

Smackdown – April 18, 2002: The Hogan Problem

Smackdown

Date: April 18, 2002

Location: Compaq Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Tazz, Michael Cole

It's the go home show for Backlash and since this is Smackdown, we have a tag team main event which doesn't have a lot to do with the pay per view. In this case it's HHH/Hulk Hogan vs. Chris Jericho/Kurt Angle as Jericho doesn't actually have a match on Sunday. Then again I'm not sure who he could fight save for Rock, who wasn't around last week and probably won't be again this week. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Billy and Chuck/Albert vs. Maven/Al Snow/Rikishi

Chuck punches Snow in the face to start in what is probably his best offensive move. Something close to a low blow has Chuck in trouble so it's off to Maven for his really bad offense. We hit the armbars on Chuck as Tazz argues that he was Maven's real trainer. I'd be careful bragging about that buddy. Albert comes in and throws Al around but Snow finds a way around Billy's amazing offense and brings in Rikishi, who is suddenly an offensive juggernaut.

Rico comes in and is almost caught in a Stinkface (along with Chuck) but Albert makes the save. We get the big slam spot that isn't as impressive as WWE would like us to be. The hot tag gives us Maven for some reason as everything breaks down. Rico kicks Snow down but Maven comes off the top with a high cross body for the pin on Chuck to set up Sunday's title match.

Rating: C+. I think we've found the winner for biggest surprise of the night as this was actually good. Maven is still hard to take seriously with his dropkick and crossbody offense but giving him the pin was the best idea after Snow won last week. Albert vs. Rikishi is just a thing that exists but I've seen worse. Nice choice for an opener here.

Stacy Keibler, looking very good in blue, bends over just as Hulk

Hogan opens his door. Vince wants to see Hogan right now so Hulk follows her with his eyes clearly panning down.

Kidman and Hurricane make fun of Planet Stasiak but Kidman says no one knows who he is. Hurricane has an idea: CHEAP POPS! So now the writers are making fun of the fact that no one cares about the Cruiserweight Title? I mean, no one does but still.

Hogan comes in to see Vince but Stacy finds Hulk a bit too attractive and gets sent away. Vince thinks he's experienced this feeling of fan support for Hogan before. Back in 1984, nothing could stop this kind of momentum but it's not going to be enough on Sunday. Naturally this takes WAY longer than it should.

Chavo Guerrero Jr./Tajiri vs. Kidman/Hurricane

Kidman armdrags Chavo to dead silence to get us going. A headscissors and dropkick do a bit better but it's off to Hurricane and you can hear the crowd wake up. Tajiri walks into a headlock before hitting a perfect looking superkick to drop Hurricane. The announcers completely ignore the match to talk about Vince and Hogan's issues despite Vince having very little to do with Hogan at the moment.

Kidman takes a quick beating before it's back to Hurricane for a jumping clothesline. Everything breaks down and Chavo sends Hurricane to the floor, only to have Tajiri come back in with a high crossbody for two. Tazz: "What is going on in this match?" It's almost like he doesn't pay attention. A big kick to the head gives Tajiri the pin on Hurricane.

Rating: B-. If there's one thing that drives me crazier than the announcers not paying attention, it's the announcers acknowledging that they're not paying attention. It's a nothing match but I miss the days of Gorilla Monsoon and Jesse Ventura where the match going on in front of them was the most important thing in the world. You can plug other stuff but don't laugh off the fact that you have no idea what's going on in front of you.

Post match Tajiri kicks Kidman in the head and yells at Torrie in Japanese.

We look back at Test trying to hurt Mark Henry during last week's feat of strength.

Here's Mark to lift a car off the ground. Wrestlers take bets and

Test doesn't buy that this is real. He can't lift it but Mark can, only to have Test cheat on the bets and beat Faarooq up.

Hulk Hogan comes out to talk about how people think he's crazy for trying this one more time. He believes that he can do it one more time because, as Vince says, perception is reality. Hogan used to take the title for granted and now he wants to just be champion one more time. We get the big HULKING UP line but here's Chris Jericho to interrupt.

Jericho goes on for a LONG time about how old Hogan is and about how HHH stole the title from him. Ever since he got back, Hogan has only had one singles match and he lost. True actually but ignore that part of course. Hogan finally tells him to shut up and come fight so here's Kurt Angle to help him out. Edge comes out for the save to finally end this.

