

Main Event – October 19, 2017: I'm Rather Speechless

Main Event

Date: October 19, 2017

Location: Moda Center, Portland, Oregon

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

If WWE is heading towards Tables, Ladders and Chairs, Main Event is coming right along with it. This is another one of those weeks where the main show didn't do so well, meaning the short form recap version might work a little bit better. Then again, that likely includes Dash Wilder losing in a singles match. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Rhyno vs. Dash Wilder

Yes, AGAIN, for the third time in six weeks. Rhyno works on the arm to start so let's dash over to the ropes for the break. For some reason Dash tries a test of strength...and actually takes Rhyno down to his knees. Dash hammers away at the neck and gets two off a running neckbreaker.

We hit the chinlock and the fans are immediately chanting for Rhyno to fight back. I'm kind of stunned by how he stays popular but the fact that he's basically the same character he's always been has a lot to do with it. Rhyno fights up but the Gore is blocked with a knee lift. The spinebuster is countered into a sunset flip for two (Dash is learning from his previous defeats.) but the second attempt connects to finish Dash off at 5:29.

Rating: C+. You know what? Not bad at all. As repetitive as this mini feud has been, I can go for Dash learning a little about Rhyno and using that for a near fall. It's still not a great match or a great story, but for a match that was supposed to be filler, they actually put some thought into it, making for a much better performance. Call this one a pleasant surprise.

We look back at Shield TripleBombing Braun Strowman through the announcers' table.

From Raw.

It's time for MizTV with Miz being flanked by the Bar and Curtis Axel but no Bo Dallas. Miz talked about how they're ready to destroy the Shield right now but they'll wait until Sunday night. Sheamus says the Shield will be broken into three pieces. They're ready to destroy Shield and here's tonight's guest: their partner on Sunday, Braun Strowman.

Braun says it's time to destroy the Shield forever and it starts tonight inside the cage. The fans get in a YES/REALLY battle with Miz, who has a bit of a surprise: there's going to be a fifth member of the team. The fans want Curtis Axel but here's Kurt Angle to say this isn't happening.

Kurt has a deal for Miz though: if Strowman wins tonight, the fifth man can join. If Reigns wins though, Strowman is out and it's 3-3 again. Miz says it's on but Angle says everyone is banned from ringside in both the cage match (kind of redundant) and the Tag Team Title match.

Also from Raw.

Here's Finn Balor for a chat. He talks about the Celtic festival of Sweeny, which sounds like Halloween cranked up to eleven. Last week Finn saw Bray's tricks but he has his own too. This Sunday, the Demon will slay a monster of his own. Finn's demon has no fear...and the Demon paint appears on his face. It disappears and Finn says his Demon dreams of nightmares (paint on and off again) and it wants to meet Sister Abigail. Run. Never let WWE get supernatural.

Drew Gulak vs. Mustafa Ali

Gulak has his NO CHANTS sign. Drew headlocks him to the mat to start and is greeted with a WE ARE CHANTING chant because this crowd is actually clever. Ali tries a drop down but Drew holds the ropes and slaps on a headlock. Back up and Ali springboards over him into a wristlock and we take a break. We come back with Ali scoring off a dropkick and getting two off the rolling neckbreaker. It's too early for the 054 as Gulak (Drew: "NO FLY!") pulls Ali off the ropes for a crash. Not that it matters as another kick to the head sets up the 054 for the pin at 8:00.

Rating: C. I could have gone for a bit more history between the two of them (though hearing Nigel sing the Aladdin song again made up for it) but this was fine. There's something amusing about the fact that the faces ALWAYS win these matches. It's logical, but WWE

doesn't do much to hide the fact that this is a glorified dark match.

Pay per view rundown.

From Raw again to wrap us up.

Roman Reigns vs. Braun Strowman

Inside a cage and Miz jumps in on commentary. Strowman sends him into the corner to start but it's way too early for the running powerslam. Reigns slips out and tries to climb, only to get pulled down. Some clotheslines have almost no effect but some big boots have a big more effect. Strowman goes shoulder first into the corner and there are the rapid fire clotheslines. One heck of a spinebuster gets two on Roman and we take a break.

Back with Reigns tasting the cage a few times. Strowman throws him at the cage so Reigns grabs the top for a climb. Now why did he think that would work with Strowman looking at him. Strowman misses a charge and hits the cage though, allowing Reigns to score with some kicks to the face. A Samoan drop gets two with a heck of a kickout so Reigns makes another escape attempt. Cue the Bar to cut Reigns off so Ambrose and Rollins are outside to cut them off. THEN WHAT WAS THE POINT IN BANNING THEM BOTH FROM RINGSIDE???

Braun gets up in time to pull Reigns back inside with a superplex off the cage. Miz: "COVER!!!" Everyone not in the match brawls up to the stage as we cut away from the match entirely. Miz joins them and the fight heads backstage. Again, we're not even looking at the CAGE MATCH WITH TWO MONSTERS FIGHTING EACH OTHER because we need to see this instead. For all we know there's a tango contest going on at the moment as Miz closes a metal door, locking the four of them in the parking lot.

Back to the ring with Reigns fighting to his feet after suffering from a bad bowl of soup as served up by Chef Strowman (prove that it didn't happen). Miz is back on commentary as Reigns goes up top, only to slip down and crotch Strowman. A Superman Punch staggers Strowman and a second puts him down. Strowman throws Reigns in the air but gets Superman Punched again for two.

It's spear time....and Kane's lights come on. Strowman splashes Reigns but eats a spear anyway. Kane comes up through the mat though and stares Reigns down, followed by a chokeslam. A second chokeslam sets

up the running powerslam, followed by a Tombstone for good measure. Strowman adds another powerslam and Reigns is done at 17:24.

Rating: C-. Let me make sure I have this straight. Angle bans everyone from ringside so we have SIX PEOPLE interfere? And Reigns loses his first match after the reunion (not fairly but it's a loss)? Here's the thing: Kane was in Shield's first match and Reigns retired his brother at Wrestlemania so there's definitely a connection there. Unfortunately we didn't hear anything about that and it's basically just the idea that Miz got Kane to join for no apparent reason. Of course the announcers sold things well here, though there's a better story to tell.

Miz, on top of a ladder, announces Kane as the fifth member of the team to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. The shortened version helped a bit here but that's not exactly enough to make up for a pretty one dimensional Raw. Wilder vs. Rhyno was shockingly above average (I hesitate to call it good) and the cruiserweights did their thing and that's enough to compliment a few nice things from Monday. Not bad here.

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Smackdown – April 24, 2003:

This Didn't Change My Mind

Smackdown

Date: April 24, 2003

Location: Gaylord Entertainment Center, Nashville, Tennessee

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's the go home show for Backlash and we have a Smackdown main event. This time around it's going to be rookie upstart John Cena challenging Brock Lesnar for the Smackdown World Title, meaning it's likely time for a big face to face showdown. Other than that it's Rikishi vs. Roddy Piper tonight for reasons I don't even want to begin to understand. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

The announcers preview the show with Cole making sure to say that "we are just 72 hours away, three days, from Backlash". I have that 72 hours, three days thing burned into my head after hearing Cole say it all those years.

John Cena vs. Rhyno

Before the match, Cena raps his history, which basically summarizes the tournament and says he's winning on Sunday. He also promises graphic footage to prove that Lesnar shouldn't be champion. Rhyno wins the early power battle and sends him outside, only to get dropkicked on the way back inside.

A middle rope Fameasser with Rhyno draped over the ropes has Rhyno in trouble and it's time to start in on the neck. Back in and we hit the armbar for a good bit until Rhyno fights up with a powerslam. The still yet to be named Throwback sets up the ProtoBomb but Rhyno catches him in a spinebuster. The Gore misses though and Cena rolls him up for the pin.

Rating: D+. Just a power match here and I kind of like the idea of Cena making a power guy miss a catch him on a quick pin as it gives him another option to take the title from Lesnar. Unfortunately it wasn't a great match in the first place, but at least Cena won and

beat someone that the fans still care about.

Mr. America is coming.

The FBI annoys Chris Benoit for losing last week when they had a bet on him. They want their money back but Nunzio winds up with a match against Benoit instead.

Sable flaunts her body to Josh Matthews and hypes up the Sable Invitational body contest later tonight.

Some wrestlers toured a Navy ship earlier this week.

Chris Benoit vs. Nunzio

Stamboli and Palumbo get in some shots from behind while Nunzio has the referee. As usual the referee has no issue with Benoit being down despite his opponent not touching him and doesn't even yell at the other Italians. They trade some chops with the Canadian getting the better of it (well duh) but Palumbo trips Benoit again. The Sicilian Slice (middle rope Fameasser) gives Nunzio two and a swinging neckbreaker is good for the same. An enziguri finally gets Benoit out of trouble and grabs the rolling German suplexes. Nunzio pops up but the springboard armbar is countered into the Crossface for the tap.

Rating: D. I'm hoping they pull the plug on the FBI thing in the very near future as it's just not interesting. Nunzio is the best worker of the team and even he's only decent. On top of that, it's such a simple and not very interesting idea. They're just stereotypical mob thugs and that's far from good enough to survive. At least Benoit won though.

Benoit gets beaten down post match.

Tajiri and Funaki watch Rey Mysterio 619 Big Show last week and have a hearty laugh. Cue Big Show to destroy the TV and VCR to blow off some steam.

Rey Mysterio vs. Crash

Crash is now an MF'er, meaning a follower of Matt Hardy, who only uses low fat salad dressings. Tazz dubs Crash a Moore-On as he's

working his way up to MF'er. Rey dropkicks Shannon to the floor but gets armbarred for his efforts. The sitout bulldog is countered with a belly to back suplex (Crash is the first person to come up with that counter?) but the kickouts frustrate Crash. Now the bulldog works fine and the springboard seated senton sets up a tornado DDT to give Rey two. The 619 sets up the springboard legdrop to put Crash away.

Rating: D+. I'm not sure how this is supposed to help Rey get ready for Big Show on Sunday. Crash doesn't exactly fit the mold for a goon as he wrestled his usual not great match here without looking like anything more than a bad wrestler. This should be setting up Rey vs. Matt but it's Rey vs. Big Show for reasons I don't understand.

Cena gives A-Train a pep talk and shows him Lesnar giving him a very scary F5 that saw A-Train landing on his head. That was edited off the actual broadcast if you don't remember seeing it. A-Train wants to end Lesnar.

Rikishi vs. Roddy Piper

Unfortunately Piper wrestles (work with me here) with his shirt off and the blinded referee doesn't see Sean O'Haire hit a low blow. Some right hands knock Piper backwards and Sean takes a few of his own but O'Haire comes in to break up the Stinkface for the DQ.

