

# FIGHTIN' TALK

NEIL AND PRAY:  
Yours truly fears  
the worst as Mark  
shows what he  
could do if he  
got really mad

Pictures:  
HUMPHREY  
NEMAR

## A weight off my mind

OUR FEARLESS GRAPPLER GOES ONE-ON-ONE WITH A MONSTER

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TOUGH: At the 1996 Olympics, left, and above, typically fierce

**WRESTLING** superstar Mark Henry certainly makes an impression.

Any fella who can bench-press 600lbs and is on first-name terms with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bill Clinton is going to.

The 30-year-old took advice from Arnie about whether he should defend his title of the World's Strongest Man.

And Bill – a big wrestling fan when he grew up in America's South – was still in the White House when he told Henry how distraught he was at the injury that ended the big man's dream of Olympic weightlifting gold.

The 380lb Texan giant is still plenty strong, able to pick up your 16st correspondent like a loaf of bread.

"If I completed this move – a running power slam – you'd be through that table," he grunted as we posed for a picture. I believed him.

### Lifting

Just before Henry's second weightlifting Olympics – his injury-blighted appearance at Atlanta in 1996 – Vince McMahon had spotted him on the Oprah Winfrey show.

Vince was on the phone immediately and Henry, a wrestling fan all his life, did not hesitate.

"He saw me and thought I was a natural for wrestling," he says. "He took time out of his schedule to keep up with sports, and I got the benefit."

"I'd always been a fan. I went to see one show when I was a kid and Andre The Giant was there."

"I reached out over the railings to touch him and fell over. Andre stopped to pick me up. It was such a

## EXCLUSIVE

thrill and I told all my schoolfriends about it." Vince signed Henry on a lucrative 10-year contract and the former fan's dreams looked set to become reality.

Soon he was in the Nation of Domination, his most enjoyable angle so far as a pro grappler.

But life in World Wrestling Entertainment hasn't always been plain sailing for the strongman.

He's had more than his fair share of daft storylines in his career, none dafter than his romance with ageing Mae Young.

That was controversial enough. But the story's ending, when Mae gave birth to a plastic hand, just left watchers scratching their heads.

Henry – then billed as Sexual Chocolate – has no regrets, though.

"I had an absolute blast doing it. I got so many e-mails from people, especially old women, telling me to dump Mae

and get together with them! I know a lot of people may not have liked the way it ended, but to put it to rest there was nothing else to do."

After training at Ohio Valley Wrestling, the WWE's development outfit, he was soon back as the World's Strongest Man.

Unusually for wrestling, this was no gimmick – he did bury the opposition last year in a major strongman event.

The tough training and real competition restored his appetite. "Lifting the

apparatus was hard but getting back into competition was easy," he says.

"I had to tell myself I wasn't an entertainer any more, I was a competitor. And Vince never doubted me."

Now Henry is debating whether to defend his title in the spring, a conversation he's had with Schwarzenegger.

### Cocky

And, when his ankle injury is mended, he's looking forward to returning to ring action in February.

Henry already has a list of whom he's after. "I'm keen to see how Brock Lesnar might do in the Royal Rumble," (screened exclusively live on Sky Box

Office tomorrow), he reveals. "And I'm curious about Paul Wight (The Big Show). We had a little thing going before Raw and Smackdown split and I wasn't able to get to him."

"When I get back I want to pick up where I left off. Right after I get the Guerreros, that is."

The cocky Mexicans inflicted the ankle injury that has put Henry on the sidelines for so long.

Now Big Show is not a shy or retiring man. The Guerreros are famously full of themselves.

But Fightin' Talk wouldn't mind betting they make themselves scarce when Henry gets back on the scene.