

205 Live: Where the Cruiserweights Are These Days

205 Live

Date: December 26, 2017

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

We're continuing the slow crawl towards the Cedric Alexander vs. Enzo Amore Cruiserweight Title match, which of course is taking place on Monday Night Raw instead of 205 Live. As has been mentioned, it's clear that this show is little more than a filler show anymore and that's not fixing any of its problems. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Enzo Amore having issues with the Zo Train and having Cedric Alexander pick the members off without much trouble.

Cedric comes up to Drew Gulak, who is waiting on Enzo (his best friend) to call. Drew tells him to mind his own business but Cedric says it'll be a wonderful life when Enzo is no longer champion. Cedric talks about how much better things will be once Enzo is out of power and Drew seems to entertain the thought.

Opening sequence.

Hideo Itami vs. Jack Gallagher

Before the match, Gallagher promises to avenge his friend in front of these Chicago pillocks. Nigel says he's faced a lot of opponents in his career but he was always scared of Itami. I love it when wrestlers mention their careers like that as it reminds you that they actually do have a perspective that can matter in a match like this. Itami knees him in the ribs and again demands respect.

The kick to the face keeps Gallagher in trouble and a Fameasser with Gallagher on the middle rope gives us another respect demand. If you have to shout it three times less than two minutes into the match, it's

time for a better catchphrase. Gallagher ties him up in the ring skirt to take over though and we hit a quickly broken chinlock.

Instead it's a cravate to keep Itami in trouble and we're right back to the chinlock. Itami finally grabs a dragon screw legwhip and there's the tornado DDT across the top rope. Back up and Gallagher pulls him into the Captain's Hook but Itami makes the rope. The running corner dropkick rocks Gallagher and a Rings of Saturn (with a leg wrapped around Gallagher's head) is good for the tap at 7:38.

Rating: D+. Itami just doesn't have the fire that he needs and it's showing more every time. Throw in the lack of the GTS (which hopefully isn't permanent) and there's just not much to look forward to with him. He's not the biggest guy in the world and he has limited charisma. He's tailor suited to be the assassin style heel but for some reason he's stuck in this lame face role. Oh right: Enzo has to be the top heel. What was I thinking?

Video on Tony Nese's issues with the Zo Train, leading to him getting beaten down by the team.

Nese wants to take the Zo Train out but he understands that Enzo is a global superstar and the money is more than worth it. Akira Tozawa comes up to ask about Nese's status and gets punched out. To recap: Enzo is the star and everyone else on 205 Live is a worthless nobody. Good to know.

Tony Nese vs. Akira Tozawa

That's quite the fast turnaround. Tozawa charges in with some right hands at the bell but Nese hammers him down in the corner. The fake out right hand smacks Nese in the jaw though and Tozawa scores with his backsplash. Nese kicks him in the head though and drops some legs for good measure.

We hit the neck crank and then a chinlock with a bodyscissors to really keep Tozawa down. Tozawa finally comes back with a suplex and now the suicide dive connects. Back in and a good looking pumphandle sitout powerslam gives Nese two but he gets kicked in the head over and over. Tozawa's top rope backsplash is broken up though and the running knee gives Nese the pin at 6:48.

Rating: C. Tozawa is far more charismatic than Itami and it's no surprise that I liked his match more. Nese on the other hand is in a weird place as he should be teasing a face turn but I think WWE knows that it would be career suicide. He needs a little more development too as you can only go so far with great abs.

We look at Alexa Bliss breaking up Nia Jax and Enzo's kiss on Monday.

Drew Gulak/Ariya Daivari vs. Cedric Alexander/Mustafa Ali

Before the match, Gulak asks how we are doing. Drew thinks we need a Best Of list and that means a look back at his best slide. What better way to do that than with a POWERPOINT PRESENTATION??? Cedric cuts him off again and Nigel wants to know who is in charge of music.

Alexander points out that we're in Mustafa's hometown and Ali has some valid points of his own to make. Ali says these two would never be friends outside of the Zo Train because Daivari is the kind of guy who would look down on a blue collar scrapper like Gulak. All that matters is Enzo would pick Nia Jax over the Zo Train every time, which doesn't sit well with the villains.

Ali and Daivari start things off with Ariya hammering away with Daivari getting armdragged into an armbar. It's off to Cedric and Drew, who fight over a wristlock of their own. Ali comes back in with some hard chops but Daivari offers a distraction so Gulak can drop Mustafa from behind. We hit the neck crank and the hometown fans are WAY behind Ali here.

Back up and Ali makes the hot tag for some house cleaning but Alexander gets kneed out to the floor. Alexander gets in a kick to the head though and it's a hot tag off to Ali, though the fans don't seem thrilled. A corkscrew flip dive to Daivari wakes them up a bit more and the rolling X Factor gets two. Daivari takes Ali up top but Gulak tells him nothing off the top. That earns Gulak a Lumbar Check and the 054 puts Daivari away at 8:51.

Rating: C. Now stop me if you've seen this one before, but odds are you've seen this one before. There's only so much interest to be had in a match (or a show for that matter) when everything of note happens on Raw

anymore. The title contenders were crowned on Raw, the #1 contenders match was on Raw and now the title match is going to be on Raw.

Overall Rating: D+. There's just nothing going on around here and that's quite the shame. Enzo being gone continues to be a problem whether he's here or not. When he's here, he dominates the entire show and nothing else matters. When he's not here, almost none of the stories goes anywhere because there's no point to them without Enzo around. Given that your big story is basically "Enzo is awesome and none of us matter", that's not the biggest surprise. This was another skippable show, which isn't going to be made any better when the title match is on Raw, but that's where 205 is these days.

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Ring of Honor – December 27, 2017: How Can You Hate Christmas?

Ring of Honor

Date: December 27, 2017

Location: RP Funding Center, Lakeland, Florida

Commentators: Colt Cabana, Ian Riccaboni

It's after Christmas (or before depending on when this show airs for you) and that means it's time for a special match. This time around we'll be having a ten man tag with surprise teams, which could make for some fun stuff. We're still waiting on the post Final Battle stuff but that's how Ring of Honor works. Let's get to it.

Cody is standing by some Christmas presents and isn't happy with being a captain of a team tonight where he doesn't even get to pick his own team. Dalton Castle, the other captain, comes in and gets to draw the first name. Castle likes his pick, which isn't revealed.

Opening sequence.

The Dawgs vs. Flip Gordon/Simon Grimm

Rhett Titus is dressed as Santa and Will Ferrara is a reindeer. Grimm is better known as Simon Gotch from WWE and I'm interested in seeing if he's as nothing here as he was there. Ferrara and Grimm fight over whether the reindeer suit should be zipped up or not. Grimm takes him down into a choke before it's off to Flip. Some chops set up a standing moonsault for two, followed by a good looking dropkick for the same.

Ferrara trips him up though, sending Gordon face first into the apron. Back from a break with Titus throwing Ferrara into Gordon for another two as the Dawgs have lost the suits but Will kept the red nose. A double suplex drops Gordon and Titus catapults Will into a splash for two. Back up and a springboard forearm cuts Titus off though and the hot tag brings in Grimm. A tiger bomb gets two on Titus as everything breaks down. Ferrara hits Grimm with a present though and an implant DDT with Ferrara helping to spike Simon (Who Let the Dawgs Out) is good for the pin at 9:33.

Rating: C-. It's the right outcome, assuming you can tolerate the Dawgs. Grimm was slightly better than his Gotch days but that's not exactly saying much. The match was nothing to see but that's kind of what you have to expect from a Dawgs match. It feels like such a nothing team and

that's pretty much what they are to this point.

Cody makes two picks. He's pleased with one but doesn't think the second even works here. Post break he makes a third pick. Cody: "Christmas sucks."

Castle makes a pick and says this makes things interesting. No names have been given yet.

Video on the Women of Honor, mainly focusing on Deonna Purrazzo vs. Karen Q. I feel like we've seen packages like this for months now and while a title will help, they need to be on TV more than once every few months.

We get an ad for Final Battle...which aired over a week before this show.

