

Reviewing the Review – Monday Night Raw: February 23, 2015

We're past Fast Lane now and the only thing left between here and Wrestlemania is time. Well that and five Raws and Smackdowns of course. The main story tonight is the start of the hard build between Lesnar and Reigns as well as filling in the rest of the card for the biggest show of the year. Let's get to it.

To begin with, let's get through the big story of the week which didn't air on Raw: Brock Lesnar not appearing. Allegedly this was over some undisclosed contract issue, which seems to be very convenient given that he was seen at UFC 184 over the weekend. I'm not saying it's an angle, but there's enough there that it seems like it's a possibility. Either way, Lesnar will be in the main event at Wrestlemania and I'd be absolutely shocked if anything else happened. At the end of the day, Brock will be there for the right price because unlike CM Punk, he isn't completely delusional.

Orton opened the show and said this wouldn't be a twenty minute speech. He wants Rollins but got the full Authority instead, and OF COURSE we had to listen to Stephanie say every corporate name she could fit into a single speech. That might be the most annoying thing she does. Everything has to be proper titles and it comes off like the least natural way of speaking I've seen in years. There's going to be a business conference later in the night to get to the point of this. I'm as riveted as you are. Not by the dumb story, but by Stephanie. I mean, don't you just freeze in place when she speaks?

Dolph Ziggler pinned Bad News Barrett. I've ranted enough about how annoying it is when the Intercontinental Champion loses, but at least this seems to be setting up a big match at Wrestlemania....where the perennial loser will win and all is supposed to be forgotten right?

The business conference was more of STEPHANIE POWER as she got Orton to agree to team with Rollins tonight. As I said back on Monday, this felt

like just a way of killing time until we get to the obvious ending. That kind of storytelling rarely works, especially with so little time before Wrestlemania.

The Prime Time Players beat the Ascension because...well why not just bail out of the Ascension story before it has the chance to go anywhere? Now, can someone please tell me what that story was supposed to be, because the legends thing stopped weeks ago.

Now we get to the big segment of the night: Daniel Bryan endorsing Roman Reigns and then Paul Heyman coming out to say the exact same thing he's been saying for weeks: Reigns is awesome, but not awesome enough. This segment was well done, well spoken and had a very clear goal. However, it completely failed at its intended goal: making me care about Roman Reigns.

They're following a script now and the idea makes sense, but Reigns is just not someone the fans can relate to. Look back at the Bryan story. It's such a basic concept with the volume turned way up: Bryan is the every man who has been held down by the machine but will not stop fighting until he overcomes the odds and achieves his glory. What is Reigns' story? Come see Superman fight Doomsday? That's only a story when Superman loses, and I don't picture Roman Reigns losing at Wrestlemania.

Someone tell me why I should care about Roman Reigns. Yeah he had a really cool run as part of the Shield, but Rollins has grown by leaps and bounds since then and Ambrose has had his moments. Reigns is basically the same guy he was a year ago at this time but without his partners around him. The more I think about it, the more I see him as Diesel in 1994: big, strong, not that interesting because there's little to him other than power and high impact offense. That's not enough to carry him against Lesnar and I don't see this experiment working longer than a few months.

Kidd and Cesaro beat the Usos in their rematch. This was about what you would expect and thankfully they didn't just switch the titles right back. The Usos can do something else besides get the belts back (I'm not sure what exactly) and just let Kidd and Cesaro show off for the next

four months or so. The Usos were good long term placeholders, but I've seen enough of them with the belts in the last year.

Mizdow has gotten a commercial shoot by being the stunt double. This would be the 318th issue to start the eventual face turn.

Bray Wyatt says his usual insane stuff about Undertaker. At least he has a target now.

Jack Swagger beat Stardust with the Patriot Lock after a distraction from Goldust. I don't like Wrestlemania rematches and we seem to be getting more than one this year.

Cena and Rusev argued over political ideologies, monetary policy and whether or not Cena gave up in the Accolade. Or Acolyte, whichever Cena is calling it this time. It's worked for 40 years and it works now.

Rollins and Orton didn't have much to say.

Cool video on Sting to catch younger fans up.

The Bellas vs. Paige/Emma lasted 30 seconds. They seem to be setting up Bellas vs. Paige/AJ in a dream tag match. That would likely be Kevin Dunn's dream with the Bellas going over.

The Bushwhackers are going into the Hall of Fame. Luke licked my face when I was three so I can't complain too much.

Ryback beat Curtis Axel in 44 seconds. That Axelmania and the Royal Rumble clock are the most entertaining things Axel has ever done.

The final match was your standard main event tag with Reigns and Bryan beating Orton and Rollins with the running knee ending Seth. Orton bailed after Rollins tagged himself in but didn't RK0 Rollins for some reason. That reason would be ALL HAIL STEPHANIE of course, because Heaven forbid he offend her.

Overall, this show proved one thing: the road to this year's Wrestlemania is lacking. The stories are being told well enough, but they're just not very good stories. Reigns isn't an interesting hero, Orton vs. Rollins

needs to just get set up already, the Intercontinental Champion is the biggest loser this side of Barry Horowitz and there are at least two upcoming rematches if not more. That doesn't scream biggest show of the year to me. It screams "oh dang we blew our ideas last year and we've got nothing left for this time." That's not good in any way, shape or form.

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Monday Night Raw – February 16, 2015: The Response To The Acceptance For A Challenge To Talk

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 16, 2015

Location: Amway Center, Orlando, Florida

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Booker T.

It's the go home show for Fast Lane and the main story here is the implosion of Reigns and Bryan. They've gone from respect to attacking each other in the span of a week, meaning it's almost time for them to either win the Tag Team Titles or respect each other again so the story stops making any sense. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's Cena to address Rusev attacking his bad eye last week. Cena knows you have to be extra aggressive to deal with something like Rusev. This Sunday it's not going to be the smiling Cena because he's coming to Fast Lane to fight for respect and to win the United States Championship. Notice that Cena makes winning the title sound like it means something to him. Ambrose has been doing the same with the Intercontinental Title and it's a nice touch that we haven't gotten in a long time.

Cue the Russians with Lana talking about how everyone has fallen to Rusev and Cena will be no exception. There is no coming back from this Sunday and Cena will be crushed. Rusev promises to destroy everything Cena has, including his will to live. Cena goes right after him and takes Rusev down on the stage, including throwing him face first into the wall like Rusev did last week. The fans are WAY into this beatdown and even count along with ten right hands to Rusev's head.

Dean Ambrose vs. Luke Harper

Dean brings out a signed contract for an Intercontinental Title shot at Fast Lane, just waiting for Barrett's signature. Ambrose takes him down with a headlock to start but Luke writhes out of it and headbutts Dean into the corner. Back up and Dean hammers away before hitting a nice middle rope back elbow to the jaw. They head outside with Dean's suicide dive being easily blocked in a move you don't see all that often. Harper kicks him in the face and we take a break.

Back with Dean caught in a headlock until he bites Harper's hand to escape. He throws Luke to the floor but Harper pops back in, only to get caught in a tornado DDT to put both guys down. The standing flying elbow drop gets two but Dean walks into the superkick for the same. The rebound clothesline is countered into a sitout Boss Man Slam for two for Harper. Luke misses the discus lariat and Dirty Deeds is good for the pin at 11:06.

Rating: C+. Nice match but it's a shame to see Harper as just another jobber to the stars. He didn't get an entrance here and was just there as a plot device so Ambrose could pin another former Intercontinental

Champion. The match was fun stuff at times though with some nice sequences, but you knew Harper wasn't going to have a real chance here.

Quick chat about the Dust Brothers imploding. Bringing in Dusty is the only logical step from here.

The Authority is in the back where Big Show and Kane argue over the ending of Tag Team Turmoil and the Royal Rumble. Kane blames him for everything and they're about to fight again. Big Show keeps saying February 13, which would be last Friday. HHH cuts them off because he's tired of how these two make him look. They have big singles matches tonight and HHH wants solutions instead of excuses.

Bray Wyatt has what looks like a nail in his hand and talks about there is fear inside of us all. It's coming. They're giving themselves extra time before revealing Undertaker, presumably to make sure he can actually go.

The Dust Brothers are in the back with Dusty Rhodes and Stardust is being his usual insane self. Dusty says he's here to tell Cody that none of the stars and galaxies mean anything without family. He loves them both no matter what happens so get it together. The brothers shake hands and Dusty is pleased.

New Day vs. Goldust/Stardust

Woods and Stardust get things going with Xavier hitting a knee to the ribs, sending Stardust over for a tag to his brother. The brothers start taking over on Woods as we see Dusty watching in the back. Woods enziguris Stardust down and makes the tag to Kofi as everything speeds up. Everything breaks down and Kofi takes a good while to get the fans into his clapping. The brothers nearly collide again, allowing Kingston to hit Trouble in Paradise for the pin on Goldust at 2:58. Not really noteworthy here but Cole confuses Woods and Kingston because he's a moron. If he can rip on people for basic errors, so can I.

Stardust and Goldust hug post match, but Stardust lays him out with Cross Rhodes.

Roman Reigns says he has to deal with Daniel Bryan and Brock Lesnar at the same time. The Authority hasn't been trying to set anything right but rather stop Reigns from riding the fans' momentum. Bryan took the opportunity he had but Reigns is going to take that opportunity back.

