

Wrestlemania Count-Up – XXXVI (Night One): Small Crowd Man

Wrestlemania XXXVI Night 1

Date: April 4, 2020

Location: WWE Performance Center, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton

Host: Rob Gronkowski

A year has passed since this show and it still does not seem real. Aside from the main event, this show has almost been erased from history as it is barely ever discussed whatsoever. The Coronavirus wiped everything out and the show was moved to the Performance Center, making it feel like a show that they had just to say they had it. Let's get to it.

Kickoff Show: Cesaro vs. Drew Gulak

Their respective friends (Shinsuke Nakamura/Sami Zayn and Daniel Bryan) are feuding so these two are having a match as well. Yeah it's weak but what else are they supposed to do? Cole is calling this one on his own and it sounds so strange. Gulak goes for the arm to start but a short arm scissors is countered into a powerbomb. They head outside with Cesaro getting in another shot but the arm is banged up.

An armdrag on the bad arm sets up a whip into the steps but Cesaro uppercuts him out of the air for two. A Fujiwara armbar is broken up so Gulak settles for two off a sunset flip. Cesaro boots him in the face and loads up a torture rack airplane spin (with no hands at one point for a crazy visual) before just dropping Gulak for the pin at 4:27.

Rating: C. The match was fine but EGADS this is bizarre. It's like we're watching a training session that was recorded and they slapped a Wrestlemania logo on the thing. It was watchable enough and would have been acceptable as a warmup but I can't believe that this is Wrestlemania. Of course it isn't on WWE given the circumstances but my goodness this is weird and that isn't likely to change over the course of

the show.

Stephanie McMahon welcomes us to the show and says that while this is going to be the most different Wrestlemania ever (due to the current circumstances, with no mention of the virus, which was a weird WWE thing for a LONG time).

Rather than someone singing America the Beautiful live, we get a montage of previous performances. Fair enough and actually a pretty cool idea.

The opening video continues the pirate theme but someone doing a pretty bad Jack Sparrow impression cuts it off, saying it sounds like they are starting at the end. He says the video isn't trying and calls for the "classic movie trailer voice". The trailer voice is cut off by the Sparrow impression (which is how he refers to it) but the video still doesn't work, so he says go to the shots of our heroes looking all serious. These people are larger than life and are marred by the work of hundreds of days and nights.

This is their quest for gold, glory and immortality. Tonight, forget EVERYTHING you know because fate leads the way, and fate can surprise us. History waits for no one and tonight, their chance to shape history begins right now. The traditional montage takes over from here. I love pirate movies and while this was pretty much a parody of the idea, it makes me wonder how good the real thing would have been with the WWE budget behind a pirate themed show.

Host Rob Gronkowski (erg) welcomes us to the show and does some fine script reading as he talks about how this is a two night event. He talks about being able to start a party on a Saturday night, even if that might be a little difficult in a mostly empty building. Mojo Rawley joins him because you need the hype here. Gronk gives him some pretty lame chops and we're off to the first match.

Women's Tag Team Titles: Alexa Bliss/Nikki Cross vs. Kabuki Warriors

The Warriors (Asuka/Kairi Sane) are defending and commentary points out that they took the titles from Bliss/Cross back in October. This is their first title defense since DECEMBER, because the titles really don't mean

much in WWE. Asuka and Bliss get things going with a lot of laughing but it's off to Sane without any contact. Sane shoves Bliss around a bit, drawing Bliss back up to knock Sane down. That sets up the double knees to the ribs and a tag off to Cross, who is taken into the champs' corner.

Some forearms stagger Asuka though and Bliss tags herself in. That means a baseball slide can knock Sane outside, followed by a flip dive from the apron. Back in and Asuka punches Cross in the face, allowing the tag back to Sane. Everything breaks down again with the Warriors taking over on the floor. Back in again and a bulldog into a basement dropkick rocks Cross but Sane gets a bit cocky.

That means Cross can kick her away, allowing the tag back to Bliss. House doesn't have time to be cleaned though as Asuka offers a distraction, allowing Sane to catch Bliss in the ropes. The Alberto double stomp gets two and Bliss is in trouble, despite Cross trying to get...well no one here to clap. The referee yells at Asuka, allowing Sane to snap Bliss' neck across the ropes.

Bliss forearms Asuka in the face so Asuka kicks her head off. Another shot from Bliss allows the hot tag to Cross, meaning it's a lot of screaming as she forearms and bulldogs Sane. A high crossbody gives Cross two but Sane gets in a cheap shot from the apron. The Reckoning gets two on Asuka with Sane breaking it up off a top rope elbow (and possibly with a camera edit because that count looked ready to go down before Sane appeared).

