

Main Event – April 20, 2017: The Main Event Brand

Main Event

Date: April 20, 2017

Location: Schottenstein Center, Columbus, Ohio

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

We're back to the recap show with wrestling attached and odds are that means more Titus O'Neil. Now that one of the main players on this show is now #1 contender to the Smackdown World Title, maybe now O'Neil is ready to take his place. You can almost guess what's going to be on this show so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Curtis Axel vs. Titus O'Neil

Axel gets thrown into the corner but comes right back out and unloads with right hands and forearms. That earns him a big chop to the chest for two and Titus grabs a chinlock. Curtis makes his comeback including a dropkick and the Hennig necksnap for two, only to get caught in a quick Clash of the Titus for the pin at 4:23.

Rating: D. This is the new reality people: Titus O'Neil is being treated as a star on this show. I really don't know why they're pushing this schnook when it's pretty clear that we've reached the apex of his potential, which really wasn't all that good in the first place. Axel continues to languish and that makes me rather sad as he had so much potential.

From Raw.

Here are Miz and Maryse for MizTV. Miz starts talking about the Superstar Shakeup but gets cut off by Dean Ambrose, the scheduled guest, before he can get very far. Ambrose sucks up to the Ohio crowd before ripping on Miz's gear. Miz doesn't want to hear it because he's done everything he can to make the people in that locker room look like superstars while Ambrose makes them look like regular wrestlers.

It doesn't matter though because people love Ambrose, who was #1 pick in the Draft and was WWE Champion at Summerslam. Then Dean

wasted all that momentum when he was on the Kickoff Show six months later. Ambrose doesn't care what he looks like because he loves coming out here in front of twenty people or a hundred thousand.

That's why he's the Intercontinental Champion, which he beat Miz for in the first place. Maryse says the title doesn't make the man so Dean asks her to hold the mic. As Miz goes on another rant, Dean empties his pockets and takes his jacket off before hammering Miz down. Dirty Deeds doesn't work though and Miz and Maryse run.

Again with the Raw.

Sasha Banks vs. Nia Jax vs. Alexa Bliss vs. Mickie James

Winner gets Bayley at Payback. Nia cleans house to start but Bliss bails to the floor, allowing Mickie and Sasha to dropkick Nia outside. Sasha gets the better of it and sends Mickie outside for a dive onto all three as we take a break. Back with Alexa in control until she charges into a slam from Nia.

Jax slams all three on top of each other before swinging Mickie around in a cobra clutch. It's off to a bearhug on Banks with Nia easily suplexing her way out of Sasha's guillotine counter. Mickie armbars her way out of a choke but Nia throws her at Sasha in the corner. Alexa goes up top to try a dropkick but thinks twice when Nia stares her down. A missed charge sends Nia into the post, allowing everyone else to hammer on each other.

The double knees in the corner get two on Bliss with Nia making the save. Mickie gets pulled outside as well and it's down to Sasha vs. Alexa. James has to break up a Bank Statement but here's Nia to knock Mickie off the top. The Samoan drop plants Banks but Bliss runs in for the 13:44.

Rating: C+. The time brings this one down a bit though it was a lot of fun until the end. Bliss winning, especially in her hometown, is a nice touch though they need to stop having Jax get THIS close, only to slip up after dominating everything in sight. It's the right call though as Banks vs. Bayley is still going to be a major showdown one day in the future.

Gran Metalik/Lince Dorado vs. Tony Nese/Ariya Daivari

Dorado climbs over Ariya to start and grabs a sunset flip for two before it's off to both partners. Metalik does his rope walking into a top rope elbow for two of his own, only to get taken down and sent

into the barricade. Back from a break with Metalik in trouble off a neck crank.

Metalik fights up and grabs a tornado DDT to set up the hot tag. Daivari cuts Dorado off with a spinebuster but eats a handspring Stunner. The masked ones get creative with stereo moonsaults to the floor, dropping Nese and Daivari in a big crash. Back in and Dorado is shoved off the top, setting up the hammerlock clothesline to give Daivari the pin at 10:11.

Rating: C. Pretty standard cruiserweight tag which is all you can expect around here. Some combination of about six cruiserweights are always filling in the second match on this show and that gets very tiring. At least the matches are usually entertaining, which is more than you can say for a lot of the Main Event stuff.

We look back at Braun Strowman's amazing destruction of Roman Reigns, including the ambulance spot.

We wrap it up with the end of Strowman vs. Big Show with the ring imploding.

Overall Rating: C-. Very skippable show here as the Superstar Shakeup is just starting to take effect. As is the case 90% of the time, the Raw highlights mean far more than the wrestling, which really needs a shakeup of its own. A few weeks back we had New Day and then Big Cass on some shows. Would it really kill them to let a midcard act show up every week or two? It can't be that hard. Anyway, pretty standard Main Event this week, which could mean different things for different viewers.

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Monday Night Raw – April 17, 2017: That Ambulance Died in Vain

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 17, 2017

Location: Schottenstein Center, Columbus, Ohio

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

Just in case we haven't had enough going on of late, this is kind of a relaunch for Raw as we have a fresh roster at full strength for the first time. In addition to all the new names, the interesting question is will Roman Reigns be here. After Braun Strowman basically killed him last week, it should be interesting to see if he'll be here tonight. If so, WWE is missing a major opportunity. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Strowman destroying Reigns last week, turning himself into the biggest unintentional face on the roster as a result.

Here's Strowman to open things up. Strowman is proud of the beating he gave Roman last week, which saw Reigns have a separated shoulder and cracked ribs. Reigns will NOT be here tonight and that earns one heck of a YES chant. Strowman says he's ready to tear through the locker room but here's General Manager Kurt Angle to interrupt. The boss gets right to the point and makes Strowman vs. Reigns for Payback. As for tonight, Strowman has the night off but Braun wants more competition. That sounds like a threat.

Samoa Joe vs. Chris Jericho

Seth Rollins, who faces Joe at Payback, is on commentary. Joe goes right after Jericho to start but gets dropkicked out to the floor as we take an early break. Back with Joe in control and hitting his chop to the shoulder blades. We hit the nerve hold for a bit, followed by the scoop powerslam for two. The crowd sounds rather

energized tonight, which I'm sure has nothing to do with the lack of Reigns and Stephanie tonight.

Joe misses a middle rope backplash (though his leg landed on the back of Jericho's head), allowing Chris to grab the Walls. That doesn't last long though as Jericho escapes and grabs the Koquina Clutch. Jericho tries the Bret Hart/Roddy Piper counter but Joe turns over and keeps the hold for the tap out at 9:08.

Rating: C+. They're making Joe out to be a killer and that's a great sign for his future. The fact that he just beat Jericho clean by submission shows that there's something to him and WWE knows it. I'd love to see Joe vs. Lesnar way down the line and they've built him as the kind of guy who could give him a run for his money.

Post match Joe says he remembers the night he debuts and the noise the fans made. Joe worked for HHH and since he cares about his clients, he'll take care of Seth at Payback. Seth says of course it was personal and Joe is going to learn that Payback is a b****.

Anderson and Gallows are on the way to the ring when they pass by the Drifter playing his guitar. They'll be facing Golden Truth tonight but Strowman runs Golden Truth over and beats the heck out of them.

Strowman won't leave.

Anderson and Gallows are in the ring with Anderson saying Golden Truth just got the United Airlines treatment. They came here for a fight so get someone out here.

Anderson and Gallows vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

After Enzo calls this the realest night of the week, Cass hammers on Anderson with a right hand to the ribs putting Karl down. Cass keeps things up by throwing Enzo at both bald guys as we take a break. Back with Enzo in trouble (some things never change), including a DDT on the arm and an armbar from Gallows. A spinebuster makes things even worse but Enzo comes off the middle rope with the jumping DDT.

Cass comes in and cleans house with the usual, including a big boot to knock Gallows outside. It takes Cass outside as well though, leaving Enzo to try another jumping DDT. Anderson is ready this time though and catches him in midair before throwing him knees first at the top rope. That's some rather unique offense but it's enough to

put Enzo away at 10:48.

Rating: C-. Well Anderson and Gallows certainly needed the win, especially with Wilder (and presumably the Revival as a whole) on the shelf for a few months. The match was good enough though that ending was a big odd. You would expect Anderson to use that as a setup for the finish but it got the pin so it doesn't make a huge difference.

Video on Mickie James.

Video on Nia Jax.

Here are Miz and Maryse for MizTV. Miz starts talking about the Superstar Shakeup but gets cut off by Dean Ambrose, the scheduled guest, before he can get very far. Ambrose sucks up to the Ohio crowd before ripping on Miz's gear. Miz doesn't want to hear it because he's done everything he can to make the people in that locker room look like superstars while Ambrose makes them look like regular wrestlers.

