

Marcus Louis, Sylvester LeFort and Bull Dempsey Gone From NXT

Louis and LeFort have barely been used for months and Dempsey was little more than a comedy jobber. It's strange to see people leaving NXT though as they rarely release anyone.

NXT – February 3, 2016: It's Like Being A Proud Parent

NXT

Date: February 3, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

It's a big week here on NXT as we have a non-title match between NXT Champion Finn Balor and Apollo Crews, who had a shot at the title late last year which was interrupted with the match pretty much even. In addition to that we should be getting some updates on the ending to last week's triple threat match which ended in a double submission. Let's get to it.

We open with a quick preview of Crews vs. Balor.

Opening sequence.

Vaudevillains vs. Hype Bros

The Bros have quite the long entrance with smoke coming down from the ceiling while they pose on the buckles. Mojo rolls English up for two to

start as Corey talks about Alf. It's off to Ryder for a running seated Blockbuster (think a Hennig Necksnap from the other way) but Gotch grabs Zack's feet to take over.

Simon comes in legally to put on a chinlock as the announcers try to figure out when the Vaudevillains fell off track, which sounds like code for starting their heel turn. Ryder kicks both villains away and makes the tag off to Mojo so Graves can make Ghostbusters jokes due to the bright green gear. Everything breaks down and Ryder misses the Broski Boot, setting up the Whirling Dervish to pin Zack at 4:16.

Rating: C. Totally fine match here though I'm really not sure about either of these teams going anywhere. The Bros are going to stay over no matter what they do based on their incredible energy alone so let them have a few wins here and there to give them a bit of credibility. The Vaudevillains on the other hand.....I'm not sure how much further they're really going to go.

We look back at Carmella winning the battle royal to become #1 contender a few weeks back.

It's time for a sitdown interview with Carmella where she talks about her dad being a wrestler in the 90s (albeit a jobber) who taught her a bunch of submission grappling. Carmella can't wait for her title shot next week because she and Bayley are going to be friends no matter what. Tonight she's going to prove how she deserves to be champion when she defeats Emma. This was a VERY toned down Carmella and showed a completely different side of her which worked better than I was expecting.

Scott Dawson and Dash Wilder are tired of hearing the same things from Enzo Amore and Colin Cassady because they've demanded shot after shot. Not that it matters because they're never going to win any of them since they're just not that good. They're fine with giving them one more shot because it's not going to work.

Carmella vs. Emma

They trade headlocks to start until Emma takes her down and pounds in right hands. A twisting wristlock keeps Carmella on the mat and Emma

pulls on both arms at the same time. Carmella fights up but gets pulled down by the hair in a hurry. Emma loads up a butterfly suplex but gets countered into a backslide of all things for the pin at 4:16.

Rating: D+. Well it wasn't the most interesting thing in the world but it did exactly what it was designed to do. Carmella gets a clean win over someone with some credibility around here, which is really necessary with just a week to go before the title shot against Bayley next week. It's probably just a one off match so do what you can in the limited time you have.

We look at the end of last week's triple threat.

Sami Zayn has looked at the video multiple times and thinks he should win because he had the Sharpshooter on longer. He has faith in the outcome.

Joe has nothing to say.

Video on American Alpha.

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. ???/???

Before the match, Enzo reiterates that if he and Cass had a dime for every time they were knocked down and didn't get back up, they would have zero dimes. They are hard bodies and there's only ONE WORD to describe people who try to knock them down. Enzo easily takes Jobber #1 down to start and does a little dance before scoring off a big knee lift. Cass comes in and throws his partner into Jobber #1 as the announcers have no idea what to call these guys. #2 is LAUNCHED to the floor and the Rocket Launcher ends this in a hurry at 2:14.

Apollo Crews says he gets to prove himself tonight after having that taken away in his first shot at Finn Balor.

William Regal has made his decision on the #1 contendership but Baron Corbin comes into his office to interrupt. There will be a rematch but Corbin isn't going to be involved. Instead, it's going to be Zayn vs. Joe for the title shot at some point in the future.

Asuka vs. Santana Garrett

Garrett is quickly sent into the ropes for the running hip attack, followed by a HARD shot to the face. Asuka misses a running knee to the face though and gets rolled up for two. Something like a leapfrog into a cross armbreaker has Garrett in trouble and the Asuka Lock is good for the submission at 2:26.

Finn Balor is looking forward to seeing Zayn vs. Joe but tonight he's going to prove to Crews that he may be good but he's not the best.

Apollo Crews vs. Finn Balor

Non-title and non-Demon for Balor. They shake hands to start and Balor starts cranking on an armbar. A headlock keeps Crews in trouble and they're certainly taking their time here. Crews is stuck in the hold for a full minute but he does keep making Finn work with some rollups. Apollo nips up and scores with a dropkick, which seems to make the announcers think everything is even.

We take a break and come back with Balor caught in a chinlock. Finn rolls through a sunset flip to dropkick a seated Crews before going back to the armbar. Crews gets up one more time for another escape and the champ is getting frustrated. It's very short lived though as Balor takes him right back down into another armbar as the slow pace continues. Another counter is broken up so Finn knocks him to the floor for a BIG flip dive.

A top rope double stomp to the back (not the Coup de Grace) gets two on Crews and now the shock is setting in. Crews throws him into the air for two off a big Samoan Drop, only to get caught in a Sling Blade. That's fine with Crews who blocks the basement dropkick and gets two more off the gorilla press/standing moonsault. Balor kicks him in the head and scores with a second Sling Blade, followed by the Coup de Grace for no cover. Instead it's the Bloody Sunday (not named) for the pin at 15:03.

