

Mae Young Classic Episode Seven: New Orleans on April 8 is a Place and Time

Mae Young Classic Episode #7

Date: September 4, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

We're down to the final eight and that means four quarterfinal matches tonight. You can probably guess what's coming for the final four but that's what makes these rounds exciting: there's the chance of a big upset and that could change everything. Things were a lot better in the second round and hopefully that's the case here too. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of how all eight made it to the quarterfinals.

No bio videos here, though to be fair you should know who they are at this point.

Quarterfinals: Abbey Laith vs. Mercedes Martinez

Abbey takes her down in a test of strength to start until a hard palm strike to the jaw slows Laith down. Mercedes headlocks her for a bit before a heck of a slap staggers Abbey again. A spinning kick is countered so Abbey just does the splits instead of getting dropped again. Laith kicks at the arm a bit and JR brings up the two years off that Mercedes needed for a shoulder injury. That little background information often helps things so much and I wish we got more of it in WWE.

Abbey chops her back and kicks Mercedes in the head for two. That just earns Abbey a hard whip into the post and they fight to the apron with Lita joining the IT'S THE HARDEST PART OF THE RING club. Abbey kicks her out to the floor (which hasn't been the case very often in the tournament) for a crossbody to leave both of them laying.

Back in and Abbey tries to get fired up but Mercedes sends her outside

for a breather. That goes nowhere so Abbey grabs a bridging German suplex for two, drawing a heck of a scream out of Laith on the kickout. Mercedes grabs the fisherman's buster for the pin at 8:57 in another fast finish.

Rating: B. These finishes coming out of nowhere aren't doing much for me and they're becoming a pattern around here. Mercedes advancing is the right call as she's been treated as a veteran killer so sending her to the semifinals makes sense. Good match here too, which is all you can ask for.

Johnny Gargano is here and you know what that means.

Quarterfinals: Candice LeRae vs. Shayna Baszler

The winner gets Martinez in the semifinals. Shayna wastes no time with a hard knee lift and looks like she's toying with Candice to start. A kick misses though and Shayna crotches herself to give Candice a breather. Shayna gets sent outside for a suicide dive into a DDT (cool) to drop her on her head. Back in and we hit an Octopus hold on Baszler, followed by the Gargano Escape for a nice touch. Baszler calmly powers her up for a side slam and tries a super gutwrench suplex. Ms. LeRae's Wild Ride is easily countered into the rear naked choke for the tap at 3:11.

Rating: C+. They were getting going here until the very sudden ending, though this was the right idea. The idea behind Baszler is that she can finish you in the blink of an eye and that's exactly what they should be going for with her. LeRae is going to be fine wherever she goes and that suicide DDT was freaking sweet. Throw in the submission tease and they had me going a few times here. Give this more time though and it's instantly better.

Baszler won't let go of the hold, to the point where I thought they were going to reverse the decision for a second. She even kicks at LeRae as the doctors check on her. Now that's how you book a heel.

Quarterfinals: Piper Niven vs. Toni Storm

Storm takes the far bigger Niven into the corner and gives her a playful tap on the jaw. For some reason Toni thinks a test of strength is a good

idea with Niven taking her down. Storm bridges up and Niven can't break it for an impressive strength display. Like, a very impressive one as Toni isn't that big. They bridge up at the same time and shake hands upside down for a cute bit.

Niven powers her down and gets two off a splash, followed by Toni getting the same off a crossbody. Two more splashes give Piper the same so Toni grabs a Backstabber (popular move in this tournament) for a breather. A German suplex is countered into the Michinoku Driver for two and Piper is stunned. She tries the Vader Bomb, only to get caught in a German superplex. A top rope legdrop sends Storm on at 7:36.

Rating: C+. I don't think anyone was buying the idea that Niven was anything more than a dragon for someone to slay. Storm is as good of an option as anyone else as she has a great look and feels like someone they want to push the heck out of, especially over time. Good enough match here and while Storm isn't making it to the finals, she's getting noticed, which is often more important.

Baszler's fellow Four Horsewomen are proud of her win but here are Bayley, Charlotte and Becky Lynch for the staredown. Rousey: "Anytime, anyplace." Say....New Orleans perhaps? Maybe early April?

Funaki is here.

Quarterfinals: Kairi Sane vs. Dakota Kai

Kairi headlocks her down to start and the fans seem pleased at an early standoff. A spinning backfist misses and Kai gives her a martial arts pose. Kairi takes her into the corner for some hard chops as this is getting physical. The fans are behind Kairi but get quieted down with a running kick to the jaw in the corner. Kairi is tired of getting hit in the face so she spears Kai down for a breather.

Kai hits another running kick in the corner but gets sent into the corner. Kairi can't hit a superplex but can avoid a top rope double stomp with Kai tweaking the knee on the landing. A top rope Phenomenal Forearm gives Kairi two but Kai kicks her down again. Another running kick in the corner misses though and it's an Alabama Slam it's the top rope elbow to

send Sane to the semifinals at 7:42.

