

Monday Nitro – January 5, 1998: Show of the Year

Monday Nitro #121

Date: January 5, 1998

Location: Georgia Dome, Atlanta, Georgia

Attendance: 26,773

Commentators: Mike Tenay, Bobby Heenan, Larry Zbyszko, Tony Schiavone

It's been a week since the mess with Hogan and Sting to end the last episode and from what I understand, nothing has been announced yet. Odds are that's going to be saved for the first episode of Thunder which airs three days after this show. We're in a new year here though so things should be pretty big tonight to give them a good start. Let's get to it.

We open with two limos pulling up, bringing the NWO in full force. They don't seem to be too pleased with each other so Tony is in a frenzy.

The announcers talk about the cameras rolling after the show went off the air last week, but there's a court injunction keeping them from showing us the tape. That's all the explanation we're given, but that sounds so appropriate for WCW. I'm not even going to bother to ask the variety of questions that statement brings up.

JJ says he thinks Sting is champion (Tony already told us that) and he's sorry for the near riot that took place in Baltimore last week.

Apparently lawyers from both sides have wanted the tape but it's in a judge's chambers. YOUR tax dollars at work people! Apparently the tape will be released in 24 hours and we can see it on the debut episode of Thunder. Boy that's convenient. We'll also see video from Starrcade on Thursday about the fast count and all that jazz.

Here's Jericho with a chair and a suit jacket in his hands. He wants to apologize for his actions last week because that's not the real Chris Jericho. The real Jericho is the one standing here right now. He understands that a lot of people look up to him and that wasn't the right reaction. Jericho gives Penzer a new chair to sit in and a new suit

jacket to wear. That will NEVER happen again.

Diamond Dallas Page vs. Chris Jericho

Non-title here. Feeling out process to start with Page taking over via a swinging neckbreaker. They get back up and slap hands before Jericho is run over with a shoulder block. Tony is still shocked by the fifteen members of the NWO showing up in two limos. We get another standoff and Jericho offers a handshake, only to sucker Page in with a right hand. Not that it matters as the Diamond Cutter hits for the pin a few seconds later.

Jericho has another fit post match.

Gene talks to some WCW lawyer who reads a prepared statement, basically saying any WCW wrestlers violating WCW policies will be fined or suspended. Also if the NWO violates a policy on Nitro, they're fined or suspended too. That's certainly riveting information.

Bill Goldberg vs. Stevie Ray

Goldberg pounds him down to start but Stevie escapes a powerslam and hits a belly to back suplex for no cover. A clothesline gets two for Stevie but Goldberg's second powerslam attempt works fine. Off to a quick chinlock but Stevie comes back with a superkick. Not that it matters as it's the spear and Jackhammer to keep Goldie undefeated.

Nitro Girls.

John Nord vs. Barbarian

You might remember Nord as the Berzerker from the early 90s. He's part of a new wave of talent coming in apparently, which will also include a former WWF Tag Team Champion debuting later tonight. Nord is just a guy in white trunks and furry boots here. They clothesline each other and no one goes anywhere but another clothesline puts Barbarian on the floor. Nord, a big guy in his own right, hits a dive over the top to crush Barbarian but he stops to go after Jimmy Hart. Barbie rams him into the barricade but Nord sends him head first into the steps.

They whip each other into the barricade as this is way more energetic than you would expect it to be. Back in and Nord hits a Samoan drop for no cover followed by a series of elbow drops. Jimmy gets choked a bit but Barbarian hits a big boot to the jaw, sending Nord out to the floor. Back in and a pumphandle slam gets two for Barbarian before he chops Nord in the corner. Nord misses a charge into the corner and falls outside again, only to come back in with a middle rope elbow. A modified camel clutch by Nord (Nord was sitting almost on the mat while pulling back on the chin) is good for the submission.

Rating: C+. This was WAY better than I ever could have expected it to be as Nord looked pretty solid out there. Barbarian was his usual self but a bit more physical than he usually was, making for a pretty solid surprise here. I barely remember Nord at all around this time which is one of the fun parts of rewatching these shows. Good stuff here.

