

I Want To Talk A Bit About Gimmick Matches

I've wanted to do this for a long time and with the cage match on Smackdown this past week and the now annual Hell in a Cell PPV coming up soon it seemed like as good a time as any.

In short, gimmick matches are dying a slow death because they've lost almost all of their meaning. Let's take a look back through time and I'll show you what I'm talking about.

Let's begin in the year 1980. Larry Zbyszko turned heel on his mentor Bruno Sammartino by leaving him laying in the middle of the ring after a chair shot. Throughout the rest of the year the two feuded around the northeast before they wound up in front of 36,000 people in Shea Stadium in a cage match, arguably the most famous of all time up to that point (Snuka vs. Muraco was three years later). Cage matches were always about the ending of a feud and would happen after a lot of regular matches weren't enough to have a finish. These two had feuded for eight months and it lead them here, for the ultimate blowoff. After Larry controlled most of the match, Bruno made a comeback, beat Larry to a bloody pulp, kicked him in the head one last time and walked out to win the match.

Now let's take a lok at a few things here and see why they made this a great match not only for the time but for all time. First and foremost, there was a great build to it. These guys had feuded all year and there was a reason for it: the student thought he had surpassed the teacher and tried to show he was better and now the teacher wanted revenge for being beaten. Second, it was violent. Larry and Bruno were both bleeding by the end of the match and the final kick to the head is a hard one, signifying that this is over in a brutal way.

Finally, and most importantly, Bruno didn't pin him but rather left him laying and left. This means a lot more than a simple pin. You can get a pin on a fluke rollup. Bruno beat Larry so badly that Larry wasn't able to get up and stop Bruno from walking across the cage and out of the door. It's very symbolic too: one man, the better man, was able to leave the cage while the other was still inside. It gives a feeling of one man being better rather than one man simply pinning the other. We reach a new level of victory and defeat which is what should happen in a match with amplified brutality.

Flash forward with me now to July 4, 1987 and the first of the WarGames matches (trivia note: there were actually 27 WarGames matches (not counting the stupid 98 or 2000 versions). Only 8 of them aired on VHS or PPV. The rest, as in 19 of them, were all at house shows. Think that might draw a crowd today?). The idea is simple: it's the ultimate in team warfare with originally five men per side (one each was a manager) and you enter at timed intervals. The only way to win was by submission and it was by nature incredibly violent and a bloodbath, especially the 1992 version which for my money is the definitive WarGames match. (If you haven't seen a WarGames match, check out the first, the 1991 or the 1992 versions. The rest tend to suck and suck hard.) In short, more blood, more violence, more fun.

We now move forward to 1997. The Undertaker has lost the world title to Bret Hart at Summerslam 1997 due to a missed chair shot from Shawn Michaels. In short, the dead man isn't happy and he wants to take out that anger on Shawn Michaels. Their first major match after this was at In Your House: Ground Zero which was the definition of a war. The referee was knocked out seconds into the match and Shawn tried to run.

The bell didn't ring for 9 minutes after they started brawling and a total of five referees were used until it was finally thrown out. It took over 15 guys to stop Taker from killing Shawn until he debuted the Taker Dive and nearly destroyed

him. This was about hatred and vengeance but Undertaker couldn't get a clean shot at Shawn due to the constant interferences by DX and the annoying rules that say you can't kill him. They offered a cage match but Shawn said something like "I've done cage matches. Don't you have anything else?"

Enter Hell in a Cell, the mother of all gimmick matches. If you've somehow never seen one, it's a massive cage that engulfs the ring, allowing room around it on the floor to walk on. The idea was simple: Shawn was entering a nightmare and had to face the Undertaker inside of it. What followed was thirty minutes of bloodshed, violence, brutality, Shawn running away and nothing being able to stop the Undertaker. The match is an undeniable classic and is one of the most violent matches you'll ever see in a wrestling ring.

Flash forward about 9 months to King of the Ring and the second (important) Hell in a Cell match, this time involving the Undertaker and Mankind. These two had feuded on and off for two years, involving all kinds of brutal fights and betrayals all around. This was a new take on the Cell, in that instead of being trapped inside it was there to attempt to contain the violence. Much like the old cage matches, the idea was to have one person enter and one person leave.

The match began on the roof of the Cell and a few minutes in, Mankind went flying off the top in probably the most repeated clip in company history. Some people fairly believed he may be dead. That of course didn't end the match as they went back up to the top of the cage and Mankind was chokeslammed through the top, having a chair fall through and hit him on the way down. They somehow managed almost ten more minutes of brutality involving chairs and thumbtacks. In the dressing room after the match, Foley asked Undertaker if he got to use the tacks. Taker told Foley to look at his arm which was full of them.