O'Haire beats him down even more and adds the reverse Death Valley Driver.

The evil French guys (now officially La Resistance) are still coming.

It's time for Sable's body contest. Before anyone comes out, Sable says this is designed to see if anyone can be as sexy as Torrie. However, Torrie won't be here tonight because she's feeling a bit fat lately as she hasn't been able to get to the gym with all the Playboy stuff. Nidia and Dawn Marie come out and are about to do their thing until Torrie comes out, as expected.

Nidia and Dawn do their thing and get their standard reactions. It's

time for Torrie, who hits on Sable, giving her kind of a standing lap dance, complete with lollipop, and....loses anyway. The beatdown is on and Torrie is left laying as this story is now more confusing than anything else. So Sable is now a lesbian cougar who didn't interest Torrie but now Torrie is interested (or just playing the proverbial "mind games") but Sable isn't interested? Is that where we are?

Chavo Guerrero vs. Shelton Benjamin

Team Angle is dedicating their win on Sunday to Kurt. Shelton takes him down without too much effort but lets Chavo up pretty quickly. Chavo scores with a dropkick and a clothesline as Tazz thinks Eddie stole money from him. Why were Los Guerreros never accused of stealing the FBI's money a few weeks back? It's kind of their thing to do.

Chavo's hurricanrana gets two but he walks into a belly to belly for the same. A quickly broken camel clutch doesn't do Shelton much good as Chavo grabs a flapjack. An STF that John Cena would think looks bad has Shelton in trouble but Charlie Haas pulls him over to the rope. The referee yells at Eddie for going after Haas, allowing Charlie to turn over a rollup and give Shelton the pin.

Rating: C-. They tried to put a bit too much into this and it wasn't as good as I was expecting. At least they actually set up something for Sunday as that hasn't seemed to be the case for most of the night. Chavo is the weaker of the team but he's certainly capable of having a good match. There was a bit too much interference to let that work here though and it was kind of a mess as a result.

Cena talks trash to Lesnar.

Big Show vs. Tajiri

Show catches him without much trouble and a clothesline cuts off the kicks. A charge misses and Show crotches himself, allowing Tajiri to fire off more kicks. Show's kick drops Tajiri again but here's Mysterio's music for a distraction. Not that it matters as the chokeslam plants Tajiri. Cue Rey in person to post Show, drawing a

countout.

Rating: D-. So let me make sure I've got this straight: Show has been humiliated twice in a row and is likely to squash Mysterio on Sunday, Rey is little more than a fly who is going to be swatted in the actual match, Tajiri gets treated like a jobber and Mysterio/Tajiri beating Team Angle to start the whole thing meant nothing at all. If someone would be interested in pointing out a positive in this whole mess, please let me know.

Stephanie McMahon is bent over a table for no apparent reason other than she probably thought she looked good that day (granted she's not wrong). She's an All-American girl and is happy to have Mr. America here next week.

Backlash rundown.

Brock Lesnar vs. A-Train

Non-title with Cena on commentary. Lesnar's pyro when he jumps to the apron seems to shake Cena, which you don't see very often. Joined in progress after a break with an exchange of power shoves. We hit a front facelock with Brock rolling A-Train around like he's not even there. Back up and a big collision puts both of them down and it's another staredown.

Brock finally gets a more definitive advantage by clotheslining A-Train to the floor, allowing Cena to trash talk even more. The distraction lets A-Train kick him in the face to take over, followed by the chinlock. Brock fights up but gets put right back down with a hard shoulder. A powerslam works a bit better for Lesnar, only to have A-Train grab the Derailer for two. Cena: "WHAT'S UP WITH CHIODA DOG??? WAY OUT OF POSITION!" The F5 plants A-Train a few seconds later but Cena comes in for the DQ.

Rating: D. Slow, plodding power match here with an obvious and dull ending. Lesnar winning is fine and A-Train got in some big shots despite having no chance to win. There's no hiding the fact that Lesnar vs. Cena is the only Smackdown match that matters on Sunday but it's looking like little more than a glorified squash. Bad main

event to a bad show.

Cena chains Lesnar in the head and hits the Death Valley Driver (now the standard AA). A belt shot to Lesnar's head ends the show.

Overall Rating: F+. The best thing on the show was a lackluster Chavo vs. Shelton match as it's clear that the Smackdown side of Backlash means absolutely nothing. Brock vs. Cena is the distant third biggest match on the pay per view card and everything else is complete filler. This show did nothing to shake that idea as the whole thing was Lesnar vs. Cena and everything else, none of which was interesting in the slightest. It was a terrible show and another part of a horrid stretch for the brand.

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Smackdown – April 10, 2003: The Old Men Program

Smackdown

Date: April 10, 2003

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's tournament time and that means some bigger matches tonight. The

tournament seems to be John Cena's to win, especially with the FBI around to mess with Undertaker. Why he's stuck with the FBI isn't clear, but it's also not clear why Hulk Hogan vs. Vince McMahon is continuing. Let's get to it.

Brock Lesnar arrived earlier today and greeted some fans, two of whom are none other than Mr. Kennedy and CM Punk. Kennedy's mugging for the camera is amusing.

Opening sequence.

Brock Lesnar vs. Matt Hardy

Non-title, meaning Matt, whose book is a New York Times best seller (of course) and is currently the longest reigning singles champion on Smackdown, can't leave as a double champion. Matt lays the Cruiserweight Title in front of Brock, who casually kicks it away and lays his title in front of him instead.

Matt goes to pick it up so Brock steps on it and takes Matt's head off with a clothesline. The very brave Shannon offers a distraction so Matt can get in a belt shot for a fast two. We hit the stomping for a bit before Brock backdrops him to the apron with Matt's face smacking off the bar that connects the turnbuckle to the post.

It doesn't seem to change much as Matt snaps the back of Brock's neck across the ropes, only to get dropped with a scary looking electric chair. Brock makes the clothesline comeback and tosses Matt with an overhead belly to belly. Shannon has to eat a shot to the head as well, leaving Matt to take the F5 for the pin.

Rating: C. Matt was game here but there was only so much he could do in a match like this. If nothing else it gave us more of Shannon's impressive selling as he looks like he's getting killed every single time. Brock gets a nice win as he's back in the ring and it's not like the Cruiserweight Champion losing to Brock is going to really hurt him.

Roddy Piper talks about the Frankie Williams interview on Piper's Pit where he beat the heck out of a jobber and dropped the "just when they think they've got all the answers, I change the questions"

line.

We look back at Hogan and Vince's segment last week with Vince sending Hogan home to get rid of him and Hulkamania for good. Is this really the best thing they can do with their TV time? I get the idea of nostalgia but wouldn't that be more like Hogan beating up A-Train in a five minute match? This is more trying to make Hogan into Austin, which is the biggest stretch you could have.

Jamie Noble/Nidia vs. Brian Kendrick/Torrie Wilson

Sable is at ringside with Torrie's Playboy. Noble jumps Kendrick from behind but gets sent into Nidia's raised boot by mistake. Kendrick's tornado DDT is countered with a northern lights suplex, sending Kendrick back first into the turnbuckle in a good looking bump. We hit the chinlock as the fans cheer for Torrie. It's off to a reverse cravate before Sliced Bread #2 is countered with a neckbreaker. Nidia misses a Rocket Launcher though and Torrie gets the hot tag. Torrie's neckbreaker gets two and everything breaks down. Nidia's high crossbody hits Jamie and it's a tornado (more like a stiff breeze) DDT to put Nidia away.

Rating: C. Not a bad match actually with the guys doing most of the work until Torrie got to do her thing at the end. As long as they keep her matches short, everything should be fine. There's no secret about why she's out there and she's actually passable in the ring at times. This could have been a lot worse so I'll take what I can get. Sable is rather pleased.

Chris Benoit and Rhyno both want to face Brock at Backlash. Brock is cool with facing either of them.

#1 Contenders Tournament Semifinals: Chris Benoit vs. Rhyno

An early test of strength goes to Rhyno (duh) and he twists the arms around into a cross arm choke. Benoit spins out without much effort and starts in on the arm, only to get suplexed down for two. It's time for the hard chops which actually bring Rhyno down to his knees. A knee to the ribs has Rhyno in more trouble but he avoids a dropkick.

Rhyno grabs a bodyscissors of all things until Benoit comes back with more chops. The Gore only hits the turnbuckle but a spinebuster gets two. A hard elbow to the jaw sets up the Swan Dive for two but Chris can't get the Crossface. What he can get though is a backslide for the pin and a spot in the finals.

Rating: B-. They beat each other up here and that made for an entertaining match. Rhyno is someone who is capable of having a better match than most people would give him credit for and that's what happened here. The ending was a nice touch too with Benoit catching Rhyno instead of flat out beating him, which should do some good for the sake of keeping their team together.

They shake hands post match.

Torrie is in the shower when Sable comes in. Sable praises her Playboy and steals the towel so Torrie has to come and get it.

Piper talks about cracking Jimmy Snuka in the head with a coconut.

It's time for Piper's Pit but Vince is in the ring instead. He talks about Hogan being sent home to rot so that when he's allowed to be back, he'll need a bag underneath him to collect his bodily waste. That brings Vince to another of his creations that he'd like to pull off the shelf: Roddy Piper. Cue Piper to interview his guest, which is of course Vince.

After mocking Vince for having small fingers, Piper says no one created him but himself. Vince mocks Piper's ample gut, including saying that he looks like he went to heck in a breadbasket. We get an offer for Piper to join Vince's club but Piper rips on Vince's business failures, including the WBF and the XFL. Vince's eyes bugging out for a few seconds is a nice touch.

Anyway, the only job Vince can hold is the one his daddy gave him. Vince gets up and talks about their dislike of Hogan, though of course they still hate each other. Piper takes off the jacket (Vince: "From one son of a b**** to another.") and they shake over their mutual hatred of Hogan. Vince goes to leave until Piper congratulates him on doing something Piper never did: lose 1-2-3 to

Hogan. Save for SuperBrawl VII of course but you can't ask Piper to remember things like history.

Vince is mad but here's Rikishi of all people, carrying a coconut. Rikishi remembers what Piper did to Snuka all those years ago and it's time for revenge. Cue Sean O'Haire of all people to drop Rikishi with a clothesline and hit him with the wooden chair. Piper busts the coconut over Rikishi's head as this is one of the most ridiculous segments I've seen in a long time.

I'm assuming they're going for the old school fans here but going for the over 40 audience isn't the best idea in the world. Adding O'Haire in helps, but the coconut stuff and Rikishi, plus the eventual return of Hogan to take all of the spotlight isn't going to do anyone any favors. Cut out some of the nonsense and there's something there, though there's a lot to get through to get to it.

