

Monday Nitro – January 4, 1999: It's Hogan! AGAIN!

Monday Nitro #170

Date: January 4, 1999

Location: Georgia Dome, Atlanta, Georgia

Attendance: 38,809

Commentators: Larry Zbyszko, Tony Schiavone, Bobby Heenan, Mike Tenay

We had to get here eventually. This is the show that a lot of people credit with putting WCW down a hole that it was never going to get out of. The main event here is Goldberg vs. Nash II for Nash's World Title, but the major story coming out of last week is Flair winning control of the company for 90 days by defeating Eric Bischoff. I'm sure that will go perfectly smoothly. Let's get to it.

We open with dramatic clips from Goldberg vs. Nash at Starrcade.

Nitro Girls in the ring and we get balloons and confetti.

There's a Nitro Party in a suite.

Hogan is here tonight.

Glacier vs. Hugh Morrus

The announcers go on about the end of last week's show and explain why Savage would want to hurt Bischoff (Bischoff helped the NWO destroy Savage's knee in a cage last year). Glacier's now in a shorter singlet and the look really doesn't work. Morrus throws him down to start until Glacier cranks on the arm to take over. Hugh grabs a powerslam and both guys are down. Glacier legsweeps him down but gets leveled with a clothesline, setting up No Laughing Matter to give Morrus the

pin. Not long enough to rate but a nice return for Morrus after a few months off.

The announcers talk about Flair a bit more.

Opening sequence, finally with some new video.

Arn Anderson, Ric Flair and the Flair Family walk from the parking lot into the arena. A lot of the backstage workers applaud Flair on the way to the ring. They finally make it to the ring with Benoit, Mongo and Malenko joining Anderson and the Flairs. Ric talks about Eric Bischoff ruining this company but it still being the greatest wrestling company in the world. The people have been asking what Flair is going to do to Bischoff on his first night. Flair tells Eric to get out here right now to talk to the boss.

An angry Bischoff gets in the ring and Flair says the shoes are on different feet tonight. Flair talks about Eric insulting him over the years on commentary and running down Ric's career. The easy thing would be for Flair to just fire Bischoff, but that wouldn't be fun. Instead, Bischoff is going to be working under Tony Schiavone and doing commentary. Also since Bischoff won't be visible on commentary, his pay is cut in half. Next up for Flair is referee Randy Anderson. Randy, stricken with cancer, was fired by Bischoff about two years ago. Flair calls him to the ring and offers him his job back at double the salary.

With Flair still in the ring, Tony walks Bischoff through the segment list. Bischoff's disgusted reply is amusing. This leaves Flair with his first match to make. He'll start with Souled Out, where he's booking himself into a handicap match with Barry Windham and Curt Hennig. David Flair steps up and asks to be his father's partner in the match. Ric says David isn't ready but Arn says David knows what he's doing.

Booker T. vs. Emery Hale

The needling continues with Tony telling Eric to jump in at any time. Hale jumps Booker to start and stomps away in the corner, only to charge into a spinebuster. The side kick sets up the missile dropkick and Hale is done in less than 90 seconds. Eric still hasn't talked other than one sentence.

Nitro Girls.

Bischoff is looking away with his feet on the desk. Tony: "Don't make me file a report with Mr. Flair."

Norman Smiley vs. Chavo Guerrero Jr.

Chavo fires off chops to start and dropkicks Norman out to the floor. Eric still won't talk. Back in and Norman runs Chavo over but stops to glare at Pepe. A World's Strongest Slam gets two on Guerrero but he comes back with a few rollups for two each. The Big Wiggle allows Chavo to dropkick him down and now Chavo dances some as well. Chavo botches a springboard and then slightly botches a rollup for two. Back up and Guerrero grabs a sunset flip for the pin.

Rating: D+. The match was just there for background noise as Chavo is still doing the same stuff he's done for months now. Smiley is still over but I'm not sure why you would have him lose a match like this. I mean, this man was on Starrcade! Nothing to see here but it's the first hour of Nitro so what do you expect?

Norman beats up Chavo and breaks Pepe's head off to turn into a serious heel rather than a goofy one.

Chris Benoit vs. Horace Hogan

Benoit gets a jobber's entrance. Horace gets beaten down in the corner but comes back with a running clothesline. Another clothesline misses and Benoit rolls some Germans as Tony threatens to demote Eric to the international broadcasts. Horace throws Benoit out to the floor and drives him into the

barricade in a nice crash.

Back in and a clothesline gets two for Horace before Tony rubs it in that Randy Anderson is referee. Horace goes up but gets superplexed down. The Swan Dive connects but Benoit is holding his head instead of covering. Horace gets two off a shoulder breaker but his suplex is countered into the Crossface to give Benoit the win.

