

Smackdown – February 18, 2016: The Go Home Exit

Smackdown

Date: February 18, 2016

Location: Citizens Bank Business Arena, Ontario, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler

We're three days away from Fastlane and the big story tonight is Brock Lesnar making a very rare Smackdown appearance. There's no word on what he'll be doing but you can assume it might have something to do with Dean Ambrose and Roman Reigns, who are teaming together to face the Dudley Boyz tonight. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Ambrose losing the Intercontinental Title on Monday thanks to Stephanie's influence.

Opening sequence.

No Mauro Ranallo tonight due to a bout with the flu.

League of Nations vs. Dolph Ziggler/Lucha Dragons

Kevin Owens is on commentary. Kalisto and Rusev get things going with the masked man firing off kicks to the meaty Bulgarian thighs. Alberto comes in and gets taken down with a standing Lionsault for two. An old Jack Brisco spinning sunset flip out of the corner looks to get two for Cara but he tagged Kalisto by mistake. Everything breaks down for a bit and the Dragons dive through the ropes to take down Sheamus and Del Rio, followed by Ziggler coming off the top to elbow all three of them as we take a break.

Back with Rusev holding Cara in a chinlock before it's off to Del Rio for a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker. That means it's time for another chinlock from Alberto, followed by some Irish Curses from Sheamus for two. Owens goes on a funny bit about not liking idiots but having other reasons to not like Cole.

Cara finally kicks Del Rio down and tags in Ziggler to speed things up. Dolph's superkick to Sheamus is broken up but the running DDT works a bit better. Everything breaks down and Del Rio kicks Cara in the mask, followed by throwing Kalisto hard into the barricade. Back inside, Ziggler hits a quick Fameasser for two on Sheamus, which draws Owens off commentary. The distraction lets Sheamus nail a Brogue Kick for the pin on Dolph at 11:27.

Rating: C-. So the League gets a pin on the #1 contender despite none of them having a match on Sunday's pay per view card. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary here though and that's pretty good for the most part. The wrestling was fine and they went with the formula that they've perfected on Smackdown, meaning this was acceptable but nothing I'll remember in about an hour.

Owens leaves with Ziggler's vest.

Tamina vs. Sasha Banks

Sasha gets slammed head first into the mat to start but flips out of a belly to back suplex to get away for a bit. The running knees in the corner have Tamina in trouble and Naomi gets knocked off the apron. A sitout bulldog sets up the Bank Statement to make Tamina tap at 2:22.

Sasha gets beaten down post match until Becky makes the save, only to be shoved away by her partner. This continues a simple story but it's been booked well.

Post break Becky wants to know what that was. They're coming up on Wrestlemania and it's going to take a win at Fastlane to give them momentum. If Sasha wants to let her ego get in the way of their Wrestlemania moment, Becky is done right now. They agree to fight together on Sunday.

Here's Chris Jericho to address AJ Styles' challenge to him from Monday. Jericho is ready to answer but he wants AJ to be here face to face. Instead here's the Miz to interrupt with an announcement of his own. Jericho hopes that it's Miz quitting the business because everyone has been begging for it for years. Miz says he isn't quitting but he

certainly wouldn't do it here. The announcement is that he's ready to fight Jericho here and now, which earns him a throw to the floor.

Chris Jericho vs. The Miz

Thankfully this starts after a break instead of that stupid ring the bell and go to a break thirty seconds later. A suplex puts Miz down and it's time for some right hands in the corner. Miz sends him into the post as the announcers debate what celebrity lists these two are on. The fans want AJ but get a knee to Jericho's back and a chinlock. That goes nowhere so Jericho dropkicks him and goes up, only to get punched in the face. A trip to the floor doesn't do much as Miz takes him back inside for more left hands to the face. We take a break and come back with Miz holding a chinlock.

The Reality Check gets two and it's right back to the chinlockery. Jericho fights back again with an ax handle and counters another Reality Check (like any signature move, it's only one per midcard match) into a failed Walls attempt. Miz's short DDT and big boot get two each so he starts ripping at Jericho's face in the corner. The running corner clothesline is easily countered into the Walls though and Miz taps at 12:22.

Rating: C+. As has been the case lately, Miz is on a roll and having a string of good matches. Now maybe that's due to having matches against Chris Jericho and AJ Styles but at least it's been better than the usual five minute nothings that he does every week. He's been a good cog for this feud and kept things from being the normal tropes. Good stuff here as Miz continues to be a pleasant surprise lately.

Post match Jericho calls out AJ for the big answer. AJ comes out but Jericho doesn't seem interested in wrestling him again. He respects Styles but doesn't really like him, which is why there won't be a third match. AJ blasts him in the face with his striking sequence and that's enough for Jericho to change his mind. That's rather heelish of AJ, who lost clean last week and now uses violence to get what he wants.

We look back at Heyman and Reigns' exchange on Monday.

Ambrose says he's fine after losing the title on Monday but tonight he just wants to go fight. That's fine with Reigns, but Dean better not try that Dirty Deeds stuff again. Reigns leaves and Dean runs into Heyman. Paul shakes off Ambrose's threats by saying Brock is here and he wants a piece of Dean. That's freaks Ambrose out so badly that he asks Heyman for advice before deciding to deal with Brock on his own later.

New Day says they can't wait to be on the Cutting Edge Peep Show because they're real musicians. On Sunday they're ready to get in their stretch limousine and make their way to the Hall of Fame. Edge and Christian are out of style because it's not the 1990s again. Tromboning and dancing (a LOT of dancing) take us out.

Video on Charlotte, as sponsored by Geico.

Charlotte vs. Natalya

Non-title and Natalya gets the jobber entrance. Charlotte's early headscissors attempt doesn't work so Natalya grabs a headlock and hits a quick basement dropkick to send Charlotte outside. Ric tries to give some advice and we take a break before coming back to see Charlotte spinning out of a leg lock. Charlotte bails to the floor and a Ric distraction lets her kick Natalya in the face. Back in and it's off to the bodyscissors for a bit before Natalya fights up and sends her outside with a German suplex. Charlotte pulls the ring skirt away though to tweak Natalya's knee, setting up the Figure Eight for the submission at 7:40.

Rating: C-. This was fine as Natalya continues to be fine as the veteran jobber. I mean, I still don't buy for a second that Brie is going to win the title on Sunday, even for a feel good title change to cash in on Daniel Bryan. Charlotte is getting the hang of the main roster now that she has a character but Ric needs to go as there's really no need for him.

Post match Charlotte does the YES chants to draw Brie out. The YES Kicks send Charlotte running and a YES chant starts.

This week, Goldust is Dusta Rhymes and has some bad rap. Truth likes it to start but eventually turns him down with a rap of his own. Goldust

looks sad, which makes me think they might not wind up teaming after all. At least it's different than the Booker T. formula.

We look back at the Wyatts going even crazier and the ending of Monday's show.

Roman Reigns/Dean Ambrose vs. Dudley Boyz

They take their sweet time on the entrances until Ambrose and D-Von get things going. Dean gets early near falls of a cross body and bulldog before it's off to Bubba. A lot of shouting is enough to bring Reigns in and the crowd...doesn't seem to care. Bubba wins a slugout and elbows Reigns in the back of the head but charges into a Samoan Drop. D-Von gets double suplexed and Bubba is sent to the floor as we take a break.

Back with Bubba cranking on Dean's neck and the reverse 3D getting two. D-Von slaps on a chinlock (despite not actually grabbing the chin) and it's back to Bubba for some stomping. The slow paced (and mostly ineffective) offense continues with another D-Von chinlock. It doesn't help that we're just waiting for Brock to come out here. Bubba tries to start a LET'S GO AMBROSE chant but it's a Reigns distraction allowing Dean to knock Bubba down on the top rope.

Thankfully a few right hands aren't enough to even things up and Bubba knocks him off, only to miss the backsplash. The hot tag brings in Reigns to clean house with the usual but he loads up the Superman Punch right before Brock's music hits. The Dudleys use the entrance for a sneak attack but Reigns blocks the 3D. Dean dives onto D-Von but Brock decks him for the DQ at 13:08.

Rating: D+. This really didn't work as most of it was the Dudleys doing slow offense until Brock came out. It wasn't even a secret as we got a BROCK LESNAR TONIGHT graphic before the match. At least they did something besides the League of Nations to put the Shield boys over for a change though, which they've been getting better at in recent weeks.

Brock cleans house post match until Reigns gets in a Superman Punch. The spear almost hits Ambrose though and Dean tries Dirty Deeds, earning himself a Samoan Drop. Brock F5's Reigns but here's HHH (how nice of him

to make an appearance as his title has been the main focus lately) to stare Brock down to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. They've been picking things up lately around here and it's been a nice change of pace. This has felt a lot more like the wrestling show that Raw just isn't and that's the best thing Smackdown can really be. If nothing else this was a good way to help set up Fastlane, which had a good build all night, even if it's for a weak pay per view.

Results

League of Nations b. Dolph Ziggler/Lucha Dragons – Brogue Kick to Ziggler

Sasha Banks b. Tamina – Bank Statement

Chris Jericho b. The Miz – Walls of Jericho

Charlotte b. Natalya – Figure Eight

Roman Reigns/Dean Ambrose b. Dudley Boyz via DQ when Brock Lesnar interfered

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

New Column: The February Problem

Looking at how bad February pay per views tend to be and how to fix the problem.

<http://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-the-february-problem/>

Monday Night Raw – February 8, 2016: YES Is No More

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 8, 2016

Location: KeyArena, Seattle, Washington

Commentators: Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, John Bradshaw Layfield

It's a sad day in WWE as Daniel Bryan has been forced to retire due to his in ring injuries. The announcement has been confirmed by WWE and could possibly close out tonight's show. In addition to this big deal we also have Brock Lesnar on hand again this week as he's getting ready for his match with Dean Ambrose and Roman Reigns at FastLane. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Stephanie is in the ring for the official contract signing for Fastlane's main event. The fans chant for Bryan but Stephanie says Bryan isn't the one going on to Wrestlemania to face her husband HHH. Stephanie lists off the three men in the triple threat at Fastlane and here's Dean to jump the gun. However, there will be NO physical violence here tonight so Reigns can come out here as well.

Reigns wants to start the fighting now so let's get to it (it's catching on). This brings out Lesnar but Stephanie cuts off Heyman's line because everyone knows who he is. They all sign so Stephanie leaves, only to have Brock hit Reigns with the table and give Ambrose an F5. Well so much for Fastlane being interesting. HHH comes out to stare everyone down.

Cole addresses Bryan's retirement and we see a clip of his debut on NXT in 2010.

Post break, Reigns and Ambrose promise to get Brock tonight.

