

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1997: Austin x1

Royal Rumble 1997

Date: January 19, 1997

Location: Alamodome, San Antonio, Texas

Attendance: 60,235

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

I'm scared to think how many of those tickets were freebies. This is the annual requested redo and I'm not sure what to expect going into it. Well I am as I've seen the show multiple times but it's been awhile. The main event is of course Shawn Michaels vs. Sid II because we need the big hometown moment. Those actually existed back in 1997. Let's get to it.

As you might expect, the opening video is all about Shawn because it's 1997. The title win at Wrestlemania was nice at all but his defining moment came at Survivor Series when he showed compassion for Jose Lothario instead of trying to retain the title. Well to be fair that would be defining as it meant Shawn actually lost a title match instead of vacating the title so maybe they're on to something.

The announcers preview the show and Lawler is VERY excited about the main event.

Intercontinental Title: Goldust vs. Hunter Hearst Helmsley

This is one of my least favorite matches ever. Helmsley is defending against a freshly face Goldust. Basically everyone thought Goldust was gay but he confirmed that he wasn't, which sent HHH after Marlina for some reason. Mr. Hughes makes his debut as HHH's short lived bodyguard/butler which is code for bodyguard/Chyna is on the way.

Goldust jumps him in the aisle and hammers away in the corner until a quick atomic drop gets us to even. A catapult sends HHH outside as the crowd is really, really quiet here. I'm not sure if it's the place being huge or the fans being bored but it's not working so far. Goldust sends

him into the steps, causing JR to suggest we might get a DQ. I mean, we probably won't this early but points for doing your job.

They keep using the steps with HHH bouncing off them and now Lawler thinks it should be a DQ. Vince talks about some fans who had been trying to talk to Shawn for weeks being thrown out of the building. That's one of those things that doesn't really hold up over time as they just gloss over it and expect us to know what he's talking about. It makes sense at the time but there are probably better things to talk about during a title match on pay per view.

HHH actually comes off the top with an ax handle but a running knee hits the barricade. As JR asks about a DQ again, Goldust starts in on the knee like a good challenger should. We hit a Figure Four as this is already dragging horribly. The knee goes into the steps again as the announcers are wondering why the referee is letting so much go. Back in and Goldust misses a crossbody (called a high risk by JR) to send him outside as HHH takes over again.

The referee FINALLY does something by taking away the director's chair before HHH can swing it (Lawler: "Why didn't you do something about those stairs earlier?") and they head back in. The match is so boring that we actually cut over to an interview with a country singer in the audience. That's getting up there on the all time boredom scale and the dead crowd seems to agree.

HHH misses the kneedrop and hurts his leg again in the process but he's still able to roll away from a Macho Elbow. Hughes, likely as bored as the rest of us, throws in the title but HHH would rather kiss Marlena. That earns him a belt shot to the head, only to have Hughes pull HHH out at two. Of course that's not a DQ so Goldust goes after Hughes, setting up the Pedigree for the pin to retain the title.

Rating: F+. Oh yeah this is still bad and still one of the worst matches I can ever remember to open the show. It's too long, too boring and completely uninteresting. This really needed to have about seven minutes chopped off and far less using the steps. I dread this match every time I watch the show and that hasn't changed a bit.

Bret Hart is used to being the marked man in a match so the Royal Rumble will be no different.

Mankind talks about the Rumble being a chance to hurt a lot of people that he doesn't like as well as some that he does. It's going to be a very nice day.

Faarooq vs. Ahmed Johnson

Faarooq injured Johnson back in 1996 and it's finally time for the grudge match in a feud that felt like it went on for the better part of forever. There are at least ten members of the Nation of Domination here, including a few actors who exist for the sole purpose of making the group bigger. As you might expect, Ahmed erupts to start and beats Faarooq down in the corner before sending him into the post. Where's the OUTRAGE from the announcers over this blatant breaking of the rules?

A shot to the kidneys slows Johnson down and Faarooq calls for a belt, earning himself a clothesline in the process though. The brawl heads outside for a bit with neither being able to keep control all that long as you would expect in a brawl like this. A chair to the back keeps Ahmed in trouble and Faarooq opts to just kick him in the kidneys for good measure.

It's off to the very logical reverse chinlock but Faarooq does the very stupid posing, allowing an electric chair to put him down. Faarooq comes right back with a spinebuster though, which JR calls a physical catch instead of a fair catch. Uh, right Jim. Ahmed pops up again and hits one of his own, meaning it's time for the Nation to come in for the lame DQ.

