

**Claims  
Department**

## Terry Funk

We all knew it was coming, but man, this one hurts.

Losing Terry Funk is, in many ways, losing three eras. It's losing the 1970s NWA champion scene, and there are so few left from that period who not only reached the peak, like Terry did, but even those who were touring with the Champ in chase. Terry was a major element in the world of Japanese garbage wrestling, and it's not-so-distant cousin ECW. Terry was a huge part of the 1980s and 90s indy scene, and one of the biggest reasons they survived in a time when WWF and WCW were carving up the world.

And there's even more.

This issue is dedicated to Terry's memory, and to the matches that I loved as a kid and today, and to the character that was Terry Funk...The Funker.



# Terry Funk wins the NWA World Title from Jack Brisco

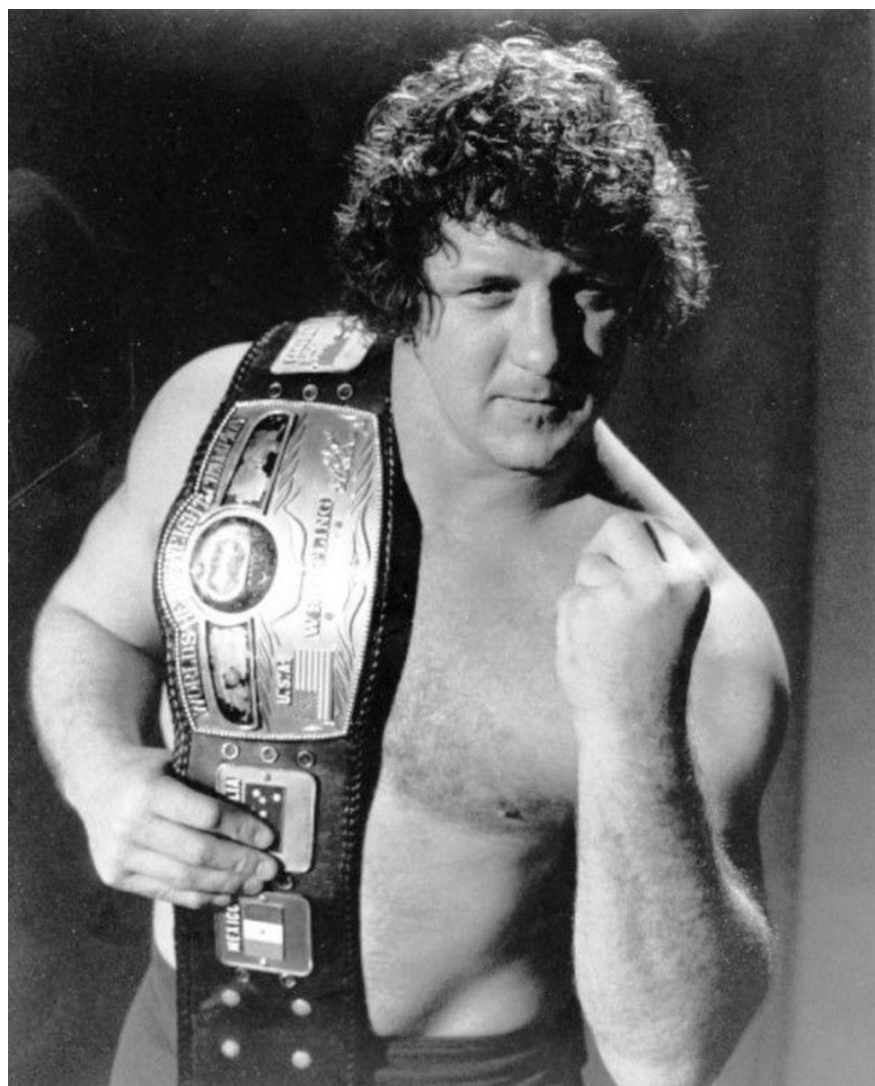
1970s World Title style isn't what I think of as exciting wrestling. It's good, but the emphasis was on a legitimacy that was baked into the wrestling of the 1960s and before, and not the spectacle of today, or the legitimate fighting we now know far more about. Watching the Brisco-Funk title change is a little less than thrilling, but it's logical, and even in the enbriefed form you can find it on YouTube, there's a lot of compelling work in it, specifically from Terry's selling.

Some would say over-selling, but your mileage may vary.

