

Hidden Gems Collection #10 (12 Days Of Hidden Gems Part 4): Do Not Open Until July



IMG Credit: WWE

Hidden Gems #10

Date: 1985, 1987, 2000

I'm FINALLY finishing up these Christmas shows and, again, it includes an AWA show because apparently there is nothing else to do on Christmas night in Minnesota. There is one little surprise in there as well though with a one match Gem instead of a full show. With luck, I can get this done by Halloween. Let's get to it.

ECW World Title: Sandman vs. Justin Credible vs. Steve Corino

Date: December 23, 2000

Location: ECW Arena, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Corino is defending (though Sandman has the title) and this is from the final ECW event at the ECW Arena so it's certainly historic. Before the match, Sandman says let's make it a three way so I'm not sure who wasn't originally in the match. Corino jumps Sandman from behind to start so the champ fights back and sends everyone outside. Credible sends Corino over the barricade as Sandman starts bringing out the toys.

The fans tell themselves to throw in their chairs before switching to the tried and true ECW chant. As the other two fight in the crowd, Sandman loads up six chairs with a piece of barricade on top of them. Credible comes back in for an ugly piledriver from Sandman, who then superplexes the bloody Corino onto the steel setup. Sandman is back up with the cane to the head and Corino hits the Old School Expulsion (basically a reverse Twist of Fate) to eliminate Credible at 3:54.

Sandman throws in chairs and the fans follow suit, throwing in probably 100 chairs. Eventually Sandman has to call them off as the mat is nearly covered, meaning a DDT onto the chairs gets...two as Corino's lackey Jack Victory makes the save. Sandman's Swanton only hits chairs and the Old School Expulsion on the chairs gets two. Victory belts Corino by mistake so Sandman can get two. A cowbell to the head retains Corino's title at 7:22.

Rating: D. The chairs thing made for a cool visual but multiple ones being launched from the further seats and landing in the closer seats were lawsuits waiting to happen. Sandman was crazy over here and Corino was a great heel for wanting to be a wrestler. Credible was just there, which is often the case for him.

AWA House Show

Date: December 25, 1987

Location: Minneapolis Auditorium, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Attendance: 1,800

Commentators: Ron Trongard, Nick Conch

The ring announcer tells us to make sure to register for a prize drawing. Given how many empty seats are behind him, you probably have a good chance of winning something.

Mitch Snow vs. Nick Kiniski

There is a guest ring announcer who donated a bunch of money to a charity. Nick is Gene's son and hopefully he's more interesting than his

dad. Oh and this is JAMMIN Mitch Snow because it's the 80s and Jammin is a cool name. That being said, he has Madusa in his corner so there's something to him. Kiniski chills on the floor to start before being driven into the corner and falling out to the floor. Back in and Snow works on the arm before taking Kiniski down and pulling on the arm.

We're clipped to Kiniski putting on a chinlock as the arena looks darker and the camera is pulled back for some reason. It's off to a front facelock with the bigger Kiniski laying on him quite a bit. Back up and Kiniski misses a charge into the corner, which didn't even start until after Mitch had moved. It's off to the reverse chinlock for a good while until Snow fights back up. We get the two minute warning and Kiniski grabs a rollup with trunks for the pin at 7:45 shown.

Rating: D+. Pretty dull match here but that's kind of the point of an opener like this. All they were doing here was getting the crowd warmed up a little bit so it's not like the standards were all that high. At least they went to a finish instead of just another time limit draw. Not very good, but I'm not exactly thinking they had the highest expectations.

Alan West vs. Kevin Kelly

Not that Kevin Kelly, though this one is better known as Nailz. West is substituting for DJ Peterson, who had won Madusa's (Kelly's manager) services for a month, which ends tonight. Madusa is in West's corner and wearing an elf costume, which the announcers ridicule/praise in a somewhat disturbing way. Feeling out process to start with Kelly posing a lot and Trongard talking about West's football career. Kelly works on an armbar as I try to figure out what happened to him until he became Nailz. He's chiseled here while Nailz looked to be almost husky, which is quite the change of pace.

The announcers talk about how bored Madusa looks at ringside as West starts in on the arm. Back up and Kelly sends him into the corner, setting up a front facelock as the slow pace (read as the AWA style) goes on. The BORING chants send us off to a chinlock for far too long as the fans are getting bored in a hurry. They head outside with Kelly stomping

away but having to come back in after the threats of a nagging referee. Back in and Kelly's very slow offense continues and we hit the backbreaker.

Slam, misses elbow, slam, elbow connects for two. That somehow ate up over a minute and a half. West finally makes a comeback off a dropkick, with Kelly jumping into it for some reason. A backdrop gives West two and a powerslam gets the same with Kelly getting his foot on the rope. They do the same thing off a backbreaker, which looked like a setup for Madusa to sweep the leg. West picks him up again and this time Madusa does sweep the leg, allowing Kelly to fall on top for the pin at 10:55.

Rating: D-. From the boring "action" to the botched finish, this was one of the most uninteresting matches I've seen in a long time. West's comeback was decent enough, but other than that this felt about three hours long and needed to be about seven minutes shorter. Terrible match here as the AWA continues its tradition of REALLY boring stuff.

Nord the Barbarian vs. Soldat Ustinov

A local radio announcer introduces this one. Nord is better known as Berzerker and Ustinov is one of those Russians from Minnesota. If Nord wins, he gets five minutes with Adnan Al-Kaissie. Nord grabs a headlock takeover and we're immediately cut to the two of them fighting to the floor. They go into the crowd with Nord getting the better of it and somehow beating the count back in. A big boot gives Nord two and we're clipped again to Ustinov charging into a boot in the corner for the same.

