

Monday Night Raw – December 20, 1993: New York Isn't Memphis

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 20, 1993

Location: Westchester County Civic Center, White Plains, New York

Attendance: 3,000

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Shawn Michaels

We're getting close to wrapping up the year and that means it's time to get ready for the Royal Rumble. Last week focused on setting up the casket match which will see Undertaker challenge Yokozuna for the WWF Title and we've heard rumblings of Bret Hart vs. his brother Owen. At least one of them is awesome. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Ludvig Borga beating Tatanka back in October, ending his two plus year undefeated streak. Borga then helped put him on the shelf so tonight it's all about revenge. Tatanka: "Tonight, I'm out for revenge!" Well that makes things pretty clear.

Vince and Shawn chat about tonight's show.

Jeff Jarrett vs. PJ Walker

Two future World Champions, which would have made the audience shake their heads in 1993. Now it makes me want to cry as my head shakes but that's just me. Jeff struts away from an Irish whip but gets hiptossed down. That's about it for Walker at the moment though as Jeff gets in a dropkick. The announcers talk about Jack Tunney being up for Secretary of Defense as Jeff misses a kneedrop, only to grab a running DDT for the pin.

Rating: D. Sweet goodness Jarrett was dull. I'm not a fan of country music and now I have to hear about it every single time Jarrett is in the ring. The running DDT was fine for a finisher but DANG the rest of him was someone who was only going to work in Memphis. It's such a simple style of offense and that's not going to make it on the main stage.

Spend your money to tell the WWF that Lex Luger should be in the

Royal Rumble!

Men on a Mission vs. Duane Gill/Barry Hardy

Mo takes Gill (with hair here instead of his better known bald look) down with an armbar and actually manages to avoid any major injuries. It must be a good night. Mabel comes in and drops the big fat elbow as the announcers talk about someone dying from eating pigs. Michael Cole doesn't even sound this awkward. Vince isn't done yet as he suggests that the Royal Rumble could come down to Mo vs. Mabel. Imagine that: Mabel as a main eventer. That'll be the day. More slow paced arm work continues as Shawn sounds a bit "under the weather". A reverse DDT and the middle rope splash end Hardy.

Rating: F. I used to love Men on a Mission but WOW they haven't aged well. Mabel was acceptable enough for the big fat monster but Mo might be the most worthless wrestler I can remember from this era. You could even say that Hardy and Gill were more valuable as they give me flashbacks to Gillberg and Barry gives me images of Broken Barry Horowitz.

The Royal Rumble Report runs down the card and the nine names in the Rumble.

Ludvig Borga is ready to crush Tatanka again.

Tatanka vs. Ludvig Borga

Tatanka chops away and we get a graphic listing the announcers. In case you're flipping through and hoping to avoid Rio Rogers I guess. Borga is in early trouble and gets sent into the post, meaning it's WAR PATH time. A high crossbody gets two but Borga gets in a clothesline for his first offense over two minutes in. The former boxer starts hammering away in the corner and gets two off a bad looking powerslam. Tatanka starts the comeback but here's Yokozuna for the DQ.

Rating: D+. I always liked Borga but time haven't been the nicest to him. He has a good enough look and was a solid character but the in-ring work wasn't exactly strong. On the other hand, Tatanka is a good example of someone who lived WAY beyond his expiration date and turned a one note character into a pretty nice career.

Tatanka gets double teamed but Lex Luger makes the save with a slam on Yokozuna.

The announcers bicker about what we just saw. Shawn doesn't like

Luger using the forearm, which sounds like the start of a feud that never happened.

Lou Albano is presented to the crowd for no apparent reason.

Adam Bomb vs. Mark Thomas

Bomb shoves him around and rips at Thomas' face. Vince: "Thomas is a big Barney fan!" That's the topic of the match with Shawn accusing Barney of charging 427% interest for a personal appearance. As you digest that brilliance, Thomas is powerbombed for the pin.

Thurman Plugg is coming.

We look at Owen Hart challenging his brother last week.

Bret says no way.

Owen Hart vs. Mike Bell

Bell actually wins a fight over the arm to start so Owen hits something like a headscissors driver (he does have a tendency to drive people's heads into the mat) to take over. Shawn accuses Bret of getting more Christmas presents than Owen as Hart drops a middle rope elbow. A belly to belly sets up the Sharpshooter to make Bell tap.

Rating: D+. Bell got in WAY more offense than I was expecting to see here and that makes Hart's win mean just a bit more. The announcers also made sure to point out the fact that Owen got in a lot of original offense instead of just using Bret's stuff. They're trying to show the difference between the two and that's going to set up the feud even better.

We go to Undertaker's shop (complete with a sign, meaning it's an official registered business, which is quite the departure from what you would expect from Undertaker) where he's working on Yokozuna's double sized casket.

Headshrinkers vs. Phil Apollo/Jerry Seavey

Apollo would wind up playing Doink a few years later. Samu hammers away on everyone as we hear about Donald Trump's upcoming wedding. Their conclusion: Trump is no Heart Break Kid. Seavey gets beaten from one side of the ring to the other and a double Stroke sets up a top rope splash for the pin.

Overall Rating: D. Nothing to see here but it's a long way towards the Royal Rumble. The Bret vs. Owen stuff is starting to go

somewhere though and that's one of the best feuds the company has ever put together. Unfortunately the rest of the stuff was as boring as you could imagine with Jarrett being a major low point for the show.

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Monday Night Raw – December 13, 1993: The Savage Stereotype

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 13, 1993

Location: Mid-Hudson Civic Center, Poughkeepsie, New York

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jim Cornette

With Bobby Heenan gone, it's probably time to start the very long running tradition of rotating commentators to go with Vince. Other than that we're getting close to the start of the build to the Royal Rumble, which means we're in for a long six weeks or so. If nothing else there's Randy Savage vs. Fatu. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

We look at the end of last week's show with Heenan being thrown out of the building.

Vince brings in Cornette, with a Santa Claus cover on the tennis racket. That's so corny that it works perfectly for him.

Randy Savage vs. Fatu

After Afa finally gets out of the ring, Savage charges into an elbow. I wonder if that's harder than his head. Randy does that one spot that you only do to a Samoan where he slams his head first into the mat. The ensuing superkick puts Savage on the floor where he tries to send Fatu head first into the steps. To paraphrase Savage at Wrestlemania IX: wrong again Slim Jim breath.

Back in and the beating continues as I have a feeling we're in the "Savage gets beaten up for five minutes and then hits the elbow for the pin" formula. Savage gets sent outside so Afa can get in a few shots, followed by a shrunken head (just go with it) shot for two. Fatu goes up but gets crotched, allowing Savage to hit the top rope ax handle to the floor. Back in and a clothesline sets up the elbow to put the Samoan away.

Rating: D+. Just a squash here until we got to the ending, which really didn't make Savage look all that great. Then again that formula got Savage a few World Titles in WCW so maybe there was something for it. Also, how weird is it to think that Fatu got into the Hall of Fame on his own and not in a tag team? It's a stretch to have him in there at all but it goes to show you that you never know what you might get out of the right gimmick.

Todd Pettengill makes an appeal to the fans to vote for Savage to be allowed back on WWF Mania. Gee I wonder if they will. Well I wouldn't for 99 cents a call.

Lex Luger says don't do drugs and I begin to laugh, albeit in a sad way.

Smoking Gunns vs. Steve Smyth/Jim Messenger

We'll say Jim gets beaten up first with a double legsweep putting him down as Cornette talks about going to Toronto to beg Jack Tunney to keep Luger out of the Royal Rumble. Lou Albano comes out to scout with Vince talking about Lou managing more Tag Team Champions in WWF history. Cornette: "Give me time! Give me time!" Bart dropkicks Messenger down, followed by a top rope bulldog to give Billy the pin. Total squash.

We look back at Shawn Michaels vs. the 1-2-3 Kid last week with

Razor Ramon's failed save attempt. Shawn gave him two (fairly bad for the sake of safety) Razor's Edges on the floor. Good angle to advance a good feud.

IRS vs. Todd Mata

Before the match, IRS opens the briefcase and shows off Razor's stolen jewelry. IRS throws him into the corner and grabs a backbreaker as Cornette comes up with a variety of excuses for what was really in the briefcase. Oh and he's dating Princess Diana. IRS grabs a belly to back suplex of all things for the pin. To be fair his finisher was a clothesline so that's hardly a stretch.

And now, Yokozuna as Santa Claus! Don't worry though as it was just a nightmare. Why was Mr. Fuji right next to Yokozuna's bed? Is that in your standard manager contract?

Undertaker vs. JS Storm

That's one heck of a pop for Undertaker, who was one of the few hot acts even at this point. Undertaker throws him outside and into the steps as Cornette rants about the upcoming casket match. The chokeslam and Tombstone keep this one short.

Undertaker puts him in a bodybag for fun.

Jeff Jarrett debuts next week.

Rick Martel vs. Tim McNeany

I always forget that Martel existed after about 1990. A crossbody gives Tim two and he gets the same off a sunset flip. Martel elbows him in the jaw and grabs a front facelock. Tim actually makes a quick comeback but misses a dropkick, setting up the Boston crab for the submission. Better than I was expecting for a change.

On Superstars, Owen Hart was sick of hearing about Bret and challenged him to a match.

