

Best of 2016: Best Major Show of the Year

As much as we like to say wrestling is about one thing or another, what really matters is getting fans to buy the show. The big shows are the things you really remember and that's what we're going to look at today. Of all the major shows of the year, which one was the absolute best? These will be presented in no particular order and if I don't list a show, I either didn't think enough of it or I didn't see it.

1. Royal Rumble

We're actually going to start off with an odd one here as this is the definition of a one match show. That's almost always the case with the Royal Rumble but this one was even bigger as for the first time since 1992, the WWE World Title was on the line. Champion Roman Reigns, who entered the match first, had to survive twenty nine other entrants, including the debuting AJ Styles, to retain his title.

That right there really is all you need to know about this show. When one match runs for over an hour, gives you a new champion, and features almost every big name on the roster including Brock Lesnar, Triple H, Roman Reigns and the Wyatt Family, there was almost no way this wasn't going to be amazing, and that's exactly what it was.

There's just something about everything being on the line in one match. It's not about setting up a title match later on because everything is going on right now. Everyone in the main event could have been the next champion and that immediately gives the match an electricity. The rest of the show was perfectly watchable as well, giving us a great card up and down. It set up "Wrestlemania XXXII" and gave us a great show to start the year off on a strong foot.

2. Takeover: Dallas

I might be a bit biased for this one as I was in the crowd for the show but my goodness what a card. It's a five match show and the absolute worst match on the card is completely watchable. Above all else, this show knew how to start out a night with the instant classic of American Alpha winning the Tag Team Titles from the

Revival. The titles would change back later but this got the crowd going with American Alpha showing that they were just flat out better on that night.

The key to this one though was the debut of Shinsuke Nakamura as he fought Sami Zayn in what was pretty clearly Zayn's NXT farewell. These two beat the living heck out of each other in one of the hardest hitting fights you will ever see in wrestling. The crowd was already fired up during the entrances and the wrestlers didn't disappoint, giving us twenty minutes of pure violence with Zayn finally going down to the Kinshasa knee.

That left us with a great main event between NXT Champion Finn Balor and Samoa Joe, which was quite a brawl in its own right. All that being said though, this show has absolutely no flaws and is one of the best things NXT has ever put together. When the only possible issue is the match order (Nakamura vs. Zayn could have closed the show), you know you've done something right.

3. Takeover: The End

If this was the end (which only meant the end of a rivalry), it certainly went out on a high note. This show might not have had the hype as the Dallas version but it might even be a better show up and down the card. Much like Dallas, when the worst match on the card is perfectly fine and everything else ranges from very good to excellent, you know you have one heck of a show.

The big draw this time was the first ever steel cage match in NXT as the new NXT Champion Samoa Joe defended his title against Balor, who was running out of things to do down in developmental anyway. Samoa Joe wound up retaining his title in what could be considered a huge upset, more or less sending Balor into his farewell tour in the process.

The rest of the card featured another great Nakamura match and the crowning of the first two time Tag Team Champions in NXT history as the Revival got the belts back. There might not have been as much atmosphere with this one in a smaller arena but it can hang with Dallas' in ring quality all day. This one is worth another look with the main event alone being worth the time.

4. Money in the Bank

We'll leave NXT for a bit and come back to the drama around the WWE

World Title. This is another very simple idea: put a bunch of people in a match built around climbing a ladder and whoever pulls down the briefcase gets a World Title shot at anytime in the future. However, the real drama comes from not knowing when the cash-in is actually going to happen.

In this case, we didn't have to wait very long as Dean Ambrose won the ladder match and cashed his contract in to end the show. He was only the second Money in the Bank winner to ever do so and that made for a very interesting evening. All three Shield members held the title in the span of about five minutes for a feat that will probably never be done by any other trio in history, which gives the show some history.

Couple all that with a very solid remainder of the card, including a long Seth Rollins vs. Reigns match with Rollins getting the title back in the first place and you have one heck of a show. Money in the Bank is often just remembered for the ladder match and whatever it offers as a main event, and to be fair that really worked quite well in 2016.

5. Clash of the Champions

This show makes me think of "Wrestlemania XIX": there might not be a great match on the card (though several come close), there are enough especially good things to make the show into something special. There's nothing bad on the whole card and you have a strong variety of matches to give you a little bit of everything.

This was the first "Monday Night Raw" stand alone show and that put a lot of pressure on the card. While it didn't do much to relieve the issues that plague the Monday night show every single week, it did to a lot to show that they knew how to blow off some feuds. Sometimes you just need a good night of wrestling matches and that's what you got here. It helped so much to take away all the drama and plot devices and just let the talent wrestle.

