SOFTWARE & TECH

Life And Death Of Owen Hart

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The Life And Death Of Owen Hart: A Tale of Talent, Tragedy, and Legacy

Few names in professional wrestling evoke as much emotion as Owen Hart. For fans of the 1990s, he was the consummate performer—a gifted athlete, a natural comedian, and a deeply loyal family man. Yet, the story of the **life and death of Owen Hart**is not merely a recounting of matches and championships. It is a narrative steeped in the pressures of a legendary family, the struggle to step out of a massive shadow, and a horrific accident that shook the wrestling world to its core. Understanding Owen requires looking beyond the tragic end to appreciate the rich, complex life he led inside and outside the ring.

The Early Years: Growing Up in the Hart Family

Born on May 7, 1965, in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Owen James Hart was the youngest of twelve children born to Stu and Helen Hart. The Hart family is arguably the most famous dynasty in professional wrestling history. Stu Hart, a formidable wrestler and promoter, ran Stampede Wrestling out of the family's infamous "Dungeon"—a basement gym where countless future stars learned the craft through brutal, unforgiving training.

Growing up in this environment, Owen was exposed to wrestling from the moment he could walk. However, unlike many of his older brothers, Owen initially pursued other interests. He was a natural athlete, excelling in amateur wrestling and even considering a career as a physical education teacher. He attended the University of Calgary, where he balanced academics with athletics. It was only after graduating that he seriously considered a career in the family business. This background gave Owen a unique perspective. He was not forced into wrestling; he chose it on his own terms, wanting to prove he could succeed on his own merit, not just because of his last name.

Breaking Into the Business: The Blue Blazer

Owen Hart's early professional career began in Stampede Wrestling and Japan. In 1987, he signed with the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). Rather than being introduced as a member of the famous Hart family, he was given a gimmick that would become iconic: The Blue Blazer.

The Blue Blazer was a high-flying, cape-wearing superhero character. It was a gimmick designed to showcase Owen's incredible agility and aerial prowess, which stood in stark contrast to the more grounded, technical style of his brothers. While the character was fun and allowed Owen to shine in the ring, it never truly showcased his full personality. He was a great hand, a reliable performer, but the character limited his ability to connect with the audience on a deeper level. After a few years, Owen left the WWF, feeling creatively stifled, and returned to the independent and international circuits, where he refined his craft and developed the charisma that would later make him a star.

The King of Harts: The Feud with Bret Hart

By 1993, Owen returned to the WWF. This time, however, things were different. He was positioned not as a masked superhero but as a member of the Hart family. This led to the most defining storyline of his career: a

Bret "The Hitman" Hart his older brother,

The storyline was rooted in powerful, real-life dynamics. Owen had always felt overshadowed by Bret's success. Bret was the "Excellence of Execution," the WWF Champion, the golden boy. Owen was the little brother, often referred to simply as "Bret's brother." The gimmick was that Owen was jealous, resentful, and tired of living in Bret's shadow.

This feud culminated in one of the greatest matches in WrestleMania history at **WrestleMania X**in 1994. In a technical masterpiece, Owen defeated Bret. The finish was pure storytelling: Owen capitalized on a mistake, hitting a roll-up for the pin. He had finally beaten his older brother on the biggest stage. The image of Owen, celebrating with his wife Martha at ringside, is one of the most joyful and iconic moments of his career. He had proven he was more than just a Hart; he was Owen Hart, the "King of Harts."

The Black Hart: A Master of Comedy and Ring Psychology

After his feud with Bret, Owen Hart's character evolved. He became a staple of the mid-card, often playing a comedic heel. He developed a fantastic run as a tag team wrestler, first with his brother-in-law Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart as part of the New Foundation, and later in an incredibly successful partnership with his brother-in-law, Davey Boy Smith (The British Bulldog), as "The Smoking Gunns" and later just as a tag team known simply as "Owen and Davey Boy."

However, his most famous comedic pairing was with the flamboyant **Jeff Jarrett** and, later, the bizarre character of **DeGeneration X**. As a member of DX, Owen was the straight man to the antics of Shawn Michaels, Triple H, and Chyna. He was hilarious, dressing up as "The Black Hart," mimicking DX's rebellious attitude with a deadpan delivery that resonated perfectly with audiences. He could make you laugh with a single expression. But beneath the comedy, Owen never lost his in-ring excellence. He could wrestle anyone—from a giant like Vader to a technician like Shawn Michaels—and make them look like a million dollars. He was the definition of a "workhorse" champion.