It doesn't matter though because people love Ambrose, who was #1 pick in the Draft and was WWE Champion at Summerslam. Then Dean wasted all that momentum when he was on the Kickoff Show six months later. Ambrose doesn't care what he looks like because he loves coming out here in front of twenty people or a hundred thousand.

That's why he's the Intercontinental Champion, which he beat Miz for in the first place. Maryse says the title doesn't make the man so Dean asks her to hold the mic. As Miz goes on another rant, Dean empties his pockets and takes his jacket off before hammering Miz down. Dirty Deeds doesn't work though and Miz and Maryse run.

Strowman drags Kalisto through the back and throws him in a trashcan. Big Show runs Strowman over and says pick on someone your own size.

TJ Perkins vs. Jack Gallagher

Neville comes out to watch in what is billed as a special appearance. This brings out Austin Aries for "an even more special appearance". They trade wristlocks to start with Gallagher taking him to the mat and cranking on both arms at the same time. Perkins does a bit of dabbing but can't handle the fact that Gallagher pops up. William III is sent to the floor to Gallagher's dismay but he misses a charge to the floor for a heck of a crash.

Back from a break with Gallagher flipping out of a suplex and grabbing a t-bone suplex of his own. The headbutt sends Perkins outside but it allows Jack to reclaim his trusty umbrella. That means the Mary Poppins dive but Perkins throws Gallagher into Aries. Austin is about to go inside, only to have Neville break it up. The distraction lets TJ kick the rope into Gallagher, setting up the Detonation Kick for the pin at 9:56.

Rating: C+. This is what 205 Live had needed to do for months now: build up some other stop stars aside from just the champion and his #1 contender. Odds are this sets up a tag match, which should be rather entertaining if it's given enough time to go somewhere. I liked this match more than I was expecting to and I'm glad they're giving Perkins more of a push.

Titus O'Neil congratulates Apollo Crews on his impending fatherhood but Titus wants to know how Apollo is going to make an impact. The best idea Titus has is joining the Titus Brand. Maybe Crews could get into travel with the Apollo Cruise where they'll dance to Apollo Blues. If that goes badly, they can go to the new law firm: Apollo Sues. Titus gives him a card but Crews doesn't seem convinced.

The Hardys are glad to be back and look forward to working with the new talent. Sheamus and Cesaro come up to talk about how much they respect the Hardys but it'll be an honor to win the titles from such legends.

Sasha Banks vs. Nia Jax vs. Alexa Bliss vs. Mickie James

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The double knees in the corner get two on Bliss with Nia making the save. Mickie gets pulled outside as well and it's down to Sasha vs.

Alexa. James has to break up a Bank Statement but here's Nia to knock Mickie off the top. The Samoan drop plants Banks but Bliss runs in for the 13:44.

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Show says he'll beat up Strowman.

Finn Balor vs. Curt Hawkins

Coup de Grace finishes Hawkins in 36 seconds. Balor isn't even sweating.

Chris Jericho can't stop thinking about his rematch with Kevin Owens and thinks America deserves a better face. If he wins the title back he heads to Smackdown, but it doesn't matter if it's Smackdown, Velocity, Sunday Night Heat or Nitro: the Friends of Jericho will follow him anywhere. Chris: "You hear them Tom?" Mike Rome: "It's Mike, Chris." We get the Bugs Bunny/Daffy Duck routine as Mike forgets his own name. Chris: "You know what happens when you don't know your own name?" Elias Samson wanders up and plays his guitar so Jericho lets Mike/Tom off the list and puts Samson on instead.

Bray Wyatt asks what we're afraid of. Maybe the unknown? The dark? Or the monster underneath our bed. Fear lives in his house and we hear about how much Bray wants to hear Randy Orton scream. I love Bray but these things are getting really tiresome as there's no reason to believe he has a chance of winning and he'll just keep plugging along like the loss means nothing.

Alicia Fox and Dana Brooke are watching clips from 205 Live when Emma comes up to say Dana was laughing at Alicia getting powder thrown in her face all week long. Fox doesn't want to be Dana's friend anymore. Dana calls Emma out for lying but Emma says that's what she gets for standing on her own two feet.

Jeff Hardy vs. Cesaro

Cesaro takes him down to start but gets sent to the floor for a clothesline from the apron. Jeff seems to be banged up on the floor and gets caught with the running uppercut. Back from a break with

Cesaro getting two and having his chinlock broken in a hurry. Jeff's knee seems to be fine but Cesaro nails him with the springboard corkscrew elbow for two.

Jeff fights up and gets the same off the Whisper in the Wind, followed by the Twisting Stunner, which isn't the Twist of Fate but you can't expect the announcers to be able to really call the moves properly. I mean, it might run them afoul of JBL and that just sounds scary. Anyway, the Swanton is good for the pin at 13:01.

Rating: C. They billed this as a dream match which is quite the stretch, though I do appreciate WWE treating Jeff like a legend. I know it's been nearly ten years but Jeff is a former three time World Champion. You have to treat someone like that as something special and it's a good sign that WWE is doing just that.

Golden Truth and Kalisto are injured but here are Heath Slater and Rhyno, the latter of whom is eating cheese whiz and crackers. Slater is VERY excited about being back on Raw but they both hide when Strowman comes by. Rhyno even dropped his crackers!

Big Show vs. Braun Strowman

The brawl starts in the aisle with Strowman tossing him into the barricade. Show sends him into it as well and we actually start the match. A baseball slide of all things puts Strowman on the floor but he comes back with a running dropkick of his own. Strowman gets in a suplex and drops an elbow as they're moving in very slow motion here.

Show escapes the powerslam and hits a splash in the corner. The chokeslam gets two and Strowman's powerslam is good for the same. Braun gets crotched on top but knocks Show away, only to dive into the KO Punch for two. With nothing else working, Show goes up top but gets superplexed down.....and they break the ring for the no contest 12:36.

Rating: D. Nope. I know the ring breaking spot is going to get a lot of attention but this COMPLETELY missed the point of the match and did nothing to push Strowman. You know who looked good here? Show, who hung move for move with a guy who TURNED OVER AN AMBULANCE LAST WEEK.

We've already established that Strowman, who didn't even win here, can beat Show and be the bigger monster but that wasn't even shown

here. No, what we saw was Big Show getting to prove that he's on equal footing with Strowman, which doesn't make Strowman look unique. That makes Strowman look like he has an equal, which completely misses the point.

Strowman gets up and poses, which I guess is WWE's version of a follow up, to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. This was a bit of a rough one as they certainly did a lot of stuff but the Strowman stuff felt really bad. Beating up Kalisto and Golden Truth and then going to a draw with Big Show doesn't exactly make me think he can beat Reigns or Brock Lesnar (the guy that regularly destroys Show).

The wrestling wasn't great but the show definitely felt like it was moving around at a faster pace, which is an upgrade over some weeks. There's good stuff to be seen here, but Payback is really holding things up. You have one of the new Raw guys being stuck waiting to face the Smackdown Champion in a match he has almost no chance of winning and Jericho teasing going to Smackdown while losing to Joe.

There's enough stuff on here to make me look forward to the pay per view but I'm not wild on some of the directions. Strowman's booking made my head hurt and Hardy vs. Cesaro wasn't the most thrilling thing in the world but I like Bliss getting the title shot and Joe being treated like a monster. Overall though, Strowman was the focus here and that REALLY bombed, but at least Big Show looks like an equal to the unstoppable monster.

Results

Samoa Joe b. Chris Jericho – Koquina Clutch

Anderson and Gallows b. Enzo Amore/Big Cass – Anderson threw Amore knees first into the corner

TJ Perkins b. Jack Gallagher – Devastation Kick

Alexa Bliss b. Nia Jax, Mickie James and Sasha Banks – Samoan Drop to James

Finn Balor b. Curt Hawkins – Coup de Grace

Jeff Hardy b. Cesaro – Swanton Bomb

Big Show vs. Braun Strowman went to a no contest when the ring broke

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Wrestlemania XXXIII

Preview: Smackdown Women's Title: Six Pack Challenge

Maybe the swerve of the night.

With Asuka retaining the NXT Women's Title at "Takeover: Orlando", I have almost no idea who is going to win here. I can't imagine they'll throw Nikki Bella in there again and as much as I'd love to see Alexa Bliss retain the title, I have a feeling we're getting Naomi winning the title again for the big hometown pop, because, and I know I say this a lot, Naomi winning the title is suddenly this huge emotional moment, especially in her hometown.

