

Summerslam Count-Up – 1997: Where It All Changes

Summerslam 1997

Date: August 3, 1997

Location: Continental Airlines Arena, East Rutherford, New Jersey

Attendance: 20,213

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon, Jim Ross

We're in a very different era now as the WWF has finally realized they needed to step things up against WCW. The result was the rise of Steve Austin in his war against the Hart Foundation. Tonight we have a main event of the now heel Bret challenging Undertaker for the world title with Shawn as guest referee along with the match that changed the wrestling world forever. Let's get to it.

We open with the Star Spangled Banner which isn't done often enough on PPV broadcasts.

The opening video talks about how heroes aren't forever with a focus on Bret going from the top of the world to America's public enemy #1 and Undertaker having to deal with a nightmare from his past.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Mankind

This is in a cage match and the continuation of a great feud. HHH beat Mankind to win the King of the Ring but had to cheat to do it, sending Mankind after revenge. You can only win by escape which I always like. Mankind is also one half of the tag team champions as Dude Love at this point. Helmsley dives for the door but Mankind makes an easy save. He pulls HHH off the cage wall and pounds HHH down into the corner. The running knee into HHH's head gives us a BANG BANG as this is one sided so far.

A Texas Piledriver puts HHH down but Mankind says close the door. There's the Mandible Claw but Chyna reaches through the bars to break it up. HHH can't get going though as a discus lariat puts him right back down.

Mankind tries to climb out but Chyna hits him in the leg, allowing Helmsley to superplex him down from the top of the cage in a big spot. Instead of leaving though HHH sends Mankind HARD into the cage and gives us a little curtsey.

More whipping into the cage ensues and HHH pounds away on Mankind's head. You could see the mean streak starting in HHH years before it really came out. The cage is especially loud tonight which makes the shots into it sound far more brutal. HHH goes up but gets caught by the head and dragged back inside. A hard kick to the side of the head puts HHH down but Chyna interferes AGAIN with a forearm to the head. Mankind comes back with a pair of atomic drops but he walks into the facebuster to stop the momentum again.

In a creative move Mankind suplexes HHH against the cage, causing his the future Game's legs to hang over the top. A running knee to HHH's upside down chest brings him down and it's time to taste the cage. HHH catches Mankind charging in with a backdrop into the cage and they both climb to the top rope. Mankind wins a slugout by crotching HHH but the landing knocks Mankind off the ropes too.

HHH's leg is tied in the ropes but Chyna slams the door on his head to make ANOTHER save. Now she rams the referee into the steps and throws a chair in to HHH. Mankind blocks a Pedigree onto the chair and catapults HHH into the cage, knocking Chyna down to the floor. A double arm DDT onto the chair puts HHH down but Mankind can't follow up.

Chyna comes inside and tries to drag HHH out as Mankind climbs over the top. He gets down to the apron and takes off his mask but climbs back up. The fans chant SUPERFLY as Mankind goes up, rips open his shirt to reveal a Dude Love heart, and drops an elbow off the top of the cage. Mankind climbs out and reaches the floor just before Chyna can drag HHH out to the floor.

Rating: A-. This was great stuff with Mankind overcoming everything HHH and Chyna could throw at him before hitting the huge spot to win it. There was a very good story built up between these two which would finally be blown off in a street fight at the first Raw in MSG. Great

opener here and the fans were WAY into it. You could see the future in these two and it was awesome.

Post match Mankind collapses on the floor next to the cage. The Dude Love music starts playing and Mankind's foot starts tapping. He gets up and struts to the back as Dude. The Foley character really was brilliant as he wasn't playing three different characters but rather one with multiple personalities. That's awesome when you think about it.

Call the Hotline!

Todd Pettingill (he still had a job at this point?) brings out the governor along with Gorilla Monsoon and the Headbangers for some reason. She got rid of some entertainment tax on wrestling shows to allow the first show in New Jersey since the 80s. Gorilla gives her a WWF Championship belt as a thank you present.

We recap Goldust vs. Brian Pillman...which is to say we hear about the stipulation: if Pillman loses he has to wear a dress until he wins again.

Video on the local festivities leading up to Summerslam.

Goldust vs. Brian Pillman

Goldust is a face by this point. Pillman jumps him to start but Goldust hits a jumping back elbow out of the corner. He pounds on Brian in the corner and kisses him to the floor but Pillman is ticked off. Brian drops Goldust with a clothesline and goes after Malena, only to be headed off by Goldie with an uppercut. Back in and Pillman takes him down with a snap suplex but Goldust crotches him off the top.