Rating: B. I'm starting to get the appeal of Sane and a lot of it is due to having her do stuff like this. Kai was very game here and that made for a more entertaining match. People like Sane are going to get more out of this than by squashing someone so it's definitely the right call. Kai will have a job in WWE if she wants one but this is Sane's tournament to win. Maybe.

The semifinals are set:

Kairi Sane

Toni Storm

Mercedes Martinez

Shayna Baszler

Overall Rating: B. I'm not sure what it says that I'm more interested in the Four Horsewomen battle than the tournament but that was definitely one of the big draws of this whole thing. The final four are interesting and while you can almost pencil in Sane vs. Baszler for the whole thing, that's not the worst result in the world. Good show here and I'm fired up for the last two shows.

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Mae Young Classic Episode Six – This is What I Signed Up For

Mae Young Classic Episode #6

Date: September 4, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

It's time to finish up the second round and get us down to the final eight. That means we have some big names facing some other big names on this show and that should be a lot of fun. I've managed to avoid as many spoilers as possible and it's amazing how much more entertaining a show like this can be when that's the case. Let's get to it.

We open with the standard recap of the previous show and tonight's preview.

Opening sequence.

We see Ronda Rousey and the Four Horsewomen arriving earlier. Gee I wonder who is making the finals.

Video on Toni Storm, who wants to fight and win.

Video on Lacey Evans, who is everything a modern woman is supposed to be.

Second Round: Toni Storm vs. Lacey Evans

They fight over a headlock to start with Toni getting the better of it. Lacey grabs one of her own with a fairly serious look on her face until a kick to the chest puts her down again. Storm tries a bit too flashy hip attack and gets rolled up for two for her efforts. A leg sweep from the apron into a slingshot elbow gives Lacey two and it's time to work on the

arm.

Storm goes back to the strikes to get a breather and it's a Backstabber (not a Codebreaker JR) to put Lacey down in the corner. Lacey comes back with a good looking swinging neckbreaker, only to walk into Strong Zero (modified White Noise onto the knee) to send Storm on at 5:08.

Rating: C-. I'm digging Storm (good look, strong enough work) so far as she's got a bit of a charisma that is helping her stand out. Hopefully she's sticking around for awhile as I could see her going somewhere with the right coaching. Evans' gimmick is kind of odd as she has the serious military background but looks like one of the Andrews Sisters in the ring. I liked her when I saw her live but it's not quite working this time.

Video on Mia Yim, who has been working specifically to be the best.

Video on Shayna Baszler, who has combat experience.

Second Round: Mia Yim vs. Shayna Baszler

Of note: Baszler, one of MMA's Four Horsewomen, walks past Charlotte, Becky Lynch and Bayley with only a passing glance. An exchange of kicks naturally goes to Baszler (JR: "Some people enjoy going to the mall. I think she'd go to the mall just to beat people up.") but Mia knocks her outside for a heck of a suicide dive. Back in and Baszler rolls some gutwrench suplexes for two but gets caught in the Tarantula (with JR calling Tajiri a handsome rascal).

An ankle lock cuts Mia off again but she's right back with some strikes to the face for two. Not that it matters as Baszler knees her hard in the face for a knockdown and it's right back to the ankle lock. Mia kicks her way to freedom and is able to powerbomb Baszler for two because ankle injuries aren't a thing. Just in case you thought it was a thing, Mia tries a 450 but gets caught in a rear naked choke for the tap at 5:36.

Rating: B-. Lack of selling aside, I'm sad to see Mia go out so early. For a long time I never got her appeal but she grew on me a lot during the tournament. That being said, Baszler is someone they're going to push

very hard in this thing due to the Four Horsewomen affiliation. It would surprise me if we didn't see a four on four match at Wrestlemania and that would be just fine.

Post match Shayna celebrates with her friends before going over to the wrestling Horsewomen to throw up the hand signs. Fans: "YES! YES! YES!"

Video on Dakota Kai, who is a fast striker. A striker? In a women's wrestling tournament?

Video on Rhea Ripley, who is big and strong but young.

Second Round: Dakota Kai vs. Rhea Ripley

The much bigger Ripley works on a headlock before diving over Kai, who snaps off some armdrags. A dropkick sends Ripley into the corner before a running kick to the chest makes things even worse. Ripley gets sent outside and drops her face first onto the apron for another two. Some running knees to the chest give Ripley the same and frustration is setting in.

The full nelson slam is broken up by a kick to the head, followed by a running dropkick. One heck of a running kick to the face in the corner gives Kai two, only to have Ripley superkick her away. A northern lights suplex drops Kai for two more and Ripley looks stunned. They head up top with Ripley getting caught in the Tree of Woe for the top rope double stomp to send Kai on at 7:03.

Rating: B-. Another good match, though this only sends Kai on to be Sane's latest victim. Ripley has every tool you could possibly need to be a huge star and I'm sure she's going to be just fine down in developmental. Kai looked great as well and should be just fine if she sticks around with NXT. Good match here as Ripley continues to impress.

