

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About WWE's Tag Team Relaunch

This is one of the things that fans always say needs to happen. I mean you hear it CONSTANTLY, and now it seems like this is actually happening. What I don't really understand is why this is something that so many people want. When you think back, there haven't been very many times when there was a strong tag team division. There's a strong case to be made that it's only happened once in WWF history. Today we're going to take a look at the tag team division and why people want it back so much. Let's get to it.

There's no argument to be made that the pinnacle of tag team wrestling in the WWF is the late 80s. In that time you had teams like the Hart Foundation, Demolition, the British Bulldogs, the Dream Team, the Killer Bees, the Powers of Pain, Strike Force, the Brainbusters, and I could probably come up with at least half a dozen more. There were TONS of teams that could win the titles at any given moment.

Then around 1991, things changed and they changed in a hurry. There were four men that caused these changes and basically killed tag team wrestling in the company forever. We'll start with the obvious two: Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels. After Wrestlemania 7, the Hart Foundation (as well as Demolition) split up. Neidhart (we'll get back to him later in a tangent) would go on to do nothing of note while Bret would get a push that would last for the next six years.

In the fall of that year, another team was starting to have some issues. This team was known as the Rockers and was comprised of Shawn Michaels and Marty Jannetty. They were hitting their peak as a team, showing continuity the likes of which were rarely seen in the WWF, before Shawn

started having a big head. It seemed that the team was on the verge of splitting when they met face to face on the set of the talk show The Barber Shop in December of 1991.

On that show, in probably the most famous tag team split ever, Shawn Michaels superkicked Marty and rammed him face first through a window, completely splitting the team and establishing himself as the a fast rising heel. Shawn would also go on to greatness, feuding with Bret on and off for five years while putting together one of the greatest in ring careers of all time.

This is where the whole division started to fall apart. Instead of building teams for the sake of having teams, it was about putting two guys together to recreate the kind of breakup that Shawn and Marty had, or splitting them off like the Harts and finding the new Bret Hart. What the company didn't get was that it wasn't the split that made the new guys big stars, but rather the fact that Bret and Shawn are two of the most talented wrestlers of all time.

Look to modern tag team wrestling for proof of this. Well by modern I mean about three years ago but you get the idea. When Miz and Morrison split up, the crux of their feud was over which one of them would be the Jannetty. Just the idea of which would be a success (and dang were most people, myself included, wrong on which one would be the star of the team) was enough to warrant a feud.

This brings me back to Neidhart and that tangent I mentioned earlier: why is the weak member of a team called the Jannetty? I've touched on this before, but Jim Neidhart is WAY more of a dud than Marty Jannetty was after his team split. Once the Rockers split, Marty won a tag team title of his own with the 1-2-3 Kid and he won it seven months before Shawn

did. Jannetty also won an Intercontinental Title, beating Shawn in a match that won Match of the Year from PWI.

Now by comparison, what in the world did Jim Neidhart ever do without Bret as his partner? He never won a title, he never had a memorable match, he never had any notable success AT ALL in the WWF without Bret. None. He was Owen's lackey in 1994 and was part of the Hart Foundation in 1997, but other than that, Neidhart did NOTHING. If you want to talk about a team with two guys having completely opposite careers after the split, it's Bret and Neidhart, not Michaels and Jannetty.

Back to the subject of what killed the tag division, there are two other men that had a big role in this: Hawk and Animal, the Legion of Doom. Now before I get into this, I want to make it clear that I was a HUGE LOD fan. I had an LOD hat, I had an LOD shirt, I ate Legion of Doom cereal, and yes that really existed. However, there came a point where there was no one that was going to be able to beat the LOD and everyone knew it.

Think about it: what tag team could give a legitimate challenge to the Legion of Doom? This was a team that had gone toe to toe with the Horsemen in the NWA and now were here, beating up everyone in sight, including the formerly dominant team of Demolition (how those two never had a big PPV match is one of the great wrestling mysteries of our time). As cool as the LOD was, there are only so many places you can go with them as champions.

At the same time the LOD was on top, the competition REALLY dried up as well. You only had a handful of other teams, with names like the Beverly Brothers, the Natural Disasters, and the team that took the titles from the LOD (in a match that was specifically never filmed), Money Inc. That's kind of a far cry from Demolition, the British Bulldogs and the

Brainbusters.

After that, the tag division went into a total funk in the 90s, with teams like the Smoking Guns and Owen/Yokozuna and a bunch of other pairings that most people don't remember dominating things. Then we reached the more modern version of tag team wrestling in late 1997 when on Shotgun Saturday Night (a show that deserves to be looked up by you Attitude Era fans), two guys said they were tired of fighting each other and decided to team up.

These two were former multiple time tag team champion Billy Gunn and the Road Dogg Jesse James, who formed the team known as the New Age Outlaws. The Outlaws would dominate tag team wrestling for the next two years, winning five tag titles, a record at the time. To give you an idea of how dominant the Outlaws were by comparison, other than them, no team from May of 1997 to June of 2003 held the titles for longer than three months. La Resistance, the team that broke that streak, won them after the brand split when there were two sets of titles.

The Outlaws lost their final title in February of 2000 to a new team called the Dudley Boyz, kicking off what is incorrectly considered a renaissance of the tag team division. Over the fourteen months, the Hardy Boys, Edge and Christian, and the Dudleys won a combined thirteen tag titles, with the final change between the teams coming at Wrestlemania X7. Between February of 2000 and April of 2001 (X7), three teams (Right to Censor, Too Cool and Rock/Undertaker) combined to hold the titles for 62 days. Other than that, it was all Dudleys/Hardys/Edge and Christian.

So what does this tell us about this period? It tells us that this was not a renaissance or a rebirth of the division. It was a three way feud that was incredibly popular for how action packed the matches were. This

was a fresh idea because the Outlaws followed the Nash/Hall formula of being tag team champions: they rarely defended the titles.

Now the Outlaws defended them a lot more often, but how many times do you distinctly remember them defending the belts? How many of those defenses do you remember lasting five minutes? In the Attitude Era, you very rarely got a long match, so seeing Edge/Christian, the Hardys and the Dudleys going out and having fifteen minute matches that were pretty awesome was a new thing for the division and it made the titles look greater than they were.

As always with a great feud, at some point it becomes stale, which is what happened once Edge and Christian broke up. You can only run the Hardys vs. the Dudleys so many times before no one cares anymore, and by the end of 2001, not many people did. After that, the tag titles fell through the floor with no one caring about them on Raw or their counterparts on Smackdown (other than the end of 2002 and early 2003 on the blue show) for the better part of the decade.

This brings us to now, with a bunch of new teams being brought together to feud for the one set of titles. As of this writing (September 26, 2012), there are currently at least eight teams that are established and could be champions. Bryan and Kane are hilarious as champions, but the question becomes what happens once their hot streak ends, will anyone care about the titles anymore? History would say no, but if the teams are given a chance to get out there and show off a bit, maybe it could last for awhile. It's too early to say but it's the best chance in awhile.

In short, the division has only really worked once and that was back in the 80s when there was a ton of talent to be put throughout the division. Since then, there never has been an extended period of time where tag

team wrestling in the company has worked. In the early 2000s, there were three teams who dominated everything and that is not a division no matter how you look at it. Today, there seems to be a chance of a division coming together a little bit, but it still certainly isn't for sure. It hasn't worked in over 20 years, so odds are it won't work now.