Asuka tries the Asuka Lock on Cross but Bliss breaks it up with Twisted Bliss. Back up and Asuka hits a Codebreaker on Cross but the Insane Elbow is broken up. Instead it's a powerbomb/top rope forearm to knock Cross silly...for two. Nikki avoids a charge to send Asuka into the post. The Reckoning sets up another Twisted Bliss for the pin and the titles at 15:11.

Rating: C. That was a lot longer than I would have bet on but the title change was the right way to start. If nothing else, just so Bliss can do her pose with a title again. You can only have the Warriors hold the title so long before it stops meaning anything due to a lack of defenses.

I can't imagine this makes a huge difference, but it was the right move here.

Sami Zayn brags about taking the Intercontinental Title from Braun Strowman, even though people thought it was inevitable that Strowman would destroy him. Tonight, people think it is inevitable that Daniel Bryan will take the title from him, but we'll see about that.

King Corbin vs. Elias

This is fallout from Corbin knocking Elias off a platform here in the arena. That should have, you know, broken most of his bones, but instead it put him out for eight days. Corbin insists that Elias isn't here but the comeback is here before the referee can even start to count. Corbin goes outside to start the fight in the aisle so Elias blasts him in the back with the guitar.

Elias sends him into various things and they head inside for the opening bell. An elbow to the face gives Elias two and it's time to choke near the ropes. Corbin tosses him over the top and wants the countout but settles for right hands to the ribs back inside. The slide underneath the rope in the corner clothesline gets two on Elias and it's time to hammer on Elias' bad shoulder (because he has a bad shoulder after crashing off the balcony last week).

Said bad shoulder goes into the post for two and Corbin yells at the referee, which you can hear a lot more of in the empty arena. Back up and Elias sends him shoulder first into the post to even things up a bit. A kick out of the corner sends Corbin into another corner and Elias hammers away. Elias has to roll through the top rope elbow and charges into Deep Six for two. Back up and Elias nails a jumping knee to the face but gets sent throat first into the ropes. A rollup with feet on the ropes gives Corbin two but the referee catches the cheating and yells a lot. Instead Elias grabs a rollup and tights for the pin at 8:52.

Rating: C-. That's one of the least interesting matches I can remember in a long time, but what were you expecting given who was in there? It's bad enough that Elias' big revenge was a rollup pin after getting beaten down for a few minutes, but the fact that it came over Corbin made things even

worse. Just not an interesting match and it would have felt a lot better as the nothing Kickoff Show match instead.

We recap Shayna Baszler vs. Becky Lynch for the Raw Women's Title. Becky Lynch has been champion for about a year and is out of people to face. Baszler showed up from NXT and...bit Becky's neck for some reason, drawing a bunch of blood. Then Baszler demolished the Elimination Chamber match to become #1 contender (in other words she beat up a bunch of losers and Asuka), setting up Lynch's biggest challenge in a long time. Lynch reminding Baszler that she beat Ronda Rousey to get the title was a great response and this was a heck of a build.

Raw Women's Title: Becky Lynch vs. Shayna Baszler

Lynch is defending and drives to the arena in a semi truck because...something about the Man I guess? They go straight to the slugout to start and the threat of the Kirifuda Clutch sends Becky bailing out to the floor. Baszler is sent into the steps to put her in trouble, followed by a missile dropkick back inside. Lynch comes up favoring her back but hammers away in the corner anyway.

A hard knee rocks Lynch but she slips out of the Kirifuda Clutch to grab a rollup instead. Baszler grabs a cutter for two but can't hit a running knee. They fight to the apron with Lynch talking trash as they forearm it out. Lynch Rock Bottoms her onto the apron for two and the champ looks a bit surprised.

Baszler slams her off the top and grabs a quickly broken cross armbreaker. Instead Baszler puts on her own Disarm Her but Lynch is out in a hurry. This time Lynch grabs the Disarm Her on the ropes, only to have Baszler knock her off the rope for a big crash. Baszler picks her up for a hard swing into the announcers' table (geez that always looks rough) before throwing it back inside. The Kirifuda Clutch goes on but Lynch backflips over for the pin to retain at 8:32.