Bret Hart vs. Brooklyn Brawler

Hart starts with a hiptoss before going after the arm. The arm work continues as you can tell Bret isn't exactly interested in working hard here. Brawler chokes in the corner a bit but gets slammed off the top, leaving Cornette to compare the Brawler to Rush Limbaugh. Bret starts in with the Five Moves of Doom and finishes with the Sharpshooter.

Rating: D. This was exactly what you would expect from a five minute

Bret vs. Brawler match. If nothing else it gave the announcers a chance to hype up Bret vs. Owen, which sounds like a very solid match on paper alone when you ignore the good story behind it. Bret wasn't exactly energized out there but it's hard to blame him for being a bit lethargic.

Overall Rating: D-. Watching this episode felt like the stereotype that comes with the older shows: the longer matches are bad and the squash matches aren't long enough to care about. The Royal Rumble and Wrestlemania are starting to shape up though and one of those is outstanding so at least I have something to look forward to.

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Monday Night Raw – December 6, 1993: Come Back Bobby

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 6, 1993

Location: Westchester County Civic Center, White Plains, New York

Attendance: 3,000

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Bobby Heenan

Dang I just finished the January 1994 shows and now I get to see how we got there. We're just past the Survivor Series where Lex Luger and AMERICA defeated the evil foreigners (one of them all the way

from Hawaii) but more importantly, Bret and Owen Hart took their first steps towards an amazing feud. Let's get to it.

The opening video looks back at Shawn Michaels attacking Razor Ramon during a match against Diesel. The 1-2-3 Kid made the save and we've got a match tonight. This was around the time when Shawn was suspended for a steroids violation while still Intercontinental Champion. He returned and claimed to still be champion, setting up a huge feud.

Vince and Bobby preview the show.

Shawn Michaels vs. 1-2-3 Kid

Shawn has the Intercontinental Title but isn't champion. They start fast with Kid firing off the kicks to send Shawn outside for a springboard dive. We hit a long headlock until Kid makes the mistake of trying to climb the corner, allowing Shawn to suplex him down for the break. That's fine with Kidd who sends Shawn shoulder first into the post, only to dive into a powerslam on the floor.

We take a break and come back with Shawn working on the ribs to keep things slow, which isn't something you often see Michaels do.

Another suplex gives Shawn two and it's off to a backbreaker. Back up and a spinning kick sets up even more kicks (to be fair, kids don't have the most varied offense), only to miss something like a Swanton as we take a second break.

Just like earlier we come back to Shawn in control and hitting a Razor's Edge, only to pull the Kid up at two. Vince thinks that should be a DQ because Vince has some weird ideas at times. A second Razor's Edge brings out Razor Ramon to chase Shawn up the aisle. Shawn trips but Diesel gets in a cheap shot from the curtain as I'm guessing the match was thrown out somewhere in there, even though it should have been a countout win for the Kid.

Rating: B. Good match here as the Kliq (not yet formed of course) continues to be the best workers in the company and are always more than willing to work with each other. This was much better than your average match around this time, which isn't exactly shocking given who was in there.

Shawn gives Razor the Edge on the floor, albeit nearly in slow motion to prevent a bad case of death. A second Edge keeps Razor in trouble as Vince is LOSING IT on commentary.

Quebecers vs. Bert Centeno/Mike Walsh

Non-title. Centeno starts with Jacques and slaps him in the face before bailing out to the floor. Walsh comes in and is sent hard into the corner as the beating begins. A backdrop sends Pierre onto Centeno and the Cannonball ends a long squash.

Rating: D. It's not a good sign when the best part of the match was Johnny Polo sitting in a chair with his feet up reading a magazine. Then again, Polo was often the best part of the Quebecers' matches. These squashes are only going to get you so far and the Quebecers weren't the best option in the first place.

Post match Centeno is put in Polo's chair and clotheslined out.

Royal Rumble ad.

Owen Hart doesn't want to hear about Bret winning Superstar of the Year. He has a surprise coming.

Doink the Clown vs. Tony DeVito

DeVito is nice enough to let Doink stroll Dink around before we get going. Dink gets on the apron for no apparent reason as DeVito gets caught in an armbar. Another takedown keeps Tony in trouble as you can hear the crowd going very quiet for this, which isn't the biggest surprise. Dink is still on the apron and being rather annoying but that's standard for him.

A German suplex drops DeVito and we hit a headlock as we hear about Star Wars airing on USA. Another takedown has Vince complaining about how many times Doink has done pretty much the same thing. The Whoopee Cushion ends a squash that has me longing for the Quebecers match.

Rating: D-. WAY too long here as Doink has lost everything after turning heel. This was a really boring match and Dink continues to be far more annoying than he really should have been. Given that he's a small clown, that's quite a bit of an accomplishment. Bad squash with the five minute runtime being ridiculous.

Jeff Jarrett and his unnamed friend (with his awesome hat) walk the streets of Nashville and complain about never getting a break.

We look back at Crush attacking Randy Savage, which somehow got Savage suspended.

Crush vs. Tony Roy

Heenan says Mr. Fuji is very happy because tomorrow is the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. This is the regular phone call match with Savage calling in from the United Kingdom. Crush shrugs off the offense and hits a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker as we hear about Savage's time as a macho baby. The slow beating continues as Savage's reception cutting in and out. I think he's giving us a salad recipe though. A gorilla press onto the top rope puts Tony away.

Rating: D. This was all about the phone call which was all to set up Savage making his in-ring return next week to face Fatu. The best part though was Vince telling Bobby that Gorilla Monsoon called in earlier today but it was a LOCAL call. The fear in Heenan's voice was perfect and I think that might be leading somewhere.

We run down next week's card and heeeeeere's Gorilla. Monsoon has good news and bad news for Heenan. The good news is he's won a free trip. Heenan: "I don't care to go anywhere!" The bad news is Monsoon grabs him by the jacket and literally drags him out of the arena. Heenan's luggage is waiting next to the door as Gorilla throws both him and it out of the building (and the company as he was off to WCW). Heenan looks close to tears as he salutes the building and leaves.

Overall Rating: C+. That one match really is enough to carry the whole show but the ending is actually a little sad. Heenan never was his old self in WCW and it's a shame to see him go. At least it was in a funny moment with Monsoon getting to do it. Those two had some of the best chemistry ever and Heenan's line of "I wish Monsoon was here" at the Hall of Fame gets me every time. Not a good show, but check out that opener.

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Monday Night Raw – November 25, 2002: Boring Wrestling and Violent Illness

Monday Night Raw

Date: November 25, 2002

Location: North Charleston Coliseum, North Charleston, South, Carolina

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We're still in the Shawn Michaels Era and he's actually defending the title this week against Rob Van Dam. Other than that we're still waiting on the return of HHH, who was injured at Survivor Series but probably needs to grace us with his presence again. Other than that, I'd assume we'll get a bunch of Testicle jokes. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Shawn winning the title and Van Dam earning the shot last week.

Opening sequence.

Tag Team Titles: Christian/Chris Jericho vs. Dudley Boyz

Christian and Jericho are defending. D-Von drops Jericho with a clothesline to start and elbows Christian for the same result. We get some championship miscommunication and Chris gets pummeled in the corner. Christian finally scores with a backbreaker though and the champs take over for the first time.

The pace slows WAY down (as is the Canadian way) but Christian takes too much time yelling at Bubba, allowing D-Von to grab a neckbreaker. Bubba comes in and cleans house but misses the middle rope backplash. Everything breaks down (as is the tag team way) and

D-Von gets two off a small package. Chris rams him into Christian though and a rollup retains the titles clean.

Actually hang on a second as here are Eric Bischoff and Sean Morely (the former Val Venis), who is now Chief of Staff. All four shoulders were on the mat at the same time for the cover so there's no pin, meaning this match MUST continue. I'm assuming this is the "heel bosses act nice to start before going really evil" segment of the night.

The match continues after a break with Bubba slamming his way out of trouble and making the hot tag off to D-Von. Notice the crowd not being as thrilled, mainly because the good guys just got pinned about as clean as you can get but the match continues on a technicality. 3D gives Bubba the pin on Christian.....but Bubba wasn't legal, so Morely restarts the match again.

The third fall begins and you can hear the fans getting annoyed. Jericho nails D-Von from behind and sleeper drops Bubba for two. That earns him a Flip Flop and Fly with What's Up making things even worse. Since there haven't been enough shenanigans in this match, it's table time but Christian dropkicks it into D-Von's face. Bubba blocks the Lionsault but Christian hits him with a belt, setting up the Walls to retain the titles for real.

Rating: D+. WAY too much going on here when they could have done a regular match with some extra time or just done a 2/3 falls match, despite the lack of any reason for this to go longer than usual. If nothing else though, it's nice to have some fresh blood in the title scene and the Dudleys are hardly a stretch for the automatic #1 contendership.

Shawn Michaels is ready to face Van Dam in his first Raw match in five years. He leaves to go talk to Rob for some reason when Christian and Jericho show up with champagne to celebrate. Jericho isn't happy with Scott Steiner but Christian says "forget about his freaks, peaks and Iron Sheiks". Chris goes with it and suggests that they hit the town because they need some Vitamin C. Christian: "YEAH! My name starts with a C too!"

