

Smackdown – July 26, 2016: The Big Problem

Smackdown

Date: July 26, 2016

Location: First Niagara Center, Buffalo, New York

Commentators: David Otunga, Mauro Ranallo, John Bradshaw Layfield

We're into the new era of Smackdown now and it should be interesting to see where they go now that they're all on their own. Given who they have on the roster, there's a chance we'll have to get some new titles or at the very least some new stars to challenge for the titles that already exist. Let's get to it.

Daniel Bryan and Shane McMahon are in the back and say this new era is all about us as they walk into the arena.

Just like Raw, there's a new intro accompanied by new music.

The roster is around the ring with the bosses inside. Shane talks about how we have the only WWE Champion here so it's time to find a new #1 contender. Dean Ambrose comes out to say he's ready for a new challenge and has Smackdown Live fever. Tonight there's going to be a Six Pack Challenge for the right to face Ambrose at Summerslam. Included in that match will be:

John Cena

Bray Wyatt

Dolph Ziggler

AJ Styles

Baron Corbin

That leaves one spot open so let's have a battle royal right now for that final position.

Battle Royal

Kane, Tyler Breeze, Fandango, Apollo Crews, Konnor, Viktor, Simon Gotch, Aiden English, Kalisto, Zack Ryder, Jey Uso, Jimmy Uso, Erick Rowan, Alberto Del Rio, Mojo Rawley

The camera has a slightly different camera angle, starting from over the cover and down a bit lower instead of the stationary shot. Kane throws out Gotch and clotheslines Ascension out to start clearing out the ring early on. Breezango gets together to eliminate Jey Uso and we take a break.

Back with Rowan and English having been eliminated, leaving us Breeze, Fandango, Kane, Del Rio, Crews, Kalisto and Ryder. I didn't bother listing Rawley as he was eliminated a few seconds after we came back. A double clothesline gets rid of Del Rio and Kane throws out Breezango to get us down to four. Everyone starts taking shots at Kane but Crews seems to injure his knee on a standing shooting star.

All four are down for a bit until thankfully Crews gets up fine. A clothesline sends Ryder to the apron and Kalisto hits Salida Del Sol on Crews. Ryder goes up for the Elbro but slips off, only to have Kane do the dramatic sit up. Kane dumps Kalisto with ease and Ryder follows him out, leaving Kane and Crews. Apollo backflips out of a chokeslam and low bridges Kane out for the win at 12:45.

Rating: C. The ending really does this match a lot of good and teasing Kane winning made it even better. Above all else though they kept this moving very quickly and didn't overstay the welcome as so many battle royals do. Crews isn't likely going to win the Six Pack Challenge but it's a nice win to get him noticed.

Crews says he won't celebrate until he wins the main event.

Shelton Benjamin is coming back.

Dolph Ziggler is ready to break through the glass ceiling. You can't be a multiple time World Champion and still complain about the glass ceiling.

Natalya vs. Becky Lynch

Battleground rematch because those are still a thing in the new era. Becky takes her to the mat for a bit but gets run over by a shoulder. Natalya flips to her feet and slams Becky off the top as we take an early break. Back with Becky jawbreaking her way out of a chinlock and getting two off a guillotine legdrop. The Disarm-Her is broken up and Nattie By Nature gets two. The slow motion Sharpshooter that is only designed to be countered is countered into the Disarm-Her to make Natalya tap at 10:21.

Rating: C-. I don't know any other way to put this but Natalya is really dull. She wrestles the exact same match as a heel that she wrestled as a face and there's really no motivation for her other than something that happened a few weeks ago and now she's a villain basically in name only. It doesn't help that these two don't have the best chemistry, especially when they're the best in the Smackdown division.

Post match Becky says you can call her Becky Balboa (No.) but is interrupted by Alexa Bliss who says this is what the new era looks like. This is followed by the returning Naomi, Carmella (almost no reaction) and Eva Marie, who comes out with a voiceover like a movie trailer, listing off every possible positive attribute about herself. It's really corny but I actually liked it, even though Eva didn't say anything.

Baron Corbin says he'll win.

It's time for MizTV with special guest....The Miz. He brags about how awesome he is (well duh) until Randy Orton interrupts. Orton thought Miz was talking about him with all those accolades and agrees that Miz is awesome. Miz brings up the upcoming Brock match and Orton is ready to take Lesnar to Suplex City because he'll be taking Brock to Viperville. Orton suggests a match against Miz tonight and he'll even make it non-title so Maryse accepts for her husband.

Randy Orton vs. The Miz

Non-title. They're quickly on the floor with Miz stomping Orton down, throwing him back inside, and then whipping him into the steps. Back in and the RKO knocks Miz silly for no cover. Instead Orton stares at the entrance and slowly gets up before slapping the ropes a bit. Miz has been down for about two minutes before getting up to take a second RKO for the

pin at 4:53.

Rating: F. Oh screw you WWE. Smackdown has almost nothing and you have Miz lose to one move with almost half the match spent on him standing up after the RK0. You know who would have been perfect for this spot? Kane. He's established, he's tough, he loses NOTHING by taking the loss and it makes Orton look like he can beat a monster. This was stupid and one of the things that ticks me off more than any other nonsense WWE pulls.

Video on American Alpha. They're here next week. Well I mean they were here earlier but we don't have time for the hottest tag team act in a long time. I mean, aside from New Day of course.

A jobber is in the ring for a match when Heath Slater comes in and knocks him out. Slater isn't happy that he wasn't drafted to either show and wants to be in the main event. He starts a SIGN HEATH SLATER chant and the fans actually go along with it. Cue Shane McMahon to say Slater needs to send in his resume. Slater says his resume would say he was the brains behind the Nexus, the Corre (there's a name I never thought I'd hear again) and the Social Outcasts. As Slater rants, Rhyno of all people sneaks up behind him for a Gore.

AJ thinks Smackdown is against him because he's too good. Why else wouldn't the Club have been drafted together and why else would he have to fight five guys at once?

Bray Wyatt says it all revolves around him and tonight he'll have the whole world in his hands.

John Cena vs. AJ Styles vs. Apollo Crews vs. Bray Wyatt vs. Baron Corbin vs. Dolph Ziggler

One fall to a finish, no tags and the winner gets a shot at Ambrose at Summerslam. We take an early break and come back with Bray and AJ double teaming Crews with the other three down on the floor. That lasts about as long as you would expect it to as Bray takes AJ's head off with a clothesline, only to be dropkicked down by Ziggler. AJ adds a springboard 450 with Cena diving back in for the save. Crews comes back in with rolling German suplexes on AJ, only to walk into an STO of all things

from Corbin. Baron throws on a chinlock, which really shouldn't be seen in a six way match.

We go to another break and come back with stereo Towers of Doom (because that's how wrestling works) and Corbin getting two off Deep Six to Crews. Apollo's toss powerbomb gets two with Bray pulling the referee out. The Zig Zag should finish Bray but there's no referee. Cena finally remembers he's in this match and AA's Ziggler and AJ with the latter getting two.

Crews and Wyatt take AA's as well but Corbin takes a bit more to get up and elbows his way out. And scratch that as the second attempt works, only to have AJ springboard in with the forearm. Styles turns right into a superkick though and Ziggler gets the very surprising pin at 16:12.

Rating: C+. ZIGGLER??? Of all the people you have here you pick ZIGGLER??? I mean I know this lets you have Styles vs. Cena and....well that's about it actually. Yeah Smackdown needs new stars but the best they can do is having Dolph Ziggler's main event push brought out of mothballs? I don't hate it but I'm going to need to see a lot more of this before I accept Ziggler as a top challenger.

Shane, Bryan and Ambrose come out and say nothing to fill in the last four minutes of the show.

Overall Rating: C. This show's main issue is it followed last night's great Raw. It's certainly not a bad show and they did some good things (Crews getting a push, setting up the title match, the women showing up) but on the other hand you have Orton's completely needless destruction of Miz, Heath Slater and Rhyno instead of American Alpha (which at least gives you something to look forward to next week so it's not all bad. This show set left a lot to be desired but it's certainly not terrible. The problem is Smackdown didn't look great in the first place and now those suspicions are even more confirmed.

Results

Apollo Crews won a battle royal last eliminating Kane

Becky Lynch b. Natalya – Disarm-Her

Randy Orton b. The Miz – RK0

Dolph Ziggler b. AJ Styles, Apollo Crews, John Cena, Bray Wyatt and Baron Corbin – Superkick to Styles

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Monday Night Raw – July 25, 2016: The Newer New Era

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 25, 2016

Location: CONSOL Energy Arena, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Commentators: Corey Graves, Byron Saxton, Michael Cole

After three months of a new era, we're actually in a New Era as we've reached the first show with an exclusive Raw roster, which means a lot of things that aren't entirely clear. We don't officially have a World Champion as Dean Ambrose retained the title last night to keep it on Smackdown. Hopefully tonight we actually get some answers to the questions left over from the Draft so let's get to it.

Quick look at the main event.

Opening sequence, complete with a new logo and theme song.

The announcers are no longer at ringside and are up by the entrance instead. There's also a new set.

