

Monday Night Raw – September 5, 2016: A Labor Of Boredom

Monday Night Raw

Date: September 5, 2016

Location: Sprint Center Arena, Kansas City, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

We're in the Kevin Owens Era but the questions remain focused on HHH, who helped Owens win the title last week while also costing Seth Rollins and Roman Reigns at the same time. This almost has to set up a big match in the very near future though it's really not clear gets to fight whom. Let's get to it.

The opening video looks at the last five minutes of Raw and focuses on the big online reaction.

Earlier today Stephanie McMahon demanded a big celebration for Owens. Mick Foley came up and looked really upset. Last week, HHH made him look like a fool and Stephanie won't talk to him about it. Stephanie gets all serious when Foley accuses her of knowing what HHH was going to do. Stephanie: "Who do you think you're talking to?" Oh here we go.

Foley actually cuts her off and tells a story about meeting Stephanie just after he flew off the Cell in 1998 and thought she was an innocent girl. Stephanie almost sounds vulnerable as she asks how she can maintain a shred of dignity after what happened last week. Mick believes her but gives a thinly veiled threat if this is all a lie.

Opening sequence.

Mick and Stephanie are in the ring and welcome Owens (in a SUIT) as the balloons fall and pyro goes off. Owens agrees that he does deserve this before ripping into the fans for making it all about themselves with the YOU DESERVE IT chants. He's known that since the day he set foot in this ring and doesn't need the fans to tell him that all over again. Last week he beat three superstars to win this title and yeah he got a little nudge

from HHH.

Owens had already done 98% of the work though so tonight it's officially the Kevin Owens Show. This brings out a ticked off Rollins to say this isn't about Owens. Instead he goes off on Stephanie for letting him down last week. Owens says this isn't about Seth but Rollins keeps going on his rampage and says everyone is in Stephanie's pocket. Kevin has been HHH's chosen one since the day he debuted in NXT but Seth is here to burn the whole thing to the ground.

Owens thinks Rollins has only been making plans for failures so Seth punches him in the face. Stephanie suspends Seth indefinitely but Foley immediately overturns it, drawing him one of the loudest pops he's gotten in years. Instead of suspending him, Foley gives Seth (Foley to Seth: "I've never really liked you.") the title match at Clash of the Champions.

This was good stuff for the most part, assuming you can ignore HHH helping Rollins last week not being brought up. Rollins seemingly turning face (or at least starting it off) is a really good thing and WAY overdue but it certainly seems to be a slower burn than a full on version. Either way, Clash just got a lot better looking on paper.

After a break, Stephanie and Foley are yelling at each other (Stephanie's third appearance in twenty three minutes) when Owens comes up. Foley gives him a match against Sami Zayn, which draws in Jericho. Chris gets in a hilarious line by calling Owens the longest reigning Universal Champion in history. That earns him a match against Rollins later.

Charlotte vs. Bayley

Non-title and Charlotte has given Dana a clipboard to take notes. Bayley starts in on the arm and throws some Japanese armdrags, only to have Charlotte send her face first into the buckle. That just fires Bayley up and she sends Charlotte into the buckles a few times instead. Charlotte heads outside and Bayley tries a dropkick under the ropes (think Sami's diving DDT) but leaves it way short, leaving her to just kick Charlotte in the chest instead. Bayley is favoring her knee as we go to a break.

Back with Charlotte holding the figure four neck lock and actually getting two off a rollup. Charlotte slams the bad leg into the corner and then wraps it around the leg. That sets up a half crab and DDT on the knee but Bayley grabs a rollup to break the momentum. Some limping ax handles to the chest have Charlotte in trouble but Dana pulls Charlotte out of the way of an elbow. Somehow that's not a DQ so Bayley kicks Charlotte into Dana and hits the Bayley to Belly for the pin at 12:40.

Rating: C+. The important thing here is the time. This match worked because it had some time to set up the leg injury and the ending made sense (save for ANOTHER lack of a disqualification) due to the extra focus it received. You can't do anything important in a four minute match and it helped so much to actually let this thing go somewhere for a change. Good stuff and the PPV rematch is obvious.

Connor's Cure video for children's cancer awareness month.

Charlotte yells at Dana, who promises to make up for it. That earns her one heck of a slap in the face.

Bo Dallas vs. Kyle Roberts

Bo is all serious here despite holding up a BELIEVE IN B0 sign (please don't let this be ANOTHER political themed character) He takes Roberts down and hammers away before snapping off some knees to the face. A Roll of the Dice (as Cole described it) puts Roberts away in 38 seconds.

Owens and Jericho fire each other up.

Chris Jericho vs. Seth Rollins

Rollins starts fast with a dropkick and sends Jericho outside for a suicide dive. Oh yeah he's wrestling like a face. Back in and Jericho slaps him a few times as the fans aren't sure who to cheer for. Jericho sends him face first into the buckle and we take a break. Back with Rollins hammering away and getting two off the Sling Blade. A Blockbuster gets the same and Rollins might as well have a big sign saying YEP I'M A FACE NOW around his neck.

Rollins dropkicks him out of the air but gets caught in the Walls. That

goes as far as you would expect and Rollins' low superkick gets two. Rollins gets caught on top but still shoves Jericho off, only to miss the frog splash. The Lionsault gets a close two as this is really picking up. The Codebreaker is broken up and a Pedigree puts Jericho away at 13:47.

Rating: B. Anyone who has watched Rollins for years now has known he would be an awesome face and that's certainly what you got here. Rollins looked great out there and he's just so easy to cheer with this offense. I don't think he gets the title back at Clash but it's going to be fun watching him in this new role.

Cesaro vs. Sheamus

Match #3 in the series with Cesaro down 2-0 and coming in with a bad shoulder/back. Cesaro grabs some rollups for early near falls but a backdrop has him in trouble. Sheamus sends the back into the apron and drives in some knees. The Cloverleaf is blocked but Sheamus grabs four straight Irish Curses for a near fall. With that not working, Sheamus lifts him up for the Celtic Cross but drops it down into a backbreaker. The Brogue Kick makes it 3-0 to Sheamus at 4:06.

Rating: C. Well that happened and I really don't care. Thank goodness the fourth match is at a house show on Wednesday so I don't have to put up with seeing them again that many times. The back injury is fine but my goodness I've seen enough of these matches for my lifetime. It really feels like a way to give the writers a month off and that gets old in a hurry.

Shining Stars vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Before the match, Enzo thinks he's in labor so Cass, who has watched a lot of ER, performs Lamaze with HOW YOU DOING replacing the "hoo hoo" part. Enzo and Cass take over to start and it's off to a quick break. Back with Enzo in trouble but avoiding a Primo charge and making the hot tag off to Cass. The Bada Boom Shaka Lacka is broken up and Epico rolls Enzo up with a handful of trunks at 7:05. Too much was in the break to rate but I'd again like to point out that NO ONE CARES ABOUT THE SHINING STARS.

Sami Zayn says his career has been stuck in place since he beat Owens, who is now the Universal Champion. Owens comes in and laughs at the idea that Sami is chasing him now. The race will never be over and Sami says he'll win the title on his own, without HHH handing it to him on a silver platter.

Nia Jax vs. Ann Esposito

Apparently Ann is friends Alicia Fox. Nia throws her around to start but gets caught in a sleeper to actually put her in trouble. That earns Ann a ram into the corner and a throw to the mat, followed by three straight Umaga attacks in the corner. A fireman's carry into a powerslam (with a pause before the powerslam) ends Ann at 1:38.

It's time for Anderson and Gallows to not be funny. Now they're retirement specialists who have already gotten rid of the Dudley Boyz, so now let's welcome the OLD DAY. Cue some New Day impersonators (one on a motorized scooter, one on a walker and one on a cane) to a slow motion version of their theme. The crowd is just silent for this as the Old Day says everything changed for them at Clash of Champions. We get every old person joke you can imagine, including Big E.'s hips going out as he does the swivel.

Cue the real New Day to ask which X-Man is their favorite. For some reason it's Cyclops...which isn't all that funny. Kofi thinks there's a paradox taking place here and if the New Day comes into contact with the Old Day, the WWE Universe will explode. Anderson and Gallows bail and dancing ensues, only to have Old Day's sneak attack completely fail. The old guys are beaten down to finally wrap this up. This went on WAY too long and it just wasn't very funny.

We look back at the opening sequence.

Darren Young vs. Jinder Mahal

Titus O'Neil is on commentary for reasons of pure torture. Darren gets an early two off a swinging neckbreaker but has to fight out of a chinlock. Titus goes out to ringside as Darren hits the Gut Check for the pin at 2:15.

Darren and Titus fight again after the match.

Alicia Fox checks on her injured friend when Nia Jax, who just happened to be there, shows up and laughs. Total Divas is mentioned and Fox yells a lot while throwing things. Nia just leaves as she goes nuts.

Braun Strowman vs. Sin Cara

Well it's better than jobber after jobber. Cara is fighting due to Braun ripping off the luchador's mask last week. A dropkick sends Braun into the corner but he explodes out with a shoulder. We hit the neck crank and nerve hold for a bit before Braun sends him outside. Cara is tossed into the steps but comes back with a dropkick, only to be whipped into the barricade for the countout at 2:11. Are we really going to have to watch this again next week? Really?

Strowman beats Cara up even worse post match.

Here's Sasha Banks for an announcement. She talks about how every story has an ending before talking about the Divas Revolution. Back in July 2015, Stephanie McMahon (oh yeah) introduced the Divas Revolution and it was a new era without bra and panties matches (which there hadn't been in YEARS) and no more butterfly title (not for about nine months actually).

This revolution was about every little girl and every person who has been told they're not enough. She used to collect soda cans to try to save up enough money to come to a WWE event. Sasha starts crying as she talks about being injured at Summerslam and she has an update on her condition. Cue Dana Brooke to say she's going to use Sasha's broken body to finish what Charlotte started at Summerslam. Dana goes after Sasha but gets caught in a Bank Statement. The bad news was for Charlotte, who will be facing Sasha at Clash of Champions.

Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens

Non-title. They start slugging it out at the bell and it's quickly outside with Sami going shoulder first into the barricade. Sami does his moonsault off the barricade (and kicks Owens square in the face) as we take a break. Back with Sami fighting out of a chinlock and sending Owens

to the floor for back to back flip dives.

The Blue Thunder Bomb gets two but Owens rolls to the apron before the Helluva Kick. A Stunner over the ropes has Sami in trouble but the half and half suplex gets two on the champ. Sami climbs the ropes but lands on a bad ankle. Owens can't hit the apron powerbomb so Sami grabs another half and half to drop Kevin on his head. Back in and the ankle gives out again, setting up the Pop Up Powerbomb for the pin on Sami at 13:05.

Rating: B-. This was their usual good match but you knew Owens wasn't going to lose his first match as the champion. Sami will probably get his title match at some point in the future and that's going to be one heck of a rollercoaster when they finally get there. Good stuff here though but this show is way past saving.

Post match here's Roman Reigns to a LOUD chorus of booing. Chris Jericho comes out to have Owens' back but Foley prevents the violence. Next week it's Roman vs. Owens and if Reigns wins, it's a triple threat at Clash of the Champions. They had that same booking idea recently on Smackdown and it's still overdone here. Reigns spears Jericho to let off some steam and end the show.

Overall Rating: D. This show hit a wall in the middle and it just never recovered. That being said, it's not like they had that much good going on in the first place. I liked the opening sequence and there was some good wrestling in the middle but pretty much everything from Cesaro vs. Sheamus until the main event was just death. Then again this is a holiday show and no one is going to watch it but it gets really tiring watching a badly bloated show with so little effort from the creative side of things.

Results

Bayley b. Charlotte – Bayley to Belly

Bo Dallas b. Kyle Roberts – Roll of the Dice

Seth Rollins b. Chris Jericho – Pedigree

Sheamus b. Cesaro – Brogue Kick

Shining Stars b. Enzo Amore/Big Cass – Rollup with a handful of trunks

Nia Jax b. Ann Esposito – Powerslam

Darren Young b. Jinder Mahal – Gut Check

Braun Strowman b. Sin Cara via countout

Kevin Owens b. Sami Zayn – Pop Up Powerbomb

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New Column: The Kevin Owens and Triple H and Seth Rollins and Roman Reigns Show

A column about the last five minutes of Raw.