Stardust rips into Dusty in the back, saying this family stuff is nonsense. He declares Cody dead and Dusty looks heartbroken.

Kane vs. Roman Reigns

Bryan is on commentary and starts us a YES chant as Reigns runs Kane over to start. Kane sends him into the middle buckle to take over, which Bryan says is on Reigns instead of him. We're already in the chinlock as Cole brings up the possibility of Bryan getting disqualified on Sunday. Bryan: "Why would I have to worry about that? I'm the better wrestler."

Back up and Kane boots Reigns in the jaw for two and we get what sounds like a YOU CAN'T WRESTLE chant. Who exactly are they talking about there? Reigns fights back and gets two off a Samoan drop, followed by another YES chant. Kane kicks him in the face again and they head outside with Kane loading up the announcers' table, only to eat a spear to give Reigns the countout win at 6:18. If anyone can come up with a reason why that wasn't a pinfall win for Reigns, please let me know so I can tell you why you're wrong.

Rating: D. Boring match here and again, why in the world does WWE have no problem having people like Miz and Mizdow both get pinned going into their match but Kane only has to lose by countout? This protection of the giants astounds me as they're both made men and can lose every match for the rest of their careers and not have their legacies hurt, but they're protected like Fort Knox.

Bryan starts another YES chant and Reigns offers him a chance to get in. Daniel walks away instead.

Post break, Bryan says Reigns is going to have to deal with a lot more YES chants Sunday than he did tonight. If he wants to be World Champion, he has to be mentally tough. This is at least somewhat interesting.

The Bellas steal Paige's clothes so she can't have a match tonight. Cameron won't let her borrow any gear so Paige grabs one of the Rosebuds, who I believe is played by indy star Mia Yim. Again, this is an acceptable use of the Divas, but there's no room for people like Charlotte and Sasha Banks to have an awesome match because it's not what fans want to see. No, they want to see pranks like you would see at a summer camp from "reality TV stars".

Summer Rae vs. Paige

Paige is dressed as a fairy princess because that's supposed to be entertaining. She runs Summer over and drives knees into Summer's chest, only to take a spin kick to the face (clearly didn't connect), setting up a full nelson with the legs. Paige rolls out and hoots the PTO for the win at 2:45.

Post match the Bellas come out but Paige cuts them off and says she doesn't need an outfit to make her look good. This Sunday, she'll look even better because she'll be wearing the Divas Championship.

Sheamus return video.

Here's Rollins for his match with Ziggler but first he rips on the idea of Presidents' Day because it's about the past. That's a waste of time because the future is right here in front of you. He's the most talented performer in the world and could do anything he wanted. Maybe he should run for President even though he isn't old enough. Or he could host the Daily Show and make it watchable. Or maybe he should just become World Champion and main event Wrestlemania.

Instead he's stuck dealing with people like Dolph Ziggler, who cuts Rollins off. Dolph says Rollins had a bad Valentine's Day. Did the Stooges get him the wrong chocolates? Maybe HHH screwed up the talk about the birds-uh and the bees-uh. Rollins calls Ziggler a nothing but Dolph says he raises the bar every time he's in this ring. If he can't keep the Authority gone, the least he can do is take care of their golden boy. Ziggler knocks Rollins to the floor and the opening bell is after a break.

Seth Rollins vs. Dolph Ziggler

The match is joined in progress after a break with Ziggler fighting out of a chinlock. The Stooges get caught interfering and earn an ejection for their troubles. Ziggler eats a forearm to the jaw but sidesteps a charge to send Rollins into the post. The buckle bomb is countered into a sunset flip for two and the running DDT gets the same. Rollins starts hammering away but misses the top rope knee. A superkick to the ribs looks to set up the Curb Stomp but Ziggler scores with a superkick of his own. The Zig Zag has Rollins beat but the Stooges run in for the DQ at 5:18.

Rating: C. The match was decent enough but my goodness can we get some better motivation here? Yeah there are some lame matches and stories, but it's hard to always blame the wrestlers for the results. Look at this one for example. Why were Rollins and Ziggler fighting? Over who is the best? Well ok fine, but that's not what their promo set up. Why didn't their promo set that up? Because it was clearly just there to fill in time rather than to set up their match. You can't pin that (or Kane for that matter) on the wrestlers, at least not all of it.

Rowan and Ryback come in for the save and lay out Noble.

Here's HHH to address Sting's actions from last week. First up we get a video recapping Sting helping get rid of the Authority at Survivor Series and helping the three fired guys get their jobs back. HHH says the word on the street is that he's afraid of Sting. This Sunday, the unthinkable is going to happen when WCW and WWE are in the same ring. I'd try to forget the Invasion too boss. Before he can get too far though, here's Ric Flair to interrupt.

Flair says he's here because he respects and loves HHH. This is the same town where HHH inducted Flair into the Hall of Fame and said Flair should have his own wing. HHH politely cuts him off to say he already knows how good Sting is, but Flair don't put yourself in a position to fail. HHH talks about how Sting took Flair to the limit at the first Clash of the Champions and then lived off that reputation for years.

If Sting had shown up here over the years, HHH would have done whatever

it took to get rid of him on principle alone. If Sting is WCW, then HHH is the WWE. Flair tries to cool HHH down by bringing up him not being a full time wrestler now (as opposed to Sting of course). HHH needs to be careful that he doesn't get caught up and lose to Sting.

In a good line, HHH says he may not be Flair in the ring, but when it comes to taking care of Sting, Flair is no HHH. Flair says don't let Sting shove you down again, so HHH shoves Flair down and rants about how important WWE is to him. This worked a lot better than I was expecting, despite all the HHH's nose sized holes in the idea.

Darren Young/??? vs. Ascension

Young's partner doesn't even get an entrance. The beating is on before the bell with Konnor crushing the nameless guy (even the announcers are referencing the fact that they don't know his name) until Titus O'Neil comes in for the save. So the Prime Time Players are back together and Slater Gator is done?

Miz and Barrett agree to take care of each others' problems.

Preview of the Destruction of the Shield DVD.

Damien Mizdow vs. Bad News Barrett

Non-title. Barrett stomps away in the corner to start but Mizdow stomps him down, only to have Miz ring a bell, meaning to stop. He needs Mizdow to come buff his shoe, allowing Barrett to kick him down off the apron. Mizdow takes over again but another bell (potential smudge on sunglasses) distracts Mizdow so the Bull Hammer can give Barrett the pin at 2:31.

Ambrose hits the ring post match and ties Barrett to the post. Ambrose demands that Barrett sign and puts a pen in his hand, literally forcing Barrett to sign. Bad News: "GET A KNIFE! THIS IS ILLEGAL!" Ambrose says that makes it official and the match is on for Fast Lane.

Bray pounds the nail into a board and shouts to find him before he finds whoever he's talking to.

Jimmy Uso/Naomi vs. Natalya/Tyson Kidd

The Usos defend against Cesaro and Kidd on Sunday. Kidd bails to the corner to tag in Natalya instead of fighting Jimmy. After a few armdrags, it's back to the guys as Kidd actually fights for a change. Jimmy stares back at him and it's back to the girls. Natalya throws Naomi down and hits a quick basement dropkick but Kidd still doesn't want to come in. Naomi flips Natalya over into a nice pinfall reversal sequence with a sunset flip getting the pin on Natalya at 2:55.

Kidd blames Natalya for the loss.

Daniel Bryan vs. Big Show

Reigns is at ringside. Bryan kicks away at Show's leg but gets shoved down. JBL: "It's like Jack and the Beanstalk, except the Beanstalk doesn't fight back." As in the story where JACK FACES A GIANT, meaning the entire analogy is completely overthinking the idea and missing the point? Show throws him around but gets caught in a sleeper as Reigns gets up and starts signing autographs. It doesn't seem to bother Bryan as he takes Show down to his knees. Show fights out as Reigns is taking pictures with fans. Bryan gets thrown down as we take a break.

Back with Reigns sitting again and Bryan fighting out of a chinlock. Show puts him in a bearhug but gets guillotined on the top rope as JBL tells Booker to stop talking about fairy tales. Big Show is finally pulled over the top rope but Reigns starts throwing out t-shirts. Daniel is thrown into Reigns so Show spears Roman down for some reason. They get back inside and Bryan knocks Show into the corner. He counters a chokeslam into the YES Lock but Show makes the ropes. Here come the YES Kicks for two but Bryan gets launched off the kickout. Bryan goes up top but Reigns Superman Punches Show for the DQ at 14:38.

Rating: C+. That would mean Big Show beat Bryan and Kane only lost via countout. Only in WWE. Anyway, this was actually a pretty decent power vs. speed match and the Reigns stuff was a

nice addition to everything. We'll call this a pleasant surprise more than anything else. We'll also call the tag match on Thursday, where Bryan and Reigns cleaned out the tag team division, not meaning anything a pretty obvious non-surprise.

Post match Bryan dropkicks Reigns down and the fight is on. Referees eventually break it up but the fans wake up to shout LET THEM FIGHT. Instead they begrudgingly shake hands before fighting again, much to the fans' delight. Bryan kicks him to the floor and hits the FLYING GOAT but Reigns sends him into the crowd to keep the fight going. A chair is brought in but they're eventually dragged away to end the show. That was a really good closing segment and I was getting into it by the end.

