

Monday Night Raw – May 20, 2002: So Steve Austin Walks Into A Bar

Monday Night Raw

Date: May 20, 2002

Location: Pyramid, Memphis, Tennessee

Attendance: 8,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the first night of the Undertaker regime and that means we're getting closer to King of the Ring. In addition to that, I'm sure there's a good chance that we're going to get more of Austin vs. the NWO, which is now adding names for Austin to beat up from week to week. As long as it's not Austin vs. Big Show, I think we're good. Let's get to it.

We open with a rest in peace video for the British Bulldog. There's a lot more effort here than in most of these, though the fact that he was only 39 makes it even harder to accept. That's just too young for anyone.

Opening sequence.

Rob Van Dam comes to the ring because the scripts calls for him to be there, only to have Undertaker come out and beat the tar out of him. A whip into the steps busts open Van Dam's eye and Undertaker hits him with the steps for good measure. Undertaker is mad that he didn't get to open the show and had to beat up Van Dam for trying to steal his spotlight. When he feels like he has something to say, he's going to come down here and say it no matter who is in the ring.

The number one rule around here is respect the Undertaker and you can ask Hulk Hogan what happens when you disobey. Last night, he killed Hulkamania and it's over for good. In fact, Hogan is going to announce his retirement on Smackdown. As Undertaker keeps talking, the referees are STILL checking on Van Dam, which means we're just waiting on him to get up and do something else. We keep hearing about respect as Van Dam crawls into the ring. Undertaker thinks Van

Dam is thick between the ears and the fight is on with Rob kicking him down and hitting a Five Star.

Undertaker demands a match with Van Dam tonight so Ric Flair makes it a title match. Makes sense given their history but doesn't make a ton of sense given Flair as a smart heel who would want to stay on Undertaker's good side.

Hardy Boyz vs. NWO

X-Pac and Big Show here. Jeff starts with a headscissors on X-Pac as the announcers don't have much to say about the Hardys getting destroyed by Lesnar last night. Matt comes in with a Side Effect but Show realizes that he's Big and runs Matt over from the apron. Show gets in his big beatdown segment but it's back to X-Pac who misses a charge in the corner. I can't picture this pair of screwups being the best idea for a team.

The brothers get smart and try to double team X-Pac, only to get thrown around by Show. Booker T. kicks Big Show by mistake because this team is rapidly turning into a big joke that just won't go away. With things going horribly for the NWO, here's Goldust as Elvis for an accidental distraction, allowing Jeff to grab a rollup for the pin.

Rating: D+. This is where the NWO belongs: as a tag team who can probably beat some lower level pairings but aren't quite good enough to go after the Tag Team Titles, mainly because they don't exist on Raw at this point. It's amazing what happens when you get rid of Hall and let X-Pac do most of the wrestling. The matches aren't good but they're a lot less horrible.

Paul Heyman talks to Trish about her lingerie and sex is suggested. Denied, but it's suggested.

The NWO argues over who should be the leader. Maybe Flair should have joined. Somehow this gets us to Goldust/Booker T. vs. the Hardys later tonight. Did anyone ask Matt and Jeff if they're cool with this?

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Jacqueline

Trish is defending. Jackie slaps her in the chest to start, giving Lawler his favorite spot in years. A headlock doesn't get Jackie anywhere but an armdrag into an armbar works a bit better. Trish fights up with forearms and a suplex for two. Lawler: "I'd like to

be her thigh master." Jackie misses a charge in the corner and the bulldog retains the title. This was actually pretty good while it lasted but the time hurt it, as is always the case.

Heyman and Lesnar come out and threaten Trish with violence if she doesn't go out with Paul. Cue Bubba Ray Dudley for the save to give Brock his first singles feud.

Video on last night's big matches. Isn't that how you should open the show?

Tommy Dreamer is still gross and one person continues to laugh. This time he eats hair as he gets it cut and washes it down with something called Barbicide, which is apparently a disinfectant. What do you even say to something like this?

Rob Van Dam isn't going to listen to the doctor who tells him not to wrestle tonight.

GET THE F OUT!

European Title: William Regal vs. Bubba Ray Dudley

Bubba is challenging and starts fast with a slam and those big elbows. You really can see the Dusty Rhodes influence in there and that's not the worst thing in the world. Molly Holly, in Regal's corner here, trips Bubba to let Regal take over but the guys slam heads for a double knockdown. The Flip Flop and Fly have Regal in trouble and it's table time for no logical reason. Cue Lesnar for the DQ.

After an F5, Molly slips Regal the knuckles to knock Bubba out again.

Here are Flair and Arn Anderson for the 10pm chat. Flair admits that he's made some mistakes over the years but there are too few to mention. See, last night, Austin pinned the illegal man so it's time for a new plan. This brings out Austin to hear said plan face to face. Or face to heels actually. Anderson threatens him with violence and Austin doesn't seem impressed. Anyway, Flair says he owns Austin and is going to take him out of the ring. Stunning and beer drinking ensues.

Hardy Boyz vs. Goldust/Booker T.

Raven of all people comes out for commentary and rips on Lawler for his lame job calling matches. Lawler won't be too interested in this

match because Lita and her puppies aren't here. JR asks about Goldust and Booker's relationship. Raven: "You don't know much about relationships Lawler. That's why your wife left you." Some forearms put Matt down to start and Booker dances around a bit before tagging Goldust in. The Side Effect puts Goldust down but here's the NWO to kick Goldust in the back of the head. Matt grabs a small package for the pin.

Austin and Debra are at a karaoke bar. I don't see this being funny. Back in the ring, Goldust is still down with the NWO around him. Booker isn't cool with X-Pac and Big Show interfering because it cost him a match. They yell at each other over their actions last night with Booker saying X-Pac can't get laid. Show points out that they never invited Booker to join the team, which makes you wonder WHY HE'S STILL THERE. Can the boss just assign people to stables? Anyway Kevin Nash comes out to take charge of the group and rips into them like a bunch of losers. Booker is officially on the team and seems very happy about it because Nash is just so darn inspirational.

Eddie Guerrero is at the bar as well and sends Debra a teddy bear. Does the bar just happen to sell teddy bears? Austin isn't pleased.

After the announcers plug the upcoming Australia show, Raven asks if Lawler knows anything about wrestling anymore. Raven gets on a regular mic and yells at Lawler for only talking about puppies. A challenge is issued for later tonight.

Debra asks Austin to sing but Eddie takes the mic and sings....I have no idea actually. It's booted off the stage as expected.

Raven vs. Jerry Lawler

Raven starts with some basic stuff and Lawler gets a bit more height than I was expecting off a backdrop. They head outside so Raven can yell at JR but Lawler gets all fired up and takes the strap down. A bunch of right hands and rams into the buckle have the crowd all entertained and knock Raven loopy. Raven bails before the fist drop can hit.

Rating: D-. They can't even have Raven do a job for Lawler in Memphis? I'm fine with Jerry doing this once or twice a year to give the fans a quick thrill because nothing the company is going to put out there is going to fire them up like a quick Lawler match. That

being said, I really don't get the idea of having Raven walking out instead of just taking the pin. Then again, the insults he got in on Lawler were pure gold and more than make up for the loss.

Austin sings Margaritaville but Eddie doesn't like it. Since this is 2002 Austin, he turns his back on Eddie and gets a beer bottle broken over his head. Aside from this taking WAY too long to finally get to the point, the idea of Austin vs. Guerrero is a huge improvement over the NWO nonsense. It's going to suck for the Intercontinental Title but at least they're elevating someone.

Undisputed Title: Rob Van Dam vs. Undertaker

Van Dam is challenging and his eye probably isn't healed up yet. A big dive takes Undertaker out before the bell, which probably isn't the best idea in the world. Undertaker crotches himself with a missed big boot and some kicks get some two counts. A clothesline puts Undertaker on the floor and Van Dam is right back out there with some kicks to the back. Undertaker gets back inside but can't hit the Last Ride.

Instead he ribs off a buckle pad but opts to elbow Rob in the face instead. The chokeslam is broken up and Undertaker goes into the exposed buckle. Rolling Thunder connects for the pin with Undertaker's foot on the ropes and Memphis is way too smart for that. Cue Flair to say the foot was on the ropes so the match is continuing. The Last Ride retains the title.

Rating: C. Undertaker gave Rob a lot here and it was a lot more entertaining than I was expecting. Van Dam moving higher up on the card is a good thing and it's always cool to see someone younger in the main event scene. I remember watching this live but I had missed the foot being on the rope. It's amazing how much fun you can have when you get surprised by something like this and buy that they did something like that.

Flair is pleased to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. There's a lot of bad stuff on here and it's certainly not a good show but WHAT AN IMPROVEMENT this was over recent weeks. Guerrero and Van Dam are moving up the card, the NWO has an actual leader (though they lost both of their matches), Undertaker, though still bad, is a huge upgrade over Hogan as champion and Brock vs. Bubba could give us some good fights.

That being said, there's a lot of bad around here too. There was way too much time spent on the bar segments and Undertaker's opening segment, which could have been done in half the time. The short matches still don't do the show any favors and it's not a good sign that the Hardys have to work twice. They have so many people running around on the show with nothing to do but we need to see Matt and Jeff twice in an hour and a half? It's still not a good show but this was miles ahead of everything they've been doing in the last month.

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Monday Night Raw – May 6, 2002: Beyond Free Fall

Monday Night Raw

Date: May 6, 2002

Location: Hartford Civic Center, Hartford, Connecticut

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

Maybe a new month will help things out a little bit. I know I say this every week but it almost can't get worse than last week with Undertaker very slowly beating Hulk Hogan down because Hogan can barely move at this point in his career. The pay per view really can't get here soon enough as I can't imagine they'll keep the title

on Hogan any longer. Let's get to it.

Oh and as of today: it's WWE. I'll put the over/under on mentions of the new name at 5000.

We open with....gardening? An older woman chops up her bushes to get them into a perfect WWE logo, which she then lights on fire. The new tagline: Get the F Out. I actually like that as it gets straight to the point.

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Jazz

Jazz is defending, there are no disqualifications and Steven Richards is in the champ's corner. The fans want puppies as Jazz sends Trish into the corner to start, only to miss a splash. Richards offers a distraction though and Trish's rollup goes nowhere. JR says this is for the World Wrestling Entertainment Women's Title and I think we're all glad that name didn't last.

Jazz throws her around with some butterfly suplexes for two, followed by the double chickenwing facebuster to send Lawler into hysterics. A Chick Kick and Stratusfaction has the champ beaten but Richards makes another save by superkicking Trish down to give Jazz the pin.

