

# Ring of Honor TV – April 27, 2016: ROH Doing New Japan The WWE Way

## Ring of Honor

Date: April 27, 2016

Location: Korakuen Hall, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 1,367

Commentators: Kevin Kelly, Mr. Wrestling 3

We're still in Japan and back in February with more matches from Honor Rising 2016. At this point you almost have to expect Ring of Honor to skip most of the Dallas stuff and just do a new set of TV tapings in May with the New Japan guys again. There won't be anything major in storyline terms here but hopefully the action will be good. Let's get to it.

### Jay Lethal/Tetsuya Naito vs. Kazuchika Okada/Yoshi-Hashi

Okada is the IWGP World Champion but has since lost the title to Naito, who is kind of a loner, which is why he's the leader of a stable. Lethal and Okada start things off in what's actually a pretty cool visual. They trade wristlocks to start as we get the silent treatment (not a bad thing) from the fans. An early Lethal Injection attempt is countered (amazingly enough) but Jay ducks the Rainmaker to get us to a standoff. Naito doesn't want to tag in and we take a break.

Back with Naito tagging in to jump over the apron and dropkick Naito for two. A quick Codebreaker allows for the tag off to Okada who eats a tornado DDT for his efforts. Lethal adds a roaring elbow but accidentally superkicks Naito (thankfully without a Young Bucks reference), allowing Okada to dropkick him down. The hot (minus the crowd reaction) tag brings in Yoshi for a neckbreaker and Blockbuster for two each. The Book of Truth is brought in to poor results but Naito's goon Evil (formerly known as Watanabe) shoves Yoshi off the top, setting up the Lethal Injection for the pin at 12:56.

**Rating:** C+. This was fine and Lethal is really starting to feel like a major player instead of someone in over his head. I'm still not a big fan of the guy but he's improved by leaps and bounds in the last year or so. Naito was fun to watch but I need to see more of him to get the idea of his whole deal.

Naito reads the Book of Truth and then uses it to pound on Yoshi. Jay shakes his hand post match to imply a future partnership.

#### Kazarian vs. Kushida

Kushida's IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title isn't on the line. It's a fight over a top wristlock to start as the announcers talk about the referee's career. Kushida gets in an early Hoverboard Lock but Kazarian bails to the ropes. That's fine with Kushida as he rides Kazarian on the mat to take us to a break.

Back with Kazarian snapping the throat across the ropes and getting in the slingshot DDT. We hit the choking with Kushida pointing to his throat as he can't breathe. A Backstabber gets two on Kushida as Kelly says we'll be seeing more Honor Rising stuff for weeks to come. Kushida gets in a dropkick to send Kazarian out to the floor and there's a big flip dive to take him out again.

Back in and it's off to the submission attempts so Kazarian goes American with a rake to the eyes. An electric chair into a rollup gets two as the announcers talk about Japanese baseball. Kazarian loads up the Flux Capacitor (because both of these guys LOVE Back to the Future in a parallel the announcers miss) but Kushida grabs the Hoverboard Lock to slam Kazarian down to the mat. Another Hoverboard Lock makes him tap at 9:37.

**Rating:** C. I liked this more than I was expecting to but really I just want to go watch Back to the Future. Kushida still doesn't do much for me and Kazarian hasn't been the same guy I used to be a fan of back in TNA. I'm also not sure why you wouldn't make this a title match to add a little spice. The wrestling was fine though.

The Briscoes get into shenanigans on the streets of Tokyo.

## Elite vs. ReDRagon/Katsuyori Shibata

Elite is a subset of Bullet Club comprised of Kenny Omega and the Young Bucks because we haven't seen them enough on the regular shows. The Elite is sent out to the floor and Shibata and Omega fight past the barricade. The Bucks try stereo sunset flips and get caught in matching cross armbreakers. Shibata puts Omega in one as well, only to get powerbombed onto his partners. Omega is left alone in the ring so he dives over the top to take everyone down.

We take another break and come back with the Elite taking turns choking Fish. A tag match breaks out of all the fighting with Nick telling Fish to suck it several times. Bobby suplexes Nick into Matt and makes the tag off to Kyle while Shibata is nowhere to be seen. Chasing the Dragon is broken up and it's off to Shibata vs. Omega for the big slugout. Shibata gets in a choke and the Bucks can't break it up.

A double superkick puts him down to one knee and the triple version gets two. Everything breaks down and Omega throws Shibata off a tornado DDT, setting up the superkick party. Everyone kicks everyone until Kyle counters the One Winged Angel into a guillotine choke. Matt sprays something in Kyle's eyes though and it's the One Winged Angle to put O'Reilly away at 10:16.

**Rating:** B-. Best match of the night here as Omega continues to look like a star. Shibata is fine in the Ken Shamrock mold of cyborg submission machine and it's a good time whenever I get to see the Bucks get beaten up. ReDRagon is still one of the best things about ROH but they're at the weird point where the Tag Team Titles don't mean anything to them anymore.

