

# Forbidden Door: Why Is It Forbidden?

## Forbidden Door

Date: June 26, 2022

Location: United Center, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Excalibur, Taz, Kevin Kelly

It's a special show as we have a host of international guest stars from New Japan coming in for a bunch of big time matches. The main event is for the Interim AEW World Title as CM Punk being stripped of the title was off the table. Other than that, we have a series of title matches which should make for a great show. Let's get to it.

Buy-In: Hirooki Goto/Yoshi-Hashi vs. QT Marshall/Aaron Solo

Solo and Hashi start things off with Hashi working on a headlock. A running shoulder drops Solo again so it's off to Marshall vs. Goto, with the latter knocking Marshall around without much trouble. Solo comes back in and cheap shots Hashi though, allowing Marshall to get in a cheap shot on Goto. That lasts all of a few seconds before the big beatdown is on to put Solo back in trouble. Everything breaks down and Marshall's cartwheel tumbling dive drops Goto and Hashi.

Back in and Goto shrugs off the beating and hits a suplex, followed by a running clothesline to Marshall. The hot tag brings in Hashi to clean house, including a Blockbuster for two on Marshall. Everything breaks down and Marshall grabs a Diamond Cutter for two, with Goto having to make the save. A 450 misses for Marshall and Solo can't hit his top rope double stomp, allowing the tag back to Goto. The superkick into the fireman's carry backbreaker sets up a GTR/powerbomb combination to finish Solo at 8:53.

**Rating:** C+. It was energetic but this went a bit longer than

it needed to. Marshall is a good pesky heel but it is a little hard to buy the Factory hanging in there this long. Goto is still a big enough star though and the right guys won in the end. For a warmup match, this did about all you could need it to pull off.

#### Buy-In: Lance Archer vs. Nick Comoroto

Archer rocks him to start but Comoroto picks him up for a gorilla press. That doesn't work as Archer slips out and hits a big boot, only to be knocked outside and into the barricade. Comoroto's collection of forearms just wake Archer up so Comoroto punches him back down. Back up and they slug it out until Archer takes over and hits the rope walk moonsault for two. Comoroto hits a powerslam for two of his own but Archer catches him on top. The Blackout finishes Comoroto at 6:05.

**Rating:** C-. I'm not sure I get the idea of commentary talking about Archer being in a big role at the G1 Climax tournament and then having him go 50/50 with a low level guy like Comoroto. This didn't really make me think much of Archer and I'm not sure what the benefits was of adding this in. They didn't pull an upset, but this didn't do much for anyone.

#### Buy-In: Swerve Strickland/Keith Lee vs. El Desperado/Yoshinobu Kanemaru

The fans sing to Lee as he starts with Kanemaru, who doesn't like said singing. Lee cranks on the arm and sends him into the corner, meaning it's off to Desperado vs. Swerve. A drop down from Swerve is countered into a quickly broken Brock Lock and Desperado is sent outside. That's fine with Desperado, who grabs the hold again on the floor.

Back in and Lee comes in again, with Swerve accidentally kicking him in the knee. The leg is cranked back and it's a DDT for two on Lee. Desperado comes back in for more stomping but Lee kicks him away and brings Swerve back in. A brainbuster gets two on Desperado but he trades running elbows

with Swerve. Lee tries to come back in, only to have Desperado kick the rope to keep him on the floor.

Swerve wins a strike off and hits a backbreaker, setting up the rolling Downward Spiral. Lee comes back in and, along with Swerve, gets taken down into stereo leglocks. With those broken up, Kanemaru loads up his whiskey and spits it in Lee's face. The ensuing rollup gets two but Swerve is back up with a double stomp to Kanemaru. The Big Bang Catastrophe finishes for Lee at 12:03.

**Rating:** C+. Pretty nice match here, though I could go for Lee and Swerve either splitting up or being a team rather than teasing it for months on end. That is something AEW tends to do far too often and I hope they don't try it again here. They work well together, but the will they/won't they stuff is kind of played out.

Post match Team Taz pops up in a sky box to make basketball references and call Lee a broke Phillip Banks. The challenge seems to be thrown out.

Buy-In: DKC/Kevin Knight/Alex Coughlin/Yuya Uemura vs. Max Caster/Gunn Club

After the Acclaimed's entrance, here is Danhausen with a customized entrance and theme song for the Gunn Club. That sends Austin and Colten chasing after him, leaving Billy and Caster to get beaten up. We settle down to Coughlin cleaning house and Caster getting double teamed to put him in trouble. Billy gets suckered in but Caster fights out of the corner anyway, only to get knocked back down. DKC drops a chop for two but Caster fights out of the corner (again) and hands it off to Billy to clean house. The Fameasser sets up the Mic Drop for the fast pin on DKC at 5:35. Austin and Colten were never even at ringside.

**Rating:** C. Kind of a weird match here as while the New Japan guys are mostly Young Lions, would it be that big of a stretch

for them to give the Gunn Club some trouble? Turning it into a handicap match with Gunn and Caster winning doesn't exactly make the New Japan guys look great, especially with it being so short. This is one of the matches that could have been dropped without missing much.

The opening video looks at the companies colliding.

No Jim Ross for the show, which might be for the best.

Eddie Kingston/Shota Umino/Wheeler Yuta vs. Chris Jericho/Sammy Guevara/Minoru Suzuki

The winning team gets an advantage in Blood & Guts on Wednesday (which has nothing to do with Suzuki and Umino). Yuta wastes no time in rolling Jericho with some German suplexes and the Crossface goes on. Everything breaks down for a bit and it's Guevara getting in some shots to Umino to take over. That doesn't last long as Kingston comes in to face Jericho, who hands it back to Suzuki.

Kingston takes the straps straight down and the fight is on, with Kingston's chops having little effect. Suzuki drops him with a single forearm so it's back to Jericho. That's fine with Kingston, who chops away in the corner and gets in a shot on Guevara for a bonus. Suzuki armbars Kingston over the arm to put him back in trouble, setting up the penalty kick for two. Everything breaks down and the triple submissions have Kingston and company in trouble again.

With that out of the way, Kingston suplexes Sammy out of the air and sweeps the leg out, allowing the tag off to Umino to clean house. Umino sends Jericho outside for a flip dive but Sammy hits a top rope shooting star onto the floor. Kingston adds a dive but Suzuki loads up his own...and of course he isn't doing that.

Back in and Yuta gets to come in and strike away, setting up a cradle for two on Guevara. Kingston's backdrop driver sets up

the Stretch Plum until Suzuki breaks it up. The spinning backfist drops Suzuki but Jericho German suplexes Kingston. We hit the parade of secondary finishers until everyone is down. The Codebreaker drops Umino but he catches Jericho on top with a super powerslam.

Suzuki makes the save and Guevara hits a GTH on Yuta on the floor. Jericho's Lionsault is broken up by Kingston so Umino can get two but Tay Conti gets in a baseball bat shot to Umino. The Judas Effect misses though and a tornado DDT into a brainbuster gives Umino two. Jericho has to be saved from the Walls and Suzuki piledrives Kingston. The Judas Effect finishes Umino at 18:45.

**Rating:** B. This got going rather well and the action was very good, though it did run a few minutes longer than it needed to. Umino being in there all but guaranteed he was taking the fall but he did showcase himself here. Heck of an opener and it got the needed goal so there isn't much to complain about with this one.

