

Wrestlemania Count-Up – #1: This Started It All? Really?

For the next 27 days I'll be posting a review a day on every single Wrestlemania. I've been going back and rewatching every show, many of which I haven't seen in years. Thrown in are ratings for each match on a traditional school grading school and my recommendation for the whole show.

If you don't like my take on a match or a show, call me out on it. The point of this is to get debate going, so say whatever you think of me. In case you've never seen or don't own any of these shows, I'm including 2-3 matches per show so there's definitely going to be something that can be debated.

Starting today, Monday, I'll be posting one a day until the day before WM 28 and after WM 28 I'll post my review of that to complete the set. They'll be going on chronological order as well, so off we go to 1985.

Please keep in mind these are the very first reviews I ever did so the quality may not be that good.

Also for something new this year, I'll be adding an individual question about each show to try to drive some extra discussion.

Wrestlemania 1

Date: March 31, 1985

Location: Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York

Attendance: 19,121

Commentators: Gorilla Monsoon, Jesse Ventura

National Anthem: Gene Okerlund

And so it begins. Wrestlemania is here. In what was perhaps the greatest cross promotional strategy of all time, the WWF teamed up with MTV to promote the biggest wrestling show of

all time in what was called the Rock N Wrestling Connection. This idea was nothing short of genius and it truly got the war going with the NWA. Spearheaded by the feud between Hulk Hogan and Roddy Piper, this show was all about fanfare. While little happened as far as historical significance, this show goes down in history as being great simply because of what it meant in history. Never before had mainstream celebrities been mixed with wrestling on such a vast scale. Obviously the results were great and Wrestlemania was born.

Tito Santana vs. The Executioner

Anyway, let's get going with the show. To begin with, in the first match in the history of Wrestlemania, we see Tito Santana vs. The Executioner, portrayed by Buddy "Blow Away" Rose. Before the match we get a pre-recorded interview (which I believe all of them are tonight) from the Executioner saying that he's going after Santana's leg which was already injured. The match is pretty much what you would expect for an 80s WWF match. Very standard stuff that's by no means bad, but not really great either. Tito is at his best here against a random heel, and he wins in standard fashion with a forearm and the figure four.

Rating: C. Considering it's the first ever match at the biggest show that would ever exist, I didn't know what to expect. It's certainly not bad, but doesn't really set a good first foot forward for Wrestlemania if that makes sense. This is more famous for simply being the first match in the history of the biggest wrestling series ever, but it wasn't anything special at all.

King Kong Bundy vs. Special Delivery Jones

The next match is I believe still the shortest in Wrestlemania history as King Kong Bundy faces Special Delivery Jones. More prerecorded comments with Bundy saying he's mad about something or other. In less than 25 seconds, Bundy hits a pair

of splashes to pin Jones. This match was the epitome of a squash match. No rating of course.

"Maniac" Matt Borne says this is his chance to beat one of the best wrestlers in the world. Steamboat is too nice of a guy which will be his downfall.

Steamboat says this is a big test for him. Wow he must have a bad memory if this is his biggest challenge.

Matt Borne vs. Ricky Steamboat

Now we get onto a solid match with the always dependable Ricky Steamboat vs. Matt Borne, who is far more famous as heel Doink. Jesse is ROCKING that pink tuxedo. Not a lot of people can get away with that big Jesse is making it work for me. What was up with the five bells after everyone's name? Steamboat is in the basic white tights which is odd to see indeed.

Feeling out process to start. Why can't it ever be a feeling up process? Steamboat chops away and we get a chinlock seconds in. That's not something you see everyday. I miss hearing Jesse call Gorilla Gino. A long atomic drop has Borne in trouble but he gets one of his own to avoid us hitting squash territory.

Ok perhaps you should forget the lack of a squash here as it's almost all Steamboat here. At least the right guy is doing the squashing. Borne gets a suplex for two as even Gorilla says this isn't going to work. He throws left handed punches and Gorilla concludes that he is in fact left handed.

We're getting a lot of suplexes in this. Swinging neckbreaker by the Dragon gets no cover. A knee drop gets two. Steamboat speeds things up all of a sudden and there's the flying cross body and I think you know what that means as this is 1985. Yep it's over.

Rating: C-. Glorified squash match here with nothing special happening at all for the most part. Steamboat is always fun to see and this was no exception here. He would get a bit higher on the card in coming years before getting his lone world title in 1989. Borne would bounce around various companies before dancing with bear cubs in WCW and becoming a clown in WWF. Nice way to see different career paths.