Video on Candice LeRae, who will give everything she has to win this.

Video on Nicole Savoy, who loves to suplex people. She must have been miserable in the first round then as she didn't do a single one.

Johnny Gargano is here. I love how these wrestlers are ushered in and out

every match.

Second Round: Candice LeRae vs. Nicole Savoy

JR talks about PWG and my head threatens to explode. Lita on the other hand slips up a bit by saying Savoy's previous match was last night. Savoy kicks away a handshake offer and we're ready to go. The fans, with a decidedly female sounding voice, are behind Candice. Savoy sends her into the corner for a crash but LeRae comes right back out with a jumping Downward Spiral for two.

The first suplex drops LeRae for two and they trade modified surfboards. Candice elbows her way out of trouble and hits a Codebreaker for a breather. Savoy rolls some butterfly suplexes but can't get a cross armbreaker. Another kick to the head gives Candice a breather and it's off to something like a Black Widow to slow Savoy down. For some reason Savoy takes her up top and even old man JR knows it's a bad idea to put LeRae up top when her finisher comes from there. As you might expect, Ms. LeRae's Wild Ride ends Savoy at 5:54.

Rating: C+. Savoy looked better here but you knew LeRae was winning here, especially with the idea of her being massacred by Baszler in the next round. This was some good storytelling with LeRae fighting from underneath and being willing to go the extra mile to beat the fighting machine. Good match here.

Again, no brackets are shown for the next round but here you are:

Mercedes Martinez

Abbey Laith

Shayna Baszler

Candice LeRae

Toni Storm

Piper Niven

Dakota Kai

Kairi Sane

Overall Rating: B. Now this is more like it. The wrestling was good from top to bottom and while a lot of the endings were obvious, there's nothing wrong with having some good wrestling where you know who's winning. I'm digging this more and more every single episode and the fact that they've done this all in two major content drops is a great idea. Best show of the tournament so far with ease.

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Mae Young Classic Episode Five: No Mercy Lives!

Mae Young Classic Episode #5

Date: September 4, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

The fast paced shows continue as we have four more episodes being released today before we get ready for next week's live finale. We're down to sixteen competitors to go and for the most part, I'm coming into

this blind on the spoilers. It's hard to say where some of these matches are going to go so let's get to it.

Mauro handles the opening recap again.

The remaining entrants are on stage.

Video on Abbey Laith, who has wrestled for years and is here now.

Video on Rachel Evers, who was originally scheduled to lose in the first round but Marti Belle was so horrible that they changed plans mid-match.

Kassius Ohno is here.

Second Round: Abbey Laith vs. Rachel Evers

The fans sound split here as Rachel shoves her down to start, only to get wristdragged to the floor. Back in and a Stunner of all things puts Abbey down but they hit stereo bicycle kicks for a double knockdown. Abbey sticks with the kicks, including a high one off the side of Evers' head to send her straight down. She's up fast enough to catch Abbey on top with a super powerslam of all things for two. Cool looking move if nothing else. Evers tries another kick but gets dropped with a powerbomb, setting up the Alligator Clutch for the pin at 4:51.

Rating: C-. This started off a bit awkward but got better as things went on. Laith feels like someone they're ready to push pretty hard, especially given her background on the indy scene. Evers just needs a lot more ring time, though she has the look and pedigree to make a pretty nice run for herself one day.

Video on Serena Deeb, who is very aggressive and will work hard.

Video on Piper Niven, who wants to be tough but with a big smile.

Second Round: Serena Deeb vs. Piper Niven

Niven powers her into the corner to start and falls on Deeb in a slam attempt. Well to be fair that was just kind of dumb. A hard belly to back suplex breaks up Serena's headlock and there's a splash for two more. With the holds not working, Deeb opts for just punching her in the face

for a change. A middle rope Codebreaker (or maybe something like a monkey flip) drops Niven and a neckbreaker gets two.

Deeb is right back up with a modified Diamond Cutter for two more as the fans are split again. A charge misses in the corner though and Niven drops a Vader Bomb...for two. Dang I would have bet on that one. Niven heads up top (uh oh) and misses a splash, only to grab the Michinoku Driver to put Deeb away at 7:12.

Rating: C. What in the world was that ending? Niven missed the splash to seemingly give Deeb a hope spot but she was up less than five seconds later and hit the finish for the pin. I looked away for a second and my head swung back because I thought the video had skipped. They were trying to get into the Sting vs. Vader formula here but that ending REALLY knocked them back.

Video on Princesa Sugehit, who may be a veteran but needs to win this tournament.

Video on Mercedes Martinez, who has waited a long time for this opportunity.

Kalisto is here.

Second Round: Princesa Sugehit vs. Mercedes Martinez

Sugehit, in Wonder Woman themed gear, takes her down by the arm and tries a quick rollup for two. Another rollup, this time into the corner, gets the same on Martinez but she's right back with Two Amigos into a draping swinging neckbreaker. Princesa grabs a Codebreaker but has to block a superplex attempt. Instead it's a tornado DDT (now a big spot on the indy Bingo card) for two on Martinez and both of them are spent less than five minutes in. One heck of a Fujiwara armbars has Martinez in more trouble but she pops up and hits a fisherman's buster for the pin at 5:09.

