

Monday Night Raw – October 28, 1996: The Fire In His Eyes

Monday Night Raw

Date: October 28, 1996

Location: War Memorial Coliseum, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Commentators: Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

Things picked up last week and it couldn't have come at a better point. The company basically has to restart after years of putting on horrible shows with uninteresting characters and it just happens to be up against one of the hottest angles of all time over in WCW. They have their work cut out for them but they also have Bret Hart and Steve Austin. Let's get to it.

We open with clips of Austin destroying Brian Pillman's ankle to write him out of the ring due to his horrible car wreck that basically ended his in ring career.

Jesse Jammes vs. Salvatore Sincere

Jammes is the REAL Double J despite the original Double J being nowhere to be seen. Well save for on Nitro that is. Jesse starts fast with a few right hands and clotheslines to send Salvatore to the floor. Back in and Sincere gets in a few shots, only to be slammed off the top to put him on defense again. A full nelson slam puts Sincere away a few seconds later.

Rating: D-. It's always amazing to see what stupid gimmick could evolve into a moneymaker like the Road Dogg. This is one of those ideas that is so stupid and they had to know it was dead in the water but that's what you have to work with. Jammes wound up turning it into something special because he has talent and because the company eventually realized the gimmick sucked. Why that isn't the case today isn't clear but I'm sure it's NOT the company's fault because that just can't happen.

Dok Hendrix is ready to talk about the Hall of Fame but Austin cuts him off because no one cares about old people. Instead Dok runs down the Survivor Series card (including the debut of one Rocky Maivia, which is completely glossed over) and mentions that Bret is in Calgary tonight. Austin is NOT happy with that one and lets Dok have it as a result.

Crush vs. Aldo Montoya

JR comes out for commentary and keeps up his stupid heel run which went nowhere and no one wanted to hear because heel commentators get annoying in a hurry. Crush throws Aldo around to start but stops to yell at fans for calling him Jailbird. JR asks if the jockstrap on Aldo's face was Vince's idea as Crush ends it with the Heart Punch. JR: "That wouldn't work on you Vince." Just a squash.

Crush beats up a fan for calling him Jailbird.

We look back at Mr. Perfect swerving Marc Mero out of the Intercontinental Title last week. Perfect has been suspended, meaning he's gone and off to WCW.

Speaking of Mr. Perfect, he wins his first round match in the Karate Fighters tournament.

We're told that we'll hear from Bret at his home tonight and Pillman from his home next week so Austin starts yelling again about how he had to go all the way to Connecticut instead of having the cameras come to Texas. Fair point actually. We'll stick with Austin for now though and look at the attack on Pillman's leg again. Austin wouldn't even let Pillman be taken away in an ambulance. He'll be at Pillman's house next week and OH MAN IT'S THAT SHOW! Austin doesn't want to hear about Vince caring about Bret because he's just a greedy promoter.

We go to Bret's house but freaking SUNNY'S music cuts it off as the audio screws up. She comes out to sit on Lawler's lap and it's time for guest commentary.

Billy Gunn vs. Freddie Joe Floyd

Yeah this instead of Bret's response to Austin. Thanks WWF. The Gunns

have basically split at this point without officially doing so. Freddie works on an armbar to start as Sunny talks about liking Billy's smile. Billy sends him outside and here's Bart to yell at his brother. That goes nowhere so Freddie hammers away and gets in an elbow to the jaw. A hotshot drops Freddie Joe and Billy's top rope legdrop gives him the pin. Of note at the end: Vince says Sunny is just like Hillary Clinton who Sunny says will be the next President.

Rating: F. This was all about Billy getting a singles push, which just happened to be on the same night as the beginning of Jesse Jammes' singles push. I love that kind of coincidence and it's not something you're going to see that often. You will however see a match like this again and the fact that it cut off the great Austin vs. Bret stuff makes it even worse.

Back to the debate with Bret giving his normal calm response which Austin interprets as Bret being scared. Bret doesn't know if Austin has what it takes to beat him and the look on Austin's face is downright scary. Vince asks Bret why Austin issued the challenge but Austin says it's not over no matter what happens in the match. If Bret wants to get rid of him he'll have to kill him.

Bret tries to get in his catchphrase but Austin cuts him off again before telling Bret to say something. Austin goes off on a production guy for counting him down to commercial and beats him up as a result. The fire in Austin gave me chills here and you can see the future right in front of your eyes.

