

# Smackdown – March 27, 2018: For Tony



IMG Credit: WWE

## Smackdown

Date: March 27, 2018

Location: PPG Paints Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

We've got two episodes of Smackdown Live left to go before Wrestlemania XXXIV and that means two episodes featuring Daniel Bryan. It's not clear what he's going to be doing in New Orleans but if the Shane McMahon health issues are true, a lot of things could be up in the air. Let's get to it.

[Here are last week's results if you need a recap.](#)

Before we get started, Happy Birthday Pop (the aforementioned Tony).

We open with a recap of Bryan's announcement last week. That's the most emotional moment WWE has had in a long time.

Bobby Roode/Randy Orton vs. Jinder Mahal/Sunil Singh

And hang on as Singh's arm is banged up after Roode and Orton attacked him last week. Mahal has a replacement though.

Bobby Roode/Randy Orton vs. Jinder Mahal/Rusev

Mahal takes Roode into the corner to start as Orton still has his vest on. Roode elbows everyone down but Singh gets on the apron, earning himself a whip into the barricade. The vest comes off and we take a break. Back with Orton working Rusev over in the corner until a kick to the head rocks Orton again. The evil foreigners take turns stomping on Orton and it's a chinlock from Mahal. Orton suplexes his way to freedom and the hot tag brings in Roode for the usual.

Roode's spinebuster gets two on Mahal as Orton is calmly watching Roode deal with both of them. Mahal takes Roode down again and we take another break. Back with Roode fighting out of a chinlock but eating a jumping knee to the face to keep him down. Rusev's chinlock has as much success and Roode starts his comeback but Orton tags himself in. The snap powerslam drops Rusev but everything breaks down with Roode hitting Orton by mistake. That earns him an RKO but the Machka Kick ends Orton at 18:26.

**Rating:** C. This was more long than good, though certainly not terrible. Hopefully this adds Rusev to the title match and gives us a little payoff for all of the RUSEV DAY stuff. It's not the best thing in the world but at least there's a logical reason to get us to the next match. That being said, I wish there was another way to get us there other than the champion getting pinned. But hey, that might require thought.

Post break an excited Mahal offers Rusev and Aiden English front row tickets to Wrestlemania. Rusev has another idea though: a spot in the US Title match. Mahal is no longer happy.

Shinsuke Nakamura comes in to see AJ Styles and says he helped him last week to keep AJ strong for Wrestlemania. Nakamura has Shelton Benjamin tonight and wants AJ in his corner. Styles agrees to protect the dream match.

### Becky Lynch vs. Ruby Riott

Becky wastes no time in knocking Riott to the floor but an argument with the Squad allows Ruby to run her over. Back in and Ruby cranks on Becky's arms but gets taken down by a forearm. Becky scores with the clotheslines until Ruby pulls her off the ropes. The rollup is called off due to feet

on the ropes but the Riott Kick is blocked. Ruby is whipped into Logan and a rollup gives Becky the pin at 6:08.

**Rating:** C-. Very basic match here but Becky came off like a star, as always. I know Charlotte and Asuka are bigger deals and bigger stars, but they're crazy if they don't do something with Becky in the near future. The Squad continues to be the punching bags for the big names in the division, but at least they're around to keep things moving.

Here's Daniel Bryan for a chat on the stage. He loves being in Pittsburgh because he's cleared to be back in the ring. However, tonight he has a job to do as General Manager. Bryan is willing to give Kevin Owens and Sami Zayn one more chance: in a tag match against Shane McMahon and himself at Wrestlemania. Shane should be back in time for Wrestlemania, so we have some stipulations. If Owens and Zayn lose, they stay fired. If they win, they're back on Smackdown Live.

Bryan talks about opportunities, like the ones he's given Owens and Zayn. He's given them those opportunities because the two of them have always been there for him, whether it's as a partner or if he needed a bed to sleep in. Bryan has a bunch of responsibilities as General Manager like going to meetings, filling out paperwork and wearing these blazers (CM Punk would not approve).

He's sick of all of them because he fought for three years to get this spot. Owens and Zayn have held him back and now, it's time for him to fight at Wrestlemania. Bryan goes on a rant about how this isn't the Bryan on a disabled list or the General Manager. This is the Bryan coming to Wrestlemania to take out Owens and Zayn.

Here's New Day for a chat before their match. Their path to Wrestlemania was so clear that they had put New Orleans in their GPS. But it turns out that the Road to Wrestlemania was bludgeoned with horribly ugly trash. They're willing to adopt that highway though and clean up the Road to Wrestlemania.

### New Day vs. Bludgeon Brothers

Joined in progress with Rowan cranking on Woods' arm. Woods is thrown

around with ease and Kofi gets beaten down as well, albeit this time on the outside. Not that it matters as the Usos come in to jump the Brothers for the DQ at 1:54.

Zayn and Owens have accepted the challenge.

Wrestlemania rundown.

Video on Charlotte vs. Asuka.

### Tyler Breeze vs. Dolph Ziggler

They're both in the Andre battle royal. Fandango gets on the apron for a dance so Ziggler dropkicks Breeze down. It's time to run laps so Breeze's superkick only gets two. They trade rollups for two each but the Zig Zag ends Breeze at 2:10.

At Wrestlemania, the Usos defend against New Day and the Bludgeon Brothers.

### Shelton Benjamin vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

AJ and Chad Gable are the seconds. Nakamura starts with the knee to the ribs and Good Vibrations puts Benjamin on the floor as we take an early break. Back with Shelton holding Nakamura in a chinlock with a grapevine until Nakamura fights up. Kinshasa is loaded up but Gable offers a distraction, allowing Shelton to get two off a northern lights suplex. Paydirt is countered into a cross armbreaker and then a triangle choke. Benjamin powers out but gets kneed down, setting up Kinshasa for the pin at 9:28.

**Rating:** C. Shelton isn't as good as he used to be but he's still more than good enough to hold his own. Nakamura getting wins like this helps, but couldn't he be beating some bigger names? Was Baron Corbin off getting new hair grease this week? Or was Ziggler too busy cutting the same promo over and over again? At least act like it's a bigger deal.

Post match Nakamura says he brought AJ out here to show him how the match is going at Wrestlemania. AJ calls that playing games because Wrestlemania is a dream match for him too. His dream match ends a little

differently though, like with AJ walking out as the undisputed best in the world. Nakamura laughs and says he'll win because AJ is too emotional. Shinsuke leaves so Benjamin and Gable jump AJ with Nakamura making the save. Kinshasa is loaded up again but Nakamura stops in time, reaches to AJ's heart, and puts it in his chest pocket to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** C+. I'm more excited for Wrestlemania tonight than I was coming in and that's an accomplishment. They added two matches tonight and put someone else in a third, giving us all but Undertaker vs. Cena confirmed. You know, for those of you who need a fourteen match Wrestlemania. The wrestling was passable here, but the storytelling is what matters most and Bryan being back in the ring is all you could have wanted from this show. Good stuff tonight and the road to Wrestlemania is getting shorter and shorter.

### Results

Rusev/Jinder Mahal b. Randy Orton/Bobby Roode – Machka Kick to Orton

Becky Lynch b. Ruby Riott – Rollup

Bludgeon Brothers b. New Day via DQ when the Usos interfered

Dolph Ziggler b. Tyler Breeze – Zig Zag

Shinsuke Nakamura b. Shelton Benjamin – Kinshasa

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<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2018/03/23/new-paperback-kbs-grab-bag/>

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# Smackdown – March 20, 2018: YES We Need The Ink



IMG Credit: WWE

## Smackdown

Date: March 20, 2018

Location: American Airlines Center, Dallas, Texas

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

And then, Daniel Bryan was cleared to medically return to the ring. I'm really not sure what else there is to say here as now we wait to see what this means for Bryan at Wrestlemania. There's a good chance that he gets the spot in a tag match with Shane McMahon against Kevin Owens and Sami Zayn but maybe it's something else. Let's get to it.

[Here are last week's results if you need a recap.](#)

We open with a look at Daniel Bryan's retirement in February 2016 in an emotional moment. Then news broke today that Bryan was cleared to return to the ring after FINALLY being medically cleared. I think we have a theme for tonight.

Here's Bryan to open things up. He needs to address the actions of Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens from last week...but they're not here yet so we need to talk about something else. Bryan talks about being grateful for everything he has, which was the theme of his retirement speech. He has the greatest fans in the world and an amazing, beautiful wife who stood by him the entire way. It was her who told him to keep going to see specialist after specialist to get him back in the ring. Fans: "THANK YOU BRIE!"

Then when he got depressed, he decided to fight and it was Brie who told him to fight for his dreams. Eventually he was told he was cleared and those dreams became a reality. Next, Bryan needs to thank all of the doctors who kept giving him clearances until the WWE doctors finally did the same. Bryan isn't sure when he'll be back in the ring so here's a WRESTLEMANIA chant to give him an idea. No announcement is made but the fans (including myself) are thrilled.

Bryan is looking for Sami and Owens but finds Ziggler, who is rather condescending about the return. Ziggler can't wait to beat him and Bryan wishes him luck trying.

#### Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Rusev

AJ Styles is on commentary. They waste no time in trading the hard kicks with Rusev throwing him into the corner and unloading. A spinwheel kick drops Nakamura for two and we take a break. Back with Nakamura firing off kicks, including one to the side of a kneeling Rusev's head. Rusev gets in a kick to the head of his own for two so Nakamura goes for a cross armbreaker. That's rolled through but Nakamura grabs the leg for the rollup pin at 7:50.

**Rating:** C. It's nice to have Nakamura get a pin but they haven't exactly put their foot on the gas to get him to Wrestlemania. That and having him win in less than eight minutes with nearly half of that being in a commercial isn't your traditional build. At least Nakamura is in the ring though and that helps a lot.

Post match Rusev and Aiden English beat Nakamura down and AJ takes his time getting up. Nakamura saves himself and stares down at AJ.

Video on Asuka.

Charlotte is in the back when Natalya comes in to say she knows how scared Charlotte is. A match is set up for later. I know I mention this a lot but Natalya is one of the weakest talkers in the company today. It's like a bad high school play.

