

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: VINCE MCMAHON

a candid conversation with the boss hoss of wrestling about life as a tough guy, battling ted turner and janet reno and saving the nfl from pantywaists

Get ready for X-rated football. After the Super Bowl (that showcase for prima donnas and pantywaists) comes a whole new ball game—a game with more blood and guts, kicks in the nuts and sheer smashmouth spectacle than the cold, corporate National Football League could ever give you.

That's the hype, anyway. And whether you call it XFL PR or XFL BS, this new pro league is a bold play by XFL founder Vince McMahon, the hypemaster with balls as brassy as the wrestling shows that made him a billionaire.

Will the XFL win America's football fans over? NBC thought enough of its chances that the network invested \$50 million in the league and will televise XFL games in prime time. The reason? McMahon, the giant-killer who turned pro wrestling from an obscure sideshow into a TV heavyweight more popular than college football or the NBA. He's the starmaker who turned Steve Williams and Dwayne Johnson into Stone Cold Steve Austin and the Rock, two of the biggest names in trashtainment. McMahon, 55, is the guy who created modern pro wrestling by admitting that the sport is fake. He let fans in on the joke, then proceeded to bowl them over with a sublimely ridiculous show, a crazed sitcom or soap complete with lewd jokes, backstage intrigue and operatic wars

in the ring. Fake? Of course! Everybody knew it, and millions of World Wrestling Federation fans played along with the gag. Unlike the rubes they're purported to be, WWF lovers are attuned to modern media: At one of the WWF's weekly Raw Is War spectacles, a McMahon fan held up a sign that read MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL IS FAKE.

What's real and what's fake? McMahon knows the difference. And of all the things he is—WWF kingpin, actor-brawler playing the evil Mr. McMahon in his own shows, XFL creator, proud father, horny husband, Forbes 400 media mogul—he is foremost a fighter. His ring exploits may be a soap opera on steroids, but go up against him in a boardroom or a back alley and you're in for a beating.

McMahon grew up in Havelock, North Carolina, with an abusive stepfather and a mean streak wider than a country road. He learned to fight dirty. After years of street brawls and minor crimes, young Vince got shipped off to military school, where he was court-martialed. But somehow he stayed out of jail long enough to run headlong into a game as reckless and raw as he was, a game that was in his blood.

On a trip to visit his real father—a man long divorced from Vince's vivacious, five-times-married mother—the kid got a look at

dad's business: pro wrestling, a "sport" that featured snarling men in leotards who pretended to beat the crap out of each other. It was the same sideshow his grandfather had promoted before Vince's father took over, and the boy was hooked in a heartbeat. But his dad told him to find steadier work. "Get a nice government job," said his father. Only after years of waiting and pestering was Vince McMahon allowed to promote a few cards in the backwaters of his father's wrestling circuit.

The rest is a hell of a story line: Eager young huckster turns regional circuit into national spectacle, body-slams cable competitors, gets famous, expands empire into action figures and restaurants, makes first billion, rides 150 mph motorcycle into sunset.

Except that in this story, nothing is as simple as it seems. In fact, McMahon's road to the top was full of potholes. There was bankruptcy, federal charges that he'd distributed steroids to wrestlers, a media war with Ted Turner. There was trouble in his marriage to Linda McMahon, the school sweetheart who became his wife and chief executive of the WWF. There was the death of WWF star Owen Hart in a ring accident, and McMahon's decision to let the show go on after Hart's body was whisked away. There was and is the persistent charge that



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ROSE

"There will be controversy. If there isn't, we'll create it. Not the lily-white, pasteurized, homogenized pro football that the NFL wants to sell you. You're going to see passion, the passion players have for winning."

"I get off on the number of orgasms a woman has, when I'm the reason she's having them. To be responsible for a woman becoming absolutely without inhibition—that's about the coolest thing in the world."

"The last time I rode a motorcycle I ran into a Volvo. I was on a Boss Hoss—having that much power is like having a 12-foot penis. I hit the Volvo and it launched me. It was just a question of how I was going to land."

McMahon is a cultural bogeyman, a pan-derer who owes his wealth to bulked-up lugs and their babes, cartoon pimps and their ho trains—the lowest of lowbrow TV.

McMahon answers with a shrug: “That’s what the people want.”

He can afford to be a little smug. After trailing Turner’s World Championship Wrestling in the ratings for almost 100 straight weeks, McMahon’s WWF smacked its rival down and now crushes WCW week after week. Chyna, the WWF women’s star, got raw in the November 2000 *PLAYBOY* and made that issue a newsstand sellout. The Rock drew roars at last summer’s Republican Convention, then turned up at the MTV awards and got bigger props than Eminem. And now, with Stone Cold Steve Austin back from injury rehab to complete the all-star team and the XFL about to kick off its inaugural season, McMahon is the most powerful figure in the field that he calls sports entertainment.

Is the McMahon of the hour a hero or a villain—in wrestling talk, a face or a heel? What makes him tick people off? And just how good is he in bed? We sent sports talker **Kevin Cook**, who hosts a daily show, *The Skybox*, on *eYada.com*, to ask. Cook reports:

“McMahon is as subtle as a concussion. He’s big—6’2”, 230—and in scary shape for a man of 55. He ticked me off at first. I arrived on time at WWF headquarters, a glass box in Stamford, Connecticut festooned with big black flags that make the building look like a pirate ship, and I waited for three hours while he finished up some business meetings. Pacing in his reception room, I watched that Monday’s Raw Is War on 12 screens flanking a backlit WWF logo on the wall. A portrait of the Rock glared down at a jumbo floral display in the middle of the room. The flowers were plastic.

“At last I was ushered into his office: black-and-white wallpaper, stark red highlights, WWF magazines and posters neatly arrayed, a panoramic fourth-floor view of leafy Stamford with Long Island Sound in the distance. After a muscular handshake he said, ‘Let’s go.’

“In the next three-plus hours he would laugh a lot, roll his eyes theatrically, whistle for effect, jump from his chair to act out wrestling moves. He would talk openly about his businesses, his background, his family, about love and Raw and feeling like you have a 12-foot penis, and he would carefully couch a surprising revelation about sexual abuse.

“I’m no WWF fan, but after hours of back-and-forth with McMahon as dusk and then darkness rolled over Stamford, I can tell you that I’d want this guy on my side in a fight.

“With the first XFL games coming in February, we started with football talk.”

PLAYBOY: At the press conference announcing the XFL, you said your league was for real men, not “pantywaists.” You questioned the manhood of guys like Joe Montana, John Elway and Brett Favre.

MCMAHON: I did not. I said it’s not a league for pantywaists, that’s true. But I was really talking about how the NFL has changed football. The billionaire owners—or at least millionaire owners—have changed the rules to protect their prime investment, the quarterback. It’s ostensibly for the safety of the performer, but that hasn’t got a damn thing to do with the game. Once you do that, it’s no longer football as we know it and love it.

