

# Wrestler of the Day – July 7: Barry Windham

Today is one of the most talented wrestlers you'll ever see: Barry Windham. This is going to be a shorter list as one of the matches is over forty minutes long. It's well worth it though.

Windham got started in 1979 so we'll pick things up at the first Wrestlemania. Barry is part of the WWF Tag Team Champions the US Express.

Tag Titles: US Express vs. Nikolai Volkoff/Iron Sheik

The Express is Barry Windham and Mike Rotundo and they're defending tonight. A little trivia for you: the song Real American was originally used for the two of them but Hogan wound up using it instead. The heels do their whole Russian national anthem and Iran/Russia #1 deal before the match. Rotundo and Sheik start things off with the Iranian hooking a headlock. A dropkick puts Sheik down and Mike grabs a headlock.

Off to Barry who avoids double teaming and causes the challengers to collide. Back to Rotundo to work over Nikolai with an elbow drop getting two. Windham comes in off the top with a shot to the arm and Rotundo does the same thing. Sheik suplexes Mike down for two as the foreigners take over. Nikolai drops him throat first across the throat and the USA chant starts up.

A sunset flip gets a quick two for Mike but it's back to Sheik for an abdominal stretch. That doesn't last long though as Mike hiptosses out of it and it's off to Barry via the hot tag. The bulldog (Barry's finisher at the time) takes Volkoff out as everything breaks down. In the melee, Sheik hits Windham in the back with the cane for the pin and the titles.

**Rating:** C. This was a better match than we've seen so far with the fans getting way into the whole USA vs. foreigners thing. The title change was there only so something historic could happen and the Express got the belts back about two and a half months later. They would split soon after that with both guys heading to the NWA.

Here's the big match. From Battle of the Belts II, on February 14, 1986.

#### NWA World Title: Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham

Flair is defending of course and actually comes out to a Phil Collins song. They shake hands to start and Windham gets the early advantage with a dropkick and slam to send the champion to the floor. Back in and they fight over a top wristlock before going into a nice technical sequence to take them down to the mat. Flair goes for the leg but Barry grabs a hammerlock to escape.

Ric fights out of the hold but gets put right back into the hammerlock to keep him in trouble. Off to an armbar from Barry before he takes Flair into the corner for some good old right hands to the face. Flair goes for a right hand of his own and Barry is offended for some reason. A rollup gets two on Ric and Barry grabs a headscissors to keep control. Flair slips out and cranks on the leg but opts for a cover instead, only to have Windham bridge up for a long time to block.

Chops don't have much effect so Windham comes back with more right hands to take over. Barry hooks a Boston crab but Flair makes it to a rope. A vertical suplex gets two and we hit the abdominal stretch on Flair. What looked to be a low blow gets Flair out of trouble and he throws Barry to the floor with Windham landing on the steps. Back in and a bleeding Windham is in trouble but he avoids the knee drop and Flair bangs his knee. As is the case in almost every Flair match, he gets put in his own Figure Four. Ric finally makes the ropes and Barry

has to start over again.

Windham cranks on the leg and drives some knees into the champion's bad wheel. Flair comes back with a knee in the corner and Ric takes a breather in the corner. Ric hooks a figure four headscissors but Windham reverses into another leg lock. That goes nowhere so it's back to the corner for some more chops. A piledriver puts Barry down for two but he counters a snapmare into a backslide for two. Back up and a big lariat gets two for the challenger but both guys are getting tired.

There's the Flair Flip in the corner and Ric heads out to the floor. Referee Bill Alfonso (yes that Bill Alfonso) orders them back inside and Ric, now bleeding as well, gets in another shot to take over. Now it's Windham being thrown outside before having his sunset flip blocked by a right hand. There's a sleeper to Windham but Flair opts for a suplex to put Barry down again.

Now it's time for Ric to go after the leg with his old standards. The Figure Four goes on but Barry turns it over for the break. Ric takes forever to get up top and earns that slam down. Windham gets another burst of adrenaline but misses a knee drop of his own to put him right back in trouble. Flair busts out a double stomp of all things but the referee gets bumped.

Barry is sent over the ropes and lands back first on the apron. He comes back in with a missile dropkick and now the fans are waking up. The groggy referee only counts two so Windham puts Flair in a sleeper. Ric basically collapses to break the hold but Barry's splash hits knees.

The Figure Four is countered into a small package but Ric lands in the ropes. Another big clothesline gets two for Barry and there's another Flair Flip. Ric gets to the top but dives into a right hand to the ribs. Barry misses the clothesline

and Flair cross bodies both of them out to the floor. Both guys fight to keep the other from getting in and it's a double countout.

**Rating:** A-. This was one of their weaker matches but it shows you what they're capable of doing when they have the time and stage to have a great match. Barry was so smooth in the ring for someone of his size (6'6, 260lbs) and it was amazing to see him move around the ring as fast as he did. Very good match.

We'll jump ahead to Barry teaming up with Lex Luger to go after the World Tag Team Titles at the first Clash of the Champions.

World Tag Team Titles: Arn Anderson/Tully Blanchard vs. Lex Luger/Barry Windham

Anderson and Blanchard are defending and Windham and Luger are incredibly popular due to the Horsemen (the champions) kicking him out of the team for reasons explained earlier. Luger starts with Tully and pushes him down with ease. The champions try some double teaming but both get clotheslined followed by a powerslam to Blanchard. Lex puts Tully in his Torture Rack finisher but Anderson kicks Luger in the knee for the save. Arn comes in and goes after the knee before it's back to Tully for more of the same.

Lex sends the Horsemen into each other and Tully can't stop the hot tag to Windham. Barry cleans house and hits the lariat followed by a powerslam for two on Blanchard. Ross is losing his mind on commentary as only he can. A sleeper nearly puts Blanchard out but Barry lets him fall to the floor for a breather. Back in and Tully goes up but gets slammed down and put in an abdominal stretch. Arn makes the save and Horsemen manager JJ Dillon distracts the referee, allowing Anderson to DDT Windham for a very close two.

