

Royal Rumble 2004 (2018 Redo): Brain Over Brawn

Royal Rumble 2004

Date: January 25, 2004

Location: Wachovia Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 17,289

Commentators: Jim Ross, Michael Cole, Tazz, Jerry Lawler, Jonathan Coachman

It's a big night and one of the most important shows of the year as we officially start the Road to Wrestlemania. The Royal Rumble is more wide open than in recent years and that's often the best thing that can happen for the match. Other than that we have a pair of World Title matches, with Raw's likely being too long and Smackdown's needing to move on before the company makes itself look worse. Let's get to it.

The opening video talks about how life's road is unpredictable and how one turn can change everything. As you might guess, the Last Man Standing match gets the most time and the Rumble itself is mentioned last.

Raw Tag Team Titles: Dudley Boyz vs. Ric Flair/Batista

Flair and Batista are defending and it's a tables match with Coach on commentary. Before the match, Batista gets in a quick jab at the Dudleys for being the biggest losers since the Philadelphia Eagles. They fight on the floor to start with Batista clotheslining the post by mistake to put the champs in early trouble. In a painful looking impact, Bubba slides a table from one side of the ring to the other, hitting Batista in the ribs to keep him in trouble.

A neckbreaker slows Batista down and D-Von takes him to the floor with a Cactus Clothesline. Flair has Bubba in the corner on a table (that's so wrong for Flair) but Bubba is right back with the Flip Flop and Fly (that's more Flair's speed) Batista comes back in for the save though as I'm glad they're not wasting time with tags here.

The belly to back suplex/neckbreaker combination puts Batista down as Evolution can't get much going here. Flair goes up, and in a shocking change of events, Flair gets slammed down. It's time for the table but cue Coach, with his bad ribs, for the save. That earns him a What's Up attempt but Flair makes a save of his own. Batista is back in with a spinebuster to put D-Von through a table for the win.

Rating: D-. Just a Raw match designed to get these guys on the show, though I can appreciate them putting the tables match on first and hopefully we don't get a bunch of chants about wanting tables. Other than that, I see nothing positive about this entire thing. Batista and Flair are fine as champions, but it's not like they have anyone important to feud against at this point.

Flair says they'll keep the titles as long as they want.

John Cena raps about how he's going to win but Rob Van Dam comes in to steal the last rhyme, saying he'll win the Rumble. Cena makes weed jokes and says Van Dam can suck his candy cane.

There's an empty chair for Mick Foley, should he bother to show up.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Rey is defending and Jamie has the still blind Nidia with him. A 619 attempt in the first ten seconds is countered into a hot shot as Jamie takes over. Cole says that Nidia, who is blind, is looking on as Jamie hiptosses Rey down, earning one heck of a tongue lashing from Tazz. Rey gets in a dropkick and a hurricanrana, followed by the sitout bulldog for two. The tiger driver is broken up and Nidia trips Jamie by mistake, setting up the 619. Rey Drops the Dime to retain in short order.

Rating: D. Well don't bother wasting time I guess. This was barely three minutes long and they didn't have time to do anything. Nidia's interference was the most important part of the match and that took all of two seconds. These two are talented but they need more time than a run of the mill women's match from this era to get anywhere.

We recap Eddie Guerrero vs. Chavo Guerrero Jr. They were a successful

team but Eddie got way more popular, sending Chavo into a jealous rage when the team stopped doing as well. Chavo went nuts, blaming Eddie for all of their problems and bringing in his father to turn it into more of a family affair, even as Kurt Angle tried to play peacekeeper. This is one of the few stories that is going to work every single time and both of them have sold it exceptionally well, turning it into the best thing going on in WWE at the moment.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Chavo Guerrero Jr.

