

Thought Of The Day: Austin Vs. Punk

This is another one of those things I don't get. What is this obsession people have with seeing these two fight? It seems like it would be a match where the outcome is never in doubt and the promos would likely be centered around "I'm straightedge" vs. "I love beer". They were both anti-heroes so they don't have character issues to argue over. Yet despite all this, fans seem to be begging to see this match. Why? At the end of the day, the money match would seem to be Cena vs. Austin, not Austin vs. Punk.

Think about it. If there is ANYONE who is the polar opposite of Austin's entire character, it's John Cena. You have the ultimate corporate guy vs. the guy who would regularly beat up his boss. The promos would be great, the characters contrasts would be great, and it would be the ultimate battle of Attitude Era (the company's new favorite marketing campaign since they finally realized people are nostalgic for it) vs. PG.

Why do so many people want Punk when Cena would be a better opponent all the way around? Also Austin vs. Punk is not happening at Mania 29. Austin's knee isn't going to be ready. Drop the speculation already.

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About The WWE Gimmick Assembly Line

Back in 1908, the Ford Motor Company began manufacturing a car called the Model T. The idea behind it was simple: use the same format on an assembly line to mass produce affordable automobiles. It was a smash hit and became the standard method used for designing cars that is still used today. All of a sudden everyone had the same kind of car, but a lot more people could get their hands on one. The idea was that if you take away the uniqueness of cars, you could get them out faster, cheaper, and sell a lot more.

Now the problem with this method is just as I said: it takes away the uniqueness of the cars being released. Basically the Model T was one size fits all and everyone got basically the same thing. This brings us to the modern WWE and one of the many (among other) problems the company is facing at the moment: a large portion of the roster could be interchangeable with anyone else on the roster and it would make almost no difference. Let's take a look at a few examples.

Before I get into this: note that I am talking about characters only. Their in ring work isn't being considered a factor here.

Let's take a look at Randy Orton. Orton's character is that he snaps quickly and has anger issues. Here's where we get to the problem: practically anyone on the roster is perfectly capable of handling that part. Orton is someone that is going to be over no matter what he does because of his reputation and the RKO. However, his character has nothing unique about it and there's almost no depth to it.

As for someone who doesn't have a big finishing move to fall back on, let's look at say Heath Slater. Slater is a guy who came out week after week and got beaten up by various legends. He ran his mouth and talked about being a one man band, but there's nothing to him. Slater has won some matches and even a few titles, but at the end of the day he hasn't done anything of note in years and almost anyone could play his part. The titles that he won don't mean anything for the most part as so many people have won championships, but that's a discussion for another time.

I could go on and on with names like that, but there's a name in particular that explains things far better than anyone else I could talk about: Cody Rhodes. Cody has had an evolution to his character over the last few years. In June of 2010, Rhodes won a poll of the WWE Divas, naming him the best looking male wrestler in the company. This led to him becoming Dashing Cody Rhodes, a man obsessed with his looks and grooming.

Up to this point, almost anyone could have portrayed the character. However, all of that was groundwork for his next feud. After about six months of this gimmick, Rhodes faced Rey Mysterio where Mysterio's knee brace smashed into Rhodes' face. For the next few weeks, Rhodes refused to let his face be seen as he required facial reconstruction surgery to repair the damages.

After staying off of TV for about six weeks, Rhodes returned while wearing a mask. He claimed to be scarred under the mask, but due to it being clear, we could see that no scars were there and the damage was all in his mind. He basically turned into Dr. Doom from Marvel Comics, as he hid his face as much as he could due to the fear of what people would think of him. This is where things get important.

After spending months caring only about his looks, Rhodes was now ashamed of them due to the severe damage he had suffered. The six months beforehand had laid the groundwork for the character that he had become, and the new character only would have this kind of impact with Cody portraying it. In short, it was a unique character that we had watched evolve over the previous few months into the person that we saw before us. These things combined to make Cody a successful and interesting character, as opposed to just being the son of Dusty Rhodes.

Then it stopped. Rhodes still wore the mask but wasn't as insane as he had been before. Rhodes did little of note before winning the Intercontinental Title in August of 2011. A few months later, Rhodes began feuding with Randy Orton, eventually resulting in him losing his mask and having it broken.

