

Monday Night Raw – January 26, 2015: Episode IV: A New Hope

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 26, 2015

Location: WWE Studios, Stamford, Connecticut

Hosts: Michael Cole, Booker T., John Bradshaw Layfield

This is going to be a special edition of the show as there won't be any new matches. Due to a very strong blizzard in the northeast, tonight's show was canceled and tomorrow's Smackdown has been postponed to a live show on Thursday night. I'd expect a lot of highlights and taped matches on this show so let's get to it.

We open with a look at the blizzard to explain why things are a bit different tonight.

Opening sequence.

Cole and Booker T. talk about what's coming, including last night's World Title match and the Royal Rumble in their entirety and an interview with Brock Lesnar.

JBL is on the roof of WWE Headquarters as the weatherman for the evening. He gets in a funny line about Sasquatches found frozen in ice dying warmer than he is right now. Points for a decent idea at least.

First up is last night's World Title match. Since I already did the play by play for this show last night, I'll be copying over the full version from last night, even though it may be clipped on this broadcast.

WWE World Heavyweight Title: Brock Lesnar vs. John Cena vs. Seth Rollins

Lesnar is defending and we get big match intros. Rollins immediately bails to the floor and Lesnar hits the first German suplex on Cena. There's the second German as Rollins comes in, only to get caught on

Brock's shoulders. The Stooges make the save so Brock suplexes them at the same time. Brock launches Seth back into the ring and Germans Cena again. All Lesnar so far.

Both challengers are easily suplexed again and there's the Kimura to Cena. Brock even climbs onto Cena but Seth makes the save with the springboard knee to the head and Lesnar is in trouble. A double suplex puts Lesnar down and there's an AA but Rollins throws Cena to the floor and only gets one on the champ. Both challengers are thrown to the floor and you can see everyone laying as Brock walks around the ring. Seth knocks Brock into the steps for a breather, leaving Cena to beat Rollins up inside.

The fans absolutely hate Cena and are thrilled to have Brock break up the Shuffle with rolling Germans. Rollins breaks it up for some reason though and knees Lesnar out to the floor. Now it's Cena getting all fired up and cleaning house, only to have Rollins knock him outside. Seth tries a springboard onto Lesnar but gets caught on Brock's shoulders for an F5. John has to make a save so Brock feels the need to throw him down with another German suplex.

That's not enough for Brock though as he loads up the announcers' table (and destroys a monitor), only to walk into the AA. Brock doesn't even stay down so Cena hits another, only to have Lesnar pop up again. A third AA gets two as Rollins makes the save, followed by the Curb Stomp for two with Cena making a save. Now the fans are impressed. Lesnar throws them both down again and goes outside, only to have Cena follow him out and spear the champ through the barricade.

Cena slams him hard into the steps and blasts him in the face with the same steps, knocking the champ onto the announcers' table. Seth kicks Cena down and goes up for a top rope elbow through the table to put everyone down. That was one heck of a crash as the war continues. Back in and Rollins hits the low superkick for two on Cena but John grabs a popup sitout powerbomb for the same. Lesnar is receiving medical attention as Rollins counters a superplex attempt into the running buckle bomb for two.

Everyone is down again but Cena grabs the STF, only to have the Stooges come in for the save. Rollins plays Reigns in a Triple Bomb as a stretcher comes out for Lesnar. Cena kicks out at two so Rollins grabs the briefcase, only to miss the charge and fly out to the floor. The Stooges take a double AA and Rollins gets the single version but kicks out at two. We cut back to Lesnar who says he wants to stay out here. Cole says Lesnar has at least a broken rib. Rollins enziguris Cena down and the Curb Stomp connects for another near fall.

Rollins busts out a Phoenix Splash but Lesnar CHARGES back in for some German suplexes as Beast Mode is on. Seth flips out of a German though and knocks Lesnar silly with the briefcase, only to have Lesnar pop up with an F5 to counter the Curb Stomp onto the briefcase to retain the title at 22:45.

