

HIDDEN GEM: WCW All Nighter #2: A Wrestling Kid's Dream

WCW All Nighter

Date: January 20, 1995

Hosts: Tony Schiavone, Bobby Heenan, Gene Okerlund, Larry Zbyszko, Dusty Rhodes, Gordon Solie

WOW. So this was the greatest thing an old wrestling fan could have imagined at the time: a six hour marathon, counting down the Top Ten Clash Of Champions matches (to date at least), which aired one night as a one night only special. I remember this thing from when I was six years old but I never actually saw the ending as I believe my mom taped over it for some reason. I'm curious to see how this holds up, and to see how it ends. Let's get to it.

Since this is over four and a half hours and the Hidden Gems part is the stuff in the middle, I'll be copying and pasting the most recent versions I have of the actual matches. As usual, these are the full versions in case something is clipped.

Dig that awesome Clash highlight reel opening.

The hosts are in the Omni Hotel in Atlanta and it looks like a party, which is quite the different kind of feeling. The amount of Hogan merchandise on display is a bit nauseating.

#10. US Title: Steve Austin vs. Ricky Steamboat

From Clash #28. Ricky is challenging and wins the title if Austin gets disqualified. We see Hogan being loaded into the ambulance during the entrances. Ricky takes him down with an armdrag as Heenan gets confused by what the DQ rule being waived means. The match is ignored while a stage hand tells the announcers what happened to Hogan. Austin rolls through a

cross body for two but Steamboat fires back with chops.

A pair of dropkicks have Austin in trouble and a powerslam gets two. We go split screen to see the ambulance driving towards the hospital. The Dragon hooks an armbar and gets a pair of twos off a rollup and sunset flip. Back to the armbar as we get a shot of Austin's trunks with the words "Dragon Slayer" emblazoned on them. Austin sends him to the outside but Ricky pulls him down as well for a series of chops.

Back in and we get word that Sting has chartered a plane in Chicago to get to the show and replace Hogan if need be. A cameraman is knocked off the apron and Austin misses a charge into the post. Steamboat stays on the arm by grabbing the wrist, jumping from the apron to the ropes and dropping down to the floor, snapping the arm over the top rope. The Blacktop Bully is still yelling from the front row as Austin takes over with a kick to the side of the head.

A thumb to the eye has Steamboat in trouble and Austin stays on him with punches and chops. We hit the chinlock for a bit before both guys escape belly to back suplexes. Steamboat's middle rope splash hits knees and Austin takes over again. A middle rope elbow (with a pair of middle fingers) gets two for Austin but Steamboat comes back with chops and breaks up a superplex attempt.

Austin knocks him off the middle rope and Steamboat lands on his tailbone, which would be the injury that would force him into retirement soon after this. He's still able to fight up and crotch Austin on the top rope but Steve counters a superplex with a top rope front suplex. Ricky catches him with a fist to the ribs on the way down and you can see him grimace with each move.

Austin sidesteps the cross body and slaps Steamboat in the back of the head for fun. It fires Ricky up though and a series of double chops puts Austin down. An Arn Anderson

spinebuster gets two on Steve and an electric chair drop gets the save. The fans are way into these near falls. They trade rollups for two each with Ricky getting two off a backslide. A hard clothesline stops Steamboat dead and Austin tries to throw him to the floor but Ricky skins the cat. In traditional Steamboat fashion, Austin tries a slam and Ricky counters with a small package for a pin and the title.

Rating: B. It's nice that Steamboat got to go out on a classic like this as he had such an awesome career. These two had some great chemistry and it's really good to see everything work this well for Austin. He likely would have either gotten the title back soon or moved up to the main event after this match but luckily he got a great match out of Steamboat. Good stuff here, as usual.

Tony talks about matches #9 and #8, the latter of which features Dustin Rhodes. Therefore, Dusty gets the chance to talk about how proud he is about Dustin...and something about the Dallas Cowboys.

#9. WCW World Title: Vader vs. British Bulldog

From Clash #24. Vader is defending and loses the title if he's disqualified. The match starts after a break with Bulldog hammering Vader on the ramp. Vader doesn't even have his mask on for this so you know he means business. The delayed vertical suplex drops Vader onto the ramp in a great power display. Bulldog clotheslines him over the top and back into the ring but Vader blocks a splash with raised knees.

