

# Payback 2023: Payback For What?

## Payback 2023

Date: September 2, 2023

Location: PPG Paints Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Corey Graves, Michael Cole

We're back to the big shows here but this one isn't exactly looking like the most thrilling. There are six matches announced, plus Cody Rhodes appearing on the Grayson Waller Effect. The main event will likely be Seth Rollins defending the Raw World Title against Shinsuke Nakamura and John Cena hosting should spice things up a bit. Let's get to it.

The opening video talks about how this was started a long time ago but now it's time for payback. The matches all get a quick look.

We recap Trish Stratus vs. Becky Lynch in a cage. Trish claims she paved the way for everyone today and wants recognition. Becky points out that she got further than Trish ever did on her own. Trish was the best of her generation, but this is a new generation. Now it's time to end a rather long running feud.

### Trish Stratus vs. Becky Lynch

In a cage with pinfall, submission or escape to win and NXT Women's Champion Tiffany Stratton is here watching again. Becky starts fast with the Bexploders but gets elbowed in the face for her efforts. Trish sends her into the cage and grabs a spinebuster to cut off a comeback attempt. The double fishhook keeps Becky in trouble (Trish: "CHEESE!") but Becky manages to ram her into the cage a few times.

It's too early for the Disarm-Her so Becky is sent into the

cage two more times. Trish Matrixes her way out of a clothesline, only to have Becky drop a double legdrop onto the stomach in a clever counter. Some rapid fire rams into the cage have Trish in more trouble and Becky goes up top for the Fameasser in the ropes for two. Trish is back up and hammers away in the corner but Becky slips out and hits a powerbomb for two more.

Back up and Becky is sent into the cage again, setting up a Widow's Peak (including the Victoria hair pulling) for two. Becky misses something off the top and gets caught with Stratusfaction for another near fall. They go up top with Trish hitting a super bulldog for two, allowing her to stare at the camera and show off a NASTY welt on her forehead. Both of them head up top with Trish knocking her down, only to have Becky climb back up for a top rope superplex and a huge crash for two more. Becky goes up as Trish goes for the door so Becky climbs down for the save.

Cue Zoey Stark to grab Trish's arms but Becky pulls her back in...where Stark slams the door on her face. Not that it matters as the Manhandle Slam gets two, as Stark comes in for the save. Becky is back up and slams the door shut to fight both of them at once. A Manhandle Slam to Stark and a super Manhandle Slam to Trish are enough for the pin at 20:02.

**Rating:** B+. It was a heck of a fight and what matters is that it felt like the big blow of to the feud. That's what it needed to be, as this feud has gone on long enough and it's time for both of them to move on. As usual, Becky looks like a warrior who overcame the odds because very few can hang with her when she is at the top of her game. The Stark interference was a bit much but if that's the only downside to the match, they did rather well.

Post match Stark gets up but Trish tells her to get out. That earns her a Z360, which should write Trish off TV.

Long video on Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Seth Rollins while they get rid of the cage.

Here is John Cena, who praises the opening match. He's done a lot of things over the years but he's never been a host. It's his job to make the night special, so how about he guest referees LA Knight vs. the Miz! Cue the Miz to say he isn't happy with this because Cena sucks as a host. Miz wants Cena to stay out of his match but Cena says that was his one idea. Does Miz have any other ideas? Sure: When the people making the Barbie movie call you, don't say you'll be a Merman! Miz suggests he take more initiative, so Cena says he'll be the guest referee. He even has a shirt and we're ready to go.

### Miz vs. LA Knight

John Cena is guest referee. Miz stalls to start and walks up the aisle but Knight brings him back in and they slug it out on the mat. It's Miz taking over and hitting the top rope ax handle for two. Knight is back up with a powerslam for two and Miz bails to the floor, where Knight hits a dropkick through the ropes. Knight sends him into a few things but goes inside to break the count, allowing Miz to manage a ram into the announcers' table.

That doesn't last long as Knight jumps onto the barricade for a clothesline to take over again. Back in and Knight hits a running clothesline before stomping away in the corner. That doesn't work for Cena, who yells at Knight, allowing Miz to get in a cheap shot. A Codebreaker out of the corner gives Miz two and we hit the chinlock. The YES Kicks keeps Knight in trouble but he suplexes his way out of trouble.

The jumping neckbreaker and a middle rope bulldog drop Miz again and a running boot gets two. Miz's DDT gets the same but a spinning DDT out of the corner gives Knight two more. Miz grabs a rollup with the rope for two and they both

almost hit Cena. The Skull Crushing Finale gives Miz two more but Miz tries his own Five Knuckle Shuffle. The delay lets Knight come back with the powerslam and spelling elbow. Blunt Force Trauma finishes Miz at 15:41.

**Rating:** C+. This was a good bit longer than it needed to be but it wasn't bad, with the important point being Knight's win. It's one of the bigger matches of his career and he beats a former World Champion, which is about all you could hope for here. Cena was there to pick things up a bit, but thankfully didn't play a role in the ending. Good stuff, with the right result.

Post match Cena offers a handshake but Knight says Cena almost cost him the match. Knight does shake his hand.

We recap Austin Theory vs. Rey Mysterio for the US Title. Theory attacked Santos Escobar before Escobar's US Title shot so Rey took the spot and won the title. Now it's time for a rematch.

#### US Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Austin Theory

Rey is defending. They start fast with Rey taking him into the corner for some right hands as Cole is still listing off Rey's career accomplishments. A clothesline cuts Rey off and a running version in the corner makes it worse. Theory grabs a suplex but another attempt is countered into a small package for two. A swinging sleeper drop sets up a chinlock on Rey, with Theory whispering something to him. Back up and Rey is sent chest first into the buckle before Theory starts going after the mask.

With that broken up, Rey hits a top rope moonsault to drop Theory again and they're both down for a bit. Rey sends him outside for a sliding tornado DDT. Back in and the top rope seated senton gives Rey two more but Theory grabs a torture rack powerbomb for the same. A Town Down misses so Theory goes with the rolling dropkick. Rey is right back with the basement dropkick and they're both down. The 619 connects

for Rey but the slingshot splash hits knees. Theory tries A Town Down again but this time it's reversed into a victory roll to retain the title at 9:49.

**Rating:** B-. This felt like a Smackdown main event and was a good bit better match than their original version. Mysterio can still go with anyone and seems likely to be ready for a showdown with Santos Escobar down the line. For now though, they had a good enough match and now Theory can move on to anything else.

Becky Lynch is interrupted by Tiffany Stratton, who forgot that Becky was never the NXT Women's Title. Becky suggests that Stratton focus on her title defense, but maybe she'll see Stratton soon. Stratton doesn't seem worried.

We recap Judgment Day coming after Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens' Tag Team Titles. They've been coming for the belts for awhile now, despite bickering a lot. Therefore, let's have a street fight.

#### Tag Team Titles: Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens vs. Judgment Day

Finn Balor and Damian Priest are challenging in a street fight. The weapons are pulled out fast, with Balor not being pleased at the sight of a Terrible Towel. Owens gets a kendo stick knocked out of his hands but it's Zayn hitting a big running flip dive to take the villains down. Trashcan shots rock Priest and Balor has a trashcan put on his head. The kendo stick shots put Balor down again so the fans request, and receive, tables.

Priest is back up for the save and Zayn gets stomped down in the corner. Owens fights back on Priest and unloads on him with stomping, plus a chair shot. Balor chairs Owens down but Zayn is back up to chair Balor down as well. The fight goes into the crowd and here is Dominik Mysterio to help take the champs down. We get a Judgment Day huddle but Owens (bleeding) and Zayn come back with Pittsburgh Penguins jerseys and hockey sticks.

Cole think they're the Pittsburgh Steelers as the champs unload on Dominik. Back in and Owens pulls Priest off the apron for a ram into the steps, leaving Zayn to Blue Thunder Bomb Balor onto a pile of chairs. A bunch of chairs are set up inside but Priest Broken Arrows Zayn onto the chairs for two, with Owens throwing a chair at the cover for the save. They head back into the crowd with Owens having to fight out of a double teaming.

Zayn comes back in for the save and dives off the Kickoff Show desk to take them both down. Owens is back up to put Dominik on a table and there's the Swanton off of a balcony. In the ring, Sami suplexes Balor into the corner but Priest throws a trashcan at Zayn's head for two. Zayn fights back up and suplexes Priest into the corner and knocks Balor through a table at ringside.

Owens is back in to Stun Priest into the Helluva Kick but JD McDonagh pulls Zayn out at two. That earns McDonagh a powerbomb onto the announcers' table but cue Rhea Ripley to spear Owens through the barricade. Back in and Balor shotgun dropkicks Zayn into the corner, only to miss the Coup de Grace. Zayn suplexes him into the corner again and the Helluva Kick gets two as Dominik makes the save with the briefcase to give Balor the pin and the titles at 20:43.

**Rating:** A-. This was ALL about the insanity and violence and that worked incredibly well. There were multiple times where I would have believed it was over and then it kept going, without ever feeling like it was going too long. It took five people, but Zayn and Owens finally lost the titles after a huge win earlier this year. The big thing here was that they changed the titles when there was almost no realistic way for Owens and Zayn to retain. That's how it should have gone and my goodness this was a heck of a fight.

Here is Grayson Waller for the Grayson Waller Effect. Waller says his guest is a lot like Pittsburgh, in that neither of them can ever finish a story. Cue Cody Rhodes to talk about...nothing actually, as Waller cuts him off. Cody talks about how new Waller is at this and sums up how this is going to go, with the big ending being a Cross Rhodes to Waller.

Instead, Cody talks about the stars of NXT and of Smackdown, the latter of which included a recent issue that needs to be solved. Cody gets up and introduces the newest member of the Raw roster: Main Event Jey Uso. Jey comes in to pose but Waller cuts him off, only to get superkicked for his efforts. Well that's a big moment.

We recap Rhea Ripley defending the Women's World Title against Raquel Rodriguez. Ripley has taken out her knee a few times, but now Rodriguez is back and healthy, meaning it's time to fight.

#### Raw Women's Title: Rhea Ripley vs. Raquel Rodriguez

Ripley is defending and we get the Big Match Intros. They trade the power shoves to start with neither getting very far. Rodriguez picks her up or a trip to the floor, where Ripley gets in a quick neck snap. Back in and Rodriguez is sent into the corner, where she blocks a whip with straight power. Rodriguez gets her up for a slam but Ripley is back with a running clothesline and some right hands.

Ripley slowly stomps away before snapmaring her into a seated abdominal stretch. A front facelock keeps Rodriguez down but she manages to power Ripley off. Back up and some clotheslines rock Ripley and there's the fall away slam. The middle rope spinning elbow is broken up though and Ripley goes up top for some headbutts. Rodriguez knocks her down again though and now the middle rope corkscrew elbow connects.

Back up and Ripley gets in a faceplant, setting up a

running knee for two. Riptide is blocked though and Rodriguez drops her throat first onto the top rope. Ripley goes back to the bad knee and gets the Prism Trap, which is broken up as well. A powerslam gives Rodriguez two but Ripley is back to the knee. They head outside with Rodriguez hitting a powerbomb against the post (ouch) but cue Dominik Mysterio. That's fine with Rodriguez, who gives him a running powerslam. Ripley kicks the knee out again though and Riptide retains the title at 17:18.

**Rating:** C. This was another match that went longer than it needed to and that really held it down. Rodriguez felt like one of the first people who could hang in the ring physically with Ripley but that is only going to take things so far. Rodriguez having that kind of size negates one of the biggest advantages that Ripley has but it was hard to fathom Rodriguez actually winning the title. Not an awful match, but keeping this as an eight minute hoss fight would have been WAY more entertaining.

John Cena, in a jacket that doesn't fit and in a pink bow tie, talks to Judgment Day about their win. There is no trouble in the ranks and insist that they are stronger than ever.

