The motive? Likely something stupid, a broken

dish or his continued steroid use or something small, came up and they quarreled, she left to the room above the garage, and it bubbled over inside him. His roid withdrawal, perhaps coupled with CTE from his years of concussions, all combined to Benoit becoming a family Annihilator.

There is a lot made of the fact that Chris didn't seem to have a release; he was always achieving, striving, working, hitting himself over his failings more and more, even as he's reached the heights. His success had meant that he couldn't have an outside release. He was famous; he couldn't get out. He moved the family to Fayetteville from Peach Tree City, to a large plot of land, gated. Here was a guy who had done nothing but be a wrestler since the age of 18, and now he had gotten where he always wanted to be, and it wasn't what he wanted, or at least like he had hoped. He was dealing with so much – a failing marriage, injuries, the long-term consequences of steroids, and importantly, concussion issues, CTE.

I have concussion issues. I've had at least a dozen of them over the years, though only one or two that were serious. Imagine you've had a migraine for a week without end. It can be like that. Luckily, it's only been like that for me once. It can make it difficult to process things, even to understand voices. It can make you hyper-irritable. It can open you up to issues with memory, with signal processing. It can make sleeping incredibly difficult. That happens to me. Not as often now, but after my last concussion, last summer, I had several nights of insomnia. It was also in the middle of my lay-off, so factors. I know that it's led to problems with my hearing, my eyesight, my sleep patterns, my hand-eye coordination. Luckily it's not given me the massive emotional issues that it seems to have done for others. CTE is a real thing, I may or may not have it to some degree, but I can tell that it has an effect.

On the other hand, there's no consensus from the medical community about the existence of roid rage. There's no question among former steroid users that it does exist. It's certain that any foreign substance you put into your body can alter who you are if you put it in regularly enough, and then withhold it. It can also simply remove the blocks of social conditioning that keep otherwise dangerous

people from being dangerous. That, of course, is a MASSIVE oversimplification, but it also speaks to a lot of people's experience.

One interesting note is that many of the football players who have CTE find religion. Benoit had joined a church not too long before. An interesting note, though maybe nothing more.



### **There is always stupid**

No, Kevin Sullivan did not murder Nancy, Daniel, and Chris as a part of a satanic ritual on the tenth anniversary of the divorce of the Sullivans. It's a stupid concept that Sullivan, a weird guy, but certainly not a theistic Satanist, would kill them in some sort of sacrifice. The same goes with the idea of the McMahons doing it because Benoit was thinking of retiring. Or Eric Bischoff because he blamed him for WCW failing. Or Bill Goldberg and a Zionist conspiracy. Or any of a dozen other theories that float about the internet. There are some things unanswered, and they are often used as an excuse to put it on a different, or a second, killer.

Benoit's phone is often noted as missing, though it was found with Nancy's in the gym where Chris hanged himself. There was a stash of drugs in a suitcase in the bedroom that the police missed, and it's often said that there was a ton of drugs in the fridge, though that does seem to be an exaggeration.



### **Cover-Up #1 – Chris Benoit?**

Did Chris Benoit try to find a way to get away with it? That's a question that I really can't figure out. The notation of the rope and the coaxial cable was intertwined isn't clear as to whether or not they

were both used to choke her or not. If they weren't, Chris could have wrapped it around her neck later, then used it to tie her wrists. It's possible he was trying to concoct an idea that it had been a home invasion, or a serial killer, and he would be gone, flown to Houston. He could claim that he discovered the bodies when he returned. He only did the tying to his wife, and not to Daniel. Maybe he couldn't bring himself to do it to Daniel. Maybe he hadn't killed Daniel yet when he did the tie-up and then when he killed Daniel, he knew it wouldn't be possible, that it wouldn't work. He did get the office to reschedule his flight, but at that point, it may have already been too late for him.

The calls play into that, as I've said. He may have wanted to tell Chavo or Scott, he may have asked them to cover for him, who knows.

The fact is, there's at least a little evidence that he was trying to cover the whole thing up. Saying the family was sick with food poisoning. That's certainly the best indicator that he was thinking about a cover-up. What did it buy him? If he was planning on leaving the house, going to Houston, then claiming that Nancy and Daniel had been killed by a stalker, then those statements would almost certainly sink his claims. Maybe he didn't realise that at first, and then when he got a bit of his sense back, maybe that's when it all came tumbling down.

