

Survivor Series Count-Up – 1996: The Austin Era Really Begins

Survivor Series 1996

Date: November 17, 1996

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

Attendance: 18,647

Commentators: Jim Ross, Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

I had three options for an older redo this year (this one, 1988 and 1992) but this one had the most Survivor Series matches plus Steve Austin vs. Bret Hart, which was more than enough to sway me over. This is an interesting time for the company as they're just starting to get squashed by WCW but the future is here tonight. Let's get to it.

Free For All: Team Bart Gunn vs. Team Billy Gunn

Bart Gunn, Aldo Montoya, Bob Holly, Jesse James

Billy Gunn, Salvatore Sincere, Justin Bradshaw, The Sultan

This would be the Kickoff Show today. I've actually never reviewed this and there's a chance I've never even seen it before. The team names are pretty arbitrary as there's little rhyme or reason for these pairings, save for maybe the brothers, meaning no one is really a captain. James (Road Dogg of course) is a country singer here and the REAL Double J as part of a stupid angle with the departed Jeff Jarrett. Ok so I might have With My Baby Tonight (his self-performed theme song) on my iPod. At least the angle wasn't a total loss.

As the Sultan (Rikishi) and Aldo (Justin Credible as a Portuguese man with a jockstrap for a mask) start us off, JR mentions that Austin vs. Hart is a #1 contenders match, which really wasn't mentioned very often on the actual pay per view. Montoya actually does some damage to Sultan by dropkicking him out to the floor but a cover results in him being

launched off. A bad looking piledriver sets up the camel clutch and Montoya is eliminated in a hurry.

Holly comes in with a bulldog as we see Aldo walk up the ramp opposite the cameras (an MSG standard). Sultan grabs a chinlock and we take a break to come back with Sultan slamming Bart on the floor so Sincere (a flamboyant yet still generic Italian) can baseball slide him in the face. Back in and Bart grabs a side slam to get rid of Sincere and tie the match up.

Bradshaw (who JR says is going to be something special) comes in and kicks the freshly tagged Holly in the face. We go to a split screen to see Austin running Dok Hendrix out of his dressing room and come back to Bradshaw hitting the Clothesline From an Undisclosed Location to eliminate Holly.

Jesse immediately rolls Bradshaw up for the elimination (ignore Billy kicking Jesse and breaking up the pin at two while the referee keeps counting anyway), leaving us with Jesse and Bart vs. Billy and Sultan. A rollup gets rid of Sultan but the Fameasser (yet to be named) does the same to Jesse. We're down to a battle of the Gunns and Bart gets tied up in the ropes for some trash talking. Billy calls him an SOB, meaning he isn't likely to get a Christmas card from his own mother. Bart stands up for Mama Gunn and hits a running forearm for the pin.

Rating: C-. This is a good example of a match where you have to consider the purpose. They weren't trying to settle any big score here or blow the roof off the place. This was about getting the fans warmed up before we got to the real show and the fast pace did that well enough. Billy vs. Bart wasn't anything interesting but at least it was a little story to tie things together. Nothing good but it did its job well enough.

The opening video looks at the WWF taking over New York (including the Hall of Fame banquet at a hotel, which would be the last one for seven and a half years) before going into a look at the two major matches. You know you have a stacked card when you're getting hyped over two matches that don't even include Undertaker vs. Mankind or any of the show's namesake matches.

Team Furnas and Lafon vs. Team Owen Hart/British Bulldog

Doug Furnas, Phillip Lafon, Henry Godwinn, Phineas Godwinn

Owen Hart, British Bulldog, Marty Jannetty, Leif Cassidy

This is Furnas and Lafon's WWF debut as they were brought in to challenge Owen and Bulldog for the Tag Team Titles. Marty and Lafon (I can never remember which is Furnas and which is Lafon) start things off with a nice little acrobatics display, capped off by a hard shot to Marty's jaw. Leif comes in instead as the announcers talk about slander. The slow pace continues and it's off to Phineas for a headlock. JR: "You ever see Hilary Clinton do that?"

For some reason Leif thinks it's a good idea to slap Phineas in the face and spit on him. Well to be fair, given all the sweat and liquid on his overalls, it's not the worst idea in the world. Owen comes in to wake the crowd up and it's time to pick Phineas apart. The heels start working Phineas over as JR wants a third referee out here.

