

NXT – January 17, 2018: From Atlanta to Philadelphia

NXT

Date: January 17, 2018

Location: Center Stage Theater, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson

We're still in Atlanta as we're heading towards Philadelphia for the next Takeover. Last week saw the Undisputed Era beat down Aleister Black to end the show, earning Adam Cole an Extreme Rules match with Black in Philadelphia. Odds are we'll get the final card for the next Takeover tonight so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

We see the shots of the crowd and there's a rather prominent fan with a Britney Spears shirt. I'd wear that.

Heavy Machinery vs. Tino Sabbatelli/Riddick Moss

As usual, it's a feud over Sabbatelli and Moss' car. Otis runs Sabbatelli over with a hard shoulder to start and Tino isn't sure what to do about that kind of power. Tucker comes in and grabs a front facelock to swing Tino around in a circle, only to have him land in front of Moss. Heavy Machinery crushes Moss between the two of them followed by something like a Worm into an elbow. It's back to Tino to hammer on Otis until a clothesline allows the hot tag to Knight. Everything breaks down and Moss grabs a rollup with his feet on the ropes for the pin at 4:41.

Rating: C-. I'm glad Sabbatelli and Moss got a win and it's not the biggest problem in the world as Heavy Machinery has already lost most of their steam. It's also weird to have a power team like Heavy Machinery as good guys but it helps when Sabbatelli and Moss are good rich jerks. Buy something other than the car though.

Cole isn't worried about Black because there are a million and one ways

to hurt him. Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly know everyone wants their titles but they're all in the Era's era. I'm still not sold on that name as Undisputed would just sound better.

We look back at the ending of last week's show with the announcement of the Extreme Rules match. Shouldn't that have aired before the promo?

Roderick Strong vs. Fabian Aichner

Strong tries a headlock to start as the fans seem split. A leg lariat gives Strong two but Aichner powerslams him out of the air as we take a break. Back with Aichner holding an abdominal stretch until Strong fights out. The Angle Slam is broken up so Strong settles for his first backbreaker. Aichner is right back with a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker of his own and goes up, only to dive into another backbreaker. The Strong Hold (now a Liontamer) is good for the tap out at 7:37.

Rating: C+. Aichner has a real future with a great look and an awesome set of skills but he needs a little something more to really make it work. Still though, it's cool to see him getting chances against big names like Strong, who still needs a few more big wins to really get somewhere. He's a good upper midcarder though and you can always use one of those.

Post match Strong says he wants Lars Sullivan, who had already said he wanted to face Killian Dain. So we might be looking at a three way?

Long video on TM-61, who will be back from injury rather soon. They've been out for a very long time. They've been training for years, including training under Harley Race. All the work has been worth it though and they're ready to make it here. They worked their way through a WWE tryout but also were young boys in Japan. Next week we'll get part two, which hopefully is as awesome as this one.

Aliyah vs. Lacey Evans

Aliyah gets taken down with a wristlock to start but walks into a jawbreaker. Evans is sent to the apron and kicks Aliyah's leg out for a slingshot elbow. A slingshot bronco buster gets two more on Aliyah but

she grabs a northern lights suplex. Back up and Aliyah charges into a right hand in the corner...for the pin at 3:24.

Rating: D+. Aliyah is starting to look better but she still needs some more polishing. Evans has a bit of a weird gimmick but it's a little more interesting than some others. Ending a match with a right hand though is rather different as well, but it does make her look a little tougher than you would expect.

Post match Evans says she wants to bring some class to the women's division and she'll start with Nikki Cross. Shayna Baszler comes out and glares at Evans before grabbing her choke on Aliyah, who is still woozy from the right hand. Ember Moon runs in for the save and tells Baszler to try that on her. Baszler says she'll do it when the title is on the line. Moon says name the time.

William Regal makes the title match for Takeover. Zelina Vega comes in to say Velvetene Dream deserves the shot more than Johnny Gargano so they should have a #1 contenders match.

No Way Jose is back next week. I liked the guy, but I hadn't remembered he was gone.

Johnny Gargano comes to the ring and says bring Dream on. This isn't a fluke and this is his time and opportunity. The match is on for next week.

We look back at the Undisputed Era attacking Sanity to avoid the title defense last week.

Authors of Pain vs. Street Profits

The winners get the title shot in Philadelphia. Akum shoulders Ford down to start and easily pulls him over to the corner so Razar can get in his own shots to the back. The fans are behind the Profits of course as Ford has to fight out of a full nelson. One heck of a full nelson slam gives Razar two and it's off to a chinlock as we take a break.

Back with Ford fighting out of a front facelock and bringing Dawkins in to clean house. A spinebuster/missile dropkick combination gets two on

Akum and that's probably their best shot. The Super Collider into the Last Chapter ends Ford at 9:43 to send the Authors to Philadelphia.

Rating: C. The Profits will be back of course but this was a big loss for them. The Authors are in a weird place as they're not being called up to the main roster for whatever reason but there are so many teams around who are more interesting or just better than they are. Throw in the soon to debut War Machine and I'm not sure where they're going.

Overall Rating: C+. This was the kind of show that they needed heading into Philadelphia as some of the stories needed a little bit more heat. Tonight helped on those fronts as well as adding two fresh title matches to the card. I'm starting to look forward to Philadelphia, which wasn't the case as we were coming into this show. Hopefully things are even better next week, which tends to be the case around here.

Results

Tino Sabbatelli/Riddick Moss b. Heavy Machinery – Rollup to Moss

Roderick Strong b. Fabian Aichner – Strong Hold

Lacey Evans b. Aliyah – Right hand

Authors of Pain b. Street Profits – Last Chapter to Ford

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Rumor: Roman Reigns Named as Customer of Steroid Distributor

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/rumor-roman-reigns-involved-steroid-distribution-ring-miami/>

It's way, WAY too early to know if this is going anywhere, but if it's true I'd be stunned if he gets the title in New Orleans. With the TV deal coming up, I don't think WWE would want to pull the trigger on something like this.

That of course brings up the major problem: what if they postpone THIS TIME FOR SURE until XXXV and make us waste another year on this nonsense? I don't think I can take that again.

205 Live – January 16, 2018: The Best Thing To Happen To This Show

[205 Live](#)

Date: January 16, 2018

Location: Laredo Energy Arena, Laredo, Texas

Commentators: Nigel McGuinness, Vic Joseph

Welcome to the shortened version of the show as we're now down to just half an hour thanks to Mixed Match Challenge (I need to send that show a Christmas card.). We're coming up on the Royal Rumble with Enzo Amore defending the Cruiserweight Title against Cedric Alexander (again) so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

TJP vs. Gran Metalik

Rematch from last week where Metalik won and sent TJP into a tailspin. Thankfully Metalik is back to his normal look and out of the Black Panther style mask. TJP runs him over for a very fast one and it's off to a front facelock. You know, wrestling. Back up and Metalik hits a very high angle springboard armdrag as we see Kalisto watching backstage.

TJP is sent outside for a top rope Asai moonsault as things are starting to speed up a bit. They head inside again with Metalik trying...something off the ropes, allowing TJP to dropkick him in the back and out of the air. That's a very simple counter but it works exactly as it needs to. The slingshot hilo gives TJP two and we hit the chinlock (because of course we do).

With that not working, TJP ties him in the Tree of Woe, only to miss a baseball slide and hit the post. A superkick and a rope walk dropkick set up the rope walk elbow for a VERY close two. The Metalik Driver is countered but Metalik reverses the Detonation Kick into a rollup for the pin at 5:17.