Rating: C. What is with these sudden endings? Sugehit was dominating and then got caught by one move, seemingly out of nowhere, for the pin. Mercedes winning certainly isn't a surprise but they could have done a better job of laying the match out. You have almost all the time you want

and there's no need to cut them down this fast.

Video on Bianca Belair, whose hair whip thing is still stupid.

Video on Kairi Sane, who is perhaps the most awesome thing ever.

Second Round: Bianca Belair vs. Kairi Sane

Kairi gets taken down to start and we hit a headlock as JR continues to brag about how awesome of an athlete Belair is. Back up and Belair blows her a kiss, only to have Sane grab it out of the air and stomp it on the mat. One heck of a forearm drops Belair but she hits the hair whip (So you can use it to whip people but get yelled at for pulling it?) to take over.

A delayed vertical suplex with some squats gets two and we hit a seated full nelson. So she's a No Mercy fan? Some ground and pound of all things has Kairi down but she gets her knees up to stop a splash. Kairi does those rapid fire chops in the corner that probably don't hurt much but they're done in Japan and therefore they must be awesome.

A seated double arm choke (another No Mercy move) has Belair in trouble until she fights up and gets in a double chickenwing slam. One heck of a 450 gets a red hot near fall on Sane and Bianca is stunned. Kairi kicks her down and hits a running corner clothesline, followed by the top rope elbow (which she almost completely misses as her hip makes contact instead) to eliminate Belair at 10:00.

Rating: B. I'll give this one a higher rating for the No Mercy based offense and the hair thing being gone. Sane is clearly the top star in this whole thing and I'd be surprised if she doesn't win the whole thing. Belair is a heck of an athlete and that 450 looked awesome. She'll be a big deal in NXT for a good while and then on the main roster assuming she has any kind of talking ability.

A recap wraps things up.

Overall Rating: B-. Now we're getting to the fun part where they're having big names face other big names. The wrestling is getting better too and that can make for some sweet matches. I'm looking forward to

where things go from here and the rest of the tournament, assuming it's given time, should be a lot of fun.

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Mae Young Classic – Episode Four: And There's the Winner

Mae Young Classic Episode #4

Date: August 28, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

It's the end of the first round here and there's a good chance we'll be seeing the tournament winner making her debut. There are a few big names still to go and that means it's time for some showcases. We'll also know the second round by the end of this episode and that means it's time for big names to collide and things to really take off. Let's get to it.

Long recap of the whole tournament so far and a preview of what we're seeing tonight.

Opening sequence.

Video on Renee Michelle who is ready to show how awesome women can be.

Video on Candice LeRae, who is one of the biggest names in the tournament. She's also married to Johnny Gargano but wants no special treatment.

Gargano is in the front row.

First Round: Candice LeRae vs. Renee Michelle

Feeling out process to start as a fan yells something that makes the crowd laugh. They trade rollups into a standoff as this is a VERY pro-Candice crowd. Candice sends her into the corner for a missile dropkick but Renee is back with kicks of her own. Renee gets kicked off and a jumping neckbreaker gives Candice two. Candice misses a charge in the corner but manages to avoid a middle rope moonsault. They head up top and it's Miss LeRae's Wild Ride (super swinging neckbreaker) for the pin on Renee at 5:37.

Rating: C-. Nothing to see here though you can tell LeRae is a step above a lot of these people. The fans are clearly into her and that's the kind of reaction that's going to guarantee at least a spot in the second round. Good enough match here with Michelle looking perfectly acceptable as well.

Video on Lacey Evans, a former Marine who has made some appearances in NXT before.

Video on Taynara Conti, a judoka from Brazil, who is ready to fight anyone.

Alexa Bliss (and I believe Bayley's fan Izzy behind her) is here.

First Round: Taynara Conti vs. Lacey Evans

The fans get behind Lacey with the USA chants as Conti fires off some knees to the ribs. An armbar has Conti in some trouble until an over the head throw takes Evans down. A shot to the chest takes Conti back down

and something like a Bronco Buster has her in more trouble. Evans throws Conti on her back for a kneeling piledriver and the pin at 4:43.

Rating: C-. Not much to see here and I'm a bit surprised that Conti, who seemed to be built up as a big deal, got beaten down that easily. Evans has been around WWE for a little while, now so her winning isn't a big shock, but that was quite the quick exit for Conti. Evans doesn't do much for me but she's got something with the ex-military thing.

Video on Reina Gonzalez, a second generation wrestler and a powerhouse.

Video on Nicole Savoy, the self-described queen of suplexes.

First Round: Nicole Savoy vs. Reina Gonzalez

Reina is sporting chaps and a Phantom of the Opera mask. You see something new every day (weekly at worst) in wrestling. Feeling out process to start with the far smaller Nicole not being able to take Gonzalez down. A hurricanrana is shoved away and a hard clothesline drops Savoy. Reina plants her again with a sidewalk slam and a reverse Boston crab, only to get pulled down into something like a Kimura. A cross armbreaker works a lot better and Reina taps at 4:46.

