

Monday Night Raw – January 7, 2013: Rock vs. Punk Begins.

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 7, 2013

Location: Tampa Bay Times Forum, Tampa Bay, Florida

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler

It's the first show of the year and the card is stacked. We've got Punk vs. Ryback in a TLC match for the world title plus the return of the Rock. Ok so maybe it's not stacked but it has a big match and something else big going on. It's hard to imagine Ryback winning the title tonight as we're less than three weeks away from the Rumble and Punk vs. Rock. Things should really get going towards the Rumble tonight though so let's get to it.

Here's Cena to open the show. He talks about how awesome everything will be tonight and wants to get to the Rumble. Cue Ziggler in a hurry who says that he'll be the thing people remember tonight instead of the Rock. I'm really thinking no on that one Ziggy. AJ (GOOD FREAKING NIGHT is she looking great tonight) says she can't believe she spent so much time with Cena as she's now with a real man.

AJ says Cena is a small man, causing Cena to go into a HUGE overly done bit, (complete with starting the Wave in the crowd) about how that's a joke. They go back and forth for a bit until Ziggler says he's in the Rumble as well. Cena says this is going to be his year and it starts tonight against Ziggler. Langston cuts a shaky promo saying Cena has someone else to worry about tonight. Apparently it's Cena vs. Ziggler post break.

John Cena vs. Dolph Ziggler

Dang they're going all out with this "DON'T WATCH THE BALL GAME" push. Just show AJ for that long and you'll have my attention. Ziggler grabs a headlock to start but Cena takes him to the mat with an armbar. Dolph sends Cena into the corner to take him down and does his situps. Cena

rolls over into a front facelock followed by a delayed vertical suplex for two as we keep going back and forth. Langston guillotines Cena on the top and we take a break. Not much to see so far.

Back with Ziggler holding a chinlock, complete with headstands to show off. It's still not much of a gimmick people. Cena slams him down again as AJ gets on the apron. Ziggler pops up and SMACKS Cena with a dropkick for two, followed by all those elbow drops. AJ slaps Cena in the face, earning an ejection for herself and Langston. Cena fires up his finishing sequence but Ziggler avoids the Shuffle and rolls Cena up for two.

The second attempt hits but the AA is countered into the Zig Zag for two. The jumping DDT gets two for Dolph so he goes up, only to jump into the AA. Ziggler flips out of that too and hits a close range superkick for two. There's the sleeper but as Cena throws Ziggler off, the referee gets bumped. The STF goes on and Langston runs in to lay out Cena. The Big Ending (that stupid falling slam) only gets two as a second referee runs out. Cena loses his shoe and hits the AA for the pin at 17:04.

Rating: B. And at the end of the day, Ziggler loses AGAIN. This is why no one is taking him seriously: he loses EVERY major match he has where he doesn't have a gimmick to help him. When he wins the title, no one is going to buy it and that's the #1 reason why. As for the match, it was slow to start but got WAY better at the end. That being said, no one is going to see the ending because the national title game kicked off about three minutes ago.

Divas Title: Eve Torres vs. Kaitlyn

Eve takes her to the mat to start and works on the leg. We get a crawler with TWEETS from fans regarding Rock being back. The referee tells Kaitlyn to tie her boot but Eve jumps her during the distraction. Eve hooks a neck stretch (picture a neckbreaker position but instead of just, you know, doing a neckbreaker, Eve bends Kaitlyn's neck over her own shoulder) but gets caught in a side slam for two. Kaitlyn loads up her gutbuster, but Eve escapes, grabs the title, and runs through the crowd for the countout at 4:40.

Rating: D. CHANGE THE FREAKING TITLE ALREADY! They've dragged this stupid

story (why do they even hate each other at this point? Does ANYONE remember why this started in the first place, and better yet, does anyone care?) on for months now and while I get that they're waiting for the Rumble, do they really think people are going to get fired up for the freaking DIVAS TITLE?