The champion hammers away in the corner with the big heavy rights and lefts. They head outside again and Vader misses a splash against the barricade. You would think he would know better after wrestling Sting so many times. Vader gets crotched across the barricade and Bulldog is in full control. Back in and Bulldog lifts him into a fireman's carry for a fall away slam and two. Vader comes back with a HARD clothesline to take over before dropping a huge elbow down

onto the leg.

Bulldog gets caught in a fall away slam as well followed by a top rope splash...for one. Jesse is shocked but the fans don't seem all that interested. Bulldog is whipped upside down in the corner and Vader drops another big splash. Vader hooks a chinlock before trying another fall away slam but getting countered into a crucifix for a close two. Bulldog fires off some right hands but avoids a running charge in the corner, sending Vader down to the mat.

The challenger stomps him down into the corner and Harley Race is begging for a disqualification. Vader gets a boot up and hits the Vader Bomb for two and the crowd is into this now. Bulldog catches Vader coming off the middle rope in a powerslam but the referee gets bumped and there's no count. He lifts Vader up again but Race trips him up, allowing Vader to fall on top for the pin.

Rating: B-. This was a solid power match with Bulldog being strong enough to throw Vader around but still being small enough that Vader's offense looked good on him. The powerslams and big slams looked great with Vader getting thrown around but being able to come back and just destroy Bulldog with hard punches. Very entertaining match.

Gordon Solie shows us a clip from 1987 with long time losers the Mulkey Brothers accidentally beating some masked guys.

We're getting a bonus match from Halloween Havoc 1994...as apparently we're just skipping match #8, which was Dustin Rhodes vs. Vader from Clash #29. Eh here's a bonus.

#8. Vader vs. Dustin Rhodes

From Clash #29. Dustin is a solid midcard guy and Vader is the #1 contender so this should be interesting. The feeling out process doesn't last long as Vader shoves him into the corner and hits a hard shot to the chest before spitting at Rhodes. Dustin just charges at him and takes Vader down to hammer

away. Vader covers up and Dustin rips his mask off before getting a VERY close two off a cross body. A clothesline puts Vader on the floor and another shot to the face knocks him up to the barricade. Dustin lays out Harley Race and waits for Vader inside.

Back inside and Dustin hammers Vader down in the corner before suplexing the big man like it's nothing. Vader has had enough of being on defense and just runs Dustin over. He hammers away in the corner but Dustin avoids a splash and gets another close two off a rollup. Another body attack puts Rhodes down but he comes right back with a powerslam of all things. Vader tries to counter a sunset flip but Rhodes gets away and drives in more right hands. The referee gets a shot in the face so Vader throws Rhodes over the top and to the floor.

Vader brings him back in and runs Dustin over with a clothesline. Two Vader Bombs get two each and Vader is getting even more angry. The referee starts a ten count on Dustin but him getting close to his feet just makes Vader even madder. He goes to the middle rope but jumps into a powerslam to put both guys down. Rhodes nails a string of clotheslines and a Bionic Elbow before a top rope lariat gets two. A middle rope DDT gets another near fall on Vader and there's the bulldog but Harley comes in for a distraction. Vader lays Dustin out and just ends him with a wheelbarrow slam for the pin.

Rating: B+. You saw a preview of this a few shows back in the six man tag but man alive this was awesome. Dustin wasn't going to win the match but he had the fans buying into the idea that he could pull off a miracle. He was throwing Vader around and beating the fire out of him for the first part of the match. That wheelbarrow slam made it even better.

And now the actual bonus match. From Halloween Havoc 1994.

WCW World Title: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan

Hogan is defending in a cage with both careers on the line and Mr. T. as guest referee. Sherri and Jimmy Hart are here as

well and Flair is in the awesome black and white robe (always my favorite). Flair is in red trunks, which almost guarantees a big loss (one of those things that I read once and can never unnotice it). Hogan starts fast by sending him into the corner, followed by the ten right hands. He even goes up top for some choking, which is enough for T. to yell at him.

The chop has no effect and Flair is sent into the cage a few times. Flair gets smart by going after the bad knee and we cut to Sting, with the reflection of the match being seen in his sunglasses for a cool shot. Hogan gets sent into the cage and there's a knee drop to the head. Back up and Hogan sends him into the cage three times in a row, only to have T. yell at Hogan again.

