

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1996: Shawn Michaels And 29 Other Guys

Royal Rumble 1996

Date: January 21, 1996

Location: Selland Arena, Fresno, California

Attendance: 9,600

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Mr. Perfect

We're in the Monday Night Wars era now and it's all about Shawn at the moment. He's back from injury and in the Rumble tonight, looking to become the second person ever to win back to back Rumbles. Other than that we've got Bret vs. Undertaker which is another of those matches that can be hit or miss. It's hard to say what we'll get here...well not really because I've seen this show a bunch of times. Let's get to it.

We open with Sunny in a bathtub, saying this show is graphic and view discretion is advised.

The opening video is about how the champion is defined by Hart, as in Bret Hart. Tonight though he's against a force who has no heart, in the form of Undertaker. The IC Title match (Ramon vs. Goldust) and the Rumble are talked about as well.

Jeff Jarrett vs. Ahmed Johnson

Last month at IYH, Jarrett hit Johnson with a gold record to set this up. Johnson is basically Ezekiel Jackson with a bit of skill and charisma. Jarrett immediately bails to the floor to hide. Back in he tries a hiptoss and Ahmed is like boy are you stupid or something? A headlock is easily countered by a throw from Johnson and a clothesline takes Jarrett down. There's a World's Strongest Slam for two for Ahmed and things slow down again. Johnson misses a clothesline by a mile but Jeff sells it anyway of course.

A cross body misses as well but this time Johnson goes flying over the top, getting his hand caught in the ropes on the way down. A HARD whip into the steps puts Johnson down and we head back in. Ahmed starts no selling stuff and catches a dive in a bearhug. That goes nowhere so Johnson sends him to the floor and hits a big dive. Back in and Ahmed misses a FREAKING SWANTON (remember that he weighs like 280) and there's the Figure Four from Jarrett. Johnson powers out of it twice, so Jarrett cracks him with the guitar off the top for the LAME DQ.

Rating: C-. I was always an Ahmed fan so this was an easy pass for me. The image of the Swanton looked great if nothing else, which is more than enough to give this a pass. Jarrett was such a mess at this point and never went anywhere in the WWF. The ending completely sucked though and it really brought things down.

BUY OUR STUFF!

Diesel isn't worried about the Rumble tonight and doesn't think it's Vader Time. He doesn't care who he faces at Mania, but he isn't happy with Taker being the #1 contender.

Tag Titles: Smoking Gunns vs. Bodydonnas

The Bodydonnas are Skip (Chris Candido) and Zip (Tom Prichard with a BIG haircut). They have Sunny with them and my goodness is she smoking (no pun intended) here. The Guns are defending. Skip and Billy start things off with Skip taking over with a headscissors. Just like Ahmed earlier, Billy misses a charge against the ropes and crashes to the outside. Both Gunns get double teamed until Bart ducks out of the way, allowing a charging Billy to dive onto both Donnas on the floor.

Things settle down a bit and it's back to Billy vs. Skip with the champion in control. Sunny hits on Bart until it's Bart vs. Zip. A gorilla press puts Zip down but he makes a blind tag, allowing Skip to take over. The champions are fine with the double teaming stuff too, and take over on Skip very easily. Sunny gets on the apron and is knocked off just as quickly, giving us a nice upskirt shot in the process.

Now we get to the important part of the match as Billy goes to check on

Sunny, allowing the Donnas to pound away on Bart. Skip hits a nice plancha onto Billy before suplexing Zip onto Billy for two back inside. Billy gets to play Ricky Morton for awhile, being put in a chinlock by Zip. This goes on for awhile until we get a sloppy spot where the Donnas collide and Skip rams heads with Billy. This would work a bit better if Billy wasn't about eight inches taller than Candido.