Marty hits a good looking back elbow to the jaw as the announcers start talking about Bret, though at least they tie it in to Owen. Today that would go off on a tangent and turn into ripping on Byron Saxton. I mean, he deserves it but it's still annoying. Marty goes up top so Phineas tries a superplex. JR: "Now how stupid was that?" Oh dang it I always forget how annoying heel JR is. Even heel Cole wasn't this bad.

Henry comes in, kicks Marty in the gut, and Slop Drops him for the first elimination. Not that it means much as Owen rolls Henry up to tie the score five seconds later. Phineas cleans house (has a fit, whatever) but Bulldog makes a blind tag and powerslams him to go up 3-2. Furnas comes in to speed things WAY up (and turn up the quality as well), only to miss a dropkick, which JR calls one of the best in the business. Like I said, heel JR wasn't the best.

Leif comes in to cover and the former powerlifter sends him flying on the kickout. The bad guys get smart with a blind tag and a springboard missile dropkick to wipe Furnas out in a great looking visual. JR goes into yet another rant about the referees not catching the heels cheating,

which is a really weird complaint for a heel to have.

Cassidy misses a charge and Furnas brings in Lafon for a snappy looking reverse superplex to get us down to two on two. The lack of a reaction to Leif being eliminated really shouldn't surprise anyone as he was just so out of place in this match. Owen comes in for a belly to belly and a middle rope elbow (both of those looked very smooth) for two. A low blow to Furnas has Vince freaking out but JR, the heel commentator here, lets it go right past him. Again: it was a bad character and you could sense he wasn't a fan of the whole thing.

It's back to Bulldog who is quickly sunset flipped for the elimination, which is a big deal as it means Furnas and Lafon can pin Owen and the Bulldog in a two on two match. Bulldog leaves Lafon with a parting gift of a chop block though and Owen follows it up with the Sharpshooter. Furnas is in for the save and hits that dropkick of his (basically a dropkick with a backflip), followed by a German suplex for the final pin.

Rating: B. This was more like it for the opener as they set up the next challengers for the Tag Team Titles, though the first part with the Godwinns really brings it down. It also doesn't help that the crowd didn't care for the most part, and can you really blame them? The good guys were people making their debuts and hog farmers. It's good wrestling but not the brightest idea.

Paul Bearer insists he WILL NOT get into the cage and be hung above the ring. Mankind will crush Undertaker like the cockroaches he used to eat for dinner.

Undertaker vs. Mankind

Bearer is in an individual cage above the ring and if Undertaker wins, Bearer is his for five minutes. The entrance is an important one as Undertaker descends from the rafters and debuts the sleeveless leather attire that would become his signature look for the next several years. It marks the evolution of the original character to the newer, sleeker fighting machine that could hurt people at will.

It's a brawl to start (duh) with Undertaker using a drop toe-hold (?!?!?)

followed by a fireman's carry into a cross armbreaker. Undertaker gets smart by working over Mankind's hand, which JR thinks is illegal. Mankind takes it into the crowd and is quickly backdropped right back to ringside but pops up for a cannonball off the apron. There's something to be said about someone launching their body at someone else.

Undertaker's comeback is cut off by a Texas piledriver and the Mandible Claw goes on. Undertaker is smart enough to send Mankind straight outside for the save and both guys are spent from the physicality. A kick to the chest sends Mankind flying hard into the barricade for a sick sounding THUD. You just can't fake that kind of brutality. Well you can but it's easier to believe it's real with Foley.

Old School is broken up so Undertaker opts to punch Mankind in the face multiple times. The chokeslam is countered with the Claw, only to be countered by a big chokeslam with the camera going wide for an awesome visual. Mankind is back up though (as always) and pulls out a spike to stab Undertaker a bit. Amazingly enough, Undertaker doesn't care to be stabbed and Tombstones Mankind for the pin instead.

Rating: B. This was a BIG change of pace for Undertaker as he was moving faster and acting like a much more well rounded wrestler, which he would be for a long time. These two were solid together as always as they just beat the heck out of each other for long stretches of time and that's always worth a watch. This is one of their lesser known matches but it's certainly entertaining.

Post match the cage is lowered and Undertaker goes right for Bearer, only to have the Executioner run out for the save, allowing Bearer to escape. That would be Undertaker's next match before he continued attempting to murder Bearer and Mankind.

Sunny comes out to replace Lawler on commentary. When you look at so many of the women who would come after her, Sunny really is remarkable. She looks great but she's also dripping with charisma, which so few women (or men for that matter) have at this level.

Team Helmsley laughs off the idea of Team Marc Mero because they're a man down due to Mark Henry being injured.

