

Wrestlemania Count-Up – Wrestlemania III: The Biggest Match In The History Of Professional Wrestling

Wrestlemania III

Date: March 29, 1987

Location: Pontiac Silverdome, Pontiac, Michigan

Attendance: 93,173

Commentators: Gorilla Monsoon, Jesse Ventura

This is the biggest show in wrestling history with the biggest match in wrestling history as its main event. How's that for a standard to live up to? In case you're one of the six wrestling fans ever that hasn't heard of this show, the main event is Hulk Hogan defending the WWF Title against Andre the Giant in a match four years in the making. In the undercard we have the greatest match of all time. This is the first show where they treated Wrestlemania as something huge and not just a big house show, making it the first "modern" Wrestlemania. Let's get to it.

The wide shot of the arena is still quite a sight. Oh and for once and for all: there were 93,000 people there. The argument about how it doesn't hold that many doesn't hold up as the total often listed is for football, which requires WAY more space than a wrestling show. It would be like covering half the field with more seats. On the other hand, let's say WWE is lying about the number. A lie? In wrestling? Surely you jest. I don't get why people are so obsessed with proving there were less people there than claimed.

Aretha Franklin sings America the Beautiful.

Gorilla and Jesse are with celebrities Bob Uecker and Mary Hart.

Can-Am Connection vs. Don Muraco/Bob Orton

No story here as they're just two teams having a match. The Can-Am Connection is Rick Martel (Can) and Tom Zenk (Am) which would kind of evolve into Strike Force. Martel and Muraco start things off with Rick hitting a quick shoulder to take Don down. A hip block and a kind of monkey flip put Muraco down again and it's a standoff. Zenk comes in for a double monkey flip and it's off to Orton who gets armdragged down as well.

Bob gets hit from one corner to the other until Zenk takes him down with an armbar. All Connection so far. They trade full nelsons and Muraco hits Orton by mistake for two. Bob gets his arm cranked on a bit until FINALLY making the tag out to Muraco. The bad luck continues for the heels as Don is slammed down and has his arm worked on as well.

Orton and Muraco finally start cheating with a knee to Zenk's back and a shot from the middle rope. Zenk and Bob ram heads and it's a double tag as everything breaks down. The heels are sent into each other and a double dropkick takes Orton down. Muraco gets double teamed and a cross body with a trip from Zenk is enough for Martel to get the pin.

Rating: B-. I've called this the best opening match in Wrestlemania history and I don't think it's that far off from the truth. There are definitely matches of higher quality, but think about what an opening match is supposed to do. It's designed to set the tone for a show and this one did that. It's about five and a half minutes long and the good guys beat the bad guys with some nice continuity. It's nothing flashy but it wasn't supposed to be. This is a very nice, basic tag match and the crowd was into it, which is all it was supposed to accomplish. Good stuff here.

We recap Hercules vs. Billy Jack Haynes which is the battle of the full nelson.

Heenan and Hercules say about what you would expect them to say.

Hercules vs. Billy Jack Haynes

This is power vs. power so expect some pretty weak chemistry. Hebner tries to get in between them in the corner which is more than a referee

should do. Haynes hits a press slam but Hercules bails to the corner to avoid the full nelson. Hercules comes back with a big old clothesline and both guys are down already. A backdrop puts Haynes down and Herc pounds on the back a bit. This is very slow paced compared to the opener.

A suplex gets two for Hercules as he picks Haynes up. Billy can't suplex Hercules because of the back so the Greek guy hits a backbreaker to keep the momentum up. Hercules hooks the full nelson but can't get the fingers locked, allowing Billy to escape. Jack fights out of it and they clothesline each other down. Haynes grabs a quick atomic drop to fire the crowd up but his back messes up again. A clothesline sets up a legdrop on Hercules and a middle rope fist to the head keeps Hercules in trouble. Jack gets the full nelson but Hercules pulls them both to the floor. Herc gets put in the hold again but a double countout ends this.

Rating: D+. The fact that the crowd is hot for everything tonight is all that made this passable, which can be a great tool to bring a match up a lot. At the end of the day, they're WAY too similar and neither guy is exactly someone that can carry a match. It's not terrible but it didn't go anywhere at all. This would be the only feud of note that Haynes had and he would be jobbing soon.

