

Summerslam Count-Up – Summerslam 1997 (Original): Great, Now He's Mad

Summerslam 1997

Date: August 3, 1997

Location: Continental Airlines Arena, East Rutherford, New Jersey

Attendance: 20,213

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Vince McMahon, Jim Ross

Well, it's another year but this time we've had some solid changes. Actually, no we haven't come to think of it. Austin is still his usual self, but in this case he's going after the IC Title from Owen. Yes, this is the infamous piledriver match. Other than that, it's the time just barely before the Attitude Era. We're not quite there yet but we can see it staring us right in the face.

Montreal was three months away and Taker vs. Shawn would be established at the end of the show. This would of course lead to the first ever HIAC match. Other than that, there's a lot of the same stuff from last year s we've only kind of slightly evolved since Summerslam 1996. This is more of a transitional show, but it still had its moments. Let's get to it.

We get a great opening video about how life isn't fair for Bret, Taker and Shawn, all of whom are involved in the main event tonight with Bret vs. Taker and Shawn as referee. The tagline of the show is Hart and Soul, which is kind of cool I think. This is all fallout from the EPIC Canada vs. USA war that happened over the summer. This would wind up causing Montreal, which I'm sure you know the story of.

HHH vs. Mankind

In a cage. This is the blowoff for a feud that's been going on for months. They met in the KOTR finals with HHH winning but they kept feuding forever. HHH is using Ode To Joy which is one of my all time favorite heel themes. This match is just after Canadian Stampede where

they brawled all over the arena. It's escape only which means it's much better than matches where you can win by pinfall, which I've always thought was a cheap way out.

For some reason the governor will be there later. Yeah I don't care either. How odd is it to have a cage match as the opening to a show? I like it though as it prevents the mind numbing delay of having to put the stupid thing up which is about ten minutes in its own right. Mankind dominates the early part but Chyna keeps interfering, mainly by reaching through and choking Mankind.

Oh and at this time, Austin and Dude Love are tag champions, but Mankind isn't. That's what's great about this character. It's not three different gimmicks. It's one guy playing three different gimmicks if that makes sense. They never hid that Foley was all three guys. They wallowed in it. That's something you simply don't see and in this case I think it certainly worked. It made him see even more insane than he already was, if that's possible.

JR says that it's a no DQ cage match. In the words of Jack Nicholson from A Few Good Men, is there any other kind? The only noticeable spot for the opening part of the match is a suplex from the top of the cage that's not hyped up enough by the announcers and wasn't nearly as good as Hogan and Bossman from 89. They're going old school here with the big blue bars that need to come back.

Chyna keeps choking and cheating like there's no tomorrow which is what she's supposed to do I guess. It's weird seeing these two as midcarders. We get a Dominic Denucci shoutout. How can you top that? Kowalski would have beaten him though, so that's not really fair. This is a really physical match as they are just beating the living tar out of each other with some sweet as well as sick shots. Both guys climb the ropes but HHH gets caught in them.

For some reason Mankind goes for the door and in an absolutely sick shot, Chyna slams the door on his head. Foley said this was one of the most painful spots he ever did in his career, and when it's Mick freaking Foley that says it, that's a painful spot. Chyna beats up the referee and

since it's no DQ, what can really be done? Chyna finally gets nailed to a HUGE pop from the crowd.

We then get the ending as Foley hits a double arm DDT onto the chair to knock HHH out. He climbs out and is a step away from winning as Chyna is trying to drag HHH out. However, the fans are losing it so Foley pulls the mask off and climbs back up. Chyna, for no apparent reason, stops pulling him and goes to the floor. In the truly famous spot of the match, Foley pulls his shirt open to reveal the Dude Love heard and dives off with the elbow.

Now as he's climbing again, Chyna starts pulling HHH out but Mankind gets to the floor first to blow the roof off the place in a cool moment. He collapses on the floor but soon his foot starts to tap. Then the music kicks on. He starts dancing. Dude Love has returned, despite holding a title at the moment. This was a cool moment and another example of why the idea behind Foley was so genius it's hard to comprehend.

Rating: A. This is an awesome old school 80s style cage match and it was great. With the manager trying to cheat every 3 minutes, the face ultimately triumphing, the big spot at the end and the fans response, this was awesome. All kinds of sick shots in there but it never went far enough that it wasn't believable, which is what makes a match like this great. Foley should have won and he did, which makes it even better. Excellent match here and I loved every bit of it.

