

Main Event – November 30, 2017: The New Normal

Main Event

Date: November 30, 2017

Location: Thompson-Boling Arena, Knoxville, Tennessee

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

Things have been changing around here lately with both Raw and Smackdown clips airing instead of just the ones from the red show that had been the case for so long. We're also back to a normal week in WWE after the huge Survivor Series weekend last time around. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Apollo Crews vs. Curt Hawkins

Crews shoves him down a few times to start and grabs a headlock takeover for good measure. A slingshot hilo gets two but Hawkins sends him throat first into the ropes. We hit the reverse chinlock with a knee in the back until Hawkins heads outside to yell at Titus O'Neil. Hawkins gets two off a top rope elbow, only to get caught with an enziguri. The Toss Powerbomb gives Apollo the pin at 5:15.

Rating: D. I'm not sure how many times you can watch this match and still get anything out of it. We get the idea already but that's not going to stop WWE from running the thing over and over again around here. Now that being said, it's just Hawkins so does it really matter that much? I can't imagine there was that much thought put into the thing, which should be the case.

From Raw.

Here's Reigns to open things up. Last week was a big week for him as he and the Shield beat up New Day. Then he had an opportunity and we see a clip of him winning the Intercontinental Title. After the show was over, Shield came back out and put Miz through a table. This is his yard and

this is the title so if you want it, come get it. Cue the Miztourage to say they know someone who wants the title. This brings out Elias of all people to say he wants the title. Reigns thinks it sounds like Elias wants to walk with the big dog, but after tonight he might have a neck brace like Curtis Axel.

And from later in the night.

Intercontinental Title: Roman Reigns vs. Elias

Elias is challenging. They trade shoulders to start with Elias getting the better of it and slapping on a reverse chinlock. Elias gets two off a clothesline and we hit a regular chinlock. Back up and the Miztourage offers a distraction so Elias can get in a hard knee for a near fall.

We come back from a break with Elias getting kicked in the face, only to have Reigns stop and take out the Miztourage instead of following up. The distraction lets Elias take Reigns down and drop a top rope elbow for a rather near fall. A sitout powerbomb gets the same but Reigns is right back with a Superman Punch for two of his own. Back up and the spear retains the title at 14:48.

Rating: B-. While the ending wasn't exactly in doubt here, it was still a good, hard hitting match. They're certainly protecting Elias at the moment and I'm not sure what to make of that. It would be nice if they had him actually win something but with the Intercontinental Title now basically the show's World Title, he's kind of stuck. But at least it was a good match.

Post match Samoa Joe sneaks in and chokes Reigns out. No Rollins for the save either, mainly because this was a Reigns singles match and not a Shield match. That determines who comes out for a save you see.

And again from Raw.

Paige/Mandy Rose/Sonya DeVille vs. Bayley/Sasha Banks/Mickie James

Alexa Bliss is on commentary.....and there's no Mickie or Bayley. Paige and company come out and laugh off the idea of Sasha having no partners. We cut to the back where Mickie is holding her shin and Bayley is holding

her neck. Paige laughs this off and says she's tired of hearing about her interfering last week. Last year, she was THE woman in WWE and helped erase the word Diva from WWE (we could have a tournament for everyone who takes credit for anything like this).

Now she and her friends, named Absolution (sounds like a bad perfume) are here to take things back. Rose and DeVille talk about how everyone has tried to be the next big thing but they remember how Paige started all of this. Paige offers Sasha a spot on the team but she forearms Paige off the apron. The beatdown is on in a hurry with everyone hitting a finisher. No match of course.

Now from the Smackdown counterparts.

Charlotte/Natalya/Naomi vs. Riott Squad

Yes Riott and no I don't know why. During Charlotte's entrance we see clips from Starrcade, WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN FREAKING BROADCAST ON THE NETWORK! Logan takes Natalya into the corner to start and scores with a clothesline. It's off to Charlotte but that's enough for Natalya, who walks out on the match less than a minute in. Back from a break with Charlotte fighting off the trio but getting caught by the numbers game on the floor. Morgan gets two off a floatover suplex and it's off to Ruby for a chinlock. That leaves the other two Squad members to take Naomi down on the floor.

They send her hard into the steps and then bridge them over the barricade, catapulting Naomi face first into the steel. The best the referee can do is glare at them, making me wonder HOW IN THE WORLD THIS ISN'T A DQ. Seriously do they need to break out a pair of nunchuks and beat the stuffing out of Naomi before the match is called off? So it's now three on one with Charlotte actually managing to fight them off for a bit. A spear hits Morgan in those impressive abs but Logan hits a knee from the apron, setting up the Riot Kick to the face for the pin at 9:12.

Rating: D+. The beatdown was impressive enough though none of them seemed capable of hanging with Charlotte or Naomi on their own. That already puts them a few steps back of Absolution (I can feel my brain melting as I write these names over and over) but at least they're looking a bit

more polished than people like Mandy Rose. Not a great match or anything but the divide and conquer strategy worked just fine.

Kalisto/Gran Metalik vs. Brian Kendrick/Jack Gallagher

Metalik headlocks Kendrick to start but gets kicked in the face for his efforts. Kalisto comes in and cranks on the arm so it's off to Gallagher. A whip sends Metalik outside in a heap and we take a break. Back with Metalik breaking away for the hot tag as everything breaks down. The Salida Del Sol is broken up but Metalik tags himself in and kicks Gallagher in the head. The rope walk elbow is enough to end Jack at 3:34.

Rating: D+. There's not much to say about these things, though I still like Metalik more often than not. They have entertaining matches, even if it's a match you can write out before it even starts. It's also the standard Main Event idea: Gallagher and Kendrick would win this 9/10 times on 205 Live but they're dead in the water on this show. Again it's predictable but not the worst thing in the world.

Back to Smackdown.

Singh Brothers vs. AJ Styles

Before the match, Jinder Mahal attacks AJ, sending him ribs first into the post. After a break (and Mahal doing his standard promo), the match is on with AJ getting double teamed. The Brothers get in some shoulders to the ribs in the corner but AJ kicks them away without much effort. AJ knocks the two off them off the top, kicks Mahal in the face, and blocks a super hurricanrana attempt. He's not done yet though as it's a SUPER STYLES CLASH with one Singh landing on the other for the easy pin at 3:56.

Rating: D. This wasn't much to see but it was exactly what it needed to be, especially with an awesome ending like that. Really, what else was AJ supposed to do against a couple of goons like this? Styles vs. Mahal isn't an interesting story but at least Mahal has goons to send out there instead of having us watch the same match over and over.

Post match Mahal lays out the Singh's, including a TERRIBLE looking

Khallas to the second one. The guy's head and back never came close to the mat as he basically bounced off his elbow (it looked even worse in slow motion). As I've said many times: Mahal just isn't very good and that finisher makes things even worse.

And then to Raw to wrap things up.

Jason Jordan vs. Kane

Before the match, Jordan talks about how he's an athlete and knew his knee was banged up last week. Kane actually gets powered into the corner a few times to start but the suplex is broken up. A hard toss sends Jordan outside where he comes up holding the knee again. That's enough for a countout at 1:42.

Post match Kane stays on the knee until Finn Balor comes out for the save. They stare each other down and we take a break.

Finn Balor vs. Kane

Kane wastes no time in whipping Balor into the corner and we're into an early chinlock. Balor dropkicks him outside and hits a dive as the announcers talk about what a big deal a win over Kane would be. Kane hits him in the ribs with a chair for the DQ at 2:44.

Kane beats on him with the chair and wraps it around Balor's throat until Braun Strowman comes out for the save. A chair to the back has no effect on Strowman and the beatdown is on. Strowman destroys him with the steps and a chair, including a powerslam onto the steps. Kane gets his throat crushed on the chair and staggers into the crowd (probably looking for registered voters) to end the show.

Overall Rating: C-. All this show did was make you remember how hit and miss some of these shows can be. Raw and Smackdown weren't exactly great this week and cutting them down to the clipped versions of the matches and ignoring some of the better stuff (Rollins vs. Cesaro from Raw for instance) isn't the best idea. I do like them adding in more stories though as it makes the show feel more like a full on recap than anything else, which is a good idea. It really might be better to cut out one of

the original matches though, just so the recaps don't feel as crammed together.

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205 Live – November 28, 2017: A Very 205 Live Anniversary

205 Live

Date: November 28, 2017

Location: Rupp Arena, Lexington, Kentucky

Commentators: Nigel McGuinness, Vic Joseph

The show is in a weird place for the next few weeks at the moment as they're setting up a new #1 contender but it's going to take a little while to get there. We have one member of the #1 contenders match but since the matches are taking place on Raw, there's only so much need for this show to even exist right now. Let's get to it.

Of note: I was in the arena for this show so it's my second time seeing it.

The opening recap looks at last night's fatal four way with Rich Swann qualifying for the #1 contenders match in two weeks.

Opening sequence.

The announcers thank us for watching 205 Live for one year now. Sweet goodness how low does the viewership have to be for us to not thank us?

Here are Enzo Amore and Noam Dar for an opening chat. Enzo's mic doesn't seem to work on the way to the ring so he waits until he gets inside to talk about having the Zo Train getting to the top of the cruiserweight Mount Rushmore. Last week the Zo Train got a little derailed because someone thought we were playing Mario Kart and slipped on a banana peel. That would be Dar, who needs to TOTALLY redeem himself tonight.

Rich Swann vs. Noam Dar

Before the match, Swann says he hasn't been Cruiserweight Champion in about a year (closer to ten months actually) but he's getting closer every day. Not much to say there Swann. Dar hits the floor at the bell (must be a Kevin Owens fan) before heading back in to crank on a wristlock. That's reversed into another wristlock, sending Dar back outside.

Swann isn't waiting this time and takes Dar out with a flip dive from the apron, much to Enzo's chagrin. Swann's Rolling Thunder gets two but an Enzo distraction lets Dar get in a kick to the knee. A clothesline to the back of the head gives Dar two but he keeps holding his knee. Enzo: "What are you, Big Cass? GET THE JOB DONE!" Back up and Swann kicks him in the head, setting up the Phoenix splash for the pin at 4:42.

Rating: D+. Dar continues to do nothing for me and Swann winning here was hardly a surprise. The problem here is the continuing story of the Zo Train: how much difference does it make to have Swann win here? Enzo will just talk a lot and the wins will be traded over and over until no one but Enzo and the eventual #1 contender gets anywhere.

Enzo threatens to fire Dar if he keeps screwing up.

Kalisto is ready to start his comeback against Jack Gallagher.

