

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1989: We're Not Quite There Yet



IMG Credit: WWE

Royal Rumble 1989

Date: January 15, 1989

Location: The Summit, Houston, Texas

Attendance: 19,000

Commentators: Gorilla Monsoon, Jesse Ventura

This is the first PPV version of the show and things have changed a lot. Tonight, everyone is in the match and they're focusing more on the idea of every man being for himself. The match wouldn't be worth anything for a few more years but things should be a little bit stronger tonight as they have a better idea what they're doing. Let's get to it.

We start off with a listing of presumably everyone in the Rumble tonight. If not then it's at least most of them.

Dino Bravo/Fabulous Rougeaus vs. Jim Duggan/Hart Foundation

2/3 falls here. Anvil vs. Bravo gets things going and they collide a few times with no one going anywhere. Both guys miss elbows and it's off to Duggan for a BIG reaction. Ray Rougeau comes in and is immediately slammed down and hit by a knee drop. Hart comes in to a small but audible reaction and gets two each off a small package and a sunset flip. Jacques

comes in and things break down a bit with all three heels being caught in one corner where Anvil drives shoulders into them, crushing Ray against the corner under two other guys.

Ray FINALLY gets something in by low bridging Bret to send him to the floor. At the end of the day, when you need someone to sell something you call on Bret. Dino's side suplex puts Bret down and The Rougeau Bomb gets the first fall. Bret and Ray start things off in the second fall with Hart in big trouble. Jacques comes in and sends Bret into the corner for the traditional chest first bump in the corner which gives Dino two.

Bravo puts on a bear hug for a bit before it's back to Jacques. A sunset flip gives Bret a quick breather but he's immediately put in a camel clutch. Anvil makes the save but as he's being put back in the corner, Ray comes in and puts the same hold back on. That's good stuff there. The heels take turns working over Bret until Jacques puts on a Boston Crab. Gorilla wants Duggan or Neidhart to come in and break the hold up, because you've got five seconds. I love the hypocrisy you would get from him at times.

Bret breaks the hold and tags in Anvil but the referee didn't see it. That's such a basic spot but you don't see it much anymore. Ray puts on an abdominal stretch before it's off to Jacques for the exact same hold. Bret FINALLY hits an atomic drop to break up the momentum and there's the white hot tag to Duggan. Anvil hits a slingshot shoulder on Ray and a Duggan elbow drop ties the match up at a fall apiece.

Duggan pounds on Ray to start before going to the wrong corner to try to beat up both guys. Bravo hammers away a bit but rams Duggan's head into the buckle for no effect at all. Duggan gets punched over into the corner and there's the tag to Hart. Everything breaks down and Duggan hits Bravo with the board to give Hart the pin.

Rating: C. This was fine but Duggan's reactions are amazing. The guy was probably the third most over guy in the company at this point, which is covering a lot of ground given how over some of the guys were in 1989. This was fine for an opener but the ending was never quite in doubt, which is ok.

We get a clip of some people pulling their numbers earlier. DiBiase isn't thrilled at all and immediately goes to find Slick to work out a deal of some kind. These segments need to come back, if nothing else to try to make us believe the numbers are random. The Bushwhackers are happy with their numbers but they trade anyway. Honky is mad about his number. Bad News says his is good news. Demolition seems annoyed. Jake...you can't tell emotion from him anyway. The Rockers don't seem to hate theirs.

It's time for the Super Posedown, which is exactly that: Ultimate Warrior and Rick Rude posing against each other to further their feud. Warrior is IC Champion here and man alive if this happened on a PPV today the fans would likely riot. Well not riot but boo heavily at least. Heenan actually sucks up to the fans because it's decided by fan vote. Again, the ending here isn't exactly in doubt. This goes on WAY too long, as it's just posing and people booing/cheering depending on who is posing. Rude finally attacks Warrior with a bar and bails. Warrior chases after him and that's it. This somehow took nearly fifteen minutes.

