

On This Day: July 31, 1988 – Wrestlefest 1988: Hogan vs. Andre IV

Wrestlefest 1988

Date: July 31, 1988

Location: County Stadium, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Attendance: 25,866

Commentators: Alfred Hayes, Billy Graham, Sean Mooney

This is another show a lot of you likely have never heard of. It's in essence a HUGE house show in a baseball stadium that was filmed and released on home video. That being said, the card had fifteen matches and I think the home video has 10 of them. I'll try to fill you in on what you missed, but there's hardly anything of note. This is more or less the follow-up to Mania 4 and not quite a preview for the first Summerslam. The main event is Hogan vs. Andre in a cage which is a decent match. Let's get to it.

Alfred Hayes, Sean Mooney and Billy Graham welcome us to the show. This is going to be painful isn't it?

The official attendance is listed at under 26,000 but there's no way I'm buying this. It's probably closer to double that.

Rougeau Brothers vs. Killer Bees

This was the third match on the card after Big Boss Man beat Scott Casey and Brutus Beefcake pinned Hercules. At least they know how to edit a tape down. Bees are in long tights and they look horrible. Hayes points out that they look fat. Graham talks about zombies and I know this is going to be a very long show. Hayes is kind of a tweener announcer but not really.

The Bees are horrible here and completely out of shape. Then

again they were promised the tag titles like 4 times and never got them so it's no wonder that they stopped caring. The crowd is kind of buzzing but it's rapidly dying here. In a moment that we would consider funny, Jacques hooks Brunzell's foot in a hold and tags in his brother and they double team. When the referee gets on him, Jacques informs the referee that they have a five count. I knew Danielson was a tape watcher but come on.

This match is painfully generic but it's not horrible. Ray gets his leg hurt so Jacques tries to fix it. That was odd. Blair taps but that means nothing yet. Oh yeah there's at least 40,000 people there. That 26k is a joke. To further get the crowd into it we get a Boston Crab on Blair. This thing is just moving very slowly. We get a full nelson to really crank it up and down goes Blair again.

The Rougeaus were decent comedy heels when they wanted to be. It helped that they could wrestle fairly well too. The Bees used to be something like a bad version of the Hardys but now they're just old and fat. Is there anything funnier than a heel selling an atomic drop? Brunzell gets the hot tag and cleans a bit of house. His finishing move is now a Figure Four when it used to be a dropkick. The dropkick does hit to a nice reaction but it only gets two. Brunzell goes for a slam on Raymond and Jacques punches him, allowing Raymond to fall on him for the pin. Off a punch? Really?

Rating: D. This was pretty bad. The crowd died a few times in there which is never a good sign for an opener or any match for that matter. The Bees were the tag team jobbers at this point and this went nowhere at all. To be fair though this wasn't the opening match so that makes up for a bit of it. Could have been worse I suppose, but not by much.

Bad News Brown vs. Bret Hart

This is fallout from the Mania battle royal and Bret is

officially a face now. Brown would get a short feud with Randy Savage soon after this which was very interesting although it never went anywhere really. The referee gets on Brown for being too evil and Brown tells him not to worry about it. That's a nice line actually.

Brown goes up and Bret is, say it with me, PLAYING POSSUM. Why would anyone buy Bret selling anything ever? It's what he does and he does it better than anyone. Bret can't get anything of note going here. Brown yells out for the Ghetto Blaster, his running enziguri finisher. Here comes the Hitman who might not have that name yet. He hits a sweet dive over the top and Brown is in trouble now.

They crank it up and the match starts getting good. Bret doesn't have the Sharpshooter yet so he's going for whatever he can get to get a pin. He hits some of the five moves of doom but after a rollup Brown reverses into one of his own and uses the tights for a win. Neidhart comes out and they both beat down Brown to an extent. I'd love to see them in a real fight as Brown would massacre them.

Rating: B-. Solid little match here as neither guy meant anything yet. Hart was supposed to be showcasing himself here and he did that quite well. He looked like this fast guy that could brawl and have solid matches to go with it. Then they put him back with Neidhart a few weeks/months later and this was completely forgotten about of course.

Honky Tonk Man goes to the interview area to talk to Gene. He says absolutely nothing of note and says he'll keep the title.

