

# On This Day: December 26, 1988 – Starrcade 1988: One of the Loudest Pops Ever

## Starrcade 1988

Date: December 26, 1988

Location: Norfolk Scope, Norfolk, Virginia

Attendance: 10,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Bob Caudle

In addition to the main event I talked about, the other major match is Sting teaming up with Dusty Rhodes to take on the freshly evil Road Warriors for their newly won tag team titles. The Warriors had turned on Dusty during a six man tag so Dusty went out and got a young star in Sting to team with him. This was a big deal for Sting as in March he had received a world title shot against Flair on live national television, so he was clearly ready for the move to the next level. Let's get to it.

The opening video is about the two major matches already listed along with Barry Windham vs. Bam Bam Bigelow for the US Title.

The announcers spend awhile hyping the show.

## US Tag Titles: Varsity Club vs. Fantastics

The Fantastics are defending here and are Tommy Fulton/Bobby Rodgers, as well as my own personal favorite WCW tag team from this era. The Varsity Club on the other hand was a very interesting idea. They're three guys

(Steve Williams, Kevin Sullivan and Mike Rotundo) who were all (well not really in Sullivan's case) top level collegiate athletes. They had a lot of success in 1988 with Rotundo holding the TV Title for just under a year. This is Williams/Sullivan challenging for the titles.

Sullivan and Fulton start things off with the champion speeding things up. A Thesz Press gets two on Kevin and it's off to Tommy for a backdrop. Williams (also called Dr. Death or Doc) gets the tag and the Fantastics stop cold. Jason Hervey from the Wonder Years is here. Doc powers Rodgers down to the mat as the match slows way down. Off to Fulton who can't do anything with Williams' power either. The champions finally start double teaming but Fulton gets caught in a gorilla press with multiple lifts in the air.

Fulton comes back with what I think was a dropkick to the ribs followed by a regular dropkick to the face. Williams misses an elbow and it's back to Tommy with a dropkick of his own. Back to Sullivan who misses a clothesline and falls to the floor. For him, that's an upgrade over his usual stuff. Back in and Rodgers counters a backdrop and dropkicks Kevin down again. Williams comes back in but gets caught in a double noggin knocker and a double backdrop.

Things settle down a bit and Williams rams Tommy face first into the buckle before bringing Sullivan back in. Kevin does little of note (as usual) and tags Doc again for more power brawling. Sullivan comes back and gets rolled up for two as Tommy has far better luck against him than Dr. Death. Williams puts a bearhug on the freshly tagged in Fulton, who pokes Doc in the eye to escape the hold.

Back to Rodgers who slams Sullivan off the top but hits knees on a top rope splash. Williams comes back in to run Tommy over, allowing Kevin to

get a few near falls. We hit the chinlock on Rodgers before it's back to Williams for even more punishment. The Varsity Club tags in and out quite well here. Off to another chinlock by Doc before it's back to Sullivan for a pair of double stomps to the ribs.

Tommy finally avoids a knee drop and gets the hot tag off to Fulton. Bobby pounds away on Steve with everything he's got before putting on a sleeper. Tommy puts one on Sullivan as Bobby charges at Williams, only to get caught in a Hot Shot (picture a spinebuster but Williams falls backwards to drop Bobby's throat on the top rope) for the pin and the titles.

**Rating:** C+. Not a bad tag match here and they're getting close to actually having a good opening match for Starrcade. The Varsity Club was on their last legs at this point but winning the titles here was a nice boost for them. Williams looked ready to be a huge star but for some reason it never quite happened.

Tony Schiavone and Magnum TA, the hosts for the evening, talk about the remaining matches.

### Midnight Express vs. Midnight Express

This has a very interesting backstory to it. The Midnight Express first formed back in 1981 as a three man team with Dennis Condrey, Randy Rose and Norvell Austin (last mention of him in this discussion). Once the team split up, a man named Bobby Eaton came into the same territory as Condrey and the Midnight Express was reformed as a regular two man tag team. They also picked up Jim Cornette as a manager and became one of the greatest tag teams of all time.

A few years later, Dennis left the team and Jim Crockett Promotions with no given explanation (allegedly drug problems but that's never been confirmed). With Condrey gone, Eaton needed a new partner. A former opponent of his named Stan Lane was brought in and the new combination proved to be even more talented than Condrey and Eaton had been. This is probably the most famous version of the team.