Todd is with the governor of New Jersey. This doesn't go well, like, at all.

Tiger Ali Singh is here. This was a gimmick that just sucked. Imagine Khali plus Million Dollar Man plus Hassan, then add in a lot more suck. You get Singh.

Brian Pillman vs. Goldust

This is a weird feud to put it mildly. The basic idea is this: Goldust doesn't like Pillman because he's implying that he and Marlena had a relationship prior to her meeting Dustin and perhaps after she met him. For no reason at all, if Pillman loses, he has to wear a dress until he

wins something. This is standard pre-Attitude Era stuff.

There's really not a lot to say here. BAD botch on a sunset flip by Goldust. He more or less crawls over Brian's back instead of clearing it. The commentary is all about the Pillman/Terri angle, which was fine but kind of generic. The sad thing is Pillman would be gone just months after this so we never got to the end of the angle. Eventually Terri blasts him with the loaded purse to get the pin.

Rating: D. This was just boring, plain and simple. The botch didn't help things either. It was predictable and fairly stupid, so how can I grade it highly?

Legion of Doom vs. Godwinns

This is stemming from a botched Domsday Device where Hawk nearly broke Henry's neck. Godwin just slammed head first into the mat and cranked his neck nearly in half. It was one of the sickest things I've ever seen. Anyway, WWF of course decided to play it up in a real feud, because a near death experience is good for one thing: making money off of it, naturally. Anyway, this is a standard late 90s LOD tag match: not very good.

This is another case of a team (the Godwinns) just completely failing as heels. They're supposed to be fun characters but as heels they're not menacing, but creepy. Anyway, this is even more standard stuff than the last match. I think that's the issue that LOD had: they had no substance at all in the latter half of their career. This match is a prime example. They don't really do anything other than just look intimidating.

Another major issue for them was their lack of involvement in the tag title picture. They were used more to put young teams over, which is fine, but the hype is a bit too much for me, although I could see how some would think it works. LOD wins with a spike piledriver, and after about 10 minutes, I'm just bored pretty badly.

Rating: C-. Again, just a bunch of meh here. It's bland and dull for the second match in a row and nothing makes me think this should have been on PPV. LOD and the Godwinns were too similar to make this work. Nothing at

all here and it was just barely watchable.

For some reason, we have a million dollar giveaway or something like that. It's really not clear what the point of this is, other than to have Sable and Sunny looking GREAT. This is a lot like million dollar mania, yet more stupid as the first 3 callers don't answer.

The people pick a number from 1-100 for a key to open a coffin with a million dollars inside. This takes up 8 freaking minutes, which could have been used for, oh I don't know, A FREAKING WRESTLING MATCH??? Is there a point to having it in a coffin that I'm just missing?

European Title: British Bulldog vs. Ken Shamrock

For some reason that I just don't get, if Bulldog loses the match he not only loses the title but has to eat dog food. This is even more fallout from America vs. Canada. We hear about a show called One Night Only which was a British PPV where the ending just ticked me off as Shawn took the Title from Bulldog and proceeded to do absolutely nothing with it before handing it to HHH, all because he just didn't want Bulldog to have it anymore.

Big brawl to start as Shamrock is all kinds of pissed off due to being force fed dog food on Raw. Ankle lock goes on almost immediately but rope is grabbed. This starts off with mainly all Shamrock but a boot in the corner gets the Englishman in control. This is a rather ugly match to put it mildly.

Bulldog takes over while we get a long chinlock. Instead though we see about 15 seconds of the crowd and random people which serve no point at all. Shamrock grabs something off the announcers' table and blasts Bulldog in the head with it for the DQ.

Rating: D-. It wasn't the worst match I've ever seen but it couldn't have been much worse. Shamrock and Bulldog had this horrible clash of styles going on here and it made for a very uninteresting match here. At least it was short though at about seven minutes.

The post match insanity is by far more important here as it makes

Shamrock look like a freaking psycho, which is what he needed to be all along. He half kills a ton of referees, making him look like a monster. He got the push that he needed because of stuff like this. Oh and he choked Bulldog out.

