

NXT – February 14, 2018: Roses Are Red, Violets Aren't Blue, OW MY ARM!

NXT

Date: February 14, 2018

Location: Center Stage Theater, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson, Mauro Ranallo

We've got another packed show this week with two title matches on tap. First up the Women's Title is on the line as Ember Moon defends against Shayna Baszler in a rematch from Takeover: Philadelphia. After that, Pete Dunne defends the United Kingdom Title against Roderick Strong. Let's get to it.

We open with a quick preview of both title matches.

Opening sequence.

United Kingdom Title: Roderick Strong vs. Pete Dunne

Dunne is defending. Strong goes for a very early attempt at the Strong Hold but Dunne slips out as we take an early break. Back with Dunne twisting Strong's arm around in a very strange angle and kicking it hard. They head outside with more shots to the arm as Dunne is certainly focused so far.

Strong sends him into the barricade though and gets it back inside to take it to the mat. The first backbreaker gets two and the second sends Dunne into the corner for a stomping. They head up top where Dunne cranks on the arm again to get out of a superplex. That's fine with Strong who gets a fireman's carry to drop Dunne onto the barricade.

We take another break and come back with Dunne grabbing the arm again. This time he cranks it back ala Lucha Underground's Pentagon Dark, followed by a sitout powerbomb for two. A snap German suplex puts Strong down again but he dives into a dropkick to give Roderick two this -time.

Another backbreaker is countered into an exchange of rollups for two and both guys are down again.

Dunne scores with an enziguri for two and grabs a triangle choke, only to have Strong pull him throat first into the rope for the break. Strong takes him up top for a super Angle Slam and it's time for another Strong Hold. That's broken up with a snap of Strong's fingers though and the Bitter End retains the title at 21:12.

Rating: A-. Is Dunne capable of having a bad match? I really don't remember the last time that he's done anything less than great and a lot of that has to do with bringing in a completely different style mostly independent of the WWE training system. Strong looked great here, but at some point he has to actually win something. The great performances can carry him a long way, but he has to actually pull off a big win.

We look back at last week's outstanding segment with Johnny Gargano, Candice LeRae, Andrade Cien Almas and Zelina Vega. The title rematch is next week.

Velveteen Dream is ready for No Way Jose next week. He has no comment on wanting to face Tyler Bate.

Here's Aleister Black in a suit for a chat. Black's path has always lead him one way, starting with a sensation, left him in a dream and put him in the way of an era. The devil has been driving him and that devil is the NXT Championship. Cue Killian Dain to say the devil isn't on Black's back. Dain is the one on Black's back and wants the NXT Title as well. That means Dain has crossed Black though, and now he must fade to black. Aleister challenging for the title in New Orleans makes sense and this certainly feels like the first step toward that match.

TM61 vs. Andrew Duckworth/John Skyler

Thorn drives Skyler into the corner to start and takes Duckworth down with a suplex. A few shots to Thorn's knee get him into the corner though and trouble begins. It's over in very short order though as Thorn grabs a belly to back suplex. The hot tag brings in Miller to start cleaning house in short order. Thunder Valley ends Skyler at 2:12. Basically a

squash.

Women's Title: Shayna Baszler vs. Ember Moon

Moon is defending and wastes no time hammering Baszler up against the ropes. The step up enziguri and a pump kick to a kneeling Baszler have her in big trouble. It's too early for the Eclipse though as Baszler rolls to the floor, only to be taken down by a HARD suicide dive. Moon wrecks the bad arm though and the title is in big trouble. Back in and Baszler grabs a cross armbreaker but Moon is quickly in the ropes. They head outside again with Moon's arm getting caught in the barricade for more damage. Baszler is going off on the arm so here's Kairi Sane for the save and the DQ at 4:46.

Rating: D+. Just angle advancement here with Baszler continuing to the monster who doesn't play by the rules. She'll win the title, likely in New Orleans, and whoever gets to beat her can be the giant killer. It's a classic story (or one ripped off from Samoa Joe and AJ Styles in TNA) and it'll work very well here.

Sane clears the ring and checks on Moon to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. They've got some big stuff set up for the coming weeks and you can tell they're already looking towards New Orleans, which is less than two months away. Next week intrigues me though as you could go either way with Gargano winning and facing Black, who he's already pinned, in New Orleans or have Ciampa interfere and cost Gargano his NXT career. I'm sure they could find a way to get to the obvious grudge match though, and it's cool to have so many of these options available.

Results

Pete Dunne b. Roderick Strong – Bitter End

TM61 b. Andrew Duckworth/John Skyler – Thunder Valley to Skyler

Shayna Baszler b. Ember Moon via DQ when Kairi Sane interfered

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NXT – February 7, 2018: That's Nice For A Change

NXT

Date: February 7, 2018

Location: Center Stage Theater, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson

We're back to the regular shows this week with about two months to go before Takeover: New Orleans. That means it's time for some short form stories before we move on towards the bigger stuff with a few weeks before the important show. That doesn't mean this first period has to be weak though as this is often some of the best material NXT has to offer. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Tag Team Titles: Undisputed Era vs. Sanity

Undisputed Era is defending. Adam Cole is here as a second but it's Sanity jumping the champs from behind to start the brawl before the bell.

Security comes in and here's William Regal (to a BIG pop) to say enough is enough. This ends tonight with all six men in a tornado tag match. No match here of course.

Heavy Machinery vs. Tino Sabbatelli/Riddick Moss

Dozovic and Moss start things off with Otis shoving him down in short order. A double falling headbutt crushes Moss for an early two but he's right back with a clothesline to the back of the head. It's off to Tino (who the fans don't like) for a good looking dropkick on Knight, followed by a clothesline for Moss.

Riddick isn't happy with Tino for some reason and chops him for another tag. The disagreement allows the hot tag to Otis and house is cleaned in a hurry. Everything breaks down and Moss' rollup with feet on the ropes (how they won the first match) gets two. Knight flips off the apron to take Moss down and the Compactor ends Sabbatelli at 4:10.

Rating: D+. Sabbatelli and Moss aren't exactly killing it out there and I'm not sure how much of a future they have. I'd like to see Tino on his own as he has the look and the attitude to make something work, but the in-ring work might not be there. Heavy Machinery doesn't have the highest ceiling but it's cool to see them get another win.

Post match, Moss walks out on Tino.

Here's Johnny Gargano for his first comments since Takeover. He had never been as confident as he was against Andrade Cien Almas but it didn't work. It's time for him to keep going though and that's because the fans were right there for him when he needed them most. Johnny: "I'M JOHNNY FREAKING WRESTLING!" It took a crutch shot to the back to put him down but now it's time for Johnny to go after Tommaso Ciampa.

This brings out Almas and Zelina Vega though as the feud isn't over. Vega laughs off Johnny wanting respect because he only proved Almas as the better man. Almas can beat Gargano again and again because Gargano is Johnny Loser. The fans want Candice LeRae so Vega shoves Johnny, drawing Candice to the ring to shove her down. Vega goes on a rant about wanting to get rid of Gargano so we're having a title vs. NXT career match. After

their previous match, they would be crazy to not do it again.

Shayna Baszler says people against her have three choices: tap, nap or snap. She'll be Women's Champion.

Next week: Pete Dunne vs. Roderick Strong for the UK Title.

Tyler Bate is disappointed by his loss but hes ready to have another Match of the Year against the best NXT has to offer.

Bianca Belair vs. Jessix Hill

Hill offers a left handed handshake to start but Bianca won't let go. Instead it's a torture rack with some squats, followed by the Alley Oop to pin Hill at 1:13. A good chunk of that was spent waiting for the handshake.

Video on Kairi Sane.

Next week: Ember Moon defends against Baszler.

