

Smackdown – January 16, 2018: This Was An Insult To America

Smackdown

Date: January 16, 2018

Location: Laredo Energy Arena, Laredo, Texas

Commentators: Corey Graves, Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton

Please be better. The last few weeks haven't been kind to Smackdown and I really could use a good episode to change things up a bit. The problem continues to be Daniel Bryan vs. Shane McMahon, which has dominated the show so strongly that it's taking away from a lot of the other stories. Hopefully that starts to change tonight. Let's get to it.

Here's the New Day for an opening chat. Woods brings out the pancakes and stands behind a podium as all three do the tongue roll to announce Jinder Mahal's Maharajah nickname. See, America is like a bunch of pancakes: made of flour, eggs and freedom. America is built up like Home Alone 1, 2 and 3. Big E: "Not so much with 3." Woods talks about Jinder hating Home Alone and hating every one of you. The fans are against Jinder but the Singh Brothers come out to introduce Mahal.

US Title Tournament Semifinals: Jinder Mahal vs. Xavier Woods

The finals will now be next week instead of at the Royal Rumble. Mahal kicks him in the face to start and elbows a charging Woods in the jaw. A jumping knee gets two and we take a break. Back with Jinder holding him in a chinlock and Big E. throwing pancakes at the Singh Brothers. The fans want pancakes as Jinder forearms Woods down to the floor. Back in and a knee to the head gets two as we take a second break.

We come back again with Woods hitting a missile dropkick and winning a slugout (with those AMERICAN right hands). A discus punch drops Mahal and a Shining Wizard gets two. New Day goes after the Singh Brothers and chases the up the aisle, leaving us one on one. The top rope elbow misses though and Woods is whipped throat first into the bottom rope (kind of a dangerous move). The Khallas sends Mahal to the finals at 18:02.

Rating: D+. Well why go with the interesting choice when you can go with the boring choice? This more or less seals Roode vs. Mahal for the title next week and that's...not the most interesting sounding match in the world. Woods' pre-match promo was great and Mahal was every bit of Mahal you would have expected. Mahal winning was the pretty obvious choice, though certainly not the fun one.

At a house show, Baron Corbin talked about knowing he'll win the Royal Rumble because it's just a fight and that's what he does best. Corbin was announced as being in the match two weeks ago.

Quick look at the media talking about Goldberg's Hall of Fame induction.

AJ Styles dubs Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens as Kami and says he sees himself as being down 3-1 because Owens is like two people.

Carmella knows how to make history so she'll win the Rumble.

Natalya has the catlike reflexes to win. She says Bret's catchphrase for the second time tonight (after a Mixed Match Challenge promo).

Tamina says she'll win.

Lana promises to make it the Ravishing Rumble.

Naomi is going to make everyone feel the Glow.

Riott knows how to create chaos and no one can stop her.

Sarah Logan isn't running from anything.

Liv Morgan is here to make history so she'll do it at the Rumble.

Becky Lynch promises to win. These were like the old school Rumble promos (save for the camera being hand held and a bit shaky, making them look kind of bad) and that's a very good thing, even if most of the women didn't have much to say.

US Title Tournament Semifinals: Bobby Roode vs. Mojo Rawley

I'm still getting used to Mojo's new music and Jackson Pollack inspired

entrance video. Roode shoves him around to start and hits the GLORIOUS pose. Back up and Mojo runs through Roode and complains at the referee for getting in his way. They head outside with Mojo hitting a long running charge to drive Roode into the barricade. We take a break and come back with Mojo putting on a pretty bad looking abdominal stretch, though he does hit Roode in the ribs a few times.

Mojo asks Roode if he's cracked a rib before hammering at said ribs. That's rather cruel of him. Back up and Mojo misses a charge into the post, allowing Roode to hit the Blockbuster for two. The Glorious DDT is countered into a fireman's carry faceplant (basically an F5 without the spin) for two. The running punch in the corner is blocked with some raised boots and Roode grabs the spinebuster. Roode hits the Glorious DDT to go to the finals at 13:13.

Rating: C-. This was longer than it needed to be and there was no drama after Mahal won earlier. Roode vs. Mahal isn't an interesting title match but that's never stopped them before. For the life of me I'm still not sure what the point was in giving the title to Ziggler in the first place but at least they're giving us a new champion fast enough.

Post match the Singh Brothers come in to beat on Roode but are dispatched fairly quickly. Mahal comes out to say he'll be champion next week. Roode wants to fight now and we get the standard heel response. You know, because why would Mahal want to face a banged up Roode who just finished a long match? Daniel Bryan pops up from behind and says the finals are on TONIGHT.

Randy Orton, in a ring in an empty arena, likes to be surrounded by chaos, so the Rumble is his match.

Charlotte/Becky Lynch/Naomi vs. Riott Squad

Charlotte suplexes Morgan for two to start and does her Figure Four neck lock flips to Riott. The Squad gets sent outside and we take a break. Back with Lynch being sent into Morgan's knees for two and Liv grabbing the hair to cut off a hot tag attempt. Becky finally dives over and brings in Naomi to speed things up. The spear cuts Logan down but Riott kicks Naomi into the one kneed Codebreaker for the pin at 8:10.

Rating: D+. Another instance of throwing the women out there with nothing interesting happening. It feels like we've seen this match or some combination of it for months now and that's the big problem with this division: almost no one gets to stand out to the point where I can't even remember that Charlotte is Women's Champion more often than not. I know the Rumble is what matters but if I don't care about the characters, it really doesn't make much of a difference.

The Usos think Chad Gable and Shelton Benjamin got together on Tag Team Tinder. They can't remember which Uso is which though and get beaten down by Gable and Benjamin. Chad knows who they are: the former champions.

Long video on AJ Styles vs. Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens.

Shinsuke Nakamura says he'll win. Is there a reason none of the big wrestlers are actually here tonight?

Next week: Rusev Day vs. Ascension.

US Title: Bobby Roode vs. Jinder Mahal

The title is vacant coming in, Roode's ribs are banged up, there are no Singh Brothers and Shane McMahon/Daniel Bryan are at ringside. Feeling out process to start with Mahal's cheap shot to the ribs being cut off. They head outside with Mahal driving the bad ribs into the barricade and getting in a few more shots as we take a break.

Back with Mahal bending the ribs around the post and then slapping on an abdominal stretch (take notes Mojo). Some knees to the ribs keep Roode down and Mahal puts a knee in the back. You can't fault the psychology here but you can fault the fans being dead bored after this lame show.

Roode gets two off a sunset flip but a superkick gives Mahal the same to keep him in control. Bobby finally sends him outside for a clothesline from the apron as the crowd is just gone here. Back in and Mahal rolls through a high crossbody for two of his own, followed by a Blockbuster for the same. Roode's spinebuster plants Mahal again and the Khallas is reversed into the Glorious DDT to make Roode the champion at 15:44.

Rating: C. This was as exciting as Mahal working the ribs for about

thirteen minutes was going to be. Roode winning was the only way they could go here with the story they were telling though and it's nice to see Mahal fall further down the card. This win gives Roode a big marquee thing on his resume, though you can probably pencil him in for a defense against Zigler at the Rumble. The match was watchable, but they had killed the show a long time before.

The bosses present Roode with the title to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. Oh just no in every sense of the word. This was a great illustration of everything wrong with Smackdown as of late, with the focus completely missing and no reason to watch. You think the low attendances of late might have been bolstered by guaranteeing you get to see a new champion? Not happening here of course, because we need to do something like this instead with almost no big name talent appearing instead.

This show felt like they weren't trying at all, presumably (and hopefully) because Smackdown was having another show somewhere else. Even if that's the case though, there needs to be some kind of effort put into these shows. This came off like the C level house shows of the 80s with anything they could come up with thrown out there to fill in a night. I stopped caring very quickly into this one and that's not good when it's supposed to be a big time for the company.

Results

Jinder Mahal b. Xavier Woods – Khallas

Bobby Roode b. Mojo Rawley – Glorious DDT

Riott Squad b. Charlotte/Becky Lynch/Naomi – Codebreaker to Naomi

Bobby Roode b. Jinder Mahal – Glorious DDT

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Ricochet Signs with WWE

<https://wrestlingrumors.net/breaking-confirmation-ricochet-man/>

So yeah, you knew this one was coming sooner or later. Ricochet is one of the best high fliers in the world and at just under thirty years old, there's no reason to not come to the big show. He's had some success in New Japan so now it's time to go to WWE and see what he can do. Of course it's in NXT first (as it should be), but I'm a bit scared of what we might be seeing over in WWE. That being said, Ricochet has the charisma and talking ability to make this work and could be a big star, assuming he's not just thrown onto 205 Live and left to drown.

Monday Night Raw – January

15, 2018: Smart Booking and Delicious Looking Chocolate Cake

Monday Night Raw

Date: January 15, 2018

Location: AT&T Center, San Antonio, Texas

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

It's the go home show for the Raw 25th Anniversary Show which is the go home show for the Royal Rumble. That makes tonight almost the go home show for the pay per view, as next week's show is going to have a completely different vibe. Tonight we have Asuka vs. Nia Jax so let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Brock Lesnar fighting Braun Strowman last week until Strowman pulled a huge piece of the set down onto Lesnar and Kane. That's quite the visual, but both Brock and Kane being conscious after a commercial hurt things a lot.

Here's Strowman to get things going. He has a short story for us but it has a happy ending. Before he can get to his story though, Kurt Angle, flanked by security, cuts him off. Angle lists off all the obvious problems with what Braun did but Strowman says it could have been worse. Kurt gets in the always dumb sounding "unsafe worried environment" line with Strowman saying he did his job.

Strowman is ready to do whatever he wants and if that means ripping the walls off of Suplex City, so be it. Angle says Strowman is lucky Kane and Lesnar can still compete at the Rumble. As for Strowman though, he's out of the match because HE'S FIRED. I'm not even going to bother getting all annoyed here because there's no way they'll do Kane vs. Lesnar as a one on one. Hardcore Holly was a more interesting (and believable) challenger back in 2004.

In the back, Braun leaves while threatening security.

Raw moment: Hugh Jackman is guest host.

Post break, a security guard orders Strowman to leave and the destruction is on. Braun promises to do even more.

The Bar vs. Titus Worldwide

Rematch from last week where Titus scored a fluke pin. Dana Brooke is in a very different top this week to prevent another instance of last week's, uh, incident. Cesaro powers Crews into the corner to start but it's quickly off to Titus for an exchange of chops in the corner. Cesaro uppercuts Crews down though and Sheamus adds a top rope clothesline as we take a break.

Back with Sheamus getting two off a middle rope ax handle and grabbing a chinlock on Crews. Apollo fights up and brings in Titus for the forearms to the chest and an impressive toss to Cesaro. Everything breaks down and Crews moonsaults to the floor just like last week but Cesaro is ready for him this time. An uppercut to Titus knocks him into a rollup for two, only to have the Neutralizer broken up. Apollo's high crossbody and standing moonsault get two each but Sheamus picks him up for White Noise. Cue Jason Jordan for a distraction though, allowing Crews to roll Sheamus up for the pin at 10:48.

Rating: C-. Now that's the right call, even if the ending didn't need Jordan out there. I was nearly convinced that they would go with the 50/50 booking here but instead, they gave Titus Worldwide another win to make them even the slightest level players in the division. Now, even if they lose for weeks to come, there's a more believable chance they could win and that's what matters most. Good idea here, even in a not great match.

Seth Rollins comes out to ask Jordan what he's doing.

Strowman kicks in the door to Angle's office and breaks a lot of stuff.

Post break, Strowman wrecks catering and chokeslams Curt Hawkins through a table. He does however take a piece of chocolate cake from a nearly catatonic worker. I can appreciate a man with a taste for some cake and

Strowman as the unstoppable monster is fun.

Tony Nese vs. Cedric Alexander

Before the match, Enzo Amore says he's like Frankenstein and Cedric is like Dracula because he sucks. Goldust is in Cedric's corner and says Cedric is a box office smash. After the title match at the Rumble, the one word to describe Cedric will be champion. Cedric says that between Amore's face and his ankle, the only word to describe him is sawft. We're joined in progress after a break, but not before seeing Strowman shoving a dumpster through the back.

That's one thing that drives me crazy about WWE. Strowman is supposed to be destroying everything on a rampage, but he does it right after we get back from a commercial and before we get to this match. Go split screen to show him doing this at the same time or something, but find a way to make it feel more spontaneous.

Anyway, to the match. Cedric catches him with an ankle scissors but Nese knees him in the ribs as Booker talks about how Angle shouldn't have fired Strowman live in the ring. We hit the neck crank on Cedric with Enzo talking so much trash that Goldust goes after him, even mocking the dance. Cedric fights up and hits the springboard clothesline for two, only to get slowed down by a headlock. Back up and Cedric elbow shim in the face, followed by the Lumbar Check (with a great sell job from Tony) for the pin at 5:52.

