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"The Miz," Wrestling Raw Show Set to Go

By Alec Luhn

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Michael “The Miz” Mizanin, acting up above at a recent news conference, is just one of the wrestling stars who will perform Wednesday in Moscow.

Michael "The Miz" Mizanin entered the news conference the same way he enters the ring. Dressed to the nines in a tailored suit, the wrestler strode into the room at the Hotel National to a canned recording of his catchphrase, "Awesome!" strutted down the aisle and stopped to smirk at the cameras, arms spread wide like a 19th-century showman.

Mizanin, who has won several World Wrestling Entertainment championships during his career, was in Moscow to promote the WWE's first show in Russia on Wednesday.

Although local organizations, such as the Independent Wrestling Federation, put on professional wrestling matches, sports entertainment featuring outlandish antics and predetermined outcomes, this will be the first time WWE professional wrestlers perform here. Besides Mizanin, the WWE Raw World Tour in Moscow will feature the wrestlers John Cena, CM Punk, Alberto Del Rio, Kelly Kelly and Eve.

Staying in character as an egotistical superstar, Mizanin spent plenty of time promoting his favorite topic at the news conference: himself.

"April 11, everyone's going to be talking about The Miz," he said. "I can make you love me, I can make you hate me, I can make you sit in your seats, I can make you stand," he added.

When asked whether he thinks Russian viewers know the outcomes of the matches at the country's first-ever WWE performance will be predetermined, Mizanin said they should see it as entertainment and approach it like a movie.

He also said the language barrier would not pose a problem, based on his appearances in other countries.

"America, Europe, China — [professional wrestling] is all over and everyone gets it," Mizanin said.

"I know this because I've heard people chant 'You suck' all over the world," he explained, referring to a popular WWE crowd chant.

It's thanks to local television broadcasts of WWE matches that audiences know this and other popular chants, Mizanin said. The inclusion of Moscow on the tour came after the local television channel 2x2 started the WWE Raw show in February 2011. Other American professional wrestling programs have been shown on Russian television in years past, and WWE Smackdown, another brand of the huge wrestling empire, made its debut on 2x2 earlier this year.

Professional wrestling has a large fan base in Russia because of this television exposure, said Yevgenia Ilicheva, a spokeswoman for SAV Entertainment, which is organizing Wednesday's event.

As of Monday, about 6,000 tickets had been sold, she said. The arena, which is located next to the Luzhniki stadium, holds 8,700 people, according to the Luzhniki website.

There are already plans for WWE to return next year.

"It's our first time coming out here, and it won't be the last," Mizanin said.

Back in WWE's home country, "Russian" wrestlers have long been well known to American audiences. The very non-Slavic Oreal Perras performed as "The Russian Bear" Ivan Koloff, during the Cold War and more recently Ukrainian-born Oleg Prudius has performed as "The Moscow Mauler" Vladimir Kozlov.

Mizanin said he remembers vividly the baddie that was "The Russian Bear" performing in his childhood. He hopes fans will egg on their heroes and villains on fight night.

"Boo who you hate, cheer who you love," he said. "Except don't boo me."

WWE Raw is on Wednesday. 7 p.m. Luzhniki Malaya Sportivnaya Arena. Metro Sportivnaya. ru.wwe.com

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