

Smackdown – March 19, 2015: The Reigns Problem

Smackdown

Date: March 19, 2015

Location: Sprint Center, Kansas City, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

With ten days to go before Wrestlemania, it's time for the hard sell to the biggest show of the year. Given the recent trends on Smackdown, this show is going to be built around the Intercontinental Title match, which has gone from a huge match to everyone trying to one up each other. Let's get to it.

We open with clips from Brock's sitdown interview on Raw, talking about how he likes to hurt people and saying he'll be WWE Champion if he stays or not. They better have a plan if they keep the belt on him.

Opening sequence.

Here's Roman Reigns to get things going. Before he can get past "Heyman and Lesnar think they can intimidate me", Mark Henry comes out to interrupt. Henry came out here last week to see what Reigns had, and that's what Reigns did. Naturally we have a clip of what happened because just telling us what happened would be too simple. Instead, let's show a minute long video of a beating. Based on that, Henry is putting all his money on Roman Reigns at Wrestlemania, because Reigns can and will beat him.

Cue the Authority with Kane asking when Mark Henry became the World's Biggest Self Help Guru. Rollins holds up the briefcase and ominously says that anything can happen at Wrestlemania. There won't be any Randy Orton tonight because the best security team has locked every door and blocked every entrance. Of course that's just for Orton's protection, because why would Rollins be scared of him? As for tonight though, Rollins thinks he needs a Wrestlemania tuneup. Therefore, tonight it's Reigns/Henry vs. Kane/Rollins. Kane: "Believe in the Authority."

Tatsumi Fujinami is going into the Hall of Fame. I know he's a legend, but they're not exactly knocking this class out of the park outside of Savage.

Brie Bella vs. Paige

AJ and Nikki are on commentary because we need a five man booth. Paige spears Brie through the ropes to start and pounds her on the announcers' table. AJ: "I taught her how to slap." Back in and Brie gets two off a middle rope missile dropkick before we hit the chinlock forty seconds into the match.

A clothesline gets two and we're on the second chinlock less than ninety seconds in. Back up and a double clothesline puts both girls down before Brie hits the running knee against the ropes. She lays back on Paige for the cover and gets rolled up for a pin at 2:28. The match wasn't two and a half minutes long and it had two chinlocks. How can this woman be married to Daniel Bryan and not be better than that by osmosis?

Recap of Seth vs. Orton on Monday with Sting making the big save. That really was an awesome moment and the best thing Sting has done since debuting.

Noble and Mercury tell security to keep an entrance open. They aren't pleased when they're not called sir.

Gauntlet Match

The participants are all of Barrett's challengers and we start with Ambrose vs. Stardust. Dean slugs away to start and Stardust bails out to the floor. The rebound clothesline connects but Stardust gets two off a Disaster Kick. A release front suplex drops Dean again and Barrett is watching from the back. Stardust tries a sunset flip but Dean drops down on him ala British Bulldog vs. Bret for the pin at 2:18.

Stardust, ever the nice guy, jumps Dean after the match and sends him shoulder first into the post twice in a row. R-Truth is in third and beats up Stardust, only to walk into Dirty Deeds for the pin at 3:02 total. Harper is in fourth with an inset interview talking about how they

took his freedom away. Now he's using you to set them all free. He's been talking to Bray again hasn't he?

Back from a break with Dean hammering away in the battle of undershirts and jeans. Harper goes after the bad arm to take over and we hit the chinlock. Notice that it's one instead of two and we're over five minutes in. Dean is sent face first into the buckle and gets locked in a crossface. Back up and Dean sends him to the floor, setting up the running standing elbow drop.

The discus lariat is countered into a rollup for two and it's back to the crossface. When all else fails, Dean bites the hand to escape and slugs away. The running dropkick against the ropes and la majistral get two for Dean but he eats a superkick, only to knock him into the ropes for the rebound clothesline to drop both guys. Back up and Dirty Deeds is countered into the discus lariat and the sitout powerbomb is enough for the pin at 12:50 total.

Daniel Bryan is in fifth and starts with Harper after a break. During said break, Mercury and Noble yelling at security guards. They check someone's credentials and let him in for a scene that doesn't seem to mean anything. Back in the arena with Bryan wrapping Harper's knee around the post a few times before firing off the kicks. He even gets Harper up for the full surfboard and lifts him up for a YES chant.

More YES Kicks have Harper in trouble so he picks Bryan up and throws him out to the floor. Luke slows things down with a headlock but Bryan knee crushes his way to freedom. That's fine with Harper as he just punches Bryan in the face to put him down. We hit the chinlock for a bit before Bryan goes right back to the knee. A headscissors takes Harper to the floor and there's the Flying Goat for good measure.

Back in again and we get more YES Kicks but the big one is countered into the half nelson suplex for two. The discus lariat is kicked away but the left arm version blasts Bryan for another near fall. Luke is getting frustrated but Bryan helps him out by tripping the leg and putting on something like a heel hook for the submission at 25:33 total.

That only leaves Dolph Ziggler in sixth and we take another break before

the bell. They lock up to start until Bryan takes him into the corner for more kicks. Ziggler goes a bit more conventional with right hands to the head but misses a Stinger splash. Bryan busts out a top rope hurricanrana but Dolph rolls through into a sunset flip for two. Both try cross bodies and both get knocked to the mat as we take another break.

Back again with Bryan working on the shoulder after sending him into the post while we were away. Daniel gets crotched on top but he counters a superplex attempt by crotching Ziggler right back. Dolph keeps up the countering by reversing the belly to back superplex into a cross body for two more. Bryan responds by kicking him in the face for the same as the fans (or at least the canned noise) are way into this. The running knee is blocked by a superkick but he can't follow up. The YES Lock goes on in the middle of the ring but Ziggler rolls out, ducks a big kick and grabs the Zig Zag for the pin at 27:36.

Rating: B+. It took some time to get going but the Bryan vs. Ziggler stuff was awesome. I can see those two building a roof on Levi's Stadium just so they could blow it off at Wrestlemania, but instead they're just throwing everyone into a ladder match. Really good and long match here, especially once they stopped with the quick eliminations.

Post match Barrett comes in and talks about a code, only to nail Dolph in the face. Bryan gets up and takes the microphone to the face. Both guys get Bull Hammers as well.

We look at Bray's promo from Monday.

LL Cool J video. People still care about him right?

The Divas give their predictions on AJ/Paige vs. the Bellas. As expected, the decision is split. This is giving them a chance I suppose?

Recap of the Cena/Rusev contract signing from Monday.

Another bit with the security.

Cesaro/Tyson Kidd/Natalya vs. El Torito/Los Matadores

Interspecies match. Well of course it is. Cesaro runs Diego over for two

to start but a dropkick sends him into the corner. Off to Natalya vs. Torito for some pelvic thrusting, meaning Kidd tags himself in to face Fernando. Kidd takes it outside and trips Fernando up to send him face first into the apron. Back in and the hot tag brings in Diego with a springboard shot to the head as everything breaks down. Los Matadores dive onto the champs, leaving us with Natalya vs. Torito for the featured part of the match. Torito armdrags her down but gets caught in a sitout powerbomb for the pin at 3:49.

Rating: D. We're ten days from Wrestlemania and this is what we're seeing from the Tag Team Champions. I mean.....dang man. The best we can get is an unfunny idea of woman vs. bull, because there are still people out there that think it's really a bull? Who could speak English? This kind of stuff is absurd and makes me hate this show more and more every time.

Seth Rollins/Kane vs. Roman Reigns/Mark Henry

And there's no Henry as we cut to the back and see him out cold. Rollins brings out a bunch of security to have his back. Maybe they're Noble and Mercury's students. Kane starts for his team and Mercury offers a trip, allowing the Big Bald to score with a boot to the face. Off to Rollins as the fans chant for Randy. Not the #1 contender and future main eventer mind you, but a guy not here.

Seth whips Reigns into a side slam for two and the bad looking running DDT gets the same. Rollins comes back in for some slow shots to the back and something like a downward spiral into the middle buckle. We're just waiting for Orton at this point and it's showing badly. Roman fights back with a forearm to Kane, followed by the tilt-a-whirl slam to Rollins. The Authority regroups but Rollins dives into a Superman Punch and the spear ends Kane at 5:07.

Rating: D. This match summed up the major problem with Roman Reigns: he could have been any given upper level guy and the match would have been the exact same thing. This was five minutes of waiting around for Orton to come out because that's the story we're seeing. Can you imagine that happening to Steve Austin or Daniel Bryan? No, because those guys commanded the audience's attention whenever they were on screen. Reigns

is just another guy here and it's very clear that he isn't someone the fans are ready to cheer as the new top man.

Rollins throws a fit and here's Orton (in wrestling gear for no logical reason) to beat up the security. Noble and Mercury take RKOs, allowing Rollins to escape to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. That Reigns match really told you everything you needed to know about this Wrestlemania season. The main feuds have little heat and the whole show is built around Undertaker, Sting and Lesnar barely appearing or not saying anything. Combine that with the fans just not being interested in Reigns at the moment (and again, a lot of that isn't on him) and this is coming off as a pretty weak year.

As for the show, the Intercontinental Title match made for a good performance but that's not what we're getting at Wrestlemania. The Divas did their usual stuff, the comedy wasn't funny, and the main event was your standard scene with someone AMAZINGLY making it past security to get into the building. This felt like any given Thursday in June, not the next to last Smackdown before Wrestlemania.

Results

Paige b. Brie Bella – Rollup

Dolph Ziggler won a gauntlet match last eliminating Daniel Bryan

Natalya/Cesaro/Tyson Kidd b. El Torito/Los Matadores – Powerbomb to Torito

Roman Reigns/Mark Henry b. Kane/Seth Rollins – Spear to Kane

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Reviewing the Review: Monday Night Raw – March 16, 2015

There are three weeks to go before Wrestlemania and the big question is simple: will anyone dare insult the memory of Andre the Giant, thereby ticking off the company's top villain and having Stephanie rip them to shreds in a segment that has nothing to do with what's going on at the moment and only serves to get Stephanie TV time? Let's get to it.

We crank up the stupid right off the bat this week as Orton and the Authority opened the show. Here's the REALLY short version of what happened: Orton threatened them, told them his plan to get revenge on Rollins, said he was kidding, and then, through a series of very convenient coincidences, carried out his plan later in the night and destroyed Rollins to end the show.

Does this company have any idea how to even do the most basic stories correctly these days? Randy Orton is a psycho, he comes back and hurts Rollins, Seth wants revenge at Wrestlemania. Or Orton comes back nice and calm, says he's seen the error of his ways, infiltrates the Authority and takes them out one by one before it's only Orton vs. Rollins at Wrestlemania.

Instead, this is what we get: Orton returns as a psycho, calms down and infiltrates the Authority (thanks to Stephanie yelling at him because that's the ultimate power in WWE), tells them their plan, gets lucky that Stephanie ejected Big Show and Kane earlier in the night, then beats Rollins to a pulp, leaving almost no logical reason to set up the match at Wrestlemania and giving us no reason to have a match without a gimmick, which we'll likely get anyway.

This whole story has been a mess because they don't seem to know what they want to do. It's a simple idea of just setting up an idea and then executing it. Look at this Reviewing the Review. I knew what I wanted to

do with it and then started writing it out. I didn't start talking about Raw, break into a recipe for how to baste a turkey, talk about Raw some more and then end by pasting the third act of the script to Con Air. Just please WWE, stop making up these stories week by week and then thinking trying to fill in the gaps in your horrible logic after you're done.

Daniel Bryan beat Bad News Barrett and Dean Ambrose beat Stardust in your Intercontinental Title shenanigans of the week. They've finally calmed down with the stealing the title and just let the people fight each other, which calms me down quite a bit. The wrestling was nothing to see but what do you expect with two matches not combining to last fifteen minutes?

Connor the Crusher is getting the Warrior Award at the Hall of Fame. If you don't smile at this at least a little bit....eh I've got nothing here. You should like it.

Heyman and Lesnar came out to say the exact same things they've said for two months. There's no reason for these guys to be fighting other than Reigns won the Rumble. They might have something with Reigns just doing what people says he can't, but we're WAY too late for that to work. It also doesn't help when it's a gladiator doing what other gladiators can't do, but at least it's something.

Big Show knocked out Kane by mistake (this is different than the time a few weeks ago when he knocked him out on Smackdown and it was never mentioned again) for a loss to Ryback and Rowan. Somehow they've linked Survivor Series to the Andre battle royal. That's just impressive.

