

Wrestlemania Count-Up – Wrestlemania XIX (2017): One More Shakeup And It's Perfect



IMG Credit: WWE

Wrestlemania XIX

Date: March 30, 2003

Location: Safeco Field, Seattle, Washington

Attendance: 54,097

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole, Tazz

This one is very interesting as the TV leading up to the show has been a cross between boring and really bad, yet the show has one of the best reputations of all time. I'm really curious to see how it goes from such a bad build to such a great show, especially with so much emphasis on Hulk Hogan vs. Vince McMahon. Let's get to it.

Sunday Night Heat: Raw Tag Team Titles: Rob Van Dam/Kane vs. Lance Storm/Chief Morely

Morely and Storm are defending with Morely acting as the new champion due to William Regal being injured. The Dudleys are on the floor in forced servitude to Morely and Eric Bischoff. Van Dam kicks Morely out to the floor to start and it's Kane diving onto the champs for a cool visual as we take a break. Back with the champs in control and Morely grabbing a chinlock. The Blue Thunder Bomb gets two as the announcers rip on Morely. The Money Shot misses and it's off to Kane for the house cleaning.

Storm breaks out of a chokeslam and gets caught in a tilt-a-whirl slam for two. There's the top rope clothesline for two with Morely making the save, only to eat a jumping kick to the face. The chokeslam looks to set up the Five Star but Rob comes inside before jumping to the top. Morely shoves him off, which makes me think there was some mistiming there. The

distraction lets the Dudleys hit a 3D on Storm....and an elbow on Van Dam so the champs can retain the titles.

Rating: D+. That's certainly how you warm a crowd up. If ever there was a time for an easy title change to give the fans something to cheer for, it should have been this right here. When you consider how soon Kane and Van Dam would get the titles anyway, this really seems like a big head scratcher.

The opening video shows wrestlers getting ready with a collection of voiceovers talking about how important this one night really is. This treats the event with a lot more respect and it's quite the effective idea. It shows that everyone is in awe of the event itself and makes it feel even bigger.

And now, the theme song Crack Addict. So much for the respect part.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Matt Hardy

Matt, defending here and accompanied by Shannon Moore, is appearing in his fourth Wrestlemania and often wonders how they did Wrestlemania without him. Mysterio is dressed like Daredevil, starting the awesome tradition of dressing like a superhero (most of the time) at Wrestlemania.

Matt is sent outside early on and Rey busts out a corkscrew dive to take both of them down. Rey can't hit a sunset bomb to the floor so Matt drops him onto the barricade to take over. The Ricochet gets two as Tazz talks about Matt being off the banana juice and moving to tea. The Twist of Fate is countered into a rollup but Matt grabs the Side Effect for two. As Cole talks about loving latex and teabagging (seriously), Matt misses a charge into the post and Rey gets two off a crossbody.

Shannon breaks up the 619 though and now the Twist of Fate gets two. Splash Mountain is loaded up but Rey reverses with a hurricanrana for two more. Shannon makes the save so Rey takes him down before hitting the 619 on Matt. The West Coast Pop is broken up though and Matt grabs a rollup and the rope to retain.

Rating: C+. This was a good choice for an opener as you want something fast paced but don't want to overstay your welcome. They were in and out in less than six minutes, which is pretty close to the sweet spot for an opener. Mysterio winning probably would have been the better option but at least he didn't get the title a week later or something like that.

The Miller Lite Catfight Girls are here. I'm with Lance Storm: it's nonsense that these two got time and the seven minute Tag Team Title match got stuck on Heat.

Nathan Jones was laid out earlier tonight.

Limp Bizkit plays Undertaker to the ring. Again, Tag Team Titles on Heat in a short match but time for this.

Undertaker vs. A-Train/Big Show

A-Train messes with Undertaker's bike on the way to the ring. If I had a dollar for every time a hairy chested man with nipple piercings adjusted the mirror on my motorcycle...well I'd be poor as I don't have a motorcycle but the rest happens more often than you would think. Show tries a sneak attack but gets sent to the floor so Undertaker can chokeslam A-Train for two.

