

Wrestler of the Day – October 9: Rusev

Today we have a modern day evil foreign monster with Rusev.

After being trained by Gangrel and Rikishi, Rusev would sign a developmental deal in 2011. Here's his debut match on FCW TV in June 2011.

Mike Dalton vs. Alexander Rusev

Dalton is currently known as Tyler Breeze. Rusev drives him into the corner to start and hits some nice jumping knees to the face. He hooks a full nelson and drives Dalton face first into the buckle for a nice move. Dalton finally gets up a boot in the corner and gets two off a victory roll. Rusev actually rolls some Germans for the pin to complete the squash.

We'll jump ahead a bit to a tag match on FCW TV, March 4, 2012.

FCW Tag Team Titles: Bo Rotundo/Husky Harris vs. Antonio Cesaro/Alexander Rusev

Rotundo and Harris (Bo Dallas and Bray Wyatt) are defending. Rusev and Harris get things going with some hard headlocks before a double shoulder block doesn't get us anywhere. Off to Bo but Rusev takes him into the corner for a beating from Cesaro. Back to Rusev for some kicks to the back as the foreign heels take over. Cesaro cranks on the arm before Rusev comes in to do the same. Bo rolls away for the hot tag to Harris as everything breaks down. Rotundo spears Rusev out of nowhere to give Harris the pin.

Rating: D+. There's an ending that would change a lot of things today. It's always interesting to see where these guys were before they started on the main roster and this is a great example of something like that happening. These guys are almost all different today with maybe the exception of Cesaro, and the changes have all been for the better. Well

in theory at least.

One more FCW match on June 24, 2012.

Alexander Rusev/Colin Cassady vs. Ascension

This is the original Ascension tag team of Conor O'Brien and Kenneth Cameron (Bram in TNA). Ascension's entrance is totally awesome here and makes the guys look like total monsters. Colin and Cameron get things going but it's quickly off to O'Brien for some power shoving. Colin actually drops him with a shoulder but Conor comes back with an armbar.

Rusev low bridges O'Brien to the floor and Colin hits a nice fall away slam, complete with a power stare to Cameron. Off to Rusev for some right hands as Cesaro (on commentary) talks about Rusev's outdoor training regimen. O'Brien nails a knee to the face and the hot tag brings in Cameron. A victory roll gets two on Rusev and Ascension screams a lot. O'Brien plants Rusev with a downward spiral for the pin.

Rating: C-. Not a bad power match here and again it's interesting to see these guys with different characters before they became what they were best known for. Ascension was much more interesting at this point before they became regular power brawlers. The supernatural elements to them made the team more intimidating but unfortunately that fell apart.

Off to regular NXT now, starting on August 21, 2013.

Alexander Rusev vs. Dolph Ziggler

Rusev is a very big man from Bulgaria who breaks a piece of wood with Ziggler's name on it over his knee. Ziggler is WAY over with the crowd. Both guys are slow to start with Rusev trying basic power stuff and Ziggler easily countering everything thrown at him so he can strut a bit. Alexander throws him into the corner and Ziggler gets serious. He staggers Rusev with a dropkick but his cross body is caught in mid air. Alexander rams knees into Ziggler's back and drops him on the floor for a breather.

Back in and a running shoulder to the ribs gets two on Dolph. Rusev puts on a quick body vice but misses a second running charge into the corner.

Dolph hits a good looking dropkick for two but walks into a running knee to the ribs for the same result. Back up and Ziggler hits a quick Fameasser for two but Rusev comes back with a nice spinwheel kick (for a guy weighing over 300lbs) for another near fall. He misses a top rope splash though, allowing Ziggler to hit the Zig Zag for the pin at 6:14.

Rating: C+. I liked this more than I thought I would. Rusev has potential to him as he's got a good look and moved very well for a guy his size. Ziggler did his job perfectly out there by making Rusev look far better than he would have otherwise. This was a very nice surprise as you would have expected a squash but got a solid match instead.

Another match in NXT on December 11, 2013.

Alexander Rusev vs. Kassius Ohno

Lana introduces Rusev who looks more and more awesome every time he's out there. This is a result of Ohno beating Rusev's time in the Beat the Clock Challenge a few weeks back. Rusev takes him into the corner to start and drops Ohno with a single right hand. He lifts Kassius up for a slam before driving knees into his ribs in midair.

Ohno gets slammed down for two and Alexander stays on the back and ribs. We hit the bearhug for a bit before another forearm to the back puts Ohno down. Ohno gets a forearm to the face to set up a small package for two. That's the extent of his offense as Rusev runs him over and the Accolade ends Ohno at 3:05.

Rating: D. Total and complete squash here as Ohno leaves the company looking like a jobber. He never clicked in this company at all but at least his comments after leaving have been nothing but positive. Rusev has a spot waiting on him on the main roster once they finally make the call and he'll take a lot of people apart.