David Sammartino vs. Brutus Beefcake

Now we go on to what was little more than a reason to have the managers brawl at ringside, we have David Sammartino against Brutus Beefcake. Davide is accompanied by his father and Johnny Valiant for Beefcake. Big stall to start which is filled in by Gorilla talking about how great the crowd is, and for the time it really was. Finally we get going and Jesse cracks me up by saying that a loss for either man here could set their careers back 2 years.

That's nothing but priceless. Anyway, we have a nice little wrestling sequence to start with Beefcake stalling again after sliding to the floor. We're almost 5 minutes in and nothing at all of interest has happened yet. They're trying to do a technical match and it's just failure. I'm quite bored as I watch this match and it's not getting any better.

I feel like I'm watching a house show match, but not the good kind. I feel like I'm watching a house show match that makes jobbers look good. Even the commentators sound bored here, yet for some reason the crowd is into this. FINALLY we get the managers involved and it's a huge brawl for the double DQ.

Rating: D-. I was so bored I almost fell asleep. Absolutely nothing at all of note and it was just done to get Bruno on the show. David had a lot to live up to and for the most part he never came close which is the case for the vast majority of the kids of major stars. If nothing else look at David Flair. This was a very bad match though as Beefcake was the top guy

in the ring which sums up things rather well.

JYD says he'll win.

Valentine says he'll win.

IC Title: Junkyard Dog vs. Greg Valentine

No intro for Valentine as he's just in the ring. That was far more common back then. It's hard to imagine that the title is less than six years old at this point. Another One Bites The Dust by Queen brings Dog to the ring. I prefer Grab Them Cakes but that's just me.

Valentine was awesome at this point and Gorilla says he might be the best IC Champion of all time at this point and I can't really put up that much of an argument against that. He would lose the title to Santana soon after this who would lose it to Savage before Mania II. Dog is more or less the challenger of the month at this point and was very popular as well. Why he was popular is beyond me as he tends to be annoying but what do I know?

Naturally the Dog dominates to start with punches and headbutts. Valentine misses a punch and Dog gets on all fours with the headbutts. That's about the biggest offensive move he's going to have so I wouldn't expect much more than that from him. We hear about Jimmy Hart's stable which has Jim Neidhart but no Bret. It's so weird to hear about Neidhart being a singles guy.

Valentine goes for the leg. He used the Figure Four as his finisher at this point which apparently he has patented. Did he file for the paperwork for it? Does he get royalties whenever Flair uses it? Dang no wonder he's broke. Jesse says Valentine has no bones about this. I love bad puns.

Figure Four is kicked off which is the traditional counter of course. They slug it out and surprisingly enough Dog loses. Ok

never mind he doesn't but he was for a few seconds there. Jesse says a Dog headbutt would drop an oak tree. No see you make the tree watch one of his matches and it'll fall asleep. That is how you drop an oak tree if JYD has to be involved.

Dog goes after Jimmy but Valentine accidentally pops his own manager. Here comes the Dog with his variety pack of punches and headbutts. Valentine cheats to get the pin with his feet on the ropes and apparently gets away with it. Tito runs out to tell the referee what happened so the match is restarted. Why can't more people do that if they can get away with it? Valentine takes a walk anyway just because he can I guess. No title change thank goodness.

Rating: D+. Pretty boring match here with Valentine dominating for the most part. It went by rather fast though which helped a good bit. I can't stand the Dog but Valentine is pretty good. This of course set up more of Valentine vs. Santana which helps a lot as at least we got a good feud and eventual title change out of it in a solid cage match between them.

On a side note, the old IC Title looks far better than the one they would replace it with. It's kind of like the NWA US Title which I've always been a fan of. Decent match but really just a placeholder for the most part. Granted though they had no idea what they were doing here so it's ok I guess.

Next up we have a match that I've always kind of liked. For the WWF Tag Team Titles, Nikolai Volkoff and the Iron Sheik against the US Express of Mika Rotunda and Barry Windham, who at the show came out to a song called Real American. Upon further review, this match is still pretty good and likely the best match of the night so far.

There's not much to it but there doesn't need to be. It's America vs. foreigners, which is a formula that absolutely never fails. Rotunda plays a great face in peril here as he tries to out wrestle the monsters on the other team. There's

not a lot to this match but what they have is just fine. Big hot tag to Windham who cleans house, which leads to a big brawl. Blassie hands Sheik his cane which is smashed over Windham for a pinfall and a title change.

