

# Best Of 2022 Awards Part 2

We have some more.

## Moment Of The Year

5. Brock Lesnar Lifts The Ring With A Bulldozer
4. CM Punk's All Out Rant
3. Cody Rhodes Is Back
2. Stephanie McMahon Announces Vince McMahon's Retirement
1. Steve Austin Wrestles Again

This continues to support my mantra of NEVER SAY NEVER in wrestling. Austin retired back in 2003 and has not wrestled since. But then, one day, Kevin Owens called Austin out for an appearance at Wrestlemania XXXVIII. You knew something was going to happen, but then it got even bigger as Owens challenged Austin to a No Holds Barred match. Austin gave an amazing face where you could see the wheels turning....and then he said yes. The bell rang and we were actually seeing it again. And then it was good! This was one of those things I never thought I would see but there it was, right in front of your eyes.

## Angle Of The Year

5. Mickie James' Last Rodeo
4. Bianca Belair vs. Becky Lynch
3. FTR vs. Briscoes
2. CM Punk vs. MJF
1. Bloodline

Where do you begin? It is very rare in wrestling for a story to keep going on for so long and not get dull. The Bloodline manages to find ways to keep going, even with Roman Reigns barely around a lot of the time. To top the whole thing off, you have Sami Zayn, who is trying his hardest to give the Bloodline a higher level of Ucey, but Reigns isn't exactly

pleased with what he's doing. I want to see where things go week to week and that is not something I get to say very often.

### Feud Of The Year

5. Bianca Belair vs. Becky Lynch
4. RKBro vs. Usos
3. Brawling Brutes vs. Imperium
2. MJF vs. CM Punk
1. FTR vs. The Briscoes

I was going back and forth between this one and MJF vs. Punk, but so much of MJF vs. Punk took place in 2021 that FTR and the Briscoes just beat it out. At the end of the day, there is nothing that is topping three instant classics like those three had and nothing was going to beat it. They had an awesome segment before their first match, because we can't have the Briscoes on AEW TV so at least they had something in the way of talking. It was outstanding and they somehow kept it amazing throughout the entire feud.

### News Story Of The Year

5. Wrestlers Return To WWE
4. HHH Is In charge
3. Naomi/Sasha Banks Walk Out
2. Brawl Out
1. Vince McMahon Retires

Ok so this one is already a little bit out of date, but there is nothing that comes close to touching this one. You can have your Brawl Out and all that, but the person who modernized professional wrestling and has dominated the industry for 20+ years walked away from the company he built into a global juggernaut. That is the kind of game changers that you do not see in wrestling ever and now we are dealing with the insane fallout. McMahon retiring was the story of the year, if not the story of the decade.

## Match Of The Year

5. Cody Rhodes vs. Seth Rollins – Hell In A Cell
4. FTR vs. Briscoes – Final Battle
3. Sheamus vs. Gunther – Clash At The Castle
2. CM Punk vs. MJF – Revolution
1. FTR vs. Briscoes – Supercard Of Honor

We'll start with the best/and then there's this (depending on which way this is posted), as you had two teams stealing the show on the biggest wrestling weekend of the year. It was the match that I knew I had to see and it blew away any and all expectations. Throw in the fact that it was a clean match that ran almost half an hour and never once felt long and you know you have something special. I can't praise this match enough as it more than blew away the considerable hype.

## Wrestler Of The Year

5. Bianca Belair
4. Josh Alexander
3. Sami Zayn
2. Jay White
1. Roman Reigns

One of the best things a wrestler can have is presence and that is where Reigns shines. You can feel something special whenever he is in on screen and it makes a huge difference. The Bloodline has featured some amazing moments, all of which revolve around Reigns. Throw in the fact that he has the matches to back it up and this is one of the easier picks of the year so far.

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# Best Of 2021 Awards Part 2

Now we get to some big ones.

## Surprise Of The Year

5. NXT Concedes Wednesday Night Wars
4. The Ending Of All Out
3. Bron Breakker Is Good
2. Hook Is Good
1. CM Punk Returns

This is the one that got me. Punk had been away from wrestling for seven and a half years, which might as well be an eternity in the business. You just do not see wrestlers leaving for this long and then coming back but Punk returned and with a bang. AEW let you know it was coming, but until the guitar riff hit in the United Center, I wasn't completely sure it was going to happen. Granted if it hadn't, the building was going to go up in smoke, but they did what they needed to do and it was incredible, to put it mildly. And now I want some ice cream.

