

On This Day: August 17, 1997 – Hardcore Heaven 1997: One of ECW's Better Shows

Hardcore Heaven 1997

Date: August 17, 1997

Location: War Memorial Auditorium, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Attendance: 1,950

Commentator: Joey Styles

So unlike in the major companies, we've had 4 months since the last PPV. Since then, Raven is gone and Dreamer is either the top face or the second biggest face in the company. He's facing Jerry Lawler tonight in a match that's more or less based off a mini invasion that the WWF was doing.

Other than that we've got a rematch from the Night the Line Was Crossed as it's a three way dance with Funk, Douglas and Sabu, the current champion, having beaten Funk for the title from Funk about a week before. Why they bothered with that is beyond me but then again it's ECW so there we are. Other than that, it's a random assortment of matches that I'm sure aren't likely to be explained, which isn't Joey's fault per se. Let's get to it.

We of course start in the ring with Joey and the lighting is AWFUL. I mean you can barely see the crowd other than the first maybe 10 rows. What's that they're chanting? I can't quite make it out. This should be interesting as they're out of their comfort zone in New England. He runs down the card, which makes little sense as anyone that's bought the show already likely knows the card already, but then again what do I know?

Only Funk gets anything close to a pop when mentioned. Lawler

gets MAD heat. Joey is about to talk about Dreamer when he's cut off by the music of Rick Rude. He clearly says son of a female dog when it starts. Rude sold out apparently. OH I remember this. It's the time where he showed up on Raw and ECW and soon on Nitro as he jumped from WWF and appeared on both shows in one night as Raw was taped.

He had been on Hardcore TV the night before, so in 24 hours he appeared on all three shows. That's pretty freaking cool. Rude had recently helped WWF guys beat ECW guys at Heatwave so no one likes him at all. Rude introduces Candido for the TV Title match. Yeah that was really useful Rick.

TV Title: Chris Candido vs. Taz

Something tells me I know the ending this already. Todd Gordon, the ECW Commissioner comes down and says Rude has to leave because he's not a licensed manager. So let me get this straight. You can throw people through burning tables. You can have your arm split open and tape it back together. You can get tied together in barbed wire. You can have a lesbian angle on nationally syndicated television. All of that's ok.

However, if you want to stand by the ring and cheer someone on, you need to have permission. I love making fun of wrestling. We go to the intro with the theme song, which I've never gotten why they do this after the show actually starts. It's just very odd. We get a wide shot of the arena and you can't see ANYTHING. Apparently this is a main event. Well ok then. The big match introductions never get old if nothing else. I have to give Taz this: he was perfect at what he did.

It's so odd to see him being goofy like he is now and then here see him be more or less a killing machine. We get a nice TAZ IS GONNA KILL YOU chant. I thought TNA and ROH were supposed to be an alternative. They stole stuff from ECW too apparently so there we are. They mention Taz is 29 here.

That's just weird to hear for some reason. He seems older than

that but the same age now if that makes sense. They do a great mat wrestling sequence and submission exchange that I'm into. You can see the shadows on the mat. That's just pitiful. An issue I have with referees in ECW: SLOW DOWN THE COUNTS. Watch an ECW match and they count as fast as they possibly can. It's insane.

Candido works the neck which makes sense here if nothing else as this is where Taz broke his neck a few years ago. That's rather smart and some nice continuity which you hardly ever get from the big two today. We hit the floor for a bit but the only weapons use would be a few slams into the railing which I'd hardly classify as weapons use. I like that.

A nice looking diving headbutt gets two as Candido is in control here. He sends Taz into the corner to set up the top rope powerbomb which was his finisher at this time. I like the set up for it also as he whips him in and Taz stays there. That's not entirely contrived.

Actually yeah it is as any wrestler usually lands back first there and why would Taz do it differently, knowing what Candido finishes with? Eh, either way he counters with a nice suplex (shocking). After Taz goes suplex insane, he sits on the second rope with Candido in control somehow, but as Chris poses, the champ gives the throat slit and locks on the Tazmission for the tap out.

Rating: A-. NOW THAT'S MORE LIKE IT! If this was what ECW was like most of the time, I'd be a huge fan. This was hard hitting, fast paced, exciting stuff. Above all else though: THEY WRESTLED. This wasn't about weapons and chairs and insanity. This was about two guys out there using their own talents and abilities to get something good doing and it worked to perfection. It would have been a higher grade with fewer powerbombs and more time, but still this was great.

Joey plugs their next PPV, and says you should come see it

live, as a lot of the time stuff happens before they go on the air. Like tonight for example, the Insane Clown Posse showed up to perform, but the then heel RVD and Sabu showed up and beat the tar out of them. I always liked Van Dam.