Here's Bischoff for a chat. He says there are no problems in the NWO so the announcers can forget about it. The fans boo him and Eric loses his cool. He goes on a rant about how Hogan beat Sting twice in a row and how there's no tape or anything and WCW is just scared of the people seeing it. Eric says Nitro should belong to the NWO after the kick to the head, but we'll see that on Thunder as well. Eric is still ticked off and walks out.

We look at Ultimo Dragon winning the Cruiserweight Title last week from Eddie.

Psychosis vs. Juventud Guerrera

The winner gets the first shot at Dragon. Apparently we're going to see Bischoff vs. Zbyszko in its entirety on Thunder. Good to know I paid to see it live because I can now see it again less than two weeks later. Psychosis takes him down twice in a row to start but misses a splash in the corner to let Juvy fire off some chops. Juvy sends him to the floor and there's a big dive to take Psychosis out.

Back in and Psychosis crotches him on the top rope as Tony starts bragging about the NWO not holding any titles. A facejam gets two for Psychosis but the guillotine legdrop misses. Juvy hits a springboard

missile dropkick to take out Psychosis' knee before pounding away at the masked head. Juvy goes up but dives into a dropkick to the ribs to shift momentum again. Psychosis has a powerbomb reversed into a DDT and the 450 sends Juvy to Thunder (where else?) for the title shot.

Rating: C. This was fine. Both guys got to do their thing and it was a nice change of pace from the match we saw just before it. As stupid as some of the main event stuff would get, the lower card stuff on Nitro was almost always an excellent mix of different styles, which is what we got right here.

We get a clip from last April with the NWO having problems to show that this has happened before. What this has to do with anything that's happened lately is beyond me but it's hard to keep up with WCW logic at times.

Hour #2 begins.

More Nitro Girls.

Here's TV Champion Booker T to say it's awesome that he's TV Champion. It was for his son apparently.

TV Title: Booker T vs. Prince Iaukea

Feeling out process to start with Booker's wristlock going nowhere. Instead Booker kicks him in the head and pounds away before getting two off the ax kick. A side kick misses Iaukea though and Booker falls to the floor. Back in and another kick to Iaukea's head sets up the Harlem Hangover for the pin to retain the title. Total squash.

We get proof of the fast count: stills of Patrick counting it. Tony: "You can see the fast count." How does this man remember to tie his shoes every morning?

Buff Bagwell/Scott Norton/Konnan vs. Ray Traylor/Steiner Brothers

Traylor and Konnan get things going with Ray missing a charge into the corner and getting clotheslined down. Konnan loads up a DDT but Scott Steiner takes his head off with a clothesline to break it up. Bagwell

gets slapped to the floor as Scott Steiner stomps on Konnan's head. Everything breaks down and the NWO is sent to the floor. Bagwell gets the tag but wants Rick instead of Scott.

Rick poses a bit in a funny spot, causing Buff to go off with right hands. That lasts all of four seconds as Rick suplexes him down and gets two off a Steiner Line. Back to Ray to face Norton with Traylor being taken down like he's nothing. Ray comes back with an uppercut and it's back to Rick for a top rope clothesline.

The NWO finally starts cheating to let Buff take over and Rick gets beaten down by all three NWO guys. Rick finally clotheslines Buff down and tags in his brother as everything breaks down. Everything breaks down and the Steiners set up the Steiner Bulldog, only to have Scott drop Buff down in an electric chair. Rick is distracted but his brother hits the awesome Steiner Screwdriver on Konnan for the pin. DiBiase gets in some kicks to Vincent for old times' sake.

Rating: C+. This match goes up a letter or so because of the Steiner Screwdriver. If there has ever been a more devastating looking move I can't think of it off the top of my head. If you've never seen it, picture a delayed vertical suplex but instead of falling back, Scott drops the other guy straight down on his head like a fast piledriver. It's incredibly dangerous but so sweet to watch. That lack of the Steiner Bulldog at the end isn't a good sign for the Brothers though.

Here are the Nitro Girls again in case you forgot what they look like.