Rating: C-. Not the worst match in the world and it's nice to see Benoit survive until the end. Horace wasn't terrible as a big guy for roles like this and the match worked well enough. That Swan Dive continues to make me cringe though as Benoit's head just smacked off Horace.

And now it begins. Goldberg is arrested for charges that aren't explained yet. He goes on a rant about all the good things he does for this community. Goldberg talks more here than he has in his entire time in the company. No charge is ever mentioned but he eventually goes "downtown."

After a break, Goldberg is taken to a police car. Nash says this can't happen because they have a match tonight. Hogan shows up and laughs, saying he's an honest man and calling Goldberg guilty. He'll appreciate Nash's vote too. As he walks by, Liz is seen talking to cops.

Perry Saturn vs. Chris Jericho

Feeling out process to start with Saturn slapping Jericho in the face. Referee Scott Dickinson, who has been having issues with Saturn lately, yells at Saturn about throwing a punch. They trade wristlocks with Saturn getting the better of it before heading to the corner. A release overhead belly to belly sends Jericho flying and Saturn fires off kicks in the corner.

Saturn goes to the apron and Jericho nails the springboard dropkick to send him out to the floor. Chris does the long

strides but there's nowhere near as much energy to it. We take a break and come back with Jericho nailing a belly to back suplex followed by its vertical cousin for an arrogant two. Satur's Death Valley Driver doesn't work but a t-bone suplex gets two on Jericho. The referee gets hit in the jaw by mistake before Jericho pulls him in the way of a diving Saturn. A low blow and the Lionsault sets up the Liontamer but Dickinson calls for the bell before Jericho turns him over. Jericho wins.

Rating: C-. This corrupt referee nonsense is getting annoying in a hurry, just like Saturn getting beaten all the time. Jericho knew he was leaving at this point and it was clear that he didn't have the same energy. He's still doing his old standards but a lot of them are really lackluster.

We go to the police precinct, which Tony points out "is across the street at the CNN Center." Remember that as it becomes important later. They'll be in room three as the cameras are already waiting for them. Apparently Goldberg is being charged with aggravated stalking by Elizabeth Lebetzki, more commonly known as Miss Elizabeth. Goldberg knows the cop and tells him to do his job because the cop knows this is bogus. I believe the charges were originally going to be rape but Goldberg refused to do it.

Nitro Girls. Larry gets in a good line about how these are real women, as opposed to Liz who has tried to be a Miss five times now.

Back to the Nitro Party where we've got thumb wrestling. Like as a featured event. A JAIL BREAK chant starts up.

We go back to the station where Liz is being interviewed. She says Goldberg last confronted her at the water cooler. Liz says she's filed three reports already because Goldberg has been at every show she's been at, at the hotels and at the gym. Again, this is more talking than she's ever done in WCW.

The detective goes off to talk with his partner.

Here's a long segment of an LWO party with low riders, a lot of women and Eddie running things. They head inside for dancing to mariachi dancing and Eddie says he's on top of the Latino world. Now there's a card game with Eddie trading cards with other LWO members to win. Eddie says they're united together and that's about it. This ran nearly four minutes.

Kidman/Rey Mysterio Jr. vs. Psychosis/Juventud Guerrera

Tornado match. Well in name only as they start with tags. Psychosis nails an early backbreaker on Kidman before it's off to Juvy who gets dropkicked a few times. Off to Rey for a nice top rope hurricanrana before he throws Juvy at Kidman for the sitout powerbomb. Rey pulls Juvy out to the floor but Psychosis gets in a shot of his own, setting up a slingshot legdrop to the floor to crush Rey.

Back in and Psychosis nails a top rope ax handle as Heenan asks Bischoff if he remembers calling the early shows with Mongo. Tony promises to deliver the World Title match they advertised. Juvy hits a backbreaker of his own on Mysterio before it's back to Psychosis who gets dropkicked out of the air.

Everything breaks down which Tony says is perfectly legal. Kidman and Mysterio clothesline the LWO outside for big planchas off the top. Back in and a springboard Doomsday Device of all things gets two on Psychosis but Juvy comes back with the Driver for two on Mysterio. Everything breaks down again and Kidman's missile dropkick accidentally hits Rey, allowing Psychosis to hit the guillotine legdrop for the pin on the masked man.

Rating: C+. This was the fun you expect from these kind of matches, but the tornado stuff was some combination of unnecessary and confusing. The referee and wrestlers didn't seem to know it was under tornado rules but Tony kept

insisting it was. It's interesting to see some drama between Rey and Kidman as a match between the two could be awesome.

Goldberg has an explanation for why he's always at the same places Elizabeth: they work for the same company and she's a member of the gym he owns. The fact that they work together comes as a surprise to the detective.