Rating: C. Yeah I'm not sure I get this one, as Lynch was ready to lose the title and Baszler seemed primed to take the thing from her. Throw in the Lynch was about to go on maternity leave (fair enough that she didn't know it at this point) and there was no reason to not switch the title here. It seemed that they were setting up a submission rematch, but at some point you need to just change the title and be done with it, which should have been the case here.

Intercontinental Title: Sami Zayn vs. Daniel Bryan

Bryan, with Drew Gulak, is challenging and Cesaro and Shinsuke Nakamura are here with Zayn. Rob Gronkowski and Mojo Rawley do the YES chant from the balcony, which just looks sad with two people in there. Sami bails straight to the floor and then does it again to get in Bryan's head. Back in and the third exit ensues, which finally causes Bryan to go after him, only to have Cesaro and Nakamura get in the way.

Gulak dives onto the two of them and hammers away, meaning Gulak and Zayn get to have their own staredown. Bryan finally gets his hands on Zayn thanks to a suicide dive and it's time to crank on the leg. Zayn is sent outside again for another suicide dive, followed by a missile dropkick back inside. Bryan slaps him in the face and shouts that Zayn is the loser because he hasn't beaten anyone.

The running dropkick in the corner might have Zayn crying (JBL: "You shouldn't be crying at Wrestlemania.") but he cuts Bryan's charge off with a shot of his own. Back up and Bryan hits the running clothesline, followed by the rapid fire strikes. Hold on though as Bryan needs to go after Cesaro and Nakamura, only to dive into the Helluva Kick to retain Zayn's title at 9:18.

Rating: C. Another rather disappointing match here but again, it's kind of hard to complain about much on this show. The biggest problem continues to be the lack of time, as you can

only make a match feel so big in just over nine minutes. It's also another situation where the title should have changed hands, as Zayn went home because of the virus (fair) and had to vacate the title without wrestling again in nearly six months.

Smackdown Tag Team Titles: John Morrison vs. Kofi Kingston vs. Jimmy Uso

Morrison is defending for Miz and John Morrison and this is a ladder match. Injuries and virus concerns took away enough of the partners that this is as good as we can get here. Everyone misses a kick to start and Morrison and Kingston both stick the landings on a monkey flip attempt, meaning it's an early standoff.

Everyone goes out to grab a ladder (Morrison gets the only regular sized one) and they all climb up, with Jimmy being knocked down and coming up clutching his knee (always a good sign). He's fine enough to get to his feet but Kofi dives off the ladder to take him down. Morrison is right there to go after Kofi but they both miss kicks and takedowns. Kofi knocks Jimmy off the ladder but Morrison takes him down as well, meaning Jimmy has to make a save of his own.

A springboard lets Kofi dropkick both of them through the ladder (cool), only to have Morrison clear the ring again. Morrison stabs Jimmy in the knee with the ladder but Jimmy sends him face first into the ladder in the corner. That's fine with Morrison, who knocks him onto the ladder and hits a corkscrew flip to crush Jimmy again. Kofi is back up with a springboard hurricanrana to pull Morrison off of the ladder, because of course he can do that.

After knocking Jimmy outside, Kofi hits a big dive over the top to take Morrison down again. Jimmy tries to run the barricade so Kofi throws the ladder at him for another knockdown. It's time to bridge the ladder between the ring and the apron, which never winds up going well. Jimmy is laid on

said ladder but Morrison walks the rope to get from one corner to another and Spanish Fly Kofi off the top.

That leaves Morrison down so Jimmy can hit a Superfly Splash to crush him all over again. Kofi and Jimmy climb the same ladder (with Kofi climbing from inside because he's a bit unique) and Jimmy gets knocked off in a heap. Morrison gets knocked down as well and Kofi comes off with the jumping double stomp to make it worse. Back up and Jimmy bridges the ladder between the rope and the standing ladder (uh oh) and then sends Kofi face first into the bridged one.

Morrison gets superkicked out of the air so Jimmy goes up another ladder, only to be shoved down. It must have been quite the fall as he went down with his feet facing the entrance and landed with his head facing the entrance. Or maybe WWE just needs better editors. Morrison throws a ladder out and goes up, only to have Kofi climb the same ladder. Jimmy is back in to climb another ladder and they all get a hand on the titles. A double headbutt knocks Morrison down....and he comes up with the titles for the win at 18:33.

Rating: B. This was the big spotfest match that you knew was coming here at one point or another on the show and there is nothing wrong with that. They did their thing all over the place here with one crazy spot after another. That's how a match like this is supposed to be and it was as fun as you could have imagined a triple threat match for the Tag Team Titles would be. Granted there is one thing wrong with the match, which would be the horrible knee injury that Jimmy suffered, which would keep him out of action for over a year.

