

Monday Night Raw – February 19, 1996: On The Road Again

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 19, 1996

Location: Cincinnati Gardens, Cincinnati, Ohio

Attendance: 8,500

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're done with In Your House VI and the big story is that it's time for Wrestlemania. There's barely anything to talk about coming out of last night's show other than Bret is still champion, Diesel vs. Undertaker is pretty clear for Wrestlemania and it's a countdown until Shawn wins the title. Let's get to it.

Sunny, on the beach in a black swimsuit (my goodness) tells us that this show might not be appropriate for all fans.

We recap last night's main event with Undertaker pulling Diesel through the mat.

Intercontinental Title: Razor Ramon vs. Goldust

Goldust is defending and I had forgotten he was even champion at this point. Marlena tries to blow smoke in Razor's face to no effect (not clear how) and it's time to rip off Goldust's robe. A clothesline puts the champ on the floor for a breather as Lawler wonders if Goldust likes being manhandled. Goldust gets in a backdrop and we take a break. Back with Goldust grabbing a sleeper but getting crotched on top a few seconds later. Razor gives him a fall away slam over the top for a bad sounding crash. Jerry: "He probably broke his golden globes!" The belly to back superplex sends Goldust running up the aisle for the countout.

Rating: D. Nothing match here as it felt like they were out there for about two minutes worth of action. It's pretty clear that this is going to be setting up something in the future and probably would have had it not been for all of Razor's issues at the time. Bad match though and not a good way to start off a show.

Post match Razor grabs the mic and begs Roddy Piper to give him a fight with Goldust because he doesn't want his kids watching that stuff on TV.

Undertaker walks out of a casket.

Slam Jam recaps almost everything from last night and eats up a lot of time.

BodyDonnas vs. Aldo Montoya/Barry Horowitz

And never mind as Vader beats up the jobbers before the match starts.

The Ultimate Warrior is coming back.

Sunny sings Happy Birthday to Mr. President. I smell a stupid impression.

Bob Backlund campaigns in the crowd.

Ringmaster vs. Marty Jannetty

Vince during Ringmaster's entrance: "You talk about a stone cold man." Austin isn't interested in having any of this wrestling stuff and sends Marty outside earlier. The Stun Gun sends us to a break and we come back with Austin driving a knee into the ribs. We hit the STF and get some LOUD spot calling, which is the kind of thing Austin would complain about today. We hit a neck crank as the fans aren't that thrilled with Austin as a submission guy. Marty makes his really simple comeback but gets caught in the Million Dollar Dream for the fast submission.

Rating: D+. Marty is a good choice to do a job here as the fans like him and he's certainly going to put on a solid performance in defeat. Austin really needed a feud though as this character is hardly interesting and isn't going anywhere at the moment. To be fair though he had to start somewhere and this is better than a lot of the nonsense that some characters got.

Mankind is coming and might even bring his rat.

Tatanka vs. Undertaker

Undertaker chokes Tatanka into the corner like he's the Undertaker and he's facing Tatanka. A Samoan drop gives Tatanka a breather but here's Diesel with an ax to steal a cameraman as we go to a break. Back with Diesel hacking up Undertaker's casket and Undertaker fighting out of a chinlock. Old School looks to set up the Tombstone but Tatanka counters into a DDT. Diesel is STILL breaking up the casket as the Tombstone puts Tatanka away.

Rating: D-. I'm almost never a fan of a match happening as a

backdrop for the angle or whatever else you would call Diesel breaking up a casket. Tatanka can't be around much longer after this as he's certainly not around for Wrestlemania and it's not like he's been interesting in years at this point.

And now, a new twist on the Billionaire Ted skits: Larry Fling Live on BNN (Billionaire News Network). After some stupid jokes, Randy from Sarasota and Terry from Tampa call in. Huckster needs time off because of a shoe to the eye. The third caller is Jane from Hanoi (Ted Turner's wife) and this goes nowhere. Larry brings up the predatory practices that Vince whined about for months and Turner suddenly can't speak about all the charges against him. More next week.

Undertaker and Paul Bearer are angry/distraught to end the show.

Overall Rating: F+. What am I even watching anymore? I know they're getting ready for Wrestlemania but that doesn't mean everything is all ok. The Billionaire Ted skits, which are closing the show almost every week now, just aren't funny. They're basically Vince's therapy airing on TV and that doesn't make for good TV for anyone other than him. The wrestling is the mess that you would expect and these shows get worse and worse every single week.

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Monday Night Raw – February

5, 1996: They're Having Fun

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 5, 1996

Location: Civic Auditorium, Stockton, California

Attendance: 2,904

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're coming up on In Your House VI but unfortunately we're starting this month at the end of a taping cycle, meaning a burned out crowd and weak writing. The big story at the moment is the upcoming Bret Hart vs. Diesel cage match for the WWF World Title but Undertaker is looming as well. Let's get to it.