Anderson tries to hold Windham's shoulder down for two but

jumps in the air, allowing Barry to raise his knees and crotch Arn for a breather. Tully breaks up another tag attempt but gets caught by a cross body for two. They run the ropes a few times and collide, knocking both guys down to the mat. A gutwrench suplex puts Tully down again and it's back to Anderson who misses a knee drop and gets popped with a right hand. Windham is spent though and collapses before making the tag.

Tully comes in again and hits his slingshot suplex finisher for a close two on Barry. Anderson comes in off the tag but Barry goes over to the corner and falls into the tag to Luger. Lex cleans house again and sends the champions into each other but Tully gets in a knee to the back to slow him down. Luger shrugs it off and snaps off the powerslam as everything breaks down. Dillon holds up a chair in the corner but Luger reverses a whip to send Arn head first into the steel for the pin and the titles. The crowd reaction for the pin is other worldly as the Horsemen were despised at this point.

**Rating:** B. This was the kind of match the show needed to make it historic as the Horsemen had held the titles for months on end and Luger was the man that needed to take them away. Barry was making the match work here before Luger came in to clean house at the end. That's a good formula for someone like Luger and the result worked well.

Barry would turn heel and join the Horsemen soon after this and eventually become US Champion. Here he is defending at the 1988 Great American Bash.

#### US Title: Barry Windham vs. Dusty Rhodes

Barry is defending here and this is Dusty's rematch after being stripped of the title for beating up Jim Crockett. Windham used to be Dusty's friend but turned on him to join the Horsemen and take Luger's spot so there's heat here. Barry charges in but Dusty lifts up his elbow to scare him away.

Dusty sends him to the floor quickly and Barry needs time out. Barry drops an elbow on the back of his head but Dusty pops up for a gorilla press to take over.

A DDT puts Barry down again as Rhodes controls to start us off. Rhodes hits a top rope cross body for two after the earth stops shaking. Dusty pops both Windham and JJ with elbows and the crowd explodes. The fat man was indeed popular and no one can take that away from him. Five minutes in now and Barry pounds away. I miss the NWA telling us the time gone in a match as it helps keep track of where we are and wasn't just for time limit endings.

We go to the floor and Windham's piledriver is reversed. Barry pounds away in the corner and we go outside again. And never mind as Dusty leans back on the rope (amazingly it doesn't snap like a twig) to slingshot Barry out to the floor again. Barry grabs his finisher, a claw hold, after JJ interferes. We're currently at 90 seconds of the US Champion having his finishing move on Dusty but Dusty is gyrating. Make that two minutes of nonstop claw. Dusty manages to stand up, climb the ropes (which doesn't call for a break from Tommy Young) and signal for an elbow but Windham takes him down again.

We're at 3 minutes straight now and Dusty hasn't been past his knees in about two minutes of that. Imagine if Cena stayed in the cross armbreaker for three minutes. The internet would form into a missile and kill him all at once. Total time in the Claw: four minutes and five seconds before an elbow breaks it up.

Let me repeat that: the old man (Dusty is a veteran at this point and in his early 40s) just lasted over four minutes in the finishing hold of the young unstoppable US Champion who won the title with that very hold. I've heard of killing moves dead before but Dusty took the Claw, shot it, buried it, turned it into a chicken, plucked it, cleaned it, put it in batter and sold it to a man named Sanders.

Dusty is immediately fine and tries a Figure Four but gets caught in the Claw again. Dusty was out of the hold all of 8 seconds. This one only lasts 46 seconds as they go up to the corner again. Barry tries the superplex but Dusty shoves him off and takes out the referee. Dusty slams him off and hits the big elbow but there's no referee. Ronnie Garvin of all people comes out and kills Dusty dead with his Hands of Stone punch finisher as he turns heel. The Claw is academic as Dusty is dead and Windham retains. Garvin would be gone in only a few months and would be in the WWF by December.

**Rating:** D+. That claw in the middle was just so ridiculous. I mean seriously, Dusty lasted practically 5 minutes in it overall and was just fine until a punch comes out and stops him cold? I mean how weak does the Claw look now when a right hand, the most basic move in wrestling, ends Dusty faster than five minutes of a claw? How many matches have you seen that are shorter than five minutes? Imagine a single hold lasting that long. Crazy.

We'll jump ahead again to the 1991 Great American Bash where Windham has been thrown into the World Title match against old rival Lex Luger.

#### WCW World Title: Barry Windham vs. Lex Luger

In a cage if you missed that point and the title is vacant. Luger is clearly the more popular guy. Remember that. This is a short cage too as it's maybe eight feet off the mat. The LOUD Flair chant begins again. Oh and another thing to complete the joke: Flair has the physical belt so they're using the old Western States Title with a cheap looking plate over the part that says Western States.

The fans want Flair and we get going. They collide but no one goes anywhere. Luger hip tosses him down as we're still in a feeling out process. They hit the ropes and Barry dropkicks him down and things slow down again. Small package gets two

for Lex. He runs Barry over but the elbow misses. There are a lot of standoffs in this. Barry backdrops him down and they stare at each other some more. The camera guy looks at the fans as they chant for Flair. Nice job dude.

They go to the mat and Barry finally pops him in the face. A suplex puts Windham down and they stand off AGAIN. A figure four is broken up by Lex despite Barry not touching the leg at all yet. We're like five minutes into the match so far and NOTHING has happened. Barry grabs a headlock and runs Luger over again. Lex grabs a sleeper but Barry counters into one of his own. Riveting stuff I tell you. Riveting.