Post match Hercules blasts Haynes with his chain a few times and busts him open.

King Kong Bundy and his midgets say they'll beat Hillbilly Jim and his midgets.

The other team says the exact opposite.

Hillbilly Jim/Little Beaver/Haiti Kid vs. King Kong Bundy/Lord Littlebrook/Little Tokyo

Beaver would be 52 and Littlebrook would be 58 at this point. Uecker jumps in on commentary. Haiti and Tokyo start before we get a four way crisscross. The good small guys hook a stupid looking hold called the rowboat on their evil counterparts and the crowd doesn't seem interested. Off to Beaver as Uecker seems really happy to be here. Jesse wants to see Bundy crush one of these guys because that's the kind of guy he is.

Littlebrook vs. Beaver at the moment but it's quickly off to Bundy. Beaver and Haiti annoy him a bit until it's off to Hillbilly for a nice ovation. Bundy gets dropped by a clothesline and an elbow drop allows Jim and company to pile on for a two. Jim gets caught in a front facelock but Beaver comes in and blasts Bundy in the face to get on his nerves again. Bundy finally grabs Beaver and crushes him with a slam and an elbow drop, drawing a DQ.

Rating: D+. This is another of those matches where you have to consider what they were going for. You've got two giants and four midgets out there with Hillbilly Jim picking up a 52 year old man so he can pull on Jim's beard. How tough can I be on a match like this? Unfortunately Beaver's back was hurt by Bundy in this and he had to retire.

Even the heel midgets turn on Bundy for what he did. Jim carries out Little Beaver ala Superman and Supergirl.

Macho Man won't let Liz get interviewed.

We recap Race vs. JYD. Race is the King of Wrestling but Dog refuses to bow because he doesn't think we have kings here in America. One night JYD put Race's robe and crown on but Race decked him and tried to force JYD to bow. JYD is the Junkyard Dog in case you're new at this.

Race, Heenan and Moolah (the Queen) says that there won't be a new king tonight.

Harley Race vs. Junkyard Dog

The loser has to bow. Uecker is apparently in love with Moolah and bails out of the booth. Race comes out to either Lawler's music or the song Lawler's music was remixed from. Dog says that he wants to take over the spot on the throne. Oh and I forgot to mention the ring carts which only appeared here and at Mania 6. Those things were AWESOME. Dog blocks some punches to start and pounds away but Race trips up JYD to give Race control.

Dog comes right back with a headbutt to send Race to the floor before pulling him right back in. Race gets knocked to the floor again and is in

big trouble. Back in and Race tries a headbutt and knocks himself silly. A Flair Flip in the corner sends Race to the floor AGAIN but it still doesn't last long. Back inside Dog hits some headbutts but has to stop to chase off Heenan, allowing Race to hit a belly to belly for the pin.

Rating: D. This wasn't that good primarily due to time. The majority of the match was spent with Race on the floor which isn't what you expect from him. Dog was all about personality and crowd response as most of his offense was a bunch of headbutts. Not much to see here but the crowd was into it.

Dog bows to Race but then blasts him with a chair and steals the robe.

Hogan talks about riding to the show after hearing people telling him this was his last ride. Tonight it's time for Andre to face the truth and all Hogan has to do is beat a 7'4 520lb giant. Andre has to beat Hogan and every Hulkamaniac in the world. Hulkamania is going to get Andre, not the dirty air or the politicians (HUH?) and Andre has to face the truth. I've seen the match he's talking about probably 40 times and it still feels huge.

Dream Team vs. Rougeau Brothers

The Dream Team is Brutus Beefcake and Greg Valentine but they've been having problems lately. Dino Bravo and Johnny V are with them here. Ray and Brutus start things off with Ray sending Brutus into the Rougeau corner for some double teaming. Off to Valentine as the Rougeaus tag in and out multiple times. Jacques finally sticks around for a bit and misses a cross body out of the corner.

Greg drops a bunch of elbows and puts on the Figure Four as Bobby Heenan comes into the commentary booth. Jacques gets to the rope before reversing a piledriver so he can tag Ray. While this is going on, Bobby and Gorilla argue about midgets. Ray puts Greg in a sleeper and Brutus' save goes awry. Valentine gets caught in the Rougeau Bomb but Dino comes in off the middle rope though with a shot to Ray's back, giving the Dream Team the pin.

