

Monday Night Raw – July 25, 2016: The Newer New Era

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 25, 2016

Location: CONSOL Energy Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Corey Graves, Byron Saxton, Michael Cole

After three months of a new era, we're actually in a New Era as we've reached the first show with an exclusive Raw roster, which means a lot of things that aren't entirely clear. We don't officially have a World Champion as Dean Ambrose retained the title last night to keep it on Smackdown. Hopefully tonight we actually get some answers to the questions left over from the Draft so let's get to it.

Quick look at the main event.

Opening sequence, complete with a new logo and theme song.

The announcers are no longer at ringside and are up by the entrance instead. There's also a new set.

Mick Foley and Stephanie McMahon are in the ring to introduce the entire Raw roster. Stephanie blames Reigns for costing them the title and says there has never been an episode of Monday Night Raw without a World Champion (Uh.....what? Just.....what?) so tonight they're going to rectify that problem. Tonight there will be two fourways with the winners squaring off tonight for the right to go to Summerslam to face Seth Rollins for the....wait for it...WWE Universal Heavyweight Championship (Killjoy is going to love that one). Foley introduces the eight people in the fourways:

Sami Zayn

Sheamus

Cesaro

Rusev

Roman Reigns

Kevin Owens

Chris Jericho

Finn Balor

We're not done yet though as Charlotte is going to be defending the Women's Title against Sasha Banks. The first fourway is right now.

Cesaro vs. Rusev vs. Kevin Owens vs. Finn Balor

Owens gets a big pop but the crowd doesn't seem to know Balor's pose yet. They'll get the hang of it soon enough. Balor and Owens are left inside with Finn scoring off a dropkick but Cesaro takes over with some uppercuts as we hit a break less than ninety seconds after the bell. Back with Owens and Rusev staring each other down until Balor comes back in to get caught in a German suplex.

Cesaro gets double teamed as well but Rusev misses a top rope splash. The heels start fighting until Cesaro cross bodies both of them. The uppercut train starts up but Rusev breaks up the Swing. Everyone goes to the floor and it's Balor hitting a big flip dive for his first major pop of the night. Back in and 1916 (lifting reverse DDT) gets two on Cesaro and we take another break. We come back again with Rusev at the base of a Tower of Doom to plant everyone at the same time.

Owens gets two on Balor with the torture rack neckbreaker. The Bullfrog Splash crushes Cesaro and the Pop Up Powerbomb plants Balor. The Neutralizer is broken up though and Rusev grabs the Accolade on Owens. Cesaro comes back in and Swings Rusev, only to have Owens break up the Sharpshooter. Balor comes right back in with dropkicks though and the Coup de Grace puts Rusev away at 20:31.

Rating: B. I can't even get mad at them for having the US Champion get pinned again when Cesaro was right there. This was really the only way to go with this match as you don't have Balor debut and then lose in his

first match. I don't need him to go to the title match at Summerslam but he needs to have a dirty finish tonight. Good match here though and a good way to showcase Balor, which was the entire point.

Nia Jax vs. Brit Baker

Nia throws her around to start and ties her in the Tree of Woe. The legdrop only gets two as Nia pulls her up. A headbutt and another legdrop put Baker away at 1:20. Total squash.

Golden Truth are playing Pokemon Go and annoy Sasha Banks. Sasha says she'll win tonight.

Sheamus vs. Chris Jericho vs. Sami Zayn vs. Roman Reigns

Sheamus and Jericho double team Reigns to start and Sami joins in on the beating. Reigns is sent to the floor so it's Sami getting beaten down by both guys until Sami backdrops Jericho onto Sheamus. That means it's time for Reigns to come back in and slam Sami down for two as the announcers talk about Stephanie. Sheamus comes back in for the ten forearms on Sami until Jericho knocks the Irishman to the floor. Reigns hits the big dive to take all of them out and we go to a break.

Back with Reigns getting double teamed but fighting back, only to get caught in a Blue Thunder Bomb for a very hot near fall. The Razor's Edge sitout powerbomb gets two on Sami but the Brogue Kick cuts off the Superman Punch. Sami adds a Helluva Kick, only to have Jericho steal the near fall. A Brogue Kick saves Jericho from the Walls but Sami dives over to break up the cover. Back to back Superman Punches drop the heels and the Codebreaker is countered into....something botched. Jericho takes another Superman Punch and the spear advances Reigns at 17:06.

Rating: C+. Not in the same ballpark as the first match with Sami and Sheamus basically disappearing in the last few minutes. Reigns winning was predictable and I'd be shocked if they went with Balor vs. Rollins for the title. They're running a risk of having Reigns get back into the title picture so soon but I don't think there was ever any real doubt.

Here's New Day to celebrate 337 days as Tag Team Champions. After Woods

says he's glad Bray was drafted to Smackdown and a quick Booty0's ad, we get a montage of the title reign. Tonight, New Day is going to let a member of the crowd be an honorary member of New Day, but the question is who.

They pick a somewhat rotund man in a New Day shirt and Big E. asks sonny boy what his name is. Man: "Sonny Boy." Kofi: "No your government name." Man: "Sonny Boy." New Day doesn't quite buy this and ask if that's the name that comes on his bills or how he signs the check at restaurants. The dancing is on but the Club comes out to interrupt and beat the champs down. Big E. takes a Magic Killer and the other two lose their shirts. The Club talk trash to Sonny Boy and throw a shirt at him.

Curtis Axel vs. Neville

Axel is listed as Mr. Irrelevant because he was picked last. Neville snaps off a neckbreaker to start and flips over him a few times. A standing shooting star to the back keeps Axel in trouble and the lifting German suplex puts him in the corner. The Red Arrow puts Curtis away at 3:45.

