

Smackdown – March 19, 2015: The Reigns Problem

Smackdown

Date: March 19, 2015

Location: Sprint Center, Kansas City, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

With ten days to go before Wrestlemania, it's time for the hard sell to the biggest show of the year. Given the recent trends on Smackdown, this show is going to be built around the Intercontinental Title match, which has gone from a huge match to everyone trying to one up each other. Let's get to it.

We open with clips from Brock's sitdown interview on Raw, talking about how he likes to hurt people and saying he'll be WWE Champion if he stays or not. They better have a plan if they keep the belt on him.

Opening sequence.

Here's Roman Reigns to get things going. Before he can get past "Heyman and Lesnar think they can intimidate me", Mark Henry comes out to interrupt. Henry came out here last week to see what Reigns had, and that's what Reigns did. Naturally we have a clip of what happened because just telling us what happened would be too simple. Instead, let's show a minute long video of a beating. Based on that, Henry is putting all his money on Roman Reigns at Wrestlemania, because Reigns can and will beat him.

Cue the Authority with Kane asking when Mark Henry became the World's Biggest Self Help Guru. Rollins holds up the briefcase and ominously says that anything can happen at Wrestlemania. There won't be any Randy Orton tonight because the best security team has locked every door and blocked every entrance. Of course that's just for Orton's protection, because why would Rollins be scared of him? As for tonight though, Rollins thinks he needs a Wrestlemania tuneup. Therefore, tonight it's Reigns/Henry vs. Kane/Rollins. Kane: "Believe in the Authority."

Tatsumi Fujinami is going into the Hall of Fame. I know he's a legend, but they're not exactly knocking this class out of the park outside of Savage.

Brie Bella vs. Paige

AJ and Nikki are on commentary because we need a five man booth. Paige spears Brie through the ropes to start and pounds her on the announcers' table. AJ: "I taught her how to slap." Back in and Brie gets two off a middle rope missile dropkick before we hit the chinlock forty seconds into the match.

A clothesline gets two and we're on the second chinlock less than ninety seconds in. Back up and a double clothesline puts both girls down before Brie hits the running knee against the ropes. She lays back on Paige for the cover and gets rolled up for a pin at 2:28. The match wasn't two and a half minutes long and it had two chinlocks. How can this woman be married to Daniel Bryan and not be better than that by osmosis?

Recap of Seth vs. Orton on Monday with Sting making the big save. That really was an awesome moment and the best thing Sting has done since debuting.

Noble and Mercury tell security to keep an entrance open. They aren't pleased when they're not called sir.

Gauntlet Match

The participants are all of Barrett's challengers and we start with Ambrose vs. Stardust. Dean slugs away to start and Stardust bails out to the floor. The rebound clothesline connects but Stardust gets two off a Disaster Kick. A release front suplex drops Dean again and Barrett is watching from the back. Stardust tries a sunset flip but Dean drops down on him ala British Bulldog vs. Bret for the pin at 2:18.

Stardust, ever the nice guy, jumps Dean after the match and sends him shoulder first into the post twice in a row. R-Truth is in third and beats up Stardust, only to walk into Dirty Deeds for the pin at 3:02 total. Harper is in fourth with an inset interview talking about how they

took his freedom away. Now he's using you to set them all free. He's been talking to Bray again hasn't he?

Back from a break with Dean hammering away in the battle of undershirts and jeans. Harper goes after the bad arm to take over and we hit the chinlock. Notice that it's one instead of two and we're over five minutes in. Dean is sent face first into the buckle and gets locked in a crossface. Back up and Dean sends him to the floor, setting up the running standing elbow drop.

The discus lariat is countered into a rollup for two and it's back to the crossface. When all else fails, Dean bites the hand to escape and slugs away. The running dropkick against the ropes and la majistral get two for Dean but he eats a superkick, only to knock him into the ropes for the rebound clothesline to drop both guys. Back up and Dirty Deeds is countered into the discus lariat and the sitout powerbomb is enough for the pin at 12:50 total.

Daniel Bryan is in fifth and starts with Harper after a break. During said break, Mercury and Noble yelling at security guards. They check someone's credentials and let him in for a scene that doesn't seem to mean anything. Back in the arena with Bryan wrapping Harper's knee around the post a few times before firing off the kicks. He even gets Harper up for the full surfboard and lifts him up for a YES chant.

More YES Kicks have Harper in trouble so he picks Bryan up and throws him out to the floor. Luke slows things down with a headlock but Bryan knee crushes his way to freedom. That's fine with Harper as he just punches Bryan in the face to put him down. We hit the chinlock for a bit before Bryan goes right back to the knee. A headscissors takes Harper to the floor and there's the Flying Goat for good measure.

Back in again and we get more YES Kicks but the big one is countered into the half nelson suplex for two. The discus lariat is kicked away but the left arm version blasts Bryan for another near fall. Luke is getting frustrated but Bryan helps him out by tripping the leg and putting on something like a heel hook for the submission at 25:33 total.

That only leaves Dolph Ziggler in sixth and we take another break before

the bell. They lock up to start until Bryan takes him into the corner for more kicks. Ziggler goes a bit more conventional with right hands to the head but misses a Stinger splash. Bryan busts out a top rope hurricanrana but Dolph rolls through into a sunset flip for two. Both try cross bodies and both get knocked to the mat as we take another break.

Back again with Bryan working on the shoulder after sending him into the post while we were away. Daniel gets crotched on top but he counters a superplex attempt by crotching Ziggler right back. Dolph keeps up the countering by reversing the belly to back superplex into a cross body for two more. Bryan responds by kicking him in the face for the same as the fans (or at least the canned noise) are way into this. The running knee is blocked by a superkick but he can't follow up. The YES Lock goes on in the middle of the ring but Ziggler rolls out, ducks a big kick and grabs the Zig Zag for the pin at 27:36.

Rating: B+. It took some time to get going but the Bryan vs. Ziggler stuff was awesome. I can see those two building a roof on Levi's Stadium just so they could blow it off at Wrestlemania, but instead they're just throwing everyone into a ladder match. Really good and long match here, especially once they stopped with the quick eliminations.

Post match Barrett comes in and talks about a code, only to nail Dolph in the face. Bryan gets up and takes the microphone to the face. Both guys get Bull Hammers as well.

We look at Bray's promo from Monday.

LL Cool J video. People still care about him right?

The Divas give their predictions on AJ/Paige vs. the Bellas. As expected, the decision is split. This is giving them a chance I suppose?

Recap of the Cena/Rusev contract signing from Monday.

Another bit with the security.

Cesaro/Tyson Kidd/Natalya vs. El Torito/Los Matadores

Interspecies match. Well of course it is. Cesaro runs Diego over for two

to start but a dropkick sends him into the corner. Off to Natalya vs. Torito for some pelvic thrusting, meaning Kidd tags himself in to face Fernando. Kidd takes it outside and trips Fernando up to send him face first into the apron. Back in and the hot tag brings in Diego with a springboard shot to the head as everything breaks down. Los Matadores dive onto the champs, leaving us with Natalya vs. Torito for the featured part of the match. Torito armdrags her down but gets caught in a sitout powerbomb for the pin at 3:49.

Rating: D. We're ten days from Wrestlemania and this is what we're seeing from the Tag Team Champions. I mean.....dang man. The best we can get is an unfunny idea of woman vs. bull, because there are still people out there that think it's really a bull? Who could speak English? This kind of stuff is absurd and makes me hate this show more and more every time.

Seth Rollins/Kane vs. Roman Reigns/Mark Henry

And there's no Henry as we cut to the back and see him out cold. Rollins brings out a bunch of security to have his back. Maybe they're Noble and Mercury's students. Kane starts for his team and Mercury offers a trip, allowing the Big Bald to score with a boot to the face. Off to Rollins as the fans chant for Randy. Not the #1 contender and future main eventer mind you, but a guy not here.

Seth whips Reigns into a side slam for two and the bad looking running DDT gets the same. Rollins comes back in for some slow shots to the back and something like a downward spiral into the middle buckle. We're just waiting for Orton at this point and it's showing badly. Roman fights back with a forearm to Kane, followed by the tilt-a-whirl slam to Rollins. The Authority regroups but Rollins dives into a Superman Punch and the spear ends Kane at 5:07.

Rating: D. This match summed up the major problem with Roman Reigns: he could have been any given upper level guy and the match would have been the exact same thing. This was five minutes of waiting around for Orton to come out because that's the story we're seeing. Can you imagine that happening to Steve Austin or Daniel Bryan? No, because those guys commanded the audience's attention whenever they were on screen. Reigns

is just another guy here and it's very clear that he isn't someone the fans are ready to cheer as the new top man.

Rollins throws a fit and here's Orton (in wrestling gear for no logical reason) to beat up the security. Noble and Mercury take RKOs, allowing Rollins to escape to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. That Reigns match really told you everything you needed to know about this Wrestlemania season. The main feuds have little heat and the whole show is built around Undertaker, Sting and Lesnar barely appearing or not saying anything. Combine that with the fans just not being interested in Reigns at the moment (and again, a lot of that isn't on him) and this is coming off as a pretty weak year.

As for the show, the Intercontinental Title match made for a good performance but that's not what we're getting at Wrestlemania. The Divas did their usual stuff, the comedy wasn't funny, and the main event was your standard scene with someone AMAZINGLY making it past security to get into the building. This felt like any given Thursday in June, not the next to last Smackdown before Wrestlemania.

Results

Paige b. Brie Bella – Rollup

Dolph Ziggler won a gauntlet match last eliminating Daniel Bryan

Natalya/Cesaro/Tyson Kidd b. El Torito/Los Matadores – Powerbomb to Torito

Roman Reigns/Mark Henry b. Kane/Seth Rollins – Spear to Kane

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Smackdown – March 12, 2015: Sign of the Season

Smackdown

Date: March 12, 2015

Location: Joe Louis Arena, Detroit, Michigan

Commentators: Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler

It should be interesting to see if this week's show continues Smackdown's recent focus on the Intercontinental Title. After all the weeks of World Title build on Raw, it's nice to have something a bit different on the other show, if nothing else just to avoid the fatigue of seeing the same things over and over again. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to get things going. He thanks the fans for their kindness and says he's been trying to ignore that Wrestlemania sign since Fast Lane. It's become clear to him that he can't repeat what happened last year at Wrestlemania, but when one door closes, another door opens.

A few weeks ago, he was surrounded by people fighting for the Intercontinental Championship and it got him thinking about his heroes. People like Mr. Perfect, Ricky Steamboat, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels and Randy Savage. When they were fighting for the Intercontinental Title at Wrestlemania, it was more exciting than anything happening in the World Title division. Wrestlemania VIII would disagree with you Bryan.

He's officially in the ladder match this year though and the fans are very pleased. This brings out Bad News Barrett who reminds us that he's still the champion and will still be after Wrestlemania. Dolph Ziggler comes out to disagree but he does say Bryan is his hero. Barrett may be the champion but he can't even hang onto the belt. How could he possibly do that with six other guys throwing him off ladders at Wrestlemania?

Cue Harper to say he wants his Wrestlemania moment. That sounds so wrong coming from someone like Harper. He should be more like old school Cactus Jack who just does stuff for the sake of violence. Dean Ambrose comes out to a very loud reaction to say every one of them should be locked up if they think they can fight without inviting him. He even knows a good place they can be held for observation if need be.

Now it's Stardust who grabs a mic and looks under the ring for the white stallion of the Milky Way. He wants the ivory enterprise, but instead gets R-Truth with the burlap sack. Truth pulls out the belt and calls it a beaut. He thinks the title has been passed around enough so he's going to hold it until Wrestlemania when he climbs that ladder. Barrett cuts him off but Truth calls him sizzle chest. A brawl finally breaks out and it's Zigler, Ambrose and Bryan left standing.

Usos/New Day vs. Tyson Kidd/Cesaro/Los Matadores

Big E. is on the floor this time and Los Matadores confirm their heel turn in an inset interview where they say they'll do whatever it takes to have their Wrestlemania moment. Not win the titles mind you but have their moment. Kofi and Diego get things going with the masked man stomping away in the corner. Kingston dropkicks him down for two and it's quickly off to Woods. The intelligence doesn't seem warmed up yet as Diego drags him into the corner for the tag to Fernando.

Jimmy tags himself in, much to Woods' annoyance. Hey dude get over it. You kind of suck in the ring. Diego offers a distraction to break up the Whisper in the Wind and Jimmy gets crotched on the top. We take a break and come back with with Diego jumping on Jimmy's back on the ropes and putting on a chinlock. Jerry: "What do you call a matador with a rubber toe? Roberto!" Jimmy fights up and makes the hot tag to Jimmy, leaving Cesaro to yell at Los Matadores.

Jey starts cleaning house but Kofi tags himself in for a springboard cross body for two on Kidd. Some heel miscommunication sends them to the floor and the good guys bust out dives, only to have Woods land on Jey. Again, he's not that bright. Cesaro uppercuts Kofi through the ropes and Kidd loads up the fisherman's neckbreaker, only to have Fernando tag

himself in. Diego sneaks in with a Backstabber for the pin on Kofi at 8:40.

Rating: C+. This did its job and that's almost all you can ask for out of a match like this. I'm assuming it's another multi-team match at Wrestlemania, just like last year, but I'm not sure this one is going to be as good. It also says something that the Usos and Los Matadores are still in the match, just like Cesaro but with a different partner. You would think something would have changed by now. Still though, good way to set things up here.

Video on Sting vs. HHH.

Recap of Rusev vs. Cena from Monday.

