

Smackdown – August 15, 2017: They Might Have Just Saved Summerslam

Smackdown

Date: August 15, 2017

Location: Dunkin' Donuts Center, Providence, Rhode Island

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton, John Bradshaw Layfield

It's the last show before Summerslam and there's a big main event to send us home. This week features Jinder Mahal vs. John Cena in a non-title match, which likely means that Baron Corbin and Shinsuke Nakamura will be lurking around. Other than that we'll be pushing some of Sunday's lower card matches as well. Let's get to it.

A narrated video talks about tonight's main event.

Phillips says this might be the biggest match in Smackdown's history. This isn't even Cena's biggest match on Smackdown this month.

Here's Mahal to talk about today being Independence Day in India. An Indian band performs a quick dance and then a woman sings the Indian national anthem. Mahal takes credit for the success of the WWE Network and goes on about how awesome India is until Nakamura interrupts. Nakamura says today is India's Independence Day but it's also Veterans Day in Japan. On Sunday, he's taking the title. This was long and accomplished absolutely nothing.

The announcers send their best wishes to Ric Flair.

Natalya vs. Becky Lynch

Naomi comes out for commentary. Becky grabs a rollup for one but gets the taste slapped out of her mouth. That earns her a slap right back, sending Natalya to the floor as we take a break. Back with Becky caught in an abdominal stretch until she makes her comeback with the clotheslines. The Bexploder looks to set up the Disarm-Her

but Becky has to escape the Sharpshooter. A top rope legdrop misses though and the Sharpshooter makes Becky tap at 7:33.

Rating: D+. Natalya continues to be the same performer she's been for years now: completely competent in the ring but mostly lacking charisma or anything interesting. I still don't know why she's getting the shot when you have Becky and Charlotte on the sidelines. In theory they're saving that for a bigger stage, but there's not much of a bigger stage than Summerslam. Unless they're just setting up the Money in the Bank cash-in and don't want to waste a big match, I really don't get the point in a glorified midcard match for the title.

Post match Naomi chases Natalya off from another Sharpshooter attack. Carmella comes out and teases cashing in her briefcase at Summerslam.

Tamina wants to know why Lana hasn't made her ravishing yet. Lana says Tamina isn't ready, which doesn't sit well.

The Usos come in to see Daniel Bryan, who thinks they want him to join their rap group. It turns out they want to know which New Day members they'll be facing Sunday. That would be Big E. and Xavier Woods, but the Usos want Woods and Kofi tonight. That's cool with Bryan, who dances a bit as they leave.

Rusev vs. Chad Gable

Gable wastes no time in suplexing him to the floor but Rusev sends him into the steps a few times. Rusev tosses Gable over the announcers' table and it's a double countout at 1:16.

Post match Rusev puts Gable in the Accolade on the announcers' table. Rusev grabs a mic and gets in the ring, only to have Orton come in from out of nowhere with an RKO. How did he not see a 6'4 wrestler running right in front of him?

Here's AJ Styles to talk about Sunday's match where Shane McMahon will be guest referee. AJ calls Shane to the ring and apologizes for accidentally kicking him last week. Shane says no apology is necessary but AJ is worried that Shane will use what happened last

week to screw him over on Sunday. The boss says that won't happen, but if AJ puts his hands on him on Sunday, Shane will put his hands on AJ as well.

AJ asks if that's a threat but here's Kevin Owens to interrupt. Owens loves those rules for Sunday because he thinks AJ has something planned. Kevin thinks AJ is going to try to get him to get into a fight with Shane on Sunday and cause a DQ. Shane tells them to shake hands but the fight breaks out with Shane having to block an errant AJ right hand. The ensuing argument lets Owens superkick Shane by mistake.

New Day vs. Usos

Non-title. Before the match, New Day said they'll be seeing the Usos at Summerslam and goes over a list of places the Usos can see them before then. Kofi and Woods take turns hitting a long string of elbows, legdrops and splashes (over ten of them total) on Jey in the first minute. Double baseball slides drop the Usos and we take a break after a very fast start. Back with Kofi making his comeback and bringing Woods in off the hot tag to chop away. A double superkick to the legs set up a double superkick to the jaw but Jimmy makes the save. Jey superkicks Kofi's knee and a double superkick his jaw for the pin at 7:49.

Rating: C-. That was a great opening but MY GOODNESS I'm sick of superkicks. This match didn't even go eight minutes and there were seven superkicks included. Remember back in the day when one superkick finished a match? Well now it takes seven times that and most of them don't even come close to finishing a match. Cool it with those already, as I assure you there are multiple other options out there.

It's time for the final episode of Fashion Peaks with Fandango recapping everything that's gone on so far, including the alien probes, which went very deep. They were MENTAL probes of course. Here's Breeze in a dress and blond wig because that's what he does these days. Breeze says they need to figure this out because the last thing they need is people thinking they're making it up as they

go along.

Fandango has a space rock that the aliens gave them, which he says can predict the future. He throws the rock and hits Ascension, who were returning pie. There's a hair in the pie, along with a used Band-Aid and...GLUTEN! Viktor panics because they live a gluten free lifestyle and gets dragged away. There's also a note in the pie, saying "Two B". Fandango says he senses danger for the whole tag division. A graphic says they'll return in two weeks.

Jinder Mahal vs. John Cena

Non-title and Jinder's entrance is joined in progress. They fight over a test of strength to start until Cena shoves him away. One of the Singh Brothers gets in a cheap shot from the floor though and Mahal slowly takes over. Jinder throws him outside and we take a break. Back with Cena initiating his finishing sequence.

The Singh Brothers pull Mahal to the floor before the AA but the referee catches them for an ejection. That means the STF but Mahal is over to the ropes. Mahal snaps his throat across the top and hits a knee to the face for two. The Khallas is broken up and the AA...gets two? Well I'm a bit surprised. That means a super AA but here's Corbin for the DQ at 9:59.

Rating: D. And so much for Mahal meaning much. He's one of the worst choices for a champion you can find and now he can't even get a full entrance in "one of the biggest matches in Smackdown history". The fact that he didn't get pinned helps a bit but he was completely destroyed at the end. Mahal needs to lose the title on Sunday, but it wouldn't shock me if they kept it on him as a swerve.

Post match Corbin knocks Cena out and leaves...before realizing how stupid he would be to not cash in right now. Corbin cashes in the briefcase and IT'S ON!

Smackdown World Title: Baron Corbin vs. Jinder Mahal

Cena offers a quick distraction and Mahal grabs a rollup to retain at 9 seconds. THANK GOODNESS as that means there's no cash-in on Sunday and we're done with one of the stupid briefcases for the next eleven months.

Corbin is livid and Mahal celebrates with the Singh Brothers to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. That ending alone saved this show as I couldn't be happier about the briefcase being gone. One of the dumbest things they could have done was have Nakamura win and then have Corbin cash-in to win the title. Now we don't have to worry about that and Nakamura can Kinshasa Mahal back to the midcard where he belongs. Other than that, this was a show similar to last night as the bigger stories were in deep freeze (until the main event of course) and not much really happened. It's not much of a show but hokey smokes that ending was a great call.

Results

Natalya b. Becky Lynch – Sharpshooter

Rusev vs. Chad Gable went to a double countout

Usos b. New Day – Double superkick to Kingston

John Cena b. Jinder Mahal via DQ when Baron Corbin interfered

Jinder Mahal b. Baron Corbin – Rollup

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Smackdown – June 27, 2017: Now Why Would You Do That?

Smackdown

Date: June 27, 2017

Location: Valley View Casino Center, San Diego, California

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton, John Bradshaw Layfield

It's ladies night with two major women's matches on the card. First up we have the second ever women's Money in the Bank ladder match as the WWE tries to fix the mess they made out of the first one just nine days ago. After that we have Lana challenging Naomi for the Women's Title in another Money in the Bank rematch. It's almost like they're just doing the same things twice for the sake of not having to come up with anything new. Let's get to it.

The opening recap looks at the Money in the Bank ladder match from the pay per view and the build to tonight with the theme of seizing opportunity when you get the chance. This is also used on the rest of the major stories going on around here.

Here's Daniel Bryan to hype up the ladder match and explain the concept, only to be cut off by Carmella. She goes on the same rant she went on last week, explaining the rules of the Money in the Bank match and saying she didn't break any rules. Carmella: "How can you break a rule if there are no rules???" Other people have interfered in ladder matches and those results weren't changed. Bryan says he's heard this before and we're having the ladder match.

James Ellsworth tells the people to shut up and calls Bryan pathetic. He looks at Bryan and sees a coward who is staying out of the ring because of some fake injury. Daniel smiles and says he should just fire Ellsworth but instead just bans him from the entire arena for the rest of the night. Security comes out and drags him away as this opening segment wraps up after nearly fifteen minutes with really nothing new being done.

Hype Bros vs. Usos

Non-title but if the Hype Bros win, they get a future title shot. Zack and Jimmy start things off with an armdrag sending Uso down. It's off to both partners with Mojo clotheslining Jey to the floor for a dive from Ryder. Jey gets in a superkick though and we take a break. Back with Ryder missing a charge in the corner and Jimmy adding the Superfly splash for the pin at 5:42. Not enough to rate due to the break but the commercial seemed completely worthless as there was less than ten seconds of action after the break.

