

Smackdown – March 27, 2003: Cena Begins

Smackdown

Date: March 27, 2003

Location: HP Pavilion, San Jose, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's the final show for Wrestlemania and also my dad's fiftieth birthday. Everything is pretty much set so there's a good chance this is going to be little more than a slow paced final push towards the show. Hopefully it's better than Raw, which really shouldn't be all that difficult of a task. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Rey Mysterio/Brian Kendrick vs. Matt Hardy/Shannon Moore

Kendrick now has theme music, but it's not as catch as Matt's, whose Mattitude will make Wrestlemania a success and is very humble. Shannon starts with Brian and gets two off an early snap suplex. A hurricanrana puts Shannon down though and it's off to Rey to speed things up. Some raised boots in the corner slow Rey down but Rey dropkicks Matt for two.

It's back to Kendrick but he's quickly pulled into the wrong corner to start the double teaming. Shannon's belly to back gets two and Matt gets the same off a wicked Splash Mountain Bomb out of the corner. Brian slips over for the hot tag and it's off to Rey for the bulldog and springboard seated legdrop for two on Matt. A tornado DDT gives Kendrick the same and he drops Shannon with Sliced Bread #2, only to walk into the Twist of Fate for the pin.

Rating: B-. Heck of an opener here with all four getting to show off a bit. I'm glad they didn't have the fall between Mysterio and Hardy for a change and it's not like pinning Kendrick is a big stretch. If nothing else it's nice to see a match with some energy in the week before Wrestlemania as they were certainly absent from Raw.

Post match Rey hurricanranas Moore but walks into a Twist of Fate.

Hulk Hogan arrives with his son and Jimmy Hart.

Roddy Piper is interested in Hogan vs. McMahon.

Video of last week's contract signing.

Here's Hogan for hopefully (and not likely) the last big push towards the match. Hogan talks about having a business relationship with Vince for over twenty years but he never really knew the man. He's seen Vince do some horrible, evil and often illegal things but he never knew how twisted Vince really was. If Vince is a genius, he's an evil genius (no brother so you know he's serious). He recaps the No Way Out ordeal and it made him so mad that he agreed to make Sunday's match a street fight.

This won't be his last time on Smackdown because Sunday is going to be a fight twenty years in the making. You'll see a Hogan you haven't seen in twenty years because you'll have to see it. Hogan promises to leave Vince in a pool of his own blood to wrap it up. It's a good promo, but we're still talking about two guys who aren't wrestlers at this point fighting over which of them is responsible for them both being multi-millionaires. That's at worst the second biggest match on the show and it's pretty hard to get behind that idea.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Charlie Haas

They trade leg trips to start and get two each as the fans are very behind Eddie early on. Eddie shoulders him down but seems to bang up his own shoulder. Charlie grabs a hammerlock and drops him arm first onto the rope to take over. A clothesline gets two and Charlie cranks on the arm even more. Eddie suplexes his way out of an armbar but lands on the shoulder again. A hammerlock northern lights suplex gets two but another suplex is countered into a rollup for the fast pin.

Rating: C+. The arm stuff was a good idea here but the time hurt them a bit. Eddie and Chavo are starting to get over as faces due to pure in-ring ability and charisma, plus the whole not fighting the FBI anymore. Haas and Benjamin continue to lose, which almost guarantees that they

retain on Sunday.

John Cena promises to teach Brock Lesnar a lesson like he's Mr. Miyagi.

Video on the FBI, which is actually really well produced. Like, more so than their usual great production.

Lesnar isn't worried about Cena.

Nathan Jones has beaten up Chuck Palumbo off camera instead of having a match. So five minutes ago we get a good video on the team and now one of them is left laying off camera. Well done WWE.

Vince training montage with Shane as his coach. Can he still catch a chicken though? This is missing from the Network version for no apparent reason.

Nidia and Jamie Noble are in the back when they see Torrie Wilson's Playboy cover. Jamie can't bring himself to say that Nidia is prettier.

Wrestlemania Moment: Morton Downey Jr. in Piper's Pit.

Video on Torrie's Playboy press conference with Stephanie introducing her for whatever reason. Torrie has the best body she's ever seen, which is the endorsement that Playboy has been looking for.

Torrie Wilson vs. Nidia

Nidia jumps her from behind and grabs a chair as this is already more physical than I was expecting. A baseball slide sends the chair into Nidia's face for two and Tazz starts singing. The fans want puppies but settle for Torrie hitting a DDT for the pin.

Big Show and A-Train run into Nathan Jones and make fun of his prison sentence.

