

CWRESTLING

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Cubed Circle Newsletter

In this week's newsletter we cover the 2013 WWE Extreme Rules pay-per-view, the fallout from that show, the post-Final Burning NOAH show with a match of the year candidate between KENTA and Sugiura, Ben Carass looks at NXT with Sami Zayn versus Antonio Cesaro and a preview of all of all of the NXT shows coming up, Impact with the an AJ Styles heel and face turn, Ben Carass covers SmackDown, and we look at a multitude of different topics in the Bits & Pieces section. I hope that this week's issue is a fun one - have a great week everybody!

-Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor

News - Extreme Rules 2013

Extreme Rules 2013 - Not as Good as Last Year

Last Sunday WWE ran its 2013 Extreme Rules pay-per-view live from the Scottrade Centre in St. Louis, Missouri. It was in many ways the show that you would have expected, in that it wasn't great, or even good for that matter, but what it did provide was a fun night of wrestling...minus a few frustrating finishes.



The main issue with the show, and stipulation pay-per-views in general, was that they had to do numerous dirty or non-finishes for matches that had, at least in theory, concrete and decisive stipulations. Matches such as the John Cena/Ryback match, simply weren't at the right stage in the program to warrant a

match such as a last man standing, and in the end the story suffered because of it.

One major story coming out of the show was that the Shield, the trio of Seth Rollins, Roman Reigns and Dean Ambrose, came out with not only the tag team championships (Rollins & Reigns), but also the United States Championship (Ambrose). The Shield have been booked strong for almost their entire run from last year's Survivor Series up until now, apart from a minor hiccup on last week's edition of RAW where they lost via DQ in a three-way match.

Many believe that the prelim titles, in this case the United States and Tag Team Championships, will drop the Shield down in position on the card, and while I agree that the titles are far more of a hindrance now than a positive, as long as they keep the Shield strong and don't job them out under the gaze of them being safe due to having the championships, all should be fine in that department.

Rollins & Reigns had what was probably the best match on the show against Team Hell No, in a match that should have gotten more time, but was all action for the the seven or so minutes that they got. Rollins and Reigns used a similar double team to the Forever Hooligans in New Japan, the torture rack/springboard knee-drop, to win the titles.

Ambrose faced Kofi Kingston for the US Title, in a match that in some ways undelivered, not due to the work itself, but more so due to the fact that they only got around six or so minutes, which wasn't enough time to tell a full story.

The six-men mentioned above Kofi Kingston, Bryan, Kane and the Shield, actually had a match that was far better than any match on the Extreme Rules show the next night on RAW in a six-man tag that went over the twenty minute mark, making it one of the longest TV matches of the year, and also one of the best. It wasn't anywhere close to the level of Cena/Punk, but I would put it above the Jericho/Punk match, and just below the big Undertaker/Shield match from the UK.

The opener saw Chris Jericho pin Fandango after a mid-air code breaker, which was a great looking finish to a match that actually got more time than both the Tag Team and US championship matches. The finish was however questionable, because there was little utility in having Jericho pin Fandango, given that he had nothing to gain, whereas Fandango had at least some degree of momentum coming off of his win against Jericho at WrestleMania. However, one just has to understand that this is WWE's booking mentality.

Sheamus defeated Mark Henry in a very unremarkable strap match. According to Bryan Alvarez of the Figure Four Weekly newsletter, there were plans at one point to actually get a gimmicked ring in there and have Mark Henry do a crazy feat of strength spot, but I guess they changed their minds on that for whatever reason.

In the first of two lame finishes on the show, Alberto Del Rio defeated Jack Swagger in an 'I Quit' match after a restart. They had a fun albeit unheated match, up until the point where Jack

Swagger grabbed an ankle lock, and Colter stole a towel from Ricardo at ringside and threw it into the ring. This led to a referee running out, and a little monitor being placed on the outside by the timekeeper before a replay was shown. This led to the referee restarting the match, and Del Rio ultimately winning in the way that you would expect - with the armbar.

I would be fine with the finish if it was consistent, but the fact of the matter is that the referee replay gimmick is incredibly inconsistent. They bring it out every now and again for the Bellas, and sometimes for matches such as this one, but the exact motives behind it make little sense both from a kayfabe and shoot perspective. I know that the idea was probably spurred on by the fact that they want to identify themselves as both sport and entertainment now that the negotiation for their TV deal draws near, but that doesn't change the fact that they are telling completely disjointed stories as a result of using the gimmick.

Randy Orton beat the Big Show in an Extreme Rules match that certainly surpassed my expectations. It wasn't a great match by any means, but the fact that they were in St. Louis and Orton clearly felt a strong connection with the hometown crowd and enjoyed working as a babyface for a change certainly helped matters. Orton busted out the punt to close the match off, which would certainly point to an eminent Orton heel turn given how long they have been building that for. However, it strikes me as rather odd that they would do that finish in Orton's hometown while playing it up as a babyface move. Still, I think that the heel turn is coming sooner rather than later.

The WWE title match went on second last behind the Steel Cage match. Ryback and Cena basically went to a no contest after they brawled in and out of the ring area, through the crowd, up onto the ramp, and Ryback speared Cena through the lighting rig. They had sparks fly everywhere, and the referee struggle to get to the back before finally finding both men down. He threw the match out, but Ryback was able to walk off, where as Cena had to be stretchered off, which would have been just cause to set up a rematch, only they never mentioned that fact at all when building to the Payback pay-per-view on Monday. It was a good match, although it was almost completely smoke and mirrors.

Finally in the main event Brock Lesnar beat Triple H, semi-clean in the middle of the ring. They had Heyman interfere towards the end landing a low blow on Triple H, but that didn't lead directly into the finish, as they still did some work with the sledgehammer before Lesnar landed a hammer shot and an F5. It was a good match with Lesnar really making it with his selling of the knee, although for whatever reason like the other matches it didn't connect on the level that you would have expected.

I was half expecting chaos on the internet after the show, as I thought that people would complain that Lesnar, the monster, was selling in the manner that he did. However, that was luckily not the case, and instead we got the Lesnar knee thread on on the BOARD, which was far more entertaining.

The question is what is next for Brock at this point. The Triple H program is clearly over, and

they can't go back to that. They have already done Cena, Orton and Sheamus don't seem to be on the right level right now, and it doesn't seem like the right time to do a Punk match. Of course, they could do the Punk match, which seems like the only logical option at this point, but then they are either going to have to turn Brock face, which I thought they were building to somewhat in the Triple H match, or they could have Punk turn face, which probably wouldn't be the best thing given that you can get more out of Punk as a top heel.

The reason I say that it is the wrong time is that Punk has just come off two losses to Rock, one clean loss to Cena and another to the Undertaker, and given that the chances of him beating Lesnar are slim (and he shouldn't beat Lesnar in any case, at least the first time in), I don't know if another loss would be the right thing for Punk. The show has clearly lacked something since Punk has been gone, so when he does return, which I presume will be at WWE Payback in Chicago, Punk's hometown, it should be a big deal for the company.

Reports

Pro-Wrestling NOAH Ark New Chapter May 12th 2013 Korakuen Hall, Tokyo, Japan

On May 12th, the day after Kenta Kobashi's retirement show at Budokan Hall. Pro-Wrestling NOAH put on its most successful show in months from Korakuen Hall. The show wasn't anything special from a wrestling perspective, apart from the mainevent of course, which was a match of the year candidate. However, the crowd was into everything whether it was good or bad, and were clearly into wrestling from the day before when wrestling was more mainstream than it had been for what must have been a decade, if not longer.

There is no indication that NOAH will be able to ride this single hot show and maybe get hot once again, but I would say that they have more momentum after this show than any other in the last nine months easily. They have been on an obvious downturn to the point that at points it looks like they could land up like the next Zero-One level promotion. Whether that is a true statement or not isn't entirely clear at this point, but hopefully they are able to build something out of this hot show, because that would be the best thing for the business in Japan as a whole.