Mizdow rapped about Miz. This wasn't funny.

Wiz Khalifa rapped. This wasn't funny or necessary.

The Bellas made Flintstones puns about themselves. This wasn't funny, necessary, or anything but a way for me to extend this bit to a third entry.

AJ pinned Summer in a match that accomplished nothing, other than allowing me to look at Summer Rae.

“Sting” narrated a video about his match with HHH. I’ve listened to Sting talk for 25 years and I’ve never heard him talk like that.

Cena yelled at the Russians and told them to respect America. Rusev then beat Curtis Axel in 26 seconds. Axel didn’t get to do his schtick and was completely destroyed. In other words, this was WWE getting annoyed that someone got over with a clever idea and made sure to crush (see what I did there?) him right before our eyes.

The big story here was that Cena came out and massacred Rusev, quickly putting him in the STF and knocking him out before doing it again and making him tap. The only way he let it go was for Lana to give him a US Title shot. Rusev yelled at Lana, sending her to the set of some movie. Rusev could be in major trouble but we’ll get to see how strong he is on his own.

Tyson Kidd and Cesaro lost because they’re champions. What makes it even worse is they lost to New Day, who I like but their momentum is dead. This transitioned into Naomi beating Natalya and Los Matadores beating the Usos. We’re probably getting a four way at Wrestlemania, or at least we would have if Jey hadn’t busted his shoulder.

Bray Wyatt had the urn and talked a lot until Undertaker sent lightning to set Bray’s chair on fire and make their match official. This was fine.

Reigns beat Orton and Rollins to set up Orton’s beatdown on Rollins.

This show was better than last week’s, but it’s still just another entry in a really bad build to Wrestlemania. At the end of the day, they have no focus and it’s showing more and more every week. Look at the Orton story again. He was angry, then he was calm, then they went with angry again. Pick something and go with it, just like they need to do in the main event feud. This week was indeed better, and a lot of that was due to less talking. Fight already.

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Reviewing the Review – Monday Night Raw: March 2, 2015

It's been a week since the last episode of Monday Night Raw and I'm still somewhat annoyed at what I sat through last week. I try to do these a bit sooner but I needed some extra time to let this one get out of my mind before I rant on it all over again. I'm going to try to focus on the good things this time and give the show a fairer look as the show made me so mad last week that I wasn't able to focus on things like I should have. Let's get to it.

Before we get started, let's establish something. With four episodes to go before Wrestlemania, every single episode of this show should be designed to make me want to watch Wrestlemania and little else. The show hasn't had a great build to this point and

Rollins and the Stooges opened the show with the former calling out Jon Stewart, who is on his way to the arena. This brought out Reigns, but Rollins mentioned a bunch of internet reports and referenced people like Wiz Khalifa (performing next week), Michael Jordan (became a billionaire last week) and Mark Henry (rumored to return last week but didn't). I'm really not sure what the point of this was but it really didn't do much.

Seth implied he was going to cash in at Wrestlemania or the night after on Raw but got punched in the mouth instead. Like most other things on this show, there really wasn't much to it and it really didn't make me care about anyone involved. Basically it set up the Stewart appearance and established that Reigns was in the building. Not much here.

Post break Orton yelled at the Stooges for letting that happen to Rollins and suggested Rollins vs. Reigns tonight. Again, this is holding the viewers' hand and walking them through every single thing instead of just throwing up a graphic and saving five minutes.

Dean Ambrose beat Bad News Barrett with Dirty Deeds. This involved more shenanigans with the Intercontinental Title and helped set up the ladder match. This is another big deal at the moment and I seem to be on the opposite side of most people. Here's the thing: yes it's doing something with the Intercontinental Title, but I still don't like it. The same title match could be set up so easily without having the champion lose all the time. Instead, he keeps losing every match he's in and the title is literally handed around as a prize.

You know what really brought this angle down for me? The quick promo Ambrose gave on the snowed out Raw where he talked about wanting to make the title mean something. This has done the opposite of that and turned the title into a comedy prop. It's true that this is an upgrade over what the title has been for years now, but it could so easily be done better that it drives me crazy.

Miz debuted the commercial he stole from Mizdow. Of course it was a comedy bit with Miz implying he had erectile dysfunction and included quotes from Miz completely out of context. We'll ignore the company filming Miz's parts before he agreed to be in them for the sake of comedy. Of course everyone laughed and Miz blamed Mizdow, but the big eruption didn't happen yet. I'm still not sure what happens at Wrestlemania though as Mizdow throwing out Miz and then getting thrown out kind of defeats the purpose.

Bray Wyatt lit a casket on fire. If Undertaker isn't going to show up until Wrestlemania, Bray has to do more than just talk so this is the smartest thing he can do.

Cesaro/Kidd/Natalya b. Naomi/the Usos to continue this feud. I'm hoping we get some fresh challengers for the champs soon.

Now we get to the segment that ruined this show for me. John Cena came out and said he wanted to face Rusev for the title again at Wrestlemania.

He wants to bring it back to America, but if Rusev won't accept the challenge, maybe he'll enter the Andre the Giant battle royal. This part was fine. Far fetched, but fine.

Then Stephanie came out and right away I saw a red flag. Here's the problem: she has nothing to do with this story. Nothing. Why was she out here? No one mentioned her name and she hasn't had any direct connection with Cena or Rusev in weeks if not months, but here she was anyway.

So anyway she said that Cena isn't allowed to just decide what match he's in (Cena: "That's what people do in a battle royal."), didn't understand a Murder's Row reference, and started talking about being Andre the Giant's friend. She pulled up a picture of her sitting on Andre's knee at the first Wrestlemania and said Cena wasn't going to disrespect his memory like this. This is about Wrestlemania, which is far bigger than John Cena. John needs to think about what he'll do without WWE, not the other way around.

This brings up the obvious question: WHAT IS SHE TALKING ABOUT? How did we go from Cena wanting to fight Rusev for the US Title to Stephanie and Andre the Giant in the span of five minutes? This segment felt like nothing more than a way to get Stephanie on the show and let her rip Cena's balls off because that's what her character does anymore.

It didn't have anything to do with Wrestlemania because no one believes Cena isn't going to fight Rusev again, and as Cena said, EVERYONE JUST ENTERS THE BATTLE ROYAL. Stephanie said something about Cena not respecting Andre's legacy, which implies that Cena isn't important. Isn't this the same Cena that the Authority sucked up to for weeks on end a while back? The whole speech made no sense and was even worse live than recapping it here.

But then, something happened to make it feel a lot better. Curtis Axel, now a full on Hogan tribute character, to say he might be the next John Cena and could win the battle royal. Stephanie makes Cena vs. Axel so Cena can prove himself or something, but the Rusev stuff is so far gone by now that it doesn't matter. Cena squashed him in two minutes. Axel was great, but there was no saving this segment. Rusev came out and said no

so Cole implied Cena won't be at Wrestlemania.

"Yes you too can see Wrestlemania for just \$10 on the WWE Network! John Cena! Daniel Bryan! These are just some of the people who might not be on the show!" I'm sure so many people are going to stick around to see if their favorites might be on the show to give you your money. Or maybe Stephanie will tell us what she did in fourth grade! That's a crowd for sure.

HHH came out and talked about how Sting was given a chance to leave without pain but he chose to fight instead. Booker T. was called into the ring, said no one could control Sting including HHH, and got fired. He went to leave but HHH hired him back because he wanted to show off his control. I'm still not 100% clear on what this feud is about, but Sting better win at Wrestlemania or the entire arena is going to go flat quick.

Paige vs. Nikki Bella got big match intros and lasted all of seven minutes. Of course half of that was in a commercial and the match ended with a DQ, but that's more of a chance than they usually get. The big deal here was AJ returned to save Paige, setting up a tag match at Wrestlemania.

The other big bit of the night was Jon Stewart coming out to face off with Seth Rollins. They knocked this out of the park with Stewart giving one of, if not the best celebrity appearance ever. You can tell he's a big WWE fan and knew what he was talking about as he ripped into Rollins. The big line here though, and one that seemed to be planting seeds for later, was Stewart asking why the Authority isn't putting Rollins in the main event of Wrestlemania if they're all behind him. The brawl broke out and Orton offered a distraction so Stewart could kick Rollins low and leave. This was exactly what it needed to be and the highlight of the show.

Daniel Bryan beat Luke Harper in a quick match. More belt shenanigans followed and ended with Ziggler taking the belt.

Alundra Blayze is going to the Hall of Fame. That's another name on the list of WOW returns.

Orton promised to have Rollins' back tonight but Big Show and Kane told him to stay out. I still have no idea what they're waiting on with this story.

Heyman came out and said Lesnar was tough and Reigns couldn't beat him. There are only so many ways Heyman can say the exact same thing before it stops working. Lesnar needs to show up already so we can mix the story up a bit.

The main event was a big standard show closing fight with Rollins pinning Reigns. Yeah this happened, for reasons that I still do not understand. Yeah apparently the idea to have Reigns look like he can beat the unbeatable Lesnar is to have him lose to someone who doesn't have a Wrestlemania match right now. Orton tripped Reigns up for the loss, but it's still a stupid idea.

BUT WAIT, the masses say, because Reigns hit a great looking dive onto the Authority and then speared Rollins out of the air to end the show. This felt like a big fireworks show at a baseball stadium after the home team loses a close game. Yeah it may look cool, but it comes right after your soul gets ripped out. Tell me: why did Reigns need to lose this match? What good does that do anyone? Just saying "he didn't need to win it" isn't a good enough answer, because winning doesn't mean much for him, but losing it makes him look weak going into the title match. These are the little things that are just done that drive me crazy.

Overall Raw felt like it had no idea what its goal was. The problem with that is there should be no doubt as to what the goal is right now. The goal should be Wrestlemania and making the fans want to see it. Instead, it feels like the goal is to cram in every single thing they can and hope that someone cares about some of it.

As good as Stewart's appearance was, it really was just a good version of the usual guest stars schtick. I get why they did it because he's the biggest name they've had on here in years, but it still doesn't make me care about Wrestlemania any more than I already did. This company needs to tighten things up by about fourteen notches, because this Wrestlemania build has been a misguided disaster.

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Monday Night Raw – March 2, 2015: Screw This Show And Screw Wrestlemania

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 2, 2015

Location: Prudential Center, Newark, New Jersey

Commentators: Booker T., John Bradshaw Layfield, Michael Cole

We're one step closer to Wrestlemania this week and the big event coming out of last week is Randy Orton not attacking Seth Rollins as everyone expected him to at the end of the show. That would seem to be a layup for a match at Wrestlemania but you never can tell around this company. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here are Rollins and the Stooges to get things going. Before he can say anything though, we get a clip of him appearing on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart last Thursday. Stewart is on his way here so Rollins suggests that he beg for forgiveness now and turn around. This isn't like Lawler

vs. Kauffman because unlike the Daily Show, every single person in this arena paid to see him tonight.

Cue Roman Reigns, who tells Rollins to keep talking because he wanted to hear what it sounded like to hear the fans tell Seth that he sucks. Rollins says he's worth more than Michael Jordan because he can out work and out talk anyone, including Wiz Khalifa. He can even out eat Mark Henry. Khalifa is scheduled to perform next week and Henry is rumored to be here tonight so that sounds like an internet newsletter come to life.

Rollins doesn't think Reigns can beat Brock Lesnar, but he can beat both Lesnar and Reigns. Roman asks if Rollins is man enough to make the main event of Wrestlemania a triple threat match as the fans chant for Punk. Rollins thinks it's smarter to cash in on the winner of the match, or maybe do it the next night. Or maybe just cash in when no one is expecting it. Or maybe Reigns should just punch him in the mouth right now, which is what he does. The Stooges are laid out and Reigns stands on the Money in the Bank briefcase, but somehow that still doesn't make me care about him.

Post break, Rollins yells at the Stooges for letting him get hit in the mouth. Randy Orton pops up and says the same thing. He thinks Rollins should demand a match with Reigns tonight to prove he can out talk Jon Stewart and out wrestle Roman Reigns as well. Rollins says he can out wrestle anyone on the roster, which doesn't sit well with Orton. Dang they were getting close to not having a main event set up. I'm glad these coincidences just happened to take place at complete random.

