



Cubed Circle Newsletter – 117 Tokyo Dome 2014

We have another big issue for you this week covering everything Tokyo Dome, what it means for the company going forward, the Network and whether or not it will be a positive for the pro-wrestling business, Old School RAW, weeks worth of ratings, Ben covers the NXT tapings, NXT and SmackDown, plus the New Japan New Beginning line-up and more! With the preview out of the way I hope you enjoy the newsletter and have a great week!

- Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor

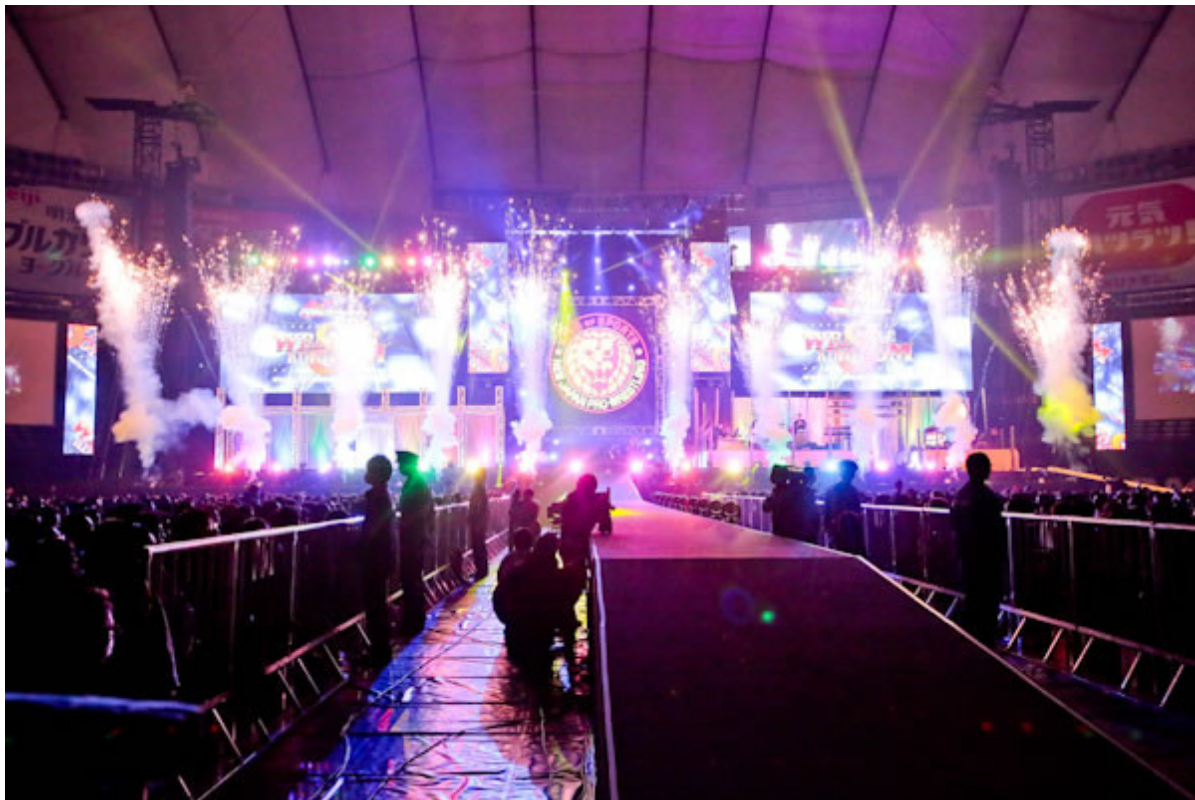
News

WrestleKingdom 8 Gateway to New Heights: New Japan's Post-Tokyo Dome 2014 Testing Ground

New Japan had momentum coming out of 2013, serious momentum. They have numerous important facets of their promotion all working to build the product up following the initial push that the company received in early 2012 with its purchase by Bushiroad. The stars are over, the matches are amongst the best you will see from this era, coupled with great presentation and some of the greatest shows that you will ever see. It is then, with this hike in business and product quality that New Japan, with the 2014 Tokyo Dome show, garnered the highest non-Mania attendance of any pro-wrestling company since the 2004 Dome show headlined by Tanahashi/Takayama in a title unification match and Muto & Sapp/Chono & Tenzan. Even with an impressive 9 year best, it could be even longer, as the 35,000 paid attendance of this year's Dome show is but a rough estimate, and concrete paid attendance announcements only became common place for New Japan in 2013.

We don't have iPPV numbers as of yet, but my believe is that like last year, the company is bound to draw in excess of 100,000 buys considering that they are hotter overall than they were last year. Even factoring in a 50 percent split with Ustream they should in theory be walking away with around 1.5 million dollars off of iPPV alone.

Even with live attendance, iPPV and other metrics booming, we were still met with a major surprise when NJPW announced their 2014 schedule during intermission. They booked an additional major, on this occasion super-Sumo Hall level, arena for 2014. The announcement of a return to Yokohama Arena, which holds around 16,000 for wrestling, was announced in November of 2013 for a May 25th show. It will be the first time that they have run the building in 11 years and will be a test for just how well the company has recovered over the past few years. However, few could have predicted the announcement that was to follow. For the first time in the 23/24 year history of New Japan's biggest tournament, the G1 Climax, the finals will not be held at Sumo Hall, an arena that they sold out the last three years. Instead they have opted for the Seibu Dome baseball stadium in Sapporo for the August 10th final. The arena holds approximately 30,000 for baseball, and with the stage set up, ramp, ringside area, announce desks etc. it will hold around the same for pro-wrestling



In the last boom period for New Japan during the 1990s and even running into as late of 2004, they were rather adventurous when running Tokyo Dome shows other than on January 4th. They also ran other super-20,000 seat buildings like the Osaka Dome, which they ran every few years up until 2004, Fukuoka until 2001 and the last non-January 4th Tokyo Dome show in October of 2005 - they also ran Budokan Hall up until 2003, although Budokan only holds about 16,000 for wrestling. From that point onwards they have mainly stuck with Sumo Hall, Bodymaker, and less frequently, the Hiroshima Sun Plaza for big shows. Their ability to draw a good house in the Seibu Dome will be based almost completely on roster strength, as the G1 is every year. This is because the card for the final night remains largely unknown until the second last show, such is

the way that New Japan books their tournaments, and the nature of tournaments in general. If they are able to draw 25,000 or more for a non-Tokyo Dome show it will be a tremendous sign of growth for the company. Not only that, but if they do manage to garner a sellout in Yokohama or close to it, and a good house at Seibu, it will put New Japan over WWE for number of attendances over 20,000 for 2014 most likely. Considering the vast gap between the two in terms of size that would be a tremendous, yet probable, accomplishment.

With the positive strides made over the past year and ebullient air coming out of the Dome, I find it funny that viewing WrestleKingdom 8 and 7 side by side, the majority of people would probably see New Japan, on that night in 2013, as the hotter of the two companies. Is that the case? No. However, last year's January 4th show set such a high standard for big shows that with this year's card it would have been highly unlikely that could have attained that level of excellence. This truth was brought forth when the Tokyo Dome card was officially announced, showcasing a far weaker undercard and match strength as a whole than last year's show. However, even factoring in all of these notions heading into the show, while the show most certainly remained very good, some of the top four matches fell below my expectations.

Why was this so even with a hotter product, improved business markers, a larger crowd and showmanship elevated to the nth degree? One of the most prevalent answers that I have heard has some degree of play - the show was simply too long. It ran around 45-60 minutes longer than last year, and with the lack of a quality balanced undercard similar to the 2013 show, the upper card was unable to sustain the crowd. That was assuredly a factor. Another reason given was that the crowd was inherently quieter than usual, which is also possible. However, while the crowd reactions hurt some of the matches like Naito/Okada and acted as restraints, even with great ring work, I don't feel the same way about Tanahashi/Nakamura. It had a good beginning and ending portion, but they didn't work the middle of the match as well as they could have - they made some really obtuse decisions.

Perhaps the most protected move of the last couple of years, with the exception of the rainmaker has been Hiroshi Tanahashi's high fly flow. If he lands the move to an opponent's front, it usually spells doom. Even at last year's Dome show, where a terrific Tanahashi/Okada match could have been made a classic by a high fly flow kick out, it was not done - the kickout wasn't used in the G1, it was used very little for Tanahashi's 404 day long reign of 2011, and annexed completely from his 295 day long reign of 2012. Therefore when Nakamura failed to get the knees up, took the high fly flow, and kicked out three quarters through the match to light applause, I was rightfully pulled out of the match in a state complete dismay. It was the same dismay that plagued my mind when Hiroshi Tanahashi - the same man who at times can be one of the best minds you will come across for putting together Japanese title matches - decided to stop selling his midsection and skin the cat, or better yet land a high fly flow to the floor.

We saw three major title changes on the show, with Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson as the new IWGP Tag Team champions over the Killer Elite Squad, Kota Ibushi triumphing over Prince Devitt as expected and what will end up being the most important of the three Hiroshi Tanahashi's IWGP Intercontinental Championship win over Shinsuke Nakamura. The reason for

the IC title's switches importance, besides the obvious of a top star winning the secondary title on the biggest show of the year, a second reason was revealed after the Dome show ended and New Japan announced the cards for its upcoming New Beginning shows and house show tours (full cards available in the Bits & Pieces section).