Luger sends him into the corner to escape and this a DDT for two. That's your biggest move so far people: a DDT. Lex goes up and gets slammed down, followed by a knee drop for two from Barry. Windham misses a top rope knee drop and Lex hits his series of clotheslines for two. There's a powerslam and Luger puts him in the Rack but Barry kicks off the cage and backflips out in a cool counter.

A belly to back puts Luger down but he shrugs it off and loads up a superplex. That gets countered and Barry hits a top rope lariat. A regular lariat still gets no cover but a slam gets two. Barry goes up and hits a kind of flying superkick for two. Harley Race and Mr. Hughes come out for no apparent reason and Race says NOW IS THE TIME. Luger pops up and piledrives Windham for the pin and the title.

**Rating:** D+. The problem here is that while there were two or three good minutes at the end, the first five minutes of the thirteen minute match were just dull. The heel turn at the end made NO sense and most people didn't catch on because they popped for the pin. The match just wasn't that good but there were good pieces to it if that makes sense. The ending sucked though and that brings it down even more. Eh screw it we'll go with a D+. They earned it. Take that for what you will.



Another year forward as Barry is going after the Tag Team Titles in the finals of a tournament at Great American Bash 1992.

### NWA World Tag Team Titles: Miracle Violence Connection vs. Dustin Rhodes/Barry Windham

The Steiners come out before the match starts and are promptly thrown out. Dr. Death (Williams) and Windham get us going. Nothing of note happens there so it's off to Gordy. Dustin finally does something by pounding away with elbows to the head. Gordy ties him up on the mat but it's quickly off to Windham who hooks a figure four. Once that gets broken up it's off to Williams and they go to the mat for more grappling.

That goes nowhere so it's back to Gordy who runs over Barry some more, getting two off a clothesline. Rhodes comes in and fights Williams over a top wristlock but Dr. Death cheats by pulling him down by the hair. Gordy comes in with the STF again, which he calls the Oriental Twist. Dustin fights up and puts on a sleeper but Gordy makes a fast tag so he doesn't have to sell or anything.

Williams takes it right back to the mat and cranks on another chinlock. JR goes on a small rant about how tag ropes should be used more, because that's the most interesting thing he can talk about right now. That's not sarcasm if you couldn't tell. Gordy comes back in and puts on a Boston Crab which is broken up by Barry. Williams hits a powerslam for two and Dustin just walks over to make the tag.

Barry speeds thing up a bit and hits a pair of suplexes for two on Williams. And never mind as he hooks a sleeper to waste even more time. Dr. Death immediately rams him into the post to break the hold and puts on a chinlock. Barry suplexes out of it but Williams blocks the tag. Williams hooks on a front facelock which fires up JR way too much. Barry collides with Gordy and suddenly I want to listen to some Motown.

Windham gets up and Williams knocks him into the corner for the tag to Dustin but he gets knocked down almost immediately. Williams puts on ANOTHER front facelock to make sure the crowd isn't woken from their slumber early. Gordy gets two off a clothesline. The Oklahoma Stampede is broken up by a Windham dropkick but Dustin's bulldog is broken up. Dr. Death kills Dustin with a lariat to complete what was close enough to a squash.

**Rating:** D. Again, this was technically sound but it was dull. The MVC dominated the vast majority of this and most of that was them on the mat with some kind of hold on Dustin or Windham. That may be what pure wrestling is, but DANG is it ever boring. Also this makes no sense, as now the MVC has all of the titles and has defeated all of their challengers, so where do they go now? Instead, COMMON SENSE would say have Windham and Rhodes (or better yet the Steiners) win here and build to a unification match, but instead let's have Oklahoma/Japan dominate.

The jump isn't as bad this time as we hit another World Tag Team Title match at Starrcade 1992.

Tag Titles: Barry Windham/Brian Pillman vs. Shane Douglas/Ricky Steamboat

Windham used to be tag champions with Dustin Rhodes but lost the belts to Steamboat and Douglas a few months ago. Pillman turned heel due to frustration with only being Light Heavyweight Champion and hooked up with Windham soon thereafter. A few weeks ago Barry beat the tar out of both champions with a chair so Steamboat and Douglas want revenge. Douglas and Pillman start things off as Jesse's mind is blown hearing about Shane holding a masters degree. A right hand puts Pillman down and more of them break up Pillman's sunset flip attempt.

Brian, tired of losing the wrestling portion of the match,

rakes Shane's eyes to take over. Shane dropkicks him to the floor as Steamboat comes in for a double dropkick on Barry. Pillman bails to the floor as the champions double backdrop Windham. Barry gets the tag and wants Steamboat all to himself. A hard chop puts Barry down and a suplex does the same. Steamboat slows Barry down with a front facelock and a snapmare before bringing Shane back in.

Douglas puts Barry in a chinlock but Windham picks Shane up and suplexes out of it. Back to Steamboat for a neck snap on Barry and a right hand to Pillman. All champions so far. A clothesline puts Barry on the floor and Steamboat slams him on the wooden floor for good measure. Barry climbs up onto the ramp so Shane slams him down again just because he's not a nice person. Ricky backdrops Barry into the ring and gets two off a neckbreaker. Back to Shane for another chinlock as Barry is trying to survive.

Windham FINALLY gets something going with a jawbreaker on Shane, allowing for the tag off to Brian. A facejam puts Shane down but a dropkick sends Pillman out to the floor and possibly into the barricade. Back in and Shane goes up top, but a distraction by Windham allows Brian to dropkick him off the top and out to the floor. Barry adds a big lariat for good measure before coming in legally and headbutting Shane down. A boot to Shane's chest stops his comeback bid and Brian gets in some cheating for good measure.