They opened up the show with Taiji Ishimori taking on Hitsoshi Kumano in an opener that didn't even reach the five minute mark. Kumano is the first rookie that Pro-Wrestling NOAH have had since what I believe 2005, which explains one of their many problems. I wasn't blown away with what I saw, but he was fun to watch. Ishimori submitted Kumano with a modified camel clutch. (** ¾)

Next was a match that you really had to take at face value. It was Mohammed Yone versus Maybach Taniguchi, and what exactly did that sentence mean you ask...well, suffice to say the match wasn't any good. They did some brawling in the crowd, and there was a ref bump allowing Taniguchi to use his staff on Yone. They actually put on a good final minute or so engaging in a slap battle with Taniguchi kicking out of a muscle buster and circuming to the

second. (* ¼)

Daisuke Harada battled Atsushi Kotoge in what was a really fun match. Kotoge denied a handshake with Harada before the match, which led them straight into a series of strike and hold exchanges. Kotoge worked over Harada for quite some time before Harada shot out with a flurry and top rope elbow. They had a great slap battle, which led to a headbutt exchange before Kotoge pinned Harada with an unprettier in twelve minutes or so. (** ¼)

Then came what was easily the worst thing on the show, yes, far worse than Taniguchi/Yone. Takeshi Morishima took on Yoshihiro Takayama in a match that didn't even go two minutes with Takayama pinning Morishima with a rollup. It should tell you something about Takayama's physical state that the match only went two minutes and that he could barely execute a roll-up, so I can in no way establish what exactly was going through their minds when the finish to this match was booked. They are short of top stars, and they can do little to nothing with Takayama, so why have Takayama beat him? (DUD)

Another sub-par match followed in the GHC tag team championship match with Toru Yano and Takashi Iizuka taking on Mikey Nicholls & Shane Haste. It was the standard Yano/Iizuka match that you would expect to see in New Japan, only this time it was done in a NOAH ring. There were a couple of unique spots, namely when Nicholls and Haste came off the entrance ways onto Yano and Iizuka, but other than that it was the same recycled material that we have seen forever. The interesting thing about the match was just how into Nicholls and Haste the fans were. They could be important stars for the company in the coming year or so as they are constantly improving, and are very over already. There were some shenanigans towards the end of the match with Iizuka landing a steel glove shot and powerbomb on Haste for the win.

Finally, there was the mainevent, which was the real saving grace of the show. KENTA battled Takashi Sugiura in what was an all out war with white hot slap battles, strike exchanges, and yes one of KENTA's insane footstomps to the outside from the top rope. There was also a great spot where Sugiura German suplexed KENTA into the bottom turnbuckle, which is a relative staple of Sugiura. KENTA finally pinned Sugiura with a GTS straight to the face after Sugiura kicked out of not one, but two GTSs. This is something that you need to go out of your way to see. (**** ½)

WWE Extreme Rules May 19th 2013 Scottrade Centre, St. Louis, Missouri

Overall Thoughts:

All in all Extreme Rules 2013 was a mediocre show. It wasn't like it was a pain to sit through, but there wasn't anything all that great on the show either. The Tag Title match was good, and so was the mainevent, but the wacky finishes really took away from the show.

Match by Match:

1. Chris Jericho vs. Fandango w/ Summer Rae

Jericho took Fandango out to the floor and landed an axe handle from the top rope. Fandango grabbed the advantage after a leaping highkick, and there was some miscommunication somewhere along the line leading to an awkward rollup spot. Jericho avoided the legdrop from the top, and landed the lionsault for two. Fandango grabbed a sunset rollup, but Jericho transitioned into the walls of Jericho. Fandango made it to the ropes, landed a highkick, but when Fandango came off of the top rope he was caught with a codebreaker for the win. They wrestled a pretty simple opener here, the crowd was really into Jericho here, and it helped, but apart from the finish, which was something that we haven't seen before, it was a simply fun opener.

** 1/2

Josh Mathews was backstage with Sheamus; he said that Henry would find out what would happen when "the Celtic Warrior" went extreme. They showed some footage of the Shield beatdown on Cena and then focused on the injured ankle.

2. United States Championship Match

Kofi Kingston vs. Dean Ambrose

I don't know if I would have gone with this match order given that you had two non-stipulation



matches that you could have interspersed during the rest of the show. Rollins and Reigns made it out with Ambrose, but simply hyped him up and left to the back, which was for the best. Ambrose grabbed a cross face chicken wing and wrestled Kingston to the match, which I thought was actually going to be the finish,

but Kingston made it up to his feet. Ambrose avoided the Trouble in Paradise, and the top of Kingston's leg hit Ambrose in the back of the head off of a leapfrog. Cole stumbled and staggered over Ambrose' name numerous times for whatever reason. Ambrose landed a big double arm suplex from the top rope, but was caught with a leaping highkick and crossbody for two. Kingston landed the trouble in paradise knocking Ambrose to the floor, but Kingston pulled Ambrose back into the ring for two. Kingston missed the Trouble in Paradise and was caught with the bulldog DDT for the win. This was a fun little match, although I wouldn't have had Kingston knock Ambrose down to the floor, as he should have come out stronger. After the

match Reigns and Rollins came in to congratulate Ambrose.

There was a commercial for the WWE App.

3. Strap Match

Mark Henry vs. Sheamus

Sheamus was out there for the first few moments getting the better of Henry, tripping him with the rope and such. Henry hogtied Sheamus and touched two of the four posts before Sheamus anchored Henry by grabbing the bottom rope. Sheamus touched three corners from the outside, but was knocked down to the floor by Henry. This of course led to Henry whipping Sheamus before sagging him over his shoulder touching three of the posts, but like in the Great American Bash finish, Sheamus trailed behind Henry touching three posts as well. Henry, however realized that the other lights were on, and landed a headbutt. Sheamus began a whipping of his own, prior to being shut down with a spinebuster after touching three posts. Henry was sent into the ring post head first, and once again Sheamus had three lights. Henry got him up for the World's Strongest Slam, but Sheamus landed a brogue kick for the win. For whatever reason the crowd reacted very well to the finish.

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AJ was “on the phone” to Ziggler and they were doing the "I hang up/you hang up" gimmick before Kaitlyn came by. Apparently AJ didn't want to wrestle Kaitlyn FOR THE TITLE, because she was “distracted”. They bickered back and forth, Kaitlyn made some headache jokes before AJ made a small remark, and a cat fight broke out. This made no sense from any perspective given the fact that AJ was the challenger, so why would she not want her match? Secondly, why did Kaitlyn, the baby face, break so easily over a stupid joke?

4. I Quit Match

Jack Swagger w/ Zeb Colter vs. Alberto Del Rio w/ Ricardo Rodriguez

Zeb Colter cut a promo before the match playing off of an IRS story - nobody cared about this in the least. He blamed the fans and ragged on the Cardinals having so many Caribbean players. Lillian Garcia then introduced Ricardo in Spanish, which is new. Both men fought out on the floor. Swagger landed some cane shots and began to work over the ankle of Del Rio. Del Rio was tied up in the ropes and caned, but refused to quit. Del Rio had an armbar locked in the ropes before being nailed with a stiff shot to the face. Del Rio landed a big enzuigiri, but Del Rio went after the leg once more. Del Rio landed some cane shots to the back followed by a back cracker. Swagger had some blood trickling down his shoulder and landed a pair of gut wrench powerbombs, but Del Rio refused to quit. Del Rio grabbed an ankle lock, but Swagger countered into the ankle lock. Ricardo wanted to throw in the towel. Del Rio said no, but Colter ran by and threw the towel in. Swagger's music hit, but another referee came out and said that Colter had thrown it in. The referee then asked for a replay that was delivered on a little monitor at ringside - I guess Vince is on a replay kick, because they sure have been doing this a lot as of late. It was

then moments later that Del Rio grabbed the armbar for the win. They worked a fine match, but the finish came across as flat and convoluted.

** 3/4

Josh Matthews was backstage with Ryback. He went off about Cena being a liar, boy is Ryback something else on the mic.

5. Tornado Tag Team Title Match

Daniel Bryan & Kane vs. Seth Rollins & Roman Reigns

Reigns and Rollins were in control from early on. Kane took both men out to the floor after Bryan landed a big frankensteiner on Reigns. Bryan then shot out with a topé onto both men. Kane went for a chokeslam on Rollins, but Reigns landed a spear, but Rollins still took the



chokeslam. This left Reigns as the only man standing in the ring. Kane had Reigns in place for a chokeslam, but Rollins came off with a flying knee setting up a spear for two. Bryan went for a no lock on Reigns, but was catapulted into a leaping highkick from Rollins before they landed a knee drop burning hammer double team for

the win and tag team championships. This led to Ambrose coming in to cap off a very good tag team title match.

*** 1/4

Renee Young was in the post-show booth with 'O Neal, Barrett and Foley. I like the concept.