Rating: C. I like both of these guys and I like the fact that they didn't go with the 50/50 booking even more. There's a chance this is leading to some kind of a turn for TJP but I'm wondering what they have in mind for Metalik. Of course on this show, it's likely joining the Zo Train or nothing. At least they're going somewhere though.

Post break, TJP is livid again in the back and might be crying.

We look back at Hideo Itami attacking Jack Gallagher with Jack's own umbrella last week. As long as they don't have Itami talk, he'll be fine.

Gallagher has been hearing Brian Kendrick's face being broken over and over but now he wants to hear Itami scream. He'll find Itami's weakness and exploit it because he is now the man with a plan. So his plan is to just hurt Itami somehow? That's quite the broad plan.

Here are Cedric Alexander and Goldust for a chat. Goldust talks about how our lives are determined by opportunities. Some might say their friendship is curious but Cedric is a star on the cusp of a golden opportunity. Cedric digs that and Goldust calls him the DiCaprio to Goldust's Scorsese. So neither of them are going to win for a really long time?

Cue Enzo Amore and the Zo Train to say they deserve an Academy Award for acting all buddy buddy. Goldust doesn't appreciate being called funny because the only clown he sees is right in front of him looking like a swamp duck. Threats are issued but Enzo says Goldust has to beat the entire Zo Train first. Goldust says bring it on.

Goldust vs. Zo Train

Drew Gulak (along with Ariya Daivari and Tony Nese) starts for the team and slaps Goldust in the face. An early hip attack puts Gulak down and it's off to Daivari, who is atomic dropped for his efforts. The numbers game offers a distraction though and Daivari hammers Goldust from behind.

Nese comes in for the choking in the corner, followed by a hard running forearm. We hit the neck crank for a bit, only to have Nese miss a charge into the corner. It's back to Gulak who eats a quick bulldog, followed by the snap powerslam for two. Nese knocks Goldust to the floor but dives onto Daivari by mistake. Cedric dives onto Enzo and the Final Cut ends Gulak at 4:00.

Rating: D. So not only does the old heavyweight come onto the cruiserweight show and get treated like a big star straight out of the gate but he beats the heel goons clean in short order. I don't want to hear about the Zo Train being anything more than lackeys ever again as

this was even more destruction after they already lost almost all of their value in the first place. There is zero reason for Enzo to keep the title another day, which is why you can pencil him in for a title defense at Wrestlemania.

Overall Rating: C-. Words cannot describe how glad I am that Mixed Match Challenge is a thing for the next three months as it means this show is now half the length. This was WAY easier to sit through as they didn't have time to waste on matches that didn't need to go on as long as they did and offered nothing but filler. 205 Live would seem to be in some trouble now and I really, really hope the change is permanent even after the Mixed Match Challenge is over.

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**Mixed Match Challenge –
January 16, 2018 (Series
Premiere): The Shoulder Pads**

Give Me Hope

Mixed Match Challenge Episode #1

Date: January 16, 2018

Location: Laredo Energy Arena, Laredo, Texas

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Beth Phoenix

This is a new concept for WWE as they're airing on Facebook for the first time ever. In this case we have a tournament of mixed matches with the winners earning money for a charity. There will be twelve episodes with twelve teams vying for the money with one match a week. I have no idea what to expect here so let's get to it.

No opening sequence here, which is quite the jarring difference.

Renee Young and Byron Saxton are on the floor as hosts.

We get quick vignettes from both teams, basically saying they're going to win. They're definitely assuming you've watched WWE before so this definitely isn't treating the fans like a new audience.

We get some rapid fire vignettes from other teams, including Carmella eating pancakes and Nia Jax being presented with some lucky underwear.

First Round: Finn Balor/Sasha Banks vs. Shinsuke Nakamura/Natalya

Nakamura has an old Jim Neidhart Hart Foundation jacket, complete with the big shoulders. The women start things off and Natalya bails into the corner. It's quickly off to the men and Phoenix is already coming off as the best analyst WWE has had in years. They fight over a technical sequence and it's an early standoff as they're playing this as even. Neither can get much control off an armbar so Nakamura tells him to COME ON.

That means another standoff and Balor throws up the Too Sweet sign. The women come in again and Sasha hits her pose before slapping Natalya in the face. Something like an atomic drop and a basement dropkick give Natalya two but Banks is right back with the double knees in the corner (haven't seen that one in awhile). Natalya bails to the floor so Sasha

dives onto...Nakamura, who calmly puts her back on the apron. The second dive takes Natalya down but Sasha walks into the discus forearm, followed by the chinlock.

Hang on a second though as we need to look at Sami Zayn and Becky Lynch talking about the show. We hit the abdominal stretch with Natalya lifting the foot off the mat for some bonus pressure. Eh she's a Hart so she should know this stuff. Sasha flips her away without too much effort and brings Balor back in to speed things back up.

Nakamura kicks Balor in the head though and hits the running knee for two. Kinshasa is countered with the Sling Blade but Natalya breaks up the Coup de Grace. Sasha throws Natalya outside but Kinshasa is countered again, this time with Nakamura being sent into the post. Stereo basement dropkicks set up the Bank Statement to make Natalya tap at 12:48.

Rating: C. And that's the problem: there's no real animosity here and they're just having matches for the sake of having a match. It doesn't help that it's not exactly a thrilling concept and the match wasn't anything we haven't seen done better before. Balor and Banks winning makes sense as they're a more popular combination, mainly because Banks actually has some charisma.

Next week: Big E./Carmella vs. Asuka/The Miz.

New Day is fired up and Carmella is in a washing machine.

Miz speaks English and Asuka shouts in Japanese before they both speak English (BECAUSE ASUKA CAN FREAKING SPEAK ENGLISH!).

Overall Rating: C. I liked the show well enough, but I'm not sure how long of a shelf life this is going to have. It's not the most thrilling thing in the world, though there might be some interesting matches going on later in the brackets. The fact that it's only about twenty five minutes an episode will do it A LOT of favors though as it's more like something to do on Tuesday instead of something really important. Not bad, but totally skippable.

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Smackdown – January 16, 2018: This Was An Insult To America

Smackdown

Date: January 16, 2018

Location: Laredo Energy Arena, Laredo, Texas

Commentators: Corey Graves, Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton

Please be better. The last few weeks haven't been kind to Smackdown and I really could use a good episode to change things up a bit. The problem continues to be Daniel Bryan vs. Shane McMahon, which has dominated the show so strongly that it's taking away from a lot of the other stories. Hopefully that starts to change tonight. Let's get to it.

Here's the New Day for an opening chat. Woods brings out the pancakes and stands behind a podium as all three do the tongue roll to announce Jinder Mahal's Maharajah nickname. See, America is like a bunch of pancakes: made of flour, eggs and freedom. America is built up like Home Alone 1, 2 and 3. Big E: "Not so much with 3." Woods talks about Jinder hating Home Alone and hating every one of you. The fans are against Jinder but the

Singh Brothers come out to introduce Mahal.

US Title Tournament Semifinals: Jinder Mahal vs. Xavier Woods

The finals will now be next week instead of at the Royal Rumble. Mahal kicks him in the face to start and elbows a charging Woods in the jaw. A jumping knee gets two and we take a break. Back with Jinder holding him in a chinlock and Big E. throwing pancakes at the Singh Brothers. The fans want pancakes as Jinder forearms Woods down to the floor. Back in and a knee to the head gets two as we take a second break.

We come back again with Woods hitting a missile dropkick and winning a slugout (with those AMERICAN right hands). A discus punch drops Mahal and a Shining Wizard gets two. New Day goes after the Singh Brothers and chases the up the aisle, leaving us one on one. The top rope elbow misses though and Woods is whipped throat first into the bottom rope (kind of a dangerous move). The Khallas sends Mahal to the finals at 18:02.

