

Wrestlemania Count-Up – Wrestlemania XI: Playing Chess With Mr. Backlund

Wrestlemania XI

Date: April 2, 1995

Location: Hartford Civic Center, Hartford, Connecticut

Attendance: 16,305

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon

This is one of the dark Wrestlemanias in that it was a very bad time for the company. That being said, the show was very well received and wound up being kind of a saving grace for the WWF. The main events are Diesel defending the title against Shawn (shocking I know) and Bam Bam Bigelow vs. NFL Hall of Famer (not at this point though) Lawrence Taylor. Let's get to it.

We open with clips from every Wrestlemania. That's a nice idea, especially for back then when you can do this in 90 seconds. Today it would take way too long. Apparently Pamela Anderson, Jenny McCarthy and others are starring in this show. Good to know indeed.

A special Olympian sings America the Beautiful. Nothing wrong with that.

Allied Powers vs. Blu Brothers

I don't remember if Allied Powers was their official name but it's Luger/British Bulldog. The Brothers are whatever name you best know the Harris Brothers by, which is most likely the DOA. The timing of this redo is perfect, as their manager is Uncle Zebekiah, who is currently Zeb Colter, manager of Jack Swagger. It's a big brawl to start and the good guys hit stereo powerslams to take over. Bulldog and we'll say Jacob (partner of Eli) start and there's the delayed vertical after only a few seconds.

Off to a headlock by the Brit as Vince sounds like he's in an auditorium

for some reason. The Brothers take over with heel power moves and it's off to Eli for a side slam. A double big boot from the twins puts Bulldog right back down but Bulldog starts firing off right hands. With the referee holding the Bulldog back, the Brothers pull a switch but they switch back just a few seconds later. That's some high quality leadership there Zeb.

We'll say Jacob takes too much time on a middle rope elbow so the British guy moves. Hot tag brings in Luger and house is cleaned. There's a powerslam and the steel forearm smash gets two. Zebekiah interferes and the twins switch again, allowing Eli to kick out of the forearm which didn't hit him. Not that it matters as British hits a sunset flip for the pin out of nowhere. Not that he was legal or anything but who cares?

Rating: C-. This match uh....exists I guess. Seriously that's all I've got here. It wasn't a good match or anything but I've seen worse. That's the problem here: it's so average that it's barely worth talking about. Luger would be gone in a few months back to WCW, which was the best move as he was doing stuff like this for the next six months or so. Nothing to see here at all and a really odd choice for a match and especially the opener.

Apparently that win deserves fireworks. If that's the high point of the show, we're in BIG trouble.

Zebekiah demands justice because the wrong Blu got pinned.

Nicholas Turturro is supposed to interview Pamela Anderson but we have audio difficulties.

Lawler explains football: it's just like the post office. "Eleven guys spend an hour trying to move a small object 100 yards." Andy Griffith he is not.

Intercontinental Title: Jeff Jarrett vs. Razor Ramon

Jarrett, the champion, has a manager here named The Roadie who would become Jesse James, making this the ultimate battle of the double initials. This is a rematch from the Rumble where Ramon got counted out

but agreed to come back in where he lost the title when his knee gave out. The 1-2-3 Kid is with Razor to counteract the Roadie. Razor decks Jeff to start and the champion immediately heads to the floor. That's nice of him as it allows Razor's pyro to go off.

A big right hand takes Jarrett down and Razor clotheslines him out to the floor for good measure. Back in and a sunset flip out of the corner by the champion is blocked by a right hand. Ramon keeps up his barrage of punches by faking Jarrett out and punching him even more. Roadie bails Jarrett out of the Razor's Edge and the champion regroups a bit on the floor.

Back inside and Roadie cheats a bit with some choking, only to have Jeff miss a charge and land on him. All Razor so far. Back in again and Jarrett hits a swinging neckbreaker and some dropkicks to take over. We hit the chinlock for a bit before things speed up with both guys getting near falls. Jarrett hooks a sleeper that lasts even less time than the chinlock so Jeff punches him down and hooks another chinlock.

Razor escapes again via a suplex but both guys are down. They get up at the same time and collide to put them down again. That's a bit of overkill but whatever. Again they get up and a double punch puts them down for a third time. Ramon comes back with more punches and they actually stay up for once. A fallaway slam gets two and there's the discus punch to put Jarrett down again. The Kid tries to interfere but gets kicked into the barricade.

