

Thunder- November 18, 1999: Benoit Does It Again

Thunder

Date: November 18, 1999

Location: Allen County War Memorial, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Attendance: 3,283

Commentators: Scott Hudson, Larry Zbyszko

We're three days away from Mayhem and the interesting thing this week is can they keep up the wrestling on this show. Thunder has definitely become the wrestling show, with matches getting more time than Nitro gets most of the time, but with less star power and more bad interference. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Jerry Flynn vs. Bam Bam Bigelow

Hardcore so Bigelow brings out some weapons but Flynn takes him away and nails Bigelow with a trashcan. Barbarian is out here with Flynn, despite Jerry beating him in an impromptu boiler room brawl Monday. Norman Smiley comes out but Hart sends Knobbs and Barbarian after him. Without noticing what's going on outside, Bigelow takes Flynn down with a clothesline. Thankfully he didn't ruin the mullet.

Time for the cookie sheet shots followed by the can lids crashing around Flynn's head like cymbals. The flying headbutt misses though and Jerry hits something like a Van Daminator with the trashcan. Barbarian comes in like a schnook and gets beaten down, followed by a chair to Flynn to give Bigelow the three count.

Rating: D. There was nothing to this one other than Hart and Smiley shouting at each other a lot. That was the most entertaining part of the match, which is likely due to the idea of taking two entertaining guys and letting them entertain. This is different than Flynn who is there because he knows karate and Bigelow, who could be entertaining but not in

a mess like this.

Disco can't get anyone to give him action on a bet for a match tonight.

Bagwell is looking for Chris Benoit.

Disco Inferno vs. Prince Iaukea

Non-title and Iaukea has new gear. Not interesting gear of course but it's new with some trunks and boots. Disco goes to the eyes to start but Iaukea smacks him in the back of the head. I'll give WCW 1999 this much: their heels had great hair. After begging off, Disco sends him into the corner and takes over with all of his usual stuff. A clothesline and middle rope elbow get two each on the Prince.

Iaukea's sunset flip doesn't work and Disco stays on him with elbows and chokes, followed by a chinlock to keep the fans bored. Iaukea comes back with an even less interesting offense (the high spot is a dropkick) until Disco drops him with a DDT. Thankfully for a change, we get silly as a messenger brings Disco a package. Inside is....a fish? Oh I get it: sleep with the fishes. The distraction lets Iaukea grab a rollup for the pin.

Rating: F. Is it bad that I want to see where the fish story is going? I know it's the mafia gambling stuff but it's more entertaining than most other stuff going on with this promotion. What isn't interesting however is the really dull wrestling in this match as neither guy knows how to keep an audience. Disco is nothing great but at least he has something unique with the dancing. Iaukea....what in the world do they see in him to keep him on the payroll?

Post match, Disco hits Iaukea with the fish. Remember that he has a title defense three days from now.

Evan Karagias says he's going to beat Savage for the love of his woman.

Van Hammer asks Curt Hennig to get counted out tonight and a fight breaks out. This story is one of the worst in the company and that covers a lot of ground.

Evan Karagias vs. The Maestro

The bubbles in Maestro's entrance are always odd to see. Maestro grabs a quick headlock to start and nails a shoulder. Evan comes back with a cross body but rolls outside to kiss Madusa. The delay works for a bit but Maestro comes back by raising a boot in the corner. Some forearms and a belly to back suplex get two on Evan as this is just a step ahead of the previous match.

More uppercuts set up a German suplex but Evan flips over the back and gets two of his own off a snap suplex. Madusa has to play cheerleader despite looking about 20 years older than she really is here. A spinebuster puts Evan down but Madusa gets on the apron and kisses Maestro. Evan kicks him down and checks on Madusa (who didn't seem to mind), allowing Maestro to roll him up for the pin.

Rating: D-. Boring wrestling, uninteresting characters, Madusa being a focus for reasons not exactly clear and the #1 contender to the Cruiserweight Title losing about ten minutes after the champion lost. The wrestling on this show isn't great, but the booking continues to be the real problem dragging this down. I guess they're setting it up that Evan is distracted by Madusa, but when the champion loses earlier in the night and Evan has never really done anything, the story is a huge mess.

The Revolution talks about Torrie being a Barbie doll. Shane wants to see Asya rip her apart, sending Saturn into a rant about taking the limbs off a Barbie. Shane: "Perry, IT WAS A FIGURE OF SPEECH!" Saturn: "My point exactly!"

Disco is panicking on the phone with Tony Marinara.

Benoit heard that Bagwell is looking for him. He leaves a few seconds before Bagwell shows up.

Nitro recap video, complete with Sid's half the brain line.

La Parka and Kaz Hayashi have another overdubbed interview with Hayashi sounding like he's from rural Georgia. I think these predated Kaientai's INDEED promos but they're around the same time.

Buff and Benoit finally get together with Bagwell asking Benoit not to

use the suplexes or the Crossface on the bad neck. Benoit says Buff knew what he was getting into and they brawl.

Kaz Hayashi/La Parka vs. El Dandy/Silver King

Kaz has his own chair and even the announcers have to mention the dubbed voices. Dandy gets flipped around while trying to backslide Kaz so it's quickly off to La Parka vs. King. La Parka does his dance so King dropkicks him in the face and everything quickly breaks down. King and Dandy are headscissored to the floor and the fans are actually behind Kaz and Parka here. Dandy comes in and tries a right hand but hits his partner by mistake. After the calamity calms down, Kaz gets whipped into a gutbuster as we settle into a more standard formula.

A double slam gets two on Kaz but Dandy lets him walk over for the tag to La Parka. Things speed up with Silver coming in to help Dandy as the heels take over again. La Parka is sent to the floor so Kaz comes in, only to get tripped down a few seconds later. The heels screw up with King hitting Dandy, allowing Kaz to tag La Parka again. Everything breaks down with La Parka hitting a missile dropkick and Kaz adding a high cross body to King. La Parka's kind of Whisper in the Wind is enough to pin King.

Rating: C-. This got messy in the middle but I like the idea of La Parka and Kaz being these guys who can barely speak English but suddenly have the dubbed voices. I'm fine with these decent nothing matches on Thunder though, as they're clean enough to not make my head hurt and long enough to quality as a match instead of an angle. It doesn't mean anything after the match ends but at least it was decent while it lasted.

La Parka chairs King post match.

Bagwell and Hennig get in a fight over something we don't hear.

Curt Hennig vs. Van Hammer

Larry goes on a rant against the term "Powers That Be". I kind of agree as WCW has announced that they're Russo and Ferrara so why not just go with that? Curt knees Hammer on the way in but gets thrown outside for a

brawl. To keep up the stupidity of this show, we see a sign saying "I'm only here for the Nitro Girls." Maybe Russo is on to something about the fans being morons. Back in and Hennig starts in on the leg as Bagwell strolls out to follow up on a five minute old angle. All the oil on Buff's arms distracts Hennig so Hammer can get in a cheap shot and snap his throat across the top rope.

Curt goes after Buff but catches Hammer trying to jump him from behind with a kick to the ribs. Back in and Hennig slams Hammer's head against the mat as Buff plays cheerleader for Hammer. Apparently it works as Hammer comes back with a knee in the corner followed by a DDT, only to miss a middle rope flip dive. Curt is sent outside for a brawl with Bagwell, only to have Benoit come out and get sent into the barricade. Back up and Hammer is accidentally whipped into Buff, allowing Curt to hit the HennigPlex for the pin.

Rating: D-. I need a minute here. Let's try to figure this out. So the Powers That Be want to get rid of Hennig by saying he's gone as soon as he gets pinned, because a submission isn't good enough for them for whatever reason. At the same time, they want to screw with Bagwell by making him job all the time because wrestling is scripted, but Bagwell wants to rebel and win his REAL matches.

Now he's screwing with Hennig to get rid of him, presumably as a favor to the Powers That Be to get them off Bagwell's back? At the same time, Benoit is involved despite being in the final four of the World Title tournament because they have nothing better to do with him tonight and there's NO ONE else they could throw into this mess? The fact that I had to write out two paragraphs to understand this story, ignoring the fact that it completely exposes the business, sums up Russo's booking in a nutshell: A stupid midcard feud took that long to understand and I don't even care now that I've figured it out.

Luger works out as Chavo sells Liz Amway jewelery. THIS story gets to continue but we're not likely to hear any more about La Parka and Kaz.

Lash Leroux vs. Kenny Kaos

Leroux takes him down to start but Kaos kicks him in the ribs and scores

with a butterfly suplex. After a middle rope legdrop gets two, Lash botches a flip over the back but takes over anyway. Why let something like a big mishap screw up your quick match right? Kaos comes back with a boot to the face and a bunch of kicks and punches in the corner.