Rating: D+. Neville is still Neville, meaning he still does almost every spot he has in each match which explains why they get weaker and weaker reactions every single time (see also Cesaro). Axel continues to be treated like a goof, especially when he should just be Joe Hennig and be Mr. Perfect II but that's too easy for WWE for reasons I don't understand.

Darren Young wants the Intercontinental Title but Bob Backlund's pep talk is cut off by the Pokemon Go hunt. Backlund yells a lot.

Video on Finn Balor.

Charlotte thinks Sasha will crack under the pressure tonight.

Women's Title: Sasha Banks vs. Charlotte

Charlotte is defending. They lock up and go down to the mat with a rollup freaking the champ out. Dana offers a quick distraction and earns an early reprimand. Banks grabs a quick Bank Statement but only gets a

modified version of the hold, allowing Charlotte to escape. That's nice of her. Instead Sasha sends her outside for the double knees from the apron and a near fall.

Charlotte kicks Sasha into the corner and then drives her into the barricade, setting up some trash talking with the belt in hand. Dana picks up the dropped belt and Sasha feigns an attack, earning Dana an ejection. Why this isn't a DQ isn't clear but it takes us to a break. Back with Sasha fighting out of a double arm crank and hitting more running knees. Charlotte grabs a quick neckbreaker but has to bail out of the moonsault. That's fine as she lands on her feet (because she can), only to have a flip dive blocked by raised boots. Sasha sends her to the floor for a dive with a SCARY landing as Banks came down on her face.

She's fine enough to cover Charlotte for two but the champ sends her outside for a huge moonsault to a standing Sasha. I mean, she barely made contact but dang it looked cool. Back in and Natural Selection gets two so we hit the Figure Four. The hold is rolled over but Charlotte goes under the ropes and bends the hold over the apron. Back in and Sasha flips out of another Figure four to grab the Bank Statement but Charlotte's foot is under the ropes. Another Bank Statement gives Sasha the title in a big surprise at 16:53.

Rating: B+. Botches aside, this was a good match and felt like a big deal. Sasha winning feels like a crowning achievement, despite a limited build and WASTING THREE MONTHS ON THAT CHARLOTTE VS. NATALYA FEUD SO WE CAN CHANGE THE TITLE ON RAW. In theory this sets up either a rematch in Brooklyn or maybe a full time Bayley call up for a shot at Summerslam.

Sasha gives a quick speech about how she's earned this and this is a new era.

Braun Strowman vs. James Ellsworth

Before the match, James thinks it would be a big win for his career and anyone with two hands can fight. A quick beating sets up a reverse chokeslam to give Strowman the pin at 1:10.

Video on Roman Reigns.

Golden Truth is STILL hunting for Pokemon and find.....the Pittsburgh Penguins logo?

Here are Enzo and Cass for a chat about various raw foods. They're cut off by the Shining Stars of all people and it's time for a match.

Shining Stars vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Primo puts Enzo down for all of thirty seconds before the hot tag brings in Cass to clean house. Cass actually gets low bridged to the floor but here are Golden Truth on the Pokemon hunt. The distraction lets Cass kick Epico in the face for the pin at 1:51. These guys were teaming with JOHN CENA last night and now they're here?

Roman and Finn wish each other luck.

Finn Balor vs. Roman Reigns

Winner goes to Summerslam to face Rollins for the title. Reigns launches him into the corner to start but Balor snaps his throat across the top. Some kicks to the head don't have much effect on Reigns as he runs Balor over again. The apron boot misses though and Balor's slingshot double stomp has Roman in trouble.

We take a break and come back with Roman powerslamming him for two and grabbing a chinlock. A sitout powerbomb gets two but Balor comes back with a string of kicks for a near fall of his own. The Superman Punch only gets two on Balor and everyone is stunned. Balor gets two off his own off a sunset flip to counter the Razor's Edge bomb. Back to back powerbombs get two more on Finn but Balor grabs a Sling Blade to block the spear. The Coup de Grace gets the big upset pin at 13:57.

Rating: B. I liked it better when AJ Styles did this the night after Wrestlemania but it's still a good ending and the right call for a change. There was really no need to do Reigns vs. Rollins again and this is a great way to make Balor seem like a big deal. He doesn't necessarily need to win the title at Summerslam but it's a really smart idea to have him get a big rub like this on his first night on the main roster.

Post match Reigns says he hopes Balor wins the title because he wants

another shot at Finn.

Overall Rating: B. This was up and down all night but the main event and the title change were enough to swing it upwards. That title change really needed to happen as the rest of the show didn't exactly have a lot going on. The re-debuts were good and the matches made some people fresh players but that doesn't mean the show was all that entertaining. I really liked the lack of authority figures as they just don't need to be there that often. Overall it's a good show but absolutely nothing that blew me away.

Results

Finn Balor b. Rusev, Cesaro and Kevin Owens – Coup de Grace to Rusev

Nia Jax b. Brit Baker – Legdrop

Roman Reigns b. Sami Zayn, Sheamus and Chris Jericho – Spear to Jericho

Neville b. Curtis Axel – Red Arrow

Sasha Banks b. Charlotte – Bank Statement

Braun Strowman b. James Ellsworth – Reverse chokeslam

Enzo Amore/Big Cass b. Shining Stars – Big boot to Epico

Finn Balor b. Roman Reigns – Coup de Grace

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Wrestlemania XXXII Preview: Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal

In case you needed a match to throw in a bunch of midcarders to get them on the card.

Battle royals are really hard to predict. Like really hard to predict. However that's not the case here as this should be one of the easiest battle royals to call in a long time. Simply put, there aren't a lot of people who could win. Based on the currently listed entrants, the only major threats are going to be Big Show, Kane and.....dang that's really it isn't it? You can almost bet the Wyatts will be involved so you can throw Strowman on there too, which is kind of necessary to avoid me going insane.