Razor loads up his middle rope bulldog but misses and lands on his bad knee. The Figure Four goes on and Razor is in trouble. After some interference from Roadie, Ramon turns the hold over but Jeff quickly lets it go. Ramon hits a quick belly to back superplex to put Jarrett down and it's time for the Edge, which draws in Roadie for the DQ.

Rating: C. This match was mainly punches but Razor was so insanely over the top he carried the crowd. Jarrett was pretty dull at this point but he would reach all new levels of dull later on in WCW. Razor would finally get the title back in a ladder match on a house show in May, but it would only last for two days. The match here was ok but nothing worth seeing.

It was better than the first match though.

Post match Jarrett puts the Kid in the Figure Four.

Jarrett says that was perfectly good conduct for a champion.

Turturro is with Jenny McCarthy and nothing of note is said. Pamela Anderson is nowhere to be seen but Shawn pops in to say nothing is wrong. Team DiBiase is behind them planning for later. Sid says Diesel is going down tonight.

King Kong Bundy vs. Undertaker

This is part of the never ending Undertaker vs. Million Dollar Corporation feud. The Corporation stole the Urn at the Rumble and tonight is about revenge and getting the Urn back. Before Taker comes out, Todd Pettingil talks to some football player. The referee is a Major League umpire who is moonlighting because MLB is on strike. Undertaker stares at DiBiase before the bell and Ted drops the Urn.

Taker pounds away to start and hits Young School but he can't drop Bundy. The jumping clothesline finally puts him down but Bundy knocks him over the top to the floor in retaliation. Taker lands on his feet right in front of DiBiase and takes the Urn back from him. Paul Bearer gets the Urn back but Kama Mustafa (Godfather) comes out to steal the Urn back. This is like a bad comedy.

Taker tries to stop the theft but Bundy jumps the Dead Man, allowing Kama to get it. He says he's going to melt it down and make it a necklace. Bundy pounds on Taker a bit and slams him down before getting two off a knee drop. We hit the fat man chinlock for a bit before Taker fights up, only to get caught by the Avalanche in the corner. No selling is done today, and it's a slam and the jumping clothesline to make Taker 4-0.

Rating: D. This was nothing but a formality for Undertaker as we continue the Urn stealing story for even longer. Bundy was worthless here, other than offering some long forgotten star power. This feud kept going and never got interesting at all since DiBiase's team was all lame power guys. Nothing to see here and probably Undertaker's least interesting

Mania match ever.

Turturro still can't find Pamela Anderson. Instead he finds Lawrence Taylor's All-Pro team of football players who are here to counter the Million Dollar Team. One of these guys is Mongo, future US Champion. Turturro moves on to find Bob Backlund playing chess with Jonathan Taylor Thomas. Backlund goes nuts when he hears Anderson is missing because he has no idea who she is.

Thomas (a 12 year old actor from Home Improvement at the time) checkmates him so Backlund accuses him of taking advantage of his elders. Backlund asks him three questions (who was the 34th President, what is the capital of Honduras, and who is Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) which Thomas answers correctly. Backlund: "THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH YOUTH TODAY!!! THEY THINK THEY KNOW EVERYTHING!!!" Crazy Backlund was GOLD.

Tag Titles: Owen Hart/??? vs. Smoking Gunns

Owen introduces Yokozuna as his mystery partner. The Gunns are defending here and say they'll win. Owen and Billy start things off with Hart trying to speed things up. That goes badly for him as Billy slaps him in the face and brings in Bart to work on the arm. Owen fights back though and brings in Yoko who misses an elbow drop. Back to Owen as we're firmly in the Colossal Connection formula (Owen does the wrestling, Yoko comes in for a few seconds to destroy whoever he's fighting).

The Gunns hit a double legsweep on Hart and a double flapjack gets two. Owen finally escapes a backdrop attempt and brings in Yoko. Billy gets taken down and sat on, giving the foreigners control. Off to a nerve hold which hopefully doesn't last as long as the ones last year did. After we kill a minute or so in the hold, Owen loads up a missile dropkick but hits his partner by mistake. There's the hot tag to Bart and house is cleaned, but Billy walks into a belly to belly suplex. The Banzai Drop hits but Bart breaks up the pin. Not that it really matters though as Owen covers Billy for the pin and the title, Owen's first in the company.

Rating: C-. Another decent but lackluster match here which is the theme of this show. The Gunns losing was definitely the right call as Owen and

Yoko made for dominant champions for several months. Other than that though, the match was boring stuff overall. Owen finally getting a title was a good moment though.