Rating: D. Still not great but WAY better than the first, at least partially because it's half the length of the opener. Johnson vs. Faarooq needed to be some big wild brawl, or maybe Johnson finding some partners to help him fight off the team. Like say the Legion of Doom in Chicago in a street fight. But for some reason the feud just kept going after that, which is probably why this feud isn't the most fondly remembered.

Post match the Nation bails for some reason, leaving Ahmed to Pearl River Plunge one of them through a table.

Terry Funk thinks he can win because we're in Texas. Nah, just one of those per show dude. Besides, Goldust is from Austin and look at what he got. Or don't look actually as it's too horrible for words. Or reviews for that matter.

Faarooq says he'll take care of Ahmed in the Rumble because Johnson is an "Uncle Tom".

Vader vs. Undertaker

There's not much of a story here save for some back and forth attacks. We get the big long Undertaker entrance and as usual it looks amazing in the big stadium. They slug it out to start with Undertaker doing the sit up off a clothesline. The standing splash gets the exact same reaction and Vader is looking a bit worried.

The fight heads outside with Undertaker getting the better of it but Vader drops him ribs first across the top rope to take over again. Undertaker gets in a slam followed by a legdrop, which JR says is like no one has ever done. I'm sure that's certainly not meant as a jab at anyone in particular second cousin twice removed.

Old School is broken up which JR says means Vader had it well scouted. Or Vader was smart enough to do ANYTHING when Undertaker was off balance and distracted? And now, let's go INTERVIEW A FAN WHO SAVED UP TO COME TO THE SHOW. Lawler rips on Pettengill for wasting our time like that (amen brother) while Vader was pounding Undertaker about the head and shoulders (the body parts, not the shampoo).

We hit the lame nerve hold for a bit until Undertaker suplexes his way to freedom, leaving both guys down. Vader is up first and goes to the middle rope, only to dive into a powerslam. That would be a lot more impressive if Ahmed hadn't done the EXACT SAME THING, even from the same corner, to Faarooq in the previous match.

Vader's powerbomb gets two but Old School drops him again....and here's Paul Bearer. Undertaker gets in a chokeslam but makes the mistake of going after Paul. Vader tries for a save and avoids a dive off the steps, sending Undertaker ribs first into the barricade. Bearer adds an urn shot

and it's the Vader Bomb to put Undertaker away.

Rating: C-. I'm a fan of Undertaker slugging away at a monster so this was more entertaining than it probably should have been. Vader was in something close to a free fall after losing to Shawn at Summerslam so this was more of a comeback win than anything else. Undertaker vs. Bearer would continue for a very long time.

Vader leaves with Bearer and Undertaker beats up a referee.

Austin says he isn't talking with anyone until he wins the Rumble.

British Bulldog is going to win because he's bizarre. Yes, bizarre.

Hector Garza/Perro Aguayo/Canek vs. Jerry Estrada/Fuerza Guerrera/Heavy Metal

This is a AAA match because the company was willing to try ANYTHING to get people interested, including these guys that 99% of fans have never heard of before. I'll do my best to have any idea who these people are and what's going on here but bear with me. Estrada and Heavy Metal (who Vince thinks is Estrada) start things off do a technical sequence to start before it's off to the ancient looking Aguayo vs. the very feathery looking Estrada.

The crowd is just GONE for this one as Canek's middle rope crossbody gets on Guerrera. Fuerza misses a top rope crane kick Swanton (that's an odd one) so Canek gets an easy two. Heavy Metal does a Tajiri handspring but stumbles through the elbow to drop Garza. Things speed up a bit but they still seem a few steps off to keep this from getting, you know, good.

We hit a stalemate and that means it's time to shake hands and bring in Estrada and Canek. They start running the ropes but WAIT! Time for more tags. Metal avoids a Figure Four and we get down to a bit of a traditional tag formula with the focus on Metal's leg. Guerrera tries to make a save but dropkicks Metal by mistake and everything breaks down. Garza gets in his corkscrew plancha and Aguayo's top rope double stomp to the arm (meant to be ribs) finally ends Metal.

Rating: D. I'll give them points for trying something different here but

this didn't work for me. The wrestling wasn't great here and I really have no idea who these people are. It was a nice try at something new and when you're in the depths that the company was in at this point it's worth the shot but this was a big miss.

Attendance announcement.

Royal Rumble

Ninety second intervals here and it's Crush in at #1 and Ahmed in at #2. JR says Ahmed has a minute and a half to do whatever he wants to Crush. So Crush is stuck with his arms behind his back and isn't allowed to fight back? They fight to the mat and the clock messes up so it's Fake Razor Ramon in at #3, earning one heck of a booing. Thankfully Ahmed gets rid of the clown in about ten seconds but Faarooq shows up in the aisle, meaning Ahmed eliminates himself to go after him.

