

Smackdown – December 22, 2023: I Remember All Of Them

Smackdown

Date: December 22, 2023

Location: Resch Center, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Commentators: Michael Cole, Kevin Patrick, Corey Graves

We're taped this week for what might be the final Smackdown of the year. Things got interesting to end last week's show as AJ Styles made his return to go after the Bloodline. At the same time though, he also went after LA Knight, which could have some Royal Rumble implications. Let's get to it.

[Here are last week's results if you need a recap.](#)

We open with a recap of Roman Reigns returning and the challengers lining up, including the returning AJ Styles.

Here is Styles to get things going. Styles talks about how Randy Orton and LA Knight want to face Roman Reigns. He can't blame them, but he's at the front of the line to face Reigns. Cue Knight to say he gets Reigns first and the fans are going to be saying his name, but Styles can be first on Knight's list.

Styles brings up Knight using Styles' absence to get into the Crown Jewel title shot but here is Orton to interrupt. Orton says this ring is his home but Knight says the Bloodline hasn't taken him out yet. Cue Nick Aldis to say the three of them can fight in two weeks for the Royal Rumble shot at Reigns. Works for Styles, who tells them both to stay away tonight when he faces Solo Sikoa.

Shotzi/Bianca Belair/Zelina Vega/Michin vs. Damage CTRL

This is Holiday Havoc, the Christmas themed street fight. It's

a big brawl to start with Belair dropkicking Sky into the corner to start. Bayley makes a save but Shotzi is back in with a present. That would be a chair but Bayley blocks the drop toehold onto said chair. Instead Shotzi uses the chair for a springboard dive onto Bayley.

Shotzi hits a big dive but the villains clear the ring with kendo sticks. Belair and Shotzi get their own sticks for their own house cleaning but it takes too long to set up a table. We take a break and come back with everyone down until Vega sends Sky outside. Belair sunset flips Bayley for two and a Doomsday Dropkick, with a trashcan over the head, drops Sky for the same.

Vega drops Sane but gets misted by Asuka, allowing the villains to go for some big boxes. Those contain...Isla Dawn and Alba Fyre, who wreck Sane and Asuka. Bayley gets caught with the KOD and Michin gives Sky Eat Defeat. The top rope backsplash through the table gives Michin the pin on Sky at 12:43.

Rating: B-. I can go on these goofy, completely out there matches and that's what we had here. It was a fun, goofy match and that's all it needed to be, though Michin is likely to get a one off title shot out of this. There are worse ways to go for her and throwing in the returns of Dawn and Fyre make this all the more interesting.

Jimmy Uso talks to Solo Sikoa about audibles as Roman Reigns looks annoyed. He wants Nick Aldis here now.

NXT North American Title: Butch vs. Dragon Lee

Lee is defending and works on the wrist to start. Butch punches him in the face but Lee manages a slingshot dropkick in the corner. The running dive to the floor is cut off though and we take a break with Lee in trouble. Back with Butch stomping on the hands until Lee snaps off a running hurricanrana over the top and out to the floor. They get back

inside where Butch hits a sitout powerbomb for two, setting up a chop off.

Lee gets the better of things and hits his own sitout powerbomb for two of his own. Butch gets tied in the Tree of Woe but is fine enough snap Lee's fingers. Since fingers aren't needed, Lee hits the top rope double stomp for two. Butch's Bitter End is countered as well and Operation Dragon retains the title at 9:46.

Rating: B-. More good stuff here with Lee getting to have another match against a more than capable opponent. That is more than you get most of the time and it worked well here. Lee's status is growing more and more every week and the more title defenses he gets under his belt, the higher he'll go. Good stuff here, though can we please find something else for Butch to do?

We recap the US Title #1 contenders tournament.

Paul Heyman brings Nick Aldis to Roman Reigns, who does not like Aldis booking matches without running them by Reigns first. Adam Pearce understood that, but Aldis says he's the sharp end of the stick around here. Tonight, Solo Sikoa is facing AJ Styles and Sikoa will be fine. He's a big boot who took care of John Cena in a way that even Reigns didn't. Aldis is looking forward to getting to know Reigns better. This was good stuff from Aldis here, as he didn't back down from Reigns and gives him a bit of a new adversary.

