



Part 1 - Physical Distractions, Clandestine Meetings & Small Town Girls...AKA Why Mark Cross Finally Joined XWF.

Excerpts from the documentary series "Duffy Defiance" - Official Release Date
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From what started out as little more than a film club project, a play at earning extra credit, with the added advantage of being able to hang around one of our favourite hobbies during school hours, came an unexpected tale of rivalry, family disagreement, scandal and debauchery. Of course, this wasn't wholly unexpected, since it was a big reason why "Beyond the Mat" was such an iconic work over two decades later, and while this may not be "Wrestlers" and while we may not have even a fraction of the budget of Netflix, the action is no less gritty, and the stories no less real.

Based out of Duffy, Georgia...Duffy Wrestling League has been a passion project for the Spade family for three generations and counting. Originally created by former wrestler and Georgia resident Tom Spade, the company is now in the hands of his son Jack, who's still a regular member of the roster, alongside a son of his own, Shane. As well as their arena, The Dome, in the namesake town of Duffy, the show goes out on the road multiple times per month, expanding their reach across the US.

When we began shooting, there was a buzz about the place. A number of new names had joined the roster, one of which boasted a history far more decorated than the Duffy fans were normally used to seeing a man with extensive independent wrestling experience under his belt, Mark "The Dragon" Cross.

Jack: So Mark called me directly, said he was looking for a new project. Now guys like Cross don't come around every day, and when they do, they're usually hooked on drugs, or painkillers, and looking for a place that's a little lax on drug testing. For a start, he's first generation, he wasn't born into this like a lot of the roster. Plus, he's worked in front of crowds a lot of our guys have only dreamt about, regularly. Now I've always been sceptical about established stars who won't sign exclusive deals...felt like he could treat us like a stepping stone, or a rehab centre...but I talked to a few guys I knew who vouched, said that wasn't his style. I couldn't really say no.

The Dragon: So I had to admit, I was going through a bit of a mid-life crisis, looking for an escape of sorts. I wanted to keep my hand in, stay active in the ring, I wasn't done by any means but somewhere a little more low-key, away from the noise. That would have been great and all, had I not walked into Hadley FUCKING Wyatt on my first FUCKING day.

Now in her second year of full-time competition, Hadley Wyatt had gotten herself off to a hot start, capturing the Tag Team titles alongside her new partner, inside and outside of the ring.

Hadley: Yeah, Mark and I didn't leave on the best terms, to say the least. He used to call me the hurricane, for how many things got fucked up with me around. He said it like he was joking, although I knew there was some truth behind it...I mean...an ex boyfriend of mine stormed the gym, started shooting at Mark and all, so I guess I kinda see his point...

The Dragon: Hadley was a student of mine. She didn't have the most natural ability...didn't have the money to pay for her training...had a lot of baggage outside of the ring...exactly the kind of person we wanted for the Dragon's Lair. I opened my first gym in New Orleans after Katrina, offering for kids to train for free. Sure, we wanted to produce great talent, but I wanted a way to give back to the community as a whole, not just to the wrestling business. Plus...we were dating for a while...so...yeah...

Hadley: I mean...I had a poster of Mark on my wall, he was the reason I wanted to get into wrestling...and I guess he's the reason I am wrestling now, too...really awkward when he came to my place for the first time by the way, but he treated me the same as anyone else to begin with. He was hands-on with all of us, not afraid to hop in the ring and work with anyone, even if they were brand new. It was only when we went to work that show...

The Dragon: I got a call from one of my buddies, he needed a mixed tag team that night, in a pinch. A lot of the Miami recruits at that time were either too green, or already working solid gigs, already booked, maybe already out of town. Hadley...to be honest...was too green too, but I figured if I was working out there with her? I could carry if I had to, y'know?

Hadley: He told me to pack my gear, we bundled in the car, and drove the 5 hours to Orlando, had a lot of time to talk, really get to know each other. That was the night I made my debut, hearing the fans chant my name, watching one of...essentially one of my heroes working right there in front of me. The adrenaline was off the charts, I couldn't contain my excitement. That was, until he kissed me, after the show...and then we pushed the beds together in our trashy motel and umm...we were more than teacher and student after that point.

Jason: Hadley dated HIM? Seriously?

Reece: Don't worry big brother, you're definitely an upgrade.

It was inevitable that there would be a crossing of paths. Hadley's new boyfriend was none other than "The Unrated One" Jason Copeland, self-proclaimed leader of the locker room, as well as the holder of the DWL World and Tag Team championships. Jason and his younger sister Reece, a country singer with growing popularity, have a famous wrestling parent in Adam Copeland, otherwise known as Edge, of WWE, and now more recently AEW fame.

