

The Fabulous Moolah: First Goddess of the Squared Circle

Lillian Ellison

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Lillian Ellison, known in the ring as the Fabulous Moolah, is one of wrestling's pioneering veterans and heroines, both in and out of the squared circle. When wrestling first caught the attention of the public, Moolah had a ringside seat. Appearing on the scene in 1949 as a "valet" for some male wrestlers, she was introduced to the crowd as a "slave girl" dressed in revealing leopardskin. But the woman who got into the business for the "moolah" wouldn't remain a valet for long, and soon Moolah turned her humble beginnings into a successful and long-lived career.

Growing up in Tookiedoo, South Carolina, Moolah was the youngest of thirteen children -- and the only girl. Surrounded by twelve rambunctious brothers, she had to be tough from the get-go. After the death of their mother when she was just ten years old, Moolah and her father spent Tuesday nights at local professional wrestling matches. At first she was just excited to do something special with her father. But everything changed when Mildred Burke (one of the most popular "lady rasslers" of the day) came to town. After years of being surrounded by boys, Moolah had finally found a woman she could look up to.

From that night on, Moolah was hooked. She stayed in the ring throughout the 1950s and 1960s, even though technically women were banned from wrestling "for their own good." When the Women's Division of the National Wrestling Alliance was failing, Moolah started training girls at her home base in South Carolina, and by the late sixties the girls she had trained at Girl Wrestling Enterprises represented the single largest group of female wrestlers in the country. Soon the National Wrestling Alliance recognized her as the undisputed Women's Champ, a title she would hold for the next twenty years.

Here, for the first time, the Fabulous Moolah tells all, from her friendship with the infamous Jerry Lee Lewis to a marriage proposal from country-music legend Hank Williams Sr. Moolah dishes plenty of wrestling dirt as well and relates hilarious moments from her decades long friendship with her in-ring cohort Mae Young.

After more than half a century of wrestling, Moolah still trains girls for the ring and even manages to get into the ring herself now and again. She is a role model for strong women everywhere, and she will go down in history as one of wrestling's all-time greats.



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