

Survivor Series Count-Up – 1998: Russo Done Right

Survivor Series 1998

Date: November 15, 1998

Location: Kiel Center, St. Louis, Missouri

Attendance: 21,779

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is what you call a one idea show as the entire show (almost) is dedicated to a tournament to crown a new world champion. Austin got robbed of the title and then wouldn't count a win as guest referee in a title match, so tonight there's a big tournament to determine the new champion. Also the Corporation now exists to make sure Austin doesn't win. There's also talk of someone joining the Corporation tonight as the Corporate Champion and the new top soldier for Vince. Let's get to it.

The opening video is of the people in the tournament talking about wanting to be champion.

I've always loved the theme song to this show. I did when I was a kid and I have it on my iPod today.

JR and the King talk about a big brawl that happened on Heat. They don't actually say WHO WAS IN IT, but it was apparently quite a brawl.

Here are the tournament brackets:

Undertaker

BYE

Kane

BYE

Rock

HHH

Goldust

Ken Shamrock

Mankind

???

Jeff Jarrett

Al Snow

X-Pac

Steven Regal

Steve Austin

Big Boss Man

This is a tournament where you could have easily cut out the first round and made it an eight man tournament but I guess they needed to fill in the time.

Here's Vince to open things up. If I remember right Undertaker and Kane recently shattered his ankle so he's hopping to the ring. Vince does a big intro for Mankind who is Corporate but is more of a comedic putz who Vince manipulates to do whatever he wants. He's also Hardcore Champion.

WWF World Title Tournament First Round: Mankind vs. ???

Vince gives a LONG speech about the mystery opponent and it's....Duane Gill. He was a jobber who injured his shoulder and was gone for two years to WCW. The fans thought it would be Shawn Michaels and are ticked off by the reveal. Then again it's meant to be a joke so it's not that big of a deal. The pyro scares Gill to death ala Eric Young. Gill is wearing a Pasadena Chargers shirt, which is an elementary school football team he coaches. Mankind is in a tuxedo and wins in 30 seconds with the double arm DDT. It would seem that a conspiracy is afoot.

Earlier tonight on Heat, Jacqueline jumped Sable. This gives us ANGRY

Sable which is more funny than interesting or intimidating.

WWF World Title Tournament: Jeff Jarrett vs. Al Snow

This is Debra's PPV debut. The winner gets Mankind and the first round matches only have ten minute time limits. Snow chases Debra around on the floor but hits a flip dive onto Jarrett off the stairs in a cool spot. We head inside and I think a bell has rung but I'm not sure. Jeff hotshots Al onto the top rope to take over but Snow is looking all psycho. Snow comes back and takes Jeff down before going up.

A guillotine legdrop misses and a dropkick takes Al down for two. Snow comes back with a crucifix for another two and counters a spinebuster into a DDT for two. They collide and here's Debra with the Head. Snow goes to find it but gets Jeff's guitar instead. Jeff finds Head but the referee gets the guitar out of the ring. During the distraction, Snow steals Head and KO's Jarrett with it to advance.

Rating: C+. This is a good idea: take two talented guys and let them have a match. What more do you need to do? The ending was a little screwy but they got there on a smooth wrestling match. When Russo could be held back from making things too crazy, late 98 WWF had more than enough talent to put on fun matches like this. Good stuff.

WWF World Title Tournament: Steve Austin vs. Big Boss Man

They're flying through this so far. Boss Man goes after Austin in the aisle but you don't win a fist fight against Austin in 1998. Austin sends him into the steps and we head in for the bell. Vince is watching in the back as Austin hits the Thesz Press and the middle finger elbow for two. Boss Man hits Austin low to come back but it just gets a warning. After a quick chinlock there's the running crotch attack to Austin's back and an uppercut for two. Austin makes his comeback and stomps a mudhole in the corner. We head to the floor and Boss Man hits Austin in the ribs with a nightstick for the DQ.

Rating: C-. Nothing of note to see here but this was more about story than the match. Did anyone expect Austin to get eliminated by Boss Man? This is the kind of roll Boss Man was good at: enhancing a story and

taking something out of the bigger name before we get to the important stuff with the bigger names later on. There's nothing wrong with that and it kept him employed for years.

Vince smiles at the ending as Austin gets beaten down by the stick some more. He says the night is young.

