

# Smackdown – April 14, 2016: Split The Roster More Often

## Smackdown

Date: April 13, 2016

Location: Valley View Casino, San Diego, California

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Jerry Lawler, Byron Saxton

It's going to be an interesting week as most of the roster is off on the international tour. However we have some fresh names tonight in the Vaudevillains who debuted last week and the even fresher team of Enzo and Big Cass, both of whom will be in the tag team tournament tonight. Let's get to it.

Opening sequence.

Del Rio vs. Styles and Jericho vs. Zayn tonight, both for the first time ever.

Maryse introduces the Miz for MizTV. Miz calls her the love of his life and the only woman worthy of being his wife. It seems that Maryse is the guest this week as Miz asks what it's like to be married to him. That would be perfection with Maryse calling Miz an a-lister and a role model for children around the world. Miz actually gets on his knee in front of her to promise holidays with Leo in St. Bart's, which Maryse calls the real life People Magazine.

This leads to them making out, only to be interrupted by Zack Ryder because he doesn't seem to get that it's over. Ryder asks Maryse what it's like to be married to someone who wears more makeup than her. Yeah the title might be gone but Ryder is looking forward to seeing Cesaro take the title from Miz at Payback. This sets up a challenge for a title match right now but apparently Ryder already has a match tonight. For some reason Miz knows this and Ryder doesn't.

Zack Ryder vs. Baron Corbin

Corbin throws Ryder around like the jobber that he is to start before sending him out to the apron. Whatever springboard move Ryder was trying is knocked out of the air with a single punch as the announcers put Corbin's battle royal win over very hard. We hit the chinlock on Ryder, followed by a northern lariat (correctly called by Ranallo). Zack gets in a middle rope dropkick for his hope spot but the Broski Boot doesn't work. Instead the End of Days puts Ryder away at 3:12.

**Rating:** D+. Well it was nice while it lasted Zack but we're back to reality now. This was the same squash that it would have been even if Ryder never won the title in the first place, which makes that whole thing feel even less important. Corbin has a good presence to him and the finish still looks good but he'll need to go somewhere else before this gets tiresome.

Post match Corbin goes after Ryder again but Dolph Ziggler runs out for the save. I'm assuming that's Corbin's first major win.

Kevin Owens mocks Renee Young and threatens to get involved in Zayn vs. Jericho. His advice is to have Renee go ask Sami if there's any insight as to what's going to happen in the main event.

### Emma vs. Paige

Paige gets a jobber entrance. The announcers make various unfunny jokes and puns as Paige takes Emma into the corner to start, only to get caught in a rollup to send her head first into the bottom buckle. Emma stomps away in the corner and we hit a seated full nelson as Ranallo actually brings up the Fabulous Kangaroos. Paige kicks away and gets two off a running knee to the chest. Some right hands in the corner are broken up with Emma dropping Paige face first onto the top turnbuckle....for the pin at 3:16.

**Rating:** C. Well it was no NXT classic but they did enough to make Emma look more like a player on the main roster. It's a shame how badly they screwed her up a few years back but it's nice to see that things could turn around for her. There's potential there and if they're going to set up something with this division, they'll need all the help they can get.

We recap the first two tournament matches and the debut of Karl Anderson and Luke Gallows.

We look back at Bray Wyatt teaming with Roman Reigns on Monday. I guess we can call that the first shovel of dirt out of Bray's grave after Rock buried him eight days prior. You know, because he totally did and when you're buried, it's because your career is over. Like, totally over and there's no recovery ever.

#### Tag Team Tournament First Round: Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady vs. Ascension

Enzo and Cass are WAY over here, as you would expect. Before the match, Enzo talks about how tough a neighborhood they grew up in. It was so tough that they almost got sent to live with their auntie and uncle in Bel-Air. He could think of a million bad things to say about the Ascension but the worst of all is that they're the Ascension. Cass promises to win the titles and declares all of their opponents to be SAWFT.

Enzo and Konnor get things going with a hard shoulder dropping Amore. It's off to Viktor who is quickly sent into the wrong corner, allowing the tag to Big Cass. Enzo gets slammed onto Viktor for two but Konnor knocks Amore off the apron and into the barricade to take over. Back in and Viktor slaps on a chinlock for a bit before avoiding a charge to send Konnor into the post. The hot tag brings in Cass for the house cleaning, including the Empire Elbow to Viktor. Everything breaks down and Konnor gets kicked in the face, followed by the East River Crossing and Rocket Launcher for the pin on Viktor at 4:33.

**Rating:** C. Nothing for the wrestling but the important thing here is how Enzo and Cass know how to work the formula. Cass is great at coming in and cleaning house after the smaller Enzo takes a big beating. There's a great history of big guy/small guy teams and these two have more than enough charisma to go around, meaning they could have a nice future ahead of them.

AJ Styles talks about fighting everywhere to get to the top and now he has to fight Roman Reigns to get to the top of WWE. Alberto Del Rio comes in and says that Del Rio has been fighting for table scraps but tonight

we'll get to see if all that hype is real. Del Rio says AJ doesn't belong here and AJ agrees. AJ: "I belong in the ring."

### AJ Styles vs. Alberto Del Rio

In a far too common theme tonight, Del Rio drives him into the corner to start as Ranallo compares AJ vs. Reigns to Muhammad Ali vs. Ken Norton. Well at least it's not Scott Norton. The feeling out process sets up the dropdown into the dropkick, which you really should see coming if you've ever watched any AJ Styles match.

AJ fires off chops but gets kicked in the chest for two. A top rope ax handle gets two more before AJ sidesteps a charge to send Alberto's shoulder into the post. The running enziguri knocks AJ off the apron and a big dropkicks ends AJ out to the floor again. Back from a break with AJ fighting out of a chinlock, as so often happens when we come back from a break.

The striking sequence drops Del Rio and AJ nips up, followed by the running clothesline in the corner. AJ loads up a pumphandle but gets countered into a Backstabber to leave his mouth hanging open. The low superkick misses though and AJ Pele's him for two. Del Rio gets in a reverse superplex and thankfully doesn't severely hurt AJ by dropping him on his head. Alberto misses the top rope double stomp but avoids the forearm. Instead it's the armbreaker, which is quickly countered into a rollup for the pin on Alberto at 13:55.

**Rating:** B. They're doing a good job of building AJ up as the guy who never gives up and fights until the end, especially against big names that are higher up on the food chain. It's almost like they're doing a good job of building up a challenger before a champion knocks him off in the title match. Good match here and the well booked story continues.

Goldust tells R-Truth that Golden Truth won't be a thing tonight. Fandango comes in and announces himself as Goldust's new partner, which means tandem gyrating. Truth doesn't want to join them and looks flabbergasted.

### Tag Team Tournament First Round: Vaudevillains vs. Goldust/Fandango

English stomps on Goldust to start and a double right hand puts him down. The snap powerslam gets Goldust out of trouble and it's off to Fandango for a comeback that goes nowhere. Well other than into a Whirling Dervish to send the Vaudevillains to the semi-finals that is.

We look back at Dean Ambrose taking over the Highlight Reel and laying Jericho out.

Jericho says he's been beating up amateurs since he got back because people like Styles and Ambrose have no respect for the veterans. He's the greatest of all time and proved it right here in this dump ("Yeah it's a dump!") when he beat the Rock and Stone Cold in one night. Tonight he'll make Zayn feel the pain because he's the best in the world at what he does.

Greetings From Puerto Rico video.

### Sami Zayn vs. Chris Jericho

Jericho poses to start so Sami rips the skin off his chest with a chop. That sends Jericho outside for a chair through...and here's Kevin Owens. He doesn't get very far down the ramp before Dean Ambrose comes out with fliers for the Ambrose Asylum before sitting in on commentary. Sami finally remembers that a match is going on and rolls Jericho up for two. Dean annoys Jericho with a flier and we take a break.

Back with Owens on commentary as well and actually complimenting Dean on the new show. Jericho knocks Zayn outside and poses a bit before a top rope back elbow gets two. We hit the ASK HIM chinlock as Dean and Owens get in a mini argument, resulting in Owens throwing away his flier. Sami gets a quick two off a high cross body and the climb up the corner tornado DDT gets the same. The Helluva Kick misses though and the Walls go on to put Sami in real trouble.

Ropes are of course reached but Sami's springboard is broken up by a running forearm. Owens and Ambrose are now full on cheerleaders until Jericho runs Dean over and sends him into the barricade. Jericho dives at Sami but hits Owens by mistake before heading back inside. Chris yells at Sami a lot, earning himself an exploder suplex into the corner. The

Helluva Kick is loaded up but Owens comes in for the DQ at 15:11.

**Rating:** B-. I liked AJ vs. Del Rio a little bit more but this also set up a few things down the road while also building up the two pay per view matches. Sami winning without getting the pin is a good idea as you can't keep having him get pinned all the time. It's not a great match or anything but at least it set some stuff up for the future.

Sami and Dean clean house to end the show and likely set up a tag match.

**Overall Rating:** B. Now that's more like it. This was how you run a Smackdown as there was good wrestling to go along with some (basic) storyline advancement. It's always nice to see them doing something interesting and important instead of just having matches for the sake of matches. The extra wrestling helped as well with the mostly empty roster helping more than it hurt, which was quite the surprise.

### Results

Baron Corbin b. Zack Ryder – End of Days

Emma b. Paige – Emma pinned Paige after dropping her onto the top turnbuckle

Enzo Amore/Colin Cassady b. Ascension – Rocket Launcher to Viktor

AJ Styles b. Alberto Del Rio – Rollup

Vaudevillains b. Goldust/Fandango – Whirling Dervish to Fandango

Sami Zayn b. Chris Jericho via DQ when Kevin Owens interfered

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# Wrestlemania XXXII: Strap Yourselves In. This Is A Long One.

## Wrestlemania XXXII

Date: April 3, 2016

Location: AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas

Attendance: 101,763

Commentators: Michael Cole, John Bradshaw Layfield, Byron Saxton

America the Beautiful: Fifth Harmony

We've finally arrived at what might be the biggest show of all time. The attendance record is going to be set tonight (it just is) and the card is.....well did I mention that attendance? Yeah the build to this one hasn't been all that great with a double main event of Roman Reigns challenging HHH for the WWE World Title and Undertaker vs. Shane McMahon inside the Cell with Undertaker's future at Wrestlemania vs. Shane controlling Raw on the line in a story that stops making sense as soon as you start thinking about it too much. Let's get to it.

Again I was in the stadium for this so it's my second time seeing the show but first time seeing the produced version.

The stadium looks nothing short of amazing, despite being mostly empty for the pre-show due to a lot of issues with getting people inside.

Pre-Show: US Title: Kalisto vs. Ryback

Kalisto is defending in this basic big guy vs. little guy feud. We get a nice tale of the tape with Ryback having 4.5 shoe sizes and more than double the bench press. The GOLDBERG chants begin at the bell and Kalisto

isn't sure how to start. A headlock proves to be a really bad idea as Ryback launches him away and easily sends him outside for a crash.

Kalisto comes back in with something like a top rope bulldog for two, followed by a nice fake out on a dive to set up double knees off the apron. Ryback will have none of that and LAUNCHES Kalisto into the air for a big crash as we take a break. Back with Ryback getting two off something we don't see and a hard back elbow to the jaw gets the same. A running sitout powerslam gets the third straight near fall but Ryback gets a bit too cocky on a very delayed superplex, allowing Kalisto to turn it into a cross body for two.

The champ's hurricanrana driver gets the same and there's the corkscrew cross body for good measure. A hard slam has Kalisto in trouble so he tries to head to the corner, only to be pulled back with the turnbuckle pad coming off. You can see the ending coming from here as Kalisto sends him head first into the exposed buckle, setting up the Salida Del Sol for the pin to retain at 8:53.

**Rating:** C+. Really good choice for the opener here as they did everything they needed to do to get the crowd (well what little crowd they had) going. It's such a simple idea to have someone smaller beat a big strong guy and they didn't try to over think things out there. The ending might have been a bit of a stretch but at least Ryback keeps a bit of face after the loss. He needs to win something eventually though and I'm really not wild on having the title match on the pre-show.

#### Pre-Show: Total Divas vs. Bad and Blonde

This would be Brie Bella/Alicia Fox/Paige/Eva Marie/Natalya vs. Lana/Naomi/Summer Rae/Tamina/Emma in a match with no story worth mentioning because these things never have stories of note. Summer elbows Alicia in the face to start before getting two off a DDT. A tag to Emma draws all ten of them in for a huge staredown as we take a break. Back with Eva coming in to some horrible booing to face Emma. A not bad headscissors puts Emma down but Eva slaps Natalya hard on the shoulder instead of tagging Paige.

It's quickly off to Naomi for those stupid dancing kicks but Paige comes

in to play Bret to Natalya's Anvil in a Hart Attack. Naomi misses a cross body and crashes into the ropes but still tags Emma back in for a wheelbarrow suplex. We finally get the tag to Lana, who started this whole thing by insulting Brie Bella. Somehow we wound up with this instead of whatever they were going for there and that's probably best for everyone. Lana wrestling with her hair down and wearing basically a one piece swimsuit isn't bad for anyone either.

Paige gets kicked down and Lana mocks the YES chants before bringing Tamina in. A lot of spot calling results in a broken up Tower of Doom and Paige diving onto the pile for a big crash. There's still no hot tag though as Emma keeps Paige in the corner and stomps away. Paige finally gets away from Naomi and makes the hot tag to Brie as everything breaks down.

We get the parade of finishers (including Eva's Sliced Bread #2 being booed halfway out of Texas) until the BRIE MODE knee is blocked by Naomi's raised boot. The split legged moonsault hits mat (called a knee by Byron), allowing Brie to grab the arm and roll forward into the YES Lock (that looked awesome) for the submission at 11:25.

**Rating:** D. What were you expecting here? It was a huge mess with a bunch of women who have no idea how to do anything besides spots and barely being able to do those. This probably would have been better as a four person tag or even better as a match between Brie and Lana so there could be an actual story. Lana was fine in the little bit she was in the ring, but you know she's a long term project. This was little more than a way to get them on the card though and that's fine all around.

