

Great Moments in Weed History

S2 E2 - Iron Sheik

ABDULLAH: This podcast is for adults 21 years of age or older. We talk about cannabis history and advertise cannabis products. If you're not 21 come back when you are.

[Spoke Media]

ABDULLAH: Hey, how's it going folks? It's Abdullah.

BEAN: And Bean.

ABDULLAH: And welcome back for yet another episode of Great Moments in Weed History. Bean and I who are both cannabis journalists and media makers go through one of the more fascinating points in the long, long, long, long history of cannabis. I have no prior knowledge of the story bean's about to tell us he has researched and written it and he's going to be telling it to me and you for the first time, except I get to sit here and react and smoke weed with this guy. Bean, what kind of a story do you have for us today?

BEAN: I have a really amazing story. It crosses continents. It looks into a subculture that's both sort of ever-present but definitely not one that I've been a part of. Not one that's always associated with weed. It's got ups, it's got downs, it's got tragedy, joy, and of course it's got a lot of weed in it.

ABDULLAH: Oh my God, that's right. This is a truly sounding like it's going to be the game of Thrones of Cannabis. Epic proportions. Oh my God. And continent crossing. That's not something that we get to do very often in Great Moment in Weed History, but we're going to do it today. I'm pretty excited. I am so excited that the joint is already rolled up or at the very top of the show and it is prepared. It's sitting in front of me and we're going to smoke it. I think we've got everything we need.

BEAN: If you're listening at home and you're not quite there yet, good time to hit pause. Roll something up. Pack something up. You got a lighter?

ABDULLAH: I got a lighter.

BEAN: You got the joint?

ABDULLAH: I got the joint.

BEAN: I got a story.

ABDULLAH: Oh my God. Well that case, I think we're ready for another

[Great Moment in Weed History Intro]

ABDULLAH: Alrighty, so I've got my joint here. I'm about to light this thing up. I'm super excited to hear what you got for us today. Bean, laid on me, brother.

BEAN: All right. The hero of today's Great Moment in History. Hossein Khosrow Ali Vaziri was born in 1942. Any guesses yet?

ABDULLAH: No, it sounds like a brown guy though, which I'm stoked to hear about always.

BEAN: Definitely Brown. Born in 1942 in a small village near Tehran, in Iran.

ABDULLAH: Okay. So as we know, the Middle East has a long, long history with cannabis. Cannabis is a tradable commodity, dating back centuries. Iran specifically. Now Iran is known for opium poppy fields, but I don't know if I have a clue yet. Let's keep going.

BEAN: Okay. As a child, Vaziri was consumed with the sport of wrestling, which was a national obsession in Iran. And despite growing up in poverty, he dreamed of becoming an Olympic champion.

ABDULLAH: An Irani wrestler who has something to do with weed.

[Stadium Commotion]

ABDULLAH: Oh man, that's, that's tough. The one guy that comes to mind is the Iron Sheik.

BEAN: Yeah!

ABDULLAH: No kidding. So the Iron Sheik was actually an Iranian dude. Huh? I always wondered if it was a guy like from somewhere else who was just playing apart. But so he was an actual maybe not actual Sheik. But he was a, he was Irani, very interesting. Oh my God. So the Iron Sheik has a weed story? I had no idea. I'm so curious. I have all kinds of questions. it's a sports story. I love sports cannabis stories. You know, like I'm always excited when we're talking about the intersection of the two things. And yes, I do consider professional wrestling to be a sport. I'm sure there's people out there that would dispute that. But truly, despite how performative it is, it's still a sport. There are plenty of performative sports. Just look at the ribbon event at the Olympics, if that's a sport then professional wrestling's a sport and the Iron Sheik, definitely an enigmatic and interesting figure from a certain era in wrestling. Let's go.

BEAN: Alright, so he grows up in a little village outside of Tehran and he is in poverty by Iranian standards of the time. They're poor. At age 18, he volunteered for the military where he trained with passionate intensity until he became one of the top wrestlers. So that's his dream. And as a poor person, his really only way to pursue that is to join the military and kind of become a wrestler within that framework.

ABDULLAH: Interesting. Okay, cool. So He's, he's playing sports in the military, like you would see, you know, like the army as a football team or whatever.

BEAN: Yeah, absolutely. And I hadn't realized this at all. But in Iran it's like the biggest sport was wrestling, even more than soccer at this time. Like this is like a national obsession.

ABDULLAH: And what we're talking about, I'm guessing is like Greco Roman as opposed to like this Monday night I'm going to crush your face. Like, you know, it's a little bit more of like the Olympic wrestling vibe.

BEAN: Yes. come down to the Tehran Amphitheatre.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. I'm going to see you downtown Tehran in front of the whole world disease and we're gonna finally settle the score. I love it.

BEAN: So yeah, he's in a, he's in the more Greco Roman you know his dream is to be in the Olympics.

ABDULLAH: Right.

BEAN: Eventually he was hired as a bodyguard by the Shah who ruled as part of a 2,500 year old monarchy that had only very recently been restored by a CIA backed coup.