Shawn Michaels/Diesel vs. Yokozuna/British Bulldog

Vince and Jerry go out of their way to point out that Shawn and Diesel are undefeated as a team. Camp Cornette has been having problems of late so there are a few variables here. Shawn and the Bulldog have a posedown to start until they take turns sending each other to the floor. Yokozuna tries to sneak up on Shawn (as well as a 600+ man can sneak) so Diesel picks Shawn up and tosses him to knock Yokozuna down.

It's off to Diesel vs. Yokozuna as Vince plugs those stupid Billionaire Ted skits. A Samoan drop (You think Vince knows what to call that?) drops Diesel and Bulldog low bridges Shawn out to the floor. The delayed vertical suplex plants Shawn as the announcers play fantasy bookers about the World Title situation.

Back from a break with Shawn in more trouble (makes sense) and Yokozuna putting on a nerve hold. Shawn finally avoids the big splash and Diesel comes in to clean house. I know he's not the most popular booker but I've always enjoyed watching Nash do his big power stuff. Everything breaks down and Shawn superkicks Yokozuna to the floor for the countout.

Rating: C-. Not terrible here and for once I can completely get the idea of not having someone get pinned. If they're setting up Yokozuna as a loser, it's a stretch to complain about getting pinned by Shawn so having him get knocked out because he's too fast is a smart way to go about it.

Post match Cornette yells at Yokozuna, who beats him up to turn

face.

Someone is coming and he's missing part of an ear.

Hakushi vs. 1-2-3 Kid

This could be good. Feeling out process to start as neither guy wants to go too fast. Kid tries to spin around a bit and gets caught by a superkick underneath the chin. A quick toss to the floor has Hakushi in trouble and a flip dive over the top draws absolutely no reaction. I don't know if the crowd is just bored or what but that was SILENCE. We take a break and come back with Kid getting dropkicked out of the air to put both guys down. Another kick to the face puts the Kid on the floor and Hakushi follows him out with a nice dive. Back in and Hakushi goes up but gets butterfly superplexed back down for the pin.

Rating: B-. This got better near the end but that crowd reaction tells you a lot. You would think a match between two high fliers like these guys would have gotten at least some kind of a reaction, but when the Kid's feud is setting up a "loser wears a diaper" match, it's not the easiest thing in the world to get behind.

Clarence Mason is annoyed that Vader isn't reinstated and promises to sue the WWF.

Video of Vader attacking Gorilla Monsoon to earn himself a suspension.

Monsoon says his injuries will heal and apologizes to the fans for losing his cool. He knows Roddy Piper will be fine as interim boss.

WWF World Title: Undertaker vs. Bret Hart

If this doesn't wake them up, nothing will. Undertaker is challenging and throws Bret around to start before a headbutt gives us a stalemate. An uppercut puts Bret down and we hit the always stupid smother hold. Old School is loaded up but here's Diesel for a distraction to break it up. Bret takes over as Diesel sits in for some commentary as this is still going slowly. It's time to go after the leg with Bret dropping elbows and wrapping it around the post.

Back from a break with Undertaker hitting a belly to back suplex and sending Bret into the barricade. Old School connects the second time but the referee gets bumped on the Tombstone attempt. Bret escapes into a rollup for no count and it's time to go back to the leg.

That's enough for Diesel as he jumps Bret from behind and Jackknifes

Undertaker. We go to a second break and come back with....the match having ended during the break. Eh to be fair it was pretty much over already.

Rating: C+. It's a shame that triple threats weren't a thing in this company yet as this three way feud really deserved everyone fighting at the same time. It's interesting stuff and I get why they didn't want to have Undertaker do a job here, especially on a TV match. I can't complain much about a non-finish on Raw, though the fans might when Nitro had a title change two weeks earlier.

And now, a Billionaire Ted sketch to wrap things up. It's a press conference with Ted saying he'll do anything to put the WWF out of business while Nacho Man and Huckster try to fight each other. Ted doesn't care about losing millions of dollars of stockholders' money because he's just having fun. Maggle! These things are so petty and such an embarrassment.

The show was pre-empted on February 12 so next up is February 19.

Overall Rating: C+. The wrestling was better here but this was actually the go home show for the pay per view due to the show not being on next week. In that sense this was a pretty strong show with four out of the five pay per view matches getting some time, which is a lot better than you would normally expect from Raw. The three way feud continues to have my attention but it's all just filling in time until Shawn gets the belt anyway.

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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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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 backsplash 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 – Liontamer

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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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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Monday Night Raw – July 15, 1996: I Need Some Nitro

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 15, 1996

Location: Brown County Expo, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Attendance: 4,660

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

It's FINALLY time to wrap up this horrible cycle as it's the go home show for the dreadful In Your House IX. The big story coming out of last week is Sid joining forces with Shawn Michaels and Ahmed Johnson in their fight against Camp Cornette, leading to a main event that serves no purpose other than to set up Summerslam. Let's get to it.

Sunday's main event participants almost got in a fight earlier today but were cut off by an opening sequence. You never know when one of those things might save you.

