

Wrestler of the Day – December 24: Earl Hebner/Nick Patrick/Danny Davis

Today, with Santa on the way, we're going to look at the greatest thing ever: WRESTLING REFEREES!

We have a trio to look at today, starting with Earl Hebner. First up is a match that became a long term running joke. From Smackdown on May 4, 2000.

WWF World Title: The Rock/Earl Hebner vs. HHH/Road Dogg/X-Pac

Rock is defending and only HHH can take it from him. HHH's left arm is in a sling but the three McMahons and the Stooges are in the challengers' corner. Rock and Road Dogg start things off with the champion hammering away and nailing Dogg with a clothesline. Even a triple team doesn't work on him as he tilt-a-whirl slams X-Pac for two, only to have HHH nail him from behind. It's amazing how much energy there is in this match as the fans are clearly WAY into it.

HHH comes in with some heavy right hands but Rock sends him into the corner and snaps off punches of his own to get the fans back into it. Hebner gets in a shot of his own as Rock wisely starts going after HHH's bad arm. The champ makes the mistake of going after Dogg and X-Pac but walks into a neckbreaker from HHH.

We get to Rock's heat segment with Hebner trying to come in to help, only allowing Vince and Shane to get in some choking. The Dogg comes in and hits a shaky knee drop for two, followed by a spinwheel kick from X-Pac. Now it's time to go after Hebner but Rock pops up with more right hands. Cue Jericho to jump HHH and distract the McMahons so Hebner can hit X-Pac low, allowing the Rock Bottom to retain the title.

Rating: C+. Now this is an interesting specimen. Coming straight off of Backlash where Rock got the title back in a huge moment, it was fairly

clear that the title wasn't changing here. However, they gave you enough of a reasonable doubt that it could happen and the fans in the arena bought into it. That's the key difference between today and back then: the fans accepted it because it COULD happen.

Look at modern WWE. You rarely see a title change unless it's a major, built up match with Big Match Intros on TV or at a pay per view. That is assuming that the title is ever defended on TV (or at all with Lesnar on top) in the first place of course. Here though the title is on the line, there's the slightest hope of a title change, and the fans bought it. Also, how many times do you see a referee defending a title? It's a unique idea and something different which lets you save HHH vs. Rock for a major showdown on pay per view. See how a little creativity can help things so much?

Hebner would defend the WWF's honor against his WCW counterpart at InVasion.

Earl Hebner vs. Nick Patrick

Of all people, Mick Foley is the referee here. Yeah I don't get it either but whatever. He's wearing a Marvel t-shirt so I can't complain at all. Nick comes out with an army of referees which is just funny looking. Earl does the same. It looks like the world's weakest gang. Oh and they're in refereeing gear.

Take a wild guess as to the quality of the work here. Do I need to offer commentary on this one? It's a glorified lumberjack match. Foley throws out the WCW referees. Earl hits something resembling a spear for the win. Patrick gets in Foley's face and guess what happens. I think you know the drill.

Rating: N/A. I'm not grading two non-wrestlers like I would grade regular wrestlers. The match was the disaster you would expect and more of a novelty than anything else. Having Foley in there was the only thing they could have done, but it really didn't do enough to save the thing.

One last Hebner match from Impact, December 5, 2013.

Ethan Carter III vs. Earl Hebner

Ethan takes his time and puts a finger on Earl's chest for the pin at 48 seconds.

We'll move on to something a bit more competitive(ish) with Nick Patrick, the top WCW referee post Tommy Young. Patrick was incredibly crooked a lot of the time and would regularly have to fight wrestlers he screwed over. We'll start things off at World War 3 1996 with Patrick as the NWO referee.

Chris Jericho vs. Nick Patrick

Patrick has been an evil referee that has screwed Jericho over a few times and this is revenge time. Jericho has Teddy Long as his manager which didn't last long. He also has to have one arm behind his back. We hear about Nick Patrick's wrestling career which also didn't last long. It's the left arm here so this should be dominance. Patrick cuts a short promo and we find out why he's a referee.

