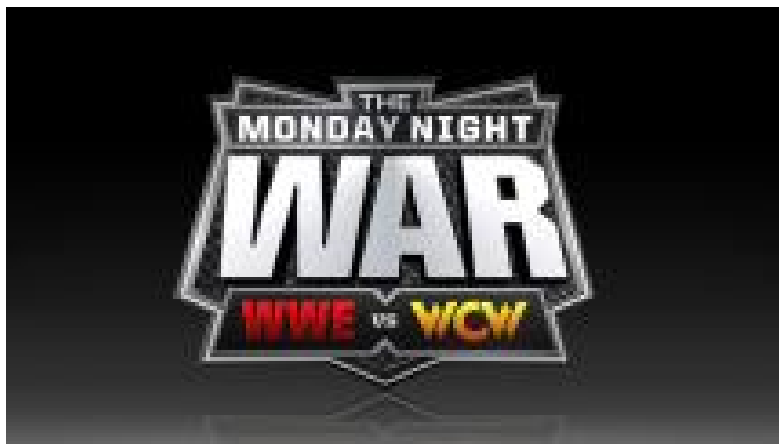


Monday Night Raw – February 23, 2004: Better Late Than Never



IMG Credit: WWE

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 23, 2004

Location: Qwest Center, Omaha, Nebraska

Attendance: 14,752

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler

Wrestlemania is rapidly closing in on us and that means things are getting serious around here. In addition to the big main event story with Chris Benoit vs. HHH vs. Shawn Michaels for the World Title being confirmed, Goldberg vs. Brock Lesnar is heating up for the interpromotional dream match. Let's get to it.

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

We open with a recap of Benoit vs. Michaels last week and the announcement of the triple threat.

Opening sequence.

Women's Title: Molly Holly vs. Victoria vs. Lita vs. Jazz

Molly is defending under elimination rules. After Lawler gets done putting his eyes back in over Victoria (fair enough), we're ready to go. It's a big brawl to start with Jazz lifting Victoria up in the double chickenwing. Lita's snap DDT gets rid of Jazz in very short order and we're down to three. Molly hits a handspring elbow on Victoria in the corner but gets caught in a quick jackknife cover to get us down to Victoria vs. Lita for the title. That's not cool with Molly, who beats the heck out of Victoria after the fall.

We take a break and come back with Victoria grabbing a headlock takeover, which feels very odd two eliminations into a match. Lita comes up and gets two off a clothesline, only to be snapped into a chinlock. They're definitely going with a weird layout so far. Victoria misses the slingshot legdrop and Lita botches the counter to the spinning side slam. A reverse Twist of Fate gives Lita two and she sends Victoria throat first into the bottom rope. The moonsault takes too long though and the Widow's Peak gives Victoria the title.

Rating: D. The first two eliminations were completely worthless and the rest of the match was a sloppy mess. They didn't seem to know how to lay a match out and the botches didn't do it any favors. Molly was fine for a champion but Victoria is a bigger star with a better character so the title change makes sense. That doesn't make up for the bad match though.

Steven Richards comes out for the big celebration.

Vince McMahon arrives and tells the driver to get his wrestling gear out of the back.

Eric Bischoff isn't happy about the main event but here's Christian to interrupt. Christian is still trying to get a Tag Team Title match for himself and Chris Jericho. Bischoff rants on Jericho and gives Christian a match with Trish Stratus instead.

Randy Orton vs. Val Venis

Non-title. Orton goes aggressive to start and chokes Venis in the corner but a few chops put him on the floor. Venis is right after him and gets backdropped down to put Orton right back in control. Some knees to the

back set up a knee to the back camel clutch as the fans want Foley. Orton mocks the BANG BANG and Venis kicks him in the head for taking too long. Venis grabs a cobra clutch slam and a spinebuster but can't follow up. With Val going up top, Orton learns from his mentor and slams him off the top for the big crash. The RKO is good for the pin.

