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Hulk Hogan Dies at 71, Leaves Behind a Legacy Larger Than Life

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Hulk Hogan, the larger-than-life professional wrestling star whose charisma and theatrical flair elevated the sport to unprecedented mainstream fame, died Thursday in Clearwater, Florida. He was 71. Authorities responded to a cardiac arrest call at his home at 9:51 a.m., according to a statement from the Clearwater Police Department. Despite efforts by first responders, Hogan was pronounced dead at Morton Plant Hospital at 11:17 a.m. Police told reporters there were no indications of foul play or suspicious circumstances.

A statement on Hogan's Instagram described him as a "legend" and noted he passed surrounded by loved ones. "His legacy will live on through the millions of fans he inspired over four decades," the statement read. "He will be deeply missed but forever remembered."

World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) expressed grief, stating, "Hogan's showmanship made him a global pop culture icon, propelling WWE to new heights in the 1980s. We extend our sympathies to his family, friends, and fans." Former WWE Chairman Vince McMahon posted on X, calling Hogan "the greatest WWE Superstar ever." McMahon praised his trailblazing career, saying, "His relentless drive and connection with fans made him a phenomenon. He gave everything to the audience he cherished."

Born Terry Gene Bollea, Hogan began wrestling in 1977, honing his craft in regional promotions and Japan before joining the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). His outsized persona sparked the "Hulkamania" craze, culminating in legendary moments like his body slam of André the Giant at WrestleMania III, a defining spectacle in wrestling history. In a 2011 documentary, *The True Story of WrestleMania*, Hogan reflected, "Wrestling at Madison Square Garden was a dream. WrestleMania was beyond anything I could've imagined."

In the 1990s, Hogan reinvigorated his career by joining World Championship Wrestling (WCW) and leading the New World Order, a villainous faction that captivated audiences. Beyond wrestling, Hogan became a household name through roles in films like *Rocky III*, where he faced off against Sylvester Stallone's iconic boxer, and the reality show *Hogan Knows Best*, which followed his family life with then-wife Linda and children Brooke and Nick. The show ended in 2007 amid personal challenges, including his son's car accident and his divorce.

Hogan's influence extended beyond entertainment. He played a pivotal role in the downfall of Gawker.com, winning a \$140 million invasion-of-privacy lawsuit in 2016, backed by tech billionaire Peter Thiel, after the site published a private video. The verdict led to Gawker's closure. In recent years, Hogan embraced Republican politics, notably appearing at the 2024 GOP convention to support Donald Trump's campaign with his trademark shirt-ripping flair.

Former President Trump mourned Hogan on Truth Social, writing, "We lost a great friend, the 'Hulkster.' He was MAGA through and through, strong, smart, and big-hearted. His cultural impact was immense." Vice President JD Vance shared a personal memory, stating, "Hogan was one of my childhood heroes. We planned to grab beers next time we met. That'll have to

wait for the other side. Rest in peace.” Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis called Hogan a “major icon for Gen X,” adding, “His passing hits hard for so many who admired him in Florida and beyond.”

Hogan’s legacy wasn’t without controversy. In 2015, WWE removed him from its Hall of Fame after allegations of racism surfaced due to his use of a racial slur. After public apologies, he was reinstated in 2018. “I’ve been praying for this day,” Hogan said then, expressing relief at returning to the WWE fold. However, the episode lingered for some, evident when fans booed him at a January 2025 Monday Night Raw event in Los Angeles, his final major public appearance.

Fellow wrestler Ric Flair, in a heartfelt statement, said, “I’m shocked by Hogan’s passing. He was there for me, even lending me money when my son Reid was ill. Our friendship meant the world.” For many, Hogan remains the heart of wrestling’s golden era, transforming a niche sport into a cultural juggernaut.