Rating: D+. Who in the world decided to put these two out there to die like this? The longer we wait on Cedric to get his big title shot, the less interesting he becomes. He's beaten up all these same cruiserweights over and over and there's no point in watching him do anything other than win the title. It wouldn't surprise me to see WWE not even do that though, which would be one of the dumbest things they could do. Just find some more interesting villains for him to vanquish or give him the title already because this was a waste of time.

Angle is thinking about calling in a SWAT team but is told Strowman is heading towards the production trucks.

Post break Strowman goes into the truck and shoves a bunch of papers around before leaving without causing too much damage. The whole thing starts shaking though as Strowman has unhooked the semi from the truck and is trying to turn it over. Angle comes up to say he's called the cops. His phone rings as Strowman leaves, only to come back and flip the truck over with the camera going spastic with cuts to hide how fake it looked, making it look worse in the process.

Strowman heads into the arena and goes after commentary, picking Cole up by one hand and carrying him over the stage. Angle and security shows up with Kurt saying he's called the cops off. Stephanie has rehired Strowman and he's back in the title match (because of course Stephanie can solve any problem in ten seconds while it's caused Angle problems for an hour) if he lets Cole go. Braun does let him go, with a flying toss off the stage and onto the security guards. The Stephanie thing made me roll my eyes but Cole being picked up by the belt and carried away like a child was funny stuff.

Tom Phillips replaces Cole on commentary.

Nia Jax vs. Asuka

Asuka gets tossed around to start but comes right back with a Black Widow (ala AJ Lee) into something like an abdominal stretch. Nia calmly shoves Asuka's leg off though and catches her with a backbreaker. A triangle choke cuts Nia off again until she lifts Asuka up for a powerbomb into the corner as we take a break. Back with Asuka fighting out of a bearhug and avoiding a sitdown splash. Asuka's running kick to the chest drops Jax but she's right back up with a hard powerbomb. Asuka grabs a kneebar to send Nia bailing to the ropes and they head outside. Asuka avoids a charge and sends Nia into the steps, only to have Nia get her knee caught between the ring and the steps. Nia beats the count back in but the referee stops it due to the knee injury at 10:45.

Rating: C. I've seen clowns who slip on banana peels less frequently than Nia Jax. It's like she loses every match she has this way and that's getting old. The match was a shortened version of what we've seen from these two every single time now with Asuka hanging in there and finding a

way to survive. This was fine, but Nia needs to win something like NOW, as she still doesn't have a big win.

Alexa Bliss comes out to check on Nia.

Jason Jordan comes in to see Angle, who is still upset over Braun. Jordan has been watching his dad's back all night and wouldn't have let Strowman do anything. He thanks Angle for the opportunities again but thinks Seth needs a warmup for next week. Say against Finn Balor tonight, which Angle makes for later.

The announcers talk about Martin Luther King Day.

Video on Martin Luther King.

Bliss blames herself for Nia's injury when Enzo comes in to check on Nia as well. Nia tells Bliss that Enzo has this so Alexa leaves while not looking happy.

Revival vs. ???/???

Yes it's an old school squash against nameless jobbers. Dawson suplexes jobber #1 and gives hi a hard clothesline for good measure. Dash comes in with a jumping knee to the face before sending it off to jobber #2. In a cool spot, Revival loads up #2 for something like a Snapshot (elevated DDT) but Dash flips him up like a backdrop, only to have Dawson send him forward in a gordbuster. The Shatter Machine ends #1 at 1:39. There's something so great about jobbers not even having names because they're not important enough.

Post match Revival brags about their tag team skills because too many people are worried about Instagram likes or video games. As for next week, Revival isn't thrilled with meeting any of the veterans at Raw 25 because there's nothing old school about beer bashes and crotch chops. They're professional wrestlers instead of sports entertainers so WWE doesn't want them to succeed. Next week at Raw 25, the superstars from around the world are coming to their universe and the Revival is setting the tone for the next 25 years. Good promo here but as always: FOLLOW UP ON IT.

Here's Elias for a new song. He's looking forward to the Royal Rumble but wants to eliminate Cena, along with 29 others. So he's going to pull a Mil Mascaras and eliminate himself? Elias insults the San Antonio Spurs and introduces Miz and the Miztourage for a chat before their match.

Miz talks about the fans cheering him last week because they recognize greatness. The fans knew something was missing from Raw and it wasn't Cena or Lesnar but rather Miz. Last week Miz and the Miztourage beat up Roman Reigns and it felt awesome. That spark is why he and Maryse are getting their own series on USA and next week he's getting the Intercontinental Title back. It's going to feel awesome. Maybe it's just because he hasn't been around lately but Miz has felt like a bigger deal in the last two weeks.

Roman Reigns vs. Miztourage

Non-title. Miz offers an early distraction to no avail as Reigns punches both lackeys down. Axel's cheap shot allows the Miztourage to send Reigns into the steps and the beating is on. We hit the chinlock for a good while until Axel has to save his partner from a suplex. Instead Dallas gets two off a DDT, followed by some double teaming to keep Reigns slowed down.

Reigns fights up and hits a Samoan drop, followed by knocking Dallas off the apron. We get the always stupid spot of someone accidentally DDTing his partner with Axel getting spiked. The Superman Punch drops both guys and Miz's distraction fails, allowing Reigns to spear Axel for the pin at 8:16.

Rating: D-. This was reaching new levels of boring as it really didn't need to be even half this long. Reigns isn't threatened by these two and there was little reason to have him be in this kind of trouble. Throw in Reigns being down after five minutes of offense from Axel and Dallas and this was a combination of really boring and unbelievable, in the completely wrong way.

Sasha Banks vs. Sonya Deville

The rest of Absolution, Bayley and Mickie James are at ringside. As we

get started, Paige is officially ruled out of the Royal Rumble. Nothing is mentioned beyond that though. A very early Bank Statement attempt send Deville bailing to the ropes but Mandy offers a distraction so Sonya can get in a few shots.

We hit a chinlock with a body vice as Booker compares Sonya to Ken Shamrock in a rare name drop. Banks fights up and goes to the middle rope, only to dive into a kick to the chest for the completely clean pin at 2:26. That's exactly the way this needed to go. Oh and welcome to the doghouse Sasha. Bayley can keep you company (for whatever reason).

Some wrestlers were at the National Civil Rights Museum last week.

Rollins tells Jordan to calm down and stop trying to be his spokesperson. This story hasn't been bad but my levels of not caring whenever either of them show up is growing in a hurry.

Matt Hardy vs. Heath Slater

Joined in progress with Matt hitting a splash to Slater's back and hammering away. Matt sends him into the ropes and laughs a lot so Slater heads outside for a meeting with Rhyno. Back in and Matt bites the hand before launching Slater into the corner. Matt thinks Slater must be deleted so it's the ten rams into the buckle and a Twist of Fate for the pin at 3:37.

Rating: D+. Matt is changing his style up enough and that's the best thing that could happen for him. He wasn't really getting far with the nostalgia run so let's see what he can do with this character. Unfortunately I'm not sure what exactly he can do with it but maybe he'll surprise me like he did in TNA.

Goldberg is official for the Hall of Fame so it's time for a long video package.

We look back at Strowman's path of destruction earlier tonight.

Royal Rumble rundown.

Finn Balor vs. Seth Rollins

Jordan, Gallows and Anderson are at ringside. Balor armbars him to start but gets armdragged away, followed by a kick to the back. Seth gets sent outside though and a kick to the chest puts him down as we take a break. Back (after a Raw moment of the 1-2-3 Kid pinning Razor Ramon in a huge upset) with Rollins hitting the Blockbuster but hurting his knee. It's fine enough to try the suicide dive though and Balor is down again.

They get back inside with Rolling hitting a forearm to the back but having Balor slip out of the Falcon Arrow. The Sling Blade takes Rollins down, only to have Seth come back with his own. Balor gets in another Sling Blade but charges into a superkick for two. I really wouldn't emphasize how they both use the same move like that but have it their way. The Wind-Up knee is countered with a forearm so Rollins enziguris him down. Seth has to roll through the Phoenix splash and gets caught with the shotgun dropkick in the corner.

The Coup de Grace is broken up with the superplex into the Falcon Arrow for two more and both guys are down. Seth's frog splash hits the knees though and Balor rolls him up for...two apparently but here's the Bar to interrupt. The brawl is on at ringside with Anderson and Gallows fighting the Bar until Balor hits a flip dive to take all four out. Another kick to the head sets up the Coup de Grace but Rollins rolls away. Cesaro's distraction allows Jordan to trip Balor and Rollins hits the curb stomp (WHERE IN THE WORLD HAS THAT BEEN???) for the pin at 15:18.

Rating: C+. Seth's eternally present knee selling issues aside, this was the kind of main event match that always works. They were pushing the idea of the messed up fall quite a bit here and that leads me to think we're heading for a rematch. I'm really not sure about the idea of Balor losing so soon after his renewed push but that's WWE for you.

Balor is rather shaken up and the camera stays on him for a long time to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This show started off great with Strowman running wild but they made sure to cut that off after an hour because it was getting too interesting. It felt like an hour of one show and two hours of the regular show, which kind of feels like a warmup for next week's

show. This show had some good booking choices (Deville winning, Revival getting a squash win, Titus Worldwide winning again etc) but the wrestling wasn't exactly thrilling. That being said, the next two weeks are all that matters so we'll see what they really have to offer then.

Results

Titus Worldwide b. The Bar – Rollup to Sheamus

Cedric Alexander b. Tony Nese – Lumbar Check

Asuka b. Nia Jax via referee stoppage

Revival b. ???/??? – Shatter Machine

Roman Reigns b. Miztourage – Spear to Axel

Sonya Deville b. Sasha Banks – Kick to the chest

Matt Hardy b. Heath Slater – Twist of Fate

Seth Rollins b. Finn Balor – Blackout

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Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2004: Uh...What's His Name!

Royal Rumble 2004

Date: January 25, 2004

Location: Wachovia Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 17,289

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz, Jerry Lawler, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is the show where you can really see the next generation rising up. The main events other than the Rumble are Lesnar vs. Holly and HBK vs. HHH. Ok so maybe the next generation only comes up in the Rumble. Other than that we don't have much going on here but this show is all about Benoit in the Rumble. Let's get to it.

The opening video talks about Shawn vs. HHH because that's what people are watching the ROYAL RUMBLE for right? The theme of the video is that things can change in the blink of an eye.

Raw Tag Titles: Dudley Boys vs. Evolution

Flair and Batista are defending here and this is a tables match. Coach is ticked off at the Dudleys for putting him through a table six nights ago on Raw, because if there's one man you need to give a reason to be a heel, it's COACH. Batista makes fun of the Eagles because he hasn't broken through to the other side of the glass ceiling yet. The fight starts in the aisle as you would expect. This is one table to a finish, meaning only one guy has to go through to end it.

Bubba slides in a table but shoves it hard enough that it slides across the ring and hits Batista in the ribs on the other side of the floor. Flair gets double teamed to start and caught in a powerslam by D-Von. There's a table set up in the ring but Batista moves it before Flair gets suplexed through it. D-Von hits a Cactus Clothesline on Batista as Flair chops Bubba against a table in the corner.

Big Dave comes back in with some clotheslines to clean house but misses a

charge into the post. The belly to back neckbreaker from the Dudleys puts him down and it's Flair getting double teamed again. According to JR, the Dudleys are the only team to win the (non-vacant) world tag team titles at the Rumble. Coach heads to the ring to distract the Dudleys and prevent a 3D to Flair. Flair saves Coach and Batista hits a spinebuster to put D-Von through a table to retain.

Rating: D. This match fell into the same trap that all bad tables matches fall into: the dull set of spots that fail until one works for the win. You rarely get something that gets around this through sheer carnage such as the match at the 2000 Rumble, but this was just terrible. I have no idea what they were going for here as the fans were disappointed and they only had four and a half minutes to get into it. Also: real smart WWE. This is the right way to start a show in Philadelphia: have some of the most famous ECW guys ever lose.

Cena raps about winning the Rumble when RVD comes in to steal the joke. Weed jokes are made. Josh Matthews looks like the king of all tools here.

There's an empty seat for Mick Foley in the front row.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Rey is defending. This is during the Nidia is Blind phase which didn't do anything for anyone. They speed things WAY up to start with Jamie avoiding the 619 and launching Rey into the air to take over. The champ gets draped over the top rope for two and a hard kick to the back gets the same.

Jamie hooks a chinlock which shifts into a seated abdominal stretch. Rey fights up and hits a dropkick and a springboard rana followed by the sitout bulldog for two. He springboards into a gutbuster from Noble for two though and momentum shifts again. Nidia accidentally grabs Noble's foot, allowing Rey to hit the 619 and springboard legdrop....for the pin? Huh?

