

Wrestlemania Count-Up – Wrestlemania XII: Grabbing The Brass Ring

Wrestlemania XII

Date: March 31, 1996

Location: Arrowhead Pond, Anaheim, California

Attendance: 18,853

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon

This is all about Shawn Michaels vs. Bret Hart. The main event is an hour long Iron Man Match with Bret defending against the absolutely on fire Shawn Michaels. Since returning last May, Shawn has hit a stride where he is without a doubt the best in the world. There's almost nothing else on the entire card other than Undertaker vs. Diesel as the Streak finally has a big match included. Let's get to it.

The opening video talks about the dream of the champion (to stay on top) and the challenger (to rise to the top of the mountain). They make the match feel like a very big deal which is the right idea. Good stuff.

Camp Cornette vs. Yokozuna/Jake Roberts/Ahmed Johnson

Camp Cornette is Vader/Owen Hart/British Bulldog and if they lose, Yoko gets five minutes alone with Cornette. Of all the music for the faces to come out to, they pick Yoko's? The monsters brawl to start and Yoko takes him down with a clothesline. Another one sends Vader to the floor and Ahmed hits a big dive over the top to take Vader down again. Back in and they slug it out some more before it's off to Owen. Yoko is so fat here it's amazing that he can move.

After Owen gets beaten up a bit it's back to Vader for more hard shots to the head. Vader pounds him down to the mat but Yoko is able to get over to Ahmed for a not hot tag. Johnston starts cleaning house on everyone until Vader gets in a shot from behind to take him down. A jumping senton misses Ahmed though and a flying clothesline puts Vader down.

We settle down to Johnson vs. Bulldog with Ahmed loading up the Pearl River Plunge (Tiger Bomb), only to have Hart hit a missile dropkick to break it up. Owen drags him back to the corner and here's more Vader. A splash crushes Johnson but there's still no cover. Back to Owen who is clotheslined down almost immediately and there's the real hot tag to Jake. Oh and Mr. Fuji is in the face corner with an American flag.

Owen avoids the DDT and Jake charges into a knee in the corner. Bulldog puts on the front facelock so the fans chant USA. At least most of the face team is made in America this time. Back to Vader for the hard clothesline and a slam, followed by a top rope elbow from Owen. That gets two so Owen cranks back on both of Jake's arms for a bit. Bulldog comes in but the powerslam only gets two as well. It was a clean knockout too which is pretty odd to see.

Vader comes in for a splash but THAT only gets two as well. The fans don't seem all that interested in this though. Bulldog tries a splash of his own but Roberts rolls away to buy himself some time. The other hot tag brings in Yoko to face Vader with the latter being punched down in the corner. Yoko cleans house on all three villains and crushes Bulldog with a belly to belly. The DDT hits Owen but Jake has to take out an interfering Cornette. Jake loads up the DDT on Cornette but Vader runs him over and the Vader Bomb is finally enough to pin Roberts.

Rating: C. Nice tag match here but the crowd doesn't seem interested in the show so far. Hopefully they're just saving it up for the main event which is the only match that matters on the entire show. Johnson looked good and would get pushed to the Intercontinental Title soon after this. The other guys all looked like themselves.

We recap Piper vs. Goldust which was supposed to be Razor vs. Goldust but Razor got in trouble for drugs. The idea is that Goldust is in lust with Piper but the REAL MAN Piper will have none of this gay stuff. The result is a Hollywood Backlot Brawl which is exactly what it sounds like: stupid.

Goldust vs. Roddy Piper

This was taped earlier in the day. Goldust shows up in a gold Cadillac

while Piper has a ball bat in hands. Naturally he puts that down and sprays the car with a fire hose. When the power of WATER doesn't stop a large car, Roddy breaks through the windows with the bat. Piper beats up Goldust with the bat and some stiff looking shots with fists and various metal objects.

