

Monday Night Raw – March 10, 1997: The Skeleton of Greatness

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 10, 1997

Location: Centrum Center, Worcester, Massachusetts

Attendance: 4,088

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross

This is the show where everything changes. After years of the same set and look, Raw changes over to the modern look with the metal ramp and huge screen that is still around today, FINALLY making it look like a modern show. We're getting closer to Wrestlemania which means things are about to get really interesting in a hurry. Bret Hart isn't pleased with the treatment he's been getting lately and very soon he's going to have a chance to get the title back. However, Steve Austin is lurking around and is willing to do whatever he can to ruin Bret's life. Let's get to it.

During the opening video, we can hear Finkel telling the fans to make some noise.

Opening sequence.

Here's Sid to open the show with an in ring chat. Sid isn't cool with teaming with Undertaker tonight, because he smells something fishy. Undertaker should just stay in the cemetery because he's getting buried at Wrestlemania. Cue Undertaker to tell Sid to just admit that he's scared. Undertaker doesn't have to be his partner tonight because he can deal with Vader and Mankind himself. He drops the catchphrase but here are Bearer, Mankind and Vader to interrupt. Bearer talks some trash and the brawl is on with Sid and Undertaker running into each other as we head to a break.

Rocky Maivia vs. Tony Roy

Non-title. Iron Sheik, Bob Backlund and the Sultan (Rikishi) come out to talk about how they're going to take Maivia's Intercontinental Title at Wrestlemania. Roy gets in some cheap shots but eats a quick clothesline. Rocky hammers him down as Backlund rants about taking the title. The spinning DDT sets up Rocky's high cross body (WAY across the ring) for the pin in a hurry.

Sultan comes in and is dispatched just as fast. The legends get taken down as well, allowing Rocky to escape. Tony Atlas, Rocky's dad's former Tag Team Championship partner is in the crowd and joins Rocky on the ramp.

Heavy Metal/Pentagon/Pierroth vs. Latin Lover/Hector Garza/Octagon

This was during the WWF's attempt at topping the Cruiserweight division, despite these guys not being quite as good as Mysterio and Guerrero. Garza and Metal, the two of the three not in masks, get things going as Lawler promises to beat Paul E. Dangerously in a debate later tonight. That goes nowhere so it's off to Pierroth and Lover, with Pierroth taking over with a clothesline.

Lover comes back with a spinning high cross body and Pierroth is nice enough to stand there so it can connect. Off to Octagon vs. Pentagon (the Jr. of which is currently in Lucha Underground), who look almost identical with black attire and colored masks. Pentagon gets armdragged down and it's back to Garza vs. Metal. Metal misses a charge to the corner and falls outside but is still able to avoid a charging Garza. We cut to the crowd where a big, muscular woman is sitting in the crowd. Her name hasn't been given yet but I'm sure you know who she is. Mongolia or something like that. Whoever she is, security gets rid of her as we take a break from the match going on in the background.

Back with the fans LOUDLY calling the match boring. Metal has his foot on Garza's back before it's off to Pierroth (I believe part of the heel team) as we go to a split screen of Chyna challenging Bret last week. Apparently Chyna has been arrested. For sitting in a crowd? Now we go to a new split screen for an interview with Brian Pillman who is back from another injury.

Lover dives off the top onto Pierroth, Metal dives onto both of them, and Octagon dives onto that big pile. None of this is acknowledged by the announcers until Garza does his big corkscrew plancha onto the five other guys. As we look at a double feature, Metal rolls up Lover for the pin.

Rating: C-. I assure you, the match was just as disjointed and messy on the show than it sounded here. It was clear that this was just meant as background noise for the storylines going on, which to be fair were more interesting than what we were seeing here. At the end of the day, there's no reason to care about any of these guys and that played a huge role in the division never going anywhere.

Wrestlemania ad.

Roy Raymond vs. Ahmed Johnson

Johnson has been dealing with the Nation and needs partners to face them in a Chicago street fight. The good sized Raymond tries to get in some cheap shots and actually suplexes Johnson down as the Nation comes out to watch. Johnson doesn't care for the white rappers though and beats up Raymond instead, setting up an ax kick and the Pearl River Plunge to end the jobber, all with the Nation theme song playing.

Faarooq goes on a rant about his father leaving him when he was a kid and calling Johnson an Uncle Tom. Johnson isn't scared of the Nation because he has the two baddest men he can find. The entire Nation can come at him because Johnson has the city of Chicago in his corner. Here are the Legion of Doom to join Ahmed and we have a street fight for Wrestlemania.

You would think that would end the segment but JR gets in the ring to interview the new team. Hawk says the game is ready and after Wrestlemania, the Nation is going to look like a pile of raw...sweat socks? Animal asks if the Nation can hear the power of the fans, triggering a big LOD chant. Johnson says all of the Nation look white now, even the black boys. Because they're scared you see.

