

Wrestler of the Day – March 5: Big E. Langston

Today we enter the world of power lifting with Big E. Langston.

Big E. started down in FCW back in late 2009 so we'll pick up his career on February 14, 2010 in a tag team match.

Big E. Langston/Skip Sheffield vs. Vance Archer/Alex Riley

Sheffield is now known as Ryback and is a cowboy here. The announcers sound like they've never seen Langston before so maybe this is his debut. Langston runs Riley over to start and it's quickly off to Sheffield for some shoulders of his own. Archer comes in and is easily slammed for Langston gets the tag to do nothing at all. Vance kicks Sheffield in the face for two and it's back to Riley as the cowboy is in trouble. We hit the chinlock for a bit before both guys try cross bodies and fall to the floor. Langston comes in off the hot tag to clean house but Riley escapes the Big Ending and hits a powerbomb into a neckbreaker for the pin.

Rating: C-. Nice idea for the debut here with Langston looking good but the ending stoppe Langston cold. Langston would get better but you can't teach raw power like he has and displayed here. Riley also had so much potential but allegedly reacted badly to a rib from Cena in the Raw locker room and lost his push.

We'll jump ahead about a year to March 27, 2011 with Langston having grown up a bit and facing Leo Kruger.

Leo Kruger vs. Big E. Langston

Langston shoves him around with ease to start and Leo bails to the floor. A headlock is countered with an easy lift into the air before Langston

casually trips him to the mat in a nice touch. Kruger rolls to the apron and snaps Big E.'s throat across the top rope to take over. The referee gets bumped but pops back up to see Kruger hit a neckbreaker to send Langston outside. Back in and Langston shoves Kruger away before scoring with some hard clotheslines. A belly to belly suplex gets two but Kruger rolls him up and grabs the ropes for a pin.

Rating: D+. Not much to see here but Kruger has almost always been a better character than a worker. Langston was starting to look more and more like his more familiar version but he's still not completely rounded into form. Also I didn't realize how often he got pinned in FCW as it's quite different from his win/loss record on Raw.

We'll wrap up his FCW run with this stacked six man tag from sometime in June 2011.

Big E. Langston/Calvin Raines/Alexander Rusev vs. Bo Rotundo/Leakee/Richie Steamboat

Raines is a big guy and Langston's FCW Tag Team Championship partner. FCW Champion Rotundo is now known as Bo Dallas and Leakee is Roman Reigns. Rusev and Richie get things going with Steamboat going after Alexander's huge calves. Rusev easily throws him away and scores with a shoulder but it's quickly off to Bo and then Leakee (pronounced Lay Ah Key) to stay on the arm. Alexander easily runs over Leakee before it's off to Langston for more power offense as we take a break.

Back with Raines running over Leakee for two and putting on something resembling a seated full nelson. Leakee comes back with a sunset flip before running over for the tag to Steamboat. Richie cleans house for a bit until Rusev slams him off the top with ease. Back to Langston who stomps away and hits a spinning belly to belly for two. Rusev comes in again for a bearhug and an overhead belly to belly.

A double tag brings in Raines vs. Steamboat and Ricky is caught in an

abdominal stretch. Back to Langston who isn't hurt by Steamboat chops but a kick to the face has some more effect. The hot tag brings in Bo to clean house as everything breaks down. Bo and Langston are left alone in the ring and a spear is enough to pin Big E.

Rating: B-. I liked this a lot more than I expected to. They followed the six man formula very well here and the whole thing worked quite well. These guys knew how to work together and everything flowed well. That being said, I need to pick better matches the next time I do one of these things. Langston is now 0-3.

Langston made his Raw debut in December as an enforcer for Dolph Ziggler, but around this time he was still a monster in NXT. One night the Shield cleaned out the NXT locker room and stood tall in the ring. Now in a good promotion, the unstoppable monster would come out for a big showdown. Thankfully NXT is a good promotion and Langston made his way to the ring for a faceoff with Roman Reigns. The next week, Langston got a title shot at NXT Champion Seth Rollins.

NXT Title: Seth Rollins vs. Big E. Langston

No DQ and Rollins is defending. Rollins doesn't have music yet. After the big match intros we're ready to go. Langston grabs a kick and shoves Rollins down to start, freaking Seth out. The champion grabs a front facelock and gets shoved into the corner for some shoulder blocks. Langston misses a charge into the corner and hits the post, but immediately comes back with a gorilla press to send Rollins to the floor.

Langston goes after him but here are Reigns and Ambrose for the triple beatdown. Big E. gets sent into the steps as we take a break. Back with both guys in the ring again with Rollins firing off kicks to the ribs. Rollins hooks a triangle choke but Langston fights up and hits an electric chair drop to escape. The crowd is ENTIRELY behind Langston here as he fires off clotheslines. A double clothesline takes down Ambrose and Reigns but they run in again to break up the Big Ending.