Post match Nikki Bella comes out in ring gear and a neck brace for the big return celebration because we're supposed to cheer for Nikki and be impressed because of her injury.

Here's Lita to talk about the history of women's wrestling and to unveil the new Women's Title belt which will be awarded to the winner of tonight's triple threat. Also of note: she calls them superstars instead of Divas, which hopefully is a permanent name change. This is called the first title ever, even though the Women's Title existed less than eight

years ago. Still though it gets rid of that butterfly thing so it's a step up.

### Pre-Show: Usos vs. Dudley Boyz

This is over the Dudleyz not wanting to use tables anymore and trying to protect their legacies as a great team who don't need weapons. The Dudleyz jump the twins to start with D-Von cranking on Jimmy's neck and taking his head off with a clothesline. Bubba comes in to shout about beating up the Usos' dad Rikishi, which Lawler calls a history lesson.

There are the dancing punches but Jimmy superkicks him down, setting up the hot tag to Jimmy. The Dudleyz beat him down too and get in What's Up, only to have a double superkick break up the table grab. The reverse 3D gets two but Jimmy breaks up the 3D with a superkick. Another good looking superkick is enough to put D-Von away at 5:18.

**Rating:** C-. This was fine but it didn't have anywhere near enough time to mean anything. The Usos vs. the Dudleyz should be a very solid match but you can only get so far on five minutes. That being said, neither team has that much of an upside at this point and I really don't need to see them fight again, especially after this only decent effort.

Post match the Dudleyz get the tables, only to get superkicked again to set up double Superfly Splashes through the tables. The fans are NOT happy with that one.

It's finally time for the regular show with the crowd mostly filled in. That's such an amazing visual as the people just keep going and going.

Pop band Fifth Harmony sings a very nice America the Beautiful.

The opening video shows the Madison Square Garden microphone dropping to signify the start of a legend. Over the years this led to a group of legends such as giants, warriors and the dead rising. That brings us to the question of who becomes the next legend. This switches into a standard video about people rising up tonight to become legends in the usually awesome Wrestlemania style. Apparently this was narrated by Kelsey Grammer.

The camera pans around the stadium and that is just a sea of humanity.

Intercontinental Title: Kevin Owens vs. Sami Zayn vs. Dolph Ziggler vs. Miz vs. Zack Ryder vs. Stardust vs. Sin Cara

Owens is defending and this is a ladder match. This started as Owens vs. Zayn but Ziggler and Miz got involved for no worthy reason. Then Owens insulted Stephanie McMahon and you just can't do that so she added the other three because she felt like it, and that of course trumps anything involving logic or storytelling. Stardust has Dusty inspired polka dots on his gear to make this feel special.

Everyone but Owens bails to the floor to start so it's time to pose, only to have Zayn come in with a ladder for the big showdown. Ziggler hits Sami in the back with another ladder to take over before slamming Cara onto the ladder for good measure. The ring is cleared out and it's Miz climbing up but for some reason he doesn't open it all the way, allowing Sami and Dolph to make the save.

Owens comes back in and backdrops Zayn onto the ladder before shouting at him to go back to NXT. Ryder and Ziggler go up but get shoved down into the ropes for the save. Everyone winds up on the floor (I'm barely skipping anything in between these spots but that's the case in most multi-man ladder matches.) and Zayn dives through the ladder for the big crash. Sami is right up with the diving DDT over the bottom rope to take out Owens for a huge reaction.

Cara gets back in and tries to go up, only to have Sami shove the ladder over, only to have Cara land on the top rope and flip dive onto everyone else. Ziggler starts busting out superkicks, including tuning up the band for one on Ryder. Owens is too smart enough for that though and it's a double superkick to put both guys down. Now Stardust pulls out a polka dot ladder for a DUSTY chant and the Terry Funk helicopter spot until Miz breaks it up and hits the Skull Crushing Finale onto said ladder.

Owens will have nothing to do with the goofy ladder but has to block the Helluva Kick. A frog splash onto Zayn onto a bridged ladder have both guys down. Owens is up first though and it's a Pop Up Powerbomb to drop Miz. Ryder sends Kevin into the ladder and hits a big old elbow drop off

the ladder onto Miz for a huge crash.

That's not enough to get the belt though as Ziggler runs up the ladder for a faceplant off the top to put himself and Ryder down. It's even worse than that though as Ziggler comes up limping, allowing Owens to powerbomb him off the ladder. Stardust and Owens come back in and it's Stardust being knocked onto a ladder bridged between the apron and the ring.

After kicking Zayn away, Cara dives through Stardust and through the ladder for a spot we've seen way too many times but still works due to the carnage. Owens and Zayn go up top for the slugout on the ladder before falling down, only to have Zayn grab a half and half suplex (half nelson/half tiger) onto the ladder. Miz climbs up but takes forever to pull down the belt, allowing Ryder to shove him off and pull down the title at 15:23.

**Rating:** B. This was your usually good ladder match but there was a bit too much going on. In other words, there were too many people in the match at the same time and it dragged things down. Ryder winning was a good way to pop the crowd at first but it's pretty clear that this was supposed to be Neville. Even after the injury though, it certainly was nice of WWE to add even more people to this to make sure it was as messy as possible. Then again it's a total spot fest and that's all anyone was expecting it to be. Good choice for an opener at least.

Zack's dad comes in to help celebrate. Cole says that's Ryder's big moment after nearly ten years of futility. That would include a Tag Team Title and the US Title so well done on making your own belts sound worthless.

We recap AJ Styles vs. Chris Jericho. Styles debuted back in January and was immediately cheered by the fans. He then went on to defeat Jericho on Raw, setting up a series of matches between the two. They then formed a tag team but lost in their shot at the Tag Team Titles. Jericho snapped and turned heel on AJ, setting up their fourth match here.

Chris Jericho vs. AJ Styles

They lock up around the ropes to start as the fans are split on who to cheer for. AJ nips up into a headscissors and Jericho throws a chair around in frustration. Back in and they slug it out but Jericho avoids the drop down into the dropkick by holding the ropes. That's fine with AJ as he clotheslines Jericho outside but dives into a dropkick.

Now we get into the meat of the match as Jericho slows things down and stomps away before putting on a chinlock. That's quite heelish of him. A dragon sleeper is as well but AJ pops up and does his striking sequence, capped off by a dropkick. Jericho grabs the Walls but AJ is quickly in the ropes and back up with an elbow to the face. AJ goes up top and fights off a superplex attempt, setting up a huge super gordbuster to put both guys down. Now the Walls go on full but AJ crawls through the legs and grabs the calf Crusher to a fairly strong reaction.

That's escaped as well so AJ tries and failed at both finishers, only to walk into the Codebreaker for a delayed two. Nice job of protecting the finisher there, even though that concept stopped mattering years ago in WWE. A Teshocker gets two for AJ so he grabs a rollup, only to flip backwards into the Styles Clash for two more (ROAR! THEY TOTALLY KILLED THE STYLES CLASH!!! EVERY TIME SOMEONE KICKS OUT OF A FINISHER IT CAN NEVER BE USED AGAIN!!! ROAR I SAY! Typical response I've seen to that near fall and as usual, wrestling fans need to calm down because it means nothing.).

The Lionsault hits knees so AJ gets in the springboard 450 for two. That means it's time for the Phenomenal Forearm (which is his finisher now, even though people have to keep raving over the Styles Clash, which isn't even all that great of a move) but Jericho counters into the Codebreaker for the pin at 17:10.

**Rating:** B. As in bamboozled, which I am over that ending. It was a solid wrestling match going into that last bit and then Jericho won. Why in the world would you have Jericho, who is older and nowhere near what he was before, beat a hot act like Styles here? The match was good but this needed to be the finale of the feud with AJ taking the final win but instead Jericho gets the pin. I really do not get this and I haven't seen anyone else who has either.

Some celebrities are here.

Maria Menunos is in the back with Zack Ryder, who says he can retire now because this is the match of his life. He talks about meeting Razor Ramon when he was a kid and getting to hold Ramon's Intercontinental Title. Tonight they're taking a new picture but this time it's going to be Razor holding HIS title. That's a great line, though I can't imagine Ryder holding the title long.

### New Day vs. League of Nations

Non-title and non-handicap due to non-Barrett, despite it being a handicap match on the pre-show. None of that matters though as New Day comes out of a giant box of Booty's dressed as Super Saiyans from Dragon Ball Z. Rusev is now in trunks instead of shorts and the look doesn't work as well. There isn't much of a story here other than New Day insulted the League a month or so ago and they've feuded ever since. No reason has been given for why this isn't a title match and I doubt one is ever coming.

Kofi cross bodies Sheamus down to start as Cole says New Day is like the Freebirds. Just...no Michael. Like....really no. Sheamus easily punches Woods down and it's off to Del Rio as JBL compares the League to the Horsemen. EVEN MORE NO JBL! Woods gets in a discus forearm to put Alberto down but the running enziguri allows for the tag off to Sheamus.

That means it's time for the forearms to the chest to the beat of NEW DAY ROCKS. Well to be fair everything else is done to that beat anymore. Woods finally sends Del Rio out to the floor but Sheamus is smart enough to break up the tag attempt. The other partners get in a brawl so Xavier DDTs Sheamus and makes the hot tag to Kofi.

Everything breaks down with Kingston cleaning house, only to have Rusev kick him in the head to break it up. Big E. suplexes Rusev over the apron so E. can spear all three members through the apron for a huge crash. Rusev laying on his back with his eyes open takes this up a step. A top rope double stomp gets two on Sheamus as Del Rio kicks away at Kofi. The double stomp drives Kingston into the floor (and it looks stupid outside too), leaving Barrett to Bull Hammer Woods into the Brogue Kick for the

pin at 10:03.

**Rating:** C-. This is the point where Wrestlemania goes flying off the cliff, leaving us with the hope that it can hang on by its fingertips. New Day is quite possibly the most popular act in wrestling but for some reason they're jobbing to the heatless wonders. Having AJ lose was one thing but for the life of me I have no idea what they were thinking here. New Day gets the big entrance and then they just lose? That's the best they've got? The match was acceptable enough but the booking just does not make sense.

Post match Barrett says no three men can beat then so here are Shawn Michaels, Mick Foley and Steve Austin (Who just doesn't fit here. Foley and Michaels are big names but they're nowhere near Austin in any regard. A third legend would have worked better, though I'm not sure who you would bring in here.) to easily clean house. New Day comes in post beatdown and tries to get the three of them to dance. Michaels is with it of course and Foley has a Dude Love flashback, leaving us with Austin. This goes as badly as you would expect until he dances just a bit, only to Stun Woods a few seconds later. Much beer is consumed.

This was called a burial of the League and I really don't know where to start with explaining why this is absurd. To begin with, it's the League of Nations. How far do they have to be put down to bury them? Second, those are three of the biggest names of all time coming in fresh to beat up a team that just had a match. This was a one off moment to give the fans something to cheer for and it's the highest profile thing the League has ever done. Stop overthinking this stuff every now and then and just enjoy a fun moment.

Ad for upcoming Network shows.

We recap Brock Lesnar vs. Dean Ambrose which is the latest in a series of challengers trying to fight Brock without much of a continuing story. In this case, Lesnar was involved in the triple threat at Fastlane where Reigns pinned Ambrose, setting up this match here so Dean can prove that Brock can't hurt him. It's also a street fight to give Dean a realistic (work with me here) chance.

## Brock Lesnar vs. Dean Ambrose

Heyman, seemingly taken aback by the size of the crowd, handles Brock's introduction for a nice touch. Brock drives him into the corner to start as is his traditional custom. We get the first suplex, which puts a big 1 on the huge video screens above the ring, which would continue counting throughout the match. We're already at #3 and it's all Brock so far. Dean grabs a kendo stick for some shots but Brock knees him away and hits two more Germans.

The fans are split on who to cheer for as Lesnar picks up the stick (JBL: "This is something you would see in Kilimanjaro." Sure JBL. Sure.) before throwing it away. There's another suplex before Brock stomps him down even more. Somehow this turns into a discussion of ice cubes in Puerto Rico because JBL and Byron can't stop having their stupid arguments.

Brock stands on the stick so Dean can't pick it up, followed by suplex number eight. Some forearms just tick Brock off even more, setting up number nine. Now Brock offers Dean a chance to come get the stick but Brock stands on it again, allowing Dean to hit him low for a hope spot. It never ceases to amuse me that a low blow is the only thing that can really hurt Brock.

Dean finds the chainsaw from Terry Funk which of course doesn't work because this is wrestling and not a slasher movie. Suplex number ten sends Dean flying on the floor, followed by a belly to belly superplex for number eleven. Dean finally gets in a fire extinguisher blast and some weak chair shots, including a dropkick to drive the chair into Lesnar.

The chair elbow drop gets two but Dean opts to throw in a bunch of chairs instead of, you know, hitting Brock with the one he has. The stupid delay allows Brock to suplex Dean over the chairs but the F5 is countered into a DDT (not) onto the chairs for two. Now it's time for the baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire but the swing misses (of course), allowing Brock to F5 him onto the chairs for the pin at 13:06.

**Rating:** D+. The more I think about this match the less I like it. This was just a step above a squash as Lesnar never felt like he was in any

danger whatsoever and made Dean look like a very second class talent by comparison. I'm really not sure what the point of these Brock matches are supposed to be these days as he's just a monster with no purpose other than coming in for the occasional squash. They don't lead anywhere and are just standalone matches so why is this supposed to be interesting? At least make Brock sweat or something because there was never any drama here.

Flair and Zack Ryder have a WOO off but it turns out to be a Snickers commercial where Ryder takes a bite and turns into Charlotte. So wait: Charlotte is the Intercontinental Champion?

Hall of Fame recap.

