

History of Summerslam Count-Up: 1996 – Mick Foley Has Arrived

Summerslam 1996

Date: August 18, 1996

Location: Gund Arena, Cleveland, Ohio

Attendance: 17,000

Commentators: Mr. Perfect, Jim Ross, Vince McMahon

Well it's certainly a new era in the WWF. For one thing, Shawn is the undisputed biggest star in the company right now. Bret is on hiatus, and a loud mouthed guy from Texas is flipping people off and cursing a lot. It's like there's a growing Attitude or something going on. Eh nothing will ever come of that. I remember this show really well but actually have never seen the main event all the way through.

When I was watching the show live I taped it and for some reason never watched the main event. I guess the tape messed up or something like that, but I've never seen all of it so this will be virgin territory for me. This is the night of the first Boiler Room Brawl which is by far and away the most famous match on the show. I have fond memories of this show, so let's see if they're justified.

Dark Match: Yokozuna vs. Steve Austin

Austin won the KOTR earlier this year and with his post match promo, instantly became one of the hottest things on the planet. Yoko weight 660 here and would be gone pretty soon. It really is sad to see someone that had undeniable talent reduced to this, simply based on the fact that he couldn't control his weight. This is a very short match, maybe three minutes or so.

Austin tries to knock him down and can't, Yoko takes over and goes to the corner, and then in one of the most infamous botches ever, the ring ropes break and Austin just pins him. I've never heard anyone say that was planned and based off the announcers' reactions, it wasn't planned. Yoko was clearly surprised when that happened, so I'd guess that was all unplanned. Like I said, Austin just kind of rolled him up for the pin afterwards.

Rating: C. This is very hard to grade so we'll call it average I guess. N/A would probably be a much better grade actually. It's way too short to tell if it's good or bad, but it wasn't terrible and it was on free TV, so how can I complain about bonus not awful wrestling?

We get a very well done intro talking about monsters that wear masks and the heroes that fight them. That's a really cool idea as both heels wear masks which is a nice connection to make. This was one of the better packages I've seen in a long time.

Savio Vega vs. Owen Hart

No real point to this match other than to have a fast opener which there's nothing wrong with. Apparently both are good with martial arts. I think I missed that memo. Owen has a cast on his hand from an injury that I don't remember happening. He's doing the Orton thing as he's been hurt forever apparently. Cornette isn't there as he's with Vader for the main event instead. Savio keeps going for the arm which is very basic yet quite intelligent strategy.

Ross wants to know how Owen passed a pre match physical. Are we supposed to believe that when matches are made on the fly that everyone has pre match physicals? Come on JR give us more credit than that. We go split screen to see Vader warming up for the main event as Vince says that Owen should feel slighted by being ignored by his manager. Why is it that every

time someone throws a kick they're instantly a martial artist?

Anyone else find that to be WAY too broad of a generalization? I certainly do for one. Savio doesn't seem like much of a martial artist to me and neither does Owen, not in the slightest really. Vince continues to stir the pot saying that Stu isn't as proud of Owen as of Bret. With talk like that, it's no wonder he was almost a career heel. Owen has an armbar on Vega for a decent while and he bites Owen to escape. That's either cool or just freaking stupid and I'm not sure which it is actually.

Clarence Mason, who is the lawyer for Cornette, starts walking towards ringside but no one is sure why. It turns out that he's more or less staging a coup of Camp Cornette, but that was a bit off in the future. He was worthless to say the least. I'm pleasantly surprised with this match. It's not mind blowing but it's certainly not bad at all. I'd even go so far as to say it's good.

A long match with faster guys is usually an excellent combination. It has one of the critical points that I think makes matches great: I'm not sure who is going to win. That uncertainly factor can work wonders for matches as it gives you a reason to want to see the ending. That's what makes a match successful or any entertainment for that matter: you want to keep watching it because you're not sure what's coming.

They do a belly to back off the top but Savio's head slams against the cast. Owen plays possum and slams the cast into Vega's head before putting the Sharpshooter on him. Clarence comes in to celebrate but Owen isn't sure why he's there. Not a fan of the ending but this was a good match. On the replay you can see that the referee would have obviously seen the cast shot.

Rating: B+. Like I said I'm not a fan of the ending, but this

was a very solid match in my eyes. It was up tempo, there was some storytelling in there, and I wasn't positive who was going to win. It was a good way to set the tempo for the show and it's given me high hopes. Based on this match alone, this show is better than last year's.

Bradshaw comes out and beats up Savio with whom he was feuding with at the time in a decent but completely forgotten feud.