Of course there's always the chance that someone could be added to the match as a big surprise (Cesaro is rumored) but unless they're going to win the thing, save that for the next night on Raw. Barring a surprise winner, I think we'll get Strowman here, even though Bray winning would make so much more sense. Even if Strowman clears the ring and then Bray orders him out ala Ted DiBiase or something, but Bray needs this way more than anyone else. I know he's banged up but it's a battle royal. He can work the whole match without taking any major bumps so just give it to him so he can actually win something for once.

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Monday Night Raw – March 21, 2016: And Then They Hit A Wall

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 21, 2016

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, Michael Cole, Byron Saxton

The march of pain continues for Roman Reigns as we're in one of the smarkiest towns in the world. There are also less than two weeks until Wrestlemania so this is the time when the really heavy lifting for the show has to be done. It's going to be rather, shall we say, interesting to see how Reigns is greeted tonight so let's get to it.

This show is dedicated to Mary Katharine Stewart. I'm actually not sure who that is.

We open with the now traditional long recap of last week's show. I get the idea of keeping us up to date but cut these things down.

Here's Stephanie to get things going. Apparently HHH isn't here tonight and you have 60 seconds to get to the box office for refunds. That absence is of course due to corporate responsibilities and NOT due to Roman Reigns attacking him last week. That's because Roman Reigns is stupid and opportunistic. How short sighted could he have been last week when he attacked HHH for revenge?

Cue Reigns to some VERY loud booing (expected of course). Stephanie goes into her patented voice but Reigns puts his hand over the mic and says the reason HHH isn't here is because he knows the beating that would be coming to him. At Wrestlemania, he's going into HHH and Stephanie's stadium and taking their title. Stephanie loads up the slap but Reigns blocks it with an ease that far more people should have when Stephanie pulls that arm back. That's it for Reigns, who again kept it short here. That's the best thing they could have done here and it worked far better than I was expecting.

Kevin Owens vs. AJ Styles

Non-title and a very smart choice for an opener. Owens takes him to a knee with a headlock but AJ pops up into the dropdown and dropkick. They head to the floor and Owens gets in a hard whip to the barricade as we take a break. Back with AJ fighting out of a chinlock and scoring with an enziguri to put both guys down. The Pele misses and Owens takes his head off with a clothesline. A nice rack neckbreaker gets two for Owens but Owens misses the Cannonball.

AJ comes right back with the AA into a backbreaker for the same. Styles can't get a top rope hurricanrana though and Owens debuts a frog splash for two. You know, because you debut a huge spot like that and have it get two. We get the ROH style slugout and AJ Peles him down again as we take a break.

Back again with AJ getting two more off his torture rack slam before heading up top. Owens is right there meet him, only to have AJ slip down into a sitout powerbomb with a nasty looking landing for two more. Cue Jericho though, only to have AJ grab the Calf Crusher anyway. That brings Jericho to the apron to break the hold though and Owens gets a rollup for the pin at 19:20.

Rating: B+. This felt like an ROH match and that's the perfect way to start a show in front of this crowd. AJ losing is the right call and I was nervous that they would go for the 50/50 booking that has plagued them for so long. Thankfully they let these two beat the tar out of each other for a long time and the match worked as a result. Really good match

but more importantly it was smart.

Post match Owens grabs the belt and says that everyone is wondering who will be facing him for the title at KO Mania. Cue Dolph Ziggler (DANG IT GET OUT OF HERE!) and Miz to argue with each other until Sami Zayn comes out. Miz calls him the skinny Seth Rogen as Owens leaves. Kevin says he'll go to the Authority and get a triple threat match set up for the title shot tonight.

Earlier today, Dean Ambrose was in a pub to talk about how far Lesnar was going to have to go to beat him at Wrestlemania. Terry Funk of all people comes in and puts Dean over before giving him a chainsaw. Dean of course turns it on and slices through a table.

Stephanie makes Owens' triple threat match for later.

We recap Shane returning last month to set up Undertaker vs. Shane. Various legends and Hall of Famers talk about how big it was, including Mick Foley, John Cena, Michael Hayes, Booker T., Chris Jericho, Edge, Steve Austin, Ric Flair and Jerry Lawler. They all think Shane is in over his head. You would think Shawn Michaels would have made an appearance here.

Here's the League of Nations for a match but first of all we have to see last week's beatdown of the New Day. This brings out New Day to call the League trash, complete with cards that call them trash. Kofi thinks Rusev has smelly feet and that the three of them would make a better set of kings than Barrett. That brings them to Sheamus, whose parents actually put the word SHAME in his name. Not to worry though because all of this could be cured with a simple bowl of Booty0's because New Day ROCKS.

Big E. vs. Rusev

Rusev drops straight to the floor at the bell but Big E. throws him back in for the one man Unicorn Stampede. A big stomp has Rusev in trouble as we take an early break. Back with Rusev holding a chinlock before nailing a nice one footed dropkick for two. New Day is out after a beatdown during the break. Cole thinks this could be the most physical match at Wrestlemania because Cole isn't that bright.

Big E. fights up again with the belly to belly but the Warrior splash hits knees. A Rock Bottom out of the corner drops Rusev for two and the fans are entirely behind New Day. Now the Warrior splash gets two and Woods is back up to start the brawl with the League. The Accolade is broken up with an electric chair but Big E. has to spear Sheamus through the ropes. That allows Kofi to kick Rusev in the head, setting up the Big Ending for the pin on Rusev at 11:03. Big E. gets a good reaction for the win.

Rating: C-. Good enough here but I'm worried that they might change the titles at Wrestlemania based on how many times the League has lost leading up to it. The key thing here though was the smart booking continues as they put out another match that people are going to care about and don't focus on something they're going to hate.