We get the Hall of Fame class presentation with Godfather (limited reaction but positive), Stan Hansen (about the same), Big Boss Man (better reaction), Jacqueline (surprisingly decent cheering), Joan Lunden (nothing of note), the Freebirds (roar), Snoop Dogg (reaction was there) and of course Sting with the full entrance and a roar. That's a solid class but Godfather looks so out of place.

We see Lita debuting the Women's Title earlier tonight.

The recap video for the Women's Title match is rather cool as it has a theme of searching for things on the WWE Network, showing the history of the women's division back in the day, which brought us here to the Divas Revolution. You have Charlotte defending against her former Four Horsewomen partners Becky Lynch, who Charlotte has never defeated and Sasha Banks, who no one has ever beaten. There's a chance that this could steal the show if they let it be an NXT style match.

Women's Title: Charlotte vs. Sasha Banks vs. Becky Lynch

Charlotte, in a robe made from the robe Ric wore in his retirement match, has her dad with her. Sasha, the overwhelming crowd favorite is in Eddie Guerrero style gear here and is introduced by her cousin Snoop Dogg with a custom rap. Charlotte gets chopped down to start but the challengers start trading near falls instead of following up. A nice pinfall reversal sequence ensues until Becky is sent outside, leaving the fans to cheer

for Sasha as she stares Charlotte down. An Eddie style armdrag out of the corner sets up the dance but Becky is back in. They botch what was supposed to be a Sasha sunset flip to make Becky suplex Charlotte (hard spot to be fair) so the champ goes outside for a bit. That goes nowhere so Charlotte takes Sasha's place, only to eat a reverse DDT for two. Charlotte rams Becky's head into the mat a few times before going in on the knee.

Sasha comes back in but can't get the double knees in the corner. Instead it's Becky slapping an armbar on Charlotte until Sasha makes the save, only to have Charlotte send her outside and slap the Figure Eight on Becky. This brings Sasha back in with a frog splash for the save and a nice ovation.

Becky comes back in to suplex Sasha but gets kneed in the chest, only to have her send Sasha through the ropes for a flip dive (Which seemed to be a botch as it looked like her foot caught the top rope.) to take out Charlotte. Becky dives onto Ric for no good reason but the fans lose their minds at the old man getting dropped.

Charlotte is up first and moonsaults down onto both challengers to really get the crowd into it. The announcers are really trying to push this as the dawning of a new era and while I don't know if I'd go that far, it's definitely awesome so far. Back in and a double Natural Selection gets two each for Charlotte but Sasha winds up on her shoulders, followed by a missile dropkick from Becky.

The Disarm-Her has Charlotte in trouble but Sasha comes over with the Bank Statement, only to have Charlotte put Sasha in the Figure Four (not Eight). That's turned over as well but Charlotte reverses the reversal into the Figure Eight. Of course that's broken up by Becky and all three are down. Charlotte chops both of them from their knees so they pound her down, only to have Becky and Sasha punch each other in the face.

A wicked spear cuts Sasha in half though and Charlotte goes up. That quickly backfires as well though as Sasha gets up, allowing Becky to tie her in the Tree of Woe. A superplex sends Charlotte flying but Sasha gets Becky (and her BADLY bruised eye) in the Bank Statement. Charlotte is

right back in for the save though and the Figure Eight makes Becky tap at 16:03 while Flair holds Sasha back.

**Rating:** B+. They were rocking here and a blown spot or two less would have made this a classic. Above all else this felt like an NXT women's match instead of a main roster Divas match, which is exactly what the point of this was supposed to be. Hopefully this becomes the focal point of the division instead of all the lame action you get more often than not.

The big criticism here is simple though: it should have been Sasha. If there has ever been a moment perfectly set up for a title change, it was right here. Sasha had the custom entrance, the special tights and the crowd entirely behind her....and it's Flair interfering to keep the title on Charlotte, just like it always is. I don't get this mentality of setting something up for down the road when you're at Wrestlemania. It didn't make sense when Lawler lost to Cole and it doesn't make sense here. Great match though.

Charlotte gets a ton of pyro, including a series of fireworks outside the stadium. That really did make it feel like a bigger moment, just like it should be.

The Cell is lowered.

We recap Shane vs. Undertaker and I still get lost in this whole thing. So Shane apparently had dirt on Vince and kept holding it over his head so Shane tried to get control of Raw. Vince agreed to put Raw up in exchange for whatever proof Shane had of what Vince did (the specifics of which have still not been explained and likely never will be). Shane has to fight the Undertaker inside the Cell tonight and unfortunately no one gives Shane much of a chance due to his age, time away from the ring, and HIS OPPONENT IS THE UNDERTAKER. Oh and Undertaker is done at Wrestlemania if he loses just in case you thought Shane could win.

This story has been a mess from the start and it's not really clear who you're supposed to cheer for. Do you go for Shane who is up against Vince and the evil Authority (after saying how much Raw has sucked in recent years) or against Undertaker who is the legend fighting for Vince

because.....well it's not really clear but in theory it's because Vince is Vince. The idea is that Shane is in WAY over his head, which he certainly is, making this whole thing a mess. To be fair though there's a good chance that Shane was supposed to be John Cena before the injury took him off the card. Unfortunately, this is the best thing we can get.

I know Shane being back has given a lot of fans a bunch of nostalgia but that doesn't mean he's capable of having a long match with anyone, let alone an old Undertaker. This has the potential to be a bunch of fun spots but having it be an actual quality match is almost completely out of the question.

### Shane McMahon vs. Undertaker

Inside the Cell of course. Of course the entrances take forever with Shane's going long as well due to having his children (Vince's grandchildren) dance out with him as Shane dollars fall from the ceiling. As usual, this creates an issue as the bills are everywhere, including sticking to the side of the Cell. Shane throws a kick to start for no effect before they start jabbing at the air in front of each other.

They head outside with Undertaker in control and "methodically taking his time" according to Cole because he doesn't get that they mean the same thing. Back in and a single right hand puts Shane down but he back elbows Undertaker in the jaw to block a big boot. Cole follows up by saying this is a cat and mouse game, making sure to point out that Undertaker is indeed the cat.

Undertaker messes with some steps but gets caught with kicks as he comes back in, earning Shane a whip into the cage wall. The apron legdrop sets up the Last Ride for two and I'm done with this match five and a half minutes in. That move can give Undertaker World Titles and major wins but it can't beat Shane McMahon when Undertaker has barely been touched? I just can't buy that no matter how much of an athlete Shane is.

Undertaker brings the steps in but gets caught in a long triangle choke, which would be laughed off and broken in ten seconds from any other opponent but since it's Shane it's hard to counter for some reason. Undertaker gets Shane on his back for a cover and the hold is broken,

allowing Undertaker to chokeslam him onto the steps for another two.

Oh come on now. Neither of those moves are enough to put Shane away? That's what I'm supposed to buy? Based on those moves, this match shouldn't have made it ten minutes but they seem to just be starting up. Undertaker misses an elbow and hits the steps so Shane says bring it on. That's actually enough to sucker Undertaker in for a DDT onto the steps for two and the actual wrestler is WAY more out of it than he should be after one or maybe two big moves in ten minutes.

Undertaker sits up so Shane punches him in the face, earning himself a Hell's Gate. Shane somehow escapes that (as in the move that put HHH away at a Wrestlemania) for a bad Sharpshooter, with the referee telling him to take his time. Thankfully Undertaker powers out pretty easily but he can't handle Shane hitting him in the face a few times. Undertaker can take punches from BROCK LESNAR but Shane takes a few weeks of MMA training and he can punch Undertaker down?

Shane hits Coast to Coast and it's only good for two because one foot driving a trashcan into Undertaker's chest (more like stomach as the can didn't seem to make any actual contact) actually isn't enough to put him away. Shocking I know but we keep going. Shane gets up and finds boltcutters under the ring to break open part of the cage wall. Undertaker is quickly to his feet though and drives Shane through the wall and up against the German announcers' table, which really isn't a huge impact as the wall only goes a few feet before being stopped.

It's time to load up the announcers' table and Undertaker calls for the Tombstone, only to have Shane counter into a sleeper. Not a special MMA choke, but a run of the mill sleeper. Instead of like, countering by easily flipping Shane over, Undertaker just stands there for a bit before driving both of them through the table for a good looking crash.

Shane comes up with a toolbox to knock Undertaker silly though....and Shane looks at the top of the Cell. A monitor shot to the head keeps Undertaker down and it's time to go up. Shane takes forever to finally dive off, driving himself through the table and right onto the visible crash pad.

I was genuinely scared when he was up there and seeing the pad helps a good bit as that thing is HUGE. I get that they had to have it but couldn't they find a better way to hide it? After a lot of sitting around so Shane can be checked out, Shane says bring it on. Back in and Shane pulls himself onto the steps where Undertaker tells him to bring it. The Tombstone finally puts Shane away at 30:05.

**Rating:** D. Nope. You can take the nostalgia, you can take Shane fighting for his legacy (whatever that means this year) and you can pretend that Shane can get through this with pure heart and it doesn't matter. This flat out did not work for me and it didn't work for several reasons.

First and foremost, I do not buy that Shane McMahon is a threat to the Undertaker, nor do I buy that he could kick out of a Last Ride and chokeslam onto the steps before getting out of Hell's Gate. They lost me as soon as that happened because, as has been established, Shane isn't a wrestler and therefore shouldn't be able to survive that kind of stuff. I know you can stretch a lot of the time but this was too much for me to believe.

Second, this was WAY too long at over half an hour. This went longer than Shawn vs. Undertaker inside the Cell and was the fifth longest Cell match in history. The elbow was cool (terrifying but cool) but that's not enough to warrant this match going longer than Undertaker vs. Mankind or HHH vs. Cactus Jack. This should have been cut in half and had the time given to other stuff or maybe cut off so the show isn't pushing five hours.

Third, it was barely a match. This was a bunch of stretches of Undertaker beats on Shane then misses a big move so Shane can get in some garbage stuff. That's entertaining for a little while but then it gets to be the same stuff over and over. I know Shane isn't a wrestler, but that's the problem: you need someone more capable to have a match that lasts half an hour.

Finally, there was barely any reason to have this in the Cell other than "it's a Cell match." Other than the big spot at the end, the cage was barely used and there was next to no reason for these two to hate each

other. Vince decided we were having this match and they tried to work in some hatred or anger later but it never clicked. This easily could have been no holds barred or something and just had Shane dive off the stage or something but instead we had the Cell, which took even more time to get ready and hype up.

Overall it's certainly not the worst match I've ever seen for the gimmick and I was entertained at times but it was just too long with too many leaps in realism. This is a match where Shane should have brought people in to help him and maybe set something up for Undertaker later.

Instead it was like when Vince and Shane fought DX with no help: no one believes it because the wrestler is just too good for the businessman who wrestles on occasion. This could have worked at about fifteen minutes but it was dragging at twelve and only came close to picking up near the end. I wasn't a fan here and it was worse on a second viewing.

Shane is wheeled out on a stretcher to eat up even more time. He throws a thumbs up and pounds his chest for the crowd.

Here's the pre-show panel while the ring is cleaned up.

### Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal

Fandango, Damien Sandow, Shaquille O'Neal, Big Show, Viktor, Diamond Dallas Page, Konnor, Tatanka, Jack Swagger, R-Truth, Goldust, Baron Corbin, Curtis Axel, Adam Rose, Heath Slater, Tyler Breeze, Mark Henry, Bo Dallas, Darren Young, Kane

Page was a cool surprise with the music getting a strong pop. Put the guy in the Hall of Fame already. Tatanka was at Axxess earlier in the day but I have no idea why he's in this. O'Neal was a surprise, even though his TapOut graphic flashed during Big Show's entrance. Show and Shaq have the staredown but Kane interrupts it, only to have everyone get knocked down to the floor so we can have the real showdown.

Fandango tries to dance but gets tossed by the giants. Shaq eliminates Sandow as well before it's time for the big choke off, only to have everyone come in and eliminate Shaq and Show. The match turns into a

regular battle royal now, minus all of the interest because....well look at the lineup. Page Diamond Cuts Viktor for an easy elimination but Konor actually gets rid of the yoga guy.

Truth dumps Konor and it's time for the Tatanka warpath. That lasts as long as you would expect it to before Corbin dumps Tatanka. Kane gets rid of Swagger and it's time for the Social Outcasts to clean house, including eliminating Truth. Goldust follows Truth to the floor and it's time for the BO TRAIN!

Kane quickly derails it (duh) and Corbin cuts off the other exit. Axel and Rose are quickly out but Kane chokeslams Corbin. Henry gets back in and easily throws out Slater. Breeze follows them as the ring is suddenly mostly empty. Kane and Young (now there's a pair) eliminates Henry. Darren celebrates and gets dumped at the same time as Dallas, only to have Corbin throw Kane out for the BIG surprise win at 9:41.

**Rating:** D. The match sucked but Corbin winning was the perfect call. It instantly gives him a path to running up the main roster and that's all this was supposed to be. Kane being the last man out is fine but I'm really annoyed that the battle royal has taken such a fall in the last two years. It's now just another battle royal with lower card and midcard goons, but at least two of the first three winners have been people in need of a push.

Wrestlemania XXXIII will be in Orlando.

Here are the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders for a completely unnecessary (yet very visually appealing) dance number. Yeah it's just an excuse to have good looking women in glorified swimsuits but here's the Rock to spice things up. Oh wait he can't walk through the cheerleader tunnel yet because.....he's got a flamethrower. He plays with it a bit before lighting up a big ROCK sign, which is put out a few moments later.

Rock FINALLY comes down to the ring, making sure to show off the bicep to one of the cheerleaders along the way. A mere SEVEN AND A HALF MINUTES after the cheerleaders came out, Rock says his first word. Rock talks about seeing smiling faces on all four sides of the stadium, which means there are going to be a lot of Wrestlemania babies in nine months. He

talks about how awesome it is to be here with the millions (which he keeps saying) before FINALLY getting to the point: announcing the new Wrestlemania attendance record. Rock says it's about to get good...and we've got Wyatts.

