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## **Blame cable for wrestler's death, fellow performer says Abdullah the Butcher says ratings war had nothing to do with Hart's fatal mishap, but questions remain over what caused WWF pro's fall**

**BYLINE:** JOHN SAUNDERS The Globe and Mail; With a report from Canadian Press

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Owen Hart's death was stupid and pointless even by pro wrestling standards, but risks are part of the game, said Larry Shreeve, the former Windsor, Ont., auto worker known in the ring as Abdullah the Butcher, the Madman from the Sudan.

"Well, let's put it this way," the semi-retired Mr. Shreeve said yesterday from his Atlanta restaurant, Abdullah the Butcher's House of Ribs. "Any time a man comes down on a cable, it's dangerous. Anything with a cable is dangerous, but that's what they get paid for. You've got lots of these guys making a million dollars, so what else can you do?"

Mr. Hart, brother of Bret (The Hitman) Hart and youngest of Calgary's Hart wrestling clan, fell five storeys as he was being lowered to the ring for a World Wrestling Federation pay-per-view match in Kansas City, Mo., on Sunday.

It remained unclear last night what piece of equipment broke or became disconnected. Witnesses said Mr. Hart's chin and neck hit the top rope. TV viewers missed the fall but saw the other matches after a 15-minute pause.

Mr. Shreeve, who gave his age as 58, said he did not make that kind of money and would not allow himself to be suspended from a cable. Aerial entrances, like the one that killed the 33-year-old Canadian wrestler, are nothing new, he added.

"A long time ago they used to bring guys down, like, on cables, and they used to have cranes that used to take you up for a cage match or something. . . . They did it all over. I don't know about Toronto. They never did it in Montreal or those places, but they used to do it in Atlanta, all over."

In a cage match, a cage was suspended above the ring, he explained.

He rejected the thought that Mr. Hart was asked to risk his life because of a ratings war between the WWF and World Championship Wrestling, or because of competition from such upstarts as extreme fighting and ultimate fighting, in which rules prohibit eye-gouging, fishhooking (snagging an opponent's mouth with the thumb) and not much else.

"You cannot blame the promoters. You cannot blame the wrestlers," he said. "The person you've got to blame is the one who didn't fix the cable."

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In Toronto, Howard Winston said physicians worry about danger in all sports but there are extra commercial pressures as you come move from sport to spectacle.

Risk-taking draws crowds, said Dr. Winston, who heads a North York sports medicine centre. "I think all of us sort of have that side to us. We sort of shy away, turn our heads, don't want to see it, and at the same time we're keeping one eye open and watching it. Why? I mean, that's human nature."

But he sees a distinction between "offering maximum of entertainment dollar value and crossing that line to playing outside the rules, and there should be certain guidelines within entertainment. You even see rock stars perform stunts on stage that potentially are damaging."

Owen Hart's death was "clearly just a fatal and tragic error," he said, but performers "are constantly pushing the envelope, pushing the line to see how far they can go" to make audiences say "'wow, that was really something. That was really entertaining.' "

Although what killed Mr. Hart was akin to a circus accident with nothing to do with actual wrestling, there is a tendency to try riskier and riskier stunts, he said.

"It's just to dramatize things. It's just to add more sex appeal, and, again, there's no harm in doing it if the risk of injury is not great."

However, some stunts entail very small chances of very great harm, he said. "You just hope people understand the risks and decide not to take them."

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