Dean Ambrose vs. Bad News Barrett

Non-title with R-Truth on commentary. Ambrose stomps away in the corner to start as Cole brings up the multi-man ladder match for the Intercontinental Title at Wrestlemania. Truth is officially announced for the match as Ambrose stomps away at the ribs and puts on a cross leg face rip. A bulldog sets up the standing elbow drop but Barrett crotches him to take over. The champ boots him out to the floor and holds up his title as we take a break.

Back with Ambrose fighting out of a chinlock but Barrett goes outside to

yell at Truth for being a thief. Ambrose hits a suicide dive to take Barrett down though and hits the running standing elbow off the apron. This allows Truth to comically sneak over and steal the title belt because this is now a children's comedy. Winds of Change plants Ambrose as Luke Harper comes up and takes the belt from Truth. The distraction lets Ambrose hit Dirty Deeds for the pin on Barrett at 9:23.

Rating: D. I have nothing left. Just nothing.

We recap Miz stealing Mizdow's spot in a commercial last week on Smackdown.

Most of the midcard is in the back when Miz asks for silence. He calls Mizdow borderline worthless before giving us the world premiere of the new commercial. Mizdow tries to tell Miz something but Miz cuts him off and mentions a bunch of actors. As expected, it's for an erectile dysfunction pill and has Mizdow involved with the good looking women. Back live and Mizdow can't control his laughter. Neither can the rest of the people in the room.

Miz yells at everyone and says his little general has plenty of bullets. This is all Mizdow's fault of course and Miz slaps him, again setting Mizdow off to a big reaction but once again he backs down. Mizdow almost has to eliminate him from the battle royal, but does it really matter is Mizdow doesn't win the thing?

Here's Bray Wyatt to ask if Undertaker is still the heart of fear. He wants Undertaker to come out and see him because Bray has built his own casket. Everything comes at a price though and Bray pulls out a gasoline can. He's always had a fascination with fire because it has no prejudice and no feelings, just like him. No one can hide from him because everything burns, including Undertaker at Wrestlemania. He pours the gas on the casket and lights it on fire before shouting to find him. Like most Bray stuff, it makes just enough sense to get the idea across without being able to understand it.

Natalya/Tyson Kidd/Cesaro vs. Usos/Naomi

Genders have to match here. Jey and Kidd get things going but the champs

take over with a quick double team. A Samoan drop puts Cesaro down but he bails to the floor, setting up a tag to the women. Naomi pops Natalya in the face and starts a quick pinfall reversal sequence, only to have Naomi kick Natalya in the ribs.

Naomi doesn't buy a leg injury from Natalya and sunset flips her for two, only to have it quickly go back to Jimmy and Kidd. A Whisper in the Wind drops Kidd but he dives away from a double superkick and tags Natalya. The distraction lets Natalya get a rollup pin at 2:54. Didn't we see this EXACT same story last month but with the titles switched? Now I'm supposed to want to see it at Wrestlemania?

Kidd and Natalya almost get in a fight but they hug it out.

Here's John Cena with something to say after Rusev turned down his request for a rematch last week. He says this is one of those rare occasions where his detractors are having a good time because not only did Rusev beat him in their first match but his rematch was turned down. Cena is going to get his rematch and is going to bring the title back home to America. Rusev is a marked man and he's going to lose that title at Wrestlemania. If he won't defend it though, maybe he could just enter the Andre battle royal.

Oh screw it Stephanie comes out with that smug look on her face. She asks when do people just announce what match they're in. Cena: "That's what everyone does in the battle royal." Stephanie doesn't get the term Murderer's Row (famous baseball lineup, means a great talent pool) and brings up a picture of her sitting on Andre's knee after the first Wrestlemania.

She says Cena can't disparage Andre's legacy (what is she even talking about?) but Cena cuts her off and says this is about Wrestlemania. He says she won't leave him off Wrestlemania so she goes into full on evil Stephanie mode and says WWE is bigger than any star it's ever had. The question is what will Cena do without WWE, not the other way around.

Cue Curtis Axel of all people who says he's already deserving a spot in the main event so he should win the battle royal too. A LOUD Axelmania chant starts up and Stephanie thinks he may be the next John Cena.

Stephanie makes a match right now, but stops to say Cena can only get his match with Rusev by changing his mind. Axel: "WHATCHA GONNA DO WHEN AXELMANIA RUNS WILD ON YOU???" He rips the shirt off and Cena looks stunned. Cena gives him one chance to leave before pain comes to him.

John Cena vs. Curtis Axel

The bell rings after the break and Axel does Hogan poses. Cena stares a hole in the back of Axel's head, hits some clotheslines, the AA and the STF for the submission at 2:02.

Post match Rusev comes out and again says no. Cole calls this humiliating because he doesn't know the meaning of basic English words. Cole: "We could be coming up on the first Wrestlemania with no John Cena." Me: "Oh screw off."

Arn Anderson and Michael Hayes talk about Sting's career and how great he really was. This lasts all of ten seconds.

Here's HHH to talk about coming to this company twenty years ago. Now he's the COO and a thirteen time World Champion. Eight days ago he offered Sting a chance to be immortal, but now he has the chance to make it as if Sting never existed. But why didn't Sting come here before? HHH invites Booker T. into the ring because Booker recently said HHH politicized Sting from ever coming to the company. Why does he think that? That makes Booker sound like one of those internet fans that think they know the ins and outs of the business when they don't know a thing.

Booker says no one has ever been able to control Sting and now HHH gets to deal with him at Wrestlemania. HHH thanks him for the opinion and then fires him. Booker goes to leave but HHH says he's changed his mind. That was just an example of the control he has because he's been handed the chance to end the last vestige of WCW and that's what he'll do. I can't believe they're STILL talking about WCW. That company has been out of business longer than it was in business and WWE is still bragging about defeating them.

Divas Title: Paige vs. Nikki Bella

Nikki is defending again in a rematch from Fast Lane. We even get Big Match Intros. Paige knocks her around to start but Nikki bails to the floor to avoid the PTO. A minute in and we hit the break. Back with Nikki cranking on the arms and Cole saying the action before the break was, and I quote (see what I did there?), fast and furious. Paige fights up but walks into a weak spinebuster for two.

We get the third mention of Total Divas in about the third minute of, ahem, action. A double clothesline puts both girls down and of course that one clothesline gets us to even after Paige has been in trouble for a few minutes. Paige hits three more clotheslines and a running dropkick for two. The PTO is loaded up again but Paige has to nail Brie. Nikki misses her forearm and eats a superkick, setting up the PTO. Cue Brie for the DQ at 6:46.

Rating: D. GIVE THEM A CHANCE! YOU MIGHT GET A FIVE MINUTE MATCH NEXT TIME! Yeah this was another obvious ending to set up the obvious return to set up the obvious "dream" tag match at Wrestlemania so the Bellas can show how good they really are and AJ can take a loss and be humiliated for calling out Stephanie on her nonsense. But hey, why bother entertaining when you can get one up on AJ in front of the dozens of people who are going to pay for this disaster of a Wrestlemania?

AJ runs in for the save and attacks the Bellas as we have new Super Best Friends.

Post break, AJ and Paige kind of agree to be friends to fight the Bellas.

It's time for the Daily Show with Seth Rollins, complete with a copy of the Daily Show's intro. Rollins takes some shots at Stewart's Oscar hosting last year (it was seven years ago) and at his movie Rosewater for not doing so well as the Stooges applaud in the background. Cue the real Stewart to rips on the Curb Stomp being a New Jersey greeting instead of something to fear. He remembers the wrestlers that earned their spots like Sammartino and Monsoon.

Rollins never went up against the establishment like Austin or fought through injuries like Undertaker. Seth wants to be the poster boy, but just like posters, they get taken down when people are tired of them. If

the Authority really cared about him, why isn't he in the main event at Wrestlemania? He's better on the mic and claims to be better in the ring, but it's Lesnar vs. Reigns.

Stewart says the briefcase doesn't belong to Rollins because he was at Money in the Bank and saw what really happened. That's enough for Rollins as he grabs Stewart by the collar, drawing out Orton for the save, but Stewart kicks Rollins low and escapes on his own. This was one of the best celebrity performances ever in WWE and most of that is due to Stewart clearly being a huge fan. You can't fake that kind of passion. Well you could, but if you've ever seen the Faculty, you know Stewart isn't that good of an actor.

Post break Stewart leaves quickly to avoid retaliation.

Daniel Bryan vs. Luke Harper

Cole says Bryan isn't going to Wrestlemania either. Harper starts fast but gets sent face first into the middle buckle. A running dropkick has him in trouble but Luke slams Bryan to the floor as we take an early break. Back with Harper kicking him in the face and hitting a half nelson suplex for two. A rollup gets the same for Bryan before Harper throws him down again. That's fine with Bryan as he counters into the YES Lock for the win at 6:23.

Rating: D+. The Divas got more time than this match, which may or may not be about Bryan going into the title match at Wrestlemania. Just like the rest of this show, it's like they have no real idea where the matches are going and we're less than a month away from the show. Announce the things and let us know what we're getting.

Barrett comes out to take the belt back, but it's stolen by Ambrose, Harper, Truth then Harper again with the big man leaving with the belt. Ziggler cuts him off with a superkick though and puts the title on his shoulder. Dolph climbs the ladder with the belt and Bryan does a YES chant on the table.

Alundra Blayze Hall of Fame video. Two notes here. One, this is shocking if you know your history. Two, in the list of great champions over the

years, we saw Moolah, Martel, Trish, the Bellas and Lita. Who on earth actually thinks that's true? I mean, someone say that to me so I can laugh very hard in their face. They actually mention the belt in the trash moment in the video.

Orton yells at Rollins for going after Stewart but promises to have his back if Rollins needs him. Big Show and Kane come up and say they have his back, so Noble says Orton won't be needed. Randy walks away, saying suit yourself.

Here's Heyman who says he's going to shoot from the hip. Yes Brock will be at Wrestlemania. Believe that. He'll be anywhere he pleases before the title match. He'll be anywhere he pleases after the title match. He'll be anywhere he wants as the WWE Champion. Fans like to believe their fantasies, starting with Daniel Bryan having a chance at beating his client.

Reality is that Lesnar would squash him under his boot, so now it's time for Roman Reigns. Heyman has to switch microphones before he rants about the fans buying into this idea of Reigns. WWE has already bought the confetti and the pyro but it's a big waste of time.

Last week he said Sammartino, Hogan, Austin, Rock HHH and Cena couldn't beat Lesnar. Fan: "ANDRE!" Heyman to the fan: "I DIDN'T MENTION HIM BECAUSE HE'S DEAD STUPID!" Of course there's no Stephanie to defend Andre now because that segment earlier made no sense. Heyman says none of those people disputed a single thing he said last week because it's all true. At Wrestlemania, Lesnar is going to conquer Reigns and maybe he'll just Ronda Rousey Roman. BELIEVE THAT.

Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins

Reigns knocks him around with ease to start and sends Rollins hard into the corner. Seth's comeback is easily stopped with a knee to the ribs but he catches Reigns with a dropkick. We hit the right hands to the face and Reigns is sent hard into the buckle, but here's Orton for a distraction as we go to our last break.

Back with Rollins holding a chinlock for a bit until Roman makes his

comeback with some clotheslines and a tilt-a-whirl slam for two. Mercury breaks up the Superman Punch, allowing Rollins to score with an enziguri for two. Roman fights up again but Noble's distraction lets Rollins kick him in the face.

A powerbomb from Reigns puts both guys down. They head outside with Big Show getting in a cheap shot but Reigns dives off the apron to take him down. Kane nails him in the ribs with a chair, giving Rollins a near fall back inside. We get yet another comeback from Reigns as he nails a Superman Punch, only to have Orton grab the foot, allowing Rollins to roll up Reigns for the pin at 15:38.

Rating: D+. The #1 contender for the World Title and the man that is supposed to save us from the horrors of Brock Lesnar just got pinned less than a month before the biggest show of the year. I don't care what he does after the match. That ending is stupid and there was no reason to not just have the big DQ or something like that. My goodness do they want me to watch Wrestlemania or not?

Reigns snaps post match and destroys everyone not named Orton. He hits a huge dive over the top and spears Rollins out of the air as JBL shouts about him being ready. No man. Screw that noise. I'm not buying Reigns as anything when he's losing less than a month before the big night, screwy finish or not. You don't do that no matter what, especially when Lesnar isn't here to set up the stupid match.

Overall Rating: F+. Where do I even start? First of all, how do you only have six matches on a three hour plus show with two of them not even breaking three minutes? That's just unacceptable. Second, they really do seem to be making this stuff up as they go. We're supposed to believe Cena and Bryan aren't going to be at the pay per view? That's your big selling point? "Hey people, come see this show without the biggest stars appearing!" Well they might not. I mean, they DARED to challenge Stephanie.