The fact is, the punches that Brisco threw had 0 legit look to them, and the selling isn't at all realistic. They certainly tell a strong story, and for the time, Terry was bumping like a ping-pong ball! It's one of the things that made him so memorable. In a time when flyers were fairly rare, a dropkick was a kinda big move, he'd bump over the top rope, do what we think of as the Flair Flip today, and basically make his opponent look like a star. He did the thing where he lays across the corner ropes, and his opponent runs in and kicks him, sending him to the outside.

Only then, it felt like it could be a match ender.

This match is a good one, I Know folks who saw it live and said it was a classic, but like most matches from that era, it doesn't quite connect with today. You can see the roots of Shawn Michaels in it, there no question, and of Ric Flair, who would have been coming around early in his career, though.



# Terry Funk vs. The Sheik

I could write an entire issue on my Dad's friend Ed Farhat.

You might know him as The Sheik.

The guy wasn't a great wrestler, but he was the definition of a 1970s brawler. He was also a major draw in Detroit, and later in Japan and elsewhere. The one video I have seen of these two going is pretty simple, but it shows exactly how good Terry was at selling the seriousness of a situation. The Sheik's offense was kick, punch, and stomp-based. Terry's selling showed his life force to 0, and it was only through his great determination that he could rebound.

Terry was also a great brawler.

The two had many matches over the years, many ended in no contests. The last I can find? 1994, when Sheik would have been 68., in Japan when Sheik's offense was largely fire-based. Funk won.

The difference between the two of them is fairly simple—Terry was a student of the game, and I'm pretty sure he knew he was starting to create a new form of wrestling that would eventually take over in many parts of the world. The Sheik? He was tired. He'd been doing it a long time, dating back to the 1950s, and using the brawling evil Sheik gimmick since the early 60s.

The two of them were wild fire!

Funk's offense was great, but it was his selling, his ability to make everything seem like it was a big deal. A lot of guys used to sell more simply, but Terry knew that acting was re-acting, and they were bigger than life, so the selling had to be too.



# How to Produce a Perfect Segment

## The Empty Arena Match

### Terry Funk vs. Jerry Lawler

This is how you do it.

There had been beef between Funk and Lawler, the King of Memphis for more than decade by 1981, and Funk had been coming out on the losing end of things. He blamed the Memphis refs, the matchmakers, the fans. They were all against him. He gave some scorching interviews leading up to a challenge—he wanted to meet Lawler 1-on-1 in an Empty Arena, no fans, no refs, nothing but an announcer and a camera crew.

Now, in the story, the day of the shoot arrived and Lance Russell, the legendary commentator, was at the Mid-South Coliseum about ten minutes to one. Funk had told Lawler to show up at one. Russell was there, chatting with the cameraman, and even lights up a cigarette. He keeps saying he doesn't know if they're going to show up or not, and then goes into the backstory a bit. Funk shows up, at 1:02, and then berates Russell while running down Lawler as a coward. He threatens Russell at one point, but backs off. Eventually, Lawler arrives.

He's in his ring entry attires, complete with cape and crown.

He takes 'em off and puts them on a table, gets in the ring and the 'match' starts. It's a kinda crazy brawl, certainly for the time, though after a decade of ECW and FMW, it seems tamer. They go through the empty chairs and toss them on one another,

something that Funk would do a lot throughout his later career. Terry and Lawler brawl, separate, get back at it several times. Terry grabs the standee that they used to mark the sections of the arena and breaks it, then hits Lawler with it a few times. He gets busted open, though not badly, might even have been hardway. He goes and breaks the stairs that lead from the arena floor to the ring. These were wood back then, and he grabs a hunk of 2-by-4 that's like a spike and tries to pry Lawler's eye out. Jerry blocks it, then as they get up, Terry's holding it and Lawler kicks his hand, and Terry ends up hitting himself in the eye with it!

He's screaming, and crying, and bellowing as Lawler takes the chance to walk away. Terry is PLEADING with Lawler to help him, but it ignored, and then he turns to Russell who says they should get him some help. It's the most pathetic I've ever seen a heel play to end an angle.

And it is incredible.

