

New Column: In Other News

Looking at some of the other WWE stories from the weekend.

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NXT Takeover: Dallas: Night of a Thousand Chants

NXT Takeover: Dallas

Date: April 1, 2016

Location: Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, Dallas, Texas

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

We're back with another NXT pay per view style special and one heck of a stacked card. The main event here is Samoa Joe challenging NXT Champion Finn Balor in a rematch from their match of the year candidate from London. Other than that we have Sami Zayn's potential farewell match for the promotion against the debuting Shinsuke Nakamura in what should be a near classic. Let's get to it.

Of note: I was in the arena for this show so this is my second time seeing it.

Apollo Crews vs. Elias Samson was scheduled for the show but was bumped to a dark match due to time constraints. I'd assume it will air on TV at a later date.

The opening video focuses on the history of Texas wrestling before talking about how this is the future. The two title matches and Zayn vs. Nakamura receive the focus.

Tag Team Titles: American Alpha vs. Revival

Alpha (Chad Gable/Jason Jordan) is challenging. There isn't much of a story here other than Alpha has beaten all the other teams to earn a shot. Gable starts with Scott Dawson (of Dawson/Dash Wilder) and the fans do the GABLE chant in tune with Kurt Angle's old cheers. That quickly changes to "WHICH ONE'S DAWSON, WHICH ONE'S DASH", which makes sense as they're about as interchangeable as the Usos.

Gable takes him down with some headlock takeovers but Dawson keeps countering with headscissors. A rollup gets two for Chad as the sequence earns a nice round of applause. Chad gives him a gentle pat on the cheek and everything is about to break down. More armdrags have Dawson in trouble and it's off to Jordan who gets a chant of his own. The evil champs get a breather with a rake of the eyes, only to have Alpha backdrop them both as this is one sided so far.

Chad comes back in to work on the arm as things slow back down. Gable gets two off a cross body out of the corner but misses a dropkick. As usual I'm not sure why that miss hurts but the one that connected didn't. Jordan comes in for some stereo German suplexes and it feels like I'm watching the Steiners vs. the Brain Busters. To continue with that theory, Wilder comes in off a tag and gets Chad to chase him into a clothesline from Dawson to take over for the first time.

Now we get to the Revival's bread and butter of cutting the ring off and working on body parts like a good old school team would do. Dawson puts on a Gory Stretch but gets countered into a sunset flip for two. A double DDT drops the champs but Wilder crawls under the ring and nails Jordan to break up the hot tag. That hooligan.

In the (unfortunately) memorable part of the match, Dash loads up a powerbomb for a clothesline from Dawson but can't keep Gable up, basically making it a slow motion Dominator with the clothesline missing completely. It's only two though as Wilder isn't legal, meaning it's back to Dawson as the fans chant BOTCHAMANIA and remind the champs that they screwed up.

Chad FINALLY crawls through Dawson's legs and makes the white hot tag to Jordan for some serious house cleaning. A string of suplexes gets two on

the champs but Scott gets a quick rollup for two with Wilder using a towel to hold his partner's feet on the ropes like a classic heel. I'd love to see more of that kind of stuff. An uppercut gets two on Jordan with Gable making the diving save for a SWEET false finish.

Jason misses a charge into the corner but Gable makes a blind tag to come in. Some rollups are exchanged for two and Gable gets some more near falls off a small package and a reverse victory roll. Jordan makes a blind tag of his own and runs around the ring to sneak in and spear the heck out of Wilder, setting up Grand Amplitude for the pin and the titles 15:11.

Rating: B+. What a match and it really did feel like the Steiner Brothers vs. the Anderson and Blanchard. That's the kind of a pairing you never expect to see again in this generation but these two really did get close to pulling it off. Like so much in NXT, the Revival was talented but just ran into a team more evolved than they were. Alpha is one of the most polished acts I've ever seen given how long they've been together. I know Gable gets the hype (as he should) but Jordan is an amazing talent in his own right with some amazing athleticism and technical abilities.

Jim Ross and Michelle Beadle are shown.

Kota Ibushi is here for a BIG reaction from the crowd.

Ad for the NXT UK tour.

We recap Austin Aries vs. Baron Corbin, which is all about Aries debuting and getting attacked by Corbin, who was mad over losing the #1 contenders triple threat match. Aries is out for revenge.

Austin Aries vs. Baron Corbin

Corbin whips him into the corner to start but gets forearmed in the head a few times for his efforts. A discus forearm puts Corbin on the floor and Aries nails a top rope ax handle for good measure. The announcers talk about Aries breaking up a 600+ day Samoa Joe title reign, which is as close as you'll get to an acknowledgment of Ring of Honor around here.

Back in and Corbin finally realizes he's a lot stronger than Aries and

shoves him down to the mat. A whip sends Aries shoulder first into the post for two and things slow way down. We hit the nerve hold with Corbin shouting that Aries is a little man from nowhere. Not quite the Great Gatsby but close enough. Corbin lets go of the hold and gets two before telling the timekeeper to ring the bell. There's something awesome about someone who just yells at everyone else because he knows no one can touch him.

Aries comes back with some left hands and a neckbreaker across the middle rope for a cool spot. A missile dropkick followed by a running corner dropkick put Corbin on the floor for a suicide dive, which of course draws an NXT chant. Aries tries another charge but runs into Deep Six on the floor for a huge crash. For some reason the referee counts one twice so Aries dives back in at eleven. It must be getting the leftover Ring of Honor out of him. Back in and Aries says bring it so Corbin tries End of Days, only to have Austin roll over into a cradle for the pin at 10:43.

Rating: C. I really don't like this ending and the match felt a bit off. Aries didn't get in a ton of offense and then he wins on a quick rollup. I'd assume this was designed to set up a rematch but it's really not the best debut. The idea made enough sense but it's not the version I would have gone with. You can have Corbin take a loss here and not really have it damage him as he can just lay people out to make up for it later. I don't hate this but it didn't do much for me.

Balor arrived earlier in a Star Wars shirt.

We recap Sami Zayn vs. Shinsuke Nakamura. There's nothing personal here but Zayn made his debut with a big win over Cesaro years ago so now Nakamura wants to win a big match in his own debut. It's pretty clear that Sami is heading for the main roster after this one so they're likely going for a big moment here. We also get a video on Nakamura, whose introduction was basically "Yeah you all know him and you know he's awesome.". Why go with anything other than the obvious?

Scott Hall and X-Pac are here.

Sami Zayn vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

The fans sing along with Sami's music for a cool moment. As big as Sami's pop is though, Nakamura's chant and reaction are just that much bigger. The place seemed to be in awe of him and his spastic dancing, even doing their holy swearing chants during the entrances. They circle each other a bit and the fans chant YES in advance of contact. Sami ducks the kick to the head but Nakamura tells him to bring it.

Back up and Sami cranks on the arm as the fans are totally split. Now we get my new favorite NXT chant of "BOTH THESE GUYS!" That's quite the compliment and not something you often hear. As we hear about Nakamura's Kinshasa knee (Daniel Bryan's running knee), Sami starts throwing him around with armdrags before telling Nakamura to bring it in a nice touch. More knees to the ribs put Sami down and we get a SHINSUKE'S GONNA KILL YOU chant.

There's the first kick to the head and a second gets a one count. Nakamura puts on a front facelock as the director tells Graves to talk. Sami gets in a suplex for two and a big forearm puts Nakamura on the floor. That's not good for Sami as Nakamura gets in two straight knees to the head, followed by a running knee to the ribs for two back inside. Sami is smart enough to make Nakamura miss a charge out to the floor, setting up the big flip dive. The fans again declare this awesome as Sami catches a charge with a Michinoku Driver to put both guys down.

Then in the sequence of the match they slug it out with forearms for at least thirty seconds, drawing a YES chant until it turns into trading forearm bombs. Nakamura's nose is busted and they start speeding up again to a round of applause. Nakamura gets the better of it with knees to the ribs and a flurry of kicks/stomps to the head to put Sami down. Both guys are gassed though so Sami takes Nakamura's head off with a clothesline.

That just earns Zayn a cross armbreaker which is turned into a triangle but Sami stands up and kicks him in the face for the break. When all else fails, KICK HIM IN THE FACE! Now it's Sami kicking Nakamura down against the ropes, followed by the Koji Clutch in the middle of the ring. Shinsuke turns it into a rollup for two and followed with a quick enziguri. Fans: "FIGHT FOREVER!"

The Helluva Kick misses but so does the Kinshasa, allowing Sami to grab the Blue Thunder Bomb for an awesome near fall. Nakamura rolls to the floor but still gets up a HARD kick to block Sami's diving DDT. Back in again and Sami tries the exploder, only to have Nakamura elbow the heck out of the back of his head. A middle rope knee to the head sets up the Kinshasa for the pin on Sami at 20:07.

Rating: A+. And that's your match of the show, weekend and year so far. Just a brutal, brutal fight with two guys hitting each other as hard as they could for twenty minutes until one of them couldn't get up anymore. Nakamura looks like a killer on arrival and Zayn gets to move on to the main roster with a classic on the way out. What more can you possibly ask for out of two guys in a match like this? Outstanding stuff and one of the hardest hitting matches I've seen in a very long time.