Rating: A. If there's one thing WWE can do like no one else, it's organized carnage. These guys DESTROYED each other for twenty two minutes and I would have believed anyone could have won at any time. Lesnar going into that other level is absolutely terrifying and you believe he could beat anyone at that point. Great stuff here and well worth going out of your way to see. They're making Lesnar out to be unstoppable, meaning whoever gets to take the title off of him will be a huge star. You might even say they'll be Reign(s)ing. And yes that was as stupid as it sounded.

This Thursday, Daniel Bryan vs. Kane in a casket match on Smackdown.

Seth Rollins is live in studio for an exclusive interview. Rollins says he deserved to be in the title match at the Rumble because of his skills, not because he brought back the Authority. He did everything he was supposed to do to win the title, including Curb Stomping Lesnar. It's put him down before, but it didn't work last night.

The springboard elbow and Phoenix Splash should have won and Rollins was surprised that they didn't. Rollins even admits that he underestimated Lesnar last night, but Lesnar underestimated him as well. Lesnar may be the World Champion, but he doesn't have a Plan B. Brock will be here next, and Rollins says he can come take this chair from him. It's not

often that you hear someone admit their best wasn't good enough and this came off more like a face interview than anything else. I don't think it's a turn or anything but we'll call it shades of gray.

After a break, Lesnar comes up to the interview set and says Rollins has his chair. Rollins gets up and shoves the chair down before walking away. Brock sits down and confirms that he has a broken rib but it was time for him to win last night and that's what he did. Heyman says they're not at odds with the Authority because Lesnar is going to be headlining the biggest show of the year. If the Authority has a problem with someone, Brock Lesnar will be there to take them out as long as the Authority pays him what he's worth.

We look at a clip of Brock breaking the Streak and Lesnar says he won the match due to overcoming and conquering everything in his path, just like he has everything else. After that totally obvious piece of filler, Brock says he's happy for Reigns and hopes he's up for the challenge, because the champ is ready. When a steamroller has momentum going, get out of his way. Heyman says Reigns can't stop Lesnar. "Anything else?" Cole says Reigns will be here later tonight and Lesnar thinks he might stick around.

Lesnar vs. Reigns already sounds better. Not due to anything here as this was nothing special, but because it's not in the really boring Royal Rumble. I really do think that has more to do with it than anything else. When you get down to just Lesnar vs. Reigns as two monsters clashing, a lot of that hatred is going away and people will calm WAY down over it. Just thinking that it's Reigns vs. Lesnar at Wrestlemania and forgetting last night makes it feel a lot less annoying and dreadful. That's a big step forward.

Royal Rumble

90 second intervals and it's Miz at #1 and R-Truth at #2. The fans immediately want Mizdow but get a headlock from R-Truth instead. Feeling out process to start until Truth gets crotched on top. In at #3 is BUBBA RAY DUDLEY, complete with taped up glasses. It's Miz getting the big beating and the wind-up elbow has Miz reeling. Truth (appropriately)

helps with What's Up and is even told to get the tables. You know the Philadelphia crowd is up for that. Miz gets back up and eats 3D, allowing Bubba to easily eliminate him.

Luke Harper is in at #4 as Bubba throws out Truth. They immediately start hammering on each other and Harper fights out of the Bubba Bomb before kicking Bubba in the jaw. A big lariat puts Harper down though and the ECW chants revive Dudley. Bray Wyatt is in at #5, complete with lantern. Bubba stares him down but Harper gives us a Wyatt Family reunion as the fans want D-Von. Harper throws Bubba out and it's time for the big staredown.

They stand in place until Curtis Axel is in at #6 but Erick Rowan (who didn't qualify for the Rumble) jumps him from behind though and whips him into the barricade, apparently stealing Axel's spot. Harper looks at Rowan and wants a team up, much to Bray's excitement. Bray and Harper join forces though and Rowan gets double teamed, only to have Bray dump both of them out to clear the ring.

