

Wrestler of the Day – April 17: George “The Animal” Steele

Today's wrestler stayed active for a ridiculous amount of time and completely changed his character over time: George Steele.

Steele started wrestling in 1962 in the Detroit area before heading to New York. He became a big deal in the WWF to the point that he had a LONG feud with Bruno Sammartino over the World Title. Here's one of those matches from July 25, 1970 in MSG.

Bruno Sammartino vs. George Steele

Gorilla Monsoon, the host of the tape this is from, says this is from sometime in the 60s but isn't sure exactly when. That would likely be because it's from the 1970s but he's close enough. Back then Steele was a top heel so this would have been a big time fight. The cage is weird looking as it's more or less wire walls rather than a traditional cage. Steele has riot gear police officers bring him out. This is still escape rules. Naturally the commentary is from the 80s rather than back in the day as there likely wasn't commentary done for this originally.

This is clipped to an extent. Bruno hammers him as this is probably the culmination of what was a major feud. Steele looks identical to what he would for the rest of his career. Steele actually gets a low blow before eating a turnbuckle. He rubs the stuffing into Bruno's eyes which blinds him but George won't just leave. Apparently Styrofoam stuffing is blinding. This is in Philadelphia according to Monsoon.

Bruno gets rocked by Steele for a good while as the camera and

lighting is really different here but of course at the time no one knew what to do from a production standpoint as this was a very new idea back then. Bruno Hulks Up as Steele pounds away and then runs as Bruno can't be hurt. Sammartino destroys him by ramming him into the cage a bunch and then climbs out.

Rating: C-. Nothing great here but seeing something from this far back in time is always cool. Steele didn't change a bit in about twenty years and was still completely awesome the whole time. This was a pretty ok match but the clipping didn't help. Bruno was completely awesome in cages and this worked ok but at six minutes shown, how into a cage match can you get?

Steele would continue getting title shots for years, including this one against Pedro Morales on June 30, 1973.

Pedro Morales vs. George Steele

This was back when Steele was still able to speak like a human. He looks almost exactly the same as he did in the 80s and 90s. Steele tries to jump Pedro to start but gets thrown into the corner and out to the floor by the champion. Back in and Steele gets in a shot to the ribs with a foreign object to put Morales in deep trouble. Another shot with the object has Pedro reeling. There's a slam and a third shot, this one to the throat, has Pedro writhing in pain on the mat.

Morales comes back with some lefts as Steele tries to hide the object. They circle each other for a bit until the champion puts him down with an armdrag. Steele tries to hide in the corner but with a chest like that (covered with hair) it's kind of hard to hide. The challenger goes to the floor for a bit before coming back in and knocking Pedro out to the apron. Morales is rammed into the turnbuckle and falls to the apron.

As Steele tries to ram Pedro's head in, the champion slips in a left hand and sends Steele into two turnbuckles. I'm not skipping stuff in between here either. The action really is that slow. Now it's George on the apron with Morales pounding

away at his bald head. The champion takes a big bite out of Steel's forehead before pounding away at it even more. The beating is so bad that the referee stops the match, awarding the win to Pedro due to the blood on Steele's forehead.

Rating: D. This was a pretty lame match with not a lot of action in it at all. Steele was a game challenger but the foreign object bit comes off as dated now. The blood flow wasn't even all that strong and it made for a weak ending for the match. On the good side though, Pedro got a great reaction from the crowd and it was clear that he was a strong champion.

We're going to jump WAY ahead here as Steele would only appear on occasion. Actually we're going to jump all the way to August 10, 1984 as Steele has become his trademark wildman persona and is again challenge for the title, this time against Hulk Hogan.

WWF Title: Hulk Hogan vs. George Steele

Steele has Fuji in his corner and Hogan is in the rare blue trunks tonight. Steele flails around the ring to start but Hogan does the same thing, sending the Animal to the floor. That's fine with the champion who follows him out and goes to work but let's stop to look at the fans for some reason. Inside again and Steele backpedals as the match stops cold. Steele finally goes to the eyes to take over before raking at the face some more.

Hogan comes back with some biting of the face but Steele hits him in the throat with a foreign object. Another shot with the object has Hogan in big trouble and Steele stomps away at the arm. We hit an armbar (to set up Steele's flying hammerlock finisher) on Hogan but Steele lets go for consultation with Fuji. It's Hulk Up time and Steele's shots have no effect. A big back elbow puts George down but Fuji breaks up the legdrop attempt. Hogan goes after Fuji and gets salt thrown in his face, sending him to the floor for a countout.

