

Main Event – January 5, 2017: The New Year is Still No Saturday Night

Main Event

Date: January 5, 2017

Location: Amalie Arena, Tampa, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton, Austin Aries

I'm really curious to see if Main Event trolls us like Raw has been doing in recent weeks. I know we'll be seeing some Roman Reigns stuff but that doesn't mean it's going to be any more interesting here. As usual it's going to come down to whatever original stuff they have to offer here and that can be all over the place. Let's get to it.

Ariya Daivari vs. Lince Dorado

So much for this week. Lince flips out of a wristlock to start and sends Ariya outside before grabbing an armbar of his own. Daivari stomps him down in the corner, only to get caught by a spinning crossbody out of the corner. It's too early for the shooting star press though and Dorado is sent head first into the post. The Magic Carpetless Ride (frog splash) ends Dorado at 4:29.

Rating: D+. If they could find two less interesting cruiserweights, I'm really not sure I want to see them. This was a really average match that was pulled down by how dull both guys really are. Neither is interesting but for some reason they both have jobs and regularly appear on TV. I know you need jobbers but could you find someone better for TV matches?

Video on Sami Zayn vs. Braun Strowman.

To Raw for the first time.

Sami Zayn vs. Braun Strowman

Last man standing, meaning Sami is about to die. Sami gets in a jab

and tries some kendo stick shots but Braun just breaks it over his leg. Another stick gets about the same treatment and the moonsault off the barricade is pulled out of the air. A few rams into the post have Strowman staggered until he punches Sami to block the diving DDT. Some clotheslines drop Sami, whose offense is shrugged off over and over again.

Back with Sami being sent off the ramp as the match goes out of the arena, meaning the fans can't see. As you might expect, this earns some widespread booing. Sami finally sends Braun into the equipment cases so Strowman throws him on top of them. Strowman THROWS A CASE AT HIM and thankfully it doesn't cause a bad case of death.

Sami cracks him in the back with a chair as they stagger back into the arena. That just earns Zayn a toss onto the stage, followed by a whip into the screen. Zayn chairs him again and Braun is staggered, followed by a crossbody to put Strowman through some tables for a six count but Strowman is reeling.

Sami swings again but Braun grabs the chair and drags him up onto the ramp in another scary power display. The powerslam on the floor gives Braun a seven so Strowman just unloads on him with knees to the head and right hands. Another powerslam on the floor ends Sami at 15:48.

Rating: B. I had a lot more fun with this one than I was expecting to as they gave Sami all the offense they realistically could. It's also a good sign that Strowman is rapidly getting the hang of wrestling like a monster instead of just standing around and doing power stuff. They beat the heck out of each other here and Strowman selling yet still shrugging the offense off was done quite well.

Sami does a stretcher job but Strowman turns it over.

Back to Raw again.

US Title: Roman Reigns vs. Chris Jericho

Owens is banned from ringside, Reigns is defending and loses the title if he gets counted out or disqualified. The champ runs Jericho over to start as the fans are split on Reigns. A middle rope

dropkick gets two for Jericho so Reigns comes back with his string of clotheslines. Reigns tries the apron dropkick but crashes into the post instead, giving Jericho a near countout as we take a break.

Back with Reigns fighting out of a chinlock and hitting his modified belly to back suplex for two. The Superman Punch is blocked but the Lionsault hits knees. The other finishers are broken up until Jericho grabs the Walls. That lasts as long as you would expect the Walls to last until Jericho goes up top again, only to dive into the Superman Punch for a near fall.

Another spear is broken up and Jericho takes off a turnbuckle pad. That sets up the old Eddie Guerrero grab the belt and pretend to get hit with it spot. The referee doesn't buy it so instead the Codebreaker gets two. Jericho goes into the exposed buckle and the spear retains the title at 13:06.

Rating: C+. The ending actually deflated me and that's not a good thing about the top face on a show. There's just no reason for Reigns to keep the title at this point and everyone has to know it at this point. He's not helping the title and he doesn't gain anything by holding it so why keep doing it this way? I mean, other than as a middle finger to the fans who want ANYONE else to hold the title.

Bo Dallas/Darren Young vs. Shining Stars

Epico and Young hit the mat to start before it's already off to Primo, who walks into a string of slams. A fired up Dallas runs Primo over on the floor and we take a break. Back with Dallas screaming at us to believe in him, allowing the cousins to take over. We get what sounds like a JOBBERS chant as Primo starts in on the arm. A slingshot legdrop sets up another armbar as Aries suggests a thumb to the eye. Dallas collides with Primo and winds up on the floor as everything breaks down. Primo grabs a rollup on Young and pulls the trunks for the pin at 10:12.

Rating: D. I liked Dallas' fire but then again I like almost anything he does out there. The Shining Stars are starting to remind me of Lance Storm: they might be technically sound but that doesn't

mean I have any interest in watching what they're doing. Young continues to be a warm body and that's why he's still on Main Event. One more Raw segment to wrap us up.

It's time for the Kevin Owens Show with a lawn chair, a table and a man standing in place with a sign over his face. Owens introduces Jericho as his first guest and he's not happy. See, the fans were chanting for Goldberg just a few minutes ago and that means TAMPA JUST MADE THE LIST.

Jericho has breaking news: he's the third (sixth) entrant in the Royal Rumble! Owens isn't pleased but Jericho says no matter what happens, they're still the champ. Kevin still doesn't want to do it but he gets cut off by Goldberg's full entrance. Goldberg throws the chair out of the ring and Jericho isn't impressed. Jericho: "You know what happens when you destroy the set?" Goldberg: "YEAH! Spear, Jackhammer."

Owens throws out the rest of the set and the brawl is teased until Paul Heyman breaks it up. He says the Rumble will be elimination, repeat, elimination, repeat but Roman Reigns interrupts as well. That brings Reigns to Lesnar but now it's Braun coming out to take the mic from a cowering Heyman. Owens and Jericho bail to the floor and Strowman is in the Rumble too. A double spear drops Strowman and posing ends the show.

