



Cubed Circle Wrestling – World Tag League Chugging On

This week was a relatively quiet news week with no major news or shows from any of the top companies. However, we still have a fun edition of the newsletter for you this week, looking at New Japan's World Tag League heading into the final day, SmackDown, NXT, RAW leading into the TLC PPV, the RAW ratings, iMPACT, a new By the Numbers section, Bret Hart and more!

Also I would like to notify everyone that the newest survey is up right now and can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/ccnsurv112> and cubedcirclewrestling.com. This is perhaps one of the most important surveys that we have ever conducted, and it certainly carries the most weight out of all of them. So if you want to help out with your feedback, or have something that you would like to suggest, it would be greatly appreciated if you could take a minute or two out of your day to fill out the survey. Your feedback will really help the newsletter improve. With everything out of the way I hope that you enjoy the newsletter and have a great week.

– Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter

News

One Night Remains of the World Tag League

After delivering a blow-away string of the best PPVs of this entire year New Japan are closing out 2013, much like 2012, with the World Tag League. To use an anime or TV show analogy the World Tag League is the equivalent to a filler story arc with bits of canon thrown about for the build to the biggest show of the year. It for that reason that they become difficult shows not to follow, although the vast majority of the tournament is uneventful. After all it was clear from the onset that teams comprised of major stars like Kazuchika Okada, Hiroshi Tanahashi and Shinsuke Nakamura wouldn't win the tournament, it is pretty unlikely that KES will win, and teams like Makabe & Honma are already booked in other matches on January 4th.

I am perfectly fine with the World Tag League, apart from the fact that with it being only a few months removed from the G1, a lot of the company's top stars have to work a long tour while not fully recovered. Older stars such as Tenzan & Kojima are baring the brunt of the damage, although Nakamura and Tanahashi are nowhere near one hundred percent. Factor in the close proximity to the Dome show, and I feel that the World Tag League should be rescheduled in future years, or if that is not an option, cut down in length. Of course these problems wouldn't be as much of an issue if New Japan had a stronger tag team division. However, it is going to take time to build up; the

only newer semi-permanent team that they have been able to create over the past few months has been Doc & Anderson, and I don't even know how stable that partnership is given contracts heading into the new year.

The four teams remaining heading into the final night, at the Aichi Prefectural Gymnasium on the



8th are TenCozy and KES together with Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows and Togi Makabe & Tomoaki Honma. I would expect either a KES/Bullet Club match or the more likely of the two a TenCozy/Bullet Club match. It is clear that Togi Makabe & Honma will not be winning the tournament, as Makabe is already booked to face King Fale at the Tokyo Dome, and therefore wouldn't be free for a Tag Team title match

against the Killer Elite Squad on the same evening. TenCozy will lose in the final if they make it past KES, as Kojima is booked opposite Rob Conway for the Tokyo Dome.

Judging by the reactions that I have seen from the World Tag League shows across Japan, as well as the Body Maker show from a few months back, Naito still doesn't seem to be truly connecting with the New Japan fan base on a large scale. Sure, there are loud pockets of "Naito" chants in most buildings, but whenever Naito faces off with Okada they are drowned out by chants for Okada. If Naito is able to really spark on the night, and work as a subtle heel in much the same way that Tanahashi is able to, then they will probably still tear the house down come January 4th. I hope that I'm wrong, but I suspect that we will be seeing Nakamura and Tanahashi going on last at the Dome.

I seem to be more excited for the Tokyo Dome than most, as the January 4th show to me has felt over the past few years very much like a WrestleMania in that even if the build isn't able to drive things home, the grandeur and aura of the event itself will. Plus, the two mainevent matches, if the crowd is hot enough, may both be match of the year contenders. With that being said, many of the matches and pairings this year do feel weaker than last year, and apart from the two top matches, feel closer to 2012's offering than 2013's. The strange thing is that they had a wide variety of fresh pairings and rematches available that they didn't really need to go with matches like Shibata/Goto and Kojima/Conway and could have easily done some exciting things with Ishii and company.

Ignoring comparisons to previous shows, this year's show will still be worth the 35\$ price tag, with three matches that are guaranteed to be great, and others that may surprise a lot of people.

WWE Monday Night RAW December 2nd 2013 Chesapeake Energy Arena, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Overall Thoughts:

We were presented with yet another weak WWE show in the form of Monday Night RAW this week. It was a better show than the post-Survivor Series RAW in that they were at least able to establish the majority of the major matches for the upcoming TLC PPV such as they are. The final segment building to the title unification match was also pretty good, along with the Shield six-man. However, the majority of the show still felt like a complete chore to get through, and apart from the main event the TLC card seems to be heading down that road too. What is more is that next week is the Slammys, meaning that most of the major build for that show took place on this week's show, and I don't believe that they delivered enough compelling content to recoup some of the damage caused by PPVs over the last few months.

They opened with CM Punk making his way down to the ring to a moderate ovation. A replay of the big Reigns spear and Shield beat down from last week aired. Punk had made a reluctant deduction that last week's Shield attack was due to him bad mouthing the Authority. If it was true he called them some of the sorriest "d***** *****" (bleeped in this newsletter as it was on TV) in the company. This brought Stephanie out, playing the friendly corporate heel. She brought Libertarian Kane out to address Punk's concerns. I find the fact that Kane makes it out to his old theme with the hell fire in the background rather humorous. Punk stated that he was being patronized threatened to KO Kane or make him go-to-sleep. Kane was held back by Stephanie before the Shield made it down. Punk rushed frantically for a steal chair, but Stephanie called the Shield off asking for Punk to be "respected and admired". It was then that Stephanie left and Kane booked a 3-on-1 handicap match at TLC; Punk versus the Shield. We have seen enough handicap matches over the past few weeks. Cole read a GUARANTEE that there would be one champion coming out of TLC. It was then that an App graphic came up for fans to vote for the champion's title "Unified champion", "Undisputed WWE champion" and "Undisputed World champion" were the options. The Slammys are next week, on the go-home show for the PPV; not a very good idea.