**Overall Rating:** C. "So you know how we've been showing you these matches that don't mean anything for weeks on end? Well how about paying to see a full pay per view of them?" That's the WWE style of booking TV to a pay per view and it doesn't work for either promotion. The limited interest I had in seeing Global Wars and War of the Worlds has been thrown out the window now because I've watched these big names for the better part of a month. Where's the incentive to keep watching and even pay for another

show?

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# Ring of Honor TV – April 13, 2016: If You Build It, The Fans Will Stay Through The Taping

## Ring of Honor

Date: April 13, 2016

Location: Sam's Town Hotel and Gambling Hall, Las Vegas, Nevada

Commentators: Kevin Kelly, Mr. Wrestling 3

It's a very big show this week with the Tag Team Titles on the line, a major star from New Japan making an appearance and a Fight Without Honor for the first time ever on ROH TV. I know these staggered shows get annoying but they've actually got a big card here and that's a rare sight on an hour long TV show. Let's get to it.

Tag Team Titles: War Machine vs. Roppongi Vice

Vice (Trent Barreta and Rocky Romero) is challenging and knocks Hansen and Rowe off the apron before the bell. Rowe says ring the bell but gets beaten down in the corner to start. A standing moonsault doesn't have much effect though and it's Hansen back in for rights and lefts of his own. Romero is kicked out to the floor as Wrestling 3 tells stories of "joysting" (not jousting but joysting), whatever that is.

We take a break and come back with Hansen taking Rowe's shotgun knees by mistake, followed by Romero kicking Rowe in the face. A quick Superman punch puts Romero down but Trent dropkicks both champs down to save his partner in a nice spot. Two double knees to the face drops Hansen but War Machine gets tired of these pests and lifts them up for powerbombs, only to slam the challengers into each other. That's a new one. The Path of Resistance is broken up though as Romero hurricanranas Hansen down. A flip dive is countered into an apron bomb though and Fallout puts Romero away at 9:56.

**Rating:** C+. This was fine despite me not being a big fan of Barreta and Romero. There wasn't much of a surprise here as they had been setting up the Briscoes challenging for the titles over the last few weeks but at least we had something other than a squash to get us there. Nice little match here.

Prince Nana brings out Donovan Dijak, in a Jay Lethal shirt, for something to say. Let's get right to it with the envelopes: you're not going to find out because you don't need to know. Nana talks about how Dijak is enlightened while Donovan talks about being tired of spending the last year guarding Jay Lethal. This brings out Lethal for a brawl that security has to break up.

Dalton Castle says his goal is different again tonight because this time he wants to hurt Silas Young.

#### ACH vs. Kenny Omega

Omega, whose Intercontinental Title isn't on the line here, is the head of the Bullet Club in New Japan and he has some awesome entrance music. Kenny is called the Cleaner so of course he comes out with a broom, along with the Young Bucks. As expected, the fans are almost entirely behind

Omega.

Feeling out process to start with ACH doing all his flips as the announcers explain the latest issues in New Japan. An elbow to the head drops Omega and a dropkick puts him out on the floor. Naturally the numbers become an issue though as Omega distracts the referee, allowing a superkick to put ACH down. In a funny bit, Matt throws out a banana peel to offer an explanation.

We take a break (and get a promo from Adam Cole about how he created the Kingdom, meaning Matt Taven has no right to reform the team) and come back with ACH holding Omega in a headlock, only to be countered into what looked like a one man More Bang For Your Buck. That goes nowhere and ACH gets up a boot in the corner, followed by another kick to the face to put Omega on the floor.

The Jordan dive takes out the Bucks and Omega to a nice reaction as it's not all Omega fans for a bit of a surprise. Back in and a top rope double stomp to the back gets two on Kenny and a brainbuster is good for the same. A 450 misses though and Omega gets in a hard knee to the ribs to take over. ACH comes back again and gets in a Stunner, giving us a Rock style sell job. The Midnight Star misses though and the One Winged Angel (electric chair into a forward piledriver) puts ACH away at 13:31.

**Rating:** B. I'm not a fan of ACH but this was pretty easily his best Ring of Honor match to date. I've heard a lot of great things about Omega over the last few months and he was definitely entertaining here but not quite as great as he's been made out to be. I can go for ACH far more easily if he's acting like a wrestler instead of a guy doing scripted out flips.

#### Dalton Castle vs. Silas Young

Fight Without Honor, basically meaning street fight. Castle has the Boys with him but they go to the back before he hits the ring. That's the right idea for something like this. The fans are behind Castle as he clotheslines Silas to the floor while the streamers are still all over the ring. A suicide dive takes Young out again but Castle misses a running knee on the apron and gets shoved out to the floor. This hasn't gotten violent yet but you can feel a different vibe.

Back up and Castle chops the post by mistake to give Young his first target. Castle tries another chop but fakes Young out and sends him into the barricade for a smart move. We take a break and come back with Young setting up a table on the floor to go with the ladder already in the ring. Neither of those are good enough for him though as he powerbombs Castle onto two open chairs instead.

A slingshot elbow gets two on Dalton and it's time for some simple choking. For some reason Young lets him loose though and tries his slingshot moonsault but only hits ladder. They slug it out from their knees and then their feet with Castle getting the better of it until Young grabs a cutter for two. Misery gets the same so it's time for a trashcan lid and some yelling on the mic.

