

Best of 2016: Feud of the Year

Wrestling is built on the backs of feuds. When you add up all the matches and promos, they combine to form a feud between two wrestlers or teams. Over the course of 2016, WWE has produced more than its fair share of them but a handful have stood out above the rest. Today we're going to look at the nominees for Feud of the Year. As will be the case with all of the awards we'll be looking at over the next few weeks, these are presented in no particular order.

1. Charlotte vs. Sasha Banks.

This is a feud that has lasted a long time as these women fought down in NXT with Banks taking Charlotte's NXT Women's Title early last year. Both of them debuted on the main roster as part of the Divas Revolution later in the year, setting them on an inevitable path towards each other, likely over the Women's Title.

This led to a long series of matches between the two of them with both women getting the better of it at one point or another. Both have taken the title from the other on multiple occasions, though Banks was never able to defeat Charlotte in a pay per view setting. All of her three title wins came on episodes of "Monday Night Raw" and all three ended in less than a month with Charlotte taking the belt back every time.

However, as good as their matches were, there was a much bigger historical significance to their rivalry. At "Hell in a Cell 2016", Banks and Charlotte wrestled in the main event, making them the only women to ever do so at a WWE pay per view. To call this a huge moment would be an understatement as just a few years ago, WWE Divas (a term which has thankfully gone by the wayside) were lucky to have a two minute match with a chunk of that going to entrances.

Charlotte vs. Banks produced some excellent matches but more importantly, they set the bar for women's wrestling at an entirely different level. What used to be a sideshow attraction turned into something that headlined one of WWE's most important events of the year. The feud also had a conclusive ending, which isn't something you get often enough in wrestling. It's very good but also historic

and that's going to take something special to beat.

2. The Miz vs. Dolph Ziggler

While Charlotte vs. Banks was built on action, this feud was built entirely on emotion. Ziggler has spent a large portion of this year talking about how he needed to win the big one no matter what happened. Unfortunately, this led to loss after loss after loss as Ziggler continues his career trend of not being able to pull off the big one no matter what he did.

After the Brand Split, Ziggler challenged for the Smackdown World Title at "Summerslam 2016" and was defeated by Dean Ambrose. Soon after this, Ziggler entered into a feud with the Miz, who seemed to have been ready to enter a feud with Daniel Bryan, despite the fact that Bryan was retired. It was Ziggler instead though and the reaction wasn't exactly positive. Rather than having the huge moment of a potential Bryan return, we were stuck with Ziggler being all talk and no success all over again.

Boy were we wrong though. What followed was the performance of Ziggler's career as he fought against everything Miz threw at him (including two male cheerleaders in something that probably didn't need to take place) and FINALLY won the Intercontinental Title at "No Mercy 2016" in an amazing performance.

Miz might have won the title back in the end and pretty clearly won the feud as a whole, but the key thing was Ziggler pulling off the win and getting somewhere for a change. The emotion more than carried the feud and while the match didn't main event "No Mercy 2016", it was certainly the most interesting and biggest match on the card.

3. DIY vs. Revival

If you're not a fan of the feuds based on talking and emotion like Miz vs. Ziggler, this one should be more your speed. These two teams went at it over the NXT Tag Team Titles over the course of several months with Tommaso Ciampa and Johnny Gargano chasing the belts in a series of matches but never being able to catch up to the Revival.

It took leaving the country but in the end, DIY finally pulled it off and won the titles in one of the best tag matches you're ever going to see. In a two out of three falls match at NXT's "Takeover: Toronto", Scott Dawson and Dash Wilder tapped out at the same time

to make DIY the new champions once and for all.

This was more of your traditional style of wrestling feud with DIY defeating the Revival in a non-title match earlier in the year to prove they could pull it off before getting closer and closer to the titles every single time. That's what made the big blowoff title match work so well (aside from the fact that it was an instant classic and a Match of the Year candidate of course): it was such a long time coming that the fans wanted to see the title change because they bought into all the close calls.

NXT is one of the few promotions where you know what's coming more often than not but the fun is in the journey to the finish line. It wasn't much of a surprise when DIY finally took the belts but that didn't make it any less of a blast to see them put Revival away. This feud had the classic match (two of them actually) and one of them might have been the best match all year. What more can you ask for?

4. Samoa Joe vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

We'll stay in NXT for one more as these two did something unheard of in the promotion's history. Nakamura debuted back in April and took NXT by storm. In his debut with the company he took Sami Zayn beyond his limits and had one of the all time great NXT performances. This was followed up by a victory over Finn Balor and then a challenge to the NXT Champion.

That champion would be Samoa Joe, who had surprised quite a few people by defeating Balor to become NXT Champion. This set up a collision course between Nakamura and Joe over the title with Nakamura taking the belt away at "Takeover: Brooklyn". It seemed that Nakamura would go on to hold the title for as long as he wanted as no one had ever been a two time NXT Champion.