Damien Sandow was in the ring for a number one contender's match against Dolf Ziggler with Big E on commentary. This was their third match, with two stipulation matches leading to the awe inspiring singles match. Sandow won clean with the full-nelson slam – a better match than the other two by a wide margin. Poor Dolf. A graphic aired with a list of accolades held by Orton and Cena – comically long it was. We had yet another multi-women tag match this week with the Bellas & Natalya going up against Summer Rae, Tamina & AJ. AJ was skipping around the ring for the majority of the match. Summer was terribly incompetent finally making the tag to AJ after botching a sunset flip with Natalya grabbing the rollup for the win. AJ was moderately upset before skipping off not bothered in the least to lose this match. Wade Barrett has been given his "Bad News Barrett" character from the JBL & Cole show – he does a good news/bad news gimmick. The good news what they were live, the bad news was that they were in Oklahoma; and then it ended. I can't see this lasting very long. Orton was intimidating Maddox backstage wanting him to let it be known that he was bigger than the WWE and more well known than Cena.

In a very surprising turn of events a graphic popped up plugging Austin's podcast with Bryan. Bryan was down for a match with Rowan. It looks like they are heavily teasing Bryan joining the Wyatts; hopefully they aren't that stupid. Rowan slammed Bryan hard into the barricade catching him on a tope before they cut to break. Rowan, while green, has improved a lot as of late and was more than competent when in there with Bryan. Bryan was able win with a rollup before the lights went out and Wyatt appeared on the tron. He claimed that Bryan was living a lie and ordered Bryan to open his eyes. After the break Bryan came by Kane at the back and Kane booked another 3-on-1 handicap match, Bryan against the Wyatts for TLC. Okay, they are that stupid. Xavier Woods & R-Truth were down for a match against Sweet T & Brodus Clay. Clay now has dinosaur spines on his

gear. Xavier pinned Clay with a rollup to end a boring, lumbering affair. If it wasn't clear from SmackDown last week, Clay is turning heel. Cody Rhodes, Goldust & Big Show were set to face off against the Shield later on. Sin Cara made it down to the ring. It was Hunico under the hood, as Mistico is down in Mexico flaunting his real identity and burning bridges as fast as humanly possible. He did not attempt the trampoline spot into the ring. Del Rio claimed that he would send SIN CARA SOUTH OF THE BORDER and then waved the Mexican flag. Unfortunately Mistico didn't take his lights with him. Sin Cara pinned Del Rio with a top rope senton; from World Champion to losing to Sin Cara on RAW. Hunico is world's better at working the WWE style than Mistico. A video recap was shown of Orton punting Cena's father in 2007. Cena was standing by with Renee Young saying that in the 80s the World Title meant everything in the South and the WWE title everything in the North – close enough I guess.

The Shield were in the back saying that Punk couldn't beat them as singles, let alone in 3-on-1 competition. The Rhodes Brothers & Big Show were down with their match against the Shield. Glad to see that after being kicked in the head to the brink of death that Show is peachy. Ambrose took some huge chest slaps early on. Before the match got under way Reigns was pulling his tongue out at the Show. Reigns was finally tagged in to chest slapping. Rollins offered sound advice to



combating the Big Show -- "pull on his beard"! Punk was shown looking on in the back. Cody ran wild on Ambrose, before Ambrose was able to get hold of and target the arm. The Shield had the heat on Cody for quite some time before the hot tag was made to the Big Show. However, the Shield garnered the advantage once again when low bridging the Big Show to the floor! Show finally landed a big chokeslam before making the hot tag to Goldust who is masterful both as the babyface in peril and as a face running wild. He then proceeded to bust out a hurricanrana of all things! Big Show got his revenge on Ambrose with a low bridge. Rollins and Goldust were down in the ring when Reigns killed Show with a spear on the floor. Cody responded with a splash to the outside still selling the arm. Goldust went for a superplex on Ambrose onto Rollins, but Rollins moved and grabbed a rollup for the win. This match made me happy. Don't break up the Shield...ever.

A clip aired from the Breaking Point 2009 I Quit match between Cena & Orton. Renee Young was backstage with CM Punk requesting his reaction to the 3-on-1 handicap match. Punk preceded to sing 'I Feel Pretty'. He became very serious and stated that he would be taken down, but the real

question was how many members of the Shield he would take with him. Bad New Barrett segment notifying the crowd of the consequences of Thanksgiving gluttony. Kingston & Miz were out for a match with Ryback & Curtis Axel stating that they would give it one more try. They had to turn Miz again after last week's abomination of a segment. Ryback pinned Kofi with a shell shock before Miz lifted him up and slapped him. Los Matadores were hawking merchandise with El Torito freaking out on the desk grabbing everything. They now have promo codes for discounts during RAW – I wonder if the wrestlers get an extra cut. Regardless, these segments are a highlight each week.

