

New Japan G1 Special in USA Night One: Welcome To Our Turf

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Location: Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, Long Beach, California

Commentators: Jim Ross, Josh Barnett

This has the potential to be either a major moment in history or something that won't be remembered in a few years. New Japan has been the favorite promotion of a lot of wrestling fans in recent years and now they've come to America on their own instead of co-promoting with someone like Ring of Honor. This is the first of a two night event, the latter of which will air six days from now. Let's get to it.

The opening video looks back at the history of the company (not exactly in depth) and the build to the show. This includes a variety of big matches over both nights and how important it is for the competitors in a tournament for the inaugural IWGP United States Title.

Here are the tournament brackets:

Michael Elgin

Kenny Omega

Jay Lethal

Hangman Page

Juice Robinson

Zack Sabre Jr.

Tomohiro Ishii

Tetsuya Naito

We look at the tale of the tape for the World Title match between Kazuchika Okada and Cody Rhodes.

We get some pre-show ceremonies with the announcers talking over both the Japanese announcements and the English translations. This goes on for several minutes with the announcers talking about the tournament and making some predictions. If nothing else it's VERY weird to hear the term "belt" so many times.

Roppongi Vice/Will Ospreay/Briscoe Brothers vs. Young Bucks/Marty Scurll/Yujiro Takahashi/Bad Luck Fale

Chaos vs. Bullet Club, again. Ospreay and Scurll start things off because....well who else was going to? Scurll flips away from him a few times and does the bird wings thing a few times. Ospreay sends him outside and apparently we're under lucha rules (never mentioned by commentary) so it's off to the Briscoes to dropkick Fale down. Takahashi gets caught in between the Brothers, who JR has confused.

Mark hits his running Blockbuster off the apron and it's off to Roppongi Vice vs. the Bucks (And for once it's not something that you would know if you were watching New Japan because this is actually New Japan!). Vice takes over without much effort but there are the superkicks. Marty adds one from the apron and busts out the umbrella, allowing the Bucks to dive onto the Briscoes.

Ospreay kicks Scurll to the floor and there's the BIG springboard shooting star to take out the pile. Back in and Scurll breaks Mark's finger but the wild dancing and shouting CHICKENWING somehow tips Mark off about what to expect. Now it's Romero coming in to clean house...until a superkick cuts him off. In case that's not enough for you, Jay gets in a little comeback and eats a superkick as well.

Ospreay grabs a C4 on Scurll and it's back to Romero for the clotheslines in the corner. The clotheslines have no effect on Fale (duh) and he keeps walking forward despite Osprey hitting clothesline after clothesline for a cool visual. Fale shrugs it off and Razors Edges Romero onto the pile,

though it knocks out some partners as well. The Briscoes drop Fale but it's the Bucks coming right back in to take over. The Meltzer driver is broken up and Romero rolls Matt up for the pin at 9:25.

Rating: B. Not the highest quality match but it was entertaining and fast paced, making it the perfect choice for an opener. This also helps set up Vice vs. Bucks for the Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Titles tomorrow night, which is almost always a good idea. I'm still not sure why Chaos and the Club are feuding but they've long since reached the point where they just are feuding so it's kind of hard to really complain anymore.

Los Ingobernables de Japon vs. Titan/Dragon Lee/Volador Jr./Jushin Thunder Liger

That would be Sanada/Bushi/Evil/Hiromu Takahashi, the first three of whom are the Never Openweight Six Man Tag Team Champions. The first three of their opponents are all from CMLL. If nothing else it's cool to hear Liger's music on TV. Finally, Titan is pronounced Tee-Tan as something that is likely lost in translation. Volador headscissors Bushi to the floor to start and it's off to Liger for a very nice reception.

Sanada comes in as well as we hear about JR seeing Liger facing Brian Pillman back in 1992. That's when Liger had been around NINE YEARS already, meaning he's now a thirty three year veteran. I really don't know what to say to that but it's rather impressive. Los Ingobernables sneak in from behind and clean house, knocking all of the villains to the floor. Sanada ties Titan up (ala Jack Gallagher) and hits a running dropkick, which isn't treated like a comedy spot as it would be over here.

Liger gets in a palm strike and makes the tag to Lee for a BIG chop off with Takahashi. The CMLL team hits double flip dives, leaving Lee to kick Takahashi in the face. Titan hand walks away and spins into a headscissors, only making himself dizzy in the process. That's some awful luck, or mal suerte to him. Titan gets triple dropkicked for two and Takahashi grabs the referee, allowing Evil to chair Titan down. The Time Bomb is good for the pin on Titan at 6:47.

