

AWA Super Sunday 1983 – Hogan's Entrance Is A Sight To See

AWA Super Sunday 1983

Date: April 24, 1983

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

Attendance: 20,000

Commentator: Ron Trongard

This is another AWA stadium show which have mostly been bad so far. This is before the first Starrcade so this is certainly one of the biggest shows ever at the time. There's a double main event of course, one of which being the required Gagne tag match. The other though is a world title match with Hogan challenging Bockwinkel. I'm sure I'll have something to say about that. Let's get to it.

Gene Okerlund is the ring announcer.

Brad Rheingans vs. Rocky Stone

Brad is an Olympian and is now a trainer I think. Stone hooks a headlock but but Brad slams his way out of it with relative ease. He hooks an armbar and then an armdrag into an armbar. The mat looks like it's a bunch of gym mats shoved together. Stone comes back with a devastating headlock and then a knee to the ribs. After a kneedrop it's off to a chinlock. We're told it's five minutes in but by my watch it's about four. Stone gets him tied up in the ropes on the apron and fires off some elbows to the head. Out of nowhere Brad comes back, hits a backdrop, a dropkick and a gutwrench suplex for the pin.

Rating: D+. Not a bad opener but the crowd popped pretty well for the ending. Rheingans was a big American hero character as he was an

Olympian, so the crowd was always going to explode when he came out of nowhere for a win like this. I have a feeling I can completely ignore the times they give us tonight too, because they said it was 5:31, with the pin coming about two minutes after they said five minutes gone by.

Rheingans says nothing of note.

Steve Regal vs. Buck Zumhofe

Buck is a rock n roll enthusiast and Regal is Mr. Electricity. Zumhofe has a Light Heavyweight Title next month which Trongard talks about for awhile. Buck takes him into the corner to frustrate Regal a bit. He gets sent into the corner and is even more frustrated now. I keep forgetting this is 1983 as the production values are about the same as they would be in an NWA show from 1987.

Regal comes back with some forearms and takes him to the mat with an armbar. Expect to read the word armbar a lot in this show. Regal fires away with knees and hooks a chinlock. This has been a pretty fast paced match so far. Buck blocks being rammed into the buckle but charges into a boot. And never mind as Buck slams him and hits a running Vader Bomb for the pin out of nowhere.

Rating: C-. Better match here but I still wasn't wild on it. These fast paced endings aren't the best things here either because there's no way to build up the crowd, but the rest of it wasn't half bad. Zumhofe was a guy that I never quite liked but he was a fairly big deal around this era I guess.

Buck says he'll get his title soon.

Jerry Lawler vs. John Tolos

Tolos is a guy named the Golden Greek who died a few years back. This is right after the David Letterman show with Kaufman so Lawler is a national sensation at this point. Tolos jumps him immediately and Jerry is in trouble early on. He hits a jumping shot to the arm and hooks a wristlock on Lawler. Lawler comes back with a punch and hooks a headlock. It's so weird hearing Jerry called a young man.

Lawler cranks on the head and the fans are getting into his stuff. He cranks on the head twenty seven times with the fans counting along. A big right hand puts Tolos down and hooks the chinlock. A jawbreaker gets him out of that and they collide to put both guys down. Tolos gets up and throws him over the top for...not a DQ for some reason.

Back in Tolos gets some two counts and there goes the strap. He takes Tolos down and hits rapid fire punches to the face followed by the middle rope fist drop for two. Lawler misses a charge and both guys go down. Tolos misses a middle rope knee drop and the piledriver ends this. Lawler can't do much but he can hit a piledriver with the best of them.

Rating: D+. Not much here but Lawler was a much bigger deal at this point on a national stage due to the Letterman/Kaufman thing. Having him come out here and piledrive a midcard level guy was the right move. The problem with this show is becoming clear though as there aren't any real stories to the matches. To be fair though, that's normal for wrestling back in this era.