Kalisto vs. Jack Gallagher

Brian Kendrick is in Gallagher's corner. Gallagher works on the arm to start but is quickly taken down into a wristlock. They fight over the same hold until Kalisto realizes that's not the best idea against Gallagher. Instead he fires off the kicks, only to have a Kendrick distraction let Jack take over again.

There's a knee to the gut to cut Kalisto off again and Gallagher stays on the ribs like an evil Englishman should. We hit the cross arm choke with Gallagher bending him back onto the knees. That goes nowhere so Kalisto hits his rolling kick to the head, followed by the springboard seated senton. A quick Salida Del Sol drops Gallagher but Kendrick comes in for the DQ at 6:23.

Rating: C. Kalisto vs. Kendrick/Gallagher could be fun, though I'm not sure how many times you can trot the two of them out there for pretty much the same feud. At least Kalisto is entertaining and fast paced enough to keep up the entertainment, which should make for a nice dynamic. He'll need a partner though, which hopefully means more Gran Metalik.

Hideo Itami is coming.

Rich Swann, Cedric Alexander and Mustafa Ali are watching the Itami video in the back and say they're worried about those strikes. It turns into a discussion of who will be facing Swann but everything is cool.

Mustafa Ali/Cedric Alexander vs. Drew Gulak/Tony Nese

These four will be in the other four way on Monday. Before the match, Gulak praises Nese's physique and says Enzo has dubbed them Team Power Point. See, Nese has power and Gulak always gets straight to the point. Drew thinks the Zo Train is like the Justice League with Enzo acting as their Superman. As a bonus though, Drew has a POWERPOINT PRESENTATION! I never would have believed it but he's got something with that bit. As usual, entrance music cuts him off and we're ready to go.

Drew gets annoyed at the POWERPOINT chants, allowing Cedric to get the

better of a wristlock. It's off to Nese vs. Ali for some more wristlockery, which has been really common tonight. Nese gets armdragged into an armbar but Cedric goes over to yell at Gulak, meaning he's not there for a tag. The tag works a few seconds later but Cedric walks into one of the loudest chops I've ever heard.

Throw in a running elbow to the jaw and Alexander is in some quick trouble. Back in and Nese hits the ab crunch kicks to the ribs. Gulak grabs something like half an STF before switching to a regular chinlock. Cedric makes the expected escape and the hot tag brings in Ali for the comeback. The rolling X Factor gets two and a Doomsday Device with a high crossbody instead of a clothesline is good for the same. Face miscommunication sends Cedric outside though and Nese gets a rollup for the pin at 9:31.

Rating: C-. This was a lifeless match and it was clearly just there to help set up Monday's match. That's not the most thrilling thing in the world and the time didn't make things any better. Gulak is getting more entertaining now that he's found his personality niche but the story still isn't much.

Overall Rating: D+. As usual, the wrestling is passable for the most part but the storytelling is just dreadful for the most part. Everything is setting up the title shot against Enzo but why should I believe that would be anything more than Enzo cheating to retain the title all over again? At least there's something else now in the form of Kalisto vs. Gallagher, which is a necessary update.

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Monday Night Raw – June 30, 2003: And It's Bad, Bad Bad

Monday Night Raw

Date: June 30, 2003

Location: HSBC Arena, Buffalo, New York

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We're closing out the first half of the year with the big story of Kane losing his mask. After the better part of six years with no one knowing what he looked like, Kane lost his mask last week in a match given one whole week of build up. You know, on the show that has needed back to back Kevin Nash pay per view main events. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of the end of last week's show, including Kane laying out Rob Van Dam with a chokeslam.

Opening sequence.

Chris Jericho is in the ring for the Highlight Reel. While everyone has been talking about Kane, let's have a beauty instead of a beast. Therefore, his guest tonight is Stacy Keibler, who comes out with Scott Steiner, much to Jericho's chagrin. Before we get going, Steiner removes her garter. Jericho asks Steiner to leave and I'll let you figure out how that goes.

We move on to Stacy's photo shoot for Stuff Magazine and Lawler rather likes the pictures. Jericho hits on Stacy and calls himself legendary. Stacy makes references to Jericho being, ahem, legendarily small. That's enough for Jericho to bring out Test as his second guest so the beatdown can ensue. Eric Bischoff comes out to call it off and say that he's in

charge tonight because Steve Austin isn't here. As for the people in the ring, it's Steiner/Stacy vs. Test/Jericho.

Here's Lance Storm to say that he is NOT boring, and he has the dictionary definition to prove it. This doesn't go far as some music cuts him off.

Goldberg vs. Lance Storm

And no match as Rodney Mack jumps Goldberg from behind. Not that it matters as a spear cuts Mack in half and the Jackhammer (Jackknife as JR says) has Teddy Long hopping mad.

Bischoff is in the back with Kane, who has a towel over his head. Eric wants Kane to address the people in the name of ratings. Kane shakes his head no so Bischoff offers him a World Title shot tonight. That's still no so Bischoff gives RVD the title shot instead. If Kane doesn't go out into the arena though, he's fired.

Women's Title: Battle Royal

Trish Stratus, Victoria, Jazz, Ivory, Molly Holly, Jacqueline, Gail Kim

Jazz is defending and this is Gail's debut. It's a brawl to start with Gail hitting a decent looking hurricanrana on Molly. Ivory is catapulted out, making the last few weeks of her defeating Jazz over and over pretty much a waste of time. Jazz gets hurt somewhere in there and is taken out by the trainers (she would be out until December with a shoulder injury, which may be why it's this instead of a regular match).

Molly and Jacqueline are out too and we're down to Gail, Trish and Victoria in less than two minutes. The Stratusphere is broken up and Trish is knocked out, leaving Gail to armdrag Victoria. A powerbomb attempt is countered into a hurricanrana to put Victoria out and make Gail champion.

Rating: D-. I'm guessing that was due to Jazz's shoulder injury and if so, that's fine. Gail winning the title was a nice little surprise, though it's not like it matters much anyway. The division isn't going to get better without something resembling a story and this isn't exactly

thrilling. Somehow this is the only title Gail would win in WWE. You would have expected her to win another just by the amount of time she was around but somehow it never happened.

Intercontinental Title: Booker T. vs. Christian

Christian is defending and jumps Booker in the aisle before the bell. They head into the crowd with Booker beating Christian around as referees can't break it up. We're joined in progress after a break with Booker slugging away and getting two off a backdrop. Christian snaps the back of Booker's neck across the ropes though and we hit the chinlock.

The second version keeps Booker down again as JR and King talk about how Test can do ANYTHING he wants to Stacy tonight because it's a wrestling match. You know, because there are no rules to a wrestling match at all. Back up and Booker misses the side kick into the ropes, setting up a backbreaker for two. Christian dives into a side kick though and both guys are down with Christian's stunned face being a nice bonus. Another kick to the face gets two but the Book End is broken up.

The ax kick is countered into a rollup with trunks for two but Booker plants him with a flapjack. But first, a Spinarooni. Booker gets crotched on top so Christian superplexes him down, right into the small package to give Booker the pin and the title. I'm not even going to bother going to the rating as Bischoff comes out to say all four shoulders were down. Therefore it's a draw and Christian retains the title.

Rating: C. This is another good example of a feud where they don't know how to just get it over with already and it's making for a bad story. Booker vs. Christian is fine for a once off but this is several weeks now with nothing being all that great in the first place. Get to something else already or just give Booker the title.

RVD goes to try and talk some sanity into Kane but Kane says he hates the fans. Rob hopes Kane doesn't hate him when he wins the title. He leaves, and Kane says he does hate him.

Stacy Keibler/Scott Steiner vs. Chris Jericho/Test

Steiner and Jericho get things going (you want to save the Test vs. Steiner money match for later) with Chris being shoved down like he's nothing. A belly to belly powerslam plants Jericho and Steiner starts in with the swearing. It's off to Test, who JR thinks has no testicular fortitude. A suplex tosses Test but he's right back with a clothesline to put Steiner on the floor.

The slow double teaming begins until Jericho misses a charge and crotches himself on the ropes. There's no one for Steiner to tag though so Test decks him again and stops for some jumping jacks. Test crotches himself though and Stacy bounces the ropes up and down for some bad measure. Jericho comes in and shoves the referee down...but here's Bischoff to say restart it as a No DQ match. A chair to the head puts Steiner down and Test forces Stacy to tag Steiner. That means a pumphandle powerslam to give Test the easy pin a few seconds later.

Rating: F. Do you get the idea yet? I didn't know if the last few weeks had explained the concept so far but WWE seems rather fine with hammering it into your head over and over. JR is getting insufferable with his SOMEONE HELP THE HELPLESS WOMAN stuff too and I continue to question why what could be a good story is being wasted on Test and Scott Steiner. This just kept going and it never approached entertaining.

Rico vs. Maven

Rico grabs a quick pinch of the trunks to start and Lawler wants to know if Maven liked it. A cartwheel earns a nose rub from Miss Jackie but Rico needs to stop and pull his room key out of his tights. With Rico taking forever to bend over and get the key, Maven tries a sunset flip, earning himself a sit on the face. Rico kisses his way out of a headlock as the beating you over the head motif continues.

In case that's not enough, we stop for some dancing with the referee. Maven finally blocks a middle rope ax handle and hits some clotheslines as JR tries to say the fans are stunned into silence. The middle rope bulldog gets two with Jackie putting the boot on the ropes. That and a shove off the top sets up the spinning kick to end Maven.

Rating: F-. Let me guess: Vince found this hilarious and the shots of

Jackie split pants were enough to validate the character. This was HORRIBLE with every low level gay joke you can imagine in one match. It comes off as a case of "well, he did something similar once so let's turn it way up this time". It's a total waste of Rico and that's quite the shame.

Randy Orton vs. Tommy Dreamer

This is fallout from Orton beating up Mick Foley last week. Dreamer wastes no time in taking him to the floor for a fight, only to have Orton whip him into the steps. Back in and Orton gets two off a hard whip into the corner. Well he's no Whipper Billy Watson. The always great dropkick gets two more but Dreamer grabs a Sky High of all things for the same. There's the DDT but Flair puts the foot underneath the ropes. The tease of Flair vs. Dreamer (which sounds oddly fascinating) is enough for the RKO (I believe debuting the name) and the pin on Tommy.

Rating: D. They're clearly trying to do something with Orton and that's the right idea. He's everything you could want out of a prospect and the good finisher makes things even better. It's easy to see why he became the star he would become but he's still needing the big win to get him over the hill.

Bischoff tells Van Dam that if Kane doesn't come out, it's on Rob's head.