That's the next major point: the Authority was all over the place tonight and not a single bit of it made sense. All of a sudden Stephanie is the patron saint of French giants and HHH is spouting off at the mouth about

having to control Sting, whatever the heck that is supposed to mean. I can't get over how bad that Stephanie segment was. How is that supposed to make me want to see Wrestlemania? Cena potentially in the battle royal because he can't convince Rusev to defend the belt, which he'll eventually do by going after the Russian flag, which won't bring up a single mention of Big Show doing the same thing months ago?

The main event continues to be a one sided affair because Lesnar isn't on TV. Heyman can only say YOU CAN'T BEAT HIM in so many different ways before it stops being entertaining. It's one of those cases where you can only perform so well with what you're given and that point has long since passed. Brock and Reigns need to do something face to face again, because the last time was the night after the Royal Rumble.

The Divas' push comes off as a huge joke as the big chance seems to be a tag match at Wrestlemania and a pairing that we've seen before. I don't really know why this is supposed to be a big match, other than AJ is the one not on Total Divas, which is the real title in this division these days. Give them a chance I guess, but if this is the chance, give them a bus ticket out of the company, because it's not getting better anytime soon.

I have almost no desire to see Wrestlemania this year and I haven't had that feeling in a very, very long time. There's almost nothing on the card that I want to see and somehow it seems to get worse every week. It's like they have no focus for the card this year other than "Reigns wins and we go from there." To what? Reigns vs. Big Show? That's a real possibility and I don't think I can handle it. Then again, I don't think I can handle three more episodes like this either.

Results

Dean Ambrose b. Bad News Barrett – Dirty Deeds

Usos/Naomi b. Natalya/Cesaro/Tyson Kidd – Rollup to Natalya

John Cena b. Curtis Axel – STF

Paige b. Nikki Bella via DQ when Brie Bella interfered

Daniel Bryan b. Luke Harper – YES Lock

Seth Rollins b. Roman Reigns – Rollup

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Reviewing the Review – Monday Night Raw: February 23, 2015

We're past Fast Lane now and the only thing left between here and Wrestlemania is time. Well that and five Raws and Smackdowns of course. The main story tonight is the start of the hard build between Lesnar and Reigns as well as filling in the rest of the card for the biggest show of the year. Let's get to it.

To begin with, let's get through the big story of the week which didn't air on Raw: Brock Lesnar not appearing. Allegedly this was over some undisclosed contract issue, which seems to be very convenient given that he was seen at UFC 184 over the weekend. I'm not saying it's an angle, but there's enough there that it seems like it's a possibility. Either way, Lesnar will be in the main event at Wrestlemania and I'd be absolutely shocked if anything else happened. At the end of the day, Brock will be there for the right price because unlike CM Punk, he isn't completely delusional.

Orton opened the show and said this wouldn't be a twenty minute speech.

He wants Rollins but got the full Authority instead, and OF COURSE we had to listen to Stephanie say every corporate name she could fit into a single speech. That might be the most annoying thing she does. Everything has to be proper titles and it comes off like the least natural way of speaking I've seen in years. There's going to be a business conference later in the night to get to the point of this. I'm as riveted as you are. Not by the dumb story, but by Stephanie. I mean, don't you just freeze in place when she speaks?

Dolph Ziggler pinned Bad News Barrett. I've ranted enough about how annoying it is when the Intercontinental Champion loses, but at least this seems to be setting up a big match at Wrestlemania....where the perennial loser will win and all is supposed to be forgotten right?

The business conference was more of STEPHANIE POWER as she got Orton to agree to team with Rollins tonight. As I said back on Monday, this felt like just a way of killing time until we get to the obvious ending. That kind of storytelling rarely works, especially with so little time before Wrestlemania.

The Prime Time Players beat the Ascension because....well why not just bail out of the Ascension story before it has the chance to go anywhere? Now, can someone please tell me what that story was supposed to be, because the legends thing stopped weeks ago.

Now we get to the big segment of the night: Daniel Bryan endorsing Roman Reigns and then Paul Heyman coming out to say the exact same thing he's been saying for weeks: Reigns is awesome, but not awesome enough. This segment was well done, well spoken and had a very clear goal. However, it completely failed at its intended goal: making me care about Roman Reigns.

They're following a script now and the idea makes sense, but Reigns is just not someone the fans can relate to. Look back at the Bryan story. It's such a basic concept with the volume turned way up: Bryan is the every man who has been held down by the machine but will not stop fighting until he overcomes the odds and achieves his glory. What is Reigns' story? Come see Superman fight Doomsday? That's only a story when

Superman loses, and I don't picture Roman Reigns losing at Wrestlemania.

Someone tell me why I should care about Roman Reigns. Yeah he had a really cool run as part of the Shield, but Rollins has grown by leaps and bounds since then and Ambrose has had his moments. Reigns is basically the same guy he was a year ago at this time but without his partners around him. The more I think about it, the more I see him as Diesel in 1994: big, strong, not that interesting because there's little to him other than power and high impact offense. That's not enough to carry him against Lesnar and I don't see this experiment working longer than a few months.

Kidd and Cesaro beat the Usos in their rematch. This was about what you would expect and thankfully they didn't just switch the titles right back. The Usos can do something else besides get the belts back (I'm not sure what exactly) and just let Kidd and Cesaro show off for the next four months or so. The Usos were good long term placeholders, but I've seen enough of them with the belts in the last year.

Mizdow has gotten a commercial shoot by being the stunt double. This would be the 318th issue to start the eventual face turn.

Bray Wyatt says his usual insane stuff about Undertaker. At least he has a target now.

Jack Swagger beat Stardust with the Patriot Lock after a distraction from Goldust. I don't like Wrestlemania rematches and we seem to be getting more than one this year.

Cena and Rusev argued over political ideologies, monetary policy and whether or not Cena gave up in the Accolade. Or Acolyte, whichever Cena is calling it this time. It's worked for 40 years and it works now.

Rollins and Orton didn't have much to say.

Cool video on Sting to catch younger fans up.

The Bellas vs. Paige/Emma lasted 30 seconds. They seem to be setting up Bellas vs. Paige/AJ in a dream tag match. That would likely be Kevin

Dunn's dream with the Bellas going over.

The Bushwhackers are going into the Hall of Fame. Luke licked my face when I was three so I can't complain too much.

Ryback beat Curtis Axel in 44 seconds. That Axelmania and the Royal Rumble clock are the most entertaining things Axel has ever done.

The final match was your standard main event tag with Reigns and Bryan beating Orton and Rollins with the running knee ending Seth. Orton bailed after Rollins tagged himself in but didn't RK0 Rollins for some reason. That reason would be ALL HAIL STEPHANIE of course, because Heaven forbid he offend her.

Overall, this show proved one thing: the road to this year's Wrestlemania is lacking. The stories are being told well enough, but they're just not very good stories. Reigns isn't an interesting hero, Orton vs. Rollins needs to just get set up already, the Intercontinental Champion is the biggest loser this side of Barry Horowitz and there are at least two upcoming rematches if not more. That doesn't scream biggest show of the year to me. It screams "oh dang we blew our ideas last year and we've got nothing left for this time." That's not good in any way, shape or form.

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Reviewing the Review: Fast Lane 2015

So with this show, we had a meaningless show with a main event that no one wanted to see and a bunch of matches in the midcard that are there to set up future rematches, and it's all free on the WWE Network, making it harder for me to complain about it? What a confusing show I've wondered into. Let's get to it.

The pre-show segment was an interview instead of a match, because somehow the roster is thin enough that they have to have a talking segment on the pay per view and no match to warm the crowd up. Heyman was a bit weak as he said whoever wins between Bryan and Reigns will be the ultimate loser, but he got the point across well enough. The entertaining part though was Mizdow standing up to Miz for a few seconds when Miz told him to face the corner. This is a slow burn, but it would have been a lot better if they had just let Mizdow win a few more matches before the showdown. This was storyline development and that's fine.

On a side note, why do we need a car themed show? We've already had Over the Limit which went nowhere. What is this obsession with cars? Did Thruman Sparky Plugg start a cult to get revenge for being named Thurman?

The Authority beat Ziggler/Ryback/Rowan with Big Show knocking Ziggler out cold to give Kane the pin. This booking has gone beyond the idea of coincidence and has reached the point of WHAT ARE THEY THINKING. Rollins isn't even involved in the pin and you have to give the loss to Ziggler instead of the already destroyed Rowan? I get the idea that guys like Ziggler are so over that they stay hot despite these losses, but there comes a point where he stops being over and starts being a loser.

On top of that, we still have Kane and Big Show being treated like the second coming of the Mega Powers where no one can ever make them look bad whatsoever, but in this case we've seen the match for fifteen years and I still haven't seen them entertain me. There's a place for those two on the roster but it's putting people over in the midcard, not hogging near

main event spots and even winning matches there.

You build up monsters to have someone beat them. That's exactly what happened, but then the monsters just stick around instead of going away for awhile. For some reason, these things just keep happening over and over and it stopped being interesting twelve years ago. I know that sounds like an exaggeration, but somehow it's reality.

That being said, at least the match was entertaining enough. It makes sense for them to have this match down as they've done variations of it on Raw and Smackdown for months now, because THIS STORY WILL NOT END. I know I've harped on this for months, but my goodness it's been going on for months on end now with no ending in sight. Stop tormenting the guys for their Survivor Series actions and move on to ANYTHING else.

Orton ran out post match and cleaned house. It's about time, especially considering he was crazed enough to stand in the back for fifteen minutes before attacking his hated enemy.

Goldust and Dusty Rhodes had a great exchange with Goldust saying he had to beat Stardust so badly that it brought him back to reality as Cody. Dusty didn't want it to be that bad but Goldust said there was no other way. As usual, the old guys can talk better than almost anyone today.

However, the match was a pretty bad opposite. The idea was neither guy wanted to do this, but that doesn't make sense. Goldust may not want to do this but he said he had to, and Stardust has shown no issue with attacking his brother over the last few weeks. It made the whole match feel way off and didn't accomplish anything they were shooting for. Either have them fight or don't set up the story so they should be fighting. Goldust won with a crucifix on what looked to be a botched finish. Stardust attacked his brother in the back after the match and blamed Dusty for their issues.

We got a package on Jon Stewart vs. Seth Rollins. See, THIS is a good celebrity appearance. It's so annoying seeing C and D list celebrities shoved into the shows to try and make WWE look important. That idea stops working when you have to remind us who the celebrity is and why they're famous. Stewart is one of the top stars in TV today and has a huge

following. It makes for some interesting TV, but the timing isn't great as Wrestlemania is coming up soon. That being said, you can't really wait when something like this happens, even though WWE likes to drag their feet for months at a time.

Cesaro and Tyson Kidd won the Tag Team Titles from the Usos in a good match that we've seen far too many times before. I'm happy with the results though as the Usos can win the belts back whenever and don't need to change anything about their act. Kidd and Cesaro have worked hard over the last year and more than deserve some recognition.

HHH called out Sting and gave one heck of a promo, walking around Sting and talking about how this is about WCW vs. WWE. I get the idea behind it, but HHH saying he was one of the main reasons WWE won the Monday Night Wars is pretty laughable. That being said, there's a much bigger issue for WWE here. What are they supposed to do at Wrestlemania? I can't imagine the WCW guy winning the match, but how in the world do you bring in Sting and have him lose? Doesn't that defeat the entire point of having him show up? However, the ball bat vs. the sledgehammer was perfect and got a big smile from me.

Paige lost to Nikki Bella in the Divas Title match. This was about what I expected with Nikki grabbing the trunks to retain the title. I know the big idea right now is GIVE DIVAS A CHANCE, but they had five and a half minutes here and I really don't want to give them much more of a chance after this. The Bellas just aren't that good in the ring but they're the focus of the division because of Total Divas. Granted the lack of any interesting story here didn't help them and Paige having as good of a chance as a snowman on Miami Beach made it even worse.

Bad News Barrett retained the Intercontinental Title via DQ when Ambrose stomped him a lot. The champ spent the entire match trying to run away, which felt WAY out of character for him. Granted it's also out of character for him to win a match but that's another story. This really didn't help either guy as Dean blows what should be another layup and Barrett gets to look like a lame coward all over again. But hey, maybe they can have a rematch and make both guys look awful one more time, just on a bigger stage.

