

Monday Night Raw – January 7, 2002: The Loudest Ovation I Have Ever Heard

The year of 2001 is gone and we're now into the year that might be even worse in 2002. At this point we're getting close to the Brand Split that has dominated the company since it first started. On the Raw side, the year would be dominated by some surprising champions in the form of Undertaker and Hulk Hogan, but by the end of the year we'll be getting a DX reunion and a big feud over the newly created World Heavyweight Championship. This is the first full year when WWF had no competition so let's get to it.

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 7, 2002

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

Attendance: 13,978

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross

It's the night of the loudest pop I've ever heard in wrestling as HHH is back from eight months of recovery from quadriceps surgery. To say there's nothing else going on tonight is an understatement, but that's going to be the case for a lot of these shows in the future. We're coming up on the Rumble and if you can't guess who is winning that, I can't help you. Let's get to it.

The opening video is set to Beautiful Day as HHH is back tonight.

Tonight we have a tag team contest "for the ages." It's Booker T/Big Boss Man vs. Rock/Austin. If those are the ages, then the ages are lost.

Here's Vince to open things up with a blue box. This is during the time where he and Flair co-owned the company and Vince isn't happy. We get a

montage of Flair's triumphs of the 80s and 90s, which would be much better if it wasn't set to Cocksy by Kid Rock. We also get a clip of Flair announcing himself as the new co-owner of the WWF. Then Flair challenged Vince to a match at the Rumble and punched Vince out at the same time. Vince goes to the box and pulls out...a Flair wig and robe. He does a Flair strut which finally brings out Naitch. Stupid sign of the night in the crowd: "Rick Flair is God."

Flair talks all slow and respectful before going into a classic rant, talking about how McMahon will NEVER do this again no matter what. He says he's Ric Flair and Vince is not so take the wig off RIGHT NOW. As Vince takes the robe off though, he blasts Flair in the head with a hidden pipe. Flair gets posted and stomped on for a bit as well.

Test vs. Rob Van Dam

The idea here is that Test can do whatever he wants because he has immunity from a battle royal win at Survivor Series. Test pounds away to start but Van Dam comes back with a spinwheel kick to take over. Another spin kick is caught in a kind of powerbomb and the Canadian pounds away on the head. A clothesline in the corner gets two and it's off to the chinlock already. Rob fights up and escapes a suplex before kicking Test's leg out.

Van Dam kicks Test down but Test kicks the referee into the ropes for the crotch. The referee and Test get in a shoving match which gives Van Dam two. Test misses the big boot so Van Dam kicks him to the floor where Test grabs a chair. The referee is shoved down again and it's the Van Daminator to set up the Five Star for the pin.

Rating: D+. This was just ok for the most part. The Test storyline didn't really go anywhere as at the end of the day, he's just Test. He was a whiny guy that never did anything of note after the year 2000, so why should anyone care that he's shoving referees around? Nothing to see here.

Angle is annoyed at HHH getting all the attention when he isn't even here. He has a big announcement of his own, but he'll save it for later.

Trish and Terri argue at WWF New York, resulting in a wet t-shirt contest later tonight. This was back when Trish was a blonde head of hair and a big rack and nothing more.

Billy and Chuck vs. Scotty 2 Hotty/Albert

Billy and Chuck aren't entirely gay yet, but Billy does suggest that they should be in the wet t-shirt contest rather than the girls. Billy and Albert get things going and it's Albert taking over on both of the guys in red. We get the COMEDY spot of Billy being sent into the corner and falling face first into Chuck's crotch because that's funny right? Scotty comes in with a neckbreaker for two on Chuck but Billy blasts him in the back to take over. The heels take over for a bit, but Scotty comes back with a DDT on Chuck to put both guys down.

There's the hot tag to Albert as the fans are nearly comatose. A powerslam gets two on Chuck and there's a splash in the corner to Billy. Chuck hits Billy by mistake and Scotty loads up the Worm. After a dancing accompaniment by Albert, the Worm gets two but Billy breaks it up. Chuck superkicks Albert down and the Fameasser is enough to pin Scotty.

Rating: D. This would be your second straight lame match that doesn't accomplish anything and is really here just to fill in some time. I'd almost think that they were intentionally having a boring show so that HHH's return looks all the more awesome, but they would NEVER do something like that right?

Jericho demands more respect and doesn't want to face Rikishi, even in a non-title match. Oh and he sucks up to Vince for a bit.

Michael Cole is in a yellow shirt and is WAY too excited. Austin comes up

and gives him the still fresh WHAT treatment. Austin says he saw HHH here in the back and he isn't sure what to think of it. He knows what it's like to come back from a nearly career ending injury. That being said, he didn't want to say hi to HHH.

Tonight he's here to enter the Royal Rumble, which is the match where you take a man and throw him over the top, then you take another (WHAT), then another (WHAT), repeat I kid you not 28 times. He actually said it that many times. Also tonight Austin is teaming up with the Rock, which prompts a bunch of WHAT's. Austin is really into this at the moment and it's working really well.

Lawler has a watergun and gets to emcee the t-shirt contest.

Intercontinental Title: Edge vs. Lance Storm

Edge is defending. Storm immediately jumps Edge and clotheslines him in the corner. They trade some fast rollups and Storm hooks the Canadian Maple Leaf (half crab). That goes nowhere so Edge elbows him in the face a few times and hits the Impaler to retain. This was barely a minute long.

William Regal jumps Edge as he leaves and it's the Power of the Punch for the champion.