Les Nouvelles (La Resistance) are coming.

Team Angle vs. Rey Mysterio/Tajiri

Non-title and Team Angle dedicates this to Kurt, who is undergoing neck surgery tomorrow. Haas armbars Tajiri down to start, only to get caught in the Tarantula with Mysterio adding a running dropkick for an early two. Shelton comes in to take a dropkick as well but a Haas distraction lets Benjamin get in a superkick to take over. A double gutbuster sets up an abdominal stretch for a bit before Rey is taken into the corner.

An electric chair is countered into something like a bulldog and it's off to Tajiri. The handspring forearm (instead of an elbow this time) gets two on Haas as everything breaks down again. Some kind of a powerbomb double team is countered into a hurricanrana to put Charlie down. The 619 into the springboard legdrop gives Rey the pin.

Rating: C+. Just like the Rhyno vs. Benoit match, this would have been better with some more time but it was fun while it lasted. That being said, I really could go with the champs being a bit more successful. I'm sure this is going to set up a title match either

here or at Backlash but isn't there a better way than having them lose clean in less than five minutes?

Undertaker is ready to win because he's got more shower time than John Cena has ring time. Tonight he's going to beat Cena up to shut him up then bust him up.

Bill DeMott vs. Nathan Jones

This is Jones' in-ring debut. DeMott grabs a hammerlock so Nathan punches in the in the face. A toss sends Bill outside as Nathan seems lost out there less than a minute in. Back in and Nathan kicks him in the face for the pin. Jones didn't even do four offensive moves in the 80 second match.

The FBI talks about Italian food and claims that they've had thousands of dollars and a laptop stolen from their bags. They're asked who might have done it.

Post break Nathan is questioned about the robbery when Undertaker comes up to say this is nonsense. Jones has to leave anyway.

#1 Contenders Tournament Semifinals: John Cena vs. Undertaker

Cena says Deadman Inc. is bankrupt and he's repossessing the yard. If Undertaker is a deadman, Cena is a necrophiliac. I really didn't need to know that and we'll move on. Undertaker sends him into the corner to start but stops to glare at the referee. Some big right hands have Cena in trouble and Undertaker asks if he wants to keep talking. A chokeslam gets a delayed two with Cena's foot on the rope.

Back from a break with Undertaker still in complete control and driving in some elbows on the apron. The apron legdrop to Cena's back but a right hand with the chain gives Cena an opening. A shoulder knocks Undertaker off the apron and gets in a shot on the bad elbow. Undertaker has a bad elbow? Good to know guys.

Cena stomps the arm into the steps but Undertaker hits a shoulder with the bad arm for no apparent reason. Old School looks to set up the Last Ride but Cena reverses into a DDT on the arm for a near fall. We hit the armbar for a bit until Undertaker punches him down

without much effort. Snake Eyes into the big boot but the ref gets bumped. Just get the Italians out here already.

Cena grabs a spinebuster, only to get caught in the Last Ride. Cue the FBI for the attack with Palumbo getting in a chair shot to the head. Cole: "Flashbulb just went off! Nathan Jones has been taken out of the building!" Sweet goodness I'm surprised he got it that fast. Cena crawls over for the cover and the pin because Heaven forbid he gets the pin with his finisher.

Rating: D. Until that chain shot, Undertaker was beating Cena like the rookie that he was. It's good that Cena won, though it would have been nice to have Undertaker not treat him like the biggest waste of his time he could find. I have no idea why the FBI is getting this spot either, but it was ALL about Undertaker here and that defeats the purpose of giving someone like Cena the win here.

Overall Rating: C-. It's a good enough show but there's a lot of bad stuff throughout the show taking it back down. The big story is really holding down the rest of the show as it's just not interesting. Much like the main event, I like the idea of putting over a young guy but they're making sure to pile on as much stuff as they can to keep it from accomplishing its goal. The wrestling on here, with the little time that it got, worked well, though it's almost completely forgotten for the sake of the big stories. That's fine in theory but it would help a lot if the big stories were a lot less horrible.

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Smackdown – April 3, 2003: Tournament Rush

Smackdown

Date: April 3, 2003

Location: Spokane Arena, Spokane, Washington

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We're past Wrestlemania and that means it's time to reset a few things. It also means that we don't have Kurt Angle around for a long time as he needs a fresh bandage on that pesky broken neck of his. Brock Lesnar is World Champion again and that means he needs a new challenger. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Wrestlemania set to Crack Addict.

Opening sequence.

Here's Stephanie McMahon for the serious speech about how great Wrestlemania was and the injuries to both Brock (who has a concussion) and Angle (pretty much everything), the latter of whom could be out for several months. But never mind any of that because we'll be having a #1 contenders tournament for the shot at Backlash starting tonight. Here are the brackets:

Rey Mysterio

Undertaker

John Cena

Eddie Guerrero

Chris Benoit

A-Train

Rhyno

Big Show

#1 Contenders Tournament First Round: Undertaker vs. Rey Mysterio

Rey tries to speed things up to start and scores with some kicks to

the leg, only to have his head taken off with a big boot. A chokeslam is broken up with Rey grabbing a DDT, followed by the 619 for two with Rey being launched off the cover. The West Coast Pop is loaded up and easily countered into the Last Ride to send Undertaker to the next round.

Rating: C. It was starting to get energetic when Undertaker realized he was selling for Rey Mysterio. The fact that Rey only got in the 619 and then got finished with one big move doesn't do him many favors, but it's not like Undertaker was exactly known for his selling at this point. Not terrible, but Undertaker didn't give him much here.

Undertaker helps him up post match. It's not exactly Jeff Hardy last year.

Vince McMahon wants to know when Hulk Hogan arrives.

Jamie Noble vs. Brian Kendrick

Shannon Moore and Matt Hardy, who was the only Hardy to wrestle at Wrestlemania this year and has read his book twelve times, are out for commentary. Jamie stomps away in the corner as Tazz tries to be funny about Matt's diet focusing on yams instead of banana juice. Brian gets sent to the floor where he kicks Nidia away and comes back in with a high crossbody. A powerslam gives Jamie two and a hard clothesline gets the same. Nidia pulls the ropes down to send Kendrick outside but Jamie's dive takes her out by mistake. Sliced Bread #2 gives Kendrick a fast pin.

Matt dumps Kendrick outside and calls out Brock for a champion vs. champion match. Brian tries to come back in and gets beaten down again.

The FBI steals stuff from a truck after tying the driver up.

Highlights of Lesnar vs. Angle. We also see Brock after the show and he was just gone thanks to the concussion. Now let's look at the botched shooting star from multiple angles in slow motion.

Piper's Pit is back next week. And so it begins. Er, continues.

#1 Contenders Tournament First Round: Chris Benoit vs. A-Train

Cole points out that we could see Big Show vs. A-Train or Benoit vs. Rhyno in the second round. Tazz: "Cole we can't get nothing past you!" A-Train knocks him to the floor to start so Benoit grabs an

early Crossface. That's reversed into a very modified camel clutch with Benoit's legs wrapped around A-Train's legs as A-Train is on his feet. Since that's not enough, A-Train pulls him up by the head and slams Benoit down hard for two.

A chinlock doesn't last long and Benoit is chopped out to the floor. Back in and A-Train talks more trash but misses a charge, setting up the rolling German suplexes to a great reaction. The Swan Dive gets two but Benoit charges into the bicycle kick. There's the Crossface again with A-Train powering up to his feet. Benoit is ready for him though and kicks off the ropes to get the hold again, this time for the tap out.

Rating: C. I liked this better than I was expecting to with A-Train acting as a pretty decent tree for Benoit to chop down. In theory this sets up Benoit vs. Big Show for a spot in the finals and if they send Benoit on to face...I'm guessing Cena, everything should be fine. Benoit was his usual good self here and I'm glad to see him back in singles matches as the Rhyno team didn't do much for me.

Stephanie comes in to see Vince, who is ready for Hogan tonight.

Sean O'Haire says break the rules in the weakest of these vignettes yet. Are these things ever going anywhere?

#1 Contenders Tournament First Round: John Cena vs. Eddie Guerrero

Cena is all over him to start with some choking in the corner and a delayed suplex for two. We hit the bearhug early on as Cena is showing the power more than usual. Tazz thinks Cena could be the next big thing. Maybe I should listen to the Tazz Show more often. Eddie fights back with some clotheslines and Three Amigos for two. Cena reverses a victory roll into an electric chair but takes too long going for a chain. Instead it's Eddie dropkicking it away and picking it up himself, only to have the referee take it away. Eddie tries a suplex to set up the frog splash but has to roll through. A charge sends him right into the Death Valley Driver to advance Cena.

Rating: C. Well if you need someone to look good, put them with Eddie. This was much more of a showcase for Cena and that's a good sign. There's little reason to go with anyone other than Cena to win this tournament after all the promos he's cut on Brock but it's very cool that he's having to beat some bigger names to get there. Barring a surprise it's going to be Eddie, Undertaker and Benoit, which is nothing to sneeze at whatsoever.

Hulk, his son Nick (with a freaking skateboard) and Jimmy Hart arrive. Nick: "Where's catering?" He was annoying even back then.

Clips of Limp Bizkit at Wrestlemania.

Here's Torrie Wilson for her Playboy coming out party, complete with the cover dropping down over the entrance. Torrie can't believe so many people want to see her in the magazine. Torrie teases taking her top off...and freaking SABLE makes her return to interrupt. Cole: "She's kicking!" The announcers do their "look at *insert name here*" stuff and it's still just as annoying as it was when Al Wilson was around.

Sable says she's having her own coming out party because she's back. Torrie clearly just wants to be Sable and a lot of people think there's no room for two Divas like themselves. Sable however thinks they'll be the best of friends and gives her a peck on the lips. Naturally the announcers act like it was the most amazing thing they've ever seen.

Team Angle vs. Funaki/Tajiri

Non-title. The champs jump Tajiri to start, leaving Funaki to get backdropped. Shelton offers a quick bow so the Japanese guys beat him down and bow right back in a cute bit. Haas gets knocked to the floor but Shelton uses the distraction to jump Funaki from behind. It's off to Haas, who would rather be facing Tajiri. That earns him a nice spinwheel kick to the face for two as the champs are in more trouble than you might expect here.

Shelton tries a cheap shot from the apron so Tajiri KICKS HIM IN THE FACE for his efforts. It's back to Shelton to jump over Charlie and land on Tajiri's back, setting up a Boston crab. Funaki makes a save to Tajiri can hit a double handspring elbow and clean house. A high crossbody gets two on Haas and there's the Tarantula to Benjamin. It doesn't last long though and Benjamin chop blocks Funaki, setting up the Haas of Pain for the submission.

