



THINK POSITIVE

That's Diamond Dallas Page's philosophy during the good times and bad. The master-of-the-Diamond-Cutter explains to **FIN MARTIN** why his WWF career bombed so badly, where he stands with TNA, and why "life's ten percent what happens to you, and 90 percent how you react to it . . ."

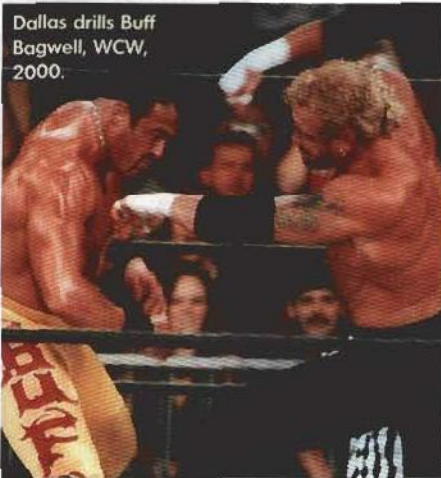
that correct?

It was my last match for TNA for *right now*. But I might go back. I'm doing a match in Puerto Rico, and at *Wrestle Reunion* in August . . . You know, I'm ten months from 50, and, although I'm strong, I want to pick my matches when I get in the ring now.

Did your exit have anything to do with the resignation as TNA booker of your longtime friend Dusty Rhodes five days before *Hard Justice*?

No! Not at all. It was great to work with him and I had a great time. But (when I left), TNA was trying to cut back as much as they could financially to keep the promotion alive until it gets picked up by WGN or Fox Sports or Spike TV or whoever they're trying (to cut a deal) with. It costs a lot of money to have Diamond Dallas Page on your card (laughs).

Dallas drills Buff Bagwell, WCW, 2000.



They wanted me to take a pay cut. But, to tell you the truth, it's not worth it for my body.

Did you see the match between me and Jeff Jarrett?

You mean the one at *Destination X in March*?

That's it. If you watch that . . . man: I went as hard in that match as I ever did — and, as I said before, I'm ten months from 50. You know, I can't work at a half-pace: I like to give the fans everything I've got. With my book coming out, *Yoga For Regular Guys*, and my film career taking off, it's more important for me to have the time to meet people and work on that. Every time I take a bump in a match, I leave a piece of my body in that ring.

It's a pride thing, then: when you climb into the ring, you don't want to short-change the fans by giving them a lousy performance?

Absolutely. I won't. The fans know — the real wrestling fans know — that we beat the s—t out of ourselves. You know, you can't fake gravity. I can still go — but I'm only going to go when the timing is right because I've only got so many of those matches left in me.

How do you feel your run with TNA went?

I thought it went great. It's a tough house there at TNA because probably half the audience there is the same at each show. When you can stay over as a babyface like I

WHAT HE HELPED VINCE MCMAHON CREATE IN THE WWF." — PAGE ON VINCE RUSSO

did . . . I was so happy with it.

I liked the whole company. I like the wrestlers they've got in the locker room. I like Dixie Carter, who's a sweetheart. I wish them all the luck in the world.

TNA's latest idea is to launch a weekly Monday night television programme. Can this bring the group closer to success?

If they get that, I think they have an opportunity to become successful. But I know they're going to need the brand names (established stars) on there, too, because people have to care about the characters, and the only way they're going to care about the characters is if their personalities fly off that screen in their living room.

The last time you were interviewed by *Power Slam* on February 3, 1998, WCW was still clinging onto the title of the number one wrestling organisation in the world. A little over three years later, WCW was a goner. Everyone has their own explanation or theory as to why WCW perished. What's yours?

I believe the overheads got too big. WCW was a monster which grew so fast. I mean, we went from no crowds to crowds to big crowds to f—king filling up superdomes. It was insane. Next thing we knew, we were doing a three-hour show every Monday (*Nitro*) and two hours on Thursday (*Thunder*), plus house shows and pay-per-views. You know, it got so big, so fast — the ratings were out of control, the budget kept getting bigger. It's like when you over-extend yourself: you're making all this money, so you buy the \$7 million house instead of the \$1 million house, and the Rolls Royce, the Bentley and the Mercedes instead of just having the Mercedes.