Overall Rating: C. This is what you call "OH SNAP THERE'S A PAY PER VIEW ON SUNDAY AND WE HAVEN'T DONE JACK!" All night long they were flying through everything they could in an attempt to hide the fact that Fast Lane doesn't need to exist. The wrestling was ok at best, but they did a decent job of setting Sunday up. The US Title match feels a lot bigger all of a sudden but I don't think Cena walks out with the title. Other than that, the Flair/HHH segment was good enough if you can ignore some of the lame motivation.

That's this show's biggest takeaway for me: the lack of logical motivation all over the show. Look at Ziggler and Rollins for example. They had an issue three months ago, but both guys have moved on since then. Are they really just fighting because of what happened at Survivor Series? All we heard from them was some lame stuff about Valentine's Day, which makes me think there was no given reason for the two of them to be fighting. That's a far too common problem in this company and it's really starting to show.

Results

Dean Ambrose b. Luke Harper – Dirty Deeds

New Day b. Goldust/Stardust – Trouble in Paradise to Goldust

Roman Reigns b. Kane via countout

Paige b. Summer Rae – PTO

Dolph Ziggler b. Seth Rollins via DQ when Jamie Noble and Joey Mercury interfered

Bad News Barrett b. Damien Mizdow – Bull Hammer

Jimmy Uso/Naomi b. Natalya/Tyson Kidd – Sunset flip to Natalya

Big Show b. Daniel Bryan via DQ when Roman Reigns interfered

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Smackdown – January 29, 2015: And So It Ends. Please Dear Goodness Let It End.

Smackdown

Date: January 29, 2015

Location: XL Center, Hartford, Connecticut

Commentators: Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler, Michael Cole

This is a rare live show due to the massive snow storm in the northeast that wiped out Tuesday's tapings. That might actually be the best thing

they could have had happen to them after the negative reaction to the Royal Rumble. Tonight's main event is yet another Bryan vs. Kane showdown, this time in a casket match. Let's get to it.

Here's HHH to welcome us to Raw before realizing he's a bit shaken up. The one thing WWE doesn't like is being told what to do, which is why they did it. Just like they were told they would never have a million Network subscribers, which is exactly what they announced this week. He actually thanks the fans for subscribing in a rare genuine act. Then he was told they couldn't have a show in Hartford, so here they are for the live show.

WWE isn't the only one with a controversy right now because the NFL and Roger Goodell have a problem with their balls. Some like them hard and some like them soft, but WWE has never had a problem with balls. However, that's not something they have an issue with in WWE. HHH is the same way, because he has a problem with the man called Sting, and he'll be dealing with that face to face at Fast Lane.

That brings him back to the Royal Rumble which had its fair share of controversy. First of all there was an exceptional triple threat where Rollins proved that he is the future, Cena proved that he is the past and Brock Lesnar proved that he is the beast and World Heavyweight Champion.

However, that wasn't the major controversy. The controversy was due to the Royal Rumble itself, which everyone has been talking about. We see some clips with Cole talking about how the fans are upset that guys like Ziggler, Bryan and Wyatt have been eliminated, leaving Big Show and Kane in the end. Reigns eliminated Rusev to win and cemented his spot at Wrestlemania.

HHH promises to make an announcement on Raw that is going to end the controversy and shake the WWE to its core. That sounds like trying to fix the main event already, which might not be the worst idea in the world. This brings out Reigns, who says there was no controversy because he won the Rumble. HHH agrees that he won the match, so now Reigns can win this one.

Big Show vs. Roman Reigns

Now let this be the FINAL match. They shove each other around to start with Big Show shoving him around to start. This is where Reigns is getting hurt more than anywhere else: he should be DESTROYING Big Show to set up a major showdown with giant killer vs. ultimate giant Lesnar at Wrestlemania. Instead it's Big Show looking dominant and Reigns probably making a comeback to win in a surprise. Show throws him across the ring as we're waiting on Reigns' first offense. He slips out of a slam and sends Big Show into the buckle for a breather, followed by a clothesline out to the floor as we take a break.

Back with Show working on the knee and putting on something like an ankle lock. Reigns climbs up the ropes to escape and counters into an ankle scissors of all things to send Show over the top. There's the apron kick but of course Show pops back up. Some clotheslines have little effect but a third one finally puts Show down.

A Samoan drop plants Show again but he rolls outside. Another running clothesline off the apron puts Show down but the knee is banged up. Back in and the Superman Punch is countered into the chokeslam for two. Show goes up but gets Superman Punched twice. He still won't go down so Reigns slams him down, setting up the spear for the pin at 12:21.

Rating: D. AND THEY'RE DONE. Like NEVER AGAIN let these two fight. It's not even that Reigns is looking bad out there but Big Show just looks like nothing. And what does Reigns get out of this win? Nothing of course, because NO ONE CARES ABOUT BIG SHOW. Dull match here and it's almost infuriating after all the months of these two fighting.

Vince announces February as a free month for new subscribers on the WWE Network.

Here are Rollins and the Stooges with something to say. Rollins says he told us he would prove himself on Sunday and that's exactly what he did. He was a single count away from winning the WWE World Heavyweight Title and he stuck a dagger into Lesnar's heart when he broke his rib. He's feeling so good that he's going to issue an open challenge to anyone in this building that wants to face him.

Cue Ryback to go after Rollins but the Stooges get the better of him.

This brings out Rowan to help but the Stooges and Rollins take him down as well. Ziggler completes the trio but gets sent into the announcers' table. Rollins knees Rowan in the back and the Authority bails before anything else happens. I smell a six man.

Kane is caressing a coffin and promises to lock Bryan inside tonight where the only thing he'll be able to hear is the beating of his heart. It's ashes to ashes and dust to dust, so may God have mercy on Bryan's soul tonight, because Kane will have none.

Jey Uso vs. Tyson Kidd

They start fast with Jey going to the corner but getting kicked in the knee. Tyson immediately goes after the bad wheel and slaps on a leg lock like a smart heel (or wrestler in general) should. Jey kicks Kidd out to the floor and nails him in the head, setting up a charge (so much for selling the leg). Kidd kicks him in the head though and springboards back in, only to get caught in a Samoan drop. Jimmy and Cesaro go at it on the floor, allowing Kidd to hit the fisherman's neckbreaker for the pin at 2:30.

Here are Rusev and Lana to talk about this past Sunday. Rusev says he should have been the winner and Lana is so upset that she can't speak English. He's the US Champion and wants to challenge a man from the past: John Cena. Cena has no hunger or desire and he isn't a superstar anymore. This brings out Cena who looks shocked at what Rusev just said. Cena threatens to shut Rusev's mouth for him.

It sounds like Rusev has bought into his own hype because he thinks Cena is no challenge for him. He's John Cena, a fifteen time World Champion, a two time Royal Rumble winner and the face who runs this place. He had that US Title years ago and challenges Rusev to do the Hartford Hoedown. Rusev is ready to go but Lana calls him off. The Russians leave but Cena isn't done. He's fighting Rusev at Fast Lane and ending the undefeated streak because the champ is here. This really didn't accomplish much but Cena sounded good.

Paige vs. Nikki Bella for the Divas Title is official for Fast Lane. Paige is in the back when the Bellas come up to make fun of her for being

pale. She elbows Brie in the face but takes a big forearm from Nikki.

Goldust/Stardust vs. Ascension

The brothers aren't sure who is going to start until it's Stardust vs. Viktor. A hiptoss puts Viktor down and Stardust W00s. Stardust is shoved into a forearm to Konnor but Viktor nails him in the back to take over. Konnor comes in an\& stumps away and hammers away before it's quickly back to Viktor for a chinlock.

Ascension keeps hammering on Stardust in the corner as the Dusts are suddenly the faces in this match. Stardust finally gets over for a hot tag and Goldust comes in with a knee to Viktor's head as everything breaks down. Stardust tags himself back in and Goldust isn't pleased. Konnor shoves Stardust off the top and a quick Fall of Man is good for the pin at 4:33.

Rating: D+. This was more angle advancement than anything else but it also gave Ascension another win. It looks like they're splitting up the Dust Brothers and I can't say I blame them at this point. There's nothing left for them to do and they're starting to get stale as a team, so give the fans a feud that they've been wanting for a good while.

Kane is STILL looking at the casket and slams it shut.

A magician is entertaining some wrestlers in the back when Miz and Mizdow come up to shake his hand. Miz gets annoyed at Mizdow shaking his hand but the magician demonstrates a magic trick with a fake egg, only to mystify Miz by turning it into a reel egg. Miz doesn't believe it's real and gets it cracked on his head. R-Truth: The yoke's on you. Mizdow makes sure he isn't caught laughing. I'm a big fan of magic so this was more entertaining than it should have been.

Bray Wyatt asks us what makes us happy. Maybe it's money or a fond memory. He finds enjoyment in things that mommy and daddy hid from us as children. Bray is legion among men so he asks what makes us smile. When he's done, it will be hard for us to ever smile again. Run.

Kane vs. Daniel Bryan

Casket match and they have a lot of time for this one. Cole talks about Bryan looking at the casket because he's never been in a casket match before. I'm sure this has nothing to do with the potential of being locked inside a casket. Kane quickly goes for the casket but Bryan comes back with kicks to the leg while wearing what appear to be furry boots. Kane can't gorilla press him into the casket and runs away from an attempted baseball slide as we take a break.