Patrick is in a sleeveless shirt and is in the NWO here. He also has a neckbrace. With one arm, Patrick wants a test of strength. That whole wrestling background falls apart pretty quickly here as it's all Jericho who puts on a clinic with one arm. It's all Jericho as we go to the floor. Jericho misses a clothesline into the post though and Patrick takes over for a bit. Since his offense does nothing though, we're kind of just wasting time here. Jericho channels his inner Shawn Michaels for a superkick to end it. This was the first pinfall loss for the NWO on PPV, four months after they debuted.

Rating: D+. Pretty boring but they came up with some fairly creative spots to let Patrick get some offense in. This was just kind of pointless though as there was no challenge at all for Jericho and it just kind of fell flat. It could have been FAR worse though as at Patrick was actually a former wrestler

(a knee injury ended his career) so he actually had an idea of what he was doing.

Now we'll get a double shot at evil Nick Patrick faces good referee Randy Anderson for Anderson's job. Bischoff had fired Anderson, who was suffering from cancer at the time, and this is his chance to come back. From Nitro, February 17, 1997.

Nick Patrick vs. Randy Anderson

If Anderson wins, he gets his job back. Patrick trained to be a wrestler but blew out his knee so he became a referee instead, meaning he actually has an idea of what he's doing. Apparently Anderson has an amateur background. He even gets fire as he comes to the ring. The regular referee checks for weapons and hands Anderson a foreign object. On camera of course so you know it's going to be called out later. Randy hits him and wins in about 30 seconds.

Now that the lame ones are over, we'll look at someone.....well he's still lame but not quite so much. Our final entry is the real evil referee Danny Davis, who cost the British Bulldogs and Tito Santana (less so in his case) titles back in the mid to late 80s and joined Jimmy Hart's stable as a result. Davis would regularly wrestle for over a year so I have some material to work with here. We'll start with Wrestlemania III, where the ripped off former champions getting their revenge.

Hart Foundation/Danny Davis vs. British Bulldogs/Tito Santana

Davis is a crooked referee that cost both the Bulldogs and Santana their titles. Apparently this is Davis' debut as a wrestler. Mary Hart (no relation) is on commentary along with Uecker here as well. Tito beats up Danny before the match before we get going with Bret and Santana. Jesse steals the Bulldogs' mascot Matilda as he leaves. Off to Davey vs. Anvil and Smith pulls him by the beard. That's a bit rough even for Neidhart.

Tito comes back in to work on the arm but gets sent to the heel corner for some high quality choking. That goes nowhere so here's Smith vs. Neidhart again. Jim takes him down with a suplex but Bret misses a middle rope elbow. Dynamite comes in for the chest to buckle bump from Bret but

Hart comes back with some punches. Tito tries to break up some interference but only allows even more cheating by Neidhart.

Jim hooks a modified camel clutch on Dynamite before it's back to Bret. I don't think we've seen Davis in yet but before I can finish that sentence he's in for a few stomps. That's the extent of his offense as it's already back to Bret for some actual skill. The sun is starting to go down so the arena looks dark now. Back to Danny for one kick before it's time for the Hitman again.

The Harts slingshot Davis right onto Dynamite's knees and it's off to Santana for the beating on Davis that the fans have been waiting for. Tito destroys Danny and hits the forearm but Neidhart breaks up the Figure Four. Off to Smith who rams Davis' head into Dynamite's. A jumping tombstone (not yet named) kills Davis even more but Smith doesn't want the cover. There's the delayed vertical followed by the powerslam but everything breaks down. Davis pops up and hits Smith with the megaphone for the pin in the melee.

Rating: C-. As fun as the beating Davis took was, the ending is really stupid as he popped up like nothing and was able to knock out a power guy with a single shot? The guy was a referee a few months ago but he's able to do that with one shot? Bad ending aside, this was fun stuff and the fans were WAY into it.

Davis would be in the first Survivor Series match ever in 1987, but had this warmup match two days earlier in Madison Square Garden on November 24.

Jake Roberts vs. Danny Davis

Davis is a former referee that is just now getting good enough to be a jobber. There's no Jimmy Hart here for some reason. Davis stalls like a Memphis man which he isn't. They have to do this because there's no one in the arena that thinks Jake will have any issues once he gets his hands on Danny. The fans however don't like the idea of wasting two minutes on hiding in the ropes though so they're not very pleased.

