

EOTY 2011 – Angle of the Year

Insert eye rolling Kurt joke here. It's pretty much a layup, but I'll go with the Summer of Punk. This got people paying attention and people were wondering what was real and what wasn't, which is a very entertaining way to go with an angle. I loved this and it worked incredibly well. On top of that the matches were awesome, which is always a bonus.

Your thoughts/picks?

EOTY 2011 – Tag Team/Stable of the Year

It's certainly not Immortal.

Pretty much this goes to Beer Money by default. They were dominant all year and held the tag titles for like six months. I don't count their world title reigns because they weren't as a team but you get the idea. Is there anyone else that can compete here?

Your picks/thoughts?

EOTY Awards – Worst Match of the Year

Criteria here: I'm not including Divas matches, most of the Knockout matches, anything that's really short (under 3 minutes or so) or whatever Sting and Jeff Hardy did at Victory Road. I'm going to go with Cena vs. Miz in the main event of Wrestlemania. Not only was the match itself boring, but the ending was atrocious. I said this in my review and in the Live Discussion of the show: They booked a Dusty Finish in the main event of Wrestlemania. That isn't acceptable to me. This is Wrestlemania, not any other show of the year. I hold it to a higher standard than a double countout and Rock suddenly having the power to make matches throughout the night. This didn't work for me at all and I remember thinking to myself "that's how they ended it?" after the match and show ended.

Your picks?

End of the Year Awards: Female of the Year

These will get better I promise. First up: Female of the Year.

The only person I can really give this to is Kharma. She showed up in WWE and flat out took over the division. She

wasn't around for very long but she made a huge impact to put it mildly. The whole division was on the verge of being built around her but it had to be stopped due to something outside her control. I can't wait for her to come back and crush Kelly so she can sprinkle her on a pizza.

Your picks?

2011 End of the Year Awards

Starting today through the end of the year, I'll be naming my best/worst things of the year, one at a time and culminating with Wrestler of the Year on December 31. These are in no particular order at all and please keep in mind that I didn't regularly watch ROH until their debut on national TV, I don't watch puro, I don't watch most indy shows, and I only barely keep up with AAA. If I left something out, odds are I didn't watch it.

Feel free to critique my thoughts or add in your own picks.

What Got You Into Wrestling?

Simple question. What got you into the grand sport (yes sport) of pro wrestling?

My mom watched for years as we live in an area that let her see such guys as Jerry Lawler. I remember hearing her talk about him when I was like 3 and she took me to house shows as a baby. I know I saw Andre the Giant once interfere in a match between Earthquake and Jim Neidhart. Also the whole Hulk Hogan thing got me more into it than anything else.

Your version?

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About Rock vs. Cena's Buildup

I'm a huge Star Wars fan. I love the characters, I love the stories, I love the themes, I love everything about it. When I was a kid I went to my uncle's house one day and he was watching Empire Strikes Back. This was my first introduction to the series and I was immediately wanting more. It turned out that the reason the movie was on TV that day was because the films were being re-released into theaters. I was very lucky because the first time I saw the original three movies was on the big screen.

Then a few years passed and I heard about the Star Wars prequels. These would be three movies set before the original trilogy that told how we reached the events of the first three movies. My friends that were Star Wars fans were so excited they could barely contain themselves. My immediate reaction: why would I want to see a bunch of movies when I already know what happens after them?

That's the problem I have with any prequel movie: we know that

Anakin Skywalker goes to the Dark Side and becomes Darth Vader. We know that he's the father of Luke and Leia. We know that Yoda goes into hiding. We know that eventually Vader turns back to good. In other words, we know the endings, so why in the world am I supposed to get interested in what else happens? At the end of the third prequel there's a huge duel between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin. I know neither of them is going to die, because they're in the next movies. Yeah the scene is really cool and it's a great fight, but I'm not going to be on the edge of my seat, because I know no one dies.

Now what does this have to do with John Cena vs. The Rock at Wrestlemania 28? The answer is simple: why should I care about what happens to John Cena from the night the match is made until the bell rings at Wrestlemania 28? His ending is already set in stone. We know where his road leads and no matter what happens to him, he's going to be in the main event in Miami on April 1, 2012. Why should I as a fan care about all these lesser matches and feuds that he's in?