That's just what Samoa Joe did though as he defeated Nakamura for the title at "Takeover: Toronto". The title reign would only last fourteen days though as Nakamura would defeat Samoa Joe again in a match held in Osaka, Japan. Nakamura finally defeated Samoa Joe once and for all inside a steel cage in Melbourne, Australia. The feud was punctuated with some great promo work from Samoa Joe, who injured Nakamura and then demanded that NXT General Manager William Regal either hand him the title or bring him Nakamura. This led to Nakamura returning and losing the title in a big surprise.

This feud had some excellent, hard hitting matches but also took NXT and its title to some new places. Instead of having someone win the title, defend it against the former champion and then move on, it was actually something fresh with the two wrestlers trading the title. This gave us some very strong surprises to go with the intense matches and promos between the two, making it an NXT classic.

5. AJ Styles vs. John Cena

There's nothing wrong with a feud between the old guard and the new guard. Cena has been one of the best wrestlers and biggest in WWE for well over ten years. Few have been able to challenge him for that crown but Styles pulled it off. Debuting in January, Styles was instantly a dream opponent for Cena as they had been the two biggest stars in the two biggest promotions in America for years.

A match was quickly set up over the summer with Styles taking a surprise heel turn on Cena to set things up. In an even bigger surprise, Cena lost to Styles, albeit with some help from Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows. With one classic under their belts, the only solution was to have a second match on the bigger stage of "Summerslam 2016".

In the real shock of the feud, Styles pinned Cena completely clean for one of Cena's only such losses in several years. Styles was instantly a huge star in WWE and would go on to win the Smackdown World Title at "Backlash 2016" while Cena was soon on his way to a hiatus, leaving Styles as the undisputed ace of the "Smackdown Live" roster.

This is how you make someone into a huge star by way of a big rub. Cena is someone who is going to be able to lose matches like this and bounce back with almost nothing lost along the way. Styles on the other hand was able to gain more in those two wins than almost anything else he could have done in months against other opponents. The shock of Styles winning clean still holds up and Cena will be just fine when he gets back in the ring full time.

6. Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens

Yeah you knew these two were going to be on here at some point. These two seem to have a great feud over year or so and that's what matters. This time it was your old standard: they've hated each other for so long that they have to feud again at some point. Owens

is such a perfect bully and Zayn is the ultimate underdog so how can the matches not work?

They had two great matches on pay per view this year at Battleground and Payback with the two of them splitting the wins. That win for Zayn at Battleground was a huge moment because he never won the big one over Owens at any point. This made Zayn into a player for the first time and if you ignore him doing nothing special after the win, it should have been a turning point in his career.

On the other hand, Owens got a big run out of this and would wind up being the World Champion as a result. Now, logic would suggest that Zayn would go on to be the #1 contender but since WWE decided that THIS IS THEIR LAST MATCH (until a few months later when they fought on Raw), that went nowhere. At least the two matches on pay per view were great.

Zayn vs. Owens is one of those feuds that is going to work no matter what because they know each other so well. Some people just have natural chemistry together and you can't teach that. They had a few great matches in 2016 and I'm sure they'll have great matches for years to come because that's what great wrestlers do.

7. Adam Cole vs. Kyle O'Reilly

This is similar to Zayn vs. Owens as they've been fighting for so long now that it's just kind of what they do. This feud went on for several months on and off over the course of the year with O'Reilly finally winning the World Title at Final Battle 2016. The matches were mostly great with Cole promising that Kyle would never win the World Title on his watch.

The key thing to this feud was how well it built up on all of their matches over time. The idea of Kyle getting closer and closer to the title with Cole holding him back just before he could cross the finish line made the title change all the sweeter. You even had some great storytelling in the title match with Cole hiding because he's a coward and Kyle fighting because that's what good guys do.

Again, must like Zayn vs. Owens, this one worked because of the story that came before it. They were both part of a great team and that made for an even better feud. There's a big difference between just having a match for the sake of having a match and building up a story to get to the big blowoff.

The feud was violent, personal and entertaining as the big payoff was worth the build in the end. Kyle made the title seem important and beating one of the biggest stars in the history of the company helped so much. The fact that it was his old partner and rival was the big icing on the cake, which made everything work so well.

As for my pick though, I'm going with DIY vs. the Revival.

For me, it was the perfect balance of everything needed in a major feud and had no problems along the way. Each of the other four options had a flaw that holds it down just a bit. Charlotte vs. Banks felt repetitive, Miz vs. Ziggler was a bit much as Ziggler kept changing what he had to do to consider himself a success, Nakamura vs. Joe didn't have a big enough ending and Styles vs. Cena was only two matches long.

That's not to say that DIY vs. Revival was leaps and bounds better but it found the perfect balance for an amazing feud. The story went on at a good pace, the matches were outstanding and the blowoff was executed perfectly. It felt like it had a beginning, a middle and an ending instead of just going through the motions until everyone had something else to do. I was completely sold on the final match and it never got anywhere close to boring. It's the best feud of the year in a year with some very strong candidates.

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