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Pro wrestler John 'Bradshaw' Layfield has higher aspirations

■ He is one of the WWE superstars to appear in "Smackdown!" at the Kansas Coliseum. The Tuesday event is being taped for TV.

BY JEFFREY LUTZ
Wichita Eagle correspondent

John "Bradshaw" Layfield will come to Wichita as the World Wrestling Entertainment champion.

Six months ago, that didn't seem possible.

In April, Layfield was coming off biceps surgery, was part of a fan-favorite tag team and looked, at age 36, to have no future as a singles competitor.

Then his partner Ron Simmons, aka Faarooq, was fired, and Layfield vaulted into the hunt for the WWE title. He won it from Eddie Guerrero at the "Great American Bash" pay-per-view in July.

"I got this break awful late in my career," Layfield said. "If I had gotten it earlier, I don't know if I would have appreciated it."

Layfield is one of WWE's "Smackdown!" superstars who will invade the Kansas Coliseum on Tuesday for a TV taping to be aired on UPN two days later.

Simmons and Layfield, known as APA, were beer-drinking, no-nonsense brawlers. Now, Layfield plays a character modeled after J.R. Ewing. He travels to the ring in a limousine, wears a large



Courtesy photo

John "Bradshaw" Layfield does more than win WWE championships. He's also written a book about how to succeed in the stock market called "Make More Money Now" and was a regular on Fox News giving stock tips.

white cowboy hat and isn't afraid to flaunt his prejudicial views.

The character is more like Layfield in real life, only much more evil.

"When I came back after my bicep surgery, I cut my hair, changed it back to the original color and didn't fit into the APA character anymore," Layfield said. "I was trying to, but I looked like a preppy nerd from Wall Street. I was going to have problems going forward with that

character."

There's a reason Layfield now is billed as being from New York. The stock market is a big part of his life. He wrote a book in 2003 called "Make More Money Now," was a regular on Fox News giving stock tips and hosts a weekly radio show.

"I follow it daily," Layfield said. I read two, three newspapers a day, and with a weekend radio show I have to keep up on it."

The knowledge he's amassing through his research and work might help with a future in politics, which Layfield says he is considering.

His JBL character acts like a campaigning politician, shaking hands and kissing babies in the audience. It might prove to be good practice.

"I've thought about it a bunch and I don't know," Layfield said. "Everybody says this: That 'if I knew I could make a difference, I'd do it.' But for me, it's actually true."

Layfield is a Republican, says health care is his biggest concern and lists Ohio congressman Bob Ney as his political role model. Layfield spoke at the Republican convention and has made three trips to the Middle East to visit troops.

"I hope to raise some awareness," he said. "We have less than a 50 percent voter turnout right now, and that's bad. People just don't think they're heard, and maybe they're not. But a lot of important decisions are being made now, and people need to be involved."

The path from pro football player to wrestler to politician is unconventional, but Layfield could make it happen. He got into wrestling only after spending three injury-plagued seasons in the World Football League.

After training in Minnesota with Brad Rheingans, a former Vikings trainer, Layfield became a pro wrestler in 1992.

He made his WWE debut four years later. Layfield's first match on TV was against the Undertaker, a 13-year WWE

If you go WWE SMACKDOWN!

What: World Wrestling Entertainment matches featuring John "Bradshaw" Layfield

Where: Kansas Coliseum

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

How much: Tickets \$20, \$25, \$30 and \$40 at Select-a-Seat outlets or by calling 755-SEAT.

If you watch

What: Taped show from World Wrestling Entertainment's appearance in Wichita

When: 7 p.m. Thursday, on UPN and KSCC, Ch. 6-36

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veteran whom he will face in his second pay-per-view title defense in a "No Mercy" match next month.

"My first match on live TV was against the Undertaker, so it's kind of cool that my first big match as champion is against the Undertaker," Layfield said. "I'm looking forward to it. I really want to do something special at this pay-per-view."

As far as special things go, winning the match might be only the beginning for Layfield. Clearly, his stock is rising.

JBL

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