

Smackdown – May 22, 2003: Prelude to a Test

Smackdown

Date: May 22, 2003

Location: Greensboro Coliseum, Greensboro, North Carolina

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We're past Judgment Day and that means it's time to get ready for...well that's not clear actually as we have Bad Blood as a Raw exclusive pay per view for June. Brock Lesnar is in need of a fresh challenger after vanquishing Big Show, which opens the door for a lot of people who don't seem ready for the spot. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Mr. America vs. Roddy Piper on Sunday with America and Zach Gowen getting one up on Vince McMahon.

Vince is in the back and marches to the arena. He sounds livid as he talks about being sick of all these mistakes going on around here. It all started when Mr. America got an iron clad contract and has snowballed from there. While he's failed to prove that America is Hulk Hogan, tonight Vince is taking over and you'll see his fingerprints all over the show (his words).

Opening sequence, now in black and white and a slower paced theme. Rather catchy one indeed.

Tag Team Titles: Eddie Guerrero/Tajiri vs. Team Angle

Team Angle is challenging in their rematch from Sunday. Tajiri and Benjamin start things off with Shelton taking him down in short order. Back up with Tajiri sliding his way out and dropping a knee on the now legal Haas. Eddie comes in to break up a double suplex and a double backbreaker puts Team Angle on the floor. It's off to Eddie to clean house, including a middle rope spinning armdrag that he can make look perfectly smooth.

Tajiri comes in and kicks at Charlie's back but Charlie hits something like a spear. Not that it matters as it's back to Eddie almost immediately. That means a bunch of suplexes as everything breaks down, including Tajiri diving onto Team Angle as we take a break. Back with a sunset flip/neckbreaker combination getting two on Eddie, followed by a cravate to keep things slow.

That goes nowhere so they head up top where Eddie breaks up a superplex attempt but the frog splash hits knees. We hit the abdominal stretch on Eddie until Charlie's takedown (kind of like a spinebuster) gets two. Shelton jumps over Charlie onto Eddie's back for two but he fights up with a wristdrag/headscissors combination to put both of them down.

The hot tag brings in Tajiri to clean house and a tornado DDT gets two on Shelton. The dragon whip drops Tajiri but Eddie hits the referee with a chair, only to throw said chair to Haas. That's enough for a DQ from the somehow conscious referee and the titles are retained.

Rating: B. Really good match here with the ending being the right call. Having Eddie cheat to retain the titles makes the most sense, especially since it's hard to imagine them losing the belts this early. Tajiri is a fine replacement partner and they have the chance to set up someone else as big time challengers.

We look back at Zach Gowen debuting last week.

Vince runs into Stephanie and promises that things are getting out of control.

Here's Vince for another chat as I'm noticing a theme here. The boss is disappointed in the lack of America unmasking on Sunday and that means he wants an apology from Roddy Piper. Cue Piper and Sean O'Haire with Roddy actually apologizing in short order. Vince slaps him in the face and the coat comes off, only to have Sean cut things off. He'll take the blame for Sunday but tonight, he wants Mr. America. Piper LOVES the idea and Vince makes the match, but with a stipulation. If O'Haire loses, Piper is fired.

Kurt Angle is back in two weeks.

John Cena vs. Spanky

Before the match, Cena doesn't think much of Spanky ripping off his gimmick. Spanky charges at him and hits a one footed dropkick Cena slams him down though and grabs a snap suplex for two. A hard throw sends Spanky into the corner for two more and Cena scores with a delayed vertical suplex. Spanky scores with an enziguri for two but it's the shoulder block and an FU to give Cena the pin.

Rating: C-. Spanky was energetic as usual and that's what matters more than anything else in his case. When you have someone who is willing to do pretty much anything you ask him, it's quite the valuable asset. Spanky has gone from annoying to a fun character where I want to see what he does every week. Cena winning was the right call though as he's going to be a bigger deal in the short and long term.

Stills of Sunday's stretcher match.

The FBI is ready to face Brock Lesnar later tonight.

Chris Benoit vs. Matt Hardy

Opening sequence. Rey Mysterio is on commentary while Matt, who likes his steak medium well and has more teeth than Chris Benoit, makes his entrance. Matt slaps Benoit's hand away and we have a very loud screeching reaction. Benoit knocks him into the corner though and it's time to crank on the arm. With Chris in control, that little MF'er offers a distraction though and Matt a Side Effect for two.

We hit the chinlock for a bit before a suplex gets two on Benoit. A neckbreaker gets two more for Matt and we hit the front facelock. That goes nowhere so the non-yodeling legdrop gives Matt another near fall. Back up and a double collision puts both guys down for a bit. Benoit grabs a snap suplex for two and a catapult sends Matt into the post. There's the Swan Dive and Rey takes care of Shannon, allowing the Crossface to give Chris the clean win.

