

Wrestler of the Day – March 3: Justin Gabriel

We're heading to Africa today for Justin Gabriel.

Justin got his start in South Africa for a promotion called World Wrestling Professionals. I'm not sure what's going on here but it's a match between PJ Black (Gabriel) and Mikey Whiplash (not Whipwreck).

PJ Black vs. Mikey Whiplash

Black sounds like a heel here and says Whiplash cost him a match last week so it's time to settle things. The fans chant for Black as he lists off more nicknames than Apollo Creed. Whiplash has one of the worst physiques I've ever seen. He isn't overweight or anything but he looks like he hasn't been to a gym in years. Mikey bails to the corner to start and complains about PJ's boots.

Whiplash finally takes him down by the leg but Black counters into a headlock. The female announcer keeps changing from English to some other language and it's getting annoying. Black cranks on the wrist but Mikey takes the leg again and pulls it down to the mat. We take a break and come back with Mikey slapping Black in the face. Apparently this show is being held in the basement of the Dome of Doom. That's quite the location.

Black takes him down to the mat but Mikey hammers him with forearms. A legsweep gets two for PJ and he takes Mikey down into a very modified cross armbreaker. Whiplash fights up and sends him into the corner before dropping an elbow for two. Some forearms set up a camel clutch on Black before changing it over to some hard elbows to the jaw.

PJ rolls over Mikey's back and scores with a pair of spin kicks and a nice dropkick. A top rope Lionsault gets two for PJ and a Blue Thunder Bomb gets the same with the fans getting into these near falls. The 450 connects as well but Whiplash somehow kicks out again. Mikey grabs a backslide and puts his feet on the ropes for the pin out of nowhere.

Rating: D+. There was a huge difference between the two guys here with Black looking like someone with a lot of potential and Mikey looking like a guy that reached his peak here in a bad match. He came off like someone who just didn't have any upside to him and nothing about him stands out at all. This was a situation where Black just needed a better opponent.

It was soon off to WWE and Florida Championship Wrestling where PJ Black would go by Justin Angel and win the FCW Title. This is a rematch against Heath Slater from November 21, 2009.

FCW Title: Heath Slater vs. Justin Angel

The idea here is that Slater lost the title to Angel in the final seconds of a 2/3 falls match and has had to wait thirty days to get a rematch. Angel armdrags him down and dances a bit, which seems to be a thing for him. A shoulder drops Slater again and it's right back to the armbar.

Back up and Angel is sent to the apron where Slater dropkicks his knee out, sending the champion face first into the apron. Slater hammers away on the floor and bends Angel's arm around the barricade. Back from a break with Angel armdragging Slater down for two. Slater takes him right back down and works over the arm until Angel comes back with a jawbreaker.

Not that it matters as Slater starts cranking on the arm again. Justin comes back with a discus forearm and a splash in the corner followed by a cross body for two. Slater drops him face first on the buckle and gets two off Sweetness (Zig Zag). Justin avoids a charge in the corner and hits a quick 450 to retain.

Rating: C. Nice match here but Slater continues to not really impress me in the ring. At the end of the day he's pretty generic but he was at least better than Whiplash. The ending came out of nowhere here and it hurt things a bit as well, but it's still a more entertaining match due to the atmosphere and better training that these guys have received.

Soon after this it was off to NXT as Justin Gabriel was one of the first batch of rookies on the premiere season of NXT. Justin would face Wade Barrett on the third episode of the first season.

Wade Barrett vs. Justin Gabriel

Speed vs....whatever Barrett is here. Jericho yells at the announcers that Barrett is showing Jericho's influence. Barrett wears his jacket over his shoulders because in case he needs to get in a fight he needs his arms free. Cole explains the differences between all of Barrett's flowers. The first meant he was sorry for beating his opponent later tonight and the second was for the love of his winner's check.

