



RAMBLINGS OF A PRIVATEER
Volume One

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By Adam Favel

These are my stories.

You may not agree with what I say.

That's cool.

It's why we have free choice.

But I'm still sharing my stories.

Because they are important to me.

- A.F.

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AN ODE TO BOB SISKA

We all have those moments when we gain clarity about something important. Something that defines who we are and how we want to present ourselves in the world. For many of us, this moment comes early in life—after some event, some person, some thing that catches our eye, our imagination, and ignites a passion inside of us that we don't completely understand in that moment, but we know it just feels right. A form of "love at first sight" for a younger self, where you just know that this thing will become a cornerstone of the person you will become.

For me, this happened at the 1999 Molson Indy Vancouver.

I believe it was 1997 when I first became hooked on auto racing. Spurred on by the coverage of Jacques Villeneuve fighting Michael Schumacher for the Formula One world championship, I started to devour information about the sport and all of its different disciplines. Saturdays and Sundays would have some part of it in front of the television, watching coverage of whatever races came on TSN and later on the SPEED Channel. NASCAR, touring cars, Formula 1 in the early mornings thanks to the time change, and then what was known as the Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) circuit—also known as Indycars. This series, mainly run in North America, was fast, loud, and featured local talent.

And during those days, there was a street race that happened in Vancouver on the Labour Day weekend, just as August ended and September began. The Molson Indy Vancouver (back when such sponsorships were allowed in front of impressionable children) raced through the streets of downtown Vancouver, and my father was able to get us tickets to watch the 1998 and 1999 editions.

One thing about my father is that he has this ability to speak to pretty much anyone. I never understood how he could do it, and as a shy 13-year-old kid who sucked with eye contact, spoke softly, and got stuck in my own head and all of its thoughts, it was something I wished I could do. Because at times it would create opportunities to see

and experience things I wouldn't have had a chance to see.

So, 1999 Molson Indy Vancouver. It rained like hell throughout the weekend. Garbage bag ponchos and umbrellas, and we had seats just before Turn 9 of the course, right after the long straight down Quebec Street where cars were really struggling to find grip. The scream of the engines resonated everywhere, and I absorbed that scream like it was classical music. It spoke to me in a way I didn't understand, but while others covered their ears and grimaced, I smiled and felt calmness and ease. It was literal music to my ears.

Now, during these race weekends, there were two or three other series competing—usually feeder series made up of drivers aiming to make it to the top level. Indy Lights, Formula Atlantic, Trans-Am was there one year (they were so loud). But the cool thing about them was that you didn't need a pass to go into their paddock. The area where they worked on their cars, got prepared for the races, and you could stand there on the other side of the rope as you watched them in all of their matching team outfits, laptops, tool chests, and sparkling race cars preparing for that next session. We walked through, picked up the promotional posters and signed photos advertising the drivers and their sponsors, and soaked in the atmosphere.

Near the end of the Formula Atlantic paddock was this single-axle cargo trailer. Not one you see hauling cars—one you see hauling cargo. Tail end easily 4 feet off the ground. Its sliding door was wide open, a bit of rust on the framing. In front of it was a set of three lawn chairs, a white gazebo that had seen better days to block out the rain, and in front was a white and green Swift chassis race car. No sponsors, no promotional materials, just the car, a tool chest, and those lawn chairs on the pavement of the paddock. In a way it stuck out like a sore thumb in the midst of all of the colors and order of the other teams. But there it was, and both my father and I were interested. And so we went over, and my father started a conversation with the driver.

His name was Bob Siska, and he fielded his own one-car team on the Formula Atlantic circuit. He was 56 years old, had previously played competitive tennis in the 60s, made his money in real estate (and was still doing so), and then decided he wanted to be a race car driver. So he went out, found an older Swift chassis, got certified, licensed, and onto the Formula Atlantic circuit. He wasn't fast, per se—usually you'd find his name at the tail end of the field or DNF'd (did not finish) due to mechanical limitations of his car. But he wanted to be out there, and he decided to make it happen, no matter what anyone thought about it.

