

Monday Night Raw – January 22, 2018 (25th Anniversary): Tug of War

Monday Night Raw 25th Anniversary

Date: January 22, 2018

Location: Manhattan Center, New York City, New York/Barclays Center, New York City, New York

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T., Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

Now this is a big night with the show having been build up for several months and a slew of guest stars booked for the night. The show is also being run from two arenas, including the location of the first ever episode. I'm more excited for this than I am for Sunday's Royal Rumble so let's get to it.

JR and King welcome us from the Manhattan Center, complete with an ICOPRO sign.

The regular announcers' team welcome us from the Barclays Center.

Shane McMahon and Stephanie McMahon are in the ring to open the show with Stephanie doing that ever present growling introduction. Shane thanks us for being here along with all the people behind the scenes who make this happen. With that, Shane introduces us to the long highlight reel of Raw moments. This was released on the site's YouTube page and is very awesome with almost every major Raw moment ever.

Back in the arena, Stephanie introduces Vince, who absolutely has to be here for the opening sequence. Vince nearly dances in the ring and says twenty five years is quite the accomplishment. The fans chant THANK YOU VINCE (which Stephanie explains to him) but Vince says enough of that and we're off to the festivities. Vince goes to leave but Stephanie and Shane have a present for him.

They have a plaque commemorating his twenty five years of Raw...and he's not happy. Vince goes on a rant about it being cheap and how plaque is the horrible stuff on the people of Brooklyn's teeth. There's only one person who should be thanked for all of this and that's Vince himself. As he goes off about how great he is.....the glass shatters.

After Austin does his usual entrance, Vince praises Austin's look but says he's had his own share of health problems. His bones are broken and brittle and he has arthritis and he even lives in a retirement home. Vince: "But my son Shane is in his prime!" Austin raises Shane's hand and gives him a Stunner to the delight of the fans. Vince produces beers and the fans chant ONE MORE TIME! Vince: "I don't think Shane can take another one!" They drink their beer and hug but Austin looks at Vince, followed by one more Stunner for old times' sake. For some reason Shane gets up and takes one more Stunner.

This was just about the perfect opening as you have to have Vince there for something like this and if there's Vince, there must be Austin. All those Stunners over the years were a huge part of the show and Austin is arguably the name that more people would associate with Raw than anyone else. This was great and the only way things should have gone to start.

Absolution/Alicia Fox/Nia Jax vs. Bayley/Sasha Banks/Mickie James/Asuka

There's a big brawl before the bell and Asuka has banged up ribs. She's still able to kick Sonya to the floor though and we take an early break. Back with Asuka hip attacking half of the villains off the apron before it's off to Jax vs. Banks. That goes fairly badly for Sasha who gets caught in Alicia's northern lights suplex for two.

We hit the chinlock until Banks gets double teamed in the corner. Everything breaks down and we take a second break because it's not like there's a lot of stuff to get to tonight. Back with Banks grabbing the Bank Statement to make Fox tap at 11:58. The stuff after the break was less than fifteen seconds long.

Rating: C-. This was fine all things considered but at the same time, there's some other stuff going on tonight that they need to cover. That's kind of the problem with having this big special on the same night as the

go home show for the Rumble. They have to build things up but at the same time they have to get to the big special features. The match was fine, but probably should have been shorter.

Post match Asuka throws her partners over the top in a Sunday preview.

Kurt Angle is in the back when Jonathan Coachman comes in. Coach talks about all the faces he's seen around here, so cue Harvey Wippleman and the Brooklyn Brawler who offer cigars. Cue Teddy Long for the required dancing. Brother Love comes in (he scared me to death as a kid) and declares love for everyone until Boogeyman comes in, complete with the worms in the mouth...which he hands to Coach. A lot of staring ensues.

In the Manhattan Center, JR and King (who mentions puppies) introduce a nice video package on Undertaker's greatest Raw moments.

Here's the Undertaker, with the lights not going out for his entrance in a strange visual (flashback to his original). For twenty five years, he's buried souls who dared to challenge him and buried them in the cold dark earth. Steve Austin, Mick Foley, his brother Kane have all fallen before the reaper and now, after all this time, they may rest in peace. JR: "Is that a warning?" The music plays again and no one interrupts. I'll believe it's over when I don't see him at Wrestlemania but that seems to be the case at the moment.

We go to the APA's office with Heath Slater losing all of his money in a poker game as Rhyno shakes his head. Someone comes in and throws some money down...and of course it's Ted DiBiase. They deal him in and we get the evil laugh. Still the greatest villain of all time for my money.

Here's are some of the all time greatest General Managers: Johnny Ace (with a red suit and blue tie), William Regal, Eric Bischoff (to a ROAR) and Daniel Bryan. Miz and the Miztourage interrupt though and it's time for one of the big matches.

Intercontinental Title: The Miz vs. Roman Reigns

Miz is challenging. They take their time to start until Reigns pops him with a right hand. The Miztourage offers a distraction though and Miz

sends him into the steps as we take a break. Back with Reigns hitting the corner clotheslines, followed by a running big boot. The apron dropkick connects but the spear is countered into a rollup for two with the feet on the ropes. The YES Kicks keep Roman in trouble but the big kick is countered into a sitout powerbomb for two.

Another apron dropkick takes the Miztourage out and Reigns slips out of the Skull Crushing Finale for another Superman Punch. Bo Dallas grabs the foot though and Miz hits his corner clothesline. That means a double ejection but Reigns hits them one more time, allowing the Skull Crushing Finale to connect for two. Back up and Reigns tries the spear but hits an exposed turnbuckle pad. The Skull Crushing Finale makes Miz an eight time champion at 13:13. A replay shows that Miz got the pad off when Reigns was beating up the Miztourage for a nice surprise.

Rating: C. This was a booking decision more than anything else and there's nothing wrong with that. The loss lets Reigns drop the title before he wins the Universal Title at Wrestlemania (THIS TIME FOR SURE!) and the win gives Miz something else to do, especially now that he's less than three months away from the most combined days as champion (and only one reign behind Chris Jericho's record).

Back to the poker game with the Hardys, the Usos, and MVP playing as Slater continues to lose his money.

It's time for the Peep Show with Christian. He knows a thing or two about being a Tag Team Champion so his guests are Jason Jordan and Seth Rollins. Jordan takes over for Seth and talks about what an honor it is to be here but the crowd won't let him talk. Jordan eventually talks about Kurt and asks the fans to applaud him. Cue the Bar to say that all the fans are because of them, not all the legends. They'll be getting the titles back on Sunday and it's because Jordan sucks. We hit the YOU SUCK song and the brawl is on. Sheamus gets knocked to the floor but Seth's springboard knee hits Jordan.

Alexa Bliss is annoyed at being asked if she'll still be champion at Wrestlemania. Charlotte comes in and MY GOODNESS she towers over Alexa. She says Alexa doesn't have the stature to be champion and Ric Flair

himself comes in to say Charlotte is going to be champion until she decides to hang up the robe. Flair appearing was great, though they're teasing the heck out of one of these two losing before Wrestlemania.

Video on Edge, who isn't here tonight.

More people are at the poker game, now including Natalya and Titus Worldwide. Heath loses again, this time to Natalya's queen high flush in hearts. Dana has counted it up: Heath has lost a lot.

Bray Wyatt vs. Matt Hardy

In the Manhattan Center and this match takes place here? Sister Abigail is broken up in the first five seconds as JR tries to figure out what Sister Abigail is. Matt grabs a Russian legsweep and drops the middle rope elbow to the back of the head. The Twist of Fate is broken up and Bray runs him over as we take a break. Back with Matt hitting a running corner clothesline but having his bulldog broken up. The Side Effect gets two on Bray but Sister Abigail is good for the pin on Matt at 5:48. Not enough shown to rate but that's quite the abrupt loss in the first match between these two.

Back in Barclays, here are some of the greatest female talents ever: the Bella Twins, Maryse, Kelly Kelly, Lilian Garcia, Jacqueline, Torrie Wilson, Michelle McCool, Terri Runnels, Maria Kanellis and of course Trish Stratus as the big name. This group is declared as trailblazers so I have a good laugh as we cut away.

Elias is walking through the back when he runs into Chris Jericho (in an Alpha Club shirt). Chris compliments his scarves and asks if he can play a song he's written about Elias. He can't borrow the guitar but worry not because Jericho has his own. The song is about Elias being a stupid idiot and HE JUST MADE THE LIST! Jericho loads up the pen but says he's kidding. Jericho: "NO I'M NOT! YOU JUST MADE THE LIST!"

Here's Elias in the ring to talk about how amazing it is that it took Raw twenty five years to find him. WWE stands for Walk With Elias but the fans won't let him play his song. Elias wants to sing it for the fans but points out Jimmy Fallon in the front row. The song is about the various

legends, including talking about how Shawn's time is passed and Undertaker is a decrepit old man. He's going to the Royal Rumble but here's John Cena to interrupt.

Cena asks the crowd if they're loud now and points out that both he and Brooklyn have balls because there they are (it's a beach ball in this case). Elias tells him to shut up because the fans are there to see Elias but Cena ruined it. Cena tells him to do something about it but Elias says no and teases leaving. The fight is on of course and Cena hits his finishing sequence but the AA is cut off by a low blow. A guitar to the back leaves Cena laying and Drift Away makes it even better. I'm pleasantly surprised here as this was a very solid rub for Elias who took some of Cena's best and left him laying. Good stuff here.

New Day is at the poker game now with Woods betting pancakes. Slater FINALLY wins a hand but is accused of cheating. A fight nearly breaks out and Bradshaw says if you want to fight, do it in the ring. Oh I can feel the Revival's death coming from here. Titus Worldwide and Slater/Rhyno leave but DiBiase wins with a royal flush. As he rakes in the chips, Ron Simmons says his catchphrase.

Mark Henry is in the back and runs into the Godfather and...some random woman. Godfather brings up Sexual Chocolate but Henry says that was a long time ago. Henry seems to hit on the woman...and it's Godfather's wife. Mark smiles and isn't sure what to think.

Titus Worldwide vs. Heath Slater/Rhyno

Titus chops Rhyno to start before it's off to Crews vs. Slater with Heath starting in on the arm. A very delayed vertical suplex puts Heath down and we take a break. IN THIS MATCH??? Back with the match being thrown out at 5:40. Again not enough to rate but this seems like a means to an end.

Cue the Dudley Boyz (including Bubba, who was named ROH GM two days ago and D-Von, who looks rather huge) as everyone bails to the floor. Slater gets thrown back inside for What's Up (with Booker commenting on D-Von's weight gain). It's table time of course (with Rhyno pulling the ring skirt back) and the 3D drives Slater through it for good measure. This

was a HUGE relief as the Revival wasn't destroyed for no apparent reason.

AJ Styles is in the back and has his own interviewer: Mean Gene Okerlund. AJ does his best Hogan impression to Gene (AJ: "Sorry I've always wanted to do that.") before talking about facing Kami on Sunday. He has a small window to fight on Sunday but if he does it right, they'll hear him announced as still being champion. Gene looks confused.

Back to the Manhattan Center and here's DX for the big reunion. Well just Shawn and HHH to start. Shawn has been hearing people ask HBSizzle what his best moment in the 25 years have been. He can't remember 25 minutes ago but he does remember something about a big sausage, which HHH cuts him off. Then one time they were all in Christmas stuff but HHH says no again.

Shawn gets annoyed because he used to be the boss of this group but now HHH is the boss of everything so Shawn doesn't get to do anything anymore. All you have to do to see all those moments again though is sign up for the WWE Network. HHH talks about the fans starting the fire and now they're here because of him.

We hear about some of the history of DX, including a rare Chyna name drop. HHH talks about going to WCW in a tank (it wasn't a tank) and starting a war (which had started well over a year prior) but now they're here because the Manhattan Center is home. They're not here alone though because here are the New Age Outlaws. Maybe Road Dogg can ruin Raw now.

Dogg does his usual and here's X-Pac for another surprise (I mean, assuming you didn't see the graphics all night long). The crowd cuts X-Pac off with a 1-2-3 chant but there's one more surprise: Scott Hall. Back after a VERY abrupt break with everyone in the ring and Ramon saying Hey Yo. He calls this whole thing too sweet...and here's Balor Club. They all do too Too Sweet...and it's the freaking Revival to get the legends burial.

Revival vs. Anderson and Gallows

Revival jumps them before the bell and it's Anderson in early trouble. A headlock is broken up in short order and it's off to Gallows for the

kicks to the head. The Magic Killer ends Dawson clean at 2:00.

Revival goes after DX and takes the finishers, because this worked so well for Damien Sandow. X-Factor, Shake Rattle and Roll, Fameasser, Sweet Chin Music, Pedigree and Coup de Grace, followed by Billy getting in his catchphrase. So glad they had Revival, one of the best teams in a long time, to do this. To be fair they're wrestlers and we don't have room for that around here.

Angle brings out all of the legends and people from the poker game to surround the ring for the closing segment as we go to a break at 11:03. Back with Angle bringing out Braun Strowman and Kane, who are held apart by a lot of the wrestlers. Paul Heyman comes out and introduces Brock Lesnar for a fight. Here's Brock...and everyone but Kane and Strowman bail in fear. Brock runs over Strowman and hits an F5 on Kane but Strowman is back in to knock Lesnar to the floor. The running powerslam through the announcers' table plants Lesnar to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. This show was trying to do two things at once and it made them both suffer. There was actually a bit too much wrestling going on and some of those longer matches (which to be fair were only in the first half of the show) were cutting down on time that could have been used for the nostalgia stuff. The problem is you have to do that for the Rumble, leaving less time for the big anniversary material.

The anniversary stuff was fine enough, but it really peaked at the beginning and was kind of downhill from there. Going back to the Manhattan Center was fun, though it really felt like the crowd there got screwed a bit. Other than DX and Undertaker's short appearance, almost nothing there felt important or special and that's not a great sign. Throw in the stupid, stupid, STUPID beatdown of Revival (who not only got taken out by the old guys but also lost a clean two minute match) and Terri Runnels/Kelly Kelly apparently being trailblazers and some of this stuff left a lot to be desired.

As for the Rumble build...eh. Once the big names for the Rumble are set, there's not a lot that can really be done to build to the pay per view. We know all of the main roster women in the Rumble and most of the men

are already set so there's only so much you can do here. What we got was ok, though the triple threat stuff isn't doing anything for me.

Now there was a lot of good stuff as well, including Miz winning the Intercontinental Title back (thanks for keeping it warm Roman), Elias beating Cena down, the lack of Undertaker vs. Cena being made (though that could change), some of the cameos (Henry and Godfather made me laugh) and of course Austin and Vince. It wasn't the worst show, but I was expecting a lot more and didn't get really close to it, which is rather disappointing. Still though, it could have been much worse.

Results

Bayley/Sasha Banks/Mickie James/Asuka b. Absolution/Alicia Fox/Nia Jax – Bank Statement to Fox

The Miz b. Roman Reigns – Skull Crushing Finale

Bray Wyatt b. Matt Hardy – Sister Abigail

Titus Worldwide vs. Heath Slater/Rhyno went to a double DQ when all four brawled

Anderson and Gallows b. Revival – Magic Killer to Dawson

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Summerslam 2003 (2018 Redo) : Like A Popped Balloon

Summerslam 2003

Date: August 24, 2003

Location: America West Arena, Phoenix, Arizona

Attendance: 16,113

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole, Tazz

It's one of the biggest shows of the year and I can't bring myself to get excited over it. This show really hasn't been built up very well with only the Smackdown World Title match with Kurt Angle defending against Brock Lesnar offering much interest. The rest of the show feels very flat, especially the Raw World Title match which should have been Goldberg vs. HHH. Let's get to it.

The United States Marine Corps Color Guard presents the flag and Lillian Garcia sings the National Anthem. As always, it's an outstanding performance.

The opening video shows a beach but the sun goes behind a cloud and the shot shifts to the Elimination Chamber. The narration basically makes it sound like the Chamber is poisoning everyone's souls and turning them all evil, including Kane, who isn't even in the thing. I'd bet money that Jim Ross wrote that, thinking it sounded even more dramatic than when he gives the Cell human characteristics.

Raw Tag Team Titles: Dudley Boyz vs. La Resistance

La Resistance is defending and Bubba brings out the American flag. The Dudleys jump them in the aisle and the beatdown is on with D-Von choking Dupree with the robe. An armdrag into an armbar (FEEL THE HATRED!) doesn't go very well as Dupree takes D-Von into the corner so the champs can take over. D-Von is right back with the shots to the head, allowing

the tag off to the very loud Bubba. It might be annoying, but I can always go for a partner making noise and being active on the apron instead of just standing there.

Grenier gets tied in the Tree of Woe so Bubba can stand between his legs for a loud scream. It's not quite table time, allowing Grenier to get in a cheap shot so the champs can really take over. Dupree grabs a bearhug, which is quite the odd visual on someone as big as Bubba. A Bubba Bomb gets him out of trouble though and the not very hot tag brings in D-Von for the house cleaning.

Dupree gets powerslammed for two but the champs clear the ring again. The double spinebuster gets two on D-Von (there's the crowd reaction, and all it took was kicking out of the champs' finisher). Bubba comes back in for the Flip, Flop and Fly, followed by What's Up on Grenier. 3D connects but Grenier pulls the referee out, allowing a cameraman to deck D-Von with his camera, giving Dupree the pin. It's the serviceman from Raw of course.