Intercontinental Title: Bart Gunn vs. Ahmed Johnson

It's going to be a very long night. Ahmed is defending because he was talented enough to get a singles title. Bart is half of the Tag Team Champions and has Sunny as a cowgirl so I'm thinking advantage

Gunn. Ahmed starts with the power by throwing Bart over off a hiptoss. A clothesline drops Ahmed and it's time to stomp a lot. Bart starts working on the arm with some slow cranking and a wrap around the post.

We hit an armbar on the mat before Bart puts on a hammerlock with his feet. The referee finally catches Sunny cheating but Ahmed charges shoulder first into the post. That means a cross armbreaker as Vince goes into a mini tirade about Warrior walking out and not being above the rest of the roster. The arm goes into the buckle and we take a break. Geez Vince we're already watching this horrible show. What more do you need? Back with Ahmed crotching Bart on top and Ahmed knocking him off the ropes for a big crash. A spinebuster and the Pearl River Plunge retain the title.

Rating: F. You could hear the crowd more and more every time Bart worked on the arm. This was WAY too long and boring with Bart Gunn being as uninteresting of a challenger that they could find. It was a horrible idea all around and I can't imagine anyone actually thought this would work.

Shawn Michaels says he'll win tonight and again on Sunday.

Marc Mero vs. T.L. Hopper

So last week we got rid of the wrestling garbageman but tonight we have the wrestling plumber. On the way to the ring, Goldust's usher runs out and gives Sable a gold package but she throws it down. To celebrate the passing of the torch, we get a look at Hopper pinning Droese over the weekend. Oh and plumbing videos. Why would those be recorded?

Mero takes him down and works on a headlock, followed by a dropkick that made no contact, even with the camera cutting away. We go to a split screen with Camp Cornette celebrating something we can't hear because the audio doesn't work. Hopper takes him down for a headscissors on the mat as the crowd is just GONE.

Can you blame them after the last few weeks of this show? I'm sure the empty seats are just a coincidence. There are long stretches of this match going on and there's just nothing to talk about. They're just slowly punching each other as Lawler and Vince make every stupid plumber joke you can imagine.

We take a break and the silence when we come back is eerie. Steve

Austin joins us and I really don't care what he says (he's ready for Mero on Sunday in case you're wondering) because it's instantly more interesting than whatever these two are doing in the ring. Lawler starts turning into a sexist as there are even more empty seats. Mero hits a running knee lift and FINALLY finishes him with the big left hand.

Rating: F-. Earlier today I was reading Chris Jericho's first book and he talked about being offered a chance to join the WWF in one of these roster filling spots with the stupid gimmicks. If Jericho has ever made a better career move I'd love to hear what it was because these things are absolutely death for these people's careers and it's no wonder you never hear from them again. I don't remember being this bored in a match for a long time and that includes Gunn vs. Johnson, which I didn't think would be topped for years.

Camp Cornette says they'll win.

Here's a three minute Undertaker video. Do they just want everyone to switch over to Nitro? I'd be glad to at this point. You know what? That's not a bad idea. Here's a match from the same week's Nitro for the sake of keeping you awake.

Chris Benoit vs. Eddie Guerrero

Think this will be good? Benoit is a Horseman and Eddie is starting to get a pretty solid push which would result in a US Title reign by the end of the year. Even Heenan knows this is going to be a great match. This is one of those combinations that is going to be awesome due to them knowing each other so well. Those are always fun as they don't have to waste time figuring each other out.

Benoit jumps him to start and pounds Eddie down in the corner. Hard whip into the corner and Benoit goes into Wolverine mode. And let's talk about Hogan now. Eddie gets draped over the top as Benoit keeps the advantage. Off to the chinlock rather quickly and thankfully it ends quickly. Reverse suplex is countered by Eddie and he sends Benoit to the floor with an armdrag. Big dive off the top takes both guys down.

Back inside Eddie busts out the hilo but doesn't cover. Tilt-a-whirl backbreaker puts Benoit down again. Eddie vs. Flair at the PPV is announced. Benoit gets a shot in and let's look at the NWO sign again because the Outsiders are gone. Benoit shows off those steroid muscles with a gorilla press. There's a camel clutch despite Eddie

not really resembling a camel at all. They show the crowd again and this time I can live with it because we're in a hold. There's nothing to see here so it's not as stupid of a move here.

Eddie gets up and fires off a belly to back suplex to break Benoit's momentum. Benoit is like screw that and hits a hard chop and the snap suplex gets two. Eric loves talking about the fact that he's taking a motorcycle to Sturgis for the PPV. Liontamer goes on before Jericho had copyrighted it. BIG powerbomb plants Eddie but a delay in the cover lets Eddie get out of it. Benoit works on the back with a backbreaker and then holds Eddie over the knee for a bit to add in some more pain. The guy knew how to hurt people.

