

Smackdown – July 18, 2002: And There It Is

Smackdown

Date: July 18, 2002

Location: First Union Arena, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's the go home show for Vengeance but the bigger story here is the in ring return of the Rock who will be facing Kurt Angle to warm up for his World Title match on Sunday. Other than that we get to meet the first Smackdown General Manager, who I'm sure won't be a huge disappointment and create a bunch of plot holes. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Eric Bischoff being announced as the Raw GM. Bischoff has promised to show up tonight and sign Rock, which apparently you can just do. The idea here is that he likes to steal talent, though I'm not sure why Vince would care since he owns both shows.

Opening sequence.

Chris Jericho vs. John Cena

Cena starts fast as has been his custom so far but misses a charge, sending him flying out to the floor. Back in and Jericho takes too long on top, allowing Cena to dropkick him down. A belly to belly and DDT get two each on Chris so he hits Cena low for the quick DQ.

Post match Jericho puts Cena in the Walls of Jericho and beats him down with a chair.

A smiling Bischoff arrives.

Bischoff goes looking for Hulk Hogan. Hint: it's the room with the HULK HOGAN sign on the door. Hulk doesn't seem interested and tells Eric that they're not down south anymore. Eric asks if Edge is really attached to Smackdown but Hulk still doesn't seem convinced.

Hurricane vs. Chavo Guerrero Jr.

Chavo slaps the handshake away and gets taken down by a neckbreaker. Hurricane blows his knee out on a leapfrog though and Chavo wraps it around the post. The Tree of Woe makes things worse but Hurricane grabs him by the throat. Cole: "I think it might be the chokeslam!" That's enough of a tip off for Chavo to take the knee out again. The knee is fine enough for a Shining Wizard and Blockbuster for two each but Chavo gets all fired up. A Brock Lock with Chavo lifting Hurricane up for a kind of powerbomb sets up an STF to make Hurricane tap.

Rating: C. The match was fine though I'd still like to point out that Chavo isn't interesting on his own. He's someone who really needs a gimmick because there's just not enough there on his own. He looked extra vicious tonight though and the leg work was good stuff. Chavo can wrestle a totally acceptable match but that doesn't mean he's interesting.

Chavo is sick of these Rey Mysterio videos and challenges him to a match next week.

Vince arrives.

Rico offers Bischoff his services but Eric runs into Vince. Eric says he's off to see the Rock to show off ruthless aggression.

Undertaker had a sitdown interview earlier (that's not something you see every day) which he turns into a promo about how Rock and Angle are in for beatings. He and Angle could fight a thousand times and Kurt could never make him tap. This was a pretty rambling promo but Undertaker doesn't get a lot of practice.

Billy and Chuck vs. Hardcore Holly/Big Valbowski

Billy punches Holly down in the corner to start but Hardcore hits his kick to the very lower ribs (Tazz: "This might not even hurt Billy!") to take over. The partners come in with the veterans keeping Chuck in trouble. A belly to belly puts Hardcore down but the advantage lasts all of a few seconds until a double clothesline drops both of them. Venis gets a hot tag with what had to be a sweetened crowd pop. Everything

breaks down and the Alabama Slam into the Money Shot finishes Billy.

Rating: D+. Sure why not. It's not like the tag division has anywhere to go but up so give a new team a win to make them players. I know it's not much and Holly/Venis aren't going to be anything serious but it's better to try to do something instead of running the same teams over and over again. Also, you can almost guarantee a passable match from the veterans and that's better than taking a gamble on someone who won't go anywhere and could put on a disaster.

Edge/Hulk Hogan/Rikishi vs. Un-Americans

It's Edge and Storm to get things going and the other Canadians are quickly tripping Edge from the floor. The fans already want Hogan as we take an early break. Back with Edge still in trouble, including a chinlock from Test. The big boot misses though and Edge gets in the half nelson faceplant but Storm breaks up the tag. Do Canadian schools teach you how to cut off the ring? Edge powerslams Lance and brings Hogan in as everything breaks down. Storm's superkick triggers the Hulk Up but Test breaks up the Stinkface. Not that it matters as Edge spears Christian and hits the Edgecution for the pin on Storm.

