

Starrcade 1991 – The Only BattleBowl That Was Good

Starrcade 1991

Date: December 29, 1991

Location: Norfolk Scope, Norfolk, Virginia

Attendance: 9,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Tony Schiavone

This is the inaugural Battlebowl and I believe the first WCW PPV I distinctly remember. This is literally the only thing on the whole card. There are ten qualifying matches with mixed up tag teams and then the two ring battle royal main event. That being said this is BY FAR the best way they ever accomplished it and a good show based on my memories.

The only thing that matters here is Sting vs. Luger as this is more or less one big buildup show to SuperBrawl where they would go at it for the world title. Starrcade went from being the biggest show of the year to this somehow which is something a lot of people never got. This concept would get bad quickly but at first it was good and it had Sting at the height of his drawing powers as a face so we have that to fall back on. Let's get to it.

The opening is a basic video explaining what I just said to you.

Eric Bischoff, Missy Hyatt and Magnum TA do the drawings. I won't mention throwing it to them as there's nothing to it really.

Michael Hayes/Tracy Smothers vs. Marcus Bagwell/Jimmy Garvin

Hayes and Garvin of course are the Freebirds. Allegedly the matches here were in fact fixed but booked to the point that you couldn't tell they were. The non-Freebirds start us off

with Bagwell being the only face in sight. Or is Smothers the only heel? I can never remember with the Freebirds. These shows are hard to talk about as there are no angles so we kind of have to figure that out as we go.

We go to the crowd where we see wide spaces of empty seats. We hear about Mike Graham teaching Bagwell and how great of a trainer he is. That's a lie as he's a terrible trainer but points for trying I guess. No tags yet. Ah there's one as Garvin comes in. Apparently the Birds are faces here. If nothing else they're popular here so that's all that matters. Smothers goes to the floor as this isn't really going anywhere.

Hayes shaking his head at Smothers is funny stuff though. Bagwell back in and the arm gets worked over. Hayes finally comes in to a solid pop. And there he goes again as Smothers is getting destroyed out there. He's a US Tag Champion at this point which means nothing but the lack of angles leaves me a lot of empty space to fill. The fans think Tracy sucks.

Yeah the Pistols (Tracy's team) are heels now which makes more sense. The Freebirds have to go at it for once and of course they don't do much other than strut and lock up a lot. Oh hey there's an arm drag! This is all in good fun though rather than being bad. And after a good bit of nothing they're both out again. Can't say I blame them though as it wouldn't have made a ton of sense to beat each other up.

Garvin vs. Smothers now as we speed things up a bit. Cross body by Bagwell gets two and then Hayes accidentally hits Garvin, which says a lot as one of his finishers was a big left hand. While they argue, Smothers misses a top rope splash and Bagwell gets his Fisherman's Suplex for the pin. The Freebirds are all cool and Bagwell and Garvin are in Battlebowl.

Rating: C-. Not bad here and the matches will be on a bit of

an adjusted scale. In other words this wasn't a great match all things considered but given what they have to work with, as in not their usual partners or in Bagwell's case a tag match in general, this was pretty good and held my interest for the nearly 13 minutes it got, which was probably too many.

Rick Rude/Steve Austin vs. Big Josh/Van Hammer

Let's see: Van Hammer was a total lack of talent but became one of the most popular guys in the company. Josh was a woodsman that danced with bears and was at the first Wrestlemania and was the original Doink. Rude is US Champion, Austin is TV Champion. Both are in the Dangerous Alliance and both are awesome. Austin and Hammer start which works as they had a TV Title feud.

Man it's weird seeing Austin as someone that reminds me of Dolph Ziggler but with a better name. His character was NOTHING like the redneck and he could move out there. You can see the talent too which is weird considering who he's in there with. Not much going on here but nothing too bad I guess.

Hot tag to Big Josh and his offense lasts all of a minute as Austin and Rude's combined awesomeness takes him down. We more or less repeat the same stuff from the previous segment as Josh gets beaten down and searches for the tag. Sweet goodness Van Hammer was over. It could be argued that he was second only to Sting in popularity. And so much for that as a blind tag and Rude Awakening end Hammer.

