

New Column: NXT Takeover: Dallas Preview

I think the name speaks for itself here.

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NXT – March 30, 2016: They Even Go Home Better Than Raw

NXT

Date: March 30, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Corey Graves, Tom Phillips

It's the go home show for Friday's Takeover: Dallas and the card is set in stone. Therefore tonight is all about the final push towards Texas, meaning all six matches are going to get some solid TV time. Announced for tonight is Bull Dempsey vs. Samoa Joe in what should be a good slaughtering. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

American Alpha vs. Corey Hollis/John Skylar

Jordan powers Hollis into the corner to start, easily lifting him up like a small child. Gable comes in and rides Hollis on the mat for a bit before cranking on a hammerlock. Fans: "BREAK IT OFF GABLE, BREAK IT OFF!" It's off to Skylar for a wristlock of his own, only to be taken down with ease. A slingshot armdrag doesn't do much damage but looks very cool, much like a lot of Gable's offense. The jobbers actually get in a

swinging slam on Gable, only to tick him off and earn Hollis and Skylar an overhead belly to belly each. Grand Amplitude puts Hollis away at 4:40.

Rating: C-. Standard squash here with American Alpha looking awesome, just like they were supposed to. The title match on Friday should be a lot more entertaining as the Revival should be a really solid opposition for Gable and Jordan, though I can't imagine anything but new champions.

Finn Balor is tired of hearing about Samoa Joe's obsession with being NXT Champion because he has an obsession of his own. That obsession is the reason that he beat Kevin Owens to become NXT Champion and the way he defeated Samoa Joe the first time back in London. Two more days Joe.

Video on Baron Corbin attacking Austin Aries a few weeks back.

Baron Corbin vs. Mike Culori

Mike actually gets in a dropkick to knock Corbin into the corner to start but it only earns him Deep Six for the pin at 1:17.

Culori gets the End of Days post match.

Video on Shinsuke Nakamura with people talking about how amazing he is.

No Way Jose video.

Revival vs. Tucker Knight/Steve Cutler

Non-title. Dawson takes Cutler into the corner to start and it's quickly off to Wilder, who kicks Cutler in the face to keep control. The slow beating continues with Dawson getting two off a gordbuster. Cutler finally escapes a suplex and it's off to the much bigger Knight to clean house. The champs get Knight to chase them though and it's the Shatter Machine for the pin at 4:45.

Rating: C-. Slow and steady here as is always the case with the Revival. They really do work an old school style and it really does still work, though the fun part is going to be seeing them get knocked off by a more energetic act. It's still cool to see the known jobbers in NXT and it's

even better that they still get in enough offense to make them look credible.

We look at Joe choking Dempsey out last week.

Bull Dempsey thinks Joe is jealous of Dempsey's physique. Tonight though, Joe gets a cheat meal in the form of these two fists.

Apollo Crews vs. Alex Riley

Riley hammers away to start and is looking aggressive like he has in recent appearances. Crews fights up and starts getting athletic though with a jumping clothesline into a nipup, followed by the toss into the Batista Bomb for the pin at 1:58.

Post match here's Elias Samson to sing a song for Crews, warning him to take his time and avoid the danger. Graves: "With a voice like that, no wonder he's homeless." Samson backs away from a challenge though.

Baron Corbin finds it interesting that Austin Aries hasn't showed up since the beatdown a few weeks ago. After Dallas, Aries can "go sit next to Virgil at one of those conventions and beg people to remember him." Oh man that was glorious.

Video on Bayley vs. Asuka, focusing on Bayley growing up in front of our eyes and becoming a role model for all fans from men to women to children. Then Asuka debuted and was immediately the most dangerous woman in NXT. As Graves put it: "Don't disrespect Asuka or she'll kick you in the skull." The women aren't sure who to pick because Bayley will never quit but Asuka is like nothing anyone has ever faced before. This was the only match they could have gone with and it's going to be awesome.

Sami Zayn is ready for Nakamura, even though he has an Intercontinental Title match of his own two days later. He knows a thing or two about making a name for yourself in NXT and doesn't think he would be here if he hadn't beaten Cesaro three years back. Yeah he may face Nakamura again down the line but there's only one chance to make a first impression at the biggest NXT show ever on the biggest wrestling weekend ever. Sami isn't about to step aside and let Nakamura make his name that easily.

Samoa Joe vs. Bull Dempsey

Dempsey runs him over to start and fires off some heavy right hands in the corner. Joe gets bored being on defense though and kicks Bull in the head, followed by an STO and the Koquina Clutch for the submission at 1:31.

William Regal has to send wrestlers down to break the Clutch but Joe beats them up as well. The hold goes on again until Finn Balor runs in for the real save. Balor dropkicks him into the barricade but Joe drags him to the announcers' table as this turns into a fight. Security holds them apart until Balor dives off the table with an AJ Styles forearm. They're finally separated to wrap things up.