Mick Foley and Stephanie McMahon are in the ring to introduce the entire Raw roster. Stephanie blames Reigns for costing them the title and says there has never been an episode of Monday Night Raw without a World Champion (Uh.....what? Just.....what?) so tonight they're going to rectify that problem. Tonight there will be two fourways with the winners squaring off tonight for the right to go to Summerslam to face Seth Rollins for the....wait for it....WWE Universal Heavyweight Championship (Killjoy is going to love that one). Foley introduces the eight people in the fourways:

Sami Zayn

Sheamus

Cesaro

Rusev

Roman Reigns

Kevin Owens

Chris Jericho

Finn Balor

We're not done yet though as Charlotte is going to be defending the Women's Title against Sasha Banks. The first fourway is right now.

Cesaro vs. Rusev vs. Kevin Owens vs. Finn Balor

Owens gets a big pop but the crowd doesn't seem to know Balor's pose yet. They'll get the hang of it soon enough. Balor and Owens are left inside with Finn scoring off a dropkick but Cesaro takes over with some uppercuts as we hit a break less than ninety seconds after the bell. Back with Owens and Rusev staring each other down until Balor comes back in to

get caught in a German suplex.

Cesaro gets double teamed as well but Rusev misses a top rope splash. The heels start fighting until Cesaro cross bodies both of them. The uppercut train starts up but Rusev breaks up the Swing. Everyone goes to the floor and it's Balor hitting a big flip dive for his first major pop of the night. Back in and 1916 (lifting reverse DDT) gets two on Cesaro and we take another break. We come back again with Rusev at the base of a Tower of Doom to plant everyone at the same time.

Owens gets two on Balor with the torture rack neckbreaker. The Bullfrog Splash crushes Cesaro and the Pop Up Powerbomb plants Balor. The Neutralizer is broken up though and Rusev grabs the Accolade on Owens. Cesaro comes back in and Swings Rusev, only to have Owens break up the Sharpshooter. Balor comes right back in with dropkicks though and the Coup de Grace puts Rusev away at 20:31.

Rating: B. I can't even get mad at them for having the US Champion get pinned again when Cesaro was right there. This was really the only way to go with this match as you don't have Balor debut and then lose in his first match. I don't need him to go to the title match at Summerslam but he needs to have a dirty finish tonight. Good match here though and a good way to showcase Balor, which was the entire point.

Nia Jax vs. Brit Baker

Nia throws her around to start and ties her in the Tree of Woe. The legdrop only gets two as Nia pulls her up. A headbutt and another legdrop put Baker away at 1:20. Total squash.

Golden Truth are playing Pokemon Go and annoy Sasha Banks. Sasha says she'll win tonight.

Sheamus vs. Chris Jericho vs. Sami Zayn vs. Roman Reigns

Sheamus and Jericho double team Reigns to start and Sami joins in on the beating. Reigns is sent to the floor so it's Sami getting beaten down by both guys until Sami backdrops Jericho onto Sheamus. That means it's time for Reigns to come back in and slam Sami down for two as the announcers

talk about Stephanie. Sheamus comes back in for the ten forearms on Sami until Jericho knocks the Irishman to the floor. Reigns hits the big dive to take all of them out and we go to a break.

Back with Reigns getting double teamed but fighting back, only to get caught in a Blue Thunder Bomb for a very hot near fall. The Razor's Edge sitout powerbomb gets two on Sami but the Brogue Kick cuts off the Superman Punch. Sami adds a Helluva Kick, only to have Jericho steal the near fall. A Brogue Kick saves Jericho from the Walls but Sami dives over to break up the cover. Back to back Superman Punches drop the heels and the Codebreaker is countered into....something botched. Jericho takes another Superman Punch and the spear advances Reigns at 17:06.

Rating: C+. Not in the same ballpark as the first match with Sami and Sheamus basically disappearing in the last few minutes. Reigns winning was predictable and I'd be shocked if they went with Balor vs. Rollins for the title. They're running a risk of having Reigns get back into the title picture so soon but I don't think there was ever any real doubt.

Here's New Day to celebrate 337 days as Tag Team Champions. After Woods says he's glad Bray was drafted to Smackdown and a quick Booty0's ad, we get a montage of the title reign. Tonight, New Day is going to let a member of the crowd be an honorary member of New Day, but the question is who.

They pick a somewhat rotund man in a New Day shirt and Big E. asks sonny boy what his name is. Man: "Sonny Boy." Kofi: "No your government name." Man: "Sonny Boy." New Day doesn't quite buy this and ask if that's the name that comes on his bills or how he signs the check at restaurants. The dancing is on but the Club comes out to interrupt and beat the champs down. Big E. takes a Magic Killer and the other two lose their shirts. The Club talk trash to Sonny Boy and throw a shirt at him.

Curtis Axel vs. Neville

Axel is listed as Mr. Irrelevant because he was picked last. Neville snaps off a neckbreaker to start and flips over him a few times. A standing shooting star to the back keeps Axel in trouble and the lifting German suplex puts him in the corner. The Red Arrow puts Curtis away at

3:45.

Rating: D+. Neville is still Neville, meaning he still does almost every spot he has in each match which explains why they get weaker and weaker reactions every single time (see also Cesaro). Axel continues to be treated like a goof, especially when he should just be Joe Hennig and be Mr. Perfect II but that's too easy for WWE for reasons I don't understand.

Darren Young wants the Intercontinental Title but Bob Backlund's pep talk is cut off by the Pokemon Go hunt. Backlund yells a lot.

Video on Finn Balor.

Charlotte thinks Sasha will crack under the pressure tonight.

Women's Title: Sasha Banks vs. Charlotte

Charlotte is defending. They lock up and go down to the mat with a rollup freaking the champ out. Dana offers a quick distraction and earns an early reprimand. Banks grabs a quick Bank Statement but only gets a modified version of the hold, allowing Charlotte to escape. That's nice of her. Instead Sasha sends her outside for the double knees from the apron and a near fall.

Charlotte kicks Sasha into the corner and then drives her into the barricade, setting up some trash talking with the belt in hand. Dana picks up the dropped belt and Sasha feigns an attack, earning Dana an ejection. Why this isn't a DQ isn't clear but it takes us to a break. Back with Sasha fighting out of a double arm crank and hitting more running knees. Charlotte grabs a quick neckbreaker but has to bail out of the moonsault. That's fine as she lands on her feet (because she can), only to have a flip dive blocked by raised boots. Sasha sends her to the floor for a dive with a SCARY landing as Banks came down on her face.

She's fine enough to cover Charlotte for two but the champ sends her outside for a huge moonsault to a standing Sasha. I mean, she barely made contact but dang it looked cool. Back in and Natural Selection gets two so we hit the Figure Four. The hold is rolled over but Charlotte goes

under the ropes and bends the hold over the apron. Back in and Sasha flips out of another Figure four to grab the Bank Statement but Charlotte's foot is under the ropes. Another Bank Statement gives Sasha the title in a big surprise at 16:53.

Rating: B+. Botches aside, this was a good match and felt like a big deal. Sasha winning feels like a crowning achievement, despite a limited build and WASTING THREE MONTHS ON THAT CHARLOTTE VS. NATALYA FEUD SO WE CAN CHANGE THE TITLE ON RAW. In theory this sets up either a rematch in Brooklyn or maybe a full time Bayley call up for a shot at Summerslam.

Sasha gives a quick speech about how she's earned this and this is a new era.

Braun Strowman vs. James Ellsworth

Before the match, James thinks it would be a big win for his career and anyone with two hands can fight. A quick beating sets up a reverse chokeslam to give Strowman the pin at 1:10.

Video on Roman Reigns.

Golden Truth is STILL hunting for Pokemon and find.....the Pittsburgh Penguins logo?

Here are Enzo and Cass for a chat about various raw foods. They're cut off by the Shining Stars of all people and it's time for a match.

Shining Stars vs. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Primo puts Enzo down for all of thirty seconds before the hot tag brings in Cass to clean house. Cass actually gets low bridged to the floor but here are Golden Truth on the Pokemon hunt. The distraction lets Cass kick Epico in the face for the pin at 1:51. These guys were teaming with JOHN CENA last night and now they're here?

Roman and Finn wish each other luck.

Finn Balor vs. Roman Reigns

Winner goes to Summerslam to face Rollins for the title. Reigns launches

him into the corner to start but Balor snaps his throat across the top. Some kicks to the head don't have much effect on Reigns as he runs Balor over again. The apron boot misses though and Balor's slingshot double stomp has Roman in trouble.

We take a break and come back with Roman powerslamming him for two and grabbing a chinlock. A sitout powerbomb gets two but Balor comes back with a string of kicks for a near fall of his own. The Superman Punch only gets two on Balor and everyone is stunned. Balor gets two off his own off a sunset flip to counter the Razor's Edge bomb. Back to back powerbombs get two more on Finn but Balor grabs a Sling Blade to block the spear. The Coup de Grace gets the big upset pin at 13:57.

Rating: B. I liked it better when AJ Styles did this the night after Wrestlemania but it's still a good ending and the right call for a change. There was really no need to do Reigns vs. Rollins again and this is a great way to make Balor seem like a big deal. He doesn't necessarily need to win the title at Summerslam but it's a really smart idea to have him get a big rub like this on his first night on the main roster.

