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Pequeno Halloween helps establish English Lucha Libre show in USA Like 1

Lucha Libre USA: Masked Warriors 10 a.m. Saturdays on MTV2, Tr3



Lucha Libre USA wrestler Pequeno Halloween PHOTO COURTESY LUCHA LIBRE USA: MASKED WARRIORS

BY JIM VARSALLONE
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Unlike the United States, a professional wrestler in Mexico garners much more respect than an amateur wrestler.

"In Mexico, lucha libre is where it's at," Luchador Pequeno Halloween said via an interpreter. "That's the celebrity portion of it. That's where people see the glitz and the glamour, and they respect you."

"Amateur wrestling is not really something that is respected there, but to become a luchador in Mexico, you still have to have a background in either amateur wrestling or some form of karate."

Pequeno Halloween, a former CMLL mini-division star in Mexico and current Lucha Libre USA: Masked Warriors competitor in the United States, became an amateur wrestler at 14 in high school. He needed four years of amateur training before testing the pro version. At 17, he received his license, a requirement for a professional wrestler in Mexico.

"I wasn't affiliated with anyone [no luchador connection], so I started knocking on doors of the

two big companies [AAA, CMLL] in Mexico," he said.

Rey Misterio Sr. and Psicosis' cousin answered. They were instrumental in helping Pequeno Halloween get his start in the pro ranks. He debuted in 1999.

In 1987, Misterio, who is Rey Misterio Jr.'s uncle, opened a gym in Mexico with Negro Casas and Super Astro. His first class included Konnan, Psicosis, Halloween, Damian 666 and Misterio Jr..

Misterio is also known for training Casandro, Eiji Ezaki, Extassis, Extreme Tiger, Fobia, Misterioso, Ruby Gardenia, Warlord, Venum Black, Greg Bownds and Pequeno Halloween.

Before becoming Pequeno Halloween, he spent two years in AAA but did not work much as Mini-Juventud Guerrero. The minis are smaller versions of the taller, heavier talent.

He is 5-2, 148 pounds.

So Misterio invited him to CMLL, which was the top promotion.

"There were several wrestlers auditioning, and it's a week long process to see whether you'll get in or not," Pequeno Halloween said. "I got in within three days."

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Damien 666 and Halloween took him under their wing.

"I was Mini-Juventud Guerrera in AAA, but when I was offered the opportunity in CMLL, I was told I had to come up with a different name, a different persona," he recalled. "Several bigger talents offered me their name to be their mini-version."

That's a huge honor and shows respect.

"I was honored, but nothing really stuck to me," he continued. "Halloween was one of the three people who really was instrumental in pushing to get me into CMLL. Then when he said, 'I want you to be my mini because I respect you, and you have a lot of talent,' I became Pequeno Halloween."

- Of course his signature move is the Trick or Treat.

He is a rudo (bad guy).

"I love being Pequeno Halloween," he said. "I owe everything to Pequeno Halloween. I feed my family because of Pequeno Halloween. I travel the world because of Pequeno Halloween. When I get into the ring, it truly is something I love."

When Pequeño Halloween steps into the ring, the ghost and goblins hide behind his sinister shadow. He is a vicious and ruthless rudo, who takes trick-or-treating to new diabolical extremes. A heartless prankster, he causes mischief wherever he goes and finds pleasure in other's misfortunes.

"I enjoy the people around me, and I enjoy beating on my rivals and foes, the technicos [good guys] that I don't care for," he said. "I enjoy playing the pranks, and I enjoy being the rudo."

"There have been several incidents with fans. [The fans are very passionate in Mexico.] I'm OK with that because that means I'm doing a good job, if I elicit that form them."

Pequeno Halloween laughs in the face of his opponents and comes to American soil to scare the wits out of them. Last year, Pequeno Halloween even married beautiful Lucha Libre USA correspondent Rebecca Reyes under dubious circumstances.

"I loved that," he said. "I love working with her. At first she wasn't too keen about it, but now she's starting to come around. She was cooking me hot dogs and hamburgers, but I'm Mexican. I need my fajitas, chimichangas, enchiladas and chiles. So she's starting to cook more of that, and when I come home, she's waiting for me in a nighty and making sure everything is prepared like a good wife should."

- Lucha libre is the second most popular sport, after soccer, in Mexico and many Spanish-speaking countries. Fans love it.

"My parents were huge wrestling fans, and they would take me every weekend to the shows," Pequeno Halloween said. "I would jump into the ring after shows and horse around and have a good time. I loved it."

Born in Tijuana, Pequeno Halloween was raised by his grandparents, and they had posters of all the famous luchadores — Mil Mascaras, Santo, Blue Demon. Mascaras helped revolutionize pro wrestling in Japan and the United States in the 1970s, bringing an aerial style to the ring.

Lucha Libre USA delivers a complete lucha libre style show — with various divisions including the minis — to viewers in the United States.

"Lucha Libre USA came around at a perfect time for me, because I was having a hard time in my career," Pequeno Halloween said. "What I love about Lucha Libre USA is the minis are a focus of the show and just as important as the other divisions. In Mexico, the minis are more of a novelty, not really respected, a sideshow."

"There are things we do that other wrestlers can't do, and we have such a strong following. We've never been in newspapers, on radio in Mexico, and this is a completely different world for us in Lucha Libre USA where we are getting showcased and the company showing us respect."

- The first English language lucha libre pro wrestling show in the United States — Lucha Libre USA: Masked Warriors — has returned for its second season on MTV2 and Spanish network Tr3 with all the high flying, thrilling acrobatics, action-packed wrestling moves and outrageous storylines.

