

Monday Night Raw – March 31, 1997: Breaking Ground On A New Foundation

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 31, 1997

Location: Civic Center, Peoria, Illinois

Attendance: 4,282

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon

We're knocking on the door of the story of the year and that's the best thing that can happen to the WWF. Bret has turned his back on the American fans and doesn't care what they think anymore due to what he perceives as a lack of respect. Steve Austin is back tonight and you know his response is going to be interesting. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Bret's awesome speech last week where he ran down all things American and destroyed Shawn's knee again.

The announcers preview the show.

European Title: Owen Hart vs. British Bulldog

Bulldog is defending after having beaten Owen to become the first champion back in February. They're also Tag Team Champions but jealousy is tearing them apart. That's an interesting point as Owen was paranoid about being in Bret's shadow back in 1994 and is the same about Bulldog here. It's so nice to see character continuity like that as opposed to today where motivation and characteristics change weekly.

Owen dropkicks him through the ropes during Bulldog's entrance and the fight starts early. They get inside for the bell with Owen getting a very fast two off a spinning cross body. Bulldog's comeback is quickly stopped by a low blow and we hit the chinlock. Owen is being far more aggressive than usual here as he rips at Bulldog's face. A quick backslide gets two for Davey but he eats a dropkick to put him back down. Owen hits a

piledriver and we take a break before the cover.

Back with Hart driving shoulders into the ribs before we hit another chinlock. The Bulldog blocks a dropkick but gets caught by an enziguri to put him right back down. Total dominance by Owen so far. He loads up a superplex, gets knocked back but moonsaults to land on his feet and knocks Bulldog off the top for a cool sequence.

They head outside with Bulldog dropping him onto the barricade to finally gain control. A catapult gets two for the champ and they head outside with Bulldog suplexing him onto the ramp. Back in and a big gorilla press gets two as Bulldog's power is rolling. There goes the referee and Owen goes for a chair. Bulldog kicks it out of his hand and goes for it himself but Bret comes in and takes Bulldog down as the match is a no contest.

Rating: B. This was the polar opposite of their clinic in Berlin, which is a sign that they're both incredibly talented. The ending is far more about setting up stuff for the future and we were lucky enough to get in a good match at the same time. It was interesting to see Owen completely dominate about 75% of the match though as Bulldog was getting squashed until they went outside. Again, that makes sense as Owen is a more polished wrestler and Bulldog got into a brawling style on occasion.

Bret shouts at both guys and holds them apart, saying this can't happen. He gets on the mic and says this is what the people want. It should be about family values and Bret ignores the USA chants. These people have turned this family into a bunch of haters. Remember the match at Wembley Stadium? Or all those times when Bret took care of Owen as a kid? They were the only two brothers who excelled in wrestling and the Americans have turned them against each other. Bret needs both of them and Owen is in tears. The three hug and we've got the angle of the summer. Lawler is in tears over these events.

El Mosco vs. Super Nova

Sunny is on commentary as this dead trend continues. Mosco hits a quick enziguri as Sunny is far better at reading house show ads than JR. A belly to belly gets two for Nova but Mosco nails a spinwheel kick for no

cover. Sunny calls JR short and fat as Nova hits a sunset bomb out of the corner for two more. He follows it up with a running flip dive through the ropes to crash onto Nova while Sunny is sitting on the commentators' laps. Back in and Mosco hits a sloppy slingshot moonsault for the pin.

Rating: D. Sunny was clearly the star here and I have no idea why they were wasting her talents on this mess. It was either this or the minis and that's really not something she should be lowering herself to do. Nothing to see here though as this was a very far cry from even the lowest levels of WCW cruiserweights.

Here's the Legion of Doom for a chat. First of all though, Animal has to yell at the Harts for running down the American fans. He talks about only remembering the winners, which is what they're going to be in just a few weeks. Hawk doesn't have much to add and that's about it.

Jesse Jammes vs. Jerry Fox

Honky Tonk Man is here to scout again. Jammes (yes that's how it's spelled) comes out with a kid who is here for reasons not quite clear. Fox (who looks like a fat Stevie Richards) is run over to start and atomic dropped out to the floor. A pumphandle slam is good for the pin for Jammes in a total squash.

Honky offers Jammes the protege spot but Jesse breaks the guitar instead. For some reason this took nearly five minutes. This wasn't the most interesting story in the world.

Savio Vega/Crush vs. Rod Bell/Adam O'Brien

O'Brien is better known as Adam Pearce and he would be about 19 here. Crush stomps on Bell to start as Savio knocks Adam to the floor. Bell fights back with right hands as we get a Shawn Michaels phone interview. The comeback goes about as well as you would expect and Shawn talks about being more banged up than he was coming into last week. He doesn't want to talk about the injury though and hangs up, promising to confront Bret next week. Crush tilt-a-whirl backbreakers Bell, setting up a Demolition Decapitator for the pin.