## Match Of The Year

5. Finn Balor vs. Pete Dunne – Takeover: Vengeance
4. Roman Reigns vs. Daniel Bryan – Smackdown, April 30
3. Thunder Rosa vs. Britt Baker – St. Patrick's Day Slam
2. Kenny Omega vs. Bryan Danielson – AEW Grand Slam
1. Ilja Dragunov vs. Walter – Takeover 36

The original match between these two were one of the best things I have seen in wrestling in a long time and that was the case again here. These two beat the living daylights out of each other and it was everything I was hoping it would be.

It was a physical struggle and felt like only one of them was going to be able to survive. Walter's incredible United Kingdom Title reign finally ends, and my goodness what a way to wrap it up.

## **Promo Of The Year**

5. Chris Jericho Might Be Saying Goodbye – Dynamite, August 25
4. Edge vs. Miz – Raw – November 29
3. CM Punk vs. Eddie Kingston – Rampage – November 5
2. CM Punk's Return Speech – Rampage – August 20
1. CM Punk vs. MJF – Dynamite – November 24

In what was the year of Punk in the world of promos, this one topped everything else. I know the First Dance has the emotion, but this was the night where they took the gloves off and went at it. These guys were throwing bombs at each other, such as MJF being a less Famous Miz and MJF calling Punk out for always having an excuse for not being the big star. This is the one that had me taking in every word and I don't know if it is being topped for a long time.

## **Most Improved Of The Year**

5. Tay Conti
4. W. Morrissey
3. Bobby Lashley
2. Britt Baker
1. Josh Alexander

I know Baker is the easy one here, but Alexander has a case not just for most improved but also the best wrestler of the year. Alexander was THE guy in Impact as the company got bigger and bigger. It was awesome watching him climb the ladder and I wanted to see what he could do when he finally got his chance in the main event. Then he won the World Title in the main event of the biggest show of the year, which he had certainly earned. This was an easy one for me and you

should watch more of Alexander's stuff.

## **Wrestler Of The Year**

5. Roman Reigns
4. Serena Deeb
3. Josh Alexander
2. Jonathan Gresham
1. Daniel Bryan/Bryan Danielson

I don't think this is much of a surprise, as Danielson is about as complete of a worker as you will find in the world today. The guy can do just about anything asked of him and that never seems to change. His AEW run will get the most praise, but don't forget his first four months of the year where he had at least two classics, including the main event of Wrestlemania. Danielson is rapidly reaching that all time elite of the elite level and he was easily the best of the year.

## **Moment Of The Year**

5. Hangman Page/Dark Order's Entrance For Ten Man Tag
4. Becky Lynch Returns
3. John Cena Returns
2. The Fans Are Back
1. CM Punk Returns

This is one of those moments that AEW built up to perfection by more or less guaranteeing that Punk would be at First Dance. Then the show started and here he was, with the music, the pose, the dive into the crowd and everything else. They turned this into an event and I don't think there is anything that AEW has done that tops this so far. Then there was the ice cream deal to make it even better. I loved this way more than I would have expected and it was as close to perfect as it could have been.

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# Best Of 2020: Match Of The Year

We were lucky in 2020 as there were some awesome matches to pick from throughout the year. That is one thing that has grown incredibly well in recent years, as the in-ring work has gotten more and more polished. There were choices from multiple promotions and some of them were absolutely great. I had fun making these picks and there are a lot to go through. Let's get to it.

As usual, no order until the winner at the end.

## Stadium Stampede (Double Or Nothing)

Opinions on cinematic matches are going to be all over the place most of the time and that was the case with Stadium Stampede. I had a blast with this as you could see a lot of creativity throughout the whole thing with some great ideas. If nothing else, Hangman Page riding a freaking horse into the stadium to chase Sammy Guevara off was outstanding and the bar fight worked well too. It's not for everyone, but this was a blast all night long and you could see the effort they put in.

