

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1997: The First Of Many

Royal Rumble 1997

Date: January 19, 1997

Location: Alamodome, San Antonio, Texas

Attendance: 60,525

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon

A good deal has changed since last year as we have Sid as world champion, defending his title against Shawn. Michaels had been champion for most of 96 before getting burned out badly and losing the title at the Survivor Series. On top of that though, WCW is MASSACRING the WWF right now with the NWO completely dominating the wrestling world. I believe this is the second biggest non-Wrestlemania PPV crowd ever for the company. Let's get to it.

The opening video is about Shawn of course. Expect to hear that name a lot tonight.

Intercontinental Title: Goldust vs. HHH

HHH is defending and the idea here is pretty simple: HHH hit on Marlena and Goldie is standing up for her. He has Mr. Hughes as a bodyguard here which didn't last long at all. This was also just after Goldust said he wasn't gay, which got them out of some hot water with some gay rights groups. You know, because it's ok to hate someone as long as you don't hate them for being gay. HHH still has the Ode to Joy song here which is an awesome theme song.

Goldie takes him down in the aisle before the bell rings and the beating is on. We get a bell as HHH is dropped throat first onto the barricade. Goldust pounds away in the corner but HHH comes out with an atomic drop to counter. Helmsley's offense lasts about eight seconds as Goldust catapults him to the floor. Goldie drops the steps on his back which isn't a DQ for no apparent reason.

A guillotine slows Goldust down and apparently two fans who have sat in the Alamodome for weeks for the show have been thrown out. Gee, I wonder if Super Shawn can help them out. An uppercut gets two on HHH and Goldust laughs a lot before being knocked to the floor. HHH goes up top (!) and dives down onto Goldust to send him into the barricade. The jumping knee misses Goldust though and HHH hits the steel to change momentum again.

Back in and Goldust works on the knee rather slowly. HHH counters a leg lock with a kick to the face but he's quickly caught in the Figure Four. Goldust hits a clothesline on the floor and rubs himself a bit. There's a knee crusher onto the steps as somehow it's STILL not a DQ. They head back in and Goldust misses a cross body to send him out to the floor. HHH goes for the wooden director's chair...and let's go to Todd Petingil for an interview with some country singer.

HHH hits the jumping knee for two but hurts his own leg in the process. Goldust lariats him down but gets crotched on the top for his efforts. After shoving HHH off, Goldust misses a top rope elbow and the title is thrown in. HHH kisses Marlina but gets blasted by the belt for two. A Hughes distraction is enough for HHH to hit the Pedigree to retain.

Rating: C-. This was too long in this spot in front of a crowd this size. It ran over sixteen minutes, which is way too long for two guys that didn't mean much to most of the fans. This era wasn't kind to the midcard guys, as they weren't ready for spots like this but they were the only options the company had. It took a good while to get over that hump, but once it did, they never looked back.

Bret whines about being a marked man tonight. You could feel the heel turn coming and it was going to be glorious.

Mankind, another newcomer, is ready for the Rumble but he wants to hurt people instead of go to Wrestlemania.

Faarooq vs. Ahmed Johnson

The idea here is a basic revenge match, but Ahmed was out with an injury for so long that the heat is gone. Naturally this would keep going for about seven months because why not? This was during the original Nation

period, when actors were hired to make the Nation look larger. That's a brilliant idea actually. Johnson charges the ring and the beating is on quickly.

Ahmed pounds away in the corner until the referee calls him off. We head to the floor for a few seconds with Faarooq just trying to survive the opening part of the match. Things finally slow down a bit but it's just so Ahmed can get a belt and whip Faarooq a bit. We head to the floor again and both guys are rammed into the steps. Faarooq slams him onto a chair and Johnson's kidney injuries flare up again.

Back in and Johnson has his back worked over and Faarooq hooks a camel clutch. Johnson comes back with an electric chair drop but can't follow up on it. Faarooq goes up but jumps into a powerslam. Johnson returns the favor and jumps into a spinebuster as his back is falling apart very quickly. Faarooq runs his mouth too long though and there's another spinebuster by Ahmed, but the Nation comes in for the DQ.