They lock up but Jake won't punch him for some reason. More locking up and more stalling. Danny won't do a test of strength as we're about three and a half minutes into this and the high point has been a tie up. Jake gets a knuckle lock (half a test of strength) and tortures Danny with it for a bit. One arm slam by Jake as we're just killing time here. More stalling, this time on the floor. Danny gets in his jobber offense for a minute or so until Jake gets bored and DDTs the heck out of him to end it.

Rating: F. This got 8 minutes. Do I need to explain why this was boring as all goodness. Well yeah I probably should, as the match explains the problem with Davis in general: he could draw incredible heat for cheating to win a lot of his matches, but when he had to have a match with some length, there's only so much he can do. Unfortunately that was passed about two minutes in and Davis could only hide in the ropes and stall for so long. If he could have wrestled even at a passing level, he could have been far more effective.

Here's the Survivor Series match.

Team Honky Tonk Man vs. Team Randy Savage

Honky Tonk Man, Harley Race, Ron Bass, Danny Davis, Hercules

Randy Savage, Jim Duggan, Ricky Steamboat, Jake Roberts, Brutus Beefcake

Honky doesn't have Cool Cockey bad as his theme music yet which is a shame. It's amazing how great the music got in the late 80s. After the heel entrances, Team Savage says they're here to settle scores. This was a different time as almost all of the faces were friends by default as were the heels just because they were faces and heels. The feuds going into this are Honky vs. Savage and Race vs. Duggan. Other than that the guys are just random midcarders who are faces or heels on a team, which is a pretty cool idea.

The place erupts for Savage's entrance. Even Jesse couldn't deny how great Randy was and was a huge fan in his own right. It was clear they

had to do something with him soon, and they certainly did soon enough. In the answer to a trivia question, it's Beefcake vs. Hercules starting the first Survivor Series match ever. Beefcake struts a bit and not much goes on for the first 20 seconds or so.

Hercules (guess what he's known for) runs Beefcake over but walks into Barber's sleeper but he falls into his corner to tag in Davis, one of the lowest lever guys you'll ever find who somehow wasn't a jobber. He's a wrestling referee. Seriously, that's the extent of his gimmick. He's a referee who cheated a lot and got fired. Savage and Steamboat (who are apparently fine after wanting to kill each other about eight months ago) take turns on Davis but Steamboat misses a charge and it's off to Race, the current King of the WWF.

Steamboat chops Race in the head and man alive how amazing would those two be able to be in a long old school program? Steamboat skins the cat (I've asked this many times, but is that really the best name they could come up with for that? I mean, skinning a cat?) and sends Race to the floor before bringing in Duggan to pound away on Race, knocking him to the floor. Hacksaw heads out with him and they brawl to a double countout, making it 4-4.

Bass (a standard old school cowboy) comes in to face Roberts but it's quickly off to Savage. A knee sends Bass into the corner and Savage is starting to roll very fast. Savage immediately goes after Honky due to the really bad blood between the two of them and it's lets Bass get in a shot. Off to the IC Champion (Honky) who gets in some cheap shots but like any good heel, he tags out when Savage starts coming back.

Bass comes in again but a blind tag brings in Barber (Beefcake for you younguns) who hits a high knee for the elimination. Hercules comes in and the bad guys start working over Beefcake's arm. Off to Honky with an armbar and then right back to Herc. Wisely they're keeping that schmuck Danny Davis out of there. I guess he's there because he works for Jimmy Hart but other than that there's no logical reason for him to be there.

Beefcake tries to punch his way out of trouble but Honky stays on the arm. To say Honky wasn't much on offense is an understatement as he

barely looks to be cranking on the hold at all. Beefcake fights out of the hold but won't tag because he's kind of dumb. Davis adds the only thing he's going to add the whole match and knees Beefcake in the back so that Honky can hit the Shake Rattle and Roll (swinging neckbreaker) for the pin on Beefcake to tie us up at three.

Off to Savage vs. Hercules with the power guy taking over. Davis comes in and things suddenly go downhill for Honky's team. Yeah, a referee beating on Randy Savage doesn't work. Who would have guessed? Honky comes in and gets elbowed in the head which lets Savage tag in Jake to pound away. The comeback doesn't last long though as Jake charges into a boot in the corner and it's off to Herc. That goes nowhere so here's Davis and since his offense sucks (BECAUSE HE'S A REFEREE) Jake shrugs it all off and DDTs him to death, making it 3-2 (Savage/Steamboat/Roberts vs. Hercules/Honky).

