

Monday Night Raw – January 6, 2003 (2017 Redo): Who Says Nitro Is Gone?

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 6, 2003

Location: America West Arena, Phoenix, Arizona

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's a new year and somehow we're stuck with Scott Steiner vs. HHH for the Raw World Title because HHH needs to make it clear that he has the best body in the world. Well the world of wrestling that is. Other than that we have Booker T. and Goldust as the Tag Team Champions, but far more importantly D'Lo Brown being held back by the man. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of last week's HHH vs. Steiner arm wrestling contest. How manly it was.

The Dudleys come out for a match but here are Eric Bischoff and Chief Morely to say we're changing things up a bit. We see a package on Jim Ross/Jerry Lawler beating Lance Storm/William Regal thanks to Bubba and D-Von. Bischoff says this is going to be his year so let's start with a handicap match.

3 Minute Warning/Rico/Batista vs. Dudley Boyz

Ric Flair is with Batista (confirmed for the Rumble) for a bonus. It's a brawl to start (of course) with Jamal being sent outside and Rico eating a very early 3D for two with Batista making the save. Even Chief Morely comes down for some right hands to Bubba as things finally settle down with Batista beating on D-Von.

The spinebuster looks to finish but the referee won't count for some reason. Bischoff comes in and demands the count, only to have Batista pull him up at two. Bubba comes back in and slugs away but Rosey suplexes him down. Flair grabs a Figure Four and Jamal adds a

top rope splash to crush Bubba again. The Batista Bomb finally ends D-Von.

Rating: D-. I guess this is the latest Corporation knockoff and the Dudleys are supposed to be important enough to be the adversaries. I'm not sure how bright it is to start a brand new year with something like this, especially with Steiner vs. HHH as the big story on top. Obviously not really even a match but no one ever accused Raw of being a wrestling show at this point.

Regal and Storm come out to yell at JR and Lawler before heading to the ring to beat on the Dudleys even more.

Flair tells HHH that the project is coming along nicely. HHH goes on about how awesome he is and brags about his physique. That physique has been featured on the cover of Flex Magazine but Steiner comes in to answer HHH's challenge for a posedown later tonight.

Trish Stratus/Jacqueline vs. Victoria/Molly Holly

Victoria runs Jackie over to start and it's quickly off to Molly for the handspring elbow in the corner. Trish tries to come in but the distraction just lets the villains put Jackie in a camel clutch/Boston crab combination. That goes nowhere since it would likely kill Jackie so it's off to Trish for the house cleaning. A rollup has Victoria pinned but Steven Richards turns it over so Victoria can grab the tights for the pin.

Rating: D. The wrestling isn't exactly off to a good start this year. This was your standard women's tag match of the day, meaning it just kind of kept going as we keep waiting until we can get to Victoria vs. Trish for the title again. Or until Lita can return from injury, which is the real long term solution.

Booker T. and Goldust don't like the idea of the Year of Bischoff and laugh at the idea of humiliating the boss.

Bischoff is livid and makes Booker/Goldust vs. Storm/Regal for later.

Here's Chris Jericho for a chat. He wants to be back in the main event of Wrestlemania so he can regain the World Title. Jericho

doesn't care who he faces to win the title back because he's going to win the Royal Rumble. Cue Shawn Michaels to say he understands the idea of needing to be the best.

Jericho thinks he's the best and Shawn isn't going to dispute that. What Jericho needs is the validation from everyone in the arena, everyone watching this TV show and everyone in the back to know he's the best. To do that, Jericho needs to volunteer to be the #1 entrant in the Rumble. Chris brings up the 1995 Rumble with Shawn lasting from beginning to end (details left out, as you might expect) because Shawn has to make everything about himself.

That brings Jericho to beating Austin and Rock in the same night because Shawn never beat either of them. Shawn cuts him off and says if Jericho won't enter at #1, he will. A fight is teased but RNN BREAKING NEWS brings out Randy Orton live. Orton has two points to make: his shoulder is up to 93% mobility but more importantly, he's the NEW sexy boy. Shawn punches him in the face and the fight is on with Jericho stomping away. Rob Van Dam comes in but the numbers get to him, thanks to Christian running in as well. Kane makes the save. Good segment but a forced way to set up a likely tag match for later.

Tag Team Titles: Booker T./Goldust vs. Lance Storm/William Regal

Storm and Regal are challenging and stare Lawler and JR down during their entrance. Booker hammerlocks Storm to start and drops a knee to the chest. Bischoff looks miserable in his office as Goldust comes in to stay on the arm. It's off to Regal to get his arm cranked a bit as well until Storm gets in a cheap shot to let the evil foreigners take over.

We're already in the chinlock with Regal and Storm both taking turns keeping Booker in trouble. Since chinlocks are only going to get you so far, Booker is right back up and making the hot tag off to Goldust. The Hart Attack with a sidekick drops Storm but Regal kicks the referee to the floor with the champs quickly following him out.

Back from a break with Chief Morely taking over as referee because WWE referees are the weakest human beings alive. Not that it matters

as Booker kicks Morely down, leaving no one to count the ax kick on Storm. A third referee comes in to count two and see the hot tag to Goldust as everything breaks down again.

Storm gets Goldust to charge into a clothesline as the challengers take over again. A knee to the back sets up a chinlock for all of a few seconds before it's off to Booker to clean house. Morely pulls the third ref out though, allowing Regal to KO Booker with the knuckles for the pin and the titles.

Rating: B-. Just in case you thought something might be different in the second half of the show. This puts the villains up 3-0 as the Bischoff dominance continues. At least the match was entertaining due to the talent involved. It was your usual overbooked mess of a title change but you have to expect something like that, especially with people who HHH probably thinks doesn't know how to work.

Regal and Storm thank Bischoff for the chance.

Raw Retro is Sable taking off the potato sack to reveal the swimsuit. The Raw Tenth Anniversary is next week. I'll begin bracing now.

Test vs. Christopher Nowinski

Stacy Keibler and D'Lo Brown are the seconds here, the latter due to a really bad pre-match promo. Apparently Stacy and the referees are prejudiced against an intelligent black man. Nowinski: "Tonight, can I be down with the brown?" D'Lo offers an early distraction so Chris can send Test shoulder first into the post. Test fights out of an armbar and decks Brown, followed by a full nelson slam for two. The big boot is grabbed by Brown but Test hits the Roll of the Dice to end Nowinski anyway.

Brown hits a Sky High to take Test out.

Christian tells Jericho that he's in the Rumble too, which Jericho thinks means he has an assistant. That's not exactly what Christian had in mind so tensions are teased. Orton comes in and tells them to worry about Rob Van Dam and Kane tonight.

Scott Steiner was on a bodybuilding magazine too, albeit back in

2000.

Recap of the arm wrestling contest from two weeks ago.

HHH is warming up for the posedown. He's still manly.

It's posedown time with HHH now in a jacket, which is likely covered with all the oil he was rubbing over his chest. HHH talks about how awesome it is to be World Champion and picks six fans from the crowd to be judges for the contest. They just happen to be six guys sitting in the front row and happen to look like wrestlers themselves.

Coach has to call out three mandatory poses just like at Mr. Olympia. Steiner comes out and this is somehow still going despite not even starting yet. The pose three times each with Steiner getting far stronger of a reaction, despite HHH (the bodybuilding fanatic), likely dominating if you're actually talking about real bodybuilding technique.

The judges give it to HHH unanimously so Steiner asks for a fan vote. Since HHH won't do that, we'll have a push-up contest instead. They get to about fifteen but the judges attack Steiner as HHH bails. Steiner beats the heck out of all of them to FINALLY end this segment after twenty minutes (counting the arm wrestling recap and HHH manliness segment).

Chris Jericho/Christian vs. Kane/Rob Van Dam

Orton and Michaels are in the respective corners. It's a brawl to start with the good guys clearing the ring, followed by a running flip dive from Van Dam. Back in and Rob goes up, only to have an Orton distraction allow Christian to shove him off the top. The Canadians take over with Jericho getting in a belly to back and dropping some elbows.

We hit the double arm crank for a bit so Lawler asks JR if he thinks Orton is sexy. Thankfully Rob fights up before JR has to answer but Jericho sends him outside again. Orton's latest attempt at interference earns him some Sweet Chin Music, only to have Chris send Shawn into the steps.

Back in and Rob kicks Christian away for the hot tag to Kane. A double suplex drops Christian and Jericho and the top rope clothesline makes things even worse. The Conchairto doesn't work as the chairs only hit each other, leaving Shawn to pull Jericho to the floor. Back in and Van Dam kicks Christian into the chokeslam, followed by the Five Star for the pin.

Rating: D. They didn't have time to do anything but the signature moves and a bunch of brawling here but that's what you get when you have a freaking push-up contest in the previous segment. It's nice to see some faces win for a change after a very long night of heel dominance.

Bischoff makes Regal vs. Lawler for next week but gets a phone call. Vince will be here next week.

Overall Rating: D-. This was a really rough one and one incredibly overbooked match is nowhere near enough to save the thing. It felt like I was watching an NWO episode of Nitro with heel dominance all night long, a VERY lengthy segment that set up a match with the potential to be a disaster and a lot of stuff that did nothing but fill in time. This show was really, really bad and it's made even worse by the fact that we're thirteen days from the Rumble and all of four names seem to have been announced. HHH vs. Steiner needs to happen already because the time dedicated to that really could be useful elsewhere.

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Monday Night Raw – December 23, 2002: With Bonus Footage and a House Band

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 23, 2002

Location: Ford Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the last regular show of the year as next week is a Best Of special. Thankfully that means one less week of Scott Steiner vs. HHH, who last week reached new levels of suck with a long talking segment. Steiner is all flash at this point and I'm really not sure HHH is the one to drag him to the next level. Let's get to it.

Minor note: this was actually taped a few days earlier due to the holidays.

We open with a long recap of the end of last week's show. You know the fifteen minute talking segment? Well here it's cut down to about two and it's still boring.

Opening sequence.

It's the Christmas/holiday show so we have a Santa's Little Helper match. That means the women, though I was hoping for Max Mini vs. Battalion.

Rob Van Dam/Kane vs. 3 Minute Warning

Rosey and Jamal take turns with the pounding forearms to Kane's back but he sits up, as is his custom. A good looking big boot to the face allows the hot tag to Rob, who is brought in with a rocket

launcher crossbody for two on Jamal. Rob gets sent outside so Rico can get in some kicks, allowing the Samoans to take over again. Not that it matters though as Van Dam kicks them away and brings Kane back in to clean house. A clothesline puts Rosey on the floor and it's the chokeslam into the Five Star to put Jamal away.

Rating: D+. Just a quick match here to make sure you know that the Samoans are done because WWE cares more about whatever their issue was behind the scenes than building up what had potential to be a decent tag division. At least Van Dam and Kane were entertaining and have some potential as a good team.

Post match Rico yells at and slaps both guys. Jamal and Rosey almost get in an argument, which is what Rico was wanting to see.

The bosses are worried about Steiner and HHH getting into it tonight when Spike Dudley comes in to yell about William Regal knocking D-Von out last week. Eric Bischoff makes Spike vs. Batista with the Dudleys banned from ringside.

We see Jim Ross' entrance, complete with the Oklahoma University marching band playing his theme song.

Earlier today, D'Lo Brown, now in what appears to be a gangsta rapper gimmick, tried to get Stacy Keibler as a marketing assistant. Stacy: "I kind of have my hands full with the Testicles right now."

Test vs. D'Lo Brown

Fallout from Wrestlemania XV. Test loses a chase to start and gets his throat snapped across the top rope. A whip into the steps makes things worse and Brown start sin on the ribs. We hit an abdominal stretch with Brown hopping over to the ropes for some extra leverage. Test hiptosses him out and grabs the pumphandle slam, only to have Brown get in another shot to the back. The camel clutch doesn't get him very far and the missed backsplash makes things even worse.

A full nelson slam (which JR calls a full nelson into a chokeslam) gives Test two and the pumphandle slam gets the same with Brown grabbing the rope. Brown goes after Stacy and sends Test into the

post off the distraction. He puts his feet on the ropes when he covers though and the referee won't count. Brown: "IF I WAS WHITE YOU'D COUNT!" Racism is too much for D'Lo and he shoves the referee for the DQ.

