

Hidden Gems Collection #2: I've Never Seen Anything Like This And You Need To Watch It Right Now

No image on this one, because I don't want to spoil the impact.

Hidden Gems #2

Date: 1989

So when I originally put this on the schedule, it was entirely for the sake of the AWA Team Challenge show which got...interesting reviews, shall we say for reasons of general insanity. Since I started doing the rest of the years though, I might as well do the entire year, which is quite the eclectic collection this time around. Let's get to it.

For the sake of simplicity, I'll do these in order from the date they aired, starting with the earliest.

From February 23, 1989 in Florida.

Gordon Solie and Diamond Dallas Page (back when he was a heel commentator with some big hair) are with Oliver Humperdink (a heel manager) at the announcers' desk with Oliver not being happy about Dusty Rhodes. Lately Dusty has brought out his son Dustin, who needs to be taken care of. Therefore, Humperdink is calling in Terry Funk to eradicate Dustin so Dusty will give up. Terry isn't here yet, but he's sent in a video for our visual enjoyment.

Funk, standing in front of a big wooden cutout labeled Dusty, has a new word for us. The word is a Dusty, which is a 150lb frame, with 50lbs of added fat, 50lbs of added obesity and 50lbs of added hot air, giving you a 300lb blob. Terry whips out a chainsaw and cuts off the wooden arms and head before hacking away the painted on heart. That leaves you with a

heartless jackass, and if you breed that with a thick tongued barmaid, you get a Dustin, who is too stupid to say no, he won't get in the ring with Terry Funk. Well, that was absolutely terrifying and we'll move on as fast as possible.

From a WWA show promoted by the AWA. Note that this is VERY late in the match with about nine minutes shown of a match that ran thirty. It was also broadcast in Japan, as you can hear the Japanese commentary under the English commentary. Also of note: former World Champion Pat O'Connor is guest referee.

Rock N Roll Express vs. British Bulldogs

Date: February 23, 1989

Location: Memorial Hall, Kansas City, Missouri

Attendance: 300

Commentators: Ray Stevens, Greg Gagne

Joined in progress with Dynamite Kid dropping a knee onto Ricky Morton's back and slapping on an armbar. Bulldog comes in for an armbar of his own as there are more empty seats than filled ones. Morton gets thrown outside as we hit the 25 minute mark. With the fans looking bored out of their minds, Greg talks about them being up for the entire match. I know they can see the match, so why like about something that is clearly wrong? I've never gotten that.

It's back to Bulldog, who misses a top rope knee but still breaks up the hot tag attempt. Morton finally rolls over for the hot tag to Robert Gibson and everything breaks down. Gibson gets one off the slowest one count ever off a backdrop and then suplexes Dynamite with two minutes left. It's back to Ricky for two off a piledriver, followed by the double dropkick for another slow two. A small package gets the same and we have thirty seconds. Smith and Gibson both try dropkicks and it's back to Dynamite for an exchange of small packages as the time limit expires at 7:14 shown.

Rating: D. It's really not fair to rate the last fifth or so of a match but what we got wasn't all that great. The wrestling wasn't anything to see but then again these teams were WAY passed their primes by this point

anyway. I certainly don't think I'd want to see the full version, but it's certainly fine for an historical curiosity if nothing else.

Post match Badd Company, the Tag Team Champions, say they're ready to face any team. They're particularly ready to face Ricky Rice and Derrick Dukes (the Top Guns), who must be dreaming if they think they're getting the titles. Ok then.

From May 13, 1989 in Sarasota, Florida in the PWF (Professional Wrestling Federation), Dusty Rhodes' promotion. As you can probably guess by the name of Dusty's opponent, it didn't even make it a year.

PWF World Title: Dusty Rhodes vs. Big Steele Man

Date: May 13, 1989

Location: Roberts Arena, Sarasota, Florida

Commentator: Gordon Solie

In a cage with Dusty defending and that would be Tugboat/Typhoon/Shockmaster. Makes sense as they're brothers-in-law, along with Jerry Sags (there's your trivia for the day). This is in a cage and joined in progress again with Dusty going after Man's manager, Oliver Humperdink (hey it's a theme collection). Man hammers away in the corner but Dusty gets in the ten right hands to take over again. The Bionic Elbow keeps Man in trouble and he gets sent head first into the cage as the blood is flowing.

