

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2023 (2024 Edition): The First Chapter

Royal Rumble 2023

Date: January 28, 2023

Location: Alamodome, San Antonio, Texas

Attendance: 51,338

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Pat McAfee

As usual, it's hard to believe that a year has passed since this show and now we get to see how it holds up. There are of course two Royal Rumble matches, plus Kevin Owens getting another title shot against Roman Reigns. The bigger story though is Sami Zayn, who has been having some issues with Reigns, his Bloodline boss, coming into the show. Let's get to it.

Musician Hardy talks about knowing what it takes to become someone. We get some previews of the show's big matches. Well as many big ones as you can on a card with five matches. Hardy says when you get the chance, kick the door down.

The announcers welcome us to the show...and Pat McAfee is here as a surprise commentator. Graves is FURIOUS and Cole sounds shocked that he's here. Cole isn't sure how McAfee could be here when he talked to him on Face Time earlier today. McAfee: "Yeah I lied straight to your face." Graves' reaction alone is worth a listen as he won't stop yelling.

Men's Royal Rumble

90 second intervals with Gunther in at #1 and Sheamus is in at #2. Believe it or not, they go straight to slugging it out with a collision not getting anywhere. Gunther tries to toss him out so Sheamus rakes the eyes for the break. The Irish

Curse isn't enough to get rid of Gunther and it's the Miz in at #3. Since it takes about thirty seconds to get to the ring, Gunther is back up and trying to toss Sheamus before Miz can even get inside. Miz finally runs inside and gets chopped down by Gunther, leaving Sheamus to hammer Gunther in the corner. Sheamus and Gunther try to toss each other until Kofi Kingston is in at #4.

Kingston high crossbodies Miz and Gunther and kicks Sheamus in the face for a bonus. Back up and Sheamus sends him to the apron but can't get rid of him just yet. No one can get rid of anyone else so Johnny Gargano is in at #5. The slingshot spear hits Kofi and there's an enziguri to Miz. For some reason Gargano loads up some forearms to Miz's chest, only to have Sheamus glare him away. Some kicks to the face put Miz out, leaving a bunch of people to go after Gunther.

Xavier Woods is in at #6 and New Day starts to clean house on everyone else. Kofi and Woods tease fighting each other but do a...we'll call it a dance I guess. Karrion Kross is in at #7 and goes after Woods (after another rather slow entrance, which is starting to become an issue as it takes time for anything to happen). Gunther BLASTS Kross with a clothesline but he's right back up, meaning it's time for a slugout with Sheamus. Chad Gable is in at #8, who gets into an amateur match with Woods, who for some reason thinks this is a good idea.

Gable German suplexes Woods down but gets decked by Kofi as Drew McIntyre is in at #9. The reverse Alabama Slam sends Gargano down onto Gable as commentary mocks Sheamus and McIntyre's team name, which may or may not be an adult film company. McIntyre Claymores Kross out and gets to trade chops with Gunther. Santos Escobar is in at #10, giving us Gunther, Sheamus, Kingston, Gargano, Woods, Gable, McIntyre and Escobar at the one third mark. Escobar goes after Gable but has to slip out of Sheamus' forearms to the chest.

Angelo Dawkins is in at #11 and McAfee seems rather intrigued. Gunther kicks Woods out but Escobar saves Gunther from Kingston for some reason. Kingston hits a pop up double stomp to Gunther's chest, only to be sent outside and onto a chair. The idea is for one foot to stay on said chair...but yeah he's out anyway. Not that it matters as Brock Lesnar is in at #12 and smashing is likely to ensue. The suplexes start fast and there go Escobar, Dawkins and Escobar.

We get the Lesnar vs. Gunther staredown and the fans REALLY like that one. Since we don't have enough power in there at the moment, Bobby Lashley is in at #13. Lesnar suplexes Gunther but walks into a spear from Lashley, who takes down almost everyone else. A clothesline gets rid of Lesnar, which somehow didn't set up a Wrestlemania rematch. Baron Corbin is in at #14 as Lesnar wrecks ringside.

