

In Your House 13: Final Four – A Forgotten Classic

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Date: February 16, 1997

Location: UTC Arena, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Attendance: 6,399

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross

Well we're in between the Rumble and Mania and DANG if it's not a weird time in the WWF. There is no world champion at the moment but we'll get to that. To begin with let's recap the Rumble which should explain a lot. Three things happened there: Vader beat Taker with help from Paul Bearer, Shawn got the WWF Title back from Sid, and most importantly Steve Austin won the Royal Rumble in a stunning shock.

OR DID HE???

Well yes but he shouldn't have. Your final five men were Bret, Taker, Vader, Austin and the fake Diesel (Kane). Mankind and Terry Funk were fighting on the floor which had the attention of the referees. During this fight, Hart eliminated Austin but no referee saw it. Austin got back in, eliminated Vader and Taker just after Hart eliminated Diesel. Austin took out Hart and the referees turned around to see him alone in the ring.

Austin is declared the winner and therefore the #1 contender. HOWEVER, Gorilla Monsoon doesn't like this so he makes a match for this PPV which he dubs Final Four. Austin, Hart, Taker and Vader, the final four men in the ring in the Rumble, would have a match at the PPV for the right to go to Mania. Ok, that's all well and good. However, there was a special Thursday edition of Raw where Shawn forfeited the title, citing a knee injury and a lost smile.

That night he had been scheduled to face Sid in a title match, so instead of just naming Sid Champion, the four way match at the PPV was now for the title with the winner facing Sid the following night on Raw for the title. Did you get all that?

That leads us here. Also on the card we have Furnas and LaFon (don't ask) challenging for the tag belts as well as Rocky Maivia defending the IC Title that he took from HHH on the same Thursday Raw against HHH in a rematch. This is your last PPV before WM 13, so it better rock. Let's see if it rocks or just Flex Kavanas.

Marc Mero vs. Leif Cassidy

We open with this, as in just after the recap we hear Sable's music begin. You can tell the camera people either don't care about this match or are just really stupid as Mero is in the ring and his pyro is going off before we even see him for the first time.

Sable has got her classic look down now: long blonde hair, one piece black leather outfit, big earrings and sunglasses. Just...dang. Anyway, Cassidy is already in the ring so how good are you expecting this match to really be? I actually like Cassidy's stuff better than Mero's. Let that sink in for a bit. Your psychology for this match is Cassidy works on Mero's knee. Mero is your face here...I think.

Actually it's more like Sable is the face and Marc is hers but that's neither here nor there. Snow really can carry a match when he's allowed to. It's not something anyone cares about though as it's Leif Cassidy vs. Marc Mero but Snow (Cassidy in case you didn't pick up on that) is handling this very well.

Everything he does makes sense and has a point to it. There's no noticeably stupid moves anywhere which is a very nice break. He goes after Sable though and Mero rescues her. After this he hits like three moves and no sells the knee injury to hit his shooting star press to win it.

Rating: D. If I could split this up into two ratings it would be an F for Mero and an A for Cassidy. Mero was just awful out there. He was on defense for probably 80-85 percent of the match, slams Cassidy's head twice, hits a bad Samoan drop and his finisher to win while no selling the whole point of the match. Snow on the other hand was crisp, solid, and logical. You're facing a high flier, keep him on the mat.

That's smart wrestling and something that makes sense to do. He even threw in a figure four, which to be fair was the absolute worst I've ever seen but he was at least trying. I was impressed with him but Mero was just awful. Sable of course was the highlight with her looks, but it was close.

Now we get a double shot of weirdness. To begin with, immediately after that match, Honky Tonk Man comes out. Now, that's not incredibly weird because based on the reaction I would assume that he'd been around a bit lately as the announcers and the crowd don't seem stunned by his appearance.

I know he had an angle coming up that had either already started or started tonight but we'll cover that later. The really weird part comes when he's about to get into the ring.

We cut to a video package recapping Shawn's forfeiting the title which shows the entire speech, Gorilla's announcement of the title being on the line in the Four Way, and then we go to an interview with Sid. Just comes from nowhere and while it would usually be fine, why have HTM come out and then show it? He didn't even get to have his music end.

As for the speech, here's my take on it: you can believe him or not, and I personally think that he was at least half telling the truth, but he's made it clear that the knee was nowhere near as bad as he implied. He had a minor surgery that could have waited but he says he very well may be retiring because of it. All I know is this: for a long stretch in that interview you could hear a pin drop in the audience.

People were on the verge of tears because Shawn might have to go. You can like Shawn you can hate Shawn you can be indifferent to him as I am for the most part, but the people loved him and that simply cannot be denied. What I believe however is that he simply didn't want to lose to Bret at Mania 13. It was very clear that was where they were going with things, but Shawn just didn't want to do it so he backed out.

Anyway, Sid says he's taking the title tomorrow.