Rating: D. Was there a point to this that I don't get? The No DQ stuff could have been forgotten with a simple referee distraction but to be fair I'd probably call that stupid. It might be easier to just have them do a regular match and scrap Richards as a whole but then we couldn't do the following.

Bubba Ray Dudley with a Bubba Bomb, Raven with the Raven Effect, Justin Credible with a superkick, Crash Holly with a missile dropkick, Bubba with a trashcan shot and Trish stealing the title and a blinded Bubba (fire extinguisher) powerbombing Trish through a table so Richards can steal the pin gives us six Hardcore Title changes in about two minutes because old jokes are funnier when you do them for the third time in less than two months. Bubba takes Trish to the back because that makes up for powerbombing her through a table.

Here's the NWO for a chat due to reasons of WE'RE TELLING YOU THEY WERE A GOOD IDEA AND YOU CAN JUST DEAL WITH IT! Show lets us see him turning heel and joining the team in a big moment. Two years ago, he was in the main event of Wrestlemania while Austin was hurt. Now it's 2002 and he spent Wrestlemania in a restaurant pretending to have a good time instead of being on the show. Last month he was in a preliminary match on Heat while Austin had a #1 contenders match. Show is a monster that no one can stop and now the NWO is even bigger.

This brings out Ric Flair to say he wishes he could have Big Show's natural gifts but he's a sixteen time World Champion because he didn't whine and cry. It's really more about when Flair didn't cry but we're not quite to that point yet. Flair tells Show to deal with it and announces the NWO vs. Bradshaw/Austin/Flair, which he already announced last week. Hall promises a history changing announcement for later tonight.

European Title: William Regal vs. Spike Dudley

Spike is defending and is coming in with a bad ankle due to Regal attacking him over the weekend. He's ready to fight anyway and jumps on Regal's back, earning himself a stomp to the foot and a slam onto the ropes. A simple leglock makes Spike tap in about 35 seconds. That would be two title changes in 40 seconds combined for this belt.

Regal beats Spike up even more after the match. D'Lo Brown of all people comes out for the save.

Flair rants to Arn Anderson in a nothing segment.

Booker T. goes to 7-11 for a Slurpee and is annoyed that there's no Booker T. cup. He runs into Goldust in a Latrell Sprewell jersey with headphones around his neck. Goldust has followed him from his hotel (Booker: "YOU BEEN FOLLOWING ME???") and wants to talk strategy for their match tonight. Booker seems to agree but has to go. Goldust: "If you'll let me have a drink of your Slurpee, I'll let you have a bite of my weiner." Booker responds as you would expect anyone to if he's offered a bite of a hot dog. Funny stuff as

always.

We look at Planet Stasiak costing Brock Lesnar and himself a tag match at Insurrextion over the weekend.

Flair finds an APA hat in the NWO dressing room. Bradshaw doesn't seem like one to just leave his hat laying around.

Undertaker arrives and assigns someone to watch his bike.

The NWO is standing near the entrance, seemingly waiting on somebody.

Planet Stasiak vs. Brock Lesnar

Brock fires off the shoulders in the corner to start as we get the GOLDBERG chants. The spinebuster looks to finish but Heyman wants an example made. An F5 and a boot on the chest is enough for the easy pin. Another squash.

Hulk Hogan has stolen Undertaker's motorcycle because Undertaker left the keys in the ignition.

GET THE F OUT! It's the same thing as earlier as the company is still WWE about an hour later.

Here's Hogan on the motorcycle to Undertaker's music. I really could have gone my whole life without seeing Hulk Hogan coming out to Limp Bizkit. Hulk gets right to the point by calling Undertaker out for a fight and threatening his motorcycle to sweeten the pot a bit.

Undertaker comes out and tells Hogan not to mess with the bike.

Hogan isn't impressed and swears a bit before turning the bike on.

It moves a whole three feet before the engine stalls, leaving Undertaker to....stand right there and not do a thing.

Hogan finally leaves the bike on the ramp and runs (work with me here) after Undertaker as we cut to the commentators. You can hear the engine revving as Hogan is apparently still out there trying to get the thing to work. Well done by JR and King to not die of laughter here. The chase is FINALLY on with Hogan driving the bike around backstage (had to do it as the pre-tape shows him on the bike backstage). He changes pace a bit by driving around even more, all while shouting for Undertaker.

Hogan eventually parks it in front of a semi truck and gets inside as we go to a break. Back with Hogan crushing the bike. You know, a month and a half ago he used a similar truck to crush an ambulance with Rock inside so this is real progress for him. This was WAY too long and I'm amazed that both guys didn't just walk off the show when the bike stalled. What a sign indeed.

Rob Van Dam/Jeff Hardy vs. Booker T./Eddie Guerrero

Van Dam and Guerrero hit the mat to start with Rob monkey flipping him down but missing a kick to the face. Instead a faceplant out of an electric chair sends Eddie crawling over to the corner for the tag to Booker. More kicks have Mr. T. in trouble and it's off to Jeff as things speed up again.

Booker finally gets in a shot on Hardy and it's time for a face to be in peril. An elbow to the jaw sets up the Spinarooni for two (Lawler: "Dagnabbit.") but Jeff comes back with a dropkick (totally missed) and the real hot tag brings in Van Dam. Everything breaks down again and Rolling Thunder gets two on Eddie. Cue Goldust for a failed distraction so a Swanton from Jeff and the Five Star from Rob can put Eddie away.

Rating: C+. These guys are becoming the lone bright spots on this show and it's a bit disappointing to have them all in the same match. At least it was one of the better segments so far this week with a good looking ending. You certainly can't fault Eddie for losing when he takes back to back finishers so he was even a bit protected in the loss.

Terri has challenged Molly to a swimsuit contest later tonight with a contest between pure and wholesome or what's under her robe.

Flair and Anderson think Bradshaw has joined the NWO, guaranteeing that he hasn't.

It's time for the swimsuit contest and of course Lawler is in charge. Terri comes out and Lawler is praying for a thong. Molly brings a pair of flippers for more proper swimming attire (JR: "The Hilary Clinton of the WWF."). Molly decides she's going first and,

after putting on her swimming cap, reveals a conservative one piece with a skirt. It looks like a figure skating costume, meaning it looks like what a lot of run of the mill women would wear to a pool every day.

Naturally Lawler and the crowd think it's horrible and treat Molly like she's wearing a full body suit with only her ankles showing. Terri reveals exactly what you would expect and wins because fans go for the orange skin with countable ribs look. Molly lays her out with a flipper in the only heelish thing she's done in the entire segment.

Flair goes to Bradshaw's locker room (Bradshaw has his own locker room?) and finds Kane's mask, which X-Pac stole weeks ago.

After a break, Flair runs into Bradshaw and demands an explanation. Bradshaw says he'll see Flair in the ring.

Undertaker finds his bike. Where in the world has he been for the last half hour? He tries to pull the bike out from under the truck and then stomps on the bike, likely thinking that floating out of the top of a casket after cutting a promo to a camera hanging from the lid wasn't so bad after all. Undertaker leaves and Kevin Nash arrives for the surprise.

NWO vs. Ric Flair/Bradshaw/Steve Austin

Austin and X-Pac start and it's a spinebuster each for X-Pac and Hall. Steve cleans house with right hands but can't get a Stunner on Hall. Instead it's off to the Big Show for some choking in the corner and a backdrop that sends Austin flying. You don't see Austin in the air that often. Bradshaw tags himself in for the fall away slam on Hall as JR thinks there's only one Kane mask in existence. You know, because they're not sold at the merchandise stands.

Show comes back in and throws Bradshaw around "like a double cheeseburger." Who throws double cheeseburgers around? I've never been to Oklahoma but are things really that different there? The bloody (thanks to some Big Show headbutts) Bradshaw is beaten down by all three NWOites with Show headbutting him into the bad corner.

A big boot finally drops X-Pac and it's Flair coming in with the chops.

Everything breaks down and Bradshaw's Clotheslines lays out X-Pac but Big Show pulls him outside for a chokeslam through the announcers' table. Austin finally goes after Show (which is the point of this whole thing) but has to Stun Hall and X-Pac at the same time. Some Big Show chops have Austin in trouble and he falls out to the floor. Austin actually goes aerial again with a middle rope Thesz press to put Show down but the Stunner is easily blocked and we get a ref bump.

A low blow sets up the Stunner but there's no referee. Of course there isn't because this hasn't gone on long enough. Flair hits Austin with a chair to go full heel and destroys the knee to make things even worse. With Austin down, Flair makes himself and Big Show vs. Austin at the pay per view. Ric grabs a Figure Four as the match is a no contest.

Rating: D-. The length here is the big problem as this went on for over fifteen minutes and set up the most obvious ending they could have gone with after eliminating every other possible option. Taking out the fact that Nash was just a decoy and what else could it have been other than Flair turning heel? It makes sense, but it was really tiresome having to sit through the APA hat/Kane mask stuff earlier. Just WAY too long here though and it really dragged things down even further than they were before.

Overall Rating: F+. Raw is now beyond free fall and has hit the ground, exploding on impact. Other than the same four midcard guys having their regularly good matches (less than six minutes this week), I can't think of a single thing on this show that isn't either too short, boring, offensive or the pit of torture that is the main event.

Raw has had six shows since the Brand Split. Here are the main event matches/segments which go along with Hogan/HHH as World Champion:

Kane vs. X-Pac/Austin contract signing

Austin vs. Hall

Austin/Bradshaw vs. NWO/Undertaker

Austin/Big Show vs. NWO

Hogan vs. Regal/Undertaker beats Hogan down

Austin/Bradshaw/Flair vs. NWO

Here's the thing: other than two major pops for Hogan, is there any reason that Austin isn't in Hogan's spot? Hogan has a long history with Hall, Nash and Flair while Austin has a long history with HHH and Undertaker. Much more importantly though, Austin may be a shell of his glory days but he's WAY ahead of Hogan at this point. Hogan's matches so far have been embarrassing while you could at least pencil in Austin for watchable at worst. Couple that with swapping the NWO out for ANYTHING else and this show is instantly better.

Raw is a disaster right now with two major angles being huge wastes of everyone's time and it's turned into one of the biggest messes I've seen in a long time. I know people would get sick of the upcoming HHH and Shawn Michaels dominance but it puts this nonsense to shame. At least you could get a decent main event, which we haven't gotten so far in six weeks.