Lesnar also wrecks Corbin, including an F5 on the floor. Things slow down in the ring and it's Seth Rollins in at #15. Rollins throws Corbin inside and quickly eliminates him, which has McAfee very happy. Sheamus and Rollins slug it out as Otis is in at #16. Otis gets to run some people over as commentary makes sumo references. Rey Mysterio is in at #17...or not as he doesn't show up. Rollins gets rid of Lashley in a bit of a surprise and here is Dominik Mysterio, with Rey's mask (suggesting an attack) in at #18.

Otis is tossed during the entrance as commentary yells about how much they can't stand Dominik. After Dominik finally gets in, Elias is in at #19 (McAfee is a big an) and goes after a variety of people. This includes breaking a guitar over Gunther, because that is a good idea. A simultaneous Claymore and Brogue Kick put Elias down and what's left of him is eliminated.

Finn Balor is in at #20, giving us Gunther, Sheamus, Gargano, McIntyre, Rollins, Dominik and Balor. Dominik and Balor get together to dump Gargano but get stared down by Sheamus and

McIntyre. Booker T. is in as a surprise at #21 and fires of some kicks into the Spinarooni. Then Gunther eliminates him without much trouble. Sheamus and McIntyre beat on Gunther (who has a cut on his back) as Damian Priest is in at #22.

That doesn't go anywhere so it's Montez Ford in at #23 and taking his time to get to the ring. Ford goes after the Judgment Day and is quickly tossed by Priest. Edge is in at #24 and yeah that gets a big reaction. Judgment Day gets speared down and Edge tosses Priest and Balor without much trouble. Dominik breaks up a Rollins vs. Edge showdown, allowing Judgment Day to pull Edge out as well.

Austin Theory is in at #25 but he pauses to get in as Edge has to beat up Judgment Day near the entrance. Cue Rhea Ripley to jump Edge but Beth Phoenix pops up to spear her down. Theory finally gets in and Omos is also in at #26. Sheamus and McIntyre are waiting on him but they get dropped without much effort. Gunther is the only one left to go after Omos but the chops only have so much effect. With Omos as the only one standing, Braun Strowman is in at #27.

Strowman staggers Omos with a right hand and puts him out with a running clothesline for the big elimination. Theory is sent flying into the corner and it's Ricochet (Strowman's partner) in at #28. Strowman uses Ricochet as a projectile but gets pummeled but Sheamus and McIntyre. The two of them get together and forearm him in the chest, with Gunther making a weird save. Gunther can't get rid of McIntyre or McIntyre...but he can eliminate both of them at once. Wrestling is weird for you.

Logan Paul is in at #29 (big reaction) and gets jumped by almost everyone left in the ring. Paul gets away and hits a heck of a Buckshot Lariat on Ricochet but Gunther gutwrenches Paul to the apron. That's broken up so Paul has to slug away at Strowman, who powerslams him down. Ricochet adds the shooting star but Paul is sent through the ropes instead of

over.

Cody Rhodes is in at #30, giving us a final grouping of Gunther, Rollins, Dominik, Theory, Strowman, Ricochet, Paul and Rhodes (that's a nice number for a final grouping). The pace picks up and Rhodes hits the Cody Cutter on Theory. After firing the weight belt into the crowd, Rhodes has to counter Three Amigos into Cross Rhodes. Dominik is out and Ricochet cuts Gunther off. Ricochet and Paul wind up on opposite aprons and springboard in at the same time for a heck of a mid air collision.

Cody and Ricochet get rid of Strowman but Theory dumps Ricochet to get us down to five (Rhodes, Theory, Rollins, Gunther and Paul, with the latter on the floor). The Stomp hits Theory and Rollins gets rid of him, giving us the Rhodes vs. Rollins vs. Rhodes staredown. Gunther breaks that up and gets double teamed, including a pair of Pedigrees. Rather than dumping Gunther, they fight each other but both miss finishers.