We recap the Tag Team Title match, with the United Empire's IWGP Tag Team Titles and FTR's Ring Of Honor Tag Team Titles on the line. They all want to win for the gold and honor.

Ring Of Honor Tag Team Titles/IWGP Tag Team Titles: FTR vs. United Empire vs. Roppongi Vice

That would be Cash Wheeler/Dax Harwood vs. Great O'Khan/Jeff Cobb vs. Trent Barretta/Rocky Romero, Vice is the only challengers and it's Harwood headlocking Trent to start. That's reversed into a headscissors and we get an early standoff. Cobb comes in and shrugs off Harwood's chop so Romero tags himself in, much to Cobb's annoyance. Harwood fights back but seems to have hurt his shoulder and drops to the floor after handing it off to Wheeler.

The Forever Clotheslines have Wheeler in trouble and Harwood is taken to the back. O'Khan sits on Wheeler's head in the

corner and Cobb adds a swinging suplex to send him into the corner. Wheeler fights out and tries a tag but realizes Harwood isn't there. Instead he goes with Trent to clean house, but Cobb blocks a tornado DDT. Everything breaks down and the fight heads to the floor, with Trent hitting a running knee off the apron to drop Cobb.

We settle back down to Wheeler chopping his way out of trouble against the Empire. That doesn't last long as O'Khan chops him down...and Harwood is back, with his shoulder taped up. Harwood comes back in to clean house, including some rolling German suplexes to Cobb. Trent helps Harwood with a double superplex but Wheeler tags himself in to add a top rope splash for two. O'Khan gets to take over on Wheeler in the corner, only to have Romero help on a spike piledriver.

Cobb is back up with a powerbomb to Romero and we hit a parade of knockdowns. The claw slam into a German suplex from Cobb gets two on Trent, who kicks out without any help. FTR gets taken out on the floor and it's a spike Strong Zero for two on Cobb, with Wheeler diving in for the save. Romero and Harwood trade rollups until an enziguri staggers Harwood. Not that it matters as the Big Rig gives FTR the pin and the IWGP Tag Team Titles at 16:16.

**Rating:** B. There was some serious relief when Harwood came back out, even if he still might be injured. FTR winning was the right call as it sets up the big winner take all match against the Young Bucks at All Out. The action was there throughout the match and it was a lot of fun, which shouldn't be a surprise. I don't know how any team can be better than FTR right now, because dang they are on the roll of a lifetime.

Juice Robinson and Jay White don't think much of their competition and promise to win.

All-Atlantic Title: Pac vs. Miro vs. Malakai Black vs. Clark

## Connors

For the inaugural title. It's a brawl to start (as you might have expected) with Connors knocking Miro to the floor (which you might not have expected), leaving Black to knock Miro into the corner. Miro comes back in to knock Black down, only to have Black come back with the springboard moonsault. Connors comes back in for a kneebar but Miro is back in to clean house. Miro runs Connors down and slams him for two before Black and Miro stomp Pac down.

Black doesn't like anyone else getting to stomp Pac though and yells at Miro, setting up the required forearm off. With Black knocked to the floor, Pac superkicks Miro and tosses Connors outside as well. There's the big flip dive to Black, followed by a shotgun dropkick to Miro. Connors comes back in with the German suplexes until Miro knocks him down. Black loads up a table against the barricade and gets in a fight with Miro on the floor.

Connors spears Miro through the table and powerbombs Pac for two back inside, as the fans get behind Connors for a change. Miro is back up though and Game Overs Pac until Black uses the mist to break it up. That means a Black Mass to Miro and a cross armbreaker on Connors, but Pac's 450 makes the save. The Brutalizer to Connors gives Pac the tap and the title at 15:04.

**Rating:** B-. This took some time to get going but the ending worked well, with Pac coming in for the save and winning the title. It's nice to see Pac winning a title for a change, as he hasn't done much in the way of championships in his career. Connors showcased himself too and has a nice future, but he was in over his head here. Black and Miro need a win, but that mist could be the start of something between them.

## Dudes With Attitude vs. Bullet Club

That would be Sting/Darby Allin/Shingo Takagi vs. the Young

Bucks/El Phantasma. And there's no Sting, though Hikuleo is here with the Club. Hold on again though as we look at the catwalk above the arena...and then Sting dives off the set to take the Club down. We get inside with the bell ringing and Takagi taking over on Phantasma as commentary dubs the Dudes Los Stingobernables.

Allin comes in and gets caught in the wrong corner, allowing Phantasma to flip around a lot and hit his back rake. Then Matt flips around, dances, flips some more, and then rakes Allin's back too. Phantasma stands on Allin's crotch in the corner and Hikuleo pulls Sting off the apron for a whip into the barricade. Allin manages to knock Phantasma away though and the hot tag brings in Takagi.

A snap suplex gets two on Nick Jackson and a pop up Death Valley Driver drops him again. Now it's back to Sting for the well received house cleaning but he has to no sell Phantasma's nipple twist. Hikuleo's distraction lets Phantasma punch Sting low though and it's a Superkick Party. Sting shrugs off the superkicks, clotheslines them both down, and then goes down. The tag brings Allin back in but the Coffin Drop hits Matt's raised knees.

Everything breaks down and it's More Bang For Your Buck on Allin, setting up Phantasma's rope walk moonsault onto everyone on the floor. Back in and Sting teases a dive, which is cut off by a triple superkick. The BTE Trigger misses though and Sting hits a double Scorpion Death Drop. Now Sting gets to twist Phantasma's nipples (Tony: "This is so much fun! Unless someone is grabbing your nipples!"), allowing Takagi to blast Phantasma with a clothesline for two. Last Of The Dragon finishes Phantasma at 12:58.

**Rating:** B-. This was a lot of fun and the lighthearted match that the show needed after three more serious fights to open the show. Sting and Tony were both having fun here and it wound up being good stuff, with Phantasma getting to be the

showcase star. Takagi continues to be great at just about anything so another nice job with this one.

Chris Jericho and his goons jump Shot Umino, setting up the fireball.

### AEW Women's Title: Toni Storm vs. Thunder Rosa

Storm is challenging, making me wonder why she didn't just win the Owen Hart tournament. Feeling out process to start with Rosa taking her to the mat for a quickly broken headscissors. Back up and Rosa cranks on the wrist before getting two off a crucifix. Storm takes her down for a double arm crank but gets small packaged for two more. It's time for the slug out with screaming until Rosa knocks her against the ropes.

The running dropkick sets up the northern lights suplex for two more, followed by a double stomp to Storm. They head outside with Rosa snapping off another northern lights but the Death Valley Driver on the apron is blocked. Storm hits a DDT onto the floor, followed by the hip attack and another tornado DDT for two. Rosa is right back with a nasty Fire Thunder Driver for two, followed by the Final Reckoning to retain the title at 10:39.

**Rating:** C. This got better near the end, but it wasn't exactly a great match at its best. The sudden ending didn't help things, and it was another loss for Storm, who can't take many more of them. They also felt rather rushed here and Rosa continues to not exactly blow anyone away with her defenses. Not a great match here, but they didn't embarrass themselves or anything close to it.