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Monday Night Raw – April 29, 2002: It's Nitro

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 29, 2002

Location: HSBC Arena, Buffalo, New York

Attendance: 8,500

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

The question at this point is how bad can things get. The wrestling has been horrible but the stories have been some of the worst of all time with uninspired main eventers who look like they're about to collapse from old age. Maybe things can start to pick up soon because it can't get much worse. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Tonight: Hulk Hogan vs. William Regal. That's one of those matches you never expect to see as Hogan almost never worked against anyone other than a main eventer.

Intercontinental Title: Eddie Guerrero vs. Jeff Hardy

Eddie is defending and we hear about Lita breaking her neck in three places on the set of Dark Angel, which would keep her out of the ring for over a year. They start fast with Jeff grabbing an armdrag and his swinging sleeper drop for two. A quick trip to the floor lets the champ get his head together and it's time to chop away in the corner. Eddie's belly to back suplex looks to set up the slingshot hilo but Jeff is too annoyed at losing his bandana and rolls away.

Jeff scores with a superplex and starts hammering away in the corner. It's too early for the Swanton though and Jeff gets crotched. JR: "That can't feel good unless you're wearing a couple of cups." I think he means it makes it hurt less but JR often gets lost in his own talking. The Whisper in the Wind takes the referee down by mistake, allowing Eddie to get in a belt shot. The Frog Splash retains the title.

Rating: C+. Pretty good here but you could see that Jeff's head wasn't in it at this point. He was just doing his normal stuff and going through the motions while Eddie was doing whatever he could to

keep the match together. The early days of his singles run weren't great but when Jeff's head was on straight, you can't deny that the talent was there.

Recap of Austin vs. Flair and Big Show joining the NWO.

Austin arrives and asks where that lying no good SOB is. Production worker: "Mr. McMahon isn't here tonight." Austin: "I don't mean that one!"

Here's Austin in the ring to call out Flair. Austin starts drinking immediately and says he has a story for us. After some Beverly Hillbillies discussion to start the WHAT chants, Austin goes through the same stuff we just saw a video on a few minutes earlier. The WHAT chants keep going until Austin says he wants Big Show but calls Flair out right now.

Flair comes to the stage and says he had nothing to do with what happened last week (which gets a mini recap because we need to fill in time). Ric apologizes and says Big Show is in India tonight so we'll get Austin/Bradshaw vs. Scott Hall/X-Pac with Flair as guest referee. The fans get where this is going immediately and seem interested, which is understandable as the promo was good but this is still leading to Austin/Bradshaw vs. the NWO. Austin promises violence if Flair tries anything.

That's where this whole story falls apart: for reasons that aren't clear, Austin is teaming up with Bradshaw to fight a bunch of washed up guys who are basically only there because WWE doesn't want to admit that they were stupid hires. Of all the people on the roster, they picked Austin to fill this role? The company is DYING for star power right now and they're using the biggest star of all time in this role? Is it any wonder why Austin was miserable around this time? It doesn't fit and I don't think anyone bought it in any form.

Booker T. is getting ready for his match when Goldust comes in. They won't be teaming together tonight and Goldust feels like the loneliest person since Macaulay Culkin in Home Alone. Goldust puts the blonde wig on Booker for luck. Booker: "If Big Bird and Spider-Man ever got busy, you would be the illegitimate lesbian." I have no idea what that means but the delivery was more than funny enough to make it work.

Booker T. vs. Rob Van Dam

Booker starts with some chops to the chest but gets kicked down for two. A quick powerbomb puts Rob in more trouble and it's off to a chinlock. Van Dam fights up and hits Rolling Thunder but here's Goldust to watch. Goldust gets on the apron for no reason other than to get us to the finish, meaning a collision with Booker. The Five Star gives Rob the easy pin.

Rating: C. This was as good as you would expect Booker T. vs. Rob Van Dam to be in about three minutes. See, that's the thing: maybe they should let these two perfectly talented wrestlers go like, seven or eight minutes? Have we gotten a reason that can't happen yet? Or maybe let one of them fight with/against Austin to make the main event a bit more interesting? Nah, let's let them do three minute matches which do nothing for anyone.

Bradshaw says Big Show attacked him last week. Well duh.

Jazz is doing push-ups when Molly Holly comes up to ask if she's crazy. Apparently Jazz is challenging Bubba Ray Dudley for the Hardcore Title. Jazz just walks away.

Planet Stasiak is ready for Brock Lesnar. His axis is a bit out of whack and Brock has a tattoo on his back but it pales in comparison to Planet Stasiak.

Brock Lesnar vs. Shawn Stasiak

Stasiak goes right after him to start and is promptly splattered with a spinebuster. Brock posts him a few times and an overhead belly to belly makes it even worse. The F5 and helicopter bomb put Shawn away in a hurry.

Flair asks Debra to put in the good word with Austin, earning himself a slap. I forgot how worthless Debra was around this time.

Undertaker interrupts Sgt. Slaughter's phone call and wants him to deliver a message to Hulk Hogan: a call out is imminent. Didn't we just do this SAME EXACT THING about forty five minutes ago?

NWO vs. Steve Austin/Bradshaw

Flair is guest referee. Bradshaw gets chopped in the corner to start so he comes right back with chops of his own. It's off to Austin vs. Hall for the WHAT stomps and a clothesline for two. A hard whip sends X-Pac into the corner and it's back to Bradshaw as this match is already dying just a few minutes in. X-Pac dropkicks the knee out and it's time to start in on the leg.

Something like a powerbomb makes Bradshaw remember to sell the knee as the announcers debate how hard it is to be a referee. Austin gets the hot tag and the pop is so weak that I don't even notice him coming in. That was STEVE AUSTIN getting such a weak pop. Everything breaks down and there's the Stunner to X-Pac for the pin. X-Pac's foot was on the ropes and Flair missed it again.

Rating: D-. This was sad. Like, actually sad. Somehow this feud has made the fans uninterested in seeing Steve Austin come into a match and clean house. If there is a single reason to have Austin wasted in this feud and not facing, I don't know, HULK HOGAN FOR THE TITLE IN AN ACTUAL DREAM MATCH, I've yet to hear it. Yeah I know about both of them wanting to protect their legacies but either could be bought for a big enough check.

The NWO complains to Flair, who didn't see the foot on the ropes again.

Here's Undertaker to call Hogan out. He remembers Hogan's first run (Wasn't that the one with Showdown At Shea?) and the fans cheering for him over and over. None of that matters though because he beat Hogan back in the day. Now, if you listen to Hogan on the Self Destruction of the Ultimate Warrior DVD, that's the biggest sin in wrestling. You know, because you're supposed to think Hogan won or something.

Undertaker takes credit for Hogan leaving the first time because Hogan was scared. Now he's so scared that Undertaker will beat him again and it's probably going to cost him the title to Chris Jericho on Smackdown. The crowd is just dying for this stuff and it's getting worse with every word. Hogan comes out and doesn't say anything as Undertaker keeps talking. Probably as bored as all of us are, Hogan punches Undertaker out to the floor to end this.

Hardcore Title: Jazz vs. Bubba Ray Dudley

Bubba is defending and, in case you actually need this made clear, only his title is on the line. Before the match, Bubba basically says "yeah I'll beat her up because that's what I do to women." Jazz is the heel in this if that wasn't clear. Bubba puts her on the top rope and blows her a kiss. Then it's time for dancing together, followed by Bubba dancing alone.

Jazz gets caught up in the fake test of strength so she kicks him low. Some weapon shots to the head have Bubba in trouble so he bites

her below the belt. Bubba puts a trashcan over her head and does the Flip Flop and Fly, complete with the crotch thrusts. It's table time but here's Steven Richards with a guitar to knock Bubba out and steal the title.

Rating: F. So to recap: we had a bunch of dancing, a low blow, more dancing and then Steven Richards. So now we're supposed to be all impressed with Jazz because we don't need to actually give her a personality when we can have her kick men low. This was one of the dumbest things I've seen in a long time (or maybe since two segments ago) and you have to imagine these things are going to keep happening over and over.

Richards and Jazz run off together. JR can't believe this could happen because he doesn't remember it happening five times this month alone. After a break, Jazz and Richards escape in a car.

Regal is watching Hulk Hogan Rock N Wrestling (I knew I liked him) and is surrounded by a bunch of Hogan merchandise. He really doesn't understand this because it makes everyone look like a pillock. People should be praising him because he's someone with class. He's someone who speaks the Queen's English. He's someone who doesn't end every sentence with the word BROTHER. "Gets on my bloody nerves." Regal promises to use the power of the punch tonight.

Bradshaw and Austin are drinking beer when Flair comes in. The Texans still aren't convinced Flair is honest so next week it's the NWO vs. the three of them. WHY DOES THIS HAVE TO KEEP GOING???

European Title: Goldust vs. Spike Dudley

Spike is defending. Goldust beats the champ into the corner to start and loads up Shattered Dreams. It's fairly clear that he's waiting around on something but nothing happens, so instead it's time for more right hands. Another attempt at Shattered Dreams brings out Booker T. to attack, allowing the Dudley Dog to retain the title. Again: let this match go five minutes and maybe we can cut off some of the horrible stuff earlier in the show.

Hulk Hogan vs. William Regal

Non-title. Actually hang on because Regal would like to offer Hogan some tea. Hogan has a sip and spits it into Regal's face to start the beating. Cue Undertaker as the match is thrown out before it starts.

Undertaker very slowly beats on Hogan who just lays around. Hogan is busted open as this just keeps going because Hogan couldn't beat Regal up for a few minutes to cut down on some of this time. A chokeslam finally wraps this up to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. Bring HHH back...please. He might be a longer winded talker than most of the people here but at least you might be able to get an entertaining match out of him every now and then. I still can't wrap my head around the fact that Austin is stuck in this AWFUL NWO story with freaking Bradshaw of all people because they need someone to put in there. I guess Booker T., Rob Van Dam, Eddie Guerrero, Rob Van Dam, Bubba Ray Dudley, Spike Dudley and William Regal are busy.

The first hour was much better with one of the longest matches on the show (less than seven minutes) between Hardy and Guerrero and Booker vs. Van Dam for all of three minutes but the focus shifted to the veterans and their stories to cripple the show for good. There are watchable elements on the show but they're completely bogged down by the old guys who won't go away. In other words, it's Nitro.

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Monday Night Raw – April

22, 2002 (2016 Redo) : Shades of WCW

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 22, 2002

Location: Savvis Center, St. Louis, Missouri

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the night after Backlash and due to reasons of pure nostalgia, Hulk Hogan is the Undisputed WWF World Champion. That means he's gearing up for a title defense against Undertaker at the next pay per view, which leaves Steve Austin to feud with Ric Flair because Austin feuds with authority figures. Let's get to it.

