

TAG-TEAMING

with his alter

About once a month, Charles Jones, a Unionville High School graduate, puts on tights and steps into the ring as "Rockin' Ronny," a title-shot contender in the East Coast Wrestling Association

By Dan Harvey Staff Writer

Talk about yer Godless acts! Of all the gutless, underhanded Commie-pinko, Pearl Harbor maneuvers to perpetrate!

While Charles Jones, 24, had his back turned, the "Russian Bear" came off the top rope, fists filled with thick chain, and brought heavy metal thunder down on his rockin' head.

And we're not talking about just any Russian bear; this was none other than the infamous Ivan Koloff himself.

Yes, that Ivan Koloff: bearded with shoe-brush bristles and bald as the tip of a nuclear warhead; brows furrowed by latitudinal scars that, like inverted braille, tell the story of 30 years of spilled blood staining ring canvas; a cannon-barrel-chested man who wrestled the heavyweight belt from the hands of "Living Legend" Bruno Sammartino.

Yet, that's the kind of roughneck Jones chooses to associate with when assuming his alternative identity as "Rockin' Ronny" — ring warrior, protagonist of the proletariat; a high-kicking, body-dropping champion of the good cause.

And make no mistake: "Rockin' Ronny" isn't an imaginative figment dreamt up by a passive Walter Mitty-type. That chain *really* came down on Jones's

head as he stood near the edge of a "squared circle." Koloff fell with the force of a 280-pound man coming off the top ring rope — brandishing the iron weapon — and the links *really* made impact with Jones's scalp — a molar-grinding collision of steel and skullbone.

So, how did this easy-going, former Doe Run resident find himself in such bad company. Split personality, perhaps?

Well, there is a sense of a "dual persona" at work.

And it involves all concerned. Consider: After the match, "Rockin' Ronny" makes his way out of the ring, then down the aisle past frenzied fans and, finally, back into the dressing room — the same quarters where the evil Ivan makes his retreat after his dastardly deed. When Jones/Ronny gets backstage, the first one to confront him is none other than his attacker. But all the "Russian Bear" is concerned about now is his victim's welfare.

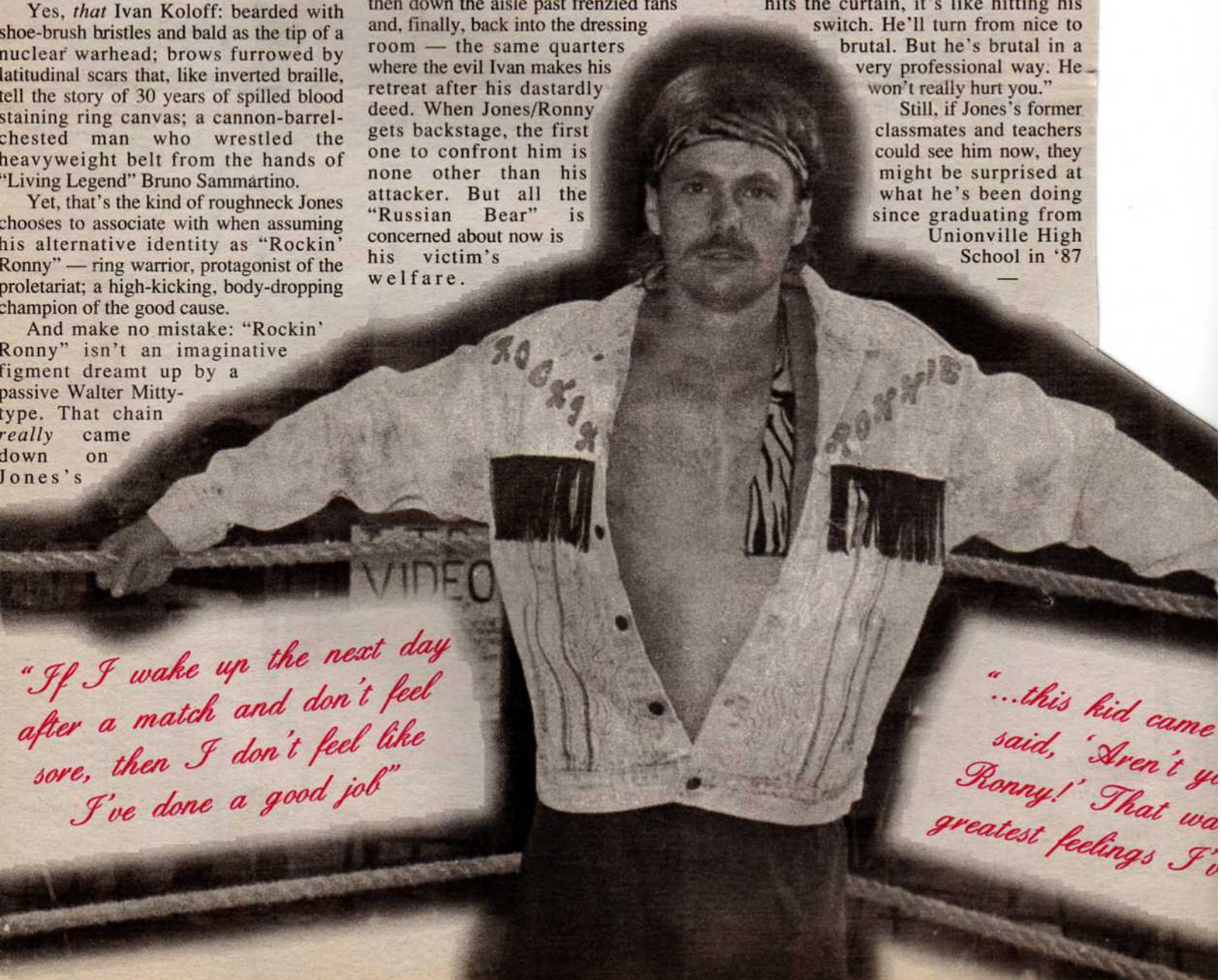
Once out of the spotlight, Koloff lapses back into his actual voice, a speech pattern laced with a heavy Canadian accent.