Undertaker actually leapfrogs A-Train and drops him with Old School as they're certainly moving in the early going. A Derailer cuts Undertaker off and Show posts him for good measure. It's off to Show whose chokeslam is countered into a Fujiwara armbar. A-Train's save is countered into a cross armbreaker so Show gets to make a save of his own. We hit an abdominal stretch as Cole wants to know if Undertaker's stamina is going to hold up after such a long layoff due to injury. We're four minutes into the match and Undertaker has been back from injury for almost TWO AND A HALF MONTHS Cole, you pathetic nitwit.

A-Train puts on an abdominal stretch of his own and Tazz shows how to do his job by suggesting things Undertaker should do to escape/relieve the pressure. I get that they have different jobs but at least Tazz is saying stuff that makes sense and doesn't sound stupid. A-Train talks trash and throws some punches until Undertaker mostly misses the running DDT (he

was barely touching A-Train).

Running corner clotheslines have the monsters in trouble until A-Train gets in the bicycle kick. Show hits his chokeslam but here's Nathan Jones in the aisle to kick Show's head off. A-Train takes a big boot from Jones (because the referee doesn't understand disqualifications) and the Tombstone is enough for the pin.

Rating: C-. Actually not a bad power match here as I can buy the idea of Undertaker holding his own against these two for eight minutes, especially after he's shown he can beat them both on his own. The fact that Jones couldn't even be trusted to wait for people to run into his kicks is incredibly telling and pretty much spells the end of his career.

The Catfight Girls meet Stacy Keibler and Torrie Wilson, who are standing around looking at Torrie's Playboy. As various gorgeous women just do. Stacy has a new marketing campaign idea for them and they all leave together.

We take a quick look at the Tag Team Title match from Heat. Add this to the stuff that could have been cut in exchange of just airing the match.

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Victoria vs. Jazz

Victoria is defending and it's one fall to a finish. Jazz jumps the champ from behind to start fast and it's already time for a modified Muta Lock on Trish. Trish gets knocked outside as Lawler thinks this should turn into a love triangle. Back in and Victoria hits her slingshot legdrop for two on Trish but has to powerslam Jazz for two.

It's back to Trish as JR tries to figure out why King called her a quarter among pennies. A sitout powerslam gives Jazz two on Trish but it's time for a fight with her fellow villain. Jazz kicks Victoria down but gets rolled up for two, followed by the Chick Kick for the same. Victoria gets sent outside, leaving Trish to get caught in the STF.

With Victoria distracting the referee, Richards breaks up the hold so Victoria and Trish can trade rollups (with Victoria's tights being pulled rather low) for two each. Jazz gets knocked outside, leaving Richards to

swing a chair but hit the top rope and knock it back into his own head. The Chick Kick to Victoria gives Trish the title back at 7:18.

Rating: C. Not bad at all here as they kept things tight and had everyone moving the entire time, including Richards with the chair to his own head. It made Trish look like the one who survived until the end, though at some point she's going to have to beat Jazz. You can do that later though as this was all about getting her the title and I'd prefer her to pin the champ than the other challenger.

Rock doesn't want to hear about the people because they've been booing him and calling him a sellout. It's true that he's a sellout because he sells out every Wrestlemania he's in. Rock has lost to Austin twice at Wrestlemania but Hollywood has taught him that the third act is all that matters.

Smackdown Tag Team Titles: Los Guerreros vs. Chris Benoit/Rhyno vs. Team Angle

Team Angle is defending and it's one fall to a finish. The challenging team both beat on a champ until it settles down to Chavo vs. Haas. A dropkick puts Charlie down and it's off to Benoit, who runs into an armdrag from Guerrero. Eddie comes in with the slingshot hilo but they ram heads for a double knockdown.

Benoit brings Rhyno in to powerslam Eddie and it's already off to Benjamin as they're keeping the pace fast here. A double dropkick gets two on Rhyno but Haas gets taken into the Rhyno corner for a double stomping. Eddie stomps on Rhyno and gets taken into the same corner that Haas got caught in. Benoit catches Eddie on the top with a superplex for two as Benjamin makes the save.