WWF World Title Tournament First Round: X-Pac vs. Steven Regal

This is one of those matches that doesn't need to exist. The winner gets Austin and X-Pac is European Champion coming in. Regal is a REAL MAN'S MAN here. Lawler sings the song as Regal comes to the ring in a funny bit. Either that or the audio messed up there for a bit. Pac kicks him down and suplexes Regal for two. Two of those fast legdrops get another two on Regal but the Bronco Buster misses.

Regal puts on an abdominal stretch on the mat as things slow down a bit. Regal charges into the corner but gets caught in a sunset flip but he rolls out of that too and hits a slingshot to send Pac flying. Off to a surfboard stretch as things slow down again. This is probably the longest match so far and it's not even four minutes in yet. A gutwrench suplex puts Pac down and it's off to a headscissors.

Pac rolls that over and gets a freaky looking hold where he was on his back with his legs by Regal's head but he was cranking on the legs in a Sharpshooter position. That gets him nowhere but it looked good. Regal puts Pac on the top and hits a butterfly superplex for two. Back to another rib/arm hold as the fans are getting a little restless. Back up and they collide in the corner before X-Pac kicks his head off for two. The Bronco Buster hits this time but Pac goes up and gets crotched, falling to the floor. They fight for awhile out there and it's a double countout to give Austin a bye.

Rating: C-. Much like the other three matches, this didn't need to exist. The match was ok and one of the longer matches of the night (about eight minutes) but it doesn't need to happen. This is a match you could easily take out and give to a longer match later on. I mean, did ANYONE see these two as threats to the title? Of course not.

Vince isn't happy with that and insists on overtime. It's sudden death too, making it just like every other wrestling match on the show tonight. That goes nowhere though as X-Pac walks to the back.

WWF World Title Tournament First Round: Goldust vs. Ken Shamrock

Shamrock is IC Champion coming in. Ken starts with a leg lariat and pounds away at Goldie. Goldust misses a lariat but a second attempt connects to shift the momentum. Shamrock clotheslines him out of the corner for two as this is starting very slowly so far. Off to a reverse chinlock followed by a Russian legsweep for two. A regular chinlock follows that up but Goldust makes a comeback. That lasts about four seconds as Shamrock avoids a charge in the corner. A powerbomb from Goldie is countered and the referee blocks his Shattered Dreams attempt. It's rana, belly to belly and ankle lock for the tap out win for Ken.

Rating: D-. This was a long and uninteresting squash. Goldust was at a weird point here as he didn't really do anything and wasn't weird or creepy anymore. He was just kind of there as a guy who used to be good but in this match he could have been Barry Horowitz and been as much of a threat to Shamrock. Terribly dull stuff here.

Austin has refused medical attention but Cole thinks he'll be here later in the tournament.

WWF World Title Tournament First Round: The Rock vs. HHH

Oh wait HHH is hurt so we've got a replacement.

WWF World Title Tournament First Round: The Rock vs. Big Boss Man

Roc literally immediately rolls Boss Man up and wins in three seconds, setting a new WWF record.

Here are the updated brackets for the quarterfinals:

Undertaker

Kane

Rock

Ken Shamrock

Mankind

Al Snow

Steve Austin

BYE

WWF World Title Tournament Quarterfinals: Undertaker vs. Kane

Taker has Bearer here and is heel but he's against the other heel faction headed by Vince. Naturally they were working together all along but that wouldn't be revealed for about seven months. Kane pounds on Taker in the corner and not a lot of selling is going on. Kane kicks Taker down and clotheslines him out to the floor. The masked one stays on the offense on the floor but gets dropped face first onto the barricade.

Back in and Taker slugs away but there still isn't much selling going on. Kane powerslams Taker down but Taker sits up to avoid an elbow. Kane sits up as well and we get more punching. Taker gets a boot up in the corner and starts working on Kane's leg. The leg work goes on for awhile because neither guy is capable of doing anything with any kind of speed whatsoever. They get back up and it's MORE punching. This is slow even for a Taker match to give you an indication of what I'm sitting through.

Taker gets caught in the corner with a clothesline and the top rope clothesline follows it up for two. They slug it out some more and good grief SELL SOMETHING ALREADY! Taker tries a chokeslam but gets countered into one by Kane. Bearer distracts Kane on the apron though and Taker pops up with a tombstone to eliminate Kane.