There's a good reason to think that he might have used the stalker idea. He was super-paranoid. He would use different paths to the gym, to the airport. HE was always worried that he was being followed. If he, or his family, was attacked, it would mean that he had been right all along. He had laid the ground work for the excuse for years, and this actually speaks to his concussion and/or steroid issues. Paranoia is quite frequent with CTE, even I get it at times, and you only have to look at Randy Savage's history to find a strong example of paranoia and the steroid-mega-user. He had laid the ground-work, probably unknowingly, but he might also have been using this as an escape for a number of things.

We need to remember, his evil and terrible behavior didn't start with the murders, it ended with the murder. He was an abusive asshole, and while there were many people who loved him outside of his family, and while it's also unlikely that he was a monster all the time, the monster was always there. He was an abuser, and whatever the steroids, drugs, and concussion issues contributed to that isn't important. He did these things, and it is typical of abusers to try and cover their tracks, and it sure could have been that he wanted to do so himself.



## **The Cover-up 2? WWE, and Vince.**

When did the WWE know?

I'm literally thinking they knew the moment Chavo told them about the texts. Did they know about the volatility in the Benoit household? There's the possibility, though I think it's unlikely. The best evidence that they knew something extraordinary was going on was the fact that it wasn't the head of Talent Relations who made the call, but a contractor, albeit an important one, Dennis Fagan of the security contractor Andrews International. It's obvious from the call that he doesn't have the information that he needs to be able to completely communicate with the Fayetteville police. The office had more information, they had the complete texts that were sent to Chavo and Armstrong. They had a member of legal call later, and he was very officious in his communication. That wasn't until 445 eastern, though, and that's the latest point where they can claim they did not know.

And that's a short time before they would have had to make a go-no-go call.

They obviously went to air, recorded Vince's speech to the roster and the audience, AFTER knowing Benoit had murdered his family. There was no way they can claim they didn't know after 5pm. I

think they knew when they called, or they wouldn't have called. The first rule of the wrestling business is protect the business. There is NOTHING that is more damaging to the business than allowing reality to come to the masses unfiltered. The idea that they wanted distance plays in perfectly with that idea. Why go with someone who is not technically a part of the company?

Plausible deniability.

They needed to be able to say they didn't know, that they didn't go to air with the full knowledge that they were celebrating a murderer. Now, they certainly should have known. They should have provided every bit of information they had. They should have put Chavo on the line. They should have had Scott Anderson talk to them. They should have had calls set-up with Talent Relations, with others. They should have had the people who knew talking to the police. They didn't, not at first. At some point, they started giving info out to people up and down the chain. Carl DeMarco, head of Canadian Operations, knew before the Benoit family and told Meltzer about 600pm EST, I believe. The word was on the street by 6pm. The first post I saw about it, and I can remember exactly, was 3:45 pacific. I left work at 3 on Mondays back then, so I could get myself all set to watch RAW (I watched it on the East Coast Feed) and then head to BASFA. Why do I remember the exact time? Because I knew it would matter. A few seconds, and I mean that literally, I got my first message. That's when it started.

That night, I was on every system I used at the time. I wanted more info, and I wrote up my edition of Falls Count Anywhere and submitted it early. The word of it being a murder wasn't out there yet, and all I had was the text and a few other sources that said it was carbon monoxide poisoning. I wrote up the Benoit deaths as such. I was a fool not to wait a bit, and the first posts had that, but I am happy to say that Derek McCaw, the best editor a guy could hope for, placed updates that indicated the state of play as we went along. The story was out there by the time the West Coast showing started. I skipped BASFA, and I remember I made myself a steak, instant mashed potatoes. I needed the comfort food.

I cried through the entire episode of RAW.