Rating: C-. The match was ok, but not exactly the hottest choice in the world for an opener. Having the Americans lose to the EVIL Frenchmen doesn't quite get the show off on the right foot and now we're likely to see another rematch between these teams as this feud to show off THE POWERS OF AMERICA continues. La Resistance is fine to hold the titles, but they need something more than "we are French and therefore evil".

Post match Spike Dudley comes in and gets beaten down as well. So after the big American military opening and carrying the flag, the Dudleys lose to the heatless champions again. The Dudleys would get the belts back a month later, but instead we need to see them lose here. Of course we also needed this match instead of the World's Greatest Tag Team, Rey Mysterio, John Cena or Christian.

Coach tries to talk to the Dudleys but makes the mistake of praising La Resistance's success. Bubba declares that people who hate America suck and promises to get the belts back.

Christian asks Eric Bischoff why he's not on the show but Eric blames Steve Austin. Since he can't wrestle, he offers to be Bischoff's backup

tonight. Bischoff has a plan though and promises to tell the world what happened with Linda on Monday.

We recap A-Train running Stephanie McMahon over last month and costing her a match against Sable. This turned into A-Train vs. Undertaker and WWE actually expects us to believe that this isn't going to turn into Sable vs. Stephanie again.

A-Train vs. Undertaker

Sable is with A-Train in a rather nice outfit. Undertaker has bad ribs so he dodges a bit to start instead of going in full steam ahead. Instead of staying on the ribs, A-Train tries a headlock, allowing Undertaker to knee him in the ribs and take over. The running DDT gets two on A-Train and Old School connects early on. A shot to the ribs finally cuts Undertaker off (thanks for finally getting the idea Train) and some forearms to the ribs are good for two.

A-Train stays on the ribs with a vertical suplex, followed by a headbutt. Cole: "It's like being hit in the head with a typewriter." Normally I would question that, but Cole is the kind of dolt who would do that for fun. Undertaker manages Snake Eyes and a double clothesline puts both guys down for a quick rest.

A slugout goes to Undertaker (well duh) and a big legdrop gets two. For some reason Undertaker tries the Last Ride but a shove gives us a ref bump. The Derailer of course gets a delayed two and the referee gets bumped again. That is way, WAY too popular of a booking trope these days. A-Train hits the bicycle kick to take Undertaker down but gets a chair kicked into his face for two. The chokeslam gives Undertaker the pin.

Rating: D. Matches against power guys like this can be Undertaker's bread and butter but there's only so much you can do to make A-Train interesting. The match wasn't terrible and they kept it slow enough, but this Undertaker stands up for Stephanie thing is about as forced as you can get. There's only so much you can do as a surrogate for Vince vs. Stephanie, especially when the best villain available for the spot is A-Train.

Post match Undertaker loads up the Last Ride but Sable comes in and rubs his chest. Undertaker grabs her by the throat and STEPHANIE IS BACK!!! WE CAN LIVE HAPPY LIVES AGAIN!!! Stephanie gets to do some catfighting until A-Train pulls Sable out. I guess this is what passes for a big moment around here.

Some fans in the front row think Goldberg is going to win the Chamber. Uh, thanks for that.

We recap Shane McMahon vs. Eric Bischoff, which starts off looking a lot like Shane vs. Kane. Bischoff then decided that he hated Shane for stealing WCW from him back in 2001. You know, because that's a story people were thinking about. Eric went after Shane, including having Kane attack him and cost him a match against Eric.

Then Eric went to Connecticut and may have forced himself on Linda McMahon. It came out of almost nowhere and really was more of a complicated way to get to Kane vs. Shane. It's more of WWE thinking you could just toss a McMahon into a story and everything would be fine, which doesn't work as well when you do it in two straight matches.

Shane McMahon vs. Eric Bischoff

Before the match, Bischoff addresses what happened with Linda, saying it happened again and again and again. Now he knows where Shane gets all of his energy, so here's Shane in a...complete non hurry actually. Shane pounds him down in the corner with reckless abandon (Or is it still Ruthless Aggression?), followed by some forearms to the ear (called crossfaces by JR).

Eric can't make it up the aisle as Christian might be coming off like a good idea right about now. A baseball slide sends Eric into the barricade as this has been one sided so far. Shane's dancing punches take Bischoff down again but the Coach of all people comes in to chair Shane down. Let me make sure I've got this straight: Bischoff thought COACH was a better option than the Intercontinental Champion? I get that they want to protect Christian from having to get beaten up by Shane but that makes no sense from Bischoff's perspective.

Eric says he's restarting the match as falls count anywhere with no disqualifications so Coach sends Shane into the steps for two. They head inside where Bischoff tells the production staff to cut JR and King's microphones so Coach can do live commentary in the ring. Bischoff throws kicks as Coach does the traditional job of mocking JR. Shane finally gets in a kick of his own and scores with a DDT, only to have Coach hit him low.

That's enough to make the glass shatter, as everyone knew was coming. Coach does the "I'm not touching you" thing until Shane shoves him into Austin, meaning the beatdown can be on. The dispatching doesn't take long and Austin orders JR and King's mics be turned on again. Austin is about to leave but Shane grabs Bischoff's hand and slaps Austin in the jaw, meaning a Stunner is perfectly acceptable. Shane pulls him up at two though, as the big elbow drives Bischoff through the announcers' table for the pin.

Rating: F. What did this accomplish? There's no reason this couldn't have been the end of Monday Night Raw as the big deal was Coach turning heel. Use this valuable pay per view time (some of the biggest pay per view time of the year) on the people who matter, not for the sake of making Kane look good because he never gets to do that otherwise. This was really annoying, especially when you consider everything that was left off the show so this could get a lot of time.

Beer is consumed post match because this hasn't eaten up enough time yet.

HHH and Ric Flair get very serious with Randy Orton, telling him that he needs to focus on keeping the title on HHH and nothing more. Orton: "What? I got it."

US Title: Eddie Guerrero vs. Chris Benoit vs. Tajiri vs. Rhyno

Eddie is defending under tornado rules and one fall to a finish. Tony Chimmel tells us that this is the four way for the US Title before telling us that this is the four way for the US Title. It's a brawl to start with Eddie staying on the floor, which might not be the smartest move in the world here. With Tajiri sent outside, Benoit snaps the Crossface onto Rhyno, drawing Eddie in for the save. Rhyno clotheslines

Tajiri for two and Eddie is there for the save again. Eddie gets triple teamed but Rhyno shifts over to Benoit for some reason.

A powerslam gives Rhyno two on Eddie as it's still all over the place, albeit not at the fastest pace. Rhyno and Benoit are sent outside, leaving Tajiri to monkey flip Eddie for two. All four are back in with Rhyno superplexing Eddie for two with Tajiri making the save. Tajiri gets the same by kicking Benoit in the head but the champ saves this time. A headscissors puts Rhyno on the floor and Eddie's rope walk hurricanrana gets two on Benoit.

Tajiri comes back in and gets caught in the Lasso From El Paso but Benoit quickly follows with a Crossface on Rhyno. Eddie isn't sure what to do but Tajiri making the ropes makes his decision much easier. That earns Eddie a Crossface of his own until Rhyno and Tajiri break it up. Rhyno busts up Tajiri's spine for two and it's Benoit rolling some German suplexes to make Tajiri feel even worse.

Tajiri manages to get in one of his own though and bridges back for a close two, leaving everyone down at once. Back up and Tajiri gets Benoit in the Tarantula, leaving Rhyno to Gore Eddie. The problem is Eddie had the US Title in his hands to bust up Rhyno's shoulder, leaving him down in pain. Benoit's Swan Dive gets two as Tajiri dives in for a save, only to have both of them fall outside. Eddie sneaks in with a frog splash to pin Rhyno and retain the title.

Rating: B-. This was a good match that was trying hard to be great. There were a few too many dead spots in there though and they never hit a higher gear that they were capable of, but at least they did well with what they did. Eddie stealing the pin after cheating with the belt makes perfect sense for him and it's the right idea to keep the title on him with the roll he's currently on.

We look at Brock Lesnar destroying Zach Gowen, who will be out for a good while as a result.

Earlier tonight on Heat, Matt Hardy accepted a forfeit win over Gowen.

We recap Brock Lesnar vs. Kurt Angle. Brock beat Angle for the title at

Wrestlemania and Angle went on the shelf. While he was out, Angle and Lesnar became friends, which lead them to Vengeance where Angle won the title back in a triple threat. A few weeks later, Lesnar turned on Angle to join forces with Vince in the name of being the REAL Brock Lesnar. Brock attacked Angle in a cage and left him laying, which has only ticked Angle off coming in to the title match.

Smackdown World Title: Kurt Angle vs. Brock Lesnar

Brock is challenging and we actually get an old school rules explanation from the referee. They hit the mat to start with Angle getting the better of it (not exactly shocking) and frustrating Lesnar early on. Another takedown looks to set up the ankle lock but Kurt goes to a headlock that Brock can break far more easily. Odd thinking there. Back up and Brock shoves him away without too much effort so Angle armdrags Lesnar outside, frustrating Brock all over again.

Kurt follows him outside and starts in on Brock's knee before sending him into the barricade. Back in and the first suplex gets two on Brock, who responds by gorilla pressing him out to the floor in a big crash (great visual with Angle just falling to the floor). Now it's Brock's turn for a suplex as he's starting to look all surly. A tilt-a-whirl backbreaker gets two on Kurt and we hit the rear naked choke before that meant much to a lot of fans. It's off to a regular bodyscissors instead, followed by a chinlock.

Of course Angle fights up (after Brock let go of two better holds), this time being cut down by a hard knee to the ribs. A hard clothesline drops Angle again and the move that would become known as Shell Shock (complete with walking around the ring) gives Brock two. Some shoulders in the corner stay on Angle's ribs so Kurt hits him in the face. You don't do that to Lesnar though and Angle gets more shoulders to his ribs for his efforts.

Brock's big running charge goes into the post though and Kurt's running shoulder block staggers Lesnar. A dropkick to the knee has Brock in more trouble and it's time to roll the German suplexes (with Lesnar holding the shoulder off each one). The Angle Slam doesn't work and Brock goes

back to the ribs with a spinebuster. Since one finisher is countered, the other has to be as well so Kurt reverses the F5 into a good looking DDT for two of his own. Now the Angle Slam is good for two and Angle is even more fired up.

In my favorite Angle spot, he puts the straps back up so he can take them down all over again. The ankle lock goes on but Brock rolls forward, sending Angle into the referee. Kurt charges at him for what looks like a sunset flip but stops halfway, wrapping his legs around Brock's neck and arm (almost in an upside down triangle choke). Since that's not the easiest hold to maintain, Angle switches over to the ankle lock for the tap but there's no referee.

Cue Vince to chair Angle in the back, setting up the F5 for a delayed two. Another F5 is reversed into the ankle lock to put Brock in real trouble. He grabs all four bottom ropes but the hold isn't broken for absolutely no apparent reasons, meaning Brock has to tap to retain Angle's title.

Rating: B+. It's not quite their Wrestlemania match but Angle getting his win back makes sense...in theory. They've been building Lesnar up as the unstoppable monster for the last few weeks so it would have made sense to have him win here (with Vince's help) before losing the rematch down the line. That being said, I'm fine with Angle retaining here as it makes sense from the long term. In other words, this one depends on how you look at it, but it's a rather strong match either way.

Vince gets an Angle Slam through a chair to wish him a happy birthday.

We recap Kane vs. Rob Van Dam. Kane lost his mask and despite Van Dam trying to calm him down and say that he didn't need the mask, Kane went crazy and started destroying everything in his path. This included beating up Van Dam, Shane McMahon and Linda McMahon and setting Jim Ross on fire. This seems to be setting up Kane vs. Shane, but first Van Dam gets his shot tonight.

Kane vs. Rob Van Dam

No Holds Barred, which is added right before the match. JR refers to Kane

as the “byproduct of an inbred mongrel dog”. As I so often wonder of both JR and Jim Cornette: WHERE DO THEY COME UP WITH THIS STUFF??? Van Dam tries to start fast but gets clotheslined down in short order. They head outside with Kane sending him into the barricade but charging into a boot, allowing Rob to follow up with another kick to the face.

Van Dam gets posted though and it’s time for a ladder. Rob is smart enough to kick it into his face, followed by a top rope kick to the chest. A crossbody puts them both on the floor and of course Kane takes over again. The announcers talk about what Kane did to Linda, which is both a good and bad idea. It’s good in that it shows you what Kane is capable of and how evil he is, but it also shows you how unimportant this match is because it’s all about Shane vs. Kane down the line.

Back in and another kick to Kane’s face knocks him into the corner (there’s certainly a pattern here) as JR deems Kane smelly. Kane shoves Rob off the top and down onto the barricade as the violence starts to go the monster’s way again. The ladder to the face drops Rob again and it’s time for some simple choking. Thankfully the referee doesn’t break it up because that comes off as barring a hold, which might get a lawyer involved with his life.

Rob gets kicked outside again and this time Kane follows by going to the top, only to dive into the barricade by mistake (that looked bad on replay as Kane seemed to slip, leaving him without enough distance and sending him head first into the barricade). Now it’s Rob getting in a ladder shot, which Kane of course shrugs off.

A DDT on the floor knocks Rob silly but he’s able to drop toehold Kane into the steps. The spinning kick from the apron drops Kane again, followed by Rolling Thunder onto the chair. Kane sits up so Rob dropkicks the chair into his face for good measure. The Van Terminator misses though and a Tombstone onto the steps is enough to end Rob.

Rating: B. Nice brawl here but I couldn’t shake the feeling that it didn’t mean anything given the story they’ve already told us is coming. Rob was trying here though and made the match fun, especially with the story of the wrestling going to Van Dam and the hardcore stuff going to

Kane, but we're heading for Kane vs. Shane and everyone knows it.

Bischoff is banged up and doesn't want to talk about his loss but Linda McMahon comes in. Eric starts stammering and gets slapped in the face as the billionaire gets revenge. I can totally relate.

Flair gives HHH a final pep talk.

The Chamber is lowered.

Long recap on the main event, which also features a look at the Chamber. HHH was scheduled to defend against Goldberg one on one but a torn groin necessitated a multi-person match because Heaven forbid HHH take a spear and Jackhammer and lose in a short match with the excuse that he wasn't ready or was wrestling hurt or any other idea they had. Somehow we get Kevin Nash in another main event though, because that's what the world was waiting for. There have been some personal issues added after the match announcement but it still feels a little thrown together.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Goldberg vs. Shawn Michaels vs. Randy Orton vs. Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Nash

The intervals are three minutes this year because we need to move this along. Goldberg slips during his entrance, which is edited out of the Network version (though he goes from standing in the middle of the stage to a few steps to the right off a camera cut). Shawn and Jericho start us off as the fans chant for Goldberg. They hit the mat to start for the Flair pinfall reversal sequence before trading slaps.

Shawn backdrops him but has to switch to a small package to escape the Walls attempt. Jericho can't hit the Lionsault so instead we'll listen to JR mess up history by saying this title has only changed hands once before in Arizona. That's some nice sounding trivia, but remember that this title isn't even a year old yet and has its own lineage. Sure that doesn't mean much, but this is the way WWE has set things up and they can't keep it straight. Anyway, Orton is in third with a high crossbody for two on Shawn, followed by the signature backbreaker gets the same on Jericho.

The RKO is broken up though and Jericho backdrops Orton onto the steel. Now the Walls work just fine on Shawn but it's Kevin Nash in fourth. That's enough for Jericho to break it up and go after Nash, who isn't happy with his new haircut. I find it rather spiffy, even as Nash throws Jericho into the Chamber wall. Nash's side slam gets two on Orton and Jericho is busted open. Nash goes over for a Jackknife, only to get superkicked down, allowing Jericho to roll him up for the pin, meaning Nash was in there for all of two minutes.

HHH is in fifth...and Shawn superkicks him right back into the pod. Nash isn't done yet though and Jackknifes Jericho and Orton as a parting gift. Shawn, who is down off throwing a superkick, covers both villains for two each. Everyone punches it out until Goldberg is in to complete the field. Right hands and forearms abound and it's the spear to get rid of Orton in short order. Jericho gets launched onto the cage floor again and another spear sends him through the Plexiglas.

As Goldberg gets back in, Shawn scores with a forearm followed by the top rope elbow. Sweet Chin Music misses though and it's a spear and Jackhammer to get us down to three. The same thing gets rid of Jericho and it's HHH (who still hasn't gotten out of the pod) vs. Goldberg for the title.

Flair shuts the pod again and holds it shut as well as he can, only to have Goldberg break the "unbreakable Plexiglas". Some right hands keep HHH in trouble and Goldberg sends him into the Chamber walls a few times. A clothesline takes him down again and HHH is busted open. Goldberg loads up the spear but Flair slips HHH the sledgehammer to knock Goldberg cold and the title is retained.

Rating: D. This wasn't even twenty minutes long. The best way to describe this match would be a middle finger to the fans who are nearly dying to see HHH lose that freaking title already but we need to make sure he's ready to give Goldberg the rub or something. I'm not sure how WWE can validate keeping the title on HHH when they have Goldberg right there and HHH can barely move, but I'm sure it's just the right thing to do, at least according to HHH. That's 2003 in a nutshell: cheer for whomever you want, but you get HHH.