Now don't get me wrong: his feud with Punk was very entertaining and I got into it big time. But at the end of the day, it's really just giving Cena stuff to fill his time for the next year. This makes his matches really uninteresting unless you get something special like his feud with Punk. Cena could lose every match he's in and he's still going to be in the main event. There's no way that's going to change barring Cena having every bone ripped out of his body, burning the flesh and muscle that remains, and feeding the charred pieces to a little boy in Idaho.

There are other ramifications to this as well and we'll start with CM Punk. Ignoring the fact that ratings haven't done jack with Punk on top (it's reality. Get over it internet fanboys), what incentive does Punk have to work hard this year? He's not going to be in the main event of Wrestlemania, which is the point of any wrestler lacing up a pair of boots. There's no point to having a big angle wasted on him, because he's going

to be playing probably fourth fiddle to Rock, Taker, and whatever Orton is doing. Want proof this is reality?

Back in the 80s and 90s WCW held their TV tapings about three months in advance. You would have shows taped passed the next PPV in the can on a regular basis. There were at least two instances that I know of where a title change was already booked before the champions that were taped losing the titles won them in the first place. Let's say you're one of those teams. What incentive is there for you to put on good matches and work on your craft if you're destined to lose the titles on so and so date no matter what happens?

Another possible outcome of doing things this far in advance: what if something major happens that you have no control over? Again, look to the WCW tapings. The main event of Starrcade 93 was to be Sid vs. Vader for the title with Sid winning the belt. They taped weeks of stuff in advance of Sid with the title (yes they gave away the ending to the biggest show of the year months in advance. And people wonder why they went out of business), but a funny thing happened on the way to Charlotte: Sid never won the title.

Instead he took a pair of scissors and stabbed Arn Anderson with them, getting himself fired and basically thrown out of any major company for about two and a half years. That's why Flair was thrown into the main event at the last minute. All of the material shot with Sid as champion was officially worthless so they had to just throw it away and start over, eating all of the costs. See how this could become a problem?

Imagine if the unthinkable happens and Cena or Rock is injured. After we pull Vince off every rooftop in the country, they would have to call in order, Austin, Shawn and HHH to come in and fill in the spot. All of those would be huge, but they wouldn't be in the same league as Rock vs. Cena. That match has been built up for over a year by the time Mania rolls around and while it would be big, it would feel like a

letdown. That brings me to my next point: guys like Austin.

People keep wanting to see Austin have one more match and they want it to be at Mania 28 against Punk or whomever. People that say this can keep dreaming, because there's no way that he's going to have his one last (yeah right) match on the same night that Rock makes his big epic return to face the biggest star of this generation in a showdown almost 15 months in the making. Austin is a smart man, and he's too smart to try something like that.

The same goes for HHH. Do you think he's going to have a big marquee match at Mania? Do you think it was a coincidence that he was gone for almost the entire build to Survivor Series? HHH is still viewed as a special attraction and he's not going to go out there and waste one of the handful of big matches he has left when Rock is going to get 10,000% of the attention? Again, HHH is a smart man and he's too smart to try something like that.

In summation, I'd think it was a bad idea to build up Rock vs. Cena for a year in advance. It's going to draw a huge buyrate for Mania, but it would have done that anyway. It's not like Rock has been around every week for the buildup or anything like that, so I really think that all the negatives I listed above outweigh the good things that a build like this brings with it.

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Attitude Era vs. PG Era

So it's only going to be one post instead of a series. Sorry if that disappoints anyone.

I read a lot of posts and opinions of people that talk about how the Attitude Era was so great and how awful the PG Era is so bad and how things need to be more like what they were back in the late 90s. This is one of the dumbest things I've ever heard because people aren't thinking when they say stuff like this. Either that or the more likely reality: they don't know what they're talking about.

Wrestling today is pretty awesome and in a lot of ways it's better than what we have back in the 90s. Now before I get into this, let me make something clear: I'm not saying this era is better nor am I saying it's worse. I'm saying that there are a lot of people that blindly say we need to get back to the Attitude Era way of thinking and style of airing TV and I'm going to explain why they have no idea what they're talking about.