Sean O'Haire tells us to eat whatever you want.

Big Show/A-Train vs. Chris Benoit/Rhyno

Cole thinks Heyman had something to do with this for the sake of

softening up Rhyno and Benoit for Sunday. For once, that's almost insightful. A-Train muscles Rhyno into the corner for a rare visual but gets stomped back for a nice reaction. Benoit comes in for some hard chops but one heck of a shoulder drops him hard.

It's off to Show and Benoit gets tossed hard into the corner, only to come out with some chops. Show clotheslines him down and the beating begins. There's the required big toss across the ring, which still looks cool every single time. A big headbutt sends Benoit into the corner and it's off to A-Train for some stomping.

Something like a Gory Stretch has Benoit screaming but a Vader Bomb hits boots. Benoit finally gets in a German suplex and makes the hot tag to Rhyno, who has no issues running through the monsters. Everything breaks down but here's Jones to go after Show for the lame but logical DQ.

Rating: C. This was actually going somewhere until the ending, which was the only option they had here. Rhyno continues to impress and I'm starting to appreciate his rather simple but effective style. Everyone was game here and it made for a better match than I was expecting, which isn't that hard for a Big Show/A-Train match.

Undertaker comes in and helps clear the ring.

Kurt Angle is looking for Brock. Post break he's in Lesnar's locker room and says they're a lot alike. The difference is that Brock is a 25 year old rookie and he's not ready. This match is going to change wrestling forever because they're the best in the business. If Angle gets destroyed on Sunday, he's done enough already. He's bringing everything on Sunday and is willing to end Lesnar's career to win.

Lesnar doesn't think this is as brave as Angle hopes it is because Kurt knows he's safe until Wrestlemania. Brock is willing to lay it all on the line on Sunday. At Wrestlemania, here comes the pain, because Lesnar will do anything to win the title. Good stuff here, and I liked it not being in the ring for a change.

Wrestlemania card, with the Raw Tag Team Title match being moved to Sunday Night Heat.

Another Vince training video.

Gene Okerlund is ready for Hogan vs. McMahon and says they were both responsible for the boom.

Chavo Guerrero vs. Shelton Benjamin

Some amateur stuff goes nowhere so Chavo speeds it up with a headscissors and a dropkick for two. Shelton goes after the leg though and Chavo is in quick trouble. Benjamin grabs a leg lock but Chavo is next to the rope for a break. Shelton puts on a different hold (always appreciated) but Chavo reverses into a small package for two. It's off to the third hold until a cradle gives Guerrero two more. An enziguri finally gets Chavo a breather and both guys are down. Eddie cuts off Charlie's interference attempt, leaving Chavo to grab la majistral for the pin.

Rating: C. Oh yeah Team Angle is winning and they're not even trying to hide it at this point. Chavo looked good here, which isn't the biggest surprise despite his abilities often being overlooked. This was basically the same formula from earlier but with a different limb, which makes it no surprise that it worked.

Post match Team Angle attacks, only to have Rhyno and Benoit make the save and clean house.

Rikishi vs. John Cena

Cena debuts Basic Thuganomics as his theme music. He jumps Rikishi during his entrance and hammers away until a single right hand puts him on the floor. Rikishi gets whipped into the steps though and Cena pulls off the barricade padding to ram him back first. Back in and we hit a crossface chickenwing of all things as things slow way down. Rikishi fights up and hits the Samoan drop. A superkick sets up the corner splash and Stinkface but the Rump Shaker hits knees. The ref bump allows Cena to hit the chain shot for two, followed by I believe the debuting FU (much closer to a Death Valley Driver here) for the pin.

Rating: D+. It's kind of fascinating to see so much of what defined Cena debuting in one match as he had the music, the finisher and most of the

signature look all at once. It made him look like a star instead of the goof that he was for months leading up to this. They almost have to do Lesnar vs. Cena now and that's not the worst idea in the world.

Cena calls out Lesnar and after a break (with Arnold Schwarzenegger hyping Vince vs. Hogan) gets his wish, only to have Angle jump Lesnar from behind with a 2x4. Lesnar is down and in pain to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This was a back and forth show with good action (FAR better than Raw) but at the same time there was so much Vince vs. Hogan stuff that it took away the limited interest I had in the match in the first place. I'm still not wild on Wrestlemania but this show did help a lot as they focused on a lot of stuff. Unfortunately one match got so much of the hype and it's really not one of the best things on the card. It's all going to be about the presentation and in-ring results on Sunday but they've got their work cut out.

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