

What Killed WCW (WCW Clue)

Part 2

Part

1:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2012/01/10/what-killed-wcw-wcw-clue-part-1/>

Now we get to the first of the big guns and something that I've considered a possible suspect in the past: the departure of the Radicalz. You have to remember that WCW had started their big run in 1996 on the idea of taking talent from the WWF. Now this had already happened in the form of Big Show a year prior and Chris Jericho about 4 months before, but this was a large group of people going at the same time. Now let's take a look at what this meant both individually and then collectively.

We'll start with the biggest of the four in Chris Benoit. Whether it was for the sake of trying to get him to stay or not, he had been given the WCW World Title just before he left. In other words, whomever was the next champion had no claim to the title. Why should I buy him as the best when the guy that was champion never lost it at all? The same thing happened to Lex Luger back in 1991, which I assure you we'll get to later on.

Second is Eddie Guerrero. Now he was never nearly as big as Benoit was back in WCW but he was certainly worth something. He gave solid Cruiserweight Title matches and had arguably the best match in WCW's history with Rey Mysterio at Halloween Havoc 1997. Eddie was the best of all of the Hispanic wrestlers there and it gave them a door into Latin America, along with guys like Juvy and Mysterio.

Saturn was a rising star in WCW, having won some tag titles in 99 and having a few runs as TV Champion as well. His

popularity was growing, so WCW made him wear a dress and hook back up with Raven. Saturn kept getting cheered so he and Benoit were shoved down in favor of guys like the Jersey Triad and the reformed Harlem Heat. Oh and the Steiners. We don't want to forget them.

Malenko is probably the weakest of the whole team, but he was certainly good for some solid mat work as well as being one of the members of the Horsemen (there's a long thing that could be written on how badly that group was screwed up past about 1995 but that's another story). Anyway, he wasn't great but he was another loss.

So we combine all these guys into one unit that bailed on WCW in January of 2000 and showed up on Raw before February hit. Now what does this mean? First and foremost, those are four guys worth of at least watchable matches that you have to replace. At the end of the day, it's a wrestling program. You have guys like Benoit and Malenko and Guerrero and Saturn out there having long matches on these shows and taking up a lot of the PPV time. Let's say there are three matches between the four of them at 12 minutes apiece. Counting promos and entrances, you're losing almost an hour or 1/3 of a PPV. That's a lot of time to fill.

When guys like them leave, you have to fill their spots. For fun, let's take a look at the three PPVs before they left and the three after and compare the matches in the spots on the cards with the Radicalz and the ones without them. The three beforehand were Mayhem 1999, Starrcade 1999 and Souled Out 1999. The three after they left were SuperBrawl 2000, Uncensored 2000 and Spring Stampede 2000.

At Mayhem, the matches involving the Radicalz were an eleven minute elimination tag third on the card and the main event for the world title which ran 18 minutes. Starrcade: fourth on the card was an 8 man tag lasting 5 minutes and the next to last was a ladder match for the US Title running 10 minutes.

Souled Out was a two and a half minute opener, a ten minute hardcore match on sixth and a fifteen minute main event for the world title. On average, their matches ran about 24 minutes per show.

By comparison to the three shows after they were gone in the same spots on the cards: at SuperBrawl the third match had 3 Count and Norman Smiley lasting four minutes and the main event had Sid Vicious, Scott Hall and Jeff Jarrett running about 8 minutes. Uncensored saw Brian Knobbs vs. 3 Count for the Hardcore Title taking up 7 minutes and the next to last match was Sid vs. Jarrett running seven and a half. Spring Stampede was another handicap with Flair/Luger vs. the Mamalukes/Harris Brothers running 6 minutes, Sting vs. Booker for six and a half and Jarrett vs. Page for 15 minutes. The averages for these matches: 18 minutes per show.

That may not mean much, but it means the matches were shorter on average and instead of guys like Benoit and Saturn, you're getting 3 Count and Brian Knobbs. Instead of Eddie Guerrero and Dean Malenko, you're getting Sid and Jeff Jarrett. Some of those may sound interesting, but which matches do you think are going to be train wrecks and which do you think are going to be good technical matches with good intensity?