Post match the New Day comes out to challenge for the titles at Battleground. The Usos accept, in rhyme no less. Kofi rhymes a bit of his own and tromboning ensues.

It's Fashion Vice time with Ascension sitting in an interrogation room to be grilled by Breezango. Fandango holds up the stick figure drawing, which Konnor says isn't them. Fandango: "You expect me to believe that? Because I do." He offers two tickets to paradise (as in Eddie Money tickets) in exchange for information but that goes nowhere.

Breeze pulls out the water guns...and offers them iced tea and a cheese platter. Konnor says it wasn't them and they were just at Money in the Bank to get a match. Noise is heard elsewhere and they leave to find their office trashed again. Fandango: "Sweet Richard Simmons." There must be someone else so Breezango starts thinking. As they do, Ascension takes the concert tickets. That's better as Ascension was the lamest reveal they could have done.

Women's Title: Naomi vs. Lana

Lana is challenging and jumps Naomi during the Big Match Intros. The bell rings and Lana's sitout spinebuster gets two. So much for that as a finisher. Naomi kicks her in the head and hits the split legged moonsault to retain at 41 seconds.

Becky Lynch is ready to have a fair chance to win Money in the Bank. Here's Aiden English to sing about how awesome he is. Cue Randy Orton to cut him off and we take a break. Back with Orton sitting in a chair, having RKO'd English during the commercial. We look back at

Orton taking out the Singh Brothers last week (because we haven't had enough filler on this show yet) before Orton says he wants another shot at Mahal's title.

If he doesn't get it, he's going to beat Mahal up in the back. Then he'll beat Mahal up in the parking lot. Then he'll beat Mahal up in the airport. Then he'll beat Mahal up at next week's show too. At what point does Mahal file a restraining order? Here's Shane McMahon to keep Orton from going Mahal hunting by saying we can't have this. Orton is willing to be fired and go from city to city and spend all his money beating Mahal up.

Shane points out that the Singh Brothers did things that Orton has done before but he can sympathize with these feelings. The rematch is set for Battleground but there will be a stipulation chosen by Mahal. That's cool with Orton but here's Mahal to interrupt as well. Mahal says this is what's wrong with everything around here when Orton isn't worthy of a rematch. He mentions Great Khali being an inspiration (who he hated back in the day) and makes it a Punjabi Prison match. As luck would have it, there's a video all primed up and ready to go as soon as he says it.

AJ Styles and Kevin Owens come in to see Bryan with Owens saying AJ couldn't answer last week's Open Challenge because he's already been beaten. Styles makes an Anchorman reference which Owens doesn't get (I don't either as I only saw that movie once and didn't care for it. I'll wait here for you to gather your pitchforks.). Bryan has an idea: next week on the Fourth of July, we'll have a battle royal with the winner facing Owens for the title at Battleground.

Here are Mike and Maria Kanellis for their Smackdown debut, only to have Sami Zayn cut them off in just a few seconds.

Sami Zayn vs. Baron Corbin

Sami goes right after him to start and sends Corbin to the floor, only to get tossed into the barricade as we take a break. Back with Corbin still in control and grabbing a bearhug. Sami slips out and hits that hard clothesline of his and avoids a charge, sending Corbin shoulder first into the post. Corbin misses another charge

and gets rolled up for two before driving Sami right back into the same corner. A headbutt puts Corbin down but he catches a charging Sami with End of Days for the pin at 8:11.

Rating: C-. Just a quick win for Corbin here and that's why Sami is around: he can lose several matches but the one or two wins he does get are enough to fuel him for a long time. Corbin needed this win to get him back on track for the sake of him being Mr. Money in the Bank, which should keep him going for a long time.

Shinsuke Nakamura says Corbin is scared of him and for good reason.

Charlotte vs. Tamina vs. Becky Lynch vs. Carmella vs. Natalya

Money in the Bank. Everyone brawls on the floor to start, leaving Carmella to make the very early climb. Naturally it's very slow, allowing the other four to come in and stop her without too much effort. We're quickly down to Becky vs. Charlotte with Lynch being left alone, only to have Tamina come back to send her into the ladder. A not great looking Superfly Splash crushes Becky and we take a break.

Back with Natalya suplexing Charlotte but getting suplexed on the floor by Becky. Charlotte and Tamina fight over the ladder until Natalya makes a save and loads it up over Charlotte in the corner. Natalya starts to climb but Charlotte shoves her ladder up to make a ramp for the save. Carmella shoves the ladder over, only to take a pumphandle suplex from Becky.

Back from another break with Natalya climbing slowly enough that Charlotte can make a save. Everyone but Carmella gets shoved down but the other four are right back to lift the ladder up and carry it away from the case. Carmella dives onto Becky and Natalya, leaving Charlotte to drop Tamina again. Charlotte puts the ladder over Tamina and climbs but Carmella is back to grab her legs.

Tamina pushes the ladder up from the mat for another save and superkicks the air in front of Charlotte's face. A double powerbomb brings Carmella down but Natalya tries a Sharpshooter on Carmella. The announcers say it's to take the legs out, though HITTING HER

WITH A LADDER might make more sense.

Natalya goes after Charlotte and fights her into the crowd....and here's Ellsworth to climb the ladder. Becky shoves him over and crotches him on the top. Carmella makes another save and Becky hurts her leg on the landing. Carmella gives her a really bad chair shot to the back and climbs up for the briefcase at 24:29.

Rating: B-. General issues with ladder matches aside (the Sharpshooter, fighting into the crowd, slow climbing until the very end etc.), completely acceptable stuff for the most part. This was more long than good but they got the ending right, which was by far the most important thing they could have done here. Of course this begs the question of why they didn't just do this in the first place but you have to take what you can get from WWE most of the time. At least Carmella won and looks strong as she goes after the title now, which is what matters most.

Overall Rating: C. The ladder match saves a lot of this but it was clear they were filling in as much time as they could. I have no idea what the point of the Women's Title match was and the Hype Bros match was a bit of a waste of time as well. The ending worked though and that's the most important part, especially when next week changes everything as Cena is back. Not a bad show, but it's all about the main event and nothing more.

Results

Usos b. Hype Bros – Superfly Splash to Ryder

Naomi b. Lana – Split legged moonsault

Baron Corbin b. Sami Zayn – End of Days

Carmella won Money in the Bank

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Smackdown – May 9, 2017: The British Curse Turns Blue

Smackdown

Date: May 9, 2017

Location: O2 Arena, London, England

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton, John Bradshaw Layfield

We're taped tonight from London as we have less than two weeks before Backlash. That means it's Jinder Mahal time tonight and we get to see more of his rapid fire build towards being a main eventer. Other than that we might get more of the Welcoming Committee, which is turning into one of the worst heel stables I can remember in years. Let's get to it.

We open with a clip of last month's Six Pack Challenge where Mahal became #1 contender. Has Mojo Rawley had a match since then? Mahal then cost Randy Orton the House of Horrors match and stole the title belt.

Opening sequence.

Here's Orton to get things going and he has the title back, thanks to Shane McMahon taking it from Jinder last week. Orton says he lost because of Mahal, not because of Wyatt or that refrigerator. Before

Orton can get too far, here's Mahal to show off his promotional pictures with the title. Mahal promises to begin a new age at Backlash before speaking I believe Punjab.

Cue Kevin Owens to say no one cares about anything but him. Owens brags about ending Chris Jericho's career and, after he gets rid of AJ Styles, he wants the World Title. Now it's AJ coming out to quite the reaction to say he's the face that runs the place. Cue Baron Corbin but Sami Zayn jumps him from behind and the fights are on with the good guys cleaning house.

Becky Lynch vs. Natalya

Before the match, we get some generic "British people have bad teeth" jokes from James Ellsworth and Carmella. Naomi and Charlotte are here as Becky's seconds. The Welcoming Committee offers an early distraction so Natalya can send Becky to the floor and take over. We hit the abdominal stretch for a bit before the STRAIGHT FIRE forearm has Natalya reeling. The Bexploder looks to set up something on the top but the other women get in a fight, allowing Natalya to pull Becky off the top for the pin at 3:02. That's almost the same ending as Alexa Bliss vs. Mickie James from last night.

Rating: D+. The time and the familiar ending hut this one but real problem was taking fifteen minutes to introduce everyone and start the match. I'm sure this sets up a six woman tag for the pay per view, which should be a good place for either someone to turn heel or at least for the Welcoming Committee to get a win. Therefore, look for Charlotte to pin Carmella.

Lana is coming soon.

Charlotte blames Naomi for Becky's loss but Lynch comes in to cool them down. A six woman tag is set for the pay per view.

It's Fashion Files time! They're at the 02 Arena this week and Fandango is dressed as Sherlock Holmes while Breeze is a standard British cop. Fandango: "Cheerio." Breeze: "No thanks. I've already had my breakfast." They find some spilled lead paint that would only be worn by Uggos. That must be a ruse so Breezango can't tell them

apart but it doesn't really matter. The paint leads to a room where roaring is heard. They think something nefarious is going on in there but it's just the Ascension warming themselves up. Breeze: "I'm getting too old for this s***e." More funny stuff here as Breezango continues to look good.