Some guys from the locker room come out to try to stop the non-champions of the Shield but are quickly dispatched. Eventually about 15 guys come out and FINALLY clear them out, leaving it one on one. Rollins hits the standing Sliced Bread for two and the knockout scares him to death. He loads it up again, but Langston catches him on his shoulder and the Big Ending gives Langston the title at 6:38 shown of 10:08.

Rating: C+. The match itself wasn't much, but the run-ins were handled perfectly, making this feel like a huge moment and a nearly Attitude Era style main event. I also really like the idea of not having Langston beat up the Shield on his own as it keeps things a bit more realistic given how strong Shield has been pushed. Not a great match, but really good booking of a title change.

After having debuted on the 2013 Slammies, Langston would make his in ring debut in a Tag Team Title match at Wrestlemania XXIX.

Tag Titles: Big E. Langston/Dolph Ziggler vs. HELL NO

HELL NO is defending. This was set up by Ziggler beating Kane and Bryan in singles matches and wanting a title match as a result. This is also Langston's debut. We get a funny bit to start with Ziggler kissing AJ to taunt Bryan and getting kicked in the head for a VERY close two ala last year. Ziggler bails to the floor and gets caught with a suicide dive. Back in and Bryan fires off the hard kicks to the chest but the big one to the head misses.

Ziggler dives off to tag in Langston and he gets Kane. Big E. easily catches a charging Kane and hits three straight backbreakers to take over. Kane gets a boot up in the corner to stop a charging Langston but the chokeslam is easily broken up. Langston runs over Kane and it's back to Ziggler for some quick choking. Langston comes in again for more shots to Kane's chest and ribs. He lowers his head though and there's a DDT from Kane to put Langston down.

Back to Dolph who breaks up a tag to Bryan, only to miss a splash in the corner. Kane's side slam gets two but the top rope clothesline misses. The Fameasser kind of misses but Bryan comes in for the save anyway. Ziggler jumps into an uppercut from Kane but Langston splashes Kane for the save at two. The Big Ending is broken up and Kane sends Big E. to the floor for the knee from Bryan. The Zig Zag gets two on Kane and Dolph is frustrated. AJ slides in the briefcase but Kane ducks Ziggler's swing. The chokeslam connects and Kane takes out Langston. The Swan Dive from Bryan retains the titles at 6:30.

Rating: C. My predictions are taking a pounding tonight. I would assume this means Ziggler cashes in tonight, because we should totally buy him as world champion after he loses to Bryan here right? The match was fine, but at this point there's no need to see HELL NO with the belts anymore. It's just dull at this point and they stopped being funny a long time ago.

Dolph Ziggler won the World Heavyweight Championship the next night on Raw but got injured soon thereafter. With Dolph out, Langston started a feud with Alberto Del Rio and faced him about five times in three weeks, including May 31, 2013 on Smackdown.

Big E. Langston vs. Alberto Del Rio

Langston pounds him into the corner to start and fires off some shoulders, but Del Rio comes back with a kick to the ribs. Big E. drapes him across the top rope and Del Rio is right back down. Del Rio comes back with more kicks and a running clothesline, only to walk into a belly to belly for two. The Backstabber staggers Langston and a German suplex puts him down again.

A hard kick to the face gets two more for Alberto and there's the armbreaker but Langston picks Alberto up to escape. Langston runs him over for two but gets caught in the armbreaker over the ropes. Del Rio falls to the floor and gets posted after an AJ distraction, allowing the

Big Ending to finish Albert back inside at 4:50.

Rating: D+. This match is firmly in the category of matches we don't need to see for a good while. They've fought something like four times in two weeks now, which is way more than any pair should be going at it. The match was nothing special either as they didn't have time to go anywhere with it.

Langston went on a tear through the midcard, earning himself an Intercontinental Title shot on Raw on November 18, 2013.

Intercontinental Title: Big E. Langston vs. Curtis Axel

They treat this as a big deal with full entrances and the big match intros. Axel, the champion, is officially no longer a Paul Heyman guy. Langston easily takes him to the mat but gets elbowed in the face to give Axel a breather. Big E. easily tosses Axel around and sends him to the floor to start a chase. Back in and Langston clotheslines him down like it's nothing as this is one sided so far.

A standing backdrop gets two on the champion but he hits a quick hot shot to get a breather. Axel pounds on his back a bit and we take a break. Back with Axel getting two off a dropkick and hooking a front facelock. Langston finally gets up and just throws Curtis off of him before scoring with some clotheslines. A belly to belly puts Axel down and there's the Warrior Splash for two. The straps come down and the Big Ending gives Langston the title at 8:50.

Rating: C-. This wasn't bad but it does beg the question: if they want to make Langston into a big deal, why in the world would you job him clean to Del Rio last week in four minutes? Either way, it was definitely the right idea to switch the belt here as Axel is long past the point of mattering. A gimmick change could help him a lot at the moment because the potential is definitely there.