Rating: D+. Well why go with the interesting choice when you can go with the boring choice? This more or less seals Roode vs. Mahal for the title next week and that's...not the most interesting sounding match in the world. Woods' pre-match promo was great and Mahal was every bit of Mahal you would have expected. Mahal winning was the pretty obvious choice, though certainly not the fun one.

At a house show, Baron Corbin talked about knowing he'll win the Royal Rumble because it's just a fight and that's what he does best. Corbin was announced as being in the match two weeks ago.

Quick look at the media talking about Goldberg's Hall of Fame induction.

AJ Styles dubs Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens as Kami and says he sees himself as being down 3-1 because Owens is like two people.

Carmella knows how to make history so she'll win the Rumble.

Natalya has the catlike reflexes to win. She says Bret's catchphrase for the second time tonight (after a Mixed Match Challenge promo).

Tamina says she'll win.

Lana promises to make it the Ravishing Rumble.

Naomi is going to make everyone feel the Glow.

Riott knows how to create chaos and no one can stop her.

Sarah Logan isn't running from anything.

Liv Morgan is here to make history so she'll do it at the Rumble.

Becky Lynch promises to win. These were like the old school Rumble promos (save for the camera being hand held and a bit shaky, making them look kind of bad) and that's a very good thing, even if most of the women didn't have much to say.

US Title Tournament Semifinals: Bobby Roode vs. Mojo Rawley

I'm still getting used to Mojo's new music and Jackson Pollack inspired entrance video. Roode shoves him around to start and hits the GLORIOUS pose. Back up and Mojo runs through Roode and complains at the referee for getting in his way. They head outside with Mojo hitting a long running charge to drive Roode into the barricade. We take a break and come back with Mojo putting on a pretty bad looking abdominal stretch, though he does hit Roode in the ribs a few times.

Mojo asks Roode if he's cracked a rib before hammering at said ribs. That's rather cruel of him. Back up and Mojo misses a charge into the post, allowing Roode to hit the Blockbuster for two. The Glorious DDT is countered into a fireman's carry faceplant (basically an F5 without the spin) for two. The running punch in the corner is blocked with some raised boots and Roode grabs the spinebuster. Roode hits the Glorious DDT to go to the finals at 13:13.

Rating: C-. This was longer than it needed to be and there was no drama after Mahal won earlier. Roode vs. Mahal isn't an interesting title match but that's never stopped them before. For the life of me I'm still not sure what the point was in giving the title to Ziggler in the first place but at least they're giving us a new champion fast enough.

Post match the Singh Brothers come in to beat on Roode but are dispatched

fairly quickly. Mahal comes out to say he'll be champion next week. Roode wants to fight now and we get the standard heel response. You know, because why would Mahal want to face a banged up Roode who just finished a long match? Daniel Bryan pops up from behind and says the finals are on TONIGHT.

Randy Orton, in a ring in an empty arena, likes to be surrounded by chaos, so the Rumble is his match.

Charlotte/Becky Lynch/Naomi vs. Riott Squad

Charlotte suplexes Morgan for two to start and does her Figure Four neck lock flips to Riott. The Squad gets sent outside and we take a break. Back with Lynch being sent into Morgan's knees for two and Liv grabbing the hair to cut off a hot tag attempt. Becky finally dives over and brings in Naomi to speed things up. The spear cuts Logan down but Riott kicks Naomi into the one kneed Codebreaker for the pin at 8:10.

Rating: D+. Another instance of throwing the women out there with nothing interesting happening. It feels like we've seen this match or some combination of it for months now and that's the big problem with this division: almost no one gets to stand out to the point where I can't even remember that Charlotte is Women's Champion more often than not. I know the Rumble is what matters but if I don't care about the characters, it really doesn't make much of a difference.

The Usos think Chad Gable and Shelton Benjamin got together on Tag Team Tinder. They can't remember which Uso is which though and get beaten down by Gable and Benjamin. Chad knows who they are: the former champions.

Long video on AJ Styles vs. Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens.

Shinsuke Nakamura says he'll win. Is there a reason none of the big wrestlers are actually here tonight?

Next week: Rusev Day vs. Ascension.

US Title: Bobby Roode vs. Jinder Mahal

The title is vacant coming in, Roode's ribs are banged up, there are no

Singh Brothers and Shane McMahon/Daniel Bryan are at ringside. Feeling out process to start with Mahal's cheap shot to the ribs being cut off. They head outside with Mahal driving the bad ribs into the barricade and getting in a few more shots as we take a break.

Back with Mahal bending the ribs around the post and then slapping on an abdominal stretch (take notes Mojo). Some knees to the ribs keep Roode down and Mahal puts a knee in the back. You can't fault the psychology here but you can fault the fans being dead bored after this lame show.

Roode gets two off a sunset flip but a superkick gives Mahal the same to keep him in control. Bobby finally sends him outside for a clothesline from the apron as the crowd is just gone here. Back in and Mahal rolls through a high crossbody for two of his own, followed by a Blockbuster for the same. Roode's spinebuster plants Mahal again and the Khallas is reversed into the Glorious DDT to make Roode the champion at 15:44.

Rating: C. This was as exciting as Mahal working the ribs for about thirteen minutes was going to be. Roode winning was the only way they could go here with the story they were telling though and it's nice to see Mahal fall further down the card. This win gives Roode a big marquee thing on his resume, though you can probably pencil him in for a defense against Zigler at the Rumble. The match was watchable, but they had killed the show a long time before.

The bosses present Roode with the title to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Oh just no in every sense of the word. This was a great illustration of everything wrong with Smackdown as of late, with the focus completely missing and no reason to watch. You think the low attendances of late might have been bolstered by guaranteeing you get to see a new champion? Not happening here of course, because we need to do something like this instead with almost no big name talent appearing instead.

This show felt like they weren't trying at all, presumably (and hopefully) because Smackdown was having another show somewhere else. Even if that's the case though, there needs to be some kind of effort put into these shows. This came off like the C level house shows of the 80s with

anything they could come up with thrown out there to fill in a night. I stopped caring very quickly into this one and that's not good when it's supposed to be a big time for the company.

Results

Jinder Mahal b. Xavier Woods – Khallas

Bobby Roode b. Mojo Rawley – Glorious DDT

Riott Squad b. Charlotte/Becky Lynch/Naomi – Codebreaker to Naomi

Bobby Roode b. Jinder Mahal – Glorious DDT

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2017 Awards: Most Improved of 2017

That's an upgrade.

One of the fun things to do in wrestling is look back and see who wasn't such a big deal back in the day but then got better

over the course of time. In this case we're looking at the improvement over the course of a year, in which there were a lot of names who got far better than you would have expected from them.

As is so often the case, we'll start down in NXT where they grow stars like few other places. One such star is Lars Sullivan, who came from practically nowhere and turned into one of the best monsters the show has ever seen. Throw him out there as a monster and let him run people over while showing no fear and no pain. It's a story that has worked for years and there's no reason Sullivan can't pull it off exceedingly well.

Sticking in NXT (that might be a theme today), we have the current NXT Champion Andrade Cien Almas. Now this one might be a lot more about Zelina Vega being amazing and one of the best managers in a long time but Almas himself has turned into quite the act as well. He's gone from someone who looked to be a lost cause to being someone who is a top star in the promotion and looking like a legitimate big deal. They have a good act together and one that looks like it could work for a very long time.