The Boogeyman returns at #7 and Cole informs us that the guy coming out to I'M THE BOOGEYMAN is in fact named the Boogeyman. Bray smiles at him and stops a charge with a big clothesline, setting up the easy elimination. Sin Cara is in at #8 and Cole sounds bored out of his mind. Cara gets in a kick from the apron but Bray just decks him with a right hand. Sister Abigail connects and Bray is all alone again a few seconds later.

Bray grabs the mic and issues an open invitation because he has the whole world in his hands. Zack Ryder returns at #9, hits the Broski Boot, and is quickly Bray's fifth elimination. Daniel Bryan is in at #10 to really pick things up. He immediately starts the kicks and has Bray in trouble in the corner. Even more kicks put him down as Fandango is in at #11. Bryan busts out even more kicks and an old school airplane spin but doesn't throw Fandango out.

Tyson Kidd (complete with his addictive theme song) is in at #12 to slug it out with Bryan before a double cross body puts both guys down. Stardust is in at #13 as we're firmly in the midcard portion. Cole says

this is Stardust's first Rumble to split a few hairs. We currently have Wyatt, Bryan, Stardust, Fandango and Kidd in the ring. Stardust and Fandango trade skinning the cat saves before Bryan belly to back suplexes Kidd out.

Bray gets knocked through the middle rope and Bryan follows with the Flying Goat, meaning both guys are still in as Diamond Dallas Page is in at #14. Stardust jumps him upon entry but eats a Diamond Cutter. Fandango takes the middle rope version, followed by Wyatt missing a charge and taking one of his own. Rusev is in at #15 and it's time to clear out some space. He blocks a Diamond Cutter and dumps Page and Fandango, setting up a showdown between Rusev and Wyatt.

Daniel breaks it up with a top rope dropkick and unleashes more kicks, only to have Bray pop up and dump him out far earlier than I was expecting. Goldust is in at #16 as the crowd is just dead. Stardust tries to throw out Goldust (with Cole mentioning that Goldust was eliminated by his brother last year, despite saying Stardust was in his first Rumble. Like I said, splitting hairs) but Goldust saves himself. The fans start chanting for Bryan and then switch to booing.

Kofi Kingston is in at #17, giving us Kingston, Goldust, Stardust, Rusev and Wyatt. Bray catapults him over the top but Kofi skins the cat and comes back in with a springboard shot to the head. Everyone gets into one corner until Adam Rose is in at #18. You can hear every word of the songs now as the crowd just does not care at the moment. Kofi is thrown out but the Rosebuds catch him and walk him back to the apron. Rusev dumps Rose and Kofi a few seconds later and Roman Reigns is in at #19 to a lot less booing than I was expecting.

Roman starts cleaning house and dumps both Dust Brothers, only to get double teamed by Rusev and Wyatt. Big E. is in at #20 to clean house and give us a very powerful foursome of Big E., Rusev, Wyatt and Reigns. Mizdow is in at #21 but Miz runs out to say it's his spot. Damien finally stands up to Miz and goes in to a good reaction, only to be dumped by Rusev. Jack Swagger is in at #22 and everyone keeps brawling until Ryback is in at #23.

Ryback busts out everyone with spinebusters as JBL incorrectly says Lex Luger is the only man to win the Rumble but never win the WWE Title (Duggan). The fans chant for CM Punk but get Kane at #24, giving us Wyatt, Rusev, Reigns, Big E., Swagger, Ryback and Kane. Dean Ambrose wakes the crowd up again at #25 and goes right for Wyatt. We get more brawling around the ropes until Titus O'Neil is in at #26 and is dumped in about thirty seconds (counting intro) by Reigns and Rusev.

Ambrose dropkicks Wyatt up against the ropes and Bad News Barrett gets lucky #27. The ring is getting full but no one is in any real danger of being eliminated. Cesaro is in at #28 and joins the fray. Rusev sends Big E. to the apron and then kicks him out to clear the ring a bit. Big Show is in at #29 and everyone stops to stare him down. They all gang up on him but Show shoves everyone down as Kane chokeslams Ambrose. Show does the same to Reigns before the monsters dump Ryback with ease.