Post break, Bischoff sends Terri to get Kane's thoughts. She doesn't want to so Bischoff threatens another firing.

La Resistance vs. Hurricane/Spike Dudley

Non-title. Is Spike really an upgrade over fat Sgt. Slaughter? Hurricane starts with Dupree and let's hit that French dance! Some armdrags have Rene in trouble and Hurricane does a little dance of his own. It's off to Spike and we hit that BORING chant. A backdrop over the top to the floor calms them down but only gets two with JR being impressed by the kickout. Spike gets in a bulldog and the hot tag brings in Hurricane to no reaction. Everything breaks down and Spike hits a top rope double stomp for two. Grenier breaks up the chokeslam though and it's the double spinebuster to end Spike.

Rating: D-. Can you blame the fans for not caring? The French guys aren't exactly thrilling in the first place and it's pretty hard to care if you see Spike Dudley coming out for a match like this. It wasn't even any good as they had all of four minutes out there, which was hardly worth the time. You know, aside from filling out the show of course.

Terri can't find Kane.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Rob Van Dam

HHH is defending and decks Van Dam before the bell. Some more right hands have Rob in trouble early on as HHH seems to be feeling the slow pace tonight. A monkey flip and some kicks to the head have JR way too excited. Really man we're not even five minutes into this. Calm down already. Rob gets two off a dropkick and it's time to head outside. There's a baseball slide followed by a middle rope moonsault to put both guys down. Cue Flair as we take a break.

Back with Rob stomping away and kicking him in the head for good measure. A chop block lets HHH start in on the knee though with Flair wrapping it around the post for good measure. We hit the standard package of knee work, including HHH bringing back the Indian deathlock. You know, for reasons. Rob grabs the rope so we'll try the Figure Four instead as HHH flashes all the way to 1984.

The hold is turned over and there's just no reaction from the fans. Rob fights up with more kicks and a springboard crossbody gets two. A spinning kick hits HHH's hands for two and there's the split legged moonsault but Flair breaks it up again. The Five Star connects but this time Flair comes in with a belt shot for....not the ending as Bischoff comes out AGAIN and restarts it as a No DQ match.

A quick Van Daminator on the floor has HHH down and Bischoff makes it hardcore for fun. Rob's standing moonsault on the floor gets two until Orton comes in for the save (with the referee looking for him after every count). Van Dam chases HHH to the stage and gets two off Rolling Thunder. Flair comes back though and it's a belt shot into a DDT on the stage to retain the title.

Rating: D. You know, for someone who prides himself on being a student of the game and all that jazz, HHH really doesn't know much more than one way to get through a match. This was your usual twenty minutes of interference and HHH doing boring leg work that doesn't get anyone's attention until the obvious finish. At least they didn't go with what I would have thought was the obvious Kane interference ending.

Post match Kane comes out, teases going after Van Dam, and chokeslams Bischoff off the stage to end the show.

Overall Rating: D-. This was a rough one as Austin really does do some positive things for the show. The biggest issue here is the middle section with the lame mixed tag and the really, really bad Rico match. That stuff isn't funny and isn't going to get anyone over so we're stuck with seeing it over and over again. It's not the worst show in the world as it was mainly a wrestling edition instead of a long talking segment but the bad stuff was absolutely awful.

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Smackdown – November 28, 2017: Welcome To My House

Smackdown

Date: November 28, 2017

Location: Rupp Arena, Lexington, Kentucky

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

We're still in the fallout period from Survivor Series and that means it's still Shane McMahon vs. Kevin Owens/Sami Zayn. However, the big question continues to be Daniel Bryan, who seems to be leaning a bit more towards the villains, which could make for quite the power struggle down the line. Let's get to it.

Of note: I was in the arena for this show, meaning it's the second time I've seen it.

We open with a recap of Owens and Zayn vs. Shane, with Bryan holding Shane up from firing them. Instead, he put the two of them in a lumberjack match against New Day, which Sami won off a quick rollup. As a result, Bryan made Owens vs. Randy Orton for tonight. For some reason Shane left the arena halfway through the show, leaving Bryan in charge for the night.

Here's Shane to get things going. After sucking up to the Lexington fans (works for me), Shane recaps everything we just saw in the recap. Therefore, he'd like an explanation straight from the horse's mouth. As Bryan makes his entrance, I try to figure out why he didn't just say the goat's mouth.

The fans go bananas for Bryan, who talks about having been fired a few times. Therefore, he believes in second chances, including some for Owens and Zayn. Shane actually agrees with him, but recaps all the issues that Owens and Zayn who have caused him over the last few months. Bryan thinks they were doing it in the name of competition but points out that if they're fired, they'll just wind up on Raw. Shane: "Great. Then they'll be my sister's problem."

That's not cool with Bryan, who thinks they should make the best of it here on Smackdown. Shane left him in charge last week so Shane has to trust Bryan when he's left in charge. As for tonight though, Shane is going to adjust the Orton vs. Owens match. Therefore, we'll have Sami Zayn barred from ringside and we'll make it No DQ.

Post break, Owens and Zayn run into Bryan and ask for some mercy. That turns into a demand, which doesn't sit well with the boss.

New Day vs. Shelton Benjamin/Chad Gable

The Usos are on commentary and New Day brings out pancakes for everyone. Eh Wrestling Revolver already did it. Xavier and Chad start things off as the fans are firmly behind New Day. Kofi comes in for a running kick to the ribs and something like a bottom rope Vader Bomb for two. It's off to Shelton as we take a quick break.

Back with Woods hitting a jawbreaker but not being able to get away from Benjamin. A belly to back suplex/top rope knee to the head combo (that's a new one) gets two on Woods. Chad can't quite hit a belly to belly superplex though and it's a missile dropkick to put him down (like he was shot). The hot tag brings in Kofi as things speed up in a hurry. Kofi flips out of a monkey flip and there's the Boom Drop. Gable gets low bridged to the floor so Woods can hit a good looking flip dive. Back in and a backbreaker/top rope stomp to the face gives Woods the pin at 8:40.

Rating: B-. They had some good looking double team moves here (that knee to the head looked great) but it just makes me wish it was New Day vs. American Alpha instead. Like really, has there been much of a worse split in recent memory? Either way, it was an entertaining match, even if the Usos are REALLY needing some fresh competition. Maybe some Brothers of the Bludgeoning variety?

We look back at Ruby Riot/Sarah Logan/Liv Morgan debuting last week.

Charlotte, Naomi and Natalya are ready to face the newcomers in a six woman tag later. Charlotte and Naomi are together but Natalya thinks she'll be the boss. The only thing I could think of during this whole thing: NO ONE TALKS LIKE THIS. It was the most forced, scripted

conversation I've heard in WWE in a long time and it really shows how they're horrible actresses. Do you really not trust them to have a simple conversation?

Bludgeon Brothers vs. Hype Bros

The Brothers deck Rawley off the apron and a spinning Boss Man Slam plants Ryder. The double spinebuster ends Zack at 45 seconds.

Post match Ryder says they were top contenders for the Tag Team Titles a year ago. Now things have changed though and...Rawley decks him from behind to end the team.

Post break, Mojo says Ryder was right: the landscape has changed.

We look back at Baron Corbin decking Bobby Roode during the lumberjack match.

Roode wants a shot at Corbin's US Title but Corbin laughs him off with a no.

Singh Brothers vs. AJ Styles

Before the match, Jinder Mahal attacks AJ, sending him ribs first into the post. After a break (and Mahal doing his standard promo), the match is on with AJ getting double teamed. The Brothers get in some shoulders to the ribs in the corner but AJ kicks them away without much effort. AJ knocks the two off them off the top, kicks Mahal in the face, and blocks a super hurricanrana attempt. He's not done yet though as it's a SUPER STYLES CLASH with one Singh landing on the other for the easy pin at 3:56.

Rating: D. This wasn't much to see but it was exactly what it needed to be, especially with an awesome ending like that. Really, what else was AJ supposed to do against a couple of goons like this? Styles vs. Mahal isn't an interesting story but at least Mahal has goons to send out there instead of having us watch the same match over and over.

Post match Mahal lays out the Singh's, including a TERRIBLE looking Khallas to the second one. The guy's head and back never came close to

the mat as he basically bounced off his elbow (it looked even worse in slow motion). As I've said many times: Mahal just isn't very good and that finisher makes things even worse.

Riot, Morgan and Logan are officially dubbed the Riot Squad. They're not here to be Total Divas but rather to turn the division on its head. Logan says she's a country girl from a family of hunters. Last week they set a trap and tonight they're bagging some trophies. The country accent was absolutely dreadful and the fans around me were groaning after she was done.

Charlotte/Natalya/Naomi vs. Riott Squad

Yes Riott and no I don't know why. During Charlotte's entrance we see clips from Starrcade, WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN FREAKING BROADCAST ON THE NETWORK! Logan takes Natalya into the corner to start and scores with a clothesline. It's off to Charlotte but that's enough for Natalya, who walks out on the match less than a minute in. Back from a break with Charlotte fighting off the trio but getting caught by the numbers game on the floor. Morgan gets two off a floatover suplex and it's off to Ruby for a chinlock. That leaves the other two Squad members to take Naomi down on the floor.

They send her hard into the steps and then bridge them over the barricade, catapulting Naomi face first into the steel. The best the referee can do is glare at them, making me wonder HOW IN THE WORLD THIS ISN'T A DQ. Seriously do they need to break out a pair of nunchuks and beat the stuffing out of Naomi before the match is called off? So it's now three on one with Charlotte actually managing to fight them off for a bit. A spear hits Morgan in those impressive abs but Logan hits a knee from the apron, setting up the Riot Kick to the face for the pin at 9:12.

Rating: D+. The beatdown was impressive enough though none of them seemed capable of hanging with Charlotte or Naomi on their own. That already puts them a few steps back of Absolution (I can feel my brain melting as I write these names over and over) but at least they're looking a bit more polished than people like Mandy Rose. Not a great match or anything but the divide and conquer strategy worked just fine.

Randy Orton has nothing to say. What is up with that growing hair?

It's Fashion Files time, featuring a Saw theme this week. Breezango and Ascension wake up chained in a shower when a video pops up on a tablet. A Jigsaw style voice says that to escape this room, they must destroy what they love most. They have a minute before a poisonous gas fills the room and a countdown begins.

There's a backpack in the middle of the room containing Tully the Horse's head. Konnor finally rips it apart to find the key, allowing Breezango to escape in time. Fandango comes running back...to get his hat, leaving Ascension to die I guess as the gas fills the room. Wouldn't Breezango leaving the door open help them a bit? To be continued of course.