Rating: C-. This was all angle rather than the match. The Rougeaus were a

talented team and looked solid out there while the Dream Team looked like a relic of the past. Thankfully this would be the end for them as Bravo would replace Beefcake immediately, although the New Dream Team never went anywhere.

Valentine, Bravo and Johnny V (short for Valentine but shortened to avoid confusion) leave Beefcake behind.

We recap Adrian Adonis vs. Roddy Piper. Piper had left to make a movie and came back to find Piper's Pit taken over by Adonis' Flower Shop with Orton having sided with Adonis. Orton, Adonis, Muraco and Hart broke Piper's leg but he came back with a ball bat and DESTROYED the Flower Shop. This is also billed as Piper's farewell match.

Piper says he's not going out to a man that wears a dress. No Retreat and No Surrender!

Roddy Piper vs. Adrian Adonis

The loser gets their hair cut and is probably the third biggest match on the show if not the second biggest. Piper walks to the ring instead of taking the cart to soak everything in a little bit more. The fans go NUTS for Piper who is still somewhat freshly face. Adonis is rather plump here, giving us a great line from Jesse: "We're either going to have a bald Scot or Humpty Dumpty." Piper takes off his belt and they whip each other a few times with Adonis taking over.

Piper comes right back by sending Adrian into the corner for Flair Flip to the floor. Both Adonis and Hart get pulled back in and Piper rams them together to send them back outside. Back in again and Piper throws Hart off the top and onto Adonis but Jimmy FINALLY gets something right by tripping Roddy down.

Now it's Adonis in control as they head to the floor. Piper gets sent into the announce table and Jimmy adds a spray of perfume into his eyes. There's Adrian's sleeper (Good Night Irene) and Piper is almost out, but Adonis lets him go at two arm drops. Brutus Beefcake runs out to wake Piper up and after a missed clipper shot from Adonis, Piper puts him in the sleeper for the win.

Rating: C+. This was the exact kind of wild brawl that you would expect it to be. The ending was the right move as Adonis had accidentally cut Beefcake's hair recently so it made sense given the haircut stuff. This is the right way for Roddy to go out though and the fans were way into it. Fun stuff here.

Post match Adonis gets his hair cut and punches a mirror. Roddy gets his big sendoff.

Jesse is introduced to the crowd before the next match to annoy Gorilla.

Hart Foundation/Danny Davis vs. British Bulldogs/Tito Santana

Davis is a crooked referee that cost both the Bulldogs and Santana their titles. Apparently this is Davis' debut as a wrestler. Mary Hart (no relation) is on commentary along with Uecker here as well. Tito beats up Danny before the match before we get going with Bret and Santana. Jesse steals the Bulldogs' mascot Matilda as he leaves. Off to Davey vs. Anvil and Smith pulls him by the beard. That's a bit rough even for Neidhart.

Tito comes back in to work on the arm but gets sent to the heel corner for some high quality choking. That goes nowhere so here's Smith vs. Neidhart again. Jim takes him down with a suplex but Bret misses a middle rope elbow. Dynamite comes in for the chest to buckle bump from Bret but Hart comes back with some punches. Tito tries to break up some interference but only allows even more cheating by Neidhart.

Jim hooks a modified camel clutch on Dynamite before it's back to Bret. I don't think we've seen Davis in yet but before I can finish that sentence he's in for a few stomps. That's the extent of his offense as it's already back to Bret for some actual skill. The sun is starting to go down so the arena looks dark now. Back to Danny for one kick before it's time for the Hitman again.

The Harts slingshot Davis right onto Dynamite's knees and it's off to Santana for the beating on Davis that the fans have been waiting for. Tito destroys Danny and hits the forearm but Neidhart breaks up the Figure Four. Off to Smith who rams Davis' head into Dynamite's. A jumping tombstone (not yet named) kills Davis even more but Smith doesn't want

the cover. There's the delayed vertical followed by the powerslam but everything breaks down. Davis pops up and hits Smith with the megaphone for the pin in the melee.