Intercontinental Title: Honky Tonk Manvs. Jim Duggan

Something tells me to expect a screwy finish. Graham enjoys the H0 chant far too much. Duggan was a fairly big deal at the moment, sort of about the level of Morrison. Honky was a guy that kept holding the title through nefarious means and the fans were drooling for him to lose the belt to anybody. He's

one of the few occasions in wrestling where people would pay to see him get beaten up.

Duggan pounds away as you would expect him to. It amazes me to think that these two would manage to get into WCW a few years later with Duggan squashing Steve Austin in like 40 seconds for the US Title. It's starting to get dark around this time and it's ALL Hacksaw. Honky comes back with some heel offense but it lasts like a minute.

Duggan wants the Three Point Clothesline but Hart grabs his leg for the DQ. This was the standard Honky match and it worked just fine. We had Duggan moments from winning the belt for sure but Honky cheats to keep it. That would only last about a month longer. Duggan gets Jimmy afterwards but the heels mess up and nothing goes well for them. Crowd loves it of course. Duggan destroys the guitar after Honky leaves.

Rating: C. I went with a C because this is the epitome of an average match for this time period. Honky gets the tar beaten out of him and then here comes the interference or other nefarious means to keep the title. It's as basic of a heel psychology as you could ask for but it drew crazy money since people wanted to see him lose finally. That's why the pop was so insane at Summerslam when he finally lost.

Power of Pain vs. Bolsheviks

Seriously we don't skip this? The Powers of Pain came in as faces but were well on the way to being heels as they and Demolition would do the double switch at Survivor Series. The Powers of Pain have the worst music I can remember in a long time for a team like them. The faces, which feels weird to use to describe the POP, clear the ring very quickly.

Volkoff and Barbarian start us off. Was there ever a time from the early 80s to the late 90s where Barbarian wasn't employed by one of the big two? He gets a sweet powerslam on Zhukov where he jumps in the air and gets extra momentum. To say this

match is slow and plodding is a huge understatement. It's all power stuff which isn't something you want to see for a long time.

Warlord gets blasted in the back off the top by Zhukov and STILL manages to win a test of strength. Now THAT is how you no sell something. Barbarian gets beaten down as something more interesting happens to the right of the ring as you see everyone get up to look at it. No clue what it was but I'd rather watch it instead. The stadium is starting to get dark now and after a 30 second comeback which is a stretch also, a powerslam and top rope headbutt on Boris ends it.

Rating: D. I know I've been saying that a lot but dang this was boring. They just kind of beat on each other for a bit and then did the finish. These four just didn't flow well together at all. For the life of me I have no idea why the company thought the POP were a good choice as faces but they eventually got it and switched them and Demolition. Getting there was a long wait though.

Jim Neidhart vs. Lanny Poffo

This was when Poffo was still a leaper and threw out Frisbees with his poetry on them. He was the king of jobbers at this point though so if nothing else he's not bad. I think his brother would be up next. He uses a moonsault which misses but was a big spot back then as he was the first WWF guy to use it I believe. I think Jim is a heel here but it's not entirely clear. The crowd is totally dead here. After just beating the tar out of Poffo a powerslam ends it.

Rating: N/A. Total squash here. I think they were toying with splitting up the Harts but that wouldn't happen for nearly three more years, resulting in Bret breaking out on his own and then Neidhart kind of fading away, although doing so in a positive way.

So next up on the card we were supposed to get an epic Savage

vs. DiBiase match for the title. We don't get that on the tape though. HOWEVER, thanks to the joys of the internet, we get it anyway! This is more or less a bonus match so enjoy.

WWF World Title: Randy Savage vs. Ted DiBiase

Yeah they cut this off for no apparent reason. This is one of about the million rematches these guys had, each one totally awesome. This is from a Savage tape released by WWF back in I think 89 so they didn't have a ton to work with. This doesn't have Graham on it so maybe the commentary was recorded later on instead of like the rest of the show. It's all Savage to start and the fans are WAY into this.

Savage hits an atomic drop and we get to see DiBiase's picture perfect selling to send him to the floor. It's so weird to think that Virgil would be in the company over 22 years later and working with Ted DiBiase still. A handful of tights get DiBiase in control as we hit the floor for a bit. DiBiase is just fun to watch. Everything he does just comes off as so perfectly smooth and crisp.