Women's Tag Titles: Joyce Grable/Wendi Richter vs. Judy Martin/Velvet McIntyre

Grable and Richter are the champions. These are the same tag titles that were in the WWF and are officially the NWA Women's Tag Titles. Vince bought the rights and brought them to the WWF in the late 80s. They were pretty much a mess but it doesn't really make much of a difference. Velvet and Richter start things off. Trongard says that Richter was one of the original Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders. The cheerleaders began in

1961, when Richter was a year away from being born, so I think Trongard is a bit off.

I think Richter and Grable are heels here. Velvet knocks her to the floor and slams her down back in the ring. Grable comes in and backs away in the corner immediately. Velvet grabs the arm and brings Martin in instead. Grable takes some wild swings but Martin ducks them with ease. Back to Richter who gets slammed down. Grable and Richter are in nearly identical outfits other than the boots so at a distance it's hard to tell them apart.

Martin works on the arm for awhile and then brings in Velvet for, you guessed it, more arm work. We get a quick tag off to Grable who immediately grabs Velvet's arm. I get the idea of psychology but could you mix it up a little bit? Grable whips Velvet around by the hair and finally mixes things up a bit with a front facelock. Back to Richter who works on the neck a bit.

Velvet gets in a single punch and tags Martin back in. The heels finally get Grable into the corner for some double teaming. We even get a Tree of Woe out of it. Richter works on a bow and arrow submission as we hit the ten minute mark. Velvet keeps trying to run in to help but it just gets Grable in more trouble. Finally Grable escapes and makes the tag so Velvet can clean house.

Everything breaks down and the champs get rammed together. Martin and Richter are in now and all four miss splashes, drawing a BUNCH of booing. Off to Velvet who is immediately put into an over the shoulder back breaker. Richter lets her go for some reason and brings Grable back in. The champs do the Faces of Fear backdrop into a powerbomb for the pin out of almost nowhere on Velvet.

Rating: D+. It wasn't the worst match I've ever seen but it went on too long. The problem with women's wrestling back in this era was that not only did most of the women look alike, but they almost all wrestled alike

because most of them were trained by Moolah or one of her students. This match having more time helped it a lot too.

The champs say nothing of note post match.

Wahoo McDaniel vs. Dizzy Ed Boulder

Boulder is more famous as Brutus Beefcake and has long blonde hair here. He looks to be roided out of his mind also. Feeling out process to start and Wahoo chops him down hard. Jerry Lawler jumps in on commentary. Test of strength goes to Wahoo and he grabs a top wristlock. Down to the mat and Wahoo drops knees onto the arm. Boulder takes him down and drops some knees onto Wahoo. To be fair that's a large target so it's hard to miss.

Lawler talks about winning his match and being glad it didn't end in a DQ. Boulder slams him down and drops another knee and then ANOTHER. He must have dropped about seven so far. Now to mix it up he chokes with the knee as well. Wahoo gets whipped into the corner and Boulder goes after the knee a bit. The announcers talk about the main event as Wahoo comes back with chops and a right hand to the ribs. Wahoo rams him into the corner a few times and goes on the warpath. A big chop sets up a big elbow for the pin.

Rating: D-. This was really boring. Wahoo was a guy who got over for his character and toughness, but his in ring work never quite worked all that well. Either way, this wasn't very interesting at all but at least it was short. Also having Lawler on commentary makes a wrestling match feel right for some reason.

Jesse Ventura/Blackjack Lanza/Ken Patera vs. High Fliers/Rick Martel

The High Fliers are Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzell and they're the tag champions. The heels (Ventura's team) has Heenan managing them. Martel vs. Patera gets us going. Patera tries to draw him into the corner but

Martel is BRILLIANT (Gene Okerlund said so) and wants to keep it in the middle. This is power vs. speed and Martel snaps off some armdrags. Martel takes him down and works on, say it with me, the arm.

Off to Brunzell for some fresh arm work and an atomic drop. Back to the arm and it's off to Ventura, who is called Mr. V. here. Brunzell grabs the arm and it's off to Gagne who comes off the middle rope onto the arm again. Ventura easily picks him up and carries Gagne to the corner and brings in Lanza. The size difference here is huge but it doesn't last long as Martel comes in and is a house of fire.