Rating: C-. As fun as the beating Davis took was, the ending is really stupid as he popped up like nothing and was able to knock out a power guy with a single shot? The guy was a referee a few months ago but he's able to do that with one shot? Bad ending aside, this was fun stuff and the fans were WAY into it.

Heenan and Andre say that Andre can't be defeated and everyone knows it. Bobby's white suit is rather awesome.

Butch Reed vs. Koko B. Ware

Slick is here with Reed. That comes into play later. Reed overpowers him to start which is appropriate in a power vs. speed match. Koko comes back with that dropkick of his to send Reed out to the floor. Back in and a shot to the Bird Man's ribs give Butch control again but Koko hiptosses him down. Koko pounds away and hits another dropkick for two. A run of the ropes proves deadly though as Reed rolls through a cross body and a handful of tights pins Ware.

Rating: D. Nothing to see here as Koko was there as a warm body to lose to Butch. Reed was going to be the Intercontinental Champion after Steamboat got done with it but Honky talked his way into getting the belt instead. This match was there only to set up the post match stuff which we'll get to now.

Tito runs in and beats up Slick, ripping off his "expensive" suit. A double dropkick sends Reed to the floor.

So far we've had eight matches and on average it's probably a C- at best. I think the next one might help bring things up a bit.

We recap Randy Savage vs. Ricky Steamboat. On an episode of Superstars, Savage smashed Steamboat's throat into the barricade and crushed his larynx with the ring bell. One night on SNME, George Steele was facing Randy Savage and promised a surprise. Steele kidnapped Liz and when

Savage got up, he saw Steamboat staring up at him and terror reigned.

Savage says that he's retaining the title and is going to prove how amazing he is.

Steamboat says this is their destiny and the Dragon is going to scorch Savage's back. This promo still gives me chills.

Intercontinental Title: Randy Savage vs. Ricky Steamboat

The fans give an audible pop for Savage which even the announcers have to acknowledge. George Steele comes out to back up Steamboat and show off that green tongue. They shove each other around a few times before Randy takes an early breather. Savage misses a back elbow and Steamboat hits a pair of those perfect armdrags of his. Randy is lifted into the air via a choke and it's back to the floor.

Back in and Savage gets in his first shot before sending Ricky into the buckle. Steamboat immediately comes back by grabbing the wrist and lifting Savage into the air. Savage comes back with an elbow to the face before sending Steamboat over the top and out to the floor. Randy starts going after the throat but has to stop to try to get his left arm working again. Steamboat sends him into the buckle and chops away, sending Savage into the ropes.

With the champion tied up, Steamboat fires away with a vengeance. Savage gets loose and Ricky hits a cross body for two, kicking off one of the fastest sets of near falls you'll EVER see. Randy finally slows him down with a knee to the back and a toss over the ropes, only to have Ricky skin the cat. Savage throws him out again and knocks him into the crowd for good measure. The top rope ax handle keeps Steamboat down even longer and Savage is in full control.

Savage hits a clothesline for two which Gorilla doesn't like. Gorilla: "That could be a disqualification." Jesse: "For what?" Gorilla: "Intentional." Jesse: "Well of course it was intentional!" Gorilla could find some weird stuff to complain about at times. After a pair of Savage suplexes for two, Ricky starts firing back and sends Savage out to the

floor. A top rope chop gets two for the challenger and they speed things up all over again.

We get another chase on the floor followed by a sunset flip by the Dragon for two. They trade ANOTHER great pinfall reversal sequence as Jesse declares this one of the greatest matches he's ever seen. A slingshot sends Savage face first into the post and there's a sunset flip for two for the Dragon. Savage reverses an O'Connor Roll with a handful of tights for two. Randy uses the tights again and sends Dragon shoulder first into the post.

They reverse an Irish whip and the referee gets bumped. Randy hits another clothesline and drops the big elbow but there's no referee. Savage goes to get the bell but Steele takes it away. That earns the Animal a kick in the head so he shoves Savage off the top. Steamboat is back up and famously counters a slam into a small package for the pin and the title.

