

New Column: Speak To Them

It's an anniversary column, and a bad one.

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/tommyhall/kbs-review-speak-2/>

I Want To Talk A Bit About Crowds

I figured I'd start doing some more editorial style stuff around here so here's the first one of them.

This is something I've been noticing a lot of lately. So often anymore I read about or hear about how much a crowd sucks and they're killing a show. When I was in college I was taught how to think as well as how to see patterns in things. When I hear people saying over and over again that "this crowd sucks" or "these fans are killing this show", it occurs to me that the crowd is different every week. What is the same every week is the product in front of them.

The WWE is something that doesn't come to town all that often. I live in Lexington and I see the show here live about once or twice a year, usually in the very early part of the year and then in the mid to late summer. I haven't missed a show in my town in years and almost every time I've put my money on the table to see a show. I sit in my seat with a container of nachos and an over priced Sprite and I watch the show. That seat is mine and I have paid for it for the night.

Over the course of about three hours, the WWE does their best

to entertain me. If I'm entertained I'll react to it, but if I'm not then I'm not going to react to it. I've sat through some of the most boring, uninteresting, mind numbing matches you'll ever hope to see and haven't made a move. On the other hand, I was there when Randy Orton caught Evan Bourne in the RK0 out of a Shooting Star Press and I almost jumped out of my chair.

Now some people might call me a bad fan for this. Some people would say that I should cheer because otherwise, it makes the show look bad. Here's the thing though: maybe there's a reason those fans are so quiet. WWE anymore is so predictable in the format they're going to use and the way things are done that it's unbearably boring at times.

Let's see: big star comes out to talk to open the show, his rival confronts him, a brawl is teased, an authority figure comes out and says chill a minute, the main event is made, a big line ends the segment and then we go to the back to see someone talking or walking to the ring. That eats up the first 15 minutes of the show, or about 1/8th of it.

You tell me: how many Raws or Smackdowns can you think of that have used that exact same formula over let's say the last year. I'd go low on it and say 80 of them we'll say 100 total shows have started like that. The rest of the show is just as predictable too: after that it's a midcard match and then an upper midcard match with a talking segment in the back separating them. Then it's the beginning of hour #2 and it's time for either the first of two main events or a confrontation which eats up about 10-15 minutes.

The midcard title feud is next or might be swapped with the upper midcard match if they're feeling a little feisty. The Divas come out next at around 10:20 on Raw and they'll eat up a little time. We get a talking segment/story moving segment occasionally disguised as a match and then it's main event time where the show either ends in someone that hasn't been

seen for most of the night beating down the winner to end the show or the two main guys staring each other down.

Tell me: how many times have you see that EXACT same show? I've seen it so many times that I didn't need to think about that in the slightest. Now let's get back to the crowd which is the point of this whole thing. As I said I never miss a live show and I rarely if ever miss a TV show. When you're in the arena, how many people do you think are like me and hardly ever miss anything the WWE puts on? We're the fans willing to put our money down to see it live, so we must be pretty dedicated to it right?

We're all dedicated enough to get out of our houses and pay pretty high prices to come to the arena, so it's pretty clear we're at least interested in what's going on.

Now we get to the whole point of this: how many people in that arena do you think could probably figure out the order of the show like I just listed off? I'd bet a decent amount of money that the majority of them could if pressed. That's what I'm getting at with this: the WWE product is so cookie cutter and so predictable in its format and the way that it's presented that the fans have seen it before. There's nothing anymore than pops off the page and, as Paul Heyman said, "makes you point at it and go yo that's different."

When's the last time there was something that you saw on the show that was legitimately different? Over the past year and a half, I can think of about two: Old School Raw and the Nexus invading. Other than that it's the same structure but with different people out there doing their absolute best to hide the fact that it's the exact same thing all over again. Take Punk for instance: when you boil it down, Punk was a heel that is rebelling against the establishment and got over as a face because the fans wanted change. Austin did it, Cena did it with the way he looked and talked (go back to his rapper days and his JBL days. It's all about being anti-establishment), DX

did it by being vulgar. Same stuff, different faces.

WWE programming is so guilty of this that it's unreal. For YEARS now they've had the same structure to their shows. It started in the days of the Alliance and has been the same way ever since. There are moments that are cool and moments that are indeed awesome, but how long do those moments last? How often do guys that catch fire keep it for more than a few weeks or months? It's very, very rare and it's because no matter who they are or what they have to say, they get trapped in the exact same cycle that everyone else does and it catches them.

And that's where the crowds come into play. In short: wrestling fans aren't stupid. They know they've seen this before and they know that it's the same stuff with different faces out there talking. When you go to a show or watch on TV, who reacts the hardest? Kids. They react the hardest because they don't realize it's the same stuff cycling over and over again. Wrestling fans are smart and the crowds of them are getting smarter every week. Punk's stuff was great at first and it's still incredibly entertaining, but the unpredictability of it is gone and now he's just another guy that wants change and is fighting the establishment. Just like Cena, just like Austin, just like DX, just like them all. Same stuff, different faces.

The crowds aren't what's killing the shows. The crowds are catching up to the tricks that WWE is putting before them and until WWE figures out that the crowds have caught on, it's going to continue to be "dead crowd" after "dead crowd" after "dead crowd" while WWE keeps trying quick fix after quick fix. Punk said something earlier tonight on Smackdown that sums up the whole problem: "I want this to be fun again."

I'm a hardcore fan and I'll be around until the day they close the doors, but not everyone is like me. You have to treat the fans with respect and give them a reason to want to keep

watching or they'll say "man look at this other show. It's totally different from anything else on" and they'll watch that instead while WWE keeps having the same fights over respect and #1 contender triple threats and contract signings and gimmick matches (which I'll get to next time) for the sake of gimmick matches and tag team main events that mean nothing while the crowds get smaller and smaller.

It's not the crowds that are dying.