

Wrestle Kingdom 14 Night One: That Is Some Amazing Wrestling



IMG Credit: New Japan Pro Wrestling

Wrestle Kingdom 14 Day One

Date: January 4, 2020

Location: Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 40,008

Commentators: Kevin Kelly, Rocky Romero, Chris Charlton, Gino Gambino

Here we go. It's time for the biggest non-Wrestlemania show of the year and this time around it's being split over two nights. There are several major draws this time around, with the first being Jushin Thunder Liger's final two matches. He's been around for a mind blowing thirty five years and is still performing at a high enough level but what better place to go out than the biggest stage of them all? Other than that we have the Double Gold Dash, which sees both major singles titles defended Saturday and then the winners and losers facing off on Sunday. Let's get to it.

As usual: I don't follow New Japan all that closely so I'll know a few things but not every detail. If I miss a major plot point or historical point, I apologize in advance. I'm mainly going off of what commentary tells me and nothing more, save for maybe a quick Wikipedia search.

There was a Stardom tag match before the show started, though it was not

filmed due to broadcasting rights issues.

Pre-Show: Toa Henare/Karl Fredericks/Clark Connors/Alex Coughlin vs. Togi Makabe/Tomoaki Honma/Yota Tsuji/Yuya Uemura

It's a battle of the dojos with Henare's team from Los Angeles and Makabe/Honma's teams from Japan. Connors headlocks Uemura to start and it's off to Coughlin to chop him down into the corner. They chop it out again with Coughlin getting the better of things and Fredericks slams him down. Uemura gets in a dropkick and the hot tag brings in Makabe to get a breather.

Everything breaks down with Honma and Makabe hammering away in the corner until Fredericks grabs a spinebuster. Henare and Tsuji come in to slug it out and it's Henare getting beaten up by all four at once. A falling headbutt gives Honma two and it's the other three diving in for the save. Tsuji gets a Boston crab on Henare and Coughlin's chops have no effect in breaking it up. A spear takes Coughlin down but Henare is back up with a kick to the face and the Toa Bottom (exactly what you think it is) finishes Tsuji at 7:38.

Rating: C. Perfectly watchable eight man tag as the Young Lions are a concept that takes some getting used to but it serves a good purpose. That's what we had here and the fans seemed rather pleased with what they were getting. It helps to have the Lions get to hang in there with the veterans, which is exactly the point. Perfectly fine opener and it didn't overstay its welcome.

Nanaba Nakanishi/Yuji Nagata vs. Tencozy

It's a brawl to start with Nakanishi getting double teamed, only to suplex both of them down at the same time. You know, because a guy who turns 53 later this month can do that. A splash gets two on Kojima and it's off to Nagata for the kicks to the chest. Kojima's DDT gets him a breather and Tenzan comes in for two off a brainbuster.

Nagata shrugs off a rake to the eyes and suplexes Tenzan down, setting up the next double tag. Everything breaks down and Nakanishi beats up both of them with a clothesline getting two on Kojima. A 3D gets two on

Nakanishi and he's right back up, only to have Kojima hit a running clothesline for the pin at 5:48.

Rating: D+. I wasn't feeling this one and it just kind of ended in a hurry instead of having much else being set up. This felt like another instance of getting the legends on the card and there's nothing wrong with that. The match certainly wasn't terrible and all four could probably have a passable match in their sleep, but it wasn't much to see aside from Nakanishi looking like an old monster.

Post match respect is shown.

The announcers run down the card to send us to the regular show.

The opening video hypes up the Double Gold Dash and everything else, including Liger's retirement. As usual, we get the matches in order and as usual, I'm not sure if I like that or not.

Naoki Sano/Shinjiro Otani/Tatsuhito Takaiwa/Ryusuke Taguchi vs. Jushin Thunder Liger/Tatsumi Fujinami/Great Sasuke/Tiger Mask

Kuniaki Kobayashi and El Samurai (legends) are the seconds and this is much more about the pageantry than anything else. The fans sing along with Liger's music and the red and white is on full display for an awesome visual. Norio Honaga (another legend) is guest referee. We get some Big Match Intros, which really is just a way to get everyone one big moment in front of the huge crowd and that's just fine.