Overall Rating: D. What exactly were you expecting out of this one? The show was another slog through the disaster that Raw has become with some very lame original matches to go with it. I really wasn't feeling this one and I have no idea why I'd want to keep watching this show if it wasn't so quick with all the recaps.

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205 Live – December 27, 2016: I Think They're On To Something

205 Live

Date: December 27, 2016

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Austin Aries, Corey Graves, Mauro Ranallo

We're starting to get in a groove around here and that's the best thing that can happen for a show that has only been around about a month. Tonight's big match is a non-title showdown (which WWE has gone out of its way to make seem like a title match) between Rich Swann and Neville, the latter of whom is likely to become #1 contender should he win. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Neville's heel turn and subsequent path of rage.

Opening sequence.

Cedric Alexander vs. Tony Nese

Alicia Fox and Drew Gulak are the seconds. Nese powers him up to start but Alexander moonsaults into a headscissors, followed by a dropkick to the chicklets (as Mauro called them). A big throw puts Cedric on the floor and Tony's missile dropkick gets two back inside. The showing off continues as Nese drops down and nips up to avoid a clothesline, leaving Alicia to play cheerleader.

We hit a chinlock for a bit before Cedric speeds things up with a Tajiri handspring elbow into a kick to the head. That means it's time for Gulak and Fox to get into the required argument, capped off

by Drew hitting the ground and claiming Alicia shoved him (she never touched him). The referee actually ejects her, allowing Nese to palm strike Cedric for the pin at 6:04.

Rating: C. Alexander is one of those guys who has grown on me so much since he's been in WWE. The twenty pound weight loss has done him a lot of good, though some of that might have to do with getting away from Ring of Honor and the really stupid Veda Scott story. Nese is being built up in a nice way too, which is what we need around this show.

Noam Dar brings some mistletoe for Alicia, earning himself a slap to the face. Dar tries again and gets slapped a second time, though he doesn't seem to mind.

Earlier today Renee Young sat down with Neville, who doesn't like being left out of the Cruiserweight Classic. WWE and Americans in general are intimidated by his greatness. When he was in Japan, Swann was his young boy and Neville isn't putting up with him here. Renee can't understand what he says at the end and that's enough of this interview.

Mustafa Ali vs. John Yurnet

Yurnet is better known as Mr. 450 and has been on NXT a few times. John seems to get injured early on with his right leg looking immobile in a hurry. He's willing to keep going though and tries a sunset flip but the referee insists on checking it out. Ali hits a quick reverse DDT and finishes with an inverted 450 at 2:12. The finisher looked cool but it's clear that Yurnet wasn't wrestling at 100% here.

Post match Mustafa says he's from Chicago and isn't going to let all the prejudice against him define things. All he's going to do is keep racking up wins and let those speak for themselves. Simple, yet effective.

Video on Ariya Daivari, who is certainly a scoundrel and thinks nothing of Jack Gallagher.

It's time for the gentleman's duel, which I don't think counts as a match. Gallagher comes out in a suit while Daivari is wearing gear. There's a table with some flowers and various weapons in the ring. Gallagher lists off some weapons, almost all of which can be found in a game of Clue, plus an umbrella and a teapot. Daivari picks the

lead pipe but Gallagher will fight with an umbrella.

We're not ready to go yet as Jack insists on standing back to back and taking five paces. Daivari tries to cheat but Gallagher knows it's coming and proceeds to use the umbrella for a low blow and a leg trip. Gallagher shrugs off a beating and hits his running corner dropkick to send Daivari running. If Daivari had ANY personality, this would be really entertaining. As it is, it's just something else to add to the highlight reel for when Gallagher becomes a star.

Tajiri is back next week.

Rich Swann vs. Neville

Non-title and Swann doesn't even dance when he gets to the ring. Rich goes right after him to start and takes the fight to the floor for a right hand to Neville's jaw. A dropkick frustrates Neville as we hear about Swann being Neville's young boy in Japan. Neville gets fired up with a forearm to the face and sends Swann into the barricade a few times to really take over.

A hard ram sends Swann's bad back into the LED apron and Neville follows by mostly missing a big flip dive. Back in and we hit a chinlock, followed by a standing shooting star to make the back even worse. A missile dropkick gets two and Neville is just toying with him. The USA chant only seems to get on Neville's nerves until a hurricanrana sends him outside.

Swann follows him out with a Phoenix splash of all things and a tiger bomb gets two. One heck of a superkick knocks Neville out on his feet and Swann's Fantastic Voyage gets a very close two. A loud kick to the head gets a third straight two but Swann gets crotched on top. One heck of a superplex knocks Swann silly for the pin at 13:55.

Rating: B. I liked this more than I thought I would and the ending was the right way to go. Swann's back was messed up and his last run was all built on adrenaline, meaning it made sense for a big shot, especially one on the back, to be enough to cut him off for good. This also sets up the rematch with the title on the line and that's going to be one heck of a fight, especially if it makes pay per view.

Post match Neville kicks him in the head and hammers away. He finally leaves and demands his crown to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This show is starting to find its groove and if I just have to sit through a fifteen minute match between people I care about week after week, so be it. If you can tweak the formula just enough and keep people like Lince Dorado off the show, everything is going to get a lot better in a hurry. The show isn't quite there yet but it's gone from a task to get through to something I'm enjoying and that's a very good sign going forward.

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205 Live – December 20, 2016: The Night of Neville

205 Live

Date: December 20, 2016

Location: Joe Louis Arena, Detroit, Michigan

Commentators: Austin Aries, Mauro Ranallo, Corey Graves

We've actually got a hot story around here as Neville returned on Sunday and turned full on heel for the first time in his WWE career. This included beating up Cruiserweight Champion Rich Swann, which set up a tag match on tonight's show. Neville will team with Brian Kendrick to face Swann and TJ Perkins. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Sunday's title match and Neville's turn, including the tag match being set up last night on Raw.

Opening sequence.

