

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About Passing The Torch And Rubs

This seems like an appropriate topic with Wrestlemania being about two weeks away. This is something that is very important and can really make or break a company if not done right. Yet for some reason over the years, it's very rarely been done right. On Rise and Fall of ECW, Heyman talked about Terry Funk wanting to get the next generation ready so that there was a business to pass on to them. That's what we're getting at today so let's get to it.

Now first and foremost, there's a BIG difference between giving someone a rub and passing the torch to someone else. Back in the 80s, Hogan tagged with a bunch of guys that were known names but didn't become anything important until they were his best friend for a few months of house show tag matches. Then they'd be Hogan's partner for awhile and they'd be bigger stars than ever before. That's giving someone a rub.

Passing the torch means that you make someone the new big name in the company. We'll get to examples of that later on, but the main idea is that someone is either leaving, is dropping down the card after being on top for a long while, or that the other person is going to be taking their place. To use the example from earlier, Hogan wasn't going anywhere and wasn't moving down the card. He was still top dog but the others were up higher than they were before. That's an important difference.

On second thought, this was going to just be about passing the torch but I might as well cover rubs in here too. We'll get to passing the torch first.

Let's go back to the past as I'm known to do. The better example is probably King Jackie Fargo passing the torch to King Jerry Lawler but we'll go with something actually in the last thirty years with Harley Race and Ric Flair. Now let's take a good look at what put this together and why it was a true passing of the torch. There were a lot of factors that came together to make it work.

First of all, Flair was already a big name. He was a two time NWA World Champion and was well established as a top guy. This is important to passing the torch because if you want someone like Race to go out, this is how you do it: to a guy that has proven he can do something already. Otherwise you might need to go to someone else which makes the moment weaker.

Second, this was built up. It had a long and personal angle to it which resulted in real emotion. Race had put a \$25,000 bounty on Flair's head and it was cashed in, resulting in Flair being put out of action for months. He took care of the attackers and then came after Race to take the championship and get his revenge. It was an angle that people wanted to see get paid off which makes the match that much more interesting.

Third, the match was great. It's a classic old school cage match with Race working him over and Flair making the comeback for the pin and the big moment. It was also in the main event of the first Starrcade, which at the time was the biggest card ever put together. Look at Cena vs. Rock this year: they're having this match in the main event of Wrestlemania after a year of these two arguing and bickering. In short: take your time and make the match feel important.

Most importantly though, RACE LEFT. After this happened, Race was gone

from the NWA spotlight. There was a three day title change in New Zealand but other than that, Race went back to the smaller territories and eventually on to the WWF. Now, that's not to say that Race couldn't have come back in a smaller role. If Race had come back in say a year or even six months it would have been fine, as long as he didn't challenge for the title or feud with Flair. That's one of the main things: Race didn't try to come back against Flair. He had been defeated and was done.

There really aren't that many of these moments to talk about in history, and since most of them have been done well there isn't really a point to going through them one by one because they would all mostly say the same thing. The other few of note are the Fargo/Lawler one that I mentioned earlier, Austin vs. Michaels in 1998, HHH vs. Batista in 2005, and really those are all of the major ones.

Now let's get to the problems that can come up when these rules are broken. This can also be called The Hogan Section.

Hogan has had a few chances to pass the torch onto someone else and both times he's broken one of the aforementioned rules and caused the next person to not be able to do as well on top. We'll start in 1990 at Wrestlemania 6. You could argue the first time was at #4 with Savage but the end result of that was ALWAYS Hogan vs. Savage for the title the next year so I can't fault Hogan for that as it was part of a major angle instead of Hogan not going away. Anyone on to #6.

I don't think anyone would argue that the main event of that show was designed to be a moment where Warrior became the top guy. However in short, Hogan didn't leave. He stuck around in 1990 and feuded with Earthquake, taking all of the spotlight (as well as the top and most obvious feud for Warrior) from the new champion. The right thing would

have been for Hogan to take AT LEAST a few months off and made a movie or whatever.

