

Hidden Gems Collection #8 (12 Days Of Hidden Gems Part 2): An Acquired Taste I Never Acquired



IMG Credit: WWE

Hidden Gems #8

Date: 1981, 1982, 1983

This is part two of the 12 Days of Hidden Gems, meaning we're going to be seeing another three events. The first batch wasn't all that great but at least they gave us some Christmas stuff instead of some random shows that have nothing to do with the season. I'm not sure what to expect here but maybe it can be fun. Let's get to it.

AWA House Show

Date: December 25, 1982

Location: St. Paul Civic Center, St. Paul, Minnesota

Attendance: 13,000

Commentator: Rod Trongard

Baron Von Raschke vs. Sgt. Jacques Goulet

Curt Hennig is guest referee here and of course that's Rene. Joined in progress with Baron in trouble thanks to an apparent foreign object shot. Hennig pulls Goulet off of Baron in the ropes so we hit the chinlock instead. An elbow to the face gets two and it's off to a rather weak chinlock. It's like he's just laying his arm over Raschke's throat instead of actually putting on any pressure.

Raschke fights up and avoids a charge in the corner but takes too long posing. That's enough for Goulet to take him down for a stomp which seemed to be low. Back up and the bearhug keeps Baron in trouble until a dropkick knocks him down. A standing chinlock (called the Scorpion) has Raschke down as we hit the ten minute mark.

The hold has been on for over two minutes now until Goulet covers for two, likely out of boredom. Goulet puts it right back on with Raschke starting to shake on the mat ala Hogan. The comeback is FINALLY on and Raschke grabs the Claw until Goulet heads to the apron for a break. Raschke pulls him back in and gets a small package for the pin at 11:52 shown.

Rating: F. This was HORRIBLE as it just kept going with lame holds and nothing that could possibly be considered interesting or good. I know Raschke is famous for his promos and had some great charisma for his character but the match was a disaster with neither guy being interested or seemingly trying whatsoever. Terrible match and something I never want to see again.

Steve Olsonoski vs. Ken Patera

Joined in progress again with Steve working on the arm as we're told it's

five minutes in. Patera shrugs the hold off and throws it outside for a forearm to the chest. Back in and Steve sends Patera outside for a change. Not a big change mind you but still a change. Patera's arm gets wrapped around the post as this one is already far more energetic than anything in the first match. Back in again and Patera uses the good arm to elbow Steve down and it's off to a bearhug.

Steve finally smacks Patera around the ears to break it up The comeback is on with a whip into the corner and some right hands to send Patera to the apron. They fight on the floor with an atomic drop (called a piledriver) knocking Patera silly. It's not silly enough to get a countout though as Patera gets back in and hits a quick suplex for a breather.

Steve is fine enough to grab a sunset flip for two but Patera keeps coming at him. A back elbow to the jaw gives Steve two more, followed by a backbreaker and neckbreaker. Steve goes aerial with a middle rope elbow for two more but Patera grabs the rope to block a neckbreaker. Another elbow drop (they like elbows around here) with feet on the ropes gives Patera a delayed pin at 10:15 shown. That's quite the busy finish.

Rating: C+. Very nice match here as Patera was a good villain and Steve was pretty underrated as I've only heard his name in passing but he did quite well here. There's nothing wrong with seeing a match that you haven't seen before and having it turn out to be good. A hidden gem you might say.

Post match Steve protests to no avail.

Rick Martel vs. Bobby Heenan

Joined in progress again, which is all you get around here. Martel has been chasing the World Title held by Nick Bockwinkel, managed by Heenan, so I think you get the idea. Martel stomps on the downed Heenan until Bobby uses some kind of substance to blind him. The chinlock slows Martel down until a hiptoss takes Heenan over, though Martel still can't see. He's fine enough to avoid a charge in the corner and there's a knee to the rather inner thigh.

The referee breaks it up so it's foreign object time as Martel is blinded again. Heenan stomps and knees away but Martel hits a crossbody to take over again. Another crossbody connects but Heenan manages to throw him outside for a necessary breather. Heenan poses until Martel comes back in to send him into the corner a few times. A dropkick to the back sends Heenan shoulder first into the post to give Martel the pin at 7:35 shown.

Rating: C. This is one where you have to consider the situation. The match was a manager vs. a hot young face and there was no reason for it to be anything other than what it was. Martel was someone they clearly wanted to push but since it was the AWA, he wouldn't get the World Title for over a year. As usual though, just watch Heenan and get a lesson in what he could do at any given time. This was a lot of fun, though not a great match by any means.

