

Monday Night Raw – April 8, 1996: This Year Wasn't All Bad



IMG Credit: WWE

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 8, 1996

Location: Orange Pavilion, San Bernardino, California

Attendance: 3,000

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Mr. Perfect

In something you don't say too often in 1996, things are in a good place after last week with the debut of Mankind as the Undertaker's newest top foe. It's going to be something special but that gets to come later. For now we have new WWF World Champion Shawn Michaels in his first match as champion against Jerry Lawler, who is as good of a choice as anyone else. Let's get to it.

[Here are last week's results if you need a recap.](#)

Opening sequence.

Yokozuna vs. Vader

Yokozuna is listed at 650lbs, putting him at 200lbs heavier than Vader. Let me repeat that: 200lb heavier than VADER. They trade some very hard

sounding right hands to the head until an impressive Samoan drop plants Vader. That just earns Yokozuna a hard clothesline as Vince hypes up the fact that the show is now airing at 8:57 to counter Nitro.

Jim Cornette gets in a tennis racket shot from the floor because he knows how to be a good heel manager. The Rock Bottom gets Yokozuna out of trouble for a bit as Mr. Fuji waves the American flag at ringside. Yokozuna pounds Vader down in the corner but misses a charge, allowing Vader to Vader Bomb the leg (CRUNCH) for a referee stoppage.

Rating: D. This was all about making Vader look like a monster and that's exactly what they should have done. Yokozuna was just way too big to mean anything at this point and it was the right call to write him off TV for awhile. You might as well pencil Vader in for the Summerslam title match from here as it's the absolute right call, even this far away from the show.

Post match Vader crushes the leg again and the swearing Yokozuna rolls outside in pain. There's no way to get Yokozuna up so here's a forklift to get rid of him. I remember watching this as a kid and thinking it was amazing. Now, it's just a bit of a funny visual.

Vince brings out the Ulllllllllltimate Warrior for his Raw debut. The first question: where have you been for the last three years? Warrior says they were places you won't find on a map because he's been deep inside his own mind. The voices never stopped and all of the fans spoke to him over the years. Vince asks about facing the stars of the New Generation and here's Goldust to interrupt. Their match (non-title it seems) is announced for In Your House so Goldust breathes at him.

Warrior does that hard to describe noise of his and Goldust quotes movie lines. He can come in Goldust's house but no one will be there. Maybe they can play a superhero game with Warrior as Superman...which makes him growl. Various sexual references are made and that's too far for Warrior, who calls Goldust a freak. This could go very badly in a hurry. Warrior doesn't give a "s***" whatever Goldust is into and freaks out when Goldust tries to touch his chest. A clothesline puts Goldust down and I guess this keeps Warrior as a good guy. Today, he would be the subject of

a Twitter campaign to get him fired.

Yokozuna is still on the forklift so here's Vader to beat on the leg with a chair. Now that's a villain.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Duke Droese

Droese starts fast and cleans house with a clothesline to the floor. Back in and Duke slaps away in the corner as we see Sable slapping Helmsley last week. A gorilla press attempt goes badly and Droese is sent outside as the announcers talk about the Preview Channel getting great ratings from the Wrestlemania pre-show.

Marc Mero comes in for an inset interview, promising a surprise next week, thereby negating the idea of A SURPRISE. Some kicks to the ribs have Droese in trouble and we take a break. Back with Helmsley being catapulted into the corner and hitting a powerslam for no cover. The Trash Compactor is countered into the Pedigree for the fast pin.

Rating: C. Not bad at all here as Droese wasn't half bad for a power guy with some size. There's nothing you can do with a trashman gimmick though and it's clear that he wasn't getting any further than this. That being said, you would think he would get somewhere with his size and decent skills but it just never happened.

We look back at Mankind attacking Undertaker last week, which was still awesome.

Yokozuna is finally in an ambulance.

It's time for arm wrestling between British Bulldog, flanked by Owen Hart, and Ahmed Johnson. Hang on though as Owen isn't happy with the oil on Johnson's chest and hands. Johnson uses the referee's shirt to wipe down and grabs a chair, which Owen describes as "buttering up the referee". Owen keeps running his mouth (as he is so adept at doing) and gets ejected. They lock up with Johnson's arm stretched far longer than Bulldog's. Johnson wins of course and Perfect freaks about him grabbing the table.

Of course Bulldog beats him down. A series of chair shots set up two

whips into the table in the corner...which doesn't break. The table (which is covered in oil) is so sturdy that Bulldog just drops it on him and then jumps on the thing a few times, which STILL doesn't break it. That's the best table I've ever seen. With nothing else working, Bulldog lifts it over his head and drops it onto Johnson from even higher, leaving Johnson mostly dead in a really effective beatdown.

Shawn Michaels vs. Jerry Lawler

Non-title with Diesel on commentary. Shawn knocks him down to start and Lawler does one of those over the top sell jobs that only he can do so well. A right hand to the face has Lawler in even more trouble so he tells the referee to stay in the corner as this turns into a boxing match. This goes as you would expect and Lawler crawls over to the referee for mercy.

There's a backdrop to put Lawler down as this is downright masterful so far. We're four minute in and it's been punches and a backdrop but the fans are completely engaged in what's going on. It's time for the invisible foreign object but Shawn cranks on his hand. As this is going on, we go split screen to show Diesel chairing Shawn down at MSG a few weeks back.

Lawler gets in the cheap shot and chokes away as we take a break. Back with Lawler celebrating his right hands, again doing very little for a lot of success. Lawler dives into a right hand to the ribs though and there's the top rope elbow. Some jawing to Diesel sets up Sweet Chin Music for the pin.

Rating: B-. I have a feeling this would be called horrible today as fans seem to equate the ability to do a bunch of stuff with quality. This was Lawler showing why he was one of the best of all time as he did almost NOTHING but punches and pantomime to make the fans want to see him get his head kicked off. Lawler was a master of getting the most out of almost nothing and it's going to work every single time no matter where you are. Shawn was the star of course but Lawler was doing most of the work, which says a lot given how little he was actually doing. It's about how you do it, and this was a great lesson.

Post match Diesel comes in and Mr. Perfect offers a distraction so Shawn can take a belt shot to the face to end the show.

Overall Rating: B+. Who said the Raw's with Shawn as champion were bad? This is the second really good show in a row and while I doubt that lasts, Shawn vs. Diesel has some steam as a title match, if nothing else for Shawn's first defense. Other than that the midcard is looking strong and the wrestling was good. That's not bad for a fifty minute show and I had a good time with it. Keep this stuff up.

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