Styles and Nakamura run into each other with AJ mocking him for saying he'll win. Nakamura says he'll win with a knee to the face.

### Baron Corbin vs. Tye Dillinger

Both are in the Andre battle royal. Dillinger chops away but gets knocked down with one hard shot. Graves buries Dillinger on commentary, asking about why he wastes every opportunity he receives. Corbin slides under the ropes but gets caught with a kick to the face. Back up and Corbin can't hit End of Days (as in couldn't pick Dillinger up for it in a nasty looking botch). Instead he sends Dillinger outside and then tries again a few seconds later, this time connecting for the pin at 2:31.

### Charlotte vs. Natalya

Non-title. Charlotte gets two off an early suplex and a bridging rollup gets the same. The Figure Four necklock rolling flips keep Natalya in trouble and a kick to the chest puts her on the floor. Back from a break with Charlotte fighting out of an abdominal stretch and throwing her over with a t-bone suplex. A big boot looks to set up the Figure Eight but Natalya crawls into the corner.

That earns her a Downward Spiral into the buckle, only to have Natalya come back with a Batista Bomb out of the corner for a close two. The Sharpshooter is broken up in a hurry so it's the discus lariat for two on Charlotte instead. They head outside where the spear connects and Charlotte slaps on the Figure Four back inside.

That's rolled over though and Charlotte lands in the ropes but bends backwards over the apron to really crank on the leg. It's fine enough to superplex Charlotte down for a big crash....and here's Carmella! Charlotte is up with a boot to Carmella though, allowing Natalya to roll her up for



the pin at 13:09. The cash-in was never official.

**Rating:** B. These two were beating the heck out of each other and then that stupid briefcase brought me right back down. I'm so sick of the thing hanging over everything because Heaven forbid we don't do it every single year. Anyway, Charlotte losing doesn't make sense here as it's NATALYA of all people. She's lost to Charlotte time after time but needs to get a pin here? Really?

#### Jimmy Uso vs. Harper

Jey is back and before the match, the brothers talk about their match with New Day going well...until New Day got involved. They put a beating on the Usos but they're still here. They're not backing down with three weeks before Wrestlemania because the Bludgeon Brothers are welcomed to the Uso Penitentiary. Joined in progress with Harper hammering him down until some chops give Jimmy a breather. Harper gets sent outside and a Rowan distraction fails. Back to back superkicks have Harper in trouble but he crotches Jimmy on top. The discus lariat gives Harper the pin at 3:29.

**Rating:** D+. This was the right call again as the Usos continue to get closer but still can't beat the Brothers. Harper and Rowan look like the most awesome monsters in years, but they need to actually announce the match already. We're two weeks away and the title match still isn't set. What are they waiting on anymore?

Here are Jinder Mahal and Sunil Singh to talk about Mahal being added to....ok I give up. As I type this, Mahal is bragging about being added to the match and OH DEAR GOODNESS I DO NOT CARE! It's the same horrible promo he's cut every single week about how rich and awesome he is and how he deserves this and I cannot even pretend to care anymore. Roode and Orton come out, they talk a lot, a brawl nearly breaks out but they all stare at each other.

#### Sarah Logan/Liv Morgan vs. Naomi/Becky Lynch

All four are in the battle royal. Becky gets double teamed in the corner to start and Logan adds a running knee to the face for two. It's off to a

cobra clutch for a bit before a spinebuster has Lynch in more trouble. She's fine enough to throw Logan over the top but Ruby Riott tosses her back inside. Not that it matters as the Disarm-Her makes Logan tap at 2:35 as Naomi cuts Morgan off.

Bryan is told that Zayn and Owens are here so he'll meet them in the ring.

Back from a break and Bryan is in the ring to see Owens and Zayn. Owens talks about taking their time getting here but Shane McMahon wasn't going to be here so it wasn't a big deal. Then they heard what happened and got over here as soon as they could. They had to get out of a speeding ticket but it was easy because everyone is dumber in Texas. Sami is happy with the news because Bryan has always been their biggest fan.

It's a classic case of good things happening to good people and any show with the three of them on it is the dream show. It sounds like a dream team, but that's not why Bryan wanted them out here. Bryan shows a clip of the two of them attacking Shane to end last week's show, which they find funny. That's not cool with Bryan but Sami says Shane deserved it. Bryan thinks they don't get it.

Shane was right: Bryan was living vicariously through the two of them, but last week was more than getting a little carried away. The thing is Sami and Kevin won because Shane agreed that he had gone too far. They had a match set up for Wrestlemania, which was all they had ever wanted. Imagine the three of them being told that at an armory in front of 300 people ten years ago.

They would have had Bryan in his corner to run the show but they still assaulted Shane. Bryan doesn't get it but he's been fired from this company twice and grown from it each time. The two of them are fired and are so shocked that they can't speak. Owens goes to leave but decks Bryan, followed by some screaming that Bryan did this.

Bryan fights back with kicks in the corner and a snap German suplex to Sami, followed by the running corner dropkicks. Referees come out as Owens takes the YES Kicks but Sami gets back up for the save. Bryan eats a Helluva Kick and the apron powerbomb makes things even worse to end the

show.

Well that worked. This gives you a logical path to the tag match (Sami and Kevin have changed from the men Bryan knew years ago and the attack on Shane was unnecessary) and gives Sami and Kevin a ton of heat at the same time. It's a good angle, but more than that it's bizarre to see Bryan taking bumps after two years of just talking. Good segment though and I'm excited for the match.

**Overall Rating:** C+. This show did what it needed to do as it advanced a bunch of stories towards Wrestlemania. As mentioned though, there's a lot of stuff you can pencil in but it's high time to bust out the ink. Bryan being back is a huge deal, but there's other stuff that needs to be done and WWE is dragging its feet like crazy right now. I don't get it, but they need to get on with it already.

### Results

Shinsuke Nakamura b. Rusev – Rollup

Baron Corbin b. Tye Dillinger – End of Days

Natalya b. Charlotte – Rollup

Harper b. Jimmy Uso – Discus Lariat

Naomi/Becky Lynch b. Sarah Logan/Liv Morgan – Disarm-Her to Morgan

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<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2018/01/26/new-book-kbs-history-of-the-wwe-championship-2018-updated-version/>

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# Smackdown – March 13, 2018: Talk Isn't Cheap



IMG Credit: WWE

## Smackdown

Date: March 13, 2018

Location: Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, Indiana

Commentators: Corey Graves, Byron Saxton, Tom Phillips

It's finally time to start the Road to Wrestlemania with the first of four Smackdowns left to go. Tonight's show is supposed to feature a Shane McMahon announcement about the pay per view, but given the way this company can't seem to remember to deliver what they advertise, it could be something else entirely. Let's get to it.

[Here's last week's show if you need a recap.](#)

Here's AJ Styles to talk about retaining the Smackdown World Title Sunday night. He was in trouble after John Cena put him through the announcers' table on Sunday. How could he beat the other five superstars when anything goes? It was unbelievable, but not impossible. He found a way

and is still WWE Champion. A few years ago, the idea of AJ Styles coming to WWE was unbelievable, just like him being WWE Champion or going to Wrestlemania. Unbelievable, but not impossible.

The fans give him the YOU DESERVE IT chant but AJ says he earned it. Now he's got the biggest challenge of his title reign at Wrestlemania. AJ may be the everyman outside the ring, but when he steps inside the ring, he is phenomenal. Cue Shinsuke Nakamura to say everyone loves him too. He respects AJ but dreams come true at Wrestlemania. His dream: a knee to AJ's face and becoming champion. This brings out Rusev of all people and we take a break.

### Rusev vs. AJ Styles

Non-title. Rusev throws him into the corner to start so AJ goes after the leg, which Nakamura banged up on Sunday. A right hand rocks Styles though as the power game is working well for Rusev so far. AJ is right back with a dropkick to the floor and the slingshot forearm puts Rusev in trouble. Rusev throws him down again and we take a break.

Back with AJ pulling Rusev off the ropes to send him face first into the turnbuckle. The strikes have Rusev in trouble but AJ can't hit the fireman's carry backbreaker. Instead it's the Machka Kick for two but AJ scores with the Pele. Now the backbreaker works but AJ bangs up his own knee. Rusev can't get the Accolade so it's the Calf Crusher instead, drawing Aiden English in for the DQ at 11:18.

**Rating:** C+. Now that's a good way to set up the title match: Nakamura could pin Rusev but Styles can only beat him via DQ, even when Rusev was banged up in the match on Sunday. Let them build up the idea that Styles is phenomenal but Nakamura might be a step better. That's a great way to go, assuming this wasn't an accident.

Nakamura takes his time but makes the save.

We see the Bludgeon Brothers attacking the Usos and the New Day.

Big E. wishes he could say the New Day won the titles and were spending tonight filling Corey Graves' car with pancakes. That's not the case

though, because his friends are both injured. Jimmy Uso comes in and says they're taking care of the Bludgeon Brothers tonight.

Kid Rock Hall of Fame video.

Styles tells Nakamura that he didn't need the help. Nakamura disagrees and will be there to help Styles until Wrestlemania.

### Jimmy Uso/Big E. vs. Bludgeon Brothers

The makeshift team jumps the Brothers in the aisle and grab a pair of chairs. The Brothers grab the hammers to knock the chairs away and we take a break before the bell. Back from a break with the opening bell and Harper plants Big E. with a Boss Man Slam. Big E. slips over and makes the hot tag to Jimmy so things can speed up. Harper gets rocked with uppercuts and superkicks but Jimmy goes after Rowan. The distraction is enough for Harper to kick Jimmy in the face and a double powerbomb ends Jimmy at 2:34. This was exactly what it needed to be.

The Brothers keep up the destruction after the match.

We look at Shane McMahon costing Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens the title at Fastlane.

Sami says he's known Owens for years but then he played him like a fiddle on Sunday. It was only because of Shane that he didn't become champion and Sami will never pay the price again.