The front facelock goes on and we're clipped again, this time to Ustinov raking the eyes. Ustinov grabs a chinlock as the announcers keep comparing this to a boxing match. They can clip everything else but not a two minute chinlock? The camera goes out for a bit as Nord fights up and hits a dropkick (which we only hear about). Nord misses a middle rope legdrop but Ustinov misses a middle rope clothesline to give Nord the pin at 5:45 shown.

Rating: D. Well what we saw was bad at least and were you really expecting anything else? You're only going to get so much stuff out of a battle of the giants like this and that's usually not the best recipe in

the world. Neither of these guys were exactly interesting but the whole deal with the manager fight is more than enough to make something like this worth it.

Nord the Barbarian vs. Sheik Adnan Al-Kaissie

The chase is on and Ustinov's interference earns himself a ram into the post. Sheik gets in and the beatdown is on with Sheik's comeback cut off by a boot to the face. Ustinov comes in and some double teaming works a bit better on Nord...and everyone walks out at 2:08.

Tag Team Titles: Midnight Express vs. Midnight Rockers

For the sake of clarification, I'll go with the Midnights vs. the Rockers here. The Express (Randy Rose/Dennis Condrey with Paul E. Dangerously) is defending here. Of note here, Shawn is starting to grow out his hair and has what would be his classic look for the next thirty years. The brawl is on before the bell with the Midnights being sent outside. We settle down to Shawn vs. Condrey to start, even though I don't think I heard a bell in there.

A right hand knocks Condrey down and it's time to complain about the closed fists. Given that referee Scott LeDoux is a former boxer, this doesn't go very well. We settle down and get clipped to Shawn punching Condrey out of the corner. For some reason Rose shoves LeDoux and gets shoved back, meaning the champs need to bail, only to come back to see the Rockers holding the belts. A headlock takeover sends Condrey outside and it's time to stall some more on the outside.

Back in and Dennis takes his time locking up, allowing Jannetty to get in the corner and block Shawn from being whipped into the corner. Rose tries the same thing and gets kicked in the ribs because Shawn is rather smart. The ring announcer says we're at ten minutes, though it's about six and a half, which makes me think the big time limit draw is coming. Rose comes in and gets monkey flipped before taking over on Shawn's arm.

We're clipped (that's more like it) to Shawn hanging Rose up in the ropes and punching away for the rocking chair effect. Condrey comes back in and gets whipped into the corner as well, allowing the tag to Marty. A rope

walk headlock takeover has Rose in trouble at the fifteen minute announcement, or ten shown. Marty's crossbody gets two and the Rockers take turns with some headlock takeovers.

Rose gets up and manages to punch Condrey by mistake as the Midnights can't get anything going. Marty knocks him into the corner again and we're clipped again to Condrey not wanting to tag in. Clipped again to Condrey getting headlocked as well and we hit twenty minutes in (about twelve shown). Dangerously offers a distraction so Shawn can be knocked out to the floor. The champs finally take over on Shawn with a gutbuster making it even worse.

We hit the chinlock (you knew that was coming) and we're clipped again to Shawn making his comeback. A clothesline takes care of that though but we're clipped AGAIN to the hot tag bringing Marty in to clean house. Condrey blocks a sunset flip as we have two minutes left. Trongard freaks out because he thought it was an hour time limit but it's only half an hour, which should be a detail they have down.

Marty gets two off a small package with a minute left. Condrey begs off so Marty wastes a long time before hammering away. Everything breaks down and the Rockers put on a freaking rowboat hold before realizing they're out of time and covering with two seconds left as time expires at 18:18 shown of 30:00.

Rating: B-. What we got was working but my goodness the Rockers looked like morons at the end there. They just waited around forever and then realized how dumb they were at the end. The clipping hurt quite a bit though and while what we got was good, I never bought that the titles were in real jeopardy. Oh and just to make this worse: the Rockers won the titles TWO DAYS LATER, because why do it on Christmas night when you can...not?

Adrian Adonis vs. Wahoo McDaniel

Adonis has Dangerously in his corner and is looking like a cross between his most famous gimmick and the tough guy version. He even throws in a peck on Dangerously's cheek to mess with the announcers. Adonis works on a headlock as the announcers talk about how much Adonis weighs, with

Trongard seriously trying to say that Adonis weighs 458. I mean he's fat but that's Earthquake levels.

Adonis takes him down into an armbar but the referee breaks it up for no apparent reason. McDaniel comes back with a chop to the nose but gets driven into the corner with a splash crushing his arm. Another splash hits the referee though and Dangerously gives Adonis the phone for a shot to the head. Adonis' splash gets two as Wahoo gets a foot on the rope. Adrian makes the mistake of going after the referee, allowing Wahoo to grab Dangerously. Wahoo steals the phone and knocks Adonis down before shoving the referee for the DQ at 5:42.

Rating: D-. This match felt like it belonged in 1983 at the latest as Adonis was just embarrassing. McDaniel looked better but that's not saying much given who he was in there against. The two of them did not belong in a ring at this point but they were names so of course they were put on the show.

AWA World Title: Curt Hennig vs. Greg Gagne

Curt is defending of course and Greg doesn't get an entrance. Both of their fathers are here at ringside so for the sake of simplicity I'll only call them Larry and Verne. There are three referees for some reason and Larry Hennig wants Scott LeDoux out of here. After the Big Match Intros, Larry and Verne have to be tied together to prevent any cheating. I'm sure absolutely no shenanigans will take place.

Curt works on an armbar to start and gets shoved away in a hurry as the announcers recap the previous issues between the two with the fathers interfering in previous matches. Why can't they do that in more matches? Greg gets in a right hand to knock Curt outside as the fathers are shoving each other on the floor. Back in and Curt gets two off a sunset flip but the threat of a right hand sends him bailing out to the floor. He gets back in again as the stall is in full swing here, allowing the announcers to list off possible challengers for the winner.