Fandango was down with Summer Rae for a match with Mark Henry. Henry did some lewd dancing towards Summer Rae -- "sexual chocolate" chants. They had a highly unremarkable match before Henry landed the World's Strongest Slam for the win. Henry invited Summer in to dance. She was disgusted, but Henry took a bow regardless. There was a recap of the repugnant Titus 'O Neal giant swing segment from SmackDown. Titus 'O Neil & Darren Young were down for a match with The Real Americans. Swagger and Cesaro have a new double team where Cesaro vaults over Swagger into a double stomp. Cesaro wanted to do the giant swing against the advice of everyone. After a few reps Colter jumped on the apron, Titus seemed sick, but managed to make the tag. Young came off the top, but was killed with an uppercut for the win. Titus feigned motion sickness after the major. Unfortunately for Titus I can see him being stuck with this for a long time. The results of the title poll were shown with "The Unified Champion" won with 38% of the vote. Lawler did say how he voted for "Unified champion" earlier on in the night, due to his Memphis ties, so I can see that being a contributing factor. Still, they changed their tune from this poll being a deciding factor, to a "recommendation to the Authority"; don't expect a unified champion any time soon. Lawler pushed Cena/Orton as THE GREATEST MATCH OF ALL TIME. Sorry Misawa & Jumbo, step aside.



Hunter & Stephanie made it down to the ring for the contract signing with all of the TLC props around ringside. Cena & Orton were brought down for the signing. Hunter mentioned the "greats" that had held the WWE: Bruno, Rogers, Backlund, Rock & Austin – Stephanie piped in "and Triple H...". He also gave the bogus "from Frank Gotch" lineage of the World title, again Steph piped in with "and Triple H..." to an awkward stare. Hunter hyped the match up as best he could before having both Cena and Orton sign. Orton was given the mic saying that he had beaten all the greats (including Triple H). Orton said "I kicked your father in the head a few years ago" and laughed.

Cena responded with a smile, as if to say "that's right, good times". Cena did some of his usual comedy before talking of how Orton never reached his potential. Cena offered him the option of leaving or making a move. Of course Orton flipped the table over leading to a brawl out on the floor with Cena ramming Orton with a ladder and landing a few chair shots. Then like a complete idiot, in the middle of this intense brawl Cena handed a shirt to a kid in the crowd and had a ladder driven into his head as a result. Orton was then sent into the table and did Batista's thumbs up thumbs down gimmick landing an AA through the table and lifting both titles above his head. A wrestling contract signing broke down into a brawl – who would have guessed.

RAW Ratings for December 2nd 2013

I am working on the segment by segment and quarterly hours, but there has been no new news on that as of yet.

This week's edition of Monday Night RAW was down significantly from last week's post Survivor Series edition of the show. This was to be expected, as RAW coming out of PPVs tend to draw higher numbers than regular shows such as this. However, it was a decline beyond the scope of that trend. There was also no tremendous growth in NFL viewership for the Sea hawks/ Saints game this week, which drew 15.5 million viewers as opposed to last week's 13.16. This week's show averaged 3.53 million viewers and pulled a 2.7 rating, and was therefore not only amongst the lowest viewed non-holiday shows of the last fifteen years, but one of the lowest rated shows of that time period overall. The first hour drew 3.616 million viewers (a 1.24 rating and 1.574 million viewers in the 18-49 demo and 8th for the night on cable). The second hour drew 3.560 million viewers (a 1.26 rating and 1.598 million viewers in the 18-49 demo and 7th for the night on cable). The third and final hour drew 3.447 million viewers (a 1.27 and 1.61 million viewers in the 18-49 demo, behind Fast n' Loud, Chrissy & Mr. Jones 2, Love & Hip-Hop 4, Sports Center and the football game). The interesting thing to note about the pattern is that it did follow the unhealthy decline over the three hours overall, but they actually showed gains in the 18-49 demo hour on hour. Unfortunately quarter hours and segment by segment breakdowns have become pretty difficult to find as of late, so it is challenging to deduce the causes of these dips in the short term under circumstances such as this.

WWE NXT – December 4th 2013. Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL. Ben Carass.

Another new generic developmental diva made the ring introductions for the women's championship opener. I've given up trying to keep track on the revolving door of ring announcers on this show; she was young and pretty, just like the last two girls they had in that role.

NXT Women's Championship: Paige (C) vs. Natalya

They shook hands and proceeded to go at it like two respectful babyfaces, with some chain wrestling and a lot of hold reversals, including a bridge spot. After a break, the women traded abdominal stretches and Paige fired up with some shots to Nattie in the corner. Both girls hit a crossbody for the double down then Nattie made a comeback and delivered a sit-out front-powerslam. Nattie scored with her discuss lariat for a near-fall then hooked the sharpshooter; Paige fought towards the ropes and rolled through, sending Nattie into the turnbuckle. Finish saw Paige get the win with her lightening spiral. – *Paige retained the NXT Women's Championship over Natalya via pinfall, at 9:58 (TV Time).* The girls hugged it out and Paige celebrated with her belt. –

Best women's match the WWE has produced in a LONG time. I recall raving about a match Nattie had with Beth Phoenix on SmackDown last year and this could easily stand alongside something of that calibre. After some of the recent horrendous efforts from the main roster Divas there is absolutely no comparison with Paige, who probably should have been called up to Raw a long time ago. Although, she would never get the chance to have a solid ten minute match so perhaps it is best that they wait until they are over their phase of putting horrible workers on TV for their own morbid amusement. I must admit to laughing at some of the terrible bumps and blown spots we've seen, but WWE has set women's pro wrestling back almost 50 years with their nonsense and letting someone like Paige go out and wrestle on TV would go a long way to bringing the girls out of the dark ages.

Antonio Cesaro cut a promo on William Regal in the back; he put on a phony British accent and told Regal to stay out of his grill. Leo Kruger showed up and asked to join the Real Americans; Cesaro thought about it for a while then Leo noted he had an upcoming match with Sami Zayn. Cesaro said he would talk to Zeb about Leo joining them if he did something for him as well then whispered in Leo's ear. The two were all smiles, Cesaro walked off and Leo continued to repeat, "Sami Zayn".