6. Extreme Rules Match

Big Show vs. Randy Orton

Orton got a tremendous reaction coming out. Orton landed some shots with a kendo stick, but they were quickly swatted off and the stick broken in half. Show did the same with a second, but after taking some abuse grabbed a ladder. Show had other plans however and superkicked it into the face of Orton. What followed this destruction was a nerve hold of all things. Show landed a chokeslam for two. Show constructed a ladder bench across from the corner. Show went for his splash out of the corner, but Orton moved, sending Show through the bench. Orton landed a top rope draping DDT and a big RKO for two in a surprising nearfall. Orton unloaded with chair

shots, but Big Show landed a spear for two. Orton landed an RKO on the chair, but couldn't make it to Big Show in time. Orton then brought back the punt for the win. The punt is Orton's heel finish so I would have thought that they would have saved it for then, other than that Orton pandered to the crowd at the most bizarre times like before he made the pin after landing the RKO. They worked hard, but it was a little weird.

7. Last Man Standing Match for the WWE Championship Match John Cena vs. Ryback

Cena had the ankle taped up once again. Ryback landed a powerslam within the first few minutes. Cena came close to the ten count numerous times after a stiff powerbomb and usual moves in the ring. Ryback was bridged out to the floor, and Cena grabbed a table, which makes sense since they have been doing tables matches on all of the house shows. Cena took a fall away slam through the table. Cena went for the AA, but was caught with a spear. Cena landed a big



powerbomb. Cena went for some kind of guillotine, but Ryback landed a powerbomb following some very obvious spot calling. Cena grabbed an STF, Ryback made it up at nine, and Cena grabbed another table. Ryback went for his marching Samoan drop, but Cena landed an AA through the table. Ryback made it back up at nine and landed the marching

Samoan Drop; Cena made it back up at nine. Ryback went for a chairs shot on the ankle, but Cena shot out with a Roman Reigns spear into the barricade, again they do that spot too much. Both men made it up and brawled into the crowd. Ryback grabbed part of a Pepsi stand and hit Cena with it. Cena shot back with a sleeper hold, Ryback faded, but Ryback made it back up at eight. Ryback was placed on a table in the stands and Cena landed a splash through the table. Ryback was back up and Cena got into an Elmer Fudd esque stance and sprayed Ryback with a fire extinguisher. Cena landed a shot with the fire extinguisher, Ryback didn't go down, but Cena landed another shot to the head. Ryback made it back up again and speared Cena through the set, which resulted in both men disappearing into the darkness in a haze of sparks. After a minute or two they cut backstage calling for medics, a finish that got sizeable boos. Cena was placed on a stretcher and taken off in an angle that lasted minutes. Not satisfying to say the least.

** ¾

There was a trailer for Payback. They busted out the awesome WWE theatrical music for the

Triple H/Lesnar video package. They only played snippets of some of the tracks, but they were there.

8. Steel Cage Match

Triple H vs. Brock Lesnar w/ Paul Heyman

It looks like they have a new cage. Triple H went after Lesnar during his entrance before taking Heyman out. Triple H dove at Lesnar as the door was closed, but Lesnar responded by throwing Triple H into the cage. Lesnar manhandled Triple H throwing him side to side. Lesnar missed a knee strike into the cage and yelled "oh my knee!" He sold it really well throughout the match..



Triple H landed a knee, Lesnar grabbed a Kimura, but Triple H went after the knee. Lesnar looked to escape, Triple H clipped the knee, but Heyman slammed the door on Triple H's head, which is a spot that really used to mean a lot. Lesnar landed an F5 and called for a chair. Heyman threw the referee out of the way and handed Lesnar the chair to run wild.

Heyman called for Lesnar to shake his knee injury off. Lesnar went for the F5, but the knee buckled and Triple H clipped it again. Triple H landed shot after shot with the chair on the injured leg. Lesnar grabbed a Kimura, but Triple H went after the leg again locking in the figure four. Lesnar turned it over and broke the hold. Lesnar started to climb the cage, but Triple H landed a chair shot to the ankle and sent Lesnar to the mat. Hunter grabbed a silver sledge hammer from the top of the cage, but Lesnar took Triple H down. Lesnar went for a hammer shot, but Lesnar locked in the sharpshooter. Heyman ran into the cage to break the hold, but was caught with a pedigree. Hunter then blocked a pedigree and landed a pedigree for two. Triple H went for a shot with the hammer, but was caught with a Heyman low blow. It was strange, because it felt like they were building Brock up as a face during the match with his selling of the knee, but then they did this spot.. Lesnar landed a sledgehammer shot to the face. Lesnar landed an F5 for the win to cap off what was undoubtedly the best of their three matches.

*** 1/4

WWE Monday Night RAW May 20th 2013

Sprint Centre, Kansas City, Missouri

Overall Thoughts:

Apart from the Shield match, which granted was very good and took up a lot of time, I can't say that there was anything on this show that I really enjoyed to a great degree. I felt that the Axel segment was done with the wrong intent, as they had Triple H go out there and make the guy look like a complete nothing. Seeing Orton in front of his home crowd (sort of) again was also pretty fun. Other than that the Ryback challenge was fine, but they didn't really make mention of the way that the last man standing ended, which I felt they should. Also, having Ryback go out there and cut a promo reminding everyone that they are in fact going to die one day really wasn't all that inspiring. All in all apart from the Shield match this show was a drag to get through.

Segment by Segment:

The show opened up with an ambulance driving into the arena. Ryback hopped out of the back, and climbed on top on the vehicle for a promo spot. They showed some footage of Cena refusing to get in the back of an ambulance. Ryback challenged Cena to an ambulance match. He made a very weird statement talking about how everyone in the arena would be traveling in an ambulance one day, because they were all weak. He then reminded us about our own mortality, which didn't seem like the right thing to do in this context. Ryback went off on a tirade about how the people were fat, lazy...you know the heel stuff. He closed with Ryback Rules. This was probably the best promo that Ryback has ever cut, but it was still lacking for a mainevent heel, even if it was a step up from everything that he has done before. There was a graphic declaring that Heyman had a new client. Wade Barrett made it out following Fandango with new theme music that starts with an eerie voice saying "God save the Queen" - it is generic superstar theme 43. Chris Jericho and Miz were the members of the face team. Instead of watching this match I could have been watching Road Dogg cut a promo on the app - who knew? Fandango was standing out on the floor for the majority of the match and then proceeded to say his name and dance out on the floor during the match. Barrett was in there forever screaming at Fandango waiting for Miz to make the tag to Jericho. Jericho proceeded to land all of his big moves to Fandango's music before poor Wade was submitted by the figure four. Miz and Jericho looked to confront Fandango, but he ran off through the crowd leaving Summer Rae to be tipped by Jericho before being dumped. I have no idea what the point of any of this was.

Vickie Guerrero made it out saying that the fans could vote on the app to choose who could face Swagger their choices were Khali, Truth and Orton - boy, they left that one open. Bryan was very upset backstage when he was approached by Kane, and he said that neither of them were the tag team champions. They argued over who the weak link in the team was until Kingston came by and Bryan stormed off. They showed a clip of Henry saying that he was going home on the post show, presumably planting the seeds for a face turn. 'O'Neal was out there with Young for a match. 'O'Neal has a rather peculiar fall away slam as he dumps the guy over his head, but

doesn't go down at all, in fact he stays on his feet. They had a fine TV match with Sheamus landing a brogue kick for the win. There was a trailer for Orton's new movie. Heyman made it out on his own with no music. Heyman recounted how Lesnar defeated Triple H. Heyman said that he was there to bring out his new guy, it was a history making moment, this led to Heyman bringing Curtis Axel (Michael McGillicutty) out to the ring. He said that it was the same reaction that Brock got in 2002 and Punk got in 2006. He talked in vague terms about his pedigree, before revealing the origin of his name from Curt Hennig and Larry "The Axe" Hennig. Heyman attempted to get the crowd to react to Hennig before Triple H made it out to interrupt. Hunter blew Axel off as a kid, and he said that he lost in battle. Triple H threatened Heyman before Hennig stepped into Hunters face. Triple H dropped him with a slap, and then said that he would have a match later on with Hennig. I was quite perplexed when they brought Hennig out, as it seemed like somewhat of an anti-climax, which wasn't his fault, but more of an error in the way that he was presented. The other main issue of course was that Triple H insisted on burying the guy slapping him and making him look completely meaningless, which didn't help matters. I understand what they are trying to do here with Hennig, but the reason that Heyman works so well with Lesnar and Punk is because he actually helped get those guys into the company, and that isn't the case with Hennig.

