

Chi-Town Rumble: Steamboat vs. Flair

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Date: February 20, 1989

Location: UIC Pavilion, Chicago, Illinois

Attendance: 8,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Magnum TA

This is a one off show with the first match in the Steamboat vs. Flair trilogy. Steamboat is the first guy Flair brought in after he took over as booker from Dusty who is on his way to the WWF. The Horsemen are mostly broken up but Hiro Matsuda is managing various people who used to be on the team. This is a very forgotten show so let's see if there's a reason for it. Let's get to it.

Jim and Magnum talk about the card.

For you visual learners out there, here's a video about the matches (there are only seven) tonight.

Michael Hayes shouts a lot and says a lot of people are shouting and says he feels like Pete Rose. He sounds like he's plugging a PPV instead of talking about his opponent, who hasn't been mentioned yet.

For you card carrying members of the IWC, Dave Meltzer is in the front row on camera all night.

Michael Hayes vs. Russian Assassin #1

It's Jack Victory under a mask. You'll be hearing that name later tonight. They exchange overly long headlocks to start and a Russian sickle misses. Hayes takes over and stops to play to the crowd because he's not that smart at times. Must be that Freebird Hair Cream getting into his brain (WCCW

joke). Hayes works on the arm but stops to strut. JR calls it the patented strut. How do you go about getting that patented?

The armbar lasts way too long and the Russian fires back with a knee. Hayes was a lot better at working a crowd than he was in the ring. You can't have everything though I guess. Most of a Russian Sickle gets two. That's like the Russian version of the Samoan Drop. The Assassin's manager, Paul Jones, messes up a cover by bickering even though Hayes is down.

Here's a chinlock by the Assassin as the fans chant USA. That doesn't last long so the Russian hits a Sickle for two and goes back to the chinlock. Hayes tries a comeback but gets hit in the back despite there being no back work on him in the first ten minutes or so. Jones chokes some and this needs to end. It's not that it's a bad match but it's really boring. Hayes blocks a suplex into one of his own but an elbow misses. A charge in the corner hits the post and Hayes pounds away. DDT out of nowhere ends it with Hayes winning.

Rating: D. Oh man this was dull. Who in their right mind thought this deserved 15:48? The match was mostly laying around and it wasn't interesting at all. Hayes is a guy that can get a great reaction out of a pile of dirt but he's not a guy you want in the ring for almost 16 minutes. Not sure what they were thinking here.

Ricky Steamboat and his family talks about how important family is and he dedicates the match tonight to them.

Sting vs. Butch Reed

Sting is on the verge of shattering the glass ceiling but they're a PPV away (about three months) from pulling the trigger and giving him the TV Title. That came at WrestleWar. Sting is in new clothes and is all fired up. He's ready for Reed too. Magnum TA summed up Sting perfectly on the Starrcade DVD: "He had so much talent and so much charisma that he had no idea what to do with it all." That's as accurate as you can

get with Sting in the late 80s.

Reed has gotten a solid push around this time too so this is far from a squash. He also has Matsuda with him as Reed was considered for a spot in the Horsemen before Arn and Tully left. Feeling out process to start and I have a feeling this is going to last for awhile. Sting speeds it up and Reed hits the floor because he has no idea what to do with the painted one.

Sting throws on a headlock and we hit five minutes. An elbow misses for Reed in the corner and it's time for a beating. Ok or maybe it's time for a wristlock. Teddy Long is the referee. Reed sends him to the floor to take over. This has the makings of a very long one here. We're ten minutes in and Reed pounds away. JR keeps calling Reed's punches soup bones. Is there some connection between Reed and Taker that I'm missing? And who puts bones in their soup?

Magnum keeps calling Matsuda an Oriental which would get him thrown off the air today. It's time for a chinlock as they need a breather and Reed needs to call some spots to the rookie known as Sting. Sting fights back and tries a Vader Bomb in what would be ironic in about 4 years. It gets knees here but Reed misses a clothesline and is knocked to the floor. Reed takes over again and hooks a one armed chinlock. That's not something you see every day.