Rating: D+. Not terrible here but the crowd continues to be dead. The idea here was supposed to be revenge but that only takes you so far when the incident that started the whole thing happened months ago. This wasn't a great power match either, making this kind of a hard one to get into. Ahmed was pretty awesome before his injuries though.

Post match Ahmed chases off the Nation and powerbombs a member through the announce table.

Terry Funk says he'll win the Rumble because he's from Texas and born to Rumble.

Faarooq yells at the Nation actors for bailing on him. He says this is just beginning.

Undertaker vs. Vader

This is a feud that went on for a few months because they were a good pairing for each other. Taker avoids a charge to start and pounds away on the big man. Scratch that, make it on the shorter and wider man. Vader comes back with his standing body attack and a second one to take

Undertaker down. It doesn't keep him down of course so Vader hits the floor. Taker jumps off the apron with an ax handle and they brawl slowly. Vader literally has his hands on his hips while Taker uppercuts him.

Vader hits a Stunner on the apron to snap Taker on the rope before heading back in. A Fameasser of all things puts Vader down as does a slam. The followup legdrop gets two (BROTHER!) but Vader crotches him to counter Old School. Vader hits Taker low so let's go talk to a fan in the audience. Seriously. We hear about her saving up her money and following Shawn Michaels everywhere she goes. Your PPV dollars at work people!

Vader clotheslines Taker down twice, one of which being from the middle rope for two. We hit the nerve hold but Taker fights up with his rapid fire punches. A belly to back suplex puts Vader down but Taker's elbow misses. The masked man goes up but dives into a powerslam ala Starrcade 92 vs. Sting, but it doesn't even get a cover here. Vader powerbombs Taker down for two and the Dead Man sits up.

There's the big jumping clothesline and this time Old School hits, but here comes Paul Bearer. Taker chokeslams Vader down but spots Bearer instead of following up. Paul is thrown into the ring and punched a lot before Taker clotheslines Vader to the floor. Taker tries a kind of Poetry in Motion dive against the railing but Bearer makes the save, pulling Vader away. Bearer blasts Taker with the Urn, allowing Vader to hit the Vader Bomb for the pin.

Rating: D+. Not terrible here but again it ran too long. This was about setting up Bearer as Vader's new manager which didn't last long unless I'm completely forgetting something. Taker looked ok here, but his power stuff looks a lot better on smaller guys as he can't throw Vader around all that well. Still though, not horrible.

Taker is all ticked off and beats up the referee as a result. He yells at Vince too but we can't hear most of what he's saying.

Austin says he isn't talking to anyone until he wins the Rumble.

British Bulldog says he's going to win the Rumble because he's bizarre. Ok then.

Hector Garza/Perro Aguayo/El Canek vs. Jerry Estrada/Heavy Metal/Fuerza Guerrera

Take six guys, throw them in the ring for ten minutes to pop the crowd. I just hope I can remember which is which. Metal vs. Garza to start. Ok so Metal is in the yellow and black tights. Got it. They speed things up to stat before quickly hitting the mat. Off to Aguayo vs. Estrada who is in the white tassels. Perro chops Jerry down and backdrops him out to the floor.

Off to Canek vs. Guerrera who are the two masked guys. That makes things a lot easier to keep track of if nothing else. Canek hits a quick cross body out of the corner as the crowd continues to be dead here. Guerrera goes up but misses a Swanton, allowing Canek to hit a top rope cross body for two. Off to Metal vs. Garza again as things are STILL slow. That goes nowhere so here's Canek vs. Estrada. Canek throws him around for a bit before it's time for Guerrera to beat up Aguayo.

Aguayo armdrags Guerrera down and sends him to the floor for a bit. It should be noted that Perro is 51 years old so seeing him running and trying to dive is rather odd to see. Canek works on Metal's leg, followed by a slingshot splash onto it by Garza. Heavy Metal gets an opening but won't tag, so instead he ducks a bad looking kick from Canek as they stagger around a bit more.

Everything breaks down as even Vince sounds bored. Let me repeat that. VINCE MCMAHON sounds bored by a match. Garza finally does something interesting by hitting his corkscrew plancha on Estrada. The double stomp on Metal gets the pin for Aguayo and the crowd pops for the pin, likely because it's finally over.