<http://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-the-kevin-owens-and-triple-h-and-seth-rollins-and-roman-reigns-show/>

Monday Night Raw – August 29, 2016: It's His Show And We're Just Watching It

Monday Night Raw

Date: August 29, 2016

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

It's a big night this week as we're guaranteed a new Raw World Champion in a fatal fourway with Kevin Owens, Big Cass, Roman Reigns and Seth Rollins facing off for the title. It's hard to say what we're going to get at Clash of the Champions in about a month so hopefully we can start setting some stuff up tonight. Let's get to it.

In Memory of Mr. Fuji.

We recap Balor's shoulder injury and the setup for tonight's title match.

All four World Title participants for the title are in the ring with Corey Graves moderating. Rollins cuts him off and says they're all here because of him so he'll cede his time to someone else. Owens talks about how he's a prize fighter and tonight he's fighting for a prize. That leaves Reigns, who Owens just allows to be booed.

Cass is tall...and that's about it. Cass: "Did Jericho write that for you?" Cass says he's the biggest dog in this fight, causing Owens to point to Reigns. Seth is glad that this is an elimination match so he can beat up all of them in one night. A brawl breaks out with Reigns and Cass having a staredown before the ring is cleared. I'm glad they kept this short since no one said anything important and it was just hype for the main event.

Neville vs. Chris Jericho

Before the match, Jericho says Owens will win tonight but promises everyone the Gift of Jericho. This is their first match since Neville broke his ankle back in the spring. A catapult puts Jericho on the floor early but he hides behind the ref to get in a cheap shot and send us to a break. Back with Jericho putting on a chinlock but diving into a kick to the ribs.

Neville moonsaults out to the floor and avoids a charge into the corner, setting up a small package for two. A superkick drops Jericho and I'm very surprised at how hot the crowd is despite such a big main event. The Red Arrow misses and the Liontamer make Neville tap at 10:50.

Rating: C+. I continue to be very glad that Neville can do more things than just the Red Arrow as those one spot guys can get lost in the shuffle quickly. Neville being a main eventer was a long shot at best but he's fine in the midcard where he could pull off an upset and most people wouldn't be that shocked.

Earlier today Bayley met the New Day and dancing ensues until Dana Brooke comes up, setting up a six person tag along with Gallows and Anderson. The key here: it didn't feel scripted. Instead it seems like the producer said "Bayley runs into the New Day and you've got two minutes. Go." That works so much better than scripting out the jokes and gives you entertaining things like this.

Nia Jax vs. Haion

Jax runs her over and finishes with an AA into a powerslam at 1:15.

Anderson and Gallows now run a retirement home and suggest that New Day will be joining Team 3D. Nurse Dana Brooke comes in and puts on a rubber glove.

Video on Seth Rollins.

Sami Zayn vs. Jinder Mahal

Sami has a bad ankle coming in and he tweaks it early on, allowing Mahal

to smack him in the back of the head for two. A chinlock doesn't go very far and Sami comes back with the Helluva Kick for the pin at 3:06.

Rating: C. I'm still waiting for an explanation of why they brought Mahal back. He's fine enough for a warm body but of all people, Jinder Mahal? Anyway I'm assuming this is the start of something for Sami as the announcers kept talking about how he wanted the title. If Owens wins it tonight, there's no logical reason to not do Sami vs. Owens at Clash of the Champions.

Earlier tonight Sasha Banks was on the pre-show, saying that Charlotte was trying to injure her and end her career. Sasha will be back for revenge and the title.

New Day/Bayley vs. Dana Brooke/Anderson and Gallows

Charlotte is on commentary and doesn't think much of Bayley putting on a unicorn horn and eating Booty0's. The women start with Bayley getting some quick two counts before working on the arm. It's quickly off to Big E. for a belly to belly (gimmick infringer) on Anderson as the champs take over. That lasts all of a few seconds before the villains beat him down in the corner. The hot (or at least moderately warm) tag brings in Kofi for the Unicorn Stampede, including a running dropkick from Bayley. Some dancing sends us to a break.

Back with the camera on the commentators as the match is going on behind them. I smell Kevin Dunn's fingers all over this. We actually look at the match to see Kofi in trouble and getting elbowed in the face. Kofi gets in a double stomp and makes the tag to Big E. for the house cleaning. Everything breaks down and Kofi does an insane dive over the top, nearly breaking his arm in the process. Back in and Dana gets two off a rollup, only to have the Bayley to Belly wrap it up at 12:28.

Rating: C+. The crowd was digging the heck out of this and I can't blame them a bit. This was the perfect match for Bayley as New Day is over by definition and she fits in perfectly with them. Bayley gets another win to help set up her title match at Clash of the Champions and Anderson and Gallows save face. Good stuff all around and a fun match.

Cesaro says no one likes Sheamus so he'll spin him around and around and around.

Video on Big Cass.

Cesaro vs. Sheamus

Match #2 in a best of seven series with Sheamus up 1-0. Before the match, Sheamus says he'll prove that he's just the better man. Cesaro takes him down to the mat to start and gets two off a double stomp. Sheamus' arm is banged up and the announcers want the match stopped to check it.

Thankfully it's a dropkick to send Sheamus outside and we take a break.

Back with the Irish Curse getting two but Cesaro comes right back by hitting the springboard corkscrew uppercut. The high cross body connects (check your Bingo card) and Cesaro sends it outside. That goes well for Sheamus who backdrops him back first into the post, setting up the Cloverleaf for the submission at 11:15.

Rating: C+. Points for putting a story into the series with Cesaro's back injury though I'm still having issues getting interested in even more of these matches. WWE has a real problem of just having the same match over and over and then wondering why it stops being interesting in the process. Make it best of three or just do a 2/3 falls match or something but having it go twice that long doesn't seem like the best move.

Tribute video to Mr. Fuji and it's as good as you would expect from WWE.

Video on Kevin Owens.

Braun Strowman vs. Americo

Standard masked luchador. It's the squash you would expect with Strowman throwing him around and tossing him into the air for a faceplant and the pin at 58 seconds.

Strowman unmaskes him post match.

Here's Stephanie McMahon to address Shane McMahon getting F5'd at Summerslam, but first she has to say we're about to crown the "first"

Universal Champion. Paul Heyman cuts her off but Stephanie is right there to cut his balls off by demanding an apology. Heyman talks about how Lesnar provides value to Raw and is here to pay Lesnar's \$500 fine. He pulls out a pile of \$1 bills but Stephanie throws them onto the floor. Stephanie wants to know what value Heyman offers to Raw and warns him of a coming storm.

Heyman goes into a rant about the board of directors and how Stephanie can control everyone but Lesnar. For some reason this turns into a discussion on female empowerment with Stephanie saying Heyman is staring at the women's revolution. Heyman apologizes to her and she accepts before dropping the mic and leaving. With Stephanie gone, Heyman chuckles and smirks.

Video on Balor's injury and surgery.

Video on Roman Reigns.

Titus O'Neil vs. Darren Young

The aggressive Young knocks Titus to the floor where he asks for a timeout. Back in and a hard whip sends Darren over the corner where he lands on a camera to break it into pieces. Some neck cranks don't go anywhere so Young crucifixes him for the pin at 4:04.

Rating: D-. Can ANYONE explain why this feud is still going or why I'm supposed to care about them fighting over and over again? Neither guy is interesting and it seems like a character that exists for the sake of the Presidential elections and nothing more. Total filler here and it's getting more and more annoying every match.

Backlund and Young celebrate so Titus beats them both up.

Mick Foley apologizes for not being out there for Stephanie but she didn't need him. He suggests that everyone is barred from ringside tonight and again Stephanie says it's the first Universal Title match. Rollins comes in and Stephanie wishes him luck.

Raw World Title: Big Cass vs. Kevin Owens vs. Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins

The title is vacant coming in and this is under elimination rules. Mick and Stephanie are at ringside as they should be. Cass says he's shocking the world tonight. The bell rings after a break (THANK YOU!) and Owens immediately heads outside. The Cass vs. Reigns showdown is delayed again as the villains go after the big men and it's time to pair off.

Seth and Kevin are knocked outside and we get the big showdown with Cass blocking the Superman Punch. A running big boot knocks Reigns outside with Cass falling out as well. Rollins dives onto Cass but Owens drops him onto the barricade, only to have Reigns dive onto Owens and Cass as we take a break. Back with Owens in control and getting two off the backslash to Cass.

Reigns fights back with his string of clotheslines until Cass kicks his head off. They've done a really good job of making Cass look like he belongs here in the first ten minutes. A big boot puts Owens on the floor and the Empire Elbow hits Rollins. The East River Crossing is broken up by a Superman Punch and the low superkick gets two. Owens adds the Frog Splash to get rid of Cass at 13:46. I'm sure Saxton saying he thinks Cass can pull it off a minute earlier didn't give that away for anyone. Also, I believe that's the first time Cass has been pinned on the main roster.

Back from a second break with Reigns powerbombing Owens and Rollins for a Tower of Doom. Rollins' falcon arrow gets two on Roman but the Superman Punch knocks Rollins out of the air for two more. Cole describes this as incredible action for the second time in about a minute.

Owens comes back in with a superkick to Rollins, setting up back to back Cannonballs for another big reaction. The crowd has somehow stayed hot all night and that's a really good sign. The Superman Punch gets two on Owens and you can hear the crowd's sigh of relief on the knockout. Owens' Pop Up Powerbomb is countered with another Superman Punch and Reigns hits a quick sitout powerbomb for two on Seth.

A spear drops Rollins on the floor but here's HHH of all people to Pedigree Reigns on the floor. HHH throws Rollins back inside for the pin on Reigns at 23:48 (POP!), meaning Rollins needs HHH's help yet again. HHH throws Owens inside, Pedigrees Rollins and gives a shocked Owens the

title at 25:05.

Rating: B+. This is a hard one to grade as they nailed the near falls and the drama to near perfection but I really don't care for HHH being back AGAIN and presumably setting up HHH vs. Rollins and/or Reigns. That's the standard problem with HHH: even if someone new is getting a big title win, it's still about HHH for a long time. However, let's get to the good part: KEVIN OWENS IS WORLD CHAMPION! Yeah that hasn't quite sunk in yet but it's actually happened and that is most certainly a good thing.

HHH leaves and Owens celebrates to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. Make no mistake about it: the main event is the ONLY thing on this show that mattered in the slightest. The only other thing of note was the really awkward Stephanie vs. Heyman promo and I'm still not sure what happened there. They did a really good job with the title match though (HHH involvement aside) and that's all that matters on this show. A lot of this stuff is going to depend on the fallout but I'm very happy with Owens winning as he's definitely the most logical option. Good show with a red hot crowd throughout helping it along.

Results

Chris Jericho b. Neville – Liontamer

Nia Jax b. Haion – Fireman's carry into a powerslam

Sami Zayn b. Jinder Mahal – Helluva Kick

New Day/Bayley b. Dana Brooke/Anderson and Gallows – Bayley to Belly to Brooke

Sheamus b. Cesaro – Cloverleaf

Braun Strowman b. Americano – Faceplant

Darren Young b. Titus O'Neil – Crucifix

Kevin Owens b. Seth Rollins, Roman Reigns and Big Cass – Pedigree to Rollins

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Monday Night Raw – August 22, 2016: Turn It Up

Monday Night Raw

Date: August 22, 2016

Location: Barclays Center, New York City, New York

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

It's the night after Summerslam and there's a lot to talk about, but first and foremost we have no Universal Champion. Finn Balor won the inaugural title last night but was forced to vacate it due to a shoulder injury suffered during the match. Odds are tonight we'll find out what happens with the title so let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last night's Universal Title match. Nothing else is mentioned.