## Roman Reigns vs. Jey Uso (Clash Of The Champions)

This one makes it for a few reasons, with the biggest one being just how out of nowhere it was. Think about it for a second: it was JEY USO in a pay per view main event and it was awesome. I wasn't sure what to expect from this and then they went out and had a classic. It wasn't the kind of a match that was supposed to have a ton of drama and the ending wasn't in doubt, but they had an outstanding match and the things they pulled off deserve praise.

## Kazuchika Okada vs. Kota Ibushi (Wrestle Kingdom Night One)

Oh like these two weren't going to make a list like this. These two put on a Wrestle Kingdom worthy major match and it felt every bit as big as you would expect. New Japan's wrestlers can do this kind of match better than anyone in the world and even though I wasn't exactly clear on the story (as tends to be the case), I got sucked into the match, as tends to be the case. Outstanding stuff and, as usual, worth seeing.

#### Will Ospreay vs. Hiromu Takahashi (Wrestle Kingdom Night One)

It's from the same night and might have been the better of the two matches. This was all about high flying and doing one crazy spot after another until the other person couldn't get back up. Ospreay might be the best in the world at doing just that and they tore the dome down with this one. These two are some of the better and more consistent performers on New Japan's already great roster and this was no exception.

#### Roman Reigns vs. Kevin Owens (Tables Ladders And Chairs)

Much like the Uso match, there was no drama in the finish but they had me coming really close to believing that they might pull the trigger. Owens just kept getting up and the whole thing was perfect given the story that had been told coming in. It was an awesome showcase for both of them with Owens continuing to earn his reputation as one of the best in WWE. It takes a lot to make me want to cheer someone to keep going but they pulled it off here. That's pretty impressive.

#### FTR vs. Young Bucks (Full Gear)

This was the dream match that a lot of people had wanted to see for good reason. The question was whether or not FTR could make their old school style work with the Bucks certainly non-old school style and indeed they did, with some rather nice bonuses thrown in. Above all else, there was a stretch of classic double team moves thrown in which was incredibly charming. This was two great teams doing everything you could want to see them do and telling a great story throughout. I know the Bucks don't have the best reputation, but they are outstanding when they are given the right circumstances.

#### Undertaker vs. AJ Styles (Wrestlemania XXXVI Night One)



Of all the matches I saw all year, this is the one that I enjoyed more than any other. These guys beat the heck out of each and it was one of the best things WWE has done in a long time. This felt like a fight between two people who wanted to hurt each other and that's exactly what they did, with all kinds of bonuses thrown in. I left this thinking I could not have asked for more and the fact that it wound up being historic made it even better.

#### Walter vs. Ilja Dragunov (NXT UK TV – October 29)

This is the definition of the big fight feel as the two of them beat the living daylights out of each other. The match felt like a struggle between two people who were fighting over a prize and that is about as good of a thing as you are going to see. No one brings it in a big match these days like Walter and Dragunov had been built up as a real threat and they lived up to the entire thing.

You could pick a few different matches for this but this one stuck out more than any other.

#### Kenny Omega/Hangman Page vs. Young Bucks

I wasn't sure what was coming during the buildup to this one and they blew away the expectations. There were so many ways to go and the question was which way they chose. One of the best feelings in all of wrestling is not knowing what was going to take place going into a huge match and that was the case here. Then there was the match itself, which was two great teams having one amazing sequence after another, including a bunch of near falls and saves. I loved this match and it stuck with me more than anything, which is the best thing you can have.

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# Best Of 2019: Match Of The Year



IMG Credit: WWE

We might as well get one of the bigger ones out of the way. Wrestling is a lot of things but at the end of the day, it revolves around what happens in the ring. You can do all the promos and segments you want, but somewhere in there you have to have a big match (don't tell Vince Russo). That was the case in a lot of places this year and some of them were outstanding.

## WWE Championship: Men's Elimination Chamber

I'm putting this one first because a good chunk of the match doesn't matter. It wasn't until it became clear that Kofi Kingston could actually pull this off that it got really, REALLY good, with one of the best sections of a match I've seen WWE put together in years. This was different than Kingston just being the last victim.

