

Smackdown – January 2, 2026: They Got The Hard Part Right

Smackdown

Date: January 2, 2026

Location: KeyBank Center, Buffalo, New York

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves

It's the new year and we are getting ready for some big stuff around here. The biggest change came last week, when Drew McIntyre announced that he and Cody Rhodes would be facing off in a Three Stages Of Hell match for the World Title. That alone should be enough to carry things for a bit, but we're back to three hours a week and the Royal Rumble is in less than a month. Let's get to it.

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

We open with a recap of Drew McIntyre challenging Cody Rhodes to the Three Stages match last week before leaving Rhodes laying with a Claymore.

Here is a ticked off Miz, who wants to air his grievances of 2025. He was left out of John Cena's retirement tour because he should have been the one to make Cena tap. Instead, he's stuck here in BUFFALO. Then he offered people help but got mocked by the people backstage and every ones of the fans. Third, he was passed over for Marty Supreme so he's coming for Timothee Chalamet.

Fourth, Joe Hen...he who shall not be named brought back a FAKE TRUTH about Miz's anatomy. Miz lists off everything he has done and says he is the locker room leader, but Randy Orton is back. After quite a bit of posing, Miz asks the fans to give it up for Orton and then puts himself on Orton's level. They could be Miz-KO! And that's an RKO to leave Miz laying, followed by a HAPPY NEW YEAR and another RKO.

Nia Jax and Lash Legend interrupt the Kabuki Warriors and are ready to help them win tonight in exchange for a future title shot. The Warriors don't seem impressed, though Sane seems scared of Asuka.

Post break, Randy Orton runs into Cody Rhodes and says after Rhodes is done with Drew McIntyre, he's coming for the title. Rhodes seems to understand and Orton leaves, with Nick Aldis coming up to remind him that he can't touch McIntyre, which Rhodes seems to understand as well.

Nia Jax/Lash Legend/Kabuki Warriors vs. Rhea Ripley/Iyo Sky/Charlotte/Alexa Bliss

The villains jump them from behind to start and the brawl is on fast. Asuka kicks Ripley in the face and then the ribs but the sliding knee is cut off. The Warriors are sent outside for a flip dive from the legal Bliss and we take a break. We come back with Bliss diving over for the tag to Charlotte to pick up the pace.

A flipping clothesline drops Legend and a moonsault gets two on Jax. Back up and Jax runs Charlotte over, setting up the legdrop for two more. Charlotte shrugs that off and puts Asuka in the Figure Eight, which is broken up by the Insane Elbow. Sky gets the tag and missile dropkicks the Warriors but Legend tags herself in. A pump kick knocks Sky out of the air and we take a break.

We come back again with Asuka forearming away on Sky, who manages to avoid a forearm. Sky flapjacks her way to freedom and it's back to Ripley to clean house. Everything breaks down with the parade of knockdowns until Ripley pulls Sane out of the air. Riptide into Over The Moonsault finishes Sane at 14:33.

Rating: B-. Pretty standard match here but the extra time let them showcase themselves a bit more. It helped avoid everyone feeling like they had to rush through things, even with the

two breaks. Ripley and Sky get some momentum before their title shot on Monday, which could even see a title change.

Nick Aldis talks to NXT's Jordynne Grace, who he wants on the roster. Chelsea Green comes in with Alba Fyre and doesn't seem interested in Grace, who says some people make her decision easier. Green has issues with people coming after her but Aldis threatens to strip of her of her title.

Here is Kit Wilson to complain about the toxic fans but he has an opponent.

Kit Wilson vs. Matt Cardona

Apparently Cardona is officially back on Smackdown and shrugs off a dropkick to start fast. Some forearms and a clothesline put Wilson on the floor for a dropkick through the ropes. Back in and Wilson gets in some right hands in the corner but stops to call Cardona toxic, earning himself a middle rope dropkick. The Reboot connects and a tiger driver gives Cardona two but Wilson hits a Tourniquet (Twist Of Fate) for two of his own. That doesn't get him very far though as Cardona is back with the Rough Ryder for the pin at 4:17.