Hot tag brings in Bart and everything breaks down with the champions taking over. The Sidewinder (side slam/guillotine legdrop combo) crushes Zip but Sunny's distraction lets Skip break things up and take Zip's place. Ignore the fact that one has the straps of his singlet up and the other doesn't, and the fact that they look as different as Demolition did. In an ending the Expresses used back in the 80s, the Donnas load up a double suplex on Bart, but Billy spears Skip down, causing Bart to fall on Zip for the pin to retain.

Rating: C-. Tag wrestling at this time was really weak with very few solid teams anywhere to be found. The Gunns were ok at best and the Donnas were only popular because of Sunny. Billy would turn heel relatively soon and would eventually join up with Road Dogg to form the New Age Outlaws and turn the division completely upside down. Nothing much to see here but it certainly wasn't terrible.

We get some of the Billionaire Ted skits, which were unfunny shots at Ted Turner. Not his wrestling company directly, but Turner himself. I'm still not sure why they decided to do these but no one liked them and they came off as mean instead of funny or witty. Note Vince Russo as one of the executives in the board room skit.

We recap Razor vs. Goldust, where Goldust is hitting on Razor to mess with his mind before the match tonight. To say Goldust's character got them in hot water around this point is a huge understatement.

Intercontinental Title: Razor Ramon vs. Goldust

The yet to be named Marlena debuts with Goldie here. Razor is defending as is his custom. Feeling out process to start with Goldust playing his usual mind games, which means rubbing himself. Razor cranks on the arm before grabbing a headlock which goes nowhere. Goldust goes behind Razor

and molests him a bit to psych Razor out even more. They head to the corner with Razor having his head rubbed a bit, ticking him off even more.

Razor goes for the arm so Goldust slaps him in the face. Perfect keeps making sex jokes as Razor slaps Goldust right back in the face. He spansks Goldie once as well, but the painted dude likes it. We head to the floor where Goldust hides behind Marlena as the stalling continues. Back in and Razor tries three straight headscissors before punching Goldust to the floor with a single shot.

We get more stalling which is called playing mind games before Ramon clotheslines him right back to the outside. Razor has to move Marlena out of the way, allowing Goldust to FINALLY do something, taking over with a shot to the ribs. Back in and Goldust focuses on the ribs, but not too much because that might mean we have some speed to this match. A bulldog gets two for Goldust as does a slingshot belly to back suplex.

Off to a sleeper, which Perfect suggests Goldust could use to do "whatever he wants" to Goldust. Much like everything else in the match, this goes on way too long until Razor fights up and kicks Goldust low. He's so spent though that Goldie gets a two count, causing Razor to start his comeback. He fires off his usual punches and the chokeslam gets two. A belly to back superplex hit but Marlena distracts the referee, allowing the 1-2-3 Kid to come in and kick Razor's head off. Goldust gets the easy pin and the title.

Rating: D-. Sweet freaking goodness this was dull. It went on WAY too long and had a bad ending on top of that, plus the stupid "psychology" from Goldust which wound up being more unpleasant than interesting or intelligent. Goldust would get WAY better when he became more of a comedy/parody character rather than this freaky dude that he was to start his WWF run. The matches got a lot better as a result too.

Wrestlemania 12 is coming.

We get the usual promos for the Rumble, but we start with a statement from Shawn's doctor who says he's back and healthy. Thankfully this is kept VERY short and he's not dull. We hear from Owen, Roberts, Lawler,

Horowitz, Vader and Shawn. Shawn would be the most obvious winner ever in the Rumble since....well since last year when he was the absolutely obvious pick to win.

Vince and Perfect talk about the Rumble a bit.

Royal Rumble

HHH is #1, having lost a match on the Free for All to Duke Droese, who won the right to be #30. Henry Godwinn is #2 and I believe he's feuding with HHH at this point. Helmsley pounds away in the corner to start but gets backdropped down very quickly. The intervals are back to two minutes this year thank goodness. Trips pokes him in the eye and chokes away until Bob Backlund is #3. Backlund saves HHH before pounding away on him. These wide shots are showing how nearly empty the upper deck is.