They head into the locker room when the Dudleys come up and want to go after the champs again. Bubba says wait, because he has a plan. I think I like this better than cutting to conveniently timed segments where people just happen to be ready to talk when someone else is done but it was still really scripted.

Test vs. Steven Richards

This is fallout from Steven taking a Testicles shirt to the testicles. I think Test is a face now despite doing nothing new other than having the catchphrase. The threat of a big boot sends Steven bailing to the floor but he comes back in with some right hands. We're already off to a reverse chinlock so at least this is going to be short. Some clotheslines and a full nelson slam give Test two and he hammers away in the corner. A low blow (that the referee should have seen) sets up an X Factor for two, only to have Test Roll the Dice for the pin.

Rating: D. See, he has a catchphrase which a nine year old would find funny so I'm sure the writers are impressed enough to push Test again. Richards got in a lot of offense here, which probably isn't the best way to push Test, though then again neither is a bunch of testicle jokes. Stacy is gorgeous but that smile is only going to carry the act so far.

Christian and Jericho are in towels after their shower but the Dudleys have stolen their bags. Chase is given and the champs are locked out of the locker room. So how did the Dudleys know that the champs were getting in the shower when they turned the corner two seconds after Christian and Jericho decided to do that? I guess they overheard them but if that's the case, why didn't they jump the champs when they were standing there talking?

Test and Stacy are happy with the win and Test goes to take a shower (common theme tonight). As Stacy beams, Victoria jumps her from behind and says she'll be thinking of Stacy during the match. Instead of her long hair and long legs though, she'll be thinking of Stacy's fear. Victoria licks Stacy's ear and that's that.

Christopher Nowinski vs. Maven

Before we get going, Chris says this is the last time that anyone can say Maven is better than he is. Maven won Tough Enough because of politics when he mentioned his sick mother and that means it's on. Nowinski hits him with a big book and Maven is out. No match.

Jericho and Christian are in a search for clothes and find 3 Minute Warning and Rico's gear. They're far from impressed (Jericho: "Do you get a free bowl of soup with this outfit?") but Rico and the Samoans come in to scare them off.

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Victoria

Trish is challenging and looks very nice in blue. They slug it out to start with Victoria grabbing something like a Thesz press before hitting some awkward kicks to the ribs. A rollup gives Trish two and the knockout sends her outside. She lands hips first, with JR saying is like a stone bouncing across a river. Victoria's slingshot legdrop gets two as Lawler thinks there's something in these two's past before explaining the backstory.

We hit a seated full nelson (that could be a solid finisher) until Trish fights up and gets some rollups for two each. Trish gets sent hard into the steps as this is already starting to drag. Back in and Trish makes another comeback, including a Chick Kick for two. We get an awkward looking shove to send Trish throat first into the ropes but it's enough to set up the Widow's Peak to retain the title.

Rating: D. Despite them both looking better than they have in a long time (which covers a lot of ground), the match really did feel disjointed. It was pretty clear that they had no idea how to go from move to move later on in the match, which really makes for some awkward moments. The women were getting better but they weren't ready for something this long yet, which isn't a good sign.

Victoria bites Steven Richards' ear for reasons of general insanity, which he seems to like.

Shawn praises Van Dam's athleticism but says he's missing a little something. Rob slaps him and that's just what the champ was looking for.

Video on Eric Bischoff.

Christian is worried about shrinkage but a shot of the Dudleys in the ring sends the Canadians into the arena. In the ring, the Dudleys are giving away Christian and Jericho's clothes, including a shirt and jeans. Bubba finds a jar of A** Cream, which has him very confused. Bubba: "WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A** CREAM???" The whole bag of clothes is sent into the crowd but they're not done yet. Cue Spike to steal the towels and we have unclothed champions.

Hurricane/Jeff Hardy vs. Lance Storm/William Regal

Jeff dives over the top to take out Storm before the bell and the good guys start fast. Some right hands have Regal staggered and it's off to Hurricane for a high crossbody. The Eye of the Hurricane is broken up so Hurricane has to settle for a chokeslam instead. Regal comes in for the save and starts working on Hurricane's back with a few knees. Storm adds some forearms, only to get caught with a Shining Wizard. It's not enough for the hot tag though as Hurricane tries his own half crab. Regal kicks him in the head for the break though and Storm grabs a Sharpshooter for the tap out.

Rating: D+. Nothing to see here but the ending was a nice touch as they went away from the standard formula for a change. You can only do the hot tag into the finish so many times so it was nice to see something get changed up. Regal and Storm aren't exactly a big upgrade but at least they're a regular team.

Jeff gets beaten down as well.

We look at Shawn's last match on Raw from December 1997 against Owen Hart.

Kane vs. Batista

Hang on a second as we have Ric Flair instead, telling Kane that he's not out of the woods for what he did to Ric last week. Batista comes in to jump Kane from behind and the beatdown is on. We do get a bell though and Batista gets to hammer on Kane in an actual match. Some clotheslines knock Kane around but he comes back with a big boot. The ref gets bumped so there's no one to count Kane's

powerslam. Ric chairs him in the head and the Batista Bomb gives Dave the fast pin.

We get the official terms of the Big Show trade: Big Show for Ivory, D-Von, Val Venis and Maven. That's a horrible trade. Anyway Bischoff tells Morely to bring Scott Steiner to Raw. Morely says he has a connection that can make something happen but RNN BREAKING NEWS. Randy talks about everything he's thankful for, including that good looking nurse at the rehab center.

Goldust vs. Rico

They trade some armdrags to start until Rico gets in a big kick to take over. A lot of stomping allows JR to list off some of Rico's accomplishments as they seem to be trying to make him into something. Rico grabs an armbar until Goldust makes a short comeback, including the powerslam for two. The Curtain Call gives Goldust the clean pin.

Rating: D. This was more filler but you have to deal with that from time to time. JR mentioned that Booker was healing, which might have something to do with a rash of illness going around the locker room at this point (dehydration due to some issues on a tour of India). If nothing else that would explain some of the odd booking choices tonight, such as this match, which was only going to last so long.

Raw World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Rob Van Dam

Shawn, in what looks to be the early Sami Zayn collection of tights, is defending. The champ fires off a dropkick to start but gets kicked in the ribs a few times, followed by a clothesline to send him outside. Rob is smart enough to throw him back inside for a slingshot legdrop to the bad back. A monkey flip is countered into something like Snake Eyes and Shawn starts in on the leg.

We hit the Ric Flair playbook with the leg being crushed on the ropes, followed by a Figure Four. Rob makes the ropes so Shawn forearms him into the nipup, only to miss Sweet Chin Music. Rolling Thunder onto Shawn's back gets two so Shawn comes back with a DDT. Shawn's top rope elbow gets two more but it's another backbreaker to

cut him off. Rob gets in the Five Star to the back....and here's HHH for the DQ.

Rating: C+. This was totally fine but you could tell that Shawn wasn't able to hit that other gear. The knee vs. back stuff was fine and I'm glad they didn't go with a clean fall over Rob, who is still recovering from the HHH loss. Speaking of HHH, thank goodness he was back so quickly to save the show. I mean, it had been a whole week without him and now we're likely going to get him in another title match.

HHH goes after Shawn post match and shrugs off a comeback. A side slam puts Shawn through an open chair to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. I'd assume the rash of illnesses changed a lot of this show but that really doesn't make the show any more excusable. It's not a good show with all the lame matches and quick build towards Armageddon, which is already looking like a boring show with another HHH vs. Shawn match on top. This wasn't the worst show in the world but it was your standard 2002 dullness.

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Monday Night Raw – April 24, 2017: I Should Be Paid Back For This Show

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 24, 2017

Location: Sprint Center, Kansas City, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, Booker T., Corey Graves

It's the go home show for Payback and that means we're getting closer to knowing how the Superstar Shakeup will really be going. Last week we saw Braun Strowman break the ring when he superplexed Big Show and tonight he's facing Kalisto in a dumpster match. I'm not sure that makes sense either but let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Braun Strowman destroying things for the last two weeks.

Opening sequence.

Here's Chris Jericho for the Highlight Reel. Jericho says this is the last Highlight Reel on Raw because he's winning the US Title and moving over to Smackdown. It doesn't matter if it's Raw, Smackdown or Southpaw Regional though because these people are the friends of Jericho and they'll cheer him on man. Tonight's guest is a real star and that would be....Chris Jericho! Cue Miz and Maryse to interrupt though with the former saying this show is about the it couple. Jericho says they better watch.....it couple.

Miz gets to the point and says MizTV is replacing the Highlight Reel, meaning it's time to replace the set. Now it's Dean Ambrose, who turns this into the Ambrose Asylum with all three as his guests. Dean wants Jericho to win on Sunday, despite their checkered past. Jericho broke a potted plant over his head and Dean broke his light up jacket. Jericho brings up the \$15,000 but Dean has a gift: a home made light up jacket! Dean says he should try it on man but Miz cuts them off.

We get a good rant about how Miz should be the only one getting gifts, which earns him Dirty Deeds. Dean leaves so Jericho asks what happens when you're married to a stupid idiot like Miz. After putting her on the list, Jericho leaves, wearing the new jacket (which is a sport coat with Christmas lights wrapped around).

