

Fall Brawl 1996 – And So It Begins

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Date: September 15, 1996

Location: Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum, Winston Salem, North Carolina

Attendance: 11,300

Commentators: Dusty Rhodes, Bobby Heenan, Tony Schiavone

WOW that's a long name for a place to hold a show. This show is about two things: War Games and Sting. Six days before this, Sting had been announced as being in Japan for that day so he would NOT be at Nitro. Ok, fine. So later on in the night, Luger went chasing after someone in the NWO and ran into the parking lot where the NWO limo awaited. And out pops Sting. My jaw went through the floor when I saw it as a kid.

It turns out though that it's a fake Sting and that the real guy really was in Japan. The deal here though is that even though we knew he was in Japan, he looked a lot like the real Sting so the WCW guys believed he had really turned until he told them otherwise. This was stupid from both sides. One: it was established he was in Japan.

If that's the case, why wouldn't they believe him? Second, can you blame them for believing it was him at least for awhile? Does NO ONE watch film anymore? So yeah the main event is NWO vs. WCW in War Games and neither team knows who the fourth guy for their team is, which makes things a bit odd but whatever. Let's get to it.

The opening video is of course about the war between the two organizations. Oh and Giant has joined since the last show. Other than that it's just about the chaos the NWO has been going off about in the last few months. We see the video from

Sting "turning" and Eric FREAKING is great. We also see them destroying a car last night with their bats. Why were they never arrested?

Diamond Dallas Page vs. Chavo Guerrero

Well this is an odd pairing. DDP is a heel still and is feuding with both Guerreros at this point. Chavo is almost brand new here having been in the company like five months and is TINY here. He hit the gym over the years and filled out a lot which is good for him as he looks pretty pathetic here. There are two rings here and they're in the left one.

Chavo goes off on him early on the floor and whips him with a belt that I have no idea where he got. Apparently Eddie won the Battlebowl ring at Clash of the Champions from DDP so at least they've set this match up. This is a real contrast of styles as Chavo is young and fast and DDP is really bad at this point still. He's pretty much the prime example of a guy that started off as horrible and just clawed his way up to being a quite good wrestler that was popular as well.

He kind of had a gimmick change but it was really more that he turned face and got confidence. He hits a top rope clothesline to really take over as Dusty is having way too much fun here. DDP hooks a nice little rolling move as he's improving at this point. To be fair though he was horrible before this so an improvement is hard to avoid. He had some flashes of good stuff though and you could see it here.

Not that we've been told this or anything as it's all about the main event here even though we've already bought the PPV in theory so it's not like it needs to be hyped or anything. In a nice move (again) he sets for a belly to back suplex but just spins him over so he lands face first. That was very nice. Chavo makes his comeback with really basic stuff and some jumping stuff but again he's a relative rookie here so there we are.

He kind of messes up a hurricanrana but it wasn't terrible I guess. And now we're in the other ring and Tony actually asks if this could be a count out. That's....actually an interesting question as they're in a different ring but they're still in a ring. The fans are rising up for rollups. That's a good sign and then they cheer loudly for a Helicopter Bomb by DDP for two. In a creative ending, DDP stomps on Chavo's foot and gets the Diamond Cutter to a NICE face pop. His turn was coming very soon.

Rating: C+. Nothing too special here but not bad at all. DDP was getting better and better every time he had a big match and this was one of them. He still wasn't that good, but you could see a lot of promise in him. He had the good music and the great finisher so he was well on his way. Once he turned face though, it was all awesome as his feud with Savage was one of the highlights of WCW. We'll get to that soon enough.

SPECIAL REPORT

Gene talks about the NWO and what they've done. Uh, why are we seeing this now? Why would we need to see this if we've bought the show already? Couldn't there be a match in this time or something? It's a GREAT video that explains the first few months of the angle perfectly, but why are we watching this now?

Ice Train vs. Scott Norton

This is a submission match. Again I have to ask WHY? Is there anyone that thinks we need to see two matches between these guys? I was a semi-mark for Ice Train though so I'm not completely furious. Teddy Long of all people is managing Ice Train. Has this guy ever not been on a roster somewhere? He's FAT looking here which is just bizarre considering what he looks like now. Train works on the arm which makes sense at least.

