

1st Annual Brian Pillman Memorial Show: A Worthy Tribute



IMG Credit: WWE

Brian Pillman Memorial Show

Date: April 29, 1998

Location: Norwood Middle School, Norwood, Ohio

Attendance: 1,002

I think the title of this show sums up the idea well enough. Pillman passed away on October 5, 1997 in a horrible surprise, leaving behind a family with far less support. As Pillman was revered in the wrestling industry, a series of memorial shows were put together for the sake of helping Pillman's kids. This is the first one and you might have heard of some of the people on the show. Let's get to it.

This event was promoted by the Heartland Wrestling Association out of Cincinnati, which was WWF developmental for a good while.

There is no commentary here (fan cam) and there's a chance I won't know some of these people so please bear with me.

The roster is in the ring to open the show....and we're cut to the opening match. Ok then.

Trailer Park Trash vs. Nick Dinsmore

Trash was the first OVW Heavyweight Champion and Dinsmore is better known as Eugene, the most successful OVW wrestler of all time. Dinsmore, who looks much smaller than usual, which is an accomplishment given how small he was, gets taken into the corner to start and the fans chant for Trash. A monkey flip doesn't work as Dinsmore sticks the landing and grabs a belly to belly.

Things reset so Dinsmore speeds things up with a pair of dropkicks and a clothesline to the floor. The announcer says five minutes gone by, meaning we missed about a minute and ten seconds at the beginning. Or the wrestling tradition of never knowing how to tell time continues. Trash runs around on the floor for some serious stalling and, believe it or not, it still works. Back in and Trash's armbar is countered into a hiptoss to put him on the floor again. The fans think Trash is a crybaby and Dinsmore certainly encourages their sentiments.

Trash rakes the eyes to take over and gets two off a flying clothesline as we're firmly in the old style heel vs. face formula here. A bulldog lets Trash strut (oh he's a southern wrestler) before getting two (they never learn). Trash is a bit better flier than Ric Flair as a guillotine legdrop connects. He misses the second though (again: they never learn) and Dinsmore gets in the right hands, followed by a backdrop as this is as wrestling 101 as you can get (not a bad thing). The bridging German suplex takes out the Trash at 11:22.

Rating: C. I could have a good time with this show as it's a classic example of basic wrestling but they're doing it well. More important than the wrestling though is knowing how to work the crowd. Both guys were playing to them very well and it made them care about something that wasn't exactly thrilling. You didn't have both of them doing all kinds of big high spots and overblown moves, but rather getting the most out of the least work. Now why can't more people get that straight?

The announcer gets in the ring and lists off some states, which I think is where the fans are all from. The audio is almost incomprehensible, but that's not really the point at the moment.

Steve Dunn/Reno Riggins vs. Brian Taylor/The Bounty Hunter

Dunn is part of Well Dunn, Riggins was a longtime WWF jobber, Taylor is an HWA regular who stopped wrestling in 1999 and Bounty Hunter is an indy guy who wrestled in the Eastern Championship Wrestling days of ECW. During Hunter's entrance, the ring announcer goes to the aisle and something happens that we can't see. It seems that we're having a change of personnel here as Sunny will now be ring announcer. Well if you insist.

This is non-title though it's champions vs. champions as Riggins and Dunn are the Music City Wrestling Tag Team Champions and Hunter and Taylor are the HWA Tag Team Champions (though they have no belts). However, from the records I can find, the MCW Tag Team Titles should be held by Dinsmore and Rob Conway at the moment. Eh those records can be sketchy at best or they might have just handed the titles to Dunn and Riggins to make this sound better.

Taylor and Dunn start things off with Steve complaining of a hair pull. Well maybe you should lose the mullet dude. It seems that Riggins and Dunn are the heels here, which you wouldn't expect when one of their opponents is named Bounty Hunter. Taylor shoves him down again to show off the power and that means more Dunn stalling. Dunn and Riggins clear the ring until Taylor comes back in for a running clothesline.

It's off to Hunter for the good sized power offense, including a big boot to the chest. The chinlock goes on for a bit before Riggins eats a double elbow to the jaw. The blind tag brings Dunn back in but the fans don't seem thrilled with him and his partner. Riggins rakes Taylor's eyes and gets in a nice powerslam before handing it off to Dunn for a snap suplex. As was the case earlier on, they're not doing anything incredible here but they're doing it efficiently.

Taylor gets sent to the floor and punched in the back, followed by Dunn picking Riggins up for a low Fameasser. That's a big enough spot to draw a gasp from the crowd and we hit the chinlock. That's broken up and Taylor gets two off a rollup, only to have Riggins hit a running dropkick to keep him in trouble. Egads what a southern match. A DDT is finally

enough for the hot tag off to Hunter and everything breaks down. With the referee distracted, Dunn gets in a belt shot to knock Hunter out for the pin at 12:24.