This segment does everything perfectly, and it uses techniques that would change wrestling. There's the understanding that the audience knew what a wrestling show was supposed to look and feel like. That opening portion, that was the perfect table-setting. What the audience was about to see wasn't normal; this was something raw and new. When Terry comes in, he's doing all the heel stuff as if there's a crowd, but there's only the cameraman and Lance Russell. He's still playing them like he would a crowd, and it's incredible how that translates. Funk is perfect in calling out Lawler, and when Lawler finally walks in, he clowns on him for wearing ring attire, but it's after, when he's screaming in pain, that things really get interesting, because he's the one that's been provoking the fight, and when his own treachery turns on him, he goes and becomes a shrieking coward. It's fascinating how good he is at both sides of this



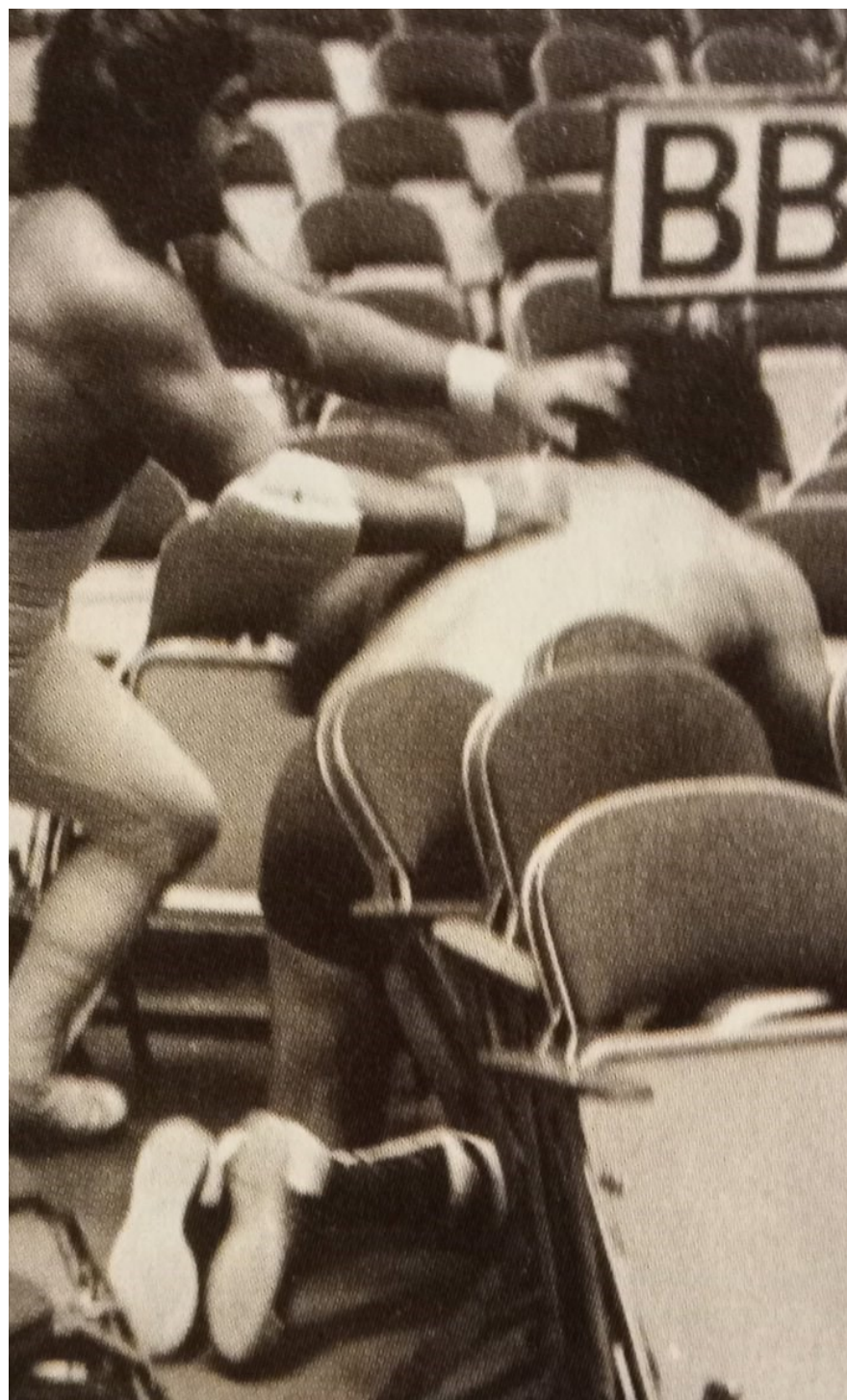
performance, and the way they shot it, the way that the whole scene was put together, it was a masterpiece.