Jason: I didn't trust Cross, at first. We were already blindsided by the invasion of a rival brand, and here was this guy, who lives in Florida, proclaims his love for Florida at any given opportunity, claiming he'd been bought in to clean up the mess that I'd let happen on my watch.

Reece: I told him he needed to show my brother, and my family a little more respect.

The Dragon: Jason. Yeah. I've always had a problem with those 'alpha' mentality guys. The ones that strut around, pounding their chests, calling it THEIR locker room because they've got the World title. I probably would have let it go, but it was that one comment. MY locker room. Thing was, his guys, if he wants to call them that? Were getting their asses handed to them in backstage attacks before I showed up.

As one of several recent acquisitions, DWL purchased the rights and assets to Florida Wrestling Dystopia, adding the roster into the existing stable of workers. Still determined to maintain their own identity, a splinter group of former FWD stars began causing disruption in the locker room, interfering in matches, staging assaults of talent, backstage and even at their home addresses. Led by the FWD World Champion, "The Anti-Hero" Braddock, the divide continued to grow.

Braddock: Yeah, I know Cross. Watched him get smoked in round one of the Cannabis Cup.

The Dragon: Did he use the smoked line with you too? Yup...thought so...

Braddock: Yeah I'll admit it, the guy can be dangerous, but he wasn't prepared to get the job done by any means necessary, not like we were, he was all about playing by the rules. I kept telling him, a win's a win, even if we had to stack the deck to get it, but he was too prim and proper to accept that.

The Dragon: Yeah, Braddock. He's...never really had the athleticism to be a Main Event guy...is probably the most polite way to put it, but he's living proof that taking a hell of a lot of punishment can be effective at times. That's also not good for your brain cells, I figure, which explains why he seems a few sandwiches short of a picnic at the best of times....

Hadley: We couldn't finish a match without someone running in, or someone being attacked...it was crazy...

Jack: They were becoming a problem.

Jason: I had to take Braddock out.

Jack: Then they got to Shane.

As a third generation Spade, and his father Jack a pivotal part of the company in and out of the ring, it was maybe no surprise that Shane Spade felt he was living in the shadows when it came to DWL. Tensions finally erupted, with Shane turning on his DWL teammates in a

six-man tag match, switching allegiances to FWD in the process. Assisted by his new stablemates, he went on to capture, and then defend the DWL Heritage Championship.

Meanwhile, after a string of victories of his own, this time without assistance, "The Dragon" found himself capturing the FWD Panhandle championship from Rooster Robbins.

The Dragon: It was, without doubt, the ugliest fucking title belt I've ever seen, or held. Plus, I don't know what they were doing with that thing out in Florida, but it took hours to polish the grime off it.

Shane: It definitely needed a redesign. I'd seen the sketches, but they weren't going to commission anything until it was back in FWD hands. That's where I came in.

The next DWL Pay-Per-View was set for a show in Washington, DC. Amongst the matches booked were two title unifications. Braddock vs Copeland, for the FWD/DWL World titles, and Cross vs Spade, for the Panhandle and Heritage championships combined.

Shane: I'd been in the dark for too long. Dad thought I wasn't ready. Dad was wrong. If he wasn't going to give me the chance to prove it, I was going to take it.

Jack: I thought Mark would be able to bring him down a peg or two.

The Dragon: Shane was a puppet. FWD would use him as a pawn until he wasn't useful anymore. Chances are, that would have come after I walked away that night with both titles. He cheated to win his belt. He cheated to defend it, this legacy he wanted to build? He was setting it up to be paper-thin, at best. It was worthless, unless he did it under his own power. I implored him to come out and face me, one-on-one.

Shane: I looked Braddock right in the eyes, told him I got this. I guess he believed me.

The Dragon: Maybe I had an eye on the schmoz, the brass knuckles out of the trunks, or the FWD run-in-

Shane: Cross and I went at it for over half an hour. Toughest match of my career, no doubt in my mind.

The Dragon: The kid was tough. I watched him in training, at the shows, he had glimpses of potential, clearly had a lot of talent, but usually guys like that, I can break their resolve. Shane was different, that night, I just couldn't put him away.

Shane: After I don't know how many attempts, he just didn't kick out anymore. I was a double champion.

Jack: It looked like I was going to have to do my own dirty work, after all.

Hadley: How the fuck did he lose?

Jason: My opinion of Cross changed, a lot. He proved he was willing to give up everything for our cause. Every time he went out there, he gave it everything. He also shouldn't have lost that match, Shane isn't on his level. Not night in, night out, anyway.

Reece: Yeah, he was alright, I guess. He grew on me.