We recap Seth Rollins vs. Shinsuke Nakamura for the World Heavyweight Title. Nakamura turned on him and revealed that Rollins had a bad back. Then Nakamura mentioned Rollins' family, which was too far for Rollins to go.

#### Raw World Title: Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Seth Rollins

Nakamura is challenging and has a special video in Japanese (with animation), talking about how he'll remove the burden of being champion from Rollins' back. As a bonus, the Great Muta of all people is here to watch the match. Nakamura goes after the arm to start but Rollins reverses into a hammerlock. Rollins takes him to the mat and grabs a quickly broken STF.



Back up and Nakamura tells him to COME ON so Rollins strikes away. With Nakamura knocked outside, Rollins hits the required suicide dive, followed by a springboard Swanton back inside. Another suicide dive connects but Nakamura is fine enough to drop Rollins onto the announcers' table. Nakamura hits the running knee in the corner and then drops another to put Rollins on the floor again.

The half crab doesn't last long as Rollins fights up and grabs a super hurricanrana. The back is too hurt to follow up though and they're both down for a bit. A Sling Blade into a frog splash gives Rollins two so he yells about his family being brought into this. The Stomp misses and Nakamura hits the middle rope knee to the chest for another near fall. The sliding German suplex gives Nakamura two more but the Kinshasa is cut off with a superkick.

Nakamura gets the triangle choke, which is countered into a sitout powerbomb for two. They slug it out until Nakamura connects with a kick to the head. Both of them go up top with a super Landslide giving Nakamura two. Kinshasa to the back of the head connects but Rollins collapses before the regular version can connect. Rollins is knocked to the apron but comes back with a Pedigree for two. The stomp from out of nowhere finishes Nakamura at 25:56.

**Rating:** B. Remember how I've taken issue with matches going too long almost all night long? That was the case again here as the match was very good but often felt like they were trying to fill in the long run time. Nakamura did his usual good match, but it wasn't like there was much of a reason to believe Nakamura was anything more than the challenger of the month.

Rollins kneels in the ring due to his back as Nakamura walks around ringside for a long time...and that's it.

**Overall Rating:** B. From a quality standpoint, this show was

quite good with only the Women's Title match not being pretty good at worst. That being said, they really needed another match or two on here so that the already existing matches didn't have to be dragged out so long. Six matches does not make for much of a pay per view card and that was a glaring issue all night. It also was only so eventful of a show, with Jey Uso jumping to Raw and the Tag Team Title change being the only important parts. Good show if you're looking for quality wrestling, but not as much for big time forward movements.

### Results

Becky Lynch b. Trish Stratus – Super Manhandle Slam

LA Knight b. The Miz – BFT

Rey Mysterio b. Austin Theory – Victory roll

Judgment Day b. Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens – Briefcase shot to Zayn

Rhea Ripley b. Raquel Rodriguez – Riptide

Seth Rollins b. Shinsuke Nakamura – Stomp

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# Payback 2023 Preview

So WWE has brought another of its shows out of mothballs and in a way, I like the idea of there not being a major theme. There is no big signature match or concept to the show, instead leaving it as just a show with matches. Now that being said, this show has not had the strongest build, with part of that being due to last week's Smackdown being thrown off the rails after Bray Wyatt passed away. There isn't much of a card to go over so far but let's get to it.

## Women's World Title: Rhea Ripley(c) vs. Raquel Rodriguez

We'll start out with the hoss fight as these two are going to be able to hit each other really hard. They aren't exactly hiding about what this is supposed to be and that is a fine way to go. Sometimes you need to just present two powerhouses doing powerhouse things and that is exactly what we're getting here. Ripley is a star but Rodriguez has risen to the occasion before so we should be in for some fun with this one.

That being said, as entertaining as the match might be, there is no reason to believe that Ripley's title reign is in any serious danger. Ripley is looking like she could have the kind of record setting title reign that WWE has been using in recent years and while Rodriguez will get her reign one day, it isn't going to be here. They'll have a heck of a fight, but it won't include a title change.

## Tag Team Titles: Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens(c) vs. Judgment Day

This is a street fight and that should make for a fun match. Owens and Zayn can work a regular match but they can also do the wild brawling stuff rather well. It also helps that the Judgment Day can work that style as well, with Dominik Mysterio and perhaps JD McDonagh getting involved as well. At the same time though, you have the internal

issues for the Judgment Day and things could get rather complicated rather fast.

Again I don't see much of a reason to believe that the titles are going to change hands here, as Zayn and Owens have cooled off as champions, but I don't think they've cooled off enough to lose. Judgment Day has to win something, but that briefcase Priest is carrying around makes the Tag Team Titles feel like a downgrade. Owens and Zayn retain here, but I'm not sure how much longer they'll keep the belts.

#### United States Title: Rey Mysterio(c) vs. Austin Theory

Mysterio is in a more vulnerable place than most champions as he does not feel like anything resembling a long term champion. He is someone who could put someone else over at any time and Theory getting the title back is not completely out of the question. It makes for a more compelling match, but the fact that Mysterio beat him so easily a few weeks ago brings that back down.

I still can't go with a new champion here though, as Mysterio retains and likely drops the title to Santos Escobar sooner than later. That is the story that has been set up and I don't see much of a reason for anything else to happen. Theory has held the title for so long that it doesn't make sense to put the belt back on him, as he is desperately in need of something new. Therefore he doesn't win here, as Mysterio gets ready for his eventual showdown with Escobar.

#### LA Knight vs. The Miz

This has been built up on a string of promos and that is where both of them shine. The match gone from what felt like an easy win for Knight into something more personal as Miz has been in serious mode in the last few weeks. That can make for a good Miz feud and he has made it work well enough here. Now they just have to stick the landing and

Knight can be well on his way.

So yeah of course there is no reason to believe that Miz wins here, as Knight is one of the hottest stars in WWE at the moment. He can move up the ladder a bit with a win here as he gets into title contention, with this kind of a win helping. What matters most is that Miz has been serious coming into it, which will make the win feel that much more important. This match doesn't have to be great, but it needs to be good enough with Knight winning, and that should work out.

### Becky Lynch vs. Trish Stratus

They're inside a cage, which should be the end to this longer than necessary feud. However, that has been the case for a few months now and the thing just keeps going. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt though as a cage match should be a sure fire way to wrap it up. Lynch has already taken out Zoey Stark as well, so they have a way to make this one work out.

Since there is no reason to believe that Stratus is sticking around after this one, I'll take Lynch to win so she can move on to something else (like Tiffany Stratton for example). Unless they jump start some new feud way faster than necessary, this should be Lynch going over to finish Stratus off or good. The feud has lost steam, but having them get a good, dramatic and violent match here would be enough to get out of it as unscathed as possible. Lynch wins.

### World Heavyweight Championship: Seth Rollins(c) vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

This is the only match that I can imagine headlining the show, but like most World Heavyweight Title matches so far, it feels like a glorified midcard title. Rollins is trying and they have enough of a feud, but this headlining the show doesn't seem like the easiest move. It's about all we

have for now though and they should be able to have a good match in this slot.

As much as I would love Nakamura to win the title for once, there is no reason to believe that he is anything more than the challenger of the month in between Rollins' bigger feuds. Rollins does have a bad back and that is going to need to be addressed sooner than later, but for now, Rollins wins. He also doesn't have to deal with Money In The Bank just yet, as they haven't ignored it long enough to have Priest cash it in.

### Overall Thoughts

And that's the show for now. It's a six match card as of the end of Smackdown and that isn't exactly feeling like something major. There is also Cody Rhodes on the Grayson Waller Effect and John Cena as the guest host, and it wouldn't shock me to see Cena and Rhodes cross paths. The show needs something else and setting up a potential Rhodes vs. Cena showdown could work. Odds are we get a bonus match somewhere, but there isn't much that can be done to hide how much of a C-list show this really is.

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# Payback 2020: At Least Someone Is Happy



IMG Credit: WWE

## Payback 2020

Date: August 30, 2020

Location: Amway Center, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Samoa Joe, Byron Saxton, Michael Cole, Corey Graves

We're back on pay per view less than a week after the last one ended, because that's a thing that needed to happen. This time around we have the big main event of the Fiend defending the Smackdown World Title against Braun Strowman and a surprisingly heel Roman Reigns, with Paul Heyman in his corner. That sounds like it could have some serious legs so let's get to it.

### Kickoff Show: IIconics vs. Riott Squad

The IIconics promise to expose them as frauds before the match. Riott charges at Royce to start and the chase is on around the ring. That means Riott runs into Shades of Kay and it's off to a neck crank inside. Kay forearms Riott for two and the trash talk is on in a hurry. Royce knees her in the back a few times and we hit the chinlock as they aren't exactly tearing the house down with the offense here.

Riott fights up but a Kay distraction lets Royce knock Liv to the floor. Kay tries to convince Morgan that Riott did it and Morgan is rather confused on the floor. Riott knocks Kay away and Morgan convinces herself to get up for the hot tag. Everything breaks down and Morgan slips off a springboard dropkick but manages to make some contact with Royce anyway.

A double stomp in the corner gets two more on Royce but the double STO is broken up. Deja Vu gets two on Riott with Morgan making the save and pulling Riott over for the corner. I'm not sure when Riott was legal in the first place but I can't imagine it matters. Oblivion gets two on Royce so it's the Riott Kick to give Riott the pin at 9:00.

**Rating:** D+. They had a story to the match and played it up well enough but they were so sloppy throughout and some of the botches and miscommunication hurt it a lot. What matters is that the right team won and the Squad getting a Tag Team Title shot could be a nice story. Just tighten things up a bit and it can be a lot better.

The opening video looks at the major feuds and talks about revenge. That only makes sense in a few of the matches but it fits the theme.

#### US Title: Bobby Lashley vs. Apollo Crews

Lashley is challenging and has the Hurt Business with him. MVP gets in a quick promo during the entrances, saying that last time Crews got hurt, but this time he gets Lashley. Crews gets taken down with a waistlock to start as Joe compares the Hurt Business to people who show up at your birthday, eat your cake in front of your wife and sing you a song. Crews fights out of the corner and hits a dropkick to the floor, setting up a moonsault from the apron.

The Hurt Business stares Crews down so he gets back inside rather than dealing with the numbers. Back in and Lashley drops him onto the top rope for another trip to the floor,



followed by a ribs first ram into the post. We hit the chinlock and then a waistlock as Lashley keeps using the power. Crews fights up and hits a jumping enziguri but gets caught in the spinning Dominator for two.

The spear misses though and Crews hits a middle rope high crossbody for a breather. The Toss Powerbomb doesn't work so Crews settles for a spinebuster for two instead. Crews can't hit a gorilla press but he can hit a German suplex. A frog splash gives Crews two more but Lashley is right back with a spinebuster. The Full Lashley with a bodyscissors gives Lashley the title at 9:29.

**Rating:** C. Lashley was going to wind up with the title at some point so giving it to him here made as much sense as anything else. Maybe Crews gets it back at Clash Of Champions but there was no stopping Lashley from getting it either here or there. You can't have the Hurt Business come up short every time so the title change had to take place.

Post match Crews jumps the Hurt Business and promises to get the title back as he runs off.

We look at Roman Reigns becoming a Paul Heyman Guy. Man that needed a live crowd.

Paul Heyman won't answer if Reigns will sign the contract but you would have to ask him for sure. Kayla Braxton: "Can I ask him in person?" Heyman: "No you may not."

JBL comes up to Keith Lee and offers him a shot at some hedge funds for only a million bucks. Lee doesn't have that kind of money, but JBL thinks he will if he wins tonight. What a random cameo.

We look at Big E. getting annoyed at Miz on Talking Smack for suggesting that the rest of New Day has been holding him back.