Silas wishes the Boys were out here to see this beating so here they come, only to have one of them jump on Young's back. That ticks Castle off all over again but he misses a running knee to send him outside. The Boys take a suicide dive to protect Dalton, who slides into the ring for a hurricanrana to send Young onto the floor again.

Back in and the Bang A Rang is countered so Dalton throws him over the top and down through the table for a YOU JUST KILLED HIM chant. Somehow that only gets two, followed by Silas hitting him low for the same. Not that it matters as the Bang A Rang onto the chairs gives Dalton the pin at 16:42.

**Rating:** B. This would have been a lot better if it had happened back in say.....December. It was a good brawl and a very strong win for Castle but this story went on WAY too long to have the impact they were going for. I still like the feud and it's a good blowoff match this could have been so much more if they had done it a long time ago.

**Overall Rating:** A-. A one hour show having two strong matches is about as easy of a layup as you're going to get. This was the first time in a long time that a show felt like something big and a lot of that is due to how much time they spent building up Young vs. Castle. No they didn't have amazing promos that made me want to see it, but just saying "it's in three weeks" made me want to see where the match was going. You don't get

that in most promotions and it was a really nice change of pace which wound up working. Well done ROH, which isn't something I've been able to say lately.

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# Wrestle Kingdom X: Gimme Back My Bullets

## Wrestle Kingdom X

Date: January 4, 2016

Location: Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 25,204

Commentators: Kevin Kelly, Matt Striker, Yoshitatsu

This is one of those shows that I have to do almost every year as it's pretty much become a tradition. New Japan is pretty easily the second biggest wrestling promotion in the world and this is its annual Wrestlemania level show, always held on the same day of the year. The main event is Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi for the IWGP World Title for the third time in four years, which is totally ok because it's Japan and therefore each of their matches MUST be five stars because it's a saga or something. Let's get to it.



On a side note: I barely keep up with New Japan and there is a very good chance that I'm not going to know a lot of the history, storylines or proper names for these things. I'm checking this out as a very rare viewer so hopefully the English commentary helps out a lot.

### Pre-Show: New Japan Rumble

This is an eighteen man Royal Rumble style battle royal, with eliminations by pin or going over the top, made up of the people who aren't on the show for whatever reason. I don't know most of the people in the match but I'll do what I can. Jushin Thunder Liger (last year's winner) and Yoshiaki Fujiwara (as in the man the man the armbar is named after, age 66) start things off. I believe we have ninety second intervals here though the English commentary doesn't kick in until the regular show.

Tiger Mask IV is in at #3 and takes his sweet time getting to the ring. Mask and Liger take Fujiwara down with a double leg lock but you don't try to put an old man in a submission hold, meaning it's Fujiwara putting them in a double hold instead. The times are getting weird here as the clocks are either at one hundred seconds or don't start until someone gets to the ring. Or it's a timed battle royal and it's just as close as they can get to set intervals. Anyway ROH's Cheeseburger is in at #4.

Everything stops for some reason with Liger and Tiger pulling Cheeseburger by an arm each. Fujiwara works Cheeseburger over in the corner as I guess this is some kind of initiation. That goes nowhere until it's Hiro Saito in at #5. Saito goes after Liger but has to fight with Tiger over a suplex. Mask takes him over and it's Yoshi-Hashi in at #6. Now it's starting to feel like a Royal Rumble with the ring filling up this quickly. The match stops again for a bit before everyone starts having random fights with each other.

Yoshi is taken to the mat for a backsplash from Saito and it's Mascara Dorado, who looks like a superhero, in at #7. There's almost nothing going on in between these entrances. Liger goes after Dorado, likely due to gimmick infringement, and puts on a seated abdominal stretch. Dorado counters into one of his own and it's Captain New Japan, an actual

superhero character, in at #8.

Fujiwara quickly takes the Captain down for a very quick namesake armbar and our first elimination. Not that it matters though as most of the people in the ring cover Fujiwara to get rid of him a few seconds later. Manabu Nakanashi is in at #9 to get us to the halfway point with a grouping of Nakanashi, Dorada, Hashi, Saito, Cheeseburger, Tiger Mask and Liger. Yoshi goes up top to chop various people on the head until Liger wisely shakes the ropes to get him back down.

Yuji Nagata (a much bigger deal here than in his lame WCW run) is in at #10. Tiger saves Cheeseburger from Saito coming off the top, only to have Saito crush Tiger with a middle rope backsplash, leading to a group pin for the elimination. Satoshi Kojima is in at #11 as Saito and Liger are thrown out. Well at least they're not letting the ring get too full. Cheeseburger chops I believe Nakanashi for no effect until it's Hiroyoshi Tenzan in at #12. Nakanashi is put out off camera as the shot stays on the entrances the entire time.

Long time partners Tenzan and Kojima start working together on Hashi until we get some miscommunication, resulting in Kojima getting clotheslined down. Ryusuke Taguchi, a party guy that I've actually heard of, is in at #13. Taguchi is immediately stomped down by everyone left in the ring for no apparent reason. Shiro Koshinaka is in at #14 to give Taguchi a much needed break by cleaning house.

