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The King Of New Orleans: How The Junkyard Dog Became Professional Wrestling's First Black Superhero



Synopsis

Telling the remarkable tale of a man who is still remembered on the streets of New Orleans and in the hearts of professional-wrestling fans, this book aims to restore the overlooked Junkyard Dog to his proper place in the history books. In 1979, Sylvester Ritter, also known as the Junkyard Dog, managed to break one of the final color barriers in the sport by becoming the first black wrestler named undisputed top star of his promotion, and this biography reveals all the famous feuds and business back stories that made him a wrestling legend. By 1985, New Orleans was one of the hottest cities in the Mid-South for pro wrestling due in large part to the Junkyard Dog; he became a legend in the Big Easy, drawing sellout crowds to the Downtown Municipal Auditorium and huge crowds to the Superdome, a feat unparalleled by any other wrestler. The King of New Orleans delves into wrestling's recent past and recounts how a region known for racial injustice became the home of the sport's first black idol.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Not much here. The author seems to have interviewed almost noone that actually knew Junkyard Dog. He takes a lot of information straight from Bill Watts' own book.. This book does little more than repeat what you can find online and creates a timeline for JYD's career, with little meat. The author seems overly concerned about race. Wrestling fans are interested in their heroes, regardless of race, but the author is motivated by it. He almost seems to have a touch of white guilt--"..it pains me to admit, I was not a black fan overjoyed at the prospect of seeing a wrestler of my skin color

portrayed..." His angle is furthered by the statement "The White League marker has since been moved, but it has often been a cause of racial provocations. Someday in the near future, you can imagine a Tea Party rally for its restoration." pgs. 60-61. The wrestling arena is a place people went to come together, regardless of political persuasion. The author can't get past the politics and tell us about the MAN. Skip this one unless you just have a wrestling library that needs filled. No real background information here at all. Other than a few wrestling fans who happen to remember JYD in NOLA, there isn't any real in-person investigation done. I am sure that countless wrestlers are alive today and willing to talk about JYD. Here, we have none, other than a few references to other books. I'm sure that if you like Mid-South, you can find what you really want in Bill Watts' book. Perhaps Michael Hayes will write something about that era in a no-holds barred fashion once he is done with WWE.

Over the past month or so I have had a chance to read Greg Klein's book on arguably Mid-South's biggest star, Sylvester Ritter, the Junkyard dog. The book covered the Junkyard Dog's time in Mid-South, as well as a pretty in depth history of Mid-South itself, Bill Watts, African American Stars and the like. It wasn't the longest book in the world clocking in at just 178 pages. However, it does an excellent job with the space it has. The writing style of the book is very similar to that of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter historical pieces and obituaries, written in a manner that sees one topic branches seamlessly to the next, which, made it a free flowing, enjoyable and easy read. There is a lot of information on Mid-South as a whole, with the history of the promotion being pretty much laid out from beginning to end - the history of the Tri-State territories and Watts' rise to prominence as a promoter. One thing that I found particularly useful was a chronological outline of many of Mid-South's Super Dome matches, which makes the book not only an interesting read, but also a good reference, with attendance, main events and gates for the shows being mentioned in full. The book isn't about JYD alone, which is both a good thing and a bad thing. On one hand in 178 pages you are able to get a great account of Mid-South, the sale to Crockett and other Mid-South wrestlers both in JYD's era and the one that preceded him. On the other hand the book is only 178 pages and because there is so much information on other topics it felt at times more like an overview of Mid-South, than a history of JYD's career. This writing style served me well in particular, because I didn't grow up with Mid-South, nor was I completely familiar with its history. Sure everyone knows the Junkyard Dog, Bill Watts and Ernie Ladd, but I had never had a chance to experience an overview of the territory like this in the past. If you are looking for an in-depth account of everything that went on with Mid-South and the Junkyard Dog and are familiar with the product, the book will

certainly entertain and inform, but it is meant more for people like me; who don't know the complete history of wrestling in New Orleans. After reading the book I don't want to say that I view JYD in a new light, but I definitely view him as a Wrestling Observer Hall of Famer at this point. Klein actually goes on at the end of the book about how the Junkyard Dog, out of all the major wrestling halls of fame, has only been inducted into one, with that one being the WWE Hall of Fame. People often bring up people like Big Daddy as cultural icons, which they were, but they were never proven draws when it came to sheer numbers. JYD was a different story. He wasn't a good worker, or even a decent one, what he was though was a cultural icon that was able to draw very well until the end of his tenure in the territory with his departure to the WWF in 1984. The Junkyard Dog is definitely portrayed as a cultural icon and one that in many ways has been forgotten. Klein even brings up a chant that was started and is famous in New Orleans that has been attributed to the Junkyard Dog. Unfortunately many people have forgotten just how influential JYD was and in many ways JYD has been forgotten for his role in New Orleans. The book even goes into WCW and very briefly into Bill Watt's booking tenure, with excerpts from Watt's book being featured throughout the book. It is a welcome edition and that together with many other quotes and sources truly makes everything stand out. As a whole the book was very enjoyable, I wouldn't put it on the same level as the Bret Hart or first Chris Jericho autobiography, but that would be an extremely unfair comparison. For one, this book was not about a wrestler recounting the tales of his career, but rather by an author retelling the story of a deceased wrestler and an entire territory in 178 pages - and as that this book does a phenomenal job. My only major gripe would be the fact that the book is so short, as I could have done with easily 50 more pages of quality writing. My gripe is overridden to some extent, because the book in many ways simply didn't need the extra space, because Greg Klein in some way, and I am not exactly sure how, was able to tell such a long and detailed story in such a short period of time. If you are looking to learn about the Mid-South territory and the Junkyard Dog, there is no better place to learn. Even if you are familiar with both I would still go and pick this book up. It has some great stories and is written so well that it is very hard not to like. Overall this was an extremely, solid, engaging and easy to read professional wrestling book that I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone even mildly interested in Mid-South. -Ryan Clingman, CubedCircleWrestling.com

This was a pretty well written book, but when it says that it's about The Dog's time in Mid-South, they aren't kidding. There's no mention of his defection to the (then) WWF, time in WCW, or the end in the Indies. I wish he would've delved more into what brought the Dog "Up North" and what

he faced there. Gotta admit, I'd buy it again.

This was a very telling book about the Junkyard Dog, I learned a lot that I did not know about the man. I can remember seeing him as Leory Rochester at the Nashville Fairgrounds, One night he followed me and my sister to her car and tried to get her to meet him, I was only 14, my sister was about 20, let me say I wish they had went out but it never happened. I now know all about his days after he left the Nick Gulas area and moved on to bigger things. If you are a true fan of the old territory days of wrestling this is a good book to teach you about wrestling in the south. Would recommend you to read this.

Because it sure doesn't seem to be about the Junkyard Dog, Sylvester Ritter. For a self-proclaimed fan, Mr. Klein seems to lose track of the focus of this book, at times focusing too much on Cowboy Bill Watts, or on Mid-South Wrestling, or even the wrestlers who feuded with JYD. I wanted to know more about JYD, but learned more about many others instead. While it's well written, it's still a disappointment.

This was a gift and the receiving fan loved it. He said writer did a good job, and Junkyard Dog was treated properly and given his just due.

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