Since then, Cody Rhodes has been Cody Rhodes. He's a guy in trunks that comes out, has the occasional match, and then goes to the back again. Nothing of note happens, his matches are about the same every week, and he only occasionally has a feud. At the moment, he's feuding with Sin Cara because he wants to take Cara's mask. Why does he want to do that? No apparent reason. No mention of Cody's time in a mask. No mention of anything unique at all.

Today, Rhodes is lucky to get on Smackdown for two straight weeks most of the time. He's lost most of the intriguing characteristics and traits that he had going for him before and is now little more than a cocky heel who says he's better than everyone else. That would be basically the same exact gimmick as Miz and Ziggler, as well as the same as guys like Del Rio and Mahal, although minus the ability to be able to say it in other languages. It's hardly a gimmick at all other than someone being cocky.

For a contrast, let's take a look at a few of the people who are freshly coming up on the roster. Instead of talking about various people and listing their personality traits, we'll focus on one: Damien Sandow. Yes he says that he's better than you, but he has a unique spin on it. Instead of just saying how great he is, Sandow says that he's smarter than you. He talks about how bad society is with the obsession with celebrities and pushes the idea of intellectualism.

If that doesn't work for you, let's take a look at David Otunga. Again just looking at his character, there is no one else on the roster that could play his character of a smug lawyer as well as he could. This is the case for one simple reason: Otunga IS a smug lawyer. He doesn't have to try to figure out what a Harvard educated lawyer would say because he just has to say what comes naturally to him. This is where you can solve a lot of the issues I'm mentioning here.

It makes little sense to take the gimmicks of people that aren't right for a part and trying to make them into that. The most successful wrestlers of all time are the ones who live the gimmick they have and see it as an extension of their own personalities. People like Undertaker, Savage, Flair, Austin and Rock all have been described as portraying themselves with more intensity than they would have in real life. It makes for a more believable performance and the characters are more successful.

If this doesn't make sense, think back to the Attitude Era. Just a quick look at the roster shows the following gimmicks: a redneck, a jock, an outcast who hangs out in boiler rooms and is craving acceptance while suffering from multiple personalities, a burn victim, a man who may or may not be dead, a pimp, a group of degenerates, a group of oddities, a group of vampires, a guy who looks like an Academy Award, a mixed martial artist, a superhero, an outdoorsman, a sex obsessed powerlifter and a security guard. For the most part, there is almost no overlap to any of

those things and they're all unique characters. You could say the same thing about a lot of people in the 80s as well.

In short, the problem that I see with a lot of the gimmicks in modern WWE is that there's nothing really specific about a lot of the characters. You could easily replace almost anyone with anyone else and you would have the same thing all over again. That doesn't make for interesting television and you have to rely on in ring talent to make up the difference. When you have almost everyone trained by the same training staff, you're not likely to see anyone break out in the ring with a different style that is going to set the world on fire. Mix it up and things will improve a lot.

Attitude Era vs. PG Era

So it's only going to be one post instead of a series. Sorry if that disappoints anyone.

I read a lot of posts and opinions of people that talk about how the Attitude Era was so great and how awful the PG Era is so bad and how things need to be more like what they were back in the late 90s. This is one of the dumbest things I've ever heard because people aren't thinking when they say stuff like this. Either that or the more likely reality: they don't know what they're talking about.

Wrestling today is pretty awesome and in a lot of ways it's better than what we have back in the 90s. Now before I get into this, let me make something clear: I'm not saying this

era is better nor am I saying it's worse. I'm saying that there are a lot of people that blindly say we need to get back to the Attitude Era way of thinking and style of airing TV and I'm going to explain why they have no idea what they're talking about.

Note that this is just about WWE, not TNA and/or WCW. Also I won't be going past the end of the year 2001 with this so don't bother mentioning stuff from January 1, 2002 on because it's not what I'm talking about. For a starting point, let's say January 1, 1998. I know the Attitude Era was longer than that but it's an easy date to work with.