Here's Charlotte to call out Asuka for a face to face meeting. Charlotte welcomes her to Smackdown and thinks she (as in Charlotte) should have been careful what she wished for. She's been defending the title around the world and no, she's never faced anyone like Asuka. The thing is though, Asuka has never faced anyone like Charlotte. WOO! Asuka says she picked Charlotte because she likes a challenge. Charlotte is a queen but Asuka is an empress. She bows to no one because no one is ready for Asuka. And....that's it. Kind of an abrupt finish but this was good stuff to help set up the big match.

New US Champion Randy Orton comes out for a chat. He's been called a lot of things, but for the first time ever he's the United States Champion.

Orton praises Bobby Roode as a tough competitor but he's taking this title to Wrestlemania. This brings out Roode to say he'll be having his rematch at Wrestlemania. Cue Jinder Mahal to also congratulate Orton on his title win. He'll beat Roode just like he did to Orton last week.

### Bobby Roode vs. Jinder Mahal

The very early threat of a Glorious DDT sends Mahal outside and we take an early break. Back with Roode slugging away and hitting a running forearm. A neckbreaker puts Mahal down and a top rope clothesline does it again. Roode gets two off the Blockbuster but walks into a superkick for the same. Sunil Singh offers a distraction and Roode gets crotched, setting up the Khallas to pin Roode at 6:26.

**Rating:** D+. Well duh. Everyone knew that Mahal would get involved with this shindig and there was nothing we could do to stop it. Now that Mahal is no longer World Champion, it's fair to say how much he manages to suck the life out of everything he touches. This is no exception and it's getting even worse every single week.

Post match Orton gives Mahal the RK0.

Owens rants about how he was screwed over on Sunday because Sami knows he can't beat him otherwise.

Fabulous Moolah battle royal video. They're going to have some real issues defending Moolah in the coming weeks.

### Carmella vs. Naomi

Before the match, Carmella enters the battle royal and teases cashing in the briefcase at Wrestlemania. Naomi throws her into the corner to start but gets taken down so Carmella can stand on the hair. The hair is pulled around the ropes so Naomi comes up slapping hard. A kick to the face sends Carmella down but she breaks up some kind of a springboard. Carmella pulls her down by the hair and grabs a rollup for the pin at 2:54. This wasn't very good but at least Carmella gets some momentum.

Here's Shane for his big announcement. He recaps the entire story between himself, Owens and Zayn before saying that he's taking a leave of absence

as Commissioner. Before he goes though, Shane makes Owens vs. Zayn for Wrestlemania. This brings out Owens with his head shaking. Before he can say much though, here's Sami to interrupt. Sami doesn't like Shane listening to the fans but doesn't seem pleased that Shane is leaving.

Shane doesn't understand this as he just gave them what they wanted. Owens does appreciate it, but thinks Shane will appreciate this too. The double beatdown is on and Owens hits a Pop Up Powerbomb and it's time for a chair. They wrap it around Shane's neck and ram it into the post before dragging him to the back. Shane gets powerbombed onto a big metal box and sounds like he can barely breathe. A stretcher is brought in to end the show. I'm sure Shane will be perfectly fine enough for Bryan to add him to the match and make it a triple threat.

**Overall Rating:** B-. This was a show that did what it needed to do. The promos here were very good and the matches were little more than filler. You don't need to have big, long matches to set up stuff this close to Wrestlemania so just base everything on the talking. AJ vs. Nakamura is finally getting some focus and the other stories are getting good too. It's pretty clear that Bryan is going to add Shane to make it a triple threat but at least Shane might be out long enough to not take up a bunch of TV time. Do more of this kind of show over the next three weeks and they could still manage to build things up quite well.

### Results

AJ Styles b. Rusev via DQ when Aiden English interfered

Bludgeon Brothers b. Jimmy Uso/Big E. – Double powerbomb to Uso

Jinder Mahal b. Bobby Roode – Khallas

Carmella b. Naomi – Rollup

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## **New Column: How To Get To Styles vs. Nakamura**

I'm not sure what else to call this.

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-get-styles-vs-nakamura/>

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## **Smackdown – January 30, 2018: Kevin Owens is a Bad Friend**

### **Smackdown**

Date: January 30, 2018

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

It's the final night of the Philadelphia Story and Smackdown is in a very different place than Raw. The blue show has the men's Royal Rumble winner and as a result, the World Title match for Wrestlemania XXXIV is already

set. There are a lot more details to get through though and that starts tonight. Let's get to it.

Here's Rumble winner Shinsuke Nakamura to open things up. He talks about kneeing everyone in the face and is ready to do it to AJ Styles at Wrestlemania. This brings out Kevin Owens and Sami Zayn to interrupt with Sami ranting about the loss in their title shot. Owens was never tagged in so he couldn't be pinned. Owens: "YEP!"

Therefore, they deserve the next shot at the title, which they'll take at Wrestlemania. Nakamura calls them losers and here's AJ Styles to interrupt as well. AJ agrees with the losers comment and suggests the dream match become a dream team against Sami and Kevin tonight. Kevin and Sami: "NOPE!"

Post break Daniel Bryan makes the tag match. Owens and Zayn are livid but Bryan gives them another chance. Next week, it's Owens vs. Zayn in a #1 contender match with the winner getting a shot at Fastlane.

#### Kofi Kingston vs. Jinder Mahal vs. Rusev vs. Zack Ryder

The winner gets a US Title shot next week and champion Bobby Roode is on commentary. It's a brawl to start with Kofi and Jinder trading rollups for two each. A knee to the head cuts Kofi off though and Ryder low bridges Mahal to the floor. After a brawl near the announcers' table, everyone gets back in with a double Irish whip setting up Kofi's dropkick to Rusev.

Back up and Kofi hits a big dive over the top onto Ryder and Mahal, meaning it's time to throw pancakes. The Singh Brother cuts off Rusev's dive (this is completely against Rusev Day tradition) so Aiden English shoves him into New Day, meaning the PANCAKES ARE DROPPED! All four seconds are ejected and we take a break. Back with Ryder hitting the Broski Boot on Rusev but Mahal throws him outside to take the near fall for himself. The SOS gives Kofi two but Rusev is right in to break things up. The Stackalade is broken up so Rusev settles for the regular version on Kofi for the tap out at 12:44.

**Rating:** C+. Nice energetic match here with the right choice for the

winner. It's a few weeks late for Rusev but it's not late enough that it doesn't work. Rusev is still hot and putting the US Title on him would be a great way to capitalize on him. They need to do something with him and hopefully this is the start of something good for him.

Ascension is helping Fashion Files answer some Twitter questions (including some about hair conditioner) when Shelton Benjamin and Chad Gable come in to call it stupid. They turn over the table and we have a match set up for later.

Here are the Usos for a chat. They talk about cleaning out the tag division, including listing off each team, causing a jail graphic to come up on the screen. There's no one left for them to face so of course here are the Bludgeon Brothers.

Bludgeon Brothers vs. ???/???

Jobber #1 is sent hard into the corner for a running charge in the corner from Harper. The jobbers are sent into each other and it's a full nelson slam/powerbomb combination to #1. The double spinebuster ends #2 at 1:50.

Daniel Bryan announces a superstar ranking system which will be starting soon. This was announced earlier in the day.

Shane McMahon is in his office when Tye Dillinger comes in. He'd love to talk about the ranking system (there are ten names on it after all) but he's not happy with what happened at the Rumble. Baron Corbin comes in to yell about not getting the title shot and questions Shane's McMahonhood. Dillinger mocks Corbin for losing Money in the Bank (a bit behind the times there buddy) but Shane says they'll settle this in the ring tonight.

Video on Ronda Rousey debuting.

Here's Charlotte for a chat with Renee Young (in what looks like Danny Davis' old ring jacket). Charlotte wanted to be in the ring on Sunday to see if she could come in at #3 and survive like this guy she knows. Then the moment happened that broke the internet and she was in the ring with Alexa Bliss, Asuka and Ronda Rousey. She's walking into Wrestlemania as

Smackdown Women's Champion and wants to know who she'll be facing.

This brings out the Riott Squad with Ruby saying Charlotte's ego is as big as her father's. Charlotte doesn't seem to mind so Riott talks about how she's met people like Charlotte throughout her career. If it's up to Ruby, Charlotte won't even make it to Wrestlemania. Charlotte holds off the attack for a bit but the numbers get the better of her. The parade of finishers ensues...AND HERE COMES CARMELLA! She hands the referee the briefcase but accidentally dropkicks him to the floor before the match is on. Charlotte is back up so Carmella changes her mind. So Carmella is now a klutz?

Styles goes to talk strategy with Nakamura but Shinsuke only wants to talk about the Wrestlemania match. They'll be fine tonight if Styles listens to him, which doesn't sit well with AJ.

Carmella wanted to remind Charlotte that the danger is real.

#### Tye Dillinger vs. Baron Corbin

They fight outside at the bell with Corbin being sent into the barricade. Back in and Corbin unloads on Tye with right hands before throwing him outside as we take a break. We come back with Tye fighting out of a chinlock and getting in some right hands to the ribs. Corbin does his slide underneath the ropes but the clothesline misses. Instead Tye sends him shoulder first into the post, followed by a boot to the face. The Tyebreaker is broken up though and Corbin hits him in the back of the head. The chokebreaker sets up End of Days to give Baron the pin at 6:38.

**Rating:** D+. This was fine for a way to give Baron a little momentum, though he doesn't have anything going on at the moment. Dillinger is in even worse shape though and needs to do something different if he wants to go anywhere. It could be worse, but at the moment there's nothing there. That's not exactly shocking either and I'm kind of surprised that he's made it this far.

Aiden English sings about the upcoming Rusev Day title change.

Roode has Rusev Day marked on his calendar. He circles it, but turns the

circle into the 0 in glorious. That was clever. I'm not wild on these handheld promos but I am a fan of promos being used to set up matches. It worked for years and I have no idea why it was decided that they can't work again.

Sami and Kevin are in the back talking about how they're ready for tonight. Kevin implies that he'll win next week and Sami doesn't seem pleased.

Wrestlers are speculating on who will be the 205 Live General Manager.