Around this time WWE started making up challengers of the month for Langston, including this one against Damien Sandow at TLC 2013.

Intercontinental Title: Big E. Langston vs. Damien Sandow

Before the match, Sandow tells the Texas crowd some assorted phrases that are worthless: y'all, ye if followed by haw, and Big E. Langston: Intercontinental Champion. Nice touch. Langston throws the challenger into the corner to start and hits a corner splash to keep Damien in trouble. They head outside with Langston in trouble, only to miss a charge into the post to change momentum.

Back in and Damien pounds away at Big E.'s head before putting on a chinlock. The Wind-Up Elbow gets two for Sandow and we're back to the chinlock again. Langston powers out of the hold and drops Damien with an electric chair. A belly to belly sets up the Warrior Splash for two but the Big Ending is countered into an Edge-0-Matic for two by Sandow. Another Big Ending attempt is countered into a small package for two but Langston is done messing around. He runs Sandow over with ease and the Big Ending is enough to retain the title at 6:25.

Rating: D+. The match was nothing you wouldn't see on Smackdown. These two did virtually the same match with the same story earlier this year for Langston's NXT Title so there was some practice coming in. Langston has a bright future and a title defense on PPV isn't going to hurt him at all.

Having destroyed the midcard, Langston was given a non-title match against WWE Champion Randy Orton on January 10, 2014's Smackdown.

Randy Orton vs. Big E. Langston

Non-title of course. Langston takes him down with a shoulder block but Orton rolls to the floor before a cover. Back in and a headlock sets up

another shoulder block sends Orton to the floor again. Orton comes in again and punches Big E. down, only to walk into a headbutt for two. Langston sends Orton to the mat with a single right hand to the ribs before slapping on an armbar.

Orton fights up again and pounds on Big E., only to get caught in a backbreaker. A second backbreaker gets two and Langston is getting in a zone. Randy escapes the Big Ending and bails to the floor as we take a break. Back with the chinlock until Big E. powers out, only to get kneed in the ribs for two. Back to the chinlock but Big E. fights up again.

The comeback is short lived again though as Orton sends him through the ropes to the floor. Langston is sent into the steps twice in a row for two before we hit the chinlock again. Big E. fights up one more time and runs Orton over twice in a row, followed by a belly to belly suplex. The Warrior Splash gets two but Orton hits his backbreaker to get a breather. The RK0 is countered with a splash in the corner but Orton pokes Big E. in the eye, setting up the RK0 for the pin at 14:28.

Rating; C+. I missed pokes to the eyes. They're such a simple heel move but they can be just what you need to get a heel through an ending. This match worked for the most part but it could have had a few minutes of chinlocks taken out. It's good that Langston gets to look like he can hang in there against top guys. There's a future there if he's used properly.

We'll wrap it up with what has become too rare anymore: an Intercontinental Title defense on PPV against Jack Swagger, who won a four way on Smackdown to earn the shot.

Intercontinental Title: Big E. vs. Jack Swagger

Swagger is challenging and Colter does his usual schtick before the match. Big E. shoves him into the corner to start and runs him over with a hard shoulder block, sending Swagger to the outside. Back in and some

overhead belly to belly suplexes put Jack down but he bails to the floor again to avoid a charging champion. This time Big E. follows him outside and sends him into the steps but the champion goes after Colter.

The distraction doesn't work though as he spears Jack into the steps in a painful looking spot. Back inside and Jack low bridges Big E. out to the floor and takes over with some running knees in the corner. After a WE THE PEOPLE it's off to a front facelock for a few moments. Big E. fights up and a double clothesline puts both guys down again. Swagger avoids a charge and Big E. goes shoulder first into the post, drawing a WE THE PEOPLE chant from the crowd.

Back up and Big E. runs Swagger over with clotheslines and a belly to belly suplex but the champion charges into a powerslam for two. The running Vader Bomb is caught in the Big Ending but Jack makes it to the apron. That's fine with Big E. as he spears him through the ropes in a big crash. Back in and the Warrior Splash gets two so Big E....goes up top? Jack catches him with a right hand and runs the ropes for a belly to belly superplex and a VERY close two.

Swagger takes out the leg and puts on the Patriot Lock but Big E. kicks his way out. The gutwrench is countered but Big E. runs him over and takes down the straps. Jack grabs another Patriot Lock but Big E. fights up and hits an enziguri of all things, setting up the Big Ending to retain the title at 11:50.

Rating: B. I liked this far better than I was expecting with Swagger putting up a great fight and making it much closer than he had any right to. It's nice to see Big E. get a win on PPV and a successful title defense over a former World Champion never hurt anyone. It should be interesting to see where the Real Americans go from here.

Overall Langston is a guy with a ton of potential and the fact that he only started about five years ago is astounding. He's incredibly strong but there's far more to him than most power guys. Langston once said on

Twitter that “When you look like I do, people don’t expect you to think that much.” I love it when people think like that and his career has shown the same promise ever since. He’ll be a big deal one day and he’s been very solid so far in his career.