Big E. Langston made it out for a match with Del Rio. He had a surprisingly physical match with Langston getting the win when AJ threw a bucket in and Langston grabbed an eye-poke and the big ending for the win. There was another commercial for the WWE app. AJ was out there for a match with Layla where she submitted her with her Octopus hold. We joined a Ryder/Rhodes match in progress after the break. As you would have expected Rhodes pinned Ryder with the



disaster kick. This was only there to set up Ryback coming down and killing poor Zack. He landed his shell shock and then threw Ryder out onto the floor before carrying him into back of the ambulance. The Shield made it out with the tag and US titles. They said that they were the reason

that Rock was injured, and that Ryback turned heel and the reason that Cena was in the hospital. They wrapped the promo up and Kane, Bryan and Kingston made it out for a six-man tag. The Shield worked over Kingston in the corner. Kingston finally made the tag to Bryan after what must have been minutes of work. Bryan brought great intensity, but he was hung up before the tag was made to Ambrose. Bryan landed a missile dropkick from the top for two, and locked in the no lock, but Ambrose made it to the ropes. After the break the Shield was in control of

Kingston again. Bryan placed Ambrose in the tree of woe and took a really stiff turnbuckle before landing a big sliding dropkick. Rollins landed a gigantic buckle bomb for two, and Reigns killed him with a clothesline moments later. Rollins yelled at Bryan calling him the weak link. Bryan made the tag to Kane who cleared house tossing men to the floor and clotheslining Reigns from post to post. Kingston and Bryan shot out with dual topés leaving Reigns and Kane in the ring. Kingston was thrown into the ring post by Rollins and Bryan was uploaded out on the floor by Ambrose. Kane set up for the chokeslam, but Ambrose came in, and Rollins flew in with a knee on Kane and Reigns landed a spear for the win in an awesome match; better than anything on the pay-per-view. Bryan was tremendous. (***) ¾)

Triple H was preparing backstage when a medic came in saying that the doctor recommended that he didn't compete. However, Triple H threatened to fire said doctor to resolve the conflict - well that wasn't a babyface move. Kaitlyn was backstage saying that she had a number. Cody Rhodes came by and they ceased his phone before confirming that it was not him. Swagger made



it out with Colter. Lawler then announced that...gasp they chose Orton with a 72% majority, Khali got 19% and Truth the remaining 9%. They had a very fun match with Swagger grabbing the ankle lock pretty late into the match following some stiff action. Swagger held on, Swagger was dropped to the floor and then caught with an

RKO for the win. There was a B.A Star video with P Diddy. McGillicutty made it out for a match with Triple H. Axel got a lot of offense in early on. They sold the fact that Triple H was injured from the night before acting like he had a concussion or something. He collapsed a chair asking for water, poured it over his head, and sat back in the chair. They then had Hunter collapse at the feet of the trainers to close of the show. This is going to lead to an angle involving the whole family apparently.

RAW Ratings May 20th 2013

The RAW rating as a whole was up this week, namely due to less competition in the form of the NBA play-off games. The other big plus coming out of the show was that for the second week running, the show gained viewers on average heading into each hour, meaning that there best hour in terms of 18-49 and overall viewership was the third. The show drew a 2.97 and averaged 4.23 million viewers.

The Miz & Chris Jericho versus Fandango & Wade Barrett match that was the first match of the show lost 360,000 viewers. It was then followed by the Sheamus/Titus 'O'Neil match which surprisingly gained 206,000 viewers, although they were coming off of a strong loss. The Paul Heyman segment with Curtis Axel gained 365,000 viewers, which is obviously due to Heyman completely. The segment then gained a further 13,000 viewers with the addition of Triple H at 21:00 to a 3.1 rating

The 20:00 to 21:00 hour drew 4.08 million viewers (1.667 million viewers and a 1.32 rating in the 18-49 demo placing in the fifth spot for the night on cable behind T.I & Tiny: The Family Hustle).

In the post-21:00 segment the Alberto Del Rio versus Big E. Langston match together with the AJ/Layla match only lost 47,000 viewers, which is really great for that segment. Cody Rhodes versus Zack Ryder with the Ryback squash that followed lost 358,000 viewers, so obviously that didn't click. Then the Shield six-man tag match versus Daniel Bryan, Kane & Kofi Kingston gained 298,000 viewers to a 3.03 quarter. I would consider that a good number for two reasons; firstly, the show was already running strong at that point, and secondly the audience simply isn't used to seeing matches of that length on TV.

The 21:00 to 22:00 hour drew 4.3 million viewers (a 1.43 rating and 1.806 million viewers in the 18-49 demo placing it in the third spot for the night on cable behind Love & Hip-Hop.)

Randy Orton versus Jack Swagger gained 237,000 viewers in the post-22:00 segment, which I would consider another big positive. Finally the Triple H versus Curtis Axel overrun gained 551,000 viewers to a 3.44 quarter, which was a really good overrun considering the viewership that they had at that time.

The 22:00 to 23:07 hour drew 4.31 million viewers (a 1.62 and 2.047 million viewers in the 18-49 demo placing it in the first spot for the night on cable). The demos for the night were as follows: a 2.5 in male teenagers, a 2.4 in males 18-49, a 1.3 in female teenagers, and a 1.0 in females 18-49, so teenage viewership was certainly up this week.

WWE – NXT
May 22nd 2013 – Full Sail University, Florida.
Ben Carass.

There was no time for a video recap this week; Curt Hawkins made his way out after the titles then Sami Zayn appeared for his debut to some awfully generic (no pun intended) music. Regal put over Sami as a well-travelled experienced guy and said wherever Zayn competed around the world, he was the best.

Sami Zayn vs. Curt Hawkins

As you might have expected, there were a few “Ole” chants. They started out slow then Sami

landed some quick armdrags and threw some chops in the corner; Hawkins landed a boot then followed up with a nice enzuigiri to start the heat. Hawkins missed a running forearm in the corner and Sami began his comeback with a pair of clotheslines and a belly-to-back. The near-falls started when Sami hit a dropkick then Hawkins got a two count after delivering a bodyslam. For the finish, Sami fought out of an attempted powerbomb and landed a springboard tornado DDT out of the corner to get the pin.

Sami Zayn defeated Curt Hawkins via pinfall, at 4:05.

Regal put over Sami for beating a former Tag Champ and Dawson stated NXT had a new superstar.

This was a pretty straightforward, fun little affair; when the near-falls come by the way of a dropkick and a bodyslam then that should give you an idea as to the psychology in play during the match.

After a vignette of Corey Graves talking about his tattoos, Antonio Cesaro headed down to the ring. Yoshi Tatsu showed up for his bimonthly NXT enhancement gig.

Yoshi Tatsu vs. Antonio Cesaro

Yoshi got in a crossbody and a dropkick; Cesaro took a few more kicks, but delivered his pop-up European uppercut then hit the neutraliser to get the win.

Antonio Cesaro defeated Yoshi Tatsu via pinfall, at 0:47.

Cesaro got on the stick to mock the weak competition and stated his put the “W” in WWE. He said there was nobody on, Raw, SmackDown, Main Event, Superstars, Saturday Morning Slam and especially NXT, that could hold a candle to him in the ring. Sami Zayn came out and told Cesaro that the fans didn’t agree with him then said if he had been looking too far and competition was standing right in front of him. Sami spoke briefly in French then called Cesaro “homeboy” and said he was going to get some competition.

Sami Zayn vs. Antonio Cesaro

Cesaro kept Zayn grounded at the start, however Sami scored with a springboard armdrag and Cesaro rolled to the floor. After the break Cesaro delivered a hotshot and started to get the heat. Sami fought up from a chinlock and tried for a sunset-flip, but Cesaro cut him off with a double-foot stomp then landed a mean looking short-arm clothesline. Sami showed some more fight and landed a back heel kick then got a two count off an O’Connor roll; Zayn came off the top with a crossbody which was turned into a tilt-o-whirl backbreaker for another two. Cesaro hit a running European uppercut in the corner to get another near-fall then unloaded some shots. The finish saw Sami try for an inside cradle, but Cesaro powered him up into a vertical suplex; Sami escaped and hooked a schoolboy for the three count.

