

Impact Wrestling – December 21, 2023 (Best Of 2023 Part 1): As Advertised

Impact Wrestling

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Commentators: Matthew Rehwoldt, Tom Hannifan

We're wrapping up the year with back to back Best Of shows, which should show off some of the Best Of 2023, assuming no false advertising. Impact has had a nice year and we could be in for a good collection of stuff over the next two weeks. Before the company becomes TNA again because of course they are. Let's get to it.

Note that I'll be posting the full versions of the matches, even if a clipped version may be shown.

Opening sequence.

The hosts give us a quick rundown of what is coming up in the coming weeks.

From Hard To Kill.

Impact Wrestling World Title: Bully Ray vs. Josh Alexander

Alexander is defending in Full Metal Mayhem, meaning TLC with pins/submissions. Ray hides during the entrances and jumps Alexander from behind to start things fast. A belt shot to the face has Alexander in more trouble and Ray sends a table inside before the opening bell. Ray tosses him inside and demands the bell ring but the bloody Alexander has to say yes first. Sure he's in, so the bell rings and Ray powerbombs him through a table for two to start fast.

We go old school (of course) as Ray whips out a cheese grater so Alexander gets smart by punching Ray in the face. The grater to the face sends Ray (bleeding as well) outside. Some trashcan lid shots to the head have Ray in more trouble and there's the grater to the head to draw the real blood. The thumbtacks are brought in but Alexander chairs him in the back first.

Alexander puts Ray on a table on the ramp and loads up a ladder, only to have Ray tip it over and send him into the ring, onto the tacks. The Bully Bomb is broken up and Alexander hits a German suplex to rock Ray again. A Regal Roll onto the tacks set up a middle rope knee (with chain wrapped around) to the head. The ankle lock goes on but Jason Hotch and John Skyler run in for the save. A 3D onto the tacks gets two on Alexander so the goons zip tie him to the top rope.

Cue Tommy Dreamer for the save with a trashcan shot to Ray. That earns Dreamer a spear through the table in the corner, leaving Alexander to get trash canned in the head. Cue Alexander's wife Jade (not supposed to be here) to beg him for mercy (Ray: "I WANT TO SEE TEARS!"). Ray demands her wedding ring but gets low blowed instead. Sliced Bread onto the tacks (Jade is a former wrestler so it's not insane) knocks Ray silly and Alexander is loose. Ray is put on another table and a splash from the ladder drives him through it for two. The ankle lock makes Ray tap at 17:02.

Rating: B-. This is a tricky one as the match wasn't all that great, mainly due to a bunch of stalling and interference taking away from the action. That being said, I'll absolutely take this over what would have been a pretty lame regular match between these two. Ray losing should get rid of him, at least at this level, for a good stretch. Alexander gets to retain again, but he needs a better challenger next time. What Ray did in the feud and here as well was far from awful, but it was really hard to get around the fact that it was Bully Ray in this spot at this time.

From Hard To Kill.

Knockouts Title: Jordynne Grace vs. Mickie James

James is challenging and some Native American dancers play her to the ring. As a bonus, her family (minus Nick Aldis) is in the front row. After the Big Match Intros, Grace powers her into the corner to start and James can't even grab a rollup. James slaps her a few times before getting dropped with a heck of a slap from Grace.

Back up and Grace double stomps her out of the corner, meaning it's time to start the real beating. Grace stomps away and tells James to stay down, only to pull her up in the corner. We'll call that a mixed message as Grace misses a running knee in the corner and a super bulldog gives James a breather. They slug it out until James kicks her in the face before taking it out to the ramp.

The Thesz press drops Grace again but she blocks the MickDT. James settles for a guillotine but Grace muscles her to the top for a superplex floated into a Jackhammer for two more. James comes back with a flapjack into a nipup and now the Thesz press connects for another near fall. A spinebuster cuts James off and a sitout powerbomb gets two. Grace hits her in the neck of all things but a Tombstone is countered with a headscissors.

The Mick Kick is shrugged off so they hit a pinfall reversal sequence for two each. The Grace Driver is countered into a small package for two and another Mick Kick staggers Grace this time. The MickDT gives us the real near fall but Grace pulls her into a sleeper with a bodyscissors. Mickie powers up again though and Grace misses a charge into the post. That's enough for Mickie to grab a tornado DDT for the pin and the title at 19:22.

Rating: B. This had the drama it needed but never quite got to the level of epic. What mattered here was having Mickie prove

she can still do it against a top star. A lot of that comes from having Grace built up as a monster over the last several months, meaning James' opponent meant something here in addition to the title. I'm glad this headlined the show as it was the better story all the way up to the show and they certainly delivered with what they were trying to do.

We have some awards over the next two weeks. First up: Knockouts Tag Team of the Year: MK Ultra.

MK Ultra is ready to do more next year.