What I like about this show is how it gives you a little bit of everything. You have a big title match in the main event, one heck of a fight in Cesaro vs. Sheamus, a surprisingly awesome performance from Anderson and Gallows and an NXT style women's triple threat match to cap it off. Everyone did everything they needed to and turned what should have been a nothing show into something worth watching, which is really hard to do.

6. Takeover: Toronto

We'll wrap it up with the last Takeover of the year and it's certainly going out on a high note. This show focused on tag wrestling with the finals of the second annual Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic where the Authors of Pain defeated TM61 to become the first regular team to win the tournament. In addition to that, Samoa Joe defeated Nakamura to become the first ever two time NXT Champion. Mickie James returned to unsuccessfully challenge Asuka and Bobby Roode defeated Tye Dillinger to win the battle of Toronto.

All that being said though, none of it compared to the NXT Tag Team Title match which saw DIY defeat the Revival in a two out of three falls match to finally win the titles. This match is on a very short list for Match of the Year (WWE.com already named it as such) and it's one of the best tag matches I've ever seen. Nothing was going to follow this and everyone knew it.

If nothing else, it was cool to see NXT in another huge arena with well over 15,000 people watching the show. It really shows how far NXT has come from just a few years ago when even their biggest shows were only held at Full Sail University. This was a great way for the series to go out for the year and it did so with one of the best matches that had been put on in a long time.

7. Wrestle Kingdom X

Every year I talk about how much I'm not interested in the biggest New Japan show of the year and then every time it winds up being at least a very good if not flat out excellent show. That's the case here as Wrestle Kingdom X more than lived up to (most of its) the hype. I mean, nothing is ever going live up to ALL of its hype but this came close.

The main event was one of New Japan's standard big angle conclusions as Kazuchika Okada FINALLY beat Hiroshi Tanahashi at Wrestle Kingdom after losing so many times. I'm not as big a fan of this feud as so many are (mainly because IT'S JUST A FREAKING CLOTHESLINE) but there's no denying that it's a big moment and something that has been built up for a very long time.

On top of that there's the whole Shinsuke Nakamura vs. AJ Styles in the last big match both of them would have for the promotion in case you need a bonus. Wrestle Kingdom is still one of the biggest shows of the year and thankfully they make it work almost every single

time. That's more than Wrestlemania can claim and it's worthy of some praise.

8. Final Battle

It's amazing what happens when you let Ring of Honor be Ring of Honor instead of just throwing out a superkick party (though there was one here) or a bunch of New Japan wrestlers who are all "special attractions" yet completely dominate anything else going on with the talent you're there to see.

Final Battle felt like a major show and that's not something you often get around here. Everything worked like it was supposed to with the three main matches all delivering and the undercard being more than good enough to live up to the hype that this show was supposed to deliver. Even when several of the wrestlers weren't the most well known, the matches still felt important, as they should have.

Ring of Honor doesn't often get the credit that it deserves but a lot of the time they bring that problem onto themselves by not having the best matches that line up with what they've been showcasing on TV. Let us see what we're supposed to be seeing and you get a better show than you would otherwise while also making me care about it. Why is that so complicated?

9. Takeover: Back To Brooklyn

This show is rapidly becoming the biggest NXT show of the year and they certainly knocked it out of the park one more time. The key to the Takeover series is to have one big match after another and nail the top of the card. That's what happened here with the big matches of Bayley vs. Asuka II, DIY vs. Revival and Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Samoa Joe all being outstanding matches.

On top of that, the undercard certainly delivered as I'm still waiting on any Takeover match to be bad. Think about that for a second: do you remember there ever being a truly bad match at one of these things? It wasn't the case here as everything from Bobby Roode (with the GLORIOUS entrance) vs. Andrade Cien Almas and Austin Aries vs. No Way Jose both being very entertaining.

Brooklyn is a big deal for NXT and it's very cool to see it tied in with Summerslam. The 2015 edition was outstanding and this one might have been even better. Nakamura slaying the Samoa Joe dragon on the

biggest stage NXT has to offer was a great way to end the show and it made for another great night of wrestling, which might as well be the series' slogan at this point.

That leaves us with the winner and the more I think about it, the more I can't get "Takeover: Dallas" out of my head. It really is one of the most complete shows I've ever seen and I didn't even touch on Asuka ripping Bayley's shoulder apart to become the new Women's Champion. The atmosphere, the look of the show, the quality of the wrestling and the expectations of having it be over Wrestlemania weekend for the first time all added up to make this the show of the year.

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