Instead of having one New Beginning iPPV and many smaller shows leading up to it, as has been the case for the last couple of years. New Japan are instead running two big shows one at the Hiroshima Sun Plaza on February 9th and a second on the 11th at the Bodymaker Coliseum in Osaka, both of which are entitled 'New Beginning'. They have been able to book two shows in strong buildings three days apart because Tanahashi & Nakamura will headline on the 9th and Okada & Goto will do the same on the 11th. It is not entirely like the WWE & World titles during the brand split. as they will still have the a singular roster on both shows, but with the IWGP Intercontinental championship being raised by Nakamura and Tanahashi to a very high level it will be strong enough to main event its own iPPV, hopefully hiking business for big shows.

The largest positive coming out of the dual title situation is that unlike I had expected, they haven't put their main title, the IWGP World Heavyweight championship, in a secondary role by elevating the IC championship, but have instead created two top titles with the IWGP Heavyweight title still remaining above the IC title. Okada and Goto will be headlining the more major of the two buildings in front of at times the hottest pro-wrestling crowd in the world at the Bodymaker Coliseum. They have attempted to balance out the two cards with other title matches, but the Osaka show finished with the better line-up with a NEVER title match with Naito defending against Ishii with the NEVER title now in the semi-main event, Devitt/El Desperado for the IWGP Jr. Heavyweight title and the Jr. Tag Title match with the Young Bucks versus the Time Splitters. The Hiroshima show will feature an IWGP tag title rematch from the Dome, as well as Satoshi Kojima defending his newly won NWA title against debuting Byron Wilcott, which most certainly isn't as strong as some of the top matches on the Osaka show. However, the Tanahashi/Nakamura match alone along with Okada, Naito and Goto in key roles should be enough for the show to succeed.

It will be interesting to see how Goto is handled during this period in that he is someone that needs to be given a new push or go through a change of some kind. That isn't to say that he should be the IWGP Heavyweight champion that would be a bad move for everyone involved, including Goto, but a long match with Goto seen at Okada's level on the 11th will go a long way. The most difficult factor to consider when booking Goto in title matches is he has already lost multiple times to Tanahashi in title matches, twice to Okada (one title one and number one contender's match) and lost the IC title to Nakamura after being somewhat rehabilitated during a short 161 day long reign as champion back in the early stages of 2012. One of Goto's biggest issues over the past few years has been his age as opposed to other top guys in the company. He was at one point pushed as the third member of the new three musketeers alongside Shinsuke Nakamura and Tanahashi, but that didn't work and he was left behind since he didn't have enough time to grow to their level. And he can't be placed in the future star role with Naito and Okada, because he came up during a different time and is slightly older. Last year they attempted

to position him with Anderson as a part of the short lived tag team, Guns & Swords, when they didn't know what to do with either man, but that didn't last long. It was his feud with Shibata last year that has helped him the most out of anything. seeing as how he was kept out of the title picture and was placed in a great natural rivalry where he could put on awesome strong style matches as he is one to do. From some of the Road to New Beginning house shows, as well as the Hiroshima show on the 9th, it would seem that they are high on the idea of a Goto/Shibata team, which I would be all for. But, we first need to see what happens at the Bodymaker, on the right night he and Okada will surprise a lot of people.

Looking at the way that they have structured at least the first tour coming out of the Dome, it makes more sense that they went with a lot of a re-hash for the dome; an idea that was frustratingly puzzling to myself and others when the Tokyo Dome card was originally announced. They have some big matches coming up, some that are truly going to test exactly how far New Japan can grow in the current climate, and with those tests in place they are going to need a healthy supply of strong matches. The Saeba show won't be able to have a big match announced before hand, but with the amount of big shows that they have lined up, they are going to need big matches like Naito/Nakamura, Nakamura/Shibata, Shibata/Okada, Naito/Shibata and others, and with so many major months ahead for New Japan, I can't imagine 2014 being anything but a great year for them.

WWE Network Announced: Effects Unknown

After two years of speculation rumors and false starts the WWE's prophesized Network is but six weeks away. The Network throughout this waiting period has been an ever morphing and changing idea, yet even with the touted February 24th launch date in place the net effect that it will have on the business and the consequences for WWE as a company are still far from certain.

The announcement of a press conference at the 2014 CES show from Las Vegas was made on Monday, and on Wednesday on a live stream the majority of the major details were revealed. For the longest time, particularly since indicators shifted to an online only approach, price has been a large point of discussion. Many, including myself, believe that while Netflix and Hulu float around the \$9.99 price range that it probably wouldn't have been a viable price point for the company. But, come Wednesday and the expected \$9.99 price point was in fact made reality. Subscriptions won't however be available for purchase on a month to month basis, and instead will be mandatory for six months upon purchase. This essentially makes the Network available for six months at \$59.95 payable in the form of \$9.99 monthly installments. When attempting to maximize the subscriber base it is most assuredly a positive, but with the impending cannibalization of the PPV business and the limits of an online only system that subscriber base may not be large enough.

Few major revelations were made in the area of content with all of the pay-per-views this year being aired on the platform. This does include, as strange as it may seem to some who weren't following developments, WrestleMania 30. It is an overwhelmingly enticing offer, but with Mania being the most profitable wrestling show of the entire year, establishing a rock solid

brand, tinkering with a winning formula could decrease revenue in the end. Other content included every WWE, ECW and WCW PPV available on demand. No mention was really made of RAW, SmackDown, Nitro or Hardcore TV, but those will be added in due time I would think. In one of the more shocking moves, every WWE Home Video release will be made available, which I took as every release made by the Home Video department since the late 1990s, and not the Coliseum library. First run programming will include Legend House, a show that no TV Network that WWE spoke to was willing to touch, and RAW and SmackDown pre and post-game shows. In addition they also have a countdown show, 'WWE Count Down' planned counting down what will probably be wrestlers, stables, moves et cetera, 'WrestleMania Rewind' looking at past Manias, and a show on the Monday Night Wars. RAW & SmackDown will not air live on the Network due to television deals. Still, the Network will be home to RAW, SmackDown and Mainevent replays coupled with first run editions of NXT, which will be taken off of Hulu were it currently runs for free, and Superstars.

It will be available on a great litany of devices including the PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Roku, PC, Android, iOS and others. There is also plans for Smart TV and Xbox One owners later on in the year. There is no international scope to the Network at launch, but Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, UK, Canada, Hong Kong and Scandinavia. Sadly, I can't see countries such as my own (South Africa) getting the Network at any time within the next few years. The international delay is reasonable considering the amount of PPV contracts and negotiations that need to take place on an international level still. Even on a national level their pay-per-view situation isn't all too clear with companies such as DirectTV threatening to drop WWE pay-per-views completely due to the shows being available far cheaper on the Network. The WWE seem to think, much like TNA, that pay-per-view is a dying business and that TV and VOD internet based programming is the way to go. In some ways you would expect a technology such as pay-per-view to be fading away, but Mayweather, Alvarez, Rousey, Tate, Silva and Weidman have all proven otherwise. If it was a dying business they wouldn't want to put Mania on pay-per-view next year. Deep down I am sure that Dixie, Vince, Hunter & Stephanie all know that it is still a viable medium, but they are unwilling to face their ineptitude at building to many of their top shows. Considering that neither company is even prepared to show moving pay-per-view clips from recent PPVs on television, there may be strong motivation behind rumors of the cable companies at least considering the annexation of WWE PPVs. WWE will most assuredly make a plan, but at the same time the cable company's will have to show the WBC and UFC that short-cutting them is not okay, or they could lose some of the largest revenue sources they have open to them in a market where their grasp is slowly slipping.

The timing of the Network is interesting, with a subscription from launch day not only giving the subscriber Mania, but also SummerSlam right before the deal expires. It is somewhat of a risky layout, even though most people won't subscribe in the first week, a lot will and I am not sure how strong the impetus will be to sign up for another six months considering the traditional autumn booking slump.

Directly the Network will not effect the way that I watch or interact with the product, but the strong consequences that it will have on the business cannot be denied. With a break even point

verging on around 800,000 subscribers minimum they are still going to need a really strong product to garner that number, even more so considering that the international market will only open up later this year. This year WWE drew 662,000 buys for Mania in North America, meaning that the buy-rate was probably closer to the 600,000 mark in the United States (Canada is included in the domestic buy-rate) where their gaze will be solely focused for the next few months. At first glance this makes the 800,000 goal seem unattainable, but with the Network offering so much more content wise than a simple Mania buy, the extra PPVs and on-demand content it is more appealing. However, it still needs to be weighted against the amount of those people unwilling to buy online or as a single people not looking for party entertainment. With the amount of people gathering for Mania parties, as well as the international market the potential market for the Network grows considerably (Mania did around 1.1 international buys last year). At that point it becomes an erratic guessing game of what means more and for what people are willing to pay.

The actual impact that I will feel from the Network will be its influence on the product and the wrestling business. If the network thrives and TV rights fees go up, the latter of which is far more of a guarantee, then pay-per-view becomes less and less important. With pay-per-views becoming further devalued the company's focus shifts towards the TV product and retaining strong ratings. This clearly changes the idea of building to a big show other than WrestleMania, and while it can be done like Ring of Honor where they build to big individual TV shows on a monthly basis, somehow I can't see that happening. The enemy of any promotion is complacency, and with these business developments in 2014 they run a serious risk of creating a vehicle for incredibly long term stagnation and that's the last thing the wrestling business needs in 2014. What is more is that the six month subscription model, even compared to the archaic delay in PPV buy-rates results, is still bound to be a slow moving metric, which will be more difficult to analyze over the short term than PPV buy-rates even with the delay. WWE over the past few months haven't been listening to their buy-rates, or at least not as quick as you would expect. Perhaps with a slower moving metric we will have to wait even longer for times such as these to change in the future.