The rest of the match was of course nothing because Goldberg was the only person who could conceivably win the thing. Instead of something competitive and compelling, it was fifteen minutes of waiting around on Goldberg, then Goldberg crushing people for a few minutes, and then HAHA IT'S THE SLEDGEHAMMER AGAIN! The ending was so deflating that there's not

Evolution beats Goldberg down and handcuffs him to the Chamber because WWE needs to demonstrate how to book Goldberg.

Overall Rating: D. The show isn't even that bad, but rather almost completely flat. There are a few good matches with Brock vs. Angle being a highlight but that just made me want to watch the Wrestlemania match again. The TV coming into this show has been really dull due to a lot of McMahons and while they were used more sparingly here, you could still feel them throughout the whole show. That main event really took the life out of the whole thing though and there was nothing else that was going to fix things. Not a good show, but it could have been worse.

Ratings Comparison

La Resistance vs. Dudley Boys

Original: C

2013 Redo: D+

2018 Redo: C-

A-Train vs. Undertaker

Original: D

2013 Redo: D

2018 Redo: D

Eric Bischoff vs. Shane McMahon

Original: D

2013 Redo: N/A

2018 Redo: F

Rhyno vs. Tajiri vs. Chris Benoit vs. Eddie Guerrero

Original: B-

2013 Redo: B+

2018 Redo: B-

Kurt Angle vs. Brock Lesnar

Original: A-

2013 Redo: B

2018 Redo: B+

Kane vs. Rob Van Dam

Original: C-

2013 Redo: C-

2018 Redo: B

HHH vs. Goldberg vs. Shawn Michaels vs. Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Nash vs.
Randy Orton

Original: D

2013 Redo: C-

2018 Redo: D

Overall Rating

Original: D+

2013 Redo: C

2018 Redo: D

That's one of the hardest swings I've ever had on a show but you can see

a little consistency in there somewhere.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/08/06/history-of-summerslam-count-up-2003-brock-vs-angle-ii/>

And the 2013 Redo:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/08/08/summerslam-count-up-2003-meet-the-old-hhh-same-as-the-new-hhh/>

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Smackdown – August 21, 2003: There's Your TV-MA

Smackdown

Date: August 21, 2003

Location: Joe Louis Arena, Detroit, Michigan

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's the go home show for Summerslam and by definition this show has to

be better than Raw. I mean it's not possible for it to be worse than the drek that they aired on Monday. Brock Lesnar vs. Kurt Angle for the Smackdown World Title is pretty much the only good looking match on Sunday's card so hopefully they can increase that to two matches tonight. Let's get to it.

This one is TV-MA, which the WWE Network tells me three times in the first thirty seconds. What in the world do they have on here? This week's Raw had implied rape, sexual slavery and cruelty to animals. What's this going to have? The Young Bucks vs. New Jack?

We open with a long recap of Vince McMahon joining forces with Brock to screw over Angle. You know, because Angle vs. Lesnar just wasn't good enough for Summerslam after being good enough for Wrestlemania.

Opening sequence.

Here's Angle to open things up and I know it's brought up a lot, but he just looks cool in that track suit look with the title. Angle yells at Brock for running to Vince McMahon for help because Kurt isn't someone who needs a 58 year old to fight his battles for him. Tonight, Angle is coming to find Lesnar and give him the beating that he deserves. He can win the match on Sunday because tonight is about a fight. He'll fight Lesnar or Vince or even both at the same time because he just wants a fight against someone.

This brings out Vince to say that he can't give Kurt what he wants tonight. See, tonight is about what Vince wants so Angle won't be having a fight. If Angle lays a hand on either Vince or Brock tonight, he's suspended and no longer champion. Instead, Angle can have a match with Big Show. This brings out Show and Angle is willing to fight him now, meaning the brawl is on in the aisle. Kurt easily kicks him low and gets in a belt shot until referees pull him off. This was a bit shorter than some recent opening segments and while it set up a match that we've covered enough, Angle showed some great fire.

Post match Show freaks out in the back and Vince tells him that the main event is now a falls count anywhere street fight.

Rey Mysterio vs. Matt Hardy

Non-title because...you know the reasons by now. Therefore, Matt, who has never lost his cell phone and has hipper pants than Rey, can't win the title. Hardy wastes no time in taking him down for some early two counts, only to have Rey come back with a springboard headscissors. Billy Kidman has to intercept a cheating Shannon Moore but the distraction lets Matt get in a thumb to the eye. That doesn't stop Rey from hitting a corkscrew dive to the floor but a springboard is broken up with a hard forearm. Shannon misses a chair shot but Kidman is accused instead, earning him an ejection.

Back from a break with Rey being posted and an elbow drop getting two. A Side Effect plants Rey for two but he comes right back with a spinning DDT to put both guys down. The springboard seated senton gets two but Matt grabs a reverse Side Effect (that's not a bad finisher) for two of his own. Rey's moonsault press gives him two of his own but a Shannon distraction saves Matt from the 619. Cue Zach Gowen to cane Matt in the back, setting up the 619. West Coast Pop gives Rey the pin.

Rating: B. As usual, these two were working out there and if you give Rey an opponent who can keep up with him, you're going to get a solid performance. I like the idea of Rey fighting off both guys and winning in the end, but setting up Matt vs. Gowen on Sunday when the Cruiserweight Champion, the Intercontinental Champion and the Smackdown Tag Team Champions don't make the pay per view seems like missing the point.

Brock comes in to see Vince and says if Angle has a match, he wants one too. Vince gives him Gowen, making Brock laugh. He promises to break Gowen's leg tonight. As in his good leg. Well it wouldn't mean much otherwise.

We actually look back at A-Train brawling with Undertaker and pinning Stephanie in a match. Oh but that's not good enough so we also see the BUILD to the match, including A-Train talking to Stephanie in the back. Do they really think that fans sympathize or identify with Stephanie? Who would actually write that story other than Stephanie herself?

Zack Gowen's mother is here (Gowen is the hometown boy tonight) and is so

proud of him but is also worried about seeing him get hurt.

Billy Gunn/Jamie Noble vs. Basham Brothers

Tazz: "Jamie's Got a Gunn!" I've heard worse. The brawl starts on the floor with the announcers putting Shaniqua over as a monster, making me worried that she's supposed to be the star of the whole thing. Billy gives Danny a tilt-a-whirl powerslam to start as the announcers talk about Lesnar wanting to break Gowen's leg. Why is this so shocking? It kind of fits what he would normally do no?

The Bashams beat Billy down in the corner as Cole laments Stephanie not being here tonight. See, she can show up and fix everything of course. Billy gets stomped down for two more and some crossface shots to the face make it even worse. A charge in the corner misses though and Gunn Diamond Cuts his way into the hot tag to Noble.

Jamie comes in and starts cleaning house, including a swinging neckbreaker for two on Doug. A good looking top rope elbow gets the same as everything breaks down. Shaniqua pulls Jamie out of the ring and clotheslines Nidia and Torrie down with ease. The Fameasser plants Doug but the twins switch, including a riding crop shot to Gunn. Doug small packages Jamie for the pin.

Rating: D+. The Bashams get a much needed win but this story hasn't exactly done anyone any favors. Billy is bringing Jamie down and it's not exactly helping Noble to have him as a good guy when he's a naturally good heel. The Bashams are playing second fiddle to their manager, who isn't interesting in the first place. But at least we got that "funny" hotel segment between the good guys.

Lesnar threatens to break Gowen's leg again.

We look at Brock destroying Spanky last week. Cool. Now do the same to Gowen.

Brock Lesnar vs. Zack Gowen

Gowen's entrance focuses on his mom so you know this one is going to hurt. Before the bell, Brock goes outside and gets in the mom's face but

she won't even shake his hand. The distraction lets Gowen hit a dive which I don't believe would drop Lesnar for a second. Brock throws him down but gets hit with the prosthetic leg, only to drive Gowen into the post. Back in and we get the opening bell as the slaughter is in full swing. The mom continues to look completely emotionless, even as Brock hits the double powerbomb. A chair to the head gives Gowen the DQ win in short order. Good. Now keep him off TV.

Gowen is busted open (and it is a GUSHER, which is probably the reason for the TV-MA) so Brock F5's the leg into the post. Another chair shot and another F5 into the post seems to destroy Gowen's leg. Cole is LIVID over the idea that Lesnar would do this as Gowen goes out on a stretcher. Brock shoves the stretcher over and the VERY bloody Gowen crashes down while his mother...looks exactly the same as she did earlier.

Back from a break and we see the attack again. Cole: "Tragedy has struck Smackdown." Oh good grief. Cole says he's breaking tradition and taking sides here to rant against Lesnar. Tazz even takes off the sunglasses to talk about how he didn't know Brock like he thought he did. This is as forced as trying to make me believe that Gowen could compete against WWE wrestlers.

Undertaker/Orlando Jordan vs. John Cena/A-Train

Pre-match, Cena rants about hating Detroit. If they think he sucks, Cena knows they swallow. Cole says that Vince has taken over with Stephanie gone. You know, because Stephanie was above Vince when she was around. Undertaker takes Cena down to start and hammers on the ribs but stops to glare at A-Train.

Back up and Cena low bridges Undertaker out to the floor for some shots to the back, only to get his throat snapped over the ropes. Old School gets two as Cole talks about the devastating work Undertaker did to Cena's shoulder a few weeks back. It's so devastating that Cena has been hiding the effects ever since.

Jordan and A-Train come in with A-Train easily suckering Jordan in and giving him an early beating. Orlando gets in a DDT and is already crawling over to the corner despite taking all of thirty seconds of

offense. Undertaker comes in to do the work, including Snake Eyes into the big boot on Cena.

The alternating corner clotheslines have the villains in trouble and Undertaker grabs a dragon sleeper on Cena. Jordan cuts off A-Train and gets the Derailer for his efforts (my goodness this guy is worthless). Undertaker chokeslams A-Train but gets caught in a spinebuster from Cena. The Last Ride is broken up by a chain shot to the ribs, giving Cena the pin.

Rating: D. The only thing I got out of this is a good laugh at how pathetic Jordan was. Really, he gets beaten down for thirty seconds and can't even get to his feet? This is supposed to be the guy Undertaker is mentoring? Cena pinning Undertaker was the right ending, even if Cena is another name on the long list of people not making the pay per view. Again: Shane McMahon vs. Eric Bischoff and La Resistance are part of an eight match card where ten people are in two matches. If you can't fit three different titles and an up and comer like Cena on there, learn to plan better.

Post break Sable hits on A-Train and wants to thank him on behalf of Vince for taking care of Stephanie. She gives him a hotel room key.

Eddie Guerrero/Rhyno vs. Chris Benoit/Tajiri

Rhyno gets a ride in the low rider. Tazz: "CALL THE ZOO!" Eddie has the REALLY strong hydraulics this week as he gets half of the car about three and a half feet off the ground and holds it there to show off. Eddie and Benoit start things off with Guerrero actually winning a chop off and sending Benoit into the corner. Benoit is back with a backdrop but Eddie hides behind the referee and gets in a shot to the knee.

It's off to Rhyno for a backbreaker but Eddie has to break up a very fast Crossface. Eddie comes back in with a seated abdominal stretch, followed by the rolling suplexes. He takes a bit too long going up though and it's a superplex back down, allowing the double tag to Rhyno and Tajiri. Rhyno gets caught in the Tarantula, leaving Benoit to hit the Swan Dive on Eddie. Tajiri decks Benoit by mistake though and the Gore is good for the pin.

Rating: C+. The four way is the only match I'm looking forward to outside of Lesnar vs. Angle and a good tag match helped the building process. Rhyno getting the pin gives him a little momentum and helps shake the feeling that only Benoit and Eddie are likely to leave as champion. This was an example of letting the wrestlers wrestle and that's always going to work.

Post match Benoit puts Rhyno in the Crossface but Eddie breaks it up with a belt shot. Just to show it's not personal, Eddie belts both Rhyno and Tajiri as a bonus.

Kurt Angle vs. Big Show

Non-title and hardcore. Angle waits at the entrance and hammers on Show as soon as he comes through the curtain. Show gets the better of the fight and knocks Angle down at ringside. It's already table time but Show slides it in instead of setting it up. A slam onto the unset table keeps Angle down and a legdrop is good for two. There's a big toss across the ring and one of those scary loud chops to Angle's chest.

Show puts the table in front of Angle in the corner yet seems surprised when Angle shoves it into his charging head. The Angle Slam gets a delayed two but Show kicks him out to the floor again. The table is set but Kurt gets in a chair shot. That has very little effect though as Show punches the chair back into his face and Angle is down again.

A powerbomb through the table is countered with a chair to the head for two more, followed by a running chair shot to put Show outside. Show drops him over the barricade and loads up the steps but Angle grabs him low for a breather. The ankle lock over the steps is broken up so Angle knocks him over the table. An Arabian facebuster of all things gets two on Show but the Angle Slam through the table is enough to put Show away.

Rating: B. Actually a fun brawl here as they were doing some different spots instead of all the usual stuff you would see here. Angle getting a win helps, even though Big Show got in a lot of offense. Of course that doesn't mean much as Big Show is another name not on Summerslam but why let that get in the way of a good match?

Lesnar comes out for the staredown to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This is a harder one to rate as the wrestling was good for the most part (the bad matches were mostly short) but it didn't do a great job of making me want to see the pay per view. Undertaker vs. A-Train is going to be about Stephanie vs. Sable/Vince and I'm not exactly thrilled by the two good looking Smackdown matches. Maybe I'll be surprised but with Raw looking dreadful, the possibilities aren't strong.

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Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2004: Uh...What's His Name!

Royal Rumble 2004

Date: January 25, 2004

Location: Wachovia Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 17,289

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz, Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is the show where you can really see the next generation rising up. The main events other than the Rumble are Lesnar vs. Holly and HBK vs.

HHH. Ok so maybe the next generation only comes up in the Rumble. Other than that we don't have much going on here but this show is all about Benoit in the Rumble. Let's get to it.

The opening video talks about Shawn vs. HHH because that's what people are watching the ROYAL RUMBLE for right? The theme of the video is that things can change in the blink of an eye.

Raw Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. Evolution

Flair and Batista are defending here and this is a tables match. Coach is ticked off at the Dudleys for putting him through a table six nights ago on Raw, because if there's one man you need to give a reason to be a heel, it's COACH. Batista makes fun of the Eagles because he hasn't broken through to the other side of the glass ceiling yet. The fight starts in the aisle as you would expect. This is one table to a finish, meaning only one guy has to go through to end it.

Bubba slides in a table but shoves it hard enough that it slides across the ring and hits Batista in the ribs on the other side of the floor. Flair gets double teamed to start and caught in a powerslam by D-Von. There's a table set up in the ring but Batista moves it before Flair gets suplexed through it. D-Von hits a Cactus Clothesline on Batista as Flair chops Bubba against a table in the corner.

Big Dave comes back in with some clotheslines to clean house but misses a charge into the post. The belly to back neckbreaker from the Dudleys puts him down and it's Flair getting double teamed again. According to JR, the Dudleys are the only team to win the (non-vacant) world tag team titles at the Rumble. Coach heads to the ring to distract the Dudleys and prevent a 3D to Flair. Flair saves Coach and Batista hits a spinebuster to put D-Von through a table to retain.

Rating: D. This match fell into the same trap that all bad tables matches fall into: the dull set of spots that fail until one works for the win. You rarely get something that gets around this through sheer carnage such as the match at the 2000 Rumble, but this was just terrible. I have no idea what they were going for here as the fans were disappointed and they only had four and a half minutes to get into it. Also: real smart WWE.

This is the right way to start a show in Philadelphia: have some of the most famous ECW guys ever lose.

Cena raps about winning the Rumble when RVD comes in to steal the joke. Weed jokes are made. Josh Matthews looks like the king of all tools here.

There's an empty seat for Mick Foley in the front row.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Rey is defending. This is during the Nidia is Blind phase which didn't do anything for anyone. They speed things WAY up to start with Jamie avoiding the 619 and launching Rey into the air to take over. The champ gets draped over the top rope for two and a hard kick to the back gets the same.

Jamie hooks a chinlock which shifts into a seated abdominal stretch. Rey fights up and hits a dropkick and a springboard rana followed by the sitout bulldog for two. He springboards into a gutbuster from Noble for two though and momentum shifts again. Nidia accidentally grabs Noble's foot, allowing Rey to hit the 619 and springboard legdrop....for the pin? Huh?

Rating: D+. This was fast paced while it lasted, but those three words are the key: while it lasted. This barely broke three minutes which simply isn't enough for a PPV title match. Unless I was missing it there was no sign of an injury or anything like that, but the match ends that fast. I have no idea what they were going for here but it didn't work in any way at all. That's a shame too because they were going well while it lasted.

Noble yells at Nidia post match.