Nakamura takes a bow but helps Sami up to chants of "THANK YOU SAMI!" Zayn raises Shinsuke's hand before staying in the ring for a bit in what looks like his goodbye as his music plays one more time. We get one final OLE chant as Sami waves goodbye and looks back. The camera work here makes it much more effective on the broadcast than it was in the arena.

We recap Bayley vs. Asuka. Again it's similar to the Tag Team Title match as Asuka has run through the division and only the champ is left. Simple but effective.

Stephanie McMahon is shown and described as an integral part of the women's division. I'm to the point where I don't even care about this anymore. Stephanie has decided that she invented the division and set it up so that's the official company line now. Moving on.

Women's Title: Asuka vs. Bayley

Bayley is defending and both women get enormous reactions. Asuka's entrance sees cherry blossoms fall from the ceiling, which were just bags being emptied out by production staff who could be seen in the rafters. The fans argue over whether Bayley is going to hug Asuka or if Asuka is going to kill Bayley. Feeling out process to start until Bayley eats a right hand to the face to knock her into the corner.

They hit the ropes but miss some running strikes to give us a standoff. The running hip attack puts Bayley down though and the champ is suddenly in trouble. A second hip attack misses though and Bayley gets in a middle rope elbow for two. Asuka can't quite get a Fujiwara armbar as Bayley makes the rope so it's off to some kicks to the ribs instead. A quick hurricanrana sets up Bayley's guillotine choke but Asuka escapes and puts on an ankle lock.

That's reversed as well and Bayley starts forearming her, only to have Asuka scream and dropkick the champ again. Now it's time for some YES kicks, followed by a running knee for two more. Asuka kicks her in the head again as this is getting a little more brutal. Back up and they both try dropkicks, followed by Bayley blocking another dropkick and grabbing a legbar of all things. Asuka gets up so Bayley elbows her in the leg before busting out a dragon screw leg whip.

A quick cross armbreaker has Bayley in trouble and a seated armbar makes it even worse. That's countered into a rollup (because of course) for two but Asuka can't get her namesake lock. Fans: "BOTH THESE WOMEN!" Bayley's armbar doesn't work and unfortunately the Bayley to Belly doesn't either, allowing Asuka to get in a snap belly to belly. The Asuka Lock goes on and Bayley is in trouble, eventually falling down and fighting for a LONG time before passing out in the hold to give Asuka the title at 15:24.

Rating: B. The ending felt a little flat here but that's up from feeling very flat live. The match worked and you could get a much better story with the camera showing Bayley getting more and more desperate as she just didn't have what it took to hang with someone as skilled and seasoned as Asuka. They did a good job of protecting Bayley by having her pass out, but I still don't think Asuka did enough on the arm to set up that hold. The ending makes sense in theory but I still don't like the execution. It's still a good match though.

Post match Asuka looks at the fallen Bayley (now awake and sitting up) but walks away without a handshake or any kind of sportsmanship.

We recap Samoa Joe vs. Finn Balor. Joe already lost to Balor in their first title match back in London but went on to win a VERY long match

over Sami Zayn to earn this spot. Since then, Joe has gone on a mini rampage (as is his custom) to set this up.

Bobby Roode is shown in the front row. Now that's a big deal. Well kind of. As big a deal as a TNA guy can really be.

NXT Title: Samoa Joe vs. Finn Balor

Balor, in full demon mode, is defending...and he has a chainsaw. It never ceases to amaze me how he goes from a normal looking guy in a leather jacket to whatever insane monster this is supposed to be (It's awesome but where in the world does this come from?). They slug it out to start with Balor being sent outside, only to come back with right hands to bust Joe WAY open. You really couldn't see the severity of the cut live but there's quite a bit of blood coming down his eye.

Joe throws Balor hard over the barricade so the doctor can look at his eye but then throws the towel away. In an amazing visual, the camera cuts to the barricade where the demon face rises up like he's on an elevator and springboards off the barricade with a forearm. The referee brings the towel in again but Joe throws it away and smacks Balor in the face.

Balor does that hop over the ropes out of the corner (that's always sweet) but Joe knocks him off the apron for one of the hardest suicide elbows I've ever seen. Oh wait though as we have to check the cut again, though to be fair half of Joe's face is bloody here. Again, that wasn't clear from the audience, who swear at the medical staff for not letting them fight. The announcers suggest that the match could be stopped but they finally get the cut closed (as well as they could at least) so Joe can Rock Bottom Balor out of the corner.

The enziguri gets two on the champ and they stop it AGAIN for the cut. That earns them an F*** PG chant, followed by the Facewash to Balor in the corner. A running big boot and knee drop get two but Balor dropkicks him down. That means it's time for another medical check and a LET JOE BLEED chant. The champ fires off some chops to send Joe outside, followed by a HARD running kick to the chest.

The Sling Blade connects but Balor misses a dropkick, allowing Joe to hit

the backslash for two. Joe stays on him with the powerbomb into the sequence of submissions, capped off by a Crossface. This caused a Benoit chant in the upper deck which was immediately booed out of the building. So even NXT fans have standards.

The Muscle Buster only gets two and Balor wins another slugout with something like a Pele and it's time for demon mode. The dropkick sets up the Coup de Grace but 1916 is countered into the Clutch, only to have Balor climb the buckles and flip back onto Joe for the pin to retain at 16:22. Joe's stunned look is great as he has no idea what happened to him.

Rating: A-. This felt much more like a fight than a match and that's exactly what it needed to feel like. I know a lot of people are going to complain about the referee stoppages but that's the wrestling world we live in now. I really don't have an issue with someone having a bloody eye getting treatment before the cut gets out of hand. Yes it got annoying but after seeing how bad it really was, I more than understand it now.

What I'm not sure of is who the next challenger is going to be. There's no logical reason to do Balor vs. Joe 3 and the only other option would seem to be Nakamura, though it's a bit too soon for that. At least we had a really good match here, though it was a step down from their London match.

Joe stares at Balor to end the show.

Overall Rating: A. The show was better on a second viewing but it wasn't a classic by any stretch. I didn't feel much of a flow here as it's really just a collection of matches. That being said, it's a collection of REALLY good matches with the Nakamura vs. Zayn match more than stealing the show. Other than that you have a great opener, an awesome main event and a totally watchable Aries vs. Corbin match that doesn't even last eleven minutes as the worst match of the night. This is what NXT does: set up matches and then blow the doors off when it's time for the show. Great stuff here and an amazing start to the weekend.

Results

American Alpha b. Revival – Grand Amplitude to Dawson

Austin Aries b. Baron Corbin – Rollup

Shinsuke Nakamura b. Sami Zayn – Kinshasa

Asuka b. Bayley – Asuka Lock

Finn Balor b. Samoa Joe – Balor flipped back onto Joe while in the Koquina Clutch

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Went To NXT Takeover: Dallas

I'm half dead already so no full live report at the moment (though the full reviews are coming eventually) but here are some quick highlights. 1. American Alpha is so over it's scary.

2. The Aries match ended REALLY fast, almost to the point that I thought Aries was injured.

3. The Zayn vs. Nakamura match woke everyone up like few matches I've ever seen. That was amazing live.

4. "BOTH THESE GUYS" is the best chant they've had in a long time.
 5. The ending of the women's title match really didn't work as it just ended out of nowhere. Also Asuka needed to work on the shoulder to set that up.
 6. The towel was the biggest heel of the night.
 7. This wasn't a great show and is probably in the bottom tier of Takeovers.
 8. I was tired at this show so a second viewing might severely change my mind.
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New Column: NXT Takeover: Dallas Preview

I think the name speaks for itself here.

<http://wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-nxt-takeover-dallas-preview/>

NXT – March 16, 2016: The Construction Project

NXT

Date: March 16, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves

Takeover is looming and we finally have a main event for the show. Last week Samoa Joe beat Sami Zayn in a two out of three falls match to earn the title shot against NXT Champion Finn Balor in just over two weeks. The rest of the card is mostly set as well and it should be interesting to see where things go from here. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Joe beating Zayn last week.

Opening sequence.

Here's Sami Zayn to get things going. Last week he went to war against a 300lb Samoan and for those of you who have never done that, it's really not that fun. Sami isn't the slightest bit ashamed of what happened last week and if he had fingers just a few inches longer, he might be going to Takeover for the title shot.

Either way though, Sami wants to do something special in Dallas and here's Commissioner William Regal with an announcement. Sami does indeed deserve something special in Dallas so here's his opponent: SHINSUKE NAKAMURA, who pops up on screen to say that he's coming to NXT. As you might expect, the fans go INSANE.

Hype Bros vs. Angelo Dawkins/Kenneth Crawford

Rawley is a big crowd favorite to start and shoves Crawford around the ring early on. Dawkins comes in so Mojo starts doing some football drills to keep him in the corner. A big shot drops Dawkins and Mojo declares that both of them ain't hyped. Ryder comes in for some of his signature stuff before bringing Rawley back in to clean house. A discus punch from Rawley sets up the Hype Ryder to put Crawford away at 3:24.