Rating: D+. This was fast paced while it lasted, but those three words are the key: while it lasted. This barely broke three minutes which simply isn't enough for a PPV title match. Unless I was missing it there

was no sign of an injury or anything like that, but the match ends that fast. I have no idea what they were going for here but it didn't work in any way at all. That's a shame too because they were going well while it lasted.

Noble yells at Nidia post match.

We recap the battle of the Guerreros. Eddie was clearly the bigger star which was fine while they were champions, but once they lost the belts to the Bashams, Chavo blamed Eddie and turned on his uncle for losing his title. The Guerreros almost made up but they lost the rematch, after which Chavo let Eddie get double teamed by the Bashams. This was actually a pretty solid story despite how basic it was. Sometimes less is more. Oh and Kurt Angle was playing peacemaker and Chavo Guerrero Senior is in his son's corner.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Chavo Guerrero

Chavo bails to the floor before the bell and the fans are totally behind Eddie here. They fight over a lockup to start with no one being able to get an advantage. Chavo slaps Eddie in the face and now we're ready to go. We hit the mat for a bit before Eddie starts snapping off chops in the corner. Chavo shoulders him down and we have a standoff. They chop it out again and Eddie goes to the eye like a true Guerrero.

Back to the mat with Eddie working on the arm before Chavo nips up and hooks a rana to send them both to the floor. Chavo sends Eddie into the announce table to finally take over and get some of the aggression going. Back in and they get into a kind of MMA style brawl on the mat until Eddie hooks a cross armbreaker of all things. That goes nowhere so Chavo suplexes Eddie down for two, followed by the Three Amigos. Eddie counters a tornado DDT and hits Three Amigos of his own. Chavo is down so Eddie goes up and hits the Frog Splash for the pin. ANOTHER quick ending tonight.

Rating: C+. This was way better than the other matches, but this felt like it was missing fifteen minutes or so. Three matches so far have combined to be about fifteen minutes long which is pretty lame for a modern PPV, even for the Rumble. This could have been a lot more, but the

feud was completely done after tonight. Eddie would become #1 contender on the following Smackdown.

Eddie destroys Chavo post match in a pretty heelish display. Chavo gets busted open.

Ad for Mick Foley's Greatest Hits and Misses. That's the most entertaining part of the show so far.

Benoit likes his odds even though he's #1 in the Rumble. Evolution comes up and says Orton is going to win the Rumble. Flair says Benoit may be great, but this is about Evolution tonight.

We recap Hardcore Holly vs. Lesnar. Brock broke Holly's neck (legit) and Holly gets a world title shot out of it a year later. This is the textbook definition of the Rumble title shot where no one buys the champion as being in any danger whatsoever.

Smackdown World Title: Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Holly jumps Lesnar in the aisle and sends him into the post because he wants to break Lesnar's neck. We get a bell and Holly misses an elbow off the top to give Brock control. They head to the floor where Holly's back is rammed into the apron and Lesnar hooks a reverse body vice back inside. That goes nowhere so Brock hits a Shell Shock for two and it's right back to the hold.

We shift to a bearhug and then one of the most wicked overhead belly to belly suplexes you'll ever see. Off to a kind of rear naked choke by Lesnar to keep things dull. Holly makes his comeback with the dropkick and hits the Alabama Slam but goes for a full nelson and revenge instead of the title. Holly hooks the hold and goes to the floor with it but has to break the count. The F5 hits a few seconds later to complete the inevitable.

Rating: D. This was Brock Lesnar defending the world title against Hardcore Holly on pay per view. If you can't figure out why this got the rating it got, I can't help you.

We recap HHH vs. HBK which is allegedly seven years in the making. I'm

guessing THIS is supposed to be the FINAL blowoff to their feud instead of the classic in 2002.

Raw World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. HHH

HHH is defending and this is a last man standing match. They chop it out to start and punch each other in the corner a lot. Shawn tries a backslide before realizing that makes no sense here, so it's back to the chops. Michaels gets caught in a facebuster as things slow down a bit. A HARD whip into the corner has Shawn's back in trouble and a backbreaker makes it even worse.

Out of nowhere Shawn takes out the leg and hooks a Figure Four, because where would we be without a Flair tribute? That gets a five count so Shawn hits a chop block for a four. HHH low bridges Shawn and we head to the floor for a bit. HHH loads up the announce table but Shawn blocks a Pedigree attempt. They slug it out on the table with HHH getting knocked to the floor, drawing a bunch of booing from the bloodthirsty Philadelphia fans.

Back in and Shawn counters a Pedigree with a backdrop to the floor but he injures his back in the process. Shawn tries a springboard cross body to the floor but crashes through the table instead as only he can. Instead of letting the now busted open Shawn get counted out, HHH throws him back in for the count, which reaches seven. The champ pounds Shawn down a few times for a few counts, most of which don't get that far.

A fast spinebuster (literally, as Shawn was flying at HHH and it almost looked like a belly to belly instead of a spinebuster) gets about six. That's the problem with most last man standing matches: it's a big move then standing around for the count. That makes it very hard to get any kind of flow going to the match. HHH cracks Shawn in the back with a chair but Shawn gets up again. A Pedigree onto the chair is countered into a slingshot into the post, busting HHH open as well.

Now Shawn cracks HHH in the head with a chair, allowing HHH to do his weird "my head hurts and I'm not sure where I am" face. There's the forearm followed by the nipup from Shawn, followed by an atomic drop and the top rope elbow. That gets about seven so Shawn tunes up the band,

only to walk into a low blow to put both guys down. Shawn hooks a sleeper which eventually gets an eight count before walking into a DDT to put both guys down.

That gets a double eight count before we head to the corner. HHH tries a belly to back superplex but Shawn counters into a cross body for another double eight count. The Pedigree hits but it's only good for a nine. Shawn pops up out of nowhere with some more Sweet Chin Music, putting both guys down for ten which keeps the title on HHH.

Rating: C-. The problem here is exactly what I said earlier: this was a lot of laying around. The last seven minutes or so had about five moves combined, as most of the match was "move, lay down, move, lay down, move, lay down." The idea is supposed to be a ton of drama, but that didn't happen here. Shawn would turn into a jerk in the next few weeks and insert himself in the Mania main event because of this ending.

Rumble video with a focus on Benoit.

The Fink is ready to start the Rumble but here's Bischoff to run his mouth. He says that a Raw guy is going to win the Rumble because he's respected as a GM. He runs down ECW, which brings out Heyman for a brawl. Cue Austin on his ATV to say that these two are both in violation of the law (he was called Sheriff Austin at this point) and wants to know who started it. Heyman and Bischoff: "HE DID!" Both guys get Stunners and the fans love it.

Goldberg, #30 in the Rumble, doesn't get to talk because Lesnar comes in to interrupt him. Lesnar is called a coward, which will come into play later.

JR has to admit Foley is a coward because he isn't here yet.

Royal Rumble

Benoit is #1 and the Intercontinental Champion Randy Orton is #2. Two minute intervals here again. They pound away on each other to start with Benoit taking him to the mat to stomp away. Mark Henry is #3 when he was a fat power guy with no direction at all. Allow me to be more specific:

he's still with Teddy Long. Benoit gets double teamed for awhile until Tajiri is #4. These intervals don't seem to be two minutes or anywhere close to it.

The handspring elbow takes Orton down but Benoit rolls some Germans on Tajiri to take him down. Tajiri only gets two as I guess Benoit is conserving strength. Henry throws Orton to the apron but stops looking like an idiot. Bradshaw is #5 and he immediately clotheslines down everyone not named Benoit. Benoit takes offense to being left out and puts Bradshaw in the Crossface before pulling Bradshaw out. Eh he would get a nine month title reign starting in the summer so I feel no sympathy for him.

Rhyno is #6 as we're flying through this so far. He goes after the two starters as Tajiri fires off kicks on Henry. Tajiri gets a half Tarantula on Henry but Henry gets Gored, knocking Tajiri out in the process. Benoit clotheslines Henry out and we're down to three again. Matt Hardy is #7 and Benoit throws him to the apron almost immediately. In FAR less than two minutes, here's Scott Steiner at #8. Oh dear it's Scott Steiner at the Royal Rumble. This could be a disaster.

He starts firing off suplexes immediately but at least this time there are some t-bones to go with the belly to bellies. Benoit rolls some Germans on him as if to say THIS IS HOW YOU SUPLEX SOMEBODY. Things slow down a bit and here's Matt Morgan at #9. He takes Benoit down with a Batista Bomb takes Benoit down and pounds away on Orton in the corner.

The Hurricane is #10 and comes in off the top with a cross body to Hardy. He goes after Morgan for no apparent reason and is thrown out in less than twenty seconds. Morgan throws Hardy to the apron again but can't get him out. Booker T, complete with the stupid remix of his theme music with Booker singing, is #11. Booker immediately goes after Steiner in a revisiting of their WCW feud that no one was asking for.

Nothing of note happens until Kane is #12. This is after he buried Taker alive. For the first time. Steiner gets dumped by Booker during Kane's entrance. Kane starts firing off chokeslams and other various power moves for which he is well known. The clock runs down at #13 and there go the

lights. A gong goes off and Kane PANICS. Booker uses the distraction to dump Kane and here's Spike Dudley at #13. He never makes it to the ring as Kane destroys him for setting off the gong.

Everyone tries to throw each other out while laying on the ropes until Rikishi is #14. Benoit dumps Rhyno to keep us at six people (Benoit, Orton, Rikishi, Booker, Morgan, Hardy) in the ring. Morgan gets a Stinkface and nothing else happens for a bit. Renee Dupree with the French Tickler is #15. In a surprising moment, Dupree actually knocks Matt out, only to be superkicked out by Rikishi a second later.

A-Train is #16 and goes right for Rikishi. Benoit avoids the yet to be named Carbon Footprint and dumps Morgan. I love that they're keeping the ring from getting full. Orton dumps Rikishi and Booker as Shelton Benjamin is #17. Benoit dumps A-Train during his entrance and Orton dumps Shelton a few seconds later to get us back to two. Orton pounds on him a bit but they crack heads to put both guys down.

Lamont, the announcer for Ernest Miller (complete with the music that would go to Brodus Clay eight years later), runs out to introduce the Cat at #18. After some dancing (and singing by Tazz), Orton dumps him out. Miller would be released in like two weeks. Kurt Angle is #19 and he might be a bit harder to get out. He's fighting for AMERICA here so the fans tell him he sucks.

Benoit and Angle destroy each other with chops and punches as only they can while Orton is content to chill in the corner. Rico, now in his Adrian Street phase, is #20. He fires off some kicks but lasts about as long as you would expect him to in a match with Orton, Angle and Benoit. The RK0 takes care of Rico as Benoit rolls a ton of Germans on Angle. Test is #21....and is nowhere in sight.

Orton RK0's Angle and we cut to the back to see Test unconscious. Austin sees someone off camera and says they're #21. The off camera man and presumable attacker: MICK FREAKING FOLEY! Orton, the guy who spat in Foley's face and called him a coward, PANICS. The place goes nuts and Foley explodes on Orton, beating him half to death and hitting a Cactus Clothesline to put both of them out. This would lead to some AWESOME

matches at Mania and Backlash which put Orton up to the world title in August.

Foley keeps beating on Orton as Christian is #22. Mick picks up the steps and BLASTS a security guy who tries to stop him. Orton comes back with two chair shots and fires back at Mick. They brawl up the ramp and Foley pulls out Socko, only to put it on Nunzio who comes in at #23. We haven't seen anything of the match for awhile but I can live with that for a hot brawl like this. Orton kicks Foley low and runs as we go back to the ring.

Angle is getting double teamed as Nunzio is down on the floor. Big Show is #24 and apparently that's Tazz's pick. Thankfully he's in the singlet and shorts again instead of the one piece swimsuit. Angle immediately goes after him but Show throws everyone around. Jericho is #25 as he's in a weird phase of his career. He wasn't a main event guy anymore but he had feuded with everyone in the midcard already so he just kind of hung around and filled in spots on the card.

All four guys go after Big Show (who has a head like a typewriter according to Tazz) but they can't get him out. Charlie Haas is #26 but gets double teamed by Jericho and Christian. Currently we have Benoit, Angle, Jericho, Christian, Haas, Big Show and Nunzio who is on the floor. Jericho backdrops Christian out for the second year in a row as Billy Gunn is #27. Apparently this is a return for him. It's Fameassers all around and then things slow down again.

John Cena is #28 and that pop is growing at an alarming rate. Show stares him down so Cena throws Nunzio in to kill some time. Nunzio goes after Show for some reason but Cena takes over for him to make it fair. RVD is #29 to a big pop of his own. It's spin kicks all around until things settle down a bit. There's an FU to Angle and Goldberg is #30. The final group: Benoit, Angle, Big Show, Jericho, Nunzio, Haas, Gunn, Cena, RVD and Goldberg. At least the ring didn't fill up until the end so that's not too bad.