That being said, I think Carmella actually gets the title here. WWE has a very strong tendency to throw in a major curveball and this seems to be a great option. While I think they'll throw in some names as there's no guarantee that the match will be limited to six, I don't think any of the surprises (whoever they may be) will win the title. I'll take Carmella in the swerve of the night.

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Smackdown – March 28, 2017: Flying Sparks From Mouths and Graves

Smackdown

Date: March 28, 2017

Location: Richmond Coliseum, Richmond, Virginia

Commentators: Tom Phillips, John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga

It's the final Smackdown before Wrestlemania and that means....well likely it means a bunch of promos and a few matches here and there but that's standard operating procedure for this time of year. I'd expect a big push towards Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt and some more names being announced for the battle royal so let's get to it.

No Mauro again, though now we know why (having a severe bout of depression apparently so hopefully he's getting the rest/treatment he needs).

Here's Daniel Bryan to get us going with a contract signing between AJ Styles and Shane McMahon. Shane says this place is supposed to be somewhere families can come and be entertained with AJ as a major part of that. Personal feelings aside, Shane knows AJ is phenomenal. AJ agrees, but Shane keeps going by saying it was AJ's ego that got him in trouble. It was his ego that cost him the WWE Championship

and got inside his head because he wasn't on the Wrestlemania card (I'd think he has a right to be angry over that one).

Shane is ready for him though and knows he'll bring out the best in AJ. The boss signs and AJ reminds him that this isn't going to be a street fight but rather a regular match, where Styles is untouchable. AJ lists off some of the greats that Shane has been in the ring with but none of them were the Phenomenal AJ Styles. The contract is signed and the table is tossed but Bryan stops things just in time. He asks for a handshake and Shane is willing but AJ walks away smiling.

Becky Lynch vs. Carmella

Alexa Bliss and Mickie James are on commentary and James Ellsworth does Carmella's entrance. For some reason Carmella gives Ellsworth her gum and runs away from the threat of a kick to the ribs. As Carmella goes after Becky, Bliss and James get in a fight which spills into the ring. Both of them wind up hitting Carmella and that's a DQ (which will be treated as a no contest because WWE doesn't quite understand the basic rules of wrestling) at 2:13.

Becky Lynch/Mickie James vs. Carmella/Alexa Bliss

Joined in progress with Mickie hitting Bliss with a running dropkick for two. Becky comes in to a nice pop but Carmella tags herself in, sending Bliss into some screeching. Bliss offers a bit of a distraction though and Mickie gets kicked down as the heels take over. Did Mickie ever turn face? She doesn't really need to but it would be a nice plot point to clarify.

Bliss grabs a chinlock but here's Natalya down the ramp as we take a break. Back with Natalya on commentary and Bliss charging into an elbow in the corner. The hot tag brings in Becky, who Natalya calls a Pippi Longstocking knockoff. That's not enough for Natalya as she gets on the apron for a distraction, allowing Ellsworth to trip Lynch up and give Carmella the pin at 9:12.

Rating: C-. This didn't have time to go anywhere but the ending was the right call as I don't think anyone is buying Carmella as a major threat to win the match on Sunday. Have her win here and give her a little momentum going into Wrestlemania and things will be a little more interesting.

The brawl continues post match until Naomi makes her return for the

save. In case it wasn't clear enough for you, Naomi officially announces her entrance into the Women's Title match.

Tyler Breeze, as Nikki Bella, offers his services for the Women's Title match. Bryan says no but Fandango comes in and they get spots in the Andre Battle Royal, plus in a ten man tag with some other participants tonight. Not a bad parting gift.

Here are Miz and Maryse for MizTV. Tonight we get a special treat: the rest of the "lost" Total Bellas episodes (if Miz isn't Bryan this time, I'll be rather disappointed). After a recap of last week, Miz (as Cena) yells about people being late for dinner. Miz has some issues with reading his cue cards until Maryse (playing Nikki) starts talking about the pitter patter of little feet. This brings in the other guests: Maryse as Brie and MIZ AS BRYAN!!!

Daniel, with a huge beard, needs a phone book to sit on and the couple brags about marriage. Daniel isn't happy with having steak but is pleased with his juicebox. Cena reads off the rules for how to eat and, again, it's hilarious given how robotic Cena comes off on Total Bellas. Another fake proposal sees John demand that Nikki take her rules seriously. This time Nikki asks John to marry her and it's to be continued.

Part two is after a break with Cena saying no because it would damage his brand. He's hustled the fans by convincing them he's something he's not. He's loyal to himself and he only respects money. Cena can never give up because someone more deserving, such as Miz, will take his spot away. You can't see him because there's no real person to be seen. Miz and Maryse flip the costumes away and promise to make Wrestlemania their curtain calls.

Without WWE, Cena can just lumber around and pretend to be a star. After Wrestlemania, everyone will know that their lives are total BS. This was great serious stuff to go with the comedy, which isn't a surprise from these two anymore. Back in the arena, here are Cena and Bella to respond. Cena makes fun of everything Miz did and says sure Nikki and Brie have moments where they're too dumb to tell each other apart (the fact that this is considered ok might sum up my entire issue with reality TV).

After the praise, Cena asks how Nikki could hold Maryse out of WWE if she's here now? Maybe Maryse wasn't asked back because she didn't do anything in her first run (What exactly did Nikki do in her first

run John? Maryse had two Divas Titles to Nikki's one and was a far better character and worker. I know why he said it but that doesn't make it true.).

Next we have Miz's Hollywood theory for Cena, but John is more brand loyal than anyone other than Vince McMahon and no one can get rid of him. Miz leaves to make movies of his own but only ones Cena made first. That's what Cena can't get: what is Miz doing here anyway? There's a Women's Revolution going on right now and last week, Nikki beat up Tyler Breeze (Can we never bring that up again?) and Miz is using Maryse to get on Total Divas. Oh and how many kids do Miz and Maryse have? Cena: "You firing blanks there sport?"

Cena calls them all talk because Miz never knows how to stop running his mouth. John rips off the gear so he's here man to man and promises to destroy Miz and Maryse on Wrestlemania. If you want to talk tough, you better be tough but Miz is a p***y. Miz is offered a free shot but the villains back away again. Nikki promises a beating on Sunday to wrap things up.

This was OUTSTANDING stuff and again some of the best talking Miz has ever done. While Miz and Maryse have been nailing the story from the beginning, this was the first time I really bought Cena's rebuttal. Basically Cena had been saying Miz didn't know himself but now Cena actually had some examples to really hammer the point home. I'm looking forward to the match and I'm actually buying Miz and Maryse having a chance, which is a lot more than I was expecting. Nikki beating Maryse would be far more acceptable than Cena beating Miz, but you can probably pencil in the stereo submissions.

American Alpha/Mojo Rawley/Heath Slater/Rhyno vs. Usos/Breezango/Dolph Ziggler

All ten of them will be in the battle royal. Jordan and Ziggler start things off with an amateur sequence on the mat and Dolph is just in over his head. Gable comes in to take over on Ziggler's arm and it's off to Slater for more of the same. Rhyno adds a belly to belly as this is one sided so far.

Back from an early break with Gable getting taken into the wrong corner so Fandango can come in for two off a hard whip into the corner. I know he's a low level guy but maybe an improvement in offense would help. Jimmy dives over to break up the tag but Gable drops him as well, meaning it's off to the (near) hometown boy with

Rawley cleaning house. A parade of superkicks is capped off with Rhyno Goring Ziggler, followed by Rawley's running right hand knocking out Breeze at 11:00.

Rating: D+. Did Breeze run over Vince's dog or something? At least he lost to a power move from a power wrestler this time instead of being beaten up by Nikki Bella. This was a fun way to help set up the battle royal and even though none of these people have a chance, I can appreciate throwing in some false hope.

Luke Harper has seen the truth: he doesn't need Bray Wyatt. Bray should run.

We run down the Wrestlemania card. Naomi is officially added to the Smackdown Women's Title match, which has been moved to the pre-show. As a bonus, the Raw Tag Team Titles match will now be a ladder match.

We see Bray doing....something to Orton with that stick thing last week. Yeah I'm still not sure what that was, though multiple masked men helping him is interesting.

Bray Wyatt vs. Luke Harper

Non-title and Harper is now in a clean black shirt. Dang he really is mixing it up. Bray starts fast with the running body attack but gets dropkicked out to the floor and punched in the face. Harper throws him over the barricade and we take an early break. Back with Luke escaping the release Rock Bottom, only to have Bray block the powerbomb. That means the Rock Bottom can connect, only to have Sister Abigail broken up. Luke gets in the suicide dive and a big boot is good for two. Back up and Bray goes into trance mode, freezing Luke long enough for Sister Abigail to put him away at 8:33.