Sheamus says tonight is Big E.'s time to fall because New Day has been propping him up.

## Big E. vs. Sheamus

Big E. goes with the waistlock to start until Sheamus reverses into one of his own. That's flipped away without much effort so Sheamus grabs a headlock on the mat instead. Big E. breaks that up as well and knocks Sheamus down but the apron splash only hits apron. Back in and Sheamus starts in on Big E.'s knee with a shinbreaker and some general stomping. The Irish Curse gives Sheamus two and we hit the half crab.

That doesn't last long so Sheamus goes up, only to dive into a pair of belly to bellies. The Rock Bottom out of the corner gives Big E. two but Sheamus is back with a slingshot shoulder. Big E. fights up again and hits the spear through the ropes to the floor. Sheamus goes back to the knee with a heel hook but Big E. is back up in a hurry. That means a jumping knee to the face but the Brogue Kick is countered into a powerbomb. Big E. hits the Big Ending for the pin at 12:25.

**Rating:** C. This felt like a slightly bigger than usual Smackdown match and that works fine enough. Big E. needs to rack up some wins, but at the same time, he needs somewhere to go with the wins. Beating Miz, Morrison and Sheamus is fine, but that is only going to get him so far. He needs a story other than "I want to be my own man" over and over again and while this was a nice step, he needs some bigger ones.

Post match a very fired up Big E. shouts at commentary that he's coming.

Matt Riddle is done with King Corbin's tweets and is ready to shut him up tonight. He has no reaction to Corbin's tweets talking about how Riddle is a failure at home. That's your official acknowledgment of SpeakingOut I guess.

Nia Jax and Shayna Baszler argue over who is the captain of the team. Remember like two weeks ago when Nia attacked

Shayna's friends on Raw Underground? Something tells me WWE doesn't.

### Matt Riddle vs. King Corbin

Corbin is carried in on the throne and jumps Riddle before the bell to get the early advantage. They fight outside early on with Corbin talking trash as Cole praises his striking abilities. Back in and Riddle kicks away in the corner and grabs a Kimura. That's broken up so Riddle grabs a choke but Corbin throws him off.

Corbin grabs a chinlock but Riddle fights up, leaving Corbin to shout at commentary. Corbin's under the ropes clothesline is cut off with a kick to the head and they head outside again. Riddle is driven back first into the apron but Riddle is back in with the running forearms in the corner.

A running knee gets two on Corbin and they strike it out with Corbin getting the better of things with a shot to the face. Deep Six gets two and the frustration sets in. Corbin hammers away some more but Riddle pulls him into a triangle. That doesn't work so it's the Bro To Sleep into the Floating Bro to give Riddle the pin at 10:53.

**Rating:** C+. Not too bad here as Riddle gets another win and starts moving up the ladder a bit. He can move up, down, left or right but it's the right way as long as he gets away from Corbin. That's a dead end feud if there ever has been one but at least he got his "feud with Corbin" badge. Just get him somewhere else now.

Post match Riddle is asked about the win but gets jumped by Corbin because this has to keep going.

We recap Sasha Banks/Bayley vs. Nia Jax/Shayna Baszler for the Women's Tag Team Titles. Bayley and Banks have dominated the women's divisions for months so it's time to throw together a pair who doesn't like each other to go

after the titles.

### Women's Tag Team Titles: Bayley/Sasha Banks vs. Nia Jax/Shayna Baszler

Jax and Baszler are challenging. Baszler tags herself in at the bell to kick Banks down in a hurry. Banks gets caught upside down in the corner so Baszler can kick her in the face over and over. Bayley comes in and gets taken down by the arm but Banks grabs Jax's leg, allowing Bayley to throw Baszler into her. Back in and Banks grabs a seated abdominal stretch on Baszler before hitting two Amigos.

It's back to Bayley for the sliding clothesline but an angry Jax comes in for the save. Jax gets the tag and slams Bayley down for two but Banks sneaks in for a chop block. Bayley gets Jax down in the corner and hammers away, only to get slammed down again. There's the Samoan drop to Banks, with Jax swinging Banks' feet into Bayley's face for a bonus.

Bayley grabs the leg for a not so great kneebar so Jax drags her over to the corner for the tag to Jax. House is cleaned in a hurry and a gutwrench faceplant hits Banks. It's off to Jax, who says they can win. Everything breaks down with Banks hitting a faceplant on Jax to cut her off. Bayley comes in to drop Jax again and Banks' frog splash barely gets two.

The champs look scared so Banks hits a sliding knee for two more. Baszler tags herself in as the champs hit a double backdrop on Jax. Banks saves Bayley from the Kirifuda Clutch so it's an Indian Deathlock to Banks and the Kirifuda Clutch to Bayley at the same time. Baszler wraps Banks' arm around Bayley's throat to make her tap away the titles at 10:23.

**Rating:** C+. It's the right way to go as Bayley cost Banks her only remaining title, but sweet goodness it is going to be around to hear Jax and Baszler bicker throughout their

entire title run. They had to change the titles sooner rather than later at this point though as the story has cleared its peak and needs to go somewhere else.

Post match Nia shouts a lot to celebrate and Shayna says they're the champs. My goodness it's already starting.

We recap Randy Orton vs. Keith Lee. Orton attacked Drew McIntyre on Raw so Lee stepped up to face him. McIntyre interfered in the match so Orton attacked him again later in the match. Lee is stepping up for his friend and his first big match.

### Randy Orton vs. Keith Lee

Lee has generic rock music but they did fix his gear, putting him in the sleeveless shirt and the same shorts he wore in NXT. Orton goes after him to start but Lee crossbodies him for a trip to the floor. Back in and Orton demands respect before snapping off a chop. Orton does it two more times and Lee is getting angry. Grizzly Magnum drops Orton in a hurry and Lee takes him into the corner.

They head outside with Orton getting in a cheap shot and dropping Lee hard onto the announcers' table. Back in and Orton gets two on off a knee drop, meaning it's chinlock time. Lee fights up and Pounces Orton all the way to the floor, setting up his own drop onto the announcers' table. Orton takes him back inside for the hanging DDT. The RKO is loaded up but Lee counters into the Spirit Bomb finishes Orton at 6:35.

**Rating:** C-. Well ok then. I didn't see that one coming but points for giving Lee the clean win in his real debut. At some point you need to pull the trigger on someone and that's what they did here in the same vein as Kevin Owens back in 2015. The match itself wasn't all that great due to the time, but Lee got the win and that's a big deal. Orton losing is rather surprising, but he's probably getting the rematch at Clash anyway.

Heyman still won't answer about Reigns signing the contract but you can believe that Reigns is leaving as champion.

We recap Seth Rollins/Murphy vs. the Mysterios. This feud has been going on for months as Rollins has tried to get rid of Rey as a sacrifice for the greater good. They faced off on Raw but Retribution interfered so it's time for a rematch.

### Rey Mysterio/Dominik Mysterio vs. Seth Rollins/Murphy

Rollins gets chased to the floor to start and the frustration sets in early. Dominik kicks Murphy in the face and brings Rey in for a Russian legsweep into a dropkick for two. Rey wants Rollins and gets to roll him up for two. Murphy takes Rey down to the floor for a cheap shot and it's Rollins hitting a shoulder to the ribs back inside. Rey gets over for the hot tag to Dominik, who is taken down in a hurry.

Murphy's snap suplex gets two and we hit the abdominal stretch to Dominik's banged up ribs. That's broken up and Dominik kicks Murphy away, allowing the hot tag to Rey. A top rope moonsault press gets two on Rollins but the 619 misses. A basement kick to the head gets two more with Murphy making the save. Dominik's DDT out of the corner hits Murphy but Rollins is back with the Sling Blade.

Murphy and Dominik fight to the floor and Rollins counters Rey's high crossbody with double knees to the ribs for two. Dominik comes back in and sends Murphy outside again, only to be sent back outside by Rollins. Both Mysterios are sent into the barricade and Rollins asks Rey where the family is now. Rollins tells Murphy to kick him in the head but the kick hits Rollins instead. Rey's sliding splash winds up being a sliding sunset bomb to send Rollins into the barricade, leaving Dominik to hit a 619 into the frog splash to pin Murphy at 15:59.

**Rating:** C+. So yeah that happened, which has been my

reaction to every match in this feud so far. It hasn't been an interesting feud but it keeps going on and on no matter what. They really need to wrap this up sooner rather than later because there isn't much to it at all. Get them on to something else already because they haven't had much of a purpose in a long time now.

The Hurt Business leaves. Nothing more to it than that.

We recap Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman vs. the Fiend for the Universal Title. Fiend took the title from Strowman last Sunday at Summerslam and the returning Reigns attacked both of them to end the show. Reigns then revealed Paul Heyman as his new associate, turning heel in the process. Tonight it's No Holds Barred, but Reigns may not have signed the contract.

#### Smackdown World Title: Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman vs. The Fiend

No Holds Barred and Fiend is defending. Fiend does his big entrance and Strowman jumps him from behind, with the powerslam getting two about thirty seconds in. Fiend runs him over and Sister Abigail gets two more as Reigns is nowhere to be seen. Strowman heads outside and they slug it out until Fiend Rock Bottoms him through the announcers' table. With Strowman down, Fiend grabs the big mallet but Strowman throws a chair at him.

A big shot to the chest puts Fiend down on the steps so Strowman grabs the mallet. That's knocked out of his hands so Fiend can pick it up and hit Strowman in the chest. Fiend screams a lot and then twists Strowman's neck, setting up a steps shot to the elbow. We see Alexa Bliss watching in the back as Fiend takes him up the ramp for another neck twist. Strowman sends him into the LED boards but has to fight out of another Sister Abigail.

A running charge knocks Fiend off the stage and through some tables for the big crash. They head back to the ring,

where Fiend catches him on top. Fiend superplexes him down and they break the ring for the even bigger crash. Now, ten minutes into the match, here's Reigns with a chair and Heyman at his side.

Reigns signs the contract (because that's how contracts work in wrestling) and demands another referee but only gets two on each of them. A bunch of chair shots have Strowman down for two more but Fiend is up with the Mandible Claw on Reigns. That's broken up with a low blow to put Fiend on the floor and the spear to Strowman gives Reigns the title back at 12:43.

**Rating:** C+. They got as close to sticking the landing as this company is capable of doing these days so I'll take what I can get. Reigns came in and basically stole the title, which is quite the heelish move for him. Now do the big promo and explanation on Smackdown and everything should be fine. Fiend vs. Reigns has been the plan for a long time now and for once they can finally get there. Not a great or even good match, but it did the job they needed it to do.

**Overall Rating:** D+. And thus ends the pay per view that only needed to exist in the minds of the WWE scheduling department. Nothing on here was terrible and the ending worked, but this was a bunch of TV level matches and then the main event. This would have been bad as a regular pay per view but coming a week after Summerslam, it felt like some downloadable content on a game that wasn't great in the first place. Totally skippable show, which shouldn't be that surprising.

### Results

Bobby Lashley b. Apollo Crews – Full Lashley with bodyscissors

Big E. b. Sheamus – Big Ending



Matt Riddle b. King Corbin – Floating Bro

Shayna Baszler/Nia Jax b. Sasha Banks/Bayley – Kirifuda Clutch to Bayley

Keith Lee b. Randy Orton – Spirit Bomb

Dominik Mysterio/Rey Mysterio b. Murphy/Seth Rollins – Frog splash to Murphy

Roman Reigns b. The Fiend and Braun Strowman – Spear to Strowman

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## Payback 2020 Preview



IMG Credit: WWE

It feels like we just got done with this. It's already time for another WWE pay per view in the form of Payback, which is another one of those generically named pay per views where there are no expectations but they might be able to make it work better as a result. The end of Smackdown gave me a lot of hope for what they could do, but you never can tell around here. Let's get to it.