There was a feeling that Kofi could win and all of a sudden,

you began to realize how much you wanted to see him actually be WWE Champion. The big thing was how real the whole possibility felt and that isn't something you get more often than not. I bought into more than one of these near falls and by the end of it, I was spent, which is as big of a success as you can get.

### Men's Survivor Series

This is another one where the atmosphere helped things out incredibly well and I was wondering how it was going to end (granted me being in the audience that day helped a lot). This was the triple threat format with NXT included and that was what everyone wanted to see. I downgrade this one a bit due to some of the booking choices (Walter being eliminated in two minutes was inexcusable) but the end with Lee pinning Rollins and then having the showdown with Reigns was top notch.

What mattered here was how big it felt. I wasn't sure who was going to win this and they gave it enough time to build things up rather than rushing through everything. It's what I wanted from a Survivor Series match and the reason I had been trying to go to a show for so many years. Couple that with Lee getting the clean pin on Rollins and this was a joy to watch.

### United Kingdom Title: Pete Dunne vs. Walter (Takeover: New York)

We'll still with NXT for a match that you knew you wanted to see from the second Walter debuted at Takeover: Blackpool. Dunne's title reign seemed like it would never end because no one could actually beat him. That's where Walter came in, as it became a question of who could possibly defeat Dunne after everyone else had failed. That's a heck of an atmosphere and they set it up to perfection.

Then there was the actual match and sweet goodness what a fight. This was Dunne going out on his shield as Walter just could not be stopped. They beat the fire out of each other and

it nearly stole the weekend, with some of the hardest hitting shots you'll ever see. It became a question of who could survive and ultimately Walter took the title in an instant classic. Incredible stuff, as British Strong Style tends to be.

### WWE Championship: Daniel Bryan vs. Kofi Kingston (Wrestlemania XXXV)

And now we have a sequel to the Elimination Chamber. This is a great example of what putting in the effort over the years can get you. Kingston had been in WWE since 2006 and somehow had never had a one on one match for the WWE Championship. It was very similar to the Jeff Hardy vs. Randy Orton feeling at the 2008 Royal Rumble and now we were finally getting the chance. It felt special and that's what it wound up being.

What mattered here was the very end. It wasn't clear until Kingston actually won that he might pull it off, because it was hard to believe that they would actually pull the trigger. After Kingston won the title though, the magic really began. New Day unveiled the classic title and Kofi's kids came in to celebrate with him. You don't get a special feeling like that very often but when it's real, you can feel it. That's what Kofi gave us and it was one of the best in years.

### NXT Title: Johnny Gargano vs. Adam Cole (Takeover: New York)

Dang it was a great Wrestlemania weekend. This one was both a case of what might have been and a case of what we wound up getting. There isn't much of a secret that this was supposed to be the final blowoff between Johnny Gargano and Tommaso Ciampa's all time classic feud, but alas Ciampa's neck flared up and he had to be pulled. This is what we got instead and it happened to be great.

What we got was a heck of a fight with both guys making you believe that they could win at any given time. Some of the near falls were outstanding and while there were times where

it went beyond the realm of being believable, it was the kind of moment that everyone had been waiting to see. Gargano FINALLY won the title that he had been chasing for years and it came after a great match.

So we have emotion and great action, but not both at a high level throughout. This changes that.

United Kingdom Title: Walter vs. Tyler Bate (Takeover: Cardiff)

I was excited for this one coming in after seeing the two of them tear the house down at a Progress show the year before. What we had here was a David vs. Goliath story with the much smaller (yet incredibly strong) Bate fighting the unstoppable monster. They took that simple story and knocked it out of the park with one of the best fights I've seen in a long time.

What made this work was how they made Walter look desperate. Walter comes off as someone who never gets shaken but this time around he could not finish Bate no matter what he did. The fans got behind Bate because he would not stay down until Walter FINALLY hit him with everything he had in a heck of a clothesline to retain the title. There was something so raw about Walter just having to unload on him like that to win and it was a great moment to end the Match of the Year.

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# Best Of 2018: Match Of The Year



IMG Credit: WWE

So this one is coming after Wrestler Of The Year, which was the Johnny Gargano vs. Tommaso Ciampa race. Well guess where we are all over again. You're going to see those names a lot in this and I don't think that requires much of an explanation. This was actually an incredible year for in-ring work and NXT ran away with just about every accolade you can imagine (again). But which topped them all?