Rating: D. Orton is getting some stature here and the feud with Foley should only make that better. A win over a former Intercontinental Champion should help him out even more, which is all you can ask for her. Venis is a great choice for a jobber to the stars and thankfully they've cut out the old gimmick stuff save for the hip swivel.

We look back at Bischoff challenging Vince...from Nitro in 1998. That's tonight's main event, all in a way to plug the Monday Night War DVD, less than a month from Wrestlemania.

Bischoff is panicking over the video being played. As expected, it was Austin, who recaps Bischoff running his mouth off last week. Austin: "You're the only man who has made out with Vince's wife and made out with Vince's daughter. And he still signs your paychecks!" Wrestling is a very strange place. Bischoff talks about a fantasy he has with Stephanie and Vince is right behind him. A lot of yelling ensues. Austin to Eric: "You've got him right where you want him."

Evolution gives Batista a pep talk for his match with Benoit. First though, HHH has something to say.

Here's Evolution so HHH can have a chat. HHH wasn't happy with the announcement of the triple threat last week and it got to him a little bit. Then Ric Flair reminded him that he's the best in the world today so there's no reason to worry. He beats opponents one after another so this time he'll beat two at once. It doesn't matter who challenges him because he's the World Heavyweight Champion.

Cue Chris Benoit to say bring it on, which is exactly what HHH tells him to do. Benoit grabs a chair and gets in but the numbers advantage lets Batista jump him from behind. Shawn runs in for the save but Benoit puts him in the Crossface to make up for last week. Now it's Austin to say let's do Batista vs. Benoit right now.

Batista vs. Chris Benoit

Joined in progress with Benoit going after the leg but the Sharpshooter is blocked with pure power. Batista clotheslines the head out of him and grabs the bearhug, kneeling to make up for the size difference. The hold goes to the mat but since that doesn't have the best effect, it's off to a half crab instead. That doesn't last long either so Batista blocks a Crossface attempt and blasts him with a clothesline. It's kind of hard to block a German suplex though and Benoit rolls his way to four in a row. The Swan Dive misses but the Batista Bomb is countered into the Crossface (sweet) for the tap.

Rating: C. This was a rather impressive showcase of Benoit's selling and ability to walk someone through a competent match. Batista is still very green at this level and while he's getting better, he needs someone as good as Benoit to get him to a higher level. They're making Benoit look great with this string of submissions (ignore the loss to Shawn of course) and he's on a roll heading into Wrestlemania.

Austin gives Bischoff a pep talk, telling him to be the Bischoff that beat Raw for 83 weeks in a row. Bischoff has gotten more out of that than Jericho beating Austin and Rock in one night.

Rob Van Dam/Booker T. vs. La Resistance

Non-title. Rob and Rene start things off and it's an early spinning kick to the face for two on Dupree. A Hart Attack with a side kick gives Booker two of his own but Conway breaks up the ax kick. The chinlock goes on as the announcers make jokes about French coffee. I'll take it over French military jokes. Booker's side kick isn't enough to get him out of trouble so he sends the French guys into each other. That's enough for the hot tag and everything breaks down with a Book End dropping Conway. The ax kick into the Five Star finishes Dupree.

Rating: D. Total formula tag match here as a way to make the new champs look good. It's pretty clear that La Resistance's time on top is over and that's the best for everyone. They didn't have the best longevity in the world and now that the anti-French stuff has died down, they can settle into the midcard role where they belong. Van Dam and Booker are fine

until a better team comes along.

We see some pictures of Foley's face after last week's beating and it's not pretty.

Trish comes in to see Christian, who agrees to lie down tonight...if she'll lay down for him. He wasn't serious though because that was the CLT: the Christian Love Test. All he was doing was seeing if she was loyal to Jericho and she passed with flying colors. Red and white I would assume.

Video on last week's Orton vs. Foley segment with Foley taking a very hard beating. Apparently Foley told Orton to actually hit him for the sake of realism, which is something only Foley would actually do.