One more NXT match against a main roster name on January 1, 2014.

Alexander Rusev vs. Kofi Kingston

Rusev pounds Kofi into the corner as Regal chides Phillips about not being able to talk to Rusev. "If he could talk to you, he wouldn't need a

translator. Fine money spent on your college education.” Kofi is lifted into the air so Rusev can drive knees into his ribs. A Samoan drop gets two on Kofi and a hard shoulder block gets the same.

Alexander misses a running splash and gets dropkicked down. The Boom Drop connects but Rusev heads to the corner so Kofi can't try Trouble in Paradise. Instead he hits a cross body off the top (good one too despite Kofi slipping on the ropes) for two but a Lana distraction lets Rusev slam Kofi off the top. The Accolade gets the big upset submission from Kofi at 3:52.

Rating: C. Rusev didn't look great in there but he got a win over a legitimate main roster guy. There's definitely a future for this guy in the big leagues and he could be something special in the vein of Umaga. Kingston continues to be the same guy he's been for years and there's nothing wrong with that.

Rusev would appear in the Royal Rumble but then not get in the ring again until Raw on April 7, 2014.

Alexander Rusev vs. Zack Ryder

Lana is officially named the Ravishing Russian. That won't last but she looks good in the short skirts. This is exactly what you would expect (plus a nice jumping kick to the face) and ends in 1:19 after the Accolade (Camel clutch) with Ryder tapping very quickly.

Time for a PPY squash at Extreme Rules 2014.

Alexander Rusev vs. R-Truth/Xavier Woods

Lana dedicates the match to the most powerful man in the world and her idol: Vladimir Putin. Truth says there's no time to rap and dedicates the match to the USA. Before the bell, Woods is kicked in the face and into Truth, knocking both of them to the floor. Rusev hits a release belly to belly on the floor to drop Woods and we get the bell as he hammers away on Truth. Fans: "WE WANT LANA!"

Truth gets crushed in the corner but raises a boot to stop a charging Bulgarian. The backflip into the side kick sets up a middle rope dropkick

but Rusev is right back up. Lie Detector has almost no effect but an ax kick gets two. Rusev shrugs it off and slams Truth down before the Accolade gets the submission at 2:51. Woods was being checked by doctors for most of the match.

Off to singles matches on PPV at Payback 2014.

Rusev vs. Big E.

Lana does her thing and Rusev is now from Moscow and weighed in kilos. They both hit their running body attacks to start with neither guy going anywhere. A nasty release German puts Big E. down as the fans want Ziggler. Rusev hits a running splash in the corner but Big E. comes back with a kind of STO. Rusev gets back up on the apron and Big E. spears him through the ropes and out to the floor in a BIG collision. Big E. comes up favoring his arm but is still able to get two. The Warrior Splash is countered by the jumping superkick and the Accolade makes Big E. tap at 3:35.

Rating: C+. Another solid match here with Big E. getting to show off before jobbing to the new monster. That jumping superkick is just awesome with Rusev still making great contact despite getting off the ground. The spear through the ropes looked great too as they're really playing up the physicality tonight.

Rusev would be in a battle royal on Raw, June 16, 2014 for the final spot in the Money in the Bank ladder match.

Money in the Bank Qualifying Match: Battle Royal

Titus O'Neil, Damien Sandow, Bo Dallas, Jack Swagger, Diego, Fernando, Curtis Axel, Fandango, Dolph Ziggler, Rusev, Ryback, Sin Cara, Santino Marella, Kofi Kingston, Big E., Roman Reigns, Rob Van Dam, Bad News Barrett, Xavier Woods

Those are all the people on the graphic so there's a chance I missed a few. Damien is LeBron James because why not. Not that it matters as everyone gets together to put him out ten seconds in. Bo throws Santino out and Rusev does the same thing to both Matadores. Woods gets the same

treatment from Rusev and everyone brawls for awhile.

Ziggler is sent to the apron and Reigns eliminates Titus. Swagger puts Sin Cara on the apron before catapulting him out. Kofi can't get Swagger out and Big E. can't get rid of Axel. Rusev gets Ziggler to the apron but a kick to the head saves Dolph. Kofi finally gets Swagger out and we take a break. Back with Rusev, Reigns, RVD, Ryback, Ziggler, Fandango, Dallas, Big E., Axel and Barrett still in, meaning Kofi (via Ryback) was the only elimination during the break. Speaking of eliminations, Ryback punches Ziggler out to the floor for his second straight elimination.

Reigns starts cleaning house and even takes Rusev down with a Superman Punch but can't take care of Ryback that easily. Roman sends Fandango to the apron but has to spear Ryback and Axel down. A kick to the head puts Fandango out and Rusev kicks Reigns in the chest. Big E. dumps Ryback and Reigns throws out Axel. Another kick puts Roman down but Van Dam kicks Rusev in the face. Van Dam and Dallas start fighting but Barrett takes Rob down with a big boot.