We might as well knock off the other NXT option with someone who shocked the heck out of me. Velveteen Dream looked like he was going to be any other effeminate character but wound up being not only a solid in-ring performer but one heck of a character who is almost mesmerizing to watch. His feud with Aleister Black was a major high spot but it was also the only major thing he did all year. Still though, one great thing is more than most people get in any given year.

We'll head up to the main roster now with someone who didn't do much in NXT but has found his calling in WWE. In this case we have Elias, who sings a song about every city he's in and manages to get the fans to hate him every single week. It works like a charm and the in-ring work has been quite good as

well. Elias might not be a top star but he's a solid midcard hand and there's nothing wrong with doing that for a long time.

Next up is someone who I had pegged to win this for a good chunk of the year with Neville. He was always talented and one of the better cruiserweights on the roster but the King of the Cruiserweights character was something fresh and new which made him feel so much better in a hurry. It's a shame that he left the company under such bad circumstances but hopefully he'll be back and no longer jobbing to Enzo.

Finally though, and this isn't much of a surprise, we have Braun Strowman. Where do you even begin with the year this guy had? Strowman came into 2017 as just another strong man and came out as a fan favorite and someone you could see winning the World Title at some point in the near future. To take a fairly one note gimmick and knock it so far out of the park like Strowman has is quite the accomplishment and I'm looking forward to seeing just how far he can take it. Starting where he was back at the beginning of 2017 is all the more impressive, making him the most improved wrestler of the year.

Ricochet Signs with WWE

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/breaking-confirmation-ricochet-man/>

So yeah, you knew this one was coming sooner or later. Ricochet is one of the best high fliers in the world and at just under thirty years old, there's no reason to not come to the big show. He's had some success in New Japan so now it's time to go to WWE and see what he can do. Of course it's in NXT first (as it should be), but I'm a bit scared of what we

might be seeing over in WWE. That being said, Ricochet has the charisma and talking ability to make this work and could be a big star, assuming he's not just thrown onto 205 Live and left to drown.

Monday Night Raw – January 15, 2018: Smart Booking and Delicious Looking Chocolate Cake

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 15, 2018

Location: AT&T Center, San Antonio, Texas

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

It's the go home show for the Raw 25th Anniversary Show which is the go home show for the Royal Rumble. That makes tonight almost the go home show for the pay per view, as next week's show is going to have a completely different vibe. Tonight we have Asuka vs. Nia Jax so let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Brock Lesnar fighting Braun Strowman last week until Strowman pulled a huge piece of the set down onto Lesnar and Kane. That's quite the visual, but both Brock and Kane being conscious after a commercial hurt things a lot.

Here's Strowman to get things going. He has a short story for us but it has a happy ending. Before he can get to his story though, Kurt Angle, flanked by security, cuts him off. Angle lists off all the obvious problems with what Braun did but Strowman says it could have been worse. Kurt gets in the always dumb sounding "unsafe worried environment" line

with Strowman saying he did his job.

Strowman is ready to do whatever he wants and if that means ripping the walls off of Suplex City, so be it. Angle says Strowman is lucky Kane and Lesnar can still compete at the Rumble. As for Strowman though, he's out of the match because HE'S FIRED. I'm not even going to bother getting all annoyed here because there's no way they'll do Kane vs. Lesnar as a one on one. Hardcore Holly was a more interesting (and believable) challenger back in 2004.

In the back, Braun leaves while threatening security.

Raw moment: Hugh Jackman is guest host.

Post break, a security guard orders Strowman to leave and the destruction is on. Braun promises to do even more.

The Bar vs. Titus Worldwide

Rematch from last week where Titus scored a fluke pin. Dana Brooke is in a very different top this week to prevent another instance of last week's, uh, incident. Cesaro powers Crews into the corner to start but it's quickly off to Titus for an exchange of chops in the corner. Cesaro uppercuts Crews down though and Sheamus adds a top rope clothesline as we take a break.

Back with Sheamus getting two off a middle rope ax handle and grabbing a chinlock on Crews. Apollo fights up and brings in Titus for the forearms to the chest and an impressive toss to Cesaro. Everything breaks down and Crews moonsaults to the floor just like last week but Cesaro is ready for him this time. An uppercut to Titus knocks him into a rollup for two, only to have the Neutralizer broken up. Apollo's high crossbody and standing moonsault get two each but Sheamus picks him up for White Noise. Cue Jason Jordan for a distraction though, allowing Crews to roll Sheamus up for the pin at 10:48.

Rating: C-. Now that's the right call, even if the ending didn't need Jordan out there. I was nearly convinced that they would go with the 50/50 booking here but instead, they gave Titus Worldwide another win to

make them even the slightest level players in the division. Now, even if they lose for weeks to come, there's a more believable chance they could win and that's what matters most. Good idea here, even in a not great match.

Seth Rollins comes out to ask Jordan what he's doing.

Strowman kicks in the door to Angle's office and breaks a lot of stuff.

Post break, Strowman wrecks catering and chokeslams Curt Hawkins through a table. He does however take a piece of chocolate cake from a nearly catatonic worker. I can appreciate a man with a taste for some cake and Strowman as the unstoppable monster is fun.

Tony Nese vs. Cedric Alexander

Before the match, Enzo Amore says he's like Frankenstein and Cedric is like Dracula because he sucks. Goldust is in Cedric's corner and says Cedric is a box office smash. After the title match at the Rumble, the one word to describe Cedric will be champion. Cedric says that between Amore's face and his ankle, the only word to describe him is sawft. We're joined in progress after a break, but not before seeing Strowman shoving a dumpster through the back.

That's one thing that drives me crazy about WWE. Strowman is supposed to be destroying everything on a rampage, but he does it right after we get back from a commercial and before we get to this match. Go split screen to show him doing this at the same time or something, but find a way to make it feel more spontaneous.

Anyway, to the match. Cedric catches him with an ankle scissors but Nese knees him in the ribs as Booker talks about how Angle shouldn't have fired Strowman live in the ring. We hit the neck crank on Cedric with Enzo talking so much trash that Goldust goes after him, even mocking the dance. Cedric fights up and hits the springboard clothesline for two, only to get slowed down by a headlock. Back up and Cedric elbow shim in the face, followed by the Lumbar Check (with a great sell job from Tony) for the pin at 5:52.

Rating: D+. Who in the world decided to put these two out there to die like this? The longer we wait on Cedric to get his big title shot, the less interesting he becomes. He's beaten up all these same cruiserweights over and over and there's no point in watching him do anything other than win the title. It wouldn't surprise me to see WWE not even do that though, which would be one of the dumbest things they could do. Just find some more interesting villains for him to vanquish or give him the title already because this was a waste of time.

Angle is thinking about calling in a SWAT team but is told Strowman is heading towards the production trucks.

Post break Strowman goes into the truck and shoves a bunch of papers around before leaving without causing too much damage. The whole thing starts shaking though as Strowman has unhooked the semi from the truck and is trying to turn it over. Angle comes up to say he's called the cops. His phone rings as Strowman leaves, only to come back and flip the truck over with the camera going spastic with cuts to hide how fake it looked, making it look worse in the process.

Strowman heads into the arena and goes after commentary, picking Cole up by one hand and carrying him over the stage. Angle and security shows up with Kurt saying he's called the cops off. Stephanie has rehired Strowman and he's back in the title match (because of course Stephanie can solve any problem in ten seconds while it's caused Angle problems for an hour) if he lets Cole go. Braun does let him go, with a flying toss off the stage and onto the security guards. The Stephanie thing made me roll my eyes but Cole being picked up by the belt and carried away like a child was funny stuff.

Tom Phillips replaces Cole on commentary.

