

Women's Group Protests 'Macho Man'

By CHRIS HAMEL

A Springfield women's organization plans to protest future appearances at Springfield Civic Center and elsewhere by pro wrestling champion Randy "Macho Man" Savage and his manager Elizabeth on grounds that the pair perpetuates violence against women.

Ginger Wells, a counselor/advocate for the Abuse and Rape Crisis Hotline, a Springfield YWCA program that specializes in care for battered and abused women, said today that ARCH is concerned about Savage and Elizabeth's act, particularly the image it presents to children.

"We're protesting against Randy 'Macho Man' Savage and Elizabeth for using abuse toward, and violence toward, women as entertainment," Wells said. "Our children are seeing this. They idolize this wrestler and want to go to his matches. We don't believe these are role models for people to be seeing. They are condoning violence toward women."

Wells accused Savage of physically and verbally abusing Elizabeth, who uses no surname at the wrestling exhibitions.

Wells said ARCH wants the World Wrestling Federation, for whom Savage and his manager work, to change the pair's routine. She added that she would also like a meeting with Elizabeth and her charge.

ARCH picketed outside Springfield Civic Center in July and earlier this month, when Savage wrestled. On a card Oct. 5, Savage defended his Intercontinental Championship against "Rowdy Roddy" Piper in the main event before 4,000 fans.

There were about 20 pickets outside, including members of the National Organization for Women, Wells said.

"We plan to go back, if they (Savage and Elizabeth) are there again," she said.

She also said the group might go to Hartford, Conn., New Haven, Conn., or other nearby sites to protest.

Wells emphasized that ARCH was not protesting to the civic center, but to the WWF. The federation is responsible for booking the bouts and determining which wrestlers appear.

Michael Weber, WWF media coordinator, said the federation does not condone violence against women. He said the way Savage speaks to Elizabeth "definitely could be termed verbal abuse."

But he denied that there is physical abuse and said the routine should be viewed in the context of entertainment.

"We don't condone that type of

violence," Weber said. "Wrestling is entertainment. If people like it, fine. If not, it's their prerogative."

He said the relationship between Savage and Elizabeth is "part of the show."

He said he was unaware of the protests and they have not taken place in other cities.

Weber said the WWF welcomes letters from the public and invited ARCH to write. However, he said he didn't think it wise for the WWF or its wrestlers "to get involved in any type of forum."

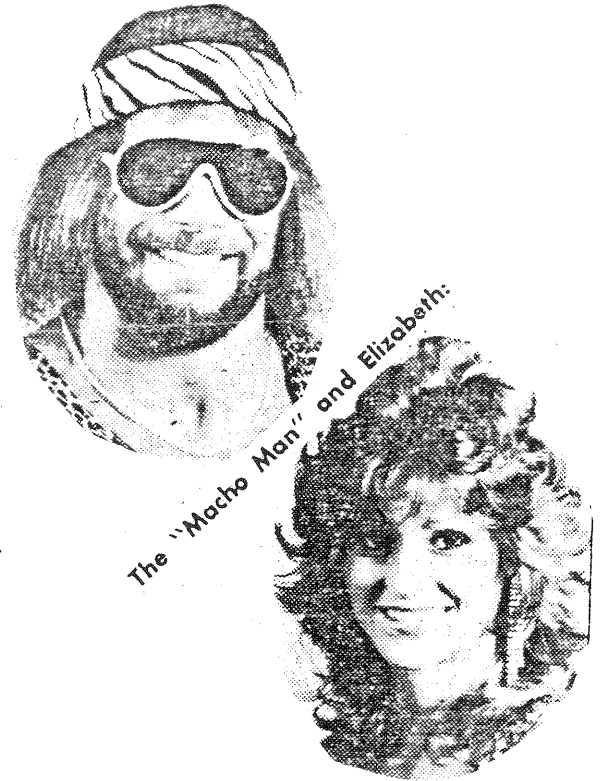
He also said the WWF was considering participation in a campaign in Kentucky against abuse of women. He said the federation also has lent its support to anti-drunken driving, anti-smoking, anti-child abuse, anti-drug and other causes.

The next WWF bouts at the civic center are Nov. 2. Savage and Elizabeth are not scheduled.

ARCH runs a support group for former victims of abuse. Discussions about Savage and Elizabeth originated in the group and were led by

Brenda Lopez and Susan Manatt, group co-facilitators.

Lopez said that subsequently support group members sent several letters to local TV stations that carry pro wrestling, including WWF matches. She said there were no replies.



Lopez said she learned about Savage and Elizabeth by seeing them on TV.

Civic Center Executive Director Michael J. Graney said Savage wrestled on Oct. 5 without Elizabeth at ringside. He said, however, that he was uncertain if the pickets had intimidated her, or if she simply stayed out of sight somewhere in the arena.

Weber said he did not know why Elizabeth didn't appear. But he noted that she has been ill this month and may have been sick on Oct. 5.

He also noted that in some cities "the crowds are so darn rowdy" that she stays out of sight.