Hennig takes the leg and gets in a spinning toehold, setting up some pulling on the leg. Since the hold goes on for several minutes, it's a BORING chant but Hennig seems to be paying attention and grabs a rollup

for two. Gagne misses a dive onto the ropes and it's a Figure Four to work on the leg even more. That gets turned over so Curt goes to the rope before starting right back in on the leg.

Gagne sends Curt shoulder first into the post and it's time for the armbar. The arm goes into the buckle as the dads are about to fight again. A hammerlock slam has Hennig begging off in the corner but it's a collision to put both of them down. Back up and the slugout goes to Curt and a middle rope splash gets two. Hennig knocks him outside and eventually is smart enough to let the referee count.

Back in and Greg turns it on with forearms and a backdrop as Larry is freaking out. The sleeper goes on and Verne finally punches Larry for trying to interfere. Larry punches him right back and breaks the hold, meaning it's a dad fight on the floor. That's enough for the DQ at 18:30.

Rating: C+. This was a long match and while it was dull at times, it was far from bad with the battle of limb work and the dads being extra factors on the floor. I wasn't wild on the long form holds but at least the match could have been a lot worse given how things have gone around here before. Hennig was very good in the ring, though just having him as a regular guy wasn't the most thrilling character. Gagne wasn't too bad either, but he was in over his head here.

The brawl stays on and some wrestlers come in for the save as the dads keep fighting. Curt even beats up Verne, meaning it's time for Verne to open his shirt and beat up everyone because that's what he does. Hennig even breaks the belt over Greg's head to brawl some blood. Things are finally settled down to end the show.

Hold on though as we've got some interviews to do.

The Midnight Rockers don't like the thirty minute time limit and didn't get to give the fans the Christmas present they wanted.

Dangerously says the Rockers had their chance and it's on to another team. Why was it a thirty minute match? It's because Dangerously is smarter than the Rockers. Hearing Dangerously talk here is such a striking difference between his more famous work as Paul Heyman.

Greg Gagne says he's beaten Curt three times now and this time Larry had to save his son's title. There is only one way to settle this and...I guess we'll find out what that is later.

Verne Gagne, still with the open shirt despite this being in the empty arena, says Greg got cheated. And yes, of course he's willing to come out of retirement. Well only if you beg him of course.

The Hennigs think the Gagnes are dumb because the Hennigs still have the title. Curt is more than down for a rematch.

Adrian Adonis says he put out Tommy Rich's fire and Roddy Piper is nowhere to be seen. Now Wahoo is a former great Indian wrestler.

We go to the opening of All Star Wrestling...which is the same shot with Adonis and Dangerously in the same places and talking about Rich, Piper and McDaniel again. What an odd way to end another night that wasn't all that great in the first place. The wrestling was fine (mostly) but the dim arena is killing them. This is less than a month before the first Royal Rumble and it looks like it's 1978. That's not going to work.

AWA Nite Of Champions II

Date: December 29, 1985

Location: Meadowlands Arena, East Rutherford, New Jersey

Attendance: 13,000

This is officially an AWA show but it's actually Pro Wrestling USA, meaning it's the AWA/NWA on the same card. At least we'll get some flavor out of it.

Tony Schiavone recaps the Road Warriors vs. the Russians. The Road Warriors and Paul Ellering come in to talk about how serious they are. Of course they haven't bitten off more than they can chew with the Russians. The Road Warriors have told Ellering what they want to do to the Russians and it is rather intense. Animal doesn't like hearing about the Russians and the beating is coming soon.

Tully Blanchard, with his head bandaged after Starrcade, is coming to get

the US Title back. He's coming to get the US Title back and for Magnum TA's eye.

The Rock N Roll Express want the Long Riders and will retain their titles. Not that they're wearing any titles here. Ricky Morton wants to get hot and nasty and speaks in what sound like a lot of song lyrics. Or he's just really high.

We hear the New Jersey Athletic Commission members. I'm assuming it's for the record but I really don't need to hear that Dr. Shaw is at ringside. Unless it's Dr. Zahorian, just move on.

No commentary here, as expected.

Ron Bass vs. JJ Dillon

Bass is a cowboy who has been chasing Dillon (a manager) for a good while now. Dillon actually gets a home state reaction but not the biggest in the world because he's quite the heel. Bass sends him into the corner and then grabs a quickly broken hammerlock. An armbar on the mat works better as Dillon seems to be in way over his head. A hair pull gets Dillon out of trouble for a split second but the fans dub this boring. Could you wait until we're three minutes into the match?

The armbar goes back on but Dillon reverses into one of his own as the crowd reactions are much more prominent here with the lack of commentary. Back up again and Dillon chokes away in the corner, followed by a nerve hold and more BORING chants. Bass makes the comeback as I try to get my head around him being a face. The Claw goes on and Dillon is done at 5:23.

Rating: D. This is a match where commentary could have helped a lot with selling the hatred and history between these two. As a regular match it's rather bad but for a nice moment for Bass, it worked well enough. Again though, it feels completely wrong to cheer for Bass, who is as heel of a character as you can get.

World Midget Title: Cowboy Lang vs. Little Tokyo

Tokyo is defending and starts by hiding behind the referee, including a

pull of his pants. I wouldn't be expecting much in the serious department here but that's to be expected. Tokyo grabs a flying headlock takeover but runs into a dropkick. A test of strength goes to Lang and he backflips over Tokyo for some more frustration. Tokyo stomps on the referee's foot in frustration/protest so Lang kicks him into the corner.

Some stomping in the corner keeps Lang down until he bites Tokyo's bare foot. Lang's delayed vertical suplex gets two and an atomic drop has Tokyo bouncing very high into the air. A backdrop and running stomp to the head gives Lang two but Tokyo rolls him up and puts his feet on the ropes to retain at 6:56.

