

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2003: It Was the Best of Matches, It Was the Worst of Matches

Royal Rumble 2003

Date: January 19, 2003

Location: Fleet Center, Boston, Massachusetts

Attendance: 15,338

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole, Tazz

To say a lot has changed in the last year is a huge understatement. We have the Brand Split now and there are two world titles. That brings us to the part of this show that is most remembered: the world title matches. We have HHH defending the Raw Title in one of the worst matches ever, followed by Angle defending the Smackdown Title in one of the best matches ever. Also Brock Lesnar is here and has taken Smackdown by storm. Let's get to it.

The opening video is about what you would expect it to be: thirty men wanting to go to Wrestlemania.

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

The loser is out of the Rumble. Big Show has Heyman with him, which I'm sure makes him the best wrestler EVER right? Show won the title from Lesnar at Survivor Series after Heyman turned on Brock in one of those matches where they were backed into a corner out of their own stupidity. Show shoves him around to start so Brock snaps off a belly to belly suplex to fire up the crowd.

There's a second suplex and Show is in trouble early. Lesnar loads up a third but Show grabs him by the throat and shoves him to the floor. Show throws Lesnar around the ring which looks awesome when you consider Brock is a massive dude. Lesnar avoids a charge in the corner and hits a release German suplex for two.

A big boot slows Brock down and a side slam looks to set up the chokeslam. Brock kind of rolls through it into a two count, followed by another belly to belly. Heyman gets dragged in but Show saves him from an F5. The chokeslam gets two as Heyman is losing his mind. Show gets rammed into Heyman and the F5 sends Brock to the Rumble.

Rating: C+. As intricate as modern wrestling has become, there's something to be said about having two big guys get out there and throw each other around for five minutes. The power displays here made the fans gasp which is the right idea. At the end of the day, wrestling is a spectacle and having larger than life characters doing larger than life things is a surefire idea. This wasn't so much good as it was fun, which is the right choice for an opener. Jericho says he'll win the Rumble.

Raw Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

Regal and Storm are defending and Regal is STILL doing the brass knuckles thing. Storm and Ray get things going with Lance working on the arm, only to get powered down with ease. Bubba hits one of his LOUD chops in the corner and takes Storm down with a kind of chokebomb. In something I've never seen him do otherwise, Bubba hooks a standing Figure Four. Actually I can't think of anyone who has ever used that.

Off to D-Von for a dropkick (what's gotten into the Dudleys tonight?) and here's Regal to get slammed down immediately. The champs double team D-Von down and we get into the standard tag team formula. Storm takes D-Von to the mat and it's off to Regal for a front facelock. Lance comes back in with a cravate into a sleeper as this continues to meander along.

D-Von rolls Storm away and makes the tag to Bubba who speeds things up. The guy has emotion if nothing else. A big running splash in the corner crushes both champions and a side slam gets two on Storm. The American hits a German on the Canadian for two, followed by a spear to the Englishman. The Bubba Bomb gets two on Lance and Regal takes What's Up. A double flapjack (stupid fans: "3D!") gets two on Storm and here's Chief of Staff Sean Morely. Regal finds the brass

knuckles but walks into the 3D. D-Von hits Storm with the knuckles for the pin and the titles.

Rating: D. This didn't work for me. It felt like a Raw match that was trying to be a PPV match but never got near the hump they were trying to get over. The ending was stupid on top of that, as they had Regal beaten with the 3D, so why use the knuckles? Also it didn't help that Bubba single handedly beat up the tag champions for about two minutes straight. Bad match.

Lawler on that match: "I'm as confused as a baby in a topless bar." What is WITH the announcers and their similies/metaphors in this company?

Nathan Jones is coming. Oh geez.

We recap the Torrie vs. Dawn feud. This is one of those stories where you look at it in awe and wonder what they were thinking. Dawn Marie (a gorgeous Diva) fell in love with and married Torrie's fifty something year old dad Al Wilson, then screwed him to death (literally) on their honeymoon. There was some lesbianism (as in kissing on screen and unfilmed other stuff) involved which was there to tease the audience and wasn't bad at all. This is supposed to be a stepmother vs. stepdaughter match. Again, I have no idea what this was supposed to accomplish.

Dawn Marie vs. Torrie Wilson

Dawn comes to the ring in a veil because she's in mourning. Torrie gets blasted in the face to start before spearing Dawn down and things get sloppy. Marie tries an armbar because we need some wrestling in this I guess. Torrie gets beaten on for a bit until they collide and hit the mat. Dawn hits a springboard spinning clothesline for no cover, giving us the highlight of the match. Torrie hits a neckbreaker out of nowhere for the win.

