

2017 Awards: Worst Match of the Year

It's the Rated RK-No Special.

This is one of the awards that often shows you how bad things can get. There's a fine line between a match that isn't very good and one of the worst of the year. That's the case this time around as well, meaning I won't be including matches that aren't very good because I'm looking for something far worse than that. These are the worst of the worst for one reason or another.

Before we get into the regular nominees, I'm intentionally leaving out Goldberg vs. Kevin Owens from Fastlane. It was 20 seconds long and it's kind of hard to make a match really be that bad in so short a time. The match was stupid booking instead of a bad match, which are two very different things.

We'll start with the ladies as Alexa Bliss and Bayley which had one of the most career destroying fallouts that you'll ever see. Bayley still hasn't recovered from this and there's a good chance that she never will. The whole story was about Bayley channeling her inner extreme and then she just got the heck beaten out of her in the actual match. Terrible idea and a really bad match, which is quite the horrible concept.

Next up is House of Horrors from Payback, which wasn't even the worse Orton vs. Bray Wyatt match of the year. This was basically a segment in a house (which wasn't horror), an hour off, and then a brawl in the ring with interference giving Bray the win. Wyatt gets nothing out of winning because it's non-title and then the Brand Split screwed everything up anyway. Easily a horrible match, but it would get worse for these two.

Let's spread the venom a little more with the men's Survivor

Series match. I don't remember the last time I saw a match and wondered what the heck they were thinking more than this. It was COMPLETELY overbooked, the big stars they brought in didn't mean much, and it wound up being about HHH vs. Kurt Angle. Oh and that whole Braun Strowman attacks HHH thing? Still waiting on a followup. This was a straight up disaster and one of the biggest missed opportunities in a long time.

It's time to get to Battleground and one of its two horrible matches of the night. First up is the flag match between John Cena and Rusev, which was as much pandering to the show's name as I had seen on anything other than the Royal Rumble. This was long, it was never in doubt, and it was flat out terrible, along with having a rather heavy handed set up in the first place. Cena is better than this, but he seems to have forgotten how to do so.

And now, in a rarity, I present you with a tie for the worst match of the year. In no particular order, we have Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt at Wrestlemania XXXIII and Randy Orton vs. Jinder Mahal in the Punjabi Prison match at Battleground. Both of these are horrible for reasons that I can't quite differentiate, meaning I can't put one beneath the other.

We'll start at Wrestlemania, which not only felt like a nothing title change but also featured Bray's main event run (which was long overdue in the first place) having its legs cut out from under him (and he's showing no signs of recovering), title reign for Orton that is as transitional as you can get, and A BUNCH OF FREAKING BUGS BEING DISPLAYED ON THE MAT FOR NO APPARENT REASON! I get the idea of Wyatt trying to get in Orton's head, but it didn't even work. Orton just shrugged it off, hit the RKO, and won the title. What was the point of this?

Speaking of that, what in the world was the point in having the Punjabi Prison match go that long? It felt like they could have chopped a good fifteen minutes (it was less than thirty

altogether) from the thing and told the same story: Orton dominates, the Singh Brothers interfere, Mahal gets beaten up some more, the Brothers interfere, Great Khali makes a one off appearance and Mahal retains. It was long, it was terrible, and Mahal retained the title.

But was it as bad as Orton vs. Wyatt in Orlando? Well...

I don't know, because I'm not thinking about these things again and you shouldn't either. Go watch some old Divas matches which were at least so bad they were funny. These were so bad that they belong in a woodchipper somewhere. The bad stuff was REALLY bad this year and I can't imagine things actually being worse this year.

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1998: You Can't Stop Destiny

Royal Rumble 1998

Date: January 18, 1998

Location: San Jose Arena, San Jose, California

Attendance: 18,542

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the year of Austin and for once, the WWF is looking good going forward as the debcale that was the main event of Starrcade has caused WCW to hit a brick wall. The main event tonight is Shawn defending the title against Taker because he didn't want to face Owen Hart, the most logical opponent. Also there's the Rumble, which is obvious of a winner as there's been in years, but in this case that's ok. Let's get to it.

The opening video is about the two main matches as you would expect. The rest of the card doesn't mean much anyway.

Mike Tyson is in a skybox.

Vader vs. The Artist Formerly Known As Goldust

This is during Goldie's midlife crisis/PAY ATTENTION TO ME phase. These two had a great match at Clash of the Champions so maybe this won't suck. Goldust jumps him as Jerry is glad the gold one is in men's clothing again. Vader shrugs off the shots to the back and chases Goldust to the floor. Vader rams him into Luna as we hear about Austin not being here yet. Goldust is sent into the steps as Vader keeps control.

Back in and Luna trips Vader up, finally allowing Goldie to get in a clothesline. Another clothesline puts him down and Goldust works on the leg a bit. Goldie drops a middle rope elbow to the ribs and we head back to the floor. Vader is sent into the steps so Luna can choke him a bit before we head back in. Goldust pounds away again but stops to kiss Vader. I may not be a pro wrestler, but I know better than to kiss a guy called the Rocky Mountain Monster.

Vader kills him with a clothesline and suplexes Goldust down before getting two off a splash. Vader loads up the Vader Bomb but a low blow stops him cold. Another clothesline puts Goldie down again and Vader sits on his chest. He loads up the Bomb again and despite Luna jumping in his back, Vader drops it anyway and crushes Goldust for the pin.

Rating: D. The place popped for the ending which did look cool, but other than that this was a messed up match. Goldust in this gimmick didn't really work because at the end of the day, he's still boring old Dustin Rhodes working the same standard style. It's not horrible but it's not a good choice to have on a PPV.

Austin gets here and tells Cole to park his truck. Southern Justice (the heel Godwinns) follow him, presumably to jump him.

Max Mini/Mosaic/Nova vs. Battalion/El Torito/Tarantula

Minis here with Sunny as the referee. Max Mini (more famous as Mascarita Sagrada) is by far the most famous of these guys as he's about 4 and a half feet tall but can move around very quickly. Nova and Tarantula start things off with Tarantula (on the heel team) being way bigger. Nova takes him down with some headscissors before it's quickly off to Battalion (military themed guy) vs. Max. Max armdrags him to the floor which brings in Torito, meaning we're in lucha rules (meaning sending someone to the floor means another member of your team can come in without an actual tag).

Torito can actually get his head over the top rope, meaning he's just under the size of Rey Mysterio. Mosaic comes in and gets caught in a gorilla press and a release flapjack. A second flapjack attempt is caught in a wrist drag to send Torito to the floor and it's off to Tarantula. That goes nowhere so here's Battalion again. The fast tags continue as here's Nova vs. Torito already.

They both hit the floor so Mosaic speeds things up against Battalion again. Mosaic spins him around again a few times before it's back to Mini vs. Tarantula. Max gets caught in a spinebuster but goes up top almost immediately for a delayed rana. Max sends him to the floor and Tarantula backs off. Back in and Torito hits a Mafia kick to the back of Max's head and a chop puts him down again.

For no apparent reason Sunny picks Max up so he can dropkick the villains. I can only assume Sunny is there to give the fans anything to care about. Mosaic and Battalion go to the floor as does Torito so Max can hit his big dive. The others dive on them as well and it's a big pile on the floor. Back in Max rolls up Torito for the pin.

Rating: C. I'm going with a C because I have no idea what else to go with. I don't know who these people are, I have no idea why I should care, and I might have seen these guys twice other than this (aside from Max). These matches are really hard to get into because there's nothing to them. Much like a lot of the luchador matches in WCW had the same issue: why should I care about these people?

The Nation goes to attack Austin but only find an Austin foam finger.

The McMahons are in Tyson's sky box.

We recap Shamrock vs. Rock. Shamrock has charged through the Nation to get this shot at the unofficial leader of the team. Mark Henry joined the Nation to save Rock from Shamrock less than a week ago.

The Nation argues over which of them will win the Rumble. Rock says the fans of course want to know what he thinks of Clinton and Paula Jones, so he tells the President not to lie down with dogs or you might get fleas. This joke would be done way better over the next few weeks.

Intercontinental Title: The Rock vs. Ken Shamrock

Rock is defending of course. Feeling out process to start with Rocky trying to get a cheap shot in the corner. Both guys shove the other into the corner and Shamrock blocks a shot to the face before hitting one of his own. They run the ropes a bit until Shamrock kicks him in the chest and knocks the champion out to the floor. Back in and Rock pounds away a bit before hitting a corner clothesline. Ken comes back with some clotheslines of his own but the standing clothesline is countered into a hot shot for two.

They're trying to get out of first gear here but it's really not working that well. The champ pounds on him in the corner and but gets caught in a fisherman's suplex for two. Back to the floor with Shamrock going into the steps and then back into the ring. The spinning DDT gets two for Rock and it's off to the chinlock. Rock tries the spinning DDT again but gets caught in a northern lights suplex for two instead.

Shamrock pounds away some more and gets two off a powerslam. The Nation comes out and sneaks Rocky some knuckles which go upside Ken's head for two. Rock hides said knuckles in Shamrock's trunks, just before getting belly to bellied for the pin and the title. Keep that in mind of course.

Rating: D+. Rock would get better, but at the end of the day this didn't work that well. It was mainly punching with both guys trying to throw in a move here or there. This feud never quite worked as well as they were shooting for I don't think and with Rocky holding the title forever, it didn't do Shamrock much good either.

Post match the referee finds the knuckles and reverses the decision. The referee is beaten up very badly for his efforts.

A Coliseum Video Exclusive from “moments later” show a clean and dry Shamrock in jeans attacking the Rock.

Los Boricuas attack someone that they think is Austin but find one of the Disciples of Apocalypse. Brawling ensues.

We recap the LOD vs. the Outlaws, which is old school vs. new with the Outlaws defending the titles. The Outlaws put a big old beating on the LOD and tonight is their return.

Tag Titles: New Age Outlaws vs. Legion of Doom

The Outlaws make fun of the 49ers who lost in the NFC Title game recently to the Packers. The LOD says that Animal’s back is fine and they’re putting the Outlaws on ice tonight. The Outlaws jump the challengers which goes badly in a hurry, as Animal powerbombs the Dogg. The champions try to walk out but get thrown back in so we can start with Hawk (who had one mohawk shaved off earlier in this feud) vs. Roadie.

Off to Animal as Road Dogg’s mouth is bleeding. The pounding continues so here’s Hawk for his one wrestling move in the neckbreaker. Gunn gets the tag and Hawk hits a freaking Lou Thesz Press of all things so he can pound away some more. Animal powerslams both Outlaws down and it’s off to a reverse chinlock on Gunn. Hawk comes in for his second surprise move of the match in an STF.

That goes nowhere so it’s back to Animal, who is tripped up by Roadie. They head outside where Animal is sent into the steps to finally switch the momentum. Hawk gets double teamed in the ring but clotheslines both

Outlaws down (Animal is still legal) but charges into the post. Dogg finds some handcuffs and attaches Hawk to the post, making it a handicap match. Animal makes a comeback with a double clothesline, but Dogg hits him with a chair for the DQ.

Rating: D. So with an injury AND his partner tied up on the floor, Animal STILL couldn't lay down for a pin? Seriously? This match sucked and would have been just slightly better on Raw with less time. The LOD was nothing at this point while the Outlaws were finally starting to turn some heads. Until this point though, they were two jobbers with the titles who kept escaping with them. Brighter days were coming.

The Outlaws destroy Animal until Hawk snaps the handcuffs to make the save.

Some fan wins the Austin truck.

We recap the build up to the Rumble. Basically, everyone knows Austin is going to win and EVERYONE else in the Rumble is trying to stop him but not one has been able to slow him down at all. The only difference here: the fans were eating this stuff up with a spoon.

Royal Rumble

Cactus Jack is #1 and Chainsaw Charlie (Terry Funk) is #2. The intervals are supposed to be two minutes again this year but they would wind up being closer to 90 seconds. Terry brings his chainsaw into the ring so Cactus throws in a bunch of chairs. The referee finally gets the saw out and they pound on each other with chairs. Cactus hits Funk in the head with one, then hands the chair to Funk so he can return the favor. These two aren't exactly normal if you didn't catch that.

Tom Brandi is #3 and lasts about ten seconds. Terry punches Jack down but can't piledrive him on a chair. Cactus suplexes him through two chairs but can't put him out. Rock is #4 and both hardcore guys are down. Rock pounds on Terry in the corner but Cactus blasts him with a trashcan and the double beating begins. Cactus puts the can over Rock's head and they

pound away on him, knocking him through through ropes and out to the floor. Funk hits Cactus low as Mosh is #5.

Mosh and Funk pair off as do the other two guys. Funk (the announcers are calling him that too) tries a moonsault but it winds up being more of a headbutt than a splash. Phineas Godwinn is #6 and helps Rock beat up Mosh. Not much happens for a bit until 8-Ball of the DOA is #7. Jack misses a charge and Funk backdrops him out to empty the ring out a bit. Apparently someone who might have been Ken Shamrock has attacked Austin.