Rating: A+. This is the greatest match of all time so what do you expect me to give it. I'm amazed at how well this holds up nearly 26 years later as there is nothing wrong with it at all. The story goes that these two practiced this match at Savage's house for three months beforehand and it shows. Not a thing is even close to screwed up and they're so fast out there it's unbelievable. How anyone can say this is anything but perfect astounds me to this day. If you haven't seen this before, watch it now and take notes.

Alice Cooper (male rock/metal singer) is here to back up Jake Roberts against Honky and Jimmy Hart. This was set up because Honky hit Jake in the back with a guitar, which was allegedly the reason for Jake's addiction to pain medication that has plagued him for years. Jake says Honky got his shot but didn't make it count. His mustache alone makes him the favorite.

Honky Tonk Man vs. Jake Roberts

This is one of the matches that is there to give us a breather between the masterpiece and the main event. Jake pounds away to start and hits a knee lift to send Honky out to the floor. Honky still can't get his ring

suit off so Jake rips it off for him. Jake follows him to the floor and slams Honky down before heading back inside. Back in and Jake charges into a knee to the face to shift momentum.

Honky drops a pair of knees to Jake's back but misses a punch and walks into the short clothesline. The grease in Honky's hair allows him to escape the DDT and we head outside again. Jake is sent into the post and the barricade so Honky can dance a bit. Back in and a middle rope punch puts Jake in even more trouble. There's a knee drop to the Snake and a pair of elbows for no cover.

The Shake Rattle and Roll (swinging neckbreaker) is countered by Jake and there's an atomic drop for the eternally funny selling by Honky. Jake punches him to the apron and Honky gets caught in between the ropes, meaning he bounces back up every time Jake punches him. The DDT is countered again and after a Jimmy interference, Honky grabs a rollup and the top rope for the upset pin.

Rating: C. You could see the Honky Tonk Man character coming on here as Jake was way better but got cheated at the end. Honky would ride that one idea for the next year and a half, drawing WAY more money and heat than he had any right to earn. Jake would feud with various heels for the next few months while being one of the many challengers to chase Honky. He finally got with Rick Rude for an awesome string of matches.

Post match Honky is chased off and Jimmy gets covered by Damien the snake.

Gene Okerlund announces a new world indoor attendance record of 93,173. That's awesome.

Nikolai Volkoff/Iron Sheik vs. Killer Bees

Unlike the previous match that had a feud going with it, this is just a random heel and face pairing. Slick (the foreigners' manager) still has his torn up suit on. Volkoff starts singing the Soviet national anthem but the pretty new Jim Duggan runs out to break it up. The Bees finally show up and it's a big brawl to start. Duggan is marching around at ringside with the 2x4 complete with a little American flag taped to it.

We start with Blair and Sheik but it's quickly off to Brunzell. The Bees work over Iron's arm with tags faster than I can type them. They stay on the arm until Brunzell hits his gorgeous dropkick for two on Sheik. Everything breaks down for a bit and Brunzell gets caught in the corner. Nikolai keeps Brunzell in trouble as the fans chant USA. There's the bearhug by the Russian but Jim smacks his ears to break the hold.

Off to Sheik for the gutwrench suplex for two and a regular version for two. Brunzell comes back with a quick high knee but the referee doesn't see the tag. A double elbow puts Jim down again and Sheik poses a lot. Duggan chases Volkoff into the ring and sees Sheik with the camel clutch on Brunzell. Being the patriot that he is, Duggan blasts Sheik in the back with the board for the DQ.

Rating: C-. Not a terrible little match here until the stupid ending. This was again about furthering another feud in the form of Duggan against the evil foreigners. Why the Bees would be ok with Duggan doing that is beyond me but I guess since they're all good guys they have to get along in WWF logic.

Andre says the next time you see him, he'll be world heavyweight champion. Heenan says he'll be the manager of the world champion and go down in history.

We recap Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan. Andre was there three years ago when Hogan won the title and they teamed together a few times with Hogan making the save when Andre was double teamed. There's a LONG story (not mentioned in the show because it isn't important) about Andre getting suspended and wrestling in a mask until Bobby Heenan, the guy behind the suspension, got it lifted.

