

# FOLLOWING HIS DREAMS THE KURT ANGLE STORY

*A Preview of the Documentary "ANGLE"*



By Al Fontes

**H**ow well do you think you know Kurt Angle? Did you know that he was an Olympic and World Champion for Team USA, or for a better part of his adult life among the most accomplished professional wrestlers to have ever enter the squared circle? For those that followed him on either side of the wrestling spectrum, or both, the answer is with a high probability, YES! However, if you were to ask the same parties whether they had knowledge of his backstory or personal struggles in life, I believe a majority would not. Even if you were to bring up the name Kurt Angle to the average sports fan on the street, there is a high probability that they would only know him as the buffed guy with the bigger than life personality in professional wrestling all while being oblivious to the fact that he was actually one of the best top tier Olympic wrestlers to ever set foot on the mat in all US history. Personally, other than Kurt wrestling with a broken neck at the Atlanta Olympics,

I was not familiar of his true backstory, nor was I mindful of the major challenges and adversity that has consumed a good percentage of his adult life.

When I first became aware of the new wrestling documentary, "ANGLE," which began streaming on Peacock this September, I initially thought they were going to highlight his career in the WWE and brush over his accomplishments as a collegiate and international wrestler. This all changed within the first five minutes of watching. From the intro, my curiosities were sparked by the unknown. I realized firsthand; I did not have a clue of who he was as a person or the overall sacrifices he made to succeed. Without a doubt, my eyes were opened. In essence, I only understood the tip of the iceberg. Directed by Alex Perry and produced by Ben Hatta, Jeremy Bailer, and Ross Dinerstein, "ANGLE" takes us back in time to his strong family roots in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and progresses on a timeline



that provides the audience a panoramic view of his early life, athletic accomplishments, and parallel to all that, the struggles he has endured both as an Olympian and professional wrestler to reach the top of his game.

Anyone who knows me very well is aware that I have been actively involved in the sport of wrestling for a vast majority of my life. Throughout my 45-year journey, I have experienced many different aspects of wrestling; wrestler, coach, mentor, promoter, and for well over half that time, I have been tirelessly integrating my passion for wrestling in the journalistic spectrum of the sport. Being a journalist has not only provided me the means to learn more than meets the eye about the athletes, coaches, and programs I generally write about, but more importantly, a distinct opportunity to gain a substantial understanding of what it takes for one to achieve top tier status in a sport that only a very small percentage in the world have the mental and physical fortitude to participate in or sustain beyond a single season. This includes their training regimen, goals, challenges, obstacles, and for the most part, what drives them to excel beyond the norm. Essentially, everybody has a backstory that is unknown by a majority and, in some cases, shrouded by the hype and accolades that is a result of their accomplishments. This is definitely the case for me when it comes to the true story of Kurt Angle.

From start to finish, the documentary "ANGLE" does an outstanding job calling to attention Kurt's consistency, rigor, and focus on his training and preparation to reach the highest level of wrestling and everything he set his mind to achieve. Being a competitive wrestler myself, I can attest to the challenges of being in a sport that requires one to integrate their daily lives into it, not the opposite. In fact, from my experience there has

not been another sport that has challenged me to the core of my soul as the sport of wrestling. Additionally, for one to achieve the level of excellence as Kurt Angle has in his lifetime is beyond comprehension. More importantly, for those that have never experienced or engaged in the oldest sport in the world, wrestling is among the toughest individual athletic competitions in existence, if not the most demanding of them all. Some will argue this point of view, but those that have actually entered the wrestling circle understand first-hand the complexities of wrestling and the reality it presents. To come to the point, what it takes to sustain in wrestling encompasses a constellation of challenges that will not only challenge one's inner core, both physically and mentally, but also exposes their strengths, weaknesses, and character in the process. That being said, in my humble opinion, there are only a handful of individual sports that mirror wrestling in some respects, but as a whole, wrestling is like no other and is KING! As one of my coaches once said, "In wrestling, you have to embrace the pain and struggle, but more importantly to survive, you have to become comfortable being uncomfortable." After watching "ANGLE," my newly established viewpoint of Kurt and his ability to manage this arduous space is second to none.

*Now, let's rewind time a bit before my first opportunity to watch "ANGLE." As far back as I can recall, I have followed the national and international wrestling scenes fairly well and felt that I had a descent understanding of Kurt's collegiate and Olympic backgrounds in addition to him pursuing a career in professional wrestling, but it all came to a stop from that point forward. As things go, I was not cognizant of his personal challenges and what he had accomplished in his twenty plus year professional wrestling career. More recently, I was asked by a friend, "why?" In all*

*honesty, I had no interest in watching him perform in WWE or any of the other professional wrestling outlets. To come to the point, although I had watched the likes of Rick Flair and Rowdy Roddy Piper while growing up, I struggled with Kurt's persona in the squared circle. Although it was only an act for entertainment purposes (which he did very well), I did not want my perception of him and the accomplishments he had achieved in domestic and international wrestling to be tarnished, at least within my psyche.*

*However, my post "ANGLE" assessment of Kurt leaves me without a shadow of a doubt a greater understanding of his personal life, a newly established appreciation of his achievements in professional wrestling, as well as his extraordinary backstory that represents the sub-surface of his journey or in other words, beneath the "tip of the iceberg." If truth be told, I respected Kurt as a great Olympic level wrestler prior to viewing this documentary, but now, I have an incredible amount of respect for him not only as one of the greatest athletes ever, but as a truly inspiring human being. There's a quote from Aldus*



**1992 NCAA Division I Champions** - First row - Jeff Prescott (Penn State), Terry Brands (Iowa), Tom Brands (Iowa), Troy Steiner (Iowa), and Matt Demaray (Wisconsin). Back Row - Pat Smith (Oklahoma St), Charles Jones (Purdue), Kevin Randleman (Ohio State), Mark Kerr (Syracuse), and Kurt Angle (Clarion). Photo by Peter Venier.

