

# **Professional Wrestling**

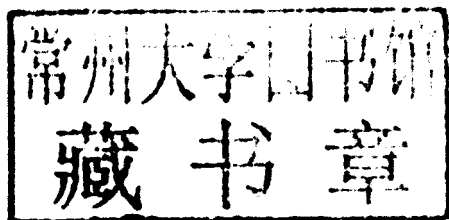
**Ed Wallace  
Smith**

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# PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING;

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Ed Wallace Smith



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FRANK GOTCH

THE WORLD'S ATHLETIC MARVEL

Being an Intimate Study of the Iowa Farmer and Financier, Both as a Man and the Wrestling Wonder of the Age

By ED W. SMITH

Sporting Editor of the Chicago American and Referee of the

Gotch-Hackenschmidt and Gotch-Mahmout International

Matches for the World's Title

Who is there of this great American reading public that has not at some time or other run across one of those pleasing little fables about the country boy who, fresh from the plow or dragged at a moment's notice from his work in the field, downed the chap from the city at some athletic contest? How often can you remember reading one of those stories, and don't you remember, too, that you sympathized with the yokel as against the haughty fellow of city birth and breeding, who was sq widely heralded about the countryside as being the greatest thing that ever happened?

Of course, everybody has read these stories at some time or other. Of course, even if you didn't believe the story, you believed *in* it, and when the climax came and the haughty athlete from town was humbled in defeat, you believed in the sentiment and gloated over the victory and the "city feller's" humiliation.

Doubtless there has been much truth in some of these yarns. Perhaps the city chap was a braggart and didn't really amount to so much as an athlete, and perhaps the farmer boy never could amount to anything if pitted against the real sort of an

259999

FRANK ALBERT GOTCH,

Of Humboldt, Iowa. flatch-as-Catch-Can Wrestling Champion of the World, a tiller secured and retained in the last two international matches in Cnicago.

athlete at the latter's favorite game, but at the same time the world loves to extend its sympathy to the under dog in such case, and always, in the story book, the farmer boy is the under dog.

Coming right down to the facts, there is one farmer boy in this country, now grown into a man – and what a man! – who maybe was the hero of some of these tales. If he wasn't he would have been simply an ideal hero for a yarn of that character. He is champion catch-as-catch-can wrestler of the world now, and his name is Frank Albert Gotch, a farmer lad from Humboldt, Ia., perhaps the greatest athlete America has yet produced, certainly the greatest wrestler.

Though a champion and something of a man of the world now, he is still a farmer at heart, for all of his great fortune – and he has accumulated much through thrifty habits contracted down on that old Iowa farm – is invested in lands in the corn State which he calls home.

Back in 1900, when wrestling was not nearly as popular in the Middle West as it is at the present time, and when wrestlers were looked upon with a great deal of suspicion by the average man, the wrestler being qualified along with the crafty second-story man and porch climber, Martin ("Farmer") Burns, then one of the best heavyweights in the country, began to circulate stories about a wonderful young fellow he had "discovered" out in Iowa and for whom he predicted the most brilliant future. His name was Gotch, and he said he intended to make a champion of the world out of him if it took him the rest of his life.

It didn't take Burns that long, because on the night of April 3, 1908, Burns saw his ambition realized. That night, or rather at an early hour the following morning, Gotch defeated George Hackenschmidt, the "Russian Lion," after two hours of a peculiar struggle, and carried off the title from that famous exhibition athlete.

A little over one year later a new Gotch, fully 100 per cent, better than he was when he defeated Hackenschmidt, successfully defended his title against Yussiff Mahmoud, the latest "Terrible Turk" to come to this country. It was Gotch's showing Picture taken in ring in Dexter Park Pavilion, Chicago. 111., April 3. IOCS.

Just before the start of the great match for the world's catch-as-catch-can title. Hackenschmidt conceded Gotch the match at the end of 2h. 5m.

**FRANK GOTCH AND GEORGES HACKENSCHMIDT, WITH REFEREE SMITH.**

in that match and the work he did on the mat immediately after that convinced many good judges of the wrestling game that the beau ideal champion had arrived.