We recap the battle of the Guerreros. Eddie was clearly the bigger star which was fine while they were champions, but once they lost the belts to the Bashams, Chavo blamed Eddie and turned on his uncle for losing his title. The Guerreros almost made up but they lost the rematch, after which Chavo let Eddie get double teamed by the Bashams. This was actually a pretty solid story despite how basic it was. Sometimes less is more. Oh

and Kurt Angle was playing peacemaker and Chavo Guerrero Senior is in his son's corner.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Chavo Guerrero

Chavo bails to the floor before the bell and the fans are totally behind Eddie here. They fight over a lockup to start with no one being able to get an advantage. Chavo slaps Eddie in the face and now we're ready to go. We hit the mat for a bit before Eddie starts snapping off chops in the corner. Chavo shoulders him down and we have a standoff. They chop it out again and Eddie goes to the eye like a true Guerrero.

Back to the mat with Eddie working on the arm before Chavo nips up and hooks a rana to send them both to the floor. Chavo sends Eddie into the announce table to finally take over and get some of the aggression going. Back in and they get into a kind of MMA style brawl on the mat until Eddie hooks a cross armbreaker of all things. That goes nowhere so Chavo suplexes Eddie down for two, followed by the Three Amigos. Eddie counters a tornado DDT and hits Three Amigos of his own. Chavo is down so Eddie goes up and hits the Frog Splash for the pin. ANOTHER quick ending tonight.

Rating: C+. This was way better than the other matches, but this felt like it was missing fifteen minutes or so. Three matches so far have combined to be about fifteen minutes long which is pretty lame for a modern PPV, even for the Rumble. This could have been a lot more, but the feud was completely done after tonight. Eddie would become #1 contender on the following Smackdown.

Eddie destroys Chavo post match in a pretty heelish display. Chavo gets busted open.

Ad for Mick Foley's Greatest Hits and Misses. That's the most entertaining part of the show so far.

Benoit likes his odds even though he's #1 in the Rumble. Evolution comes up and says Orton is going to win the Rumble. Flair says Benoit may be great, but this is about Evolution tonight.

We recap Hardcore Holly vs. Lesnar. Brock broke Holly's neck (legit) and Holly gets a world title shot out of it a year later. This is the textbook definition of the Rumble title shot where no one buys the champion as being in any danger whatsoever.

Smackdown World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Holly jumps Lesnar in the aisle and sends him into the post because he wants to break Lesnar's neck. We get a bell and Holly misses an elbow off the top to give Brock control. They head to the floor where Holly's back is rammed into the apron and Lesnar hooks a reverse body vice back inside. That goes nowhere so Brock hits a Shell Shock for two and it's right back to the hold.

We shift to a bearhug and then one of the most wicked overhead belly to belly suplexes you'll ever see. Off to a kind of rear naked choke by Lesnar to keep things dull. Holly makes his comeback with the dropkick and hits the Alabama Slam but goes for a full nelson and revenge instead of the title. Holly hooks the hold and goes to the floor with it but has to break the count. The F5 hits a few seconds later to complete the inevitable.

Rating: D. This was Brock Lesnar defending the world title against Hardcore Holly on pay per view. If you can't figure out why this got the rating it got, I can't help you.

We recap HHH vs. HBK which is allegedly seven years in the making. I'm guessing THIS is supposed to be the FINAL blowoff to their feud instead of the classic in 2002.

Raw World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. HHH

HHH is defending and this is a last man standing match. They chop it out to start and punch each other in the corner a lot. Shawn tries a backslide before realizing that makes no sense here, so it's back to the chops. Michaels gets caught in a facebuster as things slow down a bit. A HARD whip into the corner has Shawn's back in trouble and a backbreaker makes it even worse.

Out of nowhere Shawn takes out the leg and hooks a Figure Four, because where would we be without a Flair tribute? That gets a five count so Shawn hits a chop block for a four. HHH low bridges Shawn and we head to the floor for a bit. HHH loads up the announce table but Shawn blocks a Pedigree attempt. They slug it out on the table with HHH getting knocked to the floor, drawing a bunch of booing from the bloodthirsty Philadelphia fans.

Back in and Shawn counters a Pedigree with a backdrop to the floor but he injures his back in the process. Shawn tries a springboard cross body to the floor but crashes through the table instead as only he can. Instead of letting the now busted open Shawn get counted out, HHH throws him back in for the count, which reaches seven. The champ pounds Shawn down a few times for a few counts, most of which don't get that far.

A fast spinebuster (literally, as Shawn was flying at HHH and it almost looked like a belly to belly instead of a spinebuster) gets about six. That's the problem with most last man standing matches: it's a big move then standing around for the count. That makes it very hard to get any kind of flow going to the match. HHH cracks Shawn in the back with a chair but Shawn gets up again. A Pedigree onto the chair is countered into a slingshot into the post, busting HHH open as well.

Now Shawn cracks HHH in the head with a chair, allowing HHH to do his weird "my head hurts and I'm not sure where I am" face. There's the forearm followed by the nipup from Shawn, followed by an atomic drop and the top rope elbow. That gets about seven so Shawn tunes up the band, only to walk into a low blow to put both guys down. Shawn hooks a sleeper which eventually gets an eight count before walking into a DDT to put both guys down.

That gets a double eight count before we head to the corner. HHH tries a belly to back superplex but Shawn counters into a cross body for another double eight count. The Pedigree hits but it's only good for a nine. Shawn pops up out of nowhere with some more Sweet Chin Music, putting both guys down for ten which keeps the title on HHH.

Rating: C-. The problem here is exactly what I said earlier: this was a

lot of laying around. The last seven minutes or so had about five moves combined, as most of the match was “move, lay down, move, lay down, move, lay down.” The idea is supposed to be a ton of drama, but that didn’t happen here. Shawn would turn into a jerk in the next few weeks and insert himself in the Mania main event because of this ending.

Rumble video with a focus on Benoit.

The Fink is ready to start the Rumble but here’s Bischoff to run his mouth. He says that a Raw guy is going to win the Rumble because he’s respected as a GM. He runs down ECW, which brings out Heyman for a brawl. Cue Austin on his ATV to say that these two are both in violation of the law (he was called Sheriff Austin at this point) and wants to know who started it. Heyman and Bischoff: “HE DID!” Both guys get Stunners and the fans love it.

Goldberg, #30 in the Rumble, doesn’t get to talk because Lesnar comes in to interrupt him. Lesnar is called a coward, which will come into play later.

JR has to admit Foley is a coward because he isn’t here yet.

Royal Rumble

Benoit is #1 and the Intercontinental Champion Randy Orton is #2. Two minute intervals here again. They pound away on each other to start with Benoit taking him to the mat to stomp away. Mark Henry is #3 when he was a fat power guy with no direction at all. Allow me to be more specific: he’s still with Teddy Long. Benoit gets double teamed for awhile until Tajiri is #4. These intervals don’t seem to be two minutes or anywhere close to it.

The handspring elbow takes Orton down but Benoit rolls some Germans on Tajiri to take him down. Tajiri only gets two as I guess Benoit is conserving strength. Henry throws Orton to the apron but stops looking like an idiot. Bradshaw is #5 and he immediately clotheslines down everyone not named Benoit. Benoit takes offense to being left out and puts Bradshaw in the Crossface before pulling Bradshaw out. Eh he would get a nine month title reign stating in the summer so I feel no sympathy

for him.

Rhyno is #6 as we're flying through this so far. He goes after the two starters as Tajiri fires off kicks on Henry. Tajiri gets a half Tarantula on Henry but Henry gets Gored, knocking Tajiri out in the process. Benoit clotheslines Henry out and we're down to three again. Matt Hardy is #7 and Benoit throws him to the apron almost immediately. In FAR less than two minutes, here's Scott Steiner at #8. Oh dear it's Scott Steiner at the Royal Rumble. This could be a disaster.

He starts firing off suplexes immediately but at least this time there are some t-bones to go with the belly to bellies. Benoit rolls some Germans on him as if to say THIS IS HOW YOU SUPLEX SOMEBODY. Things slow down a bit and here's Matt Morgan at #9. He takes Benoit down with a Batista Bomb takes Benoit down and pounds away on Orton in the corner.

The Hurricane is #10 and comes in off the top with a cross body to Hardy. He goes after Morgan for no apparent reason and is thrown out in less than twenty seconds. Morgan throws Hardy to the apron again but can't get him out. Booker T, complete with the stupid remix of his theme music with Booker singing, is #11. Booker immediately goes after Steiner in a revisiting of their WCW feud that no one was asking for.

Nothing of note happens until Kane is #12. This is after he buried Taker alive. For the first time. Steiner gets dumped by Booker during Kane's entrance. Kane starts firing off chokeslams and other various power moves for which he is well known. The clock runs down at #13 and there go the lights. A gong goes off and Kane PANICS. Booker uses the distraction to dump Kane and here's Spike Dudley at #13. He never makes it to the ring as Kane destroys him for setting off the gong.

Everyone tries to throw each other out while laying on the ropes until Rikishi is #14. Benoit dumps Rhyno to keep us at six people (Benoit, Orton, Rikishi, Booker, Morgan, Hardy) in the ring. Morgan gets a Stinkface and nothing else happens for a bit. Renee Dupree with the French Tickler is #15. In a surprising moment, Dupree actually knocks Matt out, only to be superkicked out by Rikishi a second later.

A-Train is #16 and goes right for Rikishi. Benoit avoids the yet to be

named Carbon Footprint and dumps Morgan. I love that they're keeping the ring from getting full. Orton dumps Rikishi and Booker as Shelton Benjamin is #17. Benoit dumps A-Train during his entrance and Orton dumps Shelton a few seconds later to get us back to two. Orton pounds on him a bit but they crack heads to put both guys down.

Lamont, the announcer for Ernest Miller (complete with the music that would go to Brodus Clay eight years later), runs out to introduce the Cat at #18. After some dancing (and singing by Tazz), Orton dumps him out. Miller would be released in like two weeks. Kurt Angle is #19 and he might be a bit harder to get out. He's fighting for AMERICA here so the fans tell him he sucks.

Benoit and Angle destroy each other with chops and punches as only they can while Orton is content to chill in the corner. Rico, now in his Adrian Street phase, is #20. He fires off some kicks but lasts about as long as you would expect him to in a match with Orton, Angle and Benoit. The RK0 takes care of Rico as Benoit rolls a ton of Germans on Angle. Test is #21....and is nowhere in sight.

Orton RK0's Angle and we cut to the back to see Test unconscious. Austin sees someone off camera and says they're #21. The off camera man and presumable attacker: MICK FREAKING FOLEY! Orton, the guy who spat in Foley's face and called him a coward, PANICS. The place goes nuts and Foley explodes on Orton, beating him half to death and hitting a Cactus Clothesline to put both of them out. This would lead to some AWESOME matches at Mania and Backlash which put Orton up to the world title in August.

Foley keeps beating on Orton as Christian is #22. Mick picks up the steps and BLASTS a security guy who tries to stop him. Orton comes back with two chair shots and fires back at Mick. They brawl up the ramp and Foley pulls out Socko, only to put it on Nunzio who comes in at #23. We haven't seen anything of the match for awhile but I can live with that for a hot brawl like this. Orton kicks Foley low and runs as we go back to the ring.

Angle is getting double teamed as Nunzio is down on the floor. Big Show

is #24 and apparently that's Tazz's pick. Thankfully he's in the singlet and shorts again instead of the one piece swimsuit. Angle immediately goes after him but Show throws everyone around. Jericho is #25 as he's in a weird phase of his career. He wasn't a main event guy anymore but he had feuded with everyone in the midcard already so he just kind of hung around and filled in spots on the card.

All four guys go after Big Show (who has a head like a typewriter according to Tazz) but they can't get him out. Charlie Haas is #26 but gets double teamed by Jericho and Christian. Currently we have Benoit, Angle, Jericho, Christian, Haas, Big Show and Nunzio who is on the floor. Jericho backdrops Christian out for the second year in a row as Billy Gunn is #27. Apparently this is a return for him. It's Fameassers all around and then things slow down again.

John Cena is #28 and that pop is growing at an alarming rate. Show stares him down so Cena throws Nunzio in to kill some time. Nunzio goes after Show for some reason but Cena takes over for him to make it fair. RVD is #29 to a big pop of his own. It's spin kicks all around until things settle down a bit. There's an FU to Angle and Goldberg is #30. The final group: Benoit, Angle, Big Show, Jericho, Nunzio, Haas, Gunn, Cena, RVD and Goldberg. At least the ring didn't fill up until the end so that's not too bad.

Goldie spears a lot of people down to start before Nunzio jumps on his back like an idiot. Haas is put out and Nunzio takes a HUGE spear. Gunn is out as is Nunzio to get us down to seven. Goldberg loads up a Jackhammer on Show but Lesnar runs in with an F5 to break it up. Goldberg stares down Brock, allowing Angle to dump him out. All five remaining guys not named Big Show go after the one named Big Show but it still doesn't work.

Everyone hits their finishers on Show instead with Cena (Show's feud at the time) hitting the Shuffle instead of the FU, which I'm assuming they were saving for Mania. They try to dead lift Show and realize they screwed up by knocking a giant unconscious. Show shoves them all off and dumps Cena followed by Van Dam a few seconds later.

So it's Big Show, Benoit, Angle and Jericho as the final four. Jericho gets sent to the apron twice and manages to hang on before bulldogging Show down. The Walls go on Show and he taps but Angle breaks the hold up for no apparent reason. Show chokeslams Benoit down but chokeslams Jericho even further, sending him to the floor to get us to three. A side slam puts Angle down and there's another chokeslam to Benoit.

Show breaks up a German attempt from Angle but can't block an Angle Slam. There's a Slam to Benoit (it was a belly to back suplex but whatever) and the ankle lock to Show. Show taps again, but again it doesn't mean anything. The big guy rolls through the hold and eliminates Angle in the process, getting us down to two.

Benoit dropkicks Show but knocks him back into the ring by mistake. A chokeslam is countered into the Crossface and Show taps again, but you know the drill by now. Show shrugs it off and picks Benoit up in a chokeslam. Benoit graps a front chancery though and pulls Show to the apron....then has him teetering on the ropes....AND BENOIT WINS! The crowd kept getting louder as Benoit pulled further and further. Awesome sequence there.

Rating: A. There were some slow spots but this was ALL about Benoit and I can't complain about that at all. The ending sequence here with all three submission guys making Show tap was a cool idea and different than the ending to any other Rumble. They didn't throw a stupid curve here and made Benoit look like a star here, which is exactly what he was supposed to do. Great Rumble.

Overall Rating: B-. The Rumble is really REALLY good but the rest is horrible. Don't watch the rest of the show, but if you're a Benoit fan and can still sit through a long match of his, this is absolutely required viewing. Things would change a bit more the next year as two REALLY big names would be the stars of the Rumble, but that's not for another year. For now, this was all about Benoit and he nailed it.

Ratings Comparison

Evolution vs. Dudley Boys

Original: C

Redo: D

Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Original: N/A

Redo: D+

Chavo Guerrero vs. Eddie Guerrero

Original: C+

Redo: C+

Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Original: D-

Redo: D

HHH vs. Shawn Michaels

Original: C+

Redo: C-

Royal Rumble

Original: A

Redo: A

Overall Rating

Original: C+

Redo: B-

Just as last time, the Rumble is the only thing worth seeing.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/23/royal-rumble-count-up-2004-he-who-must-not-be-named/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Monday Nitro and Thunder Reviews Volume VI: July – December 1999 in e-book or paperback. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/11/22/new-book-kbs-monday-nitro-and-thunder-reviews-volume-vi/>

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<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2003: Some High Quality Professional Wrestling

Royal Rumble 2003

Date: January 19, 2003

Location: Fleet Center, Boston, Massachusetts

Attendance: 15,338

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is a really odd entry in the series as the namesake match is being treated as secondary to almost everything else. Really, coming into this show, there's a good argument to be made that Torrie Wilson vs. Dawn Marie is being treated as a bigger deal than the Rumble itself. Let's get to it.

The opening video is your standard montage of wrestlers talking about what it means to go to Wrestlemania because the road starts tonight.

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

The winner is in the Rumble and the loser is out in the cold. They do the customary exchange of shoves to start with the fans almost entirely behind Lesnar. Brock drives him into the corner to little avail but the belly to belly works a bit better. A second works just as well but the third is countered with a scary toss over the top. Back in and we hit the choke, which you can tell is serious because Cole starts talking about Show's shoe size.

Brock comes right back with the release German suplex but Heyman offers a distraction to break things up. A big boot and side slam drop Lesnar for all of ten seconds before he's back up with another belly to belly. Cue Heyman but he gets caught in an F5 attempt, only to have Show make the save with a chokeslam for two. A second attempt is countered into a sloppy F5 to send Lesnar to the Rumble.

Rating: D+. It was short (less than seven minutes) and had the only possible ending (it's not like there are many other potential Rumble winners) so it's hard to complain that much. The F5 didn't look great but it was how the match should have ended. This probably needs to be about it for Big Show as a main event guy but you know that's not going to be the case, which is part of the problem on Smackdown.

Chris Jericho is ready to win the Rumble and gets his World Title back at Wrestlemania.

Raw Tag Team Titles: Dudley Boyz vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

Regal and Storm are defending. Bubba punches Storm in the corner to start and hits something like a spinebuster. To really mix things up, Bubba grabs a leglock for a few seconds before handing it off to D-Von. Regal comes in and gets punched as well as this isn't exactly shaking the feeling that it's a glorified Raw match. The champs take over on D-Von with Storm drop toeholding him down into a sliding knee from Regal (nice spot).