And Terry didn't think it was great because it didn't draw money.

None of the Funk-Lawler matches were sell-outs. The Terry & Dory vs. Lawler and Plowboy Frazier Texas Death Match did do 8,000 at a time when 5K was a more likely number of folks isn't bad, but Terry thought it should have completely popped the territory. The last great sell-out Memphis feud was a full five years later—Dirty Dutch Mantel, Bill Dundee, Lawler and Buddy Landel were the participants and it did 10,000+ several times and sold-out the 11,300 seat arena twice.

Still, this was hugely important, and one of the most significant and influential in the history of wrestling, and that was largely made possible by the tape traders, magazines, and dirtsheets. Everyone knew this went down, and in photographs this likely looks a lot more violent than it was (the same thing happened with the Last Battle of Atlanta in 1983) Everyone needed to see this match, and even in 1993, when I started trading, it was considered one of the most important gets. I got it on a tape of Terry Funk's Best. And then on a Lawler comp. And again on a Best of Memphis.

It was everywhere.



# Terry Funk vs. Stan Hansen—1982

Let's talk about the word 'hoss'

The idea of Hoss in wrestling isn't just any big man, but a big brute who fights and doesn't wrestle so much. All Japan Pro Wrestling liked to have Hoss wrestlers come through for tours, notably Terry Bam Bam Gordy, Steve Dr. Death Williams, Bruiser Brody, and the best of them all, Stan The Lariat Hansen.

Now, he's the toughest son-of-a-bitch whoever lived. Terry Funk can lay some claim to that, but man, watching Hansen in the 1990s was flat-out scary. He was tough as nails, hit hard, and just kept going. He wrestled Terry many times in many places, but there's a 1983 match from All Japan that is insanely good.

This is a fight in the shape of a wrestling match, and these two knew how to make everything count. Terry bumps all over the



place, which makes Hansen's punches look like monster bashes. Terry sells a perfectly simple elbow as he came off the ropes like he had been hit with a baseball bat. He takes a tumble out of the ring and tosses a chair into the ring, and when Hansen catches it and throws it back, hitting him in the leg, Terry sells it like it KOed his very soul.

It ends when Terry pulls the ref down, and then Hansen clotheslines the replacement ref and it's a smoz. An entertaining smoz and beatdown, but a smoz none the less.

Terry was always seen as a tough guy, and one of the best brawlers of all-time. The folks who see matches like this, and similar matches with Bruiser Brody, show the absolute fact that he deserves to be in teh conversation as one of the toughest of all-time along with folks like Hansen and Brody.



# Terry Funk vs. Eddie Gilbert

Hot Stuff Eddie Gilbert is my favorite wrestler ever.

He could talk, could work a straight match as a bit of a flyer, was a really good brawler, and he saw what wrestling was going to become a lot sooner than almost everyone else.

Except maybe Terry Funk.

And the two knew each other and I'm fairly sure that Eddie got a lot from Terry. Eddie as a booker was one of the absolute best of all-time, and it's clear that Terry understood the directions of the business before anyone else did. It's not a stretch to think he shared that with Eddie.





The two had some classic matches, including a great Texas Death match and a Chain match in 1993. The two had obvious chemistry, and a big part of that was the fact that Eddie could just flat go.

Then, there were the interviews. Eddie did some great ones, but there's a classic interview where Terry is out in his horse pasture and interviews 'Eddie Gilbert'

Which turns out to be the rear end of a horse.

These two were so good together, and when I think of Terry's best post-1985 feuds, Eddie comes up with Flair, Cactus Jack, and Jerry Lawler.

Sadly, Eddie died too young, his run booking ECW was more than a year passed him and he was in Puerto Rico wrestling a bear. It's a shame, but Terry always had good things to say about him.



# Terry Funk vs. Retirement

Terry might really have thought he was retiring in 1983.

They had built up to it for two years, and though he was only 40 at the time, many folks thought this was really it. In All Japan, he had a match, teaming with his older brother Dory, against one of the biggest Hoss teas of all-time—Stan Hansen and Terry Bam Bam Gordy. The watch was the brawl you would expect, and Terry bled, as was his wont, but then they had a little ceremony and he grabbed the mic and just kept saying, over and over—“Forever! Forever!” as the crowd went absolutely nuts!