Los Boricuas vs. Disciples of Apocalypse

Oh great why did I put up the Euro match? This is the gang wars period of the WWF, which NO ONE wanted to see. The original idea was to have three groups: the Nation, the Boricuas and the DOA and have them randomly fight each other. While that sounds ok in theory, the Boricuas had one guy anyone had ever heard of in Savio Vega. Go check their wiki pages and see what I mean. The other three have one major career accomplishment: being in Los Boricuas.

As for the DOA, they were ok as well, but they were just a generic biker team fighting a bunch of tiny guys and always losing. The Nation you already know. The problem here was simple: there was no story. Why are these teams fighting? We're never told. They're just feuding, but we don't know why or over what. There were never any promos or anything like that.

It's just fighting for the sake of fighting which NEVER WORKS. This is an 8 man tag, so at least we don't have to worry about multiple matches. At first the Nation was in this feud too, but they eventually dropped out when they realized they had actual careers. The biggest issue with this feud though: the DOA NEVER WON. It was always an upset for the Boricuas, which makes even less sense as if they're dominating, how can it be an upset?

What are you expecting here though? It's an eight minute match followed by a run in from the Nation which is accompanied by Ahmed who botches the Plunge on Chainz on the floor, leading to him getting pinned. I forgot Ahmed's horrible heel turn that lasted all of five minutes. He joined the Nation and of course was injured within a month. He was even supposed to get the title shot at Canadian Stampede but that didn't happen, as he couldn't stay healthy for more than 10 minutes.

Rating: D. My goodness what was the point to this feud? It made no sense,

no one liked it, and it was boring beyond belief. Just a waste of time for guys like Crush and Brian Lee that were good workers, stuck with this stupid gimmick.

We get the recap for the showdown between Austin and Owen. This is based off one thing: Owen pinned Austin (which was a big deal) at Canadian Stampede. Hart was the IC Champion, yet him getting a pin was a big deal. That either makes no sense, or shows you how big Austin was. I think it's a bit of both.

Since Hart beat Austin, naturally it means Austin should get a title match. Umm, right? Oh if Austin loses he has to kiss up to Owen, literally. Well let's get to it, as this is far more famous for one spot than for anything else, as you likely already know.

Intercontinental Title: Owen Hart vs. Steve Austin

On the way to the ring, Michael Cole, a newcomer at this point, tries to talk to Austin by calling him Mr. Stone Cold. It's what you'd expect, but Cole is always a tool, now and forevermore. The pop for Austin is huge, as you can see he is the undisputed future. Owen goes for the knee while Austin is up on the ropes and the start is very fast. The crowd being white hot helps a lot here, as this is a heated feud already and they're both looking great early.

Austin works the arm here and actually does it really well. It's weird seeing him use technical stuff, but he's doing it quite well here. Before the neck injury he was a completely different worker, but after it he found something that worked perfectly for him, so while obviously it's not good that he hurt his neck, it turned out as well as possible for him. I know I'm doing more play by play for this one, but this is followed by a pair of spots that I really like.

Owen comes up from a wrist lock and does that series of flips that he's always used to counter it, which I've never understood. At the end of that all he does is grab the other guy's wrist. Does he need the flips or am I missing something here? Anyway, he does all those, and Austin just pokes him in the eye to get control back. It's one motion, almost like what Piper would do.

After that he goes to a hammerlock and Owen grabs his head and jumps into the air to try to flip Austin over. Steve just stands there and lets Owen slam into the mat. I love those as they're so simple yet so effective, which is a lot of what Austin's offense was based on if you think about it. His main offense was kick, punch, jump on people (Thesz Press) and Stunner, which is grab them and sit down. That's really not a lot when you think about it.

Anyway, moving on. Owen works on the fingers and hand, which against a guy whose main offense is throwing punches makes a ton of sense. Austin even busts out a powerbomb for a counter, which isn't something that I've ever seen him use. It's always fun to see guys throw new stuff like that from nowhere. It keeps things exciting. Owen hits a neckbreaker which is frightening foreshadowing.

I think he's selling the move, but I think it's more legit than work here, which explains a lot about the upcoming move. German suplex and Austin's neck is hurt even more. My guess is he initially got hurt in one of these moves but of course the big one was the piledriver of course. Vince tries to figure out why he's one of the most popular wrestlers today but he just doesn't get it. That amuses me for some reason, as they lay the ground just slightly for Austin vs. McMahon.