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Monday Night Raw – March 3, 2014: Not In Our House

Monday Night Raw

Date: March 3, 2014

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Jerry Lawler

This is one of those shows I’ve been wanting to see for what feels like months. We’re in one of the holy lands of smart fans and there’s a possibility that they’ll try to hijack the show with CM Punk chants. We’ll also get more build to Wrestlemania, including a match between Daniel Bryan and Batista. Let’s get to it.

First thing up: CM Punk’s music but Paul Heyman coming out instead. Nice little tease there. Heyman holds the mic out to the crowd as a HUGE CM Punk chant starts up. Heyman: “I believe he deserves louder than that.” He sits down in the middle of the ring and says he’s here to tell the story of a Paul Heyman guy who was never truly wanted in WWE. This was a Paul Heyman guy that was too small to main event Wrestlemania with too many tattoos who would rebel against the first family.

He's here tonight to tell you about a guy born in, raised in and still living in Chicago. His name is Paul Heyman and this is his pipe bomb about CM Punk.....who is not here this evening. After pausing for another CM Punk chant, Heyman says no one is more upset than him about CM Punk not performing in this ring tonight. So what happened? Why won't anyone talk about why CM Punk isn't here tonight? There's someone to blame for why Punk doesn't get to perform around here. That finger of blame is being pointed at every single fan here tonight.

This is why Heyman finds it easier to lie all the time. He managed Punk to a 434 day WWE Title reign and then the fans took him away with promises of love and affirmation. But all that did was take Punk away from everybody, including the fans themselves. Heyman also blames the Undertaker because Punk couldn't stop the Streak last year and now Paul wants revenge. He wants to see Streak taken away from the Undertaker, but how do you kill someone who is already dead? There is only one man that can conquer the Streak: the beast incarnate, Brock Lesnar.

A ticked off Lesnar comes out and we see a clip from the end of last week's show with Undertaker stabbing Brock with a pen to sign the contract for Wrestlemania XXX. Brock says Undertaker is scared to death of him and last week proved it. Many people have tried to conquer the streak but many men have failed to do so, including Chicago's own CM Punk.

The Streak will be conquered by Brock Lesnar and Lesnar is ready to leave, but here's Mark Henry for a staredown. Brock says bring it on and charges right into a right hand. Mark gets thrown into the steps and Lesnar looks livid. He blasts Henry in the face with the steps with one of the hardest shots I've seen in years. An F5 through the table knocks Henry even more out cold and the fans chant for Punk.

Tag Titles: New Age Outlaws vs. Usos

The Outlaws are defending but Road Dogg doesn't think the fans here are worthy of hearing his catchphrases. It only took them two months to remember they're heels. Jey hammers on Roadie to start but gets whipped hard into the corner. Uso comes out holding his knee so Dogg kicks him to

the floor for a breather. Billy throws him back inside and hammers away before it's back to Dogg. Jey's leg seems to be holding up well enough and Dogg even works it over a bit. Roadie throws him to the floor as we take a break.

Back with Jey fighting out of a chinlock but getting slammed down for two. Dogg comes back in and takes a spin kick to the face (the knee seems fine). The hot tag brings in Jimmy to face Billy. Dogg gets knocked off the apron and a Samoan drop puts Gunn down. There's a Bubba Bomb to Billy and the running Umaga attack in the corner to Roadie.

A reverse Whisper in the Wind hits Gunn and there's a superkick to knock Dogg to the floor. Gunn rolls up Jimmy for two and the tilt-a-whirl slam gets the same. The Fameasser just misses and the Usos do the plancha with the flying tag, setting up the superkick and Superfly Splash to FINALLY give the Usos the Tag Titles at 9:27.

Rating: C+. It's about three years overdue but this was the best way to do it. I have no problem with the Outlaws keeping the title for just a few weeks as they put the young guys over 100% clean before Wrestlemania. Good little match and they made it feel like it meant something, which is rare for these titles.

The Divas watch a clip from Need For Speed and pine for Aaron Paul. Apparently Dolph Ziggler is riding here with Paul tonight. Aksana wants to ride with him too because she likes fast cars.

Big E. vs. Cesaro

Non-title again. Cesaro quickly catches Big E. in a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker and the fans are completely behind him. Big E. sends him into the corner and snaps off a great belly to belly suplex, only to be sent to the floor before the Warrior Splash can hit. Big E. drops Swagger with a right hand but walks back inside for the Swing. Not that it matters as Swagger runs in for the DQ at 1:24.

Cesaro takes the Big Ending post match.