Womens' Title: Judy Martin vs. Rockin Robin

Robin is defending and is Jake Roberts' real life half sister. Sherri is in the ring and wants the title shot at the winner of this. Martin misses a charge and Sherri sits in on commentary. They pound on each other and it's clear that they're not incredibly skilled in the ring. Martin slams her down and blocks a sunset flip with a punch to the head. Robin puts on a Boston Crab as this is going nowhere.

Martin blocks an O'Connor Roll as Sherri complains about not getting a rematch yet. Gorilla talks about the process you have to go through to get a rematch, which is a nice sounding idea when you think about all the automatic title rematches you get today. Imagine that: EARNING a title match. Something resembling a DDT gets two on Martin but Robin misses an elbow drop. Martin misses one also but a backslide gets two for Judy. Robin kicks her in the face for two and gets the same off a small package. Sherri: "Come on somebody win." Robin goes to the middle rope, fakes Martin out, and cross bodies her to retain.

Rating: D. Nothing to see here but the ending wasn't bad. The Women's

Title would be retired about 13 months later and wouldn't be restored until about 1993. At the end of the day, no one cares about womens wrestling other than for how small their outfits are. Robin and Martin aren't exactly eye candy either, so this didn't do much for anyone. At least it was short though.

Slick says the Twin Towers (Boss Man and Akeem) are probably winners of the Rumble but denies knowing anything about shenanigans with DiBiase. Sean Mooney has footage (the original Vickie Guerrer) of Slick and DiBiase together and suddenly Slick realizes he misunderstood Mooney the first time. He has no comment though.

Rude runs his mouth a bit about beating Warrior. This must be intermission.

Yep, it's intermission as we get promos from a few managers, saying their guys are going to win. Nothing to see here but we hear from Fuji (representing the Powers of Pain), Liz (Mega Powers) and Jimmy Hart (Honky Tonk Man and Greg Valentine). Like I said, nothing to see here.

Jesse is sitting on the throne that will go to either Haku or Race. He thinks he might just run for King because the chair is comfortable.

King Haku vs. Harley Race

Race was King but got hurt and the crown went to Haku. This is his chance to get it back in a one time only return to the ring. Harley shoves over Haku's throne to start and the brawl is on. You know Race is going to be the brawler in this. Back in and Race pounds away before suplexing Haku down for two. Heenan manages both guys here but Race is kind of the face by default.

They head to the floor again with Race being sent into the post and chopped a few times. Haku sends him back to the floor after a few seconds in the ring as we stall for a few moments. More chops have Race in trouble as Jesse talks about Hogan injuring Race, which is only kind of true. Race no sells a headbutt and gets two off a piledriver. They collide again and Race falls to the floor as Heenan plays both sides, saying he's for both guys when the other is out of earshot.

Back in and Race punches some more before getting two off a suplex. Haku gets sent to the floor again as it's pretty clear there's not much to this match. Race tries to piledrive Haku on the floor but gets backdropped as is the usual. A second attempt at a piledriver works but not incredibly well. Back in and a clothesline puts Haku down for two but Haku comes back and misses a top rope headbutt. Race misses a headbutt of his own and charges into the superkick from Haku (looked GREAT) for the pin to keep the crown in Tonga or wherever he's from.

Rating: D+. This wasn't terrible and the ending kick looked awesome, but other than that there wasn't much to see here. Race was clearly old and banged up and he didn't have a lot to work with in the form of Haku. The crown was mostly a minor title that was only somewhat official. Nothing to see here, but no one cares about anything but the Rumble tonight anyway.

Time for more Rumble promos, with Beefcake, Greg Valentine (both of whom say they just need their fists), the Powers of Pain (Fuji does the talking for them), Big John Studd (freshly back in the company), Mr. Perfect (pretty new at this point) and Savage (insane of course).

DiBiase is much happier about his number now.

Heenan says the Family (Brainbusters and Andre) is ready and Andre says he'll throw them out if he has to. Arn whispers to Tully when Andre isn't looking because Arn Anderson is more awesome than you.

Hogan gives his usual promo with the focus on Boss Man and Akeem this time.