Rating: C. Not bad here actually, despite the stupid costume and angle for Brown. Test isn't exactly over and it's really Stacy making the sex jokes that are as over as anything else. At least they're trying something with both guys though, which is at least something of an upgrade for them both. I didn't say it was a good upgrade but it's still something.

Brown bails into the crowd.

This week's Raw Retro is JR kissing Vince's....yeah.

We see a Jerry Lawler book signing in Memphis.

Here are the bosses to explain the idea of the Royal Rumble being split between the brands. For some reason this is the greatest thing JR and King have ever heard, which doesn't sit well with Bischoff. We see an off camera moment of JR and King talking about the Raw Retro, where they ripped on Bischoff for ruining the show. Bischoff suggests that he'll replace them with Tony Schiavone and Jesse Ventura. Crowd: *SILENCE*. Anyway, Bischoff is giving them a match tonight. Or they can just be fired.

Hurricane vs. Christopher Nowinski

Nowinski jumps him at the bell and gets two off a butterfly slam. Hurricane comes right back with a neckbreaker, only to get chopblocked down. Cue Maven for a distraction though, allowing Hurricane to hit the Shining Wizard for the pin. Hurricane has no direction at all right now and the Tough Enough feud is just continuing.

Worry not: HHH isn't worried about Steiner and would slap Scott in the head right now if he could. I certainly was worried until we heard that.

Batista vs. Spike Dudley

Spike tries a chase to start but is quickly caught and powerbombed

onto the barricade. A clothesline and the Batista Bomb wrap this up in a hurry.

Bischoff and Morely are happy so Morely suggests they fight JR and King later. William Regal and Lance Storm come in and offer their services instead, which Bischoff accepts. The usage of brass knuckles is encouraged.

A camera spies on the women getting ready for the tag match later.

Victoria/Molly Holly/Ivory vs. Jacqueline/Trish Stratus/Stacy Keibler

They're all in your standard Christmas outfits, save for Molly of course. It's a brawl to start until Stacy and Molly (who of course is insulted despite looking perfectly fine in a long, sleeveless red dress) with Keibler bending over to show off her red underwear, thereby stopping Molly cold. If that's not enough, Stacy's spinwheel kick literally misses Molly the whole way by about four inches but gets two anyway.

Victoria comes in with a suplex as JR wonders if she's a real woman. Stacy gets beaten down for a bit until the tag brings in Jackie, who quickly takes her place in getting beaten up. The real hot tag brings in Trish to clean house and of course Molly's dress is pulled up for the "comedy" bit. Jackie grabs a tornado DDT and Trish hits Stratusfaction for the double pin.

Rating: D. I don't like having to go with this but it could have been FAR worse. They were trying to have a match in there but when most of the match is built around seeing the outfits come up, you can only get so far. Speaking of which, Lawler was his usual self in one of these things, which is kind of odd given when he has to do in about an hour.

Goldust runs into Chris Jericho, who says Goldust is a failure in all walks of life, including his career because it was Booker who won the titles.

Scott Steiner is going to see HHH in the ring later.

Tag Team Titles: Chris Jericho/Christian vs. Booker T./Goldust

Booker and Goldust are defending. Before the match we see Shawn Michaels superkicking Jericho last week. Normally that would suggest the result of this match was obvious but I could see Jericho vs. Michaels with Jericho as a tag champ. Goldust and Christian start things off with the Canadian eating a clothesline. The announcers have come to a strategy in the tag match: Lawler will do everything. Booker comes in for a suplex to Jericho and Goldust catapults him over the top onto Christian. The offense doesn't last long though as Jericho dropkicks Goldust in the back and the champs are in some sudden trouble. It's not long lasting trouble though as Goldust grabs a bad looking neckbreaker to put Christian down, allowing the hot tag off to Booker.

A double side kick drops the Canadians and that means it's the Christmas Spinarooni. Another kick gets three on Christian but the foot was on the rope as we go to a break. Back with Booker kicking Jericho down again but this time the referee misses the hot tag to Goldust. Even the announcers get on him for this one as Booker stays in trouble. Christian snapmares him into a chinlock as the announcers talk about mothers.

The hold stays on for a good while until Booker fights up and grabs a flapjack. That's enough for the hot tag to Goldust, who hits a quick Shattered Dreams on Christian. Jericho is sent head first to the same spot and a powerslam gives Goldust two (and one heck of a pop on the near fall). The Walls have Goldust in trouble until Booker makes a save of his own. The Lionsault hits Goldust's raised knees and Goldust grabs a rollup (with tights) to retain.

Rating: B. It had time and the hot finish makes Goldust look like an equal link to Booker for a change. The Canadians are still a good team and these four could have more good matches if given the chance. At the moment it's not like the division has a lot of depth in the first place so give them a shot.

Kane is about to leave so Van Dam gives him some merry Christmas wishes. Rob talks about having great Christmases as a child, but Kane spent his Christmases locked in the basement torturing rats

with razor blades. Dang now I feel sorry for Rob. Anyway Van Dam gives him his Christmas present: Hungry Hungry Hippos.

Rob goes into an explanation of how the marbles represent obstacles that block your chi. I'm not the most familiar with the concept, but it seems that Rob believes you're supposed to eat your obstacles. So if you have trouble at work, cook your boss over a fire? Or am I supposed to have him.....raw? Kane hates it and Rob knew he should have gone with chutes and ladders.

And now for something I'm actually confused by. On the Network version, D'Lo Brown comes out and says he wants a rematch with Test with Stacy on the line. This isn't listed anywhere on any report I've ever seen, including those written back in 2002 or in any results database I can find. JR seems legitimately confused to start, then says "ok" like he's talking to someone on headset, and then starts in on regular commentary. Normally I'd assume this was just a dark match during the break for the crowd (remember that it's taped) but then why do commentary? There's also no ring bell so it's not even an official match.

Test vs. D'Lo Brown

Brown wins an early fist fight on the floor and stomps away in the corner. A release spinebuster gets two and it's off to a reverse chinlock. Brown gets two off a belly to back suplex but misses a moonsault. Test makes his comeback and hits the pumphandle slam for two with Brown grabbing the rope. That's enough for Brown to go outside to chase Stacy, only to run right into the big boot for the pin.

Rating: D. I'm really confused by this and it's all due to the commentary. Well that and the fact that they actually had Test and Brown of all people come out and wrestle again. Brown specifically mentioned the previous match but the commentary never brought it up once. This must have been a re-shoot of some sort, but you would think they would have gone with this match in the regular show despite it not making the broadcast. The match was similar to the first but with the focus on Stacy instead of the racism angle.

And now for something else not mentioned anywhere, we go to a local mall with Sean O'Haire as Santa Claus telling children they're greedy. He tells them there's no Santa either and yells at a bad actress who complains. The truth hurts you see. This makes a bit more sense as the Devil's Advocate character would debut in January. JR goes off to get ready and Lawler says he'll stay in the ring the whole time.

You know how HHH and Steiner are going to face each other tonight? That's still taking place.

Here's HHH to call Steiner out after they've spent the better part of two hours talking about it. HHH talks down to the fans and explains how awesome he is. He would have fought Steiner last week but he was coming off a grueling match with Shawn Michaels, who of course is the best in-ring performer ever you see. We get the call out and HHH looks a bit stunned when Steiner actually shows up.

Lawler fawns over Steiner's physique and we get the quick nose-to-nose (which really shows off how huge HHH's nose is). HHH talks about how they're going to make a fortune at the Rumble and he's not giving up a single dollar of that in the first place. However, after some more bickering about how awesome they both are, we get a challenge for some arm wrestling. HHH almost wins but Steiner smiles at him and wins four times in a row. How many weeks until we get this match over with?

Jerry Lawler/Jim Ross vs. Lance Storm/William Regal

Bischoff and Morely take over on commentary and JR gets played to the ring by the OU band. Note that they don't have to win to keep their jobs but rather just compete. Lawler and Regal start things off with Bischoff going into over the top commentary territory. They trade wristlocks before it's quickly off to Storm. Lance misses an elbow and takes the famed Lawler "dropkick". JR even gets in a neck snap across the top rope but the heels take over as you might have expected.

The villains take turns with chinlocks but we get some bad old

fashioned heel miscommunication to give Lawler a chance. The fist drop gets two and there's the ref bump. Regal pulls out the knuckles but gets snapmared down so Lawler can hammer away. A low blow from Regal makes JR tag himself in so he can grab the knuckles. The double beatdown is on but here are the Dudleys for 3D on Storm, allowing Ross to knock Regal cold for the pin.

Rating: F. So they built up Regal and Storm as undefeated on Raw for the better part of two months and give the win to JR and King? Eh to be fair I really can't get that mad about this one as the winning streak stopped meaning a thing after the four way loss at Armageddon so it's not like this really means anything. The "wrestling" here was nothing of course but JR getting a moment in his hometown was nice for what is likely a once in a lifetime change of pace. Plus this was less than six minutes from bell to bell and you knew there was going to be something screwy to wrap it up.

Overall Rating: D. Far from the worst show they've done in a long time though that doesn't exactly make it good. Yeah there's a lot of bad stuff but they kept it in short bursts so I really didn't have the time to get too mad about things. They really need to get to the Rumble build soon as it can add an instant story for almost anyone on the show, which would help a lot since we can't have a midcard champion for whatever reason. Anyway, not horrible here but it needs a lot of work.

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Monday Night Raw – December 16, 2002: It's A Bad Sign When They Don't Fight

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 16, 2002

Location: TD Waterhouse Center, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We're past the final pay per view of the year and that means it's time to get ready for the 2003 Royal Rumble. That also means that the new Raw World Champion HHH needs a new challenger, which means we're in for a major problem in the next month or two. Words don't do the upcoming nightmares justice so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Trish Stratus/Test vs. Victoria/Steven Richards

I don't see the Canadian connection lasting all that long as WWE isn't likely to have two women working together without fighting for more than a show or two. Also, those Testicle jokes really were supposed to make Test a face? Trish kicks Victoria in the head before the bell (that evil Canadian) but gets suplexed by Richards to change control.

Victoria grabs something like a high angle Texas Cloverleaf but drops the legs back like a DDT to wrench Trish's back. Stratus gets two off a rollup as Lawler talks about how her puppies don't have eyes. The hot tag brings in Test to clean house but Richards saves Victoria from the pump handle slam. Richards gets two off a Downward Spiral but Stacy offers a distraction, allowing Test to boot him in

the face for the pin.

Rating: D+. Not terrible but I'm really trying to get my head around Test being a face. I mean, it's better than hearing the Testicle jokes over and over again so I can't complain too much. We'll consider this an example of a meaningless match that was fine, albeit nothing that needed to exist.

Eric Bischoff and Chief Morely meet in the back with Bischoff announcing a HHH appreciation night to close the show. Morely has already given Scott Steiner the spot for his official contract signing. Yes, this is really where we're going. Bischoff isn't happy and Morely is in charge of fixing things.

Booker is getting some water when Goldie Claus comes in to offer a peek at his sack. It's a good thing though as Goldust pulls out the Tag Team Titles. Goldust gets serious and thanks Booker for believing in him. Christian and Chris Jericho come up to say their rematch is next week. Goldust gives Christian "new and improved" A** Cream. Goldust: "Now with 35% more a**!"

Christopher Nowinski vs. Maven

The fans are WAY into the Harvard Sucks chant. Chris grabs a rollup for two and chokes in the corner a lot before hitting a seated abdominal stretch. A backbreaker sets up a chinlock as the announcers start arguing about colleges. Maven gets in a dropkick and flapjacks him down for an Oklahoma roll and two. A spinning butterfly slam (the Honor Roll) gives Chris two but Maven blocks a charge. Maven's middle rope sunset flip is countered into a rollup though and Nowinski grabs the trunks for the pin.

Rating: C. Totally watchable match here but the low level of interest didn't do it any favors. The problem is these two need to move on from "they were both on Tough Enough" and find stories with someone else. Maybe down in developmental for a few years or so. Still though, pretty easily their best match ever.