Rating: B. Where in the world did this come from? This was WAY better than I was expecting with Tajiri and Funaki getting to showcase themselves for a change instead of just being jobbers. We often forget how talented some of these guys are and it's a shame that they don't get to show it off more often. You might get more surprises like this.

John Cena knows his chances against Undertaker are slimmer than a bus full of anorexic women. He'll shock the world next week and leave Undertaker like a clean pool table with no balls.

The FBI comes up to Undertaker, who makes fun of their accents. They ask him to sit down for a chat and Undertaker, who have some coffee and asks if any of them are wearing a wire. Nunzio talks about whacking Nathan Jones at Wrestlemania, which was in retaliation for what Jones did to Palumbo last week. They want to bury the hatchet, which Undertaker can appreciate. However, he brings in Jones and the Italians bail. This was WAY out of the norm for Undertaker and felt really weird.

#1 Contenders Tournament: Rhyno vs. Big Show

Show smacks him down to start and steps on Rhyno's chest. Rhyno gets tossed around some more as Show is in full on slow mode. A side slam gets two but Rhyno slips out of what looks like a powerslam. Show misses a charge into the corner so Rhyno hits a Gore in the corner, only to have to chase off A-Train. The regular Gore connects but A-Train comes in for the DQ. I'd hope Big Show thrashes him for that.

Rating: D. This was just a step above a squash until the ending, which was rather stupid and little more than a back door to save Big Show's face. Rhyno vs. Benoit should be fun, though I'm not sure why I'd want to see Rhyno vs. A-Train. Then again, Rhyno should probably buy A-Train a steak for the free pass to the next round.

A-Train holds Rhyno for a legdrop from Show, who doesn't seem to mind what A-Train did.

Here are the updated brackets:

Undertaker

John Cena

Chris Benoit

Rhyno

Here's Vince for the big closing segment, which has a ton of time. Yeah he lost on Sunday and maybe he misjudged Hogan. Tonight though, Vince would like Hogan out here for a talk. Cue Hogan (thankfully minus the pest with the skateboard) so Vince can say Hulk has no idea how to deal with this kind of defeat. He'd like to turn the clock back twenty years if he could (meaning before Hogan had come

back from the company) and maybe one day they could be friends again. Vince offers a handshake which Hulk doesn't go for.

The boss heads to leave but Hulk asks if he's serious and extends his hand. They shake hands and Vince leaves but Hulk says stop the music. He thanks Vince, who goes to leave again. Now it's Vince saying thank you for all the memories. That's all people are going to have though as Hogan is in the ring for the last time. Hogan may have pinned him at Wrestlemania but now he's going to sit on the shelf for the duration of his new contract.

That way Hulkamania will rot and finally die a slow, agonizing death of leprosy. If Hulk has something to say about that, Vince will be waiting in the parking lot. Hulk goes to the back where Vince is waiting next to a limo. It's Hulk's limo though with Jimmy and Nick inside. Vince hides behind cops and tells Hulk to get inside, where Nick is begging him to just come on. Hogan gets in and leaves with Vince angrily gloating to end the show. This would be another example of building up a big match with a big stipulation, doing the match, and then ignoring the stipulation. Such is life in WWE and such is a reason why this story sucked.

Overall Rating: C+. This show was rolling and then the crazy long main event segment killed it. It was the better part of twenty minutes while none of the matches even broke seven, which makes for a fast paced start to the show and then a major grinding halt. I liked the tournament stuff and the faster pace with some good action, though next week is going to be a much better indicator of what the future is going to hold for Smackdown.

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Smackdown – March 27, 2003: Cena Begins

Smackdown

Date: March 27, 2003

Location: HP Pavilion, San Jose, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's the final show for Wrestlemania and also my dad's fiftieth birthday. Everything is pretty much set so there's a good chance this is going to be little more than a slow paced final push towards the show. Hopefully it's better than Raw, which really shouldn't be all that difficult of a task. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Rey Mysterio/Brian Kendrick vs. Matt Hardy/Shannon Moore

Kendrick now has theme music, but it's not as catch as Matt's, whose Mattitude will make Wrestlemania a success and is very humble.

Shannon starts with Brian and gets two off an early snap suplex. A hurricanrana puts Shannon down though and it's off to Rey to speed things up. Some raised boots in the corner slow Rey down but Rey dropkicks Matt for two.

It's back to Kendrick but he's quickly pulled into the wrong corner to start the double teaming. Shannon's belly to back gets two and Matt gets the same off a wicked Splash Mountain Bomb out of the corner. Brian slips over for the hot tag and it's off to Rey for the bulldog and springboard seated legdrop for two on Matt. A tornado DDT gives Kendrick the same and he drops Shannon with Sliced Bread #2, only to walk into the Twist of Fate for the pin.

Rating: B-. Heck of an opener here with all four getting to show off a bit. I'm glad they didn't have the fall between Mysterio and Hardy for a change and it's not like pinning Kendrick is a big stretch. If nothing else it's nice to see a match with some energy in the week before Wrestlemania as they were certainly absent from Raw.

Post match Rey hurricanranas Moore but walks into a Twist of Fate.

Hulk Hogan arrives with his son and Jimmy Hart.

Roddy Piper is interested in Hogan vs. McMahon.

Video of last week's contract signing.

Here's Hogan for hopefully (and not likely) the last big push towards the match. Hogan talks about having a business relationship with Vince for over twenty years but he never really knew the man. He's seen Vince do some horrible, evil and often illegal things but he never knew how twisted Vince really was. If Vince is a genius, he's an evil genius (no brother so you know he's serious). He recaps the No Way Out ordeal and it made him so mad that he agreed to make Sunday's match a street fight.

This won't be his last time on Smackdown because Sunday is going to be a fight twenty years in the making. You'll see a Hogan you haven't seen in twenty years because you'll have to see it. Hogan promises to leave Vince in a pool of his own blood to wrap it up. It's a good promo, but we're still talking about two guys who aren't wrestlers at this point fighting over which of them is responsible for them both being multi-millionaires. That's at worst the second biggest match on the show and it's pretty hard to get behind that idea.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Charlie Haas

They trade leg trips to start and get two each as the fans are very behind Eddie early on. Eddie shoulders him down but seems to bang up his own shoulder. Charlie grabs a hammerlock and drops him arm first onto the rope to take over. A clothesline gets two and Charlie cranks on the arm even more. Eddie suplexes his way out of an armbar but lands on the shoulder again. A hammerlock northern lights suplex gets two but another suplex is countered into a rollup for the fast pin.

Rating: C+. The arm stuff was a good idea here but the time hurt them a bit. Eddie and Chavo are starting to get over as faces due to pure in-ring ability and charisma, plus the whole not fighting the FBI anymore. Haas and Benjamin continue to lose, which almost guarantees that they retain on Sunday.

John Cena promises to teach Brock Lesnar a lesson like he's Mr. Miyagi.

Video on the FBI, which is actually really well produced. Like, more so than their usual great production.

Lesnar isn't worried about Cena.

Nathan Jones has beaten up Chuck Palumbo off camera instead of having a match. So five minutes ago we get a good video on the team and now one of them is left laying off camera. Well done WWE.

Vince training montage with Shane as his coach. Can he still catch a chicken though? This is missing from the Network version for no apparent reason.

Nidia and Jamie Noble are in the back when they see Torrie Wilson's Playboy cover. Jamie can't bring himself to say that Nidia is prettier.

Wrestlemania Moment: Morton Downey Jr. in Piper's Pit.

Video on Torrie's Playboy press conference with Stephanie introducing her for whatever reason. Torrie has the best body she's ever seen, which is the endorsement that Playboy has been looking for.

Torrie Wilson vs. Nidia

Nidia jumps her from behind and grabs a chair as this is already more physical than I was expecting. A baseball slide sends the chair into Nidia's face for two and Tazz starts singing. The fans want puppies but settle for Torrie hitting a DDT for the pin.

Big Show and A-Train run into Nathan Jones and make fun of his prison sentence.

Sean O'Haire tells us to eat whatever you want.

Big Show/A-Train vs. Chris Benoit/Rhyno

Cole thinks Heyman had something to do with this for the sake of softening up Rhyno and Benoit for Sunday. For once, that's almost insightful. A-Train muscles Rhyno into the corner for a rare visual but gets stomped back for a nice reaction. Benoit comes in for some hard chops but one heck of a shoulder drops him hard.

It's off to Show and Benoit gets tossed hard into the corner, only to come out with some chops. Show clotheslines him down and the beating begins. There's the required big toss across the ring, which still looks cool every single time. A big headbutt sends Benoit into the corner and it's off to A-Train for some stomping.

Something like a Gory Stretch has Benoit screaming but a Vader Bomb hits boots. Benoit finally gets in a German suplex and makes the hot tag to Rhyno, who has no issues running through the monsters. Everything breaks down but here's Jones to go after Show for the lame but logical DQ.

Rating: C. This was actually going somewhere until the ending, which was the only option they had here. Rhyno continues to impress and I'm starting to appreciate his rather simple but effective style. Everyone was game here and it made for a better match than I was expecting, which isn't that hard for a Big Show/A-Train match.

Undertaker comes in and helps clear the ring.

Kurt Angle is looking for Brock. Post break he's in Lesnar's locker room and says they're a lot alike. The difference is that Brock is a 25 year old rookie and he's not ready. This match is going to change wrestling forever because they're the best in the business. If Angle gets destroyed on Sunday, he's done enough already. He's bringing everything on Sunday and is willing to end Lesnar's career to win.

Lesnar doesn't think this is as brave as Angle hopes it is because Kurt knows he's safe until Wrestlemania. Brock is willing to lay it all on the line on Sunday. At Wrestlemania, here comes the pain, because Lesnar will do anything to win the title. Good stuff here, and I liked it not being in the ring for a change.

Wrestlemania card, with the Raw Tag Team Title match being moved to Sunday Night Heat.

Another Vince training video.

Gene Okerlund is ready for Hogan vs. McMahon and says they were both responsible for the boom.

Chavo Guerrero vs. Shelton Benjamin

Some amateur stuff goes nowhere so Chavo speeds it up with a headscissors and a dropkick for two. Shelton goes after the leg though and Chavo is in quick trouble. Benjamin grabs a leg lock but Chavo is next to the rope for a break. Shelton puts on a different hold (always appreciated) but Chavo reverses into a small package for two. It's off to the third hold until a cradle gives Guerrero two more. An enziguri finally gets Chavo a breather and both guys are down. Eddie cuts off Charlie's interference attempt, leaving Chavo to grab la majistral for the pin.