Martel drags Lanza into the corner but does it so slowly that Ventura falls into the ring from reaching so much. Patera comes back in as does Brunzell and the power man pulls the Flier into the corner. Off to Ventura for a bearhug. Things break down and Gagne comes in to beat up everyone. Martel comes in to help and the Heenan Family is in trouble. Gagne puts a sleeper on Patera but Ventruea makes the save.

It settles down with Lanza and Gagne and Lanza drives his knuckles into the side of Gagne's head ala Sgt. Slaughter in 1991. Ventura comes in and hits a backbreaker for two. Gagne gets the tag to Martel but the referee doesn't see it. I've always loved that sequence for some reason. Off to Patera for the bearhug again and Gagne is in big trouble. Gagne escapes with a kind of Thesz Press and sends Lanza into the corner and makes another hot tag to Martel.

Rick misses a dropkick and it's back to Patera for a suplex for two as Brunzell makes the save. Lanza interferes to break up a potential hot tag and comes in legally, only to get kicked in the face so we can get the actual hot tag to Brunzell. He hits his signature dropkick and puts on a Figure Four, called an Indian Deathlock. Everything breaks down and Heenan gets up on the apron, only to get knocked back down again.

Things settle down again and it's Brunzell backdropping Patera to set up another Deathlock attempt. Patera breaks it up and everything breaks down

again. Somewhere in there Patera pins Brunzell as it's possible that there was a foreign object sent in there by Heenan when he was on the apron.

Rating: B-. This isn't something that everyone is going to like but I was getting into it by the end. They had every face in there getting beaten down at different times as well as a lot of hot tags. The fans were staying in this too and it was by far and away the best match of the night so far. The High Fliers were exactly what their name said and it worked pretty well for the most part. Good match here.

Replay shows that Heenan did slip something to Patera during the brawl. The good guys clear the ring in a big brawl post match. Heenan takes his usual beating. The losers claim cheating post match.

We get a lot of replays as well.

This is the match I've been looking forward to.

AWA World Title: Nick Bockwinkel vs. Hulk Hogan

Hogan is fresh off Rocky III and comes out to Eye of the Tiger. The arena, in a word, ERUPTS. I mean the place comes alive like I haven't seen an AWA crowd ever do. Hogan is all fired up and immediately charges at Bockwinkel and points at the belt. He's wearing a shirt that says WE WANT THE BELT and the fans are going nuts when he points at it. Find a copy of this as it's one of the best Hogan entrances I've ever seen.

They introduce every major AWA executive for some reason and no one cares. In something I've never seen before, they do the big match intros and play Hulk's music (Eye of the Tiger) again. The fans are still chanting Hogan and we're underway. This is another match in a long running series of DQ's and screwjobs and all that jazz. Bockwinkel stalls a lot like he's an old car. Hogan pulls him into a shoulder block and the

crowd pops again. We've been stalling for almost two minutes now.

Hulk shoves him out of a lockup but gets caught in a headlock. That gets him nowhere and Hulk runs him over again and Nick hides in the corner. A third shoulder block puts Bockwinkel on the floor and we're at five minutes already. Bockwinkel finally gets in some offense by firing off some knees to the stomach. That gets him nowhere as Hogan fires off even harder knees and more of them as well.

Bockwinkel gets slammed down and rammed into the corner. We're almost seven minutes in and this is total dominance so far. Nick finally gets in a shot to the ribs and a right hand to take over. Hogan will have none of that and easily kicks him out of the ring. Nick runs back in and throws on a front facelock. After maybe a minute of the champion in control, Hulk backdrops him down and we're back to even.

Nick channels his inner JYD (was he a big name yet? I don't think so) and rams some headbutts into Hogan's ribs from all fours. Bockwinkel charges into a boot in the corner and Hogan takes over again. There's the windup punch for two. Big clothesline sets up an elbow drop for two. The fans are really coming alive for these nearfalls. Shoulderbreaker gets two. Bockwinkel fires off some punches to slow Hulk down.