Cody is in the ring with a present. He'll give it to the loudest fan...but stomps it instead because he hates Christmas. It's time for the reveal of the teams.

Team Cody vs. Team Castle

Cody, Scorpio Sky, Josh Woods, Chris Sabin, Punishment Martinez

Dalton Castle, Silas Young, Hanson, Jonathan Gresham, Marty Scurll

Neither Cody nor Castle (in an ugly Christmas sweater) has the World Title here for the sake of protecting pay per view results. Gresham and Sabin start things off and of course they hit the mat with neither being able to do much against the other. Sky and Castle come in but Young tags himself in instead. They slug it out and it's pretty clear that Sky hasn't turned heel yet. A backbreaker has Sky in trouble so he brings Cody in, only to have Castle come in as well.

As you might expect, Cody hands it off to Woods so Castle takes the sweater off. Cody puts it on instead as Castle and Woods take turns driving each other into the corner. Neither can gutwrench the other so Castle hits the peacock pose as we take a break. Back with Hanson and Martinez coming in for the hoss fight. Both guys get in a knockdown for no effect so Cody tags himself in. Hanson tags out by chopping Scurll off the apron but of course they just pose.

Castle sends Marty into Cody and despite tensions being teased, it's just a big hug. Everyone comes in and it's a big ten man staredown. Castle wants to fight because IT'S CHRISTMAS! Everything breaks down and it's Sky with the big flip dive onto the pile. Woods powerbombs Sky onto the same pile before Cody comes off the top with yet another dive. It's Martinez adding a springboard dive, followed by Hanson topping them all with a dive of his own.

Back from a break with Sky taking a series of running charges in the corner. Marty charges into a knee though and it's a Flair Flop. Now it's Marty's turn to get hit with the running charges in the corner but Cody pulls up short of course. Martinez hits Cody instead until we settle down to Cody vs. Castle. That lasts all of three seconds though as Castle has to suplex a bunch of people.

Sky slips out of the Bang A Rang and it's Gresham taking over with a dive. Sabin escapes Misery but it's Hanson kicking Woods in the face. Cody and Hanson trade cartwheels until Cody hits the Beautiful Disaster on Castle. *That earns him a Bang A Rang but Sky takes Castle down with something like a neckbreaker, though Castle lands face first instead. Another Bang A Rang puts Sky away at 19:37.

Rating: B-. This was all it needed to be, aside from maybe some more Cody vs. Castle. They had to hide the results from Final Battle so it was really just a bunch of random fighting, though that's just about all it needed to be. I had a good time with the match and for a big time special, it's hard to complain about that kind of a result.

Overall Rating: C+. Solid show, even if it's just thrown together as a filler episode. The main event was fun enough and I had a good time with it, though the opener kind of dragged things down. We're still not ready for the Final Battle fallout though as we're coming up on a Best Of show next week, though it wouldn't feel right if we got to the next stuff so soon. Good enough show this week, but I could go for some storyline advancement.

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Main Event – December 28, 2017: The Old Stuff Was Better

Main Event

Date: December 28, 2017

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

We'll wrap up Chicago week here with a recap of everything else that has happened so far. This Monday's episode of Raw was surprisingly eventful for a Christmas night show (not that there's much to compare it to) and Smackdown was your run of the mill episode. That could mean a mixed bag here so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Kalisto vs. Tony Nese

Nese says hang on a second because he needs to give these fans the Christmas gift of posing. Kalisto does the same thing and gets kicked in

the ribs for his efforts because Nese isn't very nice. A toss to the floor allows Kalisto to backflip into his pose, followed by a hurricanrana back inside.

Nese runs him over though and we hit the bodyscissors to slow things down. One heck of a clothesline gives Nese two but a springboard crossbody and a moonsault press give Kalisto two of his own. A sitout pumphandle powerslam gives Nese the same but he makes the mistake of grabbing Kalisto from behind, setting up the Salida Del Sol for the pin at 5:46.

Rating: C-. Overall Grinch-esque tendencies of Nese for rejecting Kalisto's gift aside, this was your standard Main Event cruiserweight match: not too long and simple stuff until the good guy won. I don't remember the last time a heel won the cruiserweight match on this show but you can probably count them on one hand.

From Raw!

Speaking of Cena, here he is to open things up. Actually hang on a second as Cena says there's something that needs to change. Cena goes outside and says someone is wearing the wrong colors. He takes off his hat and shirt and hands them to a kid with some sort of a disability who is wearing his old orange gear. And that is why Cena comes off as a superhero and is just flat out awesome to boot.

That earns a MERRY CHRISTMAS chant and Cena talks about how WWE is like a family. However, he wants to say cheers to the good and bad times, but cheers on a special day like today. Cue Elias to interrupt for his big spot of getting a rub from Cena. John actually agrees to walk with him but they get cut off by a CM Punk chant. Elias: "CM Punk ain't gonna interrupt me."

Cena says we need to have some fun tonight and grabs a chair so Elias can perform. The lights go down and Elias is about to play but the CM PUNK chants cut him off again. The song starts and of course it insults Chicago so Cena cuts him off and says hit the lights. Cena thinks Elias is the real jerk because he keeps insulting every city he's in.

Elias thinks Cena might be right and offers to do the song again if Chicago will give him a second chance. He sings again and this time sings a rather nice version before handing it off to Cena for "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas". Cena starts off but gets punched in the face for his efforts. Elias goes to leave but comes back to stomp away and challenges Cena to a match right now. A referee is fine with this and we're ready to go.

We see less than a minute of the fifteen minute match where Cena won with the AA.

Video on Samoa Joe.

From Raw again.

Jason Jordan comes in to see Kurt Angle but Seth Rollins cuts them off, saying he wants to face Samoa Joe tonight. In a repeat of the same thing he does every week, Jordan says he wants his match against Joe. Angle suggests that they team up to deal with the Bar first but neither seems interested. Kurt makes the match anyway and puts the titles on the line. The two of them leave and Roman Reigns comes in. Angle gives him Joe tonight, with the Intercontinental Title on the line.

We see the end of Roman Reigns vs. Samoa Joe for the Intercontinental Title. Reigns lost via DQ but beat Joe up after the match.

Video on Braun Strowman vs. Kane vs. Brock Lesnar.

Revival vs. Apollo Crews/Titus O'Neil

Is Tozawa still part of Titus Worldwide? I really can't remember the last time I saw him with the rest of the team. Titus shoves Dash into the corner to start and then does it again, this time with an overhand chop. Crews comes in and eats a forearm to the face before missing a dropkick. A double suplex is broken up by Titus and Dash is knocked outside as we take a break. Back with Crews enziguring Dawson, only to walk into the Shatter Machine for the pin at 7:05.

Rating: C. I could watch the Revival hit that Shatter Machine for at least five minutes straight. Titus Worldwide is a team that can put

people over but what WWE seems to forget is they have to actually win a few matches before that means anything. Put them over some lower level teams (get jobbers or something) and then these wins mean something more. Other than that though, it's more spinning of the wheels.

We look back at Dolph Ziggler laying down the US Title.

We look at the first two matches of the US Title tournament.

Quick look at the end of AJ Styles vs. Kevin Owens.

Quick look at the end of Jordan/Rollins winning the Tag Team Titles on Monday.

Overall Rating: D. This was too crammed together for my taste and it made the show a lot less entertaining than it should have been otherwise. Throwing in quick clips of the matches covers more but doesn't exactly give you much context. Granted a lot of that was due to showing the ENTIRE Cena vs. Elias promo, which ate up so much time. Not a terrible show but I like the older format more.

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Impact Wrestling – December 28, 2017 (Best of 2017 Part 2): Get Your Priorities Straight

Impact Wrestling

Date: December 28, 2017

Host: Josh Matthews

It's the second half of the Best of 2017 show and that means a lot more copying and pasting. There are several options that they could choose to air here but the Bound For Glory main event has already been announced. Next week is the show that really matters though so let's get to it.

We open with a quick video from Slammiversary.

Speaking of Slammiversary.