#### Kickoff Show: IIconics vs. Riott Squad

This is another match added at the last minute. It doesn't feel like it is going to be the biggest match in the world but it is something that can get the energy going a little bit to start. WWE needs some fresh teams to come after the Tag Team Titles so one of these teams makes as much sense as anything else. I mean, assuming you let one of them get some wins going.

I'll go with the Squad to win here, as the IIconics have had their moments already. They're also the kind of team who can get over again in a hurry after a loss so let the Squad get a little something going for a change. It isn't like you can have the top singles stars in the division holding the Tag Team Titles forever, so mix it up a bit and see what else you have out there.

#### Sheamus vs. Big E.

This was added on Saturday as another rematch on the card. These guys fought last week with Retribution getting involved so this is likely going to be the clean version. Given how many rematches we already have on this show, it fits in well with the overall theme, even if there wasn't much of an issues that warranted another match. They already took part in a six man this week anyway so I guess this passes for a feud these days.

I'll take Big E. to win as they seem to want to try and do something with him on his own, even if that has so far mainly consisted of beating up Miz and John Morrison. This is as good as we are going to get at the moment and this might have been better served as a Kickoff Show match. Big E. can get a win against a former World Champion though and that's a good sign for his future, even if it hasn't really gone that far yet.

#### Matt Riddle vs. King Corbin

I think I've made my thoughts on Corbin known well enough but this is the kind of spot that suits him well. He's in the midcard and

can use the legitimate heel heat that he has to make someone new look better. Riddle can shut him up and overcome the obstacle in front of him, which gives him a nice achievement on his way up the ladder. This is something that should be almost impossible to screw up, putting it in WWE's problem area.

I'll give them the benefit of the doubt (because that has never gone badly for me before) and say that they'll get it right and have Riddle go over here. There is a chance that they will stretch it out for another month but I think it's best that you just wrap it up and don't bother messing with anything else. Don't do something stupid here and let them go with whatever makes sense.

#### Dominik Mysterio/Rey Mysterio vs. Seth Rollins/Murphy

Let's get this one over with because they already have the NEXT match set up as Rey will face Rollins the following night on Raw. This is a feud that doesn't seem to have the most heat but we are still watching it every single week no matter what. They already did this match on Raw and now we get to see it all over again just six days later. Maybe Retribution can interfere the same way they always do to spice things up a bit.

Give me the Mysterios to win here because this needs to keep going for some reason. I'm assuming that the win makes Rollins mad enough that he wants to destroy Rey (again) the following night, maybe with Retribution getting involved again. Above all else though, I'm just trying really hard to make myself care about the feud and it hasn't happened in months. Get to the end of this already so they can all move on to ANYTHING else (and yes I know how dangerous it is to say that).

#### US Title: Apollo Crews(c) vs. Bobby Lashley

This is what the entire Crews vs. MVP feud seemed to be building towards and that is a good sign. Lashley is the final boss of the Hurt Business because...well how could he not be? Crews has come a long way in a short time as champion and I could see this one going either way. It's the kind of run that could get him a little higher up on the ladder, but not that much higher based on how hit and miss he is at promos.

Anyway, I'll go with...Crews here, but I don't think he makes it through Clash Of Champions with the title. This could be a good match for both of them but at the same time, Lashley winning would

make a lot of sense. The Hurt Business could use a big trophy like the US Title, but I think he slips on the banana peel here and Crews escapes. Lashley will wind up as champion, but it isn't taking place here.

#### Women's Tag Team Titles: Bayley/Sasha Banks(c) vs. Nia Jax/Shayna Baszler

Here we have one of the worst kind of teams available: anything involving Nia Jax. Or in this case it is more about the tag partners who don't like each other but are willing to team together, while still reminding us that they don't like each other. This seemed to be set up for Asuka/Baszler but why go for good when you could go for Jax?

I'll take Baszler and Jax to win here as they have been setting up the idea of Banks and Bayley finally coming back down but you've seen me talk enough about how many times I've been burned by the story. I'll just say that it happens again here and the idea of Bayley FINALLY losing her title at the Clash could work out well enough. Anyway, the champs drop the titles here and continue to fall apart.

#### Keith Lee vs. Randy Orton

That's such a cool thing to get to put down and I have no idea what they're doing here. This is another rematch from Raw when WWE managed to screw up Lee's solo debut because...well because they're not that bright sometimes. Apparently new music is on the way but if they don't get rid of the horrible looking gear, it doesn't matter. That might be one of Lee's many issues on Sunday.

For the life of me I don't get what they're going to do here but I'll take Orton to win. Orton is gearing up for the rematch with Drew McIntyre, probably also at Clash, which begs the question of WHY you would make this Lee's real singles debut. If you want Lee to be a big star (and of course you should), don't put him in this spot. Give him a nice win to start so he can get over and then go somewhere from there. Don't have him stumble right out of the gate, but given that he is basically wrestling in a skirt, we are long past that point of worrying. Orton wins, as people try to figure out how they expected to get out of this.

#### Universal Title: The Fiend(c) vs. Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman

I had this one mainly planned out and then the world got turned upside down on Smackdown as Reigns was revealed as the new Paul Heyman Guy. I'm not sure what to think of that as it only happened a few hours ago and...dang man what in the world happened? Reigns is suddenly the top heel, Strowman is fresh heel and...I guess Wyatt is going to become the top face?

With all that being said, I'll flip a coin and say Reigns win here, likely pinning Strowman, so that you make Reigns out to be the big monster all over again and have Wyatt chase him for a bit, possibly setting up the Cell. It might not be pretty, but having Fiend lose the title back this soon wouldn't surprise me. Whatever gets Strowman out of the main event scene will help a bit, but dang it has done some damage to everyone involved. Reigns wins here though, as he almost has to after that reveal (which could have come at the pay per view, and possibly should have).

### Overall Thoughts

I really don't know what to think of with this one but I'm curious to see where the Reigns/Heyman thing goes. That could be one heck of a heel run, though I'm not sure how well they are going to make it work. This isn't exactly a major show, but we have four weeks before Clash Of Champions and that means this is feeling more like your traditional B pay per view. Just don't do anything bad and work well with what you have. That is basic for a wrestling promotion, which makes it sound like deciphering hieroglyphics blindfolded for WWE. Please don't screw up Reigns and Heyman though. Please.

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# Payback 2017: Thank You Strowman! And Reigns. Rollins Too. Throw in Joe. Maybe Jericho?

## Payback 2017

Date: April 30, 2017

Location: SAP Center, San Jose, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Booker T., Corey Graves

And now, the most oddly booked, unnecessary and likely meaningless pay per view of the year! We're four weeks removed from Wrestlemania and somehow it seems like a far more distant memory. This was going to be your run of the mill rematch pay per view but the Superstar Shakeup has rendered a lot of the top matches worthless. Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt is now non-title while Kevin Owens and Chris Jericho haven't interacted in weeks. Fun for everyone you see. Let's get to it.

### Kickoff Show: Enzo Amore/Big Cass vs. Anderson and Gallows

Enzo and Cass talk about Chinese food and say that Anderson and Gallows' fortune cookie will call them sawft. Amore pounds on Anderson to start and hits a running kick to the ribs. The offense doesn't last long though as Gallows kicks him down and works on the arm until we go to a break.

Back with Anderson breaking up a hot tag attempt at the last minute, only to have the second attempt work a few seconds later. Cass starts cleaning house with the corner splashes, only to have Enzo make a blind tag. Gallows pulls him off the apron a second later for a big crash but Cass breaks up the Magic Killer. A small package

finishes Gallows at 6:39.

**Rating:** D+. This was only there so Enzo and Cass could fire the crowd up and there's nothing wrong with that. What there is something wrong with is how lifeless this feud has been over the last few weeks that it's dragged along. Enzo and Cass really could have used the Revival for their next feud but instead we're stuck here thanks to injury. Not bad but really not interesting.

We're not done on the Kickoff Show as we have MizTV with special guest Finn Balor. Miz asks what the deal is with the long entrance and Finn says it's the Balor Club. That doesn't quite make sense as Miz wants to know what it takes to get into the Balor Club. Finn puts it up to the crowd who approve of Maryse but not so much of Miz.

We hear about Balor's success worldwide but Miz thinks Finn might feel like a failure. Balor mentions all the injuries he suffered in a match that he still managed to win and become the Universal Champion (my goodness imagine where his career would be if he didn't win that match). Miz mentions all the time away and asks what's next for Balor. Finn makes it simple: he wants his title back.

Miz brings up Lesnar being the Beast but Balor is ready to fight a bigger man, just like he has for his entire career. A fight is about to break out but Miz hides behind Maryse. Miz isn't worth the beating so Finn goes to leave, only to have Miz call him out. One Sling Blade later and Miz is quickly shut up as Finn destroys the set.

The opening video is a simple look at the matches with a theme of retribution. Nothing special but it's all it needed to be.

#### US Title: Chris Jericho vs. Kevin Owens

Owens is defending after taking the title from Jericho at Wrestlemania. The story would call for a big violent gimmick here but nah, let's just let it be a standard rematch instead with IT'S RAW VS. SMACKDOWN serving as the gimmick instead. Kevin bails to the floor to start and gets sent into the announcers' table to let

Jericho take over. Owens has to roll away from a Jericho dive to the floor but makes the stupid decision to roll back inside, allowing Jericho to hit a top rope elbow to the jaw.

The springboard dropkick is broken up (which should be attributed to Owens being such a big Jericho fan) and Owens nails the Cannonball against the barricade. We hit the chinlock (Owens: "ASK HIM!") as Cole continues running down both guys' resumes. One heck of a clothesline drops Jericho again and it's right back to the chinlock. Back up and Jericho misses a charge but gets in a quick enziguri for two of his own.

A superkick out of the corner gives Owens two more and the Cannonball is good for the same. The Pop Up Powerbomb is countered with a hurricanrana into the Walls. Owens gets to the ropes by a finger again so Jericho crushes the hand beneath the steps. The bad hand means Owens can't hit the Pop Up Powerbomb so it's back to the Walls...for the tap out and the title at 14:06, sending Jericho over to Smackdown.

**Rating:** C. The ending helped it a lot (shock value can indeed do good things) but this felt like it was a long stretch of house show level stuff until Jericho started to go after the hand. Changing the title is a good idea though as they needed to do something to get off to a good start instead of having Owens beat a huge crowd favorite. Odds are Jericho loses on Smackdown anyway so it really doesn't mean that much.

Jericho signs a kid's List on the way up the ramp.

#### Cruiserweight Title: Neville vs. Austin Aries

Neville is defending in another Wrestlemania rematch where Neville raked the eyes to retain the title. An armdrag and a running shoulder in the corner have Neville flummoxed early on and it's time to lay on the top rope. It's way too early for the 450 though as Neville dropkicks the rope for the break.

We're already in the chinlock for a bit before Aries fights up and hits the middle rope elbow to the back. Aries sends him outside for



a suicide dive, followed by a suplex back inside. A running forearm in the corner looks to set up the 450 but Neville bails out to the floor for safety. Not that it matters as Aries grabs a sunset bomb to set up the Last Chancery. Neville is in trouble but grabs the referee for the DQ at 11:19.

**Rating:** C+. This was getting good until the ending. I'd assume this sets up a third match at Extreme Rules but they're to the point where Aries almost needs to win the belt. It's still a good feud but this one didn't have anywhere near the steam that the previous one did. I'm not sure they can really drag it out another month but that's never stopped WWE before.

Aries post-match protests don't get him anywhere.