Funk barely hangs onto the rope to avoid elimination until Blackjack Bradshaw (yes that Bradshaw) is #8 and looking as muscular as you'll ever see him look. We talk about Mike Tyson while things slow down a bit until Owen Hart is #9. Jeff Jarrett, the NWA North American Champion at the time in a strange invasion angle, attacks Owen on his way in. Yeah this is what Owen gets for not bolting to WCW after the Montreal Screwjob. Yes I know he was under contract but you know Vince couldn't hold him to it in that situation. Hart can't get in the ring yet.

Steve Blackman is #10 and he has a hairy chest. 8-Ball piledrives Funk as there are way too many guys in the ring right now. Since people seem content to just tease eliminations on the ropes, no one is eliminated until D'Lo Brown is #11. Rock DESTROYS Blackman in the corner before getting in a fight with his Nation teammate D'Lo. Kurrgan, still a psycho monster at this point, is #12.

Thankfully he gets rid of some people like Mosh and....that's about it for now. Dang it clear the ring out a little bit already. You're a monster Kurrgan. Go destroy some villager. Marc Mero is #13, giving us a pop for Sable. Mero pounds away on Blackman in the corner but Kurrgan dumps Steve. Bradshaw pounds on Kurrgan as Rock teases not stomping his teammate before kicking away.

Ken Shamrock is #14 and he immediately kicks Kurrgan down. A big gang takes out Kurrgan as Rock hits the People's Elbow (not yet named) on Funk. Thrasher is #15, giving us Funk, Rock, Phineas, 8-Ball, Bradshaw, Owen (not in the ring), Brown, Mero, Shamrock and Thrasher, or as they're collectively known, WAY TOO MANY PEOPLE. Still nothing happens and

Mankind is #16, confusing the announcers and immediately punching Funk out.

Shamrock finally gets his hands on the Rock as Mero asks Sable for praise. Goldust is #17 in a silver bodysuit with a thong painted on. A minute or so later he puts out Mankind but there are still way too many people out there. Jeff Jarrett is #18 and Owen runs in to beat him down. A spinwheel kick puts Jeff down, followed by Owen skinning the cat and dumping Jeff. Honky Tonk Man is #19 as HHH (on crutches) and Chyna come to the ring. Rock dumps Shamrock to complete Ken's humiliation tonight.

HHH gets on the apron and cracks Owen with his crutch to knock Hart out as well. Ahmed Johnson is #20, looking as bored as I can remember a wrestler looking in a long time. WAY too many people in the ring again. Mark Henry of the Nation is #21 and JR says Henry is "handling the big Johnson." There's no #22 which was supposed to be Skull, but he was jumped earlier remember.

Johnson is dumped out and he still doesn't look like he cares. He would be gone next month anyway. Phineas is out after a ridiculous 28 minutes. On top of being in too long, he accidentally kicks a referee in the head on the way down, giving him a legit concussion. Kama Mustafa is #23 to give the Nation four members at the moment. We're just waiting for Austin at this point.

FINALLY the glass shatters at #24 and the roof goes off the place. Austin comes in through the crowd because he's got ten people waiting on him as he comes in. There go Mero and 8-Ball and things slow down AGAIN, because we need at least ten people in the match at all times for some reason. Henry Godwinn is #25 and nothing happens. Savio Vega is #26, but since we STILL don't have enough people in the ring at the moment, he brings in the other three Boricuas to beat on Austin.

Thankfully Austin beats them out quickly but doesn't eliminate anyone. Faarooq is #27 to give us the entire Nation in the ring. He goes right for the other Nation members though as his face turn continues. Not that anyone cares mind you but he is indeed turning. Austin and Rock tumble through the ropes through the floor to brawl a bit because that's what

those two guys do.

Dude Love is #28 to complete the running joke of the match. He immediately puts out Bradshaw as Goldust is on the floor but not eliminated. You can't see most of the mat because of how many people are in the ring at the moment. Austin pounds on Rock even more with Rock falling to the floor again. Chainz of D0A is #29 as Faarooq puts Brown out. More brawling ensues until Vader completes the field at #30. This gives us a final group of....hang on I need a breath first....Rock, Thrasher, Goldust, Honky Tonk Man, Mark Henry, Kama, Austin, Henry Godwinn, Vega, Faarooq, Dude Love, Chainz and Vader, or THIRTEEN PEOPLE.

Vader immediately pounds on Goldust and dumps Honky a few seconds later. Austin dumps Thrasher after an insanely too long 28 minutes. Austin puts out Kama to finally clear the ring out a bit. There goes Vega at Austin's hands as well before Goldust dumps Vader. Godwinn goes out as well before Faarooq puts out Henry. We're down to Rock, Austin, Love and Faarooq as Chainz was put out by Austin off camera.

The Nation members are thrown together and Rock gets hit by Sweet Shin Music and the double arm DDT. Austin hits Dude low and Faarooq throws Love out. Rock puts out Faarooq to give us Austin vs. Rock. They slug it out and Rock is thrown to the apron. Austin is fine with Stunning him and throwing him out to go on to Wrestlemania where he would claim his destiny.

Rating: D+. Austin was awesome as he always was in 1998, but the rest of this match pretty much sucked. As I said over and over, there were way too many people in there for the most part. Also you had WAY too many people getting time they didn't deserve. I mean did anyone need to see Phineas, 8-Ball, Bradshaw, D'Lo Brown and Thrasher all getting over 28 minutes? Not much to see here other than Austin and Foley's funny bit.

Tyson celebrates "Cole Stone" Steve Austin winning the Rumble.

We recap Shawn vs. Undertaker. Basically they feuded extensively in the fall but then after Montreal, Shawn didn't want to face Owen for a fear of him trying to legit hurt him. Therefore they rehashed Undertaker vs. Shawn for the title here in a casket match. Most of the video here is

about the first Cell match, which is still amazing stuff. Oh and one more thing: DX (still just three people at this point) attacked Taker on Raw but Kane had saved his brother, uniting with him for the first time ever. That was six days ago, and remember that a certain Vince Russo is booking.

WWF World Title: Undertaker vs. Shawn Michaels

Like I said, Shawn is defending and this is a casket match. Taker throwing the lights back on makes Shawn jump out of the ring. It's a brawl to start and Taker immediately grabs Shawn by the throat. Shawn punches his way out of it but jumps into another choke by Taker. An attempt at putting Michaels in the casket doesn't work, but a backdrop that put Michaels out of action for four and a half years by slamming his spine onto the casket does work.

Shawn slowly gets up and is kicked into the casket but he immediately bounces out. We head back in with Taker missing an elbow but hitting Old School. Shawn gets whipped into the corner for the Flair Flip to the floor, which is probably the last move he needed to do at this point. Back in and Shawn dives into a powerslam but Taker still can't slam the lid shut. Shawn comes out throwing powder and manages to get a breather. Taker is sent knees first into the steps and Shawn smashes the challenger's back with the steps.

A piledriver on the steps actually works for Shawn but he's got a broken back and can't follow up. HHH whacks Taker with the crutch (where is Owen if he's so angry?) as Shawn stays in full control. Back in and a jumping back elbow puts Taker down but he fights out of the casket. Shawn neckbreakers Taker before putting on a sleeper which is eventually countered into a Saito Suplex.

The forearm from Shawn sets up the nipup which sets up the top rope elbow. He must be either high as a kite on painkillers or on a huge adrenaline rush to be able to have a match like this at this point. The superkick knocks Taker out cold but Shawn is Shawn and stops for a crotch chop. Taker grabs him by the balls and we head back inside for the beating Shawn deserves. Another Flair Flip sets up the big boot, but

Taker misses a clothesline and lands in the casket.

Shawn drops an elbow into the casket, closing the lid on both guys. Cool spot actually. Shawn crawls out but in a semi famous shot, Taker pulls him back into the casket, closing it with both guys inside again. Back in and Undertaker hits one of the biggest chokeslams he's ever hit followed by a JUMPING TOMBSTONE into the casket. The Outlaws and the Boricuas run in as we reenact Royal Rumble 1994, but here comes Kane to save the day. By save the day, naturally I mean turn on Undertaker and shut him in the casket to keep the title on Shawn and end the match.

Rating: B. Considering Shawn's back was literally broken in half during the match, this is a pretty awesome fight. When Taker gets ticked off and wants to hurt somebody, he can lay a beating out like few others in the world. Shawn struggling through a match in this condition is nothing short of great, and the fact that he survived Wrestlemania like this as well is perhaps the greatest physical accomplishment of all time.

Post match Kane nails the casket shut and hacks at it with an ax. He pours gasoline inside and LIGHTS IT ON FIRE to end the show. Taker of course would disappear from the casket once it was opened up.

Overall Rating: D. Good main event aside, this was a REALLY dull show overall. 1998 would wind up being an awesome year, but this wasn't the best start to it in the world. We saw a lot of the relics of the bad times here, but Austin was coming and there was absolutely nothing WCW could do to stop him. This wasn't a good show at all, but it was a necessary evil to get us to the glory days.

Ratings Comparison

Vader vs. The Artist Formerly Known As Goldust

Original: B-

Redo: D

Max Mini/Mosaic/Nova vs. Battalion/El Torito/Tarantula

Original: B-

Redo: C

The Rock vs. Ken Shamrock

Original: C+

Redo: D+

Legion of Doom vs. New Age Outlaws

Original: D+

Redo: D

Royal Rumble

Original: D+

Redo: D

Shawn Michaels vs. Undertaker

Original: B

Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: C-

Redo: D

...what in the world was I on back then?

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/18/royal-rumble-count-up-1998-austin-isnt-a-lock-to-win-please-believe-us/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Monday Nitro and Thunder Reviews Volume VI: July – December 1999 in e-book or paperback. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/11/22/new-book-kbs-monday-nitro-and-thunder-reviews-volume-vi/>

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Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1997: Austin x1

Royal Rumble 1997

Date: January 19, 1997

Location: Alamodome, San Antonio, Texas

Attendance: 60,235

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

I'm scared to think how many of those tickets were freebies. This is the annual requested redo and I'm not sure what to expect going into it. Well I am as I've seen the show multiple times but it's been awhile. The main event is of course Shawn Michaels vs. Sid II because we need the big hometown moment. Those actually existed back in 1997. Let's get to it.

As you might expect, the opening video is all about Shawn because it's 1997. The title win at Wrestlemania was nice at all but his defining moment came at Survivor Series when he showed compassion for Jose Lothario instead of trying to retain the title. Well to be fair that would be defining as it meant Shawn actually lost a title match instead of vacating the title so maybe they're on to something.

The announcers preview the show and Lawler is VERY excited about the main

event.

Intercontinental Title: Goldust vs. Hunter Hearst Helmsley

This is one of my least favorite matches ever. Helmsley is defending against a freshly face Goldust. Basically everyone thought Goldust was gay but he confirmed that he wasn't, which sent HHH after Marlena for some reason. Mr. Hughes makes his debut as HHH's short lived bodyguard/butler which is code for bodyguard/Chyna is on the way.

Goldust jumps him in the aisle and hammers away in the corner until a quick atomic drop gets us to even. A catapult sends HHH outside as the crowd is really, really quiet here. I'm not sure if it's the place being huge or the fans being bored but it's not working so far. Goldust sends him into the steps, causing JR to suggest we might get a DQ. I mean, we probably won't this early but points for doing your job.

They keep using the steps with HHH bouncing off them and now Lawler thinks it should be a DQ. Vince talks about some fans who had been trying to talk to Shawn for weeks being thrown out of the building. That's one of those things that doesn't really hold up over time as they just gloss over it and expect us to know what he's talking about. It makes sense at the time but there are probably better things to talk about during a title match on pay per view.

HHH actually comes off the top with an ax handle but a running knee hits the barricade. As JR asks about a DQ again, Goldust starts in on the knee like a good challenger should. We hit a Figure Four as this is already dragging horribly. The knee goes into the steps again as the announcers are wondering why the referee is letting so much go. Back in and Goldust misses a crossbody (called a high risk by JR) to send him outside as HHH takes over again.

The referee FINALLY does something by taking away the director's chair before HHH can swing it (Lawler: "Why didn't you do something about those stairs earlier?") and they head back in. The match is so boring that we actually cut over to an interview with a country singer in the audience. That's getting up there on the all time boredom scale and the dead crowd seems to agree.

HHH misses the kneedrop and hurts his leg again in the process but he's still able to roll away from a Macho Elbow. Hughes, likely as bored as the rest of us, throws in the title but HHH would rather kiss Marlena. That earns him a belt shot to the head, only to have Hughes pull HHH out at two. Of course that's not a DQ so Goldust goes after Hughes, setting up the Pedigree for the pin to retain the title.

Rating: F+. Oh yeah this is still bad and still one of the worst matches I can ever remember to open the show. It's too long, too boring and completely uninteresting. This really needed to have about seven minutes chopped off and far less using the steps. I dread this match every time I watch the show and that hasn't changed a bit.

Bret Hart is used to being the marked man in a match so the Royal Rumble will be no different.

Mankind talks about the Rumble being a chance to hurt a lot of people that he doesn't like as well as some that he does. It's going to be a very nice day.