Opening sequence.

The announcers tell us about Finn's injury and the title being vacated. He'll be out at least SIX months.

The bosses bring out Finn with his arm in a sling. Balor says this title represents a lifetime of sacrifice, including one last night. He has to vacate the title tonight but when he comes back, this title is the first thing he's coming for. Balor gets a hero's sendoff but Seth Rollins cuts him off with a huge grin on his face. Rollins calls himself the real winner last night but here's Sami Zayn to cut him off.

Nothing is said as Chris Jericho comes out as well. He's followed by Owens, Enzo and Cass (before this segment started I said I'd take a flier and put the belt on Cass) and Reigns. Foley says there's going to be a series of matches to determine the champion next week. You can imagine how well that's going over.

Seth Rollins vs. Sami Zayn

Before the bell, Sami looks over at Owens and gets jumped from behind to send us to a break. The match is joined in progress with Sami snapping off a headscissors to put Rollins outside, only to have him start stomping at Zayn in the corner. Back up and Sami springboards off the bottom rope and twists his ankle. Sami says he can keep going and low bridges to the floor, setting up a slingshot flip dive over the top. Seth comes back with the top rope knee to the head and we take a break.

Back with Sami hitting his big clothesline and a sunset bomb out of the corner. The Pedigree doesn't work as Sami hits the exploder suplex. The Helluva Kick doesn't work though and Seth stomps on the foot before grabbing a leg lock for...actually not a submission. Sami gets to the ropes but can't grab a suplex, setting up the Pedigree to give Rollins the pin at 11:53.

Rating: C+. I'm fairly sure that was a fake ankle injury and it's a testament to what Sami can do with his selling that I'm really not positive. Rollins advancing is fine but it would be nice if Sami could have a story that isn't Kevin Owens related. The selling worked really well and I love Rollins trying a leg lock instead of just instantly using his regular move. It shows thinking during the match, which is something Rollins should always be doing.

Kevin Owens vs. Neville

So there are going to be some named added. Neville sends him outside to start and hits a 450 off the apron. Another big running flip dive takes Owens down but here's Chris Jericho for a distraction so Kevin can (not) hit a clothesline to turn Neville inside out. Back with Neville avoiding a frog splash and hitting a middle rope phoenix splash, followed by the deadlift German suplex for two. The Red Arrow misses but Neville enziguris him right back into position. Jericho distracts the referee though and Owens hits the torture rack neckbreaker for the pin at 8:31.

Rating: C+. Oh how I love secondary finishers. It gets so tiring waiting on the one move that can finish a match so switching it up like this is a really nice change of pace. Owens winning here was obvious and there's nothing wrong with that. The match was fine for the time they had and Neville flying around is always fun.

The title match next week will be a fatal fourway. Is this surprising in the slightest?

Here's New Day to celebrate holding the Tag Team Titles for 365 days. They thank the fans for the year and it's time for a unicorn pinata. As I continue to try to understand the concept of a pinata, here are Anderson and Gallows to call this stupid. They point out that New Day lost last night so there needs to be a rematch. Anderson asks Kofi about taking the Magic Killer last night. Kofi: "BIG E! DEFEND ME!" Big E.: "Uh, I got nothing." It's Anderson vs. Big E. tonight and that means trombone time.

Karl Anderson vs. Big E.

Joined in progress again with Big E. putting on the abdominal stretch and some rhythmic spanking. Anderson sends him into the corner and starts kicking at the leg, including a running kick to the back of the knee. Big E. powers him up again and throws Anderson over the top. The spear through the ropes is broken up by a knee as the rest of New Day beats on Gallows. Back in and the Big Ending puts Anderson away at 3:34.

Rating: D+. Well that happened. I'm not sure how the champion winning is better than having the challengers get some wins to build momentum but the New Day merchandise is all that matters. New Day holding the titles for a year is amazing but I'm not sure how much longer they can go before

it stops being entertaining. Then again I was saying that six months ago.

The Dudley Boyz are saying goodbye tonight so we see a clip of their debut in 1999.

Here's Titus O'Neil for a chat. Ok ok we'll stop booing your belt. Titus talks about how New Day beat the Prime Time Players for the belts and rips on Darren Young for holding him out of the main event. People have been blaming Bob Backlund but Titus wants to blame Darren for not being in the main event. No one comes out so the fans ask for Slater again. Cue Bob Backlund at a run to put Titus in a cross face pectoral grab before Titus slams him. Darren runs out (Was he watching the Little League World Series?) and takes the Clash of the Titus while Backlund looks dead.

Video on Lesnar vs. Orton.

Earlier today, Shane said Brock crossed a line. Stephanie says she agrees. End of segment.

We look at Balor vacating the title.

Rusev vs. Big Cass

Non-title, Rusev has bruised ribs and the winner advances to next week. Before the match, Enzo tries to figure out which part of New York City Bulgaria is in. An early clothesline puts Rusev on the floor and we take a break. Back with Cass fighting out of a chinlock before Rusev takes out the leg. Rusev misses the splash though, allowing Cass to hit one of his own in the corner. That sends Rusev outside for a superkick to Enzo, sending Cass into a rage of right hands to the ribs. The bad ribs go into the steps and they trade kicks to the face with Cass getting the better. Rusev falls to the floor and walks out for the countout at 8:23.

Rating: C. Not much to the match here but I'm really pleased with the way they did the booking here. Rusev doesn't get pinned and they still send Cass on to next week's title match. Everything works out just fine here and we get a nice hope spot for the title. Oh and they didn't have Reigns interfere for the obvious ending. Well done again.

Owens and Jericho argue over who can be the next Universal Champion. They

do however manage to get Tom's name wrong over and over.

Here are Charlotte and Dana Brooke to gloat about Charlotte getting the Women's Title back. Dana does a one woman YOU DESERVE IT chant and Charlotte has to agree. Charlotte says you can forget about Sasha Banks because she did it all by herself last night. Sasha is out with a back injury and now the queen has reclaimed her throne. That's it but here's Mick Foley to interrupt.

The boss (Foley, not Sasha), praises Charlotte last night but we have to stop for a WE WANT BAYLEY chant. Mick says Sasha will be back and will get a rematch for the title. That's fine with Charlotte but there's no one left for her to face tonight. Foley says not so fast because there are parts of this match that are heartbreaking. There are great moments too though, like signing free agents.....like BAYLEY!

We get the big introduction and the HUGGER SECTION signs are out in full force. Bayley can't believe this is happening but she's cut off by a YOU DESERVE IT chant. She thanks Mick for the moment and has an idea: how about we seal the deal with a hug, right here in Brooklyn, New York? You know Mick isn't going to turn that down.

Charlotte laughs this off and plugs Mick's reality show before saying there's a reason Bayley stayed in NXT during the Divas Revolution. Bayley says she won't try to upstage Charlotte but she will challenge her for the Women's Title. That's not cool with Charlotte, who says Bayley has to earn it. Unfortunately Charlotte isn't ready so Dana can face Bayley instead. Mick agrees and the match is on.

Bayley vs. Dana Brooke

Bayley starts fast by sending Dana into the buckle for a near fall but Dana knocks her outside and into the barricade. Back in and Dana works on the leg before just slugging away. Bayley comes back with her variety of elbows and the Bayley to Belly for the pin at 4:32.

Rating: C. The match was unimportant here compared to the pop for her debut which worked as well as they could have imagined. Bayley has long since deserved this spot and while it's a shame that an injury might have

caused her to get to the main roster, she's a welcome fit here and much better suited to Raw than Smackdown.

Roman Reigns isn't worried about Kevin Owens.

The cruiserweights arrive September 19.

Sheamus is ready for his next match with Cesaro next week and insults New York sports teams.

Bruan Strowman vs. Johnny Knockout

Knockout says he's doing this because, and I quote, he likes big sweaty men. Strowman throws him around to start and the reverse chokeslam cut off the LET'S GO JOBBER chants with the pin at 1:19.

Strowman beats him up again and makes the referee count another pin. Ever the professional, the referee waits until Knockout's shoulder is down.

Here are the Dudley Boyz for their retirement speech. Bubba says they returned a year ago in this ring and it's been a heck of a year. They've had some wins and some losses but now things are changing. D-Von says it's been a great career with twenty years going up and down the roads with this man here. They had some great matches with teams like Edge and Christian and the Hardys and D-Von would take every one of those shots and falls again tonight.

Bubba has the fans give themselves a round of applause and it's time to go but here are the Shining Stars to interrupt. They have a going away present for Bubba and D-Von: two tickets (economy class) to Puerto Rico! That alone earns them a beating and we get one last 3D and WAZZUP.....before Bubba tells him to get the table. Cue Anderson and Gallows to beat down the Dudleys. D-Von goes through the table via a Magic Killer. I'm actually surprised as I would have bet on that Ray turn.

Roman Reigns vs. Chris Jericho

Final qualifying match. Jericho gets into a chase to start but stops to poke Reigns in the eye as we take a break. Back with Jericho putting the ASK HIM chinlock. Reigns fights back and sends him into the buckle but

the Superman Punch is blocked. It's too early for the Walls so Jericho settles for two off the enziguri instead.

Jericho takes too much time on the top though and gets punched out of the air, setting up the apron boot. Now the Superman Punch connects for two and Jericho's Codebreaker is easily countered into a sitout powerbomb. Kevin Owens runs out for a distraction to break up the spear but it just earns Jericho another Superman Punch.

The spear is countered into the Walls but Reigns makes the rope. Owens adds a superkick to set up the Codebreaker for two with Saxton telegraphing the near fall by saying Jericho was the fourth man. Can we PLEASE stop doing that? Back up and they trade slaps until Owens has to be punched off the apron. Now the spear connects to send Reigns to the title match at 15:03.

Rating: C+. Again this was fine but you would think Rusev might make an appearance here. Reigns getting in was the only option as you can't have Cass as the only face in the title match. That being said, Jericho is always a great choice to make anyone look good and that's what he did here. Fine enough main event here but nothing memorable.

Overall Rating: C. This show was all over the place. I had fun with Bayley debuting and their reaction to the title situation was fine, but there's basically no reaction to Brock last night and Rusev not interfering in the main event doesn't make sense. The wrestling wasn't anything special either, leaving this show square in the middle. Hopefully we get something on Lesnar soon though, because people aren't going to be pleased with just leaving the main event of Summerslam hanging while we wait for Lesnar to grace us with his presence again.

Results

Seth Rollins b. Sami Zayn – Pedigree

Kevin Owens b. Neville – Torture rack neckbreaker

Big E. b. Karl Anderson – Big Ending

Big Cass b. Rusev via countout

Bayley b. Dana Brooke – Bayley to Belly

Braun Strowman b. Johnny Knockout – Reverse chokeslam

Roman Reigns b. Chris Jericho – Spear

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Summerslam To Have 3 Kickoff Matches, 13 Matches Total

Now with the Dudley Boyz vs. Sami Zayn/Neville and the six Smackdown tag teams in a twelve man tag. Cesaro vs. Sheamus has also been bumped to the pre-show.

Even I'm getting tired of all this. There's no need to cram all this stuff on there and it's just going to burn the audience out even more than they already are.

Monday Night Raw – August 15, 2016: Stop Me If You've Seen This Before Sunday

Monday Night Raw

Date: August 15, 2016

Location: American Bank Center, Corpus Christi, Texas

Commentators: Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, Corey Graves

It's Summerslam week and Brock Lesnar is here. On top of that things should be back to normal with the full roster back after their Australia/New Zealand tour last week. We should get one last push on all of the big matches, including Seth Rollins vs. Finn Balor for the first ever Universal Title. Let's get to it.

Last week on Raw, Roman Reigns sent Lana into a cake and Seth Rollins didn't think much of Finn Balor.

Earlier today Rollins was outside waiting for his opponent Finn Balor, or the Demon King. He calls him out for a fight right then and there but no one showed up. Tonight he'll find Balor instead.