Impact Wrestling Knockouts Title/Global Force Wrestling Women's Title:
Rosemary vs. Sienna

Unification match and Gail Kim is at ringside. Rosemary has an army of freaks with her. Rosemary goes right after her and here are Laurel Van Ness and KM for the nearly immediate distraction. Sienna gets thrown out onto them and orders them to the back, leaving us one on one again.

Back in and Sienna hammers away before grabbing a chinlock. Rosemary gets sent hard into the barricade, only to fight out of a Tree of Woe for a German superplex. That doesn't do much actually as the Red Wedding is broken up and Sienna gets two off the Silencer. The second Red Wedding attempt connects but here's Van Ness to pull out the ref. Allie comes in for the save but the distraction lets Sienna get in a belt shot for two. The mist is blocked and Sienna rubs it in Rosemary's eyes, setting up a guillotine to make Rosemary tap at 10:03.

Rating: C-. I'm still not sure why these two are fighting or why I should

care about the GFW Women's Title but that's the case for the entire "promotion" pretty much since its inception. The match was a good brawl but the overbooking really dragged things down. This story has been going on for months now and it doesn't seem anywhere close to being finished, even though there's not much left for them to fight over.

From Slammiversary again. This was joined in progress but here's the full thing.

Jeremy Borash/Joseph Park vs. Josh Matthews/Scott Steiner

No DQ and D'Angelo Dinero joins commentary. Josh starts with Park and flips around a bit, followed by a kick to the head. A crossbody doesn't work so it's off to Steiner, who looks to be about 50lbs (of muscle) lighter than he was in his regular career. He's also wearing a shirt, which he would never do given that his character was built around a great physique. Again, there was NO ONE ELSE on the active roster that could play this role?

Borash hands it right back to Park....and they run to the back for a pre-taped segment. Park and Borash grab a fire extinguisher while Steiner and Matthews are in a golf cart. A car with a random fan (I think he was in one of the Final Deletion segments) shows up so Matthews and Steiner steal that to give chase, but they can't catch an announcer and an out of shape lawyer on foot.

They finally get out of the car (which had cameras inside) and chase after them with Matthews being backdropped into a pool while Steiner throws Park through a wall. With a camera under the water, the Jaws theme starts playing and Shark Boy shows up to bite Matthews. Steiner leaves Park and here's Father James Mitchell (Abyss' old manager) to say happy anniversary.

Back inside (and after an unnecessary cameo from celebrity chef Robert Irvine) and Matthews misses a Swanton. Josh spears him down but here's Steiner for the save. Matthews grabs a hug which is called a Steiner Recliner, only to have Shark Boy come in for the failed save attempt. Now Steiner puts on the Recliner and we've got Abyss to get rid of Scott without much effort. The Black Hole Slam onto the tacks crushes Josh and

Borash adds a top rope splash to give Abyss the pin at 10:50.

Rating: C. That was as good as it was going to be and the Shark Boy thing made me chuckle a bit. You knew Abyss was going to be in there at some point and there's nothing wrong with that as it was the only way they could really go. Steiner could have been any heel here though and that's not a good thing. Again, it looks like the company has no faith in its roster, which is a very bad sign. The wrestling wasn't the point here of course, but I'm more worried about it continuing until we have a singles match at Bound For Glory. Just let it be over as I don't think anyone really cared much for this in the first place. Please let it end.

From August 24, we see the final five entrants in Gauntlet for the Gold. The match ran over fifty five minutes but we only see about five minutes.

Videos on the international partnerships, including long videos on Eddie Edwards as the GHC World Champion and Johnny Impact as the triple champion of AAA.

Video on Taya Valkyrie.

From September 14, joined in progress again.

X-Division Title: Sonjay Dutt vs. Trevor Lee

Dutt is defending and this is falls count anywhere. Lee gets two on the floor off a baseball slide but Dutt sends him into the barricade for a breather. They head inside for the first time with Lee kicking him in the face, only to get dropped again. Dutt throws in a chair but Lee throws it right back out.

They hit kicks to the head at the same time for a double knockdown. Why there's no count when Dutt's leg is over Lee isn't clear, but I'd guess it's because that's not in the script and the referee doesn't know any better. Dutt's tornado DDT plants Lee but a superplex plants Dutt just as fast. They head outside again with Lee throwing a chair at his head before fighting into the crowd.

We take a break (of course we do) and come back with the fight heading into the back. Caleb Konley jumps Dutt, because falls count anywhere now

means No DQ. A trashcan to the head gives Lee two but heel miscommunication lets him get a breather. Dutt is busted open and it's time to hit Lee in the head with a trashcan lid. A tornado DDT off the wall is countered with a crotching onto a barricade and Lee rolls him up (with tights) for the pin and the title at 13:57.

Rating: C+. It never ceases to amaze me how much they've sucked the soul out of this division. This was a fast paced match and I couldn't bring myself to care about it no matter how hard I tried. It's just not interesting no matter how hard they try (and the wrestlers are trying) and so much of that is due to how worthless the X-Division is now. They're treated like an afterthought and have been for years now. Why would I care if the company doesn't?

From Bound For Glory.

Tag Team Titles: OVE vs. LAX

LAX is defending and this is a street fight. There's no Homicide, suggesting that he was the one down in the back. Santana and Ortiz dive onto the champs to start in a hurry. The brawl splits in two with Jake kicking a trashcan wrapped around Ortiz as Dave and Santana fight in the crowd. Ortiz fights back and grabs a running Liger Bomb off the ramp through a table to basically kill Jake.

Santana climbs the scaffolding as the fans chant about how they can't see anything. A big splash from near the roof crushes Dave through a table and thankfully they're both alive. Back at ringside, Jake fights off a table and pelts a chair at Ortiz's head to save himself. Some chairs are set up in the ring and it's Jake superplexing Ortiz through them, banging up his own back pretty badly in the process.

Santana is back inside and the Street Sweeper onto a pile of chairs plants Jake, only to have Dave come back in for the save. Four strikes to the face give us a quadruple knockdown with LAX getting the better of it. Some ladders and tables are set up at ringside but here's Callihan to throw powder in Konnan's face. He throws Ortiz onto a ladder and piledrives Santana through a table, giving OVE a double pin to retain at 10:21.

Rating: B-. Fun brawl, though they didn't exactly hide the ending. It also doesn't help that OVE was losing a fair fight when Sami came in. That should be a heel turn and given how this company goes, it really wouldn't surprise me in the slightest. Good match though, with the violence being the focus, as it should have been.

Video on Gail Kim. Now you knew they were getting this in there somewhere.

From November 16. As in we're skipping the title win, because that might put some focus on ANYONE other than Gail.

Gail comes out for her speech and Allie comes out as an invited guest. Kim talks about wanting to wrestle eighteen years ago and finding a wrestling school so she could do just that. We get the required YOU DESERVE IT chants, even though no one deserves as much praise as Gail gets around here. She thanks the women who helped pave the way to get her here (Trish Stratus, Lita, Molly Holly, Awesome Kong) and she's at peace with her decision.

She's vacating the title and can't wait to see where things go from here. No interruption, nothing for anyone else and just Gail. I'm so glad she got this one last moment to add to her collection of other moments. There's no denying that Gail is great but this company seems to think she's Austin and Rock combined. Did I miss it when she became the biggest star the company has ever had?

Video on Moose/Stephan Bonnar vs. American Top Team.

Video on Johnny Impact vs. Eli Drake.

And we'll close it out at Bound For Glory. Joined in progress again, but at least we got to talk about Gail Kim and TripleMania.

Impact Wrestling World Title: Eli Drake vs. Johnny Impact

Drake is defending and has Chris Adonis in his corner. Impact avoids a pre-bell jumping and starts fast with a clothesline. The champ bails to the floor so Johnny is right on him with a slingshot dive. A running flip kick off the apron has Drake in more trouble and a backdrop makes things

even worse. Johnny adds a sliding German suplex as Josh says this is the first real test for Drake as champion. Keep in mind that Impact already had a title shot, making Josh sound dumber than usual.

