

SPORTS

Chhun hopes to make pro wrestling “Classic”

By Jason Cruz
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Cody Chhun grew up watching professional wrestling with his grandfather and uncles.

The 22-year-old is now a professional wrestler himself. In fact, the Cambodian American admits his mother isn't a fan of his career choice.

“You're going to get hurt,” she warned. Although scripted, professional wrestling includes physical moves with the potential of injury. Thus far, Chhun hasn't had any severe injuries in his four years of professional wrestling.

Despite watching it with him while he was young, Chhun admits that his grandfather is worried that he'll get hurt in the ring.

Chhun's parents immigrated to the United States in the 1970s during the rule of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. While he still is close to his family, he hopes that they will one day fully support his dreams.

Professional wrestling's popularity has risen in the past several years with the Fox Network, now showing a two-hour professional wrestling show on Friday nights. World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), the biggest promoter in the industry, is a publicly-traded company and many of the professional wrestlers, such as Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson and John Cena, have gone on to have successful movie careers. Independent wrestling shows have popped up across the nation and they have become popular with a young fan base. Various shows can be



Cody Chhun

Courtesy of Defy Wrestling

seen on television as well as online. While professional wrestling may be pegged as “scripted fighting,” most shows stress the athletic part of the spectacle over the aspect of it not being real.

Chhun was an amateur wrestler at Global Connections High School (formerly known as Tyee High School) in the SeaTac area. He didn't win a single match. But Chhun's time on the mat would turn out to help him later. Upon graduation, Chhun skipped college and took time off to figure out what he wanted to do with his life. He saw the popularity of professional wrestling and thought he would give it a shot. He did some research and found the Buddy Wayne Academy in Edmonds, a well-respected school for pro-wrestling hopefuls. The school helps pro wrestlers learn how to

fall, hit, and put on a show in the ring.

Chhun recalls “disappearing” from friends and family on Wednesday nights so he could train. He wanted it to be a secret with the hopes of one day appearing on television to show his parents. After just 6 months of training, Chhun got his chance at an event in Seattle.

“I wore a stereotypical Asian outfit,” Chhun described of his muay thai shorts and a face mask. “It was a rush,” he said of performing in front of a live audience. “I felt like a star.”

Chhun was hooked and he's been wrestling for the last four years. He mainly wrestles in the Pacific Northwest, but recently, he ventured to Southern California to appear on a card featuring young prospects and loved the experience.

Chhun's sisters discovered his secret when they stumbled upon some YouTube videos of his matches.

As a professional wrestler, Chhun has to find promoters that are willing to hire him to appear at events. The process isn't glamorous for those relatively new to the business like Chhun. He's been a regular at Defy Wrestling, a Seattle-based promotion that holds monthly shows in Seattle and Portland.

“A guy like Cody, he has a lot of natural charisma and he's had that...for a long time,” said Defy promoter Matt Farmer. “It's kind of finding a way for that charisma to show. So you maybe give them hints or notes on how to amplify that.”

Chhun's nickname, “Classic,” is based on his ability to make a mistake with some of the basic moves in professional wrestling. His instructor used to call the basic mishaps a “Classic” Chhun move. The name was catchy enough that it stuck with Chhun and he uses it when he's announced entering the ring. In a nod to his heritage, he wears trunks with a depiction of the Angkor Wat temple, as well as script in Cambodian.

Chhun has had a brush with WWE on a couple of occasions, as he's been involved during the promotion's shows when it made its tour through the Northwest. One day, he dreams of making it to the WWE or one of the other national promoters and working full-time as a professional wrestler.

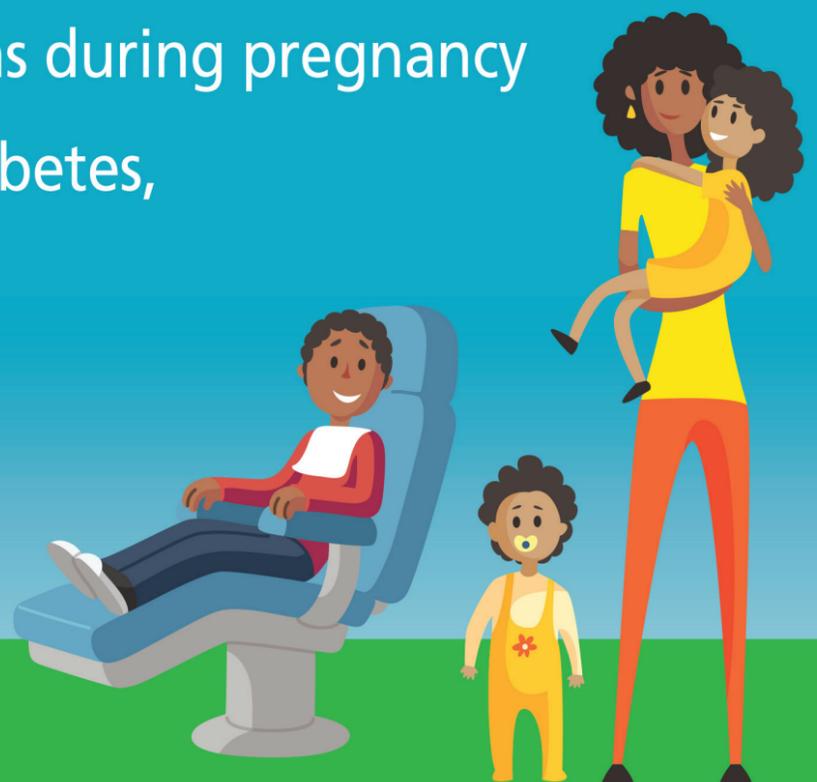
“I don't know any famous Cambodian people,” said Chhun. “I hope to make it.” ■

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