Back with Kane putting Bryan's face in the ring skirt and hammering away at the covered head. A big boot almost knocks Bryan into the casket but he kicks Kane away for the save. Kane plants him with another side slam but has to fight out of a headscissors to put him into the casket. Bryan nails a high cross body on the floor but gets kicked into the casket, only to crawl out the other side. Kane still can't get him into the casket and we take another break.

We come back with Bryan holding Kane in a chinlock (you don't see that everyday) and hitting his running clothesline to put the giant down. Here come the YES kicks to send Kane outside, setting up the FLYING GOAT and more right hands from Daniel. Kane backdrops him over the barricade as the casket has been forgotten for the moment. They head over to the announcers' table with Bryan getting sent into the chairs, followed by a bunch of chair shots to the back.

They suddenly remember this is a casket match with Kane loading up Bryan for a tombstone off the apron, only to have Daniel slip out and dropkick him a few times. He tries a third dropkick but charges into a chokeslam. Kane loads him into the casket but eats a kick to the face followed by the YES Lock with Kane partially in the casket. Even though it looks terrible, it puts Kane into the casket but Bryan still can't close it. Kane gets out again and almost turns Bryan inside out with a clothesline. Bryan escapes another chokeslam and the running knee to the side of the head puts him in the casket for the win at 22:10.

Rating: D. WAY too long here with a boring match as they had another Bryan vs. Kane showdown that no one wanted to see. Much like earlier, I really hope this is going to be the end of the feud because there's no reason for these guys to fight ever again. It took too long for Kane to

put put away here, but at least Bryan won. I'm not a fan of these matches though and it really gets annoying watching them having a dull match until they remember it's a casket match.

We see HHH teasing the announcement for Raw again to close the show.

Overall Rating: D+. The promos carried this show and the show flew by but it really wasn't all that great. The casket match felt like it went on forever, much like the entire Bryan vs. Kane feud. Thankfully Big Show vs. Reigns should be done, which is why you can already see the gimmick rematch coming at Fast Lane. This was a passable show and felt like Raw cut down to two hours.

If they did this style show every Monday, I can't imagine how much more the fans would calm down. They didn't pack this show full of nonsense and there wasn't as much time being wasted. Keep the show moving and don't let it get repetitive and the show becomes much easier to sit through. That third hour really does cripple Raw and this show is proof. It wasn't good, but it was a lot easier to sit through.

Results

Roman Reigns b. Big Show – Spear

Tyson Kidd b. Jey Uso – Fisherman's neckbreaker

Ascension b. Goldust/Stardust – Fall of Man to Stardust

Daniel Bryan b. Kane – Bryan closed Kane in the casket

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NXT – January 28, 2015: It Made Sense

NXT

Date: January 28, 2015

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Alex Riley, Jason Albert, Tom Phillips

This is another big show as we're two weeks out from Takeover and the showdown between Owens and Zayn. The contract signing is tonight and Owens has promised to say what he has to say to Zayn to his face. Also tonight the tournament to crown a new #1 contender continues with more first round matches. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Tag Team Titles: Lucha Dragons vs. Buddy Murphy/Wesley Blake

Blake and Murphy are challenging and have some new, loud entrance music. We even get big match intros before we get going. Cara and Blake get things going with Wesley slamming him down in the corner, only to have Cara come back with a double springboard wristdrag.

Murphy dropkicks him out of the air for two though as the challengers are staying aggressive. Blake puts on a chinlock for a bit until Cara fights up and makes the tag to Kalisto. Everything speeds up and a sunset bomb gets two on Buddy as everything breaks down. Blake counters Cara's springboard and makes a blind tag. Kalisto hits Salida Del Sol on Murphy but the legal Buddy rolls him up for the clean pin and the titles at 4:00.

Rating: C. This is where NXT's booking pays off for them in the end. Murphy and Blake haven't won a bunch of matches over the months, but they've hung in enough of them that this isn't the most shocking win in

the world. In WWE, a team like Slater Gator has been crushed almost every time they go out there and would have almost no chance in a title match. Even if they won, it wouldn't be accepted. On the other hand, this was fine and made sense, as well as giving us a fresh set of matches for the division.

We recap Bayley suplexing Charlotte last week and Regal making the fourway title match.

Charlotte yells at Bayley but Bayley says maybe she's been too nice. She saw what Sami Zayn did when he got more serious and now it's time for her to do it. Charlotte says if Bayley tries that again, she won't make it to Takeover.

Tyler Breeze is going to be watching the rest of the tournament very closely.

#1 Contenders Tournament First Round: Adrian Neville vs. Tyson Kidd

The fans are split on who they like best. They hit the mat to start for a nice counter sequence leading to a standoff. Adrian starts cranking on the arm before he takes Tyson down with a hurricanrana, sending Kidd scrambling to the floor. Neville even teases him with a dive but pulls back with a Tajiri handspring flip. Kidd keeps sliding under the corner and out the other side of the ring to break the count, eventually drawing Adrian outside where he gets sent into the floor.

We take a break and come back with Kidd hitting a hard dropkick to the face and rubbing the same face into the mat. Neville sends him right back outside with a clothesline and hits a big old flip dive to take him down. A standing moonsault gets two for Neville as the referee is drenched in sweat.

The spinning fisherman's neckbreaker snaps Adrian's neck for two but he flips out of a release German suplex and grabs a Batista Bomb (crowd: "Better than Batista!") for two. Neville heads outside but a hard dropkick sends him to the floor. Back in and Kidd can't hook the Sharpshooter, allowing Neville to hit a running kick in the head (similar to the Helluva Kick), setting up the Red Arrow for the pin at 16:25.

Rating: B+. These guys beat the heck out of each other and it got better and better throughout the match. This is the basic idea of hitting each other really, really hard over and over again until one of them can't get up and that's a great way to enjoy a match. Really fun stuff here and worth checking out.

Neville says he's ready to face either Corbin or Dempsey. The fans seem very interested in Neville vs. Corbin. I can't say I disagree.

Becky Lynch implies she'd turn on Banks to win the title. Good, as I like her better than Sasha.

Murphy and Blake are thrilled to win the belts and would give the Lucha Dragons a rematch anytime anywhere. They're still getting the hang of this talking thing.

Becky Lynch/Sasha Banks vs. Bayley/Charlotte

The fans aren't as into Bayley as they used to be. Bayley and Banks get things going with Bayley hitting a springboard armdrag but botching a second attempt, allowing Banks to take over. Off to Lynch for a forearm to the back before it's already back to Sasha. Charlotte comes in and snapmares Becky down before tagging Bayley right back in. In a smart move, Bayley thinks about going to the ropes but realizes <http://onhealthy.net/product-category/stop-smoking/> Banks would nail her in the back and opts for a jumping clothesline to a seated Lynch instead.

The villains use some cheating to take over and Sasha gyrates a bit, drawing a Sasha's ratchet/no she's not dueling chant. Becky comes back in and goes for the knee, only to get suplexed down, allowing the hot tag to Charlotte. She quickly gets Banks in the bridging Figure Four but Becky breaks it up as everything breaks down. Sasha Bankrupts Charlotte and Bayley makes a save but hits her partner in the process. Charlotte and Bayley start fighting each other and the opponents come in, drawing a double DQ at 5:50.

Rating: C. The match wasn't great but it was exactly the right booking. There was no need to have anyone get a pin here and it let Bayley show a lot more aggression. I'm still really high on Becky but she needs to show

that she can do something in the ring as she's barely had any ring time so far. The fourway could be awesome if they let these four go nuts.

Hideo Itami comes up to Finn Balor in the back and says he brought Finn into the company and will take him out if he has to in order to advance in the tournament.

The returning Emma says things haven't gone as she planned since she left NXT so next week she's coming back to face Carmella.

#1 Contenders Tournament First Round: Bull Dempsey vs. Baron Corbin

Baron sends him into the corner to start and runs him over with a shoulder. Dempsey bails to the floor but Baron is right back on top of him to send him back inside. Back in and a corner splash has Bull in trouble and the End of Days is good for the pin at 1:31. Total squash here with Dempsey getting nothing. That almost has to end the feud.

Baron Corbin says he just took a step closer to becoming NXT Champion and next week Adrian Neville takes a step closer to being erased. Dempsey comes up and says he'll knock Corbin's teeth out. Baron just walks away. That would seem to be the way out of Baron losing clean next week.

It's time for the contract signing. The champ comes out first but Regal is hesitant to bring out Owens. Kevin comes out and Sami looks sad as much as mad. Regal isn't going to let this turn into every other contract signing in WWE because he'll cancel the match if they make any contact. The fans chant OLE and Sami signs without saying anything. Owens looks at Sami instead of the contract. Sami asks if he's just going to look at him or if Owens is going to explain why. Owens doesn't move so Sami says he'll talk about the last 12 years.

They fought with and against each other so maybe he should have seen this coming. The truth is he didn't see it coming though and he never thought it would happen on a night like R-Evolution when both of them arrived. It doesn't matter though because Sami is going to beat the heck out of him at Takeover. Owens still won't sign because he doesn't like it being a non-title match.

