

From Don Riley's 1997 book "Gallivan's Gang".

"You know, when I was a really young cub, I used to broadcast the wrestling and boxing matches for WMIN, sometimes steady when Marty O'Neil was doing the ball games. I had the only two honest wrestling matches in the Twin Cities."

"In one, Cliff Gustafson, who is supposed to win, wrecks his back when he falls wrong while he's attacking the champ, Sandor Szabo. Szabo is supposed to take the fall that night and come back again to regain his title in St. Louis two weeks later. Szabo has mastered the Hungarian Whiplash, one of the most feared holds – along with the Backbreaker of Cowboy Dick Raines and Bronko Nagurski's acclaimed Airplane Spinner to deaden the nerves and, of course, his Shoulder Block of football antecedents."

Jesse interrupted, "Jeez, you sound like a believer."

"No, I'm just titillating your visual imagery as I describe the scene of gory combat. Of course, I knew beforehand who would win and when the action would be hectic or slow so I could read my Snyder Family Liquor Store commercials... 'For courteous and reliable service and the finest in domestic and imported wines and liquor, stop in at 95 South Sixth Street.' I always wanted to add, 'and bring in the kids, they're certain to have a good time at this family store.'"

"Anyway, Gustafson was a former AAU wrestling champ but he had no more color than a loaf of sale bread. He had a helluva following from Gonvic, a little potato town up north. All his relatives and friends were there, about 200."

"Well, when he crashes down on my announcing table – as a result of Sandor's excruciating whiplash – he snaps some vertebrae. But nobody knows that, including the ref, little Wally Karbo."

"Wally panics and so does the job. Now, get this: there are over 7,000 fans in the Minneapolis Auditorium, all pulling for the local hero and to a man they figure Szabo has pulled a dirty trick."

"First thing I know, some 200-pound plow jockey from Gonvic has grabbed my microphone and climbed into the ring, intent on killing Szabo. By the time I get up chasing after my mic, the farmer had clobbered Szabo with my equipment and there's blood streaming down his face. At least 20 people are in the ring, cursing and swinging and trying to get at the champ. Karbo is down and nearly trampled!"

"Four riot squads finally get things under control. They had to shut off the broadcast and Gustafson wound up in a cast for over a month. To this day, Gagne and Karbo and their lard-ass

crew know that I grew up in all this crap. Occasionally, a little honesty creeps in purely by accident.”

(The other “honest” wrestling match Riley says he saw was in St. Paul, where the ring at the old Auditorium – still standing by the way as the Roy Wilkens Auditorium – was on a theater stage right next to the orchestra pit.

Bronco Nagurski was wrestling Abe Kashey.

The ring ropes had a few ribbons on the side overlooking the orchestra pit so the wrestlers would know not to work that side of the ring.

Nagurski forgot.

He picked up Kashey and threw him over the ropes with the ribbons on them. Kashey fell in to the orchestra pit and broke his shoulder and wrist.

Wrestling was a serious business in the Twin Cities for many years. The bouts involving Hulk Hogan and Jesse Ventura or Nick Bockwinkel drew more than 20,000 and they had to set up a closed circuit broadcast in an arena next door which drew another 4000 to 5000.

A top radio broadcaster in Minneapolis always referred to Verne Gagne as “the world heavyweight champion of the 7-County Mosquito Control District” (a real government agency).