USA chant and Matthews points out how stupid it is. Cole thinks maybe it's for Matt. If you're cheering for the manager, what does that really say about your match? Barrett dominating for the most part here as we're running out of time. Jericho shouts to the announcers about how he's working the back because JERICH0 works the back. Jericho really is stealing the show here which is the point I guess. And then Gabriel shoves him off the top and hits the 450 for the win. I think that was all the offense Gabriel had.

Rating: D+. Again not much at all here with Barrett dominating but Gabriel winning off his one move at the time. This wasn't much at all and while it was ok for the most part, the ending kind of made you say that's it. This could have used another two minutes or so to flesh it out but it wasn't horrible. Barrett looked good.

After the season ended, Gabriel and the rest of the first season cast would become the Nexus. They would immediately feud with John Cena, including facing him in a seven on one match on July 12, 2010, with me being lucky enough to watch live.

Nexus vs. John Cena

In a weird moment before this there was an ad for Rise and Fall of WCW and Russo got incredible heat. Weird. Cena got more boos than earlier but it was maybe 25% at the very most. The heels have to tag here and the no Raw guys can help. Cena gives Cole his dog tags which is a bit strange. Tarver starts

off and Cena shows some psychology by taking the guys to the opposite corner. That makes perfect sense which is always a good thing.

He just mows people down one at a time which makes sense too. The thing about Nexus is it's the gang mentality rather than the individual nature. In the original NWO any of the three were legit threats. Here there's just arguably one guy, Barrett, who is a big threat. Together though they're deadly, which is a nice twist on the idea. They hit the floor and huddle before Slater gets a cheap shot in to take over.

The finishers start up and Slater hits three straight belly to back suplexes on him which is stupid looking. Cena fights back a bit but the numbers get to him. He gets Barrett in an FU but Sheffield takes him down. The 450 ends it clean which is exactly how it should have been. There is absolutely no way you can have Cena win here and they realized that. The Nexus surrounds him afterwards but he gets a shot in and hits the floor, getting a chair.

They surround him but make one fatal mistake: they forget to hold the mayo. Here's Sheamus with chair in hand, and the heels run for cover, ending the show. Post show, Edge and Orton came out for a tag match. Cena stayed down for like 5 minutes off a punch (turned out he was getting cleaned up from a cut) so it was 2-1. He came in at the end and cleaned house, hitting an FU on Sheamus for the pin while Orton got an RKO on Edge. Orton posed and we were done.

Rating: B. This is how you have a match like this. Cena looks human and the Nexus looks strong. There was no way you could make Cena win here and have it be believable so they didn't try to force it which is a good thing. This worked very well and I liked it quite well. It sets up an aura of mystery for the PPV which is the best thing you can do. Well done and a good ending to the show.

Nexus would stick around for several months and Gabriel would pick up a Tag Title with Heath Slater when David Otunga and John Cena laid down to give them the belts. They held the belts for months, even past the end of the Nexus. The two would join a new group called The Corre, leading to February 25, 2011 on Raw and a title defense against The Miz and John Cena.

Tag Titles: The Miz/John Cena vs. Heath Slater/Justin Gabriel

According to Josh this is unprecedented for some reason. Miz vs. Slater to start us off. All Miz so far as he beats on both Corre members. Cena responds with a golf clap and is tagged in to a good pop. Back off to Miz as the champions have had nothing for the most part. There's the Skull Crushing Finale and it's over in 3:12. What the heck? Uh...ok then. No rating due to the length as it's 10 minutes til 11:00 so there's a lot more to come here.

Barrett says hold it as the Corre is invoking their rematch clause right now. An E-Mail says ring the bell. The match starts post break.

Tag Titles: The Miz/John Cena vs. Heath Slater/Justin Gabriel

Back with the match already in progress and Miz holding a wristlock on Gabriel. Cena comes in as does Slater. Cross body by Cena gets two and it's back off to Miz. The WWE Champion is knocked to the floor and Corre holds Riley back so Miz can be beaten down by Gabriel. Slater gets two on Miz. Off to a chinlock by Slater which gets him nowhere. It's weird seeing Miz as the defacto face. Neckbreaker by Slater gets two.