#### Tag Team Titles: Sheamus/Cesaro vs. Hardys

The Hardys are defending after winning the titles at Wrestlemania in a ladder match. Cesaro and Matt start things off as an OBSOLETE chant starts up. Jeff comes in for a BROTHER NERO chant and it's almost immediately back to Matt. So much for that chant. Cesaro and Sheamus start in on the arm but it's right back to Jeff to speed things up. The legdrop between the legs and a seated dropkick set up the splash for two. Why does no one else ever do that?

Not that it matters as Sheamus sends him hard out to the floor and it's time for the heat segment. Sheamus' middle rope knee gets two and it's off to the chinlock. Back up and Sheamus kicks him in the face with Corey calling him the "alabaster gladiator". It's right back to the chinlock as Jeff seems to have lost a tooth somewhere in there. He's still able to kick Cesaro away and make the hot tag though as things pick up.

A DELETE middle rope elbow sets up the Side Effect for two. Matt's moonsault misses though and it's the Cesaro Swing into the Sharpshooter. A rope is quickly grabbed so Sheamus comes back in for a super White Noise in a great crash. Jeff makes a last second save but Sheamus breaks up the Twist of Fate. Sheamus powerslams Matt but Jeff makes a blind tag and hits the Swanton for the pin to retain at 12:48.

**Rating:** C. Another Raw match here with the Hardys still needing a real team to feud with, at least until Revival gets back to take the titles away. As has been the case both times tonight, the match was fine though it's nothing that I'm going to remember tomorrow. Matt and Jeff are still good in the ring but they don't quite have the same spark from when they made their return. It's not early enough for a big change, but the Broken stuff needs to happen before it goes too long.

Post match the Hardys shake their hands, only to have Sheamus and Cesaro turn on them and beat them up. If that doesn't set up a rematch with the Broken Hardys at Extreme Rules, nothing is going to.

Braun Strowman promises to hurt Roman Reigns.

#### Women's Title: Alexa Bliss vs. Bayley

Bayley is defending in her hometown. Bliss gets slammed to start and a knee drop gets two, followed by a long series of rams into the buckle. Alexa comes right back with a HARD shot to the head and the slow beating begins. As is normally the case, Alexa beats on Bayley and looks extra annoyed while doing so. She gets so much mileage out of her facial expressions. The chinlock is quickly broken so Bliss clotheslines her back down. Bliss spends a bit too much time trash talking though and gets caught in a Stunner over the ropes.

A belly to back suplex gives Bayley two but she takes too much time going to the ropes and gets sent hard into the buckle. Bayley can't get the super Bayley to Belly and gets pulled down with a Code Red for two. Bliss gets kneed in the face though and the Macho Elbow gets two more. A rollup gives Bayley two but the kickout sends her into the post. Bayley is so stunned that a DDT gives Bliss the pin and the title at 11:19.

**Rating:** C+. So to clarify, Bayley is NOT Naomi and is no better than anyone else that loses in their hometown. Bliss winning is fine but it really does seem that these hometown losses are just there to show that WWE is still in charge. The match was good enough and proof that playing a character well is far more important than what

you can do in the ring. Bliss' in-ring work might not be the best but it's passable enough to be carried by her great mannerisms.

We recap the House of Horrors match, which means we'll finally get to know what the heck it is. The match is non-title due to the Superstar Shakeup but that gives Bray a slight chance of winning, perhaps due to some Jinder Mahal interference. Randy Orton beat Bray Wyatt at Wrestlemania for the title and this is the (meaningless) gimmick rematch.

#### Randy Orton vs. Bray Wyatt

Non-title. The match is going to start in Bray's House of Horrors and will wind up in the ring where it's pinfall, submission or forfeiture. We go to the inside of a limo where Orton is firing himself up and wearing pants. The House of Horrors is an actual house...and a tractor goes by with no one on it. The door is locked so Orton kicks his way in and we start the rapid camera cuts.

Bray's voice says run and he jumps Orton from behind. Randy is thrown into various things as the House of Horrors looks like a not great house that is being renovated. Bray disappears but reaches through a wall to choke Orton for a second and a half. The next room has baby dolls hanging from the ceiling in various mutilated forms and we hear babies talking.

Cue Wyatt for another attack but Orton throws him through a wall. They head to another room with more dolls and some weird structure made of sticks. That goes nowhere so it's off to a kitchen (the refrigerator says WE'RE HERE) with Orton getting the better of it. Bray tries to climb onto a counter and gets in a low blow. The refrigerator is shoved down onto Randy so Bray walks outside and steals Orton's limo. We'll come back to this later.

We recap Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe. Rollins was injured at Joe's hands earlier this year so tonight is really just about payback. As is often the case, the simpler ideas work best.

#### Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe

Joe punches him up against the ropes to start and they're quickly on

the floor with Rollins chopping away. Seth hits the big suicide dive and a second one does just as well. The big guy gets smart and goes after the knee before hitting the suicide elbow to send Rollins over the announcers' table. Graves: "Like a flying school bus!"

A backslash onto the knee has Rollins screaming and his comeback is cut off almost immediately. The Knee Capper sets up the kneebar until Seth scrambles to the ropes. Joe grabs a powerbomb into a half crab into the Texas Cloverleaf but Joe is at the ropes again. Seth comes back with a Sling Blade, followed by a superkick to the neck for two of his own.

For some reason Seth tries the Buckle Bomb and the knee gives out, though it's fine enough for a Falcon Arrow a few seconds later. That great looking frog splash bangs the knee up even more so the cover is only good for a delayed two. The Koquina Clutch is countered with a quick rope climb but Joe grabs the hold again, only to have Seth roll over for a cradle and the pin at 16:03.

**Rating:** B+. It's definitely the match of the night so far which was what most people had coming in. Rollins winning is the right call as it would have been really stupid to give him the win last time and then job him here. Joe dominated the match until the ending where he got caught (ignore his shoulder being up) so this was about as well done as they were going to get.

Wyatt arrives back at the arena and stumbles into the ring. Cue Orton from behind with a chair (no word on how he got back) to start the beatdown, including sending Wyatt over the announcers' tables. There's the Elevated DDT off the table and Orton follows it up with another chair to the back. Back in and the RKO is loaded up but here are the Singh Brothers to go after Orton. They're dispatched just as quickly and there's the RKO to Wyatt. Now it's Jinder Mahal with the belt to Orton's head twice in a row, setting up Sister Abigail for the pin at 4:22 shown in the ring, not counting about ten minutes in the House.

**Rating:** D. The house stuff was more stupid than bad and that's a major improvement. They would have been in big trouble if it had

been stuff like they did at Wrestlemania so it was more just there instead of anything all that terrible. Wyatt winning might be a stretch but I'd much rather him actually get a win than lose all over again with the RKO being the great vanquishing force. Not the best concept here but it's going to be a more forgettable idea than on a list of all time horrible concepts and that's a major victory. We recap Braun Strowman vs. Roman Reigns. Strowman destroyed Reigns in an incredible segment but has since gone 0-1-1 against Big Show and Kalisto for reasons that aren't clear. Tonight Reigns is back for revenge.

### Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman

Reigns is very banged up coming in. He goes right after Strowman and hits a clothesline off the steps to drop the monster on the floor. The apron kick is pulled out of the air and Strowman chokeslams him onto the announcers' table. A powerslam gets two and Reigns is getting some sympathy for FINALLY being an underdog.

The bad shoulder is sent hard into the steps and it's off to a waistlock back inside. Strowman misses a charge into the corner and Reigns somehow hits a Samoan drop for two. They head outside with Reigns charging at Strowman and managing to send him into the post twice in a row.

The spear gets two back inside (giving us a reaction from a young girl that we'll likely see weekly from now on) but the second attempt hits boot. Two Superman Punches drop Braun but a third is caught in that head and arm choke. The powerslam only gets two so Strowman does it again for the pin at 11:20.

**Rating:** B+. This was WAY better than I was expecting and Reigns losing is probably the right call. I mean, I really don't need to see him vs. Lesnar at Wrestlemania XXXIV but if that's where we just have to go, you have to take Reigns down a few pegs first. Really good power match here and that was easily the way to go.

Post match Strowman throws in some steps (Fans: "THANK YOU STROWMAN!") and drops Reigns ribs first onto the steel in a big

crash. Braun lifts the steps over his head and brings them crashing down onto his ribs in a cringe inducing landing. Strowman is as over as free beer in a frat house and Reigns is bleeding from the mouth (Fans: "YOU DESERVE IT!") to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** B-. The really low expectations helped this a lot, as did having Jericho win and not having the House of Horrors match be a disaster. The ending was really good and Joe vs. Rollins was quite the match as well. Raw is looking strong, or at least it would if there was anything for these guys to be fighting over. Good show here, though I still wonder how long they can stretch things out with Lesnar not likely wrestling until July.

### Results

Chris Jericho b. Kevin Owens – Walls of Jericho

Austin Aries b. Neville via DQ when Neville grabbed the referee

Hardys b. Sheamus/Cesaro – Swanton Bomb to Sheamus

Alexa Bliss b. Bayley – DDT

Seth Rollins b. Samoa Joe – Cradle

Bray Wyatt b. Randy Orton – Sister Abigail

Braun Strowman b. Roman Reigns – Powerslam

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# Payback 2017 Preview

I've seen every pay per view WWE has ever produced and this is one of the most worthless they've ever put on. The Superstar Shakeup has changed the entire company and that means we have a bunch of pointless matches due to either the title not being on the line, people potentially switching shows and feuds that already have their followups started. Let's get to it.

## Bray Wyatt vs. Randy Orton

Normally I do the Kickoff Show match first but I'm going with this just so we can get it out of the way and forget about it. Remember back in 2000 when Mike Awesome defended the ECW World Title against Tazz and it was a WCW wrestler facing a WWF wrestler at an ECW show? That might be less complicated than what we have here. Here we have the Smackdown World Champion facing off against a "Monday Night Raw" wrestler who had no chance of winning the belt back at first and now that this is non-title, the odds are even lower.

The winner here? The audience, as this feud is going to be OVER, meaning we can move on to....Jinder Mahal. Three months ago AJ Styles and John Cena were tearing the house down over this title and now we have Wyatt looking like the weakest champion in years, Orton drawing reactions of "Him AGAIN?" and Mahal wondering what kind of a saint he was in a past life to be in this spot. I'll go with Orton winning here, presumably by being the first person to figure out what a House of Horrors match is.

## Kickoff Show: Enzo Amore/Big Cass vs. Anderson and Gallows

These teams are somehow still feuding for reasons that I have no idea how to comprehend. There's really not much of a reason for them to be fighting anymore so here they are on pay per view. This is a feud where they started fighting at one point and are still fighting because that's all WWE knows how to do.

I'll go with Anderson and Gallows here, as WWE doesn't seem to like Amore and Cass winning. Then again they don't like Anderson and Gallows winning either, but the Hardys are likely going to need some more challengers going forward and the big balds have only lost to the champs once so far. This match really does belong on the Kickoff Show and it's very clear that there isn't much of a reason to have

it other than Amore warming the crowd up.

### **Women's Title: Bayley vs. Alexa Bliss**

This is a natural feud with Bliss looking down on everyone that she's in the ring with and Bayley as the hometown girl who is living the dream. The question here is how important the hometown aspect is going to be. Earlier this month Naomi won the Smackdown Women's Title at "Wrestlemania XXXIII" seemingly on the strength of being from Orlando, Florida. The show is in Bayley's hometown so the question is will they let the hometown girl win twice.

I think they will as it seems that the big match on the horizon is Bayley defending against Sasha Banks in a battle of (former by then) best friends. As good as Bliss is (and she's awesome), there's some real money in Bayley holding the title for several months before losing it to Banks in a big showdown. Bliss will have her day and she's still rolling on the momentum that came with her two Smackdown Women's Titles.