The Wyatt Family talks about rebirth and promises Dean Ambrose as a sacrifice tonight.

Here's Big Show to talk about the Andre Memorial Battle Royal. JBL thinks Show has the best chance to repeat as the winner. Well given that he's the only one who CAN repeat as the winner, you can't argue there. Show talks about Andre's legacy and how Andre was the greatest giant of all time. Last year it meant a lot to him to win the battle royal because he doesn't win a lot of battle royals (right).

Cue the Social Outcasts to say they're a combined Cinderella story. Axel says they're more like Voltron and the Outcasts attack. Show grabs Slater by the throat but gets beaten down until Kane comes out for the save. The Outcasts are dispatched and Show hugs Kane, only to stupidly pose on the ropes, allowing Kane to chokeslam him down.

Stan Hansen Hall of Fame induction announcement. This is another deserved one.

Chris Jericho vs. Fandango

Just get AJ out here to cause the big upset already. Jericho takes over to start of course but stops to yell about how Fandango never beat him at Wrestlemania. Fandango gets in a few shots but misses the top rope

legdrop. Cue AJ for a distraction so Fandango can get in a small package for two. Jericho pops back up with the Codebreaker for the pin at 2:10.

AJ comes down for the fight but Jericho bails. Styles says he's competed all over the world except for one place, giving us a DRAMATIC POINT AT THE SIGN. We get the official challenge for Wrestlemania...which I could have sworn was already made.

Quick line from Mick Foley about how dangerous the Cell is.

Video on Shane's training for the Cell, including clips from more legends talking about how tough Shane is. They seem to think that Undertaker is going to kill him anyway.

Here's Kevin Owens to introduce the participants in the triple threat match for the #1 contendership.

Stardust vs. Sin Cara vs. Zack Ryder

Owens apparently got to hand pick these guys because he never told Stephanie who would be in the match. The announcers bury all three of them by asking why any of them deserve a title shot. Cara starts cleaning house to start as Ryder is sent to the floor. A slingshot ankle scissors gets two on Stardust but Ryder pulls them to the floor. Cue Sami, Ziggler and Miz to stare down Owens as the match is basically forgotten. A huge brawl breaks out and the match is thrown out at 3:40. No rating since so much was spent on Owens but the wrestling wasn't the point here.

Everyone beats Owens down and DO NOT TELL ME it's going to be a seven way match at Wrestlemania with three extra goons added in.

We look back at the opening segment.

Stephanie is thinking about leaving when Kevin Owens comes in to complain about what just happened. She gets annoyed at him calling it KOMania and makes a SEVEN WAY LADDER MATCH for the title. BECAUSE OF COURSE THEY ARE BECAUSE THE INTERCONTINENTAL TITLE IS A FREAKING JOKE THESE DAYS AND THEY'RE GIVING TITLE SHOTS TO PEOPLE THEY JUST SPENT A WHOLE MATCH BURYING BECAUSE IT'S A STUPID IDEA THAT THEY KEEP DOING EVERY SINGLE YEAR!

Stephanie (of course it's Stephanie) is leaving and HHH gets out of his car. They go to leave when Reigns appears and attacks HHH as Stephanie won't stop screaming. Doesn't she have a pointless ladder match to book?

Natalya vs. Charlotte

Non-title with Becky and Sasha bickering on commentary. Charlotte starts fast but gets knocked to the floor for a hard shot to the head. Back in and Charlotte gets two off a clothesline as the arguing continues. Charlotte hammers away in the corner but gets caught in a sitout powerbomb, setting up the Sharpshooter. A rope is quickly grabbed and Natural Selection puts Natalya away at 4:51.

Rating: D+. Not exactly Roadblock here but at least we got that good looking powerbomb in again. I could have done without the annoying chattering about Irish jokes and bling but that's how you do commentary these days. The match should be fine assuming they give it time though this was nothing interesting.

We look back at Dean and the chainsaw earlier.

R-Truth vs. Bubba Ray Dudley

Bubba pounds him down to start and asks where Truth's boy Goldust is. Truth makes a quick comeback and hits a running splash in the corner but D-Von offers a distraction, allowing a big boot to put Truth away at 2:10.

Goldust comes out for a failed save so here are the Usos for the real save. The Usos load up a table but Bubba breaks it up.

Here's Vince to talk about the Cell and what might happen if Shane somehow pulls off a miracle. We look back at last week's ending segment with Undertaker destroying Shane. Vince agrees with what Shane said about Undertaker last week because if Undertaker doesn't beat Shane, this is his last Wrestlemania. Well....that's a bit better I guess.

Dean Ambrose vs. Braun Strowman

Heyman is on commentary. Strowman hammers away to start but gets sent out

to the floor, though not off his feet. The suicide dive doesn't put Braun down and now it's time for the beating. We hit the chinlock for a bit but Dean fights up and gets a sleeper, which seems to just annoy Braun more than anything else. Ambrose makes another comeback but can't hit Dirty Deeds. Instead he settles for avoiding a charge to send Braun shoulder first into the post. Dean grabs a chair and starts beating on Braun for the DQ at 6:04.

Rating: D+. This was fine and did exactly what it should have done: showed Dean against a monster and let us see what he can do against him without wasting Braun's monster aura. The match wasn't good or anything but that's what Braun is here for: to look like a big guy who can serve as a warmup for a match against Brock. They got the idea right here and it worked well enough.

Post match Dean hits him with the chair a few more times and scores with Dirty Deeds onto the steel. Some staring at Heyman ends the show.

Overall Rating: C+. They were rolling along and then hit one of the hardest walls I've ever seen. I really can't remember the last time I stopped caring about a show as hard as when they announced that seven man ladder match. Yes it's going to be a spectacle and yes it's going to have some big spots, but it goes against every bit of storytelling they've had in recent weeks. They don't have a roster to fill in a battle royal and they have a great story HANDED TO THEM with Zayn vs. Owens, but no let's go with the big mess because it's easy and requires less work.

