

# Clash of the Champions Count-Up – #4: Horsemen Vs. Midnight Express. I'm In.

## Clash of the Champions 4: Seasons Beatings

Date: December 7, 1988

Location: UTC Arena, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Attendance: 8,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Bob Caudle

This is the set-up show for Starrcade 88 which kind of sucked but oh well. That show was pretty good and since this is the best period for the NWA, this should be good. The main event is the Midnight Express vs. Flair/Windham, both of whom are Horsemen. This should be good based on the card, but I've been wrong before. Let's get to it.

We open with a video talking about the previous battles that have led us here. Not much to say really.

## US Tag Titles: Fantastics vs. Eddie Gilbert/Ron Simmons

This is a tournament final since the Midnight Express won the world titles and had to vacate these. Jason Hervey of course introduces everything since he's the biggest celebrity EVER. Gilbert and Simmons had lost in the semis, but the team that beat them, the Shepherders, had signed with WWF where they became the Bushwackers. The Fantastics are absolutely awesome so this should be decent.

They really put this over as a huge match which is the best thing they can do. Sometimes these shows would go up against major WWF shows, such as Summerslam or Mania, although this isn't the case here. Both teams are faces here. Simmons and Fulton (Bobby Fulton and Tommy Rodgers) start us off. Simmons uses a bunch of basic power stuff which makes sense since

that's his basic stuff.

I really hate Jason Hervey. He's here every time so we just have to talk about him every time. The Fantastics speed things up and Simmons is in trouble because of it. Gilbert comes in. He's more famous as a booker, originally being the booker for Eastern Championship Wrestling. His protégé and eventual replacement is more famous: Paul Heyman.

Gilbert and Fulton shake hands and get booed out of the building. That's rather humorous. Top rope elbow misses Simmons and he hits a football tackle. That's always awesome and works very well as there's little that would hurt more than just barreling through someone like that. We hit the ten minute mark and it's pretty much even. Gilbert is underrated in the ring.

We stick with the back and forth for awhile until the Fantastics finally wake up a bit and realize they're a real team, taking over almost completely. Rodgers works on the arm of Simmons as we look for a hot tag. Ok there's the tag and it's cold at best. I don't think there was enough done to call a tag hot at this point so that might have something to do with it.

This is a very long match that is going back and forth. We're well over fifteen minutes at this point and I've seen no indication that we're slowing down at all. Yeah we just hit 20. Simmons gets a huge powerslam off the top on Fulton to take over. Gilbert has a bad left shoulder and it gets injured again in the match so he has one good arm here. Since they're an 80s tag team, the Fantastics jump on it like Elvis on a side of bacon.

The arm is now the focus of the match as we have some storytelling going on, making me smile. It sounds like the fans are chanting boring but it's not clear. That's not something you hear that often at an NWA show, at least not in

the 80s. You don't hear it now either but that's because no one goes to the NWA shows anymore. We have five minutes to go here.

That arm is taking a BEATING. It's all arm locks and shots to it. He finally gets out of it and rams Rodgers into the buckle but Fulton stops him as we hit two minutes to go. I think we skipped over three minutes to go but whatever. Gilbert gets the Hot Shot out of nowhere to get us to even but he won't tag with less than a minute to go. He slams into the post again and gets rolled up for the Fantastics to win the titles in a LONG match.

**Rating:** B-. This is a great example of avoiding the long equals good trap. This match is well over twenty five minutes long and it's pretty good but by no means great. There was some decent stuff in there but the first 15 minutes could be chopped off and everything would be about the same here. At times there just isn't a need to go long, but it doesn't really hurt anything here. It's ok I guess though.

Luger is the guest host tonight. Does he get the Bella Babies here? He would get Flair at Starrcade soon. Tony is with him and has an awesome mustache.

### Italian Stallion vs. Steve Williams

That would be Dr. Death, as in the guy that made Austin change his name. This guys is awesome if he does things right. He's also in the Varsity Club which was a great midcard heel faction. Rotunda, the leader of the group, laughs at the idea that Rick Steiner would get the TV Title from him at Starrcade. The Stallion isn't well known at all but his trainees are: The Hardy Boys.

Stallion weighs 250 here and allegedly is a heavyweight. Williams is the heel here due to the guys he hangs out with. Starrcade was on a Monday this year. That's odd but so was Mania 2 so maybe they have something going for them. Wrestling

on Mondays. What a weird idea. JR keeps calling him Doc which makes me think of the graphics mod. That's the only thing about Williams that makes me think of Doc.

I'm really not sure why this is getting time. On paper this should be a squash match as Williams is the newest piece of a heel stable against a guy that means nothing. Stallion stays on the floor forever and isn't counted out for no apparent reason. Williams hits a delayed vertical and kills the comeback from Stallion in about 4 seconds. Now we get a top wristlock. This is going too long as we're already at ten minutes.

Williams just plows through Stallion and then hits a dropkick that isn't bad. Williams isn't a guy that did a lot in America but he's more or less a god in Japan. Sullivan interferes on the floor for no apparent reason as this has been domination. Stallion gets some punches and gets cheered. He then gets knocked down and we hit FIFTEEN MINUTES in this. Top rope splash misses from Williams and the comeback is happening again. A crossbody is caught into the Oklahoma Stampede (running powerslam) to end this.

**Rating:** D. This went WAY too long. You could literally cut 80% of this match off and it does the same thing. This actually went over fifteen minutes and Stallion was on offense for all of 1 total minute. We get it: Williams is awesome. You don't have to make us watch him beat up a no name guy for a quarter of an hour to prove it.