Jerry Lawler is #4 as HHH hits the jumping knee to the face of Godwinn. The fans chant Burger King and you know Lawler isn't going to pass up a chance to rile up a crowd. He goes to get the slop bucket that Godwinn brought with him, but Henry clears the ring and gets the bucket, throwing it over the top onto Lawler and some of Backlund. Bob Holly is #5 and things slow down a bit until HHH erupts on Godwinn for some reason.

We get some slow paced elimination teases until Mabel is #6. Still nothing happens so here's Jake Roberts at #7 to an ERUPTION. No one is eliminated yet. Jake throws in the snake and everyone but Lawler can get to the floor. After nearly giving him a heart attack with the snake, Lawler disappears for a goodwhile as he hides under the ring. Mabel gets tied up in the ropes and pounded on for a bit until Dory Funk Jr. is #8.

The DDT is countered by HHH as we hear about a friendship between Terry Funk and Bruce Willis of all people. Backlund and Funk go at it because they're both old and I doubt Dory knows most of the other people in the ring. Lawler is seen hiding under the ring. Yokozuna is #9 as there are WAY too many people in the match at the moment. Backlund puts Dory in the chickenwing and is eliminated by Yoko for a prize. Yoko crushes Godwinn in the corner but Mabel splashes Yoko, killing Henry in the process.

The 1-2-3 Kid is #10 but Razor charges down the aisle to chase him away

(not eliminated). Officials get Razor off the Kid but it takes Mabel beating Razor down to stop the chases. It amazes me that Razor wasn't in more Rumbles. Come to think of it...he was NEVER in a Rumble. Omori, a Japanese star that doesn't mean much yet, is #11. At the moment we've got HHH, Godwinn, Lawler (under the ring), Holly, Mabel, Roberts, Funk, Yoko, the Kid and Omori in the match.

Wait where is Godwinn? I guess he went out off camera. Yoko and Mabel double team Omori until Jake pounds away on Yoko to the loudest reactions of the match so far. Funk hits a double underhook suplex on the Kid as Savio Vega is #12. He spinwheel kicks Mabel down, allowing Yoko to dump the reigning King (Mabel if you're lucky enough to not remember that gimmick). Omori goes out thanks to Roberts and things slow down again.

Vader debuts at #13 and lumbers around while not doing much. He picks Bob Holly of all people to beat on first as Vega eliminates Dory. Vader pulls Savio back in from the apron for no apparent reason other than he wants to beat on him some more. Doug Gilbert from Memphis is #14 and HHH goes right after him for no apparent reason. Vader and Yoko slug it out to a big reaction but Vader has to stop to clothesline Roberts out.

The camera work in this is really bad as they keep looking at corners of the ring instead of the full thing, making us miss a lot of stuff. Savio pounds on Vader until one of the Squat Team members (BIG fat guys who are there because they're fat and look alike) is #15. Vader sloppily throws Gilbert out and does the same to the Squat Team dude. Yoko and Vader slug it out again and people respond again.

The other member of the Squat Team is #16 but they both get in to double team Vader. The Mastodon (Vader) punches their faces in as only Vader can do before knocking them both to the floor. Owen Hart is #17 and everyone but Yoko is on one side of the ring for some reason. Vader and Yoko double team Savio who doesn't seem interested in selling at all. A pair of splashes in the corner crushes him, as do a regular splash and the big leg from Yoko.

Shawn is #17 to a decent pop but significantly smaller than Jake's. Vader throws out Savio as Shawn goes after HHH and the Kid. Vader and Yoko slug

it out a bit before slugging it out a lot. They fight against the ropes, so Shawn gets a running start and dumps them BOTH AT ONCE. Now THAT wakes up the crowd. If that's not enough, Shawn gorilla presses (!) the Kid to the floor as the ring is suddenly very thin. Hakushi is #19 as the big guys fight on the floor.