British Bulldog vs. Shawn Michaels

Non-title again and Owen Hart is out for commentary. Bulldog runs him down with a shoulder to start and they have some miscommunication on a Bulldog leapfrog, resulting in an armdrag sending Smith out to the floor. Shawn tells him to bring it and lays on the top rope as Bulldog takes a long break. Of course there's no counting or anything but that's not the storyline so of course it doesn't happen. Back in and Shawn grabs a headlock as we hear about the production guy calling the cops on Austin.

We take a break (and sit through a commercial for WWF Full Metal) and

come back with Shawn fighting out of a chinlock but getting slammed down by the hair. That always makes me cringe. There's the delayed vertical suplex from Bulldog and it's back to the chinlocking. Shawn fights back again and gets two off a sunset flip before Bulldog runs him over again. We take a second break and come back with Bulldog running into the flying forearm. The powerslam doesn't work and Shawn drops the top rope elbow, only to have Owen come in for the DQ.

Rating: B. These two always had some awesome chemistry together and they almost never had a bad match over several years. Shawn was clearly looking tired and it was time for a change but who else could they swap in that could come even close to his level of quality? He was going to have a good to excellent match against anyone he was in there against and that's all that mattered at this point.

Sid comes in for the save so Owen issues a challenge for a tag match next week.

Austin is being arrested but he's not worried because Vince will take care of his meal ticket at Survivor Series.

Overall Rating: D+. Steve Austin is a star and there's no way anything is going to stop him. You can't take your eyes off of him any time he's on screen with the fire in those eyes staring holes through anything in front of him. The match with Bret can't get here soon enough but there's something very important to get through next week. The main event helps this out a lot but there are still a lot of bad things hanging around and they're holding the rest of the show down. However, every time you see Austin you forget about all that stuff because he's just that great right now.

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Monday Night Raw – October 7, 1996: Halloween Comes Early

Monday Night Raw

Date: October 7, 1996

Location: Hersheypark Arena, Hershey, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 3,923

Commentators: Kevin Kelly, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

Things have picked up a bit since we left off about ten months ago. Shawn Michaels is now the reigning WWF World Champion and the company is in a nosedive with the NWO running roughshod over the wrestling world. We're coming up on In Your House: Buried Alive, meaning it's going to be a lot of Undertaker vs. Mankind. Let's get to it.

The opening video previews tonight's events, including Shawn and Vader, Goldust vs. Sid and an interview with the REAL Double J (oh yeah that thing).

Opening sequence.

Mark Mero vs. Fake Diesel

Mero's Intercontinental Title isn't on the line. Jim Ross comes out with Diesel here as this stupid angle continues. For those of you not around at the time, the idea here was that JR turned heel (just go with it) and said he was the reason Diesel and Razor Ramon were around in the first place so he was bringing them back.

Now this could have been a good dig at WCW if the WWF was going with the idea that it was the WWF who created the characters and the people didn't matter, but instead they were acting like these were the real people, thereby making JR look stupid. It didn't help that Fake Razor looked like he was in a Razor Halloween costume. Fake Diesel on the other hand looked a lot like Diesel, at least if you didn't get a good shot of his face. You would know Fake Diesel better as Kane.

Diesel charges into a boot in the corner to start and a dropkick puts him on the floor for a no hands dive. Back in and Diesel drops him throat first across the top rope to take over and slow things WAY down. The slow beating continues and we go to Fake Razor and WOW it's even worse than I remember. His Cuban accent is as good as Lana's Russian and thankfully we go to a break without having to listen to much more. Back with Mero rolling Diesel up for two and Razor coming out to watch. Mero dives onto Razor, which is probably the best thing he's done all night. Ramon comes in for the DQ a few seconds later.

Rating: D. Mero and Diesel were actually having a half decent match but my goodness this has to be one of the dumbest stories I've ever seen. It's not funny, it's not clever, THEY DON'T EVEN LOOK LIKE THE PEOPLE THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE and the matches aren't that good. Oh and stop trying to make JR a heel. It's stupid.

The beating continues post match.

Undertaker has dug a grave for Mankind.

You can get a denim shirt with Bret, Undertaker or Shawn on the back for FORTY NINE BUCKS EACH. Sweet goodness no wonder I've never seen anyone wearing one of those things.