Instead he stuck around and therefore made Warrior look like a second rate guy, which made the main event of Wrestlemania completely pointless. Warrior was a failure as the top guy but there was never a real chance for him to be the top guy. Everyone thought that Hogan was still top dog and him simply not having the title wasn't going to prove that wrong. Considering Warrior barely beat him, it didn't really prove that Warrior was the top guy. Instead of passing the torch, Hogan basically gave Warrior the title for about 7 months and then got it back later. Good for him, bad for Warrior.

Jumping to WCW, we have the moment that was a big bullet to WCW in the Monday Night Wars. Sting FINALLY stopped Hogan and won the (nearly) year and a half long title reign and it should have been the end of an era in WCW. This is probably the biggest botch of one of these things ever. First of all, the match sucked for reasons that you can read elsewhere. Second, Sting didn't get to even hold the physical title for two months, so how much do you think the fans cared by that point? Third, Sting officially won the title in February and Hogan had it back by mid-April. Sting is defeated, Hogan is champion AGAIN, and the fans are screwed over.

The third example of Hogan doing this would be in 1998 with Goldberg. Now to be fair this was probably much more about WCW than Hogan, but depending on what you believe about Hogan having creative control in the back, that could be a matter of debate. Also to Hogan's credit, he lost the match clean (mostly) and never got his win back against Goldberg, which is a big help. However that being said, he got the title back in just a few months. There was WAY more to it than that, but at the end of the day, the problem was that Hogan had the title back about half a year later, Goldberg was defeated, and the fans were screwed over AGAIN. Sound

familiar?

There are probably other examples that I'm overlooking, but I think by now you more than get the idea. The WWF in 1990/1991 was in real business trouble and was even on the verge of going under for awhile. The WCW instances are times where the company took big hits because either they wouldn't let people have the title or they wouldn't let anyone get thrown out of the main event. The moral: bad things happen when you don't change things when you need to.

Now onto the other topic that I wasn't going to talk about here but it fits as well: rubs. As we've established, a rub is where someone is going to be sticking around but is going to bring someone else up the card by giving them some of their star power and making them look like a bigger deal. We'll begin in the 80s, as I am known to do.

The perfect example of this is usually Flair and Sting from March 27, 1988 and there's a good reason for that. Sting wasn't a big time name like he is today. He was a guy that had been brought over from a regional company and was looking for his first big break in the national scene. The company knew he had talent but they needed a way to let the masses know that.

Enter Ric Flair, who in the words of Jim Cornette, made a career out of making other people look way better than they ever could have done on their own. So at the first Clash of the Champions, Sting fought Flair for the NWA Title and had him in the Scorpion when the bell rang and the time was up. Flair made Sting look AWESOME that night and Sting became a huge star because of it. Flair kept the title and would for a good while, but Sting was a major player all of a sudden. I think you get the idea.

There are dozens of other examples from history that I could go into, such as the tag teams that Hogan had which I mentioned earlier and Bret vs. Austin in 96/97, but you more than get the point by now. On the other hand, there are examples of times where bigger names lose matches, but the win doesn't do a thing for the smaller name guy. Let's take a look at a quick example.

I hate to do this again, but the best example is Hulk Hogan. In the year 2000, Hogan lost to Billy Kidman. What's forgotten about this is that Hogan DOMINATED Kidman and Kidman won after Bischoff hit Hogan with a chair. The win didn't do anything for Kidman because it didn't look like he had a chance to beat Hogan in a fair fight. The same thing is true of instances like jobbers pinning big names, such as Brooklyn Brawler pinning HHH in the year 2000. Rock had a bit of a hand in that loss, but HHH still gets made fun of for it on occasion. Again, I think you get the idea.

So anyway, in short there are good ways and bad ways of passing the torch, and hopefully Rock does it with Cena at Wrestlemania. Rock is a guy who a victory over would still mean a lot and I just hope they don't screw it up somehow. Rubs and passing the torch are very important things in wrestling, and if you don't do them right they can turn out very badly indeed.