We hit the cravate for a bit and a chinlock keeps D-Von in trouble. That doesn't last long either though as D-Von fights up and makes the hot tag to Bubba for the house cleaning. Regal takes What's Up but here's Chief Morely for a distraction to prevent the 3D. It doesn't quite work so well though as D-Von uses the distraction to grab Regal's brass knuckles and knock Storm silly for the pin and the titles. Lawler: "I'm as confused as a baby in a topless bar." He's confused enough to refer to Regal as Steve.

Rating: C-. This was just a Raw match with a title change and considering Booker T. and Goldust never even got a rematch after losing the titles, I have no idea what the thinking here is. Were Booker and Goldust really that bad of a team? I know it's a sin to get over without the company swearing off on it but it's some of the oddest booking of the year.

House show ads. They didn't edit this off the Network? I like having the complete versions but it's a strange choice to keep in.

Nathan Jones vignette.

We get a long recap of the Al Wilson Saga, which still doesn't make much sense and went on WAY too long if this is their big idea. Basically Dawn Marie decided she wanted to destroy Torrie Wilson's life (I think?) by marrying Torrie's father. She eventually went through with it but had so much, ahem, fun with Al on their honeymoon that he died.

Dawn blames Torrie for this and the match is on, even though it was booked before Al died. If this was all some big con by Dawn, what does she get out of it? Getting a match with Torrie? She seems upset and we haven't gotten any scene of Dawn saying it was all made up so I guess we're supposed to take it at face value. I know I harp on this a lot but I still don't get how this was supposed to work.

Dawn Marie vs. Torrie Wilson

Dawn is in regular ring gear and a black veil, which makes her look more like Jimmy Jack Funk (from the neck up) than anything else. Dawn elbows her in the face at the bell but Torrie takes her down as well as these two are going to be able to do. Torrie gets caught in a Fujiwara armbar

as the announcers cover the story in detail. Well the recent part at least as basically everything after Armageddon has been forgotten at this point.

Dawn stays on the arm (that'll teach Torrie for killing Dawn's husband) and grabs a flapjack. They collide in a bad looking spot and the boring chants begin. Dawn actually hits a decent looking middle rope spinning clothesline, only to fall victim to that horrible swinging neckbreaker to give Torrie the pin.

Rating: F. Really, what else were you expecting here? The feud was as soap opera level as you're going to have and the wrestlers are both models and little more. Somehow that's about as much as you could have thought these two would do and hopefully it wraps up the story for good. I know it won't but it would be nice.

Eric Bischoff and Stephanie McMahon run into each other in the back with Stephanie being smug about Eric's thirty days to fix Raw deal. Eric asks if her job is safe too but she doesn't seem worried, partially because she has her own surprise for Raw. As with most cases of both GM's on screen at once, this was a big waste of time.

Sean O'Haire tells us not to go to church.

We recap Scott Steiner vs. HHH. Steiner showed up in November and was immediately shoved into the title picture but hasn't actually had a match yet. Instead it's been stuff like a posedown, a bench press contest (which didn't happen), arm wrestling and a pushup contest. The idea is that Steiner can do everything HHH can and might also be completely insane. The fact that they've barely been allowed to get physical should be a bit worrisome but HHH wouldn't let us down.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Scott Steiner

Steiner is challenging and HHH is in the ultra rare red trunks. Before the bell, Hebner holds up the title and insists that he's the law around here no matter what. Steiner wins the early slugout and chops away in the corner, followed by the gorilla press to send HHH rolling to the floor. The champ's back is sent into the post a few times and a hard Irish whip

makes his back even worse.

We hit a Boston crab for a bit with HHH crawling to the ropes a few seconds later. That's not very noteworthy, but Steiner falling over when the hold is broken isn't the most encouraging sign. The facebuster is no sold and we hit a quickly broken bearhug. Steiner gets in the first belly to belly for two and Flair pulls him out to the floor.

Back in and Steiner charges into a boot to the face before being sent into the steps for good measure. HHH stomps and chokes in the corner with Flair adding choking of his own. Another neckbreaker gets two for the champ and you can see how winded Steiner already is. Flair chokes on the ropes again to fill in as much time as possible before Steiner reverses the Pedigree.

Scott catapults him into the buckle and grabs the second overhead suplex....before just collapsing next to the ropes. We're not even nine minutes into the match and the guy can't even stand up. Steiner picks him up for what looks like a Tombstone and you would think he was about to go into labor. HHH slips out and tries a Diamond Cutter but Steiner goes backwards with it like a regular neckbreaker. After all those years of working with Diamond Dallas Page he can't take a standard face first bump?

You can hear the crowd losing their patience with this one. Flair plays cheerleader and the fans actually cheer for HHH, who may be boring but he's at least looking competent here. The champ dives into another overhead suplex but Steiner still can't follow up. Some Steiner Lines set up suplexes four, five and six, followed by a spinning version for two.

Steiner tries a tiger bomb and falls down, drawing straight up boeing from the fans. The announcers are trying as hard as they can to make Steiner sound like a threat here and it's going as badly as you would expect. HHH heads up top so it's a superplex for two more. That's enough to send HHH and Flair up the aisle but Steiner isn't done yet and drags them back. As lame as an ending as that would be, it was the right call at this point.

A belt shot to HHH's head draws some blood and they continue to stagger

around ringside with no idea what to do. Another belly to belly (ninth suplex total) sends HHH outside again and they brawl into the crowd because THIS MATCH JUST CAN'T END. Back in again with Steiner doing the pushups and laboring through some right hands in the corner. Now Flair tries to get the referee to stop the match but the referee keeps going because he's that kind of evil.

Steiner hates the match as much as everyone else does so he throws Hebner outside but THAT'S NOT A DQ EITHER. The tenth suplex gets two and you can see Steiner looking desperate. HHH gets in a low blow and rolls Steiner up for two. That's FINALLY enough for HHH as he grabs sledgehammer and hits Scott in the ribs for the DQ, earning a chorus of boos that would make Roman Reigns proud.

Rating: N. For Not HHH's Fault. For once, this can't be blamed on HHH, who was just stuck in a horrible situation and couldn't do anything with it. To be fair though, no one was going to be able to get anything passable out of this mess. Steiner wasn't ready for this match and had no business going more than five minutes, let alone eighteen. The interesting thing here though is the first eight minutes ran more than well enough. It was a boring start but it was nowhere near a disaster or even really bad. The problem is the second half of the match where EVERYTHING falls apart.

You'll hear a lot of comparisons between this Steiner and Brock Lesnar's Suplex City but the key is in the delivery. Lesnar suplexes the heck out of people and then pops up to do it again. Steiner was suplexing HHH here and then taking twenty seconds to get to his feet out of pure exhaustion. When you can see wrestlers go twenty minutes without even breathing hard, there's no excuse for a main eventer nearly passing out from exhaustion in the first ten minutes. There's a reason this is remembered so horribly and it more than lives down to its reputation.

Post match Steiner hits him with the sledgehammer and grabs the Steiner Recliner. JR: "There's no way out of this hold." In other words, yes they're actually doing a rematch. Bischoff eventually comes out and gets Steiner off of HHH as the fans are so apathetic towards any of this.

We recap Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle. Kurt won the title with help from his new agent Paul Heyman, who also represents Big Show. Benoit beat Show to become the new #1 contender and you know this is going to be a classic no matter what. That being said, there's not much of a secret to the fact that they're building towards Lesnar vs. Angle at this point. At least we can have an incredible match on the way there.

Smackdown World Title: Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Angle is defending. Benoit has to deal with Team Angle to start so that's a double ejection. Chris tries a very quick Sharpshooter (which Tazz calls a Boston crab for some reason), sending Angle outside for a breather. Back in and another leg hold sends Angle to the ropes as it seems that they have a long time here.

Benoit easily wins a battle of the chops and gets two off a clothesline to the back of the head. A DDT onto the apron makes things even worse but Angle rolls away from the Swan Dive. The Angle Slam is reversed though and we hit the Sharpshooter. Angle grabs the ropes as well as a belly to belly (after that last match, I'm surprised those weren't banned like bar stools on Frasier) to really take over for the first time.

We hit the chinlock with a bodyscissors on Benoit for a bit before a double clothesline puts both guys down. Back up and they trade German suplexes with Benoit getting the better of it. Chris takes too long going up top though and Angle runs the corner for the belly to belly superplex. The Crossface goes on a few seconds later with Benoit switching to the ankle lock (that's like a Bingo space in an Angle match).

Kurt's ankle lock is reversed into the Crossface which is reversed into a rollup which is reversed right back into the Crossface. Angle gets to his feet for an Angle Slam but there's no cover. There go the straps though and it's back to the ankle lock. Benoit gets two off a rollup as the announcers are losing their minds (rightfully so).

Kurt is sick of this submission stuff and tries a German suplex, only to have Benoit reverse into a release version, drawing quite the round of applause. With Angle three quarters of the way across the ring, Benoit hits the best looking Swan Dive I've ever seen for a delayed two. Angle

grabs a powerbomb but drops Benoit face first onto the buckle, followed by another Slam for two.

We're right back to the Crossface but Angle rolls through into the ankle lock which can't be reversed this time. Benoit kicks him away instead, only to get caught in the ankle lock again. Chris tries to pull him into the Crossface but Angle holds on and gets the grapevine to FINALLY make Benoit tap because he was beaten and he knew it.

Rating: A+. I've seen this match several times now and I'm still exhausted just watching it. These guys were beating the heck out of each other with everything looking anywhere from great to unbelievable (that Swan Dive in particular). This was outstanding stuff and one of the best wrestling matches I've ever seen. There's also a bit of a HHH vs. Cactus Jack vibe to it with Angle being backed into a corner and having to fight, only to prove that he is indeed the better man, at least on this night. Check this out if you haven't seen it in awhile, or just because it's worth seeing multiple times.

After an Anthology ad, Benoit gets the big standing ovation, which probably should have sent him to a World Title shot (at least) at Wrestlemania. Instead it was a spot in a three way for the Tag Team Titles because that's how WWE worked in 2003.

Rob Van Dam and Kane agree that it's every man for himself tonight.

Royal Rumble

90 second intervals (though Fink says two minutes) with Shawn Michaels at #1 and Chris Jericho at #2. If nothing else, at least Shawn is starting to look like a wrestler again instead of the tiny thing he was back at Survivor Series. Actually hang on a second as it's Christian in Jericho's clothes instead of Chris himself. Cue Jericho from underneath the ring to hit Shawn low. One heck of a beatdown ensues with Jericho busting Shawn open with a chair as Christopher Nowinski is in at #3. He's willing to stay on the floor while Jericho beats on Shawn some more and easily eliminates him.

Nowinski is still on the floor as Rey Mysterio is in at #4. Rey tries to

speed things up and slips out of a gorilla press, only to get punched out to the apron. As usual, Jericho celebrates early and gets dropkicked into the ropes. Nowinski FINALLY gets in and it's Edge in at #5. Outside of Nowinski, that's quite the first four. Spears abound as Rey gets back into it and Nowinski is sent outside but not eliminated.

Jericho is sent into the post and through the ropes to the floor. Rey and Edge shake hands and go at it with Rey hitting the 619 but he gets powerbombed to put both guys down. It's Christian in at #6 with an offer to reform the team with Edge. That earns him a spear but here's Nowinski to throw Edge and Mysterio to the apron. Chavo Guerrero is in at #7 as the Smackdown is strong with this Rumble.

Rey and Chavo do a quick lucha sequence with the 619 setting up a springboard seated senton. Christian eats a 619 of his own, followed by a hurricanrana to get rid of Nowinski. Jericho comes back in for a hard clothesline to get rid of Mysterio and here's Tajiri in at #8. Things settle down a bit with Chavo choking Jericho in the corner and Tajiri not being able to eliminate Christian.

Bill DeMott is in at #9 and attacks various people in short order. The fans aren't exactly thrilled here as we're waiting on the big name to clean out some of these names. Tommy Dreamer is in at #10 to give us Dreamer, Jericho, Edge, Christian, Chavo, Tajiri and DeMott. Dreamer brings weapons with him and Edge knocks DeMott out with a kendo stick. Jericho and Christian hit a con-trashcanlid-o on Dreamer and get rid of him without much effort. Tajiri takes them both down with a handspring elbow but the Tarantula is easily broken up, allowing Jericho to get rid of him.

B2, still with the Cena entrance theme, is in at #11...and Edge gets rid of him in less than thirty seconds. Chavo is speared out next, followed by a bloody Jericho (from a Dreamer kendo stick shot) dumping Edge and Christian to leave himself all alone. Rob Van Dam is in at #12 because Edge/Van Dam vs. Christian/Jericho was out of the question for some reason. A superkick has Jericho in trouble and he's catapulted all the way to the apron. Matt Hardy, who strongly dislikes mustard, is in at #13 and drops Rob with a Side Effect.

Van Dam gets double teamed for a bit until he flips over Jericho and kicks Matt in the face for good measure. The Five Star hits Jericho and it's Eddie Guerrero in at #14. We get a rehash of Eddie vs. Van Dam from last year until Matt helps Eddie set up an ugly frog splash. That earns Eddie a Twist of Fate (Eddie is smarter than that) and it's Jeff Hardy in at #15.

Jeff doesn't buy the reunion idea either (like anyone would buy a Hardys reunion in 2003 or beyond) and beats Matt up, only to have Shannon Moore dive onto Matt to save him from a Swanton. That's fine with Jeff so he crushes both of them as Rosey is in at #16. Matt gets backdropped to the apron as the eliminations have slowed WAY down. Test is in at #17 and gets to clean house a bit without eliminating anyone. You know, because Rosey needs to stick around.

A rapping John Cena is in at #18 giving reasons why he's going to win this. The camera stays on him and for once it's not the biggest problem as nothing is going on in the ring. Van Dam beats him up on the floor (maybe for wrestling in jeans instead of jean shorts for a change) and it's Charlie Haas in at #19. Where are Lesnar and Undertaker to clear these people out? Jeff tries to run up the corner so Rob eliminates him, still leaving us with far too many people.

Rikishi is in at #20, giving us Rikishi, Jericho, Rob Van Dam, Matt Hardy, Eddie Guerrero, Rosey, Test, Cena and Haas. Rosey and Rikishi have a weird family reunion as Shannon comes in to protect Matt. That just earns him a double Stinkface, or at least it would have if Rosey hadn't clotheslined Rikishi instead. Jamal is in at #21 to superkick Rikishi, who pops right back up with a Stinkface for his....brother I believe.

Kane is in at #22 to clean house but he brings Rico in with a chokeslam to fill the ring up even more. Rosey is tossed in a hurry and it's a double chokeslam for Matt and Shannon. Shelton Benjamin is in at #23 as the ring is WAY too full with eleven people in there, plus Shannon and Rico at various times. They all fight near the ropes and it's Booker T. in at #24. We go to a weird closeup for an ax kick on Kane and there's the Spinarooni. Eddie gets backdropped out and it's A-Train in at #25.

A good looking A-Train Bomb (chokebomb) plants Cena and another one hits Van Dam but Rikishi superkicks A-Train in the face. Jericho is sent to the apron AGAIN but here's a bandaged Shawn to go after Jericho, allowing Test to knock him out. Shawn stays on Jericho and that's a Wrestlemania match. Maven is in at #26 (because this match needed two Tough Enough names) and goes after Kane as things slow down again. Goldust is in at #27 and doesn't even last a minute before Team Angle puts him out. They do the same to Booker T. a few seconds later, making sure that the Booker T./Goldust team is swiftly beaten again.

Batista is in at #28 and gets rid of Test (after EIGHTEEN MINUTES, or longer than Edge and Mysterio combined) and Rikishi. Brock Lesnar is in at #29 and becomes the most obvious winner since...well last year with HHH actually. He wastes no time in getting rid of Team Angle before throwing Matt onto both of them. Now that's how you clear out some bodies. Undertaker is in at #30 to give us a final group of Undertaker, Van Dam, Cena, Jamal, Kane, A-Train, Maven, Batista and Lesnar. Not the worst field actually.

Undertaker dumps Cena (Which could have set up a heck of a Wrestlemania match today but we wanted a reality show moment instead. Yes you did want that and Kevin Dunn told me so.) and Jamal (Why was he still there?) before Maven hits the same dropkick as last year. This time there's no effect though, making Maven's celebration a bit amusing.

After Maven is launched out, A-Train hits the A-Train Bomb on Undertaker. Van Dam and Kane get rid of A-Train and we're down to five. Kane loads up Rob in a gorilla press...and throws him out in a smart move (not a heel turn). Batista and Kane are put down with a double clothesline and it's time for Lesnar vs. Undertaker.

That's broken up before anything can happen though and the Brothers of Destruction start taking over. Brock takes care of Batista and Kane so we can have the Undertaker showdown. The F5 is countered and Brock takes a Tombstone, followed by Undertaker dumping Batista and Kane. Batista comes back in and eats a chair shot, leaving Brock to eliminate Undertaker for the win.

Rating: B. There was a REALLY bad dead spot in the middle and some of the choices were all over the place (Test, Jamal and Rikishi all getting over fourteen minutes while Los Guerreros, Edge and Mysterio were all afterthoughts) but the ending was the right call. The final four wasn't a bad group at all and having Lesnar dump Undertaker to win is as good a move as they could have made.