PLAYBOY: And the XFL will be?

MCMAHON: We’re not going to protect the investment like NFL owners have: one hand on the quarterback and the whistle blows. It’s not that way in college, it’s not that way in high school and it won’t be that way in our league. I played both offense and defense in my day, and I remember what you’re taught on defense: Knock the quarterback out of the game.

PLAYBOY: Once there’s a famous XFL quarterback, you might be tempted to protect him, change the rules—

MCMAHON: No. It’s part of the game—knock the quarterback out. Now what? You go to the backup, and maybe you

*Don’t get me wrong—I
hate failing. But I’m not
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I’ll be better off.*

run more-fundamental plays. That’s how it used to be in the NFL. It changes things: When you draft your backs, you’ll want guys who are versatile, who can run and throw. The NFL would have Mr. and Mrs. America believe there are only a few players who can make it in the NFL, but there’s plenty of talent. There’s a Super Bowl MVP who proved my point. For years no NFL team would give Kurt Warner a chance, and he languished in the Arena Football League. Next thing you know he’s MVP of the Super Bowl. I’m not saying every XFL player is of that caliber, but they’ll sure as hell have the same heart.

PLAYBOY: Do you agree with those who say the level of play in the XFL will be between Arena football and the NFL?

MCMAHON: I’d say between the very best college ball and the NFL. But we’ll have our breakouts, names you haven’t heard yet. You’ll get to know the XFL stars’ personalities—unlike in the NFL, which wants to keep everything secret except the NFL. They don’t promote individuality. They won’t let you celebrate in the end zone, and they have uniform police. They’ll fine a 330-pound guy for letting

his jersey hang out. They wouldn’t let Jim McMahon wear a headband when he played for the Bears. It’s downright un-American! The XFL will give you reality. And it’s going to be easier to produce than World Wrestling Federation entertainment, where we start with a blank page and have to write characterizations and verbiage. Now we can turn the camera on charismatic individuals and let them be themselves. One thing I’ll insist on is that they not be politically correct. I can’t stand politically correct.

PLAYBOY: You’re the antidote to political correctness.

MCMAHON: People lie through their teeth with that stuff. I hate liars. I hate half-truths. I told Rusty Tillman, head coach of the New York and New Jersey Hitmen, “Rusty, the moment you’re not yourself, I guarantee that I will be in your face. Physically as well as figuratively. Then we’ll see what kind of fun we have.”

PLAYBOY: Hall of Famer Dick Butkus is the XFL director of competition. You’d get in his face, too?

MCMAHON: Oh my God, yes! And Butkus knows it. That will be damn good TV.

PLAYBOY: What do the coaches think of your style?

MCMAHON: Rusty said, “Vince, when I coached for the Raiders I swore a lot. Then I was told we had to change our image. I couldn’t swear anymore. Specifically, I couldn’t say ‘fuck.’” I told Rusty he wouldn’t have that problem in the XFL. It’s not just that the word refers to my favorite thing to do in life. It’s that we want communication that’s visceral. Our cameras and microphones are going to capture everything as we go inside what may be the greatest sporting event on television other than the Olympics: pro football. The NFL doesn’t want the real game exposed. They have a corporate image to protect. But we’ll give you the whole show, a reality show inside a sporting event.

PLAYBOY: Should the NFL be worried?

MCMAHON: They have their audience. I think we’ll have their audience, too, and more. We’ll have a new audience that does not watch *Monday Night Football*. A younger demographic that advertisers want. *Monday Night* ratings are down, but sponsors can see that we’re going to grow. Why? Because we look at everything as an entertainment vehicle. Nothing is sacred. We’re not encumbered by the usual rules. That’s something that comes from my life, something that could have been a negative but turned out to be a plus. Most people grow up in a structured environment, but I didn’t. That gives you the ability to fall on your face, to get into trouble, and if you live through it, you don’t know limitations—other than physical ones, which I’m just learning about at 55 years old.

PLAYBOY: We’ll come back to your bouncy childhood, but first let’s talk a little more

about the XFL. You and NBC each own 50 percent of the league. So who has final cut? Who makes the big decisions?

MCMAHON: That's very clear. I've worked with NBC sports chief Dick Ebersol for years. He's one of my best friends. On the day we announced the XFL, Dick called and said, "What would you think about Saturday night—in prime time?" Getting that credibility, being in that NBC pipeline, was worth giving up 50 percent ownership. But the creative input is mine. Dick told me from the get-go: "This is your vision, and we don't want NBC screwing it up."

You know, the networks aren't doing that well. They need entrepreneurial spirit, and that's what we bring. For better or for worse, the XFL will revolutionize the way you watch sports.

PLAYBOY: What about the credibility question? When there's a thrilling flea-flicker, won't people say it was scripted?

MCMAHON: There will be controversy. If there isn't, we'll create it. But the real show is on the sidelines, in the stands, in the locker rooms, and we're going to show it all. Not the lily-white, pasteurized, homogenized pro football that the NFL wants to sell you. You're going to see passion, the passion players have for winning and coaches have for motivating, and you'll see it live, because our cameras and mikes are right there. Someone drops a pass in the end zone? When he comes off the field, we're there.

PLAYBOY: He's got to talk about it right away?

MCMAHON: Oh, yeah.

PLAYBOY: Can you say "fuck" on NBC?

MCMAHON: You can say it, but it will be bleeped out. You'll definitely see coaches, players and fans in the throes of passion, saying and doing things they would never otherwise think of. The linemen who love contact—they're trying to rip somebody's head off! It's all part of our reality show, the one no one else would have the balls to do.

PLAYBOY: Will you market-research the XFL the way you do the WWF?

MCMAHON: Yes. Not only with exit polls and focus groups but also with the empirical sort of research we do all the time. With the WWF we're in contact with our consumers more than 200 nights a year. They cheer, they boo. That's how they tell us what they like, and we're good listeners. Our shows are totally interactive. The fans are part of the show, and sometimes they surprise me.

PLAYBOY: When have they surprised you?

MCMAHON: We had a character, Val Venis, this alleged porn star we thought would be the consummate heel. But when Val's music plays and he walks out, people cheer: "Val! Yeah! All right!" That surprised me. Of course, that character has evolved—he's joined a group called RTC, Right to Censor.

PLAYBOY: He's a good guy now.

MCMAHON: No, he's not. He has seen the

light and joined Senator Lieberman's clan. Which doesn't make him a good guy, OK?

PLAYBOY: You don't like the way Joseph Lieberman invokes God in speeches and talks about cleaning up Hollywood and other bastions of so-called trashy or violent entertainment. Is he at the top of your enemies list?