Overall Rating: B+. This was a show where the wrestling meant nothing. Instead this was all about hyping up Takeover and that's exactly what they did. Every match got some time or some kind of a buildup package and I want to see Takeover more than I did coming into tonight. Friday looks like a great night of wrestling matches and that's exactly what Takeover has become: two hours of entertaining wrestling, which is all it needs to be.

Results

American Alpha b. Corey Hollis/John Skylar – Grand Amplitude to Hollis

Baron Corbin b. Mike Culori – Deep Six

Revival b. Tucker Knight/Steve Cutler – Shatter Machine to Knight

Apollo Crews b. Alex Riley – Toss sitout powerbomb

Samoa Joe b. Bull Dempsey – Koquina Clutch

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NXT – March 23, 2016: Business As Usual

NXT

Date: March 23, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

We're getting very close to Takeover: Dallas with just two shows to go before perhaps the biggest show in the history of the promotion. The card is almost entirely set now and it should be interesting to see how they final building process goes. NXT tends to be good at this so hopefully the trend continues. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Elias Samson vs. Johnny Gargano

Samson is still undefeated and starts fast by pounding Johnny down in the corner. I'm hoping this doesn't turn into a squash as Gargano deserves better for the Johnny Wrestling name alone. With Johnny down, Samson gets a bit distracted by going into something like a trance. Samson charges into a boot in the corner and eats a kick to the head, only to catch a charging Johnny with a knee to the ribs. Another jumping knee is countered with a quick rollup to give Gargano the pin at 2:18. Well that was sudden.

Samson lays Gargano out with the neckbreaker post match and sends him

into the post for good measure. He loads up another neckbreaker on the ramp but Apollo Crews comes out for the save.

Takeover video.

Rich Swann vs. Finn Balor

Non-title of course. Balor takes him to the mat with a wristlock to start and Rich can't get to his feet. Instead it's off to a headlock before the champ easily takes it down to a hammerlock. Back up and a good looking dropkick staggers Balor, followed by a spinning kick to the face. Another dropkick puts Balor on the floor and the fans are behind Swann here. Balor is all fired up now though and sends Swann outside on the other side for a hard kick to the head. The Coup de Grace sets up Bloody Sunday for the pin on Swann at 5:22.

Rating: C+. I can always go for a quick match where a big name actually has to break a sweat to beat someone a few levels beneath him. It's also a good idea to get Balor out there every now and then to make sure that people don't forget how good he really is. They're doing a nice job with Swann in his first two matches as he's gotten to show off in losing efforts.

Emma and Dana Brooke are ready for Emma's rematch with Asuka. Dana has been helping her train and tonight Emma is going to do the job. She also confirms that she's been out due to injury.

Sarah Dobson vs. Alexa Bliss

Bliss is back in the old pink attire. Dobson takes her into the corner to start but misses a charge to give Bliss a quick two. We hit an armbar on Dobson as the announcers argue over how big a star Bliss really is. Bliss misses a charge in the corner and Dobson gets two off a high cross body. This brings Blake and Murphy to the apron for a distraction and cheap shot, setting up the Sparkle Splash to give Bliss the pin at 4:12.

Rating: D. Much like on the main roster, you can really see the line between the wrestlers and the Divas. Bliss is really just out there because of her looks instead of her ring skills, though she's awesome as

the evil heel manager. Dobson wasn't bad from what I can see here and I know she's done some good stuff out on the indies.

Samoa Joe has nothing to say.

Bull Dempsey vs. Danny Burch

Well this is a bit more awkward. No match though as Samoa Joe comes out and destroys both guys before shouting about how he's coming for Balor and the title.

Video on the awesomeness that is American Alpha with the two of them talking about their paths through the amateur ranks towards NXT. None of that matters unless they win the NXT Tag Team Titles though.

Jose No Way is coming.

Emma vs. Asuka

Emma actually takes over with a headlock to start but Asuka reverses into one of her own. A jumping cross armbreaker has Emma in major trouble and the flying hip attack gets two for Asuka as we take a break. Back with Asuka working on a hammerlock until she gets bored and switches over to an ankle lock.

Emma finally kicks her to the floor and starts pounding away before putting her feet on Asuka's shoulders and pulling at the arms. It's off to a regular chinlock with Emma putting her knee in the back. As has been the case all match, the hold is quickly broken so Emma can put her in the Tree of Woe for some shots to the ribs.

Asuka is up at two though and the frustration is starting to set in. They run the ropes a few times until another hip attack drops Emma as the comeback begins. Emma dropkicks her into the ropes but Asuka bounces off for another hip attack. A good looking German suplex sends Emma flying and it's the Asuka Lock for the tap out at 15:14.

Rating: B. This was a very nice change of pace as these two still have some nice chemistry together. They were going with an enhanced version of the same formula from Balor vs. Swann here as the bigger name had to work

harder than expected with a challenger. They've done an awesome job of setting up Bayley and Asuka as unstoppable, meaning the match is going to have some awesome buzz going on.

Overall Rating: C+. Nothing great here but the build towards the big show has been awesome so far. The card is mostly set at this point and there's only so much that a few more TV shows are going to be able to do. They're doing a good job of going around the card and giving everything a good build so I actually have some faith in what they might be able to pull off in Dallas.

