

Monday Night Raw – June 17, 2002: Maybe He Should Have Left Earlier

Monday Night Raw

Date: June 17, 2002

Location: The Arena in Oakland, Oakland, California

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the go home show for King of the Ring and that means we're getting the first two quarterfinal matches tonight. Unfortunately it means we're also getting more of the mess that Raw has become. However, with WWE having to hit a big reset button last week, it should be interesting to see where things go from here. Let's get to it.

The opening recap looks at Shawn Michaels superkicking Booker T. out of the NWO, somehow managing to make them even less interesting.

Opening sequence.

Tonight: the REAL STORY on Steve Austin from Confidential (a news style show that aired in 2002). Oh that could be good.

King of the Ring Quarterfinals: X-Pac vs. Rob Van Dam

Non-title. We get the loud X-PAC SUCKS chants as he rides Van Dam on the mat, likely trying to show the fans up a bit. That earns him some kicks to the face and it's time for the RVD chants. The spinning kick to the back on the apron has both of them down on the floor but it's X-Pac coming back with a good looking kick to the face. They're already ahead of Ernest Miller vs. Jerry Flynn so that's quite the good sign. The Bronco Buster doesn't work and Van Dam mostly hits the step over kick to the...we'll say face. X-Pac sends him to the floor but Booker runs in for the Bookend, setting up one heck of a Five Star for the pin.

Rating: C+. Litany of kicks aside, this was actually quite the entertaining match, which isn't something you see enough around here. X-

Pac is still a very talented in ring worker and can hang with a high flier like Van Dam, who was on his game here as well. Van Dam going forward is interesting but I'm not sure if it's the best idea to push the Intercontinental Champion deep into a tournament as it means either giving him two accolades or having the champ lose a big match.

We get the first Confidential clip with JR saying Austin leaving was like John Wayne becoming a coward and walking away. This is going to get bad in a hurry.

X-Pac wants Booker but Kevin Nash has a plan.

Here's Vince McMahon for the big Austin segment. Austin really is gone and odds are he's not coming back. Last week, Austin was booked for Raw but didn't show up, just like he didn't after Wrestlemania. A few months ago, Austin said he was burned out and that's understandable so the company forgave him. This time is too much though and Austin owes a lot of people an apology. True.

Last week, Austin was in town but he wouldn't take any calls save for one from Jim Ross. However, Austin refused to come to the arena and air his grievances, which Vince calls uncharacteristic of Austin. The company will move on and develop new ideas and new concepts, including the King of the Ring winner receiving a title shot at Summerslam. Vince knows Austin wishes everyone well and says thank you on behalf of the fans and company. A beer toast wraps this up.

This could have been much, much worse and the company comes off as taking the high road for a change. Vince made sure to say that this isn't like Austin and it would have been ridiculous for the company to turn its back on the man who saved them at their darkest hour for one such issue. If nothing else, consider all the people who have no showed over the years and been welcomed back later. It's nice to see them acting professional and not turning this into a comedy routine for a change. Well done here, though the show isn't over yet.

Jeff Hardy vs. Raven

This is fallout from a match on Heat where Jeff snapped and choked Raven

with a cord. Undertaker comes out at the bell and it's Jeff taking over with an armdrag to send Raven outside. The Undertaker distraction lets Raven send Jeff outside as well though, followed by a knee to the back of the head. A quick headscissors sends Raven into the buckle and Jeff breaks up a superplex attempt, setting up the Swanton for the pin.

Rating: D+. Just two guys having a match here as Jeff's singles push actually begins. Granted it's not likely to get very far with the feud being against Undertaker, who isn't known as the greatest seller of all time. At least they're pushing someone new though as it's one of their biggest issues.

Goldust is now dressed like a noble because he likes the sound of King Booker. So Goldust came up with that fairly awesome character? Either way it seems to fire Booker up for his match with Brock. "Now can thou diggeth that sucka???"

Molly Holly is doing squats because someone in good enough shape to be a professional wrestler apparently needs to shed a ton of weight. Coach makes stupid puns and thankfully gets slapped.

Big Show finds that funny as X-Pac comes up and calls him G-Money. We get an NWO huddle until Paul Heyman and Lesnar come in. Heyman wants the NWO to stay out of Brock's way tonight and avoid any potential complications. X-Pac doesn't like the idea of a threat, which makes the NWO seem like the faces in this whole thing. Shawn and Heyman have a battle of the stupid looking hats and everyone stares at Lesnar.

Chris Nowinski vs. Spike Dudley

Nowinski has William Regal in his corner. Spike stomps him down in the corner as Chris is wrestling in khakis, which come off as Spike is sent outside. Back in and we hit the choking against the ropes as Chris' rookie offense isn't the most versatile yet. Spike comes back with a top rope double stomp (I still don't understand how that doesn't crack ribs) but Regal offers a distraction so Chris can get in some weird full nelson slam for the pin.

Rating: D-. Much like the Hardy match, points for trying to introduce

some new characters. Chris wouldn't seem to be the answer to a lot of the show's problems but you have to try something somewhere. Unfortunately the match was rather horrible and it took help to beat Spike Dudley. You have to start somewhere though.

