

Royal Rumble Count-Up – 1988: The First One's Free



IMG Credit: WWE

So back in late 1987, the NWA was going to start airing PPVs of their own with the first one being Starrcade on Thanksgiving night. Vince, ever the ball buster, decided to air his own show on that night called the Survivor Series, saying that whoever didn't air his show wouldn't get to air Wrestlemania. Most of the cable companies bailed on Crockett (NWA owner for all intents and purposes) and aired Survivor Series, but they told Vince to NEVER do that again.

This is where Vince got crafty: he couldn't air a PPV on the night that Crockett was running his next PPV (Bunkhouse Stampede, which is one of the DUMBEST and most screwed up shows ever for a ton of reasons, including not even being able to get the freaking start time right), but he could run a free TV show on that night. Therefore, he got an idea from one Pat Patterson about a battle royal with timed entrances and a card around it. The idea is the Royal Rumble, and there have been twenty five of them so far. Let's get to it.

Royal Rumble 1988

Date: January 24, 1988

Location: Copps Coliseum, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Attendance: 18,000

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jesse Ventura

So as I said, this is the first of the Rumbles and it aired on live TV instead of on Pay Per View. The battle royal tonight is twenty men instead of thirty and we also have three other matches on the card on top of that. We also get a bench press demonstration from Dino Bravo (just go with it) and the contract signing for Hogan vs. Andre II at the first live Main Event which would happen in twelve days. In a KB related story, I would happen in about ten days. Let's get to it.

Vince does the intro over what I thought was Rude's music. Oh it was Rude's music. No wonder they sounded alike.

Rick Rude vs. Ricky Steamboat

This should work well with a career face vs. a career heel. That's another thing you never get anymore: matches for the sake of having a match. You know what? It could work today too. For the sake of simplicity, Rick will only be used for Rude and Ricky will only be used for Steamboat. Rude pounds away to start but Steamboat fires off chops in retaliation. Rude throws him over the top because he's still new at this WWF thing. Steamboat skins the cat back in and throws Rude to the floor.

Steamboat does Rude's pose and Rude complains of a pull of the tights. Back in and Rude wants a test of strength and Dragon, ever the slow one, accepts. Down goes Ricky but he finally hits a knee to the hand to break the grip, followed by a wicked spin out to take Rude to the mat. Steamboat cranks on the arm and does so for a good while. The crowd is pretty much quiet here, so we can hear the individual shouts from fans which give Vince and Jesse something to talk about.

Rude escapes but Steamboat chops him right back down and armdrags him down as only Ricky can do. An elbow puts Ricky down for a bit and Rick pounds away some more. Steamboat comes back with chops and another armdrag into an armbar. More slugging out occurs with chops vs. punches dominating the action. In something you don't often see, Steamboat seems to botch a spot, resulting in him backing into a knee from Rude and falling (intentionally) to the floor.

Rick sends Steamboat back first into the apron and slams him down as Steamboat is in trouble. There's a camel clutch by Rude as he finally has

a body part to work on. Steamboat taps but that wouldn't mean anything else for about six years. The referee checks the arm and they make a BIG error as Ricky lets his arm fall three times before stopping it on the fourth drop. Jesse FREAKS as only he can but the match just keeps going. Gotta love that live TV thing right?

Anyway Steamboat stands up and drops Rude on his back to put both guys down. It's Steamboat up first but a splash hits knees. Back to the chinlock but Ricky makes the ropes and sends Rude into the buckle ten times. A chop to the face gets two and we hit the mat for some technical stuff and a pinfall reversal sequence. By that I mean about five pin attempts each and the crowd is waking up now. Ricky suplexes Rude down but Rude pulls the referee in the way of the cross body. Rude puts on the over the shoulder backbreaker (his move before the Rude Awakening) but it's a DQ win for Steamboat.

Rating: C. The main issue here was the length. This runs about eighteen minutes and a lame ending didn't help things either. At least you had two talented guys in there to make the match work a bit better. Still though, cut about five minutes off of this one and it's WAY better all of a sudden. Steamboat would be gone in just a few months.

It's time for the bench press lift record attempt. Dino Bravo is doing the lifting (in wrestling gear) and Jesse is spotting. Frenchy Martin, Dino's manager, is here too. Dino presses 415 to start but first demands complete and utter silence. The 415lbs are easily lifted ten times. We're going for over 700 by the end so this may take awhile. Next up is 505, which I believe is what Yokozuna weighed when he debuted. That one only goes up eight times as we're at six minutes spent on this so far.

This time it's going to be 555. Great this is going to take even more time now. Dino stops to yell at the fans a bit first and now we're going to the lifting. This one gets about seven reps as this continues to take time. Now it's 595. They keep talking about a world record, even though there's no official there to confirm this is happening or anything like that. Wait let's yell at the fans some more before he lifts it three times. We're at ten minutes now.