My father started a conversation with Bob and his team (a couple of friends and family members) and I just wandered around the car. Tires that were still warm since they'd just gotten off the track. Bits of rubber speckling the bottom of the chassis from taking turns a little too wide. The cockpit was bare, with duct tape keeping wiring harnesses in place and being used to create some sort of padding to cushion the posterior from the bumpy roads of downtown Vancouver that were rushing through him as he drove around the circuit.

Up to this point, I had never seen anyone like this. Up to this point, my understanding was that everyone had this team and support and wore fancy sponsor colors and that was the only way to do things. I never met someone who was trying to do it on their own. I never met an actual privateer.

But there I was, standing in front of this car—an older chassis, no sponsors, no glitz, no glamour, nothing special in any way whatsoever to the majority of people who walked past. But to me, it opened up something so deeply powerful that I am still deciphering it to this day.

One of the crazy things about the current day is that it's hard to have such experiences of mind-blowing impact anymore. Because we always have a way to rationalize it now and understand it quickly due to the overflow of information we have at our disposal. One quick search on

Google or YouTube and you have a clear explanation of what you just saw, and you can rationalize it and continue on your way. We don't give ourselves a chance to digest and understand why something is mind-blowing anymore, because there's just too much to do, too much to see, too much to hear—all of that jazz.

But in that moment, 13-year-old me had just had his mind blown by learning that people like Bob were out there racing, doing this sport I was obsessed with, and were doing it in a way that fit within their capabilities, budgets, and own frameworks, and didn't really care about how others saw them. For them, it was about the experience and experiencing life in a way they wanted to see—not feeling the need to fit into the mold of what the sport wanted them to be. That it was okay to be different and to do things that way as well. That conformity wasn't all that it was cracked up to be, and that there was more than one way to do something.

For 13-year-old me, in that period of life where you're desperately trying to understand who you are, trying to find ways to understand those around you, and learning what your voice sounds like (even though barely anyone ever heard it since I talked so softly and fast), this was like a revelation where the sky opened up, a rainbow popped out, and started spitting out showers of gumdrops and jellybeans. And so naturally I had to learn more.

After meeting Bob, I kept absorbing auto racing—but I stopped watching the front. I started watching the rear of the field instead. Learning about the teams that no one else paid attention to. I cheered for Minardi, hoping they'd get points. Read anthologies and learned about teams from the '90s like Forti Corse, Larousse, and Leyton House. I was watching the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) and followed their privateers like Matt Neal who battled the factory teams even though they had inferior equipment and were even given different tire types to hold them back, per se. One year, the SPEED channel started showing the Dakar Rally, which opened me up to a whole new type of privateer—the one-person teams who raced across the desert not for the win but for the pride of finishing and completing something on their own. The essence of being a privateer just settled deeper and deeper into my soul, and in turn started to make me think more and more about how I could be a privateer in my own life.

Because up to that point, my only goal in life was to be an Olympian. I'd been competing in track and field since Grade 3, and I truly believed I could make it—march into that stadium in the Parade of Nations, wave a tiny flag, compete alongside the best. I worked hard for that. Running laps after school, studying, learning everything I could about my sport and the disciplines around it. I kept this up all the way until the end of university where I

competed as a privateer on my own on the university indoor track circuits and competitions. But when the dream didn't pan out, I still had this privateer thing living inside me. I just didn't know where to take it yet.

And it took years for me to understand why this stood out to me so much. Why that word brought me so much desire and determination. Well, kind of understand, because I don't even think at this moment, at 39 years of age, that I truly understand it all the way.

But here's how I see it right now.

To me, being a privateer is a form of being yourself in its purest form. In that you are relying on yourself, working hard on yourself, and doing your best to be yourself and do things in the fashion that you feel best fits you. It's like a love letter to yourself, telling yourself how you accept who you are—flawed and imperfect—but still believe that you are enough and that you can do anything you put your mind to.

It's being okay with not going in the same direction as everyone else, or looking at things in the same way as everyone else, but allowing yourself to use your own personal lens—based off of the knowledge, experience, and way your brain works—and figuring out your way forward to whatever goal it may be.

