

Monday Night Raw – September 30, 2002: The Sledgehammer of Reality

Monday Night Raw

Date: September 30, 2002

Location: Compaq Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

We'll wrap the month up here with less than three weeks to go before No Mercy, which hasn't even been addressed yet. All I know is we're going to be seeing a lot more of Ric Flair and HHH because HHH is in charge and wants Flair to feel special again or something like that. Let's get to it.

Here's Eric Bischoff in the ring to tell us to not bother going over to Monday Night Football. Tonight there are going to be three title matches with Trish Stratus, Chris Jericho and HHH all putting their titles on the line. Good idea but I'm scared about who might be challenging. As for No Mercy, it's going to be title vs. title at No Mercy because we're going to have one show and one champion.

That brings him to Lita, who has been standing behind him.

Apparently Lita recently said Smackdown was better than Raw and it wasn't because of having better talent. Eric calls her a rather rude word and says that Lita is worthless after breaking her neck in Hollywood. Lita says that's her opinion so she has three minutes to get out. Cue Jeff Hardy, Booker T. and Goldust for the save and that means it's time for a match.

3 Minute Warning vs. Goldust/Booker T.

Booker gets knocked to the floor to start but comes right back in to break up some double teaming. We settle down to Jamal hammering on Goldust as the fans rip on Rico. Rosey drops a spinning legdrop for two and it's time to continue the beating. Thankfully the fans switch over to a Goldust chant and he grabs a neckbreaker to put

Rosey down.

That's enough for the hot tag off to Booker as house is quickly cleaned. The side kick sets up the Spinarooni but the ax kick only gets two. Rico gets in a kick to drop Goldust, leaving Booker to clothesline the monsters. A World's Strongest Slam puts him down though and Jamal's top rope splash is good for the pin.

Rating: D+. Nothing to the match here but it's not a good sign when Booker, as in the hometown favorite, gets to lose AGAIN. Booker has been one of the hottest acts on Raw for months now and I have no idea why he and Goldust keep losing so much. They should have been the Tag Team Champions a month ago with Booker moving up the ladder in a hurry. To be fair though, at least they're pushing SOMEONE fresh and that's a lot better than you can say most of the time.

Rico is ready to take 3 Minute Warning to the Tag Team Titles.

Christian and Lance Storm argue over last week's title loss but William Regal wants them to concentrate on Storm's match with Randy Orton.

Chris Jericho says Kane's chances of becoming Intercontinental Champion are as real as Terri's chest. Ace reporter Gregory Helms comes in to say his sources have told him that Jericho has no chance. Jericho: "Has everybody in this company gone completely insane?" Chris goes on a rant against freaks when Kane comes in to scare him away. After Kane kissed her last week, Terri kisses Kane and leaves. Kane: "Chicks dig the mask."

Randy Orton vs. Lance Storm

Orton starts fast with his backbreaker as the announcers talk about Saddam Hussein. That's about it for the early offense though as Storm takes him into the corner for some yelling and choking. It's off to an armbar with Orton slapping the mat to no avail. Storm tries an O'Connor Roll with trunks but Orton rolls through into one of his own and grabs the tights for a sloppy pin.

We're not done yet though as Christian steals Jim Ross' hat and says Storm dropped the ball again. That means a challenge.

Randy Orton vs. Christian

Randy starts fast again and dropkicks him before the bell, only to get draped across the top rope. Orton shrugs off some choking and gets two off a powerslam. Christian ducks a high crossbody and tries the Unprettier but Orton reverses into the Overdrive, botches the heck out of it, and then hits the second attempt for the pin.

JR gets his hat back and I have no idea why the Un-Americans are being treated like this.

Bischoff yells at Jeff and gives him another match with Big Show. Jeff leaves and Ric Flair comes in to say that kid has no respect. Apparently Rob Van Dam has challenged Flair for tonight and Eric isn't sure if the match will take place. Flair is working on an ex-Smackdown talent but details are scarce.

Jeff Hardy vs. Big Show

Jacqueline is guest referee because that's interesting. Jeff dives at him and is launched right back inside so the beating can begin. That includes a choke in the corner and a toss into the air for a big crash. One heck of a toss sends Hardy outside but Show posts himself. Jeff dropkicks a chair into Show's head to knock him over the barricade and that's a DQ.

Rating: D. The wrestling hasn't been this show's strong suit and it's not like Jeff gets anything from this win. Big Show is right back to the lumbering oaf period and the bald spot isn't helping him. It's a bad match and bad booking, which has been a theme so far tonight. That's not good when we're a third of the way through the show.

Booker T. wants to fight Jericho (who insulted Booker in his earlier promo) but Chris already has a match tonight you see. The catchphrase is loaded up but Jericho dares to cut him off before the sucka. Dang man. Booker can't get anything in tonight.

Raw World Title: Bubba Ray Dudley vs. HHH

Bubba is challenging and spray paints HHH on a table. We get a pretty nice speech about how Bubba wants to earn his title and prove

that he's more than just a tag wrestler. I'd buy into this if this wasn't Bubba Ray Dudley vs. HHH in 2002. Or ever for that matter. They slug it out in the corner before heading outside with Flair looking a bit nervous.

Back in and Bubba spears him down for some right hands but no reaction because no one buys this as a potential title change. A Flair distraction lets HHH take over and we hit the choking for two. It's off to the sleeper as we hear about how Bubba has waited twelve years for a title shot. The sleeper experiment has seemed to end though as there isn't even a dramatic arm drop.

HHH misses a right hand and gets caught in a German suplex for a breather. Bubba adds a Samoan drop and a DDT for two, followed by the Bubba Bomb. Of course that draws Flair into the ring for a distraction so there's no cover. Bubba can't hit a powerbomb so HHH Pedigrees him to retain.

Rating: C-. I'll give them points for throwing a bone to Bubba but no one who had ever watched wrestling before bought him as any kind of a threat. The match didn't even run eight minutes and the fans just did not care because they knew it wasn't going to happen. It wasn't even bad, which is a minor miracle in its own right, but the lack of drama killed off anything they could have done.

Victoria jumps Trish as she's getting ready.

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Victoria

Trish is defending and charges to the ring to start the brawl in a hurry. Victoria is thrown in and right back out but she sidesteps a dive off the apron to send Trish into the barricade. The slingshot legdrop gets two on the champ but Trish grabs a neckbreaker for the same. The Stratusphere gets the same and Victoria falls to the floor...where she grabs a chair for the DQ. This was kind of rocking until the quick ending.

Bischoff is spinning a wheel when Stacy (looking great here) cuts him off and asks for support in the semi-finals of the Internet Babe of the Year contest. Eric doesn't care and explains Raw Roulette

(Spin the Wheel, Make the Deal), which makes its debut next week. Stacy is given a match with Trish next week and leaves happy. Bischoff: "You're not going to see anything like this on Monday Night Football."

Video on Randy Orton.

The Un-Americans bicker some more.

Coach goes to talk to HHH but finds Flair, a good looking blonde and a bottle of champagne. HHH gets out of the shower to talk about his title defense at No Mercy. Two women call him back into the shower but Jericho comes in and wants a word. Coach is told to leave so Jericho hits on one of the girls. You would think they would throw the camera out too but maybe they're into that kind of thing.

Tommy Dreamer/Rob Van Dam vs. Test/William Regal

Remember eight days ago when Van Dam was in a World Title match on pay per view? Dreamer throws Regal around to start before it's off to Rob (still with bad ribs) to kick away at Test. It's back to Regal for one heck of a suplex and Van Dam is in trouble.

Unfortunately Jerry can't talk about the possibilities of a bra and panties match so the match, which isn't the most interesting in the world, isn't getting any attention. Not that it matters anyway as Dreamer comes in off the hot tag and everything breaks down. Test can't get the pumphandle so Van Dam kicks him into a rollup to give Dreamer the pin.

Rating: D. I'm so glad HHH gave Van Dam the rub so he could go and have a match like this. I know Dreamer is fine but teaming with him is a major downgrade for Van Dam, who was nothing but a sacrificial lamb for HHH. Then you have the Un-Americans who were champions two or three weeks ago and now they're 0-3 tonight. I have no idea what the point is in the fast turnover but it's been rather jarring.

Christian and Storm come out and get in a fight with Test and Regal before Dreamer and Van Dam clean house.

Booker gets in his SUCKA on Jericho an hour after he said "can you dig that". I've always wanted him to do that and now he finally has!

Uh, it's not quite the thrill I was expecting.

Wrestlemania XIX press conference clip.

Intercontinental Title: Chris Jericho vs. Kane

Kane is challenging and peppers the champ in the corner with some right hands. Jericho bails to the floor and gets slammed off the top for his efforts. Cue Flair to ringside (I'm sure he and Jericho are just fine after their big feud over the last month and a half.) so he can put Jericho's foot on the rope after Kane hits a tilt-a-whirl slam.

The chase doesn't go anywhere so Kane throws Jericho out to the floor for a big crash. Flair tries to get Jericho up, earning himself an ejection. Kane slugs him up the ramp for good measure and we take a break. Back with Kane getting crotched on top and superplexed as the fans seem to be cheering for Jericho. It's time to start in on the knee with Kane getting knocked to the floor.

Lawler keeps talking about Jericho's music career so JR suggests that he join the band as a spoon player. That's quite the visual. Kane uses the good leg to kick his way out of a leglock so Jericho switched to the Hartbreaker around the post. Back in and Jericho stays on the leg but throws in a little dance to make it a bit more versatile.

Kane gets in a belly to back suplex and a tilt-a-whirl powerslam as the knee seems just fine. Jericho is sent into the steps and the top rope clothesline gets two. Now it's HHH coming out for a distraction but it's not enough to set up the Walls. HHH gets in a spinebuster (which looked so bad that JR called it a belly to belly, which isn't that far off) on the floor for two and Jericho grabs a chair. With JR being SURE that HHH and Jericho are in cahoots, Kane gets to the ropes to break the Walls. The big boot and chokeslam give Kane the title.

Rating: C. I'll give them points for the longer match but I really don't buy that Jericho and Flair are all cool so soon. I get that Flair is just a goon at this point and HHH had some meeting with

Jericho but Chris and Flair being willing to work together so soon doesn't fit. What also doesn't fit is the match being focused on the knee and then having Kane just pop up like nothing happened. At least have a problem getting him up for the chokeslam. Finally, if you're going to have Kane be the next sacrificial lamb to HHH, what's the point in giving him the Tag Team Titles?