Bray Wyatt came out to Undertaker's entrance, popped out of a coffin, and challenged Undertaker like everyone knew he would. They had to do this at some point and if they can kill off more time on a bad PPV, so be it.

Cena and Rusev had the match everyone thought they would have with Lana offering a distraction so Rusev could kick Cena low and make him pass out in the Accolade. If there's one thing Cena can do well (and there are a lot more than that), it's have the heavyweight slugfest. They did a good job of not having Cena hit the AA until the end, which made the impact a lot stronger. That and we didn't have to see Rusev kick out of it three or four times as is the custom for Cena matches. Again this was to set up a rematch and there's nothing wrong with that for the most part. If nothing else, it means looking at Lana some more.

Roman Reigns pinned Daniel Bryan clean in the main event with a spear. This was the match that they needed to have as Reigns goes over the only other person people wanted to see face Lesnar clean, basically giving him the big endorsement. Yeah people wanted to see Bryan, but Reigns hanging in there for nearly twenty minutes, kicking out of the running knee and getting the pin helped him quite a bit. It made him look like a warrior instead of someone being handed the spot and that's exactly what he needed. At the end of the day, fans will always respond to good wrestling and that's exactly what they got here.

Unfortunately, the last two matches being good to very good didn't validate this show's existence. No matter what they threw out there, this show didn't need to happen. They would have been better off just setting up a nine week Wrestlemania build and doing these matches along the way to California. It's a good enough show to pass, but there's no need for it to be taking place and that outweighs whatever good wrestling they had on the show.

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Smackdown – February 26, 2015: Erg

Smackdown

Date: February 26, 2015

Location: Phillips Arena, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole, Byron Saxton

Wrestlemania is creeping up on us and you can see most of the card from here. The main story coming out of Monday was Randy Orton rejoining the Authority for about two and a half hours but ultimately turning back against them. For some reason he let Seth Rollins off easy, which likely won't be addressed tonight. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to open things up. The fans chant YES but Bryan shouts NO for a change. That's what he said a few years ago when he was frustrated at the lack of opportunities. He was wrong though, because the fans were in his corner. The fans gave him the opportunity to climb the ladder to the top and he won the WWE World Heavyweight Championship in the main event of Wrestlemania XXX. He had to give it up due to injury, but then he had another chance to get it back at Fast Lane.

However, he failed and there's no Wrestlemania main event this year. Without that motivation, does that mean the YES Movement is dead? NO it does not! He won't back down because he has big plans this year. Before he can get those out though, here's Bad News Barrett who has somehow gone a full three days since losing a match.

No one wants to hear Bryan's sob story because losers like Bryan don't

deserve the spotlight. Neither does a thief like Dean Ambrose, so here's Dean for the brawl. He and Barrett fight to the floor so Bryan picks up the Intercontinental Title. Barrett demands it back but Ambrose decks him from behind and takes the belt back. Daniel didn't seem interested in the belt other than keeping it away from Barrett. Cole sounds like he's begging us to believe that Barrett is still champion.

Dean Ambrose vs. Miz

Is he going to step on Miz's sunglasses and break his foot this time? No Mizdow because he might be off shooting the commercial he mentioned on Raw. An early rollup gets two for Dean but he gets caught in a neckbreaker for the same. We're already in the chinlock but Ambrose fights up with rights and lefts. Some running forearms drop Miz again but Barrett comes back out to steal the belt again. The distraction doesn't work for once though as Dean hits Dirty Deeds for the pin on Miz at 2:47.

We look at stills of Orton returning on Sunday and video of the story with Rollins on Monday. Lawler tries to defend Orton's lack of action by saying he was worried about Big Show and Kane. I'd be worried about them too if I wanted anyone to stay awake during my matches. Seriously even Bryan couldn't survive a Kane feud.

After a break, Barrett can't get Renee's name right but says Ambrose and Bryan don't deserve to touch this title.

Naomi vs. Natalya

Say it with me: this officially started on Total Divas, even though there's been almost no animosity between them on that show. Somehow though, that's better continuity than you usually get on the main shows. They run the ropes to start and Natalya drops down, only to get rolled up for two. A headscissors drops Natalya again and we hit a chinlock with Naomi using her legs instead of the arms. Both girls hit cross bodies and the guys get into it on the floor. The referee holds Naomi back from a downed Natalya, allowing the Canadian to hit the discus lariat for the pin at 2:48.

Here are the Russians to brag about their win on Sunday. Rusev says this

is what a championship looks like and Lana walks us through some stills of Cena's spirit being crushed over and over again. Lana says Rusev isn't one to sleep on the job and brags about Putin sending them congratulatory emails. She even shows us one, of course in Russian, which probably has a very funny translation.

Rusev repeats that Cena gets no shot at Wrestlemania so he needs a new opponent. Cue Jack Swagger as we flash back to August. Jack says there's no such thing as a scared US Champion and the fight is on. Just like happens every single time, Rusev survives a storm and superkicks Swagger into the Accolade. Was there NO ONE ELSE they could have used for this spot? Like.....sweet goodness there really isn't much of anyone is there? Is the roster really that thin? Or are the faces really that lame?

Bad News Barrett vs. Daniel Bryan

Non-title of course, because even Bryan hasn't fallen enough to want the Intercontinental Title. Barrett isn't sure where to put the title. Byron Saxton introduces R-Truth on commentary. Truth: "COACH! I MISSED YOU!" Ok that was funny. Barrett shoves Bryan down to start but gets sent into the corner for a kick to the ribs. The surfboard knee stomp sends Barrett back into the corner as Truth thinks a crummet is a musical instrument.

More kicks stagger Barrett but the Winds of Change connect for two. Daniel bails to the floor as Truth keeps babbling about how he should be Intercontinental Champion. Back from a break with Barrett putting on a chinlock. I really do feel sorry for him. This is at least the second and probably third loser title reign for him and I don't know what he does to deserve it.

Bryan fights up and hits more YES Kicks for two but Barrett avoids the running dropkick in the corner. The title was knocked to the floor and Barrett is distracted, allowing Bryan to hit the Flying Goat. Truth: "Bryan looks like a chicken dipped in Rogaine." How do you even respond to that? The YES Lock goes on and Truth sneaks over to the corner and steals the belt but gets back on commentary with the belt under his jacket. Bad News makes the ropes but turns around for the running knee and the pin at 10:31.

Rating: C-. This feud is turning into a battle over who can suck more than the other guy. Somehow though, Barrett is going to wind up leaving with the belt because that's how WWE works. Then they'll wonder why no one cares about Barrett, the title, or the losers in the match. Truth was funny on commentary but that doesn't mean I want to see him in the ring. At least the title is getting some attention tonight though.

Barrett can't find the title but Truth denies any involvement. This is somehow making Barrett come off like someone we should feel sorry for, because we're supposed to feel sorry for someone who loses every match he has.

We get a sitdown interview with Roman Reigns from earlier today. Reigns praises Bryan for a hard fought match on Sunday and says Bryan knows what it takes to get where Reigns is going. We look at a clip of Heyman's speech on Monday about how Reigns just can't do it. Roman is tired of hearing about how he can't do something and says he'll have to train harder than ever before. Lesnar has been on this stage before but Reigns doesn't have any experience at this level. He needs to talk to people in his family to see what it's like to be there.

Reigns wants Lesnar to be bouncing around the ring and at his very best when he faces a man representing a proud family who is trying to make a better life for himself and his family. My goodness this guy is just not good at making me care about him. That's the problem with him: he's just ok at most things other than spearing people in half. He's great as a heavyweight monster, but as a humanized character, he's just stuck in the middle of the pack. Five minutes of him talking about what he needs to do didn't make me care about him any more than I did in the first place, and I can't imagine it getting better anytime soon.

Truth runs into Ambrose and says he beat Barrett for the title. Ambrose says he's coming for the belt so Truth just hands it to him. Cole: "HAHAHAHA!" And that sums up the whole thing better than I ever could.

Fandango vs. Curtis Axel

Axel shows us a clock which has him in the Royal Rumble for 32 hours, giving Cole and Lawler something else to laugh about. Fandango jumps him

to start so Axel throws him over the top. Curtis: AXELMANIA! Fandango plants him with a release suplex and the Last Dance is good for the pin at 1:03. Again, I care about the loser more than the winner.

Miz interrupts Mizdow's commercial shoot and mocks him for just ripping Miz off. The director didn't know Miz was interested in being part of this commercial and gives him the part instead. That's ANOTHER face who is treated like a loser, but at least he hasn't.....when did he last win a match? This company is really bad at setting up good guys. Of course they have to face adversity, but they really need to win once in awhile. This idea of just letting the fans carry them doesn't hold up for everyone but it seems to be all WWE is doing lately. Either that or have the champ lose every time.

Barrett will be defending the Intercontinental Title at Wrestlemania in a ladder match against an unknown number of unnamed opponents. Sheamus returns there maybe?

We get the Sting career retrospective. WWE does a lot of things wrong but they're awesome at things like this.

Adam Rose vs. Goldust

Rose has entered the Andre battle royal. Before the match we get a recap of Stardust attacking his brother on Sunday. Rose jumps him to start and charges into the powerslam for two. The Final Cut is good for the pin at 1:02.

Stardust is dressed as a monkey Rosebud and jumps Goldust.

Bray Wyatt claims that Undertaker is clinging to his legacy. He's a snake, but even the cleverest rat can only run from the snake for so long. How long does Undertaker think he can hide? Time is ticking because Wrestlemania is approaching. Come find him.

Seth Rollins/Kane/Big Show vs. Erick Rowan/Dolph Ziggler/Ryback

We get the Jon Stewart response to Rollins before the match starts. Kane headlocks Rowan to start but gets runs over by a shoulder block. A fall away slam (that's way too popular of a move these days) and jumping elbow

get two for Rowan and it's off to Ziggler for a nice response. Kane drives Dolph into the corner for a tag to Rollins, who is quickly dropped with a neckbreaker.

Big Show makes a blind tag and throws Ziggler down with a cobra clutch throw as we take a break. Back with Kane holding Ziggler in a chinlock before kicking him in the face to give Rollins two. Big Show comes back in with a headbutt to set up the Vader Bomb. Big Show: "I'M GOING TO HIT MY MOVE!" It's only good for two though and Dolph scores with a quick Fameasser but he has to add a running DDT to Kane. That's finally enough for the tag to Ryback and house is cleaned.

An overhead belly to belly sends Rollins flying into the corner and a big powerslam plants him for good measure. The Meat Hook connects but Mercury comes in for a distraction. Big Show breaks up a double Shell Shock as everything breaks down. Rollins dives onto Rowan but his Blockbuster attempt is caught in a Shell Shock. Kane makes a save but eats a Zig Zag, only to get dropped by Rollins. The Stooges are thrown in again and the distraction lets Ryback hit Shell Shock on Rollins for the pin at 11:07.

Rating: C+. Well the booking has been frustrating all night so why not job out Rollins again while trading wins in the never ending feud as well? If there's one good thing here, it's Ryback looking like a monster this whole time. However, none of this matters until it actually leads somewhere for him. Odds are he'll be put into the battle royal though and get lost in the shuffle.

Overall Rating: D+. This show was one of the most head scratching shows I've seen in a very long time. Between having the Intercontinental Title literally handed over from one guy to another in what felt like a parody sketch instead of...whatever that really was supposed to be to faces looking like hopeless losers to somehow making me feel bad for a villain to trading wins with Big Show and Kane continuing to look strong to set up whatever in the world they're going to do, this show was every problem WWE has going on right now.

The short matches are a confusing point for me. On one hand, I really don't want to see these matches keep going on and on, but at the same

time I'd like to see a match get enough time to not be a huge waste. Throw in Roman Reigns just talking for five minutes and not getting anywhere and this was a really rough show to sit through.

Results

Dean Ambrose b. Miz – Dirty Deeds

Natalya b. Naomi – Discus lariat

Daniel Bryan b. Bad News Barrett – Running knee

Fandango b. Curtis Axel – Last Dance

Goldust b. Adam Rose – Final Cut

Dolph Ziggler/Erick Rowan/Ryback b. Kane/Big Show/Seth Rollins – Shell Shock to Rollins

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<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

Monday Night Raw – February 23, 2015: Saying The Same Things In Different Voices

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 23, 2015

Location: Bridgestone Arena, Nashville, Tennessee

Commentators: Michael Cole, Booker T., John Bradshaw Layfield

We're less than five weeks away from Wrestlemania XXXI and the main event of Brock Lesnar defending his WWE World Title against Roman Reigns is set in stone as Reigns defeated Daniel Bryan last night at Fast Lane. Other than that, it seems that most of last night's matches were designed to set up rematches at some point between now and Wrestlemania. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence. That's not something you see to open the show very often anymore.