ABDULLAH: Right. Okay. So this is a pretty well known story about the US meddling in foreign politics and removing a democratically elected leader and replacing him with a puppet. But it's still kind of crazy where we are in this story because I'm scratching my head as to how we get from here to the WWF, what was known at the time as the WWF.

BEAN: So while working for the Shah as his body guard, Vaziri also and Vaziri is to become the Iron Sheik, also became friends with his childhood hero, a gold medal winning Olympic wrestler named Takhti, who was a vocal critic of the Shah and a prominent pro-democracy activist.

ABDULLAH: Wow. So, you know, if you know anything about the Shah of Iran is probably really hard to be anti-Shah. You know what I mean? Of course. Like he had that crazy secret police Savak I think it was called. Right? And essentially if you were, you know, even talking a little bit sideways about them, I mean, this is a totalitarian leader. This is not a democratically elected guy. So to be a critic of the Shah, I mean that's a very, very ballsy move.

BEAN: And guess who set up Savak?

ABDULLAH: Hmm, an American organization that also invented aids.

BEAN: I will just say, and we'll reveal it at the end, Rasta don't work for them. And that would be the CIA. And obviously Bob Marley is beyond a friend of the podcast. But that is, you know, this is the same thing that's going on in Jamaica a little, you know, a little later in history. And if we started naming countries where the CIA, and I know you use the word meddling knowingly underplaying.

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah.

BEAN: But this is way beyond meddling.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. And not just in the Middle East. We're talking in south and Central America, like across the world. you know? Yeah. Hyper meddling.

BEAN: So this is like the most famous person in Iran. This wrestler, he won a gold medal in this sport that the country is obsessed with. So he is beyond an athletic icon. He is, I don't want to speak more than I know, but certainly one of the most famous people in the country at the time

ABDULLAH: So he's like a Muhammad Ali level celebrity.

BEAN: Yeah. Maybe even bigger.

ABDULLAH: Wow.

BEAN: So he becomes friends with this guy who was a pro-democracy activist. Tensions in Iran that had long been building since this coup would boil over in January, 1968 when Takhti's lifeless body was found in a hotel room.

ABDULLAH: Shit. See, of course like that's the Shah right there. You know what I mean? Like that's exactly the, you know, the threat of the risk that Takhti was taking. That's really tragic that someone who speaks out with silence in that way.

BEAN: Yeah. So the government pronounced his death, a suicide, but most Iranian's including Vaziri, you know, to be the Iron Sheik, believed that he had been killed by Savak. So fearing that he might be targeted next Vaziri fled to the United States where despite struggling to learn English, he continued as an amateur wrestler winning an AAU Championship in 1971 and serving as an assistant coach to the US Olympic team at the 1972 games in Germany.

ABDULLAH: Okay, wow. So he escaped the, you know, persecutory environment of Iran and found himself in the United States and he's still pursuing wrestling and he's shining at it obviously. I mean he's the coach of the Olympic team. So that's the American dream right there. Right?

BEAN: With one missing piece, which is that amateur wrestling does not really pay the bill.

ABDULLAH: Ah, yeah. I imagine it wouldn't.

BEAN: It doesn't even pay the bill because you're an amateur.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, not even the smallest bill? Like it's the water bill. It's \$16 a month. How is water this cheap?

BEAN: Well I have to pay the mat cleaning fees and I rent, you know, I have to rent the singlet. They get you a million different ways.

ABDULLAH: It's like you don't, it's singlets cost \$600 a piece. Their expensive.

BEAN: They were a lot less expensive in Iran. So later that same year, to bring in some income, he begins a pro-wrestling career. Ah, you know what we know of off the top turnbuckle pro wrestling.

ABDULLAH: Right. And so what year is this?

BEAN: This would be 1973.

ABDULLAH: Gotcha. So what is wrestling look like in America at this point?

BEAN: It's, it's all like up regional circuit.

SEGMENT: ...Atlanta from St Petersburg

SEGMENT 2: It's a pleasure to be with you and a great pleasure to be here on Georgia championship wrestling.

SEGMENT 3: [inaudible]

BEAN: You know, there's not the WWF as we know it. Mainstream entertainment like it is now. There's no big stars. You know, this is like pre Hulk Hogan, pre wrestlemania. And what the WWF actually is is people coming in and consolidating the wrestling industry gobbling up market share and becoming this huge company, which is happening right now to weed.

ABDULLAH: Right? That's right. It's the corporatization of weed essentially the conglomeration of weed. One of the great tragedies of a weed at being a weed advocate in this time is that, you

know, cannabis is becoming legal in different forms in many places and people are tolerating more, but it's also being sucked up by the capitalism machine. You know what I mean? That we hope that cannabis would be an exception to, you know,

BEAN: Yeah it's this intersection of my, one of my very favorite things and one of my, you know, least favorite things.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: So he decides to try a pro wrestling career. He wants to make some money. He's got a wife now and he competes as a baby face. Do you know what that means?