They slug it out on their knees and Sean says it looked like a midget boxing match. Someone make a Half-Pint Brawlers joke. DiBiase busts out a Spinning Toe Hold of all things. Savage is limping a good bit as I'm having trouble coming up with jokes for this as it's a very good match.

Savage tries to get his knee to work again after the lethal toe hold. Hayes points out that he's favoring his knee. I love high level analysis like that. Virgil interferes and it lets Savage get a rollup for two. Hayes goes on to point out that Savage messes up and sells the wrong knee. Wow this guy is getting on my nerves. Is there a point to the way DiBiase does that falling punch?

Out of NOWHERE Savage hooks a small package to retain. Post match the heels beat on him some more as the fans boo loudly. DiBiase puts on the belt but Savage stops him with a chair.

The crowd is oddly dead for the post match stuff.

Rating: B. Solid stuff here but were you expecting something else? They got about fifteen minutes and just beat each other up. I'm sure they did this match about a dozen times but that doesn't mean it's not good. Savage was in a zone at this point but DiBiase might be a step better. That's saying a lot and it resulted in matches like these. Very solid stuff and fitting for a main event match. Now why was this cut off the tape?

Speaking of being cut off, Curt Hennig and Terry Taylor had a match here which I believe was their debut for the company in both cases.

Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude

This is more fallout over the Cheryl Roberts kiss that didn't happen thing which was a big time angle back in the day and was incredibly well received. Naturally the fans pop very well for this so they got that part right for sure. Jake comes running out and beats up Rude to start us off very fast. Why do we keep getting shots of Rude's tights going down? Is there a strange fetish thing going on there?

Something tells me this is going to be long. They had a 15 minute draw at Mania so they'll likely do something similar this time around. We hit the chinlock and something tells me we're going to be here for a good while. I'm glad I was wrong there. Rude kicks him in the balls and no one seems to care. We hit the chinlock again to kill more time. This is going to last awhile.

How can someone live for that long with an arm around their neck like that? I just ask because Jake has been in this for about three minutes so far and is still alive. The announcers try as hard as they can to make this interesting and just can't do it. The hold is broken and Jake gets knocked to the floor just to continue this torture. Rude gets crotched on the top rope and Jake makes his comeback.

The camera work in this match is making my head hurt. They're doing FAR too many closeups. Jake goes for the DDT but Rude shoves the referee down so that he lands on him, cushioning the blow. I keep forgetting how tall Jake is. The referee is back up and Rude is leaving. Jake follows and say it with me: DOUBLE COUNT OUT. I watched 17 minutes for that finish. I hate my life. The snake gets on Rude post match and wraps around his throat in a cool visual.

Rating: D. This was just BORING. They fought that long and nothing of note happened. It was just bland filler that never went anywhere at all. These two had a white hot feud and yet nothing ever came of it. Also Rude pulling the referee down isn't a DQ? This was just bad and really brings the show down.

Haku vs. Sam Houston would be here. I'm glad they left it out.

Ultimate Warrior vs. Bobby Heenan

This is kind of a famous match. The loser wears a weasel suit. You figure out who wins this one. I'll give you a hint: he's crazy. Neither gets an entrance which is weird. We get some of Warrior's music but that's it. Heenan runs for his life multiple times but Warrior drops to the floor so Heenan can't see him and surprises him. Yes, Warrior used his brain and it worked.

Heenan gets a foreign object and pops him with it after calling Warrior a son of a gun. Wouldn't an object like that be fine to a guy from Parts Unknown? Heenan hits him with it like five times and can't drop Warrior. He more or less just jabs it in Warrior's throat over and over but it doesn't work at all. Warrior bangs on his chest and I think you can figure the rest out from there.

Warrior puts him out with a sleeper which makes sense here and puts the suit on him. Where does one get a weasel suit? Was there a furry convention in town? You know for being in a sleeper for about 30 seconds, he's WAY out of it. Warrior

bangs on his chest once he gets it done like someone standing over his fallen prey. Ooh that was a good one. Bobby wakes up and realizes he has claws and a tail. This is like Kafka's worst nightmare.

Rating: N/A. This was for comedy more than anything else. They tried to make the match into nothing at all and that's what the best answer was. Heenan was always a good sport though and could do just about any kind of comedy so this was perfect for him.