Gabriel in now but Miz fights him off and hits that knee to the back/neckbreaker combo. He can't make the tag though as

Slater is tagged in for the save. Miz still can't make a tag and Gabriel throws on a headlock. The crowd is WAY into this too which is making things a lot better.

Gabriel is sent to the apron and tries to come in off the top. He jumps into a big boot though and Cena wants a tag. Ask and ye shall receive as it's Cena vs. Slater now. Cena initiates his ending sequence and there's the 5 Knuckle Shuffle and FU. Actually it isn't as Miz shoves Cena over with something like the Skull Crushing Finale and Slater gets the pin to regain the titles at 12:00!

Rating: C+. Better formula match here and it worked pretty well. I had a feeling they were going to do the switch right back and I'm glad they did. This worked rather well and it sets up more of the world title feud between the two. Good stuff here and the whole segment worked rather well. Also very good that they didn't go with the predictable ending.

The Corre would break up without much fanfare and Justin would become little more than a high spot guy. This talent earned him a spot in the Smackdown Money in the Bank ladder match at Money in the Bank 2011.

Sin Cara vs. Justin Gabriel vs. Heath Slater vs. Sheamus vs. Cody Rhodes vs. Wade Barrett vs. Kane vs. Daniel Bryan

This is going to be a big insane match so it's almost impossible to call what's going on in these things. I'm really not sure who to predict in this. I went with Cody as a more or less random choice mainly out of a lack of anyone else. Big mess to start as these really should only have six people in them. Kane, Barrett and Sheamus clear the ring out and it's a three way staredown.

The Europeans...wait Kane is from Spain. Ok the two guys not named Kane go down and it's ladder time already. Bryan dropkicks Kane down as Slater and Gabriel team up a bit.

Cara, who is in white/gray here, gets taken down but the former tag partners fight already. Slater goes for the ladder and is loudly booed. Gabriel goes up but the ladder is way off center. Bryan dropkicks him off but Cody goes up.

Kane sends Sheamus and Cody to the floor but Barrett stops the Big Bald. Kane throws a ladder at Sheamus to take him down. Slater vs. Kane and guess who wins that one. Cara pops up out of nowhere to drill Kane and break up the clothesline. Bryan hits a big dive and Gabriel does the same. Sorry for all the play by play stuff but it's all you can do in these things for the most part.

Cara is like screw you guys I'm the flier here and takes out Sheamus with a huge one. He follows that up by kicking Bryan in the head and hitting the top rope C4 to take Bryan down. Sin tries to go for the briefcase but can't pick a ladder up and into the ring. Barrett kicks his head off so it doesn't matter. They do the whole set up a ladder as a bridge from the ring to the table thing as is customary.

Cara avoids going through it though and Barrett clotheslines the post. For some reason the masked guy goes in again without a ladder and gets his head kicked off by Sheamus. Not a good night for the Mexican dude. Cara gets powerbombed through the ladder to more or less kill him. BIG pop for Sheamus for that one. Sheamus is controlling almost everyone here as Cara is taken out on a stretcher.

Kane and Sheamus are in the ring and fighting over a ladder. Scratch that as all three go to the floor. Bryan, Kane and Cody are all in the ring with ladders now. The small guys work together to take Kane down and there goes that partnership. Cara is gone now, as in out of the entire arena via a stretcher. Kane has the big ladder set up in the ring and everyone comes in. Cody makes an attempt but all the small guys make a save.

The former Nexus triple teams Bryan and then the tag team tells Barrett to go ahead. Barrett proves why British wrestlers are stupid as he goes up and is pulled down just a few seconds later. Both of them go up but Rhodes shoves the ladder down. Cross Rhodes takes someone down and it's time for Barrett and Rhodes to fight over the ladder. Cross Rhodes takes Barrett out but Sheamus makes the last second save.

There's an Irish Curse and pasty goes up, only for Bryan to make the save. Bryan rams him into the ladder a few times and goes up at the same time. Sheamus and Kane combine for a Doomsday Device to END Bryan. Kane and Sheamus are alone in the ring now. Well other than a ladder but that doesn't count I don't think. The big ladder is in the ring and a regular one is set up as a bridge against the middle buckle.