Miz lists off his career accomplishments and says winning the battle royal will be the latest entry on that list. Mizdow is worried that Miz can't beat Ryback tonight so Miz tells him to stay in the back, press his pants and get him a drink that is way too complicated to type.

Miz vs. Ryback

Ryback will have none of the sunglasses being taken off so he puts Miz on the top rope. A delayed suplex brings Miz right back down but he hammers Ryback into the ropes to take over. The fans want Mizdow as Ryback blocks a running boot and plants Miz with a spinebuster. The Meat Hook and Shell Shock are good for the pin at 2:59. Ryback's push continues to look strong.

Mizdow chuckles in the back.

Here's Roman Reigns to respond to Paul Heyman's comments from Raw. We get a quick clip of Heyman talking about Lesnar destroying Rock, Undertaker and Cena and promising Brock will do the same thing and worse to Roman Reigns at Wrestlemania. Reigns says Heyman thinks he knows his family but he's just disrespecting them. Heyman thinks Reigns is three generations removed from cannibalism? Who thinks that? Reigns won't take someone disrespecting his family and telling him he can't when he can. He'll win at Wrestlemania and do his family proud.

This brings out a slightly thinner Mark Henry, who thinks Reigns is either trying to be funny or he's been hit in the head by one too many coconuts. He doesn't like anyone talking about his heritage but Reigns needs to understand that Heyman has gotten under his skin. Mark knows who he is, and he's been in the ring with Lesnar. Brock nearly killed him with the F5 on the floor and Mark doesn't think Roman is ready for that.

Roman says with all due respect but Mark cuts him off and says Reigns has to earn respect around here. That's enough for Roman as he goes to walk away but Mark spins him around and yells at Reigns for being a young buck that thinks he knows it all. That earns him a Superman Punch and a spear through the barricade.

Reigns is tired of hearing he can't, because he can and he will. Believe that. The family heritage idea is better than nothing but it's still not much of a connection to a guy like Reigns. However, being tired of being told he can't do something and proving people wrong IS something people can connect to and the idea they probably should have gone for months ago.

We look back at Bray Wyatt's speech from Monday and Undertaker lighting the chair on fire to accept the challenge.

AJ Lee/Paige vs. Summer Rae/Cameron

Paige is so excited for this match that she took off the white shirt under her jacket between the walk through the back and the entrances. The Bellas are on commentary as you would probably expect. Paige kicks Cameron in the ribs to start and it's off to AJ in about five seconds. AJ goes after Summer on the apron and gets nailed from behind by Cameron.

With two weeks before Wrestlemania, the Bellas are bragging about the ratings for Total Divas. Summer puts AJ in a chinlock as they FINALLY start talking about the upcoming tag match. Paige gets the tag and cleans house with her set of clotheslines, setting up the PT0 for the tap out from Summer at 2:25.

Paige and AJ yell at the Bellas post match. My guess is they're saying "TALK ABOUT WRESTLING! YOU'RE WRESTLERS!"

We look back at Reigns and Henry in case we have the attention span of a goldfish.

Henry says Reigns has made a believer out of him. He doesn't think Reigns will beat Lesnar, but now he believes Reigns can. It's a shame this wasn't Sexual Chocolate as the old Henry would have certainly hit on Renee in her stomach revealing top here. Very fetching indeed.

We look at a Cricket Wireless event with Dolph Ziggler. He's bringing some kids to Smackdown to be ringside.

Low and behold, the kids are here.

This week's sitdown interview is with Randy Orton. He looks at the footage of Rollins curb stomping him a few months back and says that night changed him. We see him returning at Fast Lane but that wasn't the best way to get his revenge. Instead he wove his way back into the Authority to gain their trust. This is really, really not making this horrible story make more sense.

He used Reigns to get closer to Rollins and this past Monday was reverse psychology. Apparently in WWE, reverse psychology is code for REALLY STUPID STORY. Orton explained getting rid of everyone else in the Authority, even though he had almost nothing to do with getting rid of Big Show or Mercury. Basically all he did was punch Noble.

Then he walked away from the tag and had fun beating Rollins up. Orton loved every single bit of hurting Rollins this past Monday and he let all of it out. He's ready for the Authority's retribution and is ready to challenge Rollins for Wrestlemania. Good for you Randy. You had a stupid plan in a stupid story that makes no sense when you actually think about it, but good for you.

Daniel Bryan/Dolph Ziggler/Dean Ambrose vs. Luke Harper/Bad News Barrett/Stardust

Unfortunately no Truth on commentary here. Ambrose headlocks Barrett to start and runs him over with a running forearm. Off to Stardust vs. Ziggler with the painted one taking over in the corner. Cole talks about

Stardust being like Gollum with the Intercontinental Title. To mix things up a bit, Saxton thinks Stardust is acting like Kim Kardashian. I'm going to move on to Bryan putting Stardust in the surfboard instead as it's less painful than talking about that disturbing, hideous, nightmare inducing creature. It's easier than talking about Gollum too.

Stardust gets out and hammers on Bryan in the corner but gets taken down by a hurricanrana. The threat of a running knee sends Stardust running to the floor and we take a break. Back with Harper Gator Rolling Bryan before it's off to Barrett for some forearms to the in the corner. Bryan finally kicks Harper away and the hot tag brings in Ambrose to clean house. An atomic drop into a faceplant gets two on Stardust and everything breaks down.

Ambrose cleans house and dives onto Harper and Stardust for a big crash. Barrett breaks up Dirty Deeds on Stardust and Harper kicks Dean in the face as we take another break. Back again with Barrett kicking Dean in the face for two. That seems so familiar. Bad News' chinlock doesn't go anywhere and Stardust's top rope superplex does just as poorly. Instead Ambrose nails a top rope dropkick and makes the tag to Ziggler.

Harper comes in as well and eats a dropkick followed by the Fameasser for two. Everything breaks down again and the good guys load up a triple dive but Harper nails Ziggler to break up a third of it. The Batista Bomb gets two on Dolph but he comes back with a Zig Zag, followed by the running knee to give Bryan the pin at 17:38.

Rating: B. Nice long tag match here to close out the show. When a show is built around talking like this one was, you almost have to give them something like this to affirm that it's really a wrestling show. Above all though, Barrett didn't get pinned! That's one whole show in a row and possibly a new record for him.

Cole congratulates Bryan on the win but Ziggler jokes that Bryan stole the pin from him. Last year Bryan had luck on his side but this year Ziggler is going to be out there with him. Dean chimes in and says Dolph stole the show, just like everyone has been stealing the title lately. Maybe Dolph thinks he isn't quite as good as Bryan and it bothers him.

Dean says the people in the locker room know the truth about Bryan: he's, shall we say, human waste. Ambrose goes to leave and Ziggler agrees with him, leaving Bryan in the ring alone. I really, really hope they don't turn Bryan heel but it seems to be the only thing left for him to do at this point.

Overall Rating: C. We're definitely in the last push to Wrestlemania, which means expect several shows like this in a row: mostly talk and hype with a token long match for most of the wrestling content. Reigns sounded fine and it's good that they're FINALLY giving him a reason to want to fight Brock.

On the other hand, Orton sounded like a crazy man trying to explain a stupid story. Either bring him back as a full on psycho or bring him back as part of the Authority without the Fast Lane attack. What they went with makes it seem like they were just hoping people weren't paying attention, though given how this build has been going, they might be onto something.

Results

Los Matadores/Cesaro/Tyson Kidd b. New Day/Usos – Backstabber to Kingston

Ryback b. Miz – Shell Shock

AJ Lee/Paige b. Summer Rae/Cameron – PT0 to Summer

Dean Ambrose/Dolph Ziggler/Daniel Bryan b. Luke Harper/Stardust/Bad News Barrett – Running knee to Harper

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Smackdown – March 5, 2015: Reestablishing Equilibrium

Smackdown

Date: March 5, 2015

Location: Verizon Center, Washington DC

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

With just a few weeks to go before Wrestlemania, one of the main stories has been the Intercontinental Title scene. We're definitely getting the big ladder match, but it's not entirely clear who is going to be in it. It's also not clear who is going to hand over the title belt to have it hung above the ring as everyone keeps stealing the thing. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Dolph Ziggler with the Intercontinental Title. He says he never got a rematch for the title against Bad News Barrett because he got fired by the Authority. This is the fifth month that storyline has now been mentioned in. Even Vince Russo didn't let stories go that long. Dolph officially enters the ladder match, but thinks there's still something missing. Last year, someone did everything he could and never stopped fighting to become champion. The fans chant YES and Dolph agrees, but he gets Bad News Barrett instead.

Barrett says Ziggler has something he wants. Dolph: "Looks? Charisma? A great Twitter account?" Bad News gets in the ring but Luke Harper sneaks in and decks Ziggler. The champ goes for his belt but Luke steps on it. Ziggler gets back up and everyone brawls so here's Dean Ambrose to get in on the fighting. The champ is knocked to the floor because he's just another guy in this story. Everyone brawls on the floor again so R-Truth sneaks down in spy mode, crawling on the mat and getting the belt before hiding under the ring.

Truth is in the back (VERY quickly too) and says he got the title in advance. "It's like when I eat when I'm not hungry, so when I get hungry I don't have to eat." He tries to give the belt to Renee Young but she politely declines. "Where's Gene Ambrose?" As usual, Renee Young is incredibly cute. I'm convinced she could be bald and still be adorable.

Cesaro/Tyson Kidd vs. Los Matadores

Non-title. Diego and Kidd start things off but both guys tag out less than thirty seconds in. Fernando hurricanranas Cesaro down and Diego does the same with a headscissors, only to get caught in a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker. A double stomp gets two for Cesaro and we hit the chinlock. Everything breaks down and Cesar goes after Torito, who kicks him in the leg. That's not a DQ for some reason but Natalya trips him up, allowing the Cesaro Swing into a dropkick from Kidd to get the pin on Fernando at 2:25. This was a good squash for the champs that we haven't seen before.

Kane and Big Show both say they'll win the battle royal.

We recap the main event from Monday with Reigns getting pinned by Rollins but cleaning house to end the show. Yeah, the dive over the top and big spear were cool, but it's like a cool fireworks display after your home team loses a ball game. It's a fun visual, but your heart isn't in it.

Ryback vs. Kane

Big Show stares at the Andre trophy at ringside. Kane stomps him down in the corner but runs into some spinebusters. Big Show offers a distraction to no avail as the Meat Hook ends Kane at 2:07. Now why did it take us this many months to get here?

Kane makes Big Show vs. Ryback for right now.

Big Show vs. Ryback

This is joined in progress after a break with Big Show getting in the ring and pounding Ryback into the corner. A clothesline puts the smaller bald power monster down and Show follows it with a slam. Ryback fires some shoulders in the corner but dives into a chokeslam attempt. The KO Punch misses and Ryback hits an awkward looking spinebuster. Kane gets

dragged in for offering a distraction and takes a second Meat Hook, allowing Big Show to KO Ryback at 2:58. Dang that was close. We almost saw someone get one over on the Big Balds and I just wouldn't want to live in that world. What was this supposed to prove anyway?

We look at Bray Wyatt lighting the casket on fire on Raw.

Bray Wyatt wants an answer from Undertaker. He has something Undertaker can relate to, and he'll unleash its spirit this Monday. Not even Undertaker can outrun his own fate. The camera pans down and shows the urn.

Sheamus return video.

Video on the Daily Show segment with Jon Stewart from Raw. That might be the best celebrity appearance ever. If not then it's WAY up there.

Brie Bella vs. AJ Lee

I'm not a fan of how Eden says "this is a Deeeeevas match". This is fallout from AJ returning to help Paige on Monday. Nikki brings up the "Give Divas A Chance" line but says that doesn't apply to AJ. The Bellas have been giving the Divas a chance since AJ has been gone and no one has lived up to their standard. It's why they're the stars of Total Divas and they don't care who comes at them.

The match starts after a break with Paige now at ringside to balance things out. AJ cranks on an armbar and elbows Brie in the face. A high cross body gets two on Brie but she comes back with a nice middle rope dropkick for two of her own. Back up and AJ has to stop so Brie can clothesline her before we hit a chinlock.

That goes nowhere so Brie dropkicks her down again, followed by a clothesline for some two counts. A Hennig necksnap gets an even closer two as the fans don't seem all that interested. We hit another chinlock before the running knee to the chest staggers AJ again. Brie immediately goes to the corner but misses another middle rope dropkick. Back up and AJ hammers away with kicks to the ribs to send Brie out to the floor. We get a big staredown outside before the Black Widow makes Brie tap at

7:42.

Rating: C. This was better than your usual Divas matches but a lot of that is due to it actually getting some time. Brie seemed to almost run out of offense about halfway through though. The Bellas are decent enough as the better than you heels and I can live with them far more when they're not being treated like all time greats who just happen to be heels now. And when they're not dominating the show. That really drove me insane.

Daniel Bryan thinks the Intercontinental Title picture is very interesting right now and can't wait to see who comes out with the belt.

I really can't stand the theme song for this year's Wrestlemania and I keep forgetting that's what the song is for when it starts up.

New Day vs. Miz/Damien Mizdow

Woods is the odd man out this week. Before the match we get a look at the commercial from Monday with Miz being embarrassed. Miz slapped Mizdow as a result but we still didn't get the big face turn. Kofi and Miz get things going by trading armdrags until Miz runs him over for two. Some kicks give Kofi a breather and Mizdow tags himself in and cleans house. Cesaro/Kidd/Natalya are watching in the back as Mizdown's figure four attempt is broken up. Miz tags himself in and orders Mizdow to the floor but Mizdow gets in his face. During the argument, Big E. gets the tag and it's the Midnight Hour for the pin at 3:15.

