Beer, Blood, & Cornmeal: Seven Years of Incredibly Strange Wrestling by Bob Calhoun, ECW Press, 2008

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Recommended Readings

*Beer, Blood, & Cornmeal: Seven Years of Incredibly Strange Wrestling*

by Bob Calhoun, ECW Press, 2008

Reviewed by J. Rocky Colavito

Mickey Rourke's Oscar-nominated performance in *The Wrestler* offered a glance into the lives of "minor league" professional wrestlers, and Calhoun's book sustains the gaze over the birth, rise, and inevitable fall of one such organization that employs them. Based out of California, Incredibly Strange Wrestling featured wrestlers you've never heard of (Macho Saquatcho, El Pollo Diablo, and Count Dante, Calhoun's wrestling persona), and yet managed to make a name for itself among those populating the fringes of California culture.

Calhoun meticulously presents the life and times of this promotion, taking us behind the curtain to see the machinations that shape wrestling shows, and the camaraderie and fraternity that develops among the players in this grand game of sports entertainment. We see the fast paced development of matches to accommodate no-show talent, the use of pharmaceuticals to treat injuries, and the clashes both in and out of the ring.

Calhoun intricately traces the developmental trajectory of the promotion, and though the promotion's flame out comes as little surprise, it still saddens us because of how well we have come to know the players. What's most arresting is seeing how the life takes control of Calhoun, and how he ultimately has to cut his losses and get out before he loses himself entirely to it (but not without some wistful thinking).

Well-illustrated with lots of photos of wrestlers both in and out of character, the book gives readers a look at a formerly shadowed part of non-mainstream culture. Highly recommended.

- J. Rocky Colavito is professor of English and Director of Writing Programs at Butler University.