ABDULLAH: Right. So I'm not totally up on my wrestling lingo. I know a heel is a bad guy, right? A baby face is like a, you know, someone like Brett Hart or something. Right? He's like kind of like a, the pretty boy. The obvious is good guy in some senses. Is that right?

BEAN: Yeah, it's, it's a, it's almost a dichotomy.

ABDULLAH: right?

BEAN: You know, you have heels like you said, and baby faces really just means the good guy and the bad guy. And of course that is very broadly drawn in the world of pro-wrestling.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: There's not a lot of like noirish antiheroes. Maybe there are now.

ABDULLAH: The Undertaker.

BEAN: Yeah.

ABDULLAH: You know, The Undertaker was not necessarily a heel. I don't know if he's considered a heel. but he always felt like somewhere in between to me, you know, he really is a guy you root for, but he is very dark thematically.

BEAN: And, I think then the skill of the heel is the person you love to hate. And some people love that feeling so much. They identify so much with the heel that they vote for them.

ABDULLAH: Right, right. They're actually rooting for who is technically the bad guy.

BEAN: Not only are they rooting for them, but they make them the leader of a country.

ABDULLAH: Yeah.

BEAN: That's what that dude is. He's a wrestling heel. And I think, I've never heard a metaphor that better explained to me, not just the methods that this person, employers, but why it connects and how it connects with people.

ABDULLAH: So true. And also there's the time that he was an actual wrestling heel in the wwe.

WRESTLER: I'll knock you on your billionaires butt. Donald Trump!

BEAN: Well, let's get back to Vaziri.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, let's do it.

BEAN: Okay. At first he believed pro wrestling was real until his trainer hipped him to the industry's big secret.

ABDULLAH: So wait, he thought it was real before he started doing it right? Because imagine like an Olympic champion wrestler getting in the ring with you and you like talking a bunch of Shit, you know, thinking that you guys are gonna play fight and then him just fucking Greco Roman kicking your ass.

BEAN: Especially if he doesn't speak English too well. So you're probably like, okay, throw me into the turnbuckle and we'll do a double spin in a flip throw, and he's like, I'm gonna crush the shit out of you.

ABDULLAH: What means uncles? What means uncle? The guy's like, you're like about to break that guy's arm.

BEAN: So he becomes a pro wrestler. He learns this big secret and not long after that he smokes weed for the first time. sharing a joint with a Jimmy Superfly Snuka.

[Superfly intro]

ABDULLAH: Superfly, huh?

BEAN: I believe it's superfly in him flying through the ring rather than the superlative flyness of his personal style.

ABDULLAH: Thank you for breaking that down, Professor Funk.

BEAN: Well those are two very distinct ring images.

ABDULLAH: Superlative nature of his flyness. Incredible. Okay, Gotcha. So this guy was super fly Jones, what was it again?

BEAN: Superfly Snuka.

ABDULLAH: Snoop, Superfly Snuka.

BEAN: Well snooper flyer. Yeah. [inaudible]

ABDULLAH: Okay. So this guy is cool as shit and he's smoking weed obviously. I'm guessing at this time there's no exhaustive pee testing regimen and a regional wrestling.

BEAN: I kind of doubt it.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. So he's getting high. I'm sure he's treating whatever, you know, injuries that he's getting in the ring with the therapeutic power of cannabis. And he offers that up to the Iron Sheik. What, what does he think of it?

BEAN: He's pretty into it. After failing to gain traction on the lower echelons of the regional touring circuit, fighting under his own name, and he's struggling to provide for his new wife. He took the advice of a longtime tour promoter's wife and reinvented himself by shaving his head growing out a bufo, bufo?

ABDULLAH: Bufo how do you say that name of that mustache? I have no idea.

PRONUNCIATOR: Handlebar

ABDULLAH: But the big ass, you know, like a old school, British bodybuilder type mustache.

BEAN: Perfect. The only other reference for that is like the Iron Sheik used to have.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, they call that mustache, the Iron Sheik now. so this, he invented the persona right there.

BEAN: Yeah. Well it's, it's like the tour promoter's wife takes him aside and it's like, hey, you know, I know this world. He's totally like, very recently he probably didn't even know pro wrestling was a thing maybe when he was in Iran. I'm not 100% sure. And then he thinks it's real when he gets there. So like he's just, you know, and what's interesting is like his early style, he wore the American flag, he wore his Olympic metals. He was like a hyper patriotic American. He was like, that's who I am and that's who I'll be.

ABDULLAH: But then obviously he's about to find a lot more traction when he leans into his heritage a little bit. So after trying it out as a baby phase and you know, not really being that effective, he finds his persona as a heal.

[Iron Sheik Clip]

BEAN: Yea, you know the connection to like, the immigrant story is so clear. He's so proud to be at least in America, he's so grateful to have a place to escape what's, you know, could have very well been his own murder where he comes from and he goes out in front of these crowds of Americans in like this really patriotic quote unquote world of pro wrestling. And he's a brown dude and they're like, meh.

ABDULLAH: They're not buying it.

BEAN: They're not buying it.

ABDULLAH: Wrong time and place in America for that kind of thing.