Here's Nash to address the Goldberg situation. He doesn't think he beat Goldberg at Starrcade because Goldberg got screwed that night. Nash doesn't buy the stories Liz is telling and thinks Hogan is behind it. Therefore, Nash wants Hogan tonight as a warmup for later tonight when he fights Goldberg. Flair comes out and says if Goldberg can't make the match, Hogan can take his place.

Video on Goldberg vs. Nash.

Liz tells the original detective's partner the story but the details are different (Coke machine instead of water cooler). The original detective comes back in. Goldberg calls her all the time but hangs up before anything is said. The detectives don't ask how she knows it's him and Liz rants about being the victim.

Here's Hogan in a black suit with something to say. Hogan says the wrestling world still revolves around him but he came here to announce his retirement. He's also going to announce his running mate but seeing Goldberg made him sick. Hogan thinks he owes the fans a retirement match so he'll give them one tonight. Gene says the match would be a title match so Hogan agrees.

Schiavone: "Fans, if you're even thinking about changing the channel to our competition, fans do not. We understand that Mick Foley, who wrestled here one time as Cactus Jack, is going to win their World Title."

I get the idea WCW was going for with this line and the idea

makes sense to a degree, but when you think about it there's much more potential for harm than good. On the other hand, giving away results worked for WCW in the past so it's logical to do it again, even in very different circumstances. The idea of one show being taped as opposed to live doesn't make much of a difference to me though. A show being live or taped doesn't matter if the show is still horrible.

We get a clip of Jericho praising Scott Dickinson earlier in the day and saying a wrestler should never touch a referee. Jericho says Saturn should get disqualified if he ever touches Dickinson again. Was this really necessary?

TV Title: Scott Steiner vs. Konnan

Both name graphics say Television Champion even though Scott is defending. Before the match, Buff dances a bit and fakes a heart attack to mock Flair. Konnan starts fast but gets taken down by a single forearm to the back. Some right hands in the corner and a clothesline put Steiner down and the fight heads to the floor. Tony repeats the Cactus Jack line and actually says HA HA at the thought of Foley winning the title.

Buff gets in some cheap shots on the floor before Scott stomps on Konnan's head back inside. The announcers spend about half the match talking about how Bischoff isn't going to say anything and about the Goldberg issues. Konnan comes back with a tornado DDT (looked more like he was trying a small package) before missing the rolling lariat and botching the X-Factor. Bagwell comes in for the DQ before the Sunrise can go on.

Rating: F. They botched a bunch of spots, I had to listen to unfunny jabs at Bischoff, and the HA HA line. Terrible match with commentary making it even worse.

Post match Konnan gets beaten down with a chair.

The announcers talk about the Goldberg situation. Tony again mentions that the precinct is across the street. Eric:

“Goldberg is jail bait.”

Wrath comes out and actually grabs a mic. He’s been destroying people for six months and wants anyone in the back to come out here and take a beating.

Bam Bam Bigelow vs. Wrath

They stare each other down to start with Wrath’s shots only having a limited effect. A running clothesline puts Bigelow down but he low bridges Wrath to the floor. They head back inside with Bigelow nailing some elbows to the back of the head. Outside again with Wrath taking over with knees to the ribs. Bigelow sends him into the barricade and back into the ring before grabbing a chair. The referee moves the chair and the distraction lets Wrath nail a backdrop. They head outside for the third time and the referee goes down, causing him to throw the match out.

Rating: D+. Take two guys and let them beat each other up for awhile. It was barely a match and there’s nothing wrong with that. It’s nice to see Wrath get to hang with someone of Bigelow’s caliber, even though this is a demotion for Bigelow. At least they dropped the idea of him not being on the roster.

They brawl to the back.

Back and the precinct, the detectives start poking holes in Liz’s story as she can’t remember details. The fact that she can’t remember the difference between water and Coke (or Pepsi, which she said she got out of a Coke machine), says a lot about Liz’s abilities. She keeps looking at her watch as she gets the color of Goldberg’s tights wrong. They threaten to charge her with perjury and Liz realizes she had the wrong wrestler.

Tony is aghast at these developments.

We’ve got roughly forty minutes left in the broadcast for

Goldberg to get back to the arena.

Nitro Girls.

Bischoff waves to the camera as the announcers talk about the World Title match later tonight. Bobby says Goldberg will come to the arena without his clothes if need be.

Brian Adams vs. Diamond Dallas Page

Anderson calls for the bell, starts counting Adams on the floor, then calls for the bell again to start the match. Adams hides in the corner to start but Page hammers away with rights and lefts. Brian bails to the floor so Page dives over the top rope to take out both Adams and Vincent. There's barely any selling though as Adams stomps away back inside to take over.

We come back from a break with Page fighting out of a chinlock as Tony brags about it being live again. A swinging neckbreaker puts Adams down but Brian nails a low blow in the corner to stop Page cold. We hit a bearhug and Eric says "by golly" for no apparent reason. Adams gets two off a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker but Page grabs his running DDT to put both guys down. Page nails a quick clothesline and goes to the middle rope for a jumping Diamond Cutter and the pin.