MCMAHON: Anyone who is against freedom of expression would be up there.

PLAYBOY: And he's reaching the top.

MCMAHON: [Whistles] Yes, he is. Lieberman's scary. Not so much for my business but for our country. I think it was his first speech after Al Gore introduced him as the vice presidential candidate, and Lieberman called it a miracle and gave all thanks to God—I'm paraphrasing—and I thought, Wow, if this guy thinks he's got a closer connection to God than I have, or than anybody else in America has, that's not good. He's not the Pope. He's not a religious leader. So either (a) he actually thinks he's closer to God, or (b) he's a hypocritical politician using God to garner votes. Then I hear that they're going to give Hollywood X number of days to respond—that's scary.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel you're more in touch with the public than politicians or corporate leaders are?

MCMAHON: Take the NFL. The suits over there don't know their audience. In corporate America, at the highest level, they don't usually have a clue what their consumers want. They drive Aston Martins, so they think everybody does. They belong to a country club, they think everybody does. It's easy to fall into that trap, but I couldn't do it if I wanted to. I loathe that. I am of the people. If I have a gift, it's the gift of understanding common, ordinary people.

PLAYBOY: How do you understand your fan base?

MCMAHON: It's real, broad-based Americana. The teen audience appreciates us, yet we're sophisticated enough that our female audience is growing by leaps and bounds. We're growing across the board, not just among the male-dominated 12- to 34-year-olds. We own that audience, but I don't say, "Great, we own 12 to 34, so let's focus on them." If you start narrowcasting, you'll make mistakes.

PLAYBOY: Should feminists loathe you?

MCMAHON: We're equal-opportunity offenders. Chyna's one of our strongest characters, far above the vast majority of the men. Our female characters are unquestionably sensual, but they're real bright, too, and they use their sensuality to get ahead. While the visceral, Pavlovian male—

PLAYBOY: Gets played like a violin.

MCMAHON: Absolutely. Many females in the WWF are manipulative. But male or female, everybody's trying to climb the ladder of success. It's all a soap opera about how you achieve stardom, and then what you do after to remain a star.

PLAYBOY: Will there ever be a female champion?

MCMAHON: Chyna's our female champ.

PLAYBOY: But how about a woman winning the belt the Rock has? Could that happen?

MCMAHON: I don't rule out anything.

PLAYBOY: How do you write story lines? Do you brainstorm with writers, send e-mail back and forth?

MCMAHON: Our writers talk with the talent, the talent submits ideas, writers submit ideas and generally it gets filtered through me. I'm blessed with a little creativity and vision. Eventually, it comes out on television in this hybrid form, the most unique form of television in history. Remember the old TV variety show? It's still around. It's the WWF.

PLAYBOY: How do you choose your stars? Did you know that Dwayne Johnson would get so famous as the Rock that he'd knock 'em dead at the Republican Convention and the MTV Awards?

MCMAHON: You can tell if someone has charisma. He has it. So did his dad and his grandfather, who also worked for us. His grandfather was a Samoan chief, about 5'10" and 280 pounds, a rugged, tough son of a bitch, but a sweetheart. And his son, Rocky Johnson—the Rock before the Rock—was an extraordinary performer. A handsome black man. That gene pool is special, and it helps make the Rock a special human being.

PLAYBOY: Did you help him with that eyebrow thing he does?

MCMAHON: No. I think he started that in college.

PLAYBOY: Is Stone Cold Steve Austin a better actor than Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone?

MCMAHON: Sure, and so is the Rock. Because they can react, and react honestly.

PLAYBOY: Michael Jordan told us he had trouble doing that in *Space Jam*. It's not as easy as it looks.

MCMAHON: Well, Michael Jordan didn't have the right coaching. Put someone with an acting coach? My God, Method acting! That won't work. You have to understand athletes and how they operate, how they think, their attention span—or lack of it. Some people can't give you an honest reaction. You have to challenge them: "Do you have any guts? Do you give a shit about anything? Tell me, and I'll take that and use it." If a guy only cares about his grandmother, I can use that. I'll get him to think of his grandmother in a certain situation.

PLAYBOY: Ominous for Grandma. Do you try to piss off your wrestlers?

MCMAHON: Sometimes. You have to relate to them viscerally.

PLAYBOY: Let's turn to a subject you rarely talk about, when a wrestler died in the ring.

MCMAHON: My God, yeah. Owen Hart.

PLAYBOY: Hart died in a ring accident, falling when the harness holding him above the ring broke. You had to decide:

Go on with the show or cancel it? You went on.

MCMAHON: I didn't know if it was the right decision. But knowing Owen as the performer he was, it's my belief that he would have wanted the show to go on.

PLAYBOY: How did you find out what had happened?

MCMAHON: I was backstage in my office when I heard. It happened when the arena was dark, so nobody saw the fall. I thought back to earlier that day: My son Shane and I were out by the ring, walking through a physical bit we had to do that night, and I was shocked and surprised by Owen. He was descending to the ring in typical Owen fashion, yelling and raising hell. He was one of the biggest rippers, as we call them in the business, a practical joker, a prankster. One time he and Davey Boy Smith put goats in my office, and they made sure those goats were well fed beforehand. You can imagine how it stunk. But that's how it is in the WWF, and how it was with Owen. So many jokes—

PLAYBOY: If you could do it over, would you still hold the show that night?

MCMAHON: I just guessed that it was what Owen would want.

PLAYBOY: So you'd do it again?

MCMAHON: I think so.

PLAYBOY: Pro wrestling is a dangerous job, a little like being a stuntman.

MCMAHON: It's a lot like being a stunt-

man, but it's ramped up, because stunt-people wear pads. We don't.

PLAYBOY: At the age of 55 you still perform in your shows. Do you have a high pain threshold?

MCMAHON: I'm blessed that way. I can handle pain. But the older I get, the longer it takes to recuperate. Sometimes we affect pain when there isn't any. Sometimes we feel it and embellish it, if it's part of the story line. Stone Cold kicked my ribs in one night, and we just went ahead. I cracked my coccyx in a bad fall on a pay-per-view, and we continued. I've had several concussions. You get a white flash, and you need time off to get better. I don't perform as much as I used to. I like the opposite side of the camera—being the producer, the director, the cable puller.

PLAYBOY: You don't pull a lot of cable now that you're a billionaire.

MCMAHON: Sometimes I do. If a cameraman is scampering and the cable puller's not keeping up, I'll pull the cable. There's no job too menial.

PLAYBOY: How about ring technique? You don't want to break your neck out there. If Steve Austin jumps off the cage onto you, whose job is it to keep it safe: the leaper or the leapee?