Faarooq vs. Ahmed Johnson

Faarooq injured Johnson back in 1996 and it's finally time for the grudge match in a feud that felt like it went on for the better part of forever. There are at least ten members of the Nation of Domination here, including a few actors who exist for the sole purpose of making the group bigger. As you might expect, Ahmed erupts to start and beats Faarooq down in the corner before sending him into the post. Where's the OUTRAGE from the announcers over this blatant breaking of the rules?

A shot to the kidneys slows Johnson down and Faarooq calls for a belt, earning himself a clothesline in the process though. The brawl heads outside for a bit with neither being able to keep control all that long as you would expect in a brawl like this. A chair to the back keeps Ahmed in trouble and Faarooq opts to just kick him in the kidneys for good measure.

It's off to the very logical reverse chinlock but Faarooq does the very stupid posing, allowing an electric chair to put him down. Faarooq comes

right back with a spinebuster though, which JR calls a physical catch instead of a fair catch. Uh, right Jim. Ahmed pops up again and hits one of his own, meaning it's time for the Nation to come in for the lame DQ.

Rating: D. Still not great but WAY better than the first, at least partially because it's half the length of the opener. Johnson vs. Faarooq needed to be some big wild brawl, or maybe Johnson finding some partners to help him fight off the team. Like say the Legion of Doom in Chicago in a street fight. But for some reason the feud just kept going after that, which is probably why this feud isn't the most fondly remembered.

Post match the Nation bails for some reason, leaving Ahmed to Pearl River Plunge one of them through a table.

Terry Funk thinks he can win because we're in Texas. Nah, just one of those per show dude. Besides, Goldust is from Austin and look at what he got. Or don't look actually as it's too horrible for words. Or reviews for that matter.

Faarooq says he'll take care of Ahmed in the Rumble because Johnson is an "Uncle Tom".

Vader vs. Undertaker

There's not much of a story here save for some back and forth attacks. We get the big long Undertaker entrance and as usual it looks amazing in the big stadium. They slug it out to start with Undertaker doing the sit up off a clothesline. The standing splash gets the exact same reaction and Vader is looking a bit worried.

The fight heads outside with Undertaker getting the better of it but Vader drops him ribs first across the top rope to take over again. Undertaker gets in a slam followed by a legdrop, which JR says is like no one has ever done. I'm sure that's certainly not meant as a jab at anyone in particular second cousin twice removed.

Old School is broken up which JR says means Vader had it well scouted. Or Vader was smart enough to do ANYTHING when Undertaker was off balance and distracted? And now, let's go INTERVIEW A FAN WHO SAVED UP TO COME TO THE

SHOW. Lawler rips on Pettengill for wasting our time like that (amen brother) while Vader was pounding Undertaker about the head and shoulders (the body parts, not the shampoo).

We hit the lame nerve hold for a bit until Undertaker suplexes his way to freedom, leaving both guys down. Vader is up first and goes to the middle rope, only to dive into a powerslam. That would be a lot more impressive if Ahmed hadn't done the EXACT SAME THING, even from the same corner, to Faarooq in the previous match.

Vader's powerbomb gets two but Old School drops him again....and here's Paul Bearer. Undertaker gets in a chokeslam but makes the mistake of going after Paul. Vader tries for a save and avoids a dive off the steps, sending Undertaker ribs first into the barricade. Bearer adds an urn shot and it's the Vader Bomb to put Undertaker away.

Rating: C-. I'm a fan of Undertaker slugging away at a monster so this was more entertaining than it probably should have been. Vader was in something close to a free fall after losing to Shawn at Summerslam so this was more of a comeback win than anything else. Undertaker vs. Bearer would continue for a very long time.

Vader leaves with Bearer and Undertaker beats up a referee.

Austin says he isn't talking with anyone until he wins the Rumble.

British Bulldog is going to win because he's bizarre. Yes, bizarre.

Hector Garza/Perro Aguayo/Canek vs. Jerry Estrada/Fuerza Guerrera/Heavy Metal

This is a AAA match because the company was willing to try ANYTHING to get people interested, including these guys that 99% of fans have never heard of before. I'll do my best to have any idea who these people are and what's going on here but bear with me. Estrada and Heavy Metal (who Vince thinks is Estrada) start things off do a technical sequence to start before it's off to the ancient looking Aguayo vs. the very feathery looking Estrada.

The crowd is just GONE for this one as Canek's middle rope crossbody gets

on Guerrera. Fuerza misses a top rope crane kick Swanton (that's an odd one) so Canek gets an easy two. Heavy Metal does a Tajiri handspring but stumbles through the elbow to drop Garza. Things speed up a bit but they still seem a few steps off to keep this from getting, you know, good.

We hit a stalemate and that means it's time to shake hands and bring in Estrada and Canek. They start running the ropes but WAIT! Time for more tags. Metal avoids a Figure Four and we get down to a bit of a traditional tag formula with the focus on Metal's leg. Guerrera tries to make a save but dropkicks Metal by mistake and everything breaks down. Garza gets in his corkscrew plancha and Aguayo's top rope double stomp to the arm (meant to be ribs) finally ends Metal.

Rating: D. I'll give them points for trying something different here but this didn't work for me. The wrestling wasn't great here and I really have no idea who these people are. It was a nice try at something new and when you're in the depths that the company was in at this point it's worth the shot but this was a big miss.

Attendance announcement.

Royal Rumble

Ninety second intervals here and it's Crush in at #1 and Ahmed in at #2. JR says Ahmed has a minute and a half to do whatever he wants to Crush. So Crush is stuck with his arms behind his back and isn't allowed to fight back? They fight to the mat and the clock messes up so it's Fake Razor Ramon in at #3, earning one heck of a booing. Thankfully Ahmed gets rid of the clown in about ten seconds but Faarooq shows up in the aisle, meaning Ahmed eliminates himself to go after him.

Thankfully (I think?) Phineas Godwinn is in at #4 to give us something to watch. It's as thrilling of a brawl as you can imagine as Vince keeps talking about the clock issues, which means there's no clock to be seen. Austin is in at #5 to wake the crowd up a bit and a middle rope clothesline is enough to allow Phineas to get rid of Crush. A Stunner gets rid of Phineas and it's Bart Gunn in at #6. That lasts all of twenty six seconds before Austin is all alone again.

Jake Roberts is in at #7 and throws the snake bag in for a bonus. The DDT is loaded up but a backdrop gets rid of Jake, who is replaced by British Bulldog at #8. This goes a bit better with Bulldog pounding Austin down until Pierroth (AAA guy) is in at #9. The luchador gets double teamed until Bulldog wises up and turns on Austin. Sultan, whose music sounds like Pierroth's, is in at #10 as they're flying through this so far.

Bulldog puts Austin on the apron but gets poked in the eye for his efforts. We've got a clock now and the fans are into it again, which is a really good sign for the match. Mil Mascaras is in at #11 and you know he's going to get his stuff in. HHH is in at #12 as there's really not much going on in between these entrances. Bulldog gets rid of Sultan to clear the ring out a bit though it doesn't do much to keep the crowd going. The middle rope middle finger elbow hits HHH and Owen Hart is in at #13.

Without much going on, Owen "accidentally" eliminates Bulldog, who really isn't happy with his partner as a result. Goldust is in at #14 and everyone gangs up on him for some reason. Cibernetico (also from AAA) is in at #15 and is tossed almost as quickly, along with Pierroth. Marc Mero is in at #16 as Mascaras dives on Cibernetico to eliminate himself in the process (which I'm sure was a COMPLETE mistake), followed by Goldust tossing HHH. That leaves us with Hart, Austin, Mero and Goldust who are joined by Latin Lover at #17.

Lover gets in some basic stuff before Faarooq comes in at #18 to eliminate him. Cue Ahmed again for a 2x4 shot to Faarooq to get rid of him as well. Austin dumps Mero and Hart, leaving himself alone in the ring. Savio Vega, Austin's old rival, is in at #19 and scores with a spinwheel kick. That's about it though as Austin clotheslines him out to be alone again. Jesse James is next and while he lasts a bit longer than Vega, it's still not even a minute before Austin gets rid of him. Austin sits on the middle rope....and it's BRET HART at #21, giving Austin one of the best OH DANG looks in wrestling history.

The key to him though: he sees Bret coming, shakes his head, and tells Bret to bring it on before starting the slug out. Notice that: he didn't back down and came out swinging because that's how Austin rolled. It

wouldn't fit Austin to panic and try to beg or something. Man against man, Austin thought he could beat anyone on the planet no matter what circumstances he was up against. That's good storytelling and a big part of what made him a star.

Lawler is in at #22 and starts the "it takes a king" line before leaving. Two right hands later and he's back on the floor four seconds later to finish the catchphrase. Vince: "Do you know you were just in the ring?" JR mentions that Bret said he should just be the WWF Champion coming into the show, which is a great example of how his heel turn took off.

Fake Diesel (as played by the future Kane) is in at #23 and at least he looks close enough to pass for a Nash look-a-like. From behind or at a distance, you could actually make a mistake. Fake Razor on the other hand wasn't even close and that's why he was booed while Diesel is greeted with general indifference. A few power moves keep everyone down until it's Terry Funk in at #24. It says a lot when Kane is by far and away the fourth most successful wrestler in a match.

Rocky Maivia is in at #25 to make Kane even less important and of course he goes right after Austin for the sake of future issues. The slow pace continues until Mankind is in at #26, giving us Mankind, Austin, Rocky, Funk, Diesel and Hart. If there has ever been a better collection of talent at one point in the Rumble, I've yet to see it. Just DANG what a lineup here.

Flash Funk is in at #27 and Lawler wants the Funkettes. Bret piledrives the heck out of Austin and Flash dives off the top to take out Diesel and Terry. Vader is in at #28 as I start to miss people wrestling earlier in the show and still being in the Royal Rumble. For some reason Flash makes the mistake of going after him, only to get pummeled down in a hurry. Henry Godwinn is in at #29 to bring the talent WAY down in a hurry.

The big Henry actually clotheslines Vader down as JR compares Lawler's entrant to Bushwhacker Luke's 1991 entrance. Oh come on. Lawler lasted TWICE as long as Luke. Undertaker completes the field at #30, giving us a final group of Undertaker, Austin, Hart, Terry Funk, Flash Funk, Diesel, Maivia, Vader, Godwinn and Mankind. Undertaker immediately punches Vader

down before chokeslamming a few people.

The still unknown brothers have a bit of a fight as Vince calls Undertaker the favorite. Vader throws Flash out and we have Henry vs. Undertaker for a rather off brawl. Rocky almost has Bret out until Vader makes the save for no apparent reason. Austin and Funk chop each other half to death and probably have a blast doing so.

Undertaker throws Henry out and my jaw drops at the talent left in there. The final eight either already are or will be in the Hall of Fame one day. That's INSANE and will likely never be even approached again. Mankind tosses Rocky and then pummels Terry before suplexing him out to the floor. Undertaker gets rid of Mankind, who is happy to brawl to the back with Funk. Bret dumps Austin for the pop of the night but the referees are busy breaking up the brawl, allowing Austin to come back in and eliminate Vader and Undertaker. Bret gets rid of Diesel, only to have Austin throw him out for the win in a great bit of cheating.

Rating: D+. And the good here is almost ALL Austin as the rest of the match was barely even worth talking about. There wasn't much in the way of storytelling to be seen here as there wasn't really a big winner teased until the very end. The lack of talent up until the end and time to go with the build towards the end didn't do a lot of good as the match doesn't even really start until Bret comes in two thirds of the way there. It's certainly not the worst Rumble but it's really not good either.

Bret has another tirade and while he has a point, he handles it like a baby.

We recap Shawn vs. Sid. Back at Survivor Series, Sid attacked Shawn's manager with a camera to cost Shawn the title. Sid has been on a rampage since but now we're in Shawn's hometown for the big rematch.

Shawn says he's sick with the flu (a-huh) but he's ready to fight with 70,000 people (or closer to 50,000 depending on who you ask) behind him.

WWF World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Sid

Sid is defending of course. Shawn stares him down to start and is quickly shoved across the ring without too much effort. A kick to the chest puts Sid on the floor but he comes right back in and grabs a camel clutch. That goes nowhere (other than around for a long time) so Sid tries a chinlock, followed by one heck of a clothesline.

Some hard whips across the ring set up a bearhug because Sid needs to keep things slow. The bearhug stays on so long that Sid actually LAYS DOWN ON THE MAT WITH IT. A legdrop gets two and it's already back to the reverse chinlock. Thankfully this one doesn't last as long and Shawn comes back with a slam. Really a slam? After all that back work?

The forearm into the flying elbow connects but Sid goes outside to yell at Jose and his son. We get a ref bump so the chokeslam only gets two as a second ref comes in. Sid knocks the second referee down so Shawn hits him with the camera for two. The superkick gives Shawn the title back.

Rating: D+. As I said in the original review, this could have been much worse. I mean, not much worse but it could have been worse. Shawn winning the title back was the most obvious thing in the world and it's ok to have him win here, especially in his hometown. It's not exactly a good match but then again Sid isn't exactly a good opponent. What is nice is seeing a hometown guy win a big match for a change and the fact that it derailed Shawn's heel turn is....well actually it kind of sucks but he wouldn't have the title long anyway.