Swagger is dumped by the power team as well, tying Kane for the all time record at 39 eliminations. Dolph Ziggler is in at #30, giving us a final group of Wyatt, Rusev, Reigns, Kane, Ambrose, Barrett, Cesaro, Big Show and Ziggler. Dolph has to fight out of the chokeslam from Big Show and dumps Barrett. Cesaro swings Dolph around and gets him to the apron, only to be pulled out for the elimination. Ziggler goes up top and dives right into the KO Punch, allowing Kane and Show to easily dump him, giving Kane the all time eliminations record.

Big Show KO's Wyatt and dumps him as well, leaving us with Ambrose, Reigns, Big Show and Kane as the final four. Reigns is bleeding from the side of the mouth as the brawl is on. The Shield fights out of a double chokeslam but Ambrose's rebound clothesline has almost no effect on Show. Reigns knocks Show down and the fans just are not happy. Big Show and Kane double team Roman though before a chokeslam is enough to get rid of Ambrose.

So it's Kane and Big Show vs. Reigns and the fans are LIVID. Reigns gets sent to the apron but Show tries to dump Kane, triggering a fight that has been going on for over fifteen years now. Reigns sneaks up from behind them and eliminates both guys to go to Wrestlemania at 57:23.

Rating: D+. I'm surprised by this but I really shouldn't be. They actually went with Reigns vs. the giants to end the Royal Rumble? This match felt like a big tease from the company as they were setting up Wyatt, Cesaro, Rusev, Ambrose and Ziggler for this big showdown but then snatched it away to go with Kane and Big Show as the big monsters. That's really what they think is the smart idea? And you know we're getting Reigns vs. Big Show at Fast Lane, probably without Big Show doing a job for him because he doesn't get pinned you see.

As for the rest of the match....yeah I liked it, but man alive it was obvious where they were going with about twenty minutes to go. Bryan going out that early is a waste, though I'm fine with him not winning it. He had his big moment last year and it would be foolish to try and recreate it. Bryan can get the title later on in his other big moment and that's all he needs to do.

The returns were fine but there was no big surprise at the end (that's fine), and Reigns was just so obvious as a winner. Also, the commentary was getting REALLY annoying with all their stats, some of which just didn't make sense. I didn't hate this match, but Reigns is getting wedged into a spot he's just not ready for whatsoever. Wrestlemania better have an amazing undercard, because Reigns vs. Lesnar is not going to cut it on top.

Post match Kane and Big Show destroy Reigns until The Rock makes a surprise run in for the save. House is cleaned but Rusev is back in! He was never officially eliminated....so Reigns throws him out to officially win about three minutes after he won in the first place. Again, more teasing.

The Authority comes out as Rock poses with Reigns before letting Reigns point at the sign to end the show.

Reigns is in the studio for a live interview. After a quick question about how amazing last night was, Byron Saxton asks him what he thinks when people say he isn't ready. Reigns tells a story of his father Sika throwing him in the pool at the YMCA when he wasn't ready. When he went under, he scratched and clawed his way up and that's how he learned how

to swim, even though he wasn't ready. As for the crowd last night, yeah he was hoping for a warmer reception but those people paid their money and can say what they want.

Reigns doesn't know if he's been handpicked as the next guy, but if he has, it's an opportunity. He has to lace up his boots and get in that ring by himself to grasp the opportunity. After the match last night, the Rock came down to help him because Rock is family. Reigns hasn't mentioned that Rock is his family too often but now he goes into the Samoan family tree. The WWE put food on his table when he was a kid and now he wants to thank them by meeting Brock Lesnar face to face both at Wrestlemania, but here tonight.

This was a good performance from Reigns as he sounded FAR more natural here and you could tell he wasn't reading from a cheesy script. It's interesting that they're addressing all the big questions being asked about him instead of just going with whatever lame story they had. I'm not saying it's going to save things but it's more interesting than what it sounded like we were getting.