Rating: B-. This was an interesting one with a nice story of Balor controlling because he's just flat out better but Crews getting back into things when the match was wrestled in his style. Balor winning in the end with the bigger finisher worked, though the announcers and crowd really didn't seem to get as into this as they were shooting for. Balor certainly has the stuff but Crews hasn't really shown that he can do

anything more than be athletic.

Balor helps him to his feet post match and they shake hands again. The announcers confirm that it's Zayn vs. Joe in two weeks to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. As usual, they're building up the big TV shows (taped in a bigger arena to make things feel more special) by using every bit of the TV time they have. Not only are they setting up stuff for the coming weeks, they're also planting seeds for what's coming at Takeover in Dallas. Watching this show is like watching your kid succeed in school and doing everything you want them to do. It's such a nice feeling and they never let me down.

Results

Vaudevillains b. Hype Bros – Whirling Dervish to Ryder

Carmella b. Emma – Backslide

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady b. ???/??? – Rocket Launcher

Asuka b. Santana Garrett – Asuka Lock

Finn Balor b. Apollo Crews – Bloody Sunday

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NXT – January 27, 2016: The Road To More Good Wrestling

NXT

Date: January 27, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

Tonight is a big night as we find out the #1 contender for the NXT Title with the title shot potentially coming at Takeover: Dallas over Wrestlemania weekend. We have Baron Corbin vs. Sami Zayn vs. Samoa Joe in a triple threat match with the winner getting a shot at some point in the future. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

American Alpha vs. Blake and Murphy

The announcers accuse Bliss of staring at Jordan as he starts with Murphy. Jason gets his kick to the ribs caught but keeps jumping over the attempted legsweeps. It's off to Gable to start in on the arm but a hair pull stops his twisting. Blake comes in and is taken down just as fast as Gable is clearly just having fun with both of them in there. Chad dives over him a few times into some armdrags and throws, followed by a crucifix for two.

We get the GABLE chants to the Kurt Angle tune until Murphy claims a knee injury. Of course it's a gold bricking job as he waves Murphy over for a distraction to set up a chop block on Gable. It's time to start in on the leg until Gable kicks Murphy over the top and out to the floor for a crash. The hot tag brings in Jordan for suplexes all around, capped off by Grand Amplitude on Blake at 7:23.

Rating: C+. It's clear that American Alpha is about five steps ahead of everyone else in the division but we're likely going to wait a bit before they get to go after the titles. At least we get to be entertained while we wait for them to go for the titles though as this was a clinic on

dismantling a lower level team. Fun stuff here.

Emma is ready for Carmella next week because Bayley carried the team last week. Carmella has never actually done anything around here and she even lost to Blue Pants.

Stills of Sami Zayn entering the Royal Rumble.

Video on Asuka.

Nia Jax vs. Liv Morgan

Eva Marie is out with Jax as we still wait to know why they're associated. Morgan tries to power Jax around to start and gets caught in an easy cobra clutch. A jawbreaker staggers Jax a bit, only to have a side slam set up the legdrop for the pin at 2:10.

Carmella is ready for Emma next week and promises to beat her all alone. Enzo and Cass aren't impressed by Dash and Dawson either and promises to take care of them as soon as they can.

Video on Baron Corbin.

We get the same sinister Vaudevillains vignette from last week.

Bull Dempsey vs. Alex Riley

The fans chant WELCOME BACK as Bull does jumping jacks. Riley takes him down to start and we're in an early chinlock. Bull pops up with left hands but walks into a spinebuster, followed by a knee to the face to give Riley the pin at 2:07.

After a break, Riley says he's tired of watching NXT and never hearing his name mentioned.

Elias Samson vs. John Skyler

Samson whips him into the corner to start and scores with a quick dropkick. A right hand drops Skyler and Samson sits in the corner ala Raven. Back up and Samson grabs a very fast swinging neckbreaker for the pin at 1:57.

The Hype Bros aren't impressed by the Vaudevillains' new videos. This turns into a discussion of Mojo watching Ryder sleep.

Video on Samoa Joe.

We look at Finn Balor vs. Apollo Crews from a few months back where Corbin interfered to break it up. They fight again in a non-title match next week.

Baron Corbin vs. Samoa Joe vs. Sami Zayn

Winner is #1 contender. They circle each other to start until Corbin hits Joe in the face for a bit of a surprise. Sami low bridges Baron to the floor but Joe breaks up the dive and pulls Zayn to the floor. Baron gets a boot to the chest to keep Joe in control and Sami gets punched down in the corner. A knee drop misses Sami but Corbin comes back in to jump Sami from behind.

We take a break and come back with Joe still on the floor and Corbin charging into an elbow in the corner. That means it's time for Joe to come back in, only to be taken down by Sami. Corbin and Joe are knocked outside and it's finally time to connect with the running flip dive. Back in and Corbin grabs a quick Deep Six for two on Sami, only to get kicked in the face by Joe. Sami fights out of the Muscle Buster and grabs the Blue Thunder Bomb for two on Corbin.

The knockout lets Joe pull Sami to the floor for a quick Koquina Clutch before walking into End of Days. Sami dives back in to break up the cover and Corbin is livid. He pounds on Sami in the corner but runs into the exploder, followed by the Helluva Kick with Joe making the save this time. Joe gets sent to the floor so Sami puts Corbin in a Sharpshooter with Joe coming back in to add a Crossface. Corbin taps at 15:33 and we've got two winners.

Rating: B. If this means we get Joe vs. Sami down the line, I have zero issues with this finish. Corbin gets to save some face by getting caught in a double submission which would make almost anyone tap so everyone comes out looking strong. Really solid main event here and another good story being told.

