

# New Japan Wrestle Kingdom IX: Same Old, Same Old

## Wrestle Kingdom IX

Date: January 4, 2015

Location: Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 36,000

Commentators: Matt Striker, Jim Ross

So yet again I've been asked to do the biggest New Japan show of the year. I usually can't stand doing these because I have no idea what's going on and I really don't care to know. However, this time the show has English commentary, which could be a solution to a lot of my problems. That being said, Matt Striker is on commentary and I don't particularly care for him to put it mildly. Let's get to it.

The pre-show match has Japanese commentary so I apologize for not knowing any stories that I may be missing.

### Pre-Show: New Japan Rumble

As far as I can tell, it's a fifteen man Royal Rumble with pinfall, submission or over the top eliminations and what seem to be one minute intervals. Tiger Mask is in at #1 and Yuji Nagata (remember him from WCW? There's a good chance you slept through most of his matches) is in at #2. Tiger fires off kicks to start but Nagata bails into the corner. They go to a test of strength followed by a Nagata chinlock until Taichi, who appears to be a rock star and is flanked by lackey bandmates El Desperado and Taka Michinoku, are in all at once at #3, #4 and #5.

The match just stops as the trio gets in, as wrestling matches tend to do in this situation. Tiger Mask takes a microphone to the face and Taichi hits Nagata low for a fast three count from Taka. They can't throw Tiger Mask over though and Jushin Thunder Liger (again, you might remember him but for much better reasons) is in at #6. The running palm strikes put everyone down and Michinoku is put in the surfboard with a dragon sleeper added for good measure. That always looked awesome.

We must have one minute intervals because Sho Tanaka is in at #7. I'm not sure why but everyone is coming in from the side of the big ramp for a reason that isn't given. Well maybe it is but I don't speak Japanese. Taichi is getting beaten up in the corner. Hiro Saito is in at #8 and looks to be about 172 years old. Liger charges right at him but gets caught by a slow motion spinebuster and a backsplash. No eliminations so far.

Another spinebuste and backsplash have Tiger Mask in trouble and everyone except Taichi and company pair off. Yohei Komatsu is in at #9 as Saito is getting double teamed. They really have to double team a guy that old and slow? Tanaka puts him in a chinlock as this is just a standard battle royal with no one trying eliminations. As the brawling circles around the ring, the wide shots showing how big the Tokyo Dome is really are impressive. This place is freaking huge.

Captain New Japan, a superhero/mascot character, is in at #10 and the ring is getting way too full. The Captain uppercuts everyone down and seems to be a crowd favorite. Tama Tonga (Haku/Meng's son) is in at #11 and crawls along the mat ala Goldust, only to easily dump out Captain New Japan. Desperado hits Liger low and they head to the apron, only to have both guys get dropkicked out to the floor.

Yoshi-Hashi is in at #12 and comes out carrying a big stick, which doesn't make it into the ring. The match slows way down again with a lot of people just standing around the ropes and now even fighting. Saito gets double teamed again as Liger and Taichi are fighting in the aisle. Manabu Nakanashi is in at #13 and takes his sweet time getting to the ring.

The ring is way too full again and Yoshiaki Fujiwara (65 years old and the inventor of the Fujiwara Armbar) is in at #14, limping out to Flight of the Valkyries. He headbutts Tiger Mask a few times and gets in a lockup with Nagata, which seems to be a big deal. A low blow and headbutt have Yuji in trouble and the 66 year old Great Kabuki rounds out the field at #15. The final grouping is Nagata, Tiger Mask, Taichi, Michinoku, Tanaka, Saito, Komatsu, Tonga, Hashi, Nakanashi, Fujiwara and Kabuki. In other words, WAY too many people.

Again, everyone stops to watch Kabuki get in, which takes far too long as he has to disrobe and play with knunchucks. Taichi and Taka go right for him with Taka taking red mist, sending him right into the Fujiwara Armbar for a submission. Everyone piles on Fujiwara for a pin as the field is getting thinned out quickly. Apparently the mist disqualified Kabuki, who probably couldn't take a bump anyway. Taichi gets sunset flipped and jackknifed pinned by I believe Funaki and Komatsu (I lost track of who everyone was a long time ago) to get us down to eight.