Sanity vs. Undisputed Era

Tornado rules. It's a brawl to start (as it should be) with Sanity getting the better of it, mainly thanks to Dain. The fighting takes us to an early break and we come back with the brawl continuing. Young, Wolfe, O'Reilly and Cole fight to the back, leaving Fish to moonsault Dain for two.

It's kendo stick time, even though I don't remember tornado rules meaning No DQ. Dain pulls it out of Fish's hands though as the other four are back. Fish runs up to the stage and tries a forearm to Dain's face, earning himself a toss off the stage onto everyone else in a big crash. There's something to be said about taking a human and tossing him around with such ease.

Back from another break with Dain pounding on Cole in the ring while everyone else is still down. An enziguri gives Cole a breather but Wolfe is back in with a Batista Bomb. O'Reilly and Fish come back in to double team Wolfe so Dain runs them over. Dain's Michinoku Driver gets two on

Fish but Cole superkicks him for a save. Ax and Smash puts Young on the floor but Dain is right back up with the heavy strikes to take over.

Unfortunately Dain's Cannonball through a table misses Cole and Wolfe gets triple teamed. Total Elimination puts Wolfe down but it's Young making the save with the kendo stick. Cole drops him with a superkick though and the Last Shot gets...two? I'd have bet on that being the finish. Dain is back in and runs everyone over, including a backplash/running dropkick combination. The Ulster Plantation ends Fish at 20:03.

Rating: B. I was very pleased with that ending as I would have bet on it being Dain running through everyone and then getting neutralized just long enough to give the Era the win. Instead this was the Killian Dain Show as he was the unstoppable force and ran through all three members of the team like they could barely touch him. It's nice to see things go in a different direction and it was a wild brawl to get there. That's how this feud should have ended and I'm curious to see where things go next.

Overall Rating: A-. That last line sums things up nicely: I'm curious to see where things go next. How often do you actually look forward to things week to week in WWE? Or most wrestling companies for that matter? NXT knows how to keep you wanting to come back for more and that's a really hard thing to do. I want to see more of Dain and I want to see Gargano vs. Almas II. Throw in the women's division getting more interesting and Ciampa still lurking around and it's a good time to be watching NXT.

Results

Heavy Machinery b. Tino Sabbatelli/Riddick Moss – Compactor to Sabbatelli

Bianca Belair b. Jessix Hill – Alley Oop

Sanity b. Undisputed Era – Ulster Plantation to Fish

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NXT – January 31, 2018: British, Strong, Style

NXT

Date: January 31, 2018

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Percy Watson, Mauro Ranallo

It's time for another of the pre-Takeover shows as we haven't had time to do more tapings, meaning we have some dark matches from this weekend's Takeover: Philadelphia. This includes a match between Roderick Strong and Tyler Bate with the winner getting a UK Title match against Pete Dunne at some point in the future. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap package from Takeover, including a focus on the incredible main event.

Opening sequence.

Nikki Cross vs. Lacey Evans

Nikki is all over her to start but gets kicked out to the floor. Evans gets tied in the ring skirt and the fans are WAY behind Nikki as she forearms Laces in the chest. Back in and Lacey hits a slingshot Bronco

Buster in the corner and is booed out of the building. That earns her a kick to the chest and the swinging fisherman's neckbreaker is good for the pin on Evans 2:35.

Video on Saturday's Tag Team Title match.

Video on the Women's Title match, including Shayna Baszler choking Ember Moon out after losing.

Baszler says that went as it was supposed to because Moon only survived instead of beating her.

Video on Moon being in the Royal Rumble.

Video on Aleister Black vs. Adam Cole.

Undisputed Era took Cole to the back as he swore vengeance on Sanity.

Next week: Undisputed Era defends against Sanity.

Video on Velveteen Dream vs. Kassius Ohno.

Velveteen Dream says read his trunks. "Dream Over." Dream to the interviewer: "And now you know too. Good talk."

TM61 vs. Ealy Brothers

Uriel Ealy jumps Shane with forearms to the back but everything breaks down in a hurry with Thorn hitting a running Fosbury Flop onto both Brothers on the floor. The Brothers switch though and Miller gets kicked in the jaw. The beatdown lasts all of a few seconds though as a clothesline gets Miller out of trouble, setting up the hot tag to Thorn. Everything breaks down and Miller hits a moonsault for two with Gabriel making the save. Thunder Valley (the double gorilla press into a sitout spinebuster) is good for the pin on Uriel at 3:18.

Rating: C. This was fine for a return showcase match with TM61 looking good. They were only starting to hit their stride when the injury cut them off so they need to pull something off to get back on track. The tag division can always use another team and they could be in the title picture in fairly short order. Thorn looked fine in his return from

injury.

Recap of the 2017 Year End Awards.

TM61 says they're a better team than they used to be because they're now mighty, and the mighty don't kneel. Ignore one of them kneeling to set up Thunder Valley.

Long video on Johnny Gargano vs. Andrade Cien Almas, including Tommaso Ciampa attacking Gargano after the match.

Post match Ciampa wouldn't answer questions, including "where have you been". Uh, rehabbing his knee, as everyone knows?

We look at Almas in the Rumble.

Zelina Vega says this was her plan all along and there's no Gargano in sight.

EC3 (Ethan Carter III isn't mentioned) has signed with NXT.

Cole was in the Rumble and faces Killian Dain next week.

Roderick Strong vs. Tyler Bate

The winner gets a UK Title shot at some point to be announced. They fight over wrist control to start with Bate kicking him in the arm to twist out of a wristlock. Bate scores with a dropkick and nips up into a mustache pose. The airplane spin is countered into a double underhook backbreaker and Strong tosses him HARD into the corner for two.

Back from a break with Strong bending Bate over his back (kind of a bow and arrow with Bate bent over the back instead of the knees). Bate slips out and hits a big boot to the jaw, followed by a middle rope knee to the side of the head. Bate's Liger Kick is followed by a crucifix for two and a rebound clothesline gets the same. The Tyler Driver 97 doesn't work due to the variety of backbreakers and Strong hits the jumping knees to the face. End of Heartache is good for the pin on Bate at 13:38.

Rating: B-. The last few minutes were very good with Bate doing more of his ridiculous athletic stuff despite looking like one of the most

generic jobbers of all time. Strong winning is the right call as Bate vs. Dunne should be saved for special occasions and Dunne needs a fresh opponent. Bate will be fine and the fact that he's only 20 is remarkable.

Overall Rating: C+. These shows are always hard to rate as there's only so much that can be said with so many recaps. This is designed to be mostly a placeholder show with a big main event and there's nothing wrong with that. Next week will be back to normal and since NXT knows what it's doing, we already have two matches set for the first show of the new tapings. It's so nice to not have to worry about things like moving to the new taping cycle and it's very cool to have a promotion that has figured this stuff out.

Results

Nikki Cross b. Lacey Evans – Fisherman's neckbreaker

TM61 b. Ealy Brothers – Thunder Valley to Uriel

Roderick Strong b. Tyler Bate – End of Heartache

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NXT Takeover – Philadelphia: Holy Bleep Indeed

Takeover: Philadelphia

Date: January 28, 2018

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Percy Watson, Mauro Ranallo

This one is a little bit different as we don't really have a top match to build this show around. There's a lot of good stuff but nothing all that great. That being said, it's kind of NXT's bread and butter as they know how to set up a full card instead of hanging everything onto one match. Let's get to it.

Paul Heyman narrates the opening video, which is either brilliant or missing the point. He talks about how this city has a rich history of fighting but tonight is about the future. We see the standard clips of the big matches before Heyman caps it off with the WE ARE NXT line. Heyman is synonymous with Philadelphia but has never done anything of note in NXT, but the delivery more than makes up for it.

