

Larry Hennig & Harley Race

Larry "The Axe" Hennig (born June 18, 1936) is an American retired professional wrestler. He is the father of the late "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig, the grandfather of Joe "Curtis Axel" Hennig, and is best known for his work in the American Wrestling Association, National Wrestling Alliance and World Wide Wrestling Federation. Hennig was also known for his muscular neck which, to this day, measures 22 inches.

Harley Leland Race (born April 11, 1943)^[2] is an American former professional wrestler, and current promoter and trainer.

During his career as a wrestler, Race worked for all of the major wrestling promotions, including the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA), the American Wrestling Association (AWA), the World Wrestling Federation (WWF, now WWE), and World Championship Wrestling(WCW). He held the NWA World Heavyweight Championship seven times, and was the first NWA United States Heavyweight Champion, which is now known as the WWE's United States Championship. Race is one of six men inducted into each of the WWE Hall of Fame, the NWA Hall of Fame, the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame and the Wrestling Observer Newsletter Hall of Fame, and is considered by many past and present fans/wrestlers and promoters as one of the best professional wrestlers of all time. He is highly respected for his toughness and lifelong dedication to the business.

After a serious auto accident where Race almost lost his leg and intense physical therapy, he returned to the ring in 1964, wrestling for the Funks' Amarillo, Texas, territory. This time, he wrestled under his own name, after his father told him that he should not work to make anyone else's name famous. Race never again used a different ring name. In Amarillo, Race met fellow up-and-coming wrestler Larry Hennig (later Larry "The Axe" Hennig and father of "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig). The two formed a tag team and moved to the American Wrestling Association (AWA). In the AWA, Race and Hennig branded themselves as "Handsome" Harley Race (which was actually a moniker given to him by fans in Japan) and "Pretty Boy" Larry Hennig, a cocky heel (villain) tag team with a penchant for breaking the rules to win matches. They quickly became top contenders, and in January 1965, they defeated Dick the Bruiser and The Crusher to capture the AWA World Tag Team Championship. Race and Hennig continued to feud with the Bruiser and Crusher and other top teams for the next several years, amassing three title reigns.

Verne Gagne was a hated rival of the team, and recruited many different partners to try to defeat Race and Hennig during their AWA run. Gagne and Crusher would win the titles from them six months after Race and Hennig's first reign but would lose them back on August 7, 1965. The team would retain the titles until May 1966 where they lost to Bruiser and Crusher.^[3] They would then embark on a tour through New Zealand, Japan, and Australia where they became the first Tag Team Champions of the World Championship Wrestling (Australia) in June.^[3] Just before leaving to Japan, they would drop the titles to Mark Lewin and Dominic DeNucci.^[3]

Race and Hennig returned to the US in fall of 1966, starting back at the bottom of the competition. As they climbed the ranks all over again, they finally received a title shot on January 6, 1967 and defeated Bruiser and Crusher in Chicago, Illinois. This would prove to be their final reign at AWA Tag Team Champions, however. In October 1967, Gagne was credited with "breaking" one of Hennig's legs, thus giving him some much-needed time off from the ring. Race (as the storyline went), could choose a new partner and retain the AWA World Tag Team Championship. Harley's choice was Chris Markoff, but the duo lost the championship at their first title defense to the team of Pat O'Connor and Wilbur Snyder in November 1967. For the next several months, Race teamed with Hard Boiled Haggerty (Don Stansauk) who over the years presented Verne Gagne with some of his greatest matches. Together, Race and Haggerty often battled Gagne and "Cowboy" Bill Watts. In March 1968, after Hennig's return to the ring, he and Harley were back together, though the two never recaptured the AWA World Tag Team Championship.

Despite his tag team success, Race left the AWA after several years at the top of the division to pursue a singles career in the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA).

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