Rating: F+. This was horrible as it was clear Taker wasn't interested in trying and Kane was only able to do so much in the first place. The match sucked as a result and things would only get worse as time went on. We would soon get into crucifixions, burials (as in dirt over bodies in graves) and demonic possessions. WRESTLING LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

WWF World Title Tournament Quarterfinals: Mankind vs. Al Snow

Mankind is still in his tuxedo. Snow jumps him to start and hits a clothesline for no cover. Mankind heads to the floor for a chair but Snow gets in a few shots to block it. A big chair shot misses Mankind against the post and Snow gets dropped on the chair to give the masked guy control. Back in and Snow grabs Head but Mankind suplexes him down to take it out of Snow's hands. Here's Socko (which had been stolen by Snow and wrapped around Head's...uh...self? Mankind clotheslines Snow down but gets caught in a sitout spinebuster for two. The double arm DDT puts Snow down and the Claw finishes Snow.

Rating: D+. Another pretty worthless match but Mankind and Snow always seemed to have fun together out there. At the end of the day though, it's Al Snow vs. Mankind in a world title tournament match so it wasn't exactly a secret as to who was going to win. Then again that's the problem with almost every wrestling tournament you have. Not much to see here but it could have been worse.

WWF World Title Tournament Quarterfinals: Ken Shamrock vs. The Rock

Winner gets Undertaker. Shamrock gets in a quick kick to the face but Rock clotheslines him down to take over. Ken hooks a quick suplex for two and hits a clothesline in the corner. Rock hits another clothesline to take over. Out to the floor and Rock spits water in Shamrock's face, prompting Ken to send him into the steps. Back in and Shamrock stomps away before hitting a leg lariat to take Rock down.

A Russian legsweep gets two for Shamrock and a running knee lift sets up a chinlock. Rock comes back with right hands but here comes Boss Man. Back to the chinlock as the fans get on the Boss Man. Rock makes a quick comeback attempt but gets caught in the ankle lock. While that would make Rock tap out in a few seconds back in the day, he's a good guy now so he fights to a rope.

Double clotheslines put both guys down and Rock starts taking over. Boss Man tries to interfere but it allows Rock to hit Shamrock low. There's the People's Elbow but it only gets two. The Rock Bottom is countered but Boss Man throws in the nightstick to Shamrock. Rock intercepts it though and KO's Ken to make the final four.

Rating: C-. Another not that great match here but it was better than most of what we've had so far. Shamrock is another guy like Boss Man who is a great soldier but was never going to get much higher than he was here. He certainly had a better chance at it than Boss Man, but that's not saying all that much.

The final four are now set:

Undertaker

The Rock

Mankind

Steve Austin

Bearer says Undertaker will win.

Women's Title: Sable vs. Jacqueline

Jackie is defending. Shane McMahon is referee after being demoted by Vince. Jackie kicks Sable down and, wait for it, runs her mouth. Sable comes back with a TKO but Mero pulls her out at two. Sable kicks Mero low and powerbombs him on the floor. Jackie decks Sable and runs her mouth some more. Did I mention I REALLY don't like Jackie? Sable counters a tornado DDT and powerbombs Jackie for the pin and the title.

Rating: D-. It came, it went, it wasn't any good at all. People actually cared Sable, but the title became a prop very quickly. There's just nothing else to say here.

WWF World Title Tournament Semifinals: Mankind vs. Steve Austin

Austin is banged up from the nightstick attack earlier but he goes right at Mankind to start. He rips Mankind's shoe off and whacks him in the head with it as Vince is wheeled out. The distraction lets Mankind take over and hit a running knee in the corner. There's the Thesz Press but Mankind escapes the Stunner. Mankind runs out of the ring and towards the entrance but the Stooges bring him back.

Foley sends Austin into the steps and then into the crowd as we're firmly

in brawl mode here. Back to ringside and Austin goes face first into the steps. Off to a reverse chinlock in the ring on Austin but Stone Cold makes a comeback. They clothesline each other down and Vince is getting worried. Austin rams into him and stomps a mudhole but Mankind goes out and gets a chair. That gets kicked into his face but Mankind hits the double arm onto the chair for two.