Seeing the fireflies in the stadium really was one of the coolest things I got to see all night and was definitely worth seeing in person. Bray introduces himself and his brothers before saying he chose Rock. See, Rock represents success, greatness and a lie. This moment doesn't belong to the Rock or to the people but to Bray Wyatt himself. Rock looks a bit nervous but immediately starts mocking Bray for saying he would eviscerate Rock right now. "You come out here and talk like you've been hitting the bong for about eight days straight jack."

Rowan's parents are clearly related and Strowman looks like he's been breast fed since he was 26 years old. As for Bray though, Rock has had his eye on him since Bray got to the WWE. Bray has the ability and the charisma (nice applause for that) and when his music hit, 100,000 people put their phones in the air. Then Bray said he wanted to eviscerate the Rock but that's knocking on a door that he doesn't want answered. Bray can say he's the eater of worlds but Rock thinks he's just the eater of Hot Pockets.

Rock is wrong though because Bray is here to kick a door down because he has no idea who he's fooling with right now. There goes the shirt but Rock doesn't think we're going to have a Wrestlemania fight. No, we're going to have a Wrestlemania MATCH. We've got a referee out here and there go the tear away pants. This is actually happening and the fans are WAY into it.

### The Rock vs. Erick Rowan

Bell, Rock Bottom, six seconds. Well it was indeed a match and a Wrestlemania record.

The Wyatts surround the ring...and here's John Cena for the save. Rowan and Strowman take finishers and it's a spinebuster into the Rock Bottom for Bray. Rock grabs a mic, says welcome back to Cena, and wraps it up after twenty eight minutes, or longer than anything all night but the

Cell.

Oh and no this wasn't a burial of the Wyatts. This was the Wyatts interacting with one of the biggest stars of all time and having him beat their lackey whose entire job is to take the fall in losses. The segment is going to set up the Wyatts turning face and maybe going somewhere for a change. Also it was Rock praising Bray, which of course buries him like it buried Rusev back in the day, before Rusev won the US Title and then beat John Cena on pay per view. You know, after crawling out of the grave that Rock put him in and all that. This was fine for the Wyatts and not a burial. Well other than being WAY too long of course.

Long recap of Roman Reigns vs. HHH, which is basically HHH wanting to hold Reigns down because Reigns didn't want to join the Authority. This turned into a really watered down story with HHH wanting to prove that he still had it with the feud dying more and more every week. Reigns has been more aggressive lately which has made things better, but this is still just a step above a disaster coming in.

We see a bunch of men with white heads and metal plates over their faces. As in thousands of them, all standing in a huge group. Stephanie is shown in the HHH skull mask standing in front of a throne looking like a witch. She wants us to rise in their presence because we all exist to serve them. They are the leaders and the power because they own all of us. After tonight, all hope will be gone because only HHH can stand in the coliseum of the immortals. Here's a quick translation: "WE'RE HEELS! BOO US AND NOT REIGNS!"

#### WWE World Title: Roman Reigns vs. HHH

HHH comes to the ring flanked by an army of the white headed guys (all from NXT in theory), all carrying WWE Titles. Reigns is loudly booed but it's not quite as bad as I was expecting. HHH grabs a headlock to start and slaps Reigns in the back of the head. Remember that they hate each other and keep wanting to hurt the other as much as possible.

Reigns gets sent over the top and out to the floor before HHH starts in on his arm. There's a right hand to send HHH into the corner and Reigns throws in a crotch chop. That earns HHH a whip across the ring but he

avoids a charge and hits Reigns in the back of the head. Some pretty loud spot calling sets up a knee to the back of the head, followed by a stiff punch to Roman's face.

Reigns comes back with the running clothesline and apron boot, only to have Stephanie offer a distraction so HHH can get in a low blow. I guess it's not enough that she takes everyone's balls but now she's helping get her husband some balls too. A slugout goes to Reigns but a spinebuster gives HHH two. They head outside with Reigns being rammed face first into the table and then being thrown over it for good measure.

You can hear the fans groaning at the slow pace, especially over six hours into the evening. Back in and a middle rope knee gets two for the champ but he tries again and gets punched out of the air. A Samoan drop gets two and has Stephanie panicking but HHH avoids the Superman punch by rolling to the outside. This is dragging BADLY here as HHH still can't work an epic style match to save his life.

Reigns sends him into the steps and followed with a huge spear through the barricade. Good thing the security guards had already cleared out that part of the crowd. Reigns' left arm is hanging as they get back inside, only to have the Superman punch countered into an armbars because this hasn't gone long enough yet.

Reigns rolls out of another armbars and lifts HHH up into the sitout powerbomb for two as this just keeps going. HHH is right back with the cross armbreaker but Reigns counters exactly the same way. The spear is blocked and HHH tries a Pedigree, which is quickly countered with a backdrop over the top. Back in and the spear gets two as Stephanie pulls the referee out.

That means another spear but Stephanie takes it instead...and suddenly Reigns is as popular as free beer in a frat house. I mean the place is suddenly WAY into him all for finally giving Stephanie what she had coming to her. HHH is livid and gets two off a Pedigree. The Superman punch connects but the spear eats knee. Stephanie hands him the sledgehammer but it's another Superman punch and the spear for the title at 27:11.

**Rating:** D. HHH needs to stop trying to go big because he just can't pull it off. I don't know how else to put it but he just can't do it. This was yet another match that didn't fit the story in the slightest as it was more like HHH was trying to outsmart Reigns instead of beating on each other like two men out for blood. It was a boring match and a really weak way to wrap up this show. The spear to Stephanie was PERFECT though and something long overdue. I don't need her to get beaten up every single week or anything but taking a bump every now and then isn't going to kill her or her all important heat.

Reigns celebrates a lot.

A five minute highlight package ends the show.

**Overall Rating:** C-. We'll get to the elephant in the stadium later and start off by saying there's a lot of good stuff on here. The wrestling is strong almost throughout save for the double main event with the women's match and the ladder match standing out as very entertaining stuff. If the two big matches hadn't been so horrible, this show would shoot up the charts.

Then there's the booking. Oh yes then there's the booking. From Ryder (who was clearly supposed to be Neville) winning the title after winning two matches on Raw in a year to AJ and New Day losing to Dean practically getting squashed to Sasha not winning, it was a big night for the heels with very little to cheer for. Just a bad night of decision making which seemed to be nothing more than a way to get on the fans' nerves.

However, that leaves us with the big problem: counting the pre-show, this was just under seven hours long, or TRIPLE what Takeover: Dallas was. I get that Wrestlemania is bigger than anything all year but they went WAY too far this year. Looking back at the show, the Cell could have been cut in half, Rock's promo could have lost five to ten minutes and the main event could have been ten minutes shorter. That's not much but it gets you down over half an hour, which is getting closer to manageable.

That's where the show loses it for me and for most people. If you can get this down to under six hours (counting the pre-show, which could have been chopped down too), you have a much better show. If you can fix the

booking issues (which could have been mostly solved by having AJ and New Day win), this show is instantly higher up on the list of great shows.

Overall, Wrestlemania was really starting to feel like a chore near the end. You shouldn't be sitting there thinking "we've got this and this left to get through and then we can leave". At a show like this, or really any show actually, you should be excitedly waiting for the main event. However, it really doesn't matter what that match is when it's six hours into a show. It's just too long and it really hurt things.

There's a lot of good on this show and the surprises really helped it out, but in any wrestling show you can reach a point where the decisions being made outweigh anything that can go on in the ring. So many things at the show held back the good stuff and there wasn't much of a way around that, which is why this show fell as far as it did. It's an entertaining show, but it really needs a good shaking while someone pulls back on the booker's reins.

### Results

Zack Ryder b. Kevin Owens, Miz, Dolph Ziggler, Sami Zayn, Stardust and Sin Cara – Ryder pulled down the title

Chris Jericho b. AJ Styles – Codebreaker

League of Nations b. New Day – Brogue Kick to Woods

Brock Lesnar b. Dean Ambrose – F5 onto a pile of chairs

Charlotte b. Becky Lynch and Sasha Banks – Figure Eight to Lynch

Undertaker b. Shane McMahon – Tombstone

Baron Corbin won the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal last eliminating Kane

The Rock b. Erick Rowan – Rock Bottom

Roman Reigns b. HHH – Spear

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book of the History of the Intercontinental Title at Amazon for just \$3.99 at:

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# Smackdown – April 7, 2016: They're Lulling Early This Year

## **Smackdown**

Date: April 7, 2016

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Mauro Ranallo, Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler

Things have changed a bit since last time and WWE has hit the ground mostly running since this Sunday's Wrestlemania. The big story coming out of Monday is AJ Styles being crowned as a surprising #1 contender to new champion Roman Reigns, which might get some buildup starting tonight. Also we have the Vaudevillains making their main roster debut so let's get to it.

We open with a long recap of Wrestlemania.

Opening sequence.

Here's Roman Reigns to get things going, drawing a good deal of booring in the process. Reigns gets right to the point by saying he took on the

Authority and won this title. When you have this title, everybody wants it so that means it's one vs. all again. Reigns gets in the "I'm THE guy" line again and I'm still not sure how I feel on that. I get what they're going for here but it's still not the answer to their problems. Saying Reigns isn't a good guy might take away some of the stigma around him but it's not going to make people like him either. Maybe that's what they're going for and if so then cool, though it's still not working great.

Anyway Reigns brings up being the new champion and getting ready to beat AJ Styles, which brings out AJ himself. Styles praises Reigns for having a great Wrestlemania, but he had a heck of a Monday Night Raw. That means it's time for AJ to come for the World Title because he's been all over the world and wants to win that prize. Reigns says AJ can want it all he wants but it means he has to beat THE GUY. Yeah AJ has beaten a lot of guys but he's never beaten Reigns, and he never will.

This feud could go somewhere interesting but I'm still not sure how well it's going to get there yet. Reigns beating AJ as a challenger of the month is a good idea because AJ will get a good match out of him, though that THE GUY idea needs some work. It's certainly an interesting idea but they need to figure out how to put everything together.

We look back at Vince giving Shane control over Raw, completely negating the importance of the last six weeks or so of this story. That might be better for everyone involved actually.

### Lucha Dragons vs. Vaudevillains

This is the Vaudevillains' (Aiden English/Simon Gotch) main roster debut after a long time down in NXT. Cara and English get things going with Mauro telling us about some martial art that English practices. Cara backdrops him down and brings Kalisto in for the monkey flip 450. As Lawler seems to call him "Hayden English", Simon breaks up Kalisto's dive with a quick knee from the corner.

English puts on a chinlock as Mauro gives a quick history of some martial art that Gotch uses called Bartitsu. Cara armdrags Aiden down and makes the hot tag off to Kalisto as things speed way up. Everything breaks down with Cara being taken down on the floor, leaving Kalisto to take the

Whirling Dervish for the pin at 4:03, because SIN CARA CAN'T TAKE A PIN FOR WHATEVER FREAKING REASON.

**Rating:** D+. The match was watchable and fine but had no spark to it. The Vaudevillains really aren't that exciting of a team as you see their gimmick and realize there's nothing more to it than what you see. Kalisto losing makes me shake my head and reinforces the fact that this team needs to split or Kalisto needs to drop the title. You can't be in a low level team and hold a title at the same time as it leads to bad losses like this which mean nothing but still devalue the title.

Stills package of the ladder match and a video of Ryder losing the title the next night to Miz.

We see Lita presenting Charlotte with the new Women's Title and everyone but Natalya leaving, probably setting up a title match soon down the line.

#### Natalya vs. Summer Rae

Charlotte is on commentary with Flair by her side. Natalya easily takes it to the mat to start and does her stepover into the basement dropkick. Summer sends her outside for a snap suplex as we actually get a Beautiful Fierce Females reference from the champ. That's a faction I haven't thought of in years. We hit the chinlock back inside, only to have Natalya pop up and grab the Sharpshooter for the tap out at 2:54. This was exactly what you would have expected.

We look back at Reigns winning the title and being challenged by Jericho, Styles, Owens and Zayn, followed by Styles winning the four way to become #1 contender.

#### Intercontinental Title: Zack Ryder vs. Miz

Miz is defending and has Maryse introduce him. Ryder gets a quick rollup for two and he's already looking desperate. A forearm and slingshot splash get two for Ryder, followed by a dropkick through the ropes for the same. Back from a break with Miz kicking out of something we don't see and getting in a quick shot to set up the Reality Check for two. A

knee to the ribs keeps Ryder in trouble and Miz makes it even worse by calling him a loser. Now come on. Just because you're a cocky heel with a gorgeous wife doesn't mean you have to be impolite.

Ryder comes back with a dropkick but dives <http://onhealthy.net/product-category/diabetes/> into a sitout powerbomb. That's not something you see Miz use that often. The short DDT gets two on Ryder but he comes right back with a facebuster for two of his own. A Broski Boot on the floor sets up the Elbro (yes the Elbro) for two back inside. Not that it matters as Maryse offers a distraction, allowing Miz to hit the Skull Crushing Finale to retain at 12:36.

**Rating:** C-. Well so much for Ryder. I get that this was supposed to be Neville (it would have made much more sense) and that it was never going to last but it begs the question: why not put the title on Ziggler? I know the match has been overdone but Ziggler at least has some credibility. Ryder has won two Raw/Smackdown matches in about two years and we were supposed to buy him as Intercontinental Champion? That just doesn't work, no matter how you spin it.

The Social Outcasts play Rock Paper Scissors to determine who gets to face Apollo Crews. Axel is the odd man out but says he wins because the ax beats all.

#### Curtis Axel vs. Apollo Crews

Axel gets in a quick shot but heads outside for the Bo Train. That's not cool with Crews who goes outside and pops Axel in the jaw. A Rose distraction lets Axel get in another cheap shot to take over but Crews clotheslines him down and nips up. The standing moonsault gets two and the lifting sitout powerbomb puts Axel away at 2:35.

