

Clash of the Champions Count-Up – #34: On To The Year Of Sting

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Date: January 21, 1997

Location: Wisconsin Center Arena, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Attendance: 6,800

Commentators: Tony Schiavone, Dusty Rhodes, Bobby Heenan

This is another of the prime time specials from WCW and one of the last ones. The NWO is in full control here and this show means nothing for the most part as everything was about Nitro. Also we were more or less in a deep freeze because everything was building to Sting vs. Hogan which was in about 11 months. This is also the go home show for Souled Out. Let's get to it.

After some yapping we're ready to start.

Cruiserweight Title: Dean Malenko vs. Ultimo Dragon

Dragon is champion coming in here and Tenay is here for the sake of knowledge. Malenko has lost two in a row coming into this including one the previous night and the opener at Starrcade. The idiot that is known as Tony Schiavone keeps calling him Ultimate Dragon. They hit the mat and Dragon uses a bunch of spin moves to get out. They stay on the mat and we take a break.

The NWO now has its own hotline.

Back with them slugging it out. Dragon apparently lost the J-Crown at the January 4th show at the Tokyo Dome to Jushin Thunder Liger. This is a more hard hitting match than you're used to with these two. Long vertical suplex gets two and it's off to a head scissors on the mat. Dragon hammers away with

kicks and Dean heads to the floor for a breather.

Half crab by Malenko and here comes Dean. Off to another leg lock and out to the floor. All Malenko here as he hooks on the figure four. Actually he doesn't as Dragon blocks it for a bit. They speed things up a bit and it's a spin wheel kick from Dragon to take Dean down. Dean grabs a superplex to take Dragon down and we speed it up even more. Powerbomb by Dean is reversed into a rana but we counter stuff even more.

Out to the floor and Dean is whipped into the railing. Asai Moonsault takes Dean down and the fans are into this to say the least. Back in and a top rope moonsault gets two for Dragon. Now all the fans turn and look at something else as Dragon gets a twisting rana off the top. Tiger suplex is reversed into a Cloverleaf attempt but that gets reversed. Another powerbomb is reversed into a butterfly powerbomb and a third Cloverleaf attempt. Down goes Onoo and the Cloverleaf ends this.

Rating: B+. Great stuff here as they were incredibly crisp with both guys working incredibly hard. The cruiserweight division was absolutely incredible at this point and Dean was at his absolute peak in 1997. Excellent match here with very little missing from it at all and an incredible opener. Bets on anything being good compared to this?

Mike Enos vs. Scotty Riggs

Neither gets an intro so what do you expect here? This is a very basic power vs. speed match and Riggs is here to look good before his match with Bagwell at the PPV. Both guys are incredibly generic and I see absolutely no reason for this to be here. A running forearm ends this for Riggs in about two minutes. Totally pointless match that gets no rating. Riggs says he's the heart and soul of WCW. I can't make this stuff up.

Here are the Horsemen, in this case Benoit and Anderson with

some women. Oh and Mongo is there too. The fans of course want Flair. Benoit talks about how awesome he is and there's a HUGE Benoit chant. Anderson says finish Sullivan tonight. Mongo (huge booing for the Bear here in Packer town). Debra says nothing of note at all.

Chavo Guerrero Jr/Chris Jericho/Super Calo vs. Konnan/La Parka/Mr. JL

Tenay and the other commentators say the Horsemen are having issues because Flair isn't here. La Parka is replacing Psicosis who is injured and Jericho is replacing Juventud Guerrera who just no showed. This is under lucha rules, meaning if you hit the floor another member of your team can come in just like a tag. Chavo vs. JL to start with Jerry Lynn (what the JL stands for) destroying him.

Off to Konnan and Calo with Konnan continuing his team's dominance. Calo was a guy I never liked or got the appeal of for the most part. We get some nice speed moves from those two with Calo looking kind of awesome actually. Off to Jericho and La Parka for awhile now and Parka is a bit nuts. Parka does a Spinarooni of all things but can't keep Jericho down. Konnan comes in and it's a Doomsday Device with La Parka throwing out a Whisper in the Wind instead of a clothesline. That was kind of awesome.