Recap of Hogan winning the title.

Opening sequence.

Matt Hardy vs. Brock Lesnar

Fallout from last week with Paul Heyman stealing Lita's underwear. Matt is smart enough to run through the crowd to go after Brock but gets pulled into an early spinebuster. The backbreakers have Matt's bad ribs in even more trouble and it's off to a bearhug like a rag doll. Lesnar misses a charge into the post though and a Ricochet has Brock in some trouble. A guillotine legdrop looks to set up the Twist of Fate but Matt gets muscled into the F5. The helicopter bomb finishes Matt for good. Well good for Brock, bad for Matt.

Rating: D. There's not much you can say about a squash but at least Brock is smashing people like he's supposed to do. I can see one more match against the Hardys with Brock going over to really make the point clear but then it's time for him to move on to something else. Brock is a real monster though and probably the best newcomer in a very long time.

The production guys won't talk to Flair because production guys care about in ring results. Undertaker comes up to thank Ric and says he did the right thing.

Here's Undertaker in the ring for the first big chat of the week. Undertaker compliments Flair on a job well done but make no mistake about it: the referee didn't matter last night. He's all over this

Hogan nostalgia run and knows that at Judgment Day, he'll be judge, jury and executioner (Hogan used that line a lot back in the Saturday Night's Main Event days, saying that same thing at least three times on that same series.). We cut to HHH in the back despite him being exclusive to Smackdown. Naturally his music is tuned up and the fight is on with HHH tackling him down and taking the fight over the announcers' table.

A bunch of monitor shots to the head have Undertaker rocked until the dreaded referees come out for the save. Undertaker gets up and tries to leave but HHH punches the referees down and goes after Undertaker again. They fight to the back with HHH getting his sledgehammer out of his car (Presumably his car at least. Either that or he should be arrested.) but security comes up to handcuff him. This went on too long and basically only existed to make HHH look awesome. In other words, it's something you'll get used to. However, having it come after a match actually helped a lot. Do that instead.

Flair meets William Regal at catering. Regal approves of last night's refereeing job but Flair keeps proclaiming his innocence.

And now, Booker T. and Goldust review the Scorpion King. Goldust brings up Fellini but Booker says just roll the footage. Booker gives it two thumbs up but thinks he would be better as the star because Rock can't act (to be fair, he was fairly horrible in that movie). We get another clip with Booker in the same role (in wrestling gear). Booker: "Not only am I the Scorpion King but I'm the five time WCW Champion AND I GOT A SWORD TOO!" Goldust does the same and Booker says that would make it the Scorpion Queen. This is edited out of the Network version for obvious reasons.

Mr. Perfect vs. Rob Van Dam

Eddie Guerrero is on commentary. Van Dam yells at Eddie on the floor and gets jumped from behind as the fans chant for Rob. A kick to the face sends Perfect to the floor but he comes back in with the necksnap. Van Dam comes back with the usual and Rolling Thunder gets two, followed by the Five Star for the pin.

Rating: C. As is so often the case, there's only so much that can be done in a match this short. It was watchable enough and Van Dam going got the point across but what are they supposed to do in three minutes? This would also be Perfect's last match on Raw and that's

really noteworthy. He was really just there for months and someone older fans would remember. That doesn't mean he's interesting and his wrestling was only average in the limited time he was given.

Post match Eddie attacks but misses the frog splash.

Trish Stratus/Jacqueline vs. Molly Holly/Jazz

Jackie armdrags Molly to start and it's off to Trish vs. Jazz. Trish avoids a splash and Jackie comes back in already as there's no flow to this at all. Everything breaks down and Jazz sends Trish into the steps. Jazz gets in a belt shot on Jackie, setting up a clothesline to give Molly the pin. This was nothing.

Trish fights the winners off.

Flair is still upset but Arn Anderson tells him to go make it right in the ring. Dang it Arn this show was going along just fine (ok not really) until that BRILLIANT idea.

Here's Flair in the arena to say he screwed up again in case you haven't gotten the point yet. Flair thinks the crowd in a city like St. Louis would take him at his word but he shows us the footage from last night again, including an alternate angle that shows Undertaker blocking Flair's view. We get a big official apology but here's Austin to interrupt.

After way too many WHAT'S, Austin doesn't accept the apology. It turns into an argument over how many titles Flair has won and that's too far for Ric. The boss says he's not Vince but Austin wishes he was so he could just stab Austin in the back already. Austin flips him off (because they're in the Show Me state and he's showing Flair something) but Flair makes it better by putting Austin in a match: with Bradshaw against the NWO. Sweet goodness end this stupid feud already. It wasn't even this heavy handed when Vince said they were going to do Austin vs. McMahon II.

Goldust/Booker T. vs. Bubba Ray Dudley/Spike Dudley

Bubba throws Spike onto the two of them to start fast before chopping Goldust in the chest over and over. It's off to Spike for a headbutt to the ribs but Goldust sends him outside as the crowd isn't exactly thrilled with this one. Booker comes in and hammers away, including the flapjack with Spike selling it as only he can. There's something about him just crashing down in a heap like that. Goldust grabs a sleeper for a bit before the hot tag brings in Bubba

for all his trash talking and punching. Everything breaks down and Spike gets two off a top rope seated senton. Spike tells Bubba to get the tables but Goldust jumps Bubba from behind. Booker gets in a quick ax kick for the pin on Spike.

Rating: D. They were trying and it's very nice to see some new teams forming but this was boring. Spike can bump like few others but they would have been much better off just leaving Bubba and D-Von together. I know he's the more talented (certainly more charismatic) but Bubba isn't doing nearly as much for me on his own as D-Von right now. At least the preacher gimmick is something fresh and new for them while Bubba is just...Bubba.

Steven Richards tries to win the Hardcore Title and gets powerbombed through a table. That's better than they usually do.

Earlier today, Planet Stasiak was interrupted by Tommy Dreamer and his Slurpee. Rhyming ensues (the voices in his head affect his choices) but Regal comes in and asks if Stasiak has lost it. Regal: "Have you gone crackers lad?" Stasiak: "Don't get silly Willy." A match is made for later.

William Regal vs. Shawn Stasiak

Stasiak charges into the ring, gets hit with the Power of the Punch and gets pinned before the opening bell. I know it's stupid but the referee not even caring made me chuckle for some reason.

Bradshaw has been attacked. Flair: "I think I know who did it!" Lawler: "I think I know who did it too!" Since this is wrestling, they don't bother to actually SAY A NAME as we go to a break.

Back with Flair accusing the NWO, who are rather worried. Flair promises that Austin will have a replacement partner. Kevin Nash comes in after Flair leaves but he catches Nash anyway. Flair gives Austin the Big Show as his partner.

Here's Hogan (after a string of Hogan Flashbacks to various title wins all night) for his big victory speech. First things first: his man, HHH, deserves a rematch. Dang it I was hoping he meant his main man the Butcher. Hulkamania was reborn last night because he became the Undisputed Champion again. He laughs at Vince for the boss' comments on Smackdown because the reality is that he's got the title one more time. Hogan thanks the fans and asks Undertaker what he's going to do to wrap up this filler interview.

Steve Austin/Big Show vs. NWO

Just put the shirt on Big Show already and save us the time. Show tosses X-Pac to start so it's off to Hall for the toothpick toss. That earns him a trip to the mat with JR saying Hall was thrown down like a cheeseburger. I don't even want to know what that means. Austin comes in before Show does much (not a good sign) and cleans a few rooms of the house with spinebusters. The NWO is sent into the corner for a double mudhole stomping because the NWO is so worthless that Austin is barely breaking a sweat on them.

X-Pac finally gets in a clothesline for a breather and the bad double teaming begins. The worst looking Thesz press I've ever seen Austin use takes Hall down but it's not enough for the tag. An abdominal stretch keeps Austin in trouble despite the lack of stretching of the abdominals. Hall's sleeper is broken up with a jawbreaker and there's the hot tag to Big Show, who does what anyone who watched WCW knew what he would do for the no contest to end the show.

Rating: D-. Do I even need to explain the NWO problems anymore? They needed a third man (there might be something to that) so the company picked the worst idea they could go with this side of....I don't know, Booker T maybe? The NWO is a disaster and they need to pull the plug but that might admit being wrong and we can't have that.

Overall Rating: D-. This show is reaching WCW levels of the main event dragging everything down. At the moment, the three top stories are Hulk Hogan vs. Undertaker in a rematch from 1991 when Hogan already looked old, the NWO vs. reality and Steve Austin vs. Ric Flair in a feud that they haven't even bothered to warm over. Those feuds are probably eating up half of any given show and Raw gets worse and worse every single week. The rest of the show isn't much better but anything is an upgrade over this stuff. Get rid of Austin, Hogan and the NWO and let anyone replace them already because this is awful.

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Monday Night Raw – April 15, 2002 (2016 Redo): One Step Is Better Than None

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 15, 2002

Location: Reed Arena, College Station, Texas

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the final show before Backlash and the big Raw main event is the fresh matchup of Undertaker vs. Steve Austin for a title shot at the next pay per view. Raw has been dying in its first few shows and I don't see that getting any better for a long time. They really need to figure out something with this Brand Split in a hurry because it's getting bad quickly. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's a slightly disheveled Ric Flair for the weekly chat to open things up. There's a lot of great talent backstage and he doesn't want to waste any time in getting them out here. I'm sure that's going to be the case of course. First though, Flair wants to talk about Steve Austin being anti-authority. The difference between Flair and Vince McMahon is that he has no interest in going to war with Austin. Flair likes Austin and made sure to put Austin in the #1 contenders match at Backlash.

We see the ending of last week's show with Flair running out to help out Austin against the NWO, only to get Stunned for his efforts. If he's such a big Austin fan, he really should have seen that coming. Cue Austin but Flair cuts him off on his way to the second rope. Oh

jeez he's in trouble. Flair isn't going to suspend him for what happened last week but he's going to fine Austin \$5000. Austin does the WHAT treatment to ask who he was supposed to face last week because he thought it was Scott Hall but saw Ric Flair out there instead. He didn't cry for help, send a smoke signal or FedEx Flair because Flair isn't Lassie or Superman.

Austin promises to win at Backlash but here's Undertaker to interrupt. Undertaker very slowly says he'll win and talks about how important it is to win because the Brand Split is making it harder to get title shots. He's ready to outwrestle, outfight or outcheat Austin but he knows Austin needs Flair's help. Both guys threaten to beat Flair up if he interferes so Flair makes himself special referee. Somehow we're STILL not done though as here's the NWO (just Hall and X-Pac these days) with something to say.