Todd goes into the boiler room to talk to Mankind, who says Taker shouldn't come in here and that he's ready for battle.

Tag Titles: Smoking Guns vs. New Rockers vs. Godwins vs. Bodydonnas

Again I ask, is it really that hard to get the tag titles on the show? New Rockers are Al Snow and Marty Jannetty, but Snow is known as Leif Cassidy at the time. This has elimination rules which automatically makes it better as it more or less gives you three matches for the price of one. Skip has a neck brace for no apparent reason. Dang the copyright for getting rid of Don't Go Messin With A Country Boy. JR is given the task of explaining the tag title scene this year. Good luck good sir. You'll be needing it.

Sunny as a cowgirl is incredibly attractive to say the least. Billy shouts about something unintelligible. She should have been one of the biggest names ever. Not just because of her looks either as she just had a great presence about her. You could see she just knew what to do in front of a camera. That's a talent that no amount of looks can buy you. Yep, the champions are heels here, I guess along with the Bodydonnas and maybe the Rockers.

This is starting off very slow as would be expected until get the comedy idea of having the Guns fight each other. This lasts about 8 seconds as Zip comes in. He gets tripped and pinned very fast as I think Skip's neck injury was legit. It seemed way too convenient and pointless to have them out there

and eliminated so fast, so I'm assuming his neck really was hurt. I think they were faces or at least tweeners actually, which surprises me. Rockers take over on Hank.

This doesn't last long as Hank realizes he's fighting the freaking New Rockers and beats them up with relative ease, pinning one of them after the Slop Drop, bringing it down to the Guns vs. the Godwins. Due to the rules being the way they are, any way this ends means the titles can change hands. Not sure if that makes sense but it's mid 90s WWF stuff so I'm just going to go with it. Billy just will not shut up and I'm sick of it already.

They beat on Henry for a long time until Billy being the brains of the team sets for a corner splash but screams first, leading to him getting caught. This allows for the lukewarm tag that no one could care less about. Apparently Bill Clinton is turning 50 today.

Hillbilly Jim goes after Sunny which allows for the double team to end the match and the Guns keep the titles. Afterwards Sunny talks about how great she is and offers a gift to the arena unveiling a massive poster of herself, which I'm certainly not complaining about.

Rating: B-. Eh, it was a pretty bland four team match but it let the Guns keep the belts with relative ease and it filled in some time on the card. It wasn't particularly good, but it certainly did the job it was supposed to: title defense that took up some time and made the champions look good. That's as good as it can get I guess.

British Bulldog vs. Sid

Not entirely sure why they're fighting but I think Sid is feuding with all of Camp Cornette at this point. No Cornette with him though as Jim is with Vader. Sid says his usual insane stuff that goes nowhere at all. Again, why was he so freaking popular? Vince thinks Psycho Sid is crazy. Nice one

there Vinny Mac.

Vince thinks fans are the same all over the world. Does he sleep through the Canadian shows? After Ross says don't expect a lot of technical stuff from Sid he breaks out a headlock takeover and various suplexes, the last of which is countered into Davey's suplex. Clarence Mason comes down to be pointless. Yes we have two big power guys here, laying on the mat with headlocks. I give up.

We see Vader warming up in the back with Cornette. They get it right here for the most part though by showing this while Sid is out on the floor rather than in the middle of action. Powerslam to Sid but Cornette comes out to yell at Mason. A second powerslam is blocked into a chokeslam and powerbomb by Sid to end it.

Rating: D. Boring match that did nothing at all but further the horrible Cornette vs. Mason feud for control over his stable. Once Mason took over the stable died completely. This was just a quick match that had nothing at all going for it and no one cared at all, or at least I didn't.

Quick video on Shawn.

Goldust vs. Marc Mero

This is stemming from Goldust hitting on Sable a lot in the past few weeks. At least there's a reason for them to fight. That's a nice lesson that the writers today need to learn: it's very possible to have a decent feud with even the most basic of stories. Running in to beat on someone isn't really a storyline. That's the common issue that starts "feuds" anymore and that just doesn't get it done most of the time. Mero says that he's going to win.

Goldust has been calling Sable mommy or something like that. That was never really explained which I think is the best move. Vince says that Mero and Sable are special people. I'm

guessing it means he slept with Sable. JR hints at something called the Wild Thing. It'll end the match. Naturally in a Goldust match it starts with random stuff from him that inspired the character that is known as KB. I've always found Mero to be overrated but he's doing pretty well here.