### **Cruiserweight Title: Austin Aries vs. Neville**

They had the Match of the Night at "Wrestlemania XXXIII" and it's not out of the question for them to do it again. These two have an amazing chemistry together and they're going with a different story this time around. In Orlando it was all about Aries being able to hang with and potentially beat Neville, but the last few weeks have been a much more personal feud built on Neville attacking Aries and the hunt for revenge.

This time around though, I think they'll switch the title. Neville hasn't lost a singles match since October and the company has been mentioning that far too often as of late. That suggests to me that they're about to have him lose, which is going to be a huge moment for Aries. He's been treated as the biggest star in the division save for Neville and it's time to bring him all the way to the top.

### **US Title: Kevin Owens vs. Chris Jericho**

Now we hit the first match with next to no drama. It also doesn't help that these two have barely interacted since "Wrestlemania XXXIII" due to the Superstar Shakeup sending Owens over to "Smackdown Live". These two had one of the hottest feuds in the company just a month ago and now it's nothing more than something that exists. Owens has completely moved on and is already looking at



a title defense against AJ Styles later in the month.

Of course I'm going with Owens as Jericho is already booked to head off with Fozzy again almost immediately. Barring a last minute switch to Jericho and then dropping it back to Owens two days later, there's no reason to believe that Owens is dropping the title here. This match feels like filler and that's a real shame given how much effort they put into the build to its predecessor.

### **Tag Team Titles: Hardys vs. Sheamus/Cesaro**

While Jericho vs. Owens feels like it has no steam because of a lack of build, this one feels like it has no steam because it was never anything special in the first place. The Hardys made their huge return earlier this month and...that's about it. Without the Broken characters they're really just a nostalgic act and that's not the most thrilling idea in the world, at least not for too long.

That being said, I'm certainly taking the Hardys to retain here. As much steam as they've lost, Sheamus and Cesaro have all the steam of a frozen lasagna. The only way I can see them winning here is through a good bit of cheating which would send Matt Hardy over the edge to set up a certain gimmick change to set the promotion on as much fire as it could possibly reach in the current environment.

### **Seth Rollins vs. Samoa Joe**

This is the Match of the Night if they're allowed to let it all hang out. I'd assume this match was scheduled for "Fastlane 2017" before Rollins got hurt (though I'm not sure he actually was, especially given how fast he's gone from nearly crippled to just fine) and now it's going to feel a bit bigger as Rollins actually got a big rub off his win over Triple H. Then again Samoa Joe has been on fire since his main roster debut and there's a real chance he could get the biggest win of his career here.

I think I'll go with Samoa Joe, likely thanks to some interference by a returning Triple H. Why would he return? Well that would be because STEPHANIE MCMAHON MUST BE AVENGED and that means the feud must continue for the next three months or so. So yeah, Rollins is about to win with the Rainmaker knee but Triple H interferes to give Samoa Joe the win, setting up a rematch at whatever the next "Monday Night Raw" pay per view is.

### **Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman**

The last two weeks have made this interesting as WWE has decided that the way to follow up on Strowman's amazing destruction of Reigns is to have him go 0-1-1 against Big Show and Kalisto. There was no way Reigns should have been on TV in the last two weeks and thankfully they've kept him away from TV, though I'm more amazed that him RETIRING THE UNDERTAKER has been forgotten a mere four weeks later.

I'll take Strowman as he seems to be the challenger at "Great Balls of Fire 2017" and...stop laughing at the pay per view name. Anyway, Strowman seems to be the next challenger for Lesnar because we need to wait for a year to set up Reigns vs. Brock Lesnar and that would suggest starting with a major loss here.

Overall.....I think you get the idea. I have no idea why they didn't do the Superstar Shakeup this coming week for the sake of avoiding all of the messes that have come from the whole thing happening eight days after "Wrestlemania XXXIII". Almost none of the matches on this show mean anything as we're already setting up everything for later, making this show all the less important. I'm going to have enough issues staying awake during this show, let alone actually making sense of it.

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# Best of 2016: Worst Major Show of the Year

Let's move on to the far more entertaining part of these things: the bad side. There's less to cover here but we're going to start with one of the big ones: the Worst Major Show of the Year. WWE is notorious for being able to put on some horrible shows and today we're going to look at what their absolute worst of the year really was. I know some of these might not be the worst shows but they're the worst options available. These are in no particular order, as usual.

## 1. Tables Ladders and Chairs

We'll start with one of the last major shows of the year as we look at "Smackdown Live's" last offering. This is always an odd show because it's almost all about the gimmicks and the violence. The problem with that is it forces a lot of matches into gimmicks that really don't need to exist in the first place. For instance, was there any reason for Kalisto vs. Baron Corbin to be a chairs match other than the show required that one exist?

It also didn't help that most of the matches were just ok at best. The main event (AJ Styles vs. Dean Ambrose in the show's namesake match for the Smackdown World Title) was by far the best thing about the show but it really wasn't strong enough to make up for a rather lackluster show. That tends to be the case with this show almost every year and that's not a good thing.

"Tables Ladders and Chairs 2016" was a watchable enough show but that doesn't mean it's a show that needs to exist. I've never been a fan of having these shows because the calendar says so and it's rarely proven to work. On top of that, the use of these gimmick matches on a single show weakens those gimmicks later on in the year. We can't have a TLC match when the show calls for it other than there's one at the end of the year just because it's December. That doesn't make sense and it almost never works.

## 2. Payback

I went back and forth on this one for a long time but the more I thought about it, the more I thought of the annoying decisions and

how many of them I have to sit through today. This was the show where we had a Natalya vs. Charlotte match end in a Montreal Screwjob reference for the sake of keeping the title on a Flair. I mean, ignore the fact that IT WAS NINETEEN YEARS AGO and add in the fact that it was for another Charlotte vs. Natalya match when the fans were begging for Sasha Banks.

Other than that we had what should have been the layup of the summer with Cesaro winning the Intercontinental Title from Miz. The champ tapped but AGAIN WWE found a way to avoid giving Cesaro a big win for the sake of....well to be fair Miz keeping the title wasn't the worst thing in the world but it really should have been Cesaro getting the title for a change.

Now, that being said, there were two Match of the Year candidates on the show and that should have been enough to make the show great. However, those two big issues are just enough to pull it down to the lower levels of the shows this year. It might not be the worst but those two decisions were so annoying that they took so much of my enjoyment away from the rest of the show.

### **3. Fastlane**

Now we're getting somewhere. Fastlane wasn't anything interesting in 2015 and that's the case again with "Fastlane 2016". They might as well just call the show "Filler 2016" or "Annual Car Themed Show" and it would be just about the same. Most of the wrestling went nowhere and the main event only confirmed the obvious "Wrestlemania XXXII" main event that we all knew was coming.

If the triple threat between Roman Reigns, Dean Ambrose and Brock Lesnar wasn't clear enough, we also had a live interview with Edge and Christian talking to New Day (which was nowhere near as funny as you might expect) and Curtis Axel vs. R-Truth on a pay per view. Is that really the best you can do on a three hour pay per view? A lot of the wrestling was tolerable but really, this just didn't need to exist.

That sums up "Fastlane 2016" as perfectly as anything else could: the show didn't need to exist. Stephanie basically made the main event on a whim and that made it illogical to go along with the fact that it wasn't really interesting. The show was watchable but pay per views really should be more than just filler, which is all "Fastlane 2016" really was.

#### **4. Roadblock: End of the Line**

This is a show that really isn't going to age well and I'm not really surprised. Overall, this show really didn't need to exist and I think everyone knew it. The biggest problem here, as is the case so often on "Monday Night Raw", is the lack of interest in the main event. The wrestling itself was fine with Kevin Owens defending against Reigns being fine but absolutely nothing interesting whatsoever.

The problem really boils down to the fact that nothing feels special. It's not a show that I'm ever going to want to watch again and that's rarely a good sign. I spent most of the show waiting on it to end and only enjoyed parts of it because some of the wrestling was good. This really is a case where the individual parts don't add up to the whole score which doesn't fill you with hope.

Finally, there's the name. Was there really no other name available than Roadblock, which already took place back in February? Come up with any generic name (Vengeance, No Way Out, Over the Limit etc) and forget this whole obsession with car names. They hammer the idea in well enough and then have such a boring build that the show is only good in spite of its card. That's really not too good.

#### **5. Backlash**

"Smackdown Live" started having its own pay per view as well and for the most part the show was spent crowning new champions. The entire roster was basically brand new and starting from scratch, meaning they had almost nothing going on coming in. Ambrose was the Smackdown World Champion but wound up losing the belt to Styles in the only really good match of the night.

Aside from that, the Usos wrestled twice, Kane defeated Bray Wyatt and Dolph Ziggler managed to lose another match, which was apparently even more important than his World Title shot back at "Summerslam 2016". You really could have accomplished most of these things on a few major episodes of "Smackdown Live" instead of doing all of it on one pay per view, but they didn't have much else to use to fill in a pay per view.

You could probably attribute a lot of the issues on the show to not having enough time to really establish things before getting to a pay per view. Then again, that's how so much works in WWE: it doesn't matter what's going on in the stories because it's all about

getting things going as quickly as possible. If that means the pay per view doesn't need to exist and suffers as a result, so be it.

## **6. Wrestlemania XXXII**

Oh boy we had to get to this one eventually. Where do I even start with this one? Ah well how about with the run time? If you take away the two hour pre-show, this was still a nearly five hour wrestling show and that's WAY too long. This problem came from the simple fact of having too much crammed onto the show. Be it Rock taking nine minutes to get to the ring, Undertaker vs. Shane McMahon taking half an hour (not even counting entrances and post match stuff) or the main event going twenty seven minutes in front of a worn out crowd, this was too long of a show.

The build wasn't great either and a lot of that is due to injuries. It's fairly clear that the big Undertaker match was supposed to be against Cena but, due to the injuries up and down the card, the best we could get was McMahon. Now, in theory, that match probably shouldn't have gone half an hour but then McMahon doesn't get to do his big dive off the cage and that just wouldn't be any fun.

The show is much more disappointing than bad but that's still covering quite a bit of ground. The biggest show of the year shouldn't feel like a never ending night of boredom with matches seemingly ending with a main goal of making the audience wonder what the WWE is thinking. That was the case with Styles vs. Jericho (which I've lightened up on) and New Day vs. League of Nations, which really isn't how things should be going. It's not a good show and that's much more due to being boring than bad, which is often even worse.

## **7. Survivor Series**

This is another case of the main event being all that people are going to remember and in this situation, I'm not sure if that's a good thing or not. I've thought about Goldberg vs. Lesnar a lot now and I'm really not sure what it really means. I don't know if I should be mad about it or not but I know it made an impact. Unfortunately, when the main thing people remember about your show is a match lasting ninety seconds, there's a lot left to be desired.

The other problem is how unbalanced this show really felt. You had the men's Survivor Series match lasting nearly an hour while the tag team and women's versions felt like they were rushed out there

because we needed to fill in time elsewhere. The big match is still good but it took up so much time from everything else and that's not a good thing.

Overall, this show is all over the place and unfortunately that doesn't pan out all that well. It's definitely one of the weaker shows of the year and when your show is approaching five hours counting the pre-show (those things are way too pesky) with ninety seconds basically defining the entire thing, there's almost no way for it to really work. The show is a pretty big mess with an infamous main event which overshadows all the good, leaving it pretty low on the WWE charts.

### **8. Bound For Glory**

It just wouldn't be right if I didn't put a TNA show on here and while it's still a stretch to call anything TNA does major, this is about as good as it's going to get. The problem here isn't so much that anything is bad but much more along the lines of it's just kind of there. You know, much like almost everything else TNA does.

As is far too often the case in TNA, Bound For Glory just kind of came and went without anything of note going on. I had to look back at the review to remember anything about it, including the main event. That's a really bad sign for TNA when the show was just a few months ago. The Great War was good enough and a big spectacle but that doesn't mean the match was, you know, good.