That's fine with Chris who throws Eddie into the air and pulls him down into the Crossface for a sweet move but Haas makes a save this time. Chavo and Haas come in and everything breaks down. The rolling German suplexes have Chavo in trouble but Benoit walks into a superkick from Benjamin. A legdrop gets two with Eddie dropping a frog splash for the save. Haas suplexes Chavo but turns into the Gore. Chavo eats one as well, only to have Benjamin steal the pin to retain the titles at 8:46.

Rating: B-. I don't remember liking this one this much but they didn't stop for the entire match. Benoit and Rhyno are still an odd choice for a tag team but it wouldn't surprise me if they were setting up for Benoit and Edge in this spot before he got hurt. Team Angle needed this win and that's the right call out of the three options.

Torrie and Stacy get in a fight over whether Vince or Hulk created Wrestlemania. The Catfight Girls do the same (though one of them keeps calling him Holgan) and agree to settle this in bed.

King is mesmerized.

We recap Shawn Michaels vs. Chris Jericho. Chris seems jealous that Shawn is back and getting attention. He's wanted to be the next Shawn Michaels but now he wants to be the first Chris Jericho by defeating Shawn at Wrestlemania. This has been a long build but they've been smart to wait until here for the match. Shawn accepted the challenge with a superkick and telling Jericho that he would see him at Wrestlemania in a moment I always liked.

Chris Jericho vs. Shawn Michaels

Shawn tries to fire some confetti cannons on the way to the ring but some of them fail to go off, prompting an "eh what are you going to do" look. Jericho on the other hand just looks down at him in disdain in the perfect response. Some early armdrags frustrate Jericho so Shawn lounges on the top rope.

Back up and Shawn kicks him away without too much effort as they're still firmly in first gear. Jericho is ready for a leapfrog and slaps Shawn in the face, earning himself a right hand to the jaw and a trip to the floor. Back in and Jericho scores with a spinwheel kick but a bulldog is countered with a good crotching. We hit a random Figure Four but Jericho reverses pretty quickly.

They head outside again with Shawn hitting a nice plancha, only to get caught in the Walls in the aisle. The bad back is sent into the post as Jericho has a big target to work with now. Back in and Jericho yells about how he's better than Shawn as he stays on the back in a variety of

ways. We hit the chinlock with a knee in the back before Shawn grabs a DDT to get him out of trouble.

Jericho nips up and hits the forearm into Shawn's pose, which you just don't do at Wrestlemania. Shawn makes his comeback (with two nipups of his own) and we hit the pinfall reversal sequence (as required by a classic like this) for a couple of twos each. Jericho is Lionsault for two more before countering a hurricanrana into the Walls. Shawn grabs the rope so Jericho elbows him in the jaw and tunes up the band.

Sweet Chin Music puts Shawn down for two and the fans seemed to buy that as the finish. Shawn teases the Walls but goes with a catapult into the post for two instead. It's Jericho up first with a belly to back superplex but Shawn reverses into a crossbody in mid-air for yet another near fall.

The top rope elbow gets the same but the real Sweet Chin Music is countered into the Walls again. Just like last time, Shawn grabs the ropes though this time he follows up with more Chin Music for a very delayed two. Both guys are spent so Jericho grabs a belly to back suplex, only to have Shawn flip over and grab a rollup with his legs for the pin at 22:31.

Rating: A. Oh come on like this one needs an explanation. These two were both on fire here and just had an awesome match. It's the match that made it clear Shawn had more than just a few performances in him as he felt a lot more like the older version here, which is exactly what the match needed to be. Jericho being able to do every athletic thing Shawn could do but not be able to outsmart him is a perfect story in a similar vein to Shawn vs. Shelton Benjamin a few years later. Great match here and one of the best Shawn had in his comeback.

They hug post match but Jericho kicks him low like the heel he is.

The evil referee from Montreal goes to see Vince.