Saito misses a middle rope backplash and gets gang pinned as well. Are they really that worried about old guys sticking around? I believe Funaki and Komatsu (they're two guys who look alike and are wearing identical black trunks) dropkick Tiger Mask out but get surrounded by Nakanashi and Nagata. Nakanashi, who looks like a gorilla, suplexes both of them down and racks Tanaka for an elimination. Tonga gets racked as well but Komatsu makes a save, allowing Tonga to small package Nakanashi for a pin. Tonga pays him back with a DDT and pin, leaving us with Hashi, Tonga and Nagata.

Tama tries a charge and gets backflipped to the floor, only to have Nagata wake up and suplex Hashi in half. Hashi comes back with a hard clothesline but Nagata hooks his kneeling armbar into a cross armbreaker, only to have Hashi get into the ropes. Back up and a bridging belly to back suplex gives Nagata the winning pin.

**Rating:** D+. I know New Japan is supposed to be the greatest promotion in the history of this planet and all others, but they're not great at battle royals. That being said, this was clearly just a way to get everyone on the show, which has long since been a tradition on these major shows. However, I really don't like the guys in their 60s being out there. I know it gives the live fans a thrill, but it looks really sad seeing these guys looking like they do and barely able to move.

We get a long, as in like nine minutes long, video recapping all of the matches. I have no idea what's going on but it looks really cool.

IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Titles: Time Splitters vs. Young Bucks vs. Forever Hooligans vs. ReDRagon

This would be like Cruiserweight Tag Team Titles. The Time Splitters are Alex Shelley and Kushida, Forever Hooligans are Alex Kozlov and Rocky Romero and ReDRagon, the champions coming in (as well as the ROH Tag Team Champions), are Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly. The Time Splitters are a Back to the Future inspired team, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. The Bucks are Matt and Nick Jackson and they like to use superkicks. One fall to a finish here. Striker's advise on how to learn more about these teams: use the Google. So why does he get a paycheck for this show again?

Kushida and Fish get things going with Kushida taking him down by the arm. He rides Fish into a nice technical sequence until both guys try dropkicks. For once it's not a standoff with Kushida hitting another dropkick, allowing Shelley to tag himself in for a knee to the ribs. The Young Bucks (members of the Bullet Club. Expect to hear that name a lot tonight) come in and are easily sent back to the floor.

The Time Splitters stay on offense but Fish sends Kushida into Shelley, knocking Alex off the apron. Kozlov tags himself in for a headscissors on Fish, followed by a double stomp for two. Fish makes a quick tag to kick Kozlov in the back before it's back to Fish for a running forearm. It's still weird to hear the crowd go silent to the point where you can hear almost every sound the wrestlers make. The Bucks try to double team Kyle but Nick winds up kicking Max in the face by mistake. Serves them right.

Back in and Nick tells Romero to suck it, only to have Kozlov kick him in the face. Everyone gets in the ring with Romero nailing everyone with clotheslines in the corner as Striker goes on about Black Tiger. Nick knees out of a double suplex attempt but it's Kushida coming in to knock everyone down. Max gets taken down by a DDT and Shelley drops Romero with a running knee off the apron.

Now it's O'Reilly diving off the apron at Shelley but eating a superkick for his efforts. Romero trips up Kushida and dives at Shelley, only to have Kozlov dive on both of them. Not to be outdone, Nick kicks the Hooligans down and Max hits a big corkscrew dive onto all of them. It's the champs' turn now as Kushida dives on everyone at once and the Time Splitters take over.

Back inside and the Splitters start using a bunch of Motor City Machine Guns moves, including Skull and Bones but with a Kushida moonsault instead of a splash (Outta Time). Kozlov breaks up an elevated Sliced Bread #2 with a tag (why not wait until after Nick was knocked silly?) but the Bucks start busting out the superkicks.

They have to flip out a double Doomsday Device attempt (that looked awesome) and it's time for a superkick party. Nick loads up Romero for a tombstone and Max springboard flips into....nothing as he just lands behind Romero as he lands with the, I kid you not, Meltzer Driver. See because it's an insider name. Kushida drops the champs with a double Tajiri Elbow but takes a double superkick for his efforts.

Fish saves his partner from More Bang For Your Buck and some running knees in the corner set up something like the Demolition Decapitator's second cousin twice removed (a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker into a middle rope knee drop) for two on Shelley. ReDRagon hits a DDT into a wheelbarrow suplex (cool) on Nick and a super falcon's arrow sends Max flying. Romero saves Kozlov from Chasing the Dragon (brainbuster/kick to the back combo) but Kozlov takes it a few seconds later for the pin to retain.