Brian comes back in legally and chops Douglas down but Shane comes back with some right hands of his own. Pillman trips him up though and it's right back to Windham, who stomps on Shane and throws him through the ropes and into the barricade to keep the champions in trouble. Steamboat goes to the floor to check on his partner but also blasts Windham in the back with a chair. It's still not enough for the tag to Ricky though as Pillman suplexes Shane down.

Barry comes in off the top with a punch to Shane's face and a

suplex for two. Ross is losing his mind over the beating that Shane is taking. A splash gets two for Brian and Steamboat charges in, allowing the challengers to double team Shane in the corner. Barry tries another suplex, but this time Douglas counters into one of his own. Shane fires off one last right hand before falling backwards into the tag to Steamboat.

The Dragon (Steamboat) cleans house with slams for both guys but he walks into a powerslam from Barry to stop the comeback cold. A belly to back suplex puts Ricky down again and it's off to Pillman, who illegally throws Steamboat over the top to the floor. The referee missed it though due to Shane, who also causes the referee to miss Windham throwing Steamboat into the post.

Back in and Steamboat chops it out with Pillman but gets caught in a headscissors for two. Windham comes in again with a top rope forearm to Ricky's ribs, causing Ricky to....lecture him? Steamboat points his finger in Windham's face and says something to him which confuses Barry. Windham goes up top but misses a right hand, allowing Steamboat to hit a superkick and a facejam to put both guys down. A double tag brings in Shane vs. Pillman with Douglas cleaning house. Everything breaks down and Steamboat cross bodies Windham onto the ramp. Shane hits his belly to belly suplex in Brian for the pin out of nowhere.

**Rating:** B+. Really awesome tag match here with all four guys working very hard to make everyone look good out there. Steamboat and Douglas would hold the belts until March, when Windham had to be replaced by Steve Austin due to an injury. Austin and Pillman proved to be a better team and took the belts, leading to a string of classic rematches. This was very good stuff though and match of the night by far to this point.

Barry would get an NWA World Title shot at SuperBrawl III.

NWA Title: Barry Windham vs. Great Muta

Flair is on commentary here. He would be perfect at that job today. This is a great example of why the NWA would never get anywhere: they insisted on doing things their way and having their own champions etc. No one cared about either of these two guys so they just insisted that they get TWENTY FIVE MINUTES on a WCW PPV. Why in the world should I care about these guys? The belt was just a name anymore but the NWA insisted it was still all about them.

It's not NWA SuperBrawl or anything like that but hey, let's make the longest match of the night about them. There's just one problem: this match SUCKS. It's 25 minutes long. After a minute we hit a headlock. At 9 and a half minutes in we break that headlock. Seriously, for nearly ten minutes it was a single headlock. The commentators have to try to make this seem interesting and epic and you can tell they don't care either.

WCW would be out of the NWA to kill the freaking thing dead in September of 93. It's been another 12 minutes since I typed anything as there is NOTHING to talk about. Muta tries two moonsaults and gets a bad jumping DDT (I think) for his troubles to lose the title. Flair hands Windham the belt and Windham shoves him. That showdown wouldn't come for three months so Windham could have a title reign that no one remembers or cares about I guess.

**Rating:** F-. This was just freaking awful. What in the world was the point to having this anyway? Oh yes: to please the almighty NWA that no one cared about. Seriously, they couldn't just accept that they were over and they still can't to this day. Flair got the title in June before the NWA got dumped in September. They waited A YEAR before crowning a new champion in Shane Douglas. Dude seriously, if you insist on being a big deal, wait a few weeks, not a freaking year. This was awful on so many levels.

We'll jump WAY ahead now as Windham didn't do jack in his WWF

run. Here he is in a double match final from the Tag Team Title tournament at SuperBrawl IX.

Tag Team Titles: Curt Hennig/Barry Windham vs. Dean Malenko/Chris Benoit

This is a tournament final, but since it's double elimination and only Hennig/Windham are undefeated, Malenko and Benoit have to win two matches in a row. If Hennig and Windham win the first fall, they win the belts. Benoit and Malenko have already won three matches this week to get here. Heenan notices a nice plot point: you have current Horsemen against former Horsemen here.

Dean chases Windham around to start before they hit the mat to fight over hammerlocks. Off to Benoit vs. Hennig as the fans are still as hot as they were earlier in the night. Tony talks about Hennig, Malenko and Windham all being second generation wrestlers. Heenan: "So is referee Mickie Jay." Tony: "Who was his father?" Heenan: "Oh he wasn't a wrestling referee. He umpired a peewee football league in Moline, Illinois back in the 40s."

Hennig chops Benoit in the corner so Benoit chops him so hard that Hennig falls to the mat. They slap it out and it turns into a fight in the corner. The running clothesline puts Hennig on the floor as Tony says Benoit has never been a champion before, meaning Benoit's TV Title wins at house shows either don't count, or Tony wasn't informed of them. Barry comes back in and hammers away in the corner, only to get chopped right back.

Off to Malenko who dropkicks Windham into the ropes. Barry is a good two and a half feet from Hennig but Hennig comes in anyway. The referee puts him out but Windham gets in a cheap shot to take over. That was kind of an odd sequence. Hennig comes in legally and gets nailed by Dean, allowing him to roll to the corner for a hot tag to Benoit. Chris comes in and

beats up both cowboys with ease and a backbreaker gets two on Curt.

A LOUD chop has Hennig in trouble and it's back to Malenko for some shots in the corner. Heenan wants all car races to have no brakes because he likes his wrestling fast. Benoit nails the Swan Dive but Windham breaks up the cover. Curt gets crotches on the top rope and dropkicked out to the floor but comes back in with a low blow right in front of the referee. That's perfectly fine with the son of a Moline football league umpire and Barry comes back in for two off a gutwrench suplex.