Rating: D+. Total run of the mill stuff here but Austin and Rude make it worth watching. They had the advantage here due to experience together but the creativity of the faces made something like this far better than I expected. Not a great match but it worked. Somehow this was the same length to within a few seconds of the previous match which blows my mind.

El Gigante/Larry Zbyszko vs. Dustin Rhodes/Richard Morton

I smell a comedy match here. Larry, the genius that he is, allows Gigante to do the vast majority of the work here. To be fair that's a rather smart strategy considering who his partner is. Larry is the coach apparently, barking orders at Gigante throughout the entire match. Rhodes does the vast majority of the work for his team which is odd as Morton is certainly capable of holding his own out there.

Larry comes in and has a good mini match with Dustin. Rhodes, more commonly known as Goldust today, was getting better every day at this point and Larry was a solid veteran that retired very early for a wrestler, hanging up the boots for the most part at around 40. He started doing more independent stuff but that's certainly common. Larry tags Gigante in and then slaps him, sealing his own fate. Larry tries to run but Gigante throws him back in by his head and into a double dropkick for a growl at the referee and the easy pin. Morton was never legally in.

Rating: C-. Another quick but solid match. Actually no it wasn't another quick match but rather the first quick match. This had a story to it which tells you what can be done if you rig the matches properly. While there was no direct connection here the idea of a loudmouth and a monster doing their thing was well done. Morton literally not being in there was weird but whatever.

Bill Kazmaier/Jushin Liger vs. Diamond Dallas Page/Mike Graham

Oh where to begin? Kazmaier is at the time the greatest competitor in the history of the World's Strongest Man from America at this point. The problem is he makes Mark Henry look like Lou Thesz. Liger I'm sure you know of. DDP was still terrible at this point as he had just entered into the wrestling world having been a manager forever. Graham is the son of Eddie Graham, the legendary Florida promoter. He wasn't

horrible but he was more or less just a territorial guy put in a spot he wasn't ready for.

Graham and Liger start us off which is by far the best possible combination. Liger is young here and completely awesome. Also keep in mind that he's unlike anything that anyone had ever seen in America before. The roof of the place is rather weird looking to the point that it looks like a spaceship or something. And here's Kazmaier. This could be painful to put it mildly, but at least Page isn't here yet.

And I need to learn to stop talking. Page can't slam him as Bill hasn't really done anything at all. Kaz can't do much of anything here so he has to defer to DDP which is a losing situation too. And here's Liger vs. Page which is going to be a disaster too since Page won't be able to do anything so Liger has to calm his stuff down. Back to the two talented ones and that lasts all of a second.

Back to Kazmaier, a power guy, that locks on a wristlock. Sure why not. Back over to Page as this is dragging something fierce. We get the eternally awesome Liger Surfboard on Graham as this match needs to end soon. Graham gets out and puts on a pretty bad looking Boston Crab. Very boring match so far. Back to DDP and Kaz which lasts about a second before it's Liger and Graham part 5.

And so much for that as we're back to the bad workers. They're tagging very fast here. Graham goes to the floor and Liger hits a big front flip to take him out. Well at least I think that's what he did as Ross can only tell us about it since the camera missed it. Second rope moonsault gets two for Liger. Everyone in there now as Kaz press slams Liger onto Page for the pin.

Rating: D+. It was FAR too long and that's definitely the biggest thing it has going against it here. The other thing is Liger is the best worker in there while Graham was just ok. He

however was the best wrestler on his team and the only one that belonged in the ring at all. Page wouldn't get much better for about four years but he got better in a hurry once he started. This could have been decent if it had cut off about 4-5 minutes.

Lex Luger/Arn Anderson vs. Terrance Taylor/Z-Man

Z-Man is the only face out there. The heel team is rather impressive sounding. Luger is the dominant world champion at this point. Anderson and the face start us off and Taylor seems to not care that he's a bad guy. Everyone goes in almost immediately and Luger and Arn are sent running. Luger and Zenk (What did you think the Z stood for?) and Luger have a nice fast paced sequence.

Taylor comes in as the faces (more or less) work on Lex's arm. We hear about Luger trying to put Sting out of action using the gift boxes which was the biggest angle going at the time. In a nice sequence, Taylor goes for a sunset flip but Luger punches him. He has to do this twice more and STILL can't get rid of Taylor but as he's going down he tags Arn.