First and foremost, people seem to think that the Attitude Era was all Austin and Vince tormenting each other and Rock cracking people up and Foley getting beaten up and then cracking a witty line. See, here's the thing: that was about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the show. The fact of the matter is that a lot of the Attitude Era's TV time SUCKED. I've been watching some 98 Raws and you get a lot of stuff like the DOA vs. the old Road Warriors, a multiple months long Jeff Jarrett vs. Steve Blackman feud, the NWA faction sucking the life out of the place, and about 15 minutes of Austin vs. McMahon per show.

People remember the cool moments of the late 90s but they forget about a lot of the really awful stuff and believe me, it got bad. You had stuff like Mark Henry getting oral sex from a transvestite, May Young giving birth to a hand, a story about Stephanie McMahon's teddy bear, William Regal as the Brawny Man, the J.O.B. Squad, a trio of vampires, human sacrifices, people almost being embalmed, live burials, Chyna turning three times at one show, Jeff Jarrett getting hit in the back by a frozen fish, a championship changing hands at a Days Inn, a wrestler whose gimmick was he could vomit on command, and Mae Young being topless on PPV.

In short, the Attitude Era had some really stupid ideas. Some of those might not have been in the time period I mentioned,

but you get the idea. People want to complain about Cena being impossible to beat and call him Superman or something like that, but is John Cena saluting people more childish than Austin holding his boss at gunpoint and having a flag come out of it that says Bang 3:16? That's something I've seen in Bugs Bunny cartoons.

People want to argue about how silly and childish things are today. Yeah, there are some pretty stupid ideas like Hornswoggle and Sheamus being related to a Muppet, but at the same time we have Punk and his Pipe Bombs, Cena standing tall against a guy that talks about Fruity Pebbles and talks in funny voices (there's a long chat in that feud that I'll save for later), anti-bullying stories which can inspire kids (corny but true), and comedy bits that aren't that bad when you remember your audience.

That brings me to one of the bigger points: the show isn't for us anymore. Back in the 80s, everything was based around kids. Hogan's feuds were never more than "I can beat this giant because the Hulkamaniacs are behind me!" You had a guy with a snake who beat up everyone else with the DDT. You had Savage being incredibly colorful and over the top. You had simple villains like Bobby Heenan and Jimmy Hart. It was a simple time for simple minds. Know what else it was? The biggest era ever for wrestling.

Then the 90s happened and those fans grew up. They got tired of seeing guys like Hogan and hearing the "you all be good" stuff. The fans rebelled and we got stuff like ECW and Steve Austin and DX and The Rock and all that jazz. The problem became that everything had to top what we had before, which is how in 1999 we had the Ministry of Darkness and crucifixions and Mideon drinking blood and vampires and all that stuff. It stopped being about wrestling and was all about drama.

Finally Austin got too hurt to wrestle and things got even better in the year 2000. What was different about 2000 rather

than 98 and 99 you ask? The focus was on the ring. You had Angle and Benoit and Jericho and Guerrero coming in and Rock vs. HHH going 25 minutes every PPV and Undertaker being a biker instead of a demon.

Nick Bockwinkel used to say "That's what it says on the marquee: Wrestling." It sounds corny and stupid, but at the end of the day he's right: if you put good wrestling out there, people will watch, because that's what they're here to see. I don't watch Raw to see pure drama or comedy. If I wanted to see that, I'd watch a drama or a comedy. Look at the biggest angle of the year in Punk vs. Cena. In every promo Punk had, it ended with him saying that he was the best in the world and that he would prove it by beating John Cena in the middle of the ring. It wasn't about power or some obscure thing. It was about pinning John Cena to the mat for 3 seconds. It was about wrestling.

So then Rock and Austin leave and you have guys like Brock Lesnar and Kurt Angle to take their place. The pendulum has swung back to pure mat wrestling...and people don't care as much. Starting around 2003-2004, things started to go downhill again, especially interest in the product. It appeared as if the pendulum would be swinging back towards the Attitude Era as things were getting insane again...and then something happened.

In June of 2007, Chris Benoit went over the edge and murdered his wife and son before committing suicide. Wrestling was on the front page of the paper as you had someone that was a big deal in WWE and was on the verge of winning a world title on the news for killing three people. This made the steroids trial in 1993 look like a walk in the park. Everything was changed and WWE had to change too. They had just come through an era where Angle and Benoit would drop each other on their heads ten times a match 4 nights a week. Benoit went crazy and Angle can't go a year without a neck injury. Things had to change.

