

AWA StarCage 1985: How Many Tag Matches Can We Fit On One Show?

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Date: April 21, 1985

Location: St. Paul Civic Center, St. Paul, Minnesota

Commentators: Doug Cameron, Ken Resnick

This is another of those AWA super shows and obviously, the main event is a cage match. 1985 is about the time where things started to go downhill in a hurry for these guys as a lot of their stars were about to head for the WWF or WCW. The main event is a handicap cage match which should be interesting. Let's get to it.

We open with Verne Gagne talking about someone being behind him.

Tom Zenk/Steve Olsonoski vs. The Alaskans

The Alaskans are Rick Renslow and Dave Wagner and I've never heard of either guy. Apparently every match tonight is a tag match. I'm not sure why as the title wouldn't suggest anything like that but whatever. The Alaskans are guys in red coats that might be made of fur. They also have clubs but the referee steals them. That's not very nice of him. Olsonoski and we'll say Alaskan #1 (that's what they're called despite being named earlier in the show) start us off.

The Alaskans try to double team in the corner but Steve (like I'm going to write that name out every time) uses some speed to get out of the corner. We stall for a bit as the fans are getting on the Alaskans' nerves. An armdrag sends #1 to the floor (apparently Renslow is #1) and it's off to Wagner vs. Zenk. Zenk messes with Wagner's hair and things slow down again.

Steve and Zenk take some fast turns to work on headlocks but Zenk gets caught in the corner and Renslow takes over. Tom grabs the arm to break that up and it's back to Steve, who is almost immediately sent into the Alaskan corner for some elbows to the ribs. Off to a bearhug for over a minute before Steve fights out, only to be put in a chinlock. After a few minutes of that Steve is powerslammed for two but he starts a comeback. That gets him nowhere either as he charges into a knee in the corner. This is quite the beatdown.

Steve FINALLY avoids a charge in the corner and makes the diving tag to Zenk. Zenk, a Minnesota man, gets a big pop for the hot tag. He slams both big Alaskans and a dropkick puts let's say #1 down. Zenk and Steve hit a double back elbow as everything breaks down. A double dropkick hits Wagner for the pin.

Rating: C+. This was a good choice for an opener as they worked the tag formula to perfection. Having Zenk get the hot tag was the right idea as it got the crowd more fired up than they likely would have been for Steve. I'm not sure why they picked Alaska for the heels to be from but I guess it's for mystery or something. This was a good opener.

The winners say they haven't teamed together before but they had fun.

Buck Zumhofe/Baron Von Raschke vs. Jimmy Garvin/Steve Regal

Not that Regal. Raschke was injured by Garvin and Zumhofe and Regal feuded over the Light Heavyweight Title for the better part of eternity. Regal has the belt here and is called Mr. Electricity. Apparently we have some tree loving hippies in the crowd as he gets booed out of the building here. Zumhofe tries to start a dance which looks more like the Tomahawk Chop. Regal argues with some fan who is apparently a regular and is rolled up for two.

Zumhofe clears the ring and the fan is the most over person on the show so far. Zumhofe and Regal officially get us going with Mr. Electricity

being sent HARD into the corner. He crawls over to Garvin for a tag as things continue to be slow paced bursts of speed to start if that makes sense. Baron comes in to face Garvin and goes after the eye, which is what Garvin injured on Baron in the first place. The fans are WAY into this now so I guess this is a real blood feud.

Garvin finally gets in a punch and brings in Regal to save himself. The Baron's eyes are raked across the top rope and double teaming ensues when Buck tries to make a save. Garvin comes back in now that the Baron is in trouble and hooks a chinlock which is broken in a few seconds. Raschke GERMANS UP and Garvin's punches have no effect. He ducks his head though and Garvin kicks him in the face to stop the momentum.

Back to Regal who is immediately caught in a sunset flip for two. That's the extent of this offensive rush from the German as the beating continues. Baron finally ducks a punch and brings in Buck who cleans house. As fast as he's going though he gets brought down by double teaming and it's a chinlock by Garvin.