We recap Seth Rollins vs. Kevin Owens. Rollins is doing his evil messiah deal and Owens doesn't want to hear it, nor does he want to deal with the beatdowns Rollins and company have given him. Grudge match time.

Kevin Owens vs. Seth Rollins

Dig that KO Mania IV shirt with the Andre the Giant/Hulk Hogan style as Owens continues an awesome tradition. After a quick bit of hiding in the ropes, Rollins starts the slugout and it goes about as badly as you would go. Owens hammers him down, shrugs off a kick to the face, and hits a hard clothesline. There's a backsplash to crush Rollins but it's too early for the Cannonball.

Some chops have Rollins in trouble on the floor but he manages a backdrop on the apron to avoid a rather painful powerbomb. A Falcon Arrow on the apron plants Owens again as Rollins is already focusing on the back. Rollins hits a hard suicide dive to knock him into the barricade and he does it again for a bonus. Back in and Rollins keeps the trash talk up but misses a pair of Stomps. Owens doesn't miss a DDT though and a superkick lets him hit the Cannonball.

The Stunner is countered and Rollins nails an enziguri, only to have Owens nail a rebound lariat for another knockdown. A superplex is loaded up but Rollins blocks it, setting up the buckle bomb. Some superkicks rock Owens, who is still fine enough to hit a pop up sitout powerbomb for a close two. They go outside and Rollins blasts him in the head with the ring bell for the DQ at 10:09.

And no this isn't what we're doing because Owens says let's keep it going with no countout or DQ. That's fine with Rollins and the bell rings, allowing him to hit a jumping knee to the face. Rollins takes it outside again and sends him into various things, followed by a steps shot to the face.

A bunch of chair shots have Owens in big trouble but he comes up with a HARD bell shot to the head. With Rollins mostly done, Owens climbs onto the big WRESTLEMANIA sign and dives off, though he is nice enough to ask if Rollins thinks this is a Wrestlemania moment. Back in and Rollins tries to talk his way out of trouble, earning himself a Stunner for the pin at 17:15.

Rating: B-. I didn't remember liking this one all that much but they beat each other up rather well and it was entertaining enough. The bell to the head sounded great and the violence was good, once you got past the pretty worthless pause in between the falls. Owens can brawl with the best of them, but unfortunately he got hurt here too and would miss time of his own, because this show is cursed.

R-Truth comes up to Mojo Rawley and Rob Gronkowski and complains about being 24/7. I think you know what happens here and Rawley celebrates with the title.

Paul Heyman scares the heck out of Charly Caruso and talks about how great how sure he is that Drew McIntyre is losing. Brock Lesnar is going to destroy McIntyre and leave him a broken man because Lesnar is the most awesome fighter ever. He gets the message across with a bit more emotion as you might guess.

We run down the night two card.

Smackdown World Title: Braun Strowman vs. Goldberg

Goldberg is defending and there is no recap because there is no story. Goldberg won the title in Saudi Arabia so he could lose to Roman Reigns here, but then Reigns pulled out due to the Coronavirus concerns (again, fair). After about twenty seconds of staring each other down, Goldberg kicks him in the ribs and hits an early spear.

Strowman is back up so Goldberg hits two more spears for a near fall. Make it four, but the Jackhammer is countered into a powerslam. We'll make that two powerslams and the third sets up a fourth to make Strowman champion at 2:11. The entire match was three moves and one of them was a kick to the ribs.

Wrestlemania XXXVII is in Los Angeles. Just like it was in the Memorial Coliseum in 1991.

We recap AJ Styles vs. The Undertaker. Styles didn't like Undertaker being a broken shell of himself so he insulted Undertaker the man, including Undertaker's wife. This did not wind up going well and for the first time, it seems that this is Mark Calaway fighting instead of Styles, which should make things all the more interesting. Oh and they're in boneyard to make things a little spicier/more cinematic.

Undertaker vs. AJ Styles

The hearse rides into the boneyard and the druids pull out the casket, which of course has Styles in it for a chuckle worthy moment. In a bit cooler moment, we get Biker Taker again, riding to the boneyard to Now That We're Dead by Metallica. AJ wastes no time in talking trash, asking if Michelle McCool knows Undertaker is out this late. Undertaker knocks a brick out of his hands and the fight is on, with Undertaker dragging him around. He even calls AJ Alan to make it more freaky.