Canadian?

And Koloff asks, with sincerity, if Jones/Ronny is hurt. But all is okay. You see, Koloff knows exactly how to hit a fellow wrestler with a chain, knows just where to place the blow to avoid pain and injury. He's a veteran, a professional; seemingly ham-fisted, yet very precise.

"He's one of the most professional guys I've ever met," said Jones. "And he's also one of the nicest. But as soon as he hits the curtain, it's like hitting his switch. He'll turn from nice to brutal. But he's brutal in a very professional way. He won't really hurt you."

Still, if Jones's former classmates and teachers could see him now, they might be surprised at what he's been doing since graduating from Unionville High School in '87



"If I wake up the next day after a match and don't feel sore, then I don't feel like I've done a good job"

"...this kid came said, 'Aren't you Ronny!' That was the greatest feelings I've

But, actually, his ring exploits are only a sideline for him. Jones — Chuck, to his friends — has a day job in construction with Dupont Merck. He only assumes his alter-ego about once a month, sort of like a werewolf on the occasion of a full moon. Jones is what is called a “semiprofessional wrestler,” as opposed to the “professional wrestler” of cable television notoriety.

He belongs to a Delaware outfit called the East Coast Wrestling Association, an organization that serves a two-fold purpose. It’s main function is to promote charity wrestling shows in the Delaware Valley, with all proceeds serving humanitarian causes. But, for some wrestlers, it’s a springboard into the world of big-time professional wrestling — you know, the WWF, “Wrestlemania,” all of that. It’s a sort of what the minor leagues are to baseball’s major league.

The athletes involved in the association can be classified into two categories. In one group are the members who have no professional aspirations, but just want to serve a good cause while having a good time. They include bankers, teachers, policemen — people from all walks of life. They wrestle about 10 to 12 times a year (like Jones), and only for the organization.

On the other side, you have ambitious

get, and with other organizations, too. They're the ones who grew up watching wrestling on television during the '70s and wanted nothing more than to emulate their idols. They remain focused on the ring; wrestling is their career.

Also making occasional appearances in the promotions are grizzled ring veterans like Koloff — or Captain Lou Albano, Abdullah the Butcher, other familiar names.

The association was created by former wrestler Jim Kettner, who stages the productions and recruits likely ring prospects. Jones got involved when Kettner's brother happened to spot him horsing around with some friends and suggested he might try out for the ECWA. Jones was intrigued by the idea, and that led to his "audition."

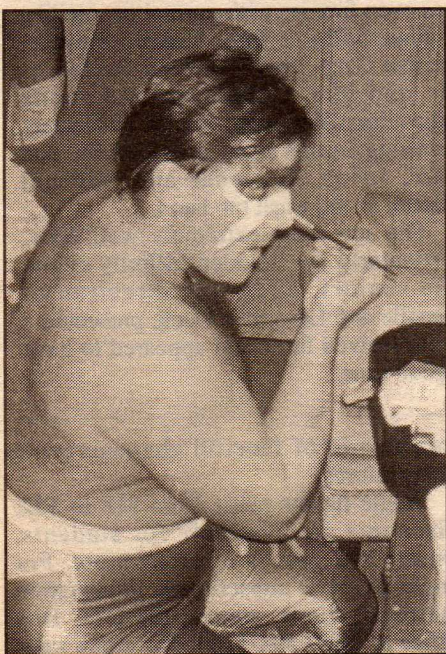
"Jim asked me to do a few moves — body slams, dropkicks, stuff like that," recalled Jones. "And he liked the way I executed the moves."

And that led to Jones's training period. Kettner never lets a wrestler enter the ring without proper, rigorous preparation.

"He took me under his wing in a student-teacher relationship," said Jones. "And he's an excellent teacher."

An ECWA wrestler has to be of a rugged bent. Though this style of wrestling is often advertised as a "sports exhibition" — staged entertainment, in other words — the matches involve full body contact, as well as acrobatics.

"Some of us do some really



A fellow wrestler applies his "personality" before a match.

Photo by Dan Harvey

