

# Wrestlemania Count-Up – Wrestlemania XXXI: Everyone Talks About It But Rollins Did It

## Wrestlemania XXXI

Date: March 29, 2015

Location: Levi's Stadium, Santa Clara, California

Attendance: 76,976

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Jerry Lawler

This is an interesting show as most people really weren't looking forward to it. The card isn't that bad on paper but the interest is still low. Reigns vs. Lesnar isn't the most exciting main event and the idea of HHH vs. Sting as a regular match is borderline terrifying. The show has surprised me before though so let's get to it.

The set is HUGE this year with a very wide stage and a big circle for the Titantron looking like a play button on the WWE Network. It's another open air stadium and since it's on the west coast, the sun is shining very brightly for a unique look.

Pre-Show: Tag Team Titles: Tyson Kidd/Cesaro vs. Los Matadores vs. Usos vs. New Day

One fall to a finish. Kidd and Cesaro, with Kidd's wife Natalya, are defending and it's Kofi Kingston/Big E. (minus the Langston) for New Day with Xavier Woods in their corner. The Usos (in San Francisco 49ers colors) have Jimmy's wife Naomi and Los Matadores still have El Torito. Cesaro and Kofi start fighting with Kingston scoring a quick dropkick but Diego tags himself in.

A ticked off Cesaro pulls Jey off the apron and whips him into the barricade, re-aggravating a shoulder injury and taking Jey out. Kofi monkey flips Diego for two and gets punched in the face as Jey is being taken to the back. Back to Cesaro for a chinlock before the Swing sends Kofi into Kidd's dropkick. Kofi gets kicked into the corner so Jimmy can tag himself in for a superkick to Cesaro.

Kidd, Fernando, Big E. and Cesaro are all down in a corner and Jimmy nails the running Umaga hip attack to each one of them. Kofi dives onto Diego as any semblance of the tagging has been abandoned. Kidd springboards into a superkick from Jimmy, who charges into an uppercut from Cesaro. Big E. comes in and launches Kofi into a double knee to Cesaro's chest for two.

Cesaro's apron superplex takes Big E. down and Los Matadores add a powerbomb/Backstabber combo to Kofi with Kidd breaking up the pin. Kofi goes after Kidd on the floor but has to catch Torito, allowing Natalya to put the bull in a Sharpshooter to continue a stupid mini feud. Jimmy and Naomi dive onto Kidd, Kofi and Fernando. Back in and the Midnight Hour (Big Ending from Big E. (a powerslam drop) and a middle rope DDT from Kofi) plants Diego with Jimmy and Cesaro making stereo saves.

Fernando switches with Diego for a rollup on Big E. but the referee says he's not legal. If that's true, I want to buy that referee a ham sandwich. Big E. picks up Diego and Kidd at the same time but Jimmy breaks it up with a superkick. Kidd eats Trouble in Paradise but Cesaro uppercuts Kofi on top. Los Matadores go up top for a double superplex but Cesaro and Big E. make it a double Tower of Doom. JBL: "OH THE HUMANITY!" Jimmy adds a Superfly splash to Big E. but Cesaro steals the pin at retain at 9:58.

**Rating:** B. Total and complete insanity here (described as a car wreck by the commentators) which was all it needed to be. They didn't go with a copy of last year's match, even though a lot of the participants were the same. Kidd and Cesaro were really clicking as a team and the division as a whole was looking up until Kidd's injury in June.

#### Pre-Show: Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal

Adam Rose, Alex Riley, Big E., Big Show, Bo Dallas, Cesaro, Curtis Axel, Damien Mizdow, Darren Young, Diego, Erick Rowan, Fandango, Fernando, Goldust, Heath Slater, Hideo Itami, Jack Swagger, Jimmy Uso, Kane, Kofi Kingston, Konnor, Mark Henry, Ryback, Sin Cara, The Miz, Titus O'Neil, Tyson Kidd, Viktor, Xavier Woods, Zack Ryder

Rose loves to party, Riley is back from injury, Axel is dressed like Hulk Hogan in a gimmick called Axelmania after he was never officially eliminated from the 2015 Royal Rumble, Dallas is a self-obsessed motivational speaker, Mizdow is Sandow copying the Miz as

his stunt double (and becoming incredibly popular due to how hard he's worked at the character), Itami is an NXT guy who won a tournament for this spot and Konnor and Viktor are a power team called the Ascension. The seven people from the opening match are surprise additions to this.

Axel breaks up the brawling to start so he can rip off his shirt, earning himself an elimination from the masses. Everyone keeps fighting until Rose and Fandango eliminate each other. Miz and Mizdow double team Riley and get rid of him with Miz taking the credit. Dallas eliminates Ryder, takes a victory lap, and then gets kicked out by Itami. The fans are way into him so here's Big Show to eliminate Itami before anyone gets too excited.

Kane gets rid of Los Matadores at the same time and Cesaro does the same to Rose. Henry throws out Kidd but the ring is still WAY too full. Ascension gets rid of Henry and knocks Show down in a stupid move. Ryback dumps Ascension for their brilliance, followed by Young and Slater a few seconds after. Titus goes out too and it's all Ryback, so Big Show is RIGHT THERE to cut him off.

Show clotheslines Swagger out and takes out all three members of New Day from the apron. You WILL respect Big Show and his amazing strength whether you like it or not. We're down to Show, Rowan, Uso, Ryback, Cesaro, Goldust, Miz, Mizdow and Kane. The fans are behind Mizdow as Show dumps Rowan.

Ryback gets rid of Goldust but Kane saves Big Show for no logical reason. Miz and Mizdow take a double chokeslam from Kane, who is quickly slammed out by Cesaro. Show dumps Jimmy but gets picked up by Cesaro again, only to escape and dump Cesaro with ease. Ryback grabs a spinebuster on Show and is eliminated for trying to get any momentum.

It's Miz, Mizdow and Show for the final three but Mizdow FINALLY stands up to Miz and tells him to go do it himself. Miz gets annoyed and yells at him for about a minute as Show just stands back and watch. Mizdow snaps and eliminates Miz and gets to fight Big Show on his own. Some clotheslines have the giant in trouble and Mizdow low bridges him halfway out. Show gets back up and shrugs off a front facelock before easily eliminating Mizdow at 18:08.

**Rating:** D. So yeah, all hail Big Show, may his name forever be praised, because he's big and strong and bald and was here back in

1999 so we must give him a win. On top of that, they were trying to push the idea that Big Show had never won a battle royal, ignoring the one he won on Smackdown in 2014 and the one he won on Raw in 2006.

Instead of using this to make Mizdow into someone important, they went with Big Show because he just hasn't won anything important in a long time. This was it for Mizdow as he would lose the big showdown with Miz less than a month later and pretty much disappear. Big Show on the other hand would do exactly the same thing he's done for about the last ten years: be treated like a monster and then lose to someone new. Except here of course because Mizdow winning would have been stupid.

Aloe Blacc sings America the Beautiful.

The opening video is hosted by LL Cool J and talks about how entertainment has evolved with everyone being connected. The one thing that has stayed the same though is us as we've watched moment after moment in the history of Wrestlemania. That generation at the beginning created what we see today and connects us all together. Tonight, these men and women will take the biggest stage and connect us all. This is Wrestlemania. Cool stuff here and it worked very well.

Intercontinental Title: Daniel Bryan vs. Bad News Barrett vs. Dolph Ziggler vs. Stardust vs. Luke Harper vs. R-Truth vs. Dean Ambrose

Ladder match and Barrett is defending after issuing a challenge for a bunch of people to fight him. Stardust is Cody Rhodes as an even freakier version of Goldust. Truth is scared of heights and is going to have some issues in this one. It's a huge brawl to start and Ambrose takes Harper down with a suicide dive. Stardust jumps off the middle rope and lands on a bunch of people (the Falling Star), leaving Harper to dive on everyone but Ambrose.