Man gets smart enough to grab a bearhug but Dusty hiptosses his way to freedom, only to miss the big elbow. A right hand knocks Dusty into the referee and of course Dusty hits the big elbow a few seconds later. Humperdink comes in (because the cage door is worthless) but gets punched back. Dusty hits a suplex but Diamond Dallas Page, Steel's other manager, throws in a towel. Apparently it's covered in something to knock Dusty out, meaning...well nothing actually as we're clipped to a still of Man holding up the title at about 4:20.

Rating: D-. I've seen a full show from these guys before and the regular thing wasn't that much better. This was slow and plodding and little more than a way for Dusty to have a foil, even though both of them would be in the WWF in about two months. That being said, what else were you

expecting from Dusty vs. Tugboat in a serious match?

And now, for the reason I wanted to watch this in the first place.

Team Challenge Series Pilot

Date: October 23, 1989

Commentators: Ralph Strangis, Greg Gagne

So back in the late 1980s, the AWA was, uh, bad. Like, really bad. Their answer was this big series of gimmick matches with a big scoring system and the entire roster split up into three teams. This was called the Team Challenge Series and what we have here is described as an unreleased home video pilot special. I'm sure this will be FASCINATING. Let's get to it.

We open with a montage, featuring cheerleaders in very 80s bikinis chanting YAY YAY YAY FOR THE AWA, plus the American flag, a concert and wrestling. I guess this is Verne Gagne's idea of patriotism?

Verne, with his dog, introduces the concept. He's so excited about this concept with new technology (remember that) that he might come out of retirement one more time. I mean, would that really surprise anyone?

Our hosts and commentators, Ralph Strangis and Greg Gagne promise us some great new stuff over the next sixty minutes. The video is less than forty, making me think that either this company can't count or something has been edited. Guess which I'm leaning towards. Greg says we'll be able to feel the armdrags and dropkicks. Well his partner had a great dropkick so I'll take what I can get.

Tommy Jammer vs. Tom Burton

Let me stop you right here. See, around this time the AWA wasn't doing well with drawing audiences. That would be the case here, so this is how they solved the problem. An example of the entrances:

https://i.kinja-img.com/gawker-media/image/upload/s-vp4tqpRy-/c_scale,f_auto,fl_progressive,q_80,w_800/qiltuijevukan52kmcq.jpg

Now, in case that's not enough for you, there are no fans in the "arena", which appears to be a small, dimly lit room. Not that you can tell how

big it is, when the lights go as far as where the first row would be. Now, to compensate for the lack of the fans, we do get some extreme closeups of some random people, presumably watching anything but this show. And now, the match.

Burton armdrags him down and we hear about the great technology: slow motion. Yes I said SLOW MOTION. Now for those of you unfamiliar with the history of slow motion...well you're pretty common actually. From what I can find, the earliest usage of slow motion in television was first used on television in 1939, or FIFTY YEARS before this aired.

Back to the match, we cut to some fans giving a thumbs down sign at what appears to be a restaurant or a bar, with a brick wall and a bottle of ketchup visible. Now, considering it's a well lit scene and the arena is about as well lit as an old school NWA arena, I'm thinking something is afoot. Or astupid. Burton hits a simple slam and that's enough for a slow motion replay.

Jammer makes a comeback and we go to a far too close camera angle, with the camera seemingly inside the ring. That sounds cool in theory, but when it's so close that you can't see Jammer as he slams Burton, it might be a little too close. Oh and where is Jammer's slow motion replay? Jammer gets an armdrag and we change camera angles, followed by another armdrag and another cut to some woman at what might be a different bar. A powerslam and a splash (called the Surfer Splash on the original call and the Jammer Splash on the replay) finish Burton at 1:46.

We go to Baron Von Raschke and Sgt. Slaughter, with the former being listed as the captain of the Blitzers. His man Paul Diamond is ready to face Slaughter's (captain of the Snipers) Colonel DeBeers (Isn't a colonel above a sergeant?) in what sounds like an over the top rope challenge.

Now it's clear that these two are on different teams, but we still have no idea what the teams are, who is on them, how many teams there are, how they were determined, what they're fighting for, or ANYTHING about the concept other than the fact that there is a concept at hand. I have a feeling this is going to get even worse as we keep go forward.

The announcers don't like the Destruction Crew. Of note: it sounds like this was a TV show that was released on video. That would explain the time issue earlier, but it's not really clear either way.

The Destruction Crew (Mike Enos and Wayne Bloom, better known as the Beverly Brothers in the WWF) swing sledgehammers at a green screen of a hotel being demolished. They're ready to destroy things. Or maybe people. This was a Demolition knockoff.