Nia Jax vs. Asuka

Asuka gets tossed around to start but comes right back with a Black Widow (ala AJ Lee) into something like an abdominal stretch. Nia calmly shoves Asuka's leg off though and catches her with a backbreaker. A triangle choke cuts Nia off again until she lifts Asuka up for a powerbomb into the corner as we take a break. Back with Asuka fighting out of a bearhug

and avoiding a sitdown splash. Asuka's running kick to the chest drops Jax but she's right back up with a hard powerbomb. Asuka grabs a kneebar to send Nia bailing to the ropes and they head outside. Asuka avoids a charge and sends Nia into the steps, only to have Nia get her knee caught between the ring and the steps. Nia beats the count back in but the referee stops it due to the knee injury at 10:45.

Rating: C. I've seen clowns who slip on banana peels less frequently than Nia Jax. It's like she loses every match she has this way and that's getting old. The match was a shortened version of what we've seen from these two every single time now with Asuka hanging in there and finding a way to survive. This was fine, but Nia needs to win something like NOW, as she still doesn't have a big win.

Alexa Bliss comes out to check on Nia.

Jason Jordan comes in to see Angle, who is still upset over Braun. Jordan has been watching his dad's back all night and wouldn't have let Strowman do anything. He thanks Angle for the opportunities again but thinks Seth needs a warmup for next week. Say against Finn Balor tonight, which Angle makes for later.

The announcers talk about Martin Luther King Day.

Video on Martin Luther King.

Bliss blames herself for Nia's injury when Enzo comes in to check on Nia as well. Nia tells Bliss that Enzo has this so Alexa leaves while not looking happy.

Revival vs. ???/???

Yes it's an old school squash against nameless jobbers. Dawson suplexes jobber #1 and gives hi a hard clothesline for good measure. Dash comes in with a jumping knee to the face before sending it off to jobber #2. In a cool spot, Revival loads up #2 for something like a Snapshot (elevated DDT) but Dash flips him up like a backdrop, only to have Dawson send him forward in a gordbuster. The Shatter Machine ends #1 at 1:39. There's something so great about jobbers not even having names because they're

not important enough.

Post match Revival brags about their tag team skills because too many people are worried about Instagram likes or video games. As for next week, Revival isn't thrilled with meeting any of the veterans at Raw 25 because there's nothing old school about beer bashes and crotch chops. They're professional wrestlers instead of sports entertainers so WWE doesn't want them to succeed. Next week at Raw 25, the superstars from around the world are coming to their universe and the Revival is setting the tone for the next 25 years. Good promo here but as always: FOLLOW UP ON IT.

Here's Elias for a new song. He's looking forward to the Royal Rumble but wants to eliminate Cena, along with 29 others. So he's going to pull a Mil Mascaras and eliminate himself? Elias insults the San Antonio Spurs and introduces Miz and the Miztourage for a chat before their match.

Miz talks about the fans cheering him last week because they recognize greatness. The fans knew something was missing from Raw and it wasn't Cena or Lesnar but rather Miz. Last week Miz and the Miztourage beat up Roman Reigns and it felt awesome. That spark is why he and Maryse are getting their own series on USA and next week he's getting the Intercontinental Title back. It's going to feel awesome. Maybe it's just because he hasn't been around lately but Miz has felt like a bigger deal in the last two weeks.

Roman Reigns vs. Miztourage

Non-title. Miz offers an early distraction to no avail as Reigns punches both lackeys down. Axel's cheap shot allows the Miztourage to send Reigns into the steps and the beating is on. We hit the chinlock for a good while until Axel has to save his partner from a suplex. Instead Dallas gets two off a DDT, followed by some double teaming to keep Reigns slowed down.

Reigns fights up and hits a Samoan drop, followed by knocking Dallas off the apron. We get the always stupid spot of someone accidentally DDTing his partner with Axel getting spiked. The Superman Punch drops both guys and Miz's distraction fails, allowing Reigns to spear Axel for the pin at

8:16.

Rating: D-. This was reaching new levels of boring as it really didn't need to be even half this long. Reigns isn't threatened by these two and there was little reason to have him be in this kind of trouble. Throw in Reigns being down after five minutes of offense from Axel and Dallas and this was a combination of really boring and unbelievable, in the completely wrong way.

Sasha Banks vs. Sonya Deville

The rest of Absolution, Bayley and Mickie James are at ringside. As we get started, Paige is officially ruled out of the Royal Rumble. Nothing is mentioned beyond that though. A very early Bank Statement attempt send Deville bailing to the ropes but Mandy offers a distraction so Sonya can get in a few shots.

We hit a chinlock with a body vice as Booker compares Sonya to Ken Shamrock in a rare name drop. Banks fights up and goes to the middle rope, only to dive into a kick to the chest for the completely clean pin at 2:26. That's exactly the way this needed to go. Oh and welcome to the doghouse Sasha. Bayley can keep you company (for whatever reason).

Some wrestlers were at the National Civil Rights Museum last week.

Rollins tells Jordan to calm down and stop trying to be his spokesperson. This story hasn't been bad but my levels of not caring whenever either of them show up is growing in a hurry.

Matt Hardy vs. Heath Slater

Joined in progress with Matt hitting a splash to Slater's back and hammering away. Matt sends him into the ropes and laughs a lot so Slater heads outside for a meeting with Rhyno. Back in and Matt bites the hand before launching Slater into the corner. Matt thinks Slater must be deleted so it's the ten rams into the buckle and a Twist of Fate for the pin at 3:37.

Rating: D+. Matt is changing his style up enough and that's the best thing that could happen for him. He wasn't really getting far with the

nostalgia run so let's see what he can do with this character. Unfortunately I'm not sure what exactly he can do with it but maybe he'll surprise me like he did in TNA.

Goldberg is official for the Hall of Fame so it's time for a long video package.

We look back at Strowman's path of destruction earlier tonight.

Royal Rumble rundown.

Finn Balor vs. Seth Rollins

Jordan, Gallows and Anderson are at ringside. Balor armbars him to start but gets armdragged away, followed by a kick to the back. Seth gets sent outside though and a kick to the chest puts him down as we take a break. Back (after a Raw moment of the 1-2-3 Kid pinning Razor Ramon in a huge upset) with Rollins hitting the Blockbuster but hurting his knee. It's fine enough to try the suicide dive though and Balor is down again.

They get back inside with Rolling hitting a forearm to the back but having Balor slip out of the Falcon Arrow. The Sling Blade takes Rollins down, only to have Seth come back with his own. Balor gets in another Sling Blade but charges into a superkick for two. I really wouldn't emphasize how they both use the same move like that but have it their way. The Wind-Up knee is countered with a forearm so Rollins enziguris him down. Seth has to roll through the Phoenix splash and gets caught with the shotgun dropkick in the corner.

The Coup de Grace is broken up with the superplex into the Falcon Arrow for two more and both guys are down. Seth's frog splash hits the knees though and Balor rolls him up for...two apparently but here's the Bar to interrupt. The brawl is on at ringside with Anderson and Gallows fighting the Bar until Balor hits a flip dive to take all four out. Another kick to the head sets up the Coup de Grace but Rollins rolls away. Cesaro's distraction allows Jordan to trip Balor and Rollins hits the curb stomp (WHERE IN THE WORLD HAS THAT BEEN???) for the pin at 15:18.

Rating: C+. Seth's eternally present knee selling issues aside, this was

the kind of main event match that always works. They were pushing the idea of the messed up fall quite a bit here and that leads me to think we're heading for a rematch. I'm really not sure about the idea of Balor losing so soon after his renewed push but that's WWE for you.