Video on the Andre battle royal, focusing on Shaquille O'Neal appearing and Baron Corbin getting the win. We also see Corbin beating up Ziggler, though the match wound up as a double countout.

Corbin says the end of days is here.

Stills of the Women's Title triple threat from Sunday. Thankfully Ranallo

says the Women's Title is back instead of being introduced.

Becky Lynch says Sunday was a brutal match but she'll never lose her passion. That's what it's all about and that's why she walked out of Charlotte's speech on Monday. Emma comes in to brag about getting to the WWE first, probably setting up a match for some point in the future.

Primo and Epico video about how awesome Puerto Rico is.

### Dean Ambrose vs. Tyler Breeze

Dean is right on him with shots in the corner and avoids a charge to make things even worse. A big clothesline sets up Dirty Deeds for the pin on Breeze at 1:15.

Ambrose leaves as Chris Jericho is coming out for the main event, giving us a staredown.

Goldust is pitching Shattered Dreams Productions II when R-Truth comes in with a camera to be the director. Apparently there's going to be a top Hollywood producer at Raw this Monday and Truth can get him an audition. For some reason Goldust goes along with this.

### Cesaro/AJ Styles vs. Chris Jericho/Kevin Owens

Cesaro still has that awesome tear away suit. Jericho and Styles get things going with Chris eating an early dropkick. Cesaro comes in and scares Jericho to the floor as we take a break. Back with Styles knocking Jericho into the wrong corner before it's off to Cesaro vs. Owens for some hard shouts to the face. Both heels have to avoid the Cesaro Swing and Jericho is able to get in a shot to the back for his first advantage.

Owens teases the Cannonball but opts for a clothesline instead before tagging Jericho in (Owens: "High five!"). The already slow paced match slows down even more with Jericho cranking on Cesaro's arms. Back up and Cesaro throws him to the floor, only to have Jericho pull AJ off the apron to break up the hot tag. Owens comes in and misses the Cannonball and NOW it's the hot tag to AJ as everything breaks down.

AJ cleans house but Owens quickly takes over, only to eat a Pele. Jericho

breaks up the Phenomenal Forearm and the package side slam gets two on AJ. Cesaro beats on Jericho outside as Sami Zayn comes out to go after Owens. The distraction lets AJ roll Owens up for the pin at 13:03.

**Rating:** C-. I really didn't care for this one as they were just going through the motions for a bit until the ending. The wrestling was fine but I never felt like this match mattered. Unfortunately that's most Smackdown main events in a nutshell: watchable but completely inconsequential more often than not.

Owens and Zayn (whose arm is heavily taped) brawl post match with security breaking it up but accidentally allowing Owens to get in a clean shot to the jaw. Zayn is sent into the steps to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** D+. Oh yeah Wrestlemania week has wrapped up and you can feel the energy going down. This was a slightly hotter than usual Smackdown though the quality really wasn't there. It was a bunch of Wrestlemania fallout stuff but since this isn't Raw, almost nothing happened and you could skip a lot of this without missing a single thing.

### Results

Vaudevillains b. Lucha Dragons – Whirling Dervish to Kalisto

Natalya b. Summer Rae – Sharpshooter

Miz b. Zack Ryder – Skull Crushing Finale

Apollo Crews b. Curtis Axel – Lifting sitout powerbomb

Dean Ambrose b. Tyler Breeze – Dirty Deeds

AJ Styles/Cesaro b. Kevin Owens/Chris Jericho – Rollup to Owens

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# Wrestlemania XXXII Preview: Intercontinental Title Ladder Match

I can't stand this match.

If anyone has been following my stuff recently, you know I can't stand this story. I have yet to see any reason for this match to take place but we're getting this disaster of a mess because it's Wrestlemania and therefore we're getting a seven man ladder match. We have seven guys in this thing and most of them have almost no reason to be in there.

This should be all about Zayn vs. Owens (and preferably without ladders) so I'm not even going to bother talking about the other five guys (Stardust, The Miz, Dolph Ziggler, Sin Cara and Zack Ryder in case you're reading this in thirty years). They're not going to win and I'm not going to pretend otherwise.

So yeah it's all about those two but the question is who wins. I think they're going with Owens, likely to set up something with Zayn one on one in a month. Owens winning doesn't make sense in a regular match but him surviving in a big mess is straight out of AJ Lee surviving everyone at Wrestlemania XXX. It's stupid but just go with it.

I'm sure there will be enough high spots for everyone and we'll get people laying around for ten minutes after a bump they would get up from in five seconds otherwise but IT'S A BIG LADDER MATCH!!! That means it's cool right? Or at least Stephanie thinks so because she gave it to us and

knows everything that's best for business. It's not like there's another match where you could throw people into the ring to get them on the card and have them do nothing. No instead let's have a ladder match where no one gets to shine in a title match. Just get it over with already and move on from this illogical nonsense.

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# Monday Night Raw – March 21, 2016: And Then They Hit A Wall

## Monday Night Raw

Date: March 21, 2016

Location: Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Commentators: John Bradshaw Layfield, Michael Cole, Byron Saxton

The march of pain continues for Roman Reigns as we're in one of the smarkiest towns in the world. There are also less than two weeks until Wrestlemania so this is the time when the really heavy lifting for the show has to be done. It's going to be rather, shall we say, interesting

to see how Reigns is greeted tonight so let's get to it.

This show is dedicated to Mary Katharine Stewart. I'm actually not sure who that is.

We open with the now traditional long recap of last week's show. I get the idea of keeping us up to date but cut these things down.

Here's Stephanie to get things going. Apparently HHH isn't here tonight and you have 60 seconds to get to the box office for refunds. That absence is of course due to corporate responsibilities and NOT due to Roman Reigns attacking him last week. That's because Roman Reigns is stupid and opportunistic. How short sighted could he have been last week when he attacked HHH for revenge?

Cue Reigns to some VERY loud booing (expected of course). Stephanie goes into her patented voice but Reigns puts his hand over the mic and says the reason HHH isn't here is because he knows the beating that would be coming to him. At Wrestlemania, he's going into HHH and Stephanie's stadium and taking their title. Stephanie loads up the slap but Reigns blocks it with an ease that far more people should have when Stephanie pulls that arm back. That's it for Reigns, who again kept it short here. That's the best thing they could have done here and it worked far better than I was expecting.

### Kevin Owens vs. AJ Styles

Non-title and a very smart choice for an opener. Owens takes him to a knee with a headlock but AJ pops up into the dropdown and dropkick. They head to the floor and Owens gets in a hard whip to the barricade as we take a break. Back with AJ fighting out of a chinlock and scoring with an enziguri to put both guys down. The Pele misses and Owens takes his head off with a clothesline. A nice rack neckbreaker gets two for Owens but Owens misses the Cannonball.

AJ comes right back with the AA into a backbreaker for the same. Styles can't get a top rope hurricanrana though and Owens debuts a frog splash for two. You know, because you debut a huge spot like that and have it get two. We get the ROH style slugout and AJ Peles him down again as we

take a break.

Back again with AJ getting two more off his torture rack slam before heading up top. Owens is right there meet him, only to have AJ slip down into a sitout powerbomb with a nasty looking landing for two more. Cue Jericho though, only to have AJ grab the Calf Crusher anyway. That brings Jericho to the apron to break the hold though and Owens gets a rollup for the pin at 19:20.

**Rating:** B+. This felt like an ROH match and that's the perfect way to start a show in front of this crowd. AJ losing is the right call and I was nervous that they would go for the 50/50 booking that has plagued them for so long. Thankfully they let these two beat the tar out of each other for a long time and the match worked as a result. Really good match but more importantly it was smart.

Post match Owens grabs the belt and says that everyone is wondering who will be facing him for the title at KO Mania. Cue Dolph Ziggler (DANG IT GET OUT OF HERE!) and Miz to argue with each other until Sami Zayn comes out. Miz calls him the skinny Seth Rogen as Owens leaves. Kevin says he'll go to the Authority and get a triple threat match set up for the title shot tonight.

Earlier today, Dean Ambrose was in a pub to talk about how far Lesnar was going to have to go to beat him at Wrestlemania. Terry Funk of all people comes in and puts Dean over before giving him a chainsaw. Dean of course turns it on and slices through a table.

Stephanie makes Owens' triple threat match for later.

We recap Shane returning last month to set up Undertaker vs. Shane. Various legends and Hall of Famers talk about how big it was, including Mick Foley, John Cena, Michael Hayes, Booker T., Chris Jericho, Edge, Steve Austin, Ric Flair and Jerry Lawler. They all think Shane is in over his head. You would think Shawn Michaels would have made an appearance here.

Here's the League of Nations for a match but first of all we have to see last week's beatdown of the New Day. This brings out New Day to call the

League trash, complete with cards that call them trash. Kofi thinks Rusev has smelly feet and that the three of them would make a better set of kings than Barrett. That brings them to Sheamus, whose parents actually put the word SHAME in his name. Not to worry though because all of this could be cured with a simple bowl of Booty0's because New Day ROCKS.

### Big E. vs. Rusev

Rusev drops straight to the floor at the bell but Big E. throws him back in for the one man Unicorn Stampede. A big stomp has Rusev in trouble as we take an early break. Back with Rusev holding a chinlock before nailing a nice one footed dropkick for two. New Day is out after a beatdown during the break. Cole thinks this could be the most physical match at Wrestlemania because Cole isn't that bright.

Big E. fights up again with the belly to belly but the Warrior splash hits knees. A Rock Bottom out of the corner drops Rusev for two and the fans are entirely behind New Day. Now the Warrior splash gets two and Woods is back up to start the brawl with the League. The Accolade is broken up with an electric chair but Big E. has to spear Sheamus through the ropes. That allows Kofi to kick Rusev in the head, setting up the Big Ending for the pin on Rusev at 11:03. Big E. gets a good reaction for the win.

**Rating:** C-. Good enough here but I'm worried that they might change the titles at Wrestlemania based on how many times the League has lost leading up to it. The key thing here though was the smart booking continues as they put out another match that people are going to care about and don't focus on something they're going to hate.

The Wyatt Family talks about rebirth and promises Dean Ambrose as a sacrifice tonight.

Here's Big Show to talk about the Andre Memorial Battle Royal. JBL thinks Show has the best chance to repeat as the winner. Well given that he's the only one who CAN repeat as the winner, you can't argue there. Show talks about Andre's legacy and how Andre was the greatest giant of all time. Last year it meant a lot to him to win the battle royal because he doesn't win a lot of battle royals (right).

Cue the Social Outcasts to say they're a combined Cinderella story. Axel says they're more like Voltron and the Outcasts attack. Show grabs Slater by the throat but gets beaten down until Kane comes out for the save. The Outcasts are dispatched and Show hugs Kane, only to stupidly pose on the ropes, allowing Kane to chokeslam him down.

Stan Hansen Hall of Fame induction announcement. This is another deserved one.

### Chris Jericho vs. Fandango

Just get AJ out here to cause the big upset already. Jericho takes over to start of course but stops to yell about how Fandango never beat him at Wrestlemania. Fandango gets in a few shots but misses the top rope legdrop. Cue AJ for a distraction so Fandango can get in a small package for two. Jericho pops back up with the Codebreaker for the pin at 2:10.

AJ comes down for the fight but Jericho bails. Styles says he's competed all over the world except for one place, giving us a DRAMATIC POINT AT THE SIGN. We get the official challenge for Wrestlemania...which I could have sworn was already made.

Quick line from Mick Foley about how dangerous the Cell is.

Video on Shane's training for the Cell, including clips from more legends talking about how tough Shane is. They seem to think that Undertaker is going to kill him anyway.

Here's Kevin Owens to introduce the participants in the triple threat match for the #1 contendership.

### Stardust vs. Sin Cara vs. Zack Ryder

Owens apparently got to hand pick these guys because he never told Stephanie who would be in the match. The announcers bury all three of them by asking why any of them deserve a title shot. Cara starts cleaning house to start as Ryder is sent to the floor. A slingshot ankle scissors gets two on Stardust but Ryder pulls them to the floor. Cue Sami, Ziggler and Miz to stare down Owens as the match is basically forgotten. A huge brawl breaks out and the match is thrown out at 3:40. No rating since so

much was spent on Owens but the wrestling wasn't the point here.

Everyone beats Owens down and DO NOT TELL ME it's going to be a seven way match at Wrestlemania with three extra goons added in.

We look back at the opening segment.

Stephanie is thinking about leaving when Kevin Owens comes in to complain about what just happened. She gets annoyed at him calling it KOMania and makes a SEVEN WAY LADDER MATCH for the title. BECAUSE OF COURSE THEY ARE BECAUSE THE INTERCONTINENTAL TITLE IS A FREAKING JOKE THESE DAYS AND THEY'RE GIVING TITLE SHOTS TO PEOPLE THEY JUST SPENT A WHOLE MATCH BURYING BECAUSE IT'S A STUPID IDEA THAT THEY KEEP DOING EVERY SINGLE YEAR!

Stephanie (of course it's Stephanie) is leaving and HHH gets out of his car. They go to leave when Reigns appears and attacks HHH as Stephanie won't stop screaming. Doesn't she have a pointless ladder match to book?

### Natalya vs. Charlotte

Non-title with Becky and Sasha bickering on commentary. Charlotte starts fast but gets knocked to the floor for a hard shot to the head. Back in and Charlotte gets two off a clothesline as the arguing continues. Charlotte hammers away in the corner but gets caught in a sitout powerbomb, setting up the Sharpshooter. A rope is quickly grabbed and Natural Selection puts Natalya away at 4:51.

**Rating:** D+. Not exactly Roadblock here but at least we got that good looking powerbomb in again. I could have done without the annoying chattering about Irish jokes and bling but that's how you do commentary these days. The match should be fine assuming they give it time though this was nothing interesting.

We look back at Dean and the chainsaw earlier.

### R-Truth vs. Bubba Ray Dudley

Bubba pounds him down to start and asks where Truth's boy Goldust is. Truth makes a quick comeback and hits a running splash in the corner but

D-Von offers a distraction, allowing a big boot to put Truth away at 2:10.

