

Monday Night Raw – June 24, 2002: The Lesnar Problem

Monday Night Raw

Date: June 24, 2002

Location: Gund Arena, Cleveland, Ohio

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

Thank goodness we're past the miserable King of the Ring and that means it's time to get read for Vengeance. Brock Lesnar is the new King and that means he'll be challenging for the title at Summerslam, but that's still a long way away. On top of that we've got the NWO running around doing....something that isn't entirely clear. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

The midcard is around the ring and here's Vince for the opening speech. Vince is often asked what makes him such a success and without a doubt it's RUTHLESS AGGRESSION. We hear about how he beat WCW and the federal government before Vince asks which of them has the ruthless aggression he's looking for. For some reason he keeps getting in Bradshaw's face during this speech. Well that would fit the idea of pushing mostly older names who aren't getting over anytime soon.

Vince starts praising Brock for winning last night while getting in Rob Van Dam's face. A few matches are set up for later and Vince goes on a big rant about how important it is to be ruthless. This brings out the NWO with Shawn Michaels offering the team's services to clear out some of the weaklings. Nash says if anyone has issue with that, go headline a few Wrestlemanias and then give them a shot.

Booker and Goldust are ready to fight the NWO because there's no one tighter than the two of them. I mean, they're buddies! Homies! They're practically married! Thank goodness they're not on the same show as Billy and Chuck. Vince makes Booker/Goldust vs. X-Pac/Big Show and threatens to fire Nash, just like he did to Scott Hall. Booker can dig that, sucka.

Bradshaw/Spike Dudley vs. William Regal/Christopher Nowinski

Lawler is too busy looking at the Harvard yearbook as Bradshaw throws Spike onto the two pompous jerks. Nowinski gets beaten up to start but Spike gets pulled out to the floor so Regal can start the beating. A very quick hot tag brings in Bradshaw for the house cleaning, including the Clothesline to Regal, only to have Chris grab a rollup and trunks for the pin.

Vince has a few names he wants fired, starting with Tommy Dreamer and Raven. They'll have a match tonight and the loser is banished from Raw. The boss heads into a locker room and gets to see Jackie Gayda in her lingerie. That's part of the build for the Divas Undressed special you see. Undertaker comes in but Vince tells him to not worry about Jeff Hardy because Jeff is a pushover. This was another version of beating you over the head with exposition.

Bubba Ray Dudley vs. Eddie Guerrero

Before the match, Eddie says there's no way he's going through a table. Bubba goes right after him with the high powered offense before trying an early Bubba Bomb...which is reversed into a rollup to give Eddie the pin in less than a minute. Huh?

Post match Eddie gets powerbombed through a table. Chris Benoit runs out to put Bubba in the Crossface. Again I say: huh? This whole thing, including Eddie's long pre-match promo, took less than five minutes.

Rey Mysterio is coming. Now THAT is a way to fire up a show.

Goldust is now the Crocodile Hunter to check out the NWO locker room. Big Show is sound asleep and doesn't hear Goldust loudly talking just a few feet away. X-Pac chases him off and Big Show talks about cheeseburgers. He was awake like half an hour ago and he's already talking in his sleep?

The Hardys need to become singles stars because they don't have any Tag Team Titles to win.

X-Pac chases Goldust but runs into a trashcan lid shot from Booker. This has turned into a bad comedy chase movie.

GET THE F OUT!

Raven vs. Tommy Dreamer

Dreamer doesn't even get an entrance. Raven starts fast and uses a middle rope knee to drive Tommy head first into the mat. As you might expect, Lawler is all over the history of ECW, saying the loser here could get a job in fast food if they're lucky. Dreamer goes shoulder first into the post but grabs a DDT for two. A Death Valley Driver gets rid of Raven in a short match.

Paul Heyman is ready to crown Brock as King.

Raven leaves without even getting to change. Matt Hardy jumps him to make up for last week.

It's time for the coronation with Heyman taking credit for everything. On top of that though, it was his idea that the winner of the tournament get the title shot at Summerslam, which must have been the idea that he mentioned to Vince a few weeks back. That's not exactly an earth shattering revelation or anything but I'll give them points for at least addressing it. Brock comes out so Heyman can talk about how awesome he is but Van Dam runs in for the attack.

Post break, Heyman begs for and is granted a match tonight between Lesnar and Van Dam. Vince even makes it for the title, sending Heyman through the roof with elation.

Video of Undertaker destroying Jeff Hardy in recent weeks.