Aiden English vs. Unnamed Jobber

English interrupted the geek's ring intro with his sing song. I'm sure each week he satirises a different famous musical number, however I have zero knowledge about musical theatre; if only he pulled out some death metal tunes, then we'd be in business. English quoted Hamlet's "to be, or not to be" (I may be ignorant when it comes to musicals, but I know my Shakespeare) and hit his version of the side-effect. – *Aiden English defeated a Jobber via pinfall, at 2:01* . More singing ensued. – *English's act is over with the NXT fans, however I don't see main roster potential in this wacky gimmick. If he were to debut on Raw, I would expect a bemused silence, similar to the reaction Los Matadores received when they first arrived.*

Antonio Cesaro hit the stage and apologised to Byron Saxton for his actions last week; he called Saxton over from the announce table and shook his hand. Cesaro apologised in five different languages then tried to get Saxton to join in with the "We the people" gimmick. Saxton half-heartedly repeated the phrase; Cesaro was unimpressed and demanded to know where William Regal was then he slapped poor Byron, who took a bump on the ramp. – *Week two of the build for Cesaro/Regal; nothing special, but I'm still doing backflips waiting to see that match.*

A backstage promo from Sami Zayn rolled; he wished Adrian Neville luck after their match last week then said he would be back for the NXT gold. Leo Kruger ambushed him from behind and Sami was left lying; Leo did his "ta-ta" bit and scarpered.

Tyson Kidd vs. Leo Kruger

They showed an angle from February where Leo tried to attack the injured knee of Kidd, so Kidd started off aggressive and showed off his speed with some kicks. Kidd continued to shine until Leo delivered a stunner to the leg then Kruger went to work on the knee. Leo used a sharpshooter during the heat then Sami Zayn showed up for the finish. Leo was distracted by Sami's presence and Kidd used a reverse victory-roll to get the pin. – *Tyson Kidd defeated Leo Kruger via pinfall, at 6:13 (TV Time).* Decent little match, although the predictable WWE distraction finish was lame. Since Kidd hasn't got much main roster time since he returned, I could see him being used in a similar role to Cesaro down in NXT. He can have a good match with just about anyone and the greener

developmental guys could learn a thing or two by getting some ring time with a worker as good as Kidd.

Backstage, Hunico and Camacho were interviewed by someone off camera, TNA style. They did a basic promo full of Latino clichés about winning the Tag Titles next week.

NXT Championship Match: Adrian Neville vs. Bo Dallas (C)

Bo went to the floor after he ate a back heel kick during Neville's shine then landed a cheap forearm shot off a ref break in the corner to start the heat. Dallas missed a knee-drop off the second rope and Neville started a fiery comeback then scored with his twisting plancha for a near-fall. Bo escaped the British Airways by rolling to the outside again, however Neville wiped him out with a big crossbody to the floor. Both guys sold the high spot and the ref started his ten count; Neville slid back inside at nine, but Bo didn't make it and was counted out. – *Adrian Neville defeated Bo Dallas via count-out, at 7:10 (TV Time).* – *Basic stuff from the main event and another cheap way for Bo to retain the title, which only adds more heat to his already despised character. I suppose you could complain about the lack of a clean finish here, but it wouldn't make much sense to do so. After all, we have seen far worse finishes on PPV lately.*

A good hour of wrestling this week from NXT that saw the women take centre stage and completely steal the show. Kruger/Kidd was decent and the main event was fine, however you owe it to yourself to see what is possible from two Divas that are not restricted by time constraints or hindered by carrying deadweight like 90% of girls on the main roster.

TNA iMPACT December 5th 2013 iMPACT Zone, Orlando, Florida

Overall Thoughts:

In terms of TNA's build towards the finals of their World Title tournament this show did a decent job per company standards, however you have to question some of the intricacies of the tournament itself. What is perhaps one of the most noticeable distinctions of the entire tournament is that every single match has been a stipulation match, which hasn't worked in the context of a World Title tournament. In fact, by having so many no-DQ style matches they devalue the title and their TV show as a whole, as the World Title should be a pure wrestling title for the most part. The second problem with the tournament, much like the WWE title tournament in 2011, is that it is blatantly obvious that AJ Styles will be returning with the real title. Therefore the best that we can really hope for this tournament winner is a unification match, at worst would be a complete blow-off of this title win. So with those thoughts in the minds of the viewing audience, why would anyone care? This was a fun show, and pretty easy to sit through, but it suffered from a recurring TNA problem. Editions of iMPACT come and go, some are good, some are bad, but now more than ever before they simply feel meaningless, and that is one of their most major problems, and it has been for years.

The show opened up with a bizarre video package of androids or dummies watching iMPACT. Pretty close to reality then. Angle came down for a promo thanking the fans and bringing Magnus down, who he was set to face later on. Angle called him out for quitting on his injury, and criticized him for not fighting through injuries like he had throughout his career. Seeing the condition that Angle's body is in I don't think I would follow him in working through those injuries. Magnus affirmed that he has the heart of a champion. Angle stated that Magnus would need to go through

him for the title. This brought Roode out saying that they both lacked killer instinct; Magnus would never be a World Champion. This brought Hardy done with no face paint dragging a table behind him. He started his own "hardy" chant, which came across as unbelievably lame. This brought us straight into the Roode/Hardy tables match after the break. Hardy came extraordinarily close to cracking the table with his foot after missing a whisper in the wind. Both men were fighting on the apron before Hardy landed a high kick and both men went through the table. They went to the break and when they came back they showed Stiffler and Brian Hebner arguing over who went through the table first. This brought Earl Hebner down to call for a restart. Regardless they worked hard for the remainder of the match before Roode was kicked off the apron through a table for the win.