Sheamus vs. Matt Hardy

Matt starts fast with a neckbreaker and three straight legdrops for two. The ten forearms are broken up and Matt hits the Side Effect on the apron as we take an early break. Back with the forearms working this time, only to have Sheamus miss a charge into the post. Matt's bulldog and a middle rope elbow get two but Matt gets sent outside. Sheamus follows and goes after Jeff, allowing Matt to hit the Twist of Fate for the clean pin at 10:02.

Rating: C-. I'm not sure how wise it is to have the Hardys wrestle singles matches as they really don't have the same fire that the tag matches do. The match wasn't much to see but there's only so much they can do in less than seven minutes of actual TV time. It's too early to take the belts off of them but I'd keep Matt out of a singles role.

Post match tempers seem to flare but they all shake hands.

Miz and Maryse cut off Kurt Angle's phone call to yell about Ambrose and Jericho. Angle doesn't want to hear about it and makes a tag match with Miz getting to pick his own partner.

Neville/TJ Perkins vs. Austin Aries/Jack Gallagher

The good guys clear the ring and we take a break before the opening bell. We're joined in progress with Gallagher in trouble until he slips over for the hot tag to Aries. Everything breaks down in a hurry with Aries cleaning house, including clapping his hands around Neville's ears. Both villains are sent outside for a double suicide dive and it's Perkins getting caught in the Last Chancery. Gallagher comes in to take care of Neville and it's a discus Fivearm to put Perkins away at 3:06 shown.

Rating: D+. The time factor caught up with them again but it's a

good idea to build Aries up more and more as he gets closer to his title shot. Perkins is a good choice for Neville's buddy and I could see him getting the title back down the line. Gallagher....dang what happened to him? They just stopped featuring him and let him be that guy who does the same collection of spots over and over, which is quite the shame.

Braun Strowman vs. Kalisto

It's a dumpster match, which means you have to put them inside but don't have to close the lid. Before the match, Braun says everyone here is trash and putting Kalisto in the dumpster will be like putting everyone in there too, including Roman Reigns. In the back, Kalisto tells Angle he has to fight like a man.

Kalisto starts with some kicks but his flip dive is caught in a suplex, only to have Strowman throw him across the ring. A front facelock over the ropes has Strowman in some trouble but he throws Kalisto down again. Strowman loads up a press slam but Kalisto slips out and dropkicks him into the dumpster for the win at 6:13.

Rating: F. I know WWE's official line is that wins and losses don't matter but you're trying to build Strowman up as an opponent for Lesnar. Two weeks ago, Strowman absolutely destroyed Reigns in one of the coolest segments in years. In the two weeks since, he's gone to a draw with Big Show (But he stood up and that makes up for it!) and now he's lost to Kalisto. He'll probably beat Reigns on Sunday and that's supposed to make up for this right? I'm sure no one will EVER reference this loss again and Strowman will be forever awesome.

Post match Strowman destroys Kalisto and puts him in the dumpster. He locks it shut and pushes the dumpster off the stage for what must have been a full two and a half foot fall. If this is how they want to build up Strowman, they have a LONG way to go.

After a break, Kalisto is stretchered out.

Video on Roman Reigns.

Bray Wyatt wants to make Randy Orton suffer.

Dana Brooke vs. Alicia Fox

This is over Emma stirring up some issues between them. Cue Emma less than thirty seconds in as Dana's cartwheel splash hits knees. Fox misses the ax kick though and a Samoan Driver ends Alicia at 1:12.

Emma hugs Dana, who shoves her away.

We run down the pay per view card and get the first details on the House of Horrors match: the match will start in the House of Horrors and end in the ring. That's a lot more than we knew before.

Samoa Joe and Anderson and Gallows are ready to torture Enzo Amore/Big Cass and Seth Rollins.

Enzo Amore/Big Cass/Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe/Anderson and Gallows

Enzo does his full entrance but the villains jump him from the crowd. Rollins runs out for the save but Enzo is laid out as we go to a break. Back with Angle announcing a replacement for the injured Enzo.

Finn Balor/Big Cass/Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe/Anderson and Gallows

It's a big brawl to start (of course) with Balor kicking Anderson in the head a few times before it's off to Joe for the heavy forearms. Anderson comes back in for an armbar and a side slam. Gallows comes in and kicks Cass off the apron but misses an elbow drop. The hot tag brings in Rollins for the Sling Blade and everyone is knocked to the floor.

Seth loads up the springboard knee to Anderson but Joe kicks him in the knee. Cue Balor to take care of Joe, leaving Rollins to hit a springboard clothesline on Anderson. Seth loads up the Pedigree but opts for a hammerlock jumping knee to the face (think the Rainmaker) for the pin at 5:58.

Rating: C. The Club loses again and I can't say I'm all that surprised. Ever since they split from AJ Styles last year it's been one horrible loss after another, even when they won the Tag Team Titles. I'm not sure what Balor is going to do next but Rollins vs. Joe has serious potential, especially if Rollins has dropped the Pedigree for good.

Sheamus and Cesaro aren't willing to team with Miz.

Here's Alexa Bliss to talk about how people come out here to talk. Some of them want to become a champion but some of them talk about how much they want to become a WWE superstar. It's all sunshine and rainbows and she nearly vomits in her mouth a bit. She's here to fight so here's Bayley to call Bliss out for talking about people behind their backs. Bayley holds up the title and says she'll do whatever it takes to walk out of her hometown with the title on Sunday.

Bliss loves the idea of beating Bayley up in front of her father but has another question: has Bayley ever even kissed a boy? Not that it matters as Bliss can't wait to destroy her. Cue Sasha Banks with Bliss saying it's time for part 3000 of the Banks and Bayley side show. Bliss asks if Banks puts love letters in the lunches she makes for Bayley. Banks is ready to shut Bliss up but Alexa says not now because Banks is unhinged. That earns her a punch to the face and it seems that the match is on.

Sasha Banks vs. Alexa Bliss

Bayley is on commentary and is immediately grilled about how she keeps coming close to losing the title. Banks forearms Bliss to start but can't hit the double knees in the corner. Bliss stomps away but gets sent into the corner again. That's enough for Alexa as she walks out at 2:38.

Bayley goes after Bliss but Alexa runs away, only to turn around and get in a cheap shot. Sasha chases her off.

Ambrose tries to mend fences with Jericho and asks if he can be taken off the list. That's too far for Jericho because it's in pen. The \$15,000 is brought up again so Dean shows off the replacement jacket. Jericho also brings up the powerbomb onto the tacks but Dean says he wouldn't do it again. He likes the jacket though and Dean JUST UNMADE THE LIST! Dean is fired up and slaps Jericho on the back, earning him another spot on the list.

Heath Slater and Curtis Axel are ready to talk about being in Marine

5 when Miz and Maryse show up (good thing there were two extra chairs there). Neither want to be his partner so Miz says they'll never work in this town again. Axel: "Kansas City?" Miz gets a note delivered and apparently he has a partner, who he describes as awesome.

Curt Hawkins issues an open challenge to his "Star Factory".

Curt Hawkins vs. Apollo Crews

Crews is looking bigger tonight. They trade some shots to start until Crews hits a running boot to the face. A jumping clothesline sets up an enziguri, followed by the Toss Powerbomb for the pin on Hawkins at 2:09.

Titus O'Neil comes out to celebrate with Crews and Apollo seems a bit more interested this week.

We look back at Kalisto and Strowman. Kalisto has suffered hip and cervical trauma.

Roman Reigns has issued a statement saying he's banged up but he'll fight.

Long video on Strowman vs. Reigns.

Austin Aries pitches an idea to Angle for the main event of 205 Live. Kurt says he'll think about it so Aries gives him a banana. The Drifter walks by and Kurt makes sure to point out that he's not the partner.

Dean Ambrose/Chris Jericho vs. The Miz/???

And it's....someone who has some issues with being on time as he's not here. Miz says the match is canceled and goes to leave but here's Angle to say the match is on. Jericho takes off the replacement jacket and chops Miz in the corner, setting up some double teaming. Miz gets clotheslined out to the floor and we take a break.

The match is joined in progress with Miz still alone and Jericho's arrogant cover getting one. Ambrose comes in and Miz begs off, earning himself a chase on the floor. Maryse offers a distraction

though and Miz gets in a boot to the face to take over for the first time. Back in and the Reality Check gets two but the YES Kick is countered into a rollup. Jericho comes in with the Lionsault but the Codebreaker is blocked.

Miz goes to leave so Ambrose follows him up the ramp. Dirty Deeds is loaded up on the stage but here's Bray Wyatt to knock Dean off. Sister Abigail sends Dean into the wall and a second one plants Jericho in the ring. Miz poses with Wyatt...and takes Sister Abigail as well. Bray kneels down to end the show and we'll say the match was thrown out at about 8:30.

Rating: D. So that happened. I'm assuming this was just a way to set up Orton vs. Wyatt as Miz and Ambrose have nothing to do on Sunday, save for hosting a talking segment on the Kickoff Show. Wyatt is an interesting choice for a partner and it's nice to have him actually show up but....yeah this didn't work.

Overall Rating: F+. I'm trying to think of a highlight tonight and the best I've got is Alexa's promo about how Bayley made her sick. Other than that, this was one heck of a bomb with Strowman's loss and the ridiculous dumpster thing being the low point. I don't know if creative was told to punt until after Payback or what but this REALLY didn't work and I haven't been left scratching my head so many times over the course of a night since probably something TNA did. This was really, really bad and that's about as nice as I can go with it.