Note that this is just about WWE, not TNA and/or WCW. Also I won't be going past the end of the year 2001 with this so don't bother mentioning stuff from January 1, 2002 on because it's not what I'm talking about. For a starting point, let's say January 1, 1998. I know the Attitude Era was longer than that but it's an easy date to work with.

First and foremost, people seem to think that the Attitude Era was all Austin and Vince tormenting each other and Rock cracking people up and Foley getting beaten up and then cracking a witty line. See, here's the thing: that was about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the show. The fact of the matter is that a lot of the

Attitude Era's TV time SUCKED. I've been watching some 98 Raws and you get a lot of stuff like the D0A vs. the old Road Warriors, a multiple months long Jeff Jarrett vs. Steve Blackman feud, the NWA faction sucking the life out of the place, and about 15 minutes of Austin vs. McMahon per show.

People remember the cool moments of the late 90s but they forget about a lot of the really awful stuff and believe me, it got bad. You had stuff like Mark Henry getting oral sex from a transvestite, May Young giving birth to a hand, a story about Stephanie McMahon's teddy bear, William Regal as the Brawny Man, the J.O.B. Squad, a trio of vampires, human sacrifices, people almost being embalmed, live burials, Chyna turning three times at one show, Jeff Jarrett getting hit in the back by a frozen fish, a championship changing hands at a Days Inn, a wrestler whose gimmick was he could vomit on command, and Mae Young being topless on PPV.

In short, the Attitude Era had some really stupid ideas. Some of those might not have been in the time period I mentioned, but you get the idea. People want to complain about Cena being impossible to beat and call him Superman or something like that, but is John Cena saluting people more childish than Austin holding his boss at gunpoint and having a flag come out of it that says Bang 3:16? That's something I've seen in Bugs Bunny cartoons.

People want to argue about how silly and childish things are today. Yeah, there are some pretty stupid ideas like Hornswoggle and Sheamus being related to a Muppet, but at the same time we have Punk and his Pipe Bombs, Cena standing tall against a guy that talks about Fruity Pebbles and talks in funny voices (there's a long chat in that feud that I'll save for later), anti-bullying stories which can inspire kids (corny but true), and comedy bits that aren't that bad when you remember your audience.

That brings me to one of the bigger points: the show isn't for

us anymore. Back in the 80s, everything was based around kids. Hogan's feuds were never more than "I can beat this giant because the Hulkamaniacs are behind me!" You had a guy with a snake who beat up everyone else with the DDT. You had Savage being incredibly colorful and over the top. You had simple villains like Bobby Heenan and Jimmy Hart. It was a simple time for simple minds. Know what else it was? The biggest era ever for wrestling.

Then the 90s happened and those fans grew up. They got tired of seeing guys like Hogan and hearing the "you all be good" stuff. The fans rebelled and we got stuff like ECW and Steve Austin and DX and The Rock and all that jazz. The problem became that everything had to top what we had before, which is how in 1999 we had the Ministry of Darkness and crucifixions and Mideon drinking blood and vampires and all that stuff. It stopped being about wrestling and was all about drama.

Finally Austin got too hurt to wrestle and things got even better in the year 2000. What was different about 2000 rather than 98 and 99 you ask? The focus was on the ring. You had Angle and Benoit and Jericho and Guerrero coming in and Rock vs. HHH going 25 minutes every PPV and Undertaker being a biker instead of a demon.

Nick Bockwinkel used to say "That's what it says on the marquee: Wrestling." It sounds corny and stupid, but at the end of the day he's right: if you put good wrestling out there, people will watch, because that's what they're here to see. I don't watch Raw to see pure drama or comedy. If I wanted to see that, I'd watch a drama or a comedy. Look at the biggest angle of the year in Punk vs. Cena. In every promo Punk had, it ended with him saying that he was the best in the world and that he would prove it by beating John Cena in the middle of the ring. It wasn't about power or some obscure thing. It was about pinning John Cena to the mat for 3 seconds. It was about wrestling.

So then Rock and Austin leave and you have guys like Brock Lesnar and Kurt Angle to take their place. The pendulum has swung back to pure mat wrestling...and people don't care as much. Starting around 2003-2004, things started to go downhill again, especially interest in the product. It appeared as if the pendulum would be swinging back towards the Attitude Era as things were getting insane again...and then something happened.