Flair uses the breather to hit a top rope ax handle as Heenan loses it even more. A chop off goes to Hogan and they wind up on the top rope with Hogan choking on the cage some more. Flair goes to the knee again and chops away...with Hogan not having any of it. Hogan rakes the face over the cage and gets two off a belly to back suplex. It's back to the top with Flair going into the cage again but he grabs a quick shinbreaker. Heenan: "OH BABY! Are we going to school???"

Flair starts in with his usual assortment of knee work as Heenan gets more and more excited. The Figure Four goes on in the middle of the ring (Heenan: "COUNT HIS SHOULDERS D*** IT!!!") so Hogan gets fired up (not Hulking up just yet). The hold is turned over for the break but T. gets bumped. Flair hits a belly to back suplex and pulls T. over but there's still no count.

Jimmy pulls Sherri off the cage (getting her skirt off in the process) so she sends him into the steps. Sting pulls Sherri down as well but here's the masked man from underneath the ring to beat Sting up with a pipe. Sherri comes off the top of the cage with an ax handle to Hogan (that was a wild woman), who doesn't seem to mind. Flair gets in a shot to the knee and

Sherri handcuffs T. to the ropes.

With the Masked Man on the side of the cage, Hogan is rammed into the pipe and suplexed again. NOW it's time to Hulk Up and it's a double clothesline to Flair and Sherri. Hogan clotheslines both of them again as Sting, Hart and the Masked Man are all gone. A big boot puts Sherri down (!) and Hogan does the real Hulk Up (he didn't really need it here), setting up the big boot to Flair. Heenan: "NOT THE LEG!!!" Hogan pulls Flair over towards T., drops the leg and retains at 19:25 to send Heenan into tears.

Rating: B+. I was expecting more of the same old Hogan/Flair stuff but they hit another level at the end there and it was rocking in the last five minutes or so. Hogan was trying hard here and it was one of the best matches I've seen him have in years. What matters is it felt big and that's what they were going for. I liked this WAY better than I was expecting to and that's always a nice feeling.

Post match Ali gets to hand Hogan the title before Hogan gets back inside for the celebration. Cue the Masked Man but Hogan catches the pipe shot and hammers away. Heenan thinks it's Arn Anderson but it's....the Big Brother and the fans actually go silent. Brother begs off as Hogan is shocked, allowing Kevin Sullivan and the former Earthquake (I believe making his debut) comes in to beat Hogan down. Heenan dubs Brother the Butcher as Earthquake hits the Earthquake. Cue Sting for the save to chase everyone off.

If this had been ANYONE but Beefcake, they would have been set as this was a very hot angle to end the show. The fans were into it and Hogan sold it as well as I've seen him sell anything not involving Andre. Having Sting under the mask would have made it one of the best angles WCW had done in the pre-Nitro days but as it was, it was just rather good, especially after a pretty awesome main event.

The hosts are happy because Tony has ordered pizza. Now we're

moving on to #6, as I guess COUNTING isn't WCW's strong suit either. No other match is mentioned

#6. Brian Pillman vs. Steve Austin

From Clash #25. Colonel Parker got in Austin's ear and split up the Blonds to set this up. Both guys still have their Hollywood Blond trunks. Brian is already in the ring and jumps Austin to start but both guys are quickly on the floor. Parker's distraction lets Austin take over with a clothesline but Pillman sends him into the barricade to put Austin down. Back inside and Brian throws chops in the corner before taking Austin down with a headscissors. They head onto the ramp with Austin taking a backdrop but being able to block a top rope splash by raising a boot.

Pillman is thrown off the ramp and face first into the barricade. Austin puts him down on the floor again but Pillman comes back in with a slingshot cross body for two. Steve is almost in trouble but lifts Pillman up in a near gorilla press and drops him throat first across the ropes. Pillman hits a chop hard enough to drop Austin to the mat but Steve comes right back with a half crab. Back up and Brian comes out of the corner with a middle rope elbow to the jaw.

Both guys slowly get to their feet and Austin goes up, only to get crotched down onto the ropes. Austin is still able to block a superplex but his top rope cross body is dropkicked out of the air for two. Brian's slingshot clothesline is caught in a powerslam for two. Steve counters a crucifix with a fall away slam but misses his top rope splash. Pillman slips over the top rope to avoid the Stun Gun but Parker breaks up Air Pillman to send Brian face first into the mat, giving Austin the pin.