Dean climbs a ladder and dives on the other six to put all seven of them down. Truth is the first one back in but he can't bring himself to climb. It's Barrett with the save but Bryan dropkicks a ladder into him before whipping Stardust into the ladder to crush Barrett even more. The momentum is stopped as Harper throws the ladder at Bryan but he's able to tie Harper upside down in the ladder for the YES Kicks.

That earns Bryan a superkick from Ziggler and it's Dean and Dolph

going for a climb. Barrett joins them but Stardust takes out the ladder to put everyone down. The fans chant CODY to freak Stardust out so he throws a ladder at Harper. Stardust goes outside and pulls out his own ladder called the, and I quote, Exo-Atmospheric Starbird. In other words, it's a ladder covered in glitter.

Barrett will have none of that and breaks a rung off to give Stardust a beating. Dean throws the glitter ladder at Barrett and the glitter falls all over the ring. Now it's time to bring in two small ladders so Harper and Ambrose can have a duel, capped off by a boot to Dean's face. Harper lays a smaller ladder on the top rope and rams Dean into it face first. The ladder around Luke's head takes some people out but Truth drop toeholds Harper down, sending him into the ladder.

Truth sets up the big ladder but Stardust goes for the climb, only to get superplexed back down by Barrett. Bryan, Ziggler and Ambrose go up top until Dean drops down and shoves the ladder over. Dean goes up until Harper powerbombs him off the ladder and through a ladder bridged between the barricade and ring. Ziggler tries a sleeper on Harper as he climbs, followed by the Zig Zag to bring them crashing down.

Somehow Dolph is able to climb up, only to have Barrett pull him down into the Bull Hammer. Another one knocks Truth off but Bryan makes a quick climb and kicks Barrett down. Barrett is right back up though and makes a save, followed by a quick running knee from Bryan, allowing him to climb up, headbutt Ziggler off and win the title at 13:55.

**Rating:** B. Giving Bryan a title (the fifth different one he's fought for in five years) is a good idea as it lets the fans get it out of their system with a feel good moment. If he hadn't won here, the fans would have probably hijacked the show with their DANIEL BRYAN chants because if Bryan isn't the featured attraction, there's no way they can possibly enjoy the show. Some fans. Anyway, this was exactly what the match should have been: Money in the Bank but for a title. Unfortunately Bryan would get hurt again and be out of action in less than a month, putting him on the shelf indefinitely.

We recap Seth Rollins vs. Randy Orton. Rollins broke up the Shield last year and became the Authority's young ace, which ticked Orton off. This led to a feud with Rollins putting Orton on the shelf

(meaning onto a movie set) with a Curb Stomp onto some steps. Then Orton returned and rejoined the Authority for a few weeks, only to turn on them again and attack Rollins to set this up. After all that stupid, they went with a simpler idea: Orton as the original future of the WWE vs. Rollins as the new future.

### Seth Rollins vs. Randy Orton

Rollins is Mr. Money in the Bank and has Joey Mercury and Jamie Noble as his personal stooges. Seth starts by flipping away from Orton, only to eat a dropkick and bail to the floor from the threat of an RK0. Back in and a big clothesline looks to set up the RK0 again but the Stooges offer a distraction to break it up. Orton deals with them early off a double elevated DDT from the apron.

The distraction lets Seth get in his first offense though and Orton is in trouble. A snap suplex gets two and we're in the chinlock on Orton. Back up and Orton grabs a powerslam, followed by a t-bone suplex to send Rollins to the apron. As luck would have it, he's in position for the elevated DDT but Seth pops up with an enziguri, followed by an Asai moonsault to put both guys on the floor.

Back in and Randy can't get a superplex but he'll settle for a top rope backdrop and a high cross body, only to have Seth roll through for two. A low superkick staggers Orton and Seth tries standing Sliced Bread #2, only to get caught in the RK0 for a very close two. That's a move you don't see kicked out of very often. The Stooges break up the Punt to keep this PG, allowing Rollins to hit the Curb Stomp for two. Seth tries it again but this time Orton launches him into the air and catches him in the RK0 for the pin at 13:15.

**Rating:** B. Good but not great here with the near falls off the false finishes not having the best heat in the world. That ending is more than worth it though and looked awesome with Orton being able to catch that thing from almost anywhere. Orton is the kind of guy that you can throw in there whenever you need a spot like this and the fans are going to freak out over the RK0 every time, especially when it's something like that. Good stuff.

Ronda Rousey is here.

We recap HHH vs. Sting, which started back at Survivor Series but Sting disappeared for a few months, as is his custom. Sting stood up against the Authority's corruption so the Authority talked down to him for never being in the big pond before, because WCW's legacy

exists for WWE to stomp on it and beat their chest over the battle that ended fourteen years ago. This turned into a big thing about the Monday Night Wars with Sting being the last soldier from WCW that had to be vanquished.

As a side note, here's a great example of why Stephanie gets on people's nerves. On one of the last shows before this match, Sting came out to say that this shouldn't be about the Monday Night Wars because that would be totally ridiculous. This brought out Stephanie, to insist that it WAS about the Monday Night Wars and barely letting Sting get in another word, because she had spoken and that's all that mattered.

### HHH vs. Sting

No DQ or countout. Sting is played to the ring by some kind of Japanese band with drums and a gong. As you might expect, HHH completely upstages him with a full on Terminator commercial with the robots rising from the stage, a clip from the movie, HHH dressed as a Terminator and Arnold Schwarzenegger himself appearing on screen for the introduction. It might be time to call in Robocop.

They lock up after forty five seconds and a shoulder drops HHH for more stalling. A hiptoss and dropkick put HHH in the corner and Sting is looking better than he has in years. Fans: "YOU STILL GOT IT!" HHH's right hands and facebuster have little effect as Sting goes for the Scorpion Deathlock (basically a Sharpshooter), sending HHH bailing to the floor. HHH comes back in but gets whipped over the corner as this has been one sided for the first five minutes.

Sting goes to the floor though and the Stinger Splash hits the barricade by mistake, as it's done all but roughly twice in his career. Back in and HHH whips him across the ring several times until Sting collapses. We hit the chinlock to slow things down again before HHH goes to the middle rope for some reason. He dives into the Scorpion and here's DX (X-Pac and the New Age Outlaws) for the save.

Sting fights them off with ease and backdrops HHH onto them, setting up a dive off the top (remember that Sting is 56 here) to take them all out. Back in and a Pedigree gets two so HHH gets the sledgehammer (one of at least two under the ring). This brings out the NWO (Hall, Nash and Hogan) to save Sting (SO much wrong with that statement, not even counting trying to remember if the Kliq

exists in storylines or not). They take their sweet time and eventually clean house, allowing Sting to hit the Scorpion Death Drop (reverse DDT) for two.

Now the Deathlock goes on and Hogan pulls the sledgehammer away. Gunn takes Nash down and Nash is holding his leg in what almost has to be a rib. Sting tries to put the hold back on but Shawn Michaels runs in for Sweet Chin Music (well the area a few inches in front of the chin that is). HHH only gets two and both guys are done. Shawn hands HHH the hammer but Hall gives Sting a bat for the awesome duel. HHH's hammer is broken over the bat and Sting pounds away in the corner, only to dive into the sledgehammer to the face for the pin at 18:35.

**Rating:** B-. This was a blast until the ending which I really didn't want to see. Of course the quality here was bad but they were never going to get a good match out there so why not just go for the big circus act? I know the logic is that you can't have Sting come in and beat HHH because he was WCW, but again, IT WAS FOURTEEN YEARS AGO.

