

Glenn Jacobs Was a Three-Time WWE World Champion. Now He's Mayor Kane

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In August 2018, the residents of Knox County, Tennessee elected a new mayor Glenn Jacobs.

Photo credit: ERIN SCHAFF

In August 2018, the residents of Knox County, Tennessee elected a new mayor. Glenn Jacobs had no experience in government, and heâ€™d won the Republican primary by just 23 votes, but Jacobs is part of a new American era. While he was unknown as a politician, people knew him a whole lot better as Kane: three-time world champion of the WWE, half-brother of The Undertaker, and a pillar of professional wrestlingâ€™s â€œAttitude Era.â€•

Fame has always leant itself to political ambitions, but we have well and truly entered the age of the celebrity politician. Weâ€™ve come a long way since John McCain tried to derisively paint Barack Obama as a celebrity in 2008 with an attack ad predicated on the notion all that glitz would be anathema to good public service and competent leadership. The lines between politics and entertainment have blurred, and the old rules do not apply.

That doesnâ€™t mean a pre-existing celebrity canâ€™t be a competent legislator or governor. Time will tell whether Mayor Kane, who ran as a hardcore libertarian and so far carried that into office, is as successful a character as Three-Time World Champion Kane. In the meantime, heâ€™s happy to use what heâ€™s got. Last year, at the suggestion of the county tourism bureau, he promoted Knoxville as a sports-events destination by choke-slammng a guy on stage.

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ESQ: You were a public figure before, but are you under a different kind of scrutiny now?

GJ: In the wrestling world, people donâ€™t look to criticize you about every possible thing, and to pick you apart, and to drag your family into it. I mean, if you do something really bad or something especially egregious, or a lot of times if youâ€™re just seeking attention, youâ€™re going to get it in a negative way. Of course, thatâ€™s not the case in politics. There are folks that for whatever reason, they disagree with you politically or whatever, that are looking for any weakness and to exploit them. Even just a remark here or there thatâ€™s taken out of context could be problematic, and thatâ€™s just the way the world is. You have to accept that, if not necessarily be comfortable with it.

ESQ: What lessons from show business have helped in your political career?

GJ: Treat people like they matter. Because they do. Thatâ€™s the view I took in WWE. The fans are the people paying my bills. My wife put it in perspective for me one day over lunch. Iâ€™d just gotten off the road, and I was tired, and people kept coming up and wanting pictures, and I was starting to get frustrated, like â€œWhy canâ€™t these people just leave me alone?â€• Crystal, my wife, said, â€œWhat you have to understand is that because youâ€™re on TV, meeting you is a pretty exciting thing for a lot of people.â€• I realized that itâ€™s not about meâ€™s itâ€™s about them. And I could put on a smile and be nice for two minutes, and give those folks a good experience. Politics is the same way. People are important and all too often, they arenâ€™t treated that way.

ESQ: Is your duty to your constituents different than your duty to the fans?

GJ: It's important in a different way now, because people pay taxes to support the government and they literally are stakeholders, right? The fans are important, because again, they're paying the bills. But if they don't like you, they can go someplace else. Here, we have constituents, and in many cases they don't have a whole lot of choice.

ESQ: Has your past career helped or hindered your new one?

GJ: Both. I was able to get my foot in the door—I was a novelty, so people talked about me, right? They didn't always talk about me in a good way, but at least they did talk about me. What I then had to do was prove that there's substance there, and it wasn't just the wrestling thing. We did take advantage of that—we'd be foolish not to. That's part of my life, so I never run from it, but that's not what I want to completely define my entire existence.

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ESQ: Are you waking up earlier in the morning than when you were a wrestler?

GJ: No, I stayed busy as a wrestler—we had a business and all that. But every day is different now. Last night, we had a county commission meeting that didn't get over until 10:30 at night. I try to keep what I can control as consistent as possible, but sometimes life gets in the way. One awesome thing is not having to travel so much out of town. I like being able to sleep in my own bed. As a wrestler I was on the road 250, 300 days a year.

ESQ: What was your greatest accomplishment as an entertainer?

GJ: The first time I won the world championship.

ESQ: What's your greatest accomplishment as mayor?

GJ: So far, it's just the fact the I've gotten to meet so many great people. I go to schools often and read to the kids - we have a literacy initiative called Read to the USA.

ESQ: When did you first feel famous?

GJ: It was around 2004, and I'd been in WWE for a while. On a promotional tour in India, I visited the Red Gate, which is a very famous monument. Someone in the crowd noticed me and pointed, then someone else pointed, and all of a sudden there was a mob of people approaching. My security literally grabbed me by the armpits and started taking me backward, and I was like, This is the coolest thing ever! These people weren't being malicious at all. They were like a human wave that overcame me.

A version of this interview appears in the March issue of **Esquire**.

- Esquire