Scratch the floor part as Vader gets back in and cleans house, but none of the eliminations count because he's not legal. Once he's finally taken away, we've got Shawn, HHH, Holly, Hart, Hakushi and Lawler underneath the ring. Tatanka is #20 as Shawn thrown Jim Cornette, Vader's manager, out. Hakushi hits a Muta elbow on Hart in the corner as HHH of course goes after Shawn.

Michaels teases a bunch of eliminations to try to make us think he's not winning. Owen dumps Hakushi as Aldo Montoya (Justin Credible with a jock strap over his face) is #21. Shawn gets sent through the ropes to the floor, where he pulls Lawler out and sends him back into the ring. Tatanka puts out Montoya as Shawn puts out Lawler.

Here's Diesel at #22 and house is cleaned. There goes Tatanka at the hands of the tall one and it's time for Shawn vs. Diesel which gets a pop but is too short to mean much. Kama (Godfather) is #23 as this continues to go slowly. Shawn pounds on Holly (why is he still in this?) in the corner as Kama and Diesel slug it out. The Ringmaster (Steve Austin who is brand new here) is #24. He's in white boots which is a really strange thing to see for him.

Shawn does his usual overblown self safe as Holly and Austin fight. FINALLY Holly goes out after nearly forty minutes. HHH vs. Austin happens about three years before it would mean anything. Barry Horowitz (with the AWESOME rock version of Hava Nagila) is #25 and he goes after Diesel. Well no one ever accused him of being brilliant. Shawn nips up to knock Owen to the apron, but Hart skins the cat back in. Cool little sequence there.

HHH punches Diesel, so Diesel grabs him by the head and LAUNCHES him to the floor. The Game made it about 48 minutes which isn't bad at all. MAKING A DIFFERENCE Fatu (don't ask. PLEASE don't ask) is #26 and he

doesn't do much. Shawn and Owen can't suplex the other one out so here's Isaac Yankem DDS (Kane) at #27. The ring is WAY too full but Barry is put out to thin it out a bit.

Owen hits the enziguri on Shawn which put Michaels on the shelf leading up to this match. Shawn hangs on AGAIN though and puts Owen out while we're looking at a double feature. Austin kills Shawn with a clothesline and here's Marty Jannetty at #28. Fatu superkicks Kane as the burst of energy from Marty is already gone. Shawn and Jannetty go at it because they're former partners. Perfect: "They're rocking now aren't they?" They punch each other down and the British Bulldog is #29.

Smith goes right for Shawn because of what happened last year. I love little bits of continuity like that which you never get anymore. Davey puts out Marty as Fatu GOES OFF on Austin before clotheslining him out off camera. Yankem puts out Fatu and here's Duke Droese at #30. The final group is Shawn, Droese, Diesel, Smith, Yankem and Kama.

Smith and Michaels fight to the floor and Owen jumps Shawn for good measure. Shawn shrugs it off and goes in to dropkick Yankem out. Kama and Diesel put out Droese to get us down to four. Shawn clotheslines Smith out before skinning the cat back in. Diesel dumps Kama and Shawn superkicks the tall one (in the shoulder) out to win for the second year in a row.

Rating: D. Oh this was DULL. The problem here was that like last year (although to a MUCH weaker degree), there were very few guys you could buy as a winner here. It's FAR better than last year's match but the crowd was dead for long stretches of this, mainly due to boredom. You could see the star power of the future, but that's the problem: they weren't stars yet and no one bought them at this point. The match isn't bad, but it's definitely not good if that makes sense.

Diesel is ticked off about the ending and goes back in as Shawn is stripping. They do their old Wolfpack thing in the middle of the ring (a high five where Shawn has to jump) and all is cool. Shawn poses for a long time post match.

Oh yeah we've got a thirty minute match left to go.

WWF World Title: Undertaker vs. Bret Hart

Bret is defending and Taker is still in his skull mask period. Diesel is still straggling behind and stares at Taker during his entrance. They brawl with neither guy getting much of an advantage. Since this is WWF, we recap what we just say two minutes ago. After all that, here's the world champion. Taker stands in the middle of the ring and Bret circles him for a bit. Hart pounds away in the corner and Taker stares at him.