Rating: C. Oh yeah Team Angle is winning and they're not even trying to hide it at this point. Chavo looked good here, which isn't the biggest surprise despite his abilities often being overlooked. This was basically the same formula from earlier but with a different limb, which makes it no surprise that it worked.

Post match Team Angle attacks, only to have Rhyno and Benoit make the save and clean house.

Rikishi vs. John Cena

Cena debuts Basic Thuganomics as his theme music. He jumps Rikishi during his entrance and hammers away until a single right hand puts him on the floor. Rikishi gets whipped into the steps though and Cena pulls off the barricade padding to ram him back first. Back in and we hit a crossface chickenwing of all things as things slow way down. Rikishi fights up and hits the Samoan drop. A superkick sets up the corner splash and Stinkface but the Rump Shaker hits knees. The ref bump allows Cena to hit the chain shot for two, followed by I believe the debuting FU (much closer to a Death Valley Driver here) for the pin.

Rating: D+. It's kind of fascinating to see so much of what defined Cena debuting in one match as he had the music, the finisher and most of the signature look all at once. It made him look like a star instead of the goof that he was for months leading up to this. They almost have to do Lesnar vs. Cena now and that's not the worst idea in the world.

Cena calls out Lesnar and after a break (with Arnold Schwarzenegger hyping Vince vs. Hogan) gets his wish, only to have Angle jump Lesnar from behind with a 2x4. Lesnar is down and in pain to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This was a back and forth show with good action (FAR better than Raw) but at the same time there was so much Vince vs. Hogan stuff that it took away the limited interest I had in the match in the first place. I'm still not wild on Wrestlemania but this show did help a lot as they focused on a lot of stuff. Unfortunately one match got so much of the hype and it's really not one of the best things on the card. It's all going to be about the presentation and in-ring results on Sunday but they've got their work cut out.

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Smackdown – March 20, 2003: At Least They're Admitting It

Smackdown

Date: March 20, 2003

Location: Freedom Hall, Louisville, Kentucky

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We're ten days away from Wrestlemania XIX and hopefully things are going to pick up around here. The big story coming out of last week is Kurt Angle screwing over Brock Lesnar in their big showdown last week. You know Lesnar isn't going to stand for that so violence is likely due. Let's get to it.

We open with a montage of America the Beautiful from Wrestlemania over the years in honor of the US armed forces invading Iraq. The fact that I can tell which Wrestlemania each is from on the audio alone tells me that I've spent WAY too much of my life watching Wrestlemania.

Long recap of last week's title match, including showing the brothers Angle switching during Lesnar's entrance. That wasn't shown last week.

Opening sequence.

Charlie Haas vs. Rhyno

Rhyno wastes no time in slugging away before Haas can even get his belt off. Some hard right hands (that intensity is always cool to see) have Haas in even more trouble but he sends Rhyno outside for a superkick from Shelton. Back in and a belly to belly sends Rhyno flying before it's time to work on the knee.

We hit a few leg locks until Rhyno finally crawls over to the ropes. Charlie sticks with the leg until Rhyno uses the good leg to kick him away. A suplex drops Charlie but the knee gives out again. Tazz: "It's like a table with three legs but Rhyno has two legs because he's a human and not a table". Shelton grabs the bad leg to break up the Gore and it's a belt shot to Rhyno's head for the DQ.

Rating: C-. I was starting to dig the match until the pretty stupid ending. If you want to do the DQ, just do it off Shelton interfering. Either way, at least Rhyno got to show off a bit as you rarely think of him doing much more than the Gore. He can wrestle a pretty decent power match and he was having a good little match here until the messy ending. I can always go for preventing title match participants from taking a pin before a pay per view though.

Bob Costas talks about how big Hulk Hogan vs. Vince McMahon will be, because it's like the seniors' golf tour. That's quite ahead of its time for a featured Wrestlemania match.

Brian Kendrick is in Stephanie McMahon's office so she can yell at him (shocking I know) for defying her authority in his efforts to get a job. Uh....if he doesn't work here, why does he answer to Stephanie? Anyway she's giving him a match tonight and if he wins, he gets a contract. You know, because Stephanie is firm but kind.

John Cena issues an open challenge for a rap off at Wrestlemania. This was scheduled to take place but the rapper, Fabolous, was arrested before the show and therefore the whole thing was canceled. Cena is ready for Lesnar too and is back next week.

Los Guerreros go to a golf course and annoy some semi-racist golfers. One golfer suggests a foursome but Eddie didn't quite mean that. They agree to a winner take all bet and of course Eddie and Chavo cheat to win. Chavo: "If you're not cheating, you're not trying."

Rikishi/Los Guerreros vs. FBI

Nunzio jumps Eddie to start but Chavo comes in with a Batista Bomb of all things for two. It's off to Palumbo so Chavo starts in on his leg but a clothesline takes him down. Cole: "I've got a nickname now: the gangsta." As you try to get that image out of your head, the Italians lure Eddie in and put Chavo in a double half crab (seems unnecessary) so Nunzio can drop a middle rope leg to the back of his head.

Palumbo gets two off a Samoan drop but a tornado DDT gives Chavo a bit of a reprieve. There's the hot tag to Eddie and everything breaks down with Rikishi cleaning house with a double clothesline. All three Italians get crushed in the corner by the big man, leaving Palumbo to take a superkick and the frog splash for the pin.

Rating: D+. Am I missing something with the four non-Guerreros? Rikishi and the FBI get TV time almost every week for some reason and I have no idea why. They're not interesting and there's nothing special about them but for some reason they're treated like fairly big stars. At least Eddie got the pin, though they should be getting more attention on their upcoming title match rather than this one off match.

Bobby Heenan calls Hogan vs. McMahon the old timers' match as well. He's right, again. It's still sad to hear his voice that way though.

Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Mysterio sends him into the corner to start but gets powerbombed into the buckle for his efforts. Rey gets tossed outside for a hard clothesline from Nidia and it's off to an inverted Gory Stretch back inside. A tornado DDT plants Noble and a top rope hurricanrana makes things even worse. Nidia grabs Mysterio's mask so he dives over the top to take her out in a rather violent moment. Back in and the 619 into the West Coast Pop gives Rey the pin.

Rating: C. Mysterio rising up the cruiserweight ranks is the best thing that can happen to the division and it's cool to see him starting to get closer to the title. It's also a good idea to have him go after Matt Hardy, who is a far bigger star than anyone in the division and therefore a better match for Mysterio. Unfortunately the rest of the division is pretty interchangeable and expendable, though they can put on some nice filler matches, just like Noble did here.

Kurt Angle tells his brother Eric, now in a leg cast, that they'll make things right.

Here are the Angles for a chat. Kurt brags about retaining the title and credits his intelligence in making it happen. He explains the entire plan from last week and says Eric is the best brother anyone could have. Eric: "Mom was right. You don't suck bro." Now on to serious business though, as Kurt has to deal with Lesnar for putting his hands on Eric. Kurt calls him a disgrace to all forms of wrestling and says if you hurt one Angle, you hurt all Angles.

He wants Brock out here right now but gets....Stephanie instead. Well to be fair she's more intimidating. She changes the rules for Wrestlemania, saying that if Kurt gets disqualified, he loses the title. Stephanie: "Don't look at me like that Kurt!". Kurt isn't happy but he's staying out here until he gets his apology from Lesnar. Cue Brock to go after Eric but Kurt hits him low and Angle Slams Brock through a chair. Angle puts a knee in Brock's back and grabs something like a Crossface until referees break it up.

Undertaker vs. Bill DeMott

Undertaker shoulders him down to start as Cole mentions that Undertaker has never lost at Wrestlemania. A kick to the ribs is countered into a legbar to send DeMott over to the ropes. Snake Eyes looks to set up a big boot but DeMott grabs a spinebuster for two instead. Undertaker is right back up with Old School for the same but the chokeslam is broken up. The second attempt works just fine though and the Tombstone ends Bill without too much effort.

Rating: D. Just a step above a squash here but it was good to give Undertaker a win like this. If nothing else it might get rid of DeMott even faster as he's still not an interesting heel. At the very least he's likely heading to Velocity now as there's little left for him to do after a loss like this.

Brock thinks he's broken his ribs again. Isn't that always the way before a big title shot?

Brian Kendrick vs. Shannon Moore

Shannon has Matt Hardy, who graciously included Shannon in his book and is Shannon's idol, in his corner. Brian tries some fast rollups to start and slips out of an electric chair into la majistral for two. A snap suplex gives Shannon two and we hit the bow and arrow.

Back up and Brian gets in a facebuster followed by a springboard missile dropkick for two, with Tazz saying that was his best shot.

Matt has had enough of this being in trouble thing and pulls Brian to the floor for a faceplant onto the steps. That's only good for two though and here's Mysterio to go after Matt, allowing Brian to hit Sliced Bread #2 for the win. Since Kendrick doesn't have music, he leaves to Rey's instead.

Rating: D+. Nothing wrong with this one and I'm glad we can get rid of the Kendrick doesn't have a job story as he's wrestled more often than most people already on the roster. Mysterio and Hardy getting involved works as well as anything else and it's not like Moore losing is going to hurt anyone. Not the worst match either.

This week's Wrestlemania moment: Mr. T. vs. Roddy Piper in a boxing match. That's the ONLY option they had?

We run down the Wrestlemania card.

Clips of the Wrestlemania press conference.

Vince is happy with the contract before the signing later tonight.

Chris Benoit vs. Shelton Benjamin

Benoit chops away to start and gets one off a belly to back suplex. Shelton gets in a suplex of his own for two and chokes on the mat to set up a chinlock. That's fine with Benoit who comes back with a Crossface but Shelton rolls out, only to get dropkicked back down. The Crossface goes on again with Rhyno goring down an interfering Haas, leaving Benjamin to tap.

Rating: C. It was really short but intense while it lasted, which is all you can expect from these two. I'm really not big on a champion losing in about three and a half minutes at any point, especially less than two weeks before the pay per view. At least it wasn't in a tag match though, which would have been even worse. Fun match while it lasted though.

Jesse Ventura doesn't think there's ever been a bad Wrestlemania and thinks Vince is willing to take chances. Did he just stop watching when he went to WCW?