Nigel McGuinness is sick today so Percy gets to take up the slack. This could be a long night.

Tag Team Titles: Undisputed Era vs. Authors of Pain

The Era is defending but there's no Adam Cole due to his match later. The Authors jump the champs to start things off, sending Fish and O'Reilly outside before the opening bell. Fish bails from Razar to start so it's Kyle coming in to take him down and strike away. That goes as long as you would expect with Razar powering out without much effort, meaning it's time to get another breather.

Back in and Fish goes after the knee but gets knocked around by the raw power. It's off to Akum for some shots to the head, which send the champs outside. Walking away doesn't work as Fish is pulled back and dropped face first onto the barricade. Back in and Akum gets low bridged to the

floor, allowing Fish to kick him in the leg and really take over. Fish spears Razar to the floor (I didn't think he could pull that off) and it's time for the double kicks to the ribs.

Some hard kicks to the leg take Akum down and O'Reilly comes back in for a leg lock. Some champion miscommunication allows Akum to hit a good back body drop for the hot tag off to Razar, even though there really aren't any faces in this. The fall away slam/drop backwards with Fish on Razar's back combination crushes the champs all over again but they're right back up with the strikes in the corner.

Fish again shows off the power with an exploder suplex for two but Razar slugs them down. Akum comes back in on the bad leg but it's a jumping knee to the head to cut off the Last Chapter. O'Reilly grabs a kneebar on Akum and Fish gets a choke on Razar, who flips him down onto Kyle for the save. Not bad.

Everyone is down so the fans start the dueling chants. It's Akum up first and buckle bombing Fish. A buckle bomb crushes O'Reilly and the Super Collider connects but Akum can't powerbomb Fish. Instead it's a hurricanrana to send the Authors into each other and Fish rolls Akum up to retain at 14:56.

Rating: B. While not a great match, it was a smart match with the champs coming at them with a power game to go with the striking and submissions. The leg work was a good story to tell throughout the match as they broke the Authors down and actually went after them instead of running away and stealing a win. I liked the story here and it made for a good match.

War Machine is here.

Earlier today, Velveteen Dream promised a thirty second knockout of Kassius Ohno.

Velveteen Dream vs. Kassius Ohno

Dream now has a muscular man and a woman to help him with his entrance, including a large pillow containing his custom made mouth piece. He's also now in boxing trunks for a rather sharp change of pace. After Ohno's

entrance, Dream boxes the buckle a little bit. The fans count and Dream hits a big right hand to knock Ohno down at 27 seconds.

Dream dances around though (how Rocky I of him) and gets forearmed in the face, knocking the mouth piece out. Back up and Dream scores with a swinging spinebuster from two as the fans are almost entirely behind Dream here. We hit the chinlock until Ohno powers him into the corner, where Dream unloads with rights and lefts. Dream shouts DREAM OVER at Ohno, followed by a top rope double ax for two more. The second chinlock goes a bit better but Ohno powers out of it again, this time slamming Dream down.

Back up and Ohno easily wins a strike off, followed by the running backsplash. A superkick cuts Ohno off and the wind up DDT (with no snap this time around) gets two, followed by Dream's Death Valley Driver for the same. The rolling forearm drops Dream but it's another Death Valley Driver into the Purple Rainmaker (from the post) for the pin on Ohno at 10:46.

Rating: B-. Now where can I get a pair of those shorts? Dream needed this win and that's why you have someone like Ohno on the roster. He can hit the heck out of people but at the end of the day, he's going to get pinned off a big finisher. Dream just has the makings of a star though as the fans buy into him, though he's dead in the water on the main roster where Cole and company would talk about every single thing he does and how they don't understand it. Good match here, but there was no way they could follow Dream's two previous matches.

We recap Ember Moon vs. Shayna Baszler. Shayna is the newcomer/outsider as a former mixed martial artist who has choked a bunch of women out. Moon won't stand for the bullying but Baszler says this has been her plan all along. Above all else though, this feud has shown how lame Ember is while Baszler has shown up and looks like a polished pro right out of the gate.

Women's Title: Shayna Baszler vs. Ember Moon

Moon is defending. Baszler easily takes her down to start and kicks Moon's leg out. Back up and Moon scores with some dropkicks to put

Baszler out on the floor. A suicide dive drops her again but Baszler takes the hair down and unloads with strikes to the face and chest. Makes sense here as they're having Baszler easily win the stand-up fighting but getting beaten down in the wrestling.

Baszler steps on the arm like she did to Dakota Kai and it's off to an armbar. More knees and stomps to the arm have Moon in trouble before Baszler just pulls on the arm. Moon gets in a few slaps though, followed by a kick to the chest and a springboard spinning crossbody. The Eclipse connects but it hurts the arm even more, causing Moon to writhe in pain in the corner.

The trainer comes in to check on the arm and the fans are NOT happy with the delay. Baszler finally gets up and tries a cross armbreaker, only to have Moon get her feet on the ropes. The armbreaker goes on again in the middle of the ring with Baszler even pulling the legs back towards the middle, just in case. Somehow Moon rolls her over though and stacks Baszler up to retain at 10:11, sending Mauro into a huge MAMA MIA.

Rating: B. Moon escaped here and that's likely to set up a rematch where Baszler wins the title. I get the idea of not putting the title on Baszler just yet but Moon needs to get better in a hurry. They told a good story with the ending as the inexperienced Baszler was too focused on one move and left herself vulnerable, which makes Ember look like a veteran who might have lost the physical battle but won the mental game. At the end of the day, the lack of ever defeating Asuka is hard to overcome and it's weighing her down a lot. This should help her though and having to fight from underneath is a good story for her.

Moon is helped out but Baszler sneaks up from behind and grabs the choke.

Ricochet (billed as Trevor "Ricochet" Mann) is here.

We recap Aleister Black vs. Adam Cole. Black knocked Cole out of the #1 contenders tournament by kicking him in the head, only to have Cole cost Black the tournament final. A match was set up but William Regal made it Extreme Rules, which might play more towards Cole's strengths.

Adam Cole vs. Aleister Black

Extreme Rules. Black's entrance is surrounded by candles and smoke this time around, making it look even better. Black easily wins an early strike off and moonsaults into the seated position. Cole grabs a chair and there's the ECW chant that you knew was coming. That's taken away in no time and Black has a seat on the chair as Cole needs to come up with a better idea.

Black follows him out this time and gets caught with a few shots, allowing Cole to throw in some weapons. Both guys find kendo sticks but Black throws his away and says bring it on. He's either very skilled or very stupid. A few kicks to the chest have Black in trouble but the springboard moonsault is caned out of the air in a good looking crash. Cole's Backstabber with the kendo stick (White Russian Backstabber?) gets two and it's table time.

Black breaks up a superplex attempt and gets slammed off the top onto a trashcan. A running knee drops Cole again and Black sets up another table next to the first. That's not enough though as Black pulls out a ladder but Cole kicks him down and sets the unfolded ladder in the corner. Cole is bleeding from somewhere (might be his hand) and hammers away in the corner. Black fights up and drops Cole onto the ladder in a good looking crash.

With Cole down, Black goes up top but Cole throws him a chair and superkicks it into Black's head, sending him through the tables. Mauro: "HOLY BLEEP INDEED!" That's only good for two so Cole loads up two chairs next to each other. Black is back up though and hits an AA onto the top of the chairs (FREAKING OW MAN!!!) to probably break Cole's back. A sliding knee into the chair into Cole's face gets two as Fish and O'Reilly run in for the save. High/Low on the floor drops Black and it's time to load up the announcers' table.