Konnan takes Jericho down and it's off to Chavo. They are MOVING out there. Jericho vs. JL at the moment with Jericho taking over. Konnan comes in as does Chavo so there are four in the ring at once. Out to the floor and JL dives on Jericho. Chavo dives on JL and La Parka dives in general. Calo with a slingshot hilo to La Parka and in the ring JL gets a rana on Jericho for two. Jericho wants a superplex but settles for a super rana for the pin. Jericho looked like a star here.

Rating: B. Fun match here that was nothing but dives and speed. This is something you got in WCW that was great: they

mixed up the styles every match almost. We've had a technical match, power vs. speed and now lucha libre. Not bad for 40 minutes. Jericho looked awesome here and of course would go on to mediocrity in WCW before becoming a legend in WWE.

Renegade/Joe Gomez vs. Harlem Heat

Guess what we've got here. Gomez is a guy that is just kind of around while Renegade is the WCW version of Ultimate Warrior who hasn't meant anything in about 18 months. Booker beats on Gomez for a bit and then Stevie and Sherri get to do the same. Axe kick to Gomez but Renegade comes in to get what passes for a hot tag. Harlem Heat destroys him and the Heat Seeker (Doomsday Device with a missile dropkick) ends him quickly. Just a squash.

Masahiro Chono vs. Alex Wright

Chono is NWO. He jumps Wright immediately but Wright charges back at him. Wright backflips off the top and gets an enziguri. Not in the same move mind you. He's a dancer, not Spider-Morrison. The fans don't really like either guy here. Wright can move and gets a leg lariat for about 9 but Nick Patrick won't count with any speed at all.

Chono takes over again and throws Wright over the top which should be a DQ but isn't here because Patrick doesn't want to count. Sunset flip by Wright but the shoulder of Patrick hurts. Belly to back gets no cover and then Wright misses a cross body. Mafia Kick ends Wright pretty easily and the shoulder is fine of course.

Rating: D+. Just a quick match here with the idea being that it was a preview of what the PPV is going to be like. The match itself means nothing of course but it wasn't really supposed to. Wright again continues to mean nothing at all but being a midcard jobber to the stars. Weak match but it got the point across.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Scott Norton

Patrick is the referee again. Eddie is US Champion here but doesn't have the physical belt as Syxx stole it. Norton chops away and uses basic power to take over. Eddie goes after the knee and gets Norton off his feet like a smart man. He chops away which just makes Norton mad. Norton is NWO if that clears anything up. Here comes the power game again as I can remember the majority of this show from watching it when it aired.

Norton does something I haven't seen before as he sets him for a suplex and just drops him without moving at all. No cover though as Norton is wanting to show off here. Big powerbomb puts Guerrero down again but a clothesline misses Guerrero and down goes Patrick. DDP, currently the fastest rising star in forever comes through the crowd and drops Norton with the Diamond Cutter and gets a huge pop. Frog Splash makes Patrick count the three with a hilarious look on his face.

Rating: D+. Well they did a great job here of making it seem possible that WCW had a chance on Saturday at the PPV. Not much of a match but it wasn't supposed to be. Eddie, like Jericho, looked great here but that wouldn't matter as we needed guys like Buff Bagwell to get pushes and the TV time.

Giant talks about Hogan. He's in the dark here almost and talks about how Hogan paid Giant to be on the sidelines and keep him from taking out Hogan because no one can stop the Giant. He strikes a match and says that Hogan is like this match. It gave light, it gave some warmth, but eventually it gets blown out. At Souled Out, Hogan is blown out. I've always liked this promo and it's still pretty awesome today.