Then Paul comes back in and dumps Rollins as we're down to three. Rhodes ducks the big right hand and hits Cross Rhodes on Paul for the elimination, leaving us with Rhodes vs. Gunther. Rhodes strikes away but the Disaster Kick is clotheslined out of the air. Gunther puts him on the top to stand on his throat and put him on the apron. Rhodes goes up top and gets toss superplexed right back down.

That's enough to start Rhodes' comeback and the Cody Cutter connects, setting up a running clothesline to put Gunther on the apron. Rhodes goes after the leg ad hits Shattered Dreams but Gunther is back with the running dropkick. The powerbomb plants Rhodes again as Gunther looks to be on fumes. The sleeper on the apron has Rhodes in more trouble, only to have Rhodes pull him outside as well. Back in and Rhodes is chopped out of the air but he's fine enough to hit Cross Rhodes. A running clothesline finally gives Rhodes the win at 1:11:40.

Rating: A-. This was a pretty awesome Rumble with Gunther having the career making (because his career wasn't made yet) performance. He was virtually unstoppable and only went down when someone who was in the match for almost an hour less took him out. Other than that, you had Sheamus and McIntyre as the monster pairing who kept fighting with everyone. The star power was strong and the action was very good, making this a great match with an excellent final sequence to boot. Heck of a Rumble.

We recap Bray Wyatt vs. LA Knight. Wyatt was back after a long hiatus and wants to be respected. Knight isn't impressed and violence has ensued.

LA Knight vs. Bray Wyatt

This is the Mountain Dew Pitch Black match, which means neon lights and anything goes. Knight charges at him to start and gets hammers down, setting up the big toss into the corner. It works so well that Wyatt throws him out of another corner, meaning it's time for a breather on the floor. Knight manages a whip into the steps but Wyatt sends him over the barricade.

Wyatt loads up a suplex off the steps but Knight drives him through the announcers' table, with all of the neon stuff popping up or a weird visual. With Knight bailing into the ring, Wyatt throws a toolbox inside as well, seemingly hinting at violence. Back in and the BFT is blocked so Knight hits him with a kendo stick. Not that it matters as Knight charges into Sister Abigail for the pin at 5:04.

Rating: D. To say things have changed in the last year is a major understatement but there isn't much of a way around the fact that this match wasn't very good. It was a bunch of slow motion fighting and then the finish came pretty much out of nowhere. The lights were a different way to go and I'm sure WWE liked the check it brought, but the match was rather nothing.

Post match Bray puts on another mask and Knight runs away, with some kendo stick shots not having any impact. Wyatt catches him near the production area and gives him the Mandible Claw. Then Uncle Howdy pops up on top of a platform and dives onto Knight, with flames coming out of the hole. Then full size versions of the Firefly Funhouse characters look down from the platform.

Tonight's attendance: 51,338.

Raw Women's Title: Alexa Bliss vs. Bianca Belair

Bliss, who has been more evil as of late, is challenging. Belair powers her around to start and hits a running shoulder in the corner, followed by the right hands in said corner. Back up and Bliss gets in a few kicks of her own, setting up a backbreaker with feet into Belair's back for the extra pain. The chinlock slows Belair down and it works so well that Bliss grabs it again.

This time Bliss says "you couldn't just leave it alone could you", which apparently wakes Belair up to hammer away in the corner. The handspring moonsault gives Belair two and some frustration is starting to set in. Bliss gets in another shot and slowly hammers away, setting up the jumping knees to the chest. A backplash gives Bliss two but Belair has had enough of this and KOD's her for the pin to retain at 7:34.

Rating: C. This version of Bliss was only going to go so far as the original "SHE'S EVIL" stuff wasn't quite interesting. Asking fans to care for the warmed up leftovers didn't help and it was on display here. Then you have Belair, who has cleared out the women's division and needs a big name to come after the title. Not a terrible match, but it could have been on Raw without missing much.

Post match Belair leaves and Bliss is left in the ring, where a video of her evil days plays, complete with Uncle Howdy asking if she feels in charge. Then she would to on maternity

leave and none of that would go anywhere, thank goodness.