Cue Sanity for the save (makes sense) with Killian Dain taking everyone out with a suicide dive. With Black still down, Cole tries a suplex through the table. That's broken up as well and the double knees (ala Sasha Banks) drives Cole through instead. Fans: "MAMA MIA!" Back in and Cole scores with his own superkick and grabs a chair. Of course he walks right into Black Mass (to the shoulder) for the pin at 21:58.

Rating: A-. This kept building and turned into a star making performance for both guys. Black is on a roll at this point and that Black Mass should put him into the title match at Takeover: New Orleans. This was better than I thought it would be as it started slowly but built into a brawl with Black finally being the last man standing by the end. Very good stuff here and easily the best part of the night so far.

Ethan Carter III, billed as EC3, is here and officially confirmed as a new signing.

We recap Andrade Cien Almas vs. Johnny Gargano. Almas has righted the ship after months of mediocrity, mainly thanks to the addition of Zelina Vega. Gargano had a nightmare of a 2017 and is on the comeback trail, finally turning himself back into Johnny Wrestling. Tonight is his chance at redemption, both by winning the title and beating Almas, who was a big part of his downward spiral.

NXT Title: Johnny Gargano vs. Andrade Cien Almas

Almas is defending and is played to the ring by a masked mariachi band. He also wears a mask to the ring but takes it off before getting inside. They start with a technical sequence and wrestle to a standoff as we see Johnny's wife Candice LeRae in the crowd. Neither finisher can connect early on and Almas bails into the corner while waving a finger at Johnny. We start again with Gargano wrestling him down into an armbar but one heck of a chop gets the champ out of trouble.

The announcers recap the Almas story of letting his career fall apart as he gets sent outside but manages to avoid the running flip dive off the apron. Back in and Almas bends Johnny's neck across the top rope, followed by the chinlock. Johnny fights up but gets caught in the Tree of Woe. Almas misses the top rope stomp though and gets suplexed into the corner. A middle rope swinging Downward Spiral gives Johnny two and the slingshot spear is good for the same.

As usual, Vega has some awesome facial expressions as you can feel her panicking on the near falls, which sell them that much more. Almas catches him with a spinning faceplant for two before going up. The regular moonsault doesn't work but Almas lands on his feet and hits a

standing version for two more in a smart sequence. Johnny's superkick gets the same and they're both down again.

Gargano puts him on the top but can't hit the sunset bomb. Almas misses the running knees in the corner but the slingshot spear is countered into a faceplant. A reverse tornado DDT gets two more and both guys are spent again. Excellent sequence. Almas can't hit the hammerlock DDT on the apron so Gargano slingshot DDTs him onto the apron instead. That's only good for a very close two back inside and Almas blocks the Gargano Escape. The running knees are broken up and there's the Lawn Dart to rock Almas again.

Vega's distraction lets Almas grab the DDT but that's reversed into a small package for a VERY close two. A low superkick gives Johnny two, with the camera panning over to tease interference but it just shows Vega panicking at the near fall. Almas cuts him off on top and it's the top rope double stomp onto the apron, followed by a hard toss to send Gargano into the apron again. Back in and the double knees are good for two and Almas is shocked. To be fair, I am too.

They fight back to their feet and Johnny somehow grabs a hurricanrana. The Gargano Escape goes on and Almas can't spin out. Vega grabs Almas' hand and the distraction lets Almas rake Johnny's eyes. The hammerlock DDT is broken up and a backdrop puts Almas on the floor for a suicide dive of all things. Vega is back up with a hurricanrana to send Johnny into the steps though and the hammerlock DDT....gets two. They had me on that one.

Gargano rolls outside and Vega goes after him, drawing Candice over the barricade for the brawl. She chases Vega to the back, drawing a THANK YOU CANDICE chant. The slingshot DDT gets a VERY close two and the Gargano Escape goes on again....but the foot is on the ropes. They head to the apron again and Almas hits the running knees to drive Johnny's head into the post, leaving him with the far away look in his eyes. A draping hammerlock DDT FINALLY ends Gargano at 32:22.

Rating: A+. Oh yeah that was amazing. They had me multiple times on the near falls and I never once got bored throughout the whole thing. Gargano

is ready to be NXT Champion at some point and not having Ciampa interfere was the right decision as their match doesn't need to be for the title. It's an epic back and forth match with the great near falls being traded near the end. It takes a lot to suck me in like that and they did it to perfection here. Outstanding match.

Post match Candice comes back to take Johnny to the back but they stop for the pose on the stage...AND TOMMASO CIAMPA BREAKS A CRUTCH OVER JOHNNY'S BACK! Ciampa walks away as Candice tends to Johnny to end the show.

Overall Rating: A. Is Takeover capable of having a bad show? Or even a bad match for that matter? Like I said coming in, this felt more like a collection of matches and it still blew me away. The worst match was probably Dream vs. Ohno and even that was above average. Nothing was following that main event though and now you have a double main event of Black vs. Almas and Gargano vs. Ciampa set for New Orleans. That alone makes for a great show and if they have a strong undercard (War Machine vs. Undisputed Era and two others would be more than enough), it could be an all time classic. Great show here of course.

Results

Undisputed Era b. Authors of Pain – Rollup to Razar

Velveteen Dream b. Kassius Ohno – Purple Rainmaker

Ember Moon b. Shayna Baszler – Rollup

Aleister Black b. Adam Cole – Black Mass

Andrade Cien Almas b. Johnny Gargano – Hanging hammerlock DDT

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Takeover: Philadelphia Preview

It's time, once again, for everybody to come about the NXT train. This weekend WWE is doing another one of its big multi-night marathons in a single city and it all starts with NXT "Takeover: Philadelphia". As usual, there's a five match card with all three titles on the line and two other matches to fill out the card. If this thing can live up to the rest of NXT's Takeover efforts, this should be excellent. Let's get to it.

Tag Team Titles: Undisputed Era(c) vs. Authors of Pain

I could have sworn that this was supposed to be a cage match. These teams (along with Sanity) have been feuding on and off for months with the Undisputed Era coming away with the titles for the time being. However, the Authors of Pain are arguably the most dominant team in the history of NXT so there's a real chance that they could get the titles back here.

That being said, I'm taking the Undisputed Era as there's no reason to keep the Authors of Pain in NXT any longer (save for a feud with the debuting War Machine). The champs retaining and finally establishing themselves as the best of the three teams is the way to go and makes whoever can take them down look that much better. The match should be fun with the

Undisputed Era cheating to win like they're supposed to.

Women's Title: Ember Moon(c) vs. Shayna Baszler

This is an interesting one in that it's not the most interesting thing in the world. Baszler has only been around for a few weeks now and is already one of the best characters in all of NXT. She knows exactly how to play the outsider bully, mainly because it feels so natural for her. Throw in the good looking choke and it's hard to argue against her. On the other hand though, Moon doesn't really have a character. She has intense eyes and that's really about it, but she's Asuka's successor.

I'm going to take Moon retaining via DQ here, though seeing Baszler choke her out for the title wouldn't shock me. More than likely though, Baszler chokes her out but won't let go and loses the title as a result. The problem right now is that aside from Kairi Sane, there isn't another face to put the title on so Moon is probably the best option. Baszler will get the title one day though.

Kassius Ohno vs. Velveteen Dream

Ohno is a very valuable thing to have on the roster: the grizzled veteran who can wrestle a solid match while putting someone young over and making them look good at the same time. Dream is in need of a big win at the moment, having lost at "Takeover: WarGames" to Aleister Black and last week on "NXT" to Johnny Gargano. I think you get where I'm going with this.

Of course it's going to be Dream winning and there's really no doubt about this one. Throw him out there in the opener and let him take a bunch of big forearm to the head before hitting the Purple Rainmaker for the pin. It's a simple idea and the fans are going to eat up Dream's stuff, especially after his previous two great performances. Easy winner here though.