#### Shelton Benjamin/Chad Gable vs. Breezango

Fandango chops away at Shelton to start but walks into a spinebuster. Chad comes in to start on the arm but makes sure to knock Breeze off the apron to keep control. Back up and Fandango gets something like a backbreaker, only to get caught with a rolling Liger kick for two. Breeze comes in off the hot tag as everything breaks down but it's a quick powerbomb/top rope clothesline to put Tyler away at 3:40.

**Rating:** D. Much like Corbin, this was a quick win to get Benjamin and Gable back on track. There was no reason to expect anything of note and it's not like Breezango was going to get anything important in anyway. The wrestling was short and to the point, though I'm not sure what Gable and Benjamin do now while the titles are busy.

Wrestlemania XXXIV ad.

#### AJ Styles/Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens

AJ wastes no time in headscissoring Owens into the corner so it's off to Sami to work on Nakamura's arm. Styles comes back in for a few kicks before Nakamura is back in, only to be taken into the corner for the double stomping. Nakamura fights back with some shots to the head and we hit the front facelock. Sami gets thrown outside but Owens uses the distraction to shoulder Nakamura down.

That leaves Sami down on the floor so Owens yells at him, meaning it's time for the big argument. That's too much for Sami and he takes the walk up the ramp as we go to a break. Back with Owens holding Styles in a

chinlock as Sami watches from the stage. AJ's belly to back facebuster gets two as Sami runs back in for the save. Sami comes in for two off a backdrop and it's quickly back to Owens for two off the backsplash. Owens chops Sami for a tag but that's not cool with Zayn, who does the same to bring Owens right back in.

They get knocked into each other so Sami leaves again, leaving Kevin to break up the Phenomenal Forearm. A Vader Bomb elbow gets two but the Pop Up Powerbomb is thwarted. Instead it's off to Nakamura for some kicks, only to have Owens bail before Kinshasa. AJ throws him right back in though and it's a spinwheel kick to the head, followed by Kinshasa to give Nakamura the pin at 15:25.

**Rating:** C+. Pretty standard main event tag match here but it advanced the story of Sami vs. Kevin's issues. AJ vs. Nakamura has a lot of time to build up and there's no need to rush things. Let that take its time to be properly built and see where they can go instead of rushing through things and running out of steam with a month to go before Wrestlemania.

An unpleased Sami is watching in the back but says that's not the end of their friendship. This is about Sami getting his chance because it's his time to be champion.

**Overall Rating:** C+. Nice enough show here, especially after we're coming out of the Rumble and heading into Fastlane. There's a lot more to do here but this set the stage for the next few weeks, which is all you can do here. You can probably pencil in Owens vs. Zayn for Wrestlemania while Nakamura vs. Styles seems to be written in ink. This should be an interesting season and since I can't imagine them messing with anything major at Fastlane, everything seems to be looking better. Throw in the lack of Bryan vs. Shane tonight and this was another nice show.

## Results

Rusev b. Kofi Kingston, Jinder Mahal and Zack Ryder – Accolade to Kingston

Bludgeon Brothers b. ???/??? – Double spinebuster

Baron Corbin b. Tye Dillinger – End of Days

Shelton Benjamin/Chad Gable b. Breezango – Powerbomb/top rope clothesline combination to Breeze

AJ Styles/Shinsuke Nakamura b. Kevin Owens/Sami Zayn – Kinshasa to Owens

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# Royal Rumble 2018: I Had Fun Again

## Royal Rumble 2018

Date: January 28, 2018

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton, Tom Phillips, Booker T.

The big night is finally here and for the first time ever we have two Royal Rumbles in one night. This time around we have a women's version to go with the standard men's version and that opens up the doors for a lot

more surprise entrants. Of course it also opens the door for a lot more boring action if the last few Rumbles are any indication. Let's get to it.

#### Kickoff Show: Drew Gulak/TJP/Jack Gallagher vs. Kalisto/Gran Metalik/Lince Dorado

Drew takes Kalisto down by the arm to start as the announcers talk about the upcoming 205 Live General Manager. That just earns a few chants from the crowd, which Gulak of course can't stand. It's off to Gallagher vs. Metalik with Gran working on the knee until Lince and TJP come in to complete each trio's ring time.

The announcers discuss dabbing until the villains are all sent outside. The three masked men hit stereo moonsaults from the same turnbuckle (very cool) to the floor as we take a break. Back with TJP kicking Lince in the ribs and handing it off to Gulak, who drops Dorado's partners off the apron. Now the announcers speculate on the next General Manager, which is much more focused than you would expect from these guys.

Jack cranks on Dorado's leg as about half of the HUGE group of empty seats opposite the hard camera is filled in. But hey, at least we have a meaningless match going on an hour and a half before the rest show starts. Gallagher goes to the middle rope, pauses to listen to Gulak telling him not to jump, and then misses a dive anyway. The hot tag brings in Metalik for the rope walk into the dropkick to put Gulak down. The rope walk elbow works just as well for two as everything breaks down. Stereo dives take Gallagher and Gulak down, leaving the Salida Del Sol to finish TJP at 13:13.

**Rating:** C. Take any match between some combination of these guys that you might have seen on 205 Live and add five minutes to get this match. I'm not sure how that's supposed to entice me to watch a pay per view but I'm sure WWE is smarter than I am on that front. Nothing special here, outside of that triple moonsault that is. This would have been fine as the only dark match but with two more, it could have been cut.

#### Kickoff Show: Revival vs. Anderson and Gallows



Rematch from Monday where Anderson and Gallows won, followed by the Revival getting destroyed by DX and Scott Hall. The Brian Pillman style trunks don't really suit Revival but anything is better than Monday. Dawson gets sent outside to start for a breather before it's Gallows tossing both of them around. Back from a break with Dawson working on Anderson's knee with a string of elbow drops.

Wilder comes in to crank the knee even more but Anderson keeps kicking him away. Therefore, in a good tag team idea, Revival double teams him to keep the advantage. Now why is that so hard to figure out? Of course the hot tag goes through a few seconds later but at least they were trying. Everything breaks down and Gallows scores with a splash for two. Everything breaks down and the Magic Killer is broken up. Dawson sidesteps a charge to post Gallows and Dash's chop block is good for the pin on Anderson at 9:11.

**Rating:** C. Well, it was better than Monday. I'm glad Revival won and now of course we're likely to have the rubber match tomorrow night because WWE loves their trilogies. The leg stuff was fine here but the break in the middle didn't do it many favors. At least the right team won though and that helps a lot.

#### Kickoff Show: Bobby Roode vs. ???

Roode is defending in an Open Challenge answered by...Mojo Rawley. The fans think Mojo sucks as he sends Roode into the corner and actually hammers him down as we take a break. Back with Mojo driving knees in the corner and grabbing a chinlock. Roode fights up and hits a running forearm, followed by a neckbreaker for two. There's the Blockbuster but the Glorious DDT is countered into a spinebuster. Back up and another Glorious DDT is countered into a backdrop but the running punch is blocked. Instead it's a regular DDT to retain the title at 7:37.

**Rating:** D. This could have been on any house show and that's not good as the Kickoff Show main event. Roode doesn't have a ton of challengers and a lot of that is due to how so few people were treated as important for the sake of Jinder Mahal. They need some kind of a feud going here and Rawley isn't the kind of person to do that.

The opening video doesn't say much out of the ordinary but it does a very good job of setting up the big matches while treating the Rumble win as a big deal. It's very nice that they gave the match some shine for once because they haven't exactly treated it like it matters up to this point.

### Smackdown World Title: AJ Styles vs. Kevin Owens/Sami Zayn

AJ is defending in a handicap match. The challengers do have to tag and it's Sami starting for the team. No contact and it's off to Owens, who hangs on the ropes instead of going after the champ. Sami is already back in as there's almost no contact in the first minute and a half. AJ wrestles Sami down but it's already back to Owens, who takes AJ down, runs to the floor and tags Sami back in.

That means a drop down into a dropkick for Zayn as Byron and Graves have ANOTHER stupid argument that completely ignores the match. There's a backdrop for two on AJ as the fans aren't sure who to cheer for. Owens comes back in and unloads with right hands before sending AJ into the barricade. Almost all challengers so far. Owens gets in a double stomp and brings AJ into the corner for more right hands. An electric chair faceplant is good for two more and it's off to the chinlock.

AJ fights up again and gets in a shot to Owens' ankle, which was banged up on Smackdown in the first place. The Pele is enough to bring Sami back in but the Helluva Kick is blocked with a raised boot. Everything breaks down and Owens monkey flips Styles, who hurricanranas Zayn to the floor instead of crashing to the mat. The Calf Crusher has Owens ready to tap until Sami dives back in for the save.

Owens kicks AJ in the back of the head to knock him into the Blue Thunder Bomb, which of course only gets two (once in a lifetime you see). Another kick to the head puts Sami down this time and the springboard 450 is good for another near fall. They slug it out with AJ throwing Sami to the floor, only to eat a superkick from Owens. The Pop Up Powerbomb is countered into a rollup though and AJ retains (pinning the illegal man) at 16:08.

**Rating:** B. About what was expected here as there's only so much you can do when the participants have been treated as background characters. I'm

glad Bryan and Shane were left out but the match has been booked to make them the stars, meaning this is likely to continue. Some good action here, but it wasn't the most thrilling match in the world.

Wrestlemania XXXIV ad.

Sami and Kevin ask Shane what he's going to do. They can't have another referee screw Owens out of another title. Shane says that yep, he did indeed see that. Nothing else is said.

### Smackdown Tag Team Titles: Usos vs. Shelton Benjamin/Chad Gable

The Usos are defending and this is 2/3 falls after Gable pinned the wrong Uso a few weeks back. In other words, the same ending as the previous match, again showing the limited creative abilities of WWE. Gable can't hit a German suplex on Jimmy to start so it's some chops to the chest in the corner. A distraction lets Chad get in a chop block though and Jimmy is in trouble early on.

Benjamin drives knees into the bad knee as the challengers start cutting the ring off for an old NWA feel. Shelton stops to yell at the crowd though and it's an enziguri to cut him off. The hot tag brings in Jey, who dives through the ropes to take out both challengers in a row. Back in and Gable gets two off a tiger suplex (I haven't seen that one in years), followed by a powerbomb to send Jey into Jimmy.