Rating: C+. These matches are better than I was expecting as they're certainly not doing anything out of the ordinary here but they're doing it well enough that it's going fine. I'm digging what we're getting here and I can tell what's going on without being told. That's the same of a good match and wrestlers that know what they're doing.

Flash Flanagan vs. Bull Pain

Flash was a big deal in OVE and Pain is a German guy with an unnamed manager. They get aggressive over a lockup to start and it's Flash getting the better of a chop off. A running jackknife cover gives Flash two but Pain pounds him down without much effort. Flash clotheslines him to the floor and hits a Cannonball off the apron, earning himself a nice chant.

Back in and Flash keeps up the pace with a Japanese armdrag but an armbar slows things back down. That stays on for a good while until Flash runs the ropes, only to be tripped by Pain's unnamed manager. They head outside with Pain hammering away and then cutting off a comeback attempt back inside.

Flash gets stomped a few times but still manages to get two off a sunset flip. Bull hits a nice frog splash for the same and the unnamed manager's distraction lets him follow up with a low blow. A second splash misses and Flash starts the comeback, including a difficult looking backdrop. Pain is right back up with a superplex for two more but a missed charge lets Flash hit a Blockbuster for the pin at 12:27.

Rating: C. Just like earlier, this wasn't the highest level stuff but it was more than watchable. Flash was someone who had a ton of potential in OVW but never went past that one company for some reason. Pain is a perfectly fine midcard heel with a bit of a smaller Albert vibe and that's not the worst place to be.

Chip Fairway/Shark Boy vs. Terik the Great/Sean Casey

Fairway is a golfer (it was the 80s), Shark Boy you know (despite him having a costume that looks like a horrible prototype of his more famous look), Terik is a foreign heel and Casey was an OVW guy. Shark and Terik start things off with a wristlock not getting Terik very far. Both guys try dropkicks and that means a double knockdown because neither connected with a chest. Casey and Fairway come in for most wristlockery with Fairway (who is a face for reasons I can't comprehend) taking him to the mat.

Shark comes back in for a right hand to Casey and the villains are sent to the floor for some dives. Casey and Terik are pulled back in and knocked down just as fast, leaving Fairway to shoulder Casey a few times. A double back elbow gets two as the really long shine continues. Casey grabs a powerbomb attempt and walks Shark back to the corner, allowing Terik to neck snap him on the top to take over, in a spot that was a little bigger than you might have expected.

Terik drops a springboard spinning legdrop for two and it's back to Casey for a dropkick. An old fashioned slingshot suplex gets two more with Fairway having to make a save this time. That's enough to draw a SHARK BOY chant, which dies off pretty quickly. Terik puts on a double underhook neck crank of all things, thankfully being smart enough to keep his shoulders off the mat. They head outside with Casey cutting off a comeback with an ax handle from the apron.

Back in and Shark snaps off a headscissors but, like a true villain, Casey cuts off the hot tag attempt. We hit the required sleeper for the required belly to back but Terik breaks up...the cover. You know, instead of the tag attempt. What a stupid shark. Casey puts on a Boston crab with Terik using his feet to push back (nice touch) but Fairway makes the save. Back up and Shark tries a victory roll, only to have Casey pull him up so Terik can springboard in with a bulldog (cool spot).

Fairway makes another save, leaving Terik to hit a running kneeling Muscle Buster (FREAKING OW MAN!) for two more. Terik botches a springboard moonsault though and falls outside, finally allowing the hot tag to Fairway. A spinebuster sets up a Texas Cloverleaf on Terik but it's Casey making the save this time. The referee tells Terik to get out,

allowing Shark to come in with a twisting high crossbody for the pin on Casey at 19:50.

Rating: B-. Who in the world would have expected this to go twenty minutes or be the match of the night up to this point? This was actually a very nice tag match, even with no reason for these four to be fighting. They did the same thing that the other wrestlers have done so far: done things well enough to get the crowd going and make them want to see the good guys win. It's wrestling 201 or so and when it works, it always works.

Chris Candido vs. Al Snow

This is before Snow became a major name, though he was the hottest thing in ECW, though he was only a few months away from the WWF. Candido is one half of the ECW Tag Team Champions at this point. The Head craze is in full swing here, though there are only a few of the Styrofoam ones in the crowd. They both drop to their knees and cross their arms at each other (ok then) until Snow drops to the floor to consult Head.