BEAN: So he, he shaves his head. He does the mustache. He adds those curly toes to his wrestling boots.

ABDULLAH: Never noticed that, that he had the curly boots.

BEAN: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And that's when he named himself the Iron Sheik.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, a most formidable opponent for any man in the wrestling ring, the Iron Sheik from Iran.

IRON SHEIK: First of all, before I speak English, I prefer to speak Iranian for my people. [Speaks Persian] Long, long time ago, wresting come from my country. Everybody know Iranby two things. Oil and wrestling.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. There it is. Really strong name for a professional wrestler. By the way, that's gotta be one of the best names ever. He's got a big ass distinct mustache. He's called the Iron Sheik. Great branding.

BEAN: Super great branding. And you might think to yourself like, what about just Iron Sheik? But then I'm like, well, there could be thousands of Iron Sheiks

ABDULLAH: Right? But this is the Iron Sheik. There can only be one.

BEAN: And there only was,

IRON SHEIK: I challenge with any human being in the world.

BEAN: So his bookings and crowd reactions just start to get way, obviously better after he does this rebranding, but don't totally take off until 1979 when the Iranian revolution led to an Islamist overthrow of the Shah.

REPORTER: For the last seven days, Tehran and other cities have seen violent clashes between troops and demonstrators demanding Khomeini's return.

ABDULLAH: Okay. Now we're at this point in history, so again, you know, there's upheaval in Iran. This is definitely a long and turbulent period and we're about to see the return of Iran to a very ultra-conservative religious rule.

BEAN: Yeah. Which was not what it was historically. You know, when the CIA comes in and overthrows your government and imposes a dictator and a tyrant, people don't always love that. And you don't always get to choose who or what comes next.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. If you breed the descent, you know, you never know where the allegiances are going to go. And they went to a ultra-orthodox cleric who was in exile at the time.

BEAN: Yeah. And backed by militant religious fundamentalists. and I just think it's always worth pointing out that religious militant fundamentalists have a lot more in common with each other despite being of different religions than with any of us.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Very true. And this is a tragic thing cause we're talking about a thousands and thousands of years old civilization, right? That made countless innovations, you know, over the course of human history and really was like a blueprint for modern human civilization that's now been descended into chaos, all because of the political interests of a small group of people.

BEAN: Now, guess who cashes in on that big time?

ABDULLAH: Who is that?

BEAN: The Iron Sheik.

ABDULLAH: Right! So what a time and place to be this character. Obviously all this stuff is in the news. You know what I mean? And it's a pretty good time to be a cinematic villain that's based on an Irani strong man.

BEAN: Yes, it absolutely is. And so with more than 50 Americans held hostage in Iran for more than a year, the Iron Sheik character becomes a star. And so, despite being a hyper patriotic American immigrant in real life, Vaziri reveled in playing the role of an arrogant, middle-eastern menace.

ABDULLAH: He's Stephen Colbert, original era. Yeah. Colbert Show, Steven Colbert.

BEAN: And so he enjoys doing this. I think you can't be a great heel without loving it on some level.

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah, totally.

BEAN: And, it's easy to think like, oh, well he's sort of like debasing basing himself or something, but he's as an essence, an actor playing a character.

ABDULLAH: Totally. Yeah. Yeah. This is a role. And like, no matter the nature of the role, like you can express yourself and you know, in, in a number of ways within that context, you know?

BEAN: Absolutely. And so he is like a genius at riling up these huge crowds and wrestling's getting bigger and bigger. He riles them up into like, these Zena phobic frenzy.

ANNOUNCER: The Iron Sheik

ABDULLAH: Yeah. I don't get to use this adjective all the time and everyday stuff, but it's very Orwellian.

BEAN: It is.

ABDULLAH: Yes. Yeah. Take that word of the day calendar.

BEAN: In 1983, the Iron Sheik won the WWF championship bout, which he then lost to Hulk HOgan setting off the era of Hulkamania that transformed pro wrestling from this like regional circuits into an international conglomerate.

ABDULLAH: Wow. Did not know that. So Iron Sheik was the last champion before Hulk Hogan and I mean, that's like super iconic time, man. Like even like as a kid growing up in Thailand, like Hulk Hogan was one of the most famous people. It was like Hulk Hogan, Michael Jackson, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

[Real American in]

ABDULLAH: You know what I mean? Like literally like, you know, in Asia, especially in the 90s you had this like star ubiquity, you know, right?

BEAN: I'm a real american.

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah, right.

BEAN: Yeah. And this is all the plan is, they're going to make, the WWF's strategy is we're going to pick one person to be the face of this whole thing. Make them super fucking famous. It's gonna gotta be this all American hero type. But how better to set the hero up then by defeating the ultimate heel, who is the Iron Sheik? So they allow him to win the belt simply so that Hulk Hogan can take it away.

ABDULLAH: So this was a long game thing to get the Hogue to be even more famous. Wow. And it worked obviously. I mean that was it. Pretty much. So what happened to the Iron Sheik once he lost the championship?

BEAN: Well, so for like the next four years, the biggest draw is Hulk versus Iron Sheik. And that's like, you know, they have storylines. It's a soap opera essentially.