Now, it’s clear that he probably didn’t intend to retire fully, but he was in need of time off. His knees would never forgive him for his schedule and never retiring.

He had several other retirements, some official, some not. He came back from the 1983 retirement and was working a full schedule for WWF in 1985. He then went off to WCW in 1989, with various stops, mostly indy places, along the way. He did a match with Bret Hart in September 1997. This was a card called *50 Years of Funk* and while it wasn’t promoted as a retirement, it was certainly played like one. The match with Bret was really good too!

He had at least one retirement in ECW, and he did a match with Lawler that also served as a retirement. In fact, it was the last meeting between the two, in 2017, and that was actually a 6-man match, teaming with the Rock ‘n Roll Express against Lawler, his son Brian Christopher, and Doug Gilbert, Eddie’s brother, that closed his career.





# Terry Funk vs. Ric Flair

The greatest feud of the 1980s, and up there all-time was in 1989.

Ric Flair had just had an excellent run with Ricky Steamboat over the NWA World title. After one of the greatest matches of all-time, where Flair won the World Title back from Steamboat, there was a great angle run. Terry Funk had been with the announce crew for the match, and afterwards, he came into the ring to congratulate the new champ, and tossed his hat in the ring to get a shot at the belt. Ric kinda brushed him off, he had just won the belt after all, and Terry then said he was only joking.

He then beat the ever-loving hell out of Ric Flair.

It was a great angle and the end of an amazing event. The show was so good, and Terry Funk started the middle-aged and crazy



angle. The WCW crew at the time was pretty much the best up until that time. You had Flair, Funk, Steamboat, Lex Luger when he was still great Sting, The Great Muta, The Steiners, The Freebirds, and on and on and on. Such a great time.

But Terry was the best.

He won all sorts of awards—Best Brawler, Best on Interviews, Best Heel, Best Feud, and Hardest Worker. It was everything you could win without winning Wrestler of the Year, and Flair absolutely deserved it, no question.

The biggest match they had, and one that I still consider one of the greatest matches of all-time, and one that truly shows the differences between a genius like Funk and a master like Flair, and there really is a difference and one that is important.

New York Knockout was a Clash of the Champions special from Troy, New York. It was a good show, but it was built around an I-Quit match between Flair and Funk to end their six-month feud. This was huge, and I was incredibly excited. I got home from school, grabbed the leftover meatloaf from the fridge, made myself a thing of microwave stuffing, and settled on to the couch with a Coke and a dream!

I also turned on the VCR and started taping at least ten minutes early; we had six hour video tapes that I used for all my wrestling tapes.

The match itself was nuts by the standards of the time. Over the years, I've said that the Steamboat feud was the last great 1980s style feud, and that the Flair-Funk feud was the first 1990s style feud. I still maintain that. The two brawled, with Flair eventually getting the advantage and working over the knee and leg of Funk like he had so many times.

Only this time, Flair was the face.

That is what's so great about this entire feud. Flair didn't change his character, he was still the brash and cocky champion, but he was being cheered because of the unhinged opponent in the feud and the others managed by Gary Hart at the time, including The Great Muta. Funk was so crazy, my favorite moment being when he used a plastic bag to smother Flair, that he got Flair over as the big time face in their feud, and that really set up the legend phase of his career, including coming into WWF in 1991/2 as a heel who would be cheered against the likes of Hogan!

**CLASH**  
WRESTLING  
*Champions IX*

**NEW YORK KNOCKOUT!**

It's gut-check time in Gotham! Someone's gotta give in the "I Quit" slugfest between Ric Flair and Terry Funk that climaxes their bitter feud. Plus U.S. Title and World Tag Team Title bouts.

**TBS** 7:05PM  
CLASH WITH A CAPITAL YES!

This feud has a huge place in the history of pro wrestling. A lot of people have called it the best of Flair's career, and I'm not sure (Wahoo is my choice!) but it's one that I go back to!!!

# Terry Funk vs. Eddie Guerrero

Eddie was the greatest.

There's no question that the 1990s and early 2000s were the time when Eddie Guerrero shone. He started off working Lucha in Mexico, and then headed to New Japan Pro Wrestling. It was 1995 when Paul Heyman brought him into ECW, and then off to WCW, and then finally to WWF where he became a massive, world champ level star.