Now he uses...let's call it a chinlock and be nice. Tony points

out that Norton is using the same move that another guy uses for a finisher which might be bad but I'm not sure. They need to pick a freaking body part and STICK WITH IT. Norton has worked the arm, the back and the neck and now the arm again. Teddy comes in and distracts and a full nelson ends Norton. At least it wasn't that long.

Rating: F+. Seriously, THIS gets 7 minutes of PPV time? Why? Who thought this was a good use of PPV time? Having them do one match at Hog Wild at least made sense, but did we really need to see these two in a gimmick match, especially THIS gimmick? I don't think so.

Mexican Heavyweight Title: Konnan vs. Juventud Guerrera

Ok a lot to talk about here. For one thing, the Mexican Heavyweight Title is the AAA Americas' Title, a title that was a midcard title that Konnan was the first to win. He won it then bailed to WCW with it so they just didn't talk about it any more. He's also a heel now with the whole street thing going on and has joined the Dungeon of Doom so he has Jimmy Hart with him. As for Juvy, he's brand new here, having been around about three weeks.

There was also an internet rumor that he was actually Sean Waltman under the mask which is about as bizarre of a story as I've ever heard of. He trips over the steps during his intro in a funny thing, so maybe there was a reason for that story after all. Oh yeah we actually have a match to do now. Konnan is now described as a big man. That's just odd to hear. In a painful looking spot, Konnan picks him up and just drops him over the top to the floor.

Juvy goes to the other ring and hits a QUADRUPLE jump leg lariat to take over. Take that Sabu. This is back when Konnan was motivated and therefore was actually interesting to watch as well as entertaining. The commentary just stops for like 30 seconds. That was strange. I'm watching a WCW show where there

is decent wrestling going on.

Never mind on that strange comment. Juvy is flying all over the place here and it's surprisingly working for me. Tenay calls the rope the top strand. Ok then. They botch the heck out of a moonsault press. I'd put that on Konnan though as it looked fine but Konnan didn't sell it at all. He hits a great powerbomb to make up for it I guess. There's a good deal of sloppiness here but for the most part it's working.

In a STUPID move, Juvy has him set for a top rope rana and instead just backflips off the top. Konnan hits a dropkick immediately as he lands which Juvy freaking deserves. Dang that looked stupid. The masked dude hits a springboard spinwheel kick which is one of my favorite moves. 450 hits for two. A corkscrew splash gets two as for some reason the crowd is dead all of a sudden. Konnan hits what we would call a Musclebuster for two and then a super powerbomb from the top for the pin.

Rating: B-. This gets a much better grade if not for the sloppiness. I thought it worked quite well though for what they were trying to do. This was another example of WCW throwing some people out there and seeing what they could do. On that level I would say it definitely worked. Again though, the constant botches were hurting it. There was some good stuff though so I'd say it was good.

Chris Benoit vs. Chris Jericho

Yeah this works. Again you can see the solid lower and midcard guys having the best matches and then the main event stuff being pure drama that was epic. With this kind of combination, there was no chance for any other company to touch WCW. The announcers imply that Benoit could be the fourth WCW guy in case Sting has jumped.

Benoit uses the Liontamer (as in the more painful looking one) before Jericho adopted it which is very weird looking. Dusty

thinks there could have been 20 men in that limo with Sting, somehow managing to rival the in ring match for entertainment value. It's so weird seeing a motivated Jericho in WCW. He goes for a springboard move but lands BACK FIRST on the apron on the way down. Freaking OW.

You can see the star in Jericho begging to be let out. Sadly it would never happen in this company. Bobby says you can hear those chops in Vietnam. What's in that cup he's drinking? According to Joey Styles it was vodka so there we go. Benoit is a Horseman here so he's incredibly popular as we're in Horsemen country, which is always odd to me since they were the top heels in that area for the most time.