ABDULLAH: And they keep on fighting after that. After that championship bout.

BEAN: This goes on for like four years. that's the biggest draw. That's his biggest competition. And then he, a rivalry with an up and coming young grappler named James Edward Duggan Jr.

ABDULLAH: Oh, Jim Duggin. Hacksaw Jim Duggan.

BEAN: Hacksaw Jim

ANNOUNCER: Hacksaw Jim Duggan!

BEAN: Hacksaw Jim Duggan. Now it's funny that like, you sort of like pulled that name out of my memory. I can't remember seeing him wrestle. I mean, obviously this is like a really famous guy. But yeah. Wait, what was the deal? Tell me more.

BEAN: So he begins a rivalry Iron Sheik versus this new character Hacksaw Jim Duggan, who also had an American baby face persona that was seemingly the polar opposite of Iron Sheik. So these guys in the world of wrestling should be complete enemies. But as we're going to find out after our break, not everything is as it appears in the world of pro-wrestling. And I see, I think our second joint is ready.

ABDULLAH: Oh yeah, it is.

[Heavy Metal in]

BEAN: You ready to do a get paid for smoking weed?

ABDULLAH: Let's do it.

BEAN: Alright.

[Heavy Metal out]

[Smoke Weedia]

ABDULLAH: We're here. We're talking about the Iron Sheik and his great moment in weed history and were smoking a fatty. And when we last left off, we just introduced a fella named Hacksaw Jim Duggan. Right, Bean?

BEAN: Yeah. And I feel like you name your kid Hacksaw...

ABDULLAH: you know what he's going to become.

BEAN: There's only, I mean, pro wrestlers, probably the most...

ABDULLAH: Or like carpenter.

BEAN: Carpenter, those are the, those are the two above board people named Hacksaw.

ABDULLAH: Escaped convict. number of things. So anyhow.

BEAN: I'm about to read an account from his autobiography. Guess what it was called.

ABDULLAH: Hacking away at life, the biography of Jim Duggan.

BEAN: It's just called Hacksaw.

ABDULLAH: Ah.

BEAN: And He, him in his autobiography, recalled a star crossed ride. He and Vaziri took together in New Jersey on May 26th, 1987.

ABDULLAH: Interesting. So I had just turned three years old when this happened.

BEAN: That, so as he opens the account Abdullah Saeed, a person I'd never met, had just turned three. I'm not sure why that was important to me then. And I don't know that it has any importance to the story now.

ABDULLAH: I respect him at least calling it out. You know?

BEAN: So many history books ignored...

ABDULLAH: They just ignored my third birthday. It was a good one.

BEAN: Yeah. And your terrible twos were so well documented.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, I know, right? But that's the bias in this fake news era that we live in. You know?

BEAN: In other news according to Hacksaw, I was relatively new to the WWF. We flew into Newark airport and in the baggage claim area, the Sheik asked me for a ride to the next match and Asbury Park. Maybe I should have had reservations about being seen, giving a ride to someone I was feuding against. But the Kayfabe mentality that the old-schoolers had was dying out.

ABDULLAH: The Kayfabe?

BEAN: Kayfabe.

ABDULLAH: Kayfabe

BEAN: Yeah. Kayfabe is the industry's secret word describing the fact that it is scripted in a way that it's not real wrestling. And so they would use that word if they had to refer to that aspect of things in front of other people. If say two a wrestler's we're hanging out and somebody's coming, you'd say Kayfabe Kayfabe and then they'd start arguing or whatever. And this was like, are you familiar with the term Omerta?

ABDULLAH: No. No, not exactly. I've heard it before. But what does it mean in this context?

BEAN: That's in the Italian mafia silence and it means you don't rat.

ABDULLAH: Okay, Gotcha. Interesting.

BEAN: And Kayfabe and wrestling is the idea that you don't break character. You never allow the audience to know that, that this isn't real.

ABDULLAH: But in this situation that's not happening cause Hacksaw Jim Duggan is about to give his opponent, the Iron Sheik arrived from the airport.

BEAN: Yeah. And you can picture him means like a young guy. He's new to the thing. This guy who's a legend is like, can you give me a ride?

ABDULLAH: He's like, no big deal. Drop me off at my hotel.

BEAN: And you know, I think the other thing is like, okay, this is 1987 and you think to yourself, okay, how many people really believed wrestling was still real? Answer is quite a few.

ABDULLAH: Yeah?

BEAN: Yeah. And when you, like I said, when you look at those type video of the Iron Sheik whipping up these crowds

[Iron Sheik yelling into crowd]

BEAN: It's like, okay. Yeah. It's an entertainment and it's fun. And certainly some people are just going along with the fun of hating this guy, but you see shining real hatred in people's faces,

ABDULLAH: Right? Yeah. This is totally, this is like live propaganda, you know, essentially.

BEAN: Yeah. And, and so...

ABDULLAH: The two minutes hate.

BEAN: Yeah. And...

ABDULLAH: To drop in another Orwellian thing. Use Orwellian twice!