Bam Bam Bigelow vs. Spike Dudley

This is a revenge match apparently. Spike is a bit different than the one that you see most of the time, as he's Little Spike Dudley. He sees "colors" and wears tie dye. I think you get the joke. He was made into the Giant Killer after beating Bigelow on TV a week prior to this. The 80s explode here as Bigelow comes out to Welcome to the Jungle and Spike comes out to Highway to Hell.

Either way they're both great bands and songs so there we are. Bigelow really was a big coup for ECW as he was a freaking machine that was quite good when he was on his game. He was the guy that threw Spike into the crowd and they body surfed him around the arena in one of ECW's signature moments. After a splash maybe a minute into the match, Bigelow does a little dance which amuses me.

The fans keep chanting over here, as in where they want him to throw Spike. I have to give the fans this: they are very loyal. After hitting some decent little offense (like anything he could do is big) Spike takes one of the best powerbombs I've ever seen. That looked AWESOME.

In another great spot, Spike is thrown from the ring into about the 3rd row. That's just impressive. This is a flat out crushing. It's beyond a squash. Another great looking piledriver leads to the moonsault for the academic pin. That ring is really small. Spike bled a lot in there.

Rating: N/A. It was a really long squash. What can I give it as a legit grade? There were some painful looking spots in there and Bigelow looked awesome so all is right I guess.

We go back to the thing from before the show with the ICP where we see Sandman who was injured by RVD and Sabu and couldn't wrestle. He beat on them a bit and then they beat him down. That's traditional ECW if I've ever heard of it. I have no idea if the fans can see this as they have no video screens that I know of.

Rob Van Dam vs. Al Snow

This is Monday Night Rules, meaning it's a traditional wrestling match. Snow wasn't quite over yet though as he was little more than a former tag jobber as far as the mainstream goes. He would find Head soon enough though, which would be more than enough to get him over, which is putting it mildly. He gets almost no reaction here though.

RVD is one of the top heels here as he had been showing up on Raw and calling himself Mr. Monday Night. He was using what would become known as Starship Pain as his finisher there for no apparent reason. He gets mild heat as he's just so popular for his in ring ability. Snow gets some boos but more or less it's indifference. Head was the best thing that ever happened to him.

This starts off fast like the other match did and I'm perfectly fine with that. Joey makes an unintended joke as he points out that there are no mats. That's true, but only WCW, the company they wanted to be completely different from, did that as a national company. They go to the floor and stay there longer in the Monday Night Rules match than they did in the traditional ECW rules match.

That makes perfect sense right? Still though, that's fine as they keep it between themselves with the only weapons being used being the guard rail. Like I said, I'd hardly even call that a weapon. Snow puts Van Dam against the apron on the floor and walks up the entry way before getting a running start for a clothesline. Ok, that's fine.

What's not fine is Joey asking if we saw that. NO YOU DIPSTICK WE DIDN'T BECAUSE THE CAMERA WAS ON VAN DAM. Will you think for like two seconds please? Back in the ring, Snow gets taken down and actually kicks out of the Frog Splash. That's very surprising and gets a just barely over minimal reaction. We hit the floor and break out our first chair of the show, in a match under Monday Night Rules.

I love these absurd rules and the like. Snow does another of the long runs for a clothesline but gets a chair pelted into his face, in clear view of the referee, who does nothing but keep the ten count going. We go back into the ring now after some more chair stuff where RVD gets two. The chair stuff was minimal, but at least it made a bit more sense. We get a LOUD Van Dam chant just before the Van Daminator gets the pin.

Rating: B. This was good, although not as good as the first match. The Monday Night Rules thing was just stupid and pointless but whatever. I'm ok with the chair here because the focus of the match was still on the wrestling and in ring action which is the most important part of the show. Both of these guys would get far bigger over the next year or so, but this was pretty solid stuff, at least in theory.

In a WEIRD segment, we go to the EXTREME CHOPPER in the sky, following the Sandman's ambulance. Ok, let me make sure have this straight. BEFORE the show started, so at least an hour ago, Sandman was put into an ambulance and taken away.

He has since taken over the ambulance and is now driving around the city, trying to find the War Memorial. It should be noted that apparently this is news worth following, despite him not wrestling tonight. Also, WHEN DID ECW GET A HELICOPTER??? I think it might actually be legit, but my guess is it's somehow faked. Whatever.

We get a promo from Lawler, who says he was talking to Vince who says that this is a bad day in his career for having to go

and do this himself. He says he's not here alone. Apparently Taker is cheering him on. For some reason I don't buy that. Apparently Bret Hart is cheering for him. That doesn't sound right either. Finally, Austin apparently wants to be there too. All of them want him to use their finishers, which strikes me as very odd but whatever.

