

Main Event – May 25, 2017: Pick Something Already

Main Event

Date: May 22, 2017

Location: Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids, Iowa

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Corey Graves

Dang it just when I'm getting used to Graves and Phillips being on every show together, or at least feeling like they are. They leave NXT and are now on one of the main shows each, 205 Live and this one. It's allowed these two to develop a great chemistry together and that makes the shows so much easier to listen to. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

TJP vs. Gran Metalik

Joseph points out that this is a rematch from the finals of the Cruiserweight Classic, which of course is taking place on this show instead of anywhere else. Metalik starts fast with his flips off the ropes and an armdrag to send TJP outside for a big dive. Back in and a springboard elbow gets two but it's way too early for the Metalik Driver.

Instead it's time to go for the mask but TJP settles for just throwing him off the top for two. TJP grabs a modified crossface chickenwing before switching over to a regular chinlock. Back up and TJP kicks him in the face a few times, followed by the top rope splash. A moonsault misses though and TJP hits the Detonation Kick for the pin at 5:27.

Rating: C. Completely watchable cruiserweight match here, which is really not saying much given the history between these two. Metalik has fallen all the way through the floor lately and I really hope there's a big reason for it instead of something petty that was holding him back, like some mistake six months ago.

To Raw for the first time.

Here's Finn Balor for a match but first he has something to say. At Extreme Rules we have a Fatal Five Way (he said Final Five at first) but here's Paul Heyman to interrupt. Paul lists off Lesnar's potential challengers and says Brock would make them all victims. Finally we have Balor himself, who Heyman thinks is the most talented performer in WWE today. Paul wants to see them fight and Balor agrees, even though Brock isn't here tonight.

And again from Monday.

Sheamus vs. Matt Hardy

The winner gets to pick the stipulation for the title match at Extreme Rules. Matt clotheslines him to the floor to start but Sheamus takes over in the brawling. The ten forearms set up a running knee to send Matt into the barricade. Back in and Matt avoids a charge into the corner but gets caught in a Regal Roll for two.

We come back from a break with Sheamus fighting out of a chinlock and using a Jeff distraction to elbow Sheamus in the head. The Side Effect gets two on Sheamus and a jumping knee to the face gets the same on Matt. Sheamus knocks him to the floor but stops to kick at Jeff, allowing Matt to grab the Twist of Fate for the pin at 12:07.

Rating: D+. Are we done yet? Like really, are we done with this feud yet? They've been doing the same stuff over and over again now with the Hardys never even seeming to break a sweat against these two. I'm liking Sheamus and Cesaro more and more but they need to actually beat the Hardys at some point to make it actually matter. Matt makes it a cage match.

Heath Slater/Rhyno vs. Curtis Axel/Curt Hawkins

Wait Axel is heel again??? Hawkins and Axel argue over who gets to start with Slater but it's quickly off to Rhyno for a HUGE pop. A clothesline gets two on Curt and it's back to Slater for a much more modest pop. Slater falls for a distraction though and gets shoved out to the floor, allowing the villains to take over as we take a

break.

Back with Hawkins putting Slater in a sleeper before it's off to Hawkins for an armbar. A good looking dropkick gets Axel booed again but Slater flapjacks Hawkins, allowing the tag off to Rhyno. Everything breaks down with Heath diving onto Hawkins, leaving Rhyno to hit a spinebuster on Axel for the pin at 11:07.

Rating: D. Rhyno's level of overness never ceases to amaze me. The guy goes out there and does his thing every single week, despite not really changing anything in his offense for the last twenty years or so. Maybe it's the Michigan thing but sweet goodness he was as popular as free beer in a frat house.

And the final Raw clip.

Roman Reigns/Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe/Bray Wyatt

As usual, Reigns is hated. Joe and Rollins start with Seth getting in a few jabs, only to be sent crashing to the floor as we take an early break. Back with Reigns giving Bray a Samoan drop but getting dropped by Joe. A chinlock and enziguri keep Reigns in trouble and Bray throws him outside.

That doesn't go quite as well as Reigns sends Joe into the barricade, allowing the hot tag to Rollins. House is quickly cleaned with Seth nailing a double suicide dive, only to get caught on top. A double high crossbody takes the villains down but Reigns runs into Rollins by mistake. Rollins and Reigns get into an argument and it's the Koquina Clutch to knock Seth out at 14:58.

Rating: C. This would be the latest in the long line of matches that mean nothing but feature people who are going to be important later on and therefore are supposed to make you care. It would have done them a lot of good to slowly announce the participants and give us something to bridge the gap between now and Extreme Rules but that's just not how WWE operates.

Overall Rating: D+. Just a run of the mill show here though the new commentator could have been a lot worse. He has a smooth voice and makes the show a bit easier to sit through. The Raw clips didn't

help things though, which is what drives this show every single week.

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205 Live – May 25, 2017: The Right Way To Do A Street Fight

205 Live

Date: May 23, 2017

Location: Huntington Center, Toledo, Ohio

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

We're getting closer to Extreme Rules and that means we're setting up another Austin Aries vs. Neville match. That would be the third match on pay per view between the two, which suggests to me that they really need to build up some fresh stars. Maybe that can be Cedric Alexander, who returns tonight. On top of that we also have a street fight between Brian Kendrick and Akira Tozawa to finally blow

off their feud. Let's get to it.

Brian Kendrick talks about how great Tozawa is and now he's come here. Kendrick took it upon himself to take Tozawa under his wing but Tozawa disrespected him. That meant it was time to learn a lesson, and another lesson, and another lesson. Then Tozawa thought he could teach Kendrick something because he hasn't learned anything yet. Now things between them need to end and Brian can think of no better way than in a street fight. Good talk from Kendrick here as he kept it simple and laid everything out there while conveying emotion at the same time.

Opening sequence.

The announcers preview the street fight.

Rich Swann vs. Ariya Daivari

I wrote Daivari's name down as soon as Swann's music hit because....well who else would you have as a heel jobber on this show? I mean, they're also fighting over Swann causing Daivari to ruin his \$1,500 shirt last week but I only remember that thanks to the nifty video package. After some yelling from Daivari, Swann sends him outside for a baseball slide.

They both head outside this time with Swann being sent into the LED ring skirt. Back in and we hit an armbar, followed by a Codebreaker to the same arm. It's off to a cobra clutch for a good while until Swann fights up with the good arm. The big spinning kick to the head gives Swann two, followed by the Phoenix Splash for the pin at 6:31.

Rating: C-. Not much to see here as it was just a step above a squash. Swann is in a weird place as he's one of the better stars on the roster and could pretty easily hang with Aries and Neville but for some reason he hasn't been near the title, at least not for the long term, in months. Then again it wouldn't be hard to throw him in there pretty easily, which is always a good thing.

Post match Noam Dar comes out to shove Swann off the top for a big crash to the floor.

We look back at the history between Aries and Neville.

Neville and Aries (eating a banana of course) join us via satellite for an interview. Graves asks if Neville sees this as the biggest challenge of his career and Neville is instantly annoyed at such a suggestion. Aries doesn't like Neville saying that he's beaten him twice and brings up the cheating. Neville calls that slander but Aries says it's just truth. Not that it matters as Aries has a bunch of submissions ready, capped off by the Last Chancery to take the title that belongs to him. Neville says bring it. Really good segment here and it's nice to have something that doesn't break down into a physical brawl.

Cedric Alexander vs. Johnny Boone

Not to be confused with the former WCW referee. A big elbow to the face sends Boone outside and he looks a bit shaken. Boone comes back in and eats the springboard clothesline, followed by the Lumbar Check for the pin at 1:33. That's how you bring a star back.

We look back at Drew Gulak and Tony Nese attacking Mustafa Ali last week.

Gulak gives us something like a campaign commercial, talking about how horrible it is when cruiserweights ruin the division's good name for the sake of drawing applause. Join him in his campaign for a better 205 Live.

Brian Kendrick vs. Akira Tozawa

Street fight and Kendrick starts with his jacket still on. Brian tries for an early weapon but gets taken down by a suicide dive instead. A hiptoss onto the announcers' table is good for two back inside and Kendrick is in a lot of trouble early on. The right hand sends Kendrick to the apron but he low bridges Tozawa to the floor for a big crash.

A table is pulled out but they slug it out instead of setting it up. Tozawa's dive is broken up with a thrown jacket and Kendrick suplexes him on the floor for good measure. It's time to get creative as Kendrick wraps duct tape around Tozawa's mouth before putting on the Captain's Hook. Thankfully Tozawa only uses the ropes

to climb to his feet and the hold isn't broken.

