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Conscience clear: Psycho Mike debuts in Japan

By [KARI WILLIAMS](#) (and Psycho Mike's Conscience) - SLAM! Wrestling

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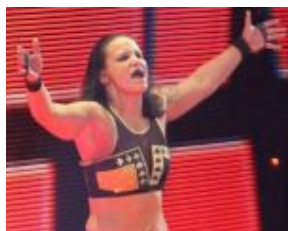
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Psycho Mike Rollins' conscience has been making its presence felt during Rollins' matches as of late. And while the man himself said it could look like the voice -- heard by the crowd and himself, but not his opponent -- is the "devil on his shoulder," he insisted that's not the case.

"If the voice wasn't there and disappeared, if you watched the match on mute, it would still make sense," said Rollins, an 11-year veteran of the southern Ontario independent wrestling scene. "The way I behaved would be consistent with how the character behaved without the conscience."

In that sense, he said, there are "no differences" between his conscience and Psycho Mike himself.



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"Technically, I think of it that the conscience has always been there, but you're hearing it for the first time," Rollins said. "In many ways, I'm actually doing same thing I've always done, now I'm just telling people why I'm doing it."

And in April, it was his conscience that revealed to a Smash Wrestling crowd that the company's resident psycho would be jetting off to Japan for his debut tour with Dramatic Dream Team (DDT) Pro Wrestling.

FREE MATCH - Mike Rollins vs Kikutarō...



GETTING TO JAPAN

Rollins' match against Kikutarō at Smash Wrestling in December caught DDT's attention, leading to the company's offer. Because Kikutarō wrestles a comedic style, Rollins knew fans would expect a comedy match. But he wanted to give them something unique.

"I don't ever try to have a 'Psycho Mike' match," Rollins said, "and I wouldn't feel fulfilled having a 'Kikutarō' match... The combination of us working together has to be a unique product."

Thus came the "really ridiculous concepts," like plugging in a pre-lit Christmas tree and simulating electrocution after being thrown into the tree.

"I wanted to show [Kikutarō] that I'm creative and able to collaborate and that I had good ideas," Rollins said. "So we hit it off pretty much right away. I pitched him a few ideas that I had, and he was down for everything. Then we would just kind of joke back and forth about different things that we could do."

He also noted "optimizing" the bout for modern media -- meaning that "vertical slices" from the match could be posted on social media.

"The way people consume wrestling content now is

different... If they feel like they experienced it in some way, it might encourage them to seek out the whole thing," Rollins said.

The irony, according to Rollins, is that for all the moments created specifically for that "vertical slice," what made the front page of SquaredCircle Reddit was when he had Kikutaro in a wrist lock and kept looking directly into the hard camera.

"It was kind of this enlightening moment where I felt vindicated in a way because that was the first time -- I know a lot of people in pro wrestling saw me specifically from that clip," Rollins said. "So by doing that, even though it was an accident, it kind of proved this idea that I've been working toward."

After that match, Rollins said, Kikutaro "went to bat" for him with DDT.

"I didn't expect anything to come of it, to be honest, because it seemed like such a longshot," Rollins said. "It was maybe a month later that he got back to me about it and said they were interested."

Even then, Rollins did not think he would really go to Japan.

"There's still a bit of a language barrier as well -- I thought that I could've been misinterpreting the message, that the call maybe meant, 'They like you,' and that was it," Rollins said. "Even as we spoke back and forth, and started talking schedules and availability."

He didn't tell many people about the opportunity because, on some level, he said, he thought something would "go awry" in the process of applying for a visa, getting a certificate of eligibility, or even a clerical error.

CREATING A CONSCIENCE

Rollins first discovered his conscience more than a year ago, but it wasn't until the past six months that it has embodied his in-ring work. A match last April with the Toronto promotion Superkick'd was altered due to his opponent sustaining an injury the day before the event. Rather than face someone else, Rollins was told that he would wrestle himself.

Mike Rollins vs Mike Rollins



"I didn't really know what to do with that," Rollins recalled. "But we were brainstorming ideas, and I thought it would be funny to have me talk to myself, but have it be something where we pre-recorded my responses ahead of time, and it would just be this back and forth, this pre-planned back and forth."