We recap the IWGP United States Title, as champion Will Ospreay is a major star but might have trouble with Orange Cassidy.

Now JR comes out to join commentary.

## IWGP United States Title: Will Ospreay vs. Orange Cassidy

Ospreay, with Aussie Open, is defending but doesn't have the title with him. Cassidy starts fast with the hands in pockets running shoulders so you know he's serious. Ospreay is knocked outside for a breather so Cassidy can mock Ospreay's pose (in slow motion of course). You know that's too far for Ospreay, who runs around the ring and takes Cassidy down, followed by a hard whip into the corner back inside.

That lets Ospreay get in some situps before we hit the abdominal stretch. Ospreay makes sure to put his hand in Cassidy's pocket so Cassidy hiptosses his way to freedom. There's the high crossbody but the tornado DDT is blocked. A top rope forearm to the head drops Cassidy but he collapses before the Hidden Blade can launch. Some Kawada Kicks put Cassidy down again, until he powers up to his feet.

Cassidy, with his hand in his pocket, hits his own Kawada kicks but has to avoid the Oscutter. The Stundog Millionaire into the Michinoku Driver gets two and the tornado DDT sends Ospreay to the floor. A springboard flip dive takes out Aussie Open, setting up the top rope DDT for two. Cassidy catches him on top and sends Ospreay face first into the camera (for a wacky visual), allowing Cassidy to...drop down and avoid a double moonsault.

Ospreay is fine enough to try a standing shooting star press but Cassidy gets the knees up, setting up the Beach Break for a close two. The Orange Punch is countered into the Oscutter for two but the Hidden Blade misses. Stormbreaker is countered into a hurricanrana for two more so Ospreay blasts him with a clothesline. The Hidden Blade gets two more, setting up Stormbreaker to retain the title at 16:10.

**Rating:** B. They did what they should have done here with Cassidy by not having him do a bunch of stupid stuff. Instead, this was the serious match that they should have had and it

worked well as a result. I didn't quite buy the near falls, but I had a good time with the match and it was probably the best Cassidy has looked in a singles match to date.

Post match the big beatdown is on but Katsuyori Shibata comes in for the save and Ospreay has a new challenger. Shibata shows quite a bit of respect to Cassidy.

Zack Sabre Jr. wanted Bryan Danielson but gets a mystery opponent, which doesn't matter to him.

### Zack Sabre Jr. vs. ???

It's Claudio Castagnoli, better known as Cesaro, who is now part of the Blackpool Combat Club and will be in Blood & Guts on Dynamite. Claudio starts fast with the running European uppercut and the Neutralizer gets a very fast two. Sabre goes straight to the floor for a needed breather to cool things off a bit, earning himself a whip into the barricade. Back in and Claudio hits a suplex but Sabre gets in a Disarm-Her to slow things down.

That just ticks Claudio off though and he forearm the heck out of Sabre. A rake of the eyes breaks up the spinning torture rack and Sabre is back on the arm. That's broken up with the deadlift but they crash over the top and out to the floor. Claudio doesn't let go though and walks up the steps to powerbomb Sabre back inside (because that's a thing a human can do).

Back in and Sabre grabs a guillotine but gets taken up top to break it up. That's fine with Sabre, who pulls him into an octopus hold on top. Claudio reverses into a gutwrench superplex and they're both down for a bit. The Giant Swing is loaded up but Claudio's arm gives out. Claudio tries a Sharpshooter instead, which is reversed into a heel hook. That's broken up but Claudio still can't get the Sharpshooter. A Pele Kick to the arm sets up a sleeper on Claudio, followed by some hard kicks to the chest. Those just tick Claudio off

though and it's a pop up uppercut into the Riccola Bomb to pin Sabre at 18:23.

**Rating:** B+. This was the Claudio that fans have been wanting to see, as he got to show the fire and then hit a bunch of his signature/power stuff. Throw in Sabre Jr. being able to do just about anything imaginable to someone's limbs and this was a fun chess match. Eventually though it was Claudio wrecking him for the win and that is how a debut should have gone.

IWGP World Title: Hangman Page vs. Adam Cole vs. Kazuchika Okada vs. Jay White

White is defending and it's one fall to a finish. After the Big Match Intros, we ring the bell and pause for the fans to cheer a lot. White bails straight to the floor so the other three can fight but Cole winds up out there with him. Cole pitches the alliance but Okada and Page join them on the floor to start the brawl. Page gets double suplexed on the ramp and a neckbreaker drops Okada inside.

Back up and Page whips White into the steps, only to be taken down by Cole. Page fights back again and gets to clean house but Cole superkicks the moonsault out of the air. That means Okada can come back, including the dropkick to knock Cole off the top and out to the floor. The running crossbody over the barricade drops everyone else before they head back inside. Cole's brainbuster onto the knee gets two on White, who is right back up with the swinging Rock Bottom.

A sleeper suplex drops Cole and White hits another on Okada. Page gets one too but he pops back up with a lariat for the four way knockdown. We get the tag team double forearm off until Cole and White slug it out. Page goes after White but has to deal with Gedo, only to hit the Deadeye. The Buckshot Lariat gets two on White with Okada having to make a save. Page and Okada forearm it out until the Rainmaker misses. A discus lariat drops Okada but Cole breaks up the Buckshot.

The Panama Sunrise is countered into Okada's White Noise onto the knee but White breaks up the Rainmaker (after the zoom). Cole superkicks Okada for two, earning himself that perfect dropkick. Some more superkicks drop Okada and Page but the Rainmaker misses Cole, as he collapses. Okada gets Sling Bladed, allowing White to pin Cole to retain at 21:04. Something looked wrong there and White was talking to the referee after the match. I don't know if Cole got hurt or something but that didn't look right.

**Rating:** B. That ending didn't help things as they didn't get the chance to go to the big climax. What we had instead was a very good match with White escaping again, which is the right call. The lack of a Rainmaker tells me that there was something bad with the ending, so this felt like it was lacking something. The fact that it worked as well as it did is quite the impressive result though, as the talent got to shine.

#### Interim AEW World Title: Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Jon Moxley

For the vacant title. Feeling out process to start with neither being able to get very far. A dragon screw legwhip puts Moxley down though and Tanahashi is starting to get the confidence going. That's broken up as Moxley grabs a quick cutter, setting up the running corner clothesline. The piledriver drops Tanahashi again and Moxley stomps away, setting up a Texas Cloverleaf (a Tanahashi signature). Tanahashi fights out and hits his middle rope flip splash for two of his own.

The Sling Blade is countered into a whip outside though and Moxley puts him through a table. Tanahashi beats the count back in so Moxley kicks away at the chest. The Sling Blade cuts Moxley down for a change and somehow he's busted open. A dive to the floor drops Moxley again, setting up Twist and Shout back inside. Moxley manages a suplex though and it's time for the hammer and anvil elbows.

With those broken up, Tanahashi headbutts him down and hits the high crossbody. High Fly Flow connects but Moxley rolls him into the bulldog choke. That's broken up so Moxley BLASTS HIM with the King Kong Lariat...for one. The Hammer and Anvil elbows set up a rear naked choke but Tanahashi fights up again. Moxley shifts into another bulldog choke, followed by the Death Rider for the pin and the title at 18:14.