**Rating:** B. This was about what I was expecting and as usual with matches like this one, there's a firm cap on how high I can rate them. The main things holding this back are the length of the match (cut out about a minute or two and it's a lot better) and how similar some of the guys out there look. I kept losing track of who was in the ring and who I was watching as they look so much alike and you have to see the backs of their trunks to tell them apart. Still though, really fun opener and good stuff.

So far, Striker and Ross have just been glorified background noise. Then again, it helped that I was familiar with everyone in the previous match.

Jeff Jarrett/Bad Luck Fale/Yujiro Takahashi vs. Hiroyoshi Tenzan/Satoshi Kojima/Tomoaki Honma

Jarrett's team is part of the Bullet Club, Takahashi is a turncoat and Fale (pronounced Fah-lei) is a monster. Tenzan and Kojima are a legendary

tag team and Honma used to be a death match wrestler in Big Japan. Surprisingly enough it's Ross bringing up Tenzan vs. Savage at Starrcade 1995. It's a brawl to start the Bullet Club in early trouble. A double headbutt has Takahashi in trouble and it's Kojima...gently tapping his chest in the corner. The idea is that they're so fast they hurt more but I didn't buy it with Kobashi and I don't buy it here.

Fale runs Kojima over in the corner and it's off to Jarrett for a Jake Roberts short arm clothesline. Some big shots from Fale set up Takahashi for some cocky kicks to the back of the head. Kojima hits a quick Diamond Cutter and makes the tag off to Honma for some clotheslines and chops. He misses a falling headbutt attempt though and walks into a fisherman's buster for two. Apparently Honma is a guy who never quits but isn't that bright. There's always a role for someone like that in wrestling.

Scott D'Amore (remember him?) uses a Karen Jarrett (remember her?) distraction to send in the guitar but Jeff hits Takahashi by mistake before taking a double belly to back suplex. Fale gets clotheslined to the floor and a 3D from Tenzan and Kojima sets up a falling headbutt from Takahashi (which, according to Striker, never hits. See, THAT is why you have English commentary) for the pin.

**Rating:** C. Totally acceptable six man tag here which didn't stick around long enough to overstay its welcome. Jarrett is a great addition to any company, because even though he's 47, he looks almost exactly the same as he did back in 1999 and wrestles a very smooth style. The rest of the match was fine and the kind of match you need to let the crowd breathe a little bit during a major show.

Toru Yano/Naomichi Marufuchi/Mikey Nicholls/Shane Haste vs. Shelton X. Benjamin/Lance Archer/Davey Boy Smith Jr./Takashi Iizuka

This place loves their tag matches. Benjamin's team is part of Suzukigun, another big heel stable led by Minoru Suzuki. On the other side, everyone but Yano is from Pro Wrestling Noah, where Marufuchi is the GHC (World Heavyweight) Champion. Nicholls and Haste are an Australian tag team known as TMDK (The Mighty Don't Kneel. Iizuka turned on former partner Yano to set up this match. Got all that? I do, because there's English

commentary (and Wikipedia) for a change.

It's a brawl to start with the chubby Yano getting jumped by Iizuka. That's fine with Yano, who calmly grabs Iizuka's beard to slow him down. Yano rips off a buckle pad (remember that they're columns instead of individual pads) but gets blasted in the head with it for his efforts. Thankfully Striker mentions that there's a metal bar inside, even though the whole thing bent like it was made of paper. Off to Shelton for the Dragon Whip before Archer and Smith hit a Hart Attack with Lance playing Bret. Archer misses a charge into the exposed buckle and bounces head first off the buckle.

TMDK comes in to hammer on Archer and Smith (the Killer Elite Squad), including a powerslam to Smith. Back up and Archer gives Haste one of the biggest chokeslams I've ever seen but doesn't cover. Instead it's off to Iizuka vs. Marufuchi with Marufuchi firing off a quick series of strikes, only to have Shelton run the ropes and superplex him down. Everything breaks down and Iizuka brings in a foreign (maybe it's domestic in this case) object but Marufuchi stops him with a superkick. TMDK adds a double gorilla press sitout slam, followed by an uppercut knee from Marufuchi to pin the knocked out Iizuka.

