

Wrestler of the Day – October 23: Jesse Ventura

Today we're looking at the greatest heel commentator of all time: Jesse Ventura.

Ventura got his start in 1975 but we'll pick things up on March 14, 1982 in MSG.

Bob Backlund vs. Jesse Ventura

Ventura is more or less a copy of Billy Graham minus the in ring skill and some of the muscle mass. Ivan Putski, a Polish wrestler, is guest referee here for reasons not explained by the commentary. Ventura, nicknamed the Body, shoves Backlund into the corner a few times and poses. Jesse tries to do it again but the champion is too fast for him, tripping up Ventura and sending him to the floor.

Back in and Backlund pounds away on Backlund's ribs but it doesn't seem to have much effect. A slap to the back of Backlund only gets a glare from the champion and Jesse is mad. Backlund starts hammering away and drives an elbow into Jesse's face before cranking on the arm a bit. Ventura finally gets in a shot of his own and takes over, stepping on Backlund's throat. The champion is sent into the corner and Jesse chokes even more, showing off the variety of offense that he has in his arsenal.

Putski finally pulls the cheating Body off of Bob so Jesse pounds away at the champion's head. Backlund fights back with some shots to the head before the two of them collide with Jesse falling on top for two. Jesse chokes away even more and gets a very slow count from Putski. Even the usually neutral McMahon is complaining about the speed. Ventura puts Backlund over his shoulder in the Body Breaker (a backbreaker) but Backlund escapes and falls on top for two. Bob escapes a second attempt and rolls up Ventura for a fast count and the pin to retain.

Rating: D. This was a rather uninteresting match which is the problem with most of Backlund's matches: unless he's against a top level talent,

he isn't able to bring people up to the next level. The match was boring for the most part with Ventura only choking and Backlund using very basic offense to make his comeback for the pin.

Jesse was a big deal in the AWA so here's a fairly big match from Turkey Day Turmoil on December 25, 1982.

Jesse Ventura vs. Hulk Hogan

Jesse bails to the floor to start and then bails some more. Back in and Jesse actually takes over by cranking on the arm and punching at the ribs. The arm gets snapped over the top rope and Jesse keeps the pace as slow as possible. Back in and we hit the wristlock again with Jesse pulling Hogan down by the hair like a villain should. The sequence works so well that they do it again and Jesse sits there to pull on the arm. He snaps it across the top rope again before putting on a hammerlock.

Another snap across the top as we're somehow nine minutes into this. Jesse wraps the arm around the top rope and walks around a lot but Hogan starts shaking. Ventura dives into a bearhug and Hulk rams him into the buckles. Now it's Jesse's turn to have his arm wrapped around the ropes and snapped down. A back elbow puts Jesse on the floor and they fight over a chair for the double DQ.

Rating: D. This took its sweet time to get going but Hogan made up for it by doing the same stuff to the arm that Jesse did to him. To be fair though, Ventura was never known for his in ring abilities and this was a good example of why. It wasn't a good match or anything but Hogan made the people care.

Still in the AWA for Super Sunday 1983.

Jesse Ventura/Blackjack Lanza/Ken Patera vs. High Fliers/Rick Martel

The High Fliers are Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzell and they're the tag champions. The heels (Ventura's team) has Heenan managing them. Martel vs. Patera gets us going. Patera tries to draw him into the corner but Martel is BRILLIANT (Gene Okerlund said so) and wants to keep it in the middle. This is power vs. speed and Martel snaps off some armdrags.

Martel takes him down and works on, say it with me, the arm.

Off to Brunzell for some fresh arm work and an atomic drop. Back to the arm and it's off to Ventura, who is called Mr. V. here. Brunzell grabs the arm and it's off to Gagne who comes off the middle rope onto the arm again. Ventura easily picks him up and carries Gagne to the corner and brings in Lanza. The size difference here is huge but it doesn't last long as Martel comes in and is a house of fire.