Gene Okerlund is here to moderate the Vince and Hogan contract signing. Hogan comes out first and makes sure to soak in some cheers from some unbelievable Maniacs. Hulk wants to know what's up with

McMahonamania because Vince didn't create Hulkamania. We see Vince walking through the back but here he is attacking Hogan from behind with a chair. I know it's a simple editing trick but I've always been a fan of that kind of thing. Vince chairs Hogan down and busts him open, forcing him to sign the contract in his own blood. We get the big dramatic shots of the bloody Hogan to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. If there was any doubt about the Smackdown main event for Wrestlemania, this show certainly got rid of them. This was full speed ahead on Hogan vs. McMahon and it's towering over Lesnar vs. Angle. The title match has the more entertaining build but there's no hiding the fact that the old timers are the real focal point. The wrestling was short here but it was entertaining while it lasted, especially for matches designed to set up the pay per view and not be big deals on their own. They're starting to focus on Seattle but there's not a lot of time left and it's really starting to show.

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Smackdown – March 13, 2003: Working All The Angles

Smackdown

Date: March 13, 2003

Location: Mellon Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

It's a big night in Pittsburgh as the hometown boy Kurt Angle is defending the Smackdown World Title against former champion Brock Lesnar. WWE has hyped the heck out of having the Wrestlemania main event two and a half weeks early and that almost guarantees some kind of a screwy finish. Let's get to it.

A fired up Lesnar arrived earlier in the day, as did a zombie-esque Angle, who is sporting a VERY black eye.

Opening sequence.

Team Angle vs. Rey Mysterio/Billy Kidman

Non-title. Kidman shoulders Charlie down to start and there's an armdrag to Shelton for good measure. Rey gets in a headscissors for two and Shelton isn't sure how to keep up with Mysterio's speed. It's off to Kidman as the Angle vs. Lesnar hype continues. Shelton avoids a charge in the corner and Kidman goes shoulder first into the corner so the champs can take over. Shelton and Charlie take turns on the arm before Benjamin does his jump over Charlie onto Kidman's back (that really needs a name).

Kidman finally gets in a dropkick and brings in Mysterio to clean house. Rey tries a hurricanrana on Shelton, who shoves him away, right into a moonsault press for two on Haas. Everything breaks down and Kidman easily reverses Charlie's powerbomb (as you might expect). Shelton is sent outside and the 619 hits Haas. Kidman adds the shooting star press but Shelton gets up for a save. Mysterio is cut off and it's the superkick into the German suplex to put Kidman away.

Rating: C+. Good action between four talented people, but more importantly it was nice to see Haas and Benjamin FINALLY get a win. I have no idea what the mentality is behind putting titles on people and then have them lose over and over again. A win like this helps, but they need to retain in a big title defense or there's not much of a point to keeping the belts on them.

Stephanie McMahon is on the phone when Brian Kendrick comes in with some flowers. This goes nowhere.

Jamie Noble went to the Playboy Mansion to yell about Torrie Wilson being in Playboy instead of Nidia. After some plugs for the Girls

Gone Wild show, security takes him away.

Chuck Palumbo vs. Rikishi

Rikishi goes after the other Italians and walks into a superkick from Palumbo for an early two. A belly to belly gets the same and it's time for the required interference from the Italians. Rikishi comes back with some right hands in the corner and the Italians get on the apron. Cue Los Guerreros to take care of them though, allowing Rikishi to hit the Rump Shaker for the pin.

Undertaker finds Nathan Jones in a dark room. Apparently you can't get the prison out of the wrestler. Undertaker doesn't care, as long as Jones is ready for Wrestlemania.

A-Train/Big Show vs. Funaki/Tajiri

Big Show BLASTS Funaki with a clothesline at the bell and adds a gorilla press. It's off to A-Train as Show sits in on commentary. Some kicks stagger A-Train but he knees Tajiri in the ribs to cut that off in a hurry. A dropkick to the knee allows Funaki to hit a springboard dropkick but they can't drop the big bald. Tajiri's kick to the face puts A-Train down so Big Show comes back in with the chokeslam. A-Train's Trainwreck ends Funaki.

Rating: D. Just a squash and unfortunately a good way to show how generic a power team Big Show and A-Train really are. These power battle matches rarely work and I have a bad feeling about what we might be in for at Wrestlemania. The fact that Jones isn't being allowed to get in the ring suggests a lot of problems and that's a really bad idea going into the biggest show of the year. As a side note, is there any reason Tajiri and Funaki aren't a regular team? They'd be fine as a midcard tag act.

We look back at Lesnar beating Heyman last week.

Fans are split on who will win the title match tonight.

Dawn Marie is sad about not being in Playboy. Sean O'Haire comes up and says that she should show off her body tonight by flashing the audience.

Torrie Wilson unveils her Playboy cover by holding up the magazine.

Here's Dawn to say she has a nice body. She unbuttons her shirt and flashes the announcers, with the top rope covering everything up.

Tazz: "THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT THE MELLON ARENA!"

John Cena talks about being a Viagra triple shot while Brock Lesnar is a limo biscuit.

Los Guerreros vs. Rhyno/Chris Benoit

The winners get Haas and Benjamin for the titles at Wrestlemania. The opening bell never rings as Chavo and Benoit fight over arm control. It's off to Eddie and the fans seem appreciative of seeing these two together. Therefore it's off to Rhyno before anything happens and a hard shove sends Eddie sprawling into the corner. For once Chavo actually does better as a snapmare into a basement dropkick has Rhyno in trouble.

Rhyno launches Eddie into the air for a crash to take over again though and it's back to Benoit for a knee to the ribs. Benoit belly to backs Chavo for two but Eddie comes back in for a good looking dropkick. In a surprising move, Eddie calms Chavo down from getting too involved to prevent a potential DQ. It's for Wrestlemania after all so that makes sense. Things settle down enough for Chavo to chinlock Benoit as the pace slows.

Tazz talks about dogs and cats for some reason as Chavo does one of the most obvious spot calls I've seen in years. Eddie's slingshot hilo gets two and we hit the armbar. Chavo comes back in and charges straight into a Crossface but he's too close to the ropes. Benoit rolls outside with him and it's Eddie diving onto Benoit, followed by Rhyno running Eddie over as we take a break.

Chavo grabbing a Crossface on Benoit (and being pretty bad at it) but Rhyno tags Benoit's boot to come in for the save. A belly to belly into a chinlock slows Chavo down but he's right back up with a middle rope dropkick. It's back to Eddie vs. Benoit with Guerrero winning a slugout and grabbing a hurricanrana. He takes a bit too much time slapping his chest though and Benoit catches him on top, only to get caught in a sunset bomb for two.

Rhyno throws Chavo outside and still manages to break up a small package on Benoit. Chavo comes back in but gets caught in the Crossface, onto to have Eddie break it up with a frog splash. There's a Gore to Eddie but Chavo hurricanranas him out to the floor. That leaves Benoit to roll some German suplexes on Eddie, who pops right back up with Three Amigos. Benoit will have none of that though and reverses into the Crossface but Eddie gets his hand out, earning himself even more German suplexes....and here's Team Angle for

the no contest after twenty minutes.

Rating: B. They were really starting to roll when the stupid finish happened. If Haas and Benjamin were just going to run in and end the match that way, why did they wait that long to do so? Anyway, Rhyno has fit right back into this show and is a nice power addition to go with the high fliers and technicians. You know this is setting up a triple threat at Wrestlemania and while I'd rather have Benoit do something important on his own, at least he's in a title match.

We look back at last week with Hulk Hogan and Vince McMahon agreeing to a fight at Wrestlemania. Well at least they were gentlemen about it. For some reason we also have to hear them go on about all their history together, because, again, fans care SO MUCH about lawsuits and wrestlers jumping ship seven years ago.

Stephanie tells Team Angle that they'll be facing both teams at Wrestlemania.

We get a clip from 1984 of Vince introducing a clip of Hogan beating Iron Sheik for the title, which transitions into a Hogan video package, including several Hogan Wrestlemania moments. That's it for the fun stuff as we now go to an interview from some DVD of Hogan talking about being the one out there doing all this stuff. Vince threw him the ball and Hogan ran with it. It's capped off by a clip from 1992 of Vince and Hogan sitting together before Hogan's "retirement" match where they shake hands and thank each other.

Vince makes us watch the final part two more times and says that's the only time Hogan ever thanked him for anything. What an ingrate. They used to be the best of friends but then Hogan changed. That change hurt Vince's family and business which cut him to the bone. That clip wasn't Hogan saying thank you but rather SCREW YOU VINCE.

We hear about how horrible it was for Hogan to jump to WCW again and Vince reiterates that it's a fight instead of a match. We go to an extreme closeup as Vince says that after Wrestlemania, he is going to be devastated because Hogan has forced him to kill one of his own creations. For that, he can never forgive Hogan.

Cole says the contract signing for Hogan vs. McMahon is next week in the historic Freedom Hall in Louisville, Kentucky. Freedom Hall is not historic Cole.

Here's Matt Hardy, who has never locked his keys in his car and

hates cleaning his carpet, to issue an open challenge to anyone under 220lbs, save for Mysterio of course.

Matt Hardy vs. Pittsburgh Penguin

Non-title and it's Brian Kendrick under a mask with a carrot for a nose. Tazz: "So this guy can fly then?" The Penguin tries to speed things up to start and hits a dropkick. Sliced Bread #2 is broken up so it's a headscissors out of the corner to send Hardy flying. The Ricochet gets two though and Matt stomps away on the back. A tilt-a-whirl slam gets two and there goes the mask, revealing Kendrick in not the best surprise. Kendrick gets two off a facebuster and something like a tornado DDT gets two more. Shannon offers a distraction but Kendrick is able to grab Sliced Bread anyway. That's enough for Matt as he takes the countout.

Rating: D+. Not terrible and the surprise (as obvious as it was) wasn't the worst idea in the world. Having Kendrick win via countout makes him look good, though I'm not sure how smart it is to do that to a champion right before the biggest show of the year. Just have him beat Shannon instead as it's not like that means anything.

After a break, Rey praises Kendrick.

Long recap of Lesnar vs. Angle.

Wrestlemania Moment: Hogan vs. Andre. That works.

Smackdown World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Kurt Angle

Angle is defending in his hometown. Kurt comes to the ring with his hood up and immediately drops to his knee in the corner with his face against the buckle. Brock jumps him from behind and fires off the shoulders to the back as the hood is still up. The F5 connects but Brock lets him up at two because that's not Kurt. Cue Team Angle for a distraction so the real Kurt can switch with whoever was in the ring. Angle small packages Brock to retain in maybe 90 seconds.

Kurt bails so Brock hits the F5 into the post on the other Angle, who Tazz recognizes as Kurt's brother Eric, to end the show.

Basically Kurt's neck was destroyed and he didn't think he'd be able to do Wrestlemania. This match was going to be a quick title change but Angle opted for surgery after working Wrestlemania because Angle is, shall we say, freaking crazy.

