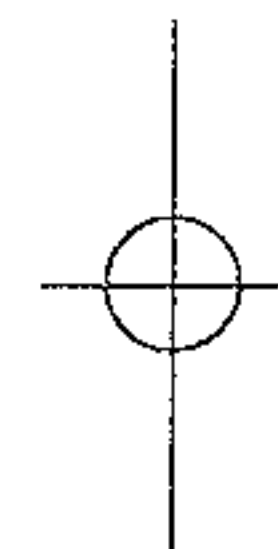
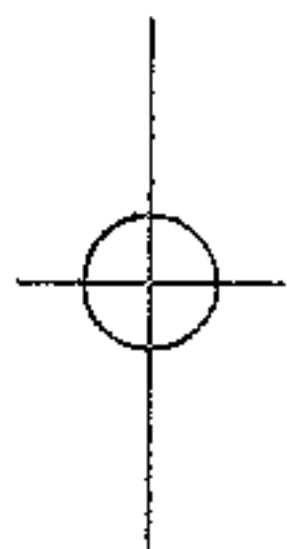


## Foreword by Phil Mushnick

I SHARE AN UNINTENDED BADGE of honor with Irvin Muchnick: if Vince McMahon and World Wrestling Entertainment ever put on paper something similar to President Nixon's "enemies list," both Irv and I would be on it, top ten.

Pro wrestling, by industry design, and hard journalism are oil and water. Irv, like me, only far more often, focuses on this industry's death trap, not its magic show. That's one reason why I hope *Chris & Nancy* gets widely read — and, more important, acted upon.

Before I go any further, a clarification, one both of us have made dozens of times over the past dozen years: beyond our professions, Irvin Muchnick and Phil Mushnick are not related. Irv's paternal grandparents and his then six-year-old future uncle, Sam Muchnick (who would become the legendary St. Louis promoter and long-time president of the National Wrestling Alliance), docked at Baltimore, where their surname was transliterated to "Muchnick," with a "c." I'm a third-generation Staten Islander (my ancestors came over on the



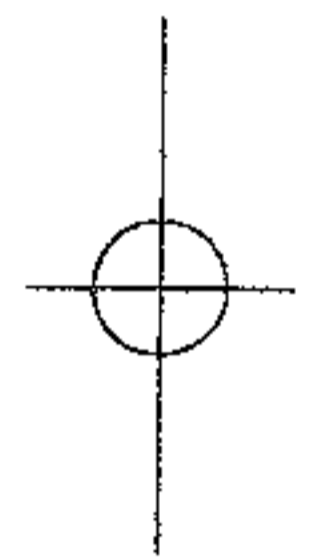
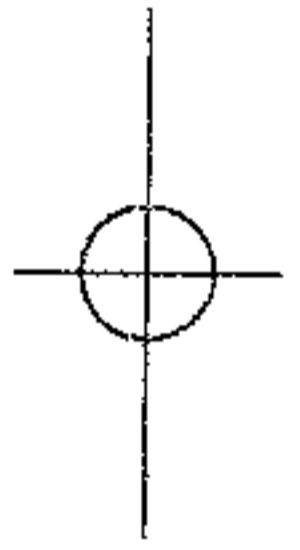
ferry), and no one's quite sure (or much cares) why or when Mushnick became Mushnick.

Irv was living in New York in the early 1980s when I became the media sports columnist for the *New York Post*. At the time there were sports anchors on local TV newscasts — Warner Wolf on WCBS, Spencer Christian on WABC — who frequently aired WWF clips as legitimate sports highlights. Irv was the first of my readers to warn me that my mere outrage could not contain this phenomenon.

And indeed, by 1985 Andy Warhol and the downtown Manhattan demimonde were seizing the proverbial fifteen minutes to proclaim wrestling the newest manifestation of “camp” art. In March of that year, when McMahon produced the first *WrestleMania* on pay-per-view, two of his key shills were Dick Ebersol (the future president of NBC Sports and co-impresario of the disastrous XFL football league) and Bob Costas (having taken a break from his otherwise well-earned position as the “conscience of sportscasting”).