Rating: B-. Not much here, but what they had was at least passable. It was the standard U.S. versus the evil heels which is a formula that's hard to mess up if anyone in the match knows what they're doing, and these people knew. The titles would change back just a few weeks later so this was to do nothing more than get a title change on the card to make it seem historic. Keep in mind that this was still in the era when title reigns were usually longer so this meant a lot more.

Body Slam Match: Andre the Giant vs. Big John Studd

It is now time for the first of two famous matches from this card as Andre the Giant faces off with Big John Studd in a \$15,000 vs. retirement match. Studd had put out a challenge saying that no one could body slam him, and no one could. Then a man named Andre took him up on the challenge, and this right here is the result of that challenge. Andre controls early on but eventually Studd evens things out.

The crowd is off the hook for this match behind Andre to say the least. This is really just a lot of bearhugs and big punches/forearms for about ten minutes but the crowd eats it up. Andre just goes off on the knee and then slams Studd like it's nothing at all. He gets the money and throws the money to the crowd, prompting Heenan to steal it and run off.

Rating: D+. The wrestling was awful, but the crowd was going crazy the whole time. Classic example of a match where the crowd played a key factor. Andre was getting to the point here where he couldn't do much. These giant vs. giant matchups were rarely good but this worked as the whole idea was to just have Andre FINALLY end the "you can't slam me" angle which he had

done about a dozen times on house shows but this was the official one.

Women's Title: Wendi Richter vs. Lelani Kai

In the penultimate match of the night, we get the first of the Rock N Wrestling matches with the Women's Title on the line with Wendi Richter against Lelani Kai for the Women's Title. At the time, Richter was the second biggest face in the company, often main eventing house shows when Hogan was elsewhere. Cyndi Lauper being in her corner didn't hurt her at all as Lauper got into this.

In a scene that for some reason is now famous, Lauper and Richter run down the aisle in the back of the arena as the crowd is going crazy over this. For one of the only times ever in wrestling, the celebrity manager clearly wants to be doing this. This match is standard back and forth stuff with the young Richter clearly being the one that's going to win or MSG might have been burned down. Finally Richter reverses a cross body to get the pin and the title as the fans are going insane.

Rating: B. This match was billed as half of the double main event. Think about that for just a bit. The Women's Title match, main eventing Wrestlemania. If that doesn't tell you how big Lauper and Richter were, nothing will. I never really got the appeal of Richter but at this time she was main eventing the B-level house shows over the IC Title or Tag Titles. Imagine going to a show today where the main event had Michelle McCool in it.

Hulk Hogan and Mr. T. vs. Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff

And now for the main event, we have Mr. T and Hulk Hogan against Piper and Orndorff with Muhammad Ali himself as the guest referee. Why this wasn't Hogan against Piper one on one is beyond me. As usual, Piper has a live bagpipes band which is always cool. The fans aren't really booing much because

they know what's coming. Real American was already taken so instead we hear Eye of the Tiger, or at least I think we do.

The eruption is so loud I'm not sure what I'm hearing. Your other referee is Pat Patterson. If you've seen one Hogan match you've seen them all for the most part and this is no exception. Hogan embarrasses his opponents to start and then gets beaten down with some cheating. Double teams throughout the match on both Hogan and T until finally we get the brawl we've all waited for. Bob Orton and Jimmy Snuka are the seconds here and they both get involved.

Finally Orton comes off with the cast to his Hogan but catches Orndorff instead as Hogan pins him. This prompts Piper to leave him in the ring, which led to Orndorff's face turn. Hogan and T pose as we go off the air.

Rating: B. Basic tag match, but why was this a tag? It just made little sense and there was no drama to it at all. Hogan didn't even win with the legdrop. Fun little match, but not for the main event of Mania. For the life of me I will never get why this wasn't Hogan vs. Piper for the title, perhaps with Piper even defending and dropping it to Hogan. Very odd choice indeed but it worked very well for what it was supposed to be.

Overall rating: C-. This show clearly isn't famous for the wrestling as there's only 2-3 good matches on the card. What this show is famous for is the idea of a supercard in the biggest arena there was in the biggest city there was with celebrities, national coverage, and a huge main event. The idea was amazing but no one knew what they had here and it shows. For its time this was mind blowing. Now it's just average at best. Watch it for the last three matches and skip the others.

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