Kane escapes though and chokeslams various small people. Big Bald goes up but Bryan makes ANOTHER save despite being legally deceased I believe. Bryan goes up and almost gets the LeBell Lock on the ladder. That would be awesome. Bryan manages to knock Kane to the floor but Slater stops him. Bryan saves AGAIN as he's been insane so far tonight.

Slater goes up one more time but Barrett saves. Time for Barrett vs. Sheamus which doesn't sound all that appealing. Thankfully they team up and stop Slater, using a ladder like a fork to stop Slater and shove him off the top. That was cool. Sheamus goes nuts and takes out a lot of people so he can climb. Naturally he's not that smart so he sets up another ladder on the top rope.

Sheamus is just beating people up at the moment and not really trying to go after it. Even Booker is saying GO FOR IT. Ok now he's going up but Kane pops up from nowhere to stop him. Sheamus has a bridge ladder beneath him. He goes onto it but doesn't break it. FREAKING OW MAN! Wasteland hits Kane and Gabriel climbs a ladder and hits 450 in the tightest space possible. That was AWESOME.

Bryan and Cody go at it on the ladder as everyone but Barrett is down. Wade comes up as Bryan tries to choke Cody out because he's an idiot. Cody goes down and Wade takes an elbow to knock him backwards a bit. Bryan is alone up there and Wade is on the bridge. Bryan kicks him down and WINS THE CASE! Totally didn't see that one coming.

Rating: A. I liked the storytelling aspect of this as Bryan was the MVP of this thing. He made a ton of saves and certainly deserved to win it in the end. The spots in this were great and Cara going out might have been due to prevent him from botching something major, which says a lot. I'm not sure I can see Bryan winning a title but stranger things have happened. GREAT match though.

Gabriel would continue to be the guy who put on good matches when given the chance, including this one from Superstars on March 15, 2012.

Justin Gabriel vs. Hunico

Hunico keeps up the tradition of saying something in Spanish and then saying it again in English. Hunico uses a nice wristlock to start and flips around a bit. They fight for control over the arm and Gabriel gets a backslide for two. Hunico bails to the floor and things slow down a bit. Back in and things speed up again which Striker says favors Gabriel. I'm not sure about that but Gabriel hits a monkey flip and sends Hunico back to the floor.

In a cool move, Gabriel does something like a 619 as he swings his legs into the ring and then back out to kick Hunico in the chest. Hunico rams Justin's back into the apron and we take a break. Back with Hunico holding a chinlock which is quickly broken. Justin tries a sunset flip but Hunico rolls through and hits a Tajiri style kick to the head. Out to the floor and Camacho gets in a shot to keep Justin down.

Back to the chinlock and then Hunico goes up. Striker makes a Super Calo reference for some reason as Hunico jumps into a dropkick. Gabriel slugs

away and hits another dropkick to knock Hunico to the floor. Justin hits a springboard plancha to take out both guys in a cool spot. Springboard missile dropkick to the back gets two.

Hunico comes back with a Saito Suplex for two. Gabriel comes back but his tornado DDT is countered into a northern lights suplex for two. A second attempt at the DDT works and both guys are down. Gabriel sets for the 450 but has to get rid of Camacho first so Hunico crotches him. A Death Valley Driver off the middle rope gets the pin for Hunico at 11:58.

Rating: B-. This was entertaining and longer than most matches you'll see anymore. Gabriel is a guy that they have something solid (not great but solid) with but if he's never going to get out of Superstars and NXT, that doesn't mean anything. Hunico is better than I expected him to be as well but he needs to get out of the generic Mexican dude gimmick. This was a good back and forth match but it never quite got to a great level.

Another good match was on Superstars from August 23, 2012.

