

Extreme Rules 2016 Preview

It really feels like we just got done with Payback and now it's already time for the next show. In this case that's not a good thing as the stories were only so strong in the first place and now it's clear that the stories don't have enough steam to keep going beyond this show. I'm genuinely not that thrilled to watch this show but maybe I'll be surprised. Let's get to it.

Starting on the pre-show, we have Dolph Ziggler vs. Baron Corbin in a No DQ match. We're getting this one because someone felt that the best way to get Corbin over was to have him lose a big match before beating Ziggler in a rematch. Now it's the always useful rubber match with a gimmick attached, even though I don't know how many people even wanted the second match in the first place.

Now in theory you have Corbin go over here but that's what everyone would have said going into their first match. Ziggler is a guy who can take loss after loss and be just fine so there shouldn't be any other option here aside from Corbin hitting a chair shot or two and End of Days for the pin, thankfully ending this mess of a feud in the process. More than once I've forgotten that they're even feuding and there's really no excuse for that.

Next up we'll go with Kalisto defending the US Title against Rusev. This is another match where the ending should be obvious, especially if you look at things for more than all of eighteen seconds. Kalisto was beaten down on Raw and Rusev is an absolute monster, so why in the world would you not switch the title here? I'm sure John Cena returning on Memorial Day is just a coincidence as well.

There's a new gimmick match on the show as well, assuming you consider a weapons based cage match to be a new gimmick. This time we have Dean Ambrose vs. Chris Jericho in an Asylum match, meaning we have a cage with weapons on top. In this case the feud is over talk shows and a potted plant named Mitch, which is probably why I'm not very interested in this one. Ambrose should go over, unless it's decided that these two need to

have a third match instead of being in Money in the Bank next month. Yeah Dean wins, but I wouldn't be surprised if Jericho got a surprise win for the sake of being illogical.

New Day is defending the Tag Team Titles against the Vaudevillains and I can't shake the feeling that we're getting new champions here. New Day has held the belts since Summerslam (a stat we're reminded of every few minutes, which is rarely a good omen for a title reign) and it should be near time for someone new to get the titles.

However, I can't exactly imagine the Vaudevillains actually taking them from New Day. It isn't going to hurt New Day if they lose them, especially if they get them back in a big moment. That being said, I think New Day retains but the Vaudevillains have been treated as someone beneath the champs, which makes them much more dangerous challengers. New Day should retain though and then drop them to Anderson/Gallows, who we'll cover next.

What have I done to deserve this? Anderson and Gallows debuted about a month ago and we're closing in on ten TV matches (counting six mans) where they've fought the Usos. If you can come up with a match that has been pounded into the ground any worse than this one, I'd beg of you to not tell me about it.

This time it's under Texas Tornado rules because it makes sense to just have them go to the big brawling segment that ends all of their matches. I'll take Anderson and Gallows for the win here as they've been beaten enough times now that it's ok to let them win, just in case people started thinking something of the Usos while making sure no one thought anything of Anderson and Gallows. I'm thoroughly sick of this match but I'm sure we'll see it again because that's how WWE does things.

Now we have a match that is actually being treated as one of the biggest on the card as Charlotte defends the Women's Title against Natalya in a submission match with Ric Flair barred from ringside. The thing here though is that we have a classic Ric Flair formula: how can Charlotte possibly survive this one?

In this case, it's probably going to be due to some other form of

shenanigans and then winning with the Figure Eight. Natalya just isn't going to win the title because she isn't that interesting and (in theory at least), it should be setting up a showdown with Sasha for the big title change down the line. The stipulation here comes off as a smoke screen though, which isn't the most interesting. The build has been good though and Ric not being around should help things a bit.

Next to last we have probably the second biggest match on the card and the one that I'm looking forward to the most as Miz defends the Intercontinental Title against Sami Zayn, Cesaro and Kevin Owens. They've put together one heck of a feud here as all four could conceivably walk out with the title and there's an actual reason to care about each of them fighting the other.

As for the winner.....I think it's going to be Miz. I know the logical move would be to move the title onto any of the other three but Miz hanging onto it can set up a one on one match for the title, perhaps for Sami, before they move on to the next big Zayn vs. Owens match. It also helps that Miz is quite the champion and could give someone a good rub in a title loss. Anyone could win here but I'd actually like to see Miz retain.

Finally we have the main event and please let this be the final match in the feud. Roman Reigns is defending the WWE World Title against AJ Styles in an Extreme Rules rematch after retaining under some shenanigans last time. The idea here is basically welcoming a bunch of violence and interference, which doesn't really make me want to see the match again. I mean, it was awesome the first time but the Usos/Anderson/Gallows interfering has destroyed any interest I have in this match.

The question here is who interferes as a surprise to cost either guy the title. Of course there's always the Finn Balor option and it would make sense but I'm still not sure they'll pull the trigger here. Of course we'll have Reigns retaining the title but my goodness I'm not really looking forward to this one. I can't imagine Styles stays in the title hunt after this as he'll likely do Money in the Bank and then move on to another feud. Either way I'm not as excited for this one than I was for the previous one and most of that is due to this story being hammered

into the ground without anything being added to it.

Overall Extrem Rules really doesn't feel that extreme. We have a nine match card (counting the pre-show) and there's an Extreme Rules match, a No DQ match, a cage match and a Texas Tornado match. Unless you could submissions and a four way as extreme, this feels like something just a step or two above a regular pay per view card.

Normally the violence and gimmicks can carry this show on its back without too much effort but this last week has killed any interest I had. It's just not a show that feels like it needs to exist and is only happening because the PPV schedule had Extreme Rules listed. There's definitely some stuff I'm interested in seeing but nothing that really blows me away. I'm almost sure things will be fine but the stories need to move on after this one.

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Smackdown – May 19, 2016: Please Let It End On Sunday

Smackdown

Date: May 19, 2016

Location: Bon Secours Wellness Center, Greenville, South Carolina

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

It's the final show before Extreme Rules and this past Monday wasn't exactly the strongest episode of Raw in recent memory. The stories are starting to run out of steam and Sunday can't get here soon enough. Odds are tonight is going to be about the Intercontinental and WWE World Title stories, which could go a few different ways each. Let's get to it.

The opening recap focuses on Monday's oddball tag match and makes sure to show Shane and Stephanie setting it up in case you're stupid enough to think these matches are just happening.

Opening sequence.

Kevin Owens vs. Cesaro

Miz, Maryse and Sami Zayn are on commentary. Miz gets right to the point and says tonight's MizTV is canceled. It never ceases to amaze me that they feel the need to change plans from Monday to Tuesday. They slug it out to start as Miz and Sami bicker about Miz constantly getting beaten up. Since this is WWE, the camera keeps cutting to the announcers' table so we can see them arguing, completely defeating the point of them being on commentary.

Cesaro dropkicks him out to the floor, followed by some chops. Back inside and Cesaro stops for a quick Rumba. I mean of course that's just a guess as I can't see what he's doing because we're looking at the announcers' table again but it's my best guess. Owens bails from the threat of a European uppercut so Cesaro follows him out for the running version up against the barricade. Maryse offers a distraction and Owens knocks Cesaro into the table and then whips him into the steps for a bonus.

Owens mocks Miz's flapping arms and drops a backslash for two (Owens: "HOW IS MY CLOSEUP?"). Maryse yells at Sami in French, forgetting that he's from Montreal. Another backslash hits raised knees because you can't hit the same spot twice (makes sense in theory, though Cesaro should have known that the first one was coming given how Owens uses it in every match) but Owens sends him into the corner for the Cannonball.

Back from a break with another shot of the commentary team showing Miz and Maryse kissing. Cesaro fires in an uppercut to break up the frog splash and grabbing a gutwrench superplex to put both guys down. A high cross body gets two for Cesaro as the wrestlers on commentary actually start paying attention and breaking down the match. The Swing doesn't work though and Owens bails to the floor, only to have him blast Sami in the face.

Cesaro flips off the apron to take out Owens before punching Miz in the face. Back in and Cesaro's eats a superkick for two but Sami comes in, only to have Cesaro punch him in the face, either over the Helluva Kick last week or to prevent a DQ. The distraction lets Owens get in a rollup with a handful of trunks for the pin at 14:48.

Rating: B-. I'm really digging the idea they're going with here and it's actually turned into a four way feud instead of two guys feuding and the other two just being there on the side. I'm actually not sure who walks out with the title on Sunday and it would seem that there are multiple ways to go after the match is over. That's a hard thing to pull off but they've managed to do it with four talented guys doing what they're supposed to do.

Post match Sami gives Cesaro the Helluva Kick but takes the Skull Crushing Finale.

Paige vs. Dana Brooke

Becky Lynch is on commentary and says her eye injury is the worst thing she's ever had because the double vision means she has to see Dana twice. Paige knees her in the face to start as we hear about Becky fighting Paige's mom over in the UK. Dana trips Paige up though and we hit a leg scissors back inside. Becky thinks she should be named Becky Balboa because she keeps getting up like Rocky. Some kicks and knees stagger Dana but she grabs a Samoan Driver for the upset pin at 3:16.

Rating: D+. Dana looked better here but that might be due to how short the match was, which always helps things out a little bit. Brooke has a great look and a lot of potential but she just needs more time in the ring, preferably down in developmental. She's just been called up too

early to be on her own, which to be fair wasn't the plan until a few days ago. That being said, what the heck has happened to Paige? She's gone from the top of the division to absolutely nothing in no time. I really don't get it.

Lana, with that accent dying faster than Paige's push, says Kalisto is hiding behind his mask and that Rusev is the greatest champion of all time. Rusev says the chant will be MACHKA MACHKA MACHKA.

Dolph Ziggler vs. Sheamus

It feels like we haven't seen Sheamus in a long time. Ziggler is shoved around to start before coming back with knees and right hands in the corner. A hard ax handle to the face drops Ziggler though and we take a break. Back with another ax handle blasting Dolph in the face before his superkick is countered with an elbow to the knee.

We hit the chinlock for a bit before Ziggler fights up and gets in a Fameasser for a near fall. The neckbreaker is broken up though and Sheamus gets two off the Irish Curse. Back up and the Zig Zag is countered but Sheamus misses a charge, setting up a superkick to give Dolph the fluke pin at 10:48.

Rating: C-. Sheamus has just died since the League split up. I had forgotten that he was around for a bit as he was only in the battle royal recently and then hadn't been seen since. Ziggler vs. Corbin isn't much better though as I have no idea why they're feuding, especially since Corbin should have won in the first place but we need to give Ziggler a fluke win instead.

Corbin comes out to say he'll hurt Ziggler on Sunday.

The Asylum cage is lowered and here's Chris Jericho for a chat. Jericho demands quiet by saying QUIET over and over before pointing out the cage hanging above us. Well to be fair no one noticed the cage hanging above the ring on Raw until Ambrose pointed it out so that was kind of necessary. Jericho lists off all of the matches that he's been in over the years and admits that he's never been in an Asylum match because there's never been one. However that means Ambrose hasn't been in one

either, meaning Jericho has the advantage because he's smarter and crazier.

Jericho asks that the cage be lowered as he talks about how he put Dean in the hospital with a twenty pound plant. Looking up, Jericho adds up the days he can put Dean in the hospital by using all of these weapons, which he sees as at least forty days. That's not counting all the mental anguish that goes with it, but above all else, Dean is receiving the Gift of Jericho. As the crowd drinks it in, a production worker comes in and of course it's Dean, who beats Jericho down with a kendo stick to send him running off. Guys in costumes are always an effective idea so this was fine.