Both guys say they won so here's GM William Regal to say he'll have to review the tape and make a decision on this controversy.

Overall Rating: B. Another good week here and again we have more stuff to look forward to next week. They're really nailing these ideas as we get ready for the big show down in Dallas. The ending has been looking forward to the fallout which should be another awesome match between Sami and Joe. As usual, building to good wrestling is the right idea and NXT keeps nailing it.

Results

America Alpha b. Blake and Murphy – Grand Amplitude to Blake

Nia Jax b. Liv Morgan – Legdrop

Alex Riley b. Bull Dempsey – Knee to the jaw

Elias Samson b. John Skyler – Swinging neckbreaker

Sami Zayn and Samoa Joe b. Baron Corbin – Sharpshooter and Crossface at the same time

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2015 Awards: Rookie of the Year

This might be the trickiest of all as you could say Sting is a rookie as he had his first WWE match in 2015. Since that could make things really complicated though, we'll go with people I consider rookies, meaning I might not consider some of your choices.

We'll start with someone outside WWE because I'm a WWE mark or something. ROH's Dalton Castle had debuted a few years earlier but changed his gimmick and debuted in the Top Prospect Tournament in the early part of the year. This turned into a great run for him as he became one of the more entertaining guys on the roster with a surprisingly strong offense and a great character. He's one of the people I enjoy most when watching ROH and his charisma alone will take him a long way.

Asuka is really kind of cheating as she's been wrestling for over ten years. However, she debuted in NXT and was instantly the second (at worst) woman on the roster. It's pretty clear Asuka vs. Bayley is coming at Takeover in Dallas and it should be one of the most awesome matches they've had....well since the last time Bayley had a big showdown match. This is a stretch but she's a rookie in WWE at least and that's close enough.

Speaking of rookie women in NXT, we have Nia Jax, who actually did debut in 2015. I know her character is limited and I still don't get why she and Eva Marie are teaming, but she played a perfect Vader to Bayley's Sting, which is really impressive given that she was debuting six months prior to that. I don't know how far she can go, but Nia is a great monster with a great look.

However, we finally have the runaway winner in Chad Gable. This is a guy who just gets it and was ready for the main roster about ten seconds after he debuted. Gable is the closest thing to another version of Kurt Angle as he went from the Olympics to the WWE where he's a comedic goon who was capable of out wrestling anyone. This guy could be something very

special in the future and he's just fun to watch, especially when he's with Jason Jordan.

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2015 Wrestling Observer Newsletter Awards

They're out for the year and as usual I'll be taking a look at each one and giving my take on whether or not I think Meltzer (yes I know the fans vote on them and if you think most of them aren't just repeating what he says, you're missing the point) got it right. I'll just be listing the winners and any other names in the top three that merit a vote. Also keep in mind that I don't watch a ton of puro so my knowledge is limited. Also, this is a wrestling site, not an MMA site, even though some people seem to think they're the same thing. There are a lot of these so I'm just going to give a quick response to each.

Wrestler of the Year – AJ Styles

Uh.....yeah I can go with that I guess. I'd have taken Cena due to how great the US Open Challenge was but Styles didn't get a bad review all year and wrestled almost EVERYWHERE.

Most Outstanding Wrestler – AJ Styles

It's another year and again I ask: what's the difference between this and Wrestler of the Year?

Feud of the Year – Conor McGregor vs. Jose Aldo

Well at least they're not wasting time this year, though can you imagine a wrestling match that ended in 13 seconds being considered a great blowoff to a feud? The top wrestling feud was Bayley vs. Sasha Banks, which is either my first or second pick as well.

Tag Team of the Year – Young Bucks

Of course. Next.

Most Improved – Bayley

This isn't the easiest year to argue against. I don't think anyone can argue that Bayley isn't better than she was last year as she's now the biggest star in NXT. I can go with this one again, even though it's not one I would have thought of.

Best on Interviews – Conor McGregor

Heyman was second and again that's fine, though I would have given it to Owens, who came in third.

Most Charismatic – Shinsuke Nakamura

Yep. No argument on that actually. The dude is a machine.

Best Technical Wrestler – Zack Sabre Jr.

I haven't seen him actually but I've heard nothing but rave reviews for him so this isn't surprising.

Best Brawler – Tomohiro Ishii

I saw his match at Wrestle Kingdom and it really wasn't brawling. Then again it was barely professional wrestling either so I'll go with a headscratch here. Brawling isn't really a thing these days in mainstream

wrestling so this is a hard one to pick.

Best Flyer – Riccochet

Neville didn't even make the top three. Seriously?

Most Overrated – Kane

Who rates Kane highly in the first place? Reigns is second. This should of course be the Young Bucks.

Most Underrated – Cesaro

For years I've thought underrated and overrated should be changed to under/over utilized as it always seems like what they're going for. Cesaro is considered awesome but he's never pushed. That's not the same as being underrated, which would also seem to be the case with Kane being overrated.

Promotion of the Year – New Japan

If you didn't see this coming, you haven't been paying close enough attention. NXT isn't in the top three, though that could be considered part of WWE (also not in the top three).

Best Weekly TV Show – NXT

Yep, with Lucha Underground second. Dang it Meltzer give me something to get mad at you over!

Match of the Year – Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kota Ibushi

You knew it would be something from New Japan, though to be fair I gave this an A. Bayley vs. Sasha from Brooklyn was third.

Rookie of the Year – Chad Gable

That's fine.

Best Non-Wrestler – Dario Cueto

Second is Paul Heyman and third is Xavier Woods. As in the guy that has

already wrestled multiple times this year alone and is a Tag Team Champion. I get what they're going for here though.