Shield vs. Wyatt Family

The fans think this is awesome while Bray is still in the chair. He stands up and whips off the hat but Ambrose and Rollins dive through the ropes to take out the Family. Reigns runs over Bray and sends him to the floor as the bell ring. Harper puts Rollins on the top rope but Seth backflips off and lands on his feet, runs into the ring and flip dives onto Harper and dives back inside to flip dive onto Rowan. Rollins goes back up but Bray throws Ambrose into the ropes to knock Seth to the floor in a nasty fall.

Back from a break with Rollins in a chinlock before being run over with a shoulder block. Ambrose goes to yell at Bray and Reigns goes to get him, leaving no one for a free Rollins to tag. Seth hits a quick Downward Spiral to send Rowan into the middle buckle and makes a tag to Dean as things speed up. He runs over Erick and hammers away before going after the leg.

Dean slaps on a Figure Four but Harper breaks it up with a double stomp. Reigns comes in as Dean brawls with Wyatt. The fans are WAY into Wyatt here as he hammers on Ambrose's head and shouts a lot. Ambrose is caught in the cultish corner as the fans think this is awesome. Another Punk chant stars up while Harper stands on Dean's chest. Back to Rowan for the fist vice but Dean is still able to taunt the Wyatts. He pulls Erick's beard to break it up but walks into a sidewalk slam for two. The fans chant for Reigns as Ambrose takes Harper's head off with a clothesline.

Bray comes in and knocks Roman off the apron, leaving only Rollins to take the tag from Ambrose.....but he drops to the floor. Seth walks away and Roman tries to play peacekeeper. Rollins shouts that Reigns wasn't there for him when he needed a tag so the other two can figure it out. Wyatt runs over Ambrose but Roman makes the save. Reigns goes nuts with Superman Punches and Ambrose is back in as well.

Reigns hits a running boot from the floor to the apron as Ambrose hammers on Wyatt. Reigns spears Rowan over the announce table and Harper hits a suicide dive to send Reigns over the table. Dean goes after Luke but Bray posts him. Rollins is still on the ramp as a THIS IS AWESOME chant starts up. Sister Abigail is enough to end Ambrose at 13:55.

Rating: B+. This wasn't the match from Elimination Chamber but it didn't need to be. We already got the showdown and tonight was all about the story. There's more to come from this story as Rollins looked conflicted about his decision, meaning there's going to be something special at Wrestlemania. Again, I'm loving this time in WWE and this is going to make Wrestlemania even better.

Batista thinks the YES Movement is one of the stupidest things he's ever seen. These fans are turning someone like Daniel Bryan into a superhero but he could never be like Batista. No one may like it, but they have to deal with it. That's a great heel catchphrase.

The Usos will defend against the Outlaws tomorrow night on the live Main Event special.

Santino Marella/Emma vs. Fandango/Summer Rae

We open with COMEDY as Santino keeps high fiveing Emma which means they have to switch. Fandango jumps Santino to start and gets two off a spinwheel kick. Santino comes back with a jawbreaker and it's off to the girls for some Emma dancing. The Dilemma (Tarantula) sets up the Emma Sandwich (running cross body to a seated Summer) and the Emma Lock gets the win at 3:24.

Rating: D+. Believe it or not the fans actually didn't hate this. Emma is the kind of girl that is going to get over due to being rather cute and fun when given the chance, which she's finally getting. It helps that she can go in the ring and some of those submission holds proved it. Nice showing here but I'm tired of this same match in various forms week after week.

Stephanie loves showing her daughters great moments in McMahon history on the WWE Network. This is treated like a sweet moment.

Sheamus vs. Christian

Christian stalls before the bell and then slaps Sheamus in the face. The chase is on and Christian is sent into the barricade. Back in and a knee drop gets two on the Canadian but he sends Sheamus into the corner for

some choking. Christian slaps him in the face again and gets an Irish Curse for his efforts. Sheamus misses a charge to the floor but just steps out of the way of a plancha. Christian escapes a powerslam and hides behind the announcers as we go to a break.

Back with Christian missing something off the middle rope but still being able to shove Sheamus off the top and out to the floor in a BIG crash. Christian throws him over the barricade and talks trash before taking Sheamus back inside. Sheamus says bring it on so Christian suplexes him down but misses a top rope splash. The rolling fireman's carry sets up the ten forearms but Christian fights out. Christian goes up top but gets caught in mid air and now the ten forearms connect.

A running knee on the apron sets up a running knee in the ring for two for Sheamus. The Irishman is holding his shoulder and arm so Christian takes him down and gets two off the frog splash. Back to the CM Punk chant as White Noise gets a VERY close two. Christian throws him to the apron but Sheamus hits a quick Brogue Kick anyway and comes back inside for the pin at 14:00.

Rating: B-. Definitely the best match in their series as they treated it more like a fight than a match. The crowd of course didn't care and called the match awful because they're petulant children that only care what they want and have no problem messing with three million fans at home because it's what they want to do.

Back from a break and Christian jumps Sheamus in the back and hits the injured arm with I believe a light.