Rating: D+. Nowhere near as good as the previous match here but the time

didn't help things. This is another good example of a match that was helped by commentary as they were explaining why these factions were feuding, which mainly took place in Mexico. I don't need anything detailed as just telling me they've fought before and it was here or there helps quite a bit. The action was fun and while I didn't know some of the guys, it was entertaining enough.

IWGP United States Title Tournament First Round: Jay Lethal vs. Hangman Page

The belt is big and rather ugly. Lethal has bad ribs coming in thanks to Silas Young and Beer City Bruiser. Page jumps him at the bell but Lethal is right back up with a suicide dive (not "drive" Josh). They head inside with Lethal missing a moonsault and getting kicked in the bad ribs. Well at least Page isn't doing anything stupid. As I say that, he hits a shooting star shoulder off the apron in what is the best example of an unnecessary flip I've seen in a good while.

Back in and Lethal kicks him in the ribs but it's WAY too early for the Lethal Injection. Instead it's something like an Octopus Hold until Lethal escapes for some kicks to the head. Jay hits his top rope elbow but hurts the ribs again, allowing Page to get up at two. The front flip clothesline gives Page two but he gets caught in the Lethal Combination. The Lethal Injection almost completely misses though and both guys are down. I'm not sure why Page is but that's not the biggest deal. Lethal kicks him in the head again and NOW the Injection connects full on for the pin at 8:24.

Rating: C-. This felt really off and almost like a highlight reel or clipped version of a much longer match. Lethal and Page are two of the ROH guys I like more than usual and you would expect better chemistry between them. Maybe it's the injured ribs but I'm not sure if that's enough to excuse the blown spots and general lack of flow to the match. They just weren't on the same page and it felt like they were wrestling two very different matches.

IWGP United States Title Tournament First Round: Zack Sabre Jr. vs. Juice Robinson

JR thinks Sabre is Ospreay. Eh I've gotten them confused before too. The fans are already singing for Sabre, making me think they're all evil foreigners. Well maybe save for those chanting for Juice. After a brief feeling out process to start, Sabre wastes no time in going after the arm with a variety of holds that I can't even begin to name.

Robinson escapes the third straight hold (all of which looked like they should have broken the arm), eventually getting Zack up in a fireman's carry for a gutbuster. Zack rolls him up for two and it's time to kick at the arm a few more times. Robinson tells him to bring it on so Zack kicks away.

Something like a triangle choke has Robinson in more trouble but he powerbombs his way to freedom (AMERICAN freedom that is). Back up and Robinson tries an Unprettier but gets reversed into an Octopus Hold with the arm being cranked at a CRAZY angle. The other arm is pulled back as well until it's a full nelson with Zack's leg between Robinson's arms (I told you his holds were hard to call) for the tap at 10:06.

Rating: C+. Sabre is an interesting guy as he's the best technician I've seen since Daniel Bryan (if not before) and that makes for some very fun matches. That being said, he's also so dominant that it's hard to imagine him losing, which makes things a bit worse. Now that being said, if there's ever a time for him to lose, it's in a tournament. Robinson continues to show WAY more upside than he did in NXT so maybe it just wasn't a good fit down there. I've liked enough of what I've seen from him so far outside of Orlando so there seems to be potential there.

David Finlay/Jay White/Kushida/Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Sho Tanaka/Yohei Komatsu/Yoshi Hashi/Billy Gunn

Yes THAT Billy Gunn and yes he's challenging THAT Hiroshi Tanahashi for the Intercontinental Title. Kushida gets quite the reception and it's time for the eight way staredown to start. Yohei and Kushida start things off with Kushida easily taking him down and offering a SUCK IT to Gunn. Finlay comes in to dropkick Tanaka but the ring is quickly cleared, leaving Sho to dropkick Kushida in the back.

Sho grabs a bodyscissors before it's off to Gunn for one of the louder

reactions of the night. A quick crotch chop sets up a staredown with Tanahashi before it's back to Sho to do the majority of the work. Kushida fights them off because the Tempura Boyz Tanaka and Komatsu don't seem all that great. Tanahashi comes in off the hot tag and forearms Gunn down with his bad arm.

Gunn completely fails to catch him off a crossbody throws in a SUCK IT, and goes down off his half of a double clothesline. White comes in to grab a suplex on Tatsu but gets caught with a spinwheel kick. A suplex into the corner drops Tatsu and everything breaks down. Tanahashi hits the Sling Blade on Gunn and it's White left in the ring for a Flatliner to put Tatsu away at 9:43.

Rating: D. This match has the one obvious question: why in the name of tree bark is Gunn getting the title shot? Star power? That's not exactly something this show is lacking and I have a really hard time believing that New Japan would have issues getting someone better in the ring and with more star power than Gunn to challenge Tanahashi. Throw Gunn into the tournament and let one of the people from there (Page maybe) have the shot instead. It really doesn't look good otherwise and the match could be a major mess, especially when you consider what Tanahashi is capable of.

