

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

# GET A GRIP

■ *Elbows up* might be a good tactic in hockey and trade, but at the Team Arm Wrestling Federation, it'll earn you a foul.

The brainchild of Jason Costantini and Alex Keary, TAWF—pronounced “tough,” of course—aims to professionalize what has long been a clandestine sport. “You’ll find these clubs all over Ontario, Quebec and Alberta, mainly in small towns,” says Costantini, TAWF’s executive producer, a brawny and bearded former chef. “It’s very underground.”

After complications from cancer treatment left him unable to power lift, Costantini says arm wrestling saved his life. He and Keary, a personal trainer and arm wrestler, launched a Toronto club called Table Monkeys, which they incorporated two years ago with a small business loan from BDC. TAWF was born soon after, billing itself as having “the strategy of the NBA or NFL, with the intensity of the UFC,” and it’s well on its way to achieving pro-sport status. It has eight franchises across Canada and the U.S., including the Toronto Smoke, Detroit Steel, Calgary Rangers and Las Vegas Reckoning, and is in the process of finalizing a broadcast deal with the Fight Network. The preseason got underway in October with an eight-on-eight, four-round showdown between the Montreal Saints and the Smoke at a Toronto brewery. (The locals lost.) Matches continue into 2026; the league officially launches next November.

Each event consists of 32 matches across four weight classes, with teams striving to reach 100 points.

The wrestlers receive a base payment of \$300 per match, with travel and accommodations covered; the winning team receives \$2,500. Costantini says TAWF’s business model is similar to the NFL’s (albeit at a millionth the scale), with the plan to generate revenue by selling franchises and broadcast sponsorships, plus tickets and established fan base, and Costantini says part of the appeal comes once people realize it’s more than just a test of brute strength. “There’s a stylistic element to it,” he says, with three basic moves: the hook, the top roll and the press. “They work the same as rock-paper-scissors, where a hook will beat a press, a press will beat a top roll, and a top roll will beat a hook.” TAWF is currently taking meetings with angel investors—though potential funders would be wise to avoid arm wrestling their way to better terms. /JamesonBerkow



Though the Montreal Saints won overall with the arm wrestling equivalent of a knockout, heavyweight Danika Lavigne of the Toronto Smoke (on left) dominated Montreal’s Tiffany Babeau.



TorontoSmoke manager Mikel Gould (below, on left) takes on veteran Ian Carnegie (a.k.a. The Gripper), who created the MAC table to reduce fouls in professional matches. Below right: Toronto’s Mike Smith gets chalked up before a match.





Left: Pascal Gervais of Montreal goes up against veteran Ian Carnegie. Right: Smoke lightweight Iti "The Falcon" M anchanda—a 14-year-old from Waterloo, Ont., who's won multiple national and international championships—took on Montreal's Kyrie Ann Kohoko and won decisively.