A ridiculously long celebration ends the show.

Overall Rating: D. Why is this show so fondly remembered? The wrestling is pretty lame (though there are worse options) and the Rumble itself isn't much to be remembered outside of Austin starting his rise to the top of the promotion. It's not the worst Royal Rumble of all time but I don't remember getting into the show a single time all night, save for that look from Austin when Bret came out. Just not a very good show but it's from a bad time for the company.

Ratings Comparison

HHH vs. Goldust

Original: C-

2013 Redo: C-

2017 Redo: F+

Ahmed Johnson vs. Faarooq

Original: D+

2013 Redo: D+

2017 Redo: D

Vader vs. Undertaker

Original: C+

2013 Redo: D+

2017 Redo: C-

Hector Garza/Perro Aguayo/El Canek vs. Jerry Estrada/Heavy Metal/Fuerza Guerrera

Original: F

2013 Redo: D

2017 Redo: D

Royal Rumble

Original: C+

2013 Redo: B-

2017 Redo: D+

Shawn Michaels vs. Sycho Sid

Original: C+

2013 Redo: C+

2017 Redo: D+

Overall Rating

Original: C+

2013 Redo: D

2017 Redo: D

Now that's more like it. The two main events just aren't that good but I have NO idea what I was thinking on the opener. That match is a disaster and I can't stand it less and less every time I see it.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/17/royal-rumble-count-up-1997-bret-hart-uh-make-that-austin/>

And the 2013 redo:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/01/11/royal-rumble-count-up-2013-redo-1997-why-austin-was-a-near-perfect-character/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Monday Nitro and Thunder Reviews Volume VI: July – December 1999 in e-book or paperback. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/11/22/new-book-kbs-monday-nitro-and-thunder-reviews-volume-vi/>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1996: Shawn's California Two Step

Royal Rumble 1996

Date: January 21, 1996

Location: Selland Arena, Fresno, California

Attendance: 9,600

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Mr. Perfect

We're in the Monday Night Wars era now and it's all about Shawn at the moment. He's back from injury and in the Rumble tonight, looking to become the second person ever to win back to back Rumbles. Other than that we've got Bret vs. Undertaker which is another of those matches that can be hit or miss. It's hard to say what we'll get here...well not really because I've seen this show a bunch of times. Let's get to it.

We open with Sunny in a bathtub, saying this show is graphic and view discretion is advised.

The opening video is about how the champion is defined by Hart, as in Bret Hart. Tonight though he's against a force who has no heart, in the form of Undertaker. The IC Title match (Ramon vs. Goldust) and the Rumble are talked about as well.

Jeff Jarrett vs. Ahmed Johnson

Last month at IYH, Jarrett hit Johnson with a gold record to set this up. Johnson is basically Ezekiel Jackson with a bit of skill and charisma. Jarrett immediately bails to the floor to hide. Back in he tries a hiptoss and Ahmed is like boy are you stupid or something? A headlock is easily countered by a throw from Johnson and a clothesline takes Jarrett down. There's a World's Strongest Slam for two for Ahmed and things slow down again. Johnson misses a clothesline by a mile but Jeff sells it anyway of course.

A cross body misses as well but this time Johnson goes flying over the top, getting his hand caught in the ropes on the way down. A HARD whip

into the steps puts Johnson down and we head back in. Ahmed starts no selling stuff and catches a dive in a bearhug. That goes nowhere so Johnson sends him to the floor and hits a big dive. Back in and Ahmed misses a FREAKING SWANTON (remember that he weighs like 280) and there's the Figure Four from Jarrett. Johnson powers out of it twice, so Jarrett cracks him with the guitar off the top for the LAME DQ.

Rating: C-. I was always an Ahmed fan so this was an easy pass for me. The image of the Swanton looked great if nothing else, which is more than enough to give this a pass. Jarrett was such a mess at this point and never went anywhere in the WWF. The ending completely sucked though and it really brought things down.

BUY OUR STUFF!

Diesel isn't worried about the Rumble tonight and doesn't think it's Vader Time. He doesn't care who he faces at Mania, but he isn't happy with Taker being the #1 contender.

Tag Titles: Smoking Gunns vs. Bodydonnas

The Bodydonnas are Skip (Chris Candido) and Zip (Tom Prichard with a BIG haircut). They have Sunny with them and my goodness is she smoking (no pun intended) here. The Guns are defending. Skip and Billy start things off with Skip taking over with a headscissors. Just like Ahmed earlier, Billy misses a charge against the ropes and crashes to the outside. Both Gunns get double teamed until Bart ducks out of the way, allowing a charging Billy to dive onto both Donnas on the floor.

Things settle down a bit and it's back to Billy vs. Skip with the champion in control. Sunny hits on Bart until it's Bart vs. Zip. A gorilla press puts Zip down but he makes a blind tag, allowing Skip to take over. The champions are fine with the double teaming stuff too, and take over on Skip very easily. Sunny gets on the apron and is knocked off just as quickly, giving us a nice upskirt shot in the process.

Now we get to the important part of the match as Billy goes to check on Sunny, allowing the Donnas to pound away on Bart. Skip hits a nice plancha onto Billy before suplexing Zip onto Billy for two back inside.

Billy gets to play Ricky Morton for awhile, being put in a chinlock by Zip. This goes on for awhile until we get a sloppy spot where the Donnas collide and Skip rams heads with Billy. This would work a bit better if Billy wasn't about eight inches taller than Candido.

Hot tag brings in Bart and everything breaks down with the champions taking over. The Sidewinder (side slam/guillotine legdrop combo) crushes Zip but Sunny's distraction lets Skip break things up and take Zip's place. Ignore the fact that one has the straps of his singlet up and the other doesn't, and the fact that they look as different as Demolition did. In an ending the Expresses used back in the 80s, the Donnas load up a double suplex on Bart, but Billy spears Skip down, causing Bart to fall on Zip for the pin to retain.

Rating: C-. Tag wrestling at this time was really weak with very few solid teams anywhere to be found. The Gunns were ok at best and the Donnas were only popular because of Sunny. Billy would turn heel relatively soon and would eventually join up with Road Dogg to form the New Age Outlaws and turn the division completely upside down. Nothing much to see here but it certainly wasn't terrible.

We get some of the Billionaire Ted skits, which were unfunny shots at Ted Turner. Not his wrestling company directly, but Turner himself. I'm still not sure why they decided to do these but no one liked them and they came off as mean instead of funny or witty. Note Vince Russo as one of the executives in the board room skit.

We recap Razor vs. Goldust, where Goldust is hitting on Razor to mess with his mind before the match tonight. To say Goldust's character got them in hot water around this point is a huge understatement.

Intercontinental Title: Razor Ramon vs. Goldust

The yet to be named Marlena debuts with Goldie here. Razor is defending as is his custom. Feeling out process to start with Goldust playing his usual mind games, which means rubbing himself. Razor cranks on the arm before grabbing a headlock which goes nowhere. Goldust goes behind Razor and molests him a bit to psych Razor out even more. They head to the corner with Razor having his head rubbed a bit, ticking him off even

more.

Razor goes for the arm so Goldust slaps him in the face. Perfect keeps making sex jokes as Razor slaps Goldust right back in the face. He spansks Goldie once as well, but the painted dude likes it. We head to the floor where Goldust hides behind Marlana as the stalling continues. Back in and Razor tries three straight headscissors before punching Goldust to the floor with a single shot.

We get more stalling which is called playing mind games before Ramon clotheslines him right back to the outside. Razor has to move Marlana out of the way, allowing Goldust to FINALLY do something, taking over with a shot to the ribs. Back in and Goldust focuses on the ribs, but not too much because that might mean we have some speed to this match. A bulldog gets two for Goldust as does a slingshot belly to back suplex.

Off to a sleeper, which Perfect suggests Goldust could use to do "whatever he wants" to Goldust. Much like everything else in the match, this goes on way too long until Razor fights up and kicks Goldust low. He's so spent though that Goldie gets a two count, causing Razor to start his comeback. He fires off his usual punches and the chokeslam gets two. A belly to back superplex hit but Marlene distracts the referee, allowing the 1-2-3 Kid to come in and kick Razor's head off. Goldust gets the easy pin and the title.

Rating: D-. Sweet freaking goodness this was dull. It went on WAY too long and had a bad ending on top of that, plus the stupid "psychology" from Goldust which wound up being more unpleasant than interesting or intelligent. Goldust would get WAY better when he became more of a comedy/parody character rather than this freaky dude that he was to start his WWF run. The matches got a lot better as a result too.

Wrestlemania 12 is coming.

We get the usual promos for the Rumble, but we start with a statement from Shawn's doctor who says he's back and healthy. Thankfully this is kept VERY short and he's not dull. We hear from Owen, Roberts, Lawler, Horowitz, Vader and Shawn. Shawn would be the most obvious winner ever in the Rumble since....well since last year when he was the absolutely

obvious pick to win.

Vince and Perfect talk about the Rumble a bit.

Royal Rumble

HHH is #1, having lost a match on the Free for All to Duke Droese, who won the right to be #30. Henry Godwinn is #2 and I believe he's feuding with HHH at this point. Helmsley pounds away in the corner to start but gets backdropped down very quickly. The intervals are back to two minutes this year thank goodness. Trips pokes him in the eye and chokes away until Bob Backlund is #3. Backlund saves HHH before pounding away on him. These wide shots are showing how nearly empty the upper deck is.

Jerry Lawler is #4 as HHH hits the jumping knee to the face of Godwinn. The fans chant Burger King and you know Lawler isn't going to pass up a chance to rile up a crowd. He goes to get the slop bucket that Godwinn brought with him, but Henry clears the ring and gets the bucket, throwing it over the top onto Lawler and some of Backlund. Bob Holly is #5 and things slow down a bit until HHH erupts on Godwinn for some reason.

We get some slow paced elimination teases until Mabel is #6. Still nothing happens so here's Jake Roberts at #7 to an ERUPTION. No one is eliminated yet. Jake throws in the snake and everyone but Lawler can get to the floor. After nearly giving him a heart attack with the snake, Lawler disappears for a good while as he hides under the ring. Mabel gets tied up in the ropes and pounded on for a bit until Dory Funk Jr. is #8.

The DDT is countered by HHH as we hear about a friendship between Terry Funk and Bruce Willis of all people. Backlund and Funk go at it because they're both old and I doubt Dory knows most of the other people in the ring. Lawler is seen hiding under the ring. Yokozuna is #9 as there are WAY too many people in the match at the moment. Backlund puts Dory in the chickenwing and is eliminated by Yoko for a prize. Yoko crushes Godwinn in the corner but Mabel splashes Yoko, killing Henry in the process.

The 1-2-3 Kid is #10 but Razor charges down the aisle to chase him away (not eliminated). Officials get Razor off the Kid but it takes Mabel beating Razor down to stop the chases. It amazes me that Razor wasn't in

more Rumbles. Come to think of it...he was NEVER in a Rumble. Omori, a Japanese star that doesn't mean much yet, is #11. At the moment we've got HHH, Godwinn, Lawler (under the ring), Holly, Mabel, Roberts, Funk, Yoko, the Kid and Omori in the match.

Wait where is Godwinn? I guess he went out off camera. Yoko and Mabel double team Omori until Jake pounds away on Yoko to the loudest reactions of the match so far. Funk hits a double underhook suplex on the Kid as Savio Vega is #12. He spinwheel kicks Mabel down, allowing Yoko to dump the reigning King (Mabel if you're lucky enough to not remember that gimmick). Omori goes out thanks to Roberts and things slow down again.

Vader debuts at #13 and lumbers around while not doing much. He picks Bob Holly of all people to beat on first as Vega eliminates Dory. Vader pulls Savio back in from the apron for no apparent reason other than he wants to beat on him some more. Doug Gilbert from Memphis is #14 and HHH goes right after him for no apparent reason. Vader and Yoko slug it out to a big reaction but Vader has to stop to clothesline Roberts out.

The camera work in this is really bad as they keep looking at corners of the ring instead of the full thing, making us miss a lot of stuff. Savio pounds on Vader until one of the Squat Team members (BIG fat guys who are there because they're fat and look alike) is #15. Vader sloppily throws Gilbert out and does the same to the Squat Team dude. Yoko and Vader slug it out again and people respond again.

The other member of the Squat Team is #16 but they both get in to double team Vader. The Mastodon (Vader) punches their faces in as only Vader can do before knocking them both to the floor. Owen Hart is #17 and everyone but Yoko is on one side of the ring for some reason. Vader and Yoko double team Savio who doesn't seem interested in selling at all. A pair of splashes in the corner crushes him, as do a regular splash and the big leg from Yoko.

Shawn is #17 to a decent pop but significantly smaller than Jake's. Vader throws out Savio as Shawn goes after HHH and the Kid. Vader and Yoko slug it out a bit before slugging it out a lot. They fight against the ropes, so Shawn gets a running start and dumps them BOTH AT ONCE. Now THAT wakes

up the crowd. If that's not enough, Shawn gorilla presses (!) the Kid to the floor as the ring is suddenly very thin. Hakushi is #19 as the big guys fight on the floor.