Rating: D. Think about it like this: in this match, four guys were either in their 40s or a year away from it. When you've got Juventud Guerrera and Chris Jericho and Rey Mysterio in the lucha matches in WCW blowing the roof off the place, it's REALLY hard to get into something like this. Terribly dull match as they were mainly just looking old out there.

The attendance is announced and no one really cares.

Royal Rumble

There are 90 seconds intervals here which isn't long enough but at least it's not terrible like two years earlier. Finkel takes FOREVER to get through the entrances. Crush of the Nation of Domination is #1 and Ahmed Johnson is #2. Crush gets to jump Ahmed as he comes in and the beating is on quickly. Ahmed comes back with a clothesline and they brawl on the mat (read as roll around) for a bit. Fake Razor Ramon (bad parody that went nowhere and is remembered as being awful) is #3 as apparently the clock is messing up. Thankfully Razor is thrown out in about fifteen seconds.

Crush is thrown to the apron but Ahmed sees Faarooq in the aisle. He eliminates himself and chases after Faarooq in a stupid bit. Phineas Godwinn is #4 as the clock speeds WAY up so we don't have to look at people standing around. They have a really dull power brawl that goes nowhere and no one cares about at all. Austin is #5 and this HAS TO pick things up a bit. Phineas jumps him as soon as he gets in before Austin and Crush double team him. A clothesline misses Phineas though and Crush is dumped.

Austin dumps Phineas as well and is alone in the ring to face Bart Gunn at #6. Bart gets in some offense but is gone in about thirty seconds. Austin sits on the ropes until Jake Roberts is #7. The music sounds really different in the big stadium setting. Jake pounds away and works on the arm a bit and hits the short clothesline, but Austin backdrops him out to counter the DDT.

British Bulldog is #8 and immediately takes Austin down. This is part of the Border War which is coming very soon and just like Jake, Smith dominates early on. There's a slightly different version of the powerslam and Austin is in big trouble. Pierroth from AAA (Mexican company which has supplied all of the luchadores tonight) is #9 and goes right after Bulldog. Apparently he's a big time heel so people don't cheer. I'm sure it has nothing to do with the hour and a half of boring wrestling right?

The Sultan (Rikishi) is #10 as the ring is finally getting a crowd going in there. Sultan and Pierroth fight on the ropes as Austin is sent to the apron. Pierroth tries to slam Sultan like an idiot as the match continues

to be dull. Mil Mascaras, Mexican legend, is #11. He FINALLY gets a reaction as he beats up on Sultan a bit. Sultan belly to bellies him down and we get some of the legendary no selling from Mascaras. HHH is #12 and there goes Sultan via Bulldog.

We've got Austin, Bulldog, Pierroth, HHH and Mascaras in the ring now. Austin hits a middle rope elbow on HHH as Owen Hart (tag team champions with Bulldog at this point) is #13. Austin has to fight both of them off and Bulldog goes out due to an accidental shot from Owen. They were having big problems around this point and it would take the Hart Foundation forming to mend the issues. Goldust is #14 and goes right for Austin instead of HHH, the guy he hates.

Mascaras gets Owen to the apron but can't get him out. Everyone gangs up on Goldust for no apparent reason and Cibernetico is #15. He goes right for Mascaras and beats the tar out of him. HHH stays on the apron as Marc Mero is #16. Cibernetico is out before Mero gets into the ring and Mascaras puts Pierroth out, before diving off the top to the floor to eliminate himself. Goldust clotheslines HHH out and we've got Mero, Austin, Owen and Goldust in the ring at the moment.

Latin Lover, another luchador, is #17. Things are still dull here but at least they're moving a bit faster. Goldust is eliminated by Owen and Faarooq is #18. He almost immediately puts Lover out and gets in a BIG slugout with Austin. Unfortunately it doesn't last long as Johnson runs in with a 2x4 to knock Faarooq out. Austin dumps Owen and Mero, leaving himself alone in the ring. Savio Vega, an old rival of Austin, is #19 and doesn't even make it thirty seconds, although he does hit a good spinwheel kick while he's in there.