Goldust gets sprayed with the hose and rammed into the hood of the car. There's a knee drop from Piper which mainly hits car followed by a LOUD punch. A low blow stops Piper so Goldie gets in the car and runs over a stuntman in a Piper costume. Goldust drives away so Piper steals a white Ford Bronco and we get a car chase which we'll return to later. I'll save the rating for the end of part two later on.

Steve Austin vs. Savio Vega

Austin debuted late last year and is the Million Dollar Champion at this point. Savio was Austin's first feud in the WWF, which says a lot about how far Stone Cold would jump up the card in just a year. Savio says he's ready. Vega pounds away to start and they brawl to the floor. Back in and Austin gets in a shot to the face before sending Savio's shoulder into the post. This is back when Austin could MOVE as he didn't have a bad neck so the offense is very different. He's also ripped with well defined abs.

Austin cranks on the arm but Savio backflips out and hits a superkick for two. Roddy calls in and says he's not letting it end this way. Savio goes shoulder first into the post again and we lose Piper. What a shame. We hit the armbar as Austin is in full control. There's a hammerlock slam as Piper is back on the phone and talking about beating Goldust up in Tijuana. Vega comes back with a fast cross body for two but Austin comes back with the Thesz Press which doesn't mean anything for him yet.

We go split screen to show "Piper" chasing Goldust in the Cadillac. This is from the air because clearly a helicopter is available in 10 minutes' notice. This is supposed to be a parody of the O.J. Simpson car chase, which was only two years earlier. Austin goes up top (I told you he was different) but jumps into a boot. There's a clothesline to put Austin down but a spinwheel kick hits the referee by mistake. DiBiase slides in

the Million Dollar Belt and Vega is KO'd. Another shot to the back of the head and a chinlock of all things are enough for Austin to get the win.

Rating: C+. Bad Piper references aside, this was pretty solid stuff. Austin was AWESOME back in the day before he had to basically invent the brawling style that he made famous. Vega wasn't much out there, but at least he was good enough to make Austin look solid. This was a fun match, but again no one cared because the main event and one other match are all that matter.

More car chase stuff. Vince: "This footage looks awfully familiar."

We recap the Undertaker's mind games with Diesel lately that set up the other big match tonight. Diesel says Undertaker is a big obstacle but he doesn't sweat the big things.

More car chase stuff.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Ultimate Warrior

HHH debuts Sable as his latest good looking valet. This is Warrior's latest return and the story was he might weigh 400lbs and be bald. Warrior of course is fine and the fans go nuts for him. Warrior's entrance is far longer than the match. HHH jumps Warrior before he takes his coat off and actually hits the Pedigree. That goes nowhere though as Warrior is on his feet at the same time HHH is. Clotheslines, shoulder blocks, press slam and splash mean we're done. The match didn't even last two minutes.

We go to the back and meet the debuting Marc Mero. He talks about being glad to be here when HHH comes up (with Mero's real life wife Sable) and a brawl erupts.

Piper is on his way back to the arena.

Diesel vs. Undertaker

So Diesel cost Undertaker a title match so Undertaker pulled Diesel through the ring during a cage match for the title against Bret. Then Taker did his usual mind games against Diesel, setting up this battle of

the titans. Diesel jumps him to start and the brawl is on fast. Taker clotheslines him down but misses an elbow drop. They fight to the floor with Diesel going face first into the steps. This is fast paced stuff so far.

Back in and Diesel avoids Old School, only to get stunned on the top rope. We head back to the floor where Undertaker's chair shot hits the post instead of Diesel. Diesel rams him back first into the post and then does it again for good measure. Back in again and Diesel slows things up by punching Taker in the face a few times. Snake Eyes (actually called that by Vince) hits and there's the running crotch attack in 619 position to Undertaker.

The Dead Man starts slugging back and they both hit big boots to put each other down. Taker sits up first but Diesel hits him in the back to get control again. Off to the bear hug that you knew was coming sooner or later. Taker finally fights out of it and things slow down again. Notice that the fans are into this one, unlike anything in the first hour of the show. Taker hits a clothesline off the top for a somewhat delayed two count.