Rating: D. Yeah I really wasn't feeling this one and I really would have preferred Harper being allowed to get a title shot after a few weeks' build. This could have been something special but it was still the same Bray hypnosis bit (Now I want to watch an Osirian Portal match.) with Harper losing the big match. He's starting to make me think of Cesaro and that's not a good thing.

Post match Orton appears on screen, kneeling over Sister Abigail's grave. Bray has claimed that Abigail gave her powers to him but Orton pulls out the same weapon used on him last week (How did he

get that?) and stabs the dirt. Orange sparks fly out to end the show on a rather dumb note.

Overall Rating: C. This was an acceptable go home show but as is so often the case with WWE, it's all over the place. First of all, you have a classic segment with Cena vs. Miz. Those two have some very underrated chemistry together and I've liked their stuff since all the way back in 2009. I'm not crazy on the mixed tag but they've really brought me around on it.

On the other hand though, WWE slipped on two major matches: the Orton vs. Wyatt match with the really stupid ending and Corbin vs. Ambrose with the really stupid lack of everything. You would think they could at least have a promo (like they had on Talking Smack) but in this case, there wasn't as much that could be cut.

Finally, the Women's Title match being moved to the pre-show is fine and if nothing else it eliminates a bunch of entrances that would take up pay per view time. As great as Alexa has been, I'm fine with them just being on the pre-show as it's not like people are really dying to see this one.

Overall, Smackdown should be fine on Sunday though I'm a bit worried about how well Orton vs. Wyatt is going to go. If they do a hard hitting, back and forth match, everything will be fine and it'll come close to match of the night. If they do something stupid with Sister Abigail appearing...well it might be better than Orton getting the title, though I'm not sure he will. Anyway, fine go home show but Sunday is still a potential big misfire for reasons beyond Smackdown's control.

Results

Carmella b. Becky Lynch via DQ when Alexa Bliss and Mickie James interfered

Carmella/Alexa Bliss b. Becky Lynch/Mickie James – Rollup to Lynch

Mojo Rawley/Heath Slater/Rhyno/American Alpha b.

Usos/Breezango/Dolph Ziggler – Running right hand to Breeze

Bray Wyatt b. Luke Harper – Sister Abigail

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

New Column: Then vs. Almost Now

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-vs-almost-now/>

I know Wrestlemania XXXII was bad, but is XXXIII going to be even worse? Let's look at five arbitrary points!

Smackdown – March 7, 2017: That Old Feeling

Smackdown

Date: March 7, 2017

Location: Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, Indiana

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, Mauro Ranallo, Tom Phillips, David Otunga

We're down to four shows left before Wrestlemania XXXIII and tonight we're likely finding out who is challenging for the Smackdown World

Title. I know you might have heard that one before but this time seems to be the real thing. Tonight AJ Styles faces Randy Orton for the title shot against Bray Wyatt at the biggest show of the year. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Randy Orton joining Bray Wyatt, seemingly with the intent to betray him later. That led us to last week where Orton burned Bray's barn down, presumably destroying Sister Abigail's grave in the process. I know I'm older than the average fan, but in my day, felonious arson recorded on tape wouldn't be seen as a face turn.

Here are Shane McMahon and Daniel Bryan to get things going. They're not sure who should get the title shot as Daniel thinks it should be Orton while Shane prefers Styles. Bryan talks about how the winner of the Royal Rumble has to get the shot. Shane says no one has ever given up their shot like Orton did (Orton would be the third I believe). This leads to more recaps and the fans seem to like the idea of Styles getting the shot. Therefore, tonight we're having a match for the #1 contendership. This too quite a bit longer than necessary.

Post break AJ gets in the bosses' faces and says he's tired of this anti-AJ conspiracy. AJ makes it clear that he's not afraid of fire.

James Ellsworth/Carmella vs. John Cena/Nikki Bella

Before the match, Ellsworth says he beat AJ Styles three times in a row and it took Cena three times to get his first win. That makes Ellsworth the mack daddy of Smackdown! The women start and here are Miz and Maryse at the bell. The distraction lets Carmella get in a superkick and we take an early break.

Back with Miz and Maryse on commentary and Nikki kicking Carmella to the floor. There's the hot tag off to Cena and Ellsworth has to come in. Ellsworth slaps him in the face and gets ProtoPlexed. Carmella gets in Cena's face and eats a forearm, setting up a double Shuffle, stereo AA/Rack Attack 2.0 and double STF's for the tap at 7:11.

Rating: D. This was completely not about the match of course and

there's nothing wrong with that. The idea here is to set up the mixed tag at Wrestlemania and having Cena and Bella dominate a couple of goons in their first match together is fine. This accomplished a goal and that's all it needed to do.

Miz and Maryse lay them out post match with Miz going on a rant about how he and Maryse have been the real first couple of WWE for a year now and it sickens him to see someone pretend to have real love for the sake of promoting their brands. Maryse throws the mic at Bella and we're out.

Orton suggests that AJ run.

Rick Rude Hall of Fame announcement.

Curt Hawkins is in the ring to call out Dean Ambrose for attacking him before their match last week. Ambrose comes out and sends Hawkins packing before saying he wanted to call out Baron Corbin. Baron pops up on screen to say Ambrose should enjoy what he has while he has it. Whenever Corbin wants to, he's taking what Dean values most. Ambrose heads to the back but stops to give Hawkins Dirty Deeds on the floor.

Women's History Month video on Trish Stratus and Lita.

Post break, Ambrose is looking for Corbin.

Mojo Rawley, in a suit, says he wants his Wrestlemania moment. Therefore, he's announcing his entrance into the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal. Dolph Ziggler comes up and says Mojo has to earn that kind of a moment. Mojo: "Is that why you don't have one?"

Dean is still looking for Corbin when Baron jumps him with a pipe to the knee and another shot to the chest. Corbin: "You found me!" Dean: "All right. Good talk!" Corbin kicks him again for saying something that stupid. Baron finds a forklift and lowers the lift onto Dean's chest. Every the geniuses, the referees try to lift it off of him until one of them wakes up and presses the UP button.

Here are Alexa Bliss and Mickie James for a chat. Bliss is here to announce her opponent for Wrestlemania but first, let's talk about who it won't be. It's not going to be Naomi because she's off

feeling the ow. It won't be Nikki Bella, who is in the trainers' room being nursed back to help by her square jawed superman. It won't be Carmella with her weird chin. It won't be Chuckie, who you all know as Becky Lynch.

Bliss has gotten rid of her over and over and she just keeps coming back (I hear Rick Steiner has experience in that area.). Cue Becky to says he has a Beclaration (Becky: "You don't have to call it that. I've done better.") to say she's taking the title back at Wrestlemania.

This brings out Natalya to tell Beaker to step aside. Natalya thinks Becky is out of her and Alexa's league but Alexa thinks Natalya has been getting into the catnip. See, Natalya is the worst there is, the worst there was and the worst there ever will be. Mickie grabs the mic and says Becky and Natalya are ruining this moment.

Of course it's going to be Mickie getting the title shot but Alexa doesn't seem to agree. Becky points out that she beat Mickie twice last week. Alexa: "See...what had happened was...". Natalya calls Mickie ugly and here's Daniel Bryan to break it up. He and Shane heard Alexa call herself the greatest woman on the Smackdown roster and there's only one way to find out if that's true. Therefore, it's going to be Alexa defending against the entire division at Wrestlemania. As for tonight, let's have a holla holla (Daniel's words) tag match.

Natalya/Becky Lynch vs. Alexa Bliss/Mickie James

Joined in progress with Bliss shoving Natalya and getting slapped in the face for her efforts. Natalya does her stepover into the basement dropkick (clearly missed) for two and it's off to Becky via a somewhat forceful tag. Mickie comes in as well and takes a few dropkicks, followed by a Becky nip-up. It's back to Bliss who throws Becky down by the hair for two as JBL wants to know what kind of a match Bliss will be defending her title in (it was never specified).

A quick trip to the floor goes badly for Lynch and we take a break. Back with Lynch still getting double teamed and James grabbing a chinlock. Becky finally throws Alexa away but she opts to

clothesline Mickie instead of tagging out. Natalya doesn't care for this and comes in with a German suplex on her partner (the fans seem surprised that a heel would do a heelish thing) before walking out. Bliss tags herself in and steals the pin at 12:45.