Ariya Daivari vs. Lince Dorado

Dorado flips around a lot with Aries accurately saying it's wasting energy. Daivari grabs a neckbreaker for two and drives a running knee into the back. We hit the chinlock as this isn't the most interesting match so far. Dorado gets up and hits a Tajiri handspring into a Stunner, sending Daivari outside for a big flip dive. A springboard hurricanrana puts Daivari down but Dorado gets shoved off the top, setting up a frog splash to give Ariya the pin at 5:37.

Rating: D+. As interested as I am in the main event tag (which has a limit), this is a good example of everything wrong with the division. There's almost no interest in the match, the wrestling was nothing all that special and Daivari is a rather dull character. Dorado is the most generic luchador in a long time and it doesn't make for a strong match as a result.

Daivari says Jack Gallagher is a scoundrel.

Kendrick comes up to Neville in the back but Neville wants nothing to do with him until they're out in the ring.

Tajiri is coming.

Cedric Alexander vs. Drew Gulak

Speaking of uninteresting characters. Cedric, with Alicia Fox in his corner, works on Gulak's arm to start and knees him in the face for good measure. Gulak sends him throat first into the middle rope and does something like a curb stomp with the shin instead of the foot. A chinlock doesn't last long and it's Cedric coming back with his springboard clothesline for two.

In a pretty scary bump, Alexander grabs a vertical suplex and takes Gulak over the top for a crash to the floor. They're lucky they landed right there. Gulak shoves Cedric into Fox and we've got a bad ankle. Cue Noam Dar to carry Fox off, leaving Cedric to hit the Lumbar Check for the pin at 5:35.

Rating: C. The wrestling was better here and both guys were trying but Gulak just isn't interesting in the slightest. Cedric has the talent and there's something there with the Fox story but it's still fairly low level by comparison to a few of the others in the division. Alexander could make the jump up the division ladder but he's going to need a stronger story.

Cedric runs off to find Fox. Gulak blames Fox for the loss because women do not belong on 205 Live.

Video on Jack Gallagher.

Fox is getting her ankle iced and thanks Dar for having her back.

Neville/Brian Kendrick vs. TJ Perkins/Rich Swann

Neville blasts Swann in the face to start and the aggression is really flowing early on. Swann gives a look that suggests he can't handle this as the announcers talk about how awesome Neville has been since Roadblock. You know, the show TWO DAYS AGO. Kendrick smiles as Neville forearms Rich in the corner but a forearm allows a blind tag to Perkins.

TJ actually gets in some offense before Kendrick comes in, stares at Neville, and chokes on the mat. A good looking spinning kick to the face puts Kendrick down, followed by a slingshot hilo for two. There's an interesting story here with Neville being the scariest thing in the match and Kendrick being the only one the good guys can beat.

The still banged up Swann tags himself in and manages a few clotheslines on Kendrick. A Flatliner cuts Swann off again though and Neville deadlifts him into a German suplex for two. Some weak rights and lefts have little effect on Neville but a superkick gives the champ a near fall (though the replay shows the lack of contact).

Neville pops right back up and clotheslines Swann inside out but the champ gets over for the hot tag. Perkins fires away on Perkins and the Detonation Kick sets up the kneebar. It's Neville making another save but Swann tags himself in and kicks Neville in the head. A double superkick gets two on Kendrick as everything breaks down.

Perkins and Neville wind up on the floor, leaving Sliced Bread #2 to set up the Captain's Hook on Rich. This time it's Perkins making a save, leaving Neville to kick Swann in the head and talk a lot of trash. TJ tags himself back in and dives into an enziguri, setting up the Red Arrow for the pin at 14:09.

Rating: B. The wrestling was good here but this was completely about the storytelling. Neville looks about 900 miles ahead of the rest of the division and the beatdown of Swann was the perfect way to make that come alive. I completely got into the story here and Neville pinning Perkins and covering him like it's an annoyance instead of a

victory is great. Neville is just killing the character so far and that's some great potential for this division.

Overall Rating: C+. The opening two matches didn't do much for me but that main event saved the show. Unfortunately this brings up the obvious problem: there's not enough (at the moment) for a whole show but this stuff doesn't work on Raw. Since putting it on Smackdown is COMPLETELY OUT OF THE QUESTION AND WE SHOULDN'T EVEN ASK ABOUT IT EVER AGAIN for some reason, this is probably the best of the remaining option.

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205 Live – December 13, 2016: You Can Feel the Vince

205 Live

Date: December 14, 2016

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Corey Graves, Austin Aries

This is turning into a more traditional WWE show week by week. Tonight's main event is focusing on setting up Sunday's triple threat match for the Cruiserweight Title instead of tonight's match standing on its own. The main event here is Rich Swann vs. TJ

Perkins in a non-title match so let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's main event where Swann defeated Brian Kendrick to retain the title. Perkins was on commentary during the match and got into it with Swann to end the show.

The announcers preview tonight's main event and Sunday's title match.

Jack Gallagher vs. Drew Gulak

Gulak accepts the handshake and they hit the mat to start, meaning Gallagher can do his handstand to escape a headlock. After rolling around for some near falls, Gulak gets tied up in the Windsor Knot for the running kick to the back of the trunks. Drew's answer is to kick Jack in the jaw and then start in on the bad knee. Jack will have none of that though and blasts Gulak with that headbutt. The running dropkick in the corner puts Gulak away at 5:52.

Rating: C. I know Gallagher does the same stuff almost every match but he's just so darn likeable. How can you not smile when you see someone this into his gimmick? Pushing him towards the title and putting him in a feud with someone whose personality he can bounce off of will be a great springboard for his character. Good enough here though and that's all it needs to be.

Perkins tells Swann that the luck is about to run out.

Tajiri is coming.

Gallagher is talking about his victory when Ariya Daivari comes up. Jack is willing to call it even but Daivari says no way and starts speaking his native language before leaving.

Mustafa Ali vs. Lince Dorado

Ali says he won't be defined by our ignorance. A great looking springboard hurricanrana takes Ali down to start but a hard kick to the head puts Dorado down. We're already in a chinlock before a dropkick sends Ali into the corner. They're certainly moving out there. A Tajiri handspring into a Stunner...uh, stuns Ali and Dorado sends him outside. An Asai moonsault crushes Ali again and both guys are down long enough for the double countout at 3:35.