Though even Gotch himself does not keep an intimate account of the happenings of his career in detail, he can tell you offhand that it was in a match on May 23, 1908, when he defeated Tom Jenkins in Kansas City in a catch-as-catch-can match, that he became champion of his own country. At least he was considered to be the best man in America, Jenkins being the only man at that time who was considered to have the slightest chance with him.

Since that time, with the exception of exactly sixteen days in December of that year, the Iowa farmer had held almost unquestioned sway. It is true that many men have come up in the meantime, but none of them were thought to be a serious contender for Gotch's title. I am speaking now merely of the American wrestlers.

I stated that for sixteen days Gotch was without his honors. That is true only in a sense. On December 1 Fred Beell of Wisconsin defeated Gotch in a match at New Orleans, winning on a fluke. Gotch had the first fall and the men were wrestling in

the second when Gotch, in making a quick turn to dodge away from his speedy little opponent, hit his head against one of the posts of the ring. This dazed him so badly that Beell had only to roll him over to secure the fall. When the men came out on the mat after the usual ten minutes rest for the third fall, Gotch was still befuddled and proved an easy victim.

They were matched again for December 17 in Kansas City, and there, before a gigantic crowd, Gotch convinced all that he was Beell's master by defeating him with great ease.

Since that time nobody has come anywhere near defeating the Iowa man, and in my opinion the man is not known at this time – the spring of 1909 – who stands any chance with him at all. I have arrived at this conclusion after an exhaustive study of the man and a careful and painstaking study of his matches of the last two years as well as of his methods. I am thoroughly convinced that he has everything that goes to make a champion of

View of the ring taken Just before the start of the match, April 14, 1901),

In Dexter Park Pavilion, Chicago, 111., In the presence of 8,600 spectators.

Gotch victor hi straight falls, 9m. 10s. and 7m. respectively.

FRANK GOTCH AND YUSSIFF MAHMOUT. ED. W. SMITH, REFEREE.

the world, and in this category I would list gameness, first of all, and then in rapid order, extreme skill, gigantic strength, a wonderful brain, and last and perhaps the greatest attribute of all, his amazing ability to read men and tell almost at a glance what is passing in their minds.

As referee of the match in which Gotch defeated the once mighty Hackenschmidt, I had a great chance to see this wonderful athlete in action against the most powerful rival he was ever asked to face. I saw that night that Gotch was so far out of the ordinary as to call for unusual attention. Not only did he outwrestle the marvellously strong "Russian Lion," but he outgamed him as well and used that wonderful brain of his to such startling advantage that Hackenschmidt was absolutely bewildered and confused at the end of fifteen minutes' work and then began to try and make excuses for having the match called a draw.

Hackenschmidt subsequently told the most disgraceful stories about Gotch and myself after he got to England, claiming to have been fouled deliberately and in general to have been the victim of a job to down him. Inasmuch as Hackenschmidt was utterly unable at any time to secure one hold of any importance on the wonderful man from Iowa, those who saw the match at once construed his talk as being that of a mighty bad loser and the words that might be expected from a quitter, for that is what Hackenschmidt showed himself to be that night.

I have never taken the trouble to reply to the stories circulated in England by "Hack," confident that the motion pictures taken of the match would show exactly what happened. Later, Hackenschmidt was found to be wrong by English sportsmen, the London Sporting Life in particular coming out in a manly fashion and making public apology to Gotch and myself for having accepted the "Lion's" statements so flatfootedly.

Briefly, however, at this time, I will say that Hackenschmidt's tale about Gotch being greased was the veriest bosh. He knows that with one man greased at the start

both men would be greased inside of ten minutes of wrestling, thus making it as hard for one as for the other to take holds. Besides that, it

GEORGES HACKENSCHMIDT, The Russian Lion.

was on the legs that Gotch would need the grease more than any other place. The fact that Gotch that night wore full length tights, as he always does in the ring, is sufficient answer.

Hackenschmidt said he was fouled. He was not. Gotch the next day was as badly punished as Hackenschmidt. Heavyweights standing up with heads together for nearly two hours and pulling and haulin? fiercely are bound to get bruises. Catch-as-catch-can wrestling is a long way from being a parlor sport, and Hackenschmidt, who can be the roughest man imaginable when he has in front of him an opponent he knows he can handle with ease, knows it well.

But it is of Gotch that we are more concerned.