Rating: C. Good for Cardona. He's a prime example of someone who was told he had a ceiling in WWE, went out and recreated himself, and apparently got another chance. I have no idea how well it's going to go, but it's proof that you can change the company's mind if you're willing to put in the work. Nice job, and I'm curious to see what he does around here this time.

Damian Priest has spent six months fighting Aleister Black and everything is done tonight in an ambulance match. Tonight, it's Black's turn to fade to black.

The Wyatt Sicks ask Solo Sikoa what it means to be part of a family. Sikoa was kicked out of the Bloodline, but the Wyatts' family have millions of Fireflies. It's time to chop down Sikoa's family tree at the root.

Here is Sami Zayn for a chat. Zayn talks about how he was in the crowd for John Cena's last match and his son asked why Cena was the "Never Seen 17." He explained that it was due to Cena being the first ever 17 time World Champion, but Zayn's son asked how many times Zayn had won that title.

Zayn had to explain that it hadn't happened...but that is changing this year. It is his time, but here is Trick Williams to interrupt. Yes he is indeed here and he is this tall, dark and handsome. He is 6'5, 250lbs and he looks like he could be a champion, but it won't take him 20 years like Zayn has. Zayn is impressed, but is looking forward to humbling Williams. Violence does not ensue.

We look back at Carmelo Hayes winning the US Title last week.

Ilja Dragunov praises Hayes for his win last week and confirms that the US Open Challenge is staying open. They're both interested in running it back. Hayes moves on to see Miz, who is responsible for Hayes winning the title. Without Miz leaving him alone, it would never happen so thank you very much.

Trick Williams comes up to Nick Aldis and Rey Fenix to rant about Sami Zayn. Aldis doesn't like it and makes Williams vs. Fenix for next week.

US Title: Johnny Gargano vs. Carmelo Hayes

Gargano is challenging and has Candice LeRae with him. Hayes dropkicks him down to start fast but Gargano is back with the rolling kick to the head. A knee sends Gargano to the floor but he's out of the way before the dive. The slingshot spear drops Hayes again and we take a break.

We come back with Hayes in trouble until a headscissors drops Gargano for a change. That's enough to send Gargano outside and the big running flip puts him down again. The Fadeaway gives Hayes two back inside and he goes up top, where Gargano

gives him a Kevin Owens swinging superplex for two as we take another break.

We come back with Hayes striking away but getting superkicked out of the air. Gargano gets out to the apron, where his slingshot cutter is kicked down. The Fadeaway misses and Gargano is back with a tornado DDT. A super Air Raid Crash gives Gargano two but he walks into the First 48. Hayes gets up top so the Fadeaway can retain at 16:46.

Rating: B+. This was two talented wrestlers getting the chance to showcase each their talents for a good while and it made for a solid match. What matters the most here is making Hayes feel like he belongs on this level, as he could still use some more success to really move up the ladder. This was a good start, as Gargano knows how to wrestle this style so well.

Shinsuke Nakamura has some tense words with Tama Tonga before leaving. Tonga turns to see Solo Sikoa, who announces an eight man tag, family vs. family match next week against the Wyatt Sicks.

Aleister Black, with Zelina, says Damian Priest can do whatever he wants but Priest has changed.

Jade Cargill says she didn't intentionally hurt Michin at a recent live event. Jordynne Grace comes in and says she wants to see the competition. Cargill introduces herself as "that b****", which Grace seems to confirm.

Cody Rhodes runs into Sami Zayn and heard what Zayn said about the title. Zayn seems to still respect Rhodes but wants the title...and here is Nick Aldis. He hasn't seen Drew McIntyre, but Rhodes is heading to the ring.

Video on Oba Femi.



IMG Credit: WWE

Here is Cody Rhodes, rocking some suspenders, for a chat. He isn't the biggest, strongest, fastest or youngest, but he's still the champion. Every week, he gets here at 2pm and makes sure the younger wrestlers see him so they think of the title. Then comes the envy in the form of Drew McIntyre. Rhodes' secret is that he plays dumb backstage but when he looks at McIntyre, he sees lunch.