There was VERY little build to this match and they did well enough with it while they could. It's not a terrible Rumble but there are many better options. Fix the middle part and get rid of people at a faster clip and it's a great one, but as it is it's just pretty good. Then again, for this year that's quite the compliment.

The big problem here though is how weak the midcard and lower card is. Maybe it's just the way some of them were booked but aside from Lesnar, Undertaker and MAYBE Jericho, was anyone a real threat to win here? Having an obvious winner is fine but it would be nice to build up someone else as a possible winner.

Overall Rating: B-. The World Title matches cancel each other out and thankfully the Rumble is there to make up for a nothing lower card. Lesnar winning was the obvious ending here and that left the rest of the show to really carry things. Angle vs. Benoit is must see and Steiner vs. HHH may be as well if you're into unintentional comedy. The rest of the show though....egads there's nothing to see there. It's a perfectly good show but the problems are very big and the Rumble isn't good enough to make it a classic.

Ratings Comparison

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

Original: D

2013 Redo: C+

2017 Redo: D+

Dudley Boyz vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

Original: C

2013 Redo: D

2017 Redo: C-

Dawn Marie vs. Torrie Wilson

Original: DD

2013 Redo: D-

2017 Redo: F

Scott Steiner vs. HHH

Original: G-

2013 Redo: H (For HHH)

2017 Redo: N (For Not HHH's Fault)

Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Original: A+

2013 Redo: A+

2017 Redo: A+

Royal Rumble

Original: B

2013 Redo: B-

2017 Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: B-

2013 Redo: C-

2017 Redo: B-

This is a rare instance where the original is much closer to the new ratings than the first redo. Maybe I was in a bad mood that day?

You can read the original review here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/22/royal-rumble-count-up-2003-best-match-ever/>

And the 2013 redo here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/01/16/royal-rumble-count-up-2013-redo-2003-best-of-both-worlds-and-a-boring-rumble/>

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Main Event – January 11,

2018: Yeah I Knew That

Main Event

Date: January 11, 2018

Location: FedEx Forum, Memphis, Tennessee

Commentators: Nigel McGuinness, Vic Joseph

What does it say that we're less than a week removed from the most recent episodes of Monday Night Raw and Smackdown Live and I can barely remember what happened? We're building towards two of the biggest shows of the year and I'm drawing blanks on what went down. That's not a great sign for either show and hopefully it's not one for this show too. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Dana Brooke vs. Alicia Fox

Now Brooke beat Mickie James last week, which more or less guarantees that she loses here, just for the sake of the dumbest result possible. They take turns slamming each other down by the hair before Brooke grabs a waistlock. Back up and Fox tries a flying shoulder but bounces off of Brooke, who of course hits the pose.

Brooke tries a charge of her own but gets kicked out to the floor so Fox can take over. We hit the chinlock for a few seconds before the bridging northern lights gives Fox two. Dana clotheslines her a few times and tries the handspring elbow, only to flip into two raised boots. The ax kick gives Fox the pin at 5:45.

Rating: D. Yeah I knew that. Somehow, I just knew that was going to be the case. Brooke really isn't that great in the ring but I still like her for some reason that I just can't quite place. If she could reach a level of plain competence, she could be a nice little midcard fixture. Fox is the same person she's been for years, which is to say acceptable and not much more.

From Raw for the first time.

Here are Paul Heyman and Brock Lesnar to talk about old school. The thing is, this is a progressive industry where you need fresh ways to present the ideas to the audience and the general public. They've gotten away from the old school way of promoting a Universal Title match (oh come on), which was all about finding a challenger who could possibly pin or tap out a champion.

Now the Universal Title is marketed as how could Brock survive this time. Even Lesnar thinks it sucks. At the Rumble, it's Brock vs. monster #1 and monster #2 but the only cliffhanger is who Lesnar will pin. Heyman knows no one can beat this man and that's all that matters. Lesnar goes up the ramp but here's Kane for the fight.

They fight into the back where Braun Strowman shows up and runs them both over. Brock is thrown into a wall where a big case falls on him. Strowman throws another case onto Kane (that is some scary power) before pulling out...a grappling hook? He attaches it to a big old piece of the set and pulls it down onto both guys for a huge crash, sending Heyman and everyone else behind him into fits of screams. That was quite the set piece and my goodness it should have killed them both. Worry not though, as I'm sure Lesnar will be just fine to lose to Reigns in New Orleans.

I know that's harped on but it's the problem with the entire Universal Title picture. Why should I even possibly buy that Strowman, who Lesnar has already beaten, or Kane (because HA) is going to take the title at the Rumble? Even if they do, there's no way they're defending it at Wrestlemania because that's Reigns' spot and everyone knows it. I know it sounds lame but that's what goes through my head every time I see anything related to the title.

Post break, Brock was taken out on a stretcher while Kane was allowed to walk away on his own. Well limp away but you get the idea. Lesnar didn't want to go to the hospital but went anyway.

Recap of Daniel Bryan and Shane McMahon's recent issues on Smackdown.

From Smackdown.

[AJ Styles/Shinsuke Nakamura/Randy Orton vs. Kevin Owens/Sami Zayn](#)

The threat of an RKO sends Owens bailing to the floor before coming back in for some right hands. It's off to Sami vs. Nakamura as the announcers talk about the Freebird Rule for the potential of co-WWE Champions. A kick to the face sends Sami outside and an attempt at the Styles Clash sends the villains walking up the ramp.

Cue Shane, because we haven't seen him enough tonight. The match is restarted (it never stopped) with no countouts. Back from a break with AJ fighting Owens off and hitting the fireman's carry backbreaker. The hot tag brings in Orton for the snap powerslam on Zayn, followed by the hanging DDT. Orton loads up the RKO but Owens chairs him in the ribs for the DQ at...oh of course Shane comes out to say restart it with No DQ.

AJ knocks Owens up the ramp and into the back with a chair, leaving Sami trapped. The chase is on but Sami can't quite make it over the barricade. Orton loads up the steps and then drops Sami back first onto the announcers' table. Kinshasa drops Zayn and the RKO is good for the pin at 14:54.

Rating: D+. What do you want me to say here? The good guys had a big advantage and used that advantage to win, including a pair of restarts in the process. This was everything you would have guessed the match would be and really didn't deviate from that premise. There's not much these guys can do when EVERYTHING in this story has been about Shane vs. Bryan, which at the moment can't be an actual match. I'm still begging for the big swerve where it's Shane as the heel, but that's getting more and more unlikely with each passing week for reasons I don't want to understand.

Ariya Daivari/Drew Gulak vs. Mustafa Ali/Akira Tozawa

Gulak and Tozawa start things off with Drew demanding no chanting. Instead Tozawa kicks him down for the jumping backsplash and it's off to the arm. Daivari makes a blind tag though and jumps Tozawa from behind as we take a break. Back with Daivari's frog splash getting two on Ali. Everything breaks down in short order (without a hot tag either), allowing Tozawa to hit his suicide dive on Daivari. The 054 ends Gulak at 8:22.

Rating: C. I'm running out of ways to say "they did the same thing they

always do" in these cruiserweight matches but that's the case here again. This was every bit out of the old 205 Live playbook with a completely standard tag match (not a bad thing) and nothing we haven't seen time after time. It could have been worse, which often times is the best thing that can be said about a match.

Quick look at the US Title tournament.

Royal Rumble rundown.

We see a little bit of Miz's return on Raw.

From Raw to close things up.

Balor Club vs. Roman Reigns/Seth Rollins/Jason Jordan

Balor and Rollins start things off with Balor scoring off an early double stomp. It's off to Anderson in a hurry but Reigns tags himself in so house can be cleaned in a hurry, including a double shoulder to Balor. Back from a break with Reigns working over Balor until a Sling Blade cuts him off. Gallows and Anderson take over in the corner with Luke grabbing a chinlock. Anderson drops a knee and puts on a chinlock of his own.

Back up and Reigns gets in a clothesline to drop Anderson but Gallows won't give up the hot tag. The third chinlock goes on but Reigns no sells a big boot and scores with a Superman Punch. The hot tag brings in Rollins for the Blockbuster, followed by a Sling Blade on Anderson. Gallows breaks up the Wind-Up knee and Anderson's spinebuster gets two.

Rollins makes the tag to Reigns but Jordan distracts the referee by mistake so Rollins stays legal. A Magic Killer plants Rollins so Reigns goes outside to fight two on one. Jordan tries to help Rollins up, allowing Balor to hit the shotgun dropkick. The Coup de Grace gives Balor the pin at 15:28.

Rating: C-. The chinlockery hurt this a lot but I'm not sure anyone was expecting this to be any more than another wedge between Jordan and company, which is all it needed to be. That team isn't going to hold together that much longer and it makes sense to have them split up just in time for the Rumble.

Post match Miz and the Miztourage come in to attack Rollins, Jordan and Reigns. Roman takes a Skull Crushing Finale and the TripleBomb to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. Yeah there's a reason I didn't remember anything from this week. This was a run of the mill show and the highlights really didn't offer anything of note. That's part of the problem with the build to the Rumble: once everything is set, there's really not much to do other than sit around and wait on the show. Raw 25 will help that a lot, but it's not like there's anything overly interesting on this week's shows.

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Smackdown – August 14, 2003: The XFL, the WBF and Cracker Barrel vs. Bob Evans

Smackdown

Date: August 14, 2003

Location: Savvis Center, St. Louis, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We're in a new era around here as Brock Lesnar has turned heel again, this time siding with Vince McMahon against Smackdown World Champion Kurt Angle. You can pretty much guarantee the Summerslam title match now, but it does beg the question of why Vince refused to give Lesnar a title shot in the first place. Either this plan came together in the span of a week or there's a bit of a lack of logic there. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's a smug Vince to get things going. Vince wants to talk about the REAL Brock Lesnar, many of whom probably think they know quite well. He won the NCAA Title right here and the fans may know some things about him, but there's a side Vince knows and we don't. Brock is really an animal (at least he's not a manster, which Cole is still trying to get over) and we see a few clips to sum up last week's charade.

This includes Angle being tossed into the cage, which Vince says is Brock's version of dwarf tossing. Brock comes out and explains his definition of friendship. The only reason you need friends is to help yourself but after that's no longer an option, they're no longer your friend. As soon as Angle became champion, Angle's value to him ended. The fans can't judge him because they would do the same. They suck too.

Vince gets to the bigger point: Angle is defending against Brock at Summerslam. This brings out Stephanie (dang it had been a nice two weeks and dang that's some really bad canned applause) and Brock seems to hide behind Vince. Give him another ten years or so. Stephanie yells at Vince for sending A-Train to attack her so Sable could win a match. She thinks Vince is scared of her having power but she's not going to quit.

Vince is a great businessman but as a father and husband, he's a piece of garbage. Screeching mode ensues with Stephanie shouting that Vince is NOTHING. Vince says that Stephanie is a bad investment, but the worst investment was the day he married Linda. As for tonight though, Stephanie can face A-Train. That's three out of four TV main events with a McMahon in the ring and again, I can't say I'm surprised. They did make this faster though as it only took fourteen minutes instead of sixteen, all to

set up Stephanie vs. A-Train.

Tag Team Titles: Rey Mysterio/Billy Kidman vs. World's Greatest Tag Team

Haas and Benjamin are defending. Kidman and Haas start things off and we hit that Stephanie discussion. An armdrag takes Haas down but Shelton kicks Kidman's knee out and cannonballs down for good measure. A missed charge allows the hot tag to Rey though and things speed way back up. They seem to botch something in the corner but Rey switches into an attempt at a tornado DDT.

That's broken up as well as Shelton throws him up for something like a northern lights suplex...which hurts Shelton? Was it supposed to have been turned into a neckbreaker? Anyway Haas gets in a cheap shot from behind and Shelton grabs a t-bone for two. Everything breaks down with Kidman diving onto Haas, leaving Shelton to take a super hurricanrana for a delayed two.

We take a break and come back with Rey taking a big backdrop to the floor and clutching his knee. It's Mysterio so that's likely six months off. Charlie takes over by choking on the ropes and starts kicking at the ribs. Not the knee that Rey was holding of course, but the ribs. It makes sense when his finisher is the Haas of Pain but they're kind of ignoring what they're being handed.

Benjamin comes in for a bearhug and an abdominal stretch. As usual, I greatly approve of mixing up your holds when you have so many options. Shelton's jump onto Rey's back gives Charlie two and a dropkick to the ribs makes things even worse for Rey. Haas grabs an armbar of all things, allowing Rey to hit a dropkick of his own. That bangs up his knee again though and Shelton breaks up the hot tag. They're building the heck out of that thing and it's working very well. Imagine that: it's easy to sympathize with Mysterio.

Rey gets in a flying mare though and a basement dropkick allows the hot tag to Kidman. Everything breaks down in a hurry as Kidman takes both champs down, including a BK Bomb for two on Haas. A belly to belly cuts Kidman off but it's Mysterio springboarding in with the legdrop for a sweet save.

Rey hurricanranas Benjamin to the floor and powerbombs Haas off the ropes, right into shooting star press position. The referee is too busy watching Rey 619 Benjamin though, allowing Haas to kick out at two. Awesome sequence. Benjamin tries to grab a belt but Rey takes it away, distracting the referee long enough that Benjamin can superkick Kidman into a rollup to retain.

Rating: B+. Heck of a match between these teams and that's all you could have expected. Kidman and Mysterio work very well together and it's no surprise that they were able to have a highly entertaining and quality match with another very talented team. I could live with this a lot more if Mysterio wasn't the Cruiserweight Champion but really, who else is there for him to face at the moment other than Kidman?

Doug Basham vs. Billy Gunn

Gunn goes straight at him to start and hits some clotheslines as the announcers talk about Shaniqua. The hiptoss into a neckbreaker gets two as Shaniqua throws Torrie in. The distraction lets the Bashams hit a Russian legsweep/clothesline combo (the Ball and Gag, because of course it is) for the very fast pin.

Post match the Bashams keep up the beating until Jamie Noble runs in to save Torrie (and her torn trunks). Thankfully the Bashams don't run from the powers of redneck violence and everyone is beaten down. The beatdown takes two or three times as long as the match.

The APA thinks Shaniqua is Shelton Benjamin in drag. Faarooq shifts gears and thinks the APA Offices should be opened again. Bradshaw goes back to the Shaniqua thing and it's really not funny.

Big Show leaves Vince's office with a smile on his face.

Undertaker vs. A-Train is set for Summerslam. You may notice the lack of Rey Mysterio and John Cena on the pay per view. No room for people like that of course.

Big Show vs. Undertaker

Show tosses him down without much effort and breaks up a waistlock

without about as little effort. Some clotheslines stagger Show though and Undertaker slips out of a chokeslam into a Fujiwara armbar. A DDT gets a very bad looking cover (Undertaker was over his arms and face instead of the shoulders) and the apron legdrop makes things even worse for Show.

Old School connects but Undertaker walks into a side slam to bang up his previously bad ribs. Show's clothesline gets two but the fans aren't impressed and tell him he sucks. Well yeah but you don't have to remind him of it so often. Undertaker gets in the jumping clothesline and a legdrop for two before the straps come down. You don't see that too often from Undertaker and he goes into boxing mode in the corner.

Show grabs the referee to block the chokeslam though and hits the bad ribs. The referee is down from a shot that shouldn't have dropped him and the fight goes outside. Show gets posted and clotheslined into the crowd, only to have A-Train come in with a 2x4 to Undertaker's ribs. Only Show can beat the ten and wins by countout.

Rating: D+. This was better than I would have guessed and it did help set up the pay per view match. Big Show is kind of just there again but that's the case with him more often than not. Maybe he'll heat up a bit down the line but for now, it seems time for him to fall back down from the main event scene. As for Undertaker vs. A-Train...well maybe it'll be short.

Post break, Undertaker needs to be treated before he interferes in the "main event".

Tajiri vs. Rhyno

Eddie Guerrero and Chris Benoit are on commentary. Tajiri kicks away to start until a hard clothesline takes him down. Rhyno, with a glare at Eddie, gets two off a suplex. Another kick gives Tajiri the same as they're certainly not wasting time here. Benoit and Eddie debate Bob Evans vs. Cracker Barrel as Tajiri sends Rhyno into the corner and hits the Buzzsaw Kick for the fast pin.

Post match Benoit wants a ride in Eddie's truck but first, we need some hydraulics. That's too much for Eddie who leaves Benoit in the truck and

walks away. Benoit isn't often put into comedy roles but it worked well here. It's still not something he should be doing too often but once in a while, it's entertaining.

Zach Gowen vs. John Cena

Before the match, Cena raps about Gowen having one leg, including saying he would be the perfect partner in a three legged race. Normally I wouldn't laugh but having to keep Gowen around as a glorified mascot has made me lose a lot of patience for him. Cena runs him over with a hard shoulder before working Gowen over in the corner. The FU is teased but Cena lets him down, instead having the super version countered into a flying armbar on Cena's bad shoulder. That's good for two but the FU puts Gowen away in short order.

Rating: D. Do you get the idea with Gowen yet? I didn't know if him doing the same thing over and over again was enough to make the idea clear yet. Cena winning and winning in short order should seal Gowen's fate just a little bit more but leave it to WWE to keep going with the guy and not get the hint just yet.