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Monday Night Raw – November 18, 2002: I'd Rather Talk About Anthology

Monday Night Raw

Date: November 18, 2002

Location: Webster Bank Arena, Bridgeport, Connecticut

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We're past Survivor Series and that means Shawn Michaels gets to keep HHH's World Title warm for the next few weeks. That's really all that matters from the Raw side as the show was almost all about the Elimination Chamber, which makes sense for the most part. We're less than four weeks away from the next pay per view so let's get to it.

Eric Bischoff is in the parking lot waiting on someone unnamed but gets Ric Flair instead. There's no HHH but Bischoff has him in a #1 contenders match tonight so he better be here soon. Flair gets in Bischoff's face, talking about how HHH had a crushed trachea last night but kept fighting anyway. Ric thinks Bischoff only cares about the show so Eric gives him a match against Kane. That doesn't seem to bother Ric because he'll show Kane how it used to be done.

Opening sequence.

Here's Shawn to get things going. After declaring himself the NEW World Heavyweight Champion, he talks about not being able to believe this is real. Last night he accomplished his goal of becoming the NEW World Heavyweight Champion but now he's not sure what to do. Does he want to be someone who keeps going way after his prime or be someone who knows when to hang it up?

Walking away now would be the smart, logical thing but he's never been the most logical guy. He'd love to come out here and see what he can do against all that young talent in the back so let's just see what this old, beat up body has left in it. Cue Rob Van Dam to

talk about what an inspiration Shawn was when Rob was growing up. If Shawn wants to meet some new faces, how about his first title defense is against Rob Van Dam? Shawn sounds ready to accept but here's Bischoff to cut them off.

If Van Dam wants to be the #1 contender, he can win a triple threat match also involving Booker T. and Chris Jericho for a shot at the title next week. That sounds fine but Shawn has a bone to pick with Eric. He's not going to represent a show that features necrophilia because it offends him as a wrestling fan. That's about it on that subject so Shawn gets in one more shot at HHH before wrapping things up.

We're coming up on the 10th anniversary of Monday Night Raw so here's a look at the first episode.

3 Minute Warning/Rico vs. Dudley Boyz

D-Von is back on the team, thank goodness. Bubba hammers on Rico to start but a little heel distraction lets Jamal deck Bubba from behind. That's not enough for Rico to hit a (great looking) moonsault though and Bubba drops him with a clothesline. D-Von comes in to almost no reaction and starts to clean house with Rosey being sent outside. What's Up hits Rico low but Jamal actually hits a dropkick. Spike gets kicked to the floor, leaving Rico to take 3D for the pin.

Rating: D+. This was basically "hey the Dudleys are back" and there's nothing wrong with that. The team really needed to be put back together after the pretty horrible face runs (though I'll miss Reverend D-Von's music) so let them go back to something you know will work. It's not like the tag division is overflowing with talent or anything.

Stacy makes testicle jokes and is going to unveil Test's new shirt tonight.

HHH is on the way.

Recap of the Chamber.

Scott Steiner, who seems to be the person Bischoff was waiting for earlier, arrives to Bischoff's delight. Steiner still hasn't signed yet.

Here's Stacy with a bunch of lame testicles shirts, which are just

puns in white text on a black shirt. She puts them in a t-shirt gun and launches some into the crowd until Steven Richards comes out to interrupt. He complains about this being stupid and takes a shirt to the groin. Crazy Victoria comes out and bites Victoria's nails off before leaving with Steven.

Post break Stacy freaks out so Eric gives her a title match against Victoria.

Lance Storm/William Regal vs. Tommy Dreamer/Jeff Hardy

The brawl starts in the aisle for no apparent reason and it's the evil foreigners taking over on Dreamer. Jeff dives off the apron to take Regal down but William kicks Dreamer in the head to give Lance the pin.

Dreamer gets beaten down post match with Storm doing Raven's drop toehold onto a chair.

We look back at Steiner beating up Matt Hardy and Christopher Nowinski at Survivor Series.

Here's Steiner for presumably his big signing announcement. Steiner talks about only caring for his freaks and his peaks before saying he's been watching both shows a lot lately. People have been talking about being the best of all time but the best of all time is standing right here. Cue Chris Jericho to say he's the King of the World so Steiner needs to shush. If you want to talk bodies, look at this gorgeous piece of meat. A brawl is teased but Jericho declines because he has a #1 contenders match later. Scott says he'll stick around. Having Steiner not wrestle is probably the best for everyone at the moment.

Women's Title: Victoria vs. Stacy Keibler

Stacy is challenging. Victoria chokes her a lot, Stacy does her horrible looking leg based offense and the Widow's Peak retains the title in just over a minute.

Victoria stays on her but Trish Stratus comes out for the save. Richards comes out and lays Trish out.

Hurricane talks about his song to promote the Anthology CD set. I loved that thing.

Maven is at the World.

Al Snow vs. Christopher Nowinski

Nowinski is in a suit with a backpack and this is a "School of Hard Knocks" match because WE DON'T DO HARDCORE ANYMORE. Snow hits him with a small blackboard and knocks Chris into the crowd. That means it's time for the bowling ball but Nowinski gets in a spinebuster before anything can be done. More weapons, including a freaking skeleton, are brought in with Chris talking to the skull. Snow hits him in the ribs with a femur before switching over to a chair. We get the bowling ball to the crotch spot as Chris is bleeding from the mouth. The moonsault only hits a pile of chairs though and Chris gets the easy pin.

Rating: F. It's not funny, it's nothing we haven't seen a hundred times before, Nowinski isn't getting anywhere out of this and the whole thing is just a major waste of time. Just do the Hardcore Title again if it's that important to you. Either that or put Nowinski in a tag team or something else where he's not on his own because this is a bunch of stupid stuff week after week.

Val Venis doesn't want to be known by that name anymore and now works for Bischoff.

Kane vs. Ric Flair

Ric is in a suit but says he's not going to fight. Cue Batista to lay Kane out instead.

Jericho can't get Christian to help him tonight.

Booker T. vs. Chris Jericho vs. Kane

The winner gets Shawn next week. Before the match, Booker isn't cool with not being mentioned as a potential title contender. JR says that the research staff says Shawn hasn't wrestled on Raw since October 1997. The internet research staff (and a decent knowledge of Raw) says WWE needs a new research staff. Jericho gets double teamed to start but, as usual, the double teamers argue over who gets to go for the cover.

Rob's standing moonsault gets two as the announcers keep bringing up the fact that there are no disqualifications. Jericho hits Booker in the head with the Tag Team Title for two but Rob gives him the monkey flip out of the corner. Van Dam is sent outside so Booker pops back up for some chops and a Walls of Jericho on Chris. In case you didn't get the idea, Van Dam makes the save and gives Booker an ax kick, only to have Jericho add a Five Star (good one too) on Rob.

Booker kicks Jericho down but gets dropkicked down by Van Dam. The snap spinebuster gets two on Jericho, only to have Christian come out and chair Booker in the back. Jericho grabs the Walls but here's Steiner for the save. The beatdown ensues and Rob adds the Five Star for the pin and the title shot.

Rating: B-. Good match here, or at least it was until we had to get two people interfering. This felt like three guys trying to get their heat back, which they certainly have to do after everything has been shifted to HHH vs. Shawn. It's also nice to see a good match get some time, though it might be that the match was good because it got time. Sometimes it's hard to tell which it actually is.

Shawn comes out to shake Rob's hand to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. Bad show with some good highlights, which means it's a big upgrade over most of what we see from Raw anymore. The main difference is the lack of HHH (who they said was coming here tonight and was then never mentioned again), who really does drag down almost everything that happens on this show. While Shawn doesn't even wrestle, it already feels like a breath of fresh air, which is one of the best things that could have happened to the show at the moment.

Now, that being said, Stacy was a major focal point on this show and that's not a good thing. Other than the World Title situation, Stacy being destroyed by crazy Victoria was the biggest thing on this show. The lack of a midcard title is really hurting this show as there's the World Title, the meaningless Tag Team Titles (because there are all of three teams on the roster) and then it's a bunch of nothing stories that are there to give people something to do without putting much effort into them.

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Monday Night Raw – April 17, 2017: That Ambulance Died in Vain

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 17, 2017

Location: Schottenstein Center, Columbus, Ohio

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

Just in case we haven't had enough going on of late, this is kind of a relaunch for Raw as we have a fresh roster at full strength for the first time. In addition to all the new names, the interesting question is will Roman Reigns be here. After Braun Strowman basically killed him last week, it should be interesting to see if he'll be here tonight. If so, WWE is missing a major opportunity. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Strowman destroying Reigns last week, turning himself into the biggest unintentional face on the roster as a result.

Here's Strowman to open things up. Strowman is proud of the beating he gave Roman last week, which saw Reigns have a separated shoulder and cracked ribs. Reigns will NOT be here tonight and that earns one heck of a YES chant. Strowman says he's ready to tear through the locker room but here's General Manager Kurt Angle to interrupt. The boss gets right to the point and makes Strowman vs. Reigns for Payback. As for tonight, Strowman has the night off but Braun wants more competition. That sounds like a threat.