From last night on the post show, Cena was doing an interview when Rusev charged in and took the microphone from him. They got in each other's faces and the match is on for Fast Lane. Cole acknowledges that it was going to be at Wrestlemania but they're moving it up.

We look back at Sting returning to help Cena win the main event last week. HHH will call out Sting at Fast Lane.

We get the announcement for the latest inductee into the Hall of Fame: Arnold Schwarzenegger. Some wrestlers do some Arnold impressions. Ryback is actually appropriate as he played a Terminator character in OVW, complete with the Terminator theme as his music.

Dean Ambrose is walking in the snow and comes inside. After a break, Dean is messing with the heater and says it isn't even that cold here. This morning, he walked through a blizzard and hitchhiked all the way here, got in a fight on a gas station, stole some hiking boots and got here. It's not unlike the Road to Wrestlemania because he loves dangerous conditions. No matter who or what is in front of him, he's going to make

it to Wrestlemania. He goes off to find out if anyone has any posters of him around here.

The next sitdown interview is with Daniel Bryan, who recaps the start of the YES Movement and his rise to the top of the company, followed by being put out of action by Kane. He feels like he let down the fans because they had supported him to get where he was. It feels like he has to win the title again, just for the people. As for being eliminated early last night, he went into the match thinking that it was the perfect opportunity to go to face the ultimate dragon and get his title back.

But he failed and Reigns rose up and made the most of the situation. Now Bryan never had WWE feed him as a kid but he's sure Reigns can have a great match at Wrestlemania and do the company proud. He's going to end Kane in the casket match on Thursday and move on to become champion. This was definitely the weakest of the interviews so far, mainly because Bryan vs. Kane again interests absolutely no one.

Reigns and Lesnar have their big sitdown meeting but Heyman takes over the questions. He's known Reigns' family longer than Reigns has known them, all the way back to when he (Heyman) was a kid. He took Yokozuna's first publicity pictures and managed Rikishi before he was Rikishi, and saw Rikishi's kids, now known as the Usos, messing around in the ring before a WCW show. Heyman knew Reigns as a boy in Pensacola when his father was wrestling down there.

Paul also knows the Rock, but more importantly, the Rock knows Brock Lesnar. Back in 2002, the Rock ruled the roost around here, but then he met Brock Lesnar. Now Reigns wants to be the next big thing, just like Lesnar was back in 2002. However, that's not going to happen. The Rock never asked for a rematch with Brock Lesnar because just one match was enough for him. That's what Rock never told Reigns, because he doesn't want Reigns to know the truth. Lesnar is the 1 in 21-1, so how is Roman going to handle disappointing his family when he loses at Wrestlemania because he can't beat Brock?

Reigns stares Heyman down and says he'll answer that to Brock's face. He turns to face the champ and says he knows what he signed up for, but

Brock doesn't know what he signed up for. Roman is going to take the title at Wrestlemania, but if he can't, he's going to take a piece of Lesnar with him. Lesnar gets right in his face and Reigns stands up. They shake hands and Brock says unlike Heyman, he doesn't respect Reigns. Roman: "But you will."

Overall Rating: B. This was exactly the kind of show WWE needed after last night. One of the biggest problems with WWE is they have the most scripted, stuck in a rut feeling to them. Instead, this felt completely different and allowed them to slow down rather than cramming everything into three hours with all the WACKY COMEDY and twenty minute promos all over the place. This show was far more entertaining than I was expecting and gave me new hope for the future.

The Lesnar vs. Reigns stuff was absolutely mind blowing with both guys more than holding their own under Heyman's masterful direction. Reigns kept this simple and sounded like a gladiator with short lines instead of doing all the scripted nonsense. A simple story about learning to swim made me care about him more than a year and a half of Shield matches. Overall, this was a great show and exactly what WWE needed. It's also amazing how much better last night's results feel when you get away from the dull Rumble. That's a great sign for the future.

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