With WWE and the wrestling world being turned upside down, everything more or less had to be reset. Benoit is still less than five years ago and it's not like you can hide things in the modern age where there are cameras everywhere. People complaining about the lack of chair shots to the head and blood don't get the bigger picture: if something else like Benoit happened, the WWE would cease to exist. Sponsors would pull out, people would leave, fans would go away. Vince is protecting himself and his company by doing what he's doing and there's nothing wrong with that. If you can't watch wrestling without someone taking an unprotected chair shot to the head, I feel very sorry for you.

So in the aftermath of that, Vince reset things back to the most basic things he could think of. Wrestling fans being wrestling fans, they didn't want something that wasn't geared exactly to them, so when the product wasn't aimed at them anymore, they declared that it sucked. Wrestling is geared towards kids right now and you know what? It's freaking good. We're getting John Cena vs. the Rock and Christian getting the push the fans have demanded for years and Sheamus being all big and awesome and Orton having his best matches in years and Punk being the voice of the voiceless and Ryder's internet show getting him on TV and a dozen other awesome things.

"But it's not the Attitude Era!!!" Get over it. It isn't your time anymore so stop thinking it's going to be. Things in life aren't always going to go your way and you need to accept that. You think your parents liked listening to Hogan telling you to take your vitamins or Warrior wanting to load up the spaceship with the rocket fuel or Hawk and Animal rambling about absolutely nothing that made sense to anyone that was human? It's not about us anymore. It's about the kids and catching their attention with bright colors and low level humor. And as much as you don't want to admit it, it's working. Mania broke 1,000,000 buys last year and the Trump record will fall with Cena vs. Rock. It's their era now, not

ours.

This next part I wrote earlier but I got on a roll with the previous section so it's going to seem a little out of place for an ending.

Also you want to complain about title changes? From 1998-1999, no WWF World Title reign lasted longer than 90 days. Think about that. No one held the world title longer than 3 months for over two years. This would include three title reigns (one by Rock, Foley and Vince) that combined to last ten days. Midcard titles more your thing? In 1999-2000, the Intercontinental Title changed hands 23 times. In 24 months, there were 23 title reigns. Think about that for a minute. The tag titles weren't as bad as they only changed 22 times in that span of time.

Title reigns didn't mean anything back then. Austin won 6 world titles starting in 1998 and ending in 2001. Factoring in the year he was gone, Austin won all of his titles in about two and a half years, or about 2.4 world titles a year. Rock won his first in late 98 and his last in 2002. He's a nine time champion over a four year span, or about 2.25 a year. By comparison, Cena has won 12 world titles in roughly 6 years (factoring out injury time) or approximately 2 a year. Orton is a 9 time champion, winning his first in 2004, which puts him at about 1.3 titles a year. But hey, Cena and Orton win them too often right? And remember Austin and Rock had one world title to vie for (save for the Alliance Era) so there were fewer titles to go around, making it harder to win them.

I think the big difference is that people stay around longer now. Austin arrived in WWF in 1995 and was gone by let's say the middle of 2002, giving him about 6 and a half years in the company (5 and a half factoring in the year off). Rock debuted in late 96 and was gone by late 2002 for a total of 5 years also (roughly 5 when you consider the time off for movies). Cena has been around for over 9 years now and Orton about the

same. Do you remember the end of Austin's run in WWF? It was when he was feuding with Flair and Big Show when he was falling apart. Imagine Austin as a shell of his former self and being so far past his time that he meant nothing. Think people would get tired of him?

You look at guys like Orton and Cena and you have two guys that have had some of their best stuff recently. Cena fueled Punk's push and Orton stole a lot of shows with his matches against Christian. Austin and Rock both left the company (spare me the arguments about them bailing out and abandoning the company. They're bogus) after about 6 years when they were past their primes. Cena and Orton have hit (very) arguably their peaks recently. The difference is that instead of spending years in another company building themselves up, they started in OVW (for the most part) and came through the WWF system, allowing them to be there faster.