Sliced Bread is broken up as Brian is sent outside, leading to a fight on the stage. Kendrick gets the better of it and tapes Tozawa to the post for a whipping with the belt. Now it's table time, prompting Phillips to say Kendrick made a name for himself in the Attitude Era. Given that he debuted in 1999 and didn't really get anywhere aside from various indies until 2002, I don't think that's quite right.

Anyway Tozawa frees himself somehow and whips Kendrick IN THE FACE with the belt. That doesn't do him much good though as he jumps into the Captain's Hook. The escape sends them both outside again with Tozawa firing off kicks and snapping off a Saito suplex for a painful sounding thud. Kendrick goes face first into the steps so Tozawa can put him on the table for a HUGE top rope senton backsplash. Brian is completely done so Tozawa throws him inside for the pin at 14:32.

Rating: B+. So often in these matches, it feels like they're just wrestlers doing spots that you would see in a fight. This time, it felt like we were watching a fight between two people who used wrestling moves, which is a major upgrade. I had a lot of fun with this and Tozawa hitting the huge spot at the end to finish the match and feud looked definitive instead of something to set up another match down the line. This should set up Tozawa to fight for the title and I have no idea why that wouldn't be the case.

Kendrick is helped out as Tozawa celebrates to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. The main event is easily enough to carry the show and having Tozawa finish the feud against Kendrick makes things even better. Things are looking up around here but Aries vs. Neville needs to wrap up so we can move to a fresh direction in the title scene. I like the show almost every week but they need to do something to draw in some viewers and make fans care, because this show apparently is a bomb in the Network viewership. Granted that's not surprising but that doesn't make things any better.

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Impact Wrestling – May 25, 2017: And There Goes The Steam

Impact Wrestling

Date: May 25, 2017

Location: Impact Zone, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: D'Angelo Dinero, Jeremy Borash

It's time for another triple threat match, this time with World Title implications. Tonight it's James Storm vs. Ethan Carter III vs. Magnus in a match that will likely help set up the World Title picture as we approach Slammiversary. We're about six weeks away from the pay per view, meaning it's almost time to start setting things up. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's show, focusing on the Ultimate X match and the setup for tonight's triple threat.

Opening sequence.

Here's Bruce Prichard to get things going with Tyrus as his new bodyguard. Despite what Carter did to him last week, Bruce wants to get us to the most important thing around: the Impact Wrestling Heavyweight Championship. This brings out Lashley, who brags about his dominance. He doesn't care about the people in the triple threat match, which does seem to be for a shot at the title.

Before Bruce can announce the challenger, here's Carter to say he'll win and get the title shot. Magnus comes out to say the same thing because Lashley has never beaten him. Naturally Storm is here to say he should be getting the shot. Bruce makes the match a #1 contenders match with the winner getting the shot at Slammiversary (Forget all those weeks of talking about the GFW Title being the golden ticket I guess). He'll even make it No DQ (because triple threat matches are known for their disqualifications) but no one can touch either of the other two before the match starts.

Carter says he's winning tonight to fulfill his destiny.

The announcers talk about the upcoming JB/Joseph Park vs. Josh Matthews/??? match at Slammiversary. We'll find out Matthews' partner tonight.

KM/Kongo Kong vs. Braxton Sutter/Mahabali Shera

Sutter and Kong get things going with JB saying we're in for a treat with Kong in the ring. JB needs to learn the definition of "treat". Allie gets in an argument with Sienna/Laurel Van Ness as Shera can't slam Kong. He can slam KM but stops due to a Laurel distraction. Since it was just a slam, KM pops up and takes over on Shera. An elbow to the jaw keeps Shera in trouble and it's back to Kong for a headbutt (giving us quite the jiggle).

Kong hits a belly to belly and a rolling backsplash to take us to a break. Back with Sutter getting the hot tag to clean house, including a middle rope neckbreaker for two on KM. Everything breaks down and the women get into it again, leaving Shera and KM down in the ring. Allie crossbodies both of them, followed by Kong headbutting Shera into a rollup (with trunks) for the pin at 11:30.

Rating: D+. This feud is still going despite not much really changing. It's still fallout from the wedding but, other than having more people brought in, it doesn't feel like anything has changed since then. Shera really only seems to be there for the sake of the India tour (at least he wasn't made World Champion) and Kong is just an embarrassment from a physical standpoint. The feud isn't horrible but I could go for a fresh plot point instead of just adding a new name.

The guys fight to the back with Allie being surrounded. Cue Rosemary of all people for the save, including mist to Sienna and the Red Wedding to Laurel. So the evil Rosemary is now face yet Allie still can't get a big win? That seems to be taking a few too many steps in the booking.

GFW Tag Team Title Tournament First Round: Fallah Bahh/Mario Bokara vs. Veterans of War

The winners get LAX in the finals because we had a four team tournament to crown a second pair of champions, assuming you don't count the titles that Bahh and Bokara bring with them. Bokara and Wilcox start things off with a toss into the corner allowing the tag off to Mayweather.

A shot to the face gives Mayweather a little trouble and it's off to the huge Bahh. Mayweather walks into a Samoan drop, allowing Bahh to bite his own fingers for some reason. Bahh misses a charge into the post and it's off to Wilcox to clean house. A missed charge sends Bahh to the floor so Mayweather can kick him in the face. The MOAB ends Bokara at 5:08.

Rating: D. Bokara and Bahh haven't done a thing for me since they debuted and that's still the case now. It's an average guy and a low rent Yokozuna imitation which isn't exactly worth much as a team. The Veterans on the other hand are rather awesome and I'm digging them more every time I see them.

Magnus is ready to win the title shot.

Here's Matthews to make his announcement. Josh calls JB into the

ring to talk about making up for all of his mistakes. Matthews loves Jim Ross, who is the greatest announcer of all time (to clarify: they're fighting over an announcer who has never and likely never will work here). He's now a Vice President of the company (Fans: "WASTE OF MONEY!") and has to act as such. As Pope rips on how stupid this is, Josh offers a handshake but gets cut off by Joseph Park.

We get a history of Josh lying and getting shoved down, which is enough to turn Josh back into his normal, ranting self (So the point of him being nice for two minutes was....?). Josh goes on about how he should be the face of the Fight Network and calling all the major sporting events. He wants the match right now so here we go.

Josh Matthews vs. Joseph Park

The bell rings and twenty seconds later here's SCOTT STEINER of all people, despite having lost about 50lbs of muscle since he was last here. No contest of course but JB and Park's eyes bugging out are great.

JB and Park bail as Steiner shakes the barricade and beats up a fan as Josh hits Park low, allowing Steiner to put him in the Recliner. So to recap: Josh is married to an active wrestler but the only option was to bring in Scott Steiner. What was that chant again? WASTE OF MONEY?

Back from a break with a recap of what we just saw, because that's really the top story in this company.

Video on Moose's reign as Grand Champion.

Eli Drake says he isn't going to change for anyone but has to back off from Moose, who is being held back by security. Moose agrees to give him a title shot next week but Chris Adonis comes in to help on the beatdown.

Alisha Edwards/Eddie Edwards vs. Angelina Love/Davey Richards

It's a brawl in the aisle to start until the guys officially get things going. Davey rips at Eddie's face and shouts that Eddie made him do this. Eddie sends him outside for the suicide dive, leaving

Alisha to hit one of her own on Angelina as we take a break. Back with Davey slapping on a Figure Four for a good while until Eddie fights up for some chops. Josh makes a nice mention of the Manchester attacks as Eddie gets a hot tag to Alisha, meaning it's off to the women. Alisha misses a high crossbody but comes back with a rollup for the pin at 11:48.

Rating: C-. This was more about Eddie vs. Davey but it's a good idea to have Alisha get her feet wet like this. The division is dying for some more talent and Edwards would be better than a lot of their options. The match was nothing special but it's another case of a feud continuing after it probably should have ended, or at least taken a break. Davey vs. Eddie is still good but it needs an endpoint, which I'd assume is at Slammiversary.

Post match Davey handcuffs Eddie as Alisha is powerbombed through a table.

Spud isn't here tonight (despite saying he would be and given that IT'S A TAPED SHOW that shouldn't be hard to avoid) but promises to be back next week. As he's talking, Spud's mom yells at him from upstairs. Spud: "KAYFABE MOM! KAYFABE!" As usual, Spud is funnier than pretty much everyone else in this promotion.