Goldust comes out for a failed save so here are the Usos for the real save. The Usos load up a table but Bubba breaks it up.

Here's Vince to talk about the Cell and what might happen if Shane somehow pulls off a miracle. We look back at last week's ending segment with Undertaker destroying Shane. Vince agrees with what Shane said about Undertaker last week because if Undertaker doesn't beat Shane, this is his last Wrestlemania. Well....that's a bit better I guess.

### Dean Ambrose vs. Braun Strowman

Heyman is on commentary. Strowman hammers away to start but gets sent out to the floor, though not off his feet. The suicide dive doesn't put Braun down and now it's time for the beating. We hit the chinlock for a bit but Dean fights up and gets a sleeper, which seems to just annoy Braun more than anything else. Ambrose makes another comeback but can't hit Dirty Deeds. Instead he settles for avoiding a charge to send Braun shoulder first into the post. Dean grabs a chair and starts beating on Braun for the DQ at 6:04.

**Rating:** D+. This was fine and did exactly what it should have done: showed Dean against a monster and let us see what he can do against him without wasting Braun's monster aura. The match wasn't good or anything but that's what Braun is here for: to look like a big guy who can serve as a warmup for a match against Brock. They got the idea right here and it worked well enough.

Post match Dean hits him with the chair a few more times and scores with Dirty Deeds onto the steel. Some staring at Heyman ends the show.

**Overall Rating:** C+. They were rolling along and then hit one of the hardest walls I've ever seen. I really can't remember the last time I stopped caring about a show as hard as when they announced that seven man ladder match. Yes it's going to be a spectacle and yes it's going to have some big spots, but it goes against every bit of storytelling they've had in recent weeks. They don't have a roster to fill in a battle royal and

they have a great story HANDED TO THEM with Zayn vs. Owens, but no let's go with the big mess because it's easy and requires less work.

The worst part though is the storyline explanation for this is "Stephanie felt like it." Nothing more and nothing less. Why should I care about some story they're putting together or anything for that matter when it continues to come down to "well the Authority wants this"? It's lazy writing and bad storytelling, which is so much of a plague on this company.

Other than that though, this was actually quite a strong show as they kept things moving and avoided any major issues with the crowd. That was the key thing to the whole show: don't give the fans a reason or a chance to hijack things and it's clear that they pulled it off here. Good show overall and a needed show with less than two weeks before Wrestlemania but there were some major holes.

### Results

Kevin Owens b. AJ Styles – Rollup

Big E. b. Rusev – Big Ending

Chris Jericho b. Fandango – Codebreaker

Stardust vs. Sin Cara vs. Zack Ryder went to a no contest when all three attacked Kevin Owens

Charlotte b. Natalya – Natural Selection

Bubba Ray Dudley b. R-Truth – Big boot

Braun Strowman b. Dean Ambrose via DQ when Ambrose used a chair

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## **New Column: From Days Gone By**

I ramble about character development for a few pages.

<http://www.wrestlingrumors.net/kbs-review-days-gone/36486/>

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## **NXT – June 10, 2015: Oh How I've Missed You**

### **NXT**

Date: June 10, 2015

Location: Full Sail University, Winter Park, Florida

Commentators: Corey Graves, Rich Brennan, Byron Saxton

The big story tonight is the in ring debut of Samoa Joe, who debuted a few weeks back and has had some intense staredowns with NXT Champion Kevin Owens. It should be interesting to see who Joe's first victim is, because it's fairly clear that he's coming for Owens and the title. Right now though, Finn Balor is the #1 contender and will be facing Owens for the title in Tokyo on July 4. Let's get to it.

The opening video is all about Joe debuting in NXT and setting his sights on the title.

Opening sequence.

### Zack Ryder/Mojo Rawley vs. Mike Rallis/Elias Samson

Ryder is WAY over here and the fans even seem happy to see Rawley. Mojo shoves Rallis down, slams Samson, but then stop, HAMMER TIME. Ryder comes in and takes some shoulders in the ribs, only to raise his knees in the corner to stop a charge. The middle rope dropkick sets up the Broski Boot but Samson offers a distraction to take over.

We hit the chinlock but a GET HYPED chant brings Ryder to his feet for the hot tag to Rawley. Mojo cleans house with some very fast paced offense, including a big running punch and capped off by a middle rope Hart Attack with the Rough Ryder instead of the clothesline for the pin on Samson at 3:55.

**Rating:** C. I've always liked Ryder and this was a good sign for him. A lot of guys could use a recharge down in NXT and Ryder is probably at the top of that list. He clearly still has a following as the fans were all over him. Rawley was doing exactly what he should have done all along here: cleaned house and never looked back. One of his biggest problems was getting beaten up until the last 45 seconds of the match for a big comeback. Guys like him should hardly ever be on defense and the reaction was a lot better as a result.

Finn Balor promo with his voice talking about how everyone has two sides. Shots of the demon paint keep appearing until "FINN BALOR ARRIVES – July 4 in Tokyo" comes on screen. Oh that's going to be amazing.

Dana Brooke video. She's the Total Diva.

### Emma vs. Blue Pants

SHE'S BAAAAACK! Big Cass' Price Is Right entrance music got one of the loudest reactions in recent weeks. The fans are smart enough to know that it's Blue Pants' birthday. Emma jumps her to start, making her the most hated woman in the promotion. A dropkick gets two and we hit the bow and

arrow on Blue Pants. Fans: "BLUE PANTS ROCKS!" Blue Pants gets some rollups for two but it's back to the chinlock. Emma drops an elbow to the back of the head for two more but Blue Pants comes back with some kicks to the head. Blue Pants gets going but Emma trips her down and the Emma Lock gets the submission at 4:40.

**Rating:** D+. Here's the key thing about Blue Pants: she isn't used that often. They could bring her in more often for some loud reactions, but they would eventually die down because Blue Pants is so beloved due to being a special attraction. If this were the main roster, she would be in five segments a night and people would get sick of her in two weeks. This common sense stuff is addictive.

Enzo, Cass and Carmella say that Blake/Murphy/Bliss wouldn't last one week in the Hunger Games and if they grew up where they're from, it would be time to go live with Uncle Phil. Six person tag next week.

#### Tyler Breeze vs. Bull Dempsey

Dempsey knees him in the head to start and we're quickly in a chinlock. Fans: "BULL IS GORGEOUS/NO HE'S NOT!" Back up and the standing splash sets up the top rope headbutt but Breeze rolls away before the jump. Breeze gets him in a chance around the ring and Bull keeps getting winded. Fans: "CARDIO! CARDIO!" Breeze laps Bull, throws him inside and gives him a Beauty Shot for the pin at 2:49. Tyler is basically a face now due to all of his hard work and string of good matches.

We look back at Becky Lynch's standing ovation after losing to Sasha Banks. Brennan's nickname for her: The Lass Kicker. As much as I hate myself for this, I kind of dig that name.

#### Becky Lynch vs. Jesse McKay

Becky has a very high energy entrance now, complete with smoke along the entrance. The fans are responding to it and it's easy to see why. McKay used to wrestle in Shimmer under the same name. Jesse gets in a kick to the ribs to start, followed by another to the face. An armbar has Becky in some trouble but she comes back with a hammerlock suplex and some legdrops. "BETTER THAN HOGAN!" Let's not get crazy here. Something like a

torture rack Samoan drop sets up the armbar (Rich: "The Disgoosted Armbar!" Graves: "The WHAT?") for the submission at 4:16.

**Rating:** D+. I really wasn't feeling this one as Jesse got in way too much offense in what should have been a Becky showcase match. McKay was good enough in there though and could be something interesting if she's allowed to develop like the rest of the girls down here have done. This was too much like an old Mojo Rawley match though: awesome entrance, next to no offense until the very end.

Regal announces that Owens will be on commentary for Joe's match but Bull Dempsey comes in eating a bag of Doritos. He blames his loss on a lack of sleep. Regal gets serious and tells Dempsey to get his act together. The boss leaves so Dempsey pulls an open Snickers out of his singlet. Well they had to do something new with Dempsey so this works well enough.

Jason Jordan says he has another partner when Chad Gable comes in, saying it should be him. "I'm ready, willing and Gable. See what I did there?" Jason says no but Gable adds his name to Jordan's locker.

#### Baron Corbin vs. Angelo Dawkins

Corbin throws him around to start and walks him around the ring before a slam. A bulldog attempt is countered by a huge clothesline and End of Days gives Baron the pin at 2:29.

#### Samoa Joe vs. Scott Dawson

Owens is on commentary and Joe's music still sucks. He does however look a bit more toned. Fans: "PLEASE DON'T DIE!" How nice of them to be worried about Joe's safety. They trade armbars to start until Joe takes it up a notch with a back elbow to the face. Owens: "Wow a back elbow! I've got a mean back elbow." The release Rock Bottom out of the corner sets up the Muscle Buster for the pin on Dawson at 3:45.

**Rating:** C. Total squash here and it did exactly what it was supposed to do. Owens is great on commentary as the guy trying to cut into Joe's hype and this was a very fun use of about five minutes. Joe's physique looked about as good as you can fairly expect. The guy is never going to look

like John Cena and it's unfair to expect him to, but he looked fine here.

During the replays, Kevin offers to get Brennan a Joe shirt from the merchandise table. Owens goes to leave but Joe calls him to the ring. Kevin won't get in because he's a good man who won't drop Joe after his first match. Joe is a rookie here in NXT and one win isn't enough for an NXT Title match. Cue Regal who agrees with Owens. Joe hasn't earned a title shot, but he's earned the right to a non-title fight against Owens next week.

**Overall Rating:** B-. Matches made for the future, six matches, some amusing promos, two in ring debuts and a new character for Dempsey. How in the world can they get all that inside an hour and have almost no filler? This was the efficient NXT that flies by every week because it's very well put together. Couple that with an energetic crowd and you have one heck of a fun show.

### Results

Zack Ryder/Mojo Rawley b. Elias Samson/Mike Rallis – Middle rope Rough Ryder to Samson

Emma b. Blue Pants – Emma Lock

Tyler Breeze b. Bull Dempsey – Beauty Shot

Becky Lynch b. Jesse McKay – Disgoosted Armbar

Baron Corbin b. Angelo Dawkins – End of Days

Samoa Joe b. Scott Dawson – Muscle Buster

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# Smackdown – June 4, 2015: Fighting All The Way To The Bank

## Smackdown

Date: June 4, 2015

Location: Toyota Center, Houston, Texas

Commentators: Tom Phillips, Byron Saxton, Jerry Lawler

In something I could get used to, the big story tonight continues to be Kevin Owens, who will be issuing an NXT Title Open Challenge in the same vein as John Cena's US Title Open Challenges. Owens has only had one match on the main roster so far so it's going to be interesting to see how they treat him here. Let's get to it.

We open with stills of Sunday's main event with Ambrose winning via DQ but leaving with the title anyway.

Here's Rollins to get things going, of course without the title but carrying a chair. A year ago to the day, he took a chair to Ambrose and Reigns to dismantle the Shield. Rollins sits down in the chair and talks about being asked "why" so many times over the last year. Why did he do what he did and destroy what he created? From the day he arrived, he said his goal was to be the very best in this industry.

After all the time in the Shield, he got tired of sharing the glory with two chumps beneath him. That led him to the Authority, who groomed him to be the future of the WWE. Then he won the Money in the Bank ladder match all by himself. Around the time of the Royal Rumble, he had a vision to defeat Brock Lesnar and Roman Reigns at the same time. To execute a plan

like that took a genius (So people like Kane and Jack Swagger are geniuses?) because now the Beast is off licking his wounds and Reigns is living in Seth's shadow.

Rollins stands here as the greatest champion of all time but with no title around his waist. That brings him to Dean Ambrose, who wants all of the fans to think that stealing a title makes you a champion. Well allegedly it made him the Intercontinental Champion so why not try it with the big belt too? Rollins can take care of Ambrose without any member of the Authority, including Stephanie or HHH. Cue Ambrose on the screen, standing under a ladder, to say Rollins either has a bad memory or is a liar.

The fans saw Ambrose pin him on Sunday and now he knows the Authority is going to send everyone that they can to keep this title from slipping through their fingers. At Elimination Chamber, Ambrose climbed to the top of the mountain and at Money in the Bank, he'll climb to the top of the ladder and claim the WWE World Heavyweight Championship that rightfully belongs to him or he'll die trying.

This right here was a great example of why the Authority really isn't needed most of the time. Yeah they helped set up the story, but this was one of the better promos these two have ever had, which happens to come off the heels of another of their best promos ever last week. The Authority bogs so much stuff down with HHH taking twice as long as any human to speak and Stephanie has to get in her buzz words because saying "WWE World Heavyweight Championship" and "Money in the Bank pay per view" is how you sell a show instead of letting the wrestlers who hate each other talk the fans into the building.

### Prime Time Players vs. Ascension vs. Lucha Dragons

#1 contenders match. Darren and Sin get things going with Cara being taken down to the mat but nipping up to his feet. Off to Kalisto who eats a clothesline for two as the fans are just silent here. Viktor tags himself in to stay on Kalisto as New Day is watching in the back. Kalisto kicks Konnor out to the floor and sends Viktor out to the floor as well, setting up a nice double suicide dive to get the fans into things a bit.

We take a break and come back with Ascension working over Kalisto, including Viktor dropping an elbow for two. Kalisto finally gets a boot up in the corner and takes Viktor down with a middle rope ankle scissors. Saxton: "Kalisto is like a real life Sonic the Hedgehog." No Byron, he isn't.

Ascension breaks up a hot tag attempt but Kalisto knees out of a delayed vertical suplex, allowing Titus to tag himself in and clean house. Everything breaks down with Titus kicking Konnor in the face and throwing Kalisto at him to put both guys on the floor. The pumphandle powerslam from Titus is enough to pin Viktor at 9:29.

