

= Swede Hanson ( wrestler ) =

Robert Fort Hanson ( March 27 , 1933 ? February 19 , 2002 ) was an American professional wrestler best known by his ring name Swede Hanson . He spent much of his career wrestling as part of a tag team with Rip Hawk . Together , they held championships in four different promotions .

Hanson and Hawk were heel ( villain ) wrestlers and competed against some of the most popular teams of their time . They later feuded with each other when Hawk found a new partner after Hanson suffered a legitimate heart attack . Hanson retired in 1986 and lived in South Carolina until his death in 2002 .

= = Early life = =

Hanson was born in East Orange , New Jersey . He attended high school until his senior year ; although he was offered a football scholarship to Wake Forest University , he declined the offer and stopped attending school . His mother was struggling financially , so Hanson became an aircraft mechanic to help his family . He also competed as an amateur boxer , and he compiled a 61 ? 3 record in New Jersey Golden Gloves competitions .

= = Career = =

Boxing and professional wrestling promoter Willie Gilzenberg discovered Hanson and convinced him to compete in wrestling . He trained with George Tragos and debuted in WWWF ( now World Wrestling Entertainment ) in Paterson , New Jersey against Miguel Torres in 1957 . Hanson was sent to Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania to compete while he continued to develop his skills . While there , he wrestled against Bruno Sammartino in Sammartino 's debut match .

He was later hired by Jim Crockett and moved to the Carolinas to compete . While there , he began teaming with Rip Hawk to form a tag team known as the " Blond Bombers " . They competed as heels ( villains ) and were hated by the crowds . During appearances , fans would throw acid or threaten them with knives and guns . In one attack , Hanson was stabbed in the leg and required 72 stitches . Hawk taught Hanson a move called the reverse neckbreaker , which saw Hanson stand back @-@ to @-@ back with his opponent , clasp his hands under the opponent 's chin , and fall to the ring floor while pulling the opponent with him . This became Hanson 's signature manoeuvre that he used in most matches .

Hanson remained silent during the team 's interviews while Hawk did most of the talking . The team won its first title on August 3 , 1965 , when they defeated Hiro Matsuda and Duke Keomuka to win the Florida version of the NWA World Tag Team Championship . They also competed in Mid @-@ Atlantic Championship Wrestling , where they became the inaugural NWA Atlantic Coast Tag Team Champions . They held the title belts four times between 1968 and 1971 while feuding with George Becker and Johnny Weaver . During that time , they also won the IWA World Tag Team Championship while competing in Tasmania . While in the Carolinas , Hanson and Hawk spent a lot of time with Ric Flair when Flair entered the wrestling business . Hawk stated that Flair used to cause trouble for the group , including one incident in which Flair flirted with the girlfriend of a Mafia member . Hanson and Hawk used their friendship with the Mafia member to help Flair escape from being killed in revenge .

In 1971 , Hanson suffered a heart attack and had to take time away from wrestling . After returning , he formed a tag team with Super Destroyer . The partnership was short lived , as Super Destroyer later turned on Hanson . As a result , Hanson become a face ( fan favorite ) and the two feuded for several months . In 1974 , Hanson and his new partner , Tiger Conway , Jr . , began a feud with Hawk and Ric Flair . The series of matches later evolved into singles matches that pitted former partners Hanson and Hawk against each other . Hanson later became a less high @-@ profile wrestler and was given the role of putting over new wrestlers in the promotion . Hanson left the territory for a while but later returned with a new gimmick . He had frizzy hair and wore psychedelic clothes while teaming with Gene Anderson and Sgt. Jacques Goulet .

Hanson returned to the WWWF in 1979 as a vicious heel under the management of Fred Blassie . To build up his heat , many of his opponents were stretchered @-@ out of the ring following their matches with Swede . He unsuccessfully challenged World champion Bob Backlund at Madison Square Garden in October of that year .

Hanson and Hawk later reformed their team and competed together in the Amarillo , Texas @-@ based NWA Western States Sports . While there , they won the NWA Western States Tag Team Championship three times . Hanson 's final title reign was the only one that did not involve Hawk , as he teamed with The Hangman in Montreal , Quebec to win the Canadian International Tag Team Championship in 1981 . Hanson then returned to McMahon 's New England @-@ based Capitol Wrestling , which had since become the World Wrestling Federation ( WWF ) . Using the gimmick of a redneck , complete with long hair and a Confederate flag , he competed for the WWF as a face until his retirement in 1986 .

= = = Legacy = = =

Hanson is regarded as an intimidating but honest wrestler . The character he portrayed was hated by many fans , but Hanson was different from many heel wrestlers because he did not cheat to win matches . Even while competing as a heel , however , Hanson and Hawk were admired by many spectators and had a fan club devoted to them . In contrast to Hawk , who remained a heel during his entire run in Mid @-@ Atlantic Championship Wrestling , Hanson gained popularity with even more fans when he feuded with Hawk and became the promotion 's top face wrestler . Writers who have looked back on his career have noted that he wrestled with " heart " and always worked his hardest in the ring . Hanson has had a lasting impact on the business , as he was willing to put over other wrestlers , including Blackjack Mulligan and Angelo Mosca to help boost their careers . He and Hawk also helped popularize the quick tag , which saw them trading places in the ring every few seconds to remain energized while their opponents became worn down .

= = Personal life = =

During the course of his wrestling career , he was married twice . While both marriages ended in divorce , he and his second wife remained close until the day he died . Swede 's marriages brought him seven children and twelve grandchildren . Swede 's first marriage to a woman named Vicky , brought him a daughter and son , named Linda and Lance . Then he married a woman named Doris , which brought him another daughter and son , Luana and Bobby . He also gained a stepson , Billy Roy and two adopted children , Mary and Carol , through his second marriage . Hanson lived in Charlotte , NC for over 20 + years . In the late 80 's , Hanson and his second wife moved to Fort Mill , SC . After divorcing his second wife , he remained living in a double @-@ wide mobile home on five acres of land in Fort Mill , South Carolina . He was later engaged to a woman named Patsy Hughes .

During his wrestling career , Hanson also worked in construction and had a position as a bouncer . After retiring from wrestling , Hanson worked a series of jobs . He was a trainer at a fitness center and later returned to construction work . His final position was as manager of a nightclub . Hanson also participated in several golf tournaments to raise money for charities .

In his later life , Hanson suffered from diabetes and Alzheimer 's disease . He also had high blood pressure and heart problems . He was hospitalized in Columbia , South Carolina in October 2001 due to dementia and died from Sepsis , on February 19 , 2002 .

= = In wrestling = =

Finishing moves

Reverse neckbreaker

Nicknames

" Big "

Managers

Gary Hart

Homer O 'Dell

Freddie Blassie

= = Championships and accomplishments = =

Championship Wrestling from Florida

NWA World Tag Team Championship ( Florida version ) ( 1 time ) - with Rip Hawk

International Wrestling Association

Canadian International Tag Team Championship ( 1 time ) - with The Hangman

Mid @-@ Atlantic Championship Wrestling

NWA Atlantic Coast Tag Team Championship ( 4 times ) - with Rip Hawk

NWA Southern Tag Team Championship ( Mid @-@ Atlantic version ) ( 1 time ) - with Rip Hawk

NWA Western States Sports

NWA Western States Tag Team Championship ( 3 times ) - with Rip Hawk

World Championship Wrestling ( Australia )

IWA World Tag Team Championship ( 1 time ) - with Rip Hawk