

Monday Night Raw – April 25, 2016: The Old New

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 25, 2016

Location: XL Center, Hartford, Connecticut

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

It's the go home show for Payback and things are getting interesting around here. The big story at the moment revolves around what's going to happen with the recently debuted Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows, who may have attacked Roman Reigns to help AJ Styles. AJ has denied it but there's a chance that this could be a Bullet Club reunion. Let's get to it.

We start with an In Memory Of graphic for Chyna. That's almost more than I was expecting.

The opening recap focuses on Reigns, AJ and Gallows/Anderson from last week.

Here's Shane McMahon to get things going. Shane talks about how he's here because of the fans and this Sunday is the first pay per view of a new era. I do love how they're just admitting that Smackdown means nothing and comes along on Raw's ride. Cue Stephanie to make her big return and suck up to the Hartford crowd as she was born in this town.

Apparently this is Shane's last night running the show because Vince hasn't been pleased. Therefore, we're going to find out once and for all who is running the show. Shane does a quick poll of the crowd to predictable responses but Stephanie says she isn't leaving. That's fine with Shane, who is in charge tonight and therefore calls security down to remove Stephanie from the ring. She fights them all the way to the back as is her custom. Shane introduces our first match.

AJ Styles vs. Sheamus

Sheamus drives him into the corner to start (take a shot) but AJ comes back with his dropkick sequence. It's back to the heavy forearms to knock AJ around so Styles hits one of his own to put Sheamus on the floor. A moonsault off the apron misses though and Sheamus sends him into the steps to take us to a break.

Back with Sheamus holding the chinlock (take another shot), followed by two straight Irish Curses for no cover. Off to a bearhug and you can't fault Sheamus' psychology here. AJ escapes and avoids a charge to send Sheamus into the post (take another shot) and go up top. Sheamus tries a super White Noise but AJ escapes into a release super powerbomb of all things. Looked good too.

It's time for the running forearms and kicks in the corner until AJ is sent face first into the buckle. A nice powerslam gets two for Sheamus but he can't get the Cloverleaf. Instead AJ comes back with a good looking Pele to put both guys down. Sheamus is up first this time and throwing on the Cloverleaf until AJ gets a quick rope. The Brogue Kick hits the ropes though and it's the Phenomenal Forearm to put Sheamus away at 14:26.

Rating: B. This has been a great buildup for Styles who has taken down one big name after another before he gets ready for the World Title match. In other words, there has been no 50/50 booking or making either the champion or the challenger look like a goon. The commentary helped here too as they talked about how similar Sheamus and Reigns are. This was a really well done setup and the whole thing worked exactly as they were hoping for. Oh and it was a good match too, which doesn't surprise me.

Anderson and Gallows come out to look at AJ, which fuels the conspiracy theory for some reason.

Roman Reigns is watching in the back when the Usos come in to suggest that they'll have his back on Sunday. Reigns doesn't seem to hate the idea. The fans in the arena were chanting WE CAN'T HEAR YOU during this.

Here's New Day to talk about how awesome their tournament has been while promising to party like it's 1999. This brings out the Vaudevillains to

say they want to party like it's 1899 when they beat up those mange ridden mongrels Enzo and Cass. Of course this brings out Enzo and Cass to a BIG reaction with Enzo saying he's hotter than a 104 degree fever and wants to run down a beach and jump into his own arms. Woods says they'll beat whoever wins because NEW DAY ROCKS. I miss simple little build segments like this without a match or a big blowoff or something. Just let people talk.

Gallows and Anderson leave AJ's locker room.

John Cena will be back on Memorial Day, May 30.

Usos vs. Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows

No team name yet but they do have matching white vests. Cole says Anderson and Gallows were in "a club" with Styles over in New Japan. Jimmy and Anderson get things going with the twin taking over to start. It's off to Jey for chops of his own, only to have Anderson come back with a hard leg lariat. Gallows comes in for a really big clothesline to turn Jey inside out before Anderson starts working on Jimmy's bad shoulder.

