

Monday Night Raw – March 31, 2003: Who's Next? Eh It's Not That Hard To Figure Out.

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 31, 2003

Location: Key Arena, Seattle, Washington

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's time for one of the biggest Raw's of the year and it should be interesting to see where things are going. HHH needs a new challenger after he sent Booker packing from the main event scene and Rock finally vanquished Steve Austin at Wrestlemania. There's room for a lot of changes on the show at the moment so let's get to it.

We open with a nearly four minute highlight package of last night. Nothing wrong with that after the biggest show of the year.

Opening sequence.

Rock is looking in a mirror when a makeup guy comes up, only to annoy the Great One. Tonight is Rock Appreciation Night and he needs to look perfect.

Here's Austin to get things going in the arena. Austin says he's always been honest since he's been here and last night Rock was the better man. He'd like to have Rock come out here right now for a handshake but gets Eric Bischoff with some papers instead. Eric doesn't buy Austin wanting a handshake and thinks it's a ploy. The fact is Austin won't be beating anyone up anytime soon.

The night before Wrestlemania, Austin was in a hospital so Eric had his lawyers look into a few things. While Austin was in the hospital for an anxiety issue, there's a lot more to it than that. Bischoff reads off a bunch of neck and back issues that Austin is dealing with (apparently having stolen Austin's personal medical records) and he's not medically

cleared to wrestle. Austin says he's going to do whatever he wants and that includes fighting against doctor's orders. That's fine with Bischoff, who fires him. The FedEx is on its way to Austin's home in Texas too.

HHH vs. Hurricane

Non-title. During the entrances, JR and King say that Goldberg will be part of the upcoming Backlash pay per view. Hurricane gives his mask to a kid so Flair takes it away and breaks the thing. HHH jumps him on the floor and takes him down with a spinebuster back inside. A vertical suplex is broken up and Hurricane's jumping neckbreaker mostly connects.

Some jumping clotheslines and a Shining Wizard give Hurricane two but Flair trips him up. It doesn't really matter as the chokeslam is good for two, followed by a high crossbody for a pretty good near fall. The Pedigree is broken up and the Eye of the Hurricane gets two more. The Blockbuster misses though and it's a Pedigree to put HHH away.

Rating: C-. This would also be known as a "take that Rock" match as Rock went out of his way to give Hurricane a rub and then HHH beats him clean in about four minutes. Hurricane's offense looked good and there's nothing wrong with the World Champion getting a clean win but did it just NEED to be Hurricane? Seems rather petty but that's how it goes.

Kane thinks he and Rob Van Dam should go their separate ways but Rob has already gotten them another Tag Team Title shot tonight. If they lose though, they have to join the Bischoff Administration. Kane is livid. Rob: "Dude.....we're gonna win."

Goldberg video. He'll be at Backlash.

Scott Steiner vs. Christopher Nowinski

Chris has a protective mask on his face and politely requests not to be hit in the face. Steiner threatens to make Nowinski floss with his shoelaces and Nowinski's running doesn't get him anywhere. Scott hammers him down and gets in a kick to the chest but Nowinski uses a headbutt with the mask to get a breather. Not that it matters as a belly to belly

and the Steiner Recliner put Chris away in short order. Total squash.

Austin confirms that his neck is messed up.

Rock Appreciation Moment: a song montage. It really is amazing how much great stuff he packed into so little time.

JR goes on a heck of a rant against Bischoff for somehow getting Austin's medical records and getting rid of him this way. Heck yeah JR. Medical reasons like Austin having a horrible neck and back? What kind of problems could those ever cause? I get what they're going for with Bischoff finding a way to get rid of Austin but good luck getting me to take issue with protecting the neck/back of someone who already missed a year due to neck surgery.

The Dudleys aren't happy with Storm and Morely. Here's the Chief to tell them that they're in the Tag Team Title match tonight as well where their jobs will be to get rid of RVD and Kane before laying down to retain the titles.

Flair comes in to see Booker T., who is getting his knee taped up. Booker chokes Flair for being annoying and shows why he's one of the scariest men in wrestling. Seriously he was terrifying when he was shouting down at Flair.

Clip of Ashanti singing America the Beautiful.

Rosey vs. Maven

Fallout from Maven pinning Rico a few weeks back and of course that requires another match. Maven kicks him in the ribs but gets his head taken off with a clothesline. King ignores the match to talk about being a celebrity photographer for Playboy, which doesn't cause nearly as much excitement as you would expect.

Rosey misses a charge in the corner and gets forearmed down, only to have Maven COMPLETELY miss a dropkick to Rosey's back. The idea was supposed to have Rosey get knocked into Rico on the apron, likely for a rollup pin. Rosey starts to go into Rico anyway but thankfully realizes how stupid that would be since he wasn't touched. They stumble around into an

awful looking rollup to give Maven two, followed by a sunset flip to put Rosey away. This was terrible and made some of the Divas matches look horrible. By the way, Maven would have been a perfect choice (one of many) for HHH's squash earlier rather than Hurricane.

Here's Chris Jericho for a match but first he needs some respect. Jericho talks about having one of the best matches in Wrestlemania history last night and Shawn Michaels knows that he was bested. When people look back at the match, they'll remember Shawn writhing in pain while Jericho walked out with his head held high. Tonight, he'll take out his frustrations on Booker T.