What has this fellow got that makes him so superior to his fellow athletes, many of whom are stronger by far than the Iowa farmer?

Briefly as possible I will attempt to show.

To begin with, when Gotch starts wrestling, he uses more headwork than any athlete I ever knew or saw work. That in two lines is the secret of the success of Frank Gotch. He is a brainy man; that is all there is to it.

Gotch in action has three wonderfully strong points.

He can get behind a man better than any wrestler I ever saw.

He can, once he gets behind and hurls an opponent to the mat, get a crotch hold more effectively than any man in the business.

From the crotch hold he works his man into a half Nelson and then it is an easy matter to get the fall.

This was shown in his great match with Yussiff Mahmout at Dexter Park Pavilion, April 14, 1909. It was with a crotch hold and half Nelson, a double hold that is effectively explained and illustrated by Dr. B. F. Roller, the famous college athlete and professional wrestler, in this book, that Gotch defended his world's title against the Bulgarian.

After the match I said to Antoine Pierri, Mahmout's manager, and himself a former wrestler of wide experience:

"He had no defense for that hold, did he?"

"That is not exactly it" came the ready reply from the Greek, DR. B. F. ROLLER, Seattle, Wash.

Graduate De Pauw and University of Pennsylvania; now a leading professional wrestler.

Copyright, 1908, James & Bushnell, Seattle."for no man living that I know can defeat this fellow. When he gets that hold on anybody living it will be the same story. He is the most wonderful wrestler I have seen since the days of Yousouf."

Gotch is known as the man who invented or devised or introduced, or whatever else you may call it, what is known as the toe hold, the most deadly grip known to wrestling, unless we except only the strangle lock. Yet when we cast back an eye over Gotch's record we find that he has won but few falls and fewer matches with this hold than any other.

I can explain that easily. Gotch invented the toe hold merely as a subterfuge for securing the easier and equally as effective crotch lock. In getting a reputation for using the toe hold Gotch got exactly what he wanted. He desired to be known as always going after that hold. But he used it in the greater number of cases merely to turn an opponent over on his side and thus get the legs spread apart that he may run his arm in between them and secure the crotch.

That is the whole thing in a nutshell. The toe hold is a stall to get something else. Let it be known right now that the toe grip is a mighty hard thing to get on an opponent who knows anything. But when you go after it you can get a man to roll on his side and spread his legs out. This makes it possible and in many cases easy to get the crotch hold.

And I will tell you something more about this crotch hold that will astonish you. I have seen Gotch pick up an opponent bodily, raise him over his head and then drop him to the mat, getting the crotch hold actually while his man is coming down through the air. This one little paragraph will serve to show how wonderfully fast this man's brain works and how rapidly he can make his muscles answer to the call of his brain.

The layman may not realize the import of this thing of making the muscles answer to the brain. I believe that this is what "class" means more than anything else. When you find a wrestler who can do it, or when you find a base ball player or a fighter or any other sort of an athlete who has the faculty of doing it, then you have a man of the highest class.

i – njahnir Ltindin, Swedish champion wrestler at Graeco-Roman ami catch as-catch-cun styles. 2 – Uaoul De Rouen, of trance, glunt l'arisiuij who came to this country to meet Frank Uotch.

Seldom have I seen in one year the marked change that came over an athlete as that which transpired in the general makeup and ability of Frank Gotch between the match with Hacken- schmidt and that with Mahmout, a trifle over one year.

In the match with Hackenschmidt he was scarcely conceded a chance to win against the famous "Lion." As a matter of fact many of his friends expressed sympathy for him, believing that he was about to get the licking of a lifetime. But not so this wonderful man from Iowa. He told me a week before the match and before there was even a suggestion of making me the referee of the contest – an honor, by the way, that was thrust upon me by the great Hackenschmidt himself – that he would win the match without obtaining a fall. Asked how he figured out such a thing, Gotch replied that he had given some study to the man and knew that Hackenschmidt would have to win inside of fifteen minutes or he could not win at all.

"He thinks I am a mark," Gotch told me, "and he isn't training. I never was better in my life and can stand him off for a half hour easily. Then he will begin to weaken and after that he will quit. He never will let me throw him because he will want to go back to England and say that he couldn't be thrown and have some bad excuse to offer."

