

Gary Mehaffy says HHH is underappreciated

I'm guessing that the mere fact of the title of this piece on the main page has led you to check it out. Either that or the fact that you think I'm some sort of literary genius and you can't wait to read my new column every couple of weeks.

I'll assume the former.

To take a step back for a moment, and assuming that some of you are new to this column, I will explain my reasons for writing this. I decided, several months back, to write about wrestlers, eh, sorry Vince, sports entertainers in WWE that were underutilised, under-pushed or underappreciated.

Even I'm not stupid enough to say that HHH is underutilised or under-pushed. But underappreciated? I think so. Let me explain my reasoning.

I've watched HHH since his days in WCW as Terra Ryzing (I'm sorry, but I've always thought it was a crap name. You may as well call them Mr. N. Tertainment, if you catch my drift).

Back then he was a bland wrestler, barely making a ripple in a tiny pond. (Please note ‐ I'm not insinuating that WCW was small, or indeed was WWE's smaller, poorer brother. I meant that Mr. Ryzing never really made it onto the biggest stage WCW had to offer, unless you count a PPV appearance with ‘Das Wunderkind’ Alex Wright!)

After a brief stint as William Regal's partner in ‘The Blue Bloods’ tag team he moved in 1995 to WWF/E. This is also the reason that they remain friends to this day. Indeed, he tried to help Regal develop a more WWE based style several years ago.

He debuted in WWE as Hunter Hearst Helmsley, a snob from Greenwich, Connecticut ‐ I can't think who it was patterned after.

He subsequently had an (un)memorable feud with, of all people, Duke ‘The Dumpster’ Droese (maybe Terra Ryzing wasn't such a bad name after all). But behind the scenes, things were different. He (allegedly) became the baggage carrier for the clique ‐ i.e. HBK, Kevin ‘Diesel’ Nash and Scott ‘Razor Ramon’ Hall (and later Sean ‘X-Pac/123kid’ Waltman). When, on Nash and Hall's last night in WWE before they joined WCW on big money contracts, the clique broke kayfabe (something that simply wasn't done, even in 1996) and all hugged in the ring, WWE felt it had to act and punish them.

Well, except for the fact that Nash and Hall were leaving, and HBK was one of their few remaining headliners. So that left the ball at one HHH's feet. And punished he was. Before it even happened, and perhaps in a sign of things to come, he was fed like a lamb to the slaughter to The Ultimate Warrior at WMXII, in a match lasting 7 seconds. Well not quite, but you catch my drift.

And the plan to have him win that year's King of the Ring tournament was changed and given to Steve Austin (in hindsight, I bet Vince was glad!) Straight after his loss at WM, as in literally backstage after it, he began a feud with recent signing from WCW Marc Mero (a.k.a. Johnny B. Badd. I know, it's almost as bad as Terra Ryzing).

To be honest, I didn't mind this feud. They could both go in the ring when motivated, and I certainly wasn't complaining when it brought Mero's (then) wife Sable into the mix.

As the years progressed, so did Hunter. He won the King of the Ring the following year, and had feuds with Owen Hart, The British Bulldog and, more interestingly, The Rock. He steadily began his progression up the card, and was being accepted as a top of the mid card heel.

Then, for me, came his crowning moment. And no, I don't mean his on screen ‘marriage’ with Stephanie McMahon. I'm talking about his feud with Mick ‘Cactus/Dude/Mankind/Love/Jack’ Foley. A feud for which, I'm reliably informed, HHH for some reason views with scepticism and was one of the reasons he was happy to see Foley leave in August of this year.

Go figure.

Regardless of who thinks what, this feud more than any other put HHH on the map. Foley's strong performances, especially in his ‘lose and I'll retire’ Hell in a Cell match at No Way Out, 2000, showed people that Hunter was no flash in the pan. Some people give Foley all of the credit for this match but, for me, it took two to tango. People sat up and took proper notice.

And rightly so.

You'll notice that I haven't mentioned DX.

Yet.

Now in fact.

Right after Shawn dropped the title to Austin at WMXIV, as his back was totally shot, HHH set about rebuilding DX. The original DX, of HBK, HHH and Chyna, had been one of the catalysts of WWE's change to the attitude era. But when Hunter took over, he set about changing the group himself (well, as far as the TV audience were concerned).