Bam Bam Bigelow is in the back and we look at the history between him and Taylor. At the Rumble, Bigelow lost in the finals of a tag title tournament and Taylor laughed at him. Bigelow shoved him and Wrestlemania was made. Bigelow doesn't have anything significant to say here. For some reason Todd Pettingil has headphones on here, presumably because of the audio difficulties. Apparently Lawler accidentally kicked some cords out and the commentary had to be re-recorded later. Maybe that's what's going on.

Bret Hart vs. Bob Backlund

This is an I Quit match with Roddy Piper as guest referee. They had a previous I Quit match at Survivor Series which wound up being pretty awesome as an old school style match that ran about thirty five minutes. Thanks to Owen cheating, Backlund won the title and shocked the world, so tonight is about revenge for Hart. Piper is here for no apparent reason whatsoever.

Bret pounds away to start and sends Backlund hard into the corner. An early Sharpshooter attempt is blocked so Bret drops an elbow. Bret keeps pounding on him and Piper asks if Backlund quits way too often. Another Sharpshooter attempt doesn't work so here's a Figure Four by Bret instead. Backlund turns it over but Bret lets go before it goes badly for him.

Off to a leg lock by Hart as the match slows down a bit. We hear about Bret hating Japanese people which was an angle that didn't go anywhere. Backlund grabs at Bret's face to escape before finally just kicking Hart in the face. Bob starts going after the arm but Bret avoids the chickenwing. Instead it's a Fujiwara Armbar and the fans are getting restless. Bob pounds on the arm even more with an armbar as Piper asks Bret if he gives up for about the dozenth time.

Bret finally fights back and hits the backbreaker and middle rope elbow. The Sharpshooter doesn't work but Bret misses a charge into the corner,

going shoulder first into the post. Bob hooks the chickenwing but Bret reverses into one of his own. Backlund yells incoherently which apparently counts as a submission, giving Bret the win.

Rating: D+. I love the original version of this but the rematch didn't work at all. For one thing, a match about making someone quit with guys of this caliber should probably be longer than ten minutes. On top of that, it was really dull stuff. This didn't work at all and even Bret has said it's one of his least favorite matches ever.

Backlund says he saw the light and looks crazier than usual.

Pamela Anderson is nowhere to be found so changes have been made. Ok then.

Diesel says something that I can't understand because the audio keeps messing up. This is getting REALLY annoying. The audio is fixed long enough for Diesel to say nothing of note.

Jonathan Taylor Thomas comes out to be timekeeper for the title match. Turturro is ring announcer because we haven't seen him enough tonight. At least he seems excited to be here though.

WWF World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Diesel

Diesel is defending and Jenny McCarthy comes out with Shawn. Pam Anderson comes out with Diesel to tick Shawn off, even though I thought McCarthy looked better. Shawn tries to jump Diesel but gets backdropped to the floor so Anderson can come in and pose. We actually get going and Shawn is dropped by a right hand. Diesel beals him out of the corner and Shawn is in trouble early.

A big backdrop puts Shawn down and Diesel throws him out to the floor. It's time to stall until Sid distracts Diesel. That doesn't work either as Diesel blasts Shawn coming in. Shawn pounds away in the corner but gets shoved away like he's not even there. A suplex puts Shawn down and Diesel easily throws him out to the floor. Sid's latest attempt at a distraction lets Shawn get in a few punches and gain brief control.

Diesel is thrown to the floor but Shawn skins the cat to stay alive. A

BIG dive off the top takes Diesel down and a baseball slide keeps him down. Shawn tries another baseball slide but Diesel steps to the side, only to accidentally ram himself ribs first into the post. A Sid chant breaks out as Shawn hits a running splash off the apron. They get back in as Sid and Hebner get in an argument which goes nowhere.

Shawn stays on the ribs before getting two off a middle rope bulldog. Back to the injured back/ribs of Diesel we go as the fans are behind Shawn now. A top rope elbow hits the back for two. The champ counters a front facelock into a backdrop and there's a second one. Shawn sends him into the buckle to slow Diesel down again and there's a sleeper. The champ escapes and hits a corner clothesline followed by Snake Eyes.

We head to the floor for a second time and Diesel wins a quick slugout. Sid tries to interfere and does nothing at all so we head back inside for a superkick. The referee has hurt his ankle (has there ever been a more prone to injury referee than Earl Hebner? He's ALWAYS getting hurt) so the kick only gets two. Sid rips a buckle pad off but Diesel suplexes Shawn down before he can do anything about it.