Kevin Owens vs. Randy Orton

No DQ with Sami Zayn banned from ringside. The threat of an RKO sends Owens bailing outside in the first few seconds but Orton is right on his trails. Randy starts loading up the announcers' table but stops to send Owens into the barricade instead. A kendo stick to the arm has Owens swearing and a second shot makes him swear all over again. The slow beating continues with Owens being belly to back suplexed onto the barricade.

The fans want tables but settle for Owens posting Orton instead. A fall away slam into the barricade takes us to a break with Orton in big trouble. Back with Owens still swinging the cane and getting two off the backplash. More stick shots continue to show that weapons based fighting is becoming a lost art in WWE. A DDT gives Owens two but Orton is right back up and catching him with a top rope superplex. It's a great crash but only good for two.

They head outside again with Owens getting dropped onto the barricade again. The brawl heads up to the stage...meaning Sami Zayn can come out with a chair to take Orton out. See, it's not at ringside so the one illegal thing is now legal. That's stretching pretty hard people. Back in and Owens gets caught in the hanging DDT, only to escape the RKO. A superkick into a frog splash puts Orton away at 16:47.

Rating: C+. Rather than being a match where it felt like they were out for blood, it felt more like how many times can we hit each other with a kendo stick and throw each other into the barricade. The Sami interference didn't do anything for me, though I was betting on them heading to the back and having him interfere there. It's still good but I could have gone for something different to mix things up a bit.

Overall Rating: B-. Smackdown is in a weird place at the moment as they have some big stuff coming up, though I have absolutely no idea what in the world they're planning for Owens and Zayn at Clash of Champions. I mean, are we heading for Orton/someone likely named Shane McMahon facing the two of them? Or are they going to do the common thing and have them win the Tag Team Titles? In theory Bryan is going to turn and join them, even if it makes no sense to get people to boo him.

There are actually some interesting stories going on around here for a change but I have a bad feeling it's going to end with Shane wrestling again, getting most of the attention, and giving someone a rub that he doesn't have to give. Tonight's show was entertaining at times though and has me wanting to know what comes next. However, it also has me wondering how long they can pretend that Shane is the good guy in this whole thing.

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Main Event – November 24, 2017: A Thankful Change

Main Event

Date: November 23, 2017

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

Now aren't you all thankful for this? We're still in Houston because that's where we have to be for every show for the better part of a week. This was a bit delayed due to the holidays and I was really missing it. Where else am I going to get Curt Hawkins losing another match and a cruiserweight match? Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Brian Kendrick vs. Gran Metalik

Kendrick grabs a headlock to start but gets taken outside with a springboard armdrag. Of course that means a suicide dive, followed by a springboard splash for two. Another dive misses though and Kendrick sends him ribs first into the apron to take over. We hit the chinlock for a few seconds before Metalik rolls him up for two more. A rope walk elbow drop gets the same and the Captain's Hook is reversed into the Metalik Driver for the pin at 5:42.

Rating: C-. Completely paint by numbers cruiserweight match here, meaning it wasn't all that bad. That being said, I do get a chuckle out of the almost certainty that the faces will always win these matches. Kendrick is miles ahead of Metalik most of the time but you put him on Main Event and he loses clean. It's kind of amazing really.

Stills of Sunday's main event.

From Raw.

Here's a happy, dancing Stephanie to open things up. Graves: "At least she's humble too." She recaps the siege and says Kurt Angle's job as GM is secure. With that, she brings out the man who lead the team to their win last night: HHH! Before HHH can say anything though, here's a livid Kurt Angle to interrupt. He's not talking as the General Manager but the man who can beat HHH up. Stephanie gets all serious and reminds HHH that he's talking to the COO.

The staredown continues and here's Jason Jordan to interrupt as well. Booker: "Oh come on." Jordan gets in HHH's face but Angle holds him back. Jason wants to face HHH tonight but Stephanie warns Jordan that he'd get killed in a match like this. Stephanie: "HHH isn't afraid of anyone in that locker room." This of course brings out Braun Strowman to get right in HHH's face as well. HHH stares him down but backs off and leaves. Stephanie makes Jordan vs. Strowman for later. She didn't cut Braun's balls off here and at least they kept this relatively short, even if Stephanie didn't need to be out there.

From later in the show.

Jason Jordan vs. Braun Strowman

Jordan tries to go with the wrestling stuff to start but gets caught without too much effort. He manages to lift Strowman off his feet but Strowman takes him down and tosses him outside. Jordan's knee is banged up again...and here's Kane to go after Strowman for the DQ at 1:44.

Kane destroys him with a chair and crushed Strowman's throat with it. Strowman can't breathe but walks off under his own power.

From Raw again.

Alicia Fox vs. Bayley vs. Sasha Banks vs. Mickie James

One fall to a finish and the winner gets a title shot at some point. Joined in progress with Fox running Bayley over but getting caught in the Bank Statement. Bayley makes the save...and PAIGE IS BACK. She says she's not here to interrupt (Then what was she doing???) but she's not alone. Cue Sonya DeVille and Mandy Rose from NXT to interrupt and jump Bayley,

drawing the no contest at around six minutes. There was barely two minutes of action though so no rating, but this was a heck of a debut and a MUCH needed face lift for the division.

The villains clean house with ease as Fox bails.

Post break Paige introduces us to her new friends. Alexa Bliss comes up, says a nervous hello, and gets destroyed.

And from Smackdown.

Naomi is getting her makeup done when NXT's Ruby Riot comes up. She's with Liv Morgan and Sarah Logan, all of whom beat the heck out of Naomi. Becky Lynch comes in for the save and gets beaten down as well.

From later on Smackdown.

Women's Title: Charlotte vs. Natalya

Charlotte is defending after having won last week. Natalya jumps at her to start but gets elbowed in the jaw. That earns her a face first toss into the middle buckle and we take a break. Back with Natalya getting two off a Batista Bomb and grabbing the Sharpshooter. Charlotte makes the rope for the break but Natalya is right back on her with right hands. A whip into the corner lets Charlotte try the moonsault, only to land on the knees. The spear connects but here are Logan, Riot and Morgan to jump Natalya for the DQ at 6:43.

Rating: C+. They were rolling until the interference here with Natalya showing more fire than she has in a long time. Charlotte looked like she was in a fight and that's not something you see from her too often. I can go for the trio interfering, though I would have liked to see Charlotte get the win first.

Charlotte gets beaten down as well as the trio poses.

Apollo Crews vs. Curt Hawkins

Hawkins bails to the ropes to start, only to come back in and eat a dropkick. Another dropkick actually sends Crews outside and it's off to a

chinlock back inside. Even Nigel is saying that's not going to be enough to make this work. Instead Hawkins stomps away in the corner, followed by a Downward Spiral for two. Not that it matters as the enziguri and a Toss Powerbomb extend Hawkins' losing streak at 3:45.

Rating: D. This is one of those standard things you just know you're getting on this show, which really isn't the most thrilling thing in the world. I'm not sure if they're going anywhere with Hawkins' losing streak but it wouldn't surprise me to see him win a big match at some point on a complete fluke. I mean, it wouldn't do anyone any good but why let that stop you?

From Smackdown again.

Here's Styles for a chat, but first we see a post-match video from Paul Heyman, saying Styles is the best in-ring performer he's ever seen. AJ wishes he could celebrate with all the fans but it didn't go as well as he thought it would. He'd love to face Lesnar again though because in the sequel, Rocky wins.

That brings him to Jinder Mahal, who says he's taking the title back tonight. AJ takes off the jacket and the belt, saying come get it. Mahal pops up on screen to say it's his time instead of AJ's. If Mahal had faces Brock, he would be hailed as the Beastmaster. AJ says bring it on because Mahal should be well rested after not doing anything on Sunday. Mahal will take his rematch at Clash of Champions. Cue the Singh Brothers from behind to jump AJ, who cleans house without any trouble.

And from Raw one more time.

Intercontinental Title: Roman Reigns vs. The Miz

Miz is defending and seems willing to take an early countout. That's not cool with Reigns, who chases him to the floor and hits an uppercut to the jaw. A Batista Bomb gets two on the champ and we take an early break. Back with Reigns hitting his running clothesline, followed by a big boot to the jaw. Miz is smart enough to bail again and catches Reigns diving off the steps.

A DDT on the floor is nearly good enough for a countout but Reigns dives back in. We hit the chinlock for a good while until Miz hits a corner dropkick. Another is countered with a big boot, only to have Miz knock him down a few more times. It's off to the YES Kicks until Reigns fights up without much effort. The Superman Punch is countered into the Skull Crushing Finale but Reigns slips out.

Miz sweeps the leg for two though and Reigns is favoring his knee. The Superman Punch knocks Miz out of the air for a VERY close two though as the fans are impressed with the kickout. The spear is loaded up but cue the Bar for a distraction, allowing the Skull Crushing Finale to connect...for two. Ambrose and Rollins run out to even things up, allowing Reigns to hit a spear for the pin and the title at 16:26.

Rating: B-. They were doing some good stuff out there and I like Reigns winning the title. Earlier on I mentioned people like Balor and Joe having nothing to do because they were bigger than the Intercontinental Title. They're not bigger than Reigns though and that gives them a bigger target to go after. Good move here, even if it's two to three years after Reigns should have won the thing in the first place.

Overall Rating: C-. Well that was certainly a packed show. I can go for this idea of putting both Raw and Smackdown clips into the same hour as it's not like there's a Raw monopoly on clips. There's important stuff happening on Smackdown and there's no reason to leave them out on a nothing recap show. I like this as the new direction and while the show wasn't thrilling, it makes more sense now.

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Monday Night Raw – November 27, 2017: The Monster Among The Mayor

Monday Night Raw

Date: November 27, 2017

Location: Thompson-Boling Arena, Knoxville, Tennessee

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Booker T.

We're finally out of Houston and on the road to the Royal Rumble. The big story coming out of last week is Roman Reigns winning the Intercontinental Title for the first time and issuing an open challenge after the show went off the air. Other than that we have the continuing issues with Kurt Angle, HHH and Stephanie McMahon as we flash back about seventeen years. Let's get to it.

The opening recap looks at Kane vs. Braun Strowman, including Kane injuring Strowman's throat last week.