I'm really not sure what else there is to say about this show. Like, what else even happened here? The World Title didn't change hands in a mostly Impact level main event. The X-Division Title match was good but, again, really nothing worth checking out. Like I said, for the biggest show of the year, that's really not a good sign.

It's not a good sign that I had to keep dropping nominees from the list because they really weren't all that bad. Really, there are only a few options to really pick from here and there's only one major option: "Wrestlemania XXXII". The show is a glorified disaster with barely any standout matches and a horrible aftertaste in many of the fans' mouths. When fans are leaving the show early to watch the ending of the show on the WWE Network, it's clear that you're doing something very wrong.

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# Payback 2016: The Booking Anchor

## **Payback 2016**

Date: May 1, 2016

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

We're off to the first pay per view after Wrestlemania and things are kind of on a roll around here. The main event is Roman Reigns defending the WWE World Title against AJ Styles with the question of whether or not Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows will be interfering on AJ's behalf. Other than that we find out who will be in control of Monday Night Raw going forward between the Authority and Shane McMahon. Let's get to it.

### Pre-Show: Baron Corbin vs. Dolph Ziggler

This was bumped from the main card earlier today. Corbin tosses him around to start and gets two off a hard right hand. Ziggler's comeback is easily cut off with a modified hot shot as Corbin keeps casually walking around. A heavy clothesline sets up the chinlock to keep Corbin on Ziggler's neck.

Ziggler gets out and grabs a sleeper for a bit, followed by a



Fameasser for two. They head outside with Ziggler loading up a dive but getting kicked out of the air. Corbin loads up a powerbomb but it's the old Big Show Alley Oop to send Ziggler face first into the post for a good looking crash. For some reason Baron takes way too much time getting back in, allowing Ziggler to roll Corbin up for the pin at 7:43.

**Rating:** C-. The match was a nicely done big man beatdown for the most part and then they do THAT ending? I don't know how to make this any clearer to WWE but Dolph Ziggler isn't going anywhere and it's long past due to stop giving him wins like this. Corbin could be something on the main roster but now he's losing his first major match less than a month after debuting. I'm sure it's a surprise though and that's what WWE must be going for, along with annoying the NXT fans who think they understand wrestling.

#### Pre-Show: US Title: Kalisto vs. Ryback

Kalisto is defending after Ryback beat him in a non-title match a few weeks back on Smackdown. The crowd is really not pleased to see Ryback here and bust out the tried and true GOLDBERG chants. Ryback blasts him with a right hand to start (that sounds so familiar) but Kalisto gets in a monkey flip to send Ryback outside.

A suicide dive sets up a springboard corkscrew plancha with Ryback barely getting underneath him in time to keep Kalisto from bouncing off the apron. Back in and a tornado DDT is countered into a suplex for two as we take a break. We come back to see Ryback sending him shoulder first into the post, only to grab a spinning DDT to put both guys down.

They head to the apron with Kalisto hitting a nice enziguri and another DDT to send Ryback onto the apron (Mauro: "MAMA MIA!"). Ryback comes up holding his shoulder but Kalisto goes with a spinning kick to the face and the hurricanrana driver for two. The Salida Del Sol is countered into a Shell Shock attempt but Kalisto flips out of that as well, only to eat a spinebuster for two. Ryback goes up for some reason but gets kicked in the head again to slow him down. Kalisto goes up as well and is promptly gorilla pressed

face first onto the mat. The top rope splash misses though and the Salida Del Sol retains the title at 9:28.

**Rating:** B. That was an AWESOME match with both guys working very hard throughout. Now the problem here is WHAT WERE THEY THINKING??? Kalisto is another name on a long list of lame duck champions who never get to do anything with the title because they either never defend the thing or lose their non-title matches. At the same time, Ryback continues to flounder in his latest heel run because WWE keeps cutting his legs off in matches like this. Still though, awesome match and one of the best pre-show matches they've ever done.

The opening video is Bray Wyatt talking about how payback is the first thing we think of every day and how much it consumes all of us. This must have been made weeks ago.

Here's the New Day to open things up. They'll be down at ringside watching and sipping on some lemonade like Becky with the good hair. Woods offers his services to help Beyonce get back at Jay-Z for cheating on her and Big E. hits the catchphrases.

Now we get a normal opening video with the standard highlight packages on the big stuff.

Tag Team Tournament Finals: Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. Vaudevillains

The winners get a title shot at some point in the future. Enzo: "If my aunt had hair on her back, she'd be my uncle." The Vaudevillains need to get in their DeLorean and go back to the future and Cass thinks they're posing like Hey Arnold. Cass: "You never should have gotten off the stoop!" After saying they never should have left their stoop (another Hey Arnold reference), Cass calls the SAWFT to get us going.

Enzo and Gotch start things off with Simon working on the arm before it's off to the partners. The tag to Cass is treated as a big deal but everything breaks down with Cass throwing Enzo at both guys. Enzo gets sent hard out to the floor with his head hitting the

bottom rope in an ugly crash. He isn't moving and a stretcher is brought out as the match is called off at about four minutes. I won't be rating this due to the time and the injury but it was fine while it lasted.

The announcers talk for a good while with the camera only showing Enzo for a few moments at a time.

Long video on Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens, the same one that aired on Raw and Smackdown.

### Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens

They slug it out immediately and Kevin is sent outside for a big flip dive. JBL starts talking about a tiger attacking Roy of Siegfried and Roy, including ripping off Chris Rock's line of "that tiger went tiger." Back in and Owens gets in a hard shot before dropping Sami face first onto the apron. Zayn is sent hard into the steps as Cole tells us that Enzo is talking and moving his extremities. That's such a relief.

Back in and Owens poses a lot while asking why Sami isn't getting payback yet. A chinlock slows things down and it's Sami slugging away with forearms. The hard clothesline puts Kevin down but Sami can't follow up. Referee: "YOU GUYS GOOD?" Owens: "Shut up!" Sami hammers away in the corner before a Michinoku Driver (called the Blue Thunder Bomb by Cole) gets two.

The real Blue Thunder Bomb gets two more and Owens' brainbuster onto the knee gets the same. Kevin drops a frog splash and a couple of Cannonballs (JBL: "He may roll a perfect game!") but the Pop Up powerbomb is countered with a dropkick. The half and half suplex sends Kevin flying but he pops up and clotheslines Sami inside out. Another powerbomb is countered into a rollup as you can feel the chemistry here. These two just know each other so well and there's nothing that can replace that.

Sami's tornado DDT is countered into a backbreaker and Kevin's face turns evil. A third powerbomb, this time onto the apron, is countered again with a backdrop to send Kevin spine first onto the

apron and then the floor. The diving tornado DDT plants Kevin again but Kevin superkicks his head off and finally gets the powerbomb for the pin at 14:28.

**Rating:** A-. I was really feeling this one as both guys beat the tar out of each other for a long time and told an awesome story of knowing each other so well. I would have had Sami go over here but you really can't go wrong with either guy winning. Both of them will be fine and Sami is the one who can lose most of his matches and be fine at the end.

Post match Kevin beats him up some more and demands that Byron bring him a mic. Kevin: "Ask me about beating Sami Zayn right now!" Byron, who is taller than Owens, asks if the rivalry is over. Owens: "THAT'S NOT WHAT I TOLD YOU TO SAY!" Kevin says he finally proved that he's the better man between the two of them and now he can refocus on getting back his Intercontinental Title. Byron asks if Kevin thinks Miz will retain the title, which Kevin takes as an invitation to do commentary on the next match.

#### Intercontinental Title: Cesaro vs. The Miz

Miz is defending and there isn't much of a story here other than Cesaro wants the title. Miz goes for the shoulder to start but Cesaro shoves him away and shakes a finger at him. The delayed vertical suplex gets two (Owens: "He can keep him up for awhile but he can't keep him down for three.") followed by a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker for the same.

Miz gets in a shot on the arm and cranks away on the shoulder as Owens is asked who he would rather face for the title. Owens: "I would rather face you but that's not going to happen." Back up and Miz poses a bit before hitting the sleeper. Cesaro gets caught in a bodyscissors but casually picks Miz up and throws him off for the break.

We hit the uppercuts with Owens saying he never wants to take another one of those. Cole: "Well if Cesaro wins you'll have to..." Owens: "COLE STOP TELLING ME WHAT I'LL HAVE TO DO!" A running dropkick gets two on Miz as Owens calls Miz Mike by mistake. Byron

interprets this as Owens cheering for his friend. Owens: "Byron go call your mom or something because no one else wants to listen to you."

The spinning uppercut sets up Swiss Death for a very close two but Cesaro goes shoulder first into the post. Miz gets the Finale for two but here's Sami Zayn to go after Owens and fight him into the crowd. Cesaro swings Miz for a long time and puts on a Crossface but Owens and Zayn get on the apron to distract the referee as Miz taps. The distraction lets Miz roll Cesaro up for the pin at 10:26.

**Rating:** C+. DANG IT WWE STOP DOING STUPID THINGS! This should have been the biggest layup on the card but instead they'll keep the title on Miz because we haven't waited long enough to give Cesaro a major win. This is up there with the League of Nations beating New Day at Wrestlemania on the scale of stupid booking decisions. I'm a big Miz fan but they should have changed the title here and moved on to Owens vs. Cesaro vs. Zayn. On a more positive note, this was some of the funniest commentary I've ever heard as Owens is one of the best jerk heels in years.

Owens and Zayn keep fighting and Sami takes another Pop Up Powerbomb. Maryse has to save Miz from a powerbomb of his own.

We recap Dean Ambrose vs. Chris Jericho which started when Ambrose took over the Highlight Reel and turned it into the Ambrose Asylum. Jericho doesn't like the idea of someone upstaging him and the match was set up as a result.

#### Chris Jericho vs. Dean Ambrose

Jericho bails to the floor to start so Dean chases him back inside and hits an early cross body. Chris crawls over to the referee for protection before dropping Dean ribs first across the top rope. We hit the chinlock on Dean for a bit but Jericho's bulldog is countered with a shove into the corner. Byron talks about both guys' documented careers, prompting JBL to say that it's documented because he and Cole have talked about him. Your lesson for this match: JBL needs to let Kevin Owens do the heel commentary.

Dean gets two off a bulldog of his own but the top rope elbow is countered into the Walls. A rope is eventually grabbed and Jericho is sent to the floor for the suicide dive. They head to the announcers' table with Jericho trying the Walls but settling for a catapult over the barricade for a big crash. As expected, Dean dives back in at nine before escaping the Codebreaker.

The rebound lariat puts both guys down for a breather. Now the top rope elbow gets two but Jericho grabs the Walls again, only to have Dean make the ropes again. The enziguri and butterfly backbreaker get two each for Chris but Dean gets the knees up to block the Lionsault. An awkward sequence (with Jericho laying on Dean's knees) sets up Dirty Deeds for the pin on Chris at 18:18.

**Rating:** C. It really is amazing how much damage that loss to Lesnar did to Ambrose as I just do not care about him anymore. This match went on for a LONG time and didn't go anywhere other than two people doing moves (and missing a lot of them) for the better part of twenty minutes. Dean winning is the right call, even if it makes Jericho going over AJ last month all the more confusing.

Jericho throws a fit post match.

Sasha Banks is talking to Shane McMahon.

Women's Title: Charlotte vs. Natalya

Charlotte is defending and has Ric Flair in her corner while Natalya has her uncle Bret Hart in hers. Charlotte W00s at her to start but Natalya grabs the Sharpshooter. That's flipped away so Natalya nips up to scare the champ a bit. Another takedown sets up a leg lock for a bit before Charlotte bails to the floor. A chase results in Natalya getting kicked on the way back in but the fans would rather have Sasha.

