

ECW on TNN – August 4, 2000: The Memory Escapes Me

ECW on TNN

Date: August 4, 2000

Location: Astro Arena Pavilion, Houston, Texas

Attendance: 2,000

Commentators: Joey Styles, Joel Gertner

We're getting close to the end here with just ten episodes left in the series. Unfortunately things were picking up a little bit around this point as some of the stories FINALLY started moving forward. There are still about two months to go before Anarchy Rulz so we're still weeks away from setting up the show's card. Let's get to it.

We open with the last thirty seconds of Rhino Goring Nova to retain the TV Title. Ok then.

Opening sequence.

After Joel talks about being with a stripper named Alexis in his Lexus here in Houston, Texas, here's Cyrus to do the same thing these two always do. Cyrus brings up the attack at Heat Wave which was an assault because Cyrus isn't a wrestler. Tonight though, he has a wrestling license and is ready to fight Gertner one on one. This brings out Spike Dudley in a suit jacket but Cyrus isn't impressed. The announcers leave as Spike says Heyman isn't here tonight because he's busy in Los Angeles. Therefore, Spike is the booker tonight and he has an idea. Here's our opening match.

Cyrus vs. Sandman

A single cane shot brings in Rhino and yeah this isn't a match.

Justin Credible comes in and Tombstones Sandman, drawing Spike back in to take a beating of his own. Spike takes a piledriver off the apron and through a table, leaving Sandman to take a double beating. Chilly Willy comes out for the save and gives Cyrus a falcon arrow.

Little Guido vs. Mikey Whipwreck

They trade chops in the corner to start with Mikey hammering away in the corner before slamming Guido's head onto the mat. Mikey has to avoid Sal to send him into the post before getting two off a

superplex. Another distraction lets Tony Mamaluke come in for a double Russian legsweep from the middle rope for two on Mikey. At least he can competently cheat. Mikey's running DDT changes momentum again and there's the Whippersnapper, only to have Sal distract the referee. Mamaluke drops a top rope leg to break up the cover and chairs Mikey in the head. The Kiss of Death puts Mikey away.

Rating: C. Not the worst here as Mikey is still very underrated despite being a Triple Crown Champion. It's nice to see them actually doing something with Mikey after all these vignettes but the FBI are only so interesting. At least they're letting the talented one do the wrestling instead of Sal and his freak show "abilities."

Post match the FBI goes after Mikey, only to have Tajiri of all people come out for the save.

Earlier tonight, Kid Kash gave Rob Van Dam something close to a sweat. As in as close as you can get with hurricanrana after hurricanrana with an occasional dive thrown in.

This episode is dedicated to Gordon Solie. Nothing wrong with that.

Tajiri vs. Steve Corino vs. Jerry Lynn

Corino is sent to the floor early and we get a very fast near fall sequence from Corino and Lynn. A Tarantula has Lynn in even more trouble until Corino makes the save. Tajiri is sent outside for some double teaming from Victory and Corino, only to have Lynn dive onto both of them for the huge crash. Back in and Corino takes the mist, only to have Lynn cradle piledrive Tajiri for the elimination. Thanks to Victory washing his eyes out, Corino does Dusty Rhodes' Bionic Elbow dance and gets two off a sitout powerbomb.

Jerry starts the one on one portion with a belly to back before a few rollups get a few near falls each. Corino gets crotched on the top but Lou E. Dangerously (He manages Corino right?) slips in the phone so Steve can knock Lynn silly for two. Cue Scotty Anton to snap Jerry's neck across the top rope so Corino can hit the Old School Expulsion (reverse Twist of Fate) for the pin.

Rating: C. Not the worst match in the world here as they let the wrestlers wrestle. That being said, I'm still not a fan of having the third man get eliminated in the first few minutes so they can do a singles match without doing a singles match. It doesn't help that

I've lost track of who is on who's side in this huge stable war. You know, assuming ECW is considered a stable of course.

The beatdown is on but Tommy Dreamer comes out and we've got a main event.

Tommy Dreamer vs. Scotty Anton

Well kind of as Victory beats on Jazz in the ring as Dreamer and Anton fight in the crowd. The people actually in the match come back to ringside with Dreamer beating on Anton until Scotty sends him into a ladder. Why is there a ladder there? Not important of course. Dreamer is busted open but is still able to send Anton into the ladder in the corner.

A superplex off the ladder (which was laid over the middle rope so that didn't add much) drops Anton and it's time to bridge the ladder over two chairs. Naturally it's Dreamer being suplexed onto the ladder, which is horribly bent. The Clapper goes on so Jazz chairs Anton in the head. Dreamer drops an elbow onto a chair onto Anton's face for the pin.

Rating: D+. Remember all those times I've told you that Scotty Anton isn't very good and has no business being on these shows? That's still the case, as this really wasn't much to see. Dreamer doing tremendous harm to his body is entertaining enough but how many times can I see it before it loses its interest?

Cyrus makes Rhino/Justin Credible vs. Sandman/Chilly Willy for the first round of the Tag Team Title tournament. Justin says no way but Rhino promises to make him do it. Francine drags him away and Rhino rants a lot to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. Some stuff happened, the wrestling wasn't great, the angles didn't really change and we have a single match announced for next week. In other words, it's your run of the mill ECW on TNN and that's not the most interesting show in the world. This could have been much worse but the same problems are still here: nothing happens. When is the last time you remember something interesting happening on this show? I can't remember it and that's a big reason why this show didn't last long.

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New Column: The Kevin Owens and Triple H and Seth Rollins and Roman Reigns Show

A column about the last five minutes of Raw.

<http://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-the-kevin-owens-and-triple-h-and-seth-rollins-and-roman-reigns-show/>

Cruiserweight Classic – August 31, 2016: They Have It All

Cruiserweight Classic

Date: August 31, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Daniel Bryan, Mauro Ranallo

The quarterfinals begin tonight with eight participants left as we

head towards the finale in two weeks. Therefore we'll probably see two matches tonight and two more next week which means longer wrestling and more action. There's always the chance of some bonus matches but this seems like a show that's going to stick to the lone concept. Let's get to it.

We open with a look at the Great Eight.

Bryan and Mauro talk about the tournament so far.

Corey Graves previews tonight's matches.

Gran Metalik thinks he's the best around and wants to prove it in WWE.

Akira Tozawa knows he's the best here and can't wait to show it.

Quarterfinals: Gran Metalik vs. Akira Tozawa

Mexico vs. Japan. Bryan keeps raving over Tozawa's German suplex as they hit the mat for some alternating leg holds. Tozawa doesn't offer a clean break as he kicks Metalik in the ribs, only to get armdragged down. Metalik comes back with a dropkick against the ropes as the fans stay into him.

We get the first of likely multiple suicide dives to put Tozawa against the barricade before it's off to something like a Figure Four. Back up and Tozawa starts with the kicks, earning himself some chants in the process. As you might expect, Tozawa hits his own suicide dive because that's required viewing in a cruiserweight match.

Back in again and they chop it out until Tozawa gets bored and just punches Metalik in the jaw. Well mask but you get the idea. Metalik blasts him with a superkick and a standing shooting star (getting a bit too common as well) gets two. The Metalik Driver is countered into a Saito suplex for two more and Tozawa is stunned.