Rating: B-. Matt loses again but at least it was in a good match. Working the neck made perfect sense and was a fine story to build things around,

though Benoit needs something to do. Matt vs. Rey seems to be set in stone for the near future but Benoit is just kind of there at the moment, which isn't the best use of him.

Post match Matt says Rey can have a title shot if he beats Shannon and Crash right now.

Rey Mysterio vs. Shannon Moore/Crash

Joined in progress with Rey sending Shannon outside and headscissoring Crash down as well. Shannon breaks up the 619 and Crash backdrops him out to the floor. Something like a double flapjack gets two on Rey but he comes right back with a double DDT. Shannon is sent outside and a top rope seated senton takes Crash down. Back up and Rey seems to be favoring his groin and is having trouble running the ropes. The 619 sets up a middle rope West Coast Pop to get rid of Shannon, despite his foot being on the ropes. Since this is apparently under elimination rules, a quick hurricanrana pins Crash as well.

Rating: D+. There's a chance that the injury slowed things down here but all that matters is Rey being able to face Matt and win the title in the near future. This hardly felt like a challenge for Mysterio anyway as he absorbed the duo's offense and winning the match without breaking much of a sweat.

Post match Matt beats up both guys as Rey is carried out.

Stephanie has a sitdown interview with Zach Gowen, who receives an apology for what happened last week. Gowen had cancer when he was a kid and the leg was amputated to prevent it from stretching. He grew up with his mom as his father bailed when Gowen was four. Make-A-Wish came to him when he was in the hospital and he would have wanted to meet Hulk Hogan but he (Gowen) declined because he was going to live. Next up though: he wants to be a professional wrestler. He's been training as of late and hopes to wrestle here on Smackdown. Stephanie says anything can happen.

Vince is seething.

Post break, Vince comes up to Mr. America and says if he loses tonight,

he has to undergo a lie detector test next week. America says no but Vince calls him a coward, which makes America change his mind. Vince goes into a RANT, shouting about how America will be proven to be a liar next week. That's more intense than he usually gets and it worked quite well.

Brock Lesnar vs. Johnny Stamboli

The entire FBI jumps Johnny to start until it's one on one for the opening bell. Brock drives him hard into the corner and scores with a fall away slam. The rest of the team gets in a little offense on the floor though and Stamboli stomps away for two. Brock misses a charge into the corner and Stamboli grabs a cross armbreaker to keep things slow. Lesnar fights up with a powerbomb and gets all fired up, drawing in the rest of the FBI for the DQ.

Rating: D. This was short and there wasn't enough time for it to go anywhere. Well that and the match being Brock vs. Stamboli. You can't get anywhere with someone like that challenging a monster like Lesnar and for the life of me, I have no idea why the FBI is getting protected like this. Haven't they run their course yet?

The beatdown is on post match until the Undertaker makes his return for the save.

Here's Sable for a chat about being in Raw Magazine and then about...Tazz? She's not cool with Tazz picking Torrie Wilson as the winner of the bikini contest and gets on the desk to look down at him. After gyrating a bit, Sable pours water over his head and Tazz is REALLY not cool with that one.

Vince tells O'Haire to take his time tonight and explains the lie detector concept.

Mr. America vs. Sean O'Haire

America has Gowen with him and O'Haire has Piper. O'Haire shoves him down to start and does it again to prove his point. Back up and America does the same, meaning it's time for some posing. American's offense is cut off by Piper grabbing his boot and a slam gets two. Some kicks to the

chest set up a chinlock on America and we're stuck there for a good while.

America fights up and no sells a spinning kick to the face, meaning it's America Up time. Piper gets knocked off the apron and the legdrop connects but Piper grabs America's leg again. Cue Vince with a bunch of cops to arrest Gowen for his actions on Sunday (egads) so America goes outside to help his buddy. That's enough for a countout though as O'Haire wins to end the show.

Rating: D-. If this is the best they can do to elevate O'Haire, they're in more trouble than I thought they were. Almost half of the match was spent on the Vince angle and the other stuff wasn't all that good in the first place. Vince didn't need to be back again but when he's the focus of the show, he's REALLY the focus of the show. Terrible main event here, as you kind of had to expect.

Overall Rating: C+. The wrestling helps a lot here but there's not much of a way around the Mr. America stuff dominating the show. Lesnar vs. the FBI and Sable vs. Torrie aren't any better but at least we had some good matches to carry things. This was far better than anything at the pay per view and that's a nice breath of air for the show.

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