

Required Viewing #3: You Gotta Believe

I've wanted to do this one for awhile now and Hogan returning last night makes it perfect. Back in 2002, a lot of things were changing in wrestling. The WWF ruled the wrestling world after ending WCW the previous year. The InVasion was over and came off pretty badly due to a lot of reasons with the lack of major stars being very close to the top of the list. At No Way Out 2002, the original NWO members returned to the WWF for the first time in many years with Hollywood Hogan making his first appearance on WWF TV since June of 1993.

Hogan appeared on Raw in Chicago after No Way Out and talked about his plans for the future. As he was talking, the Rock came out and you knew something special was about to happen.

The match was set for Wrestlemania X8 in front of over 67,000 people in the old WWF town of Toronto. Late in the match, Rock hit the Rock Bottom. Then the magic begins (video is cued up):

That moment when Hogan Hulks Up one more time is pure wrestling magic. Hogan kicked out and all of a sudden everyone in the crowd was five years old again and Hulk Hogan was their hero. Everything he had done in the last six years was forgotten and all those people wanted was to see him rise up one more time and fight off everything with the powers of Hulkamania. It only lasted for a few seconds, but that reaction set off a chain of events that made Hogan WWF Champion again in six weeks.

Nostalgia is a powerful weapon and that's all Hogan needed at

this point. Was the match good? Not really. Did Rock carry the whole thing on his back? Absolutely. Was there any chance this would last long term? Of course not. But that moment and the pop the next night in Montreal are as amazing a pair of moments as you can find. Hogan isn't everyone's favorite and I can certainly get that, but he was a hero to a lot of people and that kind of person will be their hero forever, no matter what they do.

Here's the review if you're interested.

Hollywood Hogan vs. The Rock

Both guys get solid pops as this is an old WWF city, which means Hogan could set fire to a kitten orphanage and still be popular. The pre match chants seem to favor Hulk, but here are some Rock fans to counter them. They stare at each other and there's the loudest pop for an opening bell I can remember. Hogan shoves him down to start and the fans go NUTS. You can tell Hogan is feeling it here. After a quick headlock Hogan runs him over and poses, sending the crowd further into a frenzy.

A clothesline puts Rock down as the crowd is almost completely one sided. Rock comes back with a jumping clothesline and the fans boo him out of the freaking building. Rock says just bring it and knocks Hogan to the floor with some right hands. Back in and Rock loads up the Rock Bottom but Hogan escapes and elbows out of it. He rakes his boot over Rock's eyes to another big pop. There's another big HOGAN chant for good measure.

A belly to back suplex gets two for Hulk and there's an abdominal stretch for good measure. Hulk even adds in a rollup for two before raking Rock's back. Rock escapes and comes back with some chops in the corner but walks into a chokeslam of all things from Hulk. He sends Rock out to the floor as this

is still almost one sided so far. Rock goes face first into the steps and dropped on the barricade for good measure.

Hogan starts loading up the announce table but Rock fights back with right hands. Rock gets a chair but the referee takes it away, allowing Hogan to clothesline Rock down. Back inside and Rock is sent into the referee. Rock comes back with a lame spinebuster and the Sharpshooter. Hulk makes the rope but there's no referee. Rock pulls him to the middle of the ring but there's still no referee.

The fans just lay into Rock now with the Rocky Sucks chants as he checks on the referee. Hogan hits him low though and gets a pretty freaking good Rock Bottom for two. Hogan takes off his weightlifting belt to whip Rock's back but Rock comes back with a DDT. There's the Rock Bottom but Hogan HULKS UP. The fans absolutely lose their minds now as Hogan shakes his finger and hits the big boot, but the legdrop only gets two. Another big boot hits but the second legdrop misses. There's the Rock Bottom again and a third for good measure. Rock nips up and hits the People's Elbow to end it.

Rating: B. This is a hard one to grade but I think it's a lot like the Hogan vs. Warrior match in the same building: the crowd carries it to a much higher level than it deserves to be at which is just fine. The crowd was completely eating up the nostalgia and there's nothing at all wrong with that. Hogan would get one of the longest ovations in history the next night in Montreal and those two reactions were enough to put the world title on him for a month soon after this. It wasn't the best idea in the world, but given those reactions I can understand why they did it. This was a very fun match and should have been the main event.

Post match they stare each other down with Hogan holding his ribs. Hogan extends his hand and Rock gladly shakes it. Hulk lets Rock pose but here are the Outsiders. They yell at Hogan and beat him down, but Rock runs back in for the save. Hall

and Nash are dispatched and Rock and Hogan stand tall, apparently having made up after Hogan HIT ROCK WITH A HAMMER AND CRUSHING HIM WITH A SEMITRUCK. Rock has Hogan pose for the fans after the match in another nostalgia moment.

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