

On This Day: July 10, 1988 – Great American Bash 1988: Flair Makes Another Star

Great American Bash 1988

Date: July 10, 1988

Location: Baltimore Arena, Baltimore, Maryland

Attendance: 13,000

Commentators: Jim Ross, Tony Schiavone

This is a bit more like it and it's a traditional PPV. If you're a fan of long matches, this is the show for you. There are five matches and the shortest is just under sixteen minutes long. The main event is Lex challenging Flair for the title as Luger is the hottest thing in the world and the question is how is Flair going to escape. Notice I said escape and not win. Let's get to it.

The opening video is a bit too upbeat for my tastes. The name of this show is the Price of Freedom. Did George Bush produce this?

World Tag Titles: Sting/Nikita Koloff vs. Arn Anderson/Tully Blanchard

No entrance for the champions. Koloff has a full head of hair and it's not working for him at all. Sting has burst onto the national scene with his classic at the first Clash so the crowd is white hot. They clear the ring quickly but the Horsemen are all like BRING IT ON. Sting nails a dropkick to send Arn to the floor and then hits a plancha (remember this is 1988) and takes Anderson out.

They're the official starters and it's off to Nikita for some arm work quickly. Koloff fakes Anderson out and hits Sickles on both Horsemen but doesn't cover until late and Arn gets his

foot on the ropes. Those idiot Lithuanians. Sting comes in and it's back to the arm. The Horsemen try to double team Sting with stereo top wristlocks but Sting is like screw that and backflips out of it. He was so fast and so athletic back in the day that no one could touch him.

Tully comes in and finds his arm being yanked on too. Nikita works him to the mat with ease and gets some two counts. Tony and Jim talk about the continuity of the challengers being great which is a surprise. It's so nice to hear guys talking about the match and analyzing it instead of having them rant and rave about stuff that has nothing to do with it. Blanchard misses a charge into the corner and goes into the post shoulder first.

Anderson manages to slap Tully's boot but that doesn't count. I wonder what you actually have to do to have a tag count. That's an interesting question. Anyway back to Sting after a fake tag (he did the clapping thing) as Tully still can't get out. We're 10 minutes into this and it's been all Sting and Koloff, which is an old formula in the NWA and I'd bet we see it again in Luger vs. Flair later.

Koloff and Blanchard go to the mat and Anderson FINALLY gets the tag but Nikita rolls to his own corner to further frustrate Arn. Koloff takes Anderson to the mat quickly but the Horsemen get in some shots to the knee to FINALLY slow things down. That lasts about five seconds as Koloff and Blanchard collide and go to the floor together. Nikita suplexes him in for two but JJ makes the save. Koloff tries to drill him but clotheslines the post instead and there's your match changing moment.

You don't have to tell Arn twice that someone has a bad arm so he sends Koloff's arm into the post again and Tully pounces. Off to Anderson for the hammerlock slam (called vintage by JR). There are five minutes left and that should tell you what the ending is going to be right away. Koloff fights up but

gets caught in a DDT for a pop. That's still a very popular move at this point but it only gets two here.

Tully and Arn keep working on the arm but they can't seem to pick which arm that it's supposed to be. Blanchard hooks on an armbar and we have three minutes to go. Arn tries a Vader Bomb but jumps into knees and the hot tag gets a big pop. We're under two minutes and Sting is dominating. Sting dropkicks Tully and hits the splash but Arn makes a tag to kill the crowd dead. The one minute mark brings a sleeper to Arn but Tully tries a top rope sunset flip which Sting blocks. Sting hits the splash and gets the Scorpion on Blanchard but time runs out and it's a draw.

Rating: B-. Solid stuff here but with five minutes to go everyone knew it was going to be a draw. Also the first 10 minutes or so are mainly armbars but Sting was such a popular and charismatic guy that he was able to carry the whole thing through to that point. Nikita helped as well as he knew how to work a crowd like few others. Good opener though, although I'm not sure if they should have kept the titles on the Horsemen or not.