Kevin Owens vs. Dolph Ziggler

Owens runs him over to start and hits a Cannonball in less than thirty seconds for an early near fall. Kevin stands on his head against the rope while talking a lot of trash at the same time. A clothesline followed by a bow gets two for Owens but Ziggler grabs a sleeper and they fall to the floor as we take a break. Back with Ziggler fighting out of a chinlock, only to get backsplashed for two. Ziggler starts his comeback with a Stinger Splash and neckbreaker to set up the elbow for two of his own.

The superkick gets another near fall for Owens but the Pop Up Powerbomb is easily countered, setting up the running DDT. Owens gets draped over the apron, allowing Dolph to hit a Fameasser onto the floor. Both guys are down for a VERY close nine count (they actually had me there) before they dive inside. Owens misses a Cannonball though, allowing Ziggler to roll him up and put his feet on the ropes for the pin at 11:14.

Rating: D+. I would love to hear the explanation for this one. Are they turning Ziggler heel? If so, it really doesn't seem like it as Ziggler wasn't treated like a heel after the match and the whole thing felt like nothing special. Owens must have forgotten to shake hands with someone or something.

Another Daniel Bryan moment saw him winning the US Title at Night of Champions 2010.

The Dudleyz come in to see the Usos, who have a tables match against New Day later tonight. Bubba and D-Von don't quite get this because that's

their match. If they can get it approved, the Dudleyz would love to team up with the New Day for the match.

Video on Ryback.

Charlotte vs. Alicia Fox

Non-title and a rematch from Smackdown. An early Figure Eight attempt is broken up but Charlotte drops her with a neckbreaker for two. After cutting off a WE WANT SASHA chant, the champ puts Fox in a Figure Four Neck Lock. The comeback doesn't go anywhere and the Figure Eight gives Charlotte the tap out at 5:15.

Rating: D. Just a squash here and the same match we saw on Smackdown. I'm not sure if this is supposed to help build up Brie vs. Charlotte just because Brie and Alicia are on the same "team", but this really wasn't the most interesting thing. If nothing else it makes me wonder why I bother watching Smackdown when they just air the same stuff here with nothing extra being added.

It's time for MizTV but before the guest comes out, Miz has to yell about AJ Styles attacking him. Who does AJ really think he is when he attacks an A-lister like the Miz? This brings out Chris Jericho to tells Miz to shut up. Before Miz can have much of a rebuttal, Jericho says it's time for the Highlight Reel. A bunch of roadies run in and take over the set, including lowering the Jeritron 5000. Miz says this isn't Jericho's show, so Jericho demands that his stool and potted plant are brought in.

Jericho shows us a clip of AJ knocking Miz's tooth out of his mouth on Smackdown, drawing a YOU LOOK STUPID chant. Miz: "I'm not Sheamus." Last week he had a major audition with Spielberg and thankfully his team of Hollywood dentists saved the day. Jericho sings about wanting his two front teeth for Christmas so Miz counters with a clip of AJ's pin over Jericho a few weeks back. Chris can't wait to take care of AJ on Smackdown so here's Styles. Miz is quickly dispatched and AJ stares Jericho up the aisle to wrap things up.

We recap Lesnar destroying Ambrose and Reigns earlier.

Bryan won Money in the Bank in 2011.

Ryback vs. Bray Wyatt

We get the return of the GOLDBERG chants as Ryback runs Bray over. Another big shot sends him out to the floor but the Family offers a distraction, allowing Bray to take Ryback down as we go to a break. Back with Bray clotheslining Ryback down again but missing a charge into the post. A cross body into some right hands have Bray in trouble and a spinebuster gets another two count. The Meathook is countered into Sister Abigail for a pin out of nowhere at 6:50.

Rating: C-. So why couldn't they do this to Zigler instead? It's not like he's going to have issues with a loss but instead they give Ryback a much better look and have him lose clean in his second match. As usual, it feels like this company has the potential to set something up but then they go with whatever they can to make sure it doesn't happen. As always, the worst part is you can feel it coming every time.

Post match the Wyatts destroy Ryback both in and out of the ring.

We look back at Kane and Daniel Bryan. That's still one of the funniest things the company has done in years.

Big E. is singing about working on a table while Xavier Woods is making calculations on how to destroy a table. Renee Young comes in to ask if they have a partner yet so Woods destroys the calculator. Of course they haven't because there are still three of them.

Ambrose says he's ready to fight Lesnar on his own because he's never been in the ring with him.

Titus O'Neil vs. Adam Rose

Before the match, Rose names himself the Radical Mongoose, which really doesn't work for Axel. Titus chops him in the corner to start but gets kicked in the face for two. Back up and Titus will have none of this Irish whip nonsense as he LAUNCHES Rose across the ring and takes over with some clotheslines. The Outcasts save Rose from the Clash of the Titus by pulling him to the floor, only to have O'Neil runs them all over

like bowling pins. Back in and a Slater distraction lets Rose grab a rollup for the pin at 3:19.

Rating: D. The match may have sucked but Adam Rose is the Radical Mongoose. There is no way that doesn't wind up being one of the best names in years. I mean, it's like a mongoose but RADICAL. Titus getting TV time is a good thing but not as impressive as the Outcasts actually winning something.

We look at Bryan pinning Cena at Summerslam 2013.

Here's Dean Ambrose to ask what that was from Brock earlier. It certainly couldn't have been an F5 because those are supposed to hurt. It's clear that Brock certainly can't get the job done so get out here and give it another try. No Lesnar so Dean says Brock has gone soft. "That sounds like a personal problem." Maybe Heyman didn't give him permission to come out here.

That's enough to bring out Lesnar and Dean goes right at him, only to be destroyed with ease. Dean crawls towards Brock and eats another F5 to leave him laying. Ambrose starts getting up and waves Brock back to the ring, only to have Reigns come out for a distraction. The plan seems to work as Dean hits Brock low and walks out as Brock is hunched over in pain. This worked better than I was expecting and the near falls at FastLane are going to be awesome.

Back from a break and we recap everything we just saw. Thankfully this means I have more time to flip back to Cheers, which I've seen several times but is still more entertaining than seeing the same thing twice in five minutes.

Lucha Dragons vs. Rusev/Alberto Del Rio

Rusev kicks Kalisto off the apron to start but gets rolled up for a quick two. Del Rio comes in with a snap suplex for two of his own as they're wisely setting up the hot tag to Kalisto later on. We hit the nerve hold from Rusev, followed by a chinlock from Del Rio. A snap German suplex makes things a bit better for Alberto but Cara counters a suplex into a DDT, finally allowing the hot tag to Kalisto. The springboard spinning

cross body gets two on Alberto and everything breaks down. Del Rio enziguris Kalisto down though and the top rope double stomp pins the champ at 5:38.

Rating: C. Is anyone else sick of seeing champions lose? I mean, you have a wrestler coming back off a shoulder injury and a heel with an arm submission finisher, but instead let's go with pinning a champion. There's no way a multiple time World Champion could be seen as a credible champion without winning THIS match over Kalisto right?

Earlier today, Goldust thought he was Jimi Hendrix. A guitar is smashed and security drags Goldust away as Truth isn't sure what's going on.

Daniel Bryan occupied Raw along with the YES Movement.

Tamina vs. Becky Lynch

Sasha is on commentary. Tamina powers her into the corner but Becky slaps on an early sleeper. A Naomi distraction allows Tamina to get in a hard clothesline before slamming Becky's head into the mat a few times. Tamina takes her head off with a back elbow and we hit the neck crank. That goes nowhere so Naomi beats the heck out of Sasha. Becky kicks Tamina down and goes outside to help Sasha, only to walk into a superkick to give Tamina the pin at 3:42.

Rating: D. As much as I'd love to see Becky actually get somewhere, this makes the most sense for the feud. Tamina and Naomi are looking like the weaker pairing so giving them a win makes more sense. That being said, it's rather sad that there's no one else to throw out there instead of just doing singles matches to set up the tag match.

New Day offers Mark Henry a spot on the team tonight and the unicorn horn is actually accepted. Henry plays some trombone (not bad actually) but it's the dancing that gets him the job.

New Day/Mark Henry vs. Usos/Dudley Boyz

Tables match, meaning there are about fifteen tables around the arena. Only one person has to go through a table so the good guys clean house to start. A double dive drops the New Day and we take an early break. Back

with New Day bossing Henry around...which doesn't go well as he doesn't like being told what to do and walks out. The good guys clean house with a double What's Up. Double superkicks all around set up a 3D to Big E. for the win at 6:42. Not enough to rate but this was nothing special.

Post match Jey comes up with a bad leg but the Dudleyz shove him down and turn heel with a SuperBomb to put Jimmy through the table.

Video on Daniel Bryan's career.

Here's Bryan, now with FAR less hair and beard) for his big speech. The DANIEL BRYAN chants get to him a bit as you knew they were going to. Now the YES chants cut him off but he says he was able to close his eyes and feel that in a way that he never could before. When you're out here you have to keep your eyes open but he'll never forget that feeling just now.

It's time to address the giant elephant in the room though. Yes, he did have to shave his beard but he wanted to cut his hair but he looked really silly with the beard. In his only cheap plug, he cut his hair for an organization called Wigs For Kids which doesn't charge the families for the kids that get wigs from them.

That brings him to the less fun stuff and the NO chant begins. Bryan doesn't want to be doing this any more than they do but he's been wrestling since he was eighteen years old. In the first five months of his career, he had already had three concussions. He had more and more concussions as his career went on and after sixteen years, that adds up to a lot of concussions.

Eventually it reaches the point where you can't wrestle anymore, but he's been told that he was fine. He's been training to get better and was ready at a moment's notice for WWE to say he could come back. Bryan has loved wrestling in a way that he's never loved anything else, which draws a THANK YOU DANIEL chant. Then a week and a half ago he had a test that said his brain wasn't as strong as he thought it was. He's got a family to think about and they're thinking about having kids. Fans: "YES!" Daniel: "That's what Brie says all the time!" Fans: "THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID!"

Bryan officially announces his retirement and talks about all of his emotions as of late. He's gotten to do what he loves for the last sixteen years. Now let's talk about a few things that he loves. Nobody outside this arena is going to care about this, but he loves the Seattle Seahawks. Right before his music hits, he gets a little twitch in his mouth and he loves it every single time. Third, he loves hitting the ropes and doing that dive because it makes him feel like Superman. He's wrestled in the parking lots of gas stations and in front of 70,000 people in New Orleans.

While he's been doing that, he's gotten to meet people like Kane, who is the smartest man he knows. He's gotten to meet people like his mentor William Regal. Over the years he's met children who are stronger than he could ever be like Connor. On top of that he's grateful because wrestling doesn't owe anyone in the back a thing. The people who get in this ring do it because they love to do it but one day they got behind him in a way they shouldn't have gotten behind someone who is 5'8 and 190lbs.