Women's Royal Rumble

90 second intervals and Rhea Ripley is in at #1 and Liv Morgan is in at #2. They stare each other down to start until Ripley hammers her down. A running boot drops Morgan and a delayed suplex puts her down again. Dana Brooke is in at #3 (naturally looking Barbieish) and missile dropkicks both of them down. A hiptoss into a basement dropkick hits Morgan and Brooke manages a superplex.

With Ripley down in the corner, Emma is in at #4 and grabs a neckbreaker to put Ripley down again. Everyone goes after Ripley and Shayna Baszler is in at #5 as the entrants seem to be going rather quickly here. Baszler goes after Ripley before beating up Morgan and Brooke. The arm stomp has Brooke in more trouble and it's Bayley, who rips up a sign on the way to the ring, in at #6. Morgan is right there with Oblivion to Bayley but can't get rid of her. More brawling is on and it's B Fab in at #7.

Some stomping doesn't do much for B Fab as Ripley easily tosses her out. NXT Women's Champion Roxanne Perez is in at #8 and gets to clean some house, even taking Ripley down with a spinning headscissors. Dakota Kai is in at #9 and poses with Bayley, but a bunch of women beat him down. Iyo Sky is in at #10, giving us all of Damage CTRL, with a lineup of Ripley, Morgan, Brooke,, Baszler, Bayley, Perez, Kai and Sky.

The rest of Damage CTRL has to be saved and Sky flips around a lot. Brooke helps Emma get back in but it's Damage CTRL tossing Brooke out. Damage CTRL kick out Emma and Perez and it's the returning Natalya in at #11. Bayley cuts Natalya off before she can get revenge on Baszler (who put her on the shelf) and we slow down a good bit. Candice LeRae is in at #12 and hits a step up backsplash on Bayley. Baszler hammers on LeRae in the corner before getting slapped by Natalya.

The running boot misses or Baszler and Natalya sends her to the apron, only to have Baszler come back with the Kirifuda Clutch. Damage CTRL gets rid of both Baszler and Natalya as NXT's Zoey Stark is in at #13. Stark strikes away, including a nasty looking kick to Ripley's face. A springboard corkscrew splash hits Ripley but it's way too early for Stark to put her out. Xia Li is in at #14 and cleans house as well, only to have Damage CTRL cut her off. LeRae fights back but Sky shoves her off the top for an elimination.

Becky Lynch is in at #15 and wants revenge on Damage CTRL for taking her out in a cage on Raw. House is quickly cleaned but Bayley sends Becky outside (not eliminated). The rest of Damage CTRL gets on Becky and throw her into the barricade/over the announcers' table. Tegan Nox is in at #16 and gets to clean house again. Nox and Morgan beat on Stark but can't get rid of her as Asuka, to a big reaction, is in at #17.

She unmask as the evil clown and everyone is scared, allowing Asuka to rapidly clean house. Bayley and Asuka have a big staredown, with Asuka unloading with a variety of strikes. Bayley is sent to the apron but manages a neck snap for a breather. Asuka kicks Nox out and Piper Niven is in at #18, meaning it's likely time to wreck some people. A running seated crossbody hits Morgan and Bayley as Tamina is in at #19.

That means a Tamina vs. Niven staredown and slugout but Lynch is back in to clean house. The returning Chelsea Green is in at #20, giving us Ripley, Morgan, Bayley, Kai, Sky, Stark, Li, Lynch, Asuka, Niven, Tamina and Green. Ripley tosses Green in about three seconds and Becky eliminates Kai and Sky, only to be eliminated by Bayley (the fans REALLY react to that). Morgan dumps Bayley right at Becky's feet and the fight is on again. Damage CTRL and Becky brawl into the crowd and Zelina Vega is in at #21 (cosplaying as a character from Street Fighter 6 in a promotional deal).

Li and Vega strike it out on the apron until Vega kicks her to the floor. Vega's middle rope Codebreaker hits Piper and Raquel Rodriguez is in at #22. A quick clothesline drops Ripley and a spinning slam hits Asuka. Vega is back up to kick away at Rodriguez, who puts her on the top. Michin is in at #23 and gets to fire off a bunch of kicks as a trend continues. Niven fights off a bunch of people trying to eliminate her and Lacey Evans is in at #24.