US Tag Titles: Fantastics vs. Midnight Express

The Fantastics (Bobby Fulton and Tommy Rogers) are champions and if they win they get to lash Lane and Eaton 10 times and they get to lash Cornette as well. Jim will be up in a cage above the ring though which is funny stuff as he's legit scared of heights. I've always liked the Fantastics so this should be good. Cornette is in a straitjacket as well.

Cornette freaks out as only he can do, getting in such lines as "THIS JACKET HASN'T BEEN TAILORED!!!!" and then trying to bribe the referee with 5,000, 10,000 and finally 15,000 dollars. The referee turns him down so Cornette says "WHAT KIND OF CRACKPOT ARE YOU? YOU'RE AN HONEST MAN! BOBBY HE'S AN HONEST MAN!!!" Cornette gets in the cage and has one of the

best terrified reactions you'll ever see. "AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!
I'M GOING UP IN THE AIR!!!
MOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!!" Hilarious stuff.

Ok so now there's the bell as all of that was just pre match fun. Bobby Eaton vs. Bobby Fulton gets us going. Fulton tries a cool move by sliding between Eaton's legs but pulls him down into a sunset flip position for one. Eaton takes him to the mat with a headlock to take over but a headscissors sets up a rana to put Eaton right back down. The fans are all over Cornette who I think is having a heart attack.

Lane comes in and fires off some awesome kicks to send Fulton out to the floor. Lane's martial arts were always good. Rogers comes in and beats up some Midnights to take over again. We hear about the Maryland State Athletic Commission, which no one has ever heard of before and is foreshadowing for later tonight. Eaton pops Rogers in the face but a blind tag brings in Fulton again and everything breaks down. The champions send the Midnights to the floor and dance a bit.

The focal point is mainly the arm of Lane and Rogers backflips out of a backdrop but a blind tag brings in Eaton for a bulldog. This is a total chess match with both teams trying to top each other. Stan takes Tommy's head off with a slingshot clothesline and it's back to Eaton to destroy him a bit more. Swinging neckbreaker gets two. Lane comes back in and fires off some kicks to send Rogers into Eaton for a Low Down backbreaker.

Tilt-a-whirl backbreaker gets two as Rogers is in the ropes. Cornette is still sitting in the cage and is freaking out. We're at about eleven minutes which JR and Tony tell us more than once because I guess we need to know it really badly. Rogers finally gets in a shot but Lane is in to break it up. He misses a kick by what must have been a good six inches (or half his foot, whichever you prefer). (I'll now pause for you to roll your eyes at what might be the worst joke I've ever

made).

Fulton tries to come in illegally which doesn't work because most faces aren't good cheaters. Sunset flip gets two for Rogers but Eaton takes him down quickly. Top rope legdrop (Eaton's is great) hits for a tag instead of a cover. The Midnights keep up the beating but a Rocket Launcher eats knees as we hit fifteen minutes. It's finally a hot tag to Fulton and everything breaks down. Double teaming puts Fulton onto the floor and he takes a slam out there. Down goes the referee and Stan has a chain or something. Eaton winds up with it and pops Fulton with it for the pin and the titles and a face pop.

Rating: A-. Don't let anyone tell you the 80s weren't the best time ever for tag team wrestling. This was for the midcard titles and it was a great match. It's totally awesome as both teams work together so well and you got a great match out of it as a result. This was what they did on all kinds of house shows and the scarier part is that the Rock N Roll matches with the Midnights were probably even better regularly.

The chain is found post match but it doesn't matter as Eaton slipped it into Fulton's tights. That's genius. Post match Cornette takes a lashing with a belt anyway.

Cornette rants to Bob Caudle about the torture he just went through.

Road Warriors/Ronnie Garvin/Jimmy Garvin/Steve Williams vs. Kevin Sullivan/Mike Rotundo/Russian Assassin/Ivan Koloff/Al Perez

This is the Tower of Doom match. Sooo....how in the world do I go about explaining this one? This was a one off concept (thank goodness) that is kind of like WarGames meets Doomsday Cage (Uncensored 96) meets Triple Cage (Slamboree 2000). You have three cages: one is a taller version of a regular cage. Above that you have a smaller cage and above that you have a cage that at most two people could fit in at once.

