

Smackdown – January 23, 2003: And That's Why He's Champion

Smackdown

Date: January 23, 2003

Location: Pepsi Arena, Albany, New York

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We're past the Royal Rumble and it's all hands on deck towards Brock Lesnar vs. Kurt Angle for the World Title. Lesnar won the Royal Rumble and Angle successfully defended his title in a masterpiece against Chris Benoit, leaving the two of them as the undisputed top names on the show. Let's get to it.

Stephanie McMahon announces Undertaker returning tonight, plus the return of another big surprise. The low cut of her top as she leans over a table while saying this would suggest that she's a face this week.

Opening sequence.

Chris Benoit vs. Charlie Haas

Benoit shoves him into the corner to start but Charlie easily takes him down to get into the technical sequence. Haas' leglock is countered into an armbar but Charlie reverses that just as easily. You can tell they're both more comfortable with this style and that makes for a more entertaining match. Charlie hangs onto a hammerlock as the announcers talk about Brock Lesnar being here tonight. It's always a bit jarring to have that be a normal night instead of a major announcement.

Benoit's arm goes into the steps and it's time for more armbars. Chris tries a few rollups but Charlie just goes for the arm again without missing a beat. Benoit fights up with a one arm backdrop and a release German suplex as the arm gives out. The long distance Swan Dive connects but the Crossface doesn't work. Charlie loads up some suplexes of his own but Benoit reverses into a rollup for the fast pin.

Rating: B-. This was all about the psychology with Benoit not being able to use his normal stuff but suckering the rookie in for the pin at the end. Benoit is still looking like one of the best on the show at this point and I guess I can sit and watch him wrestle this well against Team Angle for a little while longer if I just have to.

Rikishi vs. Bill DeMott

Rematch from last week but DeMott injured his arm in the Rumble. They slug it out to start with DeMott hitting some shoulders to the gut in the corner. The referee tells DeMott to let Rikishi out of the corner. DeMott: "I HAVE TILL FIVE!" Rikishi starts in on the arm and a very hard clothesline drops Bill in a heap. A spinebuster does the same to Rikishi but DeMott hits his arm in the corner. Rikishi's superkick sets up a Rump Shaker onto the arm (smart) for the pin.

Rating: D+. That should do it for DeMott. I can go for the arm work and sitting on the arm for the pin was a smart way of ending the show. The problem though is having DeMott vs. Rikishi as a feud as neither of them are all that interesting. Also I'm so glad they built DeMott up by having him wreck the cruiserweights, only to lose to Rikishi of all people.

Nathan Jones is still coming.

Big Show chokes Josh Matthews instead of talking about Undertaker.

Matt Hardy gives Shannon Moore a pep talk and sends him into the women's restroom. Thankfully Matt goes off to see Nunzio instead of following up on the comedy. Nunzio talks about his nephew being like Moore. Sometimes you need to teach people a lesson using the family way. Matt asks Nunzio to give Shannon a Mattitude adjustment.

Tony Chimmel reminds us that Stephanie still has a big announcement as well as Kurt Angle vs. Rey Mysterio later tonight. This is the kind of announcement you would have off camera to announce a dark match instead of showing it on camera. They already showed a Stephanie announcement graphic earlier so why do it this way here? Just for diversity?

Here's Undertaker, now with the You're Gonna Pay theme, (I've always

liked it) for a chat. Since irony doesn't exist in WWE's minds, Undertaker talks about how there's too much talking around here lately. We see a clip of Big Show destroying Big Show a few months back so it's time for the call out. Here's Big Show in a suit to say that's not happening tonight, but he has something for Undertaker.

Undertaker vs. A-Train

The announcers try to figure out the name of A-Train's chokebomb but drop it when A-Train shoulders Undertaker down. We're off to the bearhug a minute in but Undertaker slips out and hits his running clothesline. They're not exactly going out of the safe areas here but I can't imagine this lasts much longer.

The elbows and legdrop on the apron have A-Train in trouble but the chokeslam is only good for two. A Last Ride attempt is broken up with a backdrop and the Derailer (chokebomb, which they now know the name of) gets two. Undertaker slips off his shoulder though and a dragon sleeper (Taking Care of Business) makes A-Train tap.

Rating: D+. Again, could have been worse as the recently built up heel monsters are falling fast tonight. Undertaker beating A-Train to help build towards a Big Show match isn't the most thrilling idea but at least...wait what is the positive here? Uh...well the match wasn't all that bad I guess. Yeah that's all I've got.

Sean O'Haire doesn't like the government taxing people.