Since the Network is weird, the next two matches are from the Christmas night show the previous year yet still labeled as 1982.

AWA House Show

Date: December 25, 1981

Location: St. Paul Civic Center, St. Paul, Minnesota

Commentator: Rodger Kent

AWA World Title: Nick Bockwinkel vs. Billy Robinson

Robinson, a legendary shooter/grappler from England, is challenging and we're joined in progress with him grabbing a headlock. That one stays on for a long time so Heenan tries to break things up, earning himself a stern lecture from the referee. What a ham and egger. It's right back to the headlock as we're over three minutes in with almost nothing else. It goes off to a facelock and Bockwinkel finally makes the rope. Some consultation from Heenan tells Nick to go back inside and walk around a bit and then try a test of strength.

Robinson is way too smart for that and takes him down with a crazy set of spins into a leg snap. In other words, it's time for more coaching from Heenan. Back in and Robinson slips out of a headlock into another one of

his own as this guy is just awesome to watch. Bockwinkel tries a hiptoss but Robinson cartwheels away from him as the frustration is getting worse every time. A hiptoss (with Robinson flipping over as well) hurts Robinson's shoulder though and Heenan is ecstatic over having a chance like this.

The champ sends him outside and keeps Robinson from getting back inside with some kicks through the ropes. Back in and Robinson starts on the arm with a hammerlock as we hit fifteen minutes in. That's switched to an armbar as the fans chant something I can't understand. This one stays on for a long time as well, though at least it makes sense this time around. Robinson reverses into one of his own and cranks on both arms (like the start of a butterfly suplex) until Nick sends him outside.

Back in and Robinson sits him down for a splash to the back (that's a new one) for two, followed by a backbreaker for the same. Bockwinkel gets the sleeper but Robinson climbs the ropes and kicks back for the pin at 16:25 shown, though Bockwinkel's shoulder was up while Robinsons' were down. Fair enough, and far better than a reversed decision.

Rating: B. Long holds aside, this was a lot of fun with Robinson being as entertaining of a guy as you can find. I love that British style with all of the escapes and painful looking holds, which is why someone like Zack Sabre Jr. works so well today. Bockwinkel was more than good enough to hang with him, but there's a reason that Robinson is so revered by fans today. I could easily go for more of him as this was awesome stuff.

Hulk Hogan/Tito Santana vs. Ken Patera/Bobby Duncum

....WHERE HAS THIS BEEN ALL MY LIFE??? Heenan is here with the villains. We're joined in progress again with Hogan (who has hit the promotion like a bomb) working on Duncum's arm and dropping the leg on it to really do some damage. It's off to Tito to stay on the arm and the switching continues as Hogan works on an armbar. Tito works on one of his own and the fans are WAY into this, even as Hogan and Santana switch without tags.

The threat of Patera coming in gets Hogan's attention and Heenan telling Patera to get in there. A big shove sends Patera into the corner and it's

time for the back and forth right hands between Santana and Hogan. Duncum's cheap shot from the apron finally slows Santana down and the villains take over as the fans chant for Tito (I'd have bet on WEASEL).

Hogan, ever the impatient one, gets tired of waiting on the apron and comes in to punch Duncum but it's not enough for the hot tag. Santana fights out of a double gutbuster attempt and Hogan comes in again, acting as heelish as you can get while being the monster face. Patera grabs the bearhug to keep Santana in trouble (Kent: "Taggus Interruptus.") and things slow right back down again. Duncum's backbreaker keeps Tito down but he makes the fired up comeback (he was GREAT at that) and tags Hogan back in to a roar.

Everything breaks down and Hogan slams Patera to set up the rapid elbows. Santana is already back in for a dropkick before Hogan comes back in to drop a leg on Patera's leg. Dude I know Hiro Matsuda taught you about breaking legs but that's too far. Heenan gets on the apron for a distraction and Hogan goes after him, leaving Tito to take a beating. What a great partner. Hogan throws Patera over the top and that's a DQ at 11:04 shown.

Rating: B-. My goodness Hogan and Santana should have been the house show tag team of the decade in the WWF. That's as good and natural of a dynamic as you'll ever see and Hogan trying to speak Spanish could have been gloriously bad. I'm not sure why you can't have the villains take a fall on a show this big but at least Hogan and Santana got to give us a little taste of greatness.

Hogan and Santana clean house to wrap things up.