And now, a life lesson with Bob Backlund. Bob talks about how Darren should be able to memorize these things and demands that he recite the Presidents of the United States in order. Young: "Coach no one can do that." Backlund: "Washington, Adams, Jefferson...." Young swears a bit and Backlund LOSES IT, saying that no one needs that kind of language and demands 200 jumping jacks because Young needs to be great in the ring. These are really funny bits and I'm sure that Young in front of a blue background and Backlund in front of a red one is coincidental.

Big Cass/New Day vs. Dudley Boyz/Vaudevillains

The announcers are flat out saying that Cass has been doing better since Enzo has been gone. During the entrances, we see the Vaudevillains destroying the time machine, which messes up the announcers' audio for some reason. D-Von and Big E. get things going with the latter getting two off a belly to belly. Byron's audio is still barely audible as D-Von runs Kofi over and brings in Bubba, who misses a splash attempt. It's time for the Unicorn Stampede before a big staredown takes us to a break.

Back with Woods hammering on Bubba in the corner until Ray clotheslines him down. Byron's audio is back because we're just that lucky. The Vaudevillains starts taking over now with Gotch snapmaring Woods so English can drop a knee for two. The Dudleyz don't seem thrilled with their lack of ring time here as Bubba shouts at Gotch for tagging in English instead of D-Von.

Bubba comes in instead and punches away while shouting about Booty's. Woods finally gets away and makes the hot tag off to Cass for the house cleaning. Everything breaks down and Big E. suplexes Gotch before throwing Kofi over the top onto English. A pretty horrible looking East River Crossing (mostly botched as Bubba is a bit too big) sets up the Empire Elbow to give Cass the pin at 10:38.

Rating: C. I'd be really surprised if they don't give Cass a spot on Sunday's card in an added match. They certainly seem to be pushing him at this point and it's really cool to see someone this young and brand new on the roster getting such a shot. I don't know if he has everything to make it work but at least he's getting a good start.

John Cena is back on May 30.

Long video on Natalya vs. Charlotte on Sunday with Charlotte talking about how she'll be twice as good as her dad because she uses the Figure Eight instead of the Figure Four.

Luke Gallows vs. Roman Reigns

Non-title. Usos vs. Anderson/Gallows in a Texas Tornado match is official for Sunday. Sweet goodness just stop already. Anderson/Styles/Usos, the latter again without the Siva Tau, are at ringside here. They trade elbows to start but only Reigns goes down. A second elbow knocks him outside so Reigns comes back inside where his Samoan drop gets two. We take a break and come back with Reigns firing off kicks to the ribs until Gallows takes his head off with a clothesline for a near fall of his own.

We hit the chinlock for a bit before a corner splash crushes Reigns again. That's enough action so we hit the chinlock again. Roman gets up for a jumping clothesline but AJ's distraction lets Gallows get in a rollup for two. There's the Superman punch but AJ grabs Reigns' foot to break up the spear. Everything breaks down on the floor with Reigns kicking AJ in the face, only to walk into the Gallows' Pole (chokebomb) for a very close two. Anderson comes in and that's a DQ at 11:50, despite him not touching anything.

Rating: C+. Not a bad power brawl but you knew the ending was going to be

screwy. I have no idea why they couldn't just wait until Anderson actually did something before getting to the DQ but anything that lets these six brawl more is the right idea in WWE's eyes. That being said, it would be nice if Anderson and Gallows could actually, you know, WIN SOMETHING eventually.

Post match Anderson gives Reigns the Boot of Doom and the fight keeps going. AJ is the only man standing but he takes too long loading up the announcers' table. Reigns gets in a few shots but everyone else gets back in it to end the show.

Overall Rating: C. Thank goodness it's over. This wasn't even a bad show or even a below average show. It was just incredibly boring for one simple reason: this is all padding instead of ANYTHING worthwhile (save for a decent Ambrose/Jericho segment). We've seen the opening match in various forms time after time, Dana doesn't have a match on Sunday, Ziggler vs. Corbin has been done multiple times, Big Cass vs. New Day isn't a match as far as I know and the main event stuff has been done to death.

I don't remember the last time a company just ran out of steam like this the week before a pay per view but it's been a rough two shows. Hopefully they don't try to stretch these stories out through June as I don't even want to imagine what we might have to sit through in that case. The quality was fine tonight but there's just nothing interesting going on here.

Results

Kevin Owens b. Cesaro – Rollup with a handful of trunks

Dana Brooke b. Paige – Samoan Driver

Dolph Ziggler b. Sheamus – Superkick

Big Cass/New Day b. Dudley Boyz/Vaudevillains – Empire Elbow to Bubba Ray

Roman Reigns b. Luke Gallows via DQ when Karl Anderson interfered

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Smackdown – May 12, 2016: Another One

Smackdown

Date: May 12, 2016

Location: Wells Fargo Arena, Des Moines, Iowa

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler

It's kind of hard to say what to expect around here as the show has been bouncing back and forth between focusing on the Intercontinental Title feud and then the World Title situation. The former tends to be the more interesting and it should be a fun show tonight with all four people being thrown together in a tag match. Let's get to it.

Here's Dean Ambrose to get things going. Lawler thinks Jericho should press charges against Dean for destroying the jacket. Well, uh, YEAH probably but that's the kind of thing that doesn't happen in wrestling. Dean thinks they're even now because Jericho smashed Mitch over the back of his head to try and take away everything he has. This ring is all that he's got and as long as his heart is beating, no one is going to take it away. Now the question is what can Dean take away from Jericho and the

first thing that comes to his mind is Jericho's ego.

After Dean gets done with him, Jericho isn't even going to be sure if wrestling is for him anymore. The lights go out and Jericho's music comes on, only to have Jericho appear behind Dean and lay him out. That's not it though as he pulls out a straitjacket to tie Dean down. Ambrose wakes up as Jericho shouts that Dean needs to get crazy while beating him in the head. A Codebreaker stops Dean's comeback and a second one FINALLY has referees out here to break it up. Jericho does his Gift of Jericho pose on the announcers' table.

Rusev vs. Sin Cara

Kalisto is on commentary and says helping Cara on Monday was just being a team. Rusev drops him with an early clothesline and stomps away as Kalisto stumbles over his battle plan for the pay per view. A kick to the chest puts Cara down again and we hear about Steph Curry for no good reason.

In your random insult of the week, Rusev has dubbed Kalisto the smelly boy who hides behind a mask. Cara starts kicking at the leg and scores with some right hands, followed by a top rope flip attack. As this is going on, Lana throws water on Kalisto for a distraction so Rusev can kick him in the head. Back in and the superkick sets up the Accolade to make Cara tap at 3:09.

Rating: D. SO WHAT WAS THE POINT OF MONDAY??? If you're just going to have Rusev squash Cara like he always should, why have him lose in the first place? As usual it comes off like WWE has no idea what they're doing from one show to another and just does stuff for the sake of doing it instead of with any kind of logical reasoning or planning behind it.

We look at Dana Brooke debuting and helping beat down Becky Lynch on Monday.

Emma introduces Dana, who is ready to destroy Becky tonight. People forget that Emma used to be on top of the NXT women's division but Dana has never forgotten and knows what Emma can do. This needed more patting on the head.

Becky Lynch vs. Dana Brooke

Lynch forearms her to start and pats Dana on the head, only to be pulled down by the hair. Dana stomps her on the mat and cranks on an arm and leg at the same time. Becky starts her comeback with a clothesline and a leg lariat but Dana sends her throat first into the ropes so Emma can poke her in the eye. Dana grabs a jackknife cover for the pin at 2:52. This was really awkward, which I'm sure has nothing to do with Dana debuting in September 2014 and being injured for months but still being called up to the main roster anyway.

Video on the end of Monday's six man tag and the post match showdown between Reigns and Styles.

AJ gives Anderson and Gallows a pep talk for tonight but says he's banned from ringside. They seem to be officially going with The Club.

Here's New Day for their weekly chat. Big E. nearly swears about what happened on Monday, which Woods says was the Vaudevillians Kanye Westing them. By that he doesn't mean marrying someone who has a big.....I think you get the idea. Actually Woods means getting involved in something that was none of his business. They're stuck in the 1830s and at Extreme Rules they'll be knocked into the DeLorean and sent back to the future. Cue the Vaudevillians to sing about how they'll win the titles a week from Sunday. Soon the sun will set on the New Day and the night belongs to the Vaudevillians.

Aiden English vs. Kofi Kingston

Kofi dropkicks him at the bell and stomps the heck out of him in the corner. English gets sent outside but catches a sliding Kofi and sends him face first into the post to take over. Big E. holds up the cereal to bring Kofi back to life (needs more Lion King), which actually seems to work as Kofi kicks English in the face and gets two off a high cross body. A top rope splash to the back gets two but everyone else gets ejected. Things settle down and Kofi grabs a sunset flip, only to have English drop down and put his hand on the ropes for the big upset at 3:52.

Rating: C. English is better in the ring than he's given credit for but it's pretty difficult to have a bad match against someone like Kofi Kingston. I still don't buy the Vaudevillians as taking the titles away from New Day as Anderson/Gallows should have that spot locked up but at least the build has been set up very well.

Reigns is also banned from ringside but he's ready to come out and deal with Styles if necessary.

Luke Gallows/Karl Anderson vs. Usos

Reigns and Styles are banned from ringside. Karl and Jey get things going with Jey in control before it's off to Jimmy for a running forearm. It's Gallows pulling Jimmy down by the hair and coming in for a slam. Anderson pounds away in the corner even more as Ranallo mentions Karl teaming with Giant Bernard, who Lawler says he hasn't heard from in a long time.

Anderson finally misses an elbow and it's off to Jey as things speed up. There's a powerslam to Karl but Gallows kicks Jey in the face and we take a break. Back with Anderson dropping a knee for two before it's back to Gallows for a chinlock. With that going nowhere, Gallows opts to just punch Jey in the corner. A superkick gets Jey out of trouble and the diving tag brings in Jimmy for the real house cleaning. Another superkick drops Anderson and sets up the Superfly Splash, only to have Gallows pull Jimmy to the floor. Gallows throws him over the announcers' table and that's a DQ at 11:39.

Rating: C-. The match was fine (albeit a bit slow paced) but the problem here is I'm sick of seeing them fight. This is the sixth time in three weeks that they've been in the same match. They're not bad or anything but it's the same problem WWE has so often: eventually people get sick of them and it's time for something fresh. Have the Hype Bros come up from NXT get squashed by Anderson and Gotch or put the Social Outcasts against the Usos or something but stop just doing the same thing and then expecting us to care when you put this on pay per view (which you know they will).

The beating continues post match as Anderson kicks Jey in the face and the twins are beaten down with a chair. You know, the match is over so

there's nothing keeping Reigns from coming out for the save.

R-Truth waters his selfie stick and gets his phone wet.

Here's our first Life Lesson With Coach Backlund. Bob asks Darren what time his watch says. Darren pulls out his phone to check the time but Backlund thinks he's making a phone call. His advice is to not call the operator and waste her time about the time. Young says no one wears watches anymore and he has everything on his desktop on his smart phone. Backlund: "I don't care if your phone is Einstein!" He wants the mail in a mailbox, a calendar on a wall and the desktop on top of a desk. Darren is told to do 200 squats and that's just fine with him. Again they weren't even in the same room, which makes this even better.

On a related sidenote: since when did wearing a watch become something so horrible? Yeah you can check your phone, or you can flick your eyes over to your wrist and see what time it is. You might even be able to do that without then needing to check 14 things on your phone and getting distracted by something. Since when did that become some arcane way of thinking?

