

Royal Rumble Pre-Show Matches: How Times Change

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Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross, Tazz, Kevin Kelly, Shane McMahon

That's the kind of collection that speaks for itself and there could be some interesting options in here. Granted most of these are probably going to be seen from various pre-shows over the years, but how many of those are memorable anyway? These things can be quite good so let's get to it.

From Royal Rumble 2014.

Tag Team Titles: New Age Outlaws vs. Goldust/Cody Rhodes

The Outlaws are challenging and the fact that the countdown clock shows us less than fifteen minutes before the show starts isn't instilling me with confidence here. Rhodes knocks Dogg into the corner to start and Dogg realizes that's not going to work. The snap jabs have some more success and Dogg ducks a springboard kick to the head. Dogg is sent outside though and the champs take out both Outlaws with dives as we take a break.

We come back with Dogg snapmaring Goldust into a chinlock, which is escaped just as fast. A Code Red drops Dogg but Gunn is right there to cut Goldust off again. Commentary ignores the match to make jokes about themselves until Goldust snaps off the powerslam. Rhodes comes back in to pick up the pace, including telling Gunn to suck it. A springboard double dropkick puts the Outlaws down and Cross Rhodes gets two on Dogg, with Gunn making the save. Gunn comes in off the blind tag and the Fameasser gives us new champions at 6:59.

Rating: C. While the Outlaws would only hold the titles for about a month, it was really jarring to see the Rhodes brothers lose the titles in such a weak fashion. They had the incredible moment of beating the Shield to win the titles and then we just get...this. There is something to be said about the nostalgia factor here, but it's not like the Outlaws were ever particularly good in the ring in the first place.

From Royal Rumble 2004.

Victoria vs. Molly Holly

Holly's Women's Title isn't on the line. They go technical to start with Victoria taking her down into a quickly broken hammerlock. A headlock takeover puts Holly down again and Victoria grinds away. That's reversed into a headscissors and they fight over a backslide. A snapmare lets Holly hit a baseball slide as Lawler talks about hormones. Holly's handspring elbow in the corner gets two and she cranks on Victoria's neck. That's broken up with a jawbreaker and Victoria fires back with forearms. The standing moonsault gives Victoria two and they go up top, where Victoria pulls her down into the Widow's Peak to win at 4:58.

Rating: B-. It didn't get much time but this wound up being a pretty nice match. It's unfortunate that the women's division from this era doesn't have the best reputation as they were capable of doing more. This worked well as a way to warm up the crowd and the Widow's Peak looked great. I'd call this a heck of a nice surprise.

From Royal Rumble 2006.

Finlay vs. Brian Kendrick

This could be interesting. Finlay backs him into the corner to start but Kendrick actually comes back out with a shove. That doesn't please Finlay, who knocks him out to the floor, with Kendrick favoring his arm. Kendrick gets tied up in the ring

skirt but fights back again, this time with some forearms. That's enough for Finlay, who grabs the Celtic Cross for the fast pin at 2:07. Ok so it wasn't interesting.

From Royal Rumble 2001.

Kaientai vs. Lo Down

The winning team gets to pick a member to enter the Royal Rumble. Chaz jumps Funaki to start and gives him a slam but Funaki hits a quick dropkick. Michinoku comes in and walks into a spinebuster as Lawler teases entering the Rumble as a surprise. Some more dropkicks get Michinoku out of trouble and it's back to Funaki to clean house. That doesn't last long though as a double powerbomb gives Chaz the pin at 1:50. And then their spot went to Drew Carey anyway, which is a far better idea anyway.

From Royal Rumble 2005.

Maven vs. Rhyno

Maven is a cocky heel here and we don't have commentary as this is an actual dark match rather than something from Heat. Maven works on the arm to start and shouts a lot as he cranks away even more. The fans get behind Rhyno, who is rather displeased with Maven slapping him in the face...and apparently this IS from Heat and just joined in progress. Well that's...really not overly noteworthy.

Maven sends him into the throat and hammers away, followed by an elbow for some near falls. Some choking in the corner gets two, even with the feet on the ropes, and Rhyno's neck gets bent around the ropes. A neckbreaker gets two and we're off to the chinlock. Rhyno fights up because, you know, it's Maven, and hits a northern lights suplex. Maven knocks him right back down as JR apologizes for some technical difficulties.

The chinlock goes on again to keep things slow as this is going a good bit too long. Rhyno fights up for the clothesline

comeback and a belly to belly drops Maven again. The threat of the Gore sends Maven bailing to the floor but they switch places. Rhyno tries a sunset flip of all things but Maven grabs the ropes for the pin at 7:01.

Rating: D+. Yeah there's a reason Maven is not overly well remembered for his time in the ring and this was a good illustration of why. He oddly worked better as a heel as he's easy to dislike, but there is nothing in the ring to build off of that. This was a nothing match and it felt way longer than just seven minutes, which isn't a good sign.