Bella Twins vs. Aksana/Alicia Fox

Brie runs over Aksana to start but it's quickly off to Alicia to ram Brie's head into the mat. The heels work on Brie for a bit as this is already going nowhere. Fox slams Brie out of the corner but gets slammed down for two. Nikki finally comes in off the tag and shouts COME ON a lot. Everything breaks down and the Rack is good for the pin on Alicia at 4:17.

Rating: D-. Next.

Preview for a new USA show called Sirens.

Here's Daniel Bryan with something to say but he has to wait for the crowd to calm down. He says the fans have a voice and he's not leaving this ring until one of two things happen. The fans chant for Punk but Bryan says he isn't leaving until Batista comes down to fight him or HHH accepts his challenge for Wrestlemania. Here are Stephanie and HHH to answer, drawing an even louder CM Punk chant. Thankfully HHH acts like a heel this time and soaks the whole thing in.

Bryan ignores Stephanie and lays out his evidence of HHH holding him back for the last six months. Daniel is stronger than ever and wants to settle the score at Wrestlemania. HHH says that's not going to happen and asks why Daniel's generation can't accept its inadequacy. He dubs this the Excuses Era because no one in this era can just admit that they're not good enough. They blame everyone else and make excuses about being held down and buried.

The reality is that anyone who has ever failed in WWE is because they weren't good enough. Bryan is nothing more than a B+ player and there's nothing wrong with that. However, it's not enough to make HHH lace up his boots at Wrestlemania. Bryan says the fans chant because they see through HHH's lies and there go the people again. HHH claims to be doing this for the WWE Universe but he just isn't listening to what they want.

They want to see someone like him succeed and the only way he can do that is by beating HHH at Wrestlemania. Stephanie says they won't listen to this sea of inadequacy because they'll turn on you at the drop of a hat. The only people that won't turn on him are her and HHH because they know what he means for the business. Stephanie gives the whole "my family made all this" speech, so Bryan asks to fight her at Wrestlemania while HHH wears Stephanie's skirt.

HHH thinks she would beat Bryan up too, but Bryan vs. HHH just isn't happening. He goes into his most condescending voice and says Wrestlemania is the showcase of the immortals. As much as Bryan hates it, he just doesn't measure up and needs to get out of HHH's ring. Bryan says this is the fans' ring but HHH says Bryan and all of the fans belong to

him, so get out. Daniel says make him so Stephanie calls out Kane. The FLYING GOAT lays out Kane but the referees pull Daniel off of him.

We look back at Lesnar destroying Henry.

The expert panel recaps the night.

Alberto Del Rio vs. Dolph Ziggler

Ziggler comes in via a Shelby Mustang driven by Aaron Paul from Need For Speed. Paul is a shorter guy but has a ton of energy which is all you can ask for from these guys. He jumps in on commentary as the fans chant for Ziggler. Del Rio takes him down and does Ziggler's hair flip pose as the announcers talk about video games.

The tilt-a-whirl backbreaker gets two for Del Rio but the low superkick misses. Ziggler gets two of his own with the running DDT but Del Rio slams him down again. Paul gets up on the announce table and the Zig Zag is good for the pin at 2:43. This is par for the course on the guest star segments anymore and that's fine.

Paul Bearer is announced for the Hall of Fame. Nothing wrong with that.

Big E. vs. Jack Swagger

Cesaro runs in for the DQ at 4 seconds and Neutralizes Big E.

The Real Americans argue post match and Cesaro loads Jack up in the Swing but Colter calls him off. The fans chant for Cesaro to do it and he lets Swagger go. Colter says help your brother up and Cesaro does so, albeit roughly. Zeb makes them hug it out and they reluctantly obey.

Daniel Bryan vs. Kane is made for tomorrow night's live Main Event.

Here's a limping Cena (after the Wyatts' intro started by mistake) who can't even do his signature entrance. The fans chant for Punk and Cena thanks him for the usual Chicago welcome. Cena can't wrestle tonight, drawing a HUGE YES chant. He'll take that as their version of get well soon. John is out here to feel that energy from the crowd because he's had some great moments in this arena, such as getting his face kicked in

by Brock Lesnar and having a very special match with somebody at Money in the Bank.

Cena says he's heard about this whole hijacking thing and it's clear that the people want change. He can respect that, but success has to be earned and change comes through him. That brings him to Bray Wyatt, who isn't in the driver's seat after last week. Cena started his career in this arena and he's still standing tall right here.

The Wyatts appear on screen and Bray asks if Cena can feel these people. Cena reminds him of a great throughbred racehorse that has been winning his entire career, but then he starts to slow down. That horse is now in the back of the barn waiting to be put down. How long does Cena think he can fend the Wyatts off? Bray is the reaper and he is going to put Cena down because he knows Cena's greatest fear. The loneliest man on earth is the man who sits on the top of his empty castle. Follow the buzzards.

Orton wishes Batista luck out there tonight.

Alexander Rusev speaks Bulgarian on the stage.