But his first big exposure was on *WCW Saturday Night* in 1989 against Terry Funk.

The match was way ahead of the curve, and while it would seem like Terry Funk wasn't the ideal opponent, he was perfect.



Now, Terry had worked against Lucha wrestlers for years in Texas, including several times against Mil Mascaras, one of the all-time great draws, who was also an absolute pain in the ass.

Eddie worked the style he would be known for. There was a moment where Eddie climbed to the top rope and backflipped over Terry. That alone was new on our screens, though we knew the moonsault because of The Great Muta. He hits a flying headscissors which looked awesome, and at one point goes for a dropkick that Funk turns into a Giant Swing. It's really good stuff.

Terry Funk saw that Eddie was a huge talent, and that he was going to be a star if they gave him a chance. They didn't give Eddie a chance after the 1989 match, but after his ECW run, he was one of the hottest acts in the world.

We lost Eddie more than 15 years ago. He was still a major star. Terry was proud of the fact that he saw what we'd see in Eddie before anyone else.



# Terry Funk in FMW & IWA

Terry had been an All Japan guy, but then he went Hard Core.

There had always been a streak of hard core in Japan, there were crazy brawls at times in all the big companies because they brought in people like The Shiek, Tiger Jeet Singh, Abdullah the Butcher, and Freddy Blassie. It wasn't until the late 1980s that we got promotions that were dedicated to brawling, and that's when Atsushi Onita started FMW.

Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling was a company built around crazy brawls and the toughest of the tough—Onita himself. He could take an insane beating, and he was known for that dating back to a Concession Stand brawl in Memphis back in the early 1980s. This was one of the best and most influential companies in teh world.

And they brought in Terry Funk.

Now, The Sheik and Sabu were two of the top Americans, but as soon as Terry came in, he feuded with Onita, leading up to a legendary match—The Exploding Ring Match in 1993.

This is one of the craziest matches ever up to that point. There was a countdown clock and they had a regular match inside a barbed wire cage. Barbed Wire was the FMW signature, but the exploding ring was different. They'd done bombs matches, where there were M80 equivalents on the barbed wire, but this was different. Watching the match today, the explosion was kinda small, but at the time, it was insane.

Now, Onita won the match, KOing Terry in the middle of the ring. Funk stayed down and Onita started to leave.

Only, Terry wasn't getting up.

After a couple of minutes, the sirens that indicated the ring



was going to exploded started going off, and that meant that Terry would be in the middle of the ring and, theoretically, blown up. Inita started to go, but when Terry wasn't getting up, he headed back and slapped Funk, trying to get him to wake up. Sadly, Onita had done too good a job knocking the man out, so he wouldn't rouse. Onita tried dragging him out, but he couldn't do it and the second were becoming scarce. So, Onita did the only thing a true hero could do in that situation - he covered Funk's body with his own.

Now, this wasn't a great match, but it was an incredibly built spectacle. The ref was wearing a bomb-proof suit. The entire ring, all barked-wire and canvas stained with blood from earlier matches, made it feel like a warzone. This was an incredible scene, and for the time, it was one of the Really important moments for Americans who discovered Japanese wrestling in the 1990s. Every tape trader had the match, Dave Lagana, who later wrote for WWE and NWA's re-launch, showed it to me the first



