

Summerslam Count-Up – 1998: It Don't Get No Bigger Than This (For Summerslam)

Summerslam 1998

Date: August 30, 1998

Location: Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York

Attendance: 21,588

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is the Summerslam you guys requested that I do for the third time and I'm very glad that you picked a good one. 1998 was the year where the WWF really turned things around in the Monday Night Wars and Summerslam was the biggest show of the year, easily surpassing a two match show at Wrestlemania. The main event here is Undertaker vs. Austin for the title, but there are questions about Undertaker's loyalties to Vince and Kane. Let's get to it.

Unfortunately the opening video isn't the one set to AC/DC but instead a well done video of Austin wondering if Undertaker and Kane are in cahoots (I love that word) against him. Vince has guaranteed that Undertaker will win the title with Kane helping him out tonight.

Before the first match, we get a quick announcement that Austin attacked a hearse that either Kane or Undertaker might have been inside. Thank goodness this is 1998 because today we'd get a series of videos from WWE.com and the YouTube channel showing how it happened and speculation over who was in it and words from 10 people on what it means. Instead just mention it here and move on because there's other stuff to get to than a million recaps.

The entrance is a black gate over a red background with smoke in the aisle, directly opposite the hard camera. That's such a cool visual and it works really well here.

European Title: D'Lo Brown vs. Val Venis

Brown is defending in a match that doesn't have any real backstory, but it does have a sixth minute time limit. I love the name graphic covering Val's gyrating crotch. Val's pre-match speech is about coming, seeing and coming again. Brown is billed from Helsinki because he's a real European.

Venis tries to chop the champ but hurts his arm on the chest protector, because of a very slow healing injury. A Russian legsweep works a bit better and Brown bails to the floor. That means it's time to gyrate and the high pitched screams suggest it worked well. Back in and a spinebuster gets two on Brown as we see the mysterious rookie Edge watching from the crowd.

Venis misses a splash and since JR is JR, he points out that the splash would have hurt Val even more because of the chest protector. Brown gets in his first big move with an (appropriately) Irish whip into the corner to put Venis down. Back up and an overhead t-bone suplex of all things gives Val a breather, only to have the champ slam him down and drop a leg for two. JR gives us a great stat: Brown is 27 and Venis is 26. It's a really good idea to bring up how young these guys are, especially when they're doing well like this.

Another slam stays on Val's back and Brown is smart enough to slap on a Texas cloverleaf for some psychology. D'Lo slams him again with Lawler saying "here comes some more!", which I think was a soundbyte in WWF Attitude, a Nintendo 64 game. Val goes up but dives into a modified Sky High for no cover as Brown took himself out too. A DDT plants Val (really good one too) for a near fall and the New York fans are appreciating this match.

Brown goes up but opts for the second rope, allowing Venis to catch him in a powerslam for another near fall. Val drops him with a butterfly suplex but the Money Shot hits knees. You would think hitting the chest protector would have hurt just as much but close enough at least. Brown can't get him up for a powerbomb and almost drops Val on the back of his head in a scary spot.

The second attempt gives us a Liger Bomb, allowing the referee to make sure Val doesn't have a broken neck. The champ misses the Low Down

(Lawler: "How does Val Venis continue to rise up like that?) and they slug it out from their knees. Val finally wakes up and takes off the chest protector, only to put it on himself. The referee isn't pleased and accidentally crotches Venis on top, causing Val to shove him down for the DQ.

Rating: B. This is one of the biggest "WHERE DID THAT COME FROM" moments in wrestling history as both guys had the match of their lives here but never got close to it again. They were just beating the tar out of each other out there and working as hard as I've ever seen them go, making for one heck of an opener and a borderline classic. Give this an ending and it's even higher.

Venis beats up the referee and gives him the Money Shot post match.

Mankind laments the destruction of the hearse and plugs the Brisco Brothers Body Shop. Maybe he can use his sledgehammer after all.

Kai En Tai vs. Oddities

This is a 4-3 handicap match but more importantly, the Insane Clown Posse play the Oddities to the ring and blow the roof off the place. As usual, Kurrigan dancing badly is one of my favorite things in wrestling due to how serious his face looks. Golga (the 6'8, 450lb Earthquake) starts with Light Heavyweight Champion Taka Michinoku and all four Kai En Tai members are destroyed in about eight seconds.