Scratch the floor part as Vader gets back in and cleans house, but none of the eliminations count because he's not legal. Once he's finally taken away, we've got Shawn, HHH, Holly, Hart, Hakushi and Lawler underneath the ring. Tatanka is #20 as Shawn thrown Jim Cornette, Vader's manager, out. Hakushi hits a Muta elbow on Hart in the corner as HHH of course goes after Shawn.

Michaels teases a bunch of eliminations to try to make us think he's not winning. Owen dumps Hakushi as Aldo Montoya (Justin Credible with a jock strap over his face) is #21. Shawn gets sent through the ropes to the floor, where he pulls Lawler out and sends him back into the ring. Tatanka puts out Montoya as Shawn puts out Lawler.

Here's Diesel at #22 and house is cleaned. There goes Tatanka at the hands of the tall one and it's time for Shawn vs. Diesel which gets a pop but is too short to mean much. Kama (Godfather) is #23 as this continues to go slowly. Shawn pounds on Holly (why is he still in this?) in the corner as Kama and Diesel slug it out. The Ringmaster (Steve Austin who is brand new here) is #24. He's in white boots which is a really strange thing to see for him.

Shawn does his usual overblown self save as Holly and Austin fight. FINALLY Holly goes out after nearly forty minutes. HHH vs. Austin happens about three years before it would mean anything. Barry Horowitz (with the AWESOME rock version of Hava Nagila) is #25 and he goes after Diesel. Well no one ever accused him of being brilliant. Shawn nips up to knock Owen to the apron, but Hart skins the cat back in. Cool little sequence there.

HHH punches Diesel, so Diesel grabs him by the head and LAUNCHES him to the floor. The Game made it about 48 minutes which isn't bad at all. MAKING A DIFFERENCE Fatu (don't ask. PLEASE don't ask) is #26 and he doesn't do much. Shawn and Owen can't suplex the other one out so here's Isaac Yankem DDS (Kane) at #27. The ring is WAY too full but Barry is put

out to thin it out a bit.

Owen hits the enziguri on Shawn which put Michaels on the shelf leading up to this match. Shawn hangs on AGAIN though and puts Owen out while we're looking at a double feature. Austin kills Shawn with a clothesline and here's Marty Jannetty at #28. Fatu superkicks Kane as the burst of energy from Marty is already gone. Shawn and Jannetty go at it because they're former partners. Perfect: "They're rocking now aren't they?" They punch each other down and the British Bulldog is #29.

Smith goes right for Shawn because of what happened last year. I love little bits of continuity like that which you never get anymore. Davey puts out Marty as Fatu GOES OFF on Austin before clotheslining him out off camera. Yankem puts out Fatu and here's Duke Droese at #30. The final group is Shawn, Droese, Diesel, Smith, Yankem and Kama.

Smith and Michaels fight to the floor and Owen jumps Shawn for good measure. Shawn shrugs it off and goes in to dropkick Yankem out. Kama and Diesel put out Droese to get us down to four. Shawn clotheslines Smith out before skinning the cat back in. Diesel dumps Kama and Shawn superkicks the tall one (in the shoulder) out to win for the second year in a row.

Rating: D. Oh this was DULL. The problem here was that like last year (although to a MUCH weaker degree), there were very few guys you could buy as a winner here. It's FAR better than last year's match but the crowd was dead for long stretches of this, mainly due to boredom. You could see the star power of the future, but that's the problem: they weren't stars yet and no one bought them at this point. The match isn't bad, but it's definitely not good if that makes sense.

Diesel is ticked off about the ending and goes back in as Shawn is stripping. They do their old Wolfpack thing in the middle of the ring (a high five where Shawn has to jump) and all is cool. Shawn poses for a long time post match.

Oh yeah we've got a thirty minute match left to go.

WWF World Title: Undertaker vs. Bret Hart

Bret is defending and Taker is still in his skull mask period. Diesel is still straggling behind and stares at Taker during his entrance. They brawl with neither guy getting much of an advantage. Since this is WWF, we recap what we just say two minutes ago. After all that, here's the world champion. Taker stands in the middle of the ring and Bret circles him for a bit. Hart pounds away in the corner and Taker stares at him.

Taker LAUNCHES him into the corner which is one of my favorite of his moves. He chokes Bret in the air and moves very slowly. Off to a smother hold which goes on for a LONG time. Bret finally makes the rope so there's Old School...which sets up the smother again. Bret fights up and hits a middle rope clothesline followed by a regular one to send Taker to the floor. There's a dive to take out the challenger as this finally picks up the pace a bit.

Bret tries to dive off the apron at Taker but is pulled out of the air and rammed into the post. Taker rams him into various other things until Bret reverses a whip into the steps, trying to damage Taker's knees. Back in and Bret works over the knee as this is going nowhere. The Figure Four goes on...and on....and on.....and Taker turns it over.

Bret gets to the rope, so let's put on ANOTHER LEG HOLD! It's that always riveting one where Bret drops an elbow on the leg and just lays on it. This is also known as the Dusty Rhodes Special. He does however mix it up by trying to take off Taker's mask. After being in this for literally about three minutes, Taker smashes his free leg on Bret's head before we head back to the floor. Taker chokes away with a cord and sends Bret into the barricade as we head back in.

The champ goes back to the freaking knee as the fans loudly boo Bret. Taker's leg is wrapped around the post a few times and it's back to laying on the leg. Dear goodness get this over with already. We're over twenty minutes into this and NOTHING has happened. To save my sanity the hold doesn't last as long this time and Taker fights back. There are some legdrops and a clothesline as Taker's knee seems fine. He loads up the Tombstone but Bret slides down his back and guillotines Taker on the ropes.

A DDT puts Taker down and Bret starts headbutting the back. We get the Russian legsweep but Taker sits up. The bulldog takes Taker down and there's the middle rope elbow. Bret gives the fans a thumbs down and loads up the Sharpshooter. Taker grabs him by the throat to block it but Bret knees him in the ribs. A double clothesline puts both guys down and we lay around a bit more.

Bret is up first and takes off the buckle from a corner. He goes for the mask again and gets it off to reveal...the same Undertaker we've seen for like five years at this point. Seriously he looks fine. Taker fights back but gets rammed into the exposed buckle. That gets no sold and it's a Tombstone for Bret. Since this is such a dull match though, Diesel pulls the referee out at two for a DQ.

Rating: D+. This started VERY slow but got better for the last ten minutes or so, but the ending brings it right back down again. If this had been a fifteen minute match or so it would have been WAY better, but they only had so many other matches on the card, meaning this had to be longer. Diesel would face Taker at Mania of course.

Gorilla Monsoon makes Diesel vs. Bret for the title at the next PPV.

Shawn says the 90s will be his time.

Taker comes in to yell at Gorilla, saying that Diesel won't be champion on his watch. Gorilla makes it a cage match so Taker can't interfere.

Diesel goes on a big rant about how he's not afraid of the dark and says he's going to have his hands in everything from now on because the WWF is running on Diesel Power. This was his official heel turn.

Cornette says Vader cannot be ignored. He pretty much was until Summerslam.

Overall Rating: D. This is a really weird show to grade because while most of the matches got bad grades, it's not that bad of a show overall. Don't get me wrong: it's bad, but it's really not as bad as it sounds. The first two matches are certainly watchable, but they're not that good. The Rumble is also passable, but it's dull at times. Not horrible, but

definitely not worth seeing.

Ratings Comparison

Ahmed Johnson vs. Jeff Jarrett

Original: D+

Redo: C-

Smoking Gunns vs. Bodydonnas

Original: D

Redo: C-

Goldust vs. Razor Ramon

Original: D

Redo: D-

Royal Rumble

Original: D

Redo: D

Bret Hart vs. Undertaker

Original: C-

Redo: D+

Overall Rating

Original: D-

Redo: D

Amazingly enough I liked it a bit better this time.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/15/royal-rumble-count-up-1996-shawn-s-texas-two-step/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Monday Nitro and Thunder Reviews Volume VI: July – December 1999 in e-book or paperback. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/11/22/new-book-kbs-monday-nitro-and-thunder-reviews-volume-vi/>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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2017 Awards: Rookie/Newcomer of the Year

You have to restock the shelves somehow.

Over time, wrestling fans are going to get bored with the current crop of talent. Seeing them every single week is going to cause you to stop caring about them at some point, which means that enough is enough and it's time for a change (thanks Owen). Therefore, today we're looking at the best rookies and newcomers of the year.

Just to clarify, this isn't someone we haven't seen before but rather someone who made their debut on a new roster. You can barely ever find a true rookie and it would give you quite a shallow talent pool to pick from.

We'll start in developmental with one of the latest names to become a big deal off of Tough Enough. Patrick Clark is now named the Velveteen Dream and while that sounds like a stupid name and gimmick on paper, Dream has turned it into one of the most entertaining things around NXT. On top of that he had one of the best matches of the year against Aleister Black and there's a very high place on this list for him.

If there's one thing WWE knows how to do, it's book the heck out of a monster. That's what they have with Lars Sullivan and he's one of the best I've seen in years about running through people with reckless abandon. Just don't let him talk and he could be one of the best monsters NXT has had since Bray Wyatt.

We'll stick with NXT (shocking I know) and look at Aleister Black. While he might not talk very much, Black lets his fighting do the talking, including that awesome Black Mass kick. Couple that with his amazing presentation and the sweet entrance and there's no way Black won't look awesome. He can kick your head off and look awesome doing it. If he's not NXT Champion by the end of the year, I'll be rather surprised.

This was actually a really hard pick and it took me a long time to make up my mind between this one and the winner. Pete Dunne is one of the best young stars I've seen in a very long time. He has an incredible look and has some great matches to go with it, all in his early 20s. My only criticism of him is we don't see enough of him, which is the case with almost all of the British guys. He's outstanding and there are a lot of people I'd love to see him against on the NXT roster. Give us more.

You really can't say Dunne without going with Tyler Bate as well. Those two have beaten the heck out of each other in three straight up classics (even Jim Cornette loved them) and you can't have a great match without a great opponent. Bate is just 20 years old and that alone makes him an amazing

newcomer.

As great as all of those people have been, the big one for me is still Samoa Joe. Not only did he debut and start a pretty dominant feud against Seth Rollins, but he moved on to become a big time Roman Reigns antagonist, plus there was that whole main eventing a pay per view against Brock Lesnar and then being in the main event of Summerslam. Joe should have been in WWE about ten years ago but better late than never, especially when you have such a high level of awesome.

Monday Night Raw – February 14, 2000: 12 Year Old KB Was Stupid

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 14, 2000

Location: San Jose Arena, San Jose, California

Attendance: 13,300

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is on my request list and I'm actually making an effort to clear the thing out a little bit. We're coming up on No Way Out 2000, meaning HHH is still trying to fend off Cactus Jack, who wants to fight him inside the Cell. I'm really not sure why this show was requested but it's a good time for the company with the Radicalz freshly on the roster. Let's get to it.

If you're not familiar with this time, I've already done the February 7 show, which you can check out here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2012/08/17/monday-night-raw-february-7-2000>

-this-show-is-so-excellent-i-dont-have-a-catchy-title-for-it/

Also of note: this aired at 11pm due to the Westminster Dog Show. It still flattened Nitro.

Opening sequence.

I miss that pyro. But hey, we need to cut every cost ever right?

Here are the freshly heel Radicalz (with Eddie's wrecked arm in a sling) for a chat but they're cut off by fellow heels DX. Stephanie, far before she had the confidence to back up her voice, tells us to listen up and then shut up. We see a clip from Smackdown of Kane attacking his ex-girlfriend Tori.

Stephanie blames the fans for egging Kane on because it was their reactions that made him tombstone her. If it's suffering the people want, it's suffering they'll get tonight. HHH is tired of people accusing them of being too light on their adversaries so tonight, the real punishment begins. They'll start with Too Cool, including Grandmaster Sexay vs. Road Dogg and Scotty 2 Hotty vs. Billy Gunn. That brings him to Dean Malenko and Perry Saturn, who will go 2-1 against Rikishi. The only one left is Rock, who gets to face Chris Benoit.

With everyone else out of the way, HHH thinks Kane needs to learn about respect for women. Kane needs to learn that women are his equal and he can't chokeslam them, even if he doesn't quite have the X Factor to please a woman like Tori. Therefore, to teach him a lesson, it's going to be Kane vs. X-Pac in a no holds barred match at No Way Out. X-Pac isn't happy but HHH has a stipulation: to get X-Pac, Kane has to beat HHH and a mystery partner in a No DQ match tonight. Cue all the good guys mentioned here to clean house.

Edge vs. D-Von Dudley vs. Jeff Hardy

The winner's team gets a Tag Team Title shot at No Way Out. Edge and Jeff get together for some Poetry in Motion on D-Von as Bubba yells at JR about putting BB (a woman who wasn't around very long) through a table. D-Von fights back and drops an elbow on Jeff for two, only to have Edge

missile dropkick both of them down.