This is Jericho's PPV debut so he's brand new as well. Let the chopping begin! Heenan is a bit tipsy already I think. The headbutt hits but it's more like a splash, which works just fine too. That's a perk of having a move such as that as if it's botched like that it still looks fine. Apparently he was going 65-70 miles an hour too. I love WCW commentary at times.

And of course we get a line about the Shell Answer Man which Tony of course tries to explain, going from entertaining to ARE YOU KIDDING ME mode in seconds. Jericho goes Canadian as Heenan makes the Shell joke again. Tombstone hits Benoit but the Lionsault doesn't. Dusty makes the comment that Jericho would be a big star in WCW.

That's one for two I guess, but he had an eye for talent at least. He also says Benoit is the best pound for pound athlete in WCW but forget the pound for pound aspect. Benoit hits a belly to back off the top to knock Jericho the heck out for the pin.

Rating: B. This was a very physical match that told a good story: Jericho is the rookie that has nothing at all to lose and Benoit is the hot young guy that is looking to make a statement. These two should have headlined a bunch of PPVs,

but alas we got Hogan vs. Savage about a million times instead.

Both of these two wound up main eventing Wrestlemania though so I think they had what it took, despite the old guys saying otherwise. Anyway, this was a very good match, but seriously, did you expect anything else?

Cruiserweight Title: Super Calo vs. Rey Mysterio

Thankfully Tenay is here for this but his mic doesn't work. That leaves Heenan and Dusty to make their bad jokes about nothing in particular. Calo always looked kind of fat to me for some reason. He's listed at 200lbs but I have some issue with that. He has a backwards hat on but I think the sunglasses are painted on his mask. So he's the Blue Meanie? Some idiot chants boring a minute into the match.

Apparently his name comes from a big rap group in Mexico. Ok then. Rey is more or less the king of the hurricanrana so that's the majority of his offense. He does the 619 but it's more or less a taunting thing at this point. Calo hits a slingshot powerbomb which is a cool looking move. Calo hits an overhead senton to the floor onto Rey who is down. FREAKING OW! Calo is dominating here which isn't expected by either myself or Rey.

Someone must have slipped Heenan some coffee as he's far more coherent all of a sudden. We hear about some Lucha de Apuestas matches which is a new one on me in WCW (meaning I've never heard them talked about, not that I don't know what they are). Rey finally comes back but Calo hits a dropkick to block his springboard something. It's been probably 90-10 Calo here as he's dominated.

Rey hits an INSANE rana with like 4 different bounces and springboards in it. This is why Rey used to be my favorite wrestler. Rey gets a springboard sunset flip for two as Bobby keeps trying to talk about the NWO and is actually ignored for

the most part. That's a different one also. Finally Rey hits a double springboard into the West Coast Pop for the pin.

Rating: B-. This was good but it went on WAY too long. This gets three minutes cut out and it's way better. Calo was never really much of anything, but he's another example of a guy that got a chance in WCW and since he was brand new to the American audience, he was considered cool because he wasn't like what was being seen.

That's the brilliance of Bischoff in the day: throw so much at them so fast they can't tell if it's good or bad. The ending was well thought out though so it worked. There's your difference between Bischoff and Russo.

Tag Titles: Harlem Heat vs. Nasty Boys

Heat have the belts here. So we go from Benoit, Jericho and Mysterio to this. Ok then. We get clubbing as Dusty LOSES it. That was kind of funny. I had to do this match about 5 times in 94 and 95 so I really don't care that much about it here. Double teaming allows the champions to take over. Knobbs and Stevie run the ropes and it's painful to see. Knobbs is so out of shape it's pathetic.

And let's get a chinlock now because this match is so riveting otherwise. Also throughout the match Sherri and Colonel Parker keep interfering to get on my nerves. I'm just killing time here until we get to the next two matches as they're the "meat" of the show with War Games and Savage vs. Giant. Why was Savage not thrown into War Games? They didn't have a fourth guy and you have Randy Savage in a nothing match with the Giant?

Does this make anything resembling sense? Sags hits a piledriver which has Bobby freaking out over them using a move. That wasn't a piledriver but whatever. Parker trips Sags up to switch momentum again and I just do not care at all. END THE FREAKING MATCH ALREADY!