Best Announcer – Mauro Ranallo

Again, no surprise here.

Worst Announcer – John Layfield

Second is Cole and third is Lawler. I'm fine with this....again.

Best Major Wrestling Show – Wrestle Kingdom IX

I didn't even have to look at the results. Wrestlemania was third, after UFC 189.

Worst Major Wrestling Show – TripleMania XXIII

This has been the running answer all year and I'm not surprised. Third though was TLC, which really took me by surprise. If nothing else the three way ladder match alone would have carried it higher than third worst of the year.

Best Wrestling Maneuver – Styles Clash

Second was the Rainmaker (IT'S A FREAKING CLOTHESLINE!) and third is the Meltzer Driver, which has to be a joke instead of a real pick. The Clash is good but move of the year? As in the move that broke Yoshi Tatsu's neck? That's the best there is? Really?

Most Disgusting Promotional Tactic – WWE Using Reid Flair's Death in An Angle

Yeah this isn't surprising again. What is surprising is the Divas Revolution in second. Yeah it was stupid but disgusting?

Worst Match of the Year – Psycho Clowns vs. Villanos

Yep. Second is the Royal Rumble (which I rewatched a few days ago and yep) but third is Erick Rowan vs. Big Show in a stairs match....from 2014. Come on now man that's my thing.

Worst Feud of the Year – Team PCB vs. Team Bella vs. Team BAD

Yeah I think I can go with this. It's not so much that it was bad but more that it kept going for months and never went anywhere.

Worst Promotion of the Year – TNA

Can we just rename this the TNA Award? You would think after a nine year run it might be time.

Best Booker – Paul Levesque/Ryan Ward

As in the NXT bookers. I'm so glad that that promotion is getting the credit it deserves this year.

Promoter of the Year – Dana White

The first wrestling promoter is Takaaki Kidani of New Japan.

Worst Gimmick – Stardust

Well yeah, though I'm not sure how to define his gimmick. I'd have gone with Mex-America, which came in second.

This is more proof that this is a really weak year for awards. Everything has been pretty easy and there really isn't a lot that jumps off the page at me. It's really just been one predictable category after another and that can make for a lame awards season. At least NXT got the respect it deserves here which had me a bit worried coming in.

2015 Awards: News Story of the Year

Again, this one could depend on your definition of "news".

We'll get the two annual ones that still seem to surprise people out of the way first.

First of all, the Raw ratings bombed in the fall. I know they always do and yeah they were even worse this year, but then football season ended and the company started trying again, meaning the ratings went back up. This happens every year and I'm right there with you by saying it was never this bad, but this really does happen every year.

Second, TNA got thrown off another network and the audience continues to be dismal. This is what TNA is these days and until something major changes, it's not going to get any better no matter what happens.

Next up we have an actual surprise as Seth Rollins shredded every single piece of his knee and had to vacate the WWE World Title. This changed quite a few things depending on whose original plans you believe. Either way, Rollins being out changed quite a few things and potentially fast tracked Reigns toward the title. It was certainly shocking and changed a lot and that's how news works in wrestling.

Now we get to the big theme of the year: it's a bad time for 80s legends.

We'll start with the surprise deaths of both Dusty Rhodes and Roddy Piper. These two were giants of wrestling and passed away less than two months apart. On their own these two are much more sad than anything else but back to back like that was quite the big hit.

We also have Jimmy Snuka's potential murder trial, but given that Snuka is 72 years old and potentially mentally unfit to stand trial, this might not lead anywhere. Still though, it's quite the surprise to actually see this story come up again after all these years.

Finally in this group, we have Hulk Hogan's racist rant. Now here's the thing: it was several years ago and came at one of the lowest points of Hogan's life. Most people, including myself, thinks this comes off like Hogan venting off a lot of steam rather than the way he actually thinks. That seems to be the general consensus from his co-workers over the years so it's something I can believe.

The thing to remember with Hogan though is he said something. He didn't break a law, he didn't hurt anyone physically and he didn't do anything other than sound stupid. People say this kind of nonsense every day and Hogan happens to be a celebrity who got caught on camera. It's stupid for sure, but not the worst thing in the world.

Overall though, there's something else that comes off as a major news story to me, which shouldn't surprise a lot of you: the continued expansion of NXT. Between the wild extension of the house shows, breaking boundaries with Bayley and Sasha Banks main eventing a Network special, bringing in a bunch of new talent and the sellouts almost everywhere they go, NXT has turned into something special that we haven't seen before. It's ROH all stars under the WWE banner and this looks like the future. If so, we're in for a very good time in the coming years.

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NXT – January 20, 2016: The Other Way

NXT

Date: January 20, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

We're in a bit of a weird point in NXT as it's still a few months before the next announced Takeover and we're just starting to set up the big feuds before we get to the really big feuds. Next week it's Baron Corbin vs. Samoa Joe vs. Sami Zayn for the #1 contendership so odds are they'll get some focus tonight. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Sami Zayn vs. Adam Rose

Sami works on a wristlock to start and spins around into an armbar. We're already well into the OLE chants but Rose cuts them off with a kick to the head. Some elbow drops set up a chinlock on Sami but he's quickly on his feet. Rose chops him right back down though and drops a top rope headbutt for two before choking on the ropes. Sami shrugs those off as well though and grabs a Koji Clutch out of nowhere for the submission at 5:27.

Rating: D+. If there's one thing Sami Zayn does better than almost anyone, it's taking a beating and making a quick comeback to win while keeping it realistic. Bringing Rose back for a loss like this is the right way to use veterans here because having the big stars come down and treating them like a bigger deal than the NXT roster isn't going to be accepted. That and Sami is a bigger deal than Rose anyway.