The worst part though is the storyline explanation for this is "Stephanie felt like it." Nothing more and nothing less. Why should I care about some story they're putting together or anything for that matter when it continues to come down to "well the Authority wants this"? It's lazy writing and bad storytelling, which is so much of a plague on this company.

Other than that though, this was actually quite a strong show as they kept things moving and avoided any major issues with the crowd. That was the key thing to the whole show: don't give the fans a reason or a chance to hijack things and it's clear that they pulled it off here. Good show

overall and a needed show with less than two weeks before Wrestlemania but there were some major holes.

Results

Kevin Owens b. AJ Styles – Rollup

Big E. b. Rusev – Big Ending

Chris Jericho b. Fandango – Codebreaker

Stardust vs. Sin Cara vs. Zack Ryder went to a no contest when all three attacked Kevin Owens

Charlotte b. Natalya – Natural Selection

Bubba Ray Dudley b. R-Truth – Big boot

Braun Strowman b. Dean Ambrose via DQ when Ambrose used a chair

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2015 Awards Worst Wrestler of

the Year

This one is in pairs.

Let's get the usual male suspects out of the way first: Big Show is old and boring, Kane is more old and boring, but at least Kane had some funny moments during the Corporate days to put him firmly ahead. It's still bad and the Demon character continues to fail as he's unstoppable until the bell rings when a few finishing moves can put him away. These two have to be in the running every year though so we'll get them out of the way here.

Oddly enough you hear about two members of the Wyatt Family this year. I understand the dislike for Rowan as he's the designated jobber of the team and has to lose more often than not, but ever since that stairs match (egads what a horrible thing that is to think about) with Big Show, his career has been spiraling down further and further every single day. This one is easy to understand though and I can get the idea here.

On the other hand though, I don't get the hatred for Braun Strowman. This comes off as a case of people missing the point of a character. Strowman is supposed to be the unstoppable monster. Why would he do much besides big power moves, including the choke? This is an old school character and the way he's booked makes sense. I really don't know what people are expecting here but he's been used properly so far and is far from the worst.

Now we get to the most obvious choices with the Divas. We'll start with the developmental version in Eva Marie. Now I've gone on a rant or two about her, but the key difference is she knows how to get people to HATE her. Yeah she's terrible in the ring, but she's capable of driving fans into losing their minds. Watch her match with Bayley on NXT and see how freaked out people are over the idea of Eva winning the title. She looks great in her attire and knows how to get people to hate her. That's more than a lot of Divas have ever accomplished so I can't quite call her the worst.

However, I can call Brie Bella the worst. Brie is a fascinating case as

she has a gorgeous face, is in great shape, is married to one of the most popular wrestlers in years and I absolutely do not care about her. She can do basic moves well enough (and has a decent missile dropkick) but the idea of knowing whether she's good or bad seems WAY too complicated for her. Just watch her throw the YES Kicks completely out of time whether she's a face or a heel. It's almost fascinating to watch at times as she just misses every beat, not even factoring in BRIE MODDDDDDE!

So yeah, as usual the Diva wins this.

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Smackdown – November 12, 2015: Tournaments Actually Are Awesome

Smackdown

Date: November 12, 2015

Location: Manchester Arena, Manchester, England

Commentators: Booker T., Jerry Lawler, Rich Brennan

For the first time in a long time, there's actual important stuff going

on tonight. We're getting the final three first round matchups in the WWE World Title tournament, which hopefully is the start of a shift back to making Smackdown mean ANYTHING. Then again it could just be laying the groundwork for the move to USA in January so they can pretend it means something and then drop it back to reality. I'll take what I can get though so let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Rollins destroying anything that ends in CL and being put on the shelf for the better part of a year.

We look at the brackets and recap Monday's tournament matches.

Here are the Wyatts with something to say, which I'm assuming will involve no selling Monday's beatdown. Harper says this is how the world works: when the Wyatts show up, blood runs cold. So that's what happened go Glacier. Tonight they're sacrificing the Usos to Bray Wyatt. Rowan says Bray brings vengeance and sorrow to all who oppose him so tonight they're bringing pain and humiliation to those who oppose them. Strowman wants us to look at his face and see our annihilation because he will pile the bodies to the sky for the eater of worlds.

Bray isn't worried about Undertaker and Kane being back because he's taken pieces of them that they can never recover. Now he lives in the monster's nightmares and would like to issue a challenge for Survivor Series: their family against his family, two on two. They have until the end of the night to respond. So after losing 4-2, they want to fight 2-2? I think I'll take the Glacier match instead.

Braun Strowman vs. Fandango

They're Fandangoing in Manchester. For some reason this doesn't surprise me. Fandango goes right at Braun to start and it goes as well as you would expect. Braun clotheslines him out of the air and the standing choke makes Fandango tap (the first man to do that) at 1:30.

WWE World Title Tournament First Round: King Barrett vs. Neville

The winner faces Owens. Neville promises to finish what Wayne Rooney started on Monday. Barrett gets rolled up for an early two and it's off

to a headlock. A cross body gets two more for Neville so Barrett throws him to the floor and kicks him in the face. Nice strategy. Neville is bounced off the announcers' table a few times and we take an early break. Back with Barrett getting his own near fall off a pumphandle slam.

Neville fights out of a chinlock and tries to flip out of the corner but gets kicked in the ribs to put him down again. Barrett kicks him to the floor again and gets in some posing to annoy the crowd all over again. That's becoming too lost of an art. We hit the chinlock for a bit before the Winds of Change is countered into a crucifix for two. Barrett throws him to the floor again (Lawler: "I think gravity just remembered him.") but stops to yell at the announcers, allowing Neville to run the barricade for a front flip onto the King. As in the British king.