Overall Rating: D+. The problem here is the booking as we're closing in on HHH vanquishing Kane (and beating a double champion in the process) and...who else came out of this show looking good? The Un-Americans are mostly split, Booker T., Goldust, Jericho and Van Dam all look to have nothing positive right now and Jeff Hardy is thrilled with a countout win over Big Show.

This show is all about HHH looking great and smarter than anyone else, which really does make me wonder why I'm supposed to care about the rest of the roster. Maybe HHH can give them a rub, which of course means him beating them into dust because it's his show and anyone who thinks otherwise is getting the sledgehammer of reality to the head.

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Smackdown – February 28, 2017: That Was....A Lot

Smackdown

Date: February 28, 2017

Location: Xcel Energy Center, St. Paul Minnesota

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga.
Tom Phillips

It's a stacked card tonight and I assure you that has nothing to do with the President giving a speech to a joint session of Congress at the halfway point of the show. Tonight we have the fallout from AJ Styles and Luke Harper tying in a battle royal, a two out of three falls match between Becky Lynch and Mickie James and Dolph Ziggler vs. Apollo Crews in a chairs match. Let's get to it.

The bosses are in the back watching a clip of the ending of last week's battle royal. AJ comes in and laughs off the idea of having to face Harper tonight because Harper looks like the hair that clogs the shower. Of course Harper is behind him so AJ bails, leaving Harper to thank the bosses.

Opening sequence.

Here are Miz and Maryse to open things up with MizTV. Miz gets right to the point and brings out his guest: John Cena. However he also cuts Cena's mic and rants about how Cena has cost him ten years of misery. Cena spends all his time manipulating everyone he can find and Miz is sick and tired of it. A brief Cena chant cuts things off before Miz says he isn't just the other guy.

Two weeks ago, Miz was primed to main event Wrestlemania but Cena manipulated him out of the spot. The reason being: Cena is jealous of him. A few years back Cena went toe to toe with the Rock and went off about how Rock had gone Hollywood but now with all the movies and TV shows, we can't see Cena. The fans get in a quick YOU SOLD OUT chant as Miz talks about how Cena is a parody of himself. Miz: "You're not Super Cena anymore. You're barely decent Cena!"

Miz is the one that's here doing the media and making sure Smackdown is must see. Then Cena just comes back and gets a title shot at the Royal Rumble for a spot in the history books. Cena took the glory

away from Ric Flair (I'm still waiting on anyone to talk about Flair taking away Harley Race's glory by doubling the amount of title reigns he had. I doubt we'll be getting that though because NO ONE THINKS FLAIR TOOK ANYTHING AWAY FROM RACE, just like Cena took nothing from Flair.) and now it's time for Cena to talk.

John makes the jokes about how he's heard all of this before and held everyone back. Now it's time to prove Miz wrong though. If Cena was really this black arts manipulator, he would be standing toe to toe with the Undertaker. The fans really seem to like that idea but Cena talks about how half of this crowd, and sometimes more than half, is going to be chanting CENA SUCKS.

No matter what they chant though, everyone knows who Cena is. Miz is someone named Mike who shortened his name on the Real World because he thought it would steal Rock's electricity. Then he stole Chris Jericho's gimmick, Ric Flair's Figure Four Leglock (That was a gift!), Daniel Bryan's offense and the same thing that AJ Styles has been saying for the last six months. Miz is just someone playing someone playing someone else. If you ask any of the greats, they're just themselves with the volume turned WAY up.

That's why so many believe that Miz is where he is: he's a trend hopping shell of a WWE superstar. Cena says the next time they talk, don't bring a knife to a gun fight because Miz isn't the Undertaker. If he presses Cena again though, he's a dead man. Cena goes to leave but Maryse cuts him off and gets in a slap. Cena starts laughing and says that was the biggest mistake of her life. Cue Nikki Bella to chase Miz and Maryse off. Cena kisses Nikki, which I believe is the first time he's ever acknowledged their relationship on TV.

That's the easy frontrunner for promo of the year and is likely going to be one of the favorites in December. However, odds are this ends with Nikki hitting whatever her finish is on Maryse and Cena hitting an AA on Miz for the stereo pins so Nikki can have her big moment, which is the whole point of this nonsense. With Cena going away again, Miz should get his big moment but no, because we need a Total Divas highlight. At least this was great though and more proof that Miz is one of the most underrated talkers ever.

Becky Lynch vs. Mickie James

2/3 falls. They trade arm work to start until Mickie is sent outside and into the barricade as we go to a break. Back with Mickie in

control until she misses a legdrop. Not that it matters as the MickieDT gives James the first fall at 7:28. We take a second break and come back with Mickie getting two but missing something off the top, allowing Becky to roll her up and tie the score at 12:50 total. The Bexploder has Mickie in more trouble but here's Alexa Bliss to watch at ringside. Mickie misses her spinning kick and gets slammed for no count as Alexa has the referee. Bliss gets kicked off the apron and Mickie grabs a rollup, only to be reversed into the Disarm-Her to give Becky the pin at 14:14.

Rating: C. I appreciated the idea of making this 2/3 falls but it really could have been any regular match. It also doesn't help that about half of the match was lost in the commercials, at least one of which could have been cut. Bliss vs. Lynch in the final blowoff could be a great Wrestlemania match but I can't imagine those two getting the spot on their own.

Harper is around the light bulbs and says after tonight, Bray is going to be very afraid.

Bray says may the best man win tonight. Later this evening, the whole world will hear what he has to say but they'll also hear from Randy Orton. Bray is the keeper of the Holy Grail, meaning the championship.

Alexa is in the back and doesn't want to be asked about Becky because she just became the first two time Women's Champion. After some Oscar references, Natalya comes in and says she's taking the title. Bliss' laughing face is rather amusing.

AJ says he'll win.

AJ Styles vs. Luke Harper

The winner goes to the main event of Wrestlemania. AJ speeds things up to start but eats a running dropkick (not a great one but it was fine for Harper) to put him outside. Harper goes after him and gets caught with a Pele, allowing Styles to start in on the knee. That goes nowhere though as Luke elbows him in the jaw and scores with a slingshot hilo of all things. Styles is sent outside for a suicide shove and the Phenomenal Blitz is broken up with a half dragon suplex.

Back from a break with Harper getting two off a sitout powerbomb. AJ pops right back up and hits the Phenomenal Forearm for the pin at

10:50...but here's Shane McMahon to say not so fast because Harper's foot was on the rope (it clearly was). Harper grabs a rollup for two and they head outside with Harper accidentally superkicking Shane. Back in and the springboard 450 ends Harper at 12:55.

Rating: B. Good match but we were all waiting for the angle stuff which is fine. It's pretty clear that they're going to change something later but I'm not sure if they have time to get everywhere they want to go in four and a half Smackdowns (remember that the go home show is likely to be from Axxess). The story could be interesting and if they manage to avoid AJ vs. Shane, things can get much better.

The decision seems to stand.

Nikki and Cena are in the back when Carmella and James Ellsworth come up. Carmella: "Are you going to let him talk to me like that?" Ellsworth: "Well he's standing right there." Carmella thinks the show should be called Total Phonies so a mixed tag is set for next week.

Dean Ambrose vs. Curt Hawkins

Ambrose charges to the ring and hits Dirty Deeds with no bell. No match of course.

Dean talks about rollerblading during happy hour and learning how burrito bowls and roller coasters don't mix. The most important lesson he's learned is that when you're pushed, you have to push back. That's why he wants to fight Baron Corbin right now. Corbin pops up on screen and says he's not going to do that right now. Dean wants him to hurry up because he only has fifteen minutes left on the parking meter. Baron talks about how Dean is just a speed bump and they'll fight soon.

Apollo Crews vs. Dolph Ziggler

Chairs match so there are a bunch of chairs at ringside. Crews jumps him from behind and takes over to start, followed by a moonsault off the apron. We take a break and come back with Crews hitting a clothesline and enziguri. A standing moonsault onto a chair onto Dolph gets two and Ziggler is sent into a chair in the corner. That's fine with Ziggler who gets in a chair shot to the throat, followed by a crotching onto the chair for the pin at 8:53.

Rating: D. Holy sweet giggling carrots no one cares about this feud

and Ziggler doesn't really get anything out of this. Ziggler isn't anything interesting as a heel and I have no idea why I'm supposed to be impressed by a win over a guy like Crews. Apollo is fine enough but it's not like he's won anything of note. Nothing match and hopefully the end to a bad feud.

Here's Wyatt to talk about the title match. He really didn't care who it was because Wyatt is bringing the evil to Wrestlemania. Wyatt comes from a world of evil and that's where Randy Orton is right now. Orton pops up on screen to say he's been given the keys to the kingdom and that's where he is now.

A few months ago, he said he was going to join the Wyatts but now that he's closer to them, it's time to screw the Family. Orton is in Bray's barn and says Sister Abigail is buried underneath this floor. That means we see a bunch of worms and dirt and Orton is holding a pickaxe. Orton promises to burn Abigail's spirit and take away Bray's power.

The rocking chair next to Orton is swaying with no one in it until he grabs its back...and pulls out a can of gasoline. Orton covers everything with gas and says he's coming for the title at Wrestlemania. He pours more gas into the hold (presumably Abigail's grave) as Bray seems to be near tears. Even more gas is poured out and Orton lights the house on fire. Bray freaks out and breaks down as Orton stares at the camera to end the show.

Overall Rating: B. That ending was a lot and I'm going to need some time to process things. Orton destroying Wyatt like that is certainly interesting and could make for a big Wrestlemania match but I'm not sure if it's the right idea to have Wyatt weakened so much before the biggest match of his life. AJ is of course the wildcard in the whole thing and I'm really, really hoping that the Shane match doesn't happen.

The rest of the show was great and I absolutely loved the opening promo. I know I'm one of its more vocal critics but if Cena and Miz are bringing the talking like that, I can live with hearing Nikki running her mouth about how she's worked SO hard and come SO far to finally make it. The wrestling wasn't the point tonight but you can tell they're setting up everything big for Wrestlemania and that's the most important thing they can do now. Good show, but not for the wrestling.