Johnny Gargano says he isn't intimidated by a bully like Samoa Joe. His solution: punch Joe in the mouth. As long as his heart is beating, Johnny Wrestling will not back down.

Chad Gable and Jason Jordan talk about not being nominated for Tag Team of the Year while Blake and Murphy were on the list. They know they're getting better and they're going to the top. Another word for top is alpha and they're both Americans, so they might as well be called American Alpha.

Tye Dillinger vs. Apollo Crews

Dillinger's entrance is even more energetic than usual here. They circle

each other a bit to start until Dillinger takes him down with a wristlock. A headlock puts Crews on the mat and it's time for a quick victory lap with Tye giving himself a ten. That earns him a delayed vertical suplex with Crews only slipping a bit as Dillinger knees him in the head. It's a bit more impressive than when Lashley does it. Dillinger rolls outside but slide back in to hit a dive on Crews. Something like a Codebreaker gets two on Apollo but he pops back up and hits his lifting sitout powerbomb for the pin at 4:35.

Rating: C+. Better match than I was expecting here with Dillinger putting in more effort than I've seen from him in a long time. Crews continues to be an amazing athlete but I still haven't found a reason to connect with him yet. He's just a guy out there doing a bunch of cool looking stuff with nothing more to him. Talented for sure, but he needs some fine tuning.

Post match Crews says he's had something on his mind for a few weeks now. He isn't one to have a match end in a disqualification. Now he knows he hasn't earned a title shot, but he'd love to face Finn Balor one more time, even in a non-title match.

Alexa Bliss isn't happy with Blake and Murphy losing in London but she's going to lead by example tonight when she teams with Emma and beats up Bayley and Carmella.

We get a Vaudevillains vignette with the two of them looking very angry.

Stills of Kevin Owens appearing at the NXT Milwaukee house show.

Baron Corbin vs. Rich Swann

Swann is a longtime indy talent who recently signed with NXT. Corbin throws him into the corner to start and backdrops him into a 450. Off to something like a Tazmission from Corbin before Rich starts using some speed to avoids a few charges. A spinning kick to the face gets two on Corbin but Rich misses something off the top and charges into a big swinging Rock Bottom (called Deep Six) for the pin at 3:14.

Rating: C. Again a better match than I was expecting here with Swann

looking solid in his debut. This isn't a match to judge him off though as he didn't have a character or anything like that. Then again that's how a lot of people have started down in NXT and turned out just fine so I wouldn't be worried. Corbin having a secondary finisher is a good idea as End of Days only works so well.

Bayley and Carmella are ready for their tag match tonight when Dawson and Wilder come in to say Carmella is a loser just like Enzo and Cass. Carmella is so upset that she's being driven bananas (her words) but Bayley says save it for the match.

Carmella/Bayley vs. Emma/Alexa Bliss

Dana is here with Emma/Bliss. Emma gets in a cheap shot on Bayley and the champ's ribs are damaged before the opening bell. Bayley starts anyway but is quickly dragged into the corner and stomped in the corner with the villains staying on the bad ribs. We take an early break and come back with Bliss holding Bayley in an armbar. Bayley gets up and hits a quick middle rope dropkick which only hurts her ribs even more. Emma breaks up the hot tag attempt and gets suplexed as a result, only to have Dana offer a distraction to prevent another tag attempt.

The Emma Sandwich (called a cross body in the corner) stays on the ribs and it's back to Bliss for another armbar, even though Bayley's hand is grabbing the ropes. Bliss drags her away and that's good enough for the referee for some reason. Bayley fights out of the corner though and tags in Carmella to take over on Bliss as things speed up. Carmella's little dance sets up a Bronco Buster and the leg crossface makes Bliss tap at 9:26.

Rating: C+. Standard formula tag match here with Bayley playing the perfect face in peril until Carmella gets to make the comeback for the win. It makes a lot more sense to have Carmella get the win here as she needs to be built up before the title match and what better way to do that than by beating one of the many midcard heels?

Balor agrees to give Crews a non-title match.

Johnny Gargano vs. Samoa Joe

The fans start a JOHNNY WRESTLING chant which is such an awesome name. Joe drives him into the corner to start and grinds his forearm over Johnny's face before elbowing him in the jaw. Gargano snaps off a quick enziguri to put Joe on the floor, only to have him kick Johnny's leg out to take over again. The snap jabs have Gargano in trouble again and Joe kicks the leg out one more time, sending Gargano into a near 360.

Another kick puts Gargano on the floor but he dives in at nine with Graves ripping on him for going back to the beating. Back in and a quick enziguri and DDT stagger Joe but he kicks Gargano out of the air on a slingshot attempt. Gargano is already knocked silly so the Koquina Clutch puts him out of his misery at 4:30.

Rating: C+. Joe is the kind of guy who can work this physical ROH style and make it look good in short bursts. The Ciampa match was better but this was another hard hitting match where both guys came out looking good, even though this was pretty one sided for the most part. Gargano is another name that should be fine.

Overall Rating: B. This is where NXT continues to amaze me. They can have a week of nothing but storytelling and then the next week they do almost nothing but solid wrestling. The triple threat is looking better and you have another big match to build towards with Crews vs. Balor, even though it's non-title. As usual, they set up a goal and then they accomplish it, usually in the span of just a week. That's unheard of in today's wrestling and NXT does it nearly every single time. Well done, as usual.