It's not doing things for accolades and fame and attention and people clapping and telling you how awesome you are, but doing things because something deep inside of you wants this thing so damn badly that it makes you willing to put your limited time on this earth to make it happen. And not giving too much stock to people's opinions or thoughts about whether you can make it happen, why they think it won't work, or all of that stuff. Yes, you still listen to the constructive opinions and try your best to be open to information that works for you, but you always use that information in a way that fits what you're trying to do, and you don't let the rest of the BS change you or push you away from the path you are going down. You're willing to adapt and change things, but you do this on your own terms, for your own reasons, and through your own choices.

Is it a bit of a lonely road? Sure. Not everyone wants to walk such a road, and many try and end up turning back onto the freeway with everyone else. The twists and turns and bumpy roads and changes in climate and speed are difficult for many to handle, as many just want that streamlined path toward their goal and success.

But there are a few who willingly choose that other road and walk down it, one step at a time, one day at a time, and bet on themselves so that they can gain the experiences in life that they want, and do so on the terms that they want.

And for me, this all came from that Formula Atlantic paddock, that old Swift chassis with duct tape on the seat, that guy who wanted to experience life on his terms and do something he wanted to do, and found a way to make it happen.

He was the first privateer I ever met, and I hope he won't be the last.

Twenty-six years later, I'm still looking for them. Not on racetracks anymore, but in the world I ended up in—international sport, athlete support, the messy business of trying to help people reach their goals without losing themselves in the process.

I gravitate toward the ones who don't fit. The athletes from places no one's paying attention to. The ones building their careers without academies or pipelines or the luxury of a safety net. The ones figuring it out as they go.

Because I recognize something in them. That same stubborn refusal to wait for permission. That same willingness to bet on themselves when the infrastructure isn't there to back them up.

I don't know if Bob Siska ever knew what he gave me that day. Probably not. He was just out there living his life, doing what he wanted to do, in the way that worked for him.

But that's the thing about privateers. They're not trying to teach you anything. They're just showing you that another way exists.

And sometimes, that's all you need to see.

SOMEONE HAS TO

I started coaching high school girls basketball in late 2021. I found the opportunity in our local city newspaper. We have four different high schools in our city, and one was struggling to find people to coach certain sports—mainly basketball and soccer. So they put an ad in the paper. I was newer to the area, and after being away from coaching for a while, I wanted to get back in there again. I responded to the advertisement and soon started coaching their basketball and soccer programs. I started with Grade 8 boys—trying to herd cats, honestly, given how easily they got distracted—and then Grade 8-10 girls soccer, which was much more manageable. Eventually I moved into the role I still have today: senior girls basketball and soccer.

I enjoy coaching. I enjoy being able to share the things I learned as an athlete and through my many years of

coaching after my competitive career was done. I enjoy helping athletes find ways to build their confidence and show them how being an athlete can help them in life beyond sport. And it's fulfilling as both a coach and manager to see someone grow, get stronger, and succeed. One of the best feelings there is.

But I still wrestle with some of my "demons" as it pertains to being a former competitive athlete. One of those: my over-competitiveness that comes out usually during actual games. I was unfortunately well known as being a bit of an asshole when I was competing, and that assholery was directed towards many people, but none more at times than the referees. And as I coach now, it takes a genuine effort not to do this, and sometimes it just doesn't happen.

In our area, there are only a couple of referees available for youth basketball. And there's one in particular that every coach in the league finds very difficult to work with. We never agree with his calls. We never think he keeps up with the play. And every time he steps onto the court, you can feel the tension in the gym rise before the game even starts. I've gotten animated with him. More than once. Shouting at calls I disagreed with, questioning decisions that felt wrong, letting my frustration show in ways that I knew—even in the moment—weren't helping anyone. And there were times he called me on it. Told me to calm down. Told me to back off. And every time, I'd justify it to

myself. Tell myself it was just my passionate coaching style. That I was standing up for my team. That this was what coaches do.

But I knew, even then, that it wasn't true.