Post match Reigns says he hopes Balor wins the title because he wants another shot at Finn.

Overall Rating: B. This was up and down all night but the main event and the title change were enough to swing it upwards. That title change really needed to happen as the rest of the show didn't exactly have a lot going on. The re-debuts were good and the matches made some people fresh players but that doesn't mean the show was all that entertaining. I really liked the lack of authority figures as they just don't need to be there that often. Overall it's a good show but absolutely nothing that blew me away.

Results

Finn Balor b. Rusev, Cesaro and Kevin Owens – Coup de Grace to Rusev

Nia Jax b. Brit Baker – Legdrop

Roman Reigns b. Sami Zayn, Sheamus and Chris Jericho – Spear to Jericho

Neville b. Curtis Axel – Red Arrow

Sasha Banks b. Charlotte – Bank Statement

Braun Strowman b. James Ellsworth – Reverse chokeslam

Enzo Amore/Big Cass b. Shining Stars – Big boot to Epico

Finn Balor b. Roman Reigns – Coup de Grace

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Smackdown – January 29, 2004: Viva La Smackdown

Smackdown

Date: January 29, 2004

Location: MCI Center, Washington D.C.

Commentators: Michael Cole, Tazz

This is another request that I got so long ago that I can't remember why someone wanted to see it. I'd assume it's due to the big battle royal for the #1 contendership to the Smackdown World Title with the winner getting to face Brock Lesnar at No Way Out 2004. This was a fun time for

Smackdown so let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Smackdown GM Paul Heyman is in the ring to start but he's quickly interrupted by Vince. The big boss wants to know why the Royal Rumble winner (Chris Benoit) isn't on Smackdown anymore after jumping to Raw. Vince blames Heyman for getting rid of Benoit so Heyman goes on a rant about how the old Vince would just march on past it like he did when Hall, Nash, Hogan or even BRET HART left the company.

That's why Heyman has an idea: tonight we'll have another Royal Rumble RIGHT HERE TONIGHT. We'll have a fifteen man version with the injured Matt Morgan being replaced by Hardcore Holly and Chris Benoit's spot being taken by Eddie Guerrero. The winner gets the shot at Lesnar at No Way Out...because they can't just have the shot at Wrestlemania for some reason. Vince says it's on.

Smackdown Tag Team Titles: Basham Brothers vs. Paul London/Billy Kidman

The Bashams (Doug and Danny, a pair of very similar looking brawlers) are defending and have the useless Shaniqua in their corner. Doug (I think, though it's like trying to remember which Uso is which) starts with Kidman, who takes him down with a headscissors. Danny low bridges London to the floor though as Cole is already forgetting which Basham is which.

A spinning belly to back gets two for London and it's time to work on the spine. We hit the double arm crank for a bit until London dropkicks his way to a hot tag. Kidman's enziguri gets two on Doug with Kidman getting off the cover to dropkick Danny. Shaniqua offers a distraction and we get some twin magic, setting up a super DDT to retain the titles.

Rating: D. The Bashams were yet another lame team in a big list of them around this time. There was no reason to have two Tag Team Titles and I think everyone knew it but there was no way WWE would ever admit that. London and Kendrick would get the titles in July with three other title changes in between.

Kurt Angle is incensed that he has to pull his own number and jets off

when he sees it.

Chavo Guerrero is all bruised but promises his dad that he'll get revenge on Uncle Eddie.

Speaking of Eddie, he comes in to pick his number and seems very pleased. Cruiserweight Champion Rey Mysterio comes in with his friend boxer Jorge Paez and nothing happens.

John Cena hits on Dawn Marie (attending the ball hopper) and draws his number. Rhyno comes in and suggests he'll end Cena's career by going after his bad knee.

Cruiserweight Title: Rey Mysterio vs. Jamie Noble

Noble is challenging, gets no entrance and has his blind girlfriend Nidia in his corner. This is a rematch from the Rumble where Nidia accidentally tripped Noble and cost him the match. Jamie takes him down with a hammerlock but an ankle scissors gets him out of trouble. Something like a torture rack has Rey in trouble so he armdrags Noble down and into 619 position. It's way too early for that of course but Nidia accidentally trips Jamie again to little disaster.

Noble stays on the back and puts on a seated abdominal stretch. Back up and Noble sends him into the corner and bends Rey's back around the post. A superplex puts both guys down as Noble can't follow up. My what convenient timing. Mysterio comes right back with a middle rope bulldog and the 619 but he tweaks his knee on the West Coast Pop. Jamie sends him outside right in front of Nidia, who gets in the way of Jamie's attempted dive. For reasons that aren't clear, Jamie throws her inside but apparently she can see just fine, allowing Rey to hit a springboard seated senton to retain.

Rating: B-. Really good TV match and an improvement over the pay per view match but there's this misconception that people cared about Nidia enough to make this story interesting. Noble got what he had coming here and it's a simple story but Nidia doing a face turn isn't going to get anyone anywhere.

The new correspondent tells us that Playboy is looking for two women for the next spread. Ignore the fact that Torrie Wilson and Sable had already been announced for the issue. This sets up a quick history of the WWE/Playboy relationship, which has basically been buried in the archives ever since.

Dawn has to pick Big Show's number and "chicks dig it big" jokes are made.

Brock Lesnar isn't worried about Goldberg saying he's next because Goldberg is clearly a Lesnar wannabe instead of the other way around. Tonight he's issuing an open challenge to anyone on the Smackdown roster for a non-title match. This might be the longest I've ever heard Brock talk and I've certainly heard worse.

Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin are about to pick their numbers when someone comes in to tell Heyman that Eddie has been attacked. Everyone runs to Eddie while the Chavos deny having anything to do with this. Rey comes in and goes after Jr. but gets pulled back.

Eddie is put in an ambulance.

Brock Lesnar vs. Orlando Jordan

Oh yeah Jordan is a person that exists. I always forget. He's still a rookie at this point so this shouldn't take long. Brock actually gets knocked outside to start as the fans remind Lesnar that he tapped out recently. Jordan can't even get one off a sunset flip so Brock easily drives him into the corner for some shoulders to the ribs. We hit a modified rear naked choke for a bit before Jordan comes back with a dropkick and jumping elbow. A clothesline cuts that off though and the Brock Lock ends Jordan with ease.

Rating: D-. I'm so glad they let Jordan get in some offense on the champ like this before he was destroyed. It really enhanced his career and made me care about him. Jordan continues to rank very high on the list of worthless wrestlers as he just stayed around for years despite showing absolutely no reason to keep a spot on the roster.

Some wrestlers went to Walter Reed Hospital to see some wounded soldiers.

We see clips of Kane being tormented by the spirit of the Undertaker.

Vince says forget about Undertaker because he's buried. Uh, right. There is something to be said about Vince refusing to accept the idea that someone who comes back almost annually is coming back again.

Angle accuses Heyman of having Eddie injured. Apparently Eddie is already conscious again but Angle says that's not enough. Heyman says if Eddie is here when his number is up, he can be in the Rumble.

Royal Rumble

There are fifteen entries and we have 90 second intervals. Kurt Angle, who has dedicated this to the US Armed Forces, is in at #1 and Rhyno is in at #2. They slug it out to start and Rhyno hits a quick Gore in the first minute. Angle gets in a quick Angle Slam though and Charlie Haas is in at #3. Charlie mocks Angle for reasons of general stupidity, allowing Rhyno to jump him from behind. For some reason Angle doesn't help Rhyno get rid of Haas and goes after horned one.

Shelton Benjamin is in at #4 and the partners double team Rhyno but Angle makes another save with a German suplex. Nothing of note happens until it's Bradshaw in at #5 and it's time for the Clotheslines. We take a break and come back with Tajiri coming in at #7 but stopping to go after the Cat (who came in at #6 and was eliminated during the break) and his manager Lamont.

Billy Gunn is in at #8 and nothing happens so it's Big Show in at #9 to start clearing out some room. Everyone gets ready for him but he shoves all seven of them off like they're villagers. Tajiri is easily put out and Bradshaw follows him via a low bridge. John Cena is in at #10 despite sporting a bad knee. Cena puts Show on the apron and we come back from a break with A-Train and Nunzio having entered at #11/#12 but Nunzio is already out.

Eddie Guerrero is in at #13 and apparently Rhyno was eliminated during the break. Guerrero actually backdrops A-Train out and it's Rikishi in at

#14. Gunn is superkicked to the apron and Show gets the Stinkface. Shelton and Billy get the same thing and it's Hardcore Holly in at #15 to complete the field with Angle, Haas, Benjamin, Gunn, Show, Cena, Eddie, Rikishi and Holly.

Show chokes Cena to the apron and then the floor for an elimination that would stop the match dead in its tracks today. A big group of people almost have Show out and Cena pulls him down to the floor as we're down to seven. Since nothing else is going on, let's look at every elimination in the match so far! You know, because this couldn't be shown on a split screen for some reason.

Eddie gets rid of Haas and Shelton is sent out a few seconds later. A frog splash hits Rikishi before Angle gets rid of Holly (basically ending his "main event run" in the process). Eddie gets Gunn out and we're down to Guerrero, Angle and Gunn. Rikishi starts cleaning house until he misses a Banzai Drop. That's enough for Angle and Eddie to put him out and now we're down to the real showdown where either story would be awesome. Angle easily takes him to the mat and starts with the rolling Germans. Eddie stays on the apron and grabs an ankle lock on Kurt, only to be reversed into one from Angle (because of course).