Goldango vs. Gorgeous Truth

Breeze and Fandango open things up but it's off to Goldust and Truth less than thirty seconds in. Neither of them want to fight though so Truth tags Breeze back in, only to have Tyler knock Truth off the apron. Fandango turns on Goldust as well and Breeze pins Goldust (off a single clothesline, the only move Goldust took all match) for the pin at 1:39.

The beatdown is on and Goldust tries to cover Truth. That's a nice gesture but if I'm Truth, I'd try to find a partner who can survive a clothesline.

Greetings From Puerto Rico. Their new name is the Shining Stars.

We look at Ric Flair being escorted out of the building in the way too complicated segment on Monday.

Charlotte calls that a travesty because Ric Flair deserves better treatment than that. Ric guarantees that Charlotte will retain the title

at Extreme Rules but Charlotte looks unsure. To recap, the idea here is that Charlotte is in trouble without Flair and Ric is the one who is confident. In other words: Flair looks good and Charlotte looks almost inept. As usual, advantage Flair.

Cesaro/Sami Zayn vs. The Miz/Kevin Owens

This should be good. During Miz's entrance, Owens jumps on commentary to say he's allowing Miz one last chance to be a good partner before he takes the title at Extreme Rules. Miz and Cesaro get things going with the latter grabbing a headlock. A backbreaker gets two on Miz so Owens shouts about how he can do better. That's fine with Miz who brings Owens in, followed by Sami tagging himself in as well.

Zayn hammers away in the corner and Lawler correctly says the referee should be admonishing Sami for the punches. Miz comes in and bails to the floor but Owens won't let him leave. The good guys hit some dives to take the villains down and we take a break. Back with Sami slamming Miz and low bridging him out to the floor. Owens gets in a cheap shot though and it's time for Sami to be in trouble. A hard kick to the back sets up a camel clutch from Miz.

Owens to Byron: "YOU BETTER PRAISE ME!" The Reality Check gets two for Miz but Sami comes back with one of those clotheslines to drop the champ. There's the Blue Thunder Bomb (whose name confuses Lawler) to finally allow the tag off to Cesaro. Owens gets to eat some uppercuts and Cesaro runs to the floor for the uppercut against the barricade on Miz. The high cross body gets two on Owens but Sami's Helluva Kick hits Cesaro by mistake. Owens adds the frog splash for the pin on Cesaro at 12:45.

Rating: C+. Standard Smackdown main event tag with a nice bonus of having Sami and Cesaro screw up to add some tension there. They're actually pulling off the four way feud here as everyone wants to beat everyone else but it's all about the title (mostly) instead of personal feelings. Good match here though and the kind of thing you would expect on Smackdown.

Sami takes the Pop Up Powerbomb but Miz gives Owens the Skull Crushing Finale to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. This is what you come to know and expect from Smackdown with the watchable wrestling and meaningless storyline development as almost none of this will be brought up on Raw. You really have to take this show on a week to week basis as it really is just about whether or not the show happens to be good that particular week. Nothing much to see here though and that's Smackdown in a nutshell.

Results

Rusev b. Sin Cara – Accolade

Dana Brooke b. Becky Lynch – Jackknife rollup

Aiden English b. Kofi Kingston – Rollup while grabbing the rope

Usos b. Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows via DQ when Gallows threw Jimmy over the table

Gorgeous Truth b. Goldango – Breeze pinned Goldust after a clothesline from Fandango

Miz/Kevin Owens b. Cesaro/Sami Zayn – Frog splash to Cesaro

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Smackdown – May 5, 2016: Wholesome Smackdown Entertainment

Smackdown

Date: May 5, 2016

Location: Sprint Center, Kansas City, Missouri

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

We've hit the ground running on the way to Extreme Rules with a fairly action packed Raw earlier this week. The big story continues to be AJ Styles vs. Roman Reigns but now we also have the Usos and Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows much more closely involved. It should be interesting to see what they can throw in here before the pay per view in two and a half weeks. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

We open with the Highlight Reel but first we get a recap of the Ambrose Asylum being canceled and the ensuing brawl. Ranallo: "Payback is a Mitch!" Jericho brags about injuring Dean Ambrose and keeping him off the show tonight. That's about it for Dean though as here's Jericho's guest: Sami Zayn.

Before anything is said, we look at a clip of Cesaro vs. Owens on Monday with Sami and Miz getting involved and likely setting up a fourway for the title. Jericho says Sami isn't a decent human being for holding up the Intercontinental Title but Sami thinks the scarf makes Jericho look stupid. Sami certainly wasn't trying to steal the title but here are Miz and Maryse to interrupt.

This is Miz's Intercontinental Title so Sami better not lay a finger on her again, which is exactly what Sami does again. Jericho says he would freak out if anyone touched his \$15,000 jacket like that. Sami: "You paid \$15,000 to look like a walking Christmas tree?" That's enough for Jericho who walks out so Miz threatens Zayn for trying to go after the biggest

fish in WWE. Sami touches the title again and says he wants to go for a swim. Zayn wants to go right now but Miz bails to the floor.

Sami Zayn vs. The Miz

Non-title with the bell ringing after a break. Feeling out process to start as they fight over wristlocks and armbars. Sami grinds him down with a headlock. Back up and Sami gets in one of those kind of awkward looking clotheslines of his to send Miz to the floor. A moonsault off the barricade drops Miz again but here's Kevin Owens for a distraction.

We take a break and come back with Owens on commentary and Miz dropping a top rope axhandle for no cover. Owens: "You should be very proud of yourself Miz. You jumped up to the top rope, jumped off the top and hit him with your fists. You're an athlete!" Sami low bridges him to the floor for the big flip dive and a staredown with Owens. Kevin runs in for the DQ at 8:39.

Rating: C. Not much to this one but it was there for the angle instead of the wrestling. They've got something here with this four way feud with the title on the line and the match at Extreme Rules should be a lot of fun. There really isn't a bad option for the title at this point and that's a very rare situation to have.

Post match Sami gets double teamed until Cesaro runs down for the save, ripping his suit off on the way down the ramp. Cesaro cleans house but accidentally takes out Sami in the process. This time it's Cesaro holding up the title.

We look back at the end of Raw with the big brawl between Styles/Gallows/Anderson and Reigns/Usos, capped off by Reigns powerbombing AJ through the table.

Anderson and Gallows are a bit disappointed in AJ for not blasting Reigns with the chair on Monday. AJ wanted to keep it clean though because he wants to win the title his own way. Anderson and Gallows respect that but Roman doesn't respect AJ. Styles likes their suggestions of going extreme and thinks it's time for a chat with Roman.

Greetings From Puerto Rico.

We look at Enzo Amore's injury on Sunday.

Vaudevillains vs. Social Outcasts

Dallas/Axel here. Bo starts fast with a powerslam on English for two. Axel comes in to go after Gotch but gets backdropped out to the floor for the save. The Whirling Dervish ends Dallas at 1:51.

Post match Colin Cassady comes out to go after the Vaudevillains and cleans house before Axel gets in to call Gotch and English SAWFT. That earns him a much deserved East River Crossing and Cass shouts a lot.

We look back at Shane and Stephanie gaining power on Sunday and their first night of sharing power on Raw.

Natalya/Becky Lynch vs. Charlotte/Emma

Natalya headlocks Charlotte to the mat to start and it's off to Becky with Lawler yelling about the cheating going on. This show has been so much easier to sit through with him as a heel like he always should be. It's already back to Natalya who charges into a boot in the corner and Emma comes in for some stomping. Emma slams her face first into the mat and it's Charlotte putting on a chinlock.

Natalya finally sends Charlotte into the corner and makes the hot tag to Becky for some armdrags and dropkicks. The comeback is shortlived though as Becky is sent to the floor for a crash, allowing Charlotte to do her headscissor faceplants. Back from a break with Becky getting two off a rollup until a big boot puts her down again.

We get the eternally painful standing on the hair before Charlotte drops a knee. An enziguri puts Emma down though and the hot tag brings in Natalya for the house cleaning. The stepover dropkick sets up the discus lariat (which Ranallo seems to dub Nattie By Nature) on Charlotte but Natalya gets sent into the corner for the Emma Sandwich. Emma takes too long though and it's the Sharpshooter to make Emma tap at 13:48.

Rating: B. I had a really good time with this one as the division really

has evolved to make the whole thing feel important. Perhaps above all else, one of the major reasons has been the ring time. Look at this mach. When is the last time you saw a women's match get almost fifteen minutes on a random Smackdown? That being said, it also helps that things have been entertaining with a well done tag formula to make everything work. It also helps that the wrestlers are all skilled enough to make the match that much better. Everything is working at this point and that hasn't been the case for years.

AJ comes in to see Roman Reigns and the Usos. He wants to know if Reigns will be at ringside tonight and Reigns says he'll be wherever he wants because he's the champ. In that case, AJ will be at ringside too.

Darren Young has asked Bob Backlund to be his life coach. That's fine with Backlund, if Young will put everything he has into this.

Zack Ryder vs. Rusev

This has become WWE's version of Goldberg vs. Jerry Flynn. Ryder gets in a few dropkicks before Rusev slams him down. The Accolade wraps it up at 1:15.

Rusev and Lana do the Kalisto dance until Kalisto runs in for a corkscrew cross body before running away.

Fandango teaches Goldust to dance when R-Truth and Tyler Breeze come in. Goldust is having some issues but Truth says Fandango is the one off beat. A danceoff ensues but Fandango would rather have a tag match next week.

Usos vs. Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows

AJ and Reigns are at ringside. Jey and Karl get things going with the former getting in an uppercut and crucifix for two. A dropkick puts Anderson down again but Karl knocks Jey out to the floor. Karl goes after Reigns though and it's a DQ at 2:20.

They brawl to a break and I think you know what's coming.

Roman Reigns/Usos vs. Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows/AJ Styles

Thankfully we don't miss anything during a break. I'm so glad that's becoming more of a trend. Styles and Reigns get things going with the champ getting in a quick shoulder and drawing quite a few boos. Reigns powers out of a sunset flip into a fireman's carry, followed by a hard uppercut for two. Anderson comes in for some right hands as we get those phantom dueling chants. A big boot to the face drops Karl with Ranallo's name drop of the mafia confusing Jerry. Jey comes in to face Gallows and a kick to Luke's face allows the tag off to Jimmy as the twins start taking over.

Gallows kicks Jey in the face and we get that awkward staredown in front of the ring. They actually don't take a break though as it's AJ coming in and taking a quick enziguri. Reigns comes in off the cold tag and starts cleaning house with a running clothesline to Anderson. The corner clotheslines set up the Superman punch but it takes Gallows off the apron, followed by a suicide dive from Jimmy. The second Superman punch hits Karl in the jaw but AJ takes Reigns out before the spear. Anderson's spinebuster gets two, only to have the spear put Karl away 7:30.

Rating: C+. Fine main event tag match here though I could have gone with some more time. It's good to have Reigns get a win to reestablish himself and the World Champion getting the pin on Anderson isn't going to hurt Karl in the slightest. I'm liking this feud so far and the rematch should be a lot of fun too.

AJ points at the title to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This was a much more efficient show with everything working like it should have. They're not even hiding the fact that Smackdown is meaningless anymore as wrestlers make the matches and Shane/Stephanie never acknowledge that this show exists. All you can ask for is some good wrestling and storyline supplements which is exactly what we had tonight. Fun, easy show here with the women having a really nice match.