Samoa Joe vs. Chris Jericho

Seth Rollins, who faces Joe at Payback, is on commentary. Joe goes right after Jericho to start but gets dropkicked out to the floor as we take an early break. Back with Joe in control and hitting his chop to the shoulder blades. We hit the nerve hold for a bit, followed by the scoop powerslam for two. The crowd sounds rather energized tonight, which I'm sure has nothing to do with the lack of Reigns and Stephanie tonight.

Joe misses a middle rope backsplash (though his leg landed on the back of Jericho's head), allowing Chris to grab the Walls. That doesn't last long though as Jericho escapes and grabs the Koquina Clutch. Jericho tries the Bret Hart/Roddy Piper counter but Joe turns over and keeps the hold for the tap out at 9:08.

Rating: C+. They're making Joe out to be a killer and that's a great sign for his future. The fact that he just beat Jericho clean by submission shows that there's something to him and WWE knows it. I'd love to see Joe vs. Lesnar way down the line and they've built him as the kind of guy who could give him a run for his money.

Post match Joe says he remembers the night he debuts and the noise the fans made. Joe worked for HHH and since he cares about his clients, he'll take care of Seth at Payback. Seth says of course it was personal and Joe is going to learn that Payback is a b****.

Anderson and Gallows are on the way to the ring when they pass by the Drifter playing his guitar. They'll be facing Golden Truth tonight but Strowman runs Golden Truth over and beats the heck out of them.

Strowman won't leave.

Anderson and Gallows are in the ring with Anderson saying Golden Truth just got the United Airlines treatment. They came here for a fight so get someone out here.

Anderson and Gallows vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

After Enzo calls this the realest night of the week, Cass hammers on Anderson with a right hand to the ribs putting Karl down. Cass keeps things up by throwing Enzo at both bald guys as we take a break. Back with Enzo in trouble (some things never change), including a DDT on the arm and an armbar from Gallows. A spinebuster makes things even worse but Enzo comes off the middle rope with the jumping DDT.

Cass comes in and cleans house with the usual, including a big boot to knock Gallows outside. It takes Cass outside as well though, leaving Enzo to try another jumping DDT. Anderson is ready this time though and catches him in midair before throwing him knees first at the top rope. That's some rather unique offense but it's enough to put Enzo away at 10:48.

Rating: C-. Well Anderson and Gallows certainly needed the win, especially with Wilder (and presumably the Revival as a whole) on the shelf for a few months. The match was good enough though that ending was a big odd. You would expect Anderson to use that as a setup for the finish but it got the pin so it doesn't make a huge difference.

Video on Mickie James.

Video on Nia Jax.

Here are Miz and Maryse for MizTV. Miz starts talking about the Superstar Shakeup but gets cut off by Dean Ambrose, the scheduled guest, before he can get very far. Ambrose sucks up to the Ohio crowd before ripping on Miz's gear. Miz doesn't want to hear it because he's done everything he can to make the people in that locker room look like superstars while Ambrose makes them look like regular wrestlers.

It doesn't matter though because people love Ambrose, who was #1 pick in the Draft and was WWE Champion at Summerslam. Then Dean wasted all that momentum when he was on the Kickoff Show six months later. Ambrose doesn't care what he looks like because he loves coming out here in front of twenty people or a hundred thousand.

That's why he's the Intercontinental Champion, which he beat Miz for in the first place. Maryse says the title doesn't make the man so Dean asks her to hold the mic. As Miz goes on another rant, Dean empties his pockets and takes his jacket off before hammering Miz down. Dirty Deeds doesn't work though and Miz and Maryse run.

Strowman drags Kalisto through the back and throws him in a trashcan. Big Show runs Strowman over and says pick on someone your own size.

TJ Perkins vs. Jack Gallagher

Neville comes out to watch in what is billed as a special appearance. This brings out Austin Aries for "an even more special

appearance". They trade wristlocks to start with Gallagher taking him to the mat and cranking on both arms at the same time. Perkins does a bit of dabbing but can't handle the fact that Gallagher pops up. William III is sent to the floor to Gallagher's dismay but he misses a charge to the floor for a heck of a crash.

Back from a break with Gallagher flipping out of a suplex and grabbing a t-bone suplex of his own. The headbutt sends Perkins outside but it allows Jack to reclaim his trusty umbrella. That means the Mary Poppins dive but Perkins throws Gallagher into Aries. Austin is about to go inside, only to have Neville break it up. The distraction lets TJ kick the rope into Gallagher, setting up the Detonation Kick for the pin at 9:56.

Rating: C+. This is what 205 Live had needed to do for months now: build up some other stop stars aside from just the champion and his #1 contender. Odds are this sets up a tag match, which should be rather entertaining if it's given enough time to go somewhere. I liked this match more than I was expecting to and I'm glad they're giving Perkins more of a push.

Titus O'Neil congratulates Apollo Crews on his impending fatherhood but Titus wants to know how Apollo is going to make an impact. The best idea Titus has is joining the Titus Brand. Maybe Crews could get into travel with the Apollo Cruise where they'll dance to Apollo Blues. If that goes badly, they can go to the new law firm: Apollo Sues. Titus gives him a card but Crews doesn't seem convinced.

The Hardys are glad to be back and look forward to working with the new talent. Sheamus and Cesaro come up to talk about how much they respect the Hardys but it'll be an honor to win the titles from such legends.

Sasha Banks vs. Nia Jax vs. Alexa Bliss vs. Mickie James

Winner gets Bayley at Payback. Nia cleans house to start but Bliss bails to the floor, allowing Mickie and Sasha to dropkick Nia outside. Sasha gets the better of it and sends Mickie outside for a dive onto all three as we take a break. Back with Alexa in control until she charges into a slam from Nia.

Jax slams all three on top of each other before swinging Mickie around in a cobra clutch. It's off to a bearhug on Banks with Nia easily suplexing her way out of Sasha's guillotine counter. Mickie armbars her way out of a choke but Nia throws her at Sasha in the

corner. Alexa goes up top to try a dropkick but thinks twice when Nia stares her down. A missed charge sends Nia into the post, allowing everyone else to hammer on each other.

The double knees in the corner get two on Bliss with Nia making the save. Mickie gets pulled outside as well and it's down to Sasha vs. Alexa. James has to break up a Bank Statement but here's Nia to knock Mickie off the top. The Samoan drop plants Banks but Bliss runs in for the 13:44.

Rating: C+. The time brings this one down a bit though it was a lot of fun until the end. Bliss winning, especially in her hometown, is a nice touch though they need to stop having Jax get THIS close, only to slip up after dominating everything in sight. It's the right call though as Banks vs. Bayley is still going to be a major showdown one day in the future.

Show says he'll beat up Strowman.

Finn Balor vs. Curt Hawkins

Coup de Grace finishes Hawkins in 36 seconds. Balor isn't even sweating.

Chris Jericho can't stop thinking about his rematch with Kevin Owens and thinks America deserves a better face. If he wins the title back he heads to Smackdown, but it doesn't matter if it's Smackdown, Velocity, Sunday Night Heat or Nitro: the Friends of Jericho will follow him anywhere. Chris: "You hear them Tom?" Mike Rome: "It's Mike, Chris." We get the Bugs Bunny/Daffy Duck routine as Mike forgets his own name. Chris: "You know what happens when you don't know your own name?" Elias Samson wanders up and plays his guitar so Jericho lets Mike/Tom off the list and puts Samson on instead.

Bray Wyatt asks what we're afraid of. Maybe the unknown? The dark? Or the monster underneath our bed. Fear lives in his house and we hear about how much Bray wants to hear Randy Orton scream. I love Bray but these things are getting really tiresome as there's no reason to believe he has a chance of winning and he'll just keep plugging along like the loss means nothing.

Alicia Fox and Dana Brooke are watching clips from 205 Live when Emma comes up to say Dana was laughing at Alicia getting powder thrown in her face all week long. Fox doesn't want to be Dana's friend anymore. Dana calls Emma out for lying but Emma says that's

what she gets for standing on her own two feet.

Jeff Hardy vs. Cesaro

Cesaro takes him down to start but gets sent to the floor for a clothesline from the apron. Jeff seems to be banged up on the floor and gets caught with the running uppercut. Back from a break with Cesaro getting two and having his chinlock broken in a hurry. Jeff's knee seems to be fine but Cesaro nails him with the springboard corkscrew elbow for two.

Jeff fights up and gets the same off the Whisper in the Wind, followed by the Twisting Stunner, which isn't the Twist of Fate but you can't expect the announcers to be able to really call the moves properly. I mean, it might run them afoul of JBL and that just sounds scary. Anyway, the Swanton is good for the pin at 13:01.

Rating: C. They billed this as a dream match which is quite the stretch, though I do appreciate WWE treating Jeff like a legend. I know it's been nearly ten years but Jeff is a former three time World Champion. You have to treat someone like that as something special and it's a good sign that WWE is doing just that.

Golden Truth and Kalisto are injured but here are Heath Slater and Rhyno, the latter of whom is eating cheese whiz and crackers. Slater is VERY excited about being back on Raw but they both hide when Strowman comes by. Rhyno even dropped his crackers!