Destruction Crew vs. Jerry Lynn/Ricky Rice

This would be the second time Rice has been mentioned today in what is likely the only two times he's been mentioned in about twenty five years. The Crew has Luscious Johnny V in their corner. We get more shots of fans in what is very clearly a different location. This is described as being "just like at a sports bar". So wait: is watching the show live like it's in a sports bar, or is the show supposed to be in a sports bar? Are they saying the fans are watching this from elsewhere or are they supposed to be in the arena? I would assume the former, but egads this is far more complicated than it should be.

Rice gets armdragged (popular move tonight) down to start and Enos shoulders him for a bonus. Some wristlocks have Enos in trouble and it's off to Lynn...as the fans seem pleased. That would make you believe that the fans are supposed to be in the arena, meaning this is supposed to be in the sports bars shown. Lynn, who looks nothing like he would ten years later in ECW, stays on the arm as we can see the ceiling, which is far higher than it was in the bar shots earlier.

Bloom comes in and gets his arm worked on as well until he misses a flying shoulder in the corner, which is good for more slow motion...which shows the ceiling again, this time with the wall included, meaning there is no way there could be actual fans in the arena. Valiant offers a distraction so Enos can get in a knee to the back from the apron. The Crew takes over and it's an Oklahoma Stampede into a shoulderbreaker. Bloom hits a powerslam for...well just one at first before we go to the slow motion replay. A Doomsday Device finishes Lynn at 4:38.

Rating: D. It's not helping when the matches aren't exactly good. Lynn

and Rice were the most basic face team you could find and nothing more than jobbers here, but the more fascinating part is...well just pick something. I'm still trying to figure out the crowd situation, which is far more interesting than the wrestling itself.

The replay shows that Lynn's face and head never came close to touching the mat. Greg: "He may have a broken neck!"

Post match Eric Bischoff (with huge hair) talks to Johnny and the Crew (great band name) who just talk about how awesome they are. Only Bischoff mentions the team concept, and the fact that the Crew is on Larry Zbyszko's (unnamed) team. No word on who Lynn and Rice play for.

The announcers think that the Crew is destined for one thing: the Tag Team Titles. Not winning points or anything related to the Series, but the titles, which may or may not be a part of the Series. You know what is part of the Series? Of course not, because we still haven't been told about it nearly fifteen minutes in.

Slaughter explains what sounds like the main event, which is an over the top rope challenge, called a King of the Hill match. DeBeers better win tonight or he's going to disgrace America. Note that DeBeers is from South Africa.

DeBeers, standing in front of a flag which isn't from South Africa, talks about being in the South African military and says that while he hasn't lost a war, he's had some casualties. From now on, Slaughter needs to communicate through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Tonight, he's winning for South Africa.

The announcers FINALLY tell us something about the Series: the teams were picked at random. And we move on to Beverly Hills.

We get a foxy boxing match (meaning women basically in lingerie boxing) with a ring surrounded by women in actual lingerie. The Blonde Bomber jumps Slaughterhouse Sean before the bell as we hear about their managers. The camera goes to alternating first person views as round one ends. Apparently the beating continues, though we're looking at the Bomber's manager Mustang Sally instead.

Ralph actually explains the rules here, even as the Bomber jumps Sean from behind and puts on a chinlock. A snap suplex gets two and the referee tells her to put the gloves back on. Sean blocks a kick in the corner and hits a heck of a right hand to knock the Bomber silly as round two ends.

The third and final (thank goodness...maybe) round begins with Sally choking Sean from the apron, losing her shirt, and coming in for a backbreaker. They punch each other and it's a double knockdown with Sean beating the count to win. From what I can tell, this has nothing to do with the Series, but it was some weird MMA predecessor with managers doing bad run-ins as a bonus. In other words, this was hilarious and amazing.

Greg explains the rules and concept of the whole thing, which makes enough sense, assuming you forgive this explanation coming over halfway through the whole show.

And here are the standings:

Larry's Legends – 16

Baron's Blitzers – 15

Sarge's Snipers – 13

Of course there have already been 44 points given out when we haven't seen an actual match on the pilot yet. From what I can find, the Series started on October 1. This video is dated October 23, so assuming a point a match (and we have to assume since we haven't been told anything otherwise), there have been an average of two matches a day, every day, since the thing took place. Also, this would suggest that it's a TV show, because you probably wouldn't put "current" standings on a home video release. Then again I have no reason to believe that any matches have actually taken place at this point so who knows.