Thankfully (I think?) Phineas Godwinn is in at #4 to give us something to watch. It's as thrilling of a brawl as you can imagine as Vince keeps talking about the clock issues, which means there's no clock to be seen. Austin is in at #5 to wake the crowd up a bit and a middle rope clothesline is enough to allow Phineas to get rid of Crush. A Stunner gets rid of Phineas and it's Bart Gunn in at #6. That lasts all of twenty six seconds before Austin is all alone again.

Jake Roberts is in at #7 and throws the snake bag in for a bonus. The DDT is loaded up but a backdrop gets rid of Jake, who is replaced by British Bulldog at #8. This goes a bit better with Bulldog pounding Austin down until Pierroth (AAA guy) is in at #9. The luchador gets double teamed until Bulldog wises up and turns on Austin. Sultan, whose music sounds like Pierroth's, is in at #10 as they're flying through this so far.

Bulldog puts Austin on the apron but gets poked in the eye for his efforts. We've got a clock now and the fans are into it again, which is a really good sign for the match. Mil Mascaras is in at #11 and you know he's going to get his stuff in. HHH is in at #12 as there's really not much going on in between these entrances. Bulldog gets rid of Sultan to clear the ring out a bit though it doesn't do much to keep the crowd going. The middle rope middle finger elbow hits HHH and Owen Hart is in

at #13.

Without much going on, Owen “accidentally” eliminates Bulldog, who really isn’t happy with his partner as a result. Goldust is in at #14 and everyone gangs up on him for some reason. Cibernetico (also from AAA) is in at #15 and is tossed almost as quickly, along with Pierroth. Marc Mero is in at #16 as Mascaras dives on Cibernetico to eliminate himself in the process (which I’m sure was a COMPLETE mistake), followed by Goldust tossing HHH. That leaves us with Hart, Austin, Mero and Goldust who are joined by Latin Lover at #17.

Lover gets in some basic stuff before Faarooq comes in at #18 to eliminate him. Cue Ahmed again for a 2×4 shot to Faarooq to get rid of him as well. Austin dumps Mero and Hart, leaving himself alone in the ring. Savio Vega, Austin’s old rival, is in at #19 and scores with a spinwheel kick. That’s about it though as Austin clotheslines him out to be alone again. Jesse James is next and while he lasts a bit longer than Vega, it’s still not even a minute before Austin gets rid of him. Austin sits on the middle rope...and it’s BRET HART at #21, giving Austin one of the best OH DANG looks in wrestling history.

The key to him though: he sees Bret coming, shakes his head, and tells Bret to bring it on before starting the slug out. Notice that: he didn’t back down and came out swinging because that’s how Austin rolled. It wouldn’t fit Austin to panic and try to beg or something. Man against man, Austin thought he could beat anyone on the planet no matter what circumstances he was up against. That’s good storytelling and a big part of what made him a star.

Lawler is in at #22 and starts the “it takes a king” line before leaving. Two right hands later and he’s back on the floor four seconds later to finish the catchphrase. Vince: “Do you know you were just in the ring?” JR mentions that Bret said he should just be the WWF Champion coming into the show, which is a great example of how his heel turn took off.

Fake Diesel (as played by the future Kane) is in at #23 and at least he looks close enough to pass for a Nash look-a-like. From behind or at a distance, you could actually make a mistake. Fake Razor on the other hand

wasn't even close and that's why he was booed while Diesel is greeted with general indifference. A few power moves keep everyone down until it's Terry Funk in at #24. It says a lot when Kane is by far and away the fourth most successful wrestler in a match.

Rocky Maivia is in at #25 to make Kane even less important and of course he goes right after Austin for the sake of future issues. The slow pace continues until Mankind is in at #26, giving us Mankind, Austin, Rocky, Funk, Diesel and Hart. If there has ever been a better collection of talent at one point in the Rumble, I've yet to see it. Just DANG what a lineup here.

Flash Funk is in at #27 and Lawler wants the Funkettes. Bret piledrives the heck out of Austin and Flash dives off the top to take out Diesel and Terry. Vader is in at #28 as I start to miss people wrestling earlier in the show and still being in the Royal Rumble. For some reason Flash makes the mistake of going after him, only to get pummeled down in a hurry. Henry Godwinn is in at #29 to bring the talent WAY down in a hurry.

The big Henry actually clotheslines Vader down as JR compares Lawler's entrant to Bushwhacker Luke's 1991 entrance. Oh come on. Lawler lasted TWICE as long as Luke. Undertaker completes the field at #30, giving us a final group of Undertaker, Austin, Hart, Terry Funk, Flash Funk, Diesel, Maivia, Vader, Godwinn and Mankind. Undertaker immediately punches Vader down before chokeslamming a few people.