Evans' slingshot Bronco Buster hits Morgan in the corner and a legsweep takes Stark down. Michelle McCool, in the front row, is in at #25 and gets to beat everyone up at once, including the Faithbreaker (Styles Clash) to Vega. McCool gets rid of Tamina and Indi Hartwell is in at #26. That goes nowhere so Sonya Deville is in at #7 and gets rid of Stark. Asuka and Deville kick away at each other until Evans cobra clutches Vega out. Shotzi is in at #28 with a high crossbody to Rodriguez and Niven. Deville eliminates Hartwell and Nikki Cross is in at #29.

Cross gets to beat up various people and she throws her jacket down for a bonus. With the ten second countdown not even starting, Nia Jax is in at #30, giving us a final grouping of Ripley, Morgan, Asuka, Niven, Rodriguez, Michin, Evans, McCool, Deville, Shotzi, Cross and Jax. Everyone stops to wait for Jax, who, believe it or not, runs her mouth and fights everyone but Rodriguez off. Rodriguez gets thrown down but a bunch of people go after her, with Ripley...managing something close to the Riptide.

Everyone gets together to toss Jax and Rodriguez clotheslines Evans out. Asuka pulls Rodriguez into the armbar but Asuka moves on to kicking Deville off the apron for an elimination. Ripley gets rid of McCool and Michin eliminates Shotzi. Niven LAUNCHES Michin onto Shotzi to get us down to six, with Niven belly to back suplexing Rodriguez. For some reason Niven goes up, allowing Rodriguez to kick her out as Ripley gets the Iron Woman record.

The Tejana Bomb to Ripley is countered, with Ripley tossing Rodriguez and then sending both Asuka and Cross to the apron. Morgan knocks out Cross and we're down to Ripley, Morgan and Asuka. Ripley is sent to the apron but headbutts Morgan and pulls her out to the apron with her. Asuka joins them and mists Morgan, allowing Ripley to kick Asuka out. Morgan Codebreakers Ripley down but she hangs on and pulls Morgan out for the win at 1:01:08 (earning the Stick Stickly seal of approval).

Rating: C. I ran out of ways to say "and then this wrestler came in and they beat a bunch of people up and then nothing happened and then someone else came in." The double Iron Women thing didn't do much as Ripley was doing her thing here and there while Morgan was barely around. The Women's Rumble has a tendency to be rather top heavy and that was the case here, with the Damage CTRL run, along with Becky and Ripley, being the only interesting part. It was the Ripley show and she was kind of laying around (as you tend to do in an hour long run) and that didn't make for a good Rumble.

Hardy performs to kill some time.

We recap Kevin Owens challenging Roman Reigns for the World Title. This is much more about whether or not Sami Zayn is really part of the Bloodline or just their lackey. On the other hand, Reigns is sick and tired of Kevin Owens so it's time to get rid of him once and for all. Zayn has insisted that he's in the Bloodline, and even Jey Us, who never believed him, isn't sure about Zayn anymore. Reigns has told Zayn's final test is at the Royal Rumble, where he has to show whose side he is really on.

WWE Universal Title: Kevin Owens vs. Roman Reigns

Reigns, with Paul Heyman and Sami Zayn, is defending. They circle each other to start until Reigns hits a quick clothesline. Back up and Owens scores with an elbow to the

face before stomping away at Reigns in the corner. There's the Cannonball as Zayn is starting to look worried at ringside. Reigns rolls outside and there's the backsplash to crush him again. Back in and Reigns hits a release Rock Bottom for two, followed by the apron boot to the face for the same.

The chinlock goes on for a bit but Owens fights up and drops Reigns again. The frog splash gives Reigns two but he's back with a sitout powerbomb. Back up and the Superman Punch gives Reigns two more, only to have Owens send the spear into the post. Owens hits the Swanton for another near fall but botches a springboard moonsault attempt. The second attempt misses, allowing Reigns to hit a spear for another near fall.