Rating: D-. Yeah what is there to say about this one? The match was just a spectacle for the sake of having an attraction in there and that isn't the most interesting thing in the world. The wrestling wasn't any good and there was no flow to it, minus a few comedy spots. These things don't age well and this was quite the downer.

AWA Women's Title: Debbie Combs vs. Sherri Martel

Sherri is defending. The referee takes a LONG time checking Sherri for weapons and yelling at her in general. The lockup goes to Sherri and she grabs a front facelock to take over. Debbie takes her down by the leg, followed by Sherri taking her down by the leg to mix things up a bit. The fans don't seem pleased with this one but they like Combs being tossed to the floor.

That means some choking with a camera cable but Combs is right back with stomping and a hard slam. Back in and Sherri misses a charge into the corner but she's fine enough to knock Combs outside again. As was the case before, she doesn't seem phased by it and tries a front facelock, which fans again find boring.

Sherri's necksnap sets up...well nothing actually as she gets knocked into the corner and catapulted face first onto the mat for two. Sherri takes her down by the arm as the back and forth continues. Combs gets up again and knocks her to the floor followed by an airplane spin of all things back inside. She gets a bit too dizzy though and Martel grabs a rollup for the pin at 10:25.

Rating: D. This was a rough one to watch but the women were both trying as hard as they could have. Women's wrestling was, much like the previous match, little more than a sideshow act at this point with no women's wrestling (in America at least) meaning anything for a very long time. The WWF was trying, but it's not like it was anything from a quality standpoint.

Universal Title: Carlos Colon vs. Konga The Barbarian

Colon is defending the WWC (Puerto Rico) World Title. That would be the Barbarian with Konga The as a bonus, plus Paul Jones (one of the worst managers of all time) in his corner. There's no contact for the first minute as the referee objects to what looks like a spiked bad on Barbarian's forearm. Colon slugs away to start and then grabs a headlock to grind away. This is dubbed as boring as well, as the fans are far from the most patient people in the world.

Barbarian slams him down for the headbutt, followed by the contractually obligated bearhug. This one is broken up in a hurry but Barbarian kicks him down for two more. The top rope headbutt misses so Barbarian sends Carlos outside where Jones gets in some stomping. Back in and Colon grabs the worst small package of all time (he doesn't even touch a leg) to retain at 6:39.

Rating: D. See, I know there is a lot of variety on here and some big stars, but it doesn't matter when the matches are all somewhere between bad and boring. This was another bad match with Barbarian being as standard of a villain as you can find (though he would keep doing this same role for the next fifteen years so he was doing something right) and the ending was awful. Can we please find something to help this show?

Post match Jones says they will be back. Can you not?

Buddy Roberts vs. Paul Ellering

Roberts is a Freebird and Ellering, in a neck brace here, is best known as the Road Warriors' manager, though he did wrestle before an injury ended his career. Roberts jumps him to start and is knocked into the corner without much effort. A kick to the face has Roberts tied up in the

ropes and it takes an assist from the referee to get him out.

Back up and Roberts goes after the knee, including wrapping it around the post. Not to be outdone, Ellering crotches him against the post to take over again. Roberts is fine enough to get in a shot to the neck though and the pace slows a bit. Forearms to the back set up a middle rope elbow to the back of the head and Roberts sends him neck first into the ropes. The piledriver is loaded up but the Road Warriors run in for the save.

Rating: D+. This still wasn't great but it was better than the matches that came before it. It's a lot more understandable that the match didn't last long and had the ending it did given the circumstances they were under here. If nothing else, the Road Warriors running in was a nice bonus as the show has needed a burst of energy.

Post match the Warriors beat the heck out of Roberts, even hitting a Hart Attack of all things.

NWA Tag Team Titles: Long Riders vs. Rock N Roll Express

The Riders (Scott and Bill Irwin, a pair of bikers) are challenging. Robert and Scott start things off with Robert working on a headlock. Bill comes in to try a save and gets taken down with a headscissors at the same time Scott goes down with a headlock takeover. It's off to Bill vs. Ricky with the latter's armbars keeping things a bit slow. The champs start taking over on Bill with a full nelson and a dropkick that completely misses.

Bill finally gets in a slam but Roberts rolls through with it into a small package for no count. Instead it's Ricky coming back in for a much better looking dropkick. It gets even worse with another full nelson into an armbars from Robert as this is one sided so far. A clothesline out of the corner finally puts Robert down and it's back to Scott for a variety of choking. Bill's middle rope elbow gets two and the fans give Robert the most polite pleas for a comeback I can ever remember seeing.

The bearhug is less well received, mainly because it's a bearhug in the first good match of the card. Robert finally gets over to the corner for the hot tag to Ricky but the referee doesn't see it (always a classic).

The beatdown continues as I try to get my head around seeing Robert taking the beating for a change. Scott's splash hits knees and the hot tag brings in Ricky, who starts punching before he gets back inside. Everything breaks down and it's a double elbow to Robert, leaving Ricky to grab a sunset flip for the pin on Bill to retain at 11:04.

Rating: C. Definitely the best match of the night here as the Rock N Roll Express can work a formula like no team in history. I'm not sure why Robert was the one getting the heat here but it was a rather different change of pace from the traditional Express match. The Long Riders weren't great but the Express knew just what to do against a team like them. Not a bad match, and great compared to everything else so far.

Post match the Express bails but the Riders say they aren't leaving. Then they leave.

Sgt. Slaughter vs. Boris Zhukov/Chris Markoff

Slaughter's Americas Heavyweight and tags are required. Markoff is your classic Russian by way of Minnesota and from what I can find, has been wrestling since 1964. We get straight to the choking in the corner with Markoff just standing there with his hand on Slaughter's throat while Boris holds him. We finally settle down to Boris being thrown hard into the corner and Slaughter choking Markoff down, all to a USA chant.