Results

Sami Zayn b. Adam Rose – Koji Clutch

Apollo Crews b. Tye Dillinger – Lifting sitout powerbomb

Baron Corbin b. Rich Swann – Deep Six

Carmella/Bayley b. Emma/Alexa Bliss – Leg crossface to Bliss

Samoa Joe b. Johnny Gargano – Koquina Clutch

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NXT – January 13, 2016: That Weird Starting Point

NXT

Date: January 13, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

It's the first regular show of the new year and we're at the start of a new taping cycle. We've got a few months to go before we get to the next Takeover, assuming there isn't another one before Wrestlemania weekend. In addition to that, we're getting something like the NXT Slammy Awards tonight with the end of the year awards. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

The announcers welcome us to the show for a change.

Here's General Manager William Regal to announce tonight's main event: a battle royal for the #1 contendership to the Women's Title. With that out of the way, Regal introduces someone who hasn't been here in a long time: Sami Zayn.

Sami thinks the fans remember him but gets cut off by OLE and WELCOME BACK chants. In case you don't know him, he's the lead singer of a band and that OLE chant is their lead single. He's also a man responsible for building NXT and making what it is today. They just sold out a UK tour but it's nice to be back home at Full Sail University. Sami is back for a reason though, and that is to become the first ever two time NXT Champion.

This brings out Samoa Joe who doesn't seem to think much of Sami's plans. Joe doesn't know why Sami thinks he deserves another shot because the last time he had a title shot, it was Joe who had to come out here and save him. Finn Balor barely survived against Joe in London so if Sami wants to keep his shoulder in one piece, he better walk away right now.

Now it's Baron Corbin interrupting to say that he actually won at Takeover. While Sami was gone, he was surpassed by someone more durable so Sami needs to go to the back of the line. Joe brings up choking Corbin out and tells Sami to mind his place in his ring. The ring is Sami's place but Corbin jumps him from behind, only to get kicked in the face and knocked to the floor. Joe backs off from Sami who is left standing alone.

Bayley says she survived against Nia Jax instead of actually winning. Tonight she's looking forward to seeing who survives in the battle royal and she might even give the winner a hug. She actually does hug Rich Brennan.

It's time for the End of the Year Award winners, announced in a video package. The trophies are golden ring bells.

Tag Team of the Year: Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady

Female Competitor of the Year: Bayley

Male Competitor of the Year: Finn Balor

NXT Takeover of the Year: Takeover: Brooklyn

Match of the Year: Bayley vs. Sasha Banks – Takeover: Brooklyn

Overall Competitor of the Year: Finn Balor

Tommaso Ciampa vs. Danny Burch

Ciampa takes him down by the arm to start but Burch gets up and scores with a middle rope dropkick to take over. That just ticks Ciampa off so he blasts Burch in the face with a forearm. Something like a hanging Downward Spiral off the top rope gets two for Ciampa but Burch pops him in the jaw for the same. They slug it out until Ciampa takes him down and grabs a flip over armbar (picture Becky Lynch's Disarm-Her but with Ciampa laying over Burch's back instead of sitting on the shoulder) for the tap out at 3:42.

Rating: C. This was a hard hitting brawl while it lasted but I'm not entirely sold on Ciampa. The armbar was a nice finisher but it seems like almost everyone is using a submission hold these days. As usual though, NXT does a great job of using jobbers to set up bigger stars, which is almost unheard of on the main roster for the last several years.

Enzo and Cass say they haven't forgotten about Dash and Dawson taking them out. The champs hid behind a woman like chicken tenders and next time business will be finished.

Billie Kay, Deonna Purrazzo and Emma all say they'll win the battle royal.

Two weeks from tonight, Sami Zayn vs. Samoa Joe vs. Baron Corbin for the #1 contendership.

Scott Dawson/Dash Wilder vs. Ascension

Non-title. Wilder gets in Viktor's face to start but gets pounded into the corner for his efforts. Ascension is the clear crowd favorite here which is really strange to see. It's off to Dawson, who has a bit more luck by taking Viktor to the mat for two. The champs beat Viktor down in the corner and we hit the chinlock for a bit. Viktor fights up and catches Dawson in an STO, allowing for the hot tag off to Konnor. The flapjack drops Wilder and everything breaks down, allowing a blind tag to set up the Shatter Machine on Konnor for the pin at 4:10.

Rating: C+. I liked this a bit better and it's probably due to the false hope that Ascension might actually start being booked like a power team instead of the goofs they've been since their Raw debut. Or maybe it was the Shatter Machine which is a really awesome looking finisher for such a slow paced team.

Nia Jax isn't medically cleared for the battle royal. Eva Marie says she has this.

Carmella, Peyton Royce and Alexa Bliss say they'll win.

Elias Samson vs. Corey Hollis

Samson forearms him down to start and stomps away in the corner. A throw sends Hollis flying and Samson stop to laugh. Samson looks down at him before grabbing a hard swinging neckbreaker for the pin at 2:20.

Samson says what this place needs is what he is.

Finn Balor says the match against Samoa Joe was the most draining match of his career but he faces every challenger head to head. Now he's just going to wait to find out his next opponent. Corbin thinks he's the uncrowned champion, Sami is a friend and Joe is the one that will never go away.

Cameron, Aliyah, Asuka and Liv Morgan promise to win. Well Cameron promises to win the battle royal to become #1 contender to the Women's battle royal but you get the idea.

Battle Royal

Carmella, Peyton Royce, Alexa Bliss, Aliyah, Cameron, Liv Morgan, Billie Kay, Deonna Purrazzo, Emma, Eva Marie, Asuka

Eva gets right in Asuka's face to start and is quickly dropped with a shot to the face. The other nine all circle Asuka with Emma jumping her, starting everyone else into a brawl. Eva is out on the floor but not eliminated, likely to reduce her chances of severely injuring someone during the match.