Around this time, Condrey and Randy Rose teamed up in the AWA (the midwestern territory) and won their world tag team titles. Soon after dropping the belts, Cornette appealed to the NWA to bring Rose and Condrey back in for a Midnight vs. Midnight feud. Soon after Eaton/Lane lost the world tag titles, Cornette got a phone call laughing about the loss. Apparently Jim recognized the voice and said come say it to his face. Condrey, Rose and their manager Paul E. Dangerously stormed the ring and beat down Lane and Cornette. Tonight is the big brawl between the teams.

Eaton and Lane hit the ring fast and the beating is on. Even Cornette wants to fight Paul and the original Midnights head to the floor. Lane and Eaton double suplex Condrey into the ring and the original Midnights are in trouble early on. We finally start with Lane vs. Condrey, the latter of which is sent to the floor. Cornette blasts him in the back with the tennis racket, sending Dangerously into a frenzy.

Back in and Lane hits a quick atomic drop on Rose to send him to the floor, stopping things again. Eaton comes in for an elbow drop to Rose's back as we finally get going. Paul rings the bell for some reason as Eaton knocks Randy out to the floor. Lane continues to clean house, this time sending Condrey into the corner before tagging Eaton back in. It's totally one sided so far.

Eaton and Condrey slug it out with Bobby taking over and dropping a top rope elbow drop for no cover. Back to Stan for a chinlock as things slow down. The fans are totally behind Eaton and Lane here. Eaton comes back in and throws Condrey into the corner for a tag to Randy. Lane blocks a monkey flip from Rose and it's back to Eaton. Bobby finally misses a charge into the corner, allowing the original Midnight's to get in some offense.

We hit ten minutes into the match as Rose comes off the middle rope to blast Eaton in the back of the head. Back in and Condrey hits a quick clothesline and some knees to Bobby's ribs. Cornette chases Paul into the ring but Dangerously gets away. Things calm down with a chinlock by Dennis but Bobby comes back with a swinging neckbreaker. Rose comes back in to break up a hot tag though as the original Midnight's maintain control.

Off to a front facelock on Eaton with Rose cranking away on his head. Bobby finally backdrops out of it but Condrey comes right in with some more knees to Eaton's back to keep him down. Back to Rose as Condrey chokes away even more behind the referee's back. Dennis finally comes back in legally and pounds away on Bobby's injured ribs but the original Midnight's miss the Rocket Launcher (Rose goes up top and Condrey launches him at Eaton in a big splash) allowing for the hot tag to Lane.

Stan cleans house and dances a bit before kicking Rose in the back of the head. Everything breaks down and the referee is knocked to the floor. Dangerously nails Lane with his telephone but Cornette takes out Paul. The referee sees the phone and won't count the pin on Lane as the match continues. With Condrey distracted, the new Midnight's hit the Double Goozle (clothesline from Eaton, rollup from Lane) for the pin out of nowhere.

**Rating:** B. Really good and fast paced tag match here as both teams looked sharp. The idea here was very simple and sometimes you don't need anything more than that. Having the managers get involved was a nice touch and the whole thing worked really well. This was one of the hottest stories in the company for months on end and it's easy to see why given how crisp things looked here.

Post match the original Midnight and Heyman destroy the new Midnight and Cornette. With the originals on Cornette though, Eaton gets the tennis racket and runs them off.

The Varsity Club talks about how awesome they are and swears they'll always be at the top. Oh and Mike Rotundo is going to run Rick Steiner out of wrestling.

#### Russian Assassins vs. Junkyard Dog/Ivan Koloff

This is a thrown together tag match and if the Russians lose, they have to unmask. The Dog is recently here from the WWF where he wasn't a huge deal but he was a big deal in the UWF. Dog starts with we'll say Assassin #1 and the masked man is sent into the corner for a quick two count. Off to #2 who is almost immediately knocked to the floor with a big right hand. Paul Jones, now a Russian sympathizer, pulls #2's leg onto the ropes for the break.