Magnus vs. Ethan Carter III vs. James Storm

The winner jumps past Alberto for the title shot at Slammiversary, which I'm sure will change. It's a brawl to start with Carter being sent out to the floor, leaving the other two to chop it out. The fight heads outside in a hurry with Storm taking a double suplex onto the ramp as we take a break.

Back with Josh making fun of JB as the weapons are brought in for the first time. Storm takes a kendo stick to the back but heel miscommunication sees Magnus and Carter both take stick shots. Magnus realizes that's not a bad thing and unloads on Carter, allowing Storm to make his comeback with a clothesline.

Some chops allow Storm to grab a chair of his own for some hard shots. Carter breaks it up and gets two off the TK3 to Storm, only

to be sent to the floor. Storm's Last Call is countered into a Cloverleaf but Carter makes the save with a chair. The 1%er gets two on Magnus, followed by a Codebreaker with a chair getting the same on Carter.

A Tower of Doom sends Storm flying but he sends Storm heads first into a chair in the corner. Magnus makes the save with a top rope elbow for two. Josh: "You know they're watching in the UK right now!" The show airs on Friday night Josh, so I doubt that's true. Storm hits a Last Call on Magnus but Carter throws him to the floor and steals the pin at 20:10.

Rating: B-. Good match but does anyone really believe Carter vs. Lashley is officially set in stone and actually happening now? Like, we're just supposed to believe that Alberto is going to do something else? I mean, I know common sense isn't TNA's strong suit but I could actually see them having two World Title matches and stretching it out to Bound For Glory to make sure they drain any interest people might have in the story. Anyway, good action packed match here and while Carter would have been the favorite, he didn't feel like a lock to win.

Overall Rating: D+. Once they get done with these double titles, they might actually have something. The problem again comes down to these marathon tapings. You can only go so far with the one idea and it's probably asking a bit much to have the writers come up with something that fresh in a hurry. Unfortunately that means we're stuck with stories dragging on forever and a severe lack of steam when they reach the end of a taping cycle. The show was still good but it's needing a breath of fresh air and I don't think Scott Steiner is the solution they're looking for.

Results

Kongo Kong/KM b. Braxton Sutter/Mahabali Shera – Rollup to Shera

Veterans of War b. Fallah Bahh/Mario Bokara – MOAB to Bokara

Josh Matthews vs. Joseph Park went to a no contest when Scott Steiner interfered

Alisha Edwards/Eddie Edwards b. Angelina Love/Davey Richards – Rollup to Love

Ethan Carter III b. Magnus and James Storm – Last Call to Magnus

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UK Championship Special: They're Not Old Enough For This

UK Championship Special

Date: May 19, 2017

Location: Epic Studios, Norwich, England

Commentators: Jim Ross, Nigel McGuinness

This was a special two day event taped about two weeks ago as WWE continues their UK expansion. The idea here is to set up the UK Title match at Takeover: Chicago, which was announced before this show ever aired. The initial tournament shows were a lot of fun so

hopefully this continues the trend. Let's get to it.

We look back at the tournament with Bate shocking everyone, including himself, by winning the title. The participants talk about how it's changed their careers in a positive way. Everyone is after Bate and the title though.

Video on Wolfgang, a big Scottish wrestler who is more aggressive now that he lost to Bate.

Joseph Conners is a high flier says his future looks good.

Wolfgang vs. Joseph Conners

The arena looks a bit dark. They trade shoulders to start with Wolfgang kicking him in the face to take over. JR makes sure to tee up McGuinness for some easy questions, which is exactly what Nigel is supposed to be able to do as an analyst. Wolfgang blocks some suplex attempts before lifting Conners up for a very delayed one of his own.

It's way too early for the Howling (Swanton) though as Conners shoves him to the floor for a crash. Back in and a bad looking slingshot splash gives Conners two as the fans are trying to get back into this. Nigel gets into the simple story of the English vs. Scottish rivalry as Conners kicks Wolfgang in the ribs to keep him on the floor. Joseph throws him back in to crank on something like a seated abdominal stretch.

That's enough to start a comeback (as is always the case) but a crossbody messes with Wolfgang's damaged ribs. Wolfgang thinks about the Howling again but comes down instead. A gutbuster sends Conners outside as the fans seem to have sided with Wolfgang. The ribs are made even worse by a sitout spinebuster but Conners gets speared out of the air. The Howling gives Wolfgang the pin at 11:00.

Rating: C+. Good but not perfect way to open the show. There wasn't much of a spark here and a face power wrestler vs. a heel speed wrestler is always a bit of a weird choice. The ribs were a simple enough story to keep things rolling but the match was nothing that hasn't been done if not done better before.

Tyler Bate and Mark Andrews are getting ready.

TJP/Brian Kendrick vs. Dan Moloney/Rich Swann

So it's a match on a UK show that only has one person from the UK (Moloney). That's probably not the best choice to use on a show like this, especially after the lackluster opener. Also, you have RICH SWANN on the card and you don't use him in the opener? This is quite the curiously booked show. Finally, TJP (who JR keeps calling Perkins) covers his ears to block out Rich's music.

Kendrick and Moloney get things going with a feeling out process until the veteran drags Dan into the corner. TJP comes in and the fans start singing about him in some rather unflattering terms. JR: "What's this wanker thing they're talking about?" Nigel basically tells him not to ask if JR wants to keep his job.

The heels try some cheating with TJP grabbing an arm over the ropes, only to make the mistake of not looking and working over Brian's arm by mistake. TJP comes in and gets kicked in the head for a hesitant two, perhaps because Moloney made sure to look at the camera (which he was probably told to do) first. It's off to Swann for some dabbing, which angers TJP so much that he misses a charge out to the floor.

One heck of a flip dive takes out both Kendrick and TJP, which is made even better when Swann sticks the landing. Back in and some double teaming puts Swann in trouble for all of fifteen seconds before he kicks Kendrick in the face. Moloney comes in off the hot tag for some chops and a clothesline to Kendrick.

More double teaming (they're good at that) takes Dan down though and TJP covers his ears to block out the singing. We hit the chinlock for a bit before Dan backdrops his way to freedom, setting up the real hot tag to Swann. Everything breaks down and Swann gets caught in the Captain's Hook with Moloney making the save. Swann is tossed to the floor and Kendrick grabs a sloppy rollup (with tights) for the pin at 11:30.

Rating: C. This didn't work and the fact that Moloney is only twenty

years old has a lot to do with it. You can tell that he's really young and is still having to think a lot out there, which can cause some problems. That's not say he was bad, but you could tell he was easily the weakest in the ring. The rest of the match was good enough but they never really hit the top speed that you've seen them reach before. Granted a lot of that could be due to the whole being in another country issue, which is a common problem.

We look at Wolfgang injuring Trent Seven's arm the previous night. Seven doesn't have a broken bone and is going to keep at it. Pete Dunne, his opponent for the night, comes in and hits him in the bad arm. That guy is a special kind of heel.

Video on Pete Dunne, who is rather evil. The tournament got him the credit he deserves and he's been making money ever since.

Trent Seven has a sweet mustache and hits people really hard.

Trent Seven vs. Pete Dunne

The winner gets a UK Title shot at Takeover: Chicago. Dunne comes out with his Progress Wrestling Championship but it's not on the line here. The fans are split here between Mustache Mountain and the Bruiserweight before going with BRITISH STRONG STYLE instead. Pete starts on the good arm in an interesting strategy but Seven goes to the ropes.

One heck of a chop with the bad arm drops Dunne but he kicks Seven in the arm to send Trent outside. The arm gets crushed between the steps and the post before it's back to working on both arms at once. A kick to the mustached head gets two but he sends Pete outside for a flip dive.

Back in and another shot to the arm looks to set up the Bitter End, only to have Trent nail a hard left armed lariat for two. A suplex into a powerslam gives Trent two more but the arm is sent into the post. Pete can't quite grab a Kimura (which sends JR into a mini rant about how it's a double wristlock and NOT a Kimura) so he sends the bad arm into the barricade instead.

The arm is good enough for a dragon suplex onto the apron and both

guys are left in a heap on the floor. They both dive in at nine and Dunne manages to flip out of a dragon superplex, only to eat a huge lariat for a very delayed two. The Seven Star Lariat is broken up though and we hit another double wristlock. Trent slips out again but walks into the Bitter End to send Pete to Chicago at 14:47.

Rating: B+. This was all about the arm and Dunne being one of the most evil wrestlers around because he'll do whatever it takes to win. The fact that the match was another brutal back and forth fight makes Dunne look great all over again. Seven seems like a comedy guy with the mustache stuff but he's more than capable of backing it up in the ring.