I was putting on a mask when I coached, just like when I competed. Going from being a very introverted person (84/100 on the introversion scale) to this louder persona I convinced myself was helping my players. A sixth player on the basketball court. A twelfth on the soccer field. Loud voice, animated gestures, yelling at refs—the whole act.

It wasn't until this last year that I started to realize something wasn't right. I wasn't feeling like myself out there during the season. And when I thought about it more, I saw it was the persona I was playing. The one I thought was working. But it wasn't. I was letting the asshole athlete I used to be take over the coach I wished I'd had—someone who wasn't an asshole. And that's exactly what was happening.

And here's the thing that made it worse: those girls were watching. Every time I reacted to a call, every time I shook my head or threw my hands up or muttered something under my breath, they saw it. And they learned from it. They learned that it's okay to question the referee. That it's okay to blame the officials when things don't go your way. That the person in the striped

shirt isn't really a person—they're just an obstacle, a target, someone who exists to make your life harder.

And I hated that I was teaching them that.

So I started to think more about the role of a referee within our sporting systems, to build empathy for myself and figure out how to model it for my players. I had focused on showing respect and building confidence for my players, but this side of things was counter-intuitive to what I was doing, and so I needed to sit down and understand and find a way through to make it better. I wanted to be a good example. Being an asshole wasn't that.

I thought a lot about the journey of a referee. I read about what they deal with, tried some refereeing simulations to understand the speed of decision-making they face. I didn't score well—so many times I didn't see the situation fast enough to make the right call. Even with VAR and instant replays added in, the speed at which decisions had to be made was astounding. It definitely increased my respect for them.

From an early age, referees were cast as villains. The ones stopping people from "having fun," the sticklers who followed the rules to a T. As I got older, that perception expanded—favoritism, corruption, bias. And seeing how they're treated at the professional and international level, it's a wonder anyone agrees to do this job at all.

But it starts way before the professional level. I've watched parents scream at referees in youth soccer games. Adults—grown men and women—questioning the integrity of someone who's just trying to do their job. Accusations of bias, of incompetence, of favoritism. Over a game that doesn't matter. Over a call that, in the grand scheme of things, means absolutely nothing. And the referee—someone who showed up to do a job no one else wanted to do—becomes the villain. The scapegoat. The reason the team lost.

I've been that coach. I've blamed the referee when things didn't go the way I wanted them to.

It's pure vitriol at times. 100% unfiltered hatred and poison.

It feels at times that it is the greatest no-win position there ever was, and something where it feels you almost have to be masochistic to stick in there due to the treatment they receive. If they make the right call, someone is going to hate them. If they make the wrong call, someone is going to hate them. If one team wins, someone is going to hate them. I can't think of a time where someone nowadays has looked at the job of the referee in a match and said "I really liked what they did there." Nope, maybe once in a blue moon. You're always going to have someone hate what you did, but for a referee dealing with the "passion" of fans, bettors, the

public, that equates to crazy amounts of vitriol that very few without utmost power and confidence could ever handle properly, and I bet most of them struggle with it.

And here's the thing: these referees don't have to be there. They could walk away at any time. They could decide that the abuse isn't worth it, that the pay isn't worth it, that the stress and the pressure and the constant questioning of their competence and their character just isn't worth it.

In fact, that's exactly what's happening. Youth leagues are struggling to find officials. Matches are being postponed or cancelled because there's no one willing to put on the uniform and step onto the field. We're running out of referees. And it's not because there aren't people who love the game. It's because we've created a culture where the people who make the game possible are treated so poorly that they're walking away.

But what really hit home for me in all of this was realizing that just like I wanted athletes to be seen as humans, I had to remember that everyone working within the system—referees included—were human too, and in the case of referees, were an integral part of the system that needed to be respected.

Because without referees, there are no games. No one to keep the rules in check, to tell us who won and who lost, who would be the voice of reason when everyone is

yelling about a decision and be the one to have the guts to make that decision, even when they know that it will involve someone hating that decision a lot and be a pain in the ass about it. I was being that pain in the ass about it before, and when I started thinking about whether I'd like to deal with someone like me in those situations...well, a lot of clarity came with that.