Here's Randy Orton to open the show to a VERY loud pop for the first time in four months after a Curb Stomp made him think he was Steve Austin in the sequel to a movie that didn't do well enough to warrant a sequel eight years later. He says he isn't here to deliver a twenty minute speech but he has to get something off his chest. He's been gone for the last four months and we see a clip from November of Orton taking a Curb Stomp onto the table and another on the steps.

Orton is here to tell the Authority that he's just getting started. There will be no more running and hiding for Seth Rollins, because Orton wants him out here right now. Instead he gets HHH, Stephanie, Big Show and Kane, none of whom look happy. Stephanie congratulates him on another comeback and starts a Randy chant. Orton says he isn't part of the team anymore but she's willing to forgive him. The offer of a handshake gets a no so Big Show says joining the Authority was the best decision he ever made and it would be the best one Orton can make. I'm pretty sure Show's best decision ever was filming Vince having sex with a goat. How else can you validate his continued pushes over the years?

Back to Stephanie for her evil voice as she talks about all the things Orton has done over the years, including even some things to her. And you KNOW it's serious when someone challenges Stephanie because she's the most amazing thing in the history of ever right? Apparently there's going to be a business conference on this subject later in case this segment didn't beat it over your head hard enough.

The Authority goes to leave but this segment has only gone on for thirteen minutes so it's not done yet. Orton says he'll be there and drops the mic, so now it's over. What an odd way to stretch it out even more. By that I mean it adds a little something else to the story and isn't just the same thing over and over again. This segment was exactly what gets old fast: just filling in time with the same things being said in different voices until we get to the conclusion.

Bad News Barrett vs. Dolph Ziggler

Non-title even though Barrett doesn't have his title belt after Ambrose stole it last night. Barrett's entrance takes us to a break and we come back with him in mid-promo, talking about how he's still the real champion. R-Truth is on commentary to actually tie things into his win last week. Ziggler cranks on a wristlock to start but Barrett takes him down into a chinlock.

Dolph fights up and grabs a quick neckbreaker, followed by an elbow drop for two. The champ sends him hard into the buckle for a near fall of his own before just punching Ziggler in the face. Back up and Barrett misses a big boot, tying himself up on the top rope. A dropkick sends Barrett out to the floor and us to a break. Back with Ziggler charging into the corner for right hands to the head of his own. He counters Wasteland into a DDT for two before walking into a big boot to the face.

Barrett almost falls down on a powerbomb attempt for two but the Bull Hammer is countered into a rollup for two more. Both guys miss a bunch of stuff in a fast sequence, capped off by Winds of Change getting two. The announcers freak out about R-Truth trending on Twitter as Ziggler avoids a charge into the post, setting up the Zig Zag for the pin at 11:07.

Rating: C-. The match was decent but I'm out of complaints to make about how the Intercontinental Title is being killed. Somehow, the fact that Ambrose has stolen it makes the belt look better than it has in months. Barrett has now lost to R-Truth, Dean Ambrose and Dolph Ziggler in five weeks. Imagine that happening to any WWE World Champion and watch WWE change course immediately. Instead they cranking it up, and unfortunately

I have a feeling Barrett will walk out with the title while the announcers claim he's proven something.

Ambrose comes out to hold the title in Barrett's face but Bad News doesn't do anything. Ziggler stares down Ambrose and the title.

We look back at Sting and HHH's confrontation last night with Booker T. bringing up DX invading WCW back in 1998.

It's time for the business conference in the back with Rollins and Orton present. She yells at Rollins for thinking this is about him and tells Kane off for not looking at the bigger picture. Stephanie welcomes him back with open arms and Orton shakes Rollins' hand. This would be more wasting time as everyone and their mother knows those two are fighting at Wrestlemania. Stephanie makes Orton/Rollins vs. Bryan/Reigns for tonight.

Sheamus is returning.

Prime Time Players vs. Ascension

Before the match, Ascension says the newest inductees into the Hall of Fame, the Bushwhackers, wouldn't last four seconds with them. Viktor pounds on Young in the corner to start and a big elbow knocks Darren into the ropes. A double shoulder gets two on Young and a double slam gets the same with Titus making the save. Everything breaks down and Titus is knees out to the floor, but Darren small packages Viktor for the pin and Ascension's first loss at 3:07.

Rating: D-. Good grief pick someone to be in the tag division already. We've tried the Prime Time Players already and that went nowhere, so now we're pushing them again because Young is back? I know WWE hates to admit it, but Young is one of the least interesting people on the roster. Ascension could have been an interesting change of pace had they not been massacred by commentary and old guys, but WWE never has been the best at thinking ahead.

Here's Roman Reigns for a chat. He's been on a huge ride lately and it all started back at the Royal Rumble. It wasn't enough to go through 29 other superstars though and he had to beat Daniel Bryan last night, but

that's exactly what he did. Now he's going to Wrestlemania, which the fans don't seem to have a problem with.

Before he can go on, here's Daniel Bryan to interrupt. Bryan talks about the doubters who don't believe in Roman Reigns. He saw Reigns win the Royal Rumble (fans aren't too thrilled with that) but somehow, he felt like all of these people. Inside, he booed and booed because a lot of people see potential in Reigns, but Bryan is the biggest Reigns doubter of them all. He sees all the strength and athletic ability in Reigns but he's seen so many people with those attributes but no heart.

That heart is why people like Daniel Bryan but don't like Roman Reigns. However, last night, Bryan gave it everything he had but it wasn't enough. It wasn't from a lack of trying, but due to Reigns just being too much for him. Last night, Reigns showed how much heart he had and it was enough to beat him. Bryan shakes his hand and says he'd love to team with Reigns later tonight. Now go beat up Brock Lesnar in the main event of Wrestlemania. Bryan leaves and here's Paul Heyman to talk to Reigns.

Paul comes to the ring and shakes Reigns' hand for having a great main event and victory last night. He isn't really surprised though because his money would always be on Roman Reigns against any man Reigns ever fought. Reigns vs. Sammartino in 1975, Reigns vs. Hogan and Andre in 1987, Reigns vs. Austin in 1998, Reigns vs. Rock in 1999, Reigns vs. HHH in 2000, Reigns vs. Cena anytime in the past thirteen years, Heyman would bet on Roman. His money was on Reigns at the Royal Rumble and it was on him again last night.

However, Reigns isn't fighting a man at Wrestlemania, because he's fighting a beast. Reigns has Heyman's respect, but he can't slay the beast. He can't be the one to beat the one in 21-1. Couldn't you argue that the one in 21-1 is Punk, as he's the last victory and therefore number 21? At the end of the night, the ring announcer will proclaim Brock Lesnar still WWE World Heavyweight Champion.

Reigns asks why Heyman isn't standing in front of him. He tells Heyman to keep motivating him like this because Paul was there when Reigns went face to face with Lesnar after the Royal Rumble. Lesnar better respect

him, because he isn't going to like him much after Wrestlemania. This was the latest hard sell for Wrestlemania, but I'm really hoping Lesnar wins at this point, just for the shock of it. Reigns triumphing after being set up as the conqueror doesn't work that well.

Tag Team Titles: Tyson Kidd/Cesaro vs. Usos

This is the Usos' rematch after Kidd and Cesaro took the belts last night. Cesaro quickly takes Jimmy into the corner for a tag to Kidd before taking Jimmy outside, setting up a dropkick through the ropes from Tyson. Jey runs around and climbs the steps for a clothesline to drop Cesaro. They stay outside with Kidd hiding behind his wife and sending Jimmy face first into the apron. Back in and it's Cesaro hammering Jimmy for two as things finally settle down.

We hit the chinlock for a bit before Jimmy dives over and tags Jey. Everything breaks down all over again with the Usos catching Kidd diving off the apron and throw him into the barricade. Cesaro gets backdropped on the floor as well before Jimmy gets two off a high cross body. Back from a break with Jey in trouble until he blocks Kidd's springboard elbow drop by raising his knees. Cesaro drops him with an uppercut for two though and the champs maintain control.

The Cesaro Swing into the dropkick gets two and JBL says these two have been the best teams in the company for the past year. Jey finally catches Cesaro with an electric chair drop, setting up Jimmy's Superfly Splash, only to have Kidd break it up with another springboard elbow. Apparently Kidd is legal, despite the lack of a tag. A spinning enziguri takes Kidd down and sets up the running Umaga Attack, which only hits buckle. Naomi breaks up Tyson's rollup with feet on the ropes and the girls get into it outside. Natalya crotches Jimmy though and that's a DQ at 10:30.

Rating: C+. Not as good as last night's match but it still worked well enough. That being said, I don't need to see a third match between these guys, especially after a clean pin last night and a DQ here. Kidd and Cesaro could be good champions but they need a deeper division to defend against. Like Ascension for example, but we need to push Darren Young instead of building them up.

Miz is in the back and yells at Mizdow for packing his bag wrong. The only title he hasn't won so far is the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal, which would mean even more star power. That's what Mizdow wants to talk to him about: ever since he's been hired as a personal assistant, he's been getting calls from casting directors and one of them has made Mizdow a spokesman in a commercial. Miz isn't pleased and has Mizdow lint roll his jacket. These two are pretty easily the best written characters on the show.

We look back at Bray Wyatt popping out of a casket and making it known that he wants Undertaker at Wrestlemania.

Wyatt is standing next to a casket and says this time of year must be hard for Undertaker as he's thinking about 21-1. This casket signals the end of Undertaker's career as he's been reduced to a pile of broken bones and broken dreams on the grandest stage of them all. The evil that used to exist inside Undertaker now resides in him. It's so much better down here, so come find him.

Jack Swagger vs. Stardust

Stardust is back in the full body attire after having just tights last night. They slug it out to start with Stardust hitting the drop to the mat right hand. The Swagger Bomb doesn't work but Stardust dives into the Patriot Lock. That goes nowhere but cue Goldust for a distraction and a second Patriot Lock is good for the submission at 1:58.

Here's Cena to talk about his loss last night. On the last stop on the Road to Wrestlemania, he took Rusev to his greatest limits. Cena knew he was going to be the first man to break the "Acolyte", but he never got the chance. A low blow put him down and he was never able to break the hold, but he never gave up.

Cena is fine with losing, but he's not fine with the way it happened. He calls Rusev a coward and here are the Russians. Lana says they told him so because just like all Americans, Cena gave up. Since last night, they've been receiving messages of congratulations from Putin. Last night, Rusev proved that no one can beat him so Cena needs to admit that he was defeated, just like the United States. That gets Cena's dander up

but Lana shows stills of Cena passing out in the Accolade.

Cena says his life is a lie when he refuses to get up, but he's going to keep going until he gets the job done. That's what he does and it's what America does too: they keep getting up when they have to fight. If Putin is congratulating them, he should be embarrassed. Seventy years ago, the flag was raised at Iwo Jima because that's what America does.

Cena is going to bring the US Title home to the United States because he's going to beat Rusev at Wrestlemania. Rusev asks why Cena deserves a rematch and turns him down. This is FINALLY doing the story they should have done all along. Not eye injuries or Cena is old. USA vs. those horrible Soviet scums. It's worked for like, ever, and it's going to work now.

We recap the Orton vs. Rollins stuff from earlier.

Rollins and the Stooges come in to see Orton to talk some strategy for tonight. Orton says tonight is about taking care of Bryan and Reigns, which Rollins agrees with. Not much to this segment.

Paige comes out for a match before the break, but instead we come back for a profile on Sting. It's your usual profile with the talking heads, but we also get a big feature on the war with the NWO. There's a quick mention at the end of the feud with HHH to tie it together.

Bella Twins vs. Paige/Emma

Paige tries to go after Nikki but gets shoved to the floor, allowing Brie to hit the Bella Buster on Emma for the pin at 30 seconds.

JBL thinks Paige will be back if she can find another friend. Maybe someone who could light it up with her?

Bushwhackers Hall of Fame video. There are some shots of them as the Shepherders but no mention of the team by name.

Here's Curtis Axel, now with a Hulkamania style Axelmania shirt. He was never eliminated from the match and how now lasted an unprecedented 29 days in the match. Axel enters himself into the Andre the Giant battle

royal and says you can't stop Axelmania.

