

GET READY TO SHUCKLE... Meet Colt Cabana. Professional wrestler. Chicago Jew.

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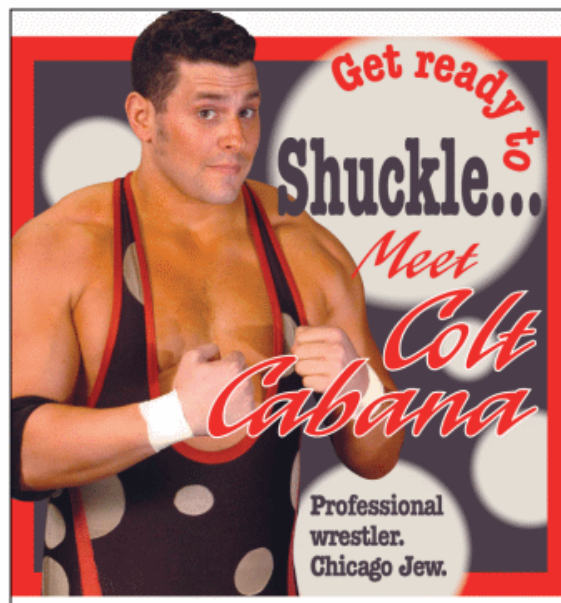
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GET READY TO SHUCKLE... Meet Colt Cabana. Professional wrestler. Chicago Jew.

By Pauline Dubkin Yearwood (05/22/2009)

He's Colt Cabana, "Classic" Colt Cabana, Colt "Boom Boom" Cabana, Chris Guy, Matt Classic, Colt Daddy or Scotty Goldman.

He has endured, according to a Web site, "being strangled with a metal coat hanger, bleeding from numerous chair shots, having Drano poured down his throat, being piledriven off the ring apron through a table and getting his head crushed between a ladder." And much, much more.

He's 29 years old and has traveled all over the world.

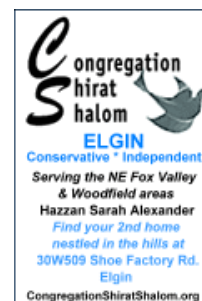
He is really just a nice Jewish boy from Deerfield, and his real name is Scott Colton.

Welcome to the wonderfully wacky world of professional wrestling.

For those who don't know what WWE and ROH stand for or what a Friday Night SmackDown is, pro wrestling today is as much about the show as about the blows. While the matches are not entirely fake, the wrestlers' personas and the grudges they hold against each other usually are. Wrestlers wear colorful costumes and makeup and have ring names like Homicide, CM Punk and Johnny Storm. Chairs are thrown so often they make Jerry Springer's show look like PBS.

Enter Scott Colton, who outside of the ring comes across as a polite, articulate, eager-to-please young Jewish guy with a sweet smile and beefy upper arms.

"I'm just a kid from the suburbs who had a different dream than



everyone else" is the way he describes himself on his MySpace page (myspace.com/coltcabana), and that seems to be about right. He grew up in Deerfield where, he says, "there are lots of Jewish families." The family belonged to Lakeside Congregation in Highland Park, where Colton had his bar mitzvah. He has a brother, Greg, who is director of animation on Fox network's "Family Guy."

Scott's infatuation with wrestling began early. His father, Steve, used to watch it on TV. "I wouldn't say he was a huge fan; he was a casual viewer, but I remember him having it on TV from when I was three or four years old, and that image stuck with me forever," he said in a recent interview. "I never let go of it."

To become a professional wrestler like those he saw on TV "was my plan from day one," he says. "As a child, everyone else had their dreams but eventually they let them go. The people in my neighborhood all went on to become doctors and lawyers, but it just made sense to me to pursue my dream as a wrestler. My brother loved to draw and I loved to wrestle, and we both went and pursued these crazy dreams."

He used his bar mitzvah money to pay for his early wrestling lessons, training first with "two guys in this little rinky-dink gym on Irving Park. The gym's not there any longer, but to this day I remain good friends with my trainers," he says.

Meanwhile Colton was growing up to be a big kid (he's 6-foot-1 and weighs 233 pounds) and played football, baseball and basketball in high school. He didn't go in for wrestling in school because, he says, "I saw amateur (wrestling) and pro completely differently, and I always knew I wanted to be a pro wrestler."

His parents, Steve and Marcia, were supportive, but set down two ground rules: He could not start wrestling before he was 18, and he had to graduate college. Colton complied, going off to Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, where he eventually graduated with a degree in marketing. He played one year of football there because he thought it would look good on his resume as a wrestler, but after freshman year "I couldn't take not pursuing my dream any more," he says. That summer he began to train seriously.

He returned to college in the fall. "I had to graduate college if I wanted to continue" wrestling, he says. "That was the only way my mom would let me do it. So I did that for all my summers, winter breaks, thanksgiving breaks, weekends while living in Kalamazoo. I would travel back to Chicago to train. It was hard. I had just come off Division 1A football, and to me this was 10 times harder."