Rating: D. This was the same thing they've done multiple times now but at least it was Miz taking the pin instead of Mizdow. I really wouldn't mind if Woods was left outside as a permanent manager as he doesn't add much to the team. The match wasn't very good though and it just reenforced the same things we've established for weeks now. In other words, it's a Smackdown match.

We look back at Heyman's speech from Raw.

Brock Lesnar video.

Reigns says Heyman is known for running his mouth, but it's true that

Lesnar is going to hurt him at Wrestlemania. Everyone that gets in the ring with Lesnar gets hurt and he'll be no different. The difference is Reigns will get up, lock his fist and hit a Superman Punch. Then he'll spear Lesnar in half to win the WWE World Championship, and then Heyman and Lesnar will believe that. As usual, this was far better because they kept it short and simple.

Jack Swagger vs. Rusev

Non-title and Swagger is thrown to the floor a second after the bell. Back in and Swagger throws Rusev to the floor as we take a break. Back with Rusev getting two off a dropkick and we hit the chinlock. Swagger fights up and tries the Vader Bob but has to settle for the Patriot Lock, sending Rusev to the ropes. Back up and Rusev kicks him in the face and Accolades him for the submission at 7:50.

Rating: D. Egads find someone new for Rusev to beat up. This didn't prove anything and was the exact same match these two have had roughly 19 times. Yeah we get it: Rusev is big and strong and can beat up Jack Swagger. We've known that for almost eight months now. FIND SOMEONE NEW.

Rusev poses but Curtis Axel pops up on screen and says don't change the channel BROTHER. He's often imitated but never duplicated DUDE. This Monday he's going to put Rusev down 1-2-3 and then coming for the US Title at Wrestlemania. Whatcha gonna do when Axelmania runs wild on YOU??? If Buddy Landel can get over by being Ric Flair, Curtis Axel can get over by being Hulk Hogan.

Cameron thinks it's time someone gives her a chance. Summer Rae comes up and says she should be getting the chance. Eva Marie thinks the two of them have no chance. This is what I was worried about when this thing started up. There are far more talented girls to give this spot to, but instead it's going to the girls on the reality show.

Bad News Barrett/Luke Harper vs. Dolph Ziggler/Dean Ambrose

Truth is on commentary and doesn't quite get the rules of the ladder match. He also doesn't like how heights look when you look down at them. Harper Gator Rolls Ziggler to start but has to break up a sunset flip

attempt. The running DDT is easily countered and R-Truth thinks he's talking to Byron Jackson. A double tag brings in Ambrose to stomp on Barrett in the corner before the standing top rope elbow drop gets two. Ziggler and Ambrose clear the ring but nearly come to blows as we take a break.

Back with Barrett elbowing Dean in the face and handing it off to Harper for an elbow of his own. We hit the chinlock from Harper, who Truth accuses of not buying his shirt. Barrett comes back in and gets caught in a tornado DDT. Truth wants the match turned into a stepladder match and claims ladder discrimination.

The hot tag brings in Ziggler to speed things up but the big elbow drop gets two on Harper. Now the running DDT connects but still only gets two. A big side slam gets the same for Harper but Barrett and Ambrose come in to fight right next to them. Those two head back to the floor and Ziggler superkicks Harper, setting up the Zig Zag for the pin at 10:03.

Rating: C-. Totally standard midcard tag match here but it's very nice to see that headlining the show instead of more dull stuff. It also helps that this is a logical part of the storyline and fits what they've been doing so far. Truth continues to be funny on commentary with a bunch of "what did he just say" lines. Oh and Barrett didn't get pinned! Life is good.

Post match Barrett goes for the belt but Ambrose dives on him. Truth kicks Harper low but Daniel Bryan shows up to look at Truth holding the title. Truth hands him the belt and starts a YES chant. Bryan poses with the title but Stardust jumps Bryan and grabs the belt to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. The show went by fast enough and it's really nice to have stuff away from the main event feud for a bit. It's also nice to not have the Authority making my blood pressure go through the roof but that's a different story. This still doesn't feel like a major show but I like the Intercontinental Title picture when it's not as all over the place and the battle royal is starting to look a lot better. This was a nice way to cool things down and bring them back to normal after a bad Raw, but it's still not a great show.

Results

Cesaro/Tyson Kidd b. Los Matadores – Cesaro Swing into a dropkick from Kidd

Ryback b. Kane – Meat Hook

Big Show b. Ryback – KO Punch

AJ Lee b. Brie Bella – Black Widow

New Day b. Miz/Damien Mizdow – Midnight Hour to Miz

Rusev b. Jack Swagger – Accolade

Dolph Ziggler/Dean Ambrose b. Bad News Barrett/Luke Harper – Zig Zag to Harper

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Smackdown – February 26, 2015: Erg

Smackdown

Date: February 26, 2015

Location: Phillips Arena, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole, Byron Saxton

Wrestlemania is creeping up on us and you can see most of the card from here. The main story coming out of Monday was Randy Orton rejoining the Authority for about two and a half hours but ultimately turning back against them. For some reason he let Seth Rollins off easy, which likely won't be addressed tonight. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to open things up. The fans chant YES but Bryan shouts NO for a change. That's what he said a few years ago when he was frustrated at the lack of opportunities. He was wrong though, because the fans were in his corner. The fans gave him the opportunity to climb the ladder to the top and he won the WWE World Heavyweight Championship in the main event of Wrestlemania XXX. He had to give it up due to injury, but then he had another chance to get it back at Fast Lane.

However, he failed and there's no Wrestlemania main event this year. Without that motivation, does that mean the YES Movement is dead? NO it does not! He won't back down because he has big plans this year. Before he can get those out though, here's Bad News Barrett who has somehow gone a full three days since losing a match.

No one wants to hear Bryan's sob story because losers like Bryan don't deserve the spotlight. Neither does a thief like Dean Ambrose, so here's Dean for the brawl. He and Barrett fight to the floor so Bryan picks up the Intercontinental Title. Barrett demands it back but Ambrose decks him from behind and takes the belt back. Daniel didn't seem interested in the belt other than keeping it away from Barrett. Cole sounds like he's begging us to believe that Barrett is still champion.

Dean Ambrose vs. Miz

Is he going to step on Miz's sunglasses and break his foot this time? No Mizdow because he might be off shooting the commercial he mentioned on Raw. An early rollup gets two for Dean but he gets caught in a neckbreaker for the same. We're already in the chinlock but Ambrose fights up with rights and lefts. Some running forearms drop Miz again but Barrett comes back out to steal the belt again. The distraction doesn't work for once though as Dean hits Dirty Deeds for the pin on Miz at 2:47.

We look at stills of Orton returning on Sunday and video of the story with Rollins on Monday. Lawler tries to defend Orton's lack of action by saying he was worried about Big Show and Kane. I'd be worried about them too if I wanted anyone to stay awake during my matches. Seriously even Bryan couldn't survive a Kane feud.

After a break, Barrett can't get Renee's name right but says Ambrose and Bryan don't deserve to touch this title.

Naomi vs. Natalya

Say it with me: this officially started on Total Divas, even though there's been almost no animosity between them on that show. Somehow though, that's better continuity than you usually get on the main shows. They run the ropes to start and Natalya drops down, only to get rolled up for two. Aheadscissors drops Natalya again and we hit a chinlock with Naomi using her legs instead of the arms. Both girls hit cross bodies and the guys get into it on the floor. The referee holds Naomi back from a downed Natalya, allowing the Canadian to hit the discus lariat for the pin at 2:48.

Here are the Russians to brag about their win on Sunday. Rusev says this is what a championship looks like and Lana walks us through some stills of Cena's spirit being crushed over and over again. Lana says Rusev isn't one to sleep on the job and brags about Putin sending them congratulatory emails. She even shows us one, of course in Russian, which probably has a very funny translation.

Rusev repeats that Cena gets no shot at Wrestlemania so he needs a new opponent. Cue Jack Swagger as we flash back to August. Jack says there's no such thing as a scared US Champion and the fight is on. Just like happens every single time, Rusev survives a storm and superkicks Swagger into the Accolade. Was there NO ONE ELSE they could have used for this spot? Like.....sweet goodness there really isn't much of anyone is there? Is the roster really that thin? Or are the faces really that lame?

Bad News Barrett vs. Daniel Bryan

Non-title of course, because even Bryan hasn't fallen enough to want the

Intercontinental Title. Barrett isn't sure where to put the title. Byron Saxton introduces R-Truth on commentary. Truth: "COACH! I MISSED YOU!" Ok that was funny. Barrett shoves Bryan down to start but gets sent into the corner for a kick to the ribs. The surfboard knee stomp sends Barrett back into the corner as Truth thinks a crumpet is a musical instrument.

More kicks stagger Barrett but the Winds of Change connect for two. Daniel bails to the floor as Truth keeps babbling about how he should be Intercontinental Champion. Back from a break with Barrett putting on a chinlock. I really do feel sorry for him. This is at least the second and probably third loser title reign for him and I don't know what he does to deserve it.

Bryan fights up and hits more YES Kicks for two but Barrett avoids the running dropkick in the corner. The title was knocked to the floor and Barrett is distracted, allowing Bryan to hit the Flying Goat. Truth: "Bryan looks like a chicken dipped in Rogaine." How do you even respond to that? The YES Lock goes on and Truth sneaks over to the corner and steals the belt but gets back on commentary with the belt under his jacket. Bad News makes the ropes but turns around for the running knee and the pin at 10:31.

Rating: C-. This feud is turning into a battle over who can suck more than the other guy. Somehow though, Barrett is going to wind up leaving with the belt because that's how WWE works. Then they'll wonder why no one cares about Barrett, the title, or the losers in the match. Truth was funny on commentary but that doesn't mean I want to see him in the ring. At least the title is getting some attention tonight though.

Barrett can't find the title but Truth denies any involvement. This is somehow making Barrett come off like someone we should feel sorry for, because we're supposed to feel sorry for someone who loses every match he has.

We get a sitdown interview with Roman Reigns from earlier today. Reigns praises Bryan for a hard fought match on Sunday and says Bryan knows what it takes to get where Reigns is going. We look at a clip of Heyman's speech on Monday about how Reigns just can't do it. Roman is tired of

hearing about how he can't do something and says he'll have to train harder than ever before. Lesnar has been on this stage before but Reigns doesn't have any experience at this level. He needs to talk to people in his family to see what it's like to be there.

Reigns wants Lesnar to be bouncing around the ring and at his very best when he faces a man representing a proud family who is trying to make a better life for himself and his family. My goodness this guy is just not good at making me care about him. That's the problem with him: he's just ok at most things other than spearing people in half. He's great as a heavyweight monster, but as a humanized character, he's just stuck in the middle of the pack. Five minutes of him talking about what he needs to do didn't make me care about him any more than I did in the first place, and I can't imagine it getting better anytime soon.

Truth runs into Ambrose and says he beat Barrett for the title. Ambrose says he's coming for the belt so Truth just hands it to him. Cole: "HAHAHAHA!" And that sums up the whole thing better than I ever could.

Fandango vs. Curtis Axel

Axel shows us a clock which has him in the Royal Rumble for 32 hours, giving Cole and Lawler something else to laugh about. Fandango jumps him to start so Axel throws him over the top. Curtis: AXELMANIA! Fandango plants him with a release suplex and the Last Dance is good for the pin at 1:03. Again, I care about the loser more than the winner.

Miz interrupts Mizdow's commercial shoot and mocks him for just ripping Miz off. The director didn't know Miz was interested in being part of this commercial and gives him the part instead. That's ANOTHER face who is treated like a loser, but at least he hasn't.....when did he last win a match? This company is really bad at setting up good guys. Of course they have to face adversity, but they really need to win once in awhile. This idea of just letting the fans carry them doesn't hold up for everyone but it seems to be all WWE is doing lately. Either that or have the champ lose every time.

Barrett will be defending the Intercontinental Title at Wrestlemania in a ladder match against an unknown number of unnamed opponents. Sheamus

returns there maybe?

We get the Sting career retrospective. WWE does a lot of things wrong but they're awesome at things like this.

Adam Rose vs. Goldust

Rose has entered the Andre battle royal. Before the match we get a recap of Stardust attacking his brother on Sunday. Rose jumps him to start and charges into the powerslam for two. The Final Cut is good for the pin at 1:02.

Stardust is dressed as a monkey Rosebud and jumps Goldust.

Bray Wyatt claims that Undertaker is clinging to his legacy. He's a snake, but even the cleverest rat can only run from the snake for so long. How long does Undertaker think he can hide? Time is ticking because Wrestlemania is approaching. Come find him.

Seth Rollins/Kane/Big Show vs. Erick Rowan/Dolph Ziggler/Ryback

We get the Jon Stewart response to Rollins before the match starts. Kane headlocks Rowan to start but gets runs over by a shoulder block. A fall away slam (that's way too popular of a move these days) and jumping elbow get two for Rowan and it's off to Ziggler for a nice response. Kane drives Dolph into the corner for a tag to Rollins, who is quickly dropped with a neckbreaker.

Big Show makes a blind tag and throws Ziggler down with a cobra clutch throw as we take a break. Back with Kane holding Ziggler in a chinlock before kicking him in the face to give Rollins two. Big Show comes back in with a headbutt to set up the Vader Bomb. Big Show: "I'M GOING TO HIT MY MOVE!" It's only good for two though and Dolph scores with a quick Fameasser but he has to add a running DDT to Kane. That's finally enough for the tag to Ryback and house is cleaned.