And there it is. Austin is dropped on his head, changing his career forever. This really was scary as it was entirely possible that he never could wrestle again from that injury. That's a very scary thought to say the least. Completely apart from his health issues, this meant a ton as far as the WWF went.

Austin's injury and Vince not allowing him to work because of it was one of the earliest issues that the pair had, as Austin and the fans wanted to see him get in the ring but Vince said for the safety of Austin, he couldn't allow that to happen. This is a case where real life and wrestling mix, which usually makes for better angles and promos. It's easy to convey an emotion in front of a camera when that's how you really do feel.

As for the match itself, I have to give credit to Owen here as he handles

this as well as he can. You can see him setting for a cover and I guess Austin says that he's hurt to him or something, as Owen looks down at him for a second and then gets up and plays to the crowd to buy Austin some time. There was no way Austin could have kicked out there and you certainly couldn't fault him if he got pinned.

About thirty seconds later Vince gets that something is wrong after clearly being upset at first. After that he calms down and says that Austin must be hurt. JR I think handles it better by not really ignoring the injury but taking the focus off of it and talking about the Canadian and American fans chanting at each other.

I could see this going either way but I'd rather use Ross' method here, as it keeps the story going on the chance that Austin is able to fix himself and that it was just temporary, which there's no way to tell the extent of the injury this quickly.

Either way, it was handled well I think. We then get the worst roll up of all time as Owen sells like a god to try to make it look like he's in trouble, but Austin is more or less just laying there with Owen's legs in the air as it was the absolute best he could do at the time. The referee fast counts as well as he can to give Austin the title as he just collapses afterwards.

This is one of the scariest things I've ever seen as he can't even walk on his own. The referees have to carry him out, but not before he throws the belt over his head and gets another massive pop. You can tell just by the look on his face that he's completely gone.

Rating: B. The match itself was actually really good I thought. They went back and forth and due to the finish they had, it's obvious that Austin was going to get the title in what I'm assuming would have been just a standard Austin finish which would have worked just fine.

I'm certainly not going to hold the ending against them as there was nothing they could have done about it. These two had great chemistry together and it showed here. Excellent match that could have bordered on classic and been famous rather than infamous.

We get a recap of Bret vs. Taker, which more or less is Canada vs. America again. Shawn is referee as you know.

WWF Title: Bret Hart vs. Undertaker

Bret wants the Canadian National Anthem to be played. His heel stuff was just masterful to say the least. Shawn's pop is big to say the least as he is the referee like I've said many times now. He and Bret are forever linked together and that's obvious even now, which is saying a lot considering their biggest moment would be about three months later. Oh yeah Taker is here too.

Another massive pop for the WWF Champion as the crowd is red hot tonight, despite the show kind of sucking. The explosion when the lights come on draws one of the loudest short pops I've ever heard. Apparently there's a ton of stipulations here, with the main one being if Bret doesn't win the title he can't wrestle in America again, so the ending is pretty clear. There's also one on Shawn, but it's not made clear.

Bret jumps Taker and hits him with his own belt before the match starts, because he's a real Canadian. For the most part, the opening here is just a brawl. That's fine as both guys can certainly fight, and this is no exception. Shawn is trying to call it fair, but you know something is coming later on. This is a long match though as there's 30 minutes to go and we're just started.

We get a report that Austin has no feeling in his hands and has been taken to a hospital. As you may know, it wasn't a good diagnosis. For the most part, Taker is dominating. Of course, just as I type that Bret starts his comeback as Taker is called a redwood for the second time in about 5 minutes. Ross' line of Bret having visions of sharpshooters dancing in his head made me laugh.

Bret gets a figure four as we touch on Taker never losing by submission. As this hold is on, Paul Bearer comes out. Apparently he's been saying Taker's brother is still alive. Yeah nothing is ever going to come from that angle. After escaping, Taker goes outside and drills Bearer but Bret takes over again because of it. We get the Heartbreaker, which is the figure four on the post.

I still don't get how that's really a big additional help but whatever. Owen and Pillman hit ringside for no apparent reason other than being nefarious. "They're not offering moral support. They don't have any morals." That was kind of clever and kind of crap. After a good long time HBK gets rid of them, but in doing so he misses the cover following a chokeslam.