Back to the chinlock which I can understand now as they've been out there for a bit and probably need some air. Benoit puts him down again and goes up but Guerrero pops up and nails a superplex to put Chris down. Solid stuff so far. Benoit gets up first as both guys were down for a bit. Eddie fires away in the corner and they slug it out. Apparently every big name is in Japan tonight.

Benoit wins the chop fest but Eddie knocks him down in the corner. Eddie tries a hurricanrana which Benoit mostly blocks as he walks to the rope. The hurricanrana hits anyway and it takes both guys over the top to the floor. Malenko pops up for no apparent reason as does Jimmy Hart. Malenko sends Benoit's head into the post and Eddie just barely beats the count back in. This led to a thirty minute or so war between Malenko and Benoit at the PPV.

Rating: B. This was your typical great match between the two but I'm not huge on the ending. It did however set up a match at the PPV which is all you can ask for. Also you don't want Benoit losing clean nor do you want Eddie losing before they get to a PPV title match. The decision was really all that they could do and thankfully we got a very good match until that point.

By the time I went into my flash drive, found that show and pulled up the review, this Undertaker video is STILL GOING.

WWF World Title: Billy Gunn vs. Shawn Michaels

Shawn is defending as we complete the Smoking Gunns two step. Billy headlocks him to start and a shoulder puts the champ (the WWF World Champ that is) down. We go to a chat with Ahmed who guarantees victory on Sunday. Billy is sent outside so Shawn kisses Sunny and

sunset flips Billy for two. The yet to be named Fameasser (minus the jump) gets two on Shawn so he crotches Billy against the post. Sunny offers a distraction so Billy can slam Shawn off the top to take over.

We take a break with Vince shouting "WHAT DOES SEX HAVE TO DO WITH THE WWF CHAMPIONSHIP???" I'll leave the context out for the sake of preventing boredom. Back with Billy putting on a chinlock and the slow beating continues. Lawler freaks out as Sunny leans over and brags about Billy winning the title. We see Camp Cornette leaving and it's time for another break. Back again with Shawn nipping up, dropping the elbow and hitting Sweet Chin Music to retain.

Rating: D. Somehow that's the best thing of the night and I assure you it has nothing to do with Sunny running all over the place. Shawn was much better than anyone else on this show but that's hardly a great accomplishment. I still don't know what anyone saw in Billy as a singles run but at least he was better than Bart.

Cornette throws coffee at Shawn to lure he and Ahmed into a beatdown. Sid drives up seconds later, nearly crashes his car, and runs over towards the brawl to end the show.

Overall Rating: Agoobwa. This might be the worst episode of Monday Night Raw that I've ever seen, and I've seen every episode in the show's history. It's very clear that they were out of gas at this point and there was no one wanting to put in any effort before we get to the worthless pay per view this weekend. Just a miserable show here which felt like it would never end, as was the case way too often around this time.

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Monday Night Raw – July 8, 1996: The Other Third Man

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 8, 1996

Location: Brown County Expo, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Attendance: 4,660

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're coming up on In Your House IX, which was barely mentioned last week. To be fair though, it's not like anyone cared about that waste of a show so they might as well just punt for the next two weeks and be done with it. The big deal this week is Ultimate Warrior's last appearance for nearly 18 years due to him leaving the company (again) before this was taped, meaning he's making "one last special appearance" here. Let's get to it.

WWF President Gorilla Monsoon suspends Ultimate Warrior indefinitely for not appearing at house shows. He can come back if he posts an appearance bond to guarantee that he'll show up as advertised in the future. Oh but he's here tonight to face Owen Hart.

Opening sequence.

Ultimate Warrior vs. Owen Hart

Owen is sent outside to start and let's go to Shawn Michaels and Ahmed Johnson to ask who they'll be teaming with on Sunday. We'll find that out later so we'll look at Warrior slamming Owen instead and then clotheslining him out to the floor. A side slam plants Owen before Warrior no sells a spinwheel kick. Owen stomps away and we take a break. Back with Owen stomping even more and hitting a loud enziguri for no cover. A missile dropkick (Owen really likes using his feet) gets two and the kickout sends Owen out to the floor. Here's the British Bulldog as Warrior Hulks Up, only to have Bulldog come in for the DQ.

Rating: C+. So that's it for the Warrior, who left because his dad died, despite not really having anything to do with his dad for

years. This got really nasty between Warrior and the company and led to them having no relationship for the better part of twenty years. Yeah Warrior was basically nuts but they completely buried him on the way out, which is rather petty.

Camp Cornette destroys Warrior post match and that's that.

Shawn and Ahmed promise to reveal the third man. This has to be a bit of a rib or something at Hogan's expense right? I mean it's not funny (nor is it meant to be) but I'm sure there's something there.

Savio Vega vs. Justin Hawk Bradshaw

Brian Pillman tries to jump Savio but gets held back. They slug it out to start with Savio hitting a spinwheel kick over the corner, only to get caught in a bulldog (required move for almost all Texans, or at least cowboys). Another slugout goes nowhere until Uncle Zebekiah punches Savio in the ribs. Lawler thinks John Travolta is the third man and Vince's reaction is exactly what you would expect.