Meanwhile Colton began developing a character, a must in the world of pro wrestling. "It can't be done overnight, unless somebody sticks you with a specific tag," he says. "For me, it took years to find out who I was in the ring. You have to travel and do a bunch of shows."

His ultimate persona, he says, is "kind of like a standup comedian. My wrestling is very fun-loving and humorous - a fun-loving kid who doesn't take himself too seriously in a sport of giants, villains, people who portray that they want to hurt people as much as possible. I'm the complete opposite. I enjoy myself, and people remember that. I put a smile on people's faces, and that's what sets me apart." On a fan Web site, he describes himself as "a jokester who loves to have fun both in and out of the ring" with an "innovative, entertaining and unconventional wrestling style."



Marc Kruskol, a wrestling fan and public relations professional who was so impressed with Colton's skills in the ring that he decided to help promote him for free, agrees.

"He definitely has a unique story," Kruskol, who grew up in Skokie, says. "His character is along old-school (an older style of wrestling) lines, but he mixes some of the newer stuff. He's a pretty good-sized guy but he still moves around the ring very well for a big guy, which isn't that common."

Colton's trainer came up with his wrestling name. Colt Cabana, he explains, incorporates his last name and raises echoes of the Barry Manilow song "Copacabana," which in a remixed version Colton would later use as a ring "entrance theme."

In 1999, within three months of graduating college, he began his professional career with Ring of Honor, one of several major wrestling companies. There "I was a big-time rookie," he says. He was soon placed in a "rivalry" with a better-known wrestler named CM Punk, now one of his best friends, as well as with other wrestlers. He became an ROH favorite and stayed in the organization until 2007.

It was a period when he also traveled extensively, wrestling in England, Scotland, Germany, France, Ireland, Canada, Puerto Rico and Japan, some 20 tours in all. "I traveled the world learning my craft," he says, calling ROH "the classiest and best pure wrestling promotion around" and his happy wrestling home for more than seven years.

Colton didn't have many Jewish wrestling role models, although there were a few, including Bill Goldberg, a star in the late '90s with another organization, World Championship Wrestling. Sometimes known simply as Goldberg, he became well known for his pride in his Jewish identity, and fans would sometimes wave Israeli flags during his matches. Colton is just as proud of his Judaism and never fails to mention it in his online bios and chatty messages to fans.

He has encountered some anti-Semitism in the wrestling world, he says, although generally none directed at him personally. "People who didn't know I was Jewish would express their hatred for Jewish people, and it was hard to sit there and take that," he says, adding that he never tried to hide his Jewish identity. Still, he says, "professional wrestling is such a circus and sideshow, there's so many different people, that for the most part everybody is accepting of everybody else. Being Jewish I'm different from most, but everybody for the most part is accepting of it."

Kruskol, the former Chicagoan and wrestling fan, who is Jewish himself, says that "there are a handful of Jewish pro wrestlers but some don't want to mention it. Colt is outspoken about it."

In 2007, Colton's Jewish identity came to the forefront as never before as he took a new step in his wrestling career. He was signed by the WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment), the largest and most famous of American wrestling organizations, an entertainment company that promotes wrestling on television, the Internet and through live events. There he made his debut on a popular event called WWE SmackDown as Scotty Goldman.

It's not unusual for a wrestler to use different names with different wrestling companies - Colton once competed under the name Chris Guy, the real name of his trainer, who went by Ace Steel. The real Chris Guy wrestled in a 2004 match under the name Scott Colton.



The WWE gave Colton the new name when he joined. "They realized they had a Jewish member of society and maybe they could capitalize on it, which I wasn't against," he says.

The company publicized

Colton's arrival this way on its Web site: "SmackDown's up-and-coming Superstar, Scotty Goldman, covers the WWE in his new Video Original series like a schmeer of Nova cream cheese covers a poppy-seed bagel - with bite. 'What's Crackin' with Scotty Goldman' premieres today as WWE.com's newest 'Kosher' series, featuring the titular Goldman kibitzing about recent happenings in WWE. Some of this Superstar's matzo ball-flavored musings are sly, some are caustic and some are downright schmeer campaigns irreverent enough to make a rabbi blush. Oy! To see what that Goldman mensch is kvetching about this week, watch WWE.com's latest Video Original series, 'What's Crackin' with Scotty Goldman.' Mazel tov." The show later was renamed "Good as Goldman."

Colton stayed in the WWE for two years; by most accounts, the company never found the right promotional slot for him, Judaism aside. "I was signed after years of hard work to the WWE, which is the top of the game monetarily," Colton says. "But creatively it wasn't, I was so low on the totem pole."

He was let go in February for unclear reasons, but he has no harsh words for the company or its chairman and majority owner, Vince McMahon, whom he calls "a genius."

"He's made this empire that's worldwide and synonymous with pro wrestling," he says of McMahon. "It was a great experience to be there. Circumstances only allowed me two years, but a lot of people aren't able to get two years there, especially being a Jewish wrestler." He quickly returned to Ring of Honor.