Regal and Nowinski put the boots to Spike until Bradshaw makes the save.

Here's Ric Flair for a chat. Last week people thought he lost everything but he realized he had to get out or put out. Ric decided that he's found himself again and is sorry for everything he's done. He might have lost a step but he's still the dirtiest player in the game, which he'll prove to Brock Lesnar.

Cue the glass shatter but of course it's a ruse so Eddie Guerrero can come out instead. Eddie goes on a rant about losing the chance to face Austin at King of the Ring, which he blames entirely on Flair. Now it's Benoit coming out, with Lawler still saying Benoit is on Smackdown. I get the idea that they drafted him but since he's clearly going to be on Raw, just say something about a trade or buying his contract or something like that.

Benoit asks Eddie if he knows who he's talking to and holds up the Horsemen sign. Eddie still doesn't buy it so Flair offers to replace Austin at King of the Ring. The challenge seems to be accepted as Eddie says something about Ric's madre. Benoit jumps to Flair's defense...and then blames him for taking Austin away before Benoit can get revenge for the lost year. The beatdown is on with Eddie putting on the Figure Four.

Chris Nowinski (he's getting a lot of time tonight) introduces himself to Vince and doesn't seem to think much of Vince going to East Carolina University. Tony Garea of all people calls and says someone is on his way. Vince doesn't say who it is but thinks it's Austin.

Vince tells security to give Austin some leeway.

Trish Stratus/D'Lo Brown vs. Crash/Molly Holly

Brown and Crash got into it on Heat last night. The guys don't do much to start so it's quickly off to the women as Lawler tries to get the fans to

chant that Molly is fat. The Chick Kick gets two but Molly puts her down, only to miss the Molly Go Round. Everything breaks down as the guys come back in with a Sky High putting Crash away. Lawler was DISTURBING here and this is getting harder and harder to listen to every week.

Molly pulls Trish off the apron, sending her face first into the announcers' table.

Lita, who can somehow look good even in a massive neck brace, thinks Matt is being too dangerous by fighting Undertaker tonight.

Vince has a separate camera crew ready to document everything Austin does. Jackie Gayda comes in and asks to be a Raw girl but has to compete in the Divas Undressed special next week.

Undertaker vs. Matt Hardy

Non-title. Matt goes right after him but has to punch his way out of the Last Ride. A running chokeslam gets two as Jeff pulls the referee out but here's Raven to go after Jeff because that's still a thing. The Last Ride finishes Matt quick.

Raven handcuffs Jeff to the ropes so Undertaker can beat on him while Raven holds Matt in place. Matt Hardy can't handle Raven?

Post break, Undertaker says he doesn't want people making a name for themselves off of him. HHH better have been watching.

Vince gets another call but can't hear who is on the way.

Heyman tells Earl Hebner to do his job tonight and DQ Booker as soon as anyone comes to ringside. Hebner tells him to stay out of it. Booker comes in for the catchphrase.

King of the Ring Quarterfinals: Brock Lesnar vs. Booker T.

The NWO comes out for commentary as Heyman starts to panic as only he can. Booker chops away to start but is clotheslined out to the floor. JR tries to find out why Booker isn't NWO material. Shawn: "He's a showman, he's a dancer. There's no place for that in the NWO." Now Goldust comes

out so we can have six extra people at ringside. A powerslam puts Booker down and Goldust decks Heyman for general purposes. The ax kick sets up the Spinarooni but the NWO gets on the apron, allowing Brock to hit the F5 (finally referred to as such) to advance.

Rating: D. This was more smoke and mirrors to protect Brock but at least Booker didn't lose clean. It was also smart to put Booker in there to guarantee the match went smoothly as someone like Brock still needs a guide to get him through a match. Lesnar is clearly getting the rocket push, despite how green he looks out there.

Goldust and Booker get the NWO beatdown.

Vince tells Slaughter to go greet Austin.

After a break, Vince is in the ring with a beer for Austin and you can feel the fans getting excited. Garea comes out to tell Vince that it was another he.....and here's the Rock. You know, the top Smackdown pick who was around for like two episodes. Rock immediately hits the catchphrases and gives Vince fifteen seconds to get out of this ring. Vince is out at ten and Rock throws the beer over Vince's head (with Vince on the stage) as he goes.

Rock goes on a tirade against Austin (without mentioning his name), saying if anyone else doesn't want to be with the company, they can get the F out. He's scheduled to be back on Smackdown July 11 but we'll make that this Sunday at King of the Ring. In fifty years he'll be using the people's walker to get down to the ring because this is in his blood. We hit one more catchphrase to wrap this up. Rock was really the only name that was going to replace Austin so this was as good as it was going to get.

Overall Rating: C-. Maybe Austin should have left a long time ago. This was a much easier show to sit through as they actually advanced some stories and started focusing on some new stars. Brock is looking like a huge deal, Booker is a charged up face with people to feud with and Jeff Hardy is in a quick feud with Undertaker. Those aren't great developments but they're steps in the right direction, which you haven't seen on this show in way too long. Better, but still not good this week.

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