Rating: C-. Not the worst match in the world but Savoy didn't throw a single suplex, which was her main talking point in her video. Gonzalez was a bit slower than she probably should have been and that hurt things a lot. The ending hurt it a bit too as Nicole was dominated and then came back with two moves to win. That's not the best thing in the world, but it was at least watchable. Kind of like Reina in general.

Video on Tessa Blanchard, another second generation wrestler who turns into a different person in the ring. She's been around NXT for a good while now.

Video on Kairi Sane, a Japanese star who likes pirates. She's probably the favorite in the whole tournament.

First Round; Kairi Sane vs. Tessa Blanchard

Kairi is very pale. Feeling out process to start with Kairi putting her

on the ropes for a clean break. A cradle gives Kairi two and a running Blockbuster drops Tessa again. Tessa comes back with a running neckbreaker of her own before a middle rope Codebreaker gets two more. Some hard forearms stun Sane but she's right back with a spear to cut Tessa off.

Something like a top rope Phenomenal Forearm drops Tessa for two and the fans are split again. Tessa gets two off a belly to back suplex and a top rope backsplash gets the same. Kairi's sliding forearm is countered into a crucifix for two but she kicks Tessa down again. Kairi points to the elbow and drops one heck of a top rope elbow for the pin at 8:39.

Rating: B. I don't know if it was enough to live up to Kairi's hype but this was the best match of the first round. Tessa was more than game here and if she's not pushed at least to like halfway to the clouds (the moon might be too far this soon), I'm not sure what WWE is thinking. Sane is likely the favorite to win the thing but it was a smart idea to have her sweat a bit in the first round.

They hug post match.

We don't actually see the full second round brackets but here they are.

Abbey Laith

Rachel Evers

Princesa Sugehit

Mercedes Martinez

Nicole Savoy

Candice LeRae

Mia Yim

Shayna Baszler

Kairi Sane

Bianca Belair

Dakota Kai

Rhea Ripley

Serena Deeb

Piper Niven

Lacey Evans

Toni Storm

Overall Rating: C+. The main event alone is worth seeing and the rest of the card is more than watchable. It's a lot better now that we know who is advancing to the second round as a lot of the deadwood has been cleared out. There hasn't been that blow away match yet but the main event here was solid enough. I've liked what I've seen so far and the second round should be an upgrade, especially in match quality. Good show here and hopefully it keeps getting better.

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Mae Young Classic – Episode Three: I Don't Get The Hair Thing

Mae Young Classic Episode #3

Date: August 28, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

It's time to start the second half of the first round and I've liked the tournament so far. It might not be anything great so far but the talent is there and they're still in the opening stages, meaning we won't be seeing any showdowns until the second round. That's when these things get good but we have to get there first. Let's get to it.

Mauro recaps and previews us again.

Opening sequence.

Video on Toni Storm, an Australian with an attitude. Oh and a little top hat. She's also the first Progress Women's Champion.

Video on Ayesha Raymond, the Deadlift Diva. I think you get the idea here.

First Round: Toni Storm vs. Ayesha Raymond

No handshake before the match. Raymond is much bigger but the fans are behind Storm. Toni backs out of a headlock and offers a handshake but this time pulls her own hand back when Ayesha goes for it. A running kick to the face sets up some hip attacks to drop Raymond again. Raymond is right back up with a side slam and corner splash as the pace slows. Toni avoids a charge in the corner and grabs a Backstabber as the Aussie fans start up again. A slam off the top puts Storm down but Raymond hops down instead of going after her. The delay lets Toni avoid a top rope splash and grab a rolling cradle for the pin at 4:28.

Rating: D+. Storm looked very good out there and has the charisma to back up the work. It's easy to see why she's getting a push on the independent scene and I'd like to see more of her. Raymond...not so much. She's every generic power wrestler you've seen with little charisma and a confusing moment at the end where she stopped to yell at the fans instead of following up. It came off as stupid, which isn't exactly the best thing to do in a big debut like this. But yeah, Storm looked awesome.

Charlotte and Sara Amoto are here. Can we just put both of them in the Hall of Fame already?

Video on Kavita Devi, the first Indian woman ever in WWE. She was trained by Great Khali so her future isn't exactly bright.

Video on Dakota Kai, the girl next girl from New Zealand who can get very serious if necessary.

First Round: Kavita Devi vs. Dakota Kai

The much bigger Devi shoves her around without much effort and then walks the top rope into an armdrag in a very impressive bit of athleticism. A second version works just as well Kai's dropkick has no effect and a gorilla press drop makes things even worse for her. Devi slowly walks around instead of following up though and gets caught with a running boot to the face in the corner. Kai is quickly up top and a double stomp ends Davi at 3:58.