Here's a dancing Shawn Michaels because legends don't have to sell brutal matches. Last week Ric Flair told him he didn't have it

anymore and needed to tell himself the truth. The truth is the Heartbreak Kid is alive and well. He might not be the World Champion anymore but he definitely stole the show. Shawn went down last night but he went down in a blaze of glory. He feels pretty good tonight and thinks we should make it three out of five. Instead it's Jericho answering though and we have a new feud.

Jericho thinks we should listen to him because he's just that much better than Shawn. Chris: "Behold the true sexy boy!" If it was the real Shawn back last night, he would have silenced the critics and, you know, won. That makes it even worse because Shawn is the reason Jericho wanted to come here in the first place. Shawn isn't the showstopper anymore but the show has stopped. One superkick later and Shawn dances off.

Goldust vs. Christian

Christian goes right after him to start but gets bulldogged for two. An armbar slows things down until Christian comes off the top rope and dives right into something like a Boss Man Slam. A clothesline looks to set up Shattered Dreams but Christian pulls the referee in front and grabs a rollup (plus the ropes) for the cheap pin. I mean, I don't know how mad I can get at Christian who was just trying to avoid a low blow but that's what they were going for.

Rating: C+. The time was a problem but points for the energy they had out there. Goldust has hit a career renaissance here, which makes it even more amazing that he's still going nearly fifteen years later. Considering he had only been around about fourteen years at this point, this Tag Team Title run came at the MIDDLE of his career to date. That's almost impossible to believe.

Bischoff comes in to see HHH, who is actually reading. The boss tries to let HHH have his big moment now but HHH wants to know what's going on. When the name Scott Steiner is mentioned, the new champ is really not happy. See, Steiner is a jacked up piece of trash who couldn't hold HHH's jock. If Bischoff gives him HHH's spot, he'll "pull a Steve Austin" and take the title with him.

Flair tells 3 Minute Warning to follow Batista's lead.

Morely tells Terri to tell Steiner that he's looking for him. Actually send him to Morely. No actually just call Morely and let him know. That's still Val Venis getting this much promo time.

Kane is livid and rants about Flair and 3 Minute Warning. Rob Van Dam gives us a very calm translation of his ravings in an amusing bit. Kane isn't pleased because he's being mocked but Van Dam says he just needs to mellow. If you need someone to play half of the odd couple tag team, you do call on Kane.

Kane/Rob Van Dam vs. Batista/3 Minute Warning

No Rico in sight. Batista stomps Rob down to start and blasts him with a clothesline before it's off to Jamal. Since he's just Jamal, Van Dam scores with a kick to the face and Rolling Thunder gets two. Jamal ignores Batista to tag in Rosey, who eats a kick to the chest. That's enough for Flair and Batista, who walk out on the Samoans. Kane comes in with the top rope clothesline but misses a running DDT, only to have Rosey sell it anyway. Well they weren't considered the best team in the world. Van Dam comes back in as everything breaks down, leaving Jamal to get kicked into the chokeslam for the pin.

Rating: D. I do like the idea of protecting Batista like that and the burial of the Samoans continue. Yeah they're in hot water at the moment and they weren't great in the first place but when the division is as thin as it already is, do you want to waste a team that could offer a quick challenge for the titles down the road? I mean, I know WWE is going to do it anyway but that doesn't make it smart.

Steiner arrives and there's no Morely in sight.

Dudley Boyz vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

It's a brawl to start again with Regal and Storm getting their clocks cleaned. Storm and Bubba get things going with Lance taking him down and grabbing a quickly broken chinlock. The fans want tables but have to settle for hearing about how much JR likes Regal and Storm again. Regal and Storm take turns on Bubba until a kick to

William's face allows the hot tag to D-Von. Storm gets What's Up and the reverse 3D is good for two on Regal. The referee gets rid of Bubba and Storm, leaving Regal to bring back the Power of the Punch to knock D-Von cold for the pin.

Rating: D+. Just a match here and the winning streak jazz got a bit annoying as it was basically "well they're undefeated if you forget the pay per view." Regal and Storm are fine for a team but they have all the heat of a frozen pizza and that's the last thing the division and/or the show need right now.

Raw Retro is Mankind winning the title in 1999.

Jeff Hardy vs. D'Lo Brown

Yes seriously and it's a rematch from Heat where Jeff won despite Brown's shoulder being up. They start fast again with Jeff sending D'Lo outside for the barricade running clothesline. Back in and Brown talks trash, sounding like he's blaming people like Jeff for...whatever caused him to turn heel. The chinlock is quickly broken so Brown hits a gordbuster for two (even throwing in some free advice: Jeff better recognize). Jeff shrugs it off with a jawbreaker and sends him to the floor for a dive, followed by a quick Swanton for the pin. Ignore D'Lo's foot being on the ropes.

Rating: D. I've always liked Brown (How can you not?) but he's one of the least interesting heel turns I can remember in a long time. The problem here is the same as it's been for years in wrestling: you can't just bring someone out of mothballs after he's spent years meaning nothing. It didn't work back then and it doesn't now.

Steiner is warming up when Flair comes in to say HHH is the main event. Scott disagrees.

Post break the referee apologizes to Brown, who turns it into a race issue.

Stacy has gotten Test a commercial shoot for a spray on deodorant...that you spray on your abs for some reason. It smells good there so Test knows it'll smell good on his Testicles. They leave and Raven of all people is shown watching.

Chris Jericho vs. Booker T.

Before the match Jericho yells about being treated unfairly so JR sends us to a commercial. Jericho jumps him before the bell to continue tonight's trend. Booker fights back but Chris shoves the referee into the ropes for a crotching. A side kick cuts Jericho off for a few seconds, only to have Chris snapmare him into a chinlock. Booker fights up but gets bulldogged right back down as JR explains the concept of calling someone your "dawg" (which he spells without the a) to Lawler. The twisting sunset flip out of the corner is countered into a cradle for two. The Book End gets the same and we hit the Spinarooni, only to have Christian come in for the DQ. I mean, there's no bell because we probably need to worry about the MAIN EVENT SLOT but whatever. JR: "Christian has been disqualified."

Rating: C. Good match from these two as you would expect but there's only so much you can do when you're just waiting around for the end of the match. This helped set up next week's rematch and I'm glad they didn't have both champs do jobs a night after FINALLY winning the titles.

Booker and Goldust clean house.

Morely tries to convince Steiner to do this next week because Florida doesn't deserve this. Oh and tonight is for HHH. Scott agrees to Morely's face but then, to no one in particular, says that HHH will never forget this.

Here are Bischoff and Morely for the closing segment. HHH and Flair come out and we hit the video tribute, set to the same song as his highlight reel from Wrestlemania XVIII. HHH talks about how awesome he is and lists off some great names he's beaten, making sure to take credit for running off the Rock.

Cue Steiner with his contract that he won't sign without a World Title shot. HHH talks about how things worked "where Steiner used to work" (there's your insider reference) but here, you have to beat someone. Steiner says he has big muscles and HHH has no testicles (not to be confused with Testicles). HHH agrees to give him a title

shot for no apparent reason and then threatens to eat Steiner.

Scott signs the contract and Bischoff makes the match for the Royal Rumble. This angers everyone involved for some reason (When did HHH expect the match to take place?) but Steiner would rather talk about arm size. Steiner wants the fight tonight and HHH gives the expected response. Scott hits the catchphrase to FINALLY end this after fifteen plus minutes.

Overall Rating: D+. There were some good parts to the show but sweet chickenwings with barbecued mustard the big interview wasn't one of them. At least have Steiner suplex HHH or something instead of just having them talk to each other. Steiner has gotten physical before but he can't do so here too?

Anyway, the rest of the show was indeed better as they've set up something for next week's show and they built it up well here. Doing something with the tag division is nice but EVERYTHING feels a mile below the main event, which isn't any good in the first place. They need a better challenger for HHH (and a better champion but we'll deal with that later) as the top story isn't interesting and it's going to get even worse when they finally have a match.

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Monday Night Raw – December 9, 2002: Three Times! THREE TIMES!

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 9, 2002

Location: Thompson-Boling Arena, Knoxville, Tennessee

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the go home show for Armageddon and that means it's time for the HHH vs. Shawn Michaels Show (as in the official version instead of the unofficial one we've seen for weeks now). Other than that, I really can't think of anything important that Raw has to offer on Sunday but it's not like Raw cares about anyone but these two anyway. Let's get to it.

Eric Bischoff and Chief Morely are in the ring with Shawn Michaels and HHH appearing on the screen. Bischoff gets right to the point: Sunday's match is going to be 2/3 falls. That's not all though as each fall will have a special stipulation. The first fall will be a street fight, the second will be held inside a cage and the third is a ladder match. HHH and Shawn didn't say a word. So to clarify, we're likely getting THREE Shawn vs. HHH matches and HHH will get to beat Shawn in his signature match to become the champion all over again. Oh joy.

Booker T./Goldust vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

During the entrances, a four way elimination match is confirmed for Sunday with Chris Jericho/Christian defending against these two teams and the Dudley Boyz. Booker works on Storm's arm to start and let's hit the HHH talk. Goldust comes in for the yet to be named Rear View on Regal. A suplex drops Goldust though and it's off to a chinlock. That goes nowhere so it's already off to Booker as the announcers manage to talk about the match for a bit.

Booker's spinebuster gets two on Lance and it's already back to the HHH discussion. There's the ax kick for two more but Goldust tags himself in for a double clothesline. Shattered Dreams makes Regal cringe and something like a Hart Attack gets two on Storm. Lance

comes right back with a Sharpshooter though and Goldust tape.

Rating: C-. This was all about the angle building but that doesn't mean much given how fast they're throwing together this weak link story for Goldust. I'm not sure why they couldn't just have Booker and Goldust go on a roll and beat some teams but why do that when you can have them lose over and over in the first place?

Goldust says he's the weak link and wants Booker to find a new partner.

Trish Stratus is reading Hulk Hogan's new book for no apparent reason when Chris Jericho comes in to read an excerpt. Apparently he made Hogan tap at one point but he'd rather talk about the sexual tension between himself and Trish. She thinks Vitamin C sounds very nu-Trish-ous. Then again she saw him without his clothes on two weeks ago and thinks it's Vitamin Wee. These two have great chemistry together.

Rob Van Dam is on the phone in Bischoff's office when the bosses come in to hang up the call. Bischoff needs to keep the line open for his call from Scott Steiner. Van Dam leaves but tells Bischoff that he just hung up on Steiner. I would pay so much money to see Steiner and Van Dam have a five minute chat about...well anything really.

Steven Richards vs. Jacqueline

Jacqueline is in a triple threat match with Trish and Victoria on Sunday, just in case you weren't over the card already. Steven easily powers her into the corner to start but gets armdragged down. Richards gets serious and grabs a side slam for two with Jackie's foot on the ropes freaking him out. A DDT gives Jackie two more but she drops him throat first across the top rope. The StevieDT is good for the pin and I have no idea why this existed.

Victoria comes in to go after Jackie but Trish makes the save. Jackie wants nothing from Trish and the loser's music plays for some reason.

Jeff Hardy is honored to be compared to a young HBK but the real version comes in to say he's not dead. Shawn knows Jeff is going to take a beating tonight and says take advantage of HHH when he gets cocky. Jeff is grateful for the advice and says if Shawn needs help in the ladder match, let him know.

Rob Van Dam vs. Batista

Batista throws him around to start as JR gets in his regular mention of Rob's offense being "unorthodox". Choking underneath the ropes ensues until Rob gets in a few kicks to take over. Rolling Thunder gives Van Dam two but Flair grabs Rob's foot. Cue Kane for the fast DQ.

Kane and Van Dam clean house.

Morely yells at Kane, who doesn't know who Morely is. The Chief explains things so Kane does a Val Venis impression, earning himself a handicap match with 3 Minute Warning.

Christopher Nowinski/D'Lo Brown vs. Maven/Al Snow

And Brown is just a heel now. The good guys clean house to start with Snow armdragging Brown a few times. Maven comes in for some right hands of his own until Nowinski pulls him down from behind. The slow beatdown begins with the fans saying someone sucks. My guess would be the whole match but I'm too big of a Brown fan to say that. Nowinski gets dropkicked off the top and the hot tag brings in Snow. The trapping headbutts have Brown in trouble until Chris makes the save. The Sky High puts Snow away.