Lana and Rusev are in the ring with Lana saying they're not leaving the ring until everyone hears what they have to say. There will be no Raw until Reigns comes out here and apologizes. Instead he gets Mick Foley, now in a Have A Nice Raw shirt and with a beard that has its own zip code. Rusev yells a lot and says Foley sucks as a GM. He asks for Stephanie McMahon to come out here instead so here's the bigger boss to stick up for Foley.

Rusev threatens to call Vince or Shane but here's Roman to interrupt as well. They insult each other a bit (as heels and faces do) and a USA chant starts up, which is exactly what they were shooting for here. Rusev

wants to defend Lana's honor so Mick makes the match tonight, albeit not for the title.

Sheamus vs. Sami Zayn

Before the match, Sheamus gets some promo time saying Sami is nothing to him because Sami talks a lot on Twitter but he's just a Sheamus knockoff. Sami throws his shirt at Sheamus and they're quickly brawling before the bell. Cesaro sits in on commentary as Sami forearm Sheamus in the corner. A headscissors only ticks Sheamus off and he sends Sami back first into the post as we take a break.

Back with Sheamus in control, as a heel should be when you come back from a break. A powerslam gets two on Sami as Cesaro talks about having an offer to go to Smackdown, which a talent like himself deserves. The ten forearm to the chest have Sami in trouble but he knocks Cesaro outside for the big flip dive.

Corey gets on Cesaro for talking about himself a lot and Cesaro brushes him off in a rather heelish manner. White Noise gets two for Sheamus and a Blue Thunder Bomb (Not Michinoku Driver Cole. Even Saxton can get that name right.) gets the same. Sheamus comes back with the Irish Curse but here's Cesaro for a distraction, setting up the Helluva Kick for the pin on Sheamus at 10:14.

Rating: B-. They were sticking with the basics here but these two doing the basics means a good match. Cesaro teasing the heel turn on commentary is interesting, though I have little reason to believe WWE isn't going to botch this as well. What's not interesting is Cesaro vs. Sheamus all over again after Cesaro beat him twice in a row in recent weeks. There's no logical reason to do the match again but that's what we're likely going to get anyway because that's that we're stuck with.

Chris Jericho and Kevin Owens say tonight's match between Owens and Big Cass isn't one on one because Jericho will have Kevin's back. Jericho wants to know who certified Enzo as a G. Does he even have a license to be a G? They're ready for their tag match at Summerslam too and tell Todd/Robert/Brian/Nathaniel so, despite the interviewer being named Tom. Now that was funny.

Post break Cesaro and Sheamus are brawling again when Foley comes in to break it up. Mick loves seeing them fight so we're getting a best of seven series. AFTER CESARO HAS ALREADY BEATEN HIM TWICE. Egads this booking makes my head hurt.

Dudley Boyz vs. New Day

Non-title and there's no Big E. at ringside. Before the match, Gallows and Anderson pop up on screen to say they're trying to cure Ringpostitis. They're doing everything they can to make sure their results aren't tainted, including putting eggs in microwaves. They're well endowed with the right equipment and the ball is in their court. The distraction lets D-Von take over on Woods to start but D-Von clotheslines Bubba by mistake. Kofi hits Trouble in Paradise on D-Von for the pin at 1:38.

Post match the doctors' experiment was a failure and they need more test subjects. Kofi wants to know why these two think this is a game. Summerslam is their anniversary of being champions and there's no way Anderson and Gallows are getting their hands on New Day's rocks.

Rollins is still looking for Balor but no one has seen him. This includes Neville, who says Rollins isn't ready for the Demon King. Seth yells a lot.

Nia Jax vs. Rachel Weaby

Rachel has blue hair, bright green and pink attire and a lot of tattoos. She's been watching the Olympics and is ready to bring home the gold. Nia throws her around and knocks her off the top with a single shot to the face. Rachel is out cold but Nia brings her back in for the fireman's carry into a powerslam for the pin at 1:05.

Here are Paul Heyman and Brock Lesnar for their big talk before Summerslam. We see Orton and Lesnar trading sneak attacks in recent weeks. Heyman starts his catchphrase...and here's Heath Slater to interrupt. Paul hopes that someone put Heath up to this because it's really stupid.

All Heyman can do is laugh as Slater talks about Raw understanding what

Smackdown can't get. Apparently if Slater fights Lesnar tonight, he gets a job. Heyman just ignores him and goes into his promo about Orton but Slater cuts them off again. Heath knows he's going to get hurt very badly but he has to do this for his kids. Brock actually talks because he can respect Slater fighting for his family. He actually wants to talk about Slater's kids...who he doesn't give a censored about.

Slater can walk out of here on his own two feet or stand here and keep ticking Brock off. Heath actually tries to fight and gets suplexed half to death, followed by the F5. Heyman puts on Heath's sunglasses and praises his courage before laughing at the idea of Orton being a viper. It's his job to hype up the match on Sunday but Lesnar won't believe a word Brock says about Orton being a real threat. Brock is the box office at Summerslam and you should buy it to see a once in a lifetime athlete. This FINALLY wraps up with Heyman saying Brock is dominant.

That's the problem with how Brock has been booked over the last year: if no one, including the reigning WWE World Champion, why in the world would I want to see him fight again? We know the ending because Brock can't be touched so it gets a little boring. Like Heyman's speech here, which just kept going and going as Heyman said the same thing he's said for over a year.

Big Cass vs. Kevin Owens

Before the match, Enzo talks about cooking zucchinis, sausage, burgers, frankfurters and those two pieces of Canadian bacon. Cass shoulders Owens down to start but Kevin knocks him off the apron and into the post as we take a break. Back with Cass breaking up the Cannonball with a boot to the face but getting sent outside again. Owens can't hit the apron powerbomb and gets backdropped, only to have Jericho jump Cass for the DQ at 6:23. Not enough to rate but Cass looked competitive here and that's all he needed to do.

Enzo and Cass get beaten down post match.

Reigns is ready to fight no matter what Rusev has ready for him. Rusev jumps him from behind and sends Reigns into a steel wall.

Prime Time Players vs. Shining Stars

Yes they were feuding just a week ago but earlier tonight Titus apologized so they're back together for a third run. Darren and Epico get things going before it's quickly off to Titus for a slam. Primo comes in and dropkicks Titus in the knee to take over, only to have Titus splash him in the corner. We get Titus suplexing Darren onto Primo for two but Bob Backlund accidentally distracts Titus, who is knocked off the apron by Darren. The Clash of the Titus plants Young and Primo gets the pin at 2:42.

Jinder Mahal vs. Neville

Neville dropkicks him outside and hits a corkscrew moonsault to the floor. The Red Arrow doesn't work yet and Mahal kicks him in the face for two. A chinlock goes nowhere and Neville kicks him in the head to set up the Red Arrow for the pin at 2:57.

The bosses casually mention that Jon Stewart will be at Summerslam when Rollins comes in to find the Demon King. Mick suggests that he try it in the ring.

Here's Rollins to call out Balor and give him one more chance to show himself tonight. No one shows up so Rollins laughs it off and calls this match just another chapter in his book. He's the face of Balor's failure but something we can't see (maybe a fan jumping the barricade) cuts Seth off. Seth keeps laughing and the lights start flickering and go out. Red lights flash and here's Demon Balor for the first time in WWE.

The fans are getting into the arms pose now and that's a very good sign. Rollins has no idea what to think of this and Balor, now with writing all over the right side of his body, gets in his face. The fight is on and Balor cleans house as he should in this case. Balor misses the Coup de Grace but hits a flip dive over the top to take Rollins down. The more I think about it, the more I like the idea of them having Demon Balor show up here. This match needs some buzz and this is going to do it.

We look back at Lana being sent into the cake last week.

Golden Truth vs. Gallows and Anderson

Gallows and Anderson are in their doctors' coats. Truth gets kicked in the face to start but gets in the spinning forearm for a breather. It's a double tag to Goldust and Anderson with Goldust hitting his bulldog and powerslam. Not that it matters as the Magic Killer ends Goldust at 2:18.

New Day comes in for the beatdown post match and it's Gallows saving Anderson from a trombone to the testicles.

Charlotte talks down to Dana Brooke about wanting a taste of the spotlight. Dana failed her when it mattered the most but Charlotte will win the title anyway. Charlotte leaves Dana in tears.

Alicia Fox vs. Charlotte

Sasha Banks is on commentary. Fox hits some dropkicks to start but gets pulled off the middle rope for two. Natural Selection ends Fox at 1:25.

Charlotte calls Sasha to the ring but Dana takes out Sasha's knee, setting up the Figure Eight.

Video on Braun Strowman.

Roman Reigns vs. Rusev

Non-title. Roman goes right at him before the bell and kicks Rusev in the face. The apron boot makes it even worse for Rusev but he posts Reigns as we go to a break. We're joined in progress with Rusev working on Reigns' bad left arm. Reigns gets choked on the ropes but comes back with a Samoan Drop for a breather. They head outside with Reigns being sent into the steps a few times but Rusev has the US Title taken away from him as we take another break.

Back with Rusev grabbing the mic and saying we're all Russian wannabes. Rusev chokes Roman with his own ring gear, which isn't a DQ for reasons that aren't clear. Roman fights out and knocks Rusev off the top to set up a clothesline to put both guys down. The Superman Punch is countered and Rusev gets two off the spinwheel kick. Four straight middle rope headbutts get four straight near falls for Rusev.

The fifth finally misses and Reigns starts fighting back until a shot to the ribs slows him down. Rusev's superkick is countered with a Superman Punch for a good near fall. The spear is countered with a few kicks to the head for two more but the Accolade is broken up as well. Another superkick to the back sets up the Accolade until Reigns basically collapses into the ropes. Back up and the spear pins Rusev at 20:39.

Rating: B. It was a solid match with both guys knowing how to do the power stuff but after seeing these two fight each other probably half a dozen times over the last year, I really don't need to see them fight for thirty minutes on Raw and then watch them in a big pay per view match at Summerslam. Then again I don't want to see Sheamus vs. Cesaro in four more matches (it'll be seven) after seeing Cesaro pin Sheamus twice already. At least this was good, but I'm not wild on seeing a champion get pinned clean to set up the title match.

Overall Rating: D+. I really wasn't feeling this one and a lot of that is due to how they're booking things anymore. Now I really like the idea of the short, squash matches but you can mix things up a little more than that. Maybe have some of these matches go six to seven minutes instead of having six of them go under three.

The bigger problem here is that, aside from Balor vs. Rollins, I don't care to see any of Sunday's matches more than I did coming into tonight. How many of these people won't be appearing on Sunday's show anyway? Sami, Strowman, Nia Jax, and Neville aren't likely to be at Summerslam but they get time (albeit very limited time) here because they need to fill in time. I'm hoping they get this stuff fixed soon because they really don't know how to put a three hour show together at this point.

Results

Sami Zayn b. Sheamus – Brogue Kick

New Day b. Dudley Boyz – Trouble in Paradise to D-Von

Nia Jax b. Rachel Weaby – Fireman's carry into a powerslam

Big Cass b. Kevin Owens via DQ when Chris Jericho interfered

Shining Stars b. Prime Time Players – Primo pinned Young after a Clash of the Titus from O’Neil

Neville b. Jinder Mahal – Red Arrow

Gallows and Anderson b. Goldust Truth – Magic Killer to Goldust

Charlotte b. Alicia Fox – Natural Selection

Roman Reigns b. Rusev – Spear

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Reviewing the Review: Monday Night Raw – August 1, 2016

I hadn’t planned for this to be a recurring feature but this week’s show seemed like it deserved a second look. Last week’s show was outstanding while this week’s show felt like any old episode and that’s not a good thing. I know things had to come back down to earth a little bit but there were some things here that really came off bad. Let’s get to it.

The show opened with a voiceover saying Last Week On Monday Night Raw. I know they do these almost every week but this made it feel more like a

special feature instead of something to fill in time. They also kept it shorter and more to the point for a big improvement.