Marlena blows cigar smoke in Pillman's face, causing him to hide behind her and sucker Goldust into a DDT on the floor. A top rope forearm/clothesline gets two for Brian and we hit the chinlock. Pillman looks INSANE which fits the Loose Canon character very well. Back up and a clothesline puts Goldust down for two but Goldie hits one of his own to stagger Pillman. They slug it out with a double fist to the face putting Brian down. The bulldog is blocked and Goldie falls to the outside. He tries a sunset flip as he comes back in and a purse shot from Marlena is

enough to pin Pillman.

Rating: D. The match sucked for the most part with no real flow to it at all. This was a long running feud which was supposed to end with Marlina leaving Goldust for Pillman but Brian would be dead in about two months to prevent that from happening. It's a shame he was so banged up that he never got to realize his potential due to his injuries.

There's a new attendance record for a WWF event in this arena.

Godwinns vs. Legion of Doom

The Godwinns are in Deliverance mode at this point and the LOD are done with the war against the Hart Foundation and in need of a good feud. Unfortunately there wasn't a good team for them to feud with so we're stuck with the Godwinns. Henry had his neck broken in a Domsday Device months ago, prompting an attack on the LOD. The LOD has sworn revenge to set this up.

The LOD are actually referred to as Road Warriors here which is rare for the WWF. LOD cleans house to start, sending the Godwinns to the floor with Hawk hitting a clothesline off the apron. We get started with Phineas vs. Animal with the latter missing a charge into the corner, allowing the hog dudes to double team him. Animal comes back with a double clothesline of his own to send the Godwinns to the floor.

Off to Henry vs. Hawk with Henry trying to hurt Hawk's neck as a receipt. Hawk sends him into the steps before dropping some legs for two back inside. Back to Phineas for a hangman's choke on Hawk to no avail. Animal comes back in to work Henry's arm before a Cactus clothesline from Animal puts both guys on the floor. Henry knocks Animal into the barricade as they come back in to shift momentum. Lou Albano is in the front row.

Back in and Phineas puts Animal in a bearhug as the crowd gets hot all over again. As the hold continues, Lawler talks about Blue Ball, Arkansas. I really don't have a joke there but you have to mention that name. Animal breaks free but Henry breaks up the hot tag attempt. Phineas goes up but jumps into a clothesline and now we get the hot tag off to Hawk. House is cleaned as everything breaks down but Phineas breaks up

the Doomsday Device on Henry. Not that it matters as the LOD hit a spike piledriver on a guy recovering from a broken neck for the pin.

Rating: D+. This was supposed to be about revenge but the match never acted like that at all. The Godwinns were horrible as heels and this was a very dull match as a result. LOD still had a little bit in the tank here but they were going to explode in the next few months but almost no one cared.

We get clips of fans winning a contest for a shot at a million bucks. The fans are here and get to pick a key to try to open Undertaker's casket which contains cash. Two more fans are called but one isn't home and the other is disconnected. We finally get through to someone but nobody wins. Sunny's cleavage looked GREAT though.

We recap British Bulldog vs. Ken Shamrock which is another spinoff from the Border War. Bulldog was about to lose an arm wrestling match on Monday so he laid Shamrock out with a chair and shoved dog food down his throat.

European Title: Ken Shamrock vs. British Bulldog

Bulldog (defending) has agreed to eat dog food if he loses, but we see a graphic for Bulldog vs. Shawn at One Night Only for the European Title, which foreshadows things a little bit. It's a power match to start until Shamrock hits a wicked belly to belly, sending Bulldog to the floor. Back in and Shamrock takes him down by the leg but Bulldog is quickly into the ropes. A hard clothesline gets two for Ken but Bulldog gets a boot up in the corner and takes over.

The delayed suplex gets two and we hit the chinlock. The fans chant USA as this hold just keeps going. This is one of those matches that goes on for less than eight minutes but needs to have a fourth of it spent in a chinlock. A small package gets two for the champion and it's back to the chinlock. Shamrock is sent shoulder first into the post and out to the floor where he comes back with some right hands. Back in and Bulldog pounds away even more and Shamrock is bleeding from the mouth. We hit the third chinlock before going back to the floor for Bulldog to hit him in the face with dogfood. Shamrock snaps and it's a DQ.

Rating: D. This didn't do anything for me at all. The match was only seven and a half minutes and we had three chinlocks and two trips to the floor. Shamrock wasn't ready for a long match yet and Bulldog wasn't capable of carrying anyone at this point. Nothing to see here but it was just leftovers from the summer anyway.

Post match Shamrock chokes Bulldog out for a VERY long time, to the point where Bulldog would be dead. The referees get suplexes.