Golga steals Yamaguchi-San's (Kai En Tai's manager) shoes and almost falls down from the smell. Kurrigan comes in to face Funaki and is nice enough to get on his knees so they can be the same height. I always appreciate a polite dancing monster. Kurrigan throws all four of them around just as easily as Golga did as this isn't going well for the Japanese contingent. Off to Giant Silva, who is about 4 inches taller than Kurrigan, who could look down at Undertaker.

All four try Silva at the same time and the Oddities go 3-3 in their dominance. Silva puts all four of them in the corner before his partners come in to help whip everyone across the ring. Now it's Taka being launched over the top onto the other three. This is getting hilarious

with how one sided it is. Funaki and Men's Teioh come in and double dropkick Golga before actually slamming him down.

Four straight top rope splashes keep Golga in trouble and four straight legdrops get no cover. The referee is fine with letting all four of them in there but can you blame him at this point? Golga clotheslines all four of them at once (that looked cool) and all three Oddities come in, leaving Yamaguchi-San to get beaten up by Luna Vachon. A triple quadruple chokeslam lets Golga pin all four men at once for the win.

Rating: C+. I know they're not very good and they were never going anywhere, but I'll always have a soft spot for the Oddities. They're a total guilty pleasure for me but I have such a good time watching them. It's an act where you know what you should be getting and that's exactly what you got. Total comedy match here but I had fun.

Jeff Jarrett vs. X-Pac

This is hair vs. hair with Howard Finkel in X-Pac's corner due to Jarrett and his cronies Southern Justice (the heel Godwinns, in an even worse gimmick) shaved his hair earlier in the night. We even get Howard doing the crotch chop to really pop the crowd. Jarrett is told to suck it and goes after X-Pac to start, only to get kicked in the face to send him outside, followed by a nice middle rope plancha.

Jeff tries a sunset flip back inside but X-Pac just steps to the side. I don't remember seeing that anywhere else but it's a very smart counter. X-Pac is very talented in the ring, all of his outside the ring shenanigans aside. Things get a bit too quick though and X-Pac gets crotched against the post to stop his momentum cold.

Back in and a powerslam gets two for Jeff as they're keeping this quick enough to not bore the New York crowd with Jarrett's Memphis style. We hit the sleeper on X-Pac and it's so strange to hear Fink's familiar voice as a cheerleader. X-Pac does the same sequence to counter the sleeper that has happened in every Jeff Jarrett match ever but Jeff puts him on the top instead of suplexing him down.

The middle rope cross body misses, just like the spinwheel kick and

Jarrett is in trouble. Like any good southern villain with his opponent on the mat, Jeff slaps on a figure four, despite not touching X-Pac's legs so far. A rope is quickly grabbed and now the belly to back puts Jarrett down but X-Pac can't follow up.

Jarrett gets two off a high cross body but his leapfrog is countered into a sitout powerbomb for the same. A Bronco Buster attempt hits a raised boot but Finkel distracts the referee (Fink: "HE KICKED HIM IN THE BALLS!"), allowing X-Pac to hit a quick X Factor for no cover. Instead here's Southern Justice to slide in a guitar but the distraction lets X-Pac take it away from Jeff and knock him silly for the pin.

Rating: C+. It's another match where both guys were working hard to get a pretty uninteresting match over and that's exactly what they did. Jarrett is in his element here as a bully midcarder who gets his comeuppance at the hands of a popular act. Read as: NOT A MAIN EVENT WORLD TITLE CONTENDER.

The New Age Outlaws, Droz and the Headbangers come out to make sure Jarrett gets his hair shaved. Jeff arguing with the referee about the guitar as he's held in the chair is great stuff.

Doc Hendrix previews the Lion's Den, a UFC knockoff.

Rock is pleased by attacking HHH's knee on Sunday Night Heat earlier in the night. We get a guarantee that Rock is retaining the title tonight, if you smell what he's cooking. Kevin Kelly: "Well there you ha..." Rock: "Shut up."

Sable/??? vs. Jacqueline/Marc Mero

Sable needs a mystery partner to help her out here after Mero dumped her for Jacqueline. This led to some contests between the two with Jacqueline getting the upper hand most of the time due to a combination of Mero and, you know, being a wrestler. Sable comes to the ring alone but introduces her partner as....Edge. The guys get things going with Mero stomping away in the corner until Edge comes back with some Japanese armdrags.

Lawler isn't sure if this is Edge or The Edge. Jacqueline comes in so

Sable demands a tag, sending Jacqueline scurrying off to the floor. It's back to the guys but Jacqueline grabs Edge's leg to let Mero take over again. Edge escapes the TKO and takes Mero down with a DDT to give himself a breather. The double tag brings in the women and it's catfight time. A chase sends Jacqueline to the floor but Mero is waiting on Sable.