Liger and Sano, the old rivals, start things off with Liger cranking on the arms early on. Sano dropkicks him to the floor though and hits an old man suicide dives and it's Otani coming in for the Facewash in the corner. Given how old that mask is, Liger's face might need a good washing. Liger palm strikes Otani down and it's Takaiwa coming in to Death Valley Drive Tiger Mask and take over.

Taguchi comes in for the hip attacks, setting up Takaiwa's top rope elbow drop for two. Mask is right back with a quick tiger driver and it's Fujinami coming in to snap off the dragon screw legwhips. Sasuke misses the Swanton but Sano misses his top rope double stomp. A superplex drops

Sasuke though, allowing Liger to come in and hammer away on Taguchi.

Everything breaks down and it's Taguchi enziguring Liger, who pops right back up. A second slows him down a little more and a double chickenwing faceplant finishes Liger at 8:54. I know Liger probably handpicked the finish but they had to let TAGUCHI pin him??? The popcorn vendor in the fifth row wasn't available?

Rating: D+. This is a match where the wrestling was completely not the point and it was all about letting Liger go out there with his friends one more time. They could have went out there and had a sandwich and everything would have been fine because it was all about letting Liger do whatever he wanted. Like I said, this was all about the pageantry instead of the match (which wasn't bad or anything) and that's all it should have been. Cool moment, with the big one coming over the next two days.

Post match a lot of respect is shown.

Suzuki-Gun vs. Los Ingobernables de Japon

That would be Zack Sabre Jr./Minoru Suzuki/Taichi/Desperado vs. Evil/Sanada/Shingo/Bushi this time around. Suzuki-Gun attacks during the intros as usual. I watch this company 2-3 times a year and even I knew that was coming. Evil knocks Suzuki into the corner and hits a Bronco Buster for an early two. A badly timed charge lets Suzuki tear away at the arm and there's the first chair shot to Evil's back.

Back in and Evil has to fight out of the Gotch style piledriver so it's Desperado coming in for a double arm crank to keep Evil in trouble. We'll make that a camel clutch with Sanada putting a boot in Evil's face for a cheating bonus. Shingo comes in to clean house and trades kicks to the face with Taichi, who gets to take off his pants. I prefer Angel Garza thank you. They trade more shots to the head and everyone is down for a bit.

We settle down to Sabre vs. Sanada (who face off for the British Heavyweight Title tomorrow) but Desperado comes in and gets Paradise Locked. Something like an abdominal stretch puts Sanada in trouble but it gets reversed into a pinfall reversal sequence. A dropkick to Sabre's

knee puts him down and it's Bushi coming in with a missile dropkick. Sabre gets triple teamed but the rest of the team comes in for the save, leaving Sabre to grab the cranked up Rings of Saturn for the tap from Bushi at 8:40.

Rating: C+. There are very few wrestlers that I would stop to watch but Sabre is one of them. He does things in the ring that I can barely understand let alone describe and it is so much fun to watch. When you add in the fact that he is one of the most punchable guys in the industry, it's hard not to enjoy watching him so much.

Post match Sabre won't let go until Sanada makes the save.

Chaos vs. Bullet Club

Hirooki Goto/Tomohiro Ishiii/Toru Yano/Yoshi-Hashi vs. Kenta/Bad Luck Fale/Yujiro Takahashi/Chase Owens here. Yano wants to start, sees Fale, and screams. Some running shoulders don't work as Fale runs him over, meaning it's time to go for the turnbuckle. With that broken up, it's Owens coming in instead but Hashi is right there to clean house instead. Takahashi pulls Hashi to the floor as everything breaks down again. We settle down to Fale stepping on Hashi's chest for two.

Ishii gets tired of waiting and comes in to start beating people up. Fale slams him down and beats up Yano for a bonus, leaving Hashi to hit a neckbreaker on Takahashi. The hot tag brings in Goto to clean house and everything breaks down again. Fake hits Ishii in the face so Ishii headbutts the heck out of him to rock Fale for the first time (that was awesome) and hits a suplex. Goto comes in for the GTR to finish Takahashi at 8:17.

Rating: C. Pretty standard eight man tag here but I loved that headbutt to Fale. There's something awesome about Ishii being the kind of guy who would just hit a monster in the face and beat him up. The action was fun and Bullet Club seems to be on a downward spiral at the moment, which is probably a good thing given their rather lackluster lineup at the moment.