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Monday Night Raw – February 27, 2017: Undisguised Filler

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 27, 2017

Location: Resch Center, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

It's the go home show for Fastlane and that could mean a few things. This show could range from entertaining to a mess and any point in between. Goldberg will be here tonight and there are rumors of Seth Rollins and Ric Flair making appearances as well. Either way it's the last Raw before we get to the pre-Wrestlemania season so let's get to it.

Here's Goldberg to get things going. He thanks the fans for their chants but gets straight to the point: he's winning the title at Fastlane with his son cheering him on. This brings out Kevin Owens to say what he really thinks about Goldberg. When he got to this company, Owens promised to grab this company by the throat and show

WWE what he was really about.

Then he beat John Cena in his first match, followed by beating Dean Ambrose, AJ Styles, Seth Rollins and the Big Dog himself, Roman Reigns. Now why should Goldberg be any different? Goldberg likes the speech and wants to fight right now but Owens doesn't think Green Bay deserves to see him fight. They'll fight on Sunday and the Goldberg chants die.

Here's New Day for a chat. They've got a lot on their plates by hosting Wrestlemania, but we need to be concerned with what's in our bowls. New Day knows the fans want something else and that means ice cream. They even know what the name is going to be: New Day Pops. First though, they need to face the Shining Stars.

Cue Primo and Epico....but someone hands Woods an envelope. It turns out that the Shining Stars' match is later tonight against Big Show. Instead, the envelope says "Rusev and Jinder Mahal". Ok you knew this was coming and there was no real way around it. Ignore the fact that they really just recreated the idea and didn't actually do anything new here. In other words: standard WWE comedy.

New Day vs. Rusev/Jinder Mahal

Woods headscissors Mahal down and we hit the Honor Roll for good measure. Big E. gets in a splash as we take a break. Back with Woods not being able to get over Rusev for the hot tag. The slow beating continues and Woods' crossbody is easily caught. He does manage an enziguri though and there's the hot tag to Big E. Everything breaks down with Big E. cleaning house. A blind tag brings in Woods for a high crossbody but Rusev makes the save. Kofi and Lana get in an argument on the floor to distract Rusev, leaving Woods to grab a rollup for the pin on Mahal at 9:43.

Rating: D+. Not much to see here but they're doing a good job of keeping the matches shorter. There's no real need to see these teams go much longer than this as it's hard to imagine Rusev and Mahal giving one of the best tag teams ever a real run for their money. New Day is in an interesting place here and I'm curious to see what they have for Wrestlemania.

Rusev and Mahal argue post match because the division is deep enough to split a team already.

We look back at Enzo Amore and Big Cass becoming #1 contenders.

Enzo is really fired up about the idea of becoming champions because he gets his name on the belt. Cass thinks he needs to chill a bit but says they'll win.

Cesaro and Sheamus want their titles back when Samoa Joe comes up to say Cesaro will never figure things out. Joe: "You mad bro?" Cesaro doesn't like the brass ring jokes and says all Joe does is carry HHH's jockstrap. A match seems to be made for later.

Stephanie is annoyed at someone for bad dictation when Mick Foley comes in. She wants to apologize but it turns into rant about how Foley doesn't live up to his old stature. That's how Foley will be remembered: as a shadow of his former self. Much like the Oscar joke, you had to know this was coming: Foley said something to Stephanie last week so tonight she had to burn him at the stake.

We look at Brian Kendrick beating Akira Tozawa last week and Kendrick talks about Tozawa rejecting his offer to be the newcomer's mentor.

Akira Tozawa vs. Noam Dar

Dar gets kicked in the chest to start and the backslash gets two. A good fake out lets Tozawa nail him again but Alicia Fox offers a distraction. That sets up some arm work but Tozawa sends him outside for a suicide headbutt. Back in and the snap German suplex puts Dar away at 2:59.

Post match Kendrick jumps Tozawa from behind and talks about how Tozawa needs to learn his lessons.

Mick Foley is upset when Samoa Joe comes in and needles him about not having a nice day. Foley doesn't want to hear it because he sees Joe as a puppet for HHH. Joe doesn't like that so Foley makes Joe vs. Cesaro for later tonight.

Charlotte/Dana Brooke vs. Bayley/Sasha Banks

Before the match, Charlotte talks about how Bayley is willing to go to any degree to take what she wanted because she has everyone fooled. Charlotte calls Bayley a one hit wonder but here's Bayley to cut her off. Bayley talks about dreams and moving on from this one. Next up for her is walking into Wrestlemania as Women's Champion but Charlotte says there's a long way to go before then. Sasha Banks comes out to say Charlotte has a stupid face and is jealous of the champ. More importantly, there's a tag match tonight. Charlotte says there is but with a little change in the lineup.

Charlotte/Nia Jax vs. Bayley/Sasha Banks

Nia throws Sasha around to start and runs her over in the corner as a bonus. It's off to Bayley who can't do much with Nia either but some right hands in the corner do enough good. Nia clotheslines Bayley's head off though and the beating begins in the corner. That doesn't last much longer either and it's back to Banks vs. Charlotte with Sasha taking over. Dana tries to interfere on the floor and gets a Bayley to Belly for her efforts. Serves that cheater right. Back from a break with Sasha trying to fight back against Nia and getting headbutted away. Charlotte misses a charge though and the hot tag brings in Bayley to clean house. Everything breaks down again and Bayley tries a choke on Nia. That goes nowhere though and a Charlotte distraction lets Nia run Bayley over. Nia drops the big leg to pin the champ at 12:20.

Rating: C-. That seems to be the way to set up the much discussed four way at Wrestlemania whether it makes the most sense or not. I still don't know why they didn't just bring Becky Lynch over for the Four Horsewomen match in the place where they got started but my guess is WE CAN'T CHANGE THE ROSTERS EVER BECAUSE THE DRAFT SAYS SO. Braun Strowman demands Foley give him a contract signing with Roman Reigns tonight. Foley agrees but basically guarantees a fight will break out.

Luke Gallows vs. Big Cass

Gallows kicks him in the face to start and easily breaks out of a

chokeslam. Another kick puts Cass on one knee and Corey says he's not seven feet tall anymore. That line is always annoying because he's still that tall but he's not standing upright. Why is that so complicated? Cass makes his comeback and watches Enzo send Anderson into the steps. A big boot ends Gallows at 2:43.

The announcers hype the WWE Network turning three years old.

Earlier today, Titus O'Neil and Sheamus got in a fight at catering.

Titus O'Neil vs. Sheamus

Titus jumps Sheamus before the bell and throws him inside for the official start. The Brogue Kick ends O'Neil in 17 seconds.

We get a long video on the long history of HHH making Seth Rollins. They've been together for years but then Rollins hurt his knee which HHH referred to as dropping the ball. Rollins is injured but the question is can he get back in time.

Here's Rollins, on crutches, for a sitdown interview with Corey Graves. He doesn't know where he is mentally now but it seems that he's in Chicago because we get a freaking CM PUNK chant. Thankfully it's loudly booed and Seth can get back to the point. He's not sure if he can continue at this point and as of right now, the doctors haven't cleared him for Wrestlemania.

This brings out HHH and Samoa Joe with the former talking about how Rollins has no idea what he's doing here. HHH knows Rollins isn't going to Wrestlemania because that's how he is. It was HHH who handed him the title and then Rollins bit the hand that feeds him. Rollins didn't mind reaping the benefits along the way but now he's treating HHH like this. Seth needs to make the right decision and not come to Wrestlemania because HHH is done playing with him.

If Rollins shows up there, it's the last thing he'll ever do in a WWE ring. HHH goes to leave but Seth cuts him off and says he'll be in Orlando and it's going to be the last thing HHH ever does. This dragged a lot and just reenforces the idea that there isn't much of a need to have this match. The match should have happened at Night of Champions or HIAC or something but instead it's at Wrestlemania

because that's where HHH wrestles no matter what.

Big Show vs. Shining Stars

Double teaming actually puts Show down for a bit before he shrugs the cousins off. A KO Punch and chokeslam wrap things up at 1:48.

Black History Month video on Martin Luther King Jr.

Neville tells Tony Nese that the purpose of tonight's tag match is to put Jack Gallagher in his place before Sunday. Nese basically says he's in this for himself.

Austin Aries video package.

Jack Gallagher/TJ Perkins vs. Tony Nese/Neville

Neville kicks TJ off the apron at the bell but gets bulldogged by TJ. Cole: "You're only going to see this kind of action on Monday Night Raw!" Yeah he doesn't watch 205 Live either. Nese gets rolled up for two and it's off to Gallagher as things speed up a bit. The headbutt puts Neville on the floor and it's the Detonation Kick into the running corner dropkick for Nese. Jack takes Nese down with something like a seated abdominal stretch while kicking Nese in the face for the tap out at 1:58. This was more filler on a show full of it.

Beth Phoenix Hall of Fame video. I miss the days when these were announced on Raw and now in a newspaper earlier in the day.

Bayley and Sasha are icing their injuries from earlier. Sasha is going to be in Bayley's corner on Sunday but Stephanie adds Banks vs. Jax to Fastlane.

Samoa Joe vs. Cesaro

They take turns driving each other into the corner and Cesaro tweaks his knee. He tries to muscle through it until Joe goes after the knee to take over as we take a break. Back with Cesaro muscling Joe up into a suplex and countering a kneebar attempt. Cesaro hits that reverse Angle Slam move of his and gets two off a double stomp. Uh, shouldn't he be in a bit more pain after stomping on someone with a bad knee? Joe breaks up the springboard uppercut though and kicks at

the knee, setting up the Rock Bottom for the pin at 7:45.

Rating: D+. What in the world was up with Cesaro's selling here? This was all about the knee injury but he was using his power stuff and did a freaking double stomp. You need WAY more selling than just that and I have no idea what was up with Cesaro in this case. He's smarter than that and I don't get it.

Post match Joe says it doesn't matter who comes against the Destroyer because he's taking them apart. This brings out Sami Zayn for the brawl until the referees break it up.

It's time for the contract signing with Mick Foley running the show. Strowman doesn't think much of him and says he would have respected him back in the day when Foley was competition. Foley finally snaps and yells at Strowman, basically threatening to get physical because he's still a legend, even if he won't be the General Manager that much longer.