ECW Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. Gangstas

The Dudleys get no intro again. They're joined by Big Dick Dudley, Sign Guy Dudley, Joel Gertner, and Jenna Jameson. Joel talks about how tonight...wait a minute. JENNA FREAKING JAMESON??? HOW DID THEY GET HER??? That makes little sense but whatever as she looks epic. Joey knows her before anyone introduces her. That's not going to go over well at all methinks (stolen from X).

Anyway, Joel does the really long intro, including a great line of "One fall, fifteen minute time limit, your referee in charge is bald." That's a lot better than it sounds. Jenna looks like she's having fun, which is far more than Pam Anderson could do. The Gangstas aren't here tonight apparently, so the Dudleys win by forfeit. Instead we get this.

ECW Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. PG-13

The challengers are more commonly known as the white guys from the Nation of Domination. They were like 15 time tag champion in Memphis so whatever. They're white rappers with the same amount of talent for wrestling that Vanilla Ice had at rapping. They've been talking all of ten seconds and I already hate them. They're naturally the heels since they're from Lawler's company.

The one that talks is trying to be Jerry Lawler and it's just failing all around. Oh and everyone wants to screw Jenna, and who can blame them? They must want to die from the clap or something like that. So after 8 minutes of intros we start

with D-Von against Wolfie D. I wonder if he's related to Desmond Wolf. You can shoot me at the end of the review. His partner is named JC Ice.

That sums them up as well as anything I can say. We get our first sexual assault on Jenna as JC hits the floor to kiss her. Ok correction: PG-13 aren't bad. They're just REALLY annoying. I really want to just smack the tar out of both of them 2 minutes into the match.

In an amusing spot, Bubba has one of the white guys in his evil clutches but as he's handing him to D-Von for some cheating, JC reverses it to give Bubba's arm to D-Von, who keeps ramming it over his shoulder while all of his managers try to get his attention. Once he finally gets the point he's slammed the arm down about 9 times, drawing him a massive YOU F'D UP chant.

Actually, the Dudleys are the heels here, which is a tribute to their heel drawing abilities. The Dudleys are FAR bigger than the other guys. It's really funny looking. Jenna looks incredible. Every time she jumps there's a huge pop. They pick up the pace a lot and it turns into a free for all, which is how most tag matches in any company end so no problems there.

PG13 is something like the Briscos if you're an ROH fan, just minus the flair and the gimmick. 3D on Wolfe and that's it. That came out of nowhere. The announcer says still 3 time tag team champions, which they could have been if they had lost.

Rating: C+. This was slightly better than your average tag match which means it wasn't that bad. It's about ten minutes long and is a run of the mill power vs. high flying match, meaning that it's decent enough. It's no classic, but I've seen far worse matches. Yeah that's all I've got.

Sandman is still trying to get back to the arena and this is still news, despite not having a match tonight. The Chopper is still looking for him. Apparently he stopped and got a carton

of cigarettes and a beer. This is pointless. They have a spotlight on him but the guy in the chopper says he can't see him.

Jerry Lawler vs. Tommy Dreamer

Lawler plugs Ground Zero, which was an ok show at best and crap at worst. He more or less says the same thing that he said in his promo, which to be fair the live crowd hasn't heard. Styles says he won't be impartial. Well at least he won't pretend to be like Ross does. BeulahL is freaking gorgeous.

After pinning Raven, Dreamer is now more or less one of the top faces in the company right there with Taz. They start off fast with weapons and that's fine here. This is supposed to be about showing Lawler what ECW is about and that's what they're doing here. Jerry is bleeding 10 seconds in.

Fans keep giving Dreamer weapons which is an old standard for the company, especially him. They're in the crowd and the lighting is so bad you can't tell who is who other than the outline of a beard. Jerry has had no offense at all. It's chair time but as he tries to come in off the top rope, Lawler manages to crotch him. It's a good thing this wasn't in Philly Lawler would be dead by now.

Styles is being really calm actually which impresses me. In a spot I like, Lawler just holds the chair up and rams Dreamer's head into it. And there goes the impartiality. Lawler chokes Dreamer. A lot. A whole lot. Oh there's a piledriver and Dreamer becomes the first person to ever kick out of it!*(Note*: that means the first person in Ft. Lauderdale named Tommy wearing an ECW shirt in August of 97.)

He rips Dreamer's shirt off and wipes himself with it which makes him jobber up. His chest looks like Hogan's if nothing else. Dreamer poses which allows for a low blow to switch the momentum again. We have our ref bump of the match to really

make it a big time match. Lawler adds a DDT to him for no apparent reason. Dreamer is about to crotch Lawler on the post and the lights go out.