He added Sean 'X-Pac/123 Kid' Waltman, who had just defected from WCW. Or been sacked by Bischoff, whichever you prefer. He added the obnoxious (in the correct way) tag team of the New Age Outlaws ('Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, children of all ages'; Ah, memory lane!) and more importantly, they added proper attitude. They mocked the Nation of Domination. They did what they pleased. And they, quite memorably, invaded WCW to 'rescue' Nash and Hall. It really was gripping stuff.

They also, inevitably, turned face. (Pity, I always preferred him as a cocky heel to be honest.)

In the last few years it has been insinuated, then (pretty much) admitted, that he is married to the boss's daughter. Trust me, that goes down less well in wrestling than it does in virtually other business. But fair play to them -- they genuinely are in love, so who am I to cast aspersions on the hows and whys of them getting together around about the time HHH was still going out with Chyna. But hey, no one can't say that Steph isn't a step up from that! (Sorry Joanie.)

This is where I'll mention his marriage, then leave it for a few paragraphs and come back to it.

In the years since he became perennial WWE/Heavyweight champion, pretty much just to try and eclipse his hero, mentor and new friend Ric Flair, he has feuded with everyone from Austin, The Rock and The Undertaker to HBK, Jeff Hardy, John Cena and even The Spirit Squad. And soon it'll be Vladimir Koslov. Somewhere, someone is crying.

Me. At the thought of that feud.

Anyway, back to HHH and his feuds. Rarely does he have a bad feud. No, seriously. By and large they deliver in the ring, and he can be relied upon to cut an effective promo and make his opponent look good.

Or maybe that sentence should read 'can sometimes be relied upon...' and end with 'make his opponent invariably lose'.

You see, this is where I'm with the vast majority of fans but then I look through the smoke to see what really needs to be appreciated.

I'm not HHH's biggest fan. Far from it. Actually, it's even further away than that. But this is where a lot of people lose their objectivity.

The fact that he is married to one of the heirs to the WWE empire counts against him in the eyes of many fans and employees alike. In my opinion, there is no way that an active member of the roster should be involved in booking so much of the show. How can they ever claim to be objective, no matter how much so they may be?

There is no way that he should be able to (hypocritically at the time) lecture the rest of the roster as to 'earning their right' to climb the card through hard work and dedication at a time when he was phoning his work in.

There is no way that he should feel the need to be the top guy all the time. He is now at a level where he doesn't need to be -- both financially and artistically -- as he is pretty much over no matter what he does.

And there is no way that DX should be brought back again -- although that's a pointless request as anyone with a passing interest of next month's Raw will know.

But, as I said, this is where objectivity kicks in.

He, when motivated, is tremendous in the ring. Just look at his recent PPV outing with Jeff Hardy for evidence of that. And regardless of what the majority of fans would love to have seen, then was not the right time for Jeff to win the title (I hope he does at some stage next year, maybe WM if he wins the Rumble? Just a thought.)

He was the driving force behind the new (and improved) DX and helped to spearhead the WWE's attitude era. He was the figurehead of Evolution, which was the mainstay of Raw for a long time.

Has he (and Shawn) unnecessarily buried people like The Spirit Squad, Cade and Murdoch and, more recently, MVP? Yes. Has he let his ego and his insecurities impede certain peoples' progress and halt their pushes? Yes. Is this right? No!

But does that mean he should be cast aside as a performer or overlooked for his contributions to WWE? Definitely not.

Listen to the response he gets when he comes out. You can argue all you want that it's because he's been force fed to the fans, but ask John Cena if he receives the cheers that Vince craves for him.

HHH is over and respected. HHH is a vital (and necessary) cog in the WWE empire. HHH is a good performer in the ring, when motivated, and has had numerous great matches on PPV and free TV.

He is worthy of our respect as a performer, if not necessarily for all of his actions.

And for that reason, he should not be underappreciated by the fans for much longer.

Now, I expect that this will hit a raw nerve with many fans, and it won't be necessarily my most popular piece ever, but c'est la vie. If you have any feedback or comments for me, feel free to email me – garymehaffy@hotmail.co.uk – and I'll get back to you.

P.S. – I have plans for a column in several weeks time looking at some ex-members of the WWE roster, where they are now and how they left their mark in the company. I'm hoping it will come together well. Watch this space………..