What Owens did at R-Evolution was business because he'll fight anyone for the right prize. That title means more money and a better life for his family, so Owens isn't doing this unless it's a title match. Regal doesn't like Owens' last minute demands but Sami says wait a minute. Make it a title match because Owens really won't do it if he doesn't get what he wants. Regal writes something on the contract and Sami signs again. Owens eventually signs and throws the pen at Sami before leaving to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. This show was about moving things forward for Takeover and they've done a great job. The title change was a nice surprise as it was something you almost never get on TV but it made sense. That's the tagline I would use for almost everything on this show: it made sense. It's clear that someone is paying really close attention to these stories and has planned them out step by step. That's such an important thing to do and the matches are almost always worth the payoff. Good show here and they're doing a very good job of a short build to the next Takeover.

Results

Buddy Murphy/Wesley Blake b. Lucha Dragons – Rollup to Kalisto

Adrian Neville b. Tyson Kidd – Red Arrow

Bayley/Charlotte vs. Sasha Banks/Becky Lynch went to a double DQ

Baron Corbin b. Bull Dempsey – End of Days

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NXT – January 14, 2015: The Best Hour Of Wrestling I Have Ever Seen

NXT

Date: January 14, 2015

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Renee Young, Rich Brennan, Alex Riley

It's the first show on Wednesday nights and we're starting with a bang as Sami Zayn is giving Adrian Neville his rematch for the NXT Title. Kevin Owens is still lurking around and there's always a chance he could get involved. We also have the continuing story of crazy Marcus Louis stalking Tyler Breeze. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Tyson Kidd vs. Finn Balor

Balor has the full entrance minus the face paint, which is still awesome. On another note, does Charles Robinson age? He looks identical to how he looked back in 1999. Balor starts with a running dropkick at the bell but misses a top rope stomp. That's fine with Finn as he takes Tyson into the corner for a running basement dropkick, sending Kidd out to the floor. The Irishman follows but gets speared into the barricade for a loud crash. The fans seemed to like that one and I can't say I disagree.

Kidd has dedicated this match Charlotte. His cat, not the wrestler. Back in and Kidd shouts at Finn to kill him before we take a break. We come back with Kidd catapulting him face first into the bottom buckle for two before we hit a chinlock. A dropkick in the Tree of Woe gets two for Kidd but Balor nails a Pele Kick to get a breather. I'm glad someone in WWE finally started using that move. A running sleeper drop puts Kidd down so

he bails to the floor, only to have Balor nail a great flip dive.

Kidd pops back up with a running chest kick from the apron and the springboard elbow drop for two. They're just beating the heck out of each other here. The Sharpshooter goes on but Finn finally crawls over to the ropes. A slingshot Fameasser misses Balor so he grabs a reverse Impaler, followed by the top rope double stomp to end Kidd 11:55.

Rating: B+. These guys were beating the tar out of each other and it was awesome. Balor has such a presence to him and is more than ready to be on the main roster. Based on that, I'd be surprised if he makes it there in the next year because WWE won't bring people up to the main show for reasons I don't understand. Granted the longer he's here and doesn't have to get "fixed" by the writers, the better he's going to be.

Package on Zayn winning the title at R-Evolution minus the post match beatdown. This is all about Neville vs. Zayn.

Bull Dempsey says he's just as undefeated as Baron Corbin and tonight will be Corbin's End of Days. The last thing he's going to hear is BULL BULL BULL.

Baron Corbin vs. Bull Dempsey

The fans start the counting as they hammer away on each other with Bull going down first. Thankfully the fans give up after about twenty seconds and the fight heads outside. Back in and Bull slams him down but misses his flying headbutt. End of Days is good for the pin at 1:36. This was exactly what it needed to be and Baron looked like a monster.

Sasha Banks/Becky Lynch vs. Natalya/Charlotte

Banks' theme song is rapidly growing on me. Natalya headlocks Becky to the mat to start before getting two off a rollup. Renee tells us about Natalya and Lynch tagging in Japan about nine years ago as the villains are sent to the floor, setting up stereo baseball slides from Natalya and Charlotte. A double delayed suplex gets two on Becky before Charlotte wheelbarrow slams Natalya on top of her for two.

Banks comes in and gets snapmared down, allowing Natalya to step on the

back of her head to drive Sasha's face into the mat, immediately followed by a low dropkick. Sasha pops back up with two knees to the ribs as things FINALLY slow down a bit. The men on the main show can't keep up a pace like that most of the time. Off to Charlotte for a neckbreaker for two as everything breaks down. Banks hits a neckbreaker of her own on Charlotte and grabs the tights for the pin at 4:20. Banks: "I WON!!!"

Rating: B-. I really wanted more of this as Charlotte and Natalya were looking like a polished team out there while Lynch and Banks have more than enough attitude to carry themselves. I still want to see more from Lynch as she has a great look and persona, but Banks is getting almost all of the spotlight, which she certainly deserves.

NXT Title: Sami Zayn vs. Adrian Neville

Sami is defending. They shake hands to start and Sami scores first with an armdrag. The champ hooks a headlock but charges into an armdrag, sending him out to the floor for a second. Back in and Neville sends him into the corner but gets caught in his third headlock in three minutes. Sami leapfrogs over Adrian and avoids a dropkick, sending Neville into his first frustration of the match.

Adrian slaps him in the face and Neville says he's sorry. Sami says sorry and forearm him in the face, starting the slugout with Neville getting the better of it and sending the champ to the floor. A big dive puts Sami down again as we take a break. Back with Neville hitting a running uppercut in the corner for two and hooking a hurricanrana for an even closer near fall.

Sami grabs the leg to block the Red Arrow but Neville won't let him hit the Blue Thunder Bomb. The power of OLE lets Sami force him up on the second try but Neville kicks out again. Zayn rolls some Germans but Neville flips out of a chicken wing/half nelson suplex. Neville cartwheels onto Sami's shoulders and snaps off one of the hardest hurricanranas you'll ever see for two. The referee has to check if Sami can continue but he shakes his head yes.

Zayn half pops up into a Koji Clutch attempt but Neville rolls away, only to have to bail outside to avoid the Helluva Kick. Sami loads up the

diving DDT through the ropes but Neville superkicks him into a state of shock. Back in and Adrian has to bail out of the Red Arrow but avoids another Helluva Kick into a sweet bridging rollup for two. Sami goes into Beast Mode and grabs the exploder suplex followed by the Helluva Kick for the pin at 13:56.

Rating: A. This was a completely different kind of match than the title change. While that one was about the drama and storytelling, this was about two guys beating the living tar out of each other and actually making me believe the title was in jeopardy. Outstanding match here and both guys come out looking awesome.

Sami celebrates but Owens comes in with a pop up powerbomb and puts his boot on Sami's face. Owens kicks the title over to Zayn's head to end the show.

Overall Rating: A+. This was as good of an hour of wrestling television as I've ever seen. Ignoring a 96 second power brawl (which was entertaining as well), the worst match would have been the best Divas match on the main roster in probably six months. Between Balor and Kidd just beating the heck out of each other and Neville and Zayn beating the heck out of each other even harder, I haven't had this good of a time watching a show since...oh I'd say the last big NXT show. Go out of your way to see this episode as they debuted on Wednesday with a major bang.

Results

Finn Balor b. Tyson Kidd – Top rope double stomp

Baron Corbin b. Bull Dempsey – End of Days

Sasha Banks/Becky Lynch b. Natalya/Charlotte – Neckbreaker to Charlotte

Sami Zayn b. Adrian Neville – Helluva Kick

NXT – January 8, 2015: I Want To Be A Sami Zaniac

NXT

Date: January 8, 2015

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Rich Brennan, Corey Graves, Alex Riley

One of the many things I like about this show is they set up something for next week almost every time. In this case, we have three things, ranging from Itami vs. Curtis Axel to the Vaudevillains getting their rematch from R-Evolution to the return of Sami Zayn for the first time since he was laid out by Owens. That sounds like a stacked show so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's the champ to get things going. Sami gets ready to talk but leaves the ring to go be with the crowd and hold up the title. A YOU DESERVE IT chant stops him again before he gets to talk about what this title means. In anyone else's hands, it means you're the best. In his hands though, it means you can do it your way and keep doing it how you want because the proof is right here.

He's going to hate himself for saying this, but this title isn't his. It belongs to both him and the fans. Everyone here is part of a band called Sami Zayn and the Zaniacs. The fans start the OLE chant and Sami loves that song. Takeover was the best night of his life, but it didn't end like he wanted it to. Owens cried on his shirt that night and then hurt Sami really bad. He may have hurt Sami, but the champ is right back here, ready to defend the title.

This brings out Adrian Neville who says they tore each other to pieces last time and Zayn was the better man. Neville saw a new Sami and he's now the champion so congratulations. Sami appreciates it and is pretty sure Neville is entitled to a rematch. This brings out William Regal to congratulate them on having such a great match at R-Evolution. There will

indeed be a rematch and it takes place next week on the first Wednesday show.

The Vaudevillains can't wait to right the wrong from Takeover and prove their manliness.

Hideo Itami vs. Curtis Axel

Axel is trying to be the last real man in wrestling. At this point there are almost enough of those to make a stable. Itami scores with the early kicks but Axel takes him into the corner and hits a series of clotheslines to the back of the head. A chinlock doesn't get Curtis anywhere but a knee to the jaw gets two. Axel throws Hideo down and asks who cares about Itami.