Sweet goodness where do I start?

[Aleister Black vs. Adam Cole – Takeover: Philadelphia](#)

I'm going to say this a lot but what a match. The idea here was Cole couldn't hang in a fight with a brawler like Black and that was pretty much exactly what happened. It wound up being an incredible brawl with Cole throwing everything he had at him and getting his head kicked off, as so many people had felt. NXT hadn't started doing the violent matches as frequently yet so this was a treat.

### Tommaso Ciampa vs. Velveteen Dream – Takeover: WarGames II

This is a match that shouldn't have been as good but they pulled it off anyway because both guys know how to bring it on the big stage. Dream was one of the least likely title contenders (Did you really believe he was winning here?) but he had some great near falls and nearly pulled off the huge upset. That's the sign of a great match: when you know where it's going to end but get sucked into it anyway. They pulled it off here, which I didn't expect.

### Velveteen Dream vs. Ricochet – Takeover: Chicago

With all of the athletic spectacles to behold this year, it was nice to have one that had a clearer story. This match was built up on the idea of both guys wanting to steal the show and get all the spotlight, which was Dream's eventual downfall. Ricochet may be the best high flier in the world right now and Dream tried to hang in the air with him, eventually causing himself to crash and burn. It's an incredible showcase, as Ricochet continues to become one of the brightest stars anywhere.

### North American Title Ladder Match – Takeover: New Orleans

Meltzer gave this five stars and it might be the fourth best match of the year in NXT alone. I was in the arena for this one and I've never gasped so much, including the time I saw Shane McMahon dive off of the Cell. This was the spotfest to end all spotfests (not named TLC or involving a certain trio of tag teams) with the place getting more and more into it until Adam Cole gave the fans exactly what they wanted. Go and watch this one if you love a great bit of insanity with some of the coolest spots you'll see in a long time. The thirty minutes feels like less than half of that and it just doesn't stop.

### Johnny Gargano vs. Tommaso Ciampa – Takeover: Chicago

We'll get to round one later but here we have the rematch. The first match was about emotion and the two getting their hands on each other. This one was about two guys beating the fire out of each other and hurting one another as much as they could. They destroyed the ring and some of the arena but it evened the score and meant that we would be

seeing a third match. After what they did the first two times, it's not like you had to ask twice.

#### Johnny Gargano vs. Andrade Cien Almas – Takeover: Philadelphia

Ten years ago, Royal Rumble 2008 was built around the idea of Jeff Could Win. Well this was Johnny Could Win, as he was coming off a horrible losing streak but if he had his head on straight, he could pull off anything. Johnny came into Philadelphia with his head on straighter than ever before but Almas knocked it off time and time again. That set up some of the most dramatic near falls that you'll ever see and an absolutely incredible match that could have gone either way.

Like it could be anything else.

#### Johnny Gargano vs. Tommaso Ciampa – Takeover: New Orleans

I don't know what to say here. The build was nearly a year in the making and these two wanted to kill each other. That's nearly what they did too, with one of the best performances I've ever seen. From Ciampa coming out to no music and just soaking in the hatred to the YOU DESERVE IT chants when Ciampa landed on bare concrete to the awesome near fall on Gargano to Gargano winning, going to the stage to pose and looking over his shoulder to avoid Ciampa attacking him again, I haven't been on a roller coaster like this at a show ever before and I can't imagine I ever will be again.

Then again I said that about Takeover not being topped and couldn't have been more wrong so I'm probably off again here.

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## 2017 Awards: Match of the Year

This is a big one.

Well yeah, of course it's a big one, because the actual wrestling is a big part of the wrestling business. One of the most common debates is what was the best match and that's what we're looking at here. Some of these might not be your cup of milk (tea was never my cup of tea) but there's some outstanding stuff to pick from this year.

Note that there's a chance I left a nominee off because I just didn't see it, which is going to be the case with some New Japan matches.

We'll start at the beginning of the year with a match that is certainly going to be discussed somewhere in here with Kenny Omega vs. Kazuchika Okada from Wrestle Kingdom XI. This was the very early clubhouse leader and the subject of some of the most discussion of the ridiculous star rating from Meltzer. The match itself is very good, though it could have been shortened a bit as it does drag. Still though, it's more than worthy of a mention.