Chavo has his father with him. They fight over a hard lockup to start until Chavo slaps the taste out of Eddie's mouth. A fired up Eddie shoves him into the corner but can't bring himself to follow up because his heart is broken. He's willing to take Chavo down into a chinlock but Chavo is right back up for a chop in the corner. Eddie chops him back and gives the first smile of the match. Some shoulders put Eddie down and Chavo is very pleased with his early success.

That just earns him a poke to the eye as the stalling continues. Eddie takes him down again but Chavo pops up in short order and hooks a hurricanrana to put them both on the floor. With Chavo back inside, his dad sends Eddie face first into the steps (Tazz: "I guess he doesn't like his little brother.") to give Chavo the first real advantage. Back in and Eddie grabs a cross armbreaker but can't get it all the way on. Chavo scores with a belly to back suplex but the tornado DDT is broken up. Eddie rolls the suplexes and drops the frog splash for the win.

Rating: C. It was good while it lasted but it should have lasted about twice as long. This was a big time story on Smackdown and it ended in a match that was about half as long as the Smackdown main event. I'm assuming they're setting Eddie up for something bigger down the line and they needed to get this out of the way, but this deserved more time.

Post match Eddie gets fired up for the first time and beats up both Chavos. Sr. gets tied to the bottom rope by the tie while Jr. gets stomped in the corner, busting him open in the process. They did a good job here with Eddie wanting to hold in his emotions during the match but being pushed too far after and finally erupting.

Chris Benoit is ready to go in at #1 when Evolution comes in with their champagne to celebrate. Flair says Benoit is the best technical wrestler alive and all man but the brass ring always slips out of his hand. It's all about Evolution holding all of the gold so Benoit is always going to be second best.

We recap the Smackdown World Title match with Brock Lesnar defending against Hardcore Holly. Lesnar broke Holly's neck back in 2002 and since we must go with real life instead of something, you know, interesting, we've been stuck watching Lesnar run from Holly for the last month. This is possibly the most ice cold title match in history as Holly is little more than a former comedy guy with a bad attitude who is ranting about wanting to break Lesnar's neck. Lesnar can beat up Kurt Angle and Chris Benoit, but Hardcore Holly suddenly scares him? That's what we're going with here?

Smackdown World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Lesnar is defending and Holly jumps him before the bell. The champ gets posted twice in a row and the bell rings with Holly on the apron, only to miss a top rope clothesline. Lesnar scores with a suplex as the referee is getting in the way more than usual here. A ram into the apron gives Lesnar two and it's off to a waistlock on the mat. What would eventually be called a Shell Shock gives Lesnar two as this is a complete squash so far.

It's back to the waistlock as you can hear the limited interest the fans had seeping out of the arena. A bearhug sets up a suplex and it's right back to a head and arm choke. Holly fights up with some kicks to the ribs and clotheslines, followed by the Alabama Slam....for no cover as it's off to that stupid full nelson. The hold stays on even as they fall to the floor so Holly tries it again with Lesnar on the apron. That earns him a neck snap across the top and the F5 retains the title.

Rating: F. Oh give me a break. Lesnar was never in danger here and in the six and a half minutes they had, at least half of it was Lesnar keeping him on the mat in a hold. Holly's finisher, while fine for beating a midcarder here and there, is nowhere near enough to be a real threat to

Lesnar. Thank goodness they didn't tease a bunch of near falls and just got out of there, because this was a bad idea from the beginning.

We're not even 52 minutes into the show and we've covered four matches, including three title matches. That's a ridiculous pace, even for a Royal Rumble.

We recap Shawn Michaels vs. HHH, which they're billing as seven years in the making. So we're counting all of the four and a half years Shawn was on the shelf and the months long feud they had in 2002? They've traded wins and the title until Shawn got a pin on the last show of 2003, albeit with his own shoulders on the mat. Therefore it's a Last Man Standing match tonight, which somehow ties into everything else they've ever done, including the most recent match, which is barely discussed.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Shawn Michaels

HHH is defending and it's Last Man Standing. They fight over a lockup to start until Shawn gets the better of a chop off. It's time for a mat sequence with Shawn loading up a backslide, only to let it go when he realizes what kind of match they're having. One heck of a whip into the corner starts n on Shawn's back, which is still a target six years after it was originally hurt.