Over the weekend, Foley, with a very black eye, sat down with JR. He's been in pain for most of his career because it comes with the territory. What he doesn't understand is why his injuries have caused him this degree of neurological problems (I'm thinking the fists to the head have something to do with it) and for the first time, he's scared. He's not sure why he kept getting up last week but it was probably just instinct.

Foley thought it was only about thirty seconds when it was actually six minutes. What he wanted to know was where the help was. He thought he was a little more loved than that but maybe some people aren't over him walking away back in December. He isn't happy with what happened and Evolution can say they beat him down last week, but it's not ok to have them say his career is over.

Foley is longing to be Commissioner Mick Foley again because he can't laugh. Evolution doesn't get to be the people who take that away and, as he stands up and starts yelling at JR, he promises to be at Raw next week to get his hands on Evolution. This started slowly and grew into one of those promos that Foley has mastered over the years. You could feel his emotion and I want to see where this goes.

Trish Stratus vs. Christian

Jericho isn't here due to reagrivating his knee. Christian lays down but

kicks out at two, gropes her a bit, and slaps on the Walls to win in short order.

Christian takes his time letting go.

Post break Trish is helped to the back and can barely stand.

Coach tries to tell Bischoff to calm down but Bischoff isn't scared. He's gone head to head with Vince before and beat him at his own game. 83 weeks are mentioned again and he lists off all the stars he stole. Yet his company still somehow managed to go out of business.

Next week: Foley is back and Shawn/Benoit vs. Batista/Orton.

Vince comes out for the main event but before we're ready to go, he has a Wrestlemania announcement. We'll have to wait on that as here are Stacy Keibler and Jackie Gayda to interrupt. They want to prove that they're the hottest Divas on the grand stage of Wrestlemania XX. Vince wants the proof right here so dancing ensues. That's cut off as an interpromotional evening gown match is made for Wrestlemania.

With that out of the way, here's Kane to yell at Vince. Kane had been promised that Undertaker would die if he was buried but now he's back. Vince tries to beg off but Kane won't have it, saying that Undertaker is here again. Undertaker torments him day and night, so if Vince doesn't do something about this, it's his turn to be buried alive. Therefore, it's Undertaker vs. Kane at Wrestlemania with Vince promising that someone will rest in peace.

That's enough for Kane, so Vince wants to make his announcement. The fans chant for Goldberg as Vince talks about Brock Lesnar getting on his knees to beg for a match against Goldberg. Vince has thought about it and it would take someone special to control this kind of a match.

Cue Austin before any announcement can be made, sending Vince into a fit. Austin knows the people want to see Lesnar vs. Goldberg and since we need a guest referee, he'll throw his hat into the mix. Vince wants to know what's in it for Austin but that's none of his business. The match is on, giving us our third match set in ten minutes. We're finally ready for the

main event, but Vince thinks Austin needs a tryout so he's refereeing this match.

Vince McMahon vs. Eric Bischoff

They stare each other down and Bischoff offers a handshake. Vince will have none of that (makes sense) and knees him in the ribs but Austin tells him to get off the ropes. Some kicks have no effect so Vince drives him into the corner. Austin breaks it up again and Bischoff kicks him down. That's it for Bischoff's offense as Vince takes it to the floor, only to have Lesnar sneak in with an F5 to Austin and the no contest to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. I'm not sure what to think about this one actually. The wrestling was bad but they've done a good job of setting up the big matches for Wrestlemania with three matches being added in about ten minutes. I kind of like that rapid fire stuff as you knew some of the matches were coming so just announce them officially and get on to something else.

That being said, the Bischoff vs. McMahon stuff felt like it was out of last century and was thrown together here to sell DVDs. They kept it very short, but was there nothing else that could have gotten Austin and McMahon out to the ring? Not a good show on its own, but a good way to get things ready for Wrestlemania, which is what really matters.

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