Edge vs. Shelton Benjamin

Edge elbows and leg lariats him down to start and it's time for the chops in the corner. Shelton just isn't that much of a striker though so he launches Edge with the first German suplex of the match. Some nice amateur moves take Edge down but he slips out of a slam and grabs the Edge-o-Matic. Shelton is right back on it with a cross arm chinlock for a little while. Edge's comeback doesn't take long but the threat of a spear brings Charlie to the apron. The distraction lets Shelton hit the Dragon Whip (that swinging kick to the face) but Edge shrugs it off and gets the spear for the pin.

Rating: C+. Pretty standard match here but Shelton and Charlie still look way beyond their years, at least on the main roster. As soon as they're allowed to be a regular team, they're going to be at worst the second best active team on the roster, depending on how well the Guerreros are feeling that night.

Kurt berates his team for the losses. They need to work on their Three I's. Kurt: "Cripes All Friday!" He tells them both to stay here during his match so they can learn a little something.

Nunzio vs. Shannon Moore

No entrance for either guy and Nunzio takes him to the mat in a hurry. Nunzio sends him shoulder first into the post (way too popular of a target tonight) as Matt seems very pleased with his protege's destruction. A middle rope Fameasser gives Nunzio two and we hit a figure four necklock for a few moments. Shannon comes back with a running flip neckbreaker for two as a weak ECW chant starts up. A Whisper in the Wind gets one as Shannon but he pulls up to shout to Matt. Shannon's Twist of Fate is countered into the tornado hammerlock DDT for the pin.

Rating: D. No time to go anywhere but this was much more about the angle than anything else. Shannon and Matt are a funny enough pair with Matt speaking such nonsense and Shannon going along with it like it's all perfectly logical. Nunzio is a weird character as he's treated like a tough guy but his second match was a squash loss to DeMott and he's really small in stature. He's trying but there are some big issues working against him.

Matt chases Shannon off.

Brock Lesnar talks about having goals in WWE and accomplishing them all. Now he wants to win the World Title at Wrestlemania and F5 Paul Heyman.

Shannon hides in a box, which Matt happens to sit on.

Rey Mysterio vs. Kurt Angle

Non-title and it's just Heyman with Kurt here. Rey starts fast with the dropkicks but his hurricanrana is countered into one heck of a sitout

powerbomb. A nearly spike German suplex gets two and Heyman is busy telling the title how much he loves it. Angle's front facelock is broken up with a northern lights suplex and an ankle scissors out of the corner sends Angle outside.

The referee won't let Rey dive so he dives over the referee like a good luchador should. Mysterio drops the dime for two and Angle goes shoulder first into the post to make things even worse. Angle LAUNCHES him with a belly to belly but charges into the drop toehold. He still blocks the 619, only to get caught in the sitout bulldog for two. Rey loads up the West Coast Pop but Angle catches him on his shoulders. A hard drop onto the turnbuckle sets up an electric chair drop for the pin.

Rating: B+. Is Angle capable of doing anything wrong at this point? He's been on fire lately with an incredible match on Sunday and this great one two days later. Mysterio was certainly game here too and he got to showcase his ample talents as well. Really good match here and one of the better TV matches in a long time for this company.

Angle goes for the ankle lock post match so Edge and Benoit make the save. Running isn't cool with the Canadians though and Angle takes a beating.

Stephanie won't tell Funaki what the surprise is but she looks at a Hulk Hogan poster to make sure there's no doubt.

Back from a break and it is indeed Hogan. Hulk gets a huge reaction and the fans take their sweet time cheering him. As you might expect, Hogan knows exactly how to soak the whole thing in and egg them on even harder. The ovation goes on so long that we take a break and come back with it still going on.

Hogan seems a bit overwhelmed (though you never can tell with him) and admits that the Hulkamaniacs are his life. He's here to make one announcement: he's signed a brand new contract but this time it's going to be the right way with the red and yellow and the fans in his corner. This is going to be the last journey but let this be the greatest of them all.

Cue Vince McMahon though and I think you know where this is going. Vince says Hulkamania is just like Al Wilson: completely dead. Hogan disagrees and wants to fight Vince first. The boss isn't cool with that (as he shouldn't be) so Hulk lays him out with a single right hand, FINALLY ending this segment at well over twenty minutes.

Overall Rating: B-. A lot of the talking hurt things here but there's only so much that can be done to stop a wrestling show like this. Tonight was all about the awesome action with the Smackdown talent being WAY ahead of the Raw counterparts, mainly due to pure in-ring talent alone. This show doesn't bother with a lot of the stupid stories and goes with people fighting over titles or because they don't like each other. Sometimes that's all you need and when you have this level of talent, it's going to work every time. Stretch some of the matches and cut out some of the talking here and it's a great show, but as it is, it's just good.

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