MCMAHON: If you're lying on the mat and Rikishi jumps from the top of the cage onto you, it's Rikishi's responsibility to come down the right way and not

crush you. In that situation you're doing what's called giving him your body. You're saying, "I give you my life." You give your life to somebody even on a simple body slam, because if he turns you facefirst into the mat and slams you, you're either paralyzed or dead.

PLAYBOY: That takes body control. Is it a natural talent?

MCMAHON: No. You learn it. Look at the backyard wrestling you can see on the Internet—some of the media try to glorify that stuff, but it encourages kids to do things they shouldn't. It takes years of training to take a back drop the right way.

PLAYBOY: What's the trick?

MCMAHON: You need to disperse the fall over as wide an area as you possibly can. Think about the physics of it: If you come off the top rope and land with all your weight on your elbow, that elbow is going to be shattered. But land on your back—as much back and leg as possible—and you can disperse the impact. Not that it won't hurt. But you will get back up.

PLAYBOY: Are you fearless?

MCMAHON: Like I said, I grew up in a very volatile environment. My view was that if I took a beating and lived, I won. I still have that view. It gives me a tremendous advantage, because I'm not afraid of failure. Don't get me wrong—I hate failing. But I'm not afraid to take chances and fall on my ass, because if

I live through it I'll be better off, and I'll win.

PLAYBOY: You had a rough childhood in Havelock, North Carolina, where you grew up in a trailer.

MCMAHON: [Laughs] A New Moon trailer, eight feet wide. Trailer park isn't poverty. You don't have much privacy, but there are nice things about it. Everything is compact. And it beats some other places. Prior to that I lived in Manly, North Carolina, in a house with no indoor plumbing. That could get a little disconcerting in the wintertime.

PLAYBOY: So you're the manly man from Manly. Are those your first memories?

MCMAHON: Yeah, and the summertime wasn't much better, sitting on the privy with the heat and humidity and stench. Oh, man, the flies! So when we moved to the trailer park, it wasn't so bad.

PLAYBOY: You lived with an older brother, your mother and occasional others, right?

MCMAHON: My parents got divorced and I went with my mom, Vickie. She was in the church choir. A real performer, a female Elmer Gantry. Very striking, with an excellent voice. Lived with her and my real asshole of a stepfather, a man who enjoyed kicking people around.

PLAYBOY: Your stepfather beat you?

MCMAHON: [Nodding] Leo Lupton. It's unfortunate that he died before I could kill him. I would have enjoyed that. Not that he didn't have some redeeming qualities. He was an athlete, great at any sport, which I admired, and I remember watching *The Jackie Gleason Show* with him. We used to laugh together at Jackie Gleason.

PLAYBOY: Lupton was an electrician. He hit you with his tools, didn't he? A pipe wrench?

MCMAHON: Sure.

PLAYBOY: He hit your brother, too?

MCMAHON: No. I was the only one of the kids who would speak up, and that's what provoked the attacks. You would think that after being on the receiving end of numerous attacks I would wise up, but I couldn't. I refused to. I felt I should say something, even though I knew what the result would be.

PLAYBOY: You fought him when he hit

your mother.

MCMAHON: Absolutely. First time I remember, I was six years old. The slightest provocation would set him off. But I lived through it.

PLAYBOY: That's an awful way to learn how a man behaves.

MCMAHON: I learned how not to be. One thing I loathe is a man who will strike a woman. There's never an excuse for that.

PLAYBOY: Eventually, you escaped from your stepfather.

MCMAHON: By the time I was 14 I was on my own. I was pretty much a man then. Physically, at least. In other ways I'm still becoming a man.

PLAYBOY: Was the abuse all physical, or was there sexual abuse, too?

PLAYBOY: Surely it must shape a person.

MCMAHON: No doubt. I don't think we escape our experiences. Things you may think you've pushed to the recesses of your mind, they'll surface at the most inopportune time, when you least expect it. We can use those things, turn them into positives—change for the better. But they do tend to resurface.

PLAYBOY: We can leave that topic, but one thing first. You have said that the sexual abuse in your childhood "wasn't from the male." It's well known that you're estranged from your mother. Have we found the reason?

MCMAHON: [Pauses, nods] Without saying that, I'd say that's pretty close.

PLAYBOY: OK, let's take a look at the teenage Vince. You once said that you "majored in badass."

MCMAHON: I was totally unruly. Would not go to school. Did things that were unlawful, but I never got caught.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever steal?

MCMAHON: Automobiles. But I always brought them back. I just borrowed them, really. There were other thefts, too, and I ran a load of moonshine in Harlowe, North Carolina, in a 1952 Ford V8. That was a badass car at the time.

PLAYBOY: What did you get paid for running hooch?

MCMAHON: A fortune. I think it was 20 bucks.

PLAYBOY: Finally, the police caught up with you.

MCMAHON: They had a lot of circumstantial evidence. I was always in fights, too.

They'd pull up and there we were, me and my group of guys, going at it with the Marines.

PLAYBOY: You fought the Marines?

MCMAHON: Havelock is right outside the Marine base at Cherry Point. There was a place called the Jet Drive-In. Real creative—the Jet, because of all the military jets at the base. On Friday and Saturday nights it was time to get it on with the Marines. It was a challenge. Most of them were in great condition, but they didn't know how to fight. I'm not saying they were easy pickings. They got their testosterone going and they were all liquored up. Some of them were real tough. But me and my guys were street fighters. I mean, maybe you've been

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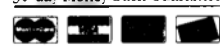


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PLAYBOY: Ever come close to killing one of them?

MCMAHON: I would like to think not very close. That's not what I wanted to do. You want to incapacitate the guy. Once you get someone down you don't want him getting back up. You don't want him moving, so you make sure he doesn't. It's not pretty, but it was challenging and fun.

PLAYBOY: Finally, the authorities in Havelock gave you a choice—

MCMAHON: Right. It was reform school or military school. I went to Fishburne Military School in Waynesboro, Virginia, in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Military school is expensive. My mom was still my guardian and she couldn't afford it. So my dad was notified and he paid.

PLAYBOY: Your father was a wrestling promoter. It was wrestling money that sent you to military school.

MCMAHON: That's right. I would see him in the summertime and on the occasional holiday. That he was able and willing to send me to that school made an impression. It was a chance to start over. Maybe it doesn't seem that I changed, since I was the first cadet in school history to be court-martialed, but I at least started to change. No one really knew me at Fishburne. I had no badass reputation to uphold.

PLAYBOY: So why did they court-martial you?

MCMAHON: For no particular infraction. Again, I was lucky and a little crafty—I wasn't caught for some stuff that would have meant immediate dismissal, like stealing the commandant's car. Colonel Zinnecker had an old, green, beat-up Buick, and he always left the keys in it. He also had a dog he was nuts about. I love animals, but one day I couldn't resist giving that dog a laxative. I put the laxative in some hamburger and the dog did his business all over the commandant's apartment, which thrilled me greatly.