WCW over-extended itself. Then, when the

ratings (started falling), they let Eric Bischoff go. (Time Warner) panicked: they put an accountant (Bill Busch) in charge of the company, and the boys who were in control ate that mother—ker alive! So, we had a ship, with no captain — and the captain was one of the best on the planet at the time — and no f—king rudder, and they're saying, "Dive! Dive!" like it's a f—king submarine!

The mistake WCW made was this. When the New World Order was in its prime, when it was the hottest thing in the world, Eric Bischoff wanted to flip the script and have them take over — he wanted to do it but the corporate people wouldn't let him because they had spent a zillion dollars trademarking WCW (products). Eric wanted to turn WCW into the NWO. WCW would then have become the rebel group, which would have been led by me and Goldberg.

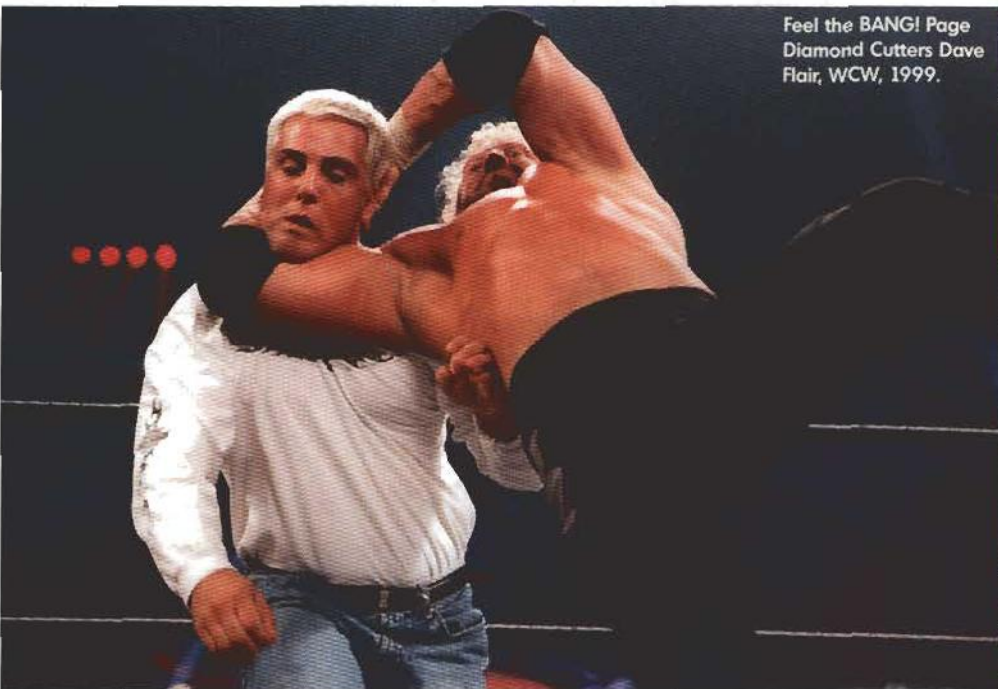
That was the plan: to have WCW invade NWO programming and live events?

Yeah. Eric wanted to flip it to NWO, but the Turner higher-ups said: "No."

As I recall, Page, when Time Warner fired Eric Bischoff in September 1999, live attendance was way down, pay-per-view business had collapsed and the wrestling product was in the toilet. Under Bischoff's leadership, WCW was losing money hand over fist and was a total shambles.

If it didn't get so big . . . you had to really see it. Everything was starting to fall, and Bischoff didn't have the back-up that he should have had. He didn't have the backing of the company. In WWE, Vince can say: "We're doing this", and it's done. Even though WWE is a public company, Vince still makes all the decisions. Eric didn't have that luxury in WCW.

A month after Bischoff was relieved of his



Feel the BANG! Page Diamond Cutters Dave Flair, WCW, 1999.