Sting hooks a jawbreaker but is sent out to the floor again. That's one of those moves that happens way too often in the late 80s NWA. Sting grabs a sunset flip but Reed grabs the top rope. Teddy breaks that grip so Reed grabs the middle rope. Teddy breaks that up too so that Sting can finally get the sunset flip for the pin. This was over twenty minutes long.

Rating: D+. The length hurts this one again as so much of it is made of armbars and chinlocks and moves like those that it never got interesting. Also having Sting not get to use any of

his big moves kind of defeats the purpose of the match as it was there to give Sting a win. However he needed Teddy Long to make that work. I don't get that at all.

Reed jumps him post match and is beaten up again.

Paul E. Heyman says that Dennis Condrey isn't going to be here tonight and Jack Victory (told you you would hear that name again) is replacing him. In other words, Condrey was fired so this is a Loser Leaves the NWA match. I think that's just the person that loses the fall though but I'm not sure.

Cornette's Express says they're not worried.

Midnight Express/Jim Cornette vs. Jack Victory/Randy Rose/Paul E. Dangerously

This was a pretty good angle with a pretty cool backstory. Ok so WAY back in the day, the original Midnight Express was Randy Rose and Dennis Condrey. They teamed for awhile (along with a third man named Norvell Austin) and were the original Midnight Express. They left Southeast Championship Wrestling where they got started and Condrey went to Mid-South Wrestling where he was put together with Condrey as the Midnight Express. This is the version that feuded with the Rock N Roll Express and is probably the most successful version.

Now here comes the interesting part. One day the Express was scheduled to go to California for a show. Condrey never showed up. No one is quite sure where he went but he wasn't seen for years. One day he popped up in the AWA with Randy Rose and said they were the Midnight Express. At the same time, Eaton teamed up with Stan Lane to become the latest form of the Midnight Express.

So then the Midnights (Lane and Eaton) got crushed by the Road Warriors for the world titles. On TV one night Cornette got a phone call by someone making fun of them. Then Dangerously, Rose and Condrey ran out and it was Midnight Express vs.

Midnight Express. Then Condrey left again and that's why Jack Victory is here now. The feud never got as good as they were hoping but the Starrcade match was pretty great.

The person to take the fall here is gone and since Condrey is gone, is there any doubt as to who is taking the fall here? Lane vs. Rose starts us off and Rose goes sailing to the floor. Cornette comes in and drops an elbow so he can strut a bit. Off to Victory who doesn't do well either so let's try Rose again against Eaton. The good guys are dominating this. The heels mess up again and Dangerously clocks Rose by mistake. JR makes fun of it, saying it's not like it hurt or anything.

Lane vs. Rose at the moment but it's off to Eaton quickly. They go to the apron and Eaton goes crashing onto the railing to totally shift momentum. The railing is the old faithful way to change things. Dangerously comes in, pounds away a bit, ducks a right hand and runs away to bring Rose back in. Cornette wants Dangerously and the fans sound like they want to see it too.

Instead Rose gets his hands on Cornette and to his credit he takes a quick beating. Off to Dangerously now who is acting like a true heel manager, only coming in when his opponent is in trouble. Cornette gets in a single shot but Dangerously runs to Rose again. Jim finally gets in a tag to Lane who meets Jack Victory but Dangerously interferes to give the heels the advantage again.

The fans are all over Paulie here as Rose jumps to the floor to take Lane down again. Lane gets beaten on for a good while and is in a chinlock by Rose. There's the hot tag to Eaton after some kicks to the ribs by Lane (his specialty) and a missile dropkick almost kills Victory. In a cool bit, Eaton walks Victory's half out cold body over to Dangerously and grabs Victory's hand to slap Paul.

Paul is dragged in to face Cornette and this is the part everyone has been waiting for. Cornette beats on him for a bit and it's off to Lane vs. Rose again. Rose misses a splash but Victory saves the pin. Everything breaks down and a double flapjack is enough for the pin on Rose. That's an old Midnight trademark so it's cool to see that instead of the Rocket Launcher or cheating.

Rating: C+. Pretty decent match here and it's always cool to hear that sweet Midnight Express theme song time and time again. The ending was never really in doubt and this eventually lead to Heyman becoming the top heel announcer a little bit after this. Still though it was a good match, although nowhere near the Starrcade one.