And now we move on to a completely different style from 1983, which could be rather entertaining.

Mid-South Wrestling House Show

Date: December 25, 1983

Location: Municipal Auditorium, New Orleans, Louisiana

Jim Duggan vs. Krusher Darsow

This is a weird setup with no commentary and the camera from a corner instead of the side of the ring. Darsow is of course Barry Darsow (Smash/Repo Man) and Duggan is a king around here. Darsow takes his sweet time with the Soviet flag but uses the distraction to jump Duggan. That just earns him an atomic drop but it's too early for the three point clothesline as Darsow bails to the floor to keep things hot.

Back in Duggan kicks him in the face as Darsow isn't sure what to do. A running forearm drops Darsow again and it's time for another break on the floor. Back in again and Duggan hits a slam with no trouble, followed by a hammerlock for more technical wrestling than I've ever seen from him. Duggan picks him up and they slug it out with Darsow going down so the armbar can continue.

Back up and Darsow gets in a few shots to the ribs to take over. Since he's a Russian here, we hit the bearhug. Duggan punches his way out (JR would call those American right hands) but a Russian right hand takes him down instead. It's right back to the bearhug, because that's the Russian way. Duggan fights out again, only to miss the running knee so Darsow can continue the lumbering offense.

The third bearhug goes on because that's how things roll with foreign heels in 1983. Duggan throws him off and avoids a charge in the corner but a collision gives us a double knockdown. The big right hands have Darsow in more trouble but the referee (probably a commie) pulls Duggan off. Duggan drops a knee and hammers away as Dawson is busted open. Tired of the interfering referee, Duggan sits him on top and punches away even more at Darsow. The referee gets bumped so here's Nikolai Volkoff to jump Duggan and it's a countout at 17:44.

Rating: C-. This one is going to depend quite a bit on your tastes as you may not care for the old fashioned America vs. evil foreign menace formula. I grew up on it though and Duggan did it as well as almost anyone else. This wasn't exactly a great match but at least they did something that was going to keep the crowd going and advance the story, which is all you can hope for out of something like this.

Tag Team Titles: Jim Neidhart/Butch Reed vs. Magnum TA/Mr. Wrestling II

Neidhart and Reed are defending in a cage. Magnum punches Reed into the corner so it's quickly off to Neidhart for a test of strength. Surprisingly enough Magnum beats a guy who tossed anvils around so it's back to Reed for a shot to the face. The crowd is eating this up as Magnum sends him into the corner for a flip upside down and a rather delayed one count. Wrestling comes in for a headlock takeover before knocking Reed over to the corner.

Neidhart and Reed drop to the floor between a gap between the ring and the cage, which you can't see from the wide shot so it was quite surprising. Magnum comes back in with another headlock takeover on Reed as this is more a regular match with a cage around it than a cage match so far. A rather hard forearm turns Reed upside down against the ropes so it's back to Neidhart to try his luck.

Since just one isn't a challenge, Magnum fights off both champs at once until a missed charge sends him into the cage and out to the floor. The champs cheat behind the referee's back (In a cage match?) and send Magnum into the cage again. Magnum gets thrown outside again as we hit the ten minute mark. Back in and Magnum does some dodging, which is finally enough to bring in Wrestling II to one of the loudest ovations you'll hear in a long time.

A trip from Neidhart brings him down though and Reed goes with the choking. The double teaming in the corner has Magnum so upset that he politely stays in his own corner watching his partner get dismantled. Neidhart's front facelock keeps Wrestling in trouble until he whips Neidhart into the corner.

Instead of tagging like a sane person though, he goes after Reed and gets blasted with a top rope shoulder. Reed drops a fist for two as he picks the cover up, which can't possibly end well. Neidhart comes back in and rips off the mask revealing...another mask. Since Neidhart doesn't look down, it's Magnum coming in and hitting the belly to belly for the pin and the titles at 16:50.

Rating: B-. Now that's a big more like it. This was a very energetic match at times, though some of the stuff with Magnum just standing there

IN A CAGE MATCH is certainly one of those things that is different depending on the promotion you happen to be in. The point of this was the ending with the cool moment of the double masks and the title change.

Back to Minnesota because the Network loves itself some AWA.

