

# Lucha libre in the US: The wrestler who taunts Latino fans

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**One of the main characters in an American professional wrestling league is a conservative "patriot" who wants to rid the US of illegal immigrants. How far can RJ Brewer wind up the sport's mostly Hispanic fans before causing real offence?**

The boos come when RJ Brewer does his job right. He is paid to be the bad guy, and fans let him have it, showering him with jeers every time he steps into the ring.

He is one of the main characters in the professional wrestling league Lucha Libre USA, which aims to spread into the American market one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Mexico - freestyle wrestling.

The four-year-old league needed "rudos", or bad guys, and organisers wanted American-born, English-speaking wrestlers who could appeal to the broader US audience.

The league cast John Stagikas, 32, to play RJ Brewer, an ultraconservative American patriot who, [his online biography declares](#), "feels that good morals and strong family values are the key to a successful country".

Before the overwhelmingly Hispanic Lucha Libre USA audience, his right-wing take on illegal immigration provokes the most boos.

His rants are so off-the-wall there is little mistaking them for anything but a joke (he has vowed to rid American wrestling of the Mexican influence, even if that means deporting wrestlers from the locker room).

The character resonates deeply with Hispanics who have been deeply affected by the illegal immigration debate, raging for decades with no solution in sight.

In a form of make-believe known in professional wrestling as "kayfabe", RJ Brewer is said to be from Phoenix, Arizona, arguably the political centre of the US anti-illegal immigration movement.



RJ Brewer vows to rid US wrestling of its Mexican influence

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## Governor's 'son'

His mother is "one of the highest-ranking officials in the nation and holds great power and influence over the state of Arizona", his biography states.

That is a transparent reference to Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, who has signed into law some of the country's strictest anti-illegal immigration measures, and who many Hispanic Americans see as a real-life villain.

Her "son" RJ Brewer tells fans he enjoys volunteering with the border patrol and that he believes undocumented foreigners are the main reason behind America's ailing job market.

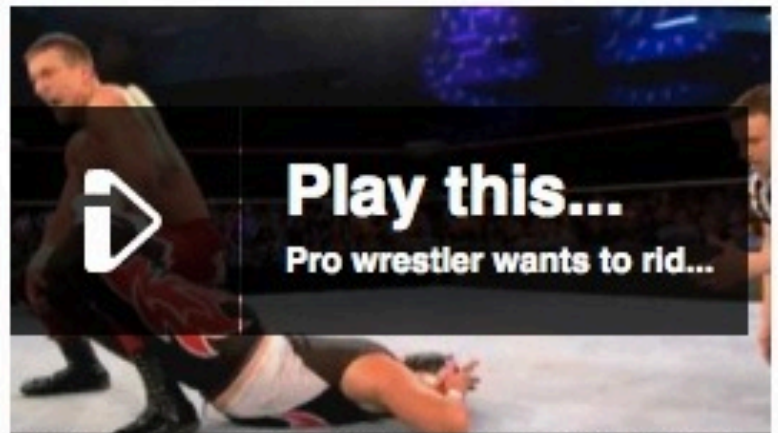
"The border has to be reinforced, I support any form of stricter control along the border," he tells the BBC.

"We have troops in Iraq and Afghanistan that should in fact come back home and engage in homeland security operations."

Lucha libre (Spanish for "freestyle wrestling") is an extremely acrobatic form of the sport. Approaching football in its popularity in Mexico, it incorporates colourful masks that become part of the wrestlers' persona.

Many of the masked warriors who battle the intolerant RJ Brewer in the ring are of Mexican origin - Super Nova, Mascarita Dorada, Lizmark Junior, Tigresa Caliente.

More than 70% of the Lucha Libre USA audience is Hispanic, promoters say. The matches, filmed in Albuquerque New Mexico, air on MTV2, a television network oriented toward boys and men aged 12-24, and MTV Tr3s, aimed at "bicultural Latino youth".



RJ Brewer explains his views in a promotional video for Lucha Libre USA

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**There has to be a bad guy that everybody loves to hate”**

Lizmark Junior

Lucha Libre USA  
wrestler

## True hate

"There has to be a bad guy that everybody loves to hate," says Lizmark Junior, another rudo.

"RJ's role is precisely that, to create a fuss around him and his beliefs, especially when he is wrestling against immigrants and has an audience of immigrants. Do I believe all he says? Well, it sounds pretty real. People truly hate him, not just when he's in the ring."

Lucha libre's operatic kayfabe storylines require the audience to suspend disbelief in the reality of what they are watching.

So when a muscular white man takes a microphone and taunts illegal immigrants, that risks causing offence, even as it draws the audience in.

In an apparent measure of his success connecting with the audience, RJ Brewer has become so hated he has stopped attending the post-show autograph sessions.

When venturing out of character, Mr Stagikas is coy about whether he truly believes all the things RJ Brewer says. But he accepts that other people do.

"We have to bring up real problems," he says.

"Those who read the news know that my character portrays an important part of US mentality... And, hey, what I say is mostly what I really think."

Steve Ship, Lucha Libre USA founder and CEO, says the goal is to show the cultural reality of the Hispanic community in the US.

"We want to deal with current matters. We do that all the time. And with each character we try to achieve an effect, get impact.

"We create characters that have to do with what's going on in the real world and with the experiences that Latinos have as immigrants."



Lucha libre competition is more acrobatic than traditional American professional wrestling