An overhead belly to belly sends Rollins flying into the corner and a big powerslam plants him for good measure. The Meat Hook connects but Mercury comes in for a distraction. Big Show breaks up a double Shell Shock as everything breaks down. Rollins dives onto Rowan but his Blockbuster

attempt is caught in a Shell Shock. Kane makes a save but eats a Zig Zag, only to get dropped by Rollins. The Stooges are thrown in again and the distraction lets Ryback hit Shell Shock on Rollins for the pin at 11:07.

Rating: C+. Well the booking has been frustrating all night so why not job out Rollins again while trading wins in the never ending feud as well? If there's one good thing here, it's Ryback looking like a monster this whole time. However, none of this matters until it actually leads somewhere for him. Odds are he'll be put into the battle royal though and get lost in the shuffle.

Overall Rating: D+. This show was one of the most head scratching shows I've seen in a very long time. Between having the Intercontinental Title literally handed over from one guy to another in what felt like a parody sketch instead of...whatever that really was supposed to be to faces looking like hopeless losers to somehow making me feel bad for a villain to trading wins with Big Show and Kane continuing to look strong to set up whatever in the world they're going to do, this show was every problem WWE has going on right now.

The short matches are a confusing point for me. On one hand, I really don't want to see these matches keep going on and on, but at the same time I'd like to see a match get enough time to not be a huge waste. Throw in Roman Reigns just talking for five minutes and not getting anywhere and this was a really rough show to sit through.

Results

Dean Ambrose b. Miz – Dirty Deeds

Natalya b. Naomi – Discus lariat

Daniel Bryan b. Bad News Barrett – Running knee

Fandango b. Curtis Axel – Last Dance

Goldust b. Adam Rose – Final Cut

Dolph Ziggler/Erick Rowan/Ryback b. Kane/Big Show/Seth Rollins – Shell Shock to Rollins

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Smackdown – February 19, 2015: Yep, It's Still Smackdown

Smackdown

Date: February 19, 2015

Location: BB&T Center, Sunrise, Florida

Attendance: 8,000

Commentators: Byron Saxton, Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler

It's the final show before Fast Lane and thankfully the ending to Monday's show was a bit more interesting than trying to figure out exactly when Bryan turned into a whiny loser who is using his contractual obligations to get back in the title picture instead of just winning matches like he did last year. Other than that we have Rollins vs. Ziggler again tonight because what else could they air? Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of the Reigns vs. Bryan story from Monday with both of them messing with the others match and a big brawl to end the show.

Opening sequence.

Miz vs. Daniel Bryan

Before the match, we see Miz ripping on Mizdow earlier in the night, but he insists it's just trying to help Mizdow from being a loser. Mizdow of course out pops Miz, earning him a severe tongue lashing. Miz orders him to go get an Egyptian cotton towel for after his match. Apparently Bryan wants Miz to only use American goods and kicks some patriotism into his former mentor.

The running clothesline and corner dropkick set up a top rope hurricanrana but Miz bails to the floor to avoid the running knee. Back in and Miz kicks out the knee before driving knees into the hamstring. You don't try to match submissions with Bryan though and the YES Lock is good for the submission at 2:54.

Ryback vs. Kane

Ryback hammers him into the corner to start and hits a decent belly to belly. A threat of the Meat Hook sends Kane outside in the same sequence from the first match with the running knee. Back in and Kane hits a running DDT followed by a big boot to send Ryback into the corner. We hit the chinlock for a bit before Ryback fights up with a Thesz Press and the Warrior Splash. Ryback gets knocked off the top rope to the floor, which means absolutely nothing as he hits the Shell Shock immediately after getting back in for the pin at 3:51.

Rating: D. This was a ten minute power match packed into less than four minutes. Ryback and Kane could have a decent match if they were given a few more minutes but they had to fly through this instead, likely so we can see a bunch of videos from Raw. Also, Ryback can pin Kane but Reigns can only beat him by countout? These are the kind of things that just make no sense and make you wonder if anyone is actually thinking backstage.

We recap Ambrose making Barrett sign the contract on Monday.

R-Truth vs. Bad News Barrett

Non-title so just raise Truth's hand now. Ambrose is on commentary and wants to know why Truth is shouting WHOMP THERE IT IS, even though it's on his iPod. Barrett stomps away in the corner as Dean talks about the

title being the backbone of the company. Truth gives Barrett a pelvic thrust, earning him a beating in the corner.

Cole asks how that contract signing can stand. Dean: "Well there's a graphic for the match on WWE.com and the internet is always true." We hit the chinlock on Truth as Barrett talks trash to Dean. Truth fights up with ease and a side kick gets two. Ambrose ignores more trash talk, even as Barrett takes Truth to the floor and beats him up right in front of Dean. Back in and Dean turns his back on Barrett, allowing Truth to grab a rollup for the pin at 3:09.

Rating: D. Egads man I was kidding about Truth winning. Remember the good old days when champions ACTUALLY WON MATCHES??? On top of that, history shows us that Truth isn't going anywhere after this win because pinning the champion is a plot device instead of a way to elevate someone. I don't know what Barrett did to deserve this treatment, but he'd have a better future as a shark dentist than as Intercontinental Champion.

Vince is on the cover of Muscle and Fitness.

We look back at Cena and Rusev fighting on Monday. If nothing else, that segment proved that American healthcare is better than Russian, as Cena's eye went from the focal point of the match to ignored in the span of a week.

Bray Wyatt says find him before he finds you.

Sheamus return video.

New Day vs. Ascension

Kofi is the odd man out here. Viktor and Woods get things going with Xavier planting a knee into the ribs for two. Ascension drags Woods into the corner for a double teaming, featuring a lot of choking in the corner. Back to Viktor for a kick to the ribs but Woods rolls over for an ice cold tag to E. Viktor gets thrown around but gets a reprieve as Big E. wipes away the sweat. A cheap shot from Konnor allows Viktor to send Big E. into the post, setting up Fall of Man for the pin at 2:52. I'm not surprised they've already pulled the plug on New Day, even though I like

at least two of the members of the team.

Luke Harper vs. Roman Reigns

My goodness Harper has cooled down since winning that Intercontinental Title. It really has become a death knell in the last few years. Reigns throws him into the corner and stomps Luke down with ease. More stomping sends Harper outside and Roman nails him with a running clothesline. If Reigns can do one thing as well as anyone, it's explode with running moves.

Back in and something like the ProtoBomb gets two but they head right back outside where Luke sends him into the steps. Back in and a slingshot hilo of all things gets two for Harper but Reigns fights out of a headlock. A big Samoan drop sends Harper flying but he escapes another and hits a swinging Boss Man Slam for two. Reigns pops back up, no sells a superkick and spears Harper down for the pin at 4:49.

Rating: C. As much as I can't stand the no selling of hard shots to the face, this is the kind of win that makes Reigns look better. Have him get in there for a hard hitting match and then spear someone in half for the pin. It's a really basic way of getting him over and to show off his physical abilities instead of whatever the heck the story with Bryan is supposed to be. I've watched the entire thing so far and I still don't get it. What I do get however is Reigns spearing people and pinning them because it looks cool.

Recap of Flair and HHH from Raw for the response to the acceptance for the challenge to talk.

Big Show vs. Erick Rowan

I don't see this going well. Show kicks Rowan to the floor before the bell and throws him into the steps. He picks Rowan up by the beard and throws him inside where the referee is fine with opening the match despite Rowan taking a horrible beating which should be a DQ but that might make Big Show look weak and this is a Big Show tribute company after all.

Show stomps him down in the corner and plants him with a slam. More stomping sets up the chokeslam for the pin at 2:26. Why in the world did we need a Big Show squash? He beat Daniel Bryan on Raw and now he needs to win a squash? Oh wait, it's more Survivor Series fallout. Why didn't I see that coming?

Cameron vs. Paige

The Bellas are on commentary and wearing sunglasses, which actually fit them quite well. Cameron flips her hair at Paige to start and gets the revolving elbows in the corner for her efforts. Paige drives knees into the chest and does her shout on the apron to no reaction from the Bellas. Apparently Nikki is fierce. Good to know. Cameron comes back with her horrible offense and slaps Paige in the face, earning her a series of clotheslines. A kick to the face sets up the PTO for the submission at 2:09.

Paige shouts at the Bellas post match. They were actually far easier to sit through here as they've turned up the obnoxious levels to make it more of a character than just half doing everything and coming off like catty teenagers at summer camp. Naturally Nikki is going to retain the title Sunday though, because Paige has won every match leading up to the showdown and the Bellas are evil, meaning they have to get the upper hand.

We recap Goldust and Stardust's issues with Dusty on Monday.

Stardust knows what it's like to be considered a freak, so he embraced Stardust. They were on fire as a team and won the Tag Team Titles, but then darkness crept in. He saw it coming because it happened to him, and it took Cody away from him. Now Stardust is a cancer eating Cody alive and he wants his brother back. That means he has to face his brother and beat him at Fast Lane. Stardust appears on the screen behind him and asks to be spared from Goldust's sentiments. After Sunday, Cody won't be the only one who has ceased to exist. The universe will forget the name of Goldust.

Jimmy Uso vs. Tyson Kidd

Before the match, Kidd says his decision to team with Cesaro is the best move he's ever made. Natalya's face is rather amusing to say the least. Also of note here: Kidd is about a foot shorter than Cesaro. I've never noticed that kind of a height difference before. Kidd fires off ROH style forearms to the head to start but Jimmy comes back with right hands in the corner. Not that it matters though as Rusev comes in to beat up both guys at 0:57.

Rusev destroys everyone and rants in Russian about Cena. No Lana here.

Seth Rollins vs. Dolph Ziggler

The Stooges are barred from ringside. Feeling out process to start with both guys going for arm holds and Rollins bailing to the ropes. They hit the mat with Ziggler caught in a headlock but he comes back with a nice dropkick. Rollins avoids a Stinger Splash though and we take a break. Back with Ziggler fighting out of a chinlock (as is almost always the case) but charging into a hot shot for two.

Big Show, Kane, Ryback and Rowan are all at ringside. After what happened earlier, why would you want Rowan out there? Isn't there an elderly music teacher somewhere that could give you a better fighting chance? Rollins yells at Ryback and Rowan, allowing Dolph to come back with a running forearm to put both guys down.

Now the Stinger Splash connects and Ziggler follows it up with a neckbreaker. Rollins tries the buckle bomb but gets countered into a sunset flip, followed by the Fameasser for two more. Dolph dropkicks him out to the floor where Seth slaps Ryback and Rowan. Back in and Ziggler has to fight off Kane, allowing Rollins to hit the buckle bomb, followed by the Curb Stomp for the pin at 10:23.

Rating: B-. Solid enough match here but it's nothing we haven't seen them do far better before. Rollins getting a big win is a good sign and I'd assume there's going to be a six man tag set up for Sunday. If nothing else it would fill out the card a bit and get us beyond six matches for the show. Oh and a big talk, because that's what I want to pay for: a preview for the next show.

The Stooges come out and it's time for the big beatdown. Given that Ziggler is done and Rowan is Rowan, it's basically Ryback getting destroyed, making a decent comeback and then getting destroyed again for the last three minutes of the show, because the Stooges were able to subdue Rowan and we're still doing the same things we did around Survivor Series time. So much for Kane and Big Show having issues I guess, unless something happens Sunday.

Overall Rating: C-. Now this felt like an alternative to Raw. Monday night tends to be about packing as much stuff as you can into a show, but at the same time it feels like they're stalling for time. This show flies by with some decent wrestling and VERY few stories. Smackdown is much more streamlined and makes it an easier show to sit through.

However, that doesn't make it an interesting show. Nothing happens on this show and it was pure false hope when it moved back to Thursdays. This is right back to the same stuff they did for years and there's no real reason to watch it. Yeah there was some mild storyline development here, but it's more like the downloadable content for a video game: it might be fun to kill some time, but if you never saw it, you wouldn't lose anything from the game itself.

Results

Daniel Bryan b. Miz – YES Lock

Ryback b. Kane – Shell Shock

R-Truth b. Bad News Barrett – Rollup

Ascension b. New Day – Fall of Man to Big E.

Roman Reigns b. Luke Harper – Spear

Big Show b. Erick Rowan – Chokeslam

Paige b. Cameron – PTO

Jimmy Uso vs. Tyson Kidd went to a no contest when Rusev interfered

Seth Rollins b. Dolph Ziggler – Curb Stomp

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Smackdown – February 12, 2015: The Longest TV Match In Company History

Smackdown

Date: February 12, 2015

Location: Nutter Center, Dayton, Ohio

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

The big story coming out of Raw is Bryan and Reigns finally coming to blows with Reigns spearing Bryan after winning the match. It didn't come off like a heel turn, but rather Reigns being more aggressive instead of his usual laid back self. The question now becomes what happens to them going forward, as this is a pretty hard turn for the story and could help things out a good bit. Let's get to it.

We open in the back with Kane and Big Show announcing a tag team turmoil match for tonight with Roman Reigns and Daniel Bryan starting things off. Show mentions grabbing the bull by the horns and we get an El Torito cameo. So basically Reigns and Bryan are running a gauntlet? The other teams include Slater Gator, Usos, Los Matadores, Miz/Mizdow, Ascension and presumably Big Show/Kane.

Opening sequence.

Bray Wyatt vs. R-Truth

You have to wonder why Truth would keep accepting this match as he's been squashed by Wyatt about a dozen times now. Wyatt just sits in the corner waiting until WHOOMP THERE IT IS makes his eyes bug out and gets him to his feet. A hard clothesline drops Truth early on but he's able to low bridge Bray out to the floor. That's fine with Bray as he nails Truth upside the head and takes over again. We hit the nerve hold before Truth avoids a seated splash. The Lie Detector totally misses but gets two anyway. Bray hits his big clothesline, Spider Walks, and Sister Abigail is good for the pin at 4:31.