It's been ten minutes so far and it's all brawling and stuff like that with a ton of interfering from the managers. END THIS. Knobbs gets like the 8th hot tag of the match and I'm barely paying attention at this point since the belts aren't changing hands. FINALLY a cane shot from Booker to Knobbs ends this idiocy. Move on PLEASE.

Rating: F. Oh just no. Who thought that these guys deserved 15 minutes? This was just boring and NO ONE cared at all. This was terrible and deserves to fail.

Savage guarantees he'll beat the Giant and then beat Hogan at Halloween Havoc.

Randy Savage vs. The Giant

Savage is wearing a Nitro T-shirt. Great way to make your #1 contender look like a jobber. Giant still has the Dungeon of Doom music here. Tony and Bobby are just funny as far as the anti-NWO stuff goes. Savage wisely doesn't let him get in the ring to start us off. And then he goes to the floor to fight. WHY DOES EVERYONE TRY TO SLAM BIG MEN? It's A BODY SLAM.

It's hardly some big epic move that's going to kill someone or explode their kidneys. It's a freaking body slam. Giant says he's going to make Savage disappear. Is he a magician all of a sudden? Giant hooks a back breaker hold as all of the fans are looking at something more interesting. Even the announcers point it out. And now it's a Boston Crab. Yes, a guy the size of the Giant is using Rick Martel's hold.

Can we just get to War Games now? Savage actually slams him in the only power display I've ever seen from him. He hits the elbow and doesn't cover to allow the storyline to go forward. And here's Hogan who he chases after. Yep, Hall distracts him and Nash pops him with a chair. Beatdown commences, Nick Patrick sees nothing of course, and Giant gets a simple pin.

Rating: D. This was short and bad. At least it wasn't that

long and now we're down to War Games so I can't complain. This somehow was supposed to build up to Halloween Havoc but whatever. At least this wasn't that long and now I'm repeating myself out of boredom. Considering how awesome the first hour and 45 minutes or so went, the last half hour has been AWFUL.

The cage is lowered. This is always cool.

Flair, Anderson and Luger say their usual stuff. Flair is asked who will be the fourth man but doesn't say a name. He almost implies there won't be a fourth. Anderson starts talking a bit, but here's Sting. He says it wasn't him and Luger says he looked him right in the eyes and knows it was him. Maybe he should have gotten his eyes checked. Sting says he'll see Luger in awhile. Other than a promo the next night on Nitro, he wouldn't speak again until January 98.

Before we get going, here are the rules. It's 4 on 4 (although we don't know who the fourth guy is for either team as Sting has apparently been thrown out). They both send in a man in each to begin for five minutes. At four minutes in there's a coin toss (the heels literally never lost) to determine control.

After the first five minute period ends, the team that won the toss sends in its second man and they have a 2-1 advantage. This lasts two minutes and after that two minutes the losing team sends in its second man making it 2-2. They alternate for two minute periods until all 8 are in and then it's first submission (no pins) wins.

War Games: Team NWO vs. Team WCW

So far it's Hogan, Hall and Nash vs. Flair, Anderson and Luger. You know there's a huge angle coming when Hogan, Hall, Nash and Giant vs. Flair, Anderson, Luger and Sting isn't the best they can do. That's a SICK sounding War Games when you think about it, but that's not the best they can do. Scott Hall is first for the NWO and he has DiBiase with him.

Anderson starts for WCW. That promo from Sting was the first time he had been seen in 6 days.

To be fair, maybe he couldn't get a flight back from Japan. Maybe I should stop thinking about it so much. We keep hearing about how awesome the Horsemen are in this match. Did they ever win one? Hall beats him up to start. Well that went well. Dusty cheering for Anderson is just wrong on so many levels. Nick Patrick is the referee. Bobby freaks out over who the fourth man is for the NWO and how unfair it is for them not to tell WCW who the fourth man is.

Tony: they don't know our fourth man either. Arn gets the figure four for like 3 seconds which is just odd. The problem is that Arn vs. Hall really isn't that interesting of a match. The key thing here is that it looks like an awesome structure and it really is. Patrick threatens to end the match right now much to the announcers' chagrins. We hit two minutes left. The NWO of course wins the coin toss.