An iMPACT #365 video aired with EC3 getting make-up applied talking about his legendary opponent for later on. Dixie Carter received a FedEx letter saying that the title belt was in transit. Pretty sure that the package will not contain the title. On a funny side note Dixie had a beer bottle with her name on in the background. EC3 was out saying how his opponent had been in the ring with Bret Hart, Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan – Earl Hebner. Hebner refused. EC3 called Hebner one of the "99 percenters", and he worked Carter and would have to do what he said. This brought Spud out forcing Brian Hebner to referee the match. Carter suggested Hebner lie down after insulting his son. After some stalling and Bateman fire, Earl lay down. The bell rang, EC3 placed a finger on Hebner's chest and Brian counted three. For some reason Earl was still on the mat and was rolled out to the floor before Brian raised EC3's hand. There was a recap of Daniels dumping blood on Park. Daniels & Kazarian spoke of the evidence that they had gathered in an envelope backstage. Serial killer Samuel Shaw was in a restaurant with Christy Hemming threatening to cut the eyes out of the waiter if he looked at Hemming wrong while Hemming has walked off to the rest room. Luckily the talent don't watch their own product. There was a friends of AJ video package involving AJ's international excursion. The airing of these videos no longer bothers Carter I guess. Speaking of Carter, she was in the back and received some flowers that she expected to be her title.

Dixie introduced a Feast or Fired gimmick to mostly unseen performers in the back. Kazarian and Daniels made it out for an expose when Park walked down. Park claimed that they had won. Daniels & Kazarian were threatening to drop some scoops when Park ripped up their envelope; it was simply a decoy. They cut to an iMPACT 365 video of Bad Influence at Park, Park & Park offices. They walked it into his office and it was empty. Turns out that Park, Park & Park closed 13 years ago. Park begged for them to leave him alone when Kazarian called him a liar and spat in his face. A beatdown ensued before Eric Young ran down and challenged Bad Influence to a tag match next week. Sting was talking to Magnus in the back telling him how proud he was. The BroMans made it down with Zema Ion on the air horn for a match with Storm & Gunner. Storm had the cover on Jesse, but Gunner mauled E after he spat beer into his face for the DQ building further to the team's breakup. Sting was backstage unaware of who Spud was. Sting actually made a tremendous comment: "I'm sure you've heard me albums". Sting made fun of Spud's size, Spud told Sting to leave, Spud left instead and Sting screamed into the locker room for no apparent reason.. There was an iMPACT 365 with Kim backstage with Robert Irvine and another with Sky & Sabin still together. Laura Dennis (Cherry Bomb, I believe) was out for a match against Gail Kim with Lei D. Tapa out on the floor. Dennis was impressive as expected, showing tons of fire, evening landing a Sliding D at one point. Kim pinned her clean with eat defeat before a post match beat down from both her and Tapa, and a run in from ODB cleaning house.

Dixie wanted to know where her package was; and we were lucky with 20 minutes left on the clock it had arrived in the building. Magnus was out for his last man standing match with Kurt Angle. Why last man standing? Well, because they are TNA. The two were in the middle of a match, they cut to a break, and when they came back Dixie Carter was shown getting ready to open her package. Angle landed his rolling Germans before tumbling down to the floor after a spear on Magnus. Angle was super red at this point for whatever reason. Mandatory mainevent ref bump leading to Bobby

Roode attacking Angle from behind . Brian Hebner really had it bad tonight, It looked like both men were going to make it to their feet, but Magnus collapsed with Roode going after Angle before Hardy made the save. Hardy and Magnus shook hands. Dixie and Spud were ready to open the package. Inside it was a toy Knockout's title – who would have guessed? Dixie then feigned anger in the most embarrassing manner. There was a friends of AJ video saying that if Dixie wanted to the title she would have to come down to Georgia and get it to close off the show.

WWE SmackDown – December 6th 2013.

BOK Centre: Tulsa, OK.

Ben Carass.

Randy Orton showed up to delight us with another monotone in-ring promo. He hyped the unification match with Cena then put himself over as a tough guy for taking a beating from Cena on Raw and called himself the greatest superstar of any generation. Orton said he never liked John Cena, but claimed he always “revered” Stephanie and Triple H because they had “worked wonders” for the WWE. Randy apologised to “the authority” for not appreciating all they had done for him then Daniel Bryan came out; he stated that Orton needed to apologise to all the fans for impersonating a champion and told Randy that he never legitimately beat him in all their title matches. Bryan noted he had been busy with the Wyatts, however he had not forgotten all the times he was screwed over and declared that he would be waiting at the front of the line to face whoever wins the TLC unification match. Bryan challenged Randy to a match later on but Orton refused, so Bryan asked the people if they wanted to see the match and the fans chanted, “Yes”. Orton left the ring and Cole said there was no doubt that the WWE Universe wanted to see the match; JBL replied, “Who cares? They don’t book matches around here.” – *A basic opening segment; heel champ talks for a while then the wronged babyface shows up to challenge his old nemesis. Although Bryan should have cut this promo a long time ago, like after SummerSlam or at least when he was still in the title programme. Orton claiming he always respected Hunter & Steph was also laughable, especially when you think back to their 2009 blood feud. But, he is a heel so I suppose he can lie all he wants.*