Rating: C+. Now that was more like it with a standard cruiserweight style. It's cool to have Gallagher and Gulak doing their mat work but sometimes you need two guys to fly around and look impressive. I

liked this more than I was expecting to and it's a good idea to establish as much talent as they can.

Ali goes for a post match cheap shot but gets kicked out to the floor.

Noam Dar hits on Alicia Fox but she isn't interested.

Long video on TJ Perkins.

Rich Swann vs. TJ Perkins

Non-title and as you might expect, Kendrick comes out to join commentary. They trade wristlocks to start with both guys flipping out of the others offense. A double dropkick means a double miss into a double nip up and a standoff. Swann finally kicks him in the jaw to take over but Perkins tosses the champ outside for a slingshot dropkick.

Back in and Swann scores with Rolling Thunder for two but another trip to the floor sees Swann tweak his knee. Perkins is no fool and dropkicks the knee out for a near fall of his own. A kick to the head puts TJ down but the knee is too banged up for Swann to capitalize. Perkins' Detonation Kick is countered into a tiger bomb for two, only to have the knee give out again. The kneebar makes Swann tap at 10:01.

Rating: B-. It's a good sign that these guys are showing themselves capable of wrestling a match instead of just doing a few minutes of high spots. Perkins needed a big win heading into the pay per view but I can't imagine they would actually change the title. Swann was fine here and while I'm rarely a fan of champions losing, the knee injury gives him an out.

Kendrick comes to the ring but eats a superkick.

Overall Rating: C+. This was better and having something to build towards is a really positive step. However, the same problem as last week persists: I don't know how long they can keep this show going with just one set of talent. It works in NXT with a revolving door but this is a bit more limited and it's going to start showing in a hurry. Still though, they're in the very early days and this was an entertaining way to spend about forty minutes.

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205 Live – December 6, 2016: How Appropriate That I Forgot to Post This

205 Live

Date: December 6, 2016

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Corey Graves, Austin Aries

It's the second week of the show after a pretty strong debut episode. The main event is the same as it was last week with Rich Swann facing Brian Kendrick for the Cruiserweight Title, though time it's Swann putting the title on the line. Other than that it's hard to say what we'll be getting but some more debuts are likely. Let's get to it.

Rich Swann talks about his family passing away, leaving him with only wrestling. It took him a long time to get here but now he's cruiserweight champion. That's a simple story but it works no matter how many times it's done.

Opening sequence.

Noam Dar vs. Cedric Alexander

Before the match, Alexander gets a kiss on the cheek from Alicia Fox. They get technical to start with Dar working on an armbar until a dropkick puts him on the floor. Back in and Dar stays on the arm

while driving his knuckles into Cedric's shoulder. They're sticking with a basic story so far and that's a good idea.

Speaking of telling a story, it's really kind of amazing how different the commentary here is. You have the announcers talking about how Alexander has good genetics and Dar is more about strategy with Aries getting himself over as a huge heel who could take this show by storm once he's healthy. In other words: it sounds like wrestling commentary instead of the usual WWE nonsense.

The arm work continues with Aries talking about how hard it is to wrestle without one limb, "unless you're Zack Gowen of course." Alexander fights back with the good arm and a springboard crossbody gets two. Dar kicks him square in the arm and grabs a Fujiwara armbar. The rope is grabbed of course so Dar kicks him in the face for the pin at 10:29.

Rating: C. The arm work here was fine for a story and the match was perfectly watchable. I'm not sure about having Alexander lose here but Dar could be a valuable asset for the division going forward. Cedric is already over with the audience but the Fox thing feels a little forced. Maybe it'll be ok going forward though.

Post match Dar dedicates the win to Fox, meaning we have a heel turn and a likely rematch.

Mustafa Ali video.

TJ Perkins wishes Swann luck but suggests that it was the same luck that gave Swann the win last night.

Ariya Daivari vs. Jack Gallagher

Rematch from last night with Jack coming in with a limp due to Daivari's post match attack. They shake hands to start though Jack isn't convinced. So he's smart and gallant. Daivari works on a leglock to start so Jack does some rapid fire kicks to the leg (from his back of course) and grabs one of his own.

It's right back to Gallagher's knee with the leg going into the LED board (because that's what wrestling rings are made of these days) and then the LED post (because...well you get the idea). A leglock keeps Jack in trouble until he remembers that he's Jack Gallagher and spins out. The big headbutt to the chest gets two but another kick to the knee drops Jack again. A frog splash puts Gallagher away at 6:30.

Rating: C+. This was only a little better than the opener but it didn't have the same spirit to the previous Gallagher matches. It's almost like taking away his speed and athleticism via a knee injury is a really bad idea. On top of that, Daivari might as well be wearing a VILLAIN shirt so he's only going to get so far.

Lince Dorado video.

TJ Perkins comes out for commentary on the main event.

Brian Kendrick says he's ready this week because a lot of the stress is gone. He's dedicating his win to himself.

Cruiserweight Title: Rich Swann vs. Brian Kendrick

Swann is defending. Perkins and Aries bicker to start as Kendrick works on the arm. A loud dropkick gives the champ two as it seems they have a lot of time to work with here. Brian bails to the floor but catches Rich with Sliced Bread on the outside. That means a banged up knee though as we combine the first two matches' stories into one main event.

Back in and a dragon suplex sets up the Captain's Hook. Swann isn't about to tap to a chinlock though so he grabs the rope and completely misses the spinning kick in the corner. Thankfully Kendrick falls outside from the collision instead of the kick, allowing Swann to hit a corkscrew dive.

Not that it matters as the fans are cheering for Aries. Swann's standing 450 (Why does that have to be in the corner?) is countered into a rollup for two and they both go down from kicks to the head. The Captain's Hook is countered again as Ranallo tries to figure out how to counter the hold. Dude it's a chinlock. Stop acting like it's an Inverted Chikara Special.