Results

Sami Zayn b. The Miz via DQ when Kevin Owens interfered

Vaudevillains b. Social Outcasts – Whirling Dervish to Dallas

Natalya/Becky Lynch b. Charlotte/Emma – Sharpshooter to Emma

Rusev b. Zack Ryder – Accolade

Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows b. Usos via DQ when Roman Reigns interfered

Roman Reigns/Usos b. Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows/AJ Styles – Spear to Anderson

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Monday Night Raw – May 2, 2016: The New Era Of Greatest Hits

Monday Night Raw

Date: May 2, 2016

Location: Scottrade Center, St. Louis, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

We're past Payback, meaning we have less than three weeks before Extreme

Rules with a main event of AJ Styles vs. Roman Reigns II for the World Title. The big story tonight though is the balance of power as Shane and Stephanie McMahon will be running the show together for the foreseeable future. I'm sure this will be fascinating. Let's get to it.

This week's recap, narrated for a change, talks about last night's main event and the announcement of Shane and Stephanie sharing power.

Opening sequence.

Here's Stephanie, carrying a present, to get things going. Before she can get anywhere though, here's Shane with 100% less presents. The bickering starts early but Stephanie's gift is for Shane. It's....the the picture of Vince holding Shane as a child that was broken up before Wrestlemania.

Before Shane can talk about his ideas for the night, here's Kevin Owens to interrupt things. He has an idea of his own: a rematch for the Intercontinental Title. Owens appeals to Stephanie's business sense and mentions having a contractually obligated rematch. This brings out Cesaro to say that Owens and Zayn cost him the Intercontinental Title last night. Shane makes a #1 contenders match right now.

Cesaro vs. Kevin Owens

Miz and Maryse are on commentary. Cesaro immediately starts with the uppercuts across the ring, followed by another big one on the floor. Back in and Cesaro gets two off the high cross body but Owens goes after the shoulder to take over. The superkick and backsplash get two and it's time to work on the arm a bit more. A quick strike exchange drops Cesaro but he crotches Owens on top.

Kevin cuts him off again with a Stunner over the top rope, followed by a frog splash off the apron as we take a break. Back with Owens hitting the Cannonball but running into the springboard uppercut. They head outside with Owens grabbing the title but Miz takes it away. That earns Miz an uppercut and it's time for the champ to run in for the DQ at 11:30.

Rating: C. The match was fun while it lasted but at the same time there's only so much you can do when you pretty much have a big clock counting

down until Miz runs in for the DQ. That kind of stuff gets old quick, especially when this had the potential to be a really fun match between two power guys.

Post match Cesaro gets double teamed until Sami Zayn runs in for the save before holding up the title. This sets up the four way, even though there's no logical reason for Sami to still be involved after losing last night. If they had gone with the logical move of Sami winning last night, you can still bring in Owens because of the required rematch. That's too simple for WWE though so we get more illogical storytelling.

Dean Ambrose is in the back with Stephanie, who volunteers to be the guest on the Ambrose Asylum.

R-Truth and Tyler Breeze are in the back talking about selfie sticks (Truth's has leaves) when Goldust comes in. Goldust insults Breeze a bit and a challenge is issued. Truth doesn't like Goldust insulting his friend so Fandango comes in to be Goldust's partner.

Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows say AJ was close to winning last night which makes AJ want it even more. They imply they'll help in the rematch but Roman Reigns comes in to say he respects AJ but not the other two. The Usos come in and a challenge is made for a six man.

Goldust vs. Tyler Breeze

Fandango and R-Truth are here as the seconds. Truth gives Breeze a headband to start but Goldust knocks it off. Goldust: "WHY DIDN'T YOU EVER GIVE ME ONE OF THESE???" Truth doesn't notice as he's playing with the stick, which distracts Goldust enough for Tyler to get in a few shots. They start dancing at each other, allowing Breeze to grab a rollup for the pin at 1:49.

Here's New Day to talk about their upcoming title defense against the Vaudevillains, who were awarded the match last night after Enzo's injury. We see a clip of the injury, which seems to be just a concussion. If this wasn't such a serious moment, Woods would be showing us all the nasty things Beyonce sent to him on Twitter last night...but unfortunately that didn't happen. What did happen though was Enzo being released from the

hospital after all the other tests were negative.

This brings out the Vaudevillains with Aiden singing about how they're going to win the titles. Apparently Enzo was the realest guy in the emergency room...and here are the Dudley Boyz to interfere. They say they didn't see the Vaudevillains win anything last night after the match was ended fast. A fight is about to break out when Big Cass interrupts. He's tired of hearing about the Vaudevillains taking out his family and the brawl is quickly on.

Dudley Boyz/Vaudevillains vs. New Day/Colin Cassidy

Joined in progress with Woods working over Gotch and bringing in Kofi for a kick to the chest. Big E. comes in for the splash before it's time for the Unicorn Stampede. Kofi gets in a running dropkick in the corner but Bubba kicks Woods in the face to take over. English comes in for a superkick as the heels start taking turns on Woods. A dropkick finally gets Xavier out of trouble, only to have D-Von drop an elbow on his back to stop the tag. The middle rope elbow misses though and there's the hot tag off to Kofi. Everything breaks down and Kofi gets sent out to the floor in a heap as we take a break.

Back with Kofi still in trouble and Gotch holding him in place for a D-Von elbow drop. Kofi finally dropkicks the Vaudevillains down and it's off to Cass to clean house. English is sent flying off a fall away slam, followed by a big boot the face. Everything breaks down again with Bubba suplexing Cass, only to have Kofi springboard in to break up 3D. Cass' East River Crossing puts D-Von away at 14:32.

Rating: B. These guys were actually rolling out there with eight people in a match that made sense. New Day continues to be awesome and should be in for a good match against the Vaudevillains, though I can't imagine they'll actually drop the titles. Enzo coming back will get an eruption and the injury makes them feel like even more of an underdog team, which fits in with them so perfectly.

We look back at the main event which set up Styles' rematch at Extreme Rules.

Now we look at the Montreal Screwjob finish to the Women's Title match. You all know the Montreal Screwjob. I mean, WWE certainly thinks you do because they're certainly not going to explain it because they know that every fan, including those under the age of 18, have gone back and looked at every bit of the company's history ever. We do however get a clip of Charles Robinson as Little Naitch from back in the day to actually explain the screwjob.

Emma vs. Becky Lynch

Apparently they've been arguing on Twitter lately. Becky quickly knocks her to the floor and does her head shaking dance, only to get pulled off the middle rope to change control. A butterfly suplex gets two on Becky and we hit a half nelson of all things. Emma sends her hard into the corner for the Emma Sandwich and a near fall. Becky gets all fired up and forearm her in the corner, followed by an exploder suplex for two. A quick poke to the eye slows Becky down though and a Michinoku Driver puts Becky away at 5:45.

Rating: C+. Would it be the worst idea in the world to let some of these other Four Horsewomen win something now and then? I mean, I know we have to wait on Sasha because of...uh, reasons, but do they also have to have Becky losing most of the time? At least it was someone like Emma getting the win and not one of the lower level women but we need to have Becky get a win here or there. Sasha actually wrestling would be nice too.

Greetings From Puerto Rico.

Here's Dean Ambrose for the Asylum with Stephanie as his guest. Stephanie talks about how happy she is so Dean shows us a shot from Wrestlemania where Reigns speared her. That was the result of Stephanie being overzealous and she does her corporate speech about how awesome WWE is because of loyalty.

Dean goes on a long rant about loyalty and asks how many sacrifices Stephanie has made. I mean, yeah she's made a ton but Shane has made all of the same sacrifices over the years. That must make Stephanie mad because now she and Shane are exactly the same. Stephanie isn't happy with this so she cancels the Asylum and brings out Jericho for the

Highlight Reel once again. Dean gets in a brawl with him of course but walks into a Codebreaker. Jericho breaks Mitch over Dean's head in the ultimate act of evil.

Battle Royal

Apollo Crews, Darren Young, Alberto Del Rio, Damien Sandow, Stardust, Titus O'Neil, Zack Ryder, Sheamus, Curtis Axel, Rusev, Dolph Ziggler, Sin Cara, Baron Corbin, Viktor, Bo Dallas,

For the #1 contendership to the US Title and I think I have everyone involved. Kalisto is on commentary and it's Viktor quickly being eliminated. Sandow is sent out a few seconds later and Crews gets rid of Stardust. Darren gets eliminated and Sheamus Brogue Kicks Crews out for a bit of a surprise.

Someone puts Sheamus out off camera but he slides back in with no issue. Ziggler superkicks Corbin over the top for an elimination but Corbin pulls him outside under the ropes and beats the tar out of him. For a nice change of pace, Corbin is smart enough to throw the half dead Ziggler back in so Rusev can get the official elimination as we take a break.

Back with Sheamus eliminating Titus (great use of his comeback) and Del Rio hitting his double stomp on Axel for a quick elimination. Cara tosses Dallas and we're down to Cara, Rusev, Del Rio, Sheamus and Ryder. A spinning cross body puts Rusev down and a springboard moonsault does the same to Sheamus and Del Rio.

There's an Irish Curse to Ryder but not enough for an elimination. Cara makes the eternally stupid mistake of going to the top, allowing Del Rio to shove him out and get us down to four. We've got the former League of Nations and Ryder, meaning Sheamus thinks they should join forces again. Ryder gets stomped down but hangs onto the top rope, leaving the League to fight each other.

Del Rio gets in a Backstabber on Rusev but walks into a Rough Ryder. Rusev spinwheel kicks Ryder down though and all four are still in it. The jumping superkick and a regular superkick are enough to get rid of

Sheamus, followed by another superkick to send Del Rio to the floor. Ryder puts Alberto out and we're down to Ryder vs. Rusev, sending the fans into a short lived frenzy. Rusev charges into some knees in the corner and a missile dropkick puts Rusev down. The Broski Boot actually connects but Rusev no sells it and throws Ryder out for the win at 13:38.

Rating: C. This was actually awesome stuff (for a battle royal) with some great drama near the end, even though I'm sick of seeing the League of Nations guys in these spots. Putting the title back on Rusev would make sense as it was his best time ever in the company, but it really does feel like we're taking a big step back in time if he wins the belt again.

Here are Charlotte and Ric Flair to address the end of last night's title match. Charlotte really doesn't see the controversy in the decision so here's Charles Robinson to explain his actions. Charles says Natalya was screaming to stop it last night and that counts as a submission. Robinson gets a bit confused about whether his admiration for Ric had anything to do with his decision so here's a CHEATER chant for him.

That's enough from Charles so here's Natalya to say this is all about Ric. Well of course it is. I mean, he's RIC FLAIR. Whether he wants to admit it or not, Bret is the best there is, the best there was and the best there ever will be. Charlotte goes after Natalya but gets sent to the floor, leaving Ric to take off his gear. Natalya slaps him in the face and puts on a Sharpshooter before Charlotte gets her dad out of there. The Flairs leave so Natalay grabs Ric's Hall of Fame ring and Rolex.

After the announcers shill for WWE, Stephanie makes Charlotte vs. Natalya in a submissions match at Extreme Rules. As a bonus, Ric is banned from ringside. Stephanie's request for a WOO is denied.

AJ Styles/Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows vs. Usos/Roman Reigns

AJ and Reigns get things going with Styles grabbing a headscissors but easily being thrown off. Some kicks to the leg have Reigns in trouble so it's off to Gallows for a battle of uppercuts. Jey comes in for his running forearm in the corner, only to dive into a big boot for two. It's time for the big standoff on the floor after Jey is thrown over the top

and we take a break.

Back with Anderson hammering away on Jey before it's off to AJ. The beatdown is on and Styles doesn't seem to like the idea of his buddies breaking up a tag. The distraction lets Jey get in a superkick to set up the tag off to Reigns. House is quickly cleaned with Roman beating everyone away until Anderson kicks him in the face for two.