**Rating:** A-. This was a good example of two guys beating the fire out of each other until Tanahashi couldn't keep going. The blood was a bit too much and felt out of place, but Moxley winning the title makes the most sense. He is a good placeholder until Punk gets back and people will buy him in the role, so this is the right choice after a great match.

Post match respect is shown but Chris Jericho and Daniel Garcia run in for the beatdown. Eddie Kingston runs in, setting off a string of run ins until the Jericho Appreciation Society beats everyone down. Claudio Castagnoli runs in for the save and gets in a Swing. Kingston yells at Claudio (who he has never liked) and leaves so Moxley's music can play us out.

**Overall Rating:** A. I don't think there was any real surprise that this was an instant classic with one great match after another, though it was lacking THAT match that took it to the next level. It helps that it felt more like a New Japan show, as they cut out a bunch of the goofy stuff and focused on the in-ring action. The talent is there to make it work and this was a fantastic show. I didn't care for the build but the show delivered on all levels, including time, as they shaved off about an hour from Double Or Nothing. Great stuff.

### Results

Hirooki Goto/Yoshi-Hashi b. QT Marshall/Aaron Solo – GTR/powerbomb combination to Solo

Lance Archer b. Nick Comoroto – Blackout

Keith Lee/Swerve Strickland b. El Desperado/Yoshinobu Kanemaru

– Big Bang Catastrophe to Kanemaru

Max Caster/Gunn Club b. Yuya Uemura/Alex Coughlin/DKC/Kevin Knight – Mic Drop to DKC

Minoru Suzuki/Chris Jericho/Sammy Guevara b. Eddie Kingston/Shota Umino/Wheeler Yuta – Judas Effect to Umino

FTR b. United Empire and Roppongi Vice – Big Rig to Romero

Pac b. Clark Connors, Miro and Malakai Black – Brutalizer to Connors

Dudes With Attitude b. Bullet Club – Last of the Dragon to El Phantasmo

Thunder Rosa b. Toni Storm – Final Reckoning

Will Ospreay b. Orange Cassidy – Hidden Blade

Claudio Castagnoli b. Zack Sabre Jr. – Riccola Bomb

Jay White b. Adam Cole, Kazuchika Okada and Hangman Page – White pinned Cole after he collapsed

Jon Moxley b. Hiroshi Tanahashi – Death Rider

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# Wrestle Kingdom XVI Night One: The Old Japanese Try

## Wrestle Kingdom XVI Night One

Date: January 4, 2022

Location: Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 12,047

Commentators: Chris Charlton, Kevin Kelly

It's back to Japan for the first time in about a year, though the company does feel a good bit colder this time around. The pandemic and a slew of injuries have battered New Japan, but this show's reputation is more than enough to warrant a look. The main event of this first night is Kazuchika Okada challenging Shingo Takagi for the IWGP World Title, with the winner facing Will Ospreay tomorrow night. Let's get to it.

Note that I do not regularly follow New Japan so I won't know much in the way of storylines or recent character development. Please bear with me if I miss something that commentary does not explain.

## Pre-Show: New Japan Ranbo

This is a 19 man Royal Rumble and over the top/pinfall/submission eliminations with one minute intervals. The final four advancing to a four way on night two for the Provisional King Of Pro Wrestling 2022 Trophy. Chase Owens is in at #1 and Aaron Henare is in at #2 The rather muscular Henare fires off knees in the corner to start but gets sent into the buckle for a breather. Kosei Fujita (a Young Lion) is in at #3 and goes after Owens, who cuts him off with a backbreaker.

Henare runs Owens over and it's Yuto Nakashima (another Young Lion) in at #4. The four pair off and it's Ryohei Oiwa (third Young Lion in a row) in at #5 with a suplex to Owens. The

Young Lions get beaten down near the apron though and it's Master Wato in at #6. Wato strikes away at Henare and Owens until Hiroyoshi Tenzan is in at #7. His entrance takes so long that all he can do is hit some headbutts before Minoru Suzuki is in at #8. That takes a VERY long time so we can get to the big part of his music but Suzuki makes up for the time by eliminating all three Young Lions (by submission of course) in a hurry.

Satoshi Kojima is in at #9 and it's Kojima and Tenzan double teaming Suzuki. Taka Michinoku is in at #10 and walks right into a Tenkoji Cutter (3D). Cima is in at #11 for his first New Japan appearance since 2009 as Taka is pinned. Tomoa Honma is in at #12 as Wato and Cima fight. Wato is tossed so Honma beats up Cima instead as Douki is in at #13. Everyone brawls and it's Yuji Nagata coming in at #14 for a slugout with Suzuki.

Yoshinobu Kanemaru is in at #15 as there is no time between these entrances. Kanemaru has a bottle of whiskey as he comes to the ring slowly again, where he spits said whiskey in Tenzan's eyes for the rollup pin. Togi Makabe is in at #16 and we get the always odd muted music due to copyright issues. Nagata belly to back suplexes Kojima and a bunch of people pile on for the pin.

Bad Luck Fale is in at #17 and gets jumped by a bunch of people. That doesn't seem to matter as he tosses Douki, Honma and Nagata in a hurry. Sixty eight year old Tatsumi Fujinami is in at #18 for a dragon screw legwhip on Fale. That lets Makabe clothesline Fale out as the field keeps thinning. Toru Yano, the 2021 KOPW Champion, is in at #19 to complete the field, giving us Owens, Minoru Suzuki, Cima, Makabe, Fujinami and Yano. Fujinami Figure Fours Makabe as Yano low bridges Henare out. Makabe and Fujinami get covered for the double pin and it's Owens, Suzuki, Cima and Yano winning at 27:01.

**Rating:** C. It's hard to grade something like this as it isn't

about having a quality match but rather flying through the entrances to get people into the ring. I do like the idea of the final four doing something as there is only so much to win from a lower card/legends Royal Rumble. This was the usually entertaining warmup and it did everything it was supposed to do.

It's New Japan's 50th anniversary so we see a highlight package on Antonio Inoki, who welcomes us to the show.

Opening video, featuring the card rundown (in order, as usual).

### Yoh vs. Sho

They were friends and partners for a long time until Sho (now part of the pretty awesomely named House Of Torture stable) turned on him. Yoh knocks him outside to start and hits the big flip dive for a bonus. They go up the ramp, where Yoh can't toss him off onto the floor. Sho slams him down instead and beats up someone standing near the ramp. Yoh crawls back to ringside, where Sho teases a dive but opts for a whip into the barricade instead.

Back in and Yoh shrugs off a beating in the corner and grabs a dragon screw legwhip. A bunch of forearms rock Sho again and Yoh stomps away at the chest. Sho gets up so Yoh dropkicks him back down, bugging Sho's eyes out as a result. With nothing else working, Sho pulls the referee in the way for a distraction so he can spear Yoh down. Now it's Sho hitting his own stomps, setting up a powerbomb and crossarm piledriver for two.

What sounds like Shock Arrow is countered into a Calf Crusher (or close enough) and Sho is in trouble. Cue Sho's manager Dick Togo for a distraction though and Sho's tap is missed. Yoh gets caught in a triangle choke but keeps his arm up, allowing him to kind of dance over to the ropes. Togo throws in a wrench, but Yoh sends Sho into him, setting up the

bridging cradle to finish Sho at 12:33.