Rating: C. The ending looked good but could have looked great had they stuck the landing (Page partially landed on his legs instead of his back but it was fine). Adams is good in his role as he has a few good power moves and seems like a moderately difficult dragon for a hero to slay.

Goldberg is released from custody as we go to a break. We've got roughly twenty minutes left in the show and he made it from the arena to the station in less than ten minutes by car earlier.

WCW World Title: Kevin Nash vs. Hollywood Hogan

Nash is defending of course. Hogan is in street clothes and

has Scott Steiner with him. Nash counters with Scott Hall, whose actions at Starrcade are apparently forgiven. The bell rings, Nash rips his shirt off, Hogan circles him for a bit, Nash says bring it and shoves Hogan into the corner, and the finger to the chest gives Hogan the title at 1:40.

Goldberg arrives less than 30 seconds later as Bischoff is already gloating. That's not terrible as far as him getting back to the arena in a reasonable time. Goldberg hits the ring and kicks down everyone not named Hogan. Some of the weakest belt shots ever have Goldberg on one knee but he's right back up to spear (almost zero impact) Hogan down. Luger comes out to break up the Jackhammer and the huge beatdown is on. Goldberg gets put in the Rack before being cuffed to the ropes.

Hall busts out the shock stick to jab into Goldberg's side (with Bischoff providing sound effects). Goldberg gets the red spray paint treatment on his back and black on his head. Hogan spray paints a red NWO on the belt to close the show. Tony in a defeated voice: "They're back together. Again."

Overall Rating: D+. That's omitting the big angle. This show just wasn't very good for the most part with the usual array of boring Nitro matches that either meant anything or were nothing we hadn't seen before. As usual the cruiserweight match was good but with Eddie being gone, it really doesn't mean anything. This was far more boring than bad.

Then there's the moment that people still talk about over fifteen years later. The idea of having Goldberg have to run through a bunch of opponents to get the title back is a good idea. Unfortunately, that's about the extent of the good to this story. Let's look at this one item at a time.

1. Why did Nash do this? He won the title fairly (remember that Starrcade was No DQ) and had the belt free and clear. Out of loyalty to Hogan? A man who as far as we knew, he had split

with about nine months ago? We'll come back to this later, but for now it brings us to the first major issue with this.

2. The title looks worthless. Nash had it all to himself and then he literally handed it over to Hogan, basically saying "I don't want this. Here you take it." If a big star like Nash says it's worthless, why would I want to see anyone else fight for it in the future? How do I know that they won't just hand it off to someone they think deserves it more?

3. Back to the first point, we could assume either it's a massive swerve and that there never was a real split or the problems between the NWO camps were hashed out somewhere in between. Either way, it makes pretty much everything since May look completely pointless. The NWO factions going to war? All patched up. The bickering and people jumping from team to team? Doesn't matter. Nash talking about how the Red and Black is forever and the Black and White was just for life? Nothing more than another catchphrase. Now everything is back where it was when Savage took the title from Sting and then lost it to Hogan the next night. That brings us to possibly the biggest problem of this whole thing.

4. IT'S HOGAN AGAIN. At the end of the day, Hogan is standing tall as champion with his army around him and it's likely going to be months before anyone can challenge him. Yeah we've got Flair and Goldberg on WCW's side and one faction is done, but we're basically back to some point in 1997 instead of going forward.

5. While it's not directly related to the story, the Foley match getting free advertising makes things even worse. If this is just a normal week in the Monday Night Wars, you could have watched one or the other. If you see the Foley title win, it's an emotional moment with a new star being made and probably the loudest moment ever in wrestling. On the other hand, you have WCW doing the same stuff they've done for years with the same people on top and the same story being set up

that we spent all of the better part of two years going through. If you don't have that comparison to make, what happens on Nitro is nowhere near as bad.

Overall, it just wasn't a well thought out move. There's a nice idea at the end, but the rest of the story just does not work. Hogan just wasn't what people wanted to see again and when you combine this with Bischoff beating Flair eight days ago, it was clear that the company wasn't interested in listening to what the people were wanting. The time for the NWO being on top had passed, but WCW decided to go back to the well again. I understand that it worked once, but it wasn't working this time.

To answer a question that is often asked, no, this wasn't what killed WCW. It was a moment that hurt them, but overall the company had a lot more moments to come that would hurt and ultimately kill them. An important thing to keep in mind was that Nitro had won a night in the ratings wars less than three months ago. The WWF had been in far worse shape than this at times and it was hard to tell how much more steam Austin vs. McMahon had at this point. It didn't turn out well for WCW, but they still had a lot more chances to make a comeback in the future.

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