The Dragon: I think I proved a lot of people wrong out here. I don't think the smaller promotions expect the big-ticket stars to be out building rings, manning the merchandise table, getting in early to hang out with fans in the parking lot, signing autographs, that kind of thing. Wrestling in front of fifty, sixty thousand people...I mean when they're on your side? Feels like your hair is never going to stop standing on end...but honestly, as long as there's one or two people chanting my name? I still get that rush, you know? It lights that fire in me. I still crave being out there.

Producer: Why couldn't you get it done against Shane?

The Dragon: He was the better guy on the night, what more do you want from me? I asked him to come out and face me, one-on-one, no interference, no distractions. He did that. I don't enjoy loss. It's valuable, sure, you learn more from one loss than you do from ten victories out there...and it's a bitter pill to swallow, always, in any circumstances, but it's just about palatable if someone brings their best stuff. He turned up with his A-game, maybe I didn't, it was enough. It happens, even to me.

Producer: Is that all it was? Nothing more?

The Dragon: Well...I've heard the whispers...it's been said I've been distracted lately...

As Mark speaks, we cut away from the scene. We are taken to a recent house show, and to Jason Copeland, bursting through the curtain to his entrance music, DWL World Championship on the line.

Producer: I heard you were distracted by Hadley Wyatt...

The scene cuts again to the backstage area. Mark and Hadley can be seen walking, fingers intertwined, both of them chuckling away to each other, glancing around constantly, as if making sure they're alone.

The Dragon: Who told you that?

Mark slips behind Hadley, wrapping an arm around her waist. As he buries his face into her neck, kissing it playfully, she bursts into laughter, until she realises and tries to bite her lip to stifle it.

Producer: Nobody needed to. We have it on film.

The pair reach a store cupboard door, which they both make their way into. As the camera pans around, Hadley has her back to the wall, Mark's frame pinning her in position, his hand

coming up, brushing hair out of her face, their bright beaming smiles undeniable in the dim light.

The Dragon: You-

After a moment of smouldering intensity, the spark is undeniable, Mark closes the distance between them until their lips crash, kissing each other desperately, both of them reaching out to try and close the door completely.

Producer: It's going in the documentary.

The Dragon: You motherf-

Producer: Lucky for you, we couldn't use the shower scene, you two were really going at-

The Dragon: Aren't you in fucking HIGH SCHOOL?

Producer: No swearing, please. Now, about the distrac-

The Dragon: Mind if I make a phone call?

Producer: Uhh, sure.

The phone was already in his hand, regardless of what we said.

The Dragon: I'll only be a minute. Hey, Theo? Mark Cross here. Yeah, I'm gonna need a favour...

Sitting across from each other from the big desk in the office area of the DWL Arena, Mark Cross and Jack Spade sit discussing their next move.

Jack: We're not tying you down here, you could always keep it open, come back when your schedule-

The Dragon: Nah, sorry Jack. Look, Sin City and Blast from the Past is going to have me tied up until the summer. I don't want to be skipping out East and West all the time, I haven't exactly given you my best work lately and that's without a travel schedule on top...

Jack: This isn't about Hadley is it?

The Dragon: No, it's-

Jack: If I knew you two had a history...

The Dragon: Jack, honestly...things are good between us. No bad blood. Look...we've talked about this, right? I've got the chance to push for a Hall of Fame spot in a place that means a hell of a lot to me, I need to train in my own environment for one, and XWF gives

me the best opportunity to face the right calibre of guys in the interim. I've got to put my career first here.

Jack: Just like all the others, huh?

The Dragon: Ambitious? You don't get a resume like mine if you never step foot outside of Duffy, Georgia.

Jack: OK we're done here.

The Dragon: Suited you just fine after you jacked up the ticket price 10 dollars after you signed me-

Jack: Get...the fuck...out.

The Dragon: Gladly.

With the scraping of wood, then the thud of a tipping chair slamming against the office floor, Mark "The Dragon" Cross begins to storm himself out of The Dome and potentially, out of Duffy, Georgia for good.

The Dragon: Oh...and can that FUCKING documentary, or you'll be hearing from my lawyers!

Jack: Go fuck yourself, Cross.

The Dragon: Love to see you DIG yourself out of this one Spade! HA!

Jack: Jumped up British asshole...

Part 2 - Al Fresco

The scene opens to a palm-tree lined street in Miami, Florida. A red Aston Martin DBS Volante is parked in the centre of the screen, outside of a building signposted as "Slaughter & May Legal Services". A few moments later, dressed in Ray Bans, Hawaiian shirt and khaki shorts, Mark "The Dragon" Cross appears.