Big Show vs. Braun Strowman

The brawl starts in the aisle with Strowman tossing him into the barricade. Show sends him into it as well and we actually start the match. A baseball slide of all things puts Strowman on the floor but he comes back with a running dropkick of his own. Strowman gets in a suplex and drops an elbow as they're moving in very slow motion here.

Show escapes the powerslam and hits a splash in the corner. The chokeslam gets two and Strowman's powerslam is good for the same. Braun gets crotched on top but knocks Show away, only to dive into the KO Punch for two. With nothing else working, Show goes up top but gets superplexed down.....and they break the ring for the no contest 12:36.

Rating: D. Nope. I know the ring breaking spot is going to get a lot of attention but this COMPLETELY missed the point of the match and

did nothing to push Strowman. You know who looked good here? Show, who hung move for move with a guy who TURNED OVER AN AMBULANCE LAST WEEK.

We've already established that Strowman, who didn't even win here, can beat Show and be the bigger monster but that wasn't even shown here. No, what we saw was Big Show getting to prove that he's on equal footing with Strowman, which doesn't make Strowman look unique. That makes Strowman look like he has an equal, which completely misses the point.

Strowman gets up and poses, which I guess is WWE's version of a follow up, to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. This was a bit of a rough one as they certainly did a lot of stuff but the Strowman stuff felt really bad. Beating up Kalisto and Golden Truth and then going to a draw with Big Show doesn't exactly make me think he can beat Reigns or Brock Lesnar (the guy that regularly destroys Show).

The wrestling wasn't great but the show definitely felt like it was moving around at a faster pace, which is an upgrade over some weeks. There's good stuff to be seen here, but Payback is really holding things up. You have one of the new Raw guys being stuck waiting to face the Smackdown Champion in a match he has almost no chance of winning and Jericho teasing going to Smackdown while losing to Joe.

There's enough stuff on here to make me look forward to the pay per view but I'm not wild on some of the directions. Strowman's booking made my head hurt and Hardy vs. Cesaro wasn't the most thrilling thing in the world but I like Bliss getting the title shot and Joe being treated like a monster. Overall though, Strowman was the focus here and that REALLY bombed, but at least Big Show looks like an equal to the unstoppable monster.

Results

Samoa Joe b. Chris Jericho – Koquina Clutch

Anderson and Gallows b. Enzo Amore/Big Cass – Anderson threw Amore knees first into the corner

TJ Perkins b. Jack Gallagher – Devastation Kick

Alexa Bliss b. Nia Jax, Mickie James and Sasha Banks – Samoan Drop to James

Finn Balor b. Curt Hawkins – Coup de Grace

Jeff Hardy b. Cesaro – Swanton Bomb

Big Show vs. Braun Strowman went to a no contest when the ring broke

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Monday Night Raw – January 31, 1994: The Tax And Coin Toss Show

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 31, 1994

Location: Fernwood Resort, Bushkill, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 1,600

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Irwin R. Schyster

We're finally on a new taping cycle and that means we're getting ready to start the build towards Wrestlemania X. In that case we need to have some clarification on the World Title situation, which is one heck of a mess at this point. As for tonight though, it's the 1-2-3 Kid vs. Johnny Polo, which would be one heck of a drug conversation. Let's get to it.

We take a quick look at the Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger situation. They

tied in the Royal Rumble so we need to know who faces Yokozuna for the title first. The solution? A coin toss! I know face vs. face was rare back then but a coin toss? Really?

Opening sequence.

For reasons I don't even want to comprehend, IRS is on commentary. He offers the loser of the coin toss a pair of Buffalo Bills t-shirts. Luger is originally from Buffalo so he might be happy with those.

Marty Jannetty vs. Johnny Polo

Jannetty is replacing an injured Kid who is relegated to commentary. Here's what I don't get: the Kid injured his leg on January 17 and the commentary that announced his match vs. Polo was recorded after the Rumble on January 22. So why in the world did they even bother announcing the match in the first place? The 1-2-3 Kid vs. Johnny Polo isn't exactly a masterpiece so how does Marty being in there instead make any difference?

Anyway Polo insults the crowd and the Kid so Marty ties him up with the microphone cord and laughs at him a lot. Polo is sent outside and teases leaving but gets slammed in the aisle instead. Hey now, he might have had a reservation at Cracker Barrel. Back in and Marty takes a shot to the face and seems a bit, ahem.....oh you know what I mean. Back from a break with Marty botching his half of a backdrop (dude it's a simple front flip) and getting caught in a chinlock. Normally I'd say he can't botch anything out of there but you never can tell. Marty fights up and a bad looking collision sends Polo outside.

Back in and we hit the pinfall reversal sequence before Johnny slows things back down with a headlock. Polo goes up to for the "I'm only going up top so I can dive onto your raised boot" spot and it's time for the comeback. Marty crotches him on top but charges into the post. The Rocker Dropper finishes Polo a few seconds later.

Rating: D+. Thank goodness Polo was trying here because it was clear that Marty was in no condition to do anything. I still don't get how anyone could ever make it back on TV when they look like that. It's clear that Marty, who could wrestle circles around a lot of people when he's clean, is in bad shape when he can't take a backdrop. Why was he allowed to go back out there without getting in some real trouble?

IRS goes after the Kid post match and loses his briefcase somewhere in between. Cue Razor Ramon, who has recovered his gold chains which IRS stole. It seems that Kid took it, which makes me wonder how IRS couldn't catch a guy on a broken leg.

After a break, IRS blames Marty for the chains being stolen.

Jack Tunney explains the World Title situation and the weird coin toss/mini tournament idea (there are brackets for this thing) for Wrestlemania. There will be guest referees for both matches. Of note: a Videocassette of the Year Award on the wall featuring Survivor Series 1987. Can we watch that instead? This whole thing is actually rather complicated, or at least moreso than it probably should have been. Today it would just be a triple threat so it's better in a way....I think?

Bam Bam Bigelow vs. Miguel Rosado

IRS officially challenges Marty for next week, which he'll accept if he has any guts. Normally those would be fighting words but in Marty's condition, he'll probably build a swing set shaped like a goldfish. Bigelow beats on him, beats on him some more, shrugs off a lame comeback and finishes with a falling headbutt.

It's coin toss time, which includes another explanation of the rules for the live crowd. I have no idea why Tony Garea, Blackjack Lanza and various other yes men are there too. Luger wins and gets to face Yokozuna first (he would have faced Crush otherwise) and can't wait to wrestle twice at Wrestlemania. Bret is upset about having to face Owen but there's no way around it.

Kwang vs. Rich Myers

Kwang is Savio Vega in a masked Japanese gimmick. Some chops and a spinwheel kick in the corner stagger Myers as we go to Owen Hart on the phone. Owen is the real winner of the coin toss because he gets to prove that he's better than Bret. The fans are doing the Wave in the tiny arena as this boring squash continues, complete with martial arts posing. Kwang ducks a middle rope crossbody and finishes with a superkick.

Rating: D-. It says a lot when a phone call is the highlight of the match. Normally I get annoyed at fans for doing something like the Wave but.....yeah it must get a bit boring with all of these squashes in a row. Kwang was a goofy gimmick and it's pretty clear you're

done when your name might come on screen during an Adam West Batman fight.

Time for the Wrestlemania Report and we recap the World Title situation for a ridiculous third time. It REALLY shouldn't be that hard.

Paul Bearer knows the Undertaker is coming back.

Earthquake vs. Corey Student

That's a horrible name, even by jobber standards. Student goes after him to start and is thrown down even faster than you would expect him to be. An over the shoulder backbreaker makes things even worse, even with IRS saying it's an illegal hold. A slam sets up the Earthquake to finish the squash, which Vince actually called it earlier on.

Rating: D. Of all the people they could pick to push as a face, it's Earthquake? If nothing else it's kind of amazing that it was only three and a half years ago that Earthquake was the top heel in the company. Nothing to see here, other than that really horrible jobber's name. Seriously: Corey Student?

Marty and Razor accept IRS' challenge with Marty going on an anti-government rant.

We run down next week's card to wrap it up.

Overall Rating: D. It wasn't a good show or anything but above all else it felt like something important was actually going on here. That's a problem that plagues so many of the shows from this era (and a lot of them today as well) but when things feel important, even a series of jobber matches are a bit easier to sit through.

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Monday Night Raw – January 24, 1994: Somebody Do Something

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 24, 1994

Location: Richmond Coliseum, Richmond, Virginia

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jim Ross

Here's a rare one as we have a TV show taped before a pay per view yet serving as the fallout show. There's a chance that the commentary has been updated (remember that the Rumble was on a Saturday so they would have extra time) but this could be an interesting case. Let's get to it.

Lex Luger vs. Austin Steele

The commentary has indeed been done post-Rumble as the announcers talk about Luger being a co-winner. Steele has a great name but looks like Buddy Landel, which isn't the best thing in the world in 1994. Luger starts with the right hands and a pair of hiptosses but Steele actually gets in a few shots to the ribs to take over. Lex grabs a belly to back followed by a regular superplex for the pin. I don't think I've ever seen him use that as a finisher and...well it was just a superplex so there isn't much to say about it.

Rating: D. Just a match here and the ending didn't exactly do much. It's a smart move to have Luger on here two nights after he won a major match. I know the fans didn't get that at the time but at least they're keeping him on TV to keep him hot. You would think he'd be a bit more upset but he can't actually say that until next week.