Post match Kenta stares at Goto before their Never Title match tomorrow.

Tag Team Titles: Juice Robinson/David Finlay vs. Guerrillas of Destiny

Juice and David (FitJuice) are challenging after winning the World Tag League while the champs have Jado in their corner. The brawl starts on the ramp and Juice gets backdropped onto the ramp with Finlay nowhere to be seen. They head inside with Juice in trouble and a dropkick getting an early two.

Juice finally gets in a DDT on Loa and the hot tag brings in Finlay to start taking over. A middle rope elbow to the face puts Loa down again but a Tama distraction lets Loa pull Finlay off the top. Some slingshot sentons have Finlay in more trouble but a spear lets him bring in Juice to take over. A pair of Cannonballs have the champs rocked in the corner but Tama kicks him in the face and snaps off a German suplex.

Everything breaks down with a running dropkick getting two on Tama. Back in and Loa powerbombs Finlay to set up Tama's top rope splash for two with Finlay making a save. The belly to back neckbreaker gets two more on Finlay and it's a Magic Killer for Robinson. A super powerbomb is countered with a hurricanrana and the Gun Stun is broken up. Finlay's Stunner gets two and there's Pulp Friction to Loa. Finlay hits a Dudley Dog to Tama for the pin and the titles at 13:40 (seven years in a row that the titles have changed here).

Rating: B-. This was the first match that felt a little bit bigger than the rest. Maybe it was having fewer people in the match or the titles changing hands, but I was more into this than any other match on the show. FitJuice doesn't feel like long term champions and the titles changing hands here is becoming predictable, but beating the Guerrillas is still an accomplishment.

US Title: Jon Moxley vs. Lance Archer

Moxley is challenging, having lost the title due to not being able to make a defense due to travel issues. This is a Texas Deathmatch, meaning you win by a ten count knockout or submission. Moxley wastes no time in throwing the chairs inside but Archer brings his own trashcan lids to start swinging. Hang on though as Archer needs to clear out the Young Lions at ringside.

Moxley runs at him with a knee to hit Archer early before sidestepping him to the floor. That means a dive and you can tell how fired up Moxley is to be here. Some whips into the barricade have Archer in trouble and it's kendo stick time. That earns him a chair pelted at his head and some trashcan lid shots for a bonus. The kendo stick has Moxley down again and there's a big shot to the chest in the corner.

Old School doesn't work for Archer so Moxley unloads on him with the stick. A running trashcan shot to the head puts Archer down again and it's a running knee to send Archer sprawling on the floor. It's enough for Archer to drop Moxley on the apron and then throw a Lion at him. Archer isn't done and hits a big running dive over the top to take out Moxley and the Lions in a big crash. Some chairs are set up in the ring and it's an Iconoclasm through them for huge pain and a nine count.

Archer grabs a Claw but gets reversed into a cross armbreaker. That's reversed with a suplex so Moxley plants him with a DDT and some knees to the face. Archer is back up with a hard running shoulder and a chokeslam onto the chair, causing Moxley to writhe around in pain. There's a big boot and it's time to put the plastic bag over Moxley's face, good for two arm drops. Some tables are set up at ringside but Moxley starts fighting back on the apron, meaning it's a Death Rider (Paradigm Shift/Dirty Deeds) through the tables to give Moxley the title back at 14:27.

Rating: B. These guys beat each other up for a good while and it felt like a fight. Archer felt like a short term champion to Moxley and there is nothing wrong with that when Moxley only lost the title due to the travel issues. Moxley was fighting as hard as he could here and Archer was a heck of a dragon for him to slay. This was a lot of fun and the show is starting to crank up.

Post match Moxley says he's leaving Tokyo with everything or nothing. We'll find out which it is tomorrow when he defends against Juice Robinson.

We recap Will Ospreay vs. Hiromu Takahashi. Osprey is defending and Takahashi is trying to get the title back after he lost it due to a

broken neck in 2018. These two have worked well together before so hopefully we get another classic between these two.

IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title: Hiromu Takahashi vs. Will Ospreay

Ospreay is defending and takes him straight to the mat with some amateur stuff before slapping him on the back of the head. Takahashi doesn't think much of Ospreay chilling on the top so it's time for an exchange of forearms. A rather snappy hurricanrana puts Ospreay down but there's no sunset bomb to the floor. There is a powerbomb to the apron though and Takahashi hits a running dropkick off the apron for a bonus.