**Rating:** C+. Nice choice for an opener here as they have a rather detailed history and Yoh gets to overcome the odds/cheating to win. I can't imagine this is the end of their feud but at least Yoh gets the big win. They didn't do anything groundbreaking here but sometimes you need a story that is easy to understand and covers all of the bases, which is what they did here.

Post match Sho and Togo go after him again but Yoh clears them out without much effort.

### Bullet Club vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi/Mega Coaches

It's Kenta/Taiji Ishimori/El Phantasmo for the Club and the Mega Coaches are Ryusuke Taguchi/Rocky Romero. This is mainly a preview for Tanahashi vs. Kenta, who are facing off for Kenta's US Title tomorrow, though the other four are involved in a triple threat Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Title match tomorrow as well. Romero and Phantasmo start things off, with the latter cartwheeling out of a hurricanrana attempt.

A middle rope hurricanrana takes Phantasmo down though and it's off to Taguchi vs. Ishimori. Taguchi sends him into the corner and it's the Coaches alternating running shots in the corner to Phantasmo and Ishimori. Kenta comes in and is sent into the back of Taguchi's tights (it's his thing) so his partners tie Taguchi in the Tree of Woe for a painful double stomp.

We settle down to Phantasmo doing about ten springboards into a back rake, allowing Ishimori to come in for a rake to the eyes. Taguchi gets out of the way in a hurry though and the hot tag brings in Tanahashi to clean house. A dragon screw legwhip takes Kenta down but the referee gets knocked outside.

Kenta hits a DDT on Tanahashi and since there is no referee, the kendo stick comes in to keep Tanahashi in trouble. The

Coaches come back in for the save though and the dives take out Phantasma and Ishimori. Tanahashi grabs the kendo stick and unloads on Kenta, earning himself the DQ from the revived referee at 8:40.

**Rating:** C. Pretty run of the mill tag match here, which was little more than a way to set things up for tomorrow. That's a perfectly fine way to go, as the match did its job well, with some good enough action. Tanahashi snapping is cool to see, and should make the No DQ title match that much better. Not a great match, but it did what it needed to do.

### United Empire vs. Los Ingobernables de Japon

That would be Will Ospreay/Great-O-Khan/Jeff Cobb vs. Tetsuya Naito/Sanada/Bushi. It's also a double preview, as tomorrow we have Khan vs. Sanada and Naito vs. Cobb. Ospreay also has his REAL World Title, as he never lost the title but was stripped due to an injury. Cobb mocks Naito with the Tranquilo pose during his entrance for a nice little mind game.

The Empire jumps them before the bell and we start fast, as probably fits for the villains. Cobb drives Naito hard into the corner and everyone is on the floor in a hurry. They get back inside with Khan kneeling and chopping Naito down for two. Ospreay comes back in, sends Naito into the corner, and hands it back to Cobb (because he is smart enough to not waste energy before his World Title match tomorrow). Naito manages to get a breather from Cobb and Los Ingobernables come in for a series of dropkicks.

Sanada Paradise Locks Khan, who manages to send Sanada outside. Khan can't bring himself to dive though, instead settling for a head and arm choke back inside. That's broken up and Sanada manages a springboard missile dropkick, allowing the tag off to Bushi. Khan runs him over as well so it's back to Ospreay for a Phenomenal Forearm. Everything breaks down and it's Sanada vs. Khan again, with neither being able to hit

a finisher. Ospreay can't Stormbreaker Bushi but he can powerbomb him for two. The Hidden Blade is enough to finish Bushi at 9:29.

**Rating:** C+. This was a more interesting match and it felt like the people were a bit more invested this time. What amazes me the most is Khan, who was in one of the weaker matches at last year's show but has completely turned things around. He was an effective looking monster here and a good part of the match. Ospreay did look to be a few steps ahead of everyone else here and once he stayed in, the match didn't last long. Logical match here and they had some energy so well done.

A lot of glaring ensues post match and the Empire seems to promise to win tomorrow.

#### Ren Narita vs. Katsuyori Shibata

Shibata is a rather hard hitter who has been out of action since 2018 after an injury seemed to force him into retirement. He wrestled a special rules match back in October but this is his first regular match. Well regular enough, as strikes are prohibited and it is catch as catch can rules. Narita is a surprise opponent and one of Shibata's students. Before the bell, Shibata challenges Narita to make this regular rules and it's game on.

They go with the grapple off to start with neither being able to get very far. Commentary talks about Karl Gotch being such a huge influence on wrestling in Japan. They fight over a headlock until Shibata misses the PK. Instead it's a Figure Four to put Narita in trouble until a rope is grabbed. Narita is up with a bunch of stomping in the corner and the referee gets shoved down.

Shibata is fine enough to hit an STO and some hard forearms in the corner. There's the running basement dropkick in the corner but Narita counters an armbar into something like a Texas Cloverleaf. That's broken up as well and Shibata strikes

him out to the floor. Back in and Shibata grabs a belly to back suplex into a clothesline, followed by some rapid fire kicks. A sleeper sets up the PK to finish Narita at 11:48.

**Rating:** C. I'm not quite sure what to make of this one, as it was mostly a squash for Shibata but that isn't the point here. This was about Shibata getting to come back on the big stage after his career was over for a few years. It's a feel good moment and having him face his student was a great idea. The point here isn't the match, but rather that the match was able to take place and that is impressive given the layoff.

On March 3, New Japan is back on AXS TV.

Strong Spirits is on February 28.

Intermission.

Never Openweight Title: Evil vs. Tomohiro Ishii

Ishii is defending and Evil has Dick Togo with him. Evil jumps Ishii on the floor and sends him into the post (with the bell ringing as they make contact). It's already time for some chairs and the duel is on. A Togo distraction lets Evil send him into the barricade as this is the hardcore section of the show.

They actually get inside with Ishii being sent hard into the corner as Kelly complains about Togo's interference. Some mocking kicks to the head wake Ishii up and he blasts Evil with a clothesline. The belly to back suplex drops Evil and a heck of a running clothesline out of the corner does it again. A superplex is loaded up and, despite his bad back, Ishii gets him over for another near fall.

Togo offers a distraction though and the referee gets bumped. That's enough for Togo and Yujiro Takahashi to come in and go after Ishii...who clears them off in a hurry. Cue Sho but Yoh comes out to break that up. Another referee comes in and Ishii

hits an enziguri into another clothesline. Yoh cuts off Togo from bringing in the title but the distraction lets Yujiro hit Ishii low. A belt shot and Everything Is Evil gives Evil the title at 12:09.

**Rating:** D+. This felt out of place, as it was all the interference and the weapons not feeling like they belong on this show. Ishii was his usual self, though you can tell he is getting older and doesn't move as well as he did before. Evil seems to be getting a lot bigger though and more built around the weapons and the violence. This really didn't work and was easily the weakest thing on the show so far.

### Tag Team Titles: Chaos vs. Dangerous Tekkers

Hirooki Goto/Yoshi-Hashi are challenging for Chaos after winning the World Tag League. The Tekkers (Zack Sabre Jr./Taichi) have Miho Abe with them. We get a long staredown before the bell until Sabre and Hashi start things off. That doesn't work for Chaos though so Goto comes in for a double shoulder and a bunch of pounding on the back. Everything breaks down in a hurry and all four go outside.