Up next: Rhodes Scholars vs. HELL NO! ANOTHER fresh match! It's clearly they're just holding out for halftime of the game at this point.

Santino is in the back with Steamboat when Barrett comes in. He insults both guys and says he's the one bringing prestige back to the title. Steamboat is going to be in Santino's corner for his title shot tonight.

Orton is in the back to talk about the Rumble when 3MB comes up, setting up Orton vs. Slater tonight. Man they're REALLY punting on the matches after the opener aren't they?

HELL NO vs. Rhodes Scholars

For all the talk about how the tag division has been reborn, these two teams really do seem to fight each other a lot. Cody and Kane start with Rhodes running away to tag in Sandow. Bryan comes in with a dropkick in the corner so it's back to Rhodes to get kicked by Daniel. The Scholars finally get in some shots to take over on Bryan with Cody shouting about the goat face. The Wind-Up Elbow gets two as we hear about Sandow's family being advisers to the President since the early 1800s. Well you can't say they're not trying.

Hot tag brings in Kane who stumbles going up top, only to come off with the clothesline on Sandow, followed by a big boot for two. Damien bails to the floor to avoid a chokeslam, before coming back in to face Bryan. Daniel moonsaults out of the corner and injures his ankle, giving us a reason to extend the match even further. Everything breaks down and Cody hits Cross Rhodes for the pin at 7:16.

Rating: C. So the ankle stuff wound up meaning nothing at all. Good to know. Anyway, this sets up like the third title shot for the Scholars which still doesn't make me care about the match. This idea of "challengers lose, challengers lose, challengers win a non-title match,

challengers win titles" doesn't make for an interesting series of matches. It makes for a series that I don't care for because it takes five matches to get through to the end counting a rematch.

Randy Orton vs. Heath Slater

They punch each other a lot to start until Orton gets clotheslined to the floor and stomped on by Mahal and McIntyre. Back in and Slater gets two off a neckbreaker but goes up and gets caught in a superplex. Here are Orton's clotheslines and the powerslam followed by the Elevated DDT. RK0 ends this clean at 4:26.

Rating: D. Yep, it's clear they're just letting the football game kill them here and I can't say I blame them. Nothing on the planet is going to be able to stop that tonight, so why not just put on a weaker show until the game isn't on and then put up your best then? It's a strategy they've done before, so why not do it here?

Intercontinental Title: Santino Marella vs. Wade Barrett

Wade doesn't even get an entrance. Steamboat is in Santino's corner for no apparent reason. The champ takes Santino to the mat and pounds away in the corner before hitting a chinlock. The pumphandle slam is escaped and a superkick to the face gets two for Marella. Santino does his usual stuff and puts on the Cobra, sending Barrett running to the floor. Back in and the Bull Hammer ends this at 2:21.

Barrett stares at Steamboat but runs as the Dragon takes his jacket off.

Sheamus is in the back to talk about the Rumble when 3MB comes up. Wow they're not even hiding this anymore? Tonight it's Sheamus vs. one of them later on. Sheamus sings a bit first.

Great Khali vs. Antonio Cesaro

Non-title here and Miz is on commentary. Apparently he had an issue with Cesaro lately which I barely remember. Khali pounds away to start but Cesaro goes after the knee. We get what might be the worst big boot ever (you can see the referee between the boot and Cesaro's head) before Cesaro makes his comeback, hitting a spinning springboard European

Uppercut. Neutralizer ends this at 3:19.

Rating: C-. Points to Cesaro for both the uppercut (that looked SWEET) and the Neutralizer which is rather impressive. This was another match we've seen before but it fills in five minutes on this show tonight, which is the right idea. Cesaro continues to impress, which is a good sign for him.

Brad Maddox annoys Heyman again. He offers to referee the TLC match but Heyman wants nothing to do with him.