A long Captain's Hook stays on the neck until Swann makes the ropes again (of course). Kendrick knocks him off the apron and out to the floor, only to have Swann send Brian into Perkins. The distraction is enough for Swann to nail the spinning kick to the head for the pin at 12:37.

Rating: B-. Good but nowhere near as good as what they did last week. That being said this was more about setting up something with Perkins involved, which is a better idea from a storytelling perspective. Swann winning clean via pin is a good idea too as you don't want him winning off a countout or something like that,

especially this early in his reign.

Post match, Kendrick goes after Perkins and Swann inadvertently collides with TJ to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. And that might be about it for my interest in 205 Live. The wrestling was fine, the storytelling was fine and that's the only word to describe the whole thing: fine. There's nothing on here that makes me feel like I need to see this again and that's not good for a recurring series. It's fine at the start but this feels like a show that doesn't have the longest lifespan and that's a problem two weeks in.

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205 Live – November 29, 2016 (Debut Episode): It's All About the Presentation

205 Live

Date: November 29, 2016

Location: Colonial Life Arena, Columbia, South Carolina

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Austin Aries, Corey Graves

Remember the Cruiserweight Classic being all awesome? Now do you

remember the cruiserweights being equally awesome on Monday Night Raw? Odds are you don't, because the division has floundered on Monday nights and it's already time for the show to have its own show on the WWE Network. This debut episode could range from good to a mess so let's get to it.

Also, these are probably not going to be done on Tuesday nights. I'll have them up as soon as possible every week though.

The opening sequence says tonight it's time to defy expectations. There are very few clips from Raw here with almost everything coming from the tournament. I'm as shocked as you are.

Opening sequence.

It should be interesting to see how the crowd looks as this was taped after Smackdown went off the air.

Austin Aries, currently out with an eye injury, is a surprise commentator. He teases winning the title once he's healthy.

The roster (or at least tonight's roster) is on stage for introductions. We have Rich Swann, TJ Perkins, Jack Gallagher (SWEET), Hoho Lun, the Bollywood Boyz, Noam Dar, Tony Nese, Drew Gulak, Ariya Daivari, Cedric Alexander, Lince Dorado, Akira Tozawa, Mustafa Ali, Gran Metalik and Brian Kendrick. This minute long series of introductions is already more than we got on Monday Night Raw and gives me some hope.

Video on the Bollywood Boyz, Harv and Gurv Sirah. They grew up watching Bret Hart and want to bring the Indian culture to America. Again, HUGE improvement over what we got on Mondays.

Bollywood Boyz vs. Drew Gulak/Tony Nese

The Boyz do a lot of dancing and are clearly the faces here. The fact that they're fighting heels was your second clue. Aries doesn't get the point of the handshakes and I still can't disagree. Gurv (who is in trunks instead of tights like his brother) works on Drew's arm to start before it's off to Harv for more of the same. Drew takes Harv's head off with a running dropkick as Ranallo is,

say it with me, a big improvement over what we've had in recent weeks. Harv gets taken down into the corner with Gulak working over his leg like a technical mat wrestler should do. Nese's chinlock doesn't last long and a neckbreaker gets Harv over to the corner for the hot tag to his brother.

Everything breaks down and we get the eternally stupid spot with Gulak being thrown into Nese, who DDT's his partner because he's incapable of letting go of his partner's head. Harv springboards into a crossbody to take Gulak down outside but Nese slams Gurv to take over again. Back in and a DDT sends Nese outside, setting up a double superkick to pin Gulak at 7:04.

Rating: C+. Let's see: characters, good action, defined faces and heels and a better reaction from the crowd. This is how you start a show and introduce some new talent, which seems to be more over with the crowd than almost anyone else has accomplished in the last few months.

Gulak and Nese say the Dancing with the Stars rejects won because of greasy ropes. That sounds like the start of a story, which again puts this one up on Raw.

Video on Noam Dar.

Kendrick says you should gamble on him tonight because he's going to capitalize on Swann's mistakes. Perkins comes in and wants his rematch so he wishes Kendrick luck.

Video on Gran Metalik. These are a bit long but you only have to air them once and people will catch on in a hurry.

Ariya Daivari vs. Jack Gallagher

Gallagher is a wrestling gentleman and got a very strong reaction in his Cruiserweight Classic run. Jack does his fancy spin to counter a wristlock before bending both arms around in ways other than nature intended. Even Graves has to appreciate how awesome Gallagher really is.

Gallagher handstands his way out of a headlock by walking on his hands. Another headstand in the corner has Aries freaked out and

it's time to tie Daviari's limbs up in so much of a knot that Gallagher stands off to the side and smiles at him. A running kick to the back of the trunks annoys Aries because it wasn't great.

Daivari comes back with some basic wrestling, including a neckbreaker and chinlock, which finally slows Jack down. Some dropkicks have Daivari in trouble again and a headbutt knocks him into the corner. One of the hardest running dropkicks I've ever seen puts Daivari away at 5:28. Even Aries calls it impressive, partially because that's one of his signature moves.

Rating: B-. Here's the simple point: Gallagher works because he's unlike anyone else on the roster. As I've said for a long time: if you do the same thing over and over again with the only difference being the name attached, no one is going to notice. If you do something completely different, people are going to notice. That's what Gallagher did here and that's why people will be talking about him.

Ranallo: "Austin, what do you think of 205 Live so far?" Aries: "Well I'm here so it's great."

Lince Dorado video. He's your standard masked luchador.

Video on Rich Swann, who lost his parents young and has traveled the world wrestling anyone he can.

Cruiserweight Title: Rich Swann vs. Brian Kendrick

Swann, billed as outlandish for some reason, is challenging and they're absolutely insane if they don't change the title here. We're ready to go after the Big Match Intros and the standard handshake. They trade wristlocks to start before it's time to speed things up, including a hard dropkick for two on the champ. A tiger bomb drops Kendrick again and he bails to the floor for a breather.