Another elimination attempt doesn't work and it's the Three Amigos to put Kurt in trouble. The frog splash is broken up with some crotching and both guys are down near the corner. Kurt grabs a sleeper/chinlock but Eddie sends him out to the apron for another slugout. They fight over a suplex with Eddie shaking his legs to save himself and suplexes Kurt to the floor for the title shot in a big surprise.

Rating: A-. This started slowly as battle royals tend to do but then it took off and turned into a great match when you knew it was going to be Angle vs. Guerrero at the end. This was the start of Eddie's rocket push and you could tell the fans were on board with the idea as Guerrero had earned this after a lot of years trying to get off the ground. It also needs to be emphasized that making this a Royal Rumble instead of a battle royal made it work so much better.

Overall Rating: B. This was one heck of a show with a good Cruiserweight

Title match and the last third of the show being dedicated to one of the better battle royals you'll ever see. They're still in the era of having having big time shows because the Brand Split was still working at this point, meaning you would get stuff like this instead of EVERYTHING being about the pay per view. I had a good time with this show and it flew by, mainly on the strength of good wrestling, though having Eddie's injuries mean a bit more would have helped.

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book, KB's WWE Grab Bag at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01IH70904>

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

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

Battleground 2016: It's Battleground!

Battleground 2016

Date: July 24, 2016

Location: Verizon Center, Washington D.C.

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

This is an interesting show as the Draft has made what was just a pit stop before Summerslam into a nearly meaningless show which happens to have something that could have been a co-main event of Wrestlemania. Other than that we have some nothing midcard matches, six man tags where two of the teams will be split starting tomorrow and a mystery partner.

You might call this a mixed bag. Let's get to it.

Pre-Show: Usos vs. Breezango

Just a thrown together match. Jimmy hits a backbreaker on Fandango to start before it's quickly off to Breeze. Some double teaming lets Breeze snap Jey's throat across the top rope and we hit the chinlock. A few kicks to the face/head drop Breezango and it's off to Jimmy via the hot tag.

Everything breaks down and it's a series of kicks to put Breeze on the floor. Tyler comes back in to save Fandango from an electric chair, only to have Jey cross body both of them. The Superfly Splash gets two on Tyler before another superkick puts Fandango outside. A running superkick looks to set up the Superfly Splash again but Breeze gets his knees up, allowing him to grab a small package for the pin at 5:28.

Rating: C+. This was a very fast paced match and above all else the right team won. The Usos don't need to win matches like this one while Breezango needs to get some wins under their belts to actually become an important team. I still like Breezango and they're a great example of making something out of nothing. Why can that almost never happen otherwise?

The opening video shows everyone holding their flags before going to a package on the Shield imploding to set up this match.

Charlotte/Dana Brooke vs. Sasha Banks/???

So Sasha has been going for Charlotte's title but keeps having to deal with Dana, hence bringing in a mystery partner. The mystery partner is....Bayley, in one of the worst kept secrets in a long time. Like, since Tuesday. The place goes insane for Bayley so that's certainly the solid debut.

Charlotte and Dana jump them from behind before the bell and Bayley is sent into the barricade. We get the official start with Charlotte hammering away in the corner until Bayley gets in the jumping middle rope elbow. It's off to Sasha who botches a hurricanrana before Charlotte

sends her into the middle buckle.

Dana's chinlock doesn't go anywhere so it's off to Bayley who is taken down just as quickly. Bayley and Dana collide as JBL talks about this being a one off appearance for Bayley on the main roster. I really, really can't imagine that's true. Sasha comes in off the tag and everything breaks down with Charlotte hitting Natural Selection for two on Banks. Dana saves the Bank Statement but Bayley takes her to the floor, setting up the second Bank Statement to make Charlotte tap at 7:24.

Rating: C+. This was much more about the crowd reaction than anything else and that worked like a charm. What won't work like a charm is having Bayley just go back to NXT at this point. Is there any real reason to not have her on the main roster full time at this point? She can do the build to Takeover and still do this stuff just fine but for some reason they want to just have this be a one off. Maybe it's to keep Sasha hot, but then again maybe they should have thought of that THREE MONTHS AGO WHEN SHE WAS THE HOTTEST THING IN THE DIVISION AND WE DIDN'T DO THE WAY TOO LONG NATALYA FEUD.

Sasha and Bayley hug post match.

We recap the Wyatt Family vs. New Day. The Wyatts returned with Bray's face turn completely forgotten and went after New Day and their power of positivity message. Bray got in Xavier Woods' head and started to psych him out but with the Wyatts being split by the Draft, most of that has been dropped.

Wyatt Family vs. New Day

Before the match, New Day says they're just not scared. Woods and Strowman start but it's off to Bray to really scare Xavier. Actually make that Kofi, who dropkicks Wyatt while Woods is frozen in the corner. Rowan comes in with a slam and grabs a head vice before Bray drops his running backplash. A clothesline turns Kofi inside out and Woods has to drop down to the floor in fear. Kofi gets away from Braun and makes the hot tag to Big E. as everything breaks down.

Braun gets kicked to the floor and taken down by a Kofi dive (less than a year ago Dean Ambrose's dive bounced off of him). Woods saves Kofi from Sister Abigail but it's time for the big psychic staredown. It takes Kofi coming in off the top to wake Woods up and he goes off on Bray with a running forearm and right hands in the corner. A top rope splash crushes Bray and a superkick (SHOT!) puts Erick on the floor. Big E. spears Rowan off the apron but Bray's spider walk freaks Woods out and sets up Sister Abigail for the pin at 8:50.

Rating: B. Well that happened. I have no idea what the point is in having these guys win unless they're either splitting up the New Day (stupid) or having....actually that's it for their options. I mean, there's always the chance that this loss means nothing and they'll just have New Day go on like it's nothing, which is probably the direction they're going with for the sake of stupidity.

US Title: Rusev vs. Zack Ryder

Rusev is defending after Ryder won a few matches (ignore the clean loss to Sheamus in two minutes of course) and challenged for the title. Lana, now in a tiara, introduces the champ. Ryder is in red, white and blue to really hammer this home. Rusev throws him into the corner to start but Ryder comes back with a middle rope dropkick....which completely misses.

A low superkick drops Ryder and it's time for heavy right hands. Ryder elbows out of a waistlock and fires off some forearms in the corner. A neckbreaker stuns the champ as we're firmly in the false hope portion of the match. Rusev knocks him to the floor but Ryder hits a dropkick off the barricade. Back in and the Rough Ryder sets up the Elbro but Rusev gets the knees up. The jumping superkick and the Accolade put Ryder away at 7:03.

Rating: D+. Zack Ryder loses to Rusev because that's what Zack Ryder does. Ryder is getting better at losing to Rusev as he finally broke five minutes against him. I really don't think anyone believed this was going to happen and there was no reason to assume anything else. Ryder isn't going to beat someone like Rusev and it's foolish to think he would.

Post match the beating continues until Mojo Rawley debuts to make the

save, thereby setting up nothing at all since he's on Smackdown while Rusev is on Raw.

Seth Rollins comes in to see Mick Foley and Stephanie McMahon (GET SETH AWAY FROM HER! NOW!) and the bosses tell him to bring the title back to Raw. Rollins isn't worried because he's just that awesome and promises that there will be a bunch of Rollins babies in about nine months.

We recap Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens who are fighting because they're Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens. They've hated each other for years now and they still are, though this was supposed to be the final fight until the Draft put them on the same show, negating the purposes of the idea.

Sami Zayn vs. Kevin Owens

Zayn's attempted Helluva Kick sends Owens to the floor and they immediately start the brawl. Back in and Owens sends him into the corner for two off the Cannonball. Owens even stomps on Sami's hand as we hit the OLE chants. We hit the chinlock with Owens mocking the SAMI chants because he's just that awesome. Back up and the Michinoku Driver gets two on Owens but he's able to break up the flip dive before Sami can dive.

Instead Sami tries the slingshot moonsault but slips up and lands shoulder first on the apron. The shoulder is fine enough for Owens to work it over so you know he's ok. The Blue Thunder Bomb gets two back inside so I'm going to assume Sami is fine. Owens can't get a superplex so he settles for a superkick and Crossface. Sami finally crawls over to the rope and grabs the exploder into the corner. He gets caught on top though and has to escape a Death Valley Driver on the apron, meaning it's the closest thing we'll see to the BRAINBUSTAHHHHHHH in WWE.

Owens beats the count by a few seconds and they slug it out to dueling chants. The diving DDT is broken up and Owens hits a Cannonball with Sami still draped over the bottom rope. I love it when they tweak moves like that. The Bullfrog splash gets two on Sami but he counters the Pop Up Powerbomb into the tornado DDT. Yet another Helluva Kick is countered with another superkick as they keep countering each others' big moves due to being so familiar with one another.