Here's Reigns to open things up. Last week was a big week for him as he and the Shield beat up New Day. Then he had an opportunity and we see a clip of him winning the Intercontinental Title. After the show was over, Shield came back out and put Miz through a table. This is his yard and this is the title so if you want it, come get it. Cue the Miztourage to say they know someone who wants the title. This brings out Elias of all people to say he wants the title. Reigns thinks it sounds like Elias wants to walk with the big dog, but after tonight he might have a neck brace like Curtis Axel.

Seth Rollins vs. Cesaro

Dean Ambrose is on his honeymoon so Rollins is on his own. It's not like he has a buddy who happens to be Intercontinental Champion around or anything. Cesaro works on a wristlock to start but gets stomped down into the corner without much effort. Seth gets sent outside though and we take a break.

Back with Cesaro working on the ribs by dropping some knees for two. Seth's high crossbody is countered into a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker and we hit a waistlock. Rollins tries an abdominal stretch of his own but gets hiptossed down without much effort. The Blockbuster works a bit better and Cesaro falls outside for a suicide dive.

Back from a second break with Rollins getting two off a Falcon Arrow. A poke to the eye sets up a small package for two on Seth and it's off to the Sharpshooter. Rollins makes the rope though and gets two of his own off the low superkick. The wind-up knee is enough to end Cesaro at 18:23.

Rating: B. Nice long match here with Rollins getting a win to hopefully set up a title match next week. That being said, I have no idea how they're supposed to keep doing these one on one matches. There really should be a better way to set up a title match than having the singles wrestlers fight over and over again, but that might mean building up more teams.

Post match Seth says the Shield isn't going their separate ways because it's time to invoke the rematch for the Tag Team Titles.

We look at the end of last week's 205 Live with the Zo Train losing but beating down the good guys anyway.

Kurt Angle is with the four good cruiserweights and says it's time to determine who gets the shot. Tonight there's going to be a four way and next week there's going to be another one. The winners of those matches will face off for the next title shot.

Titus O'Neil vs. Samoa Joe

Titus charge at him in the corner but gets headbutted away without much effort. An early Koquina Clutch is broken up and it turns into a chop

off. A kick to the shoulder gives Titus two but a right hand takes him down. The Clutch makes Titus tap at 2:30.

Apollo Crews tries to go after Joe and gets choked out too. I have no idea why this is what Samoa Joe is stuck doing.

We recap Paige and company invading last week.

Paige/Mandy Rose/Sonya DeVille vs. Bayley/Sasha Banks/Mickie James

Alexa Bliss is on commentary.....and there's no Mickie or Bayley. Paige and company come out and laugh off the idea of Sasha having no partners. We cut to the back where Mickie is holding her shin and Bayley is holding her neck. Paige laughs this off and says she's tired of hearing about her interfering last week. Last year, she was THE woman in WWE and helped erase the word Diva from WWE (we could have a tournament for everyone who takes credit for anything like this).

Now she and her friends, named Absolution (sounds like a bad perfume) are here to take things back. Rose and DeVille talk about how everyone has tried to be the next big thing but they remember how Paige started all of this. Paige offers Sasha a spot on the team but she forearm's Paige off the apron. The beatdown is on in a hurry with everyone hitting a finisher. No match of course.

Bray Wyatt is here. Post break he's in the ring for a chat. Bray talks about never having a childhood. He never got to do all the usual things that children do. Your entire world exists inside the confines of a cardboard box. They tell you what to do and who to love. It's pathetic really, just like everyone here. Their suffering brings him joy and he can see them for who they truly are. Bray says we're all dead and starts cackling.

Bray Wyatt vs. Matt Hardy

Joined in progress with Bray running Matt over without much effort. The backslash gets two but Matt drops him without too much effort. The middle rope elbow doesn't work so Matt settles for the Side Effect for two. Matt's moonsault misses and Bray spider walks up, followed by Sister

Abigail to give Bray the pin at 3:30.

Rating: D+. Nothing to see here, though that's usually the case with Matt's matches anymore. They're not very interesting and the big story with him tends to be when is Jeff getting back. I'd love it if this losing streak started moving him towards the Broken Matt character, as I can't imagine WWE not getting their hands on it eventually.

Post match Matt sits in the corner and starts screaming while doing the DELETE motion. Cole: "Are we witnessing the beginning of a Matt Hardy...breakdown?"

We look at Strowman getting hurt last week.

Jason Jordan wants to face Strowman again this week but since Braun is hurt, he'll face Kane instead.

Rich Swann vs. Akira Tozawa vs. Ariya Daivari vs. Noam Dar

One fall to a finish and winner goes on to a one on one #1 contenders match in two weeks. It's a brawl to start with Tozawa fighting off a double teaming but Swann flips over him. They trade some rollups for two each until the villains take him outside. Swann hits a big flip dive onto all of them with his knee hitting Tozawa square in the face. He seems ok though as Swann heads back inside for Rolling Thunder, only to be caught by Daivari's spinebuster.

Tozawa comes back in and is double whipped into the corner. A double suplex drops Swann on the floor and we take a break. Back with Swann still on the floor as Tozawa hits the standing backplash on Daivari. The top rope version is broken up but Swann comes back in for the Tower of Doom. Dar breaks up the Phoenix splash but Tozawa takes him out with a dive.

Daivari's frog splash gets two on Swann, only to have Tozawa catch him with a Shining Wizard. The top rope backplash crushes Daivari with Dar sending Tozawa into the post. Dar's running kick to the head drops Tozawa so Swann pulls Tozawa outside. A regular kick to the head sets up the Phoenix splash to give Swann the pin and the spot in the #1 contenders

match at 12:37.

Rating: C+. This was longer than it needed to be but the right guy won. Nothing here felt like anything you couldn't see on a regular episode of 205 Live, which is a big part of the problem. Hopefully this sets up Swann vs. Cedric Alexander for the title shot with Cedric eventually getting the win, as he's long overdue for a run as champion.

Here's Elias for his Intercontinental Title shot but first, a song about how sad the Miztourage is to not have their leader around. Dallas and Axel join in on harmonica and do give quite a performance. Elias offers them some praise but the fans cut him off with a WE WANT ROMAN chant. That's cut off by a NO WE DON'T chant and we're FINALLY ready to go.

Intercontinental Title: Roman Reigns vs. Elias

Elias is challenging. They trade shoulders to start with Elias getting the better of it and slapping on a reverse chinlock. Elias gets two off a clothesline and we hit a regular chinlock. Back up and the Miztourage offers a distraction so Elias can get in a hard knee for a near fall.

We come back from a break with Elias getting kicked in the face, only to have Reigns stop and take out the Miztourage instead of following up. The distraction lets Elias take Reigns down and drop a top rope elbow for a rather near fall. A sitout powerbomb gets the same but Reigns is right back with a Superman Punch for two of his own. Back up and the spear retains the title at 14:48.

Rating: B-. While the ending wasn't exactly in doubt here, it was still a good, hard hitting match. They're certainly protecting Elias at the moment and I'm not sure what to make of that. It would be nice if they had him actually win something but with the Intercontinental Title now basically the show's World Title, he's kind of stuck. But at least it was a good match.

Post match Samoa Joe sneaks in and chokes Reigns out. No Rollins for the save either, mainly because this was a Reigns singles match and not a Shield match. That determines who comes out for a save you see.

Asuka vs. Dana Brooke

Brooke says she'll be all over Asuka at the bell. A cross armbreaker makes Dana tap at five seconds.

Post match Absolution comes out and surrounds the ring, only to let Asuka leave in peace.

Jason Jordan vs. Kane

Before the match, Jordan talks about how he's an athlete and knew his knee was banged up last week. Kane actually gets powered into the corner a few times to start but the suplex is broken up. A hard toss sends Jordan outside where he comes up holding the knee again. That's enough for a countout at 1:42.

Post match Kane stays on the knee until Finn Balor comes out for the save. They stare each other down and we take a break.

Finn Balor vs. Kane

Kane wastes no time in whipping Balor into the corner and we're into an early chinlock. Balor dropkicks him outside and hits a dive as the announcers talk about what a big deal a win over Kane would be. Kane hits him in the ribs with a chair for the DQ at 2:44.

Kane beats on him with the chair and wraps it around Balor's throat until Braun Strowman comes out for the save. A chair to the back has no effect on Strowman and the beatdown is on. Strowman destroys him with the steps and a chair, including a powerslam onto the steps. Kane gets his throat crushed on the chair and staggers into the crowd (probably looking for registered voters) to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. The good, long matches worked but I have no idea what that ending was supposed to be. So Jordan is trying to be all gutsy and get over his knee injury, Balor is dealing with Kane (and getting destroyed by him over and over) and Kane vs. Strowman is over who the real monster is. Ignoring the fact that Kane hasn't been viewed as much of a monster in at least ten years and WHY IS THIS THE TOP STORY OF THE SHOW??? Like, is this supposed to set up Kane vs. Strowman, after

Strowman has beaten Kane down multiple times now? That's their big draw?

Other than that, the show actually wasn't half bad with Asuka's win being a high point. Sometimes there's no need to have the match be anything other than a glorified joke and that's what we had there. Asuka is just better than Brooke and there was no need to watch it go for three minutes to prove such a thing. As mentioned, the wrestling was good but the booking of the last thirty minutes or so...not so much. Have Reigns vs. Elias and the Samoa Joe attack close the show and it's far, far better. Still good though.

Results

Seth Rollins b. Cesaro – Wind-up knee

Samoa Joe b. Titus O'Neil – Koquina Clutch

Bray Wyatt b. Matt Hardy – Sister Abigail

Rich Swann b. Ariya Daivari, Akira Tozawa and Noam Dar – Phoenix splash to Dar

Roman Reigns b. Elias – Spear

Asuka b. Dana Brooke – Cross armbreaker

Kane b. Jason Jordan via countout

Finn Balor b. Kane via DQ when Kane used a chair

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Smackdown – June 26, 2003: Old Guys Out

Smackdown

Date: June 26, 2003

Location: Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York

Commentators: Tazz, Michael Cole

We're back in the World's Most Famous Arena with the blue show, including a likely six man tag after the end of last week's show. Odds are we're looking at Brock Lesnar/Kurt Angle/Mr. America vs. Big Show/Shelton Benjamin/Charlie Haas, which offers some interesting combinations. Of course it also offers Mr. America wrestling and that might not be the best thing in the world. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's Zack Gowan/Sable/Vince McMahon/Stephanie McMahon issues, including Sable humiliating Gowan to Vince's amusement and Stephanie going on a rant about how her father treated her like garbage. In other words, it's still all about Vince and Stephanie.

Opening sequence.

Here's John Cena to brag about how awesome his rookie year has been. Eh it's been good, but when you're in the same class as Brock Lesnar, it's not much to brag about. However, none of it would have started without answering an open challenge. Let's have another open challenge right now.