With stagnation looming I can't see the Network having a major positive influence on the creative aspect of the current product. Still, it is a tremendous deal for fans who ave access to it, but the long term consequences and successes of the project will still remain ambiguous long after the Network's launch.

Reports

New Japan Pro-Wrestling WrestleKingdom 8 January 44th 2013 Tokyo Dome, Tokyo, Japan

Overall Thoughts:

By the standards of big shows in pro-wrestling the 2014 Tokyo Dome show was very good, in some aspects great, but it's main faults are made overly evident by the successes of last year and

what many people would call one of the greatest shows they have ever seen. Going into this show we knew that it couldn't be as good as last year's, it didn't have a strong enough undercard, fresh enough matches, as hot a crowd or the existence of an eclectic blend of matches each comprising some of the best in their particular niche, as was the case last year. Instead we got a show that was almost entirely based on four matches from a work standpoint, and provided that this show ran in excess of five hours depth became a problem. The other issue for the show's legacy is that the main event match Nakamura/Tanahashi, for a number of different reasons, didn't live up to its full potential of what people were likely expecting. The other three matches delivered what they promised going in, although Naito/Okada could have been quite a lot more than it was with the aid of the main event slot and a hotter crowd. There was also some bad on the show with the Gracies match, which I didn't find as deplorable as many others, and you could classify the Suzuki/Yano tag match as sub-par, although not nearly as unpleasant as the Gracies match. For the most part the undercard was pretty unremarkable save for the opening spotfest and Fale/Makabe brawl. It was an avoidable situation though, iPPV schedule or not, with Ishii, Yujiro, Honma and Tanaka out of key roles on the card something could have been done with them

Where the show really succeeded was in presentation, with extravagant ring entrances and musical acts at the level of your very top tier WrestleManias; and even then most Manias don't have great entrances such as these up and down the card. There was nothing on the level of Ayumi Nakamura's live performance of 'Kaze ni Nare' last year, although I didn't expect anything to come close. The video packages were also tremendous as they usually are with some of the best package work you will see all year. If I was a non-NJPW fan looking in at this product, apart from some of the crowd reactions, I would think that this was the hottest promotion in the world at the moment, and that is credit to the company for putting that much extra in from the entertainment aspect. The only complaint I had on that end was of the theme song cuts, which have been a main foil of New Japan iPPVs for a while now; it does need to change.

Ranked up against last year's Dome shows and even other big New Japan iPPVs from 2013 this show couldn't compare in-ring wise. However, as an entire package it was well worth the \$30 for some very good matches and great entertainment in the end it delivered on the majority of its promises and provided in spades in other areas to make up for those that were not kept - Tokyo Dome show 2014.... a success.

0. Jushin Thunder Liger, Manabu Nakanishi, Yohei Komatsu & Super Strong Machine vs. Tomoaki Honma, Hiroyoshi Tenzan, BUSHI & Captain New Japan

Despite both teams being babyface comprised, Team Liger, as they did on the 21st, played the heels - stomping Honma early and heracing BUSHI as he worked over Komatsu. Komatsu showed some fire opposite the broken down veteran, Tenzan, but was swiftly cut off with a spinning heel kick. The tag was made to New Japan. Nakanishi tried his best as he hulked up on Tenzan in a similar manner to their sloppy exchanges at Korakuen. New Japan broke the torture rack, Honma delivered a very safe backdrop, which opened up Komatsu for another fiery

exhibition on Tenzan. Komatsu fought off both New Japan and Tenzan, but was caught in the Caribbean death grip allowing for headbutts from Honma and Tenzan. Tenzan then locked in the Boston crab for the submission on Komatsu. This was what you would have expected from a pre-show match, most of the men were old and slow, but Komatsu had his third straight strong performance and along with Takahashi, Watanabe and Tanaka has some great potential as a future star.

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The show opened with a hype inducing video packages pushing all of the major matches spliced in with training footage and an awesome clip of Okada holding a big JRPG style sword. They showed many of the same Shibata/Goto photos along with a clip of Shibata drinking tea. There was a live traditional instrumental of performance before the NJPW theme hit. They then had a very excited screaming English announcer announcing the top matches over the opening light show. For the rest of the show he would scream and often times sing the ring introductions, which was quite something.

1. IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Title Match

The Young Bucks vs. TAKA Michinoku & Taichi vs. Time Splitters (KUSHIDA & Alex Shelley) vs. Forever Hooligans (Rocky Romero & Alex Koslov)

The TimeSplitters with the first portion of their theme silenced, drove into the building in a Delorean. The first portion of Kaze Ni Nare was also silenced due to the Rocky sample I believe with Taichi & TAKA making it out with leaflets and a parade of women behind them. There was no issue with the Forever Hooligans' and Young Bucks' themes.



Koslov sang the Russian National anthem, as TAKA & Taichi stood respectively at attention, but before he could finish the Bucks landed tandem superkicks and cleaned house. This match was tornado rules so complete chaos ensued. Historically speaking junior heavyweights have found it more difficult to get over in the cavernous Tokyo Dome than the heavyweights, but the crowd was very much into this. There was a pretty funny spot where Taichi & TAKA hijacked Koslov's kazatzka

kicks with TAKA even donning the hat. What followed was a spot where somehow everyone got suplexed at once with all eight men engaging arm in arm. Matt Jackson superplexed Koslov to the floor after some difficulty. This acted as the base on the floor for everyone to land their dives. The Young Bucks repeated a popular spot from a couple of months ago superplexing Taichi onto

the five other men on the floor. They all made it back in at 19. Everyone killed everyone else with kicks. The Forever Hooligans landed their springboard doomsday on Nick for a nearfall. Time Splitters landed what seemed to be a new finish, but TAKA came in with the distraction. The Bucks hit their springboard tombstone assist before landing More Bang for Your Buck on Taichi for the win. This was a spotfest no doubt, but everything felt important and it was unique enough that I could forgive some of its faults. It felt very much like some of those big X division multi-man matches that garnered a lot of praise years ago.

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2. IWGP Tag Championship Match

Killer Elite Squad vs. Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows w/ Tama Tonga

The Dome looked packed when they did some camera work inspecting the arena. Tama Tonga was out with a half hearted hucker when the Anderson & Gallows made it out in camouflage. They proceeded to "shoot" the tron behind them, unfortunately their target was not Tokyo Sports. Once again KES made it out on motor cycles with Archer under a mask. Anderson worked the match in camouflage shorts opposed to his usual black trunks. KES pulled Tonga into the ring, which gave Anderson & Gallows the advantage establishing them as the true heel team. The usual tried Bullet Club tactics followed with Tonga putting the boots to Smith on the floor. Tonga interrupted Archer's always over old school spot, which got some good heat. Archer landed his crucifix bomb on Anderson, Tonga pulled ref Tiger out of the ring, but was killer-bombed for his trouble. Archer landed his chokeslam for a nearfall on Anderson, moments later Anderson landed the gun stun also for two. Archer was left open for a double team and was caught with the double team neckbreaker for the title change. The New Japan tag division needed something fresh and this may be it, although we have seen this style quite a bit with Yano & Iizuka. Still, this match could have easily overstayed its welcome, but they kept it at a good length, ensuring that the crowd stayed invested in both teams.

3. NWA World Heavyweight Championship Match

Rob Conway w/ Bruce Tharp & Jax Dane vs. Satoshi Kojima w/ Hiroyoshi Tenzan

With the NWA WORLD TITLE THEME CUT you could see the young lions and ring crew helping Harley Race into the ring. He was wearing a suit and looked well considering that he has been in a wheelchair at many a public gathering over the past few years; if you squinted looked remarkably like Donald Trump. Tharp cut a promo before the match, which was cut halfway through due to Conway's ring music. The promo was cut entirely in badly spoken Japanese, but it was getting some good heat from what I could hear. Tharp poked Race in the chest ordering him around and Race responded with a punch that Tharp bumped for getting a good reaction. Conway landed some basic offense and was DDT'd on the apron. Kojima landed his chops in the corner for a tremendous reaction, but he was brought to the floor beginning the heat. Conway proceeded to land Mongolian chops with Tenzan at ringside to very loud boos. Moments later Kojima landed a lariat to the arm followed by a cutter. Dane grabbed a sleeper on the apron, Tenzan went after him with chops and landed a Samoan drop out on the floor. Conway ducked a

lariat landing a spear. He went for his finish, Kojima fought out, he went for the rope assisted neckbreaker, but was caught with a lariat knocking him into the ring. Kojima landed another for the win pushing Tharp into a tremendous fit on the outside. This match was a wonderful surprise with these two delivering what was by far the best of their performances aided in large part by the Tokyo Dome crowd who burnt out later on. Kojima isn't given enough credit for how good he still is. Conway was good too, although he does do a couple of things that annoy me like the constant hand gestures, which gets old after a couple of times.