This is merely cited to show Gotch's wonderful perception of men and conditions and his ability to foresee events and prepare for them.

After the Hackenschmidt match Gotch gained the deepest confidence, and when he faced Mahmout he would have faced a den of panthers, so sure was he that nobody

could beat him. I was in his dressing room thirty minutes before the men went into the ring to help settle the dispute as to whether or not the foreign star would be permitted to wrestle in his bare feet or be forced to wear shoes. Never have I seen an athlete so coolly undisturbed as was this giant. He wasn't even stripped, although there was a mob of close to 8,000 persons out in that vast amphitheatre waiting to see the struggle. The gate receipts were close to \$40,000.

"He signed Police Gazette rules and now let him wrestle

1 – Ernest Siegfried, "The German Oak," a famous Graeco-Romnn star on the other side of the water. 2 – "Amerirus" (Tius Schoenleint, of Baltimore. Md., fan, ous light-heavyweight wrestler.

under those rules or not at all," Gotch said. "Send the people away if you want to. I simply won't let him dictate to me."

This stand gave the promoters an anxious half hour, because that crowd would have torn the building down if the match had been called off. The matter finally was compromised by the Turk's manager paying over a forfeit of \$500. This incident, too, will serve to show Gotch's financial shrewdness. Though he got close to \$15,000 for his end and knew absolutely that he could defeat Mahmoud, nothing short of the \$500 forfeit would make him budge from the position he had taken.

When Gotch is preparing for a match he never has anything on his mind, unless it is his everpresent love of the coin. When he trains he dismisses from his mind all thoughts of anything but the work that he has in hand. His mind is as free as if he had no mind at all and he refuses to get serious about anything. He is handled like a racehorse or a prize dog about to be displayed. He hires the best trainers to be found anywhere, men who understand him in every particular and to whom it will not be even necessary for him to explain anything. He permits no business cares to creep into his daily life, but it is train, train, train all the time. Then when he steps into the ring he is in the finest possible condition.

This should be a lesson for all athletes. It is the mental strain and the cares of matters foreign to athletics that lose more matches than anything else and unfit men for strenuous battle.

Gotch is inordinately fond of increasing his bankroll; there is no doubt of that, but he dismisses all this when he is training. Here is an incident that happened during the time that he was matched with Raoul de Rouen, the Frenchman, in Kansas City in April, 1909. There was a parcel of land near one of his own tracts that he wanted. The owner set a price, but it was a bit too high.

"I'll get about \$6,000 out of this match," Gotch reasoned, "and won't spend a cent more for the land than that. He'll have to come down in his price." The owner of the property cut the acre price \$2.50, and sure enough Gotch's one-third of the 1 – Fred Beell, of Marshfield, Wis., known as one of the greatest Hght-

heavyweight wrestlers in the business. 2 – Yussiff Mahmoud, latest "Terrible Turk" to come to this country, only to prove an easy victim for Frank Gotch after he bud defeated all other crack heavyweights.

Kansas City house reached just \$6,100, and the champion gor a valuable addition to his real estate holdings.

Gotch is a great financier, there is no doubt of it. When he first became known to Chicagoans he was willing to wrestle for very moderate amounts. He didn't want more than \$150 for a contest back in 1906. Things have changed since then and the champion adopted a new scale of prices that, while not exorbitant, gives the big fellow a tremendous income. He works constantly and will cut the usual price in order to keep forever at it.

"The public is fickle," he reasons, "and when my day of defea' comes, as it surely must if I stick long enough, I want to be so well provided with money that I will be absolutely independent."

Of one thing, dear reader, you can be absolutely sure – Gotch will never be broke.

Many predicted before the Mahmout match that the Turks peculiar crouch would puzzle Gotch and make it hard for the American to get behind his man and secure any effective hold on him. Gotch smiled at this and told his friends to wait.

Gotch solved the crouch puzzle in a hurry. "I hooked him into defeat," Gotch said afterward, and in truth he did. When the Turk crouched forward with his head stuck forward in the style usual with foreign wrestlers, Gotch reached over and hooked the Turk behind the neck, jerking him forward vigorously. This little trick entirely disconcerted the Turk and kept him so overbalanced all the time that inside of four minutes his courage began to ooze out of his finger tips. It wasn't exactly fair to fool the great foreign star in that fashion, but you see Gotch needed the money and wanted to keep the title.