Rating: C-. This was your standard match to set up a rematch while keeping Hogan looking strong. That's fine all around though as it was still early in Hogan's reign and he needed to get some big wins when it was in doubt to keep things interesting. The fans went nuts on Steele for his cheating and that's the exact idea.

And then there was a rematch with some seconds added. Let's get this over with. From 16 days later.

Hulk Hogan/Gene Okerlund vs. Mr. Fuji/George Steele

August of 84 in Minneapolis. This is when Fuji still wrestled on occasion so he's not horrible. It's all Hogan for the most part of course and by that I mean he wrestles most of the match. Gene in trunks and no shirt is something I NEVER need to see again. Clipped to Steele cheating and taking over on Hogan. Hogan sends him to the floor and struts a bit. Gene high fives Hulk and that counts as a tag. Gene, ever the idiot, tries his luck with Gene...and then dives through George's legs for the tag. That's better.

Clipped again to Hulk pounding on Fuji. Fuji tries to throw some salt but Hogan messes that up. Gene puts a knee into Fuji (or something like that) and then Hogan slams Gene onto Fuji for the pin. Yeah I think we all knew that was the ending that was coming here. Gene gets to kick both guys post match.

Rating: D+. Ok yes it's bad, but at the same time what were you expecting here? I mean, you have to keep in mind what you're watching when you look at something like this. It's not going to be a masterpiece and yes it's very bad, but you have to give it a big bit of slack as there's a manager and an interviewer out there.

Steele would drop down to the midcard soon after this, including appearing in the first match ever on Saturday Night's Main Event.

Iron Sheik/Nikolai Volkoff/George Steele vs. Mike Rotunda/Barry Windham/Ricky Steamboat

That's quite the face tag team. This was on the SNME DVD (great DVD that should certainly be picked up if you can find it. Awesome stuff on it) as an extra. Blassie is with the heels and Albano is with the faces. The two foreigners had taken the tag titles from the US Express at Wrestlemania for a token tag title change.

About a year prior to this, the US Express had been using Real American for their theme music. That went to Hogan of course and here they use Born in the USA by Bruce Springsteen which works like a charm for them as it's perfect. We start with Windham and Steele which is an odd matchup if there ever has been one.

Sheik was hitting the end of whatever usefulness that he had at this point. Rotundo would soon head to WCW and become a member of the Varsity Club, ending in an awesome moment with Rick Steiner taking the TV Title from him after months of being talked down to by him. Wow what a tangent that was.

Oh and he's more commonly known as I.R.S. Oddly enough the faces dominate early on. We go to commercial with the faces dominating. We begin the awesome SNME tradition of not having action during commercials so we don't have to be all confused about how we got to a point during a break.

Wow there are four hall of fame wrestlers in here and two on the floor. That's rather impressive, especially considering that the two that aren't in there are two of the three most talented. Steele comes in and his teammates abandon him, allowing Windham to get a quick rollup for the pin. Steele eats a turnbuckle and the tag champions beat him up. That doesn't last long as Albano comes in to calm him down and Steele is a face.

Rating: C-. Eh this was fine. It wasn't meant to be anything

special other than a way to get Steele out of the dark side, but the heel offense consisted of about four Volkoff punches and other than that it was a complete squash. I don't get why it was so one sided, but it did its job and wasn't bad at all so for the first match in show history this was perfectly fine.

Steele would turn face after the match and stay that way for the rest of his career. He would soon start a LONG against with Randy Savage with the first major match taking place at SNME #4.

Randy Savage vs. George Steele

This is about a month and a half before Savage won the IC Title and held it for over a year, losing it to Steamboat at Mania 3 when Steele helped him win it. You could argue that this is the first match in a year and 3 month long feud. We get some chasing outside on the floor and then he eats a turnbuckle. A double axehandle...gets the pin. Ok then.

Rating: N/A. Total comedy match and a bad one. This got them nearly a year and a half. WOW.

There was a rematch for Savage's Intercontinental Title at Wrestlemania II.

Intercontinental Title: George Steele vs. Randy Savage

This was a pretty big feud that also wound up meaning a lot more the next year than it does here. The basic idea is that George is in love with Liz and doesn't like how Savage treats her. There's a great angle right there that hasn't been used in a LONG time (Punk/AJ/Bryan isn't the same thing). Savage in an inset interview babbles as only Savage can without saying anything of note.

