

**THE BLACKJACKS**  
**(BLACKJACK MULLIGAN & BLACKJACK LANZA)**  
**Inducted by Stan Hansen**

While Blackjack Mulligan loved his time teaming up with Blackjack Lanza, he knew that it was too good to last. “Most tag teams are one weak guy and one strong guy, not two main eventers. Lanza and I were two main eventers, which was hard to keep as a team,” explained Mulligan. “Usually a team is formed by a weakness of one who’s an undercard guy, who’s a great talent that’s never going to make it big, and this other great talent that pulls the team along. But they compliment each other together ... We were main eventers so we didn’t really hold the longevity that we should have.”

From their initial pairing in 1972 in Indianapolis under the guidance of manager Bobby Heenan to their dissolution in 1975 when Mulligan left to go solo, the Blackjacks were just about the most feared team out there.

Jack Lanza was a 6-foot-5, 250-pounder from Albuquerque, New Mexico, who broke into the business in 1962 after being trained by Verne Gagne. A former sociology teacher after attending the University of Minnesota, he started as the babyface “Cowboy” Jack Lanza before being paired with Heenan in Indianapolis a heel. “I hit it off with Blackjack Lanza the first day I met him. It was just one of those things. We made each other laugh and became the best of friends,” wrote Heenan in his first book.

Bob Windham, a 6-foot-9, 345-pound ex-Marine who studied education—and football—at West Texas State, lined up with the New York Jets of the AFL until breaking his leg. Jets owner Sonny Werblin, who also owned Madison Square Garden, suggested wrestling to the big guy from Sweetwater, Texas. Windham served his apprenticeship setting up rings in the AWA. His first big break came when Vince McMahon Sr. invited him to the WWWF and dubbed him Blackjack Mulligan, after an old welterweight fighter.

Wearing black vests, black boots and, of course, black hats, the Blackjacks dominated territories like Montreal, Dallas, Chicago and Indianapolis. “It was just an awesome team, a great team. Lanza was

great to work with. He had all that experience,” said Mulligan. “I was green, but I was just a big guy that went in there and blasted guys.”

In the WWF, they had their biggest run, winning the tag titles from Dominic Denucci & Pat Barrett in August 1975, and losing the belts four months later to Louis Cerdan and Tony Parisi. “Captain” Lou Albano managed the Blackjacks in New York. Albano called them “big, quick, rugged guys ... temperamental, but they were pretty good guys.”

However, in October 1975, a plane crash in North Carolina would alter wrestling’s future. Mid-Atlantic headliner Johnny Valentine was crippled in the crash, and booker George Scott needed a new feature attraction. He convinced Mulligan to come in. “I believed in George Scott so much that I actually made that move,” said Mulligan, who died in April 2016. “I stayed there seven years for George as a single. I tried to get Lanza in there, but George was going in a different direction. He didn’t want me to be a tag again. He wanted to keep me a single. So the Blackjacks ceased to exist, and that was a real shame.”

In the 1980s, as the WWF ramped up nationally, both Lanza and Mulligan would end up back there. Mulligan worked on his own, then as part of the Machines under a mask with André the Giant. Lanza became a road agent for the company until his retirement.

— Greg Oliver & Steven Johnson