

787 Talk: Kenny Omega vs. Kazuchika Okada: A Tale Of Growth And Maturity



IMG Credit: New Japan Pro Wrestling

Kenny Omega won the IWGP Heavyweight Championship. I take it you've heard already. The match is one of the most impressive spectacles ever in the same year where we've had Johnny Gargano vs Andrade Almas, Johnny Gargano vs Tommaso Ciampa, Kazuchika Okada vs Tetsuya Naito and others already grasp that "oh that's one the greatest matches of all time" credit. If you're a fan of wrestling, you're blessed with great matches nowadays. But Kenny Omega winning the IWGP title was a bit more than that. It was a story. A lesson of growing up.

See, when Kenny Omega won the G-1 Climax in 2016, lots of fans were surprised. Omega was just a midcarder that had moved up from the Jr. Heavyweights earlier that year. Now he was headlining the Tokyo Dome. He lost to Okada in said main event and all of the sudden, fans started wondering why didn't he get the title. Omega never got to use his One Winged Angel. And that stuck out to fans. He didn't hit his big move. Right there is where you can see the differences of NJPW and main roster WWE. As I just said, Kenny was just a midcarder months

before. Having matches with aerosol in the middle of NJPW's big shows. His only mayor program was against Hiroshi Tanahashi. The promotion's "Ace". But that was also the program where Kenny and The Young Bucks were dealing with a Yoshitatsu who was impersonating Triple H using said aerosol. "Ready for the main event" wasn't exactly what you'd say about Omega in terms of how he was presented in NJPW. But there was no doubting he could go in the ring.

Omega had a rematch against Okada for July's Dominion event later in the year. While their first match went 47 minutes, this one went "Broadway". A full hour. Omega was finally able to hit his big move. But fate was against him yet again as he wasn't able to secure a cover before time expired. At first he lost. Now he tied with the near-unstoppable World Champion. Omega now carried the label that he can be a main eventer and repeated his performance. While he didn't win again, you can see the growth. He now had the experience of headlining for the biggest show of the year and had more time to grow as a top star and as a result, he was much closer to that elusive title win.

Despite the lack of a resolution, Omega failed twice to win the IWGP title and had to back out of contention. In the meantime he won a tournament to crown the first ever United States Champion. Then the G-1 Climax came calling. This would prove to be another example of NJPW planning well in advance. See as Omega/Okada was going on both in the Tokyo Dome and Dominion, there was another mayor rivalry just under in the form of Hiroshi Tanahashi and Tetsuya Naito. Unlike Omega, the two traded wins over the two events. A third match in both rivalries was set up as the finals of the G-1's A and B blocks. Naito won his, giving him two wins over Tanahashi. Omega took on Kazuchika Okada again. This time a 30 minute time limit put a lot of pressure, especially on Kenny. He had to win to then get a crack at the title. Okada didn't have to win. Just stall. And given the fact that both previous matches

went well over 30 minutes, Kenny did not have it easy. But this time, the third time in, Kenny did it. He hit the One Winged Angel and secured the win over Okada. Finally besting him. But he lost in the finals to Tetsuya Naito who during the same time period had managed to win his Tokyo Dome match and have a successful run as Intercontinental Champion. Even if he did treat the title like dirt. He had the momentum Kenny lacked (hey, there's another term WWE loves but NJPW uses far better). Naito had firm success while Kenny struggled to keep up with his rival.

Despite not winning the title, Kenny Omega had closure in the fact that he can defeat Kazuchika Okada. As such, the rivals drifted apart as Okada continued to defeat foe after foe. Reaching an unprecedented two year reign. While Kenny was able to firmly establish himself as a main eventers, his struggles stopped being physical ones and instead we started to see mental and personal ones. Despite being the leader of the Bullet Club, NJPW's big 'gaijin' stable, Kenny was very disassociated with the group. Especially once his rivalry with Okada started. When 2018 came, fellow member Cody Rhodes started a feud with Kota Ibushi. Kenny Omega's best friend. Kenny at first ignored it as he had a major feud going with Chris Jericho. But at The New Beginning, Omega was finally bested by the young Jay White. Who Omega failed to recruit to the group. As such, Cody saw a moment of weakness and tried to grab power, attacking Omega. But that just reunited him with Kota Ibushi. It did create turmoil with fellow Bullet Club members, The Young Bucks. But after one match, that passed. They all sided with Omega. Now with no more turmoil to stop him, he received a challenge.

Kazuchika Okada had defeated every opponent possible. Some he defeated several times. But it was Kenny Omega who gave him his toughest challenge. And Okada challenged him yet again for Dominion. But Kenny had a hard road to get here and decided to up the ante. It wasn't just a World title match with a 60

minute time limit. No. He wanted the definitive match. To show once and for all he was superior. So he asked for the match to be 2/3 Falls and with no time limit. In the weeks leading up to the match, Omega prepared with intense training while Okada relaxed fishing. Who would've thunk that even that would play into the match. As the match took place, it echoed the very story they started at Wrestle Kingdom 11. Okada had the advantage from the start. Omega struggled to keep up and was pinned in the first fall. But he came back. Stronger and secured the second. At this point, both men had very little left to give. It got to the point where Okada's infamous Rainmaker literally bounced off Omega's chest. Okada was out. He became complaisant in his dominance. While Omega matured. The young man who spent his time spraying aerosol to win matches had matured into a hard working individual who adapted over and over until he was able to best Okada. Then we saw him do it. He hit the One Winged Angel and Kenny Omega finally did it. Not only did he beat Okada, he did it twice in a row and finally won the title he was after.

That is what makes Kazuchika Okada vs Kenny Omega one of the best rivalries in pro wrestling. Sure, maybe in 10 years something else will come along to dethrone it. And their match in Dominion may not even win Best Match Of The Year. But for me, who saw Kenny Omega go from Jr to Intercontinental Champion in the blink of an eye and then find himself facing the most well protected World Champion since Hulk Hogan and The Ultimate Warrior all the way defeating him firmly, it was a journey. It's that kind of storytelling that makes wrestling feel like such a special art. Yeah, you know it's "fake". That doesn't stop them from crafting such creative and unbelievable stories. And they're constantly around US. In Japan with stories such as Mr. Gannosuke betraying Hayabusa or in the US with such simple things as Mr. Anderson's disrespectful attitude insulting a fallen soldier who gave Kurt Angle a special medal. Or Shawn Michaels being willing to put his career on the line to try and end The Undertaker's

Wrestlemania streak. Pro Wrestling is an art and this match managed to touch me by showcasing their craft.

The story of a young man coming into his own. It's almost fitting that it came from Japan given how much they love that story and tell it better than anyone under any medium. It's simple and relateable for any young wrestling fan and while it took a year and a half to tell, it was told in a mere few parts. Very much like a movie series.

But don't think the US is something I neglect. They also showcase great art. But that's a case for next time.

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