Back in and a standing shooting star gets two for Neville but Barrett kicks him in the ribs (I'm adding him to the list of people who use superkicks) for a string of two counts. Barrett to the referee: "How much is he paying you?" Neville's lifting German gets two but a release Winds of Change gets the same. The Wasteland is countered into a DDT, setting up the Red Arrow for the pin at 15:28.

Rating: B. Nice long match here with both guys looking good. This is Barrett's place in the company though: he's built up for a little bit and then loses several matches in a row. There's no point in thinking anything else is going to happen so I'm not going to bother anymore. Neville is the same way but it's cool to see that he can hang in there for a longer match.

The Usos are very excited to face the Wyatts tonight because there's been a rivalry for years.

We're going to step away from the show itself for a minute here as the version of the show I watched online before the TV broadcast includes a dark segment so here's a bonus.

King Barrett is still in the ring and says that's not exactly how he planned this. Rooney slapping him on Monday screwed him up and that's the only reason he lost here. He's been doing this for twelve years now and with all the titles he's won, he's certainly a Hall of Famer. There go

the lights and we've got Undertaker. After his forty eight minute entrance (complete with thunder as he takes off the hat), Undertaker stares Barrett down.

Barrett: "Can I help you?" Undertaker is on the wrong side of the tracks because this is northwest England. Barrett is the Preston Panther and doesn't like people coming to his place and staring at him. He explains the process behind the Bull Hammer but says he has bigger fish to try. The cheap shot doesn't work and Barrett takes a chokeslam.

Undertaker leaves to no music but stops and turns around, much to the fans' delight. There goes the throat slit and Barrett takes a Tombstone. The fans want one more and who is Undertaker to turn them down. Nothing much here but it was cool for the fans live and that was the entire point.

WWE World Title Tournament First Round: Ryback vs. Kalisto

Kalisto says it's the size of the fight in the dog but Ryback says feed him more. Some kicks to the legs stagger Ryback and Kalisto slips out of a gorilla press. A very early Salida Del Sol gets two and Ryback throws him to the floor on the kickout but is very staggered. Back from a break with Kalisto getting caught in a spinebuster and a pair of powerbombs. Ryback stays on the back with a hard knee and a delayed vertical suplex but Kalisto knees him in the head to break it up.

Some stomps to the ribs set up a bearhug on the mat as Ryback has easily slipped into the default heel role. Off to a waistlock for a bit before a big boot puts Kalisto down again. Another big boot misses though and Kalisto knocks him to the floor with a dropkick. Kalisto tries an Asai moonsault but gets caught and kind of slammed on the outside. Back in and the hurricanrana driver is countered into Shell Shock but Kalisto rolls through into a sunset flip for two. The Meathook gets the same and Ryback sets up a belly to back superplex, only to get caught in a super Salida Del Sol for the big upset at 13:11.

Rating: B-. If they want to set Kalisto up as the next lucha star, this was a great starting point. The match told a really good story of Kalisto hanging around and never giving up until he pulled it off. One thing

that's going to work in his favor is his finisher as he can hit it from pretty much anywhere, unlike the 619 which took a lot of unrealistic luck. Good match here and what could be a big starting point for Kalisto, though I wouldn't get my hopes up.

They shake hands post match and Ryback raises Kalisto's hand. Ryback did a really good job here of playing the heel without going over to the dark side.

Video on Wrestlemania tickets going on sale.

Here's MexAmerica before Del Rio's match. Colter says this should be the Divided Kingdom because all of the countries hate each other. Del Rio brings up the two soccer team in this city and suggests they unite. They promise to unify the World and US Titles into the MexAmerica World Title. This gimmick started off as lukewarm and has gotten even worse. Colter is great on the mic but there's nothing for him to work with here.

WWE World Title Tournament First Round: Stardust vs. Alberto Del Rio

Stardust now has Ascension style attire. Stardust starts fast with right hands and a clothesline to send Alberto outside but Del Rio sends him shoulder first into the post. Stardust: "OW! MY SHOULDER!" See? It hurt his shoulder. Back from a break with Del Rio kicking him in the head, followed by the corner enziguri for two.

After a quick armbreaker over the ropes, Stardust comes back with some clotheslines but walks into the Backstabber for two. A quick Disaster Kick gets the same for Stardust and he's polite enough to climb up top with his back to the ring so Del Rio can kick him down into the Tree of Woe. The top rope double stomp advances Del Rio at 10:24.

Rating: D-. This is definitely the worst match of the tournament so far. The shoulder stuff before the break didn't go anywhere and the ending had the same stupid problem that Del Rio's finisher always has. There was no logical reason for Stardust to go up top other than to get kicked back down so Alberto could do his finisher. It was a lame squash until then and then the ending made it even worse. Bad match here and I expected better from both guys.

Here are the full second round brackets:

Roman Reigns

Cesaro

Alberto Del Rio

Kalisto

Kevin Owens

Neville

Dolph Ziggler

Dean Ambrose

We recap Becky Lynch beating Paige on Raw with a handful of trunks, earning her a post match beatdown.

Roman Reigns talks about the WWE Championship being his Mount Everest over the last year. The higher you get, the weaker the footing is. Every time you go 100 feet forward, you fall back another 50. This Monday he has Cesaro who is going to uppercut his face off. Reigns isn't going to stop no matter what though, because that's the kind of man he is. As for HHH's offer on Monday, he doesn't take handouts because he isn't like Seth Rollins. He's bringing the big fight to this tournament so he can be the sole survivor.