Out of nowhere Diesel hits the Jackknife but he can't follow up. Actually he can but he would rather stand around and brag for awhile. Taker sits up so there's another Jackknife for good measure. Diesel takes forever to cover though and Taker grabs him by the throat. They get to their feet and it looks to be chokeslam time, only for Diesel to break it up with a belly to back suplex. Taker sits up again and there's the running clothesline. A pretty bad chokeslam puts Diesel down and the Tombstone makes Undertaker 5-0.

Rating: B-. For what it was, this was pretty solid stuff. Undertaker looked better than he usually does and it was really in doubt if he could hang with someone that had just come off a year long world title reign. This was probably the turning point for the Dead Man from monster of the week slayer to big time threat to anyone. He would soon be tested by a debuting Mankind, which would change his career forever.

Goldie and Piper get back to the arena so let's get this over with.

Goldust is back first and is exhausted from the driving. He and Piper stumble into the arena so I guess the "match" has been going on for an hour now.

Roddy Piper vs. Goldust

Note that the Hollywood Backlot Brawl is now a wrestling match in a ring in Anaheim. There's no referee or anything so they're just going to fight until it ends. Goldust pounds away and hits some shots to Piper's leg followed by a low blow. There goes Piper's shirt as you would expect it to. Goldust mounds him and starts pounding away but an attempt at kissing Piper makes the Hot Scot fire back.

Goldie goes up top but gets crotched down again. From his seat on the top rope though, he grabs Piper and kisses him, sending Piper into a frenzy. The fight is on and Piper, the apparent homophobe, grabs Goldust by the crotch. Goldust gets his own clothes ripped off and Piper kisses him. Well sure why not. Anyway Goldust is wearing either women's lingerie or some kind of S&M stuff so he bails, giving this to Piper.

Rating: N/A. This wasn't wrestling so no rating, but I think you can figure out what I thought of it. Goldust, who was Intercontinental Champion at this point, would feud with various midcarders before getting beaten up by Ahmed Johnson for awhile. Piper would be gone like the next day and in WCW in six months.

We recap Michaels vs. Hart which is about two different paths to get to the top of the world. The question is about who is the best, so we're going to find out in the hour long Iron Man Match.

Shawn says this is about getting to the top of the mountain.

Bret says everything has come to this point and he wants to wake up the next day with the belt.

Gorilla Monsoon is officially in charge again, taking over from Piper.

WWF World Title: Bret Hart vs. Shawn Michaels

In the famous opening, Shawn's manager/trainer Jose Lothario comes to the

ring alone. He gets on the bottom rope and points to the rafters where a spotlight shines. It's Shawn, dancing atop the rafters and ziplining down into the crowd. The shot from behind him with the flashbulbs going off was one of the most shown visuals in company history for a long time. Bret just walks to the ring because he's a bit more laid back. Of course this is an Iron Man Match lasting one hour, most falls in that amount of time wins.

Earl Hebner is the referee because there's no one else that it could be. He reads the full rules to both guys which is pretty cool to hear actually. Vince says that whoever wins the first decision will win the match. It likely helps that he picked the winner. Feeling out process to start with both guys being tentative to get into anything of note. Granted they're also likely conserving energy.

Shawn easily escapes a pair of headlocks and they trade some more technical stuff. First bit of psychology: Bret blocks a third try at the same headlock counter that Shawn used both times earlier. We head to the mat with the champion in control via a headlock. Shawn fights up and we get a nice technical sequence resulting in Bret being right back in control with a headlock. Off to a front facelock as the announcers debate which man is stronger. That's a good question actually.