Rating: D+. Nothing to see here but the angle advancement at the end was fine. The title match is going to be a huge mess but you have to expect that at a Wrestlemania. I'd much rather it be Becky vs. Bliss for the title, though that doesn't exactly benefit the rest of the division on a very, very packed show.

Mickie kicks Bliss in the head post match.

We look back at the forklift incident. Ambrose has been taken to a medical facility with possibly broken ribs.

Austin Aries wants us to watch 205 Live.

AJ Styles vs. Randy Orton

The winner faces Bray Wyatt for the title at Wrestlemania. Before the match, AJ says he should be the champ again because he made the B show into the A show. Then you have Randy Orton who burned a man's house down and is getting praised for it. No one is keeping him from being in the main event on the grandest stage of them all and making Wrestlemania phenomenal.

Orton tries the RKO in a hurry but AJ bails out to the floor. Back in and AJ grabs a chinlock before Orton sends him hard into the corner. Styles starts kicking at the knee and Orton falls out to the floor as we take a break. Back with AJ staying on the leg and grabbing a chinlock. Orton pops back up with a full nelson slam for one but gets caught in the Hoshi Geroshi for two.

The Calf Crusher goes on but Orton slowly crawls over to the ropes. Orton comes right back with the hanging DDT but AJ gets sent outside. That looks to set up the springboard 450 so Orton coils, only to have AJ springboard up but drop right back down to the apron in a good fakeout. The springboard 450 misses though and a pop up RKO sends Orton to the title match at 18:45.

Rating: B-. This was a bit more slow paced than you would expect but

Orton winning was the most obvious ending since...well since Cena and Ellsworth were in the same match earlier tonight. Orton vs. Wyatt is the logical move and I'm sure we're going to be seeing Styles vs. Shane (as in the guy who thought AJ should get the spot in the first place). I loved that fakeout spot though as it shows someone thinking in a match, which you just don't see enough anymore.

Overall Rating: C+. Here's a great example of a show that wasn't about the wrestling. Tonight was about pushing stories forward towards Wrestlemania and building interest in them. I had a good time with the show and multiple matches were advanced. There's a good feeling when Wrestlemania season is upon us and I'm getting fired up for the show. This was a good night and I had fun getting ready for Wrestlemania.

Results

Nikki Bella/John Cena b. Carmella/James Ellsworth – Double STF's

Alexa Bliss/Mickie James b. Natalya/Becky Lynch – Bliss pinned Lynch after a German suplex from Natalya

Randy Orton b. AJ Styles – RKO

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Smackdown – February 28, 2017: That Was....A Lot

Smackdown

Date: February 28, 2017

Location: Xcel Energy Center, St. Paul Minnesota

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga.
Tom Phillips

It's a stacked card tonight and I assure you that has nothing to do with the President giving a speech to a joint session of Congress at the halfway point of the show. Tonight we have the fallout from AJ Styles and Luke Harper tying in a battle royal, a two out of three falls match between Becky Lynch and Mickie James and Dolph Ziggler vs. Apollo Crews in a chairs match. Let's get to it.

The bosses are in the back watching a clip of the ending of last week's battle royal. AJ comes in and laughs off the idea of having to face Harper tonight because Harper looks like the hair that clogs the shower. Of course Harper is behind him so AJ bails, leaving Harper to thank the bosses.

Opening sequence.

Here are Miz and Maryse to open things up with MizTV. Miz gets right to the point and brings out his guest: John Cena. However he also cuts Cena's mic and rants about how Cena has cost him ten years of misery. Cena spends all his time manipulating everyone he can find and Miz is sick and tired of it. A brief Cena chant cuts things off before Miz says he isn't just the other guy.

Two weeks ago, Miz was primed to main event Wrestlemania but Cena manipulated him out of the spot. The reason being: Cena is jealous of him. A few years back Cena went toe to toe with the Rock and went off about how Rock had gone Hollywood but now with all the movies and TV shows, we can't see Cena. The fans get in a quick YOU SOLD OUT chant as Miz talks about how Cena is a parody of himself. Miz: "You're not Super Cena anymore. You're barely decent Cena!"

Miz is the one that's here doing the media and making sure Smackdown is must see. Then Cena just comes back and gets a title shot at the Royal Rumble for a spot in the history books. Cena took the glory

away from Ric Flair (I'm still waiting on anyone to talk about Flair taking away Harley Race's glory by doubling the amount of title reigns he had. I doubt we'll be getting that though because NO ONE THINKS FLAIR TOOK ANYTHING AWAY FROM RACE, just like Cena took nothing from Flair.) and now it's time for Cena to talk.

John makes the jokes about how he's heard all of this before and held everyone back. Now it's time to prove Miz wrong though. If Cena was really this black arts manipulator, he would be standing toe to toe with the Undertaker. The fans really seem to like that idea but Cena talks about how half of this crowd, and sometimes more than half, is going to be chanting CENA SUCKS.

No matter what they chant though, everyone knows who Cena is. Miz is someone named Mike who shortened his name on the Real World because he thought it would steal Rock's electricity. Then he stole Chris Jericho's gimmick, Ric Flair's Figure Four Leglock (That was a gift!), Daniel Bryan's offense and the same thing that AJ Styles has been saying for the last six months. Miz is just someone playing someone playing someone playing someone else. If you ask any of the greats, they're just themselves with the volume turned WAY up.

That's why so many believe that Miz is where he is: he's a trend hopping shell of a WWE superstar. Cena says the next time they talk, don't bring a knife to a gun fight because Miz isn't the Undertaker. If he presses Cena again though, he's a dead man. Cena goes to leave but Maryse cuts him off and gets in a slap. Cena starts laughing and says that was the biggest mistake of her life. Cue Nikki Bella to chase Miz and Maryse off. Cena kisses Nikki, which I believe is the first time he's ever acknowledged their relationship on TV.

That's the easy frontrunner for promo of the year and is likely going to be one of the favorites in December. However, odds are this ends with Nikki hitting whatever her finish is on Maryse and Cena hitting an AA on Miz for the stereo pins so Nikki can have her big moment, which is the whole point of this nonsense. With Cena going away again, Miz should get his big moment but no, because we need a Total Divas highlight. At least this was great though and more proof that Miz is one of the most underrated talkers ever.

Becky Lynch vs. Mickie James

2/3 falls. They trade arm work to start until Mickie is sent outside and into the barricade as we go to a break. Back with Mickie in

control until she misses a legdrop. Not that it matters as the MickieDT gives James the first fall at 7:28. We take a second break and come back with Mickie getting two but missing something off the top, allowing Becky to roll her up and tie the score at 12:50 total. The Bexploder has Mickie in more trouble but here's Alexa Bliss to watch at ringside. Mickie misses her spinning kick and gets slammed for no count as Alexa has the referee. Bliss gets kicked off the apron and Mickie grabs a rollup, only to be reversed into the Disarm-Her to give Becky the pin at 14:14.

Rating: C. I appreciated the idea of making this 2/3 falls but it really could have been any regular match. It also doesn't help that about half of the match was lost in the commercials, at least one of which could have been cut. Bliss vs. Lynch in the final blowoff could be a great Wrestlemania match but I can't imagine those two getting the spot on their own.

Harper is around the light bulbs and says after tonight, Bray is going to be very afraid.

Bray says may the best man win tonight. Later this evening, the whole world will hear what he has to say but they'll also hear from Randy Orton. Bray is the keeper of the Holy Grail, meaning the championship.

Alexa is in the back and doesn't want to be asked about Becky because she just became the first two time Women's Champion. After some Oscar references, Natalya comes in and says she's taking the title. Bliss' laughing face is rather amusing.

AJ says he'll win.

AJ Styles vs. Luke Harper

The winner goes to the main event of Wrestlemania. AJ speeds things up to start but eats a running dropkick (not a great one but it was fine for Harper) to put him outside. Harper goes after him and gets caught with a Pele, allowing Styles to start in on the knee. That goes nowhere though as Luke elbows him in the jaw and scores with a slingshot hilo of all things. Styles is sent outside for a suicide shove and the Phenomenal Blitz is broken up with a half dragon suplex.

Back from a break with Harper getting two off a sitout powerbomb. AJ pops right back up and hits the Phenomenal Forearm for the pin at

10:50...but here's Shane McMahon to say not so fast because Harper's foot was on the rope (it clearly was). Harper grabs a rollup for two and they head outside with Harper accidentally superkicking Shane. Back in and the springboard 450 ends Harper at 12:55.

Rating: B. Good match but we were all waiting for the angle stuff which is fine. It's pretty clear that they're going to change something later but I'm not sure if they have time to get everywhere they want to go in four and a half Smackdowns (remember that the go home show is likely to be from Axxess). The story could be interesting and if they manage to avoid AJ vs. Shane, things can get much better.