John Cena vs. Orlando Jordan

Josh Matthews is ring announcer for some reason. Cena laughs this off and insults New York but Jordan takes him down to start fast. A belly to

belly suplex gives Jordan two but Cena plants him with a release spinebuster. The FU is countered with Jordan landing on his feet and coming back with a dropkick. Jordan goes up for a high crossbody but Cena rolls through and grabs the trunks for the pin.

Undertaker comes out and chases Cena off before giving Jordan the respect pat on the ribs. I'm not sure this one is going to work as well.

Undertaker/APA vs. FBI

And you know Undertaker needs help with this one. Palumbo headlocks Undertaker to start but it's already off to the arm cranking. A kick to the face just annoys Undertaker and there's Old School. The Italians take over in the corner with Nunzio dropkicking him in the face but easily allowing the hot tag off to Faarooq.

Palumbo gets in a cheap shot and it's Faarooq giving the FBI their false hope for a bit. We hit a reverse chinlock until Palumbo crotches himself on Faarooq's knee. The hot tag (minus the fans reacting) brings in Bradshaw to clean house. Everything breaks down and it's a chokeslam for Palumbo, followed by the Clothesline From Bradshaw for the pin on Stamboli.

Rating: D. I'm not even sure what to say here. Undertaker regularly beat up all three Italians and now we're supposed to be impressed or interested when two other big brawlers beat them up too? The match was a glorified squash with the minute or so of Faarooq being in trouble not exactly making this thrilling. Can we please find something else for Undertaker to do now?

Jamie Noble and Nidia annoy some fans on the streets of New York when an attorney comes up. Apparently Jamie's aunt died and left him \$827,000. I'll ignore the questions about how the attorney knew they were there or why he did such official business on the streets, or at least in a parking lot. Nidia tries to take the attorney's pants off but they decide to go to a fancy dinner at Applebee's instead.

Wrestlemania Recall: the first edition.

Sable tries to make up for last week to Vince but he turns her down. He has something to do tonight.

US Title Tournament First Round: Matt Hardy vs. Rikishi

No one with Matt, who has better abs than Rikishi, this week. Matt is also officially out of the cruiserweight division so the experiment is over. Rikishi shoves him over to start and Matt already has to bail from the threat of a Stink Face. A posting lets Matt crank on both of Rikishi's arms, which is about the extent of the offense.

Rikishi plants him with a belly to belly suplex and the Rikishi Driver knocks Matt silly. It doesn't knock him out for three though, which is a rather questionable knockout when Hardy's head bounced off the mat. The Rump Shaker hits raised knees though and the Twist of Fate gets two. Matt takes off a turnbuckle, avoids a charge into said buckle, and hits a second Twist for the pin.

Rating: D+. That Rikishi Driver looked great (as it did most of the time) but they really could have just ended it after the first Twist of Fate. The tournament isn't exactly setting the world on fire yet but it might get better with some brackets or at least a list of names in the thing. You know, assuming they know who is in the thing at the moment.

Billy Kidman, still out of action with an injury, is in the front row but wants to be back in the ring.

Tag Team Titles: Roddy Piper/Sean O'Haire vs. Eddie Guerrero/Tajiri

Eddie and Tajiri are defending as we need to wedge an MSG legend onto the card. O'Haire jumps Eddie at the bell but gets taken down for a quick slingshot hilo. It's off to Tajiri for the handspring elbow and a superkick for two. Piper has to break up a Tarantula and then comes in legally to a nice nostalgia reaction. After a few stomps and some slaps to Eddie, it's already back to O'Haire for a chinlock. A powerslam is countered with a reverse DDT and Tajiri brings Eddie back in. Everything breaks down and Piper gets misted, setting up the frog splash to retain the titles.

Rating: D. As usual, Eddie and Tajiri looked fine, albeit at the expense of someone who should be winning the US Title tournament. This push for O'Haire hasn't gotten him anywhere and, again, it's almost all about Piper. There's no benefit to the two of them being associated and O'Haire is floundering more and more by the day. Of course none of that matters as this was it for Piper in the company due to some comments he made in an interview with HBO. Really, it's not much of a loss for WWE as Piper was barely worth keeping around at this point, save for the occasional good line in Piper's Pit.

We see the end of last week's show, which set up tonight's six man tag.

Here's Vince to call out Stephanie and Gowan. Vince sucks up to Stephanie, calling her the apple of her father's eye. She grew up in a hurry and when she was seventeen, he did have her, ahem, close some business deals for him. Those actions stole her innocence and it was as if Vince personally deflowered her (I know it's never flat out stated, but it's pretty clear what he's talking about and that's rather disturbing). He'll never forgive himself and that brings him to Gowan.

See, Vince wants to be like Zack, because it's the one thing he can't be. Therefore he wants an apology from Gowan, who says no. Gowan goes into a good rant about how he wants to be a wrestler and Vince is spitting on his dreams. All Gowan wants is a contract and Vince calmly gives him one. Well, with one condition: he has to join Vince's special club. Vince takes his pants down but gets hit low instead. At least they kept it shorter here and stayed closer to the point, albeit with Vince losing his pants.

Ultimo Dragon vs. Shannon Moore

This is Dragon's debut and Rey Mysterio is on commentary. Dragon spins out of a headscissors and a wristlock to start before kicking Moore away without much effort. Shannon gets sent outside so Dragon moonsaults back into the middle of the ring. Back in and Moore gets two off an elbow to the jaw before grabbing a chinlock.

Dragon fights up and hits a sloppy inverted hurricanrana/release victory roll (started in an electric chair and rolled forward). Shannon is sent

outside again for an Asai moonsault and the New York fans are rather appreciative. A super jawbreaker sets up a standing backflip into a reverse DDT (basically a Salida Del Sol) to give Dragon the pin.

Rating: C-. This was way more competitive than it needed to be, especially with someone who has been hyped up as strongly as Dragon. I was never the biggest fan of his but he had a good finisher and a great looking moonsault, which is often all you need. If nothing else the division needs some fresh blood and a top challenger for Mysterio.

Rey and Dragon shake hands post match.

Kurt Angle/Brock Lesnar/Mr. America vs. Charlie Haas/Shelton Benjamin/Big Show

The USA chants start up (Tazz: "I don't get this. Everybody in the ring is an American.") until Angle and Haas start things off. The chants shift to Angle as he takes Charlie down for a far too early chinlock. Haas drags him into the corner though and it's a good looking double dropkick to put Angle down. A crossbody gets Angle out of trouble as the fans want Hogan.

They'll have to settle for Mr. America though for a clothesline, only to have Brock come in for some REAL clotheslines. Brock gorilla presses Haas as Tazz tries to get Manster over as a nickname. It's back to America for a belly to back suplex and we take a break. Back with Lesnar cleaning house again and staring Big Show (who hasn't done anything yet) down.

Benjamin breaks up an F5 on Haas and it's the leapfrog over Haas and onto Lesnar's back. Now Show will come in and Brock can't slam him. Lesnar can however belly to back suplex him because physics are weird in wrestling. The hot tag brings in Angle to clean house with the release German suplexes (that's very un-American of him). Show has to break up the ankle lock on Haas and it's double teaming time again.

That lasts all of five seconds as Kurt gets in another suplex and brings America back in. Some right hands have Show rocked and Lesnar and Angle pull him outside. An F5/Angle Slam take out Haas and Benjamin, only to have Show come back in for a double chokeslam. That leaves America to

take care of Show but here's Vince carrying Gowan. The distraction lets Show chokeslam America for the pin.

Rating: C+. Not bad here, mainly because they mostly focused on Haas/Benjamin vs. Angle/Lesnar. America and Big Show could have a passable five minute match but they're much better off saving them for short bursts like this. They still need to find someone else for Lesnar to face besides Big Show though as it's getting repetitive. The other stuff was good though and that's what matters most. I'm sure Mr. America will find something fresh to do soon enough.

Vince makes Gowan/Stephanie vs. Big Show for Gowan's contract next week.

Overall Rating: C-. The first forty minutes or so were pretty dreadful but it picked up strongly enough in the second half to make it watchable. They're getting to a point with the main story but the rest of the card is kind of all over the place. We still have no idea who is in the tournament and O'Haire/Piper are the best they have for challengers to the Tag Team Titles. It's certainly better than Raw though and while that's not much of a bar to clear, it's better than nothing.

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205 Live – November 21, 2017: Always Leave On A Dance

205 Live

Date: November 21, 2017

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Vic Joseph, Nigel McGuinness

It's one of the final shows from Houston as we hit the cruiserweight division. Enzo Amore is still Cruiserweight Champion and the question now is who comes next. Kalisto has been dispatched (again) and it's not clear who will be going after the title again. The show is being turned into a faction warfare and that could go multiple ways. Let's get to it.

The Zo Train (minus Drew Gulak) has a Thanksgiving dinner prepared in the back. Enzo (in a Randy Savage shirt) says he's now 5G and therefore they're all connected. He's gotten them all matches tonight but they better rep to Enzo brand like a barbell. If they do well, Christmas could come early in the form of a recommendation for a Cruiserweight Title shot. Enzo wants to know where Gulak is but here's the Gobbledy Gooker. Naturally that's Gulak, who says he's the Gobbledy Gulaker. Gulak: "You told me to loosen up!" Enzo is disappointed.

Opening sequence.

The announcers chat for a bit.

Drew Gulak vs. Akira Tozawa

Street fight. Gulak comes out in jeans, which is a really odd look for him. Drew isn't usually into this but if Enzo is from the streets, Drew needs to help clean them up. However, that might get his hands dirty so it's time for a very special POWERPOINT PRESENTATION! Or not as Tozawa cuts him off, sending Drew into a near fit. Gulak bails to the floor with his hands covering his ears as the chanting starts early this week.

Back in and Tozawa kicks him in the chest, setting up some screaming.

Tozawa kicks him outside again but the suicide dive is countered into a suplex onto the ramp. A clothesline messes with Tozawa's throat, meaning no more chanting. That's rather evil and something you wouldn't have expected from a show like this.

Some chairs are thrown in but Gulak would rather slap him in the face for two instead. Drew puts the No Chants sign in the corner but gets suplexed through the handle, which has to be rather painful to at least a few inches of skin. The fans want tables so Tozawa pulls one out, only to get suplexed into the corner as well.

The table is set up in the corner but have to settle for Tozawa throwing Drew over the announcers' table instead. A good looking flip dive off said table has Gulak in even more trouble and it's time for more weapons. Tozawa puts a trashcan over him and swings away with a kendo stick. The top rope backsplash through the table ends Gulak at 11:12.