The bald guys take turns chinlocking Jey before it's back to Anderson with another armbar. Jey's uppercut is knocked away with an even bigger uppercut from Gallows and the bad arm is bent around the ropes. Jey goes up top but gets knocked down hard, sending the shoulder into the barricade as we take a break. Back with Jey kicking Anderson away and making the hot tag off to Jimmy for the array of strikes. Another big clothesline turns Jey inside out though and Anderson posts him for good measure. The Magic Killer (elevated suplex into a neckbreaker) knocks Jimmy silly at 13:52.

Rating: B-. Good debut here and really just a step above a squash. This was total domination with Anderson and Gallows looking like the monsters they needed to be. I could easily see them getting the titles by the summer as New Day can move on to something bigger and it's not like anyone else needs the belts at the moment. Also the Usos will be fine as they're as made as a tag team can be.

The beating continues post match until Reigns comes out for the save.

Styles says he had nothing going on with Gallows and Anderson. The two of them come in to say they'll have his back on Sunday and can do whatever he wants.

We look back at the history between Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens with both guys talking about how they grew up together and were best friends for years. Then Sami won the NXT Title in December 2014, only to have Owens turn on him and take the title a few months later. Owens debuted in WWE a few months later and beat John Cena in his first match on the main roster. Sami injured his shoulder around the same time and was out for months before returning in January 2016 to eliminate Owens from the Royal Rumble. Owens thinks Sami is the one making this personal. This Sunday it's about payback.

Sami Zayn vs. Rusev

Rusev has Lana with him for the first time in what feels like months. Sami can't do much with the power to start and gets stomped down on the bottom rope as the fans want Lana. A headscissors takes Rusev down but the slingshot plancha is pulled out of the air with Sami being dropped onto the apron. Sami pops back up though and moonsaults off the barricade to drop Rusev again. Rusev kicks him hard in the head though and we take a break. Back with Sami fighting out of a front facelock and hitting a high cross body. Rusev throws him down but can't get the Accolade, allowing Sami to roll him up for the pin at 12:00.

Rating: C. Sami needed this win a lot more than Rusev, though the incredible downfall for the Bulgarian continues. It's so strange to think that he was feuding with Cena for the US Title just a year ago and now he's a midcard monster for someone like Sami. Still though, the right guy won and it really wasn't that shocking.

Lana throws a shoe at Sami post match. That goes nowhere so Owens runs out and drops Sami with a shot to the back.

Stardust interrupts Apollo Crews in the back but Apollo calls him Cody to make things serious. Apparently Dusty Rhodes came up with the name

Apollo, which makes me wonder what Crews' name was before that. Stardust is odd as usual.

Apollo Crews vs. Stardust

Crews starts fast with his standing moonsault to avoid Stardust and a dropkick gets two. Stardust kicks him down and takes off his gloves for some reason before cranking on Crews' arm. That goes nowhere so Crews gets two off the standing moonsault. The lifting powerbomb gives Crews the pin at 3:08.

Rating: D+. They need to go somewhere with Crews or he's going to get boring with the constant smiling and squash wins over low level guys. It's hardly a lost cause or anything but he's getting close to the Rocky Maivia territory. Give him a story or a quick feud or something, as long as it doesn't mean listening to Crews talk that much.

Here's Dean Ambrose for a chat. Dean was supposed to host the Ambrose Asylum tonight but he's not in the mood for fun and games after he was attacked from behind last week. This Sunday he's facing one of the best of all time but he's ready to fight. Jericho may be the best in the world at what he does but Ambrose is pretty good at what he does too. When Ambrose sees a problem, he rolls up his sleeve and starts leaving bruises and chipping teeth because that's what he does.

Dean wants Jericho out here right now so here's Chris to call him an idiot. Jericho isn't wasting his time fighting Ambrose in a dump like Hartford. Instead, Dean should be down on his knees kissing Jericho's \$1,500 boots for letting him be in this ring. Jericho changes his mind and asks for an apology from Ambrose for stealing the Highlight Reel. Dean apologizes that Jericho paid that much money for such ugly shoes, for wearing a scarf everywhere and for that Bon Jovi haircut. He's not sorry for the brawl that starts but Jericho quickly gets the better of it and puts Dean in the Walls on the announcers' table.

Natalya vs. Emma

Charlotte is on commentary. Emma quickly takes it outside for a gutwrench suplex before we hit a seated full nelson. Not that it matters as Natalya

gets up and grabs the Sharpshooter for the submission at 2:19.

