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BARBARA WEKELMAN/SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Wrestling Federation star Diamond Dallas Page, left, spoke on a diverse array of subjects at a Master's Tea last Friday, including scripted wrestling matches and growing up with dyslexia.

Wrestling star delivers unscripted Master's Tea

By Adam Mehes
Staff Reporter

When World Wrestling Federation superstar Diamond Dallas Page, affectionately known as DDP in the wrestling community, got an offer to come to Yale to be a guest at a Calhoun College Master's Tea, he thought it was a joke. But once he found out the offer was legitimate, he jumped at the opportunity.

For Page, who dropped out of college and could not read properly until his 30s, coming to an institution like Yale to talk to dozens of students about his life and career was truly rewarding.

"Growing up with ADD and dyslexia, at 30 years old I probably had about a third grade reading level," he said. "These are some of the greatest minds in the world. To come here and speak to them inspires me and elevates me. ... It's really an honor for me to be here today."

Page began the discussion Friday by talking about the importance of setting goals and thinking positively.

He said that he dreamed about being a professional wrestler since he was 8 years old, but after he was hit by a car in high school, his future in contact sports became questionable. Page had to quit football and hockey for good.

"[After the accident], I started playing basketball, which I'm probably the worst at and like the least," he said. "But that's where I first developed a work ethic. Eventually, I became a good player."

Overcoming his injury and applying his newfound work ethic to wrestling, he finally realized his childhood dream.

Page's break came while he was managing at a Florida nightclub, when

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WWF agent Blackjack Lanza went in, saw his 6-foot-5-inch, 253-pound frame, and asked him, "Why aren't you wrestling?"

He began his career in Ted Turner's World Championship Wrestling, which later merged with the WWF. After catching the eye of "Macho Man" Randy Savage, Page went on to become a 3-time WCW champion, a 5-time WCW tag team champion, and the current WWF European title holder.

"If it wasn't for Randy, I'd never become a top guy," Page said.

After his stirring speech, Page

moved the topic over to a question that often comes up when discussing wrestling — is it fake?

"It's not fake — it's fixed," he replied, adding with a grin, "it's only fake when I lose."

Page said that professional wrestlers are like actors in a physical soap opera who put on performances for the fans both inside and outside the ring.

"We are the best improvisational actors," he said. "And when you hold a belt, [that's] like winning an Oscar."

He said that WWF storylines are usually motivating and uplifting, and that because they are scripted, they

can deliver more consistent entertainment.

"Nine times out of 10 or 10 times out of 10, it is about when good triumphs over evil," he said.

But he emphasized that, even though the fights are scripted, the moves are very real, and the wrestlers often do get hurt.

Page has already had arthroscopic surgery on his knee and both his shoulders.

To avoid future injuries, Page said, he now follows a strict yoga regimen and attends frequent rehabilitation sessions.

Toward the end of the tea, a courageous student challenged Page

to a thumb-wrestling competition. Page graciously allowed the student to win, lifting his arm and declaring him thumb-wrestling champion.

Many students' questions focused on specific WWF storylines. Page said those stories are chosen with the fans in mind.

"What we ask ourselves is how do we do it to entertain the fans the most?" he said.

Andrew Park '02 said Page shed new light on professional wrestling.

"He captured what wrestling is really like," he said. "A lot of people have the stereotype that wrestlers are dumb jocks. This guy's such an articulate person."