

Monday Night Raw – March 17, 1997: Bret Snaps

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 17, 1997

Location: War Memorial, Syracuse, New York

Attendance: 4,737

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon

Here's where everything changes for good and it blew the doors off the place. This is the go home show for Wrestlemania XIII and Bret Hart is challenging Sid for the World Title inside a steel cage. Hart has been getting screwed over and over again around this time, but this is his chance to get things back to normal. Let's get to it.

Legion of Doom vs. Savio Vega/Crush

Savio and Crush are here without Faarooq. It's a brawl on the floor to start with Hawk punching Savio in the jaw. Animal and Crush get inside as the fans are entirely behind the LOD, which is completely different from the NOD. All four get inside as we go to a split screen with Ahmed Johnson (in a bright purple jacket with a huge A J on the chest). The Nation bails to the floor for a breather and we go to a new split screen of Faarooq speaking Ebonics (his word) to communicate with Johnson.

Animal puts Vega in a chinlock as the third split screen of the match shows a clip from last night at Madison Square Garden (which I believe is the last house show recorded from that or any venue) of the Nation beating up Johnson with a 2x4. Crush comes in and no sells a Hawk clothesline but gets taken down by a dropkick and slam. We take a break and come back with Savio hitting his running spinwheel kick in the corner for no cover on Hawk.

Split screen #4 shows no Faarooq but we go to a full screen (thankfully with a monitor showing the match) to see Faarooq jump Johnson with a nightstick. Animal comes in off the hot tag and hits a double clothesline as everything breaks down. Crush gets loaded up for the Doomsday Device

but Faarooq comes in with the nightstick for the DQ.

Rating: D. These split screens have to go. They're causing the matches to be rushed because the show is trying to fit in too much stuff onto a show that can't handle it yet. It didn't help that it was a bad match with a lame ending, but I would have liked to be able to see the match. They easily could have either showed us the clip from last night before the match or simply told us about it. Faarooq attacking Johnson could have gone before the bell too. I like that they're giving the stories some time, but they shouldn't be sharing time with the match. It's too rushed.

Johnson runs in with the 2x4 for the save. The yet to be named (and still fat) D'Lo Brown takes the Doomsday Device.

We look at the Slammy nominations for Freedom of Speech: Jerry Lawler, Paul Heyman, Steve Austin, Howard Stern (never appeared in WWF) and Faarooq. Guess who won.

There are rumors that the title won't be on the line in the main event. Gorilla Monsoon is en route to the arena to make a decision, as is Shawn Michaels for less decision making.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Flash Funk

Chyna is officially named for the first time here. It takes forever to get her out of the ring, even when Flash threatens to hit her. Vince talks about HHH being more arrogant lately as Funk armdrags him down a few times and scores with a dropkick to send HHH to the floor. Back in and the pre-Game counters a reverse leapfrog into an electric chair drop to take over.

The Flair knee drop (complete with the camera cut so we can't see it hit mat instead of head) has Funk in trouble but he comes back with a slam and top rope legdrop for two, with Chyna pulling him off the cover. A German suplex of all things gets two for HHH but he dives into a weak superkick for another two. Funk goes up top but Chyna interferes again (right in front of the referee), allowing HHH to hit the Pedigree for the pin.

Rating: D. This was basically a nearly six minute commercial for Chyna and establishing that she can be big and intimidating. It was a good pairing and the two had success, but they were rough around the edges to start. Nothing match of course but that's what you have to expect from most squashes.

Shawn Michaels arrives.

We see a press conference where the Governor of New Jersey lifted a tax, allowing the WWF to come back. Of all people, they sent Undertaker to this in full gear. It's quite the visual if nothing else.

Mini Vader/Mini Mankind vs. Mini Goldust/Mascarita Sagrada

This was a thing that happened a lot around this time and I still don't get it. The problem with this batch though is other than Sagrada, they're all about the same size as Rey Mysterio, which just makes them look like a bunch of 13 year olds in Halloween costumes. Goldust and Vader get things going with Vader punching him in the face to counter the deep breaths. Some armdrags put Vader outside so it's off to Mankind for a running clothesline.

Sagrada comes in to actually do something exciting with his insanely fast flips and wristdrags. Mankind is sent to the floor but Vader sneaks in with a big running clothesline to the back of the head. It seems like this is under lucha libre rules, meaning going to the floor counts as a tag. Everyone winds up outside with Goldust hitting a cannonball off the apron to take Vader down, leaving Sagrada to victory roll Mankind for the pin. This was what it was.

Sagrada shoves Vader off the stage and hits a big (work with me here) cross body to take him down.

Gorilla Monsoon announces that the cage match will indeed be for the title. When was this ever in doubt?

Here's Bret with something to say. He immediately gets into heel mode, saying he won the Royal Rumble and Final Four and deserves some respect. The new motto around here seems to be you scratch my back and I'll stab

yours. That's the kind of thing the old Bret would never say. After he wins the title tonight, which of course he will, he'll give Undertaker a shot and Undertaker can get in line with everyone else. Bret goes on about how he's going to hurt Austin on Sunday and how he can't wait for Shamrock to hear Austin say he quits. Just like last week, Bret is knocking this out of the park.

Mike Bell vs. The Sultan

Rocky is on commentary as Sultan piledrives, splashes and clutches Bell to win in less than a minute.

Sultan gets in Maivia's face post match but Tony Atlas is here again to hold Rocky back. I'm still not sure why we're supposed to be interested in Atlas being out there all the time.

Hour #2 begins.