Goldie spears a lot of people down to start before Nunzio jumps on his back like an idiot. Haas is put out and Nunzio takes a HUGE spear. Gunn

is out as is Nunzio to get us down to seven. Goldberg loads up a Jackhammer on Show but Lesnar runs in with an F5 to break it up. Goldberg stares down Brock, allowing Angle to dump him out. All five remaining guys not named Big Show go after the one named Big Show but it still doesn't work.

Everyone hits their finishers on Show instead with Cena (Show's feud at the time) hitting the Shuffle instead of the FU, which I'm assuming they were saving for Mania. They try to dead lift Show and realize they screwed up by knocking a giant unconscious. Show shoves them all off and dumps Cena followed by Van Dam a few seconds later.

So it's Big Show, Benoit, Angle and Jericho as the final four. Jericho gets sent to the apron twice and manages to hang on before bulldogging Show down. The Walls go on Show and he taps but Angle breaks the hold up for no apparent reason. Show chokeslams Benoit down but chokeslams Jericho even further, sending him to the floor to get us to three. A side slam puts Angle down and there's another chokeslam to Benoit.

Show breaks up a German attempt from Angle but can't block an Angle Slam. There's a Slam to Benoit (it was a belly to back suplex but whatever) and the ankle lock to Show. Show taps again, but again it doesn't mean anything. The big guy rolls through the hold and eliminates Angle in the process, getting us down to two.

Benoit dropkicks Show but knocks him back into the ring by mistake. A chokeslam is countered into the Crossface and Show taps again, but you know the drill by now. Show shrugs it off and picks Benoit up in a chokeslam. Benoit graps a front chancery though and pulls Show to the apron....then has him teetering on the ropes....AND BENOIT WINS! The crowd kept getting louder as Benoit pulled further and further. Awesome sequence there.

Rating: A. There were some slow spots but this was ALL about Benoit and I can't complain about that at all. The ending sequence here with all three submission guys making Show tap was a cool idea and different than the ending to any other Rumble. They didn't throw a stupid curve here and made Benoit look like a star here, which is exactly what he was supposed

to do. Great Rumble.

Overall Rating: B-. The Rumble is really REALLY good but the rest is horrible. Don't watch the rest of the show, but if you're a Benoit fan and can still sit through a long match of his, this is absolutely required viewing. Things would change a bit more the next year as two REALLY big names would be the stars of the Rumble, but that's not for another year. For now, this was all about Benoit and he nailed it.

Ratings Comparison

Evolution vs. Dudley Boys

Original: C

Redo: D

Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Original: N/A

Redo: D+

Chavo Guerrero vs. Eddie Guerrero

Original: C+

Redo: C+

Brock Lesnar vs. Hardcore Holly

Original: D-

Redo: D

HHH vs. Shawn Michaels

Original: C+

Redo: C-

Royal Rumble

Original: A

Redo: A

Overall Rating

Original: C+

Redo: B-

Just as last time, the Rumble is the only thing worth seeing.

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

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/23/royal-rumble-count-up-2004-he-who-must-not-be-named/>

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up the Monday Nitro and Thunder Reviews Volume VI: July – December 1999 in e-book or paperback. Check out the information here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2017/11/22/new-book-kbs-monday-nitro-and-thunder-reviews-volume-vi/>

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

**Royal Rumble Count-Up – 2003:
Some High Quality**

Professional Wrestling

Royal Rumble 2003

Date: January 19, 2003

Location: Fleet Center, Boston, Massachusetts

Attendance: 15,338

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz, Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

This is a really odd entry in the series as the namesake match is being treated as secondary to almost everything else. Really, coming into this show, there's a good argument to be made that Torrie Wilson vs. Dawn Marie is being treated as a bigger deal than the Rumble itself. Let's get to it.

The opening video is your standard montage of wrestlers talking about what it means to go to Wrestlemania because the road starts tonight.

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

The winner is in the Rumble and the loser is out in the cold. They do the customary exchange of shoves to start with the fans almost entirely behind Lesnar. Brock drives him into the corner to little avail but the belly to belly works a bit better. A second works just as well but the third is countered with a scary toss over the top. Back in and we hit the choke, which you can tell is serious because Cole starts talking about Show's shoe size.

Brock comes right back with the release German suplex but Heyman offers a distraction to break things up. A big boot and side slam drop Lesnar for all of ten seconds before he's back up with an other belly to belly. Cue Heyman but he gets caught in an F5 attempt, only to have Show make the save with a chokeslam for two. A second attempt is countered into a sloppy F5 to send Lesnar to the Rumble.

Rating: D+. It was short (less than seven minutes) and had the only possible ending (it's not like there are many other potential Rumble winners) so it's hard to complain that much. The F5 didn't look great but it was how the match should have ended. This probably needs to be about

it for Big Show as a main event guy but you know that's not going to be the case, which is part of the problem on Smackdown.

Chris Jericho is ready to win the Rumble and gets his World Title back at Wrestlemania.

Raw Tag Team Titles: Dudley Boyz vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

Regal and Storm are defending. Bubba punches Storm in the corner to start and hits something like a spinebuster. To really mix things up, Bubba grabs a leglock for a few seconds before handing it off to D-Von. Regal comes in and gets punched as well as this isn't exactly shaking the feeling that it's a glorified Raw match. The champs take over on D-Von with Storm drop toeholding him down into a sliding knee from Regal (nice spot).

We hit the cravate for a bit and a chinlock keeps D-Von in trouble. That doesn't last long either though as D-Von fights up and makes the hot tag to Bubba for the house cleaning. Regal takes What's Up but here's Chief Morely for a distraction to prevent the 3D. It doesn't quite work so well though as D-Von uses the distraction to grab Regal's brass knuckles and knock Storm silly for the pin and the titles. Lawler: "I'm as confused as a baby in a topless bar." He's confused enough to refer to Regal as Steve.

Rating: C-. This was just a Raw match with a title change and considering Booker T. and Goldust never even got a rematch after losing the titles, I have no idea what the thinking here is. Were Booker and Goldust really that bad of a team? I know it's a sin to get over without the company swearing off on it but it's some of the oddest booking of the year.

House show ads. They didn't edit this off the Network? I like having the complete versions but it's a strange choice to keep in.

Nathan Jones vignette.

We get a long recap of the Al Wilson Saga, which still doesn't make much sense and went on WAY too long if this is their big idea. Basically Dawn Marie decided she wanted to destroy Torrie Wilson's life (I think?) by

marrying Torrie's father. She eventually went through with it but had so much, ahem, fun with Al on their honeymoon that he died.

Dawn blames Torrie for this and the match is on, even though it was booked before Al died. If this was all some big con by Dawn, what does she get out of it? Getting a match with Torrie? She seems upset and we haven't gotten any scene of Dawn saying it was all made up so I guess we're supposed to take it at face value. I know I harp on this a lot but I still don't get how this was supposed to work.

Dawn Marie vs. Torrie Wilson

Dawn is in regular ring gear and a black veil, which makes her look more like Jimmy Jack Funk (from the neck up) than anything else. Dawn elbows her in the face at the bell but Torrie takes her down as well as these two are going to be able to do. Torrie gets caught in a Fujiwara armbar as the announcers cover the story in detail. Well the recent part at least as basically everything after Armageddon has been forgotten at this point.

Dawn stays on the arm (that'll teach Torrie for killing Dawn's husband) and grabs a flapjack. They collide in a bad looking spot and the boring chants begin. Dawn actually hits a decent looking middle rope spinning clothesline, only to fall victim to that horrible swinging neckbreaker to give Torrie the pin.

Rating: F. Really, what else were you expecting here? The feud was as soap opera level as you're going to have and the wrestlers are both models and little more. Somehow that's about as much as you could have thought these two would do and hopefully it wraps up the story for good. I know it won't but it would be nice.

Eric Bischoff and Stephanie McMahon run into each other in the back with Stephanie being smug about Eric's thirty days to fix Raw deal. Eric asks if her job is safe too but she doesn't seem worried, partially because she has her own surprise for Raw. As with most cases of both GM's on screen at once, this was a big waste of time.

Sean O'Haire tells us not to go to church.

We recap Scott Steiner vs. HHH. Steiner showed up in November and was immediately shoved into the title picture but hasn't actually had a match yet. Instead it's been stuff like a posedown, a bench press contest (which didn't happen), arm wrestling and a pushup contest. The idea is that Steiner can do everything HHH can and might also be completely insane. The fact that they've barely been allowed to get physical should be a bit worrisome but HHH wouldn't let us down.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Scott Steiner

Steiner is challenging and HHH is in the ultra rare red trunks. Before the bell, Hebner holds up the title and insists that he's the law around here no matter what. Steiner wins the early slugout and chops away in the corner, followed by the gorilla press to send HHH rolling to the floor. The champ's back is sent into the post a few times and a hard Irish whip makes his back even worse.

We hit a Boston crab for a bit with HHH crawling to the ropes a few seconds later. That's not very noteworthy, but Steiner falling over when the hold is broken isn't the most encouraging sign. The facebuster is no sold and we hit a quickly broken bearhug. Steiner gets in the first belly to belly for two and Flair pulls him out to the floor.

Back in and Steiner charges into a boot to the face before being sent into the steps for good measure. HHH stomps and chokes in the corner with Flair adding choking of his own. Another neckbreaker gets two for the champ and you can see how winded Steiner already is. Flair chokes on the ropes again to fill in as much time as possible before Steiner reverses the Pedigree.

Scott catapults him into the buckle and grabs the second overhead suplex...before just collapsing next to the ropes. We're not even nine minutes into the match and the guy can't even stand up. Steiner picks him up for what looks like a Tombstone and you would think he was about to go into labor. HHH slips out and tries a Diamond Cutter but Steiner goes backwards with it like a regular neckbreaker. After all those years of working with Diamond Dallas Page he can't take a standard face first bump?

You can hear the crowd losing their patience with this one. Flair plays cheerleader and the fans actually cheer for HHH, who may be boring but he's at least looking competent here. The champ dives into another overhead suplex but Steiner still can't follow up. Some Steiner Lines set up suplexes four, five and six, followed by a spinning version for two.

Steiner tries a tiger bomb and falls down, drawing straight up boeing from the fans. The announcers are trying as hard as they can to make Steiner sound like a threat here and it's going as badly as you would expect. HHH heads up top so it's a superplex for two more. That's enough to send HHH and Flair up the aisle but Steiner isn't done yet and drags them back. As lame as an ending as that would be, it was the right call at this point.

A belt shot to HHH's head draws some blood and they continue to stagger around ringside with no idea what to do. Another belly to belly (ninth suplex total) sends HHH outside again and they brawl into the crowd because THIS MATCH JUST CAN'T END. Back in again with Steiner doing the pushups and laboring through some right hands in the corner. Now Flair tries to get the referee to stop the match but the referee keeps going because he's that kind of evil.

Steiner hates the match as much as everyone else does so he throws Hebner outside but THAT'S NOT A DQ EITHER. The tenth suplex gets two and you can see Steiner looking desperate. HHH gets in a low blow and rolls Steiner up for two. That's FINALLY enough for HHH as he grabs sledgehammer and hits Scott in the ribs for the DQ, earning a chorus of boos that would make Roman Reigns proud.

Rating: N. For Not HHH's Fault. For once, this can't be blamed on HHH, who was just stuck in a horrible situation and couldn't do anything with it. To be fair though, no one was going to be able to get anything passable out of this mess. Steiner wasn't ready for this match and had no business going more than five minutes, let alone eighteen. The interesting thing here though is the first eight minutes ran more than well enough. It was a boring start but it was nowhere near a disaster or even really bad. The problem is the second half of the match where EVERYTHING falls apart.

You'll hear a lot of comparisons between this Steiner and Brock Lesnar's Suplex City but the key is in the delivery. Lesnar suplexes the heck out of people and then pops up to do it again. Steiner was suplexing HHH here and then taking twenty seconds to get to his feet out of pure exhaustion. When you can see wrestlers go twenty minutes without even breathing hard, there's no excuse for a main eventer nearly passing out from exhaustion in the first ten minutes. There's a reason this is remembered so horribly and it more than lives down to its reputation.

Post match Steiner hits him with the sledgehammer and grabs the Steiner Recliner. JR: "There's no way out of this hold." In other words, yes they're actually doing a rematch. Bischoff eventually comes out and gets Steiner off of HHH as the fans are so apathetic towards any of this.

We recap Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle. Kurt won the title with help from his new agent Paul Heyman, who also represents Big Show. Benoit beat Show to become the new #1 contender and you know this is going to be a classic no matter what. That being said, there's not much of a secret to the fact that they're building towards Lesnar vs. Angle at this point. At least we can have an incredible match on the way there.

Smackdown World Title: Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Angle is defending. Benoit has to deal with Team Angle to start so that's a double ejection. Chris tries a very quick Sharpshooter (which Tazz calls a Boston crab for some reason), sending Angle outside for a breather. Back in and another leg hold sends Angle to the ropes as it seems that they have a long time here.