Dean gets sent to the floor and chopped up against the barricade for two back inside. Hennig gets sent into the corner as the fans think this is boring. Benoit takes Curt's head off with a clothesline but Barry comes in with a cheap shot to take over. The superplex gets two as Dean makes the save and it's back to Hennig for more chops. Hennig's running neck snap gets two but Benoit finally rolls over and tags in Dean to clean house. Barry gets caught in the Cloverleaf and Benoit stops Hennig, forcing the submission for the first fall.

Since this is basically a two fall match I'll save the rating for after the whole thing is done. There's a thirty second rest period between falls.

Windham has taken his belt off and chokes Dean down, which there is no reason for the referee not to see. Barry keeps choking with the belt and pulls Dean to the mat for the pin and the titles.

**Rating:** C-. This match is proof that WCW just does not understand what it's doing. After the last month of putting up with this way too complicated tournament where WCW didn't even know who was in it half the time, we sit through a long yet good match where the Horsemen win, only to have them lose the second fall a minute later because it's double elimination.

Not only was the tournament boring, but now the ending makes people mad.

Who in the world thinks Hennig and Windham deserve Tag Team Titles? They've teamed together for all of a few weeks and now they get the belts after the Horsemen win four matches in a week to lose the last fall in a minute? This is bad storytelling and completely missing what your audience wants. Yeah Benoit and Malenko can come back and win them later, but all the momentum and the interest is gone now. Horrible decision and just a stupid move. For WCW to think Barry Windham is more valuable than Chris Benoit and Dean Malenko in 1999 is ridiculous.

As for the match itself, it wasn't bad but the refereeing here was atrocious. There's a difference between relaxing the rules a bit and having referees mean as much as ECW referees. When a guy is punching the other man low right in front of the referee, something should be done. Otherwise, why bother having them there?

We'll wrap things up with Fall Brawl 1999 as Windham and Hennig try to get their belts back.

#### Tag Titles: Harlem Heat vs. West Texas Rednecks

The Rednecks are Barry and Kendall Windham with Hennig in their corner. They're country singers and that's about it. The Windhams are legit brothers. Booker vs. Kendall to start us off and Kendall bails to avoid a spin kick. Heat double teams Kendall and it's off to Stevie. Now Stevie won't sell anything. Naturally this is probably going to be praised, because WCW needs more guys to no sell so their other guys look bad right?

Barry comes in to hit a DDT for no cover. How he went from being as totally awesome as he was at one point to being here now is amazing. Odd to see two pairs of brothers here. Actually it isn't but there isn't much to talk about here.



Hennig gets in a shot to make sure that Kendall can get a two count on Stevie. Stevie gets a powerslam out of nowhere to put Barry down.

Double tag brings in Kendall and Booker with the more famous one doing what he can. Down goes Hennig and Kendall does the same a second after. The double teaming begins on the floor as Booker gets caught. Off to the chinlock on Booker by Kendall as the fans chant for the Heat. That's better than nothing I guess. Axe kick hits but it would have been a bit better if Kendall had waited until it actually hit to go down.

Spinarooni is broken up by Barry and it's back to the floor for Booker. More double teaming continues and it's back in to Barry. Barry gets a middle rope superplex (his old finisher) but Stevie makes the save. If this sounds really boring, I'm getting better at this emotion thing in the writing. Kendall gets a lariat mostly to the neck for two. Booker gets his sunset flip out of the corner for two.

The heels double team a lot, as you would expect from a team with an old school guy like Barry. There's a sleeper to Barry as this is probably on the verge of ending. Back off to Kendall who hits a weak middle rope clothesline for one. Classic old school spot as the referee misses the hot tag. Stevie beats up everyone anyway and everything breaks down. Hennig hits Ray in the head with a cowbell but the referee won't count BECAUSE HE WAS PAYING ATTENTION!!!! WOW!!!!!! Booker is still legal so the missile dropkick he hits gets the tag titles back.

**Rating:** D+. Match was weak but this is a fine sign of what Bischoff not being around means: the ending made perfect sense for a change and was actually kind of creative. No one cared about the match though, because we had seen it just a few weeks ago on Nitro. Nothing of note at all, as you could say about most matches tonight.

Barry Windham was one of the most talented guys in wrestling history. If he had ever put his mind to it, he could have been the next Ric Flair at the drop of a hat. He got lazy later in his career, but during the late 80s he very well may have been the best wrestler in the world. Given how deep wrestling was at that point, that's quite the accomplishment.

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## **Wrestler of the Day – June 29: Big John Studd**

Here's a forgotten giant: Big John Studd.

Studd got his start under the name Chuck O'Connor back in 1972, but we're going to have to jump ahead to 1980 in Minneapolis. We're skipping over Studd as Executioner #2 and winning a WWF Tag Team Title. Anyway back to Christmas Day 1980 in the AWA.

### Big John Studd vs. Mad Dog Vachon

Studd is about fourteen inches taller than Vachon and pounds away to start. Vachon will have none of that and chases Studd out to the floor. Back in and Vachon takes Studd down by the leg and bites his boot. Studd takes another breather on the floor before sending Mad Dog into the corner to take over. Now both guys head to the floor where Vachon pelts a chair at Big

John's head.

Back in and Vachon rakes Studd's back but gets caught in a bearhug for a few moments. Vachon misses a charge into the post but is still able to backdrop out of an over the shoulder backbreaker attempt. Mad Dog hammers away in the corner but the referee pulls him off and the match is stopped with Vachon winning by DQ. That makes no sense and even the announcement that it was due to using an illegal heart punch doesn't help as there was no such punch thrown.

**Rating:** C. This was far more entertaining than you would expect as Vachon lived up to the Mad Dog name. He stood maybe 5'7 and took it to the 6'9 Studd while making it look realistic. That's a really impressive feat and a good example of why Vachon was such a big star in this organization for such a long time.

Off to the WWF now with a match from July 16, 1983.