Rating: D+. Just a squash here as the Hype Bros continue to be an entertaining act and get to build themselves up before being fed to some other team who can beat them on their way to a title shot. Not bad or anything here and it's a really good sign that there are jobbers who you recognize instead of bigger names losing all the time.

Video on NXT at the Arnold Classic, complete with a cameo by Arnold

himself.

Emma and Dana Brooke run into Deonna Purrazzo and laugh about her loss a few weeks back. Deonna is ready for Emma tonight and trash is spoken. Dana promises that Emma will take it seriously but pats Deonna on the head anyway.

Deonna Purrazzo vs. Emma

Emma takes her down to start and stands on Deonna's hair like only a villain can. Some choking sets up the former Emma Sandwich for two before it's off to the chinlock. Deonna fights back with a few elbows to the chin but misses a charge into the corner, setting up the Dilemma. Dana is very pleased as the Emma Lock makes Deonna tap at 3:49.

Rating: D+. Emma and Dana are similar to the Hype Bros as they're not likely to ever get the title on their own but defeating them could look like a big deal for the right opponent. Assuming Asuka takes the title from Bayley in Texas, Emma (or Dana if she's ever healthy) could be a good choice for a TV challenger before Asuka fights a refocused Nia Jax.

Tommaso Ciampa vs. Jesse Sorensen

Ciampa is very aggressive to start and pounds Jesse into the corner, including a hard running knee to the head. A discus lariat gets two but Jesse actually makes a comeback with a good looking dropkick. Sorensen gets caught on top though, allowing Ciampa to drive a knee through Jesse's legs into the chest for a unique looking move. That floatover armbar makes Jesse tap at 2:30. Ciampa looked good here, maybe as good as he has aside from that match against Joe.

We look at Asuka saving Bayley from Nia Jax and Eva Marie.

Nia Jax/Eva Marie vs. Bayley/Asuka

Bayley and Nia get things going and the champ is thrown into the corner for the tag off to Eva. That's just fine with Bayley as she easily takes Eva to the mat and brings in Asuka. The rapid knees and kicks have Eva looking...well moderately annoyed because she doesn't know how to sell anything. It's back to Bayley but Nia gets a blind tag and plants her

with a Samoan drop. Eva comes in again to crank on both arms but Bayley pops up because she's Bayley and it's Eva Marie. Nia comes in and accidentally drops a leg on Eva, allowing the Bayley to Belly to put Eva away at 4:01.

Rating: C. There's something about that charisma that Bayley brings to any arena that always makes me smile. She's just hard not to like and it helps that she's wrestling like a main event star now instead of a goofy comedy wrestler. Hopefully this wraps up Eva and Nia for now and they'll split soon like they should have before they got together in the first place.

Post match Bayley and Asuka stand next to each other, allowing Regal to come out and make Asuka #1 contender for Dallas.

We look back at Baron Corbin beating up Austin Aries two weeks ago.

Aries is at his home for a satellite interview. He received a lot of offers to wrestle around the world but NXT was where he wanted to go. After the attack, Regal came and apologized to him but there was nothing to be sorry for. Corbin should have attacked him at his face because Aries has been a champion everywhere he's gone. Aries hasn't been handed anything because he earned his NXT contract. It wasn't because he's 6'6 and 300lbs but because he's earned it over the last ten years. In Dallas on April 1, Corbin is going to learn that it's a great day to be great but a bad day to be Baron Corbin.

American Alpha vs. Vaudevillains

For the #1 contendership. Gable takes Gotch to the mat to start but Gotch kicks his hands away and does something like an enziguri from the mat. Jordan comes in for a double dropkick and a double clothesline to put the Vaudevillains on the floor. Back from a break with English holding Gable in a chinlock before it's off to Gotch for a chinlock of his own. Those dastardly villains.

Gable finally sends Gotch throat first into the ropes and makes the tag off to Jordan. Everything breaks down and Gotch has to break up Grand Amplitude ("their finisher") according to Graves. A BIG German suplex

drops English with Gotch diving in for a save. Gotch and Jordan go to the floor as English gets two on Gable off a sitout powerbomb. Not that it matters as Jordan comes back in for Grand Amplitude and the pin on English at 10:25.

Rating: C+. It's getting more and more clear every single week that American Alpha is just flat out better than any other team on the roster right now. Dash and Dawson are talented but they're much more of a niche team than anything else. Alpha continues to look awesome all the time and they're so much fun to watch in the same vein as Haas and Benjamin used to be.

Overall Rating: C. This was a building show instead of anything worth watching and there's nothing wrong with that so close to probably the biggest NXT show of all time. There were three matches set up tonight and each one of them should be something fun to see. This was more of an important show than a good one and there's nothing wrong with that, especially since NXT continues to know how to build a card at a much higher level than WWE.

Results

Hype Bros b. Angelo Dawkins/Kenneth Crawford – Hype Ryder to Crawford

Emma b. Deonna Purrazzo – Emma Lock

Tommaso Ciampa b. Jesse Sorensen – Floatover armbars

Bayley/Asuka b. Nia Jax/Eva Marie – Bayley to Belly to Marie

American Alpha b. Vaudevillains – Grand Amplitude to English

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2015 Awards: Match of the Year

This is one of the hardest ones to pick because it's one of the two biggest awards of the year.

We'll start over in Japan with Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kota Ibushi in the WON Match of the Year. I didn't remember this being as awesome as it was but I gave it an A and you have to mention it after winning such a big award. Ibushi made this a war and came so close to the huge upset in a great story with great action but he just couldn't pull it off. Still great though.

Reigns vs. Lesnar from Wrestlemania was better than I was expecting as they just beat the tar out of each other for a long time until the big screwy ending. That ending is what holds it back for me as it turned into more of an angle than a match. What we got until that point was more than worth seeing though and it far exceeded most expectations. It's the main event of Wrestlemania so you have to at least give it a mention.

In another surprise, Kevin Owens pinned John Cena at Elimination Chamber. This was the big trading finishers showdown with both guys hitting each other with bigger and bigger shots to set up the big surprise finish with Owens winning. This was built up with weeks of great promos and then gave us a great match. What more can you ask for than that?

There's another match from outside WWE with Mil Muertes vs. Fenix in a Grave Consequences (casket) match. It's not the match of the year, but it runs away with the award for having no business being awesome but blowing the roof off the place. Casket matches are some of the goofiest gimmick matches you'll ever find but these two turned it into one of the most

dramatic things I've seen in a very long time. Given how bad the gimmick was holding them back, this was a borderline miracle.

We'll go in reverse for a second and mention the Iron Man match at Takeover: Respect. It's not quite the first match but the ending with Bayley KICKING SASHA IN THE HEAD to win and Banks making Izzy cry were things of beauty. These two have mad chemistry together and the rematch even being near the level of the original is the highest praise.

That leaves us with the final two matches that everyone knew we were coming to. First up there's the amazing triple threat from the Royal Rumble with Brock Lesnar vs. John Cena vs. Seth Rollins. I rewatched this a few days ago and good night it was something to see. All three guys hit everything they could and the story of Lesnar having to be double teamed to leave the other two fighting was great stuff.

The things Lesnar was doing and was being put through by the challengers were awesome and the ending with Brock going Beast Mode to beat Rollins left me out of breath. This was the most action packed match of the year and the clubhouse leader for a very long time. It was going to take something special to come close to it and that's what we got about nine months later.

Women in wrestling get a lot of flack. They're treated as eye candy, sideshow acts, popcorn breaks and second class citizens who do some of the dumbest things imaginable. That's what makes the NXT women's division so much fun. Instead of being treated like morons, they're treated as serious competitors who happen to be women. The idea of a Women's Title match being the main event of a random week of TV doesn't even make NXT fans think twice these days and that's a really good sign.

That's what makes Bayley vs. Sasha Banks so important. This wasn't just a great match but it was also a great moment. The wrestling, the emotion and the post match scene all wrapped this up into one of the greatest things I've seen as a wrestling fan. This was a moment for wrestling and had me losing my mind every single time, even though Bayley winning wasn't exactly a shock.

So that brings up the big debate that never ends in wrestling: action vs.

emotion. The triple threat was non-stop insanity with one big spot after another. The women's match on the other hand was all about Bayley's journey from the goofy fangirl to the serious competitor who was the best in the company. However, it didn't have Brock Lesnar breaking stuff, including various people for twenty minutes.

I keep going back and forth on this but the more I think about that sequence with Sasha getting Bayley in the Bank Statement and stomping on her hand, only to have Bayley reverse it into a Bank Statement of her own, the more I have to go with the women. For my money, the hardest thing to do in wrestling is to convince fans that something they know is happening isn't going to happen. Like I said, Bayley was the obvious winner but they managed to convince me that it wasn't going to happen for that split second.

The thing is though the match kept going and had one heck of a finishing sequence with Bayley hitting a great looking reverse hurricanrana to knock Banks senseless. That's where the match got even better for me: Bayley had Banks beaten before the Bayley to Belly, which really just put her out of her misery. In other words, Bayley looked like the decisive winner instead of someone who happened to win. It felt like an actual changing of the guard and a moment, which is what it was supposed to be. Couple that with the Four Horsewomen post match stuff and this beats anything else in the year in a big milestone.