That's fine with her as she loads up a powerbomb, only to have Jacqueline jump her to take over again. That earns Jacqueline a half decent TKO but it's Mero making a save this time. Back up and Jacqueline hits Mero by mistake, giving Sable the opening to fix her hair. Edge comes in and dives on Mero to fire the crowd up again. Jacqueline gets a spanking to keep them rolling, followed by a high cross body for two on Marc.

More heel miscommunication puts Jacqueline on the floor and Mero gets crotched on top. Sable busts out a top rope hurricanrana for two, followed by the worst "accidental falling headbutt into a low blow" from Jacqueline to Mero. Edge plants Mero with the Downward Spiral (actually called that) and picks Sable up for a splash to give her the pin.

Rating: D. Yeah I still don't care for this one. Sable was a very popular character and it made sense to put her on this show, but it's still not a good match. Edge getting a big spot like this is a nice touch, but it's still not an interesting match or story. Thankfully the Sable vs. Mero stuff would wrap up soon after this and Edge would go on to be part of the Brood.

Mankind is told that Kane can't be his partner tonight so maybe he should just forfeit the titles. If the fans want their money's worth though, maybe Michael Cole can be his partner. Or better yet, maybe Mankind can go play in the traffic. Vince comes in and brings up Mankind hitchhiking to Madison Square Garden as a teenager. The boss thinks Mankind can defend the titles against the Outlaws on his own, even though he doesn't have a sledgehammer.

Vince hands him what looks like a candelabra and a cookie sheet. That's enough to inspire Mankind and he has thirteen words for the Outlaws: "How much would would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" Well no one ever accused Foley of making the most sense. I have no idea why

but I always loved this segment as Mankind was so perfect for this character and Vince manipulating him was always entertaining.

We recap Owen Hart vs. Ken Shamrock, which is more about Dan Severn and his manly mustache against Shamrock in a UFC feud. Severn was Owen's trainer and taught him how to fight with submissions, setting up the Lion's Den match here.

Owen Hart vs. Ken Shamrock

This is in a small theater adjacent to MSG. The match is held in a small, circular cage which is about as blatant of a ripoff of a UFC cage as you can get. You win by submission or knockout. Hart is a member of the Nation but Severn is the only person here with him. Shamrock easily takes him down to start until Owen counters into a leglock. Ken gets dropped with a spinebuster but floats over and unloads with right hands.

A low blow is shrugged off as well and Shamrock takes Owen's head off with a clothesline. The cage starts coming into play with Shamrock climbing the cage into another clothesline, only to miss a charge into the steel. The fans are entirely behind Shamrock as he gets thrown face first against the cage. Lawler isn't sure what to call the structure. JR: "How about the Lion's Den?" Lawler: "Uh, ok." Owen can't piledrive him and his hurricanrana is countered into a nice powerbomb.

Both guys are bleeding from the face and Owen scores with a powerslam and a nice belly to belly. The Sharpshooter is on but Ken crawls over and climbs the cage to escape in a nice counter. Something like a tornado DDT out of the corner drops Owen but he grabs the dragon sleeper, only to have Shamrock climb the cage and roll over into the ankle lock for the submission.

Rating: C+. Again, they tried something different here, even though it was just a glorified cage match. Both guys were trying hard out there, which really is a theme for the show so far. Shamrock looked like a gladiator, but it really doesn't need to set up a feud with Severn. At the end of the day, neither guy can talk and one of them is Dan Severn, so how far can this really go?

Austin will do whatever it takes to retain the title tonight.

Tag Team Titles: New Age Outlaws vs. Mankind

Mankind is defending on his own and comes out with a big metal dumpster because this is a hardcore match. The Outlaws are in South Park shirts, which still look weird at this point. Mankind and Billy duel with chairs until Road Dogg sneaks in from behind to take over. They start cracking Mankind in the head with whatever metal objects they can find but a swinging neckbreaker on the floor gets two on Gunn.

That earns Mankind more double teaming and a ram into the side of the dumpster. It's table time back inside, but it's one of those old tables that looks a bit more realistic than the common ones. Billy is sent through it as well though and Mankind has a breather. Lawler is freaking out because Vince might have been right but a reverse 3D drops the champ again. A double powerbomb through two open chairs only gets two and Dogg stops to jaw with the referee. Instead it's a spike piledriver onto the belt to give the Outlaws the titles back.