Regal fights up and hits a cross body for two and it's back to Baron. Baron knocks Garvin into the ropes and Jimmy is tied up. Once he finally gets untied there's the Claw from Raschke and everything breaks down. Zumhofe misses a Vader Bomb on Regal but Garvin hits Regal by mistake, letting Zumhofe get the pin.

Rating: C-. This wasn't bad or anything but the biggest problem it had was that it was too long. Raschke is a guy who was popular back in his time but he doesn't really hold up that well, especially as a face. Zumhofe and Regal were far cries from what we would get in lighter weight classes later on, and they never quite got people going like they were supposed to.

The winners say there's more to come of what you just saw.

We're told about how awesome Brad Rheingans and Bob Backlund are.

Brad Rheingans/Bob Backlund vs. Billy Robinson/Bobby Duncum

Apparently the commentator had no idea what he was talking about and this is the real match.

Brad Rheingans/Bob Backlund vs. Larry Zbyszko/Butch Reed

Once Backlund left the WWF he didn't really do much but this was probably the high point of his non-WWF stuff. Rheingans vs. Reed to start which is a pure power match. The idea here is that Brad and Backlund both coached the US Olympic team which I've never heard of but maybe it's true. Anyway Brad gets caught in a headlock but he hits a dropkick to take Butch down. Off to Backlund and it's time for the arm work.

Forget Backlund because Brad is in before he can do much at all. Larry comes in and Brad puts on a HARD headlock before bringing in Backlund for a bit softer headlock. Brad comes in again and we get some good old fashioned cheating to take him down. Butch and Larry hit a double slam for two followed by a big boot to take Rheingans down, but for some reason he's able to easily tag out.

Backlund comes in and naturally works on the arm some more. More heel cheating (do I need to bother to explain which team is the heel version?) gets Backlund in trouble and it's chinlock time. Larry comes in and slams Backlund for two before more double teaming follows. A small package gets two for Backlund but it's back to Reed with a double ax to the back. There's a bearhug as Reed slows things down again.

Off to another chinlock by Reed and Backlund is in trouble again. Back to Larry for more stomping to Backlund and there's the abdominal stretch that Zbyszko loves to use. We can't have a tag yet though because we need the sequel to the bearhug: the LIFTING bearhug! Just like earlier, a headbutt gets Backlund out of the hold and they collide off the ropes.

Bob makes the tag and even though the referee doesn't see it, he lets it go anyway. I guess he's as bored as I am. After a quick cleaning of house, Backlund is brought back in to pound away on Larry, who apparently has a title Backlund wants. That helps a bit I guess. In a very abrupt ending, Larry sets up a piledriver but Backlund backdrops him and stays on top for the pin.

Rating: D+. As I said, this match just kept going. It's pretty clear that they're extending the matches longer than they should go due to the amount of time they have and a total of seven matches on the card. The problem with this show is that the stories for these matches are almost tacked on, making the matches hard to get into. They're not bad though.

Both teams say they want more.

Sgt. Slaughter says he's ready for the main event.

Tonga Kid/Jim Brunzell vs. Billy Robinson/Bobby Duncum

Tonga Kid is more famous as Tama of the Islanders. Robinson is British and is more famous worldwide than he is in America. It's a brawl to start with the heels (Duncum and Robinson) being sent to the floor. Robinson and Brunzell get us started and Billy takes him down with a quick neckbreaker. Off to Duncum who is a Texas man. Tonga Kid comes in and it's off to a quick chinlock on Duncum. Things speed up and the good guys tag in and out quickly, resulting in a knee to the face of Duncum for two.

Robinson makes the save and the heels take over on Brunzell. Billy hits a gutwrench suplex for two and it's back to Duncum. Brunzell avoids a charges and Bobby's shoulder hits the post. There's the first hot tag of the match to the Tonga Kid and house is clean. Duncum is in trouble and the good guys take their turns on the leg of the Texan. Back to Tonga vs. Robinson with the British dude getting hooked in a quickly broken sleeper.

Before Tonga can get in much trouble he tags in Brunzell who hits his signature dropkick on Robinson but Duncum breaks it up. They do the exact same thing again in case we didn't get the point the first time and the save puts Brunzell in trouble again. Robinson goes for a belly to back suplex on Brunzell but Jim tags Tonga while in the air. Tonga comes off the top with a crossbody for the pin on Robinson. Finally, a hot finish.

