

# A-Town Smackdown

The Georgia Dome hosts the Super Bowl of wrestling

**W**RESTLEMANIA, which comes to Atlanta this month for the first time, has me feeling downright sentimental. My dad loved the World Wrestling Federation, and he took me to see the superstars when I was growing up in Missouri. When I think of WWF's WrestleMania, I think of my dad. I think of the spectacle, of the foam World Heavyweight Championship belt I got at a gift shop. I think of my favorite characters—Hulk Hogan and the Million Dollar Man, Demolition and Bret Hart. I think of jumping up and down and screaming in front of my TV, and wrestling my friends near dusk on a backyard trampoline in our old neighborhood.

In Atlanta, Ted Turner was building another rabid fanbase by airing Georgia Championship Wrestling, which was succeeded by World Championship Wrestling. During the seventies and eighties, matches were taped locally, producing their own legends such as Sting, Dusty Rhodes, and Lex Luger. Shows often aired right before Braves games. Real and imagined rivalries between WWF and WCW—including the infamous renegade “New World Order” invasion of WWF by former WCW wrestlers, itself funded by WWF—stoked allegiances. Now both organizations have been acquired by Worldwide Wrestling Entertainment, so Atlanta is no longer hostile territory for WrestleMania. On the eve of the big event, it was a thrill to talk to (and about) a few of my old heroes. —JUSTIN HECKERT

**WRESTLEMANIA XXVII**  
APRIL 3,  
GEORGIA DOME,  
WRESTLEMANIA.COM

## Ted DiBiase

AKA “THE MILLION DOLLAR MAN”

WWE Hall of Fame inductee, 2010 • WM IV–IX

➤ “I had no idea that I would be headlining *WrestleMania IV*. To be a part of it was a thrill for a kid who grew up in this business [his adoptive father, “Iron” Mike, was a professional wrestler who died in the ring].

When I was walking toward the ring, I thought, ‘Dad, I wish you were here to see this.’ I tease some of the younger guys today: I was the main event at *WrestleMania*, but how many of you have wrestled *three* matches there? *WrestleMania IV* was a tournament, and I wrestled Jim Duggan, Don Muraco, and then Randy Savage in the last match [one of the best matches in WWE history]. Without a doubt, that really launched the character, launched my career; then I was off and running. Every *WrestleMania* today has

become a spectacle. I grew up in this industry. At the beginning of my career, I had an apartment in Stone Mountain and wrestled in Marietta and Atlanta in Georgia Championship Wrestling and Mid-South Wrestling. It was like an apprenticeship—you learned the basics, you learned them in the little towns that no one remembers. Wrestling is different now. And *WrestleMania* has become the Super Bowl.” ■

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## Robert Remus

AKA “SGT. SLAUGHTER”

WWE Hall of Fame inductee, 2004 • WM VII, VIII, XIV, X-Seven

➤ “As world heavy-weight champion, I was the main event in L.A. against Hulk Hogan in *WrestleMania VII*. There was nothing quite like it. I was wrestling

as an Iraqi sympathizer. Being a former drill instructor, [my act] didn’t sit well with the fans. At that time, the Iraqis had overtaken Kuwait, and Vince [McMahon, WWE owner] said, ‘I want you to go on the premise of the USA is weak, and they’re letting a little country like Iraq do all these things, and we can’t do anything about it.’ I studied hard, read the papers every day. It was pretty hellacious. [The story line] was

burning hot. Hogan came in the picture, being the all-American hero that he was portraying at that time. Vince told me, ‘Go with it, and if it gets too far over the edge, I’ll pull you back.’ I took Hogan’s shirt and put it on a flag and said, ‘This represents America,’ and set it on fire. I brought the Iraqi flag into the ring. I couldn’t even go through airports—when I landed, they’d have an escort waiting for me. They put armed guards at my

## Joe Hennig

AKA “MICHAEL MCGILLICUTTY”

Current WWE Superstar • Son of WWE Hall of Fame inductee Curt “Mr. Perfect” Hennig, whose credits include WM VI–X

➤ “Every time I think of my dad, I think of him in Las Vegas, outdoors at Caesar’s Palace, at *WrestleMania IX*, against Lex Luger. Everyone was dressed up as Greek gods. When I was young, we’d have family over for every pay-per-view WWE event at our house. I knew it was live, and I was nervous. When his matches were coming

house, took my children to school. Willie Nelson was at *WM VII* [to sing “America the Beautiful”], Regis [Philbin] was there, Alex Trebek; none of them would come near me. I thought, ‘This is entertainment.’ The

crowd was very hostile. When [Hogan] defeated me, it was hard for me to hear the announcement, people were so elated. I was the ultimate villain; there will never be another villain like that.” ■

up, I’d go outside and throw the ball around. I’d get scared for him. I was hoping he wouldn’t get injured. If he lost, I’d be devastated. But when my dad was whooping someone’s ass, I would be like, ‘Heck, yeah!’ I only cared about him. Everyone around me loved Hogan and [Brutus “The Barber”] Beefcake. I’d be in the crowd, and my dad . . . would come out, and I was the only one cheering. I couldn’t figure it out. I was eight. *WrestleMania* is the biggest stage. Dad would talk about how big it was. When he got inducted in the Hall of Fame, we got to travel to accept the award with the whole family. It was so cool to see, when we got onto the stage, how many people he actually impacted, how many people cared about him as a performer, how good of a talent he was. We were onstage, accepting the award at *WM XXIII*, and the crowd was chanting, ‘Mr. Perfect!’” ■