Chris Benoit vs. Kevin Sullivan

Woman is here with Chris and looks pretty good here. This is falls count anywhere again. Kevin wants to start it on the floor and Benoit says let's do it. They had another of these at the Great American Bash the previous year and it was

totally awesome. They're in the crowd almost immediately and are in the back quickly.

The first room is the men's room and Benoit knocks a towel dispenser off the way with his head. Benoit throws a trashcan that hits Hart and the referee. This is almost move for move the same match as their Great American Bash match. Sullivan gets a clothesline for two as we're still in the men's room. Now we're talking about an Andy Griffith movie.

Back into the arena and Benoit is kicked down the steps. Seriously, this is the SAME MATCH. Back in the ring and Benoit is in the Tree of Woe for the running knee. Double stomp to Benoit gets two. Woman comes in and cracks Sullivan with a wooden chair to end Sullivan and give Benoit the win. Well at least the ending was different I suppose. Also they didn't swerve us.

Rating: B-. Well yes it's a good match but legitimately over half of the spots are identical to the one at the Bash. Also the Bash's ending was better and it went on longer. It also helps that we got to see it for the first time back then. Sometimes you need to see a semi-shoot like this though as it makes things more interesting, as it did here.

Benoit hits him with a chair again post match.

Amazing French Canadians vs. Steiner Brothers

The French Canadians are the Quebecers. Colonel Parker is with them in a French Canadian soldier outfit I guess. They try the Canadian national anthem but get cut off by Steinerized. The Outsiders injured Scott in a form of attempted vehicular manslaughter and this is his return. The Outsiders pop up on the screen to laugh at them with Nash implying he'll come out here.

Scott has a new look here which would eventually be what he wore as a heel. The Steiners clean house to start and hit top

rope clotheslines almost at the same time. We take a break and come back with Rick in some trouble. The Canadians beat him down and try their Cannonball move but Rick gets out of the way just in time. The Canadians seem to not tag at all. Here's Scotty who destroys them both on his own. A French flag shot fails and the elevated DDT ends Oulette with ease.

Rating: C-. Without the commercial we saw about 3 minutes here so why not rate it. Nothing worth note at all as it was again really just a squash to set up the Steiners against the Outsiders at the PPV. Scott would be about to get pushed to the moon as a solo guy and get a major push. Anyway, this was domination.

Scott Hall vs. Lex Luger

Main event time here and Hall has a small army with him. Luger has the kind of rare black boots on. Luger does the pec dance and gets a toothpick in his face for his troubles. All power by Luger to start and he no sells the fallaway slam. A middle rope bulldog puts Luger down for two though and Scott works on the arm. Chokeslam puts Luger down but he's up quickly.

Some fan shouts about oozing machismo which makes me smile a bit. He hits the floor and the numbers (I only see the number Syxx but whatever) catch up with him so that Hall can take over. Syxx interferes again with Nash distracting the referee. The clothesline from Syxx gets two. Now the fallaway slam works a bit better, getting two this time.

Off to the abdominal stretch as Luger is in trouble. Luger gets out of it after about a minute but misses an elbow and here comes Hall again. Luger comes back again and hits a slingshot dropkick of all things and lets loose his rather limited offense. Atomic drops and punches and clotheslines OH MY! No sign for the Rack yet but there's one after a powerslam. Nash breaks it up but Luger fights both of them off. Where is WCW? Is there a good Old Maid game going on in

the back? Syxx finally gets a shot in and it's a DQ.

Rating: C. Just a main event match here with an unsurprising finish. At least they gave them some time here and we got a decent match out of it. Luger probably should have gone over but I guess they wanted the Outsiders looking as strong as possible going into the PPV. Not bad, but just kind of there for a TV main event.

The Steiners come out for the save from the beatdown.

Overall Rating: B-. Pretty good show here from a weaker period for WCW. There was some good stuff here but the bad is hard to overlook. The opener is great of course but there wasn't much really good after that. The good outweighs the bad though and they build up Souled Out pretty well so I can live with this. Not bad but nothing great either.

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