



December 18, 2009

## Wrestler happy in role of Lizard King of the ring

John Morrison's gimmick stays true to the person

By CHARLES RUNNELLS  
[crunnells@news-press.com](mailto:crunnells@news-press.com)

He's the Shaman of Sexy, the Honcho of Hotness, the Guru of Greatness and the Tuesday Night Delight.

Right now, though, you can just call him John.

Over the phone, wrestler John Morrison sounds much more laid-back than his gum-smacking, poetry-spouting stage persona.

Gone are the sunglasses and fur coats - we assume - and gone are his swollen ego and testosterone-fueled cockiness (although Morrison does answer the phone with a "Yo" instead of a simple "Hello").

Maybe it's because Morrison isn't performing in front of thousands of screaming fans at the moment.

Or maybe he's just tired.

It's been a hectic week, Morrison explains, and the weariness shows in his ragged voice.

"I've been staying super-busy," he says.

Five or six World Wrestling Entertainment fights (including one at Germain Arena in Estero on Monday). An Iraq trip to tape a TV show airing Saturday. And on top of that, he still needs to find time to pump iron.

Frankly, Morrison says, he's exhausted.

This isn't The Palace of Wisdom - the William Blake reference Morrison sprinkles throughout his wrestling matches.

It's more like The Tower of Tired.

"Once you're in front of a crowd, it's easy," he says. "But the hardest part is keeping up the energy in the meantime to do the stuff that's not as fun, like driving three or four hours in between two shows. Or working out on your off day.

"That's the stuff that gets really draining - when you're running on fumes."

Morrison's schedule isn't getting any easier. When he appears at Germain next week, he'll be fake-fighting with other popular WWE SmackDown wrestlers, including The Undertaker, Rey Mysterio, Batista and CM Punk.

But don't worry, wrestling fans. Morrison says he'll pep up when he bounds over those ropes in his trademark fur coat.

"It doesn't matter how big the crowd is, whether there's 3,000 people or 10,000 or 20,000," he says. "All those people screaming and cheering, you can put aside whatever you're feeling and you can just kind of live those 20 minutes in the moment.

"It's high energy. It's one of those things you come to count on."

Arena management expects the place to be packed with about 7,500 people for the Monday show (although plenty of tickets were still available at press time). The WWE hasn't been there in two years.

The crowds get really worked up as the wrestlers ham it up and clobber each other onstage, says Sammy Wallace, the arena's vice president of programming.

"They really cheer their favorites and boo the people they don't like," Wallace says. "They know all the catchphrases and they'll shout them out along with the wrestlers.

"It's definitely a high-energy crowd."

That's what Morrison counts on. It's why he loves the field of sports entertainment, he says, and why he's kept doing it since winning the MTV reality show "Tough Enough 3."

The 30-year-old, 223-pound wrestler joined the WWE in March 2004 and soon made a name for himself as spoiled rich kid Johnny Nitro.

Then, two years ago, he switched from what he calls the "dark side to the good side of the Force." Evil Johnny Nitro became good guy John Morrison (basically Doors singer Jim Morrison with more muscles - right down to the sex-god stylings and love of poetry).

Morrison - whose real name is John Randall Hennigan - says his current character is much closer to his true self than Johnny Nitro. Both of them write poetry, for example. And both are college film majors (Morrison got his bachelor's degree from the University of California, Davis).

"Wrestling has kind of been trending toward the more reality-based," he says without a trace of humor. "That sounds a little ridiculous, but it's true.

"So John Morrison is an extension of who I am as a person - obviously with the volume turned up. Way up."

The fans must like what they're seeing, because the wrestler has been steadily growing in popularity since then.

He even won the Intercontinental Championship belt earlier this year (only to lose it Sunday to wrestler Drew McIntyre, who will also appear at Germain Arena).

Radio DJ Matt Mangas plans to attend the SmackDown show Monday, and he's particularly looking forward to Morrison.

"I think John Morrison is one of the best young talents in the business," says Mangas, 51, of Cape Coral. "He's got the athletic ability, the right look, and most importantly, he's great on the mic.

"He's destined to become a headliner in the coming years - barring injury."

It certainly helps that Morrison's got some cool moves, including his signature "Starship Pain" - a backflip off the ropes, followed by a mid-air twist and a crash into his downed opponent.

The crowds go nuts for that one.

Morrison, of course, counts on that energy.

Once the cheering starts, he says, it's better than a shot of espresso.

The weariness goes away immediately.

Then it's time for the Shaman of Sexy and the Sensei of Style.

Sure, he's sore and tired later. But for those 20 minutes in the ring, it's the best feeling in the world.

"When you're part of a crowd, then you're part of this frenzy of emotion," Morrison says. "And the wrestler is the orchestrator of the frenzy, whether it be to infuriate the crowd, or make them excited or happy.

"Or make them want to see you punch some guy in the face so bad that they're screaming for it."

He lives for those moments.

"Being a part of that - being one of those pieces in that jigsaw puzzle of ecstasy - is part of the reasons I do sports entertainment," he says. "It's definitely a cathartic experience - for me as well as the crowd."

## Additional Facts

If You Go

What: "WWE Presents Smackdown/ECW Live"

When: 7 p.m. Monday

Where: Germain Arena, 11000 Everblades Parkway, Estero

Tickets: \$17-\$67. Available through Ticketmaster or the arena.

Info: Call 948-7825 or go to [germainarena.com](http://germainarena.com).

---