Tozawa charges into a superkick which just makes him scream more so Metalik sends him outside for the springboard flip dive. Back in again and Tozawa takes him up top for a superplex, only to get reversed into a great looking hurricanrana. The fans would like them to fight forever and Tozawa hits his German suplex for two. Metalik

fights out of another German suplex and hits the Metalik Driver for the pin at 15:48.

Rating: B+. If there's one thing I love about this tournament (and there are several) it's how many different match styles they can have. You can have people flying all over the place or working on the mat as fast as anyone in the world or you can have a match like this with two guys both working their own styles but making them mesh together so well that it gives us an entertaining match.

They shake hands post match.

Bryan says he won't be impartial in the next match.

Brian Kendrick knows this might be his last shot.

Kota Ibushi is one of the best in the world and wants to win because he loves wrestling.

Quarterfinals: Brian Kendrick vs. Japan

USA vs. Japan. Kendrick invites him to the floor which isn't a common strategy in this tournament. Ibushi doesn't bite but he does kick Kendrick in the head and hits a big dive to take over. Kota misses a kick though and gets his foot caught in the barricade so Kendrick dives in to try for a countout. They're doing a good job here of having Kendrick win any way he can against the younger and more talented Ibushi.

More kicks have Kendrick in trouble so he grabs a neckbreaker across the turnbuckle rod for a unique counter. Brian grabs a cravate to stay on the bad (and surgically repaired) neck, only to eat a dropkick to put both guys down. A middle rope moonsault gets two for Ibushi but Kendrick superkicks his head off to get them back to even. Sliced Bread #2 gets another near fall for Kendrick so Ibushi gives him a release German superplex from just off the corner to knock Brian silly.

Kendrick tries the Bully Choke but Ibushi turns to the side to make it a regular chinlock. A Burning Hammer of all things makes Ibushi's neck even worse, though not enough to put him away. Ibushi misses a middle rope Phoenix splash and another Bully Choke has Ibushi in

trouble. He breaks the hold with a rollup though and the Golden Star Bomb finally ends Brian's run at 13:57.

Rating: B. I thought the first match was more entertaining but this one told a better story. This was all about Kendrick throwing everything he had at Ibushi but not being able to put him away and eventually falling to the better man. The neck injury was a good bonus to the story and gave Brian enough of an opening to make this interesting. The storytelling was carrying this and it was very entertaining as a result. Good stuff here and Kendrick continues to surprise me in this thing.

Daniel cries as he talks about Brian's run being over.

After the preview for next week's show, Daniel comes to the ring to hug Kendrick to end the show.

Overall Rating: A-. As is so often the case, I'm not sure what else you could want from this show every week. The wrestling, the storytelling and the action are all there, along with some emotion this week from Brian and Bryan. The final could wind up being a match of the year candidate in case we haven't had enough greatness in the preliminaries. If you're not watching this show, I don't know what else you're waiting for as it's one of the best things every single week.

Results

Gran Metalik b. Akira Tozawa – Metalik Driver

Kota Ibushi b. Brian Kendrick – Gold Star Bomb

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NXT – August 31, 2016: Get Them In The Tent

NXT

Date: August 31, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

The champ is back tonight as Shinsuke Nakamura makes his first appearance on NXT since winning the NXT Title in Brooklyn. I mean, that was only eleven days ago but NXT is making it seem like a big deal. It should be interesting to see who comes out to challenge him for the title, though odds are it's Samoa Joe for a rematch. Let's get to it.

Earlier today, Samoa Joe was deemed unclear to wrestle due to injuries suffered in Brooklyn. William Regal looks annoyed.

Opening sequence.

Tye Dillinger vs. Buddy Murphy

Murphy is deemed a one by the fans. Back in my day, being number one was a good thing. Tye gets him to the mat in a hammerlock but gets thrown away, meaning Blake can give himself a ten. Back up and Dillinger does his spinout into a cartwheel for the real ten. Graves: "That would get you disqualified from any gymnastics competition."

The lame wrestling goes back and forth with Murphy sending him outside as we go to a break. That's probably the good thing as this is a very simple match and there's nothing that's working especially well save for the TEN thing. Back with Dillinger making his comeback off a clothesline and a backdrop. Some TEN stomps in the corner set up the Tyebreaker for the pin at 9:46.

Rating: C-. This is a good example of the crowd carrying a match higher than it should have gone otherwise. Dillinger's gimmick is way over but his in ring work isn't the greatest. It's an interesting change of pace from the Murphy vs. Ibushi match from a few weeks ago which was far more entertaining with Ibushi having more than one thing to carry him. Dillinger is more than worth investing in due to being so over but he needs some work. There's potential in Murphy too, albeit with some adjustments.

We look back at the Tag Team Title match in Brooklyn and Johnny Gargano's knee injury costing him in the Cruiserweight Classic.

Tommaso Ciampa says Gargano will be back soon when the Revival comes in and beats him into the arena. They take the beating into the ring and leave Ciampa laying. Wilder says everyone sounds tough until reality hits them in the mouth. Ciampa tries to get up but takes a good looking Shatter Machine.

Steve Cutler wants attention and demands respect. Dang the cupboard really is bare.

Steve Cutler vs. Kenneth Crawford

Crawford is a generic looking guy who Graves says is well dressed backstage. Cutler works on the arm to start but Kenneth flips his way out of a backdrop (didn't stick the landing but he tried) and grabs an armbar of his own. Some good looking dropkicks and a running shooting star get two on Cutler but he walks into a spinning fisherman's driver (as in a fisherman's suplex into a sitout slam) to give Steve the pin at 3:38.

Rating: C-. Crawford did some good looking stuff but neither guy was anything special here. Pushing Cutler (and by pushing I mean setting up to be fed to someone else) isn't the most horrible idea in the world as people already know him from all those jobs over the years and it's not like he can't just go back to being a jobber after this is done. It's better to give someone some value and then take it away than take away value from someone who you've invested a lot of time in.

Hideo Itami says he kicked Austin Aries in the head at Takeover but Aries disappointed him by claiming an injury. If he doesn't want to feel pain, get out of the ring.

Video on Sami Zayn vs. Nakamura back in Dallas.

Video on TM61.

No Way Jose vs. Angelo Dawkins

Jose dances around and grabs a headlock to start as Dawkins gets a few chants of his own. Dawkins' chinlock doesn't go anywhere so it's the baseball punch and a full nelson slam (looked more like a cobra clutch this time) to give Jose the pin at 2:43.

Aries, banana in hand (Dig that potassium replenishing!), interrupts Andrade Cien Almas' interview time, saying everyone is trying to steal his spotlight. Since Almas lost, Aries will just take his interview time. A challenge is issued for next week.

Video on Nakamura vs. Finn Balor.

Liv Morgan vs. Aliyah

Aliyah looks a bit more serious this time and kicks Morgan in the ribs. Some knees to the chest have Morgan in more trouble and Aliyah puts on a freaky hold where she cranks on Liv's arm and holds her head down with a leg. Morgan pops back up and tries a kind of spinning kick close enough to the head for the pin at 3:21. There was a hard edit in there so it was probably worse than it looked.