Rating: D. What else did you expect here? Bray continues to squash people and there's nothing to see here in a match with a jobber like Truth. He does get the fans reacting though and is likely to have a job for years as a result. It seems that we're getting Undertaker vs. Wyatt at Wrestlemania, and there would be almost no logical reason for Wyatt to lose there. That match could mean some interesting stories, but I doubt WWE would go there.

Summer Rae vs. Paige

The Bellas are on commentary again. Paige armdrags her down to start and hits a hard kick to the ribs, followed by Matt Morgan's rotating elbows in the corner. Summer comes back with something like an Indian Deathlock as the Bellas do their usual "we're better than you" schtick. Byron: "You are aware there's a match going on in the ring?" Nikki: "Unfortunately yes there is." Paige hits three clotheslines because there's no other comeback allowed in WWE. The PTO makes Summer give up at 2:58.

The Bellas pose and Paige yells after the match. This is being written about six hours after the fourway Divas match at Takeover: Rival, which was one of the best Divas matches I've ever seen, topping a list comprised of almost all NXT Divas matches. I would pay BIG money to hear someone tell me how the WWE Divas are so much better than the girls down in Florida without using the words John, Cena, Bryan, Danielson, reality or total.

Quick look at Rusev calling Cena an old man and going after his eye. Cena is 37, looks like he's about 30 and probably has at least four or five good years left in him. We're a few years away from calling Cena an old man. He's six years younger than Kane and ten years younger than Big Show, but Cena is the grizzled veteran?

Sheamus return video.

Rikishi is going to the Hall of Fame. I really don't get why people are freaking out over that. He's a multiple time Tag Team Champion, an Intercontinental Champion and was around forever. He even had a brief main event run. That's far better than some people who have gone in but this one isn't ok for some reason?

Fandango vs. Adam Rose

Rose yells at the Rosebuds to start and stomps Fandango down in the corner. He hooks a bodyscissors followed by a chinlock as this isn't going anywhere. Fandango pops up and hits a snap powerslam, followed by the Last Dance for the pin at 1:39. I have no idea why I'm supposed to care about Fandango now.

Rose shoves the Rosebuds down again. Is this story ever going to move forward?

We see HHH calling out Sting for Fast Lane and Sting accepting. I did like how clear he made the response. Sometimes you just need to keep it simple.

Tag Team Turmoil

Either this match is going to go nearly an hour or there's something else to close the show. Reigns and Bryan start against Miz and Mizdow. Miz and Bryan get things going with Daniel kicking him in the back and roughly tagging out to Reigns. Roman pounds him down in the corner and tags out just as hard. It's off to Mizdow for the Reality Check but Miz isn't pleased and tags himself back in. Daniel hits a running kick in the corner so Reigns tags himself in for the Superman Punch, but Bryan tags in for the running knee instead of the spear. Miz is done at 2:18.

Next up are the Tag Team Champion Usos who start their section after a break. Bryan grabs a headlock on Jey to start but has to spin out of a wristlock. Daniel stays on the arm but gets taken down for the double elbow drop. It's off to Reigns for a battle of the cousins and Jimmy is quickly run over with a shoulder. The Usos finally start getting together to clothesline Reigns to the floor as they're clearly in no hurry here.

Back to Bryan for a leg lock and some hard forearms to Jey's face. Daniel starts kicking at the leg in the corner as Reigns just glares at both guys. Jey makes a blind tag and comes in with a kick to the face for two. The champs start in on the arm and Daniel bails outside as we take a break. Back with Reigns suplexing Jimmy but getting annoyed at yet another blind tag from Bryan. Daniel: "THIS IS A SUPLEX!" His has a bit more snap but gets the same two count. The Usos take him into the corner again and stomp Daniel down with the running Umaga Attack getting another near fall.

A running headbutt gets two for Jey and it's back to the arm. That goes nowhere as Bryan pops back up with the running clothesline. The first regular tag brings in Reigns and it's a big boot and a neck crank on Jimmy. Back to Bryan to sidestep a charging Jimmy, sending his shoulder into the post. Both Usos head to the floor for a series of kicks to the chest but Roman says lay off of them because they're hurt. Daniel gets right in his face and they shove each other a bit as we go to our third break.

Back again with Daniel cranking on Jey's arm and suplexing him down for two. Bryan is acting a bit heelish but you could also say he's just being more aggressive and trying to win. Roman isn't interested in working on his cousin, which wasn't a problem for him back in the Shield days of course. A Samoan drop finally puts Bryan down for a breather and the hot tag brings in Jimmy.

The kneeling uppercut has Bryan in trouble but he backdrops Jimmy to the floor. Jey tags himself in on the way over though and gets two off a high cross body with Daniel making the save. Jey asks his cousin what's going on (it can't be what's up or that would be gimmick infringement) and everything breaks down.

Reigns drops Jey but gets sent to the floor for a big dive. Bryan dives on everyone not named Jimmy but Jimmy takes too much time, allowing Bryan to hit the Superman Punch. The Usos hit a few superkicks but the Superfly Splash hits knees and Jimmy taps to the YES Lock at 31:50 (total, as all following times will be).

Reigns yells at Bryan for holding the YES Lock too long as we take another break. Back with the argument continuing and Los Matadores coming in as the fourth team. Fernando throws Bryan down and scores with a headscissors to keep the tired Daniel in trouble. Daniel realizes he's in there with Los Matadores and throws Fernando in the surfboard until Diego makes a save. Fernando heads up top but gets butterfly superplexed down, setting up the YES Lock for the submission at 39:47.

Slater Gator is in next with new music and Heath appears to have chopped off his hair. Reigns tags himself in to clean house with the fireman's carry flapjack to Slater, followed by a big spear for another pin at 41:18. We take what might be a record fifth commercial break in one match and come back with Ascension as the sixth team.

Bryan and Viktor get things going with Ascension easily taking over. Daniel fights out of the corner with forearms but Konnor low bridges him to the floor. The double beating is on and Roman gets one as well for trying to make a save. Bryan gets posted and Reigns is sent over the announcers' table. Back in and Daniel takes Fall of Man but the Ascension has been disqualified, somewhere around 49:10. A bunch of referees break it up and Big Show and Kane are the final team.

Cole informs us that Ascension was in fact disqualified. Normally I would have a sarcastic line here but since the referee shouted "YOU TWO ARE DISQUALIFIED!", I'll be a bit more blunt: Cole sounds stupid. He makes it even worse by saying they can in fact confirm Big Show and Kane as the next team. AS IN THE TEAM COMING DOWN THE AISLE. We take another break and come back with Kane stomping on Reigns. A shoulder block gets two but Reigns pops back up with a clothesline, allowing for the tag off to Bryan.

Daniel busts out the YES Kicks, somehow for the first time in this match.

Show makes a fast save though and sends him out to the floor but throws Bryan back over the top and back inside. It's back to Kane for more stomping as he and Show somehow look more exhausted than Bryan and Reigns. More kicks break up the chokeslam but Kane shoves Bryan into Big Show, much to the giant's annoyance.

A double back elbow puts Bryan down and Big Show yells at Reigns a bit. Daniel kicks out of Show's chokeslam attempt before hitting a DDT. That's still not enough for the hot tag though as Show gets two off a splash. He yells at Kane for being negative and chokes Bryan in the air. Kane wants this to be over but Show says he's having fun. Show gets on the middle rope for the Vader Bomb but Kane tags himself in and yells at Show for taking too many risks. Show: "THAT'S RUDE!"

Kane gets caught in the YES Lock and Show makes a very delayed save. This time it's Show tagging himself in but has to stop and yell at Kane again. Reigns gets knocked off the apron but Bryan pulls Show down into the YES Lock. Kane makes a save but asks Show what he's doing. That's quite a rude question.

Big Show thinks so too as he KO Punches Kane and I think we have the 1000th Big Show turn. Well that's quite a milestone if nothing else. Show's gift is a spear and running knee to FINALLY end this match at 1:05:15. From what I can find, that's the sixth longest match in company history. Of the five longer matches, three were Royal Rumbles.

Rating: C-. The best part of it all: the match wasn't even that good. It was a mix of squashes and long, drawn out tag matches which really isn't enough to carry a match that length of time. Bryan and Reigns were trying to one up each other (Bryan had four falls to Reigns' one, which was over Slater) and they used half of the show to do it because half the roster is in the Middle East on tour. My goodness this felt long and I need a rest after this marathon. It's a remarkable performance from Bryan and Reigns, but not a good match otherwise.

Overall Rating: C. The show was entertaining enough but much more of a novelty than anything else. As much as I hate this booking move, there's almost no way to avoid putting the Tag Team Titles on Bryan and Reigns

now, because they literally just beat most of the entire tag division in one night, including the champions. Until the Usos beat Bryan and Reigns, they're the best team in the company by default and it gives them another way to build to the match at Fast Lane. There isn't much else to talk about here due to the main event literally taking up over half the show, but there was nothing else of note anyway.

Results

Bray Wyatt b. R-Truth – Sister Abigail

Paige b. Summer Rae – PT0

Fandango b. Adam Rose – Last Dance

Roman Reigns/Daniel Bryan won Tag Team Turmoil last eliminating Big Show/Kane – Running knee to Show

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Smackdown – February 5, 2015: Let It Go. Let It Go.

Smackdown

Date: February 5, 2015

Location: World Arena, Colorado Spring, Colorado

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole, Byron Saxton

This week's Raw changed a lot of things about the Fast Lane and potentially Wrestlemania cards. The big story was Daniel Bryan defeating Seth Rollins to earn a shot against Roman Reigns at Fast Lane with the winner facing Brock Lesnar for the World Title at Wrestlemania. This is due to the Rock interfering in the Royal Rumble when Rusev was still involved and somehow was announced without ever mentioning Rusev's name. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of the "earth shaking" announcement from Raw. Rusev is still not mentioned by the Authority. That's downright impressive. Bryan pinning Rollins to earn the shot is shown as well.

Opening sequence.

It's time for MizTV with special guests Roman Reigns and Daniel Bryan. Miz has Mizdow sit at ringside to further his new role as assistant. The fans of course want Mizdow and Miz says they have him, sitting outside where he belongs. The guests come out and Reigns lays out Miz with a Superman Punch before anything can be said. Well that's one way to make fans like him. Reigns grabs the mic and says he went through 29 wrestlers to get here and he'll go through one more to go to Wrestlemania. Wouldn't it be one of them again since Bryan was in the Rumble?

Reigns is going to go to Wrestlemania by beating Bryan at Fast Lane but they should just do it right here. Bryan is game but here are Rollins and the Stooges to interrupt. Seth blames Reigns for taking his spot in the main event of Wrestlemania but he'll get there one day on his own, even though Reigns is scared to face him one on one. As per the Authority, Bryan will be in action tonight against himself and the Stooges.

Post break Miz says he should be in the main event of Wrestlemania instead and wants to fight Roman tonight.

Goldust/Stardust vs. Ryback/Dolph Ziggler

Thankfully they come out to Ziggler's music this time. An inset interview from Ziggler and Ryback says for Goldust and Stardust, it's too bad that

they're too good. Stardust jumps over Goldust to start for the team and is quickly slammed down by Ryback. Off to Ziggler who gets two off a dropkick and brings Ryback in again to hammer on Stardust even more. Ziggler drops the big elbow (after a quick strut) and Ryback follows with the splash for two. Stardust tells Goldust he has this and we take a break.

Back with Goldust choking Ryback on the ropes before it's back to Stardust for a front facelock. Ryback finally backdrops Goldust out to the floor and punches Stardust out of the air, allowing the hot tag to Ziggler. Things speed up and the running DDT gets two on Stardust. The Disaster Kick drops Ziggler and Goldust wants a tag, calling his brother Cody again. He tags in by smacking Stardust in the head, causing Cody to walk out. The solo Goldust walks into a Shell Shock for the pin at 9:14.

Rating: D+. You know, I kind of wish these teams would just split in a hurry instead of doing these weeks long drawn out buildups to the big showdown. It should be an interesting match and feud, but again I'd like to know who else they have to fill out the division, which is currently about three teams deep. Maybe it's Ryback and Ziggler, who aren't the worst combination in the world and at least they have something in common.

Ernie Ladd Black History Month video.

Curtis Axel vs. Dean Ambrose

Axel uses the "don't change the channel" line again, which is somewhere between brilliant and depressing. He wants everyone to join the movement and of course he has a hashtag for it. Curtis tries to jump Dean to start and gets stomped down into the corner for his efforts. He spins Dean around in the corner and hammers at the back but makes the mistake of sending Dean outside. As he throws Dean back in, Ambrose comes back out with a dropkick to the face, setting up the rebound lariat. Dirty Deeds is good for the pin at 2:44 after Axel got in far more offense than I was expecting.

Barrett pops up on screen with the BNZ: Bad News Zone. The bad news this week: Ambrose is much too insane to receive a title shot.

Fandango vs. Adam Rose

The Trust Fall fails and Rose blames the Rosebuds for doing it on purpose. That earns the hot dog a right hand and kick to the knee in something I never thought I would have to type. Fandango pulls him inside and chops Rose in the corner, only to get stomped down in the corner for his efforts. A belly to back suplex onto the apron has Fandango in even more trouble. Back in and Fandango hits a spinwheel kick, yells to the crowd like a good guy would, and drops the guillotine legdrop (finally named the Last Dance) for the pin at 2:07. Fandango was wrestling entirely like a face here.