Shawn Michaels says he'll be a fair referee and there's nothing between him and Bret.

Los Boricuas vs. Disciples of Apocalypse

This is the Puerto Rican gang vs. the bikers as GANG WARZ continue. Vince calls this an eight man tag because he doesn't care enough about any of these guys. These guys feuded FOREVER and I don't remember the bikers ever winning a match in the feud. Savio Vega and Crush are the respective leaders and the rest are pretty interchangeable other than Chainz being the only other biker with hair.

It's a brawl to start of course and the bikers clear the ring. Skull starts with Jose and the big man throws him around with ease. Off to 8 Ball who hits a spinning sidewalk slam before bringing in Crush. Miguel comes in but walks into a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker for no cover. Back to Skull and 8 Ball (identical twins) to crush Miguel in the corner until Savio cheats to take over. All four Boricuas pound on Skull in the corner until the Nation of Domination (now with Ahmed Johnson) comes down to ringside, basically stopping the match cold.

Jesus hits a Fameasser on Skull to set up another four on one beatdown. We hit a chinlock but 8 Ball breaks it up to prevent further boredom. Skull finally gets over for the tag and everything breaks down. Chainz is sent to the floor and punches Ahmed who responds with a sitout powerbomb on the concrete, giving Miguel an easy pin in the ring.

Rating: D-. Oh man this was dull to sit through. Los Boricuas just weren't interesting at all and other than Savio they easily could have been interchanged with one another. The bikers weren't much better but at

least you could remember which was which. I guess the idea here was to appeal to a wider fanbase but it didn't do anything for me.

A 12 man brawl follows.

We recap Austin vs. Owen. Hart is Intercontinental Champion and pinned Austin in the ten man tag main event of Canadian Stampede. Tonight is their one on one showdown and if Austin loses he has to kiss up to Owen shall we say. Think Vince's special club.

Intercontinental Title: Steve Austin vs. Owen Hart

Owen takes him down by the knee and wraps it around the ring post right after the bell. Back in and Austin fires off right hands and hits the Thesz press before hitting the HARD whip into the corner ala Bret. Austin pulls him around by the hair and stomps the stomach for two. Back up and Austin works the arm with a wristlock as the fans chant USA. Owen does his spinning nip up to counter but Steve casually pokes him in the eye.

Back to the armbar followed by a hammerlock slam to stay on the arm. Owen finally comes back with a jumping elbow to send Austin to the floor. He goes into the post and steps as well before going after Austin's arm and fingers. Austin is tied in the ropes so Owen can stay on the fingers but Steve busts out a Stun Gun and a powerbomb of all things. A clothesline puts Owen on the floor again and he starts heading to the back. That would mean Austin having to pucker up so the fight continues in the aisle.

Back in and Owen takes over with a quick belly to belly and a neckbreaker for two. A top rope elbow gets two for Hart and we hit the neck crank. Austin fights back and tries a Sharpshooter but Owen goes back to the injured neck to take over again. A German suplex gets two on Austin and it's off to a camel clutch. Owen lets it go but gets two off a DDT and hooks a chinlock. Austin gets up and they trade sleepers with Austin escaping via a jawbreaker. Hart gets two off a Russian legsweep and it's back to the chinlock. Owen gets caught cheating and they get up again and then it happens.

Austin tries a tombstone but Owen reverses into one of his own and drops

Austin on his head. This is the move that changed wrestling forever as Austin's neck was pretty much destroyed, resulting in him completely changing his in ring style. Instead of being the well rounded wrestler that he was before, he was forced to create the Attitude Era brawling style which made millions upon millions upon millions of dollars and made Austin one of the biggest stars of all time. On top of that it required a year off for surgery but that wouldn't come until 1999.

Anyway Austin is temporarily paralyzed so Owen can't cover him. Hart walks around the ring shouting that Austin is done while Hebner tries to figure out what to do. Austin can move his limbs a bit as Owen tries to start a Canada chant. Austin rolls onto his stomach and in one of the toughest and dumbest moments in wrestling history, he gets the worst rollup of all time for the pin and the title before collapsing again.

Rating: B. Most famous wrestling injury of all time aside, this was a very solid match with both guys clicking very well. I'm assuming Austin was to win with the Stunner as otherwise Owen would have gotten a quick pin and gotten out of there. Austin was clearly going to be the next big thing but no one knew if he would ever walk again let alone wrestle after this match.

Austin can barely move but manages to sit up, only to fall over again. He can't even stand up right now. Some referees get him to his feet and Austin holds up the title to a BIG pop. It takes a bunch of people to get him to the back and his legs are VERY wobbly.