Martel drags Lanza into the corner but does it so slowly that Ventura falls into the ring from reaching so much. Patera comes back in as does Brunzell and the power man pulls the Flier into the corner. Off to Ventura for a bearhug. Things break down and Gagne comes in to beat up everyone. Martel comes in to help and the Heenan Family is in trouble. Gagne puts a sleeper on Patera but Ventruea makes the save.

It settles down with Lanza and Gagne and Lanza drives his knuckles into the side of Gagne's head ala Sgt. Slaughter in 1991. Ventura comes in and hits a backbreaker for two. Gagne gets the tag to Martel but the referee doesn't see it. I've always loved that sequence for some reason. Off to Patera for the bearhug again and Gagne is in big trouble. Gagne escapes with a kind of Thesz Press and sends Lanza into the corner and makes another hot tag to Martel.

Rick misses a dropkick and it's back to Patera for a suplex for two as Brunzell makes the save. Lanza interferes to break up a potential hot tag and comes in legally, only to get kicked in the face so we can get the actual hot tag to Brunzell. He hits his signature dropkick and puts on a Figure Four, called an Indian Deathlock. Everything breaks down and Heenan gets up on the apron, only to get knocked back down again.

Things settle down again and it's Brunzell backdropping Patera to set up another Deathlock attempt. Patera breaks it up and everything breaks down again. Somewhere in there Patera pins Brunzell as it's possible that there was a foreign object sent in there by Heenan when he was on the apron.

Rating: B-. This isn't something that everyone is going to like but I was getting into it by the end. They had every face in there getting beaten

down at different times as well as a lot of hot tags. The fans were staying in this too and it was by far and away the best match of the night so far. The High Fliers were exactly what their name said and it worked pretty well for the most part. Good match here.

Still in the AWA at some point in 1984.

Jesse Ventura/Mr. Saito vs. Baron Von Raschke/Kenny Jay

Saito and Jay start things off but it's quickly off to Baron vs. Jesse. The Baron drops Ventura ribs first over the top rope so it's back to Saito for some shots to the ribs. Jay comes in to help his partner and walks into a Russian legsweep from Saito. Jesse drops some elbows on the back of Jay's head before tying him in the Tree of Woe.

Baron comes over for the ave like the wild man that he is and beats up Saito with ease. He follows up on Jesse by ramming him into the buckle over and over before slapping on his Claw hold. Now it's Saito making a save and Jesse pops back up to slug away at Baron. There's the over the shoulder backbreaker with Saito coming in with a top rope chop. Baron is busted open and some other guys come in for the save, drawing a DQ.

Rating: D+. The Baron's energy made this one a lot better and Jesse was just kind of a background character. The ending made the heels look great though and that's why you have someone get busted open like this. On top of that they kept things quick here instead of letting it drag like the Hogan match.

Off to the WWF with Jesse appearing on the infamous Black Saturday show.

Jesse Ventura vs. Chris Curtis

We're in Minneapolis here but Jesse is billed from San Diego. He gets a roar anyway as you would expect. Gene and Gorilla are the commentators. The electronic scoreboard says that there's a car with its lights on. That's like something out of a joke for some reason. Jesse yells at a Minnesota Viking in the front row.

We start the match and Jesse wastes time. This was his

trademark at the time along with all kinds of colors. Jesse keeps yelling at the football player. Again we know nothing about Jesse other than he wears a lot of colorful stuff. Jesse's offense is very generic to put it nicely. Curtis gets some offense in but runs into a knee in the corner to end that completely. Body Vice (over the shoulder back breaker submission) is the academic win. Another squash.

Rating: N/A. Just a long squash with no context or anything at all like that. Jesse of course dominated and there was no rhyme or reason to it. Jesse is just some dude that beat up a jobber and we know nothing about what he's done or currently is doing or anything like that. That seems to be a theme here.

Here he is in MSG on August 24, 1984 in one of Jesse's biggest feuds.