**Rating:** C. Fun triple threat match here though the continued depush of Ascension makes my head hurt. They're a good power team and we even got a nice little tease of that on Sunday, so it's time for them to get pinned again here. To say they were in trouble coming out of the gates is an understatement, but WWE hasn't done them any favors.

Renee Young asks New Day about their future now that they know their #1 contenders. Woods continues to be amazing with a line of "Renee, our future is as bright as a morning sun.....rising over a new day." Their plan for the Prime Time Players: dispose of the Prime Time Players and their greed, clap and then watch Kofi Kingston win Money in the Bank. Kane comes in and makes Kofi vs. Neville for tonight.

Sonic auditions.

### Ryback vs. Stardust

Non-title. Ryback throws him into the corner to start but runs into a boot to the face. A reverse DDT gets two for Stardust and a running knee to the face gets the same. Off to the chinlock for a bit before it's the Meat Hook and Shell Shock to give Ryback the pin at 2:11. Nothing to see here.

We recap the Bellas using Twin Magic on Raw, which is still a horrible idea.

Renee Young brings Paige out for a chat. Paige says it feels like things

are never going to change around here because the Twin Magic has been done for years. The Bellas come out here every week and talk about giving Divas a chance but they know it's all about them and they make sure to hold the rest of the Divas back. Their lives are all about being celebrities but Paige's life is consumed with what happens in that ring. She'll never buy into the idea of if you can't beat em, join em. Instead, it's up to her to change the world she's in. Good stuff here but it's the same story AJ did before the Bellas took over the division.

Harper and Rowan say they're different because they're family.

Stills of Owens vs. Cena on Sunday.

Here's Kevin Owens for the NXT Title Open Challenge. Before the match, Owens talks about everyone knowing him after what he did this past Sunday. He's the man who defeated John Cena in his first match in WWE. However, Owens' son is still a John Cena fan because he's seven years old and doesn't know any better. On Monday, Owens heard the emotion in Cena's voice and learned something: John Cena is completely delusional.

Cena actually believes all the nonsense he spews out. Cena stood out here and said Owens isn't a real man, so there is no way Kevin can let his son be influenced like this anymore. The fairy tales that Cena force feeds kids around the world have to stop and Owens is glad to be the one to step up and do just that at Money in the Bank. That brings him to tonight and the NXT Title Open Challenge starts right....well he isn't wearing a watch so just get out here.

NXT Title: Kevin Owens vs. Zack Ryder

We even get big match intros. Owens is all over him to start but a single forearm sends him out to the floor. Ryder is right back on him but Owens knocks Zack into the barricade. Back in and Ryder scores with a middle rope dropkick but the Pop Up Powerbomb ends this in 1:12.

Owens gives him the Cannonball and another powerbomb post match.

Sheamus enjoyed giving Orton a beating on Monday and he's going to do it to everyone in the Money in the Bank ladder match in ten days before

going on to become WWE Champion. Simple yet effective again.

Tough Enough videos.

### Neville vs. Kofi Kingston

This has potential. Kofi kicks him down to start but Neville flips forward into the cross body out of the corner. Lawler: "Neville has so many moves that when I try to call his matches, I'm more confused than a chameleon in a bag of Skittles." That's Lawler's one clever line all year. Kofi sends him to the floor for some cheap shots from the New Day and we take a break.

Back with Kofi getting two off a reverse suplex but Neville kicks him right back. A standing shooting star gets two on Kofi and Neville plants him with a tornado DDT. Big E. pulls Kofi away before the Red Arrow can launch, but Neville just dives on both of them with a big moonsault. Back in and Neville counters a rollup into one of his own for the surprise pin at 8:04.

**Rating:** C+. Neville continues to impress and it's cool to see him fight off all three guys and pick up a win with something other than the Red Arrow. You don't want to overuse the big spots and risk burning the fans out on them, because there comes a point where even Neville can't top himself with the high spots.

It's time for MizTV with special guest Lana, who has her own Titantron video. We look back at the breakup and Rusev being all devastated as a result. Lana says Rusev didn't respect him so he doesn't deserve her. This gets a standing ovation from Miz, who describes Lana as good. He calls it a good business decision, but Lana, with the accent melting word by word, says that it was purely personal. If Miz keeps suggesting otherwise, she'll either leave or Miz will get slapped.

That brings out the second guest: Rusev, who slowly limps to the ring. Rusev is here as a broken man and blames it on his upbringing. He didn't know what he had until it was gone and he knows Lana loves that song. Rusev asks for one more chance and would like her to be his crutch while he can't walk. Lana tells him where he can stick his crutch so Rusev

erupts all over again and calls her stupid. Cue Zigler to get Lana out before things get bad. Rusev as the crushed ex-boyfriend is perhaps the worst usage of someone with potential that WWE has had in years and it's just sad at this point.

### Roman Reigns vs. Sheamus

This could be good. Sheamus goes right to the ribs to start and knees Reigns to the floor, only to eat a big clothesline. Sheamus keeps the power game going by driving him into the apron and throwing him over the announcers' table as we take a break. Back with Sheamus driving knees into the ribs and slapping on a chinlock. The Regal Roll gets two but Roman fights out of the ten forearms. Roman misses the apron kick (has he ever done that before?) and Sheamus takes over again, only to miss a charge into the post.

Back up and Roman fires off some clotheslines in the middle of the ring and in the corner but the Samoan drop is countered. They head outside again and this time the apron kick connects with Sheamus standing on the floor. Back in and here are Kane and the Stooges for a distraction, setting up the Irish Curse for two. The Brogue Kick misses and Reigns hits the Superman Punch, only to have Kane come in for the DQ at 10:40.

**Rating:** B-. I liked this as much as I expected to with both guys hitting each other over and over until we got to the obvious ending. It's getting really tiring to see Kane and the Stooges come in for the DQ or interference, especially when they barely have anything to do with the match in the first place. Fun power match here though.

Kane chokeslams Sheamus to shock the Stooges. He announces himself as the final entrant in the Money in the Bank ladder match and chokeslams Reigns to end the show.

**Overall Rating:** C+. This show was one of the more entertaining episodes they've had in a good while as they let the stories progress naturally instead of forcing everything in. The wrestling was decent enough and the two hours went by very quickly. I can live with Smackdown like this, especially with such a good opening promo instead of the Authority droning on and on.

## Results

Prime Time Players b. Ascension and Lucha Dragons – Pumphandle powerslam to Viktor

Ryback b. Stardust – Shell Shock

Kevin Owens b. Zack Ryder – Pop Up Powerbomb

Neville b. Kofi Kingston – Rollup

Roman Reigns b. Sheamus via DQ when Kane interfered

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# **Reviewing the Review – Monday Night Raw: May 25, 2015**

Oh boy it's this show. I've been putting this off for as long as I can because this show drove me up the walls, down the walls, to the grocery store and then halfway to Oklahoma. It's very rare to find a show with two different parts that get under my skin this badly but this show managed to pull it off. Let's get to it.

I'm going to do this one a little bit differently as there are two major pieces I'll be spending far more of my time on. Therefore, I'll get those out of the way and then cover the rest of the show. You can probably guess what these two major segments were (hint: I wrote a column about one of them) so we'll start with the one that went on longer: the Dean Ambrose arrest story.

The basic idea is simple: Ambrose has until the end of the show to sign the contract for the match with Rollins on Sunday (why the Authority didn't say "you have four seconds to get out here and sign this starting now" isn't clear) so the Authority ran some trickery and had Dean arrested for punching an innocent cameraman. Later in the show, it was revealed that Rollins shoved the cameraman into Dean so he wouldn't make it back to the show in time. Naturally, with the Authority celebrating at the end of the show, Dean came back (in a police van) and signed the contract just as the show ended (complete with overrun of course).

Now let's stop for a minute and think about this. Monday Night Raw is a wrestling show. We have to accept that a lot of really, really questionable things happen, but WWE has built a universe where it's plausible that these things could happen. In other words, fans are willing to suspend their disbelief to accept that we're watching crazy people do crazy things because the show has made it possible for that to happen.

Look at it from a comic book perspective. I can believe that Superman can fly because he's an alien under a yellow sun. Those are the rules that DC comics have established and as long as they play by those rules, I can go along with them. However, if one day Superman can suddenly turn people into chickens and the justification is "well he's an alien and has powers", it's unacceptable because this comes out of left field and doesn't gel with the story of the character.

This past Monday with Dean just happening to make it out of jail on time and just happening to be there at the very end of the show to sign the contract was WWE suddenly being able to turn people into chickens. There were WAY too many coincidences and perfect timing for me to accept that this was going to be the case. It didn't help that they were basically

saying “yeah you know he’s getting back and signing” and it was just a matter of time before the big evidence showed up to save Dean.

I said this in the review but it felt like the end of any given sitcom episode. Our hero is in big trouble for doing whatever and he can’t prove his innocence, but here’s some deus ex machina to save him and give us all a happy ending while the villains are left kicking and screaming and promising to get Ambrose next time Gadget, NEXT TIME!

The word to sum it up was staged. This felt like it was designed to be completely fake and set up the whole way through instead of trying to be realistic. Look at Lucha Underground for a counter example. They have some completely over the top stories (including a man who was the spirit of a dragon and a monster killing a wrestler) but they play it totally seriously and it never fails to work. This story felt like WWE was winking at the camera the entire time and making it as clear as they could that Ambrose was going to be there at the last second to save the day, making the entire three hour story a big waste of time.

That’s the other big deal for me: what did this whole thing change? Ambrose came into the show with a title shot and left with a title shot. All that happened in between was the Authority looks bad and Rollins doesn’t really do anything else. Instead of a serious promo exchange or making me want to see the match more, the show was a big stand alone story that changed nothing and got on my nerves. It’s bad writing and bad booking and something that really didn’t need to happen.

Now on to the other stupid idea of the night: Rusev turning into a big, emotional goon instead of the brute that he’s been for over a year now. I understand the idea that he would be upset over Lana leaving him for an American, but the reaction was all wrong. Rusev should have been stomping and raving and FIGHTING ZIGGLER but instead he was asking to hold Lana’s hand and talking about all the dreams they had in Bulgaria.

As I ranted about in the column I wrote (which I know you’ve all read of course), this was missing the point of the character. Rusev is a monster and they’re trying to give him emotions. It’s all wrong for him and doesn’t fit anything that they’ve set up over the past year plus for him.

It goes back to the Superman example earlier: you can't just throw in a polar opposite set of characteristics for someone without any sort of foundation for them. Rusev getting all emotional has no background, Lana or no Lana.

Oh and now Rusev is injured and could be out for more than a month, so the last thing people are going to remember from him is the big change scene with the song from the trailer from every bad romantic comedy ever. What a great followup to the four pay per view series with Cena. But hey, at least Rusev is a more three dimensional character, because a guy named the Bulgarian Brute was just dying for a soft side right?

As for the rest of the show, Ambrose pinned Rollins in a tag match, which should have ended the show and been the main focal point of their feud that night. I'll stop myself there.

Rusev squashed R-Truth in 59 seconds. Again, I'll stop myself there.

The other major story of the night was a trio of matches between the six participants in the Elimination Chamber match for the Intercontinental Title. In addition to Truth vs. Rusev, we had Ryback beating Barrett (shocking!) and Sheamus Brogue Kicking Ziggler. This is another example of tired booking ideas that need to be replaced. Only Sheamus vs. Ziggler broke four minutes, making these matches, which really change nothing for Sunday's match, more like a waste of time than anything else. Consolidate these into a long six man instead of three singles or have a tag match or two three ways or ANYTHING but this boring idea.

The cast of Entourage was here to fill in time, including a segment where they mentioned Ronda Rousey in front of Stephanie. That's something of note was well: notice that a lot of the bad writing and bad structuring take place when Stephanie is back full time. We had a bunch of bad filler segments and more of her talking with proper nouns (you don't have to say the exact name of the title, wrestlers or pay per view every ten seconds Stephanie. We're not going to care more or start Tweeting about it because WE'RE ALREADY WATCHING THE SHOW).

Neville beat Stardust (who had a pre match staredown with Stephen Amell of Arrow, allegedly setting up a showdown at Summerslam. Seriously. To

his credit though, Amell is in great shape so it could be passable) and was beaten down by Bo Dallas post match. They're still playing up the knee injury which is fine for a quick story.

Cena's Open Challenge speech was talking about the fans who boo him and want someone to knock him down for good. Kevin Owens has his chance on Sunday but it's not going to happen. As usual, this was Cena owning the fans as only he can and chuckling as they think they own him.

Zack Ryder answered the challenge and had a very fun four minute match (complete with Ryder missing a 450 of all things) before Cena pinned him. This was the right call as Ryder is a Long Island guy and this was the last show in Nassau Coliseum on Long Island, which was played up a lot during the match. As usual, this was the best part of the show as Cena continues to be amazing when they just let him go out there and do his thing. Post match Owens, now in more proper gear, laid Cena out again. They better not screw this up on Sunday, but I'm sure they will.

Tamina, the bodyguard for one of the challengers for the Divas Title on Sunday, pinned the other challenger for the Divas Title on Sunday. The stupidity was flowing through this entire show.

To cap it off, let's throw all psychology out the window and have Kane (for no apparent reason) book New Day in a 3 on 11 handicap match, because the way to get heels booed is to put them against impossible odds. This lasted less than a minute before the big brawl.

Do I need to sum this one up for you?

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# Monday Night Raw – May 25, 2015: It All Comes Crashing Down

## Monday Night Raw

Date: May 25, 2015

Location: Nassau Coliseum, Uniondale, New York

Commentators: Michael Cole, Booker T., John Bradshaw Layfield

It's Memorial Day and also the last Raw before Elimination Chamber. The two Chamber matches are set and we also have the World Title match ready to go, leaving just the details to be added to the matches to make things fully ready. There's also the issue of Owens powerbombing Cena last week and standing on his US Title. Let's get to it.

We open with the traditional salute to the veterans who have passed away serving their country. In the arena, we have a moment of silence and a ten bell salute. WWE always does a great job with these things.