AJ gets a blind tag but eats a tilt-a-whirl slam for his efforts. There's a Superman punch to Gallows but Jimmy comes in off another blind tag with a high cross body for two on AJ. The Boot of Doom into the flapjack sends Reigns into the barricade, leaving AJ to hit the Phenomenal Forearm to the pin on Jimmy at 11:30.

Rating: B-. Another good match here as they let things break down a bit before the ending. I like the idea of the Usos being the lower level guys who can't keep up with Anderson and Gallows while Reigns is enough to take out any of them but not enough to take out everyone at once. It's a simple story and the feud is working well but I can't imagine it ending with anything other than Reigns standing tall again.

Post match Anderson and Gallows give AJ a chair before holding Reigns. AJ can't do it so the beatdown is on again. The Usos come in and get the chair to knock AJ down (it wasn't clear if they saw him throw it away). AJ gets back up and hits them with the chair, earning himself a Superman punch. Reigns isn't done yet though and loads up the announcers' table for a powerbomb to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. The wrestling was good tonight but it really feels like we're just heading to Payback II with more McMahons walking us through things. That's the difference between Shane and Stephanie: Shane seems like he's telling us what's going to happen and Stephanie has to explain every single thing to you because you're not that bright. The show was still entertaining and Extreme Rules is going to be fun but they really need to get to the point with the McMahon stuff, which means we're likely waiting at least another three months on any major developments.

Results

Cesaro b. Kevin Owens via DQ when Miz interfered

Tyler Breeze b. Goldust – Rollup

New Day/Colin Cassady b. Dudley Boyz/Vaudevillains – East River Crossing to D-Von

Emma b. Becky Lynch – Michinoku Driver

Rusev won a battle royal last eliminating Zack Ryder

AJ Styles/Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows b. Usos/Roman Reigns – Phenomenal Forearm to Jimmy

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Payback 2016: The Booking Anchor

Payback 2016

Date: May 1, 2016

Location: Allstate Arena, Chicago, Illinois

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

We're off to the first pay per view after Wrestlemania and things are kind of on a roll around here. The main event is Roman Reigns defending the WWE World Title against AJ Styles with the question of whether or not Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows will be interfering on AJ's behalf. Other than that we find out who will be in control of Monday Night Raw going forward between the Authority and Shane McMahon. Let's get to it.

Pre-Show: Baron Corbin vs. Dolph Ziggler

This was bumped from the main card earlier today. Corbin tosses him around to start and gets two off a hard right hand. Ziggler's comeback is easily cut off with a modified hot shot as Corbin keeps casually walking around. A heavy clothesline sets up the chinlock to keep Corbin on Ziggler's neck.

Ziggler gets out and grabs a sleeper for a bit, followed by a Fameasser for two. They head outside with Ziggler loading up a dive but getting kicked out of the air. Corbin loads up a powerbomb but it's the old Big Show Alley Oop to send Ziggler face first into the post for a good looking crash. For some reason Baron takes way too much time getting back in, allowing Ziggler to roll Corbin up for the pin at 7:43.

Rating: C-. The match was a nicely done big man beatdown for the most part and then they do THAT ending? I don't know how to make this any clearer to WWE but Dolph Ziggler isn't going anywhere and it's long past due to stop giving him wins like this. Corbin could be something on the main roster but now he's losing his first major match less than a month after debuting. I'm sure it's a surprise though and that's what WWE must be going for, along with annoying the NXT fans who think they understand wrestling.

Pre-Show: US Title: Kalisto vs. Ryback

Kalisto is defending after Ryback beat him in a non-title match a few weeks back on Smackdown. The crowd is really not pleased to see Ryback here and bust out the tried and true GOLDBERG chants. Ryback blasts him with a right hand to start (that sounds so familiar) but Kalisto gets in a monkey flip to send Ryback outside.

A suicide dive sets up a springboard corkscrew plancha with Ryback barely getting underneath him in time to keep Kalisto from bouncing off the apron. Back in and a tornado DDT is countered into a suplex for two as we take a break. We come back to see Ryback sending him shoulder first into the post, only to grab a spinning DDT to put both guys down.

They head to the apron with Kalisto hitting a nice enziguri and another DDT to send Ryback onto the apron (Mauro: "MAMA MIA!"). Ryback comes up holding his shoulder but Kalisto goes with a spinning kick to the face and the hurricanrana driver for two. The Salida Del Sol is countered into a Shell Shock attempt but Kalisto flips out of that as well, only to eat a spinebuster for two. Ryback goes up for some reason but gets kicked in the head again to slow him down. Kalisto goes up as well and is promptly gorilla pressed face first onto the mat. The top rope splash misses though and the Salida Del Sol retains the title at 9:28.

Rating: B. That was an AWESOME match with both guys working very hard throughout. Now the problem here is WHAT WERE THEY THINKING??? Kalisto is another name on a long list of lame duck champions who never get to do anything with the title because they either never defend the thing or lose their non-title matches. At the same time, Ryback continues to flounder in his latest heel run because WWE keeps cutting his legs off in matches like this. Still though, awesome match and one of the best pre-show matches they've ever done.

The opening video is Bray Wyatt talking about how payback is the first thing we think of every day and how much it consumes all of us. This must have been made weeks ago.

Here's the New Day to open things up. They'll be down at ringside watching and sipping on some lemonade like Becky with the good hair. Woods offers his services to help Beyonce get back at Jay-Z for cheating on her and Big E. hits the catchphrases.

Now we get a normal opening video with the standard highlight packages on the big stuff.

Tag Team Tournament Finals: Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. Vaudevillains

The winners get a title shot at some point in the future. Enzo: "If my aunt had hair on her back, she'd be my uncle." The Vaudevillains need to get in their DeLorean and go back to the future and Cass thinks they're posing like Hey Arnold. Cass: "You never should have gotten off the stoop!" After saying they never should have left their stoop (another Hey Arnold reference), Cass calls the SAWFT to get us going.

Enzo and Gotch start things off with Simon working on the arm before it's off to the partners. The tag to Cass is treated as a big deal but everything breaks down with Cass throwing Enzo at both guys. Enzo gets sent hard out to the floor with his head hitting the bottom rope in an ugly crash. He isn't moving and a stretcher is brought out as the match is called off at about four minutes. I won't be rating this due to the time and the injury but it was fine while it lasted.

The announcers talk for a good while with the camera only showing Enzo for a few moments at a time.

Long video on Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens, the same one that aired on Raw and Smackdown.

Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens

They slug it out immediately and Kevin is sent outside for a big flip dive. JBL starts talking about a tiger attacking Roy of Siegfried and Roy, including ripping off Chris Rock's line of "that tiger went tiger." Back in and Owens gets in a hard shot before dropping Sami face first onto the apron. Zayn is sent hard into the steps as Cole tells us that Enzo is talking and moving his extremities. That's such a relief.

Back in and Owens poses a lot while asking why Sami isn't getting payback yet. A chinlock slows things down and it's Sami slugging away with forearms. The hard clothesline puts Kevin down but Sami can't follow up. Referee: "YOU GUYS GOOD?" Owens: "Shut up!" Sami hammers away in the corner before a Michinoku Driver (called the Blue Thunder Bomb by Cole) gets two.

The real Blue Thunder Bomb gets two more and Owens' brainbuster onto the knee gets the same. Kevin drops a frog splash and a couple of Cannonballs

(JBL: "He may roll a perfect game!") but the Pop Up powerbomb is countered with a dropkick. The half and half suplex sends Kevin flying but he pops up and clotheslines Sami inside out. Another powerbomb is countered into a rollup as you can feel the chemistry here. These two just know each other so well and there's nothing that can replace that.

Sami's tornado DDT is countered into a backbreaker and Kevin's face turns evil. A third powerbomb, this time onto the apron, is countered again with a backdrop to send Kevin spine first onto the apron and then the floor. The diving tornado DDT plants Kevin again but Kevin superkicks his head off and finally gets the powerbomb for the pin at 14:28.

Rating: A-. I was really feeling this one as both guys beat the tar out of each other for a long time and told an awesome story of knowing each other so well. I would have had Sami go over here but you really can't go wrong with either guy winning. Both of them will be fine and Sami is the one who can lose most of his matches and be fine at the end.

Post match Kevin beats him up some more and demands that Byron bring him a mic. Kevin: "Ask me about beating Sami Zayn right now!" Byron, who is taller than Owens, asks if the rivalry is over. Owens: "THAT'S NOT WHAT I TOLD YOU TO SAY!" Kevin says he finally proved that he's the better man between the two of them and now he can refocus on getting back his Intercontinental Title. Byron asks if Kevin thinks Miz will retain the title, which Kevin takes as an invitation to do commentary on the next match.

Intercontinental Title: Cesaro vs. The Miz

Miz is defending and there isn't much of a story here other than Cesaro wants the title. Miz goes for the shoulder to start but Cesaro shoves him away and shakes a finger at him. The delayed vertical suplex gets two (Owens: "He can keep him up for awhile but he can't keep him down for three.") followed by a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker for the same.

Miz gets in a shot on the arm and cranks away on the shoulder as Owens is asked who he would rather face for the title. Owens: "I would rather face you but that's not going to happen." Back up and Miz poses a bit before hitting the sleeper. Cesaro gets caught in a bodyscissors but casually

picks Miz up and throws him off for the break.

We hit the uppercuts with Owens saying he never wants to take another one of those. Cole: "Well if Cesaro wins you'll have to..." Owens: "COLE STOP TELLING ME WHAT I'LL HAVE TO DO!" A running dropkick gets two on Miz as Owens calls Miz Mike by mistake. Byron interprets this as Owens cheering for his friend. Owens: "Byron go call your mom or something because no one else wants to listen to you."

The spinning uppercut sets up Swiss Death for a very close two but Cesaro goes shoulder first into the post. Miz gets the Finale for two but here's Sami Zayn to go after Owens and fight him into the crowd. Cesaro swings Miz for a long time and puts on a Crossface but Owens and Zayn get on the apron to distract the referee as Miz taps. The distraction lets Miz roll Cesaro up for the pin at 10:26.

Rating: C+. DANG IT WWE STOP DOING STUPID THINGS! This should have been the biggest layup on the card but instead they'll keep the title on Miz because we haven't waited long enough to give Cesaro a major win. This is up there with the League of Nations beating New Day at Wrestlemania on the scale of stupid booking decisions. I'm a big Miz fan but they should have changed the title here and moved on to Owens vs. Cesaro vs. Zayn. On a more positive note, this was some of the funniest commentary I've ever heard as Owens is one of the best jerk heels in years.

Owens and Zayn keep fighting and Sami takes another Pop Up Powerbomb. Maryse has to save Miz from a powerbomb of his own.

We recap Dean Ambrose vs. Chris Jericho which started when Ambrose took over the Highlight Reel and turned it into the Ambrose Asylum. Jericho doesn't like the idea of someone upstaging him and the match was set up as a result.

Chris Jericho vs. Dean Ambrose

Jericho bails to the floor to start so Dean chases him back inside and hits an early cross body. Chris crawls over to the referee for protection before dropping Dean ribs first across the top rope. We hit the chinlock on Dean for a bit but Jericho's bulldog is countered with a shove into

the corner. Byron talks about both guys' documented careers, prompting JBL to say that it's documented because he and Cole have talked about him. Your lesson for this match: JBL needs to let Kevin Owens do the heel commentary.

Dean gets two off a bulldog of his own but the top rope elbow is countered into the Walls. A rope is eventually grabbed and Jericho is sent to the floor for the suicide dive. They head to the announcers' table with Jericho trying the Walls but settling for a catapult over the barricade for a big crash. As expected, Dean dives back in at nine before escaping the Codebreaker.