The punches stop working because Hogan Hulks Up and fires back at Bockwinkel who can't stay on his feet. Powerslam gets a close two. The legdrop misses and both guys are down. Nick hammers on Hulk in the corner but Hogan kicks him back down. A pair of elbows gets a very slow two. Hogan misses a corner charge and gets caught in the sleeper, which is one of Bockwinkel's finishers.

Hogan finally flips Nick down but the referee, who looks to be about 75, goes down too. The fans know what's coming. Bockwinkel gets put in the sleeper again but Hulk rams him into the corner, crushing the referee again. A third sleeper goes on but Hulk dumps him over the top to the floor. Back in Hogan slams him down and drops the leg for the pin and the

title.

Before the rating, a second referee comes out, says Hogan threw him over the top, and it's a DQ win for Bockwinkel, causing trash to be thrown into the ring like the night the NWO formed. Hogan beats up Heenan and Bockwinkel post match to a huge roar from the crowd. Hogan says this is the people's belt and that he's the real champion.

Rating: B. The match was good as we had Hogan taking everything Bockwinkel had and continuing to come back. He broke the sleeper three times through raw power and had the people eating out of the palm of his hand for almost twenty minutes. It was the perfect kind of match to FINALLY change the title.

But that's not what they did. What you have to remember is that this had been going on for a LONG time. I know of at least one other match where they did this, and I'd bet on this being the finish for a ton of house show matches between these two. This show would be the equivalent of a PPV for the AWA, but it was the same finish. That right there is one of the big factors that led to the downfall of the company (Note that I DID NOT say it was the final blow, because it wasn't. The company was around for about 8 more years).

The problem was that Gagne didn't want to change and wanted it to be about the old school style. Depending on what version of the story Hogan is telling, Verne wanted to give Hulk the belt (which I'll believe) but he would have had to either A, give up his NJPW commitments which were very lucrative for him, B, marry a Gagne, or C, take lower than 50% of his merchandise sale demands. Let's look at each of these separately.

If it's the NJPW stuff, I can understand that. Hogan made a deal to be in Japan and he wanted to hold up to it. That's fine. As for marrying a Gagne, that's something I've NEVER agreed with. There's this mentality at times of keeping it in the family, but in a case like this it makes no sense. Sign him to an exclusive deal or whatever, but let the marriage

stuff go.

Finally, we get to what allegedly made Hogan leave: his merchandise stuff. Hogan allegedly demanded 50% of his merchandise sales to stay and Verne said no, so Hulk went back to Vince. In short, if this is true, Verne Gagne is an idiot. Yes, that's a huge number, but LISTEN TO THE FREAKING PEOPLE. The place EXPLODED when Hogan came out and that kind of reaction wasn't touched for the rest of the night. The people wanted to see something new (Bockwinkel and Gagne traded the title for two days shy of FOURTEEN YEARS) and that was Hogan.

The common expression you hear is that the money is in the chase. The problem here is that the chase had been done for the better part of a year at this point and there was no reason to keep doing it. The fans stopped caring and therefore buying tickets because they stopped believing the title was going to change. If you don't believe the money is in Hogan as the champion, I'd point you to the WWF from January 23, 1984 to February 5, 1988.

At the end of the day, it was a bad business decision by Gagne. The stuff he had done did indeed work in the past and had gotten him this far. The problem was that Hogan was unlike anything he had ever had to work with before. Any money they lost in the merchandise would have easily been made up by additional revenue from house shows or the additional merchandise they sold because of Hogan. The company was certainly not dead after Hogan left but it was nowhere near what it could have been and it became a shell of itself in the years to come.

Jerry Blackwell/Sheik Adnan Al-Kassie vs. Verne Gagne/Mad Dog Vachon

Gagne and Vachon are an old tag team that are coming back together to fight the Sheiks in a feud that never seemed to end. They come out to Celebrate Good Times of all songs. The Sheiks stand on the apron before the bell and are counted for some reason. How can you get counted out before the match starts? Verne and Blackwell start things off with Gagne

beating up both Sheiks. The 400lb Blackwell gets backdropped for two.

