

# My Wrestling Journey



*The travels of Our Man from Down Under*

# John Shelvey

## Part 3 - What, Australia Doesn't Have Wrestling?



Spike Robson still has the looks

So, it was up, up and away to the land of Aus. Ten pound Poms. Roughly a pound for each thousand miles travelled. I wonder how it was that our family flew, while others cruised for almost six weeks? Did some clerk at Australia House in London, say to his mate, "Now this guy, George Shelvey, ex signalman Royal Navy, a machinist at a plastics factory, lives in a council house on a council estate, formerly ran a chip shop, worked in a green grocers. What d'ya reckon Digger?"

*"Absolutely Nancurvis, get 'em on a plane asap! I've got to deal with a flippin' architect from Windsor. What good is he gonna be? I suppose we might get around to building another bridge. No hurry, I'll stick him and his missus on a ship."*

So I flew, whereas around the same time, Spike Robson, one time Salford and Swinton Rugby League player and sometimes pro. wrestler, enjoyed a trip ahoy. So that was nice, for him.

Wrestling, what wrestling?



A lazy Sunday at noon perhaps? Sydney stadium 1967.

As far as I could see, there was none. Nothing in the local newspapers, national papers, no flyers in shops or on lampposts or the hundreds of telegraph poles that formed a woody skyscape. Definitely not on the t.v. although many decades later good pal Ed Lock told me that he and his family did crowd around a little black and white and watched through the fog and distortions of a telecast of our own English televised wrestling. This apparition was viewed by searching through the t.v. until picking up the weak signal of the Wollongong television station on the South Coast an hour



Local lad Larry O'Dea. Started off as fresh meat for the Yanks, but his enthusiasm, speed, youth and good looks soon led to Larry being competitive with the big boys and then actually going over a number of them.

and some from Sydney. Who'd a thunk it!

Our family initially spent two weeks in a migrant hostel in a Sydney suburb, the same one that the members of the Easybeats pop group had met each other (forming the group in late '64). In the documentary of the history of the boys it seemed they spent most of their days being menaced by other lads in the camp, presumably because of their long hair and their nights being beaten up, perhaps for the same reason. I didn't venture out of the camp at night, so I never saw anything like that happen during my stay. However, when I went to dinner in the large cafeteria like dining hall, I usually wore my Beatle jacket (jacket sans collar) and sometimes added a cravat (pretentious, moi), so in all likelihood I would have been beaten had I strayed nocturnally.

Before we leave the camp, I just need to give you an idea of how we started to think we had landed in a country so far removed from the Sussex countryside we left behind. The Georges river ran through the camp and as we were avid fishermen, my father said one day, instead of looking for work, we would go and cast a line on the morrow. So it came to pass, approaching the river bank, we spied the sight that all fisher folk in Britain hate, a sign, no doubt about to impart the information that no fishing was allowed, private water etc.

We reached the sign, walked around its front and read "*No swimming SHARKS!*" We didn't leave, however we stood well back of the bank, while watching our quill floats with trepidation, that at any moment a large, razor sharp toothed creature, would gulp down our small piece of bread paste!

Having returned to base camp unharmed, my father suggested a week later, that we try our fishing luck outside the camp thinking, I suppose, that the sharks lurking inside the camp were too lazy or stuffed too full of camp immigrants, that they didn't venture a few hundred yards downstream or upstream (as the case maybe). Sure enough, there was a sign and we thought we had better check it out, just in case this one was a '*no fishing*' warning rather than a '*Beware of the Great White*' sign. Dad and I faced the sign and we read '*Beware Poisonous Snakes Breeding Grounds*'. We looked at each other, then looked back from where we left the gravel path, probably no more than a couple of hundred yards away, but standing there knee deep in long grass that journey back to the path seemed to streeeeeeeeetch a long, long way!





Said to be in charge of stadium security as well as bodyguard to stars like Sinatra and the Beatles, Len Holt was an Australian Heavyweight Champion.

Using the excuse that my family would need the money, I quickly went to work at the same factory as an uncle. That was the only excuse that would convince my parents, that I should not enrol at a school. Poor decision! Firstly, I really wasn't initially making that much money as a labourer/gofer, to make much of a difference to the household coffers and even less so when I later signed up as an apprentice. Secondly the education system really was not as advanced as back home and I believe I would have done well at a Sydney school, especially at sports where I would have made friends.

Funnily enough, as I could kick with both feet and catch as well as any slip fielder, and

was a former school champion runner, I reckon I would have been a good hand at Aussie Rules, however as that sport was non gratis persona in Sydney in particular and NSW in general, we would have needed to have emigrated to Victoria or perhaps South Aus. or Queensland. We hadn't, so I didn't (go to school) and I spent the next couple of years working five days a week and doing nothing socially on the weekends. No friends, just family (sigh if you need to, but no tears please).

I became shy around people that I didn't know, once turning down a boating fishing trip, from a lovely couple who ran a local delicatessen, simply because I didn't know their two sons who would be going along too. On another occasion I went along to a semi professional football club meeting of players hoping to be signed on for the coming season. We were told to expect a letter in a couple of weeks informing us of when training and trials would commence. The very next day I received a telegram saying that the first training day would be two days later. Using the excuse that I was expecting to hear from the club later rather than sooner and therefore didn't have time too buy any kit, I didn't turn up and I had dodged another (social) bullet. Yes teenagers can be so silly and headstrong!

I should note that there was just one hour of wrestling I did catch one afternoon on the ABC channel. I believe it was the doco. 'This Wrestling Game' which featured Hunter, Hayes and Dave Larsen among others. Then around the middle of that first year, reading the t.v. paper, there it was, wrestling was coming Down Under and not just as a television program, an American troupe of grunt and groaners were coming our way!