The idea here is every two minutes, each team sends in a man. Now the logical thing would be to put them in at the bottom, but instead they're starting at the top via huge extended ladders. The idea is you have to climb down the cage and out the door. The catch is that Jimmy Garvin's chick Precious is in the bottom cage and has the keys.

The entire point to this match is that Sullivan wants Precious who keeps turning him down. I'm not sure if it's been introduced yet or not, but there was something about papers he had that she didn't want being seen and he called her Patti as if he had known her before so maybe they were married before or something but the whole insane story was dropped with no explanation after Garvin got hurt and Precious, his real wife, left wrestling. That's wrestling for you though.

The rest of the people aren't there for any particular reason. The Varsity Club and the Road Warriors were feuding I think but they were more there as heavies. Williams would join the Club soon after this and end that run. Ronnie is there because he's part of Garvin's family. They stand around forever to wait on everything to be secured.

Ivan Koloff vs. Ronnie Garvin to start in a clash of former world champions. Keep in mind they're up there by the lights so the fans can't see a thing. Rotunda is up there already (not in the cage but waiting outside of it) along with Williams to go in next. There's no room for anyone to do anything up there so it's really boring to start. After two minutes the trap door will open but it's only for ten seconds so there's a chance of having a 2-1 situation.

Garvin and Koloff chop each other a lot and the cage shakes. I'm scared of heights so this is terrifying for me. We randomly cut to a not very hot chick in the crowd as the horn goes off for the two minute interval. The door is open for like 40 seconds as Garvin goes through and there's some powder thrown. Ok so Garvin is in the second cage by himself and has

to wait there now. Williams is getting beaten down 2-1 and Animal and I think that's Perez who are coming in next.

Williams fights both guys off as the cage keeps shaking. I need some Tums. The horn goes off and Garvin gets down to the regular cage, Williams and Koloff get into the middle cage and it's Animal vs. Rotundo and Perez on top. Precious lets Garvin out so it's officially 1-0 Team Garvin but 3-2 in the cage itself. Hawk and the Assassin are up next but not quite yet. Animal takes over on the heels and the fans actually get into it.

Koloff gets beaten down also and there's the horn. Perez makes it to the middle cage as does Animal. No one makes it to the bottom cage so it's Animal, Koloff, Williams and Perez in the middle while Rotundo, Hawk and the Assassin are up top. Jimmy Garvin and Sullivan who are more or less the captains are left. Williams slams Koloff and JR is practically in the cage to suck him off for it.

Another horn goes off and it's Perez and Animal in the bottom cage, Koloff, Hawk, Assassin and Williams in the middle and Rotundo, Jimmy and Sullivan up top. Now remember that just because all 10 are in, it doesn't mean the horn thing ends because the trap doors aren't staying open. Animal escapes to the floor and Williams puts Koloff in a Figure Four. Ross is saying how intense and insane it is and while it's overkill, this is still pretty nuts.

There's a horn and Rotundo finally makes it out of the top. Assassin makes it to the floor as is Koloff. Perez makes it out to the floor. Hawk comes down to the bottom and is in a handicap with the Russians. Ok so the Russians and Road Warriors are feuding. That's why they're in this. Hawk takes them both down with a clothesline while Garvin and Sullivan fight up top. Williams vs. Rotundo is going on in the middle. I'll give them this: they're staying on a wide shot at least some of the time and you can see most of everything which is a

nice touch.

Precious is still in the bottom cage remember. Hawk escapes, but that leaves it 4-2 (Jimmy/Williams vs. Russians/Sullivan/Rotundo). Williams makes it to the final cage but Garvin and Sullivan don't care about moving but eventually go down. Williams and the Russians escape so we're left with Rotundo/Sullivan vs. Jimmy Garvin, who thankfully isn't in those small white trunks anymore.