Team Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Team Marc Mero

Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Jerry Lawler, Goldust, Crush

Marc Mero, The Stalker, Rocky Maivia, Jake Roberts

There's a lot to cover here. Helmsley is Intercontinental Champion, having stolen the title from Mero with the help of the now departed (to WCW) Mr. Perfect. The Stalker is Barry Windham who used to be a military themed guy but is now just Barry Windham with a big mustache. Roberts is Mark Henry's replacement as Lawler and Roberts are feuding over Jake's alcoholism.

Oh and it's Rocky's debut after weeks of videos talking about how amazing he is. The mind blowing part: they undersold what he would become. The commentary gets even more entertaining as Sunny goes nuts ripping on Sable, claiming to be all natural even down to her hair.

We hit the stall button to start with no contact for the first two minutes. After several tags, Goldust and Mero finally lock up as the announcers discuss Mr. Perfect without saying he's gone. Marc's armbars don't go anywhere so it's off to the Stalker as JR rips on Barry's attire. Helmsley comes in and immediately runs from Mero, meaning we get Crush vs. Rocky for his in ring debut. Thankfully that lasts all of ten seconds before it's off to Lawler for some great selling. Vince actually mentions the name Dwayne Johnson as Sunny suggests being able to take Rocky all the way to the top.

The heels start taking turns on Rocky until he backdrops Helmsley for a breather. Jake gets the hot tag to clean house despite looking a good bit out of shape and very pale. Lawler comes in and slowly hammers away while making alcohol jokes. The DDT scores out of nowhere and it's 4-3 in a hurry. The mustache with the Windham attached suplexes Goldust for two but a shot from the apron sets up the Curtain Call to tie us up.

Both captains come in as the crowd stays mostly silent. Again though, is there any real reason to care? Crush isn't interesting, Roberts looks awful and no one knows who Rocky is yet. Helmsley grabs an abdominal stretch and Goldust pulls on the arm, sending heel JR into his second

frenzy in an hour.

The referee finally catches Helmsley cheating to break the hold and it's a Merosault (moonsault pres) to get rid of Hunter. Crush comes in and gets dropkicked to the floor, only to avoid Mero's slingshot dive. As we're watching the replays, the announcers completely miss Crush giving Mero the heart punch (exactly what it sounds like) for the elimination. Jake gets the same thing and is eliminated ten seconds later.

So we're down to Rocky, meaning we get a closeup of his ridiculous looking hair. To his credit, even Rock has said he looked ridiculous at this point. Rocky slugs both guys down and does that stupid arm flailing thing of his. A crossbody puts both guys down and Crush heart punches Goldust by mistake. Rocky hits a second crossbody to get rid of Crush and a shoulder breaker ends Goldust for the win. The pin gets a nice pop, though it might just be because the match is finally over.

Rating: D. They accomplished the goal of giving Rocky a good rub to start (hence why you have goons like Crush around to take a fall like this) but this was WAY too long. You could probably cut out five to ten minutes here and do just about the same thing. Windham was worthless (as he was for most of the time after 1990 or so) and there were way too many stretches of boring non-action dragging it down.

Now it's time for the real main event as we recap Bret Hart vs. Steve Austin. I know Shawn vs. Sid is going on last but make no mistake about it: this was the most important and anticipated match of the night. Bret had been gone since losing the WWF World Title to Shawn at Wrestlemania XII and Austin has turned into a disrespectful rebel who doesn't care about legacies or what anyone before him has done. You can see the fire in Austin's eyes and Bret is the only one that can stop him. Or slow him down at least because there may be no stopping Austin anymore.

Austin says he's ready and isn't worried.

Bret says this is about respect, which he'll receive from Austin no matter what.

Steve Austin vs. Bret Hart

The winner gets the title shot next month. Even Vince has to acknowledge the face pop Austin receives here in New York. Bret gets a great face reaction of his own but Austin really isn't impressed with the pyro. JR thinks this might come down to a submission, which might be some great foreshadowing for Wrestlemania. He goes even further by saying Bret isn't a clown or a trashman because he's a wrestler. Uh, Doink and Droese were wrestlers to Jim. We're still not ready to go as Vince possibly spoils the main event by saying the winner of this gets Sid.

Austin flips him off to start and we're ready to go. Feeling out process to start as JR goes back to that submission idea. Vince: "How ironic would it be if Steve Austin put the Sharpshooter on Bret Hart and made him submit?" They trade wristlocks to start and you can see some extra fire in Bret for this match.