Aleister Black vs. Adam Cole

Extreme Rules. This might be the most interesting match on the show and there's a very good chance that it's going to be the best as well. Black is one of the best acts in NXT at the moment with one of the best finishers but Black is more of an acquired taste. He's a great talker, but at the same time he needs to be able to do something in the ring to back that up.

I'm going to take Black here but Cole winning is a possibility, especially with Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly available to run interference if necessary. I could see Black getting screwed out of the title, but Black getting an NXT Title shot in New Orleans makes a lot of sense as well, meaning he should win here. I'll take Black in a match that really could go either way.

NXT Title: Andrade Cien Almas(c) vs. Johnny Gargano

This is a different kind of story as they have a past together and there's a future for both guys but at the same time there isn't much going on between them at the moment. Gargano won a competition to become #1 contender and is in the middle of a huge redemption story and Almas feels more like a transitional champion, even though he's kind of redeeming himself at the same time.

That being said, Almas retains here when Tommaso Ciampa runs in for the interference and costs Gargano his chance at becoming champion. That sets up the mother of all grudge matches in New Orleans while Almas retains the title and gets to face Black, who can kick his head off and win the title...I think. It should be a fun match as they surprised me in Brooklyn, but I'm not sure they can top what they did there.

Overall, "Takeover: Philadelphia" doesn't seem like the best show on paper. Nothing really jumps off the page at me but that's been the case before and NXT has blown me away almost every time. Almas' time on top hasn't been the most thrilling

in the world but they'll set something up to get things going soon enough, because that's how NXT does things. Let them show what they can do and everything will be fine.

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NXT – January 24, 2018: Dream On

NXT

Date: January 24, 2018

Location: Center Stage Theater, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson

It's the go home show for Takeover: Philadelphia and that means most of the show is already set. There's always the chance of throwing some stuff in via a backstage segment but odds are we've seen the card announced. Tonight is likely going to be heavy on talking, which isn't a bad thing around here. Let's get to it.

With his back to the camera and purple smoke filling the room, Velveteen Dream talks about how we all dream. Everyone wants to be NXT Champion, including Johnny Gargano. Sure Johnny is a fine choice, but why would anyone pick him when they can pick Dream? Tonight, a dream will be over. Good stuff here, as Dream knows how to bring the atmosphere.

Opening sequence.

No Way Jose vs. Cezar Bononi

For once Bononi doesn't tower over his opponent. Jose shoulders him down to start and hits a quick atomic drop. Bononi fights out of an armbar and hits a pumphandle slam, followed by a chinlock. Back up and Jose scores with some punches to the jaw, followed by a powerslam. The pop up right hand (Toma, which means Take That) ends Bononi at 3:20.

Rating: D. That's quite the abrupt loss for Bononi, who has been a much bigger deal as of late and not someone you would expect to lose in such short fashion. Also, what's up with right hands becoming finishers of late? Mojo Rawley uses one and Alexa Bliss has won with them a few times as well. Are they that out of finishers? Either way, it's nice to see Jose back as I was always a fan.

Video on Adam Cole costing Aleister Black a shot at being #1 contender, setting up their Extreme Rules match at Takeover. As usual, this did a great job of making me buy into the emotion and that's exactly the point.

Bianca Belair vs. LaToya Alstott

Belair's tights say Est because she's the baddest, the best, the toughest, the smartest etc. The LET'S GO JOBBER chants begin as LaToya's rollup out of the corner is easily blocked. Belair throws her around and shrugs off some kicks to the ribs, setting up a HARD forearm to the jaw. A double chickenwing faceplant puts LaToya down but she gets in a kick to the head for a breather. LaToya goes up though and dives into the hair whip to the ribs. An Alleyoop finishes LaToya at 3:37.

Rating: D+. Belair continues to be impressive with some great athleticism and power (though I still don't like the hair thing). She's similar to

Shelton Benjamin with the awesome athletic background and that's a very good thing for her. LaToya was your standard jobber and didn't show anything of note, but she wasn't supposed to here.

Earlier today, Shayna Baszler and Ember Moon sat down for an interview. Ember talks about the code of the women's division and Shayna having no respect. Baszler laughs it off and says that it was never about hurting people but rather the end goal. She saw Moon go up against the undefeated...and lose. Moon kept going and accomplished her dream, but when she wakes up at Takeover, she'll see Baszler walking away with that dream. The one thing Baszler wants everyone to know: they'll have to get used to it.

A few things here. First of all, I know this was heavily scripted, but Baszler came off as more natural and that's because she's already got the character down. She's the bully who doesn't care about anything that came before her and just wants the title. That's it and she's nailing that character. Moon doesn't exactly have a character and that showed here, along with sounding very scripted. Also, this is almost exactly AJ Styles vs. Samoa Joe from TNA when Joe disrespected the X-Division and destroyed Christopher Daniels. Not a bad story, but it's about as copied as you can get.

We get the second part of the TM61 video, this time focusing on Shane Thorn's knee injury. It's kept him (and the team) on the shelf for about six months but now they're back to prove that they're the best team around. They know their greatness and HARLEY RACE endorses them. Well I'm certainly sold. They're back in the ring next week.

Authors of Pain vs. Chris Brown/Jason Smith

No match as the Authors destroy the jobbers and promise to do the same to the Undisputed Era. The Super Collider makes things even worse.

Next week: Nikki Cross vs. Lacey Evans.

Velveteen Dream vs. Johnny Gargano

The winner faces Andrade Cien Almas at Takeover and they have A LOT of

time here. Dream wears a Johnny Wrestling shirt to the ring to play some mind games. The fans are split as they hit the mat to start with neither being able to get the advantage. Dream throws him away and poses, mocking Gargano for crying before. That earns him a Gargano Escape but Dream gets to the floor, albeit with a sore arm, as we take a break.

Back with Gargano knocking the bad arm into the announcers' table and cannonballing off the apron to take Dream down. The slingshot spear is countered with a hanging swinging neckbreaker though and Dream uppercuts him in the back. They head outside again with Dream slugging away and we take another break. Back again with Johnny hitting an enziguri but getting superkicked away.

Johnny bounces off the ropes though and clotheslines Dream down for a delayed two. Neither can hit a headscissors so Dream grabs that Sister Abigail DDT for two of his own. Johnny shoves him away again but gets crotched on top to slow things down all over again. A super Death Valley Driver plants Johnny again (and that's a MAMA MIA from Mauro) for two more with the fans hanging on these kickouts. The Purple Rainmaker hits knees (thanks to Dream's left arm being so banged up) and it's the Gargano Escape to make Dream tap at 19:14.

Rating: A-. The arm stuff was a good story and the idea of Johnny never giving up and fighting the whole way through was the perfect way to send him on to the title match. Dream losing again is somewhat questionable as he needs to win a big match, but in this case it fits the story of Johnny needing to eliminate all doubts. It should be a great match and thankfully it was set up by a great match.

Post match Andrade Cien Almas and Zelina Vega come out and drop Gargano with a shot to the head. Johnny gets tossed to the floor but comes back in with the slingshot DDT and poses with the title as Mauro plugs everything on Saturday to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. This show did its job rather well, especially with the NXT Title feud. I want to see that match a lot more now as they sold me on the story they're trying to tell. They've also set it up where Ciampa returning to screw Gargano out of his dream or Ciampa returning later to

be the big challenger both work, and that's a great place to be. The rest of the show wasn't as strong, but everything else is already set for Saturday anyway.