Hall runs down Texas and Bradshaw in particular so Austin is willing to fight him tonight. Flair says no so here's Bradshaw and the fight is on. The good guys clear the ring but Flair is knocked down, likely setting up a six man later. Somehow it took twenty minutes to establish that Austin doesn't like authority and that Flair is guest referee on Sunday. It doesn't help that Austin and Undertaker are on pure fumes and neither are interesting save for nostalgia for about two years ago.

Post break a livid Flair makes Austin/Bradshaw vs. the NWO/Undertaker in an anything goes match.

Hardcore Title: Bubba Ray Dudley vs. Raven

Dudley is defending and throws out a bunch of Raven's weapons. They trade metal shots with Raven taking over as the announcers talk about how wild the weekend was for the title. By that they mean three straight shows with four title changes each. I can actually buy that for a house show as they're probably fun for the crowd but seeing it every single week gets tiresome. Bubba takes over with a flapjack and tells himself to get the table, only to have Raven grab the DDT for two but the referee says it's a pin anyway.

Tommy Dreamer comes out and wins the title. Then Steven Richards comes out to win the title. Then Bubba wins it back. Those four title changes took place over the course of 46 seconds.

Shawn Stasiak is back on Raw and has volunteered to face Big Show. He's not a maniac because his psychiatrist is a quack who wanted him

on some Prozac so sit back and enjoy the attack. That was more energy than I've ever seen him show.

Big Show vs. Shawn Stasiak

Shawn works on the leg for a bit but gets clotheslined and chokeslammed for the pin in less than a minute and a half. Eh every show needs jobbers.

We recap Eddie Guerrero returning and going after Rob Van Dam.

Eddie says he's mad at Van Dam for stealing the frog splash. I've heard far worse motivations. There's a tag match with the midcard champions against their challengers for an old but good idea.

Booker T. is ticked off at Goldust for costing him the Hardcore Title last week but tonight Flair has teamed them up. Goldust thinks they could be a bright star but Booker wants the freak to get away from him. Together they could make more money than Lethal Weapon. You know it's serious when they invoke Steve Blackman. Booker: "I'm getting too old for this stuff."

Debra is getting coffee when Undertaker startles her, sending the coffee onto Undertaker. Seething ensues.

Crash vs. Jacqueline

Rematch from last night on Heat where Crash cheated to win but Jackie is FROM TEXAS and won't stand for that. A missile dropkick and a sunset flip finish Crash in thirty seconds. Yeah yeah she's tough and she's from Texas. I care so much.

Now we look back at Spike Dudley beating William Regal for the European Title in about three seconds. I really wouldn't highlight the fact that there have been a match last week and another from this week combined to go 35 seconds.

Regal yells at Coach for bringing up Mr. McMahon's club and promises to break open Coach's skull for mentioning the title loss. I can always go for psycho Regal.

Rob Van Dam/Spike Dudley vs. William Regal/Eddie Guerrero

Regal jumps Spike to start but gets Van Dam to really get things going instead. It's quickly off to Spike as Lawler jokes about Spike's weight. A nasty looking half nelson suplex stuns Spike and the bad guys take turns stomping on him. I'm not as big on Spike as most people but he looks like he's dying out there most of the time.

A crossbody looks to set up the Dudley Dog on Regal but Eddie makes a save.

That's fine with Spike who takes Eddie down with a hurricanrana, allowing the hot tag off to Van Dam. Rob starts cleaning house with the usual until Eddie gets in a neckbreaker. Everything breaks down and Eddie hits a brainbuster on Spike, followed by the frog splash for the pin.

Rating: C. Spike losing actually makes sense here as he cheated to win the title and was beaten down for most of the match (as in less than three minutes) so the loss isn't exactly shocking. Van Dam vs. Guerrero is the best feud on the show at the moment and thankfully the match will be one of the better ones on Sunday so it balances out well enough. I'm always a fan of putting two feuds into one match for a fast build so this worked well.

Trish is ready to beat Molly up tonight and then take the Women's Title on Sunday. Molly comes in and offers two pictures: one of Trish on the cover of the Divas swimsuit magazine (bikini) and one of herself in a one piece swimsuit with angel's wings. Molly assumes that most students at the university have her picture on their dorm room wall. Trish says tonight she'll leave Molly in a position she's not familiar with: flat on her back.

How in the world is Trish not the heel here? If you're going to go with this angle, Molly should be in the kind of attire Ivory wore in the Right to Censor. The picture is of a good looking woman in a swimsuit and for some reason it's supposed to be something almost no one would be interested in looking at. Trish's line at the end made it even worse as, again, she implies that men wouldn't be interested in Molly for whatever reason they have to hate her this week. I know Molly is the heel and should be based on the initial attack on Trish but ever since then she's been completely realistic and hasn't done a thing wrong.

Lawler freaks out at Molly saying she was wholesome, meaning she's a virgin. Again, that's considered something horrible because WWF is run by a bunch of 14 year olds.

Molly Holly vs. Trish Stratus

Molly takes her down to start and works on the arm as the idiot fans chant SHE'S A VIRGIN. Trish comes back so Molly bails outside (Lawler: "Don't come so close to me Molly. I might convert you." Did

Lawler just imply he would rape Molly if she came closer to him?), only to beat Trish down again back inside. A backbreaker gets two on Trish but the Molly Go Round misses. There's a high kick from Trish and she rolls Molly up with a handful of tights for the pin. Your hero!

Rating: C-. The match was fine but this story is nauseating. They're actively making fun of Molly for a personal choice that a lot of people make and is no one else's business. I heard the same insult a lot growing up and then I turned about 14 so my friends grew up a little bit. Somehow that's not the case here and it's really pathetic. I'm sure parents had a blast explaining this one to their kids and were thrilled that the WWF was presenting this as a bad thing.

Bradshaw talks about Hall's testicular fortitude and sucks up to the Texas fans.

The NWO is going to focus on Bradshaw tonight.

Paul Heyman steals a pair of Lita's underwear (she had at least a dozen in her bag) and offers to give Matt Hardy some leniency against Brock Lesnar on Sunday in exchange for sex. The ensuing slap would make Stephanie proud.

Hardy Boyz vs. Booker T./Goldust

Goldust and Booker jump them to start and the brothers are in early trouble. Matt gets in a clothesline and makes the hot tag (about a minute in) so Jeff can clean house. Poetry in Motion hits Goldust but here's Heyman with Lita's underwear to distract Lita. Matt gives chase and Booker kicks Jeff down so Goldust can get the easy pin.

Heyman has Lita's bag of underwear and throws them around. Matt goes after him but runs into Brock. Figure the rest out for yourself.

JR brings out HHH for a chat about his match with Hogan, which has nothing to do with this show. Both he and Hogan have made a lot of mistakes in this rivalry (What rivalry? You had a match announced less than two weeks ago and you've punched each other a few times.) but Hogan made it worse by dropping the big leg. JR asks about what another big leg on Sunday would mean because Hulkamania is running wild. The question is whatcha gonna do. Well HHH isn't going to make any mistakes and he's going to retain the title. He doesn't care if he faces Austin or Undertaker next either. More filler on a show

full of it.

Steve Austin/Bradshaw vs. NWO/Undertaker

X-Pac has Kane's mask. It's a brawl to start (duh) until we settle down to Undertaker vs. Austin. An early Thesz press looks to set up a slightly less early Stunner but Undertaker bails. That earns him a double middle finger so it's off to X-Pac instead. Some spinebusters put the NWO down and it's off to Bradshaw for more Texas brawling. Bradshaw gets two off some suplexes and it's back to Austin as this is one sided so far.

Finally realizing that the NWO is worthless, Undertaker hits Austin in the back of the head to take over. The NWO takes turns slowly beating on Austin, who comes back with the worst punches I've ever seen him throw. The double clothesline drops Austin and Hall so JR mentions kissing your sister. Bradshaw comes in to clean house with the Clothesline, including a big one for the pin on X-Pac.

Rating: D. Bradshaw was the best thing about this match as he was the only one who seemed like he was excited to be out there. Undertaker and Austin are sleepwalking through every match and the NWO is making the Corre look like the Horsemen. This main event scene is dying for a freshening up and we're less than a month into the new era. That can't be a good sign.

A big brawl and a chair to Austin's head end the show.

Overall Rating: D. Somehow that's an upgrade over last week's mess. I don't know how many times I've said it already but the main event scene is such a mess with two guys who wrestle like they're about 476 years old and are fighting over who might get to fight Hulk Hogan next month. At this point even Hogan vs. Austin doesn't sound like the most interesting thing in the world.

Other than that though, let's look at some of the stuff we had here. Big Show beats Stasiak in about a minute. His match on Sunday? A two minute squash of Stevie Richards on Heat. You remember Richards. He's one of the guys who won the Hardcore Title tonight. On the same show you have VIRGINS ARE BAD and Jackie proving that Texas is amazing before the main event that also proved that Texas is amazing. The only good stuff here is Brock smashing anything in his path and a match over who uses a splash better. Smackdown is nothing great at the moment but you can see an idea over there and it makes a world of difference.

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Monday Night Raw – February 19, 1996: On The Road Again

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 19, 1996

Location: Cincinnati Gardens, Cincinnati, Ohio

Attendance: 8,500

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're done with In Your House VI and the big story is that it's time for Wrestlemania. There's barely anything to talk about coming out of last night's show other than Bret is still champion, Diesel vs. Undertaker is pretty clear for Wrestlemania and it's a countdown until Shawn wins the title. Let's get to it.

Sunny, on the beach in a black swimsuit (my goodness) tells us that this show might not be appropriate for all fans.

We recap last night's main event with Undertaker pulling Diesel through the mat.

Intercontinental Title: Razor Ramon vs. Goldust

Goldust is defending and I had forgotten he was even champion at this point. Marlena tries to blow smoke in Razor's face to no effect (not clear how) and it's time to rip off Goldust's robe. A clothesline puts the champ on the floor for a breather as Lawler wonders if Goldust likes being manhandled. Goldust gets in a

backdrop and we take a break. Back with Goldust grabbing a sleeper but getting crotched on top a few seconds later. Razor gives him a fall away slam over the top for a bad sounding crash. Jerry: "He probably broke his golden globes!" The belly to back superplex sends Goldust running up the aisle for the countout.

Rating: D. Nothing match here as it felt like they were out there for about two minutes worth of action. It's pretty clear that this is going to be setting up something in the future and probably would have had it not been for all of Razor's issues at the time. Bad match though and not a good way to start off a show.

Post match Razor grabs the mic and begs Roddy Piper to give him a fight with Goldust because he doesn't want his kids watching that stuff on TV.