They come back on and Rude blasts Dreamer with a trash can to bust him open. Why did they have to go out for that to happen? That only gets two as Lawler kicks the referee again. Dreamer sets for a piledriver and we lose the lights again. They come back on to reveal Jake Roberts for no apparent reason.

He hits a clothesline on Dreamer who convulses like Terry Funk for no apparent reason. He adds a DDT to Dreamer as Lawler has no idea why he's there. Neither do I but whatever. Jake says his God giveth but he doesn't have the balls to do anything else.

Now Roberts hits a clothesline on Lawler who lands on Dreamer for two. Roberts walks out as I wonder who is handling security tonight since Roberts just walked in and out at his own will. Dreamer sets for his own DDT and FOR THE LOVE OF GOODNESS SHOOT THE GUY THAT'S RUNNING THE LIGHTS!!!

Sunny is there this time and sprays hairspray in Dreamer's eyes. Beulah, who hasn't done anything this whole match and I had forgotten about her, starts a catfight. Lawler tries to use her for a human shield so she kicks him low to allow Tommy to hit the DDT for the pin. Not overbooked at ALL.

Rating: D+. Before I go into this, let it be known: this is for the wrestling and action itself and not the symbolism or importance of anything here. That being said, this wasn't that good at all. It was mainly just random weapons and ball shots that led to nothing. Also the three run ins were just overkill.

Rude I get and Sunny would have been ok, but you could have killed it off there. Roberts made no sense at all though. See, earlier in the show when Rude was there for the introduction, that justified his run in here. Since he was there earlier, it

validated him being there at the end because it was known he was in the arena to support Candido.

For Roberts and Sunny, they had no business in the arena and it made no sense for them to be there. If Roberts had cut a quick promo or something, it would have been way better. Anyway, this was what it was supposed to be: Lawler getting beaten up by Dream, which was what happened. I didn't like it that much, but I'm sure ECW fans did and that was the point.

Styles gives up the intro for the three way dance as he talks about how this is a big rematch from three and a half years ago. Heyman does the same thing in a video package.

Sandman finds the arena. This isn't going to go well is it?

World Title: Shane Douglas vs. Terry Funk vs. Sabu

Remember this is elimination rules. So we have a guy that I have never seen have a good match aside from with weapons and even then he's so spotty. Funk is old and crazy and still ok but not great. Finally you have Shane who is about as overrated as a wrestler not named Elijah can be.

Funk is at least smart and stays on the floor to start which really is intelligent. The other match should have been the main event. It really should have been as it was the focus of the show. Joey talks about how this is a changing of the guard. That's why it's a rematch of three and a half years ago right? This is a pretty decent triple threat but nothing great.

To be fair though, I hate three way matches so that makes no difference. They go at it for about twenty minutes which includes weapons since Sabu can't last longer than 10 without them. Of course we get the triple sleeper which just looks stupid but whatever.

Anyway, Sandman finally gets here despite arriving at the

building about 30 minutes ago and nails Sabu with a ladder so both others can pin him. We get a big brawl as they fight to the back which means they'll fight at November to Remember. The fans are way behind Funk now, even though there was zero point at all to having Sabu get the belt a week before this match.

The locker room comes out to watch this "epic showdown." Either way, after another bit including a kickout of the belly to belly (HOW COULD FUNK DO THAT???) a low blow and rollup gives Douglas the title again because that's how things roll in ECW.

After the match ends, the Dudleys and Joel come out to say that Douglas should join them and become the Triple Crown instead of the Triple Threat. Bigelow and Candido come out to challenge them leading to a massive brawl to end the show. That was rather pointless but whatever.

Rating: C+. Again, I don't like these kinds of matches which has a lot to do with the grade here. The timing here of about 25 minutes was FAR better than the original's hour which I like. I still don't get the point of having Sabu take the title 8 days earlier but whatever. The match was what it was which was a bunch of spots but there was some flow going out there which made it work. Not bad, but it's not my cup of tea.

Overall Rating: B-. OH MY GOODNESS this was a huge turnaround from last time. For one thing, it felt like a PPV. Ok so having 2000 people there made the show feel minor league, but this felt like a big time show. I don't like the match order especially at the end, but the big thing here: they toned down the weapons.

That balance is what makes this much more bearable for me as instead of having just random violence everything had a nice flow to it. Also, stories were addressed instead of just a bunch of random matches. This could have been better, but it

was good for what it was.

This felt like a major show instead of a celebration of them getting on PPV, so that makes this a better show in my eyes than Barely Legal. Check it out if you have two and a half hours to kill I guess, especially the opener as that was a lot of good stuff. It goes downhill after that, but not a ton.

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