**Rating:** D+. I didn't care for this one nearly as much, even though it was shorter. The story helped, but this felt much more like setting up something for later on. TMDK was good and looked like a polished team with potential, but Marufuchi felt more like a standard Japanese guy who would get on my nerves after more than just a few minutes. Yano was overweight and that's about all I have to say about him. Archer and Smith continue to be a team that WWE seemed to miss the boat on, but the last time I said that it resulted in Tensai.

#### Minoru Suzuki vs. Kazushi Sakuraba

This is treated as a big deal and you can only win by knockout or submission. I really hope this doesn't turn into an MMA style match. Naturally, Striker immediately starts talking about UFC and MMA which takes away a lot of my hope. Suzuki is the head of the Suzukigun (Suzuki's Army) stable. Both guys here are over 45 as age isn't nearly as

big of a deal in Japan. Striker and Ross immediately start calling these two the most important/best MMA fighters of all time, which really means nothing to me as this is a wrestling show, but if you can say they're the same things online, why not in a company as well?

Feeling out process to start and they head to the mat for a fast paced exchange into a standoff. Suzuki gets on his back and kicks at Sakuraba but has to escape a Sharpshooter attempt by rolling into the ropes. They stay in the ropes for the better part of ever, which makes sense given that you can't lose by DQ. JR won't shut up about MMA until Suzuki grabs a triangle choke around the top rope.

They tumble out to the floor and start slugging it out on the ramp as Striker finally mentions the wrestling story here: Sakuraba helped Yano after Iizuka turned on him, triggering the feud with Suzuki. Now why did I have to listen to all that MMA talk first? Sakuraba grabs a Kimura on the ramp, which Striker describes as legendary. The referee breaks the hold and sends Sakuraba back to the ring. Striker and Ross talk about the twenty count in this match not two minutes after saying the match can't end via countout. Well to be fair it's better than just Japanese I can't understand.

Back in and Sakuraba fires off a bunch of kicks and Suzuki looks mildly annoyed. He's back up at eight though so Sakuraba goes back to the kicks. Suzuki slaps him in the face a few times, probably due to bad psychology for not going after Suzuki's bad arm. Sakuraba hooks a cross armbreaker but Suzuki gets in the ropes. Again that shouldn't matter but it's something you have to live with.

Suzuki takes a nine count (why it's in English is anyone's guess) and it's time to no sell! You knew this was coming at some point. Even kicks to the arm have no effect because adrenaline heal potentially broken arms. Suzuki kicks him in the face, setting up a rear naked choke for the referee stoppage.

**Rating:** D+. Yeah whatever. I've never cared for this style of a match and I still can't stand it here. I watch wrestling to see wrestling, not old guys doing MMA style stuff. I'm sure I just don't get some cultural thing



here and the Japanese fans seemed to like it but I just do not care about stuff like this. JR and Striker loved it though and it's very annoying hearing them casually talk about wrestling and then get WAY into the MMA style match.

#### Never Openweight Title: Tomohiro Ishii vs. Togi Makabe

Never is an acronym for "New blood, Evolution, Valiantly, Eternal, Radical" and this is basically a midcard title. Makabe is insane and Ishii is a guy who wrestled forever before finally winning a title last year. Ishii is defending and comes in with a heavily taped shoulder. They go right to the short range forearms that you see in ROH and my head begins to hurt again. Ishii powerslams him down as this is already a hard hitting brawl. Chops and right hands are no sold for a bit until more chops actually put Makabe down.

Makabe says bring it on and the chops have no effect. Ishii sells some right hands and takes the ten weakest punches in the corner that I can ever remember. They slug it out again until Makabe hooks a quick northern lights suplex for two. Back up and it's the champ's turn to no sell forearms and Striker says this is the answer to "is pro wrestling real?" The answer to that would be no, because people don't usually growl at you when you repeatedly hit them in the head.

Ishii powerbombs him down for two but walks into a discus lariat to change control again. A German suplex (Striker calls it a German suplex hold for some reason) gets two for Makabe so he loads up the super German, only to get knocked into a Tree of Woe. Makabe does a pretty awesome looking situp and a top rope Samoan drop (not a fireman's carry drop Striker) is good for another two. A huge lariat only gets one for Makabe and frustration is starting to set in.

He's so frustrated that he no sells a German suplex but gets clotheslined for two. They trade more standing clotheslines until Makabe FINALLY goes after the shoulder....which doesn't have much effect. A chop and seated clothesline get two for Ishii and a dragon suplex gets the same for Makabe. They trade more forearms and shout at each other in Japanese until Makabe ax handles him in the chest. About the 38<sup>th</sup> clothesline gets

two more for Makabe and a top rope knee drop of all things gives him the pin and the title.