Rating: D-. If this is the future of the women's division, they've got a long way to go. Aliyah showed some fire but Morgan was a pretty bad mess. Her offense required an edit and consisted of two moves in about three and a half minutes. Also I'm really not sure how strong of a character I'M FROM NEW JERSEY is or how long of a life span it's going to have.

No Way Jose is fired up about his win and says he has the heart to go with the hair. Bobby Roode comes up, compliments Jose's head, and walks away.

Video on Nakamura vs. Joe.

Here's Nakamura for his celebration and the dancing entrance looks even cooler with the title around his waist. The YOU DESERVE IT chants start up until Nakamura starts talking about being in Japan and wanting to face the best competition in the world. That meant he had to come to NXT where he beat Sami Zayn, Finn Balor and Samoa Joe. He's still in a lot of pain but he became the NXT Champion. The Joe Era is over and it's now the Era of Strong Style. Nakamura kind of barks and poses to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This show was about setting up stuff for the future as we're firmly in the fallout period from Takeover and have a long way to go before the next one. Stuff like Almas vs. Aries and Asuka coming back next week are great ways to build week to week and keep you coming back long enough to let the big stories develop. It's about making something seem important enough that you want to watch the hour of TV to see it and then get you ready for the big stuff. That's such a simple strategy and NXT makes it work as well as anyone has in a long time.

Results

Tye Dillinger b. Wesley Blake – Tyebreaker

Steve Cutler b. Kenneth Crawford – Fisherman's driver

No Way Jose b. Angelo Dawkins – Full nelson slam

Liv Morgan b. Aliyah – Spinning kick to the face

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Monday Night Raw – April 1, 2002: The Fools In Red

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 1, 2002

Location: Pepsi Arena, Albany, New York

Attendance: 9,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's time for the first show of a new generation as Ric Flair is officially in charge of Raw with a roster all its own. I'm really not sure what to expect here as almost all of the stories are restarting, save for Kane vs. the NWO for reasons that I don't want to understand. Oh and Raven won the Hardcore Title to bring that "division" to Raw. Let's get to it.

Ric Flair joins us with the new WWF Undisputed Title and promises to make everything new. That includes signing Steve Austin to a new contract, which is indeed new and not someone we've seen for years who is way past his prime.

Opening sequence, including the debut of Across the Nation. I always liked that one.

We'll see Kane vs. someone apparently named X-Pac. I say apparently because he doesn't have a graphic.

Intercontinental Title: Rob Van Dam vs. Booker T.

Van Dam is defending and the big idea here is that we're starting with a match. You know, aside from that promo that started the show. A hurricanrana puts Booker down to start and my goodness Van Dam is over. As usual, anything that lets the fans participate (such as the finger point) is almost a guaranteed way to get fans behind you.

Booker forearms him down and puts on two chinlocks less than four

minutes in. You don't often see Booker being that lazy and it's rather surprising. Van Dam comes back with the usual but misses Rolling Thunder. The Spinarooni gets a huge pop and Booker nails a superkick, only to have JR distract me by saying "he's not Buckwheat on crack." There's a line you would never hear today. Booker's superplex is broken up and the Five Star retains the title.

Rating: C. Just a basic wrestling match here which isn't exactly a rousing start to the new era. I like the idea of starting the show with wrestling and the match was fine but nothing we haven't seen before. Van Dam always felt like the guy you put the title on so someone bigger can take it off him and Booker isn't that person.

Post match Eddie Guerrero runs out for his return and beats Van Dam down. Now that makes things feel more important.

Here's Vince McMahon as the Brand Split is already feeling unimportant. He's here to sign Austin but let's go to a break before Steve comes out. Back with security around the ring Lawler: "What are they out here for?" JR: "Security reasons." Here's Ric Flair to threaten to throw Vince out, arguing ensues and time is wasted until Ric sends out Big Show to carry Vince to the back. This took up WAY too much time and accomplished nothing.

During the break, Show literally threw Vince out of the arena.

William Regal vs. Spike Dudley

Regal's European Title isn't on the line. The evil referee takes away Regal's hidden brass knuckles to start but Regal beats Spike into the ground anyway, including a sweet diving drop toehold. A half nelson suplex sends Spike outside as the announcers discussing folding similies. Spike comes back with some headbutts to the ribs and a quick Dudley Dog for the fluke pin.

Rating: D. I'm assuming this sets up a rematch for the title next week though just having Spike pin Regal doesn't have me the most interested in them fighting for the title. Then again there's very little that's going to make me care about the European Title in the first place so they didn't have the best chances in the world.

The NWO takes over the APA's office, which has been moved from Smackdown to Raw despite the team being split up. Even the trash and table are in the same state after the brawl.

Post break, Crash tells Bradshaw what the NWO did. Bradshaw goes off to take care of it and Crash chuckles.

Terri yells at Trish for being all snooty now that she's on the cover of the Divas Magazine. Flair comes up and makes a paddle on a pole match.

Debra won't let Coach into Austin's dressing room.

The NWO spray paints the APA's door and beats up Bradshaw, who comes through the door like a gentleman, without much effort.

Hardcore Title: Raven vs. Bubba Ray Dudley

Bubba is challenging and they get right to the weapons, drawing the required ECW chants. Some elbows have Raven in trouble and it's time to throw oranges (JR: "Not the citrus.") at the champ, but not before Bubba does some juggling. Back in and Raven grabs a sleeper in a hardcore match so the announcers talk about the upcoming paddle match. A trashcan lid to the head puts Raven down for the middle rope backplash and IT ACTUALLY HITS. Bubba looks stunned for a second before covering for two. The Bubba Bomb gives him the title a few seconds later.

Rating: D. So that's the start of Bubba's face run and I actually bought into it at the time. Looking back it might not be the best idea in the world but at least they're trying to make new stars with Bubba and Bradshaw. As I typed that, the reality set in all over again and it's clear that this was destined to fail but at least they were trying.

Vince is still in the parking lot (with a camera in his limo for no logical reason) and says he's sent someone to get Austin for the signing.

Here's Flair to present HHH with the new title. Flair praises HHH for his comeback but gets cut off by the Undertaker, who says Flair drafted him here to embarrass him. Undertaker brings up beating

Flair at Wrestlemania XVIII. The fans keep up the WHAT'S so Undertaker it says if you keep saying WHAT you sleep with your own sister.

Back on point, Undertaker says he beat HHH the same way at the previous Wrestlemania so it sounds like Flair is trying to show him up. Violence is teased but here's HHH to be the big hero. At least we get one last look at the awesome Attitude Era title. HHH, in that slow voice that only he can do, says he's the Undisputed WWF Champion and that big belt says Undertaker can't beat him again. A match is made for Backlash and Undertaker isn't interested in fighting before then.

Hardy Boyz vs. Boss Man/Mr. Perfect

I guess Wrestlemania VII is all forgiven. Apparently the solution to Boss Man being the same character who hasn't been over in years is to get rid of the "big". A way too early Twist of Fate is broken up and Matt is in trouble. The veterans start taking over as JR sounds miserable talking about the upcoming women's match. As is almost always the case in these TV matches, the beating only lasts for a few moments before the tag brings in Jeff. The Twist of Fate and Swanton are enough for the quick pin.