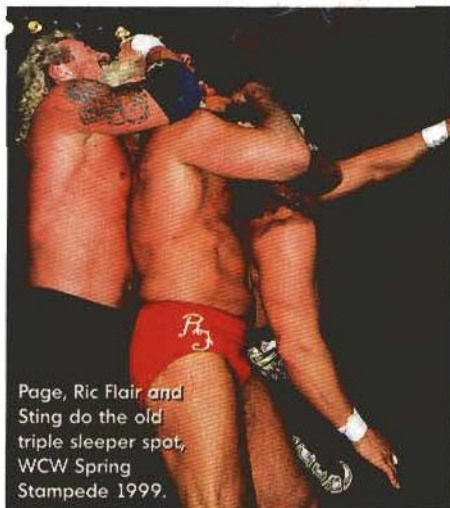
Vince Russo and Ed Ferrara and put them in charge of WCW's creative department. What was your reaction when you learned that WCW had hired the two guys who, back then, were credited with revolutionising the WWF?

I really hoped they would have a good handle on things. But they were trying to recreate guys and do different things . . . It never worked, obviously.

At first, it seemed like they were trying to turn WCW into a poor man's WWF.

And that's what really f—ked them. Do you realise there were millions of wrestling fans, who had been fans since they were children, who stopped watching wrestling (after WCW ran its last show in March 2001) because they f—king hated the WWF?

You're right. As popular as the WWF was, its product wasn't to everyone's liking; people still wanted something different — just not the woeful alternative that Russo and Ferrara presided over. When they took over in October 1999, WCW was in a mess and was losing more than \$1 million per month, but it could still have been saved, in my opinion, if Russo and Ferrara had recognised that their new audience had different tastes from the fans they previously wrote for, and they had the ability to book without supervision.



Page, Ric Flair and Sting do the old triple sleeper spot, WCW Spring Stampede 1999.

Russo is a good guy and he meant well, but he only knew one thing, and that was what he helped Vince McMahon create in the WWF. He only knew that WCW should have remained something that kids could have watched — an alternative to the WWF. It might not have done huge ratings, but it would have stayed alive.

One final comment regarding Russo's booking. On three consecutive pay-per-views in 2000, someone turned heel on you, and their betrayal caused you to lose your match. At Spring Stampede, it was your wife Kimberly who turned on you and you lost to Jeff Jarrett; at Slamboree, it was David Arquette who stabbed you in the back and you lost to Jarrett again; and at The Great American Bash, it was Canyon who screwed you over and you lost to Mike



Awesome. That was the most unoriginal booking I have ever seen in my life.

Yeah. There were times when I was so discontent with wrestling that I was ready to walk away — and from a seven-figure-per-year deal because sometimes it ain't about the money. A lot of times, it's not about the money; to me, it's about if I'm having fun. You know, the American dream, the dream for everyone, is to find something you love to do and find a way to get someone to pay you to do it. If it ain't fun, then it sucks, and I might as well be digging ditches.

What are your thoughts on former Time Warner bigwig Jamie Kellner, who famously booted WCW off the air in March 2001, which scuppered Eric Bischoff and Fusient Media's attempts to buy the company?

(shouting) If Kellner, who hated wrestling, hadn't been in charge . . . Eric Bischoff had the money! (Fusient) was going to buy it for \$60 million! But they refused to sell it. When Eric originally made the deal, they would sell him the company, but he had to stay on TBS for ten years. Eric didn't want to stay on TBS: he had Fox ready to go, a bunch of stations who wanted it! But f—king Jamie Kellner said: "No. We're not only not going to sell it because then (WCW) would stay on TBS, but we're going to cancel the programming", like they do with a normal show. So, then, (without the television deal, Time Warner) couldn't even sell WCW.

Kevin Nash came up with a great (analogy). You've got an uninsured house that's worth \$600,000, and someone offers you \$500,000 for it. But instead of taking the offer of \$500,000, \$100,000 less than its market value, you burn the house down and get nothing for it. And that's basically what Jamie Kellner did with WCW. He is the biggest f—king idiot in the history of television, and you can quote me on it.

Are you still friends with Eric Bischoff?

Oh, absolutely. He's going to be partners with me and my buddy on this T-shirt we've done. If you go to my website (diamonddallaspage.com), you'll see me wearing it and Steve Austin and Jake 'The Snake' Roberts. It's called One Jack Off: it's got a picture of a royal flush, with the jack missing. Eric's a phenomenal marketing genius. Him and his partner Jason Hervey have six different television shows that will hit the air this year.