Jeff Hardy vs. Undertaker

Non-title. Jeff is thrown shoulder first into the post and a powerslam gets two with Undertaker pulling him up. The apron legdrop misses and Jeff gets in a dive, only to be chokeslammed on the floor. The Last Ride completes the destruction.

Undertaker rides away but Jeff says not so fast. He may have been beaten down time and time again but Jeff wants one more match: A LADDER MATCH for the title.

By the way: we're over an hour and fifteen minutes into this show and no matches have broken three minutes yet.

Trish Stratus/Linda Miles vs. Molly Holly/Jackie Gayda

So...weren't the Tough Enough girls on Smackdown recently? Like, in theory EXCLUSIVELY on Smackdown? Before the match, Molly says she earned the title but Trish brings up the whole cheating thing. Thankfully Trish and Molly get things going and, not so thankfully, the fat jokes are rolling early.

For some reason it's off to both rookies at the same time, even though it would make sense to have them work with a veteran who can keep things under control. Trish and Linda take turns on Jackie's arm until Molly starts choking on the top rope. The hot tag brings Trish back in and a Chick Kick gets two on Molly. Everything breaks down and Stratusfaction gives Trish the clean pin on the champ.

Rating: D. I get the idea of Linda and Jackie getting ring time but things might actually be able to go somewhere once we get passed Divas Undressed, which is suddenly the most amazing thing ever. It's being treated as more important than the Women's Title right now and that's getting old in a hurry. But hey, that's all the women are good for right?

We look back at Van Dam attacking Lesnar.

Van Dam and Lesnar are ready for each other.

Nash fires up the NWO.

NWO vs. Booker T./Goldust

Show powers Booker into the corner to start and the chops are enough to bring in X-Pac. Goldust comes in as well and hits his own Bronco Buster but the slow beatdown begins as the NWO takes over. Riveting stuff you see. Of course it's time for a chinlock for a bit but a good looking spinwheel kick gets two on Goldust.

Show's Final Cut gets two and it's time for more kicks, only to have the Bronco Buster miss. Some heel miscommunication allows Booker to hit his

trio of kicks on Big Show. Everything breaks down and Booker kicks X-Pac outside, leaving Goldust to load up Shattered Dreams on Big Show. This of course takes WAY too long and it's the chokeslam to put Goldust away.

Rating: C+. Not bad here as they were smart enough to put Show on the apron for most of the match. He's fine when they just let him beat people up and doesn't do much otherwise, which is the best idea when you have three people this talented out there. Also at least they had Goldust take the fall instead of Booker and now Nash can be happy.

Intercontinental Title: Rob Van Dam vs. Brock Lesnar

Lesnar is challenging and runs Rob over in the corner to start. The fans get distracted by something in the corner of the arena but a jumping kick to Brock's face brings their attention back. The beating begins though with Lesnar taking Brock down and ignoring the GOLDBERG chants. We hit the suplex for another near fall, followed by the backbreakers into a bearhug which gives me time to think about the Lesnar problem.

Brock is in such a weird place as he looks great and has all the physical tools but he feels like someone who is just doing the things a great heel can do instead of actually doing them. Instead of someone who is the top star, he comes off like the ultimate dragon for the real top star to slay. Van Dam breaks out and starts the comeback with the usual, including the top rope kick to the face. Heyman offers a distraction to break up the Five Star and then comes in to break up the cover off a split legged moonsault.

Rating: C. You could hear the crowd go silent on the finish and I can't say I blame them. It's pretty clear there's going to be a rematch at Vengeance but that doesn't make this much better. Like I said, Brock really isn't the most interesting heel in the world. We really haven't heard anything actually from him as it's all Heyman saying "this guy is a monster", which we could see without Heyman around.

Heyman gets the Five Star but Brock powerbombs Rob through the announcers' table to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. Until the aftermath of Jeff vs. Undertaker, this could

have been on an episode of Heat. Yeah Vince addressed the locker room and that seems to mean a grand total of nothing. Really what it came down to was “now you all work extra hard” and then it was just another episode of Raw with a first hour that meant nothing. How can you go through a show and have so little happen until nearly the last third?

Above all else though, I’m not sure what the biggest story was on this show. In theory it’s the Ruthless Aggression part but what does that even mean? Vince said it like a new buzz word but the big thing I saw was the NWO leadership treating their two active wrestlers like rookies and teasing a Vince vs. NWO feud while Lesnar destroyed Van Dam to crickets. They need to fix something in a hurry because this show was really bad with the last half hour barely keeping it afloat.

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