Sami escapes another powerbomb attempt and hits back to back half and half suplexes for two and a standing ovation. The Pop Up Powerbomb connects but Sami gets his foot on the ropes. Owens starts slapping him as Sami says bring it, setting up another exploder into the corner. The Helluva Kick sends Owens falling into Sami's arms, setting up a second Helluva Kick for the clean pin at 18:26.

Rating: A. Can we just give these two the match of the night honors whenever they're on the card? There's such a chemistry here and I'd love to see them as partners who can't stand each other. Owens is almost being turned face by sheer force of the crowd but it's almost impossible to go against someone as loveable as Sami. Either way, great match with a great story and outstanding action to go with it.

Cole says Sami has exorcized his demons by beating Owens. Those must be quick rise demons as he pinned Owens about a month ago on Raw in a singles match.

Pre-show recap.

Natalya vs. Becky Lynch

Fallout from Natalya vs. Charlotte when Natalya turned on Becky. Natalya tries to bail to start but she's just suckering Becky in and scoring with a dropkick. It's already time to go after the knee with a side leg lock but she has to get out of a quick Disarm-Her. A stomp onto the leg sets up another leglock and Natalya gets in a quick nipup. An enziguri with the good leg gives Becky a breather before the Bexploder gets two. Becky gets two more off a missile dropkick but it bangs up the leg, setting up the Sharpshooter for the submission at 9:00.

Rating: C-. I wasn't feeling this one, especially after the classic beforehand. Natalya winning is fine and they did a good story with the leg and such but it's still just a match with a pretty lame story. I have no idea what they're going to do with the women on Smackdown but PLEASE don't bring in a second title at this point, especially with how much the talent falls off after these two.

Shane McMahon and Daniel Bryan give Dean Ambrose a pep talk.

Intercontinental Title: Darren Young vs. The Miz

Young is challenging after winning a battle royal. He also has Bob Backlund in his corner in an attempt to make Young great again. Ignore the lack of preceding greatness. Young wrestles him down to the mat before getting two off a neckbreaker. Miz shoves him off the top to take over and then grabs a headlock.

Miz's corner clothesline is cut off with another clothesline. The Crossface Chickenwing sends Miz bailing to the floor but Backlund won't let him leave. Maryse slaps Backlund and they both go down, only to have Backlund rip his shirt off. Miz goes after Backlund so Young grabs a cobra clutch on the floor as the bell rings (I think for a DQ?) at 8:40.

Rating: D. Well that happened and we can add another entry to the list of things that seem to be setting up a rematch but there's no logical way to have the rematch happen under the current rules because HAHA DRAFT. Young shouldn't have won the title here and it wouldn't have made sense for him to, though the Backlund thing has some more mileage in it, especially if it gives Young a personality.

Young chokes Miz out and looks at his hands ala Backlund in 1994.

We recap Cena/Amore/Cass vs. the Club. Cena was tired of getting beaten down by the trio so Enzo and Big Cass came out to help him, setting this up. Again though, the Club was split up so this doesn't exactly have the same meaning.

The Club vs. John Cena/Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Enzo says his team is 4G and they're very well connected. He keeps going on a rant with life advise (always lie on your resume and never make eye contact with someone while eating a banana) and also suggests a good dentist and therapist. Cena is dying in the corner listening to this and Cass tells the crowd to give it up for Enzo after that performance. Cass insults AJ's haircut and suggests that he make a lunch like a soccer mom ("Make sure to cut the crust off."). Then he can take the kids to Raw and remember the time they took a beating in Washington D.C.

Enzo and AJ start things off and we hit the SOCCER MOM chants. That earns Enzo a dropkick to the face so it's off to Cass to face Anderson. We get the standard Cass throws Enzo at people spot as Cena isn't sure what to think. Cass tosses Styles out as well before slamming Enzo onto Anderson, leaving Cena wondering why he can't get a tag. Things settle down to Gallows working on Enzo with his heavy offense. Anderson comes in with a bicycle kick to the head (Karl: "HI YAH!") to set up a chinlock.

The beating continues until Gallows misses a splash, setting up the hot tag to Cena. A very quick AA attempt on Styles is countered into a Pele as everything breaks down. Gallows hits a chokebomb on Cass before Cena and Luke play pass the Enzo, only to have AJ hit the forearm on Gallows by mistake. The AA gets two on AJ with Karl making the save, setting up a spinebuster onto the table.

Cena dives back in at nine and the Styles Clash gets another near fall with Cass making the save. The Club takes out Cass so Enzo volunteers to fight them himself. Karl is sent into the post but Gallows kicks Enzo in the face, only to have Cena come back in and take Luke out. Styles comes back in but gets caught in a super AA for the pin at 14:23.

Rating: B. So that's your setup for Cena vs. AJ II which probably should be for the Smackdown World Title if such a thing exists. Cena pinning AJ in a tag match is fine and sets things moving forward a bit more but the bigger thing here is Enzo and Cass looking like they're on a much higher level than they were just a few weeks ago. These guys are looking like something important, which you never expect to see for people who debuted just three and a half months ago.

It's time for the Highlight Reel with the returning Randy Orton. Randy really seems happy to be back and is definitely here as a face. He talks about being gone for nine months to get back to this point and he's stuck here with this loser. Jericho says Orton being in this ring with him puts Orton on a different level. That makes Orton think he should drop Jericho with an RKO out of nowhere so Jericho sums up the last few months for him, including the tacks going into his back a little while ago.

Jericho offers the Gift of Jericho and Orton walks up to him, shaking

Jericho up a bit. Orton says it was just to see the hair because it looks like Ellen DeGeneres'. We see a clip of Lesnar talking about hurting people but Orton is ready to go to Suplex City. See, it takes twenty suplexes to get there but it only takes one RKO to go to Viperville, NO ENHANCEMENT NEEDED. Even the crowd gasps at that one. Jericho suggests that Orton is in trouble and teases Orton about the RKO, which eventually hits, albeit not out of nowhere. This took WAY longer than it should have but that enhancement line was great.

We recap the Shield triple threat which is well over a few years in the making. The short version consists of Rollins returning from knee surgery and taking the title from Reigns, only to have Ambrose take it away that same night. This set up the triple threat but Reigns has been suspended for a month due to a Wellness violation.

WWE World Title: Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins vs. Dean Ambrose

Ambrose is defending but before we can get going, here are all four authority figures (because there are four authority figures in WWE). We get the big match intros and the three way staredown before Rollins is knocked to the floor. Ambrose rolls Reigns up for two and eats a big clothesline for his efforts.

Rollins gets caught in a Samoan Drop but Ambrose takes them both down as they're only just out of first gear. Roman is sent outside and we get Rollins vs. Ambrose for the third time this week. They head to the floor as well with Ambrose going into the steps and Roman going into the barricade. This is the rather dull part of the match where they haven't cranked it up yet and there's clearly at least another ten minutes in the match so we're kind of stuck waiting.

All three wind up in the timekeeper's area for a bit before Ambrose missile dropkicks Reigns for two. The standing elbow drop gets two but Rollins comes back in to break up the cover. Roman gets in a Superman Punch to Rollins but Ambrose runs him over to put all three down. Now it's Reigns getting double teamed with both guys scoring off running dives to the floor. We see the locker rooms watching (I'm sure that's completely authentic) as Reigns is powerbombed through the announcers'

table.

Back in and the Buckle Bomb is countered with a hurricanrana into the corner to put both guys down. Rollins is still able to run up the corner for the superplex into the falcon's arrow for the first near fall. Reigns comes back in to break up a superplex on Rollins, setting up a sitout powerbomb for two on Seth. The champ ducks the Superman Punch but can't hit Dirty Deeds, allowing the Punch to knock Dean outside. Rollins gets a very close fall off a Pedigree to Reigns, only to have the spear cut him in half. Ambrose scores with a quick Dirty Deeds to pin Reigns at 18:05.

Rating: B+. This started slowly but got a lot better as things went on. I'm really hoping that's not it for the Reigns punishment as just losing in a pay per view main event isn't exactly the worst thing in the world. Ambrose winning makes sense as Smackdown needs something to fight over and I'm sure Raw will still get their shots in the future. This would have been better served on a bigger stage but it really did need to happen.

JBL goes NUTS with a big rant about how great Smackdown is, completely forgetting how much he can't stand Ambrose. The Smackdown locker room comes out because this allegedly means something.

Overall Rating: B+. As is so often the case anymore, strong wrestling by the younger guys brings these shows up a few notches. The main event was solid and you had a classic in the middle of the show plus a very fun moment in the opener. The midcard stuff really holds this back though as there's a stretch in there of Natalya vs. Lynch which should have been on the pre-show to help keep this from ending at 11:15.

I'm fine with extra wrestling but there was really no need for the bonus tag when you could move something to the pre-show instead to free up some time. Still though, good stuff as WWE's PPVs continue to be better than they have any right to be. Check out Zayn vs. Owens though, in case you somehow haven't seen them fight before.