Jesse Ventura vs. Ivan Putski

Putski jumps Ventura on the entrance and the fans are actually waking up a bit here. Ventura hides on the floor for a bit before going back in, only to be shoved right back to the outside. Ivan hooks a headlock and pounds on Jesse's head a bit before kicking him to the floor again. Back in (again) and Ivan grabs Jesse by the beard to pound away on him even more. Ventura rolls to the floor again as the stalling continues.

The Body puts a top wristlock on the much shorter Ivan and pulls him to the mat by the hair, meaning we can lay around again! Putski fights up and knocks Jesse to the floor but Ventura gets in a shot on the way back inside. Jesse pulls out some kind of foreign object to choke Ivan but of course doesn't get caught. Ivan steals it away and clotheslines Jesse with it before choking as well. The referee seems to be fine with this. They head to the apron with Jesse hitting him in the throat and getting back in for a countout win.

Rating: F+. You wouldn't believe this match was twelve minutes long would you? Jesse was a master at doing absolutely nothing in a match but still getting booed and this was no exception. Putski continues to be one of the most worthless wrestlers I've ever seen, as he has nothing of note at all and the match was incredibly boring.

We'll jump ahead a bit more to March 17, 1985.

Junkyard Dog/Andre the Giant/Jimmy Snuka vs. John Studd/Ken Patera/Jesse Ventura

This is two weeks before Wrestlemania and in MSG. Isn't that pushing things pretty close together? Dog vs. Patera gets us going and the fans are already into it. Andre is in quickly and the dominance begins. Patera is knocked all over the place and Heenan tries to calm him down. Off to JYD again and Patera can barely stand up. Andre runs Patera off again and it all breaks down pretty quickly.

The heels take over and it's off to Jesse who uses his usual stuff. In kind of a surprise, Jesse tries to ram Dog's head into the buckle and it works as well as it always does. Here comes Snuka and the fans go crazy. Jesse gets in a shot though and the heels take over. Studd comes in and Andre wants a piece of him but has to wait a few weeks. Off to a bearhug to Snuka and the heels use the old switcheroo to bring back Patera.

Jesse comes in and we complete the trio of bearhugs. Back to Studd who bearhugs him as well. The place is going to erupt when Andre comes in. Jimmy breaks the hold and tags Andre. I was right about the place erupting. It's a battle of the giants but Patera breaks up the slam. Studd runs and it's off to Jesse. Everything breaks down and Snuka splashes Jesse for the pin while Andre runs interference.

Rating: D. Very boring match for the most part but the MSG reactions for Andre and Snuka were just great. Those two could do no wrong back then, which is probably what made the heel turn for Andre work so well. Boring match but a good ending which helped it a little bit. The Superfly Splash is always worth seeing.

From MSG on May 20, 1985.

Jesse Ventura vs. Tony Garea

Jesse takes forever to get ready, taking off his earrings very slowly. They get going and Jesse hits him twice to put him down. That's more than enough cause for some posing isn't it? I've heard a lot of people

say Jesse's in ring stuff isn't that good and I think they're onto something. Jesse keeps hitting him in the kidneys and then denying it to the referee.

Now Garea hits Jesse in his own kidneys and then grabs a wristlock. Make that an armbar as we up the difficulty. The announcers imply that Jesse stuffs his tights. To make his legs look bigger you sick freaks. Get your minds out of Jesse's crotch. Garea is sent into the ropes and Jesse tosses him over, getting Garea's head and neck tied up between them. I know I've seen this before.

After some brief pounding by Jesse, Garea takes over again with some weak stuff. This match is going WAY longer than it should have already. An abdominal stretch doesn't work but a sunset flip gets two. Garea misses a charge into the corner and Jesse drops a simple elbow for the pin.

Rating: D-. What was the point of this going about 8 minutes again? Nothing to see here and I don't know why this was on there in the first place. Jesse isn't much in the ring but he's had better matches than this I'm sure. If not I feel bad for his career. Pretty boring match but the head in the ropes spot looked cool.