Jinder Mahal vs. Sheamus

Sheamus toys with Mahal to start and kicks him into the ropes. Mahal grabs Sheamus' trunks in a weird spot that Sheamus seems bewildered by. A hard slap to Mahal's face doesn't do anything but an attempt at a second one sends him to the mat. There are the ten forearms in the ropes for Mahal, and there are ten for McIntyre as well. Jinder hits a jumping knee to send Sheamus to the floor where the band mates get in some shots. Sheamus slugs him down and pulls Slater in as well. A double clothesline puts the jobbers on the floor and Slater takes the Brogue Kick. White Noise and Brogue Kick end Mahal at 4:43.

Rating: D+. This was just a comedy match and I guess a way to compare Orton and Sheamus if that's what they were going for. Nothing special here of course, but then again what are you expecting from this show at this point? I get why they're doing things this way, but that doesn't make the show any easier to sit through.

Video on Punk wanting respect.

Raw World Title: CM Punk vs. Ryback

TLC match which was supposed to happen last month but had to be changed due to Punk's knee injury. The fans don't seem impressed by Ryback at all here. Ryback shoves Punk around to start until we head to the floor where Punk kicks him in the head. Punk slides in a ladder but Ryback hammers on him before anything can be done. Back in and Ryback hits a delayed spinning suplex onto the ladder, sending the champion to the floor.

Punk almost gets crushed by the steps before using them as a launching pad to knee Ryback in the face. Punk chairs Ryback down a few times and we take a break. Back with both guys down in the ring and Ryback getting up first. Ryback loads up a table on the floor but Punk blasts him in the ribs with a chair and sets up a table of his own. Ryback shoves Punk onto the announce table but another chair shot slows him down.

Back in and Punk works over Ryback's leg with a chair but can't Pillmanize it. The jump off the ropes might have hurt the champion's knee again. Ryback pounds away and hits the Meat Hook but Punk escapes the Shell Shock. They head to the floor and Ryback launches himself through a table by mistake. Punk climbs up the ladder but Ryback goes up to stop him, knocking the champ to the mat.

CM shoves the ladder over but Ryback lands on his feet. He picks Punk up and drops him onto the ladder, bending it to the point where it can't be used anymore. Punk kicks Ryback in the head again to slow him down but can't use the ladder to climb anymore. A knee in the corner slows Ryback down but when Punk tries the bulldog, Ryback LAUNCHES him to the floor through the table Punk set up.

Ryback finds another ladder and goes up but there go the lights. The lights come back up and the Shield is on the ladder. Ryback punches two of them down but has to get down to stop the third one. The numbers catch up with Ryback and he gets destroyed by chair shots and the Triple Bomb through a table onto the steps. The Shield leaves and Punk slowly climbs up to retain the title at 18:50.

Rating: B-. This was exactly what people expected, right down to the interference. Ryback continues to look like someone that can't win the big one, which is why that pop he got at the beginning of the match might as well have been a group of mice cheering. We get it: Shield goes after Ryback. They've done that for months now and Ryback has lost to them every time. There were some good bumps in this but it was exactly the match you expected to happen.

Post break Punk denies being associated with the Shield and says he's going to drop a pipe bomb on Rock.

Bryan and Kane argue over whose fault the loss was. Vickie pops up and says next week they have a follow up with Dr. Shelby. Another argument ensues as we enter Daffy Duck/Bugs Bunny territory over whether Shelby is a nerd or a monster.

We recap Big Show vs. Ricardo from last week, which sets up Show vs. Alberto on Friday.

Big Show vs. Kofi Kingston

WMD, 15 seconds, pin. That's some way to treat a guy who was a champion a week ago.

We recap Punk's heel turn at Raw 1000 where he attacked Rock.

Here's Punk before Rock can get out here. He talks about how it's time for the Pipe Bomb, but wants to clarify what the Pipe Bomb is. It's basically a dose of the truth. Well except for the ice cream, because no one here needs more ice cream. Punk meant everything he said in Vegas, but he became someone for the fans to cheer for. It doesn't matter if you're the best in the world in the WWE because there's a glass ceiling that no one is allowed to break.