The ring is starting to get too full so here's the Bullet Club's King Haku (yes THAT King Haku) at #15, with the referee holding the ropes open for him. Well to be fair that's probably the best idea he could have had. Haku cleans house and easily puts out Nagata and Kojima. As the Great Kabuki (who was in the 1994 Royal Rumble and 67 years old) is in at #16, Dorado is put out off camera.

Kabuki's nunchucks entrance takes forever, allowing Haku to go from dominant to tapping out to Tenzan. The momentum is shortlived though as Tenzan is pinned ten seconds later. Cheeseburger hides from Kabuki and it's Kazushi Sakuraba, an MMA guy and seemingly big fan favorite, in at #17. We get an immediate showdown between Kabuki and Sakuraba to freak

the announcers out all over again.

There's the mist to blind Sakuraba though, drawing a DQ. Sakuraba is pinned a few seconds later as Jado is in at #18, giving us a final field of Cheeseburger, Hashi, Taguchi, Koshinaka and Jado. By the time Jado gets to the ring, Hashi pins Cheeseburger with a swanton bomb, only to be pinned by Taguchi a few seconds later.

So we're down to three after Jado (and some pop singer he's with) take FOREVER to get to the ring. Jado is quickly double teamed with knees to the head and a double hip attack for two but Taguchi breaks up a pin attempt after helping with the beatdown. Back up and Jado backdrops Koshinaka out before low bridging Taguchi to the floor for the win.

**Rating:** D. Well that happened. I know this was more like the Andre battle royal than anything else but the weird timing and taking forever to get on with each entrance really took away from a lot of what this had going for it. The ending was far too sudden too with Jado getting the big entrance and then winning in about two minutes. Too long for what they were going for here and I never got into it, especially when the regular show is over four hours long.

After the PA announcers says a lot of stuff I don't understand, Hiroshi Tanahashi (New Japan's John Cena) and I believe Togi Makabe appear on screen, dressed as cavemen. They introduce what I believe is a comedian, a child actress and some characters for a giant song and dance number. I have no idea what any of this means and I really don't want to know.

Ad for some anime movie.

The opening video talks about the company's 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary and shows the main names appearing on the show, thankfully in English. Each match is listed in the order it airs for a nice touch, meaning we get the entire card.

IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Titles: Young Bucks vs. ReDRagon vs. Aerial Dogfight vs. Roppongi Vice

ReDRagon is defending and Dogfight is Matt Sydal/Ricochet, known in Lucha

Underground as Prince Puma. The Bucks are part of Bullet Club and have Cody Hall in their corner. Aside from about three months, the Bucks, ReDRagon and Vice have traded these titles since November 2013. In case you're not familiar with the teams, The Bucks are Nick/Matt Jackson, ReDRagon is Kyle O'Reilly/Bobby Fish and Vice is Baretta (or Trent Baretta) and Rocky Romero. This is one fall to a finish.

The Bullet Club clears the ring before the bell until it's Fish being thrown in for a double team from the Bucks. Kyle gets in a shot from the apron, allowing Fish to start in on Nick's arm. Nick tells them to suck it (because DX used to do that) and tags in Sydal to miss an enziguri to Kyle. The tags start speeding up with both members of Vice sneaking in to double team Matt, including a double SUCK IT to the Bucks.

An enziguri drops Sydal as Yoshi talks about driving with Sydal and Baretta in WWE. The Bucks come in to start a Superkick Party and thank goodness Corino isn't on commentary. It's Baretta in trouble with Matt doing Chris Jericho's posing cover for two. Things slow down with Nick holding a front facelock and then a chinlock before it's back to Matt for a superkick to knock Rocky off the apron. A really quick tornado DDT drops Matt and the hot tag brings in Ricochet as everything breaks down.

Dogfight hits a quick moonsault/shooting star combination to Nick before the champs kick Matt in the chest. Nick dives on a bunch of guys and superkicks Kyle to break up a cross armbreaker over the ropes. Ricochet loads up a dive of his own but Cody (who looks EXACTLY like his dad) trips him up and Razor Edges him over the top onto the pile.

Back in and Ricochet gets caught in an elevated swanton bomb from the Bucks but Sydal breaks up More Bang For Your Buck. Dogfight starts taking over on the Bucks with Ricochet hitting an INSANE springboard shooting star to take out Cody at ringside. ReDRagon comes back in to break up stereo shooting stars from Sydal and Ricochet before taking their turns to beat up the Bucks. Cody pulls Fish to the floor for a save, only to be taken down by Kyle.

We get a pretty ridiculous quadruple suplex with Romero having to decide which half to help on. Romero starts running the corners for clotheslines

to everyone he can find and a Shining Wizard from Sydal gets two. Ricochet saves Sydal from something called Strong Zeo but the Bucks tag themselves in to steal two off the stereo shooting stars. A quick More Bang For Your Buck is enough to put Romero away and give the Bucks their fourth titles.

**Rating:** C. This was fun albeit a bit too long. I'm rarely a fan of these insane matches with little flow and nothing but spot sequence after spot sequence but this was entertaining enough. That being said, does it really matter if the Bucks win their fourth title in just over two years? Based on how long three of these teams have dominated the division, some fresh blood would have been nice. Still though, fun choice for an opener.