Results

Johnny Gargano b. Elias Samson – Rollup

Finn Balor b. Rich Swann – Bloody Sunday

Alexa Bliss b. Sarah Dobson – Sparkle Splash

Asuka b. Emma – Asuka Lock

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NXT – March 2, 2016: An Old Friend

NXT

Date: March 2, 2016

Location: CFE Arena, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

It's a big night for NXT as we have a past great name coming in to face off with NXT Champion Finn Balor on the finale of the Orlando tapings with Neville coming back for one night only. In addition to that we're getting closer to the big showdown in a 2/3 falls match next week with Sami Zayn vs. Samoa Joe for the #1 contendership. Let's get to it.

We open with a quick video on Balor vs. Neville later tonight.

Opening sequence.

Hugo Knox/Tucker Knight vs. Vaudevillains

Knox is rather tattooed which I don't remember about him last time he got squashed. A dropkick puts Aiden in the corner but he quickly takes over and brings in Gotch for a chinlock. The announcers mention the Vaudevillains being up to their old ways to confirm their heel turn, which is probably the best move for a team called the VILLAINS. English kicks away and it's back to Gotch for another chinlock on Knox. Everything breaks down and the Whirling Dervish pins Knight at 3:33.

Rating: D+. Just a squash here with the Vaudevillains being back as the heels they should have been all along. I don't think they have much of a chance of getting back to the title picture but a feud with the Hype Bros feels like an older feud where the announcers just start talking about how they're having issues, setting up a big match later. Yeah they fought once but it was hardly anything huge. We don't need to have them come out here and fight or stare at each other every week. It worked back then so let's try it again today. It just might work better than having them fight over and over until people get sick of them.

Emma and Dana Brooke aren't impressed with women like Deonna Purrazzo and promise to win tonight.

Finn Balor video.

We look back at Dash Wilder/Scott Dawson attacking Enzo Amore outside the Performance Center until Big Cass made the save.

Enzo and Cass promise to stand over Dawson and Wilder as Tag Team Champions.

Dawson and Wilder (now collectively known as the Revival) blame Enzo and Cass for the attack.

Enzo/Cass vs. Revival for the Tag Team Titles at Roadblock.

Emma vs. Santana Garrett

Garrett used to be Brittany in TNA. Emma sends her into the buckle to start and pounds her into a butterfly suplex. There's a move you don't see very often anymore. Some kicks to the back (there's a more popular one) has Santana in trouble and another big kick stops a comeback bid. We hit the double arm crank as this has been one sided so far. Now we get the real comeback as Santana gets in a Russian legsweep, only to have Emma crotch her on top. Something like a curb stomp sets up the Emma Lock for the tap out at 5:38.

Rating: D+. Another glorified squash here with Emma getting to look good, even if there's little for someone on her level to do. Asuka vs. Bayley is going to be the big feud for the next month and I don't see anyone outside of Nia Jax being the next big challenger for whoever survives there. Emma has gotten better in the ring but I'd rather she be on her own as Brooke really doesn't add all that much.

William Regal tells Eva Marie and Nia Jax that they'll be facing Bayley and Asuka at some point in the near future.

Regal is in the ring after a break and introduces the latest talent acquisition: Austin Aries. The fans and announcers are WAY into this but Baron Corbin jumps Aries during his entrance and lays him out with the

End of Days on the floor. Corbin to Regal: "AN EYE FOR AN EYE!"

Elias Samson vs. Steve Cutler

Cutler seems to annoy Samson for some reason and gets punched in the face for his efforts. Maybe he didn't drop a dollar in the guitar case. A suplex and some elbow drops have Steve crawling on the mat but Samson stops for some air guitar. Samson's quick neckbreaker is enough for the pin at 3:03.

Rating: D+. I could go for something other than a squash at this point as they haven't been filling up the extra time with good promos like in the old NWA formula. Samson is turning into more than I was expecting but he still needs a big win over someone to take that next step. I don't know how well he's going to do and I'd call him a longshot at the moment but anything is better than jobbing like he did for all those months.

The Hype Bros are glad they lost the first match to the Vaudevillains and think they should take them out early. The Vaudevillains are listening and smile.

Neville video.

Finn Balor vs. Neville

Non-title and they have a ton of time here. It's a battle of the wristlocks to start with neither guy being able to get very far. Finn's headlock only works for a few moments and it's Neville smacking him in the face with a dropkick. Now it's Neville working on the headlock until he drops Finn with a hard kick to the ribs. Neville doesn't seem to know what to do against Balor so he kicks Finn down another time and we take a break.

Back with the fans getting behind Finn to get him out of a chinlock as Neville is the default heel here. Finn gets up again and catches a charging Neville with a backdrop over the top, sending him head first onto the steps to really wake up the crowd. Neville pops to his feet though and sends Balor outside for a great looking moonsault. It's time for another chinlock but Balor gets up with a great looking Pele to

stagger Neville.