Dunne says he'll be champion by any means necessary.

We recap Tyler Bate vs. Mark Andrews. Bate (now twenty years old) won the inaugural title in January while Andrews was a semi-finalist. It's the young upstart vs. the slightly more experienced high flier.

UK Title: Tyler Bate vs. Mark Andrews

Bate is defending. The fans serenade Bate with a song and then boo someone out of the building for trying a TNA chant. They take their time to start with Andrews working on the arm before Bate twists all over the place to escape. Bate powers out of a front facelock by casually setting Mark on top and walking away to get under his skin a bit. Andrews gets taken down to the mat for a double arm crank but he reaches the ropes and gets a clean break. That might be brought up again later.

They trade some flips and cartwheel up before nipping into a standoff for some applause. The sportsmanship starts going away as they go nose to nose and yell a bit. Andrews goes back to the technical stuff and manages a modified Octopus Hold. Bate shows off the freakish strength by walking the hold over to the ropes for the break. Tyler slaps on a reverse Boston crab which Nigel names and JR calls innovative. Something tells me JR isn't a big Colt Cabana fan. Bate grabs the arms to lift Mark up for a little rocking back and

forth. Mark comes right back by sending him outside for a big flip dive and a double stomp to the chest for no cover. With nothing else working, Bate starts swinging before avoiding a charge to send Mark outside. This time it's Tyler hitting a dive of his own but it's too early for the Tiger Driver 97.

A Frankendriver gives Andrews two and he takes Bate to the apron for a standing Sliced Bread #2. Mark's moonsault to the floor is caught so he goes with a tornado DDT instead. Unfortunately Bate is out on the floor and therefore able to kick out when Mark finally gets him back inside. Mark gets crotched on top (Fans: "NO MORE KIDS!") and takes a jumping European uppercut to put both guys down. Of course that means they slug it out from their knees with Bate getting the better of it, as you might expect.

There's the airplane spin but Bate takes too much time resetting, allowing Mark to hit a reverse Frankendriver for a close two. Now the fans are getting into these near falls because they're smart enough to know the match wasn't ending earlier. Bate is ready for the shooting star but his super Regal Roll is countered into a super hurricanrana, followed by a running shooting star for two.

The champ is reeling but still manages to earn his independent credibility with a superkick. His suplex is countered into the Stundog Millionaire but the shooting star hits Bate's raised knees. The fans get behind Bate again as he kicks Mark in the head, followed by the Tyler Driver 97 to retain at 24:15.

Rating: A-. There's very little I enjoy watching more than taking two wrestlers and having them look so polished and untouchable at first and watching them be broken down until they can barely stand. That's exactly what we got here and it made for one heck of a fight. Bate is scary good for his age and TNA continues to look like a bunch of morons for wasting someone capable of doing this. If you watched Andrews in TNA, you would think he was a one move wrestler. Now he had a great match that went nearly twenty five minutes. Who do you think did the better job with him?

Post match Dunne comes out to deck Andrews, drawing out William

Regal to stare him down. Bate and Dunne stare each other down to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. The first two matches, while good, really do feel like little more than weak appetizers before the two outstanding feature matches. You can feel a real feud here with Bate vs. Dunne and it's no surprise that their match in Chicago was a near masterpiece. Fix up the first two matches on this show and it's a classic. As it is, it's just very good.

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Ring of Honor TV – May 24, 2017: Here We Go Again

Ring of Honor

Date: May 24, 2017

Location: Korakuen Hall, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 1,636/1,271

Commentators: Rocky Romero, Kevin Kelly

We're less than ten days removed from the War of the Worlds pay per view and last week was a stand alone episode. Therefore, this week it's...a series of matches from the Honor Rising event back in February. In other words, these matches have nothing to do with anything going on at the moment, other than featuring New Japan stars. Let's get to it.

Ian Riccaboni welcomes us to the show via voiceover.

Never Openweight Six Man Tag Team Titles: Delirious/Tiger Mask/Jushin Thunder Liger vs. Los Ingobernables de Japon

Los Ingobernables (Bushi/Evil/Sanada) are defending as we start with five New Japan wrestlers and the ROH booker who hasn't been seen on TV for probably over a year. We're joined in progress with Tiger Mask coming in and taking over on Bushi via some choking with a shirt (despite Tiger being a face).

It's off to Jushin to face Sanada as the announcers continue to treat everyone as people we should know without offering much of an explanation. The villains start ripping as Liger's mask with Evil getting two off a backplash. Sanada misses a charge and gets sent outside, allowing the hot tag to Tiger Mask for a dropkick.

We take a break and come back with Bushi neckbreaking Tiger for two, only to have Delirious get the tag a few seconds later.

Everything breaks down in a hurry and Delirious gets Sanada in a cobra clutch. The champs start triple teaming him for the save though and it's a Backstabber into a belly to back for two.

Delirious grabs some rollups for two each on Sanada but Evil chairs Delirious in the face, setting up a dragon sleeper to retain the titles at 10:34 (total match time).

Rating: C. This was good enough for most of a ten minute match with people we're just supposed to know because they're in New Japan and if we watch Ring of Honor, we clearly watch New Japan. These titles have caused Ring of Honor to create their own version and the waste of time that came with them so I'm not too fond of the originals in the first place.

Never Openweight Title: Hirooki Goto vs. Punishment Martinez

Martinez is challenging and we start from the beginning for a change. Goto gets run over to start but avoids a big stomp to give us a standoff. A quick trip to the floor goes badly for Goto as Martinez hits a good looking spin kick back inside. Goto hits one of his own in the corner though, followed by a kick to the chest to drop Martinez again.

It's time for the forearm exchange/slow down/second forearm exchange until Goto hits the fireman's carry flip onto the knee (the move that Mauro Ranallo always told us that Goto invented during AJ Styles matches). Back from a break with Martinez getting two off a clothesline and going up top. Goto bails to the floor to take the over the top dive, followed by a spinwheel kick from the top. A suplex is broken up with a headbutt and Martinez is stunned but not badly enough to get kicked in the chest. The chokeslam is countered though and Goto hits the GTR (Eye of the Hurricane onto the knee) to retain at 10:49.

Rating: C+. Good power match here with the same complaint I had earlier. Martinez looked like a player here, even if there was no reason to believe he was going to win the title. This is basically the tough man title so Martinez was a very good choice for the challenger here.

Chaos vs. Bullet Club

Chaos: Briscoe Brothers/Will Ospreay/Kazuchika Okada

Bullet Club: Cody/Young Bucks/Kenny Omega

Since we're coming up on Supercard of Honor, the Bucks keep chanting DELETE. We get the big Okada vs. Omega showdown to start but, of course, there's no contact made and it's off to Mark vs. Cody. Mark is quickly annoyed with Cody's antics so it's off to Jay, who takes an elevated dropkick from Matt. A few right hands get Jay out of trouble and Ospreay gets a chance, only to have to deal with the Young Bucks, who you know aren't going to take much offense.

Ospreay sends them outside and does the backflip into the pose, only

to load up a very early Meltzer Driver. That's broken up just as quickly though and Ospreay sends the brothers outside again. A kick to the head sends Ospreay outside and we take a break. Back with Ospreay being thrown into three boots in the corner but avoiding a superkick. That's it for his good luck though as four straight superkicks set up a springboard 450/moonsault combination for two.

Omega comes in and grabs a chinlock for two arm drops (you don't see that every day) as Ospreay is in trouble. A suplex is countered into a Stunner and a tornado DDT allows the hot tag off to Okada. The Bucks aren't impressed (of course) so Okada punches them outside, followed by an over the shoulder backbreaker to Cody. Everything breaks down and the Briscoes come in to clean house as we take a break.

Back with Mark hitting a suicide dive, followed by a Cactus Jack elbow off the apron. Cody is right back up though and superplexes Ospreay onto the big pile. That leaves Omega vs. Okada (who looks like he just got out of the shower and doesn't even appear to be sweating) for the huge strike off with Omega getting the better of it. Both finishers miss though and it's the Bucks superkicking Okada down.

Omega and the Bucks get into a Three Stooges eye poke sequence on each other before a triple superkick drops Okada again. Cue Ospreay to kick Omega in the head, only to get powerslammed down by Cody. The Briscoes come back in to clean house with a superplex into the Froggy Bow on Omega.

The Rainmaker is broken up but Ospreay is right back in there to catch Kenny with the one man Spanish Fly. Will gives Cody a Falcon Arrow for two but misses the shooting star. The spinning kick to the head connects for Ospreay, only to have the Oscutter countered into Cross Rhodes for the pin at 20:16.