He's grateful because a little over two years ago in this very arena, the people here hijacked Raw during a championship celebration between Randy Orton and John Cena. However, he's grateful because his dad was sitting right over there and got to see it happen before he passed away. He's grateful for meeting the woman of his dreams and for getting to announce his retirement in front of his hometown fans.

Tomorrow morning he's starting a new life where he's not a wrestler, which means he's got one more night to enjoy this energy. We get one more YES chant as Brie comes out to celebrate with her husband to finally wrap this up at 11:25, which might be the latest this show has ever gone. This was an outstanding speech and I'm glad that it's not an angle. Bryan gets to leave and he gets to do it in (basically) his hometown. You don't get much better than that.

Overall Rating: C-. This show was all about the big promo at the end but the rest of the night was really dull stuff. It ranged from boring to really annoying at times and it was going to take something very special out of Bryan to make the whole thing work. That's exactly what we got, but it was a VERY long night to get to the amazing speech. FastLane

really is looking like a nothing show, which is one of the last things they need right now.

Results

Dolph Ziggler b. Kevin Owens – Rollup with feet on the ropes

Charlotte b. Alicia Fox – Figure Eight

Bray Wyatt b. Ryback – Sister Abigail

Adam Rose b. Titus O'Neil – Rollup

Rusev/Alberto Del Rio b. Lucha Dragons – Top rope double stomp to Kalisto

Tamina b. Becky Lynch – Superkick

Usos/Dudley Boyz b. New Day/Mark Henry – 3D to Big E.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

Monday Night Raw – February

1, 2016: It Takes Talent To Be This Shortsighted

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 1, 2016

Location: Legacy Arena, Birmingham, Alabama

Commentators: Byron Saxton, John Bradshaw Layfield, Michael Cole

We have a main event set for Fastlane and Brock Lesnar is back tonight to give us all three in the same building tonight. Other than that you can see most of the card from here, but the important questions are what happens between now and Wrestlemania and whether or not new stories will start after the February pay per view. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

We open with Brock and Heyman with the former in a new red Suplex City shirt. Heyman immediately talks about the Wyatts, whose plot to get rid of Brock from the Royal Rumble worked, but it isn't keeping him out of the main event of Wrestlemania. Now Lesnar is in a triple threat at Fastlane and that means it's time for Roman Reigns and Dean Ambrose to go to Suplex City. After that, Lesnar will conquer the billion dollar trophy husband to become the new WWE World Heavyweight Champion. Heyman goes back to the triple threat so here's Ambrose to interrupt.

Dean gets right in Brock's face and asks Heyman (or Porky) who he's calling a nutjob. Ambrose isn't stupid, crazy or scared right now because he respects Lesnar. That's why he wants to stand in front of Brock and tell him how much he wants the title. He's willing to fight his brother and Lesnar at the same time, even though he knows the beating that's coming for him at Fastlane. It better be the best beating Lesnar has ever given though because Dean is going to do whatever it takes to go to Fastlane and take the title from HHH. Dean actually leaves with no violence and Lesnar smiles.

Kalisto vs. Rusev

Non-title and Alberto Del Rio is on commentary because he gets another title shot at Fastlane. Rusev (with Lana in his corner) shoves him around to start but Kalisto starts firing off the kicks that almost every small guy uses against a bigger opponent. A hurricanrana is blocked though, only to have Kalisto stay with it and take Rusev out to the floor. The champ's dive is countered by a kick to the head though and we take a break.

Back with Kalisto charging into a shot in the corner as some of the fans in the front rows are doing the Lucha Dragons dance. A tornado DDT sends Rusev down but he plants Kalisto with a release Rock Bottom for two of his own. As you might expect, Kalisto pops right back up with a dropkick to the knee and the hurricanrana driver.

Rusev obeys the referee's command to kick out but gets kicked to the floor. Kalisto's dive is caught but he escapes what looks like a fall away slam and dropkicks Rusev into the steps. Another hurricanrana sends Rusev into the barricade and Kalisto dives back in for the countout win at 10:11. That was one of the slowest ten counts I've ever seen.

Rating: D+. Yeah yeah we get the idea: Kalisto goes through the League before getting to face Del Rio again. This would be so much easier to watch if we didn't have to see five matches between the two of them in about two months. I'm just tired of seeing the two of them fight, even though the matches are watchable enough.

Stephanie and Reigns are in the back with the new HHH World Title belt when Ambrose comes in. Both guys are willing to do whatever it takes to get that title at Wrestlemania but Stephanie implies that they might turn on each other. She even says Ambrose is Reigns' sidekick but Dean thinks it's the other way around. That earns them a match against New Day in the main event. Nothing we haven't seen on Smackdown a half dozen times, but WWE doesn't care about Smackdown either.

We look at Nikki Bella's neck surgery.

Brie Bella says her sister is in bed watching the WWE Network. Cue Charlotte and Ric to brag about beating Nikki for the Divas Title. Charlotte would be concerned about Nikki's injuries if she had any reason

to. Brie is left looking sad and good night they're actually wanting to make me care about BRIE BELLA feeling bad? That's the point we've reached?

Usos vs. Curtis Axel/Adam Rose

The Usos are announced as the Grammy Award winning Tag Team of the Year. They even re-air it after the break to make fun of Lillian's flub. There's no Bo Dallas due to his dad being in the hospital, so Slater says he's in the studio after his battle with Flo Rida last week. Axel kicks Jey in the ribs to start and it's off to Rose, who comes in with a top rope knee to the chest. The announcers go on about Stephanie suggesting that absolute power corrupts absolutely because they exist to push her stupid lines.

Axel's chinlock keeps things slow and Rose's makes it even worse until Jimmy Enziguris him down. Jey comes in with a bunch of superkicks (including one where Axel telegraphed it worse than anything I've seen in years). At least four superkicks in a row set up a double superkick and the Superfly Splash for the pin on Rose at 5:11.

Rating: 0. For obnoxious. Yeah Lillian screwed up a line so let's spend the whole match going on and on because NO ONE IN WWE HAS EVER SCREWED UP A LINE BECAUSE THEY'RE TOTALLY PERFECT AND THE GREATEST THING EVER. It's stuff like that which makes the whole company seem so stuck up that it drives me insane. Get over yourselves already and call the match instead of making fun of Garcia (a woman that people like Kevin Dunn, who I would almost bet was behind that whole thing, could never get) or talking about how insightful Stephanie's stuff was. The match sucked by the way.

Back from a break with WWE bragging about being on American Airlines in-flight magazine. Yeah that gets ten seconds but Lillian's flub gets a full match.

It's time for MizTV with special guest AJ Styles. Miz gets right to the point by cutting off AJ before he can say a word to every question. He lists off AJ's accomplishments such as being the smallest guy on the football team and coming from rural Georgia. AJ has gone all over the world and finally got to the WWE where he lasted nearly half an hour in

the Royal Rumble. Then he defeated Chris Jericho in his debut match, which is a big reason why Miz sees a lot of Daniel Bryan in AJ.

Miz goes on another rant about how he fathered the YES Movement before telling the fans to be quiet. The fans think AJ (who hasn't said a word yet) can make it in the WWE without Miz's guidance but there's no chance of that happening. That's enough for AJ as he goes off on Miz in the corner and chases him off for the big hero moment. I get the idea here, but Miz actually gave AJ quite the introduction, which was probably the other intended purpose.

Brie Bella vs. Charlotte

Non-title, mainly because Brie never wins anything and therefore probably shouldn't be in this story. Brie starts fast but the BRIE MODE knee is countered with Charlotte sending her to the floor. The figure four neck lock keeps Brie in trouble but she makes the required clothesline comeback. Now the BRIE MODE knee (minus the shouting of BRIE MODE) connects and it's off to a sleeper, only to have Ric get up on the apron. Amazingly enough the powers of Alicia Fox aren't enough to do anything, allowing Charlotte to use something like a Stunner to escape. Charlotte slaps on the Figure Four but gets rolled up for the pin at 4:45.

Rating: F. GAH THIS STUPID FREAKING COMPANY!!! So we already have the triple threat set up at Fastlane with the three NXT women but now we get the addition of BRIE BELLA so the spirit of Nikki can be upon us. I'm sure Brie will be fighting for her sister's honor or some nonsense like that because Brie and Nikki are now faces after being heels for like ever because of reasons that aren't important enough to explain. Didn't they learn anything in the Divas Revolution when Brie was dragging down every freaking match she was in with the NXT women? And it was a clean pin. On the champion. Live on Raw. Just so much dumb.

We look back at Big Show saving Reigns and Ambrose from the Wyatts on Smackdown.

Erick Rowan vs. Big Show

Show grabs the stairs to hold off Strowman and the announcers somehow

don't bring up the stairs match these two had a few years back. Rowan can't suplex Show (because he's a big bad show tonight) and after spearing Strowman off the apron, the chokeslam puts Rowan away at 1:20.

Post match the Wyatts (minus Bray who is in Florida with his dad as well) beat Show down and slam him onto the steps.

Titus O'Neil vs. Tyler Breeze

At least Breeze has his full entrance back. Titus throws him into the corner to start but Breeze is smart enough to take out the knee, which is quickly wrapped around the post. We hit the half crab on Titus before he throws Tyler across the ring all the way from his back. A HUGE clothesline drops Breeze and the Clash of the Titus is good for the pin at 2:49.

HHH comes in to see Brock and asks why Dean was allowed to live. Brock says he'll see HHH at Wrestlemania.

Dolph Ziggler vs. Kevin Owens

Owens won last week and that's got me very worried here. It's a brawl to start with Owens naturally getting the better of it. Ziggler gets thrown over the top and into the timekeeper's area as we take a break. Back with Ziggler jawbreaking his way out of a chinlock but getting crushed by the Cannonball for two. A hard elbow drops Ziggler again but he avoids a charge in the corner and hits three straight Stinger Splashes.

Thankfully Kevin will have none of that and clotheslines Dolph's head off, only to get dumped out to the floor. Back in and Owens superkicks Dolph's head off for two but takes too long going up. Ziggler's superplex is blocked though, allowing Owens to get him into the Tree of Woe. Another Cannonball connects (that looked great) and now the Pop Up Powerbomb is...countered into the Zig Zag for the pin at 10:35.

Rating: D+. That's mostly for the ending because WWE is going out of their way to screw themselves over. Kevin Owens has the potential to be something fun and fresh as a heel but we need the 50/50 booking with DOLPH ZIGGLER. Owens could be a World Champion (and if there has EVER

been a time when they need someone to step up and be a big deal, it might be before Wrestlemania with Rollins and Cena both hurt) by the end of the year but he's losing here because of whatever stupid philosophy they have. This actually made me mad and what makes it even worse is that you knew it was coming the whole way.