The Tekkers take over and it's Sabre coming back inside for a headscissors on Hashi. Taichi chokes away and Sabre adds a cravate hold, only to have Hashi elbow his way to freedom. Goto comes in for a running shoulder in the corner but Sabre calmly pulls him into an Octopus hold, because Sabre is smooth enough to do just that. Everyone comes in and it's a four way knockdown to give them a breather. The Tekkers are up first with stereo holds, but Goto makes the ropes and Taichi just lets go of Hashi.

Taichi TAKES OFF HIS PANTS, with the distraction allowing Goto to roll Sabre up for two. The European Clutch gives Sabre the same but Sabre is sent outside. Hashi and Taichi slug it out until Hashi gets caught with a belly to back suplex for two. Back up and Hashi hits a superkick, only to charge into a kick

to the face of his own. Hashi kicks Sabre down and it's a superkick into the fireman's carry backbreaker to knock Taichi silly.

A powerbomb/GTR combination connects for two with Sabre having to make the save. Sabre and Goto go outside, leaving Taichi to roll Hashi up for two. Another powerbomb/GTR combination hits Sabre but this time it's Taichi taking both of them down for a breather. Goto is back up with another GTR to Taichi, followed by an assisted powerbomb swung into a neckbreaker to give Hashi the pin and the titles at 15:29.

**Rating:** B-. This felt more like a fight while still being a tag match and that worked well. What was interesting here was the champs didn't exactly feel like they were in control at all near the end, making Hashi and Goto seem rather dominant. It was a good match and the best thing on the show so far, which is a bit of a lower bar to clear than I would have expected.

Respect is shown post match.

### IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title: El Desperado vs. Hiromu Takahashi

Takahashi is challenging after winning the Best of the Super Juniors. Commentary puts over the idea that Desperado is defending but has to beat Takahashi to really stake his claim as a great champion. These two also have a long history together, including a recent time limit draw. They go straight to the slugout to start before chopping it out to keep up the theme. With that not working, it's an exchange of running forearms with neither really getting the better of things again.

Takahashi tries a triangle choke but gets powerbombed away in a hurry. Desperado sends him outside for a dive, only to get caught in a sunset bomb. Back in and the slug it out from their knees with Takahashi knocking him into the corner.

Desperado is back with a spinebuster and something like an abdominal stretch lifted into a powerbomb for two. Takahashi grabs a pop up sitout powerbomb though and they're both down for a bit.

A belly to belly into the corner drops Desperado again and the Dynamite Plunger gives Takahashi two. Takahashi grabs a fireman's carry but Desperado slips out, sending them into a chain of escapes and reversals. Another Time Bomb attempt is countered into a Stretch Muffler, with Desperado going for the arms as well.

That's broken up as well so Takahashi is back up with a hard clothesline. A superkick nails Desperado but he is right back with a sunset driver for two. Desperado cuts him off with a right hand though and a double underhook facebuster gets two more. Takahashi gets dropped by a right hand and two more double underhook facebusters finish for Desperado (with the Undertaker pin) at 16:17.

**Rating:** B+. That's the really good match the show has been needing and it was a heck of a fight. They set up the idea that Desperado didn't just need to win but to flat out defeat Takahashi and that's how it felt in the end. It felt like a major match and potentially an official changing of the guard, which is what commentary said Desperado needed. Awesome match here and the first that really felt worthy of being a major showdown on this show.

IWGP World Heavyweight Title: Kazuchika Okada vs. Shingo Takagi

Okada is challenging and I love that role call of champions deal, even if this title only has a few months of history. This comes after Okada won the G1 Climax, meaning he gets to carry around a belt signifying the title match instead of the briefcase, which is a bit confusing until commentary explains it (like they're supposed to do). Feeling out process to start

(Kelly: "Wrestling start to this championship match.") with neither being able to get very far.

Okada takes him up against the rope and grabs a headlock, which is broken just as quickly. An exchange of shoulders sets up Okada's neckbreaker, followed by a chinlock. Back up and Takagi manages to backdrop him to the floor for a breather. Okada tries a DDT on the floor but gets suplexed for his efforts to bang up his back. They go back inside where a belly to back suplex and a bodyscissors stay on Okada's back some more. Okada fights up and gets in a knockdown of his own, followed by a flapjack and a DDT.

A dropkick knocks Takagi off the top and out to the floor (that really is one of the best dropkicks ever) and there's a big boot to send Takagi over the barricade. The running crossbody over said barricade drops Takagi again and we hit the Money Clip (modified cobra clutch) back inside. That's broken up and Takagi manages a quick DDT for a breather. Something like a Gory Bomb (named after wrapping paper, because it's putting a bow on victories) plants Okada but he counters a clothesline into another Money Clip.

That's broken up and Takagi blasts him with a lariat of his own for a double knockdown. Back up and Takagi strikes the Rainmaker poser to make Okada snap, meaning it's time to trade shots. A hard clothesline drops Okada and they head outside. Okada can't Tombstone him on the ramp but Takagi can hit a Death Valley Driver on said ramp. They both beat the count back in, where Takagi hits a superplex to damage the back even more. Made In Japan is countered and Okada hits a dropkick but the Rainmaker is countered into Made In Japan for two.

Takagi's running clothesline gets two more but Last of the Dragon is countered into the Rainmaker for another double knockdown. They slug it out from their knees and keep it going on their feet with Takagi getting the better of things. Takagi takes him up top, where Okada counters...something into a super

DDT. The Rainmaker is countered again, this time into a hard lariat on Okada. The Tombstone is countered again so Okada settles for the dropkick into the Rainmaker for the pin and the title at 35:52.

**Rating:** A-. That was a very sudden ending to a pretty awesome match. This was about two guys trying to survive with the Rainmaker being the big difference maker. Takagi gave this everything he had and came as close as you could get without the Last of the Dragon connecting. It felt like a heavyweight battle and Okada winning is never a bad thing. Main event quality match here and that's not a surprise.

Post match Okada shows respect to the title, the crowd and Takagi but here is Will Ospreay to interrupt. Ospreay says Okada's gear looks cheap but congratulates him on a hard fought match. He didn't break a sweat in his match so he'll see Okada tomorrow. Okada says goodbye fake champ and an annoyed Ospreay leaves.

With that out of the way, Okada thanks Takagi and wishes the crowd a happy new year. The IWGP Title was a great championship but now it is time for the new belt. However, the original title deserves some applause and Okada promises to lead the company to more great matches. Next year, let's have a full house.

Commentary recaps the night and previews tomorrow's show.

**Overall Rating:** B. This wasn't quite up to the top levels of the show, but that's a pretty lofty goal on any given night. What we got instead was a rather good show, capped off by a pair of awesome matches. The rest of the show was hit or miss, with the Evil vs. Ishii match being rather lame. The last two matches are worth seeing and the rest you might want to pick and choose, but it's certainly a good show and worth a look, even with the scaled back crowd.

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# Wrestle Kingdom XV Night Two: They Did It Again

## Wrestle Kingdom XV Night Two

Date: January 5, 2021

Location: Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 7,801

Commentators: Rocky Romero, Chris Charlton, Kevin Kelly

It's the second half of the biggest New Japan show of the year and as usual, the card is stacked. The main event will see new IWGP Heavyweight/Intercontinental Champion Kota Ibushi defend against Jay White, along with pretty much everything else that wasn't featured on Night One. They have a lot to live up to so let's get to it.