Pay Dirt gives Shelton two and the bug eyed look on the kickout is funnier than it should be. It's back to Gable who moonsaults onto both champions on the floor but Gable can't pin the illegal Uso. That means a superkick into the Superfly Splash for two in a surprise near fall. The double Superfly Splash is broken up so Gable loads up Rolling Chaos Theory.

That's broken up as well and four straight superkicks end Gable at 12:21. Gable and Benjamin beat the heck out of both champs to start the second fall. A rolling Liger Kick hits Jey and Chad goes up, leaving Shelton to get small packaged to retain the titles in two straight falls at 13:47.

**Rating:** B-. That was kind of a surprising ending but it's not like it

really matters. The Bludgeon Brothers (who have kind of disappeared in recent weeks) are pretty clearly the next challengers and it should be a fun match when we get to it. I'm not sure what happens to Benjamin and Gable at this point but they've proven to be a good team who deserve more time.

Rumble by the Numbers video.

Jerry Lawler joins commentary for the Rumble.

### Men's Royal Rumble

90 second intervals this year. Rusev is #1 (with Aiden English singing him to the ring) and Finn Balor (in red here) is in at #2 to a very strong reaction. Balor gets sent to the apron early on but gets back in without too much effort. Rhino is in at #3 and gets in a showdown with Rusev that doesn't go much of anywhere. Balor is back up and it's Baron Corbin in at #4 to quickly eliminate Rhino.

Finn is right behind Corbin though and gets rid of him as well, sending Corbin into a rage. That means Balor is pulled to the floor for a whip into the barricade (shoulder first) and End of Days on the floor to Rusev. Heath Slater is in at #5 and gets run over on the ramp. Everyone is down and it's Elias in at #6, playing the guitar (and kicking Slater in the head) on the way to the ring.

It's time for a song about spitting in the Rocky statue's face but the countdown clock cuts him off. NXT Champion Andrade Cien Almas is in at #7 (running Slater over again as we have a running joke) and a running elbow puts Elias into the corner. The running knees rock Elias again but the hammerlock DDT is broken up. A hard clothesline drops Almas and it's Bray Wyatt in at #8.

Naturally Slater gets laid out again and there's a release Rock Bottom to Elias. Balor comes back in to break up Sister Abigail (again, thank goodness). Big E. is in at #9 and gives Slater some pancakes instead of beating him up. Bray is waiting on him with Cole saying Bray has been so dominating since entering. IT'S BEEN LIKE TWO MINUTES!

Rusev is back in but can't get rid of Almas. Tye Dillinger is in at #10 (again), giving us Balor, Rusev, Slater (still not in the ring), Elias, Almas, Wyatt, Big E. and Dillinger. Actually hang on a second as we cut to the back to see Dillinger getting beaten down by Owens and Zayn. Sami is taking his place and continues the tradition by jumping Slater.

Sheamus is in at #11 and throws Slater in...who immediately eliminates Sheamus (on his BIRTHDAY). Bray dumps Slater almost immediately and it's Xavier Woods in at #12. Woods and Big E. double team Sami and a wheelbarrow slam into a splash hits Elias. Rusev can't get rid of Big E. and it's Apollo Crews in at #13. Apollo gets in a good looking jumping enziguri on Bray as Byron is now anti-Zayn as he tries to show a personality.

Balor escapes Sister Abigail and it's Shinsuke Nakamura in at #14. Sami is waiting on him in a Takeover: Dallas flashback as the fans sing Nakamura's song. There are WAY too many people in there and some eliminations are needed. Nakamura fires off some kicks and it's Good Vibrations for Elias. The running knee in the corner gets rid of Sami and Cesaro is in at #15, giving us Balor, Rusev, Elias, Almas, Wyatt, Big E., Woods, Crews, Nakamura and Cesaro.

Uppercuts abound without much happening and it's Kofi Kingston in at #16 to put New Day at full strength. Cesaro cuts him off with an uppercut but Crews gorilla presses Cesaro...to the apron at least but he gets back in. Instead a shot to the back gets rid of Crews to thin the ring out a bit. Jinder Mahal is in at #17 and goes after Woods, who dropkicks him into the corner. Woods is dumped a few seconds later though and Mahal gets rid of Big E. as well.

Seth Rollins is in at #18 (now with flames on his tights) and gets rid of Cesaro in short order. Mahal sends Kofi over the top but he lands on Xavier...and then on a plate of pancakes. Big E. and Woods launch him from the floor over the ropes and over Mahal, who gets caught with Trouble in Paradise for the elimination. As the rest of New Day throws pancakes at Mahal, Almas hits the hammerlock DDT and eliminates Kofi in a pretty big upset.

Matt Hardy is in at #19 for a standoff with Bray, which is broken up by Rusev. Bray and Matt actually start working together and get rid of Rusev (the fans are NOT pleased) before fighting each other. They eliminate each other and it's John Cena at #20, giving us Balor, Elias, Almas, Nakamura, Rollins and Cena.

Everyone jumps Cena at the same time in a smart move but then let him up, allowing him to AA Elias out. The Hurricane of all people is in at #22 (which Cole calls a superhero persona which was a huge hit with kids years ago) and tries a chokeslam but gets tossed out by Cena. Hurricane lands on the pancakes, nearly slips, and then does his pose over and over again on the way to the back. Aiden English is in at #22 and goes after Rollins before switching to Balor.

Adam Cole (with taped ribs) from NXT is in at #23 to a very nice reaction. Balor kicks English off the ropes for an elimination and it's Randy Orton in at #24. An RKO drops Almas and there he goes after a strong performance. Things settle down a bit and it's Titus O'Neil in at #25. Cole gets sent to the apron but slides back in, leaving Titus to chop Nakamura in the corner. Miz is in at #26 and starts fast with the YES Kicks, followed by a Skull Crushing Finale on Cena.

Lucky #27 is the returning Rey Mysterio to get rid of Cole in a hurry. The Miz takes 619 and it's Roman Reigns in at #28. You can feel the pain from the booing. Reigns goes after Miz and hits the jumping clothesline, followed by the clotheslines in the corner. Titus gets eliminated but the Miztourage saves Miz from the same fate. Rollins Curb Stomps Miz but gets into a showdown with Reigns. A DoubleBomb gets rid of Miz but Reigns turns on Rollins to get rid of him as well.

Goldust is in at #29 and hurts himself headbutting Reigns. Cena gets beaten up as well and it's Dolph Ziggler (POP) in at #30, giving us a final group of Balor, Nakamura, Cena, Orton, Mysterio, Reigns, Goldust and Ziggler. Goldust is out in a hurry and Balor kicks Ziggler out, making him one of the most inconsequential #30s in recent memory. Rey, Cena and Orton get together in one corner, Nakamura and Balor are in another and Reigns is on his own (how appropriate).

Balor takes a quick AA followed by the 619 to Reigns. There's an RK0 to Nakamura but Cena blocks another attempt. A Superman Punch lets Reigns get rid of Orton and a double 619 hits Reigns and Cena (with Cena loudly talking to Reigns while they wait). Balor throws Mysterio out to get us down to four meaning everyone goes to a corner.

We get the big staredown as the fans are behind Nakamura. Cena throws a You Can't See Me at Balor and hammers on Nakamura while Reigns beats on Balor. That gives us the big showdown as the fans think they both suck. No one throws a punch as Balor and Nakamura get back up, giving us a much better received showdown. The running knees in the corner put Balor on the apron but he kicks a charging Nakamura in the head. Another kick to the head rocks Balor but he scores with a basement dropkick.

Reigns and Cena are back up again with Cena charging into a Samoa drop. The Superman Punch is countered with a ProtoBomb but the Shuffle is broken up with a Sling Blade. Balor hits the shotgun dropkick on Reigns but Nakamura kicks Balor in the face. Balor's standing double stomp cuts off Kinshasa and Cena tosses Balor to get us down to three. Reigns slips out of an AA and hits the Superman Punch on Cena. The spear is cut off by the AA and Nakamura puts Cena on the apron.

A running kick to the face gets rid of Cena and we're down to Nakamura vs. Reigns. That means COME ON and Reigns does so with a Superman Punch. Reigns sends him to the apron but gets kicked in the head but Nakamura grabs a hanging triangle over the apron. A powerbomb brings Nakamura back in and they're both down again.

It's Reigns up first but the spear is cut off with a kick to the face. A middle rope knee to the face drops Reigns but Kinshasa is hit with a spear to put them both down again. Nakamura grabs the ropes to hang on and another running knee drops Roman, setting up the elimination to give Nakamura the win at 65:32.

**Rating:** A. Best Rumble in years, though that's not exactly saying much. The important thing here was they went with a popular name to win the Rumble, which has been lacking in recent years. Nakamura winning really surprised me as I never thought they would actually do it but I'll take

what I can get.

They laid the match out nicely here as things took a little time to get going but the final ten to fifteen minutes were excellent with the final six all being solid options. I wasn't dreading this one at all and it made the match that much better. This was a lot of fun and the way the Rumble should go, with one of the best endings in a long time. Great match.

The Smackdown bosses are celebrating in the back when Stephanie McMahon and Kurt Angle come in to say Raw will win later. Daniel and Shane (buddies again) don't seem to care.

Post match Nakamura is asked who he wants to face at Wrestlemania. Fans: "PLEASE SAY STYLES!" Nakamura: "AJ STYLES!"

There was a Royal Rumble to determine the next Colonel Sanders with Ric Flair winning. He has the wrinkles for it.

#### Raw Tag Team Titles: The Bar vs. Jason Jordan/Seth Rollins

Rollins and Jordan are defending with Seth and Sheamus starting things off. Seth gets driven into the corner with Cesaro offering a distraction to keep Jordan away from interfering. Jordan is ready for the hot tag but Cesaro pulls him down (I thought that was the heel turn) and posts him into near unconsciousness. Back in and Sheamus' top rope clothesline gets two as the double beatdown is on, made especially worse by Seth's long Rumble run.