From Impact 1000 Week 2, which for some reason isn't Impact 1001.

Team Beautiful People vs. Team Kong

Beautiful People: Angelina Love/Savannah Evans/Deonna Purrazzo/Tasha Steelz/Gisele Shaw

Kong: Awesome Kong/Jordynne Grace/Gail Kim/Trinity/Mickie James

Raesha Saed, Jai Vidal and Velvet Sky Evans are here too. Love drives Trinity into the corner to start and knocks her down for a bonus. Trinity fights up and knocks her back, allowing the double tag off to Grace and Shaw. A Jackhammer gives Grace two and Mickie adds the top rope Thesz press. We take a break and come back with Kin crashing out to the floor where the villains get in some cheap shots.

Back in and Steelz grabs a camel clutch but Kim is back on her feet rather quickly. Kim grabs a Black Widow but it's quickly off to Shaw for a swinging Downward Spiral. Mickie makes a save this time and Purrazzo comes in for the chinlock. Kim fights up again and stereo crossbodies leave both of them down.

That's enough to bring Kong in to clean house. We get the Evans vs. Kong showdown, with Evans blocking a chokeslam. Kong

drops her fast as everything breaks down, with Mickie and Trinity hitting stereo Thesz presses. Steelz is sent outside onto some villains plus trinity but Grace fireman's carries Kim to run Evans over. Kim hits a big dive to the floor and Kong hits the Implant Buster to finish Shaw at 14:34.

Rating: B. The quality here was ok, but this was about having the legends and modern stars mix it up and that worked well. Kong and Kim teaming together is one of those things that feels like a special moment and it was a very nice way to end such a milestone show. I had a great time with this and that is exactly what they seemed to be trying to do.

From Rebellion.

Tag Team Titles: Motor City Machine Guns vs. Bullet Club

The Club is defending in Ultimate X. It's a brawl to start with Sabin getting knocked down but Shelley back off, allowing Sabin to try for the belts. With that not working, the Guns are sent outside for stereo dives from the Club. Back in and the Guns take over on, with Austin's arm getting banged up.

Austin and Sabin climb up at the same time with the bad arm being rammed into the structure. Sabin ties up both of the Guns and Shelley goes up but gets pulled back down fast. Bey's knee is banged up but he's fine enough to grab a quick DDT and give everyone a much needed breather.

With everyone else on the floor, Austin busts out the big flip dive to take out both Guns. Back in and everyone gets knocked down again before all four go up for a climb at once. They all come crashing down and it's the Art of Finesse to drop Shelley, allowing Bey to pull down the titles and retain at 13:07.

Rating: B. Hot opener as expected but there wasn't much in the way of climbing, which made it kind of a regular match until the ending. The good thing is the people involved are able to

do just about anything and make it work so this went well. I did like the lack of climbing and insanity though, as it was more about the people rather than the big crashes and spots. You don't get that kind of thing in a match like this very often and it was nice for a change.

ABC are the Male Tag Team Of The Year.

ABC can't wait to be the first TNA Tag Team Champions.

From Rebellion.

Impact Wrestling World Title: Kushida vs. Steve Maclin

For the vacant title and former World Champion Nick Aldis is here as a surprise guest commentator. Aldis says he is officially back in Impact, which is better than nothing for him. Kushida goes right at him to start fast but it's way too early for the Hoverboard Lock. Back up and Kushida rides him into a headlock without much trouble as Maclin can't get anything going here.

Kushida can't hit the basement dropkick so he takes it over into a wristlock instead. The Hoverboard Lock is blocked again and this time Maclin sends him throat first into the top rope to take over. A backbreaker gives Maclin two and Kushida's back is sent into the post. They head outside with Maclin grabbing a suplex and dropping an elbow off the apron, though he might have banged up his knee in the process.

We hit the chinlock with a knee in Kushida's back as Maclin certainly has a target. An Angle Slam is blocked though and Kushida hits a running kick to the arm. A discus forearm sets up the small package driver to give Kushida two but Maclin is fine enough to crotch him on top. They go to the ramp where Kushida hits a running shot to the arm but said arm is fine enough for a German suplex back inside.

A buckle bomb into a sitout powerbomb gives Maclin two and he

puts Kushida on top. That is hardly the best idea as Kushida pulls him down into a cross armbreaker. Maclin gets over to the rope for the break and they crash out to the floor again. Back in and Maclin's spear in the corner sets up the KIA for two, leaving Maclin frustrated.

Maclin goes up top but dives into the Hoverboard Lock, only to break it up with some forearms to the head. Another Hoverboard Lock goes on but Maclin reverses into a Death Valley Driver into the corner. Kushida gets the Hoverboard Lock AGAIN, only to have Maclin reverse into another KIA for the pin and the title at 18:27.