Adonis gets in a cheap shot though and Drake takes over with an elbow off the apron. Drake keeps him outside and throws him into the barricade before choking with a boot. Back in and Drake gets two off a powerslam, followed by some elbow drops. They head outside again with Johnny kicking him in the face, knocking the champ into the post. Johnny's leg hits post though and Drake takes it back inside.

That's fine with Impact, who kicks him down and tries a moonsault, only to get elbowed for his efforts. A belly to back superplex drops Drake and another moonsault gets two. The standing shooting star gets the same as that leg seems just fine after hitting the post. Countdown to Impact misses as we're just waiting on the ref bump/Alberto. Johnny kicks him in the head and goes up again, only to have Adonis offer a distraction.

This time it's Drake running the corner for a superplex and another near fall. They head up at the same time this time around with Johnny scoring with a super Spanish Fly. That's not enough either so Adonis throws Drake the belt. Johnny takes it away though and takes Adonis down, followed by Countdown to Impact for two. The Gravy Train is countered into a Shining Wizard but Drake sends him shoulder first into the post.

They head up again (fourth time) but Johnny kicks him down, setting up Starship Pain for two as Alberto pulls the referee out. That's not a DQ for no logical reason so Johnny dives over the top at Alberto, hitting the referee by mistake. Alberto hits Drake with the belt before breaking a chair over Johnny's head (Who needs PG?). Drake is pulled onto Johnny to retain the title at 19:49.

Rating: B-. Well Alberto looks like a big deal, Johnny looks like a choker and Drake and the title are now somewhere in the top seven or eight most important things in this company. This sets up Johnny vs. Alberto, but we have no one to challenge for the title. I mean, assuming we don't get a triple threat out of this, which would be one of the least interesting things they could do. Alberto is clearly the focus of the

promotion whether you like it or not, but he should be better now that he's away from the horrible LAX feud. The match was good, but it was a long exercise in waiting for Alberto.

Josh wraps things up.

Overall Rating: D+. All this show did was show me how messed up Impact's priorities really are. To recap: we can fit in the entire Gail Kim retirement ceremony and most of a match featuring Shark Boy and Scott Steiner, but we need to clip the main event of the biggest show of the year. Oh and make sure to have that big, long package on the main event of AAA's biggest show of the year because of course. The lack of ANY kind of hype for next week's huge show (a graphic or quick announcement wouldn't have been hard) didn't help either, making this the mess that I was expecting the Best of TNA to be.

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New Column: Rusev Day and

Other Holidays

Even though every day is Rusev Day, there is room for other holidays.

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-rusev-day-holidays/>

Monday Night Raw – July 28, 2003: You Knew This Was Coming

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 28, 2003

Location: World Arena, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Commentators: Jonathan Coachman, Jerry Lawler

We're finally past the final single brand pay per view before it's time for Summerslam and that means the build begins tonight. Last week saw Goldberg come out to face off with HHH so odds are we'll have a title match set up in the very near future. Other than that, Kane is still a monster and there's not much that can be done to stop him. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Linda McMahon's appearance last week, including getting Tombstoned by Kane.

Here's Vince (in a rather hideous shirt) to open things up. He's here to confront Kane's lack of manhood, not because he's a good husband (Vince: "Everybody knows better than that."). Before tonight, everything is going to break loose against Kane.

Booker T./Scott Steiner vs. Christian/Test

Egads these feuds just won't die. Booker and Test start things off by trading some shots to the face until Christian's cheap shot lets the dastardly Canadians take over. Steiner comes in and Test actually runs to the floor to hide. Back in and the push-up elbow has Christian in trouble and a gorilla press makes things even worse.

The reverse DDT gives Christian a breather and of course Test is ready to come in and stomp away. A running clothesline in the corner allows Test to do his own pushups, though Stacy really isn't impressed. The hot tag brings in Booker and everything breaks down with Steiner suplexing Christian over to the floor. Lawler, I guess thinking this is the NWA for some reason, says that should be a DQ.

That confusing idea takes us to a break and we come back with Steiner fighting out of Test's chinlock. Another suplex allows another hot tag to Booker as things pick up again. House is quickly cleaned and Test kicks Christian by mistake, allowing Booker to ax kick Christian for the pin.

Rating: D+. I'm thoroughly sick of both of these feuds but for some reason both just keep going. Test vs. Steiner is likely leading to another big gimmick match but I'm not sure Booker vs. Christian needs to be anything more than over. While this wasn't terrible, it was a pair of feuds that didn't need to continue and for some reason that's what we're stuck with.

We see a clip of the press conference with HHH vs. Goldberg being announced as the Raw main event for Summerslam.

Goldberg vs. Steven Richards

The usual finishes Richards in just over a minute.

Post match, Evolution comes out with HHH talking about how that was an impressive win...against Steven Richards. However, HHH isn't Richards and that's not how things are going to go at Summerslam. Goldberg wants to fight right now but, of course, it's not convenient for HHH right now. Flair tells Goldberg to pay attention so Goldberg is ready to fight Flair instead. The fight is almost on but Bischoff comes out and says we'll do it next week.

Rico vs. Val Venis

Rematch from a few weeks ago where Rico beat Venis on Heat. Rico disrobes to start and it's an early spank for Val. A waistlock just makes Rico bend over as I think you can get the joke. Don't worry if you can't though as WWE will make sure to beat you over the head with it in short order.

Rico flips up to his feet and gets dropkicked in the back, which only seems to set Rico off. A middle rope ax handle gives Rico two and he gets in some right hands to the head as this is going WAY longer than it needs to. Val comes back with a spinebuster and the Money Shot is good for the pin, despite Miss Jackie's failed interference attempt.

Rating: D. WAY too long here (and it was only about five minutes) as there was no need for this match to have any kind of time whatsoever. Rico did his nonsense at first but after that it was just Rico vs. Val Venis for longer than it needed on Raw. I know they need to build midcard characters but they really need something better than this.

Bischoff instructs security on how to handle the arriving Kane. The solution: keep him locked in a van until the time is right.

It's time for the Highlight Reel with Chris Jericho in a great mood after making Shawn Michaels tap out last week. Jericho calls that the first time Shawn ever tapped out, which almost has to be an exaggeration. Anyway, after looking at the clip a few times, here's Randy Orton as the official guest. Orton talks about Evolution loving the Highlight Reel and they even have a gift for Jericho: an Evolution t-shirt. Jericho is touched and would love to give Orton a Highlight Reel shirt but they're all sold out.

Anyway, Jericho asks about the RK0, which he calls majestic. That brings Jericho to the big question though: why did Orton interfere in the match last week? It's not like Jericho needed it you see. Orton says he was trying to make a name for himself and what better way to do it than by killing another legend. Shawn says Jericho is the kind of guy who has made him a millionaire over the years and he's ready to face Jericho one more time right here tonight. Jericho declines and the fight is on in a

hurry with the numbers game getting the better of Shawn. Kevin Nash makes the save and says he'll fight Jericho right now.

Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Nash

Joined in progress with Nash forearming Jericho in the corner but Chris takes the knee out to put Nash down. Jericho stomps away on the bad knee in the corner as the announcers get in every possible nickname they can think of for either guy. Nash comes back with a side slam but Jericho hits him low for a DQ.

Rating: D-. Nothing to see here and it might as well have been attached to the previous segment. I was liking Nash being stuck in the lower midcard but you knew he wasn't going to lower himself down to that point for very long. There was nothing to see here, but you can pretty much guess that it's just a way to advance to another point in the story.

Post match Nash snaps and destroys Jericho, dropping him face first into an exposed buckle to bust him open. Nash does it again but Jericho bails into the crowd before Nash can hit him with the steps.

We look back at the opening sequence.

Hurricane thinks something is wrong with Rosey and wants to know whatsupwithdat. Rosey, the Superhero in Training, said that he was at the airport (must have been with Kevin Nash) today and someone called him a big piece of....yeah. Maybe Rosey can have half a match and a beach towel, but one day he'll have hurri-powers. Rosey tries to fly but goes and sits down instead. This was basically saying "yeah this is still going."