Andre the Giant/Jay Strongbow/Ivan Putski/Rocky Johnson vs. Wild Samoans/Samula/Big John Studd

This is the ultra rare three out of five falls match. And in an eight man tag too. Not bad for a gimmick match main event. You should know most of these people. Samula is the third Samoan and more or less just a backup guy. He's more famous as Samu of the Headshrinkers. We're in Philly here and Samula starts with Rocky. This is a pretty high profile tag match.

Afa steps in, Andre steps in, Afa steps out. Afa is in again to face Rocky. Rocky was very popular back in the day and I like him more every time I see him. For some reason the teams are on full sides of the apron instead of in one corner each. Off to Studd to take on Rocky but Andre wants in. You don't tell a giant no so it's off to Sika. Andre rams John and Sika's heads together and waits on an opponent.

Sika begs off but Andre destroys him anyway. This is 1983 so

Andre can still move. Here's Strongbow who still looks like a human. He hooks the sleeper and everything breaks down. Johnson grabs Sika so Andre can chop him. Double headbutt takes Strongbow down. The Samoans are tossed around by Andre and there was a bell for some reason. Gary Capetta is the announcer if you care. The first fall is a DQ against the Samoan team so it's 1-0 heroes.

Jay is one of the people in but we don't have an opponent. Ok so it's Samula. Studd choked Jay to give the Samoan the advantage and Andre isn't pleased. A headbutt puts Strongbow down and a falling version of it ties us up. Strongbow whips Samula into Andre's boot which is good for the third fall, making it 2-1. It might have lasted 20 seconds. 23 actually.

Round four starts and the fans want the battle of the giants. Putski hasn't been in yet. It's Strongbow vs. I believe Afa to get this one going. Now we get some Polish Power. He rams Samoan heads together and pounds on Afa. Sika finally gets a shot in and the Samoans take over on Ivan. A double headbutt sends him flying, but he flies right to Andre. The Giant cleans house and breaks up a triple team. Samula jumps into a boot and Andre sits on him to win three falls to one.

**Rating:** C. The match wasn't all that exciting but this was to fire up the crowd with something new and I think you can safely say they did just that. Not a great match or anything but it got a lot of big names in there and the fans got everything but the top request they had, but that was certainly coming. Fun way to end things.

You knew we were getting to Hogan sooner or later. Here's one of his first title defense, just two and a half months after winning the belt. From April 6, 1984.

WWF World Title: Hulk Hogan vs. King Kong Bundy

In Boston I think here. Most importantly though we get the Hulk's Rocking Wrestling theme! OH YES!!! This is pre-Mania 2

as the tights are still white and the belt is still different looking. Granted it looked that way for over another year but there's a Wrestling Album reference so that solidifies the date. Plus a website listing the dates that I have. Bundy hammers away to start and after a brief Hogan comeback he takes Hogan down. Surprising.

Hogan gets sent to the floor and Bundy tries to keep him there because clearly you can win the title that way. Hulk pulls him to the floor and hammers away like only he can. Back in and Hogan uses his speed for a change. Usually it's coke rather than speed so this is a rarity. Hogan can't slam him though so maybe he should have gone with the cocaine. Bundy falls on top for two.

We hit the chinlock for awhile as the ending is about as clear as possible. Granted every time I say that it's not the typical Hogan ending so what do I know? Hogan fights up and hits some shoulder blocks but an elbow takes him down with ease. A pair of Avalanches (splash, Bundy's finisher) gets two and here it comes. Third avalanche is no sold and Hogan wins with a powerslam. Dang it I'm wrong again!

**Rating:** C. Oh come on it's Hogan vs. a monster in the 80s. What were you expecting here? This is the formula to end all formulas and it works almost every time. This was perfectly acceptable as Hogan popped the crowd against large opponent #4. What's wrong with doing what the crowd wants?

Studd was a big enough star that he was in the main event of the show on the famous Black Saturday. This was when Vince took over the WCW show in Georgia and nearly caused an industry wide riot. From July 14, 1984.

### Bobo Brazil vs. Big John Studd

This is in Philadelphia if it matters. Bobo's punches are very bad so Studd is going to be the one to carry this. Do you get why this is going to suck? We hit a bearhug to waste some

time. Without much movement we switch places and Bobo has the hold on Studd. Studd hits the floor to waste some time.

This is the main event mind you and it's by far worse than the other squash matches we've seen. A Philadelphia crowd is DEAD for this by the way. Bobo's finishing move gets some polite applause but it (a headbutt) doesn't even put Studd down. Bobo misses a legdrop and an elbow drop from Studd ends it.

**Rating:** F. This was awful. John Studd was the best guy out there. Let that sink in.

Back to Hogan, from December 10, 1984.

WWF Title: Hulk Hogan vs. Big Jon Studd

This is in the Meadowlands. Gary Michael Copetta is the ring announcer of all people and this is in December of 84. If Hogan can slam Studd he wins \$15,000. Hogan is in yellow here. I'm trying to place the voice of the other commentator besides Gorilla. I think it's Howard Finkel actually. Wow it is. This could be interesting.

They clip the beginning of this a bit but I think it was just them staring each other down. Both guys go for slams but neither can get the other up. Heenan is Studd's manager here. Hogan gets him up but can't turn him around for the slam. There's the big boot very early but Hogan still can't slam him.

Hogan tries for about his fifth slam in 3 minutes as we're clipped to Hogan hitting a clothesline. ANOTHER slam attempt but we go to the floor instead and Hogan is in trouble. His head is bleeding too. Hogan can't get back in and we clip it some more. I'd assume it's only about 30 seconds or so each time but it's frustrating that you don't know for sure.