In June of 2007, Chris Benoit went over the edge and murdered his wife and son before committing suicide. Wrestling was on the front page of the paper as you had someone that was a big deal in WWE and was on the verge of winning a world title on the news for killing three people. This made the steroids trial in 1993 look like a walk in the park. Everything was changed and WWE had to change too. They had just come through an era where Angle and Benoit would drop each other on their heads ten times a match 4 nights a week. Benoit went crazy and Angle can't go a year without a neck injury. Things had to change.

With WWE and the wrestling world being turned upside down, everything more or less had to be reset. Benoit is still less than five years ago and it's not like you can hide things in the modern age where there are cameras everywhere. People complaining about the lack of chair shots to the head and blood don't get the bigger picture: if something else like Benoit happened, the WWE would cease to exist. Sponsors would pull out, people would leave, fans would go away. Vince is protecting himself and his company by doing what he's doing and there's nothing wrong with that. If you can't watch wrestling without someone taking an unprotected chair shot to the head, I feel very sorry for you.

So in the aftermath of that, Vince reset things back to the most basic things he could think of. Wrestling fans being wrestling fans, they didn't want something that wasn't geared exactly to them, so when the product wasn't aimed at them

anymore, they declared that it sucked. Wrestling is geared towards kids right now and you know what? It's freaking good. We're getting John Cena vs. the Rock and Christian getting the push the fans have demanded for years and Sheamus being all big and awesome and Orton having his best matches in years and Punk being the voice of the voiceless and Ryder's internet show getting him on TV and a dozen other awesome things.

"But it's not the Attitude Era!!!" Get over it. It isn't your time anymore so stop thinking it's going to be. Things in life aren't always going to go your way and you need to accept that. You think your parents liked listening to Hogan telling you to take your vitamins or Warrior wanting to load up the spaceship with the rocket fuel or Hawk and Animal rambling about absolutely nothing that made sense to anyone that was human? It's not about us anymore. It's about the kids and catching their attention with bright colors and low level humor. And as much as you don't want to admit it, it's working. Mania broke 1,000,000 buys last year and the Trump record will fall with Cena vs. Rock. It's their era now, not ours.

This next part I wrote earlier but I got on a roll with the previous section so it's going to seem a little out of place for an ending.

Also you want to complain about title changes? From 1998-1999, no WWF World Title reign lasted longer than 90 days. Think about that. No one held the world title longer than 3 months for over two years. This would include three title reigns (one by Rock, Foley and Vince) that combined to last ten days. Midcard titles more your thing? In 1999-2000, the Intercontinental Title changed hands 23 times. In 24 months, there were 23 title reigns. Think about that for a minute. The tag titles weren't as bad as they only changed 22 times in that span of time.

Title reigns didn't mean anything back then. Austin won 6

world titles starting in 1998 and ending in 2001. Factoring in the year he was gone, Austin won all of his titles in about two and a half years, or about 2.4 world titles a year. Rock won his first in late 98 and his last in 2002. He's a nine time champion over a four year span, or about 2.25 a year. By comparison, Cena has won 12 world titles in roughly 6 years (factoring out injury time) or approximately 2 a year. Orton is a 9 time champion, winning his first in 2004, which puts him at about 1.3 titles a year. But hey, Cena and Orton win them too often right? And remember Austin and Rock had one world title to vie for (save for the Alliance Era) so there were fewer titles to go around, making it harder to win them.

I think the big difference is that people stay around longer now. Austin arrived in WWF in 1995 and was gone by let's say the middle of 2002, giving him about 6 and a half years in the company (5 and a half factoring in the year off). Rock debuted in late 96 and was gone by late 2002 for a total of 5 years also (roughly 5 when you consider the time off for movies). Cena has been around for over 9 years now and Orton about the same. Do you remember the end of Austin's run in WWF? It was when he was feuding with Flair and Big Show when he was falling apart. Imagine Austin as a shell of his former self and being so far past his time that he meant nothing. Think people would get tired of him?