The decision seems to stand.

Nikki and Cena are in the back when Carmella and James Ellsworth come up. Carmella: "Are you going to let him talk to me like that?" Ellsworth: "Well he's standing right there." Carmella thinks the show should be called Total Phonies so a mixed tag is set for next week.

Dean Ambrose vs. Curt Hawkins

Ambrose charges to the ring and hits Dirty Deeds with no bell. No match of course.

Dean talks about rollerblading during happy hour and learning how burrito bowls and roller coasters don't mix. The most important lesson he's learned is that when you're pushed, you have to push back. That's why he wants to fight Baron Corbin right now. Corbin pops up on screen and says he's not going to do that right now. Dean wants him to hurry up because he only has fifteen minutes left on the parking meter. Baron talks about how Dean is just a speed bump and they'll fight soon.

Apollo Crews vs. Dolph Ziggler

Chairs match so there are a bunch of chairs at ringside. Crews jumps him from behind and takes over to start, followed by a moonsault off the apron. We take a break and come back with Crews hitting a clothesline and enziguri. A standing moonsault onto a chair onto Dolph gets two and Ziggler is sent into a chair in the corner. That's fine with Ziggler who gets in a chair shot to the throat, followed by a crotching onto the chair for the pin at 8:53.

Rating: D. Holy sweet giggling carrots no one cares about this feud

and Ziggler doesn't really get anything out of this. Ziggler isn't anything interesting as a heel and I have no idea why I'm supposed to be impressed by a win over a guy like Crews. Apollo is fine enough but it's not like he's won anything of note. Nothing match and hopefully the end to a bad feud.

Here's Wyatt to talk about the title match. He really didn't care who it was because Wyatt is bringing the evil to Wrestlemania. Wyatt comes from a world of evil and that's where Randy Orton is right now. Orton pops up on screen to say he's been given the keys to the kingdom and that's where he is now.

A few months ago, he said he was going to join the Wyatts but now that he's closer to them, it's time to screw the Family. Orton is in Bray's barn and says Sister Abigail is buried underneath this floor. That means we see a bunch of worms and dirt and Orton is holding a pickaxe. Orton promises to burn Abigail's spirit and take away Bray's power.

The rocking chair next to Orton is swaying with no one in it until he grabs its back...and pulls out a can of gasoline. Orton covers everything with gas and says he's coming for the title at Wrestlemania. He pours more gas into the hold (presumably Abigail's grave) as Bray seems to be near tears. Even more gas is poured out and Orton lights the house on fire. Bray freaks out and breaks down as Orton stares at the camera to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. That ending was a lot and I'm going to need some time to process things. Orton destroying Wyatt like that is certainly interesting and could make for a big Wrestlemania match but I'm not sure if it's the right idea to have Wyatt weakened so much before the biggest match of his life. AJ is of course the wildcard in the whole thing and I'm really, really hoping that the Shane match doesn't happen.

The rest of the show was great and I absolutely loved the opening promo. I know I'm one of its more vocal critics but if Cena and Miz are bringing the talking like that, I can live with hearing Nikki running her mouth about how she's worked SO hard and come SO far to finally make it. The wrestling wasn't the point tonight but you can tell they're setting up everything big for Wrestlemania and that's the most important thing they can do now. Good show, but not for the wrestling.

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Smackdown – February 21, 2017: But It's A Battle Royal!

Smackdown

Date: February 21, 2017

Location: Citizens Business Bank Arena, Ontario, California

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga. Tom Phillips, Mauro Ranallo

It's a double shot tonight as we have a pair of big gimmick matches to get us further along the Road to Wrestlemania. First up it's Natalya vs. Nikki Bella in a falls count anywhere match which should be the blowoff to their feud. Other than that it's a ten man battle royal with the winner getting the World Title shot against Bray Wyatt at Wrestlemania XXXIII. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's triple threat match for the Smackdown World Title and Randy Orton's decision to turn down his title shot against Bray Wyatt.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to get things going. We're forty days from Wrestlemania and the road to get there is full of twists and turns. He brings out Women's Champion Naomi, who has been given a week to either give the title back to Alexa Bliss or face her in a rematch. We actually get the YOU DESERVE IT chants and come on now. Wyatt was a stretch for that but NAOMI? She gets a chant about how hard she's worked to get here? Give me a break.

It turns out that she's injured and isn't going to be able to defend her title. Naomi talks about how life can change in such a hurry because she was on top of the mountain a week ago and now she's looking up from the bottom. She hands over the title and says she's probably out of Wrestlemania as well.

However, she's going to be back to take the title from whomever is borrowing it in her absence. Naomi leaves and here's Alexa Bliss to laugh about the performance. With Naomi gone, Bliss says that she should be the champion since she never got her rematch. Bryan doesn't think so and the title is going to be on the line RIGHT NOW.

Women's Title: Becky Lynch vs. Alexa Bliss

The title is vacant coming in. Becky starts fast with some rollups but gets kned in the ribs and we hit the choking on the ropes. Bliss' basic offense continues until a quick Bexploder sends her outside as we take a break. Back with Becky getting two off a missile dropkick, which of course warrants a crowd reaction shot. Bliss gets in a quick shot to the throat for the pin (while holding trunks) and the title at 9:03 in an ending that is as sudden as it sounds.

Rating: D+. The ending really hurt things here as it just came and went without any real build to it. Bliss winning the title makes sense as this felt like a quick match for the pure sake of giving the title back to Alexa. To be fair, it's not like she should have lost the thing in the first place. At least it's back where it should be now.

Mickie James comes down to celebrate and gets in a fight with Becky.

Dean Ambrose wants his chance to main event Wrestlemania back and if he gets to break Baron Corbin's legs in the process, so be it.

Kalisto wants to be in the main event so tens of thousands of people can chant LUCHA LUCHA LUCHA.

Miz runs down his resume and thinks being in the main event of Wrestlemania should be added.

Natalya is ready to expose Nikki Bella as a fraud.

Breezango vs. American Alpha

Non-title with Breezango jumping them at the bell. A double kick to Jordan's head puts him in trouble. That lasts all of thirty seconds as Jordan gets over for the tag, setting up the Steiner Bulldog for the pin on Fandango at 1:45.

The Usos show up in the crowd to say they're coming for the titles. Just not tonight you see. A lot of trash is talked with threats of jumping Alpha from behind.

Black History Month video on Jackie Robinson.

AJ Styles says he's going to Wrestlemania.

Dolph Ziggler superkicks the wall of the interview set.

Mojo Rawley is ready to win another battle royal.

Luke Harper is done obeying Bray Wyatt and after tonight, there's nowhere left for Bray to run. These promos for the battle royal are a great touch and it's even better that most of them have had a different backdrop (Harper was in the Wyatt area, Mojo was in the locker room, AJ was just backstage etc.). You don't get these enough and they can do a lot of good in the span of thirty seconds.

Nikki Bella says after tonight, Natalya will be the broken Hart.

Nikki Bella vs. Natalya

Falls count anywhere. An early spear puts Natalya down and Nikki grabs her facebuster for an early two. It's already table time (falls count anywhere means No DQ by definition) but Natalya baseball slides it into Nikki's face. They quickly head over the

barricade with Natalya doing You Can't See Me for a nice touch.

Nikki comes back with a shot off the barricade and the Disaster Kick (looked great for a change) to put Natalya down for two. Back to ringside they go with Natalya getting in a few kendo stick shots before loading up the announcers' table. Nikki fights out of a powerbomb attempt and gets in an Alabama Slam onto the table for a close two.

We come back from a break with Nikki getting to the ropes to break the Sharpshooter (which Natalya breaks, causing the announcers to accurately point out that she didn't have to). Nikki no sells a suplex on the ramp and they head backstage with Nikki being sent into a conveniently placed Maryse.

Nikki sends her face first into a mirror for two of her own and it's time to come back into the arena. Natalya can't get the Sharpshooter as Natalya reverses into the Fearless Lock, only to have Maryse come out with a pipe to attack Nikki (really badly that is but at least she tried). Miz drags her off and Natalya gets the cheap pin at 14:02.

Rating: B-. The match had its good and bad moments but I liked it much more than I was expecting to. This was a better brawl than I was expecting and one of Nikki's better matches, likely because it didn't involve a ton of wrestling. Unfortunately it seems that we're really getting that stupid mixed tag at Wrestlemania, even though I can't imagine how they came to the conclusion that it's the best possible idea.