Steele does a freaky kind of dance and Savage immediately bails to the floor. That works so well that they do it again

and make it three times until FINALLY George chases after him. Steele catches Savage going back in and bites his calf before they head back in. Randy hits a running knee to the chest but Steele easily lifts him into the air and chokes him down. George gets caught looking at Liz though and is tied up in the ropes so Savage pounds away.

A top rope cross body gets two for the champ (Savage in case you're really young) and Steele throws him to the floor. Randy slips under the ring and sneaks up on George, only to get bitten on the arm. Savage goes to the floor and finds...a bouquet of flowers? George shoves them into Randy's face before going to eat a turnbuckle (don't ask).

The stuffing goes into Savage's face but Steele AGAIN gets distracted by Liz, allowing Savage to hit the ax handle to the back. Back in and Savage hits the slam and elbow for two. Wait what? This is 1986 and the SAVAGE ELBOW only gets two? Steele grabs Savage by the face and sends him into the corner, only to get tripped up and pinned with the feet on the ropes to retain the title.

Rating: C-. This is one of those matches where your individual taste is going to vary a lot. On one hand, it's a comedy match but not an incredibly funny one, while on the other hand it's terrible from a wrestling perspective. On the other hand, you have three hands and should see a surgeon immediately. The point is this wasn't much of a match and never would have made it onto a modern Mania card. Of course it wouldn't; the Intercontinental Title doesn't exist around Wrestlemania time. Also, of all the people in the WWF, GEORGE STEELE gets to kick out of the elbow? REALLY? This was fun for the goofiness if nothing else.

Steele would become Hulk's buddy of the week for a tag team match on August 9, 1986.

George Steele/Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage/Adrian Adonis

This is going to be a comedy match I'd assume. Steele tries to bite Adrian after their entrance before we get going. He also rips his shirt off ala Hogan in a funny for some reason bit. Hogan eats a turnbuckle and everything is insane. We finally get down to a match with Steele vs. Savage in the ultra rare dark red boots and tights.

Savage runs to the floor and Hogan scares him right back in. Back to the floor again as you can see that Savage cut his teeth in Memphis. That's pure old school Lawler/Jarrett stuff and it works very well. We shift off to Hogan vs. Adonis with the ring covered in the turnbuckle stuffing. Corner clothesline to Adonis and it all breaks down again. Adonis is kind of crotched on the railing outside but it kind of missed.

Back in and it's Hogan with a big boot to Adonis but he makes a blind tag to bring in Savage. Hogan beats up Savage too because he can and it's off to Steele. Steele is sent into the corner and Adrian hammers away on him. Off to Savage who does exactly the same. He tries a sleeper but Steele bites his arm instead. Off to Hogan and Adonis with Adonis hitting a suplex for two.

Another suplex hits for the same result. According to Hayes ONLY Hogan could kick out of that. Sweet goodness did they suck up to him way too much. Sleeper, Adonis' finisher, goes on until Adonis just drops him and throws down Hogan. Middle rope splash eats knees and it's off to Savage. Everything breaks down again and Savage accidentally backdrops Adonis and the leg drop ends him.

Rating: C. Just a glorified comedy match for a house show main event. Not a thing wrong with that as the whole thing worked for its purpose. The fans loved it and we got some slightly funny spots out of it also. What more can you ask for from a match with Adrian Adonis and George Steele in it?

Back to Savage for a match at SNME #9, but this set up

something bigger.

Intercontinental Title: George Steele vs. Randy Savage

Vince wanted Liz like no other. To be fair she does look great here. George again says he has a surprise and comes out with an action figure of himself. He gives it to Liz but Savage takes it and throws it down. Soon thereafter he's flying through the air as Steele throws him all over the place. Savage comes back and sets for the elbow but some music hits and the roof gets blown off. RICKY FREAKING STEAMBOAT makes his return and stares down Savage. Macho loses his mind and no one can get Steamboat back. Steele gets the advantage as they finally get Ricky back to the locker room.

Steele kidnaps Liz and carries her away before he finally comes back. A buckle gets ripped open which was always a weird thing. Vince: "He's only salivating on him." It was a different time I guess. Steele bites his arm a bunch of times for some reason as Jesse asks why isn't he being better fed. Savage gets hit by a foreign object but clocks Steele with the bell to retain. A post match beatdown is attempted but Steamboat comes down for the save.

Rating: D+. Match was a glorified comedy match but most of the encounters for these two were. The main thing here obviously is that it set up Savage vs. Steamboat in the legendary showdown at Mania III. Back in the day they built up shows from a far longer away time which made them feel more epic. That and Mania was the only PPV of the year so it really was the huge show to build up to.