You look at guys like Orton and Cena and you have two guys that have had some of their best stuff recently. Cena fueled Punk's push and Orton stole a lot of shows with his matches against Christian. Austin and Rock both left the company (spare me the arguments about them bailing out and abandoning the company. They're bogus) after about 6 years when they were past their primes. Cena and Orton have hit (very) arguably their peaks recently. The difference is that instead of spending years in another company building themselves up, they started in OVW (for the most part) and came through the WWF system, allowing them to be there faster.

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About John Cena

I was listening to ESPN Radio about ten days ago before the World Series began. The analyst said that he hoped we were realizing what we were seeing with Albert Pujols (baseball player for any confused readers). He's the best player in the game today and is putting up numbers that other players probably dream of. This got me to thinking about wrestling (as almost anything does) and I started thinking about John Cena.

I'm pretty much in the minority on John Cena, in that I'm pretty neutral on him. I have never once been what you would call a Cena hater. I've never reached the point where I'm sick of him and want him gone. I've also never been a huge fan of his. However, and this is partially the whole point of this entire writing: he is without a doubt one of the greatest stars that we'll ever see and one of the greatest wrestlers ever.

Now let's take a look at this from a few angles. First and foremost, John Cena has more detractors and more supporters than anyone else in wrestling right now. That is indisputable. When you watch a show, be it on PPV, TV, DVD or in the arena, one thing is always certain: people react to John Cena. You often read about the size of the pops that someone gets. When is the last time you remember people being silent for anything related to John Cena? The answer to that would be never.

The whole idea of wrestling is to get the fans to care about you. You have to establish a character that people are going to want to watch and when you put that character up against another one and develop a conflict between them, you might be able to get the fans to pay to see the resolution of that conflict, which is the whole point of wrestling. That being said, John Cena is one of the few guys that people are always interested in. Think about this for a second.

John Cena is the face of the company. He's the guy that is put out as a spokesman, he's the guy you see on the posters, he's the guy that you see in K-Mart on WWE merchandise, he's the guy that goes on talk shows, he's the one (current) wrestler everyone knows and he's the guy that Wrestlemania is built around every year. That puts him in rare company: Hogan, Austin, HHH, Cena. In WWE history (as in post-Hogan's first title win), there aren't any other people that are the undisputed top guy in the company.

After that, let's look at what everyone thinks is the most important thing in wrestling: the matches. Let's get the biggest piece of evidence out of the way: when was the last time you saw a bad John Cena match? I don't mean a match you weren't into. I don't mean a match that you didn't care about. I mean a match that was flat out bad. Cena is one of very, very few men that have had a match rated 5 stars by Dave Meltzer. Also on that list: Shawn Michaels, Razor Ramon, Bret Hart, Owen Hart, Steve Austin, Undertaker, CM Punk. Cena was in the first match to get such a rating in almost 14 years. Think back over 14 years. It's the first match in that long to get a perfect score in this company (I'll save a Meltzer rant for later. I'm by no means a follower of his but his opinion is highly valued online).

The main argument against Cena matches is that he uses five moves and that's it. Let's think for a minute and realize why this is stupid. We'll start with AA, STF, Shuffle, Top Rope Fameasser, Protobomb, Shoulder Block. There are your six moves right there. That being said, if you believe the amount of moves that someone uses determines whether or not you're a talented wrestler, you have no idea what you're talking about. If it was about the amount of moves a wrestler knew, Dean Malenko vs. William Regal would have headlined about 8 Wrestlemanias in a row.

Speaking of multiple Wrestlemanias, let's look at Cena's career span. Let's say he became an A-list guy the night he first won the title, which was at Wrestlemania 21. For the sake of math, let's say we take this up to Wrestlemania 27 where he was in the main event. That's six years with him on top and he's going to be there longer than that. By comparison, let's say Austin was on top from Mania 14 through the day he walked out on the company in 2004. That would be 4 years on top, including his year out for neck surgery. Shawn was on top for about 2 years. Rock got let's say 4 (99-02, which is being VERY generous). Other than Hogan and Sammartino, a guy being on top for that long simply does not happen.