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Wrestle Kingdom X: Gimme Back My Bullets

Wrestle Kingdom X

Date: January 4, 2016

Location: Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Attendance: 25,204

Commentators: Kevin Kelly, Matt Striker, Yoshitatsu

This is one of those shows that I have to do almost every year as it's pretty much become a tradition. New Japan is pretty easily the second biggest wrestling promotion in the world and this is its annual Wrestlemania level show, always held on the same day of the year. The main event is Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi for the IWGP World Title for the third time in four years, which is totally ok because it's Japan and therefore each of their matches MUST be five stars because it's a saga or something. Let's get to it.

On a side note: I barely keep up with New Japan and there is a very good chance that I'm not going to know a lot of the history, storylines or proper names for these things. I'm checking this out as a very rare viewer so hopefully the English commentary helps out a lot.

Pre-Show: New Japan Rumble

This is an eighteen man Royal Rumble style battle royal, with eliminations by pin or going over the top, made up of the people who aren't on the show for whatever reason. I don't know most of the people in the match but I'll do what I can. Jushin Thunder Liger (last year's winner) and Yoshiaki Fujiwara (as in the man the man the armbars is named after, age 66) start things off. I believe we have ninety second intervals here though the English commentary doesn't kick in until the regular show.

Tiger Mask IV is in at #3 and takes his sweet time getting to the ring. Mask and Liger take Fujiwara down with a double leg lock but you don't try to put an old man in a submission hold, meaning it's Fujiwara putting them in a double hold instead. The times are getting weird here as the clocks are either at one hundred seconds or don't start until someone gets to the ring. Or it's a timed battle royal and it's just as close as they can get to set intervals. Anyway ROH's Cheeseburger is in at #4.

Everything stops for some reason with Liger and Tiger pulling Cheeseburger by an arm each. Fujiwara works Cheeseburger over in the corner as I guess this is some kind of initiation. That goes nowhere until it's Hiro Saito in at #5. Saito goes after Liger but has to fight with Tiger over a suplex. Mask takes him over and it's Yoshi-Hashi in at #6. Now it's starting to feel like a Royal Rumble with the ring filling up this quickly. The match stops again for a bit before everyone starts having random fights with each other.

Yoshi is taken to the mat for a backsplash from Saito and it's Mascara Dorado, who looks like a superhero, in at #7. There's almost nothing going on in between these entrances. Liger goes after Dorado, likely due to gimmick infringement, and puts on a seated abdominal stretch. Dorado counters into one of his own and it's Captain New Japan, an actual superhero character, in at #8.

Fujiwara quickly takes the Captain down for a very quick namesake armbars and our first elimination. Not that it matters though as most of the people in the ring cover Fujiwara to get rid of him a few seconds later. Manabu Nakanashi is in at #9 to get us to the halfway point with a grouping of Nakanashi, Dorado, Hashi, Saito, Cheeseburger, Tiger Mask and Liger. Yoshi goes up top to chop various people on the head until Liger wisely shakes the ropes to get him back down.

Yuji Nagata (a much bigger deal here than in his lame WCW run) is in at #10. Tiger saves Cheeseburger from Saito coming off the top, only to have Saito crush Tiger with a middle rope backplash, leading to a group pin for the elimination. Satoshi Kojima is in at #11 as Saito and Liger are thrown out. Well at least they're not letting the ring get too full. Cheeseburger chops I believe Nakanashi for no effect until it's Hiroyoshi

Tenzan in at #12. Nakanashi is put out off camera as the shot stays on the entrances the entire time.

Long time partners Tenzan and Kojima start working together on Hashi until we get some miscommunication, resulting in Kojima getting clotheslined down. Ryusuke Taguchi, a party guy that I've actually heard of, is in at #13. Taguchi is immediately stomped down by everyone left in the ring for no apparent reason. Shiro Koshinaka is in at #14 to give Taguchi a much needed break by cleaning house.

The ring is starting to get too full so here's the Bullet Club's King Haku (yes THAT King Haku) at #15, with the referee holding the ropes open for him. Well to be fair that's probably the best idea he could have had. Haku cleans house and easily puts out Nagata and Kojima. As the Great Kabuki (who was in the 1994 Royal Rumble and 67 years old) is in at #16, Dorado is put out off camera.

Kabuki's nunchucks entrance takes forever, allowing Haku to go from dominant to tapping out to Tenzan. The momentum is shortlived though as Tenzan is pinned ten seconds later. Cheeseburger hides from Kabuki and it's Kazushi Sakuraba, an MMA guy and seemingly big fan favorite, in at #17. We get an immediate showdown between Kabuki and Sakuraba to freak the announcers out all over again.

There's the mist to blind Sakuraba though, drawing a DQ. Sakuraba is pinned a few seconds later as Jado is in at #18, giving us a final field of Cheeseburger, Hashi, Taguchi, Koshinaka and Jado. By the time Jado gets to the ring, Hashi pins Cheeseburger with a swanton bomb, only to be pinned by Taguchi a few seconds later.

So we're down to three after Jado (and some pop singer he's with) take FOREVER to get to the ring. Jado is quickly double teamed with knees to the head and a double hip attack for two but Taguchi breaks up a pin attempt after helping with the beatdown. Back up and Jado backdrops Koshinaka out before low bridging Taguchi to the floor for the win.

Rating: D. Well that happened. I know this was more like the Andre battle royal than anything else but the weird timing and taking forever to get on with each entrance really took away from a lot of what this had going

for it. The ending was far too sudden too with Jado getting the big entrance and then winning in about two minutes. Too long for what they were going for here and I never got into it, especially when the regular show is over four hours long.

After the PA announcers says a lot of stuff I don't understand, Hiroshi Tanahashi (New Japan's John Cena) and I believe Togi Makabe appear on screen, dressed as cavemen. They introduce what I believe is a comedian, a child actress and some characters for a giant song and dance number. I have no idea what any of this means and I really don't want to know.

Ad for some anime movie.

The opening video talks about the company's 44th anniversary and shows the main names appearing on the show, thankfully in English. Each match is listed in the order it airs for a nice touch, meaning we get the entire card.

IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Titles: Young Bucks vs. ReDRagon vs. Aerial Dogfight vs. Roppongi Vice

ReDRagon is defending and Dogfight is Matt Sydal/Ricochet, known in Lucha Underground as Prince Puma. The Bucks are part of Bullet Club and have Cody Hall in their corner. Aside from about three months, the Bucks, ReDRagon and Vice have traded these titles since November 2013. In case you're not familiar with the teams, The Bucks are Nick/Matt Jackson, ReDRagon is Kyle O'Reilly/Bobby Fish and Vice is Baretta (or Trent Baretta) and Rocky Romero. This is one fall to a finish.

The Bullet Club clears the ring before the bell until it's Fish being thrown in for a double team from the Bucks. Kyle gets in a shot from the apron, allowing Fish to start in on Nick's arm. Nick tells them to suck it (because DX used to do that) and tags in Sydal to miss an enziguri to Kyle. The tags start speeding up with both members of Vice sneaking in to double team Matt, including a double SUCK IT to the Bucks.

An enziguri drops Sydal as Yoshi talks about driving with Sydal and Baretta in WWE. The Bucks come in to start a Superkick Party and thank goodness Corino isn't on commentary. It's Baretta in trouble with Matt

doing Chris Jericho's posing cover for two. Things slow down with Nick holding a front facelock and then a chinlock before it's back to Matt for a superkick to knock Rocky off the apron. A really quick tornado DDT drops Matt and the hot tag brings in Ricochet as everything breaks down.

Dogfight hits a quick moonsault/shooting star combination to Nick before the champs kick Matt in the chest. Nick dives on a bunch of guys and superkicks Kyle to break up a cross armbreaker over the ropes. Ricochet loads up a dive of his own but Cody (who looks EXACTLY like his dad) trips him up and Razor Edges him over the top onto the pile.

Back in and Ricochet gets caught in an elevated swanton bomb from the Bucks but Sydal breaks up More Bang For Your Buck. Dogfight starts taking over on the Bucks with Ricochet hitting an INSANE springboard shooting star to take out Cody at ringside. ReDRagon comes back in to break up stereo shooting stars from Sydal and Ricochet before taking their turns to beat up the Bucks. Cody pulls Fish to the floor for a save, only to be taken down by Kyle.

We get a pretty ridiculous quadruple suplex with Romero having to decide which half to help on. Romero starts running the corners for clotheslines to everyone he can find and a Shining Wizard from Sydal gets two. Ricochet saves Sydal from something called Strong Zeo but the Bucks tag themselves in to steal two off the stereo shooting stars. A quick More Bang For Your Buck is enough to put Romero away and give the Bucks their fourth titles.

Rating: C. This was fun albeit a bit too long. I'm rarely a fan of these insane matches with little flow and nothing but spot sequence after spot sequence but this was entertaining enough. That being said, does it really matter if the Bucks win their fourth title in just over two years? Based on how long three of these teams have dominated the division, some fresh blood would have been nice. Still though, fun choice for an opener.