Rating: B. This was another good story with the partners knowing each other so well that they could counter almost every signature move the other was trying. Parker interfering helps as well by giving Austin the

win due to the only advantage he had over Pillman. It's a shame this team didn't last longer as they could have been something very special.

Larry isn't happy with the next pick, though the reveal is one of my all time favorites (though it's omitted her because WCW).

#5. World Tag Team Titles: Enforcers vs. Dustin Rhodes/???

From Clash #17. Anderson and Zbyszko are defending. Dustin comes out with Barry but Windham is in street clothes. Barry says he can't wrestle tonight (that was announced earlier) but introduces the partner. The partner comes out in a black robe and a huge dragon mask over his face. Dustin goes over and pulls the mask off to reveal.....RICKY STEAMBOAT. The Enforcers go insane and refuse to hand the belts over to the referee. Anderson to Zbyszko: "HE'S JUST A MAN!"

Steamboat and Anderson get things going but everything quickly breaks down with all four guys heading outside. Zbyszko is sent into the barricade and the Enforcers go back inside, only to be dropkicked right back to the floor as the challengers stand tall. Things settle down with Ricky grabbing a headlock before dragging it over to the corner for a tag to Rhodes. The challengers start some fast tagging to work on Larry's arm with Dustin cranking on an armbar.

Arn finally fights back and takes Rhodes into the corner and stomping away to take over. Dustin charges into a knee in the corner and Arn is actually able to hit his top rope forearm to the back (which usually has as good of a track record as Flair coming off the top). Rhodes gets a boot up in the corner and drops Anderson to the floor with an elbow to the head. Back in and it's off to Larry who talks a lot of trash and wants the Dragon.

Steamboat is just fine with that and scores with some martial arts but Larry slaps him in the face and gets Ricky to chase him around. The chase allows the Enforcers to catch Steamboat

coming in with some double teaming and the champions take over. Ricky fights back with some chops to Anderson but Larry comes in to break up a sunset flip. The champions cheat on an abdominal stretch before dropping Steamboat with a belly to back suplex for two.

Anderson ducks his head for a backdrop but gets planted into the mat but Larry prevents a hot tag attempt. Steamboat can't slam him due to the work on his back so Anderson slaps on a bearhug. He takes Ricky down to the mat with the hold for some two counts but Steamboat counters with a bodyscissors. Anderson switches up to a Boston crab and keeps walking it over to his corner. Larry does the same and Steamboat slaps the mat but we're a few years away from that meaning anything in wrestling.

Rhodes gets the tag but the referee is with Anderson to further fire up the crowd. Steamboat comes back with an atomic drop to Arn and they ram heads to put both guys down. Ricky finally crawls over and makes the tag to Dustin and blow the roof off the place. Dustin cleans house with slams all around and a bulldog to Anderson. Rhodes gets knocked into the corner but Steamboat tags himself in and hits the high cross body for the pin and the titles.

Rating: A. Great old school style tag team match here with the Enforcers cutting the ring off and using classic tag team strategy. They did all the tag team spots that have worked for years and they worked here too. Dustin was getting better every single day around this time and putting him in there with Ricky Steamboat was going to make him even stronger.

Larry, Gordon and Gene have wandered off. We go back to 1989 when Ricky Steamboat returned as Mr. X to pin Ric Flair in a tag match, setting off their legendary series.

Another bonus match: from Main Event, July 24, 1994.

Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat

As Tony put it, we have seen their match from Clash #6 so many times that we might as well try something else. Flair lost the World Title to Hulk Hogan a week earlier and has Sherri in his corner. Steamboat takes him down early and immediately complains about a hair pull, as you probably saw coming. They go with the wrestling and take it to the mat as commentary compares Hogan and Flair.

A Sherri distraction lets Flair toss Steamboat over the top so Steamboat goes to yell at her, allowing Flair to get in a knee from behind. Flair hits him in the face a few times and chokes on the apron but Steamboat is back up for the chop off. Steamboat chops away and Flair Flops, setting up a big chop over the top to the floor. There's the backdrop into a dropkick but Flair grabs a rollup with feet on the ropes for a few near falls.

Back up and Steamboat gets in a gorilla press, setting up a chop to the floor and another Flair Flop. Flair hides behind Sherri but gets chopped anyway, only to knock Steamboat out of the air. The referee gets bumped and Steamboat grabs an O'Connor roll, with Sherri getting knocked off the apron. Steamboat slams him off the top and grabs the Figure Four but Sherri comes in. That earns her an atomic drop to the floor (with a great bump) but Steve Austin runs in to jump Steamboat for the DQ.