Curtis slaps on an armbar out of nowhere (no arm work so far into the match so let's ignore the neck work and go after the arm) but Hideo fights out and nails a clothesline of his own. Itami loads up a tornado DDT but instead jumps to the apron to snap Axel's throat across the top rope. The top rope clothesline is good for two but Axel tries the PerfectPlex. That goes nowhere so Itami snapmares him down and hits something like Trouble in Paradise to a kneeling Axel for the pin at 5:45.

Rating: C-. Not bad here and Hideo is starting to round into form as a singles guy. The clotheslines are a nice alternative to the kicks and it really opens up his offense quite a bit. It's also nice to see him finally have a finisher, even if it's the same move he does more often than any other. Axel as the new version of Tyson Kidd would be a fine role for him as he's talented in the ring but needs to reestablish himself after the last few years.

Tyson Kidd is getting ready in the back so Natalya tries to intercept Byron Saxton. A Total Divas interview is cut off by Kidd asking if she's taken care of the cats. Natalya goes off to feed them so Kidd can talk about how important it is to become NXT Champion. That means he can be the new face of NXT, right before he replaces Sarah McLachlan as the face of the ASPCA. Kidd loves all cats, except Grumpy Cat. Fact.

Video on Bull Dempsey vs. Baron Corbin, based on who can squash jobbers faster. They face off for the first time next week.

Sasha Banks vs. Alexa Bliss

This is due to Banks breaking Bliss' nose a few weeks back. Alexa grabs a quick sunset flip for two but has her headscissors countered into a faceplant. Banks takes her time trash talking but stops to blast Alexa with right hands to the face. She lays Bliss across the middle rope for a double knee to the ribs, setting up the Bank Statement for the submission at 2:06.

Quick package on Neville vs. Zayn from R-Evolution.

Tyler Breeze vs. Chad Gable

Gable is an Olympic wrestler who has gotten rave reviews so far. Gable easily takes Breeze down to start and rides him with a front facelock. The fans are WAY into Chad to start as Graves won't confirm or deny that he runs Breeze's fan club. Breeze fights up and takes him down for a chinlock while throwing in some trash talk to the Uggo. Gable gets to his feet and throws on an armbar over the top rope ala Alberto Del Rio. He breaks at four and Breeze is TICKED, setting up the Beauty Shot for the pin at 2:37. Gable looked good out there in the limited time he had.

Finn Balor is looking forward to facing Tyson Kidd next week, but Kidd is going to need more than nine lives to survive. Fact. Simple, yet effective. Why is that so lost on the main show writers?

We see a still from Breeze's post match celebration, showing an ominous face peeking out from the curtain to look at him. It's not clear whose face it is.

Tag Team Titles: Lucha Dragons vs. Vaudevillains

Vaudevillains are challenging again after the Dragons pinned the illegal man at R-Evolution. Kalisto quickly springboards onto Gotch and pounds away with right hands before it's already off to Cara. Some kind of modified Gory Stretch has Gotch in trouble as Graves says these two might be equally strong. English comes in and says the titles are coming home

with them tonight. He school boys Cara through the ropes and out to the floor for a nice move, but Kalisto sends both Vaudevillains to the floor for a big double dive.

We take a break and come back (after an announcement that Daniel Bryan will be in action on the first Thursday Smackdown) with Kalisto trying the big spinning wristlock, only to have English hold the ropes to send the masked man crashing down. Gotch gets two off a big belly to back before a double chop puts Kalisto down again.

English comes back in but gets rolled up for two, only to slap on a chinlock. Back up and Kalisto finally rolls over for the hot tag to Cara. Everything breaks down and Gotch kicks Cara in the head, only to be low bridged out to the floor. In what looked to be a botched finish, Cara lifts English up for a powerbomb and Kalisto adds a spinning clothesline to the back of the head to retain at 11:45.

Rating: C+. The match was fine but the ending really didn't look good. In theory it was supposed to be a clothesline to the front but it looked awkward instead of devastating. The Dragons need new opponents now, and thankfully NXT actually has some teams they could quickly build up into contenders. I'm not sure where the Vaudevillains go, but a refocus on the comedic stuff could be in order.

Overall Rating: C+. Not one of their stronger episodes here but they did a great job of setting up next week to look like something special. Sami's opening promo was excellent with a ton of emotion and it set up the rematch next week. I really like how NXT is able to wait things out and tease the big stuff, such as Owens showdown with Zayn. Not the match mind you but just those two in the same place at the same time. Instead of hot shotting to that, we're getting what should be a great match out of the way, instead of just jumping straight to it. WWE could learn from that, but the circumstances are a bit different up top.

Results

Hideo Itami b. Curtis Axel – Spinning kick to the head

Sasha Banks b. Alexa Bliss – Bank Statement

Tyler Breeze b. Chad Gable – Beauty Shot

Lucha Dragons b. Vaudevillains – Powerbomb/top rope clothesline combination to English

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2014 Awards: Most Improved

This one is always up for some debate.

We'll start by just listing off some contenders.

First up is the suddenly dominant Lashley. This was what WWE should have done with him for years: find the guy a mouthpiece and let him just hurt people. He's a genetic freak that can wrestle on the mat, so let him do that instead of trying to make him a superhero. I never got why WWE wanted him to be a face when he has the personality of a turnip, but ever since he became a monster heel, he was one of the highlights of show.

Ethan Carter III is the same thing but as an intellectual heel instead of a monster. The guy went from being nothing in WWE to one of the best acts in TNA, very much in the same vein as Rick Rude back in 1991. Carter is going to be a player in TNA going forward and I could easily see him winning the World Title in the coming year.

The Dusts have gone from eh to one of the top teams in the company, though that's not really saying much.

Seth Rollins started the year as the forgotten member of the Shield and became a strong contender for Wrestler of the Year. You couple that with more than holding his own on the mic and it's hard to argue that he's shot through the roof this year.

Tyson Kidd...the more I think about this one the less I buy into it. It's not so much that he got better but more along the lines of his got pushed. He's basically the same wrestler but with facts and cats. I like what I'm seeing out of him, but it's not like he's gotten insanely good overnight or anything.

We'll give the Divas a shot and include Charlotte. She went from a borderline disaster to the woman who can actually look down on the rest of the NXT girls. I have no idea where this came from but suddenly her title defenses are one of the highlights of the big NXT shows, which I don't think anyone was expecting. That's definitely worth a nomination.

Finally, you have to mention Tyler Breeze. The guy went from a goon to tearing the house down every time he was in a big match. That match he had against Zayn at Takeover was outstanding and he's nailed so much of the character all year long. This is one of the best surprises all year and he's gone through the roof.

At the end of the day though, I have to go with Rollins. I would have bet on him being Kofi Kingston but he's looking more like a Randy Orton every day. He's always had talent, but there are a dozen guys on the roster who have untapped skills. To go from the potential he had to realizing that potential is a huge improvement and worthy of the award.

NXT – December 4, 2014: Inzayn Intensity

NXT

Date: December 4, 2014

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Jason Albert, Alex Riley, Rich Brennan

It's the last show before R-Evolution and I'd assume tonight is just going to be about firming up matches for next week. I'm really hoping we don't get a rushed heel turn from Neville as the match would be far more entertaining with both guys staying on the paths that got them here. Other than that we might have some fallout from Bayley calling out Lynch and Banks last week. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Charlotte vs. Mia Yim

Non-title. Charlotte starts with a WOO before sending Mia into the corner for a slap to the back. Natural Selection is good for the pin at 51 seconds.

Post match Sasha Banks, in a Charlotte shirt, comes out and says just give her the title now. Charlotte tells her to bring it and starts a ratchet chant. Sasha says she has more flair than Charlotte and her daddy. She's going to beat Charlotte so badly that she'll be a bigger loser than her old man. This brings out Bayley in a big leg brace and on crutches to tell Sasha to shut her ratchet face. Banks kicks her in the knee and runs off when Charlotte comes up the ramp. Sasha tries to get a cheap shot but Charlotte drags her to the ring and says get a ref out here. Becky Lynch sneaks in from behind though and Banks lays out the champ.

Time for another silent movie from the Vaudevillains! This time the police commissioner calls them to say the Lucha Dragons are dropping water balloons off the roof of city hall. After a training montage

(complete with Gotch fighting a video of a tiger), the Vaudevillains attach an anvil to the Dragons, sending them down...into a mushroom cloud? Gotch is glad that they took the belts away because they would have just weighed the Dragons down even more. Keep in mind though that no Lucha Dragons were harmed in the filming of this motion picture, but that won't be the case next week. These things are brilliant.

Vaudevillians vs. Buddy Murphy/Wesley Blake

English jumps over Blake to start but dives into a powerslam for two. A snapmare sends Wesley into the ropes though in a nice idea. It's off to Murphy as the fans sound like they're sighing for some reason. Off to Gotch for some Hindu Squats while holding Buddy in an Indian Deathlock. English comes back in for some elbows to the leg before it's back to Gotch to stay on the leg. Murphy finally rolls away and makes the tag as everything breaks down. Blake is sent to the floor for a big crash and the Whirling Dervish ends Murphy at 4:15.

Rating: D+. Not much to see here but the Vaudevillains are getting better in the ring. Those vignettes are as good as anything I've seen in a long time. Murphy and Blake are decent in the ring but they really need to stop losing every time if they're supposed to have a future.

Regal is in the back with Tyler Breeze, who hasn't seen Marcus Louis since he wandered off last week. Tyson Kidd comes in and says he wants a rematch with Balor, but Regal makes it a tag with Itami/Balor vs. Kidd/Breeze. This took less than a minute and covered two stories. Why does it take Raw twenty minutes to cover one?