In that sequence you had Taylor, Luger and Anderson all involved in one straight stretch. It's not something you see that often either and it was rather creative. I liked that more than I should have more than likely but whatever. Race interferes, allowing Anderson to hook a DDT (his finisher) on Zenk for two as Taylor makes the save.

Luger was kicked out of Miami for disciplinary reasons. I've never heard that before. Anderson goes for a double axe handle off the middle rope while Z-Man is on his back. It's one of those stupid spots where the guy jumps into the feet. Never liked that but it's a wrestling staple I guess. Taylor gets a rollup on Luger for two. Backslide gets two.

Gutwrench powerbomb gets two on Luger to the point where Anderson has to make a save. Taylor is showing off here and

it's working. Wow did I just say that? He calls for the Five Arm (another reason I can't stand him) but Anderson gets a knee in the back to set up the Attitude Adjustment (Luger's Piledriver. I guess 19 years is long enough to steal a name) for the pin.

Rating: C+. Definitely the best tag match so far. We had a definite face and heel team out there and it helped a lot. Having Anderson being the expert in tag wrestling that he was and making the save for Luger against the young hot shot that was giving him trouble was a nice story. This was a solid match and it worked very well given the circumstances here.

Ricky Steamboat/Todd Champion vs. Buddy Lee Parker/Cactus Jack

Champion is one half of the Patriots and is more or less an army ranger kind of character. He's big and handsome and that's about it. Parker is a weak cop character and more famous as the guy that said Batista had zero future as a wrestler. He's considered one of the biggest jerks in wrestling history as he accomplished a grand total of nothing in his career but expected insane praise from anyone new in the business.

Almost all of his trainees (including one Bill Goldberg) would probably enjoy this as while he's leaving the locker room Abdullah the Butcher beats the HECK out of him because Abdullah wanted to be partners with Cactus. Side note: why was there never a Cactus vs. Steamboat feud? How awesome would that have been? The beating in essence makes this a handicap match for Cactus.

Abdullah comes out to be his partner but of course isn't allowed. Parker stumbles out through the curtain and Abdullah kicks his teeth in again, beating him half to death with the stick he carries with him. The two legends start us off here as Steamboat isn't sure what to do with the ultra-aggressive Cactus.

Parker, trying to remember what planet he's on, crawls back up onto the ramp after Abdullah kicked him off to the concrete below. Steamboat skins the cat and sends Cactus to the floor and hits what we would call a suicide dive to take Cactus down. Back in and Ricky throws in a superkick and enziguri to make the tag. To say he was ahead of his time in America is an understatement.

Champion, more or less just a big power guy, locks on a camel clutch. Parker is literally crawling on his stomach towards the ring. He's selling the beatdown if nothing else. Tony sums it up perfectly (I'm shocked too) by saying that he looks like he's in the desert reaching for a drink of water. Cactus hits his elbow from the middle rope to the floor which in his book he credits with causing his knees to slowly fall apart over the years.

Parker has made it all the way to the other ring but still has one more to get through. Cactus apparently has no clue this is happening but that was typical of him back in the day. Champion gets a powerslam for two as Parker has made it to the corner! Cactus goes up top but Champion gets a punch to the stomach to block it.

They collide and Parker, who is a jobber mind you, gets the tag. His reward for making it all the way here after a beating like that: A fresh Ricky Steamboat. Dang talk about having a bad day. Naturally a powerslam and the cross body end him in about 6 seconds. Well at least they made it quick.

Rating: C. Pretty good match here considering it was a handicap match more or less. Cactus was getting very good around this point and everyone knew it. They put him together with Sting soon after this and it was totally awesome. Steamboat here was of course good and Champion fit in very well as the power guy against Foley. Nothing great but all things considered this was fine.

Sting/Abdullah the Butcher vs. Bobby Eaton/Brian Pillman

That's actually a good sounding heel team. Since Sting is on one team they're the automatic faces of course. Abdullah was one of the guys that Luger sent to try to take Sting out so this is almost 3-1 against Sting. Abdullah with his rather horrible physique of course jumps Sting and beats him with his stick (called a kendo stick so it wasn't WWE that invented it).