The horn goes off and Rotundo gets out of the entire cage while Garvin vs. Sullivan are left in the middle. A big brawl breaks out on the floor with the other 8 guys because Garvin vs. Sullivan is pretty boring without Precious involved. Garvin works on the leg a bit and then they slug it out. The horn goes off and they both go down to the bottom and Sullivan goes right for Precious who kicks him away for Jimmy to save her. Garvin works on the knee some more and hits his brainbuster finisher but can't get the door unlocked. Sullivan gets up and shoves Garvin out to give Team Jimmy the win.

Rating: D. The match is a total mess, but by comparison to something like the Doomsday Cage Match, this is a masterpiece. It makes almost no sense but at least once you get into the match you can follow it. There's one really stupid part which we'll get to here in just a second if you haven't figured it out already. It should have been WarGames, but this isn't a total disaster I guess.

Now we get to the big problem: since Garvin was thrown out, Precious is locked inside with the man that wants to either rape and/or murder her. Yeah they didn't really think that one all the way through did they? Sullivan drops to his hands and knees and crawls over to her as Jimmy and Hawk try to climb up the ladders for the rescue. Sullivan gets her jacket off and pulls a rope or chain out of his trunks and chokes away until Hawk FINALLY comes in to half kill Sullivan with a clothesline. Garvin gets Precious out as you have to wonder

why in the world the Garvins EVER agreed to let her be in there in the first place.

Oh and one other thing about it that makes it more bearable than the Doomsday match: YOU COULD SEE IT. They were in the middle of the arena and it was well lit. Why that was such a stretch for 96 is beyond me.

Bob Caudle fills in some time while they take the cage down.

US Title: Barry Windham vs. Dusty Rhodes

Barry is defending here and this is Dusty's rematch after being stripped of the title for beating up Jim Crockett. Windham used to be Dusty's friend but turned on him to join the Horsemen and take Luger's spot so there's heat here. Barry charges in but Dusty lifts up his elbow to scare him away. Dusty sends him to the floor quickly and Barry needs time out. Barry drops an elbow on the back of his head but Dusty pops up for a gorilla press to take over.

A DDT puts Barry down again as Rhodes controls to start us off. Rhodes hits a top rope cross body for two after the earth stops shaking. Dusty pops both Windham and JJ with elbows and the crowd explodes. The fat man was indeed popular and no one can take that away from him. Five minutes in now and Barry pounds away. I miss the NWA telling us the time gone in a match as it helps keep track of where we are and wasn't just for time limit endings.

We go to the floor and Windham's piledriver is reversed. Barry pounds away in the corner and we go outside again. And never mind as Dusty leans back on the rope (amazingly it doesn't snap like a twig) to slingshot Barry out to the floor again. Barry grabs his finisher, a claw hold, after JJ interferes. We're currently at 90 seconds of the US Champion having his finishing move on Dusty but Dusty is gyrating. Make that two minutes of nonstop claw. Dusty manages to stand up, climb the ropes (which doesn't call for a break from Tommy Young) and

signal for an elbow but Windham takes him down again.

We're at 3 minutes straight now and Dusty hasn't been past his knees in about two minutes of that. Imagine if Cena stayed in the cross armbreaker for three minutes. The internet would form into a missile and kill him all at once. Total time in the Claw: four minutes and five seconds before an elbow breaks it up.

Let me repeat that: the old man (Dusty is a veteran at this point and in his early 40s) just lasted over four minutes in the finishing hold of the young unstoppable US Champion who won the title with that very hold. I've heard of killing moves dead before but Dusty took the Claw, shot it, buried it, turned it into a chicken, plucked it, cleaned it, put it in batter and sold it to a man named Sanders.

Dusty is immediately fine and tries a Figure Four but gets caught in the Claw again. Dusty was out of the hold all of 8 seconds. This one only lasts 46 seconds as they go up to the corner again. Barry tries the superplex but Dusty shoves him off and takes out the referee. Dusty slams him off and hits the big elbow but there's no referee. Ronnie Garvin of all people comes out and kills Dusty dead with his Hands of Stone punch finisher as he turns heel. The Claw is academic as Dusty is dead and Windham retains. Garvin would be gone in only a few months and would be in the WWF by December.