PLAYBOY: What finally got you in trouble?

MCMAHON: Insubordination. I had no respect for the military because they were *playing* military. Sure, it's an ROTC program, but we weren't in a war. We were a bunch of kids. The idea of this adult from Army ROTC ordering all these kids around—and getting off on it—ugh! What kind of human being is that? I was insubordinate, but I didn't really have many scrapes at Fishburne. I was playing sports—wrestling and football—and that helped me.

PLAYBOY: What position in football?

MCMAHON: Offensive guard and defensive tackle. But all I really knew how to do was fight. So it was, "Bring it on!" But when you've got bare knuckles and you're hitting a guy with a helmet on, it's no good. I was used to gouging eyes and going for the throat. A big kick in the nuts is always primo—you hear the guy go "*Huhhh!*" and you think, His ass is mine. But you can't do that on the football field. Football is all about technique, and I was a lousy football player. In one game I was personally penalized more yardage than our offense gained.

PLAYBOY: Still, you beat the court-martial and even graduated. By then you had stolen cars and run moonshine. You'd had a drink. You'd had your first joint. You'd lost your virginity.

MCMAHON: [Pauses] That was at a very young age. I remember, probably in the first grade, being invited to a matinee film with my stepbrother and his girlfriends, and I remember them playing with me. Playing with my penis, and giggling. I thought that was pretty cool. That was my initiation into sex. At that age you don't necessarily achieve an erection, but it was cool. At around the same time there was a girl my age who was, in essence, my cousin. Later in life she actually wound up marrying that asshole Leo Lupton, my stepfather! Boy, this sounds like *Tobacco Road*. Anyway, I remember the two of us being so curious about each other's bodies but not knowing what the hell to do. We would go into the woods and get naked together. It felt good. And for some reason I wanted to put crushed leaves into her. Don't know why, but I remember that. I don't remember the first time I had intercourse, believe it or not.

PLAYBOY: Your growing up was pretty accelerated.

MCMAHON: God, yes.

PLAYBOY: In your early teens you spent a stint in Washington, D.C. with your father.

MCMAHON: When I was 12 or a little older, living with my grandmother on my mom's side, my father and his mother came to visit. I must have behaved myself, because I got invited up to be with him.

PLAYBOY: You must have been aching for him all that time.

MCMAHON: Didn't know it, though. It's funny how you don't know what you're missing if you never had it. Then when I met my dad, I fell in love with him. We got very, very close, but we both knew we could never go back. There's a tendency to try to play catch-up, but you can't. You missed those years. There would always be something missing between us, but there was no reason to discuss it. I was grateful for the chance to spend time with him.

PLAYBOY: There was a colorful wrestler in his stable, Dr. Jerry Graham.

MCMAHON: Oh, boy. It's 1959 and I'm

looking up at Jerry Graham and he's lighting cigars with \$100 bills.

PLAYBOY: That's a good story, but nobody would really do it.

MCMAHON: Graham would. He spent more money than anybody I know. He was a 300-pound guy with platinum blond hair and a thick, heavy beard. He wore red pants and a riverboat-gambler shirt. The shirt was either white or red. If it was red, it had white ruffles. If it was white, it had red ruffles. He wore red shoes and rode around Washington in a blood-red 1959 Cadillac, smoking a cigar. He'd run red lights, blowing the horn, and people would scatter. If they didn't get out of his way he'd cut a promo.

PLAYBOY: Cut a promo?

MCMAHON: Yell. Go off on someone verbally. Graham was good at that. My dad wouldn't let me spend an enormous amount of time with him, but I'd sneak away when I could and go riding with the good doctor. Or we'd be at a party—my dad, Jerry and a couple of the other wrestlers. Jerry and his girlfriend would be arguing and pouring drinks over each other. It was sheer entertainment. I was learning that you can be drawn to people for their charisma, but that's not all there is to them. Damn, Jerry, he loved to drink. There was a time when I thought Jerry Graham walked on water, but he could be a mean drunk, and that turned me off.

PLAYBOY: Still, you were dying to follow your father into the wrestling business.

MCMAHON: I loved it from the day I saw it. The characters! But my dad was pragmatic. He remembered the bad years he'd had. He'd say, "Get a government job, so you can have a pension."

PLAYBOY: You wound up at East Carolina University, where you majored in business. What did you learn?

MCMAHON: That I hated economics. Sat in the back row, didn't like the subject. It's about numbers, not people. Wasn't wild about statistics, either.

PLAYBOY: You attended East Carolina with Linda, a church choirgirl who followed you there and became your wife. She finished college in three years, but it took you five years. Is she smarter than you are?

MCMAHON: Generally, yes. But it depends on how you define smart. I didn't do well scholastically. Had a grade point average of 2.001. You needed a two-point average to graduate.

PLAYBOY: It came down to your last class?

MCMAHON: I had to go back to a couple of professors to get them to change me from a B plus to an A, or I wouldn't have made it.

PLAYBOY: Why did they agree? Just because you didn't steal their cars?

MCMAHON: I guess they didn't expect a knock on the door from a student who wouldn't take no for an answer. Someone who was saying he's been here five

years, and his wife's been here three and she's graduating and she's pregnant. Now they figure this kid has either made up a hell of a story or maybe it's true. Either way, it didn't hurt them to change the grade.

PLAYBOY: It was a great story line.

MCMAHON: I delivered it with lots of conviction, because it was true. Not that I couldn't have delivered it with conviction had it not been true. But the grades got changed and we both graduated.

PLAYBOY: Soon you had a son, Shane, and a job selling adding machines.

MCMAHON: I'm not good with fucking machines. They have no personality. I went from there to a job selling cups and Sweetheart ice cream cones for the Maryland Cup Corp. in Owings Mills, right outside Baltimore. I would get up early and work a zillion hours, but it wasn't for me. I mean, they want you to talk about the characteristics of the fucking cup. It's a paper cup with a plastic coating, and it has a certain lip-type thing. They cook it at such and such a temperature. One day there I am, selling this guy on the cup, and he looks at me and says, "Son, you don't really give a damn about that cup." I said, "No, I don't, and thank you very much." That was it for that job.

PLAYBOY: Next you got work crushing rocks. You've claimed you worked 90 hours a week, but that's almost impossible, isn't it?

MCMAHON: No, it's not. Linda will tell you. I drove a huge dump truck at Rockville Crushed Stone, and after a while I got promoted to the pug mill. Linda still teases me for it. A pug mill is where you combine different levels of rock with dirt, and I was made the pug mill operator. Now, that was big time.