Punk goes into another rant about how the fans will cheer for anyone while guys like Bryan have to become catchphrase machines and guys like Brodus Clay have to dance with stupid kids and workhorses like Tyson Kidd have to take back seats to invisible children. The fans cheer and Punk says that's exactly what he's talking about.

Everyone in the past has gotten over because of the kind of business they do, except for him. He says if he was in Sammartino's era, he would have been champion for 20 years. You didn't see Hogan defending the title in TLC matches against Ryback. Punk says he's successful because of himself, but rather in spite of them. He talks about how he doesn't care about the fans and everyone who says they do is either weak or dishonest. Punk is neither though, because he's an honest man and the best in the world.

He talks about how there are winners and losers in the world and it's clear which one he is. For Punk, it's never been about the fans but

rather just about the money. A production guy gets up on the apron and says we have to go to a break. Punk says no because he doesn't want to go to a break. He tells the fans they don't matter at all and we go to a break.

Back from a break and Punk says that he's going to be back here in a year as world champion again on the first Raw of 2014. He lists off the people he's beaten in the last year and every single one of them has been beating the fans too. The fans don't get to win with Rock either, because Punk is keeping the title at the Rumble.

Rock FINALLY interrupts him and the pop actually made me jump. Rock says that he wanted to hear everything Punk had to say so he knew what he was dealing with at the Rumble. Now it's clear to the Rock that Punk is straight up delusional. Punk being champion for 414 days is incredible, but the important number is 20, because in 20 days Punk is defending the title against the Rock and then time is up.

Punk wanted a revolution and turned his back on the people, but that's not what happened. The people turned their backs on Punk. Punk couldn't even deliver the ice cream bars that he promised. Rock talks about how there's no such thing as voiceless people here in the WWE because they're going to call Punk Cookie Puss (it's an old cake/dessert company from the 80s I believe). Punk says the people are puppets because Rock got the people chanting just like he did a year ago.

Rock says the people have already won the minute Rock woke up this morning. Rock woke up, sent out a Tweet, ate pancakes, went to the gym, got in his truck and drove here so he could stand face to face with Punk and say that FINALLY, he has come back to Tampa. He's back to stop Punk and win the title for the first time in ten years. Rock has been watching to see someone say they respect Punk so he'll shut up. He says Punk looks like Popeye on crack which draws a Cookie Puss chant.

Rock praises Punk's mind but says Punk is delusional. It's not the people that don't matter but Punk. Punk starts into his speech but Rock says it doesn't matter. At the Rumble, there's nothing stopping the Rock from becoming WWE Champion. Punk lays the title down in the middle of the ring

and says it doesn't matter how often Rock comes back because Punk is going to take him out. He goes on a big rant about how Rock has never faced anyone like him again and says that at the Rumble, Rock's arms are too short to box with God.

Rock says in 20 days, Punk's time is up, so go home and look in the mirror and strip. Don't look at your cookie puss but turn around so you can find a place for two more tattoos. One on one cheek put a bunch of candy ("You can't have Almond Joy because they actually have nuts) and on the other put Rock's shoe. There's a Rock Bottom and we're done.

Overall Rating: B. All things considered, this wasn't a terrible show. For one thing, there was almost NOTHING stupid backstage other than a few moments that set up matches later on. They didn't have anything huge going on other than Rock and the title match, which is the right move given what this show was up against. There was a ton of wrestling on this show and that's what's been missing on Raw lately, so few complaints there after a slow start.

Results

John Cena b. Dolph Ziggler – Attitude Adjustment

Kaitlyn b. Eve Torres via countout

Rhodes Scholars b. HELL NO – Cross Rhodes to Bryan

Randy Orton b. Heath Slater – RKO

Wade Barrett b. Santino Marella – Bull Hammer

Antonio Cesaro b. Great Khali – Neutralizer

Sheamus b. Jinder Mahal – Brogue Kick

CM Punk b. Ryback – Punk pulled down the title

Big Show b. Kofi Kingston – WMD

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews