

Monday Night Raw – September 22, 1997 (2015 Redo): That Night In The Garden

Monday Night Raw

Date: September 22, 1997

Location: Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York

Attendance: 14,615

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is one of the biggest and more important episodes in the history of the show. For the first time ever, the show is in the world's most famous arena as we're getting closer to Badd Blood: In Your House. The crowd hasn't been this big in a long time and you know the company is going to put on something special in this arena. Let's get to it.

We open with a video on the Garden itself, focusing on some of the major moments in company history in the building, such as Hogan winning his first title, Wrestlemania I, various Roddy Piper antics, Snuka's cage dive, Wrestlemania X and many others. Like I said, they're treating this like a very, very big deal and they certainly should.

Opening sequence.

Intercontinental Title Tournament First Round: Rocky Maivia vs. Ahmed Johnson

Slaughter comes out to eject the Nation before we get started. The winner of this gets Faarooq, who is advancing due to Shamrock having a punctured lung. Maivia jumps him on the floor but Johnson launches Rocky into the corner. Rocky's floatover DDT plants Johnson as Captain Lou Albano wanders out to ringside for no apparent reason. They head outside with Rocky sending him into the steps. Johnson has a bloody hand and Lawler finally says the truth that everyone knew about Johnson a year ago: he's injury prone. A spinebuster puts Rocky down and the Pearl River Plunge sends Johnson to the semi-finals.

Rating: D. Ahmed Johnson was a physical beast and a very strong in ring talent, but there comes a point where the guy can't be trusted with any kind of a push due to not being able to stay healthy. This was too short to mean much, but Johnson was himself and Rocky was still figuring out his heel persona.

Here's Steve Austin in the crowd to say you can't have Raw in New York City without Stone Cold. Nothing else is said, but this felt so much more natural than just showing him in the back with a camera on him for no reason other than the script says it's time to do that.

Sable plays lazer (that's how it's spelled on the box) tag with Howard Finkel. I'm thinking this is a commercial.

Legendary boxer Floyd Patterson is here.

Stills of Shawn taking the European Title from the Bulldog in England. This is considered little more than a power play from Shawn who took the title so he could get one up on the Harts and took a title he had no desire or need to hold.

Here's Undertaker with something to say. Vince announces a new stipulation to the Hell in a Cell match: the winner is the new #1 contender for the WWF World Title at Survivor Series. First up, Undertaker says the reaper will be calling for Bret soon, but first there is Shawn Michaels. The only way out of the Cell is over Undertaker's dead body but Undertaker will never rest in peace.

This brings out Shawn to complain about the WWF putting him in a no win situation. First he was put in the guest referee spot at Summerslam and now Undertaker is supposed to bury him alive. Then if he wins all that, he gets his title shot. Why should Shawn have to earn a title shot, when he's the only man ever to win every title in this company? Shawn promises to be one step ahead of everyone inside the Cell and all Undertaker has to do is show up.

Faarooq/Kama Mustafa vs. Legion of Doom

Sunny does ring announcing for no particular reason. Animal and Kama

start it off with Kama being sent to the floor, only to run back in to hammer Animal in the back. A powerslam plants Kama though and it's off to Faarooq vs. Hawk. Kama and Faarooq take turns on Hawk but he comes back with a neckbreaker, with Faarooq falling down before Hawk even starts. The Doomsday Device is loaded up but the rest of the Nation comes in for the DQ.

Ahmed tries for the save but the Nation still has a one man advantage and beats him down as well.

Clip of the Snuka cage dive in 1983.

Intercontinental Title Tournament Semi-Finals: Owen Hart vs. Brian Pillman

Owen has cops surrounding the ring. This week, Pillman has Terri in a leather skirt and leather bra, plus a belly button ring and a collar around her neck. Pillman's arm is in a sling due to falling in the bathtub for trying one too many things with Terri. Therefore, he has to forfeit here to send Owen into the finals. Owen agrees but Slaughter comes out and wants to see the x-rays and a doctor's report. Slaughter throws the mic at him and Pillman catches it with the bad arm. The match is on or Pillman never wrestles here again.

They slowly fight over a test of strength before having a clean break in the corner. A slow paced rollup gets two for Owen as I think you get the idea by this point. We take a break and come back with Owen all fired up due to Terri (I'm sticking with Terri as the announcers keep swapping between that and Marlina. It's the same person) hitting Owen with her purse, which Owen blamed on Pillman. Owen gets suplexed down but here's Goldust to attack Owen, eliminating Pillman and sending Hart to the finals.

Rating: D+. I liked the idea here so it's hard to fault them for not having a plan. The purse part really wasn't needed as you could have just done the same match until Goldust came in, but points for mixing things up a bit at least. It wasn't a good match or anything, but it was nice to see them trying something that made sense.

Owen brags about his win but Austin comes in and nearly gets arrested. Vince comes in and says hang on. Apparently Vince has authority over police officers because he gets them to back off for now. He asks Austin why he doesn't get that he's barred from competing at the moment. Austin could wind up paralyzed (Lawler: "That would be good.") and the WWF isn't going to let him do that. What Austin needs to learn is to work within the system.

Austin says this is what he does for a living and no one can tell him that he isn't the best in the world. He appreciates that the WWF cares, and there's the first of 1,000 Stunners to Vince, who sells it worse than anyone ever by falling over Austin and shaking like a fish. That's enough for the cops to arrest Austin, who is cheered louder than anyone in years. As the cops are taking him away, Austin flips Vince off one more time, beginning the greatest war in wrestling history.

Let's stop and look at this for a second. Obviously Vince would go on to become Mr. McMahon, probably the best villain that has ever lived (or one of the best no matter how you look at it). His big line is coming in November, but look back at what led up to that. You have Bret going nuts on Vince back in February, then the multiple issues with Shawn, and now Austin.

When Austin won the WWF World Title in 1998, Vince told Austin that they could do things the easy way or the hard way. Most of 1997 was Vince trying to do things the easy way and getting burned. When he saw that the old ways weren't working anymore, he went full on the other way and became Mr. McMahon, who would keep control by any means he had available. Mr. McMahon was a character with a much stronger backstory than he's given credit for having.

Hour #2 is dedicated to Bulldog Brower. What does it say when you're not even worthy of having a full show dedicated to you?

The remaining announcers brag about not leaving the booth in a shot at WCW.

We get a bunch of replays of the Stunner to Vince.

Dude Love vs. Hunter Hearst Helmsley

Pinfalls count anywhere. Helmsley throws in a crotch chop before the curtsey. Dude's music plays but instead he pops up on screen. He won't be coming out here because pinfalls count anywhere really isn't his bag. It's not a love thing you see. However, Dude knows someone whose bag it is. He's a kind man and a cooky type of cat.

In a bizarre visual, Mankind comes in to talk to Dude Love face to face. As much as Mankind has dreamed of hurting Helmsley in this match, there's someone Mankind knows who could do it even worse. Dude asks Mankind to bring him out, so here's CACTUS JACK, making his WWF debut and standing with the other two faces of Foley.

This is another one of the most amazing visuals ever as we're almost inside of Foley's head here and seeing how out there he really could be. The idea of actually seeing all three of them next to each other blew my mind and was something that had to be seen to be believed. The best part: it's going to get even better.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Cactus Jack

The fans lose their minds at Cactus actually being in the WWF. Helmsley charges right at him and gets nailed with a trashcan on the ramp. The ECW chants start up and Cactus peels back the floor mats for a swinging neckbreaker on the concrete. They head inside, just so the Cactus Clothesline can take it back outside again. Helmsley starts running so Chyna can get in a cheap shot, which is totally legal here.

They fight into the crowd and then into the back with Helmsley slamming Cactus on the concrete for two. Cactus comes back with a fire extinguisher blast to the face, sending Helmsley into the barricade, which is completely broken down. Not just a piece of it but the entire section on one side of the ring. It heads back inside but Cactus whips him across the ring so hard that Helmsley falls right back to the floor. The Cactus Elbow off the apron only hits trashcan though and Helmsley FINALLY has a breather.