We hit the sleeper on Savio but Bradshaw switches over to a chinlock to really mix things up. The discussion moves on to the third man, which turns into an Abbott and Costello routine. It's back to the sleeper for a long time so now let's have a phone call from Mr. Perfect to give the announcers ANYTHING else to talk about. We take a break and come back with Mr. Perfect gone and Bradshaw hitting a pumphandle slam. This match just keeps going as Savio avoids a charge and gets in a suplex to put both guys down. Zebekiah grabs the wrong foot and Savio hits a leg lariat to FINALLY end this.

Rating: D-. Sweet goodness what a mess. This is the definition of a match that just keeps going and serves no purpose other than filling in time on a show that isn't interesting in the first place. That's the major problem around this time: there's nothing interesting about these two fighting because there's no reason for them to have a fifteen minute match. Why would I want to sit and watch a long match with no story between uninteresting characters?

Zebekiah and Bradshaw use various cowboy instruments to beat Savio down.

Shawn and Ahmed still won't say who it is.

Clips from a rally before a show.

British Bulldog/Yokozuna vs. Godwinns

Jim Cornette sits in on commentary and promises a lawsuit due to the Godwinns' animals. Henry runs Bulldog over to start but Vader comes in to destroy him. Cornette tries to figure out the Warrior suspension angle and says Warrior is running from Camp Cornette but it didn't work either. Henry actually suplexes Vader before shouldering the monster down. It's off to Phineas for a horrible looking splash so Vader takes his head off with a clothesline.

Bulldog comes in and gets caught in a bulldog (make your own joke) as the slow brawling continues. We hit a chinlock on Henry before Bulldog just hits him in the back a few times. This match just keeps going as Vader hits a splash for two as Vince tells us that we can't get a promised Undertaker video. Maybe you should cut down on fifteen minute Bradshaw vs. Vega match. The Vader Bomb crushes Henry and we take a break. You know, because Vader's finisher can't beat HENRY GODWINN.

Back with Bulldog suplexing Henry for two and bringing Vader back in to keep this going. Henry actually catches a charging Vader in a powerslam, drawing Cornette off commentary and into his manager's role. The un-hot tag brings in Phineas as Cornette is back on commentary and calling his team idiots. Everything breaks down and Bulldog hits the powerslam (without even running) for the pin on Phineas.

Rating: D. Again just long here in a match that could have wrapped up about ten minutes earlier than it should have. Somehow this was an upgrade over the previous match though, perhaps due to Bulldog and Vader being a lot more entertaining than Vega or Bradshaw. This really could have been better if they just cut off about five minutes but this is what we're stuck with because Raw sucks.

Jim Cornette isn't worried about the new partner so Shawn and Ahmed bring in Sid to send Cornette through the roof to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Another way too long and boring show with a bunch of matches that fans weren't interested in seeing and a really bad way of sending Warrior off. The Sid idea was about as good as they were going to get and I'm fine with the WHO IS THE THIRD MAN thing as they did it for one night and made it fine enough to work. This cycle can't end soon enough though so we can get on to the Summerslam build.

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Monday Night Raw – July 1, 1996: Of Course It's Shawn

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 1, 1996

Location: Brown County Expo, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Attendance: 4,660

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

It's Shawn-a-Mania running wild here as Shawn is the undisputed king of the company and rolling over anyone who dares challenge him. Unfortunately this isn't exactly saving them in the ratings but there's only so much they can do against Nitro and the Outsiders at this point, especially with British Bulldog as his top challenger in the previous few months. Let's get to it.

Shawn Michaels vs. Marty Jannetty

Non-title. Shawn has the Kliq Cam with him to make sure he's even less interesting than he already was. Jim Cornette is on the floor with the New Rockers to help set up Shawn vs. Vader. They do the big lockup to start as Vince talks about Canada Day. Feeling out process to start with Shawn nipping back up off an early takedown. Some armdrags put Shawn down again and it's actually all Marty early on. You know Shawn isn't going to sell for that long though and he makes a quick comeback with a few armdrags of his own, followed by a

clothesline.

Leif pulls his partner out of the way of Sweet Chin Music and offers a distraction so Marty can take over again. There's a backdrop to drop Shawn on his back but Marty spends too much time posing. Back from a break with Marty getting two off a snapmare (yes a snapmare) and putting on a chinlock. Shawn's comeback is cut off when his shoulder goes into the post. Marty lands on his feet to escape a monkey flip and nails a quick clothesline. Again Shawn will have none of that and hits the forearm but doesn't go straight for the superkick.

Instead he tries a powerbomb which is countered into a hurricanrana which is countered into a sunset flip for two on Marty. We take another break and come back with Marty scoring with the Rocker Dropper but missing the top rope fist drop. Shawn goes old school with a piledriver (which, along with the teardrop suplex were completely abandoned once he went to the superkick) and the top rope elbow, followed by Sweet Chin Music for the pin.