Back in and the champ snaps off a hard belly to back suplex but it's too early for the Captain's Hook to really work. A similar suplex does the same to Kendrick but Swann takes too long going up and gets caught in a neckbreaker onto the buckle. Kendrick has a target now and a bridging dragon suplex makes things even worse. It's off to a

straitjacket hold for a bit, only to have Swann grab something like a Michinoku Driver.

Brian's eyes are bugging out (great visual) but he gets the knees up to block the standing 450. The long form Captain's Hook gives us the dramatic crawl to the ropes and Kendrick's frustration continues. It only gets worse when Sliced Bread #2 gets two, allowing Swann to hit three straight spinning kicks to the head for the pin and the title at 13:31.

Rating: B. This felt like a big title change and that's exactly what it needed to be. There's no other way to put it: Brian Kendrick is one of the least interesting heels in a very long time. He was on a great nostalgia run in the tournament and the big idea was to turn him heel because...well I have no idea actually. Swann as the new face champion has potential and whoever beats him can actually be the big bad that this division needs. Good match here, which is what they needed.

Swann dedicates the win to his mother and Kendrick says you shouldn't get used to this.

A replay of the title change ends the show.

Overall Rating: B. As Paul Heyman said, it's all about the presentation. On Raw, the cruiserweights are wedged in on a show where they don't fit in the slightest. It's basically the new Divas match so people can go get nachos (Hopefully with barbecue sauce. Try it.) and that's not worth keeping around.

This show actually felt like it mattered and even if it's just a low level show for the sake of validating the talent being signed, it's WAY better than giving them ten minutes in front of a crowd that doesn't want to see them. On top of that, the talent was actually introduced to the fans so we can get to know them a bit.

Look at what we had here: two guys from India who like movies, a British wrestling gentleman and a fun guy who loves to dance winning the title. In other words, something other than a bunch of guys doing a similar style with no charisma (Perkins and Kendrick for

example, meaning the top two names in the division.

I don't think this show is going to blow the doors off of anything but giving them their own show is the only possible option if they want the division to be a success. It's not a great show or anything but it's different enough to be entertaining and that's the important thing. I liked what I saw here as it felt like a weekly episode of the Cruiserweight Classic. If they just have to keep the division on Raw for awhile so be it, but their best bet is right here.

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Superstars – October 28, 2016: The Kickoff Preview

Superstars

Date: October 28, 2016

Location: Target Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

I can get through this. I can get through Darren Young vs. Jinder Mahal IV. Normally I wouldn't believe they would actually go there but I said that after their first match and again after their second match. At least my therapy has been going well since then. Mahal was

on Raw this week though so he's at least in the building. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Neville vs. Titus O'Neil

This could be a disaster as Titus was one of the only people who could drag Neville down when they were in NXT. Neville wisely gets the crowd going by moonsaulting over Titus to start and kicking him in the face to actually do something to him. A good looking flip dive takes Titus down again but he kicks Neville in the face with a bit more force. We hit the chinlock for a bit before Titus tries to start a LET'S GO NEVILLE chant. Back up and Titus charges into raised boots in the corner and the Red Arrow finishes him at 4:30.

Rating: D. It takes a lot to mess up a power heel vs. a speed face but they managed to make it boring. I don't know how someone with Titus' look can be this bad but he pulls it off every single time. Above all else though, Neville is going to get a pop from the crowd no matter what because that Red Arrow just works every time.

We go back to Raw for the first time.

Here are Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman with something to say. Heyman does his usual schtick about how Lesnar will smash Goldberg, only to have the Goldberg chants cut him off. Heyman calls out the fan that started them and says they're getting on Brock's nerves. After their match, all of the chants in the world won't be able to put Goldberg back together again.

Suplexes are promised and the fans go back and forth with SUPLEX CITY/GOLDBERG chants. Heyman rips on them and the chant turns into GOLDBERG SUCKS....to wrap this up. Ok then. There was NOTHING here and it didn't need Brock at all. Even Heyman looked rattled by the reaction.

Back to Raw again.

Mick Foley is in the ring for the contract signing between Sasha Banks and Charlotte. They talk about how big of a moment this is going to be, only to have Foley go into his annual rant about how

evil the Cell is. Charlotte calls Sasha an entitled second rate talent who will learn respect from the Queen this Sunday. Sasha is ready to crawl up the ramp broken and bloodied as long as she has the Women's Title. They trade insults but Foley cuts them both off to say he's their future. Dude if the Cell is going to turn them into 6'4 men with long beards, maybe we should cancel the match.

As expected, the fans chant for Foley, thereby completely missing the point of this segment. Foley met Charlotte as a child and his kids gave Sasha their signed photo of Eddie Guerrero. More insults and a double signing FINALLY wrap this up. Charlotte vs. Sasha in a major gimmick match is fine but no one, like NO ONE, buys that the match is going to be all violent and career threatening like Foley is pushing and that kills the idea.

Sin Cara/Lince Dorado/Cedric Alexander vs. Tony Nese/Ariya Daivari/Drew Gulak

Cara and Nese start things off with the masked one starting in on Tony's arm. A facebuster puts Cara down and it's off to Gulak as the fans get a lot more quiet. Daivari of all people gets a reaction so Cara armdrags both Drew and Ariya at the same time. Dorado comes in and gets knocked off the apron and into the barricade as we take a break.

Back with Lince still in trouble thanks to a chinlock and armbar. Gulak misses a charge though and it's off to Alexander to really wake the crowd up. Everything breaks down with Cara knocking Nese and Gulak to the floor for a big dive. Back inside, the Lumbar Check knocks Daivari out for the pin at 8:09.

Rating: C. This was your run of the mill cruiserweight six man and it's about as good as you're going to get with no story or reason for them to be fighting. The match was fine enough and hopefully they can improve it when they do the same match again as the Kickoff match on Sunday.

We wrap the show up with Monday's main event.