Cena has been in a main event/featured match at 7 Wrestlemanias (not including the upcoming one). By comparison, Mr. Wrestlemania Shawn Michaels was in (arguably) 6 main event/world title matches at Wrestlemania. Austin had 4 or so. Rock had even less than that. The only person in the same league as Cena is Hogan who had 8 (I don't count WM 9 as one of these as it was a surprise match and lasted all of 40

seconds but again that's arguable). Even if you count that match, that record will come down in a few years.

Getting to records, we reach the world title record that Cena is going to break one day. As everyone knows, the record is currently held by Ric Flair with 16. You have Hogan with 12, Edge with like 13, HHH with about 13 and Angle with ten I think (don't bother telling me what the actual numbers are as that's not the point). Yes, having two titles makes this a lot easier to reach. Yes, Flair usually held the title longer (except for the two NWA Title reigns that didn't last two months, the five WCW Title reigns that didn't last three months each (with two reigns combining to last 7 days) and the 2 WWF Title reigns that didn't last three months because we don't like to talk about those), and yes that means a little something.

However, Cena wrestles in an era with potentially 9 hours of programming (Raw, NXT, Superstars, SD and a PPV) a week. This isn't the days of the NWA where you saw the stars in town once a year at a house show and the title changed hands twice in three years. The amount of title reigns doesn't mean a thing but people like to complain about Cena and Edge and HHH and the amount of quick title changes they have without thinking about it so who cares about stuff like consistency right?

This brings us to the present: John Cena vs. The Rock. It's no secret that Rock is the biggest mainstream star the business has ever produced. He's a big time movie star, he's hosted SNL, he's been the lead guest on the Tonight Show, he's going to be in the new GI Joe movie, he's a legit celebrity. And now he's coming back to wrestling. Who do they put him with? John Cena. This match is going to be one of the biggest in the

history of wrestling and it's going to be built up for over a year when it finally happens.

These are two of the biggest stars of all time and this match is literally going to be over a year in the making. When has there EVER been a match with that kind of build? Off the top of my head, nothing is coming to me. I mean there were matches we knew would be happening at a certain show, but I don't ever recall being told that a match would be happening a full year in advance with build lasting even longer than that. Cena is the one being trusted with this and that says something to me.

Speaking of the build, let's take a look at Cena's mic skills real quick. One of these guys is always talking about childish things, making funny faces and cracking jokes while the guy he's feuding with is being serious. The other is named John Cena. Think back to the night when Rock came back. He cut a promo on Cena and imitated John in a funny voice while talking about Fruity Pebbles. Cena replied in a rap, pointing out that Rock has made some silly movies (true), that he's never around the People he claims to be champion of (true) and how we've barely seen him for seven years (true). Rock's reply: more funny voices, more cereal jokes, more making fun of Cena's clothes.

Cena has responded to everything Rock has said and has made sense the entire time. Every word he has said about Rock has been true. It's been Cena here the last seven years. Rock has been out in Hollywood (and please, spare me the nonsense about Rock turning his back on wrestling. You would have done the same thing and it was smart of him to do). In short, Cena has been the mature one here and Rock has talked down to him like a bully the entire time.

In summation, John Cena isn't the devil in a pair of jean shorts. He's a star the likes of which we haven't seen in a very long time. Is he Austin or Rock or Hogan? No he isn't, but to say he's awful or he has to turn heel to save his career is ridiculous. When the Summer of Punk happened and Cena was having the hottest angle he's had in years, he was the same John Cena we had seen every time and I didn't hear anything but rave reviews for him. Whether you think it's going to be good or not, Rock vs. Cena is going to probably break 1 million buys on PPV and make a fortune for the company and it's going to be the same John Cena. Like him or not, he's the best there is and one of the best ever and that's all there is to it.

Upcoming: AE vs. PG – Comparing the Attitude Era to the Modern Era

This is something that I'll be starting up soon: a series of essays/editorials/those long posts I write about a single topic. This is going to be a special one that I've wanted to write for awhile. I always hear about how this era sucks and how it's not as good as the Attitude Era and all that jazz. However, this era that we're currently in is in fact good, and in many ways better than the Attitude Era that many of us grew up on. In (maybe) a series of posts, I'm going to take a look at various aspects of both eras and explain the good and the bad of both. This is not going to be a totally pro PG

argument because it's far from perfect, but I'm going to explain quite a few things. Look for that in about a week.

KB