Benoit easily wins a battle of the chops and gets two off a clothesline to the back of the head. A DDT onto the apron makes things even worse but Angle rolls away from the Swan Dive. The Angle Slam is reversed though and we hit the Sharpshooter. Angle grabs the ropes as well as a belly to belly (after that last match, I'm surprised those weren't banned like bar stools on Frasier) to really take over for the first time.

We hit the chinlock with a bodyscissors on Benoit for a bit before a double clothesline puts both guys down. Back up and they trade German suplexes with Benoit getting the better of it. Chris takes too long going

up top though and Angle runs the corner for the belly to belly superplex. The Crossface goes on a few seconds later with Benoit switching to the ankle lock (that's like a Bingo space in an Angle match).

Kurt's ankle lock is reversed into the Crossface which is reversed into a rollup which is reversed right back into the Crossface. Angle gets to his feet for an Angle Slam but there's no cover. There go the straps though and it's back to the ankle lock. Benoit gets two off a rollup as the announcers are losing their minds (rightfully so).

Kurt is sick of this submission stuff and tries a German suplex, only to have Benoit reverse into a release version, drawing quite the round of applause. With Angle three quarters of the way across the ring, Benoit hits the best looking Swan Dive I've ever seen for a delayed two. Angle grabs a powerbomb but drops Benoit face first onto the buckle, followed by another Slam for two.

We're right back to the Crossface but Angle rolls through into the ankle lock which can't be reversed this time. Benoit kicks him away instead, only to get caught in the ankle lock again. Chris tries to pull him into the Crossface but Angle holds on and gets the grapevine to FINALLY make Benoit tap because he was beaten and he knew it.

Rating: A+. I've seen this match several times now and I'm still exhausted just watching it. These guys were beating the heck out of each other with everything looking anywhere from great to unbelievable (that Swan Dive in particular). This was outstanding stuff and one of the best wrestling matches I've ever seen. There's also a bit of a HHH vs. Cactus Jack vibe to it with Angle being backed into a corner and having to fight, only to prove that he is indeed the better man, at least on this night. Check this out if you haven't seen it in awhile, or just because it's worth seeing multiple times.

After an Anthology ad, Benoit gets the big standing ovation, which probably should have sent him to a World Title shot (at least) at Wrestlemania. Instead it was a spot in a three way for the Tag Team Titles because that's how WWE worked in 2003.

Rob Van Dam and Kane agree that it's every man for himself tonight.

Royal Rumble

90 second intervals (though Fink says two minutes) with Shawn Michaels at #1 and Chris Jericho at #2. If nothing else, at least Shawn is starting to look like a wrestler again instead of the tiny thing he was back at Survivor Series. Actually hang on a second as it's Christian in Jericho's clothes instead of Chris himself. Cue Jericho from underneath the ring to hit Shawn low. One heck of a beatdown ensues with Jericho busting Shawn open with a chair as Christopher Nowinski is in at #3. He's willing to stay on the floor while Jericho beats on Shawn some more and easily eliminates him.

Nowinski is still on the floor as Rey Mysterio is in at #4. Rey tries to speed things up and slips out of a gorilla press, only to get punched out to the apron. As usual, Jericho celebrates early and gets dropkicked into the ropes. Nowinski FINALLY gets in and it's Edge in at #5. Outside of Nowinski, that's quite the first four. Spears abound as Rey gets back into it and Nowinski is sent outside but not eliminated.

Jericho is sent into the post and through the ropes to the floor. Rey and Edge shake hands and go at it with Rey hitting the 619 but he gets powerbombed to put both guys down. It's Christian in at #6 with an offer to reform the team with Edge. That earns him a spear but here's Nowinski to throw Edge and Mysterio to the apron. Chavo Guerrero is in at #7 as the Smackdown is strong with this Rumble.

Rey and Chavo do a quick lucha sequence with the 619 setting up a springboard seated senton. Christian eats a 619 of his own, followed by a hurricanrana to get rid of Nowinski. Jericho comes back in for a hard clothesline to get rid of Mysterio and here's Tajiri in at #8. Things settle down a bit with Chavo choking Jericho in the corner and Tajiri not being able to eliminate Christian.

Bill DeMott is in at #9 and attacks various people in short order. The fans aren't exactly thrilled here as we're waiting on the big name to clean out some of these names. Tommy Dreamer is in at #10 to give us Dreamer, Jericho, Edge, Christian, Chavo, Tajiri and DeMott. Dreamer brings weapons with him and Edge knocks DeMott out with a kendo stick.

Jericho and Christian hit a con-trashcanlid-o on Dreamer and get rid of him without much effort. Tajiri takes them both down with a handspring elbow but the Tarantula is easily broken up, allowing Jericho to get rid of him.

B2, still with the Cena entrance theme, is in at #11...and Edge gets rid of him in less than thirty seconds. Chavo is speared out next, followed by a bloody Jericho (from a Dreamer kendo stick shot) dumping Edge and Christian to leave himself all alone. Rob Van Dam is in at #12 because Edge/Van Dam vs. Christian/Jericho was out of the question for some reason. A superkick has Jericho in trouble and he's catapulted all the way to the apron. Matt Hardy, who strongly dislikes mustard, is in at #13 and drops Rob with a Side Effect.

Van Dam gets double teamed for a bit until he flips over Jericho and kicks Matt in the face for good measure. The Five Star hits Jericho and it's Eddie Guerrero in at #14. We get a rehash of Eddie vs. Van Dam from last year until Matt helps Eddie set up an ugly frog splash. That earns Eddie a Twist of Fate (Eddie is smarter than that) and it's Jeff Hardy in at #15.

Jeff doesn't buy the reunion idea either (like anyone would buy a Hardys reunion in 2003 or beyond) and beats Matt up, only to have Shannon Moore dive onto Matt to save him from a Swanton. That's fine with Jeff so he crushes both of them as Rosey is in at #16. Matt gets backdropped to the apron as the eliminations have slowed WAY down. Test is in at #17 and gets to clean house a bit without eliminating anyone. You know, because Rosey needs to stick around.

A rapping John Cena is in at #18 giving reasons why he's going to win this. The camera stays on him and for once it's not the biggest problem as nothing is going on in the ring. Van Dam beats him up on the floor (maybe for wrestling in jeans instead of jean shorts for a change) and it's Charlie Haas in at #19. Where are Lesnar and Undertaker to clear these people out? Jeff tries to run up the corner so Rob eliminates him, still leaving us with far too many people.

Rikishi is in at #20, giving us Rikishi, Jericho, Rob Van Dam, Matt

Hardy, Eddie Guerrero, Rosey, Test, Cena and Haas. Rosey and Rikishi have a weird family reunion as Shannon comes in to protect Matt. That just earns him a double Stinkface, or at least it would have if Rosey hadn't clotheslined Rikishi instead. Jamal is in at #21 to superkick Rikishi, who pops right back up with a Stinkface for his....brother I believe.

Kane is in at #22 to clean house but he brings Rico in with a chokeslam to fill the ring up even more. Rosey is tossed in a hurry and it's a double chokeslam for Matt and Shannon. Shelton Benjamin is in at #23 as the ring is WAY too full with eleven people in there, plus Shannon and Rico at various times. They all fight near the ropes and it's Booker T. in at #24. We go to a weird closeup for an ax kick on Kane and there's the Spinarooni. Eddie gets backdropped out and it's A-Train in at #25.

A good looking A-Train Bomb (chokebomb) plants Cena and another one hits Van Dam but Rikishi superkicks A-Train in the face. Jericho is sent to the apron AGAIN but here's a bandaged Shawn to go after Jericho, allowing Test to knock him out. Shawn stays on Jericho and that's a Wrestlemania match. Maven is in at #26 (because this match needed two Tough Enough names) and goes after Kane as things slow down again. Goldust is in at #27 and doesn't even last a minute before Team Angle puts him out. They do the same to Booker T. a few seconds later, making sure that the Booker T./Goldust team is swiftly beaten again.

Batista is in at #28 and gets rid of Test (after EIGHTEEN MINUTES, or longer than Edge and Mysterio combined) and Rikishi. Brock Lesnar is in at #29 and becomes the most obvious winner since...well last year with HHH actually. He wastes no time in getting rid of Team Angle before throwing Matt onto both of them. Now that's how you clear out some bodies. Undertaker is in at #30 to give us a final group of Undertaker, Van Dam, Cena, Jamal, Kane, A-Train, Maven, Batista and Lesnar. Not the worst field actually.

Undertaker dumps Cena (Which could have set up a heck of a Wrestlemania match today but we wanted a reality show moment instead. Yes you did want that and Kevin Dunn told me so.) and Jamal (Why was he still there?) before Maven hits the same dropkick as last year. This time there's no effect though, making Maven's celebration a bit amusing.

After Maven is launched out, A-Train hits the A-Train Bomb on Undertaker. Van Dam and Kane get rid of A-Train and we're down to five. Kane loads up Rob in a gorilla press...and throws him out in a smart move (not a heel turn). Batista and Kane are put down with a double clothesline and it's time for Lesnar vs. Undertaker.

That's broken up before anything can happen though and the Brothers of Destruction start taking over. Brock takes care of Batista and Kane so we can have the Undertaker showdown. The F5 is countered and Brock takes a Tombstone, followed by Undertaker dumping Batista and Kane. Batista comes back in and eats a chair shot, leaving Brock to eliminate Undertaker for the win.

Rating: B. There was a REALLY bad dead spot in the middle and some of the choices were all over the place (Test, Jamal and Rikishi all getting over fourteen minutes while Los Guerreros, Edge and Mysterio were all afterthoughts) but the ending was the right call. The final four wasn't a bad group at all and having Lesnar dump Undertaker to win is as good a move as they could have made.

There was VERY little build to this match and they did well enough with it while they could. It's not a terrible Rumble but there are many better options. Fix the middle part and get rid of people at a faster clip and it's a great one, but as it is it's just pretty good. Then again, for this year that's quite the compliment.

The big problem here though is how weak the midcard and lower card is. Maybe it's just the way some of them were booked but aside from Lesnar, Undertaker and MAYBE Jericho, was anyone a real threat to win here? Having an obvious winner is fine but it would be nice to build up someone else as a possible winner.

Overall Rating: B-. The World Title matches cancel each other out and thankfully the Rumble is there to make up for a nothing lower card. Lesnar winning was the obvious ending here and that left the rest of the show to really carry things. Angle vs. Benoit is must see and Steiner vs. HHH may be as well if you're into unintentional comedy. The rest of the show though....egads there's nothing to see there. It's a perfectly good

show but the problems are very big and the Rumble isn't good enough to make it a classic.

Ratings Comparison

Big Show vs. Brock Lesnar

Original: D

2013 Redo: C+

2017 Redo: D+

Dudley Boyz vs. William Regal/Lance Storm

Original: C

2013 Redo: D

2017 Redo: C-

Dawn Marie vs. Torrie Wilson

Original: DD

2013 Redo: D-

2017 Redo: F

Scott Steiner vs. HHH

Original: G-

2013 Redo: H (For HHH)

2017 Redo: N (For Not HHH's Fault)

Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Original: A+

2013 Redo: A+

2017 Redo: A+

Royal Rumble

Original: B

2013 Redo: B-

2017 Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: B-

2013 Redo: C-

2017 Redo: B-

This is a rare instance where the original is much closer to the new ratings than the first redo. Maybe I was in a bad mood that day?

You can read the original review here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/01/22/royal-rumble-count-up-2003-best-match-ever/>

And the 2013 redo here:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2013/01/16/royal-rumble-count-up-2013-redo-2003-best-of-both-worlds-and-a-boring-rumble/>

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Main Event – January 11, 2018: Yeah I Knew That

Main Event

Date: January 11, 2018

Location: FedEx Forum, Memphis, Tennessee

Commentators: Nigel McGuinness, Vic Joseph

What does it say that we're less than a week removed from the most recent episodes of Monday Night Raw and Smackdown Live and I can barely remember what happened? We're building towards two of the biggest shows of the year and I'm drawing blanks on what went down. That's not a great sign for either show and hopefully it's not one for this show too. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Dana Brooke vs. Alicia Fox

Now Brooke beat Mickie James last week, which more or less guarantees that she loses here, just for the sake of the dumbest result possible. They take turns slamming each other down by the hair before Brooke grabs a waistlock. Back up and Fox tries a flying shoulder but bounces off of Brooke, who of course hits the pose.

Brooke tries a charge of her own but gets kicked out to the floor so Fox can take over. We hit the chinlock for a few seconds before the bridging northern lights gives Fox two. Dana clotheslines her a few times and tries the handspring elbow, only to flip into two raised boots. The ax kick gives Fox the pin at 5:45.