**Rating:** C-. This is a hard one for me to grade as I completely get the idea behind the match but I can't stand it. It's cool to see people beat each other up, but that growling at each other and no selling the strikes drives me up a wall. All I ask is that you at least stagger a bit and act like it had an effect. Otherwise, it looks like a waste of time, especially when the forearms don't look all that hard. I've never been a fan of this style and I don't think I ever will be. The ending was questionable too as this needed a big spot, and the Ivan Koloff's old finisher doesn't quite do it.

Ads for upcoming shows.

#### IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title: Kenny Omega vs. Ryusuke Taguchi

This is basically the Cruiserweight Title and Omega, a member of Bullet Club with the Young Bucks in his corner, is challenging. Ross likens Omega to Brian Pillman as he's a bit off kilter. Taguchi has been feuding with Bullet Club since the team's debut, when Prince Devitt (Finn Balor, which Striker mispronounces) turned on Taguchi to found the team. They take each other up to the ropes with only Taguchi (called the Funky Weapon) offering a clean break.

They speed things up until Taguchi hits a Rear View to take over but first, a Rude hip swivel. Omega's hurricanrana attempt is countered into an ankle lock before Omega is quickly sent to the floor. The Bucks offer a distraction and Omega blasts Taguchi in the eyes with cold spray (used to help with injuries after matches). JR: "That's not too cool." Striker: "No but it is too sweet." It should be noted that Bullet Club does the Too Sweet hand sign to make it even better. Omega gets two off a running elbow in the corner. Nick Jackson: "You're the worst referee in the business."

Taguchi blocks a suplex attempt but Omega shows off a surprising amount of power by just muscling him up. He walks around instead of covering though and JR gets back into his old form by asking why Omega isn't covering. Kenny misses a spinwheel kick and Nick trips Taguchi, only to

have the champ sidestep a charging Omega, sending him into the Bucks. Taguchi hits a big dive of his own, making him seem more like a standard cruiserweight. Back in and Omega escapes Three Amigos before taking out Taguchi's knee.

Kenny's cover gets two and SWEET GOODNESS his eyes are freaky looking. They're bugging out of his skull before he loads up a buckle bomb, only to have Taguchi hurricanrana him into the buckle for a sweet counter. Back up and Kenny dropkicks him out of the air, followed by a sweet gutwrench sitout powerbomb for another near fall. A faceplant gets the same on Kenny and it's back to the ankle lock.

Taguchi mocks the Too Sweet sign but Kenny blocks what looked to be a torture rack attempt and hits a hard German suplex. He throws Taguchi onto his shoulders for an electric chair but drops him down into a driver (the One Winged Angel. He's a Final Fantasy fan?) for the pin and the title.

**Rating:** B. This took its time but got rolling eventually. Omega certainly deserved the win here as he was blowing Taguchi out of the water for most of the match. The visuals on his face were outstanding and made the match that much better. Really fun match here with Kenny being all confident but just knocking Taguchi silly with all his high powered offense. I had a good time with this and liked it a lot more than I was expecting to.

Tag Team Titles: Hirooki Goto/Katsuyori Shibata vs. Doc Gallows/Karl Anderson

Anderson and Gallows are defending and part of Bullet Club, meaning they're accompanied by Tama Tonga and the Bullet Babe (Gallows' wife, indy wrestler Amber O'Neal). Goto and Shibata beat them to win the World's Strongest Tag League in 2014. JR compares Karl Anderson to Arn Anderson which is some of the highest praise you can get.

Goto and Anderson, former partners, start things off with a stalemate out of a quick sequence on the mat. The challengers are in trouble early as they're sent into each other on the apron and Gallows kicks Goto's head off for the early advantage. Back in and the champs hit a pair of

splashes for two on Goto with a leg lariat getting the same for Anderson.

The monster Gallows comes in (it's amazing how much better he is with some intensity instead of just being a standard big man) to exchange some clotheslines with Goto and the champ goes down. Off to Shibata who nails a running dropkick as everything breaks down. The champs take running dropkicks in the corner and a double belly to back suplex gets two on Gallows. Anderson comes back with a backbreaker, setting up a standing Demolition Decapitator for two on Goto.