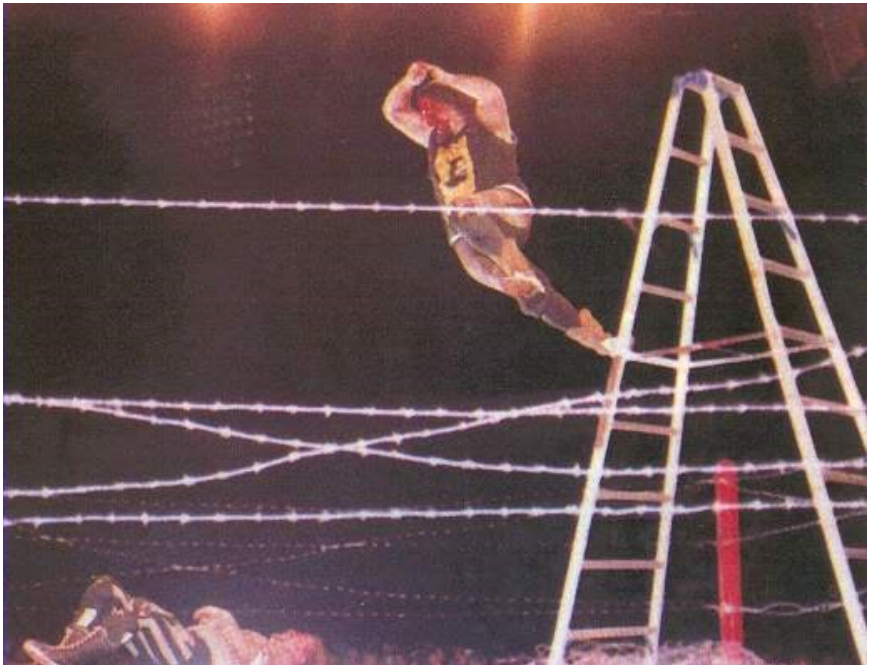
time. It was exactly the drama that it needed to be.

Funk ended up going to IWA Japan. This was a more extreme version of FMW's style, focusing on barbed wire, but also fire, glass, and things like stacks of bricks and beds of nails. They were more violent and more focused on the blood, but the shows were still a lot of fun.

They ran a King of the Death Match tourney in 1995, and Funk, Cactus Jack, Terry Gordy, Leatherface, and their biggest Japanese names—Ono and Nakamaki, were in the tourney. The matches were brutal, and then, at the end, it was Terry Funk, the definition of 1970s and 80s brawling up against Cactus Jack, the 1990s greatest brawler.

And it was the bloodiest match I'd ever seen.

It was legitimately hard to watch, but it was an incredible moment because this was the peak of IWA, and though they lasted another decade, they never hit that high again.





# Terry Funk & Cactus Jack

## The Dumpster Angle

It all works like this.

You establish something, a routine, a method, and then when you stick to it long enough and subvert it, it means something.

Cactus had come to WWF in 1996, and Terry arrived in 1997 or so under the name Chainsaw Charley. They were wild and crazy, tearing up the fed and feuding with the New Age Outlaws. One of their brawls saw a dumpster brought out, and the Outlaws put Cactus and Terry in it.

Then, they pushed them off the stage, about 8 feet to the floor below.

Now, it looked incredible, the dumpster was filled with trashbags full of stuff (likely foam) and packing peanuts. They were treated like they were seriously injured, and the lockerroom emptied to check on them. The Outlaws, the biggest heels in the WWF at the time, kept saying 'we didn't mean it!' and tensions among everyone ran high, leading to fights among guys who wouldn't normally have been involved.

And Sunny was perfect.

She went down to where they'd landed, cradled Terry's head, and cried and sobbed and cried some more.

The scene was incredible, and it was only because we understood what wrestling TV was supposed to look like, to feel like, that it worked. The same way that the Empty Arena match worked.

You have to think that Terry had something to do with it.



# Terry Funk—The End

It ended quieter than most of us would have expected.

We knew that dementia had caught up with him, that the years of damage had wrecked his physical body, but two things seemed to be what brought us into the finish. The first was the loss of his incredible wife, Vikki. She had stood by him, even after she left him during his World Title run. They got back together and it stayed that way.

Terry's knees were shot by the mid-90s, and probably much earlier than that. His back wasn't great. I believe he had a torn labrum at one point and didn't get it fixed for a while. He was, in many way, the model for Randy the Ram in *The Wrestler*, but really, he was just an archetype—broken in so many ways.

He was always beloved, and he knew it.

Tommy Dreamer was like his son. So was Mick Foley. He'd get calls, dozens of them, from friends who felt as if he was as close as family. He had two daughters, and his older brother Dory had five kids of his own. They were a big family, a proud family, a Texas family (who originated in Indiana, but let's not dwell on that...)

Terry is gone. That's a hard pill for many to swallow, but it's true. The last few years he'd gone downhill, but had his good days and his bad days. He was constantly reminded of how much he was loved and admired, and everyone in wrestling had a story.

Mine was simple.

WrestlerMania was in Boston, and we'd gone to get Ice Cream at the Ben & Jerry's by the Park Plaza. As we're walking out, Terry and his wife just finish crossing the street.

"Hello, Mr. Funk!"

"Hi there, hope you like the ice cream!"