We hit the Royal Rumble recap to cover everything major. Todd does screw up and say the show was last night (it was two nights ago).

Jeff Jarrett vs. John Paul

Jeff starts with a dropkick but gets small packaged and sunset flipped for two each. The comeback doesn't take long though as JR brings up a good point about Jarrett: for someone who wants to be a country singer, he certainly dresses oddly for his wrestling matches. Jarrett misses an elbow and gets rolled up for two, followed by some uppercuts to the jaw. Jeff comes right back with a rollup and a handful of trunks for the pin.

Rating: D+. Well it was better than Luger's match. I know his later stuff wasn't the most interesting in the world but DEAR GOODNESS Jeff was so much worse back at this point. The gimmick, the look and the wrestling itself really didn't work and that's a dangerous combination. It's bad enough when one of them isn't up to par but with 1994 Jarrett, I'm not sure any of them were.

Men on a Mission vs. Headshrinkers

Men on a Mission are replacing the Harts, which is annoying as I wanted to see the original match. Mo sends Fatu into the corner in one of the only successful things you'll ever see him do. The Samoans head outside for a breather as this is already dragging. For some reason Mo tries a faceplant and is almost immediately superkicked down.

It's off to Mabel to scare Fatu, who actually tries a slam. A pair of superkicks actually bring Mabel down to a knee but for some reason Fatu tries a suplex. That earns him a big boot to the face before it's back to Mo as we take a break. Back with Mo taking a double clothesline and giving one of the most bewildered faces I've ever seen. Mo is sent into the steps and chopped down but does manage to get in a sunset flip.

Fatu is right there for a save, which probably isn't necessary considering it's freaking Mo (Did I mention I'm not a fan of his?). A double headbutt gets two more but Mo manages to fall into the ropes to crotch Fatu. The hot tag brings in Mabel for all of his usual stuff, only to have the Samoans knock him outside. Mo takes another double headbutt and a top rope splash for the pin.

Rating: D-. Who decided that Men on a Mission should have gone this far? Being a big Headshrinkers fan helped a bit but this was hardly the easiest thing in the world to watch. Mabel was good for a big man but....yeah Mo was horrible. Like horrible horrible. The look on

his face when he got beaten up was amusing though.

Adam Bomb vs. Tommy Angel

Angel shrugs off some offense and scores with a few dropkicks, only to get shoved into the corner for a stomping. Bomb dropkicks him in the ribs as the announcers take shots at Bill Clinton. JR switches over to blaming Harvey Wipelman for screwing up Bomb's career as Adam hits a top rope clothesline. The Atom Smasher (powerbomb) puts Tommy away.

Rating: D. Angel was a regular jobber around this time so he was able to put on a watchable match. The same could be said for Bomb, who was a good power guy but with a gimmick based on being the result of a nuclear disaster who sounded like he was from southern Alabama was a bit too much for him to overcome.

Sparky Plugg loves cars.

Doink the Clown vs. Joey Stallings

Dink has an invisible dog...and the jobber actually sells for it. JR: "Stallings is a sandwich or two short of a picnic." Doink gets two off a belly to belly and it's off to an armbar. Back up and Stallings grabs a bad looking side slam, only to miss a dropkick. Doink grabs a powerslam and finishes with the Whoopee Cushion.

Rating: D-. I'm not sure what there is to say about this one. Do you really brag about beating someone who was attacked by a non-existent dog? I know 1994 was kind of a dumb time but are we really to the point where jobbers are scared of a tiny clown's invisible dog. I....can't believe I actually had to type that.

Tyrone Knox vs. Shawn Michaels

Knox has a good look. They run the ropes to start with Shawn taking him down and dropping an elbow across his back. Knox's offense doesn't go very far as Shawn gets in a hiptoss and stomp to the head. We hit the chinlock and Vince confirms that the WWF will NOT be replacing the NFL on CBS. Thanks for that boss. Knox gets in a few headbutts (JR: "YOU GO TYRONE!") but it's a superkick and the piledriver (good one too) for the pin.

Rating: D+. Shockingly Shawn has the best match on the card. It helps when you have someone who doesn't look like a complete loser and Knox at least looked good at times. It's still just a squash but when you have a decent opponent and one heck of a piledriver to end

the show, things are at least a bit better.

Overall Rating: F. Oh yeah this one was bad. They knew they had to be careful with what they could say in the arena and that makes for a REALLY dull show. Just long and boring here, which really shouldn't be the case on a show that is only about forty five minutes long when you take out commercials. The new cycle should help but this was really boring.

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Monday Night Raw – January 17, 1994: A Phone Call From The Future

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 17, 1994

Location: Richmond Coliseum, Richmond, Virginia

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Crush

It's the go home show for the Royal Rumble and that means it's time for a good old fashioned hard sell show with a big brawl at the end. Unfortunately it also means more about Undertaker vs. Yokozuna to help set up one of the worst matches of all time. This show starts the second year of the show so let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's Tag Team Title change, including the false finish for some reason.

Opening sequence.

Crush is on commentary. I didn't know he could talk for five minutes straight, let alone an hour. We get some ranting about how Crush is going to win the Royal Rumble and how horrible Savage is.

Owen Hart vs. Terry Austin

It's weird to see Owen as a face with Bret in his corner. Owen takes him down and hits a monkey flip without the flip. We hit the chinlock as Crush is actually complimenting Owen on his good stuff, which you rarely hear from a heel comment. It's time to work on the arm as we go to a phone call from Stan Lane at Madison Square Garden for a live report on the Tag Team Title match. This is a bit more interesting as the title match wouldn't take place for another week. Owen throws him down for a top rope elbow, followed by the missile dropkick. The Sharpshooter ends Austin in a hurry.

Rating: D+. Nothing to see here but Crush said "Brudda" every other word and it's going to be a long night. Owen was starting to come into his own around this time and he's on the verge of launching through the roof when his brother gave him one of the best rubs of all time. You can hear the seeds in the commentary too as we keep hearing about how their issues have been smoothed over.

Owen is happy for Marty Jannetty/1-2-3 Kid but he wouldn't mind the Quebecers getting the titles back so the brothers can have a shot. Bret says about the same but knows Marty and the Kid would give them a shot too.

Tatanka vs. George South

South is a long time NWA jobber who Ric Flair always wanted to have a classic match with but the company would never let it happen. Scott hammers away in the corner and they trade clotheslines. We hear from Lane again as the title match has begun with the champs showing a lot of fire. A ram into the buckle sends Tatanka onto the warpath and it's a series of chops, capped off by the top rope chop, for the pin.

Video on Alundra Blayze.

Here are Yokozuna and Mr. Fuji for a chat. Jim Cornette isn't here because he's over in Tokyo at a press conference to get ready for

Yokozuna's big celebration. Cue Paul Bearer with the big casket to scare Yokozuna. This takes forever and of course Undertaker is inside. Yokozuna wobbles away after taking nearly six minutes for the whole thing.

Next week: The Hart Brothers vs. the Headshrinkers. That actually sounds pretty good.

Diesel vs. Scott Powers

Diesel hits Snake Eyes and a side slam before throwing it to Shawn for some cheating on the floor. There's something so evil about a guy who can beat up the jobber like that but allows his buddy to get in a few shots of his own. We go back to Lane at MSG and THOSE DASTARDLY QUEBECERS HAVE STOLEN THE TITLES BACK! As we try to digest that, Diesel powerbombs Powers and then boots him in the face (odd choice of a sequence) wraps it up.

Rating: D. This was about what you would expect but the amazing thing is that Diesel would be World Champion in about ten months. Then again that's the kind of thing you can never guess in wrestling, which is one of the most fun aspects. Diesel was starting to get good and only needed a few more months to put it all together.

We hit the Royal Rumble report with a look at most of the card and everyone in the Rumble.

Randy Savage vs. IRS

Vince calls Savage the Joe Montana of the WWF. IRS actually takes over to start and sends Savage into the corner and then to the floor. I guess Savage is devastated over the title change. Crush continues to surprise me as he basically turns his commentary into a long heel promo on Savage, only to be cut off by Savage's comeback taking us into a break.

Back with Savage being dropped across the barricade, which Crush hopes will shut his big mouth. A suplex sets up a chinlock (pretty clearly a choke) for a bit until Savage misses a charge into the corner. Savage is sent outside and we take a second break. Back again with Savage caught in an abdominal stretch before hitting the third chinlock of the match. Another quick comeback sees Savage slam him and go up for the elbow, only to have Crush come in for the DQ.

Rating: D+. The chinlocks took the life out of this but I'm glad

they didn't have IRS, who is challenging for the Intercontinental Title at the Rumble, lose clean here. You could see that Savage had lost a lot of steam at this point but he was still able to have a perfectly acceptable match, especially if he had someone willing to put in a bit more effort than IRS here.

Post match the Mini-Rumble breaks out to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Horrible show here but that's pretty standard for this era. The 94 Rumble wasn't the most interesting thing in the world and they really didn't do much of a job of featuring Luger, especially when he's possibly the biggest star in the whole thing. It really does feel like a show where anyone could win, but that doesn't always make for the best match. If nothing else we do have to sit through the build for Undertaker vs. Yokozuna and that wouldn't be good for anyone.

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