Rating: D+. Much like Raymond, Davi didn't show me anything here and it made for a dull match. Kai has a good look and seems to have the charisma to back it up but there's only so much you can do against someone who was trained by Great Khali. Hopefully the next match is a better fit for her, which I can't imagine being the case otherwise.

Rock's family, including Nia Jax, is here.

Video on Bianca Belair, who is quite the well rounded athlete with a VERY long hair braid that is often used as a weapon.

Video on Sage Beckett, formerly known as Rosie Lottalove. She's lost something like 150lbs and turned into quite the vicious brawler. Beckett

talks about channeling energy to do whatever she needs.

First Round: Sage Beckett vs. Bianca Belair

The power showdown starts early with the bigger Sage (though Bianca is far from small) running her over and getting two off a shoulder. Belair comes back with a dropkick and a hard clothesline for two each as they're beating each other pretty well here. Something like a running frog splash gets the same and it's off to a double chickenwing on Sage. Back up and a Bubba Bomb gives Beckett (who was trained by the Dudleys) a near fall of her own and Bianca gets splashed in the corner. Belair gets tied in the Tree of Woe but avoids a Vader Bomb. A shot with the hair braid sets up a spear to send Bianca on at 5:25.

Rating: C+. I liked this one but it had some rough spots. Beckett is a bit better than your average monster, though it felt like she was just there for Belair to slay. As for Belair, there's some awesome potential there due to natural athleticism but the hair thing isn't working for me. It's distracting and having her whip Sage back with it was too far for me.

Charly Caruso recaps things.

Video on Santana Garrett, who is billed as the Wonder Woman of the tournament and has appeared on NXT (and TNA) before.

Video on Piper Niven, a Scot with some size to her. She's better known as Viper on the indy scene.

First Round: Santana Garrett vs. Piper Niven

Piper drives her into the corner and gives her a friendly shove to the jaw. The fans are split again as Garrett spins out of a wristlock. Niven easily powers out of something like a Black Widow, only to get kicked in the chest for two. A headscissors drops Niven but she comes right back with a crossbody for a near fall of her own. It's off to the cravate, which JR compares to bangers and mash or fish and chips.

A clothesline gives Piper too as JR praises her for her simple strategy. Garrett gets two off a DDT and an Eat Defeat but a bulldog is broken up.

Piper's running splash gets two (looked great too) but she gets caught on top with a running strike to the face. The fans are WAY into these near falls and Santana's superkick makes it even better. She misses a moonsault though and a backsplash sets up the Michinoku Driver to end Garrett at 7:10.

Rating: B-. Niven did more than most huge females do and that makes for an entertaining match. Sometimes you need a change of pace from all the same stuff and that's why she's going to shine so well. Garrett still seems to have most of the tools but needs some better coaching. You know, like at the Performance Center, where she's still not signed for some reason.

The recap and preview finish things off.

Overall Rating: C. The good was good and the bad was tolerable but some of this stuff is starting to run together. There are definitely some people starting to stand out though and that's what makes things more interesting. Avoiding spoilers for the most part has helped too, though when WWE.com is telling you who won some of the first round matches, it gets a little annoying. Still though, not a bad show but it's yet to hit that high gear.

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Mae Young Classic – Episode Two: The Future Is Bright. And Tall.

Mae Young Classic Episode #2

Date: August 28, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

It's kind of nice to have all four episodes of the first round up on the same day as we're going to be able to get to the final sixteen in one day. The first four matches were all fine and we already have some names to watch. This show will get us down to twenty four names left in the competition so let's get to it.

Mauro Ranallo narrates the opening video, which looks at last week's show and previews tonight's four matches.

Opening sequence.

JR and Lita preview tonight's matches.

Video on Xia Li, a signee from China who trains in Chinese martial arts.

Video on Mercedes Martinez, who has been a big star on the independent circuit for years and is covered in tattoos.

First Round: Mercedes Martinez vs. Xia Li

Li has a fan in her hand, which gives me a nice flashback to Mulan. Martinez gets rather evil by doing the crane kick pose instead of shaking hands. A headlock into a front facelock has Li in early trouble but she comes right back with a spinning kick to the ribs. More kicks get two and a forearm knocks Martinez straight down. A spinebuster cuts Li off for

one though and Martinez's shocked face is rather over the top. Martinez stays ticked off enough to grab a surfboard into a dragon sleeper for the tap at 3:06.

Rating: D+. This wasn't quite a squash with the far bigger star winning despite selling a lot of Li's offense. Li has a good look and seemed poised in the ring. If she can learn English I could see her going somewhere down in developmental. Martinez is going to be a big deal in this thing and that really shouldn't be any kind of a surprise.

Video on Rachel Evers, the daughter of Paul Ellering who has made several appearances in NXT. She's well rounded and ready to fight any style.

Video on Marti Belle, who is best known from her time in TNA. She leads the pack instead of following it.

First Round: Marti Belle vs. Rachel Evers

The fans are entirely behind Evers here and Belle is a very clear heel. A single underhook suplex gives Marti two and she brags about how close that was. Back up and Evers gets one off a springboard spinning legdrop out of the corner. Marti snaps the throat across the top as the dueling chants begin.