A reverse 3D gets the same on Shibata but Goto breaks up a Tornadoplex (AJ Styles and Tomko's old move, where Gallows loads up a spinning suplex with Anderson adding a spinning side slam) and AA's Anderson onto his knee. Gallows chokeslams Shibata for the same but the challengers pop up to double team the monster. A bunch of kicks from Gotp set up a running kick to the chest for the pin and the titles.

**Rating:** C. This wasn't bad but I didn't get a big feeling from the title change. Goto and Shibata feel like any two guys who happen to be fighting the champs. The problem here though is I've only been told about the history here. A video package of the champs being dominant and then losing to Shibata and Goto in the tournament final would have helped, but the talking about it is far better than nothing.

The new champs sit down in the ring to pose.

### AJ Styles vs. Tetsuya Naito

Styles is Bullet Club and Striker plays up the two broken necks from Styles Clashes. AJ goes right after him at the bell and tries the Clash but Naito sends him to the apron. They head outside with AJ moonsaulting to the floor but landing on his feet. Back in and Naito hits a top rope dropkick but AJ comes back with a Stunner on the leg to slow down the high flier. Psychology is fun.

A Robinsdale Crunch sets up an Indian deathlock as AJ keeps mixing up the offense. I love it when people avoid just doing the same moves over and over because there are so many different things you can do. Naito comes back with some right hands and a neckbreaker out of the corner. The knee

gives out though and AJ hits that springboard forearm (love that move) to take over again.

AJ tries a suplex into a neckbreaker but slips up on the landing. Yes, people do botch things in New Japan too. A wicked German suplex on Naito looks to set up a faceplant but Naito rolls through for two of his own. Styles pops back up and crotches him on top but Naito backflips out of a belly to back superplex. It jams the knee again though and AJ puts on the Calf Killer (which Striker screws up by calling it the Calf Killer), eventually sending Naito diving to the ropes for the break. AJ fights out of something like a German suplex but gets caught in a dragon suplex for two.

Naito's leg is suddenly fine so AJ Pele's him down for a lack of selling. Sunday Bloody Sunday (a single arm implant DDT which used to be Devitt's finishing move) looks to set up the Clash but Naito backdrops him to the floor. After a quick breather, AJ sends him into the buckle but collapses, allowing Naito to hit a slingshot dropkick. He loads up a top rope Frankensteiner but gets caught in a super Styles Clash (now with 100% less neck breaking) for the pin.

**Rating:** B. I liked the match and AJ's offense made perfect sense, but having him in the finisher leg lock and then Naito hitting dropkicks and trying high risk offense made my eyes roll. What good can AJ do if Naito won't keep selling the leg injury? They had a good story going here though and the action was good enough. Solid match and one of the better AJ matches I've seen in a good while. See what happens when you get away from the overrated TNA roster?

Video on Nakamura vs. Ibushi. The two fought as junior heavyweights where Ibushi won a big showdown, so tonight they're fighting as heavyweights for Nakamura's Intercontinental Title. This match has received rave reviews with Meltzer giving it five stars (You knew he was giving something on this show five stars) so I'm curious to see how great it is. I've only seen one Nakamura match and I liked it quite a bit so hopefully this lives up to that standard.

Intercontinental Title: Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kota Ibushi

I still can't quite describe Nakamura but he seems to be something like a Dean Ambrose who marches to his own drum. Ibushi is a very high flier who does a lot of cool looking flips. Nakamura comes to the ring in a robe and a crown to a huge reaction. He certainly has more charisma than almost anyone else tonight. I get a kind of Mick Jagger feel from him and that's a very high compliment.

They slowly feel each other out by throwing some kicks and Nakamura drives him up against the ropes for some knees to the ribs. The champ offers him a handshake but pulls him in for a knee to the ribs, only to miss the Daniel Bryan running knee. Kota takes him down into the corner and puts his boot on Nakamura's face, which is apparently a Nakamura signature. That would be proven correct as Nakamura does the same thing to him ten seconds later.

Another knee to the back of the head sends Ibushi to the floor as JR talks about Mr. Wrestling II. Off to a cravate from the champ and we hit the chinlock. Nakamura steps it up a bit and gets some two counts without breaking the hold. That's a new one. Back up and Nakamura slaps him in the face over and over before they do the face to face staredown. A Backstabber puts Kota down but a hurricanrana sends Nakamura outside, setting up a huge moonsault to the floor.