Flash Funk/Bart Gunn/Goldust vs. Nation of Domination

Flash's entrance takes a ridiculous amount of time as he and his ladies, who are sexy in an odd way, just have to have a full dance sequence in the ring. As his illustrious partners make their way to the ring, we get a recap to explain this "feud". Apparently all three of our jobbers have been unfairly beaten by the NOD thanks to their gang mentality. The Nation makes their entrance and look like the NWO.

I kid you not, there are 9 people in this stable. A checklist: 2 white rappers, Clarence Mason, D'lo Brown, Farrooq, Crush, Savio Vega and two guys who were apparently actors hired to look like the NOD was bigger than it really was, which is actually a good idea. That's a huge freaking stable and their coming through the crowd and rapping their own music was genius.

This match goes under 7 minutes so this is going to be a relatively short review. Basically here all that happens is a six man tag. It's as simple as that. This is a basic 6 man tag match. It's not great and it's not bad. It's just your standard run of the mill 6 man tag. Faces start strong, heel takes over, you get a face comeback and the heels win. There is however one sick spot in it. Funk is getting double teamed by Savio and Farrooq.

They send him into the ropes for a double clothesline but he grabs their arms and in one motion backflips over them to land

a double clothesline of his own. I was very impressed by this move as it just looks sick. Finish comes when Crush drops a leg on Bart to let Farrooq pin him.

Rating: C-. Now stop me if you're heard this one before: a cowboy, a pimp and a man that is of the homosexual persuasion walk into a bar. Seriously we have those three gimmicks against a group modeled on the Black Panthers. How over the top can you get? And Vince has the nerve to wonder why the NWO was destroying him in the ratings at the time? Give me a break.

In the back Doc is with Steve Austin. He talks about how Austin hasn't beaten any of the three men he's in the ring with. Austin says he did at the Rumble and there's a conspiracy against him by everyone in the company with any kind of power.

IC Title: HHH vs. Rocky Maivia

This is the rematch from three days prior as Rocky shocked the world and took the IC title from HHH. Helmsley has gotten to the best heel music I can remember in a long time as he comes out to Beethoven's Ode To Joy now. DAng that's some sweet music for a heel. He's also dropped the random woman valet which helps a lot as well in my eyes. He's becoming much more deadly in the ring and the HHH character is coming soon.

Man HHH is a twig at this point, maybe cracking 245 soaking wet. Rocky was still a rookie at this point but you could see the star in him just begging to get out with a gimmick change. HHH was on the verge of stardom but not as naturally. Early on the botch a baseball slide spot but HHH does a great improvised spot where he turns it into a drop toehold. This is a pretty good match so far with some good one liners from the King.

HHH is so rich he takes taxis to drive in movies. You could see the chemistry that these two had even this young in their

careers. They knew how to get the best out of one another and that's not something that can be taught to you by anyone. The commentators do a comparison of the people that trained both men to kill some time. JR mistakenly says that was a nice suplex by HHH so you can see him starting to slip even 12 years ago.

HHH and Hebner do their usual thing of Earl not being willing to be intimidated by HHH. HHH hits a perfect jumping knee to the face which might be the best he's ever done. This is a very good match as it's hard hitting and has a lot of near falls. However, they of course ruin it with the finish. Goldust whom HHH was feuding with at the time comes and stands in the aisle allowing Maivia to hit a German suplex to get the pin.

Post match Marlina gets choked out by some big woman/man with black hair that would come to be known as Chyna. Goldust says "throw her in jail." They did a decent job of implying she was just a fan but the replay of it kind of gives it away.

Rating: B+. This was a very good match and if it had a finish could have been great. These two just put on great matches together no matter what and this was no exception. Rocky would go on to have a nice little reign with the title while HHH would go on to do nothing over the Summer but would start hanging out with Shawn Michaels and that creature that just interfered in a little thing that would come to be called DX.

Promo for Mania airs.

Kevin Kelly interviews Vader who says he'll be taking down all three men tonight. Paul Bearer says the same thing.

Tag Titles: Furnas/LaFon vs. Owen/Bulldog

This was a strange match. The story is that the champions have been arguing a lot lately and at the same time they lost in a Survivor Series match to these same two guys, resulting in

this tag match. Now I know nothing about the challengers at all but to be fair I really hadn't seen much of them. These guys were actually good. They were great movers out there and had some great technical stuff.

The person that stood out the most though was the referee. He was just flat out bad here. He kept taking forever as he kept wanting people out of the ring etc. and while that's fine to try to keep going, he took it way too far. Whenever there was a cover he'd check the two partners before he went to make the count. That's a waste of time and looks bad. Also during the match the champions kept fighting, eventually seeing Bulldog intentionally clothesline Owen hard.

Now once that happens it's like a new match starts. The second match is far superior to the first one. Once they change gears, things get very good very fast. There was a ton of near falls and I actually believed that there would be new champions on more than one occasion. I knew who was going to win and I still believed otherwise. That my friends is compelling wrestling. The champions get hit with everything but they keep getting up every time.