Rating: B+. That certainly worked. You knew what they were going to do here as soon as you saw who was in here and that's all that mattered. Omega vs. Okada was a very fresh match at this point and it's one of the few things that's actually well timed here as we're

less than a month away from their rematch. Anyway, really good stuff here, which isn't exactly a surprise.

We're off the air with two minutes left in the hour.

Overall Rating: B-. This one ENTIRELY depends on what kind of wrestling show you were looking for here. If you're looking for an hour of no frills and good action, you're going to like this. If you're looking for Ring of Honor, just wait until next week. In other words, the taping cycle curse strikes again because, for whatever reason that I've never heard, we can't just move the new shows a bit closer to the pay per view. No instead we NEEDED to see a New Japan showcase. I still don't get why this company works this was and I don't see it changing anytime soon.

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New Column: Cool it with Mahal the Backlash

What else was I going to talk about? An amazing angle to end Takeover?

Monday Night Raw – December 23, 2002: With Bonus Footage and a House Band

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 23, 2002

Location: Ford Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the last regular show of the year as next week is a Best Of special. Thankfully that means one less week of Scott Steiner vs. HHH, who last week reached new levels of suck with a long talking segment. Steiner is all flash at this point and I'm really not sure HHH is the one to drag him to the next level. Let's get to it.

Minor note: this was actually taped a few days earlier due to the holidays.

We open with a long recap of the end of last week's show. You know the fifteen minute talking segment? Well here it's cut down to about two and it's still boring.

Opening sequence.

It's the Christmas/holiday show so we have a Santa's Little Helper match. That means the women, though I was hoping for Max Mini vs. Battalion.

Rob Van Dam/Kane vs. 3 Minute Warning

Rosey and Jamal take turns with the pounding forearms to Kane's back but he sits up, as is his custom. A good looking big boot to the face allows the hot tag to Rob, who is brought in with a rocket

launcher crossbody for two on Jamal. Rob gets sent outside so Rico can get in some kicks, allowing the Samoans to take over again. Not that it matters though as Van Dam kicks them away and brings Kane back in to clean house. A clothesline puts Rosey on the floor and it's the chokeslam into the Five Star to put Jamal away.

Rating: D+. Just a quick match here to make sure you know that the Samoans are done because WWE cares more about whatever their issue was behind the scenes than building up what had potential to be a decent tag division. At least Van Dam and Kane were entertaining and have some potential as a good team.

Post match Rico yells at and slaps both guys. Jamal and Rosey almost get in an argument, which is what Rico was wanting to see.

The bosses are worried about Steiner and HHH getting into it tonight when Spike Dudley comes in to yell about William Regal knocking D-Von out last week. Eric Bischoff makes Spike vs. Batista with the Dudleys banned from ringside.

We see Jim Ross' entrance, complete with the Oklahoma University marching band playing his theme song.

Earlier today, D'Lo Brown, now in what appears to be a gangsta rapper gimmick, tried to get Stacy Keibler as a marketing assistant. Stacy: "I kind of have my hands full with the Testicles right now."

Test vs. D'Lo Brown

Fallout from Wrestlemania XV. Test loses a chase to start and gets his throat snapped across the top rope. A whip into the steps makes things worse and Brown start sin on the ribs. We hit an abdominal stretch with Brown hopping over to the ropes for some extra leverage. Test hiptosses him out and grabs the pumphandle slam, only to have Brown get in another shot to the back. The camel clutch doesn't get him very far and the missed backsplash makes things even worse.

A full nelson slam (which JR calls a full nelson into a chokeslam) gives Test two and the pumphandle slam gets the same with Brown grabbing the rope. Brown goes after Stacy and sends Test into the

post off the distraction. He puts his feet on the ropes when he covers though and the referee won't count. Brown: "IF I WAS WHITE YOU'D COUNT!" Racism is too much for D'Lo and he shoves the referee for the DQ.

Rating: C. Not bad here actually, despite the stupid costume and angle for Brown. Test isn't exactly over and it's really Stacy making the sex jokes that are as over as anything else. At least they're trying something with both guys though, which is at least something of an upgrade for them both. I didn't say it was a good upgrade but it's still something.

Brown bails into the crowd.

This week's Raw Retro is JR kissing Vince's....yeah.

We see a Jerry Lawler book signing in Memphis.

Here are the bosses to explain the idea of the Royal Rumble being split between the brands. For some reason this is the greatest thing JR and King have ever heard, which doesn't sit well with Bischoff. We see an off camera moment of JR and King talking about the Raw Retro, where they ripped on Bischoff for ruining the show. Bischoff suggests that he'll replace them with Tony Schiavone and Jesse Ventura. Crowd: *SILENCE*. Anyway, Bischoff is giving them a match tonight. Or they can just be fired.

Hurricane vs. Christopher Nowinski

Nowinski jumps him at the bell and gets two off a butterfly slam. Hurricane comes right back with a neckbreaker, only to get chopblocked down. Cue Maven for a distraction though, allowing Hurricane to hit the Shining Wizard for the pin. Hurricane has no direction at all right now and the Tough Enough feud is just continuing.

Worry not: HHH isn't worried about Steiner and would slap Scott in the head right now if he could. I certainly was worried until we heard that.

Batista vs. Spike Dudley

Spike tries a chase to start but is quickly caught and powerbombed

onto the barricade. A clothesline and the Batista Bomb wrap this up in a hurry.

Bischoff and Morely are happy so Morely suggests they fight JR and King later. William Regal and Lance Storm come in and offer their services instead, which Bischoff accepts. The usage of brass knuckles is encouraged.

A camera spies on the women getting ready for the tag match later.

Victoria/Molly Holly/Ivory vs. Jacqueline/Trish Stratus/Stacy Keibler

They're all in your standard Christmas outfits, save for Molly of course. It's a brawl to start until Stacy and Molly (who of course is insulted despite looking perfectly fine in a long, sleeveless red dress) with Keibler bending over to show off her red underwear, thereby stopping Molly cold. If that's not enough, Stacy's spinwheel kick literally misses Molly the whole way by about four inches but gets two anyway.

Victoria comes in with a suplex as JR wonders if she's a real woman. Stacy gets beaten down for a bit until the tag brings in Jackie, who quickly takes her place in getting beaten up. The real hot tag brings in Trish to clean house and of course Molly's dress is pulled up for the "comedy" bit. Jackie grabs a tornado DDT and Trish hits Stratusfaction for the double pin.

Rating: D. I don't like having to go with this but it could have been FAR worse. They were trying to have a match in there but when most of the match is built around seeing the outfits come up, you can only get so far. Speaking of which, Lawler was his usual self in one of these things, which is kind of odd given when he has to do in about an hour.

Goldust runs into Chris Jericho, who says Goldust is a failure in all walks of life, including his career because it was Booker who won the titles.

Scott Steiner is going to see HHH in the ring later.

Tag Team Titles: Chris Jericho/Christian vs. Booker T./Goldust

Booker and Goldust are defending. Before the match we see Shawn Michaels superkicking Jericho last week. Normally that would suggest the result of this match was obvious but I could see Jericho vs. Michaels with Jericho as a tag champ. Goldust and Christian start things off with the Canadian eating a clothesline. The announcers have come to a strategy in the tag match: Lawler will do everything. Booker comes in for a suplex to Jericho and Goldust catapults him over the top onto Christian. The offense doesn't last long though as Jericho dropkicks Goldust in the back and the champs are in some sudden trouble. It's not long lasting trouble though as Goldust grabs a bad looking neckbreaker to put Christian down, allowing the hot tag off to Booker.

A double side kick drops the Canadians and that means it's the Christmas Spinarooni. Another kick gets three on Christian but the foot was on the rope as we go to a break. Back with Booker kicking Jericho down again but this time the referee misses the hot tag to Goldust. Even the announcers get on him for this one as Booker stays in trouble. Christian snapmares him into a chinlock as the announcers talk about mothers.

The hold stays on for a good while until Booker fights up and grabs a flapjack. That's enough for the hot tag to Goldust, who hits a quick Shattered Dreams on Christian. Jericho is sent head first to the same spot and a powerslam gives Goldust two (and one heck of a pop on the near fall). The Walls have Goldust in trouble until Booker makes a save of his own. The Lionsault hits Goldust's raised knees and Goldust grabs a rollup (with tights) to retain.

Rating: B. It had time and the hot finish makes Goldust look like an equal link to Booker for a change. The Canadians are still a good team and these four could have more good matches if given the chance. At the moment it's not like the division has a lot of depth in the first place so give them a shot.