Rating: D. Total squash here that was more about the phone call than anything else. I really don't know what else you want to hear about this match so....how about that phone call? Yeah how about it, because there really isn't much else to talk about it either. They really need to work on their midcard.

Video on Ken Shamrock, complete with UFC footage.

Hour #2 begins.

Here's Paul Bearer, complete with a casket, to say he wants Undertaker back. After a bit of begging, the lights go out and here's the champ. He doesn't immediately get in the ring but rather goes around to lock the casket just in case. Undertaker says he can forgive Bearer and does in fact owe Bearer something. He kisses the title and hands it to Bearer before punching him in the jaw. They head to the ramp but Mankind comes out from under the ring with a fireball to burn Undertaker. Mankind and Bearer hug but Sid runs out to chase them off. Undertaker is so blind that he wanders into the crowd and stumbles away.

After a break, Sid challenges Mankind for some point in the future.

HHH vs. Goldust

Chyna isn't allowed at ringside. Goldust is all over him to start and tosses HHH hard into the corner. Another hard whip sends him over the top and out to the floor before a head knocker has HHH reeling even more. Goldust misses a cross body and falls to the floor and HHH follows him out with a baseball slide. Back in and Lawler talks about how awesome Canada is. Ross suggests Lawler move to Canada, so Jerry tells him to join a cult. That's quite the exchange.

Anyway, HHH stays on Goldust with a snap suplex and knee drop for two. We hit the chinlock for a good while before a DDT plants Goldust for another near fall. Back to the floor with HHH hitting a middle rope ax handle as Chyna shots up on stage. We take a break and come back with Goldust hammering away, drawing Chyna closer to ringside. Screw stipulations I guess. The Curtain Call connects but Chyna comes in for the DQ.

Rating: D+. I never liked this feud and I don't know why it went on so long. Their pay per view matches bored me and the TV stuff hasn't been much better. They're just not interesting and the chemistry is only decent. It doesn't help that the story is far more about Chyna getting over than anything else, which makes the matches more of a way of killing time than anything else.

Chyna knocks Goldust down and referees come in to break it up. Pat Patterson gets in a big fight with HHH due to Chyna attacking him recently as Goldust wants to fight Chyna.

We look at the Hart Family reunion, with a side of Smith of course, from earlier tonight.

Here's Steve Austin with something to say. He makes it clear that he never quit at Wrestlemania and it was a steel barricade that busted him open. The Sharpshooter was on, but it was Austin's own blood that made him pass out. Bret is the biggest piece of trash he's ever seen and Austin isn't changing for anyone. It doesn't matter if he's against a good guy or a bad guy because he's the King of the Ring and is out here to beat up whoever he's in there against. Bret pops up on screen and says Austin knows what happened at Wrestlemania, and it's going to be even worse the next time they're in the ring.

Bret vs. Sid is announced for In Your House.

Intercontinental Title: Bret Hart vs. Rocky Maivia

My goodness what a different time this was. The difference here is that Bret taking the title wouldn't have been a shock. Yeah Bret is the heavy favorite here, but in today's product, there would be no chance of him winning the title because it's beneath him. Back in this era, any title was worth winning no matter who you were. That's something I really would love to see come back.

Rocky takes him into the corner to start but Bret bails to the floor before any punches are thrown. Back in and we see Tony Atlas sitting in the front row. Bret easily takes Rocky down but the champ scores with a cross body for two. Maivia cranks on a hammerlock and drives some elbows

into the arm as they're still in second gear. Back up and Bret just stomps Rocky down to take over before choking in the corner. Hart is even nailing the heel actions in the ring to the letter.

We take a break and come back with Bret still in control but getting small packaged for two. Bret misses the middle rope elbow and Rocky starts his comeback with a fisherman's suplex getting a near fall. The high cross body connects but Bret rolls through for a sloppy two count. Bret has had enough of this rookie and puts him in the Figure Four around the post for the DQ.

Rating: C. This was fine but it was much more a historical note than anything else. Obviously Rock was nothing compared to what he would become later on and the match doesn't really mean anything as a result. As I mentioned, notice how Bret was such a different character both in the ring and on the microphone around this time. He wasn't putting in a ton of effort (intentionally) and seemed more bored fighting someone like Maivia than anything else. That's a very good sign and makes things far more interesting.

Austin comes out for the save but Owen and Bulldog come in to beat him down. The Legion of Doom makes the save to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This was an easier show to sit through as they kept the midcard matches moving instead of letting them drag down the awesome main event stuff. The Hart Foundation is coming and the war they'll wage is already looking like the most interesting story since....oh I'd say Flair vs. Savage back in 1992. Better show here but they still need to tighten up a few things.

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