We look back at Hogan returning last week and see him on the Today Show. Hogan has a Wrestlemania announcement for next week.

Batista vs. Daniel Bryan

Orton comes out to watch. The bell rings at 11:02 so this probably doesn't last long. Cole incorrectly says this is a first time ever match on Raw as these two fought once back in 2010. The fans immediately chant B00-TISTA as he runs Bryan over with a shoulder. Daniel goes after the leg though and Batista is in trouble. A dropkick to the knee puts Batista down again and Bryan follows up with a half crab. Batista kicks him off and knocks his head off with a clothesline. The fans think Batista can't wrestle as he throws Bryan to the floor....and we take another break.

Back with Bryan backflipping over Batista and hitting the running dropkicks in the corner. Batista rolls to the floor to avoid the third so it's the FLYING GOAT. The YES Kicks get two but here comes the Authority for a distraction. The fans chant for Punk as Batista sends Bryan into

the steps. Daniel is thrown into Randy Orton and Batista looked annoyed. Daniel is thrown back inside and gets an overrated chant plus a high kick from Daniel Bryan. Not that it matters as Orton comes in to attack Bryan for the DQ at 10:10.

Rating: C. Not a bad match here but they were just waiting for the screwy ending to close things out. I was thinking they would have Bryan get the pin here to change things up even more but this keeps the triple threat hopes looking solid. At the same time it keeps the Bryan vs. HHH hopes looking solid so I'm still not sure where they're going. That's still an awesome feeling.

Post match Orton loads up the RKO on Batista but gets shoved into the running knee. Bryan goes after the Authority but gets speared down by Batista. HHH gets in the ring and yells at Bryan but Daniel kicks him from the mat. A Batista Bomb lays out Bryan and HHH adds in a Pedigree, leaving the Authority standing tall to end the show.

Overall Rating: B+. This was the WWE fighting back against the fans and showing the product is what really matters. The fans chanted all night and at the end of the day it came off as desperate pleas for attention instead of something witty or funny. The Punk chants just got annoying by about 9:30 and I don't think anyone was paying attention to them.

The show itself was very solid with Wrestlemania being shored up and a title change that needed to happen finally taking place. Brock looks like a killer heading into Wrestlemania and there are still doors open for major matches on the card. WWE is at it's full power here and it's a very exciting time. Bryan and Punk are still wild cards and there's the announcement next week that might be something interesting. Good show this week and things are really picking up.

Results

Usos b. New Age Outlaws – Superfly Splash to Gunn

Big E. b. Cesaro via DQ when Jack Swagger interfered

Wyatt Family b. Shield – Sister Abigail to Ambrose

Santino Marella/Emma b. Summer Rae/Fandango

Bella Twins b. Alicia Fox/Aksana – Rack to Fox

Dolph Ziggler b. Alberto Del Rio – Zig Zag

Big E. b. Jack Swagger via DQ when Cesaro interfered

Daniel Bryan b. Batista via DQ when Randy Orton interfered

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On This Day: August 29, 2012 – NXT: Crowning A Champion

NXT

Date: August 29, 2012

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Byron Saxton, William Regal

It's time for the title match tonight and I'm actually somewhat excited. This change officially turns NXT into its own regular promotion which is what it needed for the last year and a half or so. It's Jinder Mahal vs. Seth Rollins for the inaugural title, which is a matchup I didn't think I'd like. Mahal is growing on me as a basic foreign heel and Rollins...well he's energetic. Let's get to it.

Jason Jordan/Mike Dalton vs. Hunico/Camacho

Jordan/Dalton won the first match between these teams. Regal calls the fans the NXT Universe now. Great. Now we're hearing the same stupid lines from NXT that we hear on Raw and Smackdown. Jordan and Camacho start us off with Jordan getting in some basic offense before walking into a pretty good spinebuster. Camacho pounds on Jordan's face and suplexes him down to bring in Hunico.

Back to Camacho after nothing of note and the bigger guy throws Jordan around with a nice butterfly suplex. A legdrop gets two but Jordan escapes a suplex and tags in Dalton. Dalton hits a spinwheel kick and a charge in the corner, followed by a hurricanrana for two. A missile dropkick gets two on Hunico and everything breaks down. As Jordan is being put back on the apron, Camacho hits Dalton from behind, allowing Hunico to hit his version of an Angle Slam for the pin at 4:00.

Rating: C. This was your run of the mill tag match between four guys who aren't that interesting but they made it work well enough. Hunico and Camacho are fine for a low level tag team and giving the unknowns a win over them in the first match was a good way to give Dalton and Jordan some exposure. As is the case with almost everyone on NXT though, they need ring time.

Here are the Usos with something to say. They call out the Ascension and as the lights go out for Ascension's entrance, Ascension runs in from behind and jumps the Usos, laying them out with relative ease.

Raw ReBound is about Punk vs. Lawler. I'm still curious as to when Cena forgot how to climb a cage.