Balor is rather shaken up and the camera stays on him for a long time to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This show started off great with Strowman running wild but they made sure to cut that off after an hour because it was getting too interesting. It felt like an hour of one show and two hours of the regular show, which kind of feels like a warmup for next week's show. This show had some good booking choices (Deville winning, Revival getting a squash win, Titus Worldwide winning again etc) but the wrestling wasn't exactly thrilling. That being said, the next two weeks are all that matters so we'll see what they really have to offer then.

Results

Titus Worldwide b. The Bar – Rollup to Sheamus

Cedric Alexander b. Tony Nese – Lumbar Check

Asuka b. Nia Jax via referee stoppage

Revival b. ???/??? – Shatter Machine

Roman Reigns b. Miztourage – Spear to Axel

Sonya Deville b. Sasha Banks – Kick to the chest

Matt Hardy b. Heath Slater – Twist of Fate

Seth Rollins b. Finn Balor – Blackout

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2017 Awards: Feud of the Year

It's the building block of wrestling.

2017 was a heck of a year for feuding wrestlers, with some excellent options for the best feud of the year. Some of them were better than others but the top choices are hard to separate. There are almost as many options here as there are for any award, making this one of the hardest choices to make.

I'll actually start with something from New Japan as you just can't ignore Kazuchika Okada vs. Kenny Omega. I know the promotion isn't built around promos like WWE but Okada challenging him for the rematch and the matches going 1-1-1 is way too much to look past. These two tore the house down every single time and put on an all time classic trilogy. Definitely worth a look if you somehow haven't seen it yet.

We'll go with a tag feud now and one that I considered putting at the top of the list with New Day vs. the Usos. These guys just beat the fire out of each other all year with some really entertaining promos and segments as a bonus. The Usos showed why they're the best team in WWE at the moment while New Day got to prove that they still have it (you know, because they're so old and such). Their match in the Cell was excellent and capped off an incredible feud, which is the big key that you need for one of these things to work. I loved this stuff and it made me an even bigger Usos fan.

Down to NXT we go (you knew this was coming) with Aleister Black vs. Velveteen Dream. This was much more psychological with Dream desperate to have Black say his name (with some innuendo running wild), leading to an outstanding match at Takeover: WarGames where Black beat Dream but gave him what he wanted. I got way into the build for this and it made Dream look WAY better than he would have otherwise. This is probably second on my list, which blows my mind as I was rolling my eyes when I heard the feud start.

We'll stay in NXT (mostly) for the UK Title feud between Tyler Bate and Pete Dunne. They met for the inaugural title and then had two incredible followups for one of the best trilogies WWE has ever put together. Much like Okada vs. Omega, this was all about the action with both guys (who are way too young to be able to do stuff like this) leaving it all in the ring every single time. Their Chicago match was the best match I saw all year and I'd love to see these two again, assuming they don't overdo the match.

We'll continue with the battling countrymen with Kevin Owens vs. Chris Jericho. These two started the year off as best friends before falling apart at the Festival of Friendship (we'll be coming back to that one). It lead to some awesome matches and title changes with some of the best moments of the first half of the year. I could have gone for one more big gimmick match between the two of them but what we got more than did the trick.

In another feud that didn't last very long but was a lot of fun, we have Samoa Joe vs. Brock Lesnar. This was built around the idea of two guys beating each other up in a pair of matches that didn't waste time. They beat the heck out of each other with the big match atmosphere that most people can't bring. Joe's promo of choking out Paul Heyman and saying he wanted Lesnar was great stuff and the singles match was as good of a short form match as you were going to find given this style.

The winner though is the other half of the Summerslam main event with Braun Strowman vs. Roman Reigns. This feud had more matches than the other options with a great segment (“I’M NOT FINISHED WITH YOU”) and some awesome, hard hitting matches. Reigns won the first match but Strowman dominated the rest of the feud, giving him a very rare win over Reigns. I never got bored with this feud and they beat the heck out of each other, making it the best feud of the year.

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2004: Uh...What’s His Name!

Royal Rumble 2004

Date: January 25, 2004

Location: Wachovia Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 17,289

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz, Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is the show where you can really see the next generation rising up. The main events other than the Rumble are Lesnar vs. Holly and HBK vs. HHH. Ok so maybe the next generation only comes up in the Rumble. Other than that we don’t have much going on here but this show is all about Benoit in the Rumble. Let’s get to it.

The opening video talks about Shawn vs. HHH because that’s what people are watching the ROYAL RUMBLE for right? The theme of the video is that things can change in the blink of an eye.

Raw Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. Evolution

Flair and Batista are defending here and this is a tables match. Coach is ticked off at the Dudleys for putting him through a table six nights ago on Raw, because if there’s one man you need to give a reason to be a

heel, it's COACH. Batista makes fun of the Eagles because he hasn't broken through to the other side of the glass ceiling yet. The fight starts in the aisle as you would expect. This is one table to a finish, meaning only one guy has to go through to end it.

Bubba slides in a table but shoves it hard enough that it slides across the ring and hits Batista in the ribs on the other side of the floor. Flair gets double teamed to start and caught in a powerslam by D-Von. There's a table set up in the ring but Batista moves it before Flair gets suplexed through it. D-Von hits a Cactus Clothesline on Batista as Flair chops Bubba against a table in the corner.

Big Dave comes back in with some clotheslines to clean house but misses a charge into the post. The belly to back neckbreaker from the Dudleys puts him down and it's Flair getting double teamed again. According to JR, the Dudleys are the only team to win the (non-vacant) world tag team titles at the Rumble. Coach heads to the ring to distract the Dudleys and prevent a 3D to Flair. Flair saves Coach and Batista hits a spinebuster to put D-Von through a table to retain.

Rating: D. This match fell into the same trap that all bad tables matches fall into: the dull set of spots that fail until one works for the win. You rarely get something that gets around this through sheer carnage such as the match at the 2000 Rumble, but this was just terrible. I have no idea what they were going for here as the fans were disappointed and they only had four and a half minutes to get into it. Also: real smart WWE. This is the right way to start a show in Philadelphia: have some of the most famous ECW guys ever lose.

Cena raps about winning the Rumble when RVD comes in to steal the joke. Weed jokes are made. Josh Matthews looks like the king of all tools here.

There's an empty seat for Mick Foley in the front row.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Rey is defending. This is during the Nidia is Blind phase which didn't do anything for anyone. They speed things WAY up to start with Jamie avoiding the 619 and launching Rey into the air to take over. The champ

gets draped over the top rope for two and a hard kick to the back gets the same.

Jamie hooks a chinlock which shifts into a seated abdominal stretch. Rey fights up and hits a dropkick and a springboard rana followed by the sitout bulldog for two. He springboards into a gutbuster from Noble for two though and momentum shifts again. Nidia accidentally grabs Noble's foot, allowing Rey to hit the 619 and springboard legdrop....for the pin? Huh?

Rating: D+. This was fast paced while it lasted, but those three words are the key: while it lasted. This barely broke three minutes which simply isn't enough for a PPV title match. Unless I was missing it there was no sign of an injury or anything like that, but the match ends that fast. I have no idea what they were going for here but it didn't work in any way at all. That's a shame too because they were going well while it lasted.

Noble yells at Nidia post match.