Back in and Takahashi misses a shoulder to the ribs, allowing Ospreay to hit a double stomp to the back of the head. A hanging DDT gets two on Takahashi and Ospreay bends the neck over the barricade like a villain should. Back in and a Koji Clutch stays on the neck with Takahashi having to get a foot on the rope. Takahashi scores with some chops so Ospreay kicks him in the face to send things back to the apron.

Ospreay misses a flip dive to the floor, flips out of a German suplex onto the ramp, dives back in, and hits a Sasuke Special for one of those crazy sequences that about two people in the world can do. Back in and Pip Pip Cheerio gets two but Takahashi dropkicks him into the corner. A springboard double stomp to the back of the neck crushes Takahashi again though and a missile dropkick to the back of the head gets two.

The Kawada kicks set up the Cheeky Nandos kick but Takahashi manages to grab a super victory roll for his own two. Ospreay is right back with the Robinson Special for two of his own and it's a hooting star press to Takahashi's back. The Oscutter connects for two more and they're both down again. Takahashi grabs a pop up sitout powerbomb for another breather and they slug it out.

Ospreay tries a springboard but gets countered into a German suplex. Takahashi's Canadian Destroyer gets two more but the Time Bomb is blocked. That's fine with Takahashi as he superkicks him down, only to have to counter the Stormbreaker. Ospreay grabs a C4 into the Hidden Blade but Stormbreaker is countered into a Code Red for two more. Now the Time Bomb connects for the big near fall so it's a modified Emerald

Flosion to give Takahashi the pin at 24:34.

Rating: A. Yep this was great and I continue to get all of the love for Ospreay. He's as smooth as you can get in the ring and can fly as well as anyone in the world. Then you have Takahashi, who has impressed me before but never at this level. This was about getting Takahashi back to the top and reaching that goal again, which told a great story and had Ospreay doing stuff that only he could do. Incredible match here and the best thing on the show by a lot.

We recap the Intercontinental Title match. Tetsuya Naito is trying to reclaim his status on top of the roster and he has to win the Intercontinental Title to start. Jay White is defending but everyone hates him so Naito is the huge favorite. The winner is not only champion but also gets the World Title shot tomorrow.

Intercontinental Title: Jay White vs. Tetsuya Naito

Naito is challenging and White has Gedo with him. White bails to the floor to start so Naito grabs Gedo to draw White in. Back in and Naito scores with a dropkick, meaning we hit that Tranquilo pose. Naito catches him coming in and hits a neckbreaker off the apron to put White down again. They go inside again but this time Gedo grabs a boot so White can finally get something in.

Another grab from Gedo lets White crotch Naito against the post and Gedo gets in a chair shot to the knee. The knee gets wrapped around the barricade and White gets to flip into his own Tranquilo pose, plus a Too Sweet for some flavor. The Muta Lock goes on until Naito makes the rope, despite White fish hooking his jaws. A Russian legsweep gives Naito two and there's the basement dropkick in the corner to make it worse.

Naito ties his legs around White's arms to crank on the neck some more but White is in the ropes after a pretty freaky looking hold. White can't hit the Blade Runner so Naito grabs the arm and hammers away at the neck. A Downward Spiral into a German suplex plants Naito though and a legsweep sends him face first into the top turnbuckle. White goes old school with a dragon screw legwhip over the rope and Naito can't even run the ropes.

A Rock Bottom gets two so White goes even bigger with a Saito suplex over the top. Back in and the Kiwi Crusher gets two more as Naito won't die. The reverse Figure Four goes on and Naito is in trouble, meaning it's the long crawl to the rope. Naito somehow fights up with a Liger kick, only to walk into a spinebuster. Another comeback is cut off by Gedo getting inside, only to have Naito score with an enziguri on White.

A super hurricanrana drops him again and Gloria (pumphandle slam) gives Naito two. The referee gets bumped so Gedo brings in a chair, only to get kicked low. White pelts a chair at Naito though and snaps off a dragon suplex. Naito shrugs that off though and hits Destino to put them both down. Another Destino gets two more and it's a brainbuster into a third Destino to give Naito the pin and the title at 33:53.