Family Man: The Private Life of Owen Hart

Outside the ring, Owen Hart was a different person entirely. He was deeply devoted to his wife, Martha, whom he married in 1989. They had two children: Oje and Athena. Owen was famously private and grounded. He did not indulge in the party lifestyle that many of his colleagues did. He was a man of faith who enjoyed spending time reading, playing video games, and being a father.

His love for his family was his anchor. He frequently expressed his desire to eventually retire from wrestling to spend more time with his children. He had a dry, quick wit that he shared freely with close friends, but he reserved his deepest affection for his immediate family. This contrast between his on-screen persona (the arrogant, sneaky heel) and his off-screen persona (the quiet, loving husband and father) made him an even more compelling figure. He was a man who could entertain millions but whose heart was always at home in Calgary.

The Over the Edge Incident: A Tragic End

On May 23, 1999, the wrestling world stopped. The WWF was holding a pay-per-view event called **Over the Edge**in Kansas City, Missouri. Owen Hart was scheduled to perform as his old gimmick, The Blue Blazer, in a comedic match against The Godfather for the Intercontinental Championship.

In an effort to create an exciting and humorous entrance, the plan was for Owen to be lowered from the ceiling of the Kemper Arena into the ring via a harness and a quick-release mechanism. The harness was not properly secured. As Owen was being lowered from the rafters, approximately 78 feet above the ring, the release mechanism triggered prematurely. Owen Hart fell. He landed chest-first on the top rope of the ring, then crashed onto the mat.

The arena fell silent. The show, unbelievably, continued for several minutes before announcer Jim Ross broke the devastating news to the viewing audience: Owen Hart had suffered a severe accident. He was rushed to a local hospital, but the internal injuries were too severe. At 39 years old, Owen Hart was pronounced dead. The event was a turning point—a moment of profound tragedy that professional wrestling has never fully recovered from.

The Aftermath: Shock, Grief, and Controversy

The **life and death of Owen Hart**left a gaping wound. The immediate aftermath was chaos. The decision to continue the pay-per-view was universally criticized and remains a source of deep controversy. Friends, family, and fans were in utter shock. The wrestling community mourned collectively.

For the Hart family, the pain was immeasurable. Stu and Helen Hart lost their youngest son. Bret Hart, who had left the WWF just two years prior, was devastated and publicly blamed the company for the reckless stunt. Martha Hart, Owen's widow, was furious and heartbroken. She filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the WWF and World Championship Wrestling (which had ownership ties at the time), alleging negligence and a complete disregard for safety. The lawsuit was eventually settled out of court for a reported $18 million.

Martha Hart also made a decision that had a lasting impact on wrestling history: she refused to allow the WWF (now WWE) to use Owen's likeness, name, or image in any video games, hall of fame inductions, or DVD releases. For over two decades, Owen Hart was essentially erased from official WWE media, a constant reminder of the painful legal and emotional battle that followed the tragedy.

Legacy: The Man Who Was More Than a Wrestler

Despite the corporate silence, the legacy of Owen Hart has never faded. For fans, he represents a golden era of wrestling where storytelling and in-ring psychology reigned supreme. He is remembered for his incredible matches—the WrestleMania X match with Bret, his ladder match with Shawn Michaels, his tag team classics with Davey Boy Smith, and his hilariously entertaining work in DX.

More importantly, he is remembered for his humanity. In an industry filled with larger-than-life egos, Owen was humble. He was the guy who would help younger talent, who never complained about his position, and who always prioritized his family. His tragic death served as a catalyst for significant changes in the wrestling industry regarding safety protocols. Stunts like the one that killed Owen are now subject to far greater scrutiny and stricter safety checks.

In recent years, there has been a cultural shift. With the passing of time and the change of leadership at WWE, the door has slowly opened. In 2013, the Hart family's relationship with WWE began to thaw. In 2021, Martha Hart, in a monumental decision, reached an agreement with WWE to allow a documentary and a line of merchandise dedicated to Owen's legacy, with the proceeds going to the Owen Hart Foundation—a charitable organization she founded in his honor to support education, amateur athletics, and community building. The documentary, titled *Owen*, was released in 2024 to critical acclaim, finally bringing Owen's story to a new generation.

Conclusion: A Legend That Refuses to Fade

The **life and death of Owen Hart**is not a story of a wrestler who died in the ring. It is the story of a son who chose his own path, a brother who fought for his own identity, a husband who cherished his family, and an artist who mastered his craft. The tragedy of his fall will always be a part of his story, but it does not define him. What defines Owen Hart is the laughter he brought, the incredible matches he performed, and the quiet dignity with which he lived his life. He was the "King of Harts," and his legacy, built on excellence and kindness, is finally being honored the way it always should have been. He is gone, but he will never be forgotten.

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