Huxley, an English writer and philosopher that states, “There are things known, and unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.” In a nutshell, this quote defines what I will call my before and after “ANGLE” documentary experience. Beyond question, my preconceived perceptions of him prior to watching this documentary have been smashed to smithereens after viewing it. Even my wife, who is not a fan of wrestling but supports me 100%, enjoyed watching “ANGLE” from start to finish.

So therefore, let me provide a brief synopsis of “ANGLE.” Born on December 9, 1968 in the Pittsburg suburb of Mt. Lebanon Township, Pennsylvania to parents David and Jackie Angle, Kurt grew up in a blue-collar household with four tough older brothers and one sister. From an early age, Kurt understood the meaning of hard work, survival, perseverance, and for the most part he lived by the never give up attitude, even in the midst of great adversity. The sport of football was Kurt’s first love growing up, not wrestling, baseball, or basketball. Regardless, he excelled in all of them. During his childhood, Kurt did not have a lot, but what he did have was a great amount of support from his siblings and loving parents. Talking about sports at the dinner table was the common thread among his family, a norm that kept them close and engaged with each other. In fact, it was his father, a career military veteran that believed in Kurt’s potential and at an early age planted a seed in Kurt’s mind that he had the potential to reach the highest level possible in whatever he set his mind to pursue. Following his dreams, Kurt took his father’s words of wisdom to heart and never looked back.

As an amateur wrestler, Kurt achieved what is known as the Grand Slam of all wrestling achievements. Specifically, he won individual titles at the Junior Nationals, NCAAs, World Championships, and the Olympic Games. This is a very rare feat as only a few can list all of these accomplishments on their respective resumes. Add to that, Kurt has won virtually everything possible in the professional wrestling ranks in addition to being inducted in multiple national and international Hall-of-Fames. The question is, at what price? Only Kurt Angle can truly answer that question. In the final segment of the documentary, Kurt recounts his turbulent journey to Olympic Gold and his more recent induction into the WWE Hall-of-Fame and states, “I think I want Kurt Angle to be remembered not for the mistakes he’s made, but what he was able to accomplish in his lifetime.”

Now retired from professional wrestling, Kurt is currently enjoying his life dedicated to being the best he can be as a full-time husband and father. Always moving forward, Kurt is actively involved in other ventures that includes television, brand endorsements, public appearances, and WWE merchandise to name a few. If the past is a leading indicator of what to expect in the future years to come, I am confident we’ll experience more of Kurt Angle, because at the end of the day, he is DRIVEN BY DESIGN. In line with what you may or may not know about him is only the tip of the iceberg of who is as a person and what truly drives him to succeed. What Kurt has experienced in his journey to the top, coupled with the struggles he has had to overcome in the midst of his accomplishments, is inconceivable. All things considered, you do not have to be a wrestler or professional wrestling fan to enjoy or appreciate the message of this documentary. If you have not had the opportunity to watch “ANGLE,” I highly encourage you to do so and share this experience with all your family and friends. It’s a must see!



## KURT ANGLE’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### INTERNATIONAL/OLYMPIC FREESTYLE

- 1996 OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST – FREESTYLE (ATLANTA, GA), 1996
- 1995 WORLD CHAMPION – FREESTYLE (ATLANTA, GA), 1995
- 2X USA SENIOR NATIONAL CHAMPION – FREESTYLE
- FILA JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPION – FREESTYLE, 1988

### COLLEGIATE – CLARION UNIVERSITY, PA (DIVISION I)

- 2X NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPION, 1990, ‘92
- NCAA DIVISION I FINALIST, 1991
- 3X NCAA DIVISION I ALL-AMERICAN
- CLARION UNIVERSITY FRESHMAN-OF-THE-YEAR, 1988
- ESPOIR NATIONAL CHAMPION – FREESTYLE, 1988

### HIGH SCHOOL – MT. LEBANON H.S. (PA)

- PENNSYLVANIA STATE CHAMPION, 1987
- USA JUNIOR NATIONAL CHAMPION – FREESTYLE, 1987
- 2X PENNSYLVANIA STATE MEDALIST
- ALL-STATE LINEBACKER – FOOTBALL

### PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP TITLES

- WCW UNITED STATES CHAMPION
- WWE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
- WWE KING OF THE RING
- WWF/E CHAMPION (4X)
- WWF EUROPEAN CHAMPION
- WWF hardcore CHAMPION
- TNA WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION (5X)
- TNA KING OF THE MOUNTAIN (2X)
- TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION

### NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL HALL OF FAMES & AWARDS

- WWE HALL OF FAME, 2017
- INTERNATIONAL SPORTS HALL OF FAME, 2016
- TNA HALL OF FAME, 2013
- PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED MOST POPULAR WRESTLER OF THE YEAR, 2003
- NATIONAL WRESTLING HALL OF FAME – DISTINGUISHED MEMBER, CLASS OF 2001
- PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED MOST INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER OF THE YEAR, 2001
- USA WRESTLING HALL OF FAME, 2001
- CAULIFLOWER ALLEY CLUB FUTURE LEGEND AWARD, 2000
- PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED ROOKIE OF THE YEAR, 2000
- PA STATE ATHLETIC CONFERENCE (PSAC) AWARD OF MERIT, 1992