Rating: B. These two have some all time chemistry so it isn't like they could do anything but great. This was just playing the hits and it was still a match worth seeing, because that is the kind of thing that you can just do. Very good stuff here and the ending was fine as you want to keep both of them strong. Nice job.

Bobby Eaton and Brad Armstrong of all people come in for the save as Austin and Flair run.

David Crockett joins the hosts and reminisces a bit, sending us to some Four Horsemen interviews from 1986. It turns out

that they have a lot of titles and know how to talk like the best of them. Flair losing his mind over anyone, Nikita Koloff in this case, is always worth seeing.

Again, because of counting, we're skipping #4 and moving on to #3. Dusty is excited about this one because he gets to beat up the Horsemen. Somehow Heenan has managed to get some Hogan merchandise censored, which is a rather Heenan thing to do.

#3. World Tag Team Titles: Sting/Dusty Rhodes vs. Arn Anderson/Tully Blanchard

Sting and Rhodes are challenging of course and Dusty is nearing the end of his run with the promotion. Sting starts with Anderson and counters the wristlock in the same way he did to Flair at the first Clash. Arn bails to the floor for a breather and the fans are WAY into Sting here. Back in and Anderson throws Sting to the floor, only to miss a charge into the post. Sting wraps Arn's arm around the post and cranks on it back inside for good measure.

The champions tag to bring in Tully but Sting slams him down twice in a row and tags in Dusty to an even bigger ovation from the crowd. Rhodes cleans house with punches to the face and Blanchard is in trouble in the corner. A big elbow to the head puts him down and Dusty puts on his pretty bad looking Figure Four. The hold is short lived though as a JJ Dillon distraction lets Anderson make the save and send Dusty to the floor.

Sting immediately comes over for the save and Dusty gets back inside, only to take a beating from Tully. Rhodes scores with a shoulder block and a dropkick without much air under it. Back to Sting to take over with a Stinger Splash to Blanchard but Anderson breaks up the Deathlock attempt. The Horsemen drop Sting onto the barricade to stop his momentum and Anderson drives an elbow into his back for two.

A middle rope splash hits Sting's knees but more Horsemen

double teaming stops the hot tag to Rhodes. Tully can't get a sunset flip but Arn clotheslines Sting down to the mat for two. Blanchard sends Sting back to the floor and Anderson gets in a quick DDT on the concrete to knock Sting out cold. Dillon throws Sting back in but the referee is with Dusty, allowing Sting to kick out at two.

A backslide gets the same on Arn but he's able to tag out while still being counted. It's amazing how efficient the Horsemen were at teaming and that's a great example of their skill. Sting catches Tully in a hot shot and now Dusty comes in off the tag. The fans suddenly believe the championships are in trouble and everything breaks down. The referee gets bumped and Barry Windham and Ric Flair run in for the disqualification.

Rating: D+. The fans helped this a lot but it wasn't a great match from a technical standpoint. There was a good chance of a title change here given what happened at the previous Clash, which sets a good precedent for future shows in this series. It's also a good sign that Sting is in another main event here and is being treated like a big deal and threats to titles.

Barry puts Rhodes in the Claw to knock him out and Sting is beaten down three on one.

The pizza guy arrives and explains the idea of pepperoni and sausage. Heenan is asleep and we get a bonus match from Starrcade 1989.

Steiner Brothers vs. Road Warriors

This is the ONLY meeting (that mattered) between two of the biggest tag teams of all time. Why it was wasted on a show like this in an inconsequential tag match is beyond me. These teams are friends at this point. Scott and Hawk get things going with Cornette considering this a battle of idiots. Ross says the fans are in awe as an excuse for them being bored so far. Both guys get big boots to the face in succession so it's

off to Rick for a chance at Hawk.

Hawk hits a BIG clothesline to take Rick down for two before Animal comes in for a double back elbow. Rick comes back with a Steiner Line to stagger Animal and we're at a standoff. Animal tries a bearhug but gets caught in a belly to belly suplex for no cover. Back to Scott to meet Hawk with the bird enthusiast gorilla pressing him down to the mat with ease. Rick has to make the save this time and Hawk is annoyed at his actions. Animal comes back in and gets caught in a few belly to belly suplexes. This is pure power the entire way so far.