And we're out in a hurry, with the next match starting about a second after the pinfall. Come on man, Maven wasn't THAT bad.

From Royal Rumble 2015.

Tyson Kidd/Cesaro vs. New Day

Adam Rose, Natalya and Xavier Woods are here too. This is a weird case as it's actually HEEL New Day as they've only been around in their best known form for about two months. The fans do seem to like singing along with Woods though. Big E. and Kidd start things off as the fans are rather enthusiastic about Cesaro. Commentary hypes up the WWE Network and I can't help but shed a bit of a tear over its memory.

Some early backbreakers have Kidd down for two as commentary talks about the Rumble, which is a bit more acceptable here. Kingston comes in with a dropkick to Kidd and it's off to Cesaro, with the fans rather approving. Big E. comes back in for the running shoulders in the corner, allowing Kingston to get the blind tag for a middle rope crossbody. Lawler isn't sure where New Day will wind up as they seem to be evolving, which is the biggest understatement he could imagine.

A cheap shot from Cesaro drops Kingston and it's back to Kidd, with the Swing into the dropkick getting two. We take a break and come back with Kingston fighting out of Cesaro's chinlock.

Kidd kicks him right back down for two but it's back to Big E. to fire off the belly to belly suplexes. A not so great Rock Bottom out of the corner gives Big E. two and Kidd is catapulted over the top.

Big E. sends Kingston flying out to the floor, which gets commentary to stop talking about the WWE Network (thank goodness as I can't cry over it anymore). The spear through the ropes stops Cesaro but he escapes the Big Ending back inside. Kingston comes in but the referee says there was no tag, so we do indeed get a tag, with Kingston not looking pleased (in a rare sight).

Cesaro uppercuts the heck out of Kingston and a superplex into Kidd's top rope elbow gets two. The Sharpshooter attempt is kicked away so Kidd tries a sunset flip but Cesaro gets caught cheating. Kingston's rollup gets two more but Kidd is back with the Sharpshooter. That's broken up with a belly to belly so Cesaro drops Big E. again. Cesaro isn't done as it's an uppercut to Kingston, setting up Kidd's fisherman's neckbreaker for the pin at 11:06.

Rating: B. Kidd and Cesaro were one heck of a team and it's a shame they didn't get to do this a lot longer. They worked so well together and were a great example of power/speed meshing. On the other hand though you have New Day, who were starting to get popular as you couldn't get around that kind of talent for so long. It helps that they were rather good in the ring in their own right, which was starting to come out. Rather good match here and easily a PPV worthy match.

From Royal Rumble 1999.

JOB Squad vs. Too Much

Too Much (Cool) jump them to start but Scorpio flips out of a double backdrop attempt. A powerbomb puts Taylor down but Christopher breaks up the moonsault. Christopher accidentally sends Taylor crashing outside, leaving Scorpio to kick

Christopher in the face. Holly comes in and fights off some double teaming, followed by a clothesline to Taylor. Scorpio's spinning top rope splash hits Taylor as well but he holds Scorpio for Christopher's missile dropkick. Everything breaks down and Holly grabs a Falcon Arrow to pin Taylor at 3:53.

Rating: C-. Yeah what were you expecting here? One of the teams was the heel version of Too Cool, without the charisma that made them stars, and the other team was literally built around the idea of being losers. They weren't going to be able to do anything overly impressive, but that was the point. In other words, it was a fine idea for a warmup match but this was about as good as it was getting.

From Royal Rumble 2003.

Spike Dudley vs. Stevie Richards

Jacqueline is referee and shouts a lot as Spike jumps Richards to start. Richards' friend Victoria grabs Spike's leg though and a neckbreaker puts him down. A seated full nelson (always liked that one) has Spike in more trouble but he fights up rather quickly. Richards catches him on top but gets knocked down, setting up a top rope double stomp for two. Jacqueline isn't going to have Richards stomping in the corner but Victoria's interference doesn't work. Instead, Spike uses Victoria to set up a Dudley Dog for the pin at 3:35.

Rating: C+. Spike is someone who doesn't get the credit that he deserved, as he was able to take one heck of a beating and keep going while getting people behind him. At the same time, Richards was a fine villain who was better than people remember. As was the case with a lot of these matches, they did what they could in the time they had, but there wasn't a ton of time in the first place.

Overall Rating: B-. I had fun with this, as they did a nice job of throwing together some matches that you probably haven't seen in a good while. Pre-show matches got a lot

better in latter years as they were basically pay per view matches airing earlier. You mix that with some simple stuff like Spike vs. Richards and it gives you a nice idea of how things have gone over the years. This was short and to the point, which is kind of the idea with the concept in the first place. As usual, nice job.

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