Back in again and a springboard missile dropkick sends Nakamura sprawling across the ring. Nakamura backflips him to the apron, which Striker attributes to his "veteranness." Now a normal person would just use the word "experience" there, but Striker seems to prefer to invent words that are more complicated than they need to be in an effort to sound smart. Ibushi's second missile dropkick attempt is kicked out of the air and a front suplex sets up more knee strikes to Kota's head.

Another running knee attempt misses and a great looking springboard hurricanrana gets two on the champ. A dragon suplex (WAY too popular of a move tonight) sets up a standing corkscrew moonsault for another near fall. Something like a Chick Kick sends Nakamura into dream land and a Last Ride sitout powerbomb (cool) gets the third straight two count. Kota misses the Phoenix Splash (moonsault into a 450) though and a big knee to the back of the head knocks him silly and both guys are down.

Back up and Nakamura stomps away but Kota just smiles at him. Kota just unloads on him with right hands and Nakamura shoves the referee down for no apparent reason. There's a cross armbreaker on Kota but he fights up and viciously stomps Nakamura's face to escape. A reverse T-Bone suplex sends Nakamura flying and Kota hits the champ's running knee for two. Nakamura is all ticked off now and it turns into a slugout until Nakamura drops down so Kota can hit a standing double stomp. That was a horribly telegraphed spot.

Kota takes him over to the apron, springboards up to the top and muscles the bigger Nakamura up for a German superplex. Ok that made up for the double stomp. Freaking awesome move there. Somehow it only gets two and therefore Nakamura is going to retain. Nakamura headbutts out of something called the Phoenix suplex and elbows Kota in the head.

A middle rope knee to the back puts Kota down but it's time for FIGHTING SPIRIT, which is Japanese for no selling. They both try knees and collide in a good spot before a fireman's carry driver (Lucha Underground's King Cuerno's Thrill of the Hunt) sets up Nakamura's running knee to retain.

**Rating:** A. Here's the match where I get in trouble. I really liked this one and it's by far the best match of the night so far, but giving this five stars is a BIG stretch. That would put this on the level of CM Punk vs. John Cena from Money in the Bank, Flair vs. Steamboat (pick one), Undertaker vs. Shawn in the Cell and Hart vs. Austin at Wrestlemania XIII? There's no way I can see that happening, but this is Meltzer talking about Japan so you have to expect a lot of over hype.

The match itself was indeed very good though and Nakamura thankfully can do more stuff than just the knee strikes. Not a lot more mind you but at least he can mix things up. Ibushi's strength surprised me here and he looked like someone who could succeed anywhere. Really good match here and worth checking out. It's not as good as it's hyped up as, but most matches rarely are.

Nakamura bows to Ibushi post match and grabs the mic to say.....I have no idea actually. Striker offers some websites to find out the translation, because the idea of having a translator there on sight is too complicated

I guess.

We recap Tanahashi vs. Okada, which is the NJPW equivalent of Rock vs. Austin. They've fought time after time now and traded the title for years. Tanahashi is the old guard and Okada wants to be the new top guy.

#### IWGP World Title: Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Kazuchika Okada

Tanahashi is defending. Okada, 27 here and known as the Rain Maker, has an entrance video of gold coins falling for a nice touch. He also has Gedo, one of NJPW's bookers and a famous tag wrestler, in his corner. Tanahashi, basically a superhero, plays air guitar on the way to the ring. They lock up after a minute of circling each other until they trade wristlocks. Tanahashi takes him down into a headlock but Okada reverses into one of his own. The champ tries another headlock but gets countered into a headscissors for a stalemate. They're going for the big match feel here and they're off to a good start.

They head into the corner and Okada nails him in the face, causing Tanahashi to go straight at him with forearms. He heads to the middle rope though and a hard running elbow knocks him down to the floor. A big boot knocks him over the barricade and an Orton DDT brings him back to the floor. They fight up the ramp where Tanahashi has to block a tombstone attempt. Instead it's a jawbreaker to stagger Okada but he comes back with something like a Roode Bomb. JR brings up that Tanahashi has a bad back and neck, which is exactly the reason they brought him in.

Back in and Okada elbows him in the jaw but misses a backsplash. A middle rope Swanton gets two for the champ but he gets caught in a majistral cradle into a choke. Again, staying on the neck. A slingshot hilo gets two for Okada and things slow back down. They slug it out with Okada getting the better of it until they grab each other by the hair. The champ heads to the top but has to elbow out of what looks like a Samoan drop, setting up the High Fly Flow (Five Star Frog Splash) but Okada rolls away.