Video on Mark Henry for Black History Month.

Here's Sasha Banks for a match but first she has something to say. Sasha says she's on her own and no one is going to stop her from winning the title. This brings out Naomi and Tamina because the world was waiting for the Team BAD blowoff. Naomi says she knew this was coming but Sasha wants them to still be friends. They do the UNITY pose and everything seems cool. Of course.

Becky Lynch vs. Sasha Banks

They trade rollups to start with Sasha getting the better of it and hitting the double knees in the corner. Becky gets knocked to the floor but Sasha doesn't want Tamina and Naomi to help. She says she doesn't need the help so Tamina and Naomi pull her to the floor for the DQ 3:40.

Rating: D+. No time of course because the NXT women never get a chance to do anything. I'd like to repeat though: no one cares about Tamina and Naomi and they're clearly just doing this (possibly a tag feud for Fastlane) so we can get BRIE BELLA as a title contender. Yeah it's a fill in challenger, but why not spend the extra time setting up your big Wrestlemania match instead of wasting your time on a nothing feud with no drama?

Post match Becky saves Sasha from the beatdown.

We get a clip of JBL interviewing Ron Simmons on the Network.

Chris Jericho says everyone has been talking about AJ Styles...except for him. Everything about their match last week was tremendous except for the outcome. AJ showed that he's a tenacious pitbull and Jericho is going to be watching AJ's match with Miz on Smackdown.

R-Truth goes into the bathroom and finds Goldust crouching on the toilet.

Goldust still won't take no for an answer on the team but Truth thinks Goldust is a weirdo. That means it's time to bring up Little Jimmy, which seems to get to Truth a bit. Remember like eight days ago when Truth was still crazy and not the straight man in these vignettes?

New Day vs. Roman Reigns/Dean Ambrose

Non-title because the champions need to lose again and Heyman is on commentary. Before the match, Woods talks about how the comments from Rock have Francesca so upset that she can't sleep at night. Rocky needs to think of the children, like the one they point at in the front row doing the New Day dance. Tonight they're taking care of Rock's cousin and they'll throw in Dean too.

Reigns and Kofi get things going with Kingston having to get out of a Samoan Drop, earning himself a right hand to the head. It's off to Dean for a basement clothesline as Heyman is already frustrated with Cole's talk about Ambrose staring Lesnar down earlier. The threat of the Superman Punch causes Woods and Big E. to pull Kofi to the floor as we take a break.

Back with Big E. missing the Apron Splash but Ambrose is kept in trouble with a whip into the steps. Kofi kicks him in the head for two as Woods jumps in on commentary to yell about how awesome they are. Ambrose stays in trouble and Big E. gets two off a splash. Heyman is trying to get in on this but there's only so much you can do with Woods blasting that trombone.

We hit the abdominal stretch (Woods: "Stretch the abs!") but Dean doesn't like the spanking and bites Big E.'s nose. A suplex allows the hot tag to Reigns and it's time for some corner clotheslines. The other hot tag brings in Ambrose as everything breaks down. The Superman Punch sets up Dirty Deeds on Big E. for the pin at 17:22.

Rating: D+. Hey look: champions lose again clean. This is how things work in WWE this time of year and they really don't care how obvious they make it coming in. The match was fine but they made it clear that New Day was losing here for the sake of pushing Reigns and Ambrose. Pushing the two of them is fine, but it's really sad that they had no one else to lose to

Reigns and Ambrose. Can you imagine sitting through another League “showdown”?

Post match Brock comes out for the showdown but New Day attacks Reigns, allowing Brock to F5 Ambrose to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Oh man this one was rough. This was a show where they made it clear that they don't care what's going on until the night after Fastlane, which makes me wonder why I'm going to watch until then. We're getting stuff like Brie Bella fighting for the spirit of her sister, whose goal in life is to get John Cena to marry and impregnate her. That's my hero in the Divas division.

On top of that, there's the nonsense with the 50/50 booking. Again: the roster is so depleted right now and tonight we saw Dolph Ziggler, the definition of career midcarder, is beating Kevin Owens clean. Why? Just because Owens won last week and we need to set up something at Fastlane. Instead of having Owens look like a killer and setting up something big at Wrestlemania, we need to see this nothing feud and story that is only taking place to fill in time before we get to Wrestlemania.

Then why have Fastlane? Why not just give us a ten week build to Wrestlemania? That's where WWE loses me. It's clear that they're just having a filler show at Fastlane, so why should I bother paying attention for the next three weeks? They're resetting again after the show and we've got a month before the biggest show of all time. Well done on making it feel special WWE. Really, it takes talent to be this shortsighted.

Results

Kalisto b. Rusev via countout

Usos b. Curtis Axel/Adam Rose – Superfly Splash to Rose

Brie Bella b. Charlotte – Small package

Big Show b. Erick Rowan – Chokeslam

Titus O'Neil b. Tyler Breeze – Clash of the Titus

Dolph Ziggler b. Kevin Owens – Zig Zag

Roman Reigns/Dean Ambrose b. New Day – Dirty Deeds to Big E.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

New Column: The Object Of The Game

Explaining why HHH was one of the best options to win the Rumble.

[The Object Of The Game](#)

Royal Rumble 2016: This Rumble Game Thing

[Royal Rumble 2016](#)

Date: January 24, 2016

Location: Amway Center, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

It's time to start the Road to Wrestlemania and it's never started on this hot of a note. This year it's all about the World Title as Roman Reigns is defending the title in the Royal Rumble itself for the first time ever. That leaves a lot of possible options open and with Reigns starting at #1, there could be a lot of drama by the end. Let's get to it.

Pre-Show: Darren Young/Damien Sandow vs. Ascension vs. Dudley Boyz vs. Mark Henry/Jack Swagger

One fall to a finish and the winning team gets spots in the Rumble. Swagger and Young get things going but it's quickly off to Henry as the fans want Sandow. That changes into a "HEY! WE WANT SOME SANDOW!" chants and that's exactly what they get, including the Wind-Up Elbow for two on Jack. Konnor tags himself in and it's a big four way standoff as we take a break.

Back with Swagger holding Konnor in a chinlock but D-Von tags himself in, only to get stomped down in the corner. Konnor puts D-Von in a chinlock as the fans want Sexual Chocolate. D-Von avoids a charge and it's a double tag to Bubba and Viktor with the former cleaning house. A Rock Bottom gets two on Viktor and Young takes What's Up, meaning it's table time. Actually scratch that as a 3D gets two on Viktor with Swagger making a fast save. Henry splashes D-Von and covers Viktor for the pin and the Rumble spots at 7:58.

Rating: D+. This was fine and the right team won. There's no point in putting a thrown together team or either regular team in there so go with the two former World Champions. Neither of them have a chance of winning but at least they add a bit more prestige to the lineup. The match was just there but that's all it was supposed to be.

Vince and Stephanie arrive before the opening video with Vince saying (while stooping down to be on JoJo's height) they're going to give Reigns an opportunity to do something unheard of tonight. Vince loves this night, almost as much as he loves himself. Pretty pointless scene but

good night Vince is a ball of energy.

The opening video focuses on the statues before going into a regular video all about Reigns being up against the entire roster tonight.

Intercontinental Title: Dean Ambrose vs. Kevin Owens

Owens is challenging in his rematch from TLC and this is last man standing. It's a brawl to start with Owens taking an early bulldog to send him outside. Dean sends him over the announcers' table with a suicide dive with Cole being wiped out by Kevin. Owens hits the champ in the ribs with an iPad so Dean whips him into the steps for four. It's already kendo stick time and Cole is suddenly a huge Ambrose fan.

Owens comes back with a Cannonball to drive Ambrose through the barricade for a nine. They head inside and the fans sound like they're mainly on Owens' side. The backplash keeps Dean in trouble and it's time to throw in a bunch of chairs. A chair to the back drops Ambrose again but Owens has a seat instead of following up. The Rebound Lariat puts Owens down but Dean has to counter the Pop Up Powerbomb with a backdrop through the chairs.

Kevin bails to the floor but suckers Dean in for some hard whips into the steps and a seven count. It's table time (fan: "I feel like you're wasting your time right now!") as Dean is laying on the apron, which should earn him a count. Owens stacks up two tables on top of each other in front of a post but gets a chair pelted at his face. It hangs around his neck so Dean starts punching the chair until it falls off. That's not the brightest thing in the world champ.

The Pop Up Powerbomb is countered with a hurricanrana and Dean grabs Dirty Deeds for eight. Dirty Deeds onto the chair has Owens in trouble but he rolls outside and onto his feet to break the count before collapsing. Dean loads up another table at ringside ("HEY! WE WANT SOME TABLES!") and drops the top rope elbow for a double eight count. We get yet another table in the ring and they trade shouts of I HATE YOU.

Ambrose loads up a superplex through the table but Owens reverses into the fisherman's superplex for the big crash. They're both back up again

so Owens grabs a hard Pop Up Powerbomb for nine and a half, only to have Dean collapse at 9.6. Frustration sets in for Owens as he loads up all the chairs and goes up, allowing Dean to shove him off the top and through the double tables at ringside for the win to retain at 20:21.

Rating: B. Good but certainly not great last man standing match. The double tables were clearly going to be the ending and it was just a matter of time instead of a big surprise at the end. It was good enough though and all it needed to be, though I was hoping Owens would get the title back. However, it leaves the door open for a big match at Wrestlemania which is the important thing.

We recap the destruction of Francesca the Trombone. That's a really odd statement if you're reading this a long time from now. In other words it's time for the Tag Team Titles.

Tag Team Titles: New Day vs. Usos

New Day (Kofi/Big E.) is defending and Kofi asks for a moment of silence, allowing Woods to debut Francesca II. Yes Xavier will miss Francesca but he has, ahem, needs. As for tonight, one of them will also win the Rumble because 2016 will be the year of all gold everything. Thankfully the Usos have the different color boots on again.

Kofi and Jimmy get things going with Kofi missing his reverse leapfrog, allowing Jimmy to throw him down. It's off to Jey as we have a discussion of Byron's street cred. Big E. comes in and sends Jey shoulder first into the post to take over. It's back to Kofi to pummel away in the corner as Woods rants about being in the match as well. The fans want Woods to play Francesca but Woods says not so fast.

Both guys try superkicks (shocking I know) but Kofi pulls Jey down by the leg so Big E. can get in a splash. A slingshot stomp crushes Jey again but he enziguris Kofi off the apron and out to the floor for a nice crash. Jimmy gets the tag and starts cleaning house with a Samoan Drop and Whisper in the Wind getting two on Big E. Everything breaks down and Big E. knocks Jimmy off the top, setting up a belly to belly for two of his own.