Rating: D. Yeah I knew that. Somehow, I just knew that was going to be

the case. Brooke really isn't that great in the ring but I still like her for some reason that I just can't quite place. If she could reach a level of plain competence, she could be a nice little midcard fixture. Fox is the same person she's been for years, which is to say acceptable and not much more.

From Raw for the first time.

Here are Paul Heyman and Brock Lesnar to talk about old school. The thing is, this is a progressive industry where you need fresh ways to present the ideas to the audience and the general public. They've gotten away from the old school way of promoting a Universal Title match (oh come on), which was all about finding a challenger who could possibly pin or tap out a champion.

Now the Universal Title is marketed as how could Brock survive this time. Even Lesnar thinks it sucks. At the Rumble, it's Brock vs. monster #1 and monster #2 but the only cliffhanger is who Lesnar will pin. Heyman knows no one can beat this man and that's all that matters. Lesnar goes up the ramp but here's Kane for the fight.

They fight into the back where Braun Strowman shows up and runs them both over. Brock is thrown into a wall where a big case falls on him. Strowman throws another case onto Kane (that is some scary power) before pulling out...a grappling hook? He attaches it to a big old piece of the set and pulls it down onto both guys for a huge crash, sending Heyman and everyone else behind him into fits of screams. That was quite the set piece and my goodness it should have killed them both. Worry not though, as I'm sure Lesnar will be just fine to lose to Reigns in New Orleans.

I know that's harped on but it's the problem with the entire Universal Title picture. Why should I even possibly buy that Strowman, who Lesnar has already beaten, or Kane (because HA) is going to take the title at the Rumble? Even if they do, there's no way they're defending it at Wrestlemania because that's Reigns' spot and everyone knows it. I know it sounds lame but that's what goes through my head every time I see anything related to the title.

Post break, Brock was taken out on a stretcher while Kane was allowed to

walk away on his own. Well limp away but you get the idea. Lesnar didn't want to go to the hospital but went anyway.

Recap of Daniel Bryan and Shane McMahon's recent issues on Smackdown.

From Smackdown.

AJ Styles/Shinsuke Nakamura/Randy Orton vs. Kevin Owens/Sami Zayn

The threat of an RKO sends Owens bailing to the floor before coming back in for some right hands. It's off to Sami vs. Nakamura as the announcers talk about the Freebird Rule for the potential of co-WWE Champions. A kick to the face sends Sami outside and an attempt at the Styles Clash sends the villains walking up the ramp.

Cue Shane, because we haven't seen him enough tonight. The match is restarted (it never stopped) with no countouts. Back from a break with AJ fighting Owens off and hitting the fireman's carry backbreaker. The hot tag brings in Orton for the snap powerslam on Zayn, followed by the hanging DDT. Orton loads up the RKO but Owens chairs him in the ribs for the DQ at...oh of course Shane comes out to say restart it with No DQ.

AJ knocks Owens up the ramp and into the back with a chair, leaving Sami trapped. The chase is on but Sami can't quite make it over the barricade. Orton loads up the steps and then drops Sami back first onto the announcers' table. Kinshasa drops Zayn and the RKO is good for the pin at 14:54.

Rating: D+. What do you want me to say here? The good guys had a big advantage and used that advantage to win, including a pair of restarts in the process. This was everything you would have guessed the match would be and really didn't deviate from that premise. There's not much these guys can do when EVERYTHING in this story has been about Shane vs. Bryan, which at the moment can't be an actual match. I'm still begging for the big swerve where it's Shane as the heel, but that's getting more and more unlikely with each passing week for reasons I don't want to understand.

Ariya Daivari/Drew Gulak vs. Mustafa Ali/Akira Tozawa

Gulak and Tozawa start things off with Drew demanding no chanting.

Instead Tozawa kicks him down for the jumping backplash and it's off to the arm. Daivari makes a blind tag though and jumps Tozawa from behind as we take a break. Back with Daivari's frog splash getting two on Ali. Everything breaks down in short order (without a hot tag either), allowing Tozawa to hit his suicide dive on Daivari. The 054 ends Gulak at 8:22.

Rating: C. I'm running out of ways to say "they did the same thing they always do" in these cruiserweight matches but that's the case here again. This was every bit out of the old 205 Live playbook with a completely standard tag match (not a bad thing) and nothing we haven't seen time after time. It could have been worse, which often times is the best thing that can be said about a match.

Quick look at the US Title tournament.

Royal Rumble rundown.

We see a little bit of Miz's return on Raw.

From Raw to close things up.

Balor Club vs. Roman Reigns/Seth Rollins/Jason Jordan

Balor and Rollins start things off with Balor scoring off an early double stomp. It's off to Anderson in a hurry but Reigns tags himself in so house can be cleaned in a hurry, including a double shoulder to Balor. Back from a break with Reigns working over Balor until a Sling Blade cuts him off. Gallows and Anderson take over in the corner with Luke grabbing a chinlock. Anderson drops a knee and puts on a chinlock of his own.

Back up and Reigns gets in a clothesline to drop Anderson but Gallows won't give up the hot tag. The third chinlock goes on but Reigns no sells a big boot and scores with a Superman Punch. The hot tag brings in Rollins for the Blockbuster, followed by a Sling Blade on Anderson. Gallows breaks up the Wind-Up knee and Anderson's spinebuster gets two.

Rollins makes the tag to Reigns but Jordan distracts the referee by mistake so Rollins stays legal. A Magic Killer plants Rollins so Reigns goes outside to fight two on one. Jordan tries to help Rollins up,

allowing Balor to hit the shotgun dropkick. The Coup de Grace gives Balor the pin at 15:28.

Rating: C-. The chinlockery hurt this a lot but I'm not sure anyone was expecting this to be any more than another wedge between Jordan and company, which is all it needed to be. That team isn't going to hold together that much longer and it makes sense to have them split up just in time for the Rumble.

Post match Miz and the Miztourage come in to attack Rollins, Jordan and Reigns. Roman takes a Skull Crushing Finale and the TripleBomb to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. Yeah there's a reason I didn't remember anything from this week. This was a run of the mill show and the highlights really didn't offer anything of note. That's part of the problem with the build to the Rumble: once everything is set, there's really not much to do other than sit around and wait on the show. Raw 25 will help that a lot, but it's not like there's anything overly interesting on this week's shows.

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Smackdown – August 14, 2003: The XFL, the WBF and Cracker Barrel vs. Bob Evans

Smackdown

Date: August 14, 2003

Location: Savvis Center, St. Louis, Missouri

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

We're in a new era around here as Brock Lesnar has turned heel again, this time siding with Vince McMahon against Smackdown World Champion Kurt Angle. You can pretty much guarantee the Summerslam title match now, but it does beg the question of why Vince refused to give Lesnar a title shot in the first place. Either this plan came together in the span of a week or there's a bit of a lack of logic there. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here's a smug Vince to get things going. Vince wants to talk about the REAL Brock Lesnar, many of whom probably think they know quite well. He won the NCAA Title right here and the fans may know some things about him, but there's a side Vince knows and we don't. Brock is really an animal (at least he's not a manster, which Cole is still trying to get over) and we see a few clips to sum up last week's charade.

This includes Angle being tossed into the cage, which Vince says is Brock's version of dwarf tossing. Brock comes out and explains his definition of friendship. The only reason you need friends is to help yourself but after that's no longer an option, they're no longer your friend. As soon as Angle became champion, Angle's value to him ended. The fans can't judge him because they would do the same. They suck too.

Vince gets to the bigger point: Angle is defending against Brock at Summerslam. This brings out Stephanie (dang it had been a nice two weeks and dang that's some really bad canned applause) and Brock seems to hide behind Vince. Give him another ten years or so. Stephanie yells at Vince

for sending A-Train to attack her so Sable could win a match. She thinks Vince is scared of her having power but she's not going to quit.

Vince is a great businessman but as a father and husband, he's a piece of garbage. Screeching mode ensues with Stephanie shouting that Vince is NOTHING. Vince says that Stephanie is a bad investment, but the worst investment was the day he married Linda. As for tonight though, Stephanie can face A-Train. That's three out of four TV main events with a McMahon in the ring and again, I can't say I'm surprised. They did make this faster though as it only took fourteen minutes instead of sixteen, all to set up Stephanie vs. A-Train.

Tag Team Titles: Rey Mysterio/Billy Kidman vs. World's Greatest Tag Team

Haas and Benjamin are defending. Kidman and Haas start things off and we hit that Stephanie discussion. An armdrag takes Haas down but Shelton kicks Kidman's knee out and cannonballs down for good measure. A missed charge allows the hot tag to Rey though and things speed way back up. They seem to botch something in the corner but Rey switches into an attempt at a tornado DDT.

That's broken up as well as Shelton throws him up for something like a northern lights suplex...which hurts Shelton? Was it supposed to have been turned into a neckbreaker? Anyway Haas gets in a cheap shot from behind and Shelton grabs a t-bone for two. Everything breaks down with Kidman diving onto Haas, leaving Shelton to take a super hurricanrana for a delayed two.

We take a break and come back with Rey taking a big backdrop to the floor and clutching his knee. It's Mysterio so that's likely six months off. Charlie takes over by choking on the ropes and starts kicking at the ribs. Not the knee that Rey was holding of course, but the ribs. It makes sense when his finisher is the Haas of Pain but they're kind of ignoring what they're being handed.

Benjamin comes in for a bearhug and an abdominal stretch. As usual, I greatly approve of mixing up your holds when you have so many options. Shelton's jump onto Rey's back gives Charlie two and a dropkick to the ribs makes things even worse for Rey. Haas grabs an armbar of all things,

allowing Rey to hit a dropkick of his own. That bangs up his knee again though and Shelton breaks up the hot tag. They're building the heck out of that thing and it's working very well. Imagine that: it's easy to sympathize with Mysterio.

Rey gets in a flying mare though and a basement dropkick allows the hot tag to Kidman. Everything breaks down in a hurry as Kidman takes both champs down, including a BK Bomb for two on Haas. A belly to belly cuts Kidman off but it's Mysterio springboarding in with the legdrop for a sweet save.

Rey hurricanranas Benjamin to the floor and powerbombs Haas off the ropes, right into shooting star press position. The referee is too busy watching Rey 619 Benjamin though, allowing Haas to kick out at two. Awesome sequence. Benjamin tries to grab a belt but Rey takes it away, distracting the referee long enough that Benjamin can superkick Kidman into a rollup to retain.

Rating: B+. Heck of a match between these teams and that's all you could have expected. Kidman and Mysterio work very well together and it's no surprise that they were able to have a highly entertaining and quality match with another very talented team. I could live with this a lot more if Mysterio wasn't the Cruiserweight Champion but really, who else is there for him to face at the moment other than Kidman?

Doug Basham vs. Billy Gunn

Gunn goes straight at him to start and hits some clotheslines as the announcers talk about Shaniqua. The hiptoss into a neckbreaker gets two as Shaniqua throws Torrie in. The distraction lets the Bashams hit a Russian legsweep/clothesline combo (the Ball and Gag, because of course it is) for the very fast pin.

Post match the Bashams keep up the beating until Jamie Noble runs in to save Torrie (and her torn trunks). Thankfully the Bashams don't run from the powers of redneck violence and everyone is beaten down. The beatdown takes two or three times as long as the match.

The APA thinks Shaniqua is Shelton Benjamin in drag. Faarooq shifts gears

and thinks the APA Offices should be opened again. Bradshaw goes back to the Shaniqua thing and it's really not funny.

Big Show leaves Vince's office with a smile on his face.

Undertaker vs. A-Train is set for Summerslam. You may notice the lack of Rey Mysterio and John Cena on the pay per view. No room for people like that of course.

Big Show vs. Undertaker

Show tosses him down without much effort and breaks up a waistlock without about as little effort. Some clotheslines stagger Show though and Undertaker slips out of a chokeslam into a Fujiwara armbar. A DDT gets a very bad looking cover (Undertaker was over his arms and face instead of the shoulders) and the apron legdrop makes things even worse for Show.

Old School connects but Undertaker walks into a side slam to bang up his previously bad ribs. Show's clothesline gets two but the fans aren't impressed and tell him he sucks. Well yeah but you don't have to remind him of it so often. Undertaker gets in the jumping clothesline and a legdrop for two before the straps come down. You don't see that too often from Undertaker and he goes into boxing mode in the corner.

Show grabs the referee to block the chokeslam though and hits the bad ribs. The referee is down from a shot that shouldn't have dropped him and the fight goes outside. Show gets posted and clotheslined into the crowd, only to have A-Train come in with a 2x4 to Undertaker's ribs. Only Show can beat the ten and wins by countout.

Rating: D+. This was better than I would have guessed and it did help set up the pay per view match. Big Show is kind of just there again but that's the case with him more often than not. Maybe he'll heat up a bit down the line but for now, it seems time for him to fall back down from the main event scene. As for Undertaker vs. A-Train...well maybe it'll be short.

Post break, Undertaker needs to be treated before he interferes in the "main event".