Cue Reigns to start the fight, which quickly heads into the crowd. Strowman beats on him even more until Reigns spears him through the barricade and a security guard in the process. Back in and Reigns stops to sign the contract but gets sent into the corner so hard that the top rope breaks. Strowman leaves and Reigns signs to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. This show really enforced the idea that Fastlane doesn't need to exist. There were multiple matches with no story and even more that didn't last long enough to rate. I have a very low tolerance for undisguised filler and Sheamus vs. Titus O'Neil in a 17 second match over a fight at catering is nothing but a way to fill in time. Fastlane was almost half booked tonight and that's a really bad sign six days before the pay per view. I've seen worse shows but I just want to get to Wrestlemania and Fastlane is an annoyance we have to get through on the way there.

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Beth Phoenix to the Hall of Fame

No real surprise on this one but I'm starting to wonder how many more women they can put in without scraping the bottom of the barrel. That being said, Beth was really underrated as she was a big deal in a dead period for the company while also being a very beautiful woman.

Main Event – February 23, 2017: Keeping Me Guessing

Main Event

Date: February 23, 2017

Location: Staples Center, Los Angeles, California

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Corey Graves, R-Truth

I'm not even sure what to expect from this show anymore as it really could be anything from week to week. That's not exactly a good thing either as the show can be an entertaining hour but at the same time it can be something so uninteresting that I don't know how I survive

every week. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Sin Cara vs. Bo Dallas

Bo takes him down to start and poses a lot, as you would expect him to do. A clothesline sets up a chinlock before Bo hammers away in the corner. That earns him a monkey flip as Cara starts his comeback, including a headstand into a headscissors out of the corner. Dallas gets sent outside for a running Swanton off the apron but he rolls through a high crossbody and grabs the tights for the pin on Cara at 4:53.

Rating: D. It's going to be one of those weeks isn't it? I really don't know why Dallas isn't on the main roster. You really can't do something with that grin and the extra aggression that he's been showing from time to time? It's not like the main roster is flush with jobbers to the stars so throw him on there and let us have something fresh for a change.

We open with a long recap of the Festival of Friendship and Kevin Owens turning on Chris Jericho. Sweet popcorn baked into a pie that was an amazing segment.

Owens is sitting in the ring in the dark in a chair to get things going. When he was growing up, if anyone had told him he would be defending the World Title against Goldberg in the main event of a pay per view, he would have thought you were crazy. Of course he'd be in the main event of a pay per view, but against Goldberg? The Goldberg chants start up and Owens thinks that's exactly what he wanted to hear.

That's the chant that makes Goldberg think he's invincible as they head into their match at Fastlane. At the pay per view, all Owens has to do is outlast and outsmart Goldberg because the longer a Goldberg match goes, the weaker and weaker he gets. Owens is the master of outsmarting opponents and no one knows how to play the game like him.

Goldberg can say Owens is next all he wants but as far as Owens is concerned, Goldberg is nothing. As for what happened last week with Jericho...Owens drops the mic and walks out. This is the Owens that we've been waiting to see on the main roster for a long time and that's nothing but good as we head into the final stretch to

Wrestlemania. Owens was great here and that's awesome to see.

Our second Raw moment.

Cole is in the back for a sitdown interview with Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman. We get straight to the point with Goldberg but Heyman cuts Cole off and says Lesnar isn't interested in questions like this one. Heyman says Lesnar isn't interested in hearing about Goldberg winning the title so Lesnar scares Cole away and stares straight into the camera.

Paul talks about Owens attacking Jericho last week because Lesnar disagrees with Owens being the most violent champion in years. Lesnar isn't interested in hearing about Owens but Heyman talks about Kevin's greatness anyway. A lot of people want to see Owens pull it off but Lesnar disagrees because if Owens loses, it's Goldberg vs. Lesnar for the title. That's just one more thing for Lesnar to conquer at Wrestlemania and that's what he wants to do.

Diamond Dallas Page Hall of Fame announcement.

TJ Perkins/Cedric Alexander vs. Noam Dar/Tony Nese

Nese throws TJ around to start so Perkins grabs a headlock instead. With that not working, a jumping spinning kick to the face puts Nese into the corner, followed by the Detonation Kick to send him outside. Back from a break with Perkins snapping Noam's arm back but some heel double teaming takes over. Perkins fights out of a waistlock and hits a gutbuster to set up the hot tag to Cedric. Everything breaks down and a Lumbar Check ends Dar at 9:37.

Rating: C-. Still not good but at least there was some better action. You're still only going to get so much out of these random cruiserweight tags though and that's rather tiresome. I know Dar and Alexander were feuding a few weeks back but that hasn't really been the case recently. I need more than just a random tag match to keep my attention and I'm not getting that here.

We'll wrap it up here.

Braun Strowman vs. Big Show

And yes, this really is the main event. Show grabs a wristlock to start but Braun rolls around and nips up to escape. Now that's going to get him noticed. Show shoves him down but gets punched in the jaw and dropped for his efforts. Strowman charges into a choke but easily reverses into a DDT for two. A clothesline drops Show for two

and it's all Strowman so far.

Show reverses a suplex into one of his own and grabs the chokeslam for two. The powerslam doesn't work so Show puts him on top for the superplex. Strowman escapes that but dives into the KO Punch for two. Show loads up the Vader Bomb, only to have Strowman get up for the powerslam (doesn't look great) for two of his own. Not that it matters as Braun hits another powerslam for the pin at 12:10.

Rating: C. Right here is a great example of a match that doesn't need to be good to get the point across. Much like last week, this was about Strowman showing that he's the new star instead of the old guard like Show or Mark Henry. It's a very simple idea but they're telling the right story, which is all you can ask for.

Post match Reigns comes out and gets in a few Superman Punches but Strowman hits the powerslam to end the show.

Overall Rating: D+. This was one of the weeks where the original stuff wasn't enough to carry the show, despite the fact that the Raw replays were much better. I still don't get why they can't throw in a bigger name for all of a match, even if they're appearing on the main show that week. I know there's a point to this show but they could at least try.

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Smackdown – September 26, 2002 (2017 Redo): The Best Smackdown of All Time

Smackdown

Date: September 26, 2002

Location: San Diego Sports Arena, San Diego, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

Well Brock retained the title but they basically ruined the end of the pay per view with a double DQ finish. That almost guarantees that we're setting up a rematch at No Mercy in a month because that's how WWE main events work. Other than that we don't have much of note on Smackdown because Unforgiven wasn't a very important show. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of Stephanie McMahon's BRILLIANT (and highly illogical) plan to have Rikishi humiliate Eric Bischoff at the pay per view.

Opening sequence.

Rikishi vs. Chavo Guerrero Jr.

This is over Chavo hitting Rikishi with a camera last week. Chavo wisely gets him to give chase early on but Rikishi grabs him by the head and then throws Chavo into the corner by the throat. Something like a Scotty 2 Hotty style bulldog drops the big guy though and Rikishi is sent shoulder first into the post.

In the unfunny comedy portion of the match, Chavo loads up a Stinkface of his own but gets shoved away, meaning it's time to back it up in the corner. The Rump Shaker is countered though and Chavo goes for the camera, which is superkicked back into his face. That's enough for the Rump Shaker to connect and put Chavo away.

Rating: C. This was MUCH better than I was expecting and Chavo got to show off a bit. Rikishi is fine in a role like this where he beats up a midcarder and stays away from the bigger stories. It's easy to like someone as fun as Rikishi but it's a lot more difficult to take him seriously.

Rikishi dances post match.

It's time for a bikini contest between Torrie Wilson and Nidia with Billy and Chuck as the judges. I guess it's time to rehabilitate their masculinity or something. Nidia gets a 6 and a 9 (it's funny you see) and Torrie gets a double 10. Billy and Chuck get in the ring and here come Tajiri and Jamie Noble, giving us an impromptu tag match.

Billy and Chuck vs. Tajiri/Jamie Noble

Chuck gets sent to the floor so it's a series of kicks to put Billy down. Torrie is on the apron in a neutral corner for no apparent reason but it makes for some better scenery. The always great looking Tajiri superkick drops Billy again and Jamie starts in on the knee. Noble wraps it around the post as you can see the Cruiserweight Title on the floor. At least put it on the apron so it looks somewhat important.

Billy can't even stand on the banged up leg so Jamie puts on a leglock as the world's only WE WANT CHUCK chant starts up. A flapjack finally puts Jamie down though and there's the hot tag to Chuck. House is cleaned and Billy manages to get up top for the Code Red (bit of a stretch there) for the pin on Tajiri (who was on Chuck's shoulders for a LONG time before Billy was ready).

Rating: C+. That's your standard tag team formula and it's going to work no matter how many times we see it. They managed to get Chuck Palumbo a chant with the most basic tag team match you can put together. There's a reason it's a classic and it's going to work as long as wrestling is around.

Post match the women get into it again and Torrie spanks Nidia.

Funaki interviews Brock Lesnar and asks him if he's going to give Undertaker a rematch. Brock will give him an answer in the ring. Funaki is thrilled with getting a scoop and doesn't realize he's likely about to die.

Kurt Angle comes in to see Stephanie and they reminisce about the Stinkface. Angle would like a rematch against Chris Benoit but Stephanie has something else in mind. Rey Mysterio pops up and Angle asks if this is a violation of child labor laws. Stephanie's big idea: a triple threat match between Mysterio, Angle and Benoit. Angle says he'll get the 1-2-3 but Rey says it's more like the

6-1-9, which the fans certainly approve of.

Here's Funaki with the chair that was dented over Lesnar's head at Unforgiven. After Funaki actually gets one heck of a pop (I'm as shocked as you are), Lesnar comes out and doesn't want to hear about the Undertaker. Brock shoves him into the corner and for reasons of general stupidity, Funaki comes out swinging. A running right hand is easily countered into an STO, followed by a few throws and an F5 for good measure.

Dawn Marie offers Torrie some insincere praise for the win, though everyone knows Dawn would have beaten her with ease.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Edge

No DQ. Eddie starts hammering away until a monkey flip puts him down. The fans are all over Eddie as he easily breaks up a keylock. An elbow to the head drops Edge and Eddie hits some rather hard right hands. We hit a chinlock for a bit before Edge snaps off a powerslam, only to take too long getting to the top.

That means a huge superplex to give Eddie two and it's time to head outside. Unfortunately it's also time for a ladder and that means a ref bump as the ladder goes straight into his face (looked great actually). Back in and Eddie unloads on him with a chair but misses the frog splash to put both guys down.