Somehow of course Hart pops back up and gets the second rope elbow, just after a double bird to the fans. I love how a heel turn can make whatever you preached for a year mean nothing at all. Always loved that quick legdrop that Bret uses from time to time. Bret goes for the sharpshooter as Shawn looks in very close. I guess he's taking notes on how to put it on properly for later on or something.

Oh come on I had to make one joke. Taker with a sweet over the top rope from the apron chokeslam. This has been a very solid match, but I'd have preferred no Shawn. He's not hurting things as he's been consistent and he had to be there for the ending, but I'd have preferred a standard match here. Ross says that we're seeing Vintage Hart. Oddly enough, Cole was a relative rookie at this point. I guess he also took good notes.

Finally we get the sharpshooter, and after it's been on for a little while, Taker just launches Bret with nothing leg strength. Isn't it amazing how after one person (Austin) broke the unbreakable hold, it happens more and more? That always makes me chuckle for some reason. Bret counters a tombstone and puts the Sharpshooter on again, but this time he uses the post. However, the post isn't even touching Taker's leg or back, making the use of the post, say it with me, COMPLETELY POINTLESS!

Seriously, it's not even touching him and because it's there, Bret can't put any torque on the hold. Isn't the point of the hold to raise up the legs while the torso stays still to put pressure on the knees and back? With this it's like Taker is just lying on his stomach with his legs crossed like he's in Terms of Endearment. Now how's that for a bad image? To get out of it, Taker kicks him off with ease, since there's NO PRESSURE ON HIS LEGS.

Of course Bret lands on HBK, and Michaels assumes that Bret just jumped

on him, since of course Bret would just jump on him and let go of a hold. Bret slams Taker with a chair as Shawn is trying to get his knee to work, and since it's Shawn's knee, you know that's nothing but legit. I mean it's not like he'd fake a knee injury for a match involving Hart. That would be just a waste of everyone's time and effort, so why would Shawn fake a knee injury in an angle involving him and Bret Hart?

Such a thing would obviously be impossible. Anyway, Shawn comes back in and asks Bret about the chair. As this is happening, Taker gets up and is standing behind Bret. Shawn is standing there arguing with Bret and pulls back the chair. Now let's pause for a second here. Shawn is looking at Bret. Bret and Shawn are arguing. Bret is considered to be one of the smartest wrestlers of all time. Shawn pulls back the chair.

Was Shawn supposed to think that Bret was just going to stand there and get hit in the head with a chair? Oh and don't worry about the big demon behind Bret. He'll just move. You get the point don't you? Yeah, that ends Taker's title reign as Shawn is completely disgusted that he had to do that, since obviously there was nothing more intelligent that he could have done in this case.

The fans are going nuts as Bret is pelted with garbage while Taker leaves to go get him a piece of HBK. Insert your own Becca joke here. For no apparent reason, this is the upset of the year or something. Why? Bret is a former what, 3-4 time champion? Is it that far out of the realm of possibility that he could beat the Undertaker for the belt? We go to replays as Bret is joined by the Hart Foundation and the party is on.

They're still talking about how this is shocking. WHY IS IT SHOCKING??? Pillman runs up and kisses the belt as we go off the air, which is sad as he would be dead in two months or so.

Rating: A. VERY good match. They hammered each other the whole time, and as I've said countless times, the key to a great match is not knowing who the winner would be. While it was clear given the stipulation about Bret that he would win, I actually forgot about that. That's the sign of a good match in my eyes. Absolutely great match here and something that you should go out of your way to see.

Overall Rating: B. This was a very hard grade for me to come up with. The show could be called good but some could call it awful. As you can see, I liked it more than I didn't like it. This is very hit or miss. The best summary I can give you: the parts that are good are good and the parts that are bad are bad. The cage match is excellent and to me the best match on the card, but I'm a fan of the older style.

The main event is solid as these two have great chemistry together and brought it hard here. I'm fine with the ending as it set up one of the great blood feuds of all time. The rest of the card is at least ok. The IC match is more infamous than famous but it certainly holds up. To sum up in one word, Summerslam 97 is passable.

It's got enough good here to make it above average, but not by much. Too much filler in a row and the million dollar thing was just a waste of time. Overall, it's certainly not bad, but it could have been better.

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