Bischoff yells at the guards for opening the van doors to give Kane some air.

Rob Van Dam has a severe concussion and JR is out of the hospital.

Tag Team Titles: La Resistance vs. Garrison Cade/Mark Jindrak

La Resistance is defending and the Dudley Boyz are on commentary. Jindrak and Cade won a non-title match on Heat to set this up, because the tag division is so deep that you can have the champs lose clean falls. Cade

shoulders Dupree down to start and a second version sends him to the floor. Back in and a double dropkick gets two on Rene and Jindrak hits a regular version to keep him in trouble.

Cade comes in for some right hands as the fans want tables. A hot shot (to the middle rope) cuts Cade off though and the champs take over. The threat of a flag shot brings the Dudleys down for a save and we take a break. Back with Jindrak coming in for more dropkicks and one of the highest backdrops I've seen in a long time. Maybe if he did that more than just dropkick everyone, he could have stayed in Evolution. Everything breaks down and the double spinebuster puts Jindrak away to retain the titles.

Rating: D+. The French guys are rapidly hitting their ceiling but there's only so much you can do when you have the Dudleys and virtually no one else to face. It also doesn't help that your whole characters are "we're French". Jindrak and Cade are fine for some pretty boys, but you have a limited amount of chances with the first name Garrison. Was someone watching South Park and got pressed for a name?

Post match the beatdown is teased but the Dudleys come in for the save. That lasts all of five seconds before some flag shots leave the good guys laying.

Kane is let out of the van but isn't in a good mood.

Women's Title: Gail Kim vs. Molly Holly

Gail is defending after Molly pinned her in a tag match last week. Kim armbars her to start as Lawler goes straight into the "all women hate each other" speech. The rope walk armdrag is broken up as Molly shoves her out to the floor in a heap. It's off to a bow and arrow hold for a few moments until Kim snaps off a headscissors. Some rollups give Gail two and she gets in the required hurricanrana for the same. The top rope hurricanrana is broken up though and the Molly Go Round gives Holly the title.

Rating: D. They didn't have a choice here as Kim was bombing out there as champion. I know she would get better in later years but it REALLY wasn't

working at this point and there's no way around that. Somehow, Kim would never win another title in WWE. You really would think they would have gone back to her at some point but it just never happened. The match was nothing of course and just a way to give us the necessary title change.

Here's Vince to address Kane face to face. Kane is brought out in shackles but Vince wants them removed. They go face to face in the ring with Vince insulting him but then shifting to the idea of having a monster in the palm of his hand. Before he can get too far though, here's Austin to interrupt, giving us that amazing look that only Vince hearing Austin's music can bring.

Austin gets straight to the point: he's continuing as General Manager, which means he can't beat people up without being physically provoked. Therefore, he wants Kane to provoke him RIGHT NOW. Austin insults him a few times and literally sticks his chin out while begging Kane to hit him. Kane backs up instead but here's the returning Shane McMahon to beat Kane up instead. Shane hits some chair shots to knock Kane up the ramp and a big one sends him off the stage. Kane sits up and laughs to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Well that didn't work. With no good matches in sight and almost nothing that makes me want to see Summerslam (at least on the Raw side), this show did little more than make me want to watch Smackdown. Somehow HHH vs. Goldberg might be the most interesting thing on this show and that's really not saying much. Shane vs. Kane makes my head hurt as you have Rob Van Dam, as in an actual wrestler, there to face Kane instead. Really bad show here, which you knew was coming sooner or later.

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NXT – December 27, 2017: Johnny Cinderella

NXT

Date: December 27, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson, Mauro Ranallo

I know I say this a lot but it's a big night around here. This time around we have the four way match for the #1 contendership to the NXT Title as Johnny Gargano, Lars Sullivan, Killian Dain and Aleister Black fight for a shot at Andrade Cien Almas. That should be a nice way to wrap up the year so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Street Profits vs. Chris Star/Riley Apex

Those are some rather jobberish names. Ford and we'll say Star start things off with a shoulder dropping Chris. It's off to Dawkins for some rapid fire high fiving. A corner splash crushes Apex and it's the spinebuster into a frog splash to give Ford the pin at 1:49. Total squash with the only noteworthy moment being Apex having a fitting description of NWO JBL.

The Profits hit the crowd and say they want the titles in 2018. It's not like they're getting anywhere else squashing jobbers so this works.

Women's Title: Sonya Deville vs. Ember Moon

Moon is defending. Deville goes straight for a kneebar but Moon is way too close to the ropes. Back up and they both miss some kicks to give us a standoff. A dropkick puts Deville on the floor for a breather as Moon is seemingly a bit hesitant to follow up. Moon speeds things back up with a dive off the apron to the floor and we take a break.

Back with Deville striking away and grabbing a waistlock. Moon finally sends her face first into the turnbuckle for a breather but can't follow up. Some hard strikes to the chest give Moon two more and a springboard dropkick has Deville in more trouble. The Eclipse retains the title at 10:03.

Rating: C. This was a nice first defense for Moon, especially when no one was buying a potential title change. The Eclipse is still one of the coolest finishers in wrestling and beating someone on the main roster is a good way to make Moon look all the more dominant. There are some big names coming for her though and there's no way around that.

Post match Kairi Sane comes out and motions that she wants the title. Moon agrees but Shayna Baszler sneaks in and chokes Sane out.

Paul Ellering says the Authors of Pain's time isn't over yet and they're coming for the titles.

Moon says bring on all the challengers.

Video on how everyone qualified for the four way.

Next week is a two hour Year in Review show.

In two weeks, Sanity gets their rematch for the Tag Team Titles.

Killian Dain vs. Aleister Black vs. Johnny Gargano vs. Lars Sullivan

One fall to a finish and the fans are WAY behind Gargano here. Black goes after Sullivan to start and a hard shot sends him outside. After moonsaulting into his seated position, Black moonsaults out onto Sullivan....who catches him. Dain takes Sullivan down with a suicide dive and we take a break.

Back with Black kicking Sullivan up the ramp but getting shoved into the barricade. Dain throws Gargano onto Black before loading up the announcers' table. Gargano climbs the set to escape a powerbomb and kicks Sullivan onto the table instead. Dain DIVES off the stage to crush Sullivan through the table and Gargano is stunned.

Black and Gargano head back to the ring and the fans REALLY like this one. The slingshot spear is countered with a hard knee to the head. One heck of a superkick staggers Black into the Gargano Escape but Dain comes in for the save. A backsplash gets two on Black and a powerbomb into an elbow is good for the same on Gargano. Dain heads up but it's a double powerbomb to pull him out of the corner for another big crash. Somehow Sullivan staggers back to the ring to clean house, including a powerslam for two on Gargano.

It's time for another big man showdown and back to back clotheslines put both guys down. Black comes back in and cleans house with the kicks including Black Mass to Sullivan, only to have the Undisputed Era come out to break up the pin. A Last Shot on the floor drops Black until Gargano dives onto Adam Cole. Gargano sends the monsters into the steps and the slingshot DDT gives Johnny the pin on Black at 16:40.

Rating: B+. That's a great way to have Gargano win and to close out the year at the same time. Gargano was basically done a few weeks ago and now he's risen back up the card to become a top player. If you have him ready to win the title and then have Ciampa return to screw him over, the whole thing is pure gold. The battle of the monsters was very good here too and there were multiple ways to go for the winner here. Really fun match though and Black vs. the Era could be very entertaining.

Overall Rating: B. This was a good way to wrap up the year and it was a fun show as well. Taking next week off is fine too as there's only so much you can do with a lack of TV available. They've set some stuff up for the future, which is pretty much NXT's trademark at this point. Good show, very good main event and goals accomplished, which is really all you can ask for.

Results

Street Profits b. Chris Star/Riley Apex – Frog splash to Apex

Ember Moon b. Sonya Deville – Eclipse

Johnny Gargano b. Lars Sullivan, Aleister Black and Killian Dain – Slingshot DDT to Black

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

Appeared on the Universal Chatter Podcast

With two fellow staffers from Wrestlingrumors.net, we break down this year's Best of Awards and debate Jinder Mahal. Check out the show, which has a funny host and a few decent verbal jabs from the guests.