US Title #1 Contenders Tournament Semifinals: Kevin Owens vs. Carmelo Hayes

We get an insert interview from Logan Paul (these are GREAT ways to keep him involved when he's not around) who says Hayes' first win was impressive but now he has to face the DISGUSTING Kevin Owens. They lock up to start with Hayes taking him down for an early two. An exchange of near falls lets Hayes hit a dropkick and Owens seems impressed. Owens

comes back with a right (as in still broken) hand, allowing Hayes to pull him out to the floor.

That's fine with Owens, who sends Hayes into the steps as we take a break. Back with Hayes grabbing a slam, followed by an ax kick for two. A spinning faceplant gets the same but Owens puts him on top for a hanging DDT. They trade kicks to the face until Owens blasts him with a clothesline. Hayes manages a Codebreaker but Nothing But Net misses, allowing Owens to hit a pop up powerbomb for two more. The Swanton and Stunner send Owens to the finals at 10:20.

Rating: B-. That's a fine way to get rid of Hayes, who came in and got a win on the main roster before losing to a bigger star. This wasn't meant to bring Hayes up full time and they didn't do anything they shouldn't have done. At the same time, Owens has felt like the obvious winner of the tournament since the beginning so him in the finals was almost expected.

The OC comes in to see AJ Styles, who hasn't been in touch. Karl Anderson asks if they're good. Styles: "I don't know. Are we?"

Karrion Kross promises to take away something else from other people. Of note: he seems to say the word "authors" and as the lights are lashing, two large men can be seen standing around him. Authors of Pain perhaps?

United States Title #1 Contenders Tournament Semifinals: Bobby Lashley vs. Santos Escobar

The Street Profits are here with Lashley, who starts fast with a running shoulder in the corner. Escobar manages to go up top but gets pulled out of the air and sent outside. We take a break and come back with Escobar hitting a suicide dive. The running knees in the corner connect twice in a row but Lashley fights his way out of a superplex attempt. Cue some men in masks to jump the Profits though, with the distraction letting Escobar grab a rollup for the pin at 8:19.

Rating: C+. That's a smart move as not only did WWE need a way to get the almost unstoppable Lashley out of the way, but it also avoids the fans cheering for him over Kevin Owens in the finals. Escobar also seems to have some backup now and that could very well set up a nice six man tag against the LWO when Rey Mysterio is back.

Post match the masked men are revealed as Humberto Carrillo and Angel Garza.

Butch is upset by his loss but he lost to the better man. Pretty Deadly comes in to mock him and the fight is on, with Nick Aldis coming in to tell Butch to find a partner for two weeks from now. That sounds Sheamus-y.

Logan Paul isn't impressed by his potential opponents. As usual, he's at his best when he's talking down to people and that was on high here.

Here's what's coming in two weeks. Earlier tonight, a graphic confirmed that next week will be a Best Of show.

AJ Styles vs. Solo Sikoa

Styles strikes away to start but gets dropped with a shot to the face. Sikoa is knocked outside for a knee from the apron, followed by a slingshot forearm as we take a break. Back with Sikoa hitting a backdrop and sending Styles back first into the post. Another whip sends Styles face first into the bottom buckle and the running Umaga attack makes it worse.

Styles fights back and drops him as well, setting up a Lionsault for two. The Phenomenal Blitz connects but Sikoa grabs a pop up Samoan drop for another near fall. A forearm to the face looks to set up the Phenomenal Forearm, which is countered into a missed Samoan Spike. Styles gets back up and hits the Phenomenal Forearm, only to have Roman Reigns run in for the DQ at 11:33.

Rating: C+. I'm a bit surprised that Styles didn't get a pin here but he did have Sikoa in trouble until the screwy ending. What matters is that Styles is back in the ring and looked like his old self. I don't know if he'll win next week, but having Styles back in any role on the roster is going to be something that helps out quite a bit.

Post match Jimmy Uso comes in to help with the beatdown but Randy Orton and LA Knight make the save. The Bloodline is cleared out but the other three get in a fight to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This was a pretty nice show with some good action and quite a few returns. They've also set up a pretty stacked card for New Year's Revolution, which should be a big time event to send us on to the Royal Rumble. You have to do well n the way to a Best Of show next week and they did well enough, though I wouldn't call anything here worth going out of your way to see.

Results

Shotzi/Bianca Belair/Zelina Vega/Michin b. Damage CTRL – Top rope backslash through at able to Sky
Dragon Lee b. Butch – Operation Dragon
Kevin Owens b. Carmelo Hayes – Stunner
Santos Escobar b. Bobby Lashley – Rollup
AJ Styles b. Solo Sikoa via DQ when Roman Reigns interfered

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