Tajiri vs. Rhyno

Eddie Guerrero and Chris Benoit are on commentary. Tajiri kicks away to start until a hard clothesline takes him down. Rhyno, with a glare at Eddie, gets two off a suplex. Another kick gives Tajiri the same as they're certainly not wasting time here. Benoit and Eddie debate Bob Evans vs. Cracker Barrel as Tajiri sends Rhyno into the corner and hits the Buzzsaw Kick for the fast pin.

Post match Benoit wants a ride in Eddie's truck but first, we need some hydraulics. That's too much for Eddie who leaves Benoit in the truck and walks away. Benoit isn't often put into comedy roles but it worked well here. It's still not something he should be doing too often but once in a while, it's entertaining.

Zach Gowen vs. John Cena

Before the match, Cena raps about Gowen having one leg, including saying he would be the perfect partner in a three legged race. Normally I wouldn't laugh but having to keep Gowen around as a glorified mascot has made me lose a lot of patience for him. Cena runs him over with a hard shoulder before working Gowen over in the corner. The FU is teased but Cena lets him down, instead having the super version countered into a flying armbar on Cena's bad shoulder. That's good for two but the FU puts Gowen away in short order.

Rating: D. Do you get the idea with Gowen yet? I didn't know if him doing the same thing over and over again was enough to make the idea clear yet. Cena winning and winning in short order should seal Gowen's fate just a little bit more but leave it to WWE to keep going with the guy and not get the hint just yet.

We recap Undertaker and A-Train from earlier.

Stephanie is warming up (good thing she had gear ready) and the fans seem pleased. I mean the outfit being very low cut has a lot to do with it but Stephanie will take any cheering there is to be had. A-Train comes in and hints at wanting rough sex. I'll leave you with getting that image out of your head.

During the break, Matt Hardy jumped Gowen as he was leaving the arena. I knew I always liked Matt for a reason.

Spanky, in what looks like a Kool-Aid shirt, chugs chocolate syrup and gets some on Vince. The boss doesn't recognize Kendrick, who says he's been working here for like a year (it hasn't even been five months since he officially got a contract in storyline terms). Kendrick is annoyed and brings up the failures of the XFL and the WBF (I didn't know the second was allowed to be mentioned). As a result, he'll face Brock later tonight.

Spanky vs. Brock Lesnar

The opening charge is cut off by three straight powerbombs and Tazz wants the match stopped. Instead it's a LOUD chair shot to the head to bust Spanky open for the DQ. That was horrible looking and I can't say I'm all that surprised. Brock does look like a killer though. Cole: "This is not about chocolate syrup."

Post destruction, Spanks is pressed ribs first into the post and is covered with more blood. Vince comes out to smile at his new toy.

Stephanie McMahon vs. A-Train

Let's get this over with. Before the match Vince introduces Sable as the guest ring announcer. Stephanie tries to get at Sable, who makes it no countouts. The catfight is on, much like the canned heat. A-Train comes out and runs Stephanie over before hitting a running splash in the corner.

Vince gives it a thumbs down and A-Train puts her over the shoulder, only to have Undertaker come to the aisle for the brawl. Undertaker chairs A-Train in the back (I guess no countout now means no DQ) but Big Show comes in for the save. Now it's Undertaker getting chaired in the ribs, allowing A-Train to go back in and hit a Vader Bomb for the win.

Vince and Sable kiss to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. The opener helps this a lot but EGADS the A-Train and McMahon's stuff is killing this show. If you don't like the tales of the

boss and his family, there's no point to watching most of this show. There's some good wrestling but most of the time it feels like they're just throwing stuff out there for the sake of throwing it out there with Vince vs. Stephanie getting most of the time and thought.

It would be nice if they actually had a reason to be fighting but really, it's something about Vince being a bad father and Vince not just firing her for some reason. Such is life on Smackdown, but maybe Summerslam can help things a bit. Then again that might suggest that this story is ever going to end, or if anything else really matters around here. The dead times continue for this show and I can't imagine that changing in the near future.

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205 Live – January 9, 2018: The British Are Sneering

205 Live

Date: January 9, 2018

Location: Legacy Arena, Birmingham, Alabama

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

Another Raw (the show where the real cruiserweight stuff happens) has come and gone and Enzo Amore is STILL Cruiserweight Champion as he retained via countout last night. Enzo also came up with a bad ankle, which means we might wait even longer before getting the title off of him. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last night's title match with Amore injuring his ankle on a flip dive over the top, setting up the countout loss. You can probably pencil the rematch in for the Rumble and I think my head is going to explode if Enzo keeps the title any longer than that.

Opening sequence.

Earlier today, TJP came up to Gran Metalik and Kalisto in the back to brag about winning the Cruiserweight Classic. I love it when these grown men talk like thirteen year olds (albeit with the standard obsession with specific names and titles).

TJP vs. Gran Metalik

TJP returned last week and Metalik is back after his latest sabbatical for no apparent reason. Metalik now has a black mask which really doesn't suit him very well. The early flip off goes in Metalik's favor and a hard armdrag sets up an armbar on TJP. A basement dropkick has TJP in trouble as the announcers wonder if Metalik's loss in the Cruiserweight Classic final is still bothering him. If he's not over it in a year plus, he's not getting over the thing.

Metalik misses a dive and gets caught with an uppercut on the floor. He's fine enough to dive off the steps into a hurricanrana though and it's time to head back inside. TJP kicks him in the ribs though and it's off to the Tree of Woe. The running basement dropkick gets two and we hit the chinlock.

Back up and the springboard forearm gets two (minus the nipup, which TJP loaded up and then just didn't do), followed by a belly to back suplex for the same. Metalik gets sent hard into the corner but is right back up

with a sunset bomb off the post (cool looking move) to put both guys down. It's Metalik up first though with the rope walking dropkick getting two. The double chickenwing gutbuster gives TJP two but Metalik slips out of the Detonation Kick. Instead he dropkicks TJP into the Metalik Driver for the pin at 9:04.

Rating: C. What was up with the booking here? TJP comes back last week and is losing clean to Metalik here? I like both guys quite a bit but TJP losing here makes no sense whatsoever. If Enzo's booking has taught us anything, it's that 205 Live needs star power more than ever. If that's the case, keep TJP winning and find someone else for Metalik to beat. Or just keep doing what you're doing and wonder why this show is death.

Post match TJP snaps and breaks a bunch of stuff, including the announcers' area. It's nice that they're giving him something, but again STOP DOING IT RIGHT AFTER HE LOSES CLEAN!

We look at Nia Jax checking on Enzo Amore after his ankle injury on Raw.

A banged up Enzo says he's thinking about getting the Ford logo tattooed on his back because he's Ford tough. He'll be back to take care of Alexander but here's Tony Nese to say he wants back on the team. Not only that but he wants to be the top guy (the Bob to Enzo's Joker if you will). Enzo likes the idea but doesn't say yes. Egads can we get to the end of Enzo's title reign so the heels can grow some spines again?

Here's Jack Gallagher to talk about taking Hideo Itami out last week. Itami is out licking his wounds at the moment but as soon as he's back, Gallagher has even more damage in store for him. Gallagher isn't pleased with the fans not caring but shifts back to talks of torturing Itami. This of course brings out Itami, giving us an awesome sneer from Gallagher. The fight is on with Gallagher taking an umbrella shot to the head to send Jack running off. The fans didn't quite react to this and Itami's "COME ON" didn't help matters. Just be the silent assassin because everything else isn't working for him.

Cedric Alexander is ready to win tonight and Goldust comes in to compliment him on banging Enzo up last night. Alexander promises to hurt Enzo even worse next time and Goldust likes the idea. They almost have to

be getting ready to have Goldust screw him out of the title right? I have no idea what that accomplishes but it wouldn't shock me all that much. Whatever gives us more Amore right?

Tony Nese vs. Cedric Alexander

Enzo handles Nese's entrance. After some long posing to start, Nese cranks on the wristlock (way too common of a start in WWE these days). Nese takes him down and makes sure to suck up to Enzo. Cedric is sent face first into the apron and then the barricade before we hit a neck crank back inside. Back up and Cedric's chop doesn't get him very far as a hard whip sends him into the corner. Nese misses a charge though and the slingshot Downward Spiral takes him down.

For some reason he thinks going outside is a good idea, apparently never having watched a Cedric match before. The running flip dive gives Cedric two more and the springboard clothesline is good for the same (at least both looked quite good). The Neutralizer is countered into a gutbuster and Nese takes over. Another fireman's carry is escaped but Cedric hurts his knee. A very fast small package gives Cedric the pin at 8:56.

Rating: C-. Pretty standard 205 Live main event with Enzo running his mouth the whole time and taking away a lot of the focus that the wrestlers could have had. They're doing a very good job of making me want to see him lose but knowing WWE, they won't know when to pull the trigger and we'll be stuck with Enzo bringing this show down until Wrestlemania or so.

Post match Cedric is perfectly fine (and pointing at his brain) as Enzo tells Nese to get out now. Cedric looks down at Enzo's feet and kicks out the good ankle, followed by the Lumbar Check to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. As is always the case with an Enzo era show, none of this stuff feels like it matters. TJP loses to Metalik and Gallagher vs. Itami continues? Good for them, but none of those four are likely to be near the Cruiserweight Title anytime soon (well maybe Itami) and fans seem to know it. With so much of the time going to Enzo, everyone else gets left in the dust and that's going to be a problem when you don't have Enzo on top anymore. But hey, at least 205 Live cracked the top ten

WWE Network shows a few times right?

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Bragging Rights 2009: Even Attempted Murderers Need Rest Periods

It was mentioned that this wasn't up so here's a bit of a bonus.

Bragging Rights 2009

Date: October 25, 2009

Location: Mellon Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Attendance: 13,562

Commentators: Todd Grisham, Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler

This is back in the days of Raw vs. Smackdown meaning something but in this case there are two major matches. In addition to the Raw vs. Smackdown match, we also have John Cena vs. Randy Orton in an Iron Man match because all the other pay per view matches those two have had

haven't been enough. The card really is built around those two matches and I'm not sure what else there is to mention. Undertaker is also defending his Smackdown World Title in a four way match, which means eighteen people are involved in two matches. That might explain the hour long Iron Man match. Let's get to it.

The opening video focuses on the seven on seven brand supremacy match with Orton and Cena not even being mentioned. The rest of the show is really just filler around those two and that might be better all things considered. You would think the title match would warrant a mention though.

There are three Raw vs. Smackdown matches tonight and the winner gets a trophy. Yeah the whole Team Raw vs. Team Smackdown match that the show is built around is only a third of the formula.

We recap Miz (US Champion, Smackdown) vs. John Morrison (Intercontinental Champion, Raw). This is basically a showdown that would have happened anyway as they used to be a big tag team and now they've split with an argument over who was the Shawn and who was the Marty. In other words it's catchphrase vs. skill though Morrison was considered a much stronger prospect around this time.

Miz vs. John Morrison

Non-title. The ropes are half blue and half red for a cool visual. Morrison takes him to the mat to start and Miz bails to the ropes like a good heel should. Miz is driven into the corner but heads outside for an early breather. Back in and Miz gets caught in a flapjack, followed by Morrison's standing shooting star for two. The Moonlight Drive is broken up so Morrison settles for a hard clothesline to the floor, only to have Morrison get thrown out as well for a much nastier crash.

Miz cranks on both arms for a bit before putting on a quickly broken chinlock. A slugout goes to Morrison (of course) and a leg lariat gets two. The Flying Chuck (springboard kick to the face) gets the same and now the fans are getting into these near falls. Miz bails to the floor and takes a corkscrew dive but he breaks up Starship Pain (split legged corkscrew moonsault) and pins Morrison at 10:54.

Rating: C+. The match was fine but that ending was really quite lame. The crash and burn for Morrison was fine but Miz couldn't throw in a Skull Crushing Finale? After a strong build up to this, you would kind of expect more than just what we were given here. If nothing else though, I was really glad to see Miz win here as he's worked hard after being considered a nothing guy while Morrison was rolling on charisma for a long time.

We look back at Smackdown with Team Smackdown beating defeated by another group of five, meaning the winners took their places. Both lineups had Chris Jericho and Kane as co-captains but the original lineup of:

Dolph Ziggler, Eric Escobar, Drew McIntyre and Cryme Tyme

Has been replaced by:

R-Truth, Matt Hardy, Finlay and the Hart Dynasty

It should be noted that the match match where the new team won didn't have Shad Gaspard, who was out sick. It's also not a good sign that they switched a team out with just two days before the pay per view.

Cody Rhodes, part of Team Raw tonight, is bragging about how awesome his show is when R-Truth comes in. Rhodes berates him so Truth says the only reasons Cody is here are Dusty Rhodes and Randy Orton. Big Show comes in to say Raw (his team) will win.