Undertaker walks out of a casket.

Slam Jam recaps almost everything from last night and eats up a lot of time.

BodyDonnas vs. Aldo Montoya/Barry Horowitz

And never mind as Vader beats up the jobbers before the match starts.

The Ultimate Warrior is coming back.

Sunny sings Happy Birthday to Mr. President. I smell a stupid impression.

Bob Backlund campaigns in the crowd.

Ringmaster vs. Marty Jannetty

Vince during Ringmaster's entrance: "You talk about a stone cold man." Austin isn't interested in having any of this wrestling stuff and sends Marty outside earlier. The Stun Gun sends us to a break and we come back with Austin driving a knee into the ribs. We hit the STF and get some LOUD spot calling, which is the kind of thing Austin would complain about today. We hit a neck crank as the fans aren't that thrilled with Austin as a submission guy. Marty makes his really simple comeback but gets caught in the Million Dollar Dream for the fast submission.

Rating: D+. Marty is a good choice to do a job here as the fans like him and he's certainly going to put on a solid performance in defeat. Austin really needed a feud though as this character is

hardly interesting and isn't going anywhere at the moment. To be fair though he had to start somewhere and this is better than a lot of the nonsense that some characters got.

Mankind is coming and might even bring his rat.

Tatanka vs. Undertaker

Undertaker chokes Tatanka into the corner like he's the Undertaker and he's facing Tatanka. A Samoan drop gives Tatanka a breather but here's Diesel with an ax to steal a cameraman as we go to a break. Back with Diesel hacking up Undertaker's casket and Undertaker fighting out of a chinlock. Old School looks to set up the Tombstone but Tatanka counters into a DDT. Diesel is STILL breaking up the casket as the Tombstone puts Tatanka away.

Rating: D-. I'm almost never a fan of a match happening as a backdrop for the angle or whatever else you would call Diesel breaking up a casket. Tatanka can't be around much longer after this as he's certainly not around for Wrestlemania and it's not like he's been interesting in years at this point.

And now, a new twist on the Billionaire Ted skits: Larry Fling Live on BNN (Billionaire News Network). After some stupid jokes, Randy from Sarasota and Terry from Tampa call in. Huckster needs time off because of a shoe to the eye. The third caller is Jane from Hanoi (Ted Turner's wife) and this goes nowhere. Larry brings up the predatory practices that Vince whined about for months and Turner suddenly can't speak about all the charges against him. More next week.

Undertaker and Paul Bearer are angry/distraught to end the show.

Overall Rating: F+. What am I even watching anymore? I know they're getting ready for Wrestlemania but that doesn't mean everything is all ok. The Billionaire Ted skits, which are closing the show almost every week now, just aren't funny. They're basically Vince's therapy airing on TV and that doesn't make for good TV for anyone other than him. The wrestling is the mess that you would expect and these shows get worse and worse every single week.

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Monday Night Raw – July 22, 1996: I Love Cake

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 22, 1996

Location: Key Arena, Seattle, Washington

Attendance: 6,755

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're past the dreadful and worthless In Your House IX and nothing has changed. Vader pinned Shawn Michaels to become the de facto #1 contender and thankfully we're about a month away from Summerslam so maybe things can pick up a little bit. Things have been so boring around here lately that I'm ready for anything new. Let's get to it.

We open with a look at Seattle for a change of pace.

This arena is HUGE compared to the tiny places we've been in lately and it really makes things feel better.

Tag Team Titles: Shawn Michaels/Ahmed Johnson vs. Smoking Gunns

The Gunns are defending and it happens to be Shawn's birthday so Sunny has a cake. She offers him a piece on the way to the ring (oh come on that's too easy) but the Gunns jump the challengers from behind. Billy eats Sweet Chin Music (I'd prefer cake) and Ahmed shoves the cake into Sunny's face. Shawn of course licks some of it off and there's no match.

Post break, Gorilla Monsoon says the Gunns will defend the titles later tonight or they'll be stripped of the titles.

The Goon vs. Marc Mero

What did Mero do to deserve these horrible matches? Steve Austin

sits in on commentary to spice things up a little bit. Goon tries a hip check and various other hockey moves and they're uh, bad. A snapmare sets up a chinlock on Mero as Jake Roberts calls in so Lawler can make alcoholism jokes. Goon kicks him in the face as the call ends. Mero hooks a horrible looking victory roll for two as Austin goes on an anti-Lex Luger rant for some reason. Oh and he'll be ready to beat up Undertaker next week.

Goon grabs a chinlock as the alcohol jokes continue. At least it allows me to notice Goon's ice skate shaped boots, a very nice touch. They head outside where Goon slips on the icing (oh geez) and hip checks the steps. Mero takes him down again with a flip dive, followed by a slingshot legdrop for the pin.

Rating: D-. Another horrible match here as Goon was a wrestling hockey player. I'll give them something for having so many nice details but at the end of the day they're putting this much effort into such a stupid gimmick. The crowd popped a lot stronger at the end and that's a good sign, but can we PLEASE find a more interesting match already?

Shawn and Ahmed say they'll win tonight.

Bob Backlund campaigns for President.

Attorney Clarence Mason lobbies Monsoon to let an ex-con back into the WWF. You can see Crush from behind as he stands next to them so it's not really a secret.

Mankind vs. Freddie Joe Floyd

Freddie actually kicks Mankind outside to start but Mankind throws him into the ropes and pulls his own hair out. A discus clothesline sets up some choking in the corner and I'll let you guess who is in control. Floyd is caught in the Tree of Woe but he avoids the running knee. Mankind eats a good looking top rope back elbow to the jaw but the Mandible Claw ends Floyd in a hurry.

Rating: C-. Actually not bad here, especially for a squash. Floyd was an energetic and talented guy who had a lot of success elsewhere (as Tracy Smothers in case you're not familiar) so it was no surprise that he was one of the better options for this batch of losers who are running around the company at the moment.

Goldust vs. Barry Horowitz

Brian Pillman is on commentary and promises to say the seven words

you can't say on television. If nothing else we get the rocking Hava Nagila theme for Horowitz. Before we're ready to go, we hear from Marc Mero about giving Vader cat scratch fever next week. Oh and he's feuding with Goldust to make this actually matter. Brian makes lesbian jokes about Marlena and Sable as Goldust slowly beats on Barry. The Curtain Call wraps this up in a hurry.

Sunny and the Smoking Gunns are livid but know they'll keep the belts.

Jim Cornette announces Vader as #1 contender for Shawn's title at Summerslam. He's going to take Shawn's lunch money you see.

Tag Team Titles: Smoking Gunns vs. Shawn Michaels/Ahmed Johnson

The Gunns are defending again as that actually hasn't changed in the last half hour. It's a brawl to start with the challengers cleaning house and sending the Gunns outside. We settle down to Shawn punching Billy to officially start with Gunn quickly being knocked outside. Ahmed comes in to work on the arm as Billy begs off faster than someone asked to watch a Billy Gunn tape. Vince calls the team of Ahmed and Sid a threesome and I'm leaving that one alone.

A release powerslam (worse than it sounds) sends Billy flying and it's back to Shawn for two off an ax handle. Bart finally cheats by breaking up a flying headscissors to put Shawn in trouble. The beatdown continues and of course the referee misses the tag off to Ahmed. Back from a break with Billy sending Shawn into the buckle for a near fall before slapping on a chinlock. That goes nowhere and the hot tag brings in Ahmed to clean house. Bart low bridges him though and here's the debuting Faarooq (in full blue gladiator attire) to destroy Ahmed for the DQ.

Rating: C. This was already a huge improvement over everything we've seen in recent weeks and even then it's still not all that great. It just helps when they have so much energy in a match like this, despite the screwy finish that set up something more down the line. At least this can get Shawn out of this story and ready to fight Vader.

The beating continues with Lawler actually mentioning Ron Simmons. Faarooq pledges his loyalty to Sunny to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. Bad Goon match aside, this was much better than the previous weeks with some passable wrestling and a hot crowd. The

fact that we're coming up on Summerslam helps too as we're actually getting ready for a show that matters instead of a mess like In Your House IX. Hopefully things stay warm like this as I can tolerate these shows for a little while at least.

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In Your House IX: International Incident (2013 Redo): The Most Worthless Show Ever

In Your House #9: International Incident

Date: July 21, 1996

Location: General Motors Place, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Attendance: 14,804

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross

The People's Posse originally had the Ultimate Warrior teaming up with Johnson and Michaels, but Warrior bailed on the company again for asking for too much time off. Warrior claimed he was leaving due to not getting money he was owed and Vince McMahon claiming that he didn't buy Warrior's excuse of grieving over his father's death. Either way, we get Sid tonight which might actually be the better option. Let's get to it.

Earlier tonight on the Free For All, Cornette swung the tennis racket at Jose Lothario but got punched in the face for his efforts. Vader and Shawn came in to prevent any further violence. The main catch for the

Smoking Gunns vs. Bodydonnas

The Gunns are champions and have Sunny with them but this is non-title. The Bodydonnas have turned face with a new manager named Cloudy (a man in woman's clothing), but no one cares about them at all either way. Sunny, who looks great as a cowgirl, won't let Vince hold the tag titles. The Gunns are sent to the floor to start before we get down to Bart vs. Zip. They trade chops with neither guy seeming all that interested in selling for the other. Zip takes him down with an armdrag into an armbar before bringing in Skip to crank on it as well.

Bart gets tired of having his arm pulled apart so he throws Skip down and brings in Billy to fire off some right hands. A nice headscissors puts Billy down and Skip spins out of a few hiptosses, only to be punched down for his efforts. Skip grabs another armbar as the match slows down all over again. Out of nowhere Sunny collapses but as Skip goes to check on her she slaps him in the face, allowing the Gunns to clothesline him down.

Back in and the Gunns take over with Bart whipping Skip HARD into the corner to take him down. Skip comes back with a quick clothesline and goes up top, only to dive into a sweet powerslam for two. With Skip draped throat first over the top and Bart holding his legs up, Billy tries to jump over his partner's back to land on Skip's back but can't get up and over Bart. If you can't do the spot, don't try it.

Skip and Bart mistime something out of the corner and awkwardly stop in the middle of the ring. Bart goes up top but jumps into an atomic drop, allowing for the hot tag off to Zip. Billy trips Zip down but can't get in place for the Sidewinder (side slam/guillotine legdrop combo), allowing Skip to hit a missile dropkick on Bart to give Zip the pin.