Rating: D-. Anything with these two in those outfits can't be considered a failure, but at the end of the day, there is no real defending this match in the slightest. It was HORRIBLE and the story was borderline insulting to my intelligence, but the girls looked

good and I guess that was the whole point. Why not just have a regular match if you want to is beyond me, but it's 2003 so what do you expect?

Stephanie seems to hit on some young guy in the back when Eric comes up to trade some weak trash talk. They're both GM's at this point. Stephanie has a bombshell for Smackdown which would wind up being Hogan. They argue over money or blood being more important and nothing goes anywhere. That young guy by the way? Randy Orton.

House show ads, including one for 7pm on a Monday night.

Sean O'Haire as the Devil's Advocate promo. Sweet goodness this could have been HUGE.

Nathan Jones is STILL coming. Seriously did we need that twice in 30 minutes?

We recap HHH vs. Scott Steiner as I begin to take deep breaths. HHH was giving a promo about how awesome he was when Steiner interrupted and demanded a title shot. This led to a series of contests like pushups and bench presses which went nowhere. Note that Steiner hadn't actually had a match in WWE up to this point. I wonder why.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Scott Steiner

HHH has red trunks on here for some reason. He mixed them up every now and then and rarely did the other colors work. Stick with basic black Game. Hebner brings them to the middle for instructions which is ultra rare stuff. Steiner wins an early slugout and pounds on the champion in the corner. A gorilla press sends HHH to the floor and Steiner pounds away with those weird looking overhand punches of his.

Steiner suplexes him back in for two and works on the back some more. An elbow to the face puts HHH down and there's an appropriate Boston Crab. HHH powers out of it and hits the facebuster but Steiner no sells it. There's a bear hug which is quickly broken but Steiner snaps off an overhead belly to belly (1) for two. Flair saves HHH from being put in the Steiner Recliner and Steiner charges into a boot in the corner to finally change the momentum.

We head to the floor again where Scott goes into the steps. The fans aren't exactly thrilled with this so far but they've still got time to crank it up a bit. Flair chokes away with his jacket and HHH hits his second neckbreaker in about 30 seconds for two. Since we didn't allido it properly the first time, Flair chokes away even more. A Pedigree attempt is countered into a slingshot into the buckle. Steiner looks like he's going through labor.

An overhead suplex (2) puts HHH down and I kid you not: Steiner FALLS DOWN due to exhaustion. He's clearly sucking wind and HHH didn't touch him at all. Speaking of HHH, he counters a tombstone attempt into a....I think it was supposed to be the third neckbreaker in about 90 seconds but Steiner took it wrong, causing it to look like a cutter where he fell backwards instead of forwards. That gets two and the fans are starting to boo.

HHH is loudly calling spots to try to salvage this before he hits a vertical suplex. For no apparent reason he goes up and jumps into a belly to belly (3). Steiner can barely punch so he settles for some clotheslines. There's an overhead belly to belly (4) and an overhead belly to belly (5) and an overhead belly to belly (6). The fans are openly booing Steiner now. His response? To hold HHH's hair while HHH rams his own head into the buckles (seriously, Steiner clearly isn't even pushing) and to hit a spinning belly to belly (7) for two and even more booing.

Steiner tries a butterfly powerbomb and literally falls backwards as he does it, causing HHH to land on Steiner's knees. The fans groan at the sight of this so HHH goes up top to get superplexed down. He's handing these spots to Steiner. THANKFULLY HHH tries to walk out but Steiner won't have it, because WE HAVE TO KEEP GOING.

Steiner blasts HHH with the belt to bust him open to try to get the fans to care but the match is long past salvageable at this point.

Back in and Steiner hits ANOTHER belly to belly (8), causing the fans to get MAD. They're not annoyed, they're not wanting a new champion, they want Steiner to get out of their ring now. HHH tries to get counted out but Steiner goes after him AGAIN. Back in and

Steiner does the pushups to tick off the fans even more as Flair is BEGGING the referee to stop the match.

Now HHH throws the referee to the floor but HEBNER WON'T STOP IT. I mean he pulls his arm up to ring the bell but stops and says keep it going. Steiner hits the NINTH belly to belly suplex (9) of the match for two so HHH hits him low and grabs a fast rollup for two. HHH finally gives up and hits Steiner with the sledgehammer for the DQ.

