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Death in the ring; Professional wrestler dies in fall in front of 14,000 stunned fans

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The World Wrestling Federation is investigating a deadly accident involving one of its own, a 33-year-old scion of a Canadian wrestling family who plunged 50 feet into the ring.

Owen Hart, who wrestled under the nickname "Blue Blazer," fell Sunday night as he was being lowered from the ceiling during a sold-out WWF event at Kansas City's Kemper Arena. The event was on pay-per-view national television, but the fall was not shown.

Hart was given CPR inside the ring as the announcer haltingly told the audience that the incident was not scripted. The wrestler was pronounced dead at a hospital.

"We at the WWF are saddened by the tragic accident that occurred here tonight," said Vince McMahon Jr., the president of WWF. "We have no answers as to how this happened yet. We will shortly."

Some witnesses said the cable snapped, while others said it appeared Hart was somehow disconnected from it. They said his head snapped backward when he hit a turnbuckle, one of the padded pieces of metal that hold the ropes together in each corner of the ring.

"We thought it was a doll at first," said 15-year-old Robert McCome. "We thought they were just playing with us. We were really shocked when we found out that it was no joke."

Hart, the younger brother of Bret "The Hitman" Hart, a star with rival World Championship Wrestling, fell as his match introduction was about to begin.

"He was moving pretty fast (as he fell)," said Jesse McDonald, who was sitting near the ring. "His chin and neck hit the top rope."

The arena fell into silence.

Commentator Jim Ross repeatedly told the 14,000 fans that Hart's fall was not scripted, as professional wrestling matches openly are. Hart was known for his acrobatic stunts.

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"I didn't see it, but from what I can gather, somebody slipped up," Hart's 83-year-old father, former wrestler Stu Hart, said from the family home in Calgary, Alberta.

"You don't get up 60 or 70 feet in the air without being properly anchored down," he said. "I haven't talked to Vince McMahon yet, but somebody was careless or missed something or else Owen would still be here."

Hart's fall happened in the second part of the event called "Over the Edge. " The first part of the event, "Sunday Night Heat," was televised live on the USA cable network.

The TV audience was being shown a montage of Hart's clips when he fell and the camera panned through the crowd while paramedics worked him. The show stopped for 15 minutes before Hart was taken away, and the matches resumed.

All seven of Stu Hart's sons entered professional wrestling, with Owen joining in 1989. He had recently told a magazine that he was planning to leave wrestling when his contract was up.

Survivors include his wife, Martha, and two young children.

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Stunt turns tragic: Paramedics try to revive wrestler Owen Hart after he fell 50 feet into the ring as he was being lowered on a cable from the roof of the Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo., Sunday night./ TODD FEEBACK / Associated Press

Photo

mug of Owen Hart, aka "Blue Blazer"

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