Brian runs down and makes the save for his buddy, beating on him with the same stick. Eaton works on Sting's bad knee as this is going insanely fast so far. Eaton throws him into the ring and we're finally going officially. The other two are still brawling on the floor and Sting is in big trouble already. The hero fights back through and Eaton is in trouble as we're on the ramp.

Eaton is part of the Dangerous Alliance who Sting is feuding with. Sting is just ridiculously popular here. Eaton slaps Pillman which is apparently a tag. Ok apparently it isn't. Butcher blasts Sting just because he feels like it and Sting is in trouble again. He drops down to the floor and grabs a pencil from Ross' desk. Tony: I don't think he's going to use that pencil in its proper use. You can't buy announcing like this people.

Naturally the pencil goes towards Sting's throat. Who would you disqualify there? Pillman makes the save for his friend and Sting is all ticked off. He beats up Eaton on the floor as he's getting violent out there. Pillman slams Butcher in the ring and hits a big old splash on the fat dude. Brian won't tag Eaton.

Eaton tries to tag Abdullah who has no issue with wanting to beat up Sting. The announcers talk about how Sting has been in there the whole time which Eaton has as well. Sting counters something into a tombstone which is more or less botched.

Pillman and Abdullah come in to fight some more as Cactus come lumbering out. Abdullah holds Sting but Cactus misses and blasts Butcher with the stick. After a dropkick for Jack, a cross body to Eaton ends this.

Rating: C+. Well it was certainly not boring. It wasn't particularly great but Eaton vs. Sting is always worth checking out. Total one man show out there from Sting which is all the fans wanted. Pillman wasn't quite a star yet so he was the only person anyone cared about out there. It would play into the ending of the show later on so this was important. Very fast paced and never once boring.

Cactus and Abdullah fight up the ramp for fun.

Vader/Mr. Hughes vs. Rick Steiner/Nightstalker

Nightstalker is Brian Clark, AKA Adam Bomb. It was originally supposed to be Diamond Studd (Scott Hall) but he has an arm injury. Vader is kind of new at this point but would become awesome very shortly. Steiner is the only face here. Vader and Hughes apparently team from time to time. Vader and Steiner start us off.

Everyone here played college football apparently. Wait Rick did? Are you sure about that? Ah never mind he just said college sports. That's ok then. Steiner jumps from the apron to the floor to nail Vader as this is really just those two having a match while the other two are standing around which is likely the best idea for everyone involved.

Steiner and Vader get into a big power match on the floor so Vader rams him into the post. In an impressive show of strength Rick suplexes Vader back over the top rope and into the ring. Rick won't tag out because he knows Nightstalker is awful. He tags Rick instead and promptly gets drilled by Vader. Bulldog off the top from Steiner to Hughes but he's not legal so a splash on Nightstalker ends it.

Rating: D. Bad match here but at the same time look at who was out there. Steiner was all his team had and Vader was just a monster that if you weren't named Steamboat or Sting you had no business in there with. This was the shortest match on the show at barely over five minutes so there's that at least. Nothing good here at all but Steiner was trying.

Ad for Superbrawl, an hour and a half into this.

Scott Steiner/Firebreaker Chip vs. Arachnaman/Johnny B. Badd

Arachnaman is Brad Armstrong and Chip is Todd Champion's partner in the Patriots. Basically Steiner is the only one in this worth anything. Badd means nothing at this point. He and Chip, who is roided like there is no tomorrow, start us off. And I'm bored. It's not too bad but we're just waiting for Scott to come in there and destroy everything in sight.

Yep there's the tag and there goes Johnny. Armstrong (you try spelling the other one over and over) comes in and as usual gets his head handed to him. Steiner is just killing anything in sight with raw power. Down goes Badd again and Chip gets tagged back in. And of course he gets beaten down again. When I say beaten down I mean for a very long time as the heels (I guess?) take turns destroying him.

There are long stretches in here with nothing to say as no one cares about anyone but Steiner and with good reason. We speed things up a bit and Steiner gets a blind tag from Chip. Steiner comes in to a solid pop and just massacres them. Armstrong gets a kick but goes up top, only to get caught in a GORGEOUS belly to belly suplex from Scott to end this. Awesome suplex to end it as it looked devastating.