Why does anything about the other company matter anymore? Sting came in as a big, fun moment and then it's HAHA HHH WINS AGAIN! To be fair though, this was his first Wrestlemania win in five years so it's not like it happens often. Still though, fun stuff but the ending was a punch to the stomach.

Post match HHH shakes Sting's hand. As in the guy he hit in the face with a hammer two minutes ago. This doesn't make any sense as HHH is still the corrupt villain, meaning Sting's original mission should be ongoing. Forget all that though as this was one more rehash of the Monday Night Wars because people still care about that.

Ads for new shows coming to the WWE Network, including the new Divas Search.

Maria Menunos, in a Bushwhackers shirt, brings in Daniel Bryan. First ever Intercontinental Champion Pat Patterson comes in to congratulate him, as do Roddy Piper, Ricky Steamboat, Ric Flair (of course) and Bret Hart, who starts a YES chant. Ron Simmons comes in and scares them all before hitting his catchphrase.

Skylar Grey, Kid Ink and Travis Barker perform the theme songs. Thankfully it wasn't a full on medley.



## AJ Lee/Paige vs. Bella Twins

Real people vs. reality stars (from Total Divas), even though Paige had already become a cast member. Nikki is Divas Champion and in the middle of her reign of doom. Paige debuted at the Raw after Wrestlemania last year and has formed a dream team with AJ to take on the sisters.

Nikki and Paige have a catfight to start with the champ getting the better of it and knocking AJ off the apron. An Alabama Slam gets two on off an Alabama Slam. Brie comes in with a middle rope missile dropkick as the announcers debate the importance of the women not on Total Divas. AJ gets knocked off the apron again and Brie's running knee to Paige gets two.

Back to Nikki who drops AJ for the third time, followed by the Rack Attack for two on Paige. They're even kicking out of the finishers in midcard matches now. Paige superkicks Nikki down and both Bellas wind up on the floor, setting up Paige's flip dive off the apron. The hot tag FINALLY brings in AJ who is quickly slammed down for two but Brie has to save Nikki from the Black Widow. Nikki forearms AJ for two more, only to get caught in the Black Widow for the submission at 6:42.

**Rating:** C-. This was a handicap match for the first half with Paige cleaning house, which was made even weirder when AJ came in anyway. Not that it mattered though as the Bellas were going to be pushed as the stars as long as they wanted to because of that stupid reality show. In theory this should have set up AJ as the next challenger but she retired later in the week and left the company for good.

We get a tale of the tape for Lesnar vs. Reigns, which Cole says is the result of a computer analysis. The stats include height, weight and career accomplishments. Did this computer analysis take place in the Korean War?

Hall of Fame video, with highlights of Lanny Poffo reading a poem to induct his brother Randy Savage and Connor Michalek receiving the first Warrior Award.

The Class of 2015 includes Rikishi, Larry Zbyszko (mainly famous in the 80s), Alundra Blayze, Connor Michalek, the Bushwhackers (with Butch on crutches but still doing the strut), Tatsumi Fujinami (a legendary Japanese wrestler), Randy Savage (represented by his brother), Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Kevin Nash (for the required

Kliq member, though I wonder why he can go in under his real name and not Hall).

We recap John Cena vs. Rusev for the US Title. Rusev, an evil Bulgarian/Russian, won the title late last year and is undefeated. He's run through all kinds of American stars and even beat Cena via knockout at Fast Lane 2015. Tonight is the big rematch (as granted by Rusev's manager Lana to plant the seeds for their split) and showdown for the title. This is one of those stories that worked for years and is still working now because it's such a simple idea.

#### US Title: Rusev vs. John Cena

Cena is challenging. Rusev's entrance trumps everything tonight as the Russian military accompanies Lana to the ring before Rusev rolls out IN A TANK. This is so Rocky IV. Cena has a video montage of Presidents of the United States talking about American exceptionalism until Cena walks out. The fans do the always awesome JOHN CENA SUCKS chant to the tune of his music.

The champ spinwheel kicks the American down to start and dives at Cena for a gutwrench suplex (from Rusev in a cool move) for two. A Cannonball in the corner gets the same but Rusev stops to wave the Russian flag. You don't do that to a real American so Cena kicks him in the face and starts his way too early finishing sequence. The top rope Fameasser gets two but the fans are too busy cheering for Lana to care.

The AA is broken up and a jumping superkick drops Cena cold. Rusev argues with the referee though and Cena hooks a tornado DDT for two more. A quick Alabama Slam (that's how you do it Nikki) looks to set up the Accolade (Rusev's camel clutch finisher) but Cena pulls him down into the STF. As Cena does some of the loudest instructing I've ever heard (telling Rusev to keep his head up), Lana throws in a shoe for a distraction so Rusev can make the ropes. Seriously, a shoe? You couldn't like, go yell at him or something? At least it was rather heelish.

Rusev throws him down with a fall away slam, followed by a top rope headbutt of all things for two. He can't quite get the Accolade though, allowing Cena to kick him away and debut the springboard Stunner for two of his own. Another jumping superkick and a wheelbarrow slam set up the Accolade and the fans are THRILLED. This time Cena powers out and grabs the STF. Lana offers another

distraction but Rusev rams into her by mistake, setting up the AA to give Cena the title at 14:43.

**Rating:** C+. It's cool to see Cena drop down the card like this as he's been in the main event for so long now that it's hard to get into seeing him win the World Title again. The match was good enough even if there was an obvious ending but the Accolade could have stayed on longer. Rusev was built up to lose at a match like this and there's nothing wrong with that. It would have been interesting to see Rusev escape again here though and have Cena chase him over the summer.

Rusev blames Lana for the loss.

Wrestlemania XXXII is in Dallas.

The pre-show panel talks about the Tag Team Title match and Big Show winning the battle royal. Thanks for reminding me.

Here are HHH and Stephanie to brag about the new attendance record and desperately fill in some time as we have two matches left and nearly an hour and a half to go. Stephanie talks about watching Wrestlemania I live and seeing her friend Andre the Giant (This was a thing for her around this time as she would mention this whenever she could. For some reason this was her justification for not letting Cena be in the Andre battle royal.).

Wrestlemania has grown exponentially since then and it's all because of the Authority's leadership. HHH says it's like he beat everyone here tonight, just like he beat Sting (Buy a ticket, get a hammer to the face!). They own everyone here because the Authority wins. That means they own the people and that means it's time for the Rock. Cole says Rock has headlined five Wrestlemanias. Are they really still going with the idea that Rock vs. Hogan wasn't the headliner?

The fans keep cheering until Stephanie asks them to be quiet because we get the idea. Rock tells Stephanie that she doesn't own the people here, including himself because he was born right around here. As for HHH, he can either go dress up as the Terminator again or they can make a Wrestlemania moment right here and right now. HHH doesn't seem interested so, just like Rock left his heart in San Francisco, HHH clearly left something back in Connecticut.

Stephanie gets in Rock's face and says he knows there's no Rock without the McMahons. Rock's dad Rocky Johnson would be nowhere

without Vince Sr., Vince Jr. and Stephanie. That starts a chant for Shane, which even Cole acknowledges. Rock says that Stephanie would be nowhere without Vince so she slaps him. Stephanie keeps ranting as Rock goes outside.....and stands next to Ronda Rousey. Fans: "RONDA'S GONNA KILL YOU!" Rock introduces her to Stephanie but Stephanie says they're friends already.

Stephanie KEEPS GOING and says this is her ring. Ronda says any ring she steps into is hers so Stephanie can make her leave. Stephanie smiles at her but Rousey gives her a look, which Rock sums up as meaning "she's going to reach down your throat, pull out your insides and play jump rope with your Fallopian tubes." HHH tries to interrupt and gets beaten down, including a hiptoss from Rousey. Stephanie loads up the slap but gets her arm bent back with as little force as possible, likely due to UFC contract stipulations. Rousey and Rock stand tall.