Here's the problem: the fans absolutely love to cheer Hogan's comeback and old nostalgia stuff because Hogan can still do it well enough to make the schtick work. The problem is that only works during the matches. In between them, Hogan has almost nothing to talk about other than how he wants to be a star one more time. That lost its steam about two days after Wrestlemania and it's getting close to impossible to sit through, especially when he talks for ten minutes a week.

Vince throws Edge out but Edge thinks it's Vince being afraid of what's going to happen to Angle on Sunday. Edge leaves and Stacy comes up to offer her, ahem, services to calm Vince down. Vince wants HHH instead.

Test vs. Faarooq

Faarooq goes right after him but makes the mistake of sliding in, allowing Test to take over. Faarooq's comeback goes nowhere and Test rolls him up with his feet on the ropes for two. The pumphandle slam doesn't work so Faarooq avoids a charge and grabs a rollup with his feet on the ropes for the pin.

Test kicks Faarooq in the face.

Stacy goes to get HHH but is distracted when he takes off the shirt. She finally gets the line out but HHH says she can't make him come just by telling him to.

Hardcore Holly wants to beat Page up because he likes destroying

positivity. Page comes in and smiles but says the anger is ticking him off.

HHH comes in to see Vince so Stacy is quickly sent out. Vince asks if HHH is ready to "dampen the fires of the greatest fire in sports entertainment." If HHH loses, he's on Smackdown. Now THAT'S a punishment.

Diamond Dallas Page vs. Hardcore Holly

Page starts fast with a clothesline and neckbreaker before hammering away in the corner. Holly gets in a hard clothesline of his own, only to get crotched on top. A superplex brings them down but Page lands on his head, injuring his neck in the process. Thankfully Page is able to walk and tries the Diamond Cutter but Holly shoves him away and hits the dropkick for the pin. According to Holly's book, the ending was originally going to be the Alabama Slam but Page asked for it to be changed due to Page having some injuries. For some reason this was considered rude and Holly was punished as a result.

Page has to fight Holly off and gets in a quick Diamond Cutter. That's it for Page in the WWF and really it's for the best. Page never quite fit in the WWF but that's to be expected when a lot of his WCW appeal came from fans watching him rise up the card. That and signing at 45 years old. He had a nice little run though and that's more than a lot of people get.

Angle and Jericho are in the back and Kurt gets annoyed at Jericho saying Angle would suck the life out of Hogan. Kurt is so mad that he keeps leaving and coming back to yell more.

Here's Reverend D-Von to say Vince is a prophet and go on like your standard enthusiastic preacher. He even takes up a collection and the fans give him a nice wad of cash.

Chris Jericho/Kurt Angle vs. HHH/Hulk Hogan

HHH and Angle start with the champ hammering away, just in case you didn't realize HHH is better than Kurt. That doesn't go anywhere so it's off to Hogan for a change. Jericho comes in and tries a posedown before Angle comes in for the double teaming. Two simple villains are no match for Hogan of course so it's HHH coming in to help stomp Jericho in the corner.

A catapult sends Jericho into Angle and a spinebuster gets two. For

some reason the good guys get in an argument, allowing Jericho to hit HHH low and finally take over. We hit the sleeper because that's going to get the fans to care. As usual, Hogan is awesome at playing cheerleader on the apron, which really is something so many people miss. Watch someone like Hogan or Cena when they're on the apron in a tag match. They're almost always doing something, even if it's just slapping the turnbuckle. The energy helps a match so much.

Angle misses a charge into the post and the tag brings in Hogan for the 1986 offense. Jericho breaks up the legdrop and grabs a chair but stops to throw the referee out. HHH gets up but Jericho breaks up a Pedigree. Dang Kurt is going to owe him forever now. Hogan comes back and takes the chair away, setting up the chair shot to HHH's head that everyone saw coming. Edge comes in to save Hogan (again) and the match is a no contest.

Rating: D+. Just angle advancement here and that's fine. I still have no idea why Jericho doesn't have a match on the pay per view when he's in such a featured role on this show. Hogan vs. HHH can't end fast enough and these matches aren't making me want to see them fight on Sunday. The wrestling, which means HHH and Hogan making it clear that they're miles ahead of their opponents, was watchable enough if you can ignore the boring stories.

Edge fights Jericho and Angle off, leaving HHH to chair Hogan to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. I know the show wasn't great but this was so far and away better than Raw. Maybe it's the younger talent around here or maybe it's the lack of thirty second matches but this is easily more entertaining. There's still a lot of bad stuff here though as they need to get rid of Hogan as fast as they can. It's really not working at the moment and that's only going to get worse as time goes on. This was a completely watchable show though and that puts it leaps and bounds above Raw.

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