Off to Ivan with a hard clothesline and he chokes #2 down to the mat with ease. #2 charges into a boot in the corner and there's a middle rope clothesline from Ivan for two. JYD and Ivan hit a double clothesline on

#2 but #2 comes back with a headbutt of his own to put Dog down. Everything breaks down for a bit until Dog gets a near fall on #1 off a clothesline. The Assassins double team JYD but #2 misses a splash in the corner. Ivan comes in to clean house as everything breaks down again. In the confusion, the Russians load up a foreign object in their masks and a headbutt ends Ivan.

**Rating:** D. This wasn't any good. I have no idea why Ivan and the Dog teamed up for this match and I didn't even know the Assassins were a team anymore at this point. This came off like a long filler match which isn't something you should have to use on a card with just seven matches.

The announcers wrap up the first three matches for some reason.

#### TV Title: Rick Steiner vs. Mike Rotundo

This should pick things up a bit. The idea here is that Rick used to be in the Varsity Club but was used as a whipping boy by Rotundo for the better part of a year. One day Steiner, whose mind is a bit scrambled because of a car accident he had a few years earlier, got sick of Mike's treatment of him and suplexed Rotundo into the middle of next week. Rotundo agreed to face Steiner here to embarrass him, because Rotundo claimed that no one could beat him in a twenty minute match, which is the time limit for TV Title matches. Mike is defending if that's not clear. Kevin Sullivan is locked in a cage hanging from the ceiling.

Mike gets knocked out to the floor to start as Rick is really excited early on. Back in and the champion puts on a wristlock but gets caught in a quick fireman's carry to get us back to a standoff. Rick hooks a headlock for a bit until Mike shoves him away. Steiner is perfectly fine

with that and takes Rotundo's head off with a Steiner Line for two. A drop toehold puts Rick down but he immediately counters into a hammerlock. Steiner has been out wrestling Rotundo the entire time here.

Mick finally counters into a headlock on the mat but Rick, the good guy here, pulls the hair to escape. Back up and Steiner puts on a headlock but gets suplexed down by the champion. They head to the mat again with Mike holding Rick down in a headscissors. Apparently that's too boring for them so it's back up for some more circling. Rick starts dancing a bit so Mike bails to the floor for a breather.

Back in and Rick runs him over again, only to miss a charge and go flying over the top and out to the floor. Mike pounds away with some elbows to the head back inside followed by a kick to the chest. Off to a chinlock by Rotundo for a LONG time as the match slows down again. A hard clothesline puts Steiner down again as the commentary has stopped for some reason. Rick comes back with a sunset flip for two but gets punched in the jaw for his efforts.

Rick fights back again and hits a quick Steiner Line to take Rotundo down. Now the commentary is back and Steiner is pounding away on Mike in the corner. A big backdrop puts the champion down and a powerslam gets two. Rick hits the belly to belly suplex but Steve Williams rings the bell. The referee thinks it's the time limit but we've only gone about seventeen minutes out of twenty allotted.

The timekeeper tells the referee what happened as Sullivan is lowered. Another referee comes down as well and Sullivan gets on the apron. Steiner rams Rotundo into Sullivan, knocking the champion out. Rick gets the pin (from both referees) and the title, blowing the roof off the place. It's one of the loudest pops you'll ever hear anywhere in



wrestling.

**Rating:** C-. The match mostly sucked, but man alive the ending to that was awesome. This is a perfect example of how you blow off a story at the biggest show of the year. The fans went NUTS for the ending as they identified with Steiner as someone standing up to a bully and finally getting his revenge on said bully. Rotundo would get the title back in a few weeks, but THIS match was the important moment and it was done perfectly.

Rick hits the floor and sprints around the ring, pointing at a confused Rotundo and shouting I BEAT YOU I BEAT YOU I BEAT YOU! He grabs the TV Title and runs out of the arena before Williams can kill him as the fans come unglued. This is one of those moments where if you don't smile just a little bit, odds are you don't have a soul.

Tony and Magnum talk about what we just saw and the remainder of the card.

US Title: Barry Windham vs. Bam Bam Bigelow

Bigelow is a four hundred pound bald monster covered in tattoos who wrestles like he's about a hundred and fifty pounds lighter. Windham is a Horseman and defending here. Bigelow has Oliver Humperdink with him who was a lower level manager in the 80s while Barry has JJ Dillon who I'm sure you've heard of by now. Feeling out process to start with neither guy doing much in the early going. Barry takes it into the corner for some big right hands but Bigelow comes back with an airplane spin of all things.