<https://www.facebook.com/wrestlingrumors/videos/1562209503855700/>

Also I'll be starting the 2017 Awards on January 2. This year

will be MUCH better run than last year and I'll have them wrapped up way faster this time around. And on an unrelated note, yes I'll be doing Wrestle Kingdom, which hopefully will be up the day of the show.

Smackdown – December 26, 2017: There Is No Time For Humbug On Rusev Day

Smackdown

Date: December 26, 2017

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

We're still in Chicago to wrap up the year and the big story seems to be finding AJ Styles' next challenger for the Smackdown World Title. We also need to find out what's going on with the United States Title, which was left in the middle of the ring by champion Dolph Ziggler. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to open things up. Before he says much though, we see a clip of Ziggler leaving the title in the ring last week. The title is now vacant and we'll be having a tournament to crown a new champion.

Fans: "RUSEV!" Bryan says the first match is tonight with Baron Corbin facing Bobby Roode but here are Chad Gable and Shelton Benjamin to ask about the Tag Team Title situation. Fans: "RUSEV DAY!"

Shelton says they never got a one on one rematch with the Usos, which of course brings up Rusev and Aiden English being added to the match. They get in the ring and HERE THEY COME! English and Rusev come out with

English singing about why they deserve to face the Usos. English: "Just listen, and we will disclose."

They didn't lose at Clash but more importantly, Rusev Day is the day after Christmas! Gable: "It's Boxing Day!" Rusev: "No you fool. IT'S RUSEV DAY!!!" Now it's New Day with a True False Challenge. Big E.: "Did the team of Chad Gable and Old Jason Jordan get pinned at Clash of Champions?" New Day gets in the ring to dance with Bryan but Rusev, and the RUSEV DAY chants, cut them off. After mentioning Bryan needs Shane McMahon's approval, a triple threat #1 contenders match is made for right now.

Rusev Day vs. New Day vs. Chad Gable/Shelton Benjamin

The Usos come out for commentary and it's Xavier, Chad and English starting things off as we're in the WCW formula again. Chad gets sent into Rusev but everything breaks down with everyone being sent outside. Xavier hits a big flip dive to take the pile down, followed by Big E. powerbombing him onto English for two. Gable German suplexes English and Big E. at the same time (that's not normal) and it's off to Shelton for some stomping.

Rusev comes in for some stomping and more chants in his honor, only to have Big E. run everyone over. A suplex cuts Woods off but English kicks Xavier down. The hot tag brings in Rusev for the house cleaning, including a spinwheel kick to drop Big E. Rolling Chaos Theory takes Rusev down and Woods' missile dropkick gets two on English.

A Rock Bottom/Backstabber gets two on Gable but Woods jumps into a knee to the head. Gable adds a moonsault for two in a good false finish. English blocks another Rolling Chaos Theory and Woods kicks Gable in the head. A quick reverse AA gets two on Gable with Benjamin making the save. Rusev breaks up a Tower of Doom and powerbombs Gable and Benjamin down, allowing English to add a top rope splash for a VERY close two on Chad.

The second hot tag brings in Rusev for a kick to Woods, setting up a double Accolade for the two of them. Benjamin makes ANOTHER save as the false finishes are strong with this one. Big E. spears Benjamin through the ropes but Shelton escapes the Big Ending. One heck of a running knee

staggers Big E. and it's the powerbomb/top rope clothesline to give Gable the pin at 13:51.

Rating: B. Questionable ending aside, that was a heck of a match with some insane false finishes. Gable/Benjamin vs. the Usos should be a lot of fun but at the same time, the fans want Rusev right now. Maybe he wins the US Title, but my goodness they're running a risk of blowing what should be a solid opportunity.

The title match is next week.

Shane McMahon comes in to see Daniel and talks about Bryan saying Shane is becoming Vince. Shane defends his father, which certainly doesn't sound like a speech to make people believe that Vince is a business genius who can totally pull off the XFL II. On top of that, Shane isn't cool with the US Title Tournament because Corbin should get a one on one singles match.

Bryan likes the idea of giving multiple people chances and Shane can go with that. What he can't go with is AJ vs. Kevin Owens (non-title) tonight in the main event Bryan has made. There's been talk of favoritism being shown to Kevin and Sami Zayn, which Shane needs to prevent. Bryan thinks we should finish the year with another entry in a great rivalry. Shane reluctantly agrees.

Breezango vs. Bludgeon Brothers

Ascension got Breezango this match as a present. Breezango goes straight at them, earning Fandango a spinning Boss Man Slam and Breeze a face plant on the apron. Back in and Harper's big boot drops Breeze, followed by an assisted sitout powerbomb for two with Rowan pulling him up. The beating continues but the Ascension runs in to attack the Brothers for the DQ at 2:06.

The Ascension say Breezango aren't ready for an interview but they're ready to challenge the Brothers to a rematch next week. Breezango doesn't look happy.

Video on the Women's Royal Rumble, including the Women's Revolution

history.

Ruby Riott vs. Naomi

Naomi goes right at her to start and hits a springboard kick to the face. Liv Morgan and Sarah Logan offer distractions though, allowing Riott to kick Naomi in the leg. The Riott Kick is good for the pin at 57 seconds.

The post match beatdown is on but Charlotte makes the save. The numbers game gets the better of Charlotte as well though, only to have Tamina, Lana, Natalya (So we're just dropping the turning her back on Smackdown story?) and Carmella make the save. The Squad loses a quick fight and gets chased off. As usual, Carmella shows no interest in cashing in on the downed Charlotte.

AJ Styles talks about challenging himself in 2017. He started the year as WWE Champion and he's ending it the same way. Owens isn't outworking him and AJ is ending the year on a high note.

US Title Tournament First Round: Bobby Roode vs. Baron Corbin

Corbin sends him into the corner to start and hammers away, including some forearms to the chest. A spinning side slam gives Corbin two and he follows it up with a hard running clothesline on the floor. Back in and Roode hits some clotheslines followed by the Blockbuster for his first near fall.

End of Days is broken up and Corbin's slide underneath the ropes only earns him a spinebuster. The Glorious DDT is countered into Deep Six for two more. Corbin takes him up top for a superplex but Roode slips out and shoves him down. He dives right into a chokeslam but counters that into a rollup for the fast pin to put Corbin away at 8:39.

Rating: C+. Nice back and forth match here, though I'm still not completely sold on Ziggler being gone. Roode winning is another interesting call as Corbin, the former champion, seemed to be pretty close to a lock to move on at least to the second round. The near falls were good here and it was an entertaining little match, which is about all you can ask for here.

US Title Tournament First Round: Jinder Mahal vs. Tye Dillinger

Tye sends him outside to start and we take a very early break. Back with Jinder holding him in a chinlock until Tye fights up with the left hands. The Tyebreaker is broken up so Tye goes up, only to have Jinder roll through a high crossbody for two. Jinder grabs a fireman's carry but tosses him up for a gutbuster and another near fall. Tye gets crotched in the corner though and the Khallas sends Jinder on at 5:58. Not enough shown to rate but this is where Mahal should have been seven months ago and a lot of the damage has been done.

Kevin Owens and Sami Zayn have a bottle of champagne to celebrate tonight's win. It's the same bottle that Daniel Bryan wouldn't accept from them but tonight there's no cheating guest referee. After tonight, there's a party which only the two of them are invited to.

Randy Orton officially enters the Royal Rumble. Shinsuke Nakamura comes in to say that sounds like a good idea so he's in too.

AJ Styles vs. Kevin Owens

Non-title with Sami Zayn at ringside. Owens charges into a dropkick at the bell and Styles hits his jumping knee. An early Calf Crusher sends Owens bailing to the ropes and Owens kicks AJ out to the floor in a heap. Back in and we hit the chinlock, followed by a kick to the back as we take a break.