Rob comes back with more kicks but Bo shoves him off the corner for a surprise elimination. That could be Bo's first big feud. Barrett lays out a celebrating Bo and throws him to the apron but Bo hangs on. Nice little call back to the Rumble from a few years ago. Reigns dumps Barrett and Dallas knocks out Big E., but walks into the spear. Dallas is dumped and we're down to Rusev vs. Roman.

The fans are WAY into this and the slugout is on. Reigns gets the early advantage but walks into a wicked spinwheel kick. They trade running charges in the corner and Reigns puts him on the apron. Some big right hands can't get rid of the Russian but the Superman Punch sends Reigns to Money in the Bank and the crowd is VERY happy.

Rating: B. I was doubting Reigns for awhile but he's coming off like a STAR at this point, just like Ambrose. This was a really solid battle royal as there were some good saves and the last bit of the match was really solid stuff. The last pairing is how you should do big matches: take two guys who look unbeatable and have them fight. Notice the reaction and you'll see why that's an idea.

Rusev would have a match at Money in the Bank as well.

Rusev vs. Big E.

Big E. hammers away to start and actually has some early success. Rusev is knocked to the apron but gets up a knee to stop the spear through the ropes. The gutwrench suplex drops Big E. and we hit a chinlock from Rusev. A splash misses though and Big E. gets two off a belly to belly. Rusev charges into the Rock Bottom out of the corner for two and Big E. avoids the jumping superkick. Another suplex sends Rusev to the apron and now the big spear connects. Back in and the straps come down but Rusev kicks him in the side of the ear. The jumping superkick and Accolade keep Rusev undefeated at 7:19.

Rating: C-. Better than last month's match between these two but it was still nothing special. Rusev needs to move up a step as he's defeated Big E. twice in a row now. It's good to see him get tested a bit though and that's what this match was designed to do. Those kicks still look good too.

Here's Rusev's first big singles match on Raw, July 7, 2014.

Rusev vs. Rob Van Dam

That's quite the upgrade in opponent. Rob fires off kicks to start but Rusev says bring it on. A slingshot DDT freaks Lana out but Rusev throws Rob off the top to break up the Five Star. He runs Van Dam over and sends him flying with a fallaway slam. We hit the chinlock as Zeb Colter pops up in an inset interview and officially challenges Rusev for Battleground.

Rusev begs Van Dam to hit him in the ribs before putting on a front facelock. A small package gets two for Rob and he gets a boot up in the corner. Rusev is staggered and there's a top rope kick to the face. Rolling Thunder has to be aborted and Rusev nails the jumping superkick. The Accolade gets the clean submission at 4:38.

Rating: C-. Not a great match but it's a very good upgrade for Rusev. It's more proof that Swagger has no chance at Battleground, but the USA

chant and Swagger coming in carrying the American flag will be a great visual. Rusev is getting better and that jumping superkick just looks awesome.

The singles match on Smackdown, July 11, 2014.

Rusev vs. Roman Reigns

They lock up to start until Rusev kicks at the legs to take over. Reigns cleans house with right hands and knocks Rusev to the floor as we take a break. Back with Rusev controlling with a nerve hold before he drops Reigns with a spinwheel kick. We hit the nerve hold again before Reigns' comeback is squashed by a kick to the chest. The fans think Russia sucks and help Roman fight out of the third nerve hold. A running clothesline drops the Russian and a Samoan drop does it again. The apron kick has Lana freaking out and there's the Superman Punch, drawing in Orton for the DQ at 6:55 shown of 9:25.

Rating: C. This was decent while it lasted but there was no way either guy was getting a clean win here. Also, a nine and a half minute match on Smackdown doesn't have nearly the same atmosphere that these two had in the battle royal. Build these two up a bit more and make it mean something and the match will be much better.

Next up was a patriotic feud with Jack Swagger, including this flag match at Summerslam 2014.

Rusev vs. Jack Swagger

This is a Flag Match, meaning a regular match with the winner's flag being displayed after the match. Lana talks about how unrealistic Hollywood is, because there will be no happy ending. Swagger comes out with a military escort and a presentation of the American flag. Rusev jumps Swagger before the bell so Swagger puts on the Patriot Lock. They're finally separated but Lana says Rusev is too injured to wrestle. The referee says ring the bell and Swagger goes after him in the corner.

Rusev is sent outside but Swagger takes him back inside and hammers away. The Russian keeps running so Swagger runs him over with a clothesline on

the floor. All Swagger so far. Back inside and the Vader Bomb is countered with a kick to Jack's bad ribs. Rusev fires off some shoulders in the corner and puts on a bearhug. Jack can't belly to belly suplex him and Rusev cannonballs down onto his back again.