Bull Dempsey vs. Elias Samson

The fans count until the flying headbutt ends Samson at 22 seconds.

Baron Corbin vs. ???

End of Days, 11 seconds. Of course Bull was watching from the stage.

Kevin Owens video, talking about how he's fought and teamed with Seth Rollins, Daniel Bryan, Adrian Neville, and Sami Zayn (called Owens' best friend), but WWE called all of them first. Now it's his turn.

Tyler Breeze/Tyson Kidd vs. Hideo Itami/Finn Balor

Kidd holds the ropes open for Natalya and offers to do the same for Breeze in a funny bit. Itami and Kidd get things going but it's quickly off to Breeze, whose arm is quickly yanked. Balor comes in with a slingshot stomp for no count but Kidd makes a blind tag and decks Finn to take over as we go to a break. Back with Breeze coming in to stomp Finn in the corner before it's quickly back to Kidd for even faster stomping.

A neckbreaker gets two for Tyson and we hit a bow and arrow. Balor fights up but misses a dropkick to put him right back down. Breeze grabs a neckbreaker of his own for two before Kidd comes back in for a hard kick to the leg. A slingshot legdrop to the back of the head gets two for Kidd but he eats a Pele (now called a soccer kick), allowing Finn to tag Hideo. Itami fires off a series of kicks to destroy Breeze before hitting a delayed running dropkick in the corner to a sitting Tyler. Everything breaks down and Balor hits Shadows Over Hell, setting up Itami's kick to the back of the head for the pin at 11:30.

Rating: C. Pretty standard tag match here but Itami continues to look totally one dimensional. I know he isn't the biggest guy in the world but he needs to do something more than just kick a lot. Daniel Bryan has proven that a smaller guy can do more than just strike while still having it be a major part of his offense so it certainly can be done.

Post match Finn tells Ascension to bring everything they have because he's going to show them something they've never seen before.

Here's Adrian Neville for the final speech before the title match. A lot of people have said he should be conflicted by this match, but his goal is the same as always: to win at all cost. Some people say that he should be ashamed of what he did to retain the title at Fatal Four Way and every other title match. If he had it his way, it would have gone completely differently, but that's the fundamental difference between himself and Sami: Zayn doesn't have the killer instinct and that's why he'll never be NXT Champion.

This brings out Sami who says he's been listening to everything Neville has been saying and it's ticking him off. Who is Neville to act like

Sami's babysitter and tell him how he should live? Whatever Sami decides to do after the match is up to him and his actions, not Neville's. Adrian backs off a bit and says he respects Sami more than anyone else and next week it's going to be an honor to face Sami in the match of their careers.

Adrian offers a handshake but Sami says no. This is where he goes wrong every single time but he won't do it here. This isn't about respect and he slaps Adrian in the face. Neville doesn't get to end him because it's going to be Sami ending Adrian's story and taking that title. This wasn't a heel turn for either guy but rather Sami just being more intense this time around.

Overall Rating: B-. The wrestling wasn't great here but I'm wanting to see Takeover a lot more than I did coming in. That main event has me drooling because you know those two are going to tear the house down with the near falls. The only match that doesn't do much for me is Ascension vs. Itami/Balor as there doesn't seem to be a ton of drama there, but whatever gets Ascension onto the main roster is a good thing at this point. This show did exactly what it was supposed to do and sets up a good looking card for next week.

Results

Charlotte b. Mia Yim – Natural Selection

Vaudevillians b. Wesley Blake/Buddy Murphy – Whirling Dervish to Murphy

Bull Dempsey b. Elias Samson – Flying headbutt

Baron Corbin b. ??? – End of Days

Finn Balor/Hideo Itami b. Tyler Breeze/Tyson Kidd – Kick to Breeze's head

NXT – November 20, 2014: The Fastest Show In Wrestling

NXT

Date: November 20, 2014

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Renee Young, Alex Riley, Rich Brennan

We're getting close to the end of the year and ultimately the next Takeover special, but now the main event isn't as clear. Last week Sami Zayn was tricked into losing his NXT Title shot against Adrian Neville, leaving his future up in the air. Other than that we have Itami/Balor getting ready for their showdown against the Ascension which will be the newcomers' official welcome to the company. Let's get to it.

We recap Sami's loss last week.

Opening sequence.

Bayley vs. Becky Lynch

Bayley is sent out to the apron to start and gets dragged right back in. A release northern lights suplex and legdrop give Becky two and we're already in a chinlock. They get right back up with Bayley hitting some quick ax handles to the chest for two. Sasha offers a distraction from the floor though, allowing Lynch to pull the hair and grab a rollup and tights for the pin at 2:14.

Charlotte comes out to save Bayley from a post match beatdown.

Bayley thanks Charlotte for the help but warns her to stay away from Sasha. They hug and everything seems ok.

Here are the Vaudevillains with something to say. They're patient gentlemen, but they deserve the title shot that they've earned. Cue two mini wrestlers dressed like the Lucha Dragons (Renee: "Kind of like Lucha-Loompas!") and we're actually having a match.

Mini Lucha Dragons vs. Vaudevillains

The full sized guys takes turns with airplane spins on #1, even handing him off between each other instead of dropping him. #2 gets tagged and doesn't want to come in. A quick neckbreaker from English gets the pin at 1:29.

Kevin Owens (Steen) is coming on December 11, 2014.

Baron Corbin vs. Elias Sampson

End of Days, 22 seconds. The fans were counting again.

Bull Dempsey comes out for his match and stares Corbin down on the way.

Bull Dempsey vs. Steve Cutler

The fans start counting again. Fans: "21! 22! 23! BARON'S BETTER! BARON'S BETTER!" Bull destroys Cutler and no sells some right hands before the top rope headbutt ends this at 54 seconds.

Tyson Kidd vs. CJ Parker

It's the rare heel vs. heel match here. Kidd grabs a hammerlock around the ropes as the fans chant TOTAL DIVAS. Parker nails a quick kick to the face for two but Kidd knocks him out to the floor. A dragon screw leg whip onto the ropes has Parker in even more trouble and the Sharpshooter ends him at 2:59.

Kidd offers to excellently execute Finn Balor next week.

Enzo takes credit for Carmella's success but nothing comes of it.

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. Dash Wilder/Scott Dawson

Enzo and Cass aren't the Parker Brothers, but they'll scrabble your headpiece, monopolize you, connect your four eyes and never feel sorry for it. Enzo grabs a headlock on Dawson to start as Renee critiques Amore's hair. Off to Cass to clean house before shouting "ENZO! I'M GONNA TAG YOU IN!" Cass kicks Dawson's head off, giving Enzo the pin at 1:38.

Ascension runs in and destroys Wilder with the Fall of Man. Fans: "SEVEN MORE TIMES!" They're going to kill Itami and Balor before they rise again.

Zayn thanks Regal for the chance to get something off his chest tonight. End of scene.

Here's a serious looking Sami Zayn to talk about last week. He's known he has what it takes to be a champion his entire life, but last week proves otherwise. We see a similar video to the opening montage of Neville pinning Sami in the title match last week. Fans: "YOU GOT ROBBED!" Sami asks Neville to come out so here's a limping champion.

Sami talks about having no business being here if he can't win the big one. Now Neville doesn't owe him anything because he gave him a title match last week, but if their friendship means anything to him, Adrian will give him one more chance at the NXT Championship. If Zayn can't win that one, then he's done. Neville says he'd give him a rematch tonight but that's not his decision.

Above all though they're friends, and Neville thinks Sami has nothing left to prove. Zayn gets mad and says the only thing he has left to prove is on Adrian's shoulder. If he can't beat Neville for that title, then he doesn't need to be here. Sami sounds like he's on the verge of tears. Cue Regal who says Zayn is far from a failure.

Sami was part of NXT Arrival and Regal can't think of any main event better than Sami Zayn vs. Adrian Neville. That rematch will take place at NXT Takeover: Our Evolution on December 11. Neville is pleased but he doesn't want Sami's career on the line because he won't be responsible for ending Sami's dream. Zayn again says he's done if he loses and drops the mic to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This is a hard one to grade as everything went by so fast. I kind of like it that way though as the matches may have been short but they all did their jobs efficiently enough, especially when two of them were about winning as fast as they could. Sometimes you don't need to keep a match going just for the sake of keeping it going and NXT was smart enough to realize that. Sami's promo at the end was awesome but

it kind of telegraphs the ending to the match. Still though, solid show tonight as NXT continues to destroy the main show in making the most out of their time.

Results

Becky Lynch b. Bayley – Rollup with a handful of tights

Vaudevillains b. Mini Lucha Dragons – Neckbreaker to #2

Baron Corbin b. Elias Sampson – End of Days

Bull Dempsey b. Steve Cutler – Top rope headbutt

Tyson Kidd b. CJ Parker – Sharpshooter

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady b. Dash Wilder/Scott Dawson – Big boot to Dawson

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Smackdown – November 14, 2014: Story Advancement And

Good Matches. Mass Hysteria!