Some kicks (hard ones too) get near falls on Neville but he comes right back with the rapid fire kicks and a pair of German suplexes. The Red Arrow is broken up with a running enziguri and Balor hits the big flip dive to put Neville down on the floor. That's still not enough for the Coup de Grace though as Neville crotches him again.

Neville has to bail out of the Red Arrow though and gets caught in a Sling Blade for a VERY close two. They're trading bombs here and the fans are getting more and more into it every time. Balor dropkicks him into the corner and nails the Coup de Grace, followed by Bloody Sunday for the pin at 18:40.

Rating: B+. This was a great chess game as Neville was way too cocky to start until he got serious and had to trade big shots with Balor, who he seemed to underestimate early on. People forget how good Neville can be when he's doing stuff besides high spots and that's what we got here: a long wrestling match built around high spots but still with enough wrestling and storytelling to keep the fans hooked from bell to bell.

They shake hands and applaud each other post match.

Joe says next week should be easy and calls Sami Zayn ungrateful. Sami thinks Joe is trying to come in here and take whatever he wants at Sami's expense. Joe gets in his face and brings up saving Sami from Kevin Owens. That was Joe saving his career but next week he's taking it away. I'm really digging this stuff with the interviews hyping up a match from next week to close out the show. So many times Raw is wrapped up to end the week and it gets annoying.

Overall Rating: C+. It's really hard to have a single match save a show but that's what they did here. This was a bunch of nothing until two guys got to spend nearly a third of the show beating each other up and showing how great the in ring product around here really can be. Really fun main event here and it actually makes up for the uninteresting stuff that got us here.

Results

Vaudevillains b. Hugh Knox/Tucker Knight – Whirling Dervish to Knight

Emma b. Santana Garrett – Emma Lock

Elias Samson b. Steve Cutler – Neckbreaker

Finn Balor b. Neville – Bloody Sunday

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NXT – February 10, 2016: Hug Her Up

NXT

Date: February 10, 2016

Location: CFE Arena, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

We're on the road again and in this case we have a big main event with Bayley defending the Women's Title against her friend Carmella. This isn't quite on the level of the Takeover shows and title shots but the big TV shows are almost always good with this hopefully being no exception. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

The arena looks almost the same as Full Sail, save for the lack of a ramp.

Baron Corbin vs. Johnny Gargano

The fans chant for JOHNNY WRESTLING and he avoids a charge in the corner before pounding in left hands. Corbin will have none of that and throws Gargano around, followed by some heavy stomping in the corner. We get some good old fashioned yelling at the referee before Corbin slaps on a cobra clutch. Gargano reverses into a choke but gets sent hard into the Deep Six. End of Days is countered with a HARD superkick for two and Corbin rolls to the floor where he's almost out on his feet. Gargano goes right after him but walks into End of Days for the pin at 5:50.

Rating: C. Gargano is a good hand in there and the Johnny Wrestling name is awesome. I don't think anyone was expecting Corbin to lose again here but it was cool to see someone get close like that. Nice opener here as it's almost always worth seeing a match happening for the sake of having a match, especially when it starts the show.

We look back at the end of Zayn vs. Joe vs. Corbin.

Sami is disappointed in the ruling but is willing to go through whatever to get the NXT Title back.

Vaudevillains vignette.

Hype Bros vs. Corey Hollis/John Skyler

Graves is all over Mojo as the announcers disagree over whether the Internet Title is still being defended. Ryder dropkicks Hollis in the face to start and it's off to Rawley, who declares that Hollis AIN'T HYPED. A double clothesline sends Hollis and Skyler out to the floor and the Hype Bros are in control as you would expect. Back in and Ryder gets in a bit of trouble before Hollis charges into some knees. The hot tag brings in Rawley to clean house and Ryder adds a Broski Boot. The Hype Ryder puts Hollis away at 3:32.

Rating: D+. Just a squash here but the Hype Bros continue to have some excellent energy out there. There's nothing wrong with a fun team who beats up the lower level acts but then goes nowhere against the top level guys. Let the Hype Bros be a goofy team and then have them lose to some more important team and everything will be fine.

Bayley says keeping the title has been harder than winning it but she's not ready to let it go yet. Carmella is ready to make the most of her shot and their friendship isn't in jeopardy.

Alexa Bliss vs. Cameron

I had forgotten about Cameron and her entrance talking (I hear no singing anywhere) of Girl Bye. Cameron armdrags her down before choking on the middle rope. Alexa snaps the throat across the top rope and the fans are really pleased with Bliss' aggression. Bliss is instantly the face here as the fans start booing Cameron out of the building on near principle alone. It's nowhere near Eva Marie's level but they clearly don't want to see her.

Cameron gets two off a running flip neckbreaker but Bliss puts her down and misses the moonsault into the double knees. It doesn't matter as Cameron sells it anyway (this one was on Bliss as her knees didn't really even get close to connecting), setting up the Sparkle Splash for the pin at 4:13.

Rating: D-. Other than Bliss looking good, this was a borderline disaster. Cameron is some kind of weird flashback to the horrifying days of Divas past where they were all about the looks and how well they filled out tight costumes. This is a different era and the women like Cameron just aren't going to cut it when we're likely about to see Bayley carry Carmella to a good match in a few minutes.