We come back with AJ fighting out of another chinlock but eating a hard clothesline. A neckbreaker on the knee gives Owens two more but the Cannonball misses. AJ wins a slugout with the Phenomenal Blitz into the seated forearm. The Pele drops Owens again but a springboard is countered into a gutbuster.

Owens goes up for a middle rope Vader Bomb elbow for two more as frustration is setting in. There's another neckbreaker to send Owens outside but AJ dives onto Zayn this time around. Another distraction lets Owens superkick him down for two so here's Shane to eject Sami. That means the referee misses Owens getting rolled up, allowing Owens to grab his own rollup for the pin at 16:30.

Rating: B. These two have surprisingly average chemistry together so this was one of their better performances. In theory this sets up Owens as a potential challenger, but odds are the focus is going to be on Shane (again) for reasons that I'm not clear on. You would think AJ Styles and the World Title would be enough but why do that when you can put the focus on the McMahons?

Shane apologizes to AJ, who doesn't seem pleased to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. The first hour lacking commercials didn't do it any favors but this was definitely a solid night with a lot of stuff taking place. You can feel the Ryan Ward influence at times as they knock down so much stuff in a show every now and then. Things should be picking up for the Rumble season and that's a great thing for everyone. Tone Shane way down and you might even have a great show.

Results

Chad Gable/Shelton Benjamin b. New Day and Rusev Day – Powerbomb/Top rope clothesline combination to Big E.

Bludgeon Brothers b. Breezango via DQ when Ascension interfered

Ruby Riott b. Naomi – Riott Kick

Bobby Roode b. Baron Corbin – Rollup

Jinder Mahal b. Tye Dillinger – Khallas

Kevin Owens b. AJ Styles – Rollup

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Monday Night Raw – December 25, 2017: I'm Dreaming Of A... Huh?

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 25, 2017

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

For reasons of "USA Told Us To Do It", WWE presents a three hour Monday Night Raw on Christmas night. As a bonus, the first hour will feature no commercials, because if there's one thing I think of when I watch Raw, it's that there's not enough material. John Cena is back for another one night shot so let's get to it.

Speaking of Cena, here he is to open things up. Actually hang on a second as Cena says there's something that needs to change. Cena goes outside and says someone is wearing the wrong colors. He takes off his hat and shirt and hands them to a kid with some sort of a disability who is wearing his old orange gear. And that is why Cena comes off as a superhero and is just flat out awesome to boot.

That earns a MERRY CHRISTMAS chant and Cena talks about how WWE is like a family. However, he wants to say cheers to the good and bad times, but cheers on a special day like today. Cue Elias to interrupt for his big spot of getting a rub from Cena. John actually agrees to walk with him but they get cut off by a CM Punk chant. Elias: "CM Punk ain't gonna interrupt me."

Cena says we need to have some fun tonight and grabs a chair so Elias can

perform. The lights go down and Elias is about to play but the CM PUNK chants cut him off again. The song starts and of course it insults Chicago so Cena cuts him off and says hit the lights. Cena thinks Elias is the real jerk because he keeps insulting every city he's in.

Elias thinks Cena might be right and offers to do the song again if Chicago will give him a second chance. He sings again and this time sings a rather nice version before handing it off to Cena for "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas". Cena starts off but gets punched in the face for his efforts. Elias goes to leave but comes back to stomp away and challenges Cena to a match right now. A referee is fine with this and we're ready to go.

John Cena vs. Elias

Cena, whose shorts look shorter than usual, gets hammered down to start but grabs a desperation headlock. Elias gets two off a release slam before tying Cena in the Tree of Woe. An Alberto Del Rio top rope double stomp gets another near fall but Cena avoids a second attempt.

Cena gets taken down again though and a Batista Bomb gives Elias another near fall. We hit the chinlock to eat up some more time with Elias even flipping forward to get Cena away from the rope. Back up and a hard clothesline gets two on Cena, which does so well that Elias does the same thing again for the same result.

Cena has to pull himself up using Elias' body, earning himself another right hand to the face for two more. A quick STF has Elias in trouble but Cena doesn't have it in full. Elias crawls to the ropes so Cena tries to grab it again, only to have Elias pop up for a jumping knee to the face.

That doesn't even get a cover as Cena rolls outside before grabbing the STF again. This time Elias makes the rope but the damage seems to have been done. Something like a slow motion Drift Away gets two but Elias takes his sweet time posing. Cena pops up and initiates his finishing sequence. The AA is good for the pin on Elias at 16:08.

Rating: C+. Elias got in most of the offense here and that's all you can ask for him here. No Elias shouldn't have won here as it's just a way to

give the fans a feel good win and there's nothing wrong with that. You have to imagine Cena will be around for the Rumble and he's going to be a favorite so let him have a win to get some of his mojo back.

Cena salutes the kid in the crowd.

Samoa Joe video.

Jason Jordan comes in to see Kurt Angle but Seth Rollins cuts them off, saying he wants to face Samoa Joe tonight. In a repeat of the same thing he does every week, Jordan says he wants his match against Joe. Angle suggests that they team up to deal with the Bar first but neither seems interested. Kurt makes the match anyway and puts the titles on the line.

The two of them leave and Roman Reigns comes in. Angle gives him Joe tonight, with the Intercontinental Title on the line.

Brian Kendrick and Jack Gallagher are in the ring before Kendrick faces Hideo Itami. Kendrick laughs off the idea of being scared of Itami because the two of them are some of the finest competitors around.

Hideo Itami vs. Brian Kendrick

They forearm it out to start with Itami getting the better of it and demanding respect. Back up and a jumping knee to the face gives Kendrick two. We hit a cross arm choke on Itami but he's back up without much effort. The tornado DDT into the neck snap across the top has Kendrick in trouble and a running corner dropkick makes it even worse. The GTS ends Kendrick at 4:00.

Rating: C-. Itami is a great striker but he doesn't have the best fire in the world. Just shouting RESPECT ME over and over isn't exactly going to make him the most popular guy, but at least he's trying. Let him show off more of his strikes and see what he can do and maybe that'll get him somewhere. As it is though, nothing all that special here.

Video on the announcement of the Women's Royal Rumble, naturally with Stephanie getting most of the focus. Thankfully we do get some reactions from some of the women.

Mickie James, Sasha Banks and Bayley run into the very Christmas themed Miztourage. They sing some Miz themed Christmas carols. The ladies bail in a hurry.

Bayley/Mickie James/Sasha Banks vs. Absolution

Paige forearms Sasha in the face to start before it's off to Mandy. Mickie comes in for a running forearm and it's off to Bayley, who gets a heck of a reaction. It's off to Deville who gets in her hard strikes, only to have Bayley take her back into the corner. The fight heads outside with Sonya hitting a heck of a clothesline to drop Banks and take over. The fans are happy to have Paige back in but it's quickly back to Sonya for a hard knee.

We hit a bodyscissors for a bit before the villains take turns beating on Banks. The announcers continue to drool over Mandy (they have good taste) as she knocks Bayley and James off the apron to break up a hot tag attempt. As is so often the case though, Banks shoves her away a few seconds later, allowing the hot tag off to Bayley so house can be cleaned. Bayley starts throwing suplexes and even knocks Deville off the apron for good measure. A Bayley to Belly gets two on Paige as everything breaks down on the floor. Back in and the Rampaige ends Bayley at 10:14.

Rating: C. Absolution winning is the right call and they're starting to establish themselves with more defined characters. I could go for Rose as more than the eye candy character but to be fair, what else is she supposed to do? Paige is a good leader and Deville is made to be the tough one so it's not like the team needs many changes. Then again almost none of this matters until we get to the Rumble but at least the right team won.

We look at Dean Ambrose's arm being destroyed last week. The injury may keep him out up to nine months.

Renee Young isn't happy to interview Samoa Joe, who has no remorse for what he did to Dean last week. Joe is ready to take the Intercontinental Title when Reigns comes seeking vengeance.

Video on Kane and Braun Strowman becoming #1 contenders to Brock Lesnar

at the Royal Rumble.