Seth Rollins vs. Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Owens

Non-title. They play keep away to start until Owens gets kicked out to the floor. A Blockbuster gets two on Jericho but Owens pulls Seth outside. The champ is sent into the barricade but Jericho throws Seth into the crowd. Back in and Owens scores with a clothesline, only to have Rollins avoid the Cannonball. The Pedigree doesn't work on either Canadian but the Lionsault hits Seth's knees.

Owens saves his buddy from a Pedigree and it's time for the double teaming. The handicap portion continues until Owens is low bridged to the floor. Jericho eats the low superkick and Rollins dives onto Kevin. Seth misses the frog splash and eats a Codebreaker for two. Owens comes back in and slaps Rollins a lot as the STUPID IDIOT chants kick in. Rollins escapes a double superplex and pins both guys at the same time with a double rollup at 10:00.

Rating: C+. The match was fun but it's WAY too late in the night to really matter. Rollins pinning the champ is appropriate as Owens has been a huge afterthought in this entire story. That also makes four straight times that Rollins has pinned Jericho so you certainly can't say he's getting too many wins.

Post match Owens and Jericho destroy Rollins by sending him hard into the steps. We're still not done though as Rollins runs up the ramp and dives at Owens, only to get beaten down again. Owens gives him the Apron Bomb and walks back up the ramp to get his title so some posing can end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. Yeah this was fine. Aside from Rusev vs. Reigns, this was a solid preview for Sunday's show. I would have gone with ANYTHING other than the Lesnar/Heyman promo though and I really don't get why they decided to air that mess again. The exclusive wrestling was fine for a pair of glorified dark matches and that's all Superstars is supposed to be.

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NXT – September 7, 2016: Well You See... .What Happened Was... .

NXT

Date: September 7, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Corey Graves, Tom Phillips

We're in an interesting place here as the next Takeover has been announced for November but the taping schedule hasn't caught up to the announcement yet. Therefore we're still in the fallout stage from Brooklyn, meaning we're likely going to see some stuff being set up for the next big TV show. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

TM61 vs. Tony Nese/Ariya Daivari

Thorn and Nese start things off with Tony doing a sweet drop down into a nip up to avoid a clothesline. Neither guy can do anything so it's off to Miller vs. Daivari for a change of pace. A jawbreaker sends Miller into the corner and Nese adds a dropkick to set up a big flip dive to the floor. Unfortunately he takes out his partner in the process, only to have Thorn dive over all of them, barely grazing his opponents.

Back in and Nese gets two off a running knee (I'm getting sick of running strikes. It seems everyone uses one of those these days.), followed by some stomping in the corner. We take a break and come back with the tag off to Miller as the crowd is really not

interested so far. A high/low gets two on Nese but he comes right back with a superkick. Ariya gets two off a frog splash but walks into Thunder Valley for the pin at 10:30.

Rating: C. I really don't get the appeal of TM61 and the fans being that silent didn't do them any favors. They're really just two guys in trunks who can wrestle a good enough match but that's not good enough when we've had American Alpha, the Revival and Gargano/Ciampa tearing the house down every time they're in the ring. This was more about the cruiserweights though and they looked fine out there.

Earlier today, Asuka talked about the crowd being so excited in Brooklyn and how she now respects Bayley. Even though Bayley fought hard, Asuka fought harder and retained the title. Asuka has cleaned out the division and she defends the title for herself and Japan. She says something for her Japanese fans and says no one is ready for her.

Steve Cutler wants to know what Shinsuke Nakamura has sacrificed to get here. Cutler has sacrificed four years of his life to get this opportunity. People will respect him.

Ember Moon vs. Leah Von

Von is a blonde newcomer. Ember starts fast with a springboard spinning crossbody but gets taken down into a chinlock. That goes nowhere as Moon kicks her in the ribs, hits a flipping clothesline and finishes with the top rope Stunner (possibly called the Eclipse) at 2:45.

No Way Jose appreciated Bobby Roode's fashion sense and isn't changing for anyone.

Johnny Gargano and Tommaso Ciampa will get a match at the Cruiserweight Classic final and if they win they might get a Tag Team Title shot.

Austin Aries vs. Andrade Cien Almas

Almas has dropped the hat and suspenders. The fans are all over Almas to start and Aries gets them on his side with a dropkick to the face and a little rest in the corner. Almas comes back with a dropkick of his own and a good looking hurricanrana. Aries is just fine though as he shoves Almas off the top for a nasty crash as we take a break.

Back with Aries dropping a knee for a cocky cover before we hit the

chinlock. Almas sends him crashing into the ropes and scores with a springboard dropkick. That just earns him the running dropkick in the corner but Aries misses a charge in the corner. The running knees miss (again with the running strike) and a powerbomb sets up the Last Chancery to make Almas tap at 11:48.

Rating: C-. I don't know what's with this show so far tonight but they're not clicking so far. Then again maybe it's just Almas being such an uninteresting character with a really basic offense that feels like the generic template you would get if you selected high flier in a Smackdown vs. Raw game. Just turn him heel and let him be bitter so people don't have to be bored with him every time. Aries winning is fine and that's all that mattered here.

Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Steve Cutler

Non-title with Samoa Joe on commentary. They start slow with Nakamura not exactly treating Cutler like a serious threat. We're quickly into the corner for Good Vibrations before Nakamura starts in with the strikes. The reverse exploder sets up Kinshasa for the pin on Cutler at 3:21.

Rating: D+. Not much to say here because there wasn't much to it. Cutler could have been anyone in this spot and it would have been the same match as Nakamura dismantled him in just a few minutes. Joe vs. Nakamura II should be a lot of fun, especially if they're allowed to beat the heck out of each other for twenty minutes.

Joe walks away from commentary to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. I really wasn't feeling the show this week as two of the matches just kept going and the other two were too short to mean much. They're definitely in need of some energy but luckily this isn't Raw, where such a thing sounds impossible. Not a very good show this week but it certainly wasn't bad.