Rating: D+. So you know how the Hardys are one of the best tag teams of all time? Well they still are and they're capable of beating a makeshift team who had only teamed together a few times before this. Boss Man and Perfect aren't the most interesting guys in the world at this point and neither would be around much longer.

Post match Brock Lesnar comes out and destroys the Hardys to set up his first feud.

Terri vs. Trish Stratus

Paddle on a pole and they're in bikinis. Thong jokes are made, puppies are requested and a bulldog allows Trish to get the paddle in just over a minute.

Before the paddling can occur, Molly Holly comes out and destroys Trish to give her a real match. Trish gets the paddle broken over

her head to make it serious.

Vince promises he'll get this done tonight. Like he promised last week was his last night on Raw.

Austin is here and tells Flair to let Vince inside so they can handle this after the main event.

We look at Kane's amazing promo with Rock and Hogan. Rock being confused by Kaneannites is still great stuff.

Kane vs. X-Pac

X-Pac has Hall and Nash at ringside but Kane beats him up to start. Some kicks send Kane outside though Hall pulling the ropes down might have helped too. Nash adds in a big boot and X-Pac does his spinning heel kick, only to be launched out to the floor. Back in and the Bronco Buster has gets no reaction so Kane powerslams him for no cover. Kane finally has enough of the interference and punches Hall in the face, drawing the Outsiders in for the DQ.

Rating: D. I've been watching some Raw's from 1996 lately and it's amazing how different X-Pac became in the years since then. There was no fire here and it was a bunch of greatest hits, or as great as X-Pac ever got. I have no idea who thought Kane vs. the NWO was going to be entertaining and so far they're being proven wrong.

Bradshaw comes in for the save and house is cleaned. For some reason Kane's pyro fails, meaning two things had no heat here.

Here's Flair for the Austin contract pitch. Before he can get very far, here's Vince (JR: "No one walks like that.") to say his intellectual sperm (Vince: "Yes I said intellectual sperm.") that brought us here today. Vince takes credit for pay per view and growing the WWF to an international level. He also knew the Ringmaster wasn't going to cut it and invented the Stone Cold character. This brings out Austin to ask Vince about the contract and play the WHAT game for a bit.

Austin reminds Vince of their history together and does some WHATing with Flair too. Austin asks if Vince had a chance to see this and flips him off. He's intrigued by both offers because of both men's

success and agrees to sign with Smackdown. Austin tells Flair it was just business and asks where he signs. Before he does, there's one more thing: April Fools. Vince gets a Stunner and Flair freaks out. Beer is served and Flair gets a Stunner of his own, followed by Steve signing with Raw to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. This Brand Split is in trouble early and there's really no way around it. Raw has almost nothing going for it with the highlight of Austin who clearly isn't all that fired up to be here. Most of the young talent is over on Smackdown and everyone knows it but Raw is the flagship and gets all the attention. There's very little to talk about here and it wasn't an entertaining night, which is hardly how you want to start things off.

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Smackdown – August 30, 2016: How To Waste A Big Moment

Smackdown

Date: August 30, 2016

Location: American Airlines Center, Dallas, Texas

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga

Much like last night, this show has a lot of potential to be something big but instead of one big match, this show is built around a few individual issues. First and foremost, we'll see the fallout from Miz's awesome shoot promo on Daniel Bryan, which some people didn't expect to see referenced on TV. There's also more of the Tag Team Title tournament and Dean Ambrose vs. Baron Corbin. Let's get to it.

We open with the full Miz vs. Daniel Bryan interview from last week's Talking Smack with Bryan calling Miz soft but Miz saying his style means he doesn't get injured and leave for six months to a year at a time. Bryan walked off and Miz went on a tirade about how the Intercontinental Title is the most important one on Smackdown because he's the one out there every night. This was GREAT and more emotion than Miz has ever shown, which makes me think his days as champion are numbered.

Shane tells Bryan that he can't do that to the talent and Bryan agrees. However, Bryan finds this ironic coming from the person having issues with Brock Lesnar.

Opening sequence.

Here's a ticked off Miz with something to say. Miz doesn't want to hear any booing because it's taken 148 days (the length of his title reign) to get the fans' attention. He's bringing prestige back to this title but people think he's soft. Yeah he wrestles a different style but it's because he's smart enough to see the big picture.

What the fans don't understand is what goes on backstage. Who do you think they call when they need someone to do a red carpet premiere or a commercial or main event Wrestlemania and then dress up as a chicken? Miz didn't spend the first twelve years of his career wrestling in front of 50 people and people booing him for that makes them cowards. Cue Dolph Ziggler and I'm done. This was getting really interesting and it's about Dolph "RESPECT ME WHEN I'M SERIOUS AND THEN LOSE EVERY BIG MATCH OVER AND OVER AGAIN" Ziggler all over again.

Dolph says no one is going to buy what Miz says because he's never proven a thing. If Miz wants to show how tough he is, fight right now with no referees or titles on the line. Just the two of them right now. As expected, Miz teases fighting but walks off. Ziggler says Bryan was right and calls him a soft, safe coward but that's

not enough to get him to fight either.

I actually felt the air go out of me when Ziggler came out. This story had the potential to actually be something fresh but instead it's the same old Ziggler that we've seen for months and have no reason to believe it's going to be anything different this time around. Ziggler is just a played out character and I wanted something fresh this time from Miz. Instead it's another Battle of Cleveland because that's what WWE thinks new and different means.

Tag Team Title Tournament First Round: Hype Bros vs. Vaudevillains

The villains takes over to start and send Ryder outside for a neckbreaker on the floor. The double teaming only lasts for a few moments before the tag brings in Rawley for his splashes. A running fist in the corner sets up the Hype Ryder to pin English at 2:53. This was exactly the kind of energetic match these two needed, even though they're likely losing in the next round.

To my shock, JBL seems to love the Hype Ryders. You would expect him to hate a team like this.

Post match the Hype Bros say they're hyped enough to win the titles.

We finally see the tournament brackets and the Usos vs. American Alpha is actually a semifinal match. That makes things a lot more interesting.

AJ Styles runs into Apollo Crews and introduces himself as the face who runs this place.

Here's AJ Styles for a chat. AJ, in the Cena headband, says he's already beaten up John Cena and now he's going to win the World Title. This brings out Apollo Crews to say Daniel Bryan has granted him a match against AJ right now. I love the fact that they just got to the point here. It was clear we were getting this match the second they ran into each other so there's no reason to waste time setting it up.

AJ Styles vs. Apollo Crews

Crews leapfrogs AJ to start and sends it outside but Crews stops to brag about a right hand. Back with AJ holding a chinlock because that's how you come back from breaks in WWE. Crews sends him into the corner and backdrops AJ outside for a moonsault from the apron. Back in and AJ's high cross body is countered into a Samoan drop (that's kind of insane) for another near fall. Not that it matters

as AJ stuns him across the ropes and the Phenomenal Forearm puts Crews away at 8:15.