Markoff pulls out a belt of some kind and hits Slaughter in the head as this is already getting dull. Slaughter is busted open and choking with the belt ensues, though the USA chants don't slow down a bit. The choking keeps going as this is either a No DQ match or the referee is rather blind. Boris joins Markoff for some stomping to put Slaughter on the timekeeper's table as they're not veering out of their comfort zone. Slaughter finally Hulks Up...and gets choked down by the belt again.

Boris' clothesline gets two and he drops some elbows so Markoff can get two of his own. Forearms to the back just wake Slaughter up and he takes the belt for a real whipping. A big shot with the belt gets two but the heels take him down AGAIN, this time with a double backdrop. Slaughter sends Boris outside though and finishes Markoff with the Slaughter Cannon at 11:50.

Rating: D-. HOW IS THIS SHOW GETTING WORSE? The crowd came close to pushing this up a bit but it was just so much choking that cut off the momentum every single time. They needed to cut about four minutes out of this to make it work and even then it wasn't going to be very good. This show is death so far and this show dragged it right back down even further.

US Title: Magnum TA vs. Tully Blanchard

I'll give it an A+ if it's even close to what they can do. Magnum is defending and Tully has Baby Doll with him. Tully gets punched in the face and gorilla pressed to start so it's time for some Doll time on the floor. Back in and Magnum punches away some more with a great look of intensity. Tully goes villainous with a poke to the eye and a throat drop across the barricade though and the champ is down on the floor.

Kicking and stomping keep Magnum down as they're doing an outstanding job of making you feel the hatred. Magnum gets back up and wins the slugout on the floor before winning another one back inside. They're both busted open as Magnum gets two off a suplex. A superplex attempt is shoved off though and Tully starts in on the back for the first actual wrestling of the match. With that box checked off, Tully goes back to hammering on the cut but runs into a dropkick for two. The belly to belly finishes Tully completely clean at 11:11.

Rating: B-. The ending was as sudden and surprising as you could get as Magnum just hit the dropkick, threw some punches, and finished. You would expect more out of these two for an ending but maybe that's just the modern fan in me talking. What mattered here was the intensity and you could feel the hatred between the two of them. That's what sold the feud and it was on full display here. It's a nice followup to their masterpiece at Starrcade and for a big house show match, it was more than good enough.

NWA World Title: Dusty Rhodes vs. Ric Flair

Flair is defending of course and it's almost strange to see him in anything but the Big Gold Belt. Dusty mocks Flair's slick back the hair taunt and dances a bit, much to the crowd's delight. The first elbow to

the head gives us an early Flair Flop and it's already time for a breather. That means more yelling at the fans, which Flair has turned into an art form over the years.

Back in and the dancing punches have Flair in more trouble, meaning we need more breathing (after he accidentally rolls onto the timekeeper's table). Back in again and Dusty grabs a hammerlock into the boot rake to the face as you can feel how into this the fans really are. A kick to the leg gets Flair out of trouble and it's time to get back to the basics. Dusty staggers around the ring off the shots to the leg and Flair cannonballs down onto it as only he can make look perfect.

The referee gets in his face over the cheating to a nice reaction but Flair lets it go and puts on the Figure Four. Dusty manages to turn it over and Flair is smart enough to let go almost immediately. Back up and Flair misses a charge into the corner, meaning it's time to beg off. Dusty's running clothesline gets two as Flair puts a foot on the rope. Flair begs off again so Dusty hammers away and we've got some blood.

A sweep of the legs lets Flair grab a rollup with feet on the ropes for two, because he has to get in that classic cheating where he can. Dusty slaps on his own Figure Four until a rope is grabbed. Back up and Dusty throws him over the top for a second, only to have Flair hit the referee. Oh yeah you know where this is going. Dusty nails the elbow and a second referee comes in to count the pin at 14:50.

Rating: C. Their matches might not be great but you can't deny the natural chemistry between these two. The fans are going to get behind Dusty because of the all time charisma and Flair is Flair. There's a reason these two were as perfect together as they knew exactly what they were doing, but the constant Dusty Finishes made it hard to care. Dusty would finally win the title in July, so at least they did pay it off at some point.

Say it with me: and there's no title change Flair was thrown over the top earlier on, meaning it's a DQ.

Road Warriors vs. Russians

Ellering is here with the Warriors. That would be Ivan Koloff/Krusher Khrushchev with Nikita Koloff on the floor. Animal wastes no time in gorilla pressing Koloff and hands it off to Hawk for some right hands. Krusher comes in and cranks on a wristlock but Hawk shoves him away without much trouble. A big boot and backdrop have Krusher in trouble and Animal gets in a slam to make it even worse.

Koloff comes back in and slugs away at Hawk, who chokes him to take over instead. Animal even sneaks in a low blow to keep him down, followed by more choking. Krusher finally embraces his inner evil Russian by low bridging Animal to the floor for the first opening. We hit the neck crank but Animal rakes the eyes to escape, which is something so simple that few ever think of it.

That and a hot shot aren't enough for the tag to Hawk though and it's a double clothesline with Koloff for a double knockdown. Animal finally gets over for the tag and the house cleaning is on. Koloff is busted open and the blood all over Hawk's chest is quite the visual. Everything breaks down and the Russians try to switch but Ellering stops the count and points out the switch, meaning it's a DQ win for the Warriors at 10:45.

Rating: C-. It might not have been the best match in the world but the energy was there and this is another match that gives you a layup on paper. How can you not get fired up about an American power team against a trio of EVIL Russians (who happen to be monsters in their own right) in 1985? Hence why this feud lasted for a long time.