The champion bails to the floor for a timeout before coming back in to suplex Bigelow down. Bam Bam pops back up and drills Windham in the face with a clothesline to send him outside again. Back in again and Bigelow runs Barry down one more time as Windham has no idea what to do here. A HUGE gorilla press puts Windham on the floor again as this has been one sided so far.

Bam Bam pounds away in the corner and Windham falls flat on his face. A dropkick sends Windham out to the floor as the fans are going nuts. Bigelow suplexes him down for two and it's off to a chinlock. Barry fights up and finally gets in some shots to the ribs. Bigelow is knocked to the floor and lands on his knee to really slow him up. They head back in with Bam Bam knocking Barry down from the apron and hitting a slingshot splash. Bigelow lets him up for some reason before slamming Barry down, only to miss the top rope splash.

Windham lariats him down and is all fired up now. A belly to back suplex puts Bam Bam down in an impressive display of strength. Barry pounds down right hands in the corner and launches Bigelow out to the floor. Back in and there's Windham's claw hold for a bit until Bigelow staggers into the corner for the break. Bigelow is slammed down but Barry misses a top rope elbow. Bam Bam starts pounding away and charges into Barry, knocking both guys over the top and out to the floor. Barry rams him into the post and Bigelow can't make it back in before the ten count.

**Rating:** B-. This was a big power brawl and it worked pretty well for the most part. The ending is lame but I guess the idea was to keep Bigelow looking strong. That's rather odd given that Bigelow was pretty much gone from the company after this. Bam Bam looked good here though and we got a good match out of these two so this was a solid effort.

Rick Steiner says he got tired of the Varsity Club calling him stupid. Apparently his friend Alex promised him cake. Alex would be his hand puppet.

#### Tag Titles: Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes/Sting

So a few weeks before this, the Road Warriors had turned heel on Dusty and tried to blind him with one of the spikes from their shoulder pads. With Dusty down, they had also gone after Sting, setting up this match for revenge. The Warriors also mauled the Midnight Express for the tag titles so the belts are on the line also. It's a short but simple story and that's all it needed to be.

Sting and Animal get things going and Sting isn't used to not being the strong one. Animal runs him over but Sting comes right back with a dropkick to send Animal to the floor. The problem with the angle is apparent very early: the fans love all four guys. The Road Warriors had a huge heel turn but they were so beloved that no one wanted to boo them. Dusty comes in to crank on the arm but instead goes after Animal's eye to send him to the floor.

Off to Hawk vs. Sting with the challenger cranking on the arm again. Hawk is WAY too muscled for that to have much effect though and he punches his way out of it. He stomps Sting down in the corner and fires off lefts and rights but one HUGE right hand from Sting drops Hawk. You'll probably never see that happen again. There's a powerslam on Hawk and it's back to Animal for an easy gorilla press on Sting.

Sting knocks Animal right back to the floor and hits a huge dive off the top to take him down. The crowd loves Sting and with good reason: he has so much charisma he can barely contain it. Off to Dusty who wraps Animal's leg around the post but like an idiot, Dusty allows the tag off to Hawk. Dusty loads up his awful figure four on Hawk but Animal saves the hold from being butchered again. Hawk knocks Dusty to the floor and stomps away before heading back in for punches to the jaw.

Dusty comes back with a dropkick to stagger Hawk but Animal comes right back in and chokes Rhodes down. Off to a neck crank by Animal as the Dusty portion of this match continues to be a letdown. Hawk comes back in with a sleeper and Dusty continues his "stand around and look annoyed" style of selling. A jawbreaker lets Dusty out of the hold and thank goodness we get the tag off to Sting. He dropkicks Animal into the corner and hits the Stinger Splash but Hawk breaks up the Scorpion Deathlock. Everything breaks down and Sting hits a top rope crossbody, but Paul Ellering pulls the referee out for the DQ.

**Rating:** C. The dilemma of this match is simple: when Dusty is in there it's dull and when Sting is in there it's good. The other problem here though is that there was no way they could live up to the hype of this match. This was built up as a dream match and rarely do those things ever work. Also it never felt like Sting and Dusty were out for vengeance with Dusty looking bored out there for awhile. Not that any of this mattered as Dusty would be fired soon after for the excessive blood used in the attack that led up to this feud.