There's the spinebuster on Hall and then a half crab which Hall taps to. It's Nash in second and after about 9 seconds Arn goes down to a big boot. Nash hits Snake Eyes, and he was the guy that actually gave it that name when he was Vinny Vegas back in the early 90s. Luger jumps the gun and they realize there's nothing they can do about it so there we are. He's wearing black boots which is kind of weird looking.

He beats up both Outsiders for awhile and Arn is back up now. There's a formula to these matches and to be fair it worked so there was no real need to ever change it. Heenan points out that everyone should just come out here now. WCW dominates as we have 15 seconds left.

Hogan is 3rd so it's the original three vs. Luger and Anderson. Hogan goes off on Arn which is a match that happened a lot on Nitro in 96 actually. The fans want Flair as Anderson is beating Hogan up. That's a new one. Hogan drops the leg on

Anderson and we're still waiting on Flair. There he is to an ERUPTION. It's North Carolina. Did you expect anything else?

Flair stays in the empty ring and calls out Hogan. Dusty then cracks me up to the point where I have to stop the video. "One on one, I don't know if Hogan can beat Flair." WOW. I don't think Flair has ever beaten Hogan, but all of a sudden Hogan can't beat him. That's just hilarious. We go split screen when for once we actually should. Flair goes low on everyone and WCW is in control again.

"Sting" is the fourth man in the NWO. This became a running joke as there would be like a million fake Stings over the years, ranging from Chris Harris to guys as tall as Nash and somehow the announcers could never tell. There's another referee in there now too. The fans, having basic intelligence and passable vision, of course get the idea as they chant WE WANT STING.

Another way to tell is that Sting has always had a very unique striking style. Pop in some Sting tapes and you'll see what I'm talking about. Oh and Tony offers a pearl of wisdom by saying the one man advantage has been the deciding factor. The clock runs out and it's the real Sting. His pop is better than Flair's so take that for what it's worth. He beats the living crap out of the NWO on his own and stares down Luger.

He leaves, asking if that's good enough. The NWO destroys them afterwards with Sting putting on a Scorpion and Hogan making sure he gets some credit by throwing on a horrible front facelock for the "submission." In a scary line, Heenan says that hold could make Luger lose the use of his legs, which of course he has in real life. Luger crawls towards the back, screaming for Sting.

And now he gets beaten up even worse. The Horsemen keep fighting but it's 4-2 at this point so it doesn't mean much. Savage runs out and he goes straight for Hogan. Hogan runs and

here's the Giant. The beatdown is on and it's bad for Savage. Here's Liz to do...something. She tries to cover up Savage and gets painted with the words 4 Life on her dress. I'm sure there's a joke there.

The fans think he sucks and he wants a mic. He talks about how they said they would be together until death do them part and he says he'll make that happen then SPITS ON LIZ. WOW. Yeah he's eternally punished. Tony says this is the lowest WCW has ever reached. Oh you don't want to go there dude.

This company had the Ding Dongs for crying out loud. Giant says he's the best artist in the world. This needs to end. And now the NWO takes over the announce position in the middle of the announcers complaining about life in general. The show ended over ten minutes after the match ended.

Rating: C+. This match is about getting to the ending. The wrestling itself is just boring though. However, it's War Games, which makes it awesome by association. The match was of course second to the ending but it worked out fine for what it was. This was about setting up Sting and the biggest angle in company history and it certainly worked in that regard. It built to that point so I can't complain.

Overall Rating: B. Other than the AWFUL tag title match, there isn't really anything that bad on here. There are a ton of good and entertaining matches in play here and every one of them worked just fine. Also, other than the Savage match and the submission match, everything here is at least thirteen minutes long.

They let the guys go out there and work and it came off very well. This would become the system used for a LONG time in WCW: awesome midcard, terrible main stuff and while it started out awesome, ultimately it ended WCW for reasons we'll get to later. Overall though, very good show and well worth checking out. Just fast forward the tag title stuff.