

NXT Takeover – Philadelphia: Holy Bleep Indeed

Takeover: Philadelphia

Date: January 28, 2018

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Percy Watson, Mauro Ranallo

This one is a little bit different as we don't really have a top match to build this show around. There's a lot of good stuff but nothing all that great. That being said, it's kind of NXT's bread and butter as they know how to set up a full card instead of hanging everything onto one match. Let's get to it.

Paul Heyman narrates the opening video, which is either brilliant or missing the point. He talks about how this city has a rich history of fighting but tonight is about the future. We see the standard clips of the big matches before Heyman caps it off with the WE ARE NXT line. Heyman is synonymous with Philadelphia but has never done anything of note in NXT, but the delivery more than makes up for it.

Nigel McGuinness is sick today so Percy gets to take up the slack. This could be a long night.

Tag Team Titles: Undisputed Era vs. Authors of Pain

The Era is defending but there's no Adam Cole due to his match later. The Authors jump the champs to start things off, sending Fish and O'Reilly outside before the opening bell. Fish bails from Razar to start so it's Kyle coming in to take him down and strike away. That goes as long as you would expect with Razar powering out without much effort, meaning it's time to get another breather.

Back in and Fish goes after the knee but gets knocked around by the raw power. It's off to Akum for some shots to the head, which send the champs outside. Walking away doesn't work as Fish is pulled back and dropped face first onto the barricade. Back in and Akum gets low bridged to the

floor, allowing Fish to kick him in the leg and really take over. Fish spears Razar to the floor (I didn't think he could pull that off) and it's time for the double kicks to the ribs.

Some hard kicks to the leg take Akum down and O'Reilly comes back in for a leg lock. Some champion miscommunication allows Akum to hit a good back body drop for the hot tag off to Razar, even though there really aren't any faces in this. The fall away slam/drop backwards with Fish on Razar's back combination crushes the champs all over again but they're right back up with the strikes in the corner.

Fish again shows off the power with an exploder suplex for two but Razar slugs them down. Akum comes back in on the bad leg but it's a jumping knee to the head to cut off the Last Chapter. O'Reilly grabs a kneebar on Akum and Fish gets a choke on Razar, who flips him down onto Kyle for the save. Not bad.

Everyone is down so the fans start the dueling chants. It's Akum up first and buckle bombing Fish. A buckle bomb crushes O'Reilly and the Super Collider connects but Akum can't powerbomb Fish. Instead it's a hurricanrana to send the Authors into each other and Fish rolls Akum up to retain at 14:56.

Rating: B. While not a great match, it was a smart match with the champs coming at them with a power game to go with the striking and submissions. The leg work was a good story to tell throughout the match as they broke the Authors down and actually went after them instead of running away and stealing a win. I liked the story here and it made for a good match.

War Machine is here.

Earlier today, Velveteen Dream promised a thirty second knockout of Kassius Ohno.

Velveteen Dream vs. Kassius Ohno

Dream now has a muscular man and a woman to help him with his entrance, including a large pillow containing his custom made mouth piece. He's also now in boxing trunks for a rather sharp change of pace. After Ohno's

entrance, Dream boxes the buckle a little bit. The fans count and Dream hits a big right hand to knock Ohno down at 27 seconds.

Dream dances around though (how Rocky I of him) and gets forearmed in the face, knocking the mouth piece out. Back up and Dream scores with a swinging spinebuster from two as the fans are almost entirely behind Dream here. We hit the chinlock until Ohno powers him into the corner, where Dream unloads with rights and lefts. Dream shouts DREAM OVER at Ohno, followed by a top rope double ax for two more. The second chinlock goes a bit better but Ohno powers out of it again, this time slamming Dream down.

Back up and Ohno easily wins a strike off, followed by the running backsplash. A superkick cuts Ohno off and the wind up DDT (with no snap this time around) gets two, followed by Dream's Death Valley Driver for the same. The rolling forearm drops Dream but it's another Death Valley Driver into the Purple Rainmaker (from the post) for the pin on Ohno at 10:46.

Rating: B-. Now where can I get a pair of those shorts? Dream needed this win and that's why you have someone like Ohno on the roster. He can hit the heck out of people but at the end of the day, he's going to get pinned off a big finisher. Dream just has the makings of a star though as the fans buy into him, though he's dead in the water on the main roster where Cole and company would talk about every single thing he does and how they don't understand it. Good match here, but there was no way they could follow Dream's two previous matches.