Rating: C+. Crews is still fun to watch but he loses a lot more often than not and really doesn't have a character to speak of. Really all I know about him is that he's an athletic freak and that's not exactly enough to carry you far. It only worked so well for Shelton Benjamin and Crews isn't that far along yet.

Earlier this week, Renee Young went to Heath Slater's trailer and met his wife for some redneck humor. As Rhino eats cheese whiz and crackers, Slater calls not being drafted an oversight. More redneck jokes ensue and Slater talks about how he's earned a contract several times now. When they win the titles, it's time to upgrade to a double wide. There's talk of the kids (outside picking up bottles and cans) but a car screeching sends the Slaters outside. Rhino just keeps calmly eating crackers. I get what they were going for here but this just isn't my kind of humor.

Here's Bray Wyatt with a message for Randy Orton. Bray isn't scared of snakes or monsters because he doesn't see Orton as anything more than a man. If Orton really hears voices, Bray hopes they're telling him to run but here's Randy in person. Randy says that a bunch of staples in his head aren't going to change anything because being damaged is what he does. Bray calls himself the new predator and promises to cut the serpent's head off at Backlash. Orton talks about Bray seeing the scars on his body but needing to worry about the scars inside. He agrees to the match and goes inside but Bray vanishes.

Natalya/Alexa Bliss vs. Becky Lynch/Naomi

Nikki Bella is on commentary to do a commercial for Total Bellas. Naomi hurricanranas Natalya to the floor and we take an early break. Back with Naomi in trouble until a jawbreaker allows the tag off to Becky. House is cleaned and everything breaks down as Carmella comes out to brawl with Nikki. In the melee, Bliss rolls Becky up and grabs the trunks for the pin at 7:21.

Rating: D+. This division really needs some promo time. I know all of their basic characters (or what they have for characters) but I really don't know much about most of them. Almost all of them need a chance to give us a reason to care, even if it's just a quick promo during their entrances.

Video on the Headbangers. For the life of me I don't get why they were picked to come back. It's like when Greg Valentine would show up on Nitro for a one off match.

Video on Curt Hawkins.

Tag Team Title Tournament First Round: Headbangers vs. Rhino/Heath Slater

Mosh and Thrasher look exactly the same as they did in 1999. Slater gets beaten down to start and the springboard clothesline puts him on the floor. Some stomping sets up a chinlock as Otunga calls the Headbangers the last two Marilyn Manson fans. The Stage Dive (powerbomb/guillotine legdrop combo) gets two as Rhino makes the save. Rhino (with what looks like some blood on the left side of his face) drags Slater over for the tag and the Gore ends Mosh at 2:53. It might be time for Thrasher to go back to training wrestlers like he did with Big Show.

A guy in a suit named Derrick Milliman has been granted a match tonight and issues an open challenge. Kane comes out for a chokeslam and leaves. Were they just running short on time or something? As Kane leaves, Baron Corbin comes out for the main event. Maybe that's what they're trying to set up?

Baron Corbin vs. Dean Ambrose

Non-title and AJ is on commentary. Ambrose knocks Baron to the floor to start and hits a running clothesline from the apron. Back in and Dean's bulldog is broken up and Baron pounds away with right hands. We come back from a break with Corbin holding a chinlock and getting two off a choke legsweep. Dean fights up and gets two off his clothesline before hitting the suicide dive on the floor. Back in and the Deep Six plants Dean but AJ gets in Baron's face and tells him to stay on it. Dean knocks Baron into Styles so AJ kicks Baron in the face for the DQ at 12:12.

Rating: C. Odd ending aside, this was a nice showcase for Corbin and it's a good sign to not have him get pinned here. It would be nice if they gave Corbin something to do other than torture Kalisto (Did that go anywhere yet?). It's not like they're overflowing with options at the moment and building up a big man isn't going to hurt anything.

Post match the main eventers fight until Dean hits Corbin with Dirty

Deeds. AJ gets crotched and Dean seems to sympathize before bouncing the ropes up and down. Dean takes his belt and leaves AJ sitting on the top rope to end the show. I really don't like having AJ look silly like that, especially after he did something good earlier tonight.

Overall Rating: B-. This felt like an older episode of Smackdown but thankfully it was one where they actually got some stuff done. Nothing major was set up (save for making Bray vs. Orton official) but they did a good job of advancing a few angles and building towards the matches later on. That's the kind of show they needed with less than two weeks before Backlash, but I'm still not sold on this being a full on three hour pay per view.

Results

Hype Bros b. Vaudevillains – Hype Ryder to English

AJ Styles b. Apollo Crews – Phenomenal Forearm

Alexa Bliss/Natalya b. Naomi/Becky Lynch – Rollup with a handful of trunks

Rhino/Heath Slater b. Headbangers – Gore to Mosh

Baron Corbin b. Dean Ambrose via DQ when AJ Styles interfered

Monday Night Raw – August 29, 2016: It's His Show And We're Just Watching It

Monday Night Raw

Date: August 29, 2016

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

It's a big night this week as we're guaranteed a new Raw World Champion in a fatal fourway with Kevin Owens, Big Cass, Roman Reigns

and Seth Rollins facing off for the title. It's hard to say what we're going to get at Clash of the Champions in about a month so hopefully we can start setting some stuff up tonight. Let's get to it.

In Memory of Mr. Fuji.

We recap Balor's shoulder injury and the setup for tonight's title match.

All four World Title participants for the title are in the ring with Corey Graves moderating. Rollins cuts him off and says they're all here because of him so he'll cede his time to someone else. Owens talks about how he's a prize fighter and tonight he's fighting for a prize. That leaves Reigns, who Owens just allows to be booed.

Cass is tall...and that's about it. Cass: "Did Jericho write that for you?" Cass says he's the biggest dog in this fight, causing Owens to point to Reigns. Seth is glad that this is an elimination match so he can beat up all of them in one night. A brawl breaks out with Reigns and Cass having a staredown before the ring is cleared. I'm glad they kept this short since no one said anything important and it was just hype for the main event.

Neville vs. Chris Jericho

Before the match, Jericho says Owens will win tonight but promises everyone the Gift of Jericho. This is their first match since Neville broke his ankle back in the spring. A catapult puts Jericho on the floor early but he hides behind the ref to get in a cheap shot and send us to a break. Back with Jericho putting on a chinlock but diving into a kick to the ribs.

Neville moonsaults out to the floor and avoids a charge into the corner, setting up a small package for two. A superkick drops Jericho and I'm very surprised at how hot the crowd is despite such a big main event. The Red Arrow misses and the Liontamer make Neville tap at 10:50.

Rating: C+. I continue to be very glad that Neville can do more things than just the Red Arrow as those one spot guys can get lost

in the shuffle quickly. Neville being a main eventer was a long shot at best but he's fine in the midcard where he could pull off an upset and most people wouldn't be that shocked.

Earlier today Bayley met the New Day and dancing ensues until Dana Brooke comes up, setting up a six person tag along with Gallows and Anderson. The key here: it didn't feel scripted. Instead it seems like the producer said "Bayley runs into the New Day and you've got two minutes. Go." That works so much better than scripting out the jokes and gives you entertaining things like this.