Rating: B. It was awesome, though the interference near the end felt really out of place. White is still good, though I can see what some of his critics say. There is another gear that I haven't seen from him, though maybe it's due to the match going longer than he should have for him. It's a rather good match, but not great, even though Naito winning is the right call because he seems to be the big story of the weekend (other than Liger).

We recap Kazuchika Okada vs. Kota Ibushi for the IWGP World Title. Okada is the great champion and Ibushi won the G1 Climax, but again it's really just a semifinal for the match with Naito, so enjoy it while it lasts.

IWGP Heavyweight Title: Kazuchika Okada vs. Kota Ibushi

Okada is defending and of course has the incredible entrance that he is known for. They stare at each other for a long time to start with the first lockup taking nearly a minute and a half. Ibushi takes him down by the leg as we hear about Okada having a bad arm. A headscissors gets Okada out of trouble and we're up with a standoff. Okada's headlock takeover keeps Ibushi down as they're certainly in first gear to start.

A shoulder drops Ibushi and he's up in less than a second. The strike off goes to Ibushi and a standing moonsault gives Ibushi two. We hit a one armed camel clutch so Okada makes the rope (with the arm over the leg just to show off). Okada is back up with a running elbow to the face and

a DDT gets two. The hanging DDT plants Ibushi again for one as he's starting to get fired up.

Okada knocks him right back down and puts on the chinlock, only to have Ibushi fight up and hit the dropkick. A powerslam into the middle rope moonsault gets two and they get a breather. They head outside with Okada kicking him over the barricade and following with a heck of a running crossbody. Back in and a modified STF makes Ibushi scream but a rope grab calms things down a bit. Okada drops a top rope elbow and we get the Rainmaker pose (and camera shot).

That's broken up and the Tombstone is as well, allowing Ibushi to hit his kneeling Tombstone for two. With Okada on the floor, Ibushi hits a springboard moonsault to near perfection (and to Okada). Back in and Ibushi loads up a Kinshasa (complete with pose) but Okada cuts him off with a dropkick. Ibushi shrugs off the forearms and uppercuts and hits Okada in the face. A right hand to the face (a rarity) drops Okada and Ibushi beats him on the ground.

Okada rolls to the apron so it's a deadlift German superplex, which is countered out of a high fear of death. Instead Okada Tombstones him onto the apron for the big knockout shot, mainly because Ibushi is completely insane. Ibushi beats the count and it's Heavy Rain (looked like a high angle TKO) for two more. Another Rainmaker attempt is countered with a heck of a lariat to put Okada down for a change.

Now the deadlift German superplex drops Okada on his head for two more but he pops back up with another Tombstone. Ibushi is right back up with his own Rainmaker and the big knee....gets one. Another big knee gets two and the fans are freaking out over the near falls. A third knee is cut off by Okada's dropkick and they're both down. They forearm it out again with Okada going down but he's able to forearm Ibushi off the top.

Okada dives into a powerbomb though, only to avoid the Phoenix splash. Back to back Rainmakers get two and two more connect but Ibushi ducks the fifth. A kick to Okada's head sets up a knee to the face but Okada is right back with a sitout Tombstone. Another Rainmaker finishes Ibushi to retain the title at 39:18.

Rating: A. I know I get on him about his finisher a lot but dang Okada is incredible to watch. Put him in there with someone as insane as Ibushi and there was no way this wasn't going to work. Outstanding stuff here and worthy of a Wrestle Kingdom main event, or at least the first of two in a row. Okada can do some amazing stuff and Ibushi is (probably) going to get his chance one day. Awesome main event as they fought over who wanted it more and eventually one of them gave out. Great story, great action, great all around.

Post match Naito comes out and lays his belt down, saying he's leaving with both titles tomorrow. Naito leaves so Okada thanks Ibushi for the fight and promises to win tomorrow.

The announcers recap the event and talk about the champions.

Overall Rating: A-. They really are great about building things up on these shows, which is where the structured card offers a lot of help. It's a great show and there are two incredible matches on here, which almost feels weak for a Wrestle Kingdom. I'm still not wild on the double nights though as there were things on here that could have been skipped for the sake of one big show, but that's the case with every show that goes on for such a long time. Check out the main event and Ospreay vs. Takahashi of course, but the bigger stuff seems to be coming tomorrow.

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