Kane vs. Heath Slater

Apparently Rhyno got Slater this match to toughen him up a bit. Merry Christmas buddy. Kane takes him into the corner for some knees to the ribs and there's the side slam for good measure. Slater bails to the floor for a breather and a pep talk from Rhyno. As you might expect, Kane throws him right back to the floor and it's time for more pep talking. Back in and Slater's offense is shrugged off, setting up the chokeslam for the pin at 2:13.

Kane goes after Rhyno post match and a quick flurry is cut off by a chokeslam.

Here's Curt Hawkins who has to tell himself to face the facts. 2017 hasn't been his best year but the year isn't over yet. How about a little Christmas miracle tonight? The open challenge is on.

Finn Balor vs. Curt Hawkins

Hawkins grabs a quick rollup for two and gets the same result off the same move. Balor calmly kicks him down and hits the Coup de Grace for the pin at 1:30.

The Miztourage sings to Goldust and throw in a DVD of Santa's Little Helper. Titus Worldwide comes up and Goldust gives them the DVD.

Bray Wyatt talks about how Sister Abigail always hated this time of year. He's ready to face the Woken Warrior because Matt Hardy is surrounded by the fireflies. Bray is here.

Wyatt heads to the ring but Matt runs in and the fight is on. A Twist of Fate misses and Bray bails to the floor. After threatening to DELETE Bray, Matt throws in some maniacal laughter.

The Bar isn't happy with having to defend their titles but they're ready to fight. Sheamus has a gift for Cesaro, including a char containing their catchphrase. The gift: a Dean Ambrose action figure with a missing arm! Cesaro has a gift for Sheamus as well: a Seth Rollins action figure

which Sheamus can break just like the real one tonight. There's more in the box too as Cesaro has gotten him a Jason Jordan figure too. Sheamus: "I don't want this." Cesaro says no one wants Jordan so it's perfect.

Cedric Alexander gets his Cruiserweight Title shot next week.

Enzo Amore/Drew Gulak/Ariya Daivari vs. Akira Tozawa/Mustafa Ali/Cedric Alexander

Miracle on 34th Street Fight but first Enzo (as Santa, with the other two as his elves) has to run his mouth about Cedric not getting a present on Christmas morning. Even though it's a street fight, Daivari and Cedric start things off with Alexander cleaning house in short order. Tozawa and Ali take out Daivari and Gulak with dives as we take a break.

Back with Enzo whipping Tozawa back first into a Christmas tree. Tozawa remembers that he's only fighting Enzo though, meaning the hot tag brings in Ali a few seconds later. The rolling X Factor gets two and there's the 054 for two with Gulak making the save. Enzo's candy cane kendo stick is taken away from him and begging off ensues. Gulak runs into Enzo by mistake, setting up a few stick shots to his back. The Lumbar Check ends Daivari at 7:49.

Rating: D+. So, again, why were they tagging in a STREET FIGHT? The match was about what you would expect here and the wrestling really wasn't all that good. That being said, they did a decent enough job of setting up the title match with Alexander looking strong. This really didn't do much for me though and felt rather forced, which isn't the best idea during a comedy match.

Post break Enzo isn't happy but runs into Nia, now with red and blue hair. It turns out they're underneath the mistletoe and are about to kiss but Alexa Bliss runs in and needs Nia. Enzo doesn't look happy.

Reigns is ready to hurt Joe for what he did to Ambrose last week.

Intercontinental Title: Roman Reigns vs. Samoa Joe

Reigns is defending and punches Joe in the face at the bell. Joe gets

knocked into the ropes and it's the apron boot for good measure. Back in and Joe grabs a belly to back suplex for two but Reigns snaps off the corner clotheslines. A big boot drops Joe again but he's right back up with right hands to take us to a break.

We come back with Reigns getting two off a Samoan drop but getting punched in the face some more. It's already off to the Koquina Clutch but Reigns is just too close to the ropes for the break. Joe takes him outside and the suicide elbow drives Reigns into the barricade. Reigns comes up holding his elbow so we hit the armbar in a logical move. The hold is broken and Reigns unloads in the corner before shoving the referee for the DQ at 12:45.

Rating: C+. This feels like a way to set up a rematch at some point in the future, likely at the Royal Rumble. Joe vs. Reigns is a good feud and it's made even better when you have two people who can beat the heck out of each other. Working on the arm made sense and tying it back to Ambrose's injury is a nice idea. Good brawl here, but it's clear that they're setting up for something in the future.

Post match Reigns beats on Joe even more, including a steps shot to the arm. Joe avoids a heck of a chair shot and looks a bit shaken up while bailing.

Rollins tells Jordan to bring it tonight and Jordan is ready.

The Miztourage is in the ring to sing about their Secret Santa match. I think you know where this is going.

Braun Strowman vs. Miztourage

The goons are thrown around with ease and the running powerslam ends Dallas at 58 seconds.

Powerslam to Axel, powerslam to Dallas, powerslam to Axel.

Here's Alexa Bliss for a chat. She's here tonight to give us the Gift of a Goddess because this has been her year. Bliss has dominated his year like a Jedi from Star Wars (unlike one from the DMV). That brings us to the announcement of the Women's Royal Rumble, which Bliss takes credit

for taking place. Cue Asuka to say she's entering the Rumble because no one is ready for her. Bliss gets kicked down.

Brock Lesnar is back next week.

Tag Team Titles: The Bar vs. Seth Rollins/Jason Jordan

Cesaro and Sheamus are defending. Jordan wrestles Sheamus to the mat to start but the champs take him down with a double hiptoss. Rollins comes in off the hot tag and hits a suicide dive as we take a break. Back with Rollins in trouble as the champs take turns beating him down.

We hit the chinlock for a good while until Rollins fights up with some forearms to Cesaro's head. That's not enough for the hot tag though as it's Sheamus cutting him off. A middle rope legdrop gives Sheamus two and we're back in chinlock. Sheamus gets frustrated at Rollins fighting up again so Seth is sent outside for a clothesline from Cesaro. Jordan actually makes a save, earning himself a hard trip into the barricade.

Seth gets in a few shots but there's no one to tag. Instead it's the Irish Curse for two on Seth, followed by a hard knee to the face for the same. Jordan charges in for a save and the hot tag brings him back in. Everything breaks down and a pair of something like the Demolition Decapitators get two on Jason.

Cesaro unloads with right hands and a Brogue Kick takes Rollins down. The Cloverleaf sends Jordan scurrying over to the ropes and the champs are frustrated. Super White Noise is broken up though and Rollins takes Cesaro out to the floor. Back in, Jordan's wheelbarrow neckbreaker is good for the pin and the title at 15:24.

Rating: C+. Well that was unexpected. I get the idea that it's the first Christmas episode in twenty five years but that's still not exactly something I would have guessed. It's interesting to see where it's going though and Jordan FINALLY has a win, albeit as a tag wrestler again (it's almost like he shouldn't have been moved out of his team in the first place). This is one of those things where I'm going to need more information, but at least it worked at the moment.

Overall Rating: C+. This show was a weird hybrid between a stand alone show that felt like something special and a show that actually advanced the stories. Then again, we have to get ready for the Rumble and they really don't have time to burn off a show, even if it's something like this. Hopefully people actually watched the show, but they're going to be in a stretch to get much of an audience. Not a bad show though and better than I was expecting.

Results

John Cena b. Elias – Attitude Adjustment

Hideo Itami b. Brian Kendrick – GTS

Absolution b. Bayley/Mickie James/Sasha Banks – Rampaige to Bayley

Kane b. Heath Slater – Chokeslam

Finn Balor b. Curt Hawkins – Coup de Grace

Akira Tozawa/Cedric Alexander/Mustafa Ali b. Enzo Amore/Drew Gulak/Ariya Daivari – Lumbar Check to Daivari

Samoa Joe b. Roman Reigns via DQ when Reigns shoved the referee

Braun Strowman b. Miztourage – Running powerslam to Dallas

Seth Rollins/Jason Jordan b. The Bar – Wheelbarrow neckbreaker to Cesaro

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