AWA House Show

Date: December 25, 1983

Location: St. Paul Civic Center, St. Paul, Minnesota

Attendance: 18,000

Commentator: Ron Trongard

Brad Rheingans vs. Billy Robinson

Rheingans was an Olympic wrestler. Joined in progress as they fight over a top wristlock until a very hard elbow to the face sends Robinson outside. Back in and Rheingans grabs a headlock takeover, which the fans deem boring. If they don't like that, they're really not going to like it when Robinson fights up and gets taken down into the same hold a second time. Robinson gets to his feet to escape as we hit the ten minute mark after seeing about three and a half minutes. It's always nice to have some clarification like that.

A headscissors keeps Robinson in trouble but he gets out of a sunset flip to finally get a breather. Robinson's neckbreaker gets two and it's off to a chinlock on Rheingans for a real change. We get the rare rope break to get out of a chinlock so it's another neckbreaker into another chinlock for another rope break. Maybe it's not so rare. The neck crank keeps Rheingans on the mat as the BORING chants get louder.

Back up and they slug it out, which amazingly gets rid of the chants in a hurry. Robinson gets knocked outside and let's pause for a much needed breather with five minutes left. Back in and they grapple on the mat for some near falls from Robinson as we hit four minutes. A headbutt to Robinson's ribs sets up...nothing actually as Robinson grabs the ropes to slow things down again.

Three minutes left as Rheingans hits a neckbreaker of his own for two. An atomic drop gets the same and we have two minutes left. Some armdrags and a slam give Rheingans two more and the fans are loudly booing, likely knowing what's coming. The powerslam gets two more with less than a minute to go. They slug it out as time expires at 13:30 shown.

Rating: C-. This took some time to get going as the first third or even half was downright boring with one chinlock after another. You can talk about logic and workrate all you want but that kind of stuff isn't entertaining and never has been. Now after that was over and they started to go for the win, the match got a lot better in a hurry and while the bigger moves weren't exactly huge, they were certainly better than what we were getting and it felt like two guys who were evenly matched. The full version sounds dreadful but what we got was fine enough.

Post match they stare each other down but tentatively shake hands.

Jesse Ventura vs. Steve Olsonoski

Joined in progress with Jesse slapping on a chinlock. Steve fights up so Ventura claims a pull of the (limited) hair, allowing him to pull Steve's hair instead. That's exactly what you would expect from him here. The chinlock stays on as we're now two and a half minutes into the match. The hold is finally broken at around the three minute mark and a crossbody (called a flying bodyslam by Trongard) gives Steve two. A dropkick gets the same and a slam sends Ventura outside for a breather.

Back in and they stare each other down a bit until Jesse kicks him to the floor without much effort. Ventura won't let him get back in, likely afraid of having to do all that much. That's fine with Steve, who sweeps the leg and wraps it around the post. Back in again and it's an airplane spin to put both of them down with Steve slowly getting to the middle rope. The elbow drop misses and Jesse drops a knee to the back, setting up the over the shoulder bodyvice for the tap at 8:33.

Rating: D. It's always kind of depressing to see Jesse in the ring because as incredible of a talker and commentator as he was, he was a nightmare in the ring more often than not. The match was eight and a half minutes with three of that being spent in a chinlock. There's no excuse

for something like that and it's not that uncommon for a Ventura match.

Rick Martel vs. Billy Graham

Graham is in Kung Fu mode, which isn't something you see very often. Joined in progress again with Graham coming back inside to win a test of strength. As Graham can't keep Martel's shoulders down, we actually hear about Graham beating Bruno Sammartino for an unnamed title. I wouldn't have bet on that, just as I wouldn't have bet on Martel fighting back to take over on the test of strength.

Instead Graham grabs the bearhug as we hit the ten minute mark after about four and a half minutes shown. Graham drives him into the corner a few times for two until Martel is back with an atomic drop. A Kung Fu show to the throat has Martel stunned and Graham throws him over the top for the DQ at 6:51 shown.

Rating: D+. Not much to see here other than the historical curiosity of Kung Fu Graham. Martel was on his way to becoming a star around here and it was kind of puzzling to not have him get a win over Graham, who was definitely on the downside of his career. This wasn't great, though it's the second best match on the show this far.

Gene Okerlund (who is not long for the promotion) is in the ring with Blackjack Lanza and talks about a Texas Bunkhouse match coming up in a few weeks. That would be Lanza vs. Bobby Heenan with Lanza explaining the concept of the match, which today would translate to a street fight lumberjack match, but with cowboy gear. For some reason they keep changing directions, which would suggest looking at different parts of the crowd, though the TV CAMERA might be a good place to look. Lanza leaves and Gene mentions that Hulk Hogan will NOT be here tonight, because he's in Japan. Yeah Japan.