Back to the headlock which is smart this early in a match like this. Shawn gets up again and fires off some armdrags before hooking an armbar. Freddie Blassie and Stu Hart are in the front row. They run the ropes a few times until Bret takes it back to the mat, only to be caught in a kind of abdominal stretch on the mat. They go into the corner and Shawn fires off some right hands, only to be sent into the other corner. Shawn is cool with that as he sends Bret to the floor with a headscissors. Fifty minutes left.

Back in and Shawn puts on an armbar but Bret throws him over the top. It's Shawn though so he skins the cat and hooks the armbar again to put Bret down. Bret comes back with a shot to the ribs and a headbutt to the abdomen to take over. Off to a chinlock for a bit but Michaels escapes with a jawbreaker. There's a Fujiwara Armbar on the champ but Bret nips up and catches Shawn in a kind of spinebuster.

The Sharpshooter doesn't work though so he clotheslines Shawn to the floor. The fans aren't sure what to think of that. Bret heads to the floor and gets sent into the post which makes him stagger into the timekeeper. We've got 45 minutes left as Shawn misses Sweet Chin Music on Bret, hitting the timekeeper by mistake and knocking him out cold. Back in and Bret hooks another chinlock as the timekeeper gets stretched out.

As the chinlock goes on for almost three minutes we see the problem with this match: it doesn't need to be an Iron Man Match. Yeah it's kind of cool that it did went an hour but it would have been fine as a regular match that went like 45 minutes or something like that. The drama would have been better too and we wouldn't have long rest holds like this. I can't blame the wrestlers for resting like that as it's not fair to ask them to go nuts for an hour, but it doesn't make for the most interesting TV in the world.

Shawn finally gets up but can't get an O'Connor Roll. Instead he hits a dropkick and grabs another armbar to take Bret down. Shawn cranks on the arm even harder with 40 minutes to go. Now we hit the hammerlock as the crowd is pretty silent. Back up and Shawn sends Bret's shoulder into the post to give him the biggest advantage yet. There's a shoulderbreaker to the champion followed by a double ax from the middle rope to the shoulder.

Bret starts firing off punches but Shawn comes back with a DDT on the arm. There's a cross armbreaker but Shawn breaks it after one pull. Now it goes on full but Bret fights up and rakes his boot across Shawn's face to break the hold. That's rather heelish no? Back to the armbar but Hart counters into a kind of middle rope hot shot. Shawn fights back but misses a Stinger Splash in the corner, giving Bret his first advantage in a long time.

The bulldog puts Shawn down so Bret goes up top. That's an odd sight for him and Shawn tries to slam him down, only to get pulled down to the mat by his hair. Bret hit the referee on the way down and we're at halftime. Shawn comes back with a powerslam for two but a backdrop attempt is countered into a piledriver which gets two for the champion. Bret goes up

again but gets slammed down.

Michaels starts speeding things up with a standing hurricanrana but Bret hangs onto the ropes to avoid the superkick. A backbreaker gets two for Shawn but Hart bails to the floor to avoid the kick again. Instead Shawn goes up and hits a HUGE dive to the floor to take the champ down. Back in and Shawn skins the cat, only to get caught in a small package for two. A Perfectplex gets two for Shawn and he hooks a sleeper. Hart gets his arm up on the second drop so Shawn rams him into the corner again.

Michaels charges at Bret but gets backdropped up and over the post and out to the floor in a great looking crash. Bret goes out to get him though which isn't the brightest idea in the world. Back in and Bret works over Shawn's injured back before dropping a leg for no cover. We've got twenty minutes left and Bret stomps away on the back. Shawn is flipped upside down in the corner and there's a belly to back superplex for a close two.

We hit the camel clutch for a few minutes before Shawn fights up again. Hart tries a superplex but has to settle for punching a jumping Shawn in the ribs. Michaels gets whipped into the corner and it's a Flair Flip to the floor where Shawn accidentally kicks Jose in the head. Out to the floor and Bret whips Shawn into the steps, knocking Jose down again. We head back inside with fifteen minutes to go.