The rebound lariat puts both guys down for a breather. Now the top rope elbow gets two but Jericho grabs the Walls again, only to have Dean make the ropes again. The enziguri and butterfly backbreaker get two each for Chris but Dean gets the knees up to block the Lionsault. An awkward sequence (with Jericho laying on Dean's knees) sets up Dirty Deeds for the pin on Chris at 18:18.

Rating: C. It really is amazing how much damage that loss to Lesnar did to Ambrose as I just do not care about him anymore. This match went on for a LONG time and didn't go anywhere other than two people doing moves (and missing a lot of them) for the better part of twenty minutes. Dean winning is the right call, even if it makes Jericho going over AJ last month all the more confusing.

Jericho throws a fit post match.

Sasha Banks is talking to Shane McMahon.

Women's Title: Charlotte vs. Natalya

Charlotte is defending and has Ric Flair in her corner while Natalya has her uncle Bret Hart in hers. Charlotte W00s at her to start but Natalya grabs the Sharpshooter. That's flipped away so Natalya nips up to scare the champ a bit. Another takedown sets up a leg lock for a bit before Charlotte bails to the floor. A chase results in Natalya getting kicked on the way back in but the fans would rather have Sasha.

They trade some chops until Natalya sends her flying with a release German suplex. Charlotte starts in on the leg (“Hey Bret, you want to learn something?”) but takes too much time bragging and gets caught in an armbar. Natalya shoves her off the top for a big crash, allowing Flair to tell some fans to keep their mouths shut. Charlotte loads up a powerbomb onto the apron but Natalya counters into something resembling a hurricanrana on the floor.

Back in and a boot to the face stops Natalya’s discus lariat, only to have a slap (yes a slap) break up the Figure Eight. A quick Natural Selection gets two for the champ, followed by that great looking moonsault for the same. The Figure Four is put on but quickly reversed so Charlotte puts on Natalya....AND IT’S FREAKING MONTREAL with Charles Robinson (a noted Flair megafan) ringing the bell without Natalya tapping to retain the title at 13:04.

Rating: C+. MONTREAL. It’s been nearly twenty years and they’re STILL doing that thing again? Would it freaking kill them to just put Sasha in the title hunt instead of giving us Natalya vs. Charlotte IV or whatever it’s going to be at Extreme Rules? Bret did absolutely nothing here and the whole thing feels like a huge waste of time and effort.

Bret and Natalya put on matching Sharpshooters post match. I’m so glad Natalya got over that loss in all of 14 seconds.

Here’s Vince for his decision on the control of Raw but the fans cut him off with a CM PUNK chant. Vince talks about how amazing Raw is but gets cut off again, prompting him to ask how long it can go. Vince: “COME ON! YOU’VE GOT MORE THAN THAT!” He talks about all the different eras Raw has gone through and thinks it’s time for a new visionary. Vince brings out Stephanie to even more booing.

The fans are pleased with the idea of Reigns spearing Stephanie at Wrestlemania but she doesn’t want their support or sympathy. Stephanie brags about her success, including the debut of the Shield and the Divas Revolution. Their biggest success was the launch of the WWE Network which went from an idea to 1.8 million subscribers. That brings her to Shane, whose only qualification to run Raw is being a man. After the better part

of five minutes, Stephanie brings up Shane blackmailing Vince to get back into the company after leaving for seven years. Cue Shane to break up the BORING chants.

Shane shows a bunch of media clips about how he's made wrestling cool again. That brings him back to the WWE Network comment, which was Vince's idea. Of those 1.8 million subscribers, we've got about 18,000 of them in the house tonight. Oddly enough, a lot of those people came on board around Wrestlemania XXXII, which was probably due to one match in particular. Fans: "YOU STILL GOT IT!" Stephanie: "Thank you, yes I do!"

Shane brings up the departure in 2007 and says it was due to his voice being ignored. In the void he left, the Authority took over and promptly ran the company into the ground. Shane came back to save the company's future for all of the future McMahon generations. The fans are entirely behind Shane of course but Vince says Shane shouldn't be here after the loss to Undertaker.

Then Shane came out the night after Wrestlemania and was handed Raw because he would fall on his face. However, Vince didn't think Shane failed that badly but he doesn't listen to these people. Vince wants to see them slit each others' throats and disembowel each other....so they'll both be running the show together. Shane and Stephanie shake hands before leaving.

Pre-show recap.

We recap the World Title match. Reigns won the title at Wrestlemania and AJ became #1 contender the next night at Raw. The twist has been the debut of Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows, AJ's former partners in the Bullet Club in New Japan, who attacked Reigns multiple times. AJ has denied being behind it but Reigns doesn't buy it.

Enzo has been diagnosed with a concussion but all other tests have come back negative.

WWE World Title: AJ Styles vs. Roman Reigns

Reigns is defending. AJ cranks on a headlock to start but is easily

shoved away. Styles starts kicking at the legs but it's still a standoff in the early going. They do a quick chase around ringside and AJ gets in a few kicks to briefly take over. A hard clothesline turns AJ inside out and a big old sitout powerbomb gets two. The Superman punch is countered with a quick enziguri (cool visual there) and AJ's strike rush sets up the low forearm for two on the champ.

AJ elbows out of a Samoan drop and gets the Calf Crusher, sending Roman crawling to the ropes. Reigns bails to the floor and eats a GREAT looking Phenomenal Forearm to send both guys through the table in a big crash. AJ tries to throw Reigns back in but it's a countout win for Styles...until Shane comes out to make this match no countouts. Ignore the fact that he runs RAW and not pay per views of course.

They get back in with AJ not being able to hit anything off the top. Another strike rush sets up a 450 but Reigns gets the knees up for two. AJ is up first but dives into a right hand below the belt for a DQ. As you might expect, here's Stephanie to say not so fast because we're restarting it with no disqualifications. Oh yeah it's going to be all about the McMahons.

Reigns takes him outside and sends AJ into the steps before kicking him over the barricade and into the crowd. Thankfully Reigns doesn't follow him to avoid being murdered. AJ kicks him again and they head back inside, only to have another Phenomenal Forearm countered with a Superman punch. Again, that looked GREAT. A second Superman punch drops AJ but here are Gallows and Anderson to go after Roman.

The champ is beaten down and another Phenomenal Forearm gets two with Reigns putting his foot on the ropes. Cue the Usos to go after Anderson and Gallows but Reigns shoves AJ onto all four of them to break up the fight. Now Reigns does his own big dive to take out the pile so AJ throws him inside for a springboard 450 (Not a shooting star Cole. Come on now that's not even close.) and another near fall. Another Forearm misses and the spear puts AJ down at 24:58.

Rating: A. Oh yeah this was awesome with Reigns being the perfect foil for someone like AJ and his high flying offense. It's clear that we're

getting a big gimmick rematch in three weeks at Extreme Rules but at least the first match was excellent stuff. Shane and Stephanie interfering was really annoying but that's exactly what you have to expect going forward because they're like interesting or something. Great match here though and better than I was expecting.

Reigns poses until we cut to the back where Shane and Stephanie make AJ vs. Reigns II in an Extreme Rules match for the title. Shane supports Stephanie's decision to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. Well that was....something indeed. There was a lot of good action but the booking decisions (Miz and Montreal) really brought things down. AJ vs. Reigns and Owens vs. Zayn were both excellent but my goodness the McMahon drama feels like something that is going to go on for the better part of ever. I had a good enough time watching it though and the wrestling in the two big matches really brought things up. Find a way to fix the booking (read as STOP DOING STUPID THINGS) and this show goes through the roof.

Results

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. Vaudevillains went to a no contest when Amore was injured

Kevin Owens b. Sami Zayn – Pop Up Powerbomb

Miz b. Cesaro – Rollup with a handful of trunks

Dean Ambrose b. Chris Jericho – Dirty Deeds

Charlotte b. Natalya – Sharpshooter

Roman Reigns b. AJ Styles – Spear

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Enzo Amore Injured At Payback (Updated)

He was being sent outside and went neck first into the middle rope, causing his head to slam into the mat/apron. The match was almost immediately stopped and Enzo was taken out on a stretcher. This clearly wasn't storyline and looked very bad. The camera wasn't on him so no word on if his limbs were working or not.

Update: Cole says Enzo is talking and moving his extremities. That's such a huge relief.

Payback 2016 Preview

For once I'm actually looking forward to a regular pay per view as Payback has had an awesome set of buildup over the last few weeks. Things really have been picking up in recent weeks and while the ratings haven't been great, it's been an awesome series of wrestling matches and storytelling. Let's get to it.

We'll start with a title match as Kalisto defends the US Title against Ryback on the pre-show for the second straight pay per view. I have no

idea why anyone would think Kalisto keeps the title here as his title reign has died worse and worse every single week. Ryback actually needs something to do these days and it would be nice to see him get another title run. I was digging his Intercontinental Title reign last year before it was handed over to Kevin Owens so the US Title would be just fine.

In another title match we have Charlotte defending the Women's Title against Natalya in a match that is really more about Ric Flair being opposed by Natalya's uncle Bret Hart. I get the idea of the match but I'm still not a fan of the match being more about the older guys. I'm sure the wrestling will be very good and of a high quality but I'm expecting Flair to help cheat again because that's how this story is going to roll.

Of course right now we're waiting on Sasha to get her big shot so this is more an exercise in waiting than anything else. On top of that, it would have been better if we hadn't just seen this at Roadblock but you can't expect WWE to come up with another idea that fast. I mean, it's not like they have a full division of possible challengers here or anything like that.

We'll keep up the title match theme here with what should be the biggest layup of the entire show: Cesaro taking the Intercontinental Title from the Miz. If Miz has proven one thing over the years, it's that he can take loss after loss before coming back to win the Intercontinental Title for a nothing reign with the title being dropped off to an upcoming star.

In this case, that would be Cesaro. There's no reason to suggest that Cesaro doesn't get the title here as he's rocketed up the card and finally has the kind of character that can go somewhere. The only thing missing now is an actual accomplishment and the Intercontinental would certainly fit the description.

Speaking of results that should be obvious, Baron Corbin should be going over Dolph Ziggler. Much like Miz, Ziggler is a made man who can lose every single big match he has and not lose a drop of popularity so putting Corbin over is exactly the right move. Corbin is someone who could get some traction on the main roster and a win over Ziggler would

be a good second start to his WWE career.

In the last of the lower card matches, we've got Enzo Amore vs. the Vaudevillains in the tag team tournament final for the right to face New Day for the titles later on. While this should be a layup on paper, I'm not so sure on who wins here. On one hand you could give the Vaudevillains the title shot to put New Day over a fresh team while they wait to have the Bullet Club get the belts in the summer.

On the other hand you could go with Enzo and Cass....but do you give them the titles this fast? You really don't want to risk Enzo and Cass losing what they have to the better act in New Day but you also don't want the new guys losing to a team that just isn't as good as they are in Gotch and English. We'll go with Enzo and Cass but I really wouldn't be surprised to be wrong here.

Now we'll get to some of the more interesting stuff and we'll start with Dean Ambrose vs. Chris Jericho. After the win at Wrestlemania, it would seem that Jericho is getting ready for one last main event run, perhaps with one more World Title shot. If that's the case, a win over Ambrose would certainly do him a lot of favors. At the same time, Dean REALLY needs a big win after his near squash loss to Brock at Wrestlemania. Either way I can't imagine this is the last match we're going to see between the two and I think Dean goes over early on, but the idea of a draw is up there as well.