Luke Harper vs. Erick Rowan

Rowan throws him to the floor to start as the announcers talk about how these two are running amuck with no one to guide them. Back in and Rowan scores with a spinning kick to the face and a splash for two. Harper suplexes his way out of the head vice but the discus lariat is blocked. Instead Erick gets two off a Side Effect and grabs the mask. The distraction (as the referee tries to figure out what the mask is supposed to look like) allows Rowan to poke Harper in the eye and grab a reverse spinning powerslam for the pin at 4:23.

Rating: D. Just a power match here but they really need to either stop pushing Harper for a few weeks and then having him lose over and over again. I mean, do they really think there's value in Erick Rowan winning with a lame powerslam? This didn't work and the booking makes my head hurt so we'll move on.

Here's Dolph Ziggler to call out Shinsuke Nakamura. He's been here for eight years (How has it only been that long?) but the fans treat him like a disease. Who do the people cheer for now? That starts a Nakamura chant as this is starting to sound like Chris Jericho vs. AJ Styles last year.

Now people are calling Nakamura an artist but Ziggler is the strongest man in WWE because he never needed the people. This brings out Nakamura to tell Ziggler to shut up. Nakamura is ready to show him so here's a referee but Ziggler says nope. Dolph says we do this on his time and wants the match at Backlash. The sneak attack earns Dolph a beating.

Sami is fired up to team with Orton and Styles. Zayn tries to run a strategy session but seems to just annoy his partners. By the time he announces their team as the winners, they've both left.

New Day is coming and we get a video game themed promo with every other team being listed on a character select screen.

Breezango vs. Ascension

Fandango chops at Konnor to start but it's off to Viktor who runs him over. A chinlock doesn't last long and it's off to Breeze for some house cleaning. Fandango makes a blind tag and it's an atomic drop into the Last Dance for the in at 2:39.

Post match the Usos come out to say twelve days over and over while listing off various things that Breezango can do to each others' backs (with Jimmy clearly trying not to crack up).

Mojo Rawley is giving some kids a tour of the backstage area but stops to tell them a story about Andre the Giant. Andre did a lot of things but Mojo switches to a story about a boy who was different growing up. He was bullied as a kid but then he used it as motivation to become a legend. Mojo pulls out the trophy and the kids are amazed. I've started to like Mojo more and more lately and I'd love to see him get some more TV time.

Rusev hasn't heard about his demand for a World Title shot but he'll be here next week to get an answer.

Randy Orton/Sami Zayn/AJ Styles vs. Jinder Mahal/Baron Corbin/Kevin Owens

Sami and Corbin get things started but a quick tag brings in Owens. There's no contact though as it's off to Mahal for some kicks to the chest. Sami grabs a headscissors and brings in Orton so Mahal tags out to Owens. The threat of an RKO sends Owens out to the floor and we take a break.

Back with Corbin working over Sami and handing it off to Owens as the eternal feud continues. Sami is tossed outside for a stomping from Mahal, drawing AJ over to stare him down. Corbin's chinlock keeps things slow so Jinder comes in for one of his own. The stomping keeps going and we take a break.

Back with AJ getting the hot tag to come in and clean house as everything breaks down. The running forearm drops a seated Corbin

and Sami hits a big flip dive onto all three villains. Owens breaks up the Phenomenal Forearm though and Styles and Corbin are down. It's Mahal breaking up the tag though and dropping a knee for two on Styles.

Owens comes back in for some very aggressive stomping and a chinlock of his own. That's quite the popular move tonight and in no way a method to stretch out a long main event. The backplash hits knees though and the hot tag brings in Orton. Everything breaks down and Owens eats the RKO, only to have Jinder's cobra clutch slam put Orton away at 22:14.

Rating: C+. The match was more long than good and the ending extended the Mahal vs. Orton feud but this felt like a way to fill in TV time instead of a match that needed to go this long. I'm not sure how much people are going to buy Mahal's cobra clutch slam as a threat to beat Orton but at least they're setting it up as a possibility.

Overall Rating: D+. This was a rough one as it felt like a shortened version of Raw. The problem is I don't watch Smackdown for a shortened version of Raw but rather something far more interesting and exciting. To be fair though, I think we can blame that on the UK tour as those shows are almost always lifeless. Some stuff was set up for the pay per view though and that's important with just a show left beforehand.

Results

Natalya b. Becky Lynch – Natalya pulled her off the top rope

Erick Rowan b. Luke Harper – Spinning reverse powerslam

Breezango b. Ascension – Last Dance to Viktor

Jinder Mahal/Kevin Owens/Baron Corbin b. Sami Zayn/Randy Orton/AJ Styles – Cobra clutch slam to Orton

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Wrestlemania XXXIII

Preview: Smackdown Women's Title: Six Pack Challenge

Maybe the swerve of the night.

With Asuka retaining the NXT Women's Title at "Takeover: Orlando", I have almost no idea who is going to win here. I can't imagine they'll throw Nikki Bella in there again and as much as I'd love to see Alexa Bliss retain the title, I have a feeling we're getting Naomi winning the title again for the big hometown pop, because, and I know I say this a lot, Naomi winning the title is suddenly this huge emotional moment, especially in her hometown.

That being said, I think Carmella actually gets the title here. WWE has a very strong tendency to throw in a major curveball and this seems to be a great option. While I think they'll throw in some names as there's no guarantee that the match will be limited to six, I don't think any of the surprises (whoever they may be) will win the title. I'll take Carmella in the swerve of the night.

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Smackdown – March 28, 2017: Flying Sparks From Mouths and Graves

Smackdown

Date: March 28, 2017

Location: Richmond Coliseum, Richmond, Virginia

Commentators: Tom Phillips, John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga

It's the final Smackdown before Wrestlemania and that means....well likely it means a bunch of promos and a few matches here and there but that's standard operating procedure for this time of year. I'd expect a big push towards Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt and some more names being announced for the battle royal so let's get to it.

No Mauro again, though now we know why (having a severe bout of depression apparently so hopefully he's getting the rest/treatment he needs).

Here's Daniel Bryan to get us going with a contract signing between AJ Styles and Shane McMahon. Shane says this place is supposed to be somewhere families can come and be entertained with AJ as a major part of that. Personal feelings aside, Shane knows AJ is phenomenal. AJ agrees, but Shane keeps going by saying it was AJ's ego that got him in trouble. It was his ego that cost him the WWE Championship and got inside his head because he wasn't on the Wrestlemania card (I'd think he has a right to be angry over that one).

Shane is ready for him though and knows he'll bring out the best in AJ. The boss signs and AJ reminds him that this isn't going to be a street fight but rather a regular match, where Styles in

untouchable. AJ lists off some of the greats that Shane has been in the ring with but none of them were the Phenomenal AJ Styles. The contract is signed and the table is tossed but Bryan stops things just in time. He asks for a handshake and Shane is willing but AJ walks away smiling.

Becky Lynch vs. Carmella

Alexa Bliss and Mickie James are on commentary and James Ellsworth does Carmella's entrance. For some reason Carmella gives Ellsworth her gum and runs away from the threat of a kick to the ribs. As Carmella goes after Becky, Bliss and James get in a fight which spills into the ring. Both of them wind up hitting Carmella and that's a DQ (which will be treated as a no contest because WWE doesn't quite understand the basic rules of wrestling) at 2:13.

Becky Lynch/Mickie James vs. Carmella/Alexa Bliss

Joined in progress with Mickie hitting Bliss with a running dropkick for two. Becky comes in to a nice pop but Carmella tags herself in, sending Bliss into some screeching. Bliss offers a bit of a distraction though and Mickie gets kicked down as the heels take over. Did Mickie ever turn face? She doesn't really need to but it would be a nice plot point to clarify.

Bliss grabs a chinlock but here's Natalya down the ramp as we take a break. Back with Natalya on commentary and Bliss charging into an elbow in the corner. The hot tag brings in Becky, who Natalya calls a Pippi Longstocking knockoff. That's not enough for Natalya as she gets on the apron for a distraction, allowing Ellsworth to trip Lynch up and give Carmella the pin at 9:12.

Rating: C-. This didn't have time to go anywhere but the ending was the right call as I don't think anyone is buying Carmella as a major threat to win the match on Sunday. Have her win here and give her a little momentum going into Wrestlemania and things will be a little more interesting.

The brawl continues post match until Naomi makes her return for the save. In case it wasn't clear enough for you, Naomi officially announces her entrance into the Women's Title match.

Tyler Breeze, as Nikki Bella, offers his services for the Women's Title match. Bryan says no but Fandango comes in and they get spots in the Andre Battle Royal, plus in a ten man tag with some other

participants tonight. Not a bad parting gift.

Here are Miz and Maryse for MizTV. Tonight we get a special treat: the rest of the "lost" Total Bellas episodes (if Miz isn't Bryan this time, I'll be rather disappointed). After a recap of last week, Miz (as Cena) yells about people being late for dinner. Miz has some issues with reading his cue cards until Maryse (playing Nikki) starts talking about the pitter patter of little feet. This brings in the other guests: Maryse as Brie and MIZ AS BRYAN!!!