BEAN: Yeah, so this is getting back to his account of this, this is Hacksaw. "Even though it was just 50 miles from the airport to where we were wrestling that night, Sheik said, well maybe we stop and have a beer Hacksaw. I've never been much of a beer drinker, but he kept asking. So we stopped at a convenience store and then I said" this is hacksaw. "Well, I got a little marijuana cause I had like five or six doobies rolled up"... His word. I'm not against doobies.

ABDULLAH: I like the word Doobie.

BEAN: So we smoked one and then we're driving along drinking beer in the car, when we pass by a state trooper.

ABDULLAH: Oof brown guy in a white guy driving along drinking beers while driving.

BEAN: Yeah.

ABDULLAH: Passing a state trooper. What happens next? This is like the classic moment in this show when it's *[Siriens]* woop woop, the sound of the police.

BEAN: The cop pulls them over, smells the smoke in the car and immediately starts a search of the vehicle. Hacksaw gets popped for a misdemeanor amount of cannabis. A while the Iron Sheik had three separate baggies of cocaine in his wallet.

ABDULLAH: Oof.

BEAN: Yeah. Which constituted a felony for intent to distribute.

ABDULLAH: Eesh, o h yeah. This is a classic thing. He got one bag with a small amount. It's personal, but if you got multiple bags with small amounts in them, then it's intent to sell and you can get busted real bad. Okay. Shit. So things are looking down for the Iron Sheik.

BEAN: Yeah. And so, but they get arrested, they go to the station, you know, and they leave and you know, we've got to remember is it's 1987. It's a different media world. They believe nobody knew what happened, that the story is not going to get out.

ABDULLAH: Right.

BEAN: And so they go to the match, they wrestle that night, each other, and they agree. We're just never going to ever talk to this talk about this to anyone or to each other ever. This just didn't happen. And they think it's all cool, but the next morning the whole story hits the press.

ABDULLAH: Alright, so it hits the press, but like who exactly is reporting on this kind of thing at the time? Is it like ESPN? I mean this is before wrestling blogs, right?

BEAN: Yeah. This is before blogs. This is, I won't say it's technically before the Internet, but it's before the internet as we know it. But as a journalist, how could you pass this, you know, story up.

ABDULLAH: Right.

BEAN: You have the biggest villain and the biggest hero caught smoking weed together in a car. So it's like on the cover of the New York Post.

ABDULLAH: Oh Wow. Okay. So this is like an actual mainstream big story.

BEAN: Yeah. Coast to coast, it's a huge deal. And this is like early. Now there's Wrestlemania and WWF is way bigger. It's Hulkamania time.

ABDULLAH: Right, right, right.

BEAN: It's like all eyes on them now.

ABDULLAH: Right. Okay. Gotcha. Holy Shit. So this is big news and it definitely, it's like for so many people, it's finding out that Santa Claus isn't real right.

BEAN: That Santa Claus and Satan were smoking a joint together in the sleigh.

ABDULLAH: That's amazing. Holy Shit. So, it's blowing people's minds.

BEAN: Absolutely. So the next morning, the whole story hits the press. Hacksaw's first call is to his wife. His second was to his father, who was a chief of police in Glen Falls, New York. And then he calls Vince McMahon.

ABDULLAH: His boss.

BEAN: His boss, head of the WWF. And this is his account of that. I've never gotten through that quick to Vince in my life.

ABDULLAH: Holy Shit. Yeah. The head of the entire fucking organization, I'm sure he had a bone to pick with Hacksaw Jim.

BEAN: I'm sure. So he says Vince was angry that we got busted, but he was way more angry that we got busted together. I've never recovered from that arrest. I've had a successful career, but I was on the fast track to being a world champion before that.

ABDULLAH: Oh Wow. So that explains why Hacksaw Jim's name was so vague to me like, oh yeah, yeah. Hacksaw Jim Dugan. Wow. So this actually stunted his career. That's insane. I mean it's, it's the illusion and obviously Vince McMahon wasn't mad about the weed thing. He was mad about the cover of the story being blown. That's like spoilers.

BEAN: Yeah. I mean this changed his wrestling forever. and not long after that they had always sort of legally maintained that it was a sport. and had their certain like kind of tax differences between a sport and entertainment and within a few years they just went ahead and changed their status to entertainment. This kind of ends Kayfabe.

ABDULLAH: Oh wow. No kidding. So at a certain time wrestling did, there was more of an effort to make wrestling feel real.

BEAN: Way more. And they still, of course, like, you know, you don't stop a play every 10 minutes. I'd be like hey is just to play. I'm a regular guy.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Right, right, right. But it's like slightly more like admitted that it is whatever scripted or something like that. But I feel like fans of wrestling are like, it's not fake, it's just planned. You know what I mean? And that it is still that there's an acrobatic element to it that

there's a performative element to it that still makes it a sport, which I feel, I mean I agree with that, you know?

