

Local attorney body slams trademarks for wrestling world

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BY JASON WEBBER / THE BLADE

Is wrestling real or fake? The question may never be definitively answered, but Toledo attorney Mike Dockins has built a body slam of a career as a trademark lawyer for professional wrestlers.

Sitting at his desk at the Shumaker law firm, Mr. Dockins leans back in his chair, surveying his office, which is a shrine to professional wrestling, both past and present. There's a bright blue wrestling boot signed in silver Sharpie by Ric Flair sitting on top of a glass trophy case filled with autographed WWE and AEW wrestling action figures.

He counts wrestling legends Chris Jericho, Tito Santana, and Eric Bischoff as clients and friends, and in about an hour he's scheduled to talk to Arn Anderson.

The Evansville, Ind., native is known from coast to coast as the Gimmick Attorney; he even owns the trademark on that term. His job is to help professional wrestlers trademark their names and identities.

How did a patent and intellectual property attorney end up becoming the wrestling world's go-to guy for legal advice?

"It's 2018. My kids are in bed, my wife is in the shower getting ready for bed and I'm lying on the couch watching WWE Raw. And I had this thought about the intellectual property rights of wrestlers. The WWE doesn't allow its wrestlers to own their own stage name. It always bothered me. I get it from a business sense, but I don't like it. So I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if I could help these guys?'"

Always a passionate wrestling fan, Mr. Dockins took his idea and ran with it, quickly discovering there was a legal void that he could fill. He began reaching out to local wrestlers and began helping them trademark their name and wrestling identity.

A piledriver of a break came in 2019 when his friend Conrad Thompson, host of several popular wrestling podcasts, introduced Mr. Dockins to a bunch of wrestlers on the then-fledgling network AEW, and word of mouth about Mr. Dockins spread amongst the wrestling circuit.

"There's a saying in wrestling — telephone, telegram, tell-a-wrestler," Mr. Dockins said. "The word of mouth just caught fire."

Fast forward to 2021. Mr. Dockins now boasts more than 80 professional wrestling clients, including about half of the current AEW roster, featuring superstars like Christian Cage and Billy Gunn. He also hosts a wrestling podcast called *Wrestling with the Law*, and he gets to go to work every day at Shumaker and talk about his lifelong love for pro wrestling. Mr. Dockins credits his bosses at Shumaker for allowing him to pursue his passion and the law firm has sponsored several AEW events.

And what about the notoriously litigious WWE chairman Vince McMahon? Mr. Dockins smiles at the mention of the biggest wrestling promoter in history.

“Vince does know who I am. I’ve poked the bear a few times,” Mr. Dockins said. “I’ve dealt with his legal team a few times. But I think he respects me. It’s just business. WWE is very reasonable to deal with.”

Mr. Dockins has never had to go to court against WWE, but he’s worked out a number of deals behind the scenes at the federation that he says worked out well for his clients.

Justin Carnes, who wrestles under the names Conrad Kennedy and Krimson and runs Skull & Bones Professional Wrestling and Fitness at 444 W. Laskey Rd., has worked with Mr. Dockins and can’t praise his services enough.

“Mike is seen as ‘One of the boys’ in pro wrestling circles,” Mr. Carnes said in an e-mailed statement. “I have steered a few of my friends in need of representation his way. Mike genuinely cares about his clients and is also sympathetic to everything that comes with being in this strange business, the good and the bad.”

For Mr. Dockins, his job is a dream come true.

“I’ve gotten to do what I wanted to set out to do, which was help the individual wrestlers understand what they can do to protect themselves in a business sense.”