Rating: B. These two always worked well together, dating back to their great feud in 1993 over the Intercontinental Title. Marty continues to be a very underrated performer who could have been much better remembered if he wasn't partnered with Shawn Michaels earlier in his career. Really good TV match here though which you could easily put on yet another Shawn DVD.

Leif tries to interfere and gets a superkick of his own. Shawn's manager Jose Lothario punches out Cornette, who did nothing here.

We look at Sunny suckering Phineas Godwinn in to admit he loved her before ripping him apart and sending the Smoking Gunns in for the beatdown. Hillbilly Jim and Henry Godwinn made the save, leaving Sunny to be slopped. Sunny looked great here, before the slopping that is.

Mankind vs. Duke Droese

Jake Roberts is on commentary, which isn't something you often hear. Lawler makes drunk jokes about Roberts as Mankind beats the heck out of Droese to start. We take a very early break and come back with Mankind cranking on the arm as the slow beating continues, only to be cut off by Jake asking what closet Lawler came out of. A quick spinebuster gives Duke a breather but Mankind grabs the Mandible Claw to break up....something that isn't important as Droese is out.

Rating: D. This was just a squash and it makes sense that Droese was gone after this, save for a few matches on Superstars. The guy was a wrestling garbageman though and he's only going to get so far in the company. At least things are starting to shift though and that's a really good thing for the WWF's future.

Lawler and Roberts get in an argument with Jerry slapping him, only to have Mankind put Jake down with the Claw.

Marc Mero vs. Goldust

Steve Austin is on commentary before his match with Mero at In Your House IX. Goldust is feuding with Undertaker so a cameo isn't out of the question. During the entrances, Austin starts yelling at Vince for cutting him off and you can almost hear 1998 from here. Mero punches him out to the floor to start as Austin goes off on Roberts for being old. Goldust is sent outside again as the stalling continues.

We take a break and come back with Mero knocking Goldust around ringside before he gets caught in a chinlock. Make that three chinlocks as this just keeps going. Goldust drops a fist to the head and we hit ANOTHER chinlock as we go to a second break. Back with Mero missing an elbow drop and Goldust hammering away with right hands. That's enough excitement so it's off to a REVERSE chinlock.

Mero gets back up and charges into a back elbow, setting up a powerslam for two. A double clothesline puts both of them down because this match hasn't involved enough laying around. Marlena gets very close to Sable as Mero makes his comeback. The camera stays on the women and cuts back to see Goldust hitting the Curtain Call for the pin.

Rating: D-. Oh sweet goodness what a boring match. This was a bunch of sitting around waiting on anything interesting to happen and then not being surprised when nothing happened. These guys are better than this and I have no idea why they had such a horrible match with such little effort involved.

Overall Rating: C-. The opener is really good but it's not enough to save the rest of the show. This show went up against the go home show for Bash at the Beach 1996 (as in the Third Man) so the follow up from this mess is going against Hogan's big first appearance from this show. Well at least it should as Hogan didn't debut in the Black and White until the NEXT week for reasons of WCW is stupid.

Either way, this show sucked, save for Shawn of course, which is just how things worked in 1996.

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Monday Night Raw – March 25, 2002 (First WWF Draft): This Might Be A Bad Idea

This seemed appropriate given what we're seeing now. Starting tonight, I'll be putting up alternating reviews from the original Brand Split with Raw going up on Wednesday and Smackdown/pay per views going up on Saturdays. There's no better place to start than on the original Draft so let's get to it.

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 25, 2002

Location: Bryce Jordan Center, State College, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 15,550

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This seemed due for a second look since they're doing it all again this year. We're just after Wrestlemania XVIII and things are kind of in a lull. With so many wrestlers and no big evil for the WWF to fight (since the WCW/ECW Invasion just had to be started and wrapped up by Thanksgiving), it was decided to split the rosters in two. This was a really cool idea at the time but it should be interesting

to see how it worked when the initial Brand Extension isn't the most fondly remembered concept. Let's get to it.

Linda McMahon is in WWF Studios to welcome us to the show, telling us that only twenty picks will be made tonight for the sake of time. The changes won't officially take place until next week so everyone will be on Smackdown this week. As for tonight though, HHH, Chris Jericho and Stephanie McMahon can't be drafted because they're in a triple threat for the World Title (Yes Stephanie was getting a World Title shot and was a major focus fourteen years ago as well.). Steve Austin can't be drafted either due to a contractual stipulation (read as a real life contract dispute) and is therefore a free agent and can sign wherever he wants.

Opening sequence.

There are PODIUMS ON THE STAGE! YES I SAID PODIUMS!!!

Tazz vs. Mr. Perfect

Perfect wouldn't be around much longer due to a certain airplane ride (long and bad story). After promising to be a perfect pick, Perfect dropkicks him at the bell as we're told that the WWF and Women's Champion can compete on both shows. An early PerfectPlex gets two as Tazz is next to the ropes. Perfect charges into a boot and the Tazmission finishes quick. I wouldn't expect to see a lot of strong wrestling tonight.