We look at a fan's Nitro Party.

Brad Armstrong vs. Rick Martel

This is Martel's debut and his first national match in years. A quick rollup gets two for Martel as I think Armstrong is the heel here. Brad grabs a headlock as Tony is SURE there are problems in the NWO. Armstrong charges into a knee in the corner and gets caught by a middle rope clothesline for no cover. Brad gets in a forearm out of the corner and chokes away, only to get caught in the Quebec Crab for the win for Martel. Another short match.

More Nitro Girls.

Chris Benoit/Steve McMichael vs. Perry Saturn/Riggs

Benoit and Saturn get things going and the chops start flying fast. Off to Mongo who gets pounded into the corner, only to come out with a hip toss. A powerslam puts Saturn down but Riggs comes in for a double team. Benoit is fine with letting his partner get beaten down by both guys in an odd bit. Riggs trips Mongo up for a clothesline from Saturn before drawing in Benoit to allow more cheating.

The Flock cuts the ring off to keep Mongo in with Saturn putting on a Fujiwara Armbar. A double shoulder puts McMichael down but he hooks a double suplex and makes the hot tag to Benoit. Everything breaks down and there's the Crossface to Saturn but a Kidman distraction lets Raven hit the DDT on Benoit, giving Saturn the pin.

Rating: C-. They're taking their sweet time to get to Raven vs. Benoit but that has the potential to be a classic when we get there. The tag match was a fine idea to keep the story going now that Benoit has gone through every individual member of the Flock but hopefully Mongo isn't a fixture in these matches.

Here's Ric Flair with something to say. He's glad WCW is taking over again and is glad that Sting is world champion, but everyone wants the belt. One of the people that wants it is someone that has rubbed him the wrong way: Bret Hart. How can someone like Bret call himself the best when Flair is around? This brings out Hart who says that he'll say the catchphrase and then say WOO at the end of it.

Flair talks about how Bret is a big time columnist in Canada, but we're here in Atlanta tonight and Flair is prime USA man. He tells Bret to say it again and Bret does just that. If Flair has a problem with it, too bad. Flair lists off some legendary names and says Hart can believe he's better than them, but Race and Kiniski and Funk and Brisco aren't Ric Flair. Bret takes off his jacket and says to be the man you gotta beat the man, which he's done before. Flair says if you think you're better than me, let's see you do it again. AWESOME segment here that makes me want to watch them fight right now.

Lex Luger vs. Randy Savage

Nick Patrick is the referee here to tick off the announcers. Actually scratch that as JJ comes out to suspend him, drawing out Bischoff to protest. Bagwell and Norton are here with Savage and Luger gets jumped before the bell. An elbow to the face puts Luger down for two and a belly to back suplex gets the same as this is one sided so far.

A slam puts Luger down but Savage jumps into a right hand to the ribs. Luger starts firing off his wide array of clotheslines and the powerslam looks to set up the Rack, only to have Savage bail to the floor. Savage bails to the floor to avoid the Rack and after hiding behind Liz he's able to send Luger into the barricade to take over. Back in and Luger gets a small package out of nowhere for the pin.

Rating: D+. These two spent like three years fighting each other and this wasn't one of their better matches. The match was almost too short to rate and the ending came out of nowhere, making it hard to get into the match at all. Luger was rapidly becoming a shell of himself which would only continue in the coming years.

Post match Savage goes after Luger with a chair but Bischoff pulls the chair away (remember the threat of suspensions earlier tonight). Savage doesn't know who it was and decks Bischoff, drawing out Hogan to calm things down. Nash comes out and decks Savage as Hogan tries to calm things down. The NWO surrounds Luger but Sting runs in for the save to end things.

Overall Rating: B-. This was actually a pretty solid show with the NWO showing real signs of problems and Sting clearly being the lead soldier in WCW's war. Add that in with some excellent talking between Bret and Flair and you have a pretty good TV show here. You can see a lot of Souled Out coming together, but right now we're getting ready for Thunder on Thursday which should be interesting. Good show this week and one of the best in a very long time.

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