If they stand up straight Gotch finds it easy to get into their legs, and if they try to block him off and crouch he hooks 'em into defeat. It looks as if nothing could fool him at all.

Gotch reminds me of a man who has a fad for hunting and with means at his command has provided himself with a perfect arsenal of weapons. But down in a corner of that arsenal is his favorite gun which he uses most of the time for all sorts

1-CHARLES OLSON. 2-OHARLES POSTL.

of game. That weapon is his crotch and half Nelson. If the game refuses to come down with that weapon Frank looks over his stock and selects something else that will hit the vital spot. He is the best equipped hunter I ever knew.

Of one thing I am thoroughly convinced. Had Gotch not been a bit cautious of Hackenschmidt and the terrible rep'irn- tion he brought to this country as a man-killer, I am satisfied that he would have beaten the "Lion" that night inside of twenty minutes and beaten him more decisively than he did. Gotch had the foreigner sized up pretty well as it was, but he figured that "Hack" was a better wrestler than he really is. At the time this story was written Hackenschmidt would stand no show at all with Gotch, who would outclass him at every point, and especially in speed and knowledge of the game.

An incident happened during the Mahmout match that shows the extreme coolness and confidence of the man. He had the dreaded crotch hold and half Nelson on the Turk and had his second shoulder within a few inches of the mat for the first fall. I was flat on the canvas watching and directly facing Gotch. "He'll come this time, Ed, but he's pretty tough," he remarked with a grin, as if indulging only in a frolic in

the gymnasium instead of in a world's championship match upon which thousands of dollars depended.

What manner of man is going to beat a fellow like that?

That is a question I cannot figure out. It will take a big fellow who has got all that Gotch has and a little more. No man under Gotch's weight is going to defeat him. He will ha, ye to be crushed down, but the man who does the crushing will have to be like a steam roller.

Often I am asked about the honesty of matches. Of the general run of contests in this country I can speak only in a general way, but of those that I have seen around Chicago I will say that nine-tenths of them are very much on the square. The simple answer that the better man always wins should settle all argument. I believe there are times when one wrestler permits another to make a better showing than he would if the better man hustled and won as quickly as he could. Even these

1 – JESS WESTERGAARD "BEIMER." 2 – CHARLES ODTLER

occasions are remote, for wrestlers are getting to be more guarded of their reputations than formerly, being convinced of the truth of the old maxim about honesty being the best policy.

There is one thing you can wager your all on. The last two international matches were strictly honest in every detail. Hackenschmidt would not have lost to Gotch dishonestly for many times what anybody could have afforded to offer him. As for Mahmoud, he could have cleaned up \$100,000 inside of two years had he been able to defeat Gotch.

There was a time, I am satisfied, when wrestlers practically had to fake in order to get along, so thoroughly was the game in disrepute. Careful handling in Chicago has done much to put the game on a firm and honest footing, and I think the old-time system of faking and jobbing has been done away with. A good wrestler does much better these days by being strictly on the level, and I believe a very large majority of them are.

To Dr. Benjamin Franklin Roller, one of the leading athletes of this country, the American Sports Publishing Company owes a debt of gratitude. It was Dr. Roller who, with Charles Postl of Buffalo, N. Y., posed for the excellent pictures of this little work on wrestling.

No man in the country is better fitted to discourse on catch- as-catch-can wrestling than Dr. Roller. He is a thorough student of the game and, in addition, is said by Frank Gotch himself to be the second best professional wrestler in this country. This is proved by the fact that while the doctor has met every first-class wrestler in America in straight matches, he has yet to lose a fall to any man excepting only the champion himself.

Dr. Roller is sincere in his statement that he, in common with all other American wrestlers, considers Gotch to be the most wonderful athlete of the day. He makes the flat statement that Gotch has got some "stuff" that no other wrestlers attempt at all because they know nothing about it. Gotch invented the famous – or infamous, as you please – toe hold, and, in addition to that, wrestles around an opponent's legs in a style adopted by no other wrestler.

It is this "inside legwork" and other of Gotch's great holds