

Best of 2016: Surprise of the Year

This is one of the last two because we're getting close to the Royal Rumble and that's FAR too late for the sake of doing a Best of series. Basically today we're looking at the Surprise of the Year, which I'm going to keep a bit shorter for the sake of time. There are a LOT of options here and it's going to take forever if I go into a bunch of details. These are in no particular order.

1. AJ Styles Debuts at the Royal Rumble.

Sweet goodness this worked, assuming you can ignore what WWE felt was the more important visual. This was AJ STYLES debut in WWE and for some reason we were looking at Roman Reigns. Styles actually appearing in WWE was almost unthinkable but here it was, in one of the most important matches of the year. That's one of those moments you remember and it worked really well here.

2. Dean Ambrose Cashes in Money in the Bank.

I know it might not be the biggest in the world but the cash-ins are always cool to see. Ambrose cashed in and beat Seth Rollins for the World Title, which meant that all three members of the Shield were World Champion in the same night. Ambrose actually winning was a surprise as he was a few steps below the other Shield members and he finally won the big one. Well done, especially considering how many times that briefcase has been cashed in before.

3. Goldberg Returns.

For someone who hasn't been around in over twelve years, Goldberg made one heck of an impact and the place went nuts when he showed up again. Sure it was just for the sake of a video game but the place came unglued when he was announced and it set up a big moment down the line. That's hard to do with someone from a different generation but they pulled it off here.

4. AJ Styles Beats John Cena Clean.

You know how many people get to beat Cena clean? You can probably count them on your fingers (and toes if you're a little slow) and Styles is another one to have done it. People were expecting the

whole “Cena loses then Cena wins” but instead, Styles becomes one of the few to get away with a perfect record against Cena, which is quite the year for someone who hasn’t been around that long.

5. Zack Ryder Wins Intercontinental Title.

This was one of those things that you just couldn’t imagine happening and the fact that he did it at Wrestlemania is even better. Ryder could barely win a single match and now he’s the Intercontinental Champion. Sure he lost it the next night and sure I’m convinced that it was going to be Neville before his broke his ankle but Ryder won that title and there’s no one that can take it away from him. Well save for Miz of course.

6. Rhyno/Brian Kendrick Have Titles in 2016.

These two hadn’t even been thought of in WWE in years and they manage to win new titles. Rhyno is a bigger surprise given how good the tag division actually is over on Smackdown. I liked his run with Heath Slater even more than I was expecting to and the team worked very well. Kendrick wasn’t the most thrilling Cruiserweight Champion but at least he put on a few good heel performances.

7. Cruiserweight Division Returns.

Speaking of the cruiserweights, they’re back too! This is one of those things that has been talked about for years and they actually did it. I’m not sure we needed a Cruiserweight division but the tournament they used to bring it back was awesome too. 205 Live has become a lot of fun and that’s an even bigger bonus. Good stuff here, which I didn’t expect coming into the division.

8. Sasha Banks vs. Charlotte Main Events a Pay Per View.

Let me repeat that: women main evented a WWE pay per view. I really don’t think this needs much more of an explanation.

9. Goldberg Squashes Brock Lesnar.

It’s very rare that I sit in awe of something I see on a wrestling show but that’s what happened here. I was genuinely shocked by what I saw and that doesn’t happen. Goldberg didn’t just beat Lesnar but rather DESTROYED him in less than ninety seconds. That’s getting up there with an old Midnight Express time in the main event of a pay per view. Just...dang man.

10. Daniel Bryan Retires.

I'm not sure if this qualifies as a surprise after all the time that Bryan missed from the ring. Still though, the speech itself was incredible and Bryan looked like a star who never had the chance to stay on top. It made him a legend but it was a pretty big shock when we knew he wasn't coming back this time around.

11. Finn Balor Vacates Universal Title.

The fact that this happened so soon after he won the thing (another surprise in its own right) is what makes this one so big. Balor literally won the title in his third match on the main roster and then he goes down with a major shoulder injury. Above all else: just imagine what happens to his career if he lost that title match. He'd be lucky to get a Cruiserweight Title run at that point.

12. Shane McMahon Returns.

I don't know how to put this one into words. The wife and I were looking away from the screen and our necks snapped into place as our jaws dropped. Shane hadn't been around in nearly eight years and yet here he was on Monday Night Raw with his dad all over again. It was a genuine shock and that doesn't happen in WWE.

13. Another Brand Split.

Again, this is one of those things that is talked about all the time but for once they actually pulled the trigger. I'm still not sure the rosters are deep enough to pull this off but it's the wrestling world we live in now, McMahons and all. I like the idea well enough and it was certainly exciting, especially for the Draft when it actually happened.

Overall this was a two horse race. I had to think back to how shocked I was over Shane returning and the Lesnar squash and the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't get my head around Goldberg vs. Lesnar. That to me is the sign of a surprise having lasting power and it's enough to give the main event of Survivor Series the win here.

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