

Gary Mehaffy talks Matt Hardy

Well, another day, another column.

All this off the back of several WWE releases in the last week or two. I was surprised by the Elijah Burke release, but he's been so far off the radar he's turned into a B52. Estrada disappointed me a little too, but he apparently wants to wrestle more and it just wasn't going to happen in WWE. Maybe he should have looked at Matt Striker's example and run with his verbal skills.

Now onto the main show.

Almost.

Before I get on to looking at Matt, let me make a few comments off the back of my last column about HHH.

I got a good lot of feedback about it, some positive, some negative and some downright baffling, but one thing that I noticed was this – the piece turned up on several random websites, which is fair enough, IF CREDIT IS GIVEN! Some of the sites that it turned up on gave no credit to this website (F4wonline.com) and made it look like I was writing exclusively for their site. As I said, this is not me getting all defensive about my work, far from it, but there should be a crediting of the appropriate site. And anyway, why anyone would want to say this work was theirs is anyone's guess!

NOW we'll return you to your usual programming.

I want to look at Matt Hardy in respect to him being undervalued by WWE – although much of it may be due to the petty nature of the business!

Some of the more knowledgeable fans among you will know when Matt made his (unofficial) WWE PPV debut along with his brother Jeff. You'll get ten points for those of you who email me and give me the right answer! This is like Cyber Sunday – interactive!

Matt and Jeff signed their full time contracts in 1998 and soon after went about gaining a cult following. The Hardy Boyz style was unlike a lot of what was going on in the company at the time – they were influenced by a lot of high flyers and brought this style into their matches. They acquired Michael 'PS' Hayes as their manager, leading to some six man tags with 'The Brood' of Edge, Christian and Gangrel. After winning and losing the tag titles, they had the dubious distinction of winning the Terri Invitational Tournament (you figure it out) by winning a tag team ladder match. More on these later.

In early 2000 they had a new manager – long time friend (and girlfriend of Matt) Amy 'Lita' Dumas. They collectively became known as Team Xtreme and were an incredibly over trio. In the next several months they had what would become a seminal feud with Edge/Christian and the Dudley Boys. Tables, ladders and chairs would never be the same again.

Truth be told, I always had a soft spot for Matt when, after a short lived Hardy Boyz split, he was transferred to SmackDown, became Matt Hardy: Version 1, espoused the benefits of Mattitude and has his own lackey – MF'er Shannon Moore (another long-time friend). I thought that he was superb in this role, especially when he had to lose weight to get a cruiserweight title shot. The storyline itself, Matt and even Shannon were great at this time. He was beginning to show himself as a versatile performer with great charisma, and one who was finally getting out of his brother's shadow.

Before I leave the Hardy Boyz, I want to say what many people knew but few admitted – Jeff may have been the flashier, more popular brother, but Matt was the glue that kept the team together. Matt was technically sound as well as versatile.

Then disaster struck. Hardy was set for some time off for a knee operation and in storyline terms he was written out via Kane. Lita was aligned with Kane, albeit unwillingly, and it all looked good for when he came back.

Until Lita began a real life affair with their mutual friend Adam 'Edge' Copeland and Matt was released. He had posted some blogs on his site about it, and when WWE caught wind of it they looked at the scenario and, after figuring that Matt was the most expendable of the trio, fired him.

He talked to TNA, who at this stage had Jeff under contract, but ultimately chose to go back to WWE. He tried to mislead the fans, by saying his return to Raw when he attacked Edge and promoted ROH was a shoot. No one bought that. And, sure, he turned up on Raw, gave a Vince inspired speech about why he was let go months before which smacked of him being, deep down, a WWE mark.

Inevitably he was second best in their subsequent feud, which yielded only one real super match – that being the loser leaves Raw match. Matt was transferred to the blue brand in October 2005. He entered an entertaining feud with Gregory Hems in 2006 before teaming on and off with Jeff on ECW, Raw and on a Survivor Series team.

In mid 2007 he began a feud which may have helped elevate him in the eyes of management – that being one with MVP. They went from being reluctant tag partners to feuding after MVP turned on him. He was moved to ECW in the draft in June of this year and eventually won the title in the ECW scramble match at Unforgiven.

In the WWE he has held the tag titles 8 times (1 WCW, 7 WWE), the U.S., Intercontinental, Hardcore, Cruiserweight and European titles once each and the ECW title once (he’s the current champion).

He has held (obviously) every title in WWE except for the WWE or World titles. He was, has been and is again over with the fans. He has been involved in some of the greatest matches in WWE history (TLC). He is a good ring technician who has worked hard to improve his interview technique (it kind of disappeared after he dropped being Version 1). And, if nothing else will sway you, he has had a good match with Mark Henry. Now, how many people can say that?

The thing is this – Hardy has the support of the fans, sometimes without having a decent push from the office. He was needlessly buried in the feud with Edge, despite it being one that casual and smart fans alike wanted to see succeed. You would almost have thought that Vince was showing him who was boss. I know, I know, Vince would NEVER be that spiteful at the detriment of his business.

Yes, that was sarcasm.

Some saw his transfer to ECW as a demotion (and perhaps internally it was viewed that way) but he has not allowed it get him down – on the contrary. He has approached it with vigour and is using it to help bring an air of seriousness to the title. He, along with Finlay, should be used to help develop the young/inexperienced talent on the third brand, but he should not be left to languish there.

I may be going out on a limb here, and run the risk of being ridiculed, but I could see him as a future WWE or Heavyweight champion on Raw or SmackDown. For those of you who doubt, ask yourself this – did you ever expect to see CM Punk as champion?

He has been around the WWE for years, and yet the fans still react to him – he is not viewed as a stale act hanging on to previous glories. This is a plus in my book. He has worked hard to develop his connection with the fans (leaving his worked shoot stuff to the side). Again, another plus. He is dedicated to the WWE, rightly or wrongly, as seen by him turning TNA down and working through a couple of injuries as we speak. Yes, you guessed it, another tick. And he has managed to work his way back from losing his girl to his best friend – and who can blame him for moaning about it? The guy was heartbroken at the time – to being ECW champion.

Do you see my point? He may not be unappreciated by fans but he definitely was in the eyes of the front office. Now, more than ever in the last 6 years, is the time for someone to kick start the cheers of the casual fans that have been turned off WWE in droves. Can Matt help plug that gap? I think so. Not on his own obviously, but as part of the WWE Universe.

By being on ECW he could easily be reintroduced full time to either roster and not feel like a rehash (and I know, I know, it’s not like the brand extension had been treated seriously, but that should help him when he’s moved – note that I said when, not if). And by being on ECW he has shown his dedication to the WWE cause, and has had several good and well received matches. A proper feud between Matt and a heel Finlay has great potential, and could pull in other guys on the roster.

There is even an obvious storyline to be written here – and perhaps he could even win Money in the Bank at WM and go on at SummerSlam to challenge, say, Jeff for the title? Now there’s a feud that would write itself.

Here’s hoping that management continue to show their confidence and faith in Matt and that fans will embrace both Hardys as singles headliners the way they did as a tag team – now that would be something for the brothers who used to wrestle in their back garden.

Whether you agree or disagree with me, or simply know that answer to my pointless trivia question at the start, feel free to email me – garymehaffy@hotmail.co.uk – and I’ll get back you sooner rather than later.

Oh, just in case any of you have been unable to sleep at night – I still intend to write my piece about a couple of ex-WWE wrestlers and how they influenced the industry, but we’re having trouble tracking some of them down! All in good time hopefully.