A long celebration takes us to intermission, which features a look at the main event, a look at the Tag Team Title match and a recap of the night's matches so far. This runs just under twenty minutes.

Tag Team Titles: War Machine vs. Guerillas of Destiny

War Machine is challenging in a rematch from Dominion where they lost the belts. JR says War Machine are SEVEN TIME ROH Tag Team Champions, which makes me think one of two things: JR is drunk or he looked at their Wikipedia page, saw that they had seven successful title defenses in their ONE reign with the titles, and didn't bother checking what he was reading.

Before the match, Ray Rowe wants to make it a No DQ match and it's immediately on. The four of them head outside without wasting a second with the champs getting more fired up every time they take a shot to the

face. JR goes into a weird rambling speech about having nothing to say, followed by Barnett taking over with play by play. Did he drop his notes there or something? A trashcan shot stops Rowe's suicide dive and the champs work him over in the ring.

Rowe takes a neckbreaker and splash for two but Hanson remembers that he's in the match and makes the save. About fifteen straight running clotheslines in the corner crush the champs again, prompting JR to talk about....Hanson's beard? The Bronco Buster misses though and it's time for the big slugout with War Machine throwing Tama around until Loa powerslams Hanson out of the air. A Swan Dive into a frog splash gets two on Rowe but Hanson is back in.

Fallout is loaded up but here's fellow Bullet Club member Chase Owens to take out Hanson with a chair. JR sounds rather annoyed about the lack of disqualifications, which isn't exactly like him. Rowe gets powerbombed through two chairs (Can Hanson just not take a big bump tonight?) but Hanson is here to save Rowe from going through a table. Fallout through the table ends Loa to give us new champions at 11:07.

Rating: B-. Sometimes you need four strong guys to beat the heck out of each other for a little over ten minutes. War Machine is a fun team and the Guerillas are the kind of team who can be right back due to pure charisma. A good power brawl is hard to come by and I had fun watching them beating on each other. Entertaining match and a nice change of pace to a lot of the other stuff on here.

IWGP United States Title Tournament First Round: Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomohiro Ishii

Naito jumps him from behind during the entrances, setting up the charge into the pose on the mat for a VERY strong reaction. After we hit the stall button to start, Ishii hammers Naito like he stole something, including the loud chops. Naito thinks it's a good idea to chop a guy named the Stone Pitbull (who I didn't realize was shorter than Naito), earning himself another beating.

Back up and Naito tries again for the same result. Must be a Ric Flair fan. A hiptoss and running dropkick to the back of the head work a bit

better and it's time to pose. Ishii suplexes him down and blasts Naito with a suplex. A powerslam nearly drops Naito on his head for two but he pops right back up with a missile dropkick for a breather.

Ishii's suplex is countered into a DDT (always liked that counter) and a top rope hurricanrana gets two. Naito walks around for a good while...and then spits at Ishii. I get that he's confident but sweet goodness that seems unwise. One heck of a headbutt drops Naito and a powerbomb cuts him in half.

A hard clothesline gives Ishii two more but his brainbuster is countered, eventually into a tornado DDT. Destino is broken up so Naito kicks him in the head again, only to get caught by the sliding lariat. A dragon suplex gives Naito two but it's a clothesline into the brainbuster to advance Ishii at 15:53.

Rating: B. They had a good story here with Naito being able to hang with Ishii on his own but getting too cocky and showing the lack of respect that a monster like Ishii deserved. It's a good way to make Ishii a big deal as pinning a former World Champion always will be. I liked this a lot more than the other Ishii matches I've seen so it was a nice surprise, though I tend to like Naito matches.

IWGP United States Title Tournament First Round: Michael Elgin vs. Kenny Omega

Omega has the Bucks with him as usual and is playing the full on face here despite still being a heel (officially). They try to get the referee to do Too Sweet but he offers a crotch chop instead. Elgin powers him (Omega, not the referee) into the corner to start before some forearms and kicks earn Kenny a wave of the finger. Kenny still can't do anything with the monster so Elgin chops him for a change.

The delayed vertical suplex has Kenny reeling but an Elite chant brings him back so he can do the Rise of the Terminator deal (still don't get it and don't really care to know). Back in and one heck of a top rope shoulder sends Omega flying across the ring and out to the floor. Omega hits a moonsault from the apron...and Elgin casually catches him because he can.

Kenny slams him onto the apron for a nineteen count and we hit the chinlock to slow things down a bit. Elgin raises his knees to block a middle rope moonsault as JR calls the Bucks very annoying. That might be the understatement of the year. A powerslam pulls Kenny out of the air for a close two (ignore the spitting onto the mat during the cover). Elgin powers him up again but gets caught in a snap dragon suplex to send him outside.