Rating: C. That ending helped this a lot. What hurts this a lot is the lack of any story at all. In the other matches we had stuff like a singles feud or something like that, but here there was nothing that we were told of. That's fine for a filler match, but when you have seven four matches and almost all of them could fit that description, that's not a good thing. That was a good ending though and again I want to make it clear that the matches aren't bad at all. They're just kind of dull.

Paul Ellering and the Road Warriors say they'll beat up the Hennigs tonight. It's for the tag titles and I'm not sure who the good team is. The Hennigs would be Curt and his dad Larry. Usually a dad on a team means good, but the Warriors were insanely popular. We'll see I guess.

Before the match, here's a music video on the Road Warriors with them "singing".

Here's a video set to We're Not Gonna Take It of various tag teams beating each other up. One of the teams has Mr. Saito on it.

Verne Gagne/Greg Gagne vs. Nick Bockwinkel/Masa Saito

It's a brawl immediately and the Gagnes send them both out to the floor. Greg vs. Saito start things off and it's a chop fest early. Greg armdrags him down a few times and it's off to Bockwinkel. The idea here is that Verne wants to kill Bockwinkel for something not important enough to tell us about. Bockwinkel comes in and avoids a dropkick from Greg and the beating begins.

Saito beats on Greg for a minute or so and it's back to Bockwinkel who can't seem to suplex the younger Gagne. The fans want Verne. Nick works on a front facelock but Greg suplexes his way out of it. Now Saito comes in and works on the same facelock but Greg is inching towards the corner. Bockwinkel runs in to break it up, but Greg makes the tag anyway. The referee didn't see it though and the fans are getting mad. I love it when that happens in tag matches.

Bockwinkel's piledriver is countered by Greg but instead of tagging out he runs the ropes and they collide. Greg FINALLY tags in Verne and to the old man's credit, the place ERUPTS. He cleans house, sending both guys out to the floor with ease. Greg stomps on Saito on the apron and drops a top rope knee on him for good measure. Bockwinkel breaks up Verne's sleeper on Saito and it's off to Greg vs. Nick again.

A flying knee to the face puts Bockwinkel down and Greg goes after the knee. We finally get to Bockwinkel vs. Verne and Verne hits a decent dropkick for two. Another one puts Nick down but Verne is old and can't cover. Saito comes in again and Verne gets chopped up against the ropes. Nick comes in again and trades sleepers with Verne as everything breaks down. Verne gets beaten down but it's the dropkick the back of the guy getting slammed spot as Verne is kicked onto Bockwinkel for the pin, which was the only possible ending.

Rating: C-. The crowd reaction for Verne really was impressive here but that seemed to be the case on every big show that he came out of retirement on. The same problems are here as they have been all match long, but at least with this one there seemed to be a real feud that people cared about. Still though, decent enough here.

Verne gets beaten down post match until Greg makes the save.

Tag Titles: Road Warriors vs. Larry Hennig/Curt Hennig

Curt is almost a baby here while Larry is basically a house on legs. I

don't mean he's fat. I mean that he's muscular and large. I think the Warriors are the heels here and I know they're defending. Larry and Animal start but Animal can't budge him with shoulders. Off to Hawk who pounds away to some more success. Larry grabs the arm for a wristlock and brings in Curt who looks like he's in way over his head.

Animal comes in and Curt uses his speed to avoid the monster, before hitting a dropkick to send Animal into the corner. Off to an armbar as I'm surprised that Curt is still in one piece at this point. Hawk comes in and is cross bodied for one as Hennig is hanging in there. A sunset flip is completely no sold and the Road Warriors finally remember that this is 1985 and they're facing a 27 year old Curt Hennig.

Back to Animal who slams Curt down for two. Larry looks ticked as Hawk casually picks Curt up into the air for some choking. Trongard (the announcer, more on that later) has no idea which Warrior is which, despite them looking almost nothing alike. Off to a chinlock by Hawk and we get the always awesome Paul Ellering yelling at Curt. Curt gets in a shot to Animal's ribs which forces a tag, but it also brings in Hawk for a gorilla press slam.