#### NEVER Openweight Six Man Tag Team Titles: Briscoe Brothers/Toru Yano vs. Bullet Club

NEVER is kind of a hard concept to explain but basically it's for people who have never had a real chance to succeed. This is for the inaugural titles and the Bullet Club is represented by Bad Luck Fale (a monster)/Tama Tonga (Haku's adopted son)/Yujiro Takahashi (a New Japan traitor). The Briscoes are making their New Japan debut. Yujiro is accompanied by a good looking woman named Shiori. Yano is a comedy guy who keeps hyping some DVD of his.

The Briscoes clean house on Yujiro to start with Jay clotheslining him out to the floor. A Cactus Jack style elbow from Mark crushes Yujiro on the floor and the fans aren't sure what to make of the Brothers. Back in and it's Tonga taking Mark into the corner before it's off to Yano for a slap to Fale's neck. Tonga comes back in to scare Yano and it's time to beat on the comedy goof.

Yoshi doesn't like a Japanese man being in the otherwise foreign Bullet Club as Fale throws Yano down. All three Club members come in but Yano pulls off the turnbuckle pad (remember it's one pad over all three buckles in Japan) to send Fale crashing into the steel. Fale misses another charge into a different corner and the hot (minus the heat) tag brings in Mark. Some Redneck Kung Fu wakes the crowd up a bit but Yujiro takes Mark down with a fisherman's buster.

Jay comes in for a Death Valley Driver on Tonga but he can't hit the Jay Driller. Instead it's Tonga getting two off a running boot to the face for two on Jay. An Alabama Slam gets the same as the announcers put over the idea of Tama never winning a title in New Japan. Tama goes up top but gets caught in an electric chair, allowing Yano to blast him with a chair to knock him into a Doomsday Device from the Briscoes for the pin and the titles.

**Rating:** C-. I wasn't feeling this one though at least it was a unique ending. Unfortunately this match felt like something they added to the show just so they could have another title match. That's rarely an idea that makes you think you need to see something and the fact that the Briscoes never wrestled in this company before does little to make me think I needed to see this match, especially on this show. Not bad, but nothing that really needed to exist.

#### Ring of Honor World Title: Jay Lethal vs. Michael Elgin

Elgin is challenging after having won a tournament called Survival of the Fittest. He's been on fire in Japan lately so Lethal, also making his debut in this company, is in trouble here. The champ also has Truth Martini in his corner. Elgin powers him into the corner to start as the announcers put over the basic story of power vs. speed. A big clothesline in the corner has Jay in trouble and there's a delayed vertical suplex with Jay not being able to knee his way out of it. That's insane strength.

There's a one armed press slam to make it even worse but Martini breaks up the powerbomb onto the apron. Michael is smart enough to stomp on the Book of Truth, only to get dropkicked right in the face for his efforts. A suicide dive puts Elgin into the barricade and Truth does an off camera Spinarooni. Nice job camera people. Back in and Lethal makes the mistake of chopping a power guy. Like, when has that EVER worked in history? Jay spins out of a hiptoss and dropkicks a seated Elgin for two.

We hit the reverse chinlock to kill some time until Elgin starts firing off some running forearms to the jaw, followed by a nice slingshot splash for no cover. The fans are finally starting to get into this after a just

average match so far. In a cool visual, Elgin dead lifts Lethal up into the bridging German for two. The look on Lethal's face was perfect as he seemed terrified.

Jay comes right back with the Macho elbow for two but Elgin counters the Lethal Injection with another suplex. I'm not sure but it could have been due to Jay shouting LETHAL INJECTION. The apron suplex (think Cesaro) into a falcon arrow is only good for two (and to freak Yoshi out) but Elgin has to smack Martini. A shot to the head with the Book of Truth knocks Michael silly though and the Lethal Injection retains the title.

**Rating:** C+. Again this was fine but nothing you wouldn't see at any Ring of Honor house show. I'm kind of surprised they didn't change the title here for a big ROH moment on the biggest New Japan show but Elgin being awesome in Japan was only going to get them so far. Still though, not bad and the match did what it was supposed to do.

#### IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title: Kenny Omega vs. Kushida

Omega is defending and is part of the Bullet Club, meaning he has the Bucks with him. Kushida is part of the Timesplitters team and therefore has Taguchi (from the battle royal earlier) dressed as Doc Brown from....you know I really shouldn't have to tell you what Doc Brown is from. Omega gets a Terminator entrance so it's easily Kushida already out in front. These two have traded the title since last year's Wrestle Kingdom, making me think the junior heavyweights as a whole need an adjustment.

The Bucks jump Taguchi before the bell, only managing to tick Kushida off in the process. Omega spits on him and stomps away so Kushida dropkicks him in the face for his efforts. The champ bails to the floor and grabs some hairspray (so he's ripping off DJZ), only to have Kushida baseball slide him down. The referee is easily distracted of course though and Matt throws a trashcan at Kushida's head, allowing Omega to do a one man More Bang For Your Buck with the aforementioned trashcan.