We recap Bret vs. Undertaker. It's a very basic idea: Bret was the top heel over the summer and Taker was just kind of around as world champion. Bret says if he doesn't win the title, he'll never wrestle in America again. Shawn Michaels is guest referee because he's the other top guy in the company.

We get the full Canadian national anthem before Taker's entrance.

WWF World Title: Undertaker vs. Bret Hart

Remember that Shawn is guest referee. Bret hits Undertaker in the back with the belt to start and pounds away but Undertaker throws him away and

out to the floor. The champion misses a charge into the post and is sent knees first into the steps by the Canadian. Bret tries to jump off the apron at Taker but is caught in midair and slammed into the post. Back in and Undertaker works on Bret's back before sending him into the corner a few times.

Off to a bearhug on Hart followed by a big boot to the face, but Taker misses a legdrop. A second big boot misses though and Bret goes after the knee. Hart cannonballs down onto Taker's knee and kicks the leg out from under the 6'10 champion. As a small sidebar, Vince says that you're not 6'10 when you're on the mat. I'm pretty sure he still is actually, but he just can't use that height advantage.

Hart cranks on the leg even more and puts on the Figure Four for good measure. This brings out Paul Bearer for some reason which angers the champion. Undertaker turns the hold over to escape before going after Bearer. Bret uses the distraction to jump Undertaker from behind and send him into the barricade. There's the Figure Four around the post by Bret as he stays on Taker's leg. Owen Hart and Brian Pillman of the Hart Foundation come out to ringside.

Taker's leg is wrapped around another post and Bret flips off a yelling fan. Shawn hasn't been a factor as referee yet. Back in and Bret puts on another leg lock but Taker rolls it over and uses the good leg to kick Bret in the face. With no provocation, Undertaker drops to the floor and beats up Owen and Pillman. Back in and there's the chokeslam but Shawn is watching for more Harts. Bret heads to the floor and rams Undertaker's back into the apron and post to take over again.

Shawn tells Bret to get back inside or the match is over. They head into the ring again with Bret getting two off a backbreaker. A suplex puts Undertaker down again and there's the middle rope elbow for two. Bret hits a DDT for the same but Undertaker drops him face first onto the turnbuckle for two of his own. Hart goes after the back again but can't hook the Sharpshooter. The chokeslam is countered with a kick to the leg but Undertaker hits an uppercut to put Bret down.

Undertaker hits his jumping clothesline to take over again before

whipping Bret chest first into the buckle for two. Bret tries to go up but gets chokeslammed down off the top for a close two. Old School is countered and Bret superplexes Undertaker down but he can't cover. Instead he puts on the Sharpshooter but Undertaker kicks him away, which is the first time the hold has been completely broken. Another clothesline puts Bret down but he escapes the Tombstone and puts on the Sharpshooter around the post in a new move. Taker kicks him off and he crushes Shawn in the process though.

Bret brings a chair into the ring and lays out Undertaker with no Michaels to see it. Shawn limps back into the ring but the count only gets two. Bret erupts on Shawn and flips him off before pounding away in the corner again. Shawn picks up the chair and is spat on by Bret. Shawn swings the chair but knocks Undertaker out cold, giving Bret the pin and the title.

Rating: B+. This took a lot of time to get going but with thirty minutes to use they had more than enough time to waste. Hart winning was definitely the right move after he spent all summer on top of the company. This opened up a lot more options than Taker was providing, which is what a champion is supposed to do.

Post match Undertaker is FURIOUS and goes after Shawn. The Hart Foundation celebrates to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This isn't the worst show in the world but there's nothing to see here other than the last two matches and the opener. Those matches take up a lot of the card but the rest of the stuff is just dreadful. This set up a lot of important stuff, ranging from the first Hell in a Cell to Kane to Montreal to Shawn breaking his back, but there's a very clear line between the good stuff and the bad stuff.

Ratings Comparison

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Mankind

Original: A

Redo: A-

Brian Pillman vs. Goldust

Original: D

Redo: D

Legion of Doom vs. Godwinns

Original: C-

Redo: D

British Bulldog vs. Ken Shamrock

Original: D-

Redo: D

Disciples of Apocalypse vs. Los Boricuas

Original: D

Redo: D-

Owen Hart vs. Steve Austin

Original: B

Redo: B

Undertaker vs. Bret Hart

Original: A

Redo: B+

Overall Rating

Original: B

Redo: C+

About the same other than the world title and the overall rating which doesn't surprise me. That's the kind of show this is.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/07/31/history-of-summerslam-count-up-1997-shawn-vs-taker-begins/>

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