Three years later Irv Muchnick published a devastating profile of the sick Von Erich wrestling family of Texas (one son died accidentally from prescription drugs, one was a drug suicide, two shot themselves to death). The piece would be selected for the anthology *Best Magazine Articles: 1988*; not best wrestling magazine articles or best sports magazine articles, but the best magazine articles of any kind. “Born-Again Bashing With the Von Erichs” was the first serious attempt at legitimate long-form narrative journalism on what quickly became a pandemic of occupation-related deaths in American junk entertainment.

A few years after that, now living in California, Irv

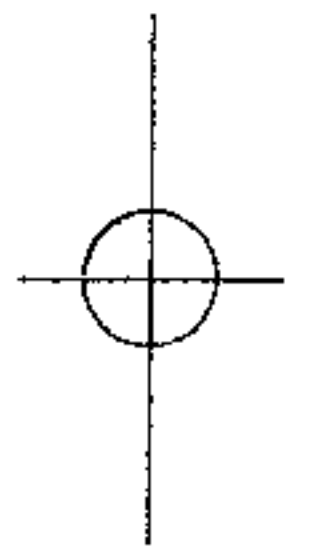
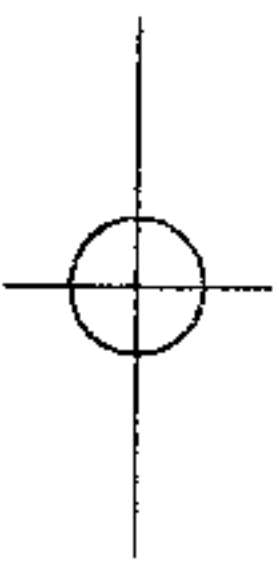


stayed at my house while he tracked down the cover-up of how Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka probably killed his girlfriend in a Pennsylvania motel room in 1983. The Von Erich and Snuka stories would be included in Irv’s 2007 collection, *Wrestling Babylon*.

In the 1990s, as night follows day, scandal wracked WWF. The original “mark” doctor, George Zahorian, got busted by the feds for distributing steroids like Tic Tacs. McMahon himself was indicted (but acquitted at trial). His company, competing in a race to the bottom with Ted Turner’s deeper-pocketed World Championship Wrestling, clawed back with R-rated programming, which glommed the crotch-grabbing wit of “Degeneration X” onto the perverse family pitch of the Hulkamania era.

In the course of our long friendship, Muchnick and I haven’t always seen eye to eye. He can’t always be right, ya know. But I’ve leaned on him for information, insight, and inspiration far more often than he has on me. I simply appreciate and admire Irv’s work for projecting a vision of wrestling’s dark side in a way that transcends the subject. His larger canvas isn’t wrestling. It’s how all of late-empire America has been *wrestlingized*.

In my *Post* column, Vince McMahon’s sleaze mill gets less attention than it once did. This fact does not reflect that there are bigger fish to fry so much as it acknowledges this sad triumph of wrestling values throughout sports and culture. In years to come, for example, we’re certain to see more and more veterans of baseball’s steroid era dying young, like Ken Caminiti and like the hundreds of wrestlers both before and after him. The ESPN TV, radio, and magazine brands — not to mention sports talk in general, and even national political dis-



course — all subscribe to the puerile “attitude” playbook pioneered by WWE. As a critic, I no longer need to note that fringe programming foretells the content of the mainstream. The future is now, and crude is in, and not likely to fade.

Meanwhile, from his own perspective, Muchnick is still throwing facts into the fire, still connecting the dots between the sacred cows of respectable society and the WrestleWorld they collude with. I’m glad he is. The Benoit murder-suicide was one of the most sensational crime stories of 2007, and it cried out for the scrutiny of someone with a longer attention span and more intellectual integrity than the local authorities, the media, and Congress brought to bear on it. If you can read what Irv has dug up and continue to turn your head, then your powers of denial exceed mine.