Herc comes in and takes Jake down and Savage tries to come in for a save, which just allows the heels to double team Jake. Savage isn't thinking here because of his anger, almost like....a savage. Oh you're very clever WWF. Honky hooks a chinlock and Hercules comes in to do the same. Jake hits a jawbreaker to escape and there's the hot tag to Steamboat who cleans house with chops.

A top rope chop has Herc reeling and it's off to Savage for the elbow. It's just Honky left and Savage explodes on him, only to miss another charge (third one for Savage's team) and let Honky get in some offense. That lasts all of six seconds as the beating continues. Jake comes in and pounds away on him, followed by Savage dropping a double ax. An atomic drop sends Honky to the floor and he's like screw this and takes the countout. Can you blame him?

Rating: B. This was a really fun match with a good story to it. The fans HATED Honky and the idea of getting him caught at the end with no one to defend him had the fans going nuts. Honky vs. Savage was a great feud but it never had a blowoff due to a bunch of backstage stuff. Honky would somehow hold the title nine more months before perhaps the greatest end to a title run ever at Summerslam. This was a great choice for a first match ever for the concept too as it showed how the idea worked and gave

the fans something to cheer about too. Really good stuff.

From two days later on Saturday Night's Main Event XIII. This is the result of a one off angle six months earlier where Davis hit George Steele with the ring bell.

George Steele vs. Danny Davis

Steele starts fast and goes after Davis in the corner before choking him in the air. At least Danny is smart enough to bail to the floor so Steele chases the referee around the ring. Back in and Davis' right hands have no effect as George punches him right back out to the floor. Davis tries to sneak up on him but Steele falls to his stomach into a drop toehold, sending Danny back to the floor and Jesse into shock.

A chair won't be allowed inside the ring but the distraction lets Danny get in a cheap shot with a foreign object. Davis chokes on the ropes, with Jesse claiming that he's just brushing Steele's teeth and barely holding back a big laugh. More foreign object shots have Steele in trouble but he grabs a flying (lifting) hammerlock, actually his regular finishing move. Davis kicks the referee by mistake for the DQ.

Rating: D-. Why in the world did this not close the show? Steele winning here is fine as no one was going to buy Davis as anything other than a joke heel, so I really don't see why Steele couldn't have gotten the submission here. This really was an odd choice to open the show as it was a comedy match instead of the usual hot start. Also did a moment from the spring really need a blowoff in November?

Another Saturday Night's Main Event with XVI.

Danny Davis vs. Brutus Beefcake

Based on the two interviews I think you get the story here. Davis is the former referee that always cheated and is now a bad heel. Jesse sounds stunned when Davis goes on offense. That's hilarious for some reason. They botch something and down goes Davis with the fans just losing their minds over Beefcake. The sleeper goes on and this is academic. Post match

Davis gets his hair cut...kind of. Oh and he gets a skunk stripe put on his back and hair.

Rating: D. Just a quick match to get Brutus over a bit more. That works as it was just a comedy thing for the most part but it was really short. Post match stuff went on a good bit longer though and let Davis get some more of what was coming to him. That's the entire point of the character and it worked well enough here.

We'll wrap it up at Survivor Series 1988.

Team Ultimate Warrior vs. Team Honky Tonk Man

Ultimate Warrior, Brutus Beefcake, Sam Houston, Jim Brunzell, Blue Blazer
Honky Tonk Man, Bad News Brown, Danny Davis, Ron Bass, Greg Valentine

This is fallout from Warrior winning the title at Summerslam. Brunzell is subbing for Don Muraco who has left the company at this point. That'll be a recurring theme tonight. Valentine and Beefcake starts us off, making it the second year in a row that Beefcake has opened for his team. It's quickly off to Davis and the sleeper puts him out in less than a minute and a half. Well to be fair there's no reason for him to be around anyway. Valentine charges right back in to continue the war of the original Dream Team, which I doubt most people would remember at this point.

Greg goes after the legs as is his custom, but since we're only about three minutes into the match, the Figure Four is broken up. Well to be fair everyone says that Valentine doesn't get warmed up for about ten or fifteen minutes so he's still looking for his keys at this point. Off to the Blazer (played by then mostly unknown Owen Hart) who drops an ax handle onto Valentine, giving us the trademark slow fall.