Daniel, with a huge beard, needs a phone book to sit on and the couple brags about marriage. Daniel isn't happy with having steak but is pleased with his juicibox. Cena reads off the rules for how to eat and, again, it's hilarious given how robotic Cena comes off on Total Bellas. Another fake proposal sees John demand that Nikki take her rules seriously. This time Nikki asks John to marry her and it's to be continued.

Part two is after a break with Cena saying no because it would damage his brand. He's hustled the fans by convincing them he's something he's not. He's loyal to himself and he only respects money. Cena can never give up because someone more deserving, such as Miz, will take his spot away. You can't see him because there's no real person to be seen. Miz and Maryse flip the costumes away and promise to make Wrestlemania their curtain calls.

Without WWE, Cena can just lumber around and pretend to be a star. After Wrestlemania, everyone will know that their lives are total BS. This was great serious stuff to go with the comedy, which isn't a surprise from these two anymore. Back in the arena, here are Cena and Bella to respond. Cena makes fun of everything Miz did and says sure Nikki and Brie have moments where they're too dumb to tell each other apart (the fact that this is considered ok might sum up my entire issue with reality TV).

After the praise, Cena asks how Nikki could hold Maryse out of WWE if she's here now? Maybe Maryse wasn't asked back because she didn't do anything in her first run (What exactly did Nikki do in her first run John? Maryse had two Divas Titles to Nikki's one and was a far better character and worker. I know why he said it but that doesn't make it true.).

Next we have Miz's Hollywood theory for Cena, but John is more brand loyal than anyone other than Vince McMahon and no one can get rid of

him. Miz leaves to make movies of his own but only ones Cena made first. That's what Cena can't get: what is Miz doing here anyway? There's a Women's Revolution going on right now and last week, Nikki beat up Tyler Breeze (Can we never bring that up again?) and Miz is using Maryse to get on Total Divas. Oh and how many kids do Miz and Maryse have? Cena: "You firing blanks there sport?"

Cena calls them all talk because Miz never knows how to stop running his mouth. John rips off the gear so he's here man to man and promises to destroy Miz and Maryse on Wrestlemania. If you want to talk tough, you better be tough but Miz is a p***y. Miz is offered a free shot but the villains back away again. Nikki promises a beating on Sunday to wrap things up.

This was OUTSTANDING stuff and again some of the best talking Miz has ever done. While Miz and Maryse have been nailing the story from the beginning, this was the first time I really bought Cena's rebuttal. Basically Cena had been saying Miz didn't know himself but now Cena actually had some examples to really hammer the point home. I'm looking forward to the match and I'm actually buying Miz and Maryse having a chance, which is a lot more than I was expecting. Nikki beating Maryse would be far more acceptable than Cena beating Miz, but you can probably pencil in the stereo submissions.

American Alpha/Mojo Rawley/Heath Slater/Rhyno vs. Usos/Breezango/Dolph Ziggler

All ten of them will be in the battle royal. Jordan and Ziggler start things off with an amateur sequence on the mat and Dolph is just in over his head. Gable comes in to take over on Ziggler's arm and it's off to Slater for more of the same. Rhyno adds a belly to belly as this is one sided so far.

Back from an early break with Gable getting taken into the wrong corner so Fandango can come in for two off a hard whip into the corner. I know he's a low level guy but maybe an improvement in offense would help. Jimmy dives over to break up the tag but Gable drops him as well, meaning it's off to the (near) hometown boy with Rawley cleaning house. A parade of superkicks is capped off with Rhyno Goring Ziggler, followed by Rawley's running right hand knocking out Breeze at 11:00.

Rating: D+. Did Breeze run over Vince's dog or something? At least he lost to a power move from a power wrestler this time instead of

being beaten up by Nikki Bella. This was a fun way to help set up the battle royal and even though none of these people have a chance, I can appreciate throwing in some false hope.

Luke Harper has seen the truth: he doesn't need Bray Wyatt. Bray should run.

We run down the Wrestlemania card. Naomi is officially added to the Smackdown Women's Title match, which has been moved to the pre-show. As a bonus, the Raw Tag Team Titles match will now be a ladder match.

We see Bray doing....something to Orton with that stick thing last week. Yeah I'm still not sure what that was, though multiple masked men helping him is interesting.

Bray Wyatt vs. Luke Harper

Non-title and Harper is now in a clean black shirt. Dang he really is mixing it up. Bray starts fast with the running body attack but gets dropkicked out to the floor and punched in the face. Harper throws him over the barricade and we take an early break. Back with Luke escaping the release Rock Bottom, only to have Bray block the powerbomb. That means the Rock Bottom can connect, only to have Sister Abigail broken up. Luke gets in the suicide dive and a big boot is good for two. Back up and Bray goes into trance mode, freezing Luke long enough for Sister Abigail to put him away at 8:33.

Rating: D. Yeah I really wasn't feeling this one and I really would have preferred Harper being allowed to get a title shot after a few weeks' build. This could have been something special but it was still the same Bray hypnosis bit (Now I want to watch an Osirian Portal match.) with Harper losing the big match. He's starting to make me think of Cesaro and that's not a good thing.

Post match Orton appears on screen, kneeling over Sister Abigail's grave. Bray has claimed that Abigail gave her powers to him but Orton pulls out the same weapon used on him last week (How did he get that?) and stabs the dirt. Orange sparks fly out to end the show on a rather dumb note.

Overall Rating: C. This was an acceptable go home show but as is so often the case with WWE, it's all over the place. First of all, you have a classic segment with Cena vs. Miz. Those two have some very

underrated chemistry together and I've liked their stuff since all the way back in 2009. I'm not crazy on the mixed tag but they've really brought me around on it.

On the other hand though, WWE slipped on two major matches: the Orton vs. Wyatt match with the really stupid ending and Corbin vs. Ambrose with the really stupid lack of everything. You would think they could at least have a promo (like they had on Talking Smack) but in this case, there wasn't as much that could be cut.

Finally, the Women's Title match being moved to the pre-show is fine and if nothing else it eliminates a bunch of entrances that would take up pay per view time. As great as Alexa has been, I'm fine with them just being on the pre-show as it's not like people are really dying to see this one.

Overall, Smackdown should be fine on Sunday though I'm a bit worried about how well Orton vs. Wyatt is going to go. If they do a hard hitting, back and forth match, everything will be fine and it'll come close to match of the night. If they do something stupid with Sister Abigail appearing....well it might be better than Orton getting the title, though I'm not sure he will. Anyway, fine go home show but Sunday is still a potential big misfire for reasons beyond Smackdown's control.

Results

Carmella b. Becky Lynch via DQ when Alexa Bliss and Mickie James interfered

Carmella/Alexa Bliss b. Becky Lynch/Mickie James – Rollup to Lynch

Mojo Rawley/Heath Slater/Rhyno/American Alpha b.

Usos/Breezango/Dolph Ziggler – Running right hand to Breeze

Bray Wyatt b. Luke Harper – Sister Abigail

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Smackdown – March 7, 2017: That Old Feeling

Smackdown

Date: March 7, 2017

Location: Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, Indiana

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, Mauro Ranallo, Tom Phillips, David Otunga

We're down to four shows left before Wrestlemania XXXIII and tonight we're likely finding out who is challenging for the Smackdown World Title. I know you might have heard that one before but this time seems to be the real thing. Tonight AJ Styles faces Randy Orton for the title shot against Bray Wyatt at the biggest show of the year. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Randy Orton joining Bray Wyatt, seemingly with the intent to betray him later. That led us to last week where Orton burned Bray's barn down, presumably destroying Sister Abigail's grave in the process. I know I'm older than the average fan, but in my day, felonious arson recorded on tape wouldn't be seen as a face turn.

Here are Shane McMahon and Daniel Bryan to get things going. They're not sure who should get the title shot as Daniel thinks it should be Orton while Shane prefers Styles. Bryan talks about how the winner of the Royal Rumble has to get the shot. Shane says no one has ever given up their shot like Orton did (Orton would be the third I believe). This leads to more recaps and the fans seem to like the idea of Styles getting the shot. Therefore, tonight we're having a match for the #1 contendership. This too quite a bit longer than

necessary.

Post break AJ gets in the bosses' faces and says he's tired of this anti-AJ conspiracy. AJ makes it clear that he's not afraid of fire.

James Ellsworth/Carmella vs. John Cena/Nikki Bella

Before the match, Ellsworth says he beat AJ Styles three times in a row and it took Cena three times to get his first win. That makes Ellsworth the mack daddy of Smackdown! The women start and here are Miz and Maryse at the bell. The distraction lets Carmella get in a superkick and we take an early break.

Back with Miz and Maryse on commentary and Nikki kicking Carmella to the floor. There's the hot tag off to Cena and Ellsworth has to come in. Ellsworth slaps him in the face and gets ProtoPlexed. Carmella gets in Cena's face and eats a forearm, setting up a double Shuffle, stereo AA/Rack Attack 2.0 and double STF's for the tap at 7:11.

Rating: D. This was completely not about the match of course and there's nothing wrong with that. The idea here is to set up the mixed tag at Wrestlemania and having Cena and Bella dominate a couple of goons in their first match together is fine. This accomplished a goal and that's all it needed to do.

Miz and Maryse lay them out post match with Miz going on a rant about how he and Maryse have been the real first couple of WWE for a year now and it sickens him to see someone pretend to have real love for the sake of promoting their brands. Maryse throws the mic at Bella and we're out.