A gutwrench suplex gets two for Kaos but Lash comes back with a Russian legsweep and stomps of his own. Kaos is sent outside but Lash baseball slides into his leg to really take over. The leg is fine enough to catch a diving Cajun though and drive him back first into the barricade. So he's generic and doesn't sell. Back in and Lash escapes a slam and hits Whiplash for the pin.

Rating: D. In the old days, this would be filler on Saturday Night but now it's one of the later shows on Thunder. It really is apparent that no one cared about this show and they were clearly just filling in time. Again, I'd love to know what someone was high on when they picked Kaos to be a champion a year ago. That stuff could make me a fortune on the streets.

The Animals brag about Torrie being a martial arts expert. I smell an unfunny comedy bit coming up.

Vampiro wraps a chain around his hand.

Chavo Guerrero Jr. vs. Barbarian

Chavo comes out with his order forms for Barbarian, but Barbarian hits him in the back with the briefcase, setting up the Kick of Fear for the pin at 8 seconds.

Post match, Barbarian says he'll pay Chavo later. Well, at least it's something for Chavo to do. Stupid yes but something.

Tournament recap.

Liz and Luger watch Meng from a monitor.

Meng vs. Vampiro

Vampiro gets taken down by the hair to start, which you would expect to

have been the other way around. Meng loses a kick-off but Vampiro stupidly tries a headbutt. Well no one ever accused him of being smart. Now Meng headbutts the buckle but doesn't seem to phase it. A bunch of chops stagger Vampiro and Meng nails a decent dropkick. I remember Jesse Ventura freaking out when Haku hit those and I can't say I disagree.

Vampiro gets piledriven and sent to the floor for a whip into the barricade. Back inside and Meng is finally put down by a top rope spinwheel kick. That's the extent of Vampiro's offense though as his hurricanrana is countered with a powerbomb. Jerry Only of the Misfits comes in and takes the Tongan Death Grip and that's the match, presumably for a no contest.

Rating: D+. Meng is one of those guys that is kind of fun to watch, just due to him not selling almost everything and hurting as many people as he did. Unfortunately he's being set up with Luger, which is about as dull of a program as you can have. The ending here did nothing for anyone, but that really shouldn't be surprising.

Liz comes out to apologize to Meng and the monster is nice enough to stop lunging at her with the Death Grip as Luger is late with his cue. He finally shows up and chairs Meng down before crushing his knees with the chair.

Chris Benoit vs. Buff Bagwell

Ever the genius, Buff tries to slide under the ropes and gets stomped down. Chris takes over with a dropkick and a knee to the ribs but gets dropped ribs first onto the top rope. They head outside with Buff dropping Benoit's throat across the barricade before stomping away. Back inside and Buff keeps up the stomping motif as this is actually one of the more entertaining matches of the night due to the charisma both guys have. Buff wasn't much in the ring but he had some energy to him.

A neckbreaker sets up a chinlock on Chris as I guess Buff is a heel all of a sudden. They trade punches and chops in the corner before Benoit takes it to the floor to give Bagwell the beating he deserves. Back in and Benoit hits the snap suplex and puts on a surfboard before "accidentally" kicking Buff low. They head outside again with Buff

getting whipped into the barricade but Benoit makes the same mistake Buff made at the start and lets Bagwell get in some shops as he comes in.

Buff hammers away but has to grab the ropes to block a German suplex. That's fine with Benoit as he plows through Buff with a clothesline, only to miss the Swan Dive. Buff goes up for the Blockbuster but here's Hennig to break it up, allowing Benoit to slap on the Crossface for the win.

Rating: C+. So to recap, Benoit has gotten two of the longest matches of the Russo Era and has put in two of the best performances to date. Aside from Benoit being awesome, a lot of it goes to show that when you give the guys a chance to show what they can do, you more often than not get a good match. You can't do anything with two minutes and three plot devices at a time.

Benoit stares at Hennig and leaves, allowing Curt and Buff to brawl to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. They had something here with the self contained story of Bagwell/Benoit/Hennig ending with a match but I can't imagine this is going to be a recurring theme. Other than that though, this was your usual disaster with nonsensical ideas and booking decisions that seem to be more there for the amusement of Russo and Ferrara than anything else. I have no desire to see Mayhem more than I did two hours ago though, so the show was a waste of time.

No show next week due to Thanksgiving.

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