NEVER Openweight Six Man Tag Team Titles: Briscoe Brothers/Toru Yano vs. Bullet Club

NEVER is kind of a hard concept to explain but basically it's for people who have never had a real chance to succeed. This is for the inaugural

titles and the Bullet Club is represented by Bad Luck Fale (a monster)/Tama Tonga (Haku's adopted son)/Yujiro Takahashi (a New Japan traitor). The Briscoes are making their New Japan debut. Yujiro is accompanied by a good looking woman named Shiori. Yano is a comedy guy who keeps hyping some DVD of his.

The Briscoes clean house on Yujiro to start with Jay clotheslining him out to the floor. A Cactus Jack style elbow from Mark crushes Yujiro on the floor and the fans aren't sure what to make of the Brothers. Back in and it's Tonga taking Mark into the corner before it's off to Yano for a slap to Fale's neck. Tonga comes back in to scare Yano and it's time to beat on the comedy goof.

Yoshi doesn't like a Japanese man being in the otherwise foreign Bullet Club as Fale throws Yano down. All three Club members come in but Yano pulls off the turnbuckle pad (remember it's one pad over all three buckles in Japan) to send Fale crashing into the steel. Fale misses another charge into a different corner and the hot (minus the heat) tag brings in Mark. Some Redneck Kung Fu wakes the crowd up a bit but Yujiro takes Mark down with a fisherman's buster.

Jay comes in for a Death Valley Driver on Tonga but he can't hit the Jay Driller. Instead it's Tonga getting two off a running boot to the face for two on Jay. An Alabama Slam gets the same as the announcers put over the idea of Tama never winning a title in New Japan. Tama goes up top but gets caught in an electric chair, allowing Yano to blast him with a chair to knock him into a Doomsday Device from the Briscoes for the pin and the titles.

Rating: C-. I wasn't feeling this one though at least it was a unique ending. Unfortunately this match felt like something they added to the show just so they could have another title match. That's rarely an idea that makes you think you need to see something and the fact that the Briscoes never wrestled in this company before does little to make me think I needed to see this match, especially on this show. Not bad, but nothing that really needed to exist.

Ring of Honor World Title: Jay Lethal vs. Michael Elgin

Elgin is challenging after having won a tournament called Survival of the Fittest. He's been on fire in Japan lately so Lethal, also making his debut in this company, is in trouble here. The champ also has Truth Martini in his corner. Elgin powers him into the corner to start as the announcers put over the basic story of power vs. speed. A big clothesline in the corner has Jay in trouble and there's a delayed vertical suplex with Jay not being able to knee his way out of it. That's insane strength.

There's a one armed press slam to make it even worse but Martini breaks up the powerbomb onto the apron. Michael is smart enough to stomp on the Book of Truth, only to get dropkicked right in the face for his efforts. A suicide dive puts Elgin into the barricade and Truth does an off camera Spinarooni. Nice job camera people. Back in and Lethal makes the mistake of chopping a power guy. Like, when has that EVER worked in history? Jay spins out of a hiptoss and dropkicks a seated Elgin for two.

We hit the reverse chinlock to kill some time until Elgin starts firing off some running forearm to the jaw, followed by a nice slingshot splash for no cover. The fans are finally starting to get into this after a just average match so far. In a cool visual, Elgin dead lifts Lethal up into the bridging German for two. The look on Lethal's face was perfect as he seemed terrified.

Jay comes right back with the Macho elbow for two but Elgin counters the Lethal Injection with another suplex. I'm not sure but it could have been due to Jay shouting LETHAL INJECTION. The apron suplex (think Cesaro) into a falcon arrow is only good for two (and to freak Yoshi out) but Elgin has to smack Martini. A shot to the head with the Book of Truth knocks Michael silly though and the Lethal Injection retains the title.

Rating: C+. Again this was fine but nothing you wouldn't see at any Ring of Honor house show. I'm kind of surprised they didn't change the title here for a big ROH moment on the biggest New Japan show but Elgin being awesome in Japan was only going to get them so far. Still though, not bad and the match did what it was supposed to do.

IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title: Kenny Omega vs. Kushida

Omega is defending and is part of the Bullet Club, meaning he has the Bucks with him. Kushida is part of the Timesplitters team and therefore has Taguchi (from the battle royal earlier) dressed as Doc Brown from....you know I really shouldn't have to tell you what Doc Brown is from. Omega gets a Terminator entrance so it's easily Kushida already out in front. These two have traded the title since last year's Wrestle Kingdom, making me think the junior heavyweights as a whole need an adjustment.

The Bucks jump Taguchi before the bell, only managing to tick Kushida off in the process. Omega spits on him and stomps away so Kushida dropkicks him in the face for his efforts. The champ bails to the floor and grabs some hairspray (so he's ripping off DJZ), only to have Kushida baseball slide him down. The referee is easily distracted of course though and Matt throws a trashcan at Kushida's head, allowing Omega to do a one man More Bang For Your Buck with the aforementioned trashcan.

A flip dive takes Kushida down again but he's able to block a suplex back inside. Kushida starts firing off some kicks to the arm and grabs the Hoverboard lock (modified Kimura), only to have Omega get his legs into the ropes. Something like a handspring kick to the head drops Kenny again and Kushida nails a nice top rope flip dive to the floor.

Back in and we hit another Hoverboard lock but Omega rolls out again, this time into a quick suplex. Omega takes him into the corner for a superplex, only to have Kushida stay smart with a Hoverboard lock, complete with a flying armbar to bring Kenny right back down for a huge crash. Kushida shrugs off a jumping knee to the face (as you do) and blasts Omega in the jaw to put the champ down. Back up and Omega tries a German suplex but gets pulled down into the Hoverboard lock.

Taguchi takes out the Bucks as the hold is broken, only to have Omega win the slugout. Oh wait he holds his arm after the brawling is over because he sells. A sitout powerbomb gets two on Kushida and Omega puts him up for the One Winged Angel (a reverse piledriver out of an electric chair) but Kushida reverses into one of the worst looking small packages I've ever seen to get the title back. Omega's shoulder was so ridiculously off the mat it was unforgivable.

Rating: B-. I was liking the match but the arm work didn't go anywhere and that ending looked horrible. However, the good vs. evil story was working here and Kushida looked better than I've seen him look in almost any of his matches. Omega would become the new leader of the Bullet Club the next day and it was a nice, though not great, farewell to the junior heavyweight division.

IWGP Tag Team Titles: G.B.H. vs. Bullet Club

Yes another title match with Bullet Club involved. In this case it's Karl Anderson/Doc Gallows defending for the Club against Togi Makabe/Tomoaki Honma. The Club has the good looking Bullet Babe (Amber Gallows, Doc's wife) in their corner, which is better than the Bucks again.

Big fan favorite Honma starts with Anderson and the Club quickly takes over in the corner. A quick tag brings Makabe in to clean house with right hands as the fans are suddenly much more interested after not having much of a reaction to the ROH guys. Everything breaks down for a bit and Doc gets in a chain to Makabe's neck (complete with an F bomb) and the champs take over. Back in and it's Makabe in trouble with a lot of hard shots to the mouth for two.

Anderson is starting to get annoyed and walks into a clothesline, allowing the hot tag to Honma as house is cleaned. Gallows trips him up to give the champions control again and a reverse 3D plants Honma very nicely. Anderson puts Honma up in a fireman's carry for a running boot from Gallows, knocking it into a spinning flapjack for a great crash. Honma is put up top and has to escape a super cutter, only to get caught in a running Liger bomb for two.

Back down and Honma blocks some RKO's before headbutting Karl square in the chest. The hot tag brings in Makabe for some hard clotheslines to finally drop the much bigger Gallows. Honma starts hitting a bunch of headbutts, capped off by a falling version from the top rope to Doc. Makabe adds a top rope knee drop for the pin and the titles in a big upset.

Rating: C-. Again, not bad but nothing that I really cared about. I'm assuming Honma getting a title is a big deal but they really didn't put

that over too well. I liked the story here of the native Japanese wrestlers fighting the evil foreigners but it still wasn't the most interesting thing in the world.

Ad for upcoming shows.

Hirooki Goto vs. Tetsuya Naito

This is the only non-title match on the show. Naito has two masked men with him and seems to be a heel here after having turned his back on the fans. Striker takes this chance to continue his show long trend of talking about all the heat he has as a commentator. You know, because people talk about him. As has happened too many times tonight, Naito's goons jump Goto from behind before the bell to give the heel an early advantage.

Everything quickly breaks down and the goons also beat up Captain New Japan who is here due to no apparent reason. Or at least no explained reason. Goto takes a big chair shot to the head and a neckbreaker from the apron puts him through the table, leaving Naito to pose in the ring like a real villain. Back in and we hit a headscissors on Goto before Naito just pulls his hair. Well he certainly is being evil.

Goto dropkicks the knee out and starts firing off some kicks to the chest, only to have Naito easily kick him down in the corner. Naito puts him on top for a superplex, only to get countered into a sunset bomb (Tatsu: "Really? Really?") for two. Goto starts no selling kicks to the head but loses a slugout because you have to trade forearms at some point. The referee gets bumped and here are the goons to help, only to have one mist the other by mistake. Naito low blows Goto and gets a nice rollup for two, only to have Goto pop up with a suplex into a side slam (think something like Matt Morgan's Hellevator) for the pin out of nowhere.