Jey dives off the apron (out of the WWE Universe according to Cole) to take Kofi out, followed by Big E. spearing Jimmy through the apron in an always cool looking spot. Back in and the Midnight Hour is broken up, allowing Jimmy to superkick Kofi into a very quiet Superfly Splash. Woods makes the save though, earning himself a suicide dive from Jey. Back in and Jey superkicks Kofi down but misses a blind tag to Big E., allowing the Big Ending to pull Jey out of the air for the Big Ending to retain the titles at 10:54.

Rating: C+. This picked up a bit at the end but the tag division is at such a weak point right now that it's hard to get excited about a match we've seen a few times already. I don't know if they think the Usos getting the titles back is going to be a big deal but this never felt important or really anything more than just a regular title defense.

We recap the Highlight Reel from Monday and the ensuing chaos.

The Wyatts talk about slaughtering the Beast and the Chosen One. Tonight they slaughter them all on their way to the title. Then he really will have the whole world in his hands. Run.

US Title: Alberto Del Rio vs. Kalisto

Del Rio is defending and this is the rubber match because WWE can't count to four. They've traded the title in recent weeks with Del Rio's League of Nations teammates beating Kalisto down three days earlier on Smackdown. Kalisto hammers away in the corner to start but gets kicked in the chest for two. Del Rio rains down some right hands in the corner but gets kicked in the back to knock him out to the floor.

We get another suicide dive to take the champ out but he knocks Kalisto off the top with an enziguri. A chinlock gives both guys a breather before the tilt-a-whirl backbreaker drops Kalisto again. They head outside again so Kalisto can snap off a hurricanrana. Byron: "Kalisto looked up to guys like Rey Mysterio and Eddie Guerrero." JBL: "He looks up to everybody Byron. He's short!"

Del Rio whips him into the barricade and it's time to go for the mask, which you know is enough to start a comeback. That's quickly cut off by

the low superkick for two but Del Rio misses another running enziguri. A very nice tornado DDT gets two for Kalisto and there's the corkscrew crossbody. The hurricanrana driver gets two more but Kalisto takes too long going up, allowing Del Rio to reverse superplex to connect for two.

They botch a sunset bomb but Kalisto turns into a quick rollup for two more anyway in a close enough save. The top rope double stomp misses and a springboard Salida Del Sol gets two more with Alberto grabbing the bottom rope. Kalisto tries a springboard but lands on two knees for a unique counter. Del Rio would rather take the turnbuckle pad off though, only to be sent face first into the steel. A quick Salida Del Sol gives Kalisto the title back at 11:30.

Rating: C. This didn't have nearly the surprise and shock factor that the first title change did but at least they got it back on Kalisto for a good moment. He's more interesting as champion by default after Del Rio's boring time with the belt so why not do something here to give us a nice moment? Another good match as this show is on a roll so far.

Kickoff recap.

Paul Heyman comes in to see Stephanie and the disgust is quickly on. Heyman talks about Brock winning the title tonight with just ten weeks before we go to Wrestlemania. He promises that Brock will eliminate the entire Wyatt Family tonight but all Stephanie cares about is Reigns being eliminated. If Brock gets rid of him, Stephanie will gradually renegotiate Lesnar's deal, which is all Heyman wanted.

Ad for Edge and Christian's Network show.

Fastlane ad.

We recap Charlotte vs. Becky Lynch. They were friends but Charlotte freaked out after losing to Becky, triggering a heel turn as Charlotte wanted to be more like her dad. Becky tricked Ric Flair into setting this up by implying that Charlotte was a coward.

Divas Title: Becky Lynch vs. Charlotte

Charlotte is defending. Becky takes her to the mat to start but can't get

the arm this early. An armdrag sends Charlotte into the corner as they're sprinkling in some Steamboat vs. Flair. The Figure Four doesn't work so Charlotte cranks on an armbar of her own. The fans are entirely behind Becky here but Charlotte takes over with some good old cheating from her dad, who kisses Becky to distract her.

Back in and a suplex gets two for the champ and we hit the figure four neck lock with Charlotte slamming her face first into the mat. The hold stays on for a long time until Becky fights up with some running clotheslines. Becky forearm out of the Figure Eight and grabs a t-bone suplex for two. The running legdrops set up another t-bone but Charlotte hits a quick spear to take over again.

Becky is sat on top but grabs Charlotte's arm and rolls into an armbreaker. That's countered into a pretty impressive powerbomb for two more as Flair's cheerleading gets louder and louder. Back up and Charlotte baseball slides her dad by mistake, allowing Becky to grab the Disarm-Her. Ric throws his coat onto Becky's face though to break up the hold (and somehow not draw a DQ). Another spear retains Charlotte's title at 12:37.

Rating: C-. As usual, the Divas are hurt by too many rest holds and WAY too much Ric Flair. This is getting into the Evolution format from thirteen years ago when it was already old. Not a great match here, which is a shame considering what these two are capable of doing. Just stop with the rest holds and the Ric and things will get better overnight.

Post match Charlotte beats Becky down even more until Sasha Banks comes out (on her own thank goodness)...and kicks Becky to the floor. Sasha says she wants the title but waits until Ric leaves before putting on the Bank Statement. Somehow Flair doesn't notice this for a bit, despite the fans going NUTS for it.

Some fans won a tour of the Performance Center from Chex Mix.

Rumble by the Numbers video. Good night they're stretching the heck out of this.

WWE World Title: Royal Rumble

Roman Reigns is defending and is coming in at #1 with ninety second intervals. The fans instantly boo Reigns to continue their tradition. It's Rusev in at #2 as we get the final two from last year starting this year. They slug it out to start and Rusev elbows out of a Samoan Drop. There's a spinwheel kick to stagger the champ and Rusev throws him through the ropes to the floor. That sets up the Apron Boot and a spear to get rid of Rusev quick.

It's....AJ STYLES in at #3 and the fans lose their minds at the reveal. Roman looks as stunned as anyone as the announcers acknowledge the internet rumors, which to be fair were on WWE.com. An early Styles Clash attempt doesn't work so AJ Pele Kicks him, only to have another Clash countered into the Samoan Drop. Tyler Breeze is in at #4 with kicks to both guys as the fans chant for AJ. Breeze can't get Reigns out so AJ picks him up, only to have Roman punch AJ in the ribs, sending Breeze out to the floor.

Curtis Axel is in at #5 and actually gets in the ring. Axel actually gets the best of it to start but the Outcasts' interference doesn't work, allowing AJ to clothesline Axel to the floor. Chris Jericho is in at #6 and goes after Reigns before elbowing AJ down. Reigns is sent shoulder first into the post, leaving AJ to try another Clash on Jericho. That's countered into a Walls of Jericho attempt but Reigns makes the save. Kane is in at #7 and Cole actually calls him arguably the greatest Rumble performer of all time. You know, minus the whole WINNING THE MATCH thing.

Kane kicks AJ in the face before going after the other two as things settle down. Goldust is in at #8 and Kane is the only person on his feet. Everyone gets into the same corner as the fans are still chanting for AJ. Ryback is in at #9 and WOW the fans are not happy. Kane and Jericho form an unlikely team (time heals all hot coffee wounds) to put Ryback on the apron but not to the floor. Kofi Kingston is in at #10 and goes after Jericho. AJ hits the springboard forearm on Jericho but gets dropped to the mat for his efforts.

Titus O'Neil is in at #11 and does the usual cleaning house spot, including eliminating Goldust. We've got Reigns, Styles, Ryback, Jericho, O'Neil, Kane and Kingston in at the moment and it's R-Truth in at #12.

That means it's time for a ladder but there's no briefcase to grab. Kane gets rid of him in a few seconds and throws Kofi out as well, only to have him land on Big E.'s shoulders for the save of the year. Kofi stops to have a Coke and it's Luke Harper in at #13.

Cue the League of Nations and Vince to pull Reigns to the floor for a beating, which is likely the way to keep him out of the match until much later. The camera ignores everything going on in the ring as the beating goes on, continuing a long stretch of bad camera work tonight. Stardust is in at #14 as Rusev splashes Reigns through the French announce table. We've been away from the ring for the better part of two minutes at this point.

The camera FINALLY goes back to the ring as the League walks off with a monitor for some reason. Kofi was eliminated off camera and it's Big Show in at #15, giving us Show, Reigns (down on the floor), Styles, Jericho, Harper, Stardust, O'Neil, Ryback and Kane. Titus and Ryback are dumped by Big Show as a stretcher comes out for Reigns. Neville is in at #16 and Reigns gets off the stretcher but goes to the back anyway. We finally see that it was Jericho who eliminated Kofi earlier in the match.

Braun Strowman is in at #17 and runs people over before breaking Kane's chokeslam attempt. Strowman dumps Kane with ease and it's time for the showdown with Big Show. Another chokeslam attempt is broken up and Strowman chokes him out for another easy elimination. So the old giants are already out and we're not even to #20 yet. That's quite the surprise. Kevin Owens is in at #18, limping to the ring to sell the injuries from earlier.

We've got Jericho, Strowman, Harper, Stardust, Styles, Owens and Neville in the ring at the moment with Reigns in the back. Kevin goes right for AJ for the slugout but Neville breaks it up. The Clash is broken up again as Owens superkicks Styles and throws him out for a bit of a surprise. Dean Ambrose is in at #19 and goes right for Owens as you would expect. The fans start cheering for AJ as he leaves and we recap the League beating Reigns down earlier. Sami Zayn is in at #20 for a big surprise and goes right for Owens, tossing him in pretty short order.

Erick Rowan is in at #21 to give us three Wyatts with Bray still to come. The Wyatts get together to dump Stardust and Neville before Strowman starts choking Jericho. Mark Henry is in at #22 and Strowman slams him with ease. The three Wyatts dump Mark about ten seconds after he got in and get rid of Sami as well. Strowman chokes Jericho some more and it's Lesnar in at #23. Brock goes right for Jericho and Strowman before suplexing anyone he can find.

We get Brock vs. Braun and a BIG forearm puts Strowman on his back. Lesnar clotheslines Rowan out and German suplexes Harper. Strowman elbows out of one but misses a charge into the post. Another clothesline drops Strowman and Brock is looking winded. Jack Swagger is in at #24 and charges right into an F5 for an elimination in fifteen seconds. We've got Lesnar, Strowman, Harper Ambrose and Jericho in the ring.

Miz is in at #25 and goes to commentary where he promises to turn Suplex City into Mizney World. Lesnar gets rid of Harper and it's Alberto Del Rio in at #26. Brock throws him down with ease before clotheslining Braun a few times for the elimination. Del Rio, Jericho and Ambrose gang up on Lesnar and it's Bray Wyatt (Cole makes it sound like a random Uso) in at #27. The rest of the Wyatts come back for the gang attack but Brock shrugs them off like the nothings they are.