We recap Undertaker and A-Train from earlier.

Stephanie is warming up (good thing she had gear ready) and the fans seem pleased. I mean the outfit being very low cut has a lot to do with it but Stephanie will take any cheering there is to be had. A-Train comes in and hints at wanting rough sex. I'll leave you with getting that image out of your head.

During the break, Matt Hardy jumped Gowen as he was leaving the arena. I knew I always liked Matt for a reason.

Spanky, in what looks like a Kool-Aid shirt, chugs chocolate syrup and gets some on Vince. The boss doesn't recognize Kendrick, who says he's been working here for like a year (it hasn't even been five months since he officially got a contract in storyline terms). Kendrick is annoyed and brings up the failures of the XFL and the WBF (I didn't know the second was allowed to be mentioned). As a result, he'll face Brock later tonight.

Spanky vs. Brock Lesnar

The opening charge is cut off by three straight powerbombs and Tazz wants the match stopped. Instead it's a LOUD chair shot to the head to bust Spanky open for the DQ. That was horrible looking and I can't say I'm all that surprised. Brock does look like a killer though. Cole: "This is not about chocolate syrup."

Post destruction, Spanks is pressed ribs first into the post and is covered with more blood. Vince comes out to smile at his new toy.

Stephanie McMahon vs. A-Train

Let's get this over with. Before the match Vince introduces Sable as the guest ring announcer. Stephanie tries to get at Sable, who makes it no countouts. The catfight is on, much like the canned heat. A-Train comes out and runs Stephanie over before hitting a running splash in the corner.

Vince gives it a thumbs down and A-Train puts her over the shoulder, only to have Undertaker come to the aisle for the brawl. Undertaker chairs A-Train in the back (I guess no countout now means no DQ) but Big Show comes in for the save. Now it's Undertaker getting chaired in the ribs, allowing A-Train to go back in and hit a Vader Bomb for the win.

Vince and Sable kiss to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. The opener helps this a lot but EGADS the A-Train and McMahon's stuff is killing this show. If you don't like the tales of the boss and his family, there's no point to watching most of this show. There's some good wrestling but most of the time it feels like they're just throwing stuff out there for the sake of throwing it out there with Vince vs. Stephanie getting most of the time and thought.

It would be nice if they actually had a reason to be fighting but really, it's something about Vince being a bad father and Vince not just firing her for some reason. Such is life on Smackdown, but maybe Summerslam can help things a bit. Then again that might suggest that this story is ever going to end, or if anything else really matters around here. The dead

times continue for this show and I can't imagine that changing in the near future.

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Smackdown – August 7, 2003: Obvious Isn't Bad

Smackdown

Date: August 7, 2003

Location: Skyreach Place, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

Commentators: Tazz, Michael Cole

Smackdown has some work to do to catch up with Raw, which announced an Elimination Chamber match for the upcoming Summerslam. Tonight Smackdown has a big match of its own though with Brock Lesnar vs. Vince McMahon in a cage with Kurt Angle as guest referee. Why that's a big deal isn't clear, but note that we'll be having two McMahons in main events this week, meaning the ratings should be through the roof. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Kurt Angle giving Brock a rematch for the title but being cut off by Vince. For some reason Vince agreed to face Brock in

a cage tonight. You really can feel the shenanigans coming here and in this case that works best. Just because you can see the ending doesn't mean it's a bad thing.

Opening sequence.

Chris Benoit vs. Eddie Guerrero

Non-title despite Benoit asking for the title to be on the line. Eddie picks the leg to start and they hit the mat for a technical sequence as you might have expected from these two. The Canadian fans are VERY pro-Benoit (well duh) but an Eddie chant pops up as well because Eddie is just on another level at this point.

Benoit backdrops his way out of a wristlock and Eddie bails to the ropes before Benoit can grab a hold of his own. Instead some insanely loud chops have Eddie begging for time out but he's still able to snapmare him down and take over again. A slingshot hilo and belly to back suplex give Eddie two and it's off to an armbar.

Back up and Benoit grabs a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker (stealing both Eddie's move and gimmick), followed by a very hard powerbomb. Cue Rhyno to break up the Swan Dive but Benoit avoids the frog splash. A dive takes Rhyno down, only to have Tajiri come in and take Eddie down for the DQ.

Rating: C+. Even with the lame ending, Eddie vs. Benoit in any form is worth seeing. They didn't have very long here but they managed to get something out of it because they're that popular. Having the Canadian fans cheer for Eddie shows you what kind of a roll he's on at the moment and that's an incredibly positive sign for Guerrero. It's also a good sign that they were doing the technical stuff here, making the US Title feel more like the wrestlers' title. Almost no title has an identity and this one having such a thing and doing it well so far hopefully is a sign of things to come.

They keep brawling but Sgt. Slaughter of all people (like Stephanie would lower herself to this) says we're going to restart this as a tag match. Now I need to see Slaughter doing the Teddy Long dance.

Chris Benoit/Tajiri vs. Rhyno/Eddie Guerrero

Joined in progress with Benoit getting the Crossface on Rhyno and Eddie having to make a save. Eddie comes in legally with a hurricanrana but Tajiri makes a save this time around. A baseball slide dropkick takes Eddie's knee out and now Tajiri can come in legally. The handspring elbow drops Rhyno as they're working a very nice pace to start things off.

Tajiri goes after Eddie but gets run over by Rhyno. That just earns him a Tarantula but Eddie is there with a dropkick for his own save. Rhyno actually puts on a Sharpshooter, drawing Benoit in to protect Canada's honor. He's fine with Eddie's half crab though, suggesting that he's not much of a Lance Storm fan. Rhyno comes in for some forearms as Benoit's save attempt goes nowhere.

Instead it's Eddie getting backdropped to the floor and Tajiri makes the tag, albeit thanks to Rhyno knocking him into Benoit. With Benoit on the floor, Rhyno powerbombs Tajiri but gets misted (with the referee looking at them). Eddie didn't see the tag and frog splashes the illegal Tajiri, only to get caught in the Crossface for the tap.

Rating: B-. It was certainly a creative ending and odds are this sets up a big title match, perhaps with all four fighting at the same time. As mentioned earlier, this is the kind of wrestling that makes the show a lot more interesting and I'd really like to see it happen a lot more often. Benoit and Eddie are the wrestlers so it's a smart idea to throw in a striker like Tajiri and a power guy like Rhyno to really even things out.

Josh Matthews (looking as stupid as I've ever seen him with two necklaces and an earring) asks Kurt Angle about some rumors, but Kurt cuts him off. Kurt has been hearing rumors about Josh, scotch tape, two midgets and a picture of Justin Timberlake that still keeps him up nights. He's heard the rumors about Brock, who he still considers a friend. A big stupid friend at times, but still a friend. They're going to resolve their issues face to face though.

Zach Gowen vs. Nunzio

Matt Hardy, who puts ketchup on one fry at a time and is a better commentator than Michael Cole, is on commentary and brought Shannon Moore with him. Gowen takes him down to the mat to start but is easily powered into the corner. Nunzio grabs the leg and mocks his inability to sweep the other leg as Matt complains about having to share the stage with a sideshow freak. As cruel as he sounds, there's really nothing wrong about what he says.

A quick leglock is broken up and Nunzio sends him outside. Gowen gets turned inside out with a clothesline and we hit the chinlock. Matt: "Everybody knows that Matt Hardy's career has more legs underneath it than Zach Gowen's.". Back up and Nunzio crotches himself and a middle rope moonsault hits him in the ropes. A leg lariat and a middle rope Fameasser both get the same. Gowen grabs a neckbreaker but has to elbow Shannon down, allowing Nunzio to hit a top rope dropkick for the pin.

Rating: C-. That's on a bit of a sliding scale and that's the problem: you have to adjust everything for Gowen and the matches are only going to be so good. He has to have a select group of opponents and his offense is almost all based around that one leg. It's nothing special in the first place and when your entire character is based around your one trait, it's not like you have much of a shelf life. Gowen is incredible impressive, but this isn't going to work for very long.

Post match, Gowen takes another Twist of Fate.

Undertaker finds Sable sitting on Vince's laugh and asks her to leave. He's not happy with Vince sending A-Train after Stephanie so the little "oil hoochie" could get a win at Vengeance. If Undertaker was part of the family, he'd have already beaten the heck out of Vince. The boss is about to tell Undertaker what he can do with that opinion when Funaki comes running in to say Brock has been attacked. Angle and the FBI are near him and Vince gives Kurt a look without saying anything. You can feel the twist coming from here and it's still working just fine.

Undertaker vs. John Cena

Undertaker beat him at Vengeance in a match that hurt a lot of Cena's credibility. Cena's rap implies he wants to force sexual acts onto

Undertaker. The big man wastes no time in sending him into the corner and the slow beating begins. He starts in on Cena's shoulder as the fans think Cena sucks. A hard clothesline looks to set up Old School but Cena pulls him down, somehow knowing what to expect.

Cena starts in on the knee, only to get his arm pulled down again. A lifting wristlock keeps Undertaker in trouble as they must have a long time here. Now Old School connects and the slow paced beating heads outside. Totally one sided so far. Back in and Undertaker actually takes him all the way to the top for a superplex but Undertaker bangs up his own ribs.

Back from a break with Cena in control and pounding on the ribs. They had something here with Cena having such a basic offense but sticking with it because it was the most logical thing he had. Undertaker shrugs it off and posts Cena on the floor because he's had enough of being on defense for now. In a good example of everything wrong with commentary, Cole keeps mentioning the bad ribs and Tazz yells at him for saying it over and over. Heaven forbid he tell a story or something.

The Throwback gives Cena two but a big boot and elbow give Undertaker the same. Cena's spinebuster goes back to the ribs but Undertaker mounts him for some rights and lefts. The Last Ride is broken up and the ref is bumped. Now didn't we all know something like that was coming? The chokeslam gets no cover and it's A-Train coming in for a bicycle kick and a backbreaker. That's only good for two on Undertaker so he tries the Tombstone, only to get reversed into the FU for the pin.

Rating: D+. They really didn't need this much time, especially with the arm work going nowhere. Undertaker vs. A-Train isn't going to be much to see and this seemed to be more about setting that up than helping Cena. That being said, it helped a lot to have Cena get the win off his own move instead of A-Train's. Cena needed a win like this and you knew full well they weren't giving Cena a clean pin, either here or at the pay per view. The match wasn't very good because of the slow pace and the ending didn't really help things.

Jamie Noble vs. Doug Basham

Shaniqua gives Doug a spank for inspiration and the announcers laugh the whole thing off. Jamie, apparently a face for getting to sleep with Torrie and Nidia (ok they've got something there), kicks Doug away but gets caught with some crossface shots to the head. A Vader Bomb elbow gives Doug two as Tazz goes on and on about what Shaniqua does with the Bashams.

The move that would become known as Wasteland gives Doug two and we hit the chinlock. Jamie fights up with a clothesline and dropkick for a near fall each. A top rope elbow looks to finish but Danny distracts the referee. Not that it matters as Jamie gets a small package for the pin.

Rating: D. Commentary made this one insufferable and I don't see it getting much better. I'm sure there was nothing better for WWE to do than spend years on the Bashams in OVW before bringing them up as unintentionally comedic sex characters. On top of that they're apparently feuding with a team that got together over group sex. Oh and the boss is having an affair with his mistress. You really shouldn't need so much of the same theme on one show.

Post match the beatdown is on until Billy Gunn makes the save.

Angle denies attacking Lesnar. I'd believe him.

Next week, Haas and Benjamin defend against Mysterio and Kidman. That would be another week where the Cruiserweight Title isn't so much as mentioned.

Rey Mysterio vs. Charlie Haas

Non-title of course. Haas takes him down without much effort to start and takes Rey's head off with a hard clothesline. A hard whip into the corner starts working on Rey's back and it's off to something like a torture rack with Tazz referencing the luchador Atlantis of all people. Back up and Charlie misses a charge, allowing Rey to hit a springboard flipping seated senton for two, followed by a springboard spinning crossbody (with Haas having to run over to catch him). The 619 connects but a hurricanrana is countered into the Haas of Pain for the tap.

Rating: C. Charlie got to show off here and a clean win over Mysterio is quite the accomplishment. It's a very good sign that both he and Benjamin can have solid singles matches and more proof of how great an amateur background is. Even if nothing else is working, just taking them down to the mat is a good way to get through parts of a match. Mysterio as a tag guy is fine, but get the title off of him already. The problem though is finding someone to put it on as the division basically doesn't exist. On a related note, what the heck happened to Ultimo Dragon? He was around all of two weeks and then vanished.

The cage is lowered.

We recap Brock's injury.

Angle leaves Vince's office.

Brock Lesnar vs. Vince McMahon

In a cage with Angle as guest referee. Brock looks banged up but is easily able to shove Vince down twice in a row. The F5 is loaded up but Brock collapses. Angle won't count the cover so Vince slaps him, earning himself an ankle lock. Brock of course nips up and F5's Angle for the pretty obvious (not a bad thing) heel turn. No rating as the match doesn't really end and wasn't exactly a match in the first place.

A long, long beatdown ends the show. This is definitely the right move as Brock wasn't working as the good guy and Lesnar vs. Angle II with Lesnar as the heel could be a lot more interesting. One last note: Brock and Vince pose with the camera panning from Vince's face to Brock's, who looks completely maniacal with his eyes bugging out for a really creepy visual.

Overall Rating: C+. There's some very solid wrestling on here (see the first half hour) and Brock turning heel is a good move as Brock just wasn't working in the role. Him working as Vince's heavy is a far better use for his talents and gives him some new people to work against. At the same time though, anything below the midcard is basically death at the moment with stuff like Noble and Gunn being goofy wastes of time and Gowen still riding on momentum even though the foot was taken off the gas

a long time ago. Get some better stuff on the bottom part of the card and Smackdown could be awesome all over again.

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Main Event – January 4, 2018: Why I Watch Wrestling (Seriously)

Main Event

Date: January 4, 2018

Location: American Airlines Arena, Miami, Florida

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

It's a new year and...that's not likely to change a single thing around here. Main Event is the definition of a single formula show and really, that's the best thing it can be. The show gives some people a chance to get in the ring which they won't be getting on Raw, mainly because we need some more cruiserweight matches that advance nothing because Enzo Amore doesn't defend the title anymore. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Mickie James vs. Dana Brooke

It's nice to change up from the cruiserweights every now and then. Feeling out process to start until Dana takes her head off with a clothesline. The handspring elbow in the corner gets two and we're off to the chinlock because that's what you do in wrestling. Back up and Mickie grabs a hurricanrana out of the corner but the MickDT is broken up. Mickie chokes her over the ropes with her legs (similar to a Tarantula) but Dana grabs a rollup for the completely clean pin at 4:36.

Rating: D. What the heck was that? I know Mickie is mainly there to put people over but DANA? I've been quite a fan of her new look with Titus Worldwide and I'm one of the only people on the planet who is still a fan of hers in general but why in the world is she winning here? I mean, if you have to give her a win like this it makes sense here, though that still doesn't mean it makes sense.

Quick look at Asuka beating Alexa Bliss on Raw.

Quick look at Becky Lynch returning on Smackdown.

We look back at Sami Zayn costing AJ Styles a match against Kevin Owens last week.

From Smackdown.

AJ Styles vs. Sami Zayn

Non-title. Shane, Owens and Bryan are at ringside. Sami takes AJ down early to start and gets two off a backdrop. A dropkick gets two more and we take an early break. Back with Sami holding a chinlock to keep AJ grounded. AJ fights back up, only to get his throat snapped across the top rope. Sami gets caught on top but punches his way to freedom, followed by the Blue Thunder Bomb for the same near fall that the move always gets.

Styles is right back up and grabs the Calf Crusher, only to have Sami make it to the ropes in fairly long order. The Phenomenal Forearm doesn't

work but the referee gets knocked to the floor. As expected, AJ grabs a rollup for two as the referee dives in after being held up by Owens. Shane shoves Kevin down and Owens is ejected, followed by Bryan saying Shane should go with him. The distraction lets Sami hit the Helluva Kick for the pin at 13:44.

Rating: C+. I don't think the ending was any kind of a surprise and that's all well and good. What worries me is the battle of the bosses, as I could easily see this turning into some kind of a mess where the wrestlers are overshadowed for the sake of a story that a lot of people aren't interested in seeing. The wrestlers are talented so just let them do their thing. We don't need to see Shane get this kind of focus and it's been going on for MONTHS now.

Post match AJ tells Owens and Zayn to stop acting like children. He's tired of everyone else getting involved so let's just make it a handicap match for the title at the Rumble. A smiling Bryan makes the match to end the show.

We look back at Samoa Joe injuring Dean Ambrose and Roman Reigns getting disqualified in his quest for revenge.

From Raw.

Intercontinental Title: Samoa Joe vs. Roman Reigns

Reigns is defending and loses the title if he's disqualified. Joe pops him with the right hands to start but Reigns comes back with some forearms to the back. The referee breaks up some shots to the face in the corner because the rules say he needs to be all serious here when no referee would ever do something like this otherwise. A suplex puts Reigns on the floor and we take a break.

Back with Joe running him over with an elbow for two. Reigns grabs a suplex though, only to miss a charge and go shoulder first into the post. Joe works on the arm but Roman is back up with a clothesline. That just earns him a charge to take him down again as the pace stays slow (in a good way). A hard whip sends Reigns into the corner and Joe takes him down to the mat to crank on the arm some more.