Rating: H. As in HHH, who I feel sorry for here. Now everyone knows I'm no fan of the guy in 2003, but he was in a HORRIBLE situation here. HHH was trying to keep this a coherent match, but Steiner was beyond worthless here, causing the match to sink to levels far below what any other main event "talent" would be capable of. After about seven minutes (out of eighteen), Steiner stopped doing anything resembling trying to have a match and was just doing suplexes.

Remember that back stuff he did at the beginning? Completely forgotten. Did you see him try his finisher? Not even once. He somehow managed a belly to belly suplex every two minutes, despite being on defense for a good third of the match. This was absolutely horrible and quite possibly the worst world title match I can EVER remember, which is covering a lot of ground.

Post match, Steiner beats up HHH and Flair with the hammer, which gets SYMPATHY from the fans. HHH is getting SYMPATHY from a crowd. Think about that for a minute. And what's worse: THEY HAD A REMATCH! Oh and there's the Steiner Recliner to absolutely nothing positive from the crowd at all. Bischoff has to come get Steiner off HHH.

We cut to Cole and Tazz and even MICHAEL FREAKING COLE has a look on his face as if to say "WOW that was an abomination."

We recap Benoit vs. Angle. Angle won the title from Big Show at Armageddon thanks to Lesnar before revealing that he hired Paul Heyman to be his new manager. Heyman said anyone could get a shot other than Brock Lesnar and brought in Team Angle (Haas and Benjamin) to protect Kurt during a knee injury. Benoit won a title shot over Big Show to set this up.

Smackdown World Title: Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Team Angle is immediately ejected to make sure it's one on one.

Benoit grabs a headlock to start before trying the Sharpshooter to send Angle to the floor. Back in and Angle goes for the ankle but gets dropkicked away. Benoit grabs a kind up reverse Figure Four but Angle grabs the rope. This is all holds/counter holds so far. Benoit gets sent shoulder first into the post followed by an Angle suplex for two.

They chop it out with Benoit taking over and hitting a reverse clothesline to take Angle down. Angle drops Benoit across the top rope but gets guillotined down by the Canadian. They head to the apron with Benoit DDTing him down onto the side of the ring. The champion has a busted nose now. Back in and the Swan Dive misses but Benoit rolls out of the Angle Slam. There's the Sharpshooter to Angle who eventually gets to a rope. A belly to back suplex gets two for Chris but Angle snaps off an overhead belly to belly (just one so far).

Back to the floor where Benoit gets dropped onto the barricade to further mess with his head. Off to a rear naked choke back inside so Kurt can overly loudly call some spots. Angle catches Benoit in another belly to belly followed by a belly to back for two. Back to the chinlock for a bit until a double clothesline puts both guys down. Benoit rolls some Germans but so does Angle. And people wonder why their necks were held together by tape.

Benoit gets the final German but Angle runs the ropes to hit the belly to belly off the top to put both guys down. That gets two but the Angle Slam is countered into the Crossface. Angle gets the rope, so Benoit shifts to an ankle lock. Angle reverses into one of his own and now Benoit is in trouble. Benoit goes to kick off but instead grabs another Crossface. Kurt counters into a rollup but Benoit put the Crossface on the other (right) arm this time. Angle stands up and hits the Angle Slam but can't immediately cover.

Angle takes the straps down but another German attempt is countered into a rollup for two. They trade HARD Germans until Benoit hooks a

release German to put both guys down. Before anyone asks, the difference between this and the previous match with the suplexes is how hard these are. Steiner looked like he was at a dance recital but here they look like they're trying to kill one another. Not to mention there's OTHER STUFF in between the suplexes.

Benoit hits the longest diving headbutt you'll EVER see, but he can't cover because of his head getting jarred like that. Angle counters the Crossface into a reverse powerbomb onto the buckle. The Angle Slam gets a VERY close two as the crowd is losing their minds. Back to the Crossface but Angle rolls through into the ankle lock. Benoit rolls over but can't break the hold. He kicks Kurt off but Angle goes right back to the hold. Benoit keeps trying to kick him off but Angle hooks the grapevine and Benoit has to tap.

Rating: A+. That's your match of the year right there people. Oh wait according to Meltzer there was some match in Japan that no one but him ever saw and that has to be better than this right? Anyway, these two DESTROYED each other with some absolutely amazing counters and awesome sequences out there while suplexing the tar out of each other. This both guy's best match ever, and that's saying A LOT.

Benoit gets a standing ovation, showing that he was ready to be world champion. Naturally that's why he had to wait fifteen months to get the title, because the world was BEGGING for another Steiner match, the Nash feud with HHH, and the Goldberg run of doom. Ok Goldberg I can live with but the other two? Screw that.

Van Dam and Kane say they'll knock each other out to win the Rumble.