Shawn is right back up with a Figure Four but HHH turns it over for the break. That's enough of the wrestling so it's time to head outside with HHH loading up the announcers' table. A suplex through the table is broken up and Shawn ax handles him in the head. Back in and a backdrop puts HHH on the floor again but Shawn's springboard spinning crossbody only hits table in a big crash.

Shawn is busted open (of course he is) and we get a replay, showing that Shawn would have cleared HHH by two feet even if HHH had stood in place. Back in again and the very bloody Shawn won't stay down, instead telling HHH to bring it on. Right hands get a seven and a spinebuster gives HHH eight more. It's chair time and a hard shot to the back gets nine this time. The Pedigree on the chair is countered into a slingshot into the corner, followed by Shawn's own chair shot to the face.

Back up and the forearm into the nip up have the bloody HHH in trouble. The top rope elbow looks to set up Sweet Chin Music but HHH cuts him off with a low blow. Back up and Shawn grabs a sleeper, which lasts as long as a sleeper is going to in a match like this. HHH's DDT gets eight so he loads up a belly to back superplex, which is countered into a spinning crossbody for a double knockdown. The Pedigree gets nine and Shawn hits Sweet Chin Music, good for a double knockout and a draw.

Rating: C-. Well of course we need to see these two fight again. You wouldn't expect HHH and Shawn Michaels to wrap up their feud in just two matches right? This wasn't very good with just an exchange of moves and nothing that went anywhere, though the blade jobs were both quite nasty looking. I'm sure we'll see these two again, but these two will likely be fighting in their retirement home.

The fans are NOT pleased with the draw and I can't say I blame them. HHH is taken out on a stretcher but Shawn insists on walking.

Video on the Royal Rumble, which really just shows the names involved. Chris Benoit is in at #1 and Goldberg is in at #30.

The Fink is ready to start the introductions but here's Eric Bischoff to promise that Raw will win the match. He runs down Paul Heyman's abilities to run shows in Bingo halls, in a line that has to have been repeated a thousand times now. Ignore that WCW officially went out of business before ECW (on an extreme technicality but it was still officially in business after WCW was purchased). Heyman tackles Bischoff but here's Steve Austin on the ATV to say they're both in violation of the law. Stunners abound and beer is consumed. I'm so glad they spent five minutes on this when four matches got less than twenty two minutes combined.

Goldberg is asked about being #30 in the Royal Rumble when Brock comes in to wonder where his interview is. Brock asks where Goldberg's title is but Goldberg says it's coming back at Wrestlemania. Goldberg suggests Brock is a coward.

Foley still isn't here.

Royal Rumble

JR and Tazz are on commentary, thankfully giving us a standard booth instead of the usual mess that these things have become. Tazz even has keys to victory: hide, stamina, get a high number. I've heard worse analysis so I'll take what I can get. Chris Benoit is in at #1 and Randy Orton is in at #2 and we have ninety second intervals. Benoit gets aggressive to start (ignoring key to victory #2) and scores with a suplex but gets uppercutted into the corner.

Mark Henry is in at #3 and shoves Benoit down so he can choke Orton in the corner. The clock seems to get a little faster as Tajiri is in at #4 and gets suplexed down for his efforts. Henry throws Orton ribs first onto the top rope and everyone pounds away as Bradshaw is in at #5. Clotheslines abound until Benoit pulls him into the Crossface and gets him out in less than a minute. Well at least they're keeping the ring at a manageable number. Rhyno is in at #6 and goes after Orton and Benoit as Tajiri kicks away at Henry.