Rating: D+. There isn't much to talk about here as this was a glorified squash for obvious reasons. Mankind is a tough guy but having him beat a top level team like the Outlaws on his own would have been way too much. This also sets up more stuff with Kane for Mankind so what else can you really ask for?

The Outlaws put Mankind in the dumpster but Kane is inside, sledgehammer in hand. With Mankind out of camera range, Kane slams the hammer down into the dumpster and everyone goes silent.

We recap HHH vs. Rock, which was disguised as DX vs. the Nation. Rock won almost every major match leading to this final blowoff, including costing HHH the European Title. Tonight it's a ladder match for Rock's Intercontinental Title, which he's held for a remarkable nine months. The only solution was to hold the title above the ring and channel Shawn vs. Razor at Wrestlemania X.

Intercontinental Title: The Rock vs. HHH

Rock is defending and of course this is a ladder match. Chris Warren and the DX Band sings HHH to the ring because 1998 was a time when people actually knew who Chris War was. HHH destroys the band's equipment for reasons that aren't exactly clear but here's the Rock to turn things serious. The seconds here are Chyna and Mark Henry, which aren't exactly fair. I mean, at this point Chyna was kind of awesome and Henry was....well he was Mark Henry. The title isn't hung above the ring yet so we have to wait a few seconds for it to go up.

Rock drops a few F Bombs before it's time to slug it out. A big clothesline puts Rock down and HHH hammers away, followed by the facebuster. Neither finisher can hit and HHH is backdropped over the top to give HHH a reason to limp on his legitimately bad knee. They slug it out in the aisle with HHH getting the better of it but limping back inside so Rock can hammer away again.

It's already time to go for the ladder but instead of just picking it up, Rock whips HHH face first into the ladder instead. Why bother with anything but violence if you don't have to? Rock starts a climb but HHH dives off the top to break it up, only to have the ladder fall onto his back. There isn't much effect though (HHH is allowed to no sell at least once in every big match) and HHH climbs up, only to get nailed in the knee to bring him back down.

Rock goes in after the knee with elbows before realizing he has a ladder at his disposal. The leg gets crushed between the ladder but now it's time for a chair to crush it even worse. He wraps the leg around the post as well before driving the knee into the ladder for good measure. Ever the cocky one, Rock climbs up as slowly as he can, allowing HHH to knock the ladder over for the save.

You don't cut the Rock off on the second rung though so he takes HHH and the ladder to the floor for a catapult into the steel. I'm sure it happened at some point before but someone should catapult the ladder into a person instead. Rock keeps it going by backdropping HHH onto the ladder and this is getting ugly.

Henry thinks (yes seriously) the ladder is too busted up so he throws in

another so Rock can climb faster. Chyna forearms Henry in the face, allowing HHH to dive in for the save. A baseball slide puts the ladder into Rock's face and HHH has his first control in a long time. The bloody Rock is able to pull the ladder down again before setting the second ladder on the top rope. I don't see this ending well, but that could be because I've seen this many times.

HHH is smart enough to break up whatever Rock had in mind though and plants him with a DDT. They climb the ladder again and Rock shoves him down and into the ladder in the corner, only to have HHH bounce into the standing ladder to knock Rock throat first into the top rope. Rock is up first and grabs a ladder, only to have HHH blast it with a chair over and over to get a breather.

Back up and Rock wins a slugout before slamming HHH onto the ladder for the People's Elbow. Neither guy can follow up though and it's HHH climbing first, only to dive into a Rock Bottom for no logically explained reason. HHH is able to get up again and pulls Rock (and his trunks) down, followed by the big Pedigree to give himself the best chance he's had all match. As he's getting up though, Henry throws powder in his face. The blind HHH climbs, only to get punched in the face by Rock. This brings in Chyna for a low blow on Rock, allowing HHH to finally pull down the belt to win.

Rating: A. This is one of my favorite matches of all time and it still more than holds up. It's a match that launched both guys up the ladder to the next level with HHH becoming an upper midcarder and Rock becoming a main eventer who would pick up the World Title in November. The key thing here though is they focused on the wrestlers and the drama instead of the ladder and the spots, which almost always make for the best matches. Check this one out if you want a great brawl with some awesome back and forth action which meant a great deal going forward.

We get some exclusive home video footage of Rock stumbling to the back and swearing revenge that wouldn't come for years. He's still the People's Champ.

Quick recap of Undertaker vs. Austin, minus the awesome video package,

which is built around where Undertaker's loyalties lie. He may or may not be in league with both Kane and Vince, but there's no actual proof either way. It feels like a conspiracy against Austin, which really isn't all that shocking when you consider who he had gone to war with all summer.