Bret takes him down and stays on the arm with a hammerlock until a hard elbow to the jaw puts him down. Austin keeps slugging away until Bret pulls him into another armbar. Bret: "ASK HIM!" Did Jericho get that from Bret? Steve comes right back with a hot shot and starts choking on the bottom rope.

We hit the chinlock and JR goes back to that submission idea again. That's three times now and it's really not adding anything new. Back up and it's time for the slugout with Austin easily taking over as you would expect. Bret comes back with his usual offense but gets shoved chest first into the buckle, again as is his custom. Austin's superplex is broken up though and Bret goes all the way to the top for the elbow.

They head outside with Austin driving the back into the post as the brawling continues to favor Austin while Bret wins the wrestling. Makes sense. Of course as soon as I say that, Bret throws him through (yes through) the barricade and Austin is suddenly reeling. Just because it's required, they fight over the announcers' table with Austin taking over (JR: "It seems that it always happens to the Spanish guys!") and dropping an elbow onto Bret. The table actually doesn't break though in a very rare sight.

Back in and we hit the abdominal stretch as Austin continues to know how

to focus on a body part. The referee catches Austin holding the ropes (which doesn't add leverage but helps block a hiptoss counter) so it's time for a slugout, capped off by Bret hitting a Stun Gun for two. Austin is right back up with a top rope superplex but Bret does the lifting the legs spot (looked horrible here as they were both down for several seconds before going for it) for two.

The Stunner hits out of nowhere for two and JR makes a REALLY good save by saying Bret only kicked out because Austin rolled him away from the ropes. That protects the move, which is completely lost on today's product. Austin grabs a Texas Cloverleaf, followed by a Bow and Arrow of all things. Unfortunately Austin makes the mistake of trying to mat wrestle with Bret and has to grab the ropes to avoid a Sharpshooter. Back up and Austin grabs the Million Dollar Dream but Bret walks the turnbuckle and flips back onto Austin for the surprise pin.

Rating: A+. Like this would get anything else. I know most people (including myself) say that the I Quit match made Austin a star but he's not getting to that match without this one. Austin was always a great talent but this was the moment where you knew he was ready for the main event stage. Notice something important about the ending: Bret caught Austin for the pin rather than really decisively beating him. It shows that as great as Austin is, Bret was just that much better and used his experience to win.

Make no mistake about it though: this is a masterpiece and one of the best matches of all time. Unfortunately there was a rematch that is somehow even better and this is a bit forgotten as a result. I've heard people say they like this one better and I really can't argue against that. It's a must see match and an incredible lesson in giving someone the rub of their career.

JR: "I don't think anyone, including Shawn Michaels or Sid, could have beaten Bret Hart in this ring on this night." Vince: "I totally disagree with that." No followup or anything and the tone was very heelish.

Sid says he'll win.

Faarooq/Vader/Razor Ramon/Diesel vs. Flash Funk/Savio Vega/Yokozuna/???

Here's another match with a bunch of notes. Faarooq debuts his traditional Nation look here, thankfully ditching the ridiculous blue gladiator gear. Flash Funk is also making his debut after years as the far better 2 Cold Scorpio. That would be fake Razor and Diesel (duh) with the former just looking horrible. Fake Diesel at least looks like the real thing if you look at him from the right angle. Again, the original idea here wasn't bad: it's the gimmicks that got them over instead of the people. Unfortunately that falls apart because Fake Razor looked horrible.

Jim Cornette (Vader's manager) sits in on commentary and JR says he's the same size as Yokozuna. Cornette sounds like he wants to cry when he sees Funk for the first time. JR: "I've never seen the yellow and red look so good here in the Garden." The mystery partner is Jimmy Snuka, which gets a mild reaction from the MSG fans and a groan from the audience at home who already saw a legend return with Roberts earlier.

Vader slugs Funk down to start but is quickly sent outside for a moonsault to the floor. You can hear the ECW chants before they even start. Back in and Vader gets tired of this flying nonsense and powerbomb Funk in half. Yokozuna comes in for the embarrassing fat man offense as JR rips on the refereeing again. It's off to Vega vs. Ramon as the crowd isn't sure what to care about here.

JR and Cornette argue about whether JR could manage a Wendy's. JR: "I could if you were in town." Razor screws up the fall away slam and thankfully it's off to Funk vs. Diesel so we can get something watchable. Vega comes back in and gets pummeled in the corner as this is already dragging horribly. Snuka get the tag to a pretty anemic pop and quickly runs into Diesel's knee. In a big surprise, Snuka actually slams Vader. Not bad for a guy who hasn't been around in forever.