Big E. Langston vs. Chase Donovan

A clothesline and that falling slam thing gets the pin at 40 seconds. He really needs to change finishers. A powerslam would be fine.

The locker room comes out to watch the title match.

Langston says nothing.

Howard Finkel is doing the announcing for the main event.

Dusty comes out and JR is now on commentary.

NXT Championship: Jinder Mahal vs. Seth Rollins

They have a ton of time for this. Fink may be fat and older now (he's only 62 so he's hardly ancient), but that voice is still perfect. Mahal won't shake Dusty's hand before the match. Rollins tries to take him to the mat to start but Mahal gets back up quickly. A dropkick puts Mahal down again and Rollins hits a hard chop. Mahal gets sent to the floor but he avoids a dive and sends Rollins face first into the apron. A suplex onto the ramp has Rollins in trouble and we head back in.

We take a break and come back with Rollins in even more trouble. Mahal stomps him down and hits a backbreaker to start setting up the camel clutch. Rollins gets choked against the ropes and the fans are behind Rollins now. He tries a comeback but gets kneed in the face by Mahal to take him back down. The camel clutch is escaped so Mahal pounds him in the back again. An enziguri out of nowhere puts Mahal down and Rollins punches Jinder down.

Mahal goes up for another knee but Rollins knocks him off the top and out to the floor. Rollins hits a HUGE dive to the floor and both guys are down. Back in and Seth goes up again, only to get crotched and superplexed from the top. We take another break and come back with the two of them slugging it out. Mahal might have a bad knee but he pulls off a sitout slam for two. A full nelson slam is countered and Rollins goes to the apron.

Seth hits an enziguri to the head and a running knee for two. The near falls are getting closer and closer here. A running forearm in the corner staggers Mahal but he manages to drop Rollins face first into the buckle. The low superkick (I think he calls it Avada Kadavra, making Rollins awesome) gets two. Phoenix Splash (moonsault into a 450) misses and Mahal hits the full nelson slam for two. Rollins gets to the rope before the clutch can go on and Rollins rolls him up for two. Rollins comes back with the buckle bomb and the Blackout out of nowhere for the pin and the title at 14:24 shown of 21:24.

Rating: B. I'm still not wild on Rollins' in ring work but the fans are

into him and he's not dull. He also needs a new finisher as the Blackout looks pretty forced to put it mildly. As for the match though, they did a great job of building both guys up as unbeatable and then having them go at it. The match was very good as far as making you wonder who was going to win and it turned into a good back and forth fight at the end. Not a masterpiece or anything, but for the first NXT Championship, this was more than acceptable.

Fink giving Rollins the NEEEEEEEEEEEEEW treatment makes the announcement much better. The roster puts Rollins on their shoulders to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. This was all about the main event so I'm not going to really bother thinking about the rest of it. Rollins is a good choice for a first champion as he can defend the title for a few months and then have a big time heel beat him to take the title. This felt like a big show and I wanted to see it, which is the right idea here. I'm very pleased with this and it worked quite well.

Results

Hunico/Camacho b. Jason Jordan/Mike Dalton – Reverse fireman's carry slam to Dalton

Big E. Langston b. Chase Donovan – Over the shoulder mat slam

Seth Rollins b. Jinder Mahal – Blackout

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Wrestlemania 29 Preview: Shield vs. Randy Orton/Big Show/Sheamus

If there's a potential show stealer out there, this is it. Shield has been as dominant as any new group of people I've seen in years. They came in and have instantly been treated like a killing machine. Look at the names they've taken out: Ryback, Rock, Cena, Bryan, Kane, and now they have a shot at Orton, Sheamus and Big Show. The questions to this match are will Shield stay undefeated and who, if anyone, is going to turn on their partners. At the end of the day, it's really hard to buy Orton, Big Show and Sheamus as working together well enough to do something Cena couldn't accomplish. The KO punch is certainly a wildcard though as it's knocked out Reigns and Rollins before.

The thing about Shield though is they can only do these six man matches against dream teams for so long. They've done two already before this show and you can only buy them as unbeatable for so long. Either that or we're going to run out of combinations to fight them in big matches. My guess is either way, soon after this we get an amicable separation by Shield to go after some singles gold, perhaps feuding with Cena in singles PPV matches over the summer. It's clear Reigns is going to be a big deal and the other two are going to be well pushed also, but the question is when and against whom.

As for the match, I'll take Shield to win with Orton turning on his partners. Over the last few weeks he's been playing the peacemaker between the big guys, which makes him the least

likely suspect, which makes him the most potential heel out of the bunch. Like it or not, that's WWE logic for you and odds are it's how things are going to go. Big Show regularly changes from face to heel every three months or so and Sheamus is still very over as a good guy, so that really just leaves Orton. I'm not sure if it happens during or after the match, but I definitely think it happens and Shield gets the win before breaking up on good terms.