Rating: D. This is as low level of a feud as you can get and despite the pre-match video on the match, I have no idea why these guys are feuding. I don't know if this is still supposed to hype up Tough Enough but it's really not interesting. Also, this gets nearly two minutes longer than Batista vs. Van Dam? Is Batista really that incapable of wrestling a longer match?

Booker tries to talk Goldust out of splitting up the team. The plea is enough and they'll be a team at the pay per view. So they set up and blew off the story in about forty minutes. That might be a record even for Raw. The story is fine but could we get a bit more time to let it set in? At least have the story go on longer than two weeks to let it have some impact.

HHH vs. Jeff Hardy

HHH pulls him off the ropes during the entrances but Jeff gets in the legdrop between the legs. That's enough trouble for HHH as he takes Hardy outside for some whips into the steps. Back in and a spinebuster sets up a side slam, followed by an over the shoulder backbreaker. Jeff's comeback consists of a running forearm before

two Pedigrees (because HHH can't just have one of anything) give HHH the pin.

Rating: D. Well it's not like Jeff is doing anything at this point. You knew they were going to put HHH over someone very hard to make sure you know how awesome he is before Sunday's title match. Just in case you didn't realize how completely awesome HHH was you see. Hardy was treated like a jobber here, though to be fair it's not that far from the truth.

HHH loads up a chair but Shawn comes out for the staredown as we take a break. Back with Flair saying he'd like a word with Shawn. With Shawn holding the title, Flair talks about carrying that very belt around the airports (not quite) but then someone told him that Shawn was the new man.

Then one day Arn Anderson said Shawn was a tough act to follow and Flair had to take a look in the mirror. Ric realized that he wasn't the best in the world anymore and there was no way around it. As high as Shawn was on the pedestal though, there's a new man in town. That man's name is HHH and he's the best in the world. Shawn needs to concede the fact that he needs to pass the torch. If Shawn tries to keep going, HHH will kill him on the way to taking the most coveted prize in this business. Shawn seems to buy into the idea and walks away as HHH reiterates what Flair just said.

Great stuff here from Flair but there's no way around the fact that we're looking at three Shawn vs. HHH matches on Sunday despite no one wanting to see it. The first match was great but their promos haven't done much since then. Couple that with the fact that I can't imagine their match is going to validate crushing everyone else in their paths to get there and it's hard to imagine this is worth all the effort.

The Raw Retro for the week is Mike Tyson debuting and Steve Austin getting in his face. You can hear WCW collapsing from here.

Kane vs. 3 Minute Warning

Rico offers an early distraction so the Samoans can jump Kane from behind. Double headbutts have Kane in trouble and Rosey gets two off a legdrop. The running DDT plants Jamal and Rosey splashes his partner by mistake. The chokeslam puts Jamal down for the pin in less than three minutes. We have four teams and the Samoans are jobbing in a handicap match?

Rico helps with a post match beatdown until Van Dam makes the save. Jamal even eats a Van Terminator.

Stacy is in a rather sexy Santa outfit and debuts the Test blue ball Christmas ornament. Yes, this really is the joke they're STILL going with. Just in case you didn't get the idea, Stacy sings a Christmas carol about the testicles roasting over an open fire.

RNN BREAKING NEWS shows Randy Orton at the New York Stock Exchange. We run down the pay per view card with all four of its announced matches.

Chris Jericho wants to put Trish through a table in their six person tag. Oh and it's rather large in case you were wondering. Victoria comes up and says she'll be the one doing that.

Shawn tells Flair that he'll be waiting for HHH in the parking lot.

Trish Stratus/Dudley Boyz vs. Chris Jericho/Christian/Victoria

Tables match. D-Von hammers Christian into the corner before it's off to Bubba for the big elbows. Why they're tagging isn't clear but I'd assume it's because they need to fill in some extra time and don't have any more matches. It's off to Victoria, who takes What's Up. Trish hits one on Jericho to make Lawler a bit envious. D-Von brings in the first table but gets knocked off the apron. That's fine though as Bubba loads up a powerbomb on Victoria...and we take a break?

Back with Bubba in a chinlock and JR apologizing for the abrupt commercial. Victoria comes in to work on Bubba as we see a clip of Jericho breaking up the powerbomb before the commercial. The referee doesn't see a tag to D-Von, who can't come in despite, as JR has mentioned more than once, there being no disqualifications. Now the announcers discuss which version of Shawn will show up on Sunday (Shawn Michaels, HBK or the Showstopper).

The Lionsault hits knees and Bubba covers out of instinct as Christian slides in a table. That table is set up in the corner and Jericho bounces off of it as this just keeps going. Bubba dives over for the hot tag to D-Von and house is cleaned in a hurry. Jericho saves Christian from being suplexed through a table but takes 3D for his efforts.

The Dudleys load Victoria up for a powerbomb but Richards comes out for the save, only to have Spike Dudley get rid of him. Christian

eats a good looking double flapjack but now Regal and Storm come in to jump Bubba and D-Von. Booker T. and Goldust make it SIX RUN-INS as they go after the champs.

Jericho takes the Stratusphere for some reason and since it's just a weak hurricanrana, Chris takes Trish's head off with a clothesline. Booker saves Trish and stops for a Spinarooni but gets dropped by Storm. That earns Lance a 3D and the Dudleys finally help Trish powerbomb Victoria through the table for the win.

Rating: D. Did I mention there isn't much on this show and they don't have enough to fill in two hours? This match ran over fifteen minutes with six people running in. The tagging stuff got old in a hurry, especially with JR mentioning more than once that there were no disqualifications. Why he didn't mention the tags not being necessary isn't clear but it might have made too much sense.

HHH and Flair head to the parking lot where Shawn hits HHH in the head with a shovel. Flair takes a shot as well (at least wait for the bar) and a trashcan shot knocks HHH into a dumpster. As you might expect, Shawn climbs the highest thing he can find (the production truck) and dives onto HHH for the big crash. Shawn rants about having heart to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. Yeah this isn't working and it's very, very clear that the red side of Armageddon is a horrible show with EVERYTHING banked on Shawn vs. HHH. I'm not even sure why the Tag Team Title match needs to be a four way when you could easily have two tags to flesh things out a bit. The long matches and bad wrestling didn't help here but above all else, Raw needs something fresh instead of HHH vs. Shawn again.

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Monday Night Raw – December 2, 2002 (2017 Redo): The Best In The World Because They Say So

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 2, 2002

Location: Frank Erwin Center, Austin, Texas

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

So HHH is back and I'd assume that's about all you need to know for this show. That whole week without HHH around to really run the show must have scared the company as he interfered in last week's World Title match, seemingly setting up another pay per view showdown with Shawn Michaels. I'm as thrilled as you are. Let's get to it.

The opening video is about...well by George it's about HHH coming back last week! To be fair it's not like anything else was treated like it mattered last week.

Opening sequence.

Dudley Boyz vs. 3 Minute Warning

They don't waste time with the wrestling to start and Rosey gets dropped with a double belly to back. A double crossbody puts Bubba and Rosey down and we get down to Jamal getting knocked back and forth between the Dudleys. Rosey and Bubba chop it out with the latter taking him down into what can best be described as a cross armbreaker. D-Von stays on the arm as this is already more technical than I was expecting.

Rico gets involved for a distraction though and D-Von gets beaten down for a short while. For some reason a DDT stops Rosey but the

referee doesn't see the tag. A neckbreaker puts Rosey down again and now the tag brings Bubba back in. House is cleaned but Rico gets in a kick to the back of the head. Cue Spike for the way too fast save, allowing the brothers to hit What's Up. After Rico's interference doesn't go anywhere, a 3D finishes Rosey.

Rating: C-. Well that happened. Really I'm not sure what else there is to say about the match as it just came and went. It's good to have the Dudleys back but it's very clear that there's nothing to the division at this point and if 3 Minute Warning is the best they have, they're in big trouble.

We come back from a break with all three Dudleys down, thanks to an off-camera attack at the hands of Chris Jericho and Christian and 3 Minute Warning. D-Von was put in the Walls for a Conchairto and Bubba was beaten down as well while Spike was already carried out. As much as I'd like to have seen it happen, I can greatly appreciate the idea of having stuff seem more realistic instead of having it so rigidly attached to the schedule.

Sean Morely tells Eric Bischoff that he's got this covered. Oh and call him Chief Morely. HHH to come in to say that he wrestled for thirty minutes in the Elimination Chamber but now he has to beat Rob Van Dam to become #1 contender. Bischoff doesn't want to hear it and demands great TV. Morely suggests a guest referee to be announced, likely as Shawn Michaels, so HHH can overcome even more odds.

We look at the Dudleys' beatdown again.

Trish Stratus vs. Ivory

They hit the mat to start before trading arm cranks. Ivory gets two off a rollup as this isn't exactly thrilling so far. We hit the chinlock with Ivory pulling on Trish's face until she fights up for a neckbreaker. The Chick Kick gets two as the announcers debate who the guest referee is going to be. Trish hits a very assisted Stratusfaction for the pin.

Rating: D. I know Trish would get much better in the coming years but she really wasn't able to lift anything up the ladder at this point. It doesn't help that Ivory is someone who has been the same performer for years and isn't going to have a memorable match no matter what she does. They really need to bring in some exciting talent if they want this division to work as Trish vs. Victoria is only going to take them so far.

Speaking of dull women, Jackie yells at Victoria for going through her bag and a match is made. She doesn't even mind if it's not for the title, because why would she want that? Jackie beats her up because it's Texas and that means Jackie is all tough and awesome.

Jericho and Christian threaten violence against anyone who disrespect them. Christopher Nowinski instantly sucks up to them like the worm that he is. Of note: the champs' bags are chained to their lockers.

Jeff Hardy/Tommy Dreamer vs. Lance Storm/William Regal

This is the result of Regal dislocating Dreamer's jaw a few weeks back. They start fighting in the aisle with Jeff running around the ring to take both evil foreigners down. Dreamer grabs a half crab on Storm to start and gets his jaw broken again for the gimmick infringement. Regal comes in for a knee to the jaw as there's certainly a target so far. A front facelock allows Dreamer to get over for the tag to Jeff, which the referee naturally misses. With the referee dealing with Jeff, Regal gets a buckle pad off and Dreamer goes face first into the steal for the easy pin.

Rating: D. Jeff and Dreamer are a really lame low level team and having them waste Regal and Storm's time isn't that interesting. Then again, it's certainly better than the stupid hardcore feud with Nowinski. You really can tell that Jeff doesn't have any fire in him at the moment but at least he wasn't out there long enough to horribly botch anything.

Ric Flair talks about Batista's rough upbringing but Batista doesn't want to go into it. Flair doesn't seem to mind and brings up Batista bouncing from foster home to foster home. Now Batista gets to use the anger in the ring.

Batista vs. Hurricane

Spinebuster and Batista Bomb are good for the pin in under a minute. Sounds like Flair has a future as a teacher.

Kane comes out for the save because they were partners for like two weeks.

Shawn and Van Dam go face to face about how horrible HHH is. Bischoff comes in to officially make Shawn guest referee. That was ever in doubt? If Shawn doesn't play it fair, he loses the title.

Booker T. vs. Chris Jericho

Before the match, Booker makes jokes about Jericho being left without his clothes last week and makes jokes about size. Jericho throws some chops to start and dropkicks Booker out to the floor. The top rope back elbow to the jaw gets two and it's already off to the chinlock. After a little dance (you always need a little dance), Booker catches him on top for a big crashing superplex.

A missile dropkick gives Booker two and Jericho gets catapulted into the corner for good measure. Christian and Goldust run in but quickly cancel each other out, leaving Booker to hit the ax kick. And never mind as Chief Morely comes out and makes this a tag match, minus any sort of Teddy Long's charisma.

Rating: C+. The match was just there to fill time before the ending but it's always helpful to have people this talented in the ring. Even if they have nothing to do and are only having a simple match, they're going to do it well enough that it's something you can watch without getting bored. I mean, it's not good enough to have them get the World Title or anything but that's just crazy talk.