Royal Rumble

The entrants are every two minutes, allegedly. #1 is Ax and #2 is Smash, beginning a tradition of having partners fight at the beginning of these matches. They immediately pound on each other and amazingly enough, they actually sell the offense. It's a bunch of clotheslines and punches, but the key to Demolition has always been how HARD they hit each other, which is what you get a lot of here. In at #3 is Andre, which gives us one heck of a handicap match.

Demolition immediately hits a double clothesline on Andre and start demolishing him to a BIG pop. Andre is way past being past his prime here but this is still cool to see. Here's Mr. Perfect at #4 and he strolls down the aisle, which is pretty wise for him. Andre starts fighting Demolition off and for some reason this turns into a tag match. Andre easily throws out Smash, resulting in a 2-1 attack on Andre.

The Giant fights them off and Perfect sells a headbutt as only Mr. Perfect can. Here's Ronnie Garvin at #5 and they get Andre tied up in the ropes. The Giant breaks free and beats up Ax while Garvin and Hennig fight a bit. Andre shifts over to beat up Perfect, giving us some more awesome overselling. Greg Valentine is in at #6 to make it 4-1 against Andre. AGAIN Andre is all like BRING IT ON and knocks them away, eliminating Garvin in the process.

Andre chokes Valentine in the corner while Ax and Perfect continue their rather uninteresting fight. Andre starts choking Ax and the look on his face is eerie. Jake Roberts is #7 and Andre immediately pounds him down. Nothing of note happens for two minutes so here's Ron Bass at #8 as Jake gets eliminated by Andre. Shawn Michaels is in at #9, giving us Ax, Perfect, Andre, Bass, Valentine and Michaels. As I type that, Perfect knocks out Ax.

Perfect throws Shawn over the top rope but some skinning the cat brings him back in. Shawn dropkicks Perfect to the apron as we get into a sell-off. #10 is Butch who gets a big pop of his own. As Butch gets in, here's Jake Roberts again with the snake to scare Andre out of the match. The fans look at something, presumably Jake and Andre in the aisle, as things settle down a lot. It's Honky Tonk Man at #11 as things are in that annoying slow period of most Rumbles.

Tito Santana is in at #12 to finally balance the heel/face ratio out a bit. There's almost nothing going on here other than the energy burst you get from the new guys coming in. Bass hits a good backdrop on Michaels as Santana barely survives an attack from Valentine. Bad News Brown is #13 and Butch and Santana (there's a pairing for you) dump Honky. Butch gets beaten up and Shawn goes up top to jump on Bad News and Bass. Marty Jannetty is #14 and the Rockers double dropkick Bass out.

Tito kills Valentine with the forearm and world champion Randy Savage is #15. NOW the place wakes up as he hammers away on Bad News. Perfect and Savage go at it in a match that would have the purists drooling. Speaking of making purists drool, Arn Anderson is #16. Savage dumps Valentine as Shawn fights Arn. Savage...saves Anderson and eliminates Shawn? Now there's one I didn't expect. To recap, we've got Marty, Anderson, Butch, Brown, Savage, Santana and Perfect in there at the moment. That's quite the lineup for the most part.

Tully Blanchard makes the lineup even stronger at #17. Just to be clear, that's two tag teams getting back to back numbers. Gee, what are the odds? The Brainbusters double team Marty as we're just waiting for Hogan at this point. And here he is at #18. There goes Perfect, giving him the new Iron Man record at just under 28:00. Off camera, Savage and the Busters put Santana out as Hulk beats up Brown. Hogan fights off all three heels as Savage beats on Butch. Nice partner, especially after Hogan saved Savage when he got to the ring.

Here's Luke at #19 as things slow down again. Butch gets thrown out after a remarkable 18 minutes. Hogan hot shots Blanchard but has to beat up Luke instead of eliminating Tully. After a brief lull, here's Koko B. Ware at #20. After more of that epic Hulk vs. Luke showdown, Arn goes up top and is immediately slammed down by Hogan. Dude, you're best friends with RIC FLAIR. Why would you think that's smart? Hogan dumps Koko and Luke but gets double teamed by the Busters.