Jesse James (Road Dogg) is #20 and he does quite a bit better than Vega, making it a full 45 seconds before Austin puts him out. Austin is all like GET ME ANOTHER ONE and tells the crowd what they can do to themselves. The clock runs out, and BRET HART walks through that curtain at #21. The look on Austin's face is absolutely amazing as he is TERRIFIED.

However, there's something very important that happens next. Austin is

scared for a minute, but then gets in the middle of the ring and says BRING IT ON. He's been out there a long time now and is ready to go still, facing his arch rival who is totally fresh. Austin doesn't back down, he doesn't run, he doesn't cheat. That's because Austin was a different kind of heel than you see today. Instead of running or finding a way out, he fought with his fists and took a beating like a man. Today it's all about the cowardly heels and that drives me crazy. Once in awhile is fine but give us somebody with a backbone once in awhile.

They go right at it with Bret getting the better of a tired Austin. He hits a quick atomic drop and a clothesline before stomping away in the corner. There's the Sharpshooter but we need a #22, so here's commentator Jerry Lawler. In a hilarious bit, Jerry says "It takes a King...", then he gets in, gets punched twice by Bret for an elimination, and comes back to commentary and says "to know a King."

Bret stays on Austin and hits a backbreaker as Fake Diesel (you know him better as Kane) is #23. The good thing here is that Kane actually looks like Diesel from about ten feet away and is nearly identical from behind. Razor looked like a bad Halloween costume. Diesel goes after Hart before slowing down to let Austin do the work. Terry Funk is #24 to give us a very strong lineup in there at the moment. Funk is sent to the apron but Hart makes a save, earning him a punch to the ribs from Terry.

Rocky Maivia is #25 to give us perhaps the best five man lineup ever in the Rumble at any given time. That's not an exaggeration either. Rocky hooks up with Austin and Diesel but gets kicked in his face for the efforts. The lineup stays strong with Mankind at #26. He immediately throws Funk to the apron as everyone pairs off. Hart gets suplexed by Austin as Rock and Diesel fight in the corner.

There's a sleeper by Hart to Austin, which makes you wonder why you would EVER put yourself in that position against Austin? A jawbreaker breaks the hold as Flash Funk (2 Cold Scorpio) is #27. Not quite on the level of everyone else but he's a personal favorite. Terry piledrives Mankind into the ground before Flash dives on Diesel and Terry. Vader is #28 to give us another power guy and he goes right for Bret.

Vader pounds Flash down so Austin goes right after the big man. That would be Vader in case you're confused. In a funny bit, Lawler keeps implying he's never been in the match. Henry Godwinn is #29 to drop the talent level a good bit. The ring is filling up now. Rocky gets sent to the apron and Undertaker is #30. The star studded final group: Austin, Bret, Fake Diesel, Terry Funk, Rocky, Mankind, Flash Funk, Vader, Henry Godwinn, Undertaker. That's REALLY good and I can't think of any Rumble coming closer to perfect than that.

Taker goes right after Vader but stops to punch Mankind too. There's a chokeslam for Austin and one for Vader as well. Taker pounds on Diesel in a sign of what is to come later in the year. Vader throws Flash out as Godwinn hammers on Taker. Funk almost puts Hart out but Austin makes the save for no apparent reason. Godwinn pounds on Taker some more, so Taker easily throws him out by the throat.

The final eight: Rock, Austin, Hart, Kane, Undertaker, Terry Funk, Mankind, Vader. How is THAT for a talent pool? Taker throws Austin to the apron before Mankind puts the Claw on Rocky to eliminate him. He was just a rookie at this point so being in there this late was a big accomplishment for him. Mankind and Funk beat on each other because that's what they love to do. They fight to the apron and Mankind gets Funk out.

Taker sends Mankind out a second later to get us down to five. Vader beats on Taker as Austin does the same to Diesel. Bret throws Austin out to a HUGE pop but the referees were breaking up a fight between Mankind and Funk. Austin slides back in, dumps Vader and Taker, then dumps Bret who just eliminated Diesel, and Austin wins the Rumble!