Orton suggests that AJ run.

Rick Rude Hall of Fame announcement.

Curt Hawkins is in the ring to call out Dean Ambrose for attacking him before their match last week. Ambrose comes out and sends Hawkins packing before saying he wanted to call out Baron Corbin. Baron pops up on screen to say Ambrose should enjoy what he has while he has it. Whenever Corbin wants to, he's taking what Dean values most. Ambrose heads to the back but stops to give Hawkins Dirty Deeds on the floor.

Women's History Month video on Trish Stratus and Lita.

Post break, Ambrose is looking for Corbin.

Mojo Rawley, in a suit, says he wants his Wrestlemania moment.

Therefore, he's announcing his entrance into the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal. Dolph Ziggler comes up and says Mojo has to earn that kind of a moment. Mojo: "Is that why you don't have one?"

Dean is still looking for Corbin when Baron jumps him with a pipe to the knee and another shot to the chest. Corbin: "You found me!"

Dean: "All right. Good talk!" Corbin kicks him again for saying something that stupid. Baron finds a forklift and lowers the lift onto Dean's chest. Every the geniuses, the referees try to lift it off of him until one of them wakes up and presses the UP button.

Here are Alexa Bliss and Mickie James for a chat. Bliss is here to announce her opponent for Wrestlemania but first, let's talk about who it won't be. It's not going to be Naomi because she's off feeling the ow. It won't be Nikki Bella, who is in the trainers' room being nursed back to help by her square jawed superman. It won't be Carmella with her weird chin. It won't be Chuckie, who you all know as Becky Lynch.

Bliss has gotten rid of her over and over and she just keeps coming back (I hear Rick Steiner has experience in that area.). Cue Becky to says he has a Beclaration (Becky: "You don't have to call it that. I've done better.") to say she's taking the title back at Wrestlemania.

This brings out Natalya to tell Beaker to step aside. Natalya thinks Becky is out of her and Alexa's league but Alexa thinks Natalya has been getting into the catnip. See, Natalya is the worst there is, the worst there was and the worst there ever will be. Mickie grabs the mic and says Becky and Natalya are ruining this moment.

Of course it's going to be Mickie getting the title shot but Alexa doesn't seem to agree. Becky points out that she beat Mickie twice last week. Alexa: "See...what had happened was...". Natalya calls Mickie ugly and here's Daniel Bryan to break it up. He and Shane

heard Alexa call herself the greatest woman on the Smackdown roster and there's only one way to find out if that's true. Therefore, it's going to be Alexa defending against the entire division at Wrestlemania. As for tonight, let's have a holla holla (Daniel's words) tag match.

Natalya/Becky Lynch vs. Alexa Bliss/Mickie James

Joined in progress with Bliss shoving Natalya and getting slapped in the face for her efforts. Natalya does her stepover into the basement dropkick (clearly missed) for two and it's off to Becky via a somewhat forceful tag. Mickie comes in as well and takes a few dropkicks, followed by a Becky nip-up. It's back to Bliss who throws Becky down by the hair for two as JBL wants to know what kind of a match Bliss will be defending her title in (it was never specified). A quick trip to the floor goes badly for Lynch and we take a break. Back with Lynch still getting double teamed and James grabbing a chinlock. Becky finally throws Alexa away but she opts to clothesline Mickie instead of tagging out. Natalya doesn't care for this and comes in with a German suplex on her partner (the fans seem surprised that a heel would do a heelish thing) before walking out. Bliss tags herself in and steals the pin at 12:45.

Rating: D+. Nothing to see here but the angle advancement at the end was fine. The title match is going to be a huge mess but you have to expect that at a Wrestlemania. I'd much rather it be Becky vs. Bliss for the title, though that doesn't exactly benefit the rest of the division on a very, very packed show.

Mickie kicks Bliss in the head post match.

We look back at the forklift incident. Ambrose has been taken to a medical facility with possibly broken ribs.

Austin Aries wants us to watch 205 Live.

AJ Styles vs. Randy Orton

The winner faces Bray Wyatt for the title at Wrestlemania. Before the match, AJ says he should be the champ again because he made the B show into the A show. Then you have Randy Orton who burned a man's

house down and is getting praised for it. No one is keeping him from being in the main event on the grandest stage of them all and making Wrestlemania phenomenal.

Orton tries the RKO in a hurry but AJ bails out to the floor. Back in and AJ grabs a chinlock before Orton sends him hard into the corner. Styles starts kicking at the knee and Orton falls out to the floor as we take a break. Back with AJ staying on the leg and grabbing a chinlock. Orton pops back up with a full nelson slam for one but gets caught in the Hoshi Geroshi for two.

The Calf Crusher goes on but Orton slowly crawls over to the ropes. Orton comes right back with the hanging DDT but AJ gets sent outside. That looks to set up the springboard 450 so Orton coils, only to have AJ springboard up but drop right back down to the apron in a good fakeout. The springboard 450 misses though and a pop up RKO sends Orton to the title match at 18:45.

Rating: B-. This was a bit more slow paced than you would expect but Orton winning was the most obvious ending since...well since Cena and Ellsworth were in the same match earlier tonight. Orton vs. Wyatt is the logical move and I'm sure we're going to be seeing Styles vs. Shane (as in the guy who thought AJ should get the spot in the first place). I loved that fakeout spot though as it shows someone thinking in a match, which you just don't see enough anymore.

Overall Rating: C+. Here's a great example of a show that wasn't about the wrestling. Tonight was about pushing stories forward towards Wrestlemania and building interest in them. I had a good time with the show and multiple matches were advanced. There's a good feeling when Wrestlemania season is upon us and I'm getting fired up for the show. This was a good night and I had fun getting ready for Wrestlemania.

Results

Nikki Bella/John Cena b. Carmella/James Ellsworth – Double STF's
Alexa Bliss/Mickie James b. Natalya/Becky Lynch – Bliss pinned Lynch after a German suplex from Natalya

Randy Orton b. AJ Styles – RKO

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Smackdown – February 21, 2017: But It's A Battle Royal!

Smackdown

Date: February 21, 2017

Location: Citizens Business Bank Arena, Ontario, California

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga. Tom Phillips, Mauro Ranallo

It's a double shot tonight as we have a pair of big gimmick matches to get us further along the Road to Wrestlemania. First up it's Natalya vs. Nikki Bella in a falls count anywhere match which should be the blowoff to their feud. Other than that it's a ten man battle royal with the winner getting the World Title shot against Bray Wyatt at Wrestlemania XXXIII. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's triple threat match for the

Smackdown World Title and Randy Orton's decision to turn down his title shot against Bray Wyatt.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to get things going. We're forty days from Wrestlemania and the road to get there is full of twists and turns. He brings out Women's Champion Naomi, who has been given a week to either give the title back to Alexa Bliss or face her in a rematch. We actually get the YOU DESERVE IT chants and come on now. Wyatt was a stretch for that but NAOMI? She gets a chant about how hard she's worked to get here? Give me a break.

It turns out that she's injured and isn't going to be able to defend her title. Naomi talks about how life can change in such a hurry because she was on top of the mountain a week ago and now she's looking up from the bottom. She hands over the title and says she's probably out of Wrestlemania as well.

However, she's going to be back to take the title from whomever is borrowing it in her absence. Naomi leaves and here's Alexa Bliss to laugh about the performance. With Naomi gone, Bliss says that she should be the champion since she never got her rematch. Bryan doesn't think so and the title is going to be on the line RIGHT NOW.

Women's Title: Becky Lynch vs. Alexa Bliss

The title is vacant coming in. Becky starts fast with some rollups but gets kned in the ribs and we hit the choking on the ropes. Bliss' basic offense continues until a quick Bexploder sends her outside as we take a break. Back with Becky getting two off a missile dropkick, which of course warrants a crowd reaction shot. Bliss gets in a quick shot to the throat for the pin (while holding trunks) and the title at 9:03 in an ending that is as sudden as it sounds.

Rating: D+. The ending really hurt things here as it just came and went without any real build to it. Bliss winning the title makes sense as this felt like a quick match for the pure sake of giving the title back to Alexa. To be fair, it's not like she should have

lost the thing in the first place. At least it's back where it should be now.

Mickie James comes down to celebrate and gets in a fight with Becky.

Dean Ambrose wants his chance to main event Wrestlemania back and if he gets to break Baron Corbin's legs in the process, so be it.

Kalisto wants to be in the main event so tens of thousands of people can chant LUCHA LUCHA LUCHA.

Miz runs down his resume and thinks being in the main event of Wrestlemania should be added.

Natalya is ready to expose Nikki Bella as a fraud.

Breezango vs. American Alpha

Non-title with Breezango jumping them at the bell. A double kick to Jordan's head puts him in trouble. That lasts all of thirty seconds as Jordan gets over for the tag, setting up the Steiner Bulldog for the pin on Fandango at 1:45.

The Usos show up in the crowd to say they're coming for the titles. Just not tonight you see. A lot of trash is talked with threats of jumping Alpha from behind.

Black History Month video on Jackie Robinson.

AJ Styles says he's going to Wrestlemania.

Dolph Ziggler superkicks the wall of the interview set.

Mojo Rawley is ready to win another battle royal.