There's no time to recap Bray Wyatt vs. Undertaker but it's what you would expect: Bray wants to be the new evil monster and Undertaker stands in his way. The interesting note here is Bray sprained the heck out of his ankle earlier in the day so he's nowhere near 100%.

#### Bray Wyatt vs. Undertaker

The awesome entrances continue (well as awesome as a guy holding a lantern when it's still daylight can be) as Bray walks down the ramp and passes a string of zombies who come to life as he goes by. Undertaker has grown some hair back and looks like he did in 2002. Bray charges into a boot before the bell, though that might be all that ankle can handle for the match.

Some driving shoulders set up Old School (notice that Undertaker's offense here keeps Bray from having to stand alone) but a running clothesline puts Undertaker on the floor. He lands on his feet though and pulls Bray out to keep up the beating. The apron legdrop staggers Bray even more but he breaks up the big boot with his running cross body. Bray takes his time pounding Undertaker down which makes sense coming from him.

The ankle is fine enough for a running splash in the corner but Bray drops down and puts on a chinlock. For someone as banged up as he is, this is a solid performance from Wyatt. Undertaker's head is rammed into the post but Bray goes down and holds his ankle. I don't know why they didn't do a quick angle during the match to explain

the injury. Back in and Bray can't stand at first.

Undertaker grabs Hell's Gate but Bray punches his way out before it goes on full. A release Rock Bottom sets up the backsplash for two on Undertaker. Sister Abigail is countered into a chokeslam followed by a Tombstone for two. These near falls are WAY past overdone so far tonight. Another Tombstone is countered into Sister Abigail to freak Bray out even more. Bray does his spider bridge up but Undertaker sits up and glares into Wyatt's eyes, sending Bray wilting to the mat in a perfect reaction. Bray actually wins a slugout but Sister Abigail is countered into a second Tombstone to give Undertaker the pin at 15:06.

**Rating:** C+. This match told me a few things. First and foremost, last year's match was so bad because of the injury. Undertaker looked like his old (emphasis on that word) self here and was nowhere near as off as he was last year. Unfortunately it also tells me that Bray isn't going to move up the card any time soon.

With the Streak over there's no real reason for Undertaker to win here, other than to give the fans a feel good moment. Bray was trying as hard as he could on one leg but he could only get so far. Finally, Undertaker is missing something now that the Streak is gone. 21-1 still sounds impressive but it's just not the same.

Ad for Extreme Rules.

We recap Roman Reigns vs. Brock Lesnar. Brock has been unstoppable lately after squashing Cena to win the title at Summerslam 2014. Reigns won the Royal Rumble to earn the shot, despite being LOATHED by the crowd at this point. The idea became about him trying to honor his family's history and legacy which worked to a degree, but no matter what they did, it was still Brock Lesnar on the other side and people wanted to see him massacre Reigns in every way he could think of.

The other problem for Reigns is he hasn't really earned the spot. Aside from the Rumble, his only major win was last month over Daniel Bryan. This really wasn't the strongest build in the world and is boiling down to Brock suplexes a lot and Reigns hits him a lot. Roman has been told he can't beat Brock and his motivation is to prove him wrong. That's the extent of his motivation and that's not enough for the main event of Wrestlemania.

WWE World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Roman Reigns

Brock is defending of course. We do the big match intros and Reigns is booed out of the building, following by the fans to quote Heyman's intro along with him. Roman goes right at Brock to start but gets driven into the corner, setting up the first German suplex. Brock is already bleeding but he hits the F5 inside of thirty seconds. A release fisherman's suplex sends Reigns flying but he elbows out of a German, drawing incredible booing from the crowd.

Brock no sells a clothesline and now the German sends Reigns across the ring again. Reigns smiles at Brock, earning himself a belly to back suplex and Brock debuting the "SUPLEX CITY" line. Right hands don't bother Brock either as another German drops Reigns again. Roman keeps smiling so Brock breaks it up with a release German. The fans think this is awesome as Brock forearm's Reigns off the apron and into the barricade. As he gets back in, Reigns scores with a knee to the ribs, followed by some kicks to the face but Brock catches a foot and knocks Reigns silly with a clothesline.

A belly to belly overhead brings Reigns back in over the top rope but Reigns shakes his head at Brock again. Another F5 gets two and now Brock take the gloves off. Some hard slaps put Reigns down but he tells Brock to bring it on. Another German earns him another bring it on so Brock gives him suplex number ten. The third F5 gets two more, putting Reigns past Undertaker last year. Brock takes Roman outside but Reigns posts him, drawing some real blood from Lesnar.

Back in and Brock is wobbly so Roman its two straight Superman Punches. That gets him to a knee but Reigns has to elbow out of another German. The third Superman Punch puts Brock down and there's the spear. Brock is up though so a second spear gets a VERY close two. Heyman is on his knees praying as the fans are booing Roman even more. A fourth Superman Punch is countered into a fourth F5.....AND HERE COMES SETH ROLLINS TO CASH IN MONEY IN THE BANK!

WWE World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins

The Curb Stomp puts Brock down but Reigns has to spear Brock down to save Seth from an F5. Another Curb Stomp (and a whisper of "thank you so much" to Reigns) gives Seth the title at 16:43!

**Rating:** A-. They went in a TOTALLY different direction here and it was the best thing they possibly could have done. Reigns vs. Lesnar had little interest as a match but as a one sided war with Reigns

giving it everything he had near the end, they turned it into one of the most dramatic spectacles you could find. They had me on the near fall after that second spear and I lost it when Rollins came out.

That ending was a stroke of brilliance as they didn't want to job Lesnar but they didn't want to give Reigns the title yet. Rollins had been the wrestler of the year in 2014 and it made much better sense to give him the credit that he deserved for it here. Great drama, great action, and a way better match that it had any right to be.

Fireworks and posing take us out.

**Overall Rating:** B+. I actually liked this show a lot more live, which probably had a lot to do with the expectations being so low coming in. With more time to think about it and the shock of the cash in being gone, it's still a really strong show that FAR exceeded expectations. The main event was great and most of the other stuff was good. Aside from the main event there really isn't a big blow away match though and that hurts things a bit.

The entire show was set up differently this year as there were very few backstage segments and the show was able to fly by otherwise. However, there was that big twenty plus minute segment with Rock/HHH/Stephanie and that's what caused a big part of this show's problem: it's too long.

Counting the two hour pre-show and it's nearly thirty minutes of wrestling, this show runs nearly six hours. It doesn't matter if it's the greatest show you've ever watched; that's too long. There had to be something that could be cut in here (hint: it was the long part that didn't involve a match), even though none of the matches broke twenty minutes. Between the big talking segment and the live performance, which still adds nothing to the show, there's too much in here and it makes for a very long sit.

Overall though, this was a major surprise and a better show than it had any right to be. The low expectations helped it a lot, but this was looking like one of the worst Wrestlemanias in history and wound up being a lot of fun. Nothing on it really stands out above the rest (save for maybe the main event) so the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts. Really fun show here.

Ratings Comparison

New Day vs. Los Matadores vs. Usos vs. Cesaro/Tyson Kidd

Original: C+

Redo: B

Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal

Original: D+

Redo: D

Intercontinental Title Ladder Match

Original: B

Redo: B

Seth Rollins vs. Randy Orton

Original: B

Redo: B

Sting vs. HHH

Original: B

Redo: B-

Paige/AJ Lee vs. Bella Twins

Original: C+

Redo: C-

Rusev vs. John Cena

Original: B-

Redo: C+

Bray Wyatt vs. Undertaker

Original: B

Redo: C+

Roman Reigns vs. Brock Lesnar

Original: B+

Redo: A-

Overall Rating

Original: A

Redo: B+



Yeah the shock had a lot to do with it but there was good stuff throughout.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2015/03/29/wrestlemania-xxxi-shock-and-awe-shock-and-awe/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the NXT: The Full Sail Years Volumes I and II, now in PAPERBACK. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/03/24/kbs-history-of-nxt-volumes-1-and-2-now-available-in-paperback/>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

---

## Which Wrestlemania Should I Redo?

Aside from XXXI of course. The count-up starts March 3.