Naturally the referee gets bumped and more naturally, there is no one to count as Owens hits the Pop Up Powerbomb. Reigns goes low to cut Owens off again and tells Zayn to throw in a chair. That goes rather slowly, allowing Owens to come back with a Stunner or a rather near fall. Zayn is breathing a sigh of relief as Heyman glares at him and the two inside slowly get up.

Another Pop Up Powerbomb is countered into a Superman Punch (that was cool) and another spear gets another two. Owens rolls outside where Zayn tells him to stay down, only to have Reigns spear Owens through the barricade. Rather than covering though, Reigns sends him head first into the steps, followed by another spear to retain at 19:13.

Rating: B-. It was a good, hard hitting fight but there was absolutely no drama as to the winner because we have been flat out told that this is all about Sami Zayn. Owens was trying, but he was just the designated challenger here and there was no way around it. Reigns could only make you believe he was in so much danger and it showed pretty badly. Not a bad match whatsoever, but the opening bell started the countdown to the spear.

Post match Reigns holds on on Zayn getting his lei, as instead he has the Usos destroy an already out of it Owens. The beating continues, including a chair being wrapped around Owens' neck for the running Umaga attack from Solo Sikoa. Owens gets handcuffed to the ropes for some superkicks as the fans chant for Sami. Reigns grabs the chair and yells at Owens, but Zayn gets in between them, saying Owens is done.

Reigns thinks about it and then holds the chair out to Zayn, who doesn't want to do it. Zayn: "I don't want to." Reigns: "I think you should." Zayn takes the chair as Reigns shouts about how he loves Zayn while Owens keeps trying to hold him back. Does Zayn want to go do the Jackass stuff again? Zayn stands behind Reigns and slowly holds up the chair, with Reigns turning around and saying PULL THE TRIGGER. Reigns calls out Zayn for crying and shoves him in the face a few times, shouting that THIS IS MY WHOLE LIFE.

With that, Reigns turns to look at Owens again, and with the fans chanting for him, Zayn blasts Reigns in the back with the chair to one of the loudest pops you will ever hear. Jey Uso looks at Zayn and can't believe what is going on but never touches him. Instead Jimmy superkicks Zayn down and destroys him, with Sikoa adding the Spike. Reigns tells Jey to get in on this but a broken Jey rolls to the floor and leaves without touching anyone. Reigns destroys Zayn with the chair and forearms to the head, ripping the Honorary Uce shirt off of him to end the show.

I didn't catch it live but as has been pointed out: that was the same way Seth Rollins turned on Reigns to end the Shield, which ties the whole story together. Reigns was so betrayed by the Shield that he turned to the only people he could trust, his family, to avoid it happening again but then the one person who wasn't blood, turned on him. That is some top level storytelling and the fans reacted to it as a result. For wrestling, this was Shakespeare, and the tag match at Wrestlemania and then Jey siding with Jimmy was incredible,

but they just couldn't find a way to wrap it all up, at least within the next year.

Overall Rating: B-. As usual, the Royal Rumble is one of the most unique shows of the year as it is built around two matches. The first Rumble was great and the second was...well not, but this year had a special bonus. The post main event angle was an instant classic and set things off for the next several months. The show is not great and the women's Rumble is weak, along with the other non-Rumble matches, but the two good parts carry the show far enough.

Results

Cody Rhodes won the men's Royal Rumble last eliminating Gunther

Bray Wyatt b. LA Knight – Sister Abigail

Bianca Belair b. Alexa Bliss – KOD

Rhea Ripley won the women's Royal Rumble last eliminating Liv Morgan

Roman Reigns b. Kevin Owens – Spear

Ratings Comparison

Men's Royal Rumble:

Original: A-

2024 Redo: A-

LA Knight vs. Bray Wyatt

Original: D+

2024 Redo: D

Bianca Belair vs. Alexa Bliss

Original: C-

2024 Redo: C

Women's Royal Ruble

Original: C

2024 Redo: C

Kevin Owens vs. Roman Reigns

Original: B-

2024 Redo: B-

Overall Rating:

Original: B

2024 Redo: B-

Yep, more or less the same as the original.

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