The new attendance record is announced.

Limp Bizkit takes their sweet time performing Crack Addict.

Here are the Catfight Girls to fight on a bed set up on stage. Cue Stacy and Torrie to join in. Girls are stripped, pillows are swung and Coach is pantsed and pinned. Again, World Tag Team Titles not on the show but these girls get like four segments.

We recap HHH vs. Booker T. which focuses on Booker's criminal past. That's firmly established before the "someone like you doesn't deserve to be World Champion" line is made. It's a better way to go about it but there's no good way to spin that statement. Basically Booker is fighting for his one big moment and HHH is defending because...well because it's Wrestlemania and what else is he supposed to do?

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Booker T.

HHH is defending and comes out first for some reason. JR talks about Booker becoming a five time WCW Champion so King says that place was a joke. JR: "How long did you work there?" King: "Never." JR: "Well I did." King: "Was it a joke?" JR: "D*** right." A hard lockup takes them into the corner where they trade chops and some right hands. Booker charges into a boot to the face and HHH goes up top, only to get armdragged down. You would think Flair would have taught him better but if Ric never learned, HHH didn't need to either.

The announcers bicker over whether or not Booker was born on a pool table which turns into a discussion of Fink being drunk last night. Booker gets sent outside and goes into the steps as the pace slows a lot (yes, in a HHH match). A neckbreaker gets two on Booker and a spinebuster gets the same.

Booker slips out of a suplex and grabs a DDT for his first offense in a long time. The jumping knee and a facebuster cut Booker off but he comes back with a spinebuster. HHH goes up again for some reason and dives into a boot to the face. Seriously they never learn. The scissors kick only hits ropes and Booker falls out to the floor as he was getting dangerously close to beating up HHH and that must be stopped.

Flair sends Booker's knee into the steps and it's time for an Indian Deathlock back inside as we flash back to 1974. Back up and the knee is done but Booker grabs a sunset flip for a fast two. A jumping elbow to

the jaw puts HHH down again and there's the ax kick for no cover.

Flair's distraction has no effect as Booker hits the Houston Hangover, which thankfully isn't followed up on because the knee gives out again. They stagger to their feet with Booker's knee preventing him from trying another ax kick. Instead it's the Pedigree, the completely ridiculous 24 second wait, and then the pin with one hand over Booker's chest to retain the title at 18:44.

Rating: C+. And there goes Booker's main event career for the next few years. Aside from being a somewhat boring match, that ending is unforgivable. There's no reason to not give Booker the title here, even if it's just until Backlash. The leg stuff at the end was better but this was WAY too much HHH with Booker only having a few hope spots here and there. He didn't even get the big two count at any point. This was all about HHH establishing that he is the one and only star on Raw no matter what and that's a major problem. Booker needed this win, or at least anything other than a clean loss.

Long recap of Hulk Hogan vs. Vince McMahon for the show's real main event. Basically Vince suddenly decided that he hated Hogan for leaving the company ten years ago and testifying against him in the steroids trial so they had to have a fight. This was suddenly elevated to the biggest match of all time despite there not really being a clear reason why Vince started hating Hogan in the first place. If it was mentioned at the start, it was completely bogged down in all the mess that followed. This is at worst the second biggest match on the show and while not surprising, that's probably not the best idea in the world.

Hulk Hogan vs. Vince McMahon

Street fight and if Hogan loses, he has to retire. Hogan "spears" Vince down because that's the kind of thing Hogan is known to do. Some slow motion (expect to hear that a lot in this one) right hands have Vince in trouble and Hulk stomps him in the corner. A clothesline gives Vince a breather and he throws those awkward punches. Now it's off to an armbar because that's what you want to see from these two in a street fight.

Hogan fights out of the test of strength but Vince is smart enough to

kick him in the gut. That's so effective that they do it three straight times before Vince sends him outside. Hogan gets posted but still manages to avoid a chair shot. Instead it's Hulk chairing Vince in the head and of course we've got some blood (you knew that was coming and you know it's coming from Hulk too).