Here's the Authority in full to open things up. After a look at the ending to last week's show, Seth talks about Ambrose coercing the Authority into giving him a title at Elimination Chamber last week. That's not how the Authority operates because it's not best for business. Therefore, couldn't the Authority just take away the title match or fire Ambrose right now? Well they could and they considered it, but Rollins asked them not to.

HHH has a contract ready for Ambrose to sign so here's Dean to the stage. Dean thinks there might be something wrong with him because he's been having trouble sleeping lately. He's tried counting sheep but he would rather count the times he punches Rollins in the face. It's the closest thing to happiness he can have and that's what he got last week. He always enjoys beating Seth up, but next time he wants it to be for the

World Title.

Once he becomes the new face of the WWE, there are going to be some changes. The Stooges can go barefoot like some respectable hobbits and Kane can just wear a collar like the lapdog that he is. That leaves Rollins to drunk dial Selena Gomez like the Justin Bieber that he is.

Rollins shrugs off the Justin Bieber chants by actually defending him, saying the fans all want to be Bieber, just like Ambrose wants to be like Seth. He talks about Ambrose being a loser all his life and asks him to sign so he can lose one more time. Really good back and forth segment here with the Authority just being in the background while it happened. Ambrose comes to the ring but here's Reigns to have his back. Stephanie gets on the mic and says Dean can sign the contract until the end of the show, but until then, it's Reigns/Ambrose vs. Rollins/Kane right now.

#### Seth Rollins/Kane vs. Dean Ambrose/Roman Reigns

Kane slugs Ambrose in the corner to start but Dean punches and chops up against the ropes. Off to Reigns who takes Kane down with a suplex before Rollins comes in to do the same to Ambrose. It's quickly back to Reigns for a Samoan drop on Seth but he goes outside to chase the Stooges off, only to get caught in a chinlock back inside. A lukewarm tag brings in Ambrose for shots in the corner and a clothesline to put Seth outside, setting up the suicide dive. The good guys stand tall and we take a break.

Back with Rollins stopping a Dean comeback and getting some nice applause from the Stooges. A big time clothesline puts Rollins down and the hot tag brings in Reigns. Roman cleans house for a bit until a Kane boot puts him down. That earns him a Superman Punch and the top rope elbow from Dean for two with Rollins making the save. The springboard knee to the head gets two for Seth (that looked good) but an enziguri knocks Dean into the ropes, only to have him bounce back and grab a backslide to pin Rollins at 13:25.

**Rating:** C-. The wrestling was fine but it was really hard to care about this one. It's almost the same match we've seen a dozen times with one or two pieces being changed without anything really changing. Ambrose

getting the pin is the right idea for this match to set up Sunday, but these tag matches are almost impossible to get up for these days.

After a break, Ambrose says he'll get the contract signed later in the night. The Stooges come up and say they have the contract but Mercury forgot it. Noble: "Well slap me upside my head and call me Sally!" Always the gentleman, Ambrose does just that and beats up the two of them before punching a cameraman by mistake. Dean looks upset by what he did to the innocent guy.

Video package on Kevin Owens' career.

The cast of the movie Entourage arrives and don't get much of a reaction.

### Rusev vs. R-Truth

Rusev is officially Bulgarian again. Truth gets in a few shots but the Accolade wraps things up in 59 seconds.

Post match Rusev says he and Lana need to talk so please get down here. He stays in the ring waiting for her through a break asking her to come out and talk to him. Come on man. At least have a giant boom box. Lana finally comes out but won't let Rusev hold the ropes open for her. Rusev knows she cares about him, even with all the mistakes she's made and that he makes sure to list off.

It's not her fault though. She's a woman, and all women make mistakes. He talks about the dreams they had back in Bulgaria and asks her to take his hand...which she eventually does. Rusev wants to hear three magical words though: "I was wrong." That's too much for Lana though as she shoves his hand away and leaves, saying Rusev quit. Rusev: "YOU NEED TO KNOW YOUR PLACE WOMAN!" Lana calls him a liar and a quitter. No one earns her, especially Rusev. She leaves yet again and here's Zigler for another kiss.

So yeah, remember the last year plus of Rusev being a monster who beat Cena by knockout at Fast Lane? Well screw all that because we need to put him in a stupid soap opera style story because EVERYONE is a character like that who needs to have depth and emotions and all that nonsense.

HHH and Rollins come into Ambrose's locker room and have the cameraman say that Ambrose hit him, despite thinking someone pushed him. Dean is arrested ("Yeah I've heard this before.") and HHH smiles.

Post break the Stooges laugh at Ambrose as he's taken away.

### King Barrett vs. Ryback

Ryback still has bad ribs coming in. Barrett is thrown around to start and planted with an early powerslam but he rolls outside. Ryback follows but takes a hard kick to the ribs to give the King control. Back in and some kicks to the ribs followed by a middle rope elbow get two. Wasteland gets the same as Barrett wisely stays on the ribs. The Bull Hammer takes too long to set up though, allowing Ryback to hit a spinebuster and the Shell Shock for the pin at 3:56.

**Rating:** D+. So Barrett just spent the entire match working on the ribs and then Ryback hit his power moves like he was perfectly fine. Nothing to see here other than yet ANOTHER Barrett loss, which just keep coming and coming and coming. This was another match designed to set up the Chamber but with no time to get there because we need more stupid soap opera nonsense.

The cast of Entourage comes in to see the Authority and name drop people cameoing in their movie. They bring up Rhonda Rousey making Stephanie scream at Wrestlemania and are politely asked to leave.

Tough Enough videos.

### Stardust vs. Neville

Stephen Amell of Arrow is in the front row. Neville vs. Bo Dallas is official for Sunday. Stardust goes after the bad knee to start as the announcers talk about Stardust and Amell feuding on Twitter. As Stardust puts on a half crab, Bo Dallas slowly walks to the ring to cheer for Neville. Stardust can't hit a superplex as Neville kicks him down and nails a tornado DDT, setting up the Red Arrow (after some slaps to the bad knee to wake it up again) for the pin at 3:19.

**Rating:** C-. The match was nothing special, but this is the kind of

match I like: a guy with a pay per view match having a bit of a sweat before beating a guy with a nice resume. We don't get these nearly enough. It sets up the match on Sunday and keeps Neville from having to waste a big match. Good booking but not a great match.

Post match Dallas tells him to Believe and kicks the knee out again.

The Entourage guys hit on the Total Divas, creating a massive vortex of indifference. Zack Ryder comes up and asks them to come into his dressing room because he has an idea.

### Dolph Ziggler vs. Sheamus

Cole incorrectly says the Intercontinental Title is the only title Sheamus has never held (Tag Team Titles being the other). Sheamus runs him over to start as the announcers talk about Lana and Rusev. We're already in the chinlock with Sheamus talking a lot of trash at the same time. They head outside with Dolph ramming him into the announcers' table, only to get kicked in the knee back inside.

A Cactus clothesline puts both guys on the floor but Sheamus powerslams him outside, drawing Lana to the stage to watch. Back from a break with Sheamus getting two off a neckbreaker but Ziggler fights up with a bunch of forearms. The Fameasser gets two and Ziggler escapes White Noise and ducks the Brogue Kick. Ziggler's superkick gets two and here comes Rusev to the ring for a distraction, allowing Sheamus to hit the Brogue Kick for the pin at 10:20.

**Rating:** C. And we're DONE with the Intercontinental Title preview matches. This is one of those ideas where WWE does one match and then just MUST do the exact same idea three times in one show with no one looking good coming out of it because none of this matters for Sunday. Decent match but my goodness this show has killed my interest.

Rusev puts on the Accolade to make Ziggler look at Lana. "KISS HIM NOW!"

It's Open Challenge time. Fans: "JOHN CENA SUCKS!" Cena to the camera: "I

guess the remix is still a popular song.” Cena says in the last ten years, the WWE Universe can be summed up in five words: “Let’s go Cena, Cena sucks.” He thanks the fans who believe in hustle, loyalty and respect but has to stop for a WE WANT RYDER chant. Those people have had his back for years and he thanks them from the bottom of his heart.

That brings him to the other group of fans, who have been begging for someone to get in this ring and knock him down. Name after name have tried to do just that but all of them have failed. Last week he met Kevin Owens, who broke the internet last week and then broke his best friend Sami Zayn in half.

Maybe that’s why the fans think Kevin Owens is the man that can put Cena down for good. This Sunday those fans that chant CENA SUCKS can instead chant FIGHT OWENS FIGHT. Owens can fight all he wants because it doesn’t mean WIN OWENS WIN. Last week Cena found out that Owens knows how to start a fight and this Sunday he’ll find out if Owens can finish one. That’s Sunday though, so let’s get to tonight. The Open Challenge starts right now.

Cena is ready and here’s the cast of Entourage. Cole: “Really?” Thankfully they’re just here to introduce the man taking the challenge.

#### US Title: John Cena vs. Zack Ryder

The Entourage cast is at ringside. Some early suplexes get two for Cena to start but Ryder comes back with the middle rope dropkick. Cena avoids the Broski Boot and starts his finishing sequence, only to have one of the Entourage guys get in for a distraction. A quick rollup gets two on Cena but Ryder counters the AA into a Killswitch for two. Now the Broski Boot gets two and the Rough Ryder gets the same. Zack goes up top but misses a 450 of all things, setting up the AA for the pin at 4:05.

**Rating:** C+. At the end of the day, it would have been cool to see Ryder get the big win to close out the building but you can’t do something like that to Cena here. Ryder looked good here and hopefully gets some more TV time out of a good performance like this. The 450 wasn’t half bad either.

Cena, Ryder and the Entourage guys get to pose in the ring for a nice

moment. Cena poses on his own but turns around for a Pop Up Powerbomb from Owens, now wearing a FIGHT OWENS FIGHT shirt. Owens stomps on the US Title again for good measure.

The Authority recaps the Ambrose incident.

Now the announcers recap the Ambrose incident.

### Tamina vs. Paige

Bellas are on commentary. Tamina knocks her to the floor to start and slaps on a neck crank. A quick rollup gets two for Paige followed by her three clotheslines and a dropkick. Nikki gets in a quick cheap shot though and Tamina's Samoan drop is good for the pin at 3:52.

**Rating:** D-. Oh sweet goodness really? This is the best thing they can do? We're six days before the Divas title match and the #1 contender just got pinned by the enforcer in less than four minutes. I know Tamina is Jimmy Snuka's daughter or whatever, but that doesn't make her the slightest bit interesting. Bad match here and even dumber booking.

Here's the New Day to say it's preposterous and ridiculous that they're being persecuted for being positive. No one wants to see them lose their titles! Just ask the WWE Universe! Cue Kane to say that the Chamber is fair, but the following match isn't quite the same.

### Cesaro/Tyson Kidd/Los Matadores/Lucha Dragons/Prime Time

#### Players/Ascension vs. New Day

10-3 handicap match and joined in progress with.....never mind as all ten come in for the big beatdown and the DQ at 49 seconds. Yes, the HEELS are in a big handicap match and were put there by a heel. I guess logic and the Curb Stomp can chill together on the banned list.

We get the big brawl with the Dragons diving on most of the other people at the same time. New Day stands tall, only to have Cesaro and Kidd come in and clean house.

Preview of the preview of the Daniel Bryan documentary airing on the Network tonight.

We get a second angle of Ambrose punching the cameraman (from the WWE Youtube channel because of course it is) because Rollins shoved Ambrose into him. This really doesn't change anything as Ambrose still turned around and punched him, but this show is a sitcom instead of a wrestling show.

Here's the Authority for the big stupid ending to this stupid, stupid show. Yeah there's a video, yeah there's evidence saying Ambrose is innocent (he isn't) but there's no time. Therefore...cue Reigns before HHH can say it's too late. The brawl is on, Reigns gets beaten down, Ambrose shows up in the police van and wearing police gear, and the big brawl allows Ambrose to sign just in time. CUE THAT LAUGH TRACK AND END THEME SONG!!!

**Overall Rating:** F. Yeah it failed. I was miserable watching this show as they took a huge leap backwards from all the good stuff they had been doing in the last few weeks. Instead of the fun matches and high energy, this was ALL about the backstage stuff and in ring segments with the Authority being on screen WAY too much. Look at some of the things they were doing out there and tell me they were segments we needed to see. The Entourage guys were on TV like four times and added nothing. They certainly weren't bad, but have them out there once and stop showing them otherwise.

On top of that...my goodness just make Rusev into the crying Zack Ryder when Eve left him. No it won't be that bad, but my goodness man, what in the world is the point of this stupid love triangle story? What WWE doesn't understand is there are some people who shouldn't be like everybody else. Yeah Rusev is a human, but he needs to be treated like a monster. Let him just be the guy that got this far and stop trying to add dimensions to him. There are some people it's ok to mess with, but Rusev isn't that kind of character.

Then there's the stupid contract signing deal, which comes off like a sitcom plot: it's some wacky situation which JUST HAPPENS to work due to some master plan coming together, but it somehow manages to all unravel just as the show goes off the air with the Authority shouting that they'll get you next time Ambrose, NEXT TIME!!!

I was livid sitting through this show as they just completely turned off the reality and made it into the biggest TV show schtick they could. That's not even talking about the HORRIBLE booking choices of having three Intercontinental Title preview matches that went nowhere and barely set up the Chamber whatsoever. Horrible, horrible show here and wouldn't you know it: it's also the first show in a long time where Stephanie was a featured player. How about that.

### Results

Dean Ambrose/Roman Reigns b. Seth Rollins/Kane – Backslide to Rollins

Rusev b. R-Truth – Accolade

Ryback b. King Barrett – Shell Shock

Neville b. Stardust – Red Arrow

Sheamus b. Dolph Ziggler – Brogue Kick

John Cena b. Zack Ryder – Attitude Adjustment

New Day b. Cesaro/Tyson Kidd/Los Matadores/Lucha Dragons/Ascension/Prime Time Players via DQ when all ten attacked New Day at the same time

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