Swagger fights back with a running clothesline and a big boot followed by the Vader Bomb for two. The superkick is countered into the Patriot Lock but Rusev quickly rolls out. A hard kick to the ribs has Rusev in trouble and a kick to the face sets up the Accolade. Rusev can't stand on the bad ankle though so it's a one legged Accolade instead. Jack rolls over into the Patriot Lock but Rusev rolls over and kicks at the ribs. A spinwheel kick to the shoulder drops Jack again and there's a Warrior Splash, setting up the Accolade and Swagger is out at 8:53.

Rating: C+. Good match here with both guys bringing their harder games. Swagger looks good by not tapping out and the right guy wins. This should end the feud between the two though and hopefully sends Rusev after Sheamus and the US Title. Does anything else really make sense at this point?

Rematch from August 29, 2014 on Smackdown.

Rusev vs. Jack Swagger

Submission match. Swagger immediately goes after the ankle but he can't suplex Rusev because of the bad ribs. With that not being an option, Swagger kicks him in the ankle and puts on the Patriot Lock, sending Rusev crawling to the ropes. They head outside with Rusev whipping Swagger into the barricade. We take a break and come back with Swagger being sent back outside but Rusev's ankle is hurting too badly to follow up. Swagger blocks a kick and puts the Patriot Lock on outside.

Rusev crawls back inside for the break so Jack kicks at the leg in the corner. The Vader Bomb connects but the ribs are hurt even worse. Now Rusev puts Swagger in a Patriot Lock until Swagger rolls through into one of his own. The ropes save Rusev again and he nails the jumping superkick. Rusev hooks the Accolade but Jack gets an arm free and grabs a rope. The hold goes back on in the middle of the ring but Jack powers to his feet. A towel comes flying in and Bo Dallas trips up Swagger to put

him back in the full hold, making Swagger tap at 7:03 shown of 10:33.

Rating: C. This is an interesting one as they keep Swagger looking as strong as they can, but having him tap defeats the purpose. It continues to set up Swagger vs. Dallas, but that doesn't really do as much for me with Swagger submitting. Have him pass out again, or let it be a regular match ending in a pin but the tapping out hurts this. It does however keep Rusev strong and that's more important long term.

The next big shot American to try their luck was Mark Henry at Night of Champions 2014.

Rusev vs. Mark Henry

Lillian Garcia sings the National Anthem before the match and Henry starts crying. Henry wins the early slugout and Rusev bails to the floor. They do the same sequence again but Henry follows him out the third time. Rusev drives him into the steps to take over before hitting a running splash back inside. He puts on a side choke and things slow down a bit.

Back up and Henry hits a quick splash in the corner but can't lift him for the World's Strongest Slam. Rusev nails a spinwheel kick and starts in on the bad back. Henry fights out of an Accolade attempt and nails the World's Strongest Slam out of nowhere but his back gives out. Rusev wisely rolls outside but comes back in with the running superkick. Now the Accolade goes on and Henry quickly taps at 8:35.

Rating: D. That was pretty much exactly what was expected and it really wasn't anything interesting. No one gave Henry much of a chance here and can you really blame them? At the end of the day the Hall of Pain period was such an outlier in his career as the rest of his career has been such a mess.

After a verbal showdown with Rock, Rusev would face the Intercontinental Champion in a non-title match on Smackdown, October 10, 2014.

Rusev vs. Dolph Ziggler

Non-title again. Rusev powers him into the corner to start and kicks Ziggler in the back before choking on the apron. Ziggler fights out of a

chinlock but misses a Stinger Splash as we take a break. Back with Dolph hammering away but getting caught with the knees to the ribs and fall away slam. Rusev hooks a front facelock with a body scissors but Ziggler finally rolls forward to escape.

A hard shot to the face staggers Rusev and there's a dropkick for good measure. The running DDT is blocked but Rusev misses a charge, setting up a bad looking Fameasser for one. Back up and the running superkick sets up the Accolade to make Dolph tap at 8:20. This was only a few steps above a squash save for that one flurry.

Rating: C. But I thought Rock buried Rusev on Raw and there was no way he could ever recover. Those comments still make my head hurt but that's another story for another time. This was a big win for Rusev and they're getting more and more common. I know the logical story was to have him go over Sheamus for the US Title, but they're getting to the point where he needs to go into the World Title picture with wins like these. He's not there yet, but they can't ignore him much longer.

Rusev is the modern version of the evil Russian and his athleticism makes him quite the force. The problem with a character like him is that once he loses, a lot of his heat is going to go with him. It happens to everyone, but the question is how well can he bounce back. He'll do something special in the future though, and that's more than a lot of people can say.

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