Results

TM61 b. Ariya Daivari/Tony Nese – Thunder Valley to Daivari

Ember Moon b. Leah Von – Eclipse

Austin Aries b. Andrade Cien Almas – Last Chancery

Shinsuke Nakamura b. Samoa Joe – Kinshasa

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Cruiserweight Classic – July 13, 2016: Wrestling Matters

Cruiserweight Classic

Date: July 13, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Daniel Bryan

This is something very different as it's all about the actual wrestling. What we have here is a thirty two man international tournament with a bunch of wrestlers coming in from outside the company to compete. From what I understand there won't be any storylines here, though that could change as we go along. Let's get to it.

The opening video, narrated by HHH, shows clips of various great cruiserweight matches over the years. HHH talks about how this has always been the most exciting style of wrestling and tonight it's time to start the new generation with people trying to blaze a new trail.

Opening sequence.

Corey Graves shows us the four matches we'll be seeing tonight.

Gran Metalik (Mascara Dorado) from Mexico and Alejandro Saez from

Chile say they're here to represent their countries.

The set is very similar to NXT's though there's no ramp and the aisle comes from the corner instead of to the side of the ring.

First Round: Alejandro Saez vs. Gran Metalik

According to their quick bios, Saez is a striker while Metalik is a luchador. Charles Robinson brings them to the middle of the ring for a handshake and we're ready to go. Saez starts things fast with a shoulder and basement dropkick, followed by a springboard missile dropkick for two.

A quick argument with the referee allows Metalik to knock him outside for an ACH middle rope springboard flip dive. Back in and a top rope (as in from the middle of the rope instead of the corner) gets two on Saez but Gran gets kicked out to the floor. Saez hits a shooting star off the apron, only to get caught in a Samoan Driver to give Metalik the pin at 4:05.

Rating: B-. Oh yeah this was the perfect choice for an opener. They kept it short and to the point here with fast paced high flying and a quick finish. Metalik seems like a big deal and a potential favorite here, though it's probably way too early to predict something like that when we've only seen two people so far. This was a good opener though and that's so important for something like this tournament.

Metalik is announced as the official winner ala a UFC fight.

Ariya Daivari (the brother of the better known Daivari) knows what it takes to win and he'll do whatever it takes.

Hoho Lun is here to show that this is his job.

First Round: Ariya Daivar vs. Hoho Lun

Lun is a regular in a very small Chinese promotion I watch so this is kind of bizarre. Daivari won't shake hands to give us our first heel. A dropkick puts Daivari down to start and a second one to the back gets two as the fans are a lot more quiet this time around. Daivari comes back with a neckbreaker and a good looking jumping knee to the face for two of his own.

We hit the chinlock as the fans chant HOHO to the OLE tune. Daivari kicks him in the head but a slap to the face just sets Hoho off and earns Daivari a spinwheel kick to the face. A running knee to the back of Daivari's head and a low superkick set up a German suplex to put Daivari away at 5:07.

Rating: C. Lun is a small guy and I'm surprised that he went over the brother of a name like Daivari. If nothing else you would think they would go with Daivari for the sake of having a heel going forward. Lun doesn't seem to have much of a future in this but it's cool to see him get a win, if nothing else due to him being from a small promotion that not a lot of people have heard of.

Clement Petiot is a Lance Storm student from France and seems to be one of the bigger guys in the field.

Cedric Alexander is from Charlotte and used to be in Ring of Honor.

First Round: Clement Petiot vs. Cedric Alexander

They almost get in a fight before the bell rings and it's time to hit the mat with Cedric quickly escaping a front facelock. Clement is sent outside and Alexander teases a big dive to the floor but moonsaults back to the middle instead. Back in and a great looking dropkick puts Petiot down for two but Clement sends him hard into the corner.

We hit the chinlock before a running knee to the face gets two in the corner. Cedric comes right back with a perfect springboard clothesline but Clement flips him inside out with a discus clothesline. Not that it matters as Cedric comes right back with the Lumbar Check (belly to back suplex into a Backstabber) for the pin at 6:01.

Rating: C. Three matches in and we have three faces going forward but there's a lot of time left to get some villains. Alexander looked great here with that springboard clothesline being as smooth as any I've seen in a long time. Petiot was fine but clearly needs some ring time and a bit more of a character to make him stand out.

Kota Ibushi is ready to prove himself.

Sean Maluta is Afa's nephew and another part of the Anoa'i Family.

First Round: Sean Maluta vs. Kota Ibushi

Ibushi is a big crowd favorite. Feeling out process to start with Maluta taking him down to the mat, only to have Ibushi come back with a kick to the chest. A t-bone suplex sends Maluta flying but Sean gets in a middle rope Codebreaker to knock Ibushi silly. Maluta sends him to the floor and tries a running flip dive, which may or may not have been botched as he landed on the apron but it might have been intentional as he immediately flipped over again to take Ibushi down.

Back in and Kota hits a very high dropkick before some very fast strikes have Sean in trouble. A standing moonsault gets two on Sean but he blocks a superplex, only to get kicked hard out to the floor. Ibushi keeps things fast with a running springboard moonsault to take Sean down. Back in and a superkick knocks Kota silly for two but he pops up and hits a sitout Last Ride for the pin at 9:40.

Rating: B. Best match of the night here and a lot of that is due to the time. Ibushi is definitely one of the big favorites and it's clear that he's a big star as they put him in the main event slot on the debut episode. Maluta looked good and could probably get a developmental deal very soon. Ibushi is going to be a big deal if he signs with WWE though and his match with Alexander should be awesome.

Overall Rating: B. This was a strong start to the show and the key was they kept the matches fast. With no stories and a lot of wrestlers that fans probably haven't seen before, it's very important to not let them get bored. Keeping the matches quick with fast paced offense and simple stories is going to allow the fans to stick with this and prevents the audience from losing interest in people who aren't the most interesting in the first place. It's a good show concept but the first few weeks are going to be a bit more rough with a lot of first round matches before we get to the bigger stuff down the line. Good start though.

Results

Gran Metalik b. Alejandro Saez – Samoan Driver

Hoho Lun b. Ariya Daivari – German Suplex

Cedric Alexander b. Clement Petiot – Lumbar Check

Kota Ibushi b. Sean Maluta – Sitout Powerbomb

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