Tag Team Titles: Christian/Chris Jericho vs. Booker T./Goldust

Christian and Jericho are defending and this is joined in progress with Christian in early trouble. It's off to Booker to hammer away on Jericho until the champs get in a cheap shot to take over. Jericho's running crotch shot to the back sets up more dancing but Christian's attempt earns himself a crotching.

Goldust comes in to clean house and gets two off a rollup for very hot reaction. Booker's snap spinebuster gets two and he ducks Christian's belt shot. The Book End gives Booker two more with Christian pulling the referee out. Now the belt shot works and Jericho adds the Lionsault for the pin to retain because the Texas guys have to job in their home state.

Rating: C+. Another solid outing here with all four working hard before the annoying ending that follows the WWE formula of humiliating the hometown favorites. I guess it's a good sign that Goldust didn't lose in his hometown and it's not like Booker has much more momentum to lose, even if the fans seem to love him. They really need to change the titles soon though as Goldust and Booker have been primed up for months now.

This week's Raw Retro is Austin with the cement truck destroying Vince's Corvette.

F-View shows us Test and Stacy making out on a couch, only to have her stop for the sake of a marketing idea.

Jackie vs. Victoria

Non-title. Victoria shoves her down to start and stomps a lot as the announcers make sure to talk about how tough Jackie is. Jackie gets in a hurricanrana for two but charges into a boot in the corner. The slingshot legdrop gets two but the Widow's Peak is countered with a backdrop. Jackie's spinning kick to the head gives her the clean pin and WOO TEXAS! I mean, Dallas and Austin are totally the same thing. They're only two hours apart and if you can have someone the fans don't care about win a non-title match it's completely the same as the popular team losing a title match right?

Steven Richards comes in to check on Victoria. They're still in the ring post match with Victoria demanding that Jackie come back out here. Instead it's Scott Steiner for some rhyming before destroying Steven. Cue a very smiling Bischoff to offer Steiner a contract pitch. The pitch is in the back though, where Bischoff has eight women waiting for him. Steiner says he already has a super freak tonight and opens his limo to reveal....Stephanie McMahon in a short skirt and low cut top. She has things to offer Steiner that Bischoff can't. So to sum this up: Stephanie is now hotter than eight good looking women combined.

We go to the World for RNN Breaking News....but we have breaking news in the arena, where HHH and Flair are looking for Shawn, who is in a referee shirt. Shawn is going to DQ HHH for any broken rule, which is totally going to happen because we're certainly NOT guaranteed to see HHH vs. Shawn for the title again.

HHH vs. Rob Van Dam

The winner gets Shawn, the guest referee here, at the pay per view. Actually hang on as Shawn needs to eject Flair before we get going. HHH isn't allowed to throw a closed fist so Rob springboard kicks him down for two. A slingshot dive drops HHH and there's the spinning kick to the back. Rob kicks him in the face for two more, followed by a small package for a fast counted near fall. HHH gets caught in a sleeper with Shawn sitting in front of the ropes for a nice touch.

Back up and Shawn gets bumped and since he's a referee here instead of a wrestler, a single clothesline keeps him down for a good twenty

seconds. Shawn gets up to pull a chair away from HHH so Rob kicks him down by mistake. Rolling Thunder hits HHH but a chair shot knocks Rob silly for the slow counted pin.

Rating: D. Not only was it short and not very good but this felt like something Austin would have done in his day. His only support is sent outside, he has a guest referee that can't stand him and he can't use a right hand. The only cheating HHH did was swinging a chair after Rob hit the referee by mistake. I know HHH is amazing and the best thing ever (save for Stephanie) but this made him look like a face instead of the top heel.

They fight post match and Shawn gets in a superkick to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Between the two really bad women's matches, the HHH/Stephanie worship and Booker/Goldust losing in Texas in a title match they should have won months ago, this was a really bad show. The Tag Team Title match was fine until the end but the rest of the show was the standard problem this era has: bad wrestling, uninteresting storytelling and pushing people who are only there because WWE has decided they're the best things in the world.

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Smackdown – May 2, 2017: The Chris Jericho Alarm Clock

Smackdown

Date: May 2, 2017

Location: Save Mart Center, Fresno, California

Commentators: Tom Phillips, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

Things are back to normal now and that means we're in the Jinder Mahal Could Be World Champion Era. Mahal cost Randy Orton the House of Horrors match on Sunday to help set up the title match at Backlash in just under three weeks so Orton is likely out for revenge. Tonight we have Chris Jericho defending his newly regained US Title against Kevin Owens, which sounds like something could be up. Let's get to it.

Earlier today, Jinder Mahal was in a photo shoot with the stolen Smackdown World Title. Shane McMahon came up and took it back while saying Mahal would be facing Sami Zayn tonight.

Opening sequence.

Here's Shane to introduce Chris Jericho as the newest member of the Smackdown roster. See, this is the new Show of Jericho so smack it down man! Cue AJ Styles, who will face the US Champion, whoever that is (Owens) at Backlash. Styles reminisces about their previous issues and says he's looking forward to Backlash where he can take the title.

That doesn't sit well with Jericho, and do you know what happens when you don't sit well with Jericho? It turns out that you get cut off by Owens, who is reminded that he tapped out. Owens wants AJ to get out of his ring so Styles goes up the ramp for a brawl. Shane: "SPLIT EM UP!" Jericho: "LET THEM FIGHT!" Shane gets his way as security breaks it up.

Sami Zayn vs. Jinder Mahal

Zayn is still banged up after Baron Corbin attacked him last week on Talking Smack, earning Corbin a suspension for the week. Mahal elbows him in the back of the head to start but Sami speeds things up with a headscissors. A dropkick sends Mahal outside and we take a break. Back with Sami in a chinlock for a good while until Jinder gets two off a clothesline. And never mind as it's right back to the chinlock.

Sami misses a dropkick but starts his clothesline based comeback, followed by the high crossbody for two. The corner climb tornado DDT looks to set up the Helluva Kick but one of the Singh Brothers pulls Mahal to the floor. The other grabs Sami's foot, setting up the cobra clutch slam to give Mahal the pin at 10:57.

Rating: C. I think I might be starting to like Mahal and I don't know what that means. Mahal certainly isn't the next big thing in WWE but they've built him (with the Brothers) into enough of a threat that it could make for a good one off match. It's a simple act and sometimes that's all it needs to be.

Becky Lynch comes up to the Welcoming Committee and mentions them all by name for no apparent reason. They think Becky should be getting the shots that Charlotte gets but she doesn't seem convinced.

Dolph Ziggler and some friends of his watch a Shinsuke Nakamura video and aren't impressed. Ziggler runs his mouth about Nakamura and insults Shane, who is of course right behind him.

Tye Dillinger vs. Aiden English

English isn't happy with Tye for cutting off his song. Dillinger starts fast with a forearm and clothesline before stomping away in the corner. As usual, the TEN chants seem to be more over than he is but take what you can get. Tye loads up the Tyebreaker but spins English around into a facebuster instead of the backbreaker for the pin at 1:05.

English seems to have a breakdown post match.

Jericho is about to talk to Renee Young (who he calls Ronnie) when he runs into the crying Aiden English. There's no need to cry when you can sing and have a hairy chest. That being said, do you know what happens when you cry on Chris Jericho's new show? HE JUST MADE THE LIST! And so did Renee for no apparent reason!

Charlotte doesn't think much of the Welcoming Committee so they beat her down.

Naomi/Charlotte vs. Carmella/Natalya

And there's no Charlotte due to the attack. An early atomic drop doesn't do anything to Carmella so Naomi kicks the heck out of her leg. Carmella's kick has no effect either and it's time for the dancing kicks. The fresh Natalya comes in and poses a bit before getting sunset flipped for two.

A headscissors puts Natalya on the floor but she blocks a baseball slide (that's a new one) and sends Naomi face first into the steps. The double teaming puts Naomi in real trouble with Carmella shouting about Naomi wanting to kick her. Natalya and Naomi collide on a double crossbody and here's a banged up Charlotte to take the hot tag. Now it's Charlotte's turn to get taken down by the numbers game and we take a break.

Back with Natalya fighting out of a bodyscissors with ease since Carmella really isn't that big of a threat, even when Charlotte is injured. Carmella misses a Bronco Buster and the real hot tag brings in Naomi for a springboard crossbody. The Rear View should finish Carmella but Natalya offers a distraction, allowing Carmella to grab a rollup with tights for the pin at 11:42.

Rating: C-. Not much to see here but that's all you can really ask for with people like Carmella and Natalya as your top heels. Natalya has been around forever and still doesn't really have a character aside from being a member of the Hart Family and Carmella isn't exactly ready for this spot. Not a bad match but the heels need a bigger star to make this story work.

The Welcoming Committee beats on Charlotte and Naomi until Becky

Lynch slowly walks out. She shakes hands with the Committee before throwing Ellsworth into the women and hammering on all of them. Tamina superkicks Becky down and the Welcoming Committee stands tall.

Sin Cara vs. Dolph Ziggler

Ziggler elbows him in the mask to start but eats a springboard elbow for his efforts. A big kick sends Ziggler to the floor and Cara only somewhat botches the suicide dive when his feet get caught on the ropes. Back in and Ziggler gets two off a neckbreaker before they botch...I think a reversal to a suplex where Ziggler couldn't stick the landing. Ziggler quickly recovers with a fireman's carry slam but the Fameasser is countered into a powerbomb. Not that it matters as Ziggler gets the superkick for the pin at 4:33.

Rating: D. The botches hurt it but Cara got in a lot more offense than you would have expected. That helps a match like this so much as it at least makes Ziggler look like he had to break a sweat. Cara might not be great but he's a step above the Brooklyn Brawler so he should take a bit more effort.

Lana vignette.

And now, the Fashion Files from the Fashion Police. We go to a police station where Breezango are investigating the Usos for a variety of crimes. Fandango: "They're twins." Breeze: "Identity theft!" Along with making their outfits making Breezango's eyes hurt, Tyler thinks they're guilty of Jimmy and Jey walking. The big bust goes down in Chicago on May 21.

The best part here is everything in the background, ranging from a framed picture of the Big Boss Man to various news articles about the tag match to some wanted posters. A few examples are John Cena with whereabouts unknown, Nakamura as the King of Strong No Style and the Colons for real estate fraud. This is what giving a fresh team a shot can do for you as this was the first entertaining thing to happen to the division since American Alpha won the belts in the first place. Breezango might not be the best team in the world but they're likeable and this was funny so give them a one off chance.

US Title: Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Owens

Jericho is defending and Styles is banned from ringside. They waste no time in getting the fight started with Jericho stomping on the injured hand that cost Owens the title on Sunday. Owens sends him into the steps though and takes over without too much effort. The backsplash keeps Jericho in trouble and he's thrown outside for a Cannonball against the barricade.

Back from a break with Jericho escaping the Pop Up Powerbomb but Lionsaulting onto knees. The second attempt works fine and it's off to the Walls. This time Owens makes the rope but another Pop Up Powerbomb is countered into the Walls in the middle of the ring. A much better tease of the tap out sets up Owens making the ropes again and it's back to the floor. Owens nails a loud superkick and DDTs him onto the ramp. Back in and another superkick sets up the Pop Up Powerbomb to give Owens the title back at 12:40.

Rating: B. I wanted to see more of this but they did the right thing by having Owens hit a big move with the superkick on the floor and then get in a few more moves to win the title back. It felt like Owens proving himself to be the better man and that's exactly what it needed to be. The ending wasn't exactly a surprise but Owens has the title back and that's what matters.

Medics come in to check on Jericho, who takes another powerbomb. Owens leaves and a very woozy looking Jericho is carried out. Of course Kevin comes back out and puts a chair around Jericho's neck which is sent into the post. Owens slowly walks up the ramp to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. There was no secret to the fact that this was all about the main event and almost nothing more. You can see a lot of the Backlash card from here and they're actually doing a good job of setting up a show on such short notice. The title change felt like a big moment and it sets Owens on a roll before Backlash. It's not a great show and it was rather dull at several points (namely the women's tag) but it worked well enough.