Sami Zayn defeated Antonio Cesaro via pinfall, at 5:01 (TV Time).

An irate Cesaro disrupted Sami's celebrations and pounded away on the victorious babyface then Antonio delivered his neutraliser. Regal and Dawson still put over Sami's achievement of beating two established WWE guys on his debut night.

This was a good little match, but not great. Still, everything looked tight, crisp and was probably one of the most believable pro-wrestling matches this show has ever seen, just in terms of the move for move aesthetics. Obviously this couldn't compete with the psychology Regal and Ohno displayed during their fabulous encounter due to the time, but it is encouraging to know that if Cesaro and Sami were given 15 minutes they could easily put on a TV match of the year. Sami looked great overall on his debut and the two wins automatically established him at the top of the NXT roster. Even Regal played his part well in getting over the idea that Sami is not just another guy and is someone the fans need to take notice of. Sadly, it appears like WWE's mentality of booking alternating wins came into play at the latest set of tapings, which will be run down at the end of the report.

Renee Young was preparing to interview someone in the back; Emma walked in and said she was ready. Renee told her she was not scheduled then Audrey Marie, who apparently had the original promo time, showed up. Emma called her "Amy" and "Alicia", Audrey insulted Emma's wacky dance then threatened to remove her if she didn't leave immediately. Emma walked off doing her dance; as she passed Audrey, she tapped her on the head and this caused Audrey to get so angry that she could not continue with the slated interview.

Even though this sets up a match between the two, it was horrible. I believe I forgot to add Audrey to the list of names that were released last week, so let's try it again. The recently released are as follows: Brandon Traven, Percy Watson, Anya, Derrick Bateman, Briley Pierce, Sakamoto and Audrey.

WWE's answer to Robbie E, Enzo Amore made his first appearance on the show; William Regal had no idea who he was watching and for once had to ask Dawson for help. Enzo claimed NXT was full of fake tough guys and stated, "everybody's a G, until a G walks in the room". Mason Ryan made his return; he was still jacked up but the longer hair thankfully made him look less like Batista.

Mason Ryan vs. Enzo Amore

Ryan showed his power and landed a couple of clotheslines; Enzo got nothing in and Ryan finished him off with an inverted TKO type move.

Mason Ryan defeated Enzo Amore via pinfall, at 1:25.

It was hard to tell if Ryan has improved during this squash, but the crowd didn't really seem to

care that he had come back. I would hope his skills have developed even a little, because other than his freaky physique he has got nothing.

A graphic hyped Stephanie McMahon for next week; apparently Steph has an “historic announcement” for us. It seems like Steph has usurped Dusty’s announcement of the Diva’s title tournament, but we shall see.

Corey Graves made his way through the curtain for the main event. Bray Wyatt (and his mask) came down with The Family.

Corey Graves vs. Bray Wyatt w/ The Wyatt Family

Tony Dawson killed Wyatt’s new gimmick straight away, by explaining that Chris Jericho broke Bray’s nose, therefore revealing the mask to be a protective necessity. Regal tried to cover and said he wears the mask to intimidate his opponents. Graves controlled with a front-facelock then threw a dropkick, which in the process of taking, Wyatt’s mask fell off. Bray rolled out and fixed the mask then back inside, landed a few shots. Graves landed a boot to the face and followed up with Candice Michelle’s old candylicious submission on the ropes. Wyatt hit a big crossbody to start the heat, then after the break was still in control, however Graves low-bridged Bray over the top, only to miss a baseball slide and take a ride into the steps. Wyatt hit a running splash in the corner, but Graves ducked a clothesline and landed a crossbody for the double down, after which Graves started his comeback with a flurry of strikes. Graves delivered a chopblock and set up for the Fullerlock; the Family tried to interfere, but Graves dropped them both off the apron with some right hands then caught Wyatt with a dropkick to the knee and applied the Fullerlock. Rowan slid in, which distracted the ref and Harper dropped an elbow on the helpless Graves. Wyatt hit his reverse STO to pick up the victory.

Bray Wyatt defeated Corey Graves via pinfall, at 7:40 (TV Time).

Harper and Rowan put the boots to Graves after the match, but Kassius Ohno ran down to try make the save. Ohno got some shots in on the Family then caught Wyatt with a few blows, however Rowan drilled him from behind and Harper flattened him with his discuss lariat. Wyatt finished Ohno off with his reverse STO and the three heels stood proudly over their victim.

The main event was fine. It was hurt by the crowd not fully understanding that they were supposed to get behind Graves, although the two guys did work the match in a way that made it clear who was the heel and who was the face; Wyatt was the ugly brawler and Graves was the heroic underdog fighting against the odds. The run-in from Ohno pretty much cements his face turn and sets up a tag match in two weeks.

This show is definitely worth checking out; the first half or so was excellent and the main event wasn’t bad either, although it did kind of drop off a little in the middle. Next week is the last show from the May 2nd set of tapings and Audrey Marie, Derrick Bateman and Brandon Traven all do jobs on their way out. Plus if you count the #1 contenders battle royal (which Bo Dallas wins),

Sakamoto and Briley Pierce also lose on their last appearance.

Four more weeks of TV were taped on May 23rd so here are some of the things to look forward to for next month.

The show opened with Stephanie McMahon on the Tron announcing the NXT Diva's title tourney, which I imagine they will air next week in place of the promo Dusty cut in front of the live crowd.

Taped for June 5th: Show opens with an NXT title contract signing angle with Big E. Langston and Bo Dallas. Jim Ross oversees the deal and the two insult each other. Paige beats Tamina in a first round match. Mason Ryan squashes another geek. Connor O'Brian debuts a new submission to down Alex Riley and the Wyatt family go over Graves and Ohno in what should be a good outing.

Taped for June 12th: In a reportedly "amazing match", Antonio Cesaro defeats Sami Zayn to presumably set up a third encounter. Scott Dawson & Garrett Dylan w/ Sylvester Lefort beat Baron Corbin & Travis Tyler. Alicia Fox downs Bayley in a first round match and unbelievably in the main event, Bo Dallas pins Big E. Langston to take the NXT Championship. Apparently there was some sort of botch with the finish, so we'll have to keep an eye out for any editing, also there were reports of fans sitting on the hard camera side turning their backs in protest of the finish. The people were not fond of Bo before, but now I imagine he will be one of the biggest heels on the roster. At least they seem to be booking Bo to turn and didn't have him win the belt clean.

Taped for June 19th: The Wyatt Family run-in on Adrian Neville vs. Bray Wyatt, but Dusty shows up and books a six man for later on. Sami Zayn beats Angelo Dawkins. Summer Rae goes over Sasha Banks in a first round match. Xavier Woods cuts a Power Rangers themed promo then defeats Jake Carter and The Wyatt Family down Graves, Ohno and Neville in the main event.

Taped for June 26th: Big E. Langston squashed Aiden English. Leo Kruger returns and makes quick work of Dante Dash then stays at ringside to see Bo Dallas beat Axl Keegan. Leo attacks Keegan after the match and this is somehow meant to set up a feud with Dallas, who it seems is still a babyface here which is completely baffling. Emma overcomes Aksana in a first round match. Finally, Ohno & Graves go over Scott Dawson & Garrett Dylan w/ Sylvester Lefort in a number one contenders match for the tag straps. The Wyatt Family show up and beat down Ohno & Graves; Adrian Neville makes a run-in, but Dylan & Dawson get involved. William Regal tries to make the save, but the swarm of heels are too much and the faces are left lying.

TNA iMPACT May 23rd 2013
USF Sundome, Tampa, Florida

Overall Thoughts:

You probably know that this is a problem from the fact that we say it every week, but once again

the same exact critiques apply to iMPACT. The show was not terrible; however, as has been the case for months everything but the final segment simply wasn't that good. I also can't say that there wasn't anything bad on the show, as the James/Sky match, despite James' best attempts, was simply terrible. The AJ Styles angle at the end of the show was good, but the thing is that while the crowd bought the heel turn completely, they didn't have enough time to build the turn, which should have realistically lasted a few weeks, which obviously means that the angle wasn't as big as it could have been in the long run. If you watch iMPACT every week and enjoy it you will have a fun time with this show, but if you don't there is no need to start watching the show at this point.

Segment by Segment:

Before the show there was a small tasteful notice for the victims of the Oklahoma tornado and the number for the Red Cross, which is far more than you can say for the WWE.