Studd comes off the top to crush Hogan for two. MORE clipping as Hogan is in big trouble here. He gets slammed as Studd's

offense is shall we say really limited. Studd kicks him to the floor so Hogan is like screw it let's fight out here. Can Studd do anything besides pound on him with forearms? Hogan slams him on the floor which doesn't get him the money but it does get him a countout win. Hogan lifts the referee over his head in a gorilla press position for no apparent reason.

**Rating:** D. Pretty bad match but the fans wanted to see Hogan win and that's what they got. Hearing Howard on the announce team is still weird beyond belief as is Copetta doing the announcing. From a few other places it appears the match was only clipped by about 90 seconds, which begs the question of why clip it at all. Anyway, bad match but Hogan winning was the point here. Andre would claim the money at the first Wrestlemania.

Here's probably Studd's most famous match, from the first Wrestlemania in the Body Slam match against his biggest rival.

### Big John Studd vs. Andre the Giant

This is a bodyslam challenge with some special stipulations: if Andre wins, he gets \$15,000 but if Studd wins, Andre has to retire. Studd charges in to start but is immediately chopped back and he bails to the floor. Back in and Andre punches him in the head and rams him in the corner with all of his weight. Studd goes for a slam and Andre is just like dude please. The fans chant for a slam as Andre puts on a bearhug. That goes on for a good while until Andre shifts over to a facelock. Apparently if this goes to the time limit, Andre has to retire. Andre kicks at the leg for a bit and casually slams Studd for the win. It's as quick as it sounds.

**Rating:** D. This was pretty terrible but the fans loved Andre and he had to be on here. Also this was part of a big feud as Andre and Studd cut Andre's hair a few weeks before this. The match was pretty weak but then again what are you going to expect from these two guys with Andre's body starting to fail

on him.

Here's a match with a different kind of opponents. From June 21, 1985.

US Express/George Steele vs. Adrian Adonis/Big John Studd/Bobby Heenan

This is from MSG and this show is a bit more famous because of the debut of Randy Savage on it. No one wants to start with the Animal. Barry and Adonis (not yet gay or in pink) start us off. Let the stalling begin! Before anything happens, Heenan is brought in so Windham tags Steele. Heenan DIVES to the floor to hide and it's back to Adonis. Now it's back to Windham before any contact has been made at all.

Off to Studd to meet Windham and Barry is knocked down pretty easily. It isn't often that Barry has to speed things up but he does it here as he doesn't have another option. He keeps going for the slam which doesn't work at all. A cross body gets two. Clipped to Heenan being brought in and Barry beats him down like a world champion beating on a manager.

Everything breaks down and Steele rams all three heels into the posts. Rotundo comes in and Heenan's mouth is bleeding. Mike takes Studd down and works on the arm. Clipped to Adonis beating on Rotundo. Gorilla gives us some analysis of what we're seeing and the fans chant USA. Windham finally comes in as does Steele, wanting to get his hands on Bobby. There wasn't a tag and everything breaks down. Steele goes outside and comes back with a chair which he hits the referee with for the DQ.

**Rating:** D. Pretty boring match here and I really don't get the point of them giving us what appears to be a focus on Steele and then having him lose his match. Then again I think they did that more than once in this series so it must be a running theme. That doesn't mean it makes sense but it's what they're doing I guess.



Studd was part of the beginning of a huge angle. Here's the first part at Saturday Night's Main Event II.

### Big John Studd/King Kong Bundy vs. Tony Atlas/Andre the Giant

The heels cut Andre's hair and beat him up in Toronto so he picked some random partners to try to fight back. By the way that's Abraham Washington's Tony Atlas in there. Andre and Bundy start and the bigger fat man is MAD. He rams Bundy's head into Atlas' which is kind of mean but whatever. Somehow Atlas, a big old man, is the smallest in this match by far.

He gets beaten down and the splash from Bundy half kills him. Andre and Studd.....uh.....I guess you could call it fight. Everything goes insane and Andre gets the tar beaten out of him. I think the match has been thrown out. Oh and Atlas got posted so he's out. AND HERE COMES HULK! The faces clean house as Andre and Hogan begin their year and a half long angle that would culminate at Mania in Detroit. Andre and Atlas win apparently, I'd guess by DQ.

**Rating:** D. Match was awful, but this was about starting a huge angle. Now at the time no one knew how big, but this is a very historic moment no matter how you look at it. Studd wasn't the focus here, but he was a great choice as a catalyst for the start of this feud as both Hogan and Andre hated him.

And the next part, from Saturday Night's Main Event III.

### Hulk Hogan/Andre the Giant vs. King Kong Bundy/Big John Studd

Hogan in white is always interesting. This was the main house show main event at the time so you would see this quite often around this time. It's still Eye of the Tiger for Hogan which is weird to say the least. He's rocking an Abyss shirt as it says American Made. Who would have thought ripping a shirt off would get such a pop?

Hogan vs. Bundy starts us off. Hogan of course can't slam him

and hurts his back. That lasts less than two seconds and it's ALL Hogan. Ok make that Andre, called the Big Boss Man here which is something I've heard before. I love Andre's punches since he has to swing down to connect due to his height.

Hogan does the majority of the match due to Andre already being injured. Ventura says he'll be in a six man on the next SNME with the previously mentioned guys. Andre accidentally hits the referee and of course we get a huge brawl. It's weird when Hogan is the smallest guy in there. Actually it isn't as he commonly was.

Another referee comes in since the original is more or less dead. Vince's overselling of all this stuff is great. After a commercial we have Studd vs. Andre. Hogan spits at Studd after knocking him down. What a nice guy. Andre gets tied up in the ropes and Bundy hits the avalanche on Hogan and the double team begins. The referee throws it out as Hogan makes the save. Hogan and Andre win by DQ.

**Rating:** D. This was a glorified squash as the heels controlled for a combined 9 seconds I think. This was just to have a TV spectacle and nothing more which is fine I guess. It's a tag team main event match, but this was just different and didn't work in the slightest. The historical aspect helps it a bit though.