That means a big flip dive followed by a jumping knee to Elgin's face, only to have one heck of a clothesline take Omega's head off. They fight to the apron for a hard German suplex to drop Elgin on his head for a scary looking crash. Back in and a super crucifix bomb gives Elgin two more, prompting JR to ask the obvious: if that doesn't work, what will?

Well nothing more than likely, but you have to be used to some big (and arguably ridiculous) kickouts around here. Three straight jumping knees to the head knock Elgin silly and a package Tombstone gets two. There's another running knee and the One Winged Angel sends Omega on at 22:36.

Rating: A-. I liked this a bit more than a lot of the Omega matches I've seen, mainly because it wasn't far longer than it really needed to be (and it won't be called 25% better than the best matches of all time). They had another good story here with Elgin using pure power while Omega was more well rounded and therefore capable of adapting to counter whatever Elgin threw at him. Omega is very good and it's fun watching him, face/heel issues aside (which is more a company/stable thing than anything else).

Here are tomorrow's final four:

Jay Lethal

Kenny Omega

Tomohiro Ishii

Zack Sabre Jr.

We recap Cody vs. Kazuchika Okada. It's a short story with Cody challenging Okada for the title right after Okada's draw against Omega at

Dominion. Okada went with it because...well that's what wrestlers do.

IWGP World Title: Kazuchika Okada vs. Cody

Cody is challenging and comes out with a bunch of people in ex-President masks. Brandi Rhodes is with him (still absolutely stunning) in an American flag outfit and lights a cigar for him. After a kiss from Brandi (with his right shoulder taped up), we're ready to go with a slow start, which means this is likely going long. Okada takes him to the mat and then to the ropes where he gives Cody a friendly pat on the chest.

That warrants a break for another kiss, followed by heading back inside for a standoff. They head outside to speed things up with Okada hitting a running dive over the barricade, only to have Cody go after the knee to take over. Cody chokes with his boot but Okada neckbreakers his way out.

Back up and a fast running elbow to the jaw followed by a DDT lets Okada nip up. The signature dropkick knocks Cody off the top and out to the floor in a heap. A DDT on the floor makes things even worse but Okada can't follow up, meaning it's a long count. Back in and Cody runs the corner for a super armdrag (looked like a C4 2000 at first) but the Disaster Kick is countered into a flapjack (cool).

There's the top rope elbow, only to have Cody grab the Trailer Hitch to go back to the knee. The hold is broken and a slap fires Okada up all over again, prompting a mudhole stomping in the corner. The jumping Tombstone and a pair of Rainmakers drop Cody. Cue Omega with a towel like Cody was teasing at Dominion but Brandi says no.

This brings out the Bucks to ask what Omega is doing and Okada nails another dropkick. Naturally Cody hits a Rainmaker of his own for two, followed by Okada grabbing his own Cross Rhodes. So now that we're back to even with the stolen finishers, Cody gets two more off an inverted DDT. To really mess with his boss, Cody loads up the One Winged Angel, which is quickly reversed into a German suplex. The jumping Tombstone (yes another one) sets up the Rainmaker to retain the title at 27:12.

Rating: B+. I liked the Omega match a bit more but Cody is a bit more of a generic style than Elgin being awesome with the power. Okada is still

very smooth in the ring, though I do think he uses his big moves a bit too often. That being said, it was an excellent match with both guys hitting their big spots. Omega vs. Cody could be interesting, assuming it's not just a swerve for later. Very good main event, even though I didn't quite buy Cody as the biggest threat to the title.

Post match Okada poses but Omega gets in too. He won't take the night from Okada, even though he wanted to main event this show. They'll meet again in the G1 and tonight is Okada's. Gedo and Okada both say they're awesome and Okada will make it rain strong style around the world.

At the post show press conference....I have no idea as I don't speak Japanese.

A highlight reel ends the show.

Overall Rating: A-. This was a very good show and that's the best thing that could have happened. It's not a masterpiece or a classic but for what was basically a pay per view in front of a small crowd, it worked as well as it could have. They showcased most of their stars and the two major matches were both outstanding. Couple that with this airing at 8pm EST and on free TV, it's hard to find anything major to complain about. Maybe a little bit could have been cut (as in like 10-15 minutes, or the Tanahashi eight man tag) but the time really wasn't a problem.

The one thing that needs to be remembered though is this is one match. Based on this, New Japan isn't going to overtake WWE or become the hottest thing in American wrestling. It's a very good night but they need to do it again (as in beyond night two) for it to mean much. It's a very good show though and they're off to a great start in America. Now build on that and keep it at (or really near for that matter) this level and we'll see where things go. Strong debut though.

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