Hogan made it out to open the show. Tampa was his home, and so was TNA he said. He also made a very random mention of Shark Boy, which would later make sense. He then brought out Sting calling him one of the family members that had stuck with him through thick and thin. Sting was fired up and stuttered over some of his lines. Hogan tried to convince Sting that he didn't have to put future title shots on the line and just then Brooke Hogan made her way out. She claimed that she had ruined her relationship with her father and Sting, and she wanted to resign. However, before much could be resolved Bully made it out. He said that everything was his fault, to strong "what?" chants. Ray said that it was Brooke's fault, and he said that he still loved her and he always would - he would never take his ring off and he walked away. There was another Suicide vignette. Kenny King was on commentary for a match between Joey Ryan, Petey Williams and Suicide, who was T.J. Perkins under the mask. Suicide pinned Ryan with a double knee gutbuster, in what was a good X-division three-way, but it really did feel like every other one for the most part.

Chris Sabin walked by Storm backstage and proposed that they form a tag team, but Storm politely declined. Brooke Hogan yelled at Bully Ray backstage asking what it meant that he still loved her in the most phony manner possible. Ray said that he still loved her and walked off. Talking about bad acting, Mickie James talked to Velvet Sky backstage wanting to reschedule their championship match, but Sky refused. Alex Silva made it out for a Gut-Check tournament match with Sam Shaw. However, before Silva could even make his way out Wes Briscoe came out with some of the other Aces & Eights, botched some lines, and said that he left Silva broken and beaten backstage. He then walked down to the ring upset that he wasn't in the Bound for Glory series before beating Shaw down. Magnus then made it out for the save. He cut the babyface promo that you would expect before alerting Briscoe that he had a match with him right then and there. they had an extremely unremarkable match until the Aces & Eights stormed the ring, and Samoa Joe made it out for the save to conclude a segment that we have seen far too many times.

Surprisingly the Aces & Eights were drinking beer in the clubhouse saying that Style wouldn't let

them down. They aired a video package with Kurt Angle at the New York amateur wrestling event with Russia vs. Iran vs. USA. A great video that they should honestly shoot more of from a personality profile perspective. Angle and Anderson made it out for a match. AJ was shown parking his bike in the back. They had a pretty fun match until Styles was brought out at ringside setting up a low blow from Anderson for the win. There was a promo with Gail Kim backstage until Taryn Terrell came screaming by and threw Kim all over the place before they were pulled apart. James Storm made it out with Hernandez and Chao on commentary. Before he could make his announcement Roode and Aries made it out. Roode called the four years that they teamed the worst of his life. Before Roode could respond Daniels and Kazarian made it out - and as always they were the most entertaining part of the entire program. Shark Boy of all people made his way out. He did his Stone Cold impersonation gimmick for a while before Robbie E came out. He suggested tag names for them such as Beer Bro, and America's Most Bro. Shark Boy and E bickered until Gunner made his return and laid both men out. Well, this segment felt overbooked in comparison to the size of the payoff.. Also, why have a presumably babyface in Gunner lay out Sharkboy?

Park was talking to Sting backstage. He said that getting the strap sounded painful, which was actually pretty funny. Sting wanted Abyss to team with him next week, but if he couldn't he wanted Park, who agreed and walked off. This segment really suggested that Sting is the only



one that knows that Park and Abyss are the same person. Mickie James made it out for a Knockout's title match with Velvet Sky. They wrestled an horrendous match with Sky really doing an awful job of selling the leg until James landed a DDT to become the new Knockout's champion. There was a video recap of the AJ Styles angle. Poor D-lo was running errands in the clubhouse before Ray, Knox (Knux as he is now

called), Devon, Wes and Anderson made it out. Ray, in the arena, said that no one member was more important than the other. He put Anderson over and called Styles down to the ring. Ray said that Styles didn't drink and never had, which didn't make much sense given how they played up drinking problems in storyline. Ray said that he could give his soul to Jesus, but his heart to the Aces & Eights. He drank the whole beer, and Anderson looked to adorn Styles with the jacket, but Angle walked out. Angle screamed for Styles to put on the colors and asked if it was what he really wanted. Styles put the jacket on, and a beatdown on Angle ensued. Styles then landed a shot with the hammer to the knee of Angle. They made the Aces & Eights sign, but

Styles whacked DOC with the hammer and ran off to abruptly end the show.

The final few moments of this segment were really good, with the crowd reacting just how you would want them to for the whole thing. However, it seemed a little early to have Styles lay the Aces & Eights out, even if it got a big reaction here.

WWE SmackDown – May 24th 2013.
CenturyLink Centre: Omaha, NE.
Ben Carass.

Our weekly recap started with stills of the Triple H/Brock Lesnar cage match at Extreme Rules then they ran down Curtis Axel's debut and showed Triple H trying to out-do his buddy Shawn Michaels in 1995 with the angle at the end of Raw. Next, they hyped Dean Ambrose vs. Kofi Kingston for the US Championship.

Unfortunately Miz Tv was our opening segment again this week; Miz claimed he would win back the Intercontinental Title then introduced Fandango as his guest. The usual three-man booth was at ringside and Cole talked about the bizarre outcome of the tag match on Raw that Fandango was involved in. Fandango told Miz how to pronounce his name then the irritating host repeated the worst babyface catchphrase in history, "really?" and said Fandango did something that nobody else had ever done during the tag match on Raw. Footage aired of the heel act's impromptu dance during the match then the post-match deal with Jericho and Summer Rae. JBL said, "she's a dance partner for hire" then Miz told Fandango he left Barrett high and dry and said his ego was more obnoxious than his name. Miz asked what kind of self-absorbed narcissist would dance at ringside during a match. Fandango stated he would dance all over the face of any one that ever touched Summer again and found the idea of Miz accusing him of having a big ego somewhat hypocritical. Miz admitted to having a big ego, but claimed he knew the "balance between sports and entertainment" then stated that when the bell rings it's all about business, not dancing at ringside like a giant bag of skittles. Cole did his horrendously phony laugh and JBL sternly stated, "that's not funny"; he was correct. A handful of easily led automatons began to chant "bag of skittles" and Miz claimed that was the new "fruity pebbles". Fandango claimed he was bored of the Miz's shtick; I concurred with the heel, then Wade Barrett showed up and began by calling Summer a "pathetic waste of skin". Wade told Fandango that he was the only reason why they lost on Raw then stated he would smash every tooth Fandango had if he ever crossed him again. Miz chimed in; he reminded Barrett that he was set to defend the IC Title later against him and that he tapped him out on Raw. Wade drilled Miz with a cheap shot then the two began to brawl in the ring; Fandango and Summer fled as one referee came down to break up the skirmish. Cole hyped the title match for after the break.

Another terrible opening segment courtesy of Mike Mizanin and his lugubrious talk show. I found Miz to be just as detestable as ever and his interaction with Fandango came off as completely scripted; things picked up when Barrett appeared and put a stop to all the nonsense. Although I fear that Wade could come out of this programme in an even worse position than he is at the moment. Hopefully he will drop the title and get a real singles push, however that seems

unlikely now they have got behind Curtis Axel.

Intercontinental Championship Match: The Miz vs. Wade Barrett (Champion)

We joined the match in progress and Fandango was on commentary. Barrett worked over Miz for the heat then applied a chinlock. Miz fought up and started his comeback with a knee-lift, followed by a big boot to the face. Fandango said he needed to stretch his legs and called for his music to be played; when the annoyingly catchy tune began, Fandango and Summer went into their dance routine. This caused a distraction for the Miz and Barrett planted him with the Traylor Slam for a two count. Miz countered a pump-handle slam and got a two off an O'Connor roll then hit Fandango with a baseball slide and got another near-fall with a roll up. Barrett countered the figure four and Miz landed in the ropes; Fandango drilled Miz with his enzuigiri from the floor to cause the DQ.

The Miz defeated Wade Barrett via disqualification, at 2:55 (TV Time).

After the match, Fandango began to pummel the Miz and Barrett joined in; Wade backed off and set up for the bullhammer, however when Fandango turned around, Barrett smashed his with his lethal elbow. Summer shirked, Wade demanded his title and left in triumph.

This was not great. The match was fine I suppose, but it was hard to make a fair assessment when the thing started during a break and Fandango began to dance just as the near-falls started, which was more than a little distracting. The idea of a three-way feud between these guys is depressing, considering Wade has been used so poorly lately and now he is a programme with the novelty act, plus the world's least credible babyface.