A flip dive takes Kushida down again but he's able to block a suplex back inside. Kushida starts firing off some kicks to the arm and grabs the Hoverboard lock (modified Kimura), only to have Omega get his legs into

the ropes. Something like a handspring kick to the head drops Kenny again and Kushida nails a nice top rope flip dive to the floor.

Back in and we hit another Hoverboard lock but Omega rolls out again, this time into a quick suplex. Omega takes him into the corner for a superplex, only to have Kushida stay smart with a Hoverboard lock, complete with a flying armbar to bring Kenny right back down for a huge crash. Kushida shrugs off a jumping knee to the face (as you do) and blasts Omega in the jaw to put the champ down. Back up and Omega tries a German suplex but gets pulled down into the Hoverboard lock.

Taguchi takes out the Bucks as the hold is broken, only to have Omega win the slugout. Oh wait he holds his arm after the brawling is over because he sells. A sitout powerbomb gets two on Kushida and Omega puts him up for the One Winged Angel (a reverse piledriver out of an electric chair) but Kushida reverses into one of the worst looking small packages I've ever seen to get the title back. Omega's shoulder was so ridiculously off the mat it was unforgivable.

**Rating:** B-. I was liking the match but the arm work didn't go anywhere and that ending looked horrible. However, the good vs. evil story was working here and Kushida looked better than I've seen him look in almost any of his matches. Omega would become the new leader of the Bullet Club the next day and it was a nice, though not great, farewell to the junior heavyweight division.

#### IWGP Tag Team Titles: G.B.H. vs. Bullet Club

Yes another title match with Bullet Club involved. In this case it's Karl Anderson/Doc Gallows defending for the Club against Togi Makabe/Tomoaki Honma. The Club has the good looking Bullet Babe (Amber Gallows, Doc's wife) in their corner, which is better than the Bucks again.

Big fan favorite Honma starts with Anderson and the Club quickly takes over in the corner. A quick tag brings Makabe in to clean house with right hands as the fans are suddenly much more interested after not having much of a reaction to the ROH guys. Everything breaks down for a bit and Doc gets in a chain to Makabe's neck (complete with an F bomb) and the champs take over. Back in and it's Makabe in trouble with a lot



of hard shots to the mouth for two.

Anderson is starting to get annoyed and walks into a clothesline, allowing the hot tag to Honma as house is cleaned. Gallows trips him up to give the champions control again and a reverse 3D plants Honma very nicely. Anderson puts Honma up in a fireman's carry for a running boot from Gallows, knocking it into a spinning flapjack for a great crash. Honma is put up top and has to escape a super cutter, only to get caught in a running Liger bomb for two.

Back down and Honma blocks some RK0's before headbutting Karl square in the chest. The hot tag brings in Makabe for some hard clotheslines to finally drop the much bigger Gallows. Honma starts hitting a bunch of headbutts, capped off by a falling version from the top rope to Doc. Makabe adds a top rope knee drop for the pin and the titles in a big upset.

**Rating:** C-. Again, not bad but nothing that I really cared about. I'm assuming Honma getting a title is a big deal but they really didn't put that over too well. I liked the story here of the native Japanese wrestlers fighting the evil foreigners but it still wasn't the most interesting thing in the world.

Ad for upcoming shows.

#### Hirooki Goto vs. Tetsuya Naito

This is the only non-title match on the show. Naito has two masked men with him and seems to be a heel here after having turned his back on the fans. Striker takes this chance to continue his show long trend of talking about all the heat he has as a commentator. You know, because people talk about him. As has happened too many times tonight, Naito's goons jump Goto from behind before the bell to give the heel an early advantage.

Everything quickly breaks down and the goons also beat up Captain New Japan who is here due to no apparent reason. Or at least no explained reason. Goto takes a big chair shot to the head and a neckbreaker from the apron puts him through the table, leaving Naito to pose in the ring

like a real villain. Back in and we hit a headscissors on Goto before Naito just pulls his hair. Well he certainly is being evil.

Goto dropkicks the knee out and starts firing off some kicks to the chest, only to have Naito easily kick him down in the corner. Naito puts him on top for a superplex, only to get countered into a sunset bomb (Tatsu: "Really? Really?") for two. Goto starts no selling kicks to the head but loses a slugout because you have to trade forearms at some point. The referee gets bumped and here are the goons to help, only to have one mist the other by mistake. Naito low blows Goto and gets a nice rollup for two, only to have Goto pop up with a suplex into a side slam (think something like Matt Morgan's Hellevator) for the pin out of nowhere.

**Rating:** D+. I really didn't care about this and I easily could have seen it cut off the show. That's the problem with this show as a whole: so much stuff is being crammed into here and it's making the show feel a lot longer than it needs to be. I'm still not entirely sure what the story was here and that's not good on a show this big, especially when there shouldn't be a language issue.

#### NEVER Openweight Title: Tomohiro Ishii vs. Katsuyori Shibata

Ishii is defending and let me stop here for a second. I've heard a lot of glowing things about this division and this style of match. I've also seen a few of the matches that receive such high praise from a lot of fans and I do not care for it. I'll spare you a very long rant that will get me in trouble and just say this isn't my style. I understand why some fans like it and even like it a lot, but this really isn't my kind of wrestling. I've had similar opinions changed before, but this kind of match has never done anything for me.