Royal Rumble

The intervals are two minutes if you listen to Fink and 90 seconds if you listen to JR. There are fifteen Raw guys and fifteen Smackdown guys this year which would be the norm for a few years to come. Shawn gets #1 and Jericho gets #2, but it's Christian playing the role of Jericho at the entrance, allowing Jericho to sneak in from behind and jump Shawn. Jericho hits Shawn low and starts the beat down before getting a chair to crack Shawn open.

Chris Nowitski is #3 and he's perfectly fine with letting Jericho maul Shawn. Jericho easily dumps Shawn, setting up their classic at Wrestlemania. Nowitski isn't in the ring yet. Rey Mysterio (still pretty new here) is #4 as things speed up a lot. A springboard dropkick and rana take Jericho down but Nowitski gets in as well...or not as he slid back out. Rey escapes a gorilla press and dropkicks Jericho into the ropes, only to get jumped by Nowitski.

Edge is #5 for a big pop. He would have been world champion by summer if he hadn't hurt his neck. Jericho is sent into the post and Nowitski is knocked down, allowing the two good guys to pound away on each other while both miss finishers. A springboard rana by Rey is countered into a sitout powerbomb and Christian is #6. He hugs his brother but Edge spears him down out of common sense. Nowitski tries to dump Edge and Rey but gets caught by a "double" dropkick (read as Mysterio hit him but Edge completely missed and landed on Chris after he was already down).

The Bronco Buster hits Nowitski and Chavo is #7. He immediately takes Rey down but gets caught in a 619. Rey drops the dime on Chavo and hits a 619 on Christian. He tries a springboard rana on Christian but lands on Nowitski and takes him to the floor in the process. Jericho puts Mysterio out, leaving us with Jericho, Edge, Christian and Chavo at the moment. You can add Tajiri at #8 to that list.

Christian gets the tar kicked out of him and Chavo gets put in a spinning backbreaker. Not bad for the first twenty seconds for Tajiri. Bill DeMott is #9 and no one cares. At this point, he had been a Tough Enough trainer and his gimmick was that the rookies had ticked him off so much that he was basically a sociopath. I've heard of worse. Tommy Dreamer is #10 and he brings some toys with him.

There are too many people in the ring at the moment. Edge gets in some kendo stick shots on DeMott for an elimination. Christian and Jericho hit Dreamer with trashcan lids in a modified Conchairto for another elimination. Tajiri elbows both guys down but tries the Tarantula on Jericho and gets dumped as a result. B2, as in Bull

Buchanan as Cena's ex-lackey, is #11. Edge knocks out Chavo as the ring is thinning out nicely.

Jericho gets sent over the top but skins the cat and pulls out Edge and Christian in the process. Jericho is busted open but he's left all alone in the ring. RVD is #12 and man alive do the fans love him. They slug it out for a bit with Van Dam hitting a slingshot to send Jericho to the apron but not out. Matt Hardy (who strongly dislikes mustard) is #13. The heels (as in those not named RVD) double team the good guy (as in those named RVD) but Jericho is too weak to do much and Matt kind of sucks so Van Dam takes them down.

There's a Five Star to Jericho and Eddie is #14. He pounds away on Van Dam as well and hits a Frog Splash of his own, only to walk into a Twist of Fate from Matt. Jeff Hardy is #15 and Matt tries an alliance, only to get kicked in the gut. Jeff throws Matt to the apron but Matt's MF'er Shannon Moore prevents the elimination. There's the Twist of Fate to Matt but Shannon covers up Matt from the Swanton. Jeff just dives on both of them and Rosey of 3 Minute Warning is #16.

Absolutely nothing of note happens here so Test with Stacy is #17. He cleans house until John Cena is #18 with a rap for us. He manages to rhyme "Explain it to ya" with Wrestlemania so I'm impressed. He spends forever rapping until Van Dam throws him inside. The ring is way too full again. After Cena is in the ring for about eight seconds, Charlie Haas is #19. Van Dam and Jeff slug it out until Jeff goes up top like an IDIOT and gets shoved out. He would burn out and leave the company in about three months anyway.

Eddie walks the buckles and hits a rana on Jericho as Rikishi is #20, giving us Jericho, Van Dam, Matt, Eddie, Rosey, Test, Cena, Haas and Rikishi. Again that's too many people. Rosey and Rikishi square off but nothing happens. Instead they team up and beat up Matt and Shannon because they can, until Rosey clotheslines the heck out of Rikishi. Jamal of 3 Minute Warning (you know him better as Umaga) is #21.