Taker LAUNCHES him into the corner which is one of my favorite of his moves. He chokes Bret in the air and moves very slowly. Off to a smother hold which goes on for a LONG time. Bret finally makes the rope so there's Old School....which sets up the smother again. Bret fights up and hits a middle rope clothesline followed by a regular one to send Taker to the floor. There's a dive to take out the challenger as this finally picks up the pace a bit.

Bret tries to dive off the apron at Taker but is pulled out of the air and rammed into the post. Taker rams him into various other things until Bret reverses a whip into the steps, trying to damage Taker's knees. Back in and Bret works over the knee as this is going nowhere. The Figure Four goes on...and on....and on.....and Taker turns it over.

Bret gets to the rope, so let's put on ANOTHER LEG HOLD! It's that always riveting one where Bret drops an elbow on the leg and just lays on it. This is also known as the Dusty Rhodes Special. He does however mix it up by trying to take off Taker's mask. After being in this for literally about three minutes, Taker smashes his free leg on Bret's head before we head back to the floor. Taker chokes away with a cord and sends Bret into the barricade as we head back in.

The champ goes back to the freaking knee as the fans loudly boo Bret. Taker's leg is wrapped around the post a few times and it's back to laying on the leg. Dear goodness get this over with already. We're over twenty minutes into this and NOTHING has happened. To save my sanity the hold doesn't last as long this time and Taker fights back. There are some legdrops and a clothesline as Taker's knee seems fine. He loads up the Tombstone but Bret slides down his back and guillotines Taker on the

ropes.

A DDT puts Taker down and Bret starts headbutting the back. We get the Russian legsweep but Taker sits up. The bulldog takes Taker down and there's the middle rope elbow. Bret gives the fans a thumbs down and loads up the Sharpshooter. Taker grabs him by the throat to block it but Bret knees him in the ribs. A double clothesline puts both guys down and we lay around a bit more.

Bret is up first and takes off the buckle from a corner. He goes for the mask again and gets it off to reveal...the same Undertaker we've seen for like five years at this point. Seriously he looks fine. Taker fights back but gets rammed into the exposed buckle. That gets no sold and it's a Tombstone for Bret. Since this is such a dull match though, Diesel pulls the referee out at two for a DQ.

Rating: D+. This started VERY slow but got better for the last ten minutes or so, but the ending brings it right back down again. If this had been a fifteen minute match or so it would have been WAY better, but they only had so many other matches on the card, meaning this had to be longer. Diesel would face Taker at Mania of course.

Gorilla Monsoon makes Diesel vs. Bret for the title at the next PPV.

Shawn says the 90s will be his time.

Taker comes in to yell at Gorilla, saying that Diesel won't be champion on his watch. Gorilla makes it a cage match so Taker can't interfere.

Diesel goes on a big rant about how he's not afraid of the dark and says he's going to have his hands in everything from now on because the WWF is running on Diesel Power. This was his official heel turn.

Cornette says Vader cannot be ignored. He pretty much was until Summerslam.

Overall Rating: D. This is a really weird show to grade because while most of the matches got bad grades, it's not that bad of a show overall. Don't get me wrong: it's bad, but it's really not as bad as it sounds. The first two matches are certainly watchable, but they're not that good.

The Rumble is also passable, but it's dull at times. Not horrible, but definitely not worth seeing.

Ratings Comparison

Ahmed Johnson vs. Jeff Jarrett

Original: D+

Redo: C-

Smoking Gunns vs. Bodydonnas

Original: D

Redo: C-

Goldust vs. Razor Ramon

Original: D

Redo: D-

Royal Rumble

Original: D

Redo: D

Bret Hart vs. Undertaker

Original: C-

Redo: D+

Overall Rating

Original: D-

Redo: D

Amazingly enough I liked it a bit better this time.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/15/royal-rumble-count-up-1996-shawn-s-texas-two-step/>

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