Before the match, Striker says the previous match between the two of them received five stars from the Wrestling Observer Newsletter, which is really rare. Well maybe in America, whereas in Japan you get four and a half for a good sneeze. They slug it out to start and trade the big forearms for the first time. Shibata takes over and slowly kicks at Ishii's head but Ishii pops up and gets in his face. Now they take turns

sitting down and dare each other to kick each other in the back. Ishii gets the worst of it but is allowed to chop Shibata over and over.

A big forearm puts Ishii down but he pops up with a Saito suplex. Shibata kicks him in the head for two and slaps on a modified octopus hold. That goes nowhere and it's time for another slugout with Ishii getting the better of it and taking Shibata into the corner for a quick facewash. Shibata comes back with a quick dropkick and tries something like a triangle choke. Ishii gets over to the ropes and they slug it out again until a double clothesline puts them both down.

Back up again and Ishii starts firing off chops to the throat (actually illegal) before powerbombing Shibata down for two. A superplex is countered into a Shibata armbar which he snaps down over the top. Shibata clotheslines him down and slaps on a rear naked choke to slow things down again. More kicks to the back keep Ishii in trouble until he blasts Shibata in the chest with a headbutt. Now they just headbutt each other for some very cringe worthy sounds. Ishii starts firing off some clotheslines for two until Shibata fires off a bunch of kicks, capped off by a running kick to the seated Ishii's chest for the pin and the title.

**Rating:** C+. This is a really hard one to grade as I definitely didn't hate it and it's a lot less annoying than I was expecting but I had almost no reaction to this. The match runs about seventeen minutes and you really could have cut out a good chunk of it to help shorten this way too long show. Again I get the idea here but I just don't care for it.

Video on AJ Styles vs. Shinsuke Nakamura, which is happening for the first time and is rightfully being billed as a dream match.

#### Intercontinental Title: AJ Styles vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

Nakamura is defending and one of the guys I like best in New Japan. Styles is Bullet Club (with no seconds here) and I don't think he needs much of an explanation. Feeling out process to start as they have nearly an hour and a half for the last two matches here. Nakamura takes it to the mat and gets nowhere, meaning it's time for another standoff. Back up and Nakamura drives him into the ropes before they trade headlocks. Things start to speed up and AJ ducks the running knee.

We get AJ's drop down into the dropkick spot but the champ quickly kicks him down and drops a knee. AJ goes to the ropes but gets pulled down, possibly reaggravating his bad back. Nakamura gives him some space but AJ pops up and nails him from behind to take over. A quick bridging reverse crossface (think something like the Last Chancery if the feet are tied together) has Nakamura in trouble but he pops up with a backbreaker to send AJ to the floor.

The champ drives him into the barricade to keep the back in trouble. An enziguri puts Styles in the corner but the running knee misses in the corner. That's fine with Nakamura as he puts Styles on the corner for a running knee to the already bad back. Well you can't fault his psychology.

AJ avoids another charge and hits the springboard forearm, which he really shouldn't be able to do with his back so screwed up but I love that move so I can forgive it. Styles gets him over with a snap suplex into the corner, only to hurt his back even more. A quick Backstabber has AJ in trouble but he grabs the Calf Killer out of nowhere.

Nakamura reverses into an armbar so AJ gets to his feet and drops a big right hand to break it up. AJ is able to pick him up for a torture rack (what back injury?) and spins Nakamura out into a powerbomb for two. The Styles Clash is broken up and Nakamura jumps to the middle rope for the knee to the chest but can't follow up.

Back up and we get the slow forearms (which I can live with after a long match like this) until AJ scores with the Pele, only to take a running knee to the chest for two. Nakamura gets back up and charges right into a knee from AJ, followed by a 450 for another two count. There's a cross armbreaker on AJ which is switched over into a triangle choke but AJ lifts it up into a one armed Styles Clash for a VERY close near fall.

With nothing else working, AJ takes him to the corner for a super Styles Clash, only to have Nakamura kick him in the and put him on the shoulders for a fireman's carry into a falcon's arrow from the top for another insanely close two. Both guys are barely able to get up until Nakamura blasts him with a running knee to the back of the head. Another one to

the chest is enough to finally retain Nakamura's title.

**Rating:** A-. The back injury just stopping in the middle of the match hurt a bit but the back and forth bombs helped it quite a bit. This was about two guys beating on each other as long as they could and that's all it needed to be. For once it did feel like a dream match and it lived up to the hype. Really good match but the back not instantly healing halfway through would have made it even better.

They fist bump post match.

We recap the very long history between Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi, who have been trading the World Title for the better part of ever. Since January 4, 2011, these two and AJ have been the only three World Champions in the company. Again, you think they might need some fresh blood? The idea is that Okada is going to be the new star and take Tanahashi's place but he has to beat Tanahashi here at Wrestle Kingdom.

IWGP World Title: Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi

Okada is defending and Tanahashi won the shot by winning the G-1 Climax tournament (not exactly but close enough). This is their eighth match and it's a tie (3-3-1) coming in. At least it's not one sided. Okada has Gedo in his corner. Very slow feeling out process to start with Okada putting him up against the rope and giving Tanahashi a condescending pat on the chest. A forearm puts Tanahashi down but another does the same to Okada.