---

## 2015 Awards: Moment of the

# Year

This one is always kind of hard to pick.

Again, we'll get through some of the easier ones first.

The Salida Del Sol through the ladder at TLC was amazing and one of the biggest high spots in a LONG time. Just....dang. It doesn't really have a long lasting impact but it was really cool and definitely deserves mentioning.

For a quick one, Brock Lesnar sitting up next to Undertaker and laughing at him, only to have Undertaker do the same. Again, didn't mean much but it was awesome at the time.

The Ronda Rousey appearance at Wrestlemania was great as well with the great line of "She's going to reach down your throat and play jump rope with your Fallopian tubes." This would be a nearly runaway winner if Rousey had really hurt Stephanie but pesky contracts prevented it.

Shield reunited for all of thirty seconds. That's more of a preview than an awesome moment though.

Now we'll get down to the actual top choices.

First up was the Divas Revolution, which would have been even better had Stephanie not been involved. I get that she wanted to be involved because she's Stephanie and has to be involved in something cool every time, but it was Paige's story and should have gotten the moment to make the whole thing work.

Another major one is Seth Rollins cashing in Money in the Bank. This was a legitimate shocking moment and the big story that people remember from Wrestlemania. I don't know if I'd put it at number one but it worked very well at the time, before WWE decided to make Rollins a worthless champion.

From the same show, there's the NWO vs. DX. This was the Monday Night Wars in the span of fifteen minutes and I had a blast with it. Points off for the complete lack of continuity and HHH winning, but this was so much fun.

Then Bayley did a reverse super hurricanrana, gave Sasha Banks a Bayley to Belly and won the Women's Title, followed by the Four Horsewomen posing in the ring one last time. Wrestling is all about

emotion and that's what you got here. This was as good as it got in 2015 and it's going to be a long time before anything tops this.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of the History of Wrestlemania at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0188BJRGU>

And check out my Amazon author page with cheap wrestling books at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

---

## **New Column: It's A Big World After All**

Something I thought about over the ocean.

<http://www.wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-its-a-big-world-after-all/37205/>

---

## **Thought of the Day: Wrestlemania XXXI Didn't Mean Much**

Think about it: what from that show still matters less than two months removed?

Other than Rollins and Cena winning their titles, almost nothing

that happened there matters.

Bryan – Vacated his title

Kidd/Cesaro – Lost the titles they were defending

Sting – Hasn't been mentioned

Lesnar – Appeared once

Undertaker – Hasn't been mentioned

Wyatt – Basically no sold the loss

AJ/Paige – Both gone

Bellas – Now faces

Big Show – Nothing changed after winning the battle royal

Cena is still feuding with Rusev and Rollins is still feuding with Orton. Other than that, it's almost like Wrestlemania just came and went.

---

## **WWE First Quarter Financials At A Glance**

I'm not a financial guy so these are just highlights.

The Network now has 1.3 million paid subscribers worldwide. Naturally, they're airing May as the second straight free month because screw you fans that paid since day one.

Wrestlemania drew 259,000 buys on regular pay per view, which will help offset some of the Network costs.

Live event revenue was up big due to Wrestlemania taking place in the first quarter this time.

WWE Studios is down. I'm as shocked as you are.

---

# Thought of the Day: It's Deja Vu All Over Again

Let's see if this one makes your skin crawl.

So I got to thinking about Seth Rollins tonight and the path he took to the World Title. In case you've forgotten, here's a flashback.

He starts by winning a developmental title. That's nice people say, but what can he do with the big boys? Well he makes it to the main roster and gets in a team. That's nice too, but he's being outshined by his partner. The other guy has the look, the skills, and the charisma and is going to be the star.

Well then they win the Tag Team Titles and it's time for the guys to shine. The title reign goes well enough and they put on some good performances, but once they lost the titles, it was time to move on up. They started fighting bigger names and it all went well, but, as happens with every team, they split. As is the obvious move, they started feuding and the heel won, despite the fans thinking the other guy was the natural. Somewhere along the way the heel also won the Money in the Bank briefcase.

Then he got his big break and became captain of an elimination tag team. Despite looking like the guy that was going to be forgotten, he was suddenly the star and someone you could see as the future, even though his old partner seemed like the better option in some fans' eyes.

Then he cashed in Money in the Bank, won the World Title and walked out of Wrestlemania in one of the biggest shocks of all time, despite one of the hottest stars in the world and the guy fans were sure was going to take the title (his former Tag Team Championship partner) were in the same ring. Some people were scared, some people were stunned, some people were pleased, but he walked out with the title and is going to brag about it for the rest of time.

Oh wait I've gotten my notes crossed. I meant to be talking about [THIS GUY.](#)

But I was talking about [THIS GUY](#).

---

# NXT – April 8, 2015: Let's Go Hideo!

## **NXT**

Date: April 8, 2015

Location: San Jose Convention Center, San Jose, California

Commentators: Rich Brennan, Corey Graves

We're on the road again with some matches taped for this year's Wrestlemania Axxess weekend. For at least the last two years, there has been a ring set up on the Axxess floor for live matches, including some title defenses. Tonight we're going to see some of those matches and maybe some from the well received house show the same weekend. Let's get to it.

The main story tonight is a tournament for a spot in the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal at Wrestlemania XXXI. Here are the brackets.

Finn Balor

Baron Corbin

Bull Dempsey

Tyler Breeze

Hideo Itami

Jason Jordan

Kalisto

Adrian Neville

Video of Wrestlemania's impact on the area, which I believe was shown on both Raw and Smackdown.

We get a quick recap of the first round to give us the final four.

Balor rolled up Corbin to advance, Breeze beat Dempsey with a Beauty Shot, Itami's running kick to the face knocked Jordan out and the Red Arrow advanced Neville.

Here are the updated brackets.

Finn Balor

Tyler Breeze

Hideo Itami

Adrian Neville

#### Battle Royal Qualifying Tournament Semi-Finals: Hideo Itami vs. Adrian Neville

Neither guy gets an entrance. The crowd is very small, maybe about 200, as the ring is just tucked away in a corner of the convention center. They fight over a wristlock to start with Neville taking him down to the mat but Itami counters into an arm crank for a near fall of his own. The fans boo something off camera as the guys have a staredown and Neville teases going after whoever it was.

We hit the dueling chants as Neville grabs a headlock. That goes nowhere so Hideo hits a running kick to the chest and clotheslines Neville out to the floor. Neville makes it back in at nine and the fans don't seem thrilled with him. Some shots to the chest and a big back elbow get two on Hideo but he comes back with his three clotheslines (of course) and the tornado neck snap across the top rope.

The top rope clothesline gets two and Itami follows up with a sleeper (Fans: "GO TO SLEEP!") before switching off to a dragon sleeper. The GTS is countered and Neville blasts him with a superkick for two. Neville has to bail out of a shooting star and gets caught by the running dropkick in the corner. The Shotgun Kick sends Itami to the finals at 11:16.

**Rating:** C+. Good enough but Itami really needs to open up the offense. First it was nothing but kicks and now it's primarily

clotheslines. Star throwing in some more submissions or throws or whatever, but stop using one or two moves over and over. Neville was working heel here and it was kind of odd to see. Not bad or anything but just a sharp change from his usual style.