Who would have thought that Goldust would still be active 13 years later? Ahmed Johnson, the IC Champion, is out with an injury and they're not sure what's going to be done about the belt. It's vacated very soon if I remember correctly. Correction it was vacated earlier in the week. Mero would win it in a tournament in about a month or so. Goldust takes over for awhile until Mero is beaten down pretty badly.

Mankind comes out for no apparent reason as he and Goldust were working together for no apparent reason. Mero goes into the corner and comes off with a...well he jumped off and...it was kind of like...well he just jumped backwards and hit Goldust. This was of course very risky since it was from Mero. We're told that Pillman is interviewing Sid on the Superstar line. Have to love that they've gotten over Sid nearly killing him in the War Games match in the early 90s.

The fans and commentators are just bored out of their mind but the classic ten punches in the corner gets them going a bit. Mero finally gets in the air a bit and wakes the people up somewhat. After beating Goldust up, they completely screw this up as Mero debuts the Wild Thing, more commonly known as a Shooting Star Press. Now, Mero just debuted a new big move that was clearly a finisher. So the logical thing would be to have him get the pin with it right?

Apparently not as Marlana is on the ropes for all of 5 seconds, which added to the two count is enough for Goldust to kick out. Yeah, that's great. Let Goldust just kick out of it. If you're going to do that, have the two count and THEN Marlana up on the apron so the count stops and Mero goes after her. Just don't kill the move's credibility that quickly.

They show the double screen of Mero doing and talk about how great it was. Goldust hits the Curtain Call for the pin. I just don't get that. What's the point of debuting a huge move like that and have him lose? Goldust tries to kiss Sable but Mero beats him up pretty well for it.

Rating: C+. This just has me shaking my head. It made the Wild Thing look weak here to have Goldust simply kick out of it, as well as just have Goldust beat him clean maybe 90 seconds after it. The wrestling was fine, but I do not get what the point was of the Wild Thing.

Sunny and Farroq come out, as Sunny's stable now consists of two cowboys and a black supremacist/gladiator. Does that sound like the beginning of a bad joke to anyone else? Two cowboys, a gladiator and a gold digging woman? Either a bad joke or a cheap B movie. His blue helmet just looks so stupid.

He's out there yelling about not being the IC Champion. To make even more sense, he lost the tournament in the finals to Mero of all people. Simmons desperately needs to get in the Nation of Domination. Sunny says she gets what she wants and she wants the IC Title. Does that mean she's going to be in the tournament?

We see a recap of Lawler vs. Jake Roberts. Now this was a very interesting and intense albeit short feud. The idea is simple: Roberts is a recovering alcoholic and Lawler is making fun of him for it, even having a big bottle of alcohol in the corner with him for the matches and offering Jake a drink. Lawler, as a heel, has a huge fear of snakes. Some of the this is actually really disturbing as Jake has a bad issue with alcohol, which means I don't think it should be used as an angle.

Before the match, we're introduced to the World's Strongest Man, Mark Henry. Oh dear. He comes out to Luger's music of all things so you know this is going to be bad. He can't even get

the headset on right to do commentary. For a guy like Vince that is obsessed with musclemen, this is just a big orgasm, complete with pyro for Henry.

Jerry Lawler vs. Jake Roberts

He's been on commentary 10 seconds and I'm already annoyed with him. Lawler has a bag of his own but we don't see what's inside yet. He's also rocking a Baltimore Ravens jersey, which is considered cheap heat but to me that's just pure awesomeness. For an Indians fan like me, this is just fun. Sandy Alomar is there and he says he's left tickets for the Modells. He brings Jake's partners, the Jim Beam twins.

He insults Jake's wife as Henry is cracking up at the jokes, despite being a face. They point out that Henry was injured in the Olympics, as Lawler says that he's dumb enough to bronze a gold medal. Henry is just awful on commentary. His comebacks are that of a 6th grader. Lawler is just doing one liners here as is his trademark. I never realized how tall Jake is but he's about 6'5 which is taller than Orton and HHH.

Harvey Whippleman is the referee so Lawler is the most normal person in the ring. Lawler shows what's in his bag: a massive bottle of alcohol. Henry shows that he's a long term heel, saying that he's afraid of snakes. Roberts wraps Revelations, the big yellow snake, around the King. Wouldn't that be a foreign object? Ross sounds like he's giving moral support to Henry which is just stupid sounding. After about 7 minutes of stalling, they finally make contact.