This is what the WWE, Vince, was trying to avoid. I knew by the West Coast feed (I skipped the East Coast feed because I was too busy writing, digging, reading, eating. I watched the West Coast feed and it was so very jarring because I knew the truth, well what little of it was out there, and I could barely stand to watch the matches. The place I was living, I had my computer, a desktop, in a little hallway in a nook in front of my room. On the other side of my door was my TV, on a swivel so I could watch while writing and such at my computer. It was so sad watching the messages, reading all the posts, seeing legit news sources cover wrestling for the worst possible reason. A friend sent me a message saying to turn on the radio, I remember it as KNBR, which was doing an extended segment on the Benoit tragedy. I never listen to sports radio save for Giants games, so I had no idea who was talking. It was very basic. I watched the show and it was hard. The emotions kept changing. One minute, it was about Benoit the genius in the ring, but I was never too far away from “this was the man who murdered his family” and then the hurt would creep in. It was wrestling, and at that point I was probably as far into it as I’d ever been. I could never imagine this sort of thing happening. Drug deaths? Sure. Murder-Suicide? Never.

And as I watched, I was blaming Vince.

I was blaming wrestling.

I still kinda blame the WWE for not being upfront, for what at the time seemed like an unwinnable situation. If it had been the Monday Night Wars era, like when Pullman died, I could completely understand them making this call, but then, when they were the only train on the track, it shouldn’t have been anything difficult. There are more issues, of course. Television contracts certainly played a part, but they could have made the call. They knew by 5pm, and that should have made the call so much easier.



## **Dark Side of the Ring**

Viceland's second season of *Darkside of the Ring* started with the Benoit story, and I'm so torn. It was a powerful story, of course, and the first half had the most powerful emotional segment, the one where they talked about Eddie Guerrero's death. That got me. It was the most emotional of all the wrestler deaths for me, and to hear Vicki, Eddie's wife, and Chavo, his cousin who was almost like a brother, talk about that day was super painful. It was the emotional heart of the first half, episode one.

Episode 2 was a much more difficult matter.

Throughout the episodes, they talk to some of the most important people in the story. Nancy Benoit's sister, Chris's son David, Chris Jericho, Dean Malenko, Chavo, Vicki, Jim Ross. Jericho gets the most screen time, and probably should, and later in the episodes he really kinda stabs at the idea that Benoit should be scrubbed from history. I agree with him in one sense, but not in another. We can not forget the monster when we talk about the man. I think the opposite is far more excusable, but not ideal. We can't pretend that monsters aren't real, and that the things they can sometimes do are extraordinary. On the other hand, we can not pretend that their contributions didn't happen. Benoit changed the business, without question, and to say the end defined his entire life, is wrong. On the other hand, to say "he was a great wrestler, and that's what matters" is even more wrong. To say, "he was a monster, and he also did these other things." May not be perfect, but it's honest, and it allows us to talk about him, at least to a level. We must never forget, neither the good nor the bad, and to present the good without the bad is not at all right.

The coverage of the actual events of 2007 was probably the second best I've found. The best? The Lapsed Fan Podcast's multi-hour audio presentation. They get a few things wrong, but it's great and very thorough. The Last Podcast on the Left gets more wrong, and it's highly inappropriate at times, but there's a lot there to like.



## **In the End**

The Benoit Murders were huge. It totally changed the business. It brought the bad attention. The worst attention. There's little comparable in other sports. There was OJ Simpson, but he wasn't active. There were the rash of domestic violence events in the NFL that had a huge impact, and there was Aaron Hernandez. And on and on. The impact of Benoit on the industry was tiny compared to what his final actions caused to harm it. It really wasn't until the explosion of the American Indy Scene in 2013-14, and the rise of New Japan to international heights that the business bounced back. It was a HUGE deal.

And it hurt.

I started writing this issue in October. I started and stopped about a dozen times. When I heard there was going to be a second season of Dark Side of the Ring, and that the Benoit story would be the premiere, I knew I had to finally do this one. I've been a fan of wrestling as long as I can remember, and certainly longer, and it made it... heavy. Too heavy. I didn't stop watching, but I didn't breathe it like I had prior. It was an end of an era, a great one, and it was too real.

I was planning on getting this out the day after the episode aired. I wrote it, I wrote the review to finish it.

I could release it. I couldn't lay it out. I had to let it sit. This stuff means something to me, wrestling's been a huge part of my life, and even a True Crime guy like me can get himself tied up by some of these stories. This was a painful one, even more painful when I read the Wrestling Observer Newsletters from the time. It was impossible for me to do this one without feeling like the thing I've always had in my life is even dirtier than I knew it was.

And it turned out it was impossible for me to not do it.

Three more issues coming out this year. The next out in June will be on Abstract Expressionism. The one after that? Punk.