We come back from a break with a new referee and the second only now being taken to the back. That's really not a good response time. Edge gets in the half nelson faceplant but takes too much time going up, allowing Eddie to snap off a hurricanrana for a close two. A springboard hurricanrana is countered into a sitout powerbomb with Eddie's head bouncing off the mat in a scary visual.

The ladder is brought in but it's also knocked into Edge's face to drop the Canadian again. That means Eddie needs a second ladder so he can sandwich Edge together, setting up the slingshot hilo. Guerrero gets one heck of a cheer from the crowd and it's really hard to blame him with how hard they're beating each other up out there.

Eddie goes up the ladder but Edge is there to slug it out....so Eddie sunset powerbombs him off with one of the biggest bumps you'll see on regular TV. Edge just got folded up and it looked awesome. That's good for another respectful round of applause and somehow only two.

In almost any other match, that should have been the fall.

Back up again and Edge backdrops him into the ladder in the corner before they climb the second ladder a second time. You know, because it ended so well earlier. This time Edge rams him face first into the top a few times and grabs an Edgecution off the ladder (looked a bit more like a superplex for the sake of clearing the ladder but the landing still looked great) for the pin and one last big reaction from the crowd.

Rating: A. Sometimes you need a great story with all kinds of intricacies and plot details. Sometimes you need a big climax to a major story. Then sometimes you need two incredibly talented wrestlers doing crazy things to each other involving a ladder. This was spectacular with both guys absolutely destroying each other with one more big spot after another. Nothing was topping that sunset powerbomb though and I think everyone knew it. Edge winning the match (and in theory the feud) is the right call and Eddie didn't lose a thing here. Aside from the match of course. This is on multiple DVDs and it's easy to see why.

A bloody Eddie gets the big respectful ovation, which he more than earned.

Marc Lloyd comes up to ask Benoit about the main event. Benoit: "YOU SUCK!" That got a good laugh. Anyway Benoit is ready.

Matt Hardy talks about running Hurricane off and suggests he'll do the same thing to Undertaker tonight. Shannon Moore isn't convinced and thinks it might have had something to do with Brock. Hardy pshaw's him and leaves with Lesnar looking on. Good thing he was watching the show on a monitor and knew where Matt's locker room was in relation to his.

Wrestlemania XIX press conference video. It's very, very odd to see Undertaker in a collared shirt and pants.

Undertaker vs. Matt Hardy

I always liked the version of Undertaker's song with lyrics. Matt's handshake doesn't go how he'd hope it would and the beating is on early. Hardy gets up an elbow in the corner though and starts in on the knee but the Twist of Fate is countered into a chokeslam. The Last Ride finishes Matt in less than two minutes.

Post match Lesnar runs out and busts Undertaker open again with a belt shot. During the break, Undertaker couldn't stand up and EGADS he's covered in blood. That's one heck of a blade job for a TV show.

Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle vs. Rey Mysterio

Before the match, Angle accuses Rey's fans of being illegal immigrants. The real threat in this match isn't the toothless weirdo or the lost member of Menudo because it's your Olympic hero. Rey takes over to start and hits the sitout bulldog on Benoit while kicking Angle in the face at the same time.

That earns Rey a trip out to the floor so Angle and Benoit can hit the match for their usual fast paced sequence. Kurt can't get the ankle but settles for a two count with his feet on the ropes. Rey comes back in and avoids a charge to send Kurt shoulder first into the post. Not that it matters as Benoit is right there for a German suplex.

Chris throws Rey to the floor but gets chopped n the corner by a fresh Angle. We hit the rolling German suplexes and an Angle Slam on Benoit but Rey dropkicks Kurt for two. Benoit is sent outside this time and Rey scores with a dive, only to have Angle send him into the barricade.

Back in and Benoit gets his ankle locked until he grabs the rope, setting up a double 619. Angle blocks the West Coast Pop but gets rolled up for two more. Now it's Kurt getting caught in the Crossface but Rey breaks it up by Dropping the Time for a VERY close two on Benoit. Angle gets suplexed to the floor and Benoit throws Rey over his head and onto the ropes, only to have Rey springboard into the West Coast Pop for the pin to blow the roof off the place.

Rating: A-. I'm exhausted after watching that. I didn't skip more than a few moves here and there and all three guys came off looking outstanding. It's a great example of just letting people do crazy sequences and look awesome all over the place. I'm going to need a little time to get over the idea that Mysterio won in his hometown. When was that concept banned? Anyway, check this one out after you see Eddie vs. Edge.

Overall Rating: A+. That's probably the best Smackdown of all time and I'd be surprised if anything ever topped it. The worst match of the night was either Undertaker destroying Matt Hardy or a surprisingly good Rikishi vs. Chavo match. Even if you're not

impressed with that one, it didn't even break five minutes. Throw in two classics and Torrie in a rather nice looking swimsuit and I don't know what else you could ask for. Check this show out and have a great time with it because it might be the best Smackdown I've ever seen.

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205 Live – February 21, 2017: The Supplemental Show

205 Live

Date: February 21, 2017

Location: Citizens Business Bank Arena, Ontario, California

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Corey Graves, Austin Aries

We're less than two weeks away from Fastlane and that means it's time for some of the more basic build towards the Cruiserweight Title match. There are three matches announced for tonight, all of which suggest that this is going to be a much more wrestling heavy show than one built around angles. Let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of last night's contract signing.

Opening sequence.

The announcers chat for a bit.

Akira Tozawa vs. Brian Kendrick

This almost took place on Raw but Kendrick laid him out instead. Tozawa goes off on him with forearms and a running kick to the chest. Some mounted right hands have Kendrick in even more trouble and Tozawa shouts that he doesn't need him. Tozawa chokes with the boot in the corner as this is completely one sided so far.

Kendrick finally manages to post him to take over and it's time to work on Tozawa's neck. A big boot sets up the Captain's Hook but Tozawa gets a hand between the arms for the block. Tozawa sends him outside for a suicide dive and the crowd is getting into this. With nothing else working, Kendrick sends him into the apron and ties Tozawa's foot into the cables underneath the ring for the countout at 5:42.

Rating: C+. This was a way to set up something else down the line and there's nothing wrong with that. Tozawa has the potential to be a big star in the division and I can actually get behind the idea of Kendrick as a gatekeeper. He isn't exactly great as a top heel but this role is fitting him a bit better. I'm still not sure why he carries that flag but whatever.

Kendrick says that was another lesson for Tozawa. More lessons are coming.

Noam Dar didn't like Rich Swann dedicating a match to Alicia Foxxxx last week so tonight, Dar is going to do the same thing. Fox is a bit under the weather this week but worry not because she would NEVER leave him.

Noam Dar vs. Mustafa Ali

They trade wristlocks to start until Ali backflips away and dropkicks him to the floor. That means a big flip dive (Aries: "MAMA BELLOMO!") with Ali jumping over the referee for a nice touch. Dar kicks him in the leg on the way back in though and things slow down again. Back in and Dar starts working on the arm for a change, only to eat a dropkick to the face.

Dar uppercuts him into the corner but gets caught in a tornado DDT to put both guys down. It's Ali up first though and he takes Dar over to the corner, only to have Noam get to the apron before the reverse 450 can launch. That's enough to have Ali go head first into the post, setting up a running knee to the head for the pin at 7:34.

Rating: C. Dar continues to be fine in the ring but he's still missing a certain fire that would carry him up towards the top of the division. I'm curious to see who Fox could leave him for (it's pretty clear that's where they're going) and where Dar can go from there so it's far from hopeless. Ali should be higher up on the food chain than he is too but for some reason he's cooled off a lot in recent weeks.

Austin Aries introduces a video on...himself, as he's getting back in the ring soon. That would have been better as a surprise attack but Neville vs. Aries for the title at Wrestlemania would have me drooling.

Neville wasn't pleased with the attack during the contract signing and has his sights focused on Gallagher.

Jack calls tonight's match a preview for Fastlane.

Jack Gallagher vs. Tony Nese

The idea here is that Nese is the most comparable person to Neville on the roster. Nese throws him down to start and we hit the pose. That earns him a takedown into a SICK looking armbar with Gallagher tweaking the mustache and making sure his hair stays straight. Back up (thankfully without a torn pectoral), Nese elbows him in the face and tosses Jack over the top for a breather. One heck of a superkick drops Gallagher again and we hit a bodyscissors.

A legdrop gets two but also seems to start Jack's comeback. Gallagher gets two off a crossbody and a sunset flip before headbutting the heck out of Nese. It's too early for the running dropkick but Jack puts him in the Tree of Woe. That's fine with Nese though as he pulls himself up into a super German suplex. Nese goes up top again, allowing Gallagher to catch him in a top rope belly to back superplex. The running corner dropkick puts Nese away at 10:05.

Rating: C+. This was a very simple idea and it worked as well as it was going to be able to. Gallagher was in trouble but used his technique and footwork (which he talked about earlier) to come back and win, which is what they'll be aiming for at Fastlane. Then again I don't buy Neville as being in any real danger but at least they're getting the story right.

Overall Rating: C+. They basically took a week off for a filler show here but it was still entertaining enough to work. Gallagher is

being built up as the best possible challenger for a nothing pay per view and they're already setting up a few things for the future, including Aries' in ring return. You didn't need to see this show but it did exactly what it was supposed to do.

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Monday Night Raw – September 23, 2002: The Bad Times Are Here

Monday Night Raw

Date: September 23, 2002

Location: Arrowhead Pond, Anaheim, California

Commentators: Jim Ross, Jerry Lawler

It's the night after Unforgiven and the big story on the Raw side is Ric Flair joining forces with HHH to form...well to form nothing at the moment but that's the only noteworthy thing that happened last night. I'm worried about what we'll be getting going forward but that's so often the case around here. Let's get to it.

Women's Title: Trish Stratus vs. Molly Holly vs. Victoria

Trish is defending after winning the title last night. Victoria goes after the champ before Molly even gets to the ring and the fight is

on in a hurry. As Lawler asks if Trish is the hottest Women's Champion ever, the challengers start double teaming Trish as you might expect them to do. That earns them a double clothesline and some signature stuff but Molly lifts her up for a toss out to the floor (and one heck of a bump). Back in and Molly avoids Victoria's moonsault, setting up a collision to knock Molly into Trish's rollup to retain the title.

Rating: D+. The match was nothing to see (save for that nasty crash to the floor) but this was quick enough to not overstay its welcome. The women just aren't good enough at this point to work a long match so it's a good idea to keep things short here. Victoria looked a lot more aggressive here and that's the best thing possible for Trish and the title.