To his credit, Gagne is getting one of the loudest reactions of the night. Off to Vachon for another good reaction. We hear from the referee in the Hogan match who says he has broken ribs. Apparently it's all owner Stanley Blackburn's decision to keep the title off Hogan. The referee is glad Hogan almost won but it was a fair decision. Vachon rips at Blackwell's face and Gagne cheats a bit.

Off to Al-Kassie who hides in the corner from a growling Mad Dog. Vachon is finally knocked to the floor but Gagne saves him from a bell shot. The Sheik brings in a chair to hit Vachon but after it connects, Gagne gets it away and blasts everyone with it. Vachon is busted open now. Blackwell powerslams him down for two as Gagne makes the save. Off to an abdominal stretch from Sheik but Gagne makes another save.

Vachon staggers into the wrong corner and Blackwell drills him. They slug it out and there's the hot tag to Verne. Blackwell almost immediately powerslams him down for two. A splash misses as does a second one. There's a sleeper and Jerry is in trouble. Everything breaks down and Vachon rams the loaded cast of the Sheik into the head of Blackwell. They take the cast off Sheik's arm and Vachon hits Blackwell with a chair. A middle rope shot to Sheik's bad arm gets the pin for Gagne.

Rating: D+. Not much here but it was the best thing they could do to send the fans home happy. Gagne was certainly still pretty awesome considering he was closer to sixty than fifty, but it was probably better that it was a rare occurrence to see him in the ring. This was a long feud that really wasn't explained here, but that's a difference from today that you can't criticize them for.

Verne and Vachon celebrate to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. This was pretty boring for the first half but the last three matches helped a lot. The world title match is quite good as is the

six man tag. The main event tag is just ok but it sent the crowd home happy which was the right idea. The white elephant in the arena though is Hogan not getting the title again and he would be gone by the end of the year, launching the WWF to the top of the industry.

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AWA All-Star Wrestling – January 1, 1984: Complete With Bloopers

AWA All-Star Wrestling

Date: January 1, 1984

Location: WFBT Studios, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Commentator: Ron Trongard

This is I think the flagship show of the AWA. Since it's getting kind of hard to find some of the requests I've gotten, I figured I'd work on this huge backlog of shows I've found while I download copies of others. I don't know very much about this company at all so I'll be guessing on a lot of it as we go. Let's get to it.

We open with Gene Okerlund who has Jesse Ventura with him. Jesse has promised us a major announcement that is going to knock wrestling both forward and backward. Two years ago he was in Japan and saw a guy that he wanted to start tagging with. It's not Adrian Adonis but rather someone who compliments Jesse perfectly. It's Mr. Saito. Saito gives Jesse a kimono. Saito hits a board with his head but it doesn't break. He does it again and the board still doesn't break.

Everyone cracks up laughing and I think that was a blooper.

Here's Gene again who brings in Verne Gagne. He talks about how this is the season for amateur wrestling. Verne congratulates all of them for their hard work and dedication. Back to the pro ranks though, he's glad Schultz (I presume Dave) has been suspended. Rule breakers are going to get cracked down on a lot more in 1984.

Opening sequence.

Rocky Stone vs. Jim Brunzell

Brunzell is half of the High Fliers and takes Stone down with an armbar. Off to a headscissors but Stone gets to the ropes. The referee's nickname is Sodbuster. I can't say I've heard that one before. Stone grabs a front facelock but Brunzell knocks him into the corner and works on the leg. Pick a body part dude. A high knee sets up the dropkick for the pin.

Rating: D+. That dropkick is awesome but the match was boring up to that point. Brunzell was in a team with the owner's son so you know that he was getting pushed strong. The match was dull as Brunzell couldn't pick what he wanted to work on so he worked on everything, then finished with the dropkick. Boring but it's a squash so it doesn't matter much.