It's time for Bray vs. Brock and Wyatt is quickly suplexed. Harper saves Bray from the F5 though and we get a big gang beatdown. Sister Abigail allows the rest of the Family to dump Lesnar and set up a Wrestlemania match. Dolph Ziggler is in at #28 and starts cleaning house with his usual stuff. Miz finally gets in the ring and plants Dolph with the Skull Crushing Finale. It's not enough for an elimination though as Jericho goes after Miz until Sheamus is in at #29. Reigns decks him in the aisle and gets back in to eliminate Miz and Del Rio.

Bray is up to go after Roman as Sheamus hasn't gotten in the ring yet. The Superman Punch decks Wyatt and the booing is all over the place again. Reigns is the only man standing and indeed it's HHH in at #30 to give us HHH, Reigns, Sheamus (on the floor) Jericho, Wyatt, Ambrose and Ziggler as the final group.

HHH and Reigns have their big staredown but Ziggler has to be Pedigreed. Bray gets speared and it's back to the staredown with all seven still in. They slug it out with Reigns countering the Pedigree. Sheamus gets in and throws Reigns to the ropes before it's time for the parade of finishers. Bray gets a Codebreaker and Lionsault but Jericho can't put Reigns out. HHH sidesteps a charging Dolph for an elimination and we're down to six.

Bray and HHH have a bizarre staredown but HHH points to Reigns. That's not cool with Bray who punches the boss in the jaw, only to have Sister Abigail broken up with a Brogue Kick. HHH and Sheamus put Bray out but are both sent to the apron by Reigns. Ambrose takes Sheamus down with a neckbreaker but Jericho drops Dean with a high cross body. A Codebreaker drops HHH but Dean throws Chris out to give us Ambrose, HHH, Reigns and Sheamus (he's always there near the end) for the final four.

Sheamus misses a Brogue Kick and gets Superman Punched to the floor, only to have HHH throw Reigns out for a big ovation. We're down to Ambrose vs. HHH which is a really surprising final pairing. The fans are all behind Ambrose (duh) and there's an early Rebound Lariat (which Cole actually calls, I kid you not, the Wacky Line). The Pedigree is broken up and Dean sends him to the apron but charges into a knee. HHH backdrops him out and wins the title at 1:02:45.

Rating: A-. That was exhausting. You kind of knew HHH was going to win but it's still the right call as it sets up Reigns vs. HHH at some point, hopefully next month instead of in Dallas. I really liked the fact that they didn't have HHH vs. Reigns as the final two as it would have been way too easy. Ambrose wasn't going to win of course but it was nice to have the false hope instead of just going with the obvious.

The rest of the match was awesome though I have no idea what they're thinking if they want to do Brock vs. Braun. It was almost painful watching them same spots over and over as Brock can only clothesline and knee him in the back so many times. Lesnar was kind of all over the place in this as he really doesn't fit the wrecking machine mold like you would expect him to.

It was a good enough night for surprises with AJ (I had forgotten he was

in by the end though that's not a criticism) and Sami, who hopefully is main roster bound soon, as the main names. It's probably best that they didn't do the legends and such in a match for the title so well done all around. Really good Rumble and easily the best in years, at least partially because of the options near the end. I know I say that a lot but they're so important in a match like this.

A very quick celebration takes us out as it's 11pm.

Overall Rating: A. Oh yeah this was great. The Rumble is a tricky show as it's all about the one big match and it more than delivered this year. On top of that though we had four good to really good matches for a strong undercard. I had a great time with this show, though I'm really curious to see what they have planned for Wrestlemania at this point. HHH vs. Reigns really isn't a strong enough headliner though I'm not sure what else they have with so many injuries. Still though, great stuff here and an awesome show.

Results

Dean Ambrose b. Kevin Owens – Ambrose shoved Owens through two tables

New Day b. Usos – Big Ending to Jey

Kalisto b. Alberto Del Rio – Salida Del Sol

Charlotte b. Becky Lynch – Spear

HHH won the Royal Rumble last eliminating Dean Ambrose

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

2015 Awards: Match of the Year

This is one of the hardest ones to pick because it's one of the two biggest awards of the year.

We'll start over in Japan with Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kota Ibushi in the WON Match of the Year. I didn't remember this being as awesome as it was but I gave it an A and you have to mention it after winning such a big award. Ibushi made this a war and came so close to the huge upset in a great story with great action but he just couldn't pull it off. Still great though.

Reigns vs. Lesnar from Wrestlemania was better than I was expecting as they just beat the tar out of each other for a long time until the big screwy ending. That ending is what holds it back for me as it turned into more of an angle than a match. What we got until that point was more than worth seeing though and it far exceeded most expectations. It's the main event of Wrestlemania so you have to at least give it a mention.

In another surprise, Kevin Owens pinned John Cena at Elimination Chamber. This was the big trading finishers showdown with both guys hitting each other with bigger and bigger shots to set up the big surprise finish with Owens winning. This was built up with weeks of great promos and then gave us a great match. What more can you ask for than that?

There's another match from outside WWE with Mil Muertes vs. Fenix in a Grave Consequences (casket) match. It's not the match of the year, but it runs away with the award for having no business being awesome but blowing the roof off the place. Casket matches are some of the goofiest gimmick matches you'll ever find but these two turned it into one of the most dramatic things I've seen in a very long time. Given how bad the gimmick was holding them back, this was a borderline miracle.

We'll go in reverse for a second and mention the Iron Man match at Takeover: Respect. It's not quite the first match but the ending with Bayley KICKING SASHA IN THE HEAD to win and Banks making Izzy cry were things of beauty. These two have mad chemistry together and the rematch even being near the level of the original is the highest praise.

That leaves us with the final two matches that everyone knew we were coming to. First up there's the amazing triple threat from the Royal Rumble with Brock Lesnar vs. John Cena vs. Seth Rollins. I rewatched this a few days ago and good night it was something to see. All three guys hit everything they could and the story of Lesnar having to be double teamed to leave the other two fighting was great stuff.

The things Lesnar was doing and was being put through by the challengers were awesome and the ending with Brock going Beast Mode to beat Rollins left me out of breath. This was the most action packed match of the year and the clubhouse leader for a very long time. It was going to take something special to come close to it and that's what we got about nine months later.

Women in wrestling get a lot of flack. They're treated as eye candy, sideshow acts, popcorn breaks and second class citizens who do some of the dumbest things imaginable. That's what makes the NXT women's division so much fun. Instead of being treated like morons, they're treated as serious competitors who happen to be women. The idea of a Women's Title match being the main event of a random week of TV doesn't even make NXT fans think twice these days and that's a really good sign.

That's what makes Bayley vs. Sasha Banks so important. This wasn't just a great match but it was also a great moment. The wrestling, the emotion and the post match scene all wrapped this up into one of the greatest things I've seen as a wrestling fan. This was a moment for wrestling and had me losing my mind every single time, even though Bayley winning wasn't exactly a shock.

So that brings up the big debate that never ends in wrestling: action vs. emotion. The triple threat was non-stop insanity with one big spot after another. The women's match on the other hand was all about Bayley's

journey from the goofy fangirl to the serious competitor who was the best in the company. However, it didn't have Brock Lesnar breaking stuff, including various people for twenty minutes.

I keep going back and forth on this but the more I think about that sequence with Sasha getting Bayley in the Bank Statement and stomping on her hand, only to have Bayley reverse it into a Bank Statement of her own, the more I have to go with the women. For my money, the hardest thing to do in wrestling is to convince fans that something they know is happening isn't going to happen. Like I said, Bayley was the obvious winner but they managed to convince me that it wasn't going to happen for that split second.

The thing is though the match kept going and had one heck of a finishing sequence with Bayley hitting a great looking reverse hurricanrana to knock Banks senseless. That's where the match got even better for me: Bayley had Banks beaten before the Bayley to Belly, which really just put her out of her misery. In other words, Bayley looked like the decisive winner instead of someone who happened to win. It felt like an actual changing of the guard and a moment, which is what it was supposed to be. Couple that with the Four Horsewomen post match stuff and this beats anything else in the year in a big milestone.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

Royal Rumble 2016 Preview

This is one of the most difficult shows of the year to predict and it's not just because of the battle royal. Aside from the big main event, it's hard to guess a lot of the title matches because there's a chance that they're starting a new title program but they also might just be extending the current ones a few more months. Then there's the whole "let's throw the roster into one match for the title." Let's get to it.

We'll start on the pre-show with a nice little concept: a four way tag with the winning team getting Rumble spots. We've got Darren Young/Damien Sandow (So are the Players officially split?) vs. the Dudley Boyz vs. Ascension vs. Mark Henry/Jack Swagger. Ascension is written off of course and there's no reason to pick Young/Sandow. Therefore, we'll go with the only team remaining and the only one comprised of two former World Champions. Neither guy has a chance of winning but the more former World Champions you add to a World Title match the more prestige it has. If nothing else due to how lame the other options are.

Del Rio retains the US Title. Why? Well for some reason WWE insists on making us sit through as many boring Del Rio matches as we can while the title gets less and less interesting every single week. I had a good time believing that Kalisto could go somewhere as champion but in the back of my head I knew WWE would hand it back to Del Rio as soon as possible. I have no idea who takes it off him (AJ maybe?) but it's not going to be Kalisto at this show.

I'll go with Ambrose keeping the title from Owens. In theory Owens should be in line for a big match at Wrestlemania and I can't imagine they put the title on him beforehand. Last man standing is a good way to have him lose but still keep him looking strong as Dean could win through shenanigans after a long fight. As long as they don't do the lame and way overdone "trap him under some big object" ending, this should be a really wild brawl that both guys are capable of delivering. Ambrose wins, though

both guys should be in the Rumble too.

In a pick that doesn't make a ton of sense, I'll go with the Usos to win the titles off New Day. It's not that New Day isn't entertaining still (though the Jericho stuff has been horrible), but they've cleaned out the division more than once now so unless Enzo/Cass or Gable/Jordan are coming to the main roster like Monday or something, who else is New Day supposed to fight?

Charlotte retains, likely setting up a match against Sasha Banks as we roll into Wrestlemania, which could set up Bayley vs. Sasha on the main roster. Not that WWE is smart enough to pull that off of course. We're likely setting for the return of Nikki to challenge Charlotte in a copy of AJ returning to take the title from Paige in 2014.

That brings us to the main event and good night where do you start? Well actually you start with Reigns based on Monday, but I think it finishes with HHH. Yeah as simple of a story as they have, I really do think this winds up being HHH coming out in the last spot and defeating a worn out Reigns to win the title. However, I don't think it sets up HHH vs. Reigns at Wrestlemania. Instead I think they'll do that match at Fastlane and then set up Reigns vs. Lesnar II at Wrestlemania. I can't imagine they keep the title on Reigns as if nothing else, it leaves no one as a realistic challenger.