Oh look: we get to interview JASON HERVEY. He's going to be at Starrcade. He's the older brother from the Wonder Years. That's why he's on all these shows. Dang he's annoying.

Magnum TA is here and has the Junkyard Dog with him. Dog is going to help in the next match if the heels get out of hand or something.

We see a clip of the Road Warriors turning on Dusty and trying

to blind him.

We run down the card for Starrcade 88. Decent sounding show I guess.

### Ivan Koloff vs. Paul Jones

Jones was a heel manager for a long time. It's billed as a handicap match because Koloff has to have an arm behind his back. Koloff used to work for Jones but now hates him of course. What a coincidence. This is rather boring. Jones used to be a wrestler so he's not terrible but he's getting destroyed which makes this rather pointless. Jones finally takes over and Koloff's arm is now hurt.

This is very slow paced and about as limited as possible from a moveset perspective since Koloff can only punch and Jones can only punch and stomp. Jones brings in a foreign object but Koloff gets it and pops Jones with it to win. The referee has no issue with this apparently. The Russian Assassins run down to beat up Koloff afterwards. Cue JYD for the save. This would be a tag match at Starrcade.

**Rating:** D. Again the issue here is that there wasn't much you could really do. It was just punching and kicking and while that's ok for a little bit, you need more to make a match. Also, they needed to take a page from Heenan on how to run a manager match. It isn't supposed to go nearly 9 minutes for one thing. That's way too much again, so it fits with the show so far.

Luger talks about what's going on here. He's the total good guy face here and it's rather annoying.

Sting comes down and is either insane or high as a kite. He does the Flair running around all over the ring even though the interview was on the floor.

### Six Man Titles: Dusty Rhodes vs. Animal

Dusty and the Road Warriors were the 6 man champions but the guys with painted faces turned heel and put their spike in Dusty's eye. The winner gets to pick who teams with them for the titles. This is also no DQ. And Dusty isn't here. We throw it to Rick Steiner and Magnum TA. Rick hears voices from a guy named Alex. I don't think this went anywhere. Apparently Alex is the face drawn on his hand. Remember: WE WRESTLE IN THE NWA!

Dusty is here after a commercial with his eye patched. I'm guessing the Sizzler was closing and he wanted another three plates or so. Rhodes trying to run is sad. Big elbow misses and Animal is kind of controlling. They're moving quickly but it's a mess to put it mildly. Dusty works the knee and hooks the figure four but throws the referee out. Animal's manager, Paul Ellering, hits Dusty in the eye to take over. Hawk runs in and beats up Dusty. Sting runs in and beats up Hawk. Dusty gets a chair and beats the heck out of Animal....for a DQ....in a no DQ match. Sure why not.

**Rating:** C+. This was the most overbooked 3 minute match this side of the Attitude Era. However, it was never boring which is a nice perk for tonight. Sting and Dusty would beat them at Starrcade if that matters. The ending here is completely idiotic which is why it's a lower rating. The Road Warriors would pick Tenryu as their partner and then a month later the belts would be retired. Fun but insane.

Apparently Starrcade is on Monday because Sunday was Christmas Day. That makes sense then.

### Ric Flair/Barry Windham vs. Midnight Express

Yeah this works. It's Eaton and Lane this time around so this should be GREAT. Cornette is at his absolute most evil at this point and it's great. Flair and Windham have the world and US Titles here. I think you can guess who has which. Dillon and Cornette have a staredown, which is a DREAM match for most

members of the IWC. Flair and Eaton start us off. This works also.

They really like calling him Slick Ric here. Flair of course gets beaten up to start, which is very standard fare for him. Lane comes in and does a weird little dance. His martial arts and karate were always cool. Windham takes over and is described as looking like an eagle coming off the top. What kind of eagle wears a glove, tights and boots? I think the Express are faces here actually, which feels wrong even to type. Eaton is looking awesome here.

Lane hooks a figure four as does Eaton for a double figure four. Yeah they're definitely faces. Then again they're against the Horsemen so how could they not be the popular ones? As the heels take over, Paul E. Dangerously takes is here with comments. He has the original Midnight Express, Randy Rose and Dennis Condrey, to fight the current and more famous Express.

This is pretty back and forth here and is pretty good so far. Windham hits a nice powerslam as the Horsemen take over again. Eaton just beats up Flair and it looks great. Hot tag to Lane as Windham comes in too and it's on again. Eaton hits the Alabama Jam but Dillon tries to interfere. Cornette BLASTS him with the tennis racket but Flair gets a shot to Eaton with a shoe and the more or less dead Windham gets the pin.

**Rating:** B. Very physical match here with both teams looking completely solid the whole way through. The Express was taking it to the Horsemen here which isn't something you would have expected. Very entertaining match and it fits with the name of the Clash of the Champions, even though the Express had recently lost the tag belts to the Road Warriors. Solid match and a good main event.

Cornette goes on a rant of course, talking about how great the Express is and how they're better than the Horsemen and only

Dillon cost them the match. He goes off about the other Midnight Express. To be able to go on such long winded speeches like he does and not stumble over everything really is impressive.

We recap the night and Luger says he's ready to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** C. The show is definitely not bad, but there are matches that just need to have less time. You have a total of five matches here and while they're all at least watchable, so much more could have been put into this show. I mean did we really need 45 minutes for the first two matches? They weren't bad, but they weren't particularly good. The late 80s NWA is a very acquired taste and this wasn't a particularly great show. It's not bad though, although nothing worth tracking down.

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