This gives you two working

<http://onhealthy.net/product-category/antifungals/> definitions of what the Cell can be used for: we have either the idea of trapping someone in it or the ultimate in brutality. Those were the original two matches and there was a logical story behind both of them. And then it all fell apart. Following those two matches, the vast majority of Hell in a Cell matches were put on for the sake of a cage match and not having anywhere near as solid of a story behind them or time to build up to them. In 2009 WWE began airing the Hell in a Cell PPV, which we'll get to later on in this.

On the other side of the gimmick spectrum, we have the ladder match. Beginning in 1972 (yes 1972 in Canada), the idea was that you have something, usually a title, put above the ring and the only way to get it is by climbing up a ladder. We'll skip ahead 22 years to the first well known ladder match at Wrestlemania X between Shawn Michaels and Razor Ramon (yes I know about the 92 one with Shawn vs. Bret). The idea was that Shawn had been suspended while Intercontinental Champion. Ramon had won the vacant title but Shawn came back with the original belt, claiming to be champion. The answer to the problem: put both belts above the ring and let the first person to grab them be declared undisputed champion.

The match is a well known classic that I'm sure most of you have seen at least once. It's brutal, filled with drama, still a classic and is considered one of the best matches ever. The key to it though was that there was a story behind it and the match was more about showcasing their abilities rather than the brutality in the match. This is far different than what is usually seen in cage matches as it's designed for smaller and lighter guys who can use the ladders for better and more spectacular moves.

There was a rematch a year and a half later and then there wasn't a televised ladder match for over three years. After a classic one (also at Summerslam in Madison Square Garden between HHH and Rock) the floodgates began to open. After one

in three years, the next ladder match was three months later. The one after that was only two and a half months later in February of 99. Since then there has been two years, 2004 and 2008, that didn't have at least two ladder matches in a single year (2006 had four ladder matches, all after August 14 or about one every 40 days). This isn't counting TLC matches or MITB matches. After having six from 1992 – 1998 (less than one a year), counting three on house shows there have been a total of 36 since, or 3 a year (again not counting MITB or TLC).

If you think that's bad, TNA is even worse. Not counting King of the Mountain, TNA has had 35 in 9 years or almost four a year. For those curious, WCW's first was in January 1997 and they had ten total with the last coming in December of 2000, or approximately 2.5 a year.

All of these stats hold true for almost any gimmick match you prefer: last man standing, hardcore/street fight, Ultimate X (26 of those in 9 years or about one every 4 months), TLC matches, MITB matches and I could go on and on. The problem in short is that gimmick matches have become so watered down and overused that they almost mean nothing anymore. A gimmick match is designed to be special and rare, not something you have three or four of a year. It's the concept of absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Today we have a Hell in a Cell PPV, a MITB PPV, a TLC PPV, an Elimination Chamber PPV and a PPV called Extreme Rules which is all gimmick matches. In July, TNA threw an Ultimate X match on TV with no hype, no build and no particular reason for the match. WWE does this as well, such as with the cage match between Christian and Alberto Del Rio a few months ago on Smackdown. Jeff Hardy and when he was still active Edge would have TLC matches or ladder matches simply because they were known for having such matches. The matches sometimes are good, but there's no reason to get involved in the matches as fans or to be excited going into them. With the right kind of build, these matches can be far more exciting than they

currently are.

Anymore the gimmick matches happen because the calendars call for it. Look at the current feuds in WWE and other than maybe Orton vs. Christian, is there anything that seems like it would fit in the Cell? HHH vs. Punk maybe, but it's not like a single PPV match and a bunch of talking validates going into the Cell. With Orton vs. Christian, Orton has dominated Christian so much that putting them in the Cell to have him do it again would miss the point of the match entirely. There's not really a valid reason to put Cena and Punk in the Cell either. Violence isn't what fits those two as it's been more of a "can you top this" feud, making last man standing or iron man more appropriate stipulations.

In summation, gimmick matches mean a lot less now because they've been done too often. We don't see great cage matches or last man standing matches or ladder matches anymore because we see them so often that they don't have the same pop to them. The schedule making the gimmicks instead of the feuds making the gimmicks also cripples things, as there's no way for the feuds to end in a major gimmick match as we can't have Hell in a Cell in say June because the Hell in a Cell PPV is in October. Until these changes are made, gimmick matches will become more and more worthless every year, meaning more and more will be thrown on the cards until they lose the value they have already. It's another one of those things that Russo put into place and it's hurting business more and more every day.