#### Battle Royal Qualifying Tournament Semi-Finals: Finn Balor vs. Tyler Breeze

Balor gets an entrance. Breeze poses on the corner to start so Balor dropkicks him in the face and poses exactly the same. More kicks to the chest get two on Breeze but he takes Balor down and puts on a chinlock (Tyler: "ASK HIM PLEASE!"). Balor quickly rolls through and hits a basement dropkick, followed by even more kicks to the face and chest for two. We definitely have a theme in this match. Breeze finally mixes it up with some forearms but charges into the Sling Blade. The Coup de Grace ends Breeze at 5:22.

**Rating:** C+. It's very telling how much more of a presence Balor has in half the time that Itami had. The guy is just awesome in the ring and has the full package. Even though the match was nothing special and Breeze was basically getting squashed for five minutes, it felt more entertaining than the previous match.

Dana Brooke debuts next week and calls herself the Total Diva.

Video package on the NXT house show from Wrestlemania weekend and it looks like a big Ring of Honor show, just with HHH in the ring. It really is amazing that WWE basically has their own in house indy company. This show looks like a blast.

Sami Zayn vs. Rhyno next week.

#### Battle Royal Qualifying Tournament Final: Hideo Itami vs. Finn Balor

We get a wide shot of the arena to show several hundred more people on the hard camera side. The fans are behind Balor as the guys do a wrestling sequence, ending with a standoff. Balor takes him down and cranks on the arm before a dropkick gets two. Itami comes back with some kicks to the chest and puts on a chinlock. That goes as far as a chinlock can take you and Finn rolls out for another basement dropkick.



An enziguri in the corner knocks Hideo off the top for two but he comes back with the top rope clothesline. The GTS is teased again but Balor escapes into the Pele to put both guys down again. Back up and Hideo wins a strike off, followed by a running basement dropkick in the corner. The Sling Blade out of nowhere drops Itami but he crotches Finn to break up the Coup de Grace. Yet another GTS attempt is countered and the Shotgun Kick sends Hideo to Wrestlemania at 8:15.

**Rating:** C. I wasn't feeling this one as much as they built up the GTS through the match but they still didn't let it hit. I'm glad Hideo won though as having Balor in his spot at Wrestlemania would have been a waste of him. All the kicks are getting annoying too and it's really hard to care when it's the same stuff all show long. Good enough match but it didn't have the time to get anywhere.

They shake hands post match.

We get a cool video on Hideo Itami, dating back to his press conference in Osaka, announcing his signing with WWE. Then he debuted in NXT, then he beat Balor in the match from earlier on this show. We see Itami going through the curtain to be greeted by the contingent of HHH, Tatsumi Fujinami and.....Hillbilly Jim?

Itami introduces us to his family and again, his English is fine. His language skills really aren't an excuse for his lack of promos. You can keep them short and get the point across well enough. Also included is a clip of Itami hitting the GTS on Breeze at the house show and how people freaked out online. Naturally, Stephanie is RIGHT THERE to comment on the impact on social media.

Itami is in the battle royal. We see him warming up backstage and all his friends praising him for making it this far this fast. He comes out to the crowd, Cole gives him a special introduction, he knocks out Dallas, and then Big Show treats him like any given jobber as Cole says "welcome to the big leagues." I'm SO glad we got to see him beaten down that fast. It just wouldn't have been complete without seeing Big Show looking dominant. Hideo cries once he gets backstage and a bunch of people congratulate him. Even Big

Show says he looks forward to working with Itami again. His kids hug him to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** C+. This is a hard one to grade as it's mainly a theme show with some wrestling included. The stuff on Itami is a really cool feature (Big Show dominance aside) and made him look like a big deal. Above all else though, I want to focus on that house show. On the Rise and Fall of ECW, Paul Heyman talks about wanting to make his shows into a big party where the fans say "WOW! I want to go there! I want to buy my ticket and be right there in the middle of all that."

That's the feeling I got watching that house show. It looked like a blast and something I'd love to get to see. It's the feeling you don't get on Raw because NXT feels far more fan friendly and built on excitement. Like I said, it's basically an in house indy company with very little connection to the main roster. This is a special promotion and it's going to keep going for a long time at this pace.

### Results

Hideo Itami b. Adrian Neville – Shotgun Kick

Finn Balor b. Tyler Breeze – Coup de Grace

Hideo Itami b. Finn Balor – Shotgun Kick

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of 1998 Pay Per View reviews at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00UYAMB8U>

And check out my Amazon author page with wrestling books for under \$4 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

---

# Reviewing the Review: Wrestlemania XXXI

This is a show where most fans just didn't want to see it. The interest wasn't there, but it had one good thing going for it: it's Wrestlemania. No matter what happens on the show, there's always something worth checking out. A few days before the show, I was talking about the card on the radio and the host said that it was a good card on paper and you would be looking forward to the show if you hadn't seen the build. That seemed more and more accurate as the show came closer. Let's get to it.

Before we get to the card, I want to cover some of the scenery. Above all else, that stage was HUGE. It was probably an easy forty yards long, making the wrestlers look tiny by comparison. That helped give the show the huge feel it was hoping for and the whole thing looked great. I know some people have complained about the sunlight but it really didn't bother me that much. I've seen shows outside where it was raining so hard that there were puddles in the ring so some sun isn't exactly a disaster.

The opening pre-show match was its usual fun, though I liked the elimination style from last year better. Jey Uso not being able to go hurt things a bit but having one less person might have been the best thing that could have happened in this mess. Also, it's not like he's some polar opposite from his brother. When I'm reviewing an Uso match I just pick one of their names and alternate whenever they tag. Does it really matter either way?

The match was a huge spotfest as you would expect and eventually lost all semblance of wrestling. Normally that would sound bad but it was exactly what it should have been here. The champs stood out more than anyone else and it's clear that no one cares about New Day and Los Matadores, but did anyone not know that coming in? The champs retains after Cesaro stole a pin, which was exactly the ending they should have gone with.

The second match was the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal and Big Show won. Why you ask? Because apparently he's never won a battle royal and we're supposed to ignore World War 3 1996, the one he won on Smackdown in March of last year, the one he and Kofi co-won on Raw in 2011, the ECW vs. WWE Head to Head battle royal in 2006 and a battle royal he won on Nitro because this company doesn't know how to do research, which could include things like looking online or, I don't know, ASKING HIM IF HE'S EVER WON A BATTLE ROYAL.

Anyway, this was your old standard formula of having everyone brawl then have some people do a sequence to get eliminated. Mizdow got the big face turn against Miz, only to get thrown out by Big Show with ease. Yeah having Mizdow eliminate Big Show on his own would be a stretch, but having him win by eliminating Miz would have been a huge moment. Naturally we need Big Show to win his fourth battle royal because no one remembers the others. Oh and if you remember the story, he was the last man standing in the 2000 Royal Rumble but wasn't declared the winner.

Aside from Big Show and Mizdow, the only story was Hideo Itami from NXT. He didn't do much, but at least he was there and got to have a quick moment. It was probably better to have him in there instead of someone they're ready to push like Balor. Itami is just a kicking machine at this point but he's still decent enough for a spot like this. Not a fan of the match if you couldn't tell by three paragraphs about a battle royal.

Aloe Blacc sang America the Beautiful. Four things: Aloe Blacc sounds like a lotion and is a far cry from Aretha Franklin or Gladys Knight. Also, why is it almost always America the Beautiful and almost never the Star Spangled Banner? Either is fine but I've always wondered that. Finally, I'm out of touch with modern music and I don't seem to be missing anything.

The opening seven man ladder match was pretty much exactly what fans were expecting: a huge mess with almost no story to it and one big spot after another. It wasn't anything we haven't seen before and it probably would have been better to have five people instead of seven

but for an opening match, this was solid. I would have put this on later and not had it so soon after the other mess of the Tag Team Title match, but there was nothing much to complain about here.