Rating: C+. Totally fine six man here and, again, they kept Hogan's in ring time limited. The fans love him and want to see him do his stuff so why let him ruin a match due to age and physical limitations? This was exactly what it should have been, save for Rikishi being a bit of an odd fit with the champs.

Bischoff gives Rock his sales pitch and Rock says he'll be at Raw....because he'll be the new Undisputed Champion. See, Rock could go on any show and be a success. Rock could even show up on Frasier and make it electrifying. Bischoff thinks Rock would have been great on Nitro but Rock says he was too busy helping to put WCW out of business.

Here's Vince to announce the new GM. Before we get there though, Vince says any talent can negotiate with any show if they're interested. The Smackdown General Manager tried to put Vince out of business as well and has a history of ruthless aggression. The new boss is....Stephanie McMahon, because being banished FOREVER means less than four months. As

expected, she takes WAY too long to get to the point while screeching a lot. Short version: HHH is signing with Smackdown and she's going to throw Bischoff out.

Stephanie goes to the back in full power walk mode to find Bischoff talking to the Un-Americans. We get the big staredown that a total of four people care about. Bischoff is willing to leave but says a lot can happen in three days. He'll see her at Vengeance, assuming her AMAZING PRESENCE doesn't melt him before then.

So yeah....this isn't a surprise. Everyone knew Stephanie's banishment would never last because WWE exists as a way to make her look awesome. Ignore the fact that people don't care and Stephanie's angry voice is more funny than intimidating. This is the new version of Vince vs. Flair and Stephanie is a weaker talker than either of them, meaning things are already looking down.

Tajiri vs. Billy Kidman

The announcers hit the "let's praise Stephanie" button in a hurry as the match is easily ignored. Tajiri fires off some chops in the corner but the reversal is enough to make the announcers acknowledge the match, only 54 seconds after the bell. Kidman gets caught in the Tarantula and we hit a chinlock to keep things slow. A good superkick drops Kidman but he bulldogs Tajiri down and drops the Shooting Star for the pin.

Rating: C. This was a victim of time as there's only so much you can do in about 3:45 with a chinlock in the middle and a crowd that is still annoyed at the Stephanie announcement. The cruiserweights are starting to get somewhere and it's only going to get better with Mysterio coming in as the division's star.

Jamie Noble comes after Kidman and, with the help of Tajiri's mist, powerbomb him down.

Jericho goes to see Stephanie and is given a match with Edge next week. Swearing ensues after he leaves.

Rey Mysterio is here next week.

The announcers run down the Vengeance card.

Kurt Angle vs. The Rock

Before the match, Angle promises to make Rock tap. Undertaker comes out to watch so just pencil in the post match brawl now. Rock charges to the ring and does those one punch knockdowns. They head outside with Rock suplexing him on the ramp but getting catapulted into the post for one of those awesome bumps.

Angle stomps him down and gets two off a clothesline, only to walk into a belly to belly. There will be no suplexing our American hero though and the rolling German suplexes get two on Rock. Angle spends a bit too much time talking to Undertaker but is perfectly fine with more suplexes.

A long chinlock fills in some time before the Angle Slam, with Rock bumping so hard it almost looked like a reverse AA, gets two. Rock pops back up and grabs the quickly broken Sharpshooter. They head outside with Rock going after Undertaker, only to catch Angle in the spinebuster without much effort. The People's Elbow is loaded up but Undertaker comes in for the DQ.

Rating: B-. Not a great match or anything but perfectly acceptable as a big time TV main event, especially with Rock making his big comeback here. The triple threat will be fine and as long as it gets the title off of Undertaker, everything will be fine. Angle and Rock always have chemistry together and this was good, especially given the circumstances.

Post match Angle chairs Undertaker down and puts Rock in the ankle lock.

HHH is going to his limo (Was he even on the show?) when Stephanie comes up to him. She wants to have a professional discussion with him but HHH only asks if she's gaining weight. He gets in the limo and Bischoff is waiting for him. Stephanie shouts a lot (I'm shocked) to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. I really can't emphasize how much that Stephanie announcement sucked the life out of this show. It really does make you realize how much none of this show or company matter because it's all about the McMahons. Even the Rock, who might be the most charismatic

wrestler of all time, could barely make a dent in what Stephanie brings to this show. It's an entertaining night but you can really feel where things change all at once.

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