Chris Jericho vs. Booker T.

Booker has a bad leg so Jericho goes after it before the bell. Some kicks and elbow drops have the leg in trouble but Booker kicks him over the top for a breather. Back in and a flapjack drops Jericho as JR praises HHH's Indian Deathlock. There's a superkick but here's Flair for the DQ.

HHH comes out and it's a 3-1 beatdown until Shawn makes the save. Jericho breaks up Sweet Chin Music though and it's Shawn taking the beatdown, including the Walls. HHH gets the Indian Deathlock and the good guys tap. Yeah it's still just an Indian Deathlock dude. Try the sleeper again.

Jeff Hardy vs. Steven Richards

Jeff is in all white, making him look like he's off to paint an apartment. Richards gets sent outside early on but Victoria pulls him away before Jeff's barricade running clothesline. Back in and a DDT on the arm gives Richards two and we hit the armbar as Jeff's blue arm paint is all over Richards. Jeff makes the comeback and gets two off the leg lariat in the corner. The Swanton is broken up by Victoria so here's Trish, who got out here WAY too fast, to kick her in the head. Now the Swanton can put Richards away.

Rating: D. The paint was the most interesting part of the match. This Jeff/Trish thing isn't doing anything for me but I can't imagine it's going to be anything long term. They also need some fresh talent for the women's division as Trish vs. Victoria all over again makes my head hurt.

Trish smiles at Jeff post match.

Austin says goodbye to the production staff and leaves.

Rock Appreciation Moment: Rock insults various crowds and people. "HE SAID TORONTO! THAT'S WHERE WE LIVE!" Still amazing.

Test calls Torrie Wilson because he's dumb enough to do this when his girlfriend is around. Speaking of the girlfriend, Stacy comes up and innocently asks who was on the phone. Test gets nervous and says it was a wrong number. He tries to get Goldust to lie for him but the Tourette's gets the better of him.

Rock finds the dejected production staff (who haven't moved since Austin left) and says he's got a big party after Rock Appreciation Night. I mean, they can't come in or anything but the party will be happening.

Goldberg video.

Tag Team Titles: Dudley Boyz vs. Rob Van Dam/Kane vs. Lance Storm/Chief Morely

The graphic still shows the old title belt design. Morely and Storm are defending and this is elimination rules. Rob and Kane slug it out with the champs with Van Dam moonsaulting to the floor to take out the two of them plus Bubba as a bonus. Kane dives onto all of them and the fans are way into Van Dam, as is usually the case. We really get things going with Rob and D-Von as the fans want tables.

Bubba comes in to club Kane in the chest but takes a jumping clothesline for his efforts. A quick What's Up slows Kane down but it's right back to Rob for a bunch of kicks to the face. Everything breaks until it's Bubba and Van Dam alone in the ring where Rob misses the Five Star. Storm tries to bring in a chair but D-Von takes it away and misses a swing, setting up the Van Daminator to get rid of the Dudleys.

Back from a break with Morely suplexing Van Dam and Kane making a save. Storm comes in and grabs a half crab, which isn't even treated as a finisher anymore. To be fair, did anyone outside of WCW ever buy that as a good move? The hot tag brings in Kane as everything breaks down.

A really bad camera shot shows Van Dam's top rope kick not coming close to Storm (which the announcers didn't acknowledge, making it a bit less bad than Maven's disaster earlier). There's the double chokeslam on the champs and the Five Star to Morely gives Rob and Kane the titles.

Rating: D+. Kind of slow here but the ending was the only important part. Kane and Van Dam should have won the titles last night but the extra emotion here did make things a little better. At least the titles are off of Storm and Regal as they were setting new standards for uninteresting champions. The Dudleys didn't really need to be there either but they didn't hurt anything.

Bischoff has a contract of some kind and promises a big surprise.

Here's Rock for Rock Appreciation Night/the most obvious debut ever. Rock has FINALLY come back to sea...all you jabronis appreciate him. The ROCKY chant breaks out and Rock says he doesn't care for what happened to Austin earlier tonight. If Austin just had to get beaten last night, at least it was by the best. Rock brags about all the Rock Bottoms last night and the fans keep cheering him.

We get another montage of awesome Rock moments (edited off the Network due to the music), which still doesn't get them to boo. He talks about going to Hollywood and coming back to boos as the fans FINALLY catch on...by chanting for Goldberg. Rock: "Don't think you're cool just because you know Rock's accountant Ira Goldberg!"

Rock is out of people to beat though so this is the last time you'll ever see him. He tells them what they can do with their booing...and here's Goldberg. This would have been a heck of a surprise if they hadn't said he would be at Backlash and then had Bischoff do the contract thing. Goldberg says Rock is next and a spear ends the show.

Overall Rating: C. This definitely felt like the post-Wrestlemania show with very little wrestling throughout and one match with any significant time. They set up a few things going forward but a lot of this show was about taking a breath after the hard push towards Wrestlemania. There's nothing wrong with that and the Goldberg debut, while highly telegraphed, did feel like a big moment. Not a bad show, but it's not the place to

look if you want a lot of action.

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