Results

Jinder Mahal b. Sami Zayn – Cobra clutch slam

Tye Dillinger b. Aiden English – Fireman’s carry into a facebuster

Carmella/Natalya b. Naomi/Charlotte – Rollup with a handful of tights

Dolph Ziggler b. Sin Cara – Superkick

Kevin Owens b. Chris Jericho – Pop Up Powerbomb

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Payback 2017: Thank You Strowman! And Reigns. Rollins Too. Throw in Joe. Maybe Jericho?

Payback 2017

Date: April 30, 2017

Location: SAP Center, San Jose, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Booker T., Corey Graves

And now, the most oddly booked, unnecessary and likely meaningless

pay per view of the year! We're four weeks removed from Wrestlemania and somehow it seems like a far more distant memory. This was going to be your run of the mill rematch pay per view but the Superstar Shakeup has rendered a lot of the top matches worthless. Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt is now non-title while Kevin Owens and Chris Jericho haven't interacted in weeks. Fun for everyone you see. Let's get to it.

Kickoff Show: Enzo Amore/Big Cass vs. Anderson and Gallows

Enzo and Cass talk about Chinese food and say that Anderson and Gallows' fortune cookie will call them sawft. Amore pounds on Anderson to start and hits a running kick to the ribs. The offense doesn't last long though as Gallows kicks him down and works on the arm until we go to a break.

Back with Anderson breaking up a hot tag attempt at the last minute, only to have the second attempt work a few seconds later. Cass starts cleaning house with the corner splashes, only to have Enzo make a blind tag. Gallows pulls him off the apron a second later for a big crash but Cass breaks up the Magic Killer. A small package finishes Gallows at 6:39.

Rating: D+. This was only there so Enzo and Cass could fire the crowd up and there's nothing wrong with that. What there is something wrong with is how lifeless this feud has been over the last few weeks that it's dragged along. Enzo and Cass really could have used the Revival for their next feud but instead we're stuck here thanks to injury. Not bad but really not interesting.

We're not done on the Kickoff Show as we have MizTV with special guest Finn Balor. Miz asks what the deal is with the long entrance and Finn says it's the Balor Club. That doesn't quite make sense as Miz wants to know what it takes to get into the Balor Club. Finn puts it up to the crowd who approve of Maryse but not so much of Miz.

We hear about Balor's success worldwide but Miz thinks Finn might feel like a failure. Balor mentions all the injuries he suffered in a match that he still managed to win and become the Universal

Champion (my goodness imagine where his career would be if he didn't win that match). Miz mentions all the time away and asks what's next for Balor. Finn makes it simple: he wants his title back.

Miz brings up Lesnar being the Beast but Balor is ready to fight a bigger man, just like he has for his entire career. A fight is about to break out but Miz hides behind Maryse. Miz isn't worth the beating so Finn goes to leave, only to have Miz call him out. One Sling Blade later and Miz is quickly shut up as Finn destroys the set.

The opening video is a simple look at the matches with a theme of retribution. Nothing special but it's all it needed to be.

US Title: Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Owens

Owens is defending after taking the title from Jericho at Wrestlemania. The story would call for a big violent gimmick here but nah, let's just let it be a standard rematch instead with IT'S RAW VS. SMACKDOWN serving as the gimmick instead. Kevin bails to the floor to start and gets sent into the announcers' table to let Jericho take over. Owens has to roll away from a Jericho dive to the floor but makes the stupid decision to roll back inside, allowing Jericho to hit a top rope elbow to the jaw.

The springboard dropkick is broken up (which should be attributed to Owens being such a big Jericho fan) and Owens nails the Cannonball against the barricade. We hit the chinlock (Owens: "ASK HIM!") as Cole continues running down both guys' resumes. One heck of a clothesline drops Jericho again and it's right back to the chinlock. Back up and Jericho misses a charge but gets in a quick enziguri for two of his own.

A superkick out of the corner gives Owens two more and the Cannonball is good for the same. The Pop Up Powerbomb is countered with a hurricanrana into the Walls. Owens gets to the ropes by a finger again so Jericho crushes the hand beneath the steps. The bad hand means Owens can't hit the Pop Up Powerbomb so it's back to the Walls...for the tap out and the title at 14:06, sending Jericho over to Smackdown.

Rating: C. The ending helped it a lot (shock value can indeed do good things) but this felt like it was a long stretch of house show level stuff until Jericho started to go after the hand. Changing the title is a good idea though as they needed to do something to get off to a good start instead of having Owens beat a huge crowd favorite. Odds are Jericho loses on Smackdown anyway so it really doesn't mean that much.

Jericho signs a kid's List on the way up the ramp.

Cruiserweight Title: Neville vs. Austin Aries

Neville is defending in another Wrestlemania rematch where Neville raked the eyes to retain the title. An armdrag and a running shoulder in the corner have Neville flummoxed early on and it's time to lay on the top rope. It's way too early for the 450 though as Neville dropkicks the rope for the break.

We're already in the chinlock for a bit before Aries fights up and hits the middle rope elbow to the back. Aries sends him outside for a suicide dive, followed by a suplex back inside. A running forearm in the corner looks to set up the 450 but Neville bails out to the floor for safety. Not that it matters as Aries grabs a sunset bomb to set up the Last Chancery. Neville is in trouble but grabs the referee for the DQ at 11:19.

Rating: C+. This was getting good until the ending. I'd assume this sets up a third match at Extreme Rules but they're to the point where Aries almost needs to win the belt. It's still a good feud but this one didn't have anywhere near the steam that the previous one did. I'm not sure they can really drag it out another month but that's never stopped WWE before.

Aries post-match protests don't get him anywhere.

Tag Team Titles: Sheamus/Cesaro vs. Hardys

The Hardys are defending after winning the titles at Wrestlemania in a ladder match. Cesaro and Matt start things off as an OBSOLETE chant starts up. Jeff comes in for a BROTHER NERO chant and it's almost immediately back to Matt. So much for that chant. Cesaro and

Sheamus start in on the arm but it's right back to Jeff to speed things up. The legdrop between the legs and a seated dropkick set up the splash for two. Why does no one else ever do that?

Not that it matters as Sheamus sends him hard out to the floor and it's time for the heat segment. Sheamus' middle rope knee gets two and it's off to the chinlock. Back up and Sheamus kicks him in the face with Corey calling him the "alabaster gladiator". It's right back to the chinlock as Jeff seems to have lost a tooth somewhere in there. He's still able to kick Cesaro away and make the hot tag though as things pick up.

A DELETE middle rope elbow sets up the Side Effect for two. Matt's moonsault misses though and it's the Cesaro Swing into the Sharpshooter. A rope is quickly grabbed so Sheamus comes back in for a super White Noise in a great crash. Jeff makes a last second save but Sheamus breaks up the Twist of Fate. Sheamus powerslams Matt but Jeff makes a blind tag and hits the Swanton for the pin to retain at 12:48.

Rating: C. Another Raw match here with the Hardys still needing a real team to feud with, at least until Revival gets back to take the titles away. As has been the case both times tonight, the match was fine though it's nothing that I'm going to remember tomorrow. Matt and Jeff are still good in the ring but they don't quite have the same spark from when they made their return. It's not early enough for a big change, but the Broken stuff needs to happen before it goes too long.

Post match the Hardys shake their hands, only to have Sheamus and Cesaro turn on them and beat them up. If that doesn't set up a rematch with the Broken Hardys at Extreme Rules, nothing is going to.

Braun Strowman promises to hurt Roman Reigns.

Women's Title: Alexa Bliss vs. Bayley

Bayley is defending in her hometown. Bliss gets slammed to start and a knee drop gets two, followed by a long series of rams into the

buckle. Alexa comes right back with a HARD shot to the head and the slow beating begins. As is normally the case, Alexa beats on Bayley and looks extra annoyed while doing so. She gets so much mileage out of her facial expressions. The chinlock is quickly broken so Bliss clotheslines her back down. Bliss spends a bit too much time trash talking though and gets caught in a Stunner over the ropes.

A belly to back suplex gives Bayley two but she takes too much time going to the ropes and gets sent hard into the buckle. Bayley can't get the super Bayley to Belly and gets pulled down with a Code Red for two. Bliss gets kneed in the face though and the Macho Elbow gets two more. A rollup gives Bayley two but the kickout sends her into the post. Bayley is so stunned that a DDT gives Bliss the pin and the title at 11:19.

Rating: C+. So to clarify, Bayley is NOT Naomi and is no better than anyone else that loses in their hometown. Bliss winning is fine but it really does seem that these hometown losses are just there to show that WWE is still in charge. The match was good enough and proof that playing a character well is far more important than what you can do in the ring. Bliss' in-ring work might not be the best but it's passable enough to be carried by her great mannerisms.

We recap the House of Horrors match, which means we'll finally get to know what the heck it is. The match is non-title due to the Superstar Shakeup but that gives Bray a slight chance of winning, perhaps due to some Jinder Mahal interference. Randy Orton beat Bray Wyatt at Wrestlemania for the title and this is the (meaningless) gimmick rematch.

Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt

Non-title. The match is going to start in Bray's House of Horrors and will wind up in the ring where it's pinfall, submission or forfeiture. We go to the inside of a limo where Orton is firing himself up and wearing pants. The House of Horrors is an actual house...and a tractor goes by with no one on it. The door is locked so Orton kicks his way in and we start the rapid camera cuts.

Bray's voice says run and he jumps Orton from behind. Randy is

thrown into various things as the House of Horrors looks like a not great house that is being renovated. Bray disappears but reaches through a wall to choke Orton for a second and a half. The next room has baby dolls hanging from the ceiling in various mutilated forms and we hear babies talking.

Cue Wyatt for another attack but Orton throws him through a wall. They head to another room with more dolls and some weird structure made of sticks. That goes nowhere so it's off to a kitchen (the refrigerator says WE'RE HERE) with Orton getting the better of it. Bray tries to climb onto a counter and gets in a low blow. The refrigerator is shoved down onto Randy so Bray walks outside and steals Orton's limo. We'll come back to this later.

We recap Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe. Rollins was injured at Joe's hands earlier this year so tonight is really just about payback. As is often the case, the simpler ideas work best.

Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe

Joe punches him up against the ropes to start and they're quickly on the floor with Rollins chopping away. Seth hits the big suicide dive and a second one does just as well. The big guy gets smart and goes after the knee before hitting the suicide elbow to send Rollins over the announcers' table. Graves: "Like a flying school bus!"

A backslash onto the knee has Rollins screaming and his comeback is cut off almost immediately. The Knee Capper sets up the kneebar until Seth scrambles to the ropes. Joe grabs a powerbomb into a half crab into the Texas Cloverleaf but Joe is at the ropes again. Seth comes back with a Sling Blade, followed by a superkick to the neck for two of his own.

For some reason Seth tries the Buckle Bomb and the knee gives out, though it's fine enough for a Falcon Arrow a few seconds later. That great looking frog splash bangs the knee up even more so the cover is only good for a delayed two. The Koquina Clutch is countered with a quick rope climb but Joe grabs the hold again, only to have Seth roll over for a cradle and the pin at 16:03.

Rating: B+. It's definitely the match of the night so far which was what most people had coming in. Rollins winning is the right call as it would have been really stupid to give him the win last time and then job him here. Joe dominated the match until the ending where he got caught (ignore his shoulder being up) so this was about as well done as they were going to get.

Wyatt arrives back at the arena and stumbles into the ring. Cue Orton from behind with a chair (no word on how he got back) to start the beatdown, including sending Wyatt over the announcers' tables. There's the Elevated DDT off the table and Orton follows it up with another chair to the back. Back in and the RKO is loaded up but here are the Singh Brothers to go after Orton. They're dispatched just as quickly and there's the RKO to Wyatt. Now it's Jinder Mahal with the belt to Orton's head twice in a row, setting up Sister Abigail for the pin at 4:22 shown in the ring, not counting about ten minutes in the House.

Rating: D. The house stuff was more stupid than bad and that's a major improvement. They would have been in big trouble if it had been stuff like they did at Wrestlemania so it was more just there instead of anything all that terrible. Wyatt winning might be a stretch but I'd much rather him actually get a win than lose all over again with the RKO being the great vanquishing force. Not the best concept here but it's going to be a more forgettable idea than on a list of all time horrible concepts and that's a major victory.