Usos vs. Wyatt Family

The lights go out and the Wyatts just appear at ringside for a nice change of pace. Harper and Rowan hit the ring and clean house before the bell. Jey breaks up a double chokeslam and the brawl goes outside as we're still waiting on this to officially start. The bell rings with Jey and Rowan getting things going with Erick throwing him to the floor for a clothesline from Harper and we take a break.

Back with Jey in Rowan's head vice and losing his shirt. It's off to Harper who eats a right hand to the jaw so Rowan comes in to rip at

Jimmy's nose. Jey can't slam Rowan and the fans want Harper. Rowan misses a charge and it's off to Jimmy for two off an enziguri. Jey's running Umaga attack is broken up by Rowan as everything breaks down. Jimmy gets two off a high cross body to Harper and a Whisper in the Wind to send Rowan outside.

Harper kicks Jimmy in the face and plants him with a Batista Bomb, only to have Jey come back in with a Superfly Splash for two. Luke no sells a superkick but a second knocks him to the floor. A double superkick does the same to Rowan and there's the double dive. That's enough for Bray so he and Strowman come in for the DQ at 12:12.

Rating: C+. This was the normal fun match that these teams have and it's nice to see them not have the Usos job so soon after coming back. The idea of having all four Wyatts come together to clean house is cool but doesn't matter considering it's going to be two on two at Survivor Series. Good match here but the time and ending held it back.

The Usos are beaten down until Undertaker's voice promises to make the Family rest in peace at Survivor Series. If (presumably) Braun and Bray win, that beatdown on Monday is forgotten, which is best for everyone.

Overall Rating: B+. It's amazing how much more easier this show is to watch when it actually matters. The show felt important for a change as the brackets were filled out. I don't think it's going to happen but there's a chance that they might do the semi-finals here next week. It was a fun show this week with some important matches and a major Survivor Series match being set up.

Results

Braun Strowman b. Fandango – Standing choke

Neville b. King Barrett – Red Arrow

Kalisto b. Ryback – Super Salida Del Sol

Alberto Del Rio b. Stardust – Top rope double stomp

Usos b. Wyatt Family via DQ when Bray Wyatt and Braun Strowman interfered

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Smackdown – October 8, 2015: The A-List Superstars

Smackdown

Date: October 8, 2015

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Rich Brennan, Booker T., Jerry Lawler

Things look a bit different coming out of Raw as New Day got all aggressive and violent to end the show. They even left John Cena and a few others laying in their first real display of dominance. It should be interesting to see where they go from here as they've been so goofy but now they have a new edge. Let's get to it.

Here's New Day to brag about what they did on Monday. No one has ever dominated like they did. Not the Shield, the Wyatts, the NWO, the Dungeon of Doom or Los Boricuas. Philadelphia doesn't know what it's like to win and Eagles head coach Chip Kelly (Big E: "Chip?" Woods: "Yes. Grown man and his name is Chip.") even called them for some tips after they lost to the Washington Redskins this past week. However, now they have to deal with the Dudleys, who have politicked their way into ANOTHER title shot

at Hell in a Cell.

It's time for the chants but here's Ziggler (in trunks again) to interrupt. Normally Dolph would be out there one upping every single one of New Day's jokes but tonight is about revenge. The Authority has allowed him a match against any member of New Day he wants so he picks Big E., who cost him a US Title shot on Monday. Dolph even has a way to guarantee it's a fair fight: John and Juan Cena! Actually it's just the Dudleyz. You think a star like Juan would work this show?

Big E. vs. Dolph Ziggler

Ziggler dropkicks him down and hits the running DDT as we take a quick break. Back with Big E. running him over with a clothesline (Woods: "TRICEP MEAT! WE TOLD YOU THE STOCK WAS RISING! HE IS THE CEO OF TRICEP MEAT INC.!") before choking on the ropes. Woods of course gets an interview with Ziggler before throwing it back to Kofi in the studio. Ziggler fights back but his cross body is countered into a backbreaker for two. We hit that trombone with Woods playing Ziggler's music and Big E. slaps on a chinlock.

It's off to a bearhug instead before E. drops him face first onto the buckle. E.'s charge hits the post though and a Fameasser gets two. A belly to belly from E. sets up the Warrior splash for two but Dolph's superkick gets the same. New Day and the Dudleyz get in a fight on the floor and Kofi snaps Ziggler's neck across the top. That's not enough though as he holds Ziggler's foot down so Big E. can pin him at 9:51.

Rating: D+. Not a great match here but it was more about the New Day's antics than anything else. I like the idea of the team having some singles success but I'm more interested in seeing how they write Cena off TV in just a few weeks. Unless they just go with "I'm going home for a few months", something big is going to have to change.

Stills of Lesnar vs. Big Show on Saturday.

We recap Heyman's promo and Lesnar beating up Show on Monday.

We look at Summer proposing to Rusev on Monday.

Summer is wedding planning but Rusev comes up and asks why she's telling everyone about their engagement. You mean the one that was announced in front of millions on Monday? His Russian accent is almost completely gone at this point. Summer has gotten him a match with Ryback tonight and if he wins, he'll probably be #1 contender to the Intercontinental Title.

Team Bella vs. Charlotte/Becky Lynch/Natalya

Becky armbars Fox down to start and it's quickly off to Charlotte for a double elbow into a double nipup. It's off to Natalya vs. Nikki, meaning Brie has to get in the first batch of "COME ON'S!". Becky comes in but eats a middle rope dropkick from Brie as we take a break. Back with Fox chinlocking Banks as Booker talks about how beautiful they all look. Brie throws Becky away from her corner but the BRIE MODE (minus shouting BRIE MODE thank goodness) knee misses.

Nikki breaks up the tag but gets sent into the corner, allowing the tag off to Charlotte. The champ cleans house for a bit until Nikki comes back with a Disaster Kick for two. The Rack Attack is broken up though and a spear sets up the Figure Eight. Brie makes a save and helps Nikki roll it over but Becky switches it right back and Nikki taps at 11:07.