They get in each others' faces and it's the champion kicking Tanahashi in the face to take over. That means it's time to hit the mat with neither guy being able to get the better of it. Tanahashi takes a small advantage with a headlock but Okada counters into one of his own. Now we get somewhere as Tanahashi starts in on the leg. Again it doesn't seem to matter as Okada pops up to try a tombstone, only to have Tanahashi wind up on the apron.

The leg work hasn't had much effect though as Okada is able to dropkick him out to the floor for a big crash. A running cross body puts Tanahashi over the barricade, which apparently is a callback to last year's match. Now that's a good use of English commentary as I never would have

remembered that from a match I haven't seen in a year. We hit the chinlock with a knee in Tanahashi's back, followed by a running elbow in the corner and a DDT for no cover.

Some uppercuts stagger Tanahashi and he misses a running dropkick to the knee. Tanahashi is right back at it and the second dropkick to the knee works, allowing him to start the comeback. A dragon screw leg whip in the ring and another on the corner (that's a new one) has Okada in even more trouble and the Sling Blade on the apron drops him again. Tanahashi is right back up with a high cross body to the floor and Okada has to dive back in at nineteen to beat the count.

Back in and a middle rope High Fly Flow (frog splash) crushes the knees again as Tanahashi is getting creative. Okada grabs a quick White Noise onto the knee but can't follow up. I can buy that actually as he had to hit something big and he sacrificed his own body to slow Tanahashi down. Back up and they slug it out again with Okada's knees suddenly being fine enough for three straight dropkicks. A top rope dropkick gets two for the champ and a top rope elbow (gah) gets the same.

Tanahashi grabs another leg whip to get a breather but has to block a dropkick (GAH) and counter into a Texas cloverleaf. He can't get it all the way on though and Okada rolls out, only to take the Sling Blade. The High Fly Flow misses and a tombstone (you really could have cut out the leg work part of this match and not missed a thing) plants Tanahashi. Now the Rainmaker connects for two (BECAUSE IT'S A LAME CLOTHESLINE!) and Okada casually pops up top for a High Fly Fly Flow of his own.

If you've watched a main event style wrestling match in any country in the last fifteen years, you know what's coming next. Tanahashi hits a Rainmaker of his own before going back to the knee in vain. I say in vain as Okada lifts him up for another tombstone, only to have Tanahashi reverse into a third Sling Blade.

A dragon suplex (always liked that move) gets two and two straight High Fly Flows get another near fall. Now we're getting somewhere on these false finishes. Tanahashi goes up again but dives into a dropkick with Okada holding his ribs instead of his knee. A good looking dropkick sets

up three straight Rainmakers (he actually followed through on the third) to retain Okada's title.

**Rating:** B+. Yeah it's big, yeah it's epic, yeah it tells a story, and I guess that completely excuses the waste of time spent on the legs and THE RAINMAKER BEING A REALLY LAME FINISHER because it's some saga or whatever. Of course I'm sure the New Japan fans who worship this stuff will be talking about fighting spirit or whatever as it's the grand out for pretty much any criticism you can throw at this style of wrestling.

I actually liked Styles vs. Nakamura a good bit more than this one as the legs being abandoned here was actually ticking me off with Okada flying all over the place without even wincing. Tanahashi was trying but there's only so much you can do when you tear the knees to pieces and five minutes later Okada is flying off the top. Also, I get that it's an epic main event and needed the time, but when a show is pushing five hours, I was kind of begging for this to end already when it hit twenty five minutes and it had ten more to go. It's very good, but the near universal praise these two get really doesn't hold up.

Post match Okada gets the big victory speech (With Tatsu FINALLY offering something by translating. I completely get why he didn't say much all night as his English is rather limited but his role could have easily been eliminated.) and says he's awesome. We should all stay tuned.

**Overall Rating:** B+. This was LONG. Last year's show was under four hours and this one was over five (including the pre-show), which I'm sure has a lot to do with this being a good bit lower. You really could have cut some of this show out (the six man and Goto vs. Naito would be a great place to start, plus trimming the opener by about five minutes) and really not missed much. That's a common issue with this show though and I'm not surprised it was a problem again here.

The show definitely had a better flow this year and jumped from match to match really easily. I got into almost every in one way or another to keep things from getting dull and there's some good action throughout. Nothing on the show is truly bad, but it wasn't until the final matches that things really started to pick up.

Now that being said, I really can't get over the praise the main event gets. I mean, does selling mean nothing in Japan? I'm well aware that it happens in America too, but this is supposed to be the greatest wrestling in the history of ever and their ace is flying off the top and ignoring a good stretch of leg work mere minutes later. Seeing that at the end of a show I really wanted to end isn't the best idea in the world.

Overall though, the problem here is the length. No show, including Wrestlemania, needs to be this long. Get this thing under four hours (start by cutting down some of that battle royal and put another match on the pre-show) and it's instantly better. The show is definitely good and worth watching, though I'd highly recommend fast forwarding through a match here or there.

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