They trade some chops until Natalya sends her flying with a release German suplex. Charlotte starts in on the leg ("Hey Bret, you want to learn something?") but takes too much time bragging and gets caught in an armbars. Natalya shoves her off the top for a big crash, allowing Flair to tell some fans to keep their mouths shut.

Charlotte loads up a powerbomb onto the apron but Natalya counters into something resembling a hurricanrana on the floor.

Back in and a boot to the face stops Natalya's discus lariat, only to have a slap (yes a slap) break up the Figure Eight. A quick Natural Selection gets two for the champ, followed by that great looking moonsault for the same. The Figure Four is put on but quickly reversed so Charlotte puts on Natalya....AND IT'S FREAKING MONTREAL with Charles Robinson (a noted Flair megafan) ringing the bell without Natalya tapping to retain the title at 13:04.

**Rating:** C+. MONTREAL. It's been nearly twenty years and they're STILL doing that thing again? Would it freaking kill them to just put Sasha in the title hunt instead of giving us Natalya vs. Charlotte IV or whatever it's going to be at Extreme Rules? Bret did absolutely nothing here and the whole thing feels like a huge waste of time and effort.

Bret and Natalya put on matching Sharpshooters post match. I'm so glad Natalya got over that loss in all of 14 seconds.

Here's Vince for his decision on the control of Raw but the fans cut him off with a CM PUNK chant. Vince talks about how amazing Raw is but gets cut off again, prompting him to ask how long it can go. Vince: "COME ON! YOU'VE GOT MORE THAN THAT!" He talks about all the different eras Raw has gone through and thinks it's time for a new visionary. Vince brings out Stephanie to even more booing.

The fans are pleased with the idea of Reigns spearing Stephanie at Wrestlemania but she doesn't want their support or sympathy. Stephanie brags about her success, including the debut of the Shield and the Divas Revolution. Their biggest success was the launch of the WWE Network which went from an idea to 1.8 million subscribers. That brings her to Shane, whose only qualification to run Raw is being a man. After the better part of five minutes, Stephanie brings up Shane blackmailing Vince to get back into the company after leaving for seven years. Cue Shane to break up the BORING chants. Shane shows a bunch of media clips about how he's made wrestling cool again. That brings him back to the WWE Network comment, which

was Vince's idea. Of those 1.8 million subscribers, we've got about 18,000 of them in the house tonight. Oddly enough, a lot of those people came on board around Wrestlemania XXXII, which was probably due to one match in particular. Fans: "YOU STILL GOT IT!" Stephanie: "Thank you, yes I do!"

Shane brings up the departure in 2007 and says it was due to his voice being ignored. In the void he left, the Authority took over and promptly ran the company into the ground. Shane came back to save the company's future for all of the future McMahon generations. The fans are entirely behind Shane of course but Vince says Shane shouldn't be here after the loss to Undertaker.

Then Shane came out the night after Wrestlemania and was handed Raw because he would fall on his face. However, Vince didn't think Shane failed that badly but he doesn't listen to these people. Vince wants to see them slit each others' throats and disembowel each other....so they'll both be running the show together. Shane and Stephanie shake hands before leaving.

Pre-show recap.

We recap the World Title match. Reigns won the title at Wrestlemania and AJ became #1 contender the next night at Raw. The twist has been the debut of Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows, AJ's former partners in the Bullet Club in New Japan, who attacked Reigns multiple times. AJ has denied being behind it but Reigns doesn't buy it.

Enzo has been diagnosed with a concussion but all other tests have come back negative.

#### WWE World Title: AJ Styles vs. Roman Reigns

Reigns is defending. AJ cranks on a headlock to start but is easily shoved away. Styles starts kicking at the legs but it's still a standoff in the early going. They do a quick chase around ringside and AJ gets in a few kicks to briefly take over. A hard clothesline turns AJ inside out and a big old sitout powerbomb gets two. The Superman punch is countered with a quick enziguri (cool visual there) and AJ's strike rush sets up the low forearm for two on the



champ.

AJ elbows out of a Samoan drop and gets the Calf Crusher, sending Roman crawling to the ropes. Reigns bails to the floor and eats a GREAT looking Phenomenal Forearm to send both guys through the table in a big crash. AJ tries to throw Reigns back in but it's a countout win for Styles....until Shane comes out to make this match no countouts. Ignore the fact that he runs RAW and not pay per views of course.

They get back in with AJ not being able to hit anything off the top. Another strike rush sets up a 450 but Reigns gets the knees up for two. AJ is up first but dives into a right hand below the belt for a DQ. As you might expect, here's Stephanie to say not so fast because we're restarting it with no disqualifications. Oh yeah it's going to be all about the McMahons.

Reigns takes him outside and sends AJ into the steps before kicking him over the barricade and into the crowd. Thankfully Reigns doesn't follow him to avoid being murdered. AJ kicks him again and they head back inside, only to have another Phenomenal Forearm countered with a Superman punch. Again, that looked GREAT. A second Superman punch drops AJ but here are Gallows and Anderson to go after Roman.

The champ is beaten down and another Phenomenal Forearm gets two with Reigns putting his foot on the ropes. Cue the Usos to go after Anderson and Gallows but Reigns shoves AJ onto all four of them to break up the fight. Now Reigns does his own big dive to take out the pile so AJ throws him inside for a springboard 450 (Not a shooting star Cole. Come on now that's not even close.) and another near fall. Another Forearm misses and the spear puts AJ down at 24:58.

**Rating:** A. Oh yeah this was awesome with Reigns being the perfect foil for someone like AJ and his high flying offense. It's clear that we're getting a big gimmick rematch in three weeks at Extreme Rules but at least the first match was excellent stuff. Shane and Stephanie interfering was really annoying but that's exactly what you have to expect going forward because they're like interesting or something. Great match here though and better than I was expecting.

Reigns poses until we cut to the back where Shane and Stephanie make AJ vs. Reigns II in an Extreme Rules match for the title. Shane supports Stephanie's decision to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** B. Well that was....something indeed. There was a lot of good action but the booking decisions (Miz and Montreal) really brought things down. AJ vs. Reigns and Owens vs. Zayn were both excellent but my goodness the McMahon drama feels like something that is going to go on for the better part of ever. I had a good enough time watching it though and the wrestling in the two big matches really brought things up. Find a way to fix the booking (read as STOP DOING STUPID THINGS) and this show goes through the roof.

### Results

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. Vaudevillains went to a no contest when Amore was injured

Kevin Owens b. Sami Zayn – Pop Up Powerbomb

Miz b. Cesaro – Rollup with a handful of trunks

Dean Ambrose b. Chris Jericho – Dirty Deeds

Charlotte b. Natalya – Sharpshooter

Roman Reigns b. AJ Styles – Spear

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# Enzo Amore Injured At Payback (Updated)

He was being sent outside and went neck first into the middle rope, causing his head to slam into the mat/apron. The match was almost immediately stopped and Enzo was taken out on a stretcher. This clearly wasn't storyline and looked very bad. The camera wasn't on him so no word on if his limbs were working or not.

Update: Cole says Enzo is talking and moving his extremities. That's such a huge relief.

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## Payback 2016 Preview

For once I'm actually looking forward to a regular pay per view as Payback has had an awesome set of buildup over the last few weeks. Things really have been picking up in recent weeks and while the ratings haven't been great, it's been an awesome series of wrestling matches and storytelling. Let's get to it.

We'll start with a title match as Kalisto defends the US Title against Ryback on the pre-show for the second straight pay per view. I have no idea why anyone would think Kalisto keeps the title here as his title reign has died worse and worse every single week. Ryback actually needs something to do these days and it would be nice to see him get another title run. I was digging his Intercontinental Title reign last year before it was handed over to Kevin Owens so the US Title would be just fine.

In another title match we have Charlotte defending the Women's Title against Natalya in a match that is really more about Ric Flair being opposed by Natalya's uncle Bret Hart. I get the idea of the match

but I'm still not a fan of the match being more about the older guys. I'm sure the wrestling will be very good and of a high quality but I'm expecting Flair to help cheat again because that's how this story is going to roll.

Of course right now we're waiting on Sasha to get her big shot so this is more an exercise in waiting than anything else. On top of that, it would have been better if we hadn't just seen this at Roadblock but you can't expect WWE to come up with another idea that fast. I mean, it's not like they have a full division of possible challengers here or anything like that.

We'll keep up the title match theme here with what should be the biggest layup of the entire show: Cesaro taking the Intercontinental Title from the Miz. If Miz has proven one thing over the years, it's that he can take loss after loss before coming back to win the Intercontinental Title for a nothing reign with the title being dropped off to an upcoming star.

In this case, that would be Cesaro. There's no reason to suggest that Cesaro doesn't get the title here as he's rocketed up the card and finally has the kind of character that can go somewhere. The only thing missing now is an actual accomplishment and the Intercontinental would certainly fit the description.

Speaking of results that should be obvious, Baron Corbin should be going over Dolph Ziggler. Much like Miz, Ziggler is a made man who can lose every single big match he has and not lose a drop of popularity so putting Corbin over is exactly the right move. Corbin is someone who could get some traction on the main roster and a win over Ziggler would be a good second start to his WWE career.

In the last of the lower card matches, we've got Enzo Amore vs. the Vaudevillains in the tag team tournament final for the right to face New Day for the titles later on. While this should be a layup on paper, I'm not so sure on who wins here. On one hand you could give the Vaudevillains the title shot to put New Day over a fresh team while they wait to have the Bullet Club get the belts in the summer.

On the other hand you could go with Enzo and Cass....but do you give

them the titles this fast? You really don't want to risk Enzo and Cass losing what they have to the better act in New Day but you also don't want the new guys losing to a team that just isn't as good as they are in Gotch and English. We'll go with Enzo and Cass but I really wouldn't be surprised to be wrong here.

Now we'll get to some of the more interesting stuff and we'll start with Dean Ambrose vs. Chris Jericho. After the win at Wrestlemania, it would seem that Jericho is getting ready for one last main event run, perhaps with one more World Title shot. If that's the case, a win over Ambrose would certainly do him a lot of favors. At the same time, Dean REALLY needs a big win after his near squash loss to Brock at Wrestlemania. Either way I can't imagine this is the last match we're going to see between the two and I think Dean goes over early on, but the idea of a draw is up there as well.

This brings us to probably the second biggest match on the card as Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens actually get to face each other on the WWE roster for the first time ever (likely of many times in the future). For me, this one is an absolute layup: Sami should win and he should win going away. Owens is a bigger deal at this point and Sami needs a big main roster rub. I'm sure Owens will wind up winning the feud because Zayn doesn't win long term feuds (as he shouldn't) but he wins the first match to get things going hot. Owens will be fine long term and doesn't need the win as much here so we'll go with Sami starting fast.

That leaves us with the biggest match on the card and I'm not sure where to start here. Roman Reigns is defending the WWE World Title against AJ Styles but there's also the shadows of Luke Gallows and Karl Anderson who may or may not be in league with Styles. In this case, I don't think we're going to have the big Bullet Club moment yet but there's almost no way AJ loses. Instead, what I think is Reigns gets Anderson and Gallows on his side as the Roman Empire with AJ bringing in Finn Balor and then someone else for a big feud down the line.

WWE has done an excellent job setting up this match with AJ going

over big name after big name and Reigns just kind of being there. It's a good way to have AJ look awesome while also giving Reigns a big win in his first title defense. The match should be a lot of fun as Reigns is great once the bell rings (assuming the match isn't 27 minutes long of course) and AJ is AJ. I'm really looking forward to this one and there are a lot of possibilities of what might happen at the end.

Payback looks like one heck of a show and it's going to be in front of a white hot Chicago crowd, which could be a big hit or a miss depending on how things go. This is a show that looks like it has a great batch of matches with almost nothing looking weak on the entire card. It should be a lot of fun, which is so strange to say outside of Wrestlemania season.

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