Diamond Dallas Page Hall of Fame announcement.

Baron Corbin says he's winning.

Apollo Crews says he's winning.

Orton and Wyatt will be watching.

Battle Royal

Baron Corbin, Apollo Crews, Dolph Ziggler, The Miz, Luke Harper, Kalisto, AJ Styles, John Cena, Dean Ambrose, Mojo Rawley

The winner get the Wrestlemania title shot. After the long entrances, they waste no time in getting started with Ambrose and Corbin slugging it out in the corner. The fans are almost entirely split between Styles and Cena and you can tell they're way into this instead of not really caring. Cena and Ziggler are both sent to the apron but quickly make it back in. A bunch of near eliminations go nowhere and Cena can't get Corbin up for the AA.

We take a break and come back with Corbin as the only man standing. He tosses Rawley for the first elimination but eats a superkick from Ziggler. Kalisto gets up and starts kicking away until kind of botching what looked like a moonsault press to Dean. Ziggler and Kalisto both wind up on the apron and a pull of the mask sets up a superkick to eliminate Kalisto, getting us down to eight. Crews kicks Ziggler in the head though (DANG he healed from that knee injury in a hurry) and it's down to seven. Ziggler chairs Kalisto though and Corbin tosses Crews, who chases Ziggler off with the chair.

We're down to Corbin, Cena, Miz, Ambrose, Harper and Styles and it's AJ having to flip out of the AA. Almost everyone hits a hard strike and it's Miz in the middle of the ring, meaning it's time for the running corner dropkicks all around. Cena pops up and backdrops Miz out, which is probably a way to keep setting up that stupid mixed tag.

Back from another break with Styles and Ambrose knocking each other down. Cena loads up the Five Knuckle Shuffle on Styles but walks into End of Days. Ambrose tosses Corbin from behind and is quickly pulled to the floor for another End of Days. With Cena staggering to his feet, Miz sneaks in and tosses him, with Cena leaving a bit too calmly.

So we're down to Styles, Ambrose and Harper with Dean getting back inside. All three are quickly put on the apron for a three way slugout with Dean having to hang on very carefully. AJ gets on Dean's shoulders and gets back in, allowing Harper to superkick Dean out to the floor, leaving us with two. Harper stays on the apron and

pulls AJ over the top to the join him but they're both back in a few seconds later. Luke suplexes him to the apron again but quickly follows him out there, only to have Harper pull him out at 22:22.

Rat.... Actually not so fast as the referees say Harper hit at the same time (it wasn't even close and they're not showing replays) so here's Daniel Bryan for a ruling. The official decision is a draw so there's no winner. However, we will determine a winner next week. Harper blasts AJ with the discus lariat and poses to a rather mixed reaction to end the show.

Rating: B. That ending really dragged things down as this was a heck of a battle royal leading up to the finish. Harper winning was the logical call here and I'm really not sure why they went with that double ending. From what I could tell, Harper's feet were either on the apron or the steps when he landed but officially it was a tie. I don't get that.

Wyatt and Orton pop up on screen to laugh at Harper to end the show. That also suggests that there's no reason for AJ to have been involved in the ending like that.

Overall Rating: B-. I'm still trying to get over that ending as it really hurt what should have been a big moment. Unless they're still trying to force AJ vs. Shane (who I don't remember seeing recently) out of this, that should have been Harper winning clean. Still though, the rest of the show was good enough and it was certainly eventful but the Women's Title change and the ending felt somewhere between forced and messy, neither of which are good.

Results

Alexa Bliss b. Mickie James – Rollup with a handful of trunks

American Alpha b. Breezango – Steiner Bulldog to Fandango

Natalya b. Nikki Bella – Pin after a pipe shot from Maryse

A battle royal went to a draw

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Elimination Chamber 2017 Preview

We're two weeks removed from one of the biggest shows of the year and that means we're ready for another major pay per view which will likely change the way "Wrestlemania XXXIII" looks. That's right, it's time for "Elimination Chamber 2017", a "Smackdown Live" show with two matches containing eighteen wrestlers between them. It's a rather interesting looking card so let's get to it.

Kickoff Show: Mojo Rawley vs. Curt Hawkins

It's quite the change to go from a Tag Team Title match to this in the span of two weeks. I'm not sure if this really is the best they can do but it really does show how limited the "Smackdown Live" roster is in some places. This seems more like a match that should set up a tag team later on but for now, we've got the two of them fighting in the battle over who was a better partner for Zack Ryder.

I'll go with Rawley here as he seems to have the bigger upside since Hawkins' character has died a horrible death since having an interesting debut. Rawley could be something with his ridiculous charisma but I don't know if it's going to be enough to carry him past the midcard. At least he's getting a shot here but it's going to take more than the Hammer Time dance. He'll likely win here

though.

Women's Title: Naomi vs. Alexa Bliss

It makes sense to get some of these out of the way as there are three women's matches on this one show. We'll start with Bliss defending the title in a pretty thrown together match, which actually isn't as much of a layup as it seems. I know Naomi is the athletic freak who always seems to come up just short of winning the big one but Bliss seems vulnerable enough for Naomi to finally pull it off.

That being said, I don't think she actually does it and Bliss will retain here. Bliss has turned into one heck of a champion and there are a lot of options to take the title off of her in a really big way. Losing it to Naomi at "Elimination Chamber 2017" really isn't all that big of a deal and I can't imagine Naomi defending the thing at the biggest show of the year. So yeah, Bliss retains in a match that could range from highly entertaining to a horrible disaster.

Kalisto/Apollo Crews vs. Dolph Ziggler

Can someone explain this one to me without making my head hurt very badly? From what I can gather, Crews and Kalisto have beaten the heel Ziggler now but due to him attacking both of them with chairs, they now get to fight him at the same time. You know, the faces getting the advantage over the heel who is supposed to be the one getting the big push out of this.

Somehow though, Ziggler probably wins here and we completely forget about his losses because that's how things work in WWE: nothing matters until the ending, which makes things even dumber than they were in the first place. Kalisto and Crews aren't likely to go anywhere (aside from a big ladder match for the Intercontinental Title) and for some reason WWE still thinks Ziggler is going to be the big deal all these years later. At least he'll retain his title as most overrated and uninteresting performer in WWE.

Nikki Bella vs. Natalya

Now here's the real women's main event because we don't know how

much longer Bella is going to be around for us to call her fearless and stand in awe of her greatness. Again I'm not sure what the story is supposed to be here as Bella has looked like an idiot for not realizing that Natalya attacked her at "Survivor Series 2016" while everyone else knew it. Then there was something about who sells the most t-shirts and a potential wedding to John Cena because EVERYTHING IS ABOUT BELLA AND CENA GETTING MARRIED ONE DAY BECAUSE...sorry this isn't "Total Divas" so we'll move on.

Naturally Bella wins because Natalya is just a wrestler (yeah earlier this week, Bella said Natalya is only a great wrestler. I love that we've somehow reached the point where "YOU'RE REALLY GOOD AT WHAT WE'RE DOING!" is the biggest insult that can be mustered and by a face no less. Bella wins of course and I continue to try to figure out what the heck she's talking about.

Luke Harper vs. Randy Orton

In a way this is one of the more interesting matches on the card, even though there's only one way it could possibly go. It's kind of hard to get behind the concept of Harper having a chance here as Orton is on his way to "Wrestlemania XXXIII" but at least we could get a strong performance out of him, as Harper is so often known to deliver. The idea here of Orton taking Bray Wyatt's attention and Harper turning on the team as a result is interesting but it's not enough here.

So of course Orton wins and I don't think there's an easier match on the show to predict. Orton is on a higher level than Harper right now (and has been for his entire career of course) so there isn't exactly a ton of doubt to this one, nor should there be. If this were at another show with Orton not coming off winning the Royal Rumble, I might be able to be tempted into an upset pick but it's just not happening here.

Becky Lynch vs. Mickie James

We'll wrap up the ladies' trifecta here with a straight grudge match. James says that she was the one who should get the credit for the Women's Revolution while Lynch says James left when things

started getting tough (of course we know that it was really Stephanie McMahon who started the Revolution by just talking about it). This was preceded by James dressing up like a luchadora, which kind of fits her given how off the wall she can be at times.

I think I'll go with James here as I can't bring myself to say WWE will go with Lynch as we head into "Wrestlemania XXXIII". There's a logic to having Lynch fight back and regain the title in Orlando but I have a feeling we're more likely to get a big multi-woman tag or some mess like that instead. Therefore, James wins here and Lynch lives to fight another day, as is the case so often with her.