More chair shots have Vince reeling, though not enough to knock him out, because Vince is more manly than your average wrestler. Another chair shot hits the Spanish announcer in the head because this match needed additional casualties. Vince low blows him and gets in his own chair shot to draw Hogan's blood as this is already dragging. And now....it's ladder time, which certainly picks things up a bit.

A monitor shot to the head puts Hogan on the table and Vince climbs up, puts his hand to his ear, and drops a leg (which doesn't hit Hogan but it's a great visual nonetheless) to destroy the table and freak the crowd out all over again. Vince throws Hogan inside and grabs a pipe from underneath the ring. In the visual of the match, Vince very slowly raises his bloody head over the apron and gives the kind of evil smile that only he can pull off. It's a great shot too and makes up for a lot of this match.

Hogan hits him low to put both guys down....and here's Roddy Piper, looking so out of shape that he makes Hogan look great. Piper teases hitting both of them before knocking Hogan out with the pipe (Why this is considered a surprise is beyond me. They're mortal enemies whose feud was the reason for the first Wrestlemania main event. Why was him attacking Hogan ever in doubt?).

That's only good for two so Vince beats up the referee, drawing out the evil referee from earlier in the night, along with a regular referee. Vince pipes Hogan again, giving us that flopping around like a fish selling. It's Hulk Up time with Hulk beating up both Vince and the evil referee. The big boot and three legdrops finish Vince at 20:48.

Rating: C-. I've seen this match several times and it's actually grown on me a lot. The expectations were through the floor coming in and it's a pretty fun old people brawl. It's dumb, goofy fun and while it's WAY too

long (you could easily cut eight minutes if not more), it's one of those matches where you knew what you were getting and that's exactly what was delivered. Vince's complete over the top visuals made it even better. It's not good of course but it's fun, which is a lot more important for something like this.

Hogan poses as Shane comes out to check on his father. We get a staredown but Hogan seems to understand that he doesn't have any issues with Shane.

You can already hear Cole's voice giving out.

We recap Steve Austin vs. The Rock. This is ALL about Rock as Austin is on fumes and it's not exactly a secret. Basically Rock is ticked off about being booed last year in Toronto and turned into the most amazing heel in the world as a result. The only thing he has left to do in his career is beat Austin at Wrestlemania and this is probably his last chance. This gets the music video treatment but it can only get so far when one person is doing 90% of the work in the feud (not really a criticism of Austin but Rock was just on another planet at this point).

Steve Austin vs. The Rock

Writing that one never gets old. The camera follows Austin from behind in a pretty unique shot which works quite well. They stare each other down to start with Austin hitting the first right hands. The threat of a Stunner sends Rock bailing to the floor so Austin beats him over the announcers' table and whips him into the steps.

Back in and Austin chokes a bit (that's somewhat out of character) and gets two off a suplex. Rock gets in a chop block to get a breather with Austin bailing out to the floor. The kicks to the leg have Austin staggering around and Rock wraps the leg around the post. We hit the Sharpshooter with Austin fighting to the ropes as you can really feel the lack of fire in this one.

It's intense but it's clear that Austin doesn't have that high gear anymore. The leg is wrapped around the post again and Rock grabs Austin's vest. That's too much for Austin so it's some bad punches and a double clothesline for another breather. The Thesz press and middle finger elbow

get two as Austin is getting some fire going.

A Rock Bottom gives Austin two but Rock comes back with a Stunner. Austin grabs the real thing for two more but Rock cuts him off with a low blow. The vest comes off and the People's Elbow gets two. The Rock Bottom gets the same, followed by two more to FINALLY put Austin away at 17:55.

Rating: B+. I know there were outside circumstances (Austin spent the previous night in the hospital due to drinking too much alcohol and caffeine) but this would have felt so much bigger as the main event. It's a very good match and feels big at times but when you have the history that these two have, nothing is going to live up to that standard.

Austin not being able to keep up with Rock was a great way to show that Rock was the better man that night and even with the fire not as hot as before, Austin is still worth seeing at any point. This is another one that's grown on me and while it might not be as great, it felt important, which is what matters most here.