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4. Yuji Nagata & Kazushi Sakuraba vs. Daniel Gracie & Rolles Gracie

Nagata and Sakuraba were also shown drinking tea together along with photos of Sakuraba as the Gracie Hunter. Sakuraba's music hit, sound muted. He made it out in his usual Sakuraba mask together with around 10 kids all in orange masks saluting for Nagata's masked appearance. The kids also did the Gracie train like you would see at the early UFC shows eliciting a hearty chuckle. The Gracies made it out with what was most likely a Japanese Gracie academy; no Gracie train. The bizarre aspect of the Gracie entrance was that even with them being non-regulars they had licenced music. Rolles and Sakuraba started off and they did an okay job with some simple grappling. Daniel & Nagata were in next with Nagata getting a couple of big pops from leg kicks and an ear slap. Shoves ensued, Rolles wouldn't break against the ropes to boos. At this point the Gracies grabbed control and the match was derailed, unbelievably with much haste. Sakuraba recreated the famous Mongolian chop spot from his Pride fight with Royce Gracie and others. Nagata landed a big exploder on Rolles. Daniel managed to get a break out of a demon armbar. He then choked Nagata out with the gi for the DQ. Rolles got on the mic after the match, it was all in Portuguese or Japanese so I understood nothing. This match was going surprisingly well until the four minute mark or so, where the Gracies' ineptitude and lack of charisma became apparent. Unfortunately we will be seeing more of the Gracies in future months - this feud must continue.

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5. Minoru Suzuki & Shelton Benjamin w/ TAKA Michinoku & Taichi vs. Toru Yano & Great Muta

The fact that there was no live Kaze Ni Nare performance made me very sad, but even without that this match was a waste of Suzuki. Still we were granted yet another fabulous entrance with traditional Chinese dragons making it out on stage for the entrance of Yano & Muta. Muta even busted out a new cyborg mask. Muta looked to pull not a chair, not a table, not even a hammer from under the ring, but a piece of scaffolding - he failed. Yano got some offense in, but inevitably it was the usual Suzuki-gun beatdown on the floor ensued. Yano was caught with a suplex but scurried to expose the buckle sending Benjamin into it face first. He made the tag to Muta who picked Benjamin apart with a chair on the floor. Yano was sent into the exposed buckle, no sold it, but was kicked down while taunting. Suzuki went for the sleeper, but was caught with a shining wizard, followed by dragon whips on everyone including TAKA and mist for Taichi. Suzuki grabbed a sleeper, but Yano slid in sneekly with a chair. Suzuki grabbed a

sleeper on Yano while the referee tried to rustle the chair away. Muta scratched his head attempting to determine what exactly going on. Muta decided to spew mist in Yano's eyes after a push, but Yano ducked and it caught Suzuki. Yano grabbed the roll-up for the win - yet another bad feud that must continue.. For whatever reason they forgot to cut the music after the match. Suzuki did a fantastic job selling the eyes on the way out.

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Intermission time it was. New Japan advertised all of the major shows for 2014 the big story is that they are going back to Yokohama Arena and will be running the finals of the G1 at the Seibu Dome! The same traditional Japanese band opened up part two.

6. Togi Makabe vs. Bad Luck Fale

Neither man had a spectacular entrance; this was just the story of two scary men trying to hurt each other, which is why the match was KO only. Both men went straight after each other with forearms, an exchange Makabe got the better of sending Fale to the floor. Fale strangulated Makabe with his own chain before dragging him by his neck. Fale got a lot of slow lumbering offence in. Makabe missed the King Kong knee, Fale grabbed the chain, but Makabe was the one to land the shots out on the floor. Fale was placed in a table, as Makabe mounted a turnbuckle meters away. Fale threw him back in and landed the spike chokeslam, Makabe made it back up. Fale landed the border toss for what has been the KO finish leading up to this match, but Makabe made it up at nine. Fale missed a splash and was taken back out, realistically this should have been the closing stretch, but there was still that table out on the floor. Fale jumped on the apron, but was caught with a powerbomb landing on his neck after his back went through the table. Makabe landed lariat after lariat for another near knock out. Finally Makabe went to the top rope catching a kneeling Fale with a knee to the back of the head and one to the face, which was the knockout finish. This was better than expected and provided something different on the card.

** 1/2

7. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Hirooki Goto

There was another fantastic Goto/Shibata video package. I couldn't understand the majority of the dialogue, but boy did it get me excited for the match. They showed some of both men's career highlights as well as the slap from Tanahashi that broke Goto's jaw. This is one of the best video packages you will see all year. Things got really bizarre when they failed to cut Shibata's theme - one that is actually copyrighted! There was a live drum performance before Goto's entrance with people in costumes, fans and fire. They didn't go straight to the elbows and strikes like in prior encounters, but instead started with a collar and elbow tie up. Shibata landed a slap off of a break, Goto went for the same, but it was preempted and almost resulted in a PK. Shibata grabbed a figure four and Goto landed some slaps from within. Shibata unloaded with a few elbows, went for a running kick, was caught with a heel kick, but ended up stomping Goto in the head. Goto fired up and an elbow exchange ensued. Shibata landed his crazy dropkick in the corner, Goto rolled out to the floor as a result, but was immediately rolled back in. Goto caught him with a pair or lariats. Another elbow battle transpired followed by a lariat war. Shibata

landed some boots, but Goto fired back with a rolling lariat. The two hit their own suplex variations. They repeated the big no-sell back suplex spot from June of last year. It wasn't in excess, but still wasn't as effective as the original sequence. They teased a double KO and huge series of one counts followed (thanks G1) for another double down. Shibata locked in his sleeper and landed Goto's fireman's carry neckbreaker, but Goto kicked out of the PK. Goto has a new gut buster into a front knee that he landed. An intricate combo of neckbreakers followed for two - very impressive. The reverse shouten was hit for two, but Shibata landed a shouten kai of his own for yet another two count. Shibata went for the GTS, Goto elbowed out, and headbutt mayhem followed. They teased the double KO yet again! Shibata had his PK caught, kicked out of a lariat at one, no sold a lariat flurry, but was caught with a stiff lariat and shouten kai for the fall.

It was a very good match, although the story was told to perfection last June and I believe that was clear here. Both men lay dead in the ring afterwards. They then had their moment smiling and helping each other up with Shibata lifting Goto's hand and helping him to the back. Even that Shibata did in the most intense manner possible, sprinting off arm in arm with Shibata more like he was looking for a fight than having a bonding moment.

**** 1/4

8. IWGP Junior Heavyweight Title Match Prince Devitt w/ The Bullet Club vs. Kota Ibushi



It looks like they are finally taking the Junior Heavyweight belt seriously again placing it third from the top, which was very nice to see. Ibushi came popping out of a Rey Mysterio style trap door with new NJPW licensed theme music. Devitt's entrance was pretty out there though with grim reapers raising a casket to reveal him in evil demon body paint limping to the ring, which beats out Low Ki's

wacky Hitman suit any day. I thought he looked like a combination of a Titan from Attack on Titan and Venom from Spider Man. According to people online he was Spiderman character Carnage though. It wasn't long before the Bullet Club was putting the boots to Ibushi out on the floor. Devitt is great in his role and they do generate real heat, but I just wish that this could have been closer to a straight up singles match. Ibushi took a stiff powerbomb on the apron from

Anderson. He evaded a double stomp as the Bucks stormed the ring and were caught with double peles. He laid the entire club out with an Asai moonsault. Ibushi was caught with an unprotected chair shot to the head through the second rope from Anderson, but kicked out. He went for the phoenix splash, but with a Doc assisted was sent to the floor. Finally the Bullet Club was sent to the back by those at ringside and the officials. Ibushi took a stomp to the back of the head, but managed to catch Devitt with a dropkick at the top rope. Both men teetered on the top rope allowing Ibushi to land an outstanding frankensteiner. Devitt avoided the Phoenix splash and landed a lariat and Bloody Sunday, but Ibushi kicked out. Devitt landed a foot stomp, but again Ibushi got the shoulders up. Ibushi hit the pele and a super highkick, german suplex and rabbit lariat. Devitt kicked out of the powerbomb, but Ibushi landed Phoenix splash for the win, who was in every way the right man to go over. After the match a masked wrestler stepped into the ring pointing to the title with a guitar case of all things in his hand, they call him El Desperado. This match would have been rated far higher if it wasn't for interference after every spot for most of the match.

*** 1/4

9. IWGP Heavyweight Championship Match Kazuchika Okada w/ Gedo vs. Tetsuya Naito



There was the new best video package hyping up a match that I have seen in so long with a package entitled "What is your Dream". The interesting this is that when showing the Naito injury they actually showed the legit German suplex reversal that he hurt the leg on and not the kayfabe Yujiro injury. Naito had tons of fire coming out (in the literal pyrotechnical sense), and also had a pretty amazing looking spiked jacket. He also has new non-

frilly gear, which should delight many many people on the internet. Actually the new gear kind of looks like he works at a candy store, so maybe it isn't the best. Okada made it down in a similar robe that he does during most big events, although a ton of rainmaker money was falling from the ceiling of the Tokyo Dome. The two had a face off before the ring introductions and the match got under way with some mat work. Naito worked over the back of the neck and shoulders with his new submission hold. Naito was dropkicked to the floor where they battled on the entrance ramp a bit. Okada gave up and landed a running dropkick on the ramp, which set up Okada as the subtle heel for a few minutes. He made it more evident with a one footed cover later on. Okada locked in the 3/4 face lock. Naito unloaded with a variety of dropkicks, Naito

heeled more on Okada than Okada did on him with a prolonged boot to the face in the corner. Okada tried for a tombstone on the floor, but Naito countered into a tornado DDT with the apron as the assist. Naito elbowed Okada in the face in the corner, Okada wanted more so Naito laid in with headbutts, which was a really unique idea. Okada landed a top rope dropkick, his leg was hooked and red shoes pushed him off to the floor (!) for fear of injury I guess. Okada landed a suspended DDT from the apron on the floor on Naito. Okada landed his elbow, and the camera zoomed out to pretty full Tokyo Dome lower levels. Naito caught Okada with a DDT and a spinning heel kick. Naito grabbed the modified Koji clutch for the second time in the match (Pluma Blanca), but Okada made his way to the ropes. Naito looked to climb for the star dust splash, but was pulled back down for an Okada flapjack. Okada locked in Red Ink, but Naito made it to the ropes. Okada battled for the tombstone, Naito fired back with yet another headbutt. Naito landed a big flying forearm and a frankensteiner followed by the dragon suplex for two. Naito landed the gloria for two, but missed the stardust press, which I liked given that he never goes for the cover after the gloria - putting over the urgency of the match. Naito was lifted up into the belly to back over the shoulder over the knee backbreaker followed by heavy rain for two. Naito grabbed a cradle off of a rainmaker attempt followed by a sloppy looking gloria that actually played into the match. The two slugged it out from their knees and brought it back to the feet. Naito was sick of wimpy forearms and rammed Okada like a goat. Naito ducked the rainmaker and was caught with a slap in its place. Okada went for it again, but Naito grabbed a rollup. Naito went for one of his usual packages, but was caught with a dropkick to the back and a tombstone. Naito looked to counter the rainmaker, but was pulled into a second tombstone for the rainmaker finish. This was the match of the night by leaps and bounds with both guys proving their worth as main event caliber stars.