A piledriver on the chair is broken up because it would have destroyed Austin's neck which was already in pieces. The Stunner hits but Vince jumps out of his wheelchair and beats up the referee. Mankind loses his tuxedo pants and puts on the Claw but there's the Stunner. Shane comes in to count the pin but stops at two and flips Austin off, opening up a BIG plot hole which was probably explained by Russo logic. Remember that it was SHANE that rehired Austin, but apparently he was working with his dad the whole time. So why rehire him? Anyway Brisco hits Austin with a chair and Mankind takes the pin to go to the finals.

Rating: C+. Definitely the best match of the night so far. It was insanely overbooked but it was certainly the best match. Imagine that: take two of the best ever and give them some time and you get the best match of the night. This also opens up the door for a surprise ending, as Austin was the favorite going into the tournament. Basically they've done the DiBiase master plan from Mania IV but it actually worked here.

Vince and company immediately get in the limo and leave with Austin in pursuit. Austin hijacks a car and we've got a chase scene.

WWF World Title Tournament Semifinals: The Rock vs. Undertaker

Rock pounds away in the corner to start but Taker gets in a clothesline to the back of the head to take Rock down. We head to the floor and after being sent into the barricade, Taker knocks Rock's head off with another clothesline. Back inside and an elbow puts Rock down before Taker chokes on the mat. An uppercut puts Rock in the ropes and Taker pounds away.

Taker charges at Rock but gets backdropped to the floor and hit in the face with a water bottle. They head into the crowd for a few seconds and Taker gets the advantage back again. They slug it out with Taker getting the advantage again before walking into a Samoan Drop. Here comes the

Boss Man again as Taker sits up. Rock comes back and loads up the Elbow but Boss Man trips him up. Taker hits Boss Man for reasons of EVIL, but here's Kane to chokeslam Rock, sending him to the finals by DQ.

Rating: D. If there have ever been two big names with worse chemistry than Rock and Undertaker, I'd like to know who they are. These two just could not have a good match together if their lives depended on it back in the Attitude Era. It never clicked no matter how many times they main evented PPVs. This didn't work either but at least it wasn't that long of a match.

Taker and Kane brawl everywhere.

Mankind is ready to climb his last Rock.

Tag Titles: New Age Outlaws vs. Headbangers vs. D'Lo Brown/Mark Henry

The Outlaws are defending of course. This was set up on Raw with both challenging teams doing something that I can't remember to earn the shot. Billy and Brown start things off but Mosh comes in off a blind tag to try to steal a pin on Billy. Mosh hits a running body attack in the corner on Gunn before diving at Brown as well. This is pretty messy so far. The Outlaws pound on the former Nation guys in opposite corners before the Headbangers double team Roadie.

Brown and Mosh trade pin attempts on Dogg. This is the old triple threat tag match rules where there are three people at a time in there which I've always preferred. Off to Henry for a bearhug on Roadie until Mosh makes the save. Off to Brown, Thrasher and Dogg as this continues to be ugly stuff. Gunn gets in a LOUD argument with the referee as Brown rans Thrasher off the top.

Roadie pounds on Brown and Thrasher but Henry takes his head off with a clothesline. Brown's running powerbomb to Thrasher is countered into a sunset flip for two. A Henry legdrop gets the same on Dogg, followed by the Headbangers double teaming Roadie for the same. Brown offers a pact with Mosh but gets kicked in the balls for his efforts. JR can almost be heard moaning at how bad this match is. Roadie finally escapes the beating for the hot tag to Billy. The fans LOVED the Outlaws so at least

they're reacting here.

Brown hits the Sky High on Billy but since everyone is out of position, it takes forever to start the count. Jesse Ventura would have a field day with this. To further the stupidity here, Billy hits a Fameasser on Mosh but Henry makes the save with a splash, also hitting Mosh. Mark just stays on top of Mosh for a cover, but after two finisher it only gets two. That Mosh man, he's TOUGH. Billy finally piledrives Mosh to retain the titles.

Rating: F. This was terrible and there's no other way to put it. They were all over the place and no one was even reading the same book out there. The referee had to count very slowly so the saves could be made and there was no flow to this at all. Just awful and JR's commentary makes it even funnier, but in a kind of sad way.

We recap Austin getting cheated out of the finals.

WWF World Title: The Rock vs. Mankind

Vince and Shane are back and are talking with Boss Man backstage. Feeling out process to start as Lawler makes fun of Halloween Havoc going off the air earlier a few weeks prior to this. Rock gets two off a clothesline and they head to the floor quickly. Rock gets rammed into the steps and Mankind takes over. Back inside for a chinlock as the McMahons come out. JR is very annoyed at various things and he vents a bit as they come to the ring. A suplex gets Rock out of the hold and Mankind is sent outside.