After thanking Austin for what happened (not audibly but he's since said that's what was he was doing), Rock leaves Austin for the big hero's sendoff. This wasn't billed as Austin's farewell but it turned out to be his retirement match. It would have been a great way to close the show, but I get the idea of not wanting that to be the case if Austin couldn't go. It's a bit of a disappointment but at least he got the big moment.

We recap Brock Lesnar vs. Kurt Angle. Brock got cheated out of the title at Survivor Series and has gone on a path of destruction to get it back, including winning the Royal Rumble. Angle has used every possible way out of facing him but tonight he's out of escapes and has nothing left to do but fight. The fact that his neck is being held together by paperclips and duct tape is just a detail because Angle has a low level of sanity. This feels like a major showdown, which is all you can ask for out of the main event of Wrestlemania.

Smackdown World Title: Kurt Angle vs. Brock Lesnar

Lesnar, with bad ribs, is challenging and can win the title via DQ or countout. Angle grabs a front facelock but Brock throws him off and we're

back to a standoff. Kurt's headlock has about the same effect but he breaks up Brock's armbar. Lesnar grabs a powerslam, only to get caught in the first German suplex. Brock pops right to his feet though, sending Angle bailing to the floor as they're not laying into each other just yet.

Back in and a gorilla press (Tazz: "The vanilla gorilla!") plants Angle, who cuts off a charge with a boot. A German suplex into the corner messes with the ribs again and it's off to something like an STF from the side. Angle lets go of the legs and switches to something closer to a Bank Statement. Brock won't tap so Angle suplexes him with ease. That earns him a spinebuster though, which Angle is crazy to take with such a bad neck.

Brock hits his own suplexes but Angle pops up and rolls some German suplexes of his own. Neither finisher can hit so Angle trips him into the ankle lock. Brock grabs the rope...which doesn't count for no apparent reason. Instead Angle switches to a half crab, followed by a running knee to the back. Brock backdrops him to the floor, again because Angle is freaking nuts.

Back in and the Angle Slam gets two, which Cole says has never happened before. I find that very hard to believe. The F5 gets two more but Kurt gets the ankle lock with a grapevine. Brock manages to drag him over to the ropes for the break, followed by another F5. Instead of covering though, Brock heads up top.

In one of the scariest moments in wrestling history, Brock tries a shooting star press (apparently suggested by Johnny Ace) but leaves it short, landing square on his head and knocking himself completely silly. With his eyes glazed over, Brock hits a third F5 for the pin and the title at 21:09.

Rating: A-. This started off rather slowly but then picked up the pace to become one heck of a hard hitting fight. Angle did everything he could with all the suplexes and left it all in the ring in what might have been his last match. Lesnar did everything he needed to do (save for hitting that shooting star) and if he had nailed the finish, this would go up

several notches. It's a great finish and the kind of main event that Smackdown should have put on at this point. Excellent match.

Lesnar is GONE as he tries to pull himself up.

A long highlight package ends the show.

Overall Rating: A. The more I watch this show, the more I appreciate it. There's nothing bad on the card with the worst match being either Undertaker vs. Big Show/A-Train or the street fight and even those are watchable. There's also a great selection of top matches, though HHH vs. Booker leaves a lot to be desired. That being said, Jericho vs. Shawn, Rock vs. Austin and the main event are more than enough to make this a classic.

My main issue is still the same: the show could use a breather between all of the top matches. I could have gone for swapping in say the women's triple threat or the Smackdown Tag Team Title match in between the street fight and Rock vs. Austin, just for the sake of a little breathing room. The way it's done is more than fine though and it would only have been improved with a few tweaks.

Overall, it's one of the best Wrestlemanias ever but I can't put it above or really near the level of X7. There's some great stuff here but it's not enough to top everything that show has to offer. I could easily see this being the second best Wrestlemania of all time (it's in the top three or four at the absolute worst) and that's some pretty high levels of quality.

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