We recap Ember Moon vs. Shayna Baszler. Shayna is the newcomer/outsider as a former mixed martial artist who has choked a bunch of women out. Moon won't stand for the bullying but Baszler says this has been her plan all along. Above all else though, this feud has shown how lame Ember is while Baszler has shown up and looks like a polished pro right out of the gate.

Women's Title: Shayna Baszler vs. Ember Moon

Moon is defending. Baszler easily takes her down to start and kicks Moon's leg out. Back up and Moon scores with some dropkicks to put

Baszler out on the floor. A suicide dive drops her again but Baszler takes the hair down and unloads with strikes to the face and chest. Makes sense here as they're having Baszler easily win the stand-up fighting but getting beaten down in the wrestling.

Baszler steps on the arm like she did to Dakota Kai and it's off to an armbar. More knees and stomps to the arm have Moon in trouble before Baszler just pulls on the arm. Moon gets in a few slaps though, followed by a kick to the chest and a springboard spinning crossbody. The Eclipse connects but it hurts the arm even more, causing Moon to writhe in pain in the corner.

The trainer comes in to check on the arm and the fans are NOT happy with the delay. Baszler finally gets up and tries a cross armbreaker, only to have Moon get her feet on the ropes. The armbreaker goes on again in the middle of the ring with Baszler even pulling the legs back towards the middle, just in case. Somehow Moon rolls her over though and stacks Baszler up to retain at 10:11, sending Mauro into a huge MAMA MIA.

Rating: B. Moon escaped here and that's likely to set up a rematch where Baszler wins the title. I get the idea of not putting the title on Baszler just yet but Moon needs to get better in a hurry. They told a good story with the ending as the inexperienced Baszler was too focused on one move and left herself vulnerable, which makes Ember look like a veteran who might have lost the physical battle but won the mental game. At the end of the day, the lack of ever defeating Asuka is hard to overcome and it's weighing her down a lot. This should help her though and having to fight from underneath is a good story for her.

Moon is helped out but Baszler sneaks up from behind and grabs the choke.

Ricochet (billed as Trevor "Ricochet" Mann) is here.

We recap Aleister Black vs. Adam Cole. Black knocked Cole out of the #1 contenders tournament by kicking him in the head, only to have Cole cost Black the tournament final. A match was set up but William Regal made it Extreme Rules, which might play more towards Cole's strengths.

Adam Cole vs. Aleister Black

Extreme Rules. Black's entrance is surrounded by candles and smoke this time around, making it look even better. Black easily wins an early strike off and moonsaults into the seated position. Cole grabs a chair and there's the ECW chant that you knew was coming. That's taken away in no time and Black has a seat on the chair as Cole needs to come up with a better idea.

Black follows him out this time and gets caught with a few shots, allowing Cole to throw in some weapons. Both guys find kendo sticks but Black throws his away and says bring it on. He's either very skilled or very stupid. A few kicks to the chest have Black in trouble but the springboard moonsault is caned out of the air in a good looking crash. Cole's Backstabber with the kendo stick (White Russian Backstabber?) gets two and it's table time.

Black breaks up a superplex attempt and gets slammed off the top onto a trashcan. A running knee drops Cole again and Black sets up another table next to the first. That's not enough though as Black pulls out a ladder but Cole kicks him down and sets the unfolded ladder in the corner. Cole is bleeding from somewhere (might be his hand) and hammers away in the corner. Black fights up and drops Cole onto the ladder in a good looking crash.

With Cole down, Black goes up top but Cole throws him a chair and superkicks it into Black's head, sending him through the tables. Mauro: "HOLY BLEEP INDEED!" That's only good for two so Cole loads up two chairs next to each other. Black is back up though and hits an AA onto the top of the chairs (FREAKING OW MAN!!!) to probably break Cole's back. A sliding knee into the chair into Cole's face gets two as Fish and O'Reilly run in for the save. High/Low on the floor drops Black and it's time to load up the announcers' table.

Cue Sanity for the save (makes sense) with Killian Dain taking everyone out with a suicide dive. With Black still down, Cole tries a suplex through the table. That's broken up as well and the double knees (ala Sasha Banks) drives Cole through instead. Fans: "MAMA MIA!" Back in and Cole scores with his own superkick and grabs a chair. Of course he walks right into Black Mass (to the shoulder) for the pin at 21:58.

Rating: A-. This kept building and turned into a star making performance for both guys. Black is on a roll at this point and that Black Mass should put him into the title match at Takeover: New Orleans. This was better than I thought it would be as it started slowly but built into a brawl with Black finally being the last man standing by the end. Very good stuff here and easily the best part of the night so far.