In other words, the Radicalz leaving left a big hole in the card and instead of replacing them with younger wrestlers, the answer was more old guys, which was a major criticism of WCW at the time. The problem with the Radicalz leaving was that the company lost a lot of their young talent that was able to put on long matches and eat up PPV time. After they left, you get things like handicap matches and boy bands. Combining that with the further damage to the world title and it's pretty easy to add the Radicalz leaving to the list of suspects as to what killed WCW.

In reverse chronological order:

1. David Arquette Wins World Title – May 7, 2000

2. The Radicalz Jump Ship – January 17, 2000

Just before then in the fall of 1999, Smackdown debuted as a regular show for the WWF. Due to this, Vince Russo and Ed Ferrara, the writers for WWF, left and went over to WCW. Since WCW was the only other game in town, both guys headed down south (because WCW is a southern company don't you know) and decided that it wasn't Foley and Taker and Rock and Austin and the young guys that had made WWF the dominant force in the last 18 months. It was all about the WRITERS, not the wrestlers.

Russo's first major show as head writer was at Halloween Havoc 1999 and things almost immediately went downhill. To begin with, on the first show we had a "shoot" where Hogan laid down for Sting to pin him. No reasoning was ever given for this, but hey, it's a shoot so it's good right? Also we had Goldberg vs. Sting in the last match of the night because the match that you could have seen as the main event of Starrcade a mile away should be thrown onto the end of the PPV unannounced and it should last 3 minutes right?

You had ludicrous gimmicks (That 70s Guy, Screaming Norman, Oklahoma etc), more swearing, more semi-clothed women, a lot more people talking about how things were behind the scenes, and a lot more title changes. Here are a few more numbers for you stats people. We'll take a look at how many times the WCW World Title changed hands in the years from 97-99 and then the year 2000.

In 1997, the world title changed hands 3 times, in 98 it changed hands 6 times, in 99 13 times, and then in Russo's first year: 24 times, or once about every 2 weeks. The world title changed hands or was vacated seven times in January alone. In 2000, the title was vacated or stripped six times. Like we talked about before, why should I buy whomever the next champion is if they didn't win the title? Also during this stretch, Arquette and Vince Russo himself were world

champions. While TV ratings went up, the limited integrity that WCW had left as well as the general idea of what wrestling still was were thrown away for the sake of shock value and soap opera style television.

You'll often hear that the difference between WWF and WCW under Russo was that there was a filter in the form of Vince McMahon. The difference is that at the end of the day, the big matches of the WWF Pay Per Views were usually awesome. You were getting Austin vs. Foley and HHH vs. Rock and Rock vs. Austin and Undertaker vs. Foley and Foley vs. Rock and there was some great wrestling going on. Yes it was all over the top and there were a lot of wild brawls, but what mattered was who got the 1-2-3.

In short, the WWF World Title was treated as something special. Instead of these matches happening on Raw, they happened on PPV. Remember those 24 world title changes in a year? Of those 24, 7 took place on PPV. The world title changed hands or was vacated on Nitro or Thunder SEVENTEEN TIMES IN A YEAR. By comparison, over in the WWF in the year 2000, the title changed hands 5 times, once on TV. Since Monday Night Raw debuted, the WWE Championship has changed hands 19 times IN TOTAL on something other than PPV, one of which was at a house show and one of which was it being vacated due to injury and being announced on WWE.com.

In short, Russo's regime made the WCW World Title look a lot more worthless than it ever had before. With stuff ranging from the title being vacated to everything happening for free on TV instead of PPV, to constantly vacating the title, to David Arquette as champion, to Vince Russo as champion, why in the world would I want to see a WCW World Title match? The problem was that no one did want to.

The world title was probably the biggest thing he killed, but you also have to factor in things like the idiotic angles (pinata on a poll, That 70s Guy/The Fat Chick Thriller, Duggan

turns Canadian, the Graveyard match (exactly what it sounds like), to Scott Steiner's main event push, to Jeff Jarrett's main event push and more stuff I've probably blocked out of my memory. He took a wrestling company and turned it into whatever WCW was from late 99 to the year 2000, so we'll have to add him to the list. The minute he was hired, things were put on a very slippery slope and they never recovered.

In reverse chronological order:

1. David Arquette Wins World Title – May 7, 2000
2. The Radicalz Jump Ship – January 17, 2000
3. Vince Russo Hired – October 5, 1999

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