[Here are last week's results if you need a recap.](#)

Note that there were two Stardom dark matches which were not broadcast due to various rights issues.

The opening video runs down the card, in order.

King Of Pro Wrestling Provisional Title: Toru Yano vs. Chase Owens vs. Bad Luke Fale vs. Bushi

So this is a new thing that started last year, where you have to become the Provisional Champion and then defend it throughout the year, with whoever is the final champion at the end of the year winning a trophy. Then the whole thing starts over. Yano was the first champion and this is one fall to a finish. Bushi and Yano chill on the floor to start so Fale heads outside to hammer on Yano while Owens does the same thing to Bushi inside.

Everyone gets inside with Yano rolling Bushi up for two. Yano isn't having this wrestling stuff and pulls off the turnbuckle pad to continue his tradition. Owens saves Bushi from getting hit in the face but Bushi rakes him in the eyes for offering an alliance. Fale and Owens start double teaming Yano but Bushi is back in to low bridge Fale to the floor.

A fisherman's neckbreaker gives Bushi two on Owens as Yano slams Fale in the back of the head. Well he never has seemed like the smartest person. Owens blocks Bushi's top rope Codebreaker but can't hit the package piledriver. Fale comes back in to hit the Grenade Launcher on Bushi but Owens won't let him have the pin. They go after the referee, allowing Yano to come in with the low blow and steal the pin on Bushi for the title at 7:34.

**Rating:** C-. This wasn't supposed to be anything serious and was more or less a warmup match for the rest of the show. It was quick, it gave the fans a smile at the end and lets Yano do his thing. There was no reason to believe that this was going to be anything special and they had a perfectly acceptable match.

## IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Titles: Suzuki-Gun vs. One of Eight

That would be El Desperado/Yoshinobu Kanemura (defending) vs. Ryusuke Taguchi/Master Wato after the challengers (with Hiroyoshi Tenzan) have beaten the champs twice. Wato and Desperado start fast with Wato knocking him to the floor for the big dive. It's off to Taguchi who runs the ropes a lot until Kanemura takes him to the floor for a whip into the barricade. Back in and Kanemura takes advantage of a distracted referee to send Taguchi's knee into a chair.

We settle down a bit with Desperado dropkicking Taguchi's knee out and easily avoiding the hip attack. Taguchi gets over for the tag to Wato though and it's a springboard uppercut to drop Kanemura. The referee is sent into Wato for a distraction, allowing Kanemura to hit an enziguri. Desperado comes back in and gets pulled face first into the back of Taguchi's tights over and over (that's his thing you see). The running hip attack puts Desperado down again and Three Amigos do it one more time.

Desperado and Taguchi counter a few things each until Taguchi grabs a cobra clutch suplex. That just earns him a Stretch Muffler but Taguchi reverses into an ankle lock. A double chickenwing gutbuster gets two on Desperado but he and Taguchi trade rollups for two each. With the other two being knocked outside, Desperado hits Angel's Wings (which had a Spanish name I couldn't make out) to finish Taguchi and retain the titles at 13:21.

**Rating:** C+. This is the kind of match that seems to come and go most years without having much long term meaning. The Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Titles offer some fun matches but they don't exactly seem the most important. It's nice to see the champs retain to let their reign grow a bit and seeing Taguchi lose always makes me smile just a little bit. Pretty nice match too, but it didn't hit anything great.

## Never Openweight Title: Shingo Takagi vs. Jeff Cobb

Shingo is defending and Cobb is part of the Empire. They shove each other around to start and then go to the forearm off, as is the custom for the title. Shingo hits a hiptoss and runs him over with a shoulder but Cobb is right back with a dropkick. That's enough to send Shingo to the floor for some whips into the barricade, followed by a heck of an overhead belly to belly. Back in and an elbow to the face gives Cobb two and we hit the bearhug. That's broken up in a hurry so Cobb suplexes him down again.

They slug it out until Shingo suplexes him out to the apron. Shingo joins him and has to slip out of a Razor's Edge attempt (must fear a bad case of death) before knocking Cobb out to the floor. The big flip dive hits Cobb again and an elbow drop gets two back inside. It's Cobb's turn to hurt him, meaning it's the rolling gutwrench suplexes into a sitout Razor's Edge powerbomb for a big two. Shingo is right back with a Death Valley Driver as they're trading bombs here.

A top rope superplex sends Cobb flying again and there's a German suplex to make it worse. They trade t-bone suplexes and forearm it out until Shingo hits a clothesline but falls to the floor in exhaustion. Shingo dives back in, earning himself a quick piledriver for two more. Tour of the Islands is broken up so Shingo hits Made In Japan for his own near fall.

Cobb snaps off a rebound German suplex into Tour of the Islands but the knee gives out to delay the cover. They're both down with Cobb's knee still bothering him but he's fine enough to hit a backflip fall away slam (Does that mean it's still an away slam?). Tour of the Islands is blocked again and Shingo hits a kind of fall away suplex. A big lariat turns Cobb inside out and Last of the Dragon (kind of a reverse Samoan driver) retains the title at 21:13.

**Rating:** A. Oh yeah this was amazing as these two just beat the

fire out of each other for twenty one minutes. There was nothing scientific about it and there wasn't supposed to be. This was all about two big, strong guys hitting each other really hard and Cobb is born for that kind of match. Great stuff here and if you want one of those old school hoss fights with suplexes thrown in, check this one out, because it's awesome.

### Sanada vs. Evil

They're former partners but Evil (with Dick Togo tonight) turned on him to become Heavyweight Champion. Feeling out process to start with Sanada being thrown outside but he jumps back in as Evil goes to the floor. Back in and Sanada loads up the Paradise Lock for the running kick, sending Evil outside again. This time Evil catches Sanada to drive him into the barricade and some chairs are brought out as well.

Evil and Togo set up a table and Sanada is taken back inside...only to be taken outside again for a whip into the barricade. That's good for two back inside but Sanada gets in a shot to the knee to put Evil down for a change. A dropkick does it again so Sanada has the chance to dive onto Togo. Back in and Togo trips Sanada but Evil can't put him through the ringside table. Instead, Sanada misses a springboard, having to settle for a hanging swinging suplex.

A tiger suplex gives Sanada two but Evil drives him hard into the corner. Evil gets him up top for a superplex into the Scorpion Deathlock, with Sanada diving for the rope. Darkness Falls gets two on Sanada but Evil misses a charge into an exposed (When did that happen?) corner. Sanada's belly to back suplex gets two, only to have Evil swing Sanada's leg into the referee. Togo comes in to beat on Sanada, who kicks Evil into the ropes to crotch Togo (Togo: "OH S\*\*\*!") out to the floor.

Sanada moonsaults over Evil into Skull End (dragon sleeper), which he lets so for a moonsault instead. He tries a second but this time Evil gets his knees up to put them both down. Skull End goes on again so Evil grabs the referee, allowing Togo to choke with a wire from the apron. That's broken up though and Sanada dropkicks Evil into Togo through the

table (There it goes!). Evil panics, kicks out of a rollup, and blasts Sanada with a clothesline for two of his own. Skull End is broken up again so Sanada hits his own Everything Is Evil (Evil's finisher), setting up a pop up TKO. The moonsault finishes Evil for good at 23:45.