**** 1/4

10. IWGP Intercontinental Championship Match Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi

Okay, perhaps this video package was best. Stan Hansen made it out first as the presenter of the belt. There was a live guitar of Tanahashi's theme song by Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman walking down the ramp with Tanahashi, which was pretty pool idea. Nakamura, the King of Strong Style, made it down with dancers and pole dancers and even lifted one of them onto his shoulders. For whatever reason it didn't make me as uncomfortable as the half naked women in CMLL. Nakamura was also wearing a fantastic M. Bison style jacket. Nakamura attempted to ground Tanahashi early. Tanahashi went for a splash off the middle turnbuckle, but was caught with a knee to the gut. This brought a smile to Nakamura's face and began the work over Tanahashi's midsection. Tanahashi attempted to fight back up again, but was dropped down with a knee to the stomach. Tanahashi then went after the leg with a dragon screw, dropkick and chokblock. Nakamura landed a spinning heel kick for a double down. Nakamura went back to the midsection of Tanahashi with more kicks. Nakamura landed a flurry of knees to Tanahashi elevated on the turnbuckle, Tanahashi went for a dragon screw, but was caught with an enzuigri. Tanahashi however evaded a knee drop guillotine on the apron, sending Nakamura to the outside knee first for the high fly flow on the outside. Tanahashi didn't sell his midsection all too well after this. It allowed Tanahashi to finally land the dragon screw in the ropes. Nakamura locked in

a triangle, but had it countered into the Texas cloverleaf. Nakamura countered the straight jacket



German suplex Ishii style with a headbutt with the back of his head, but Tanahashi landed it anyway for two. Tanahashi was kicked seemingly to the floor, before skinning the cat. This was such a stupid spot given that Nakamura had been working on essentially the abdominal muscles of Tanahashi for the whole match. Nakamura caught him with a back cracker. Tanahashi slapped Nakamura, who responded by spitting and stomping Tanahashi viciously down to the mat and in the ropes. Nakamura landed a Boma Ye to the back of the head for a double down. Tanahashi hit the sling blade for another. Nakamura countered a powerbomb into a codebreaker and was caught with a full nelson suplex before Tanahashi landed the High Fly flow flush for two - this really should have been a bigger deal than it was. Nakamura hit the top rope Boma Ye followed by one on the mat also for two. Tanahashi landed a dropkick to the knee, Nakamura missed the Boma Ye and was caught with a dragon screw. Both men were down again. Tanahashi grabbed a cloverleaf again before walking to the center of the ring, Nakamura wouldn't tap as it was countered into the Styles Clash. Tanahashi landed

a kneeling high fly flow before landing one to the back and one to Nakamura straight for the win. After the match Tanahashi did his promo and played air guitar as expected with an encore with Marty Friedman up again too.

WWE Monday Night RAW Old School January 6th 2014 Baltimore Arena, Baltimore, Maryland

Overall Thoughts:

RAW this week was a clear improvement over the Holiday editions of the show that we have been subjected to over the past few weeks. It was Old School RAW and so there were the usual guests that you would expect, which lightened the dragging effect somewhat. I wasn't a big fan of the Daniel Bryan segments however, as it is terribly frustrating to watch as a booking team takes a hideously ill-fated detour with a top star. The big story of the show is that Reigns beat Punk with a small degree of interference, which built further to the Shield implosion and acted as the first sample of what is going to be a very strong Reigns push going forward. There was a Piper's Pit segment with the Shield, but so much more could have been done with it considering

that they had Dean Ambrose and Roddy Piper in one ring. None of the matches or segments on the show were all too memorable, but at least the show had a couple of fun moments and built to the Rumble responsibly well, even if they are going in the wrong direction with a few people.

The Now, Then, Forever gimmick at the start of the show was also old school this week. The show kicked off with Flair making his way down to the ring to a great reaction while Cole talked about his 49ers prep-talk. He was Ric Flair being Ric Flair for a short while until Orton came down with both belts. Orton gave Flair a hug on the way in and thanked him for everything he had taught him, but quickly turned to state that the night was about himself. He politely asked Flair to leave. Flair refused, but Orton continued on anyway pantomime style. Orton called himself “the man” causing Flair to step in suggesting that he work with Cena again to prove it. Ric Flair showed off his Hall of Fame rings. It had me confused for a moment, because he left one in Reid's casket, but Hunter did in fact give him another one. Orton got fired up and called Flair overrated, Flair talked about their time in Evolution and asked if Orton was really a man when he gets home and closes the door at night. He wanted to get physical with Flair, but Cena made it down putting Flair over. Cena in fact addressed Orton as “Randal” wanting to fight, but Orton declined and walked off. They cut to JBL dressed as Vince McMahon circa 1996 at the announce table with Cole. Lawler was not there as Cole informed us. He discussed some rumours of heart issues, stated that it was far from the case, but if the viewer wanted more they could go to THE APP; not the time. There was a recap of the Daniel Bryan heel turn spliced in with some creepy music. Rey Mysterio & The Usos were out for a match with Luke Harper, Rowan & Daniel Bryan. Bryan was walking side by side with Wyatt in refuse remover style clothes. Thankfully they are not calling Bryan 'Daniel Wyatt', as they were on the house shows. Mysterio was in with Bryan early, and Bryan changed a lot of his offence landing vicious knees on Mysterio. Mysterio landed a 619 on Rowan, but Rowan avoided the splash. Bryan tagged himself in, but Harper interrupted to get rolled up by Jimmy Uso.

There was a new Batista video. Cole announced Batista's entry into the Rumble match. They aired a recap of Sandow's match with Khali last week. Maddox was talking to Hall of Famers off screen to decide the special guest referee for Sandow/Khali II to be voted upon on the App. Backlund, Arn Anderson & Sgt. Slaughter were the options. Kane approached Maddox in the back, Maddox asked if Kane wanted to inflict “physical violence” upon him. Kane went into all the possible scenarios that could transpire if Maddox talked to Stephanie or Hunter about his performance – none of them being very favourable for Brad. Big E. was walking through the back with Nikolai Volkoff just singing into the void, Ted DiBiase was there in full Million Dollar Man mode, as was IRS too. There was a graphic for the CES WWE press conference Wednesday. Ryback was on commentary for a Big E/Curtis Axel match. Langston put Axel away with a big ending, it was completely unremarkable. Ryback said that Big E still hasn't gotten “over”; insider baseball terms again I guess. Roddy Piper was down for Piper's Pit with the Shield, Piper didn't get a chance to say much before the Shield made it down through the crowd. Seeing Ambrose and Piper face to face was pretty great given how similar they are in so many ways. Ambrose was only given some age based comedy before Piper said that Punk is the only man who could match him on the mic. Piper attempted to break the team apart by asking if Reigns could beat Punk when Rollins or Ambrose could not. Piper pinched Reigns' face, Reigns threatened

violence, but out came Punk and the New Age Outlaws cleaning house. There was a recap of Lesnar's return last week followed by a Rumble video package. Huncara was out for yet another match with ADR. ADR won with the superkick, which probably means that Huncara is out of favour again. Del Rio said that they should be talking about him when the Rumble is mentioned, but instead everyone is talking about Batista, which makes this the first time that another performer has mentioned Batista on TV since the December 23rd announcement.