Rating: D+. Total dominance from Scott as everything here was designed to make him look like a star. If he hadn't kept getting hurt he really could have been something special. Back in his young days he really was the prototype athlete as he had insane strength and agility for someone his size. Shame he

completely lost his mind.

Ron Simmons/Thomas Rich vs. Steve Armstrong/PN News

This is the final tag match which is a good thing as you can tell that the fans are pretty much sick of them at this point. They really needed some singles stuff thrown in here and there to give the people something of a break. Power vs. power to start here with News vs. Simmons. Rich is a former world champion and Armstrong is one of the Young Pistols.

Simmons is on the verge of a huge push where he would win the world title. Simmons dominates for a good while until Rich more or less demands to come in. And then Armstrong beats him up so he begs to get back out. Simmons says no you wanted in so stay in like the jerk he used to be.

News and Armstrong beat up Rich for a LONG time and it gets very boring. The fans want Ron, Rich wants Ron, I want a stiff drink. This concept is fine but it REALLY needs to have shorter matches. We're about ten minutes into this and there's just nothing to talk about. Simmons finally gets the hot tag and the fans pop BIG. He slams News (who weighed like 450) and hits a Spinebuster on Armstrong to win it.

Rating: D+. Yeah whatever let's just get to the battle royal so I can stay awake. See the previous match's rating and substitute Simmons for Steiner.

Battlebowl

Two ring battle royal with the 20 winners from the ten tags that I'm not going to list off. Ok so I am since it takes a good while for the entrances: Vader, Marcus Bagwell, Jimmy Garvin, Dustin Rhodes, Bill Kazmaier, Jushin Liger, Steve Austin, Richard Morton, Todd Champion, Abdullah the Butcher, Firebreaker Chip, Thomas Rich, Ron Simmons, Ricky Steamboat, Mr. Hughes, Scott Steiner, Lex Luger, Rick Rude, Arn Anderson, Sting.

They saved Sting for last and I guess the fans were counting as just after Anderson you can hear them erupt. Sting is just ridiculously popular to the point where it's hard to tell who the second most popular guy in the company is since it's such a gap between whoever it is and Sting. Steamboat I suppose. This is on the Essential Starrcade DVD if you want to see it. The DVD is well worth picking up anyway as it's awesome. Bad documentary though.

The first guy, Vader, misses his cue so the announcer has to stall by saying "The first competitor.....in Battlebowl.....the very first.....is.....VADER!" Funny. Quick summary of the rules: you start in the first ring and have to be thrown into the second ring (never specified if it has to be over the top) and then from the second ring over the top to the floor to be eliminated. Whoever wins the first ring will meet whoever wins the second ring in an over the top rope challenge for the whole thing.

They all start as Sting hits the ramp. Like the idiot that he is he goes straight for Vader. Anderson vs. Steamboat happens on the ramp. If nothing else the image of Anderson PANICKING when Steamboat is revealed as Dustin's partner at Clash 17 is great. Kazmaier is put on the ramp over the top and Vader and Hughes, the guys that put him out, look legit confused when he's allowed back in.

It's so weird seeing Austin with blonde hair long enough to be in a ponytail. Ok apparently it is over the top to get into ring two. Vader and Steamboat go to the ramp too which is another drool worthy match. I know they had at least one big time TV match because I've seen it. Sting and Austin go at it in the corner. Imagine that match in 1998. Sweet goodness that would have drawn millions.

Vader puts Steamboat on the ramp again just because he's evil. Rhodes and Anderson are brawling on the floor. Liger beats on Abdullah which is one heck of a weird match when you think

about it. Thomas Rich goes into ring 2. You just have to go over the rope and can land between the rings as going over both sets would be really hard since there's a good three foot gap between them.

Sting goes after Luger and the fans ERUPT. Morton throws Bagwell into ring 2 to give Rich something to do. Thankfully they go to a wide shot instead of the very annoying double screen. Dangerously gets on Tony and Jim's nerves which is really funny. He was such a freaking jerk. Vader won't go near the other side of the ring which is really smart. Well who's going to make him I guess.