We recap Braun Strowman vs. Roman Reigns. Strowman destroyed Reigns in an incredible segment but has since gone 0-1-1 against Big Show and Kalisto for reasons that aren't clear. Tonight Reigns is back for revenge.

Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman

Reigns is very banged up coming in. He goes right after Strowman and hits a clothesline off the steps to drop the monster on the floor. The apron kick is pulled out of the air and Strowman chokeslams him onto the announcers' table. A powerslam gets two and Reigns is getting some sympathy for FINALLY being an underdog.

The bad shoulder is sent hard into the steps and it's off to a waistlock back inside. Strowman misses a charge into the corner and Reigns somehow hits a Samoan drop for two. They head outside with Reigns charging at Strowman and managing to send him into the post twice in a row.

The spear gets two back inside (giving us a reaction from a young girl that we'll likely see weekly from now on) but the second attempt hits boot. Two Superman Punches drop Braun but a third is caught in that head and arm choke. The powerslam only gets two so Strowman does it again for the pin at 11:20.

Rating: B+. This was WAY better than I was expecting and Reigns losing is probably the right call. I mean, I really don't need to see him vs. Lesnar at Wrestlemania XXXIV but if that's where we just have to go, you have to take Reigns down a few pegs first. Really good power match here and that was easily the way to go.

Post match Strowman throws in some steps (Fans: "THANK YOU STROWMAN!") and drops Reigns ribs first onto the steel in a big crash. Braun lifts the steps over his head and brings them crashing down onto his ribs in a cringe inducing landing. Strowman is as over as free beer in a frat house and Reigns is bleeding from the mouth (Fans: "YOU DESERVE IT!") to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. The really low expectations helped this a lot, as did having Jericho win and not having the House of Horrors match be a disaster. The ending was really good and Joe vs. Rollins was quite the match as well. Raw is looking strong, or at least it would if there was anything for these guys to be fighting over. Good show here, though I still wonder how long they can stretch things out with Lesnar not likely wrestling until July.

Results

Chris Jericho b. Kevin Owens – Walls of Jericho

Austin Aries b. Neville via DQ when Neville grabbed the referee

Hardys b. Sheamus/Cesaro – Swanton Bomb to Sheamus

Alexa Bliss b. Bayley – DDT

Seth Rollins b. Samoa Joe – Cradle

Bray Wyatt b. Randy Orton – Sister Abigail

Braun Strowman b. Roman Reigns – Powerslam

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Payback 2017 Preview

I've seen every pay per view WWE has ever produced and this is one of the most worthless they've ever put on. The Superstar Shakeup has changed the entire company and that means we have a bunch of pointless matches due to either the title not being on the line, people potentially switching shows and feuds that already have their followups started. Let's get to it.

Bray Wyatt vs. Randy Orton

Normally I do the Kickoff Show match first but I'm going with this just so we can get it out of the way and forget about it. Remember back in 2000 when Mike Awesome defended the ECW World Title against Tazz and it was a WCW wrestler facing a WWF wrestler at an ECW show? That might be less complicated than what we have here. Here we have the Smackdown World Champion facing off against a "Monday Night Raw" wrestler who had no chance of winning the belt back at first and now that this is non-title, the odds are even lower.

The winner here? The audience, as this feud is going to be OVER,

meaning we can move on to....Jinder Mahal. Three months ago AJ Styles and John Cena were tearing the house down over this title and now we have Wyatt looking like the weakest champion in years, Orton drawing reactions of "Him AGAIN?" and Mahal wondering what kind of a saint he was in a past life to be in this spot. I'll go with Orton winning here, presumably by being the first person to figure out what a House of Horrors match is.

Kickoff Show: Enzo Amore/Big Cass vs. Anderson and Gallows

These teams are somehow still feuding for reasons that I have no idea how to comprehend. There's really not much of a reason for them to be fighting anymore so here they are on pay per view. This is a feud where they started fighting at one point and are still fighting because that's all WWE knows how to do.

I'll go with Anderson and Gallows here, as WWE doesn't seem to like Amore and Cass winning. Then again they don't like Anderson and Gallows winning either, but the Hardys are likely going to need some more challengers going forward and the big balds have only lost to the champs once so far. This match really does belong on the Kickoff Show and it's very clear that there isn't much of a reason to have it other than Amore warming the crowd up.

Women's Title: Bayley vs. Alexa Bliss

This is a natural feud with Bliss looking down on everyone that she's in the ring with and Bayley as the hometown girl who is living the dream. The question here is how important the hometown aspect is going to be. Earlier this month Naomi won the Smackdown Women's Title at "Wrestlemania XXXIII" seemingly on the strength of being from Orlando, Florida. The show is in Bayley's hometown so the question is will they let the hometown girl win twice.

I think they will as it seems that the big match on the horizon is Bayley defending against Sasha Banks in a battle of (former by then) best friends. As good as Bliss is (and she's awesome), there's some real money in Bayley holding the title for several months before losing it to Banks in a big showdown. Bliss will have her day and she's still rolling on the momentum that came with her two Smackdown Women's Titles.

Cruiserweight Title: Austin Aries vs. Neville

They had the Match of the Night at "Wrestlemania XXXIII" and it's

not out of the question for them to do it again. These two have an amazing chemistry together and they're going with a different story this time around. In Orlando it was all about Aries being able to hang with and potentially beat Neville, but the last few weeks have been a much more personal feud built on Neville attacking Aries and the hunt for revenge.

This time around though, I think they'll switch the title. Neville hasn't lost a singles match since October and the company has been mentioning that far too often as of late. That suggests to me that they're about to have him lose, which is going to be a huge moment for Aries. He's been treated as the biggest star in the division save for Neville and it's time to bring him all the way to the top.

US Title: Kevin Owens vs. Chris Jericho

Now we hit the first match with next to no drama. It also doesn't help that these two have barely interacted since "Wrestlemania XXXIII" due to the Superstar Shakeup sending Owens over to "Smackdown Live". These two had one of the hottest feuds in the company just a month ago and now it's nothing more than something that exists. Owens has completely moved on and is already looking at a title defense against AJ Styles later in the month.

Of course I'm going with Owens as Jericho is already booked to head off with Fozzy again almost immediately. Barring a last minute switch to Jericho and then dropping it back to Owens two days later, there's no reason to believe that Owens is dropping the title here. This match feels like filler and that's a real shame given how much effort they put into the build to its predecessor.

Tag Team Titles: Hardys vs. Sheamus/Cesaro

While Jericho vs. Owens feels like it has no steam because of a lack of build, this one feels like it has no steam because it was never anything special in the first place. The Hardys made their huge return earlier this month and...that's about it. Without the Broken characters they're really just a nostalgic act and that's not the most thrilling idea in the world, at least not for too long.

That being said, I'm certainly taking the Hardys to retain here. As much steam as they've lost, Sheamus and Cesaro have all the steam of a frozen lasagna. The only way I can see them winning here is through a good bit of cheating which would send Matt Hardy over the edge to set up a certain gimmick change to set the promotion on as

much fire as it could possibly reach in the current environment.

Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe

This is the Match of the Night if they're allowed to let it all hang out. I'd assume this match was scheduled for "Fastlane 2017" before Rollins got hurt (though I'm not sure he actually was, especially given how fast he's gone from nearly crippled to just fine) and now it's going to feel a bit bigger as Rollins actually got a big rub off his win over Triple H. Then again Samoa Joe has been on fire since his main roster debut and there's a real chance he could get the biggest win of his career here.

I think I'll go with Samoa Joe, likely thanks to some interference by a returning Triple H. Why would he return? Well that would be because STEPHANIE MCMAHON MUST BE AVENGED and that means the feud must continue for the next three months or so. So yeah, Rollins is about to win with the Rainmaker knee but Triple H interferes to give Samoa Joe the win, setting up a rematch at whatever the next "Monday Night Raw" pay per view is.

Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman

The last two weeks have made this interesting as WWE has decided that the way to follow up on Strowman's amazing destruction of Reigns is to have him go 0-1-1 against Big Show and Kalisto. There was no way Reigns should have been on TV in the last two weeks and thankfully they've kept him away from TV, though I'm more amazed that him RETIRING THE UNDERTAKER has been forgotten a mere four weeks later.

I'll take Strowman as he seems to be the challenger at "Great Balls of Fire 2017" and...stop laughing at the pay per view name. Anyway, Strowman seems to be the next challenger for Lesnar because we need to wait for a year to set up Reigns vs. Brock Lesnar and that would suggest starting with a major loss here.

Overall.....I think you get the idea. I have no idea why they didn't do the Superstar Shakeup this coming week for the sake of avoiding all of the messes that have come from the whole thing happening eight days after "Wrestlemania XXXIII". Almost none of the matches on this show mean anything as we're already setting up everything for later, making this show all the less important. I'm going to have enough issues staying awake during this show, let alone actually making sense of it.

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Main Event – April 27, 2017: As Raw Goes

Main Event

Date: April 27, 2017

Location: Sprint Center, Kansas City, Missouri

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

I'm not even sure what to say about this show anymore. It comes and goes with a few interesting highlights and the rest is just a bunch of matches between the standard batch of regular people and then a cruiserweight tag. I could certainly go with a little change of pace but those are very few and far between around here. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Rhyno vs. Titus O'Neil

It's about time Rhyno and Heath Slater actually appeared in the arena. They start with the power exchange before a clothesline puts Titus on the floor. That's fine with Titus who unloads on him with a right hand to the jaw, followed by his own clothesline for two inside. Another clothesline (because Titus isn't very skilled) gets

the same and it's off to the chinlock. Rhino comes back with some shoulders and a spinebuster for the pin at 5:29.

Rating: D. Just long and slow here with Titus not being able to do anything other than hit really low level offense. Also what's up with the spinebuster for the finish instead of the Gore? Rhino's offense is basically two moves and he only hit one of them. Then again he's still getting some of the most consistent pops of the show so he's doing something right.

Video on Roman Reigns.

From Raw!

Braun Strowman vs. Kalisto

It's a dumpster match, which means you have to put them inside but don't have to close the lid. Before the match, Braun says everyone here is trash and putting Kalisto in the dumpster will be like putting everyone in there too, including Roman Reigns. In the back, Kalisto tells Angle he has to fight like a man.

Kalisto starts with some kicks but his flip dive is caught in a suplex, only to have Strowman throw him across the ring. A front facelock over the ropes has Strowman in some trouble but he throws Kalisto down again. Strowman loads up a press slam but Kalisto slips out and dropkicks him into the dumpster for the win at 6:13.

Rating: F. I know WWE's official line is that wins and losses don't matter but you're trying to build Strowman up as an opponent for Lesnar. Two weeks ago, Strowman absolutely destroyed Reigns in one of the coolest segments in years. In the two weeks since, he's gone to a draw with Big Show (But he stood up and that makes up for it!) and now he's lost to Kalisto. He'll probably beat Reigns on Sunday and that's supposed to make up for this right? I'm sure no one will EVER reference this loss again and Strowman will be forever awesome.

Post match Strowman destroys Kalisto and puts him in the dumpster. He locks it shut and pushes the dumpster off the stage for what must have been a full two and a half foot fall. If this is how they want to build up Strowman, they have a LONG way to go.

Video on the House of Horrors match.

Gran Metalik/Lince Dorado vs. Tony Nese/Drew Gulak

Nese and Dorado get things going with Tony's strikes not having much effect, allowing Dorado to wristdrag him out of the corner. Drew will have none of Dorado's high flying though and shoves him to the floor in a big crash. Back from a break and it's off to Gulak legally now, meaning we hit the mat wrestling in the form of a leg crank. Not that it matters as Nese comes back in and gives up the hot tag to Metalik.

That means it's time to hit the ropes in a variety of ways, which really is a great way to get yourself over. I mean, it won't get you onto 205 Live or anything but at least it looks cool here. A handspring takes Gulak down and a top rope elbow gives Metalik two. There's the handspring Stunner from Dorado to put the villains on the floor, followed by double moonsaults from the top. Back in and the Metalik Driver ends Gulak at 10:28.

Rating: C. This one got a lot better after the break when they just let the high fliers fly all over the place like they're supposed to be doing. Metalik really should be on 205 Live but they really do seem happy with leaving him around here where almost anyone else could fill in his spot. Then again I doubt anyone has actually thought about that, much like everything on Main Event.