Nia Jax vs. Haion

Jax runs her over and finishes with an AA into a powerslam at 1:15.

Anderson and Gallows now run a retirement home and suggest that New Day will be joining Team 3D. Nurse Dana Brooke comes in and puts on a rubber glove.

Video on Seth Rollins.

Sami Zayn vs. Jinder Mahal

Sami has a bad ankle coming in and he tweaks it early on, allowing Mahal to smack him in the back of the head for two. A chinlock doesn't go very far and Sami comes back with the Helluva Kick for the pin at 3:06.

Rating: C. I'm still waiting for an explanation of why they brought Mahal back. He's fine enough for a warm body but of all people, Jinder Mahal? Anyway I'm assuming this is the start of something for Sami as the announcers kept talking about how he wanted the title. If Owens wins it tonight, there's no logical reason to not do Sami vs. Owens at Clash of the Champions.

Earlier tonight Sasha Banks was on the pre-show, saying that Charlotte was trying to injure her and end her career. Sasha will be back for revenge and the title.

New Day/Bayley vs. Dana Brooke/Anderson and Gallows

Charlotte is on commentary and doesn't think much of Bayley putting on a unicorn horn and eating Booty0's. The women start with Bayley

getting some quick two counts before working on the arm. It's quickly off to Big E. for a belly to belly (gimmick infringer) on Anderson as the champs take over. That lasts all of a few seconds before the villains beat him down in the corner. The hot (or at least moderately warm) tag brings in Kofi for the Unicorn Stampede, including a running dropkick from Bayley. Some dancing sends us to a break.

Back with the camera on the commentators as the match is going on behind them. I smell Kevin Dunn's fingers all over this. We actually look at the match to see Kofi in trouble and getting elbowed in the face. Kofi gets in a double stomp and makes the tag to Big E. for the house cleaning. Everything breaks down and Kofi does an insane dive over the top, nearly breaking his arm in the process. Back in and Dana gets two off a rollup, only to have the Bayley to Belly wrap it up at 12:28.

Rating: C+. The crowd was digging the heck out of this and I can't blame them a bit. This was the perfect match for Bayley as New Day is over by definition and she fits in perfectly with them. Bayley gets another win to help set up her title match at Clash of the Champions and Anderson and Gallows save face. Good stuff all around and a fun match.

Cesaro says no one likes Sheamus so he'll spin him around and around and around.

Video on Big Cass.

Cesaro vs. Sheamus

Match #2 in a best of seven series with Sheamus up 1-0. Before the match, Sheamus says he'll prove that he's just the better man. Cesaro takes him down to the mat to start and gets two off a double stomp. Sheamus' arm is banged up and the announcers want the match stopped to check it. Thankfully it's a dropkick to send Sheamus outside and we take a break.

Back with the Irish Curse getting two but Cesaro comes right back by hitting the springboard corkscrew uppercut. The high cross body

connects (check your Bingo card) and Cesaro sends it outside. That goes well for Sheamus who backdrops him back first into the post, setting up the Cloverleaf for the submission at 11:15.

Rating: C+. Points for putting a story into the series with Cesaro's back injury though I'm still having issues getting interested in even more of these matches. WWE has a real problem of just having the same match over and over and then wondering why it stops being interesting in the process. Make it best of three or just do a 2/3 falls match or something but having it go twice that long doesn't seem like the best move.

Tribute video to Mr. Fuji and it's as good as you would expect from WWE.

Video on Kevin Owens.

Braun Strowman vs. Americo

Standard masked luchador. It's the squash you would expect with Strowman throwing him around and tossing him into the air for a faceplant and the pin at 58 seconds.

Strowman unmaskes him post match.

Here's Stephanie McMahon to address Shane McMahon getting F5'd at Summerslam, but first she has to say we're about to crown the "first" Universal Champion. Paul Heyman cuts her off but Stephanie is right there to cut his balls off by demanding an apology. Heyman talks about how Lesnar provides value to Raw and is here to pay Lesnar's \$500 fine. He pulls out a pile of \$1 bills but Stephanie throws them onto the floor. Stephanie wants to know what value Heyman offers to Raw and warns him of a coming storm.

Heyman goes into a rant about the board of directors and how Stephanie can control everyone but Lesnar. For some reason this turns into a discussion on female empowerment with Stephanie saying Heyman is staring at the women's revolution. Heyman apologizes to her and she accepts before dropping the mic and leaving. With Stephanie gone, Heyman chuckles and smirks.

Video on Balor's injury and surgery.

Video on Roman Reigns.

Titus O'Neil vs. Darren Young

The aggressive Young knocks Titus to the floor where he asks for a timeout. Back in and a hard whip sends Darren over the corner where he lands on a camera to break it into pieces. Some neck cranks don't go anywhere so Young crucifixes him for the pin at 4:04.

Rating: D-. Can ANYONE explain why this feud is still going or why I'm supposed to care about them fighting over and over again?

Neither guy is interesting and it seems like a character that exists for the sake of the Presidential elections and nothing more. Total filler here and it's getting more and more annoying every match.

Backlund and Young celebrate so Titus beats them both up.

Mick Foley apologizes for not being out there for Stephanie but she didn't need him. He suggests that everyone is barred from ringside tonight and again Stephanie says it's the first Universal Title match. Rollins comes in and Stephanie wishes him luck.

Raw World Title: Big Cass vs. Kevin Owens vs. Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins

The title is vacant coming in and this is under elimination rules. Mick and Stephanie are at ringside as they should be. Cass says he's shocking the world tonight. The bell rings after a break (THANK YOU!) and Owens immediately heads outside. The Cass vs. Reigns showdown is delayed again as the villains go after the big men and it's time to pair off.

Seth and Kevin are knocked outside and we get the big showdown with Cass blocking the Superman Punch. A running big boot knocks Reigns outside with Cass falling out as well. Rollins dives onto Cass but Owens drops him onto the barricade, only to have Reigns dive onto Owens and Cass as we take a break. Back with Owens in control and getting two off the backslash to Cass.

Reigns fights back with his string of clotheslines until Cass kicks his head off. They've done a really good job of making Cass look like he belongs here in the first ten minutes. A big boot puts Owens

on the floor and the Empire Elbow hits Rollins. The East River Crossing is broken up by a Superman Punch and the low superkick gets two. Owens adds the Frog Splash to get rid of Cass at 13:46. I'm sure Saxton saying he thinks Cass can pull it off a minute earlier didn't give that away for anyone. Also, I believe that's the first time Cass has been pinned on the main roster.

Back from a second break with Reigns powerbombing Owens and Rollins for a Tower of Doom. Rollins' falcon arrow gets two on Roman but the Superman Punch knocks Rollins out of the air for two more. Cole describes this as incredible action for the second time in about a minute.

Owens comes back in with a superkick to Rollins, setting up back to back Cannonballs for another big reaction. The crowd has somehow stayed hot all night and that's a really good sign. The Superman Punch gets two on Owens and you can hear the crowd's sigh of relief on the knockout. Owens' Pop Up Powerbomb is countered with another Superman Punch and Reigns hits a quick sitout powerbomb for two on Seth.