Rating: B. That was about the only way they could go as Kushida was a filler opponent for Maclin. That isn't something they could really get around given the circumstances and it wound up being a rather good match anyway. Maclin has been built up to be champion for months now and it was the only conclusion they had here. Kushida going for the arm time after time but having Maclin escape it at every turn worked well. They were limited in what they could do and made it work as well as possible.

Post match Maclin insists that Scott D'Amore come out and hand him the title. D'Amore does so and gets hit in the face with the belt. Nick Aldis gets in and glares Maclin off. Aldis works just fine for a first challenger, as Maclin has already run through a lot of the other options.

From Rebellion.

Knockouts Title: Deonna Purrazzo vs. Jordynne Grace

For the vacant title. They shake hands to start and Grace grinds away on a headlock. Purrazzo cranks away on the arm and has Grace in some early pain. Some armdrags into a running hurricanrana has Grace in more trouble but she sends Purrazzo outside. That means a dropkick through the ropes and a Jackhammer on the floor as Purrazzo is rocked.

A rather stalled suplex gives Grace a slightly delayed two but she has to roll out of a Fujiwara armbar. The Queen's Gambit on the ramp is broken up so Purrazzo settles for a moonsault to the floor instead. Back in and the Queen's Gambit is broken up again but Purrazzo is able to grab a Koji Clutch.

Grace powers out and drops her hard with a Vertebreaker for all things for two. The Grace Driver is blocked and she pulls Purrazzo into a rear naked choke. They trade some strikes but Purrazzo pulls her into the Fujiwara armbar. Make that the Venus De Milo but a foot on the rope is good for the break. Back up and Grace's spinebuster gets two, followed by a Grace Driver for the same (as Rehwoldt is getting into these near falls). Purrazzo counters a superplex into a sunset bomb, setting up the Queen's Gambit for the pin and the title at 17:06.

Rating: B. This is an interesting way to go as I would have expected Grace to win but Purrazzo is a completely acceptable choice as well. Grace had held the title for a long time until James took it off of her but it has been a bit since Purrazzo. They could go quite an interesting direction with Purrazzo fighting off some challengers and hurting some arms, so this was certainly a smart idea. It was a good match as well, similar to Kushida vs. Maclin actually, but with the submission holds having more success until Purrazzo managed to pull it off.

KiLynn King is The One To Watch In 2024. She's happy and wants the Knockouts Title.

From May 4.

Here is Trinity (formerly Naomi, not the Trinity from the old TNA days) for a debut chat and the fans seem happy to see her. She's glad to be back and is happy to be in Impact, where she can glow. The reason she chose Impact is the most storied women's division in wrestling and she wants a piece of it.

She's here to make an impact and wants the Knockouts Title.

Cue Deonna Purrazzo, who says Trinity invoked her. She knows what it is like to be in a new place, so if Trinity wants a title shot, it isn't something she can just walk out on. Trinity says facing her will make Purrazzo wish she got fired. Cue Jordynne Grace to say everyone wants to see the two of them fight, but she has the next title shot. Grace and Purrazzo argue but Trinity says she's waiting on the winner. Trinity leaves them to stare each other down to end the show.

Trinity is the Knockout Of The Year and is so happy to be part of the great division.

From Slammiversary.

Knockouts Title: Trinity vs. Deonna Purrazzo

Purrazzo is defending and has a live violinist play her to the ring. They trade armdrags to start before Trinity has to roll away from a Fujiwara armbar. The threat of the Rear View sends Purrazzo outside so Trinity takes her down with a slingshot flip dive. Back in and Purrazzo starts in on the arm and the cranking has Trinity in trouble. Trinity tries to go up top but gets pulled into a leg/neck crank to keep her down.

With that broken up, Trinity manages a kick to the face into a Samoan drop. A springboard kick to the face gives Trinity two but Purrazzo is back with a leg trap Tombstone for the same. The Queen's Gambit is blocked so Purrazzo settles for the Fujiwara armbar. Trinity makes the rope and hits a slingshot X Factor. The split legged moonsault gets two but Purrazzo is right back with a Queen's Gambit on the apron for two. Back up and Trinity quickly pulls her into Starstruck for the tap and the title at 14:26.

Rating: B-. I'm not sure what was missing here but it didn't quite get to the next level. Trinity is crazy athletic and feels like a star but the match felt like a pretty firm

downgrade from the usual great Knockouts stuff. She did win in a good match here and it makes sense to go with her early on, so well done here, even if it could have been better.

Overall Rating: B+. This was more or less a look back at the first half of the year and the “Best Of” moniker pretty much sums up Impact in a nutshell: their best might not be the best anywhere, but it’s some of the most consistently good wrestling out there. You could keep track of the main stories and get solid action to follow them up. It’s nice to look back on a lot of this stuff, as Impact really did have a nice year. I’m sure we’ll get the second half next week and that sounds like a nice way to wrap up 2023.

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