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Arm-Wrestling With the Monster

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Palatine, Ill.

I'm going to tell you about Cecil Moon, Big Dave Robin and Lee Ann Krough, the best there is, but first a few words about a contraption they use that's a boon to mankind if ever there was one.

It's called the Monster, and it has mechanized the ancient sport of arm-wrestling. No longer must competitors put up with opponents' sharp fingernails, sweaty palms or other unpleasant aspects. They snuggle their elbows into the adjustable, padded platforms on the table's opposite corners, grasp the metal arms and go at it. What could be fairer or more sanitary?

Needless to say, this gizmo's inventor has big plans for it. He's Jack Barringer, of Ames, Iowa, and he previously earned his living selling water beds, among other things. Last Saturday night, dapper in a

On Sports

tuxedo, he was at the Charlie Club, a health club and bar in this Chicago suburb, overseeing the fourth annual Monster Arm Wrestling National Championships.

As big-biceped contestants of both sexes strained in combat over his devices in a glass-enclosed racquetball court to the cheers of their loved ones, Mr. Barringer proclaimed the emergence of a new, big-time sport. "We're taking arm-wrestling out of the saloons and making it respectable," said he. "Today we're national. Next year we'll be international. Don't be surprised if you see us on TV one of these days. We're working on a deal."

Mr. Barringer allowed himself to be persuaded to tell how he conceived his machine. "I was in a lounge in Hastings, Neb., having a drink with a guy," he said. "There was a brass rail along the bar, and he started twisting it. It got on my nerves, so I started twisting it the other way.

"Pretty soon we were putting quarters on top of the rail to see who could twist them off. The other guys in the place wanted to play, too. I figured, this is a wonderful game, and when I got home I

put some handles on a pipe gadget and showed it around. Everybody said it was great; but that an arm-wrestling machine would be greater. So I invented the Monster."

Having produced the thing, Mr. Barringer set his mind to its proper distribution. "I could have sold them to bars, but that would have oversaturated the market in no time. It'd burn out in a year, like Pac-Man," he said. "I saw the Monster as a sport, not a machine, so I formed the World Monster Association. We make the machines available only to our distributors, who use them to hold tournaments in their areas. They pay me \$10,000 for their franchises, and earn their money in entry fees and rentals from the places where they have them. Most of 'em tell me they're doing fine."

Mr. Barringer said there are Monster franchises in 41 states and seven foreign countries—Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland and Ireland. He said he's negotiating to put one in Malaysia. He's planning his first world championships for next year, and hopes to sell it to television.

It doesn't bother Mr. Barringer that another arm-wrestling championship, the annual classic in Petaluma, Calif., is already a TV fixture. "I don't want to rap Petaluma, but our sport is a much fairer test of strength," he said. "Once people try it, they never want to go back to the old hand-to-hand way."

The promoter saw Saturday's event here as a large step forward for his enterprise, because it was the first national Monster tournament staged outside of Iowa. It drew a field of more than 200 competitors, most of them outgoing types, and the spouses and friends they brought along weren't exactly sedate either. Their beer consumption alone made the day a success for the host club.

But despite the high decibel level, it was a well-behaved crowd, and except for the fellow who tossed a chair in the direction of a referee after he'd lost a disputed decision, the contestants also comported themselves with relative gentility.

The stars of the show were the above-mentioned Moon, Robin and Krough. Cecil Moon is a blond-bearded screen printer from Tama, Iowa, who holds national Monster crowns both right- and left-handed. He

topped the left-handed open class Saturday. Moon is a special crowd favorite because he roars like King Kong after his victories. "This is a tense sport, and it helps me let off steam," explained the 6-foot-2-inch, 220-pounder.

Dave Robin was the meet's champion of champions by virtue of his win in the right-handed superheavyweight class. A lithographer from Wayne, N.J., he stands 6-foot-2-inches tall and weighs 275 pounds. He wears dark-rimmed glasses and did a good imitation of Clark Kent by emitting hardly a grunt while polishing off seven sizable foes enroute to his triumph.

Nobody in the place, though, could match the record of Lee Ann Krough, a 35-year-old mother of four from Van Horne, Iowa, who won her fourth straight national title in the women's open division. She's been arm-wrestling for five years, and says she has lost just once, "to a little, bitty 135-pound gal at the Kansas State Fair. Of course," she noted, "it didn't help that I threw my arm out about 15 seconds into that match."

The jovial Mrs. Krough, who is 5-foot-10-inches tall and weighs 217 pounds, entered her first arm-wrestling contest after she'd read about it in a newspaper. She said she gets her strong hands from her job as a corn sorter for Funk's Hybrid in her hometown, and, slapping an ample hip, declared that having "the biggest tush in Iowa" makes her hard to budge.

She says the sport "is about as much fun as you can have with your clothes on," but she has a practical use in mind for the \$350 that went with her latest title. "It's going for a new water softener," she said. "The stuff that comes out of the wells in my part of Iowa looks like tea. You sure can't be a champ drinking it raw."