Rating: B. They were getting close to that next level here but they never could flip the switch on. Tozawa is good for a hardcore brawler and it was cool to see Gulak move up to another level of violence every now and then. Good, hard hitting brawl here that needed a little more to become great.

Hideo Itami is coming to 205 Live. Well it's not like he's going to do much in NXT so get him up here while he's healthy.

Tony Nese doesn't think much of Itami but Amore seems nervous. If Nese doesn't get, better, he won't be on the Zo Train much longer. Rich Swann, Cedric Alexander and Mustafa Ali come in and trade some insults.

Tony Nese vs. Mustafa Ali

Hang on a second as Nese needs to show off the abs. That just earns him a wristlock though and even a slam won't break it up. Now that's some dedication. Nese goes with some stomping but gets sent outside for a heck of a flip dive from the top. Ali might not have the best charisma in the world but he can throw some pretty dives.

Back in and Nese grabs a chinlock to slow things down, only to miss a

charge into the corner. Ali switches things up a bit with a rolling X Factor instead of the rolling neckbreaker but he can't follow up. The 054 takes way too long though and Nese sends him HARD into the post. The running knee in the corner ends Ali at 7:05.

Rating: C. Just a quick match here with Nese giving the Zo Train what is likely its only win tonight. This feels like the kind of show designed to give the fans a lot of stuff to cheer for and Nese winning should keep it from being a clean sweep. It helps that Nese is a simple character who does his thing quite well. I mean, it's hard to argue with someone being in that kind of shape.

Daivari and Dar are ready to impress Enzo too. Enzo will be in the front row, but Gulak, back in the turkey suit, is stuck in time out.

Ariya Daivari/Noam Dar vs. Rich Swann/Cedric Alexander

Enzo is at ringside. Daivari and Cedric start things off with a rather long feeling out process until Cedric scores with a dropkick. Swann comes in for the Rolling Thunder as Enzo is talking to the fans. It's off to Dar, who gets caught with a good looking springboard clothesline. Cedric's ankle scissors is countered with a kick to the ribs though and it's time for some villainous control.

Both guys take turns kicking away as Enzo continues to talk trash from the floor. Alexander finally rolls away and makes the diving tag off to Swann for almost no reaction. Enzo breaks up the Phoenix splash though and Daivari's frog splash gets a rather close two. If back to Dar who gets kicked in the head but Cedric goes after Enzo, earning himself a baseball slide from Dar. Back in and Swann kicks Dar in the head again, setting up the Phoenix splash for the pin at 8:07.

Rating: C+. The energy was there, even if the fans weren't exactly thrilled. Swann and Alexander are a good tag team and every time they're out there, I can't help but wonder why they're not a midcard team on the main roster. It's not like the shows have anything better at the moment.

Post match Enzo comes in to beat on Swann until Tozawa and Ali come down. Cue Nese and Gulak to cut them off though and the big beatdown ensues.

Enzo hits a top rope splash onto both guys and it's a group dance to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This was a strong show by 205 Live's standards and I'm glad to see them having a little more energy. That being said, I'm rarely a fan of having one storyline completely dominate the show like this. If you're not a fan of the good guys vs. the Zo Train, there's no reason to watch the show. In theory this sets up Itami as the next star, but it wouldn't shock me to have him just be another name on Amore's list. If nothing else I'd love to see Cedric get the title at some point, as he's certainly earned it. Good show this week.

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Monday Night Raw – June 23, 2003: I Hope The Rating Was Worth It

Monday Night Raw

Date: June 23, 2003

Location: Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York

Attendance: 14,451

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We're in the World's Most Famous Arena for one of the weaker stretches in WWE history. However, there's a heck of a main event tonight as HHH defends the World Title against Kane in a champion vs. mask match. That's an area that we've touched on over the years with Kane but the idea of HHH actually losing the title doesn't seem likely anytime soon. Something's got to give so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Scott Steiner/Booker T. vs. Test/Christian

Two feuds in one is often a good way to go. Christian takes Booker into the corner for some right hands before the much taller Canadian gets to do the same. Test mocks Steiner's pushups and the delay allows Booker to hit the spinning kick to the face. The hot tag brings in Steiner to toss people around, including sending Christian out to the floor. Test grabs Stacy though, earning himself a slap. He shoves Steiner into her though and, since WWE Divas have the weakest ankles ever, Stacy twists her ankle. Booker and Christian take each other out, allowing Test to boot Steiner in the face for the pin.

Rating: D. This Test vs. Steiner feud is getting worse and worse every single week. Test beating up Mae Young last week helped him a little, though his complete lack of talking skills and charisma hold him back a lot. Booker and Christian were glorified window dressing here, which shouldn't be the case for the Intercontinental Title feud.

Kane looks around stoically as we look at his debut in 1997.

Teddy Long and Christopher Nowinski come out to talk about how unfairly Chris has been treated. He's been discriminated against due to his intelligence, which is the only reason he didn't win Tough Enough. It's thuggin and buggin time.

Maven vs. Christopher Nowinski

Maven reverses a suplex into a rollup and wins in thirty seconds with a

rollup.

Evolution arrived earlier.

It's time for the Highlight Reel with Chris Jericho ripping on the New York fans. He wants to talk about Steve Austin interrupting Lance Storm's match last week to call him boring. Storm is the guest tonight and he has a prepared statement. No one enjoys a good laugh more than he does but Austin crossed a line last week. His in-ring abilities should be more than enough to entertain people and if you want bells and whistles, go to the circus. Therefore, please stop chanting BORING.

At the end of the statement though, here are some movers to take away the set. Austin comes up on screen to say they're boring Madison Square Garden to death. Instead of reading prepared statements and Jericho annoying him in general, let's have a tag team match right now.

Chris Jericho/Lance Storm vs. Dudley Boyz

The Canadians jump them during the entrances until the Dudleys run Storm over and toss him outside. We settle down to Bubba hammering away until Jericho trips him from the floor. The running crotch attack to the back connects and a belly to back suplex makes it even worse. Storm's boring leg lariat sets up a chinlock before it's back to Jericho for a quickly broken Walls.

It's another chinlock and there go those chants again. Storm switches to a sleeper and Lawler can't help but make boring jokes. Bubba gets out with a suplex and makes the hot tag to D-Von. Everything breaks down with a neckbreaker to both Canadians. Jericho gets flapjacked and What's Up hits Storm but the table request takes too long. It's Storm coming back in with the springboard clothesline for two on D-Von, only to have the 3D put Storm away in short order.

Rating: B-. They were moving out there, but the boring stuff got annoying in a hurry. I kind of get what they're going for there but at the same time it's hardly the most logical move in the world to get someone over. Also, Storm is now a combination of boring and a loser. Maybe it's a long term project but my goodness it's taking a questionable road to get

there.

We look back at Evolution stealing Kane's mask five months ago.

Randy Orton and Ric Flair mock Mick Foley's Tietam Brown in the traditional not so subtle plug. Their goal for tonight is to have HHH retain the title.

Here are La Resistance to sing the French National Anthem. This rendition makes me long for the days of Nikolai Volkoff though as singing certainly isn't their strong point, which I think is kind of the point. However, it's about to get worse.

La Resistance vs. Sgt Slaughter/Hurricane

Non-title. Sarge is looking huge but the fans definitely respond to him. Hurricane dives off the top onto Grenier, leaving Slaughter to knock Dupree around. We hit the cobra clutch for a second until Dupree makes a rope. Grenier uses the distraction to get in a belt shot for the fast pin. Hurricane was never in the match.

We look at Austin trying to fire Kane up a few weeks ago. This is treated as one of Kane's memory (complete with the screen getting all wavy as it ends), meaning we now have a camera in his head. Somehow this isn't quite the surprise.

Here's Austin for an announcement: Wrestlemania XX is coming to Madison Square Garden. As for tonight though, he'd like to have Mick Foley come out here right now. He knows Foley is going out on a book tour and yes he'd like an autographed copy. Before he goes though, Austin has a little gift. After Foley steps away to avoid a Stunner, Austin brings out some people who used to wrestle in ECW with a framed Hardcore Title. He's not done though as we get a music video about Foley with quite the set of highlights. Foley: "I almost forgot how good I was!"

Before he can go anywhere else though, here's Vince McMahon to interrupt. Vince brings up Foley saying he would never be back here again yet here he is. That's not cool with Vince from a personal standpoint but from a professional standpoint, it's something else. Therefore, Vince has two

words for Foley: thank you.

Foley shakes his hand but wants a hug, much to Vince's annoyance. He used to mock wrestlers for crying during their great moments but that's the case right now. We get the required cheap pop and Al Snow joke, Foley talks about the Snuka vs. Muraco match where he knew what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. In the words of Dorothy Gale, there's no place like home, so he hopes he'll be welcome back in a WWE ring at some point again. One last thing: in the words of Frosty the Snowman (noted hardcore philosopher), "I'll say goodbye, but don't you cry. I'll be back again someday."

It's kind of random to have Foley show up less than a month ago and then have a big goodbye ceremony but this felt like a big way to make up for the way he left before. Foley deserves a big sendoff like this and I'm glad to see it be such a nice moment. At least he went out on good terms for once, which isn't always the case.

Shawn Michaels/Kevin Nash vs. Ric Flair/Randy Orton

Shawn chops away at Flair to start so it's off to Orton to trade right hands. Nash gets the side slam on Orton, followed by the framed elbows to Flair in the corner. With Evolution on the floor, Shawn hits a slingshot corkscrew dive to take them out and we go to a break after a rather pedestrian first part.

Back with Shawn getting stomped down by Orton and starting in on the arm. Flair comes in for an armbar of his own, which looks so out of place from him. Even more armbaring from Orton goes nowhere as I'm longing for more Slaughter to energize this tag match. A collision allows for the hot tag to Nash to clean a few rooms of the house.

Flair saves Orton from the Jackknife and it's a double clothesline to put Evolution down. That's enough from Nash so it's back to the winded Shawn as they've managed to bore New York City. Sweet Chin Music is blocked but Orton is sent outside. The top rope elbow hits Flair and Sweet Chin Music is good for the easy pin.

Rating: D-. What in the world was that supposed to be? No one in the

match looked interested in being there and it was eight minutes of lame arm work. Nash barely did anything and Orton was just there for the sake of being there. In other words, this might as well have been Shawn vs. Flair II, though I'm not sure how much good it was going to be. I have no idea what was wrong here as they're definitely capable of better.