(Psycho Mike, this is your conscience speaking! Don't forget to mention the debuts of your other alter egos: Psycho Michelle, Psycho Michael, Cycle Mike...)

At the same time, Rollins said, he thought the audience would "appreciate the complexity" of pulling that off.

Since then, Rollins had considered continuing to work alongside his conscience to give a sense of logic to the "strange and quirky things" his character does. But it wasn't until this past winter that his conscience made a planned appearance. Rollins faced Sebastian Suave at Smash Wrestling, where a couple weeks prior Suave's [head was split open](#) in a match against Tarik.

"I thought a good story for that would be that I was afraid of hitting him because I'm afraid of blood," Rollins said. "My character would be afraid of the blood."

(Psycho Mike, this is your conscience speaking! You're doing great! Just be sure not to mention your fear of cats...)

That concept was set up in a pre-match segment and once Rollins and Suave stepped in the ring, the match continued selling that narrative.

"Suddenly, the voice came on telling me it was OK to hit him, then that changed the entire concept of the match... It gave me a reason to suddenly get aggressive, then we just got really silly with the idea," Rollins said.

Suave said he loved the concept because Rollins isn't afraid

to think outside the box or take risks.

"I feel like it is low-risk with Mike because he truly gives it 110 percent, even beyond the ring or event day," said Suave, also Smash's promoter. "He takes pride in the presentation and story of his character. So, for me, it was something fresh and exciting."

(Psycho Mike, this is your conscience speaking! The boss likes you. Ask for more money.)

TRANSITIONING TO THE CULTURE

Rollins landed in Japan at 3 p.m. on a Wednesday and less than 24 hours later, he was in Tokyo, tagging with Ricky Starks, who he had just met, for his debut match -- a three-way tag against Soma Takao and Nobuhiro Shimatani, of the stable Damnation, and Mike Bailey and MAO.

Between having just met Starks, the difficulties of a three-way tag, a language barrier, a new country and a new audience, the match was "stressful to say the least."

"Even as the match was going, I never let myself breathe... [I kept thinking], 'I can't screw this up.' My brain is working overtime to process everything to make sure I'm doing my part," Rollins recalled.

It wasn't until about four weeks into the nearly six-week tour that he started to feel comfortable in his surroundings.

"I do tend to get over-analytical about everything," said Rollins, who was adjusting to a new country, a new style of wrestling and the structure of DDT shows, a more colorful version of grappling compared to the harder-hitting, serious All Japan or New Japan.

"I was trying to figure out what my role is, what's expected of me," Rollins said. "It was hard to figure out because the cues and feedback I get here [in Canada] are not the same as it is over there. I had a lot of trouble getting a sense of what was working and what wasn't. The style is very, very different.

"It took me a while to acclimate to it. I was very fortunate to have Mike Bailey there. He coached me through a lot of this. Even then, it was one of those things where if I was to do it again, I don't think it would be an issue because I already know what's going to happen. I'm much more prepared for it."

But within that context, Rollins was featured in two

Japanese magazines, able to reunite with a former trainer, take in a Sendai Girls' Pro Wrestling show, and, of course, fight for his own personal streamers while wrestling for DDT. On top of that, he also crossed wrestling in Korakuen Hall off his bucket list -- twice. His fourth match of the tour was at Korakuen, along with his a match the day before returning to Canada.

"The first one was another thing where walking into building and seeing the crowd come in, that was kind of like the 'holy shit' moment for me," Rollins said. "Doing the match itself for me was probably same thing as the first one... I didn't put myself in a state to appreciate it for what it was."

He wrestled another three-way tag and had yet to acclimate to the new environment.

"[I was] creating all that pressure on myself. That one I kind of wish happened toward the end of the tour because I would've been in a better state for it, I think," Rollins said. "Afterwards, it was just kind of that release of, 'I did this thing that I've wanted to do for a long time, and no matter what else happens, I can say I did that. This trip is a success.'"



A leap of faith in Japan.