Valentine goes for the arm (not a hammer lock which takes away the irony of it) but Blazer easily takes him down with a headscissors and brings in Brunzell. The Killer Bees were gone at this point so he's just a guy in trunks. He's a guy in trunks with a good leapfrog though as he clears

Valentine with a lot of room to spare, only to get slammed down. Brunzell pops up and hits the dropkick but it's off to Bad News. Sweet goodness was this guy born in the wrong generation. Imagine him after the rise of MMA, remembering that he's a legitimate Olympic bronze medalist in judo.

Brown comes in like the headhunter he's known as and kills Brunzell with a clothesline. Brunzell tries some basic stuff so Brown kicks him in the chest and beats on him in the corner. Brunzell misses a charge in the corner and the Ghetto Blaster (enziguri) gets the easy pin to tie things up. Brutus comes in and grabs Brown so Houston, one of the least intimidating guys ever, can come off the top with a double ax.

Houston misses a charge in the corner and Brown pounds on him like a stupid looking dancing white boy. A clothesline takes Houston's head off and here's Valentine. Make that Brown again and Valentine accidentally hits Brown. That ticks off Bad News and he walks off. That's not a face turn. He just didn't like anybody. Houston tries to steal a pin on Valentine but Greg is like boy please.

Off to Bass in a match that I think happened before in the NWA. A rollup gets two for Houston but he charges into another boot in the corner. That's a popular move in this match. A middle rope cross body gets two for Sam and a forearm from Bass takes his head off for two. Houston's monkey flip is countered into a powerslam and he's gone, thank goodness. The guy is just not interesting or good at all.

Warrior comes in to fire the crowd up and attacks everyone left on the other team (Valentine, Bass and Honky vs. Warrior, Beefcake and Blazer at the moment). Honky comes in because he's not that bright and there he goes, flying through the air off a shoulder tackle. Off to Bass who gets slammed down and hit with a Rocket Launcher from Blazer. Honky comes in and is cross bodied down immediately. A monkey flip and dropkick have Honky in even more trouble so it's off to Valentine.

Owen gets crotched on the head of Valentine during a leapfrog but apparently Blazer has balls of steel because he suplexes Valentine down and drops a knee for two. Blazer goes up but Honky shoves him off, sending Owen down onto his knee. The Figure Four means a quick

elimination by Valentine and we're down to 3-2. Off to Beefcake vs. Valentine and Jesse mentions that these guys were not only a team but tag champions. Why is that such an afterthought?

Off to Bass who also has history with Beefcake but that isn't mentioned here, despite it happening like three months before this. A headbutt keeps Beefcake down and it's back to Elvis Man. His contribution is ramming Beefcake's head into Bass' boot and tagging in Valentine. Well no one ever accused him of being a ring general. After Warrior charges in like an idiot, it's back to Honky for Shake Rattle and Roll, but Brutus backdrops out of it to start his comeback.

Back to Bass who hits a top rope clothesline to keep the advantage and brings in Honky who goes up. Beefcake punches him in the ribs because Honky is about as fast as Arn Anderson at going to the top. Beefcake wins a slugout and we get the eternally funny selling of an atomic drop by Honky. There's the sleeper but Man dumps them to the floor and they fight to a countout.

This leaves us with Valentine and Bass vs. Ultimate Warrior. Gee I wonder what's going to happen. A double clothesline puts Warrior down but Valentine can only get two. More double teaming works for a bit but Warrior gets to the ropes and starts shaking. Another double clothesline doesn't work and an ax handle each gets the two pins to make Warrior the sole survivor.

Rating: C. Not the best match in the world but for a midcard match it was fine. Warrior was insanely over here (as well as insane in general but that's another talk for later on) and the fans erupted for his comeback at the end. The rest of it is just ok and there's nothing wrong with that. This was the right choice for an opener though.

Davis would job for another few months before heading back to refereeing full time in mid 1989. Like I said, there just isn't enough skill in the ring to back up the heat he had built up. Once he lost all of his matches and the people he had screwed over beat him, Davis was just that guy that was crooked about a year ago, which really isn't going to keep you over. It was a good idea for a character but there was a firm limit on how far

it was going to go.

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