Ethan Carter III, billed as EC3, is here and officially confirmed as a new signing.

We recap Andrade Cien Almas vs. Johnny Gargano. Almas has righted the ship after months of mediocrity, mainly thanks to the addition of Zelina Vega. Gargano had a nightmare of a 2017 and is on the comeback trail, finally turning himself back into Johnny Wrestling. Tonight is his chance at redemption, both by winning the title and beating Almas, who was a big part of his downward spiral.

NXT Title: Johnny Gargano vs. Andrade Cien Almas

Almas is defending and is played to the ring by a masked mariachi band. He also wears a mask to the ring but takes it off before getting inside. They start with a technical sequence and wrestle to a standoff as we see Johnny's wife Candice LeRae in the crowd. Neither finisher can connect early on and Almas bails into the corner while waving a finger at Johnny. We start again with Gargano wrestling him down into an armbar but one heck of a chop gets the champ out of trouble.

The announcers recap the Almas story of letting his career fall apart as he gets sent outside but manages to avoid the running flip dive off the apron. Back in and Almas bends Johnny's neck across the top rope, followed by the chinlock. Johnny fights up but gets caught in the Tree of Woe. Almas misses the top rope stomp though and gets suplexed into the corner. A middle rope swinging Downward Spiral gives Johnny two and the slingshot spear is good for the same.

As usual, Vega has some awesome facial expressions as you can feel her panicking on the near falls, which sell them that much more. Almas catches him with a spinning faceplant for two before going up. The regular moonsault doesn't work but Almas lands on his feet and hits a

standing version for two more in a smart sequence. Johnny's superkick gets the same and they're both down again.

Gargano puts him on the top but can't hit the sunset bomb. Almas misses the running knees in the corner but the slingshot spear is countered into a faceplant. A reverse tornado DDT gets two more and both guys are spent again. Excellent sequence. Almas can't hit the hammerlock DDT on the apron so Gargano slingshot DDTs him onto the apron instead. That's only good for a very close two back inside and Almas blocks the Gargano Escape. The running knees are broken up and there's the Lawn Dart to rock Almas again.

Vega's distraction lets Almas grab the DDT but that's reversed into a small package for a VERY close two. A low superkick gives Johnny two, with the camera panning over to tease interference but it just shows Vega panicking at the near fall. Almas cuts him off on top and it's the top rope double stomp onto the apron, followed by a hard toss to send Gargano into the apron again. Back in and the double knees are good for two and Almas is shocked. To be fair, I am too.

They fight back to their feet and Johnny somehow grabs a hurricanrana. The Gargano Escape goes on and Almas can't spin out. Vega grabs Almas' hand and the distraction lets Almas rake Johnny's eyes. The hammerlock DDT is broken up and a backdrop puts Almas on the floor for a suicide dive of all things. Vega is back up with a hurricanrana to send Johnny into the steps though and the hammerlock DDT...gets two. They had me on that one.

Gargano rolls outside and Vega goes after him, drawing Candice over the barricade for the brawl. She chases Vega to the back, drawing a THANK YOU CANDICE chant. The slingshot DDT gets a VERY close two and the Gargano Escape goes on again...but the foot is on the ropes. They head to the apron again and Almas hits the running knees to drive Johnny's head into the post, leaving him with the far away look in his eyes. A draping hammerlock DDT FINALLY ends Gargano at 32:22.

Rating: A+. Oh yeah that was amazing. They had me multiple times on the near falls and I never once got bored throughout the whole thing. Gargano

is ready to be NXT Champion at some point and not having Ciampa interfere was the right decision as their match doesn't need to be for the title. It's an epic back and forth match with the great near falls being traded near the end. It takes a lot to suck me in like that and they did it to perfection here. Outstanding match.

Post match Candice comes back to take Johnny to the back but they stop for the pose on the stage...AND TOMMASO CIAMPA BREAKS A CRUTCH OVER JOHNNY'S BACK! Ciampa walks away as Candice tends to Johnny to end the show.

Overall Rating: A. Is Takeover capable of having a bad show? Or even a bad match for that matter? Like I said coming in, this felt more like a collection of matches and it still blew me away. The worst match was probably Dream vs. Ohno and even that was above average. Nothing was following that main event though and now you have a double main event of Black vs. Almas and Gargano vs. Ciampa set for New Orleans. That alone makes for a great show and if they have a strong undercard (War Machine vs. Undisputed Era and two others would be more than enough), it could be an all time classic. Great show here of course.

