

WHO SAYS TOUGHMEN DON'T WEAR TIES?

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I am a toughman.

I am scrappy and quick and, at times, full of rage, which is why I briefly considered entering the Toledo Toughman contest, which takes place Feb. 8 and 9.

I really thought I had the body for it - 6 feet and 135 pounds of pure power. Unfortunately, compared with the people who signed up for the competition, I'm only about half a toughman.

I have never viewed such a competition, but I have heard things. I've heard it helps to be big and bear-like. I've heard those guys always keep the little, quick guys at arms length before beating them silly.

Last year, I entertained similar thoughts of getting in on the action. I started exercising, getting off the couch and doing a few push-ups during commercials.

All I lacked was an identity. I enlisted some friends to help me come up with an intimidating name that would strike fear into opposing toughmen. I had in mind something catchy, something like "The Pain Train" or "Tank."

Instead, one friend suggested Goldberg. I'm not exactly sure why this seemed intimidating to him. He was very high on the body-crushing abilities of the professional wrestler and the fact that we both are Jewish, but it's not exactly what I was looking for.

Another friend suggested "Death." Not "Death Machine" or "Legion of Death." Just "Death." Maybe it was more of a prediction than a nickname. A swift death was precisely the end many foresaw for me.

Surely they had no knowledge of my history as a toughman. I could beat up my little brother with the best of them. In fact, I'm undefeated. My parents are convinced that I stopped picking fights when my brother, Michael, turned into a muscle-bound monster. I think they're all lucky he hasn't made me mad lately.

Anyway, I ended up heeding the advice of others last year and decided to experience the contest as a spectator seated safely in the Toledo Sports Arena.

Walking around in a dress shirt and tie after work, I knew it wouldn't be easy to fit in. Toughmen don't wear ties; they use them to bind the legs of high school honor society students.

My idea was to try and camouflage myself in a larger group. I had little success recruiting such a crew at work, but continued my efforts at a nearby bar. An hour later, after much taunting and numerous adult beverages, I had a posse of five friends practically chanting: "Toughman! Toughman! Toughman!"

We arrived at the arena five minutes after the first bell was scheduled to ring and we were amazed. The place was packed, and more people were trying to get in.

We sent a member of our gang into the hoard surging toward the ticket windows and surveyed the crowd. Lots of long hair, leather jackets, and tight pants. There was a general nod of agreement that I made the right decision in not entering the contest. Most of the audience members could have knocked me out.

Then the word came back: no more cheap seats. All that were left was ringside, and that was a bit too close for us. It would have left no money for beer, and what is a Toughman without his beer?

We left full of adrenaline, but disappointed. I won't let that happen again this year.

As we exited into the drizzling rain and encountered the crowd still on its way in, a friend of mine threw up his arms and wailed, "I can't believe you got thrown out of the Toughman for fighting!"

It was a KO, honest.

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[< previous](#)

[next >](#)