Jesse yells at McMahon a bit and Bravo takes forever to do 655. Gene doing the used car salesman selling of this segment helps a bit due to how over the top and ridiculous it is. Now they go for 715, but the record would be unofficial because the bar will have to be weighed later. We stop to yell at the fans of course first though and storms off. As Bravo goes to finish, Ventura reaches down and pulls the bar up. Yep, that's the actual payoff of over fifteen minutes of this nonsense.

Women's Tag Titles: Jumping Bomb Angels vs. Glamour Girls

These are real titles (held by the Glamour Girls at this point) which have perhaps the most confusing history ever, as the belts were literally bought and sold between two wrestling companies. Anyway, they're here now and the Angels (Tateno and Yamazaki) beat the Glamour Girls (Judy Martin and Lelani Kai) in the finals of the Survivor Series match which basically set this up. This is also 2/3 falls.

I'm not entirely sure which is which on both teams but Vince doesn't even know the names of the Angels at all until someone tells him later on. The Angels immediately charge at the Girls and hit stereo dropkicks to take over. For those of you unfamiliar with the Angels, basically imagine the Hardys before they became poster children for what drugs can do to you but with long hair and wearing one piece female swimsuits.

We start with Kai vs. Yamazaki (the one in pink. Got it) and a knee to the back from Martin gives the Girls control. Yamazaki Matrixes out of a cover and rolls Kai up for two. Off to Tateno for a kind of suplex out of a piledriver position for one. Jesse asks Vince the names of the Bomb Angels and Vince has NO idea. He suggests calling them pink and red. Yamazaki tries a cross body but it literally bounces off the shall we say rotund Martin.

Off to Kai again so Yamazaki knees her down before bring Tateno back in. Both Angels fire off forearms to take Kai down and there's an Octopus Hold (a freaky kind of abdominal stretch from Japan) from Tateno. The Angels put on stereo figure fours before it gets down to just Tateno on Kai. There's a legdrop between the legs ala Jeff Hardy but instead Tateno spreads her own legs to spread Kai's into the splits as well.

Yamazaki hooks something like a Sharpshooter while being off to the side of Kai. That's incredibly painful looking and I don't think I've ever seen it otherwise. The Angels get in a tug of war over Kai with Martin losing the war. Martin makes a tag but it doesn't count because her feet weren't on the apron. There's a rule you never see enforced. Not that it matters as there's the regular tag anyway. Martin comes in and beats on Tateno a bit before hitting a falling backwards facedrop out of a powerbomb position for the first fall. Big Show called that the Alley Oop if it wasn't clear.

Martin pounds on Tateno after the break but Tateno bridges out in the Matrix move from the mat. Martin misses a splash and there's Yamazaki again. A middle rope clothesline puts Martin down for two as Vince knows the Angels' names now. The Angels cause some heel miscommunication but Martin loads up the same move that won her the first fall. In a classic example of PSYCHOLOGY, Tateno rolls through it into a sunset flip for the second fall this time. See? She LEARNED over the course of the match. That shows thinking, which is psychology! It's not that hard! She slipped a bit on the flip but I'll forgive it this time.

The third fall begins with a double clothesline from the Angels for two on Kai but Lelani pounds away on her in retaliation. Off to Martin who blocks a fisherman's suplex and escapes a backslide out of the corner. A slingshot sends Yamazaki into the wrong corner and double teaming gets two on her.

Off to Tateno who is thrown around even more than Yamazaki was. Tateno comes back with a pair of release atomic drops minus the knees and it's off to Yamazaki for a top rope knee for two. A double underhook suplex gets two on Kai but a senton backplash misses for Tateno. With Kai trying to get in, the Angels hit stereo missile dropkicks on Martin for the pin and the titles.

Rating: B. For the late 80s and women's wrestling, this was off the charts. The Angels are every bit as good as any male cruiserweight not named Mysterio you'll ever see and when they're against people like the Girls, their skills are shown off even better. This was beyond state of the art for this time period and is still amazing today. Check these

chicks out and you won't be disappointed.

We recap Hogan vs. Andre at Wrestlemania by getting the opening minute or so which saw Hogan trying the slam and Andre getting a "controversial" two count. Andre wants a rematch and has been sold to DiBiase, who wants to buy the world title. Andre showed how evil he was by attacking Hogan on SNME and easily choking him down, setting up the rematch in about two weeks and a match which drew an INSANE 15 rating on LIVE national TV on NBC. Today Vince would lose his mind at a 5 on cable, so this was unthinkable back then.

Oh and now we get the contract signing between Andre and Hogan on tonight's show for the match on February 5 in Indianapolis. DiBiase is here too as Jesse points out how stupid the fans are for cheering for a song called Real American here in Canada. Even Jack Tunney is here. For those of you unfamiliar, picture Johnny Ace if he wasn't dripping with charisma.