McIntyre pops up on screen to call Rhodes predictable. They're going to have a Three Stages Of Hell match so let's get to the stages: regular match, falls count anywhere and steel cage. That's assuming Rhodes is still champion next week because if he touches McIntyre, he's no longer champion. McIntyre is in front of Rhodes' bus, where he has been, and found a photo of Cody and Dusty himself. The photo is smashed and Cody gives chase, but McIntyre is in the ring, where he lights the photo on fire and throws it in a trashcan as Cody is held back.

Here's what's coming next week.

Women's US Title: Chelsea Green vs. Giulia

Green, with Alba Fyre, is defending and Kiana James is here with Giulia. They start fast with Green getting sent into the corner for the early stomping. A kick to the face sends Green outside but a Fyre distraction lets Green get in a suicide dive. We take a break and come back with Green slugging away, which just seems to annoy Giulia. The Un-Pretty-Her is blocked

so Green settles for a Rough Ryder instead. Green goes up but gets butterfly superplexed back down. The northern lights bomb gives Giulia the title back at 7:35.

Rating: C+. That's what it should have been, as the point of Giulia is that she's a better and more physical star in the ring than Green. While Green is able to hang in there through cheating and her own skill, Giulia is on a different level and gets the title back. Now do something with Giulia already, as otherwise it's just a waste of time.

Rhea Ripley and Iyo Sky are ready to get the Women's Tag Team Titles back. Charlotte and Alexa Bliss come up to say good luck, though Ripley isn't sure if they are to be believed. Oh and Charlotte wants the first shot. That's more like it for Ripley.

Video on Aleister Black vs. Damian Priest.

Fraxiom mocks Johnny Gargano on his loss and recommend that he grows up. They also want Axiom's mask back but Gargano says no. Axiom says he's going to get a match with Gargano to get the mask back. Rather than, I don't know, punching Gargano and taking it.



IMG Credit: WWE

Damian Priest vs. Aleister Black

Ambulance Match and Zelina is here with Black, who jumps

Priest at the bell to start fast. Black kicks him in the face and the fight heads out to the floor to open both ambulance doors. Priest fights back and whips out a stretcher, which he drops Black onto face first as we take a break.

We take a break and come back with Priest hitting a clothesline and a running elbow in the corner. A Pounce sends Black over the announcers' table but Black manages to kick a chair into Priest's face for a breather. Back in and Priest snaps off a super hurricanrana, earning himself a kick back to the head for the double down.

We take another break and come back with the fight up by the ambulance again, where Black sends him into the set. Zelina opens up the doors but finds Rhea Ripley, who takes her into the ring for the Riptide. Black knocks Priest into the ambulance but only closes one door, allowing Priest to kick him back out.

Priest is back out with a crutch but Black knees him in the face. A fire extinguisher blast and fireball knock Black down, allowing Priest to pull out a table tech equipment. The Razor's Edge is blocked and they sent each other into the side of the ambulance. Black wheels out an ambulance case but Priest gives him a Razor's Edge into the windshield. That sends Black climbing onto the ambulance, and Priest chokeslams him through the tables. Priest throws him inside and wins at 24:00.

Rating: B. This was a rather long match and that made it feel like a match worthy of being on a pay per view. Priest winning isn't a huge surprise, as the idea seemed to be more about Black getting inside his head than winning. At the same time, Priest absolutely needed a big win, as he has fallen way off the map since losing the World Title. They had a big time main event here though and that helps both of them quite a bit.

Overall Rating: B. This was a good start to the three hour era

of Smackdown, but I have a feeling that this isn't going to be the way the show goes most of the time (shocking there I know). They packed in a bunch of stuff into one night and the same will be true next week. What matters the most here is the fact that the show didn't feel long, which is one of the biggest issues that a three hour show can face. Next week should be huge as well, but for now the new Smackdown is off to a good start.

Results

Rhea Ripley/Iyo Sky/Alexa Bliss/Charlotte b. Kabuki Warriors/Nia Jax/Lash Legend – Over The Moonsault to Sane
Matt Cardona b. Kit Wilson – Rough Ryder
Carmelo Hayes b. Johnny Gargano – Fadeaway
Giulia b. Chelsea Green – Northern lights bomb
Damian Priest b. Aleister Black – Priest put Black in the ambulance

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