Post match the brawl continues with Ellering getting knocked down until the Warriors clear the ring.

AWA World Title: Rick Martel vs. Stan Hansen

Hansen is challenging. They slug it out at the bell, because slugging it out with STAN HANSEN is a good idea. Martel hits a crossbody to send him outside so Hansen throws in a chair, which is quickly disposed of. Back in and Martel armdrags him into an armbar, which is probably smarter than trading punches. Naturally the fans declare this boring, because they're quite a fickle bunch.

Hansen breaks the armbar without much trouble and dumps him outside to keep up the brawling. That doesn't last long as Martel is right back to the arm with a legdrop and a short arm scissors. Hansen gets up and slams him down again as it's the back vs. the arm so far. To mix things up a bit, Martel takes him down and drops a leg on the arm. At least this time he goes with an armbar for something a little different.

Hansen comes up with a backbreaker and some ax handles to the back. A gutwrench suplex gets two but Hansen's splash hits raised knees. Martel's own slam gets two but his back gives out on a suplex attempt. The abdominal stretch goes on until Martel can get out with a small package for two. His back is done though and Hansen puts on a Boston crab but leans his head onto the turnbuckle (completely legal) so Martel can't kick out. Martel taps like crazy and finally gives up 14:00.

Rating: D+. The back vs. arm stuff was a fine idea but the execution was lame. There is only so much that you can get when the match is spent on a series of armbars and arm scissors with Hansen hitting him in the back in between. The ending was very smart though and something I don't remember seeing done again. Martel was a nice breath of air for the title but was anyone buying him as a top star?

Overall Rating: D. That's how you end Christmas I guess. The ECW match was nothing, the AWA show was your usual boring event that only appealed to the hometown fans and the Pro Wrestling USA show was one of the worst things I can remember save for one or two bright spots. This is another situation where you can understand why things were hidden and it's better if they stay that way in cases like this one.

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Wrestler of the Day – October 25: John Nord

Today is a guy you probably only know under one gimmick: John Nord.

Nord started in 1984 and we'll pick things up in the AWA at Wrestlerock 1986.

Nord the Barbarian/King Kong Brody vs. Jimmy Snuka/Greg Gagne

A few notes here: Snuka is a mystery partner subbing for Jerry Blackwell (that's for the better, trust me), this match originally went on second of the three cage matches, King Kong Brody is Bruiser Brody because of some legit complaint from Dick the Bruiser, and if Snuka/Gagne win, Verne gets 10 minutes in the cage with Sheik Adnan-Al Kaissie. This is announced as the main event, even though there could be more stuff after it. Oh and Nord the Barbarian is just called Barbarian and is more famous as the Berzerker.

Snuka gets zero fanfare at all. Gagne looks like a 1996 version of Chavo Guerrero. They have to tag here so the match is automatically dropped a few notches. Gagne starts with Brody. Greg gets in a few punches but Brody kicks him in the face, making Gagne look like he got shot. Off to Barbarian who gets punched back into his own corner. Off to Snuka for a death defying chinlock.

The match slows way down as Brody comes in and knocks Snuka down. Then they stand around. Then they stand around some more. Snuka does his

leapfrogs but Brody knocks him right back down. Off to Gagne and I can't believe I'm saying this, but it makes the match way better. If nothing else he sells everything like death which is usually a cool thing to see.

Greg gets rammed into the cage to bust him open. Good piledriver by Brody gets two. Nelson turns into an annoying fanboy again but Gagne's comeback is shortlived. He manages to send Nord into the cage and there's the hot tag (with a pop) to Snuka. Off to Brody who is busted open. He yells a lot as Snuka hammers away on him.

Snuka gets in Superfly position but hits a headbutt instead. Nord interferes and Snuka is in trouble again. Everything breaks down and the heels get rammed into each other. Double dropkick puts Nord down and a double suplex does the same to Brody. Snuka rams into Gagne by mistake, but Snuka gets up and dropkicks Nord who trips over Gagne and gets pinned.

Rating: D. Oh boy did they screw this up. First of all, WHERE IS THE SUPERFLY SPLASH??? You bring in Jimmy Snuka and he doesn't even hit the move he's legendary for in the kind of match he's legendary for hitting it in? Second, there was way too much heel control here. The idea is supposed to be faces control to start, Gagne opens, tag to Snuka for more dominance, back to Gagne, Gagne gets beaten down, hot tag, finish.

Instead it was faces control, heels control, faces comeback, faces screw up, faces steal a win. The problem is that it doesn't allow the fans to build up momentum. This match had the pieces of a decent match, but they were all in the wrong order which is what made it hard to stay invested in. Also the lack of a splash hurt it a lot.

A few years later Nord would become Yukon John, a lumberjack as over the top as he would later be as the Berzerker. From the AWA, I believe in 1990.

Yukon Eric vs. The Menace

Generic masked guy. He bounces off the far bigger Eric and a big boot drops Menace again. A dropkick knocks him a third time and Yukon plants him with a powerslam. Eric howls a lot and drops a leg for the pin. Nord

has an awesome look.

It was off to the WWF in early 1991 as the Berzerker, but first he was the Viking, with the exact same gimmick. Here's his debut on Wrestling Challenge, February 16, 1991.

The Viking vs. David Eisley

Viking shoves him around and nails a big boot as this doesn't look to last long. A dropkick does the same thing and Viking starts shouting HUSS a lot. Another big boot against the ropes drops Eisley again and a gordbuster knocks him silly. Viking lifts David up and throws him out to the floor like he's nothing and it's a countout.

Berzerker was in action at Survivor Series 1991.