Tajiri can't get the Tarantula so Rhyno Gores Henry, eliminating Tajiri in the process. Benoit dumps Henry and we're already down to three. They fight by the ropes and it's Matt Hardy in at #7. There's a Side Effect to Rhyno but Benoit knocks Matt to the apron. Matt gets back in and everyone pummels everyone until Scott Steiner is in at #8. Benoit rolls some German suplexes on Steiner as JR gives us the good stat of there being no former Rumble winners in this match.

Matt Morgan is in at #9 as the ring is starting to fill up. A helicopter bomb plants Benoit and there's a big boot to Hardy. It's back to the exchange of forearms around the ring with no one going for an elimination until Hurricane is in at #10. Before I can recap who is in the match, Morgan tosses Hurricane in short order, leaving us with Benoit, Orton, Rhyno, Hardy, Steiner and Morgan. Morgan throws Hardy to the apron but not out as Steiner lays on Orton in the middle of the ring.

Booker T. is in at #11 to a nice reaction but also to a really annoying song. An ax kick has Orton in trouble and Steiner is thrown out off camera (in his last match with the company) as Kane is in at #12. Benoit and Morgan both get chokeslams and the Gore and RKO are both blocked. Kane starts beating on Matt in the corner....and a gong strikes at #13. As

expected, Kane freaks out and the distraction lets Booker throw him out. It's actually Spike Dudley in at #13 so Kane beats him up in the aisle, both for the gong and for Spike upsetting Kane on Monday. Things settle down and it's Rikishi in at #14.

Benoit dumps Rhyno and Orton gets a Stinkface as the fans aren't exactly interested, probably due to the gong taking some of their interest away. They're certainly not burning up the pace for eliminations here but that's not the worst thing in the world. Rene Dupree is in at #15 to get us to the halfway point. He dropkicks Hardy out but turns into a superkick from Rikishi to get eliminated as well.

A-Tran is in at #16 and goes after Rikishi as Benoit ducks Morgan's charge to get rid of him. Orton dumps out Rikishi and Booker in the span of a few seconds, leaving us with Benoit, Orton and A-Train. Benoit eliminates A-Train as Shelton Benjamin is in at #17. Benjamin slugs away as JR completely missed A-Train's elimination. How do you not notice the 6'8 350lb bald guy being gone? Orton dumps Shelton and we're down to two again. To be fair, other than Kane and maybe Booker, none of the other entrants are worth anything so far. Lamont runs out to introduce Ernest Miller at #18 and Tazz loves the song.

Benoit tosses Lamont and Orton does the same to Miller so these two can keep slugging it out. Kurt Angle is in at #19 and now things can pick up a bit. Benoit and Angle go at it (of course) while Orton is smart enough to just chill in the corner. Angle has Benoit in trouble on the ropes but Orton makes a rather questionable save. Rico is in at #20 and goes after Orton, who dropkicks him almost immediately. A kick to the head rocks Orton though, leaving Benoit to roll some German suplexes on Angle. Orton dumps Rico with ease and it's Test....not in at #21.

We cut to the back where Test is unconscious. Austin sees who did it and makes that person #21 instead. In the arena, MICK FOLEY is #21 and Orton knows he's about to die. Foley slugs him down in the corner, throws up a BANG BANG and hits the running knee in the corner. The Cactus Clothesline gives us a double elimination and it's down to Benoit vs. Angle. Foley isn't done with Orton and sends him into the steps as Christian is in at #22.

Orton gets in a few wicked chair shots to Foley and punches him down before slamming Foley's head into the ramp. Some right hands get Foley out of trouble and it's Mr. Socko but Foley has to give it to Nunzio, who comes in at #23. The distraction lets Orton get in a low blow and run off after a great angle that makes me want to see these two have a heck of a fight. Back in the ring, Christian can't get rid of Angle or Benoit so Angle suplexes Benoit instead. Benoit is the only one standing as Big Show is in at #24.

