

Monday Night Raw – March 3, 1997 – Perhaps The Best TV Match Ever

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 3, 1997

Location: Deutschlandhalle, Berlin, Germany

Attendance: 6,373

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Honky Tonk Man, Jim Ross

This is a very nice surprise. I had planned to do this because it was the 200th episode (again that's an approximation because a simple thing like counting is a hard task for a company like the WWF) but in reality it has what is considered one of the best matches in the history of Raw and possibly in the history of wrestling on free TV. We're setting up for Wrestlemania 13 which is in about three weeks I think. Let's get to it.

The opening video is about the Berlin Wall being torn down and how tonight it's the tournament final.

Honky Tonk Man comes out for commentary.

There are three title matches tonight. This card is STACKED. See how this grabs you for an opener.

Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Bret Hart

For those of you that can't do the math, that would be HHH. He's just a midcard guy here though. Bret says he can stay focused because he has to. The fans throw in a Bret Hart bear so HHH punts it out. HHH is nowhere near what he would become so this would be like Orton vs. Mahal. Bret takes over with a headlock and they go to the mat. Honky says Bret plays it up like he's quick but he's really cheating.

HHH gets in a kick which might have been low as we take a break. Back with the future Game still in control and working on the arm. The jumping knee to the face takes Bret down as we talk about the submission match. HHH goes up but Bret crotches him and a superplex gets two. The Russian legsweep and middle rope elbow gets the same. Pedigree is countered but a rake to the eyes breaks up the Sharpshooter. Bret puts HHH in the Tree of Woe and goes after him but shoves the referee in the process for the DQ.

Rating: B-. Not as good as you would expect but like I said, HHH wasn't anywhere near what he'd become. This wasn't a terrible match and HHH certainly didn't look bad here at all. It's not a classic, but it's nice to see something like this where a veteran puts over a young guy by going toe to toe with him for twenty minutes. Good stuff.

Chyna gets in Bret's face but she's escorted out.

There's no Austin for an interview.

Intercontinental Title: Vader vs. Rocky Maivia

Again we have someone in the form of Rocky that isn't anywhere near what he'd become yet. He's the Intercontinental Champion though so he's had a good start to his career I'd say. Vader beat Rocky in the first round of the European Title tournament so the title is in jeopardy here. All Vader to start who takes Rocky's head off with a clothesline. Rocky hooks a rollup for two and is crushed by a splash in the corner.

Rock tries a sunset flip but Vader sits on him for two. He speeds things up and hammers away on Vader. Taking the fight to Vader always seems to be the best course of action actually and Rocky even manages a belly to back for two as we take a break. Back with Vader getting two off a splash. Paul Bearer is at ringside with Vader. A middle rope splash (not the Vader Bomb) gets two.

Vader really changes gears now by throwing on a leg lock. That's not something you see him do that often and it goes against his style pretty hard. Vader goes up again but Rock powerslams him down for two. A pretty sweet belly to belly gets two. Spinning DDT gets two and Rocky is all fired up. Vader has lost his mask. Rocky hits his top rope cross body finisher but Vader gets out before the count starts. A dropkick puts Vader on the floor but Mankind runs in and clocks Rocky with the Urn for the DQ.

Rating: B. Pretty solid power vs. speed match here and I really wanted to see the ending here. Vader was still valuable at this point as he hadn't been made into a jobber to the stars yet. Rocky of course was on the rise but he didn't have much to go on yet. That's what veterans past their primes like Vader are good for too. This was very fun and I was having a great time with it.

Vader beats Rock up post match.

We get a clip from last week where Lawler issued an open challenge to ECW and they ran in. I've reviewed that show already and it was pretty dull if I remember. Dreamer beat up D-Von and there were a lot of weapons involved. Seeing stuff like weapons being blurred out is weird. Sandman drinking a beer is censored. That's so bizarre to see on Raw. The ECW guys had to stop a fight between Lawler and Heyman.

Sultan vs. Flash Funk

Sultan is Rikishi. Jim Ross has joined us on commentary. Lawler calls in and yells at Vince for having ECW guys on Raw. Didn't Jerry invite him? If the ECW guys show up next week, Lawler will finish the fight. After a break the match is joined in progress with Sultan running him over. Flash does his usual flying around the ring to get in some offense but Sultan hooks him in a sleeper. Heyman calls in to say Lawler is over the line. The challenge is accepted but it might not

be next week. Standing rana sets up a top rope moonsault for two by Funk. Sultan counters a headscissors and the camel clutch ends this quick.

Rating: C-. This match was fine but it's by far and away the weakest of the matches as far as star power goes. Good match here as Funk is always someone I love watching. Sultan was a dead end gimmick and more or less stopped meaning anything after Mania when Rocky beat him in the IC Title match.

We get a clip from October with Austin breaking a lot of stuff in the back. He yelled at a security guard and got thrown out by cops. We're looking for him tonight.

Sid says he's ready for Mankind.

We get a clip from Final Four where Bulldog and Owen had some issues.

Here's Ahmed to answer the challenge from Farroq for a street fight at Mania. The announcer speaks in German and then shifts to very accented English. Ahmed accepts and I have no idea what else he's saying.

Video on the LOD who are still awesome at this point. On Shotgun Saturday Night (I really need to do more of that show) they said they'd be in Chicago for Wrestlemania.