Now for the interesting parts: the surprises. Counting the two names from the pre-show, we'll have fifteen names announced. I won't bother trying to predict all fifteen as it's likely going to be one or two of the Social Outcasts and a bunch of midcard fillers plus HHH to cap it off. That leaves a handful of spots for legends and new names so here are a few guesses.

Word on the street is they're putting the Tough Enough winner in there for some hazing. If so, whatever. It'll take two minutes and no one is going to remember because Tough Enough winners barely ever mean anything because it's a stupid concept that doesn't work.

I don't think we get AJ Styles and I'd almost bet on the fact that we don't get Daniel Bryan. AJ likely debuts the next night or the next week

and Bryan being in the Rumble would be a borderline disaster based on the last two years. Both guys would be fun, but the problem boils down to this: what's the point of bringing them in if they're just going to lose?

For legends picks, let's go with Jim Duggan and.....Papa Shango. Why? Well why not? If they can bring in the Boogeyman last year, why not bring in Shango here? I'll throw in Vader too, just so the announcers can make a lame Star Wars joke.

Finally, I'll go with Sami Zayn as the NXT representative. The fans know who he is and he can go right back down to NXT to build towards Sami vs. Balor at Takeover.

Overall, this is always a show worth looking forward to. The Rumble is one of the few matches that is always fun due to the drama and surprises included and this has the potential to be something awesome. I like the idea of putting the title on the line as it really does feel like the biggest Rumble of all time. Reigns is likely dropping the belt here to set up his big win at Wrestlemania, but this has the potential to throw a huge curveball. I know HHH vs. Reigns is likely at some point, but there's always the chance that it could go another way.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

2015 Awards: Feud of the Year

This is another one that doesn't have a lot of options this year but the top choices are good.

As usual, we'll knock out the honorable mentions first.

Brock vs. Undertaker had two good to awesome matches with a Match of the Year candidate inside the Cell. My big problem with this one is how it started up again. The Undertaker coming out and costing Brock the title didn't work for me as it took him a year and a half to come back and go after Brock with the World Champion getting sacrificed to set it up. That and the messy ending to their Summerslam match. It was such a disaster.

That's about it for the honorable mentions actually. Like I said, it's not the best year.

One of the two big ones is of course Kevin Owens vs. John Cena with the whole battle of different roads to get to the top level. This one was carried by the promos but Owens winning made the whole thing a huge success. I know a lot of people say that Owens losing the last two matches killed it, but Owens would win the Intercontinental Title later in the year and could easily be a main event player by the time Summerslam rolls around. How much of that do you think is due to the first win over Cena?

The other option is Sasha Banks vs. Bayley, which just worked on every level. You had the perfect good vs. bad style with two awesome matches (I still swoon over that Bank Statement reversal) and it main evented a Takeover. That alone is remarkable and the fact that they brought Izzy into it and MADE HER CRY was one of the best heel moves I've seen in years.

Picking a winner here is splitting hairs, but I have to go with Owens vs. Cena, just due to the shock of that first win. Bayley winning was an amazing moment but it was also obvious from the second she got the title shot. The surprise of Owens pinning Cena in a great match on pay per view was such a stunning moment and is enough to pull this forward.

That being said, it's rather sad that there are so few feuds these days. Everything is about setting up a rubber match or for a title. It's so rare to see a good personal feud but when they work, they're as entertaining as anything wrestling can produce. Now why can't WWE produce more of them?

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2014: Oh NO! NO! NO!

Royal Rumble 2014

Date: January 26, 2014

Location: Consol Energy Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Jerry Lawler

The big story here is the rise of Daniel Bryan, who has gone from solid midcard guy to the people's choice to win the Rumble. However, Batista has returned and is basically the guaranteed winner of the Rumble, no matter what the fans want to see. I can't imagine this ends well. Let's get to it.

Pre-Show: Tag Team Titles: Goldust/Cody Rhodes vs. New Age Outlaws

The Outlaws reunited as a nostalgia act and pinned the champs to earn this shot. Dogg and Cody get things going with Dogg hammering away, only to miss his Shake Rattle and Roll punch. Cody misses the Disaster Kick but sends both Outlaws to the floor. The champs hit dives on the Outlaws as we take a break. Back with Goldust in trouble as Dogg puts on a chinlock.

The Outlaws double team Goldust for a bit until he hits a jumping sunset flip for two on Dogg. Gunn charges into a powerslam and there's the hot tag to Cody. A missile dropkick drops both Outlaws and Cross Rhodes plants Dogg for two with Billy making the save. Gunn makes a blind tag and hits a Fameasser on Cody for the big upset win.

Rating: C. This was fine for an opener and the fans were into the nostalgia. The Outlaws were only transitional champions anyway as the Usos would get the belts before Wrestlemania. Cody and Goldust had them back before the year was over too so no one was really hurt by this.

The opening video talks about working to achieve your dreams. Sometimes there's a very thin line between almost getting there and getting everything you want. We also focus on Orton vs. Cena because that's the real main event here. The Rumble itself gets a quick mention too.

Daniel Bryan vs. Bray Wyatt

Daniel joined the Wyatt Family on the last Raw of the year but then rejected them a few weeks later, leading to one of the loudest YES chants you'll ever hear. Bryan punches out of the corner to start but Bray drives knees into his ribs and blasts him with an elbow. That's fine with Bryan as he kicks the knee out but has to go after Bray's followers Luke Harper and Erick Rowan. A suicide dive drops Harper but the referee ejects both monsters.

Bray huddles with his Family on the floor, allowing Daniel to take him down with a plancha. Back in and a high cross body gets two on Wyatt but he chops Daniel off the middle rope and out to the floor. Bray charges at Daniel but drives the bad knee into the steps to put him back down again. Back in and Daniel starts kicking at the leg before snapping off a dragon screw leg whip. A modified curb stomp gets two for Bryan but Bray drives

him back into the corner.

They slug it out to the apron with Wyatt snapping Daniel's shoulder down in a big crash. Back in and Bray hits his release suplex slam and we hit the chinlock. Bray puts Daniel's head against the post and drives in forearms to follow up on Bryan's recent concussion. Back in again and a kick to the face gives Bray a few near falls. A big release Rock Bottom plants him again and Bray does his Spider Walk out of the corner. Bryan finally avoids an elbow drop and hits a running clothesline.

Some kicks stagger Bray and a drop toehold sends him into the middle buckle. Daniel kicks away in the corner and nails a top rope hurricanrana for two. Another running clothesline is countered by a running elbow to the chest as Bray takes over again. Bryan low bridges him to the floor and hits a running tornado DDT off the apron. A running dropkick sends Bray into the barricade and a missile dropkick puts Wyatt down in the ring.

The YES Kicks get two but Bray turns him inside out with a clothesline for two. Sister Abigail is countered but Bray bites his way out of the YES Lock. Daniel scores with more kicks and hits a top rope splash but Bray ducks to the floor to avoid the running knee. The Flying Goat is blocked though and Bray hits Sister Abigail into the barricade to knock Bryan silly. Back in and another Sister Abigail is good for the pin.

Rating: A. This was considered a match of the year contender and it's easy to see why. These two beat the tar out of each other with each move getting harder and harder than the previous. Bryan lost here but came out looking like a star. Bray on the other hand looks like a killer and that's exactly what he's supposed to be.

Paul Heyman says Brock Lesnar is going to challenge the winner of Orton vs. Cena for the World Title. However, first he has to make an example out of Big Show.

Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger is here.

The expert panel of Jim Duggan, Shawn Michaels and Ric Flair aren't sure who to pick between Lesnar and Big Show.

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

These two have had a feud for years and this time Big Show has been getting the better of it through pure power. Lesnar takes Show down before the bell and pounds on him with fists and then a chair. As Big Show is down, Lawler says Big Show gave Lesnar his first loss at the 2002 Royal Rumble, which would be three months before Lesnar debuted. We get the opening bell with Lesnar getting another chair but Show nails him with the KO Punch. Lesnar is rocked and Show takes him outside for a whip into the barricade. Back in and Big Show loads up another KO but Lesnar ducks and throws him up for the F5 for the easy pin.

Lesnar beats on him with the chair even more after the match. He's broken two chairs over Show's back.

Shield says they have 27 enemies tonight and it'll be the three of them left standing. Only one of them can stand tall at the end but Reigns thinks he has the winning number. He won't say what it is though. Dean offers to tell him his if Reigns tells his. Dean: "What if I have two numbers? I have ALL the numbers!" They agree to believe in the Shield.

Orton says he's going to beat Cena and put him to the back of the line. Renee Young asks about Batista, Brock Lesnar and Bray Wyatt wanting title shots but Orton laughs it off and calls Wyatt a deranged hillbilly Duck Dynasty reject.

We recap Orton vs. Cena. This is more about their short term history, focusing on the titles being unified back in December. Orton seems to be cracking under the pressure of being champion and even attacked Cena's father at Raw recently.

WWE World Title: Randy Orton vs. John Cena

No countout and no DQ with Orton defending.. The fans loudly chant for Daniel Bryan before and after the bell. They hit the mat and the fans are already bored less than twenty seconds in. Cena fights up and gets two off a bulldog but charges into an elbow in the corner. Now a Randy Savage chant starts up and Orton stops for a second before kicking Cena even more.

Off to a chinlock as the fans chant for Y2J. After fighting out, Cena catches on and tries a Boston crab. Orton kicks him to the floor during a brief Undertaker chant and now it's just the standard boring chant. A clothesline puts Orton back outside but he sends Cena into the steps. Back in and a DDT gets two for Orton as the fans just say both guys suck. Cena comes back with shoulder blocks and the ProtoBomb, only to take too long jawing and walk into a powerslam for two.

A half nelson slam into a neckbreaker gets two for Cena but he gets caught on top. He headbutts his way out though and hits the top rope Fameasser for two. Orton counters the AA attempt into his backbreaker for two as the fans have calmed down a bit. The Elevated DDT off the apron to the floor gets two more on John. Orton's RKO is countered into the STF but Randy is too close to the ropes. He grabs the ropes to block an AA as well but the referee gets bumped.

There's the STF again and Orton taps but there's no referee. Orton uses the opportunity to nail Cena with a title belt for two. He stands around too long again though and takes an AA for two more. The RKO gets the same and now the fans want Divas. Orton misses the Punt but pulls Cena down into an STF. John counters that into a Crossface but Orton rolls into a cover for two.

Back up and Orton hits Cena with an AA, followed by Cena grabbing an RKO for another near fall. With nothing left to do, Cena loads up a middle rope AA but has to settle for a tornado DDT. The STF goes on in the middle of the ring...we've got Wyatts. The lights go out and come back on to reveal all three on the apron. Cena goes after them but walks into an RKO to keep the title on Orton.