We'll go with one more SNME match so Steele can get a win. From SNME #13.

Danny Davis vs. George Steele

Davis was the referee that went heel and became a bad wrestler with an interesting gimmick. Steele is way over and Davis is

way hated. This should be decent from a crowd perspective. The wrestling will suck though. Davis tries to sneak up on Steele and he does a SWEET jumping reverse drop toehold. That's the best description I can give it but he did it without turning around. It was awesome. Let's go with that.

That was what was great about Steele's character: he was the original Eugene more or less. There was a freaking hilarious bit on Tuesday Night Titans once where he got electrocuted and started talking like a normal person for a few seconds and then another shock turned him back into his usual self.

It was better if you saw it I guess. Davis has a foreign object and it gives him the advantage. Steele gets the flying hammerlock (don't ask) off a missed punch and Davis kicks the referee for the odd DQ. Why not just give Steele the submission? I don't get that but for a four minute match to end an incident from six months ago I can't blame them that much.

Rating: D+. This wasn't supposed to be serious so I'll go easy on it. You simply can't grade every match the same and I try not to in cases like this, although that doesn't always work. This was fine for what it was as Davis cheated to get the limited offense in that he could, but at the same time he got caught and everyone was happy in the end.

Steele would retire a littler over a year later due to his Crohn's Disease but would come back for a few occasional appearances. One of those was at Heroes of Wrestling.

Greg Valentine vs. George Steele

Valentine says he's the son of the legend Johnny Valentine. That's an old school idea which was done with guys like Shane Douglas as Paul Orndorff's nephew and Bruno Sammartino had a "cousin" as well. He says he'll leave with Sherri tonight whether she likes it or not. Seriously, this is some very basic but great heel stuff tonight and it's making things a

lot better than they have any right to be.

Sherri comes out with Steele as she's already standing by her man. George looks exactly like he did over 20 years before this, as does Valentine. That's quite the testament to their training regimens. Valentine hits the floor and goes after Sherri like any good heel going after the weaker person. Randy keeps things simple by saying it's stalking. Sounds like a reason for Steele to stand up and stop Valentine if you ask me. George eats a turnbuckle and you can practically see Sherri's eyebrows go up.

Steele bites Greg's arm which is probably a bit more nutritious. I can't believe I'm saying this but Sherri isn't looking bad here. Back inside and George tries to take his shirt off but Valentine jumps him with the shirt over his head, almost like a cheating hockey player. Now we get to the climax of the match as Sherri turns on Steele and helps Valentine, playing up on George's stupidity as he won't be able to see her and will think it's one of Valentine's friends.

Back up and with the shirt off, Valentine pulls out a foreign object to get in a cheap shot and keep his control. We're hitting all of the 80s high spots here and the crowd is reacting to it exactly as they should be. Dutch has gotten up to try and talk some sense into Sherri which might be going a bit too far. Do your job Dutch. The talk doesn't even work as Sherri gets in a chair shot to give Valentine the pin.

Rating: D+. Not as good of a match here but they hit everything the needed to hit. Steele was a great choice of a sympathetic face, much like Kane with Tori over in the WWF around this time. You wanted to see him succeed and they did a great job of having everyone else involved screw with him and set up a rematch later on.

Steele would also appear on Nitro on January 10, 2000 as a

special legend to face Jeff Jarrett that night.

George Steele vs. Jeff Jarrett

This is a Bunkhouse match, meaning anything goes. Chris Benoit is guest referee to continue his feud with Jarrett. Steele brings out a dumpster full of weapons with him but Jeff sidesteps most of them. Animal finally connects with a trashcan shot to the head and a second one sends Jeff to the floor. While George eats a turnbuckle, the Old Age Outlaws (seriously) sneak up on Jarrett. They're a bit late as Jeff blasts Steele with the guitar, only to walk into an Arn Anderson spinebuster. Steele is put on top for the easy pin.

George Steele was, shall we say, an interesting one. He was far better known for his character than his in ring work and there's nothing wrong with that. Steele wrestled for a very long time and only retired because of his illness. No his matches weren't all that great, but he scared me to death as a kid and that's what a guy like him was supposed to do. Well at least when he was a heel. Still though, he was a likeable guy if you were old enough to not be terrified by him and that's a valuable asset to have. Also the shock therapy segment his hilarious if you have time to look it up.

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