New Blackjacks vs. Owen Hart/British Bulldog

Non-title again. Owen cuts off new European Champion the British Bulldog

but swears he isn't jealous. Before the match, Windham says they would win the titles if they were on the line here and Bradshaw accuses Owen of living off Bulldog. He also says Owen has purdy lips and the brawl is on. Owen posts Bradshaw on the floor as the cameras are still trying to master this new set. Bulldog clotheslines Windham outside and we settle down to Bradshaw hammering on Bulldog in the corner.

A split screen gives us Vader and Mankind, who will be challenging for the titles at Wrestlemania, saying the champs aren't good enough or strong enough. Bradshaw fights back against Bulldog and knocks Owen off the apron. This split screen makes it really hard to keep track of the match. Back to a full screen with Owen backdropping Bradshaw but taking a low blow as JR plugs the hotline. They head outside with Owen going into the barricade before a suplex gets two back inside.

We take a break and come back with Windham breaking out of a sleeper with a jawbreaker as the fans again think this is boring. Owen tries to make a save as Bret vs. Sid in a cage is officially announced for next week. We're still not done with the storylines during the match as Taz pops up on the split screen and warns Lawler not to keep making jokes about him. Bulldog shoves Bradshaw off the top and the hot tag brings in Owen. Spinwheel kicks drop both Blackjacks and everything breaks down with Owen putting Windham in the Sharpshooter, only to have Bulldog shove the referee for the DQ.

Rating: D. Wrestling wasn't exactly this show's strong suit if you haven't gotten that yet. The ending is much more about building up the friction between the champs than anything else, which was supposed to lead to them dropping the titles at Wrestlemania. There wasn't much to see here though and the split screens are getting old in a hurry. The Blackjacks went a total of nowhere off this push.

The announcers aren't sure why the Blackjacks win, even though Bulldog clearly shoved the referee.

Preview of the Slammys, which used to be a separate show and far more memorable, as well as right before Wrestlemania.

As soon as the match is over, here are Taz and Bill Alfonso to get in

Lawler's face. Jerry goes right after him but Sabu dives off the top and right through a table. It's not clear who he was trying to hit but Lawler seems to approve. Sandman and Tommy Dreamer get Sabu out of there.

Leif Cassidy vs. Miguel Perez

Cassidy is of course Al Snow. Lawler is ranting about Heyman and ECW but switches gears to insult Puerto Rico. We see a clip of Perez debuting a few weeks back in the Manhattan Center and he's as generic as you can imagine. Perez hiptosses Cassidy over and hits some dropkicks as the crowd is really not interested.

With the match boring everyone to tears, we jump to another split screen with Paul Heyman shouting about wanting to fight Lawler. The other half of the screen is now on Lawler as we can't see any of the match. For once I can't say I blame them. Back to the ring with Cassidy working on Perez in the corner but missing a moonsault. You can see the empty seats opposite the camera and there are more emptying as the match goes on. Perez grabs a quick rolling cradle for the pin.

Rating: D. It's clear that they had nothing better to do here than show the Heyman vs. Lawler stuff. Perez is just another (very hairy) guy who was brought in to fill in a spot on the roster. The company's energy is starting to build up but there's still this kind of stuff to get through at times.

Sid shouts that he doesn't react but reacts reaction. He goes on about the tag match tonight and is ready for the cage match next week. Yeah there's a major title match six days before Wrestlemania in case you didn't realize this was a very different time.

Hour #2 begins.

Jim Ross brings out newcomer Ken Shamrock of UFC fame, even though UFC meant almost nothing at this point. Shamrock is going to be the special referee in the submission match at Wrestlemania because he's a legitimate submission expert. He sucks up to the fans a bit and thanks Vince for letting him appear at Wrestlemania. Shamrock's only concern is being a fair referee which is all he ever asks in his own fights.

Cue Austin on the screen, threatening to stomp a mudhole in Shamrock if he has to keep running his mouth. Austin isn't happy with Bret getting a title shot six days before Wrestlemania, but he wouldn't mind the submission match being for the title. Shamrock doesn't have his gear tonight but he isn't going anywhere if Austin would like to come try him out. Instead it's Bret to a pretty strong but not universal ovation. Shamrock was very shaky on the mic here but to be fair he was brand new at this.

Bret says it's nice of the WWF to let him finally say something all these weeks after losing the WWF World Title. He's seen signs with people saying that Bret is crying again, but he's had it up to here with the lack of justice but he accepts the WWF's apology by giving him a title match next Monday night inside a steel cage. Sid is good, but next week Bret is going to become a five time champion. That means Austin is the lucky one because he's going to be receiving a title shot at Wrestlemania.

In something that really affirms Bret's change of attitude, he flat out says he's the best submission wrestler in the company with Shamrock standing about five feet away from him. Everyone in the company has screwed him over (oh you have no idea) but he has no issues with Shamrock, unless he tries to screw him over at Wrestlemania. Shamrock says he'll be a fair referee and raise the winner's hand. This brings out Austin to flip both guys off and leave. I love how simple that was from Austin. Why give a big speech when you can just do something quick and leave?