Booker T. and Goldust show some of the roster clips of last night with Eric Bischoff getting humiliated. Goldust: "I haven't seen anything that bad since Chris Jericho's last Fozzy concert." As a bonus, Goldust has a picture of Bischoff with Rikishi's thong replacing the face. Rico: "That's disgusting! I'M TELLING ERIC!"

Bischoff welcomes an unnamed face to the Raw side when Rico comes in. Eric wants to know where Rico was last night but it was Bischoff who sent them out on the town. Anyway Rico tells him what Booker and Goldust were up to and Eric is ticked.

After a break, here's a ticked off Bischoff in the arena. Bischoff isn't cool with the fans booing him but more importantly, Vince McMahon has issued a new decree: there's a freeze on all contracts and no one gets to jump between shows unless there is an official trade. However he made a few last minute deals before the deadline with details coming later.

For now though, Booker needs to come out here RIGHT NOW. Bischoff wants an explanation but Booker calls him a skippy hippie. Booker keeps making jokes about last night and says Bischoff's breath is heinous like a fat man's anus. Cue 3 Minute Warning and Rico for the beatdown with Goldust's save going nowhere.

Post break, Rico offers to face Booker tonight and Chris Jericho comes up to demand a shot at Goldust for the Fozzy insult. Eric agrees but makes it an Intercontinental Title shot. That's a very face move for a heel boss.

Jeff Hardy vs. Big Show

Jeff goes right after him to start and actually hits something like a suicide dive. That's not what you do to a giant though and he tosses Jeff over the top so we can have the opening bell. Back in and Jeff dropkicks him in the knee and hits the Swanton across Show's back for what is likely his only near fall. Show just blasts him with the overhand chop to bust open Jeff's shirt. That's enough for Show as he plants Jeff with the chokeslam for the pin.

Rating: D. I'm so glad we're getting the renewed Big Show push because I just don't want to imagine a WWE without it. Allegedly Hardy was rather, ahem, unable to perform last week so this might have been punishment as a result. I'd rather have that instead of "comedy" but Big Show might not be the best choice to push.

We look back at Tommy Dreamer beating up Christopher Nowinski two weeks back.

Nowinski is in a classroom and wants to fight dreamer. Post break Dreamer shows up and gets caned down. Dreamer puts him through the ceiling and the beating just keeps going because we NEED hardcore stuff around here without actually having hardcore matches.

Randy Orton vs. Steven Richards

Here's one of the talent jumps but it's not clear if he was the mystery man earlier. Orton hits his quick dropkick as the crowd is just silent for this. Richards slows things down and gets two off a side slam. The rather slow pace continues until Orton slips out of a neckbreaker and grabs a belly to back suplex.

Commentary would suggest that the company wants Orton to be the next Rocky Maivia but it's not quite working. How can Orton be considered a blue chipper without a Jheri Curl? Orton's backbreaker and powerslam get two each, only to walk into the Stevie Kick for two. That means a freak out session and choking from Richards, only to eat the high crossbody to give Orton the pin. Lawler: "THIS KID IS PHENOMENAL!" Just...no Jerry.

Rating: D-. Above all else this was incredibly boring. Orton has no character at this point and there's only so much you're going to be able to do in a match against a low level nothing like Richards. It's a really boring match and that doesn't make Orton seem like the bright star that the announcers are pushing him to be.

The Union Underground performs Across the Nation (Raw's theme) while

some Divas dance. Lillian looks like she's just enjoying the song, Terri looks like she has no idea what she's doing (might not be her kind of music) and Jackie is having a great time while barely staying in her top. Stacy is miles ahead of all of them as she looks amazing and clearly has done this kind of dancing for a long time.

Here's Flair for the big explanation. Last week, HHH yelled at him and said Flair was pathetic. HHH was right and it's because Flair was too busy listening to the fans. When he was a kid, HHH wanted to be Ric Flair (or Hulk Hogan if you listen to the story from back in April) and now Flair is going to try to pull that off.

If HHH is willing, Flair is going to teach him how to get to another level. Flair's payment is very simple: he gets to be by the champ's side and spend the twilight of his career on top where he belongs. Rob Van Dam tries to interfere but HHH beats him down from behind. The double team is on until Bubba Ray Dudley makes the save.

Two notes here: first of all, they kept this short but covered the point. We know why Flair did it and we know what he gets out of it. Simple yet effective, as promos often need to be.

Second, this is a great example of how important it is to have the right character in the right role. I can accept the idea that HHH is a huge Flair fan and wants to be just like him. There's no specific reason but it's something I could accept at face value. For an example of it going bad, look back at AJ Styles doing the same thing in 2010. I can imagine AJ being a Flair fan but I absolutely can't believe one of the most natural faces ever being a Nature Boy clone. You need to have the right kind of character for any given role and it works very well here, which is why the angle should work as well as it's going to.

Post break Bubba and Van Dam say this is the people's show and demand a tag match tonight. Bischoff comes up to say it's his show but allows the match anyway.

Intercontinental Title: Chris Jericho vs. Goldust

Jericho is defending and these two are somehow still active fifteen years later. Goldust gets in a quick hiptoss and catapult to send him into the buckle. The champ comes right back with a bulldog and cranks on the neck as we hear about how big a band Fozzy really is. With that going nowhere, Jericho hits an extended trash talk sequence. It's enough for Goldust to fight back with something like

a Boss Man Slam/chokeslam but the Curtain Call is broken up. Goldust will settle for a powerslam but the referee breaks up Shattered Dreams. Jericho gets in the enziguri and the Walls retain the title.

Rating: C. Not bad here, as you might expect. I don't think anyone was going to buy Goldust as a full fledged threat to win the title but you're going to get a completely watchable match out of him. I'm still not entirely sure why Jericho has the title again but he's far from the worst choice.

Tag Team Titles: Un-Americans vs. Kane/???

Kane is challenging along with his partner....the Hurricane? Again it's not clear if he was the one who was in Bischoff's office or not but it doesn't really matter. An early Blockbuster puts Christian down but the rest of the team jumps Hurricane on the floor. Kane does his best angry stare for the save and it's Christian getting in a few stomps of his own. We hit the chinlock for a bit until a clothesline puts both guys down.

Hurricane dives over for the hot tag and the fans react as strongly as they can. House is quickly cleaned until Regal gets in a title shot to Kane's head. Er, mask. Either way, it only gets two and Regal and Test are both ejected for their efforts. Charles Robinson trying to be intimidating is one of the best comedy spots of the year. Hurricane gets a sloppy hurricanrana on Christian and heel miscommunication sets up a double chokeslam (eh cute) for the pin and the titles.

Rating: C-. I'm so glad we had the Un-Americans all over the show for so many weeks to have them lose to the latest thrown together team. I've seen worse matches though and Hurricane is always entertaining, at least for a quick laugh. Not bad here and the fans got into the American victory, which is the whole point here.

Post break Hurricane says he and Kane are perfect together because they both wear masks and both use chokeslams. Tonight it's time to celebrate and Kane says freaks are cool. Hurricane is ready to go to the Hurricane but Kane stops to kiss Terri before leaving with his partner.

Regal isn't happy but says the team will regroup.

Booker T. vs. Rico

Booker hammers away in the corner until Rico reverses and fires off

some kicks to the head. That springboard version always looks good. A kneelift only seems to fire Booker up and it's the forearm into the Spinarooni. The scissors kick ends Rico in short order.

Post match it's 3 Minute Warning for the beatdown and Goldust for the failed save. The difference is Booker is in gear instead of street clothes like earlier and Goldust actually hits Shattered Dreams on Rico before getting taken apart. Totally different idea you see.

Bischoff makes 3 Minute Warning vs. Goldust/Booker T. for next week. Again, not exactly a heel move. It's putting them on square footing and taking away the Samoans' advantage. How is that a heel boss?

Van Dam says he's at peace with HHH and Flair but isn't impassionate despite his bad ribs.

Bubba Ray Dudley/Rob Van Dam vs. HHH/Ric Flair

After some long entrances, HHH jumps Bubba from behind and gets backdropped for his efforts. The fans want tables but get Flair, who has no issues with Bubba, making this kind of pointless. Some shoulders put Flair down as JR thinks Ric is going through "the change of life".

It's right back to HHH as Bubba seems a bit hesitant to tag in the injured RVD. Bubba gets the better of a chop off with Flair before it's off to Rob for a series of kicks. Rolling Thunder isn't the best idea and HHH doesn't stay down long enough to really validate the pain on the bad ribs. HHH gets in a belly to back suplex but the hot tag brings in Bubba a few seconds later.

The fans react like they're watching an Orton match and only pick up a bit as Bubba hammers on Flair. House is quickly cleaned and Van Dam plays D-Von on What's Up. It's table time but HHH shoves Van Dam off the top. A throat snap across the top knocks Bubba into a Flair rollup (with tights) for the pin.

Rating: D+. This was awkward with the wrestling not being great and the story being sort of all over the place. It's clear that they're setting up Bubba as the next challenger (which is likely only going to be short term) and I'm really not sure how that's going to work. The story makes sense but I'm not sure if Bubba Ray Dudley is going to work in that role no matter what. Van Dam really does look like a one off challenger and that's a really bad thing given how second

rate he looked next to HHH.

Bubba saves Van Dam from a low blow and almost completely misses the table when powerbombing HHH. The champ hit the corner and the table didn't even break, causing the crowd to go almost silent. Van Dam legdrops him through the table (makes sense due to the bad ribs) instead to end the show.

Overall Rating: D. The bad times are here and that's got me worried going forward. There was WAY too much 3 Minute Warning vs. Goldust/Booker T. (a fine feud on its own but it was a lot of overkill here) and too many nothing matches (the opener, Orton and Hardy vs. Big Show) to fill out a two hour show. Cut out some of the filler (like the concert, which felt completely tacked on) and turn it into some better stories and the show will improve. As for now though, Raw is back to its normal horrible.

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Smackdown – February 21, 2017: But It's A Battle

Royal!

Smackdown

Date: February 21, 2017

Location: Citizens Business Bank Arena, Ontario, California

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, David Otunga. Tom Phillips, Mauro Ranallo

It's a double shot tonight as we have a pair of big gimmick matches to get us further along the Road to Wrestlemania. First up it's Natalya vs. Nikki Bella in a falls count anywhere match which should be the blowoff to their feud. Other than that it's a ten man battle royal with the winner getting the World Title shot against Bray Wyatt at Wrestlemania XXXIII. Let's get to it.

