Lucha Libre wrestling is wildly popular in Mexico

by Hiram Soto

Body slams, leg drops and drop kicks.

This scene might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Mexican culture, but Lucha Libre has a special place in the hearts of Mexicans.

LORDS OF THE RING - Wrestler Dos Caras Jr. (Two Faces Jr.) signs autographs before a match at the Tijuana, Mexico, Auditorium. CNS Photo by Charlie Neuman.

LUCHA LIBRE - Chaos reigns in the ring during a bout of Lucha Libre wrestling in Mexico. CNS Photo by Charlie Neuman.

Masked wrestlers, such as El Santo and Blue Demon, were national heroes and cinema icons in the '50s and '60s, battling everything from mad scientists and vampires, to ugly monsters and extraterrestrial beings.

The eternal battle of good versus evil continues to thrive in today's "cuadrilateros," or wrestling rings, where every imaginable character fights for a small space of Mexico's consciousness. After all, Mexico is probably the only country in Latin America where Lucha Libre is regularly, and sometimes prominently, covered in the sports sections of newspapers and television programs. Latinos have imported a small taste of their passion for Lucha Libre to the United States, inspiring cartoon shows such as "Mucha Lucha!" and movies such as "Nacho Libre." Several wrestlers, including Rey Mysterio Jr., enjoy plenty of success in the United States.

The Tijuana Auditorium, which is about a seven-minute drive from the San Diego border, features fights most Fridays at which entire families enjoy a two-hour show while snacking on Mexican candies and appetizers.

Sometimes you'll see grandparents treating their grandchildren to a fight. At least that's what they say. Often the older folks are the ones who scream the most at the wrestlers, demanding body presses, power bombs, and backbreakers, perhaps reliving their own childhoods when their heroes ruled the land.

WHO'S WHO

Wrestlers are divided between "rudos," bad guys who break all the rules to win, and "tecnicos," who represent everything that's good in human nature. There is no middle ground.

The five top tecnicos are:

- El Hijo del Santo

- Mistico

- Rey Misterio Jr.

- Volador Jr.

- LA Park

The five top rudos:

- Dr. Wagner Jr.

- El Hijo del Perro Aguayo

- U-ltimo Guerrero

- Cibernetico

- Blue Demon Jr.

Legendary wrestlers:

- El Santo

- Blue Demon

- Perro Aguayo

- Mil Mascaras

- Canek

- Rayo de Jalisco

- Huracan Ramirez

Tickets usually start at about $5 dollars but can go up depending on the fight.

Fights are featured on television Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Galavision and Sundays at 9 p.m. on Fox Sports en Espanol.

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