Something like White Noise onto the knee gets two for Okada but the Rain Maker (the move, not the person. It's a wristlock into a big clothesline, which has been named Best Wrestling Move two years in a row in the



Observer. For the life of me I don't understand the huge appeal. It's just a clothesline) is countered into a rollup for two. A dragon screw leg whip takes Okada down again and Tanahashi dropkicks the knee out to send Okada outside.

This time it's Okada being sent over the barricade and getting taken down by a huge cross body. Striker: "Dare I say a Wrestle Kingdom moment???" JR's silence is glorious. Back in and Tanahashi teases a Rain Maker but takes him down with a Sling Blade (spinning clothesline neckbreaker), only to have Okada pop up and try a tombstone, but Tanahashi reverses into one of his own. High Fly Flow hits Okada's back and a second hits the chest for a very close two. The camera goes over to a shot of the title in a very nice touch.

Okada kicks away from an attempted Texas Cloverleaf but gets caught in another Sling Blade. Tanahashi mocks the Rain Maker post but walks into the real thing for two, which is the first time he has ever kicked out of it. They slug it out from their knees until Tanahashi reverses a tombstone into a rollup for two. A big slap staggers Okada but he grabs a backslide of all things for two, only to get caught in a German suplex for two.

Okada hits an even bigger bridging German for two more. The Rain Maker is countered into a dragon suplex for two and a big old dropkick catches Tanahashi in the jaw. JR is in full on main event mode here and it's really working. Tanahashi twists the knee around two more times with Okada in the ropes, setting up the High Fly Flow for no cover. Instead he cranks on the knee even more, setting up a High Fly Flow to a seated Okada, followed by a fifth High Fly Flow to retain the title.

**Rating:** A-. So when Tanahashi does it it's a classic but when Cena does it, he's repetitive and only knows a few moves? I really don't care for the repetition of a move to get a pin but it's how main events work today. The knee work didn't really go anywhere here and Tanahashi never even hooked the Texas Cloverleaf.

I need to get on something more positive here because it sounds like I hated this match. It's the same rating I gave to them at this show two

years ago and it's about the same level as the previous one. This was a good, back and forth fight with both guys looking like big stars. I wouldn't call this a classic, but it was certainly worthy of ending the biggest show of the year. They hit a point near the end with the suplexes that got me far more into things and kicking out of the Rain Maker was a nice touch.

Post match Okada leaves but Tanahashi gets on the mic to shout at him. I'm not sure what he's saying but it doesn't seem to be angry or mean. With Okada gone, Tanahashi seems to thank the fans but they won't let him leave. He gives us some air guitar and collapses in a nice bit. We get a quick translation of his comments to Okada: Okada is a long way from being the ace and Tanahashi is proud of his performance. That's kind of a heelish comment no? He takes a few more minutes to leave and we're out of here.

**Overall Rating:** A. As usual, I liked the show but I have no desire to keep watching it full time. There are some very good and entertaining matches on the show and the wrestling is more than good enough to warrant sitting through this once. The worst match for me was the Suzuki match but that's much more due to me not being a fan of the style than anything else. It's definitely an excellent show and lived up to (most of) the hype it had. There are a lot of people I'd keep watching on here and that's not something I often say.

Striker and Ross were fine on commentary though nothing outstanding. They were definitely a positive for the show and experience as a whole as the Japanese commentary can get annoying in a hurry since it's just gibberish to me most of the time. Striker had some annoying moments but he was FAR better here than he usually is in Lucha Underground. Ross sounded like an old, grizzled veteran but he got into the main event, which is all you really could ask from him at this point. They could have been better, but they were a very welcome addition.

Overall I did like the show and I can see why its fans are so passionate about this company, but it's just not something I care about enough to keep watching. For the most part I have no reason to care about most of these characters because I don't follow them enough. The strong style

still gets on my nerves and I can't imagine ever becoming a fan of it. I like my wrestling more character based than in ring based and that's really hard to do here when I can't understand what's being said most of the time.

One last thing: cutting this down to under four hours is a GREAT move. I remember one of these breaking five hours and it felt like a nightmare slogging through the whole thing. Three hours and forty five minutes (not counting the pre-show match) is acceptable for the biggest show of the year and the show never felt like it was dragging. Really good show though and worth checking out if you have the time.

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