Justin Gabriel vs. Cody Rhodes

This is a rematch from a few weeks ago where Cody won. There's actually a story here: Justin showed up with a chick and Cody hit on her, setting up the first match. See how easy that is? Both guys feel each other out to start and it turns into a contest of showing each other up. Gabriel gets a rollup for two which Cody takes offense to. They trade some HARD slaps and Gabriel takes Cody down and into a freaky arm trap hold.

Cody gets sent to the floor but he moves before Justin can dive. Unfortunately he moves into position for another dive from Gabriel as we take a break. Back with Gabriel hitting what looked like a dropkick for two. Gabriel goes to the apron but gets his arm snapped across the top rope to give Cody control. He bends Gabriel's arm over the apron before hitting a gordbuster for two. Cody cranks on the arm a bit more and gets two off an uppercut.

Back to more work on the arm, this time in the form of a hammerlock. Justin starts a quick comeback but misses a top rope Lionsault to give Cody control again. Off to a short arm scissors but Gabriel gets off his

back to break the hold. A monkey flip puts Cody down as does a spinning kick to the face. Justin hits a kind of sitout powerbomb for two but a slam is countered into the Cross Rhodes for the pin for Cody out of nowhere. Nice counter.

Rating: C+. Pretty decent match here with a sweet counter to end things. Gabriel is good in this kind of a role: the guy who isn't going to win a major match anytime soon but he's got enough speed and ability to keep things interesting. For a main event on Superstars, this was fine.

These matches earned him a US Title shot at Hell in a Cell 2012.

US Title: Antonio Cesaro vs. Justin Gabriel

Since we only had three announced matches left and it's ten after 9, they had to add another match or two. Antonio says something in what sounds like German or Swiss before the match. Cesaro is defending and they've traded wins on Raw lately to set this up. Cesaro takes it to the mat as soon as the bell rings before cranking on the arm a bit. Gabriel counters a hip toss and monkey flips Cesaro down.

Justin goes up top but the champ knocks him off to the floor. Back in and a legdrop gets two for Cesaro and he pounds away with some rough looking shots to the head. An uppercut to the back of Gabriel's head gets two and it's off to a chinlock with a knee in the back of Justin. Cesaro puts him face down on the top rope and hits a running knee to the ribs. A double stomp gets another two on Gabriel and it's back to the arm. The crowd is pretty dead for this so far.

Gabriel comes back and takes Cesaro down for a quick top rope Lionsault for two. Cesaro takes Justin's head off with a clothesline for two. The champ pounds away in the corner but Gabriel comes out with a spinning DDT for two. Gabriel tries the 450 but rolls through when Cesaro moves. Cesaro goes to the floor so Justin hits a dropkick through the ropes for two. He heads back in but dives into the uppercut to knock Gabriel silly. Back in and the Neutralizer retains the title at 7:35.

Rating: C. I know there wasn't much here, but having Cesaro run through the entire lower card is a fine way to keep him on TV without having him

face guys he's not ready to beat yet. It's also a good way to make him look like more than he really is, which is something Cesaro needs. Imagine that: using jobbers to the stars to push someone higher up the card. It's so crazy that it just might work.

We'll wrap it up with a match from Main Event on May 15, 2013.

Cody Rhodes vs. Justin Gabriel

Cody chops away to start but gets suplexed down in a nice counter. Rhodes comes right back with a swinging neckbreaker but Justin hops up and fires off some kicks. A Blue Thunder Bomb gets two for Gabriel and the top rope Lionsault gets the same. Cody can't hit a quick Cross Rhodes attempt and gets countered into a small package for two. The Alabama Slam gets the same for Cody before Cross Rhodes is enough to give him the pin.

Rating: D+. This didn't have time to go anywhere and was just happening so Cody could get in an argument with Miz on commentary before their match at Extreme Rules. Gabriel looked decent but again it shows that he isn't much if he's not flying through the air. The kicks weren't bad though.

Overall Justin comes off as a one note guy but they're some very sweet notes when he gets the chance to play them. That 450 of his is a thing of beauty and he's pinned some very big names with it. I could see him having a nice run with a midcard title, but at this point he's lost in a very deep roster and there's not much he can do to get out of that.

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