BEAN: Yeah, absolutely. I mean in the moment if you just compare it to ballet, I think the well rounded person can appreciate both. You know, like you don't have to knock ballet cause you like wrestling, but you could see, you know, no one's trying to stop you from doing Swan Lake, but it's hard. And so as we know in all cases dealing with drug laws and their ramifications, white people and not white people get treated equally, right?

ABDULLAH: Completely equally. you know, in fact, there's never been a case where somebody has been treating, treated slightly differently when there's drugs involved and you know, there are different color of skin. Thankfully, you know, that's all been vanquished in this reality that we live in. You hear that post apocalypse and people listening to this, it was all good back in 2019

BEAN: On old Earth. So obviously this is not how things go. A few days later, Vince McMahon holds a press conference to announce that neither Hacksaw Jim Duggan or the Iron Sheik will ever wrestle for the WWF again, but hacksaw was back wrestling at WWF events a few months later and he appeared in a nationally televised match that thanksgiving.

ABDULLAH: Oh Wow. So it was all just kind of posturing. Vince McMahon was just like addressing the outrage or something, maybe making a little bit of a stunt out of it himself.

BEAN: For Hacksaw. For the Iron Sheik, his road to redemption however, was a lot longer and a lot bumpier including a seven year exile to the regional events held in like high school gyms and VFW halls.

ABDULLAH: Wow.

BEAN: That were like kind of the last vestiges of this old regional, small time wrestling world. He has to go. He's performing in high school gyms.

ABDULLAH: Wow. So he goes from being one of the most famous wrestlers in the world to performing in high school gyms. That is crazy. Why was it that a Hacksaw Jim got that treatment and the Iron Sheik got shat on?

BEAN: I mean, I think the racial implications are pretty obvious. I think in a more generous way you might say, well, we can forgive a hero, but not a villain. But that doesn't really make sense.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, seriously. They're actors. That's absolutely fucking ridiculous.

BEAN: Or even to say like the Iron Sheik, not, not Vaziri, but the character of the Iron Sheik. He is trying to overthrow the whole government of the country and destroy the American way of life

and, and, and impose Islamic dictatorship on us. And he smoked a joint. So right now we're done with this guy for seven years. but Hacksaw could come back in a couple months.

ABDULLAH: That is pretty funny that imagine if up until this point you had no idea the wrestling was scripted. Right. And you thought that these two guys fucking hate each other and then they get caught smoking a joint together. Wouldn't you be like, I gotta try that Shit. You know what I'm saying?

BEAN: I had not thought of it from that angle, but that's a great advertisement for weed.

ABDULLAH: Yeah, it seriously is. And I mean really to me fundamentally is what makes this a real great moment. You know what I mean? Like that going public. I bet you there's people out there who are like, Holy Shit, weed can do that. I gotta try this shit. Amazing.

BEAN: Here's how the Iron Sheik described this seven year period of exile from the WWF. And this comes from a documentary called *The Sheik*, which is really fascinating. "I made one bad mistake and everything changed. I lost millions and millions of dollars wrestling in front of 93,000 people. Great feeling, great atmosphere. Wrestling in front of 93 people. Not so much excitement, but I loved my business and I want to make a living. So I didn't have any choice. Something better than nothing."

ABDULLAH: Wow, man. Think about the life that this guy has led up until this point. The ups and the downs, he's gone through regime changes. He's been close to the top and a country with a dictator. He's been a regular, you know, working, wrestling, stiff in America. He's become a massive star. He's become a pariah and now he's kind of like, you know, further down than when he first came to America. You know, before that he was an Olympic coach, whatever. Now he's wrestling in high school gyms and stuff.

BEAN: Yeah. And he's getting older. You know, your body takes the wear and tear. and then you know the traveling life. Imagine the conditions you're traveling to get from one high school gym to another. This is like you're supposed to do that kind of life when you're 18 and in a punk band.

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Seriously. Man, poor Iron Sheik. Holy Shit. That's fucking tragic.

BEAN: We're not going to leave him down though.

ABDULLAH: Ah, redemption is at hand.

BEAN: Redemption is at hand.

ABDULLAH: That's a good wrestling story.

BEAN: So as the years passed and his body absorbed the pain and abuse of a hard traveling, hard partying, pro wrestlers, existence, the Iron Sheik's life outside the ring would descend into drug abuse and despair, particularly after the murder of his daughter by her boyfriend in 2003.

ABDULLAH: Oof, that is absolutely horrible. What a tragic thing.

BEAN: Yeah. And so he actually showed up at the courtroom during the trial, the murder trial with a razor blade hidden in his cheek and he was prepared to exact a bloody revenge right then and there.

ABDULLAH: Wow.

BEAN: Until his family realized and they surrounded him in the court room and talked him out of it.

ABDULLAH: Wow. Oh my God. What a scene? That is so fucking crazy.

BEAN: Yeah. Just somebody at the end of their rope. And so his daughter says to him, you can't kill him because they'll put you in prison. I lost my sister and I don't want to lose my father. And he is so moved by her words that he, not only backs down from this plan to, to murder somebody in the middle of a trial, he vows to quit smoking crack, which had just, you know, wrecked what was left his life.