Sasha Banks (with the Women's Title looking WAY too big) came out to open the show but was cut off by Charlotte (of course). They went back and forth a bit with the rematch being made, but Chris Jericho of all people interrupted. This turned into a back and forth between the Jericho and Sasha over which woman deserved to be champion more. The worst part about this was hearing Ric Flair's name brought up over and over, making me think he'll be back soon. You know, because last week's title change was begging for Ric Flair to be at ringside.

Anyway Enzo Amore came out on his own to defend Sasha and hit on her as only Enzo can. The result was some actually funny comedy between Jericho and Enzo (I say actually because Jericho's interactions with other big time comedy names often go badly) until Mick Foley came out to make it a mixed tag. The heels won with Charlotte pinning Sasha, which isn't a good idea a week into her reign. Yeah it's to set up the rematch but you couldn't have Sasha get knocked out with Natural Selection on the floor to make it a countout? Also of note: Kevin Owens was on commentary here and didn't like Enzo at all.

Braun Strowman squashed a jobber. These matches have gotten me more interested in Strowman than anything since his debut.

Mark Henry was given a US Title shot against Rusev later in the show. The match was exactly what you would expect from the two of them fighting with Rusev winning via the Accolade. There were two interesting parts here though. First of all, Lana was in her wedding dress and dear goodness that woman is gorgeous.

In the more interesting part though, Roman Reigns came out for the save post match and seemed to set up what seems like a feud against Rusev for the US Title. Punishment over the drug test aside, this is the kind of thing Reigns needs to do: fight in the midcard in a feud where people are going to cheer for him in a simple story so he can build more love from the fans. This is what he needed to do years ago to get himself over instead of getting one third of the Shield over but for some reason

REIGNS MUST HAVE BEEN THE STAR AT WRESTLEMANIA XXXI NO MATTER IF HE WAS READY OR NOT.

Golden Truth seems to be breaking up over Pokemon Go. It's not like Smackdown needs tag teams or anything. No instead let's break them up for the sake of a lame comedy bit after spending months setting them up in the first place.

Now for the big speech of the night as Finn Balor came out for a chat and was cut off by Seth Rollins. Seth kept to the idea that he's done everything Balor has done over the years but did it first. Balor talked about how there's always someone talking down to him and everywhere he's gone he's taken their spot because he's the better man before kicking Rollins out to the floor.

For some reason people have been saying Balor looked bad here but I liked the exchange. Balor definitely isn't the most comfortable talker in the world but that's where modern WWE gets in trouble: they seem to think that if everyone doesn't fit their idea of what a big star is then that person has no value. Balor is going to get over because of his in ring ability, his look, his in ring work and his overall cool factor. But no, for some reason he's doomed to never make it in the main event because he can't stand in the ring and exchange with someone on the mic.

Look back at some of the biggest stars ever. How much did someone like Austin, Rock, Hogan or Sting get over based on their look and how you had to see what they were doing? Balor has the same appeal. There's the leather jacket and the cool music and the posing and the Demon and all the other intangibles he brings to the act. No he isn't the best talker in the world but what people don't get is that he doesn't need to be.

The same thing played a big role in bringing Reigns down: he was bad at talking in the middle of the ring but he didn't need to be doing that in the first place. How over did Balor get in NXT while barely ever talking? The reaction to this seemed to be that Balor was stumbling over his words and having no business being there. I'm not sure what they were watching but I saw Balor looking just fine (different than excelling) in an area he really shouldn't need to be great in.

Titus O'Neil beat Darren Young in a bad match. Afterwards they seemed to set up something more with Titus yelling at Bob Backlund and getting laid out by Young. I don't want to see this continue but they have to fill those three hours somehow.

Now we get to the thing that actually made me want to do this again this week, though unfortunately I can't take credit for pointing this out in the first place. Stephanie and Foley were backstage (They were on the show a lot more this week but it wasn't annoying. Yet.) when Sheamus came in wanting to know why he didn't get the US Title shot. Cesaro came in and asked the same thing. Foley said a lot of Cesaro's issues are due to his Draft spot, which was lower due to that shoulder injury.

Here's where we get to the big issue: Cesaro is drafted lower because he's three months removed from a shoulder injury but less than half an hour earlier Rollins was talking about his near career ending knee injury that he returned from about a month ago. Rollins was the #1 pick in the Draft but that knee injury hasn't been mentioned once by Stephanie or Foley or any other boss.

This is a great case of WWE picking and choosing their storylines and not paying attention to continuity. A simple "but he's Seth Rollins and we believe how great he can be" from Stephanie would solve this but odds are we're never going to hear about it because the writers either A, didn't notice or B, think/have been told that it's not important enough to mention. It's inconsistency that should be solved so simply but instead it's just left sitting there because Heaven forbid you close a small plot hole with a quick statement.

Oh and one more thing: Cesaro and Sheamus' match isn't for the #1 contendership or a future title shot. Well it kind of was but not directly. See, instead of the WINNER getting the prize, it was whoever would impress the bosses more. In other words: wrestling doesn't matter because it's all about making the bosses happy. I've never liked that idea and I was really hoping it would go away but that's not the case just yet.

Nia Jax squashed another jobber. Same idea here as Strowman and the same

positive result.

New Day beat Gallows and Anderson (which seems to be their official name) in less than ninety seconds to set up a post match beatdown. Big E. was crotched against the post to potentially injure him. I'm really not sure what the point is in having Gallows and Anderson lose so quickly is, unless their rematch will see them get serious and win the titles. Stupid again, but that's WWE for you.

Cesaro and Sheamus had a good power brawl with Cesaro winning clean off the Neutralizer. I've seen these two fight before and they didn't do anything we haven't seen a dozen times but at least it was entertaining. Unfortunately this match further illustrated the problem with someone like Cesaro or Dolph Ziggler.

Yes, Cesaro has a lot of cool moves that are going to pop the crowd but he does them EVERY SINGLE MATCH. It's kind of hard to get fired up over the same cool stuff week after week. They just stop having the same impact when they're out there every single time but they have to do them to get the crowd going. Save that stuff for the bigger matches and find some basic stuff to get you through the regular matches.

Jinder Mahal and Heath Slater came to the ring to say they wanted jobs, Foley came out to make a match for said job and Mahal won in 14 seconds. Next.

Owens said he had Jericho's back. Fine enough, especially if it leads to Kevin turning face.

Rollins beat Sami Zayn in a good enough main event. The idea here was to have Rollins beat someone similar to Finn with all the NXT experience to set up the Summerslam match and it worked just fine, though hearing the announcers brag about this being on Raw for the first time ever made me cringe.

The other reason I wanted to do this again was the closing segment, which I completely undersold in the live review. Paul Heyman and Brock Lesnar came out to do their usual speech with a focus on Randy Orton not being able to hit the RK0 on Lesnar. Now anyone who has watched wrestling

before knew what was coming here but it was still awesome to see Orton run through the crowd and lay Lesnar out with an RKO to end the show. I really liked this and it was pulled off perfectly.

Of course that's assuming you don't mind Raw and Smackdown already invading each other less than two weeks after the Draft. I really, really don't need to see this already as it defeats the point of the Draft in the first place. If you want these shows to be separate then be separate. If you want them to be the same then let them be the same. There's a very good chance that this is just because the match was announced before the Draft but I have a feeling that this is going to be the norm going forward.

Overall this show was up and down but the biggest issue was a lack of energy. Aside from the opener and one or two other things, most of the show felt like any given show that you might see in the middle of May instead of with just a few weeks to go before Summerslam. Hopefully they can make things better once they work the kinks of the Brand Split out but this was a letdown after last week's great show.

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Monday Night Raw – August 1, 2016: One Week

Monday Night Raw

Date: August 1, 2016

Location: Phillips Arena, Atlanta, Georgia

Commentators: Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, Corey Graves

After last week's well received show, it should be interesting to see where everything goes with the full time Monday Night Raw roster. Last week Finn Balor made his main roster debut and earned himself a shot in the first ever Universal Title match at the upcoming Summerslam. On top of that, Brock Lesnar is going to be making his first appearance since Wrestlemania. Let's get to it.

We open with a "Last Week On Raw" video, which is a really good idea that I'd love to see become a regular feature, as long as they keep it short.

Opening sequence.

Here's Sasha Banks to open things up and that belt looks ridiculous on her tiny waist. We have to wait for the YOU DESERVE IT chant to die down before Sasha can talk about herself and Bayley stealing the show last year over Summerslam weekend. That's going to be the case again this year when she defends against Charlotte at Summerslam. Cue Charlotte who is walking much faster than usual.

That means we get the YOU TAPPED OUT chants before Sasha says she can't put her finger on what's different about Charlotte this week. Charlotte says it was a fluke because she was champion for over 300 days. Sasha thanks Charlotte would never have been champion without her dad and here's.....Chris Jericho to interrupt? Jericho calls Charlotte royalty and thinks she's done more than Flair ever did. Now we get to the important point: what makes Sasha his boss?

Jericho brings up the Snoop Dogg connection and calls Sasha a brat. Now it's Enzo Amore coming out without Big Cass to kiss Sasha's hand. Sasha

doesn't seem to mind the ensuing flirting but Charlotte has heard bad things about Enzo's love life. This turns into a surreal scene of Jericho impersonating Cass and Sasha impersonating Enzo before it turns into Enzo saying Jericho is like a messed up iPhone.

Jericho calls Enzo a hip hop hobbit so the fans call Jericho a stupid idiot. Enzo talks about going back in time and warning Jericho to not buy that scarf but here's Foley to cut them all off. Foley: "Enzo is a certified G and I'm a certified GM." After a cheap plug for Holy Foley, Mick makes a mixed tag for right now.

Enzo Amore/Sasha Banks vs. Chris Jericho/Charlotte

To keep things odd, Kevin Owens is on commentary with Byron's tie around his neck. The guys start with Enzo scoring off some armdrags before it's off to Sasha for a quick rollup on Charlotte. Sasha's chop hurts her own hand so she wristdrags Charlotte down instead. A double clothesline puts the bad people on the floor as Owens talks about wanting to knock Enzo out for interrupting him on Draft night. The double dive puts everyone down and we take a break.

Back with Jericho in control of Enzo until Amore gets two off a cross body and a faceplant to the knee. Jericho dropkicks him out of the air but bangs up his knee in the process, allowing the double tag to the women. Sasha kicks her in the face but here's Dana Brooke for a distraction. Jericho offers another distraction, setting up Natural Selection for the pin at 9:58.

Rating: C-. I like the match being a very fresh mix but at the same time I REALLY don't like the new champion getting pinned in her first match as champion. It weakens the new title reign, which is the last thing you want to do, especially when the champion is as on fire as Sasha is right now.

Post match Enzo takes a Codebreaker but Big Cass comes down for the save.

Braun Strowman vs. Evan Anderhold

When asked why he's here, Evan (better known as Corey Hollis from NXT)

says it's because he gets \$1000 and \$5000 if he wins. Those numbers serve as great joke material for the announcers during Evan's massacre, capped off by the reverse chokeslam for the pin at 59 seconds.

Stephanie and Mick talk about how awesome each others' ideas have been when Mark Henry comes in. Henry thinks it's time to reopen the Hall of Pain but Stephanie thinks he would be better in a mentorship role. All Mark needs is one more chance so Foley gives him a US Title shot against Rusev.

Golden Truth is still looking for Pokemon but Goldust thinks they should focus on their match instead.

Golden Truth vs. Shining Stars

Goldust and Primo start things off as Truth is still playing Pokemon Go on the apron. Graves mistakenly says Truth is playing inside the ring as Goldust gets in a powerslam to change control. Truth has apparently caught a Pokemon and misses a tag. On top of that he drops his phone and actually goes out to get it as Goldust is waiting for a tag. Epico grabs a sunset flip for the pin at 2:00. Cole: "Pokemon no for Golden Truth tonight."

Truth finds another Pokemon post match.

Michael Cole brings out Finn Balor for a chat. Finn says he's here to prove his draft status but Seth Rollins cuts him off. Seth tells us about Balor being a former NXT Champion, though he wasn't the first NXT Champion because that was Rollins. Balor was also a first round pick but he wasn't the #1 overall pick because that was Rollins too. Last week Balor pinned Roman Reigns, even though Rollins did the same thing in his first match back after a career threatening injury.