Kane is about to leave so Van Dam gives him some merry Christmas wishes. Rob talks about having great Christmases as a child, but Kane spent his Christmases locked in the basement torturing rats

with razor blades. Dang now I feel sorry for Rob. Anyway Van Dam gives him his Christmas present: Hungry Hungry Hippos.

Rob goes into an explanation of how the marbles represent obstacles that block your chi. I'm not the most familiar with the concept, but it seems that Rob believes you're supposed to eat your obstacles. So if you have trouble at work, cook your boss over a fire? Or am I supposed to have him.....raw? Kane hates it and Rob knew he should have gone with chutes and ladders.

And now for something I'm actually confused by. On the Network version, D'Lo Brown comes out and says he wants a rematch with Test with Stacy on the line. This isn't listed anywhere on any report I've ever seen, including those written back in 2002 or in any results database I can find. JR seems legitimately confused to start, then says "ok" like he's talking to someone on headset, and then starts in on regular commentary. Normally I'd assume this was just a dark match during the break for the crowd (remember that it's taped) but then why do commentary? There's also no ring bell so it's not even an official match.

Test vs. D'Lo Brown

Brown wins an early fist fight on the floor and stomps away in the corner. A release spinebuster gets two and it's off to a reverse chinlock. Brown gets two off a belly to back suplex but misses a moonsault. Test makes his comeback and hits the pumphandle slam for two with Brown grabbing the rope. That's enough for Brown to go outside to chase Stacy, only to run right into the big boot for the pin.

Rating: D. I'm really confused by this and it's all due to the commentary. Well that and the fact that they actually had Test and Brown of all people come out and wrestle again. Brown specifically mentioned the previous match but the commentary never brought it up once. This must have been a re-shoot of some sort, but you would think they would have gone with this match in the regular show despite it not making the broadcast. The match was similar to the first but with the focus on Stacy instead of the racism angle.

And now for something else not mentioned anywhere, we go to a local mall with Sean O'Haire as Santa Claus telling children they're greedy. He tells them there's no Santa either and yells at a bad actress who complains. The truth hurts you see. This makes a bit more sense as the Devil's Advocate character would debut in January. JR goes off to get ready and Lawler says he'll stay in the ring the whole time.

You know how HHH and Steiner are going to face each other tonight? That's still taking place.

Here's HHH to call Steiner out after they've spent the better part of two hours talking about it. HHH talks down to the fans and explains how awesome he is. He would have fought Steiner last week but he was coming off a grueling match with Shawn Michaels, who of course is the best in-ring performer ever you see. We get the call out and HHH looks a bit stunned when Steiner actually shows up.

Lawler fawns over Steiner's physique and we get the quick nose-to-nose (which really shows off how huge HHH's nose is). HHH talks about how they're going to make a fortune at the Rumble and he's not giving up a single dollar of that in the first place. However, after some more bickering about how awesome they both are, we get a challenge for some arm wrestling. HHH almost wins but Steiner smiles at him and wins four times in a row. How many weeks until we get this match over with?

Jerry Lawler/Jim Ross vs. Lance Storm/William Regal

Bischoff and Morely take over on commentary and JR gets played to the ring by the OU band. Note that they don't have to win to keep their jobs but rather just compete. Lawler and Regal start things off with Bischoff going into over the top commentary territory. They trade wristlocks before it's quickly off to Storm. Lance misses an elbow and takes the famed Lawler "dropkick". JR even gets in a neck snap across the top rope but the heels take over as you might have expected.

The villains take turns with chinlocks but we get some bad old

fashioned heel miscommunication to give Lawler a chance. The fist drop gets two and there's the ref bump. Regal pulls out the knuckles but gets snapmared down so Lawler can hammer away. A low blow from Regal makes JR tag himself in so he can grab the knuckles. The double beatdown is on but here are the Dudleys for 3D on Storm, allowing Ross to knock Regal cold for the pin.

Rating: F. So they built up Regal and Storm as undefeated on Raw for the better part of two months and give the win to JR and King? Eh to be fair I really can't get that mad about this one as the winning streak stopped meaning a thing after the four way loss at Armageddon so it's not like this really means anything. The "wrestling" here was nothing of course but JR getting a moment in his hometown was nice for what is likely a once in a lifetime change of pace. Plus this was less than six minutes from bell to bell and you knew there was going to be something screwy to wrap it up.

Overall Rating: D. Far from the worst show they've done in a long time though that doesn't exactly make it good. Yeah there's a lot of bad stuff but they kept it in short bursts so I really didn't have the time to get too mad about things. They really need to get to the Rumble build soon as it can add an instant story for almost anyone on the show, which would help a lot since we can't have a midcard champion for whatever reason. Anyway, not horrible here but it needs a lot of work.

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NXT – May 24, 2017: The Chicago Dream

NXT

Date: May 24, 2017

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Percy Watson, Nigel McGuinness, Tom Phillips

This is one of those cool down shows that was taped before Takeover started off. In other words we're in for a night of quick matches with a bunch of interviews and recaps being used to fill in the gaps. Odds are we're not going to find out any storyline development tonight but slowing things down a bit isn't always a bad thing. Let's get to it.

As expected, we open with a long recap of Saturday's show. This makes the ending of the Women's Title match look a lot better.

Opening sequence.

Aleister Black vs. Curt Hawkins

This is actually fallout from an episode of Main Event where Black beat Hawkins without much effort. Black starts fast with his backflip into the seated position and grabs a rollup for two. A hard shot to the face staggers Hawkins and Black picks him up with a boot underneath the jaw. Hawkins bails to the floor but the chase goes badly as Black Mass ends Curt at 2:50.

Video on Saturday's ladder match with the Authors of Pain retaining and Tommaso Ciampa turning on Johnny Gargano to end the show.

Ember Moon talks about how her career got a boost here in Chicago but it sucks sitting here watching all the action.

Video on the Women's Title match, this time with narration.

Video on Roderick Strong vs. Eric Young.

Velveteen Dream vs. Robert Anthony

The Dream is the former Patrick Clark (with the music spelling out C-L-A-R-K in the background) in something like an Exotic Adrian Street gimmick. A dropkick drops Anthony early on and we get some shouting in the corner. Dream goes up top for a spinning chop to the head as the LET'S GO JOBBER chants start up. A Rude Awakening sets up a very high top rope elbow to put Anthony away at 2:27. Dream looked good, albeit in a small dose.

Video on the UK Title match.

Dunne says bring on all comers because he'll do the same to them.

Video on Roode vs. Itami with Roode retaining his title.

Roode isn't surprise he retained and he'll decided who and when he fights again.

Roode will have a Glorious Celebration next week.

Wesley Blake vs. Drew McIntyre

This was set up backstage last week. McIntyre runs him over to start and tells Blake to bring it. Blake talks some trash and gets kicked in the face, followed by an overhead belly to belly to send Blake flying. Drew's throat is snapped across the top rope and we take a break. Back with Blake working on the arm with a Kimura and a cross armbreaker.

Drew fights right back with a clothesline and a sitout powerbomb for two. Blake sends him shoulder first into the post and grabs a quickly broken Crossface. Another comeback is countered with a Codebreaker onto the arm, only to have Drew toss him off the top. One heck of a headbutt sets up the running boot to the face to end Blake at 11:20.

Rating: C-. The announcers treat this like a big deal because Blake is a former NXT Tag Team Champion. Well yeah, and Drew is a former Intercontinental Champion. I really don't think it's all that

impressive of a win. At least Drew is being featured now and I could easily see him challenging for the title in Brooklyn after Roode faces someone else (Roderick Strong being a likely option).

Overall Rating: D+. This was your usual post-Takeover show, meaning almost nothing happens and it's mainly a chance to catch your breath. It's nothing you need to see but if you don't have time to watch the full thing, this is as good an option as you have. Oh and they managed to advertise something for next week because they're just that good at their jobs.

Results

Aleister Black b. Curt Hawkins – Black Mass

Velveteen Dream b. Robert Anthony – Top rope elbow

Drew McIntyre b. Wesley Blake – Running boot to the face

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Smackdown – May 23, 2017: Do You Know the Way to St. Louis?

Smackdown

Date: May 23, 2017

Location: Huntington Center, Toledo, Ohio

Commentators: Tom Phillips, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

Somehow we're living in Jinder Mahal's WWE, which could mean several things. First of all, we're in for a Punjabi celebration tonight, which could mean a good number of possibilities. On top of that Mahal needs a challenger, who is likely to be Randy Orton in a rematch. We're also about a month away from Money in the Bank so it could be time to set up the ladder match. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of the end of Backlash with Mahal winning the title.