A spear drops Rollins on the floor but here's HHH of all people to Pedigree Reigns on the floor. HHH throws Rollins back inside for the pin on Reigns at 23:48 (POP!), meaning Rollins needs HHH's help yet again. HHH throws Owens inside, Pedigrees Rollins and gives a shocked Owens the title at 25:05.

Rating: B+. This is a hard one to grade as they nailed the near falls and the drama to near perfection but I really don't care for HHH being back AGAIN and presumably setting up HHH vs. Rollins and/or Reigns. That's the standard problem with HHH: even if someone new is getting a big title win, it's still about HHH for a long time. However, let's get to the good part: KEVIN OWENS IS WORLD CHAMPION! Yeah that hasn't quite sunk in yet but it's actually happened and that is most certainly a good thing.

HHH leaves and Owens celebrates to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. Make no mistake about it: the main event is the ONLY thing on this show that mattered in the slightest. The only

other thing of note was the really awkward Stephanie vs. Heyman promo and I'm still not sure what happened there. They did a really good job with the title match though (HHH involvement aside) and that's all that matters on this show. A lot of this stuff is going to depend on the fallout but I'm very happy with Owens winning as he's definitely the most logical option. Good show with a red hot crowd throughout helping it along.

Results

Chris Jericho b. Neville – Lontamer

Nia Jax b. Haion – Fireman's carry into a powerslam

Sami Zayn b. Jinder Mahal – Helluva Kick

New Day/Bayley b. Dana Brooke/Anderson and Gallows – Bayley to Belly to Brooke

Sheamus b. Cesaro – Cloverleaf

Braun Strowman b. Americano – Faceplant

Darren Young b. Titus O'Neil – Crucifix

Kevin Owens b. Seth Rollins, Roman Reigns and Big Cass – Pedigree to Rollins

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Mr. Fuji Passes Away At 82

<http://www.wwe.com/article/mr-fuji-passes-away>

I know Fuji is best remembered as the other manager when you have people like Jimmy Hart and Bobby Heenan around in the 80s, but a lot of people forget a few things about him, including the following:

1. Shawn Michaels loves Mr. Fuji
2. He still holds the record for most days as a WWF Tag Team Champion, 932 over five reigns. Billy Gunn is second with 916 and then it's Ax and Smash at over 100 days less.
3. And then this. If you've never seen it, I give you the 80s.

Monday Night Raw – July 29, 1996: And Then There Was Summerslam

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 29, 1996

Location: Key Arena, Seattle, Washington

Attendance: 6,755

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

It's time to wrap up the month and that can't come soon enough, despite the marginally better show last week. Summerslam is still a few weeks away and above all else we've got a big time main event with Vader vs. Shawn, which has the potential to be something special. I'm sure we'll get something to go with it soon enough though and that's where things get better. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Faarooq debuting to end last week's show, putting Ahmed on the shelf with a kidney injury.

Opening sequence.

Sycho Sid vs. Justin Hawk Bradshaw

Sid gets an awesome face reaction. They slug it out to start and a chokeslam plants Bradshaw so fast that they're already plugging the other matches instead of paying attention. Bradshaw hits him with the cowbell and we're done in about a minute.

Sid fights off a post match beating and powerbombs Bradshaw. So why in the world did they do the DQ if Bradshaw is going to be left laying anyway? It's not like he's doing anything so just do the pin and give the crowd the pop they want.

Sunny officially introduces Faarooq Asad (first time the name is officially used), who thinks Ahmed is disrespectful to women.

Faarooq talks about the streets and wants a shot at the Intercontinental Title at Summerslam. Simple and effective, as I often like it.

Vader vs. Marc Mero

Vader isn't quite the Goon or T.L. Hopper but I'll take it. Sable is looking great tonight too. Cornette sits in on commentary as an extra bonus. Vader powers him into the corner to start and spits in Mero's eyes. Some clotheslines actually stagger Vader and something like a running Cannonball puts him down. A crucifix doesn't quite work on someone Vader's size but Mero gets two anyway. Vader comes right back with a wheelbarrow slam and wins a slugout, which is something of an upset when you remember Mero's Golden Gloves success.

Things slow down a bit with Vader headbutting him down and then just punching Mero in the face over and over. Mero gets right back up and hits a cross body before knocking Vader to the floor for a flip dive. A top rope sunset flip doesn't work as Mero WAY overshoots him

and Vader has to walk backwards. Thankfully he tries to sit down, only to crash onto the mat. Mero heads up top again but dives into a powerslam for the pin.

Rating: B-. This was a heck of a match with Mero being game against the unstoppable monster. People forget how great Vader was at selling as this straight out of the great Dustin Rhodes vs. Vader match at Clash of the Champions XXIX with the non-monster doing everything he could and Vader making him look like a million bucks. It's a formula that always works and this was no exception. Really fun match.

More from the Crush (not yet named or identified) litigation from last week.

Shawn's mentor Jose Lothario comes out for a face to face showdown with Cornette. After asking Jose to not pull out his switchblade, Cornette goes into a bit of history with a story of Shawn looking up to Jose and seeing him as a father figure. We see Shawn watching in the back, basically guaranteeing that this gets physical.

The ranting (as only Cornette can do) continues with Cornette going on about Lothario sitting on a back porch in San Antonio until Shawn wanted his help at Wrestlemania XII. After Vader gets done with Shawn, Jose will be right back on that porch. Jose punches Cornette out and we see Shawn in Mankind's Mandible Claw. That's quite the random attack.

We recap Aldo Montoya (Justin Credible as a Portuguese wrestler) beating Jerry Lawler on Superstars in a big upset, which is a bigger deal since Aldo is suddenly Jake Roberts' protege. Montoya (with that thick Portuguese/Connecticut accent) accepts a rematch for next week.

British Bulldog vs. Henry Godwinn

Owen Hart is on commentary and doesn't want his Slammy anywhere near the bucket of slop. The guys in the ring trade power shots as we get a crawl across the bottom of the screen advertising Sunny in an AOL chat. A wheelbarrow slam (popular move tonight) plants Bulldog and Henry hammers away with some big forearms to the back. Bulldog sends him outside as Owen snaps after Vince asks him about Bret one too many times.

We hit the chinlock as Owen keeps going, likely due to all that time

around Cornette. As for Owen's broken wrist, he's still a few months away from being healthy. Vince doesn't buy it but Lawler and Owen will have none of his naysaying. Henry muscles Bulldog up into a suplex and we take a break. Back with Owen suggesting that Austin vs. Bret would be a great match. The Slop Drop looks to finish Bulldog but Owen turns over the slop bucket (he dropped the slop you might say) for a distraction to set up the powerslam to put Henry away.

Rating: C. I'm a sucker for two power guys beating the heck out of each other and that's what we had here, plus Owen cracking me up with his angry rants on commentary. Henry was just a big old strong guy who could hit you really hard and there's always going to be a place for that. Bulldog was the same way but with a bit more finesse and that's why he was a much bigger star. Well that and he wasn't a hog farmer.

Some guy named Mark Henry is really strong.

We get a quick interview from In Your House IX with Mankind in the boiler room with Goldust and Marlena. Mankind rants about an incident when he was a kid and says destruction can be beautiful. Vince mentions the Boiler Room Brawl at Summerslam and my goodness that would change a lot of things.