On his Web site too, Colton was philosophical about his release from the WWE, commenting only "SEE YA!!!" and noting that he was looking forward to moving back to Chicago and going to England to fight a wrestler named Johnny Saint. "Goodbye Scotty Goldman. Hello (again) Colt Cabana. Good times, great memories," he writes. He doesn't believe his release from the WWE had anything to do with being Jewish.

Kruskol says that Colton's popularity only increased after he left the WWE. "I was at a show about three months ago," he says. "He had just been released from the WWE and the very next day, he was at another event. The crowd went crazy when people saw who he was. He's popular and very good at what he does. He's just a talent."

"A lot of people make fun of pro wrestling, but there's a real art to it, to be able to tell a compelling story in the ring and have people buy it," Kruskol adds. "People don't want to see a couple of guys play-fighting. You have to be able to tell a story in the ring, the classic battle of good versus evil, and pull that off within 10 or 15 minutes. He is one of the practitioners who's very good at it."

He adds that Colton "is a very nice guy, very charming. He's not one of these blown-up guys physically or ego-wise. It helps to be liked by your fellow professionals because they literally have your life in their hands. People like to work with him, and the hard-core wrestling fans, the ones who really look into the minutiae of everything, like him, and if they like you, you're doing something right. He's very well liked and respected by them and by regular fans too."

Colton's assessment of his own abilities is more modest but basically in agreement. Even though he admits that much of pro wrestling is pure show, he says, "I still see it as a competition in the ring. Whether the competition is to actually beat the wrestler or to put on the best possible show, to me it's still a competition. Of course there's theatrics. You have to draw people in, it's about drawing people in, making money, surviving. If you're going to be a boring wrestler, nobody's going to want to come see that. That's where the showmanship comes in, and I consider myself a great showman."

Along with forming a humorous, good natured persona, Colton made another decision early on that has clearly impacted his career: He does not take steroids and never has.

"I'm proud of being steroid-free, very proud. I don't do any drugs, don't smoke, don't drink," he says while admitting that "steroids have been very predominant in pro wrestling for years."

The WWE, he explains, has a strict policy on steroids, testing wrestlers on a regular basis. "Whether people can duck and dodge it I don't know, but I took urine tests every three months and had someone watching me," he says. "That's in the WWE. Out of the WWE, anybody who's a wrestler, an independent contractor, they have nobody telling them what to do or not to do. That's up to their own discretion."

As for himself, he says, "I'm smart enough to know not to do that. I've wrecked my body enough just with wrestling to want to do that." Steroids, he says, "can give a wrestler an advantage when you look at them, and pro wrestling is a very visual job. Obviously the guy who's 6-5, 225 pounds of pure muscle is going to catch the eye, but if you can't do the job past that, when what good does it do you?" I'm very proud that I can do my job without it."

He adds that even though a lot of wrestling involves theatrics, that doesn't mean that wrestlers don't punish their bodies. "We're trained to learn how to take the falls, there's no secret about that," he says. "If you're slamming a guy to the mat you can only be trained so well" and eventually you're going to hurt him. But the training, he says, "helps us protect ourselves against totally getting knocked out, but it can only help you so much. It does hurt. You build up a tolerance for pain. I was always a big kid, an athletic kid, I played football, hockey, and I did build up a tolerance. You have to be a tough person."

Now he generally wrestles three to four times a week and trains five to six times with weights and cardiovascular exercises. Someone just starting out in wrestling might train three to four times a week and work up to a higher level, he says.

Even so, he has endured much pain, torn AC joints in both shoulders, torn his MCL, a knee ligament, torn his quads, chipped teeth. "There's a big list," he says. "My body aches constantly. I fight through it. Nothing has put me out permanently."

Today Colton, who is single (but with legions of female fans, by all accounts) lives in Wicker Park, sharing a house with several wrestling buddies, and continues to wrestle with ROH and to cultivate his sunny persona. "I wish I didn't have to own a suit," he writes on a fan Web site. "Or shoes for that matter. I like to surround myself with people who like to laugh and don't take themselves too seriously. I live a drug-free and stress-free lifestyle."

His parents, he says, "I think are finally under the realization that I'm almost 30 years old, I've been doing this for 10 years and it's what I want to do the rest of my life.

"They were never against it, they were very supportive," he adds. "They just wanted to make sure I had a backup plan, college, another job maybe. I know tons of wrestlers who don't have the support of their parents, and it hurts them."

His own plans are to continue wrestling indefinitely. The ROH world champion, Jerry Lynn, "is 46 years old and I don't see him stopping any time soon. He's inspirational to me," he says. And one of the first wrestling superstars, Ric Flair, is 60 and still wrestling. "If that's what my body allows me to do," Colton says, "that's what I would love to do."

Scott Colton (Colt Cabana) will appear with the ROH at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 27 at Frontier Fieldhouse, 9807 Sayre Ave., Chicago Ridge. For tickets, visit www.rohwrestling.com or www.tickets.com or call (215) 781-2500.