Gene actually calls Andre Mr. Roussimoff here, which you NEVER hear on WWF TV. Andre won't sit down and then he won't sign. Hogan signs but Andre wants to read the whole thing first. One thing to note: Gene has probably said the date of the match about ten times. It's so simple yet so effective. Andre signs and beats up Hogan for fun to end this after a LONG time.

Jesse and Vince talk about the Rumble and say that if you go over the top, it doesn't matter where your feet touch because you're out. I'm assuming that means you have to hit the floor but it's not exactly clear.

Royal Rumble

Okerlund explains the rules and the intervals are every two minutes here. If you don't know the Rumble rules, you have no business reading this. It's a battle royal, people come in every two minutes, there are 20 people in it (this year only) last man standing wins. #1 is Bret Hart and #2 is Tito Santana, and wouldn't you know it their tag teams are feuding right now. I mean what are the odds?

They slug it out to start with no one having any kind of advantage. Bret

finally takes him down and heads towards the rope as Butch Reed comes in at #3. This is a different kind of Rumble as heels don't fight heels and faces don't fight faces yet. They just kind of work together as you would expect them to. Tito is almost thrown out by Reed but he escapes and beats on both heels for a bit.

It's Neidhart in at #4 as not a ton is happening so far in this match. This leaves Santana more or less down 3-1 and everyone pounds away on him. The clock is pretty lenient so far as there's no way they're going two minutes between each of these entrants. We get some slow triple teaming and after a choke on the ropes, here's Jake Roberts in at #5 to quickly toss out Reed. We've got Roberts/Santana vs. the Hart Foundation which is quite the tag match when you think about it.

The Harts get beaten down and then thrown into each other but Neidhart breaks up the DDT. Bret piledrives Santana down and Harley Race is in at #6. The crowd is staying way into this which is a good sign for the future. Things kind of slow down a bit as the faces and heels beat on each other for a little while. Here's Jim Brunzell at #7 to make it a six man tag for all intents and purposes.

Roberts goes EVIL by pulling on Neidhart's beard. Only Reed has been eliminated so far. The good guys are in control at the moment with Race almost being thrown out. Here's Sam Houston, Jake's real life half brother, coming in at #8 to beat on everyone in sight. Well every heel at least. The Harts finally get together and throw out Santana to get us down to six people in the ring.

After about 90 seconds, here's Danny Davis at #9. To be fair he's barely a jobber so it's not like this is going to give the heels any significant advantage. Oh wait he's fighting Sam Houston so yeah, the heels are in control. Race gets caught in the ropes and Jake keeps knocking him back and forth in a funny bit. Davis tries to kick Jake and gets his leg caught, followed by a suplex from Roberts.

Danny escapes a DDT as we get Boris Zhukov at #10, maybe 80 seconds after Davis came in. Things continue to go slow as we're trying to build up to a regular battle royal. Race goes after Boris in the first instance of

heel vs. heel in this match. Race and Hart double team Brunzell for a bit as this continues to be slow. Don Muraco comes out as #11 but Nikolai Volkoff follows him out, apparently thinking he's #11. Now there's a story you don't see that often but which could work.

Brunzell puts out Zhukov and apparently Nikolai is going to be #12 in a few moments. After way too long of nothing happening, Nikolai is officially #12. Brunzell is put to the apron but gets back in just as Race is eliminated by Muraco. We've got eight in there at the moment, which would be Hart, Neidhart, Roberts, Brunzell, Houston, Davis, Muraco and Volkoff. Race won't leave ringside so as Duggan comes out at #13, he beats Race up on the way. This would lead to one of those so ridiculous it's hilarious moments at the Slammys.

Duggan goes right after Neidhart because HE wants to be the Jim in this match. The place is way into him too so the crowd reaction is good. After maybe a minute here's Ron Bass at #14. Volkoff dumps Brunzell as Jake and Neidhart collide. The clock gets even shorter as B. Brian Blair is #15. There are way too many people in the ring now. Everyone fights everyone as Hillbilly Jim is #16, and the fourth person in this match named Jim. He also dumps out Jim Neidhart to empty the ring a tiny bit.

Dino Bravo is #17 as Bass dumps Houston. Back to slow motion mode with everyone pounding on people near the ropes without really doing much. Ultimate Warrior (doesn't mean anything yet) is #18 and Bret is FINALLY put out by Don Muraco. I timed this next one, and the One Man Gang comes out at #19, 53 seconds after Warrior. They're not even trying here. Gang immediately pounds on Roberts so Warrior jumps on the big man's back. This is WAY before he would have been able to slam him anyway.