Luke Harper is done obeying Bray Wyatt and after tonight, there's nowhere left for Bray to run. These promos for the battle royal are a great touch and it's even better that most of them have had a different backdrop (Harper was in the Wyatt area, Mojo was in the locker room, AJ was just backstage etc.). You don't get these enough and they can do a lot of good in the span of thirty seconds.

Nikki Bella says after tonight, Natalya will be the broken Hart.

Nikki Bella vs. Natalya

Falls count anywhere. An early spear puts Natalya down and Nikki

grabs her facebuster for an early two. It's already table time (falls count anywhere means No DQ by definition) but Natalya baseball slides it into Nikki's face. They quickly head over the barricade with Natalya doing You Can't See Me for a nice touch.

Nikki comes back with a shot off the barricade and the Disaster Kick (looked great for a change) to put Natalya down for two. Back to ringside they go with Natalya getting in a few kendo stick shots before loading up the announcers' table. Nikki fights out of a powerbomb attempt and gets in an Alabama Slam onto the table for a close two.

We come back from a break with Nikki getting to the ropes to break the Sharpshooter (which Natalya breaks, causing the announcers to accurately point out that she didn't have to). Nikki no sells a suplex on the ramp and they head backstage with Nikki being sent into a conveniently placed Maryse.

Nikki sends her face first into a mirror for two of her own and it's time to come back into the arena. Natalya can't get the Sharpshooter as Natalya reverses into the Fearless Lock, only to have Maryse come out with a pipe to attack Nikki (really badly that is but at least she tried). Miz drags her off and Natalya gets the cheap pin at 14:02.

Rating: B-. The match had its good and bad moments but I liked it much more than I was expecting to. This was a better brawl than I was expecting and one of Nikki's better matches, likely because it didn't involve a ton of wrestling. Unfortunately it seems that we're really getting that stupid mixed tag at Wrestlemania, even though I can't imagine how they came to the conclusion that it's the best possible idea.

Diamond Dallas Page Hall of Fame announcement.

Baron Corbin says he's winning.

Apollo Crews says he's winning.

Orton and Wyatt will be watching.

Battle Royal

Baron Corbin, Apollo Crews, Dolph Ziggler, The Miz, Luke Harper, Kalisto, AJ Styles, John Cena, Dean Ambrose, Mojo Rawley

The winner get the Wrestlemania title shot. After the long entrances, they waste no time in getting started with Ambrose and Corbin slugging it out in the corner. The fans are almost entirely split between Styles and Cena and you can tell they're way into this instead of not really caring. Cena and Ziggler are both sent to the apron but quickly make it back in. A bunch of near eliminations go nowhere and Cena can't get Corbin up for the AA.

We take a break and come back with Corbin as the only man standing. He tosses Rawley for the first elimination but eats a superkick from Ziggler. Kalisto gets up and starts kicking away until kind of botching what looked like a moonsault press to Dean. Ziggler and Kalisto both wind up on the apron and a pull of the mask sets up a superkick to eliminate Kalisto, getting us down to eight. Crews kicks Ziggler in the head though (DANG he healed from that knee injury in a hurry) and it's down to seven. Ziggler chairs Kalisto though and Corbin tosses Crews, who chases Ziggler off with the chair.

We're down to Corbin, Cena, Miz, Ambrose, Harper and Styles and it's AJ having to flip out of the AA. Almost everyone hits a hard strike and it's Miz in the middle of the ring, meaning it's time for the running corner dropkicks all around. Cena pops up and backdrops Miz out, which is probably a way to keep setting up that stupid mixed tag.

Back from another break with Styles and Ambrose knocking each other down. Cena loads up the Five Knuckle Shuffle on Styles but walks into End of Days. Ambrose tosses Corbin from behind and is quickly pulled to the floor for another End of Days. With Cena staggering to his feet, Miz sneaks in and tosses him, with Cena leaving a bit too calmly.

So we're down to Styles, Ambrose and Harper with Dean getting back inside. All three are quickly put on the apron for a three way slugout with Dean having to hang on very carefully. AJ gets on

Dean's shoulders and gets back in, allowing Harper to superkick Dean out to the floor, leaving us with two. Harper stays on the apron and pulls AJ over the top to the join him but they're both back in a few seconds later. Luke suplexes him to the apron again but quickly follows him out there, only to have Harper pull him out at 22:22.

Rat... .Actually not so fast as the referees say Harper hit at the same time (it wasn't even close and they're not showing replays) so here's Daniel Bryan for a ruling. The official decision is a draw so there's no winner. However, we will determine a winner next week. Harper blasts AJ with the discus lariat and poses to a rather mixed reaction to end the show.

Rating: B. That ending really dragged things down as this was a heck of a battle royal leading up to the finish. Harper winning was the logical call here and I'm really not sure why they went with that double ending. From what I could tell, Harper's feet were either on the apron or the steps when he landed but officially it was a tie. I don't get that.

Wyatt and Orton pop up on screen to laugh at Harper to end the show. That also suggests that there's no reason for AJ to have been involved in the ending like that.

Overall Rating: B-. I'm still trying to get over that ending as it really hurt what should have been a big moment. Unless they're still trying to force AJ vs. Shane (who I don't remember seeing recently) out of this, that should have been Harper winning clean. Still though, the rest of the show was good enough and it was certainly eventful but the Women's Title change and the ending felt somewhere between forced and messy, neither of which are good.

Results

Alexa Bliss b. Mickie James – Rollup with a handful of trunks

American Alpha b. Breezango – Steiner Bulldog to Fandango

Natalya b. Nikki Bella – Pin after a pipe shot from Maryse

A battle royal went to a draw

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Elimination Chamber 2017 Preview

We're two weeks removed from one of the biggest shows of the year and that means we're ready for another major pay per view which will likely change the way "Wrestlemania XXXIII" looks. That's right, it's time for "Elimination Chamber 2017", a "Smackdown Live" show with two matches containing eighteen wrestlers between them. It's a rather interesting looking card so let's get to it.

Kickoff Show: Mojo Rawley vs. Curt Hawkins

It's quite the change to go from a Tag Team Title match to this in the span of two weeks. I'm not sure if this really is the best they can do but it really does show how limited the "Smackdown Live" roster is in some places. This seems more like a match that should set up a tag team later on but for now, we've got the two of them fighting in the battle over who was a better partner for Zack Ryder.

I'll go with Rawley here as he seems to have the bigger upside since Hawkins' character has died a horrible death since having an interesting debut. Rawley could be something with his ridiculous

charisma but I don't know if it's going to be enough to carry him past the midcard. At least he's getting a shot here but it's going to take more than the Hammer Time dance. He'll likely win here though.

Women's Title: Naomi vs. Alexa Bliss

It makes sense to get some of these out of the way as there are three women's matches on this one show. We'll start with Bliss defending the title in a pretty thrown together match, which actually isn't as much of a layup as it seems. I know Naomi is the athletic freak who always seems to come up just short of winning the big one but Bliss seems vulnerable enough for Naomi to finally pull it off.

That being said, I don't think she actually does it and Bliss will retain here. Bliss has turned into one heck of a champion and there are a lot of options to take the title off of her in a really big way. Losing it to Naomi at "Elimination Chamber 2017" really isn't all that big of a deal and I can't imagine Naomi defending the thing at the biggest show of the year. So yeah, Bliss retains in a match that could range from highly entertaining to a horrible disaster.

Kalisto/Apollo Crews vs. Dolph Ziggler

Can someone explain this one to me without making my head hurt very badly? From what I can gather, Crews and Kalisto have beaten the heel Ziggler now but due to him attacking both of them with chairs, they now get to fight him at the same time. You know, the faces getting the advantage over the heel who is supposed to be the one getting the big push out of this.

Somehow though, Ziggler probably wins here and we completely forget about his losses because that's how things work in WWE: nothing matters until the ending, which makes things even dumber than they were in the first place. Kalisto and Crews aren't likely to go anywhere (aside from a big ladder match for the Intercontinental Title) and for some reason WWE still thinks Ziggler is going to be the big deal all these years later. At least he'll retain his title as most overrated and uninteresting performer in WWE.

Nikki Bella vs. Natalya

Now here's the real women's main event because we don't know how much longer Bella is going to be around for us to call her fearless and stand in awe of her greatness. Again I'm not sure what the story is supposed to be here as Bella has looked like an idiot for not realizing that Natalya attacked her at "Survivor Series 2016" while everyone else knew it. Then there was something about who sells the most t-shirts and a potential wedding to John Cena because EVERYTHING IS ABOUT BELLA AND CENA GETTING MARRIED ONE DAY BECAUSE...sorry this isn't "Total Divas" so we'll move on.

Naturally Bella wins because Natalya is just a wrestler (yeah earlier this week, Bella said Natalya is only a great wrestler. I love that we've somehow reached the point where "YOU'RE REALLY GOOD AT WHAT WE'RE DOING!" is the biggest insult that can be mustered and by a face no less. Bella wins of course and I continue to try to figure out what the heck she's talking about.

Luke Harper vs. Randy Orton

In a way this is one of the more interesting matches on the card, even though there's only one way it could possibly go. It's kind of hard to get behind the concept of Harper having a chance here as Orton is on his way to "Wrestlemania XXXIII" but at least we could get a strong performance out of him, as Harper is so often known to deliver. The idea here of Orton taking Bray Wyatt's attention and Harper turning on the team as a result is interesting but it's not enough here.