Gene runs down a card and talks about how Bockwinkel needs a partner. Heenan, Bockwinkel's manager, has been asking old Heenan Family members to be Nick's partner. Heenan and Bockwinkle, the world champion, come in and deny that. They won't announce who their partner is. We'll find out by the end of the show.

Buddy Lane vs. Mr. Saito

Lane takes him to the mat but Saito gets us easily. Saito takes him down now and works over the arm. He chops Lane in the corner and dropkicks him down (kind of). Saito tries a

Boston Crab but Lane blocks it. Instead he tries a cradle but Lane keeps getting his shoulder up. That goes on for about 30 seconds and they get back up. Saito punches him near the throat and chops him down again. Saito Suplex ends this.

Rating: D. This was another odd match as Lane got in a lot more offense than you would expect as well as blocking a lot of Saito's stuff. It wasn't horrible I guess but it was a different kind of squash and I'm not sure if I mean that in a good way or not. Still though, it wasn't bad.

We get the Jesse/Saito thing again but this time he breaks the board. That's awesome that we got a blooper.

Jake Milliman vs. Buck Zumhofe

Milliman is nicknamed Milkman and is kind of the AWA's version of the Brooklyn Brawler. Buck is Light Heavyweight Champion and this is 2/3 falls. And now Jingle Bell Rock is playing. Buck is nicknamed Rock N Roll so maybe that's why? He hooks a quick stepover toehold and then shifts to the arm. I don't think the title is on the line here. Zumhofe hooks some armdrags and back into the armbars.

Milliman manages a knee to the ribs and hooks a chinlock for his first offense. Buck fights up and works on the arm again. A dropkick takes Milliman down and a second one does as well. A cross body (called a flying body slam) gives Zumhofe the first fall. We take a break and come back with the second fall. The fans chant for Milliman who is the heel I think as Buck works on the arm.

Now for a change of pace, Buck works on the arm. Good to see them mixing things up in a match that has no apparent reason for being two out of three falls. Milliman gets two off something like a DDT. A slam gets two for Buck. Jake hits a flying forearm to take over but Zumhofe slams him off the top and wins with a Vader Bomb.

Rating: D+. Boring match and I have no idea why it was two out of three. Milliman got squashed twice in a row when once certainly would have given us the same result. Also, why not make this for the title if it's going to be a squash? Either way, dull stuff but not terrible I guess.

Buy the AWA shirt! It's \$10 which is a lot better than the \$39.99 for the Austin jersey in 1998.

The High Fliers say Saito is strong. They say they'll be patient about getting their titles back.

Zumhofe says happy new year while having Auld Lang Syne playing on his boombox.

House show rundown. Bockwinkel comes in to announce his partner as Jerry Blackwell. He's half of the tag champions and injured both Mad Dog Vachon and the Crusher, the two guys they're teaming against.

AWA World Title: Mad Dog Vachon vs. Nick Bockwinkel

This is from Christmas Night and we're joined in progress with Bockwinkel in trouble. I think they said there are five minutes left in the time limit. A backdrop gets two for Mad Dog. Vachon has dominated this according to Trongard. Bockwinkel avoids a charge in the corner and both guys are down. Nick tries the piledriver but Vachon reverses. Vachon puts him down but pulls him up at two. There's a piledriver by Mad Dog for the pin and the title! That came out of nowhere. Not enough shown to properly rate it but it was your usual main event style ending, although the pin comes out of nowhere.

Heenan and Bockwinkel jump Mad Dog's friend Crusher post match until Crusher gets a chair and pops them both with it. And never mind as Bockwinkel is disqualified for something so there's no title change. This was a weekly thing in the AWA, including twice taking the title back from Hogan, which is why

he bolted.

Vachon says he'll hurt Blackwell. Crusher comes in and calls Blackwell fat.

Overall Rating: C-. The show isn't really bad and at just an hour, it's not like this is a chore to sit through. The in ring work is far weaker than the talking parts though, which set up future stuff as well as catch us up on what's been happening. Not a terrible show or anything, but it's not something I would regularly watch I don't think.

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