

# Ring of Honor TV – March 23, 2016: Can I Sign Up For Old Japan?

## Ring of Honor

Date: March 23, 2015

Location: Sam's Town Hotel and Gambling Hall, Las Vegas, Nevada

Commentators: Mr. Wrestling III, Kevin Kelly

It's a special show this time as we have a new taping cycle including the New Japan crew. These things can go a bunch of different ways and unfortunately a lot of those ways don't often go well for the normal Ring of Honor guys. It's also the fight show after the 14<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Show so things can start moving forward. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

### TV Title: BJ Whitmer vs. Tomohiro Ishii

Ishii is defending after taking the title in Japan because WE MUST PRAISE NEW JAPAN. The graphic says "Tomorhiro" but I can't find anything else that spells it that way. We're not quite ready to go yet though as Veda Scott and Cedric Alexander come out with Veda offering a check in exchange for the title shot. Whitmer is appalled at the suggestion that he could be bought off and then takes the check anyway.

### TV Title: Cedric Alexander vs. Tomohiro Ishii

The match starts after a break with Ishii hitting a hard shoulder and throwing Alexander across the ring with ease. Ishii headbutts him down but Veda grabs the boot to finally give Cedric an opening. See, she's effective as well as gorgeous. Cedric starts stomping at the head before going with a far less painful chinlock.

That's enough for the champ though as he Hulks Up and scores with chops and a suplex. Cedric is up at two and climbs the corner for a spinning

kick to the head. Back up and Ishii just headbutts the heck out of him, only to have the sliding lariat get countered into a crucifix for two. Ishii is done playing though and he brainbusts Alexander for the pin to retain at 6:32.

**Rating:** C. I'm really not a fan of the NEVER stuff that Ishii does over in New Japan but he's perfectly acceptable when he's doing more wrestling than all that strong style toughman nonsense. Alexander is way too generic for my tastes but at least Veda is awesome in her role and can carry anyone however far she needs to.

Here's the Addiction to complain about the reunion of the Motor City Machine Guns. Oh great that's a thing again. They take credit for bringing Chris Sabin back from the depths (I'd have cheered if they added "of TNA") and now they've been betrayed for a Machine Guns reunion. Kazarian gets in a few shots at Las Vegas being the land of bad decisions and thinks this was all one bad choice. Daniels thinks the fans are all thinking it's Christmas morning to see Sabin/Shelley back together again but it's time for an apology.

Cue the Guns, unfortunately without their rocking TNA theme. Before they get going, how in the world is Sabin the only former World Champion out of this group? Sabin has reached the conclusion that the Addiction are just delusional jerks. The brawl is teased but of course the Addiction bails. Daniels says they'll have a match but it's up to them, the adults, to decide when that happens.

Jay Lethal is ready to defend against Hirooki Goto next week.

### Reno Scum vs. Briscoes

Scum (Luster the Legend/Adam Thorestowe) is a team who has been around before but aren't that well known. Adam and Mark get things going with the former getting double teamed in a somewhat heelish attack by the Briscoes. Back in and Adam can't get anywhere with Mark so it's off to Luster for a running shoulder in the corner. Mark gets pounded down but finally comes back with some right hands to both Scum.

It's still not enough though as a catapult sends Mark into a Death Valley

Driver for two. Not that it matters as Mark flips onto his feet and makes the tag off to Jay as house is cleaned. Everything breaks down and a powerbomb into a neckbreaker gets two on Luster. A German suplex followed by a double stomp gets the same on Mark, only to have him pop up with a Death Valley Driver. The Froggy Bow is enough to put Adam away at 6:55.

**Rating:** C-. Scum didn't do anything for me here and I'm really not sure who is supposed to benefit here. The Briscoes were fine enough but this had that Ring of Honor style to it that doesn't get me interested. There are more than enough teams in Ring of Honor already and Scum really wasn't needed here.

Dalton Castle is excited for his Fight Without Honor with Silas Young in three weeks but the Boys aren't old enough to know what he has planned.

#### Young Bucks vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi/Michael Elgin

The fans are far more behind Tanahashi than the Bucks here, which is a nice sign for the future of wrestling. Elgin and Nick start with Michael actually trying a test of strength. Now since no power guy has ever gotten a small heel to try a test of strength, I'll let you guess how this goes. The Bucks start speeding things up and a pair of dropkicks have the good guys (I think?) on the floor.

Matt dives over the top to take Tanahashi out and we take a break. Back with Elgin bicycle kicking Matt out to the floor before giving him a double suplex. Elgin and Tanahashi give Nick a double SUCK IT in a nice visual. There's a delayed vertical suplex with Nick trying a save, only to have Elgin suplex both of them at the same time. Tanahashi grabs an abdominal stretch and uses Matt's ribs as an air guitar. Eh that was amusing.

We hit the chinlock for a bit until Nick pulls Elgin to the floor for our first superkick. Nick gets in a regular SUCK IT and there's the slingshot X Factor. We take a break and come back with the Bucks still in control and getting cheered way too loudly. Tanahashi gets in a cross body though and the tag brings Elgin back in. Big Mike picks up the Bucks for a Samoan drop/fall away slam at the same time because he's got freaking strength. The Falcon Arrow gets two on Matt but double superkicks set up

a double 450 for two on Elgin.

Tanahashi no sells ANOTHER superkick and gets loaded up into kind of a reverse Alabama Slam from Elgin to send him onto...Matt's knees. Now you might think we just had enough double superkicks for a lifetime, but that's not how the Bucks roll. FIVE more superkicks have them in control but the Meltzer Driver is countered with Elgin's powerbomb. The Sling Blade and another powerbomb sets up the High Fly Flow to give Tanahashi the pin at 16:10.

**Rating:** B. Better match here but I've made my opinions on the Bucks pretty clear over the last year. I still don't get why they're faces in this or any other promotion (well maybe PWG would make sense) but the fans go nuts over them and that's the point of bringing in acts like this. Tanahashi continues to be amazing (I'm a bit late on that one) and Elgin has that freakish strength that only a handful of people ever have, making this a rather fun match. Not exactly the kind of match I'd like as I'm not big on the styles of either promotion, but at least it was a fun performance.

**Overall Rating:** C+. This was good enough but the New Japan shows can get annoying in a hurry. At least we had a good match and the Fight Without Honor offers some promise, especially if it gives Castle the boost that he's been needing for months. Unfortunately I have a feeling we're in for A LOT more New Japan before we get there and that's not the most entertaining thing in the world.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the History of the Intercontinental Title at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01D4D3EGQ>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

---

# 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 armbar 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, Dorada, 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 44<sup>th</sup> 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 insanelly 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.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the History of Wrestlemania at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0188BJRGU>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>