Rating: D. This was a horrible choice for an opening match with WAY too much time and the botches dragging the match down. On top of that, why in the world would you make this a non-title match? To set up a future rematch? Why in the world wouldn't you do this on Raw

and then have the title match here? Very dull match here.

Camp Cornette rants about the fight with Cornette and Lothario while guaranteeing a win later.

Mankind vs. Henry Godwinn

Mankind is one of the most bizarre characters in wrestling history. He debuted the night after Wrestlemania and immediately targeted the Undertaker, easily beating him down like no one else ever had before. Mankind lives in a boiler room, often sits on the mat and rocks back and forth and is known to pull out his hair. He also wears a leather mask that covers half of his face and is missing part of an ear. Henry is substituting for Jake Roberts who didn't show up for the show.

Mankind jumps Godwinn from behind to start but Henry is more than comfortable in a slugout. He punches Mankind in the face a few times and powerslams him down for two. Mankind pounds him down with shots to the back as Lawler makes jokes about Roberts' substance abuse issues. Henry sweeps Mankind's legs out and hits some HARD shots to the face, only to have Mankind choke him for a breather.

A running knee to Henry's face has him in even more trouble so Mankind goes to the floor and pulls back the mats. Henry gets taken down by a swinging neckbreaker onto the concrete. Back in and Mankind misses a charge into the corner but he easily sends Henry out to the floor. Godwinn comes right back by slamming Mankind from the apron to the concrete but the Slop Drop is countered with into Mankind's Mandible Claw for the win.

Rating: D+. Nothing great here but it was a nice brawl while it lasted. Henry was stuck in a stupid gimmick but he could throw some great right hands and brawl with the best of them. There's nothing wrong with having a guy like that around as you're going to get an entertaining match more often than not. Still though, nothing great here.

Mankind sprints up the aisle but stops at the entrance because he's a bit strange.

Marc Mero vs. Steve Austin

This is a rematch from the King of the Ring tournament. Austin jumps him right after the bell but Mero comes back with a quick armbar. That gets him nowhere so Steve grabs a headlock and takes him down

to the mat. Back up and they slug it out with Mero, a former New York Golden Gloves Champion, easily taking control. Austin is knocked to the floor and goes after Sable, only to be jumped from behind.

Back inside and Steve gets rolled up for two but manages to send Mero out to the floor to take over. A catapult sends Mero face first into the post and another shot knocks him off the apron and into the barricade. Back in and a middle rope elbow gets two for Austin and we hit a reverse chinlock. Austin slaps Mero in the back of the head but misses a charge and lands on the middle rope to give Marc a breather.

Steve goes up but gets crotched down, allowing Mero to pull him down and hook a hurricanrana to send both guys to the floor. A moonsault press off the apron takes Austin down again and a slingshot moonsault gets two back inside. Mero pounds away with right hands in the corner but Austin shoves him to the side, crotching Mero on the top rope. Marc blocks Austin's Stunner finisher and gets two off a slingshot legdrop. For some reason Marlena comes out to watch the ending. Not that it matters though Austin comes back with a quick chop block and the Stunner connects for the pin.

Rating: C. Good stuff here for the most part but the match felt off for some reason. It's very interesting to see Austin evolve the Stunner over the years as there's no kick to the ribs yet and he just snaps it off. Mero wasn't bad in the ring at all but he never quite fit in the WWF.

Former WWF Champion Bob Backlund is running for President of the United States and looks for registered voters in the crowd.

Highlight video on the Undertaker's feuds with Mankind and Goldust, which is set up like a music video for some reason.

Goldust vs. Undertaker

Goldust, who has since lost the Intercontinental Title to Ahmed Johnson, bails to the floor to start and does so again after Undertaker moves towards him. He gets in again and hides behind the referee for a few moments before doing his trademark deep breath. It only earns him an uppercut to the jaw, sending Goldust right back to the floor for more stalling. Lawler makes movie references as Goldust teases walking out and VERY slowly gets back in the ring.

Undertaker finally goes out after him and chokeslams Goldust down onto the steps in an awkward looking sequence. Undertaker picks up the steps but won't crush Marlina along with Goldust. Apparently he's a zombie with a heart. Back in and Goldust gets clotheslined down before a legdrop gets two for Undertaker. This has been one sided so far. Goldust finally comes back with some knees in the corner to take over but Undertaker grabs him by the throat and throws him into the corner to hand out a beating.

The fans chant Rest in Peace (Undertaker catchphrase) as he connects with Old School and some uppercuts. Goldust clotheslines Undertaker over the top rope but Undertaker lands on his feet and keeps firing off uppercuts. Something resembling a Stunner across the top rope snaps Goldust's neck back but he uses the distraction to pull the turnbuckle pad away. Undertaker is sent back first into the exposed steel to finally give Goldust control.

They head outside again so Goldust can drop the steps on Undertaker's back to further his advantage. Back in and Goldust puts on a reverse chinlock to keep the pace of the match very slow. The fans chant for Undertaker so Goldust breaks the hold like any idiot heel would do. Undertaker comes back with a big boot to the face and a small package of all things for two. The flying clothesline takes Goldust down and there's the Tombstone, drawing Mankind up through a hole in the ring for the DQ.

Rating: D-. Way too long here and horribly boring due to all of the stalling. Goldust and Undertaker had some of the least interesting matches I can ever remember for two guys with as much talent as they have. It was clearly just a backdrop for Undertaker vs. Mankind, which isn't something you spend three months on.

Mankind pulls Undertaker through the hole with the Mandible Claw before crawling back out on his own. The lights flicker and Undertaker's music plays but he comes out of another hole to sneak up on Mankind. They brawl to the back to one of the only good reactions of the night.

The announcers talk about the main event while the ring is repaired. We go to the back to see the brawl between Undertaker and Mankind continue.

Goldust and Marlina are in the boiler room where Mankind and Undertaker were fighting earlier. Goldust quotes Kramer vs. Kramer

when Mankind pops up and calls Goldust mommy. Mankind rams his head into a cabinet while screaming about what mommy wants, mommy gets.

The announcers ignore what we just saw and talk about the main event a bit more.

We recap the main event six man tag which started at King of the Ring. Shawn pinned British Bulldog in the rematch but Vader and Owen Hart came in for a post match attack. Ultimate Warrior and Ahmed Johnson came in for the save, setting up the six man. Ultimate Warrior was suspended a few weeks after for reasons already mentioned, so Shawn and Ahmed brought in Sid to take his place. It's not clear if Sid can be trusted though.

The People's Posse says they can trust Sid and they'll win tonight.

People's Posse vs. Camp Cornette

If Camp Cornette loses, Cornette has to pay back all of the fans, which would cost him millions. Also Owen has a broken arm coming in. Vader and Ahmed start things off but Vader wants the world champion instead. Shawn is happy to oblige and is easily shoved away by the monster. Vader lifts Shawn into the air in a choke but Shawn punches his way to freedom. Shawn speeds things up and actually hits a running hurricanrana to take Vader down. A cross body sends Vader to the floor and Michaels follows with a nice plancha to take the monster down.

Shawn tries another hurricanrana but gets hit a bit low to give Vader control. Vader pounds away in the corner and Shawn is in quick trouble. Michaels manages to escapes a belly to back suplex and makes the hot tag off to Sid for a battle of the giants. Sid cleans house and sends all of Camp Cornette out to the floor, drawing a HUGE reaction from the crowd. Owen tries to sneak in from behind but is easily taken down by another clothesline. Off to Johnson who actually rolls German suplexes on Owen.

Johnson misses an elbow drop and it's off to the Bulldog to pound away for a bit until he gets caught in a spinebuster. Ahmed hits his Pearl River Plunge tiger bomb but it's Owen making the save. Off to Vader for some power but Ahmed pounds him down in the corner to keep the fans into things the entire way through. Vader easily reverses a whip into the corner and hits a hard splash followed by even more fists to the head and body. Another splash attempt is caught in a slam which looked WAY easier than it should have for Ahmed.

Owen comes in and takes Johnson down with a spinwheel kick but Johnson pops up at two. Johnson keeps coming back with a gorilla press slam and it's back to Sid for a big boot to the face before firing off some very fast right hands in the corner. Sid whips Owen into the Cornette corner and it's time for the Bulldog vs. Sid power match. Smith actually lifts him up in the delayed vertical suplex and a Vader elbow is good for two. Vader runs Sid over again and brings Smith back in for some headbutts.

Sid is able to get in a shot to the face and makes the tag off to Shawn, but Bulldog quickly avoids a charge to send Shawn shoulder first into the post. Shawn sends Bulldog into Vader to knock the big man off the apron and get a pair of two counts on Smith. Back to Owen to trade some VERY fast rollups with Shawn for two each before Shawn gets two more off a cross body. A victory roll gets the same for Michaels and they head to the mat before bridging into Ric Flair's trademark pinfall reversal sequence. Outstanding sequence there.

Back to Bulldog for a legdrop but Michaels avoids an elbow drop to get a breather. Owen finally uses the cast on the bad arm to put Shawn down and it's back to Vader to pound away on the world champion. Shawn is whipped across the ring and goes over the corner and out to the floor in a big crash. After Owen and Bulldog get in some cheap shots on the floor it's back in for a half standing chinlock/half bearhug on Shawn with Vader's arms wrapped around his neck and under his arms. Not a bad looking hold actually.

The hold stays on for awhile as a fan tries to interfere and is easily run off by Bulldog and the referee. After several minutes of the hold, Vader throws Shawn down and splashes him but Ahmed comes in to break up a cover. Bulldog comes in and puts on an over the shoulder backbreaker followed by a fallaway slam for two. Smith misses a charge into the corner but it's Hart breaking up the hot tag attempt yet again.

Shawn punches Owen down but can't follow up, allowing for another tag back to Davey, whose cover is quickly broken up by a Sid legdrop. Vader gets the tag and Shawn crawls over to make one as well, but the referee doesn't see Ahmed get the tag. Johnson protests but Shawn gets triple teamed, giving Bulldog another two count. Owen tries a missile dropkick but hits Bulldog by mistake, allowing Shawn to FINALLY make the tag off to Sid.

The big man cleans house and chokeslams every member of Camp Cornette before launching Shawn off the top onto Vader for two. Everything breaks down and Cornette throws in the tennis racket but Shawn intercepts it to clock Vader in the head. Somehow that's only good for two so Shawn tunes up the band, only to have Cornette trip him up. Vader runs Michaels over and hits the Vader Bomb for the pin to suck the life out of the crowd.

Rating: A-. REALLY good match here with everyone working hard and having a match that had the fans going nuts. Sid's popularity is nearly astounding as the guy was just crazy over on about three moves. The ending was obvious, but on rare occasions that's not a bad thing with this being a good example of that.