Rating: C-. Not bad if you ignore the fact that this is the Wyatts vs. the Shield Boys with Natalya currently playing the third man to help in the war. I'm hoping they add Sasha to this feud as it's finally starting to get interesting. There's really no wrong way to go with the title unless it's back to the Bellas, but NXT can only have these awesome matches for so long before everyone realizes the Bellas are in way over their heads.

Paige thinks Natalya is trying to steal her spot.

Rusev vs. Ryback

Owens is on commentary and he's officially defending against Ryback at the pay per view. Ryback takes him into the corner to start as Owens calls Lawler stupid. Owens: "With all due respect of course. Now that I said that you can't be mad at me." Rusev throws him through the ropes and Ryback gets his hand caught in the ropes to give Rusev a target.

The hand is rammed into the steps and post but amazingly enough that's not enough for a pin. Rusev switches up to just going after the arm as Brennan asks Owens about Renee Young saying he isn't a real Canadian. Owens: "Has anyone ever told you that you look like Millhouse from the Simpsons?" Brennan: "Only you Kevin." Owens: "Well there you go." Ryback's comeback is quickly stopped and it's off to an armbar. A belly to belly gets Ryback out of trouble and he stops a charging Rusev with a boot.

Rusev counters what looked to be a powerbomb and gets two off an Alabama Slam. Off to a sleeper of all things but Ryback escapes with an over the shoulder Stunner. Shell Shock is broken up and Rusev's jumping superkick gets two (with Summer shoving the boot off the ropes). Back up and the Meat Hook and Shell Shock end Rusev at 8:25.

Rating: C-. You can see Rusev's star falling from here as he's now regular losing matches on Smackdown. There's a chance that they're going with Summer costing Rusev matches (not that she did but Rusev is the kind of guy who would blame her for his troubles) and they split as a result. Ryback doesn't really gain anything here but a win is always helpful.

Recap of Kane attacking Rollins again on Raw.

Bray asks if he'll be locked inside the Cell with Roman or will Roman be trapped inside with him. Not that it matters as the result is the same. Tonight, Reigns and Orton face the wrath of the black sheep. Strowman used to catch rabbits and then squeeze them until they crossed over. Run little rabbits.

Video on King Barrett.

King Barrett vs. Neville

Neville flips out of the corner to start but gets slammed into the mat via a hair pull. We take an early break and come back with Barrett tossing him into a boot to the chest for two. Barrett hooks a bow and arrow as the announcers give us a quick history of King of the Ring. An enziguri puts Barrett on the floor and a moonsault to the floor takes him down again. This is almost every match we've ever seen between these two.

Neville gets two off the German suplex but Barrett gets away before he can launch the Red Arrow. The Bull Hammer gives Barrett the in at 8:32.

Rating: D+. Neville loses again and while I could usually get behind the idea of him putting someone else over, it's Barrett. He'll probably be losing to a mascot or an actor or the returning Hornswoggle soon enough. The match was watchable enough but Neville is really in need of some momentum.

Post match Stardust, wearing a card dealer's hat, says it won't be a king, a champion, or Stardust's lady fair. He picks up another card and likes what he sees but doesn't tell us what it is. Lawler's easiest line in a month: "He's not playing with a full deck."

Breast cancer is bad moment of the week.

Roman Reigns/Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt/Braun Strowman

No Harper or Ambrose at ringside. Orton and Wyatt get things going with Bray being sent to the apron but escaping the hanging DDT. Back in and Bray hands it off to Strowman who runs Orton over like he's not even there. It's off to Reigns for the big showdown and a shoulder puts Roman down like he's one of the Ding Dongs. Orton makes a blind tag but Strowman shoulders both opponents down with ease. It's back to Bray to stomp away in the corner until Orton scores with his backbreaker. Braun misses a charge into the corner and there's the tag to Reigns.

Roman slugs away and lifts Braun for a Samoan drop but can't get it over. Instead Roman gets him in the ropes and kicks Strowman in the face, eventually Superman punching him to the floor. The camera zoomed in on Roman to make sure we couldn't see Braun down on the floor though. That's a very nice touch as they've done a great job of keeping Strowman looking like an unstoppable monster and he still hasn't been down. Why waste that on Smackdown? Roman goes after Bray on the floor but Wyatt hits him in the ribs with a chair for the DQ at 7:50.

Rating: C-. Another average match here that felt like it was cut really short. I still love how they're booking Strowman as he's going to get beaten one day but they need to build him up as long as they can before

finally having someone take him down. The match was just another step towards the Cell match and I'm assuming Ambrose and Harper will be in part of a tag match at the pay per view.

Post match Orton saves Roman from Wyatt but gets choked out, only to have Reigns score with a Superman punch. Bray can't hit Sister Abigail and it's an RKO to Wyatt, followed by the spear to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. It was another worthless edition of Smackdown this week and those are getting more and more annoying to sit through. None of the matches felt important and the whole show felt like a way to kill two hours. I've been saying that WAY too often lately and it's even worse when it's something that could be remedied. If no one is watching, give us some nice long matches every week instead of the endless recaps and 8-10 minute matches that change nothing. It's even less effort for the writers as all they have to do is let the wrestlers do their thing. Is that too much to ask for?

Results

Big E. b. Dolph Ziggler – Pin after Kofi Kingston guillotined Ziggler across the top rope

Charlotte/Becky Lynch/Natalya b. Team Bella – Figure Eight to Nikki

Ryback b. Rusev – Shell Shock

King Barrett b. Neville – Bull Hammer

Roman Reigns/Randy Orton b. Braun Strowman/Bray Wyatt via DQ when Wyatt used a chair

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