Here's Shawn for a chat and he's back in full face mode. He immediately says he's found his smile again because he left it in San Antonio but now he's bringing it wherever he goes. A lot of fans sent him thank you cards and he thanks them for their patience because he's a hard man to deal with. Vince asks about the knee injury and Shawn brings up President Clinton injuring his knee recently (well 18 years ago but you get the idea). He's getting the knee looked at soon and should be back in a few months. One way or another, his clothes are coming off.

However, he has a bone to pick with Vince. He's been sitting at home and knows that Wrestlemania is right around the corner. For some reason, his phone just hasn't rung and there's just no way to have a Wrestlemania without Shawn Michaels. He can walk well enough to get to Wrestlemania and do some commentary on the main event. While he's at it, he might as well show up at the Slammys this Friday.

Vader vs. British Bulldog

Owen, Mankind and Bearer are at ringside. Vader shoves him around a few times and then pounds the Bulldog down in the corner with ease. Back up and Smith's shoulders finally drop Vader and he actually hits the delayed

vertical suplex. That's freaking insane when you think about it. We take a break and come back with Vader's middle rope splash getting two. Bulldog avoids a sitdown splash but his old crucifix is countered into a kind of Samoan drop.

Yet another splash gets two for Vader and the middle rope standing splash sends Bulldog flying across the ring. He's still able to slam a diving Vader though, which is far more common of a spot than I thought it was. Bulldog picks him up, walks him around, and then slams him down in another scary display of strength. The powerslam is loaded up but Mankind gets involved for the DQ.

Rating: C. Decent power match here with Bulldog's offense looking very impressive. I mean, he got Vader up for the delayed vertical suplex. That's cool looking no matter how you look at it. I get why they went with that ending too as they didn't want a champion losing going into a title defense. They need to watch these old shows to get some ideas.

Slammy ad.

Billy Gunn vs. Aaron Ferguson

Shamrock is on commentary and says Billy needs to pay attention to his opponent, because you never know what might happen. Gunn takes him down for a bad looking knee bar and Shamrock doesn't sound impressed. The worst cross armbar I've ever seen makes Ferguson give up.

Gunn gets in Shamrock's face post match and Ken gets in the ring. Shamrock gets in and takes him down into a Fujiwara armbar to make Gunn tap, which I believe is the first time that had ever been done in this company. The ankle lock makes it happen for the second time and Gunn tries to go get a chair but bails anyway.

We go to Austin who says that didn't impress him because Gunn just finished a match. All Shamrock did was have some street fights that someone filmed, which means he's an overrated piece of trash. One day he'll beat Shamrock up and punch his lights out. Vince asks why he's here tonight and Austin says he shows up anywhere there's a ring. He's going to win the title on Sunday and beat up Bret Hart because Hart can't lace

his boots. Vince sounds terrified and it's with good reasons. You could see that look in Austin's eyes here and he's on a roll, clearly ready to go to the top of the company.

Sid tells Austin to stay out of his business because he rules the world.

The cage is being set up so the announcers preview the main event.

WWF World Title: Sycho Sid vs. Bret Hart

In a cage with old school escape only rules and Bret challenging. He still high fives fans on the way to the ring because the heel character is there but he hasn't fully turned yet. Sid fists bumps fans too though so maybe Bret is already a full on heel. Hart is aggressive to start and stomps Sid down in the corner. That's fine with Sid who hits his awkward right hands to the head, only to be snapmared down.

An early escape attempt causes Bret to get crotched on the ropes and Sid takes over. Bret is sent spine first into the cage three times in a row but he's still able to catch Sid going over the top. They get back onto the mat with Sid pulling him down by the hair and going for the door but Austin comes out to keep the door closed. After a break, Bret is working on the champ's back, only to have Sid hit a powerbomb out of nowhere.

Sid climbs up but Austin climbs as well and punches Sid back down into the cage. The war over Colonel Park's contract continues! If you don't get that reference, be glad you weren't watching WCW back then. Bret climbs up as well and actually helps Austin beat up Sid instead of, you know, walking out the door with no one else around.

This brings out Undertaker to help Sid because he wants him to retain the title to ensure his title shot on Sunday. All four are on the corner of the cage until Austin and Undertaker fall down and Bret superplexes Sid. Austin chairs Undertaker as both guys in the match go to leave. Undertaker slams the door on Bret's head and Sid climbs out to retain.

Rating: C. The match was nothing special but man alive do I love smart stories. Everyone here was doing exactly what they should have been doing and it made perfect sense. That shot of them all fighting on the cage was

awesome and it's so cool to see the whole thing playing out because they all want the title. Not because some evil boss told them what to do or some power struggle, but because they want to be World Heavyweight Champion.

After a break, Vince is in the ring with half of the cage down to talk to Bret. Hart shoves him down and goes into one of the greatest tirades since Savage split up the Mega Powers, dropping every swear word that he can think of about how everyone is against him and Vince keeps turning a blind eye to him getting screwed. Austin gets on the screen to call Bret a crying loser who couldn't get the job done.

This brings out Sid, Undertaker and Austin with the big men pairing off for a brawl in the ring while Austin hammers on Bret outside. Bret fights back and nails Pat Patterson as Sid and Undertaker try to chokeslam each other. Undertaker starts getting the better of it as Shawn slowly walks down the ramp as Bret and Austin keep fighting. Michaels looks at both of them and gets in the ring with a chair as Sid and Undertaker fight to the floor to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. The show still wasn't great this week with some bad to watchable wrestling but the historical significance of the angles was great. Bret turning heel was exactly what the main event needed and the big payoff this Sunday was exactly what the company needed and set up the next six months that would get them back in the fight. They were about to hit an incredible stretch and Bret vs. Austin would be at the top of the card. Not a great show this week but a very, very important one.

Here's Wrestlemania if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/03/22/wrestlemania-count-up-wrestlemania-xiii-austins-ascension/>

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