As for the people in the match, they did just about what they were supposed to do. R-Truth and Stardust were just there (though Barrett breaking Stardust's glittery ladder was hilarious), Ziggler was the one that got close but couldn't pull it off, Ambrose got put through a ladder for the big spot (which was actually really smart because it wrote him off the show later so he couldn't stop the big ending), Barrett was fighting everyone, Harper was there for the power and that only leaves one guy.

Having Bryan win a title in the opening match was a good way to get the show off on the right foot. Aside from fighting for his fifth different title in five Wrestlemanias (US Title, World Heavyweight Title, Tag Team Titles, WWE World Heavyweight Title, Intercontinental Title), they had to throw the fans a bone to go from him having one of the coolest moments ever at Wrestlemania to opening the show the next year. Winning the Intercontinental Title is a step down, but at least it's Bryan getting back into the swing of things. Good stuff here and a solid opener, though it probably could have been trimmed down.

Things slow down a bit with the first singles match of the night as Randy Orton beat Seth Rollins. This was kind of a surprising result for me but it also telegraphed what was going to happen later in the night, ala Edge back in 2006. The RKO at the end with Seth being launched through the air was good, though I'll still take Evan Bourne's Shooting Star into an RKO for the best ever. Either way, Orton can nail that thing from almost anywhere and it never stops looking great.

However, this opens up some problems: we've seen these guys fight a few times now and we're supposed to pay to see them fight at Extreme Rules and potentially at a third show in May? The booking may be logical on paper, but I'm not sure it's going to get people to watch week after week. It was a good match, but I really liked what Wade

Keller said about Orton on Austin's podcast this week: he's so naturally talented and has been around so long that the expectations on him are very high. When he has a good match, it's almost considered a disappointment because he can be so naturally good when he's on his game.

Now we get to the match which is probably going to get the most controversy all night. This is where the great entrances began. First we had Sting coming out to a Japanese drum band, which was cool but kind of bizarre at the same time. I have no idea what kind of connection it's supposed to be, but I guess WWE just wanted Sting to have his own entrance that was unique for their show. The problem with this was Sting is always a high energy guy and the slow drum stuff didn't quite fit the top level show in the world.

Then HHH came out with an army of robots, in Terminator gear with Arnold Schwarzenegger himself doing a video introduction. It was at this point that you knew HHH was going to be the big star here and that this was really just a story with Sting involved instead of a story about Sting. The question here was what could Sting do after a few years off and all that time in TNA.

Amazingly enough he looked pretty solid. This was an old school style match with both guys working each other over and HHH working over the back to slow Sting down. This was a very nice change of pace after Orton and Rollins having the fast paced main event style and all the insanity that took place in the first three matches. It's the style they should have gone with and it worked fine.

Then seven people interfered, completely ignored wrestling history, made old people look old, having Kevin Nash do what I think was the funniest bit of the night, and then ending it with a hammer to the face. In case you didn't watch the show and are just reading this (for some strange reason), it was the Monday Night Wars all over again with DX running in first (with Sting DIVING OFF THE TOP ONTO ALL THREE OF THEM. Not bad at 56 years old) and then the NWO slowly hobbling in to counter them, all capped off by Shawn superkicking Sting.

Where do I even begin? Aside from the logical Shawn interference, this was one of the most ridiculous things I've seen in years. First and foremost, Sting spent nearly two years fighting the NWO (or at least the Black and White) but now he's going to fight with them for the Monday Night Wars? A battle where his partners are the biggest WWF guy ever to that point and two guys who were the definition of hired mercenaries in the war and are fighting against one of their best friends? That's the best they've got?

It also caused us to see the New Age Outlaws and X-Pac on the same level as Hall, Nash and Hogan. Under no circumstances at any time in the history of professional wrestling does that hold up. Despite the fact that Billy Gunn is less than five years younger than Sting (no real connection to this, just find it kind of mind blowing), there is no way that these six guys are on the same level, even with Nash going down and holding his quad in a funny bit.

After all the insanity and ignoring continuity for the sake of the Monday Night Wars revival, Sting kicked out of the superkick (and out of the Pedigree earlier) and broke the sledgehammer, only to have the third Stinger Splash collide with the sledgehammer to give HHH the pin.

This is one of those moments where you sit at the screen, shake your head just a bit, then either sigh heavily or break a small appliance while screaming loudly. The fact that they brought Sting in and had him lose in his first match came off as one of the biggest wastes of time I've seen in years. It felt like they were closing the door on Sting, which is fine in theory, but they couldn't close it on a victory? It was such a mess that it wouldn't have been remotely clean so HHH doesn't lose face and the fans get to cheer.

Instead, it was one last (and by last I mean not last whatsoever) thumb of the large nose at WCW, which was entirely what this feud was based on, even after Sting said how ridiculous that would be. They even had the factions come out for the match, despite WCW going out of business FOURTEEN YEARS AGO. Is WWE really that insecure about a show on the air less than six years total that they have to

dig it up and bury it one more time nearly fifteen years later? Apparently so, because that's exactly what they did.

Oh but we're not done. After the match, we got the big respect handshake. As I said in the original review: YOU HIT HIM IN THE FACE WITH A HAMMER AFTER COMING OUT WITH AN ARMY OF ROBOTS! NO HE DOES NOT WANT TO SHAKE YOUR HAND! This was supposed to be HHH saying he respected Sting after the battle. Keep this one in mind because we'll be coming back to it later.

I know I complained about it a lot, but this was one of the big song and dance numbers that you can only get at Wrestlemania and I had a blast watching it. The run-ins were incredibly fun (illogical but fun) and Sting looked like he did back in the best of his TNA years, which was a pretty good time for him. I was impressed with what he did on a wrestling front and the match was more entertaining than it had any right to be. No it didn't make sense and was a huge mess, but what else were you going to do with this match, especially with that ending?

Daniel Bryan celebrated with a bunch of former Intercontinental Champions for the Ron Simmons cameo. Jericho would have been a good addition here but what we got was fine.

Then we had a concert as all the NWO and DX guys try to figure out whose walker is whose. I still don't like these things as they waste so much time to give us songs we've heard a million times coming into the show, but hey, at least WWE can say this is an ENTERTAINMENT show instead of silly old wrestling. You know, because a seven minute concert totally changes the opinion of the show right?

The not so serious portion of the show continued with the Divas tag match between AJ Lee/Paige and the Bella Twins in what wound up being AJ's final match in WWE (for now). This match reenforced my issue with the Bellas all along: they're just not very good. Yeah they're watchable in the ring and have gotten WAY better in the last six to eight months, but there's a very thick line between good and watchable. They're combining to be the top of the division and



that's just not going to cut it for a long term run at the top. AJ made Nikki tap in a short match after spending a lot of time on the floor.

I tried to like this match and it was better than most Raw matches you would see, but it didn't work as the big Wrestlemania match for them. The Bellas are good at getting heel heat and playing the stuck up better than you villains, but they simply cannot back it up in the ring. It's like they're following a tightly written script for the match and would be lost if anything went against that plan. That's a sign of a sub-par worker and the Bellas fill that role like Nikki fills out those shorts.

In theory this was to set up AJ vs. Nikki for the title, but why couldn't that be taking place at Wrestlemania? I complained about this leading up to the show and it still didn't make sense here. Having this just be a tag match after a couple of title matches were used to set it up was totally backwards thinking and never held up. The wrestling was ok, but the Bellas are just killing this division every day they have the title. It's like the life is being drained out of the division, much like HHH's World Title reign in 2003: the matches aren't bad but you roll your eyes when the title is retained and beg for ANYONE to give you a break.

The Hall of Fame did their thing. This was what it was and I always like seeing them out there and hearing the Fink's voice. It felt faster this year, but there's nothing wrong with taking five minutes out of a four hour card to let these people salute the crowd on the grand stage one more time.