WWF World Title: Steve Austin vs. Undertaker

Austin is defending. They get in each other's faces to start before trading wristlocks. A rollup with tights gets two for the champ and he puts on a Fujiwara armbar of all things. It's off to a regular armbar as Austin could never look right with a technical hold like a Fujiwara armbar. Then disaster strikes as Undertaker ducks his head and gets kicked in the face, only to have Undertaker snap his head up and nail Austin in the jaw, knocking him silly for the rest of the match.

Once Austin can stand again, a quick Thesz press attempt is countered into a hot shot for two as you can see Austin is WAY off. Undertaker slowly punches and stomps away but Austin is coherent enough to go after the leg and wrap it around the post. It's not enough though as Undertaker comes back with the running clothesline and some good old fashioned choking. Old School is easily broken up and it's back to the knee as there's only so much they can do here aside from striking.

Cue Kane as a 3:16 chant starts up. The distraction lets the referee make sure Austin knows what planet he's on but Undertaker tells Kane to head back because he wants to do this himself. Austin goes after Undertaker on the floor again but takes too much time, setting up a nearly falling chokeslam from the apron back inside. Undertaker can't cover though, allowing Austin to clothesline him out to the floor and right onto that bad knee.

They brawl up the aisle and into the crowd, which is probably best for Austin as it's a lot less complicated for a scrambled brain to deal with. Undertaker backdrops him onto the concrete as the knee seems fine. Austin goes spine first into the post, heads back inside, and is promptly thrown right back to the floor in an awkward landing. It's time for the big spot as Undertaker lays Austin onto the announcers' table and heads up top for a HUGE legdrop, crushing Austin but not the table for maybe the biggest

spot Undertaker has ever done.

Somehow it only gets two, which is only right as Undertaker's foot was under the bottom rope. You would expect a better enforcement of the rules from Earl Hebner. This time it's Undertaker missing a charge into the corner and running into a double clothesline to put both guys down. It's time for the hero comeback with Austin winning a slugout and hitting the Thesz press. Something like the Stunner is mostly botched as Undertaker falls backwards with Austin landing on top of him for two.

Undertaker comes back with the chokeslam but Austin escapes the tombstone. They have an awkward exchange in the corner with Austin getting crotched on the top rope, followed by a Russian legsweep from Undertaker to put both guys down. Old School is loaded up again but Undertaker dives into a low blow, setting up the Stunner to retain Austin's title.

Rating: B-. This is a really hard one to grade after the injury to Austin. It's much more a collection of spots loosely tied together instead of a match, but the big spots worked well enough and Austin won as clean as he was going to win in a main event match in 1998. It's also really nice to not have all the interference for a change because that was the norm for so long at this point. Good match, but it's definitely a few steps beneath Austin's usual greatness.

Undertaker hands the belt to Austin and Kane comes out to stand by his brother's side to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. Oh yeah it still holds up. This is a great show with some awesome matches that capped off stories while also setting up some stuff for the future. Above all else though it felt like a major show, which isn't really the case at any other show all year. It's still one of the best Summerslams and a show you kind of have to see at least once.

Ratings Comparison

Val Venis vs. D'Lo Brown

Original: B

Redo: C+

2015 Redo: B

Oddities vs. Kai En Tai

Original: C-

Redo: C-

2015 Redo: C+

Jeff Jarrett vs. X-Pac

Original: B

Redo: C

2015 Redo: C+

Marc Mero/Jacqueline vs. Sable/Edge

Original: F

Redo: C-

2015 Redo: D

Ken Shamrock vs. Owen Hart

Original: B-

Redo: B

2015 Redo: C+

Mankind vs. New Age Outlaws

Original: D+

Redo: D+

2015 Redo: D+

HHH vs. The Rock

Original: A+

Redo: A+

2015 Redo: A

Steve Austin vs. Undertaker

Original: B-

Redo: B-

2015 Redo: B-

Overall Rating

Original: B

Redo: A-

2015 Redo: B

This is a good example of why I don't do a third take of shows very often. Most of the ratings are either the same or really close to the same with the World Title and Tag Team Title matches having the same rating every time. I think we've found my definitive take on those matches and I really don't have anything else to say about most of them. I'll do a different Summerslam next year and a fresh review of each of the big four every year though, as it's a fun thing to look back at, especially a good show like this one.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/08/01/history-of-summerslam-count-up-1998-the-biggest-summerslam-ever/>

And the original redo:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/08/03/summerslam-count-up-1998-rock-and-hhh-ascend/>

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