We take an early break and come back with no eliminations but Cameron throws Aliyah out a few seconds later. Cameron gets rid of Purrazzo as well, followed by Morgan botching something that looked like a powerbomb. She tries it again but Bliss comes up from behind and tosses Morgan and Cameron at the same time. Emma gets Carmella in the Dilemma to send her underneath the ropes and out to the floor, meaning no elimination. Bliss chokes Emma, only to be put on the apron and punched off for an elimination.

We're down to Emma, Royce, Kay, Asuka, Eva and Carmella, with the final two on the floor. Emma has to kick away the other two Australians, only to have Asuka kick her out of the corner for an elimination. Billie and Peyton put Asuka on the apron but of course start fighting over who gets to eliminate her. Asuka puts them both on the apron and hip attacks both of them to the floor to get us down to three. Eva sneaks in and eliminates Asuka, freaking out the crowd until Carmella throws Eva out for the win at 10:45.

Rating: C-. These things are always hard to rate but the false finish was a nice way to tease the crowd. It says a lot that they had to have two people on the floor until the end for the double false finish. The other good thing here though is they kept Asuka safe, likely for a big showdown in Texas against Bayley.

Carmella celebrates until Bayley comes out for a hug. Asuka gives them an evil smile to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This show was much more about setting stuff up instead the show itself which is good long term but not the most interesting hour on its own. The triple threat in two weeks should be really good and they're already doing a good job of setting up the women's division with the new names. I mean, they're not the Four Horsewomen but at least they're trying and should be filling things in quite well. Good enough show here but again it's about setting stuff up later on.

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2015 Awards: Best Angle of the Year

We'll go in reverse on this one.

Let's get this out of the way first: the best angle of the year was John Cena's US Title Open Challenges. These things were the highlight of the week almost every time one took place as you were wondering who was going to come through that curtain and have one of the best matches of their career. Nothing is really close to this and I'm not going to waste your time suggesting otherwise.

However, there are some other good stories that are worth looking at.

We'll start in Ring of Honor actually with the battle of the Jay's. The company's big story over the summer was a pretty quick title feud between TV Champion Jay Lethal and World Champion Jay Briscoe for the Undisputed Title. The match itself worked really well too as the announcers made sure to build up the fact that these two just don't lose. It's an idea that has worked forever in wrestling and it's always going to work. As usual, simple yet effective is almost always best.

Also as usual, we have a Bray Wyatt story which could have been awesome but wound up being just ok with "Anyone But You Roman." This had the potential to be something really interesting but instead we wound up with the usual hot opening and then the standard fallout that went nowhere

because Bray can't win in the end. At least the match inside the Cell was fun though and that's really all you can expect from Bray's stories most of the time.

Another good one was over in Lucha Underground with Pentagon Jr. going from a midcard guy to one of the most interesting heels as he was guided by a mysterious master. Vampiro, the grizzled veteran who was long removed from being a regular, went after Pentagon to try and slow him down, only to eventually be revealed as Pentagon's master. It was a great story with a great surprise at the end and one of the best things from an awesome first season of Lucha Underground.

Finally, we have the story that would have won almost any other year: Bayley's road to the NXT Women's Title. This one had all the makings and the perfect blowoff as Bayley won the belt in the real main event of Takeover: Brooklyn. The only thing holding this one back is the fact that Sami Zayn did it the previous year in a better story and better final match. If I hadn't seen it so recently, this could have passed Cena but it was still awesome on its own.

But yeah, this goes to the US Open Challenge in probably the biggest runaway this year.

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NXT – January 6, 2016: Best of the Best

NXT

Date: January 6, 2016

Hosts: Rich Brennan, Corey Graves

This is part two of the Best of 2015, meaning we'll be seeing another hour of great stuff from last year. There's still a lot of awesome matches they haven't touched on yet which is really amazing given how much we saw last week. I'd assume a lot of this will be Finn Balor focused and there's nothing wrong with that. Let's get to it.

Again: these are the full reviews of matches even though the clipped versions are airing on the show.

We open with a package on Finn Balor vs. Kevin Owens from Tokyo at Beast in the East.

Brennan and Graves welcome us to the show. That's kind of backwards no?

From Beast in the East.

NXT Title: Finn Balor vs. Kevin Owens

We get the Demon entrance and oh yes it's still glorious. For a bonus, the camera changes to an arena shot at the crescendos of the music. To make it feel even more special, we get the full on flower presentation from geisha girls (Owens throws his into the crowd of course) and streamers for both guys. Get this through your head ROH: doing the same thing for every match doesn't make it feel more special. Hideo Itami is shown in the front row and we're ready to start. Balor has more paint than ever with his face, torso and left leg covered.

Balor charges at the bell and loads up the Coup de Grace in the first ten seconds. Owens rolls outside so Balor nails a big dive as the NXT chants start up. He tries to bail again and eats a baseball slide as Balor is all over him. Back in and Owens hammers away to take over for the first

time. Owens: "AND THAT'S WHY I'M THE CHAMP!" We hear more of Balor's accomplishments in New Japan as Owens takes some bows.

It's off to Chinlock City before a forearm breaks up Balor's springboard. The slow pace is working for Kevin here and it fits him very well. Finn beats the count back in but takes the backsplash for two. Back in and Owens snapmares him down and runs the ropes....before stopping for a chinlock. Owens: "Are you not impressed? I don't care. I hate this country and all its stupid people!" Balor fights back again with a middle rope forearm for two so Owens does Cena's finishing sequence, complete with an attempted AA.