Ryback vs. Curtis Axel

Axel's offer for a handshake is ignored and Ryback brings up their time as a tag team. They were one of the best teams of all time, but only Ryback will be winning the battle royal. Meat Hook and Shell Shock end Axel in 44 seconds.

Seth Rollins/Randy Orton vs. Roman Reigns/Daniel Bryan

Before the match we get a package on Rollins' feud with the Daily Show's Jon Stewart. Rollins gives a big over the top introduction for Randy, prompting everyone in his corner to applaud. Bryan and Rollins get things going with Bryan quickly trying the surfboard, sending Rollins running over for a tag. Reigns comes in as well and runs Orton over, only to charge into a dropkick. It's back to Bryan as they start working on Orton's arm and shoulder. The backbreaker makes its return to put Bryan down but he's able to backdrop Rollins to the floor. The Authority huddles up as we take a break.

Back with Reigns in trouble and Rollins putting on a chinlock. Reigns slams him down to escape and dives over for the hot tag to Bryan. Daniel speeds things up but the YES Kick is countered into a rollup. That's countered into the YES Lock but Orton makes the save. Reigns and Orton are sent to the floor with Rollins being sent out on the other side, setting up the Flying Goat.

The Stooges' distraction lets Rollins crotch Bryan on top, allowing Orton to load up a superplex. Big Show's applause isn't enough though and Bryan punches Randy down. The flying headbutt misses though and it's a double tag to bring in Rollins and Reigns. The Samoan flapjack sets up the Superman Punch to Mercury, allowing Seth to enziguri Reigns down.

Another tag brings in Orton for the Elevated DDT but Rollins tags himself in. That's not cool with Orton as he DDTs Reigns anyway but goes outside to yell at Big Show and Kane. Reigns avoids the Curb Stomp and hits the Superman Punch, only to have Bryan tag himself in, setting up the running knee for the pin on Seth at 16:13. Reigns didn't seem to mind Bryan

taking the pin.

Rating: C. Standard main event tag match here with the ending that everyone was expecting in one form or another. I'm glad Reigns vs. Bryan didn't start up again as that story needs to stay done. Orton coming back is a big deal and that's exactly what it needs to be focused on. His match with Rollins at Wrestlemania should be awesome if they can do what they should, and this was a decent enough way to set it up.

Post match Orton loads up the Punt on Rollins but stops to RKO Noble. Orton picks Rollins up in the corner...and leaves so the announcers can plug the Network's first birthday to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This is a really tricky one to grade as they went straight into Wrestlemania mode and basically jettisoned every boring method of storytelling they had been doing for months beforehand. That being said, it's still not the most interesting stuff in the world to set up.

This just doesn't feel like a good or interesting Wrestlemania, especially given how quickly they have to build to it. Five weeks just isn't enough time to do a proper build, especially after weeks of sitting through most of the same stories in the buildup to Fast Lane. This show was all about storytelling, and it has to be given how little time they have left.

Results

Dolph Ziggler b. Bad News Barrett – Zig Zag

Prime Time Players b. Ascension – Small package to Viktor

Usos b. Tyson Kidd/Cesaro via DQ when Natalya interfered

Jack Swagger b. Stardust – Patriot Lock

Bella Twins b. Paige/Emma – Bella Buster to Emma

Ryback b. Curtis Axel – Shell Shock

Daniel Bryan/Roman Reigns b. Seth Rollins/Randy Orton – Running knee to

Rollins

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Fast Lane 2015: The Best Commercial I've Ever Seen

Fast Lane 2015

Date: February 22, 2015

Location: FedEx Forum, Memphis, Tennessee

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Jerry Lawler

It's the final major show before Wrestlemania XXXI and I've yet to find someone who really wants to see this show. The big story tonight is finding out who is going to be in the main event against Brock Lesnar, as well as if Sting is going to accept HHH's likely challenge for a match at the biggest show of the year. Gee I wonder what his answer is going to be. Let's get to it.

There's no pre-show match this month but we do have MizTV with special guest Paul Heyman. Before Heyman comes out though, Miz tells Mizdow to go sit in the corner. Miz was supposed to be at the Oscars but the Academy got Dwayne Johnson to fill in for him. He explains Reigns vs. Bryan for later tonight and here's Heyman. Paul suggests that Miz is terrified of Lesnar being here because he's not a good enough actor to hide that fear.

Brock is NOT here tonight, but Miz can't get off that insult to his acting abilities. He brings up his win in the main event of Wrestlemania (he's going to catch Jericho's "I beat Rock and Austin in one night" at this pace) as a qualification for being able to ask who Lesnar wants to face this year. Miz talks up Bryan's wins last year and Heyman understands how hot Bryan is right now, but he doesn't think Brock would be worried.

Heyman gets freaked out by Mizdow sitting in the corner so Miz makes his employee face the corner. This gets Mizdow on his feet but Miz shouts him down again. Now we get back to the main event of Wrestlemania with Heyman repeating all of his lines about Reigns from the last few weeks.

The fans cut him off with a Mizdow chant so Heyman actually starts all over again. That's one way to get some heat. Heyman talks about the YES chants at Wrestlemania that will be silenced by Brock Lesnar, and you can believe that Reigns will go down as well. Paul rolls his eyes as he leaves. This felt like total filler since there aren't enough matches to go around.

The opening video has a computerized car theme, talking about speed and velocity while focusing on the two main events.

Dolph Ziggler/Erick Rowan/Ryback vs. Seth Rollins/Kane/Big Show

This was announced on WWE.com earlier in the week. Rowan now has a big R on his coveralls. Ziggler and Rollins get things going as the fans chant for Ryback. Dolph escapes a headlock and counters a powerbomb into a sunset flip. Cole brings up Rollins bringing up the Daily Show and Jon Stewart actually responding to him. A nice dropkick staggers Rollins and it's off to Rowan to work on the arm.

That's not enough for Rowan so he hooks a pumphandle backbreaker for two. I've always liked pumphandle moves and could go for more of them. Kane comes in for the battle of boring big men and Rowan slams him down, followed by a legdrop for no cover. A nice jumping middle rope back elbow gets two on Kane but he drives Rowan into the corner for the tag to Big Show.

The villains take Rowan to the floor where he spinwheel kicks the post by mistake. Another FEED ME MORE chant starts up as Lawler makes easy bald jokes about Big Show. Back in and Kane stomps Rowan in the corner before it's off to Rollins to stomp on the leg. A Blockbuster gets two more and Big Show comes back in to keep control. He hooks the Lasso From El Paso to actually show some psychology but just lets go for some reason. Rowan counters a chokeslam and plants Show with a DDT but Rollins breaks up the tag attempt.

Erick gets up though and spinwheel kicks Seth down with the bad leg. The hot tag brings in Ryback as things speed up but Rollins avoids the Warrior splash. The Curb Stomp is countered into a powerbomb but Kane takes the Meathook. There's the low superkick for two on Ryback but another Blockbuster is countered into Shell Shock but Big Show makes the save. It's off to Ziggler for a jumping DDT on Kane for two but Rollins interference allows Big Show to knock Ziggler cold, giving Kane the pin at 13:00.

Rating: B. The man is Mr. Money in the Bank and possibly the future of the company and he's now running interference for Big Show and Kane to get the glory as they pin one of the most popular guys in this company. This was your basic Smackdown main event, meaning it was entertaining enough and a good choice for a PPV opener. I'm totally sick of this story, but at least it's a good enough match.

The beating continues post match (picture any Smackdown.....if anyone actually watches that show) but Orton FINALLY returns and cleans house, sending Rollins running away. He goes all the way into the parking lot and presumably drives away though we don't see him get in a car.

We recap Stardust vs. Goldust, which is due to their issues as a tag team. Their father Dusty Rhodes tried to settle things on Monday but Stardust attacked his brother, setting up this match.

Dusty is in the back with Goldust and asks him not to hurt Cody too badly tonight. Goldust talks about going to the shows with Cody to watch Dusty in the ring. Tonight, he's facing Stardust though, and he has to beat him so badly that the thought of painting his face and putting on a costume

will make Cody sick. He isn't leaving without Cody tonight.

Stardust vs. Goldust

Stardust is now in star tights and no shirt. Goldust shoves him out of the corner to start and neither guy seems comfortable to be out there. They trade hiptosses and Stardust hides in the corner for some polite applause. An atomic drop and right hand have Stardust in more trouble but Stardust escapes the Curtain Call. We see a nervous Dusty watching in the back. Goldust clotheslines him out to the floor before loading up Shattered Dreams, only to have Stardust bail to the apron.

Back in and Stardust finally gets some energy into the match and stomps away, taking it back to the floor. This isn't very interesting so far but it's not the worst thing I've ever seen. Back in and we hit a bodyscissors on Goldust before a rollup gets two for Stardust. A slap to the back sets up another body vise as the fans can't decide who to cheer for. Goldust misses a springboard elbow but counters Cross Rhodes into a bad looking crucifix for two, which is called three in what looked to be a botched ending at 10:00. The referee's hand only hit the mat twice.

Rating: D. I think they were going for Goldust not wanting to do this, but it came off as much more boring and dull than anything else. At the end of the day, these sort of matches don't hold up for me with neither guy wanting to do much and clearly just being there to set up another match down the line. Nothing to see here other than a good looking change of outfit for Stardust, who wound up losing.

We see Jon Stewart of the Daily Show responding to Seth Rollins. Seth has made a big mistake by coming after the Daily Show and even J and J Security can't get him out of it. Stewart is coming for him.

Rollins says he's not hard to find and welcomes Stewart to Fast Lane or any Raw he has time to come to.

Goldust and Dusty are in the back and hope it's over but Stardust comes in and destroys his brother. He yells at Dusty that he was the black sheep of the family before nailing Goldust again.

Tag Team Titles: Usos vs. Tyson Kidd/Cesaro

The Usos are defending after Cesaro and Kidd beat them in a non-title match. Naomi and Natalya are here as seconds. Jey takes Kidd down to start and holds him for a top rope shot to the chest from Jimmy. It's off to Cesaro via a blind tag and he takes out Jimmy's knee to take over. Kidd goes after the knee and Cesaro follows suit with a one legged swing.

Back to Kidd with a slingshot legdrop for two. Notice how much they're mixing up the offense on the leg. You don't have to take turns doing the same holds over and over again. Jimmy gets over for the tag to speed things up but Cesaro grabs a quick rollup for two. The running Umaga attack gets two on Cesaro but he crotches Jimmy on the top. Cesaro lifts Jimmy off the apron for a superplex, setting up the top rope elbow from Kidd for two.

Jey escapes the Sharpshooter and throws Kidd into the air for a Samoan drop from Jimmy, only to have Cesaro drag Kidd outside. That's fine with Jimmy as he hits a huge dive. A Samoan drop drives Kidd into the barricade and all four are down outside. Back in and Jimmy's Superfly Splash hits knees and Kidd slaps on the Sharpshooter. Jey makes the save and slugs it out with Cesaro but they fall to the floor. With Jimmy still shaken up, Kidd hits a quick fisherman's neckbreaker for the pin and the titles at 9:35.

Rating: B-. Another good match here and I'm very pleased with the results. Kidd has gotten a lot better in the last few months and it's nice to see him get rewarded for all the hard work. The Usos can only do their thing for so long before they need a freshening up and this might be such a chance. Another good result after another good match.

We recap Sting interrupting HHH at Survivor Series and then again on Raw a few months later, setting up their confrontation tonight.

HHH comes out in his leather jacket and jeans for a change. He brings up the meeting with Flair on Raw and calls out Sting right now, so here's Sting in person. HHH knows why he's here and thinks Sting is backing the wrong horse. Sting may have been WCW but he went down with the ship.

It was guys like HHH that made the ship go down in the first place because his family is what keeps the WWE alive. So HHH is now taking credit for killing WCW? He wasn't even in the Winner Take All match. If Sting just walks away now, his legacy goes on. He can continue through DVDs and merchandise, and maybe even the Hall of Fame one day.

HHH takes off the jacket and says we can do it another way. He goes for a cheap shot but Sting lays him out, only to eat a microphone shot to the face. It's sledgehammer time but Sting pulls out the ball bat. HHH throws the hammer down and Sting points the bat at the Wrestlemania sign. Sting turns away but hits HHH with the bat while he's trying a cheap shot. The Death Drop leaves HHH laying. This was exactly what people expected but it worked well enough. The hammer vs. the bat was really cool to see.