High Fliers/Ray Stevens/Baron Von Raschke vs. Jerry Blackwell/Ken Patera/Mr. Saito/Sheik Adnan Al-Kassie

The High Fliers are Greg Gagne/Jim Brunzell, a very successful tag team around here. The Baron is Hogan's replacement, because that's what the fans were clamoring for instead of Hogan: a 43 year old who had been

around for the better part of ever. Joined in progress again with Gagne working on Blackwell's (a huge guy who would become a big star) arm as we're five minutes in.

Stevens (said to be the Ric Flair of the 60s and someone you don't see much from) comes in to face the Sheik but it's Blackwell right back in because Sheik is a bit of a coward. Blackwell headlocks him to no avail and it's off to Raschke for a headlock of his own. Baron can't pick Blackwell up but he's fine enough to avoid a splash and bring Gagne back in. Blackwell knocks him down again though and it's off to Saito for a forearm to the back. The villains start taking turns on Gagne with Saito choking in the corner.

Everything breaks down and absolutely nothing changes, save for the Sheik working on a bearhug instead of Saito. Blackwell's elbow gets two and he drops Gagne back first onto Patera's knee. The fans chant about wanting Hulk, which Trongard acknowledges as the fans chanting. Not what they're chanting mind you, but that they're chanting. Patera grabs a bearhug and gets some near falls before handing it off to Saito.

That means a failed Sharpshooter attempt with Brunzell making a save and getting the tag a few seconds later. Patera has to break up a Figure Four attempt and it's off to Baron to a decidedly non-Hogan level pop. The Claw goes on the Sheik as everything breaks down again. The High Fliers are slingshotted (Slungshot?) in for a double splash onto Sheik for the pin at 10:37 shown.

Rating: C. Definitely the most energetic match shown so far though I wanted to see more from Stevens than we got here. This was a match that would have been helped by knowing more of the extensive history between some of these people, but you would be expected to know that if you were watching it at the time, which is fair enough. Not a very good match, but I'll take some energy over all the chinlocks for a change.

AWA World Title: Nick Bockwinkel vs. Mad Dog Vachon

Vachon, with the Crusher in his corner, is challenging because it's the early 80s and therefore Bockwinkel (with Heenan) must be champion. We're actually NOT joined in progress for a change and get the Big Match

Intros, with the Crusher getting his own introduction. He's billed as returning to St. Paul for the first time in two years, which makes me wonder why he wasn't Hogan's replacement given how special of a reception he received here.

Bockwinkel (the younger of the two here, at 49 compared to Vachon's 54) jumps him to start and gets two off a snapmare. Vachon fights up with some shoulders to the ribs and the overhand chops before just grabbing the champ by the face. The Crusher chases Heenan to one of the bigger reactions of the night and Vachon gets in a microphone shot to the ribs. A neck snap across the top rope and a slam give Vachon two and it's time to bite Nick's leg.

The bitten leg is wrapped around the middle rope and Nick needs a hug from Heenan. Back in and Vachon sends him into the buckle a few times but misses a charge into the post. You know Bockwinkel will know what to do with that but Vachon blocks the piledriver. Vachon's own piledriver gets a very, very close two as Heenan seems to be slightly late coming in off the top for the DQ. Of course the referee raises Vachon's head after what could have been three, with Trongard saying we have a new champion.

Rating: C. The screwy finish was another obvious one because that's how the AWA works. It's really annoying to see time after time and the AWA just never got it. Can you blame so many people and so many fans for leaving after the mess that this company is anymore? They were dying for someone new to break through and Martel would do that in a few months, but why not do it here on a big show?

Post match the brawl is on with Vachon and Crusher cleaning house....and yeah of course it's a DQ and there's no new champion because SCREW YOU! YOU GET NO HOGAN AND YOU GET NO NEW CHAMPION BECAUSE THIS IS THE AWA WHERE WE DO THE SAME THING FOR YEARS AND THEN GO OUT OF BUSINESS BECAUSE WE NEED THE SAME WRESTLERS FROM FIFTEEN YEARS AGO!

Overall Rating: C+. The AWA is definitely something that takes a lot of getting used to and I'm not sure I ever reached that point. I know it's a more grappling based promotion but that doesn't make it the easiest thing to watch. Now, when you get some people in there who can make it into an

art (Robinson and Bockwinkel for example), it can be highly entertaining and that's something like what we got here. The Mid-South stuff is out of left field and not all that great, making this quite the interesting collection all things considered.

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