Rating: D+. I really didn't care about this and I easily could have seen it cut off the show. That's the problem with this show as a whole: so much stuff is being crammed into here and it's making the show feel a lot longer than it needs to be. I'm still not entirely sure what the story was here and that's not good on a show this big, especially when there

shouldn't be a language issue.

NEVER Openweight Title: Tomohiro Ishii vs. Katsuyori Shibata

Ishii is defending and let me stop here for a second. I've heard a lot of glowing things about this division and this style of match. I've also seen a few of the matches that receive such high praise from a lot of fans and I do not care for it. I'll spare you a very long rant that will get me in trouble and just say this isn't my style. I understand why some fans like it and even like it a lot, but this really isn't my kind of wrestling. I've had similar opinions changed before, but this kind of match has never done anything for me.

Before the match, Striker says the previous match between the two of them received five stars from the Wrestling Observer Newsletter, which is really rare. Well maybe in America, whereas in Japan you get four and a half for a good sneeze. They slug it out to start and trade the big forearms for the first time. Shibata takes over and slowly kicks at Ishii's head but Ishii pops up and gets in his face. Now they take turns sitting down and dare each other to kick each other in the back. Ishii gets the worst of it but is allowed to chop Shibata over and over.

A big forearm puts Ishii down but he pops up with a Saito suplex. Shibata kicks him in the head for two and slaps on a modified octopus hold. That goes nowhere and it's time for another slugout with Ishii getting the better of it and taking Shibata into the corner for a quick facewash. Shibata comes back with a quick dropkick and tries something like a triangle choke. Ishii gets over to the ropes and they slug it out again until a double clothesline puts them both down.

Back up again and Ishii starts firing off chops to the throat (actually illegal) before powerbombing Shibata down for two. A superplex is countered into a Shibata armbars which he snaps down over the top. Shibata clotheslines him down and slaps on a rear naked choke to slow things down again. More kicks to the back keep Ishii in trouble until he blasts Shibata in the chest with a headbutt. Now they just headbutt each other for some very cringe worthy sounds. Ishii starts firing off some clotheslines for two until Shibata fires off a bunch of kicks, capped off

by a running kick to the seated Ishii's chest for the pin and the title.

Rating: C+. This is a really hard one to grade as I definitely didn't hate it and it's a lot less annoying than I was expecting but I had almost no reaction to this. The match runs about seventeen minutes and you really could have cut out a good chunk of it to help shorten this way too long show. Again I get the idea here but I just don't care for it.

Video on AJ Styles vs. Shinsuke Nakamura, which is happening for the first time and is rightfully being billed as a dream match.

Intercontinental Title: AJ Styles vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

Nakamura is defending and one of the guys I like best in New Japan. Styles is Bullet Club (with no seconds here) and I don't think he needs much of an explanation. Feeling out process to start as they have nearly an hour and a half for the last two matches here. Nakamura takes it to the mat and gets nowhere, meaning it's time for another standoff. Back up and Nakamura drives him into the ropes before they trade headlocks. Things start to speed up and AJ ducks the running knee.

We get AJ's drop down into the dropkick spot but the champ quickly kicks him down and drops a knee. AJ goes to the ropes but gets pulled down, possibly reagrivating his bad back. Nakamura gives him some space but AJ pops up and nails him from behind to take over. A quick bridging reverse crossface (think something like the Last Chancery if the feet are tied together) has Nakamura in trouble but he pops up with a backbreaker to send AJ to the floor.

The champ drives him into the barricade to keep the back in trouble. An enziguri puts Styles in the corner but the running knee misses in the corner. That's fine with Nakamura as he puts Styles on the corner for a running knee to the already bad back. Well you can't fault his psychology.

AJ avoids another charge and hits the springboard forearm, which he really shouldn't be able to do with his back so screwed up but I love that move so I can forgive it. Styles gets him over with a snap suplex into the corner, only to hurt his back even more. A quick Backstabber has

AJ in trouble but he grabs the Calf Killer out of nowhere.

Nakamura reverses into an armbar so AJ gets to his feet and drops a big right hand to break it up. AJ is able to pick him up for a torture rack (what back injury?) and spins Nakamura out into a powerbomb for two. The Styles Clash is broken up and Nakamura jumps to the middle rope for the knee to the chest but can't follow up.

Back up and we get the slow forearms (which I can live with after a long match like this) until AJ scores with the Pele, only to take a running knee to the chest for two. Nakamura gets back up and charges right into a knee from AJ, followed by a 450 for another two count. There's a cross armbreaker on AJ which is switched over into a triangle choke but AJ lifts it up into a one armed Styles Clash for a VERY close near fall.

With nothing else working, AJ takes him to the corner for a super Styles Clash, only to have Nakamura kick him in the and put him on the shoulders for a fireman's carry into a falcon's arrow from the top for another insanely close two. Both guys are barely able to get up until Nakamura blasts him with a running knee to the back of the head. Another one to the chest is enough to finally retain Nakamura's title.

Rating: A-. The back injury just stopping in the middle of the match hurt a bit but the back and forth bombs helped it quite a bit. This was about two guys beating on each other as long as they could and that's all it needed to be. For once it did feel like a dream match and it lived up to the hype. Really good match but the back not instantly healing halfway through would have made it even better.

They fist bump post match.

We recap the very long history between Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi, who have been trading the World Title for the better part of ever. Since January 4, 2011, these two and AJ have been the only three World Champions in the company. Again, you think they might need some fresh blood? The idea is that Okada is going to be the new star and take Tanahashi's place but he has to beat Tanahashi here at Wrestle Kingdom.

IWGP World Title: Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi

Okada is defending and Tanahashi won the shot by winning the G-1 Climax tournament (not exactly but close enough). This is their eighth match and it's a tie (3-3-1) coming in. At least it's not one sided. Okada has Gedo in his corner. Very slow feeling out process to start with Okada putting him up against the rope and giving Tanahashi a condescending pat on the chest. A forearm puts Tanahashi down but another does the same to Okada.

They get in each others' faces and it's the champion kicking Tanahashi in the face to take over. That means it's time to hit the mat with neither guy being able to get the better of it. Tanahashi takes a small advantage with a headlock but Okada counters into one of his own. Now we get somewhere as Tanahashi starts in on the leg. Again it doesn't seem to matter as Okada pops up to try a tombstone, only to have Tanahashi wind up on the apron.

The leg work hasn't had much effect though as Okada is able to dropkick him out to the floor for a big crash. A running cross body puts Tanahashi over the barricade, which apparently is a callback to last year's match. Now that's a good use of English commentary as I never would have remembered that from a match I haven't seen in a year. We hit the chinlock with a knee in Tanahashi's back, followed by a running elbow in the corner and a DDT for no cover.

Some uppercuts stagger Tanahashi and he misses a running dropkick to the knee. Tanahashi is right back at it and the second dropkick to the knee works, allowing him to start the comeback. A dragon screw leg whip in the ring and another on the corner (that's a new one) has Okada in even more trouble and the Sling Blade on the apron drops him again. Tanahashi is right back up with a high cross body to the floor and Okada has to dive back in at nineteen to beat the count.

Back in and a middle rope High Fly Flow (frog splash) crushes the knees again as Tanahashi is getting creative. Okada grabs a quick White Noise onto the knee but can't follow up. I can buy that actually as he had to hit something big and he sacrificed his own body to slow Tanahashi down. Back up and they slug it out again with Okada's knees suddenly being fine enough for three straight dropkicks. A top rope dropkick gets two for the champ and a top rope elbow (gah) gets the same.

Tanahashi grabs another leg whip to get a breather but has to block a dropkick (GAH) and counter into a Texas cloverleaf. He can't get it all the way on though and Okada rolls out, only to take the Sling Blade. The High Fly Flow misses and a tombstone (you really could have cut out the leg work part of this match and not missed a thing) plants Tanahashi. Now the Rainmaker connects for two (BECAUSE IT'S A LAME CLOTHESLINE!) and Okada casually pops up top for a High Fly Fly Flow of his own.

If you've watched a main event style wrestling match in any country in the last fifteen years, you know what's coming next. Tanahashi hits a Rainmaker of his own before going back to the knee in vain. I say in vain as Okada lifts him up for another tombstone, only to have Tanahashi reverse into a third Sling Blade.

A dragon suplex (always liked that move) gets two and two straight High Fly Flows get another near fall. Now we're getting somewhere on these false finishes. Tanahashi goes up again but dives into a dropkick with Okada holding his ribs instead of his knee. A good looking dropkick sets up three straight Rainmakers (he actually followed through on the third) to retain Okada's title.

Rating: B+. Yeah it's big, yeah it's epic, yeah it tells a story, and I guess that completely excuses the waste of time spent on the legs and THE RAINMAKER BEING A REALLY LAME FINISHER because it's some saga or whatever. Of course I'm sure the New Japan fans who worship this stuff will be talking about fighting spirit or whatever as it's the grand out for pretty much any criticism you can throw at this style of wrestling.

I actually liked Styles vs. Nakamura a good bit more than this one as the legs being abandoned here was actually ticking me off with Okada flying all over the place without even wincing. Tanahashi was trying but there's only so much you can do when you tear the knees to pieces and five minutes later Okada is flying off the top. Also, I get that it's an epic main event and needed the time, but when a show is pushing five hours, I was kind of begging for this to end already when it hit twenty five minutes and it had ten more to go. It's very good, but the near universal praise these two get really doesn't hold up.