This brings us to probably the second biggest match on the card as Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens actually get to face each other on the WWE roster for the first time ever (likely of many times in the future). For me, this one is an absolute layup: Sami should win and he should win going away. Owens is a bigger deal at this point and Sami needs a big main roster rub. I'm sure Owens will wind up winning the feud because Zayn doesn't win long term feuds (as he shouldn't) but he wins the first match to get things going hot. Owens will be fine long term and doesn't need the win as much here so we'll go with Sami starting fast.

That leaves us with the biggest match on the card and I'm not sure where to start here. Roman Reigns is defending the WWE World Title against AJ

Styles but there's also the shadows of Luke Gallows and Karl Anderson who may or may not be in league with Styles. In this case, I don't think we're going to have the big Bullet Club moment yet but there's almost no way AJ loses. Instead, what I think is Reigns gets Anderson and Gallows on his side as the Roman Empire with AJ bringing in Finn Balor and then someone else for a big feud down the line.

WWE has done an excellent job setting up this match with AJ going over big name after big name and Reigns just kind of being there. It's a good way to have AJ look awesome while also giving Reigns a big win in his first title defense. The match should be a lot of fun as Reigns is great once the bell rings (assuming the match isn't 27 minutes long of course) and AJ is AJ. I'm really looking forward to this one and there are a lot of possibilities of what might happen at the end.

Payback looks like one heck of a show and it's going to be in front of a white hot Chicago crowd, which could be a big hit or a miss depending on how things go. This is a show that looks like it has a great batch of matches with almost nothing looking weak on the entire card. It should be a lot of fun, which is so strange to say outside of Wrestlemania season.

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Monday Night Raw – April 25, 2016: The Old New

Monday Night Raw

Date: April 25, 2016

Location: XL Center, Hartford, Connecticut

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

It's the go home show for Payback and things are getting interesting around here. The big story at the moment revolves around what's going to happen with the recently debuted Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows, who may have attacked Roman Reigns to help AJ Styles. AJ has denied it but there's a chance that this could be a Bullet Club reunion. Let's get to it.

We start with an In Memory Of graphic for Chyna. That's almost more than I was expecting.

The opening recap focuses on Reigns, AJ and Gallows/Anderson from last week.

Here's Shane McMahon to get things going. Shane talks about how he's here because of the fans and this Sunday is the first pay per view of a new era. I do love how they're just admitting that Smackdown means nothing and comes along on Raw's ride. Cue Stephanie to make her big return and suck up to the Hartford crowd as she was born in this town.

Apparently this is Shane's last night running the show because Vince hasn't been pleased. Therefore, we're going to find out once and for all who is running the show. Shane does a quick poll of the crowd to predictable responses but Stephanie says she isn't leaving. That's fine with Shane, who is in charge tonight and therefore calls security down to remove Stephanie from the ring. She fights them all the way to the back as is her custom. Shane introduces our first match.

AJ Styles vs. Sheamus

Sheamus drives him into the corner to start (take a shot) but AJ comes back with his dropkick sequence. It's back to the heavy forearms to knock AJ around so Styles hits one of his own to put Sheamus on the floor. A moonsault off the apron misses though and Sheamus sends him into the steps to take us to a break.

Back with Sheamus holding the chinlock (take another shot), followed by two straight Irish Curses for no cover. Off to a bearhug and you can't fault Sheamus' psychology here. AJ escapes and avoids a charge to send Sheamus into the post (take another shot) and go up top. Sheamus tries a super White Noise but AJ escapes into a release super powerbomb of all things. Looked good too.

It's time for the running forearms and kicks in the corner until AJ is sent face first into the buckle. A nice powerslam gets two for Sheamus but he can't get the Cloverleaf. Instead AJ comes back with a good looking Pele to put both guys down. Sheamus is up first this time and throwing on the Cloverleaf until AJ gets a quick rope. The Brogue Kick hits the ropes though and it's the Phenomenal Forearm to put Sheamus away at 14:26.

Rating: B. This has been a great buildup for Styles who has taken down one big name after another before he gets ready for the World Title match. In other words, there has been no 50/50 booking or making either the champion or the challenger look like a goon. The commentary helped here too as they talked about how similar Sheamus and Reigns are. This was a really well done setup and the whole thing worked exactly as they were hoping for. Oh and it was a good match too, which doesn't surprise me.

Anderson and Gallows come out to look at AJ, which fuels the conspiracy theory for some reason.

Roman Reigns is watching in the back when the Usos come in to suggest that they'll have his back on Sunday. Reigns doesn't seem to hate the idea. The fans in the arena were chanting WE CAN'T HEAR YOU during this.

Here's New Day to talk about how awesome their tournament has been while promising to party like it's 1999. This brings out the Vaudevillains to

say they want to party like it's 1899 when they beat up those mangle ridden mongrels Enzo and Cass. Of course this brings out Enzo and Cass to a BIG reaction with Enzo saying he's hotter than a 104 degree fever and wants to run down a beach and jump into his own arms. Woods says they'll beat whoever wins because NEW DAY ROCKS. I miss simple little build segments like this without a match or a big blowoff or something. Just let people talk.

Gallows and Anderson leave AJ's locker room.

John Cena will be back on Memorial Day, May 30.

Usos vs. Karl Anderson/Luke Gallows

No team name yet but they do have matching white vests. Cole says Anderson and Gallows were in "a club" with Styles over in New Japan. Jimmy and Anderson get things going with the twin taking over to start. It's off to Jey for chops of his own, only to have Anderson come back with a hard leg lariat. Gallows comes in for a really big clothesline to turn Jey inside out before Anderson starts working on Jimmy's bad shoulder.

The bald guys take turns chinlocking Jey before it's back to Anderson with another armbars. Jey's uppercut is knocked away with an even bigger uppercut from Gallows and the bad arm is bent around the ropes. Jey goes up top but gets knocked down hard, sending the shoulder into the barricade as we take a break. Back with Jey kicking Anderson away and making the hot tag off to Jimmy for the array of strikes. Another big clothesline turns Jey inside out though and Anderson posts him for good measure. The Magic Killer (elevated suplex into a neckbreaker) knocks Jimmy silly at 13:52.

Rating: B-. Good debut here and really just a step above a squash. This was total domination with Anderson and Gallows looking like the monsters they needed to be. I could easily see them getting the titles by the summer as New Day can move on to something bigger and it's not like anyone else needs the belts at the moment. Also the Usos will be fine as they're as made as a tag team can be.

The beating continues post match until Reigns comes out for the save.

Styles says he had nothing going on with Gallows and Anderson. The two of them come in to say they'll have his back on Sunday and can do whatever he wants.

We look back at the history between Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens with both guys talking about how they grew up together and were best friends for years. Then Sami won the NXT Title in December 2014, only to have Owens turn on him and take the title a few months later. Owens debuted in WWE a few months later and beat John Cena in his first match on the main roster. Sami injured his shoulder around the same time and was out for months before returning in January 2016 to eliminate Owens from the Royal Rumble. Owens thinks Sami is the one making this personal. This Sunday it's about payback.

Sami Zayn vs. Rusev

Rusev has Lana with him for the first time in what feels like months. Sami can't do much with the power to start and gets stomped down on the bottom rope as the fans want Lana. A headscissors takes Rusev down but the slingshot plancha is pulled out of the air with Sami being dropped onto the apron. Sami pops back up though and moonsaults off the barricade to drop Rusev again. Rusev kicks him hard in the head though and we take a break. Back with Sami fighting out of a front facelock and hitting a high cross body. Rusev throws him down but can't get the Accolade, allowing Sami to roll him up for the pin at 12:00.

Rating: C. Sami needed this win a lot more than Rusev, though the incredible downfall for the Bulgarian continues. It's so strange to think that he was feuding with Cena for the US Title just a year ago and now he's a midcard monster for someone like Sami. Still though, the right guy won and it really wasn't that shocking.

Lana throws a shoe at Sami post match. That goes nowhere so Owens runs out and drops Sami with a shot to the back.

Stardust interrupts Apollo Crews in the back but Apollo calls him Cody to make things serious. Apparently Dusty Rhodes came up with the name

Apollo, which makes me wonder what Crews' name was before that. Stardust is odd as usual.

Apollo Crews vs. Stardust

Crews starts fast with his standing moonsault to avoid Stardust and a dropkick gets two. Stardust kicks him down and takes off his gloves for some reason before cranking on Crews' arm. That goes nowhere so Crews gets two off the standing moonsault. The lifting powerbomb gives Crews the pin at 3:08.

Rating: D+. They need to go somewhere with Crews or he's going to get boring with the constant smiling and squash wins over low level guys. It's hardly a lost cause or anything but he's getting close to the Rocky Maivia territory. Give him a story or a quick feud or something, as long as it doesn't mean listening to Crews talk that much.

Here's Dean Ambrose for a chat. Dean was supposed to host the Ambrose Asylum tonight but he's not in the mood for fun and games after he was attacked from behind last week. This Sunday he's facing one of the best of all time but he's ready to fight. Jericho may be the best in the world at what he does but Ambrose is pretty good at what he does too. When Ambrose sees a problem, he rolls up his sleeve and starts leaving bruises and chipping teeth because that's what he does.

Dean wants Jericho out here right now so here's Chris to call him an idiot. Jericho isn't wasting his time fighting Ambrose in a dump like Hartford. Instead, Dean should be down on his knees kissing Jericho's \$1,500 boots for letting him be in this ring. Jericho changes his mind and asks for an apology from Ambrose for stealing the Highlight Reel. Dean apologizes that Jericho paid that much money for such ugly shoes, for wearing a scarf everywhere and for that Bon Jovi haircut. He's not sorry for the brawl that starts but Jericho quickly gets the better of it and puts Dean in the Walls on the announcers' table.

Natalya vs. Emma

Charlotte is on commentary. Emma quickly takes it outside for a gutwrench suplex before we hit a seated full nelson. Not that it matters as Natalya

gets up and grabs the Sharpshooter for the submission at 2:19.

Natalya stares Charlotte down first match so the champ hides behind Ric.

Chyna tribute video. It's nice that they're actually doing this. Most of this is a series of clips and then a series of tweets from various wrestling personalities commenting on her passing.

Baron Corbin vs. Damien Sandow

In a role reversal from Smackdown, no match as Ziggler jumps Corbin from behind and chases him off.

Greetings From Puerto Rico.

Here are Miz and Maryse to talk about Miz's title defense against Cesaro on Sunday. Miz is used to being tormented by the anonymous internet trolls who now think Cesaro is going to win on Sunday. This title is more than important because it's legendary. Miz is tired of seeing all the handmade signs saying CESARO SECTION because the fans should be better than that. You can have your internet section because he has a Miz section that looks like Maryse.

This brings out Cesaro to interrupt but Miz goes into a Robert De Niro speech from Taxi Driver. Cesaro promises to roll the credits on Miz's title reign and tells Miz to make his day. Miz goes to leave but tries a cheap shot, earning himself Swiss Death but Maryse dives on top of her husband to prevent the Swing. Cesaro holds up the title. I could totally go for this "let's yell at each other and make the story more unique" to set up big matches. If only that had been done for decades instead of "here's a match three times before the BIG version of it that you have to pay for."

AJ comes up to Reigns in the back and says he's taking the title on Sunday. Reigns thinks Gallows and Anderson already have ringside seats.

This week's Kickoff match is Ryback vs. Kalisto for the US Title.

Alberto Del Rio vs. Roman Reigns

Non-title. Roman throws him around to start and gets in one of those running corner clotheslines. The running enziguri staggers Reigns though and Del Rio double stomps him from the apron as we take a break. Back with Del Rio holding the chinlock a bit longer than usual before hitting a DDT for two. The low superkick misses though and Reigns comes back with his series of clotheslines. That earns him the now standard booing but Del Rio bails to avoid the Superman Punch.