Balor is just like a bad Hollywood remake like the new Ghostbusters. The idea of Balor beating Seth for the title is like the Atlanta Braves winning the World Series. Balor says everywhere he's gone, there has been someone like Seth, saying they're the man until Balor comes in and takes that spot. They may have a lot of things in common, but at least Finn earned his spot in the title match instead of having it handed to him.

The brawl is about to start but Balor easily kicks him out to the floor to send Seth running. Balor looked like an underdog here, though an underdog that belonged in this spot.

US Title: Mark Henry vs. Rusev

Rusev is defending and Lana is here in her wedding dress. Saxton: "What is she wearing?" Henry throws him around a few times to start and snapping his throat across the middle rope. Back from a break with Henry blocking the Accolade and kicking Henry in the face. Now the Accolade goes on and Henry taps at 6:35. Too much time spent during the break but this was every Henry vs. Rusev match you've ever seen.

Post match Rusev rips on the American Olympic teams for not having to face the superior Russian and Bulgarian athletes. This brings out Roman Reigns to a very distinct face pop. Rusev is chased off with a Superman Punch. That face pop has to be a big relief too, because if Reigns can't get over by standing up for AMERICA, he might as well be running a doughnut shop.

Video on Nia Jax.

Darren Young vs. Titus O'Neil

Earlier today Titus asked the same question everyone has been asking: when was Darren great in the first place? Darren's chops don't have much effect and Titus hits a few backbreakers. The splash in the corner gets two and we hit the armbars. A slam gets two on Darren but he comes back with a kick to the face. Both finishers are broken up and Titus grabs a rollup with a handful of trunks for the pin at 3:58.

Rating: D-. Who in the world thought this was a good idea in any way? Neither guy is interesting and it was another spur of the moment heel turn that does nothing for either guy. The fact that it was a boring match because Titus has some of the worst offense in recent memory doesn't help either.

Stephanie presents Foley with his own tablet when Sheamus comes in to complain about getting overlooked for that US Title shot. Cesaro cuts him

off though and says the fans want to see him. Foley says the only reason Cesaro wasn't drafted so highly was due to that shoulder. Sheamus on the other hand hasn't had his head in the game since cashing in Money in the Bank. Tonight they'll have a match and whoever impresses them the most (not whoever wins because that would make too much sense) gets a future title shot.

Backlund yells at Titus for cheating so O'Neil threatens to knock him out. Darren jumps Titus from behind and puts him down with one punch.

Nia Jax vs. Ariel Monroe

Ariel actually laughs at Nia to start and is pulled around the ring by her hair as a result. A fireman's carry into a powerslam is enough to flatten Monroe at 1:12. That's a much better finisher than the legdrop.

Post match Saxton asks Nia how it feels to be here so she runs Ariel over again. Nia: "Why don't you ask her?"

Sami is ready to face Rollins tonight.

New Day vs. Gallows and Anderson

Non-title and Woods is banned from ringside due to drawing a banana out of a bag instead of one of the two oranges. The obvious joke is about to be made but New Day says that's too serious. Big E. throws Anderson around to start but Karl gets in a cheap shot to take over. We get some Too Sweet but Big E. rolls Anderson up for the pin at 1:19.

Post match the brawl is on with Woods coming out, only to have New Day get destroyed and left laying. Big E. is crotched against the post to really hammer the point home.

Cesaro vs. Sheamus

They trade uppercuts to start with Sheamus getting the better of it. The fans don't seem entertained though and it's Cesaro coming back with more uppercuts. Cesaro sends him outside for the cannonball off the apron, only to have the bad shoulder go into the post. Back in and Sheamus hits the ten forearms to the chest, only to be deadlifted into a suplex

because Cesaro is freakishly strong. The springboard corkscrew uppercut sets up the Neutralizer to put Sheamus away at 5:58.

Rating: C. How many times do we need to see these two fight each other? Cesaro vs. the winner of Rusev vs. Reigns should be a fun power brawl either way they go, despite Cesaro having next to no chance against either of them. Sheamus really is in need of ANYTHING new at this point as he's really just a guy in trunks with weird hair.

Cesaro and Sheamus are still brawling after a break, leaving Heath Slater and Jinder Mahal of all people to show up in the ring. Slater promises that 2MB is going to set Raw on fire but here's Foley to interrupt. Tonight they're going to have a match and the winner gets a job.

Jinder Mahal vs. Heath Slater

Mahal kicks him in the face for the pin at 14 seconds.

We look back at the mixed tag.

Jericho rants about how Enzo and Cass made fun of him earlier tonight and promises some revenge, you dig? He has someone in mind to watch his back and it's....Jimin Marvintluter, a Canadian shot put champion? Kevin Owens comes in to say he has Jericho's back instead because Jimin Marvintluter isn't a real person. Oh and Tom Phillips is a stupid idiot for saying his name isn't Tim.

Sami Zayn vs. Seth Rollins

The big attraction here: they've never fought on Raw before, making this completely different than the match they had on Smackdown about six weeks ago. They're quickly on the floor with Sami hitting his moonsault off the barricade to take over. Rollins sends him into the barricade and then into the corner with a hard whip. Sami is sent outside again and we take a break.

Back with Sami getting caught in the Buckle Bomb, followed by an enziguri to keep him in trouble. That's not enough for the Pedigree though as Sami climbs the turnbuckle for the tornado DDT, only to have Seth bail to the floor to avoid the Helluva Kick. That's fine with Sami who hits his flip

dive to the floor instead. Back in and the Helluva Kick misses again, setting up the Pedigree for the pin at 11:40.

Rating: C+. I can't emphasize enough how lame of a finisher the Pedigree is for Rollins. I know that's become his thing now but it feels like they're just doing it to set up a match with HHH that really doesn't have the highest level of interest. It's a good idea to have Rollins go over various NXT stars to get ready for Balor, but I'm really hoping it doesn't end with Rollins going over Finn himself. We've been there and it's just not that interesting.

Puff Daddy guest stars next week.

Here's Paul Heyman to introduce Brock. At Summerslam, Brock is going to entertain the fans. Yes entertain, because his form of entertainment isn't what you see promoted in WWE. Instead it's something violent, which isn't something he should be saying but he can because he's standing next to Brock. Good point actually. That brings Heyman to Randy Orton, who has this great equalizer called the RKO. All Orton has to do is hit one RKO at Summerslam to shock the world, just like when Brock conquered the Streak at Wrestlemania XXX. Heyman: "If that still bothers you, GET OVER IT ALREADY!"

Paul's advise for Orton is to take it from the wise old Jew (his words): Lesnar is going to drag him down to Suplex City. Maybe Orton can stay out of the hospital though and can fight again in 2016. Maybe he can do it if he can hit one RKO, but that's never gonna....and here's Orton with an RKO to lay Lesnar out. Yes indeed they made it a whole ONE WEEK before a Smackdown wrestler was on Raw. Orton bails through the crowd to end the show. I'll give them this: that one RKO with Lesnar being down for a few seconds is better than anything Ambrose got in his buildup.

Overall Rating: C-. So much for Raw being awesome. This was every episode of the show you've seen for years with a few more squashes thrown in. It wasn't terrible by any stretch and the ending segment was a good idea but there was just so much stuff on here that felt like a nothing episode.

The opening gave me some hope that they really were mixing it up but then a match was lost due to Pokemon, Jinder Mahal was back, Rusev squashed

Mark Henry AGAIN, a champion got pinned and we were supposed to be excited about a match taking place on this show for the first time ever. Oh and Smackdown invaded. Welcome to the new era.

Results

Charlotte/Chris Jericho b. Sasha Banks/Enzo Amore – Natural Selection to Banks

Braun Strowman b. Evan Anderhold – Reverse chokeslam

Shining Stars b. Golden Truth – Sunset flip to Goldust

Rusev b. Mark Henry – Accolade

New Day b. Anderson and Gallows – Rollup to Anderson

Cesaro b. Sheamus – Neutralizer

Jinder Mahal b. Heath Slater – Kick to the face

Seth Rollins b. Sami Zayn – Pedigree

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Monday Night Raw – July 25, 2016: The Newer New Era

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 25, 2016

Location: CONSOL Energy Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Corey Graves, Byron Saxton, Michael Cole

After three months of a new era, we're actually in a New Era as we've reached the first show with an exclusive Raw roster, which means a lot of things that aren't entirely clear. We don't officially have a World Champion as Dean Ambrose retained the title last night to keep it on Smackdown. Hopefully tonight we actually get some answers to the questions left over from the Draft so let's get to it.

Quick look at the main event.

Opening sequence, complete with a new logo and theme song.

The announcers are no longer at ringside and are up by the entrance instead. There's also a new set.

Mick Foley and Stephanie McMahon are in the ring to introduce the entire Raw roster. Stephanie blames Reigns for costing them the title and says there has never been an episode of Monday Night Raw without a World Champion (Uh.....what? Just.....what?) so tonight they're going to rectify that problem. Tonight there will be two fourways with the winners squaring off tonight for the right to go to Summerslam to face Seth Rollins for the....wait for it...WWE Universal Heavyweight Championship (Killjoy is going to love that one). Foley introduces the eight people in the fourways:

Sami Zayn

Sheamus

Cesaro

Rusev

Roman Reigns

Kevin Owens

Chris Jericho

Finn Balor

We're not done yet though as Charlotte is going to be defending the Women's Title against Sasha Banks. The first fourway is right now.

Cesaro vs. Rusev vs. Kevin Owens vs. Finn Balor

Owens gets a big pop but the crowd doesn't seem to know Balor's pose yet. They'll get the hang of it soon enough. Balor and Owens are left inside with Finn scoring off a dropkick but Cesaro takes over with some uppercuts as we hit a break less than ninety seconds after the bell. Back with Owens and Rusev staring each other down until Balor comes back in to get caught in a German suplex.

Cesaro gets double teamed as well but Rusev misses a top rope splash. The heels start fighting until Cesaro cross bodies both of them. The uppercut train starts up but Rusev breaks up the Swing. Everyone goes to the floor and it's Balor hitting a big flip dive for his first major pop of the night. Back in and 1916 (lifting reverse DDT) gets two on Cesaro and we take another break. We come back again with Rusev at the base of a Tower of Doom to plant everyone at the same time.

Owens gets two on Balor with the torture rack neckbreaker. The Bullfrog Splash crushes Cesaro and the Pop Up Powerbomb plants Balor. The Neutralizer is broken up though and Rusev grabs the Accolade on Owens. Cesaro comes back in and Swings Rusev, only to have Owens break up the Sharpshooter. Balor comes right back in with dropkicks though and the Coup de Grace puts Rusev away at 20:31.

Rating: B. I can't even get mad at them for having the US Champion get pinned again when Cesaro was right there. This was really the only way to go with this match as you don't have Balor debut and then lose in his

first match. I don't need him to go to the title match at Summerslam but he needs to have a dirty finish tonight. Good match here though and a good way to showcase Balor, which was the entire point.

Nia Jax vs. Brit Baker

Nia throws her around to start and ties her in the Tree of Woe. The legdrop only gets two as Nia pulls her up. A headbutt and another legdrop put Baker away at 1:20. Total squash.

Golden Truth are playing Pokemon Go and annoy Sasha Banks. Sasha says she'll win tonight.

Sheamus vs. Chris Jericho vs. Sami Zayn vs. Roman Reigns

Sheamus and Jericho double team Reigns to start and Sami joins in on the beating. Reigns is sent to the floor so it's Sami getting beaten down by both guys until Sami backdrops Jericho onto Sheamus. That means it's time for Reigns to come back in and slam Sami down for two as the announcers talk about Stephanie. Sheamus comes back in for the ten forearms on Sami until Jericho knocks the Irishman to the floor. Reigns hits the big dive to take all of them out and we go to a break.