Tazz says the perfect pick has become just another victim.

Ric Flair (Raw owner) and Arn Anderson are in their war room to go over their draft options.

Vince's war room is just an office. He has the first pick and a photo of Kurt Angle is visible on his desk.

Here's Vince for the first pick, which I'm sure will involve a speech. The first pick for Smackdown will be....the Rock. Well who else was it going to be? Rock leaves the locker room (walking past Undertaker and Hogan who are among the masses in a nice touch) as we see a quick graphic showing his career highlights.

Vince tells Rock that he's not allowed to put his hands on him or threatening to put his boots in various places or saying IT DOESN'T MATTER ever again. The fans cut him off with a ROCKY chant so Vince says he made both Hogan and the Rock. The boss goes to leave but Rock isn't quite done yet. To be fair he hasn't said anything yet so

he hasn't actually started.

Rock wants to go out on Raw with a bang because he won the WWF World Title here, formed the Rock and Sock Connection here and did various things to Vince. We hit some catchphrases before Rock has them do the Penn State chant (WE ARE....PENN STATE) and then alters it to insult Vince even more. This was just a Rock's greatest hits stretched over about ten minutes.

Ric comes out and picks Undertaker #1 overall despite hating him.

Kurt Angle comes in to yell at Vince for not picking him first.

Vince talks about throwing Flair a swerve out there (By picking the Rock?) when Undertaker comes in to yell. The boss promises to make this right.

Edge/Diamond Dallas Page vs. Christian/Booker T.

Two feuds in one here but Edge is about to start a really good feud with Angle. Booker kicks Edge in the face to start and Christian gets two off a powerslam. A quick clothesline drops Christian though as the announcers talk about Austin having a clause in his contract to make sure he's a free agent. In case of a Brand Split you see. Booker eats the Diamond Cutter but Christian gives him an Unprettier. A quick scissors kick puts Page away in a nothing match.

Angle reads off his resume until Vince makes him the #2 pick.

Ric picks the NWO (Hall/Nash/X-Pac) because that's something you can do. I can't wait for that Rock vs. Nash match. The NWO is uh....not in the locker room.

Vince yells at Angle for getting the NWO (who Vince brought in to poison the company) and promises to sign Austin. Angle suggests Chris Benoit (currently out with an injury but coming back soon.) with the next pick so Vince makes him #3. Benoit would return in July and just show up on Raw with no mention of being drafted to Smackdown. If nothing else it's a good idea to have some of these picks backstage as there's no reason to have them both come out here every time.

We see both brands' big boards and JR thinks Flair's strategy is, uh, strange.

The NWO threatens Ric so he picks Kane to keep an eye on them. Aside from X-Pac, Hall is now the second shortest member of the roster.

Trish Stratus vs. Ivory

Ivory returned last week to start a feud with Trish. They start fast with Ivory hammering away and ducking a middle rope cross body. Trish fights out of a chinlock and grabs the Stratusphere, followed by the Stratusfaction for another nothing match.

Vince picks Hulk Hogan, whose graphic incorrectly lists him as a seven time WCW Champion.

After a break, Ric picks Intercontinental Champion Rob Van Dam.

Vince is ticked because he wanted the title so Angle suggests giving him an Intercontinental Title shot tonight so he can bring the title to Smackdown. Vince: "That's why you're the number two draft pick! Maybe he should have been #1."

Rock and Hogan have a bro moment where they praise the people. Ignoring the whole attempted murder thing from a few weeks ago, Rock agrees to team up against the NWO in a handicap match.

Vince picks Billy and Chuck as a unit.

The Rock/Hulk Hogan vs. NWO

The NWO powerbombed Rock through a table on Smackdown until Hogan made the save to set this up. Hogan and X-Pac get things going with a big shove sending the smaller one out to the floor. Hall gets pushed down with ease so it's off to Nash who can actually shove Hulk down.

Hogan cleans house with ease but he takes too long loading up a backdrop and gets kicked in the face. It's off to X-Pac for more kicks but Hogan knocks him away and makes the tag off to Rock. Things finally speed up and X-Pac is easily knocked to the floor. The Rock Bottom and legdrop get two on Nash with X-Pac making the save. It's a three on two beatdown until Kane comes out for the DQ.

Rating: F. Were you expecting anything else? It says a lot when the match lasts five minutes and is this boring with a screwy ending. I mean, X-Pac can't take a fall to the combined forces of Hulk Hogan and the Rock? I could go for an entertaining match at some point tonight but I'm not feeling confident at this point.

The NWO runs off.

Vince accuses Ric of sending Kane out there so Flair takes Booker T. Vince: "Edge!" Ric: "Big Show!" Vince: "Rikishi!"

Jeff Hardy vs. Billy

Lita, Matt, Chuck and Rico are all at ringside. Billy fires off some right hands in the corner to start but misses a charge. The announcers talk about being drafted to different shows as Jeff hits a tornado DDT. The Swanton misses though as Lita completely botches a hurricanrana to Rico (her legs weren't around his head and he had to flip himself). Jeff grabs a rollup for a fluke pin in another nothing match.