Just to make it even more confusing, Diamond says this is the beginning of the Series and he's in the first match. So yeah, there are just points for the teams despite the Series not even starting yet. This just keeps

getting better and better.

Paul Diamond vs. Colonel DeBeers

Over the top rope challenge. It should be noted that during the entrances with the fake crowds, the wrestlers are turning to the left and walking into the people, just in case you thought they might be real you see. Ralph: "We are watching this with you, live from satellite base. From sea to shining sea, in sports bars and in your homes. This is the new AWA. Ralph Strangis and Greg Gagne ringside." They can't even go three sentences without screwing something up!

Also, if this is possibly released on home video (which makes sense if this is the first match), then how are they supposed to be watching it at a bar? And are these all bars in the Minnesota area? Or is it like some worldwide watch party where everyone got a pre-release copy of this tape and they're all watching it together?

The bigger DeBeers shoulders him down to start but gets caught in a flying headscissors. Diamond misses a crossbody in the corner though and DeBeers tries to get him out, showing some actual thinking here for the first time on this whole thing. A dropkick grazes DeBeers and we look at the slow motion replay to prove how badly it missed. DeBeers snapmares him down and hits a top rope headbutt, followed by a kick to the ribs to knock him over the top and out to the apron.

Another headbutt misses and we take a slow motion look at DeBeers going face first into the buckle. Some right hands get DeBeers out of trouble and we crank up the crowd noise again. DeBeers rolls outside (legal) and drives some elbows into the chest before heading back inside. A piledriver is reversed into a backdrop though and Diamond gets the win for...some to be announced amount of points at 5:49.

Rating: D. Again, it's not even the worst wrestling ever. DeBeers and Diamond are talented enough guys that they could work a completely watchable match. This was fine for what it was, even with a little drama on some of the near tosses. It's just everything else thrown in there leaves you with so many questions.

Sgt. Slaughter vs. The Terminator

I believe the Terminator is Marcus Laurinaitis, Animal and Johnny Ace's brother. The ring is heavily mic'd here so we're getting a lot of extra trash talk, somehow with no swearing included. It's so weird seeing Slaughter with hair. Slaughter hits a forearm to the chest and we see it in SLOW MOTION WITH MIC'D UP SOUND!!! I CAN'T HANDLE THIS MUCH TECHNOLOGY! They demand that the other show them toughness so Slaughter drop toeholds him down into a headlock.

Back up and a better than expected crossbody gives Slaughter two and he wants to hear it from the fans. This includes kids, who are always welcome at sports bars. Terminator can't slam Slaughter, who falls onto him for two. Back up and some rakes to the eyes have Slaughter in trouble, followed by a ram into the post. It doesn't last long though as Slaughter hits a backdrop and a dropkick to the shoulder. The Slaughter Cannon (middle rope clothesline) allows Slaughter to play to the non-existent crowd (I get the idea but...come on.) and the Cobra Clutch gives Slaughter the win at 6:38.

Rating: D. It's not like the match was much worse than the others, but that whole playing to the non-existent crowd was a bit too much. Slaughter was probably the biggest star in the promotion at this point and it makes sense to feature him on...whatever this is actually supposed to be.

Post match Slaughter...doesn't really have anything to say.

We get a quick preview for next week (Again, video or not?), including a very young Yokozuna, to wrap things up.

Overall Rating: A+. This was incredible, with everything going wrong in every possible way and turning the whole thing into one of the most amazing things I've ever seen. It didn't make sense, the wrestling was crazy, and the entire show was such a blast to watch. It was the kind of thing that you have to see to believe and it's absolutely incredible in a train wreck sense.

Normally I would list off a bunch of stuff that they did wrong here but

there isn't enough space to do that justice. This was a perfect storm of awful as the AWA continues to have no idea how to get out of the downward spiral they were in. The company was long past the point where they should have pulled the plug and instead we get a show where Slow Motion is the next big thing in wrestling technology.

Really, this is something that you need to see to believe because words can't do it justice. Just watch it for a few minutes and see if you can look away. The entire concept was a mess in the first place and then there's...whatever you want to call this thing. It's such an incredible spectacle and one of the few things that ever had me nearly speechless. Go out of your way to check this out and just have a good time with how insane the thing really is.

Here's the show on the Network. You owe yourself this one.

<http://network.wwe.com/video/v2518758883>

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