Andre appeared with Hogan in Piper's Pit where both received trophies; Andre's for being undefeated for fifteen years and Hogan's for being world champion for three years. However, Andre's trophy was noticeably smaller, prompting him to say "three years to be a champion, that's a long time." A few weeks later, Andre walked into the Pit with Heenan at his side and challenges Hogan for Wrestlemania. Hogan is STUNNED and has the crucifix ripped off his chest. Hogan finally agrees to fight Andre at

Wrestlemania and the arena exploded. Make no mistake about it: THIS is why Wrestlemania III is the biggest show ever.

Hogan talks about how he's going to knock the giant down and shake the world.

Bob Uecker is brought in as the guest ring announcer. Jesse says hi to Terry, Tyrell and Jade back in Minneapolis. He did this on nearly every show but never said who those people were. It was nothing secretive: it's his wife and kids. Mary Hart is guest timekeeper.

WWF World Title: Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan

Hogan walks to the ring and the ovation is unreal. To put it simply, this is the biggest match in the history of professional wrestling. We get the historic staredown and we're really supposed to believe that Hogan is nine inches shorter than Andre? It's like three at most. Hogan punches away to start but goes for a slam a minute into this and falls down, giving Andre a very close two. That right there would fuel the rematch requests for the next year. Hulk's back is hurt and Andre starts taunting him. A big forearm hits Hogan in the back and Andre slams him twice. Andre pounds away very slowly and hits a few headbutts.

Hulk fights back up with some forearms into the head. A running elbow staggers the Giant and Hogan sends him head first into the buckle ten times, only to charge into a boot to slow things right back down again. We hit the bearhug and Hogan is in trouble. This lasts for a LONG while until Hogan punches his way out of it, possibly hurting his hand in the process. Hulk rams into him a few times but charges into a chop to put Hogan down again. A boot to the ribs knocks Hulk to the floor but Andre headbutts the post. Hogan tries a piledriver of all things but is easily backdropped down.

We head back in for the legendary ending sequence. Hogan ducks a big boot and clotheslines down. It's Hulk Up time and in the most famous scene in wrestling history, Hulk Hogan slams Andre the Giant to blow the roof off the place. The big legdrop makes Hogan immortal and the title is retained.

Rating: B. Ok here's the thing: if you think this is about the wrestling itself, you have completely missed the point here. This was about making Hogan look like the biggest star ever and to say it did that is an understatement. On top of that, the match isn't that bad. Don't get me wrong: it's not a masterpiece or anything like that, but the match is nowhere near as bad as it's made out to be. This was exactly what it was supposed to be.

Hogan poses for a long time as Heenan leaves with his head in his hands, wondering where it all went wrong.

Overall Rating: A+. There's really no other grade to give this. It's the biggest show of all time, the greatest match of all time is on here, and the main event has two of the most famous images of all time. This show is the pinnacle of wrestling in America and it's never been as big as this again. There's nothing truly bad on this show as even the weaker matches are at least really short. This show was never about the wrestling though. It's all spectacle here and it's an absolute must see show for any fan and it still goes by very smoothly. If you somehow haven't seen this, definitely check it out.

Ratings Comparison

Can-Am Connection vs. Don Muraco/Bob Orton

Original: B+

Redo: B-

Billy Jack Haynes vs. Hercules

Original: C-

Redo: D+

Hillbilly Jim/Haiti Kid/Little Beaver vs. King Kong Bundy/Little Tokyo/Lord Littlebrook

Original: F

Redo: D+

Harley Race vs. Junkyard Dog

Original: D+

Redo: D

Dream Team vs. Rougeau Brothers

Original: D+

Redo: C-

Roddy Piper vs. Adrian Adonis

Original: C+

Redo: C+

Hart Foundation/Danny Davis vs. Tito Santana/British Bulldogs

Original: C

Redo: C-

Butch Reed vs. Koko B. Ware

Original: N/A

Redo: D

Ricky Steamboat vs. Randy Savage

Original: A+

Redo: A+

Jake Roberts vs. Honky Tonk Man

Original: C

Redo: C

Killer Bees vs. Iron Sheik/Nikolai Volkoff

Original: D

Redo: C-

Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant

Original: A

Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: B+

Redo: A+

It still holds up.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2012/03/07/wrestlemania-count-up-3-this-show-is-required-viewing-for-all-fans/>

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