A belly to belly suplex gets two for Bret so it's time for a slugout. An O'Connor roll doesn't work for Shawn as Bret kicks him out to the floor on the kickout. A suicide dive takes Shawn down again and we've got twelve minutes left. Back in again and Bret hits a German suplex for two. They slug it out but Shawn can't hang with Bret at this point. Hart is too exhausted to follow up though so it's back to the camel clutch.

Ten minutes to go now and the camel clutch eats up about two of that. It's off to a regular chinlock with eight minutes to go and Shawn fights up. They clothesline each other down and more time is being burned up. A superplex puts Shawn down again but he STILL manages to block the Sharpshooter. Hart settles for a half crab as the punishment on the back continues. Shawn makes a rope but gets taken down by a backbreaker with

five minutes to go.

Bret loads up his middle rope elbow but jumps into a boot to put both guys down again. A dropkick puts Bret in the corner as Shawn gets his nineteenth win according to Shawn. Four minutes to go now. There's the flying forearm and the nip up (the camera misses it) as Shawn picks up the speed. A jumping back elbow puts Hart down and a top rope spinning ax handle gets two. The top rope elbow hits with two and a half minutes left. A good looking gutwrench powerbomb gets no cover with two minutes to go.

Shawn busts out a moonsault press for two as Bret is trying to hang on. Ninety seconds left and Shawn hits a middle rope rana for two more. Shawn slams him down and goes up top but he can't follow up with a minute left. Shawn tries another rana but jumps into the Sharpshooter with thirty three seconds left in the match. The place is going NUTS but Shawn amazingly holds out until the time limit expires.

BUT WAIT!

As Bret leaves, Gorilla Monsoon orders the match to continue under sudden death rules. As Bret puts it: why? This was never agreed to and Bret is indeed getting screwed here. The bell rings and Bret is TICKED. He goes after Shawn's back and hits a big backdrop. Bret whips Shawn into the corner, and in one of two moments that made me jump to my feet when I was watching it live, Shawn jumps over Bret out of the corner and hits Sweet Chin Music to put both guys down. Michaels gets up, tunes up the band, and kicks Bret's head off for the pin and his first world title.

Rating: B. After an hour and five minutes of this match, there's one word that can sum it up: LONG. That's the problem here: it did not need to be an hour long and would have been much better suited as a regular one on one match. Either that or have a few falls in between, as having it be one very long glorified one on one match makes the stipulation seem pretty lame. The psychology is good though and it's not a bad match by any means. It just could have had over 20 minutes cut out and you could have had the same match, and that's not a good sign. Oh and what happened to Bret's shoulder injury?

Bret, ever the mature one, storms off like a baby with the ability to walk as Shawn is awarded the title. Shawn has a very touching moment when he realizes he finally won the title and is very somber. Then he turns into Shawn and goes nuts celebrating which he deserves the right to do.

Overall Rating: C+. The show isn't terrible but the main problem is that it's almost a one match show. Now to be fair there's a five match card (not counting the brawl) and two of the matches are quite good, but the problem is that this was basically a four man show. It's certainly not terrible, but it feels incomplete due to one match being about half the show. Bret vs. Shawn is worth seeing, but make sure you have a remote in your hand.

Ratings Comparison

Camp Cornette vs. Yokozuna/Jake Roberts/Ahmed Johnson

Original: D+

Redo: C

Steve Austin vs. Savio Vega

Original: B-

Redo: C+

Ultimate Warrior vs. Hunter Hearst Helmsley

Original: N/A

Redo: N/A

Undertaker vs. Diesel

Original: B

Redo: B-

Roddy Piper vs. Goldust

Original: N/A

Redo: N/A

Shawn Michaels vs. Bret Hart

Original: B

Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: C-

Redo: C+

I guess it gets better over time.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/03/19/history-of-wrestlemania-with-kb-wrestlemania-12-one-really-long-match-and-not-much-else/>

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