

Thought of the Day: Setting Up Title Matches

I think I might have said this before but it came to me again watching Raw.

Is there NO other way to set up a title feud than having the challenger pin the champion? Just say they're having a title match at the PPV. Seriously just do it that way. Stop having to walk us through everything and just do the match. Let them TALK to each other and have some interaction and then do the freaking match. I assure you it's not that hard.

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About Sting Vs. Vader

This is one of those feuds that people always mention among the best ever, but every time I watch some of the matches from it, I'm blown away all over again by how freaking AWESOME they are. These guys had some of the best chemistry you'll ever see in wrestling and I don't recall them ever having a bad match against each other. I don't really have a point to this other than I love this feud and I felt like talking about it and why it's awesome. Let's get to it.

Before we get to the reasons this was awesome, let's get through the basic story of it. Vader had been around WCW for a year or two but didn't do much. Then he was paired up with Harley Race and got a world title match against the resident superhero and WCW World Champion Sting. They fought in the Omni in WCW's home city of Atlanta and in very basic terms,

Sting got massacred. Vader beat him from one side of the arena to the other with Sting not getting in much offense at all. The beating became so bad that Vader was disqualified and Sting literally escaped with the title.

They had a rematch a few months later (to sell Sting's injuries from the match. That's very important as it made Vader look like even more of a monster) at the Great American Bash and things got interesting. Sting did WAY better this time, hitting Vader with almost everything he had and literally throwing him around the ring (Remember that Vader is roughly 450lbs and a MONSTER) for over fifteen minutes....and then got powerbombed to death and Vader won the title.

Between July and December, Vader lost the title to Ron Simmons, but both he and Sting were entered into the King of Cable (This wasn't about cable TV. This was about the ropes being made of cable. WCW was actually confused as to why most people didn't get this) Tournament. The finals were at Starrcade 1992 and Sting had been talking about a new strategy against Vader. Watching the match, you can see Sting's basic pattern: when he goes all insane and aggressive, Vader destroys him. When Sting takes his time and makes Vader miss, Sting takes over. Midway through the match, Vader starts beating on Sting again, but Sting tells him to bring it on, resulting in Vader being spent and allowing Sting to FINALLY catch Vader in a powerslam to win the tournament.

At SuperBrawl III there was a strap match where Sting agreed to fight Vader in a match based on power. Sting may be a lot of things, but smart has never been one of them. To the shock of almost no one, Vader completely overpowered Sting and won the match by hogtying Sting and touching all four corners. They then feuded over Vader's WCW World Title in Europe and traded the title back and forth in a week.

Over the summer and into late 1993, they feuded with each other in a variety of tag matches with various partners. In the spring of 1994, the main event of a PPV was going to be Vader vs. Rick Rude for the WCW International Title, but since Rude had a career ending injury, the title was returned to the former champion Sting (WCW made little sense at times if that wasn't already clear) but Sting wanted a match to earn the title. The natural opponent to pick: the #1 contender, Vader (Someone has to explain this logic to me. Shouldn't it have been Vader being handed the title and then him having to earn it?). Anyway the match wasn't great but it was still one of the best matches of the night.

The final match was actually a threeway involving the Big Boss Man who was eliminated early, leaving Sting vs. Vader. To give you an idea of how good Vader and Sting were, the match (through MORE WCW idiocy) wound up being about who could knock the other off their feet first (Vader won due to cheating), and it was STILL arguably the best match of the night. You could watch these two fight over a game of Chinese checkers and it would be interesting.

Now the interesting question is WHY these matches and the feud were so great. There are a few different reasons here and we'll start with the most important one: the results weren't obvious. Look back at the matches in the feud that I listed. A quick count shows that the results are 4-3 in favor of Vader. The key idea to this is that it's not clear who is going to win. By comparison, John Cena and Chris Jericho have fought on PPV in singles matches or triple threats five times. Cena is undefeated. To the best of my knowledge, Chris Jericho has a total of one televised one on one win against John Cena, which was in their first match when Cena was a rookie.

Having the winner of a match being pretty obvious doesn't make things interesting. It takes something special to overcome an obvious ending to a match. Look at Undertaker's Wrestlemania matches for an example where

this can work. It took people like HHH and HBK to make those matches interesting, because there was no way someone like Mark Henry was going to end the Streak. That's the main reason a feud like Vader and Sting worked: it was a legitimate rivalry instead of Sting beating Vader every time, giving you an uncertainty of who is going to win. Think of it like this: it's rare that a movie or book is as good if you've heard the ending, because the payoff isn't there.

A second reason these matches worked is the formula. It's a classic story of a hero against a monster. Sting was the undisputed top man in the company and by 1992, it was a pretty safe bet to say that he was the most popular wrestler in the world, given that Hogan was on an indefinite hiatus. Vader was an unstoppable monster that only Sting could stop and you can connect the dots yourself here. The idea of a classic story is one that you can run at any time and get a reaction. Hero vs. monster is one of the most classic stories of all time and it's never not going to work.

Third, and arguably the most important depending on how you look at it, the matches were really good. I know that sounds simple, but that's a very important point that a lot of feuds don't have. Look at Flair vs. Rhodes. It's another classic story (wealth/elite status vs. the common man) where the promos were great and the fans were into the feud, but the matches SUCKED.

Sting is one of those wrestlers that gravitates to the kind of wrestler he's facing. If his opponent is good, he'll have a good match. If his opponent is bad though, the match is going to suck. Vader happens to be one of the best big men workers of all time, and Sting had the power and speed combination that works perfectly against him. You had Sting selling like a madman out there for Vader, causing the crowd to erupt whenever Sting would make a comeback. Vader would then kill Sting dead with a few HARD shots and the sequence would start all over again.

Finally, the matches were mixed up. Look at the list of matches I gave you. We had title matches, tournament finals, gimmick matches, tag matches and multiple man matches. It wasn't the same stuff every single time and you had to wait between each match to get another one on one encounter, even if it was just a little time. This is the way to keep the feud fresh, which is something that so often misses anymore. Look at the recent snoozefest known as Alberto Del Rio vs. Sheamus. There were three PPV matches and two of them ended with Sheamus Brogue Kicking Del Rio for the pin. Mix it up a little. Throw out the Cloverleaf for one of them. You know, the move that Sheamus had built up for weeks.

Overall, Sting vs. Vader is one of the best feuds ever for a lot of reasons, ranging from how back and forth it was, to how high quality the story was, to how the feud was kept fresh. You don't get stories like this too often anymore, mainly due to how fast the turnover is in them, but when you do you'll often hear them compared to this one. Sting vs. Vader is one of those matches that I throw on every now and then when I just want to see a fun match. Check them out, especially the Starrcade one as I can almost guarantee you'll be impressed by something in it.