Daniel Bryan was seated in the locker room; Kane walked in and told his partner not to be upset, because they were still a team despite losing the Tag Team titles. Kane took responsibility for losing on Raw, but Bryan took that like Kane was implying he lost because Bryan was incapable of making the save. Bryan said he knew what everyone was thinking and declared he was not the weak link of the team before he stormed off. Kane just looked to the sky and let out a sigh.

The announcers hyped John Cena's return for this Monday then after the Raw rebound, Jack Swagger and Zeb Colter made their way out. Daniel Bryan showed up with Kane to take on the real American.

Daniel Bryan w/ Kane vs. Jack Swagger w/ Zeb Colter

Bryan was fired from the start and soon dumped Swagger over the top and hit a topé. Back inside, Bryan landed a missile dropkick for an early two count, but Swagger came back with a clothesline to slow down the pace. Swagger tied Bryan up in the tree of woe then delivered a running corner splash; after the break, Bryan fought out of an armbar then started his comeback with a clothesline and his running dropkick in the corner. Swagger ate some rapid-fire kicks, but was finally able to stop the barrage of strikes with his high single-leg takedown. Bryan countered the Doctor bomb and tried for the No-lock; Swagger escaped to apply the anklelock, however Bryan rolled through for a two count. Swagger landed a knee strike, but missed a Vaderbomb and Bryan drilled him with a head kick which looked tremendous. Kane yelled, "cover him", but

Bryan didn't want the pin. Instead, Bryan did his old repeated stomps to the face while controlling his opponent's hands, sadly there were no "you're gonna get your F'n head kicked in" chants, then applied the No-lock to get the tap.

Daniel Bryan defeated Jack Swagger via submission, at 5:04 (TV Time).

Bryan did not release the hold until Kane and the referee intervened, however he became enraged again and yelled, "who's the weak link?!" then slapped on the No-lock once more. Kane pulled his partner off Swagger, then two former Tag Champs had a brief argument and Bryan stormed off on his own, yelling "yes!"

The match was great. Bryan looked like a complete badass in there and if you are a fan of the guy, like me you probably have been waiting for him to be booked like this. Swagger was high on Vince's priority list not too long ago and Bryan absolutely beat him mercilessly here. It seems like they are hinting at a break up and a possible Bryan/Kane feud, which would be a complete disaster. Nobody wanted to see their initial programme last year and now would just be a moronic time to do it. For the past two weeks on Raw, Bryan has received the biggest pops of anyone on the roster when he came in off the hot tag and ran wild. The WWE would be total idiots if they didn't listen to the people and just ignored what is going on in the arenas. Not only is the guy a great worker and can pretty much do anything he is asked, Bryan has established a genuine connection with the fans, which only a handful of guys on the roster can dream of achieving.

They showed Ryback's promo from atop the ambulance on Raw after which we got to see him killing Zack Ryder and the browski going for a ride in the ambulance.

Damien Sandow was in the ring with Matt Striker; there was a heavily varnished table and a black carpet set up. Sandow said for the past few weeks he had seen, "two troglodytes disguised as WWE Superstars engage in a series of contests, each more half-witted and embarrassing than the last". He was talking about Sheamus and Mark Henry with the tug-o-war, arm wrestling and truck pulling, then claimed those gimmicks appealed to the lowest common denominator. Sandow stated the true measure of a man was not in his feats of physical strengths, but in his ability to deal with mental challenges then pointed to a ball of rope on the table which he called, the "Gordian knot". Sandow gave us a history of the knot that cannot be untied then claimed Striker was there because he used to be a teacher and was going to attempt to untie the thing. Striker fumbled around with the rope then quickly gave up; Sandow mocked his stupidity then called him the problem with the education system. Sheamus came out and after some bad comedy about Damien's personal life, told Sandow he used to play with a few Rubik's cubes and offered to untie the knot. Sheamus gave it a try, but Sandow took the rope away from him and offered to show him how it is done. Sandow pulled out a pair of bolt cutters, cut the knot and held the untangled rope over his head with pride. Sheamus told Damien he was the better man, but tried to blindside him with a Brogue kick; Sandow avoided the boot and flat out said he outsmarted the stupid babyface. Sheamus informed Damien he would teach him about Newton's law and tossed the hapless Striker through the ropes on to Sandow, or at least that was the plan; the two just ended up in an awkward heap on the floor.

This was no good and quite tiresome to sit through. This must have been the Damien Sandow Show, which Teddy said he would take under advisement last week, although you would have had no idea of that if you missed last week's show, because nobody explained why Sandow was out there taking up airtime talking about knots. Regardless, this is likely to lead to a meaningless match between the two for the hundredth time while they figure out what to do with Sheamus now Mark Henry has "gone home".

Chris Jericho made his entrance then the Big Show came down for a one-on-one match between the former Tag Team Champs.

Chris Jericho vs. The Big Show

Show used his size and power right away and dropped Jericho with some overhand chops and body shots. Jericho landed some blows, but the giant no-sold then applied a bearhug; Jericho



fought out and landed a dropkick to the knee. Show cut off Jericho with a spear for a two count then set up for a chokeslam; Jericho escaped and came off the top, however Show drilled him with an overhand chop in mid-air. Show missed an elbow off the second rope and Jericho hit the lionsault to get a near-fall then went for the

codebreaker. Show countered, however Jericho landed a DDT for another two. Show powered out of an attempted walls of Jericho then delivered a chokeslam; Jericho rolled to the outside and Show tried to lawn-dart him into the ring post. Jericho escaped and sent Show into the post then hit the codebreaker, which sent Show tumbling back over the barricade near the timekeeper's area and was counted out.

Chris Jericho defeated Big Show via count-out, at 5:25.

Show was enraged and grabbed a chair, however Jericho delivered a baseball slide into the chair then nailed the giant with a chair shot to the spine.

This was fine. Jericho was great in portraying his struggle against his massive opponent; I do wish Show would stop doing that elbow off the second rope. I used to hate it when he came off the top in WCW and I still think it is completely unnecessary. I don't know what the deal was with the finish, perhaps these two are heading for a programme or maybe we'll just get a rematch on Raw.

The Paul Heyman/Curtis Axel segment from Raw aired then they showed the hokey finish to

Curt's match with Triple H. Cole and Josh tried to sell us on the idea of Trips suffering post-concussion symptoms and claimed Hunter would be out of action for a while.

Curtis Axel came out with Paul Heyman for a promo. Heyman talked about Lesnar and CM Punk then claimed to be the most exclusive manager/agent/advocate in history, before stating he managed in two of the three main events at WrestleMania. Paul said he had invested his money in a stock that will forever be known as Curtis Axel then handed the mic over to his newest client. Axel professed that he accomplished more in one day than his father and grandfather ever did in their entire careers when he left Triple H lying and declared himself the official winner of the match. Heyman applauded vigorously then Axel stated that was just the first day in building the brand of Curtis Axel.

After the break, we joined a match in progress between Axel and Sin Cara, who I'm sure was booked to go against Wade Barrett on this show, or maybe I just imagined that.

Sin Cara vs. Curtis Axel

The pointless yellow lighting made its return. Axel took Sin Cara down with ease several times; Cara landed a few kicks and a hurricanrana. Axel took a lucha armdrag, but dumped Cara on the apron and drilled him with a right hand. Curtis scored with a dropkick then worked a chinlock; Sin Cara fought up to hit a handspring elbow and a springboard crossbody. The finish saw Axel avoid a crossbody off the top and deliver his running one-armed swinging neckbreaker to get the three count.

Curtis Axel defeated Sin Cara via pinfall, at 3:01 (TV Time).

As usual Heyman was great in the pre-match promo, however it's clear that Axel is still a little green in that department. I can't recall him even cutting many promos on NXT, which is strange when you consider the logical thing to do would be to make him practise them more. Although I suppose that is why they gave him Paul. E. The match was nothing, I would have just had Axel kill Cara in 30 seconds, but what do I know, I mean I thought that slapping Axel and talking to him like a geek was not a good booking decision; crazy, I know.

Kofi Kingston appeared for his US Title rematch; Dean Ambrose came through the people to defend the strap.

