

She's so bad
Britney on DVD
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TV Sunday

Wrestling's next big thing grew this size chasing cows. Got milk?

By MICHAEL GILTZ

OK, everyone knows professional wrestling is a physically demanding, arduous task.

Detractors used to call it "fake"; supporters, including World Wrestling Entertainment head Vince McMahon, now call it "entertainment."

But while the body slams can hurt, surely the outsize personalities of the wrestlers themselves, the pain-hungry demands for vengeance are just silly fun.

Right?
Not according to Brock Lesnar, aka "The Next Big Thing." A 25-year-old former collegiate wrestling champion who joined the WWE (formerly WWF) in March, Lesnar loves to rile up the crowd, taunt his opponents and use the infamous "Brock Lock" to inflict pain.

"I'm myself pretty much," says the 6-ft., 4-in., 295-lb. Lesnar. "My character in the WWE is me; just multiply it a little bit."

So when World Wrestling Magazine describes a childhood wrestling match in epic terms and says "At the tender age of five, Brock Lesnar was already a monster," it isn't just hype?

"I was a big bully as a kid," laughs Lesnar from his home in Minneapolis. "I was always a big kid and I was always trying to run the playground. I was always fighting and doing all kinds of stuff. It was just in me; I didn't back down to anybody. I would bend the rules."

That aggressive stance has paid off. Lesnar is already a star on "WWE Raw," airing Mondays at 9 on TNN. He competes tonight at 8 in "Vengeance," a pay-per-view match from Detroit in which he goes up against Rob Van Dam.

And, most importantly, on Aug. 25 he fights for the WWE undisputed championship at Nassau Coliseum on Long Island, less than a year after making his professional debut.

Lesnar's opponent will be determined tonight at "Vengeance," during a three-way match between The Rock (who's already slated for a sequel to *The Scorpion King*), the Undertaker and Kurt Angle.

All three are big stars, so Lesnar's match is a chance to join them as a hot property, a wrestling icon, and a valuable addition to an industry that's lost a little heat since its late-'90s peak.

It also means a chance at money for an athlete who devoted his life to a sport that offered little fame and no possibility of financial reward.

"I feel very fortunate," says Lesnar. "A lot of my friends from college don't have this opportunity and I do. I was blessed with my size and my look and everything and I feel very, very fortunate. Definitely all the years of hard work paid off."

Lesnar grew up on a dairy farm in Webster, South Dakota, so early hours and hard work were a given even as a little boy.

"It's 24 hours a day," says Lesnar. "We had to put up hay and harvest our small grains and milk 120 cows."

But Lesnar increased his workload tremendously by pursuing collegiate wrestling — all for a sport that gets precious little attention by the media.

Lesnar achieved his ultimate goal — the NCAA title in his weight class — and says frankly that WWE fame and fortune pale in comparison.

"That means more to me than any pay-

He's Brock — the new Rock



Lesnar is more

"I was a big bully as a kid," says 295-lb. Brock Lesnar (right and in the ring, above), an aggressive stance that has paid off for the WWE star.

day in the WWE," admits Lesnar. "There's only a select few people in the United States that can say they're NCAA champions. Even though it's only a little plaque — that's all you get — to me, it's in my heart. It's with me forever."

Then he was faced with a crucial decision. Should he pursue a gold medal at the Olympics, attend a tryout for professional football (Tampa Bay and Washington had invited him to give it a shot) or listen to the offers of the WWE?

When it really came down to it, it wasn't really a hard decision to make," he says. "I like being center stage and I like wrestling. Even though it's a different kind, I still get the same feeling when I walk through the curtain."

Now, unexpectedly, Lesnar is actually making money from a sport he pursued simply for the love of competition.

He doesn't pay any attention to the T-

shirts, posters and other merchandising, and doesn't even get a kick seeing himself on TV.

"I'm very focused on living day to day," says Lesnar. "I have long term goals I want to achieve: I want to save my money so I can live a great life."

"I'd definitely like to give back to amateur wrestling, whether it's coaching somewhere. Or it might be me giving back to this business. For the moment, he's happy to settle for a full night's sleep, now that his three-month-old daughter Mya is letting Lesnar and his fiancé Nicole snag more than two minute's rest at a time.

"Yeah, Mya's pretty good," says Lesnar, forgetting for a moment he's a fierce, pain-mad warrior for the WWE.

There's no wedding date as of yet, so when will Nicole make a decent man out of him? "I don't know," laughs Lesnar. "I might not ever be a decent man."