Back with Reigns getting double teamed but fighting back, only to get caught in a Blue Thunder Bomb for a very hot near fall. The Razor's Edge sitout powerbomb gets two on Sami but the Brogue Kick cuts off the Superman Punch. Sami adds a Helluva Kick, only to have Jericho steal the near fall. A Brogue Kick saves Jericho from the Walls but Sami dives over to break up the cover. Back to back Superman Punches drop the heels and the Codebreaker is countered into....something botched. Jericho takes another Superman Punch and the spear advances Reigns at 17:06.

Rating: C+. Not in the same ballpark as the first match with Sami and Sheamus basically disappearing in the last few minutes. Reigns winning was predictable and I'd be shocked if they went with Balor vs. Rollins for the title. They're running a risk of having Reigns get back into the title picture so soon but I don't think there was ever any real doubt.

Here's New Day to celebrate 337 days as Tag Team Champions. After Woods

says he's glad Bray was drafted to Smackdown and a quick Booty0's ad, we get a montage of the title reign. Tonight, New Day is going to let a member of the crowd be an honorary member of New Day, but the question is who.

They pick a somewhat rotund man in a New Day shirt and Big E. asks sonny boy what his name is. Man: "Sonny Boy." Kofi: "No your government name." Man: "Sonny Boy." New Day doesn't quite buy this and ask if that's the name that comes on his bills or how he signs the check at restaurants. The dancing is on but the Club comes out to interrupt and beat the champs down. Big E. takes a Magic Killer and the other two lose their shirts. The Club talk trash to Sonny Boy and throw a shirt at him.

Curtis Axel vs. Neville

Axel is listed as Mr. Irrelevant because he was picked last. Neville snaps off a neckbreaker to start and flips over him a few times. A standing shooting star to the back keeps Axel in trouble and the lifting German suplex puts him in the corner. The Red Arrow puts Curtis away at 3:45.

Rating: D+. Neville is still Neville, meaning he still does almost every spot he has in each match which explains why they get weaker and weaker reactions every single time (see also Cesaro). Axel continues to be treated like a goof, especially when he should just be Joe Hennig and be Mr. Perfect II but that's too easy for WWE for reasons I don't understand.

Darren Young wants the Intercontinental Title but Bob Backlund's pep talk is cut off by the Pokemon Go hunt. Backlund yells a lot.

Video on Finn Balor.

Charlotte thinks Sasha will crack under the pressure tonight.

Women's Title: Sasha Banks vs. Charlotte

Charlotte is defending. They lock up and go down to the mat with a rollup freaking the champ out. Dana offers a quick distraction and earns an early reprimand. Banks grabs a quick Bank Statement but only gets a

modified version of the hold, allowing Charlotte to escape. That's nice of her. Instead Sasha sends her outside for the double knees from the apron and a near fall.

Charlotte kicks Sasha into the corner and then drives her into the barricade, setting up some trash talking with the belt in hand. Dana picks up the dropped belt and Sasha feigns an attack, earning Dana an ejection. Why this isn't a DQ isn't clear but it takes us to a break. Back with Sasha fighting out of a double arm crank and hitting more running knees. Charlotte grabs a quick neckbreaker but has to bail out of the moonsault. That's fine as she lands on her feet (because she can), only to have a flip dive blocked by raised boots. Sasha sends her to the floor for a dive with a SCARY landing as Banks came down on her face.

She's fine enough to cover Charlotte for two but the champ sends her outside for a huge moonsault to a standing Sasha. I mean, she barely made contact but dang it looked cool. Back in and Natural Selection gets two so we hit the Figure Four. The hold is rolled over but Charlotte goes under the ropes and bends the hold over the apron. Back in and Sasha flips out of another Figure four to grab the Bank Statement but Charlotte's foot is under the ropes. Another Bank Statement gives Sasha the title in a big surprise at 16:53.

Rating: B+. Botches aside, this was a good match and felt like a big deal. Sasha winning feels like a crowning achievement, despite a limited build and WASTING THREE MONTHS ON THAT CHARLOTTE VS. NATALYA FEUD SO WE CAN CHANGE THE TITLE ON RAW. In theory this sets up either a rematch in Brooklyn or maybe a full time Bayley call up for a shot at Summerslam.

Sasha gives a quick speech about how she's earned this and this is a new era.

Braun Strowman vs. James Ellsworth

Before the match, James thinks it would be a big win for his career and anyone with two hands can fight. A quick beating sets up a reverse chokeslam to give Strowman the pin at 1:10.

Video on Roman Reigns.

Golden Truth is STILL hunting for Pokemon and find.....the Pittsburgh Penguins logo?

Here are Enzo and Cass for a chat about various raw foods. They're cut off by the Shining Stars of all people and it's time for a match.

Shining Stars vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Primo puts Enzo down for all of thirty seconds before the hot tag brings in Cass to clean house. Cass actually gets low bridged to the floor but here are Golden Truth on the Pokemon hunt. The distraction lets Cass kick Epico in the face for the pin at 1:51. These guys were teaming with JOHN CENA last night and now they're here?

Roman and Finn wish each other luck.

Finn Balor vs. Roman Reigns

Winner goes to Summerslam to face Rollins for the title. Reigns launches him into the corner to start but Balor snaps his throat across the top. Some kicks to the head don't have much effect on Reigns as he runs Balor over again. The apron boot misses though and Balor's slingshot double stomp has Roman in trouble.

We take a break and come back with Roman powerslamming him for two and grabbing a chinlock. A sitout powerbomb gets two but Balor comes back with a string of kicks for a near fall of his own. The Superman Punch only gets two on Balor and everyone is stunned. Balor gets two off his own off a sunset flip to counter the Razor's Edge bomb. Back to back powerbombs get two more on Finn but Balor grabs a Sling Blade to block the spear. The Coup de Grace gets the big upset pin at 13:57.

Rating: B. I liked it better when AJ Styles did this the night after Wrestlemania but it's still a good ending and the right call for a change. There was really no need to do Reigns vs. Rollins again and this is a great way to make Balor seem like a big deal. He doesn't necessarily need to win the title at Summerslam but it's a really smart idea to have him get a big rub like this on his first night on the main roster.

Post match Reigns says he hopes Balor wins the title because he wants

another shot at Finn.

Overall Rating: B. This was up and down all night but the main event and the title change were enough to swing it upwards. That title change really needed to happen as the rest of the show didn't exactly have a lot going on. The re-debuts were good and the matches made some people fresh players but that doesn't mean the show was all that entertaining. I really liked the lack of authority figures as they just don't need to be there that often. Overall it's a good show but absolutely nothing that blew me away.

Results

Finn Balor b. Rusev, Cesaro and Kevin Owens – Coup de Grace to Rusev

Nia Jax b. Brit Baker – Legdrop

Roman Reigns b. Sami Zayn, Sheamus and Chris Jericho – Spear to Jericho

Neville b. Curtis Axel – Red Arrow

Sasha Banks b. Charlotte – Bank Statement

Braun Strowman b. James Ellsworth – Reverse chokeslam

Enzo Amore/Big Cass b. Shining Stars – Big boot to Epico

Finn Balor b. Roman Reigns – Coup de Grace

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Battleground 2016: It's Battleground!

Battleground 2016

Date: July 24, 2016

Location: Verizon Center, Washington D.C.

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

This is an interesting show as the Draft has made what was just a pit stop before Summerslam into a nearly meaningless show which happens to have something that could have been a co-main event of Wrestlemania. Other than that we have some nothing midcard matches, six man tags where two of the teams will be split starting tomorrow and a mystery partner. You might call this a mixed bag. Let's get to it.

Pre-Show: Usos vs. Breezango

Just a thrown together match. Jimmy hits a backbreaker on Fandango to start before it's quickly off to Breeze. Some double teaming lets Breeze snap Jey's throat across the top rope and we hit the chinlock. A few kicks to the face/head drop Breezango and it's off to Jimmy via the hot tag.

Everything breaks down and it's a series of kicks to put Breeze on the floor. Tyler comes back in to save Fandango from an electric chair, only to have Jey cross body both of them. The Superfly Splash gets two on Tyler before another superkick puts Fandango outside. A running superkick looks to set up the Superfly Splash again but Breeze gets his knees up, allowing him to grab a small package for the pin at 5:28.

Rating: C+. This was a very fast paced match and above all else the right team won. The Usos don't need to win matches like this one while Breezango needs to get some wins under their belts to actually become an important team. I still like Breezango and they're a great example of

making something out of nothing. Why can that almost never happen otherwise?

The opening video shows everyone holding their flags before going to a package on the Shield imploding to set up this match.

Charlotte/Dana Brooke vs. Sasha Banks/???

So Sasha has been going for Charlotte's title but keeps having to deal with Dana, hence bringing in a mystery partner. The mystery partner is....Bayley, in one of the worst kept secrets in a long time. Like, since Tuesday. The place goes insane for Bayley so that's certainly the solid debut.

Charlotte and Dana jump them from behind before the bell and Bayley is sent into the barricade. We get the official start with Charlotte hammering away in the corner until Bayley gets in the jumping middle rope elbow. It's off to Sasha who botches a hurricanrana before Charlotte sends her into the middle buckle.

Dana's chinlock doesn't go anywhere so it's off to Bayley who is taken down just as quickly. Bayley and Dana collide as JBL talks about this being a one off appearance for Bayley on the main roster. I really, really can't imagine that's true. Sasha comes in off the tag and everything breaks down with Charlotte hitting Natural Selection for two on Banks. Dana saves the Bank Statement but Bayley takes her to the floor, setting up the second Bank Statement to make Charlotte tap at 7:24.

Rating: C+. This was much more about the crowd reaction than anything else and that worked like a charm. What won't work like a charm is having Bayley just go back to NXT at this point. Is there any real reason to not have her on the main roster full time at this point? She can do the build to Takeover and still do this stuff just fine but for some reason they want to just have this be a one off. Maybe it's to keep Sasha hot, but then again maybe they should have thought of that THREE MONTHS AGO WHEN SHE WAS THE HOTTEST THING IN THE DIVISION AND WE DIDN'T DO THE WAY TOO LONG NATALYA FEUD.

Sasha and Bayley hug post match.

We recap the Wyatt Family vs. New Day. The Wyatts returned with Bray's face turn completely forgotten and went after New Day and their power of positivity message. Bray got in Xavier Woods' head and started to psych him out but with the Wyatts being split by the Draft, most of that has been dropped.

Wyatt Family vs. New Day

Before the match, New Day says they're just not scared. Woods and Strowman start but it's off to Bray to really scare Xavier. Actually make that Kofi, who dropkicks Wyatt while Woods is frozen in the corner. Rowan comes in with a slam and grabs a head vice before Bray drops his running backplash. A clothesline turns Kofi inside out and Woods has to drop down to the floor in fear. Kofi gets away from Braun and makes the hot tag to Big E. as everything breaks down.

Braun gets kicked to the floor and taken down by a Kofi dive (less than a year ago Dean Ambrose's dive bounced off of him). Woods saves Kofi from Sister Abigail but it's time for the big psychic staredown. It takes Kofi coming in off the top to wake Woods up and he goes off on Bray with a running forearm and right hands in the corner. A top rope splash crushes Bray and a superkick (SHOT!) puts Erick on the floor. Big E. spears Rowan off the apron but Bray's spider walk freaks Woods out and sets up Sister Abigail for the pin at 8:50.

Rating: B. Well that happened. I have no idea what the point is in having these guys win unless they're either splitting up the New Day (stupid) or having....actually that's it for their options. I mean, there's always the chance that this loss means nothing and they'll just have New Day go on like it's nothing, which is probably the direction they're going with for the sake of stupidity.

US Title: Rusev vs. Zack Ryder

Rusev is defending after Ryder won a few matches (ignore the clean loss to Sheamus in two minutes of course) and challenged for the title. Lana, now in a tiara, introduces the champ. Ryder is in red, white and blue to

really hammer this home. Rusev throws him into the corner to start but Ryder comes back with a middle rope dropkick...which completely misses.