So of course Orton wins and I don't think there's an easier match on the show to predict. Orton is on a higher level than Harper right now (and has been for his entire career of course) so there isn't exactly a ton of doubt to this one, nor should there be. If this were at another show with Orton not coming off winning the Royal Rumble, I might be able to be tempted into an upset pick but it's just not happening here.

Becky Lynch vs. Mickie James

We'll wrap up the ladies' trifecta here with a straight grudge match. James says that she was the one who should get the credit for the Women's Revolution while Lynch says James left when things started getting tough (of course we know that it was really Stephanie McMahon who started the Revolution by just talking about it). This was preceded by James dressing up like a luchadora, which kind of fits her given how off the wall she can be at times.

I think I'll go with James here as I can't bring myself to say WWE will go with Lynch as we head into "Wrestlemania XXXIII". There's a logic to having Lynch fight back and regain the title in Orlando but I have a feeling we're more likely to get a big multi-woman tag or some mess like that instead. Therefore, James wins here and Lynch lives to fight another day, as is the case so often with her.

Tag Team Turmoil

There are so many teams in this match that aren't worth mentioning so I'll just go with the defending American Alpha and their most likely challengers, the Usos. There's just no reason to believe that the other four teams have any real chance of winning so we'll just go with these guys, assuming there's no debuting team added on to the end.

That being said, I'll take Alpha to retain and continue their rather ho-hum title reign. The problem here is the same thing that has plagued so many NXT talents: WWE feels the need to take everything that makes the team work in the first place and then get rid of those things for the sake of...well I have no idea actually. Alpha wins here and prays every night that the Revival is called up and half the roster gets a bad case of the flu.

John Cena vs. Bray Wyatt vs. Dean Ambrose vs. AJ Styles vs. Baron Corbin vs. The Miz

And then there's this, which depends on how much you believe in rumors and dirt sheets. If you buy into them, this is Wyatt's all the way and his match with Orton is pretty much set in stone. If you don't though, you have some options. To get it out of the way, Corbin, Ambrose (already Intercontinental Champion) and Miz are flat

out not winning. That leaves us with three viable options.

Cena could certainly retain and go on to face someone at "Wrestlemania XXXIII", though I'm not sure who that's going to be. There's also the chance of putting it back on Styles, though again, who would he face in Orlando? Cena again? I really can't picture them going with that.

Given that I write for one, of course I'm going with the dirtsheets and picking Wyatt, which unfortunately means we'll have to hear JBL's ridiculous commentary talking about how evil Wyatt is going to be. Anyway, Wyatt winning is the logical choice here but I'm really worried about how the rest of the blue side is going to fall out for the big show.

This is one of the weirdest cards I've ever seen and that could mean multiple things. This could be a show where everything is a mess and shows off how horrible the Brand Split is or it could be one of the biggest surprises of the year. The whole thing is built around how well the main event goes and with the talent in there, I can't imagine it being anything but solid at worst. I'm looking forward to the show but it still doesn't need to exist.

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Best of 2016: Worst Match of the Year

This is another big one and something more interesting than several of these. We've all seen some bad matches from WWE every single week and it's always fun to go back and look at what might be the worst of them all. In case you might be a bit slow today, we're looking at the worst matches of the year in WWE. As usual, these are in no particular order.

1. Brock Lesnar vs. Dean Ambrose – Wrestlemania XXXII

We're hitting the ground running with a no holds barred street fight between two people who should have been able to beat the heck out of each other. That's basically what was teased as we came into this match with various hardcore legends giving Ambrose weapons to use, such as a chainsaw and a barbed wire baseball bat. On paper, this had the potential to be one of the best fights of the year.

And it just wasn't. Lesnar destroyed Ambrose for the majority of the match and unfortunately that was the trend for most of Lesnar's matches over the year. Ambrose hung around for a good while and had a few hope spots but above all else this was just boring. The aforementioned weapons were brought in but not really used as the chainsaw didn't work and the barbed wire bad shot missed (of course). One F5 later and Ambrose was done.

This was really just about being boring than bad and that's not a good thing. The problem with Lesnar was the fact that almost no one was able to do anything to him and he would just disappear for months on end while the loser would be stuck doing nothing. Ambrose was treated like a jobber and then won the World Title a few months later. It's hard to overlook Ambrose's complete destruction here though and that's not a good thing.

2. Carmella vs. Nikki Bella – Tables, Ladders and Chairs

If you want to see why so many people don't like Bella, this is where you start. The story behind the match was Carmella calling Bella out for being a reality star with everything handed to her and whose whole relationship with John Cena was based on her fame. Instead of taking this as a bunch of insults like they really were,

Bella basically said “Yeah, what’s your point?”

A No DQ match was set up and it all fell apart from there. Carmella worked on the knee for most of the match and then Bella just popped up like there was no injury, shrugged off everything Carmella did to her and won clean. In other words: let’s all praise Bella because she’s so amazing and interesting when she treats so many people like they’re beneath her and acts all serious because she’s famous or whatever WWE wants you to buy at this point.

Above all else though, the match wasn’t any good to go along with a horrible story. Carmella could be something special in the division going forward but this is another loss to Bella, who really doesn’t seem phased by all of the insults and rather true statements because she’s famous and therefore above any criticism. That’s not interesting and it’s even worse when the match was horrible.

3. Natalya vs. Charlotte – Payback

You know what’s a bad idea? Pushing a feud over and over long past the point where it stopped being interesting. You know what’s an even worse idea? Having the ending to a match tied back into the Montreal Screwjob, which has been brought up over and over again for years despite it being less interesting and more eye roll inducing every single time it comes up.

Yes, somehow in 2016, we got another Montreal Screwjob finish to a match and they made it even better by tying it into the idea of Charles Robinson being a huge fan of the Flair Family. It felt like a way to back out of a story without actually giving us anything logical or a good idea in general. Charlotte vs. Natalya wasn’t the best story in the world in the first place and then giving us a bad ending made things even worse.

This is a case where the booking brings what could have been a totally fine match down. It’s a stupid decision that feels like a way for WWE to chuckle at themselves and stretch their story out even longer because, for some reason, Sasha Banks wasn’t allowed to face Charlotte until later in the year so we were stuck with something like this. Lucky us indeed.

4. Shane McMahon vs. Undertaker – Wrestlemania XXXII

Let’s get this out of the way right now: McMahon was pretty clearly a replacement after names like Cena and Randy Orton were both left

off the card due to injuries. Either of those two against Undertaker inside the Cell would seem like a much better main event level match but this was about as good as we were going to get. Based on that, this match deserves a little bit of a break.

However, that doesn't make up for the fact that it was one of the worst executed matches I've seen WWE put together in a long time. First and foremost, I do not accept that McMahon can give Undertaker a real run for his money, including kicking out of a chokeslam and Last Ride as well as surviving Hell's Gate. This is the same Undertaker who took Lesnar to the limit just a few months earlier but now he's having issues with McMahon? Really?

Couple that with the THIRTY MINUTE run time (longer than Undertaker vs. Shawn Michaels, Undertaker vs. Mankind, Undertaker vs. Lesnar (either time) and Undertaker vs. Edge among other Cell matches) and there was almost no way this was going to work. The big dive, while entertaining, was also terrifying (assuming you ignore the crash pad underneath the table) and not enough to save the match. This should have been fifteen minutes long and a glorified squash rather than a competitive match that lasted twice as long. But hey, you have to fill that six hour run time somehow.

5. Dean Ambrose vs. Chris Jericho – Extreme Rules

Here's a story about a potted plant named Mitch, who became the plot point of a feud between these two major stars. For some reason Ambrose was given his own talk show to replace the "Highlight Reel" and he brought Mitch in as a decoration. Jericho broke the plant over Ambrose's head and a huge feud erupted, eventually setting up a cage with weapons match at "Extreme Rules 2016".

What followed was a nearly thirty minute long match with the weapons barely being used and the plant (one of the weapons included) not being used AT ALL. If there has ever been a match that missed the point worse than this one, it hasn't happened recently. The match was a watchable brawl at times but the big problem is it was supposed to be all about the violence rather than just some mild brawling.

In a word, this one missed. There's more to a match than what you do between the bells. You also have to do the things that make sense instead of just doing something that you want to do. The whole point of this match should have been the plant (as ridiculous a premise as

that is in the first place) but it wasn't even touched, despite the fans waiting on it to be picked up at some point. I'm sure that has nothing to do with the fans not being all that into the match at times.

6. Triple H vs. Roman Reigns – Wrestlemania XXXII

This is a match that was doomed from the start. To begin with, the fans really weren't interested in seeing Reigns in the main event of the biggest show of the year. Making it even worse was Triple H, whose feud with Reigns hadn't been interesting either and really wasn't doing anything to make the fans care that much more. On top of that, by the time the match began (counting the pre-show), "Wrestlemania XXXII" had run for about six and a half hours. Think about that for a minute and wonder how tired you would be.

It didn't help that they then went on to have a twenty seven minute match (not counting Stephanie McMahon's WAY too long intro with some weird Mad Max theme) which was built around working on the arm instead of the violence and anger that the match needed. It was all about standing around, waiting on the inevitable Reigns spear and pin that the fans were dying to boo. Not exactly main event caliber stuff there.