NWA World Title: Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger

Speaking of Dusty being fired, since he knew that he was going to be gone as both a wrestler and the booker soon after this, he tried to mess with

his real life rival Ric Flair before leaving. The original plan for this match was to have the Varsity Club jump Luger and have Rick Steiner, who remember is basically mentally handicapped, beat Flair for the world title in five minutes. As you can guess, that's not what happens but it's an example of what happens when personal issues get in the way of the booking.

If Flair is disqualified here, he loses the title. Flair WOO's in Luger's face to start before strutting around a bit. No contact in the first minute or so. Flair hits some chops before being clotheslined out to the floor by the much stronger Luger. Legendary wrestler Lou Thesz is in the audience. Back in and Flair tries a hammerlock but is easily overpowered into the ropes.

Another clothesline puts Flair down and he hides in the corner for a breather. A powerslam puts Ric down again and there's a gorilla press for good measure. Off to a wristlock by Luger before he no sells a chop. Flair is sent arm first into the buckle and it's off to a hammerlock by the challenger. Back up and Ric FINALLY pokes him in the eye to get himself a breather. Flair tries the chops again and Luger just yells at him. Those chops never worked on guys like Luger and Sting but Flair never learned.

They head to the floor with Luger cranking Flair's arm around the barricade to injure it even more. Back to the armbar by Luger as this has been one sided so far. Back up and another clothesline puts Flair down for one and Flair rolls to the apron. There's a suplex back inside for another near fall on the champion. Luger isn't getting frustrated yet but he misses a jumping elbow drop to slow him down.

Back to the floor with Flair sending him face first into the barricade

and chopping away which actually has an effect now. They go back inside and Flair stomps on the ribs but tries more chops which just wake Luger up. Lex puts on a sleeper but gets suplexed right back down to give both guys a breather. The Figure Four is countered into a small package for two by the challenger, followed by a superplex for two more.

Now Luger puts the figure four on Flair but the champion eventually makes it into the ropes. Lex pounds away in the corner but accidentally knocks the referee down. Flair uses the distraction to rake Luger's eyes and throw him over the top, but Luger dives back in for a clothesline for two. Lex pounds away in the corner and sends him into the other corner for the Flair Flip. Another suplex gets another two on the champion but the referee gets taken down again.

Luger hits another powerslam but doesn't cover for some reason. To be fair the guy never has been all that bright. He calls for the Rack but a JJ Dillon distraction lets Flair hit Luger in the leg with a chair to completely change momentum. Back in and Flair cannonballs down onto the leg as Luger is in BIG trouble. Flair kicks him in the knee and drops his own knee on Luger's bad knee before putting on the Figure Four. Luger sits up and flexes his muscles before turning the hold over for a break. The leg is badly damaged though so Luger's explosiveness is gone.

Flair goes up but Luger manages to slam him off the top on just one good leg. Luger no sells a right hand to the head and is all fired up again. There's another gorilla press slam but the knee goes out as he turns Flair over. Flair sends him out to the floor again but Lex comes back in with a sunset flip for two. Luger flexes again but pounds Flair down in the corner on pure adrenaline. A clothesline gets two and there's another powerslam. Luger calls for the Rack but after he gets Flair up, the knee gives out and Flair falls on top, throws his feet on the ropes for additional leverage, and retains the title.

**Rating:** A. This is an excellent match with an excellent story being told. Luger was such a natural athletic machine that he would never stop going on pure athleticism alone and eventually his body gave out on him, giving Flair the win. These two had great chemistry together and would always have good if not great matches together. Excellent main event here and well worthy of closing out the biggest show of the year.

The announcers talk about how great a match we just saw. As they're talking, you can hear a battle royal being announced as a post PPV dark match.

Flair goes on a rant about how awesome he is and how the title is his.

The announcers talk about how great the company is.

A highlight package ends the show.

**Overall Rating:** B. This was one of the best Starrcades to date with arguably the best main event yet. There are seven matches on the card and only one of them is actually bad. The main event is excellent, the Midnights match is very good, there's a great moment with the TV Title changing hands. The best sign of this show though is the rise of the young stars. Sting was in there with some major names, Luger had Flair beat, and Rick Steiner winning the title was a great moment that people genuinely cared about. Solid show here and worth checking out if you can find it.

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