Post match Okada gets the big victory speech (With Tatsu FINALLY offering something by translating. I completely get why he didn't say much all night as his English is rather limited but his role could have easily been eliminated.) and says he's awesome. We should all stay tuned.

Overall Rating: B+. This was LONG. Last year's show was under four hours and this one was over five (including the pre-show), which I'm sure has a lot to do with this being a good bit lower. You really could have cut some of this show out (the six man and Goto vs. Naito would be a great place to start, plus trimming the opener by about five minutes) and really not missed much. That's a common issue with this show though and I'm not surprised it was a problem again here.

The show definitely had a better flow this year and jumped from match to match really easily. I got into almost every in one way or another to keep things from getting dull and there's some good action throughout. Nothing on the show is truly bad, but it wasn't until the final matches that things really started to pick up.

Now that being said, I really can't get over the praise the main event gets. I mean, does selling mean nothing in Japan? I'm well aware that it happens in America too, but this is supposed to be the greatest wrestling in the history of ever and their ace is flying off the top and ignoring a good stretch of leg work mere minutes later. Seeing that at the end of a show I really wanted to end isn't the best idea in the world.

Overall though, the problem here is the length. No show, including Wrestlemania, needs to be this long. Get this thing under four hours (start by cutting down some of that battle royal and put another match on the pre-show) and it's instantly better. The show is definitely good and worth watching, though I'd highly recommend fast forwarding through a match here or there.

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Ring of Honor TV – December 30, 2015: Best of N-Jay-P-W

Ring of Honor

Date: December 30, 2015

Host: Mandy Leon

This is another Best Of show and I'm actually looking forward to seeing what Ring of Honor considers their best. I've had a good time watching the show since the summer and things have been getting better for months now. You can almost guarantee a lot of New Japan talent to appear on this show so let's get to it.

As usual, the matches on this episode will be heavily clipped but I'll be posting the full review of each match. All dates listed are when the match aired.

We'll start with those New Japan guys in a tag match from Global Wars. From June 17.

Matt Sydal/ACH vs. Tetsuya Naito/Hiroshi Tanahashi

Sydal is formerly known as Evan Bourne, ACH is a high flier and Tanahashi is basically the John Cena of Japan. The Japanese guys won't shake hands to start, in theory making them heels here, even though an ROH crowd isn't going to boo a star like Tanahashi. Sydal and Tanahashi trade go behinds to start until Matt takes him down for a standing moonsault. A double tag brings in Naito and ACH with the fans being split. They take

their time to start until Naito slugs him down in the corner to take over.

ACH avoids a clothesline and does some unnecessary flips before dropkicking Naito in the face. Tanahashi knees ACH in the back and throws him into the barricade as we take a break. Back with Tanahashi missing a middle rope swanton but still preventing a hot tag. We hit the chinlock from Naito as I'm struggling to find things to say here. There's no real story here other than company vs. company and the announcers aren't giving me any information about any of the four guys.

Naito sends him into the corner for a basement dropkick. ACH finally counters a hurricanrana and makes the hot tag to Sydal, who comes in to clean house. In a nice counter, Sydal loads up the standing moonsault but Tanahashi is waiting on him with a German suplex. ACH fires off a bunch of kicks to Tanahashi and a clothesline for two. A German suplex from ACH gets the same and he mocks Tanahashi's air guitar. Tanahashi puts on his Texas cloverleaf but Naito tagged himself in. Granted the referee didn't seem to notice, leaving ACH to have to grab a rope.

The New Japan guys break up Sydal's Asai moonsault but ACH hits a big dive to take both of them down. Back in and ACH hits a kind of springboard downward spiral to Tanahashi, followed by Sydal's shooting star for two. Now it's ACH going up top for a 450 but Tanahashi seemingly got the knees up. A sling blade sets up the High Fly Flow (frog splash) to give Hiroshi the pin.

Rating: C+. Fun match but it got a bit messy near the end. I still don't get why they're trying to make all the Japanese guys heels when they're naturally faces for the most part, especially with fans like the ROH crowd. Still though, good enough match here and it got the crowd going like it was supposed to.

From June 24.

Roderick Strong vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

Strong is on a roll at the moment and is known as Mr. ROH. Nakamura is a huge star in New Japan and has amazing charisma. I've always been a

Strong fan and Nakamura is one of the few New Japan guys who lives up to the hype he receives. Nakamura takes him down by the arm to start but Strong reverses into a key lock of his own. Back up and Strong nails some dropkicks but can't put on a bow and arrow hold.

An Angle Slam gets two on Nakamura but he kicks Strong in the head and starts with his signature knee strikes. Another knee puts Strong over the barricade and we take a break. Back with Strong winning a slugout but falling to the mat. Strong is back up with a torture rack into a backbreaker though (he's been called the Messiah of the Backbreaker), sending Nakamura to the ropes before the Strong Hold (Boston crab) can be locked in.

Instead it's Nakamura slamming him down but missing the running knee (Bryan took it from him) and taking a jumping knee to the face. A backbreaker onto the top turnbuckle gets two as I'm digging the psychology in this one. His move is a back hold so work on the back. Why is that so complicated? A big forearm drops Strong and a jumping knee from the middle rope knocks him silly.

Strong is up first and grabs the Strong Hold, sending Nakamura into the ropes for a break. They slug it out again with Strong taking Nakamura's head off with a running boot (Sick Kick) but a suplex backbreaker (I told you he knew a lot of them) only gets two. The running knee gets one on Strong and Nakamura can't believe it. Granted he usually gyrates around like that so it's hard to tell how mad he is. Strong hits another knee but Nakamura just blasts him with a knee/kick to the face for the pin at 17:05.

Rating: B+. This was a hard hitting wrestling match here and that's the kind of stuff that Ring of Honor is shooting for. Strong is a big star in ROH but Nakamura comes off like a natural performer, which makes him stand out anywhere he performs. This was a fun match that again lived up to its hype, which is what Nakamura does best.

Also from June 24.

Roppongi Vice/Kazuchika Okada vs. AJ Styles/Young Bucks

This is Chaos vs. Bullet Club with Vice being a tag team of (Trent) Baretta (with its 19,000 spellings) and Rocky Romero. The Bucks (Nick and Matt Jackson) are the IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Champions and Styles is IWGP Heavyweight Champion, making this champions vs. challengers. Styles and Okada get things going with AJ snapping off some armdrags before they trade victory rolls for two each. An early attempt at both finishers fails as well and it's a standoff after a very fast start.

Off to Baretta vs. Nick for some missed superkicks before Matt and Rocky come in. The Bullet Club gets tired of waiting and cleans house with a single superkick. Yeah the Bucks REALLY like throwing superkicks. Baretta gets triple teamed but Romero comes in to break up a cover. The Bucks start their pretty slick double teaming before it's off to Styles for a suplex into the corner. I like it when wrestlers do normal moves into different places. It's simple yet still seems fresh, which is hard to do these days.

Back from a break with AJ taking Romero and Okada off the apron to prevent a tag, so Trent whips out a tornado DDT for the tag to Romero. Rocky cleans house by dropkicking AJ off the apron and hurricanranaing both Bucks at the same time. Matt nails a superkick to slow him down but Rocky pops off the ropes and hits a clothesline to put both guys down. Okada and Styles come in off another double tag with Okada taking over in a hurry. AJ comes back with his moonsault into a reverse DDT but Okada reverses into something like White Noise into a backbreaker.

Nick gets double teamed by Vice as everything breaks down. A Doomsday Device but with a running knee and on the floor, plants Nick but AJ plants Okada with Sunday Bloody Sunday (Prince Devitt's old move, basically a one arm DDT brainbuster). Like so many Japanese stars, Okada isn't interested in selling though and pops up with a tombstone. The Rainmaker (maybe the most overrated finisher I've ever seen. It's a standing clothesline with theatrics) misses and Nick takes Okada to the floor with a tornado DDT which clearly didn't connect.

Romero gets hung over the ropes for a swanton and More Bang For Your Buck (a quick series of dives) is broken up and Okada drops a top rope elbow

on Nick. AJ's springboard forearm (I love that move) takes Okada out again but Matt starts firing off even more superkicks, only to have Okada dropkick Styles down to break up the Clash on Romero.

All six slug it out and a triple superkick staggers Chaos. Okada again pops up and a double superkick/Pele combo and a spike piledriver into a flipping spike tombstone (the Meltzer Driver. Yes that Meltzer) puts him right back down, followed by a double superkick into a Styles Clash on Baretta for the pin at 17:25.

Rating: B. Here's the thing: this match was not a very well done match. It was sloppy at times, the "fighting spirit" thing still comes off as a way to not have to sell, the flips are borderline meta, the move is actually called the Meltzer Driver, Kelly has to shout SUPERKICK every single time one connects, the tagging part was forgotten halfway through (and no that's not an ROH thing. It annoys me when every company does it) and the fans cheering for the heels is always annoying because they're cool heels instead of trying to do, like, heel stuff.

