

Required Viewing #4: The Dog Faced Superhero

Rick Steiner used to be awesome. Seriously. He also used to be a heel in a group called the Varsity Club, which was a team obsessed with their collegiate athletic careers. The group was led by TV Champion Mike Rotunda and was rather evil. Steiner wasn't entirely cool with all the cheating and was mocked as a result, so the team kicked him out and beat him down one day. Rick, who was portrayed as slightly mentally disabled at the time, came back with one of the hardest belly to belly suplexes you'll ever see, knocking Rotunda out cold. Two weeks later when Mike woke up, a TV Title match was announced at Starrcade 1988.

The match isn't the most interesting in the world, but the ending is better than anyone could have wanted it to be. The Varsity Club tried one of their old tricks by having Steve Williams ring the bell before the time limit was up to confuse the referee. Kevin Sullivan was lowered from the ceiling (where he had been in a cage hanging above the ring) but the referee didn't fall for it and said wrestle. Sullivan got on the apron but Rick rammed Rotunda into him and got a quick pin for the title.

The pop was nothing short of unholy with the fans blowing the roof off the place. Rotunda had been a nearly unbeatable champion who had held the title for nearly a year. Steiner sprints around the ring and shouts "I BEAT YOU!" at Rotunda before getting out of the arena so the Club couldn't kill him.

This was about making the crowd identify with a story and it

worked like a charm. The audience could identify with someone who wasn't as smart or as skilled as a bully, but he was willing to stand and fight for himself. Instead of having some superhero stand up to the bully, it was a guy who had faults just like everybody else. It's a story everybody could get behind and that made it work. It's rare to get a story like that but when one works, the fans are going to get invested in it every single time.

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.

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