Tag Titles: Demolition vs. British Bulldogs

The Bulldogs are more or less done at this point as they would be gone very soon. Yeah their last appearance as a team was at Survivor Series, about four months after this. They had one televised match in between: a draw at Summerslam. Demolition is getting more and more popular at this point, having won the titles at Mania. They would hold them for over a year, setting the record that still stands for longest tag title reign.

If nothing else the music here is great. Davey vs. Smash starts us off which is probably the best combination given how broken down Billington was at this point. Dynamite comes in and gets the tar beaten out of him which makes something close to sense I guess. Graham suggests Hayes manages the Bulldogs. Thankfully that never happened. He says they should be more malicious.

Graham needs to shut up now. When Mooney is your most competent announcer you can tell this isn't going to go well. Dynamite comes back in maybe 30 seconds after getting beaten down for far too long. The snap suplex hits Axe and they do the launch headbutt. Dynamite busts out the Octopus Hold but Axe gets a cane shot for the pin.

Rating: C-. Nothing really great here but this was just to give us a tag title match against a competent team so that certainly worked. The Bulldogs were done at this point but

they were still good for stuff like this. It's no classic or anything but it'll do just fine for what it's supposed to be here.

Ken Patera vs. Dino Bravo

Commentators were actually suggesting that Patera retire at this point due to a lack of skill. He only had two moves: a full nelson and a bearhug at this point. Hopefully this is short. Bravo is a "world title contender" allegedly. That's very funny. Patera was finally back after being put in jail for beating up a cop back in the day and no one cared.

He was this era's Mark Henry: he used to be in the Olympics and then left for a long time before coming back to no one caring. Patera keeps going for rollups and such but gets caught in the side suplex to end it. At least it was short.

Rating: D-. Again this just wasn't any good. There was nothing to Patera at this or most any other point in his career so it's not like this meant anything. At least it was short, and when that's the best thing you can say about a show, it's not good.

Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant

This is obviously the main reason to see this show as these two were still a pretty big draw at this point. Andre is almost as tall as the cage, which makes the whole 15 feet thing a bit of a stretch. Hogan of course gets a huge pop. Normally I would complain about Hogan getting the main event over the champion, but here it makes sense. Hogan is now the greatest sportsman of all time. Oh dear.

This is escape only. This doesn't quite have the appeal of Mania 3 for some reason. Andre is aging very badly at this point, not even able to stand up straight anymore. Sean listed the rules at the beginning of the match and then Hayes spends a minute and a half asking how you win. It's not comical like

when Heenan did it. Hayes just doesn't get it. They punch and choke each other a lot. Andre ties Hogan to the cage with his t-shirt and Hayes thinks Andre should go up top and jump to the floor.

For some reason Andre thinks a t-shirt is going to hold Hogan. Has he not watched ANY of Hogan's entrances over the years? Andre is on his knees and uses a bearhug on Hogan. That's just a weird visual. He switches up his offense and uses an elbow drop. Andre takes a turnbuckle pad off which even Graham sees the problem with: YOU'RE IN A STEEL CAGE.

It busts Hogan open though and you can clearly see him bleed. Andre bites the cut, clearly being influenced by Twilight and wanting to be a sparkly giant. Hogan makes his comeback and drops the leg. No slam or anything but just clotheslines. Heenan comes in and gets beaten up too. Andre tries to climb out but gets caught and tied up in the ropes. After another shot to Heenan, Hogan wins over the top. He doesn't even pose.

Rating: D+. Pretty bad match here and nothing of note at all. Hogan was clearly winning the whole time and with just 10 minutes of punching etc, there isn't much good going on here. Then again it's Hogan in his prime doing what the fans wanted to see so it's a bit difficult to trash it. This was a house show though, so Hogan winning to send them home happy is what matters most.

After the show ends we see the three hosts standing in front of the "stadium". The green screen effect might not be so obvious if the fans in the picture actually you know, moved?

Overall Rating: D. This show is BAD. Keep in mind that the Savage/DiBiase match wasn't on the tape so you really can't count that one. Other than that there just isn't anything of note here. Then again like I said this was just a filmed house show so it wasn't supposed to be anything classic. It's boring beyond belief, but it wasn't supposed to be a PPV quality

card. There are far worse shows but the two big ones aren't bad for checking out for historical sake. Also, including the extra match, all this was done in two hours and fifteen minutes. That's not bad for like 12 matches. Anyway, check out the main two and that's about it, but only one is actually good.

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