All this time I'd been pestering my dad to let me work with him: "Come on, Pop. You know I love this stuff." He had a promoter in Bangor, Maine who had been caught stealing. Caught stealing above and beyond the norm, I should say. In those days all the promoters stole. But you can steal too much, and then you're a thief.

PLAYBOY: How much was too much?

MCMAHON: [Laughs] Over about 20 percent and you're a thief. So my dad tells me, "Look, the guy in Bangor, I just threw him the hell out. Go up there. You can't ever say I didn't give you an opportunity, but this is the first and last opportunity you'll have in this company." I went to Bangor, the northernmost outpost of my dad's territory. Now I'm hustling, promoting a product I love. People cheer and boo and have a good time, and I leave with some money in my pocket. Goddamn, life is good! Started making my way south, promoting areas that hadn't been promoted before. First thing you know, half my dad's business is in New England.

PLAYBOY: Pro wrestling had always been regional, but before long you were invading other promoters' turf. You were the guy who was going to make wrestling a national business.

MCMAHON: Right. At tremendous risk.

PLAYBOY: There was a gentlemen's agreement: Promoters don't violate each other's territory. In wrestling terminology, what you were doing was sort of a double cross. You got death threats.

MCMAHON: Many times. On the phone and in person. There's a person who still works for us, Jim Ross, who was at a confab in Memphis back then. Ninety percent of the major promoters flew to Memphis for a big meeting. So one day Jim was sitting on the throne in the men's room when a few of the elder guys come in, and they're saying, "How are we going to stop this kid?" Meaning me. They're plotting to do me in. Of course, Jim doesn't want them to know he's there, because he heard them.

PLAYBOY: They were talking about killing you?

MCMAHON: [Nodding] Murder. They were going to take me out. So Jim, God bless him, in the middle of his defecation he picks up his feet so they can't see him. Here's Jim with his feet up on the throne, thinking, Please don't let them know I'm in here. Sure enough, they walked out, and Jim had no trouble finishing his job after that.

PLAYBOY: Do you think they were serious about murder?

MCMAHON: Some of it was probably bravado from a pseudo tough-guy. Some of it was real. They were the last vestige of the old school, and I wanted to change the whole deal. I *had* to go national.

PLAYBOY: By 1984 you had achieved it. You were planning the Wrestlemania, the first of those huge national shows. But it was also the time your father was dying.

MCMAHON: Dying of cancer. I went to the hospital and I kissed him. I've always been demonstrative. If I don't like you, I'll tell you. If I love you, male or female, I'll hug you and say I love you. But my dad was old Irish. The old Irish, for some reason I don't understand, they don't show affection. That's not how I live my life. It's certainly not the way that my kids, Shane and Stephanie, were brought up—I don't know how many times a day I tell them I love them. But my dad, no. He never said it. Maybe he would say something complimentary about me to somebody else, but not to my face. That time in the hospital, I kissed him and said I loved him. He didn't like to be kissed, but I took advantage of him. Then I started to go. I hadn't quite gotten through the door when I heard him: "I love you, Vinnie!" He didn't just say it, he yelled it.

PLAYBOY: This came after you made your first fortune and promptly went bank-

rupt. You owned horses, had diversified investments. What happened?

MCMAHON: It was visions of sugarplums. It was, "Look how successful I am! I guess I really am somebody." I got involved with people who weren't that bright and let them tell me that I needed tax shelters. There was a construction company, a horse farm, a cement plant, and it all went belly-up. I felt bad about the bankruptcy. I wanted to pay what I owed, but there were other people involved, and finally the banks wrote it all off.

PLAYBOY: Later you had some trouble with the IRS.

MCMAHON: I have withstood numerous IRS investigations. They've never found anything against me, because there's nothing to find. I've always remembered when my dad fronted money for some people before a light-heavyweight fight. A certain party out of New York couldn't show his money, so my dad fronted the money. Laundered it through his company, so the money could be legitimate.

PLAYBOY: A fixed fight?

MCMAHON: Yes. After that came a grand jury investigation, which my dad withstood. And then, just when he thought he was off the hook, *knock, knock!* It was the IRS.

I can still see my dad during that time, saying, "Goddamn it, if I could just get through this I'd pay every nickel I owe and then some. I just want to be able to sleep at night." I remember the anguish on his face when he said it. So I adopted his philosophy, and I sleep at night. In terms of taxes, anyhow. I'm not wild about sleep.

PLAYBOY: How many hours a night do you sleep?

MCMAHON: About five. It takes me forever to go to sleep. I get frustrated and sweat a lot and think, Damn it, you've got to get up in two hours, you stupid son of a bitch. You've got to be at your best tomorrow. Finally, I learned that if your mind is going to race, you might as well enjoy the ride. Watch the visions. It's a colorful show. I'm also learning that as I get older, my dreams get less violent.

PLAYBOY: Are we talking video game-style violence?

MCMAHON: Not the sort you want to remember. Now they're changing, though. Now they're more typical, R-rated.

PLAYBOY: R for sex or violence?

MCMAHON: Both.

PLAYBOY: About 18 months ago you were in a violent motorcycle crash.

MCMAHON: I'm a guy who gets more out of life than some people—more out of one big breath of fresh air than most people get from breathing in and out for a lifetime. Bungee jumping in Germany went OK, but the last time I rode a motorcycle I ran into an idiot in a Volvo station wagon. It was July 3, 1999. I was on

a Boss Hoss, a motorcycle with a Chevy V8 engine. Enormous power. Not enormous speed—I've been on it at 150 miles an hour; it won't go much faster—but great acceleration. Zero to 60 in something like a second and a half. Having that much power between your legs, it's like having a 12-foot penis. But I had a little accident. I was coming down a secondary road, going about 45, when this idiot backed out of a blind driveway. I hit the Volvo and it launched me. It was just a question of how I was going to land. That's when my training in the ring helped me. Up in the air I was conscious of where the ground was, and I made sure I didn't land on my head. It's like taking a back drop or some other wrestling move: You might not hit just right, but you can manage to land pretty flat.

PLAYBOY: You dispersed the impact.

MCMAHON: Right, and again, it's like being in the ring—you don't realize you're hurt at first, because you've got your adrenaline going. You don't know you're hurt until you try to bounce up, and you can't. The bike was uphill from me, gasoline pouring out on me. So I had my motivation: I was going to try not to burn to death. Got up. Walked, kind of. I had broken my tailbone, which wasn't the big problem, because bones heal pretty fast. The big problem was that my pelvis was separated. It felt like I'd given birth to a 20-pound baby. Got out of

there, though, and it didn't keep me from working.

PLAYBOY: You've alluded to feeling older in recent years. How's your libido?

MCMAHON: I am a giver. Whether it's performing in the ring or sexually, that's how I get off. I give. I get off on the number of orgasms a woman has, when I'm the reason she's having them.