I think about that referee in our league. The one every coach finds difficult to work with. The one who brings everyone's blood to a boiling point. I still don't love his calls. I still disagree with him. I probably always will. But I'm trying to see him differently now. Because he shows up. Week after week. Even knowing that every coach in the league can't stand him. Even knowing that he's going to take abuse, that he's going to be questioned, that he's going to walk off that court with people muttering about him under their breath.

And that takes something. Something I'm only now starting to understand.

He doesn't have to be there. None of them do. But they show up anyway. Because someone has to. Because the game needs someone to hold the line, to make the calls that no one else wants to make, to stand in the middle of chaos and try to find order.

So, I'm not going to be perfect, per se, but I am going to make an effort to be a better example for my athletes,

because without those referees, sport literally stops. We need them, whether we want to admit it or not, and even though there will be times I can't stand the decisions they make, I'm going to do my best to be empathetic there, because I definitely don't want to be in those shoes.

Maybe one day I'll try though. That could be an interesting experience...

LEANING INTO WEIRD

I moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba when I was in Grade 10, moving from the West Coast of Canada to the Prairies to be closer to my father's family, as my grandfather wasn't in the strongest health. I ended up going to a small private catholic school, complete with dress pants, dress shirts, dress shoes, and a navy blue tie we had to wear everyday. I still can't tie a tie—clip-ons all the way. For those three years in that school, clip-on ties became my best friend. Now, as a very introverted person, and one who was never great at meeting new people, coupled with going into a school where most people knew each other from an early age, you can guess that making friends and building friend groups was a bit tough for me. But I was lucky to meet two people early on, who became good

friends throughout my high school life. One was named Vishe (short for Vincenzo) and the other was Amit.

Amit's parents sent him to this school because of the higher level of education it had, even though he was Sikh, not Catholic. But we bonded immediately over video games, bouncing between Goldeneye for the Nintendo 64, and then into the PlayStation catalogues, which is where he introduced me to professional wrestling.

My mother wasn't a fan of wrestling. I don't blame her, as during this time it was a very "attitude" style of doing things, which meant it was trying to be very edgy, very different, and very risqué—things my mom didn't want me to see. But starting with the video games, Amit introduced me to the world of professional wrestling, both the current stuff and the older history of it. And I became fascinated by it, not just for the action in the ring, but the design and characters and almost mystique that came with it.

I was obsessed with things most other kids weren't. I had this dream of being an Olympian. I was training constantly, studying my sport, reading everything I could about how to get better, how to get faster, how to make it to that level. While other kids were hanging out on weekends, I was on my own—training, reading, watching racing on TV, daydreaming about marching into an Olympic stadium with a flag in my hand. I was focused.

Maybe too focused. But only on the things I cared about. Sports. Racing. The Olympics. Quiet. Off to the side. Not unpopular, but not in the center of things either. Just doing my own thing, chasing my own dream.

And somehow, wrestling fit into that world. It was competition. It was performance. It was people who had dedicated their entire lives to becoming the best at what they did. And it was this world where people like me—people who were different, obsessive, singular in their focus—didn't just survive, they thrived. They built characters out of what made them different and made thousands of people care about them because of it. For a kid who was trying to understand who he was and what he wanted to be in the world, wrestling gave me this door opening to the idea of building one's character and becoming what they wanted the world to see. And for someone who didn't have that kind of confidence, who didn't know how to make people care about him, I was fascinated by how they did it. How they drew people in. How they made people invest in them.

I continued this fascination with professional wrestling into university, where the advent and growth of YouTube opened my eyes to an even bigger world of it. I was first limited to WWF (now WWE) but with YouTube I learnt about Japanese Puroresu, Mexican Lucha Libre, British Technical styles, Hardcore wrestling, and all of the strange and wonderful men and women who populated

this world within all of the different federations, and the "Indies" where they travelled the country, continent, and the world to build a name for themselves, and build a character that would bring them to super stardom.

I got into the video games too. Extreme Warfare Revenge. Fire Pro Wrestling. WWF No Mercy. I loved the idea of building a character, watching people respond to it, seeing a following grow. As someone who didn't have that kind of confidence in real life, the idea that you could create a version of yourself that people wanted to follow was fascinating to me.