Undertaker vs. Steve Austin

Two years from here, this would be the biggest Summerslam main event of all time. Wrestling is funny that way. Speaking of weird, it's still odd seeing Austin with anything on his trunks. Austin breaks out of a chokeslam attempt and wrenches the wrist, only to annoy Undertaker in the process. A right hand sends Austin into the corner so he tries one of his own and IMMEDIATELY backs away when Undertaker gives him a death stare.

Old School is broken up and Austin kicks him low, causing Vince to scream about how that should be a DQ. He's right but that's never stopped a referee before. Austin drives some shoulders into the ribs so Undertaker ties him up in the ropes for a running boot to the face. That's a bit better than shoulders to the ribs. Austin slugs him in the jaw and goes back to the shoulders as we take a break.

Back with Austin cranking on a chinlock until Undertaker rakes his eyes. You don't often see that from a face but it still works. Some more right hands stagger Austin even more but he comes back with a

quick piledriver, only to get crotched on top. A chokeslam brings him back down but here's Mankind for a distraction, leading to Undertaker get counted out.

Rating: C+. You could see the fire in Austin and all he needed was a big opponent to make him. Say, a Canadian who wore pink and black in Madison Square Garden. Undertaker vs. Mankind on the other hand is already a great feud and by far the best thing Undertaker had done to this point. They just worked well against each other and you can't teach something like that.

Undertaker Tombstones Austin post match and promises to make Mankind rest in peace to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. You could feel the energy here and the star power helped that a lot. Austin vs. Undertaker is always worth seeing and it's cool to see a bunch of matches that actually affect some storylines. Things are, at least for now, starting to look a little bit better though they're far from turning things around. This was better though and that's a really good thing after all these dreadful shows.

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Monday Night Raw – July 22,

1996: I Love Cake

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 22, 1996

Location: Key Arena, Seattle, Washington

Attendance: 6,755

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're past the dreadful and worthless In Your House IX and nothing has changed. Vader pinned Shawn Michaels to become the de facto #1 contender and thankfully we're about a month away from Summerslam so maybe things can pick up a little bit. Things have been so boring around here lately that I'm ready for anything new. Let's get to it.

We open with a look at Seattle for a change of pace.

This arena is HUGE compared to the tiny places we've been in lately and it really makes things feel better.

Tag Team Titles: Shawn Michaels/Ahmed Johnson vs. Smoking Gunns

The Gunns are defending and it happens to be Shawn's birthday so Sunny has a cake. She offers him a piece on the way to the ring (oh come on that's too easy) but the Gunns jump the challengers from behind. Billy eats Sweet Chin Music (I'd prefer cake) and Ahmed shoves the cake into Sunny's face. Shawn of course licks some of it off and there's no match.

Post break, Gorilla Monsoon says the Gunns will defend the titles later tonight or they'll be stripped of the titles.

The Goon vs. Marc Mero

What did Mero do to deserve these horrible matches? Steve Austin sits in on commentary to spice things up a little bit. Goon tries a hip check and various other hockey moves and they're uh, bad. A snapmare sets up a chinlock on Mero as Jake Roberts calls in so Lawler can make alcoholism jokes. Goon kicks him in the face as the call ends. Mero hooks a horrible looking victory roll for two as Austin goes on an anti-Lex Luger rant for some reason. Oh and he'll be ready to beat up Undertaker next week.

Goon grabs a chinlock as the alcohol jokes continue. At least it allows me to notice Goon's ice skate shaped boots, a very nice touch. They head outside where Goon slips on the icing (oh geez) and

hip checks the steps. Mero takes him down again with a flip dive, followed by a slingshot legdrop for the pin.

Rating: D-. Another horrible match here as Goon was a wrestling hockey player. I'll give them something for having so many nice details but at the end of the day they're putting this much effort into such a stupid gimmick. The crowd popped a lot stronger at the end and that's a good sign, but can we PLEASE find a more interesting match already?

Shawn and Ahmed say they'll win tonight.

Bob Backlund campaigns for President.

Attorney Clarence Mason lobbies Monsoon to let an ex-con back into the WWF. You can see Crush from behind as he stands next to them so it's not really a secret.

Mankind vs. Freddie Joe Floyd

Freddie actually kicks Mankind outside to start but Mankind throws him into the ropes and pulls his own hair out. A discus clothesline sets up some choking in the corner and I'll let you guess who is in control. Floyd is caught in the Tree of Woe but he avoids the running knee. Mankind eats a good looking top rope back elbow to the jaw but the Mandible Claw ends Floyd in a hurry.

Rating: C-. Actually not bad here, especially for a squash. Floyd was an energetic and talented guy who had a lot of success elsewhere (as Tracy Smothers in case you're not familiar) so it was no surprise that he was one of the better options for this batch of losers who are running around the company at the moment.

Goldust vs. Barry Horowitz

Brian Pillman is on commentary and promises to say the seven words you can't say on television. If nothing else we get the rocking Hava Nagila theme for Horowitz. Before we're ready to go, we hear from Marc Mero about giving Vader cat scratch fever next week. Oh and he's feuding with Goldust to make this actually matter. Brian makes lesbian jokes about Marlena and Sable as Goldust slowly beats on Barry. The Curtain Call wraps this up in a hurry.

Sunny and the Smoking Gunns are livid but know they'll keep the belts.

Jim Cornette announces Vader as #1 contender for Shawn's title at

Summerslam. He's going to take Shawn's lunch money you see.

Tag Team Titles: Smoking Gunns vs. Shawn Michaels/Ahmed Johnson

The Gunns are defending again as that actually hasn't changed in the last half hour. It's a brawl to start with the challengers cleaning house and sending the Gunns outside. We settle down to Shawn punching Billy to officially start with Gunn quickly being knocked outside. Ahmed comes in to work on the arm as Billy begs off faster than someone asked to watch a Billy Gunn tape. Vince calls the team of Ahmed and Sid a threesome and I'm leaving that one alone.

A release powerslam (worse than it sounds) sends Billy flying and it's back to Shawn for two off an ax handle. Bart finally cheats by breaking up a flying headscissors to put Shawn in trouble. The beatdown continues and of course the referee misses the tag off to Ahmed. Back from a break with Billy sending Shawn into the buckle for a near fall before slapping on a chinlock. That goes nowhere and the hot tag brings in Ahmed to clean house. Bart low bridges him though and here's the debuting Faarooq (in full blue gladiator attire) to destroy Ahmed for the DQ.

Rating: C. This was already a huge improvement over everything we've seen in recent weeks and even then it's still not all that great. It just helps when they have so much energy in a match like this, despite the screwy finish that set up something more down the line. At least this can get Shawn out of this story and ready to fight Vader.

The beating continues with Lawler actually mentioning Ron Simmons. Faarooq pledges his loyalty to Sunny to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. Bad Goon match aside, this was much better than the previous weeks with some passable wrestling and a hot crowd. The fact that we're coming up on Summerslam helps too as we're actually getting ready for a show that matters instead of a mess like In Your House IX. Hopefully things stay warm like this as I can tolerate these shows for a little while at least.

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