The still unknown brothers have a bit of a fight as Vince calls Undertaker the favorite. Vader throws Flash out and we have Henry vs. Undertaker for a rather off brawl. Rocky almost has Bret out until Vader makes the save for no apparent reason. Austin and Funk chop each other half to death and probably have a blast doing so.

Undertaker throws Henry out and my jaw drops at the talent left in there. The final eight either already are or will be in the Hall of Fame one day. That's INSANE and will likely never be even approached again. Mankind tosses Rocky and then pummels Terry before suplexing him out to the floor. Undertaker gets rid of Mankind, who is happy to brawl to the back with Funk. Bret dumps Austin for the pop of the night but the

referees are busy breaking up the brawl, allowing Austin to come back in and eliminate Vader and Undertaker. Bret gets rid of Diesel, only to have Austin throw him out for the win in a great bit of cheating.

Rating: D+. And the good here is almost ALL Austin as the rest of the match was barely even worth talking about. There wasn't much in the way of storytelling to be seen here as there wasn't really a big winner teased until the very end. The lack of talent up until the end and time to go with the build towards the end didn't do a lot of good as the match doesn't even really start until Bret comes in two thirds of the way there. It's certainly not the worst Rumble but it's really not good either.

Bret has another tirade and while he has a point, he handles it like a baby.

We recap Shawn vs. Sid. Back at Survivor Series, Sid attacked Shawn's manager with a camera to cost Shawn the title. Sid has been on a rampage since but now we're in Shawn's hometown for the big rematch.

Shawn says he's sick with the flu (a-huh) but he's ready to fight with 70,000 people (or closer to 50,000 depending on who you ask) behind him.

WWF World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Sid

Sid is defending of course. Shawn stares him down to start and is quickly shoved across the ring without too much effort. A kick to the chest puts Sid on the floor but he comes right back in and grabs a camel clutch. That goes nowhere (other than around for a long time) so Sid tries a chinlock, followed by one heck of a clothesline.

Some hard whips across the ring set up a bearhug because Sid needs to keep things slow. The bearhug stays on so long that Sid actually LAYS DOWN ON THE MAT WITH IT. A legdrop gets two and it's already back to the reverse chinlock. Thankfully this one doesn't last as long and Shawn comes back with a slam. Really a slam? After all that back work?

The forearm into the flying elbow connects but Sid goes outside to yell at Jose and his son. We get a ref bump so the chokeslam only gets two as

a second ref comes in. Sid knocks the second referee down so Shawn hits him with the camera for two. The superkick gives Shawn the title back.

Rating: D+. As I said in the original review, this could have been much worse. I mean, not much worse but it could have been worse. Shawn winning the title back was the most obvious thing in the world and it's ok to have him win here, especially in his hometown. It's not exactly a good match but then again Sid isn't exactly a good opponent. What is nice is seeing a hometown guy win a big match for a change and the fact that it derailed Shawn's heel turn is....well actually it kind of sucks but he wouldn't have the title long anyway.

A ridiculously long celebration ends the show.

Overall Rating: D. Why is this show so fondly remembered? The wrestling is pretty lame (though there are worse options) and the Rumble itself isn't much to be remembered outside of Austin starting his rise to the top of the promotion. It's not the worst Royal Rumble of all time but I don't remember getting into the show a single time all night, save for that look from Austin when Bret came out. Just not a very good show but it's from a bad time for the company.

Ratings Comparison

HHH vs. Goldust

Original: C-

2013 Redo: C-

2017 Redo: F+

Ahmed Johnson vs. Faarooq

Original: D+

2013 Redo: D+

2017 Redo: D

Vader vs. Undertaker

Original: C+

2013 Redo: D+

2017 Redo: C-

Hector Garza/Perro Aguayo/El Canek vs. Jerry Estrada/Heavy Metal/Fuerza Guerrera

Original: F

2013 Redo: D

2017 Redo: D

Royal Rumble

Original: C+

2013 Redo: B-

2017 Redo: D+

Shawn Michaels vs. Sycho Sid

Original: C+

2013 Redo: C+

2017 Redo: D+

Overall Rating

Original: C+

2013 Redo: D

2017 Redo: D

Now that's more like it. The two main events just aren't that good but I have NO idea what I was thinking on the opener. That match is a disaster and I can't stand it less and less every time I see it.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/17/royal-rumble-count-up-1997-bret-hart-uh-make-that-austin/>

And the 2013 redo:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/01/11/royal-rumble-count-up-2013-redo-1997-why-austin-was-a-near-perfect-character/>

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