WWF Title: Mankind vs. Sycho Sid

This should be...interesting. Mankind gives a quick prematch promo mostly in German. Sid pounds away on him while the music is still playing. Out to the floor and Mankind gets in a few shots before hitting the post by mistake. Back inside Sid hooks a chinlock and we hear that next week, Raw is War. That would be the official new name of the show. Sid grabs a Fujiwara Armbar of all things.

Austin pops up on the split screen and rants about how he's the #1 talent in wrestling today but he was sitting next to

the bathroom on the plane and had a stale sandwich in a brown paper bag. That's not what made him sick though: it was Bret whining all over the place. More from him later. Mankind hooks onto Sid with what looks like a face grab or something. An elbow on the apron gets two.

Mankind pounds away while Sid is on the apron on the outside. Sid comes back and pounds away. Why this guy is world champion is beyond me but he would lose it soon. He and Taker will be teaming up next week says Vince. A running boot in the corner misses for Sid and we take a break. Back with Sid pounding on him and Mankind is knocked to the floor. They slug it out on the outside with Sid grabbing him by the throat and throwing him into the post.

A belly to back on the floor takes Mankind down again but he gets a Stunner on the top rope to break up the momentum. Back inside and a top rope legdrop gets two on Sid Mankind takes over again via a chinlock and there's the Claw. It only gets two and Sid stands up which breaks away the leverage. Double Arm DDT gets two. Off to a sleeper for awhile until Sid rams Mankind into the buckle to escape. Bearer tries to interfere but it results in Mankind taking the chokeslam for two. The powerbomb keeps the title on Sid.

Rating: C-. Sid was just awful at this point and Mankind just wasn't good enough to get something good out of him. He tried as hard as he could but the clashes of styles and the sheer force of suck from Sid really brought this down. When your offense consists of punch, kick, forearm, chokeslam and powerbomb, there isn't much that can be done.

Austin is back for the more of his interview and we get a clip where Austin tried to keep Bret from winning the title at Final Four. Bret won the title but Sid won it the next night thanks to a chair shot from Austin. Austin goes on a rant about how Shawn was sick and had a knee injury and got a video about them.

Austin was sick and had a bad knee and went 25 minutes but that's never talked about. He should be champion and knows enough to beat Bret into submission. Austin isn't worried about Shamrock because no one can make him quit. He says Vince treats him like a dog so why shouldn't he be bitter? AWESOME promo with Austin being full of fire in his eyes.

European Title: Owen Hart vs. British Bulldog

They're tag champions but have been having a lot of problems lately. This is the finals of a tournament with the first title going to the winner. They go to the corner to start with no one having an advantage. They exchange wristlock counters and it's Davey with some very early control. He counters a monkey flip with a cartwheel and both guys nip up to a standoff.

They shake hands and things reset. Owen grabs the wrist and climbs the ropes but gets caught in a powerbomb. Davey catapults him to the floor and invites him back in. Rollup gets two for Owen but an armdrag puts him on the mat where Davey takes over with a headlock again. Owen tries the same wristlock counter as before but Davey drops him right on his back and arm to counter.

We take a break and come back with Davey working on the arm some more. Davey's old crucifix gets two. Delayed vertical is countered into an enziguri attempt which Davey ducks. There's a surfboard but Owen grabs the referee to escape. Bulldog speeds things up but Owen avoids him to toss him out to the floor. Davey is holding his knee but gets back in pretty easily.

Back in Owen tries a leapfrog but injures his own knee. He's channeling his inner Bret though and is goldbricking so he can get the advantage. Now they're ticked off and the Sharpshooter is broken up. Things speed up and Owen kicks his head off for no cover. Owen drops a leg for two and hooks a chinlock as

they get a breath. Davey is knocked to the floor and a sunset flip back in gets two.

We take a second break and come back with Davey ramming elbows into Owen's ribs but a belly to belly suplex stops him cold. Off to a camel clutch but Davey stands up and hits an electric chair to break the hold. Owen tries a Flair cover with his feet on the ropes for two. Middle rope elbow gets the same. This is already very good and is getting great. Up to the corner and Davey falls onto him to counter a superplex for two.

Davey comes back with clotheslines and the fans are getting into it. Suplex puts Owen down for two. Smith gorilla presses him but crotches him on the top. The Canadian grabs a German on the Englishman for two. Davey loads up the powerslam but Owen grabs the ropes to escape. There's the enziguri and Davey is down. He hooks the Sharpshooter but Bulldog makes the rope. Owen loads up a tombstone but Davey reverses into the Powerslam for two. The victory roll that Owen beat Bret with at Mania X is countered into a rollup of Davey's own for the pin.

Rating: A+. Just a total classic here as they countered each other perfectly the entire time and we got a great false finish with Owen kicking out of the powerslam. Do you ever remember that happening? This is easily one of the best matches you'll ever see, especially on free TV. Great stuff and probably their second best matches ever each.

They shake hands post match.

Overall Rating: A. The WWF was FEELING IT at this point but they were in so deep against WCW and the NWO that no one really noticed it until the end of the year. You had guys like Austin that were hungry for anything they could get and Bret being all ticked off. The main event would set up a rematch in a few weeks which Bret would interrupt to start the Hart

Foundation, leading to the vastly underrated Border War of 1997. Excellent show and well worth checking out.

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