Seth finally sends Sheamus into the post to get it back to even, followed by a Sling Blade and Blockbuster. Sheamus comes back in for the save but Rollins drops both of them for a double frog splash. As Seth gets up, Jordan is STILL sitting on the steps, leaving Sheamus to hit the Brogue Kick. The super White Noise gives us new champions at 13:03. Jordan was never in the match.

**Rating:** C-. This was an angle instead of a match and there's nothing wrong with that. For some reason we seem to be waiting on Jordan vs. Rollins at Wrestlemania, even though that doesn't quite blow my skirt up.



The match was stuck in the cool down spot after the great Rumble and that was the right spot for it.

We recap the Raw World Title match. Basically you have three monsters fighting each other and breaking things to hurt each other, meaning it's time to get violent.

### Raw World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Kane vs. Braun Strowman

Brock is defending and it's one fall to a finish. Strowman wastes no time in cleaning house, including a hard knee to Brock's head. That's fine with Brock who starts throwing punches, only to have Kane score with a chokeslam. Brock grabs a chair but Braun punches it away and drops everyone.

Shots with the steps clean house and it's time for a pair of tables. Strowman chokeslams Kane for two with Brock making the save and it's time for Suplex City. Braun pops up like a daisy and powerslams Brock through a table with Kane making the save this time. Kane is tossed away again (it's almost like he's completely unnecessary in this match until the ending) and it's time for the announcers' table.

Braun takes too long though and it's an F5 to drive him through instead. Brock turns the other table over Braun (Corey: "I'm about to throw this German guy in front of me!") and F5's Kane through another. Braun gets up again and sends Brock into the steps, followed by the powerslam. Kane makes the save and sends Braun outside, setting up an F5 onto the chair to retain Brock's title at 10:12.

**Rating:** B-. Well duh. The world knows that Braun is ready to be World Champion and should have been like six months ago but Vince McMahon and seemingly Vince McMahon alone wants to see Reigns take the title from Brock. Again, as has been the case many, many times: none of this is important because we're just sitting around waiting on Reigns to take the title like we've been waiting for for nearly a year now. After that, I have no idea where they go and I'm not sure WWE does either. This was fun, but exactly as expected.

Trailer for Andre the Giant's HBO documentary.

We get a video on the women's Royal Rumble with a focus on the Revolution (and Stephanie of course) with everyone talking about how important this is.

Maria Menunos is guest ring announcer and Stephanie McMahon is guest commentator, with Cole reading off her resume (and saying Stephanie will tell you about her trailblazing). Alexa Bliss and Charlotte come out to watch at ringside.

### Women's Royal Rumble

Sasha Banks (in Wonder Woman gear) is in at #1 and Becky Lynch is in at #2 to give us a good start. Becky blocks an early elimination attempt and we talk about how nervous Stephanie is. The Bank Statement is broken up and it's a double clothesline as Sarah Logan is in at #3. Logan clotheslines Becky down but Sasha makes a questionable save. Becky gets stomped down in the corner and it's Mandy Rose in at #4. Mandy can't get rid of Sasha and it's LITA in at #5.

Sasha and Becky aren't sure what to do so they opt with kicking her in the stomach. Mandy jumps Lita from behind and gets placed on the apron, followed by a hard shot for the first elimination. Kairi Sane is in at #6 and chops Lita into the corner as Cole talks about her "yacht persona". She's not Ashley Remington (bet you didn't think I knew that one) because SHE'S A FREAKING PIRATE! Sane kicks Sasha down and drops the Insane Elbow, followed by another to Becky as Tamina is in at #7.

Lita starts hitting the Twists of Fate and hits a double moonsault onto Sasha and Becky (more like her falling backwards instead of any kind of jump but give her a break). That means the YOU STILL GOT IT chant before she eliminates Tamina, only to get dumped by Becky. That's all this needed to be from Lita and it worked to perfection. Dana Brooke is in at #8 and actually dumps Kairi before stomping on Sasha in the corner.

Torrie Wilson is in at #9 (oh give me a break) and it's time to prove why she wasn't a wrestler. Logan dropkicks her down but Torrie pops up and eliminates Dana. Sonya Deville is in at #10, giving us Banks, Lynch, Logan, Wilson and Deville. Sonya starts firing off knees and gets rid of Torrie (thank goodness). Liv Morgan is in at #11 so the Squad can start

getting together. No one is tossed though and it's Molly Holly in at #12.

Molly gets rid of Logan and hits the Molly Go Round on Sasha. Lana is in at #13 and is immediately taken down by Morgan and Deville. She actually gets fired up and slaps her way to freedom as Michelle McCool is in at #14. That means an UNDERTAKER chant as she gets rid of Logan, Morgan and Holly. Sasha and Becky are down on the floor (not eliminated) as Michelle gets rid of Lana as well. With Michelle alone, Becky and Sasha get back in and it's Ruby Riott at #15, giving us Michelle, Becky, Sasha and Ruby.

Vickie Guerrero is in at #16 and shouts EXCUSE ME over and over but everyone stares her down. She tries to bail and is tossed with ease (I guessed that as a comedy spot and it's as perfect as I thought it would be). Carmella is in at #17 but Vickie takes the Money in the Bank briefcase to knock her silly. Natalya is in at #18 and throws her gear on Carmella, who pulls Natalya off the apron. That's enough for Carmella to get in for some superkicks and it's Kelly Kelly in at #19. Kelly fends off an early elimination as Natalya gets rid of McCool.

Naomi is in at #20, giving us Banks, Lynch, Riott, Carmella, Natalya, Kelly and Naomi at the moment. Becky goes up for some reason and gets dumped by Riott. Jacqueline is in at #21 and goes after Kelly. Nia Jax is in at #22, meaning it's time to clear the ring. Jacqueline is out first, followed by Kelly with ease. Natalya is sent outside (through the ropes), leaving Nia to press Riott onto the top turnbuckle and then out to the floor. Naomi goes after Nia's legs but tries a hurricanrana.

Nia knocks her off the apron but the pile catches her, allowing Naomi to land on the barricade. NXT Women's Champion (with a bad arm) is in at #23 with a springboard kick to Nia's face. Nia sends her flying as Naomi is walking across the barricade to steal Maria's chair on wheels. She then crawls across the floor using her hands and the wheels on the chair...only to have Nia catch her coming back in and toss her out. I smiled at the irony. Beth Phoenix is in at #24 and this could be a lot of fun.

Phoenix is a lot closer to Nia's size than I expected and manages a fireman's carry but can't eliminate Nia. Natalya's help doesn't work very well as they knock Nia through the ropes. That means a hug and of course

Natalya turns on her and gets rid of Beth. Carmella (never eliminated) comes back in to jump Natalya from behind...and it's Asuka at #25. There's the hip attack to Carmella and it's time for the showdown with Ember Moon.

Ember actually hits a one armed Eclipse but Asuka goes after the bad arm and gets rid of her. Sasha (also never eliminated) gets back in and it's Mickie James in at #26. That goes nowhere and it's Nikki Bella getting lucky #27 (well duh). That means the JOHN CENA SUCKS song but Carmella takes Nikki into the corner for the Staten Island Shuffle (not the Moon Walk Stephanie). Nikki powers her up though and a neck snap across the top rope gets rid of Carmella.

Brie Bella is in at #28 to save her sister from a big beatdown. The Bellas get their big moment (their latest one for those of you who have lost track) and knock Nia off the apron. A double suplex puts Natalya down and it's Bayley in at #29. Asuka kicks Bayley in the head in short order but can't get rid of her. It's Trish Stratus in at #30 (not exactly shocking and that's not a bad thing) to give us a final group of Sasha, Natalya, Nia, Asuka, Mickie, Nikki, Brie, Bayley and Trish.

Stratus gets to clean house and hits a double Stratusfaction before getting into a showdown with Mickie. James misses a charge and gets tossed, meaning it's time for everyone to go after Nia. She shrugs them all off but the Bellas choke her on the ropes, allowing everyone else to join in and get rid of Nia. Sasha of course turns on Bayley for the elimination and we're down to six.

Natalya puts Trish in the Sharpshooter for some reason and is broken up just as quickly. The Chick Kick eliminates Natalya but Trish mocks Sasha's Boss pose, meaning the Stratusfaction is broken up to get rid of Stratus. Sasha turns around to meet Asuka but they decide to get rid of the Bellas...for all of three seconds until Sasha decks Asuka from behind. Sasha calls the Bellas off so she can beat on Asuka in the corner but the Twins dump her out as she tries the double knees.

So we're down to the Bellas and Asuka and it's time for the YES Kicks to both Twins (there's a joke there that I'm not touching). Brie gets sent

to the apron but Nikki decks Asuka, followed by the Rack Attack 2.0. Nikki decks Brie to get rid of her though and it's down to two. Asuka is on the apron and hits a missile dropkick but Nikki's spinning middle rope kick catches her in the face. Nikki puts her on the apron for the big forearm...which doesn't end it. Instead Asuka grabs a headscissors to put Nikki on the apron but Asuka kicks her in the leg for the elimination to win at 58:47.

**Rating:** B. I know a lot of people are going to be annoyed about the amount of legends (and the amount of botches) in there but my goodness what else were you expecting? The women's division is about twenty people deep and I'd rather have people like McCool, Lita and Trish in there to give us either a good performance or appearances from people who are legitimate trailblazers (not McCool obviously but she did quite well). I was surprised by the lack of NXT names but what we got was fine, save for the Iconic Duo still not appearing.

The match itself was fine, albeit a bit predictable. You knew Asuka was the heavy favorite and really, it's not like there were many other solid options. Aside from Jax, who really else was there? Banks or Lynch? Well maybe, but Asuka getting the title needs to be a big deal and one of those two can take the other title. Either way...uh, back in a minute.

The champions get in the ring.....AND BAD REPUTATION HITS AS RONDA ROUSEY IS HERE!!! Rousey, in a Roddy Piper shirt, points at the Wrestlemania sign and offers Asuka a handshake but Asuka slaps it away. Ronda also shakes Stephanie's hand and high fives fans to end the show.