Rating: B-. This took awhile to get going, but once Bret's music hit, it's REALLY good. The problem is that's 2/3 of the way into the match and the stuff before that is just terrible. It's a who's who of jobbers and no names which isn't interesting at all. This was the night Austin was launched into superstardom and he did it with a bigger catapult than almost anyone else ever. Amazing last twenty five minutes, but the first twenty five or so are absolutely dreadful.

Bret goes nuts on the announcers post match, shouting conspiracy and injustice. Oh I need to get to 1997 Raw. It's AMAZING when it gets rolling.

We recap Shawn vs. Sid. Sid won the title at Survivor Series and this is the rematch. Sid was on a legit roll at this point, having pinned Shawn and Bret in back to back matches. Shawn is bordering on a massive heel turn here but Sid isn't quite ready to be a face, which likely has a lot to do with Taker being moved to the main event. Sid has been tormenting the son of Shawn's mentor Jose Lothario to set this up.

Shawn has the flu and looks horrible in his pre match promo. Not much to say here either. This would wind up being Lothario's last match in Shawn's corner.

WWF World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Sycho Sid

Shawn gets by far and away the pop of the night as the hometown boy. I love Sid's name in lights pyro entrance. Shawn is shoved down to start until Sid pounds away. Michaels comes back with a cross body and rams Sid's head into the mat, drawing the longest reaction of the night. Sid heads to the floor for a breather and lays on the mats. Shawn goes after him and is about to be gorilla pressed but he rakes Sid's eyes to escape.

Back in and Shawn jumps into a powerslam followed by a camel clutch. Sid drops down onto the back and Shawn is in trouble. Shawn avoids the second drop down but Sid comes right back, sending Shawn into the corner for the Flair Flip. Back to the chinlock followed by a clothesline for two. Off to a bearhug which eats up several minutes. Shawn's parents are concerned. Shawn breaks the hold with an atomic drop but the hold goes right back on. A legdrop gets two for Sid and the champ isn't getting frustrated at all.

We hit the reverse chinlock again but Shawn fights up with right hands. He slams Sid down and hits the forearm to set up the nip-up. The top rope elbow hits but Shawn is knocked to the floor before the superkick can hit. Shawn gets powerbombed on the floor so Sid grabs both Lotharios. That goes nowhere so Shawn pounds away even more. Dang he popped up fast after that powerbomb.

The referee gets bumped and there's the chokeslam for two from a second referee. Sid shoves the second referee down and Shawn hits Sid with the camera, which is what Sid did to win the title in the first place. That only gets two though (Lawler: "WOO HOO!") but Sweet Chin Music gives Shawn the title back.

Rating: C+. Not a great match or anything but it did exactly what it was supposed to do. There was zero chance Shawn was losing here and there's nothing wrong with that at all. He got by far and away the biggest reactions all night long and it's as basic of a story as you could ask for. Decent match, especially considering how sick Shawn was. Sid did really well here too, doing exactly what he was supposed to but making it look good.

Shawn celebrates for a LONG time to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. This show has a solid last forty minutes, but it's a three hour show, not an hour long show. The year of 1997 was about as bad as it could have gotten for WWF from a business standpoint, but the future was bright. The main thing I want to focus on here though is Austin, as today you would see him get the world title at Mania 13, whereas here they let him simmer for a year. That's smart business, because while he would have been a successful champion, he wouldn't have been the juggernaut that he became. Anyway this show was bad, but it does have some bright spots.

Ratings Comparison

HHH vs. Goldust

Original: C-

Redo: C-

Ahmed Johnson vs. Farroq

Original: D+

Redo: D+

Vader vs. Undertaker

Original: C+

Redo: D+

Hector Garza/Perro Aguayo/El Canek vs. Jerry Estrada/Heavy Metal/Fuerza Guerrera

Original: F

Redo: D

Royal Rumble

Original: C+

Redo: B-

Shawn Michaels vs. Sycho Sid

Original: C+

Redo: C+

Overall Rating

Original: C+

Redo: D

That overall rating surprised me. How could I go that high after nearly the same grades leading up to it?

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/17/royal-rumble-count-up-1997-bret-hart-uh-make-that-austin/>

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