The partners try to get involved but it's Bubba getting suplexed on the floor for his efforts. The announcers get Jeff and Matt confused (I did the same for years) as Jeff hits a Twist of Fate into the Swanton for two on D-Von. Edge spears Jeff down but gets caught in the reverse implant DDT to give D-Von the fast pin.

Rating: D+. This was just a means to an end but it's still kind of weird to see D-Von in a singles match. The Dudleys were still pretty new around this point but it was time for them to move up the ranks in a hurry. The tag division was about to take off and this was one of the first major steps to get us there.

Mark Henry and Mae Young get a hotel suite for Valentine's Day and make it the honeymoon suite, much to the desk clerk's shock and awe.

Road Dogg vs. Grandmaster Sexay

Dogg breaks up the rather lengthy dancing but gets caught in what would become known as the Skull Crushing Finale for his efforts. Back in and Dogg gets to do some dancing, only to charge into a boot in the corner. A bulldog is broken up though as Sexay is crotched in the corner, followed by a running kick to the head for good measure. Sexay is right back up and crotches Dogg on the top to even things out a bit. The Hip Hop Drop misses though and Dogg's pumphandle slam is good for the pin.

Rating: D. Not much here but what are you expecting from these two in a singles match? There's a reason that they were put into teams more often than not and that was rather evident here. Dogg was a great talker but once he had to be in the ring, a lot of his talents were exposed in a hurry.

Mark carries Mae over the threshold and we get a Do Not Disturb tag on the door.

Godfather/D'Lo Brown vs. Al Snow/Steve Blackman

Godfather does his full entrance and it's kind of amazing to think this airs on the same show that we see today. In the back, Snow is trying to

hypnotize Blackman into having an interesting personality. Godfather offers Blackman the ladies but gets turned down, setting off a HEAD CHEESE chant. Snow and Godfather get things going with Al avoiding a running elbow. A kick to the back cuts Godfather off as Lawler oogles the ladies. Blackman comes in and kicks Brown down but stops to yell at Snow for carousing with the women. The distraction lets Brown get a sunset flip for the pin, giving Snow and Blackman their first loss.

Mark and Mae get romantic with talks of getting into something more comfortable.

Here's European Champion (and still relative newcomer) Kurt Angle to talk about how much better Europe is since he won the title. The economy is up, suicide rates are down and tourism is up 16.4%. Whereas in America, the stock market has collapsed and towns like San Jose continue to fall into a deeper depression.

Those falls coincide with Chris Jericho becoming Intercontinental Champion so Angle needs to intervene. Therefore, Angle wants a title shot at No Way Out so he can save America. Angle wants Jericho to come out now but when there's no Chris, Kurt goes into a rant about Chyna being on the Tonight Show in a rather low cut outfit. He was on the Tonight Show after the Olympics but didn't embarrass himself because of a little thing called the 3 I's.

Before he can list them off though, here's Jericho (who has only been around about six months himself) to interrupt. Jericho heard Angle talking about America falling into a depression but all Angle is doing is make America fall asleep. The brawl is on with Jericho getting the better of it until referees break it up. Cue Chyna to DDT Angle on the floor and celebrate with Jericho. Really strong segment here as you could feel the fire from these two young, hungry and talented guys. Once they threw Benoit in, the combinations just never stopped working.

Mark is in bed and Mae comes out in some lingerie. Shall we say, snuggling ensues and Lawler is almost sick in his crown.

Chris Benoit vs. The Rock

Eddie is in Benoit's corner. They slug it out to start with Benoit hammering away in the corner but getting punched down for his efforts. A swinging neckbreaker gets two but Eddie grabs the foot to give Benoit an opening. Rock's arm goes into the post and there's a chair to the back to keep him in trouble. They're keeping this one pretty simple so far and that's the right idea with a TV match. It's certainly better than throwing a pay per view level match for free on Raw with all of a few hours' build.

Back in and we hit a cross armbreaker on Rock but Benoit lets it go in short order. A belly to back suplex gets two but Rock grabs a DDT. Eddie is up on the apron in short order though and there's no count. There is a right hand to Eddie's jaw however, allowing Benoit to slap on the Crossface. JR swears there's no way out of the hold, naturally just a few seconds before Rock makes the rope.

The Samoan drop puts Benoit down again as Rock continues to just use basic punches and power moves while Benoit comes up with 28 ways to torture you per match. They fight to the floor where Big Show sneaks in (somehow) and knocks Rock into a German suplex for the pin.

Rating: B-. It's nice to have some good wrestling, even if it has to be interrupted by Big Show. Rock and Benoit always had nice chemistry together and that made for some solid stuff until we got to the storyline ending. Rock is the kind of guy who can wrestle any kind of opponent and make his offense work. Couple that with a submission master and Rock's good selling and there's almost no way this could go bad.

Rock gets laid out post match.

Show, still looking muscular, says there's no way out for Rock at No Way Out. He's going to Wrestlemania, hallelujah.

Mark and Mae are in bed and it's time to exchange gifts. Mae gets chocolates and Mark gets...oh good grief I remember this...edible underwear. Thankfully the camera stays up as she puts them on. The lights go off and....Mark: "TUTTI-FRUITY!" I...yeah move on. TO ANYTHING ELSE!

Billy Gunn vs. Scotty 2 Hotty

Gunn, with the appropriate lips on his gear, punches Scotty down in the corner to start. The running bulldog sets up the Worm but since it's just a chop, Billy is right back up with a Jackhammer. Dogg distracts the referee for no apparent reason though, allowing Grandmaster to get in a right hand to give Scotty the fluke pin.

The Outlaws' music plays for some reason. Was Too Cool's not fun enough or something?

Light Heavyweight Title: Crash Holly vs. Essa Rios

Rios is defending here, having won the title last night on Sunday Night Heat in his debut. Also of note, 12 year old KB loved Rios but thought Lita was holding him back. Hardcore sits in on commentary and says this is the start of a move away from being super heavyweights. They trade bouncing armdrags to start until Essa gets two off a tornado DDT. Crash sends him throat first into the ropes and pounds away before missing a charge in the corner. Lita even grabs a hurricanrana on the floor to quite the reaction. Yeah no future for her whatsoever. Back in and the moonsault retains the title.

Lita adds her own moonsault with Rios counting the pin. Ok so I might have been wrong on this one.

Post break the Hollys are still in the ring with Hardcore saying he's going to show Crash how it's done.

Hardcore Holly vs. Tazz

Tazz only debuted less than a month ago. Holly jumps him during the entrance and raises a boot in the corner to stop a charge. A powerslam gives Holly two as the announcers talk about gimmicks. Barbecue sauce is NOT a gimmick by the way, but it might not be able to make Mae's gift delicious. Holly's dropkick lets him pose but Tazz grabs a suplex. The Tazmission goes on but Crash comes in for the DQ.

Crash gets beaten up for the third time tonight.

Rikishi Phatu vs. Perry Saturn/Dean Malenko

The villains jump him at the same time to start and quickly eat a double clothesline. A one man 3D drops Malenko and Saturn takes a Samoan drop. That means a double Stinkface but Saturn is back up with a superkick to take over. Rikishi reverses a double suplex but nearly drops both of them on his own attempt. That really didn't look good, though Rikishi was never quite known for his power. The Rikishi Driver (a sitout Tombstone instead of over the shoulder but still great looking) knocks Malenko silly and a belly to belly drops Saturn. Rikishi loads up the Banzai Drop but Eddie comes in with a pipe to the leg for the DQ.

Rating: C-. This was actually better than I was expecting (botched double suplex aside) with serious Rikishi still being somewhat awesome at times. That Rikishi Driver still looked great and some of the power stuff Rikishi could do worked well enough. I could have gone with the Radicalz not basically being squashed so soon after debuting though and that's not a great sign for their futures.

The Radicalz work on the leg even more until Too Cool makes the save.

Kane vs. HHH/???

No DQ and if Kane wins, he gets X-Pac at No Way Out. The mystery partner is...not X-Pac, who comes out just before the real partner: Big Show. Kane has to slug away at everyone to start and Show breaks up an early chokeslam attempt. We settle down to the big men starting things off with Kane shrugging off some right hands.

JR talks about Show "shocking the world" earlier tonight when he cost Rock a match earlier. I don't know if he even shocked half of the arena Jim. The fans are logically chanting for Rock as HHH stomps Kane down in the corner. The facebuster and jumping knee put Kane down as we're just waiting for Rock here. Kane slugs away until a DDT pulls him down for two. Show comes back in for the elbows in the corner as the announcers debate whether or not Kane should have Tombstoned Tori.

Kane fights back on HHH with a big boot, followed by a jumping clothesline to Big Show. A low blow cuts HHH down and X-Pac throws in a chair but here's Rock...who is immediately chokeslammed. X-Pac comes in to help with the beatdown but Cactus Jack comes in for the real save

(running Tori over in the process). Rock chairs Show into a chokeslam for the pin. JR: "BIG SHOW WINS IT! BIG SHOW FACES X-PAC AT NO WAY OUT!" Lawler: "NO! KANE WON!" JR: "KANE WON!" Geez dude.

Rating: D+. Screwy commentary at the end aside, this was perfectly fine with everything you would expect it to have been. When the fans have figured out what's coming for the ending it's probably not the best idea in the world, but at least it's only a few minutes long. There's no need to stretch this out for longer than it needed to go and they didn't do that here. Not a bad match but really just there to serve a single purpose.

The good guys clean house to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This is a good example of how building to a pay per view used to work. Look at how many stories (some better than others) were advanced here. A lot of them were set up in the first segment but as the show went on, the whole thing tied together. However, they managed to do that with a bunch of short matches, which made me wonder where the wrestling was, and why that's not the best way of thinking.

That's where the modern fan in me is coming out and shows you how different things are. Today you get the long matches and the big storyline developments in chunks. This is much more about moving things slowly and that works much better week to week, which is how this was supposed to go. It makes for a slower pace because things don't all happen at once, instead going week to week. You know, for a reason to come back. Now why can't today's Raw get that vibe?

They do it to an extent but the modern philosophy seems to be "air big match, air big match again, air same big match on pay per view". Back in the day, you would actually have to PAY to see the big matches in a rather novel concept. It's almost like the TV isn't the be all end all of stuff and fans wanted to see the bigger matches down the line. I'm sure there's no connection to wrestling's popularity and this concept.

It also doesn't help when you have commentary treating only a handful of things as important. How many times today do you see commentary either ignoring a match or basically calling half the wrestlers worthless or

stupid? It feels like more than half the time, which makes so much stuff seem like a waste of time. When a lot of the matches are a waste of time, it makes for a weak show.

Overall though, this was a fun show with a lot of things happening but the show never feeling like it was dragging. There's no match where you look at your watch to see how much longer it could possibly go and nothing feels repetitive. Why is that so hard to get to today? The lack of a second hour helped, but things were on such a roll at this point that it didn't seem to matter.

Oh and then we had the Mae Young stuff. Today's Raw doesn't have that, therefore making it better almost by definition.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Monday Nitro and Thunder Reviews Volume VI: July – December 1999 in e-book or paperback. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/11/22/new-book-kbs-monday-nitro-and-thunder-reviews-volume-vi/>

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2017 Awards: Tag Team/Group of the Year

Now this one isn't that hard. And no it's not the Young Bucks. This is for good teams, though they did block me on Twitter so maybe I should...never mind.

What's better than a great wrestler? Well not much, but something that's also good is having a bunch of wrestlers who come together and do well as a unit. That's the basic idea behind a stable and since there aren't enough of them to get their own category, we'll throw them together with tag teams, as usual.

Before we get started, I'm intentionally leaving off LIJ and Bullet Club. I know they're both big deals but I just don't watch enough New Japan to give a good opinion on them.

We'll start with a team that I never liked who have turned into a pretty solid combination. Back in late 2016, the Bar was put together and for the life of me I did not get why. I understood the point in putting them into a team but EGADS the build to get there was terrible. It turned out that they worked quite well together as two big Europeans who hit other people really hard is a heck of a combination. Who would have guessed?

Down to NXT for a bit with the Undisputed Era. While the name is still bad (like the Bar), they've taken charge of NXT and have already won some gold there, which is a lot more important down there instead of how it would be on the main roster. The team hit the ground running and there's a good reason to believe they'll keep right on going. You can almost pencil in Adam Cole as winning the NXT Title in 2018 that's really not a bad thing.

As much as I can't stand their leader more often than not, the same could be said of Sanity. Killian Dain is a heck of a monster and I can watch Nikki Cross doing her crazy thing for days. The team also had some success and teased getting closer to the main event scene without actually getting there. This is pretty much the perfect fit for everyone involved and that's a very good sign for all of them, along with being a great stable at the same time.

One more in NXT, even though they split up pretty early in the year. DIY is one of the better in-ring teams NXT has ever had (and that's covering some serious ground. They came into the year as Tag Team Champions and then had some great matches over the next few months. Throw in one of the best heel splits in many, many years (if not ever, actually) and there's no way they weren't at least getting a mention.

