

Thunder – January 15, 1998: That's One Nice Graphic

Thunder

Date: January 15, 1998

Location: Jenkins Center, Lakeland, Florida

Commentators: Mike Tenay, Bobby Heenan, Lee Marshall

It's the second episode of the show and as of Nitro, the NWO is in shambles again. The main problem seems to stem from Nash and Savage over Savage accidentally hitting Bischoff two weeks ago on Nitro. As luck would have it, the main event tonight is Nash/Savage vs. Diamond Dallas Page/Lex Luger. Let's get to it.

We open with a video from Nitro of DDP hyping up the tag match tonight.

The announcers talk about the NWO's problems. It's strange to not have Schiavone doing commentary on a WCW show.

We get video from Nitro about the \$1.5 million bonds put up by WCW and the NWO to ensure Nash vs. Giant actually happens at Souled Out.

Here's Giant in the ring for a chat with Schiavone. Giant says that he's a patient man and will be ready for Nash at Souled Out. He'll be bringing the chokeslam to the PPV but first he has to rip up one of Lodi's signs. Lodi is pulled into the ring via a chokeslam and the Flock swarms the Giant. The big man swats them all away and literally throws Kidman into the front row. This brings out Nash but Giant isn't allowed to touch him, even after Nash throws coffee in his face.

Back to Nitro again to look at the issues between Nash and Savage. We get some exclusive footage from after Nitro went off the air of Savage slapping Nash and running off.

Black Cat/Ohara/Gedo vs. Steiner Brothers/Ray Traylor

Tenay tells us that DDP has been mugged in a parking lot and has a knee injury which might keep him out of the main event tonight. Traylor and Ohara start with Ohara firing off kicks to the knee. Ray comes back with some uppercuts before Black Cat comes in to be pounded down by Rick. A series of elbows get two for Rick as the fans chant USA. Back to Traylor as we take a break.

We come back with Rick clotheslining Gedo and Ohara down before ripping away at Gedo's face. Scott finally tags himself in and explodes on Black Cat with clotheslines and right hands. An overhead suplex sends Ohara flying and Scott puts him in the Tree of Woe for some choking. Rick and Ray have their arms out for tags but Scott isn't paying any attention to them. A move Tenay calls the Steiner Screwdriver (this was more like a sitout powerslam) is good for the pin on Gedo.

Rating: D+. This was more storytelling than a match which is a good idea. Scott's slow burn heel turn is going well here as you can see why Rick would get upset and why Scott would think he doesn't need to tag out. Traylor doesn't need to be here but what else are they going to do with him?

Post match Rick, Ray and DiBiase leave Scott to celebrate by himself.

Ernest Miller vs. Yuji Nagata

This is a preview match for a proposed martial arts division held under pro wrestling rules. Miller immediately kicks Yuji down for two but Nagata's manager kicks Ernest in the back to give Nagata control. Yuji hits a quick suplex and cranks on the arm for a bit before shifting over to a leg lock. Another kick to the chest gets two for Yuji but Ernest hits a spin kick to the face to take over. Nagata chokes in the corner and gets in an argument with the referee, allowing Miller to pull himself to the top for a great looking spin kick to the face for the pin.

Rating: D. That finish looked great but the rest of the match was pretty dull stuff. The idea of a martial arts division under pro wrestling rules adds nothing at all as these guys do little more than kick each other for three minutes anyway. You can only be so interesting as that kind of a character and putting the same kind of guys against each other isn't going to do them any favors.

JJ is here to talk about Page's injury but the mic goes out. Page comes out on a crutch and says he's going to do it. JJ says there are liability issues and Page might sue him. Page says he'll sign whatever paper he has to and he'll take WCW off the hook.

Louie Spicolli vs. Scott Hall

Before the match, Hall asks Spicolli who he is and how old he is. Spicolli is 26 but will be 27 next month. This brings out Larry Zbyszko to give Spicolli some advice. Hall challenges Larry to a fight so here comes Zbyszko, but Spicolli jumps Larry from behind. Larry clears the ring with ease.

We recap Jericho snapping again on Nitro and beating up Mysterio before Mysterio's Cruiserweight Title shot.

Chris Jericho vs. Eddie Guerrero

The winner gets a Cruiserweight Title shot at Souled Out. Before the match, Jericho claims that Mysterio was making disparaging remarks about his family on Nitro to trigger the beatdown. Jericho offers a handshake to start but Eddie clotheslines him down instead. A jumping back elbow puts Chris down again but Jericho blocks an O'Connor roll and throws Eddie throat first onto the top rope.

Eddie backdrops out of a belly to back suplex and dropkicks Jericho's knee out to keep control. Off to an abdominal stretch with Eddie grabbing

the middle rope to cheat. Would you expect anything less of him? Jericho comes back by launching Eddie into the air and letting him crash to the mat.

Eddie rolls through a powerbomb for two before clotheslining Jericho down for two. Off to a chinlock with two knees in Jericho's back with Jericho bent backwards. Eddie tries an upside down Gory Stretch but drops Jericho on the top of his head in a scary landing. Jericho sends him into the corner with Eddie jumping up to try a hurricanrana, only to have Jericho counter into the Liontamer for the win.

Rating: C+. This could have been something special with another five minutes. The lack of time and Jericho being dropped on his head hurt things though as the match never had the chance to really get going. Jericho is starting to look like a future star though instead of just a talented smiling good guy.