Miz vs. Roman Reigns

They're flying through these matches tonight. Miz gets in a good line before the match with "You want to headline Wrestlemania? Come face someone who actually did it." That's Miz's "I beat the Rock and Austin in the same night." He knocks Reigns off the apron during the entrances and sends Reigns into the steps. Roman says ring the bell and Miz pounds away as soon as he can. Reigns ducks his head for a backdrop and gets kicked in the face, so he opts for just running Miz over with a shoulder.

After a quick beating on the floor, Miz comes back inside with even more left hands as he's come to play. Cole says a loss here would really hurt Roman Reigns. Like the one on Monday where Big Show beat him in less than three minutes? Or is that an exception because it's Big Show who is in fact big? Miz puts on a neck crank followed by a chinlock but charges into a big clothesline. The low DDT is countered into a bearhug and then a Samoan drop, setting up the spear to pin Miz at 5:47.

Rating: C-. This was much better than I was expecting with Miz having more fire in him than I've seen in years. It's also a good idea to have Reigns have to come from behind instead of just running people over, especially over former World Champions. Yeah Miz is on the low end of that list, but it's better than beating up jobbers or Kane all over again. Also at the end of the day, it's not Big Show, meaning it's a better match by definition.

Rusev vs. Erick Rowan

Non-title. They slug it out to start with Rowan kicking him in the face as a huge USA chant starts up. A shoulder sends Rusev outside but he scores with a spinwheel kick back inside to take over. We hit the chinlock for a bit before Rowan clubs him down and beats Rusev across the ring. A middle rope back elbow to the jaw drops Rusev again but Rowan gets kicked off the ropes. The Accolade makes Rowan tap at 3:20.

Rating: D. Standard brawl here to make Rusev look good by beating up Cena's....buddy I guess? I mean who remembers Rowan helping to steal the souls of children last summer or whatever you call it? After all, they had a 45 second chat that one time on Raw and those things bury all hatchets. This was your run of the mill Rusev match.

We look at the Bellas putting spray tanner on Paige from Monday. Somehow this is the most interesting feud in the division in months.

Paige was actually embarrassed on Monday because she isn't your standard Diva. She's also not a conformist and the Bellas will be the embarrassed ones at Fast Lane. Not a bad thirty second promo, especially given what she has to work with.

Paige vs. Alicia Fox

In case you didn't get enough of it on Raw. Paige erupts on her to start and hammers on Fox, only to walk into a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker. The Bellas are watching in the back as Fox sends Paige outside. Back in and the northern lights suplex gets two on Paige and it's time for the chinlock.

Saxton says the Bellas have been the faces of the Divas division for the better part of seven years. That would make my soul hurt if it was actually true, but I think Laycool, Mickie James, Kelly, Melina, AJ and even Paige might have a bit to say about that, especially given that before this title reign, the Bellas had combined to hold titles for about two and a half months in those seven years. Anyway, Paige fights up and hits a dropkick, setting up PT0 for the win at 2:32.

We go to the double date with Jimmy Uso/Naomi and Natalya/Kidd, but Tyson thought he'd be coming with Cesaro because they're partners. Natalya

facepalms and eats at the same time while Cesaro and Kidd say FACT at the same time. Naomi yells at Natalya for being rude and letting her husband be a jerk. Jimmy doesn't like what Kidd says about Naomi and gets knocked out by Cesaro. Natalya blames Jimmy and Naomi.

Network/Fast Lane hype.

Bray Wyatt says a man is defined by his actions but he is no man. He is the reaper, so what makes you think your actions towards him mean nothing? You are blinded by your pride and the devil is knocking on your door. He just wants you to come home, so just let him in. Let him in. Let Bray in.

Daniel Bryan vs. Jamie Noble/Joey Mercury/Seth Rollins

Mercury offers a test of strength to start but gets kicked in the leg instead. Daniel rides him on the mat with ease so it's off to Noble to get abused as well. A cross armbreaker sends Noble running to the ropes and it's off to Rollins for a smattering of applause before the YOU SOLD OUT chants begin. A dropkick puts Seth down but he gets Bryan into the corner for the triple team. Back to Noble as the announcers recap Wrestlemania from last year. Rollins takes Bryan outside and sends him into the barricade as we take a break.

Back with Bryan getting German suplexed for no cover. Seth does Brock's bounce before throwing another German suplex. The Stooges take turns stomping away with Noble throwing some shadow punches. Mercury gets two off a dropkick (people might forget how young the Stooges really are. Noble is the older of the two and is only 38. This is hardly Patterson and Brisco II) before Seth comes in for some cocky stomping.

Daniel fights up for a double cross body to put both guys down. Back up and Seth sends him into the buckle to take over again but makes the mistake of setting up the Triple Bomb out of the corner. Bryan counters into a hurricanrana and Daniel speeds things up. A top rope double dropkick puts the Stooges down and it's time for rotating YES Kicks. Bryan clotheslines Rollins to the floor and throws Noble out with him, setting up the YES Lock for the submission on Mercury at 13:58.

Rating: C. This was fine and again it helps that the Stooges are still more than capable of having a passable match. Considering they're wrestling in business casual clothing, this wasn't too bad. Bryan winning here makes sense and there's no need to have him pin Rollins again. As I said in the Wyatts' feud against Cena (before it was resolved with one of those 45 second backstage chats), a good villain needs lackeys for situations like this one.

Post match Kane comes out and beats down Bryan because THIS FEUD WILL NOT FREAKING DIE ALREADY. Bryan gets a big beating to end the show, including a chokeslam and curb stomp. There is no reason for Kane and Bryan to keep fighting, especially after last week.

Overall Rating: C. This show was rolling along to a decent rating and then they do this stupid thing again where they can't just let a feud end and move on to ANYTHING else because for some reason, writers in WWE don't get that it's ok to end a story at some point. There's no reason for this thing to keep going but they're just going to keep it going because they have no idea where else to go with Kane.

Unfortunately, this show felt like an old Friday night episode of the show with nothing really interesting and a decent match here and there. It's not bad or anything, but at least they had the two most important names featured here. At the end of the day, any show that doesn't have Cena on it all the time doesn't feel like a major show. The company really does revolve around him and you can notice when he's gone.

Results

Dolph Ziggler/Ryback b. Goldust/Stardust – Shell Shock to Goldust

Dean Ambrose b. Curtis Axel – Dirty Deeds

Fandango b. Adam Rose – Last Dance

Roman Reigns b. Miz – Spear

Rusev b. Erick Rowan – Accolade

Paige b. Alicia Fox – PT0

Daniel Bryan b. Seth Rollins/Jamie Noble/Joey Mercury – YES Lock to Mercury

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Smackdown – January 29, 2015: And So It Ends. Please Dear Goodness Let It End.

Smackdown

Date: January 29, 2015

Location: XL Center, Hartford, Connecticut

Commentators: Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole

This is a rare live show due to the massive snow storm in the northeast that wiped out Tuesday's tapings. That might actually be the best thing they could have had happen to them after the negative reaction to the Royal Rumble. Tonight's main event is yet another Bryan vs. Kane showdown, this time in a casket match. Let's get to it.

Here's HHH to welcome us to Raw before realizing he's a bit shaken up. The one thing WWE doesn't like is being told what to do, which is why they did it. Just like they were told they would never have a million Network subscribers, which is exactly what they announced this week. He actually thanks the fans for subscribing in a rare genuine act. Then he

was told they couldn't have a show in Hartford, so here they are for the live show.

WWE isn't the only one with a controversy right now because the NFL and Roger Goodell have a problem with their balls. Some like them hard and some like them soft, but WWE has never had a problem with balls. However, that's not something they have an issue with in WWE. HHH is the same way, because he has a problem with the man called Sting, and he'll be dealing with that face to face at Fast Lane.

That brings him back to the Royal Rumble which had its fair share of controversy. First of all there was an exceptional triple threat where Rollins proved that he is the future, Cena proved that he is the past and Brock Lesnar proved that he is the beast and World Heavyweight Champion.

However, that wasn't the major controversy. The controversy was due to the Royal Rumble itself, which everyone has been talking about. We see some clips with Cole talking about how the fans are upset that guys like Ziggler, Bryan and Wyatt have been eliminated, leaving Big Show and Kane in the end. Reigns eliminated Rusev to win and cemented his spot at Wrestlemania.

HHH promises to make an announcement on Raw that is going to end the controversy and shake the WWE to its core. That sounds like trying to fix the main event already, which might not be the worst idea in the world. This brings out Reigns, who says there was no controversy because he won the Rumble. HHH agrees that he won the match, so now Reigns can win this one.

Big Show vs. Roman Reigns

Now let this be the FINAL match. They shove each other around to start with Big Show shoving him around to start. This is where Reigns is getting hurt more than anywhere else: he should be DESTROYING Big Show to set up a major showdown with giant killer vs. ultimate giant Lesnar at Wrestlemania. Instead it's Big Show looking dominant and Reigns probably making a comeback to win in a surprise. Show throws him across the ring as we're waiting on Reigns' first offense. He slips out of a slam and sends Big Show into the buckle for a breather, followed by a clothesline

out to the floor as we take a break.

Back with Show working on the knee and putting on something like an ankle lock. Reigns climbs up the ropes to escape and counters into an ankle scissors of all things to send Show over the top. There's the apron kick but of course Show pops back up. Some clotheslines have little effect but a third one finally puts Show down.

A Samoan drop plants Show again but he rolls outside. Another running clothesline off the apron puts Show down but the knee is banged up. Back in and the Superman Punch is countered into the chokeslam for two. Show goes up but gets Superman Punched twice. He still won't go down so Reigns slams him down, setting up the spear for the pin at 12:21.

Rating: D. AND THEY'RE DONE. Like NEVER AGAIN let these two fight. It's not even that Reigns is looking bad out there but Big Show just looks like nothing. And what does Reigns get out of this win? Nothing of course, because NO ONE CARES ABOUT BIG SHOW. Dull match here and it's almost infuriating after all the months of these two fighting.

Vince announces February as a free month for new subscribers on the WWE Network.

Here are Rollins and the Stooges with something to say. Rollins says he told us he would prove himself on Sunday and that's exactly what he did. He was a single count away from winning the WWE World Heavyweight Title and he stuck a dagger into Lesnar's heart when he broke his rib. He's feeling so good that he's going to issue an open challenge to anyone in this building that wants to face him.

Cue Ryback to go after Rollins but the Stooges get the better of him. This brings out Rowan to help but the Stooges and Rollins take him down as well. Ziggler completes the trio but gets sent into the announcers' table. Rollins knees Rowan in the back and the Authority bails before anything else happens. I smell a six man.

Kane is caressing a coffin and promises to lock Bryan inside tonight where the only thing he'll be able to hear is the beating of his heart. It's ashes to ashes and dust to dust, so may God have mercy on Bryan's

soul tonight, because Kane will have none.

Jey Uso vs. Tyson Kidd

They start fast with Jey going to the corner but getting kicked in the knee. Tyson immediately goes after the bad wheel and slaps on a leg lock like a smart heel (or wrestler in general) should. Jey kicks Kidd out to the floor and nails him in the head, setting up a charge (so much for selling the leg). Kidd kicks him in the head though and springboards back in, only to get caught in a Samoan drop. Jimmy and Cesaro go at it on the floor, allowing Kidd to hit the fisherman's neckbreaker for the pin at 2:30.

Here are Rusev and Lana to talk about this past Sunday. Rusev says he should have been the winner and Lana is so upset that she can't speak English. He's the US Champion and wants to challenge a man from the past: John Cena. Cena has no hunger or desire and he isn't a superstar anymore. This brings out Cena who looks shocked at what Rusev just said. Cena threatens to shut Rusev's mouth for him.

It sounds like Rusev has bought into his own hype because he thinks Cena is no challenge for him. He's John Cena, a fifteen time World Champion, a two time Royal Rumble winner and the face who runs this place. He had that US Title years ago and challenges Rusev to do the Hartford Hoedown. Rusev is ready to go but Lana calls him off. The Russians leave but Cena isn't done. He's fighting Rusev at Fast Lane and ending the undefeated streak because the champ is here. This really didn't accomplish much but Cena sounded good.

Paige vs. Nikki Bella for the Divas Title is official for Fast Lane. Paige is in the back when the Bellas come up to make fun of her for being pale. She elbows Brie in the face but takes a big forearm from Nikki.

Goldust/Stardust vs. Ascension

The brothers aren't sure who is going to start until it's Stardust vs. Viktor. A hiptoss puts Viktor down and Stardust W00s. Stardust is shoved into a forearm to Konnor but Viktor nails him in the back to take over. Konnor comes in an\ d stomps away and hammers away before it's quickly

back to Viktor for a chinlock.

Ascension keeps hammering on Stardust in the corner as the Dusts are suddenly the faces in this match. Stardust finally gets over for a hot tag and Goldust comes in with a knee to Viktor's head as everything breaks down. Stardust tags himself back in and Goldust isn't pleased. Konnor shoves Stardust off the top and a quick Fall of Man is good for the pin at 4:33.

Rating: D+. This was more angle advancement than anything else but it also gave Ascension another win. It looks like they're splitting up the Dust Brothers and I can't say I blame them at this point. There's nothing left for them to do and they're starting to get stale as a team, so give the fans a feud that they've been wanting for a good while.

Kane is STILL looking at the casket and slams it shut.

A magician is entertaining some wrestlers in the back when Miz and Mizdow come up to shake his hand. Miz gets annoyed at Mizdow shaking his hand but the magician demonstrates a magic trick with a fake egg, only to mystify Miz by turning it into a real egg. Miz doesn't believe it's real and gets it cracked on his head. R-Truth: The yoke's on you. Mizdow makes sure he isn't caught laughing. I'm a big fan of magic so this was more entertaining than it should have been.