Results

No Way Jose b. Cezar Bononi – Toma

Bianca Belair b. LaToya Alstott – Alleyoop

Johnny Gargano b. Velveteen Dream – Gargano Escape

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NXT – January 17, 2018: From Atlanta to Philadelphia

NXT

Date: January 17, 2018

Location: Center Stage Theater, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson

We're still in Atlanta as we're heading towards Philadelphia for the next

Takeover. Last week saw the Undisputed Era beat down Aleister Black to end the show, earning Adam Cole an Extreme Rules match with Black in Philadelphia. Odds are we'll get the final card for the next Takeover tonight so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

We see the shots of the crowd and there's a rather prominent fan with a Britney Spears shirt. I'd wear that.

Heavy Machinery vs. Tino Sabbatelli/Riddick Moss

As usual, it's a feud over Sabbatelli and Moss' car. Otis runs Sabbatelli over with a hard shoulder to start and Tino isn't sure what to do about that kind of power. Tucker comes in and grabs a front facelock to swing Tino around in a circle, only to have him land in front of Moss. Heavy Machinery crushes Moss between the two of them followed by something like a Worm into an elbow. It's back to Tino to hammer on Otis until a clothesline allows the hot tag to Knight. Everything breaks down and Moss grabs a rollup with his feet on the ropes for the pin at 4:41.

Rating: C-. I'm glad Sabbatelli and Moss got a win and it's not the biggest problem in the world as Heavy Machinery has already lost most of their steam. It's also weird to have a power team like Heavy Machinery as good guys but it helps when Sabbatelli and Moss are good rich jerks. Buy something other than the car though.

Cole isn't worried about Black because there are a million and one ways to hurt him. Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly know everyone wants their titles but they're all in the Era's era. I'm still not sold on that name as Undisputed would just sound better.

We look back at the ending of last week's show with the announcement of the Extreme Rules match. Shouldn't that have aired before the promo?

Roderick Strong vs. Fabian Aichner

Strong tries a headlock to start as the fans seem split. A leg lariat gives Strong two but Aichner powerslams him out of the air as we take a break. Back with Aichner holding an abdominal stretch until Strong fights

out. The Angle Slam is broken up so Strong settles for his first backbreaker. Aichner is right back with a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker of his own and goes up, only to dive into another backbreaker. The Strong Hold (now a Liontamer) is good for the tap out at 7:37.

Rating: C+. Aichner has a real future with a great look and an awesome set of skills but he needs a little something more to really make it work. Still though, it's cool to see him getting chances against big names like Strong, who still needs a few more big wins to really get somewhere. He's a good upper midcarder though and you can always use one of those.

Post match Strong says he wants Lars Sullivan, who had already said he wanted to face Killian Dain. So we might be looking at a three way?

Long video on TM-61, who will be back from injury rather soon. They've been out for a very long time. They've been training for years, including training under Harley Race. All the work has been worth it though and they're ready to make it here. They worked their way through a WWE tryout but also were young boys in Japan. Next week we'll get part two, which hopefully is as awesome as this one.

Aliyah vs. Lacey Evans

Aliyah gets taken down with a wristlock to start but walks into a jawbreaker. Evans is sent to the apron and kicks Aliyah's leg out for a slingshot elbow. A slingshot bronco buster gets two more on Aliyah but she grabs a northern lights suplex. Back up and Aliyah charges into a right hand in the corner...for the pin at 3:24.

Rating: D+. Aliyah is starting to look better but she still needs some more polishing. Evans has a bit of a weird gimmick but it's a little more interesting than some others. Ending a match with a right hand though is rather different as well, but it does make her look a little tougher than you would expect.

Post match Evans says she wants to bring some class to the women's division and she'll start with Nikki Cross. Shayna Baszler comes out and glares at Evans before grabbing her choke on Aliyah, who is still woozy

from the right hand. Ember Moon runs in for the save and tells Baszler to try that on her. Baszler says she'll do it when the title is on the line. Moon says name the time.

William Regal makes the title match for Takeover. Zelina Vega comes in to say Velveteen Dream deserves the shot more than Johnny Gargano so they should have a #1 contenders match.

No Way Jose is back next week. I liked the guy, but I hadn't remembered he was gone.

Johnny Gargano comes to the ring and says bring Dream on. This isn't a fluke and this is his time and opportunity. The match is on for next week.

We look back at the Undisputed Era attacking Sanity to avoid the title defense last week.

Authors of Pain vs. Street Profits

The winners get the title shot in Philadelphia. Akum shoulders Ford down to start and easily pulls him over to the corner so Razar can get in his own shots to the back. The fans are behind the Profits of course as Ford has to fight out of a full nelson. One heck of a full nelson slam gives Razar two and it's off to a chinlock as we take a break.

Back with Ford fighting out of a front facelock and bringing Dawkins in to clean house. A spinebuster/missile dropkick combination gets two on Akum and that's probably their best shot. The Super Collider into the Last Chapter ends Ford at 9:43 to send the Authors to Philadelphia.

Rating: C. The Profits will be back of course but this was a big loss for them. The Authors are in a weird place as they're not being called up to the main roster for whatever reason but there are so many teams around who are more interesting or just better than they are. Throw in the soon to debut War Machine and I'm not sure where they're going.

Overall Rating: C+. This was the kind of show that they needed heading into Philadelphia as some of the stories needed a little bit more heat. Tonight helped on those fronts as well as adding two fresh title matches

to the card. I'm starting to look forward to Philadelphia, which wasn't the case as we were coming into this show. Hopefully things are even better next week, which tends to be the case around here.

Results

Tino Sabbatelli/Riddick Moss b. Heavy Machinery – Rollup to Moss

Roderick Strong b. Fabian Aichner – Strong Hold

Lacey Evans b. Aliyah – Right hand

Authors of Pain b. Street Profits – Last Chapter to Ford

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Ricochet Signs with WWE

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/breaking-confirmation-ricochet-man/>

So yeah, you knew this one was coming sooner or later. Ricochet is one of the best high fliers in the world and at just under thirty years old, there's no reason to not come to

the big show. He's had some success in New Japan so now it's time to go to WWE and see what he can do. Of course it's in NXT first (as it should be), but I'm a bit scared of what we might be seeing over in WWE. That being said, Ricochet has the charisma and talking ability to make this work and could be a big star, assuming he's not just thrown onto 205 Live and left to drown.

NXT – January 10, 2018: This Doesn't Feel Right

NXT

Date: January 10, 2018

Location: Center Stage Theater, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Nigel McGuinness, Percy Watson

We're on some hallowed ground tonight as NXT heads to the former home of WCW Saturday Night. The next three shows will be all about setting up Takeover: Philadelphia, which means we need some more matches announced. A good chunk of the card is already set but NXT somehow manages to make the shows building to the big show entertaining as well. Let's get to it.

The Undisputed Era is ready to start their year of dominance by taking out Sanity once and for all tonight. Adam Cole is ready to start becoming the next NXT Champion. Simple and to the point here with something that you would expect them to say. Just ignore the whole "the beginning of the era of undisputed" making O'Reilly sound like Yoda.

Opening sequence.

The ring is turned to the side here, meaning wrestlers come to a corner when they come down the aisle. It's an awesome visual and feels different, which is where NXT excels.

Shayna Baszler vs. Dakota Kai

This is both of their NXT in-ring debuts. Before the match we see a clip of Baszler randomly attacking Performance Center trainees for fun because that's the kind of villain she is. Baszler drives her into the corner to start and takes Kai down into an armbar. A stomp bends Kai's arm at a NASTY angle and that's a referee stoppage at 1:23. Total squash and Baszler looked awesome here.

Post match Baszler stays on her until Ember Moon makes the save.

The Authors of Pain are ready to take care of the Street Profits. Since when can the Authors speak English?

General Manager William Regal talks to Baszler, saying that's not going to get her a title shot. Baszler: "We done here?"