Non-Title Match: Big E. Langston (IC Champion) vs. Fandango w/ Summer Rae

Damien Sandow was on commentary and he told Cole he would be the next IC Champ. E shone briefly with power spots, but Fandango landed a clothesline on the outside for the heat spot. E made a comeback and landed the Hellwig splash. Finish saw E dump Fandango off the top rope and he hit the big ending. – *Big E. Langston defeated Fandango via pinfall, at 2:45. Sandow got in the ring and faced off with Big E; E held his belt in the air and Damien naturally backed off like a heel. – Nothing more than a showcase match for Big E. If, and that is a big IF, if they are going to unify the two World titles then the IC title is going to need some serious rehabbing after years and years of neglect. Big E wouldn’t have been my first choice to resurrect the IC division, however as long as he is booked strong and isn’t jobbing to the real main eventers, or even trading wins with mid-carders, then they have a foundation to rebuild on. I still think it will take years for the belt to mean anything and all of this speculation will likely be made redundant when the World title unification is pulled out from under us. I could be completely wrong (I have been many times before), but I just cannot believe that they will deliver what they are promising at TLC. Never have the words, “I’ll believe it when I see it” been more appropriate.*

Non-Title Match: Cody Rhodes & Goldust (Tag Team Champions) vs. Ryback & Curtis Axel

They showed the angle from Main Event that set this thing up. The heels got some heat on Goldust;

Goldie caught Axel with a powerslam for a double-down then Cody fired up off the hot tag and got a near-fall off a moonsault press. Finish came when Goldust took himself and Ryback over the top with a clothesline then Cody drilled Ryback with a disaster kick off the announce table. Axel hooked Cody in a small package as he tried to get back in the ring and got the three count. – *Curtis Axel & Ryback defeated The Rhodes Brothers via pinfall, at 4:14. – I guess Axel & Ryback are getting a title shot at TLC and someone realised they needed a win after all the jobbing they have done recently. Still, couldn't they have beaten a couple of prelim babyface teams then had some kind of angle or no-contest with the Rhodes Brothers, instead of beating the champs clean the first time around in 4 minutes? The finish made Cody look dumb as he had the legal man down in the ring, but he decided to go after Ryback on the floor. Earning a title shot by pinning the champion(s) always comes across as lazy booking to me, but that is the price you pay for 50/50 booking, which isn't so much lazy as it is completely stupid.*

We got a Bad News Barrett segment. Wade buried the Oklahoma fans and that was about it. – *I'm afraid I don't watch the JBL & Cole show, so I had never seen this gimmick before Raw, but as soon as I saw Barrett behind a podium I knew nothing good could come of it. The name "Bad News Barrett" maybe corny, but if it helped repackage Wade then I would have been all for it. But how on earth is making irrelevant statements supposed to reinvigorate Barrett's tough-guy character? I don't remember Bad News Allen randomly showing up during WWF Superstars in the 80's and making meaningless announcements; maybe if there was a YouTube show that nobody watched back then he would have also been sentenced to this waste of time gimmick.*

Kofi Kingston vs. Alberto Del Rio

They showed Del Rio losing to Sin Cara on Raw, which led to a whoopin' from Alberto. The match never officially got started, because Del Rio jumped Kofi during his entrance; Alberto tossed Kofi into the barricade then threw a short-superkick and slapped on the armbreaker. Cole and JBL played up the idea that Alberto was making a statement after his lose to Sin Cara. – *A nice angle considering Del Rio put over a character that had lost any shred of respectability a long time ago. I did see a few kids in Sin Cara masks at the Raw taping I attended last month, so I guess WWE still believes that gimmick is a major cash cow for them. I have no problem with Hunico taking over the role, as Luis Alvirde never quite adapted to the style or reached the performances levels he achieved in his CMLL run. What is concerning however, is that Del Rio is being used to get the character over again. With WrestleMania coming up, WWE needs all the top/second from the top guys to be as strong as possible and I don't believe this programme will do Alberto any favours at all in that department.*

The Shield cut a promo in the back. Reigns threatened to destroy CM Punk tonight, but Rollins said they didn't want to hurt Punk so badly that he wouldn't make it to TLC. Reigns noted that it would take the "baddest man in the Shield" to take out the Best in the World; Ambrose interjected and nominated himself for the job. Reigns gave a subtle quizzical look and Dean walked away. – *Great stuff here; Reigns was clearly putting himself over as the only man that could take out Punk and he was shut down by Ambrose. I will be sad when the Shield dissolves, but if they keep telling the story like this then at least we will get a solid narrative and Roman Reigns will undoubtedly become a huge babyface by the time they are done.*

Non-Title Match: CM Punk vs. Dean Ambrose (US Champion)

Things started out fairly even; Punk did some wacky Sean Waltman short legdrops and Ambrose landed a clothesline then worked a chinlock. Punk went for the GTS and Ambrose escaped to the

floor; Punk followed, but Ambrose sent his ribs into the apron a bunch of times, playing off the “injury” from the spear a couple of weeks ago. Ambrose got the heat and worked over the ribs then landed a spinebuster; Punk avoided an elbow from the top and hit some hope spots, however Ambrose hooked a backslide and transitioned into a Fujiwara armbar. Punk fought out to apply the anaconda vice, but Ambrose got to the ropes. Dean delivered a butterfly superplex and applied the Fujiwara again; Punk made it to the ropes then got some near-falls off an O’Connor roll and a head kick. After some finisher reversals, Punk took the ring post spot and was rolled up for a near-fall then the finish saw Punk counter Dean’s headlock DDT and deliver the GTS. – *CM Punk defeated Dean Ambrose via pinfall, at 9:49 (TV Time).* – *Highly enjoyable match, mostly because it didn’t follow the WWE formula of, shine, heat, hope spots, cut off, comeback, near-falls and the finish. Nice psychology with Ambrose going after the ribs and the arm as well for good measure; it’s just a shame this is building to another lame handicap match.*

Rey Mysterio joined Renee Young in the back. Zeb Colter showed up with the Real Americans and subjected Rey to his usual xenophobic routine then challenged Rey to find a partner to take on the Americans.