Rikishi superkicks Jamal down almost immediately and there's a

Stinkface for him. Kane is #22 and I think we have eleven people in there at the moment. He cleans as much house as you can clean with that many people in there before FINALLY putting someone out in the form of Rosey. Jericho gets thrown to the apron but hangs on.

Shelton Benjamin is #23 and Team Angle starts taking over. Booker T is #24 and we DESPERATELY need someone to clear some guys out.

Booker immediately kicks Kane down and fires up a Spinaroo to a BIG pop. Eddie gets backdropped out and Booker pounds on Rikishi. A-Train (Albert/Tensai) is #25 and the hometown boy gets to beat up a lot of people in a hurry. Shawn Michaels runs in with a bandage on his head and goes after Jericho, causing Test to dump Jericho out. See, that way it's legal.

Maven from Tough Enough (finally with actual trunks) is #26. He goes right for Kane like an idiot and gets punched in the face for his efforts. Goldust is #27 and he barely makes it 45 seconds before Haas and Benjamin put him out. Booker goes off on Haas in the corner but gets thrown out by Team Angle as well. He would get the world title shot at HHH as a consolation prize.

Big Dave Batista is #28 and you can hear the fans react to him. The first guy he hits? John Cena. It's always cool to see the future in there like that. Test takes him down with a full nelson slam but Batista low bridges him for the elimination. Batista takes down Rikishi with a spinebuster before clotheslining him out. At least the ring is clearing out a bit. Brock Lesnar is #29 and is the odds on favorite to win this thing.

Brock immediately eliminates Team Angle by himself before F5ing Matt on top of them. A-Train hits a bicycle kick to take Batista down as Undertaker is #30 to a big ovation. The final grouping: Van Dam, Cena, Jamal, Kane, A-Train, Maven, Batista, Lesnar and Undertaker. Drop Maven and A-Train and that's a pretty stacked field. To the shock of no one paying attention, Taker is returning here. There's a 9 hour DVD of matches and moments where Undertaker returns easily.

Taker punches everyone and dumps Cena and Jamal with ease. Maven dropkicks Taker in the back and celebrates, earning himself a

chookeslam. The elimination is academic. A-Train hits the chokebomb on Taker to finally slow him down as Kane chokeslams Lesnar. Kane and Van Dam, the Raw tag champions, start teaming up to beat people up but A-Train takes them both down. Van Dam saves Kane from a backbreaker and the champs double clothesline Albert out.

Kane tells Van Dam to let him pick Van Dam up and drop him on Batista, but Kane turns (not heel) on Van Dam to throw RVD out. We're down to Lesnar, Undertaker, Kane and Batista which is awesome by today's standards. Taker and Lesnar have a showdown but the other two guys break it up. Taker pounds away on Batista in a preview of the feud of the year in 2007.

A big spinebuster puts Taker down and Lesnar fights off the two Raw (Batista/Kane) guys. There's an F5 for Kane and NOW we get Taker vs. Brock. They slug it out and after Taker says big boot, he hits a big boot to take Brock's head off. The F5 is escaped but there's a tombstone for Brock. A clothesline casually puts Batista out to get us down to three. Taker teases an alliance with Kane but dumps him as well. He has to knock away an invading Batista and Brock dumps Undertaker to go to Wrestlemania.

Rating: B-. Good but definitely not great Rumble here. You could see the next generation in the blocks but the problem is they were just that: the NEXT generation. Taker was the only possible winner here other than Brock and that's a recipe for a bad Rumble. You need more than one candidate for the Rumble and as soon as Lesnar's music hit, it was clear who was winning this.

Taker says go win the title but he wants the first shot. Brock says ok to end the show. Did we need that?

Overall Rating: C-. The problem with this show is that the excellent match on the card is brought down by the HORRENDOUS match just before it. The Rumble is good but it isn't good enough to save an otherwise bad card. The show isn't terrible, but it's a sign of things to come for this year, especially with HHH on the Raw side. Not much to see here other than Benoit vs. Angle of course. HHH vs. Steiner is only worth seeing if you want to see a trainwreck.

Ratings Comparison

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

Original: D

Redo: C+

Dudley Boys vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

Original: C

Redo: D

Torrie Wilson vs. Dawn Marie

Original: DD

Redo: D-

Scott Steiner vs. HHH

Original: G-

Redo: H (As in HHH)

Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Original: A+

Redo: A+

Royal Rumble

Original: B

Redo: B-

Overall Rating

Original: B-

Redo: C-

I'm not sure what I was thinking the first time. The show just isn't that good.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/22/royal-rumble-count-up-2003-best-match-ever/>

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