Rock suplexes Mankind on the floor but he has to go after the McMahons a bit. Into the crowd we go with Rock in control. He backdrops Mankind back to ringside and we head into the ring for a Rock chinlock. Mankind fights back up and hits a Cactus Clothesline to take it back to the floor. A chair takes Rock down again and Mankind gets the steps, only to have them knocked down onto him. Rock pounds on the steps on Mankind with the chair before cracking Mankind over the head with the chair.

That gets two back in the ring but Mankind kicks Rock low to take over again. Rock is sent back to the floor for the elbow off the apron. Mankind starts taking the announce table apart as JR loses it even more.

Mankind is heel for the most part coming in but he's a sympathetic heel. A legdrop on the table mostly misses Rock but it gets two back inside. Off to the chinlock again and Rock's comeback is cut short by a backdrop to the floor again.

Back in again and Rock hits a DDT to put both guys down. Mankind sends him to the floor AGAIN but a middle rope elbow to the floor sends the masked one through the announce table. The crash looked great if nothing else. We head back inside and the People's Elbow gets two. A double arm DDT puts Rock down and here's Socko. Rock hangs on in the Claw forever and comes out of it with a Rock Bottom but it only gets a delayed two. Rock puts on the Sharpshooter and Vince says ring the bell just like last year, giving Rock the title, because Rock is Corporate. He's also the new champion.

Rating: C-. This definitely wasn't their best performance with the constant going to the floor getting old fast. Mankind would have his day but it would take awhile to get there. This was all about the shock which shouldn't be a shock when you think about it. All night it was assumed that Mankind was the Corporate guy, but let's look at this.

Rock's first match was against a corporate guy and he just happens to get the easiest pin ever. Then a corporate guy throws in a nightstick so Rock can beat another corporate guy. Then Rock wins by DQ, and now this. That's establishing a story and giving clues instead of an illogical swerve. It's easy to tell which is better as this is shocking, but also MAKES SENSE. This is what Russo was capable of, but we almost never got to see it.

Rock hugs the McMahons and JR erupts. Vince says the people have themselves to blame and the explanation is coming tomorrow on Raw. Mankind isn't sure what to do. Vince brags about screwing Austin over and Shane brags a bit in general. Rock says it's time for the fans to pucker up to him. Mankind wants to know why he lost because he never gave up. Rock hits him with the belt and here's Austin to clean house. This set up Rock vs. Austin for the title the next night in a HUGE match which I believe set a then ratings record.

Overall Rating: D+. This show was ALL about the stories and not much about the wrestling. The matches were mostly bad with a few ok ones, but those aren't the point. This was about Vince and Shane doing their things and getting their Corporate Champion. All of that was accomplished and this set the stage until Wrestlemania. This show doesn't really hold up that well on its own, but in context this would have been gold.

Ratings Comparison

Mankind vs. Duane Gill

Original: N/A

Redo: N/A

Al Snow vs. Jeff Jarrett

Original: B+

Redo: C+

Steve Austin vs. Big Boss Man

Original: D

Redo: C-

X-Pac vs. Steven Regal

Original: B

Redo: C-

Ken Shamrock vs. Goldust

Original: D+

Redo: D-

The Rock vs. Big Boss Man

Original: A (For Are you kidding me)

Redo: N/A

Undertaker vs. Kane

Original: C-

Redo: F+

Mankind vs. Al Snow

Original: D

Redo: D+

The Rock vs. Ken Shamrock

Original: C-

Redo: C-

Sable vs. Jacqueline

Original: D

Redo: D-

Mankind vs. Steve Austin

Original: C+

Redo: C+

The Rock vs. Undertaker

Original: B-

Redo: D

New Age Outlaws vs. D'Lo Brown/Mark Henry vs. The Headbangers

Original: F

Redo: F

Mankind vs. The Rock

Original: B-

Redo: C-

Overall Rating:

Original: C+

Redo: D+

Man what was I thinking with some of those ratings? I had no idea what I was doing back then and it shows.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/11/07/history-of-survivor-series-count-up-1998-deadly-game-the-tournament-not-hhh/>

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