Smackdown

Date: November 14, 2014

Location: Echo Arena, Liverpool, England

Attendance: 2,500

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tom Phillips, John Bradshaw Layfield

We're wrapping up the European shows here with the blue show over in Liverpool. By now most of the Survivor Series main event is set as I believe we have five guys apiece. It should be interesting to see if any of them are swapped out again. They've done a nice job so far of building up the people in the match other than Cena, which should be the point of something like this. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Raw's events and all the changes to the teams.

Here's the returning Chris Jericho for a British Highlight Reel. Jericho has one burning question: Who is Adam Rose's Bunny, because he's AWESOME. He thinks it's Funaki, drawing the first Funaki chant in WWE history. That's enough hijinks though so let's get our guests out here. This brings out HHH and Stephanie, with Steph doing Jericho's pose in a cute bit.

Jericho would like to know why the Authority wanted to be on the show. Stephanie says it was because it's been too long since Smackdown had the Highlight Reel and they like to have fun. She sucks up to the fans and calls them the most important part of the show. We get a YES chant, which shows how important the fans are because they keep him that popular. However, he wouldn't be there without the Authority. Who could run the WWE without the Authority? Jericho: "I could."

Actually he has a better idea: the fans run WWE. He lists off some humiliating ideas for HHH, such as cleaning Jericho's boots, before showing us a clip of Vickie Guerrero shoving Stephanie into the mud in her retirement match. That's enough for HHH who says the wolf doesn't ask to be embraced by sheep. The Authority is going to be laughing when they

win at Survivor Series. Jericho should learn that when he calls again to come back and get his WWE fix, because he might be erased from the WWE history books by then. Chris thinks this is an arena full of Jericholics and starts singing the Goodbye song.

Video on Wyatt costing Ambrose the Cell match.

Bray Wyatt vs. Sin Cara

Bray nails him a few times to start but misses a charge. Cara goes up for the Swanton but only hits mat. Back up and the charge hits this time, setting up the suplex slam. The Spider Walk sets up Sister Abigail for the pin at 2:16. Total squash.

Post match Bray says he can feel Ambrose screaming for help in his heart. Dean used to feel unloved and woke up every Christmas morning, hoping that daddy would come back. But when he came downstairs, only darkness was waiting for him. That's what life has become for Dean, but Bray is the light he's been searching for his entire life.

Salvation is at hand so let Bray fix him. Cue Ambrose but Bray bails and calls Dean predictable. All he has to do is push the right buttons and Dean will be there right on time. Ambrose wants to punish him, just like he wants to punish his daddy. Bray gets in but gets knocked out by a single right hand. As he walks away, Bray says Dean is crying out for help and that he is the key.

Xavier Woods' new day is coming.

Goldust/Stardust vs. Adam Rose/The Bunny

Non-title. Rose is a bit less energetic on the way to the ring this week. We get a clip from Main Event where the Bunny took out Goldust, allowing Rose to roll up Stardust for a surprise pin to get back in Adam's good graces. Adam runs over Goldust to start but gets thrown into the corner for a tag off to Stardust. The Express tries to fire up Rose as he fights out of a chinlock. Goldust and Rose bang heads and the hot tag brings in the Bunny. Stardust gets taken down and won't tag out, allowing Stardust to block a splash with knees. Dark Matter ends the Bunny at 2:03.

Rose Party Fouls the Bunny post match.

WWE2K15 stuff.

Dolph Ziggler looks at what the Authority has put him through in recent weeks and isn't worried about his triple threat elimination title defense tonight. He says he's survived everything they've thrown at him and if this is the night he loses, he's going down with a fight and staying on Team Cena. All he has to do is survive until Survivor Series and then the Authority is gone.

Video on Ryback.

Ryback says he's on his own team and the only person who needs to worry about surviving is Kane, who he faces tonight. What you saw on Monday was just an appetizer and unfortunately for Kane, it's almost feeding time.

Intercontinental Title: Tyson Kidd vs. Cesaro vs. Dolph Ziggler

Ziggler is defending under elimination rules. Kidd gets shoved away to start and Cesaro kicks Dolph in the face. The smaller guys dropkick Cesaro down but Dolph has to kick out of a rollup from Tyson. They trade rapid fire rollups for two each until Dolph dropkicks Cesaro down again. We take a break and come back with Cesaro suplexing both guys at the same time in a nice power display. A powerbomb plants Dolph and Kidd comes back in with a springboard elbow drop.

Cesaro throws Tyson down to cover Ziggler for two and the fans think this is awesome. Dolph gets two off a Fameasser to Kidd but gets caught in the Tree of Woe. Now it's Kidd with some delayed dropkicks to Dolph's face but Cesaro nails a clothesline for two on the Canadian. The champ comes back in with a high cross body to Cesaro as JBL rips on Ziggler for complaining too much. Ziggler neckbreakers Kidd and DDTs Cesaro at the same time for two each. Kidd pops back up with a neckbreaker of his own to the champ but gets caught with an uppercut on the top.

They all head to the corner and grapple up top until Cesaro superplexes Ziggler while Kidd powerbombs Cesaro for the Tower of Doom. Cesaro covers Ziggler but Kidd slaps on the Sharpshooter to the European at the same

time. Pure leg strength breaks the hold though and Cesaro counters the running DDT with Swiss Death. We take another break and come back with Kidd hitting a Blockbuster on Cesaro, driving him into Ziggler's raised knees at the same time.

For once that hurts the knees so Kidd puts on the Sharpshooter with Cesaro adding a Crossface at the same time. In what JBL calls a very stupid move, Kidd lets go of his half and stomps on Cesaro, earning him a Cesaro Swing. Ziggler comes back with the running DDT for two on Cesaro but Kidd kicks the champ in the face, right into a German suplex from Cesaro. Back up and a Zig Zag nails Cesaro but Kidd dropkicks the champ down and steals a pin to eliminate Cesaro at 18:17.

So it's Ziggler vs. Kidd for the title now with the champ on the floor. Tyson headscissors him down into the steps before running the barricade for a kick to the face. Back in and Kidd chokes on the ropes but gets rolled up for two. A Moss Covered Three Handled Family Credenza gets two for the challenger so Kidd springboards with a dive only designed to get superkicked down for two. Tyson pops back up and grabs the Sharpshooter, only to have Dolph roll through into the Zig Zag for the pin at 21:43.

Rating: B+. This had the time to get going and worked out quite well by the end. I like that Kidd is getting a solid push and getting to show off his skills instead of just being an accessory to Natalya. This feud is doing a great job to build up Ziggler, and more importantly the Intercontinental Title, which have been needed for a long time now. Really good, long match here.

Natalya vs. Layla

Layla steals the shirt Natalya is about to throw into the crowd. Natalya rolls out of a wristlock ala Owen Hart but Layla rolls out of an early Sharpshooter attempt. They trade some hard forearms until Layla just kicks her in the head. Some choking on the ropes gets two for Layla and we hit a figure four neck lock. Off to a body vice instead as we keep cutting to Summer Rae on the floor, even though she hasn't done anything. Layla poses a lot but gets dropkicked down for two. Natalya gets thrown out to the floor but slaps Summer hard in the face. Back in and a quick

Sharpshooter makes Layla tap at 3:55.

Rating: D+. Eh Summer looked good in a short black dress and Layla is always good looking. I'm not sure why I'm supposed to care about this though but I'm assuming it's something related to a show that doesn't air with the rest of WWE's shows and is about four months removed from current events.

Recap of the opening segment.

Kofi Kingston's new day is coming as well.

We recap Bray's promo on Dean earlier.

Ambrose shouts about being sick of Bray Wyatt. Bray jumps him from behind and lays Ambrose out. He says this world isn't made for people like them and labels are the way the world puts them in a box.

Ryback vs. Kane

HHH and Stephanie are at ringside. Kane grabs a headlock to start as we're already in the slow power counters stage. Ryback runs him over with a shoulder but eats an uppercut for his efforts. Cole wants to know what HHH and Stephanie could possibly do if they lose at Survivor Series because it's all the know. A suplex puts Kane down and we take a break. Back with Ryback hitting his Thesz Press and slamming Kane's head into the mat.

The Meat Hook is stopped by a big boot and an elbow drop gets two for Kane. Ryback fights back with chops but gets whipped hard into the corner. We hit the chinlock for a bit but Ryback powers up and breaks a chokeslam attempt. Now the Meat Hook connects but Kane escapes the Shell Shock and takes it to the floor where a chair to Ryback's ribs draws a DQ at 11:45.

Rating: C-. Watchable power match here with neither guy doing anything of note but enough big crashes to make it work. Ryback continues to look good in the ring and capable of doing more than big spots, though I'm not sure why they couldn't have Kane take a pin here. I don't know why they keep letting him lose by DQ but it's not going to kill him to lose to a

fairly big name.

Ryback shrugs off the chair shots and nails Kane with the chair. He stares HHH down to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. Smackdown and WWE continue to pick up steam as they let the wrestlers do their thing tonight. It's almost like interesting stuff happens here, including Ambrose vs. Wyatt which has mainly been built up on Fridays. This wasn't a must see show or anything but it had a great TV match that got a lot of time. What more can you ask for from Smackdown anymore?

Results

Bray Wyatt b. Sin Cara – Sister Abigail

Stardust/Goldust b. Adam Rose/The Bunny – Dark Matter to the Bunny

Dolph Ziggler b. Cesaro and Tyson Kidd – Zig Zag to Kidd

Natalya b. Layla – Sharpshooter

Ryback b. Kane via DQ when Kane used a chair

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