We recap the main event of Best in the World with Jay Lethal vs. Jay Briscoe for the TV/ROH World Titles, winner take all. Both guys had been on a roll for over a year and this is the showdown of the best in Ring of Honor for both titles. This match will be clipped as well and I don't have a full version so there will be clips listed.

ROH World Title/TV Title: Jay Briscoe vs. Jay Lethal

They shake hands to start and we're ready to go. The House of Truth tries some early interference and get thrown out to make this one on one. Well two on one as Truth Martini is still at ringside. Lethal drops to the floor twice in a row to start but the fans declare it awesome anyway. Well to be fair that was indeed some AWESOME walking around on the floor. A lockup doesn't go anywhere so they trade wristlocks with both guys challenging, only to have Briscoe take over with a front facelock.

Both guys get back up and it's time for the slugout with Briscoe being sent out to the floor. Lethal follows him out and drives Briscoe into the barricade to keep his control as we take a break. Back with Briscoe kicking Lethal in the head, only to be sent to the floor for a suicide

dive. Lethal loads up another but Briscoe decks him with a hard clothesline and a big suicide dive of his own. Martini finally does something by grabbing Briscoe's leg, allowing Lethal to stomp away some more.

We hit the chinlock for a bit before Briscoe fights back up and grabs a neckbreaker. Back from another break with the Lethal Combination getting a quick two. The Macho elbow is broken up for a bit, only to have Lethal shove Briscoe off to stop a superplex. Now the elbow gets two but a Koji Clutch is quickly broken up.

They head to the apron with Lethal hitting him low to save himself from a Jay Driller through the table. Well I'd hope he broke it up as it would have meant a bad case of death otherwise. Martini's distraction earns himself an ejection and NOW the Jay Driller puts Lethal through the table as we take a third break.

Back with both guys inside and Briscoe running into a superkick, only to counter the Lethal Injection with a discus lariat. The fans are losing their minds over this stuff, though I'm still getting over the rolling out of the ring earlier. Lethal grabs the Injection out of nowhere for a very close two and Corino can barely keep going. With nothing else working, Lethal grabs a Jay Driller, followed by another Lethal Injection to finally become undisputed champion at 27:13.

Rating: B. The clipped version was good and I'm assuming the full version is even better. Lethal winning clean here, especially after going through the table like that, was a great way to make him look like the top guy in the promotion. Briscoe is pretty easily the most decorated name in the company's history so having him lose a major match like this, especially going down fighting, isn't going to cost him that much. This was good stuff all around and felt like a major showdown so well done all around.

Delirious of all people comes in to wish us Merry Christmas to wrap things up.

Overall Rating: B+. These shows are hard to screw up if they're being put together by a competent company such as Ring of Honor. Giving us a pay per view main event nearly in full was a nice present though I'm not sure

I'd call this a full on Best Of the year show as they really only touched on two things. Still though, it's fun while it lasts and a really easy sit so well done.

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WWE Raids New Japan, Possibly Signs AJ Styles, Shinsuke Nakamura and Others

<http://www.f4wonline.com/wwe-news/njpw-stars-nakamura-aj-styles-luke-gallows-and-karl-anderson-headed-wwe-204971>

If this is true, it's the biggest talent raid since Hall and Nash. This could be huge.

Ring of Honor TV – September 30, 2015: Like A Rolling Stone

Ring of Honor

Date: September 30, 2015

Location: 2300 Arena, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: King Corino, Kevin Kelly

It's another stand alone episode with the New Japan guys coming in to help bridge the gap between the pay per view and the start of the new taping cycle. Tonight we have a dream match with Adam Cole facing Shinsuke Nakamura, who is one of the best in the world right now. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Matt Sydal vs. Kushida

Kushida's IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title isn't on the line. I'm not a fan of Kushida's in ring work but the Back to the Future theme is awesome. The fans start the THIS IS AWESOME chants at the bell which always gets on my nerves. Feeling out process to start with Kushida taking him down off a headlock and floating around Sydal's back until it's a standoff.

They trade armdrags until Kushida no sells a hurricanrana and blasts him with a dropkick. Sydal gets smart and goes after the knee with some kicks and a bridging Indian deathlock as we take a break. Oddly enough WCW would always go to a commercial whenever anyone else put on those holds. Back with Kushida diving into a spinwheel kick but he comes back with a front flip into a kick to the head. So much for selling the knee of course but that's such a common problem in wrestling and Japanese wrestling in particular.

Back in and a moonsault gets two on Sydal but Matt kicks the knee out. His standing moonsault is countered into the Hoverboard Lock (sweet name

for a Kimura) but Sydal makes the ropes. They trade big strikes to the head and both guys are down. Sydal is up first with a reverse hurricanrana for two but the Hoverboard Lock goes on again. Matt rolls out of it and kicks Kushida in the head, setting up the Shooting Star (which still takes forever) for the pin at 12:14.

Rating: C. I'm not a fan of either guy and this really felt like a very stereotypical ROH match. The knee work went nowhere because Kushida wouldn't sell the thing. Sydal is better than just a single finisher but I'm still not a fan of his since he left WWE. This wasn't a bad match or anything but it's not my style.

Watanabe vs. Will Ferrara vs. Moose vs. Adam Page

One fall to a finish. Before the match, BJ Whitmer says Page should get some better competition because he beats everyone he fights. Page goes right after Watanabe to start and the fans aren't pleased because Watanabe is Japanese and therefore the ROH fans worship him. Ferrara comes in and knocks Page around the ring like he stole something. Off to Moose who throws Ferrara around but Page tags himself in to pick the bones. A belly to belly gets two on Ferrara but it's quickly back to Watanabe for a backsplash.

Moose breaks up a cover and backdrops the much smaller Ferrara over the top and out onto Watanabe. Colby gets on the apron and is promptly kicked back to the floor. Page comes back in and gets speared in half, only to have Ferrara tornado DDT Moose. Back to Watanabe for a German suplex to Moose and an STO to pin Ferrara at 5:45.

Rating: C+. This would have been better with more time and I like Watanabe a little bit better than Kushida so this didn't get to me as much. Moose is kind of in a free fall at this point and could use a big win but as usual Watanabe needs another win that doesn't seem to get him anywhere. Ferrara continues to be spunky which is about as good as you can get for someone his size.

Bushwacker Luke marches around the ring. This is a semi-regular thing in ROH.

We see Cheeseburger getting beaten down by Brutal Bob Evans earlier in the night because these two are destined to be fighting forever. Luke came in for the save with a Stunner (yes a Stunner) and used Cheeseburger for a Battering Ram.

Back in the arena and Luke says Corino looks like a bucket of sardines (a compliment) and licks his face. As someone who has experienced that as well, I don't know why Corino is wincing.

Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Adam Cole

Nigel McGuinness is in on commentary. Cole is full on heel here and thankfully the commentary knows it for a change. Unfortunately they can't say what he did but that's the danger of a taped show. I still get a Mick Jagger vibe from Nakamura. Cole works on a wristlock to start but they stop to take in some crowd reactions. Nakamura does Cole's pose in a funny bit but Cole kicks him in the leg and does an awkward little dance as we take a break.

Back with Nakamura driving Cole into the barricade but Adam scores with a superkick. Corino misses it though and sounds downright depressed. He's really starting to grow on me and I'm not sure if I like that. Back in and Cole sends him hard into the corner before going into that evil smile of his. Nakamura starts driving the hard knees into the head and gets two off a gordbuster. We could all use a bit more Arn Anderson in our lives so I heartily approve.

Cole comes back with a superkick to both knees and a low one to the jaw for two. More kicks to the knee take us to a break and we come back with Cole slapping on the Figure Four. Nakamura gets the ropes so Cole busts out some dragon screw leg whips, only to get caught in a cross armbreaker. That goes nowhere so Nakamura comes back with knee strikes (gah) and an overhead belly to back suplex. The knee gives out though, allowing Cole to come back with a running knee to the face.

A Shining Wizard gets two for Adam and a superkick to the back of the head into a cross arm German suplex for two. Cole freaks out and goes after the referee but charges into a knee in the corner. Nakamura's middle rope knee drops Cole but he can't cover. An ax kick sets up the

running knee to the side of Cole's head for a close two. Cole spits in Nakamura's face so Shinsuke comes back with the Landslide (sitout Death Valley Driver) and another running knee for the pin at 22:50.

Rating: B. Good but not great match here which felt like a major showdown as it was supposed to. Nakamura has more personality than anyone else in New Japan and it's always fun to see him in the ring. Cole has that it factor and the smile when he had Shinsuke in trouble was great. The match was certainly good and well worthy of the spot they were going for here though I've seen better. The constant knee strikes from Nakamura after Cole spent the time working over the knee got annoying in a hurry but at least Shinsuke sold the knee a bit in between. That's a lot better than some people would do.

Overall Rating: B. This was a solid, wrestling heavy TV show. When one match takes up nearly half the show it's going to dominate the rating and that's exactly what happened here. That being said, I could go for some more stories as I had them built up for weeks and now I have to wait more weeks to see where they go. I'd really like them to fix this problem because it gets on my nerves every single time. Still though, fun show here with a lot of solid to good wrestling.

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