Post match Sid and Ahmed clean house with powerbombs to Owen and Bulldog but Vader is pulled to safety. Shawn dives over the top and takes out Vader, sending Camp Cornette running off. A lot of posing ends the show.

Overall Rating: D. The only thing that is holding up this show is the main event. Let's look at this entire card: what in the world would you want to pay for on this show? There are five matches, zero titles on the line, and the one match that might draw some interest had a telegraphed ending. This was a terribly uninteresting show which set a record for the lowest buyrate in company history as not many people cared about seeing this show. It also doesn't help that two weeks prior to this, Hulk Hogan turned heel in WCW, lighting the fire that would burn the WWF as close to a crisp as you can be for the next year and a half.

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Monday Night Raw – July 1, 1996: Of Course It's Shawn

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 1, 1996

Location: Brown County Expo, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Attendance: 4,660

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

It's Shawn-a-Mania running wild here as Shawn is the undisputed king of the company and rolling over anyone who dares challenge him. Unfortunately this isn't exactly saving them in the ratings but there's only so much they can do against Nitro and the Outsiders at this point, especially with British Bulldog as his top challenger in the previous few months. Let's get to it.

Shawn Michaels vs. Marty Jannetty

Non-title. Shawn has the Kliq Cam with him to make sure he's even less interesting than he already was. Jim Cornette is on the floor with the New Rockers to help set up Shawn vs. Vader. They do the big lockup to start as Vince talks about Canada Day. Feeling out process to start with Shawn nipping back up off an early takedown. Some armdrags put Shawn down again and it's actually all Marty early on. You know Shawn isn't going to sell for that long though and he makes a quick comeback with a few armdrags of his own, followed by a clothesline.

Leif pulls his partner out of the way of Sweet Chin Music and offers a distraction so Marty can take over again. There's a backdrop to drop Shawn on his back but Marty spends too much time posing. Back from a break with Marty getting two off a snapmare (yes a snapmare) and putting on a chinlock. Shawn's comeback is cut off when his shoulder goes into the post. Marty lands on his feet to escape a monkey flip and nails a quick clothesline. Again Shawn will have none of that and hits the forearm but doesn't go straight for the superkick.

Instead he tries a powerbomb which is countered into a hurricanrana which is countered into a sunset flip for two on Marty. We take another break and come back with Marty scoring with the Rocker Dropper but missing the top rope fist drop. Shawn goes old school with a piledriver (which, along with the teardrop suplex were completely abandoned once he went to the superkick) and the top rope elbow, followed by Sweet Chin Music for the pin.

Rating: B. These two always worked well together, dating back to their great feud in 1993 over the Intercontinental Title. Marty continues to be a very underrated performer who could have been much better remembered if he wasn't partnered with Shawn Michaels earlier in his career. Really good TV match here though which you could easily put on yet another Shawn DVD.

Leif tries to interfere and gets a superkick of his own. Shawn's manager Jose Lothario punches out Cornette, who did nothing here.

We look at Sunny suckering Phineas Godwinn in to admit he loved her before ripping him apart and sending the Smoking Gunns in for the beatdown. Hillbilly Jim and Henry Godwinn made the save, leaving Sunny to be slopped. Sunny looked great here, before the slopping that is.

Mankind vs. Duke Droese

Jake Roberts is on commentary, which isn't something you often hear. Lawler makes drunk jokes about Roberts as Mankind beats the heck out of Droese to start. We take a very early break and come back with Mankind cranking on the arm as the slow beating continues, only to be cut off by Jake asking what closet Lawler came out of. A quick spinebuster gives Duke a breather but Mankind grabs the Mandible Claw to break up....something that isn't important as Droese is out.

Rating: D. This was just a squash and it makes sense that Droese was gone after this, save for a few matches on Superstars. The guy was a wrestling garbageman though and he's only going to get so far in the company. At least things are starting to shift though and that's a really good thing for the WWF's future.

Lawler and Roberts get in an argument with Jerry slapping him, only to have Mankind put Jake down with the Claw.

Marc Mero vs. Goldust

Steve Austin is on commentary before his match with Mero at In Your

House IX. Goldust is feuding with Undertaker so a cameo isn't out of the question. During the entrances, Austin starts yelling at Vince for cutting him off and you can almost hear 1998 from here. Mero punches him out to the floor to start as Austin goes off on Roberts for being old. Goldust is sent outside again as the stalling continues.

We take a break and come back with Mero knocking Goldust around ringside before he gets caught in a chinlock. Make that three chinlocks as this just keeps going. Goldust drops a fist to the head and we hit ANOTHER chinlock as we go to a second break. Back with Mero missing an elbow drop and Goldust hammering away with right hands. That's enough excitement so it's off to a REVERSE chinlock.

Mero gets back up and charges into a back elbow, setting up a powerslam for two. A double clothesline puts both of them down because this match hasn't involved enough laying around. Marlena gets very close to Sable as Mero makes his comeback. The camera stays on the women and cuts back to see Goldust hitting the Curtain Call for the pin.

Rating: D-. Oh sweet goodness what a boring match. This was a bunch of sitting around waiting on anything interesting to happen and then not being surprised when nothing happened. These guys are better than this and I have no idea why they had such a horrible match with such little effort involved.

Overall Rating: C-. The opener is really good but it's not enough to save the rest of the show. This show went up against the go home show for Bash at the Beach 1996 (as in the Third Man) so the follow up from this mess is going against Hogan's big first appearance from this show. Well at least it should as Hogan didn't debut in the Black and White until the NEXT week for reasons of WCW is stupid. Either way, this show sucked, save for Shawn of course, which is just how things worked in 1996.

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Monday Night Raw – December 18, 1995: The Tennessee Invasion

Monday Night Raw

Date: December 18, 1995

Location: Bob Carpenter Center, Newark, Delaware

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

We're FINALLY past the nightmare that was the December taping cycle and In Your House V. Bret Hart retained the WWF World Title (shocking I know) and Undertaker beat Mabel in the casket match (shocking again) and that's about it for anything of note from that pay per view. Tonight we have Razor Ramon vs. Yokozuna for Razor's Intercontinental Title. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last night, including Diesel and Undertaker staring each other down to plant seeds for Wrestlemania.

Opening sequence.

Jeff Jarrett vs. Fatu

This is Jarrett's return after a long absence. Fatu dances a lot and makes a difference by atomic dropping Jarrett out to the floor. Back in and a shot to the head has no effect on Fatu but Jeff sends him throat first into the ropes for the running crotch attack to the back of the head. Jarrett rams him into the steps and actually has some success as we go to a break. Jeff slowly beats on Fatu but dives into a punch to the ribs. Fatu hits a powerslam and corner clothesline for two until he crashes down and holds his shoulder. It's time for the Figure Four but Ahmed Johnson comes in to jump Jarrett for the DQ.

Rating: D. It's not a good sign when Jeff Jarrett's big return match

is put in the perfect kind of spot for him and the match wound up being this bad. Jarrett just isn't interesting in the ring and he's not interesting on the mic either. Other than that he's just fine though. That ending seemed to be improvised though as Fatu looked hurt off the crash landing.

Ahmed beats Jarrett up and helps Fatu to the back.

Gorilla Monsoon says Diesel can get over Undertaker being named #1 contender. As for the Royal Rumble, Jeff Jarrett won't be in the Rumble itself because he'll be facing Ahmed Johnson.

The graphic for Razor vs. Yokozuna is really weird as Razor is in the middle and Yokozuna is off to the side with most of his left arm cut off.

Goldust wants to sleep with Razor Ramon.

We see a clip from last night with Diesel getting in Undertaker's face about Undertaker being #1 contender.

Buddy Landel vs. Bob Holly

Landel is a Ric Flair knockoff/ripoff/tribute character and even had Flair's 1992 theme music here. Holly armdrags him down to start but Landel takes it back to 1985 with every Flair move you can think of, even down to his mannerisms. Buddy keeps it on the mat and starts working on the leg before getting two off a backdrop. We FINALLY get to the comeback with Holly hitting right hands and a clothesline but he misses a dropkick, allowing Buddy to drop a jumping elbow for the pin.

Rating: F. I sat through almost seven minutes of these two boring the fans to death and the best I can get is an ELBOW DROP? They had no idea what to do to counter Nitro at this point and if the best they can do is back to back old school Tennessee style matches like they've spent the first half of this show airing, they deserve to get squashed.

To make it even better, it's the Brother Love Show with Ted DiBiase. The topic tonight: DiBiase having his answer to Santa Claus with Xanta Klaus, who lives at the South Pole and steals presents from kids. Now he's going to steal victory after victory (oh dear) because 1996 is going to be the year of the Million Dollar Team and the Million Dollar Champion.

Raw Bowl ad. Did they really think this was some brilliant idea?

Intercontinental Title: Razor Ramon vs. Yokozuna

Razor is defending and here's Goldust to watch from ringside. The champ quickly knocks Yokozuna out to the floor to start and we look at Goldust during the lull. Back in and Razor hammers away with everything he's got before having to avoid a sitdown splash. Yokozuna takes him down with ease and grabs the nerve hold because he already needs a break.

Razor gets up because it's just a fat man nerve hold and hits some clotheslines. Back from a break with Razor having to fight out of another nerve hold. Razor fights up, stops a charge in the corner and hits the middle rope bulldog.....as Undertaker comes out with a casket. Yokozuna panics and runs away because THESE TWO HAVE TO FEUD FOREVER.

Rating: D. Match of the night here until the horrible ending. Was anyone asking for another casket match between Undertaker and Yokozuna? Like, wasn't the Undertaker's spirit rising out of the casket and then Chuck Norris enough for us? Thankfully this didn't go anywhere of note and Undertaker would move on to the main event and then his much better feuds in 1996.

Razor is actually flattered that Goldust likes him but he's just into women.

And to wrap it up, Tell Me A Lie, a video tribute to Shawn Michaels who might never return.

Overall Rating: F. That might be the worst episode of Raw that I've ever seen. The first half of the show is spent on Jeff Jarrett and Buddy Landel, neither of whom could keep the fans awake let alone interested. After that we have an Intercontinental Title match with Razor bouncing off Yokozuna before Undertaker comes out for really not much of a reason.

I mean, there was the face crushing last month but Undertaker is getting a title shot at the Royal Rumble and is pretty clearly about to fight Diesel soon after that. Why do I need to see him with Yokozuna? Absolutely horrible show here with almost no effort, nothing interesting, and now I have Tell Me A Lie stuck in my head. Thanks Raw, for irritating me this badly.

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