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## Lucha Libre USA: Wrestling Series Spins Anti-Immigrant Storyline To Connect With Latino Fans (VIDEO)



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John Stagikas isn't a xenophobe, but he plays one on TV. In real life, he's a former real estate agent and dog trainer from Massachusetts. But unlike most actors, Stagikas can't say who he actually is. That's because these days he is playing RJ Brewer -- the antagonist in a Mexican wrestling series on MTV 2 called [Lucha Libre USA](#).

Stagikas, like many professional wrestlers, must play by the industry rules of "kayfabe," which say that stars cannot break character when off-camera or outside of the ring. So when Stagikas sat down with HuffPost LatinoVoices for an interview earlier this week, he arrived as his character RJ Brewer, the son of [Gov. Jan Brewer of Arizona](#). Throughout the interview RJ Brewer touted the strengths of his "mother's" [controversial](#)

[immigration enforcement law, SB1070](#), and made clear his disdain for the other Mexican wrestlers in his own wrestling troupe. Unmasking fellow wrestlers, ending all lucha libre-style wrestling, and deporting those who "cheated and lied their way in to get here," are Brewer's primary goals in the show.

"There's no room for guys hiding behind masks in wrestling. I mean, clearly they're hiding something," Brewer insisted.

When asked about the irony of an anti-immigrant character wrestling in a Mexican-style company, Brewer said, "Even though it kills me to enter the world of lucha libre, I have to enter it, and I have to change things, and hopefully when it's said and done, it won't be lucha libre anymore."

"Duty calls, and as an American citizen, I just have to go and finish my mother's work," he added.

**SEE THE PHOTOS:**





"Lucha Libre USA," the first English language "lucha-style" pro-wrestling show in the U.S., has a mostly Latino audience. Creators say that lucha libre is the second most popular sport in Mexico, after soccer. Because of its popularity, they manage to sell out a 3,000-seat arena for every taping of the show. CEO Steven Ship and Creative Director Alex Abrahantes wrote Brewer's villainous character because, they said, they believed it would resonate with the audience.

"I think any time you see something that's happening in the real world and then you mix it with what we're doing -- it's gonna make people wanna watch. Whether we're parodying something, or whether we're mirroring something, it's something that's interesting to people right now," said Abrahantes.

For Ship, the story lines are also a way to bring humor to a serious issue. "The majority of the media treats it in a very serious manner -- but there's no reason it can't also be sort of highlighted in a satirical manner at the same time," he said.

Both men believe story arcs that are inspired by the political climate make for more exciting matches and better ratings. Abrahantes, however, learned this lesson the hard way when he himself was a pro-wrestler and was cast as an Iranian.

"I really do empathize with RJ and the reaction you get from people," Abrahantes said. "You know, part of your job as a sports entertainer is to strike those chords with people, and if you can do that, then you're doing your job."

However, sometimes striking chords with people can be dangerous, warned the show's CEO.

"Fans line up and get to meet with all the wrestlers after shows, but RJ doesn't partake in that, for his own security reasons," Ship said. "When he walks on stage he gets a legitimate negative reaction, because they understand what he's about, they understand who he is, and they don't like him. So we have to be careful about where we take him, because of the reaction he provokes in people."

Polarizing story lines are nothing new to the world of pro-wrestling, but other aspects of Lucha Libre USA are certainly novel for American audiences. The show markets itself as "not your grandparent's pro-wrestling," because, creators say, it stays true to Mexican lucha-style fighting. Unlike American pro-wrestling, Lucha Libre USA features masked wrestlers, male wrestlers in drag called "Exóticos," female wrestlers called "Chica Stars," and "Mini Estrellas," who are often "mini" versions of other wrestlers.

And the "Mini Estrellas," explains Abrahantes, are really what sets Lucha Libre USA apart.

"Our 'minis' are super high flying and athletic. A 'mini' match here in the U.S. -- it's nowhere near as competitive. It's a comedic guest bit, for American wrestling. But in Mexico it's a huge honor to have a 'mini' named after you, so we have some of the most famous minis anywhere because of that. Such as Mini Park, Octagoncito, Mascarita Dorada and Pequeño Halloween."

Pequeño Halloween, a "mini" wrestler who wears jack-o'-lantern makeup to each match, "is a fan favorite," according to Abrahantes.

The creators believe that the show thrives on having fan favorites who are called "técnicos," and characters that are easy to hate, known as "rudos." RJ Brewer is definitely a "rudo," said Ship.

"I only drink American beer. None of that imported crap, only domestic," Brewer asserted in our interview. This, he said, is because he's a patriot, and America is the only country for him.

I asked why then was he wearing a T-shirt full of Greek writing, and if it had anything to do with a certain man named John from Massachusetts with a Greek surname -- the same one who used to be real estate agent and a dog trainer.

He laughed, and true to "kayfabe" form told me not to get carried away. His shirt belongs to a good friend he insisted. His "friend" has parents who are immigrants from Greece, he said.

*The second season of Lucha Libre USA will premiere on [MTV2](#) on Oct. 1 at 10 AM EST.*