Cole said that Lawler had a stomach virus and was in the back "having fun" - I highly doubt that said virus allowed for this. Bryan yelled at Harper and Rowan in the back wanting to contribute to the team. Bray came allowing saying that instead he would be teaming with him the next week. The Real Americans were out with a sign reading "The best defence is a fence" for a match with the Rhodes Brothers. They showed a quick clip of the giant swing only for the WWE app. Swagger had an ankle lock in for quite some time before the hot tag was made to Goldust. Cesaro made a save with a headbutt, but Goldust managed to pin Swagger with a neckbreaker



moments later. DDP was doing some yoga in the back when Booker walked by in what turned into a giant DDP yoga infomercial. Booker hurt himself doing a stretch with Ron Simmons coming in for the "Damn" spot. Khali was down with the returning Ranjin Singh, with blackmail and life wrecking as water under the bridge. Sgt. Slaughter won with 55% to Backlund's 15% and Anderson's 30%. I expected Slaughter to take the vote, but I was surprised that Anderson beat out Backlund. Khali won with Sandow's foot on the rope from the count of two. Sandow argued with Slaughter and pushed him being caught in the cobra clutch. This feud must continue? Khali, Slaughter and Singh proceeded to dance very very badly. Just like with the initial RAW move to two hours they had a second intro around half way through the show. Lesnar & Heyman were out with Lesnar wearing his new 'Eat. Sleep. Conquer. Repeat' shirt. Heyman stated that trudging out legends wasn't Old School, but old-school was when everyone in the back wants to come out and challenge one man. Bruno, Hogan and Austin were all men in

that vein. It was old-school again, as one man reigns supreme with one title. Regardless of the champion heading out of the Rumble, the next champion would be Lesnar. Lesnar gave Henry the worst beating of his career last week and it would be the same for anyone looking to challenge Lesnar as champion. Heyman began to chant the words on Lesnar's shirt until Henry limped down. Lesnar quickly took Henry out with a kimura. They were walking off when Big Show's music hit prompting Lesnar to walk slowly back towards the ring. Lesnar wanted to fight, but then backed down slipping out to the floor. Lesnar attempted to go after Show following a Heyman distraction, but was tossed and took a huge bump onto his shoulders, slid out and retreated with an angry scowl on his face. They are selling the Henry "injury" as a dislocated and fractured elbow.

The Bellas were out for a match with Aksana & Alicia Fox, oh no. The finish was quite bizarre with Aksana pinning Brie off of a missed dropkick...in 2014. They pushed the Network live stream again. Rikishi, Scotty 2 Hotty & Grand Mastery Sexay were in the back. 3MB were out with a very entertaining inset promo airing. Rikishi & Too Cool danced down for a trios match. I don't know if I have mentioned this yet, but I find the fact that Scotty 2 [HOT]y is now a fireman pretty humorous. Rikishi was not in his usual attire, which is just as well since he seems to have gained weight. Scotty did the worm and was caught with a McIntyre kick starting the heat.



Rikishi was tagged in and was far more limited than the last time we saw him. Mahal attempted the sunset flip and was sat on for the win. All three men danced after the match. There was a Royal Rumble video building the Cena/Orton match as "perhaps the biggest championship rematch in history" - ha! All the legends came out with the Godfather. Every single one of them were introduced by name, given applause, but up came Bad News Barrett on his podium. He gave them an earful on attempting to relive their glory days and declared that everyone would forget their names. There was no rebuttal, that's just how WWE treats their former stars. The only fun I got out of this segment was watching guys like Arn Anderson and Ric Flair stare at

Barrett and I just wondered what was truthfully going through their minds. There was another Batista video. Mean Gene was brought out and plugged his hotline for “all the inside scoops”. He brought out the New Age Outlaws who put him over and did their usual gimmick; this time Billy Gun did the “suck it” gimmick. Road Dogg introduced Punk who they helped out earlier on. Punk was out in a Ribera jacket, which I found pretty amazing for the first edition of RAW to air live in Japan. I guess now that Punk and Lita have broken up he is no longer vegan. Reigns worked over the ribs with bear hugs and stretches. The Shield & Outlaws exchanged words on the outside after Punk countered the superman punch with a heel kick. There was an awkward superplex spot leading to an elbow from Punk. Ambrose climbed onto the apron, was pulled off by Road Dogg and Punk landed a tope on Rollins. Punk went for a springboard clothesline, but was caught with a superman punch. Punk leapfrogged a spear and grabbed a rollup for two. A highkick followed also for two. Ambrose was on the apron for the distraction leading to Reigns landing the spear on Punk for the win in a big victory. It was then time for the return of Jake Roberts to a disappointing reaction, I think a lot of people couldn't even recognize the guy. Punk laid Ambrose out with a GTS, which then had the crowd into it as they figured out who he was. He strung the snake over Ambrose – I have never really been a fan of animals in wrestling.

Old School RAW Ratings for January 6th 2014

Old School RAW from Monday pulled an incredibly impressive rating going up against one of the most watched cable programs in history, the Auburn/Florida State football game, which drew 25.57 million viewers! RAW still drew 4.54 million viewers this week, up substantially from last week's 4.12. What is also surprising about this show is that they had a strong first hour, dropped off in the second and came back in the third, which is a very different pattern from the usual build to the second hour from the weak first. The first hour drew 4.72 million viewers (a 1.6 in the 18-49 demo 7th for the day on cable behind Love & Hip Hop and all of the Bowl related programming). The second hour drew 4.43 million viewers, a substantial drop-off (a 1.6 in the 18-49 demo, 9th for the day on cable behind hour three). The third and final hour drew 4.46 million viewers (a 1.6 in the 18-49 demo, 8th for the day). The show ended up drawing a fantastic 3.2. You have to believe that nostalgia played a big part in how well this show did, especially against such strong competition. I can't really comment on the pattern, as I don't know how the Bowl game unfolded and how its viewership evolved along with it. It is with interesting ratings developments such as this when I really wish that we had the segment-by-segment viewership data again.

We neglected to add a view components of the 18-49 viewership over the past few weeks, so here it is.

A18-49 viewership:

1/6

20:00-21:00: 2,049,000 viewers (1.61 rtg)

21:00-22:00: 1,981,000 (1.56)

22:00-23:12: 2,028,000 (1.60)

12/30

20:00-21:00: 1,726,000 (1.36)

21:00-22:00: 1,774,000 (1.40)

22:00-23:07: 1,708,000 (1.35)

12/23

20:00-21:00: 1,632,000 (1.29)

21:00-22:00: 1,688,000 (1.33)

22:00-23:05: 1,533,000 (1.21)

**WWE NXT – January 8th 2014.
Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL.
Ben Carass.**

Summer Rae was accompanied out by her BFF, Sasha Banks then Bayley showed up with Natalya for the opener.

Summer Rae w/ Sasha Banks vs. Bayley w/ Natalya

Summer tried to lure Bayley in for a hug; I thought for all the world that this was going to be the heat spot, however Bayley was too smart to fall for that and commandeered Summer's head band. Despite being an intelligent babyface Bayley didn't have the chance to shine, as Summer got the heat after the old cheap shot in the corner. Bayley made her comeback after Summer missed, of all things, the RAINMAKER then hit a belly-to-belly, which Bryon Saxton called the "belly-to-Bayley" and "the hug-plex", for the finish. – *Bayley defeated Summer Rae via pinfall, at 3:53. – Whenever Summer Rae works matches on Raw she comes off like an Aksana/Rosa Mendes level worker, however in NXT she invariably shows a lot potential in terms of her psychology. Don't get me wrong she has a long way to go technically, but she clearly understands how to portray her conceited/cocky heel character within the confines of a pro wrestling match. This tells me not only do the agents and writers put more time and effort into the women's angles and matches, but the calibre of the actual workers in NXT is far superior to that of the Divas on the main roster. With the exception of Natalya, I would say Paige, Emma and Bayley put on better matches than any of their potential peers on Raw or SmackDown. The bad news for Bayley is that her look doesn't lend itself to what the WWE typically want out of their main Divas, unlike Paige and Emma, who both look the part (albeit for very different reasons), but sadly for them they will never get the chance to shine on the main shows like they do in NXT.*

In the back, Devin Taylor told Xavier Woods, who acted wackier than usual, that Kane was in the house and he had an announcement concerning R-Truth's new running buddy.

Colin Cassady vs. Aiden English

The fans weren't into English's singing that much this week; maybe they have realised that the

go-nowhere mid-card gimmick is as one-note as Bad News Barrett. Cassady played the fiery babyface at the start; English worked a chinlock for the heat and Big Cass made his comeback. Finish was lame and saw English kick Cassady's knee out then he landed his side-effect move to get the pin. – *Aiden English defeated Colin Cassady via pinfall, at 2:32. – Another example of the detrimental mentality that having a guy take 90% of the match only to lose is a good idea. It makes both guys look like geeks and helps no one get over, which was proven to be the case when the fans chanted for Tyler Breeze after the match.*

Adrian Neville took a phone call during a backstage interview with Devin; talk about professionalism. It turned out to be Tyler Breeze, who was in the same room and he walked into shot. Breeze said this way he didn't have to look at Neville's "ugo" face. The segment was way too long; they bickered about this and that, then Neville apparently booked a match between the two for next week. – *For a feud that is based on Breeze costing Neville his match for the NXT title, this segment was far too wacky.*

Kane hit the ring and told Xavier Woods that the authority had not forgotten that he started a campaign to help get Big Show his job back. Kane claimed that Hunter and Steph had waited over 3 months to punish Xavier then booked him in a match with Alexander Rusev. – *Given that the product was so horrendous during the last quarter of 2013, it took me a while to remember what the hell Kane was talking about, as I suppressed the big baby Big Show storyline to the back of my mind along with the Yeti raping Hulk Hogan and every episode of Thunder from 2000.*

Xavier Woods vs. Alexander Rusev w/ Lana

Woods took a monster Samoan-drop and Rusev got the heat right away. Xavier soon made his comeback and scored with his handspring lariat, however Rusev cut him off before he could hit his finish and applied the camel-clutch for the win. – *Alexander Rusev defeated Xavier Woods via submission, at 1:51. – Nothing match. Woods is a geek on the main roster and NXT; what was the point in even calling him up? Rusev is sure being booked like a monster killer and has got to be a sure fire candidate for the main roster in 2014; someone is clearly high on the guy despite his greenness. Hopefully for him they won't give him the Ryback push; look how that turned out.*

An interview with Kofi Kingston after his match with Rusev from last week rolled. Kofi said he underestimated Rusev then blamed Lana for speaking in "slang – or whatever language she speaks"; what a great babyface. Kofi demanded a rematch and claimed he would not underestimate Rusev again.