Bray Wyatt asks us what makes us happy. Maybe it's money or a fond memory. He finds enjoyment in things that mommy and daddy hid from us as children. Bray is legion among men so he asks what makes us smile. When he's done, it will be hard for us to ever smile again. Run.

Kane vs. Daniel Bryan

Casket match and they have a lot of time for this one. Cole talks about Bryan looking at the casket because he's never been in a casket match before. I'm sure this has nothing to do with the potential of being locked inside a casket. Kane quickly goes for the casket but Bryan comes back with kicks to the leg while wearing what appear to be furry boots. Kane can't gorilla press him into the casket and runs away from an attempted baseball slide as we take a break.

Back with Kane putting Bryan's face in the ring skirt and hammering away at the covered head. A big boot almost knocks Bryan into the casket but he kicks Kane away for the save. Kane plants him with another side slam but has to fight out of a headscissors to put him into the casket. Bryan nails a high cross body on the floor but gets kicked into the casket, only to crawl out the other side. Kane still can't get him into the casket and we take another break.

We come back with Bryan holding Kane in a chinlock (you don't see that everyday) and hitting his running clothesline to put the giant down. Here come the YES kicks to send Kane outside, setting up the FLYING GOAT and more right hands from Daniel. Kane backdrops him over the barricade as the casket has been forgotten for the moment. They head over to the announcers' table with Bryan getting sent into the chairs, followed by a bunch of chair shots to the back.

They suddenly remember this is a casket match with Kane loading up Bryan for a tombstone off the apron, only to have Daniel slip out and dropkick him a few times. He tries a third dropkick but charges into a chokeslam. Kane loads him into the casket but eats a kick to the face followed by the YES Lock with Kane partially in the casket. Even though it looks terrible, it puts Kane into the casket but Bryan still can't close it. Kane gets out again and almost turns Bryan inside out with a clothesline. Bryan escapes another chokeslam and the running knee to the side of the head puts him in the casket for the win at 22:10.

Rating: D. WAY too long here with a boring match as they had another Bryan vs. Kane showdown that no one wanted to see. Much like earlier, I really hope this is going to be the end of the feud because there's no reason for these guys to fight ever again. It took too long for Kane to put put away here, but at least Bryan won. I'm not a fan of these matches though and it really gets annoying watching them having a dull match until they remember it's a casket match.

We see HHH teasing the announcement for Raw again to close the show.

Overall Rating: D+. The promos carried this show and the show flew by but it really wasn't all that great. The casket match felt like it went on

forever, much like the entire Bryan vs. Kane feud. Thankfully Big Show vs. Reigns should be done, which is why you can already see the gimmick rematch coming at Fast Lane. This was a passable show and felt like Raw cut down to two hours.

If they did this style show every Monday, I can't imagine how much more the fans would calm down. They didn't pack this show full of nonsense and there wasn't as much time being wasted. Keep the show moving and don't let it get repetitive and the show becomes much easier to sit through. That third hour really does cripple Raw and this show is proof. It wasn't good, but it was a lot easier to sit through.

Results

Roman Reigns b. Big Show – Spear

Tyson Kidd b. Jey Uso – Fisherman's neckbreaker

Ascension b. Goldust/Stardust – Fall of Man to Stardust

Daniel Bryan b. Kane – Bryan closed Kane in the casket

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Smackdown – January 22, 2015:

The Goat Face Of Thursdays

Smackdown

Date: January 22, 2015

Location: Frank Erwin Center, Austin, Texas

Commentators: Byron Saxton, Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler

Much like last week, this actually feels like a big show. The main event for tonight is again Bryan vs. Kane, now in a No DQ match with Bryan's Rumble spot on the line. The show had a significantly bigger audience last week compared to the normal audiences on Fridays, so maybe we're in for more big time shows. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of the end of Raw with Sting helping Cena win the 3-1 handicap match to save Cena's spot in the Sunday's title match but more importantly getting Ziggler, Rowan and Ryback's jobs back.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to get things going. He's excited to get on the Road to Wrestlemania and would love to talk about his No DQ match tonight and how he won't let anything stop him from winning the Royal Rumble. He could talk about how obsessed he is with getting the WWE World Heavyweight Championship back. Or he could talk about Sting's first ever appearance on Raw and how it ruined the Authority's night.

However, there's something more important than that, and it's what John Cena accomplished on Raw. There are three people with something to say about it, so here are Ryback, Rowan and Ziggler for their big returns. Well as big as they can be after just getting a few weeks off. It's really hard to care about them being fired when they're back in just a few weeks.

The fans chant FEED ME MORE at Ryback before he compares his firing to Bryan's injury. The Big Guy is back but doesn't have much more to say other than catchphrases. Rowan says being gone was sort of a blessing because he had a lot of time to sit back and think. Believe it or not, he used to be a different person. He was naive and someone's puppet, but

these last few weeks have let them (as in he and the sheep mask) know who he really is.

That leaves us with Ziggler, who of course gets the biggest reaction of the three. Ziggler set around eating stuffed crust pizza and watched the HHH and Stephanie fitness DVDs. He's joking of course and brings up all the momentum he had before getting fired (because WWE loves to build people up and then take them off TV). But the Authority tried to take it away because they're a threat. He would rather stay here and take a beating like never before than going home sitting on his couch and complaining on a podcast (it had been too long since the last Punk cheap shot).

Cue the Authority minus the actual authority with Rollins saying this is a Survivor Series reunion with a garden gnome replacing Bryan. Ziggler wants to beat Rollins up right now but Rollins has more important things to do than deal with someone who sits on a couch eating stuffed crust pizza. Oh and the fitness DVDs are AWESOME! Ziggler says Rollins must enjoy them because he's never seen anyone run away from Lesnar that fast.

Kane tells Bryan to calm down because he still has to survive tonight to get into the Rumble. Bryan responds by showing a clip of Lesnar destroying Kane and Big Show to close Raw. That's not cool with Big Show who promises to win the Rumble on Sunday because the four people in the ring are all losers. Kane promises to go to depraved levels to destroy Bryan but turns his attention to Ziggler. Since he's a new employee, Ziggler has to start back at the bottom of the ladder and work his way back to the Intercontinental Title. However, Kane is willing to give Ziggler a match against Barrett right now.

Royal Rumble Qualifying Match: Bad News Barrett vs. Dolph Ziggler

Non-title and only Ziggler can qualify with a win. Barrett easily takes him down to start but gets caught in a headlock. A nice dropkick gets two for Dolph but a headscissors is countered with a kick to the ribs. They head outside where Barrett sends him into the apron before cranking on the arm back inside. This is the kind of stuff I'd like to see more of: someone grabbing a body part and cranking on it for the middle part of

the match.

A top wristlock has Zigler in trouble but he avoids a charge in the corner. The running DDT gets two for Dolph and we take a break. Back with Barrett going back to the arm but Zigler rolls through to send Barrett shoulder first into the post. Dolph nails a big superkick for two more and both guys are down. Back up and the champ kicks him in the ribs but the Bull Hammer is blocked, setting up the Zig Zag for the pin at 10:54.

Rating: D+. Barrett losing all the time is officially a running joke. I mean, it has to be. There's no way they can think this is the logical way to book anything. The match was actually pretty dull with neither guy going out of the ordinary. I'm not sure what the solution is for Barrett, but this stuff is turning him into more and more of a waste every week.

We recap Ascension getting beaten down by the legends on Raw.

Reigns looks at the footage of Big Show going after the legends from Raw and knocking out Flair until Reigns made the save. Roman doesn't know if Renee Young has heard, but Big Show is a giant. If you haven't heard, just listen because it's all he ever talks about. Andre never had to do that because his actions did the talking.

Show also always talks about Reigns wanting his spot, but Reigns wants his own spot. In the Rumble, everyone is all over the place and his fist is cocked, locked and ready to rock. He's the one vs. all and he's the one standing at the end. Believe that. This was FAR better than his usual stuff and felt much more natural.

Fandango draws his Rumble number and seems very pleased. As he dances with Rosa, Ambrose sneaks in and steals his number. The referee monitoring the drawing has no issue with this.

Ryback vs. Rusev

Non-title again and only Ryback can qualify. Ryback hits a hard shoulder but Rusev frantically rolls outside before the cover. Back in and Ryback hits a nice suplex, sending Rusev's legs into the ropes in the process. The champ bails to the floor again but is able to dropkick a charging

Ryback to take over. We take a break and come back with Rusev getting two off a DDT.

Rusev wraps the leg around the post, hoping Ryback actually sells it unlike he did in the Big Show match a few weeks back. Ryback takes advantage of Rusev's trash talking and hits a slingshot belly to back suplex and a powerslam for two. A Backpack Stunner gets two more and Ryback stops to hold his knee (to be fair Rusev didn't do much to the knee so it's not as annoying this time).

Ryback's powerbomb is countered into an Alabama Slam (Siberia Slam?) for two but he just runs Rusev over. For some reason Ryback goes up top, only to be quickly crotched down for two. Rusev tells himself to crush but Ryback fights out of the Accolade and loads up the Meathook, sending Rusev running again. Ryback follows and hammers away before beating the count at 13:47.

Rating: C+. Who would have thought these two would be better than Zigler and Barrett? There was even a bit of a story told with Rusev running a lot in the beginning and then losing when he tried it once too often. Ryback can do a decent power match and Rusev is finding ways to keep the unpinned streak alive without looking stupid. I'll call this a pleasant surprise.

Rusev goes after him again but gets dispatched one more time.

Brie Bella vs. Naomi

Paige and Natalya are on commentary. Thankfully the BRIE MODE is gone. The Bellas mock Natalya for loving cats and call Paige a vampire. Paige corrects them by saying she's a glampire and a black heart. Naomi kicks at Brie's leg as Paige and Natalya debate if they're friends or not. Paige calls Tyson Kidd an idiot as Naomi gets her throat snapped across the top rope for two. Brie misses her running knee but hits a jawbreaker on the knee, setting up the Bella Buster for the pin at 2:20. So much for Naomi meaning anything.

Luke Harper says you can send anyone into the Royal Rumble, but don't send in anyone you want back. Rowan better not blink or the monsters will

get him. Are you scared yet?

Goldust and Stardust draw their numbers and hiss at each other.

Erick Rowan vs. Luke Harper

Only Rowan can qualify. They slug it out to start and Rowan runs him over with a shoulder for an early two. Harper busts out a freaking hurricanrana to counter a powerbomb. This guy is not normal. Rowan just throws him into the corner and gets two more off a spin kick. Luke bites the fingers to block I think a full nelson but this time Rowan's powerbomb connects for two. Erick misses a top rope splash though and a superkick and discus lariat gives Harper the pin at 3:20.

Rating: C. The more I see Harper the more I wonder why he isn't being pushed to the moon and back. On the other hand, the more I see Rowan, the more I wonder why they even bothered pushing him in the first place. He's fine in the ring and I like his potential, but he's just a big jobber at this point and it seems like that's all he was ever meant to be.

Kane borrows the Stooges for his match with Bryan.

Rumble by the numbers video.

Miz is annoyed at Mizdow for imitating X-Pac without his permission. Mizdow says the fans liked it but Miz says no one cheers for him because they're all cheering for Miz. Miz also rejects the pumpkin latte for having the wrong amount of foam. He leaves and the Usos come up and tell Mizdow that he can get his hands on Miz in the Rumble. The idea intrigues Mizdow but he still looks conflicted.

Kane vs. Daniel Bryan

No DQ with Bryan's Rumble spot on the line and the Stooges in Kane's corner. A cross body gets one on Kane but Bryan has to go after the Stooges, allowing Kane to kick him down to the floor. He stays on the neck with a neckbreaker on the floor before dropping him onto the barricade. It's kendo stick time with Bryan getting cracked over the back a few times before they head back inside.

Daniel gets the cane to cane Kane before alternating between kicks and cane shots to the back. A big kick to the head is only good for two and Kane knocks him out of the air as we go to a break. Back with Kane holding a chinlock (what else would he be doing?) and cracking Bryan in the back with a chair for two. The chair gets wedged into the corner but Kane low bridges him to the floor. The Flying Goat is countered with an uppercut and Kane takes over on the floor. Bryan gets whipped into the steps and the Stooges load up the announcers' table. They're already more useful than Patterson and Brisco.

The torestone and chokeslam are both countered and Kane gets sent into the post to give Daniel a breather. Back in and a bad looking YES Lock has Kane in trouble but the Stooges come in to break it up. Lawler and Cole are incensed but Saxton correctly point out that they're not breaking any rules. Bryan fights them off but eats a chokeslam for two. Kane is livid and gets another chair, only to be sent into the one he wedged in the corner, setting up the running knee to send Bryan to the Rumble at 12:18.

Rating: B-. This was as good as you can expect from Bryan vs. Kane, but the feud needs to end here. Kane as the monster hunting Bryan is only going to get you so far and we passed that point back in April. Having Bryan overcome a small set of odds is the right way to use him and getting the big win off his finisher is the right way to go. I can more than live with Kane in roles like this, with him getting pinned by a bigger star who slays a monster. Why can't we get there with Big Show?

Speaking of Big Show, he drags Bryan back to the ring but Ziggler, Rowan and Ryback come in for the save. The big Rumble brawl is on until Ambrose and Reigns come out to make it serious. Roman cleans house, even though most of the guys were already gone by the time he got in. It gets down to all of the big heroes in the ring (minus Rowan. They're not even hiding it now) and Kane and Big Show on the apron to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. It's still not a great show, but the important part of this show is stuff happened. Instead of spending a big segment on Raw bringing back the three fired guys, it was saved for here and we even saw two of them qualify for the Rumble. It's not exactly Lesnar and Rollins

having a showdown, but I'll take this over the weekly big tag match every day. If WWE can build up momentum for Smackdown, it might get even bigger in the future. Good show this week that felt important.