PLAYBOY: What's the record?

MCMAHON: [Pauses] You know, you might not be sure when you're younger. She could be like Meg Ryan in *When Harry Met Sally*. When you're older, you can generally tell. Not just from sound, but physically.

PLAYBOY: Muscular interaction.

MCMAHON: There you go. You can't fake that. To answer your question . . . probably six. Which is pretty damn good.

PLAYBOY: How long does that take?

MCMAHON: Over the course of an hour. See, I love women. A woman's body is so complex and so beautiful, and it's not just her body. It's her mind. To be responsible for a woman becoming absolutely without inhibition, surrendering in that way—that's about the coolest thing in the world. I'm not a guy who just appreciates a woman's physicality, either. My wife is chief executive officer of the company not because her last name is McMahon, but because she's the best one for the job. You would think the WWF is a bastion of male domination,

but it's not. I am a women's rights advocate. I'm big on equal pay, all that stuff. It's the right thing to do and it's good business.

PLAYBOY: Linda's not the only family member who's in the business. Your son, Shane, and daughter, Stephanie, work on both sides of the camera. Few fans know that Stephanie, who is a major part of the on-air story line, still works behind the scenes, in ad sales.

MCMAHON: If your name is McMahon, you have a day job and a night job. Stephanie's now segueing out of sales into creative. She's going to head up the creative division.

PLAYBOY: Her night job gets rowdy. Is it annoying to hear fans yelling, "*Shut!*" and "*Stephanie swallows!*" at her?

MCMAHON: Not at all. You can't think, That's my daughter they're referring to. It's a character. As the father of the person who plays that character, I think she's getting a response. She must be doing a hell of a job. You know what my worry is? That she might get hurt, just as I worry about Shane or any of the performers. They all take big risks out there.

PLAYBOY: Shane came back after getting hurt in a fall at a SummerSlam show, carrying on the family tradition. But there's one story about a time he was scared to death. He was four years old.

MCMAHON: [Grinning] Linda and I have

been married for 34 years now, but we're really different. She would always read to the kids at night. I'd make up stories for them, and my stories were full of action. Couldn't help it. They've just had their bath and they smell so good, they're tucked into their little beds and they're so sweet that you just want to eat them. I'd tell them a story, kiss them goodnight, and they would be absolutely wired. Linda would have to calm them down. So Shane was scared one night. He thought Dracula was in the closet. I said, "Oh yeah? Watch this." I went in that closet and started growling and yelling, having a battle. I threw a little furniture. Now Shane's really scared to death, until finally his dad walks out of the closet. I said, "Son, you never have to worry about Dracula again. Dracula's dead."

PLAYBOY: How are you as a husband?

MCMAHON: I tease Linda about the sacrifices I've made for my marriage, but she has made enormous sacrifices. When Linda and I got married, I promised her two things: that I'd always love her and that there would never be a boring moment. I've lived up to both promises. I have always been . . . loyal.

PLAYBOY: And faithful?

MCMAHON: Not necessarily faithful. I probably lied to myself, thinking she knew who I was when we got married. The wild guy. But I never, ever threw anything in her face. I was discreet. And Linda never suffered from a lack of attention, physical or emotional. But one day she asked me, point-blank, "Are you having an affair with so-and-so?" And I've never lied to her.

"Yes."

It crushed her. Then she asked, "What about such and such?"

"Yes."

It went on. More names. I said, "Yes, yes and yes."

PLAYBOY: Were your affairs at different times or concurrent?

MCMAHON: Different times. Some were concurrent, but I didn't think she had to know that. She didn't ask that question or I'd have had to say yes to that, too. It's not something I'm proud of. I just didn't realize the impact of messing with other people's lives. Notwithstanding the impact on my wife, I'm talking about the havoc you create in other lives, just from wanting to have a good time. There's no such thing as an innocent fling. When a woman commits to a sexual encounter, it's generally with a great deal of emotion. With very few exceptions, it's not just, "Let's have sex! Boy, that was great. OK, see you." Women don't do that. So I guess, maybe . . . I hurt a lot of people. The sex was terrific, but from an emotional standpoint, I regret it.

PLAYBOY: Did you change?

MCMAHON: I learned about the ramifications of a sexual relationship, if you're

married. You're touching a lot of lives, mostly negatively. You think, It was just supposed to be sexual. We were supposed to have a great time and be better off. But it's always more complicated than that. It can interfere with your own life, too. Having an affair, running off here and there, can take a lot of energy. It takes a lot of effort, a lot of time. The last five or six years, I've found that I not only appreciate my wife more, but I can get a hell of a lot more done.

PLAYBOY: You don't cheat anymore?

MCMAHON: I have been not only loyal but faithful for about six years. Linda and I have a great marriage, and I don't want to screw it up. I'm not saying I don't look. I'm not saying I won't fall off the wagon one day. I hope not, because of all the complications and because I would have to tell her if she asked me. But other than for the innate id, I don't have a desire to go outside our relationship.

And if I'm on the road for more than three days, you know I'm flying afterward to where Linda is.

PLAYBOY: You're always on the move. Were you hyperactive as a kid?

MCMAHON: Maybe. When Shane had alleged learning disabilities in high school, we put him on Ritalin. When I was in school there was no Ritalin. Attention deficit disorder hadn't been discovered, so I was just a bad kid.

PLAYBOY: A little Ritalin in 1960 might have changed the course of American entertainment.

MCMAHON: [Laughing] That's one drug I've escaped. Maybe I had learning disabilities, or maybe I was just starved for attention, striving to be liked.

PLAYBOY: Your wrestlers have been getting more attention lately. A couple of years ago Ted Turner, Time Warner and their World Championship Wrestling beat your WWF in the ratings for 88 weeks in a row. Now you kill them week after week. How fun is it to body-slam Turner like that?

MCMAHON: What happened was that the superstars we created got bought off by Ted Turner. When their WWF contracts came up, Ted opened his checkbook and paid them up to 10 times what we were paying. I had a fraternal, we're-brothers relationship with our stars, guys like Hulk Hogan, and I never thought they would leave. They gave me every personal assurance that they wouldn't. But exorbitant money can change minds. It's not easy competing with a billionaire and Time Warner. Still, we knew we could create new stars, and this time around we'd keep them, knowing that the guys Ted bought would get old quickly. Looking back, yes, there was a brief time when the superstars Ted purchased almost in bulk and the promotional machine he owned—CNN, TBS, TNT, the NBA package, the NFL package, which he had for a while—all combined to put him

ahead. But how far ahead? An average of 20 percent, or at the most 25. It's not the crushing situation you see now, when we have new stars and their superstars are old and jaded and don't want to work. As my dad would say, the wrinkles are out of their bellies. They're no longer hungry. At Time Warner, they don't understand the creative process. They have never been able to create stars, but Ted buys things. He's always been like that. By the way, he has tried to buy the WWF on many occasions.