And from Raw again.

Dean Ambrose/Chris Jericho vs. The Miz/???

And it's....someone who has some issues with being on time as he's not here. Miz says the match is canceled and goes to leave but here's Angle to say the match is on. Jericho takes off the replacement jacket and chops Miz in the corner, setting up some double teaming. Miz gets clotheslined out to the floor and we take a break.

The match is joined in progress with Miz still alone and Jericho's arrogant cover getting one. Ambrose comes in and Miz begs off, earning himself a chase on the floor. Maryse offers a distraction

though and Miz gets in a boot to the face to take over for the first time. Back in and the Reality Check gets two but the YES Kick is countered into a rollup. Jericho comes in with the Lionsault but the Codebreaker is blocked.

Miz goes to leave so Ambrose follows him up the ramp. Dirty Deeds is loaded up on the stage but here's Bray Wyatt to knock Dean off. Sister Abigail sends Dean into the wall and a second one plants Jericho in the ring. Miz poses with Wyatt...and takes Sister Abigail as well. Bray kneels down to end the show and we'll say the match was thrown out at about 8:30.

Rating: D. So that happened. I'm assuming this was just a way to set up Orton vs. Wyatt as Miz and Ambrose have nothing to do on Sunday, save for hosting a talking segment on the Kickoff Show. Wyatt is an interesting choice for a partner and it's nice to have him actually show up but....yeah this didn't work.

Overall Rating: D. This really is a case of as Raw goes, so goes Main Event. The highlights just made me remember how bad Raw was and that's not a good thing, especially with the bad first match and the only watchable second one. I'm not sure why this show is such a dumping ground, especially when there are a lot of people on the roster who don't get to do anything on Raw. Just pull names out of a hat and let them have a match here. Why is that so far fetched?

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Monday Night Raw – November 25, 2002: Boring Wrestling and Violent Illness

Monday Night Raw

Date: November 25, 2002

Location: North Charleston Coliseum, North Charleston, South, Carolina

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We're still in the Shawn Michaels Era and he's actually defending the title this week against Rob Van Dam. Other than that we're still waiting on the return of HHH, who was injured at Survivor Series but probably needs to grace us with his presence again. Other than that, I'd assume we'll get a bunch of Testicle jokes. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Shawn winning the title and Van Dam earning the shot last week.

Opening sequence.

Tag Team Titles: Christian/Chris Jericho vs. Dudley Boyz

Christian and Jericho are defending. D-Von drops Jericho with a clothesline to start and elbows Christian for the same result. We get some championship miscommunication and Chris gets pummeled in the corner. Christian finally scores with a backbreaker though and the champs take over for the first time.

The pace slows WAY down (as is the Canadian way) but Christian takes too much time yelling at Bubba, allowing D-Von to grab a neckbreaker. Bubba comes in and cleans house but misses the middle rope backplash. Everything breaks down (as is the tag team way) and D-Von gets two off a small package. Chris rams him into Christian though and a rollup retains the titles clean.

Actually hang on a second as here are Eric Bischoff and Sean Morely (the former Val Venis), who is now Chief of Staff. All four shoulders were on the mat at the same time for the cover so there's no pin, meaning this match MUST continue. I'm assuming this is the "heel bosses act nice to start before going really evil" segment of the night.

The match continues after a break with Bubba slamming his way out of trouble and making the hot tag off to D-Von. Notice the crowd not being as thrilled, mainly because the good guys just got pinned about as clean as you can get but the match continues on a technicality. 3D gives Bubba the pin on Christian.....but Bubba wasn't legal, so Morely restarts the match again.

The third fall begins and you can hear the fans getting annoyed. Jericho nails D-Von from behind and sleeper drops Bubba for two. That earns him a Flip Flop and Fly with What's Up making things even worse. Since there haven't been enough shenanigans in this match, it's table time but Christian dropkicks it into D-Von's face. Bubba blocks the Lionsault but Christian hits him with a belt, setting up the Walls to retain the titles for real.

Rating: D+. WAY too much going on here when they could have done a regular match with some extra time or just done a 2/3 falls match, despite the lack of any reason for this to go longer than usual. If nothing else though, it's nice to have some fresh blood in the title scene and the Dudleys are hardly a stretch for the automatic #1 contendership.

Shawn Michaels is ready to face Van Dam in his first Raw match in five years. He leaves to go talk to Rob for some reason when Christian and Jericho show up with champagne to celebrate. Jericho isn't happy with Scott Steiner but Christian says "forget about his freaks, peaks and Iron Sheiks". Chris goes with it and suggests that they hit the town because they need some Vitamin C. Christian: "YEAH! My name starts with a C too!"

They head into the locker room when the Dudleys come up and want to go after the champs again. Bubba says wait, because he has a plan. I

think I like this better than cutting to conveniently timed segments where people just happen to be ready to talk when someone else is done but it was still really scripted.

Test vs. Steven Richards

This is fallout from Steven taking a Testicles shirt to the testicles. I think Test is a face now despite doing nothing new other than having the catchphrase. The threat of a big boot sends Steven bailing to the floor but he comes back in with some right hands. We're already off to a reverse chinlock so at least this is going to be short. Some clotheslines and a full nelson slam give Test two and he hammers away in the corner. A low blow (that the referee should have seen) sets up an X Factor for two, only to have Test Roll the Dice for the pin.

Rating: D. See, he has a catchphrase which a nine year old would find funny so I'm sure the writers are impressed enough to push Test again. Richards got in a lot of offense here, which probably isn't the best way to push Test, though then again neither is a bunch of testicle jokes. Stacy is gorgeous but that smile is only going to carry the act so far.

Christian and Jericho are in towels after their shower but the Dudleys have stolen their bags. Chase is given and the champs are locked out of the locker room. So how did the Dudleys know that the champs were getting in the shower when they turned the corner two seconds after Christian and Jericho decided to do that? I guess they overheard them but if that's the case, why didn't they jump the champs when they were standing there talking?

Test and Stacy are happy with the win and Test goes to take a shower (common theme tonight). As Stacy beams, Victoria jumps her from behind and says she'll be thinking of Stacy during the match. Instead of her long hair and long legs though, she'll be thinking of Stacy's fear. Victoria licks Stacy's ear and that's that.

Christopher Nowinski vs. Maven

Before we get going, Chris says this is the last time that anyone

can say Maven is better than he is. Maven won Tough Enough because of politics when he mentioned his sick mother and that means it's on. Nowinski hits him with a big book and Maven is out. No match.

Jericho and Christian are in a search for clothes and find 3 Minute Warning and Rico's gear. They're far from impressed (Jericho: "Do you get a free bowl of soup with this outfit?") but Rico and the Samoans come in to scare them off.

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Victoria

Trish is challenging and looks very nice in blue. They slug it out to start with Victoria grabbing something like a Thesz press before hitting some awkward kicks to the ribs. A rollup gives Trish two and the kickout sends her outside. She lands hips first, with JR saying is like a stone bouncing across a river. Victoria's slingshot legdrop gets two as Lawler thinks there's something in these two's past before explaining the backstory.

We hit a seated full nelson (that could be a solid finisher) until Trish fights up and gets some rollups for two each. Trish gets sent hard into the steps as this is already starting to drag. Back in and Trish makes another comeback, including a Chick Kick for two. We get an awkward looking shove to send Trish throat first into the ropes but it's enough to set up the Widow's Peak to retain the title.

Rating: D. Despite them both looking better than they have in a long time (which covers a lot of ground), the match really did feel disjointed. It was pretty clear that they had no idea how to go from move to move later on in the match, which really makes for some awkward moments. The women were getting better but they weren't ready for something this long yet, which isn't a good sign.

Victoria bites Steven Richards' ear for reasons of general insanity, which he seems to like.

Shawn praises Van Dam's athleticism but says he's missing a little something. Rob slaps him and that's just what the champ was looking for.

Video on Eric Bischoff.

Christian is worried about shrinkage but a shot of the Dudleys in the ring sends the Canadians into the arena. In the ring, the Dudleys are giving away Christian and Jericho's clothes, including a shirt and jeans. Bubba finds a jar of A** Cream, which has him very confused. Bubba: "WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A** CREAM???" The whole bag of clothes is sent into the crowd but they're not done yet. Cue Spike to steal the towels and we have unclothed champions.

Hurricane/Jeff Hardy vs. Lance Storm/William Regal

Jeff dives over the top to take out Storm before the bell and the good guys start fast. Some right hands have Regal staggered and it's off to Hurricane for a high crossbody. The Eye of the Hurricane is broken up so Hurricane has to settle for a chokeslam instead. Regal comes in for the save and starts working on Hurricane's back with a few knees. Storm adds some forearms, only to get caught with a Shining Wizard. It's not enough for the hot tag though as Hurricane tries his own half crab. Regal kicks him in the head for the break though and Storm grabs a Sharpshooter for the tap out.

Rating: D+. Nothing to see here but the ending was a nice touch as they went away from the standard formula for a change. You can only do the hot tag into the finish so many times so it was nice to see something get changed up. Regal and Storm aren't exactly a big upgrade but at least they're a regular team.

Jeff gets beaten down as well.

We look at Shawn's last match on Raw from December 1997 against Owen Hart.

Kane vs. Batista

Hang on a second as we have Ric Flair instead, telling Kane that he's not out of the woods for what he did to Ric last week. Batista comes in to jump Kane from behind and the beatdown is on. We do get a bell though and Batista gets to hammer on Kane in an actual match. Some clotheslines knock Kane around but he comes back with a big boot. The ref gets bumped so there's no one to count Kane's powerslam. Ric chairs him in the head and the Batista Bomb gives

Dave the fast pin.

We get the official terms of the Big Show trade: Big Show for Ivory, D-Von, Val Venis and Maven. That's a horrible trade. Anyway Bischoff tells Morely to bring Scott Steiner to Raw. Morely says he has a connection that can make something happen but RNN BREAKING NEWS. Randy talks about everything he's thankful for, including that good looking nurse at the rehab center.

Goldust vs. Rico

They trade some armdrags to start until Rico gets in a big kick to take over. A lot of stomping allows JR to list off some of Rico's accomplishments as they seem to be trying to make him into something. Rico grabs an armbar until Goldust makes a short comeback, including the powerslam for two. The Curtain Call gives Goldust the clean pin.

Rating: D. This was more filler but you have to deal with that from time to time. JR mentioned that Booker was healing, which might have something to do with a rash of illness going around the locker room at this point (dehydration due to some issues on a tour of India). If nothing else that would explain some of the odd booking choices tonight, such as this match, which was only going to last so long.

Raw World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Rob Van Dam

Shawn, in what looks to be the early Sami Zayn collection of tights, is defending. The champ fires off a dropkick to start but gets kicked in the ribs a few times, followed by a clothesline to send him outside. Rob is smart enough to throw him back inside for a slingshot legdrop to the bad back. A monkey flip is countered into something like Snake Eyes and Shawn starts in on the leg.

We hit the Ric Flair playbook with the leg being crushed on the ropes, followed by a Figure Four. Rob makes the ropes so Shawn forearms him into the nipup, only to miss Sweet Chin Music. Rolling Thunder onto Shawn's back gets two so Shawn comes back with a DDT. Shawn's top rope elbow gets two more but it's another backbreaker to cut him off. Rob gets in the Five Star to the back...and here's HHH

for the DQ.

Rating: C+. This was totally fine but you could tell that Shawn wasn't able to hit that other gear. The knee vs. back stuff was fine and I'm glad they didn't go with a clean fall over Rob, who is still recovering from the HHH loss. Speaking of HHH, thank goodness he was back so quickly to save the show. I mean, it had been a whole week without him and now we're likely going to get him in another title match.

HHH goes after Shawn post match and shrugs off a comeback. A side slam puts Shawn through an open chair to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. I'd assume the rash of illnesses changed a lot of this show but that really doesn't make the show any more excusable. It's not a good show with all the lame matches and quick build towards Armageddon, which is already looking like a boring show with another HHH vs. Shawn match on top. This wasn't the worst show in the world but it was your standard 2002 dullness.

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