And the more I read about the journeys these wrestlers were taking—the years on the road, bouncing from town to town, sleeping in cars, wrestling in front of 50 people in a high school gym, all for the chance that someday, maybe, they'd get their shot—the more I saw something familiar in it. The sacrifice. The obsession. The singular focus on a dream that might never pay off. It reminded me of what I was doing as an athlete. What I was chasing.

Years later, I started working in sports management. Helping athletes—Olympic athletes, international athletes—build their careers, find sponsorships, create opportunities. And the challenge that kept coming up was always the same: getting people to care.

I'd pitch athletes to brands through emails and correspondence, send over their profiles, their stats, their

achievements. And I'd get back responses that their following wasn't what they were looking for. That their social media presence wasn't strong enough. That they didn't have the engagement metrics the brand needed. Excuses, really, for not collaborating. But the more I did this work, the more I started to see the pattern. So many athletes—not just the ones I worked with, but across the board—were posting the same thing. Generic training clips. Motivational quotes. Highlight reels that looked exactly like everyone else's. And if everyone looks the same, no one stands out.

And I kept thinking about wrestling. About the indie wrestlers I'd followed for years. The ones who traveled the world with nothing, who built their own followings, who created characters that people actually cared about. And I started to see it: these journeys are the same. Wrestlers and Olympic athletes—same sacrifices, same struggle, same dream that might never pay off. But wrestlers figured out something athletes haven't.

They figured out how to make people care.

There's a divide between the two worlds. Olympians versus wrestlers. Real athletes versus fake fighting. Sophisticated fans versus... whatever wrestling fans are supposed to be. A snobbery exists, this idea that what Olympic athletes do is pure and noble and what wrestlers do is lesser. Entertainment. Not real sport.

But wrestlers have built global followings. Careers that span decades. They've turned themselves into brands people will pay to see, buy merchandise from, follow anywhere. And Olympic athletes? Most of them disappear the moment they don't medal. Four years of work, a lifetime of sacrifice, and then nothing. Because no one knew who they were.

Let me give you an example. Orange Cassidy. If you don't follow wrestling, the name probably doesn't mean anything to you. But in AEW—All Elite Wrestling—he's one of the most popular acts they have. His gimmick: he's a slacker. Hands in his pockets. Sunglasses on. Moves in slow motion. Looks like he doesn't care about anything.

It's completely different from what you'd expect a professional wrestler to be. No muscles. No screaming. No over-the-top intensity. But he owned it. He leaned into it. He built on it. And the genius of it is that when he does take the sunglasses off, when he does go serious, people lose their minds. Because he's created a character people are invested in.

And it works because it's rooted in something real. It's an exaggeration of who he actually is, not a fabrication. You can't fake that for years. You can't sustain it if it's not connected to some part of yourself.

He built that gimmick over years. Started in CHIKARA, refined it with Beyond Wrestling—two organizations you

would never know existed unless you followed indie wrestling hard. I found him during his Beyond Wrestling days, watching grainy YouTube videos of shows in small venues. And even then you could see it clicking. He was onto something. And now he's one of the biggest names in a major wrestling promotion.

Because he figured out how to make people care.

Wrestlers understand something athletes don't. Your character—your persona—is an alter ego. An exaggerated version of something that's already there. And the part athletes miss: your athlete self is already an alter ego. The person you are when you compete isn't the same person you are at home. It can't be. You tap into a different part of yourself. A part that's willing to suffer, to push through pain, to dig deeper than you thought possible.

That's a character. That's a persona. Most athletes just don't realize they're building one.

Wrestlers know this instinctively. I listened to a podcast once where Tom Budgen talked about figuring out his character. He went by Aleister Black in WWE and NXT, Malakai Black in AEW. And his character was rooted in his real obsession with the occult. He'd studied it for years. It wasn't fake. It was him, turned up to 11. And it worked because people could feel the authenticity in it.