We recap the battle of the Guerreros. Eddie was clearly the bigger star which was fine while they were champions, but once they lost the belts to the Bashams, Chavo blamed Eddie and turned on his uncle for losing his title. The Guerreros almost made up but they lost the rematch, after which Chavo let Eddie get double teamed by the Bashams. This was actually a pretty solid story despite how basic it was. Sometimes less is more. Oh and Kurt Angle was playing peacemaker and Chavo Guerrero Senior is in his son's corner.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Chavo Guerrero

Chavo bails to the floor before the bell and the fans are totally behind Eddie here. They fight over a lockup to start with no one being able to get an advantage. Chavo slaps Eddie in the face and now we're ready to go. We hit the mat for a bit before Eddie starts snapping off chops in the corner. Chavo shoulders him down and we have a standoff. They chop it out again and Eddie goes to the eye like a true Guerrero.

Back to the mat with Eddie working on the arm before Chavo nips up and

hooks a rana to send them both to the floor. Chavo sends Eddie into the announce table to finally take over and get some of the aggression going. Back in and they get into a kind of MMA style brawl on the mat until Eddie hooks a cross armbreaker of all things. That goes nowhere so Chavo suplexes Eddie down for two, followed by the Three Amigos. Eddie counters a tornado DDT and hits Three Amigos of his own. Chavo is down so Eddie goes up and hits the Frog Splash for the pin. ANOTHER quick ending tonight.

Rating: C+. This was way better than the other matches, but this felt like it was missing fifteen minutes or so. Three matches so far have combined to be about fifteen minutes long which is pretty lame for a modern PPV, even for the Rumble. This could have been a lot more, but the feud was completely done after tonight. Eddie would become #1 contender on the following Smackdown.

Eddie destroys Chavo post match in a pretty heelish display. Chavo gets busted open.

Ad for Mick Foley's Greatest Hits and Misses. That's the most entertaining part of the show so far.

Benoit likes his odds even though he's #1 in the Rumble. Evolution comes up and says Orton is going to win the Rumble. Flair says Benoit may be great, but this is about Evolution tonight.

We recap Hardcore Holly vs. Lesnar. Brock broke Holly's neck (legit) and Holly gets a world title shot out of it a year later. This is the textbook definition of the Rumble title shot where no one buys the champion as being in any danger whatsoever.

Smackdown World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Holly jumps Lesnar in the aisle and sends him into the post because he wants to break Lesnar's neck. We get a bell and Holly misses an elbow off the top to give Brock control. They head to the floor where Holly's back is rammed into the apron and Lesnar hooks a reverse body vice back inside. That goes nowhere so Brock hits a Shell Shock for two and it's right back to the hold.

We shift to a bearhug and then one of the most wicked overhead belly to belly suplexes you'll ever see. Off to a kind of rear naked choke by Lesnar to keep things dull. Holly makes his comeback with the dropkick and hits the Alabama Slam but goes for a full nelson and revenge instead of the title. Holly hooks the hold and goes to the floor with it but has to break the count. The F5 hits a few seconds later to complete the inevitable.

Rating: D. This was Brock Lesnar defending the world title against Hardcore Holly on pay per view. If you can't figure out why this got the rating it got, I can't help you.

We recap HHH vs. HBK which is allegedly seven years in the making. I'm guessing THIS is supposed to be the FINAL blowoff to their feud instead of the classic in 2002.

Raw World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. HHH

HHH is defending and this is a last man standing match. They chop it out to start and punch each other in the corner a lot. Shawn tries a backslide before realizing that makes no sense here, so it's back to the chops. Michaels gets caught in a facebuster as things slow down a bit. A HARD whip into the corner has Shawn's back in trouble and a backbreaker makes it even worse.

Out of nowhere Shawn takes out the leg and hooks a Figure Four, because where would we be without a Flair tribute? That gets a five count so Shawn hits a chop block for a four. HHH low bridges Shawn and we head to the floor for a bit. HHH loads up the announce table but Shawn blocks a Pedigree attempt. They slug it out on the table with HHH getting knocked to the floor, drawing a bunch of booing from the bloodthirsty Philadelphia fans.

Back in and Shawn counters a Pedigree with a backdrop to the floor but he injures his back in the process. Shawn tries a springboard cross body to the floor but crashes through the table instead as only he can. Instead of letting the now busted open Shawn get counted out, HHH throws him back in for the count, which reaches seven. The champ pounds Shawn down a few times for a few counts, most of which don't get that far.

A fast spinebuster (literally, as Shawn was flying at HHH and it almost looked like a belly to belly instead of a spinebuster) gets about six. That's the problem with most last man standing matches: it's a big move then standing around for the count. That makes it very hard to get any kind of flow going to the match. HHH cracks Shawn in the back with a chair but Shawn gets up again. A Pedigree onto the chair is countered into a slingshot into the post, busting HHH open as well.

Now Shawn cracks HHH in the head with a chair, allowing HHH to do his weird "my head hurts and I'm not sure where I am" face. There's the forearm followed by the nipup from Shawn, followed by an atomic drop and the top rope elbow. That gets about seven so Shawn tunes up the band, only to walk into a low blow to put both guys down. Shawn hooks a sleeper which eventually gets an eight count before walking into a DDT to put both guys down.

That gets a double eight count before we head to the corner. HHH tries a belly to back superplex but Shawn counters into a cross body for another double eight count. The Pedigree hits but it's only good for a nine. Shawn pops up out of nowhere with some more Sweet Chin Music, putting both guys down for ten which keeps the title on HHH.

Rating: C-. The problem here is exactly what I said earlier: this was a lot of laying around. The last seven minutes or so had about five moves combined, as most of the match was "move, lay down, move, lay down, move, lay down." The idea is supposed to be a ton of drama, but that didn't happen here. Shawn would turn into a jerk in the next few weeks and insert himself in the Mania main event because of this ending.

Rumble video with a focus on Benoit.

The Fink is ready to start the Rumble but here's Bischoff to run his mouth. He says that a Raw guy is going to win the Rumble because he's respected as a GM. He runs down ECW, which brings out Heyman for a brawl. Cue Austin on his ATV to say that these two are both in violation of the law (he was called Sheriff Austin at this point) and wants to know who started it. Heyman and Bischoff: "HE DID!" Both guys get Stunners and the fans love it.

Goldberg, #30 in the Rumble, doesn't get to talk because Lesnar comes in to interrupt him. Lesnar is called a coward, which will come into play later.

JR has to admit Foley is a coward because he isn't here yet.

Royal Rumble

Benoit is #1 and the Intercontinental Champion Randy Orton is #2. Two minute intervals here again. They pound away on each other to start with Benoit taking him to the mat to stomp away. Mark Henry is #3 when he was a fat power guy with no direction at all. Allow me to be more specific: he's still with Teddy Long. Benoit gets double teamed for awhile until Tajiri is #4. These intervals don't seem to be two minutes or anywhere close to it.

The handspring elbow takes Orton down but Benoit rolls some Germans on Tajiri to take him down. Tajiri only gets two as I guess Benoit is conserving strength. Henry throws Orton to the apron but stops looking like an idiot. Bradshaw is #5 and he immediately clotheslines down everyone not named Benoit. Benoit takes offense to being left out and puts Bradshaw in the Crossface before pulling Bradshaw out. Eh he would get a nine month title reign stating in the summer so I feel no sympathy for him.

Rhyno is #6 as we're flying through this so far. He goes after the two starters as Tajiri fires off kicks on Henry. Tajiri gets a half Tarantula on Henry but Henry gets Gored, knocking Tajiri out in the process. Benoit clotheslines Henry out and we're down to three again. Matt Hardy is #7 and Benoit throws him to the apron almost immediately. In FAR less than two minutes, here's Scott Steiner at #8. Oh dear it's Scott Steiner at the Royal Rumble. This could be a disaster.

He starts firing off suplexes immediately but at least this time there are some t-bones to go with the belly to bellies. Benoit rolls some Germans on him as if to say THIS IS HOW YOU SUPLEX SOMEBODY. Things slow down a bit and here's Matt Morgan at #9. He takes Benoit down with a Batista Bomb takes Benoit down and pounds away on Orton in the corner.