Animal comes out of the corner with a hard clothesline so Hawk comes in for an over the shoulder kneeling backbreaker. A release tilt-a-whirl slam gets two on Scott but he comes back with what was supposed to be a middle rope suplex. Instead it was more like Hawk fell flat on Scott's chest and was driven face first into the mat. Back to Animal for a bearhug on Scott followed by a BIG powerslam from Hawk. Everything breaks down and Animal picks up Scott for a belly to back suplex with Hawk adding a top rope clothesline. Animal bridges Scott back but Scott raises his arm to get the pin as Animal's shoulders were down.

Rating: D+. Most of that is for the star power alone. This was a lot of pounding on each other and a SCARY botch on that middle rope belly to belly superplex. The Steiners winning was probably the right move here as they shouldn't have gotten pinned while still being the tag team champions. The Warriors should NOT be wrestling multiple matches in one night though as they already look spent.

Gene knows that everyone is talking about WCW, including in Troy, New York. Let's go there for #2 and an all time classic.

#2. Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk

The only way to win is to make the other man say he quits. Funk offers Flair a chance to leave right now but Ric is ready to go. A quick chop sends Terry out to the floor and Ric is

right out after him with more chops before heading back inside. Back in and they just start choking each other with Funk getting the better of it. A headbutt knocks Flair down onto the apron and they head to the aisle where Funk hammers away even more.

Terry asks Flair if he quits so Flair takes the skin off Funk's chest with a chop. Back in and Terry pounds away at Flair's head and asks him again to no avail. A swinging neckbreaker drops Flair but he grabs Terry's throat and chops away. They head outside again with Ric in control and shoving Gary Hart out of the way. Inside again and Flair demands that Funk quit but he has to watch out for Hart, allowing Funk to get in a cheap shot.

Funk yells at Flair about the broken neck before nailing him with the piledriver. Flair still refuses to quit so Funk piledrives him on the floor as well. Ric won't quit yet and Funk is getting frustrated. He throws Flair back through the ropes and sets up a table, only to have Flair ram him face first into the wood to change momentum. Flair gives up on the wrestling and just dives on Funk before throwing him across the table. Terry gets dropped throat first across the barricade and Ric is starting to take his time.

Back inside and Ric starts in on the leg as only he can but makes sure to throw in some chops for good measure. A suplex puts Terry down but he goes to the eyes to prevent the Figure Four. Flair suplexes him over the top and down onto the apron before finally getting the Figure Four. Funk screams never before finally quitting to end the feud.

Rating: A+. This is an absolutely outstanding brawl with both guys being out to hurt the other. The match was about respect which is much more important than the title. Both guys looked crazy out there and it was almost impossible to believe that either of them was going to ever quit. Flair was a mad man out there though and he's as good as anyone when he hits that level.

Terry shakes Flair's hand like he promised he would and Flair accepts it. Gary Hart is livid and lays out Funk with a cheap shot so here are Great Muta and Dragonmaster (another Hart guy) until Sting comes in for the save. Luger runs in to lay out Sting, setting up the Iron Man tournament at Starrcade. He breaks Sting and Flair's trophies for good measure.

Back in 1985, Dusty Rhodes brought in a gorilla (or someone in a gorilla suit) to deal with the Russians. Dusty's promo about going to Kenya to find the gorilla is great and Tony can barely hold it together. We see Dusty bringing in the gorilla and he has named it Baby Doll #2. Then he brought it back the next week and fed it a banana. Since tomorrow is Mother's Day, he has brought in the gorilla's mama (it has a hat and a purse).

Tony and Gene mess with the sleeping Heenan before sending us to another bonus match. From SuperBrawl II (I apologize for the quality as this is really old).

WCW World Title: Lex Luger vs. Sting

Luger is defending and this was just a formality at this point as Luger was ready to go elsewhere and Sting was ready to be the guy. Also, there was this guy named Vader that had just started working full time. With Luger gone, Sting needed someone to feud with, so he got the biggest feud of his career. Sting doesn't even have music here which is rather odd. This is Luger's first match in about two months other than a match that was taped and won't air until next month at the Japan show.

They have the staredown which is awesome if nothing else. They stand there and stare at each other for about a minute or so. I wonder what they're talking about. FREAKING DO SOMETHING! Hey a minute and a half in we get a shove and then more talking! There's a second shove at two minutes! Ooo a lockup. Ok there's building tension and then there's STUPIDITY.