Enzo and Cass are ready to start their pursuit of back to back Tag Teams of the Year. Enzo: "We're back to back like Lethal Weapon 2." American Alpha comes in to say this is their year before hyping up an eight man tag next week.

Elias Samson vs. Jesse Sorensen

Corey starts things off with a big rant about going to Pittsburgh and being disgusted by all the people playing Nickleback songs as Samson cleans house. The fans get in a DRIFT AWAY chant at Samson, who responds by dropping knees and ripping at Jesse's face. The snap neckbreaker is good enough to pin Soresen at 2:38.

We look back at Finn Balor pinning Apollo Crews last week.

Crews has no regrets and promises a new Crews next time.

Women's Title: Carmella vs. Bayley

Carmella is challenging. After the Big Match Intros, it's time to trade some early holds with neither of them getting the advantage. Carmella's wristlock has Bayley in some trouble but the fans get her back up with a "HUG HER UP BAYLEY! HUG HER UP!" chant. Bayley slams her down and we take a break.

Back with Bayley cranking on the arms but Carmella slams her into the mat a few times. A hurricanrana staggers Bayley but she sends Carmella into the buckle to take over. Bayley gets sent to the floor though and Carmella actually busts out a suicide cross body for an NXT chant. She even does it again for two back inside and the Staten Island Shuffle looks to set up crossface, only to have Bayley cradle her for two. We hit a nice pinfall reversal sequence with some very close rollups until Bayley keeps her down for the pin at 11:03.

Rating: C+. Yep Bayley is amazing. This was all the match needed to be and Carmella got to have the match of her career so far out there. No one was expecting this to be a masterpiece or even very good so just a nice wrestling match with little drama is just fine. It's all about Takeover for Bayley now and that's all it should be about.

Post match Eva Marie and Nia Jax beat Carmella down. Bayley gets taken out as well until Asuka makes the save. Asuka looks at Bayley's title and smiles that creepy grin of hers.

Samoa Joe says that Sami has no triple threat to hide behind next week. I like this whole ending the show with a promo for the upcoming show. You

don't get that enough.

Overall Rating: B-. Just a nice wrestling show this week which seemed to set up one of the title matches for Dallas. As usual they were going about their business and getting things done as they needed to. Next week's match will be fun and should give us another match for Takeover (if not earlier) as things continue to roll along very nicely around here.

Results

Baron Corbin b. Johnny Gargano – End of Days

Hype Bros b. Corey Hollis/John Skyler – Hype Ryder to Hollis

Alexa Bliss b. Cameron – Sparkle Splash

Elias Samson b. Jesse Sorensen – Swinging neckbreaker

Bayley b. Carmella – Rollup

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NXT – January 27, 2016: The Road To More Good Wrestling

NXT

Date: January 27, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

Tonight is a big night as we find out the #1 contender for the NXT Title with the title shot potentially coming at Takeover: Dallas over Wrestlemania weekend. We have Baron Corbin vs. Sami Zayn vs. Samoa Joe in a triple threat match with the winner getting a shot at some point in the future. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

American Alpha vs. Blake and Murphy

The announcers accuse Bliss of staring at Jordan as he starts with Murphy. Jason gets his kick to the ribs caught but keeps jumping over the attempted legsweeps. It's off to Gable to start in on the arm but a hair pull stops his twisting. Blake comes in and is taken down just as fast as Gable is clearly just having fun with both of them in there. Chad dives over him a few times into some armdrags and throws, followed by a crucifix for two.

We get the GABLE chants to the Kurt Angle tune until Murphy claims a knee injury. Of course it's a gold bricking job as he waves Murphy over for a distraction to set up a chop block on Gable. It's time to start in on the leg until Gable kicks Murphy over the top and out to the floor for a crash. The hot tag brings in Jordan for suplexes all around, capped off by Grand Amplitude on Blake at 7:23.

Rating: C+. It's clear that American Alpha is about five steps ahead of everyone else in the division but we're likely going to wait a bit before they get to go after the titles. At least we get to be entertained while we wait for them to go for the titles though as this was a clinic on

dismantling a lower level team. Fun stuff here.

Emma is ready for Carmella next week because Bayley carried the team last week. Carmella has never actually done anything around here and she even lost to Blue Pants.

Stills of Sami Zayn entering the Royal Rumble.

Video on Asuka.

Nia Jax vs. Liv Morgan

Eva Marie is out with Jax as we still wait to know why they're associated. Morgan tries to power Jax around to start and gets caught in an easy cobra clutch. A jawbreaker staggers Jax a bit, only to have a side slam set up the legdrop for the pin at 2:10.

Carmella is ready for Emma next week and promises to beat her all alone. Enzo and Cass aren't impressed by Dash and Dawson either and promises to take care of them as soon as they can.

Video on Baron Corbin.

We get the same sinister Vaudevillains vignette from last week.