The Hurricane is #10 and comes in off the top with a cross body to Hardy. He goes after Morgan for no apparent reason and is thrown out in less than twenty seconds. Morgan throws Hardy to the apron again but can't get him out. Booker T, complete with the stupid remix of his theme music with Booker singing, is #11. Booker immediately goes after Steiner in a revisiting of their WCW feud that no one was asking for.

Nothing of note happens until Kane is #12. This is after he buried Taker alive. For the first time. Steiner gets dumped by Booker during Kane's entrance. Kane starts firing off chokeslams and other various power moves for which he is well known. The clock runs down at #13 and there go the lights. A gong goes off and Kane PANICS. Booker uses the distraction to dump Kane and here's Spike Dudley at #13. He never makes it to the ring as Kane destroys him for setting off the gong.

Everyone tries to throw each other out while laying on the ropes until Rikishi is #14. Benoit dumps Rhyno to keep us at six people (Benoit, Orton, Rikishi, Booker, Morgan, Hardy) in the ring. Morgan gets a Stinkface and nothing else happens for a bit. Renee Dupree with the French Tickler is #15. In a surprising moment, Dupree actually knocks Matt out, only to be superkicked out by Rikishi a second later.

A-Train is #16 and goes right for Rikishi. Benoit avoids the yet to be named Carbon Footprint and dumps Morgan. I love that they're keeping the ring from getting full. Orton dumps Rikishi and Booker as Shelton Benjamin is #17. Benoit dumps A-Train during his entrance and Orton dumps Shelton a few seconds later to get us back to two. Orton pounds on him a bit but they crack heads to put both guys down.

Lamont, the announcer for Ernest Miller (complete with the music that would go to Brodus Clay eight years later), runs out to introduce the Cat at #18. After some dancing (and singing by Tazz), Orton dumps him out. Miller would be released in like two weeks. Kurt Angle is #19 and he might be a bit harder to get out. He's fighting for AMERICA here so the fans tell him he sucks.

Benoit and Angle destroy each other with chops and punches as only they can while Orton is content to chill in the corner. Rico, now in his

Adrian Street phase, is #20. He fires off some kicks but lasts about as long as you would expect him to in a match with Orton, Angle and Benoit. The RKO takes care of Rico as Benoit rolls a ton of Germans on Angle. Test is #21....and is nowhere in sight.

Orton RKO's Angle and we cut to the back to see Test unconscious. Austin sees someone off camera and says they're #21. The off camera man and presumable attacker: MICK FREAKING FOLEY! Orton, the guy who spat in Foley's face and called him a coward, PANICS. The place goes nuts and Foley explodes on Orton, beating him half to death and hitting a Cactus Clothesline to put both of them out. This would lead to some AWESOME matches at Mania and Backlash which put Orton up to the world title in August.

Foley keeps beating on Orton as Christian is #22. Mick picks up the steps and BLASTS a security guy who tries to stop him. Orton comes back with two chair shots and fires back at Mick. They brawl up the ramp and Foley pulls out Socko, only to put it on Nunzio who comes in at #23. We haven't seen anything of the match for awhile but I can live with that for a hot brawl like this. Orton kicks Foley low and runs as we go back to the ring.

Angle is getting double teamed as Nunzio is down on the floor. Big Show is #24 and apparently that's Tazz's pick. Thankfully he's in the singlet and shorts again instead of the one piece swimsuit. Angle immediately goes after him but Show throws everyone around. Jericho is #25 as he's in a weird phase of his career. He wasn't a main event guy anymore but he had feuded with everyone in the midcard already so he just kind of hung around and filled in spots on the card.

All four guys go after Big Show (who has a head like a typewriter according to Tazz) but they can't get him out. Charlie Haas is #26 but gets double teamed by Jericho and Christian. Currently we have Benoit, Angle, Jericho, Christian, Haas, Big Show and Nunzio who is on the floor. Jericho backdrops Christian out for the second year in a row as Billy Gunn is #27. Apparently this is a return for him. It's Fameassers all around and then things slow down again.

John Cena is #28 and that pop is growing at an alarming rate. Show stares him down so Cena throws Nunzio in to kill some time. Nunzio goes after Show for some reason but Cena takes over for him to make it fair. RVD is #29 to a big pop of his own. It's spin kicks all around until things settle down a bit. There's an FU to Angle and Goldberg is #30. The final group: Benoit, Angle, Big Show, Jericho, Nunzio, Haas, Gunn, Cena, RVD and Goldberg. At least the ring didn't fill up until the end so that's not too bad.

Goldie spears a lot of people down to start before Nunzio jumps on his back like an idiot. Haas is put out and Nunzio takes a HUGE spear. Gunn is out as is Nunzio to get us down to seven. Goldberg loads up a Jackhammer on Show but Lesnar runs in with an F5 to break it up. Goldberg stares down Brock, allowing Angle to dump him out. All five remaining guys not named Big Show go after the one named Big Show but it still doesn't work.

Everyone hits their finishers on Show instead with Cena (Show's feud at the time) hitting the Shuffle instead of the FU, which I'm assuming they were saving for Mania. They try to dead lift Show and realize they screwed up by knocking a giant unconscious. Show shoves them all off and dumps Cena followed by Van Dam a few seconds later.

So it's Big Show, Benoit, Angle and Jericho as the final four. Jericho gets sent to the apron twice and manages to hang on before bulldogging Show down. The Walls go on Show and he taps but Angle breaks the hold up for no apparent reason. Show chokeslams Benoit down but chokeslams Jericho even further, sending him to the floor to get us to three. A side slam puts Angle down and there's another chokeslam to Benoit.

Show breaks up a German attempt from Angle but can't block an Angle Slam. There's a Slam to Benoit (it was a belly to back suplex but whatever) and the ankle lock to Show. Show taps again, but again it doesn't mean anything. The big guy rolls through the hold and eliminates Angle in the process, getting us down to two.

Benoit dropkicks Show but knocks him back into the ring by mistake. A chokeslam is countered into the Crossface and Show taps again, but you

know the drill by now. Show shrugs it off and picks Benoit up in a chokeslam. Benoit graps a front chancery though and pulls Show to the apron....then has him teetering on the ropes....AND BENOIT WINS! The crowd kept getting louder as Benoit pulled further and further. Awesome sequence there.

Rating: A. There were some slow spots but this was ALL about Benoit and I can't complain about that at all. The ending sequence here with all three submission guys making Show tap was a cool idea and different than the ending to any other Rumble. They didn't throw a stupid curve here and made Benoit look like a star here, which is exactly what he was supposed to do. Great Rumble.

Overall Rating: B-. The Rumble is really REALLY good but the rest is horrible. Don't watch the rest of the show, but if you're a Benoit fan and can still sit through a long match of his, this is absolutely required viewing. Things would change a bit more the next year as two REALLY big names would be the stars of the Rumble, but that's not for another year. For now, this was all about Benoit and he nailed it.

Ratings Comparison

Evolution vs. Dudley Boys

Original: C

Redo: D

Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Original: N/A

Redo: D+

Chavo Guerrero vs. Eddie Guerrero

Original: C+

Redo: C+

Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Original: D-

Redo: D

HHH vs. Shawn Michaels

Original: C+

Redo: C-

Royal Rumble

Original: A

Redo: A

Overall Rating

Original: C+

Redo: B-

Just as last time, the Rumble is the only thing worth seeing.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/23/royal-rumble-count-up-2004-he-who-must-not-be-named/>

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