Rating: D+. That claw in the middle was just so ridiculous. I mean seriously, Dusty lasted practically 5 minutes in it overall and was just fine until a punch comes out and stops him cold? I mean how weak does the Claw look now when a right hand, the most basic move in wrestling, ends Dusty faster than five minutes of a claw? How many matches have you seen that are shorter than five minutes? Imagine a single hold lasting that long. Crazy.

Garvin is with JJ and Gary Hart, another heel manager. There

appears to be a suitcase of money handed to Garvin. See, why is that so hard? Someone did it because of money. Why is that such a hard concept anymore?

NWA World Title: Lex Luger vs. Ric Flair

That would be written a few dozen times over the years but this is one of the first times. Pretty basic story here: Luger was a Horsemen, lost his US Title to Dusty at Starrcade and then said he was going to be on his own and got thrown out of the Horsemen and was replaced by Windham, his best friend. This is his revenge/shot at awesomeness. Flair is in white which isn't something you see often.

Flair is in white trunks with yellow pads and Luger is in yellow trunks with white pads. Uh...deep? Very slow paced start but they have a lot of time. This has TV time remaining which sounds really odd on PPV but it's the truth. Flair is sent to the floor and takes a walk in front of the State Athletic Commission. Luger leapfrogs him and adds a gorilla press for pain.

The champ hits the floor again and yells at a fat boy in the crowd. There's always one of them out there. I think the real money in the NWA was in coaching physical fitness, not wrestling. Back in Lex grabs a half test of strength and guess how that goes. Gorilla press puts Flair down again and it's off to a bearhug. There's a suplex and Flair's back is being destroyed. Lex's big elbow hits but a second misses.

That does a total of nothing as Lex hits a hip toss and we're back on the floor again. Flair sends him into the railing and takes over. We're over ten minutes in now as Flair puts him down again. Flair starts in on the ribs which takes away the Rack I think. Lex fires off a clothesline for two and Flair goes up. This time it's different though as Lex shakes the rope and Flair is crotched. Another clothesline gets two as does a slam.

A very long sunset flip gets two. Now we get to the second half of the match as Flair goes after the knee. We're 15 minutes in and Flair cannon balls down onto the leg. There's the Figure Four (wrong knee of course) but it only lasts for a few seconds. Lex somehow gets up and clotheslines Flair to the floor and it's the momentum that sent him out there as the rule is adjusted again. Granted that was almost always how it was called.

Flair chops away but Super Lex isn't hurt at all. That was another constant: chops never worked on Lex. Sting was about the same too. Luger hits another gorilla press but the knee gives out after it hits. Lex, ever the genius, tries a knee drop and misses. He deserves it for such a boneheaded move too. Flair goes up and this time is slammed down. JR says that's the fourth gorilla press for Luger. And people say Cena is repetitive.

An atomic drop is no sold by Lex. If there's ever been an anti-steroids ad, I give you exhibit A. We're at twenty minutes so this is almost done. Flair is sent to the floor again but it doesn't last long. They collide and both go over the top where Flair screams that his leg is hurt. Lex goes into the post and Dillon sends him into it again.

Now we get to the interesting part: Lex is busted open. Remember that. There's barely any blood but the announcers make it clear that Lex is bleeding. And here's the Maryland State Athletic Commissioner to get the referee's attention. Lex puts him in the Rack and there's the bell.

Rating: B. Good match here but the Starrcade one blows this out of the water. The ending is pretty stupid as I'm sure you can see what's coming a mile away. Lex would face Flair about a thousand more times for the title but he would never get the big win, which is what stopped Lex from becoming the mega star that he was supposed to become. Let's get to the part you all know is coming.

The match is stopped because of the cut. The fact that no fan has ever heard of the Commission and that you can't see any blood is ignored.

The faces come out to raise Lex's arms but it means nothing.

Overall Rating: B-. It's a pretty good show but the ending is pretty weak. I don't get the point in not switching the title here and having Flair get the title back at Starrcade. The rest of the show is pretty good stuff although the Tower of Doom is pretty stupid. The second tag match is very good and the rest of it is solid enough. Worth seeing but don't watch the home video as it hacks the thing to pieces.

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