Tag Team Turmoil

There are so many teams in this match that aren't worth mentioning so I'll just go with the defending American Alpha and their most likely challengers, the Usos. There's just no reason to believe that the other four teams have any real chance of winning so we'll just go with these guys, assuming there's no debuting team added on to the end.

That being said, I'll take Alpha to retain and continue their rather ho-hum title reign. The problem here is the same thing that has plagued so many NXT talents: WWE feels the need to take everything that makes the team work in the first place and then get rid of those things for the sake of...well I have no idea actually. Alpha wins here and prays every night that the Revival is called up and half the roster gets a bad case of the flu.

John Cena vs. Bray Wyatt vs. Dean Ambrose vs. AJ Styles vs. Baron Corbin vs. The Miz

And then there's this, which depends on how much you believe in rumors and dirt sheets. If you buy into them, this is Wyatt's all the way and his match with Orton is pretty much set in stone. If you don't though, you have some options. To get it out of the way, Corbin, Ambrose (already Intercontinental Champion) and Miz are flat out not winning. That leaves us with three viable options.

Cena could certainly retain and go on to face someone at

“Wrestlemania XXXIII”, though I’m not sure who that’s going to be. There’s also the chance of putting it back on Styles, though again, who would he face in Orlando? Cena again? I really can’t picture them going with that.

Given that I write for one, of course I’m going with the dirtsheets and picking Wyatt, which unfortunately means we’ll have to hear JBL’s ridiculous commentary talking about how evil Wyatt is going to be. Anyway, Wyatt winning is the logical choice here but I’m really worried about how the rest of the blue side is going to fall out for the big show.

This is one of the weirdest cards I’ve ever seen and that could mean multiple things. This could be a show where everything is a mess and shows off how horrible the Brand Split is or it could be one of the biggest surprises of the year. The whole thing is built around how well the main event goes and with the talent in there, I can’t imagine it being anything but solid at worst. I’m looking forward to the show but it still doesn’t need to exist.

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Smackdown – January 24, 2017: Why Pretend Otherwise?

Smackdown

Date: January 24, 2017

Location: Huntington Center, Toledo, Ohio

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, John Bradshaw Layfield, Tom Phillips, David Otunga

It's the final show before the Royal Rumble and that means we might be in for a few more announcements for the big battle royal. At the moment, twenty one names have been announced and most of them are from Monday Night Raw. A few more Smackdown names wouldn't hurt anything and could be on the way tonight. Let's get to it.

We open with Miz complaining to Daniel Bryan that he and Maryse don't have their own private dressing room. Miz wants to know what will be done for someone with his star power so Bryan offers to curtain off a stall in the men's room. Bryan gives him a better offer: a rematch for the Intercontinental Title against Dean Ambrose. Miz suggests a No DQ match but Bryan thinks a lumberjack match would be better.

We get a long recap on Randy Orton joining the Wyatt Family and the team's issues since.

Randy Orton vs. Luke Harper

Bray is sitting in his rocking chair and stoically looking ahead. Orton elbows Harper in the jaw to start and they head outside for nothing in particular. Back in and Orton kicks him in the face to set up the elevated DDT. Harper's neck seems to be a bit banged up as they head outside again with Luke kicking Orton in the face.

Bray throws both of them back inside and it's off to a break. Back with Orton fighting out of a chinlock and scoring with a superplex.

Harper grabs his Michinoku Driver and kicks Orton in the face for two, drawing a smile from Bray. Orton gets two off a rollup so Harper tries the discus lariat, only to get caught in the RKO for the pin at 9:50.

Rating: C. This was much more about the angle than the match and I don't think there was much of a surprise with Orton winning. Harper is a talented guy but he has no business going over someone on Orton's level at this point. I wouldn't mind if Harper went out on his own but it didn't go all that well in the first try and he's about the same as he was back then.

Post match Wyatt gives Harper Sister Abigail. The announcers aren't sure if Harper is out of the Family or if it was just tough love.

Recap of last week's cage match and Mickie James being revealed as La Luchadora.

Renee Young brings out Mickie James to explain her actions from last week. She reads off her resume but Renee says that isn't enough. Mickie doesn't like having to explain herself because this Divas Revolution is nonsense. The only person that sees things the right way is Alexa Bliss, who has been fighting against the Revolution since it started. Becky Lynch is nothing special and Mickie would love to fight her anytime. Cue Becky to chase Mickie into the crowd but Alexa jumps her to start the double beatdown.

Last week, Carmella took James Ellsworth on a shopping spree. James wasn't sure about the prices but Carmella insists. First up: pants. Ellsworth starts with jeans but Carmella isn't happy. Various other goofy outfits ensue so Carmella finally takes over with the help of Dante the fashion guy. Eventually it's decided to make him into someone who belongs on Jersey Shore and that's it.

Battle Royal

Heath Slater, Rhino, Tyler Breeze, Fandango, Simon Gotch, Aiden English, Konnor, Viktor, Mojo Rawley, Curt Hawkins

The winner is in the Rumble and Baron Corbin is on commentary. English and Gotch are out in the first five seconds and Mojo punches

Hawkins out next. Slater and Viktor get rid of each other, followed by Mojo helping to get rid of Rhyno and Konnor. Mojo superkicks Fandango out and backdrops Breeze to the floor for the win at 3:15.

Rating: D. This wasn't much but they kept it quick enough that it couldn't cause any problems. Rawley is in a weird spot at the moment as he hasn't done any real singles work in a long time so it's not the worst idea to let him establish himself a little bit here. The match was so short that it's hard to complain so I'll spare you any issues with a three minute battle royal.

Nikki Bella was walking into the arena earlier when she explained that she and John Cena just happened to be next to her on the side of the production truck. Natalya comes up and lays Nikki out.

Here's AJ Styles to call out John Cena. Before he gets there though, he has an issue with the Royal Rumble poster. Cena is up near the front and Styles is almost in the back of a big group shot. Now it's Cena, who looks to have some new gear. Earlier this week, Styles turned on the Today Show and saw Cena as guest host. Cena talked about facing some guy from Atlanta and the incredibly marky host is confident Cena will win. AJ doesn't like being referred to as just some guy and says no one has missed Cena.

John is a sorry excuse for a wrestler so Cena finally goes on a rant about how he's been around for ten years while AJ has only been hot for six months. AJ might have been great on the indies but Cena was built for WWE and gets more done in one day than AJ does in a year. If Styles is so mad about the poster, learn how to Photoshop. AJ is just like everyone else: wanting to be Cena when he just can't do it.

Kalisto vs. Dolph Ziggler

The superkick ends Kalisto in 48 seconds.

Post match Ziggler grabs a chair but JBL stands up, allowing Apollo Crews to really chase Ziggler off.

Naomi vs. Natalya

No match as Nikki attacks Natalya in the back.

Naomi says she wants to fight someone so here's Alexa...to says he won't do it either.

Dean Ambrose says there aren't enough lumberjacks in the world to stop him from beating Miz tonight.

Intercontinental Title: Miz vs. Dean Ambrose

Ambrose is defending in the Rumble. Dean threatens Dirty Deeds to send Miz outside and the lumberjacks pummel him. That's only good for two though and we take an early break. Back with Miz sending Dean to the floor a few times, followed by the YES Kicks. Dean comes back with the top rope elbow for two and it's time for the lumberjacks to beat on Miz even more.

Back in and Maryse grabs Dean's leg, setting up a running knee ala Daniel Bryan (JBL says that's how Bryan won the title at Wrestlemania because JBL isn't as smart as he thinks) for two more. Miz is sent to the floor again and Dean dives on the big pile. The fans think this is awesome as Dean hits the rebound lariat for two, only to have everyone come in for....absolutely nothing because ten guys coming in and attacking both wrestlers isn't a DQ. Dirty Deeds ends Miz at 12:15.

Rating: C+. While I'm not sure this was awesome, I'm sure that the ending didn't make a lot of sense. Like, you can't do a no contest when ALL THE LUMBERJACKS come in at once? It's really that important to have Ambrose pin Miz here? Anyway, the match was fine as these two have chemistry together and that's all that matters.

Ambrose poses to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This wasn't Smackdown's best work as it seems that they're getting ready for everything besides the Rumble. Now in a way I can get that idea as there's only so much hype you can do for a battle royal when your roster doesn't even comprise a third of the lineup and none of your entrants have any real chance. Still though, they did the best with what they had and that's fine enough.

Results

Randy Orton b. Luke Harper – RKO

Mojo Rawley won a battle royal last eliminating Tyler Breeze

Dolph Ziggler b. Kalisto – Superkick

Dean Ambrose b. Miz – Dirty Deeds

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