

# OUT, BUT NOT DOWN

*American Madusa has just been officially retired by the All Japan Women's Pro-Wrestling Association, but she'll be back.*

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**S**HE'S MADUSA — MAD-USA — a Caucasian woman wrestler who is dumping Japanese and Asian sports expectations flat on their back. In return, she is surrendering some of her own Oriental pre-conceptions.

"In America, women's wrestling is all about glamour," she said. "It's not serious. In Japan, it is a 100 per cent professional sport.

"Likewise, American fans treat us really badly. Here, I get tremendous respect. That's a good feeling, and one I'm not going to let go of easily. My self-esteem has soared, yet my feet remain firmly on the ground (well, most of the time).

"I just got offered a lot of money to lure me back to the States, but I'd much rather stay in Asia for the present."

She likes the atmosphere, especially when her fans stand up and shout her name. Everyone, it seems, knows her as Madusa, professionally and in private. Even some of her best friends don't know Deborah was the name given to her at birth.

And her fans throw a lot of pink and white streamers into the ring because she wears a lot of pink. She reckons this is a beautiful sight, a beautiful sensation. The buzz is something else.

These fans follow her all over the country; they are especially loyal, supportive and giving. Only one thing she finds curious: they are all girls and very boyish-looking, with close-cropped hair. She really wishes someone would explain this phenomena to her.

How did she get her name? "I always liked Medusa, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to be associated with all those snakes. One day, while doodling, I scribbled 'MAD U.S.A.', and that was that. Strangely, it somehow sounds a bit Japanese."

Ask her how she got into the wrestling business, and the former nurse will rope you in with a gripping story. In 1985, a girlfriend introduced her to a wild-looking 50-year-old who contrived stunts, like jumping off the CN Tower in Toronto.

She thought he was coming on strong because he kept staring, asking if she liked her job as a nurse and if she

wouldn't prefer to be in the movies. It was embarrassing.

He eventually suggested she try wrestling and she assumed by this that he meant mud wrestling. But, two weeks later, she was working out in a gym, a member of the American Wrestling Association.

The first tour year was murder. She often slept in her car, finally selling it in order to survive. A glamorous life it wasn't. In the belief that the AWA offered no control, and disturbed that her so-called new career lacked clear objectives, she quit.

About a month later, sitting at home doing nothing, the telephone rang with an offer to wrestle in Japan, Madusa recalled.

In the US, a woman can wrestle as a member of the AWA from the age of 20 to 30. In Japan, a girl can start at 15, but must retire at 26. Madusa is now 26 and she was officially retired in late December.

**B**UT SHE'S BEEN ASKED TO STAY on another two years, and expects to be back in the ring by April.

Madusa is resting up now, having a break. She needs to take stock, she says, and make a few clear decisions.

She also flew her father and step-mother to Tokyo just before Christmas as a present.

Half-American, half-Italian, she was born in Milan but moved to the state of Minnesota as a baby. Her parents split up soon after. Her relationship with her father is improving all the time.

"It's important I settle things with my family," she said. "With my first big cheque, I bought tombstones for my dad's family. It was so sad to see their graves unmarked. I think it's made him real happy. Next, there'll be a house for my mum."

Early this year, after a trip to Australia, she got her broken nose sorted out. It has been fractured four times. Once it was spread across her face. As for other fractures and dislocations, she's lost count. It's not so much the wrestling that takes this toll, but Thai kick-boxing. She's not keen to do it, but was obligated because of her contract.

"In the States, an injured wrestler



gets time to heal. In Japan, you're patched up and expected to get back in the ring almost immediately. There's no time for recuperation."

Madusa's making her first film this year, and is currently taking acting classes in Tokyo. It was supposed to start shooting last autumn, but the female lead was hurt. This was bad luck for her, but good news for Madusa, whose role is now stronger. Called *High Calibre*, and made by the same team that did *Blue Steel*, it's a futuristic action movie aimed at a female audience.

"I'll never be a Meryl (Streep), Meg (Ryan) or Bette (Midler), but I reckon if I work hard I can turn myself into a female version of Mel Gibson.

"It's great to have a rest from training," Madusa added. She normally sticks to a rigid diet, bolstered by a powder-based shake as a food supplement and she never eats meat, eggs, milk or cheese. Nor does Madusa pop pills.

Madusa says she is considering a number of offers at the moment. As a *gaijin* (foreigner) in Japan, she believes she can move faster, career-wise, than back home. There are many more possibilities. And she says she loves to travel the circuit — around Japan, to China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

She returned from Thailand last December in time for a big pre-Christmas and year-end show at the Korakuen, normally a *sumo* venue. This was the occasion she was "retired". The current lull means a rest from the training and the grappling that's been her life for the last five years.

"Now I can run a hot tub, climb in for a long soak with a good book, and just wallow as long as I like," she grinned. "You can't imagine what a self-indulgence that is — and I reckon my poor beat-up old body deserves it, don't you?"