The series was recorded before enthusiastic, live audiences at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Albuquerque, N.M. Broadcasting began 10 a.m. EST Saturday, Oct. 1 and continues each Saturday morning on MTV2 and Tr3.

"When Lucha Libre USA was starting, they were looking for the cream of the crop," Pequeno Halloween said. "They weren't just looking for the heavyweight division. They were looking for the heavyweights but also the flyers, the minis, the chica stars."

"I believe Lucha Libre USA has the best mini-division around. I love it.

"It also gives us another option, somewhere else to work, and it gives fans something different to watch. It's exciting and a fresh product for fans in the United States. It opens the world of lucha to so many

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people.

"There are other companies out there [in the United States] but nothing like this."

Lucha Libre USA caters to the American wrestling fans hungry for something different, the vast numbers of young male sports enthusiasts and the more than 50-million Hispanics living in America. Women are fans as well, watching a sport where female athletes can go into the ring against male athletes.

- Because of Lucha Libre USA's growing popularity, it managed to fill a 3,000-seat arena for each show taping. The luchadores portray characters like many professional wrestlers, and they must play by the industry rules of 'kayfabe' as stars cannot break character when off-camera or outside the ring.

Pequeno Halloween wears the green and orange facepaint no matter where he goes. The facepaint means something, an honor to wear, and is important to Mexican wrestling culture, like a mask.

RJ Brewster (an American wrestler) is an example of a luchador whose anti-immigration character is the protagonist in one of the angles, making him a rudo (bad guy) with Latin fans.

- Steve Ship, the CEO of Lucha Libre, introduced the sport in the United States and has been touring the league to crowds. He introduced Lucha Libre USA to Americans by creating a distinctive fusion of American pop culture and the great Mexican sport, one that appeals equally to the Hispanic audience and the mainstream wrestling fan.

"Lucha is like an action telenovela," Ship said in a release.

Almost a religion in Mexico and Spanish-speaking countries worldwide, where it rivals soccer in attendance, lucha libre (free wrestling) boasts a 75-year history of colorful, fun-for-the-whole family entertainment.

The tradition of wearing masks harkens to the Aztecs, and the designs are meant to evoke the power of animals, gods and other ancient heroes. The mask is considered "sacred" to a degree, so much so that fully removing an opponent's mask during a match is grounds for disqualification and embarrassing to the one whose mask is removed.

The masks luchadores wear have become iconic symbols of Mexican culture. Contemporary artists like Francisco Delgado and Xavier Garza incorporate wrestler masks in their paintings.

But make no mistake, this is not a sport frozen in time. Having already won the loyalty of generations of Latino fans of all ages around the world, Lucha Libre USA is conquering Hispanic and Anglo audiences in the United States with its unique spin on the art of wrestling and the outsized personalities of its Lucha stars.

The television series is a distinctive fusion of American pop culture and the great Mexican sport, one that appeals equally to the Hispanic audience and the mainstream wrestling fan.

To capture an even larger audience, Lucha Libre USA: Masked Warriors has brought in a well-known, world-class roster of Mexican and U.S. wrestlers, like Marco Corleone (Mark Jindrak), Lizmark Jr., Super Nova, former WWE superstar Shane Helms (Hurricane) and Tinieblas Jr. These guys are not your typical brutes.

Corleone, a former WWE superstar who has the highest vertical leap in the business, wrote a kids book in Spanish about bullying.

The company also created some new larger-than-life characters, such as RJ Brewer, an Arizona patriot and supporter of the state's anti-immigration bill SB 1070, and Tigresa Caliente, a woman of Amazonian proportions.


"Unlike other professional wrestling, our Lucha stars come in all shapes, sizes and sexes," Ship said. "We have co-ed and trio tag teams and a mini-division of Lucha stars. Outside the ring, we introduce compelling stories that can range from battles over a divorce to immigration issues, from money to morality. Inside those ropes, you'll witness action you won't see anywhere else. You have to be a trained athlete and in superb condition to perform these moves."

Corleone added: "I can't wait for pro wrestling fans to check out Masked Warriors. It's really a much different product than U.S. fans are used to seeing. As someone who wrestled in the States for years, I can tell you that the lucha style is a lot more high-flying and thrilling than traditional pro wrestling. Lucha Libre USA: Masked Warriors is going to take the lucha experience to a whole new level."

Ship has upped the production values for the series too, bringing in Craig Leathers to co-produce and direct the program.


Ship said: "Craig was the executive producer and director of WCW Nitro and is responsible for some of the highest grossing pay-per-view events in the industry."

- Lucha Libre USA wrestlers can not work for companies on television in Mexico and the United States but can work for independent groups.



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
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• Pequeno Halloween is married to Hiroka Yaginuma, a Japanese born professional wrestler and former CMLL women's champ. He uses a special facepaint from Japan.

As for that green and orange he wears, a Miami college football team also sports those colors.

"They took my colors, so they could be famous like Pequeno Halloween," he said, "but I understand. Go for it guys."

• Along with the television show, live tours are powering the momentum for the sport. In addition, a new Lucha Libre USA app for iPhone and Android will allow fans to create and become their own masked warrior.

• Check out the action-packed season two highlights:

youtube.com/luchalibreusa#p/a/u/0/9QmZABWaIVE.

• Dr. Pepper is the company's newest sponsor.

• Lucha Libre USA: Masked Warriors is striving to be interactive with fans through social media. Fan Club: Masked Warriors Tribe. Chat with talent.

• Questions will be tweeted to fans during the show, and they can be answered on Facebook. Each winner will receive one of the competitor's masks.

• Visit Facebook.com/MaskedWrestlers.

• Twitter is @LuchaLibreUSA.



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