Instead it's the apron kick to send Del Rio into the post, only to have him kick the ropes to crotch Reigns as he comes back in. This is referred to as a kick to the hamstring due to reasons of convenience, allowing Del Rio to get in the superkick for two. Del Rio misses the top rope double stomp because Reigns is able to drop down instead of sit up, allowing Reigns to hit the Superman Punch. Cue Anderson and Gallows to stare Reigns down, allowing Del Rio to roll Roman up for two. The spear puts Del Rio away at 13:00.

Rating: C. At least they seem to be turning Reigns heel because there's just no way it's going to work as a face act at this point. No matter what Reigns does, that booing is part of the whole package now. They're certainly acknowledging it now though and that's the best thing to happen to Reigns in a long time.

Post match Anderson and Gallows come in for the beatdown. AJ runs out to stop them but gets Superman Punches. Gallows and Anderson come back in, allowing Reigns to hit the Phenomenal Forearm to end the show.

Overall Rating: B-. This show started off looking great and then really ran out of steam in the second half. However, they did a lot of good things to help set up the pay per view and you can still see the momentum from Wrestlemania. The key thing for me is they're doing a better job of setting up feuds and big matches.

Whether it's the rather awesome World Title match or Sami vs. Owens (ok so that one wrote itself) or Cesaro going after Miz and the title, most of the matches have gotten a much stronger focus than in previous months. Above all else though they all seem to have a mostly unique story and setup.

With Cesaro vs. Miz it's Cesaro never holding the title before and all the movie stuff. With the tag tournament match you have two unique teams with a bit of a history in NXT. With the Women's Title you have the families feuding (not a fan but at least it's something). The key though is everything has a story instead of "well they've fought a bunch of times and now they're fighting again" or "contractually obligated rematch". It makes things feel fresh for a change and that's something WWE has been lacking for years now.

Results

AJ Styles b. Sheamus – Phenomenal Forearm

Luke Gallows/Karl Anderson b. Usos – Magic Killer to Jimmy

Sami Zayn b. Rusev – Rollup

Apollo Crews b. Stardust – Lifting powerbomb

Natalya b. Emma – Sharpshooter

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Smackdown – April 21, 2016: Miz Is Awesome

Smackdown

Date: April 21, 2016

Location: O2 Arena, London, England

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

It's the last show on the UK tour and we're in the same building we were in on Monday for Raw. These shows can range from nothing special to more interesting than usual but Smackdown tends to be just your run of the mill show. We're getting closer to Payback though and the card is looking stacked. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of AJ vs. Roman on Monday, including Luke Gallows and Karl Anderson beating Reigns down.

It's time for MizTV with Maryse handling the introduction before Miz brings out guest AJ Styles. Miz gets right to the point of asking about AJ being tight with Gallows and Anderson in New Japan, to the point that he knows them better than anyone else. Styles denies being behind the attack but he never told them NOT to attack Reigns. Miz continues being awesome at needling as AJ eventually gets annoyed at him for asking about Gallows and Anderson over and over again.

The fact of the matter is that AJ doesn't need them to beat Reigns but Miz thinks that being a better "rassler" isn't going to get it done because Roman Reigns is the guy. Miz says he can handle the truth from AJ but Maryse tells him to go Will Smith. This leads to a rather romantic moment which disgusts AJ so badly that he backfists Miz in the face.

AJ vs. Miz is set for later.

Ryback vs. Kalisto

Non-title for no apparent reason other than Kalisto loses here because the title is back to meaning nothing. Ryback runs him over in the corner

and the GOLDBERG chants begin for reasons of general annoyance. Kalisto's kicks have little effect as Ryback gorilla presses him down and sends him shoulder first into the post as we take a break. Back with Ryback doing his delayed superplex for a delayed two count.

Ryback puts him in the Tree of Woe for kicks to the ribs, only to miss a charge and go shoulder first into the post. Kalisto's kicks to the chest and corkscrew cross body stagger Ryback and the hurricanrana driver gets two. Ryback hits a quick Meathook but the Shell Shock is countered into a DDT for two more. The Salida Del Sol is countered into the Shell Shock to give Ryback the pin at 9:42.

Rating: C-. It's clear that WWE wants to put the title on Ryback and I have no idea why they just don't do it at this point. Kalisto means nothing as champion at this point as he won the belt and then did nothing with it ever since (as is so often the case) so just give it to Ryback who could be a decent monster for someone to slay later on. First though, we get a rubber match because that's how the midcard titles roll around here.

Dolph Ziggler vs. Baron Corbin

Never mind as Corbin jumps Ziggler during the entrance and beats him down on the floor as has become his custom.

The Miz vs. AJ Styles

Non-title again. Miz gets clotheslined down to start and AJ goes old school with a Muta Lock (bridging Indian deathlock with a chinlock) but Miz gets his head out and rolls to the floor. Back in and AJ gets caught with some knees to the back, only to hit a quick dropkick (Lawler: "That was a miso soup dropkick wasn't it?"). A spinwheel kick drops Miz again so he hides behind Maryse, allowing him to get in a left hand to drop AJ.

Styles gets sent into the barricade and we take a break. Back with Miz stomping away in the corner and hitting that running clothesline. We hit the chinlock (because of course) but AJ jawbreaks his way to freedom. A big boot drops Styles again (Miz can throw a nice boot) but it's a double cross body to put both of them down. AJ is up first though and gets in

the running seated forearm for two. Miz starts going after the knee before a DDT gets two more.

The Skull Crushing Finale is countered into the fireman's carry backbreaker onto the knee (which Lawler pronounces correctly for once) for another near fall but AJ dives into an atomic drop. We hit the Figure Four for a bit until AJ turns it over with Ranallo doing a great job of putting over AJ as someone who will never quit.

The Calf Crusher goes on out of nowhere but Miz is too close to the ropes. Styles hit the Pele and that's enough for Miz who tries to walk, only to run into Gallows and Anderson. Miz makes the mistake of turning around and it's a slingshot forearm to set up the Phenomenal version for the pin on Miz at 17:55.

Rating: B. I know I'm in the minority but I've been a big Miz fan for a long time now. No he's not going to get back to the main event or anything but he's more than capable of having a strong performance against someone who can walk him through a match. They're doing a really good job of setting AJ up as someone who could shock the world at Payback. That's an impressive feat, especially if they go somewhere else with this Bullet Club story after the pay per view. Oh and well done on having both midcard champions lose clean in less than an hour and a half.

We look at the end of Raw with Jericho and Owens taking out Zayn and Ambrose.

Ambrose and Zayn are ready for Owens and Jericho in tonight's main event. Spotted dick is referenced but they can't decide on a cool team name.

In what might be a dark segment that won't air on the TV show, Miz and Maryse are still in the ring after the match. Miz says he knew Gallows and Anderson were with AJ but that just showed he was right. Tonight there was an injustice and he demands an investigation on this match right here and right now. Miz doesn't care how long it takes because he wants someone to come out here.

Cue Shane McMahon to say what's up London. That's not cool with Miz because he should be a priority to everyone on any show. He pokes Shane a

bit and that's not cool with the red show boss. Miz pokes him a few more times so Shane punches him in the face and drops him with the back elbow to the jaw before clotheslining him out to the floor. Again, not likely to make the show but a cool thing for the crowd.

Post break, Gallows and Anderson say they're here to make an impact and aren't here with Styles. They'll debut on Monday against the Usos.

Paige/Natalya vs. Naomi/Tamina

Tamina and Natalya get things going but it's quickly off to Naomi for her stupid wiggling headscissors without any actual damage being done to Natalya. Seriously, the Divas era is done so stop that nonsense. Paige comes in to help with a double wishbone before it's already back to Natalya because Paige being in the ring in front of her home crowd would be a waste of time.

Naomi drops Natalya again and shouts that Natalya wants to wrestle. Well kind of yeah. We hit the chinlock from Tamina for a bit before Natalya easily gets over for the tag off to Paige. Naomi gets sent into the buckle and the Rampaige gets one with Tamina making the save. Natalya comes back in and it's a Sharpshooter to Tamina while Paige gets Naomi to tap to the PTO at 5:33.

Rating: D+. I like that double submission ending as you let Natalya look good while Paige gets to win in front of her home country. It's really tiring to see her lose all the time but with the way the division has been realigned, maybe she has to be moved down to the lower levels. I'm still a fan of hers but she's really not up to the top level at this point.

Fandango vs. R-Truth

Goldust is guest referee and this is fallout from Goldust teaming with Fandango instead of Truth last week. They trade knockdowns and trade hip swivels. More dancing ensues with Goldust joining in until Truth lays Fandango out with the Lie Detector for the pin at 1:53. I have no idea where they're going with this but if they could get to the point already, it would be most appreciated.

Goldust and Truth dance post match with Goldust looking terrified at the thought of trying the splits.

Here are Enzo Amore and Colin Cassady for a chat about the tag team tournament final. Enzo gets through the opening spiel before the Vaudevillains cut him off. English thinks Enzo has mange so Enzo thinks the Vaudevillains are a couple of haters. Apparently the G stands for gentlemen so Enzo is going to be honest with him. That thing English said about him having rodent mange.....well Enzo really doesn't know what it means.

Gotch insults Enzo's rhyming (hater) and English says that it's going to take two real men to show what a real era should be like. After they win the tournament, Simon promises to use proper pronunciation and ask "how are you doing". Cass thinks that's SAWFT. This was a really good exchange and a much better introduction to the Vaudevillains than we've seen so far.

Greeting From Puerto Rico.

Dean Ambrose/Sami Zayn vs. Chris Jericho/Kevin Owens

Jericho and Zayn get things going with Sami doing that reverse leapfrog and armdragging Chris down into an armbar. Dean comes in and has to spin out of a Walls attempt but can't get Dirty Deeds as we head to a break. Back with Owens elbowing Ambrose in the head and slowly hammering away. Jericho can't keep Dean in the corner though and it's off to Sami for the high cross body and a near fall.

Sami loads up the corner climbing wristdrag but opts to dive onto Owens instead. Makes sense. That's fine with Owens as he pulls Sami outside and pounds away as Dean has been down WAY longer than he should have after a beating. It's back to Jericho for a chinlock followed by a Lionsault for a very calm near fall. The Blue Thunder Bomb doesn't even warrant a cover here but it's a double tag to Ambrose and Owens with the latter running into a boot in the corner.

Dean hits the suicide dive through the ropes but Owens gets in a superkick for two. The fans are having some issues getting into this one

even though it's certainly not bad. A quick Dirty Deeds and the Helluva kick have the heels in trouble but Dean goes up instead of covering, allowing Jericho to crotch him on the ropes, giving Owens a quick pin at 12:53.

Rating: C. Totally standard Smackdown main event tag match and while that's fine, it's certainly nothing you need to see. I like the idea of putting two feuds into one match but they're out of combinations to do before the pay per view, which is a common problem WWE runs into. Ambrose getting pinned via cheating is a good idea as well.

Owens is very pleased with the win to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. The wrestling was stronger tonight but my goodness some of the booking decisions made my head hurt. As usual the midcard titles mean nothing because they're just midcard titles and a way to make people look good by beating midcard champions. It's so backwards compared to the way things used to go and went for years that it makes no sense but I'm sure WWE can explain it better to you than I could. They speak crazy like that you see.

Results

Ryback b. Kalisto – Shell Shock

AJ Styles b. The Miz – Phenomenal Forearm

Paige/Natalya b. Naomi/Tamina – PTO to Naomi

R-Truth b. Fandango – Lie Detector

Kevin Owens/Chris Jericho b. Sami Zayn/Dean Ambrose – Owens pinned Ambrose after Jericho crotched him

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