

Irv Muchnick on the Wikipedia hacker

After a four-month fight with Georgia and Connecticut authorities, Irvin Muchnick — author of and the forthcoming *Chris and Nancy: The True Story of the Benoit Murder-Suicide and Pro Wrestling's Cocktail of Death* — has acquired the full video of the Stamford police interrogation of Matthew Greenberg, the 19-year-old wrestling fan who reported the death of Nancy Benoit on Wikipedia a minute past midnight on June 25, 2007, some 14 hours before the family's dead bodies were discovered.

Wrestling Babylon

The VHS tape is being prepared for upload to Muchnick's blog, Wrestling Babylon News, <http://muchnick.net/babylon>. Here are some common questions and answers.

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What does the video show?

See for yourself when it's up. I'll blog analysis in due course.

Does it cast doubt on the official ruling of the deaths of Chris, Nancy, and Daniel Benoit as a double homicide/suicide by Chris?

No. Nor should it. Chris committed the crime.

Then why the fuss over what has been reported as just an ugly coincidence in Greenberg's Wikipedia posting?

Both the Fayette County sheriff's investigators and the media let slide the 30-hour gap after Chris Benoit's early Sunday morning text messages to Chavo Guerrero and Scott Armstrong. The sheriff also didn't ask WWE's security consultant, Dennis Fagan of Andrews International, about a blatant error in his Monday afternoon report to 911, which led the authorities to the crime scene. (Fagan emphatically stated more than once that the texts were "this morning.")

Guerrero and Armstrong have avoided my phone calls and messages, but the former, at least, has had two contradictory explanations for why WWE officials supposedly didn't know about the texts under Monday afternoon. In July 2007 Guerrero told Greta Van Susteren of Fox News that he just didn't connect the dots in Benoit's cryptic messages pointing to his physical address in unincorporated Fayetteville. Later, however, Guerrero and Armstrong would say something very different to friends and journalists: that they'd had text reception problems in Texas and didn't get Benoit's messages until the following day.

And Chavo's two explanations are more than contradictory; both of them are transparent nonsense. There's no way that he didn't talk to someone else about Benoit, and there is no way flags didn't go up at all levels of WWE, when Benoit no-showed the pay-per-view in Houston on Sunday night, at which he was booked to win the championship of the company's ECW brand. (He had already been excused by talent relations from the house show in Beaumont on Saturday night after telling Guerrero, Armstrong, and others that Nancy and Daniel were violently ill from food poisoning.)

OK. But if a "fixer" was involved before the cops were on the scene, then why didn't anyone get rid of the growth hormone and other drugs that were all over the place in Benoit's house?

A fair point. Anyone reading my blog knows that I haven't accused WWE of sending in a fixer. I'm just following the evidence where it leads — and, especially, where it should lead but doesn't. I wouldn't be raising these questions if the sheriff hadn't doctored the telephone logs and failed to retrieve any of the voicemail from Chris and Nancy's cell phones. I wouldn't be raising these questions if security chief Fagan hadn't told 911 that Benoit's texts were 24 hours later than they really were, and if the sheriff's lead investigator, when asked about that by me, didn't maintain that he hadn't even noticed. Above all, I wouldn't be raising these questions if WWE hadn't aired the Benoit tribute on "Monday Night Raw" at a point when company officials already knew full well, for at least several hours, that the crime was a double murder/suicide by Chris, not a crime by Nancy or a random third party. My blog has covered all these areas. My book will include details not yet published and will further develop this theme.

Bear in mind the larger narrative. Hundreds of pro wrestlers have died prematurely; Benoit's rampage was only the most sensational manifestation of a generation-long phenomenon. Benoit snapped, most likely, from depression caused by long-term steroid abuse (forget the straw-man chatter about "roid rage"). He also had brain damage caused by serial concussions. Add to that mix marital strife & perhaps some "X factor" fatal predisposition & "all of the above." In response to its greatest damage-control crisis ever, WWE's corporate culture of total control over its talent put into motion the most sophisticated PR and spin money could buy. The process goes a long way toward showing why, without reforms, more Benois are sure to happen.

So where does the Wikipedia angle fit in?

We need to look for at least three things in the Stamford PD interrogation of Greenberg. If these elements aren't there, we shouldn't be making excuses & leave those for the most defensive and knee-jerk WWE apologists. Instead, we should be asking, "Why aren't they there?"

1. Because he lived in Stamford, a thorough and professional interview of him demanded persistent, probing, in-depth questions & not a single dismissive one & about his and his family and friends' possible connections to WWE.
2. Because his Wikipedia edits had included removal of ethnic slurs from Chavo Guerrero's page (in what may have been the only act of kindness in the pattern of Wiki vandalism by Greenberg and friends), there is a legitimate reason to wonder whether Greenberg knew or was acquainted with Guerrero or someone close to Guerrero. Did the detective even ask?
3. Because the fact of Nancy's death was accurate & even if just a lucky guess, a sick joke, or an irresponsible escalation of rumors & the record is incomplete without precise information on the wrestling Internet sites, discussion boards, etc., that led Greenberg to post that at Wikipedia. In the snippet acquired earlier from Stamford PD by the Fayette County sheriff, which mysteriously cuts off after three minutes, Greenberg says, "I forgot the exact, like, sites" where he saw the rumors. (See my transcript at <http://muchnick.net/babylon/2008/07/16/benoit-wikipedia-hacker-police-video-snippet-part-1-&-transcript/>.) Yet this was all of four days later, during a period when the Benoit crime and the Wikipedia edit were 24/7 media obsessions; how credible is that? The possibility is remote, or less, that Greenberg had any serious direct involvement in the events of June 22-25, 2007. But the odds that he had some level of useful information improve considerably when you frame the question of whether he was, perhaps even inadvertently, a conduit of something chillingly accurate in the cyberspace virtual information chain.

Don't you feel bad for this kid?

Only to a point. I held off on posting the three-minute clip I've had since July. Before sharing the primary-source interrogation with blog readers, I wanted to make sure we had the full context.

From the beginning I've left Greenberg repeated emails at an apparently good account, plus a voicemail on his cell phone. I contacted one of his online social-networking friends from the University of Connecticut & the circle who, according to Internet sleuths, did all kinds of Wikipedia mischief. Some of that stuff & pornographic fantasies at the Stacey Kiebler page, calling basketball's Ron Artest "a piece of @!\$%# nigger!!!!!!", and so forth & went beyond good, clean juvenile fun. (Also: Greenberg is not a juvenile & though a Stamford police captain, in his first conversation with me, tried to insinuate that Greenberg was 12 or 13, rather than 19.)

In addition, I left voicemails for Greenberg's father, who, by the way, works for the city of Stamford. That fact & as much as WWE's obvious political clout in Stamford & may help explain why I had to get practically to "the courthouse steps" of a hearing at the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission before the cops would agree to release this clearly public record.

I don't know the guy from Adam, but actions have consequences. I'm writing a book about the human fallout of a billion-dollar industry. I'm not running for Miss Congeniality.