Oh and Stephanie's commentary was annoying but acceptable. She didn't need to be there and added nothing at all but she could have been worse. Sounded very much like a fan who wasn't the most polished but it was fine.

**Overall Rating:** A-. I loved the heck out of this show as they made the Rumbles FUN. That's been sorely, sorely lacking in recent years and they made up for it tonight. The Rumbles are interesting by definition but above all else, these matches were a good time as I kept waiting to see who was coming out next. I was actually worried about Reigns and Nikki

winning so well done on some false drama. This did everything it needed to do, including setting up a major Wrestlemania match. I had a great time with this show and that's what the Rumble is supposed to be. Well done all around and a great show.

### Results

AJ Styles b. Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens – Rollup to Owens

Usos b. Chad Gable/Jason Jordan – Small package to Benjamin

Shinsuke Nakamura won the Royal Rumble last eliminating Roman Reigns

The Bar b. Seth Rollins/Jason Jordan – Super White Noise to Rollins

Brock Lesnar b. Kane and Braun Strowman – F5 to Kane

Asuka won the Royal Rumble last eliminating Nikki Bella

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# He's Going to Wrestlemania!

YES! YES! YES HE IS! By that I mean Shinsuke Nakamura of course, who last eliminated Roman Reigns to win. John Cena and Finn Balor filled out the final four. The big surprise was Rey Mysterio with Hurricane as a comedy joke. Andrade Cien Almas and Adam Cole were the NXT representatives. No Daniel Bryan.

Also, Nakamura said he wanted to face AJ Styles, so the match seems to be made for Wrestlemania.

I was completely wrong about this as I never would have guessed Nakamura to win. Some people said he would though and it turns out they were right.

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## Royal Rumble 2018 Preview

The big day is here. We're less than twenty four hours away from the "2018 Royal Rumble" and that means we're in for one of the biggest nights of the wrestling year. In this case we have two Royal Rumble matches to go with two far less interesting World Title matches, but the double Rumble on its own should be enough to carry the show as far as it needs to go. Besides, even if the Rumbles are terrible, they're still Royal Rumbles and that makes them entertaining by definition.

**Kickoff Show: US Title: Bobby Roode(c) vs. ???**

This is an open challenge with new champion Roode defending against an opponent to be named. In this case, that could be anyone and that makes this a little more interesting. It also

opens the door for another Rumble name if a surprise shows up as there's always the chance that someone will work two matches on the show, though that tends to not be the case most of the time.

I'll take Jinder Mahal to answer the challenge and Roode to retain. The other options would likely be Tye Dillinger and Dolph Ziggler, though I would need therapy to get my head around the idea of Ziggler vacating the title and then coming back to try and win it in a regular match. Roode should of course retain and sadly enough, he has to do it on the pre-show.

### **Kickoff Show: Revival vs. Anderson and Gallows**

You know, I'm already more optimistic about this match than I was when they fought Monday on "Raw". Really, it can't get any worse for the Revival than what happened to them there so it's a nice relief to know we might actually get an interesting match. At the very least there isn't likely to be a completely unnecessary legends beatdown, so things are looking up.

Unfortunately I'll take Anderson and Gallows to win here. Not that they need it more (though a win would be nice for them) but more laong the lines of WWE seems to like the idea of throwing someone out there and having them lose in a short match before having them lose in a longer match. This should be fine though, and if Revival can pull off the win, even better.

### **Kickoff Show: Kalisto/Lince Dorado/Gran Metalik vs. TJP/Jack Gallagher/Drew Gulak**

Watch them put this on the pre-show second, leaving one of the other matches to get the empty arena treatment. This feels like any other six man tag you might see on "205 Live" and as luck would have it, the same three good guys fought TJP and two other partners on this week's show. For WWE, this is impressive progress.



I'll take the luchadors to win because really, it's not like it matters one way or another. We're still waiting on the new General Manager to take over "205 Live" and reset things (again) so there's no way of telling what to expect at the moment. You'll get some nice dives and flips, but really there's not much to this one. It'll serve its purpose of warming up the crowd, but that purpose is low when there are so many other matches on the card.

### **Raw Tag Team Titles: Seth Rollins/Jason Jordan(c) vs. The Bar**

Jordan and Rollins have only been champions for a month now and it already feels like they've had them for a year. I'm not sure why I'm supposed to be interested in Jordan's heel turn and move into a feud with Rollins in the injured Dean Ambrose's place but that might suggest that WWE has to come up with something that fits instead of just writing a new story two months out.

I'll take Rollins and Jordan to retain for now but you know they're going to lose the titles in the near future. Sheamus' injury issues would suggest that they're not the best options in the world to take the titles so I'll wait on Anderson and Gallows to win the titles, probably at "Elimination Chamber 2018" For now though, it's more miscommunication as we wait on the heel turn.

### **Smackdown World Title: AJ Styles(c) vs. Kevin Owens/Sami Zayn**

What a weird title match. Does anyone believe we're going to have co-champions? I get that the idea is something about Shane McMahon vs. Daniel Bryan in their ridiculous power struggle story because WWE for some reason thinks that's more important than the World Title situation, but for now we're getting this match for the title on one of the biggest pay per views of the year.

I'm not sure how, but Styles retains here, possibly through interference from the two bosses. I mean, it's hard to imagine

that they're not at ringside to keep the focus where it needs to be, but other than that we're likely watching a lot of double teaming from some great heels while they try to make the match work. Styles can be great against either of them, but for some reason they've gone with the least appealing match they could choose. But yeah, Styles retains.

### **Smackdown Tag Team Titles: Usos(c) vs. Chad Gable/Shelton Benjamin**

This is a 2/3 falls match, which seems like a smart idea on a show with so much time to fill. If they spend their time right, they can put together something very entertaining here as they all know how to fly around the ring and be very entertaining. The Usos have been the best team in the company for a very long time and that could make for a fun match, especially given the amount of time they should have.

I'll take the Usos to retain here as their feud against the Bludgeon Brothers seems to be set in stone from here. Benjamin and Gable are almost guaranteed to win one fall and then we can move on to the teams going crazy in the third fall. The Usos are more than capable of rocking the house with good challengers and that's what they have here. This should be a lot of fun.

### **Raw World Title: Brock Lesnar(c) vs. Kane vs. Braun Strowman**

This is being written a few hours after Johnny Gargano and Andrade Cien Almas rocked the house for the NXT Title. Now why do I have a feeling that this one might not have the same level of emotion? The Universal Title has continued to be a thing that exists while we wait until New Orleans and there's just no hiding that.

I'd like to say Braun Strowman wins here just for the sake of some false hope but it's going to be Brock Lesnar pinning Kane (though pinning Strowman wouldn't shock me) to retain the title and head on to the big title match with Roman Reigns.

Hopefully this approaches the intensity of the hoss fights from late last year but I'm not exactly buying the idea of Kane being able to do that. Hopefully he doesn't slow things down too badly, but he should just be there to take the pin.

### Men's Royal Rumble

The more I think about it, the more drama I think there might be in this. That's a little bit of a change of pace as WWE has done next to nothing to hype this match. It's really just been "hey it's the Rumble" and we'll worry about the rest later. There are a few potential winners and while some of them are more interesting than others, as usual, it's going to boil down to just a few options.

I'm torn on this one but I think I'm going to go with Roman Reigns. It's either going to be him or Shinsuke Nakamura (or maybe John Cena) but it would be better if they didn't waste our time with the false hope of Reigns not going to the title match in New Orleans. Of course they could use this to make a new star but that doesn't seem to be their cup of tea lately. Hopefully it happens here though, as they REALLY need that at the moment.

### Women's Royal Rumble

I'm starting to get more interested in this one as I'm curious to see what they might throw in here to fill in the spots. That being said, EGADS WHY MUST STEPHANIE MCMAHON BE ON COMMENTARY DURING THE ENTIRE THING??? I really could go without the announcers cowering in fear of her hatred of all things pronouns and trying to be all casual and funny while speaks the corporate line all match.

The more I think about it, the more I think Nia Jax takes this. Asuka seems to be a little too easy and hopefully it sets up Asuka vs. Charlotte. Asuka vs. Alexa Bliss II isn't a Wrestlemania caliber match and they would be crazy to go there when Charlotte is an option. Go with Jax and see who she gets

to face for the title while FINALLY giving her a big win at the same time. It's a better story, but none of the options are really great.

### **Overall Thoughts**

Like I said, they've done a pretty pathetic job of setting up this show. They've focused on the two World Title matches without realizing that there's not much to either of them in the first place. The "Raw" match is the most obvious ending in the world and the "Smackdown" match is more about the bosses being passive aggressive to each other than the title match or the wrestlers involved. That's not lost on the fans and it hasn't helped make me interested in the show.

Other than that we have the two Rumbles themselves, which haven't built up anyone but Asuka as a real threat to win either match. You could go for Nakamura or Reigns, but other than the two of them the thing feels like it could be anyone winning, even though almost no one has been built up for either match. Hopefully the matches do better than they seem on paper, which should be the case given that it's the Rumble.

Oh and for surprise picks: Kaitlyn, Michelle McCool, Tommy Dreamer and for some reason, Ryback.

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# On the Big Royal Rumble Matches

We're almost to one of my favorite matches of the year as the Royal Rumble is almost upon us. Well the double Royal Rumble in this case but you get the idea. The interesting thing this time around is either Royal Rumble could go in multiple directions and that makes things a lot more fun. So what to do with each one? Or the title matches for that matter?

We'll start with the men's Rumble, which is probably the hardest of the four top matches to pick. You really could go in several different ways, but the best option would [seem to be either Roman Reigns or Shinsuke Nakamura](#), who are the favorites on at least one betting site. The more I think about it the more I'm leaning towards Reigns, as you can imagine WWE wanting to "get it right" in Philadelphia this time around.

As for the women's Rumble...dang again. While it's hard to imagine anyone not named Asuka winning this, the fun part [might be guessing who is going to be in the thing](#). We already know eighteen names announced, leaving twelve in the air for either legends or NXT talent. I can't imagine we see Ronda Rousey but after this week's Raw, Trish Stratus and the Bella Twins are all strong possibilities. Asuka will win, but the fun part is seeing who she defeats to get there.