Results

Dolph Ziggler b. Bad News Barrett – Zig Zag

Ryback b. Rusev via countout

Brie Bella b. Naomi – Bella Buster

Luke Harper b. Erick Rowan – Discus lariat

Daniel Bryan b. Kane – Running knee

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Smackdown – January 15, 2015: I Can Hope Can't I?

Smackdown

Date: January 15, 2015

Location: Baton Rouge River Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

Smackdown is back on Thursday nights in its original time slot, which

might mean WWE will put a fresh focus on it instead of just using it as a dumping ground for whatever they can't fit on Raw. The big story tonight is Daniel Bryan's return to the ring for the first time since his neck surgery in May. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan (with a fresh set of name graphics) for an in ring chat. Daniel says he should be in good spirits because he's back home where he belongs, in front of these great people, wearing his gear and ready to fight. Saxton shows him a clip of Kane tombstoning Bryan on everything he could find and Bryan looks a bit shaken. He talks about being Kane's partner and brother, but then Kane stabbed everyone in the back by trading in the mask for a suit.

Doctor after doctor has told him that he would never wrestle again but now he's ready. Of course he's worried about his neck but tonight he's going to prove himself by fighting Kane, winning the Royal Rumble and then getting his title back at Wrestlemania. Now some people think that's just a pipe dream, but YES he thinks he can do it. This brings out the Authority who actually doesn't have anything to say before the match starts.

Daniel Bryan vs. Kane

Bryan charges right at him to start but Kane takes him down with a single forearm to the back. They head to the corner where Bryan smartens up and goes after the knee. As usual though, Kane doesn't seem interested in selling and takes Daniel down with a pair of neckbreakers. A cravate doesn't last long so Kane kicks him in the head for two. I know I rip on Kane a lot but at least he's smart enough to go after the obvious body part. A neck crank has Bryan in even more trouble but he's able to kick Kane to the floor.

Kane is staggered up against the barricade but not staggered enough to let Bryan hit a flying knee from the apron as he punches Daniel out of the air. Back from a break with Kane holding a chinlock, followed by a running DDT for two. Off to the chinlock as the Authority plays cheerleader. For some reason the Noble seems like he would be very

enthusiastic in that role. Kane loads up a superplex but gets shoved down and dropkicked for two. The kicks to the chest get the same but the Stooges come in to break up the YES Lock for the DQ at 11:41.

Rating: C-. If there isn't something else later in the night, I'm sending WWE a bill for the injuries suffered from my eyes rolling that hard. There is no way WWE doesn't let Bryan get a clean win in his big comeback match against Kane. Bryan looked fine but there's only so much you can tell in a match that didn't even get eight minutes of TV time. I did like Kane going after the neck and setting up the tombstone. It never ceases to amaze me when you have someone coming back off an injury and their opponent goes after a different body part. Even Shawn did that once when HHH had a bandaged leg.

Bryan fights back and finally runs away from the numbers advantage. The Authority stays after him but Reigns and Ambrose come out to stand next to them. HHH makes a six man with those three against Kane, Big Show and Rollins later tonight.

Randy Savage Hall of Fame video. I'm very worried about Hogan turning the induction speech into a way to talk about how great he was.

Bray Wyatt is not a human being but for thousands of years, society has labeled people like him a threat. At some point, his poison starts to seep out of the cracks. All those people over the years have been right, and it's going to be too late to run after he wins the Royal Rumble.

Usos/Naomi vs. Damien Mizdow/Miz/Alicia Fox

Miz/Mizdow vs. Usos for the titles is official for the Rumble. Mizdow gets a huge ovation as he's on the apron and watching Miz start with Jimmy. The brothers elbow Miz down for the double team elbow, followed by a nice suicide dive from Jey. Mizdow finally gets the tag but Fox tags herself in. That's fine with Naomi, who goes off on Fox for taking her spot on Total Divas. Pay no attention to Naomi still being on the show of course. A cross body gets two on Fox and it's already back to Miz vs. Jimmy.

The Reality Check is broken up and a double clothesline puts both guys

down. The ice cold tag brings in Jey for a Samoan drop, followed by a Whisper in the Wind. Fox makes the save, only to have Jimmy throw Naomi at her for a cool looking spot. Mizdow tries to come in but takes a superkick to the hands (clearly didn't get close to his face). The distraction works though, allowing Miz to hit the Skull Crushing Finale for the pin on Jimmy at 4:50.

Rating: D+. Cool Naomi throwing spot aside, this feud is really getting dry. The Naomi Goes Hollywood part has been completely dropped, which you almost had to expect because it was actually interesting. That basically leaves Miz fighting the Usos in a handicap feud as we wait on Mizdow to finally break off on his own, even though they passed his peak about a month ago. At least the girls were there to keep this from being the champions losing in another non-title match.

Roman Reigns is with Renee Young (who has chopped off a lot of her hair) and says his partners would be in big trouble if this was the Royal Rumble. However, Dean is his boy and he has no issue with Bryan. On the other hand, he has a problem with the Authority and their giant crybaby Big Show. When it comes to the Royal Rumble, it's one vs. all. Dean and Bryan are part of the all, and that leaves him as the one. This felt a lot more natural from Reigns and it worked better than his usual stuff. The lack of fairy tales or Looney Tunes lines helped too.

Here's a ticked off Heyman with something to say. We look back at Rollins laying out Lesnar to end Raw and standing tall over the champion. Heyman says he's afraid for the first time because there's a threat to Lesnar. Brock has conquered everyone and everything because he can. When he beat up the Undertaker and broke the Streak or suplexed John Cena 16 times, it was all because he could and felt like doing it because he didn't have anything else to do on a Sunday night.

Now his purpose is to F5 the future of the WWE back into the past, but here are Rollins and the Stooges to interrupt. Seth is sick and tired of hearing about how awesome Brock Lesnar is and accusing him of hiding behind the Authority. He isn't afraid of Brock Lesnar and is going to cash in right now. Let's give the fans a treat for the show being back on Thursdays and have Brock Lesnar vs. Seth Rollins right now...but Brock

isn't here.

Rollins isn't cool with that and threatens to curb stomp Heyman if he can't curb stomp Lesnar. Heyman tells Rollins to be original because everyone threatens to beat him up when Lesnar isn't around. Seth is right in his face and says he's going to curb stomp Heyman and take away Lesnar's greatest asset. Then at the Royal Rumble, it's Rollins vs. all brawn and no brains, leaving Brock as nothing more than a 300lb mass of muscle that he can run circles around.

The facts are that he's curb stomped Lesnar twice now and he's going to do it again at the Royal Rumble, so why shouldn't he knock Heyman out right now? Paul says the Authority has been removed from power once so what makes Rollins think they can't be removed again by hook, crook, or by Vince McMahon's whims?

He's gained power every single day since he returned to the WWE and been by Brock Lesnar's side. Brock Lesnar has a death grip on the WWE Championship and he will control it as long as he likes. He can control that title by either defending the title or protecting the new champion when Heyman decides that the future is now. Paul drops the mic and leaves Rollins with a lot to think about.

This story has gone from another dull title match to one of the better stories around the title in a good while. Rollins is looking like a monster on equal footing with Lesnar and Cena in the span of a week. There's always the chance that this is the annual Royal Rumble challenger who goes nowhere after, but I'm totally buying into Rollins as a main event player. After the year he's had, there's a real argument to be made for him to win the title and defend it at Wrestlemania. I'd love to see him stop being the Authority's lap dog if nothing else.

Natalya vs. Nikki Bella

Non-title and Paige is here to counteract Brie. Natalya goes for the leg to start but gets taken down by a flying armbar of all things. She actually stays on the arm instead of yelling at the crowd but Natalya lifts Nikki into the air to break up a short arm scissors. Back up and Natalya steps onto Nikki's back before to drive her face first into the

mat, followed by a running dropkick to the face.

Brie gets on the apron for a distraction, accidentally allowing Paige to slap Nikki. I'm sure they'll argue about it and then forget it a month later with no resolution. The Sharpshooter makes Nikki tap at 2:40. This would be their third match since December 29 now. Well that settles it. We MUST continue this feud at the Rumble. I for one couldn't survive without the thrilling end to this saga.

Big Show cuts Renee off and brags about knocking out Cena and Reigns this past Monday. Tonight he'll knock out all three but more importantly he's entering the Royal Rumble. That's where he dominates because no one can throw him over the top. Kane comes up and says he's in the Rumble as well.

Intercontinental Title: Sin Cara vs. Bad News Barrett

Rematch after last week where Sin Cara beat Barrett in a non-title match. Cara gets two off a rollup just after the bell and hits an enziguri from the apron to stagger Bad News. Barrett has had enough of that though and hammers Cara down before whipping him hard into the corner for two.

We hit the chinlock for a few moments before Cara hits a springboard spinning cross body for two. The announcers actually bring up Barrett's past troubles against Cara for some context. The Winds of Change lays Cara out but the Bull Hammer is countered into a rollup into a powerbomb. Cara misses the Swanton though and the Bull Hammer retains the title at 2:51. I'm so glad they had the champ get pinned clean to set up this epic showdown. To be fair though this was fun while it lasted.

The announcers plug the WWE Network launching in the UK, which went live a few days earlier than planned.

Dean Ambrose is in a dimly lit room and says he was the one you avoided on the playground. His report card always said he was disruptive in class, but that works really well for him in the Royal Rumble. The winner of the match isn't going to care about friendships or their own well being. Don't count him out, because you should be counting him in. His partners tonight have one big thing in common: they all detest the

Authority.

Kane/Big Show/Seth Rollins vs. Daniel Bryan/Roman Reigns/Dean Ambrose

Seth and Dean get things going with Ambrose slamming him face first into the buckle. He rips at Seth's hair and stomps at the ribs before bringing in Reigns for a nice suplex. Roman starts working on the arm but lets Rollins go for a tag to Kane. Reigns throws the big bald around for a bit before tagging Bryan in for the rapid fire kicks in the corner. A big uppercut finally puts Bryan down but Ambrose is right there to stop the Stooges from getting involved.

Everything breaks down in a fight on the floor and the good guys stand tall in the ring (not as tall as Big Show and Kane but still tall) as we take a break. Back with Ambrose stomping Rollins in the corner and hitting his dropkick up against the ropes for two. Seth finally sends him into the corner and ties Dean in the Tree of Woe to work on the injured knee.

Off to Big Show for something like an ankle lock but pushing forward on the shin instead of the foot. Rollins gets two off a running forearm in the corner and we hit the chinlock. Again I wonder why you would do that when you should know it's going to lead to a comeback. Back to Big Show as the Authority keeps things slow, hopefully leading to the hot tag to Bryan. I'll settle for one to Reigns as long as we don't hear another scripted promo.

Show hooks that same leg lock before Kane comes in and keeps up his good psychology by cranking on the knee. Seth comes back in and talks a lot of trash, earning him a slap in the face. The rebound clothesline finally puts Kane down but Rollins breaks up another tag. Dean sends him to the floor but everything breaks down on the floor. With everyone else fighting, Ambrose dives over for the hot tag to Bryan. Daniel cleans house and hits the Flying Goat on Kane and a top rope hurricanrana for two on Seth.

Kane comes back in with a chokeslam for two with Reigns having to make the save. Show loads up the announcers' table but Reigns jumps him to put both guys down. The YES Lock goes on Kane but Rollins makes a save.

Dean's standing elbow takes out Rollins and the Stooges on the floor, leaving Bryan to escape the tombstone and hit the running knee for the pin on Kane at 17:48.

Rating: B+. This got a lot better as things went on and the slow build worked well here. I'm really glad Bryan won in the end and thankfully they kept the focus off Reigns vs. Big Show. At the end of the day, there just isn't enough interest in that feud to validate giving it the attention here. Ambrose selling a knee injury is a good way to keep him from 100% and makes the losses a bit easier to sit through. Really solid main event here though and a good main event for the first show back on the old night.

Post match HHH comes out and says Bryan's luck is running out. Next week on Smackdown, Kane is getting a rematch against Bryan and if Kane wins, Daniel is out of the Rumble.

Overall Rating: B-. The show was good but there's one thing I liked more than anything (well anything other than the main event): HHH making Kane vs. Bryan for next week. It's not the biggest match in the world, but it's a match being announced in advanced for Smackdown with a week's notice. If you're lucky you'll get a match announced four days in advance, but this feels like a match for Smackdown, not a match that happens as a result of something on Raw. It's like they're treating Smackdown as a show that matters, even if it's just a bit at first. That's something this show has been lacking for years now.

The rest of the show felt like a regular episode, meaning the wrestling was good to decent and mostly skippable. The main event was really good though and worth seeing, but most important of all is how they put a match on this show that people would want to see and it was given the time to stand out. If this were on Raw, they would have had to squeeze it in around a twenty minute promo, the New Day and Adam Rose beating up the Bunny for the 19th time. Hopefully Smackdown gets some more attention and is able to take some of the pressure off Raw, which would help both shows and the TV product as a whole.

Results

Daniel Bryan b. Kane via DQ when Jamie Noble and Joey Mercury interfered

Miz/Damien Mizdow/Alicia Fox b. Usos/Naomi – Skull Crushing Finale to Jimmy

Natalya b. Nikki Bella – Sharpshooter

Bad News Barrett b. Sin Cara – Bull Hammer

Daniel Bryan/Roman Reigns/Dean Ambrose b. Kane/Big Show/Seth Rollins – Running knee to Kane

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