Results

Undisputed Era b. Authors of Pain – Rollup to Razar

Velveteen Dream b. Kassius Ohno – Purple Rainmaker

Ember Moon b. Shayna Baszler – Rollup

Aleister Black b. Adam Cole – Black Mass

Andrade Cien Almas b. Johnny Gargano – Hanging hammerlock DDT

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Takeover: Philadelphia Preview

It's time, once again, for everybody to come about the NXT train. This weekend WWE is doing another one of its big multi-night marathons in a single city and it all starts with NXT "Takeover: Philadelphia". As usual, there's a five match card with all three titles on the line and two other matches to fill out the card. If this thing can live up to the rest of NXT's Takeover efforts, this should be excellent. Let's get to it.

Tag Team Titles: Undisputed Era(c) vs. Authors of Pain

I could have sworn that this was supposed to be a cage match. These teams (along with Sanity) have been feuding on and off for months with the Undisputed Era coming away with the titles for the time being. However, the Authors of Pain are arguably the most dominant team in the history of NXT so there's a real chance that they could get the titles back here.

That being said, I'm taking the Undisputed Era as there's no reason to keep the Authors of Pain in NXT any longer (save for a feud with the debuting War Machine). The champs retaining and finally establishing themselves as the best of the three teams is the way to go and makes whoever can take them down look that much better. The match should be fun with the

Undisputed Era cheating to win like they're supposed to.

Women's Title: Ember Moon(c) vs. Shayna Baszler

This is an interesting one in that it's not the most interesting thing in the world. Baszler has only been around for a few weeks now and is already one of the best characters in all of NXT. She knows exactly how to play the outsider bully, mainly because it feels so natural for her. Throw in the good looking choke and it's hard to argue against her. On the other hand though, Moon doesn't really have a character. She has intense eyes and that's really about it, but she's Asuka's successor.

I'm going to take Moon retaining via DQ here, though seeing Baszler choke her out for the title wouldn't shock me. More than likely though, Baszler chokes her out but won't let go and loses the title as a result. The problem right now is that aside from Kairi Sane, there isn't another face to put the title on so Moon is probably the best option. Baszler will get the title one day though.

Kassius Ohno vs. Velveteen Dream

Ohno is a very valuable thing to have on the roster: the grizzled veteran who can wrestle a solid match while putting someone young over and making them look good at the same time. Dream is in need of a big win at the moment, having lost at "Takeover: WarGames" to Aleister Black and last week on "NXT" to Johnny Gargano. I think you get where I'm going with this.

Of course it's going to be Dream winning and there's really no doubt about this one. Throw him out there in the opener and let him take a bunch of big forearm to the head before hitting the Purple Rainmaker for the pin. It's a simple idea and the fans are going to eat up Dream's stuff, especially after his previous two great performances. Easy winner here though.

Aleister Black vs. Adam Cole

Extreme Rules. This might be the most interesting match on the show and there's a very good chance that it's going to be the best as well. Black is one of the best acts in NXT at the moment with one of the best finishers but Black is more of an acquired taste. He's a great talker, but at the same time he needs to be able to do something in the ring to back that up.

I'm going to take Black here but Cole winning is a possibility, especially with Bobby Fish and Kyle O'Reilly available to run interference if necessary. I could see Black getting screwed out of the title, but Black getting an NXT Title shot in New Orleans makes a lot of sense as well, meaning he should win here. I'll take Black in a match that really could go either way.

NXT Title: Andrade Cien Almas(c) vs. Johnny Gargano

This is a different kind of story as they have a past together and there's a future for both guys but at the same time there isn't much going on between them at the moment. Gargano won a competition to become #1 contender and is in the middle of a huge redemption story and Almas feels more like a transitional champion, even though he's kind of redeeming himself at the same time.

That being said, Almas retains here when Tommaso Ciampa runs in for the interference and costs Gargano his chance at becoming champion. That sets up the mother of all grudge matches in New Orleans while Almas retains the title and gets to face Black, who can kick his head off and win the title...I think. It should be a fun match as they surprised me in Brooklyn, but I'm not sure they can top what they did there.

Overall, "Takeover: Philadelphia" doesn't seem like the best show on paper. Nothing really jumps off the page at me but that's been the case before and NXT has blown me away almost every time. Almas' time on top hasn't been the most thrilling

in the world but they'll set something up to get things going soon enough, because that's how NXT does things. Let them show what they can do and everything will be fine.

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