We recap the pre-show edition of MizTV.

Quick recap of the Bellas embarrassing Paige.

Divas Title: Paige vs. Nikki Bella

Paige is challenging. Lillian screws up again and calls it the Women's Title. Paige quickly takes it to the mat and Nikki rolls to the floor. A chase gets us back inside but Nikki knocks her right back to the floor. Back in again and we hit the chinlock before an Alabama Slam gets two on Paige.

Nikki charges into a boot in the corner before Paige hits the three straight clotheslines. A dropkick gets two and Paige kicks her in the face for the same. The Rampaige is countered into a facebuster but Paige pops right back up. Nikki counters a superplex into a nice powerbomb for two but has to crawl to the ropes to escape the PTO. In a fast ending, Nikki sends her into the buckle and grabs the trunks for the pin to retain at 5:37.

Rating: D+. Believe it or not, this wasn't horrible, but I think most of that is due to Paige holding the thing together. The Bellas (they're the same person in my eyes anyway) know how to do some decent looking moves, but they don't know how to work a match. That's a very big difference and it shows badly when they're in there against well rounded wrestlers.

Cameron and Eva Marie are at the Oscars.

Sting vs. HHH is officially announced for Wrestlemania.

Intercontinental Title: Dean Ambrose vs. Bad News Barrett

Ambrose pinned Barrett in a non-title match (join the freaking club) and literally forced him into signing a contract for a title match. Dean goes right after him to start but gets kicked off the top rope and out to the floor. A chinlock doesn't last long and Barrett kicks him in the face again to stop Dean's comeback. Back in and Dean scores with a tornado DDT before countering Winds of Change into a small package for two.

The standing elbow drop gets two more but Dean runs into Wasteland. They're just trading signature moves right now. The Bull Hammer is countered into a rollup for two and Dean kicks him in the face for no cover. Barrett tries to bail but gets caught by a suicide dive. Dean pulls him back from the crowd and stomps away in the corner for the DQ at 7:46.

Rating: D. This felt like a Raw match to set up a pay per view match, reenforcing my theory that this show could have been broken up into a bunch of Raws instead of being its own pay per view. Nothing to see here and it was pretty clear about halfway through that it was going to be a screwy finish.

Dean hits Dirty Deeds and leaves with the title.

The lights go out and Undertaker's druids come out with their torches. The gong strikes and two hooded men wheel out a casket. The casket opens up and it's Bray Wyatt inside. He says he will never forget the first time that he saw him. He made Bray tremble with his cold eyes but now he's just a shell of his former self. His soul is lost and it's time to go home. Bray's mission is clear because he doesn't fear him anymore. At Wrestlemania, he will claim the Undertaker's soul. Bray lays back down in the casket and the druids close it up.

The pre-show panel recap the evening so far.

We recap Cena vs. Rusev, which is based on the idea of Cena reaching the

end of his career and being far weaker than he used to be. The eye injury has been forgotten in the span of a week.

US Title: Rusev vs. John Cena

Rusev is defending. They stall to start and the fans think Cena sucks. A big right hand drops Rusev so he kicks Cena in the face for two. The champ chokes him in the corner and nails a spinwheel kick for two more. A Jerry chant starts up as a fan takes pictures of Lana. Cena comes back with a dropkick for two of his own but Rusev hits a slightly worse dropkick for two more.

The fall away slam gets yet another near fall and Rusev slowly stomps away even more. Cena charges into an elbow in the corner and we hit the chinlock. A suplex puts Rusev down but the AA is countered with a DDT. Back up and Cena fires off right hands before starting his usual sequence. Another AA is countered into the jumping superkick for two. The STF doesn't work either and Rusev hits a swinging Rock Bottom for two more.

Cena goes to the middle rope for a tornado DDT but still can't put Rusev away. They slug it out and Rusev grabs the ropes to block another AA attempt. Cena pulls him into a Crossface (called an STF by Cole) but Rusev easily powers out and hits the second Alabama (Moscow?) Slam of the night. Some elbows to the back look to set up the Accolade but Cena blocks a stomp (it could have been the shouting of RUSEV CRUSH) and slaps on the STF.

Rusev finally grabs a rope and escapes the AA again but misses the superkick. Now the AA connects for two (I'm as shocked as you are) and both guys are spent. The top rope Fameasser misses though and Rusev hooks the Accolade. Cena has his knees under him though and powers up, only to have Lana offer a distraction so Rusev can kick him low. Another superkick to the face sets up the Accolade and Cena passes out at 19:00.

Rating: B. Good freaking grief STOP USING PAY PER VIEW TO SET UP REMATCHES. They're making it as clear as they can that this show is just a big preview for Wrestlemania and they can claim "you didn't have to pay for it." Unless you're loyal to WWE of course and actually bought the

Network before the free month. This took some time to get going but finally took off about halfway through. Of course it sets up Cena's big win at Wrestlemania, but this is a good win for Rusev. Granted it's on a worthless show but at least it's there.

Cena is dazed post match.

Kickoff panel recaps again.

We recap Reigns vs. Bryan, which is all about headlining Wrestlemania against Brock Lesnar. They started off respecting each other but it's evolved into a game of topping each other to play mind games.

Roman Reigns vs. Daniel Bryan

The previous match got big match intros but this didn't get anything. Good sign in the crowd: PUNCH THAT HIPPIE! Bryan keeps getting down low on the mat to avoid Roman's power in a smart move. A headlock slows Reigns down a bit but he counters into one of his own. Daniel goes for the leg and takes Reigns down into the surfboard but Reigns easily kicks him away. Roman stomps him down in the corner without showing a lot of aggression.

A nice tilt-a-whirl slam and clothesline put Bryan on the floor but he comes back with kicks to the leg to slow Reigns down again. That's fine with Roman who just blasts Bryan with a right hand to the jaw as they're getting a good story going here. Back up again and Reigns hits the jumping clothesline but misses a charge into the corner. Another clothesline turns Bryan inside out and Reigns starts rolling some pumphandle suplexes. The Superman Punch is countered with a kick to the ribs.

Some knees to the ribs have Reigns in even more trouble and the running corner dropkicks stagger him again. Bryan tries a top rope hurricanrana but gets caught in a superbomb for a close two as things are starting to get good. Reigns loads up a top rope superplex but gets crotched down, setting up a belly to back superplex to stay on the weakened midsection. The YES Lock goes on but Reigns gets the rope and bails to the floor.

Bryan hits back to back Flying Goats but tries once too often and gets belly to belly suplexed. The spear hits the steps though and Reigns barely beats the count back in. Bryan dives into something resembling the Superman Punch for two. The spear is countered into a rollup but the running knee only gets a very near fall. The YES Kicks have Reigns reeling but he blocks the big one.

Bryan slaps him in the face on one leg before pulling Reigns down into a YES Lock. Reigns turns it over and hammers away right hands to stun Bryan again. He lifts Bryan up into a powerbomb and both guys are down. Bryan's legs are over Reigns but the referee doesn't count it as a cover. Both guys sit up and Reigns hammers away with right hands so Bryan just unloads with kicks to the head to put him down again. Another running knee is countered with the spear though to send Reigns to Wrestlemania at 20:04.

Rating: A-. I actually really like that ending because storyline wise, Bryan has very little claim to a spot in the main event at Wrestlemania. This is the big win that Reigns needed to look like a star and he certainly delivered his half. They were telling a good story out there with Bryan trying to pick Reigns apart but eventually just getting run over by raw power. Excellent main event here and it did what it was supposed to do.

Bryan pokes Reigns in the chest and tells him to take out Lesnar at Wrestlemania. They shake hands and Bryan lets Reigns celebrate to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This show was good in spite of itself because of some really solid wrestling. Unfortunately, the total lack of need to have this show really hurts it though as this simply didn't need to be a pay per view. Reigns should have eliminated Bryan last from the Rumble and the exact same things could have been accomplished on TV. The wrestling carried this, but there was no way to care about a lot of the stuff on this show. Think about it like this: other than the Tag Team Titles and the Divas, every match on here (or the post match segment) seemed to be to set up a future match. That's inexcusable for a big time show.

Results

Kane/Big Show/Seth Rollins b. Dolph Ziggler/Ryback/Erick Rowan – Kane pinned Ziggler after a KO Punch from Big Show

Goldust b. Stardust – Crucifix

Tyson Kidd/Cesaro b. Usos – Fisherman's neckbreaker to Jimmy

Nikki Bella b. Paige – Rollup with a handful of trunks

Bad News Barrett b. Dean Ambrose via DQ when Ambrose wouldn't stop stomping

Rusev b. John Cena – Accolade

Roman Reigns b. Daniel Bryan – Spear

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Fast Lane 2015 Preview

It says a lot that I had completely forgotten this show was tomorrow night. Fast Lane is a show that really doesn't need to exist and most of these matches could have easily been done as big time Raw main events over the course of a few weeks. Instead though they need a way to bulk up the Network subscriptions, and to be fair the free month for Survivor Series was an amazing success. This show really isn't doing much for me

though so let's get to it.

We'll start with the match recently added: a six man tag between Kane/Big Show/Seth Rollins vs. Ryback/Dolph Ziggler/Erick Rowan. This match makes sense because the Survivor Series WILL NEVER DIE. It was also odd that you had these six guys all sitting around doing nothing so why not just get a big tag match to put them all on the show? It's definitely the most logical move they could go with and avoids repeats of singles matches we've already seen for a change.

As for the winners, of course it's the Authority, because we have to keep Big Show and Kane looking strong see. Oh and that Rollins guy gets to get a nice rub too. Rollins hasn't had much to do since the Rumble and it really goes to show you how up and down the booking is. Yeah he's beaten Ziggler a few times, but who hasn't at this point? Rowan is done to say the least, but Ryback has been treated as a pretty big deal since he's been back. Still though, the Authority wins and they win without much trouble.

I'll take Stardust over Goldust, likely setting up a Wrestlemania rematch for Goldust's career. The guy has been around forever and would be excellent for an agent's job. Stardust needs a win to establish himself as a singles guy, which could be interesting if they let him run with it.

Usos retain the titles because Cesaro and Kidd are just there to give the smarks something to cheer for. Not that it matters anyway as the Ascension is waiting in the wings to take the belts. I wouldn't mind a more interesting story for the titles, but at least it's based on something that happened in WWE rather than the stupid reality show.

Ambrose somehow loses the title shot because Barrett has lost almost everything leading up to this match, so why not just let him keep the title? Besides, Ambrose hasn't won on pay per view since...well since the Shield was around actually. Couple that with him not winning a singles pay per view match since Night of Champions 2013 and there's no reason to think he should win tomorrow night.

Speaking of horrible stories that make my soul hurt and have no basis in logic or reasoning while involving babbling morons who are a disgrace to

their far more talented NXT counterparts but fill out tight tops and shorts better and therefore are more entitled to a spot on the main roster, Nikki retains the title over Paige because TOTAL DIVAS MEANS THEY'RE SO TOTALLY CELEBRITIES and since that show is about the Bellas, they're more important than Paige. Or something.

I'll actually take Rusev to keep the title, albeit not in a straight finish. This screams Wrestlemania rematch, which isn't something I care for most of the time. They also seem to be having some issues with how this match is booked, as the eye injury has been forgotten and for some reason they're not just going with America vs. Russia, which has worked for the better part of eternity. Instead it's "Cena is suddenly old, even though no one but Vince thinks that", which is a pretty lame storyline. Anyway, Rusev retains and Cena gets his big win at Wrestlemania...in theory. I'd love to see Rusev beat him on the big stage.

That leaves us with Bryan vs. Reigns for the Mania title shot, and I really think they're going with the triple threat. It would fit perfectly with this show meaning nothing, so why not just have them go with that and put Bryan in the title match? It makes sense (or as much sense as this story can make) and gets us where we need to go. Reigns vs. Lesnar wouldn't work on its own nearly as well, but it's clear that this Wrestlemania is going to suffer from them not knowing where they want to go, at least on paper.

Oh and HHH calls out Sting. They'll talk, they'll talk some more, they'll pretend the Invasion wasn't a thing, Sting will punch him a few times, a match will be made for Wrestlemania, it will take about three times longer than it should.

Overall, as I've mentioned more than once in the preview, this show doesn't need to exist. It's there because the Network needs something to hype up and doesn't make sense with the storylines they have. It's a weak card which will likely lead us to a weak Wrestlemania, so why would I want to see this? I'll be watching, but I think the Oscars are going to distract me from this dull show more than once.

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