Still from the world's most famous arena on November 13, 1985.

Randy Savage/Jesse Ventura vs. Mario Mancini/Mike Rice

Ventura drives Mancini into the corner for some right hands before it's off to Savage to start the beatdown. Savage kicks him in the back of the head and pulls Mancini in to stay on the beating. Jesse slams Mancini down and the flying elbow is enough for the pin.

Here's one of Jesse's most high profile (and last) matches. From Saturday Night's Main Event IV.

Jesse Ventura/Roddy Piper/Bob Orton vs. Cousin Luke/Uncle Elmer/Hillbilly Jim

Jim is the most talented of the face hillbilly team. What does that tell you? Piper and Orton say funny things about the

hillbillies. He was a total master on the mic in this era. The hillbillies say generic hillbilly stuff. The mat is dark gray and the ropes are mixed up, as in they go blue, red then white. It's weirder than it sounds. Also, the ring looks TINY. Uncle Elmer and Ventura start. Elmer is REALLY fat.

Wow it's odd hearing Heenan from this era. It really is. He's a totally different commentator. He's still his usual jerky self, but his voice sounds different to put it mildly. Luke...sucks. That's all there is to it. I mean he sucks HARD. Naturally he gets beaten down for the majority of the match. Piper was still moving in the ring at this time and was far better at wrestling than he was given credit for.

Jesse's wrestling was underrated. He knew how to sell and could work a crowd really well. Luke gets his head handed to him for a good while. We get the classic ref doesn't see the tag spot which is one of the easiest ways in the world to get heat on someone. Piper beats up Uncle Elmer, who is like 6'7 and close to 500lbs on his own. It's rather amusing. We get a melee and after a cast shot to Luke, Piper puts him to sleep to end a glorified squash.

Rating: D. Weak stuff here but like I said, I'd expect a lot of that. There was heat from the crowd, but when the third best in ring guy is Hillbilly Jim, it's a bad sign. This just didn't work and felt weak. Jesse wouldn't be around much longer due to issues from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. Elmer and Luke would be gone because.....well I think you get the idea.

We'll wrap it up with Ventura getting a title shot on February 9, 1986.

Intercontinental Title: Jesse Ventura vs. Tito Santana

Interesting point to start: we're told that Jesse and Adonis held the tag titles. They did, but they were the AWA tag titles. They said this regularly but it wasn't something you expect to hear. I think this is in Toronto. Jesse complains about the closed fist because that's what heels do before punching their opponents. He calls Santana Chico which is

always awesome. Jesse keeps getting caught in holds and heading for the ropes.

Time for a wristlock as the fans are almost all behind Jesse. They pop for Tito's reversal as well though so I guess the Canadians are confused here. Off to a headlock but Jesse gets a knee to the ribs to take over. Out to the floor now and it's confirmed that we're in Toronto. Jesse's offense is pretty basic but he knows how to work a crowd like a master which is more important.

Tito gets in a few punches but Ventura pokes him in the eye to stop him. Win if you can, lose if you must but always cheat. Backbreaker gets two and an atomic drop does the same. Here's a bearhug which makes sense given the back work that was done earlier. Tito smacks him in the head to escape. Gorilla: "Look at that firey Mexican!" Tito grabs the Figure Four but Jesse gets the rope. They fight up the ramp and Tito puts the Figure Four on out there but Jesse kicks him into the ring for the countout win.

Rating: C. Not bad here but it worked for the most part. It was actually a double countout if you care. This was fine for a house show title defense, especially with someone like Jesse who was a rarity to see in the ring at this point. He knew how to work a crowd but the people loved him which is the right idea.

In the words of Mick Foley, Jesse was a great talent but not inside a ring. People remember him as the heel commentator that ripped on Hogan every chance he got and that's quite the career to have. Ventura is one of the most interesting people you'll ever find and wrestling is just a small part of that. Listen to him instead of watching him though.

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