US Championship Match: Kofi Kingston vs. Dean Ambrose (Champion)

There were some "Ambrose" chants early. Kofi landed a dropkick, however Ambrose reversed a whip into the corner for the transition. Ambrose got some heat briefly then Kofi fired back with chops and another dropkick. Kofi came off the second rope with a splash to the back for a two count then went up top. Ambrose tried for a superplex, but Kofi fought free; Rollins showed up and Kofi dropped him with a boot then took out Reigns with a crossbody to the floor. Kofi slid back inside, however Rollins did too and Charles Robinson called for the bell.

Kofi Kingston defeated Dean Ambrose via disqualification, at 2:30.

The Shield beat down Kofi and Randy Orton ran down to try save the day; Orton was overwhelmed, but Sheamus made a run-in and the babyfaces quickly got rid of the heels. Teddy Long, who I'm convinced was fired a long time ago and has been replaced with an advanced animatronic robot, which can be programmed to book anywhere from two, to ten guys in a main event, showed up and made a Six-man tag.

Kofi Kingston, Randy Orton & Sheamus vs. The Shield

The match was joined in progress after the break. Sheamus planted Reigns with a front-powerslam then took Rollins over with a hiptoss; Orton came in to land some right hands in the corner then Kofi came off the top with an axe-handle and landed a few kicks. Ambrose came in, but the babyfaces kept control; Sheamus landed a neckbreaker, but Ambrose fought back and made the tag. Rollins took over with some shots, however Sheamus positioned him for the



clubbing forearm shots. Ambrose and Reigns pulled Rollins to safety before the break. After commercial, The Shield had the heat on Sheamus and the trio worked him over in their corner. Sheamus fired up and fought his way out of the heel's half of the ring; Reigns took the ring post spot which led to Orton coming in off

the hot tag and running wild. Randy caught Rollins and Ambrose with a couple of powerslams then delivered the hangman's DDT to Rollins, who slid to the outside to avoid an RKO. Reigns hit Orton with a cheap shot as he tried to reach through the ropes. Randy beat the ten count and The Shield began to build the heat for the next hot tag; Reigns was selling his ankle on the apron. Rollins unloaded shots in the corner, however Orton fought back, only to take a downward spiral into the turnbuckle. Rollins went up top and Randy fought free to gain control and landed a superplex for the double-down. Sheamus got the hot tag and ran wild on Ambrose then took out Reigns, before smashing Rollins with his clubbing forearms. The finishing sequence saw Sheamus hit Rollins with the Brogue kick and hoist up Ambrose for the white noise, but Reigns cut him off with a spear. As Reigns rolled to the floor, Orton hit him with an RKO; in the ring, Kofi got the tag and landed a springboard crossbody for a two count. Kofi set up for the trouble in paradise, however Rollins grabbed his foot and Ambrose nailed him with a dropkick then scored with his headlock driver to get the three count.

The Shield defeated Kofi Kingston, Sheamus & Randy Orton via pinfall, at 11:20 (TV Time).

The Shield stood tall with their belts in the ring; JBL put over the trio and Cole asked, "who can

stop The Shield?”

The match was a wonderful main event; it was action packed and the finish was great. The babyfaces controlled at the start, but the unity of The Shield allowed them to take over and get the heat. The crowd went crazy for the hot tags and comebacks, plus most of them bought the false finish when Kofi hit the springboard at the end. The Shield's Six-man tags are quickly becoming the best thing on either show; this wasn't quite as good as their match on Raw, but I encourage everyone to try and see this fabulous main event.

The rest of the show was the usual mixed bag: Miz TV continues to send me into a spiral of despair and they set up a questionable three-way feud over the IC title, plus the Damien Sandow/Sheamus segment was utterly imbecilic and tedious. Most of the other stuff was enjoyable and generally productive. Curtis Axel emphatically stated that he beat Triple H on Raw which was smart, although they could have just done that on Monday or even better had Axel pin Hunter, (despite the previous statement, I assure you I live in the real world). Daniel Bryan looked like an absolute killer, however it appears like an ill-advised heel turn is coming and The Shield keep on rolling strong. I may not be thrilled with the direction some of the angles are going, but for the first time in a while I'm definitely intrigued and looking forward to how things play out on Raw. So in that respect, this show did its job I suppose.

Bits & Pieces

One of the most positive news stories this week, and one that I made note of on the site was the announcement by Max Zaleski, founder of Wrestling with Subtitles that both the WWE and TNA have agreed to add subtitles to their DVD releases. Now, if you haven't been following the project over the last seven to nine months or so, you may be wondering what the big deal is about wrestling DVDs featuring subtitles - well, for fans that are hearing impaired it is a large issue, and one that will hopefully be alleviated to some extent in the next few months. Zaleski released the following message via email earlier this week:

“Hello folks!

This will be the last email you'll get from me, but I'd like to thank you for all of your support since last June.

I started Wrestling with Subtitles to get subtitles on wrestling DVDs in North America.

In January, we hit our goal of 1500 signatures. In February, I sent the petition to WWE, TNA, and ROH.

In late February, TNA contacted me to let me know they will now begin putting subtitles on their DVDs for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing wrestling fans.

And today, May 23rd, I gained knowledge that WWE will now include subtitles

on their new releases effective June 2013.

I want to thank you for all your support!

WrestlingWithSubtitles.com will now become a blog / opinion site for all things wrestling. We hope to see you there!”

In a rather upsetting story, TNA X-Division star, Zema Ion, underwent an appendectomy on May 16th, something that was mentioned briefly on TNA television this week. However, what was not mentioned was the fact that he also has a tumor on his colon, which he did have a biopsy of and is waiting for the results to come back to show if it is malignant or not. Making matters worse is that TNA does not have an insurance policy like WWE (a policy that they only introduced fairly recently), meaning that Ion is going to have to pay for all of the medical costs that he has incurred over the past couple of weeks. His sister as a result has created a funding page on crowd sourcing site, Give Forward, for him in a similar vein to Scott Hall, which can be found at <http://gfwd.at/17HRqew>. At press time he has raised around \$5,000 of his \$30,000 goal.

News broke sometime last week that Yuji Nagata had suffered a pectoral muscle injury during the preliminary tag match at the Wrestling Dontaku show from a few weeks ago. There was and still is a feeling that he could miss out on his first G1 Tournament in around 15 years. However, he did work on the May 22nd show from Korakuen Hall, but he wasn't scheduled to appear on the May 24th show. I would assume that he will be able to work the G1, but I wouldn't say so with absolute certainty either.

Despite the fact that the All Japan program of Kotaro Suzuki & Atsushi Aoki and Koji Kanemoto & Minoru Tanaka over the All-Asia tag team titles has been one of the best of the entire year, they failed to draw at even a decent level as the mainevent on the May 18th Korakuen Hall show. They drew an announced 1,200 fans, which was probably closer to 800. That was a very bad number for a building that can realistically hold 2000 people for a sell out. However, for what it's worth they apparently had a great thirty plus minute long match with Suzuki pinning Tanaka with a Tiger Driver.

Impact showed a strong increase in the ratings this week drawing 1.38 million viewers, which was up substantially from what they have been doing over the last few weeks. The rise in viewership can be attributed to the lack of competition. However, we will never know if it was a one time gain or not, as it was the final show (for now) in the 21:00 time slot.

We have almost nothing to go by at this point, because the news just broke at press-time, but WWE has released its newest estimates for its 2013 WrestleMania buyrate, which currently sits at 1.048 million buys worldwide.

In addition to releasing many members of the developmental roster this week, WWE released Adam Rudman, the new head of creative who replaced Erik Pankowski in late March. There is not much to go by on why exactly this was done.

The results of the first night of the Best of the Super Juniors are as follows: Block A: Jushin Liger beat Hiromu Takahashi with a brainbuster in 07:49, Taichi beat Rocky Romero in 08:30, Ricochet beat Trent? with his double rotation moonsault in 11:56, Prince Devitt defeated Alex Shelley in the main event with a Blood Sunday in 12:44. Block B: TAKA Michinoku beat Tiger Mask, in the biggest surprise of the first night Jado beat Kenny Omega 09:37, Alex Koslov beat Ryusuke Taguchi with a Russian Star Press in 12:25 and BUSHI pinned KUSHIDA with the BUSHI roll.

Next Week's Issue

Next week I am looking to run a special story looking at the current young prospects in the WWE, but that may have to be moved back a week or so. We also look at Extreme Rules fallout, New Japan on the road to Dominion, All Japan, the news and so much more!

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