Another noteworthy match is WarGames from Takeover: WarGames. I know a lot of fans were worried about this one and while the

match wasn't what WCW used to put on, it was still as brutal and violent of a match as WWE was going to offer these days. It was a lot of fun with everyone beating the heck out of each other, including some brutal spots and even some blood. I had a blast with it and it was an incredible spectacle.

At the same show is a match that I underrated pretty badly, despite saying it was quite good. Velveteen Dream shocked the heck out of a lot of people by having an awesome match with Aleister Black after an even better build up. The story was really entertaining and seeing Black kick Dream's head off and then FINALLY give Dream what he wanted by saying his name was the best thing that could have happened. Both guys looked awesome and Dream got a huge elevation. What more can you ask for?

Well how about a big gimmick match? That was the case in the blowoff for the Usos and the New Day inside the Cell. These guys beat the heck out of each other and it was quite the spectacle. This was the match that made the Usos the undisputed top team in WWE in a move a long time in the making. It's very cool to see them get a major match like this and they stole the show in the process.

Speaking of four men in a match, we have the main event from Summerslam with Brock Lesnar vs. Braun Strowman vs. Roman Reigns vs. Samoa Joe. There's no other way to put this: these guys beat the heck out of each other and showed why they come off like bigger stars than almost anyone else in the process at the same time. This was about hitting each other really, really hard until only one person was left standing and it was exactly what people wanted to see.

Next up we have the other clubhouse leader from January with AJ Styles vs. John Cena. I watched this back a few weeks ago and not only does it hold up, but it has some outstanding drama and a huge moment with Cena tying Flair's record. It's great stuff, but there's other stuff that surpassed it later

in the year.

That leaves us with the winner and it was the year of the British. Tyler Bate and Pete Dunne had one of the best trilogies in WWE history (easily) and their second match was the best of them all. Taking place at Takeover: Chicago, the match with Dunne taking the title from Bate was one of the most exciting matches I've seen in years with the two young guys leaving everything in the ring with an absolutely crazy Chicago crowd. It was the match of the year and nothing else was really in its world for me.

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## 2015 Awards: Match of the Year

This is one of the hardest ones to pick because it's one of the two biggest awards of the year.

We'll start over in Japan with Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kota Ibushi in the WON Match of the Year. I didn't remember this being as awesome as it was but I gave it an A and you have to mention it after winning such a big award. Ibushi made this a war and came so close to the huge upset in a great story with great action but he just couldn't pull it off. Still great though.

Reigns vs. Lesnar from Wrestlemania was better than I was expecting as they just beat the tar out of each other for a long time until the big screwy ending. That ending is what holds it back for me as it turned into more of an angle than a match. What we got until that point was more than worth seeing though and it far exceeded most expectations. It's the main event of Wrestlemania so you have to at least give it a mention.

In another surprise, Kevin Owens pinned John Cena at Elimination Chamber.

This was the big trading finishers showdown with both guys hitting each other with bigger and bigger shots to set up the big surprise finish with Owens winning. This was built up with weeks of great promos and then gave us a great match. What more can you ask for than that?

There's another match from outside WWE with Mil Muertes vs. Fenix in a Grave Consequences (casket) match. It's not the match of the year, but it runs away with the award for having no business being awesome but blowing the roof off the place. Casket matches are some of the goofiest gimmick matches you'll ever find but these two turned it into one of the most dramatic things I've seen in a very long time. Given how bad the gimmick was holding them back, this was a borderline miracle.

We'll go in reverse for a second and mention the Iron Man match at Takeover: Respect. It's not quite the first match but the ending with Bayley KICKING SASHA IN THE HEAD to win and Banks making Izzy cry were things of beauty. These two have mad chemistry together and the rematch even being near the level of the original is the highest praise.

That leaves us with the final two matches that everyone knew we were coming to. First up there's the amazing triple threat from the Royal Rumble with Brock Lesnar vs. John Cena vs. Seth Rollins. I rewatched this a few days ago and good night it was something to see. All three guys hit everything they could and the story of Lesnar having to be double teamed to leave the other two fighting was great stuff.