Now we get to one of the bigger matches as Rusev defended the US Title against John Cena. In what might have been the entrance of the night, Rusev came out in a tank. I mean a full sized let's go blow a hole in a building tank with Lana surrounded by Russian soldiers carrying the belt. I know Cena's entrances are well known at Wrestlemania, but he's going to have his hands full topping this.

Cena had a big speech with videos from American Presidents and shots of the military as we heard about how great this country is. Then

Cena just walked to the ring as usual for a pretty anticlimactic ending. It was cool, but it needed something more than just Cena coming down the long aisle. I mean....RUSEV WAS IN A TANK! Side note: the next night on Raw and then on Smackdown, the announcers started using The Russian Tank as a nickname for Rusev. I dig it.

The match....not so much. It was still good and an entertaining match with Cena finally breaking the Accolade and pinning Rusev to win the title, but it was just kind of there. I still liked it and Cena brought the goods (including a springboard Stunner, which should be someone's finisher again minus the springboard) as he always does. This isn't a loss where Rusev is never going to recover as every monster built up like him has to lose eventually.

It's good and Rusev has already won his big match over Cena, but the ending hurt things. The story for this match had been built around submissions but Cena just sidestepped Rusev so he could hit Lana and nailed the AA for the pin. I mean....that's it? It's a good match and the ending had to be Cena winning (though imagine the promos Rusev could cut if he escaped with the belt), but the ending was a bit flat for me. At least this way they avoid the ultra repetitive YOU TAPPED OUT chants.

Now we get to the long time filler as the show had two matches to fill in about 80 minutes at this point. HHH and Stephanie came out to brag about owning the company, roughly an hour after HHH was all humble and shook Sting's hand, making that whole thing even more stupid. I'm still kind of annoyed at that six days after the show.

Anyway, they talked about how they own the people and everyone here and you knew this was going to bring out the Rock. He did his long entrance and catchphrases, only to have Stephanie do her usual schtick as she ripped him apart and made him look like any given guy on the roster. She went one step too far though and slapped Rock in the face, so Rock bailed to the floor....and walked over to Ronda Rousey.

Now THIS was a worthy use of a celebrity as Rousey is one of the biggest stars in sports right now (and ignore the fact that I have a

thing for her) and fits this story perfectly. As you would expect, Stephanie ran her mouth and got her arm cranked. By cranked I mean slightly tugged on instead of being put in a full on armbar, but I'm assuming Ronda is only allowed to get so physical outside of UFC. That's fine. Disappointing, but fine.

My guess is this sets up HHH vs. Rock with the girls as seconds, because even though Stephanie is a great talker, I don't think anyone is going to buy her lasting more than five seconds against Rousey. Real trained fighters can barely break fifteen seconds against Rousey but we're supposed to buy Stephanie as having the slightest bit of a chance against her? Because it's in a wrestling ring? I'm not buying that, and this is assuming Rousey would ever be allowed to work a match in the first place. Rock vs. HHH is an established feud and seeing them go at it one more time would be fun.

It mostly worked, except for one problem: IT TOOK NEARLY HALF AN HOUR. This was one of the longest talking segments I've seen in a long time and a lot of it is due to Stephanie and Rock taking forever to get to the point. Now once Ronda was introduced it was fine as everyone was begging for her to, as Rock put it, reach down Stephanie's throat and play jump rope with her Fallopian tubes", but sweet goodness they could have cut five to ten minutes of this and done the exact same thing. But then we wouldn't have been able to hear about Stephanie being Andre's friend again, because....why do we need to hear that anyway?

The segment ran long enough that we didn't have time to recap Bray Wyatt and Undertaker starting small fires to set up their match. The interesting thing here was Bray wrenching his ankle very badly before the show and barely being able to walk. However, he gutted it out and managed to hold up his half of the match. That brought us to the big question: how was Undertaker going to do?

Actually quite well, as it really seems the concussion played a huge role in how bad the match against Lesnar was last year. Undertaker wasn't at the HBK level, but he was more than fine for a match like

this. He's also grown some hair back to make him look like Biker Taker, which isn't my favorite look but is miles better than the bald version, which just makes him look old. I don't really need to see Undertaker again, but it was good to see that he still had something in the tank after last year's mess.

I have to give a quick bit of praise to Bray's entrance, which saw a bunch of scarecrows come to life as he walked past them, turning them into his henchmen. It makes no sense but looked awesome, which brings me to something I've been meaning to talk about recently. A criticism I've been hearing lately is that Bray's promos don't make a ton of sense. I want to tilt my head at these people and ask them what is wrong with their heads.

Look at Bray Wyatt. He's a backwoods cult leader who worships a spirit named Sister Abigail, who told him that he would save the world one day. Why in the name of all that is good and holy would you expect him to give a logical promo? The whole point of the character is that he sounds bizarre and only makes sense to those people crazy enough to follow him.

Undertaker talked about spirits, Ultimate Warrior talked about loading spaceships with rocket fuel and Hulk Hogan talked about dog paddling Donald Trump to safety when an earthquake caused New Jersey to fall into the ocean. Bray Wyatt's promos are closer to Nick Bockwinkel's than the work of a lot of people praised for their speaking abilities, but people complain that he doesn't make sense.

Of course they don't make sense and he'd be failing if they did. He looks and sounds mysterious and you're supposed to wonder what he means. It makes just enough sense for you to follow it, but the details aren't all there and that's why they work. Yeah he gets repetitive at times, but criticizing him for not making sense is an unfair complaint.

All of that brings us to the big main event, which doesn't have as much to talk about. It was basically Lesnar vs. Cena all over again with Lesnar destroying the challenger and shrugging off his best shots until he made a mistake and let Reigns stay in it, only to

have Rollins cash in Money in the Bank and pin Reigns to win the title.

The match itself was fun, but they were running the risk of making Lesnar repetitive. Don't get me wrong: it's still entertaining to see him be all freaky strong (even though he has some thin legs, at least compared to how huge his upper body is), but they can only do this for so long before it loses some of its impact. I liked that they had Reigns making a comeback near the end and you weren't quite sure if he could pull it off, but if they had him survive and win, I would have been scared to show up at Raw the next night. The booing would have been too much for that hair to handle.

Another point here is the blood, which did a lot of good for the match. It's something you don't need to see that often, but it's good in spots like this one. Quick note here: there's a video going around that allegedly shows the referee passing the blade to Reigns. That's actually the referee checking on Reigns, who squeezes his hand to show he's fine. It's an old technique and not passing a blade.

Rollins cashing in was a good way to end things, but unfortunately it's going to lead to some repetitive title matches for the next few months, unless they go with some triple threats. Rollins deserves the title though and that's the important thing to get done. I certainly like the cash in and it kept them from having to pick from a short list of bad possible endings. It's a great ending to a great show.

Yes this was a great show and I had an awesome time with the whole thing. I don't know how well it holds up over time with the lack of a bad build and low expectations in the future, but as it stood it was an outstanding show without a really bad match on the card. There are some issues (Sting losing, time getting crunched because of the talking segment going long) but overall, this blew away my expectations and I had a lot of fun watching it. How long has it been since we had two great Wrestlemanias in a row? Seven years or so? However long it's been, the answer is too long so it was great

seeing another classic.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book of 1998 Pay Per View reviews at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00UYAMB8U>

And check out my Amazon author page with wrestling books for under \$4 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-Hall/e/B00E6282W6>

---

## AJ Lee Gone From WWE

As confirmed by WWE.com. I can't say I'm stunned by this, but how smart of it was of her to get a Wrestlemania payday before she walked away? It also explains Naomi getting a push out of nowhere like that and no followup from AJ beating Nikki on Sunday.