Show starts fast with the overhand chops and throws some Canadians around until Chris Jericho is in at #25 to a very nice reaction. Jericho and Christian stomp on Angle in the corner until Show makes a save with a double noggin knocker. How old school of him. Everyone goes after Show so he shrugs them off and Charlie Haas is in at #26. Christian tries to turn on Jericho but gets dumped out instead, which just fits for Christian for some reason. Billy Gunn returns at #27 and hits some Fameassers but can't get rid of anyone.

John Cena is in at #28 to a very nice reaction and you can feel the star power growing every night. Cena catches Nunzio sitting on the floor and throws him inside as the ring is starting to get too full. For some reason Nunzio goes after Show, earning himself that hard shot to the back. Rob Van Dam is in at #29 and can't get rid of Show either. Cena gives Angle an FU and here's Goldberg in at #30 to complete the field. I'm not going to bother saying who all is in there because we're about to lose a bunch of them.

Goldberg wrecks everyone and tosses Haas, Gunn and Nunzio (after an insane spear). That leaves us with Benoit, Angle, Show, Jericho, Cena, Van Dam and Goldberg for a heck of a final group. Goldberg loads up the Jackhammer on Show but here's Lesnar to jump him from behind, allowing Angle to dump Goldberg, who is busy seething at Lesnar. Show shrugs off the masses again but Angle chop blocks him, which isn't the brightest idea. That means a Lionsault, a Five Star, a Shuffle and a Swan Dive but Show is unconscious on the mat. Real smart guys.

Show fights up and dumps Cena, who lands VERY awkwardly on his knee. Van Dam is gone too and we're down to Jericho, Big Show, Angle and Benoit.

Jericho goes after Show's knee and bulldogs Show now, which has done so well against him already. The Walls make Show tap but Jericho lets him go. That's not the brightest move in the world and Show makes him pay with a chokeslam over the top for an elimination. A regular chokeslam drops Benoit so Angle gets the Angle Slam on Show.

Benoit gets one as well and now it's the ankle lock to make Show tap again. Show gets up and muscles Angle out as well, leaving us with two. With Show hanging over the top rope, Benoit hits the Swan Dive to the back of his head, accidentally bringing Show back in. The chokeslam is countered into the Crossface to make Show tap for the third time.

A side slam gets Show out of trouble as we hear about Benoit getting close to Ric Flair's longevity record. Show loads up a gorilla press but Benoit pulls him down into a guillotine, even as Show puts him on the apron. Benoit pulls him down and slides back inside as Show goes out, giving Benoit the big win.

Rating: A. It's one of the best Rumbles ever, mainly due to Benoit. There was some great storytelling near the end, with Jericho and Angle both making Show tap but then making some kind of a mistake to get eliminated while Benoit was smart/determined enough to make it work in the end. The same thing happens when the big groups try to get Show out and Benoit does it on his own, showing how technique and determination are better than brute strength. It kept you wondering if Benoit could finally win the big one and that's what they managed to pull off in a great story throughout the whole match.

Other than that, they did a great job of not letting the ring get too full save for near the end, which Goldberg took care of in short order. Pacing is often such a problem in these things and it's very nice to see them get it right. They had a big angle with Foley and Orton too, giving it something besides the winner to go off of from here. Finally, there were multiple possible winners, which always makes for a better match than having one or two people be the only ones who could win. Great Rumble, and one of the best of all time.

JR loses it praising Benoit, who smiles (a rare thing for him) to end the

show.

Overall Rating: C. The Rumble is always a unique show as it's the only one where one match can really save the whole thing, as the main event is often at least a third of the show. The problem is the rest of the show was so bad due to the matches either being rushed or being HHH vs. Shawn in their annual attempt at an epic match that it's hard to call this good overall. Really though, the Rumble itself is more than enough to carry it, but on any other card of the year this would have been a disaster.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/23/royal-rumble-count-up-2004-he-who-must-not-be-named/>

And the 2013 redo:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/01/18/royal-rumble-count-up-2013-redo-2004-they-couldnt-wait-any-longer/>

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