The things Lesnar was doing and was being put through by the challengers were awesome and the ending with Brock going Beast Mode to beat Rollins left me out of breath. This was the most action packed match of the year and the clubhouse leader for a very long time. It was going to take something special to come close to it and that's what we got about nine months later.

Women in wrestling get a lot of flack. They're treated as eye candy, sideshow acts, popcorn breaks and second class citizens who do some of the dumbest things imaginable. That's what makes the NXT women's division so much fun. Instead of being treated like morons, they're treated as serious competitors who happen to be women. The idea of a Women's Title

match being the main event of a random week of TV doesn't even make NXT fans think twice these days and that's a really good sign.

That's what makes Bayley vs. Sasha Banks so important. This wasn't just a great match but it was also a great moment. The wrestling, the emotion and the post match scene all wrapped this up into one of the greatest things I've seen as a wrestling fan. This was a moment for wrestling and had me losing my mind every single time, even though Bayley winning wasn't exactly a shock.

So that brings up the big debate that never ends in wrestling: action vs. emotion. The triple threat was non-stop insanity with one big spot after another. The women's match on the other hand was all about Bayley's journey from the goofy fangirl to the serious competitor who was the best in the company. However, it didn't have Brock Lesnar breaking stuff, including various people for twenty minutes.

I keep going back and forth on this but the more I think about that sequence with Sasha getting Bayley in the Bank Statement and stomping on her hand, only to have Bayley reverse it into a Bank Statement of her own, the more I have to go with the women. For my money, the hardest thing to do in wrestling is to convince fans that something they know is happening isn't going to happen. Like I said, Bayley was the obvious winner but they managed to convince me that it wasn't going to happen for that split second.

The thing is though the match kept going and had one heck of a finishing sequence with Bayley hitting a great looking reverse hurricanrana to knock Banks senseless. That's where the match got even better for me: Bayley had Banks beaten before the Bayley to Belly, which really just put her out of her misery. In other words, Bayley looked like the decisive winner instead of someone who happened to win. It felt like an actual changing of the guard and a moment, which is what it was supposed to be. Couple that with the Four Horsewomen post match stuff and this beats anything else in the year in a big milestone.

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## 2014 Awards: Match of the Year

Here's another major award with some last minute entrants.

We'll start with the frontrunner for most of the year, mainly due to its build up: the Wyatt Family vs. the Shield at Elimination Chamber. These two teams had looked dominant for months coming up to the match and they finally stared each other down. It's one of those moments where you just knew it was going to be great and then they blew the doors off the place at Elimination Chamber.

Daniel Bryan vs. HHH from Wrestlemania is way up there and the ending was perfect with HHH getting to chuckle at all the fans (myself partially included) who thought he would put himself into the title match. This isn't something that's going to hold up though, as it's good but the show's booking hurts it a bit. At the end of the day, there was no way Bryan wasn't winning here, which brings things down. It's still great, but I can't say it's the best match of the year.

We even get a TNA entry with the ladder match in the Tag Team Title series. I know Full Metal Mayhem gets the attention because it was the final match, but the ladder match was just a hair better. This was back

to the TLC formula of take six guys and let them break a lot of stuff, including their bodies. It's a total stunt show and that makes for some very entertaining matches.

I know this one wasn't universally popular, but I have to mention WeeLC from Extreme Rules. When WWE does comedy well, it can be some of the funniest stuff you get. They NAILED this one and made what could have been the worst idea in history into something hilarious that was a highlight of the night. This isn't really a serious contender but man alive it was funny.

Back to the first major show of the year with Daniel Bryan vs. Bray Wyatt. Here we have two guys just beating the tar out of each other for over twenty minutes in an outstanding opener. Wyatt beat Bryan, but it's a match where the winner really doesn't matter. Bray has so much potential, and the fact that he can back it up in the ring is a very important point.

I can't go with Team Authority vs. Team Cena as a nominee but I'll throw it in as an honorable mention. The last ten minutes actually had my heart beating fast and not being sure of what should have been a sure thing. Throw in Cena going out halfway through the match and it gets even better. Great match, including STING, but I'm not sure if it's one of the best of the year.