Bundy and Studd would become a regular team, including this match from April 22, 1986, just after Wrestlemania II.

#### British Bulldogs vs. King Kong Bundy vs. Big John Studd

Main event here and non-title for reasons not explained. Either heel weighs more than the champions combined. That's rather cool for some reason. Smith vs. Studd to start but Dynamite cheats to take Studd down. No tag though so they hit a double dropkick instead for two. The fans are all over Heenan here. Off to Bundy now. How did he main event Mania but Smith never did?

More double teaming by the champions takes Bundy down but one on one it's all Bundy. Ladd is talking about the stock market for some reason. All power by Bundy of course and Smith is in trouble. Back off to Studd who hammers away on Smith for two. We talk about Andre's suspension which would lead to the Machines and ultimately his heel turn and Mania III. Bundy back in now and an elbow gets two. This is non-title for no apparent reason.

Studd comes in, misses a charge and tags back out. Neither of those guys were ever accused of being technical masters. They double team Smith a bit as we're just waiting on the hot tag. Ah there it is and Dynamite comes in and tries a sleeper on Studd which goes nowhere at all. Everything breaks down and the referee is tossed for the DQ. Weak.

**Rating:** D. Uh yeah. This is more or less the match they hyped all show (work with me here) and we get a five minute match with a DQ ending? Nothing great here but considering the non-champions (why was this non-title again?) what did you really expect? Weak ending.

Time for a handicap match on June 3, 1986. The ending sets up the next match on June 14, 1986.

### Big John Studd vs. Ricky Hunter/Jim Powers

I just can't escape this Powers guy. Before the match starts though King Tonga (Meng/Haku) comes out and says he can slam him. Studd says wait your turn. Both guys try to slam him which doesn't work at all. Bruno is on commentary and he's about one step shy of saying "dudes, fail." They finally figure out that you have to beat on him and then slam him when he's stunned. The idea is fine but it doesn't work at all. Studd destroys them and pins Hunter with a slam.

King Tonga runs in and slams him with ease. You know what that means.

## Big John Studd vs. King Tonga

Studd immediately slams him during the opening bell to take over. Tonga goes for a slam but it gets countered. That's the whole point of the match: Tonga wants to slam Studd. Off to a chinlock but Tonga comes back with some martial arts. Another slam attempt sends them tumbling to the floor and it's a double countout. No rating again but this was a one move match.

They brawl on the floor post match with Tonga getting the better of it. The brawl and teasing going back in goes on longer than the match. Now they get back in and brawl as there's a referee in there for some reason. Tonga headbutts him to the floor and that's enough for John.

Around this time, Andre the Giant was suspended, only to be replaced by a three man team from Japan called the Machines. One of them was Giant Machine and the joke should be obvious. Here's a match with Andre's partners facing the Heenan Family at the Big Event.

## Big Machine/Super Machine/Lou Albano vs. Big John Studd/King Kong Bundy/Bobby Heenan

Ah yes the Machines. Now this was the epitome of a comedy angle that took off for a little while. The idea was that Andre the Giant was suspended for (kayfabe) not showing up for a match. Soon thereafter two new masked guys from Japan appeared: Super Machine (Ax from Demolition) and Giant Machine (duh).

Over the Summer they feuded with Heenan, Studd and Bundy with guest appearances by Piper Machine, Animal Machine and Hulk Machine. It was total tongue in cheek, kind of like Mr. America with Hogan. They were eventually joined by Big Machine who was Blackjack Mulligan when Andre could barely move.

Andre was kind of the manager and only wrestled occasionally.

The angle ended about two months after this to set up Mania 3. Anyway let's get to this. We get a shot from the broadcast booth and the ring is TINY. Studd and Super Machine start us out. The Machines' strength is freaking impressive. Ax is by far and away the smallest one. What does that tell you? Gorilla says he's been over 500 pounds before but at Mania 4 said the biggest he ever wrestled at was 440. I don't want to live in a world where I can't trust Gorilla Monsoon! Ok I'm back now I think.

With Big Machine down Heenan comes in and goes for the mask. Super Machine is like screw that and drills him. Bundy was just a big fat waste of oxygen. You can tell he was just thrown into Mania. Look where he was just 4 months later. Heenan comes in again and Albano comes in also.

Super Mario kicks his teeth in for a bit but a thumb in the eye and the heels beat up Albano. Andre has had enough and just comes in there and starts whipping all kinds of villains which causes the DQ. He was just freaking terrifying when he got mad. Ax being the smallest guy by far is a freaky sight.

**Rating:** C-. It was a comedy match so that's fine. The Machines were just a fun team so this worked fine. Andre was fun as all goodness when he could move and this was no exception. It was nothing serious and it wasn't supposed to be. The idea would be over soon but it was fun while it lasted.

Studd would retire in 1986 before coming back in early 1989 as a face. He wasn't around long but he won the Royal Rumble and then feuded with the Heenan Family, particularly Andre the Giant. Here's one of those matches from Wrestling Challenge on May 7, 1989.

### Big John Studd vs. King Haku

The crown is on the line here and remember that Haku used to wrestle as King Tonga. Haku hammers away to start as we get an inset interview from Heenan, saying Andre is always watching.

Studd shrugs off the King's offense and knocks him down with ease. Big John calls for the bearhug but Andre comes out for a distraction. Haku kicks Studd in the back of the head and right at Andre for some choking, drawing a DQ. Jim Duggan runs out for the save, likely setting up a tag match.

Big John Studd wasn't anything great, but he was imposing enough that a win over him meant something. He's almost like the Great Khali today: you know he isn't going to win, but he's impressive looking enough that he could get people's attention. No he wasn't going to have many good matches, but he didn't need to in order to fulfill his purpose.

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