Reigns fights up again and hits a running clothesline, followed by the standing clotheslines in the corner. The running apron dropkick gives Reigns two but hang on a second as the referee has to warn for a DQ. Joe sends him outside though and there's the suicide elbow for a double knockdown.

They're both back in at nine and we take a second break. Back again with Reigns getting headbutted down but yelling at Joe to hit him harder. Reigns gets two off a Samoan drop and Joe bails to the floor. Roman dives into a shot to the chest and gets sent into the steps but thankfully Joe rolls back inside to break the count. A whip into the steps is reversed but of course that's not enough for the DQ.

Joe gets in a shot to the face, only to eat a Superman punch off the steps. Back in and another Superman punch gets two with the kickout stunning Reigns. The spear is blocked and Joe sends Reigns into the referee, who of course is talked out of the DQ. Another Superman punch is countered into the spinning Rock Bottom for two more and now Joe is yelling at the referee. The Clutch goes on but Reigns spins out of it and hits the spear to retain at 24:53.

Rating: B+. The DQ stuff was kind of annoying but they were beating the heck out of each other for a LONG time here and it made for a good match. I mean, you knew the most likely ending was spear into Reigns winning but at least Joe got in a very solid match before losing via clean pin. It's going to be almost all Reigns until we get to the Superdome because THIS TIME FOR SURE but that's how WWE works anymore.

Akira Tozawa vs. Tony Nese

Ok so maybe it's nice to have the tag teams gone for a week. Hang on a second though as Nese needs to pose. Tozawa isn't in the mood to wait and starts in with the kicks, followed by the fake out right hand. Nese is back up and stomping away in the corner as this is heavy on the striking so far. Tozawa knocks him outside but the suicide dive is blocked (just like it would be on 205 Live this week).

Back from a break with Nese grabbing a waistlock to keep Tozawa down. A double kick to the face puts both guys down, suggesting that Tozawa is a

much harder kicker than Nese. Now the suicide dive connects for two and it's time to strike it out again. Tozawa knocks the heck out of Nese and the top rope backplash is good for the pin at 10:12.

Rating: C+. For a match that should have been just a quick time filler, they were actually working out there and that's always cool to see. Tozawa is still one of the better options in the division and Nese is a heck of a heel, even if his in-ring stuff might not be the best in the world. This was certainly better than waiting around on Enzo but that's what we're stuck with for the time being.

We'll wrap it up here.

Here are Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman to close things out. Paul thinks the company's New Year's Resolution is to stack the deck against Lesnar by throwing multiple challengers at the same time. It used to be challenger and now it's CHALLENGERS because there's no other way to stop Brock. That makes things more complicated because Brock can lose the title without getting pinned, which is the only way it could happen.

Heyman mocks the announcers talking about the odds but says Brock is always 100%. If it's one on one, no one is beating Brock. You could even throw all thirty Royal Rumble entrants against him and it would be the same slaughter. They go to leave but here's Kane (with Brock pausing due to a delay in Kane's music hitting) to chokeslam Brock but Lesnar sits up like Undertaker. A Cactus Clothesline puts them on the floor but some of the locker room comes out for the break up. No Braun as Brock poses to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. You know, as odd as it sounds, the original content here is a good example of why I keep watching wrestling. There are two nothing matches here and we had a pair of surprises. The cruiserweights worked hard and had a fun match while the women gave us a bit of a surprise with an unexpected finish. That's the fun part about wrestling: just when you think you know what you're going to see, it throws you the occasional curve ball. I'm not saying it was great or even very good, but it surprised me and that's a good feeling.

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Monday Night Raw – January 1, 2018: Should Raw Acquaintance Be Forgot, Remember Brock Lesnar

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 1, 2018

Location: American Airlines Arena, Miami, Florida

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

It's a new year (yes it is) and that probably doesn't mean much. We'll be getting ready for the Royal Rumble in less than a month and tonight that includes an appearance by Brock Lesnar. Other than that we have Roman Reigns defending the Intercontinental Title against Samoa Joe and Cedric Alexander challenging Enzo Amore for the Cruiserweight Title. Let's get to it.

Alexa Bliss goes to see Kurt Angle in the back because she's not happy with having to face Asuka tonight. Angle basically says get over it.

Here's Angle for a chat. Angle talks about how great 2017 was and promises 2018 will be even better. In a few weeks we'll be having the 25th Anniversary of Raw and then the Royal Rumble. John Cena entered the men's Royal Rumble earlier today and that brings us to the women's Royal Rumble. The same rules will apply for the men: thirty entrants with the winner getting a title shot at Wrestlemania.

Cue the Bar to complain about Angle giving Jason Jordan and Seth Rollins a title shot last week and then celebrating with the new champions after the show. They won't stand for this favoritism. The Bar wants their rematch tonight but Angle says it's when he chooses. Cue Jordan to say he and Seth earned the titles last week but Cesaro isn't convinced. Angle makes a match for right now but here's Rollins to interrupt as well. Rollins thinks Jordan is going a bit too fast but Seth will be in his corner...to watch Jason lose.

I know this was supposed to be Rollins and Ambrose again but Rollins and Jordan aren't working so far. They're a very forced together team and Rollins acting like Jordan has no idea how to be a tag wrestler is quite the stretch. Jordan going full heel would help, but it seems that they've shifted gears into him just proving himself as a talent, which he doesn't need to do.

Jason Jordan vs. Cesaro

Joined in progress with Cesaro in control and grabbing a chinlock. Back up and Cesaro's dive is pulled out of the air, allowing Jordan to drive him into the corner over and over. Sheamus offers a distraction though and Cesaro takes the knee out. Cesaro cranks on the knee in a variety of ways before Jordan manages to send him outside. That just earns him another shot to the knee, followed by a knee crusher onto the apron.

We take a break and come back with Cesaro baseball sliding Jordan out to the floor again. Cesaro grabs a half crab (that's a back hold but whatever) but Jordan fights up and grabs some suplexes. Both guys are down again and Sheamus knocks Jordan into a rollup, followed by another half crab. Seth goes after Sheamus though, allowing Jordan to grab the wheelbarrow neckbreaker for the pin at 15:13.

Rating: C. A lot of that made my head hurt as Jordan's leg was worked over for the majority of the match, including two holds (again, didn't work on the leg but they were trying) but then he's throwing suplexes and the wheelbarrow neckbreaker. What's the point in doing something like that if Jordan just does his stuff anyway? It's a common problem and again, it seems that they're postponing the heel turn for the moment, which isn't good for anyone.

Roman Reigns promises to stay in the rules tonight because if he gets disqualified he loses the title. If that had actually lead to a title change via DQ more than maybe twice ever, that declaration might actually mean something.

Sasha Banks says she'll win the Royal Rumble.

Bray Wyatt vs. Apollo Crews

Bray takes him into the corner without much effort but has to punch his way out of a headlock. An enziguri into a slingshot hilo doesn't do Crews much good as Bray runs him over with a headbutt to the chest. Crews kicks him down again but gets crotched on top. Bray glares down at Dana Brooke and we take a break.

Back with Bray holding a chinlock until Crews fights up for a running kick to the face. Crews looks for the Toss Powerbomb but gets his head taken off with a hard clothesline. Dana gets on the apron and gets scared off onto Titus, allowing Crews to hit the jumping enziguri. The Toss Powerbomb is easily reversed into Sister Abigail though and Crews is done at 10:23.

Rating: D+. What the heck was that? Like seriously, what was that? Crews is someone who should be losing in about two minutes, not stretching it through a commercial. This is a good example of why Bray is in the place he's in: despite being presented as a monster, he doesn't wrestle like a monster. Instead he comes off like someone who is dealt with by speaking to him with a firm voice. I like Crews a lot but he should have been flattened here.

Post match Matt Hardy pops up on screen to say he's all around Bray and

intends to delete him. The screen turns into hundreds of small screens featuring Matt's face and Bray looks disturbed. I would be too if it took me that long to beat Apollo Crews.

Nia Jax is trying to leave because Enzo Amore is in the hospital with the flu. Alexa cuts her off and says she needs her at ringside. Bliss says it's Enzo or her and Nia leaves. Sweet goodness you mean Enzo is STILL going to be champion next week? Well of course, because there's no way they'll put the title match on 205 Live.

Ad for the Mixed Match Challenge, which I believe is the first time it's been mentioned on the main show. That being said, HAHAAHAHA if they actually think people are staying until 11:30 for the end of 205 Live after that show is over.

Alexa Bliss vs. Asuka

Non-title. This was set up last week when Asuka kicked Bliss in the head. An early spinning backfist misses so Asuka goes with a front facelock instead. Bliss has to bail from a kneebar but the hip attack puts her on the floor. Back in and Bliss gets kicked down as this is one sided so far. Bliss bails to the floor again and we take a break.

Back with Bliss holding Asuka in a bodyscissors, only to be reversed into an ankle lock. Bliss makes a rope and kicks her in the ribs again, followed by some forearms to the back. A backbreaker lets Bliss hammer away with right hands and it's back to the bodyscissors. That's switched into a guillotine choke before Bliss stomps away in the corner.

A running slap just ticks Asuka off though (Well what were you expecting?) and it's some dropkicks to put Bliss in trouble again. There's a running hip attack and a hard knee to the face but Bliss comes out of the corner with a sunset flip. Asuka counters that into a cradle for two, followed by the cross armbreaker to make Bliss tap at 14:35.

Rating: B. Bliss hung in there but this wasn't exactly a shocking result. Asuka is going to win the title one day and they're going to treat it as a big moment. Normally this would set up a title match at the Rumble but we can't do that when Asuka is already in the Rumble itself. There are

some options here and that's what you want going into a major match like that.

We look back at Roman Reigns attacking Samoa Joe last week and causing a DQ in their title match.

Joe is ready for Reigns because he's already broken up the Shield. It's because of Joe that Dean Ambrose is a stay at home husband living off his wife's (who happens to be doing this interview) paycheck. Renee's face off that line was great and as usual, Joe comes off as the most serious person not named Brock Lesnar in this company.

Bayley enters the Rumble.

Braun Strowman vs. Rhyno

The announcer introduces Slater as the opponent. Well they do both have meaty thighs. Strowman drops him with an early shoulder and goes outside to grab a mic. Braun tells Strowman to either stay on the floor and be quiet or take a beating. Slater comes in and the double teaming actually works for a good five seconds. The running powerslam ends Rhyno at 2:31.

Post match, multiple powerslams ensue. Yeah he's great. Now have him be the odd man out when Lesnar pins Kane so we can move on.

Rollins comes up to Reigns in the back and Roman says he's keeping his cool. Jordan comes in and says they'll take the Bar out tonight. Jordan: "Believe that." Seth and Roman share a funny look. Ok point for a good scene.

Strowman runs into Kane, who just wants to talk about Lesnar. Kane says they're the alpha monsters and since NO ONE HAS EVER TALKED LIKE THIS IN THE HISTORY OF EVER, Kane wants to team up, Strowman says no. Can no one in this company speak like a human?

Finn Balor comes in to Angle's office and enters the Royal Rumble. Angle is pleased but wants to know who Balor has for partners tonight in a six man tag. Cue Anderson and Gallows with Balor asking who else it would be.

Intercontinental Title: Samoa Joe vs. Roman Reigns

Reigns is defending and loses the title if he's disqualified. Joe pops him with the right hands to start but Reigns comes back with some forearms to the back. The referee breaks up some shots to the face in the corner because the rules say he needs to be all serious here when no referee would ever do something like this otherwise. A suplex puts Reigns on the floor and we take a break.

Back with Joe running him over with an elbow for two. Reigns grabs a suplex though, only to miss a charge and go shoulder first into the post. Joe works on the arm but Roman is back up with a clothesline. That just earns him a charge to take him down again as the pace stays slow (in a good way). A hard whip sends Reigns into the corner and Joe takes him down to the mat to crank on the arm some more.

Reigns fights up again and hits a running clothesline, followed by the standing clotheslines in the corner. The running apron dropkick gives Reigns two but hang on a second as the referee has to warn for a DQ. Joe sends him outside though and there's the suicide elbow for a double knockdown.

They're both back in at nine and we take a second break. Back again with Reigns getting headbutted down but yelling at Joe to hit him harder. Reigns gets two off a Samoan drop and Joe bails to the floor. Roman dives into a shot to the chest and gets sent into the steps but thankfully Joe rolls back inside to break the count. A whip into the steps is reversed but of course that's not enough for the DQ.

Joe gets in a shot to the face, only to eat a Superman punch off the steps. Back in and another Superman punch gets two with the kickout stunning Reigns. The spear is blocked and Joe sends Reigns into the referee, who of course is talked out of the DQ. Another Superman punch is countered into the spinning Rock Bottom for two more and now Joe is yelling at the referee. The Clutch goes on but Reigns spins out of it and hits the spear to retain at 24:53.

Rating: B+. The DQ stuff was kind of annoying but they were beating the heck out of each other for a LONG time here and it made for a good match. I mean, you knew the most likely ending was spear into Reigns winning but

at least Joe got in a very solid match before losing via clean pin. It's going to be almost all Reigns until we get to the Superdome because THIS TIME FOR SURE but that's how WWE works anymore.

Paul Heyman comes in to see Angle and basically says Lesnar is awesome. Thanks for coming in for that one Paulie.

Absolution is entering the Rumble. These entrances aren't exactly surprising when there are all of twenty or so women on the main roster.

Drew Gulak and Ariya Daivari are in the ring with Drew reading Enzo's promo off a letter Enzo wrote for them. Enzo isn't defending the title tonight due to the flu and would love to face Cedric, who interrupts in short order. The villains are willing to have a tag match but Cedric doesn't have a partner. Cue Goldust of all people to ask if Cedric wants to be friends. Goldust: "Cedric, want to be friends?". See that's what he said.

Drew Gulak/Ariya Daivari vs. Cedric Alexander/Goldust

Daivari takes Cedric down into a chinlock to start but gets elbowed in the face for his efforts. That's enough for a pretty early double tag to Goldust and Gulak as the pace quickens. They botch Goldust's running bulldog (Gulak seemed to trip and Goldust made a quick save by punching him in the head so it was nothing too bad) but the second attempt works just fine. Goldust actually goes up top and hits a pretty good looking twisting crossbody. Cedric's springboard double clothesline takes both guys down and it's the Lumbar Check to end Gulak at 3:26.

Rating: D. It says a lot when my reaction is "uh.....ok?" to a match being made. Was everyone else on vacation or something? I'm really not thrilled with Enzo holding the title EVEN LONGER and really hope they don't stretch this out to the Rumble because there's just nothing for the two of them to talk about any longer. Goldust can still go though and I hope he makes it to 2020 so he can wrestle in five decades.

Finn Balor/Anderson and Gallows vs. Elias/Miztourage

Before the match, Elias has the Miztourage come out of the shadows with a

cowbell (Bo) and some bells (Axel). Miz is back next week so they dedicate a little Auld Lang Syne to his honor. This goes as well as you would expect and even Elias cuts them off. Joined in progress after a break with Axel getting two on Balor before it's off to Elias for some boots in the corner. Balor gets over to the corner for a hot tag to Gallows though and house is cleaned in the form of some kicks to the head. A splash crushes Dallas and the Magic Killer into the Coup de Grace puts him away at 3:24.

Rating: D. Just a squash here but I'm thinking the Miztourage should just stick with Elias. They have some chemistry there and it's not like it matters who their boss is. Miz doesn't really need lackeys (though they don't hurt him) and it would give Elias a nice little rub, which he could use with his current status.

Video on Miz's return next week.

Here are Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman to close things out. Paul thinks the company's New Year's Resolution is to stack the deck against Lesnar by throwing multiple challengers at the same time. It used to be challenger and now it's CHALLENGERS because there's no other way to stop Brock. That makes things more complicated because Brock can lose the title without getting pinned, which is the only way it could happen.

Heyman mocks the announcers talking about the odds but says Brock is always 100%. If it's one on one, no one is beating Brock. You could even throw all thirty Royal Rumble entrants against him and it would be the same slaughter. They go to leave but here's Kane (with Brock pausing due to a delay in Kane's music hitting) to chokeslam Brock but Lesnar sits up like Undertaker. A Cactus Clothesline puts them on the floor but some of the locker room comes out for the break up. No Braun as Brock poses to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. The Intercontinental Title match is more than enough to carry the show but the rest felt like it was being extended to fill in time. Unless Enzo was getting something like twenty minutes (I'd be STUNNED), then it felt like they were trying to punt because of the college football but didn't know how to do it. The show was more good

than bad as the focus is firmly on the Rumble and that's good for everyone. Now build up some potential winners for both matches and we should be fine.

Results

Jason Jordan b. Cesaro – Wheelbarrow neckbreaker

Bray Wyatt b. Apollo Crews – Sister Abigail

Asuka b. Alexa Bliss – Cross armbreaker

Braun Strowman b. Rhyno – Running powerslam

Roman Reigns b. Samoa Joe – Spear

Cedric Alexander/Goldust b. Drew Gulak/Ariya Daivari – Lumbar Check to Gulak

Finn Balor/Anderson and Gallows b. Elias/Miztourage – Coup de Grace to Dallas

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