This was an outstanding segment and the story of the Attitude Era in a nutshell: Bret, representing tradition and respect, can't handle it when this in your face new generation is starting to pass him by. The war with Austin carried the company through 1997 and launched Austin into superstardom, but a lot of people overlook how good Bret was in this role. Most people don't give him credit for how good he was on interviews, but he was able to keep it simple here and nail it with promos like this one. The character is great, the matches were some of the best ever, and the story was perfect.

Here's Honky Tonk Man as he's trying to find his new protege. He isn't wasting his talents on a crowd like this and mispronouncing the name of the town, which is more old school, basic heel work that is almost guaranteed to work.

Billy Gunn vs. Aldo Montoya

Honky Tonk Man joins commentary and Montoya is Justin Credible under a mask. How amazing is it that Billy is still having pay per view matches eighteen years later? It's one of those things that just doesn't make sense that you would never imagine at this point. Gunn ties Montoya in the Tree of Woe and stomps away before nailing a running clothesline. An enziguri puts Gunn down and JR reads house show ads to ignore another boring match. Gunn grabs a quick DDT and drops a top rope legdrop for the pin as Sunny is shown in a robe, promising undercover work on Shotgun Saturday Night.

Mankind talks about his mommy and hits himself in the head. The Undertaker thinks he knows him but he's about to know him even better. He goes on to talk about taking a bite out of a bad apple but we cut to a commercial.

Goldust vs. Tim McNeedy

HHH and Chyna are on the stage to distract Goldust but it really doesn't work. Goldust hits a running clothesline, sends McNeedy into the corner and nails the Curtin Call for the fast pin.

HHH and Chyna come to the ring but Marlena comes out and jumps on Chyna's back to a really big reaction. Referees break it up but Chyna shoves them all away with ease and throws one onto the rest.

It's time for the debate between Lawler and Dangerously with Ross moderating. Jerry goes first and asks why ECW exists. This is the biggest exposure they've ever had because they're a bunch of misfits and thugs, who happen to be surrounding the ring. Dangerously is comically leaning over the podium as Lawler rips on ECW's obsession with violence as the Eliminators, Taz and the Dudleys look on.

Jerry calls the ECW fans idiots with Honky Tonk Man agreeing. Lawler says ECW couldn't get a crowd in a big arena in Philadelphia, even though he gets the name of the big arena wrong. Dangerously goes on one of his patented rants about how ECW is about busting themselves to earn the fans' respect and give them their money's worth. Cue Sandman, Dreamer and Beulah with Sandman saying he's ready to cane Lawler right now.

Lawler says there are four million people watching this but Dangerously is bragging about getting 1100 people. "You can get 1100 people to watch paint dry." Unless you're TNA in New York City more than once a week right? They start shouting at each other with Dangerously saying he's proud of hardcore, so Lawler implies Paul is gay.

Dreamer is ready to fight and the rest of the ECW guys get in the ring. Jerry calls out his friends....and no one shows up. Lawler is allowed to leave as this segment comes to a strange close. I'm really not sure who I'm supposed to cheer for here as Lawler was in full on heel mode here but he was defending the WWF. This was much more about setting up Lawler actually appearing in the ECW Arena a few months later and then fighting Dreamer on pay per view in August. It was WAY different than anything else they were doing at the time and pretty entertaining but this would be like running an angle with ROH back in 2005.

Mankind/Vader vs. Undertaker/Sycho Sid

Sid has to go it alone before Undertaker comes to the ring. After nearly a minute of double teaming, Undertaker comes out to no music and cleans house, hitting a chokeslam on Vader. Of note here, they made sure to cut the camera angle to a lower shot so you couldn't see Undertaker not getting him that high off the ground. Little things like that are what keeps starts looking special instead of making everything as realistic as possible and causing people to look human.

Vader and Sid officially get going with Vader in control off a series of headbutts and a big clothesline. A splash gets two on the champ and we hit the chinlock. It's a LONG one too with Vader holding onto Sid for over two minutes and goes into a break. Back with Sid suplexing Vader but Undertaker is fighting Mankind on the floor instead of taking the tag.

Mankind comes in and drops an elbow but Sid crawls over and makes the tag a few seconds later. Well that missed tag was pretty worthless. A chokeslam gets two on Mankind as Sid and Vader fight on the floor. Sid hits his partner by mistake and the champ gets chokeslammed, setting up a modified Taker Dive, only to have Sid lay Undertaker out with a powerbomb, giving Vader the pin.

Rating: D. The chinlock just killed this match and it never had the chance to recover. Not that it mattered though as this was much more about angle advancement than the match itself. Undertaker was starting to get ticked off near the end there and angry Taker breaking stuff is all kinds of fun. Also, I had forgotten the Taker Dive had debuted at least six months before Ground Zero.

Sid breaks up a post match Vader Bomb and Undertaker beats up Vader for a bit.

Bret promises to win the title to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This is a case where the good is REALLY good but the bad is horrible. It was clear that they had no interest in the midcard at this point other than maybe HHH vs. Goldust, because other than the main event and Austin vs. Hart, almost none of the wrestling stuff was worth a thing. Lawler vs. ECW was more about ECW than anything else, but it was really cool stuff to see back in the day. The core is here though and once they fill in the details, this company is going to blow Nitro out of the water.

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