Kassius Ohno vs. Raul Mendoza

They even shake hands to start in a really old school move. Ohno grabs some rollups for a few early near falls but Mendoza is too fast. Mendoza hurricanranas him into a side roll but gets his head elbowed off without too much effort. An inverted Gory Special has Mendoza in more trouble until he reverses into a victory roll.

Back up and Ohno charges into a forearm in the corner, followed by a springboard spinning armdrag to drop Kassius again. Mendoza is showing off some very nice high flying here, which is exactly what he should be doing in a match like this. Ohno shrugs him off though and the High Tension Elbow Strike (running jumping elbow to the back of the head) ends Mendoza at 4:26.

Rating: C. This is the kind of thing that both guys needed. Ohno isn't exactly a star in NXT but he's great for a role like this: making people look good and using his experience to put together some better matches. Mendoza on the other hand is a rather good high flier and can showcase himself well around here. Mentioning that he's been in so many matches against top quality talent shows that they're likely to give him a win soon, which could lead somewhere for him.

Zelina Vega held a mini press conference saying she and Andrade Cien Almas aren't worried about Johnny Gargano after beating him twice. That's a fairy tale and Almas is reality. Vega is amazing at this condescending heel stuff and she's made Almas that much better.

Johnny Gargano is thrilled to be #1 contender but here's Velveteen Dream to interrupt. Dream wants a thank you for allowing Gargano to get his spot in the competition because Dream would have won it with ease. Gargano needs to thank him because Dream deserves his spot.

The Street Profits loudly come into Regal's office and think they deserve a Tag Team Title shot. Regal seems to agree so next week it's the Street Profits vs. the Authors of Pain in a #1 contenders match. More loudness ensues and Regal smiles.

Lio Rush vs. Lars Sullivan

This could hurt a lot. Rush dodges to start and even slaps Lars in the face. A kick to the jaw staggers Sullivan for a bit but he pulls Rush into the ropes to take over. Rush gets whipped hard into the corner but Lars misses a charge. That's about it for Rush though as one heck of a clothesline turns him inside out, followed by the Freak Accident for the pin at 1:54.

Post match Sullivan talks about destroying everyone until he ran into a different kind of force. That was Killian Dain and Sullivan wants to see him again. For now though, Rush takes a super Freak Accident to really hammer home the punishment.

The Undisputed Era has attacked Sanity in the back. The Era says that's it for the title shot.

Here's the Undisputed Era in the arena for a chat. Cole thinks they're missing something and Kyle asks where Sanity is. Maybe they forgot about their title shot tonight. Cole says they kicked the chaos out of Sanity but here's a livid Nikki Cross trying to get at the Era. Referees hold her back but so Regal comes out to cut the Era off again. The boss says the titles are on the line tonight and here's Roderick Strong to say he'll fight right now. Strong offers to go find a partner but someone

interrupts to say he'll do it.

Tag Team Titles: Undisputed Era vs. Roderick Strong/Aleister Black

The teams are at different corners than the usual WWE formula with the champs on the left side closer to the hard camera. I don't remember the last time I've seen the corners changed in WWE. Fish and O'Reilly are defending and get cleared to the floor, sending us to a break before the bell.

Back with the bell ringing and Black kicking away at both champs. A knee to Kyle's head gets two and Strong adds a dive to the floor. Back in and Black's Oklahoma roll gets two on Kyle, followed by an armbar to keep him in trouble. Strong comes in for a chinlock as the champs are still looking for their first offense. Fish finally takes Black's knee out and we take a break.

Back with Kyle holding the knee and Fish adding a slingshot hilo for two. An exploder suplex gives Fish two but Black kicks O'Reilly away. There's the double tag to bring in Strong and Fish as everything breaks down. The champs' Ax and Smash is broken up with a jumping knee to the face and everyone is down. Cue Cole to go after Black, who stalks him into the crowd. Back inside, the champs go High/Low to retain at 11:50.

Rating: C+. This didn't feel like the standard NXT main event but maybe they're saving the Sanity match for another time. It was entertaining for what it was though and thankfully NXT is smart enough to not put the titles on a thrown together team like you would see so often on the main shows. Fine main event, but it felt more like a big time house show.

Post match Black comes in for the brawl but gets taken out. An AA onto an open chair knocks Black cold. The Era poses but here's Regal to talk about Philadelphia's extreme history. At Takeover: Philadelphia, Cole vs. Black will be an Extreme Rules match. Cole and Regal stare each other down to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This show felt a little off from the norm for NXT but it still did everything it needed to do. The big story here was the arrival of Baszler (nailed it) and some more matches being teased for

Takeover. NXT can fill in the gaps over the next few weeks and that's where they shine. Good enough show, but it didn't feel like it had the same flow that most of their episode do.

Results

Shayna Baszler b. Dakota Kai via referee stoppage

Kassius Ohno b. Raul Mendoza – High Tension Elbow Strike

Lars Sullivan b. Lio Rush – Freak Accident

Undisputed Era b. Roderick Strong/Aleister Black – High/Low to Strong

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NXT – January 3, 2018: I Have An Eye For Talent

NXT

Date: January 3, 2018

Hosts: Kayla Braxton, Mike Rome

It's the first show of the year but as a special, we're looking at the Best Of 2017 in a double length episode. These are always fun to look at as there's nearly a guarantee that you've forgotten at least something that you'll see tonight. There's been a lot of good throughout the year for NXT so let's get to it.

As usual, even if the versions presented on the broadcast are clipped, I'll be posting the full review of each match.

Opening sequence.

We look at Bobby Roode defeating Shinsuke Nakamura for the NXT Title in January.

We look at the rematch from Takeover: Orlando with the full entrances, albeit with some different camera angles during the entrances. Roode retained and Nakamura got the big sendoff.

Video on Shinsuke Nakamura's NXT career from William Regal announcing his debut all the way to his farewell in April.

Video on Drew McIntyre coming to NXT.

From Takeover: San Antonio.

Tag Team Titles: DIY vs. Authors of Pain

Johnny Gargano and Tommaso Ciampa are defending and unfortunately the Authors take off their jackets, meaning the name tags go away. Razar takes Ciampa into the corner and shouts at him a lot, drawing a PSYCHO KILLER chant from the crowd. Gargano tries the spear through the ropes and is casually swatted away. Everything breaks down and the champs just can't do anything with rights and lefts.

Some running knees work a bit better though and the monsters are knocked to the floor for a suicide dive and running knee from the apron. Back in and Akam casually slams Gargano over the top and the beating is on. It's off to an over the shoulder backbreaker until Johnny slips down into an enziguri....which has no effect whatsoever.

Gargano finally slips away and makes the hot tag off to Ciampa so house can be cleaned as well as possible. Some German suplexes take the Authors down and Paul Ellering is losing it on the floor. The referee tells Ciampa "six minutes left" as he chops away at Akam, who takes Ciampa's head off for two. The champs get two of their own off a double spear but Johnny gets knocked to the floor again, leaving Ciampa to get caught in a powerbomb/neckbreaker combination for two.

Johnny is back in to break up the Last Chapter and it's off to the double arm submission. Akam powers out of Johnny's crossface though and slams Gargano onto Tommaso to break the other hold. That's a really effective spot as the champs took their best shot and couldn't stop the raw power. They slug it out from their knees but the double strike is countered into the Authors' double powerbomb. The Last Chapter on Ciampa give us new champions at 14:27.

Rating: B. I'm kind of surprised here but at the same time not exactly. Coming in I didn't think this would happen but now that it has, it makes the most sense. That being said, I was very, very pleasantly surprised here as I was expecting a big drop off and got the best match the Authors have ever had. It's a good match though and that's all you could ask for out of these guys.