Results

Sasha Banks/Bayley b. Charlotte/Dana Brooke – Bank Statement to Charlotte

Wyatt Family b. New Day – Sister Abigail to Woods

Rusev b. Zack Ryder – Accolade

Sami Zayn b. Kevin Owens – Helluva Kick

Natalya b. Becky Lynch – Sharpshooter

The Miz b. Darren Young via DQ when Bob Backlund interfered

John Cena/Enzo Amore/Big Cass b. The Club – Super AA to Styles

Dean Ambrose b. Roman Reigns and Seth Rollins – Dirty Deeds to Reigns

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Cruiserweight Classic – July 20, 2016: More Classic

Cruiserweight Classic

Date: July 20, 2016

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Daniel Bryan

It's week two and therefore time for more first round matches. Last

week's show was entertaining stuff as they're going with a very different vibe this time around. It's rather cool to see a lot of the unknowns getting shots, even if a lot of them have almost no chance of winning the thing. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Mauro welcomes us to the show and congratulates Bryan on his new role in WWE, though no specific spot is mentioned.

Corey Graves introduces a recap of last week's show and introduces tonight's matches.

First Round: Tajiri vs. Damien Slater

Japan vs. Australia. Tajiri starts fast and sends Slater into the ropes as they're still feeling each other out in the early going. Slater kicks him in the ribs and Bryan is right there to say kicking with Tajiri is a bad idea. Instead they fight over some wristlocks with Tajiri hammering him down with some elbows.

More kicks sets up an armbar on Slater but he makes the ropes and sends Tajiri outside for a slingshot corkscrew dive. Back in and Tajiri grabs a wristlock to slow down Slater's offense. That's so simple but actually smart at the same time. I mean it didn't work but it was smart. A running knee to the head gets two for Slater. Tajiri gets in even more kicks and grabs a quick Tarantula, followed by the handspring elbow. The Buzzsaw Kick puts Slater away at 5:49.

Rating: C. Tajiri was one of my favorites in ECW and it's a good sign that he's basically the same wrestler that he was back in the day (albeit a bit slower). Sometimes it's easier to just kick someone in the head over and over. Slater wasn't the flashiest guy out there but he looked very confident in the basic stuff he was doing.

TJ Perkins is the wrestler who makes everything look good.

Da Mack wants to be the Michael Jackson of professional wrestling. Take that for what it's worth.

First Round: Da Mack vs. TJ Perkins

Germany vs. Philippines and both guys seem cocky. Mack's dancing draws an Alex Wright reference. Perkins takes him down with a dropkick and a headscissors with some dancing that Bryan (nor myself) can identify. Mack catches him with a palm strike but Perkins dances into a Boston crab with Perkins lifting him up by the arms. The threat of a Muta Lock (bridging Indian Deathlock with a chinlock) sends Mack over to the ropes and he's able to pull TJ to the floor.

Naturally that means a big flip dive, followed by some dancing stomps back inside. Now the Muta Lock has Mack in trouble but he's right in front of the ropes. Mack is back up and runs the corner for a spinning kick to the face, only to have the landing delay the cover. Perkins is right back up with a slingshot dropkick but he misses a 450. Not that it matters as some kicks to the head set up a kneebar to make Mack tap at 6:30.

Rating: B-. They packed a lot into a short amount of time and it was a much different style than the first match. This was all about the high flying with some submission stuff thrown in for some flavor. Mack looked like almost any high flying indy name but Perkins looked like a much more versatile and polished wrestler. Not great but entertaining enough.

Mustafa Ali says he's the most well rounded wrestler in the tournament.

Lince Dorado, a masked man, talks about wrestling around the world and being ready to face anyone.

First Round: Mustafa Ali vs. Lince Dorado

Pakistan vs. Puerto Rico. Ali doesn't want to shake hands but eventually does so to get us going. Dorado headscissors him out to the floor but gets pulled outside as well, setting up a running knee from the apron. A knee to the back gets two on Dorado but he kicks Ali in the face. Dorado isn't done as he headscissors Ali to the floor, setting up the longest Asai Moonsault I've ever seen. Back in and a springboard reverse hurricanrana (it sounds better than it looks) gets two on Ali, who comes right back with a springboard Spanish Fly for the same. Ali misses a 450

though and a shooting star gives Dorado the pin at 5:53.

Rating: B+. Take two guys and let them fly all over the place for a few minutes. It worked back in WCW and it's still going to work today. This was easily the most entertaining thing so far with two guys who both got to show off a lot. I've seen Dorado before but Ali looked a lot better than I was expecting. Really fun match here and the kind I've been waiting for.

Akira Tozawa is excited to be here.

Kenneth Johnson thinks it's his time.

First Round: Akira Tozawa vs. Kenneth Johnson

Japan vs. USA. Again they fight over a wristlock to start until Johnson actually takes him to the mat and works on the leg. A headlock into a headscissors gives us a standoff. Tozawa, the heavy favorite coming in, finally starts getting serious and wins a chop off before just punching Johnson in the jaw.

Johnson takes a hard roaring elbow but comes right back with a dropkick for no cover. There's a double clothesline to put both guys down until Tozawa goes nuts with some forearms to the jaw. Johnson stops him cold with knees to the face and a jackknife cover for two. Kenneth misses a middle rope spinning legdrop though and Tozawa snaps off a hard German suplex for two, followed by a bridging German for the pin at 10:00.

Rating: B. Tozawa cranked it up in the end and looked like one of the favorites to win the whole thing. Johnson was the definition of a guy in tights but he held his own here against someone with a lot more experience and skill. There was even a good story here with Tozawa underestimating him and Johnson trying to make the most of it until he was overcome by all the skill and experience. The match was shockingly good and far better than the squash I was expecting.

Overall Rating: B+. The last two matches were definitely upgrades over the first two with two flashy, high flying cruiserweight styles matches which is more what I was looking for here. I do however like the multiple

styles because they keep the thing from getting stale with the same stuff over and over. Mixing it up is always an appreciated touch and it made the show much more entertaining this week.

Results

Tajiri b. Damien Slater – Buzzsaw Kick

TJ Perkins b. Da Mack – Kneebar

Lince Dorado b. Mustafa Ali – Shooting Star Press

Akira Tozawa b. Kenneth Johnson – German suplex

Results

Tajiri b. Damien Slater – Buzzsaw Kick

TJ Perkins b. Da Mack – Kneebar

Lince Dorado b. Mustafa Ali – Shooting Star Press

Akira Tozawa b. Kenneth Johnson – German suplex

Remember to follow me on Twitter @kbreviews and pick up my new book, KB's WWE Grab Bag at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

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Full WWE Draft Results

Including the picks from the Network.

Monday Night Raw

1. Seth Rollins
2. Charlotte
3. Finn Balor
4. Roman Reigns
5. Brock Lesnar
6. New Day
7. Sami Zayn
8. Sasha Banks
9. Chris Jericho
10. Rusev w/Lana
11. Kevin Owens
12. Enzo Amore/Big Cass
13. The Club
14. Big Show
15. Nia Jax
16. Neville
17. Cesaro
18. Sheamus
19. Golden Truth

20. Titus O'Neil
21. Paige
22. Darren Young
23. Sin Cara
24. Jack Swagger
25. Dudley Boyz
26. Summer Rae
27. Mark Henry
28. Braun Strowman
29. Bo Dallas
30. Shining Stars
31. Alicia Fox
32. Dana Brooke
33. Curtis Axel

Smackdown

1. Dean Ambrose
2. AJ Styles
3. John Cena
4. Randy Orton
5. Bray Wyatt
6. Becky Lynch
7. The Miz w/Maryse

8. Baron Corbin
 9. American Alpha
 10. Dolph Ziggler
 11. Natalya
 12. Alberto Del Rio
 13. Usos
 14. Kane
 15. Kalisto
 16. Naomi
 17. Ascension
 18. Zack Ryder
 19. Apollo Crews
 20. Alexa Bliss
 21. Breezango
 22. Eva Marie
 23. Vaudevillains
 24. Erick Rowan
 25. Mojo Rawley
 26. Carmella
-

Smackdown – July 19, 2016: Draft Notice

Smackdown

Date: July 19, 2016

Location: DCU Center, Worcester, Massachusetts

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler

Now this is a big one. Tonight we're not only going live but also splitting the shows into two rosters again for the first time in a few years. There's only been one other draft like this in company history and it wasn't the greatest show in the world. The interesting things here tonight are the potential returns of former stars as well as the guaranteed NXT callups. Oh and a rematch from last night's World Title match as a bonus. Let's get to it.

We open with the Commissioners and the GM's on the stage and a quick explanation of the rules:

1. Raw gets three picks to every Smackdown two.
2. Tag Teams are selected as a unit unless a GM wants either.
3. Raw has the first pick.
4. Six NXT picks will be made.

Stephanie cuts Foley off and picks Seth Rollins number one. So much for the title meaning a lot.

Daniel Bryan picks Dean Ambrose to put the Shield boys on different shows.

I won't bother saying the specifics so I'll just say which show.

Raw: Charlotte

Smackdown: AJ Styles

Raw: Finn Balor

Before we get to another pick, it's time for a match.

John Cena vs. Luke Gallows

The rest of the Club, Enzo and Cass are at ringside. We go to a quick commercial but this time they're showing the match during the commercial on a split screen. Gallows powers him down and is apparently too heavy to take the AA. Cena gets in a dropkick and we come back from the break. A spinning side slam gets two for Luke but he walks into the ProtoBomb and the Shuffle. Gallows breaks up the AA with a superkick (GET THAT MAN A T-SHIRT!) but the other four get in the ring and the match....is allowed to continue with Anderson and Styles being sent to the floor. An AA gives Cena the pin at 5:27.