Mahal and the Singh Brothers arrive with a police escort and the champ having a rug laid out for him. So....yeah he really is the new JBL, complete with his own Bashams.

Here's Shane McMahon to open things up. He's impressed that Mahal won the title but we need to move forward. First of all, Randy Orton is cashing in his rematch contract at Money in the Bank in his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. On that same show we'll be having the Money in the Bank ladder match and it's already time to announce the five (SWEET) competitors: AJ Styles, Baron Corbin, Sami Zayn, Dolph Ziggler and....someone other than Kevin Owens, who comes out here despite Shane saying he's not in the match.

The actual fifth entrant is Shinsuke Nakamura but Owens isn't cool with being left out because he beat Styles at Backlash and AJ is in the field. Maybe he's not in there because Shane is jealous of Owens beating AJ when Shane couldn't do it. Shane actually agrees and makes Owens the sixth entrant. Corbin tells Owens to stop talking

and promises to win. AJ says his catchphrase because this house isn't being blown down by a lone wolf. He calls Owens WWE's Eric Cartman and says he doesn't care who he has to beat.

Sami can't say much as Corbin cuts him off and calls him the Rudy of Smackdown Live. That sounds like Corbin wants a rematch but Owens and Ziggler get in an argument before anything can happen. Dolph promises to win again but Nakamura introduces himself as Mr. Money in the Bank. Shane makes AJ/Nakamura vs. Owens/Ziggler and Zayn vs. Corbin for tonight.

Natalya/Carmella vs. Becky Lynch/Charlotte

Carmella headlocks Becky to start but a dropkick sends Carmella outside for a break. Back with Charlotte coming in off the hot tag and cleaning house, only to get dropped by some double teaming. Naomi dives onto Tamina and it's back to Becky for a quick Disarm-Her and the tap at 7:40.

Rating: D+. Some might call this fine, but I'd like to think I can come up with something a little better than that. If nothing else it seems like a waste of time as they might as well have just done this on Sunday if they're going to beat the Welcoming Committee this easily. The stable (if you can call it that) continues to be nothing more than a way to fill in time and the alliance of heroes is pretty clearly only there for the sake of waiting around until they all fight each other.

Sami Zayn vs. Baron Corbin

Neither gets an entrance....and Sami rolls him up for the pin at 21 seconds. They were on a roll for the first half and it was looking like it had serious potential but that next six seconds just fell apart. At least they fixed it in the end.

Corbin beats the heck out of him after the match, including crushing his head against the top of the barricade with a series of elbows. Sami does a stretcher job.

AJ thanks Nakamura for what he taught him in Japan but now they're both going after the same thing. At Money in the Bank, Nakamura is

going to turn AJ's house into his playground.

It's time for the final Fashion Files, which takes place in Shane's office (including a wanted poster, accusing the Mean Street Posse of gang activity). Breeze brings in his stuff and thinks they're fired. They even turn in their (squirt) guns and a bunch of cleaning supplies. Shane: "You do know that you're not real cops right?" Fandango: "That's what my dad tells me." Breeze takes his pants off but Shane says they're having singles matches against the Usos tonight. They're back on the case and Fandango takes a doughnut.

Here's the Punjabi celebration, complete with a band and dancers. Mahal says 1.3 billion people are celebrating the new champion and the Americans hate him because he's different. He's proven everyone wrong and showed that India is on the rise while America is in decline. We hear some Punjabi and fireworks go off with no one interfering to wrap it up.

Lana is still coming.

Jey Uso vs. Tyler Breeze

Tyler still has his bag of stuff....and rolls Jey up for the pin at 23 seconds after spraying him with the squirt gun. So he shot on Jey?

Jimmy Uso vs. Fandango

Breeze puts on a wig and gets Jey to chase him into the ring, allowing Fandango to roll Jimmy up for the pin at 44 seconds.

Fandango: "You Usos look like you just got caught wearing white after Labor Day." Breeze wants a rematch for the titles, which is actually on right now.

Tag Team Titles: Usos vs. Breezango

The Usos are defending and we're joined in progress with Fandango coming in off the hot tag. A tornado DDT/dropkick combination gets two on Jey but it's quadruple superkicks to set up the Superfly Splash, only to hit Fandango's knees. Jey gets small packaged for two and the Last Dance crushes Jimmy, only to have Jey hit the Superfly splash for the pin to retain at 2:48 shown. So to recap,

the champs lose on joke finishes and then the popular act loses a short match after losing their big title shot two days ago. Yeah I'm sure this kind of booking has nothing to do with the ratings being so bad. Clearly just the NBA.

Natalya comes in to Shane's office and demands a title shot. The rest of the Welcoming Committee, Becky and Charlotte come in with the same demands. A big argument breaks out (because that's what women do, at least in WWE's eyes) so Shane makes a fatal five way #1 contenders match for next week.

Kevin Owens/Dolph Ziggler vs. AJ Styles/Shinsuke Nakamura

That argument cost us AJ/Nakamura's entrances. AJ shoves Ziggler around to start before it's off to Nakamura vs. Owens, which the fans certainly seem to enjoy. Some early strikes put Owens on the floor but the threat of a Kinshasa sends him bailing to the floor. Back from an early break with Ziggler raking Nakamura's eyes across the top rope before grabbing a headscissors to keep him on the mat.

We hit the chinlock (required in an Owens match) for a long bit until Nakamura fights up, only to be taken back down until we take a second break. Back again with Nakamura getting over for the hot tag to AJ, who immediately brings the strikes. A good series of them sends Owens to the floor but he drops AJ again and we're back to the chinlock.

AJ fights up again and kicks his way to freedom, allowing the hot tag off to Nakamura. House is cleaned again with a series of kicks but Ziggler grabs a Fameasser for two. Everything breaks down and Ziggler saves Owens from the Styles Clash, only to eat a running knee from Nakamura. The Kinshasa ends Owens at 24:33.

Rating: B. Insert your own complaint about the champ taking a fall when Ziggler is right there. This felt like a bit match and a lot of that is due to having an actual dream team for the face side. I can live with this kind of a match instead of the normal ten minute trading wins between the ladder match participants. It's always nice to have the main event feel important and that's what this did.

Overall Rating: C-. The main event was good but I don't think it's enough to make up for the rapid fire matches we had in the middle of the show. Was there really a need for three matches in a row to have a rollup finish in less than a minute? Is that really the best possible option? They kept Mahal short, which is probably best for everyone involved. He's not the worst idea in the world but we're certainly at the point where the less of him we see, the better. We're firmly on the way to Money in the Bank though and that can make for some dull shows, which hopefully isn't the case this year.

Results

Becky Lynch/Charlotte b. Carmella/Natalya – Disarm-Her to Carmella

Sami Zayn b. Baron Corbin – Rollup

Tyler Breeze b. Jey Uso – Rollup

Fandango b. Jimmy Uso – Rollup

Usos b. Breezango – Superfly splash to Fandango

AJ Styles/Shinsuke Nakamura b. Kevin Owens/Dolph Ziggler – Kinshasa to Owens

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Histories of Saturday Night's Main Event and Clash of the Champions, now in PAPERBACK. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/05/19/history-of-saturday-nights-main-event-and-clash-of-the-champions-now-in-paperback-plus-price-drops/>

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<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

Monday Night Raw – May 22, 2017: The Longest Steps Of The Year

Monday Night Raw

Date: May 22, 2017

Location: Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids, Iowa

Commentators: Michael Cole, Booker T., Corey Graves

Somehow we're less than two weeks away from Extreme Rules and that means it's time to start building the pay per view card. We already have a five man main event for the #1 contendership to Brock Lesnar's Universal Title but a pay per view needs a bit more than that. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of the five way being announced last week.

Here's Bray Wyatt to tell us all to stand up. The Beast is all around us and he's the only one who can protect us all from him. At Extreme Rules, four souls will fall before him. Bray lists off the four men who will fall, finishing with Roman Reigns. This may be Reigns' yard but Bray owns the world. Eh it was better when HHH said Undertaker's yard is in the middle of HHH's world. Cue Reigns who promises to win and then beat Brock Lesnar. They bicker a bit until Kurt Angle comes out to make a match right now.

Bray Wyatt vs. Roman Reigns

Roman starts with a shoulder block using the bad shoulder and has to fight out of Sister Abigail. A big boot sends Bray to the floor but he grabs a release Rock Bottom back inside. Bray adds the running body block but here's Samoa Joe to attack Reigns for the DQ at 4:40.