We take a break and come back with the guys in the ring and Helmsley

hitting Jack with a mop. They fight to the apron and Cactus gets in a low blow to knock Helmsley outside. Cactus dives off with a sunset flip for two, followed by a backdrop onto the ramp for a sick thud. Chyna's chair shot to Cactus has almost no effect so Helmsley hits Cactus in the back, only to drive Cactus into Chyna, who goes into the steps.

Chyna is out cold so Helmsley suplexes Cactus on the ramp as both guys can barely move. A shovel to the back keeps Cactus down and Helmsley slams him head first into the steel. Now it's table time and the fans couldn't be happier. Helmsley loads up the Pedigree but Cactus reverses and grabs a pulling piledriver to drive Helmsley through the table for the pin. We get a famous visual of the camera looking down at Cactus, who smiles at the pain.

Rating: A. This is one of the best matches ever on Raw and one of best moments the company ever had. The promo before this set Cactus up as perfectly as it could have and the Three Faces of Foley are finally here. Great stuff here and something that really hadn't been seen in the WWF before. I mean, it had been seen in ECW, but the WWF in Madison Square Garden is a bit higher on the food chain.

So in the last half hour, we had the first Stunner to Vince, the debut of Cactus Jack and then that classic. If there has ever been a better and more famous half hour in the history of Monday Night Raw, I've never seen it.

Video on a sweepstakes for Survivor Series.

Clip of the first Wrestlemania with Andre the Giant slamming Big John Studd.

More stills of Bulldog vs. Shawn in England.

Here's Shawn with the chair that started his feud with Undertaker. Shawn has a story for us because we're all wondering how he became the first Grand Slam Champion. Shawn sits down in the chair and says he wants Undertaker out here to face him right now. So much for story time.

We take a break and come back with Shawn still calling Undertaker out.

Cue the Undertaker, who was nice enough to wait until the show came back from a break. Helmsley comes out to slow him down and Shawn gets in the chair shots as Rude and Chyna come out to help. Rude chairs Undertaker a few times and Undertaker just stands up, sending Shawn and company running off.

Bret Hart vs. Goldust

Non-title. Before the match, Bret says he doesn't care who wins between Undertaker and Shawn. He's not afraid of Undertaker and he'd love to give Shawn the beating he deserves for what he did to the Bulldog. Goldust still only has half the paint on, which is due to half of him missing. They slug it out to start as Lawler gets in as many jokes as he can about Pillman and Terri.

Bret stomps him down in the corner and starts going after the knee so Goldust rakes his eyes. That's fine with Bret who cannonballs down onto the knee and flips off a fan in the front row. He slaps on the Figure Four around the post but Shawn saunters down the ramp as we take a break. Back with Bret staying on the leg and Shawn dancing on the stage. So where is Undertaker while this is going on?

Goldust gets in a few right hands but a kick to the knee puts him right back down. A suplex gives Goldust a breather and he gets in a sweet right hand. Goldust kicks Bret out to the floor and limps outside to keep up the fight. Back in and a bulldog gets two on Bret but raises his boot and gets caught in the Sharpshooter for the quick submission.

Rating: B-. This was a good match that people aren't going to remember after everything else that happened on this show. It's always cool to see Bret getting to pick a talented wrestler to pieces and then make them quit. That is the definition of technical wrestling and psychology and Bret was as good as anyone in history at making it work.

Bret won't let go so Shawn runs in for the save. Cue Helmsley, Chyna, Owen and the limping Bulldog. Rude and Neidhart follow but it's Undertaker to really make things interesting. Shawn and Bret are left alone with Undertaker and a double chokeslam ends the show.

Overall Rating: A. This is still one of the best episodes the show has ever had. They knew they had to do something special in Madison Square Garden and knocked it out of the park. You can see the future waiting to break out here and the main event stuff is just as great. The three way feud between Undertaker, Bret and Shawn is the culmination of the last year of main event storylines (well minus Sid but is anyone really missing him?). It's still a great show and well worth seeing if you never have before.

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