WORKING WITH A CONSCIENCE

The vision for his conscience -- "at the risk of sounding pretentious" -- was a way to add layers to the Psycho Mike character, even though on the surface, it can stand as a "self-contained match or segment."

The concept of a voice that speaks to Rollins, that the audience and he can hear, but his opponent can't, he said, is "really absurd." But he wanted a platform to tell "nuanced," yet conventional pro wrestling stories within that realm of

absurdness.

"You take like a very typical story that might have its own tropes, like a tag team splitting up," Rollins said. "It's probably something seen a hundred times over, but then you add this extra element to it, and suddenly you can change the dynamic of it."

And that's what happened with the breakup of the Well-Oiled Machines, Psycho Mike and Pepper Parks (Braxton Sutter in Impact), before Rollins left for Japan. Rollins didn't "necessarily" express his feelings about Parks, but rather, they were conveyed through an internal monologue.

"Or if I behaved in a certain way, I could have an internal monologue explain it to the audience," Rollins said. "So even though it's a typical story and progression as it pertains to pro wrestling... suddenly it's more interesting because there's this extra component."

(Psycho Mike, this is your conscience speaking! Why are you showing so much tact when speaking about Pepper?! Use more aggressive language and four letter words!)

The technical aspect of creating a match with his conscience, according to Rollins, is "extremely stressful," despite the physicality of the matches being simple. A full day's effort goes into putting the match together and, Rollins said, requires commitment on all fronts.

"You have stuff that you've recorded hours beforehand and certain cues someone is waiting for to play the voiceovers... You have to make your match make sense within it," Rollins said. "You can't change your mind later. And if I do, it's a very hard to re-coordinate everything."

(Psycho Mike, this is your conscience speaking! Why are you making me sound like a burden?! I revitalized your career!)

Over time, according to Rollins, fans have grown to appreciate the "nuance" behind his conscience.

"It's not just this shallow comedy thing, but there are actual stories and feelings involved," Rollins said. "We've done bunch of things where we we're not just playing it up for laughs."

He noted the build up to a match at Smash Wrestling with Kevin Bennett.

"[The concept was] me showing an interest in his hip-hop career and rapping and how I wanted to do a duet, and I was

very eager to do that," Rollins said. "And that just manifested itself in me, or my conscience, interrupting one of his music videos. So we made a whole song and music video that starred Kevin Bennett, Psycho Mike and my conscience."



Slam.

A FULL CIRCLE MOMENT

While this tour was the first time wrestling in Japan became a reality, there were a handful of times over the past 11 years when it seemed like it would happen, but never came to fruition.

"I kind of resigned myself to the fact that I might just have to admit that it's this unattainable thing and have to be OK with it," Rollins said.

So he visited on vacation instead. As that trip wound down, he visited Haoming Mask, a famous pro wrestling shop in Tokyo, Shibuya.

"On the wall, they have all the pictures of all the wrestlers who have been there before and they sign them," Rollins said. "I was looking at Ethan Page and Michael Elgin, [and I was] with my girlfriend and just kind of pointing around. A guy working there behind the counter asked if I knew them. I said they were friends from back home... I didn't want to

look lame, like I came into shop, but I'm not here to wrestle."

Then Olivia, his girlfriend, started showing the employee Rollins' matches on YouTube, and the employee said Rollins might be a good fit for DDT.

"We exchanged some information and then I left the shop thinking maybe something [could happen]. Nothing came from that," Rollins said. "And then it was almost like a year to the day later, I was back in the country for DDT. One thing I wanted to do was go back to the shop and say, 'Hey, I'm here again but this time under better circumstances.' For me, it was just kind of this story that came full circle. The prospect of going there, the seed was planted a year before and a year later it finally grew and here I am."

RELATED LINKS

- [Twitter: @iampsychemike](#)
- [Psycho Mike Rollins on Facebook](#)

Kari Williams is a Midwest-based journalist who enjoyed collaborating with Psycho Mike's Conscience to make this feature a reality. She can be reached at williams.kari09@gmail.com, and you can follow her on Twitter: [@Kari_Williams](#).

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