These television programmes are going to

happen, right?

Yeah. They're signed, they're green-lit.

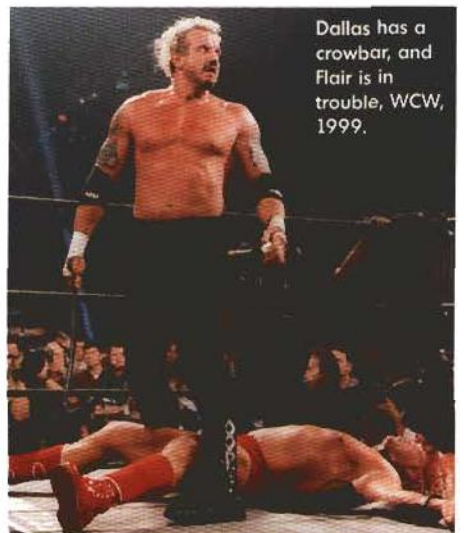
Eric has done well for himself in WWE. He's been there three years now, which is amazing when you think about it.

Fabulous. I tell you what: he really enjoys working in WWE, he has a good relationship with Vince. It just goes to show that you can never say never. I think Vince probably respects Eric because he's a great actor.

Rumour has it that you gave Vince McMahon a friendly hug after you signed your WWF contract in 2001, and that was the impetus for the hugging Steve Austin character which appeared on WWF television shortly afterwards. Is that true?

Absolutely, it's true. I'm a huggy guy, you know. I've got so much respect for Vince McMahon. I grew up watching (his promotion), even though he's only about seven or eight years older than me.

When I finally got to meet him — and that was the stupidest move I ever made. I don't mean hugging him; I mean, being a mark for him . . . I said to them: "You guys know what you're doing." But I should have controlled my own destiny. I should have said to them: "You



Dallas has a crowbar, and Flair is in trouble, WCW, 1999.

know, Vince, the stalker's a great idea, but it's not my character."

Someone wrote that I got back a good piece of my legacy in TNA that I lost in WWE, because they never treated me right. But I take the blame for that because I agreed to do the stalker thing, which wasn't me.

It was funny when Austin kept hugging

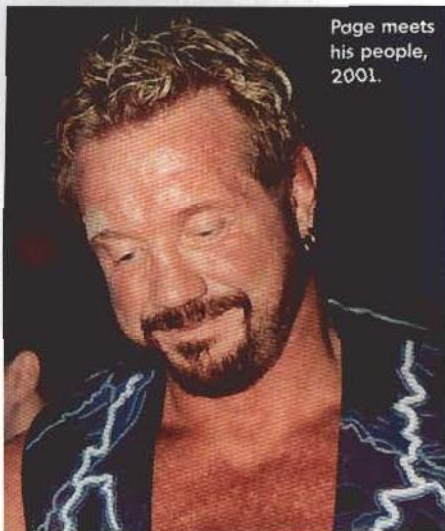
... didn't even get the job in the beginning. When I did, I was, like, "You bastards... you bastards." But it was funny.

Steve Austin moved into your house last year after his troubled relationship with Tess Broussard ended.

Steve's a smart guy and has such an incredible work ethic, but he needed to be around a positive environment (at that point in his life). Now, Steve's going to light the world on fire again.

From the clips I've seen, he looks great in *The Longest Yard* remake.

He only has a cameo in that. They were as happy as hell to have him. He was just getting his feet wet on that, getting in there. You know, he takes meetings every day, works his ass off, stays in great shape. He's going to do his stuff with Vince, and a lot of other stuff. Steve's career is just starting all over again.



Page meets his people, 2001.

Was Austin a fun person to share a house with?

Oh, yeah. He's just a regular guy. He could be really quiet and unassuming and, other times, he made me laugh so hard, I nearly cried. I remember we were watching *Raw* the time that Eugene did the Stone Cold Stunner, and watching (Austin) sell that... I laughed for 30 minutes.

Rather than dwelling on failure, you've obviously put your WWF career behind you and moved on.