Rating: D. This didn't have time to go anywhere but I like the idea of Samoa Joe coming in and attacking these guys. It makes him feel like a bigger star to be attacking the stronger names and that's the best thing that can happen to him. The match wasn't the important

thing here and there's nothing wrong with that.

Post match Joe chokes on both of them until Seth Rollins makes the save. Just announce the tag match already.

Back from a break and Angle does in fact make the tag match. Rollins and Reigns leave but the Drifter comes in. Angle gives him a match with Dean Ambrose later.

Akira Tozawa vs. Ariya Daivari

Brian Kendrick is watching in the back and giving Tozawa some tips. They trade some shots to start with Kendrick talking about how Tozawa isn't a serious enough competitor. Tozawa comes back with a big boot and a top rope backsplash for the pin at 2:05.

Noam Dar and Alicia Fox laugh at Sasha Banks for the loss last week but Sasha blows them off.

Elias Samson vs. Dean Ambrose

Non-title and Samson gives us a quick song before we're ready to go. In case that's not enough, Miz and Maryse are on commentary. Samson actually takes over to start with some elbows to the jaw, followed by a running knee to the face as we take a break. Back with Ambrose fighting out of a chinlock and cutting off the comeback with a Fujiwara armbar. Dean fights up and gets his swinging neckbreaker but a hard knee to the jaw puts him down. Ambrose comes back again but here's Miz for the DQ by attacking Samson (just a single tap to give Dean the loss) at 9:49.

Rating: D+. Nothing to the match again but the ending was somewhat creative. Miz just lightly hitting Samson for the loss made sense and advances the story, which could make for an interesting title match. Having Maryse trying to get Ambrose disqualified makes it hard for Dean to retain and that's how you build up a story. Bad match, good story advancement.

Samson saves Ambrose with the reverse swinging neckbreaker.

Enzo Amore has been attacked.

Here's Finn Balor for a match but first he has something to say. At

Extreme Rules we have a Fatal Five Way (he said Final Five at first) but here's Paul Heyman to interrupt. Paul lists off Lesnar's potential challengers and says Brock would make them all victims. Finally we have Balor himself, who Heyman thinks is the most talented performer in WWE today. Paul wants to see them fight and Balor agrees, even though Brock isn't here tonight.

Finn Balor vs. Karl Anderson

Joined in progress with Balor hitting a basement dropkick and hammering on the back. Luke Gallows gets in a cheap shot from the floor and Anderson grabs a chinlock. Balor comes back with a kick to the head and another dropkick, only to get caught in a spinebuster for two. That's about it for the offense at the moment though as Balor sends him outside for a flip dive. Back in and the Sling Blade into the Coup de Grace is good for the pin at 6:19.

Rating: D. This was as exciting as Karl Anderson holding a chinlock for three minutes was going to be. I'm not all that interested in seeing the Club reunite but this is certainly going to bring up more talking about the possibilities. At least Balor won clean, as he should be doing most of the time.

Sasha Banks vs. Alicia Fox

Rematch from last week. Banks tries an early Bank Statement but has to deal with a Noam Dar distraction, allowing Fox to kick her in the face for two. The running knees in the corner stagger Fox and the double knee drop gives Banks the pin at 2:13.

Post match Dar yells at Banks, allowing Fox to lay her out.

Kalisto, in what looks like a rejected Kane mask, thinks Apollo Crews is changing and even accuses him of attacking Enzo. Titus O'Neil comes in and says he's fine with an international member of the team but tonight, Crews is taking Kalisto out.

We look back at Goldust turning on R-Truth.

Goldust says gold is the purest mineral because its shine never fades. He's back in the director's chair and gets to decide how his next film ends. The Golden Age is back.

Alexa Bliss says last week's attack on Bayley was just the beginning. There's no happy ending at Extreme Rules because Bayley doesn't have it in her.

We recap Reigns putting Braun Strowman on the shelf two weeks back.

Apollo Crews vs. Kalisto

Crews kicks him in the face to start, followed by an enziguri for two. The Toss Powerbomb is countered into a rollup for two and a quick Salida Del Sol gives Kalisto the pin at 2:46.

Sheamus vs. Matt Hardy

The winner gets to pick the stipulation for the title match at Extreme Rules. Matt clotheslines him to the floor to start but Sheamus takes over in the brawling. The ten forearms set up a running knee to send Matt into the barricade. Back in and Matt avoids a charge into the corner but gets caught in a Regal Roll for two.

We come back from a break with Sheamus fighting out of a chinlock and using a Jeff distraction to elbow Sheamus in the head. The Side Effect gets two on Sheamus and a jumping knee to the face gets the same on Matt. Sheamus knocks him to the floor but stops to kick at Jeff, allowing Matt to grab the Twist of Fate for the pin at 12:07.

Rating: D+. Are we done yet? Like really, are we done with this feud yet? They've been doing the same stuff over and over again now with the Hardys never even seeming to break a sweat against these two. I'm liking Sheamus and Cesaro more and more but they need to actually beat the Hardys at some point to make it actually matter.

Matt makes it a cage match. I'm stunned it's not another ladder match.

We look at the opening segment.

Austin Aries vs. Tony Nese

Aries starts fast with the elbow to the back but Nese comes right back with a shot to the knee. A catapult sends Aries into the ropes and he gets elbowed out of the air for good measure. Nese's suplex

is reversed into a guillotine, followed by the Last Chancery to make Nese tap at 4:31.

Rating: C-. Just a short match here to show that Aries can win with a submission before we head to the submission match at Extreme Rules. Nese could have been any given jobber here and it would have been the same story. At least he's not being pushed as anything special on 205 Live at the moment.

Neville beats Nese up and gives him the Rings of Saturn. Aries applauds him.

Mickie James vs. Alexa Bliss

Non-title. Mickie wastes no time and sends Bliss into the corner to start before hitting a string of forearms to the champ's face. A basement dropkick actually gets no cover but Bliss breaks up the hurricanrana out of the corner. One heck of a right hand drops Mickie though and the DDT wraps her up at 3:02.

Rating: D. So Mickie goes from being this big talent acquisition to being cannon fodder for a three minute loss on Raw? Bliss' rocket push continues and there's nothing wrong with that. She's so completely awesome in this role and is easily one of the most improved wrestlers in the world over the last few months.

Post match Bliss uses the kendo stick on James, only to have Bayley run in and take it away. She doesn't swing it though as Bliss bails to the floor.

Roman Reigns/Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe/Bray Wyatt

As usual, Reigns is hated. Joe and Rollins start with Seth getting in a few jabs, only to be sent crashing to the floor as we take an early break. Back with Reigns giving Bray a Samoan drop but getting dropped by Joe. A chinlock and enziguri keep Reigns in trouble and Bray throws him outside.

That doesn't go quite as well as Reigns sends Joe into the barricade, allowing the hot tag to Rollins. House is quickly cleaned with Seth nailing a double suicide dive, only to get caught on top. A double high crossbody takes the villains down but Reigns runs into

Rollins by mistake. Rollins and Reigns get into an argument and it's the Koquina Clutch to knock Seth out at 14:58.

Rating: C. This would be the latest in the long line of matches that mean nothing but feature people who are going to be important later on and therefore are supposed to make you care. It would have done them a lot of good to slowly announce the participants and give us something to bridge the gap between now and Extreme Rules but that's just not how WWE operates.

Balor comes up to Angle in the back and wants to be in action next week. Angle gives him a triple threat with Joe and Wyatt. He throws in Reigns vs. Rollins as a bonus.

Overall Rating: D+. Even though they set up a lot of stuff for the pay per view, it still feels like they're treading water on a lot of the show. This really did need to be a two hour version as the extra sixty minutes didn't do them any good. At least the build to the pay per view worked, but it felt like it took forever to take a few steps.

Results

Roman Reigns b. Bray Wyatt via DQ when Samoa Joe interfered

Akira Tozawa b. Ariya Daivari – Top rope backslash

Elias Samson b. Dean Ambrose via DQ when Miz interfered

Finn Balor b. Karl Anderson – Coup de Grace

Sasha Banks b. Alicia Fox – Double knees in the corner

Kalisto b. Apollo Crews – Salida Del Sol

Matt Hardy b. Sheamus – Twist of Fate

Austin Aries b. Tony Nese – Last Chancery

Samoa Joe/Bray Wyatt b. Roman Reigns/Seth Rollins – Koquina Clutch to Rollins