Even though they didn't have the best year, you have to include New Day, if nothing else just for how long they've managed to survive. They should have been a nothing little act that died out in a few months and we're now on what? Their fourth year? They did host Wrestlemania this year and won some tag titles so there has to be something going on there. There's always the fun bit of just seeing what they're going to do to stay relevant, which they somehow keep managing to pull off. Now just get Kofi in the main event.

And that leaves one of the easiest picks of the year. I've been a big fan of the Usos since they debuted and MY GOODNESS they've turned it up lately. This Uso Penitentiary is getting to be one of the best things on WWE at the moment and they've dominated the tag division on Smackdown for months now. The only thing missing for them was leading the Smackdown Siege (they were MADE for that) and that's quite the resume for the year. The Usos win and it's really not close.

Smackdown – August 7, 2003: Obvious Isn't Bad

[Smackdown](#)

Date: August 7, 2003

Location: Skyreach Place, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

Commentators: Tazz, Michael Cole

Smackdown has some work to do to catch up with Raw, which announced an Elimination Chamber match for the upcoming Summerslam. Tonight Smackdown has a big match of its own though with Brock Lesnar vs. Vince McMahon in a cage with Kurt Angle as guest referee. Why that's a big deal isn't clear, but note that we'll be having two McMahons in main events this week, meaning the ratings should be through the roof. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Kurt Angle giving Brock a rematch for the title but being cut off by Vince. For some reason Vince agreed to face Brock in a cage tonight. You really can feel the shenanigans coming here and in this case that works best. Just because you can see the ending doesn't mean it's a bad thing.

Opening sequence.

Chris Benoit vs. Eddie Guerrero

Non-title despite Benoit asking for the title to be on the line. Eddie picks the leg to start and they hit the mat for a technical sequence as you might have expected from these two. The Canadian fans are VERY pro-Benoit (well duh) but an Eddie chant pops up as well because Eddie is just on another level at this point.

Benoit backdrops his way out of a wristlock and Eddie bails to the ropes before Benoit can grab a hold of his own. Instead some insanely loud chops have Eddie begging for time out but he's still able to snapmare him down and take over again. A slingshot hilo and belly to back suplex give Eddie two and it's off to an armbar.

Back up and Benoit grabs a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker (stealing both Eddie's move and gimmick), followed by a very hard powerbomb. Cue Rhyno to break up the Swan Dive but Benoit avoids the frog splash. A dive takes Rhyno down, only to have Tajiri come in and take Eddie down for the DQ.

Rating: C+. Even with the lame ending, Eddie vs. Benoit in any form is worth seeing. They didn't have very long here but they managed to get

something out of it because they're that popular. Having the Canadian fans cheer for Eddie shows you what kind of a roll he's on at the moment and that's an incredibly positive sign for Guerrero. It's also a good sign that they were doing the technical stuff here, making the US Title feel more like the wrestlers' title. Almost no title has an identity and this one having such a thing and doing it well so far hopefully is a sign of things to come.

They keep brawling but Sgt. Slaughter of all people (like Stephanie would lower herself to this) says we're going to restart this as a tag match. Now I need to see Slaughter doing the Teddy Long dance.

Chris Benoit/Tajiri vs. Rhyno/Eddie Guerrero

Joined in progress with Benoit getting the Crossface on Rhyno and Eddie having to make a save. Eddie comes in legally with a hurricanrana but Tajiri makes a save this time around. A baseball slide dropkick takes Eddie's knee out and now Tajiri can come in legally. The handspring elbow drops Rhyno as they're working a very nice pace to start things off.

Tajiri goes after Eddie but gets run over by Rhyno. That just earns him a Tarantula but Eddie is there with a dropkick for his own save. Rhyno actually puts on a Sharpshooter, drawing Benoit in to protect Canada's honor. He's fine with Eddie's half crab though, suggesting that he's not much of a Lance Storm fan. Rhyno comes in for some forearms as Benoit's save attempt goes nowhere.

Instead it's Eddie getting backdropped to the floor and Tajiri makes the tag, albeit thanks to Rhyno knocking him into Benoit. With Benoit on the floor, Rhyno powerbombs Tajiri but gets misted (with the referee looking at them). Eddie didn't see the tag and frog splashes the illegal Tajiri, only to get caught in the Crossface for the tap.

Rating: B-. It was certainly a creative ending and odds are this sets up a big title match, perhaps with all four fighting at the same time. As mentioned earlier, this is the kind of wrestling that makes the show a lot more interesting and I'd really like to see it happen a lot more often. Benoit and Eddie are the wrestlers so it's a smart idea to throw in a striker like Tajiri and a power guy like Rhyno to really even things

out.

Josh Matthews (looking as stupid as I've ever seen him with two necklaces and an earring) asks Kurt Angle about some rumors, but Kurt cuts him off. Kurt has been hearing rumors about Josh, scotch tape, two midgets and a picture of Justin Timberlake that still keeps him up nights. He's heard the rumors about Brock, who he still considers a friend. A big stupid friend at times, but still a friend. They're going to resolve their issues face to face though.

Zach Gowen vs. Nunzio

Matt Hardy, who puts ketchup on one fry at a time and is a better commentator than Michael Cole, is on commentary and brought Shannon Moore with him. Gowen takes him down to the mat to start but is easily powered into the corner. Nunzio grabs the leg and mocks his inability to sweep the other leg as Matt complains about having to share the stage with a sideshow freak. As cruel as he sounds, there's really nothing wrong about what he says.

A quick leglock is broken up and Nunzio sends him outside. Gowen gets turned inside out with a clothesline and we hit the chinlock. Matt: "Everybody knows that Matt Hardy's career has more legs underneath it than Zach Gowen's.". Back up and Nunzio crotches himself and a middle rope moonsault hits him in the ropes. A leg lariat and a middle rope Fameasser both get the same. Gowen grabs a neckbreaker but has to elbow Shannon down, allowing Nunzio to hit a top rope dropkick for the pin.

Rating: C-. That's on a bit of a sliding scale and that's the problem: you have to adjust everything for Gowen and the matches are only going to be so good. He has to have a select group of opponents and his offense is almost all based around that one leg. It's nothing special in the first place and when your entire character is based around your one trait, it's not like you have much of a shelf life. Gowen is incredible impressive, but this isn't going to work for very long.

Post match, Gowen takes another Twist of Fate.

Undertaker finds Sable sitting on Vince's laugh and asks her to leave.

He's not happy with Vince sending A-Train after Stephanie so the little "oil hoochie" could get a win at Vengeance. If Undertaker was part of the family, he'd have already beaten the heck out of Vince. The boss is about to tell Undertaker what he can do with that opinion when Funaki comes running in to say Brock has been attacked. Angle and the FBI are near him and Vince gives Kurt a look without saying anything. You can feel the twist coming from here and it's still working just fine.

Undertaker vs. John Cena

Undertaker beat him at Vengeance in a match that hurt a lot of Cena's credibility. Cena's rap implies he wants to force sexual acts onto Undertaker. The big man wastes no time in sending him into the corner and the slow beating begins. He starts in on Cena's shoulder as the fans think Cena sucks. A hard clothesline looks to set up Old School but Cena pulls him down, somehow knowing what to expect.

Cena starts in on the knee, only to get his arm pulled down again. A lifting wristlock keeps Undertaker in trouble as they must have a long time here. Now Old School connects and the slow paced beating heads outside. Totally one sided so far. Back in and Undertaker actually takes him all the way to the top for a superplex but Undertaker bangs up his own ribs.

Back from a break with Cena in control and pounding on the ribs. They had something here with Cena having such a basic offense but sticking with it because it was the most logical thing he had. Undertaker shrugs it off and posts Cena on the floor because he's had enough of being on defense for now. In a good example of everything wrong with commentary, Cole keeps mentioning the bad ribs and Tazz yells at him for saying it over and over. Heaven forbid he tell a story or something.

The Throwback gives Cena two but a big boot and elbow give Undertaker the same. Cena's spinebuster goes back to the ribs but Undertaker mounts him for some rights and lefts. The Last Ride is broken up and the ref is bumped. Now didn't we all know something like that was coming? The chokeslam gets no cover and it's A-Train coming in for a bicycle kick and a backbreaker. That's only good for two on Undertaker so he tries the

Tombstone, only to get reversed into the FU for the pin.

Rating: D+. They really didn't need this much time, especially with the arm work going nowhere. Undertaker vs. A-Train isn't going to be much to see and this seemed to be more about setting that up than helping Cena. That being said, it helped a lot to have Cena get the win off his own move instead of A-Train's. Cena needed a win like this and you knew full well they weren't giving Cena a clean pin, either here or at the pay per view. The match wasn't very good because of the slow pace and the ending didn't really help things.

Jamie Noble vs. Doug Basham

Shaniqua gives Doug a spank for inspiration and the announcers laugh the whole thing off. Jamie, apparently a face for getting to sleep with Torrie and Nidia (ok they've got something there), kicks Doug away but gets caught with some crossface shots to the head. A Vader Bomb elbow gives Doug two as Tazz goes on and on about what Shaniqua does with the Bashams.

The move that would become known as Wasteland gives Doug two and we hit the chinlock. Jamie fights up with a clothesline and dropkick for a near fall each. A top rope elbow looks to finish but Danny distracts the referee. Not that it matters as Jamie gets a small package for the pin.

Rating: D. Commentary made this one insufferable and I don't see it getting much better. I'm sure there was nothing better for WWE to do than spend years on the Bashams in OVW before bringing them up as unintentionally comedic sex characters. On top of that they're apparently feuding with a team that got together over group sex. Oh and the boss is having an affair with his mistress. You really shouldn't need so much of the same theme on one show.

Post match the beatdown is on until Billy Gunn makes the save.

Angle denies attacking Lesnar. I'd believe him.

Next week, Haas and Benjamin defend against Mysterio and Kidman. That would be another week where the Cruiserweight Title isn't so much as

mentioned.

Rey Mysterio vs. Charlie Haas

Non-title of course. Haas takes him down without much effort to start and takes Rey's head off with a hard clothesline. A hard whip into the corner starts working on Rey's back and it's off to something like a torture rack with Tazz referencing the luchador Atlantis of all people. Back up and Charlie misses a charge, allowing Rey to hit a springboard flipping seated senton for two, followed by a springboard spinning crossbody (with Haas having to run over to catch him). The 619 connects but a hurricanrana is countered into the Haas of Pain for the tap.

Rating: C. Charlie got to show off here and a clean win over Mysterio is quite the accomplishment. It's a very good sign that both he and Benjamin can have solid singles matches and more proof of how great an amateur background is. Even if nothing else is working, just taking them down to the mat is a good way to get through parts of a match. Mysterio as a tag guy is fine, but get the title off of him already. The problem though is finding someone to put it on as the division basically doesn't exist. On a related note, what the heck happened to Ultimo Dragon? He was around all of two weeks and then vanished.

The cage is lowered.

We recap Brock's injury.

Angle leaves Vince's office.

Brock Lesnar vs. Vince McMahon

In a cage with Angle as guest referee. Brock looks banged up but is easily able to shove Vince down twice in a row. The F5 is loaded up but Brock collapses. Angle won't count the cover so Vince slaps him, earning himself an ankle lock. Brock of course nips up and F5's Angle for the pretty obvious (not a bad thing) heel turn. No rating as the match doesn't really end and wasn't exactly a match in the first place.

A long, long beatdown ends the show. This is definitely the right move as Brock wasn't working as the good guy and Lesnar vs. Angle II with Lesnar

as the heel could be a lot more interesting. One last note: Brock and Vince pose with the camera panning from Vince's face to Brock's, who looks completely maniacal with his eyes bugging out for a really creepy visual.

Overall Rating: C+. There's some very solid wrestling on here (see the first half hour) and Brock turning heel is a good move as Brock just wasn't working in the role. Him working as Vince's heavy is a far better use for his talents and gives him some new people to work against. At the same time though, anything below the midcard is basically death at the moment with stuff like Noble and Gunn being goofy wastes of time and Gowen still riding on momentum even though the foot was taken off the gas a long time ago. Get some better stuff on the bottom part of the card and Smackdown could be awesome all over again.

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Ring of Honor TV – January 4, 2018: British Scoundrels

[Ring of Honor](#)

Date: January 3, 2018

Host: Ian Riccaboni

It's another Best Of show as we're STILL waiting on the fallout from Final Battle. In theory this is the last show before we move forward but that doesn't exactly do much good for the fans who are waiting around. That being said, a highlight show can do a lot of good so hopefully this lives up to expectations. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Ian welcomes us to the show and says tonight is going to be all about the War of the Worlds UK Tour.

From August 18 in London.

TV Title: Titan vs. Kushida

Kushida is defending. Technical sequence to start and it's an early standoff with the fans being impressed. Then again it's a Ring of Honor crowd so they would probably cheer if they were bored out of their mind. Titan springboards into an armdrag to the floor, followed by a running hurricanrana on the outside.

