

In the Wake of the News

Here's problem to grapple with

"Rocky Marciano? He may be the heavyweight champion but he'd be a sitting duck for me. I'd cripple The Rock."—Wrestling's Buddy Rogers, 1955.

"I'll knock Jack Dempsey's teeth out."—Wrestler Cowboy Luttrell, 1940.

"I've been trying to match myself with these boring greats for 20 years."—Wrestler Verne Gagne, May 18, 1976.

HONORABLE ANTONIO INOKI of Tokyo, a specialist in judo, karate, wrestling, and ballyhoo, is in town to warn the media of bad things in store for Muhammad Ali, the heavyweight boxing champ.

Mr. I and The Greatest will tussle, catch-as-catch-can, in Tokyo on June 25. The Cubs engage the Mets the same date but people are not speculating on that contest as much as on the one between Mr. I and Ali.

The international duel has been arranged for two purposes. No. 1, to fatten the pocketbooks of Mr. I, Ali, and pro-

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motors.

It is also expected to answer, to no one's satisfaction, the age-old question: Can a great wrestler whip a great prize fighter?

"IF THIS THING is on the level, the wrestler has got to win," observed Red Smith during a lull in the betting at Saturday's Preakness.

Other wise heads echoed "ayes" to Mr. Smith's observation.

Fortunately, the next race went to the post before anyone expressed an opinion

whether the Mr. I vs. Ali duel, was to be on the level.

But, whether they're going to play for keeps, the Tokyo match will be an intriguing happening. One must give credit to Ali for accepting a bout where he can be victimized by a home town decision, if nothing worse.

WHEN ROCKY Marciano wore boxing's heavyweight crown there was a wrestling champ named Buddy Rogers. Buddy trained by pushing elderly women down flights of stairs.

Marciano and Rogers ran out of opponents in their specialties at the same time. So Buddy sat in the Sberaton-Chicago saloon and proposed that Marciano be fed to him. The wrestler scorned a suggestion that Rocky would knock him flatter than those gals who order their upholstery from Frederick's of Hollywood.

"Marciano cannot accept because I

would ruin him," sneered Rogers. "It would be so simple. . . ."

"The bell would sound. We'd confront each other. I'd fall to my knees, clutch one of Marciano's legs, and break it. Crunch. . . ."

ALL THAT CAME of this challenge was that Frank Mastro, then The Tribune's boxing editor and a former fighter, volunteered to flatten Rogers on the spot. The situation was eased when someone was inspired to order another round of drinks.

As recently as Tuesday, however, Good Guy Verne Gagne testified that Bad Guy Buddy Rogers had not been whistling "Dixie".

"These boxers all have been deaf when I've suggested that the top sports attraction in the nation would be a battle to the finish between the best in wrestling [that's Gagne], and the best in boxing," said Verne.

"Of course, I know Ali is doing it for the big money. We are going to have the closed circuit TV in the Amphitheatre . . . and Jimmy the Greek presently is offering odds that Mr. I will beat Ali and that The Giant [a wrestler] will emerge triumphant over Chuck Wepner [a fighter] in the other feature. . . ."

THE WRESTLERS, or martial art stars, a clinch against fighters? Whoever says so hasn't studied an interesting experiment in Atlanta on July 1, 1940.

That event paired Jack Dempsey, boxing's ex-champion, and Clarence "Cowboy" Luttrell, wrestling's tough hombre of the moment. It was a promoter's dream; also a legitimate grudge.

After hanging up his gloves, Dempsey became a wrestling referee. One evening his officiating did not delight Cowboy Luttrell. Luttrell cuffed Dempsey. The boxer cuffed back. A good brawl was in the making when a promoter suddenly realized that the public should not see for free what it would pay to watch.

SO THEY MATCHED Luttrell [wrestler] against Dempsey [boxer]. Cowboy was 34, and 240 pounds; Dempsey 45, and 205. Dempsey was guaranteed a "fabulous" \$15,000 . . . peanuts compared to what Mr. I and Ali will earn.

Cowboy Luttrell went about boasting of the damage he would inflict on Dempsey. Ha!

They were scheduled for 10 rounds, 3 minutes each. By the end of the first round the wrestler's face was "a bloody mess," according to The Tribune's Stewart Owen.

It was over when Luttrell was knocked down, for the third time, at 1:58 of the second round. Dempsey's KO punch sent the wrestler under the front row of seats. Cowboy was in the hospital for an hour before he regained consciousness.

ON THE OTHER hand, I must report that Chicago's own King Levinsky, who once beat Dempsey in a boxing match, did not fare quite so well. Levinsky quit boxing and embraced wrestling because it looked like a soft touch.

He was booked against one Alonzo Wood in Louisville. And Kingfish, ex-boxer, was flat on his back when the referee halted the bout with the explanation:

"This man does not know how to defend himself."

Which Joe Louis had proved in boxing Levinsky years earlier. . . .