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Angle complains to European Champion Christian about HHH returning. It was Angle that saved the company at Survivor Series and it's Angle that brings happiness and joy to children every day. They make fun of Beautiful Day for a bit too before Angle gets in this gem: "I tore my quadricep this morning and I'm here tonight!" When Angle is on, he's WAY on and he certainly was here.

Steve Austin/The Rock vs. Big Bossman/Booker T

Booker and Boss Man are Vince's cronies and they're fighting the heroes. It's a big brawl to start of course with Rock vs. Booker on the floor and a Thesz Press to Boss Man back inside. They switch partners and it's Austin vs. Booker to start things off. A hot shot puts Booker down as Boss Man is rammed into the table a few times. Austin throws Booker to the floor so Rock throws Boss Man inside.

It's time to stomp a mudhole as the Super Best Friends are completely dominant so far. Another clothesline puts Boss Man down and it's off to Rock. The big jumping clothesline gets two for Rocky but Boss Man hits a kind of running clothesline in the corner to take over. Off to Rock who gets his face slammed into the mat, only to come back and send Rock to the floor. Back in and Booker stomps away but Rock pops up for a quick slugout.

A spinebuster puts Booker down but Boss Man breaks up the People's Elbow. There's the Book End but Austin comes in to break up something that hadn't started yet. Boss Man comes in to fire off a knee to Rock's chest and Booker adds a superkick for two. Austin comes in to break things up again and this time it's enough for the hot tag to the Rattlesnake. Boss Man seems to have issues with any spot where he has to be lifted into the air. Everything breaks down for a third time and the Stunner pins Boss Man.

Rating: D+. Tag match for the ages? This? This was two legends beating up a big name and a guy who was over the hill nine years before this. It was clear that Austin was losing steam at this point as there was no fire in him here at all. He wasn't terrible looking or anything, but at the end of the day he's beating up Big Boss Man. Can you blame him for bailing in a few months?

Beer is consumed.

Apparently Rikishi gave Test a Stinkface recently.

Rikishi vs. Chris Jericho

Non-title here. Rikishi shoves him around to start and loads up a quick Stinkface, only to have referee Nick Patrick block it for no apparent reason. We head to the floor where Jericho rips the padding off the barricade and whips the fat man into it to take over. Back inside we go and Jericho gets two off a missile dropkick. The Lionsault misses though and the fat man starts his comeback.

A kind of Alabama Slam puts Jericho down and there's a Samoan Drop for no cover. Rikishi loads up the Banzai Drop but Patrick blocks it again. After shoving him away, Rikishi misses the Banzai and Jericho heads to the floor. He grabs one of the belts but the swing misses and Rikishi superkicks Jericho into Patrick. A Stinkface only hits the referee and it's a belt shot to Rikishi's non-stereotyped head for the pin.

Rating: D. Did we really need a crooked referee, a belt shot and a cheating win for Chris Jericho to beat Rikishi in less than four and a half minutes? The match was dull and mainly there for the chance of Rikishi hitting a Stinkface, which isn't really all that interesting at the end of the day. Another nothing match.

Big Show, Torrie and Tajiri have an awkward moment talking about HHH until Angle comes in and accuses them of acting like teenagers at a Ricky Martin concert. Tajiri does a Martin impression. Next.

We recap the Vince/Flair thing earlier.

The Dudleys get in a confrontation with Tazz and Spike, who they defend against in a bit. Wouldn't this be better suited for more than five minutes before the match?

Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. Spike Dudley/Tazz

This is hardcore for no apparent reason and Stacy is with the Dudleys. It's a brawl to start with Spike being sent into the steps. Bubba sprays him with a fire extinguisher as the fans want tables. Spike tries a sunset flip on Bubba, only to get blasted with the extinguisher again. A HARD trashcan lid to the face puts Tazz down and What's Up Tazz? Bubba wants tables but whispers it because he's evil right now.

Tazz is almost put through but Spike makes the save with a stop sign. There's a Tazmission to D-Von but Tazz has to let it go to move a table. Stacy flashes Tazz to distract him but Bubba gets the view instead, allowing for a suplex onto a table. Spike puts him through the table with a Dudley Dog for the upset and the titles.

Rating: D+. The match was fast paced but not all that great. The problem here was that at the end of the day, does anyone buy Spike and Tazz as a long term championship team? It was clear that they were transitional champions, which is ok, but it doesn't do much overall. The live crowd loved this though and there was a match before this to set it up, so it was far better than some other angles I've seen that tried to do the same thing.

Undertaker says he's winning the Rumble, and wishes HHH bad luck.

It's time for the wet t-shirt contest now. Terri goes first and Jerry freaks out as you can see through her shirt. Trish leans against the ropes to get wetted down, but Jazz runs in to beat her down and end the contest. This was about what you would expect from it.

Here's the reason this show exists: HHH makes his return to the absolutely loudest pop I have ever heard in MSG and likely the loudest I've ever heard anywhere. I mean the place EXPLODES. He poses for a good long while as the fans will not stop cheering. That's very awesome when you think about it. HHH says he's the Game and he's back to another huge

reaction. He officially enters the Rumble and here's Angle to break it up. Kurt says that he too will be in the Rumble which is the big announcement he's been talking about all night. The brawl is on and HHH of course gets the better of it, hitting a Pedigree to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. This show isn't bad but it's clear that all they've got to hope for at this point is HHH. His return was awesome, but they're not going to have an MSG crowd to bail them out of a weak show week after week. Next week is the go home show for the Rumble though so we've got a lot of changes coming up which would be changed even more in a few months. Not a terrible show but it's nothing worth seeing other than the end.

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