They're both down now as Hebner's ankle is strong enough for him to stand up now. Shawn goes to the middle rope for something resembling a dropkick but jumps into a side slam. That was a cool looking catch. Diesel still can't follow up because of the ribs but he manages to scoop Shawn's legs out and launch him into (the buckle below) the exposed buckle. A big boot and the Jackknife retain the title as Anderson asks someone if she's supposed to be clapping now.

Rating: B. It's good but somehow this won Match of the Year in PWI. For the life of me I have no idea how as it's not even Shawn's best match of the year. The rematch would be MUCH better with a typical David vs. Goliath formula. The lack of such a formula here was weird as Diesel, the 7'0 monster, was the underdog. Shawn would turn face very soon after this.

Diesel celebrates with all the celebrities.

Shawn goes on a rant (calling the superkick Chin Music, perhaps for the first time but I'm not sure) about how the referee being hurt cost him

the title.

The Million Dollar Team is introduced for the main event: Bundy, Tatanka, Nikolai Volkoff, Kama, I.R.S. and DiBiase himself. We also get the NFL All-Pro Team: Ken Norton, Chris Speilman, Rickey Jackson, Carl Banks, Steve McMichael and Reggie White.

Bam Bam Bigelow vs. Lawrence Taylor

R&B group Salt N Peppa sings What A Man live for Taylor's entrance. Pat Patterson is guest referee to make sure things go as smoothly as possible. Taylor is a legit NFL superstar so this is an actual big deal as far as celebrities go. There are a TON of reporters and photographers at ringside plus the two teams so it looks like a lumberjack match. Before the bell, Taylor SMACKS Bigelow in the face and we're ready to go. Oh and Diesel has been training with Taylor. Remember that.

A big forearm immediately puts Bigelow down and a clothesline puts him on the floor. The crowd is losing it over this stuff as Taylor looks GREAT. Back in and a bulldog (decent one too) gets two for Taylor. There's a hip toss and Bigelow needs a breather. In two minutes, Taylor has already showed more skill and fire than McMichael showed in two and a half years in WCW. Lawrence follows him to the floor and a big brawl almost starts between the teams.

Back in and Bigelow gets in some shots to take over including a headbutt. A falling headbutt misses so Taylor fires off a big forearm to take Bigelow down. Bam Bam pounds him right back down and puts on a Boston crab which almost immediately shifts into a half crab. It breaks down even further into Bigelow just pulling on one leg. Now he just leans on it instead of cranking on it.

Taylor fights up again and hits a suplex of all things to give himself a breather. It's a quick breather though as Bigelow pounds away even more. There's Bigelow's moonsault but he "hurts" his knee in the process. Lawrence kicks out at two (ZERO reaction for the crowd for some reason) and it's time for a comeback. Bigelow ducks his head so Taylor tries something resembling a suplex that was supposed to be a Jackknife.

Bigelow misses an enziguri but Taylor falls down anyway. The top rope headbutt gets another two and the crowd reacts a bit. Taylor gets his last gasp of energy though and pounds Bigelow in the corner before hitting a pair of big forearms. A third from the middle rope is enough for the shocking upset.

Rating: B. All things considered, this was nothing short of a miracle. Keeping in mind that Taylor had zero experience coming in there, he looked amazing. They didn't have most of the problems that most celebrity matches have as Taylor looked like he had actual talent instead of looking like he needed someone to walk him through everything. As a regular match this wasn't much, but all things considered this was great.

Taylor can barely stand up post match and the team has to help him back. DiBiase goes on a rant to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. You often hear how terrible this show is but it really isn't that bad. It's terribly boring and uninteresting for the most part, but there are FAR worse shows out there. The other major problem this show has is that it's a Wrestlemania. If this show was something like In Your House or even Summerslam it wouldn't have nearly the bad reputation it does. It's certainly not good or even decent but it's FAR better than it's given credit for.

Ratings Comparison

Allied Powers vs. Blu Brothers

Original: D

Redo: C-

Razor Ramon vs. Jeff Jarrett

Original: D+

Redo: C

Undertaker vs. King Kong Bundy

Original: F+

Redo: D

Owen Hart/Yokozuna vs. Smoking Gunns

Original: D+

Redo: C-

Bob Backlund vs. Bret Hart

Original: F+

Redo: D+

Diesel vs. Shawn Michaels

Original: B

Redo: B

Lawrence Taylor vs. Bam Bam Bigelow

Original: D+

Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: F+

Redo: D+

Man alive what was bugging me when I watched it the first time? It's not THAT bad.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/03/18/history-of-wrestlemania-with-kb-wrestlemania-11-just-get-it-over-with/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>