Gang dumps Blair and Roberts in about ten seconds, which is the best thing that could happen in this match. The Junkyard Dog is #20, giving us a final group of Davis, Volkoff, Muraco, Bass, Hillbilly Jim, Dino Bravo, Ultimate Warrior, Gang, Duggan and Dog. Hillbilly and Gang hammer on each other as Duggan puts Volkoff out. Gang tosses Hillbilly as Bravo and Davis double team Duggan. This ends badly for Davis as Duggan dumps him to a BIG pop.

Bravo and Gang dump the Warrior as we're down to six pretty quickly. Bass jumps the Dog and tosses him to get us down to five. Muraco dumps Bass and we have a final four of Muraco, Gang, Duggan and Bravo. Gang splashes Duggan in the corner, leaving Muraco to have to fight off both guys. He even takes Frenchy Martin down with a dropkick, only to have Gang clothesline him out to get us down to three.

Jim gets double teamed for awhile and Bravo drops an elbow on him. The same clothesline sequence the heels tried earlier backfires and Bravo gets clotheslined out. Duggan pounds on Gang in a Mid-South reunion but a single shot from Gang takes him down. Gang beats on him next to the ropes, so Duggan low bridges him to win the first Royal Rumble.

Rating: C+. This is one of those matches where the words "well, they tried" come to mind. That's the best way to put this match: they didn't really know what they were doing yet, but they tried. The lack of star power hurt this one as only Duggan and maybe Dog were big names here. It wouldn't be until next year when the star power came into this and it became a main event thing. Still though, it's certainly not a bad match and they would get better as time went on.

We recap (see? It even happened back then) the contract signing from earlier tonight.

Hogan is in the arena (in jeans, which is a weird image for some reason) and says that he wants Andre. Standard hype interview for a big match but it's Hogan in the late 80s so you know it's awesome.

Islanders vs. Young Stallions

Another 2/3 falls match here just to fill in the final part of the show. The Islanders have recently kidnapped Matilda and are recently back off suspension for returning the dog. Tama and Powers (It's Haku/Tama vs. Jim Powers/Paul Roma) start things off and no one can get a real advantage in the early going. The Stallions beat on Tama a bit, with shots to the head for some reason, before it's Haku in off the tag.

A cross body gets two for Roma and the Stallions work on the arm for awhile. Off to Tama who gets in like one shot before we cut to a camera

angle from over the announcers shoulders. That's a new one. Powers gets caught by a double headbutt and Haku hammers away on him some more. This continues to go nowhere so I think out of boredom it's off to Roma vs. Tama.

Roma dropkicks Tama down but Haku low bridges Roma, sending him to the floor and injuring the knee. That's good enough for a countout for the first fall and the Stallions take Roma to the dressing room to get his knee looked at. In other words, we need a reason to show the contract signing again and let Andre talk a bit. Just like Hogan, Andre doesn't have much to say but it hypes up the Main Event.

Back to the match after the promo, the recap and a pair of breaks and it's basically Powers in a handicap match now. You can see big gaps of seats where fans have left. For this one, I can't say I blame them. Powers dropkicks him down and we hear about Giant-A-Mania from Jesse. Off to Tama who pounds away even more and kicks out of a small package at two. Tama's jumping back elbow takes Powers down and it's a little Samoan trash talk for good measure. Haku's dropkick gets two and there's a gutwrench suplex for two more.

It's off to an abdominal stretch but Powers finally hiptosses out of it to get a breather. Haku misses a splash and things slow down again, but there's no one for Powers to tag because of Roma's knee injury. Roma finally tags himself in and Haku casually kicks the leg out to take over. Jesse wishes that was Vince's knee because that's the kind of guy he is. Tama puts on a half crab and the referee stops it.

Rating: D. This match is a victim of its spot on the card. The problem here is that everything else is done and this was the textbook definition of filler. It's hard to care about something like this when there's no story and no interest in this match, and on top of that it wasn't even anything decent. This is one of those matches though where you can't blame a lot of the problems on the wrestlers.

Jesse and Vince chat a bit about what we saw to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. There's one major thing to keep in mind about this show: it was on free TV. On PPV, this would have been bad, but to be fair

they had no idea what they were going for here so anything good, which a lot of stuff on here was, was a surprise. This was a decent entry into the show, but they did WAY better next year when they had an idea what they were doing. Good first effort though.

As I did with the last series of reviews, I'll be comparing the new ratings to the original ones and posting a link to the original review.

Ratings Comparison

Ricky Steamboat vs. Rick Rude

Original: C+

Redo: C

Jumping Bomb Angels vs. Glamour Girls

Original: B-

Redo: B

Royal Rumble

Original: C-

Redo: C+

Islanders vs. Young Stallions

Original: C-

Redo: D

Overall Rating

Original: C+

Redo: C+

This show hasn't changed much other than a few tweaks here and there.

Here's the original review:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/08/royal-rumble-count-up-1988/>

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