Rachel comes back with some forearmms and a COME ON, followed by a running backplash. A pretty bad looking spinebuster gets two on Marti so Rachel loads up a fisherman's buster but slams her forward for two instead. Marti comes back with a Stroke for two of her own as this needs to end soon. A very quick small package pins Belle at 6:31. It's as sudden as it sounds.

Rating: D-. Yeah this really didn't work. Rachel has all the requirements to make something of herself (good look, good pedigree) but the in-ring work really isn't there. The match was sloppy and looked completely disjointed at times, easily making it the worst match of the tournament so far. That only puts it in sixth but I can't picture much beating this. Really bad match.

Video on HHH welcoming the 32 entrants.

Video on Miranda Salinas, who was trained by Booker T. She's 5' and from what I can find, has less than twenty matches in her career. I can't imagine that's all she's had but if so, well done on getting here.

Video on Rhea Ripley, a 20 year old phenom (I'd like some more details on that description) from Australia with a soccer background.

First Round: Rhea Ripley vs. Miranda Salinas

Miranda definitely has some charisma to go with her small stature. The far bigger (probably by a foot) Rhea headlocks her down before hitting a good looking dropkick to send Salinas outside. Ripley fires off some chops in the corner but gets kicked in the back of the head. A running knee to the chest gives Miranda two but a forearm to the face just seems to get on her nerves. Ripley hits a running kick to the face in the corner, followed by a running basement dropkick for two. Something like a Chick Kick sets up a full nelson slam to put Salinas away at 3:51.

Rating: C+. If she's only 20, they might be on to something with the prodigy thing. I really liked this match a lot more than I was expecting to and there's something to both of them. Rhea has a good look, solid size and the in-ring work. Her charisma was a bit below average but she can work on that. Salinas' size is going to work against her but if she can get the work down, she'll be fine. I was impressed by these two and they had a much better match than I would have bet on. Well done and keep an eye on Ripley coming to NXT.

Video on Mia Yim, who you've probably seen in various promotions, including TNA as Jade. She talks about her domestic violence story last year, which got some mainstream attention.

Video on Sarah Logan, better known as Crazy Mary Dobson, who is a backwoods tough girl from Kentucky who trained in Japan.

Natalya and Beth Phoenix are here.

First Round: Mia Yim vs. Sarah Logan

Mia works on a wristlock to start and a dropkick gets two. Sarah comes back by taking her down and hammers away with some right hands for two of

her own. A basement dropkick keeps Mia in trouble but she kicks Sarah right into the corner. That's fine with Sarah, who screams at her to do it again.

Mia obliges and puts on the Tarantula before getting two more off a jumping knee. A rolling guillotine choke has Sarah in trouble but she slips out and it's time for a seated slap off. Logan is back up first with a running knee to the face for another two but Mia grabs a pair of bridging German suplexes for near falls of her own.

Sarah gets two more off a Samoan drop and a fisherman's suplex out of the corner gets the same. Sarah: "OFF WITH YOUR HEAD!" She then misses...I'm not sure what actually but Mia kicks her in the head (Mia: "Off with YOUR head!"), setting up Eat Defeat (still don't like that move) for the pin at 7:17.

Rating: B-. Yim is one of the bigger stars in this thing but she's going to be facing Shayna Baszler in the second round, meaning she's probably done after two matches. Logan has some skills but at the same time she's only going to go so far with the Kentucky tough thing. She needs more time in front of the crowd though and that's going to come with time.

The recap ends the show.

Overall Rating: C. This wasn't as good of a show as the first one and a lot of that is due to the Belle vs. Evers match, which really brought things down. The big thing I got out of this one though was the future is looking bright. There's a lot of talent in this tournament and several of them have been signed to developmental deals. If they can go somewhere with this stuff, the NXT women's division is going to be in good shape in the near future.

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Mae Young Classic – Episode One: It's Ladies Month

Mae Young Classic Episode #1

Date: August 28, 2017

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jim Ross, Lita

It's finally here. In the tradition of last year's Cruiserweight Classic, this is a thirty two participant women's tournament held down in Florida. The field is comprised of an international group of talents, some of whom you probably haven't heard of before. There are four shows up today with the finals taking place live on September 12. Let's get to it.

The opening video, narrated by Stephanie McMahon (because of course), talks about the history of women's wrestling and how the biggest stars have helped lead us here. The result was the Women's Revolution and it's allowed something like this to be possible.

Opening sequence.

One note: I'm not familiar with most of the names in this so if I miss something big about one of them, I apologize in advance.

Video on Kay Lee Ray, a Scot who describes herself as a hardcore daredevil.

Video on Princesa Sugehit (pronounced sue hay). She was the only woman in

her gym in Mexico and is here to win the tournament.