Rating: B. This matchup has suffered from brand damage. We've seen it so many times over the years that even if the match is good, like it was here, people just do not want to see it. The guys got the crowd to calm down a bit about halfway through the match, but there's just nothing left to see from these two. They're both hard workers and try every time they're out there but the interest is just gone.

The fans chant for Bryan as the Wyatts destroy Cena even more.

Tribute video to the recently passed away Mae Young.

The New Age Outlaws celebrate but tell Renee that she isn't invited to the party.

We get some classic Rumble promos.

Miz will win because he'll do whatever it takes to headline Wrestlemania again.

The Usos are cool with having to fight each other.

Intercontinental Champion Big E. says headlining Wrestlemania is where it's at.

Fandango thinks he's the only one worthy to headline the big dance.

Batista just says exactly.

Damien Sandow says it's insane to try the same thing and expect different results. He won't make the same mistake again.

Ryback says there are 29 superstars and one Human Wrecking Ball.

Mysterio will shock the world again.

The expert panel makes their picks. Duggan likes Ziggler, Shawn goes with Shield or Punk and Flair takes Batista.

Royal Rumble

90 second intervals with Punk at #1 (as ordered by Kane) and Seth Rollins at #2. Punk takes him into the corner to start for some shoulders to the ribs. Some kicks stagger Rollins but he comes back with a big kick of his own. A clothesline drops Rollins again but he pops back up with an enziguri. Both guys are down as Damien Sandow is in at #3. The fans loudly chant for Punk as he DDTs Sandow and drops Rollins with a neckbreaker at the same time.

The heels stomp Punk down until Cody Rhodes is in at #4. Cross Rhodes plants Sandow but Rollins stops an elimination attempt. Punk dumps Damien

a few seconds later though and it's time for Rollins to get double teamed. Kane comes in at #5 and cleans Punk's clock. He loads up the chokeslam but Punk kicks him in the head for a surprise elimination. The debuting Alexander Rusev is in at #6.

Rusev kicks Rollins and Rhodes in the face but can't eliminate either guy. Instead he just beats everyone up until Jack Swagger is in at #7. It's Swagger vs. Rusev now but everyone opts to gang up on Rusev instead. Cody and Swagger break off and Kofi Kingston is in at #8. Everyone fights by the ropes until Jimmy Uso is in at #9. The announcers are noticing how fast the clock is going by.

Jimmy goes after Kofi in the corner as Rusev works on Swagger. Punk puts Rusev in a sleeper and Goldust is in at #10, giving us a group of Punk, Rollins, Goldust, Cody, Jimmy, Swagger, Kingston and Rusev. Goldust hammers away until Rusev nails him in the jaw. A group of people gang up on Rusev and dump him out, which isn't quite a great debut for him. Kofi gets thrown out as well but Rusev catches him in mid air. He drops Kofi on the barricade and it's time for the great return. Kingston stands up, uses the barricade as a balance beam and jumps back to the apron in a pretty cool save.

US Champion Dean Ambrose is in at #11 and goes right after Punk. Things slow down again and Dolph Ziggler is in at #12. The fans are entirely behind Dolph as the ring is getting too full. Punk has to hang onto the apron as R-Truth comes in at #13, only to be dumped in about thirty seconds by Ambrose. Rollins knocks out Jimmy and Kofi steals Swagger's boot while literally hanging on by his feet. Jack comes over to him but gets nailed by the boot as Kofi gets back in.

Kevin Nash makes a required return at #14. He eliminates Swagger with ease and goes after Ambrose and Rollins. Punk has Ziggler dangling but Dolph gets his feet back in. Roman Reigns completes the Shield at #15, giving us Punk, Rollins, Rhodes, Kingston, Goldust, Ambrose, Ziggler, Nash and Reigns. Roman cleans house with punches and spears before launching Kofi out.

Ziggler puts Roman down with a DDT but eats a spear to cut him in half.

Reigns throws Ziggler out with ease and the fans suddenly hate him. Nash gets the same treatment as Reigns now has three eliminations in less than two minutes. Great Khali is in at #16 and goes after the Shield but gets tossed by Reigns. Goldust eliminates Cody to make up for the last two years but Reigns gets rid of Goldust a second later. That leaves the Shield alone with Punk but Sheamus returns after being out six months with an injury at #17.

Sheamus cleans house and gives Dean the ten forearms followed by an Irish Curse to Rollins. Reigns eats a Brogue Kick as Miz is in at #18. Punk is just laying in the corner and making almost no effort to get back up. Miz hammers away on Reigns in the corner and Fandango is in at #19. The entire crowd starts doing his dance but Miz sends him to the apron in just a few seconds. Fandango gets back in though as Shield slowly takes over again. Reigns motions to Punk in the corner but doesn't go after him. Punk hasn't moved from there in at least five minutes now.

El Torito is in at #20, giving us Punk, Rollins, Ambrose, Reigns, Sheamus, Miz, Fandango and Torito. Of course the bull cleans house until Punk stands up. Punk grabs him by the head but takes a headscissors, only to have Fandango run Torito over. The referee checks on Punk as Torito dropkicks Fandango out. Reigns catches Torito with ease and dumps him out for his sixth elimination. Punk gets back up as Cesaro is in at #21. He immediately starts swinging Miz but Shield breaks up a Swing attempt on Punk. Instead Rollins gets swung a ridiculous THIRTY TIMES. Luke Harper is in at #22 as Reigns spears Cesaro down.

Rollins and Cesaro slug it out until Jey Uso is in at #23. The brawling slows down a bit now and JBL is in at #24. Cole: "The JBL character has never entered the Royal Rumble." Good grief. JBL wears his full suit into the ring but asks Cole to go get his jacket, allowing Reigns to dump him out. Fans: "YOU STILL GOT IT!" Erick Rowan is in at #25 as JBL tries to talk about ANYTHING but being in the Rumble. Rowan kicks Miz out to clear things up a bit but everything slows back down again.

Harper tosses Jey Uso but the Wyatts turn around to see the Shield. Ryback is in at #26 and goes right for Cesaro as the fans chant Goldberg. Alberto Del Rio gets lucky #27 and things slow down yet again. Batista is

in at #28 and the fans just rip him apart. He quickly dumps Rowan and has a staredown with Ryback before dumping him as well. Del Rio, the man who has been going after Batista since he returned, superkicks him down but gets lifted into the air and dumped with ease.

Intercontinental Champion Big E. is in at #29 to almost no reaction but the fans like him for suplexing Batista. The fans are chanting for Bryan and get even louder as the countdown clock comes on. The clock runs out...and it's Rey Mysterio. To say the fans aren't pleased with this is the understatement of the year. We're going to pause for a second here and look at this.

First of all, Rey Mysterio is a fine choice for #30 in the Royal Rumble. He's a multiple time World Champion, he's held nearly every title in WWE history, he's going to be in the Hall of Fame one day, he's the most successful cruiserweight of all time, he's won the Royal Rumble before and he's one of the most popular wrestlers ever. However, he's not the right choice for this spot.

There are two schools of thought here. The first and more prominent is that WWE just did not understand the fans and thought they would accept Batista as the big star making his return and embrace him with open arms. Then they heard the reaction and changed course to make Wrestlemania all about Daniel Bryan. The other school of thought is Bryan not being in the Rumble was planned from the beginning, they knew where they were going at Wrestlemania the entire time and the stories about Orton vs. Batista headlining the show were false rumors. I'm in the middle on that but I lean more towards the second.

Now Bryan didn't have to win the Rumble here. You could have had a bunch of different ways to get rid of him, even down to having Kane run out and eliminate him if need be. However, he should have been in the main event. It makes sense that he at least has a chance to be in there, even if it's just to get screwed over again.

Anyway, we have a final grouping of Punk, Rollins, Ambrose, Reigns, Sheamus, Cesaro, Harper, Batista, Langston and Mysterio. Rey hurricanranas Punk to the apron as the fans are booing the heck out of

the match. Sheamus clotheslines Langston out to end his worthless Rumble. Cesaro hammers on everyone in sight and Rey hits the 619 on Rollins just to make everyone even madder. Rollins enziguris Rey out for a nice pop and we're down to eight.

Dean and Seth put Harper on the apron but Reigns Superman Punches him out to give him eight eliminations. Ambrose tries to put out his Shield mates but Cesaro jumps he and Rollins. That's fine with Reigns who dumps Cesaro, Rollins and Ambrose all at once to tie Kane's record for eliminations in a single Rumble.

We're down to four now and everyone hits a finisher. Reigns takes the GTS but Kane sneaks in to eliminate Punk. That would be Punk's last WWE match to date. Kane goes off on Punk outside and chokeslams him through the announcers' table. We're down to Sheamus, Batista and Reigns but all three are down. Another Daniel Bryan chant starts up as Batista takes over, turning it into a NO chant.

Sheamus cleans house and points at the sign before loading up a Brogue Kick. He misses Batista though and gets backdropped to the apron. Reigns elbows Sheamus out to set a new Rumble record for eliminations with twelve. That leaves Reigns vs. Batista and all of a sudden everyone is a Reigns fan. Reigns wins a slugout and clotheslines Batista down as the people chant for Roman. Batista comes back with his own horrible spear, only to have Reigns show him how it's done...and then get thrown out a few seconds later to send Batista to Wrestlemania.

Rating: D. This just wasn't a very good Rumble though its moments. Batista came in at the wrong time and it killed any kind of comeback he could have had. The fans did not want to see what the company was offering them at this point and they let them know about it. In their defense though, this Rumble was kind of awful. The comedy and returns felt forced, Rusev's debut went nowhere and they might as well have given it to Batista and put on an hour of Mighty Mouse cartoons to save everyone's time. It's not a good match but the crowd reaction is certainly interesting.

Batista is booed out of the building as we see a highlight package ends

the show.

Overall Rating: D+. The Rumble really hurts this show as it drags down two good matches and an entertaining Lesnar squash. The problem is that's the lasting memory of this show: the fans booing the heck out of Batista as WWE seemed to think he was exactly what WWE wanted. The show isn't horrible but it leaves a really bad taste in your mouth.

Ratings Comparison

New Age Outlaws vs. Goldust/Cody Rhodes

Original: C

Redo: C

Daniel Bryan vs. Bray Wyatt

Original:A

Redo: A

Brock Lesnar vs. Big Show

Original: N/A

Redo: N/A

John Cena vs. Randy Orton

Original:B

Redo: B

Royal Rumble

Original:B

Redo: D

Overall Rating

Original:A

Redo: D+

Hokey smoke that's quite the drop.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2014/01/26/royal-rumble-2014-the-night-the-crowd-died/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the Complete Monday Nitro Reviews Volume IV at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01AXP08DK>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

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