Natalya vs. Tamina Snuka w/ AJ (Diva’s Champion)

AJ was on commentary and buried Nattie for being boring. Nattie hit her discuss lariat early then Tamina sent her into the ring post for the heat spot. Finish was no good: Tamina missed the Superfly splash and Nattie got the pin, just like that. – *Natalya defeated Tamina via pinfall, at 2:55.* – *Nothing segment; check out NXT if you want to see what talented women are capable of.*

Rey Mysterio & Big Show vs. The Real Americas w/ Zeb Colter.

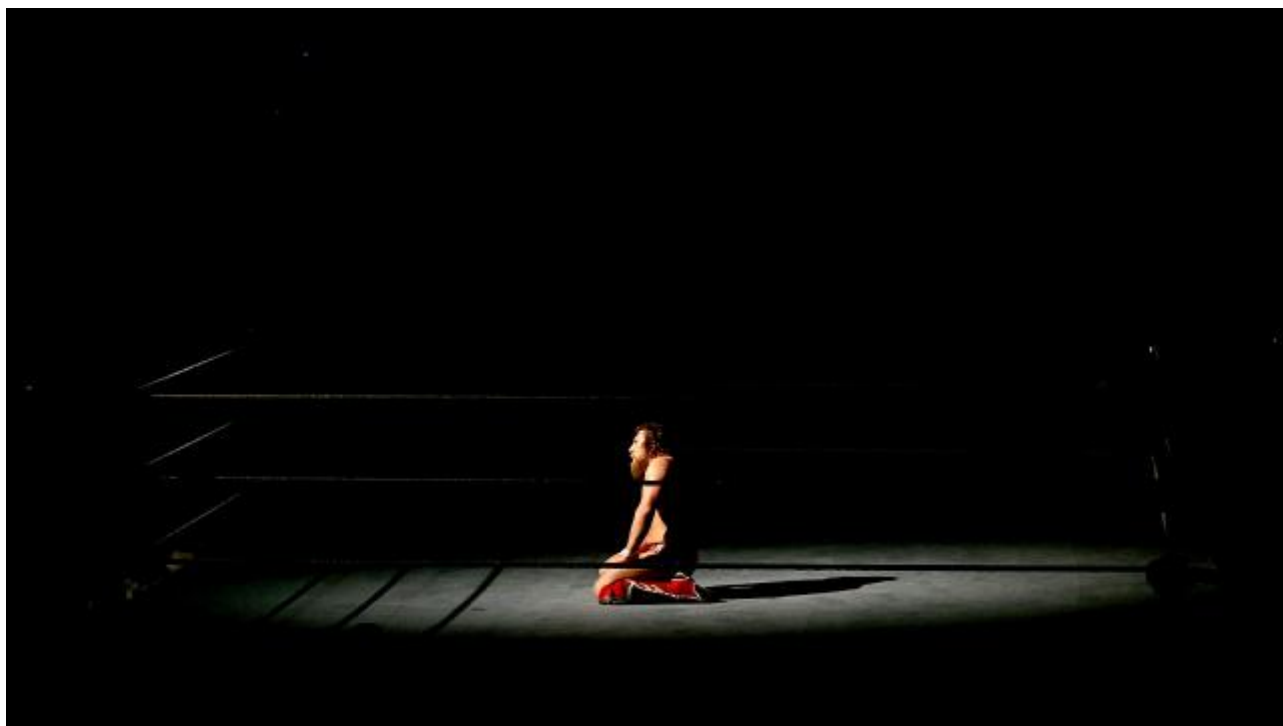
Swagger hit Rey with a wheelbarrow suplex to start the heat and Cesaro drilled him with a running knee on the floor. JBL heeled on Rey for wearing a mask and asked what kind of person covers their face in everyday life; Cole replied, “Batman wears a mask and he is a citizen”, which I thought was quite funny. Rey landed a tornado DDT for the double-down and Show ran wild off the hot tag. For the finish, Show hit Cesaro with a spear and Rey took out Swagger with the 619; Show chokeslammed Cesaro and Rey dropped the dime off Show’s shoulders to get the win. – *Rey Mysterio & Big Show defeated the Real Americans via pinfall, at 4:20.* – *So much for my, “they are protecting Cesaro” theory. Surely it is time for younger guys like Swagger & especially Cesaro to become the focus of something serious, instead of jobbing in meaningless matches to guys that are pushing 40 and are on the verge of breaking down.*

A video package hyped the unification match at TLC; they pulled out clips of former WWE/NWA champs: Rogers, Bruno, Hogan, Michaels, Austin, Rock, Flair, Race, Rhodes among others were shown. Then an interview with Triple H rolled; Trips played up the importance of the unification match and he guaranteed that “the King of Kings” would crown an undisputed champion. – *Stuff like this would mean so much more if Orton/Cena didn’t feel like a last minute decision and people actually trusted them to deliver on their promises.*

Another Bad New Barrett deal saw Wade explain that whoever wins the unification match would become the target of everybody else in the locker room.

Non-Title Match: Daniel Bryan vs. Randy Orton (WWE Champion)