We open with a recap of last week's triple threat match for the Smackdown World Title and Randy Orton's decision to turn down his title shot against Bray Wyatt.

Opening sequence.

Here's Daniel Bryan to get things going. We're forty days from Wrestlemania and the road to get there is full of twists and turns. He brings out Women's Champion Naomi, who has been given a week to either give the title back to Alexa Bliss or face her in a rematch. We actually get the YOU DESERVE IT chants and come on now. Wyatt was a stretch for that but NAOMI? She gets a chant about how hard she's worked to get here? Give me a break.

It turns out that she's injured and isn't going to be able to defend her title. Naomi talks about how life can change in such a hurry because she was on top of the mountain a week ago and now she's looking up from the bottom. She hands over the title and says she's probably out of Wrestlemania as well.

However, she's going to be back to take the title from whomever is borrowing it in her absence. Naomi leaves and here's Alexa Bliss to laugh about the performance. With Naomi gone, Bliss says that she should be the champion since she never got her rematch. Bryan

doesn't think so and the title is going to be on the line RIGHT NOW.

Women's Title: Becky Lynch vs. Alexa Bliss

The title is vacant coming in. Becky starts fast with some rollups but gets kned in the ribs and we hit the choking on the ropes. Bliss' basic offense continues until a quick Bexploder sends her outside as we take a break. Back with Becky getting two off a missile dropkick, which of course warrants a crowd reaction shot. Bliss gets in a quick shot to the throat for the pin (while holding trunks) and the title at 9:03 in an ending that is as sudden as it sounds.

Rating: D+. The ending really hurt things here as it just came and went without any real build to it. Bliss winning the title makes sense as this felt like a quick match for the pure sake of giving the title back to Alexa. To be fair, it's not like she should have lost the thing in the first place. At least it's back where it should be now.

Mickie James comes down to celebrate and gets in a fight with Becky.

Dean Ambrose wants his chance to main event Wrestlemania back and if he gets to break Baron Corbin's legs in the process, so be it.

Kalisto wants to be in the main event so tens of thousands of people can chant LUCHA LUCHA LUCHA.

Miz runs down his resume and thinks being in the main event of Wrestlemania should be added.

Natalya is ready to expose Nikki Bella as a fraud.

Breezango vs. American Alpha

Non-title with Breezango jumping them at the bell. A double kick to Jordan's head puts him in trouble. That lasts all of thirty seconds as Jordan gets over for the tag, setting up the Steiner Bulldog for the pin on Fandango at 1:45.

The Usos show up in the crowd to say they're coming for the titles. Just not tonight you see. A lot of trash is talked with threats of jumping Alpha from behind.

Black History Month video on Jackie Robinson.

AJ Styles says he's going to Wrestlemania.

Dolph Ziggler superkicks the wall of the interview set.

Mojo Rawley is ready to win another battle royal.

Luke Harper is done obeying Bray Wyatt and after tonight, there's nowhere left for Bray to run. These promos for the battle royal are a great touch and it's even better that most of them have had a different backdrop (Harper was in the Wyatt area, Mojo was in the locker room, AJ was just backstage etc.). You don't get these enough and they can do a lot of good in the span of thirty seconds.

Nikki Bella says after tonight, Natalya will be the broken Hart.

Nikki Bella vs. Natalya

Falls count anywhere. An early spear puts Natalya down and Nikki grabs her facebuster for an early two. It's already table time (falls count anywhere means No DQ by definition) but Natalya baseball slides it into Nikki's face. They quickly head over the barricade with Natalya doing You Can't See Me for a nice touch.

Nikki comes back with a shot off the barricade and the Disaster Kick (looked great for a change) to put Natalya down for two. Back to ringside they go with Natalya getting in a few kendo stick shots before loading up the announcers' table. Nikki fights out of a powerbomb attempt and gets in an Alabama Slam onto the table for a close two.

We come back from a break with Nikki getting to the ropes to break the Sharpshooter (which Natalya breaks, causing the announcers to accurately point out that she didn't have to). Nikki no sells a suplex on the ramp and they head backstage with Nikki being sent into a conveniently placed Maryse.

Nikki sends her face first into a mirror for two of her own and it's time to come back into the arena. Natalya can't get the Sharpshooter as Natalya reverses into the Fearless Lock, only to have Maryse come out with a pipe to attack Nikki (really badly that is but at least she tried). Miz drags her off and Natalya gets the cheap pin at

14:02.

Rating: B-. The match had its good and bad moments but I liked it much more than I was expecting to. This was a better brawl than I was expecting and one of Nikki's better matches, likely because it didn't involve a ton of wrestling. Unfortunately it seems that we're really getting that stupid mixed tag at Wrestlemania, even though I can't imagine how they came to the conclusion that it's the best possible idea.

Diamond Dallas Page Hall of Fame announcement.

Baron Corbin says he's winning.

Apollo Crews says he's winning.

Orton and Wyatt will be watching.

Battle Royal

Baron Corbin, Apollo Crews, Dolph Ziggler, The Miz, Luke Harper, Kalisto, AJ Styles, John Cena, Dean Ambrose, Mojo Rawley

The winner get the Wrestlemania title shot. After the long entrances, they waste no time in getting started with Ambrose and Corbin slugging it out in the corner. The fans are almost entirely split between Styles and Cena and you can tell they're way into this instead of not really caring. Cena and Ziggler are both sent to the apron but quickly make it back in. A bunch of near eliminations go nowhere and Cena can't get Corbin up for the AA.

We take a break and come back with Corbin as the only man standing. He tosses Rawley for the first elimination but eats a superkick from Ziggler. Kalisto gets up and starts kicking away until kind of botching what looked like a moonsault press to Dean. Ziggler and Kalisto both wind up on the apron and a pull of the mask sets up a superkick to eliminate Kalisto, getting us down to eight. Crews kicks Ziggler in the head though (DANG he healed from that knee injury in a hurry) and it's down to seven. Ziggler chairs Kalisto though and Corbin tosses Crews, who chases Ziggler off with the chair.

We're down to Corbin, Cena, Miz, Ambrose, Harper and Styles and it's

AJ having to flip out of the AA. Almost everyone hits a hard strike and it's Miz in the middle of the ring, meaning it's time for the running corner dropkicks all around. Cena pops up and backdrops Miz out, which is probably a way to keep setting up that stupid mixed tag.

Back from another break with Styles and Ambrose knocking each other down. Cena loads up the Five Knuckle Shuffle on Styles but walks into End of Days. Ambrose tosses Corbin from behind and is quickly pulled to the floor for another End of Days. With Cena staggering to his feet, Miz sneaks in and tosses him, with Cena leaving a bit too calmly.

So we're down to Styles, Ambrose and Harper with Dean getting back inside. All three are quickly put on the apron for a three way slugout with Dean having to hang on very carefully. AJ gets on Dean's shoulders and gets back in, allowing Harper to superkick Dean out to the floor, leaving us with two. Harper stays on the apron and pulls AJ over the top to the join him but they're both back in a few seconds later. Luke suplexes him to the apron again but quickly follows him out there, only to have Harper pull him out at 22:22.

Rat... .Actually not so fast as the referees say Harper hit at the same time (it wasn't even close and they're not showing replays) so here's Daniel Bryan for a ruling. The official decision is a draw so there's no winner. However, we will determine a winner next week. Harper blasts AJ with the discus lariat and poses to a rather mixed reaction to end the show.

Rating: B. That ending really dragged things down as this was a heck of a battle royal leading up to the finish. Harper winning was the logical call here and I'm really not sure why they went with that double ending. From what I could tell, Harper's feet were either on the apron or the steps when he landed but officially it was a tie. I don't get that.

Wyatt and Orton pop up on screen to laugh at Harper to end the show. That also suggests that there's no reason for AJ to have been involved in the ending like that.

Overall Rating: B-. I'm still trying to get over that ending as it really hurt what should have been a big moment. Unless they're still trying to force AJ vs. Shane (who I don't remember seeing recently) out of this, that should have been Harper winning clean. Still though, the rest of the show was good enough and it was certainly eventful but the Women's Title change and the ending felt somewhere between forced and messy, neither of which are good.

Results

Alexa Bliss b. Mickie James – Rollup with a handful of trunks

American Alpha b. Breezango – Steiner Bulldog to Fandango

Natalya b. Nikki Bella – Pin after a pipe shot from Maryse

A battle royal went to a draw

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Monday Night Raw – February 20, 2017: They've Hit the

Switch

Monday Night Raw

Date: February 20, 2017

Location: Staples Center, Los Angeles, California

Commentators: Michael Cole, Corey Graves, Byron Saxton

It's a big show this week with a ton of things to get to. First of all, Brock Lesnar is scheduled to be in the house and that's huge in general. Second, Bayley has been told to either give her title back to Charlotte or else, which could mean multiple things. Oh and Rock might be in town. Let's get to it.

In Memory of George Steele. Not Ivan Koloff for some reason.

We open with a long recap of the Festival of Friendship and Kevin Owens turning on Chris Jericho. Sweet popcorn baked into a pie that was an amazing segment.

Owens is sitting in the ring in the dark in a chair to get things going. When he was growing up, if anyone had told him he would be defending the World Title against Goldberg in the main event of a pay per view, he would have thought you were crazy. Of course he'd be in the main event of a pay per view, but against Goldberg? The Goldberg chants start up and Owens thinks that's exactly what he wanted to hear.

That's the chant that makes Goldberg think he's invincible as they head into their match at Fastlane. At the pay per view, all Owens has to do is outlast and outsmart Goldberg because the longer a Goldberg match goes, the weaker and weaker he gets. Owens is the master of outsmarting opponents and no one knows how to play the game like him.

Goldberg can say Owens is next all he wants but as far as Owens is concerned, Goldberg is nothing. As for what happened last week with Jericho...Owens drops the mic and walks out. This is the Owens that we've been waiting to see on the main roster for a long time and that's nothing but good as we head into the final stretch to

Wrestlemania. Owens was great here and that's awesome to see.