We look at Drew McIntyre winning the NXT Title at Takeover: Brooklyn. Again it's just a few minutes of highlights from a long match. Post match, the yet to be named Undisputed Era ran in and attacked McIntyre.

Video on the Undisputed Era, focusing on Adam Cole.

We look at the Undisputed Era stealing the Tag Team Titles two weeks ago.

Here are some of the tag teams to watch in 2018: the Undisputed Era, the Street Profits, Tino Sabbatelli and Riddick Moss, Heavy Machinery and TM61 (returning from injury in two weeks).

Video on Aleister Black vs. Velveteen Dream. I underrated the heck out of that match.

From Takeover: WarGames.

Aleister Black vs. Velveteen Dream

Black does his still awesome rising up entrance. Dream debuts some custom made tights with himself on one leg and Black on the other ala Rick Rude back in the day. The fans are rather pleased with Dream, even as he slaps Black in the face. They hit the mat to start with Black working on an armbar before grabbing something like an Octopus hold. Dream slips out and actually tries to turn it into a striking match, earning himself a trip to the floor.

That allows Black to backflip into his sitting pose, right in front of Dream. A hip swivel doesn't seem to get on Black's nerves, but he does look away a bit. Dream sits down as well as the fans chant SAY HIS NAME. Black crawls forward like Dream did a few weeks back, freaking Dream out for a change. Dream actually snaps his throat across the ropes to send Black outside, meaning it's time for more posing.

Back in and Dream gets two off a good looking superkick before we hit a reverse chinlock (Dream: "SAY IT! SAY IT!"). Black gets tied up in the ropes as the fans really want him to say it. Dream slaps him though and that's just not a good idea. Black speeds things up with some strikes and a springboard moonsault press for two (SWEET, according to the annoying fans).

A quick Death Valley Driver gives Dream two so he tries a super version, only to get kicked down. Black knees him in the face for a close two, only to get caught in a Sister Abigail into a DDT for a delayed two. The Purple Rainmaker lands on a raised boot though, sending Dream into the ropes. Black kicks him in the face but walks into a superkick. That's enough for Black though and it's Black Mass for the pin at 14:41.

Rating: B+. Who knew Dream had that in him? This was all about the mind games at first but at the end of the day, you (mostly) knew it was going to be Black Mass wrapping this up. Black seems ready to become a huge deal around here and Dream...I'm not sure where he goes from here actually. Really good match though.

Post match Black takes the mic and says "enjoy infamy...Velveteen Dream." I'm not sure what to make of that. Sign of respect maybe?

Video on the build to Andrade Cien Almas vs. Drew McIntyre.

From November 17, the night before Takeover: WarGames.

NXT Title: Drew McIntyre vs. Adam Cole

Date: November 17, 2017

Location: Aztec Theater, San Antonio, Texas

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Percy Watson, Nigel McGuinness

Drew is defending, Cole has Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly with him and Shawn Michaels is guest referee. McIntyre takes him down with almost no effort and Cole seems to need a fresh plan. Cole gets tossed off a headlock and bails to the floor as the stalling begins. Back in and a jawbreaker staggers Drew, allowing Fish to grab his foot. Fish and O'Reilly get on the apron so Shawn ejects them both.

That earns a SWEET CHIN MUSIC chant as reality sets in for Cole. One heck of a backdrop puts Cole down (well up and then down) and a poke to the eye has no effect on Drew. Shawn calls Drew off of Cole in the corner and McIntyre isn't exactly happy. Cole takes the knee out though and it's time for a break. Back with Cole getting powerbombed down and a super Celtic Cross getting two.

Cole is right back by kicking the knee out and hitting a Shining Wizard for two of his own. Sweet Chin Music (well you knew that was coming) is loaded up but Drew drops Cole with the Futureshock. Back up and Cole superkicks Shawn by mistake, meaning the Claymore gets a very delayed two. Cue Fish and O'Reilly to stomp Drew down for a bit but the comeback bumps Shawn again. Shawn is up fast enough to superkick O'Reilly and it's a swinging Futureshock (cool) into the Claymore to retain the title at 15:12.

Rating: B. This was almost more about Shawn than anything else and that's just fine. Shawn was a special attraction in this one and really, he's more interesting than a house show title match. I'm sure Cole is going to be back in the title hunt eventually (around Brooklyn against Gargano would be a nice choice) and Drew should be on the main roster once he

gets back from injury. There's nothing left for him to do in NXT and his size is way too much for the rest of the roster.

Quick look at Almas winning the title the next night, during which Drew suffered a bad arm injury.

Almas is ready to face Johnny Gargano, who he insulted after Gargano won the title shot last week.

We look back at Asuka's NXT career from her debut to vacating the title.

Package on the women's division, including looks at the Iconic Duo, Lacey Evans, Kairi Sane, Bianca Belair, Vanessa Bourne, Shayna Baszler and Nikki Cross.

Last week, Sane made it clear that she wants the title but got choked out by Baszler.

Baszler debuts next week.

Video on WarGames, which really was the carnage that it should have been. I know it wasn't quite the match that a lot of people were expecting but it was still a heck of a performance with some rather memorable spots. Let the WWE have its own version rather than a watered down version of the WCW style, which wouldn't work today anyway.

We look back at the injured Tommaso Ciampa explaining why he turned on Gargano at Takeover: Chicago. DIY was supposed to have a moment but Ciampa hurt his knee during a match. Fans started talking about Johnny wrestling on his own and that's not what Ciampa wanted, hence the betrayal. However, during the ladder match, Ciampa tore his ACL in the match and would be out for the rest of the year.

Video on last week's fatal four way with Gargano becoming #1 contender, earning a shot at Takeover: Philadelphia.

Also set for Philadelphia: Adam Cole vs. Aleister Black. I'm not sure Black wins that one and that makes things more interesting.

Gargano talks about his rough 2017, which started at such a high but then

came crashing down around him, including the DIY split and all the losses that followed. He always knew he could do it though and 2018 is going to be the best year of his life. It makes sense to give Gargano this kind of focus as there's no doubt that he's going to be one of the top stars in NXT in 2018, likely holding the title at some point. He had a rocky 2017 but the performances were always there.

Here are the categories for NXT's End of the Year Awards

Takeover of the Year

Match of the Year

Tag Team of the Year

Breakout Star of the Year

Male Competitor of the Year

Female Competitor of the Year

Future Star of NXT

Rivalry of the Year

Overall Competitor of the Year

We get a long profile on Ember Moon, which started with her growing up in Texas watching wrestling with her grandfather. She went to train with Booker T. but got shot down in her first WWE tryout. WWE told her she didn't have the Diva look (read as: she's not a blonde model more than likely) but Norman Smiley say something in her. She stuck with Booker's Reality of Wrestling promotion and developed a following, eventually earning herself a job after a second tryout.

Moon debuted with her crazy entrance and the Eclipse and was off to the races. Eventually she lost to Asuka though and it crippled some of her confidence, only to win the vacant title a few months later. Moon talks about knowing she can do it and being ready for anything to end the show. I remember watching an episode of the Reality of Wrestling show and thinking she was the standout star of the show. It turned out that she

had already been signed by the time I saw it so maybe I have an eye for talent.

Overall Rating: B-. Normally I never know what to do for a Best Of show but this actually had some effort put in, which is a nice touch. They covered a lot here and I can appreciate the extra time being spent on something like this instead of just throwing a bunch of matches out there to fill in time. They even managed to add in extra stuff for next week and hype the Takeover because that's what NXT knows how to do.

The exclusive match was fun and made the show feel special, but I really liked the profile on Moon. We really don't know much about her and if there's one thing WWE knows how to nail, it's introducing you to a character and making them feel important. That's what I got out of Moon and that's what WWE needed to do more than anything else with her. Good show here, and the new year should be off to a hot start.

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