First Round: Kay Lee Ray vs. Princesa Sugehit

Sugehit starts with the kicks and a big one to the chest gets two. They trade some trips until Ray grabs something like a Gory Stretch. That's reversed into a sunset bomb for two as the crowd is WAY into this so far. Sugehit drops three elbows for two but gets kneed in the face for the same. Back up and Kay chops her in the corner as Lita laments never wrestling in a mask.

A reverse DDT sets up a Koji Clutch on Sugehit for a few moments and the fans stay split. Sugehit gets out and rolls her around the ring into a cradle before a hard kick to the head gets two. More kicks are countered into something like a Gory Bomb for a slightly delayed two on Sugehit. Ray misses a splash though and a Fujiwara armbars makes her tap at 5:58.

Rating: B-. Good choice for an opener here with two easy to identify styles and Sugehit being the more polished of the two. It wasn't a classic or anything but it was the right idea: get the crowd into things (shouldn't be that hard) and something like a masked woman kicking another one in half was an easy choice.

Video on Serena Deeb who has a lot of history in WWE as part of the Straight Edge Society and a long stint in developmental. She had a bit of a drinking issue though and left the company, meaning she had to earn her way back.

Video on Vanessa Borne, who used to be a cheerleader for the Arizona Cardinals and a dancer for the Phoenix Suns but now she's here to be the star instead.

Naomi is here.

First Round: Serena Deeb vs. Vanessa Borne

Of note: Jessika Carr, the new female full time referee, is working this match. Feeling out process to start as the announcers focus on Deeb's previous issues that sent her away from the ring for two years. Some armdrags have the rookie Borne in trouble but she headbutts her way out.

The aggressive style doesn't seem to sit well with the fans, who are notably more silent for this match (though to be fair these could have been taped out of order). A sliding headbutt gets two on Deeb and we hit the chinlock. Serena fights up with some left hands and a neckbreaker but she goes shoulder first into the corner. A flip neckbreaker and Samoan drop give Borne two each but Deep is right back up with a spear for the pin at 6:06.

Rating: C-. There's your first story of the tournament and it's a good one with Deeb's road to redemption. She never was the biggest star in the division as she barely wrestled singles matches for the company but it's an easy story to tell. It's easy to imagine her making a long run in this thing as she's one of the more experienced names in the field and that could help her go a long way.

Video on Zeda, who learned martial arts to deal with bullying as a kid. She didn't have a hero to look up to so she became one herself.

Video on Shayna Baszler, a former UFC fighter with a long career. She's here to try something new now but the style will be the same. Baszler has wrestled in Shimmer so she's not coming into this as a rookie.

Ronda Rousey is here to cheer on her former Four Horsewoman teammate.

First Round: Shayna Baszler vs. Zeda

Lita and Zeda were in the same judo club, albeit many years apart. Shayna won't shake hands but the fans know Zeda is going to die anyway. An early cross armbreaker doesn't work on Zeda and it's back to a standoff. A ZEDA chant goes nowhere and Baszler easily strikes her into the corner. Zeda gets in some elbows and a monkey flip is good for two but Shayna is done playing around. A suplex backbreaker into a choke makes Zeda tap at 2:21.

Baszler poses with the Horsewomen.

Video on Jazzy Gabert. She grew up in Germany and throws people all around. It's like a demon comes out in the ring when she hurts the little girls. You might remember her from a few matches in TNA as Alpha Female.

Video on Abbey Laith, who is better known as Princess Kimber Lee.

First Round: Abbey Laith vs. Jazzy Gabert

Gabert is rather intimidating looking with a very blonde mohawk. It's also odd hearing JR talk about Chikara, where Abbey was Grand Champion. Abbey slugs away to start but gets thrown down by the hair. A Jazzy chant starts up as she throws Abbey down into the splits. That's fine with Abbey who has a ballet ground for some great flexibility. We hit something like an Anaconda Vice of all things as Abbey is being completely overwhelmed here.

Back up and Abbey is sent into the turnbuckle as the dominance continues. It's off to a chinlock before a rolling forearm knocks Abbey's block off. Abbey slips out of something and grabs a Tarantula into a choke on the ropes. Some kicks to the chest stagger Jazzy and some bicycle kicks make things even worse. There's a dropkick into the corner and a Swanton gets two on Gabert. One heck of a clothesline puts Laith down but she rolls off Jazzy's back -into an Alligator Clutch (a rollup used by Mae Young) for the pin at 7:12.

Rating: C+. I liked this one more than I was expecting to as they seemed to be going with a squash and then turned it into a better story with Laith winning in the end. There's a good chance that they're going to be sending her pretty far in the thing. Good idea here as Laith looks like a star now and should get a nice reception as a result.

Gabert shakes her hand post match.

We wrap it up with a quick recap of the night's events.

Overall Rating: B-. Good start for the tournament here as they showcased four names and we're already getting a good chunk of the second round ready. They should be flying through this pretty easily and that makes for a fun tournament. I also like having four episodes released at once as we can get through the first round in a single day instead of stretching it out for months. Lita was completely acceptable on commentary and seemed to be starting to get the hang of it more as the show went on. Good show here and that's a positive sign.

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