Sting hits the Splash and of course Luger no sells it because Luger doesn't care about making Sting look credible or anything stupid like that. To be fair though, did he really need to? Just because he can, Sting puts Luger in the rack. I don't think anyone ever did that to him so that was kind of cool. They point out that Sting's cardio is far better and he almost gets the Scorpion but not quite. Luger takes over and they try to cover up his completely not caring at all by saying he's arrogant.

In reality it was that he was just walking through the match without the slightest bit of effort at all. You know, because being world champion in WCW is nowhere near as great as being a midcard joke in the WWF. It turned out he got out at the right time though as Watts took over and ran the company into the ground.

They eventually can't cover it up anymore and say how odd it is that he's just walking around with his hands on his hips. Luger hits his finishing move, the Piledriver, and Sting kicks out to seal how awesome he is. It gets NO pop though as Luger has managed to kill one of the best crowds in company history.

Sting begins his comeback with that odd striking style that he had. Seriously, do you remember anyone having the method of striking that Sting did? Watch one of his matches and notice how he hits and kicks. It's just different looking and I don't remember anyone else ever did it that way. We hit the floor and Luger continues to move very slowly. Coming back in, Sting hits a crossbody to get the pin and the title and a great pop.

Rating: D+. And that's ALL on Luger. This was just completely unprofessional as he was walking around most of the time and making the crowd just be bored. I get that it's your last day, but dude, a little effort isn't going to kill you. Like I said this was just a formality though so it was all about the moment and not the match itself which is fine at the end of the day. Luger was a jerk like always so there's no shock there.

Tony and David throw us back to 1985, where Ric Flair gave Magnum TA a new suit. Well first we need to see the end of Starrcade 1984 with Flair beating Dusty Rhodes and then beating up Magnum in May 1985. Now Flair has a suit for Magnum so he can look like the World Champion, because he'll never BE World Champion. Flair runs to the ring and we have a match.

Ric Flair vs. George South

Non-title and Flair snapmares him down, only to get backdropped out of the corner. Flair backs into the corner but pulls South in and hammers away. They head outside with Flair hammering away even more and a butterfly suplex connects back inside. An elbow gets two and it's time to crank on both arms. Cue Magnum TA to look at the suit as Flair slaps on an abdominal stretch. The Figure Four is good for the fast submission.

Rating: C. Just a squash here but the important stuff is coming in a few seconds. South is an interesting case as Flair was sure he could have a heck of a match with him if given the chance but it never came to pass outside of some quick TV matches like this. Magnum felt like a star though and the showdown seemed imminent.

Post match Magnum takes the suit into the ring and rips it up. Ric charges into the belly to belly and is left laying.

Gene has turned Heenan into a weasel and it's time for the grand finale. There was only one option for this and you should know what it is.

#1. NWA World Title: Sting vs. Ric Flair

Flair is defending and this is Sting's first big match in the main event. Ric is the leader of the Horsemen and has JJ Dillon with him, though JJ will be locked in a small cage above the ring. The much stronger Sting takes the champion into the corner to start as Hervey is flirting with Mullen at ringside. Flair grabs a wristlock on Sting but he easily nips

up to scare Ric back to the ropes. Sting fights out of a top wristlock and Ric bails again.

Ric gets nowhere on a test of strength and chops get him just as far before Sting dropkicks him out to the floor. Back in and Flair tries a headlock but Sting reverses into an armbar as they're still feeling each other out. Ric gets free and runs the ropes but Sting leapfrogs him twice and gorilla presses the champion down. A headlock takeover puts Flair down again as it's been all Sting in the first five minutes.

Flair fights up again but gets put right back into the same headlock. They're clearly taking their time here due to the longer time limit and to conserve energy. The champion gets to his feet for a third time and tries chops in the corner but Sting punches him in the face and hiptosses Flair down. Sting seemed to get poked in the eye so Flair throws him to the floor, only to run right back inside and hammer away in the corner even more.

Back to the headlock and we hit the ten minute mark. Ric gets up and hits a chop that actually takes something out of Sting. It takes so much out that the next gorilla press only lasts for about five seconds. Off to another gorilla press on the champion and Sting actually takes him to the mat for a few two counts. Sting lets him up and tries the Stinger Splash in the corner but only hits the buckles, giving Flair his first opening.