Then we have the World Title matches with one of them being a little easier to predict than the other. That would be the WWE Championship match as I can't imagine Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens taking the title from AJ Styles and becoming the co-champions. AJ should retain here, and then we can figure out an opponent for him down the road (likely at Fastlane).

Finally there's the Universal Title match and really, there isn't a ton

of doubt here either. Roman Reigns vs. Brock Lesnar is all but chiseled into stone for Wrestlemania XXXIV in New Orleans. With Kane around, they can easily keep the title on Lesnar without taking anything away from Braun Strowman. That's especially important with Strowman [having a pretty big match on the Wrestlemania card](#).

The show should be a lot of fun, but those Rumble matches alone should make the card worth seeing. They're much more interesting than the two World Title matches, mainly due to the wide open fields. It's one of my favorite nights of the year and this time around the best part is doubled.

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## Smackdown – January 23, 2018: That Actually Worked!

### Smackdown

Date: January 23, 2018

Location: Capitol One Arena, Washington DC

Commentators: Corey Graves, Byron Saxton, Tom Phillips

It's the night after the Monday Night Raw 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary so now we need to bring things back down to earth a bit. This time around though it's also the go home show for the Royal Rumble and we need to get things ready. There's also the issue of Enzo Amore, who Daniel Bryan will address for some reason. Let's get to it.

Here are Kevin Owens and Sami Zayn to open things up. They introduce each other as the future co-WWE Champions before Owens talks about being in a handicap match a few weeks back. There's no way that AJ can win a 2-1 match because they couldn't win a 3-2 match because they're already better than AJ.

This brings out AJ to say there's no way that's going to happen and if

the two of them could shut their YEP holes for awhile, reality would set in. Sami says he knew that AJ would be out here with his macho act and brings up a clip from a few weeks back. Three weeks ago AJ asked for the handicap match and Owens accuses him of trying to back out of the match.

The next clip is AJ saying he would fight both of them in the same night. Owens suggests that AJ fight the two of them in a row tonight. This brings out Bryan to imply that the matches are about to be made but AJ doesn't know whose side Bryan is on. AJ makes the matches official instead.

I know we're coming up on Sunday's title match, but my goodness they need to get somewhere with this story. You can only tease Bryan being in cahoots with Sami and Owens for so long before you need to actually go somewhere with it. They were nice enough to give AJ and his challengers some actual mic time here but they REALLY need some advancement in this story already. I'm very tired of having Bryan and/or Shane arguing with each other and using these guys as pawns and it needs to change. Oh and what's up with people working multiple matches a night? This is two weeks in a row now.

Bryan and Shane are in their office with Shane talking down to Bryan about his choice. Daniel asks if Shane believes AJ can take care of himself but Shane says AJ isn't the one he's questioning.

### Jey Uso vs. Chad Gable

Gable goes for a single leg to start and takes Jey into the corner before putting him on the ground without much effort. Back up and Jey sends him outside and we take an early break. Back with Gable getting two off a northern lights suplex but missing the moonsault. Jey sends him outside and a suicide dive drops Chad again. Gable charges into a Samoan drop but the running Umaga Attack is blocked. Instead Gable Liger Kicks him and grabs Rolling Chaos Theory for the pin at 7:44.

**Rating:** D+. This didn't go very far but to be fair it's not like it was supposed to be anything of note. They were going with the standard singles win to set up a tag match which has worked before and it'll work again almost any time they try it. I'm not sold on a title change but

just having them give us something interesting on Sunday is a good idea.

Shinsuke Nakamura's strategy for winning the Rumble: knee them all in the face. Baron Corbin comes in to say Nakamura is all hype and nothing to show for it. He doesn't care about the fans and asks what Nakamura has done. Shinsuke says he'll do something on Sunday and offers a rumble tonight. I know Nakamura is becoming one of the favorites to win the Rumble but I still don't buy it. There's not much to build off of with him and it would seem to come out of nowhere. That's been the case before but I'm not buying it here.

Tye Dillinger, still using the handheld camera style, enters the Rumble. He can't do the Perfect Ten because he only has one hand so it's two fives instead.

#### Naomi vs. Liv Morgan

They fight over a backslide to start until Naomi kicks her in the face. Liv is right back with a pull into the middle buckle, followed by a cross arm chinlock. Cue Natalya, Carmella and Lana for a distraction, allowing Naomi to grab a sunset flip for the pin at 2:39.

The Riott Squad comes in to beat Naomi down but Becky Lynch makes the save. It turns into the mini Rumble with Naomi and Natalya standing tall. Becky throws Naomi to the apron for a staredown but here's Charlotte to say good luck to everyone, especially the winner. That's how a champion should talk to a bunch of challengers.

Miz and Asuka are ready to win the Mixed Match Challenge.

Carmella and Big E. are ready to win as well, but first: pancakes.

#### Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Baron Corbin

Nakamura drives him to the ropes for the arm swing into COME ON, with Corbin warning him not to do it. Good Vibrations sends Corbin outside with Nakamura giving chase, only to get posted. Serves him right for not listening to Corbin's request. Back from a break with Corbin holding a chinlock but Nakamura fights up and starts striking away. A running kick to the head and the running knee in the corner give Nakamura two.



Kinshasa is countered into Deep Six for a pretty hot two and Nakamura is in trouble. Corbin's slide underneath the ropes into the clothesline turns Nakamura inside out for two more. A cross armbreaker out of nowhere has Corbin in trouble but Nakamura switches to a kick to the head. Kinshasa is loaded up but RKO OUT OF NOWHERE plants Nakamura as Randy Orton runs in for the DQ at 12:26. Well done there as they actually surprised me with the run in.

**Rating:** B. This was starting to cook and the run-in finish was perfect, especially as a way to keep both guys solid going into Sunday. Having Orton run in for the DQ made perfect sense and reminds us that he's in there too. It takes some time to warm Nakamura up but once he gets going, he's as entertaining as anyone on the show. That was starting to be the case here and the match was starting to rock.

Post match Corbin takes an RKO of his own.

We look at the media coverage of last night's show.

Video on last night's show.

Here's New Day for a six man tag but first, they all enter the Royal Rumble. It's just two of them tonight so they need a partner. That man would be the new United States Champion, with Woods singing the theme into the trombone. Roode says his goal is to be the best US Champion of all time and his reign is going to be.....Kofi: "Stupendous!" Woods: "Delicious!" Big E.: "Exuberant!" Actually it's GLORIOUS!

New Day/Bobby Roode vs. Rusev Day/Jinder Mahal

Big E. is the odd man out here and there's only one Singh Brother thanks to an ankle injury last week. Joined in progress with Rusev holding Kofi in a bearhug and hitting a running shoulder into the corner. English misses a charge though and it's Roode coming in to clean house. The Blockbuster drops English and a spinebuster does the same to Jinder. Rusev comes in and kicks Roode into a rollup for two but it's Kofi diving in to put English on the floor. Kofi's dive into the trust fall takes the other two down, leaving English to get caught with another spinebuster. Woods' top rope elbow is good for the pin at 2:38 shown.

Royal Rumble rundown.

### AJ Styles vs. Kevin Owens

Non-title but hang on a minute. Shane comes out to say Sami can't be at ringside, just like Owens can't be at ringside for the next match. If either of them interfere, they're out of the title match and fired. The bickering continues into the break and we're back for the opening bell (thank you). AJ scores with a dropkick but gets his head clotheslined off. That goes nowhere and it's a Calf Crusher to make Owens tap out immediately at 1:08, likely to save himself for Sunday.

Sami runs in to beat on AJ to break the hold, which doesn't count as breaking Shane's rules because we're between matches. AJ gets beaten down in the corner as Kevin limps off. The stomping continues as we're still waiting on the opening bell. A whip sends AJ into the steps as the bosses are watching in the back.

### Sami Zayn vs. AJ Styles

Non-title again with AJ saying he's ready to go. Sami charges at him again as Owens is still at ringside due to not being able to walk to the back. The stomping continues and we hit the chinlock for a bit as a stretcher is brought out for Owens. AJ fights back and hits his running seated forearm to get a breather. Sami gets sent outside for a slingshot forearm but AJ goes after Owens instead as we take a break.

Back with Sami hammering away even more and grabbing another chinlock. AJ snaps off a super hurricanrana to get a breather as we see the bosses watching in the back for the third time. The fireman's carry backbreaker gives AJ two and the Helluva Kick is blocked with a raised boot. The Pele scores on Sami for two but Sami grabs a Michinoku Driver for two. Frustration is setting in as he takes AJ to the top, only to get dropped face first onto the top turnbuckle.

AJ takes him outside where Owens is STILL being loaded onto the stretcher. That's enough for Styles as he slides into a knee to Sami's face and turns the stretcher over. Back in and the Helluva Kick connects followed by the Blue Thunder Bomb....WHICH GETS THE PIN AT 15:44????? I've

been watching Sami since his WWE run started and I don't ever remember that getting a pin. I was actually surprised when that worked.

**Rating:** B-. I'm still trying to get over that finish as the Blue Thunder Bomb winning is so unthinkable. This was similar to Gable vs. Uso earlier in the night where you build some drama with the idea that the underdog has a chance. I don't think AJ is going to lose the title but it's nice to try to get something set up.

Owens and Zayn pose over AJ to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** C+. Bickering bosses aside, it was nice to have Smackdown doing something good for a change. They did a solid job of setting up some stuff for the Rumble and that's what was needed after last night. They added four more names to the Rumble and made me more interested than I was coming into the show. Good night here, especially with all of the previous weeks of mess.

### Results

Chad Gable b. Jey Uso – Rolling Chaos Theory

Naomi b. Liv Morgan – Sunset flip

Shinsuke Nakamura b. Baron Corbin via DQ when Randy Orton interfered

New Day/Bobby Roode b. Rusev Day/Jinder Mahal – Top rope elbow to English

AJ Styles b. Kevin Owens – Calf Crusher

Sami Zayn b. AJ Styles – Blue Thunder Bomb

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