However in this case, I'm ok with the stalling as it makes sense here. Vince talks about how Jake is a veteran. I'd think Lawler has more experience actually. Lawler steals a soda from the floor and throws it at Jake. Henry of course is concerned about the fan's drinking tonight. My goodness he's terrible at this. Ross suggests that Henry learn the DDT. Yeah that's a big negative. Lawler hits Roberts in the throat with a bottle

to pin him with the tights.

The ironic part of Perfect being on commentary was that he was a huge alcoholic too. After the match, Lawler pours whiskey down Jake's throat. He gets another bottle to do the same, but Henry, the face, stops him. This got really quite intense, but it was better in ROH when Raven did it to Punk, with Dreamer's help.

Rating: C-. This was all about the angle and not about the match at all. The match itself would probably be an F, but the angle is very solid. It's a real life angle that can actually work out. The sad part was how Roberts fell apart with alcohol and drugs in the future as has been well documented.

Backlund is campaigning to be President.

Recap of Taker vs. Mankind. Nothing here that needs explaining.

Boiler Room Brawl: Mankind vs. Undertaker

The way you win here is to come to the ring and claim the urn from Paul Bearer, who will be standing in the ring for the whole match. This is an odd match as Taker comes into the boiler room and immediately starts looking for Mankind. The big problem at first is you can't see anything. The lighting is terrible and it's a lot of lurking in the shadows and stuff, which is fine but not for a wrestling match.

Everything is way too dark to really get anything going. The commentators are talking about how Mankind could be anywhere. Now we get to the weird part: as soon as Mankind sneaks up on Taker and beats him up, we lose commentary. It's not like the audio dies, but they just stop talking. It's really weird to have a match like this with no audio at all other than the wrestlers themselves and whatever sounds they make while beating on things.

As for the match itself, it's mainly the two of them hitting each other with random objects, which is fine as it's just a big brawl in an odd place but the chemistry they have is perfect with each other, making this very fun. We get random things from the announcers, but it's like a word between all three of them a minute. I'm assuming there's closed circuit or something in the arena. The video goes out momentarily too but Vince says they're sorry for it. Ah there it is.

This is mainly just weapons use, which is ok but can only go on for so long. Mankind launches some steam at Taker, which may or may not have been scalding. The crowd pops huge for Taker getting a pipe to the balls for some reason. This is really starting to show how important commentary is to a match as it would help a lot here. Running knee to the area near Taker's head into a steel door would hurt horribly I think, if nothing else it would hurt Mankind's knee.

Taker is getting his head handed to him like never before, which seems to happen in every match he competes in against a big time heel. Mankind's incoherent babbling is a very nice touch. More technical difficulties as I'm pretty sure the fans are watching on closed circuit as they boo the heck out of it. This is the longest its been out for, although we pop in long enough to see Taker being slammed. We're back now and Mankind has a ladder.

When I say ladder, I mean an old wooden one, not the kind in ladder matches. Here's where we get the most seen spot of this match, with Taker pulling Mankind off the ladder and him falling onto a bunch of pipes and pieces of metal and wood. Oh, apparently it was a big box. As Taker goes for the door, a thought occurs to me: when Taker was looking around for Mankind just after coming in, why didn't he just turn around and leave?

The rules just said once they were both in the first to get to the urn in the ring wins, so why not just turn and run?

Probably because it wouldn't be much of a match if that's what they did I suppose. Big shot with a fire extinguisher which is always cool. They get through the door which is good as this match was in bad need of a change of venue. Mankind does something very smart and barricades the door. That's actually a brilliant move when you think about it.

The dumb part comes when he stands there to help barricade it. Isn't the point of blocking the door to be able to run from it? It's weird seeing wrestlers standing in the hallway as these two fight. Mankind throws hot coffee on Taker, which could be fake I suppose. After about 20 minutes they're in the arena. The good part is that it doesn't feel like this has been going that long, which to me says it hasn't been boring.

Ah good we have TV monitors there to show the people what was going on during the earlier part of the match. That's nice of them. They fight even more trying to get into the ring. This is a great touch as it's just more brawling and I like that after this long there's no real leader. In a sick looking spot, both are on the apron and Taker slings the ropes back and Mankind slams down on the concrete. Taker gets in the ring and takes the knee, but Bearer won't give him the urn.

Mankind takes him out with the claw as Bearer is laughing. He slaps Taker as JR screams to stop that. Taker crawls to Paul, reaching up for the urn. Bearer slams him in the head with it and hands Mankind the urn for the win. This was huge at the time as Taker had always had Paul Bearer with him. As they leave, Bearer says he's Paul Bearer and you're not. Well I'm glad he can say his own name. Maybe next he'll know his phone number.