Sting tries to come back with more right hands in the corner but gets countered into an atomic drop to put him on the mat for the first time. Flair takes him to the floor and whips Sting into the barricade before chopping and clotheslining him down in the ring. Some knee drops get a two count on the challenger and Flair throws him back to the floor where referee Tommy Young has to take a chair away from the champion. Sting is sent into the barricade again and the fans are getting scared.

Back in and Sting starts feeling the energy, making him impervious to the chops before hitting a hard right hand to send Flair over the top. Sting misses a charge into the post and injures his arm to really give Flair a chance. Ric takes over back inside and now the wristlock works far better. Well at least it does for a few seconds until Sting nips up again and takes Flair into the corner for more right hands. A clothesline gets two on the champion and a suplex looks to set up Sting's Scorpion Deathlock but Flair is in the ropes at the twenty five minute mark.

Sting is getting winded now but the chops fire him up yet again and a right hand gets two. Ric is barely hanging on and he collapses down, sending Sting flying over the top on a missed charge. He's still on his feet first and back on the apron but Ric snaps his neck across the top rope. Sting pops up AGAIN and hits a top rope cross body for two. It's back to the headlock but Ric picks him up and hits a knee crusher out of nowhere to go for his primary target. Flair sends him to the floor and this time Sting isn't popping back to his feet.

Back in again and Flair goes for the leg even more, picking it apart like the master he is. A belly to back suplex sets up the Figure Four as we've got fifteen minutes left in the time limit. Sting is in big trouble with Flair pulling on the ropes for extra leverage. After several minutes in the hold, Sting is finally able to turn it over and send Flair into the ropes. Flair is up first and tries to suplex Sting to the floor but referee Tommy Young won't let it happen, allowing Sting to suplex Flair back in.

A quick splash hits Flair's knees but Sting is able to come back with an abdominal stretch. Flair hiptosses out with ten minutes left but misses an elbow drop. Ric goes up top but as you can guess if you're a Flair fan, Sting is able to slam him down for another near fall. Sting crotches him against the post and puts Flair in the Figure Four for a change of pace. Ric screams for mercy but FINALLY makes the rope as the

crowd's hopes are dashed again. Sting pounds in more right hands and hooks another hiptoss as he's on pure adrenaline.

More stomping on Flair's leg has the champion reeling so he tries to get himself disqualified, only to have the referee shove him down. Sting sends Flair over the corner and onto the judges' table as JR goes nuts again. We've got five minutes to go as Sting blocks a sunset flip and hammers at Flair's head. Four minutes to go. A big clothesline gets two as Flair gets his foot on the ropes for the break. The Stinger Splash totally misses and Sting crashes to the floor in a heap. Three minutes to go and Sting is back inside.

Somehow forty two minutes haven't taught Flair that chops don't work as Sting makes about his 19th comeback by sending Flair into the buckle. Flair sends him to the floor to kill some time and counters a sunset flip for a near fall with two minutes left. Ric goes up for a cross body but Sting rolls through for another two count. Sting gets all fired up with a minute left and goes nuts on Ric in the corner. There's the Stinger Splash and the Scorpion Deathlock with thirty seconds left. The champion is screaming in agony and somehow holds on for the time limit.

Rating: A-. There's a reason this is the textbook example of a veteran giving a young wrestler the rub of a lifetime. Sting went from a middle of the road guy with potential to a main event star in forty five minutes with Flair walking him all the way there. There's a great story here with Sting being full of energy and power but not being able to close it out and spending too much time throwing punches instead of trying to bring the title home. It's still a great match that doesn't even drag during the long holds at the beginning and the first of many classics between these two over the next ten plus years.

We go to the judges' scorecards and only three are shown. The first two are split, leaving it up to Sandy Scott. Sandy gives it to....no one as it's a draw, meaning Flair keeps the belt.

Tony and Gene laugh at Heenan for being painted like a weasel and he has no idea what is going on. Tony signs us off.

Overall Rating: A. It's kind of sad that WCW is only remembered for the later years of the company because they had some outstanding stuff going on in their earlier years. That was on display here in an awesome mostly complete countdown (seriously, how do you mess up a COUNTDOWN) and all kinds of classic matches. I liked them throwing in some bonuses as well, as you have to fill out that six hours somehow. It was also very nice to see the announcers in a much more laid back environment and just having a good time. I really liked this thing and it's a good example of WCW doing something right.