Bull Dempsey vs. Alex Riley

The fans chant WELCOME BACK as Bull does jumping jacks. Riley takes him down to start and we're in an early chinlock. Bull pops up with left hands but walks into a spinebuster, followed by a knee to the face to give Riley the pin at 2:07.

After a break, Riley says he's tired of watching NXT and never hearing his name mentioned.

Elias Samson vs. John Skyler

Samson whips him into the corner to start and scores with a quick dropkick. A right hand drops Skyler and Samson sits in the corner ala Raven. Back up and Samson grabs a very fast swinging neckbreaker for the pin at 1:57.

The Hype Bros aren't impressed by the Vaudevillains' new videos. This turns into a discussion of Mojo watching Ryder sleep.

Video on Samoa Joe.

We look at Finn Balor vs. Apollo Crews from a few months back where Corbin interfered to break it up. They fight again in a non-title match next week.

Baron Corbin vs. Samoa Joe vs. Sami Zayn

Winner is #1 contender. They circle each other to start until Corbin hits Joe in the face for a bit of a surprise. Sami low bridges Baron to the floor but Joe breaks up the dive and pulls Zayn to the floor. Baron gets a boot to the chest to keep Joe in control and Sami gets punched down in the corner. A knee drop misses Sami but Corbin comes back in to jump Sami from behind.

We take a break and come back with Joe still on the floor and Corbin charging into an elbow in the corner. That means it's time for Joe to come back in, only to be taken down by Sami. Corbin and Joe are knocked outside and it's finally time to connect with the running flip dive. Back in and Corbin grabs a quick Deep Six for two on Sami, only to get kicked in the face by Joe. Sami fights out of the Muscle Buster and grabs the Blue Thunder Bomb for two on Corbin.

The knockout lets Joe pull Sami to the floor for a quick Koquina Clutch before walking into End of Days. Sami dives back in to break up the cover and Corbin is livid. He pounds on Sami in the corner but runs into the exploder, followed by the Helluva Kick with Joe making the save this time. Joe gets sent to the floor so Sami puts Corbin in a Sharpshooter with Joe coming back in to add a Crossface. Corbin taps at 15:33 and we've got two winners.

Rating: B. If this means we get Joe vs. Sami down the line, I have zero issues with this finish. Corbin gets to save some face by getting caught in a double submission which would make almost anyone tap so everyone comes out looking strong. Really solid main event here and another good story being told.

Both guys say they won so here's GM William Regal to say he'll have to review the tape and make a decision on this controversy.

Overall Rating: B. Another good week here and again we have more stuff to look forward to next week. They're really nailing these ideas as we get ready for the big show down in Dallas. The ending has been looking forward to the fallout which should be another awesome match between Sami and Joe. As usual, building to good wrestling is the right idea and NXT keeps nailing it.

Results

America Alpha b. Blake and Murphy – Grand Amplitude to Blake

Nia Jax b. Liv Morgan – Legdrop

Alex Riley b. Bull Dempsey – Knee to the jaw

Elias Samson b. John Skyler – Swinging neckbreaker

Sami Zayn and Samoa Joe b. Baron Corbin – Sharpshooter and Crossface at the same time

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NXT – January 13, 2016: That Weird Starting Point

NXT

Date: January 13, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

It's the first regular show of the new year and we're at the start of a new taping cycle. We've got a few months to go before we get to the next Takeover, assuming there isn't another one before Wrestlemania weekend. In addition to that, we're getting something like the NXT Slammy Awards tonight with the end of the year awards. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

The announcers welcome us to the show for a change.

Here's General Manager William Regal to announce tonight's main event: a battle royal for the #1 contendership to the Women's Title. With that out of the way, Regal introduces someone who hasn't been here in a long time: Sami Zayn.

Sami thinks the fans remember him but gets cut off by OLE and WELCOME BACK chants. In case you don't know him, he's the lead singer of a band and that OLE chant is their lead single. He's also a man responsible for building NXT and making what it is today. They just sold out a UK tour but it's nice to be back home at Full Sail University. Sami is back for a reason though, and that is to become the first ever two time NXT Champion.

This brings out Samoa Joe who doesn't seem to think much of Sami's plans. Joe doesn't know why Sami thinks he deserves another shot because the last time he had a title shot, it was Joe who had to come out here and save him. Finn Balor barely survived against Joe in London so if Sami wants to keep his shoulder in one piece, he better walk away right now.

Now it's Baron Corbin interrupting to say that he actually won at Takeover. While Sami was gone, he was surpassed by someone more durable so Sami needs to go to the back of the line. Joe brings up choking Corbin out and tells Sami to mind his place in his ring. The ring is Sami's place but Corbin jumps him from behind, only to get kicked in the face and knocked to the floor. Joe backs off from Sami who is left standing alone.

Bayley says she survived against Nia Jax instead of actually winning. Tonight she's looking forward to seeing who survives in the battle royal and she might even give the winner a hug. She actually does hug Rich Brennan.

It's time for the End of the Year Award winners, announced in a video package. The trophies are golden ring bells.