Back in and an exchange of hammerlocks goes nowhere...and we're clipped to them fighting outside. Candido actually gets the better of things and takes Snow back inside for a delayed vertical suplex. You wouldn't expect that kind of power out of him. The chinlock goes on early and it goes so well that Candido puts on a second one. A very crisp swinging neckbreaker lets Candido strut a bit and the camera zooms in on Candido's title for some reason. Gah, amateurs.

The third chinlock in less than four minutes goes on...as the announcer says ten minutes. That's a heck of a cut in there for whatever reason. Back up and Candido chops away in the corner until Snow switches places with him and chops even faster. A good looking enziguri sends Candido into the corner and it's time to pound away with Head in the corner (they like those in this match).

Snow hits a slingshot splash onto the floor, which draws an ECW chant for some reason. Likely because in ECW, doing anything is worthy of cheering. Back in and Snow hits a high crossbody with Candido rolling through for two. A clothesline gives him the same, as does a superplex with Snow

bouncing quite well.

Snow faceplants his way out of trouble and does the Sting face first fall onto the crotch. The moonsault and Swan Dive both miss but here's Sunny (in a different outfit) to break up the Snow Plow. Candido saves her from taking one, only to walk into one himself for the pin at 14:14 show (of what seems to be about twenty minutes).

Rating: B-. It's nice to see two guys who can handle this much time without having to resort to obvious stalling or something stupid to fill in time. It makes for an entertaining match because they know how to keep things going on their own. Candido really was one of the most underrated guys you'll ever find as he did come off as a natural talent no matter what he was stuck doing.

The fans show the heads at Candido and Sunny, who throw them back in a funny moment.

We cut to Steve Austin (reigning WWF Champion) in the ring (makes sense) and the ring announcer possibly selling something. Austin leaves but comes back for one more double middle finger.

We see the check presentation to Pillman's family. Brian's widow Melanie, pregnant at the moment, is in the ring and what sounds like a pastor gives her over \$23,000. Melanie thanks the fans for everything. I'm not sure how true it is, but I've heard various stories that say she uh, wasn't exactly using the money for what she was supposed to so this isn't as inspiring as it might seem.

Terry Taylor, in the production area, is acknowledged for some reason.

Chris Jericho vs. Chris Benoit

Oh I think this could work. Jericho is WCW Cruiserweight Champion but I don't think this is a title match. Benoit has Woman with him. Before the match, Jericho says he wants us to want him...and other things I can't quite understand. I think he talks about the fans knowing they're here to see him. With that out of the way, Benoit say something else I can't understand but Jericho really doesn't like it. Maybe he said Woman had

better hair? The bell rings and someone is on the mic outside the ring.

Whatever they say has Jericho freaking out until they go to a wrestling sequence to start. This goes very badly for Jericho so he wants a test of strength instead. Benoit starts going down so he switches it into a pinfall reversal sequence and a standoff. Jericho actually gets the better of a wristlock and blows a kiss to Woman, earning himself a beating in the corner. That's enough to send Jericho outside where he chases Woman inside, earning himself a chop from Benoit and a slap from her, meaning it's time for more stalling.

Back in and Jericho works on a headlock as the fans seem to be behind him. Benoit enziguris him down but gets drop toehold into the bottom buckle for his efforts. Back in and a delayed vertical suplex sets up the chinlock to keep Benoit down. Jericho pulls him into a weird submission where he pulls on the arm like a hammerlock but wraps his leg around Benoit's head for a bonus.

That switches to a looks crossface chickenwing but Benoit gets up again, this time into a rollup for his own near fall. The chinlock goes on again until Jericho stops to yell at the crowd. Back up and Benoit holds the ropes to avoid a dropkick, setting up a catapult into the top turnbuckle.

A belly to back superplex puts them both down and it's time to chop it out. Benoit's German suplex attempt is countered into a failed Liontamer attempt so Jericho knocks him down instead. Another Liontamer attempt is reversed into a victory roll but the Swan Dive misses again. Jericho tries a rollup but gets reversed into the Crossface for the tap at 13:00.

Rating: B. Well of course these two have the best match of the night. It's not like there was any doubt that this would be awesome as both of them were near the top of their game right now and wanted to show off what they could do. Of course these two would go on to have some of the best matches in the WWF when they had the chance but it's cool to see them rocking this smaller stage too.

Overall Rating: A-. I had a really good time with this show and that was quite the surprise. With a show like this, you don't know what to expect as it could be a mess with a few bigger names putting in a low level

effort at the end. Instead, you had a bunch of guys who have clearly been very well trained leading up to the bigger main event and that made for a heck of a show. Nothing on here felt like an indy match but rather a show full of people trying their best and showing what they can do. Good show here, and a worthy tribute.

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