Mr. Perfect will be back in two weeks. Well kind of but not as they're implying.

New Rockers vs. Smoking Gunns

I still can't believe the Gunns were a thing in late 1996. Sunny has left the Gunns due to them losing the Tag Team Titles so they're definitely on

their last legs. With the Gunns in the ring, we go to pre-recorded comments from the two of them, saying they want the titles back so they can get Sunny with them. Sunny calls in to the show and isn't happy that Ahmed Johnson will be on Livewire with her on Saturday.

Billy and Cassady (Leif Cassady, better known as Al Snow which I'm sure we've covered before) start things off as Sunny brags about how awesome she is and lists off the Livewire fax and e-mail contact information. Bart and Marty come in as Kelly apologizes for not calling the first two and a half minutes of the match. It's not like anything was happening but it wasn't the nicest thing in the world. Marty gets two off a small package and it's time for JR to go on a rant about how much he hates Vince McMahon.

Bart gets punched down by Cassady (Marty was in there too but his punch didn't make anything close to contact so I'm not counting him) and Leif plants him with a swinging Rock Bottom. Billy finally does something by kneeing Marty from the apron as the crowd is just silent. A low bridge sends the now legal Billy out to the floor and it's Leif cleaning house with right hands. Billy makes a blind tag though and the Sidewinder puts Cassady away.

Rating: D. Long, slow and boring here which is one of the worst combinations you can have in a match. The tag division was such a mess around this time and it would take years to improve, oddly enough with Billy Gunn as one half of the least likely tag teams in wrestling history. But yeah, bad stuff here.

We recap the REAL Double J angle which involved Jeff Jarrett pretending to sing his big song With My Baby Tonight when it was really the Roadie singing the whole time. Both guys left for over a year and are finally back to reignite the feud. Of note here, as Roadie talks about everything that's happened, Jim Johnston is seen next to him and is even mentioned by name. We see Jammes (Yes Jammes, not James.) accidentally tripping Jeff to cost him the Intercontinental Title, which was his last appearance for a long time. We'll get more next week, even if Jarrett would be WCW by the end of the month.

Goldust isn't worried about Sid.

Livewire ad, complete with the yet to be named Vince Russo in the background.

JR brings out Jim Cornette and Vader for a chat. Vader gets to face Sid at Buried Alive in a #1 contenders match but Cornette has no idea why that's necessary when he's beaten Shawn four times since July, including last week. Very fair point but Vader will be fine with beating Sid again.

Ad for the Hall of Fame/Survivor Series.

The Sultan vs. Aldo Montoya

Sultan has Bob Backlund and Iron Sheik in his corner with the former sitting in on commentary. Aldo speeds things up as Bob says he can't hear without his glasses on. A suplex drops Montoya as Backlund is on an anti-drug rant. Sultan whips him hard into the buckle and a German suplex gets one. The camel clutch makes Montoya give up.

Rating: D-. Just a squash here but the commentary was dominating everything with Backlund doing his ranting and JR talking about being vice president with twelve names signed under his watch. Sultan clearly wasn't going to go anywhere but it was an interesting idea to give him two famous managers like this.

Mankind gets in the grave but doesn't want to be buried alive.

Goldust vs. Sycho Sid

Goldust jumps Sid from behind as JR is still babbling on about how much he hates Vince. Sid comes right back with an atomic drop and a clothesline as Shawn Michaels calls in to say he'll have to be more than resilient to beat Sid or Vader. Goldust drops Sid across the top rope and stomps away as Shawn starts swearing a bit too much. Cue Jim Cornette as we take a break. Back with Sid hitting the chokeslam and powerbomb for the pin. There was no need for that commercial.

Rating: D-. This only existed to have Shawn call in, which wasn't exactly thrilling stuff. It's a boring match with two guys who weren't exactly

thrilling around this time and it was clear that things needed to change. You can only get so far with Goldust being a toned down version of what made him great and he had long since hit that wall.

Post match Vader comes out to beat on Sid, who no sells a middle rope splash and hits a chokeslam to end the show.

Overall Rating: F. This was absolutely horrible and one of the worst episodes of the show I've ever seen. They were obviously running out of ideas here and there was almost no reason for them to keep going in this direction, especially with WCW killing them the way they were. At some point you have to put on something interesting and that's just not what was happening here.

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