Tyson Kidd vs. Baron Corbin

As if Kidd didn't have a big enough mountain to climb in getting over, they've given him some disgraceful stock boy-band style music. Poor guy. From the start Kidd sold for the big former football player's offence, which consisted of punches, tackles and a chinlock. Kidd landed some

kicks then instead of going through a comeback routine, delivered a blockbuster off the top for the finish. – *Tyson Kidd defeated Baron Corbin via pinfall, at 3:09. – If you are going to do a squash, especially with a guy like Baron Corbin, who was probably on TV three times last year, just do a squash and have the guy you are trying to showcase win convincingly. In the old days, the jobbers would be lucky to get in a couple of punches and a clothesline, these days, at least in WWE, the enhancement often get more spots in than the guy they are there to make look good. If the plan is to make everyone look as useless as EC3 then they are doing a fine job.*

Non-Title Tornado Tag Match: Hunico & Camacho vs. The Ascension (NXT Tag Team Champions).

Alex Riley talked about his tornado match with Rey Mysterio against Jack Swagger and the Miz from June 2011, which was actually was quite good and much better than it reads on paper. They paired off early and the Latinos got the best of the brawling. The Ascension simultaneously countered the ten punch deal and both Hunico and Camacho were planted with powerbombs out of the corner for a double near-fall. Ascension got the heat with some more brawling then the Latinos started their comeback after Hunico took out O’Brian and Victor with a crossbody off the top. Hunico landed a quebrada on both Ascension members for a near-fall; Camacho planted O’Brian with a Samoan-drop and Hunico hit a senton off the top, but Victor broke up the pin. Finish came when Camacho tried a tope and Victor cut him off with a European uppercut; O’Brian delivered a full-nelson slam on Hunico then the Ascension hit their version of total elimination for the three count. – *The Ascension defeated Hunico & Camacho via pinfall, at 8:23 (TV Time). – Match was decent in places, but was mostly a wayward attempt at a wild brawl and frankly just wasn’t very good. The ever impulsive Full Sail crowd were so enthralled by the wearisome action that they started to entertain themselves and played the annoying, let’s get ourselves over game. I believe they were mimicking the phony monster noises made by Konnor O’Brian.*

The show this week was a pretty angle heavy episode; the wrestling wasn’t great, but they did a decent job building their stories. From the looks of the tapings, Bayley’s win over Summer was the start of her retribution over the mean girl BFFs and Colin Cassady also got a little revenge on Aiden English in the early stages of that feud. Although it was a poor segment, Adrian Neville’s path to a live NXT Championship ladder match on February 27th, began right here with his challenge to the man that cost him the title in the first place. As for the Ascension, well they are still no good and are probably only still around because Triple H likes two big guys teaming together. Next month’s run of TV hardly looks thrilling from an in-ring perspective, however everything is headed towards the live show on February 27th and for the most part the booking on NXT is pretty logical, which should provide some good storytelling if nothing else.

NXT TV Tapings

Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL.

Five episodes of NXT were filmed on January 8th. Before the cameras started rolling, Triple H announced that the first live NXT will take place and air on the network February 27th; at this

point it looks like the live show will be a one off special and is likely to go head-to-head with Impact. The next set of tapings is on January 30th, so they are definitely still filming stuff for international TV markets. Hopefully we have some more details in the coming weeks. According to live reports, they switched up the announce teams regularly throughout the show, which means they could have taped things out of order. Five episodes were taped in all, which will take us up to February 26th, just be aware that by the time the shows reach the air things may have been altered in post-production.

Episode 1: Taped for January 22nd.

Adrian Neville beat Wesley Blake. Alexander Rusev downed Xavier Woods and beat him down post-match; Sin Cara ran down to save Woods. Antonio Cesaro over CJ Parker. Sami Zayn challenged Cesaro to a rematch of their 2 out of 3 falls match, however Cesaro declined and walked away. Natalya w/ Bayley defeated Summer Rae w/ Sasha Banks.

Episode 2: Taped for January 29th.

The Ascension squashed ROH's Q.T Marshall and an unnamed geek. Corey Graves cut an in-ring promo on Adrian Neville for trying to end his career then he got a win over Camacho. Bo Dallas came out to celebrate being the longest reigning NXT champ (224 days); Neville interrupted and challenged Bo to a rematch for the strap. Bo said Neville earned his first shot by beating a nobody in 4:45 and declined the challenge. Triple H appeared on the screen and booked a Beat-the-Clock match with the stipulation that if Neville could last 4:45 against Bo, he would get his title shot on the first live edition of NXT. Neville went the distance and earned his shot at the belt. Bo tried to attack him afterwards, but Neville outsmarted him and hit his finish.

Episode 3: Taped for February 5th.

Bayley w/ Natalya downed Sasha Banks w/ Charlotte. Tyler Breeze beat Colin Cassady. The Miz went over CJ Parker. Renee Young oversaw a contract signing for the Bo Dallas vs. Adrian Neville title match on the live NXT. Bo didn't show at first, but he eventually came out and told Neville to watch him make quick work of his opponents. Bo Dallas defeated Danny Burch in a non-title match then signed the contract and the show ended with a brawl between Dallas and Neville.

Episode 4: Taped for February 12th:

Alexander Rusev taped-out Sin Cara with the camel-clutch. Emma submitted Alicia Fox, presumably with the Muta-lock then cut a promo wishing Paige a speedy recovery from injury and said she wanted a title shot when Paige is healthy. Alicia, Summer Rae, Sasha Banks & Charlotte attacked Emma then Natalya & Bayley ran down for the save. Mason Ryan beat Sylvester LeFort. Tyson Kidd pinned Aiden English after Colin Cassady provided the distraction. Adrian Neville over Corey Graves; afterwards, Bo Dallas attacked Neville so Triple H came out and made their title match on February 27th a ladder match.

Episode 5: Taped for February 26th.

Emma, Bayley & Natalya downed Summer Rae, Sasha Banks & Alicia Fox. Aiden English beat Colin Cassady. Sami Zayn cut a promo about wanting to face Antonio Cesaro again; Cesaro came out and told Sami he could have a rematch if he promised not to complain when he lost. Sami tried to shake hands, but Cesaro kicked his knee out. Triple H came back out and booked a 2 out of 3 falls match for the live NXT on Feb 27th. CJ Parker pinned Tye Dillenger then turned heel on the fans, because nobody likes him. The Wyatt Family beat Marcus Louis & Jason Jordan.

WWE SmackDown – January 10th 2014. Wells Fargo Centre: Philadelphia, PA Ben Carass.

A short recap of Daniel Bryan teaming with the Wyatt Family on Raw rolled at the top of the show then for the first time in I don't know how long, they splashed out on some pyro for the official open of SmackDown. I guess all that network coin is being spent already. The Usos made their entrance and thanks to the benefit of editing a taped show, the Wyatt Family magically appeared in the ring. Bray Wyatt and Daniel Bryan were nowhere to be seen.

The Usos vs. The Wyatt Family

Usos shone with some teamwork for all of a minute then the Family got the heat on Jimmy. Harper knocked Jey off the apron then nailed Jimmy with a big boot for a cut off spot and Jimmy sold for the Wyatt's big-man offence some more. The heat lasted forever, until Jimmy finally hit Rowan with a corkscrew moonsault for the transition to the hot tag and Jey ran wild on both Wyatt's, but Harper eventually cut him off with a sitout-slam. Finish saw everyone end up on the floor; Jey landed a plancha on Harper, however was taken out by Rowan then Jimmy dove off the apron onto Rowan, finally Harper drilled Jimmy with his discuss lariat and both teams were counted out. – *The Usos & The Wyatt Family fought to a double count-out, at 6:41 (TV Time).* Jimmy saved Jey from another beating and headed up the ramp, when suddenly the Wyatt's graphic flashed and an awkward cut was made to Daniel Bryan and Bray attacking the Usos on the ramp. Cole also provided some laughably obvious overdubbed lines. The Family destroyed the Usos; Bryan hit Jimmy with the busaiku knee then Bray nailed Jey with his finish and the Wyatt's posed over the Usos' carcasses. – *Match wasn't great; the heat went way too long, although I did like the finish with both teams brawling on the floor. At least the Usos didn't just get pinned again. The angle after was weird in the sense that it felt like amateur hour in the production department. The edit of Bray & Bryan's reveal was sloppy, Cole's overdubbed lines clearly didn't match the tone/pitch of his voice during the match and there was a bizarre shot transition from the hard camera and what I can only describe as a lower angle hard camera.*

Backstage, Randy Orton asked Vickie Guerrero where Triple H and Stephanie were. Vickie said the authority was not in the building and Orton blew up about being booked in matches without

being consulted. Vic tried to get out the “best for business” line, but Randy cut her off and spoke for every single fan when he told her, “I’m sick of hearing it”. Randy stated he would give Hunter and Steph a piece of his mind on Raw, because that was “best for Randy Orton”. – *Should the top heel really be saying what all the fans are thinking?*

It is my sad duty to report that Miz TV made a return; that’s right, after months of being booked like a total goober and losing in a fan vote to the Great Khali, somebody actually believed we would care what the Miz had to say. Footage of Brock Lesnar “fracturing AND dislocating” Mark Henry’s elbow with the kimura rolled and they showed the botched biel from Big Show, which Brock still managed to take an amazing bump for. Show came out as Miz’s guest and explained that Brock injuring Mark Henry was more than he could stand to watch then declared that he didn’t like Lesnar. Show challenged Brock to a “fight”, so Paul Heyman came out and teased the fight taking place right there in Philly. He also referred to Brock as the, “ultimate fighter in WWE”; subtle. Paul told Big Show that he didn’t get to pick when he fought Lesnar and Heyman booked the match for the Royal Rumble. Paul finished by informing Show that if he wanted a piece of his client before the Rumble, then Brock would not be hard to find...unless it’s on SmackDown. – *So let me get this straight; Big Show is now a valiant hero that stands up for people that can’t fight their own battles? What about all that crying he did when he made the decision to punch 68 year old Dusty Rhodes in the face? Talk about a ridiculous premise. I suppose they had to come up with something to justify Show being used as fodder for Brock to carry on being booked as an absolute killer.*

They showed highlights of the network announcement. Pre and post shows for Raw and SmackDown? Someone has got to be pulling a giant rib with that idea.