Wrestling fans expect weirdness. They celebrate it. Wrestling culture is built on characters being strange, being different, being over the top. Athletes don't have that permission. Athletes are supposed to be calm, collected, strong. The "high-level athlete" image. And so most athletes sand down their edges. They become generic. Same training clips. Same motivational quotes. Same "hard work pays off" captions. And then they wonder why no one cares.

I've seen so many talented athletes who couldn't understand why sponsors weren't interested. World-class athletes. Athletes with incredible results. But when brands looked at their social media, they saw nothing that stood out. Five hundred followers. No engagement. Just another athlete in a sea of thousands. It wasn't about the talent. It was about the fact that everyone was posting the same thing everyone else was posting, and no one could tell them apart.

And what sucks about this: attention has become a bigger factor than performance. Social media gave brands a metric, and now that's what they look for. And so athletes look around, see what's getting likes and follows, and copy it. Cookie-cutter posts. Generic captions. The same thing everyone else is doing. And then they're surprised when they still don't stand out.

Because you can't stand out by doing what everyone else is doing.

Meanwhile, wrestlers figured this out years ago. They weren't waiting for promoters to build their brands for them. They were uploading their own matches to YouTube. Starting their own podcasts. Building their own followings. Creating their own media because no one else was going to do it for them.

I've watched athletes sit around waiting for their federation to post about them. Waiting for a journalist to notice. Waiting for TV coverage that's never coming. Some international sports federations don't even livestream their major competitions. In 2026. World-class athletes competing at the highest level of their sport, and there's no way to watch unless you're in the building.

Indie wrestling federations figured out livestreaming years ago. Because they had to. Because if they didn't, they'd have no audience. No following. No career. Wrestlers had no choice. No governing body paying their way. No national team support. No Olympic coverage. If they wanted to eat, they had to make people care. And if promoters didn't book them, they didn't eat. So they got creative. They built characters. They told stories. They made people feel something.

And the ones who did it well—the ones who found that sweet spot between authenticity and exaggeration—built careers that lasted.

Athletes can do the same thing. But most of them are too precious about it. They think their skill should be enough, that if they just keep working hard, someone will notice.

But it doesn't work that way.

The truth is, no one's going to care just because you're good at your sport. There are too many people who are good. What makes someone care is the story. The character. The humanity. The thing that makes you different.

And here's the thing about being weird, about being different—there are a lot more of us out there than you think. But so many people are too afraid to show it now. Social media created this idea that you're supposed to be perfect. Polished. Put together. The best version of yourself, all the time. And so people sand down their edges. Hide the parts of themselves that don't fit the aesthetic. Present this curated version and wonder why it doesn't resonate.

But that's not what makes people care. What makes people care is the weirdness. The authenticity. The thing that makes you different. And if you're too afraid to show

that, you'll just blend in with everyone else trying to be perfect.

I still watch wrestling. On and off, depending on how I feel. There are weeks where I'm watching everything. Indies, highlights, full shows. And then there are months where I take a break. But it always pulls me back in. Because at its core, wrestling is about people figuring out how to make other people care. And that's the same challenge every athlete faces.

Wrestlers and Olympic athletes—same journeys, same sacrifices, same struggles. Different levels of respect, sure. But the same fundamental challenge: how do you make people care when no one's paying attention?

Wrestlers figured it out because they had to. Athletes haven't because they're still waiting.

I didn't expect to find that lesson in a wrestling ring. When I was a kid watching wrestling in high school, playing those video games with Amit, I wasn't thinking about athlete development or sports marketing or personal branding. I was just watching people be unapologetically themselves, turned up to 11, making thousands of people care.

But that's the thing about inspiration. You find it in the strangest places. Sometimes it's in a cargo trailer at a Formula Atlantic paddock. Sometimes it's in the person

holding the whistle who shows up even when everyone hates them. And sometimes it's in a wrestler with their hands in their pockets, moving in slow motion, making you believe that not caring is the coolest thing in the world.

Who knew you could find lessons about Olympic-level athlete development in an indie wrestling ring?

But here we are. And the lesson's pretty simple: find what makes you different. Lean into it. Own it. Make people care.

Because if you don't, no one else will.

RAMBLINGS OF A PRIVATEER

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