Flair says he'll keep the title because he's awesome.

TV Title: Rick Steiner vs. Mike Rotundo

This is the Starrcade rematch but the heat isn't on it anymore as Steiner won the title. However there's now the added issue of dealing with Rotundo's Varsity Club's teammates. Let's go to Rick Steiner to see how he plans to deal with that. Rick brings in his brother as Scott Steiner debuts. Scott mentions that Rick is out there like he is (including talking to a puppet named Alex) because of a bad car wreck they were in a few years ago.

Rotundo is out there alone so Rick looks a bit odd having his brother there. Rick takes over to start, hitting what we would call an AA to frustrate Rotundo. This is going to be a very technical match. Mike gets sent to the floor again as Rick is controlling early but he hasn't done anything major. Rotundo fires off a European uppercut but Steiner takes over again, this time with a headlock.

Steiner hits something but the camera is on someone in the crowd so we don't see what gets the two count. We're about six minutes into this and nothing has happened so far. Well at

least nothing of note. They've been doing more than standing around for that whole time. Off to an abdominal stretch and Scott tries to get the referee to notice Rotundo's cheating. They go to the mat and Rotundo hammers away with crossfaces.

Off to an armbar as this is a very slow paced match. It's not bad but it's slow. Rick hits a monkey flip to get a breather and a knee lift for two. A top rope splash (???) misses for the champ and we head outside. Back in and Rick snaps off a powerslam for two. And here's Kevin Sullivan, talking about Rick's dog in the back so Steiner goes after him. Back in Rotundo gets a suplex for two. Steiner pounds away in the corner with five minutes to go and there's a sleeper. Steiner goes to the mat with it but loses focus with Rotundo on top so that Steiner gets pinned while holding on to the sleeper.

Rating: C+. Pretty creative ending there and it plays to the idea that Steiner isn't all there but he's trying. The Steiners would start teaming up soon after this and would become the best team WCW ever produced. Not a great match here but the pacing was good enough to give us something else that we didn't see that often.

The Road Warriors say they'll end the Varsity Club in their home town of Chicago.

US Title: Barry Windham vs. Lex Luger

Barry turned on Lex months ago to join the Horsemen and this is the revenge match. Barry is also champion. The champion says he's going to beat up Lex. Matsuda is with him as well, as he's been with every heel tonight. They exchange shoulder blocks and no one moves. Lex no sells a suplex and throws Windham around as only Luger can. Windham suplexes him back in but can't grab the Claw. It's gotten a bit stronger since Dusty stayed in it for about five minutes last show.

Lex's eye is busted a bit due to right hands. Out to the floor again and Barry manages to punch the post. It busts open

Windham's hand and injures him to the point that the Claw is worthless. Oh please like that's the case after last year's Bash. A powerslam gets two. Barry is like screw it and goes for the superplex but Lex gets up at two. Barry isn't sure what to do now so he goes for a belly to back and it's the ending where Lex gets his shoulder up first to win the title.

Rating: C+. Pretty decent here but there were a lot of times on here where I wasn't sure what the appeal of it was. Lex would go on for a huge run with the title, holding it nearly two years. Barry would be in the WWF by about Mania time so this was his last hurrah in the NWA, at least for a few years.

Barry piledrives him on the belt post match because he's a sore loser and he wants Lex to be a sore champion.

Rotundo is all HAHAHA I'm the champion again! He lost it to Sting at the next PPV.

Tag Titles: Varsity Club vs. Road Warriors

The Warriors have the belts and it's Sullivan/Williams on the other side. The Varsity guys are the US Tag Champions. The Warriors in their hometown with Iron Man playing and coming in as champions is a pretty awesome sight. Animal vs. Sullivan to get us going. Off to Williams and the question of who sells first comes up. Well so far that would be no one until Williams hits a powerslam and brings in Hawk.

Williams hits a gorilla press so Hawk takes his head off with a clothesline. The Warriors hit a clothesline on both sides of Williams at the same time. It gets two and you don't have to ask JR twice to praise Williams for that one. Out to the floor and Sullivan hits a chair shot to the shoulder of Animal to take over. Williams busts out a leg lariat/kick to the face to get two.