Tag Team of the Year: Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady

Female Competitor of the Year: Bayley

Male Competitor of the Year: Finn Balor

NXT Takeover of the Year: Takeover: Brooklyn

Match of the Year: Bayley vs. Sasha Banks – Takeover: Brooklyn

Overall Competitor of the Year: Finn Balor

Tommaso Ciampa vs. Danny Burch

Ciampa takes him down by the arm to start but Burch gets up and scores with a middle rope dropkick to take over. That just ticks Ciampa off so he blasts Burch in the face with a forearm. Something like a hanging Downward Spiral off the top rope gets two for Ciampa but Burch pops him in the jaw for the same. They slug it out until Ciampa takes him down and grabs a flip over armbar (picture Becky Lynch's Disarm-Her but with Ciampa laying over Burch's back instead of sitting on the shoulder) for the tap out at 3:42.

Rating: C. This was a hard hitting brawl while it lasted but I'm not

entirely sold on Ciampa. The armbar was a nice finisher but it seems like almost everyone is using a submission hold these days. As usual though, NXT does a great job of using jobbers to set up bigger stars, which is almost unheard of on the main roster for the last several years.

Enzo and Cass say they haven't forgotten about Dash and Dawson taking them out. The champs hid behind a woman like chicken tenders and next time business will be finished.

Billie Kay, Deonna Purrazzo and Emma all say they'll win the battle royal.

Two weeks from tonight, Sami Zayn vs. Samoa Joe vs. Baron Corbin for the #1 contendership.

Scott Dawson/Dash Wilder vs. Ascension

Non-title. Wilder gets in Viktor's face to start but gets pounded into the corner for his efforts. Ascension is the clear crowd favorite here which is really strange to see. It's off to Dawson, who has a bit more luck by taking Viktor to the mat for two. The champs beat Viktor down in the corner and we hit the chinlock for a bit. Viktor fights up and catches Dawson in an STO, allowing for the hot tag off to Konnor. The flapjack drops Wilder and everything breaks down, allowing a blind tag to set up the Shatter Machine on Konnor for the pin at 4:10.

Rating: C+. I liked this a bit better and it's probably due to the false hope that Ascension might actually start being booked like a power team instead of the goofs they've been since their Raw debut. Or maybe it was the Shatter Machine which is a really awesome looking finisher for such a slow paced team.

Nia Jax isn't medically cleared for the battle royal. Eva Marie says she has this.

Carmella, Peyton Royce and Alexa Bliss say they'll win.

Elias Samson vs. Corey Hollis

Samson forearms him down to start and stomps away in the corner. A throw

sends Hollis flying and Samson stop to laugh. Samson looks down at him before grabbing a hard swinging neckbreaker for the pin at 2:20.

Samson says what this place needs is what he is.

Finn Balor says the match against Samoa Joe was the most draining match of his career but he faces every challenger head to head. Now he's just going to wait to find out his next opponent. Corbin thinks he's the uncrowned champion, Sami is a friend and Joe is the one that will never go away.

Cameron, Aliyah, Asuka and Liv Morgan promise to win. Well Cameron promises to win the battle royal to become #1 contender to the Women's battle royal but you get the idea.

Battle Royal

Carmella, Peyton Royce, Alexa Bliss, Aliyah, Cameron, Liv Morgan, Billie Kay, Deonna Purrazzo, Emma, Eva Marie, Asuka

Eva gets right in Asuka's face to start and is quickly dropped with a shot to the face. The other nine all circle Asuka with Emma jumping her, starting everyone else into a brawl. Eva is out on the floor but not eliminated, likely to reduce her chances of severely injuring someone during the match.

We take an early break and come back with no eliminations but Cameron throws Aliyah out a few seconds later. Cameron gets rid of Purrazzo as well, followed by Morgan botching something that looked like a powerbomb. She tries it again but Bliss comes up from behind and tosses Morgan and Cameron at the same time. Emma gets Carmella in the Dilemma to send her underneath the ropes and out to the floor, meaning no elimination. Bliss chokes Emma, only to be put on the apron and punched off for an elimination.

We're down to Emma, Royce, Kay, Asuka, Eva and Carmella, with the final two on the floor. Emma has to kick away the other two Australians, only to have Asuka kick her out of the corner for an elimination. Billie and Peyton put Asuka on the apron but of course start fighting over who gets

to eliminate her. Asuka puts them both on the apron and hip attacks both of them to the floor to get us down to three. Eva sneaks in and eliminates Asuka, freaking out the crowd until Carmella throws Eva out for the win at 10:45.

Rating: C-. These things are always hard to rate but the false finish was a nice way to tease the crowd. It says a lot that they had to have two people on the floor until the end for the double false finish. The other good thing here though is they kept Asuka safe, likely for a big showdown in Texas against Bayley.

Carmella celebrates until Bayley comes out for a hug. Asuka gives them an evil smile to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This show was much more about setting stuff up instead the show itself which is good long term but not the most interesting hour on its own. The triple threat in two weeks should be really good and they're already doing a good job of setting up the women's division with the new names. I mean, they're not the Four Horsewomen but at least they're trying and should be filling things in quite well. Good enough show here but again it's about setting stuff up later on.