That's the part that really brings this down: it was the main event of the biggest show of the year, making it probably the biggest match of the year by default. You can't go with a match this dull with a bad story after all this horrible buildup and expect it to work in any way. This match was a disaster and neither of the two has really gotten over it in the nine months since it's taken place.

7. Randy Orton vs. Brock Lesnar – Summerslam

Again, this one has to do with the stage. This wasn't some nothing pay per view like "Battleground 2016" or "Fastlane 2016". No, this was the second biggest show of the year and the main event should be a major deal instead of just some nothing match. The match was even hyped up over a month in advance with Orton being announced as Lesnar's opponent a full pay per view in advance.

What wound up happening? A squash. Lesnar absolutely flattened Orton, defeating him in less than thirteen minutes with Orton managing a quick RKO and elevated DDT for his lone important offense. Other than that, Lesnar squashed him with a string of German suplexes and F5's before beating Orton so badly that his head

was busted open and the match had to be stopped.

That's it. That's how the main event of the second biggest show of the year ended. I don't know if that bleeding was the planned ending or not but the build towards it certainly wasn't the most interesting idea in the world. It was even more of Lesnar destroying someone with almost no recourse before walking away. Orton didn't need to defeat Lesnar here but he should have at least given him a challenge, which wasn't the case here.

All of these matches have something bad about them but only one of them had the honor of being the main event of the biggest show of the year and that's enough to make it the worst match of the year. Aside from Reigns spearing Stephanie McMahon, there was nothing here that entertained me. It was a disaster up and down and there's really no way around that.

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Smackdown – December 13, 2016: Random Cameos Can Be Good Things

Smackdown

Date: December 13, 2016

Location: Verizon Center, Washington D.C.

Commentators: Tom Phillips, John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga, Mauro Ranallo

As has been the case more often than not lately, we've got a fairly stacked Tuesday show. Tonight it's a tag team battle royal to determine some new #1 contenders to go along with AJ Styles defending the Smackdown World Title against James Ellsworth. Smackdown doesn't have anything major to set up until the Royal Rumble so it's all about big TV until then. Let's get to it.

We open with Shane McMahon (What purpose does he serve? Can anyone answer that?) and Daniel Bryan watching Ellsworth cost Dean Ambrose last week's main event. Ellsworth comes in coughing and sneezing so Bryan says the title match is postponed. Therefore, we need a new #1 contender.

Opening sequence.

It's time for MizTV with special guest AJ Styles, who thinks Ellsworth has come down with Chinfluenza. AJ laughs off the idea of Ellsworth being a threat to the title, which is probably accurate. Miz says that he's the one who raised his title to greatness and beat Ambrose last week. It's true that Miz isn't on AJ's level because he's above it, meaning maybe it's time to make the WWE Championship legendary. A fight is teased but Ambrose and Dolph Ziggler come out because Heaven forbid we go a week without hearing from Dolph. Miz takes Dirty Deeds and actually so does Ziggler, only to have Luke Harper appear and lay Ambrose out.

After a break, AJ comes in and demands protection from the bosses. Tonight it's a fourway elimination match for the #1 contendership between Miz, Ambrose, Harper and Ziggler with interference being grounds for an elimination. The title match will take place on the December 27th episode of Smackdown.

Carmella vs. Natalya

Nikki Bella is on commentary because this is her division. It's a catfight to start and we head to a rather early break. Back with

Carmella sending Natalya into the corner for the Bronco Buster. We hit the bodyscissors, meaning a lot more screaming. Nikki keeps babbling on about how she trusts Natalya and a friend would never do that because it needs to sound like a reality story. Natalya powers out with a Michinoku Driver but opts to argue with Nikki even more. She even shoves Nikki out of the way of a charging Carmella but the distraction lets Carmella grab a small package for the pin at 9:05.

Rating: D+. So like did you know that Nikki and Natalya were the best friends EVER and would never ever stab each other in the back? I need a camera to awkwardly stare into while I list off various emotions I'm feeling as I talk about this because it's one of the worse reality show stories they've done in a long time.

Video on John Cena hosting Saturday Night Live. Cena is back in two weeks.

Gabriel Iglesias (standup comedian) talks to Apollo Crews about being on tomorrow's Tribute to the Troops. Miz and Maryse come in so insults can be exchanged.

Tag Team Battle Royal

American Alpha, Heath Slater/Rhyno, Ascension, Vaudevillains, Hype Bros, Breezango

The winners are the #1 contenders and both members have to be eliminated. Simon Gotch is knocked out two seconds into the match off a hard clothesline from Mojo Rawley. Thing slow down considerably with people taking various shots at each other around the ring. In other words, it's a battle royal. Slater and Rhyno start double teaming English as Chad Gable pulls Viktor over the top for an elimination.

Konor gets rid of Gable a few seconds later and we're down to nine. Slater accidentally puts Rhyno out and another team is split. We take a break and come back with English being dumped out, meaning the Vaudevillains are done. Fandango is swept out to the floor and we're down to Jordan, Breeze, Slater, Konor and Ryder, meaning Rawley was put out during the break.

Jordan starts to clean house with shoulders and suplexes but Breeze and Konor get together for the elimination. Dang American Alpha just can't get there. Slater snaps off some neckbreakers but the numbers game catches up with him, allowing Konor to throw him out. Breeze tries to turn on Konor but gets dropkicked down by Ryder. Konor knocks Breeze out to the floor and Zack gets rid of him for the win at 13:33.

Rating: D. Battle royals almost always suck by definition and it certainly didn't help that the Hype Bros were built up as the next challengers last week. At least they had to do more than beat Ascension and Breezango to get the shot though, making this somewhat of an effective way to crown new #1 contenders.

Baron Corbin video.

Alexa Bliss vs. Deonna Purrazzo

Actually never mind as Bliss says this is beneath her so no match. Bliss lays Purrazzo out but here's Becky Lynch to interrupt. She wants her rematch right now but Bliss says not tonight. Actually never mind again as Shane McMahon comes out to say the title match is on.

Smackdown Women's Title: Alexa Bliss vs. Becky Lynch

Lynch is challenging and Bliss hides in the ropes to start. The threat of a Disarm-Her sends Alexa even further into the ropes, followed by some armdrags to keep the champ in trouble. Bliss gets rolled up for two as JBL talks about blocking Mauro on Twitter. Another Disarm-Her sends Bliss outside and, claiming a knee injury, she takes the countout at 4:30.

Rating: C-. See, Smackdown is smart enough to not blow the big title match on a regular Smackdown with no hype. If this were Raw, the title match would have five minutes' build and then go fifteen minutes before we got the next match. The match was little more than an angle but it gives Becky a win over the champ and sets up another rematch.

Bliss goes after Becky with the knee looking just fine. The beatdown

sends Bliss limping back to the floor.

Dean Ambrose vs. Dolph Ziggler vs. Luke Harper vs. The Miz

AJ is on commentary, elimination rules with the winner getting a title shot in two weeks and of course Miz's title isn't on the line. Harper absolutely cleans house to start by knocking Ziggler and Ambrose to the floor, followed by a Michinoku Driver to Miz. Ziggler and Ambrose get together to put Harper on the floor, leaving Miz to DDT Ziggler for two.

Miz starts firing off some baseball slides but stops to mock Bryan's pose. That means it's time for YES Kicks and the corner dropkicks to make it even worse. It's Dean coming back in to cut Miz off but Harper just blasts him with a boot to the face. Ziggler gets caught in a torture rack but Ambrose makes the save and takes Luke down with the rebound lariat. Miz tries to steal a fall but gets small packaged for the elimination at 6:45 as we take a break.

Back with Ambrose hitting a spinning backbreaker for two on Ziggler while Luke it out on the floor. The Zig Zag puts Harper down but Dean drops the top rope clothesline for two on Ziggler. Harper comes back with a sitout powerbomb for two more on Ziggler but a superkick into Dirty Deeds gets rid of Luke at 15:13.

So what was the point of adding him to this match in the first place? Couldn't they do the exact same thing with three instead of four? The catapult sends Ziggler face first into the post but he's fine enough to hit a super X Factor for two. Cue Miz to offer another distraction but Ambrose takes him down with a suicide dive. Ziggler uses the distraction to get in a superkick for the pin and the title shot at 19:05.

Rating: B-. Harper being there for no apparent reason aside, this was a nice long match with everyone looking good to quite good. I really could go without Ziggler getting ANOTHER World Title shot but at least it's only two weeks away on a TV show and not six weeks away at the Rumble.

Rich Swann tells us to check out 205 Live.

Overall Rating: C+. This was an interesting show as they set up a lot for what feels like it could be a major show on December 27. I can go for the Hype Bros as the next victims for the Wyatts and it should be interesting to see what happens when Lynch finally gets a big time title shot. Good show here and I think I can handle another week without Ellsworth getting his title shot.

Results

Carmella b. Natalya – Small package

Zack Ryder won a battle royal last eliminating Konor

Becky Lynch b. Alexa Bliss via countout

Dolph Ziggler b. Luke Harper, Dean Ambrose and the Miz – Superkick to Ambrose

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