Video of Kane agreeing to the match last week.

The fans think Kane will win the title 56% to 44%, which surprises JR.

Foley signed a book to Vince but Evolution comes in with Foley getting beaten down at Orton's hands. A bottle to the head cuts Foley off and Orton kicks him down the stairs. Vince sees him down and says he needs a janitor to get Foley up.

Here are Teddy Long and Rodney Mack for another FIVE MINUTE WHITE BOY CHALLENGE!

Goldberg vs. Rodney Mack

Knees to the ribs (no spear) and the Jackhammer end Mack faster than Maven beat Nowinski. Well that woke them up.

Rob Van Dam gives Kane a pep talk and Kane breaks a mirror he's been looking into all night.

We get a Wrestlemania Recall, which isn't from New York City. It is however of Stephanie, with HHH Pedigreeing her at XVIII.

Raw World Title: HHH vs. Kane

Kane is challenging and it's mask vs. title. They start fast with HHH being sent into the corner and getting caught in a choke. There's no slam quite yet though so Kane takes him outside and sends him into the steps instead. Flair gets in the ring for a distraction though and HHH scores with a chair to the head.

Back from a break with HHH scoring with a spinebuster before botching a DDT. Thankfully Kane sits straight up so HHH pulls him down by the hair (called a neckbreaker) for the same level of effectiveness. A powerslam

gives Kane two and the top rope clothesline connects...only to bump the ref. He's not bumped well enough though so Kane runs him over for good measure.

Flair tries to bring in the belt to no avail as Kane knocks HHH silly for two instead from a second referee. HHH's low blow into the Pedigree gets two and Kane sends HHH into Flair. The chokeslam is loaded up but Orton comes in with a low blow and the RKO. The second Pedigree retains the title.

Rating: D. So this was basically a pay per view main event match with HHH going with the exact same style he's used for about nine months now. I remember being stunned that they actually had Kane lose his mask but it's not like he had anything else going on at the moment. Of course this could have been something they actually took time to set up but why do that when you can rush it in a week? For MSG? Eh, fair enough, though there could have been a bigger moment for such a big deal.

Post match Eric Bischoff comes out to say Kane has to unmask right now. He reaches for the chin strap but HHH hits him from behind with the belt. Van Dam comes in to save Kane (WHERE WAS HE FIVE MINUTES AGO???) and it's a chokeslam to Orton, followed by the Five Star. Kane loads up the ring post pyro but stops and eventually unmask. Most of his hair comes off with it, revealing a heavily make-uped face that I guess was supposed to be his horrible burns. Kane chokeslams a stunned Van Dam to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. Other than the rather good match designed to make Lance Storm seem boring and the genuinely great Foley ceremony, there wasn't much on this show of value. Above all though, they came up with an angle where Kane gets unmasked and blew it off in the span of a week. I get the idea of popping a rating but what about popping a pay per view buy rate instead? Would Kane vs. HHH, mask vs. title, inside the Cell have been a worse idea than HHH vs. Nash? Anyway, this had a few good parts but they're bogged down by some rather bad thinking.

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Smackdown – November 21, 2017: Really Shane? Really? Shane?

Smackdown

Date: November 21, 2017

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton, Corey Graves

So the battle between brands is over and now it's time to find out where we go from here. In theory we go towards Clash of the Champions in just shy of a month, which could mean multiple things. AJ Styles is likely going to have to deal with Jinder Mahal again, though the title match won't be taking place tonight. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Sunday's main event.

Here's Shane McMahon to get things going. They were so close on Sunday and, despite what his sister wants to say, Smackdown proved that they're nothing but the best show. The Smackdown roster gives it their all every night and he's proud of them all. Save for two that is, meaning Kevin Owens and Sami Zayn.

Shane has them come out here and Owens immediately calls Shane drunk with power. Sami wants to know whether it's harder for Shane to keep coming up with excuses for his failures or just admitting that he's wrong. They would have beaten the Shield or even won a 5-2 handicap match or beaten Brock Lesnar. Shane says he's the Commissioner and the two of them have no respect for anyone. He teases firing them but Owens says that would be stupid as they're both future Hall of Famers.

Shane loads up the firing but gets cut off by Daniel Bryan. Sami starts getting fired up but Daniel tells him to be quiet. Everyone in the back hates Sami and Kevin's guts, to the point where Bryan had to send Randy Orton home before he tried to kill them. Tonight, the two of them will be facing New Day in a lumberjack match.

So to recap: yes, we are just supposed to go with the fact that Shane put himself in the match and assume that he really was the best option. I have no idea why we're supposed to go with that other than Shane is a former fan favorite but if you disagree with whatever he says, you're apparently a heel. Oh and Smackdown is totally equal to Raw, even though it lost on Sunday. Such is life in WWE.

Jey Uso vs. Shelton Benjamin

Shelton lets him out of the corner to start, only to climb the ropes for a knee to the face, knocking Jey outside. Back from an early break with Shelton working on a chinlock until Jey fights up with a Samoan drop. Gable offers a distraction so Shelton can get two off a rollup, only to have Jey score with a superkick for the same. The Superfly Splash misses though and it's Paydirt to give Shelton the pin at 7:07.

Rating: C-. You might as well just pencil in the Tag Team Title match at Clash of the Champions and that's fine. It's not like there are many other teams to challenge for the belts unless they hot shot the Bludgeon Brothers up to the title scene in a hurry. Not bad or anything but they need a little more time to get somewhere, especially with such a simple booking idea.

Sami and Kevin try to get help from Baron Corbin and Bobby Roode, both of whom shoot them down. Roode promises both of them a receipt.

Naomi is getting her makeup done when NXT's Ruby Riot comes up. She's with Liv Morgan and Sarah Logan, all of whom beat the heck out of Naomi. Becky Lynch comes in for the save and gets beaten down as well.

The bosses are in the back with Shane praising Bryan's decisions tonight because he can fire Sami and Kevin whenever he wants. Shane leaves to go watch the show at his hotel.

Hype Bros vs. Bludgeon Brothers

It's Luke Harper and Erick Rowan with big Thor style hammers. Rowan runs Ryder over to start and knocks him outside. Harper gets in a hard clothesline and sends him into the steps, leaving Rawley alone. A double spinebuster puts Mojo away at 1:24. Total squash.

Natalya applauds Charlotte for winning the title last week and beating Alexa Bliss on Sunday. I mean, Natalya's cat could beat Bliss but tonight she'll give Ric Flair something to really cry about.

Video on Brock Lesnar vs. AJ Styles from Sunday.

Here's Styles for a chat, but first we see a post-match video from Paul Heyman, saying Styles is the best in-ring performer he's ever seen. AJ wishes he could celebrate with all the fans but it didn't go as well as he thought it would. He'd love to face Lesnar again though because in the sequel, Rocky wins.

That brings him to Jinder Mahal, who says he's taking the title back tonight. AJ takes off the jacket and the belt, saying come get it. Mahal pops up on screen to say it's his time instead of AJ's. If Mahal had faces Brock, he would be hailed as the Beastmaster. AJ says bring it on because Mahal should be well rested after not doing anything on Sunday. Mahal will take his rematch at Clash of Champions. Cue the Singh Brothers from behind to jump AJ, who cleans house without any trouble.

Sami and Kevin recruit Aiden English and Rusev, who don't say no.

Women's Title: Charlotte vs. Natalya

Charlotte is defending after having won last week. Natalya jumps at her

to start but gets elbowed in the jaw. That earns her a face first toss into the middle buckle and we take a break. Back with Natalya getting two off a Batista Bomb and grabbing the Sharpshooter. Charlotte makes the rope for the break but Natalya is right back on her with right hands. A whip into the corner lets Charlotte try the moonsault, only to land on the knees. The spear connects but here are Logan, Riot and Morgan to jump Natalya for the DQ at 6:43.

Rating: C+. They were rolling until the interference here with Natalya showing more fire than she has in a long time. Charlotte looked like she was in a fight and that's not something you see from her too often. I can go for the trio interfering, though I would have liked to see Charlotte get the win first.

Charlotte gets beaten down as well as the trio poses.

Daniel Bryan has no comment on the trio attacking. Sami and Kevin come up and threaten him with repercussions if he fires them.

New Day vs. Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens

Lumberjack match and New Day comes out with some pancakes. Woods is on the floor here as Owens and Big E. get things going. Kevin knocks Kofi outside early on and the lumberjacks let him back in without any issue. Sami comes in so Kofi leapfrogs him into a back elbow for one. Back up and Kofi is sent outside again and for the second time, no one touches him.

Sami goes to get him this time and gets pummeled, sending him running up the aisle. No one is letting that happen though and Sami gets carried back to the ring. We take a break and come back with Owens taking the Unicorn Stampede. Owens knocks Kofi into the corner though and stomps away as Saxton says the lumberjacks are like sharks who can't wait to get their hands on Owens and Sami. Graves: "Sharks don't have hands Saxton."

Sami comes in and mocks New Day's dancing claps before stomping away. Owens' backplash hits Kofi's knees though and the hot tag brings in Big E. The Big Ending doesn't work on Sami so it's back to Kofi for his high crossbody. Everything breaks down with Sami being sent outside,

triggering the brawl between the lumberjacks. They all come in and the referee doesn't call for the DQ, leaving Sami to roll Kofi up for the pin at 11:50.

Rating: C. This was much more about everything else going on than the match itself and that's fine. Sami and Kevin winning makes sense and it's not like New Day is hurt by a fluke pin after all the issues with the lumberjacks (or a recent match with Shield). It's storyline advancement and there's nothing wrong with that.

Post break the lumberjacks leave with Kofi diving onto Rusev and English. Sami takes the Midnight Hour to leave him laying.

In the back, Owens gets on his knees in front of Bryan, begging him not to fire them. Bryan was never going to do that because he recognizes their talent. Next week, Owens goes one on one with Orton.

Overall Rating: C+. This was a back to normal show without much in the way of major developments. AJ is still champion, Mahal is still in way over his head and saying the same things he always says, Owens and Sami are still right in that they were better options than Shane at Survivor Series and Shane is still a face for reasons that I don't possibly comprehend. The debuts and returns were nice though and gives the show some much needed fresh blood. Good enough show, though nothing of note really happened.

Results

Shelton Benjamin b. Jey Uso – Paydirt

Bludgeon Brothers b. Hype Bros – Double spinebuster to Rawley

Natalya b. Charlotte via DQ when Sarah Logan, Ruby Riot and Liv Morgan interfered

Sami Zayn/Kevin Owens b. New Day – Rollup to Kingston

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