We get a single gong which I thought was a mistake but the lights go out and druids start singing. They head to the ring I guess to help Taker. What was it like when they got to the arena? I'm trying to imagine them asking where their dressing room is. The druids carry him out in more darkness.

Naturally, he'd be back soon but feuding with Vader over the WWF Title #1 contender spot, eventually taking the belt at Mania. This would in turn lead to what was likely the biggest angle of his career, as in less than a year, Bear would mention the name of the man called Kane.

Rating: A-. This was a very good fight. The angle was huge at the end, but I think the brawling in the boiler room went on a bit too long. Coupling that with the lack of commentary and it's just below a classic. This at the time was one of the most brutal matches ever, but what they would do in the summer of 98 blew this so far out of the water it's unreal. Still, this was great.

In Your House promo.

Vader and Cornette, who is still a bigger name than Mark Madden as he's on Summerslam here cutting a promo just before the main event, say that they're going to beat up Shawn and take the title.

WWF Title: Vader vs. Shawn Michaels

Vader had been built up as unstoppable all year and had pinned Shawn the previous month in a 6 man tag. The opening/formula is exactly what you would expect: Shawn starts off hot by throwing all kinds of high risk stuff and punches at Vader and they work for a long while. However, soon Vader takes over after landing a power bomb on the floor. Granted that's the same move that nearly killed Mick Foley, but we can let that slide I suppose.

Shawn is just getting the tar beaten out of him here so he's following the Bret Hart formula of start hot, look good getting beaten up, and then make your comeback. Shawn has some mini comebacks and Vader counters with a thumb to the eye. There's something funny about that to me. Perfect drops the term go home, which means to end the match. That doesn't happen at the moment of course though as that would just suck

for a main event.

Shawn skins the cat which to me is one of the most athletic moves you can do along with the nip up. He gets caught though and Vader just throws him which is a cool looking move. Perfect just hates Shawn to say the least. Shawn keeps trying to come back with punches and clotheslines but they just don't work. In an odd spot, he slides down to try a sunset flip but Vader puts his foot on Shawn's chest. Shouldn't that be a pin since Shawn's shoulders are down?

He finally takes Vader down with a big clothesline. I think Shawn botches a move as he has Vader down to the elbow but he pulls up and just kind of lands next to Vader on his feet. I think he was trying to make it look like a big stomp but it just missed totally. I wonder why it wasn't the elbow at that moment. They go to the floor and brawl again, but this time Vader picks up Shawn and drops him over the railing chest/ribs first.

Vader slides into the ring for the count out win. Wait, what the heck? Yes, Vader wins by count out that quick. The female fan at ringside is SCREAMING at Shawn to get up as apparently Becca has made her way to Cleveland. Cornette is ticked off and shouts into the mic that it's not over yet and demands to keep going. Shawn is called a coward and agrees to keep going of course. Vader beats the tar out of Shawn but a powerbomb is countered by a bunch of punches.

Shawn finally gets the elbow but Cornette throws in the racket. Shawn catches it and beats the heck out of Vader, which is merely Shawn returning the favor for Cornette beating on Shawn earlier in the match. Vader wins by DQ. And so ends Summerslam...again with Shawn leaving to fight another day. Apparently it doesn't though as Cornette is talking (stop the presses!) again.

Shawn of course accepts one more restart and they're at it

again. Shawn is killing him to start but gets caught. In between the ref goes down and there's no one to count the pin. Also, Vader gets up from SCM. They set for the Vader Bomb but Shawn moves as the big man goes for the moonsault. He hits a moonsault from the top of his own onto Vader to get the pin. Perfect is ticked off and leaves the announce booth. He comes back all of three seconds later. Shawn poses us out to end the show.

Rating: A-. This was another very good match, but the triple ending just kind of left me scratching my head. It would have been fine had they just done a standard match by giving Vader a ton of time to beat on Shawn, ending with the moonsault to win in. Either way, this was a fine version of David vs. Goliath with Shawn looking like the giant killer at the end of it all to send the fans home happy.

Overall Rating: A. This show was AWESOME. It was the polar opposite of that excuse for a show we had last year. Every match is at least good with some solid angles, brutal matches and good technical stuff. I really liked what I saw here tonight and yes, this certainly lives up to the hype. It's certainly in the running for best Summerslam to date and perhaps best ever, but at the moment I'll have to go with 92 just ahead of it. Still, excellent show and a big recommendation.