PLAYBOY: What's the prognosis for Turner's WCW?

MCMAHON: I understand it's for sale.

PLAYBOY: You interested?

MCMAHON: Possibly.

PLAYBOY: Now that you're on top, has the WWF been getting a little less raunchy?

MCMAHON: On balance, we've never been raunchy. I'd say we are certainly more mainstream than we were several years ago, and we have pushed the envelope too far a few times. A couple years ago we did that with a character called Sexual Chocolate. It was an S&M parody in which Sexual Chocolate was surprised to learn the person gratifying him was a male. Some of the audience got it as humor, but some felt like, How do I explain this to my young son or daughter? So maybe we pushed it too far. There was no reason to go there. But there will always be sexuality in the product. We're a variety show, soap opera, rock concert, action-adventure with a little Comedy Central thrown in and with charismatic world-class athletes performing their feats in the ring. There has never been anything quite like this, and you can't copy it. It can't be copied because there's no formula. It's living and breathing.

PLAYBOY: Some of your critics say it's disgusting. Phil Mushnick of the *New York Post* calls you a pornographer.

MCMAHON: Look, we have a huge demo. Fifteen percent of our prime-time audience is 12 and under. Fifteen percent is 12 to 18. That's 30 percent who are 18 and under, while 70 percent is your older audience. Who do you write for? Remember, we're part of the cable universe, where you've got *The Sopranos*, *Sex and the City*. Compared with a lot of what's on cable, the WWF actually leans to the conservative side. Phil Mushnick? He's so right-wing that everybody laughs at him. Even in the *New York Post* recently, there was only one pro-Mushnick letter. All the rest were pro-WWF, saying, "Phil, grow up. Who the hell are you to view the WWF the way you do in this day and age?" Jerk. Phil writes his opinion, but he never calls us before he writes. He's been invited up here. Won't come, won't meet me anywhere. Hello, Phil? Wake up! It's the real world!

PLAYBOY: Your shows feature talk about "puppies" and "tits."

MCMAHON: We don't say "tits." We use "puppies," a cute term for breasts. It's not

meant to be derogatory. I'd say "tits" is vulgar, but "puppies" is cute terminology. **PLAYBOY:** But the fans yell about tits. And the signs fans hold up at your Monday night show, *Raw Is War*, aren't just about puppies.

MCMAHON: If we see a sign that's objectionable or obscene, we'll take it away. We're scanning the crowd, but sometimes there are 20,000 people there. You might see some signs that should not be there, especially on the live show Monday night. As much as I appreciate freedom of expression, we will ask the person not to display that sign. If he displays it anyway, we'll say, "You know what? We're going to bribe you now. Would you like to have this Stone Cold T-shirt for free? Give me that fucking sign." Generally it works.

PLAYBOY: Last year you were charged with hypocrisy for refusing to allow ads for the documentary *Beyond the Mat* to run during WWF broadcasts. How do you explain that?

MCMAHON: As a business decision. You want to know what happened? Ron Howard is one of my neighbors. Not that I know Ron well, but he called me and said, "Vince, I'd like you to meet this guy. He wants to do a documentary." That's how I heard about Barry Blaustein. I figured it would be a great positive. But when Linda and I went to a private screening, we found out it's so bad. It's the underbelly of the wrestling business in the early Eighties. You've got Jake the Snake off doing blow, and the movie winds up with one of our characters, Mick Foley—Mankind—bleeding everywhere. I think it was a Royal Rumble event in Anaheim. Foley's kids are in the audience, along with his wife, and the camera's on them. Now, Mick's wife has seen him in a lot worse condition, but here she is screaming so much that the kids—who shouldn't have been there for this—are reacting to her hysterical screams. It turned me off so badly. I'm thinking, Barry, you and I have completely different visions of the business.

In the early Eighties, and certainly before then, it was viewed as a six-pack and a blow job. But today's performer is more sophisticated, educated. He's on the Internet after his match, or playing video games. Or he wants to watch tape to study his performance. He does not go to the bar. So few of our performers even drink, much less do drugs and other things that were once run-of-the-mill. So to see Mick and his kids and his wife in that movie was a real downer.

Even before that screening, I had told Barry and his backers, "You're using our characters, our trademarks. But none of our performers got paid. You're not paying the company. Let us buy in—I'll pay half the production costs." We were denied. I told them, "Look, you know we control all the advertising in our vehicles." We have for years, because we

didn't want Turner or anyone else capitalizing on our hard work. We can't control Ford or Chevy, but we control the wrestling genre. So I'm trying to strong-arm Barry and his studio. I tell them, "If you don't let us in, you won't have access to our vehicle." I guess they didn't believe me. Ron Howard said, "You know, Vince, sometimes out there in Hollywood you make bad deals, and you have to live with them." But this wasn't one I had to live with. And my decision wasn't an editorial one, even though I didn't like the movie. There's plenty of stuff we do that I'm not in love with, but the audience likes it. So this wasn't censorship. It was financial. It was, "You guys didn't let us in, even when I was willing to buy our way in, so fuck you. You raped me once, you don't get the privilege of raping me twice. Fuck you. You can't advertise inside our vehicle."

PLAYBOY: Tell us about fear. You're not afraid of Ted Turner or Dracula. What scares you?

MCMAHON: I was scared of the United States government when I pissed off the Justice Department and they trampled on my rights. They accused me of something I didn't do.

PLAYBOY: You were charged with conspiring to distribute steroids. You originally faced six charges but were ultimately cleared of all of them.

MCMAHON: And they were the ones who had been coming to me with a plea bargain! It's supposed to work the other way—the accused goes to the government. But they came to me, and I said, "Fuck you." Those were my exact words. I tried to call Attorney General Janet Reno but never got through, which is probably a good thing.

PLAYBOY: Have you worked out any plans to hand over the reins of the WWF to Shane and Stephanie?

MCMAHON: Depends on what you mean by the reins. We'll be doing films, music—there's a lot to keep me busy, like this little thing called the XFL. But if I bust tonight, Shane and Stephanie and Linda will make sure the business goes on.

PLAYBOY: When you do step aside, will you write a death scene for your alter ego, the evil Mr. McMahon?

MCMAHON: A death scene? No, that wouldn't be reality. Unless . . . you know what? I believe in the laws of nature. When it's time for me to go, I would like to be devoured by the biggest, baddest carnivore that ever walked the face of the earth. And then I'd like that son of a bitch to get indigestion and vomit my remains back up.

PLAYBOY: A romantic finish.

MCMAHON: Yep.

PLAYBOY: And you know you'd get—

MCMAHON: Great ratings.