Natalya stares Charlotte down first match so the champ hides behind Ric.

Chyna tribute video. It's nice that they're actually doing this. Most of this is a series of clips and then a series of tweets from various wrestling personalities commenting on her passing.

Baron Corbin vs. Damien Sandow

In a role reversal from Smackdown, no match as Ziggler jumps Corbin from behind and chases him off.

Greetings From Puerto Rico.

Here are Miz and Maryse to talk about Miz's title defense against Cesaro on Sunday. Miz is used to being tormented by the anonymous internet trolls who now think Cesaro is going to win on Sunday. This title is more than important because it's legendary. Miz is tired of seeing all the handmade signs saying CESARO SECTION because the fans should be better than that. You can have your internet section because he has a Miz section that looks like Maryse.

This brings out Cesaro to interrupt but Miz goes into a Robert De Niro speech from Taxi Driver. Cesaro promises to roll the credits on Miz's title reign and tells Miz to make his day. Miz goes to leave but tries a cheap shot, earning himself Swiss Death but Maryse dives on top of her husband to prevent the Swing. Cesaro holds up the title. I could totally go for this "let's yell at each other and make the story more unique" to set up big matches. If only that had been done for decades instead of "here's a match three times before the BIG version of it that you have to pay for."

AJ comes up to Reigns in the back and says he's taking the title on Sunday. Reigns thinks Gallows and Anderson already have ringside seats.

This week's Kickoff match is Ryback vs. Kalisto for the US Title.

Alberto Del Rio vs. Roman Reigns

Non-title. Roman throws him around to start and gets in one of those running corner clotheslines. The running enziguri staggers Reigns though and Del Rio double stomps him from the apron as we take a break. Back with Del Rio holding the chinlock a bit longer than usual before hitting a DDT for two. The low superkick misses though and Reigns comes back with his series of clotheslines. That earns him the now standard booing but Del Rio bails to avoid the Superman Punch.

Instead it's the apron kick to send Del Rio into the post, only to have him kick the ropes to crotch Reigns as he comes back in. This is referred to as a kick to the hamstring due to reasons of convenience, allowing Del Rio to get in the superkick for two. Del Rio misses the top rope double stomp because Reigns is able to drop down instead of sit up, allowing Reigns to hit the Superman Punch. Cue Anderson and Gallows to stare Reigns down, allowing Del Rio to roll Roman up for two. The spear puts Del Rio away at 13:00.

Rating: C. At least they seem to be turning Reigns heel because there's just no way it's going to work as a face act at this point. No matter what Reigns does, that booing is part of the whole package now. They're certainly acknowledging it now though and that's the best thing to happen to Reigns in a long time.

Post match Anderson and Gallows come in for the beatdown. AJ runs out to stop them but gets Superman Punches. Gallows and Anderson come back in, allowing Reigns to hit the Phenomenal Forearm to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This show started off looking great and then really ran out of steam in the second half. However, they did a lot of good things to help set up the pay per view and you can still see the momentum from Wrestlemania. The key thing for me is they're doing a better job of setting up feuds and big matches.

Whether it's the rather awesome World Title match or Sami vs. Owens (ok so that one wrote itself) or Cesaro going after Miz and the title, most of the matches have gotten a much stronger focus than in previous months. Above all else though they all seem to have a mostly unique story and setup.

With Cesaro vs. Miz it's Cesaro never holding the title before and all the movie stuff. With the tag tournament match you have two unique teams with a bit of a history in NXT. With the Women's Title you have the families feuding (not a fan but at least it's something). The key though is everything has a story instead of "well they've fought a bunch of times and now they're fighting again" or "contractually obligated rematch". It makes things feel fresh for a change and that's something WWE has been lacking for years now.

Results

AJ Styles b. Sheamus – Phenomenal Forearm

Luke Gallows/Karl Anderson b. Usos – Magic Killer to Jimmy

Sami Zayn b. Rusev – Rollup

Apollo Crews b. Stardust – Lifting powerbomb

Natalya b. Emma – Sharpshooter

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the History of the Intercontinental Title at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01D4D3EGQ>

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

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