Balor is afraid of a lawsuit over gimmick infringement (only Kurt Angle can steal that many finishers) and slips out twice in a row. Bloody Sunday is teased (and the fans gasp) but it's a Pele Kick to put Owens down instead. Owens takes a big flip dive and a top rope double stomp to the back, followed by a reverse Bloody Sunday (not called that of course) for a VERY close two. The Coup de Grace misses though and Owens' Cannonball gets two. The package piledriver slam gets the same but Balor hits a quick Sling Blade.

Another Coup de Grace is countered so Balor kicks him in the head and FINALLY connects with the stomp....for two. Dang I thought that was it. Owens can't hit the swinging fisherman's superplex so he settles for a middle rope Regal Roll for two. That looked great. Kevin's Swanton hits knees and the real Bloody Sunday gets an even closer two. They're trading bombs here and it's getting awesome. Owens makes the eternal mistake of slapping a hero in the face and saying the hero can't beat him. Balor dropkicks him into the corner, hits a running corner dropkick and a second Coup de Grace for the title at 19:30.

Rating: B+. Was there ever any doubt that this was going to be awesome? Owens is one of the best heels that I've seen in years and he does everything he can do to make you hate him. The fact that he can go as well as he does in the ring makes him even better, which is saying quite a bit as he's that good as a character.

Here's one of Elias Sampson's songs.

We see the last few minutes of Tye Dillinger vs. Apollo Crews from the Wrestlemania XXXII ticket sale kickoff at AT&T Stadium on November 5. Joined in progress with Dillinger putting on a chinlock. After nearly a minute and a half, Crews finally breaks out and throws Dillinger to the side, followed by some right hands and clotheslines. Dillinger gets two off a superkick and both guys are down again. Back up and Crews kicks him in the head, setting up the gorilla press into the standing moonsault for the pin. What was the point of showing this? It's barely three minutes long and nearly half was in a chinlock.

Video on the women's division.

Video on Dusty Rhodes, leading to a recap of the Dusty Classic.

We look at some people going from NXT to the main roster.

From August 29.

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady/Hype Bros vs. Scott Dawson/Dash Wilder/Chad Gable/Jason Jordan

Enzo and Cass are over with the live crowd to put it mildly. They keep it simple this week though and just call their opponents sawft. Mojo drives Dash into the corner to start and hands it off to Ryder for a quick clothesline. The fans want Enzo but have to settle for Ryder's missile rope dropkick instead.

Now they get Enzo who does a little dance and punches Dawson in the face, setting up a big eight man staredown. Everything breaks down and the heels are sent to the floor for a HUGE dive from Enzo (with an assist from Cass) to take them down again. Back from a break with Jordan getting two on Enzo and the fans cheering for their diminutive hero. Gable bends the arm over the top rope before it's back to Dash to keep Amore in trouble.

The villains take turns on the arm and Gable monkey flips him into the corner to prevent a hot tag. Now the fans want Cass and a tornado DDT almost gives them what they want but it's Jordan breaking up the tag this time. Enzo sends him into the corner and NOW the hot tag brings in Cass.

The big man comes in to clean house and it's time for the parade of finishers, capped off by the Rocket Launcher to pin Gable at 13:12.

Rating: C. Totally fine eight man here as the whole point was to get Enzo and Cass out there to fire up the crowd. That's the kind of act you always need to have on the card as they can set the pace for a show and keep everything hot. Enzo playing Ricky Morton is such a simple formula and it worked just fine here.

We recap Samoa Joe vs. Finn Balor.

From Takeover: London.

NXT Title: Samoa Joe vs. Finn Balor

Balor is defending and we get the full demon entrance with Balor as Jack the Ripper from the vignette they've been running for a few weeks now. Feeling out process to start and the fans are split. Balor sends him outside for a kick to the face and a dropkick into the steps. The double stomp from the apron misses though and Joe plants him with the release Rock Bottom.

Back in and a corner enziguri gets two, followed by a knee drop for the same. There's the Facewash but Balor nails an enziguri (WAY too common of a move as well) from the apron. His springboard is broken up though and Joe does his 300lb flying monster out of control suicide dive to take him out again. Back in and Joe puts on a Boston crab into a Crossface into a modified Rings of Saturn.

Balor gets his foot onto the ropes for the save and spins over into a DDT for a breather. It's time for the chops from Finn but he runs into an elbow. Joe goes up but takes another enziguri to send him outside again. There's the big flip dive to the floor, followed by a top rope double stomp for two back inside. The Sling Blade has Joe reeling but he sidesteps a dropkick and drops the backplash. Balor counters the Muscle Buster into a sunset flip for two, followed by a Pele to put both guys down.

They slug it out again and Joe grabs the standing Clutch, only to have

Balor send him into the buckle. Another enziguri is blocked (thank you) and Joe drags him back in by the throat. He can't get Balor on the mat with the Clutch though as the champ rolls out and hits a quick double stomp. Another Sling Blade and some running dropkicks just tick Joe off so Finn dropkicks him down one more time. Balor has to shove him off the top to set up the Coup de Grace to retain at 18:20.

Rating: A. This was the heavyweight slugfest that everyone was wanting to see from these two. They beat each other up for nearly twenty minutes and had me believing that the title was in jeopardy a few times. I'm not sure who goes after Balor next but there's a long list of people who could be up for a shot, which makes things that much more interesting.

Rich and Corey wrap it up.

Overall Rating: B+. It's really hard to not enjoy a show that packs in so much of a great year from a great show. NXT continues to be probably the most entertaining wrestling show every single week and it's cool to look back at what worked so well. This show was much more about Finn Balor and it's hard to imagine him not making a huge impact in 2016 as well. This was a very fun look back and it worked quite well.

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