Finally the end comes and it is just strange. Bulldog gets one of the guys up for the powerslam and Owen hits the guy in the head with a Slammy right in front of the referee for the DQ. What in the world? Why would you do that when your partner was about to hit his finisher which people didn't kick out of? They fight even more afterwards with Smith throwing down the title and then even breaking the Slammy. He finally leaves with his partners.

Rating: B-. Just like in the opening match this was a tale of two matches and two separate grades. The first half was just flat out bad. It wasn't interesting and I was wanting to just fast forward through the match and get to the end. However once Owen and Bulldog got done fighting the thing turned into a great tag match.

The ending just made no sense at all and was just to further the Bulldog/Owen angle which mostly ended with the debut of the European Title later on that month in which these two faced each other for the title.

Doc is with the Deadman in that back who says he has rediscovered his edge which makes me expect the Rated R Superstar to pop up.

WWF Title: Undertaker vs. Vader vs. Steve Austin vs. Bret Hart

Lawler keeps asking what lucha libre means (the Spanish announcers keep saying it) and JR says rough wrestling for some reason. This is actually an over the top rope battle royal but you can also be eliminated by pin or submission, which is a very interesting twist. I'm not sure if I like it or not. It takes away Vader's weight advantage but why would you try to pin someone when you can just knock them out of the ring?

Bret of course gets a prematch interview. He says nothing can stop him from taking the title tonight. Bret's jacket really is cool. JR says that even Wrestlemania wasn't this exciting. Suuuuuure. Starts off with both singles feuds being renewed. Very quickly Vader and Taker figure out that going through the ropes is legal. Everyone just beats on everyone with them trading partners which further supports my orgy theory from earlier.

Leaving the ring was critical here I think as it opens up a lot of alternative possibilities for these guys which is certainly a good thing. Vader gets cut BAD around his left eye. Like it looks as if it fell out and there's just a hole there that's shooting blood out of it. I finally found where it was and it's not pretty. Within a few seconds he takes a chair to the face and he hits his eye on the stairs, right on the corner.

They fight all over the arena and all fight each other at

least once and in some cases twice. That's what makes this match work as well as it is: you can keep the fighting fresh. Austin even breaks out a top rope clothesline which never stops making my head shake given how bad his knees got later in his career. After that we cut to the floor where VADER HAS BRET IN A SHARPSHOOTER. What the heck???

Those things happen within a few seconds of each other. DAng I need my medicine after seeing that. Sadly enough it was a better one than the one Rock would use later in his career. We're at 12 minutes and no one is out yet. That's another thing that's making this great is all four are in there for over half of the match so far. It's more or less Bret wrestling Austin and Taker fighting Vader now.

Bret sets Austin for a belly to back suplex and Austin BACKFLIPS out of it. Man alive Austin was the cat's meow before he got hurt. Vader's eye is freaking sick right now. This whole thing is absolutely brutal and it's a great match so far. We're at fifteen minutes and it's still all four guys in there. Just as I finish typing that Austin is thrown out as Bret Hart uses what we would now call the FU to eliminate him. Bret Hart used an FU. Sly can never see this moment.

His orgasm would flood Missouri. Taker gets knocked to the floor so we continue our orgy match with Bret and Vader getting it on for awhile. I will now pause to attempt to erase such a mental picture. Ok I'm back now as Vader goes to the top in a dumb move. Why would you do that when being knocked to the floor eliminates you?

Bret stops him and lands a superplex from the top rope which is freaking insane given A) how long they've been going and B) the fact that Vader's gut needs its own zip code. Taker breaks up the sharpshooter on Vader which makes no sense at all and even the announcers question it. Austin comes back out and beats up Hart some more to pretty much secure the fact that he'll be winning this.

Vader again goes to the ropes for a Vader Bomb but Taker sits up and hits an uppercut to the little Vaders to eliminate him so we're down to Bret vs. Taker. Austin is still around after a chokeslam and for some reason he stops the tombstone. Taker and Hart both go for Austin but Taker is too slow.

He turns around and is clotheslined out to make Bret the champion again. Sid comes out for the staredown after Taker storms off. Sid says let's do it right now as we go off the air in the middle of the showdown. I like that ending as it leaves us on a cliffhanger for tomorrow's show.

Rating: A. This was a very fun match and the key to it was you knew there was going to be a new champion at the end so you had to watch all of it. Another key was that no one was eliminated until over half of the match was gone. This kept things fresh and made you want to stay until the very end to see how everyone went out. The leaving the ring was key as well as it allowed three separate one on one matches to occur throughout the match. Great match indeed and very fun.

Overall Rating: B-. First two matches were pretty bad but the other three more than made up for them. By the middle of the main event I was hooked. The second half of the show was great with another solid Rock/HHH encounter, a solid and surprising tag match and a great main event. Overall this show started slowly but kicked it into high gear at the end. Not great but certainly fun, this is worth a watch someday but don't make it a top priority.