Michelle McCool/Natalya/Beth Phoenix vs. Melina/Kelly Kelly/Gail Kim

Smackdown vs. Raw. Natalya is part of the Hart Family and Kelly Kelly is a model who eventually became a pretty good worker. Michelle (who has gotten a very nice haircut since we last saw her) and Melina are the respective brand's women's champions. Beth and Gail get things going with Phoenix quickly dominating. It's off to Natalya who is quickly rolled up for two.

Natalya misses a charge in the corner so Gail can sit on the back of her head and bring in Kelly. A screaming headscissors drops Natalya but she drops Kelly across the top rope for two. Kelly gets caught in the wrong corner and it's off to Michelle for some bad looking knee drops. Beth

won't let Kelly get over for the tag and Michelle comes back in for some knees to the face. A jawbreaker finally lets Kelly tag Melina in and house is cleaned. Beth stops her with a slingshot suplex and everything breaks down. Everyone else goes outside and it's the Glam Slam (double chickenwing faceplant) to put Melina away at 6:54.

Rating: C-. This was fine but there was absolutely no doubt who was going to win here thanks to the best of three format. It really is amazing to see how strong the division was around this time before it collapsed with the rise of the Bellas and everyone else leaving around the same time. The match wasn't bad but just filler and a way to get the women on the show.

HHH gives Team Raw a pep talk but brings up all the stuff they've made fun of Mark Henry for over the years. Jack Swagger isn't worried about the match and Shawn threatens to replace him with the first person he sees. Hornswoggle comes in and Shawn quickly changes his mind. The team eventually rallies around DX.

We recap the Smackdown World Title match with Undertaker defending against CM Punk (getting another rematch), Batista and Rey Mysterio (friends who are getting shots because they're former champions).

Smackdown World Title: Undertaker vs. Rey Mysterio vs. CM Punk vs. Batista

Punk runs around to start and causes Undertaker to blast Batista with a clothesline. The champ sends Punk to the floor so Mysterio can dive off the apron to take him down, leaving us with a Batista vs. Undertaker showdown. Old School keeps Batista in trouble but Punk saves Mysterio from the same fate. A superplex drops Undertaker and Rey springboards in with a splash for two as Punk makes a save.

Batista comes back in to go after Punk but eats a big boot from Undertaker. Rey's springboard is countered into a Last Ride, only to have Batista spear Undertaker down for the save. Rey scores with a 619 to send Undertaker into the spinebuster but Punk makes the save again. Hell's Gate has Batista in trouble but...yeah you know who breaks it up. That just earns Punk a Last Ride for two and there's a chokeslam to Batista

for two.

Punk is tossed outside so the big guys can go at it even more with Batista hitting a quick Batista Bomb for two as Mysterio makes a save of his own. That's not cool with Rey's friend Batista and they get in an argument, allowing Undertaker to chokeslam Batista for two more. A double clothesline drops both of them so Punk can cover both of them for two. Batista gets back up and tosses Rey again, only to walk into the Tombstone to retain Undertaker's title at 9:58.

Rating: B+. They were smart to keep this one a bit shorter as it allowed the match to be this energetic throughout. This wouldn't have been as good with the laying around and it allowed Punk to keep running in and out and Undertaker and Batista to do all the big power stuff. Strong stuff here and a good bonus, though it's not going to mean anything in the long run.

Post match, Josh Matthews goes inside to talk to Rey and Batista. Rey says it was a good try but Batista asks the fans if they were close. Batista thinks he was close but he was tired of only coming this close and of his best friend stabbing him in the back. Batista: "I'm not playing. I'm gonna rip your head off." And he comes pretty close with a big clothesline as Smackdown has a new monster heel. Rey is thrown hard into the barricade and kicked in the head before Batista slowly walks away.

This was an EXCELLENT turn as Batista had a good reason to go after Mysterio but it still looks like a big guy treating a smaller one like a loser for his own failures. In other words, Batista looks like a jerk who is abusing his power and the fans will want to see Mysterio try and get some revenge, even if that's not likely. Really good stuff here and something I'd love to see happen more often. Not necessarily this specific thing but something character based and logical.

The fans are split on who wins here.

Team Raw vs. Team Smackdown

Raw – Shawn Michaels, HHH, Cody Rhodes, Big Show, Kane, Kofi Kingston,

Jack Swagger

Smackdown – Chris Jericho, Kane, Matt Hardy, Finlay, R-Truth, Hart Dynasty

One fall to a finish here. The Hart Dynasty are Tyson Kidd (speed) and David Hart-Smith (power). Cody and Truth get things going and everyone is wrestling in a red or blue shirt. Well save for DX because they're special. Rhodes spins around and grabs a leg but Big Show tags himself in.

Truth isn't crazy (yet) so he brings in Kane for the giant showdown. Show quickly puts Kane down and drops a leg before bringing in Swagger for some shots to the back. It's already off to Hardy to clothesline Swagger as the announcers push the idea that the wrestlers all really want to be the best. Normally that means with titles but let's just go with bragging rights instead. They head outside to start the big showdown as Swagger loses his shirt. But how will I know which side he's on?

Hardy is dragged into the corner for some arm cranks from Henry. A big elbow misses but Mark easily throws Matt into the corner, meaning it's time for Shawn to come in. You can hear the fans get fired up now because it's starting to get serious. Shawn may be great but he allows the tag off to Finlay for some heavy shots of his own. Sweet Chin Music makes up for it but a blind tag brings in Hart-Smith who helps hit a quick springboard Hart Attack for two on Michaels, meaning it's time for some selling.

Jericho slaps on the chinlock ("ASK HIM! ASK HIM!") before bringing in Kane for one of his own. David makes it three chinlocks in a row but Tyson's springboard elbow misses and the hot tag brings in HHH. A series of spinebusters have Smackdown in tatters but Kane stops HHH with a chokeslam. HHH puts Jericho down though and it's off to Kofi as everything speeds way up.

Trouble in Paradise gets two on Chris as everything breaks down into the parade of secondary finishers. Cole: "VINTAGE BRAGGING RIGHTS!" It's been on the air for less than an hour and a half and there's a vintage era? Anyway Big Show turns on his partners (because he's Big Show) and

chokeslams Kofi to give Jericho the pin at 15:40.

Rating: B. You can only get so far on a made up rivalry with fourteen people having to cram in all their stuff in the span of less than sixteen minutes. It certainly wasn't bad though and both teams were more than fine, albeit a bit stretched as a lot of the guys didn't quite fit the level as people like DX, Jericho and Kane. Big Show screwing over his team wasn't the most interesting thing in the world either as he does it so often but at least it makes it clear that Raw was better until Smackdown got some help. You know, in case anyone thought otherwise.

We recap Cena vs. Orton in yet another match as this rivalry cannot die. Orton attacked Cena's dad to make it even more personal and if Orton wins, Cena is off Raw. Yeah just keep pretending it's not obvious now. This is billed as the final showdown, which WWE is usually pretty good about holding up. In this case though, I give it two months at most.

Kofi and Cody argue over why Raw lost and get in a fight over it with Kofi being left laying.

Raw World Title: John Cena vs. Randy Orton

Orton is defending, anything goes, falls count anywhere Iron Man rules, meaning the most falls in sixty minutes wins. The introduction makes sure to point out that there will be a thirty second rest period between falls, which will come into play later. They start slow (makes sense) with Orton getting caught in a headlock, only to send Cena hard into the corner. The champ slowly stomps away but Cena grabs the STF for the immediate tap out at 3:56 (all times listed will be total and the thirty second rest periods count towards the time limit) as Orton wants to get out of the hold to avoid damage.

1-0 Cena

Orton is right back up with a powerslam for two as we're five minutes in. The very slow pace continues as we hit the chinlock on Cena. Back up and Cena initiates his finishing sequence but takes too long loading up the Five Knuckle Shuffle, allowing Orton to pop up and hit an RKO to tie things up at 9:00.

1-1

With ten minutes left, Orton knocks Cena off the apron and into the barricade. Now it's time for the anything goes aspect to take effect as Orton hits Cena in the head with a monitor for two on the floor. Back in and Orton calmly hits him in the head with a microphone for another near fall. Things slow down though as the referee has to check a cut on Cena's head and the clock is actually stopped.

Cena will have none of that and charges at Orton with right hands in the corner. They go outside again with Cena going into the steps to slow him right back down. Cena is sent into the barricade as we hit fifteen minutes in. You don't keep Cena down with just a few shots like that though and it's already time for the FU, only to have Orton catch him with an RKO to counter. That means a double pin (with Orton having to adjust his arms to get the spot right) at 16:46 to keep us tied up.

2-2

The medical staff uses the break to fix the cut in a smart use of time. Orton goes shoulder first into the post to give Cena a breather. That breather doesn't last long though as he puts Orton on the top rope for a super AA to give him the lead back at 19:23. You would think that would be a bigger spot for later in the match.

3-2 Cena

During the break, here's Legacy to beat Orton down to give Orton an easy pin to tie it up at 20:46.

3-3

Kofi runs in to chase them off, which makes sense given the segment with Rhodes earlier. Nicely done WWE. Orton and Cena are left alone and a double clothesline lets them burn off some more time. Cena takes him down by the legs and it's time to go outside again. Cena takes him up the aisle until Orton sends him into the barricade for two. They head over to the tech area and Orton sends him into the board to set off some pyro. That gives Orton an idea and this can't end well. Randy sends him through

a piece of the lighting grid for a fall at 25:20.

4-3 Orton

With Cena down, Orton goes over and starts playing with the pyro board. Like a real villain, Orton throws Cena onto the stage AND TRIES TO BLOW HIM UP WITH FIREWORKS. It doesn't actually work but that's quite the heel move. You know, attempted murder and all that. They go back to the ring because there's less violence to be found there. The champ sends him into the steps and we hit halftime.

Orton throws the steps at his head for two before cracking him over the back with a chair for two. We're firmly into the "there's no reason to believe he can kick out of these things" territory. Back in and Cena grabs a small package to tie it up at 32:40. Orton beats the heck out of Cena during the break but the referee makes sure to enforce the thirty second break. TO THE ATTEMPTED MURDERER!

4-4

Cena is basically done though and Orton makes it even worse with the elevated DDT off the apron for a fall at 35:04.

5-4 Orton

Randy is smart enough to immediately go for the cover but Cena kicks out despite likely needing to be in a hospital. The beating continues back inside with Orton hammering him in the chest for two. Orton wastes a few minutes walking around (smart) and hitting Cena every now and then, which makes sense as we have twenty minutes left and they're probably running out of big spots.

Cena, with the blood flowing again, gets in a right hand to send Orton up the ramp. The chase goes nowhere so Orton pounds away back inside. The threat of an AA sends Orton running into the crowd with Cena slowly giving chase (well he walks briskly at least) as the clock keeps ticking. Cena finally catches him and hits the champ with a trashcan. See, at least Cena keeps the violence on a lower level.

The beating knocks Orton back towards the ring as we have fifteen minutes

to go. Cena gets a few near falls at ringside before sending him through the barricade. The steps go into Orton's head and we have ten minutes left. Those steps are sat next to the table and an AA through the table ties it up again at 51:46.

5-5

Cena covers again after the rest period ends but only gets two. It's time for another table in the ring but Orton avoids the top rope legdrop to drive Cena through instead. Five minutes to go now and both guys are down again. They slug it out with four minutes left as they're clearly spent. The slugging continues with neither guy getting an advantage as we have three minutes left. Of course Cena's cardio is fine as he starts the shoulders but takes the referee out by mistake.

There's an RKO but there's no referee. Another one comes in and count two with two minutes left, earning himself a beating from the champ. The Punt misses with a minute left and Cena grabs the STF with fifty five seconds to go. Orton hangs on as long as he can but as you might expect, he taps out with three seconds left to give Cena the title back at 60:00 with a final score of 6-5.

Rating: B. It's entertaining for the most part but you could really see them running out of things to do after awhile. Having Cena win at the very end keeps both of them looking equal, which is fine, but doesn't quite make Cena look like the big winner of the feud. There was no real reason for this to be an Iron Man match but at least there was one memorable spot with the pyro.

The biggest problem here is still the burnout between these two. The fans had seen them time after time and there's almost no reason to get interested in seeing them fight one more time, especially for an hour. They're firmly at the point where people don't want to see them wrestle no matter what happens and that's never a good thing. Oh and as for the "final" meeting: they fought again before Christmas.

A long recap for a long match wraps us up.

Overall Rating: B. Not a bad show for the most part but you could cut out

the first two Raw vs. Smackdown matches and no one would notice. That being said, I kind of like the idea of shortening the series to just three matches instead of doing seven or nine matches to accomplish the same goal. It would have been nice to have some other stuff going on besides the two main events and the fourway helped a good bit but the show still felt like it was all about those two matches and nothing else. At least the wrestling was strong though and that's more important than so many other things.

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Happy Birthday

To Monday Night Raw, which debuted 25 years ago today. I still haven't missed a show and I don't see that changing anytime soon.