Jimmy almost runs over for the tag back to Vega, who hits maybe 10% of a spinwheel kick on Diesel. Faarooq rams him into the post and the Jackknife ends Vega to hopefully start wrapping this up. The Superfly Splash ends Ramon less than a minute later and then the remaining six come in for the big brawl, resulting in a massive DQ and no winner.

Rating: F-. If there's a worse Survivor Series match not involving four clowns, my therapy must be working because I've completely blocked it from my mind. This was HORRIBLE with eight people that the crowd wasn't interested in seeing and a nothing ending that only made things worse. Absolutely terrible here as they couldn't even have Vader survive to give him a bit of a rub?

We recap the main event which is basically Shawn fighting another monster but this time it's someone he used to trust. Yeah this is hardly anything interesting and feels like a major letdown after Austin vs. Hart. Also, given how badly the ratings were doing around this time, there's almost no way Shawn is keeping the title here.

WWF World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Sid

Shawn gets a John Cena style pop as a sign of the times. Sid is challenging of course and pounds Shawn down early on with JR getting right to the point: Sid isn't technically sound but he can hit you really hard, which is all he needs to do. Shawn speeds things up with some left jabs and a headlock takeover.

The threat of a powerbomb sends Shawn bailing to the outside and we have a breather. Back in and Shawn gets smart by going after the knee, including a Figure Four (actually done on the proper leg). The hold is turned over and Sid sends him shoulder first into the post to take over. Shawn goes right back to the knee and the fans boo him out of the Garden. Thankfully they catch on to the idea and Sid blasts Shawn to the floor with a clothesline.

Back in and Sid gets in a few kicks to the face, followed by a big backbreaker for two. We hit a cobra clutch of all things (Sid would use that occasionally and it always looked weird for someone his size) before a chokeslam drops the champ. Shawn hits his flying forearm and is loudly booed, though the nipup draws a high pitched pop.

Sid grabs a camera and hits Shawn's manager Jose Lothario in the chest, followed by Sweet Chin Music to the giant. With Jose grabbing his chest, Shawn goes to check on him instead of retaining the title. Sid tries to throw Shawn back in and the referee gets bumped, allowing Sid to hit him

with the camera. The powerbomb gives Sid the title (somehow the first title he ever won) to a BIG face pop.

Rating: B+. I don't like the ending with the camera thing but it's still a really well put together match. This was pretty much Ric Flair vs. Sid and since Shawn knows how to wrestle a Flair match as well as anyone ever (including Flair), there was almost no way this wasn't going to work. They let Shawn walk Sid through the match and that was all they ever needed to do.

Shawn checks on Jose as Sid poses to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. This is a hard one to grade as the Survivor Series matches were horrible but everything else ranges from very good to masterpiece. That's more than enough to say this is a great show and worth checking out. If nothing else there are so many debuts and repackages here that it's worth checking out for pure history. The MSG crowd helps provide so much energy and the show is just a lot of fun (save for the one horrible match, which only lasts about ten minutes). See this one at least once but watch Bret vs. Austin as many times as you can.

Ratings Comparison

Team Jesse James vs. Team Billy Gunn

Original: N/A

2012 Redo: N/A

2016 Redo: C-

Team Furnas and Lafon vs. Team Owen Hart/British Bulldog

Original: B-

2012 Redo: C+

2016 Redo: B

Undertaker vs. Mankind

Original: C+

2012 Redo: B

2016 Redo: B

Team Jerry Lawler vs. Team Jake Roberts

Original: D

2012 Redo: C+

2016 Redo: D

Steve Austin vs. Bret Hart

Original: A+

2012 Redo: A+

2016 Redo: A+

Team Vader vs. Team Yokozuna

Original: D-

2012 Redo: F

2016 Redo: F-

Shawn Michaels vs. Sycho Sid

Original: C-

2012 Redo: B

2016 Redo: B+

Overall Rating

Original: B-

2012 Redo: B+

2016 Redo: B

This was mostly the same as four years ago, save for me liking Rocky's debut a lot more back then. That smile must have made me go weak in the knees.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/11/15/history-of-survivor-series-count-up-1996-bret-vs-austin-the-prequel-and-rock-debuts/>

And the 2012 Redo:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2015/11/04/survivor-series-count-up-1996-thats-blue-chip-right-there/>

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