The beating continues as Animal comes in with a HUGE clothesline to take Curt's head off for two. Hawk puts on a camel clutch but lets Curt go to toy with him. Animal comes in but a splash hits knees. There's the hot tag to Larry who the fans aren't that thrilled with. Curt is back in way too fast but he hits a missile dropkick for two on Animal. Everything breaks down and Ellering is dragged in as well. Larry hits Animal in the back, sending him over the top for the DQ. Lamé ending.

Rating: C-. This was the same as usual for the show. Curt could take a beating and showed that he could do it here, which is why he got a nearly year long reign as world champion a few years aftert this. This match is available on the Road Warriors DVD if you want to see it. It's labeled differently on that DVD though, as this was broadcast on AWA All-Star Wrestling in August of 1985, which is why Trongard is on commentary here

as the tape I was using messed up and I couldn't see the full match.

Another music video.

Sgt. Slaughter/Jerry Blackwell vs. Sheik Adnan Al-Kassie/King
Tonga/Masked Superstar

Masked Superstar is Ax of Demolition, King Tonga is Haku and this is in a cage. The reason for the match? EVIL NON AMERICAN SCUM!!! Blackwell and Superstar start things off but Jerry wants the Sheik. That would be a feud that went on for almost half of the 80s. Anyway he gets King Tonga instead and the King immediately tries to escape. That gets him nowhere as Blackwell (who weighs nearly 500lbs) kills him with a clothesline.

Off to Sarge who gets a BIG reaction. Tonga suplexes him down and the match slows a bit. Masked Superstar comes in and is immediately ping ponged between Blackwell and Sarge. That's not nice to a new guest guys. It works so well that they do it again, this time with Blackwell as the legal man. Superstar gets in a shot to Blackwell and it's off to Sheik for the usual shots you get from a coward when the hero is down.

Sheik sends him into the cage a few times and it's back to the King who isn't as much of a coward. A headbutt gets two and it's off to a chinlock. I think you win by pin or submission here but it hasn't really been made clear. Superstar comes in and immediately collides with the fat man. Sheik gets rammed down and Blackwell has been busted somewhere in there. Sheik slams Jerry a few times and man that's just stupid.

Jerry STILL won't tag so he rams the fresh Tonga into the cage, busting him open as well. Blackwell gets beaten into the corner but he punches Superstar in the face and tags Slaughter. House is cleaned but the fans don't seem to care as much about Slaughter this time. Sarge slams Superstar down and goes TO THE TOP OF THE CAGE. Thankfully he slips a few times and thinks better of it and just jumps off the top, but the knee misses the Superstar.

Since this show hasn't dragged on long enough yet, Slaughter becomes hopefully the final face in peril of the night. Sarge is busted now and Superstar clotheslines him down for two. Off to a chinlock but Sarge goes for Superstar's mask to break it up. Sheik comes in and pounds on Sarge with his cast but a weak USA chant allows Slaughter to punch him down and tag out. Everything breaks down and Blackwell hits a top rope splash on the Sheik for the pin.

Rating: D+. Not a great match here but DANG that was a good looking ending. The referee falling to the mat almost immediately was good as he knew there was no way that wasn't the ending. Also at the end of the day, it's hard to go against the AMERICANS winning. Blackwell vs. Sheik went on too long though and this was just another chapter in that war.

Slaughter and Blackwell brag a lot. Blackwell doesn't like the training Slaughter has been putting him through but he respects him. That almost sounded like a heel turn speech for awhile but nothing comes of it.

Overall Rating: D+. This is one of those shows where the final rating doesn't reflect the show as a whole. To be clear, none of the matches are what I would call bad. The problem with this show is that it is so freaking REPETITIVE. There are only so many hot tags you can sit through until it means nothing at all anymore. A few singles matches here and there would have helped a lot. Also, where was the world champion? If this is a major show shouldn't he at least make an appearance? Anyway, the show isn't bad, but it's very boring if you sit through it all in one day.

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