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NXT – December 23, 2015: Jolly Old NXT

NXT

Date: December 23, 2015

Location: Wembley Arena, London, England

Commentators: Rich Brennan, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

We're past Takeover: London now and the big question is where do things go from here. Before we can get to the next major shows though, we have a few matches taped at the Takeover show to get through here, including a four way tag and the return of someone you might remember. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap/highlight package from Takeover. I might be looking forward to Takeover more than Wrestlemania.

Opening sequence.

Vaudevillains vs. Hype Bros vs. Blake and Murphy vs. Chad Gable/Jason Jordan

One fall to a finish. The Vaudevillains are dressed as Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. The Hype Bros aren't the most beloved but Gable and Jordan's eruption makes up for it. Gable and English get things going with Chad easily taking him to the mat. It's off to Gotch for a wristlock but Chad easily takes him down to the delight of the crowd. Mojo tags himself in but Gable and Jordan clean house, leading to a four way staredown.

Back from a break with English having issues getting out of another Gable wristlock. Blake comes in and walks into a headscissors, followed by a dropkick. It's off to Murphy who is caught in an armbreaker across the top rope, only to have Blake make a save (thanks to Bliss) with a stomp to the ribs for two. Blake starts in on Chad's leg until English tags himself in to take over.

Gotch works on the leg as well but Gable gets the knees up to give himself a breather. Murphy breaks up the hot tag, only to have Gable backflip out of a double suplex and make the hot tag to Jordan. Everything breaks down and it's suplex city on everyone, including one to Murphy onto the pile, setting up Grand Amplitude to Blake for the pin at 12:46.

Rating: C+. Fun match here as you would expect with this many people in the ring at once. Gable and Jordan are something special and there's almost no way we're not getting them vs. Dawson and Wilder for the titles sooner than later. I can't imagine they'll stretch the chase all the way out to Dallas as they're too hot right now.

Dana Brooke yells at Emma for losing to Asuka. Asuka comes in and smiles so Dana turns around and asks Emma if Asuka left yet.

Sami Zayn is back tonight.

Video on the European tour.

Clips of Finn Balor vs. Samoa Joe from Takeover.

Tye Dillinger is tired of people talking about Sami Zayn, who is not a perfect ten.

More from the song man, who debuts next.

Next week (and perhaps the week after) will be the Best of 2015.

Clips of Apollo Crews vs. Baron Corbin.

Corbin brags about his win and declares himself #1 contender.

Bull Dempsey vs. Elias Samson

Sampson is confirmed as the drifting guitar player. Bull starts with some clotheslines so Samson stomps him down into the corner. The snap jabs and a shoulder put Elias down but he comes back with a quick knockdown. That gives us a creepy smile from Elias, followed by a top rope elbow to pin Bull at 1:37. Well that was quick. Not very impressive but quick.

After some clips of their title defense, Scott Dawson and Dash Wilder say they're awesome.

Clips of Bayley retaining over Nia Jax.

Tye Dillinger vs. Sami Zayn

We have to pause the start of the match due to some extended OLE chants. Tye starts going after the arm to start but Sami reverses into a wristlock of his own and we get a standoff. A pair of armdrags send Ty to the floor but he bails away from a dive, leaving Sami to flip back into the ring. They head outside with Sami being sent shoulder first into the post, taking us to our first break.

Back with Dillinger working on the arm and firing off some left hands to the head. Sami fights out of another armbar and clotheslines Tye a few times, followed by a fisherman's suplex. Now we get the big flip dive and the fans are very happy to have Sami back. The Blue Thunder Bomb gets two but the Helluva kick is countered into a rollup for two (with a handful of tights). Tye starts fighting back but gets suplex into the corner, setting up the Helluva kick for the pin at 12:47.

Rating: C. This was little more than "hey Sami's back". He had a bit of ring rust but it's a good idea to give him a relatively easy match like this to allow him to get his timing back. Sami is at his best when he's fighting uphill, but it's going to be interesting to see him as the returning hero instead of an underdog again. He looked fine here and that's all that matters.

Sami says he's back and soaks in some OLE's. The trend in his career has been every time a dream comes true, it quickly turns into a nightmare. It happened when he won the NXT Title and it happened when he showed up on Raw but tonight broke the trend. This is just the beginning and 2016 will be even better for NXT and Sami Zayn.

Overall Rating: C+. These shows are always tricky as they're really more WCW Saturday Night (in the Nitro era) than Monday Night Raw. It's still a fun show and a really easy sit though and that's all NXT needs to be. What makes it even better is how they make me want to keep coming back. I

believed Sami when he said it's going to get even better, which is mainly lip service most of the time. Another fun show here and the Best of shows coming up should be a nice flashback.

Results

Chad Gable/Jason Jordan b. Hype Bros, Blake and Murphy and Vaudevillains – Grand Amplitude to Blake

Elias Samson b. Bull Dempsey – Top rope elbow

Sami Zayn b. Tye Dillinger – Helluva kick

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