What I am sure of though is how amazing Sami Zayn vs. Cesaro from NXT: Arrival was. These guys just know how to make things work with Sami as the ultimate underdog and Cesaro being able to do insane power moves that just blow your mind. It's a hair beneath the 2/3 falls classic, but they got in most of the same spots and Cesaro going into Beast Mode at the end. He doesn't go there often, but when he goes to that place, I see the superhero that people say is inside him.

It's been too long since we've had a Shield match and HHH might bury me if I don't mention him, so I'll throw in Shield vs. Evolution in the elimination tag at Payback. They let the match go for a long time until we finally got to an elimination so the pin was a surprise. This was the old standard of let six guys beat the tar out of each other for half an

hour with the young guys hitting one high spot after another and making the big comeback because the fans actually want to see them do it. In other words, they built up the drama and paid it off at the end. Wrestling 101 still works if you can believe that.

Now we'll go to the other end of the spectrum with Bully Ray/Rockstar Spud vs. Austin Aries/Bobby Roode from One Night Only: Jokers Wild II. In short, this is the funniest match I've ever seen and you should watch it yourself. The key here: you can tell the guys in the match came up with the comedy themselves. Instead of inserting them into "funny" situations, the comedy flows naturally because it's stuff that these people would logically do that is still funny. Over in WWE you see people doing things that are only being done because a script tells them to do it.

That brings us to the winner, which was the only match all year that I had to see. The build was perfect, the go home promo was perfect, the match was perfect, the execution was perfect, the aftermath was perfect, yet for some reason I only gave it an A. The match is of course Sami Zayn vs. Adrian Neville for the NXT Title at Takeover: R-Evolution. It's a strong contender for Show of the Year and it was capped off by the Match of the Year.

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## Wyatt Family vs. Shield

WATCH

THIS

MATCH.

Match of the year so far by about a mile.



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# 2013 Awards: Match of the Year

There were some great matches in 2013 and several of them were available for free.

One honorable mention: Sami Zayn vs. Antonio Cesaro from NXT. It's a 2/3 falls match and an outstanding fight. Zayn is as good of an underdog character as you'll find in wrestling today but Cesaro in Beast Mode is going to put down anyone he's against.

Now to the nominees:

Rhodes Brothers vs. Shield – Battleground. It's the worst show of the year but this match brought out so much emotion for reasons we've already covered. The main story here is the Brothers trying to get their jobs back after losing them to the Authority. The match was all about the emotion and that's better than action every single time. Great match but it didn't save the show.

CM Punk vs. John Cena – February 26 Raw. This was the match for Cena's Wrestlemania title shot and these guys tore the house down. I called it the best TV match I've ever seen and I still think it ranks right up there with anything I've ever seen. The one thing that holds it back is the lack of drama at the end. Everyone knew Cena was going to win, but the question was how. That's very good but not perfect.

Daniel Bryan Runs The Gauntlet – July 22 Raw. If a match told a better story on TV this year, I didn't see it. Bryan had to face Jack Swagger, Antonio Cesaro and then Ryback in succession. Swagger didn't even last three minutes, but the

Cesaro section is a war between two different styles. After that it was Ryback where Bryan gave it his all but couldn't overcome the power. The key here though: Ryback lost via DQ, thereby giving us a logical conclusion that doesn't damage anyone. Outstanding stuff.

That brings us to the two real contenders.

Daniel Bryan vs. John Cena – Summerslam. What else can I say about this match? It was long, it was exciting, it had great action, it had an ending that came out of nowhere. The one thing that holds it back: there was no way Cena was winning with that baseball growing out of his elbow. Just like Cena vs. Punk, there was only one possible winner to this and that was Daniel Bryan. Still though, excellent match.

The winner:

CM Punk vs. Brock Lesnar – Summerslam. My goodness what a match this was. In something I don't say that often, I was completely wrong about this one. I didn't think Punk could be a realistic threat to Lesnar but he went move for move with the beast and had me wondering who was going to win the entire time. It's an amazing match with both guys beating the tar out of each other. On top of that, it was more proof that HHH had no business hogging Lesnar for a year as Brock has had masterpieces with Punk and Cena but three only good matches with HHH.

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