Team Mustafa vs. Team Slaughter

Colonel Mustafa, Berzerker, Skinner, Hercules

Sgt. Slaughter, Tito Santana, Jim Duggan, Texas Tornado

A lot of these guys are on their way out. Hercules would be in WCW by May, Tornado would job to the stars until leaving in July as would Mustafa (Iron Sheik), and the rest of the guys would do nothing of note for the rest of their time in the company. Kerry (Tornado) looks high as a kite and almost falls off the apron getting into the ring. This is pretty recently after Slaughter's face turn as he was a heel at Summerslam. This isn't exactly the most talent laden match ever and the only feud is Slaughter vs. Mustafa.

Tito and Skinner start with Santana taking over with a headlock. There's the flying forearm out of nowhere and Skinner hits the floor without a cover. Off to Berzerker vs. Tornado which would work a lot better down in Dallas. Berzerker (a crazy viking who tried to stab Undertaker with a sword) misses a dropkick and it's off to Mustafa. After some very brief offense, Kerry tumbles to his corner and brings in Duggan to face Hercules, which was in the first ever match at Survivor Series.

Duggan gets taken down by double and triple teaming and it's off to

Mustafa. He loads up his curled boots (it's a Sheik thing) and does nothing with them. Thanks for wasting our time with that. Duggan pounds away and backdrops Mustafa down before the hot tag to Slaughter. The big showdown is an atomic drop and a clothesline to Mustafa for the elimination.

Berzerker comes in with some clotheslines and a kick to the fat gut of Slaughter. A boot to Slaughter's face puts him down and it's off to Hercules for some two counts. Back to the viking who gets crotched on the top rope and kicked in the legs. Off to Duggan who clotheslines Berzerker to the floor and backdrops him back there a few seconds later. Tornado comes in and pounds away on him before it's off to Hercules again. Tito gets a blind tag and hits a forearm to the back of the head (El Paso Del Muerte) for the pin and the elimination.

Skinner, the guy that owned now former developmental program FCW, comes in as it's 4-2. When you have Skinner and Berzerker as your only guys left, the team is in big trouble. A blind tag brings in Slaughter who rolls up Skinner for the elimination. Slaughter whips Berzerker into Duggan's clothesline for the elimination and the win.

Rating: F. The match sucked, it was never in doubt, and the biggest deal on the heel team was Skinner, who would get an IC Title shot soon after this. What a horrible match and one of the most worthless ones in the history of the show so far, which is covering quite a bit of ground. Nothing to see here at all.

Here he is in MSG on December 29, 1991.

Berzerker vs. British Bulldog

This should be short and relatively bitter. Bulldog's music is rather hard to hear here. Crisscross to start and Berzerker kicks him in the head. Bulldog is a favorite in the Rumble because he won some other battle royal in England. Gorilla said the cup he won was ugly. What a great ambassador Gorilla is.

You can tell the fans aren't exactly caring here, even though

if the chart I saw is correct, this was the opener. No Fuji with Berzerker here for some reason. Camel clutch by Berzerker has Bulldog in something resembling trouble. Gorilla and Heenan talk about people in the Rumble as they don't care at all here. It's a shame that they have something to talk about here as Gorilla and Jesse could be hilarious when they got bored. Powerslam is blocked and Berzerker falls on him for the pin.

Rating: N. As in nah that didn't really happen. I'm just so bored here that I wanted to do something to break up the monotony. Bulldog gets the worst rollup ever about a second later for the real pin.

Rating: D-. Boring match with these two managing to botch a rollup of all things. That's HARD to do. This went nowhere at all and nothing at all came of it. I get that Bulldog is supposed to be getting a push, but wouldn't the powerslam be a better way to do that? We really needed to protect John Nord?

Here's an upgrade in opponent on Superstars, January 18, 1992.

Undertaker vs. Berzerker

Mr. Fuji steals the urn to start and Berzerker nails him with the shield and sword (yeah he hit him with a sword) but misses a stab attempt. A clothesline puts Berzerker on the floor, right in front of Fuji. He drops the urn but Berzerker dives off the apron to put Undertaker down again. The mats are pulled back and Undertaker gets piledriven on the concrete but he sits up a few seconds later. We get the slow stalk up the aisle and the villains leave. I'm not sure if this was a match or not but again Berzerker looked AWESOME.

Here's a power tag match on June 3, 1992.

Undertaker/Ultimate Warrior vs. Papa Shango/Berzerker

The good guys clean house to start until we get down to Undertaker vs. Berzerker in a tall slugout. This time it's Undertaker getting the better of it but missing a charge in the corner and getting dropkicked out to

the floor. The fight heads outside with Undertaker ramming him face first into the steps. Back in and it's off to the Warrior but Shango hits him in the back with the voodoo stick.

The heels take over with some forearms to the back and actually make some nice tags to keep the fresh guy in. Warrior gets tied up in the ropes and stomps by Berzerker until he gets his arms free and backdrops the big man to the floor. The hot tag brings in Undertaker who chokeslams Berzerker for two. The flying clothesline drops Shango and everything breaks down with Warrior hitting a quick shoulder and splash to pin Berzerker.

Rating: D. Not much to this one but I'm still kind of astounded by how well Berzerker is moving out there. I liked Undertaker learning from getting beaten up by Berzerker before and adjusting in future matches. He's always been a smart wrestler and that's some good, basic psychology that so many wrestlers just miss. This was a standard house show match and was probably much better for the live crowd than someone watching elsewhere.

Another big tag match from Prime Time on July 21, 1992.

Ric Flair/Berzerker vs. Undertaker/Randy Savage

Savage is still WWF Champion here and starts with Flair. Ric takes him into the corner to start and WOOs in the champ's face. Randy goes after the arm until he drops Flair a few times with a clothesline and shoulder. Off to Undertaker and Flair is already begging off into the corner. Chops and punches have the exact effects you would think they would on the dead man and he gorilla presses Flair down.