Overall Rating: D. That ending felt straight out of WCW and really brings down the rest of the show. It's all they were talking about

for most of the night and that's not how you want to wrap up one of the last shows of the year before Wrestlemania. On top of that, the Vince vs. Hogan stuff is getting old in a hurry and the rest of Smackdown's stuff isn't all that great. Bad show this week as the main event cuts the legs off what could have been a good, or at least ok, night.

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Smackdown – March 6, 2003: Say That Again Hulk?

Smackdown

Date: March 6, 2003

Location: Harbor Yard Arena, Bridgeport, Connecticut

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We've reached Wrestlemania month and it's time for some payback as we have Brock Lesnar vs. Paul Heyman inside a steel cage. The hard sell for the pay per view has become but Kurt Angle's neck isn't even being held together by gum and duct tape anymore. It should be interesting to see how the company deals with that as Wrestlemania is less than a month away. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble vs. Tajiri

Winner gets the Cruiserweight Title shot at Wrestlemania. Only Rey gets an entrance and he's tossed to the floor to start, leaving the other two to slug it out. Rey comes back in with a springboard seated senton for two on Noble but Tajiri starts in with the kicks to take over. A spinning springboard crossbody gets two more on Tajiri but it's a handspring elbow to drop Noble.

Mysterio gets sent outside so Noble can grab a Fujiwara armbar on Tajiri. That means a rope grab for a quick break as Rey comes back as well. A three man Tower of Doom (not yet named that of course) drops Mysterio and all three are down. Noble gets two on both of them and a powerslam on Tajiri gets the same.

Tajiri is right back up with the Buzzsaw Kick for two as Rey makes the save. Rey drops the dime on Tajiri for two and there's the 619 to Noble. It's too early for the West Coast Pop though as Tajiri BLASTS Rey with a kick to the head, only to have Rey roll him up for the pin and the title shot.

Rating: C+. Fun match here and the shorter time worked well for it. This isn't something that needed to be stretched out to ten or more minutes so keeping things fast paced and tight was the best thing they could have done. Mysterio getting the title shot was the only way to go here as him winning the title is going to be a big deal.

Los Guerreros vs. FBI

Palumbo and Stamboli for the Italians here. Cole gets straight to the bad news: Rikishi is on a PR tour tonight and won't be here. There go the ratings. Chavo and Palumbo get things going with the bigger Chuck driving him into the corner, only to get slapped in the face. It's off to Eddie for a few kicks to the head, including a dropkick to a charging Stamboli. Palumbo gets in a cheap (and mistimed) right hand from the floor though and the Italians take over.

A good looking Samoan drop plants Eddie again as the FBI aren't bad for a power team. Generic mind you but not bad. We hit the bearhug

on Eddie for a bit until a hurricanrana gets him out of trouble. The hot tag brings in Chavo to start cleaning house as everything breaks down. Eddie and Palumbo fall out to the floor and Chavo brings Nunzio in. Stamboli hits a quick fall away slam but Eddie comes in with a frog splash to Johnny's head, giving Chavo the easy pin.

Rating: C-. I know I said the FBI were fine, but is this really the best we can do for Los Guerreros? Most of the division has been taken apart and the best we can do is have one of the best teams face the FBI? It's a watchable match but this really wasn't interesting and that's not what should be happening with one of your best acts.

Heyman is panicking but his clients (all five of them) say they've got his back. Angle implies he can sweet talk Stephanie out of the match.

Wrestlemania is 24 days away. That still makes me smile even when the video is fourteen years old.

Heyman and Angle try to talk their way out of the match with Paul diving at her knees and begging. It doesn't work so Heyman leaves Angle to hit on Stephanie. This goes badly as well as Stephanie makes things a little worse: if Brock wins, he gets Angle next week for the title. So to clarify, Stephanie is currently a bastion of all things good and wholesome who can shout about having integrity. Just in case you thought she was bad at being a face or something, because Stephanie isn't bad at anything.

Cruiserweight Title: Matt Hardy vs. Billy Kidman

Matt, who enjoys looking at pictures in Playboy and considers himself a sex symbol, is defending. The champ tries a rollup before the bell and has to wait for a one count. Kidman gets sent over the top so Shannon can get in a few cheap shots and we hit a bow and arrow back inside.

An enziguri gets Kidman out of trouble and he kicks Matt out of the corner and onto the top rope for a good crotching. Kidman hits his own screaming legdrop for two and a Bodog looks to set up the

shooting star. Thankfully Shannon is right there to pull Matt outside so Kidman dives onto both of them. Back in and a Side Effect and the Twist of Fate retain the title.

Rating: C. Kidman was trying here but it's clear that his time near the title is gone. Matt has instantly become a far more interesting character because he actually has some charisma and more than a good match with a cool finisher. Hardy vs. Mysterio should be a good pay per view match, especially if Shannon is running around like a good annoying lackey.

Package on Torrie Wilson's Playboy shoot. The cover will be unveiled next week.

Nidia went to the Playboy Mansion to complain about not being in the magazine and got in some Girls Gone Wild plugs.

Nidia challenges Torrie to a body challenge at the Girls Gone Wild pay per view, flat out saying they'll both be...uh, wild. She flashes Josh Matthews for good measure.

Hulk Hogan sends a referee to tell Vince that he's going to the ring.

Here's Hogan to start the real push towards his match with Vince. He's got something to get off his chest: sure he could just leave this place for good and be done with Vince, but the boss has gotten under his skin. There's an issue with them and it goes way deeper than him costing Hogan a match with Rock. Hogan wants Vince out here right now to settle this like men.

This brings out the boss to say he has no problem settling this man to man but Hogan is no man. Hogan cuts him off and rants about all of Vince's delusions of grandeur about creating Hulkamania. These Hulkamaniacs are the reason for Hulkamania and the reason that Vince has all of his money. Vince says that anyone could have been Hogan so Hulk asks about all the people that Vince tried to push as the star with none of them running as hard as he did.

In a pretty infamous moment (which I'd assume never made air and can only be found online), Hogan starts flubbing his lines, including

pausing to say "let me say it one more time just so you completely understand." Hogan says he was also the right "gay" at the right time before stumbling over a challenge to fight Vince tonight. Vince looking like he's having to bite through his lip to keep from laughing doesn't help things either.

Vince says there's no chance of a fight tonight but let's talk about Hogan bailing to WCW and the steroids trial as this is somehow still going. Hulk says he kept Vince out of jail and implies that there would have been a lot of activity in the shower if Vince was still there. This somehow KEEPS GOING with Vince taking credit for plucking Hogan from obscurity in Minnesota.

Vince finally agrees to fight Hogan at Wrestlemania to give us what they probably saw as the real main event. For a bonus, Hogan's career is on the line and Hulk immediately agrees. They cut each other off over trying to use Hogan's catchphrases until Hogan tells Vince to start saying his prayers to FINALLY wrap this up.

This was WAY too long at nearly fifteen minutes (if you take out the flubbed lines) and with a lot of stuff that most fans don't care about at all, mainly because they were about ten years ago. Doing Hogan vs. Vince at Wrestlemania over who is the bigger star is fine enough, but you really don't need to drag up WCW (again) or the steroids trial as it's just extra baggage on an already easy to write feud.

Undertaker coached Nathan Jones in the ring earlier today, which translates to he watched him hiptoss some jobbers. The big advice: the ring is like a prison cell. Next up: headlocks and a shoulder block, though Undertaker gets mad when Jones doesn't show enough power to knock someone out. Nathan kicks the jobber's head off and Undertaker has to calm him down.

A-Train vs. Undertaker

Big Show and Jones are the seconds. They trade big shots to start until Big Show offers a distraction to get Undertaker outside. The distraction lets A-Train grab a powerslam for two and he throws him outside for another beating from Big Show. Jones, apparently done

shopping for fruit, FINALLY comes over to stare Show off so A-Train can stomp away even more. Undertaker gets in a few shots of his own and it's time for Old School. The Derailer connects but Undertaker grabs his triangle choke, only to draw in Big Show (with his very white shoes). Jones comes in as well and the match is thrown out.

Rating: D-. I know what they're setting up for Wrestlemania and Jones has a great look but this is hardly the most interesting thing in the world. It's better than Undertaker vs. Big Show though and I'm not sure I could handle Undertaker vs. A-Train at Wrestlemania so this might actually be the best possible option if we just have to continue this feud.

Clip of Heyman turning on Lesnar at Survivor Series.

During the break, Stephanie ejected A-Train and Big Show and will NOT take any lip from Big Show.

Rhyno/Chris Benoit vs. Team Angle

Non-title. Benoit takes Shelton down by the leg to start and they hit the mat for some grappling. Shelton can't get out of a hammerlock so it's off to Rhyno, who catches Charlie in a drop toehold. Charlie gets Benoit into the wrong corner so it's off to Shelton, who needs a blind tag to escape a Crossface attempt. A powerslam goes a bit better for Haas but Benoit drops him with a clothesline to set up a double tag.

Rhyno gets to clean house for a bit but Charlie breaks up a Gore. A superkick from Shelton sets up a chinlock and we take a break (How often do you see one of those as we go to a commercial?). Back with Shelton getting in a shot to Rhyno's neck for two and Charlie wraps his leg around Rhyno's neck and pulls on the arm (basically sitting on Rhyno's neck).

Benjamin opts for a standard cravate before handing it off to Charlie for some choking on the ropes. Rhyno finally gets in a spinebuster for a breather and the hot tag brings in Benoit. Shelton gets sent into the post and Benoit rolls the German suplex on Charlie, setting up the Swan Dive for two. The Crossface is

countered and it's off to the Haas of Pain until Rhyno makes a save. The Gore takes Shelton down and the Crossface ends Haas.

Rating: C+. The ending was good but the middle was a bit dry for my tastes. The biggest problem here is the continued losing streak for the champs, who haven't won a match, even a handicap match, since winning the titles. Just having the belts isn't going to carry them forever and while their matches are good, they need to be impressive and dominant wrestlers instead of just lackeys in similar tights.

Cena is back on his feet, albeit using a cane, and promises to unleash the beast on Brock. He's so intense that he's going to fill Brock full of holes like a chain link fence.

Kurt Angle is giving Heyman a pep talk when Team Angle comes in to yell at them for not being there. Angle calms them down and tells Heyman to go do it.

Video on the South Africa tour.

Paul Heyman vs. Brock Lesnar

Inside a cage and if Lesnar wins, he gets Angle for the title next week. Kurt and Team Angle come to the ring with Heyman, who is going to be wrestling in a suit. Lesnar easily dispatches Haas and Benjamin and beats up Kurt with even less effort (drawing some blood), allowing him to throw Paul inside for the opening bell.