Cesaro/Sheamus vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

The winners get a title shot at Fastlane. Cass slugs it out with Cesaro to start before it's off to Enzo, who is launched at Sheamus in the corner. Back from an early break with Enzo in trouble but backdropping Cesaro out to the floor. Sheamus gives chase though and Cesaro just blasts Amore with an uppercut to break up the hot tag attempt (Cue crowd reaction shot!). Cass comes in a few seconds later and everything breaks down. The corkscrew uppercut drops Cass but Enzo breaks up the swing. The East River Crossing ends Cesaro at 9:17.

Rating: C-. Can we please wrap up the Cesaro and Sheamus experiment already? They weren't an interesting team in the first place and for some reason we're still watching them do their thing. Then again, the tag division is pretty much four teams (if you count New Day) so it's not like there's any better option.

Post match Enzo runs his mouth and gets Brogue Kicked. That doesn't feel exactly like a heel turn.

Owens is leaving when Mick Foley comes in to say he has a match with Sami Zayn tonight. Kevin chuckles and says he thought Foley liked Sami.

Video on Braun Strowman.

Video on Bayley winning the Women's Title and fulfilling her lifelong dream. This sounds like the setup for a cruiserweight match.

Roman Reigns interrupts Foley and wants to fight Strowman tonight. Foley says that can't happen but here are Anderson and Gallows to interrupt. They want to fight Reigns again tonight and Foley agrees if Roman can find a partner.

Brian Kendrick vs. Akira Tozawa

I would have expected a bit longer build to this one. Tozawa won't shake hands so Kendrick hits him before the bell, including sending him neck/ear first into the turnbuckle hook. The Captain's Hook

knocks Tozawa out and there's no match.

In the back, Kendrick says he won't be disrespected like that.

Roman Reigns/??? vs. Anderson and Gallows

Non-title and Reigns' partner is.....not here as this is just going to be a handicap match. Anderson starts for the team but Roman drops them both to control early on. Gallows kicks him in the face though and it's already off to the chinlock. The Boot of Doom is broken up and it turns into a double beating on the floor. A chair is brought in but Reigns takes it away and beats the champs down for the DQ at 3:57.

Rating: D+. Another short match that makes me wonder what the point is in having the Tag Team Champions get treated like this. Is there NO ONE ELSE that can do the mini feud with Reigns? Like, no two big guys you could throw out there? It's almost like having the divisions this divided has ruined a lot of things and gives us moments like this.

Post match Reigns Superman Punches Gallows and spears Anderson out of the air, sending the champs crawling away.

Video on New Day being announced as the hosts of Wrestlemania.

New Day vs. Rusev/Jinder Mahal

Reigns couldn't have beaten up Rusev and Mahal? Before the match, New Day says they're working on a bunch of things right now, including being the hosts of Wrestlemania and trying to become the voices of the hyenas in the new Lion King movie (Kofi: "That's not a joke.").

On top of that, they've got the ice cream machine plans back and THEY'VE DIGITIZED THEM! Lana holds up a tablet and says she has the plans...which seem to be authentic. Apparently they include a flux capacitor, three unicorn hairs and New Day starts panicking. Woods: "HOW DID SHE GET THE PLANS?" Big E.: "You know she's Russian right?"

The match is joined in progress with Rusev grabbing a bearhug on Kofi. It's quickly off to Jinder, who can't do a thing due to high levels of being Jinder Mahal. Big E. comes in and cleans house,

including putting Rusev on the floor for a big dive. This lets Woods take the tablet back and completely destroy it for a big pop. The Midnight Hour puts Jinder away at 3:42.

Rating: D+. What in the world happened to Rusev? Like really, the guy should have been a big deal or at least feuded with Big Cass but now he's jobbing in a nothing tag team? This really is a waste of someone who could have been something special and of course he still could be fine, but at the moment it's a big waste of time. New Day is fine in this role as it's not like they have anything else to do right now so let them have fun at Wrestlemania.

Video on George Steele.

Austin Aries is in the ring for the contract signing between Neville and Jack Gallagher. Since Gallagher is present, there are already cookies and tea prepared. Gallagher quickly signs before Neville can even come out. Neville does the same and immediately goes to leave, only to be stopped by Gallagher.

Neville mocks all of the British stereotypes and calls Gallagher a caricature. The real streets of England look like Neville but Gallagher is what the WWE Universe wanted Neville to be. Gallagher assures him that he is NOT a joke because this is the real thing. The table, including the tea is turned over and the fight is on with the headbutt sending Neville outside. Gallagher is one of my favorites at the moment but if they don't do Neville vs. Aries for the title at Wrestlemania, they've lost their minds.

Nia Jax b. Sara Pierce

Splash and Samoan drop finish Pierce at 34 seconds.

Post match Nia says she's putting Bayley and the title on notice.

Black History Month video on Barack Obama.

Here's Bayley for her first appearance as Women's Champion. She grew up here in California and had a dream of being a champion and getting to point at a Wrestlemania sign. When she was a kid, her dad brought her to the events and bought her all the shirts and toys. Last week, the first thing she did was call her dad and it's a call

she'll never forget. Bayley's dad is here tonight and the fans are making her look cool in front of her dad.

Cue Stephanie McMahon to ask if Bayley's dream included everyone wondering if she could have done it without Sasha Banks. Stephanie's daughters look up to her and she wants to know if Bayley is going to throw everything away for the sake of a championship that she didn't earn. Bayley is about to hand it over when Sasha Banks comes out to say don't do it. She thinks about it but says no way is she handing the title over. Bayley won the title because of the WWE Universe. The title belongs to all of them and she'll defend it any time any place.

Cue Charlotte to say she's cashing in her rematch at Fastlane. Sasha cuts her off and says Bayley will keep the title at the pay per view. As for tonight though, Sasha's knee is feeling fine so let's have a trip down memory lane. Stephanie makes the match right now because of course she gets to have the last word.

Sasha Banks vs. Charlotte

Bayley is on commentary. Joined in progress again with Sasha grabbing a headscissors but getting her face driven into the match. Charlotte does the Figure Four faceplants and grabs a necklock. Sasha is sent outside and we take a break. Back with Charlotte grabbing a dragon sleeper. Sasha fights out and makes her comeback, including a dropkick in the corner. Cue Dana Brooke for a distraction but Bayley cuts her off, allowing the Banks Statement to make Charlotte tap at 10:03.

Rating: C-. This didn't have time to go anywhere with the long break in the middle but you can pretty much pencil in the four way at Wrestlemania from here. Sasha is going to make a great heel when she turns, even if you can see it coming a mile away. Oh and can we please drop the "renewal of a rivalry" when they last fought about two months ago? That's rather pitiful.

Diamond Dallas Page Hall of Fame video. This is LONG overdue.

Sami Zayn knew Owens would do this kind of thing and he told us all

it would happen. He sees a lot of similarities between Owens and Samoa Joe (insert your own Scott Steiner "HE'S FAT" joke here), including both of them doing all kinds of horrible things for the sake of some demented loyalty to someone else. Tonight, Sami is kicking Owens' teeth down his throat.

Kevin Owens vs. Sami Zayn

Non-title. Before the match, cue Samoa Joe to massacre Sam. For some reason he agrees to the match anyway and it's a Cannonball to crush Zayn even worse. The referee pulls him off so it's a second Cannonball and the Pop Up Powerbomb to give Owens the pin at 1:11.

At 10:48pm, this show is dedicated to the memory of Ivan Koloff.

The bosses are in the back and Stephanie ribs on Foley for not coming out there during either the women's segment or Samoa Joe beating Sami down. Foley FINALLY stands up for himself and blames Stephanie for Seth Rollins being injured. He was telling HHH and Stephanie how great Samoa Joe was twelve years ago and yells about how he's not letting Stephanie's greed get in the way of this show. Stephanie threatens him with an "accident" and Foley leaves.

Cole is in the back for a sitdown interview with Brock Lesnar and Paul Heyman. We get straight to the point with Goldberg but Heyman cuts Cole off and says Lesnar isn't interested in questions like this one. Heyman says Lesnar isn't interested in hearing about Goldberg winning the title so Lesnar scares Cole away and stares straight into the camera.

Paul talks about Owens attacking Jericho last week because Lesnar disagrees with Owens being the most violent champion in years. Lesnar isn't interested in hearing about Owens but Heyman talks about Kevin's greatness anyway. A lot of people want to see Owens pull it off but Lesnar disagrees because if Owens loses, it's Goldberg vs. Lesnar for the title. That's just one more thing for Lesnar to conquer at Wrestlemania and that's what he wants to do. The ring is reenforced for the main event.

Braun Strowman vs. Big Show

And yes, this really is the main event. Show grabs a wristlock to start but Braun rolls around and nips up to escape. Now that's going to get him noticed. Show shoves him down but gets punched in the jaw and dropped for his efforts. Strowman charges into a choke but easily reverses into a DDT for two. A clothesline drops Show for two and it's all Strowman so far.

Show reverses a suplex into one of his own and grabs the chokeslam for two. The powerslam doesn't work so Show puts him on top for the superplex. Strowman escapes that but dives into the KO Punch for two. Show loads up the Vader Bomb, only to have Strowman get up for the powerslam (doesn't look great) for two of his own. Not that it matters as Braun hits another powerslam for the pin at 12:10.

Rating: C. Right here is a great example of a match that doesn't need to be good to get the point across. Much like last week, this was about Strowman showing that he's the new star instead of the old guard like Show or Mark Henry. It's a very simple idea but they're telling the right story, which is all you can ask for.

Post match Reigns comes out and gets in a few Superman Punches but Strowman hits the powerslam to end the show.

Overall Rating: C+. This was an odd show as they advanced a lot of stories and set up a bunch of stuff for Fastlane but there's nothing going on here that is worth going out of your way to see. Above all else though they've hit the switch and it's clearly time to get ready for Wrestlemania. They're taking things more seriously and you can see where a lot of the stories are going. I can't believe I'm saying it but for once, I actually care about the Raw stories more than Smackdown. The show has been good lately and it's at the perfect time.

Results

Enzo Amore/Big Cass b. Cesaro/Sheamus – East River Crossing to Cesaro

Anderson and Gallows b. Roman Reigns via DQ when Reigns used a chair

New Day b. Rusev/Jinder Mahal – Midnight Hour to Mahal

Nia Jax b. Sara Pierce – Samoan drop

Sasha Banks b. Charlotte – Bank Statement

Kevin Owens b. Sami Zayn – Pop Up Powerbomb

Braun Strowman b. Big Show – Powerslam

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