ABDULLAH: Oh my God, man. So this guy's life is just in shambles at this point as if the tragedy around his daughter wasn't enough. You know, addiction on top of that.

BEAN: But he does pull out of it this, this is literally the lowest moment of his life. And you know, he's redeemed by our family and he cleans up his act. And then this is like, I remember this only through researching this but just as he'd once changed himself from a baby face to a heel, the Iron Sheik transformed again this time into a social media sensation after an expletive laced 2006 youtube video calling out Seinfeld actor, Michael Kramer Richards, for racist comments at a comedy club.

IRON SHEIK: Kramer, I want to let you know, you break my heart. You insult all my muslim brother in this country, especially my brother, Mohammad Ali. [inaudible]

ABDULLAH: That's gotta be one of the very early, you know, celebrity viral videos I guess.

BEAN: Yeah. And really it resuscitated him. He was still on the down and out. It's just cause you're not smoking crack anymore. Doesn't mean everything. It doesn't all turn around that first day. I mean, crack fucks your shit up, but I think you, you know, it takes some time to rebuild your life and he's in that process. He's still smoking weed and he kind of gets this young person

in his life who is a big wrestling fan and a big fan of his and knows the whole story up to that point and kind of comes to him and says, we can make these videos and you don't have to go high school gym to high school gym to reach people and to be the Iron Sheik. You can do it in this new way. And you know, it wasn't the first video they made but it just went viral like you said at a time when that was just becoming a thing.

ABDULLAH: Wow. Okay. So what happens next?

BEAN: That video? He does lots of media around it and then he becomes a regular on Howard Stern show.

IRON SHEIK: Hacksaw Jim Duggan, he was driving. I was a passenger. You're right, we had coke, we had crack, we had the marijuana, and also we had the beer. [inaudible] and I pay for my dues. What the fuck?!

STERN: So there's his comments on that incredible story.

ABDULLAH: Whoa.

BEAN: And that like blows it all up even more and he is just bringing it into this new way. He's developed the Iron Sheik character yet again as somebody who comments on popular culture and you know, as we've gone through that, where this from where this story started to where he ends up is a wild ride and I'm happy to say, you know, his Twitter's still blows up and he's still doing these videos and he is, you know, off the hard drugs for a long time. He's enjoying life, he's in good health, he's smoking plenty of weed to deal with the physical pain of all his years wrestling. And I think the emotional pain of his what he's been through.

ABDULLAH: His whole life story, man. Holy Shit. That's wild. And is he public about his cannabis use nowadays?

BEAN: Yeah. And he's sort of known in wrestling circles for bringing the fire

ABDULLAH: No shit, really? That's fucking amazing. So do we know what the WWE's stance on cannabis is now.

BEAN: Yeah. I looked it up and it's a banned substance so you're not allowed to use it. What's interesting is I found some articles that seem to indicate they use that policy very selectively if they want to get you out. Cause these guys are all on contracts. So imagine you kind of want to get rid of somebody. You might drug test them a lot cause they have a three strikes policy.

ABDULLAH: Ah, okay gotcha.

BEAN: And there's these big fines that people call the weed fine for coming up positive. But the reporting I've seen indicates that if you're a big star and everything's good, you're probably not going to get drug tested. But if you are on the outs with the WWE, you probably are. And then even more than that there were people who were trying to purposely fail drug tests to get out of their contract. Wow. And the WWE apparently just won't test them and you know, it's, it's...

ABDULLAH: Oh man. So Vince McMahon learned from that whole Iron Sheik Jim Duggan thing that he can use cannabis against his wrestlers and he's doing that to this day. That's pretty fucking crazy.

BEAN: Yeah, absolutely. But Iron Sheik is retired from the ring line, puffin freely. And I living a, you know, some good years right now. He's still loves being a heel. And just to kind of wrap it up, the most recent headline I could find about him, just to give you an idea of the role he's playing in our culture right now, he was acting as a peacemaker in a possibly real life, possibly staged feud between Fred Durst of Limp Bizkit and Shaggy Too Dope of the Insane Clown Posse.

ABDULLAH: Still at it.

BEAN: Yeah. Which seems to me like a good place to leave our story.

[Iron Sheik Theme]

ABDULLAH: Yeah. Wow. Who knew that behind the Iron Sheik, one of the best known characters in professional wrestling history. There was an incredible story as well as an incredible cannabis story. Bean, thank you so much man. I really enjoyed that one.

BEAN: Absolutely man. It was fun. Great Moment in Weed History is a Spoke Media production. It's hosted by me, David Bienenstock, a.k.a Bean, and Abdullah Saeed.

ABDULLAH: We're produced by Brigham Mosley and Cody Hofmockel, with help from Reyes Mendoza and Kendall Lake. Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian, and Keith Reynolds. Special thanks to the Gold Diggers Studio. This episode was mixed by Jonathan Villalobos. You can find us on Twitter and Instagram at GMIWHpodcast, or shoot us an email at gmiwhpodcast@spokemedia.io. Check out our show notes for more info on all the things we discussed on today's episode.

IRON SHEIK: Kramer, I want to let you know, you break my heart.