AJ is sent into the closed casket but Undertaker's punch goes through the hearse window (cue the Goldberg flashbacks). He is fine enough to throw him through the windshield and they fight on top of the hearse, with Undertaker still getting the better of things. Undertaker hammers away while yelling at AJ to not talk about his wife and then quotes Clubber Lang by saying he has a lotta more. AJ gets smart by throwing dirt in the eyes and then trying to punch Undertaker into a grave.

It turns out that standing in front of someone who can't see and talking a lot makes you easy to punch so Undertaker drills him in the jaw. That's enough to knock Undertaker into the grave but the Good Brothers show up, complete with imitation western music. Undertaker goes after them...and we've got druids for some reason. They don't really do much good though, as they stand there while Undertaker goes in a circle punching them. Now Undertaker can beat up Gallows and Anderson in peace, including beating on them with the handle of a shovel.

AJ is back with a tombstone (the stone, not the move) though and shatters it over Undertaker's back. That means trash talk from AJ and weird sounds from Undertaker...and they are both knocked through the wall of a shed. Undertaker wheezes and backs away, allowing AJ to break a shove over his back to knock him into a grave. With Undertaker down, AJ jumps in the dump truck (or whatever you call it)...and Undertaker appears behind him in a big ball of light. Eh it's not that insane really.

AJ runs off (as you should) and climbs onto the roof of the barn so Undertaker shoots fire out of the roof foo. Cue Gallows and Anderson so Undertaker beats them up again and throws Gallows into the abyss. A Tombstone onto the roof drops Anderson and Undertaker says it's just him and AJ. For some reason AJ swings at him and gets chokeslammed off the roof and through a big piece of wood. Undertaker climbs down and asks AJ what his wife's name is. Or maybe AJ can tell Undertaker how old he is.

AJ is out on his feet as Undertaker picks him up and talks about how AJ is tougher than he gave him credit for. It's time to go to the grave and AJ says he's sorry. Undertaker wants to know what for and then picks AJ up by the throat. AJ begs him not to bury him and Undertaker hugs him while saying AJ put up a great fight. Then Undertaker boots him into the grave and fills it in with the dirt. The gong sounds and we'll say that's the match at about 19:12 (your individual times may vary).

Rating: A. Yeah this is still great and is the pinnacle of the cinematic stuff. It doesn't get too goofy (I mean, Undertaker stuff is weird by definition) and it felt like two guys having a fight. AJ being all cocky and sure of himself until he finally realized what he was up against is a classic Undertaker story and it worked well here. Above all else, this felt like Undertaker having one last brush with greatness before hanging it up and I can see why he was ok with this

being the big ending. Go out doing something different and special, which is what he did here. I loved this when I watched it and still do here, so well done.

AJ's gloves hand sticks out of the grave as Undertaker gets on his bike, throws up the fist to make the fire go off again. Undertaker's symbol goes up on the barn wall and he rides away to end the show. And to end Undertaker's career it seems, as he has not wrestled since and announced his retirement at Survivor Series about seven months later.

Overall Rating: B-. Like I said at the beginning, this show has kind of been forgotten and it is easy to see why. I'm not sure how you could expect anything else here, as the show was cobbled together from whomever was left and they did what they could to still have a Wrestlemania. It's a Wrestlemania in name only for the most part, but it isn't like they had any control over the thing. What we got was good enough, but don't expect this to be anything more than an historical curiosity, because it doesn't feel like Wrestlemania.

Ratings Comparison

Drew Gulak vs. Cesaro

Original: C

2021 Redo: C

Alexa Bliss/Nikki Cross vs. Kabuki Warriors

Original: C

2021 Redo: C

Elias vs. King Corbin

Original: D

2021 Redo: C-

Shayna Baszler vs. Becky Lynch

Original: B-

2021 Redo: C

Daniel Bryan vs. Sami Zayn

Original: C+

2021 Redo: C

Jimmy Uso vs. John Morrison vs. Kofi Kingston

Original: B

2021 Redo: B

Kevin Owens vs. Seth Rollins

Original: C

2021 Redo: B-

Goldberg vs. Braun Strowman

Original: N/A

2021 Redo: N/A

Undertaker vs. AJ Styles

Original: A+

2021 Redo: A

Overall Rating

Original: C

2021 Redo: B-

Mostly in the ballpark, but it's not like this is a show that is going to feel the same after a year.

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

<https://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2020/04/04/wrestlemania-xxxvi-night-one-broken-undertaker/>

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