Chip hits ring 2 also giving us three people there. Liger and Morton go over also as the first ring is thinning out a bit. I love that they don't even bother showing us that ring as no one cares. Ok now they won't show ring 1. Well to be fair what happens there doesn't really matter I guess. Morton and Liger have a solid mini match and then both go out, eliminating them from the match altogether.

Hughes is in ring two now. That gives us 14 people in ring 1 I believe. Rich is out. Steamboat and Anderson have fought around the ring and just kind of go into ring 2 for the fun of it. Garvin and Champion are in ring two now. It's reaching the point of just needing to know who is left in ring #1. Tony thinks there are ten left in there but counting may be beyond his skill set.

Austin and someone else that may have been Scott Steiner hit ring 2. Garvin is out. Kazmaier and Abdullah go to the second ring. So does Simmons even though he went through the ropes. In ring 1 we have Sting, Rude (who both go to ring 2 as I type their names) leaving Luger and Vader (Rhodes went over as I was typing) in ring 1. Luger beats up Vader and Harley Race looks awesome here since he manages both guys. Or at least he would manage Vader soon.

Chip is out as Luger wins ring 1. You can't say he wasn't pushed as a strong champion. Abdullah and Kaz and Champion all go out. Luger gets to chill for awhile as Steiner has the future Steiner Recliner on Hughes. There's a chance I've missed some people as it's hard to tell as everything is going kind of fast. We do a wide shot and a split screen to annoy me. Granted the split screen are just small windows and are over the ring skirt (the thing that says WWE or TNA and is below the apron).

Rhodes is out and so are Hughes and Simmons. Bagwell is out and so are Vader and someone else I missed. Steiner is out and we have one heck of a tag match left with Steamboat, Sting, Austin and Rude as the final four. Steamboat pairs off with Austin and Sting beats on Rude. Stinger Splash to Austin which just sounds right coming out of JR's mouth.

Rude is US Champion, Austin is TV Champion and Steamboat is a tag champion here. With four people left is there really a need for small split screens? Rude accidentally hits Austin to out him out. Rude throws Steamboat but he skins the cat and gets a headscissors on Rude to eliminate him. Rude grabs him as he gets back in to eliminate him then slides back in to hit a Rude Awakening on Sting.

The fans go NUTS for the idea of Sting vs. Luger though, making this the perfect ending for Battlebowl. This was the top rivalry at this point and everyone was just waiting for Sting to rise up and take the title off the monster champion. All Luger here as Sting is more or less dead. Both guys are in yellow here which is weird. Luger doesn't throw him out when he has the chance, showing his incredible intelligence.

Luger throws him to the ramp and Race beats Sting up so Sting has to fight him off too. Sting goes into the guardrail and Sting is more or less nothing right here. Sting blocks a shot to the railing and takes over with the fans getting into things again. Sting puts him back into the ring and is all

fired up. He beats the tar out of Luger and has him draped over the ropes.

Race comes in and Sting has to stop him, allowing Luger to rest enough to avoid the Splash and leave Sting hanging over the top rope. And again like an idiot he pulls him back in. Luger throws him over but Sting holds on and just goes OFF, beating the heck out of Luger and finally hitting a big clothesline to put Luger out and then collapses in the ring.

Rating: B. This was rather fun actually. The two ring idea worked very well and the final pairing was perfect. This is what you get when there's a POINT to a battle royal rather than just having one for the sake of having one. Sting looks awesome and we set up the main event of the next PPV. What more can you ask for?

The announcers say time is running out for Luger to run as Sting is coming for him. He'd get him in about two months.

Overall Rating: C. This was a hard one to grade as this is the definition of a hit or miss show. The concept is a novelty for sure, but this is the only time it ever really worked. The main reason for this has to be Sting and Luger. At the three other versions of this the winners were Great Muta (left for Japan soon after), Vader (already world champion) and DDP (glorified jobber).

Here with Sting winning it you have a story and reason for him now to fight Luger since he's beaten him in a major competition. That being said, this is more or less a failure as a build for the biggest show of the year as THIS should have been Sting vs. Luger, not Superbrawl. At least we got something entertaining between them before Luger was a jerk at the title match, knowing it was his last match and more or less phoning in the phone call he made to phone the match in. Either way, if you want to see Battlebowl at its best, this is the show to do it. Good show but ODD choice for Starrcade.