I swear, I've needed a lawyer more times in the last month than I have in two decades in professional sport...

Evidently, the car belongs to him, as he opens the door and climbs inside.

The only thing more bullshit is how hot these leather seats are going to b-OW FUCK!

The camera shifts to the dashboard, watching Mark as he starts the engine and begins to drive away.

Now that documentary...it never actually explained why Hadley and I broke up. When she got her first development deal, she asked me to go with her. I talked to management, they wanted me, would have fucking killed to get me there, honestly...in any capacity, any capacity at all, except as a wrestler. They didn't want me in the ring...and while I'd love to be at the announce table one day, I was in such a purple patch I didn't want to be anywhere but hunting World titles.

I loved her, I really...genuinely did...and I think if we weren't both in this business, we might have gotten married, had a couple of kids, lived the American dream, y'know? The thing about love though, is you always want what's best for a person, even if that means it's not with you. I didn't want to stand in the way of her dream, and she...well she couldn't stand in the way of mine.

Was sneaking around behind the poor World champion's back fun? Hell yeah! It was a throwback to the times back in the gym, where we were torn between wanting to fuck like rabbits and needing to hide our relationship from everyone...but I'll be forty next birthday. I really am getting too old for that shit, and I really need to get down to business.

Now I may have fallen into XWF by an accident of sorts, a cruel twist of fate that made me formalise one of the many conversations I've had with Theo Pryce over the years, but make no mistake, I'm here to WORK. Burning bridges has never been my style, and when you're talking about the likes of Sin City Wrestling...WGWF...OCW when it was still around...XWF, those long-standing legacy companies, the only way I'd ever sign that dotted line is if it had my full time, desire, and attention. This is one of those times.

That leads me to Raion Kido. Now this could be a fun one...and you know what? It's a good time to be a newcomer in these parts.

I like hearing you speak, Raion. You're like the history professor I never had, in a way. Your long tirades, made up of little more than the who-beat-who-for-what-title in a blow for blow account of what happened way back in the past? I mean I can sit here with my notepad and my pencil, getting all the information I ever need, right? I mean who needs to watch tape anymore, when I can hear everything I need to know from you! I mean, it's an option, but you know what's even quicker?

Reading the result online.

For one? It's a whole lot quicker, and two? I don't think you really add all that much value.

You've done, as you claim, more in a short space of time than a lot of your peers have in years. That, I can actually accept. Now as for those deeds, right here in XWF? I have a couple of quick thoughts to leave you with, since I have a lunch reservation at Ariete I need to get to...and the first one is a very British phrase...horses for courses.

This industry...the independent scene in particular? Jam packed with guys who suit a certain situation, you know? They get tons of success in one particular place, where the fans really get on their side, where the ropes have just the right amount of spring to them, that kind of thing. They win everything under the sun in that promotion, build up a head of steam, ready

to take on the world...but as soon as they step out of that little bubble, where they're so safe, so familiar? The reality sets in real fast.

Now...I know a quick study, when I see one. Raion's a sponge, he soaks up so much information he just has to BLURT it out before it bursts and that's great...except...it's not going to apply to me...because all he seems to know is XWF history, and of course, I don't have one of those. I have a history, sure. I've been around a long time, disproving the theory of horses for courses as I go. See, whatever ring I step into, the pattern is the same. If Raion were to recount the history of every time I, Mark "The Dragon" Cross have gone somewhere new...beaten most everyone in my path...earned myself a title shot on merit...and walked out with gold in my hand? Well...it'd take so long I wouldn't make my favourite restaurant if I booked dinner next fucking Thursday. Don't try it, Raion, by the way. Just know, I realise what you do.

You've done more in a short space of time against the people you know. Sure. Against the people you've watched, week in, week out. Can you do the same against an unknown quantity, with a grand total of one appearance, against the Head of Security? Who knows.

The scenery moving past begins to slow, eventually coming to a complete stop.

That takes me, just briefly, to thought number two. There is only now. Now is now. The past was now, the future will be now. See...I live my life in the here and now. I always have, and to be honest, I probably always will, as when it comes to wrestling? It keeps me hungry, keeps me sharp. You like to hang on history, Raion, and in mine? I've been really fucking successful, you know? Far more than your two Universal titles and your one Tag championship. If we go off that alone? You'd walk in thinking you haven't got a hope in hell's chance, and I'd walk in so complacent that you might be able to sneak one over on me. That's not what the fans want to see now, is it?

The Lion, versus the Dragon. The Japanese, versus the man who learned his best lessons in Japan. The rising star, versus the human accolade collector.

It could be one for the history books...

One everyone talks about in the future...not just you...

The End...