A low superkick drops Ryder and it's time for heavy right hands. Ryder elbows out of a waistlock and fires off some forearms in the corner. A neckbreaker stuns the champ as we're firmly in the false hope portion of the match. Rusev knocks him to the floor but Ryder hits a dropkick off the barricade. Back in and the Rough Ryder sets up the Elbro but Rusev gets the knees up. The jumping superkick and the Accolade put Ryder away at 7:03.

Rating: D+. Zack Ryder loses to Rusev because that's what Zack Ryder does. Ryder is getting better at losing to Rusev as he finally broke five minutes against him. I really don't think anyone believed this was going to happen and there was no reason to assume anything else. Ryder isn't going to beat someone like Rusev and it's foolish to think he would.

Post match the beating continues until Mojo Rawley debuts to make the save, thereby setting up nothing at all since he's on Smackdown while Rusev is on Raw.

Seth Rollins comes in to see Mick Foley and Stephanie McMahon (GET SETH AWAY FROM HER! NOW!) and the bosses tell him to bring the title back to Raw. Rollins isn't worried because he's just that awesome and promises that there will be a bunch of Rollins babies in about nine months.

We recap Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens who are fighting because they're Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens. They've hated each other for years now and they still are, though this was supposed to be the final fight until the Draft put them on the same show, negating the purposes of the idea.

Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens

Zayn's attempted Helluva Kick sends Owens to the floor and they immediately start the brawl. Back in and Owens sends him into the corner for two off the Cannonball. Owens even stomps on Sami's hand as we hit the OLE chants. We hit the chinlock with Owens mocking the SAMI chants because he's just that awesome. Back up and the Michinoku Driver gets two on Owens but he's able to break up the flip dive before Sami can dive.

Instead Sami tries the slingshot moonsault but slips up and lands shoulder first on the apron. The shoulder is fine enough for Owens to work it over so you know he's ok. The Blue Thunder Bomb gets two back inside so I'm going to assume Sami is fine. Owens can't get a superplex so he settles for a superkick and Crossface. Sami finally crawls over to the rope and grabs the exploder into the corner. He gets caught on top though and has to escape a Death Valley Driver on the apron, meaning it's the closest thing we'll see to the BRAINBUSTAHHHHHHH in WWE.

Owens beats the count by a few seconds and they slug it out to dueling chants. The diving DDT is broken up and Owens hits a Cannonball with Sami still draped over the bottom rope. I love it when they tweak moves like that. The Bullfrog splash gets two on Sami but he counters the Pop Up Powerbomb into the tornado DDT. Yet another Helluva Kick is countered with another superkick as they keep countering each others' big moves due to being so familiar with one another.

Sami escapes another powerbomb attempt and hits back to back half and half suplexes for two and a standing ovation. The Pop Up Powerbomb connects but Sami gets his foot on the ropes. Owens starts slapping him as Sami says bring it, setting up another exploder into the corner. The Helluva Kick sends Owens falling into Sami's arms, setting up a second Helluva Kick for the clean pin at 18:26.

Rating: A. Can we just give these two the match of the night honors whenever they're on the card? There's such a chemistry here and I'd love to see them as partners who can't stand each other. Owens is almost being turned face by sheer force of the crowd but it's almost impossible to go against someone as loveable as Sami. Either way, great match with a great story and outstanding action to go with it.

Cole says Sami has exorcized his demons by beating Owens. Those must be quick rise demons as he pinned Owens about a month ago on Raw in a singles match.

Pre-show recap.

Natalya vs. Becky Lynch

Fallout from Natalya vs. Charlotte when Natalya turned on Becky. Natalya tries to bail to start but she's just suckering Becky in and scoring with a dropkick. It's already time to go after the knee with a side leg lock but she has to get out of a quick Disarm-Her. A stomp onto the leg sets up another leglock and Natalya gets in a quick nipup. An enziguri with the good leg gives Becky a breather before the Bexploder gets two. Becky gets two more off a missile dropkick but it bangs up the leg, setting up the Sharpshooter for the submission at 9:00.

Rating: C-. I wasn't feeling this one, especially after the classic beforehand. Natalya winning is fine and they did a good story with the leg and such but it's still just a match with a pretty lame story. I have no idea what they're going to do with the women on Smackdown but PLEASE don't bring in a second title at this point, especially with how much the talent falls off after these two.

Shane McMahon and Daniel Bryan give Dean Ambrose a pep talk.

Intercontinental Title: Darren Young vs. The Miz

Young is challenging after winning a battle royal. He also has Bob Backlund in his corner in an attempt to make Young great again. Ignore the lack of preceding greatness. Young wrestles him down to the mat before getting two off a neckbreaker. Miz shoves him off the top to take over and then grabs a headlock.

Miz's corner clothesline is cut off with another clothesline. The Crossface Chickenwing sends Miz bailing to the floor but Backlund won't let him leave. Maryse slaps Backlund and they both go down, only to have Backlund rip his shirt off. Miz goes after Backlund so Young grabs a cobra clutch on the floor as the bell rings (I think for a DQ?) at 8:40.

Rating: D. Well that happened and we can add another entry to the list of things that seem to be setting up a rematch but there's no logical way to have the rematch happen under the current rules because HAHA DRAFT. Young shouldn't have won the title here and it wouldn't have made sense for him to, though the Backlund thing has some more mileage in it, especially if it gives Young a personality.

Young chokes Miz out and looks at his hands ala Backlund in 1994.

We recap Cena/Amore/Cass vs. the Club. Cena was tired of getting beaten down by the trio so Enzo and Big Cass came out to help him, setting this up. Again though, the Club was split up so this doesn't exactly have the same meaning.

The Club vs. John Cena/Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Enzo says his team is 4G and they're very well connected. He keeps going on a rant with life advice (always lie on your resume and never make eye contact with someone while eating a banana) and also suggests a good dentist and therapist. Cena is dying in the corner listening to this and Cass tells the crowd to give it up for Enzo after that performance. Cass insults AJ's haircut and suggests that he make a lunch like a soccer mom ("Make sure to cut the crust off."). Then he can take the kids to Raw and remember the time they took a beating in Washington D.C.

Enzo and AJ start things off and we hit the SOCCER MOM chants. That earns Enzo a dropkick to the face so it's off to Cass to face Anderson. We get the standard Cass throws Enzo at people spot as Cena isn't sure what to think. Cass tosses Styles out as well before slamming Enzo onto Anderson, leaving Cena wondering why he can't get a tag. Things settle down to Gallows working on Enzo with his heavy offense. Anderson comes in with a bicycle kick to the head (Karl: "HI YAH!") to set up a chinlock.

The beating continues until Gallows misses a splash, setting up the hot tag to Cena. A very quick AA attempt on Styles is countered into a Pele as everything breaks down. Gallows hits a chokebomb on Cass before Cena and Luke play pass the Enzo, only to have AJ hit the forearm on Gallows by mistake. The AA gets two on AJ with Karl making the save, setting up a spinebuster onto the table.

Cena dives back in at nine and the Styles Clash gets another near fall with Cass making the save. The Club takes out Cass so Enzo volunteers to fight them himself. Karl is sent into the post but Gallows kicks Enzo in the face, only to have Cena come back in and take Luke out. Styles comes back in but gets caught in a super AA for the pin at 14:23.

Rating: B. So that's your setup for Cena vs. AJ II which probably should be for the Smackdown World Title if such a thing exists. Cena pinning AJ in a tag match is fine and sets things moving forward a bit more but the bigger thing here is Enzo and Cass looking like they're on a much higher level than they were just a few weeks ago. These guys are looking like something important, which you never expect to see for people who debuted just three and a half months ago.

It's time for the Highlight Reel with the returning Randy Orton. Randy really seems happy to be back and is definitely here as a face. He talks about being gone for nine months to get back to this point and he's stuck here with this loser. Jericho says Orton being in this ring with him puts Orton on a different level. That makes Orton think he should drop Jericho with an RKO out of nowhere so Jericho sums up the last few months for him, including the tacks going into his back a little while ago.

Jericho offers the Gift of Jericho and Orton walks up to him, shaking Jericho up a bit. Orton says it was just to see the hair because it looks like Ellen DeGeneres'. We see a clip of Lesnar talking about hurting people but Orton is ready to go to Suplex City. See, it takes twenty suplexes to get there but it only takes one RKO to go to Viperville, NO ENHANCEMENT NEEDED. Even the crowd gasps at that one. Jericho suggests that Orton is in trouble and teases Orton about the RKO, which eventually hits, albeit not out of nowhere. This took WAY longer than it should have but that enhancement line was great.

We recap the Shield triple threat which is well over a few years in the making. The short version consists of Rollins returning from knee surgery and taking the title from Reigns, only to have Ambrose take it away that same night. This set up the triple threat but Reigns has been suspended for a month due to a Wellness violation.

WWE World Title: Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins vs. Dean Ambrose

Ambrose is defending but before we can get going, here are all four authority figures (because there are four authority figures in WWE). We get the big match intros and the three way staredown before Rollins is knocked to the floor. Ambrose rolls Reigns up for two and eats a big

clothesline for his efforts.

Rollins gets caught in a Samoan Drop but Ambrose takes them both down as they're only just out of first gear. Roman is sent outside and we get Rollins vs. Ambrose for the third time this week. They head to the floor as well with Ambrose going into the steps and Roman going into the barricade. This is the rather dull part of the match where they haven't cranked it up yet and there's clearly at least another ten minutes in the match so we're kind of stuck waiting.

All three wind up in the timekeeper's area for a bit before Ambrose missile dropkicks Reigns for two. The standing elbow drop gets two but Rollins comes back in to break up the cover. Roman gets in a Superman Punch to Rollins but Ambrose runs him over to put all three down. Now it's Reigns getting double teamed with both guys scoring off running dives to the floor. We see the locker rooms watching (I'm sure that's completely authentic) as Reigns is powerbombed through the announcers' table.

Back in and the Buckle Bomb is countered with a hurricanrana into the corner to put both guys down. Rollins is still able to run up the corner for the superplex into the falcon's arrow for the first near fall. Reigns comes back in to break up a superplex on Rollins, setting up a sitout powerbomb for two on Seth. The champ ducks the Superman Punch but can't hit Dirty Deeds, allowing the Punch to knock Dean outside. Rollins gets a very close fall off a Pedigree to Reigns, only to have the spear cut him in half. Ambrose scores with a quick Dirty Deeds to pin Reigns at 18:05.

Rating: B+. This started slowly but got a lot better as things went on. I'm really hoping that's not it for the Reigns punishment as just losing in a pay per view main event isn't exactly the worst thing in the world. Ambrose winning makes sense as Smackdown needs something to fight over and I'm sure Raw will still get their shots in the future. This would have been better served on a bigger stage but it really did need to happen.

JBL goes NUTS with a big rant about how great Smackdown is, completely forgetting how much he can't stand Ambrose. The Smackdown locker room

comes out because this allegedly means something.

Overall Rating: B+. As is so often the case anymore, strong wrestling by the younger guys brings these shows up a few notches. The main event was solid and you had a classic in the middle of the show plus a very fun moment in the opener. The midcard stuff really holds this back though as there's a stretch in there of Natalya vs. Lynch which should have been on the pre-show to help keep this from ending at 11:15.

I'm fine with extra wrestling but there was really no need for the bonus tag when you could move something to the pre-show instead to free up some time. Still though, good stuff as WWE's PPVs continue to be better than they have any right to be. Check out Zayn vs. Owens though, in case you somehow haven't seen them fight before.

Results

Sasha Banks/Bayley b. Charlotte/Dana Brooke – Bank Statement to Charlotte

Wyatt Family b. New Day – Sister Abigail to Woods

Rusev b. Zack Ryder – Accolade

Sami Zayn b. Kevin Owens – Helluva Kick

Natalya b. Becky Lynch – Sharpshooter

The Miz b. Darren Young via DQ when Bob Backlund interfered

John Cena/Enzo Amore/Big Cass b. The Club – Super AA to Styles

Dean Ambrose b. Roman Reigns and Seth Rollins – Dirty Deeds to Reigns

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