**Rating:** B+. This is as easy of a story as you can get, with the tag team splitting up and one of them needing to prove that he is the better man. That's what we got here, with Sanada wrestling the clean match to overcome the villains, including using Evil's own finisher. Rather good match here, and it's easy to see why this was one of the featured showdowns.

We recap Hiromu Takahashi (Best of the Super Juniors) vs. Taiji Ishimori (IWGP Junior Heavyweight Champion) for the title. Takahashi won a #1 contenders match against El Phantasma last night and now he has his title shot.

#### IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title: Hiromu Takahashi vs. Taiji Ishimori

Ishimori is defending and they run the ropes to start, with Takahashi being sent outside. Ishimori's dive is broken up on the apron as Takahashi cuts him off and hits a superkick. The sunset bomb is countered as well so Takahashi powerbombs him hard onto the apron. Takahashi goes WAY up the ramp and runs down but his dropkick is countered into a suplex to cut him down.

Ishimori nails a moonsault down to the floor and then sends Takahashi shoulder first into an exposed turnbuckle (Is that the same buckle from the Yano match? They never replaced it???). The shoulder is banged up but the legs are fine enough to snap off a running headscissors to put Ishimori down. A running dropkick off the apron sends Ishimori hard into the barricade for two back inside but he's back up with the sliding German suplex.

The YES Lock stays on Takahashi's bad arm until a foot on the rope is good for the break. Takahashi counters a charge into a belly to belly into the corner and they're both down for a deserved breather. It's Takahashi up first with a wheelbarrow into a Downward Spiral, followed by the running Death Valley Driver. Ishimori's handspring is countered into

a German suplex but he's right back up with a Canadian Destroyer for another double knockdown.

They slug it out from their knees and then from their feet until Ishimori sends him shoulder first into the post. A shoulderbreaker sets up the YES Lock with Takahashi needing the ropes to keep him alive. Ishimori tries the YES Lock again but this time gets faceplanted down for a delayed two instead. They both try what looks to be a suplex until Ishimori takes him down into a Gargano Escape. With that almost broken, Ishimori lets it go and tries the YES Lock, only to be reversed into a suplex into a faceplant. That lets Takahashi get back up for the Time Bomb 2 for the pin and the title at 25:31.

**Rating:** A-. This was another slugout as both of them were barely able to hang in there until the end, with Takahashi's shoulder nearly doing him in. Takahashi coming back from his injury and winning the title again was a great moment and a great story. Granted it wasn't as spiffy again as the second time, but Takahashi has turned into a huge star around here and the win felt special and was made even better by an awesome match.

Takahashi takes his time getting the title.

We recap Jay White vs. Kota Ibushi for the IWGP Heavyweight and IWGP Intercontinental Titles. Ibushi won the titles last night but lost to White a few months ago. White is the most evil man in the company and it's time to fight him off.

IWGP Heavyweight Title/IWGP Intercontinental Title: Kota Ibushi vs. Jay White

White is challenging and has Gedo with him. White bails to the floor to start but then gets back in for the trash talk. They lock up nearly two minutes after the bell and an early Gedo distraction lets White stomp away. The headlock goes on for a bit but the threat of a big kick to the head sends White bailing to the floor. Gedo offers another distraction on the way back in though, allowing Kota to grab a DDT. A suplex onto the apron bangs up Kota's back and that means a rather long count on the floor.

Back in and a knee to the ribs gets two and the waistlock goes on. Rib stomping ensues and it's a tranquilo pose to keep White's cockiness high. A hard DDT plants Kota again and White yells at the referee as the champ pulls himself up. That's enough for Kota to get in a shot of his own, followed by the standing moonsault for two. They head to the floor with Ibushi's ribs going into the barricade to cut him off again.

Back in and Kota's powerslam looks to set up the middle rope moonsault but White crotches him instead. That means it's time to start working on the leg, followed by a swinging brainbuster for two. Kota manages to send him outside but the knee gives out on the springboard attempt. White shoves him out to the floor and then suplexes him into the corner for two more. Kota grabs a desperation half nelson suplex and they slug it out again. The kneeling Tombstone gives Kota two and they're both down.

It's White up first with a snap belly to back suplex into a Rock Bottom for his own two. Back up and Kota hits his own belly to back for two, followed by a kick to the head. Gedo's distraction breaks up another moonsault though and it's time to go up to tease a dragon superplex (geez). Thankfully that's broken up and White goes after the knee instead. A leglock goes on to put Kota in trouble but he's in the rope in a hurry. White kicks him in the face a few times and gets a "dude really" look from Kota, who gets back to his feet.

Ibushi strikes him down into the corner and tells White to come on. That's fine with White, who is knocked right back down. They do the same thing again, with White getting knocked to the floor. Back in and Kota says hit him but White lays down, telling Ibushi to pin him. Instead, Ibushi unloads on him until the referee tries to intervene, allowing White to get in a low blow. They head outside again with Ibushi going ribs and back first into the barricade and apron.

White gets back inside and tells Ibushi to bring it, earning Kota some German suplexes. It's back to the apron (Kelly: "Oh no.") with Ibushi gets in a kick to the head to rock White for a change. A super German suplex brings White back in for two for a rather near fall but he grabs a sleeper suplex. White hits another one and a RegalPlex is good for two. Blade Runner is broken up but Kota reverses into the big knee to the face

for two and the applause.

The phoenix splash connects but Gedo pulls the referee, sending Kelly into hysterics. Gedo's brass knuckles shot is countered into a big knee to the face so Kota sends the referee back in. The delay lets White hit the Blade Runner for a very close two (first time anyone has ever kicked out) so he pulls Kota down into what looks like a reverse Figure Four.

Kota is nearly to the rope but White pulls him back into the middle. That's not going to happen though as Kota makes it back to the rope again. Bloody Sunday looks to set up another Blade Runner but Kota nails a jumping knee to the face. Another jumping knee sets up a hard lariat into a pair of big knees to retain the titles at 48:05 (the longest match in Dome history).

**Rating:** A. It says a lot that you don't feel a match running nearly fifty minutes but this felt like nothing close to that. Ibushi had a pair of great performances and it makes him look like an even bigger star. White is the kind of heel you want to see get destroyed and having him get kneed in the face works very well. This was a heck of a match and lived up to the main event spot, with the time being a great addition, especially fast the whole thing felt.

Post match here's Sanada to issue the (very respectful) challenge for the titles. Kota talks about how he is more powerful than ever and agrees to the match. With Sanada gone, Kota gives his big speech to wrap it up. Commentary applauds him as he leaves.

The long wrapup ends the night.

**Overall Rating:** A+. This was an interesting one as I wasn't feeling it as much as the first night but aside from the not exactly serious opener, this was one great match after another with nothing being close to bad and a bunch of classics. It's the kind of show that you expect from Wrestle Kingdom and that is a very hard reputation to achieve. Absolutely awesome show though and somehow better than the very good Night One, which is hard to pull off. Yeah it's annoying to have back to back shows this long, but it's once a year so I can't get mad, especially when it's this. Check both nights out, because they're worth the time.

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