Sullivan shows better psychology and works over the arm he hit. Williams does the same, I guess being influenced by

Sullivan. Wow that's not exactly something I was expecting. Lots of arm work follows as Animal stays in trouble. There's the dreaded double clothesline, which is a huge compliment to whoever was in trouble beforehand because one clothesline is enough to keep the other guy down for the same length of time that a guy who was beaten down for awhile does. Everything breaks down and something gets botched, resulting in Hawk getting the pin off a top rope clothesline.

Rating: D+. Not much here but they tried at least. The Road Warriors were only able to do so much and they kept it short which is the right idea for them. Not a great match or even a good one, but like I said the Road Warriors in Chicago are always worth checking out as this was a solid reaction.

Luger, with a bandage around his head, thanks the fans and says he won't let them down.

We recap Steamboat vs. Flair which was started in a tag match where Steamboat beat the tar out of him. They played up the family man in Steamboat vs. the womanizer in Flair which was an awesome idea. This of course resulted in Flair being stripped to his underwear because that's what Flair is all about.....somehow. This takes about four minutes to get through.

NWA World Title: Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat

Steamboat comes out with his wife and son. Flair comes out with a band, his theme song and six women. Never let it be said that he didn't live up his gimmick. Matsuda is here again. Steamboat gets a shoulder block for a very fast two. In another nice move, Flair drops down for Steamboat to run over him but Steamboat drops down to grab a headlock. Flair hits the floor as he isn't sure what to make of this speed.

Back in Flair fires a chop and Steamboat is like I can do that too and chops even harder. Steamboat grabs the headlock and takes Flair to the mat with ease. Flair keeps rolling him up for two counts. We hear about how they had different

backgrounds, ranging from blue collar to white collar. They chop it out and MAN are those loud. Flair takes a double chop for two and bails for a bit.

Steamboat chops him to the floor so Flair slows things down again. A hip toss and headscissors get two. They speed things up and Flair takes him down with an elbow. Steamboat is all like HI YAH and chops him to the floor. Out to the floor and Flair takes over with his nefarious means. These shots are HARD. Things slow down and Flair takes over, dropping the knee for two.

Butterfly suplex gets two. They chop it out again and there's the Flair Flip. Ric comes off with a cross body but Steamboat rolls through for two. The crowd is eating this up. Flair hits an atomic drop and grabs the Figure Four out of nowhere. A huge Steamboat chant breaks out and Steamboat is tapping, but we're about four and a half years from that meaning anything in America.

Steamboat has been in the hold for about two minutes now but Flair gets caught grabbing the ropes and Young breaks the hold. Steamboat fires off even more chops but Flair hits a cross body to put them both on the outside. A suplex back in gets a few two counts for the champ. Belly to back gets two and Steamboat grabs a rollup for two. They do the backslide counter into the bridge but Steamboat stops in the middle with the butterfly suplex for two.

Flair keeps trying to come back and control but a clothesline and a chop takes him down again. This is incredibly fast paced. Top rope chop puts Flair down and the cross body hits but Young goes down as well. Flair gets a cradle with tights for no cover. Steamboat misses another cross body and Flair tries the Figure Four but Steamboat rolls him up for the pin as Teddy Long runs in to count the fall and give Steamboat his only world title.

Rating: A+. I've heard about how great these Flair vs. Steamboat matches are and this is my favorite of them. They did not stop for over twenty minutes and the result is a classic war where Steamboat outsmarted Flair at the end in a clean finish. Those are some of the loudest chops you'll ever hear and it's a great match as a result. Excellent stuff.

Steamboat wants his family out here and holds his son...who immediately reaches back for his mom.

Steamboat says he can't believe it and the other faces shower him in champagne. Ever the pro, Steamboat praises Flair and says he's got the first shot.

Overall Rating: B-. Well you have a classic main event and the rest of the card isn't that bad on top of it. Nothing is really all that bad but other than the main event, nothing is going to stand out. That's the point of a masterpiece though and I can't call it anything other than that. Pretty good show but check out the main event for sure as it's a great match between two masters.