Warlord is #20 and Hogan clotheslines both Busters out at the same time. Warlord poses on the apron, gets in, and is clotheslined out in 2 seconds flat, setting a record that would last 20 years. Hogan also dumps Bad News, but it takes out Savage in the process which adds even more fuel to the Mega Powers Exploding in less than a month. Liz comes in to play peacemaker and the Powers shake hands.

Now we get the big showdown of the match as Big Boss Man is #21 and gets to face Hogan one on one. This is when Boss Man weighed like 400lbs and was just freaking fat. Hulk slams Boss Man down and pounds away in the corner but falls victim to a splash. A piledriver puts Hulk down and Boss Man stands tall. Gorilla says Hogan has been out there for half an hour

(it's been about 8 or 9 minutes) and Jesse is hilarious in freaking out.

To give us the third team back to back in this Rumble, #22 is Akeem. Hogan rams them together and slams Akeem but the numbers catch up with Hogan. After a brief comeback, a double splash crushes Hogan and he's easily tossed. Hogan, ever the jerk, pulls Boss Man out and beats on him, which is apparently an elimination. Beefcake is #23, which means we just missed what could have been a good house show tag match.

Hogan and Boss Man brawl to the back as we get to the pretty dull third act of the Rumble. Red Rooster is #24 and helps double team Akeem a bit. They try to dump Akeem but Barbarian comes in at #25 and breaks it up. Gorilla: "That was kind of stupid." Taylor and Akeem pair off, as do Barbarian and Beefcake and the heels take over. Akeem crushes the Rooster (Terry Taylor in case you're some young kid) and here's Big John Studd at #27.

Nothing of note happens there so here's Hercules at #28. Again nothing happens so Rick Martel is #29. He goes right for Akeem but Studd shoves him away because Akeem is his big piece of chicken tonight. DiBiase is of course #30, giving us DiBiase, Akeem, Hercules, Beefcake, Studd, Barbarian, Rooster and Martel. Jesse and Gorilla have a debate about what a manager is as DiBiase throws out the Rooster to get us down to seven.

DiBiase and Barbarian team up to put out Hercules and Beefcake, leaving us with five. This last part isn't quite death for the match but it's certainly a bad sickness. Martel puts out the Barbarian to give us a final four. Akeem misses a splash on Martel in the corner and Rick fires off some dropkicks to no avail.

A cross body is caught and Akeem dumps Martel to get us down to Studd, Akeem and DiBiase. Akeem pounds on Studd as DiBiase gives instructions. Studd pulls Ted in front of a splash and dumps Akeem to get us down to two. DiBiase offers money but Studd shakes a finger at him. Studd actually fires off some suplexes to the shock of Monsoon. The elimination is academic and Studd wins.

Rating: C-. The last third REALLY hurts this. It's not that it's bad but after Hogan leaves you could almost hear a pin fall. Ha I made a

wrestling joke. Also, John Studd? Really? They've got all those guys in there and they pick Studd to win? After Wrestlemania the guy was pretty much gone and I don't think there was ever a clear reason for Studd winning given, other than they thought he was going to be a big deal. It's just an odd pick and one that hindsight doesn't look kindly on. Anyway not a terrible match but the booking hurts it.

Savage reassures himself that he's still great. You can hear the paranoia and see the heel turn coming if you look hard enough.

Jesse and Gorilla wrap things up.

Overall Rating: D+. I can't say this was a bad show because nothing on here is truly terrible, but it's certainly not good either. This is very characteristic of the late 80s as other than Hogan and Savage, the stories were very limited at best. They were trying though and that's something you can't fake. Not a terrible show, but it's nothing more than a moment \for the most part.

Ratings Comparison

Jim Duggan/Hart Foundation vs. Dino Bravo/Fabulous Rougeaus

Original: C+

Redo: C

Rockin' Robin vs. Judy Martin

Original: C-

Redo: D

King Haku vs. Harley Race

Original: C

Redo: D+

Royal Rumble

Original: C+

Redo: C-

Overall Rating

Original: C-

Redo: D+

About the same again. That's interesting compared to what happened with the Survivor Series Redos.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/08/royal-rumble-count-up-1989/>

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