Berzerker finally comes in for the monster slugout and a big boot puts Undertaker on the floor. Back in and Undertaker slugs away before bringing Savage back in with a top rope ax handle. The heels take over on the champ with Flair putting on a chinlock. Berzerker puts him in the corner and kicks Savage into the post.

Randy gets beaten up on the floor even more until Undertaker comes over to scare them off. A slam onto the exposed concrete has Savage in even more trouble and Berzerker ties him up in the ropes. Randy kicks his way

out though and makes the hot tag off to Undertaker. A quick tombstone plants the viking and Savage's elbow is good for the pin.

Rating: C+. Much better match here with better workers to fill in the teams. Flair vs. Savage is one of the best feuds WWF had that people don't remember enough about and this was another good, albeit short, performance from them. Fun match here that had more time to build and was better as a result.

Berzerker was in a dark match at Summerslam 1992.

Tatanka vs. Berzerker

This is the final dark match and is held right before the main event but I'm putting it here for the sake of simplicity. Berzerker wants a test of strength to start and easily takes the smaller Tatanka down. The Native American comes back by easily shoving Berzerker to the floor before they slug it out back inside. They collide after a crisscross but Berzerker misses a dropkick, allowing Tatanka to fire away on the leg.

A World's Strongest Slam gets two on Tatanka before a regular slam puts him down outside the ring. Back in and Heenan makes Indian jokes as Berzerker kicks Tatanka in the ribs. A backdrop puts Berzerker on the floor before Tatanka starts his war dance back inside. The Papoose to Go is enough for the pin on the viking.

Rating: D. To give you an idea what this match was, think of nothing. Now take away any possible interest that nothing has and you'll have this match. It was very dull and uninteresting and the fans clearly wanted to see the main event instead of more worthless wrestling. Tatanka would become a pretty big deal against Yokozuna in about a year.

Here's another match on November 23, 1992.

Crush vs. Berzerker

We're in Erie, Pennsylvania here and apparently this is going to be a classic. Gorilla and I need to have a chat about what it means to be a classic. Hayes likes Berzerker and thinks bCrush should have more of a mean streak. We get a test of

strength and the power of Hawaii wins.

Apparently Mr. Fuji has left Berzerker. I'm sure it has nothing to do with that Yoko guy. He misses a big knee drop. Yeah he's not inspired by Bruiser Brody AT ALL. Crush makes his comeback but manages to mess up an atomic drop. That's hard to do. He was over as all goodness though so I can't complain. Crush gets the Head Vice for the submission.

Rating: D+. Just a way to get Crush a win to keep him over which is fine. To say he was over is an understatement and this was just a way to get him over. This was short enough to not be that bad though, which helps a lot. Berzerker's stock is starting to fall, even though it wasn't very high in the first place.

Another match against a big name guy on January 2, 1993.

Berzerker vs. Mr. Perfect

Berzerker gets right in his face to start but gets chopped back. Perfect ducks a big boot and clothesline before a dropkick sends him out to the floor. Back in and Perfect misses a charge into the post but has to avoid a shot from the sword. A big boot puts Perfect down again but he backdrops Berzerker out to the floor. Cue Ric Flair for a distraction, though not a good enough one for Berzerker to get in any good shots. Flair leaves and the big guy is able to drop Perfect though and we take a break. Back with Berzerker getting two off a World's Strongest Slam but he ducks his head and gets PerfectPlexed for the pin.

Rating: C-. Not the worst match in the world but the Flair interference stopped what they had going. The sword thing continues to be so over the top that it's awesome, which is the best thing you can do for a character like Berzerker. I mean, he's a viking with a sword and shield. How serious can you be with him?

We'll jump way ahead now to a return run in WCW, starting on Nitro, January 5, 1998.

John Nord vs. Barbarian

You might remember Nord as the Berzerker from the early 90s. He's part of a new wave of talent coming in apparently, which will also include a former WWF Tag Team Champion debuting later tonight. Nord is just a guy in white trunks and furry boots here. They clothesline each other and no one goes anywhere but another clothesline puts Barbarian on the floor. Nord, a big guy in his own right, hits a dive over the top to crush Barbarian but he stops to go after Jimmy Hart. Barbie rams him into the barricade but Nord sends him head first into the steps.

They whip each other into the barricade as this is way more energetic than you would expect it to be. Back in and Nord hits a Samoan drop for no cover followed by a series of elbow drops. Jimmy gets choked a bit but Barbarian hits a big boot to the jaw, sending Nord out to the floor. Back in and a pumphandle slam gets two for Barbarian before he chops Nord in the corner. Nord misses a charge into the corner and falls outside again, only to come back in with a middle rope elbow. A modified camel clutch by Nord (Nord was sitting almost on the mat while pulling back on the chin) is good for the submission.

Rating: C+. This was WAY better than I ever could have expected it to be as Nord looked pretty solid out there. Barbarian was his usual self but a bit more physical than he usually was, making for a pretty solid surprise here. I barely remember Nord at all around this time which is one of the fun parts of rewatching these shows. Good stuff here.

We'll wrap it up with one more WCW match on Worldwide, July 4, 1998.

John Nord vs. Goldberg

A big boot immediately drops Goldberg but he pops up and clotheslines Nord to the floor. They head outside (the Worldwide set is interesting as the ring is surrounded by a platform, meaning the guys are just under the top rope when they're standing outside) with Goldberg slugging him around but getting punched a few times back inside. Not that they matter as the spear and Jackhammer are good for the pin. Goldberg would win the World Title two days later.

I was expecting a boring, mostly comedic set of matches here but Nord was actually awesome with some great flexibility and a look that made him

even more intimidating. If you gave him a serious gimmick in the WWF, he could have been a big deal with all of his athletic gifts. This one was a very nice surprise.

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