Rating: C-. This didn't have time to go anywhere and I'm hoping the airing the match during the break doesn't become a regular thing. If there's one concept WWE never got, it's the idea of giving the fans a breather. You can't present every single moment as must see and expect the fans to stick with you through the insane amount of content WWE pumps out.

Time for more picks.

Raw: Roman Reigns

Smackdown: John Cena

Raw: Brock Lesnar

Smackdown: Randy Orton

Raw: New Day

Darren Young/Zack Ryder vs. Rusev/The Miz

Challengers vs. champions. Backlund atomic drops Miz to start and Ryder adds a slingshot elbow for two. Miz pulls Zack off the ropes for a crash before it's off to Rusev for some shots to the back. Miz gives up the hot tag to Young for his still generic offense. A quick Gut Check gets two

but Rusev suplexes Darren, only to throw Ryder into a Rough Ryder on his partner. Zack dropkicks Rusev off the apron and the crossface chickenwing makes Miz tap at 4:05.

Rating: C-. No time here and I have a feeling that's going to be the case for almost all matches tonight. That's how things should go though as the wrestling isn't the point here. Young making Miz tap sets up the title match just fine, though I don't see much of a reason to get hyped for Ryder vs. Rusev. Maybe it was the losing to Sheamus in two minutes flat.

Xavier Woods vs. Bray Wyatt

Everyone is at ringside. Bray stands in the corner with his back to Bray before bending backwards. He even kneels in the middle of the ring to offer a free shot but Woods is afraid. Woods seems to be hypnotized so Bray beats him down and chokes a bit. The release Rock Bottom plants Woods again but he makes a quick comeback, only to walk into Sister Abigail for the pin at 4:47.

Rating: D+. This was all about the story instead of the match and that's the right idea. Bray squashing Woods is the right idea too and it's cool to see someone freaking out at the sight and thought of Bray. That almost has to play into the finish on Sunday but it also makes the titles more interesting. If Woods is teasing a split, they'll have to drop the belts soon and that's not happening Sunday.

Kevin Owens vs. Kane

And never mind as Sami Zayn runs out to attack Owens. Kevin sends Sami in for a chokeslam from Kane but he chokeslams both of them for fun. No match.

Back to the picks!

Raw: Sami Zayn

Smackdown: Bray Wyatt (not the Wyatt Family)

Raw: Sasha Banks

Smackdown: Becky Lynch

Raw: Chris Jericho

Sasha Banks vs. Charlotte/Dana Brooke

Dana starts for the team but Sasha knocks Charlotte outside and hits the double knees off the apron. Back in and Dana misses a charge to set up the Bank Statement, only to have Charlotte break it up and hit Natural Selection for the pin at 2:21.

More picks:

Raw: Rusev w/Lana

Smackdown: The Miz w/Maryse

Raw: Kevin Owens

Smackdown: Baron Corbin

Raw: Enzo Amore/Big Cass

Chris Jericho vs. Cesaro

Cesaro uppercuts him to the floor and hits a running version up against the barricade. Back in and we hit the pinfall reversal sequence until Jericho slams him off the top. The Lionsault is countered into a Russian legsweep off the middle rope and it's time for a Swing. The spinning springboard uppercut is countered into the Codebreaker for the pin on Cesaro at 4:53.

Rating: C+. In case you didn't get enough of these two during the build to Money in the Bank. I'm really not wild on the idea of Jericho winning here as they don't seem interested in actually doing anything with him despite giving him a bunch of wins. Cesaro continues to be that guy who keeps losing and WWE keeps expecting him to be over, which to be fair he kind of is.

Back from a break with Becky Lynch attacking Natalya before a match. Ok then.

Draft time.

Raw: The Club

Smackdown: American Alpha

Raw: Big Show

Smackdown: Dolph Ziggler

Raw: Nia Jax

Rollins says he'll win tonight.

Time for the final five televised picks before 30 more will be made on the WWE Network.

Raw: Neville

Smackdown: Natalya

Raw: Cesaro

Smackdown: Alberto Del Rio

Raw: Sheamus

WWE World Title: Dean Ambrose vs. Seth Rollins

Ambrose is defending and Rollins jumps him during the big match intros. We take a break before the bell rings with Dean being posted. Back with Ambrose saying ring the bell, allowing Rollins to hammer away in a hurry. A backbreaker sets up the chinlock before Rollins sends him outside for a chop off. Dean gets whipped into the barricade but he backdrops Rollins into the timekeeper's area. Back in and Seth hits a low superkick for two as we take a break.

We come back again with what sounds like a CM Punk chant accompanying Rollins hitting a running forearm in the corner. Dean fights back with elbows to the face and a swinging neckbreaker for two. A quick Buckle Bomb sets up a missed frog splash but Rollins grabs a quick superplex. He loads up the Falcon's Arrow but Dean reverses into Dirty Deeds at 12:21.

Rating: C+. The match was fine but it's pure filler with Battleground and the triple threat looming. Rollins getting pinned clean is interesting as now Dean looks a lot more like an equal instead of someone who keeps getting beaten in the big matches over and over. It's a good main event, though it feels kind of worthless after last night. Like, what did any of that accomplish?

Shane and Bryan come out to celebrate and a PPV rundown ends the show.

Overall Rating: B-. These are the hardest shows to review as there's nothing to compare it to. They kept it moving fast enough and the wrestling was just there for the most part but they kept the draft picking moving and that's a very good thing. This felt like something professionally run and that's never really been the case in previous drafts. Good show here but this would have been better off after Battleground.

Results

John Cena b. Luke Gallows – Attitude Adjustment

Darren Young/Zack Ryder b. Rusev/The Miz – Crossface chickenwing to Miz

Bray Wyatt b. Xavier Woods – Sister Abigail

Charlotte/Dana Brooke b. Sasha Banks – Natural Selection

Chris Jericho b. Cesaro – Codebreaker

Dean Ambrose b. Seth Rollins – Dirty Deeds

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All 30 Televised Draft Picks

I'll be updating this throughout the night with all the picks so keep refreshing. I also won't update the tags until after the show in case you don't want to be spoiled. There will be an additional thirty picks on the Network later tonight.

Monday Night Raw

1. Seth Rollins
2. Charlotte
3. Finn Balor
4. Roman Reigns
5. Brock Lesnar
6. New Day
7. Sami Zayn
8. Sasha Banks
9. Chris Jericho
10. Rusev w/Lana
11. Kevin Owens

12. Enzo Amore/Big Cass

13. The Club

14. Big Show

15. Nia Jax

16. Neville

17. Cesaro

18. Sheamus

Smackdown

1. Dean Ambrose

2. AJ Styles

3. John Cena

4. Randy Orton

5. Bray Wyatt

6. Becky Lynch

7. The Miz w/Maryse

8. Baron Corbin

9. American Alpha

10. Dolph Ziggler

11. Natalya

12. Alberto Del Rio

Monday Night Raw – July 18, 2016: The Lame Duck Go Home Game Changing Show (Updated)

Monday Night Raw

Date: July 18, 2016

Location: Dunkin' Donuts Center, Providence, Rhode Island

Commentators: Michael Cole, Byron Saxton, John Bradshaw Layfield

This is a unique show as it's kind of a big night but also kind of a lame duck show while also being the go home show for a pay per view. The Draft is tomorrow night but there's also a World Title match as champion Dean Ambrose defends against Seth Rollins. The show is also going to open with the announcement of the new General Managers for both shows. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Here are Shane and Stephanie to open things up. They have their standard bickering that makes award show presenters seem like Bogart and Bergman before arguing over testicles vs. lady balls. Stephanie's big announcement: there's going to be a new Cruiserweight division on Raw. Shane mentions his General Manager and the YES chants begin. That's cut off just as quickly though as Stephanie Raw's General Manager: Mick Foley. I wouldn't have bet on that one but I'd be shocked if he's still around by TLC.

After Stephanie awkwardly dances to his music. Foley compares the feeling here to the Attitude Era because IT'S THE GREATEST THING EVER and feels like the MONDAY NIGHT WARS ALL OVER AGAIN BABY! Stephanie calling him made the little embers turned into a fire. He's ready to bring Raw to new heights and all that jazz.

Shane brings out his own General Manager with the worst kept secret in wrestling this year: Daniel Bryan. Daniel won't shake Stephanie's hand before he talks about how much he missed the people. Naturally Stephanie cuts him off to suggest he pander to the fans. See she doesn't get it because they've never cheered for her. Stephanie: "They did once!"

Bryan talks about how he heard Shane's ideas for a show where wrestlers are put first and he wanted to come back. When he beat HHH at Wrestlemania XXX (Stephanie: "Technicality.") and won the WWE World Title, he and the fans did that together. Stephanie gets in her B+ jokes and Shane says Stephanie can only stay relevant by marrying a WWE superstar. One last YES chant takes us out.

Chris Jericho/Kevin Owens vs. Sami Zayn/Cesaro

Cesaro gutwrenches Jericho to start before it's off to Sami so things can speed up a bit. An Owens distraction lets Jericho get in a shot though and we take a break. Back with Jericho still in control over Sami and sending him out to the floor. Sami gets in a few shots of his own though and the hot tag brings in Cesaro.