Back in and Titan teases a hand walk headscissors but Kushida throws him at the referee for a kick to the ribs. They're quickly back on the floor with Kushida putting him in a chair for a running dropkick. Kushida starts in on the arm to soften it up for the Hoverboard Lock. A basement dropkick mixes things up a bit but the actual holds sends Titan bailing to the ropes. Back up and something like a Pele cuts Titan down but he's still able to hurricanrana the champ to the floor. A big old Lionsault puts Kushida down (and sees Titan landing on the barricade) as we take a break.

Back with Titan grabbing something like a Figure Four but a rope is grabbed in pretty short order. Titan gets caught on top but Kushida pulls him down into a cross armbreaker. That's rolled into the ropes again but Titan handsprings right back into the hold. Titan rolls out of that as well and la majistral gets two.

Another wacky rollup gets the same and that draws the FIGHT FOREVER chant. A springboard hurricanrana takes Kushida down but he's right back up with the Hoverboard Lock. Titan gets a bit too close to the ropes so Kushida rolls away and tries Back to the Future. That's countered as well (geez) and Titan kicks him in the head. A Downward Spiral into the buckle sets up Back to the Future to retain the title at 15:49 shown.

Rating: B+. Wow. When this match started, I was expecting just another pretty good TV match that didn't really offer anything special. What I got was one of the best Ring of Honor matches I've seen in a VERY long time as both guys left it all in the ring and came out looking like stars. Kushida is my favorite New Japan guy and this is a great example of why. I've always really liked his matches and this is one of the better ones I've seen from him. Definitely check this out.

From August 19 in Liverpool.

Jay Lethal vs. Josh Bodom

Bodom's British Cruiserweight Title isn't on the line. I've seen Bodom's work before and wasn't that impressed but maybe a better opponent will help. They exchange wristlock counters to start until Lethal blocks a hiptoss and grabs a swinging neckbreaker. A springboard dropkick puts Bodom on the floor but he comes back in with a hurricanrana. There's a dropkick to really stagger Lethal, though not enough that he can't hit his cartwheel into a dropkick of his own.

A missile dropkick misses and Bodom knees him in the head. Bodom grabs a reverse hurricanrana to put him outside, followed by a middle rope moonsault. Back in and a top rope double stomp to the back of Jay's head, followed by a standing shooting star, gives Josh a near fall. The Lethal Combination gets Jay out of trouble and Hail to the King gets two. We hit the Figure Four but cue Silas Young for a distraction. Not that it matters as the Lethal Injection is good enough to pin Bodom at 9:18.

Rating: C-. Ok so maybe it is Bodom. This did nothing for me, again, and that's not a positive sign when we're only on the third match. Lethal shrugged off the distraction and won anyway, making me think that Lethal vs. Young was the right move here. You know, a match between two people

with a story and who happen to actually WORK FOR RING OF HONOR. There were some moments here but it didn't work, again.

Once again from August 18 in London.

Bullet Club vs. Los Ingobernables de Japon

Cody/Young Bucks/Hangman Page/Marty Scurll

Tetsuya Naito/Bushi/Evil/Sanada/Hiromu Takahashi

Marty and Takahashi start things off with Hiromu stealing the umbrella. That scoundrel! Does he not know who the villain is around here? The tease of a lick to the umbrella is just too far for Scurll and the fight is on with a technical sequence into the bird pose. A running hurricanrana allows Takahashi to do his own bird pose but he has to flip out of a chickenwing attempt.

Cody and Sanada come in with the fans singing about Cody, including his last name as a copyright infringement. Maybe that earns another Cease and Desist letter? Sanada dropkicks him into the corner and the singing continues. We get the big ten man showdown but there's no violence. Instead the fans want some superkicks so it's Page coming in and teasing one. Naito comes in as well and we take a break.

Back with Naito avoiding a lockup and handing it off to Evil. Page is sent outside and it's Naito spinning into his signature pose to a BIG reaction. Scurll jumps him from behind but Los Ingobernables clear the ring without much effort. A quick spank from Evil keeps Scurll in trouble (Appropriate?) and it's off to Bushi for a middle rope dropkick. Marty gets in a Backstabber and the hot tag brings in both Bucks (sure why not) for the house cleaning to go with the big reactions from the crowd.

Everything breaks down and the Club does the five man Rise of the Terminators, setting up four straight dives. Marty gives Bushi a reverse Razor's Edge into something like a One Winged Angel, followed by a top rope splash to give Matt two. Back from another break with Page and Nick missing moonsaults. Matt misses as well so Nick and Cody stomp away. The Club wants Marty to try a moonsault and panic sets in very quickly. He

finally gets up (shaking the entire way) and....I think misses? His hands grazed Bushi but he sold it like a miss.

The hot tag brings in Sanada to tie Page up, followed by the running dropkick to the back. Everything breaks down again and Page hits Naito with the rolling lariat. Sanada comes back in with Cross Rhodes for Cody, only to have Scurll break his fingers. The Superkick Party is on and the Bucks grab Takahashi's stuffed cat Daryl. Takahashi has to save Daryl from the chickenwing but he winds up taking the Meltzer Driver.

The Club poses and Takahashi starts crying. Fans: "SAY YOU'RE SORRY!" Takahashi fights all of them because his partners are out looking for hot dogs and beet juice. A quintuple superkick drops Takahashi but Naito comes back in. Bushi offers some mist and Naito rolls up the very green Page for two. Destino plants Page for the pin at 22:09 shown.

Rating: B. That's a great way to do a major house show main event and that's the right idea. The fans need something entertaining to make the shows feel more important and having two big groups like this in one match is the right way to go. They had some good stuff going on here, but some of the screwy comedy stuff wasn't exactly my taste. I can see why this is considered one of the best things the company had though as it was some good fun, especially for the fans there live.

Ian wraps it up and we get some credits to end the show in a nice touch.

Overall Rating: B+. In a way, I like this better than just going with the standard Best Of formula. There's way too much to cover in the course of a year in just an hour long show so focusing on a single tour might have been the way to go. Two really solid matches and...well they had two really solid matches and that's more than you get more often than not. Fun show here, but I'm really looking forward to getting back to the regular stuff.

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Main Event – January 4, 2018: Why I Watch Wrestling (Seriously)

Main Event

Date: January 4, 2018

Location: American Airlines Arena, Miami, Florida

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

It's a new year and...that's not likely to change a single thing around here. Main Event is the definition of a single formula show and really, that's the best thing it can be. The show gives some people a chance to get in the ring which they won't be getting on Raw, mainly because we need some more cruiserweight matches that advance nothing because Enzo Amore doesn't defend the title anymore. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Mickie James vs. Dana Brooke

It's nice to change up from the cruiserweights every now and then. Feeling out process to start until Dana takes her head off with a clothesline. The handspring elbow in the corner gets two and we're off to the chinlock because that's what you do in wrestling. Back up and Mickie

grabs a hurricanrana out of the corner but the MickDT is broken up. Mickie chokes her over the ropes with her legs (similar to a Tarantula) but Dana grabs a rollup for the completely clean pin at 4:36.

Rating: D. What the heck was that? I know Mickie is mainly there to put people over but DANA? I've been quite a fan of her new look with Titus Worldwide and I'm one of the only people on the planet who is still a fan of hers in general but why in the world is she winning here? I mean, if you have to give her a win like this it makes sense here, though that still doesn't mean it makes sense.

Quick look at Asuka beating Alexa Bliss on Raw.

Quick look at Becky Lynch returning on Smackdown.

We look back at Sami Zayn costing AJ Styles a match against Kevin Owens last week.

From Smackdown.

AJ Styles vs. Sami Zayn

Non-title. Shane, Owens and Bryan are at ringside. Sami takes AJ down early to start and gets two off a backdrop. A dropkick gets two more and we take an early break. Back with Sami holding a chinlock to keep AJ grounded. AJ fights back up, only to get his throat snapped across the top rope. Sami gets caught on top but punches his way to freedom, followed by the Blue Thunder Bomb for the same near fall that the move always gets.

Styles is right back up and grabs the Calf Crusher, only to have Sami make it to the ropes in fairly long order. The Phenomenal Forearm doesn't work but the referee gets knocked to the floor. As expected, AJ grabs a rollup for two as the referee dives in after being held up by Owens. Shane shoves Kevin down and Owens is ejected, followed by Bryan saying Shane should go with him. The distraction lets Sami hit the Helluva Kick for the pin at 13:44.

Rating: C+. I don't think the ending was any kind of a surprise and that's all well and good. What worries me is the battle of the bosses, as

I could easily see this turning into some kind of a mess where the wrestlers are overshadowed for the sake of a story that a lot of people aren't interested in seeing. The wrestlers are talented so just let them do their thing. We don't need to see Shane get this kind of focus and it's been going on for MONTHS now.

Post match AJ tells Owens and Zayn to stop acting like children. He's tired of everyone else getting involved so let's just make it a handicap match for the title at the Rumble. A smiling Bryan makes the match to end the show.

We look back at Samoa Joe injuring Dean Ambrose and Roman Reigns getting disqualified in his quest for revenge.

From Raw.

Intercontinental Title: Samoa Joe vs. Roman Reigns

Reigns is defending and loses the title if he's disqualified. Joe pops him with the right hands to start but Reigns comes back with some forearms to the back. The referee breaks up some shots to the face in the corner because the rules say he needs to be all serious here when no referee would ever do something like this otherwise. A suplex puts Reigns on the floor and we take a break.

Back with Joe running him over with an elbow for two. Reigns grabs a suplex though, only to miss a charge and go shoulder first into the post. Joe works on the arm but Roman is back up with a clothesline. That just earns him a charge to take him down again as the pace stays slow (in a good way). A hard whip sends Reigns into the corner and Joe takes him down to the mat to crank on the arm some more.

Reigns fights up again and hits a running clothesline, followed by the standing clotheslines in the corner. The running apron dropkick gives Reigns two but hang on a second as the referee has to warn for a DQ. Joe sends him outside though and there's the suicide elbow for a double knockdown.

They're both back in at nine and we take a second break. Back again with

Reigns getting headbutted down but yelling at Joe to hit him harder. Reigns gets two off a Samoan drop and Joe bails to the floor. Roman dives into a shot to the chest and gets sent into the steps but thankfully Joe rolls back inside to break the count. A whip into the steps is reversed but of course that's not enough for the DQ.

Joe gets in a shot to the face, only to eat a Superman punch off the steps. Back in and another Superman punch gets two with the kickout stunning Reigns. The spear is blocked and Joe sends Reigns into the referee, who of course is talked out of the DQ. Another Superman punch is countered into the spinning Rock Bottom for two more and now Joe is yelling at the referee. The Clutch goes on but Reigns spins out of it and hits the spear to retain at 24:53.

Rating: B+. The DQ stuff was kind of annoying but they were beating the heck out of each other for a LONG time here and it made for a good match. I mean, you knew the most likely ending was spear into Reigns winning but at least Joe got in a very solid match before losing via clean pin. It's going to be almost all Reigns until we get to the Superdome because THIS TIME FOR SURE but that's how WWE works anymore.

Akira Tozawa vs. Tony Nese

Ok so maybe it's nice to have the tag teams gone for a week. Hang on a second though as Nese needs to pose. Tozawa isn't in the mood to wait and starts in with the kicks, followed by the fake out right hand. Nese is back up and stomping away in the corner as this is heavy on the striking so far. Tozawa knocks him outside but the suicide dive is blocked (just like it would be on 205 Live this week).

Back from a break with Nese grabbing a waistlock to keep Tozawa down. A double kick to the face puts both guys down, suggesting that Tozawa is a much harder kicker than Nese. Now the suicide dive connects for two and it's time to strike it out again. Tozawa knocks the heck out of Nese and the top rope backsplash is good for the pin at 10:12.

Rating: C+. For a match that should have been just a quick time filler, they were actually working out there and that's always cool to see. Tozawa is still one of the better options in the division and Nese is a

heck of a heel, even if his in-ring stuff might not be the best in the world. This was certainly better than waiting around on Enzo but that's what we're stuck with for the time being.

We'll wrap it up here.

Here are Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman to close things out. Paul thinks the company's New Year's Resolution is to stack the deck against Lesnar by throwing multiple challengers at the same time. It used to be challenger and now it's CHALLENGERS because there's no other way to stop Brock. That makes things more complicated because Brock can lose the title without getting pinned, which is the only way it could happen.

Heyman mocks the announcers talking about the odds but says Brock is always 100%. If it's one on one, no one is beating Brock. You could even throw all thirty Royal Rumble entrants against him and it would be the same slaughter. They go to leave but here's Kane (with Brock pausing due to a delay in Kane's music hitting) to chokeslam Brock but Lesnar sits up like Undertaker. A Cactus Clothesline puts them on the floor but some of the locker room comes out for the break up. No Braun as Brock poses to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. You know, as odd as it sounds, the original content here is a good example of why I keep watching wrestling. There are two nothing matches here and we had a pair of surprises. The cruiserweights worked hard and had a fun match while the women gave us a bit of a surprise with an unexpected finish. That's the fun part about wrestling: just when you think you know what you're going to see, it throws you the occasional curve ball. I'm not saying it was great or even very good, but it surprised me and that's a good feeling.

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