Brock gets in a few shots until Kurt comes in and takes out the knee. There's an Angle Slam to give Heyman two and it's off to the ankle lock. Heyman still can't escape as Brock holds him down while still in the hold. Kurt gets sent into the cage but Brock pulls Heyman off the top. The F5 easily finishes Paul.

Rating: D. This might be the best example I've ever seen of angle advancement disguised as a match. The wrestling here meant nothing of course but setting up Lesnar vs. Angle next week makes sense, even if Angle is in no shape to wrestle whatsoever. At least they're setting up something in advance, which is more than they usually pull off.

Lesnar stares Angle down to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. The wrestling was watchable with the worst matches both being under five minutes but that Hogan vs. Vince segment really brought things down. Wrestlemania really isn't shaping up very well as the TV shows are getting worse every week. I'm assuming Edge and Angle being hurt really screwed things up but it's still not looking good as we head for Seattle.

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Main Event – June 22, 2017: Open Casting Call

Main Event

Date: June 22, 2017

Location: Ford Center, Evansville, Indiana

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Corey Graves

I'm not sure what the point is in having the cruiserweights on this show. Given that they're already appearing regularly on Monday Night Raw and their own show, that makes three different shows they're on every single week. That's more than anyone else gets and I'm really not sure how much it helps anything. Maybe they'll switch things up a bit this week. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Kalisto vs. Rhyno

That's already a bigger match than most of these shows have. Rhyno throws him around to start but gets kicked in the face and out to the floor. Back in and Rhyno starts taking over in the corner, basically making him the heel in the match despite getting that hard to shake legends pop. A whip into the corner sets up ye olde chinlock but Rhyno goes up top for no adequately explored reasons, allowing Kalisto to snap off a hurricanrana for two. Rhyno breaks up the Salida Del Sol and grabs a superplex for two of his own. Kalisto doesn't seem to mind and hits the Salida Del Sol for the pin at 5:40.

Rating: D+. No time to go anywhere but a power vs. speed match will always have something of value in them. I'm still a bit thrown by Rhyno as a heel though as he's basically a legend at this point with the old school fans remembering his days of slightly above average quite fondly.

To Raw for the first time.

Here's Seth Rollins to talk about being on the cover of the game. He brings up his heel turn from a few years back and everything it brought him. The problem was he couldn't look in the mirror. Now he's on the cover of the game and it's his second chance. This cover belongs to both himself and the fans because it's THEIR cover.

Cue Bray Wyatt to talk about how he feels the struggle in Seth's soul. Seth is still conforming to whatever the people want and he's just not that man. Rollins says he's THE man and lists off some accomplishments. Bray says he's here and blows out the lantern before coming out to the ring. Thankfully Seth is smart enough to dive on Bray as he walks very slowly to the ring.

And again, this time from the ending.

Here's Angle to announce the attacker. He brings out Enzo, Cass, Revival and Big Show to really set the stage. Angle starts with Big Show, who says he'd fight someone face to face. If Angle thinks he did it, maybe he doesn't need to be on Raw anymore. Show leaves and Cass is very happy until Kurt cuts him off to talk about Revival. Angle says it wasn't them because enough referees and agents saw the two of them elsewhere.

Corey Graves says he has some information though. A few moments ago

Cass said he had a golf ball sized lump on the back of his head, but the medical team said they never treated him. Cass starts backtracking but Graves has security footage. We see Cass staging the scene of the crime and laying on the ground like he's unconscious. Cass admits he did it and yells about how tired he is of Enzo running his mouth about whatever he's always talking about. No one behind the curtain likes Enzo and Cass felt bad for him.

Cass finally snapped and it felt good to lay Enzo out from behind. He unloads on Enzo for all the years of having to put up with him and wanted to see how smart Enzo really was. It turns out that Enzo is even dumber than he looks and nothing but dead weight holding Cass down. All Enzo does is have his mouth write checks that he can't cash but now Cass isn't behind him anymore. Enzo gets kicked in the head to end the show.

Gran Metlalik vs. Tony Nese

Nese drives him up against the ropes to start and that's just not something you do to Metalik. You know, the guy called the KING of the ropes. I guess Nese isn't as smart as he looks, which is fairly insulting when you think about it. Nese misses a moonsault and gets sent to the apron, followed by the floor. A nice flip dive takes Nese down again and we take a break. Back with Metalik walking the ropes for a dropkick and that top rope elbow for two. Metalik can't hit his namesake driver as Nese slips down the back and gets in a superkick. The suplex into the corner and running knee put Metalik away at 6:52.

Rating: C-. Considering over half of that match was during the break, I really don't know why they timed the match like this. Just show more of the stuff from Raw and cut this one down a bit. Nese winning makes sense, even though he has nothing going for him at the moment. Metalik's normal stuff was as entertaining as usual.

We get the long video on Samoa Joe vs. Lesnar.

One last Raw moment as we join the very end of Roman Reigns vs. Samoa Joe where Braun Strowman returned and laid Reigns out. The challenge for the ambulance match at Great Balls of Fire wraps us up.

Overall Rating: D+. Almost completely standard Main Event here and that's not the best thing in the world. The main difference was of course a fresh match between Kalisto and Rhyno, which I can

certainly go for after all the times we've seen the same people on this show. That being said, with Curtis Axel and Bo Dallas now on Raw, maybe we need to find some new Main Event Musketeers.

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Main Event – June 1, 2017: This Is Your Life Wasn't THAT Bad

Main Event

Date: June 1, 2017

Location: Bon Secours Wellness Arena, Greenville, South Carolina

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Corey Graves

For the first time in a good while, I'm getting to the point where I don't quite know what to expect from this show. They've actually mixed things up a bit in recent weeks and that's been the best idea they could have had. I'm not saying the show is good yet but at least it's easier to sit through. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Drew Gulak vs. Lince Dorado

Dorado starts fast with some kicks to the face and something like a springboard headlock takedown. Drew is smart enough to hide behind the referee to get in a shot to the throat and take over. It's off to the arm with Gulak cranking on the chin for good measure. One heck of a clothesline drops Dorado again and we hit a regular chinlock. Dorado comes back with a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker but hurts his knee and the match is actually called off at 4:40.

Rating: D+. The injury hurts things but you have to assume that Gulak was going to win anyway. Hopefully Dorado isn't out long term as he's perfectly fine for a face jobber in the division. Gulak has found his groove in this character and hopefully he can take it somewhere instead of just doing the same bits over and over.

From Raw!

Here's Alexa Bliss with a table of stuff and some random people for This is Your Life Bayley. Bliss talks about the kendo stick hanging in the corner, which Bayley would probably try to hug instead of use on her. Now it's off to the table, which includes Bayley's first doll, which she still plays with. Then we have a trophy for best in sportsmanship. Bliss also has Bayley's yearbook where she was voted most likely to apologize.

That's enough for the table of stuff though so let's move on to the guests, starting with Mrs. Flapper, Bayley's fourth grade teacher. Apparently Bayley had perfect attendance and sat next to her father, who she just couldn't be away from without crying. Then we have Bayley's best friend Tracy, who says Bayley was the nicest girl in the world. The problem was Bayley let people take advantage of her by taking the fall for them or doing their homework. Then something happened and they stopped talking. Bayley wanted to watch wrestling instead of going out and doing anything else.

Bliss finds this hilarious we have Bayley's ex-boyfriend Phil, who said their first date was ok but kind of strange. Her dad was there every single time, including the time they almost had their first kiss. Phil didn't really like her though because he just wanted to

get closer to Tracy. She liked him too so they kiss, which Bliss deems disgusting. Cue the real Bayley to clean house, including going up to grab the stick. Bliss cuts her off though and pulls out a second stick to give Bayley a beating. This was a long segment but Bliss sold it as she can do so well. The joke got old in a hurry more than once but at least they kept it moving fast enough.

We see a few minutes of Samoa Joe vs. Bray Wyatt vs. Finn Balor from Monday.

Heath Slater/Rhyno vs. Bo Dallas/Curt Hawkins

Is there any show Hawkins isn't on (not a bad thing)? Rhyno and Hawkins get things going with the fans going nuts for Rhyno again. Some early shoulders stagger Hawkins and it's time for some cheese to go with those crackers. Slater comes in and works on the arm for a bit and Dallas gets some of the same. A little double teaming sends Slater outside though and we take a break.

Back with Dallas driving knees into Slater's back and grabbing a cravate. Hawkins comes back in for a chinlock of his own as the fans want Rhyno. A kick to the face is enough to grant the fans' wish and it's time to clean house. Everything breaks down and Rhyno TKO's Hawkins for two. The spinebuster puts Dallas away at 10:48.

Rating: C. Is there a reason Slater and Rhyno aren't on Raw? They might not be the best team in the world but they're a perfectly serviceable face team and the fans are always going to be behind Rhyno. Then again that's asking WWE to be able to handle two face teams at once and you know that's not going to happen.

We'll wrap it up here.

Seth Rollins says he'll win.

Roman Reigns says he'll win.

Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins

They circle each other to start with the fans being almost one sided behind Rollins. Reigns throws him around and stares Rollins down. Some big forearms send Rollins outside but he hits the jumping knee, followed by a clothesline over the top. A dive takes us to a break

with a good deal of time left.

Back with Rollins being sent into the barricade, right in front of a good number of empty first and second row seats. Reigns hits the corner clotheslines but the Superman Punch is pretty easily blocked. Rollins springboards into the Superman Punch for two but it's too early for the spear. Instead Rollins hits the low superkick for two of his own, only to have Reigns no sell the Buckle Bomb and hit another Superman Punch.

They head outside with Reigns going shoulder first into the steps, setting up a Blockbuster for another two. That great looking frog splash is still only good for a near fall but Rollins misses the third Phoenix Splash of the night. An enziguri sets up the windup knee but Reigns spears him down for the pin at 18:22.

Rating: B-. As is the case in the tag match (albeit to a better degree), the match was good but nothing we haven't seen several times before. I know the idea is that Reigns has the momentum heading into Sunday, though it's really hard to buy the idea that he's getting the title shot at some nothing show in July instead of in his fourth Wrestlemania main event in a row. Good main event, but people really didn't seem to care.

Overall Rating: C-. I know this goes against the common opinion but I really didn't think This Is Your Life was that bad. Sure the thing at the end with the actors kissing was dumb but the rest was fine with Alexa being such an awesome heel that it can never be completely bad. The rest of the show was your usual weak effort in a dead time for the show but that's Money in the Bank season for you.

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