JBL claimed that Orton/Cena at TLC was bigger than Ali/Frazier, which is absolutely laughable. Bryan shone and went after the arm. Orton landed his inverted headlock backbreaker; Bryan came



back and went for a tope, but Orton escaped to the timekeeper's area. Orton had the heat after the break and Cole tried his best to make Orton/Cena seem like a big deal. He explained that Chris Jericho only unified the WWE and WCW titles, however Cena/Orton would be for the unification of the "World title that dates back to 1905". This was so preposterous I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Bryan fired up with his comeback and delivered a super-rana then scored with a tope. Orton landed the hangman DDT for a near-fall, but Bryan came back with a headkick and went up top for the diving headbutt. The Wyatt Family came down to ringside and Bryan was distracted like a goof for the finish, which saw Orton hit an RKO. – *Randy Orton defeated Daniel Bryan via pinfall, at 8:45 (TV Time)*. Orton left with his belt then Bray Wyatt appeared on the Tron; Bray told Bryan that at TLC he would realise what he really was and urged him to join the Family. – *Decent main event, nothing special though. The finish was typical WWE idiocy that made one of the most over babyfaces look like an utter chump. On a similar note, if creative really thinks turning Bryan heel and joining with the Wyatts is a good idea then it is clear they have lost touch with reality. There may come a point in the future when a turn for Bryan would make sense, but after months of being screwed and buried beyond belief, he really needs to come out on top of a programme that means something. Joining with the Family at this point would just be another slap in the face of all the fans that got behind Bryan in the first place and would send a message that the almighty WWE machine picks the top stars, not the fans that pay their hard earned money to cheer whoever they want.*

If you didn't know any better, this episode of SmackDown could have fooled you into thinking the WWE product isn't a steaming pile of garbage at the minute. There was good wrestling up and down the card and unlike last week there were no horrendous segments or anything too offensively bad. Some of the finishes were questionable, but overall this was a very good professional wrestling television show. They even spent a lot of time trying to make Cena/Orton seem important, which may be a lost cause at this point, however at least they tried to make the unification match seem significant. The two handicap matches at TLC may seem like lazy booking, and honestly it is, however Punk & Bryan are both super over and should be able to make people care about whatever

they are involved in. Whether they can make anyone pay to see what happens is another issue entirely.

This Week in Wrestling by the Numbers

4: Years since the passing of one of the greatest big men of this era -- Umaga.

18: Years since Manami Toyota pinned Dynamite Kansai to win the WWWA title at Sumo Hall as of December 4th.

55: Age of Dynamite Kid as of his December 5th birthday. As we noted a couple of weeks ago he is in rough shape after suffering multiple small strokes over the last few weeks. He apparently lost use of his right arm, but has regained mobility in it as of the last few days. However, he is still suffering from an unrelated eye issue, and I would guess that there are some other complications from the strokes.

611: The sad attendance figure for the second night of All Japan's tag team tournament at the Osaka Bodymaker Coliseum.

87,000: Domestic buys for WWE's terrible Battleground PPV With all things being equal it still ranks above some of the weaker shows of recent years such as Capital Punishment, but it is in no way a good number.

121,000: Domestic buys for the WWE Hell in a Cell PPV, which is down quite a bit from last year's buyrate of 157,000.

1,240,000: iMPACT TV viewers this week, up significantly from one of the lowest Spike viewerships that they have ever drawn last week, 825,000. They were going up against a far weaker football game, which probably contributed to the spike. Although, historically external factors have very little influence on iMPACT and its ratings.

Bits & Pieces

In an interview conducted with Metro Bret Hart commented that he "[regrets] all of it" when referring to the events following the Montreal Screwjob and his departure from the WWF in 1997. He also remarked "I wish I had never left the WWE but I've moved on". I believe that Hart is referencing his want to depart from the WWF in the first place, and not quitting after the screwjob; I couldn't see things going the other way after that incident. Bret also commented on the deaths of many of the people that he knew in the wrestling business, including Owen Hart, Rick Rude, and Curt Hennig saying: "I shake my head in anger that so many of them are not around when they should be". The full interview is available at metro.co.uk.

TNA are busy taping TV at the iMPACT Zone into early January and beyond. However, spoilers are jumbled, as they are taping the segments and matches out of sequence with the fans in the building not seeing any of the backstage segments. I assume that this is more due to time constraints and has less to do with avoiding spoiler leakage. During the tapings Magnus did win the TNA World Title, which I would think will lead to a unification match with AJ Styles down the line, a match that Styles should win given the manner that he has been pushed in. It still isn't all too clear as to whether or not AJ Styles has signed a long-term deal with the company, although letting Styles roam around with the title on a short term contract would be on an entirely different level of stupidity, even by TNA standards.

WrestleMania 2015 will be held at the Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara California. WWE will be hosting a press conference for the official announcement at the Santa Clara Convention Center on Tuesday. According to reports the San Francisco 49ers played a large part in securing the deal. The post-Mania RAW and Hall of Fame ceremony will take place at the SAP Center in San Jose.

Good Helmet has just released the first of two gargantuan Jerry Lawler compilations with the first set spanning 35 disks. The set is 90\$ for local customers and 100\$ for international customers. On top of that if you order either that set or a yearbook set you get the next yearbook at 75\$. For more information head over to prowrestlingonly.com.

Stephanie McMahon was granted a position change this week from Executive Vice President of Creative, a position that she has held since 2007, to Chief Brand Officer. I doubt that the change will have a major impact on the creative direction.

Personal Note

Whilst this is in no way wrestling related, I would be amiss if I were not to mention the passing of Nelson Mandela. Often times when public figures pass away there is a great deal of synthetic emotion and hollow statements made by people in order to feel included in an eventful period – this is not one of those times. In fact, it is only when a rare figure of Nelson Mandela's magnitude and stature passes away that I believe one truly experiences a special connection with a person that you've never even met, and I am pretty sure that this is the case for most South Africans. I was born into a free South Africa and the people that I know and the life that I have lead up until this point are in large part due to that environment, an environment that would have been incredibly different if it wasn't for Madiba. Because of him and what he did for this country that I can raise my head proud. It is for that reason that I would like to say "Thank you Tata, farewell".

Next Week's Issue

Next week we look at the winners of the 2013 World Tag League along with the TLC go-home show, which just so happens to be the Slammys too, NXT, Impact with Magnus' World Title win, SmackDown, TLC preview, the Network, news, Akira Taue retirement show, more By the Numbers and more!

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