That means it's time for the uppercut train and the springboard spinning uppercut for two on Jericho. Owens and Sami come in off the double tags but Jericho breaks up the Helluva Kick. Cesaro's high cross body gets two on Chris and the Swing makes it even worse. Everything breaks down and Sami tornado DDTs Owens before small packaging Jericho for the pin at 12:02.

Rating: C. In case you didn't get enough of these guys during the Money in the Bank build. I love Sami getting a pin here though it should be interesting to see what happens with all four of these guys tomorrow night. Jericho and Cesaro not having matches on Sunday doesn't say much for either of them but that's their norm all around.

Golden Truth, Titus O'Neil and Jack Swagger try to get on Daniel Bryan's good side until Stephanie interrupts. They insult each other (with jabs about Daniel and Brie planting peaches) for a bit until Daniel says she ruined Raw.

Alberto Del Rio vs. Darren Young

Miz is on commentary. Del Rio sends him into the corner to start and works on the arm as Miz gets in his second plug for Bob Backlund's book. Young comes back with a backdrop and atomic drop as we flash back to the 70s. A Miz distraction earns himself a forearm to the face, allowing Darren to roll up Del Rio (with a Backlund style bridge) for the pin at 2:33.

It's time for a twelve man tag but Cena comes out first and says it's an interesting time in WWE with Battleground being the icing on the cake. The Club is going to try to beat up Cena on Sunday but he has the Certified G's. Enzo says the term "don't take this the wrong way" has a 0% success rate so don't take this the wrong way but the Club is like a bunch of herbs.

Without ugliness in the world there can be no beauty so thanks for your sacrifice Gallows. AJ has a haircut like a soccer mom and Anderson is as generic as Times New Roman. Cena thinks Enzo is just a catchphrase machine but Cass says that's what he does. That's what makes them the best trio in the world like Nirvana, Destiny's Child or the Wu Tang Clan.

Enzo: "How you doin?" Cena: "I don't know how I'm doing!" He thinks they need to get serious but the Club cuts off the S-A-W-F-T line. AJ accuses them of meeting a few weeks ago over a bowl of candy at catering and thinks they can beat up everyone on the team tonight. Cue New Day to talk about going to the Wyatts' compound but AJ makes fun of Woods for being scared.

That goes nowhere so New Day explains How You Doin to Cena. Naturally this turns into a Pokemon Go reference with Woods listing off the ones he's captured but Cena cuts him off, only to be cut off with a NEW DAY ROCKS chant. This brings out the Wyatts as it turns out we actually have a match to get to.

John Cena/Enzo Amore/Big Cass/New Day vs. The Club/Wyatt Family

This is joined in progress after a break with Gallows coming in to shoulder Cena down. That brings in Big E. for a power showdown, only to

have a little gyrating first. Now we get Strowman coming in to run Big E. over but Enzo tags himself in. Woods plays some trombone and Enzo bounces off Strowman so it's time for Cass to try his luck. A shove to Cena triggers a huge brawl until it's back to Strowman and Cass with the big boot staggering Braun. Kofi tries to dive in but gets slammed down by Braun as we take a break.

While we're on commercial, it deserves to be pointed out how good of a job they've done with Cass. Him staring down Strowman felt more like a big deal than anytime Lesnar did it and I actually bought Cass as a threat to hurt him. That's very impressive and a great sign for him to come.

Back with Bray charging into Kofi's pendulum kick and a diving tag to bring in Cena. The finishing sequence is initiated but Bray brings the spider walk out of mothballs to shut him down. Rowan grabs a chinlock and the heels start taking turns on Cena. Gallows misses a splash and we take another break.

We come back again with Bray missing his backsplash to Cena, allowing the hot tag to Cass. Everything breaks down again and New Day cleans house on the Wyatts. Woods hits a big flip dive to take them all out but Gallows breaks up Bada Book Shakalacka. New Day and the Wyatts fight up the ramp, leaving Enzo to clothesline Cena by mistake. The Styles Clash ends Amore at 18:58.

Rating: B+. This is even more impressive when you consider how many people had to be incorporated here. The ending really pushes the idea that Cena/Enzo/Cass don't know each other well enough to fight off a well oiled machine like the Club which is a really logical point to make. New Day vs. Wyatts could be a lot of fun and this was a nice preview. Really good stuff here with the pre-match promo being just as great.

Earlier today, Seth Rollins was in the empty arena (well save for the cameramen) to talk about how they came through so many stands to fight. He was the brilliant mind and kept Ambrose around to take the beatings and Reigns around to dish them out. After Sunday, Reigns will never be the same again. Ambrose on the other hand is a coward who is running out

of places to hide. This Sunday, Rollins will prove he was always the man.

We recap the opening segment.

Shane comes up to Foley in the back and suggests that Stephanie just hired him because he'll connect with the fans while being manipulated. Foley appreciates the caring but thinks Stephanie has fire and drive. This would be another beloved face trying to put Stephanie over.

Baron Corbin vs. Sin Cara

This is Cara's first match after the Lucha Dragons officially split. Corbin sends him into the corner to start but gets kicked away. A springboard elbow to the jaw staggers him but End of Days gives Baron the pin at 1:15.

Kalisto comes out for the post match save but gets beaten down as well.

Charlotte/Dana Brooke vs. Becky Lynch/Sasha Banks

Dana gets taken into the corner to start and it's time for Becky's early armbar. The spinning legdrop gets two on Dana but here's Natalya to attack Lynch for the DQ at 2:22.

Sasha gets beaten down post match.

Rusev/Sheamus vs. Dolph Ziggler/Zack Ryder

Sheamus headlocks Ryder down to start and cuts off his comeback by hitting him in the face a few times. Rusev sends him into the barricade and it's back to Sheamus for the slow beating. Sheamus won't tag for some reason though and we hit the chinlock. Ryder dropkicks him down and makes the hot tag off to Ziggler as everything breaks down. Rusev kicks Ziggler in the back and it's the Accolade for the submission at 3:45.

Rating: D+. Just a quick way to show off the idea that Rusev is awesome because we didn't know that yet. Ryder needed a win here after that mess last week against Sheamus. Ryder is going to get destroyed on Sunday and I'm not sure where things go after that. Sheamus on the other hand continues to float, just like Ziggler. And no WWE, that's not a hint

about a bonus match for Sunday.

Video on Randy Orton.

Video on Cena hosting the ESPYs.

Daniel suggests a peace treaty with Mick Foley because they're so much alike. Foley has no issue with Bryan but the battle is on.

Raw World Title: Dean Ambrose vs. Seth Rollins

Rollins is challenging and all the bosses are at ringside. Dean headlocks him to start and Seth bails out to the floor. The champ sends him into the barricade and we take a break. Back with Seth in control and putting on a chinlock. A hard right hand gives Seth some near falls before both try cross bodies at the same time. Dean fights up first and hammers on Seth a bit, including a forearm to put him on the floor.

There's a big suicide dive but Rollins powerbombs him into the barricade. Back in and a frog splash gets two as we take another break. Back with Seth still in control and hitting his springboard knee to the head. Another frog splash misses though and Dean has an opening. It sounds like the fans are cheering for Rollins here.

Dirty Deeds gets two with Rollins putting his foot on the ropes. Seth rolls outside but comes right back in and counters the top rope clothesline into the Pedigree for two. With nothing else working, Seth loads up a superplex but Dean ties up the legs and it's a double pin at 24:18.

Rating: B+. More really good stuff from these two but the ending comes off as a cheap way to have Sunday's title match be for the vacant title. You knew they weren't sticking with Ambrose on top for long because he's not the "star" kind of guy and that's the excuse they're sticking with. I mean, Rollins may be a ratings disaster but he's a STAR ratings disaster. Really good match here though and a big feeling title match.

Stephanie (of course) declares Rollins the new champion and Shane doesn't say anything to close the show. You know you'll see more of this on Sunday.

Overall Rating: A-. Like I said at the beginning, this was a very odd show without anything actually mattering until the ending but even that was odd. I'm sure there's going to be an update tomorrow night but this comes off as a way to either set up a new World Title or to just give the belt back to Reigns like nothing ever happened. There are two great wrestling matches on here though and they were more than enough to make this show awesome, questionable ending aside.

So apparently after the show went off the air, a bonus clip aired on the Network where Ambrose was declared champion because it was a screwy finish. You know, because THREE HOURS AND EIGHT MINUTES isn't enough content.

Results

Sami Zayn/Cesaro b. Kevin Owens/Chris Jericho – Small package to Jericho

Darren Young b. Alberto Del Rio – Rollup

Wyatt Family/The Club b. Enzo Amore/Big Cass/John Cena/New Day – Styles Clash to Amore

Baron Corbin b. Sin Cara – End of Days

Sasha Banks/Becky Lynch b. Charlotte/Dana Brooke via DQ when Natalya interfered

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WWE Releases Draft Rules

<http://www.wwe.com/article/wwe-draft-rules-2016?sf31145497=1>

Just in case you thought Smackdown would be treated equally or better you see. Of course I don't know why you would think that when Stephanie runs Raw.