Oh, absolutely. Life's ten percent what happens to you, and 90 percent how you react to it. I learned a lot from (my run in the WWF). That's how I took it.

I'm assuming that you genuinely believed your wrestling career was over when you announced your retirement in June 2002, two months after you suffered a serious neck injury in a match with Hardcore Holly. I really did (laughs). I knew that if I took a really bad bump in that (part of my body) without strengthening it, I would be in a lot of trouble. But, as it turned out, I was able to strengthen (my neck), and I did come back.

That was in a tag team match in Honolulu, Hawaii on July 21, 2004.

WORK, SELL AND BE HIMSELF." — DDP ON WRESTLING'S NEXT MAJOR SUPERSTAR

I was offered the shot on the card when Kevin Nash couldn't make it. The money was stupid. So, I thought, "You know, let me see how I feel." So, I went out there with (Satoshi Kojima) against Sting and The Great Muta, and Sting was amazed. He said, "Damn! That was good." Then I did another match (on a different card) with Johnny Swinger, who's a great guy, and it was pretty easy. And then I did a match with Kanyon, where we brawled all over the building and did a f—k finish (screwjob). Then the match was restarted, and we went 15 minutes. I was sore afterwards, but the people were with the match, and I realised I could still do it.

With its light schedule, TNA must have seemed like a natural progression.

(Kevin) Nash was going into TNA, and he said: "Come on, Dally. Come in — it'll be great." I said to him: "Who am I going to work with?" And he said: "Raven."

I hated Raven at the time. He was one of my best friends, but he kinda turned on me — in real life. At some point, Scotty (Raven) heard that I was coming in, and he called me up and said, "Listen, man: I heard you're coming to TNA. I just want you to know I'm not mad about anything any more, and I hope you're not." It was a man thing to do. I'm glad we fixed it: I don't want to be mad at anybody.

You have a role in the forthcoming horror movie *The Devil's Rejects*, sequel to *House Of 1,000 Corpses*.

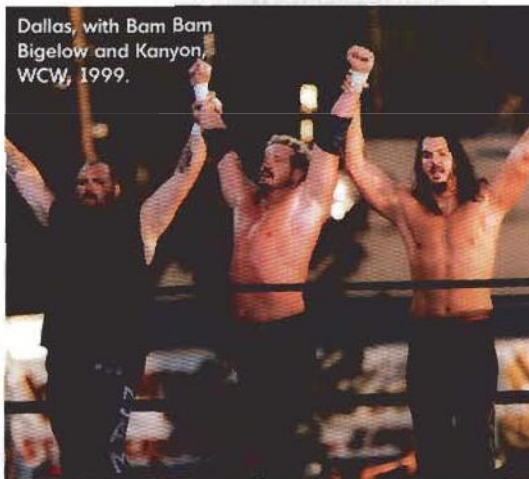
It's released here on July 22. I play Billy Ray Snapper.

Is it a big part?

It's not a large part, but it's a good one. I'm in about the last third of the movie. There's no real good guys in the film — just bad guys and badder guys (laughs).

Back in February 1998, you rightly predicted that Bill Goldberg would become a bona fide superstar. Who, in your opinion, is destined to be wrestling's next major attraction?

I don't know. But whoever the guy is, he's gonna have to know how to work, sell and be himself. That's one of the (flaws) I see in a lot of guys today: I don't feel they're really the guy they're playing. You know, I knew Ric Flair was Ric Flair; Dusty Rhodes was Dusty Rhodes;



Dallas, with Bam Bam Bigelow and Kanyon, WCW, 1999.

Hogan was Hogan... sometimes, it takes a long time to become yourself. It wasn't until Austin said: "Austin 3:16 says, 'I just whipped your ass'" (at King Of The Ring 1996) that Steve Austin became Steve Austin.

For the young guys out there... it's tough when they're giving you words and shoving them down your throat. I never had any words given to me that I didn't rewrite and do myself until I got to the WWF. That's why the stalker became the character it was: I was just acting. (After being myself on-screen for so many years), the fans weren't gonna buy it... You have to bring yourself to the part. ■

SMASH! DDP clubs Jeff Jarrett with a kendo stick, TNA, April 24, 2005.