We get the Ric Flair/Jim Neidhart segment from Nitro which led to Flair and Bret brawling.

Somehow that causes the announcers to talk about the world title situation for a bit.

Chavo Guerrero Jr. vs. Bill Goldberg

Before Goldberg's entrance, here's the Disco Inferno to interrupt. I don't know if it's my video or something from the broadcast but the audio is way off as it sounds like the announcers are shouting into megaphones. Disco says people are here to see him dance instead of seeing Chavo wrestle. Chavo says Disco can't dance and that this isn't even his time. They keep arguing and the video feed cuts out, going to a still shot of the arena with "Lakeland, Florida" written on the bottom. Based on the audio, Disco hits the Chartbuster on Chavo before Goldberg comes out for the spear and Jackhammer on Inferno.

Back from a break with Tenay apologizing for the technical issues. The audio and video are fixed now.

We look at a clip from last week of JJ stripping Sting of the title.

Here are Hogan and Bischoff with something to say...and there go the video and audio again. It's back to the graphic this time with the audio cutting in and out as well. Bischoff thanks Hogan for putting up the \$1.5 million which Hogan says was no big deal. What is however a big deal is the NWO having problems. Hogan talks about taking a palm tree and a hippie in each hand and talking to the big NWOite in the sky.

Apparently they've gone to federal court where a judge said Hogan is the world champion. JJ can either give him the belt tonight or on Nitro because Hogan is getting it back one way or another. Hogan brags about being the man that wrestling revolves around and says the NWO is intact. The audio and video kept cutting up every thirty seconds or so during this.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Juventud Guerrera

This is a rematch from Nitro where Guerrera successfully defended the title thanks to a prematch beatdown by Jericho. Mysterio fires off some forearms to start but Juvy backflips out of a German suplex. A headscissors sends the champion to the floor and Rey hits a flip dive to take him down again, possibly injuring his knee in the process. Back in and Juvy rolls through a springboard sunset flip and slingshots Rey back to the floor. A BIG dive...might have hit as the video cut out again.

Juvy is up first and chops away before hitting a slingshot legdrop back inside. Guerrera loads up something similar to a Muscle Buster but drops down onto his knees to drive Rey's neck into Juvy's shoulder. A brainbuster gets two for the champion before they head to the apron, only to have Rey launch Juvy over his head and face first into the post. It has next to no effect though as Juvy rams him into the apron and drops a

slingshot legdrop to the floor. Back in and a springboard dropkick gets two but Rey sidesteps a regular version a second later. Juvy sends him face first into the middle buckle and flicks his tongue a lot.

They slug it out and Rey hits a Killswitch (called a modified DDT by Tenay) for two. A pinfall reversal sequence gets a pair of two counts each before Rey has to pound his way out of a powerbomb attempt. Juvy counters a top rope rana attempt into a powerbomb and Rey is in trouble. Mysterio avoids the 450 though and hooks a quick rana for the pin and the title.

Rating: B-. This was pretty solid stuff but Juvy didn't sell much of anything throughout the match. There was a good story of Rey hanging on and trying to hit one quick move to win the title while Juvy was hitting him with everything he had. This is the third title change in about two and a half weeks, which makes me wonder why they didn't just put the title on Rey the night after Starrcade in the first place and cut out Dragon and Guerrera.

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We see the end of Nitro with Liz distracting Luger so Savage could jump him. Page made the save to set up the tag match tonight.

Diamond Dallas Page/Lex Luger vs. Kevin Nash/Randy Savage

The audio and video go out again before the entrances are done. Back from a break and it's the Lakeland graphic again as Luger's music is playing. Page is limping on the bad knee during his entrance so Luger volunteers to go it alone. Hogan sneaks up on Page and breaks Page's crutch over the bad knee. Savage jumps off the top with an ax handle to Luger and beats up the trainer looking at Page's knee. Nash wants a tag but Savage doesn't seem all that interested.

Hogan yells at Savage to make him tag, but once Nash comes in he throws Savage to the floor. For some reason this earns Savage more yelling from Hogan as the video cuts out yet again. Nash hits a knee to Luger's ribs in the corner before going back to Savage and slapping him in the face. Savage goes up top to dive on Nash but Hogan gets in the way. Luger gets back up and hits the forearm on Nash as Hogan comes in for the DQ.

Rating: N/A. The match was only about three and a half minutes long and about a minute of that was spent looking at a graphic of the arena so it's not fair to rate the little I saw. This was all about drama as Page was on the floor for the entire match and a lot of the "action" was spent on Nash and Savage's problems.

Post match Luger puts Hogan and Nash in the Rack but Savage makes the save (it's not clear if he was aiming for Luger or Nash). Savage holds Luger for a shot from Hogan but Hollywood kicks Savage in the ribs instead. They go nose to nose as Giant comes out to chokeslam Hogan (in theory as the video went out again) before getting in Nash's face. The NWO comes out for the beatdown but Sting and Luger clean house to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. Really annoying technical difficulties aside, this did a good job of advancing the NWO stories leading up to Souled Out. Also unlike last week, this show actually built on what we saw on Nitro rather than starting something new. There's decent wrestling and good angle advancement here so there isn't much to complain about on the second episode.

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