Ric picks Bubba Ray Dudley so he can have "the most dominant tag team in WWF history." Vince: "Well Ric it looks like you're trying to get the most dominant tag team in WWF history." Did Stephanie write this segment? Vince picks D-Von to balance things out.

The Dudleys, realizing their careers are pretty much over for the time being, hug it out.

European Title: William Regal vs. Rikishi

Regal is defending. And never mind as Brock Lesnar runs out and flattens Rikishi with an F5.

Jazz wants to see where the Divas end up.

Vince comes out to pick Brock but Ric says it's his pick and he'll select Brock instead. Vince: "Mark Henry!" Ric: "William Regal!" Vince: "Maven!" (Hardcore Champion). Ric: "Lita!" Vince gets on him for choosing a woman and thinks Ric just wants to sleep with her. Well duh.

Here are the picks:

Smackdown

1. The Rock
2. Kurt Angle
3. Chris Benoit
4. Hulk Hogan
5. Billy and Chuck
6. Edge
7. Rikishi
8. D-Von Dudley
9. Mark Henry

10. Maven

Raw

1. Undertaker

2. NWO

3. Kane

4. Rob Van Dam

5. Booker T.

6. Big Show

7. Bubba Ray Dudley

8. Brock Lesnar

9. William Regal

10. Lita

Riveting no?

Intercontinental Title: Kurt Angle vs. Rob Van Dam

Angle is challenging and grabs a German suplex for two as the bell rings. Van Dam gets stomped down as the fans chant USA. I'd assume for Angle, even though Michigan is just as American as Pennsylvania. Van Dam kicks him in the head and gets two off Rolling Thunder. Angle pulls the referee in the way of a top rope kick for the DQ.

Kurt puts on the ankle lock until Edge makes the save.

Stephanie is ready to win the title.

WWF World Title: HHH vs. Chris Jericho vs. Stephanie McMahon

HHH is defending and the challengers have a business relationship. I have no idea why they never had a romantic relationship as that could have been amazing. If HHH pins Stephanie, she's gone FOREVER. HHH backdrops the real wrestler to start but has to look at Stephanie so Jericho can chop away. Stephanie lays down so Jericho can cover her for two but he has to save her from the Pedigree.

HHH catapults Jericho into Stephanie so we can have the falling low blow spot. Thankfully HHH kicks her to the floor so we can have an actual match for a bit. Of course Stephanie won't STAY AWAY FROM THE MATCH as she just has to come back in to screech about how Jericho needs to work on the leg. Stephanie gets run over by mistake so she slaps Jericho and demands that he get HHH. Jericho clotheslines her

by mistake but gets sent to the floor, allowing HHH to tease another Pedigree. Naturally that can't happen because the fans love waiting on her getting her comeuppance instead of actually getting it.

Jericho grabs the belts (this was when there was no Undisputed Title belt yet) for a double knockout, meaning Stephanie can cover both of them. The Walls have HHH in trouble but Stephanie breaks them up by jumping on Jericho's back. A Pedigree gets rid of Jericho but THERE SHE IS AGAIN. HHH has finally had enough and hits a spinebuster (because we can't hurt her perfect face) to retain.

Rating: D-. They couldn't even do a good match (which these two are certainly capable of having) because that wasn't the point here. Yeah a Wrestlemania main event rematch for the title eight days later wasn't the focus. Instead, as I'm sure you can tell, this was ALL about Stephanie and there was no hiding it. Of course her being gone "forever" lasted less than four months as she was brought back as the completely face GM of Smackdown because she's just so darn loveable that we can forgive this along with the whole Alliance thing last year.

Here's the thing: what exactly did Stephanie add to this? Why couldn't this have just been HHH vs. Jericho with Stephanie leaving if Jericho lost? It's actually a good match, Jericho is fine with losing a fall to the champ and the guys don't have to keep stopping so often so she can catch up. Horrible match of course and completely not HHH and Jericho's fault, but since it can't be Stephanie's fault either (as nothing ever can be), we'll blame...uh...oh yeah the referee. HE RUINED IT!

Stephanie of course freaks out and tries to hang on to anything she can before security takes her away. HHH sings the Goodbye Song to end the show. This was a special bonus in case you didn't get that you were watching Monday Night Stephanie.

Overall Rating: F. Oh sweet goodness what a mess. First of all, the match of the night was.....uhhh....you know what it was actually Mr. Perfect against Tazz in a match lasting 1:53. That's not to say it was good but it didn't have a major botch, a stupid ending or the powers of Stephanie holding it back.

Other than that though, this was a complete disaster with Smackdown being stacked, Raw basically begging Austin to come back and save the thing and the "wrestling" being little more than background

noise. This was somehow worse than I remembered it, which is covering quite a bit of ground as I remember this show being horrible the last time I watched it.

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