Rey Mysterio, Sin Cara & Los Matadores w/ El Torito vs. Ryback, Curtis Axel & The Real Americans w/ Zeb Colter

Rey got half an entrance; everybody else got nothing. Babyfaces on top early; Los Matadores shone against the Americans, Sin Cara took out Axel with a dropkick then Rey set up for a 619 on Ryback, but he rolled outside and the heels regrouped on the floor. After a break, we were right into the near-falls; the matadors delivered a double tope to Rybaxel and Torito hit Axel with a summersault dive. Swagger countered the 619 with his high single-leg slam, but Sin Cara broke up the pin then hiptossed Cesaro over the top. For the finish, Rey countered the doctor-bomb, hit the 619 then dropped the dime on Swagger. – *Rey Mysterio, Sin Cara & Los Matadores defeated Curtis Axel, Ryback & The Real Americans via pinfall, at 4:40 (TV Time). – Another strange deal on this show. It was almost like we got the beginning and end of the match, without a middle. The faces shone, they went to break then it was near-falls and the finish. As a result it was a total showcase match for the babyfaces, which may have been the intention, however there is always the possibility they cut part of this for time.*

A brief history of Randy Orton vs. John Cena video package aired; they tried to make their rematch at the Rumble seem like a big deal, but they were fooling no one.

Non-Title Champion vs. Champion Match: Randy Orton (WWE World Heavyweight Champion) vs. Big E. Langston (IC Champion)

Slow pace at the start; E dropped Orton with a couple of tackles, so Randy had enough and simply beat Big E down like he was nothing and posed arrogantly. E recovered and displayed his power with a pair of backbreakers then went for his finish, however Orton escaped and rolled to the floor. Big E sent Randy into the barricade then the heat spot saw E miss a shoulder block and spilled through the ropes to the outside. E made a brief comeback, although it was more like a hope spot as Randy quickly cut him off and hit the hangman DDT. The finish was just as poor as the rest of the match; E countered the RKO and delivered a corner splash, but Orton thumbed him in the eye then scored with the RKO. – *Randy Orton defeated Big E. Langston via pinfall, at 14:23 (TV Time). – Personally, I thought this match was horrible. It was lumbering, had no heat until the finish and was highly tedious to watch. Not only that, but Big E looked like an utter mid-card geek; whoever put this match together didn't give poor E a chance. He didn't get the opportunity to shine and only got a couple of power spots in, Orton beat him down like a chump and didn't give him a real comeback then there was that lame finish. So much for making the IC title mean something now it is the number two belt in the company; we just got more of the same nonsensical garbage of putting the "real" champion over, which establishes that only the top guys are important and you shouldn't care about everybody else.*

Bray Wyatt cut a promo on the Usos in the back while the Family watched on; Bray said the Usos were living a giant lie then Daniel Bryan screamed that everything he knew had been a lie and it made him want to destroy something, or someone. Bray closed with, "Run". – *Bryan is fantastic at virtually everything he does, however I didn't buy for one second that he transformed into a brainwashed pawn who believes in Bray's message.*

Xavier Woods w/ R-Truth & The Funkadactyls vs. Fandango w/ Summer Rae

They showed the distraction finish from main event that set this thing up. Truth was on commentary; he said little of any relevance. Woods pinned Fandango with a quick roll up. – *Xavier Woods defeated Fandango via pinfall, at 1:24. Summer got in Xavier's face, so the Funkadactyls took her out then Truth and Woods got rid of Fandango with a double dropkick. – A complete waste of time and the apparent, let's not get Xavier over plan is working to perfection.*

For some reason Tom Phillips (the NXT guy that knows absolutely nothing about pro wrestling other than what propaganda he has learned from the WWE machine) interviewed the Usos in the back. Jey was selling from the beating earlier and Jimmy said the Usos would stand up and fight back against Bray Wyatt and Daniel Bryan on Raw. – *Jimmy was a little rough around the edges, but showed a lot a fire and potential. Hopefully somebody took notice and will give the Usos more time to develop their characters with a few more promos.*

The Shield cut a promo before the main event; Reigns started it off and declared himself the new "best in the world" after pinning CM Punk on Raw. Ambrose talked about hating snakes then

declared he would “choke the snake out” if it was in the ring with them. Rollins stated that the Outlaws had no place in the future of the WWE and claimed they would break CM Punk again; he finished with the customary, “believe in the Shield”.

CM Punk & The New Age Outlaws vs. The Shield

The faces made some quick tags during the shine then cleaned house and had the routine stare-down with the Shield. False heat on Punk, who came back with a dropkick to Reigns and made the tag. Road Dogg landed his patented jabs and the shake, rattle-n-roll knee drop, however Rollins cut him off with a springboard knee strike. The Shield got the heat on the Dogg and stomped him down in their corner; Rollins delivered a downward spiral into the turnbuckle, Ambrose landed some shoulder blocks and Reigns worked a chinlock. Road Dogg caught Reigns with a transitional DDT for the double-down and CM Punk ran wild off the hot tag. Punk hit Ambrose with his signature spots then they traded finisher reversals and collided with a double crossbody for another double-down. Billy Gunn and Reigns tagged in; Billy got a chance to run wild briefly and he planted Reigns with the jackhammer that he tried to get over as a finish that one time. Finish came when Punk wiped out Rollins with a tope; Gunn set up for the fameasser on Ambrose, when Reigns cut him off with a spear and got the pin. – *The Shield defeated CM Punk & The New Age Outlaws via pinfall, at 13:36 (TV Time).* – *Decent main event; the Outlaws looked good, but with workers like Rollins and Ambrose to feed and bump for you that shouldn't be a surprise. The finish was well timed and once again put the focus on Reigns being the strongest member of the Shield. This slow-burn approach to Reigns' turn is the best storyline in the entire company and it makes you wonder why they don't take a more considered approach to their other major angles. I'm sure if they had protected Big Show and not booked him like a giant baby, buried him after the Survivor Series and thrown him into a random team with Rey Mysterio for a few weeks then a showdown with Brock Lesnar could have stirred up some excitement.*

We got a lot more misses than hits this week. As stated, the main event was alright; the Usos/Wyatts match and subsequent promos were a good way to build towards a match on Raw with Bray & Bryan. Orton vs. Big E was complete idiocy, while everything else was your standard SmackDown filler. The only real “big” news was the announcement of Brock vs. Big Show at the Rumble, however even the logic behind that was more flawed than the Russo and Ferrara booking handbook. Once again SmackDown was totally missable; aren't you just jacked for the pre and post shows that are coming on the network? Two extra hours of geeks that creative has nothing for, yakking and trying to make these humdrum SmackDown shows seem interesting. And all for just \$9.99 a month.

** A quick correction from last week's report. In reference to Brock Lesnar & Shelton Benjamin's OVW tag team, I mistakenly referred to them as the “Minnesota Wrecking Crew”, which was obviously the Anderson's old team name. Not that it matters now, but “Minnesota Stretching Crew” was what I intended to write, so apologies for that little gaff. Hopefully grumpy Ole isn't on his way to find and stomp my mark-ass for even thinking I have the right to comment about his business. I'm sorry Ole!*

Bits & Pieces

In a bizarre and very sad story this week it was reported that Mae Young had been placed on life support after being placed under hospice care a couple of weeks ago. This information from what I have heard and read came from the fact that she was invited to Old School RAW, but clearly couldn't attend. Well, later on this week it was reported that Young had passed away after being taken off life support. It turns out that there was some miscommunication, and Mae Young is in fact still alive and was taken off life support in a good way as far as I can determine – in that she is able to breath on her own. She is still being described as “gravely ill”. I hope that she makes it out of this – she is in fact very tough.

Dolf Ziggler has suffered his second major concussion in less than a year at the hands of a stiff Ryback clothesline at a Superstars taping on Monday. Much like his first, which ended the biggest push of his career as World Heavyweight champion, this was not the result of a callus bump, but rather cast at the hands of another person working too stiff – his concussion mid-way through last year was due to a stiff kick from Del Rio. There has apparently been some heat on Ryback, but luckily as of Friday Ziggler is clear after passing his impact training. The strange think about Ziggler is that they killed his push dead after the first one, which wasn't his fault. I have heard some people propose that he was told to slow down in the past, but did not and therefore there was heat on him for getting injured, but even that doesn't make sense as he hasn't been putting himself out with wacky bumps.

Kaitlyn resigned this week.

Michael Elgin stated the following on Twitter this week in reference to New Japan and any future dealings: “Watching NJPW WK8, my #1 goal is to compete next year at WK9”. Elgin could actually have some pretty amazing matches with a lot of the New Japan roster with Goto, Shibata, Okada and company.

TNA drew it's best viewership in months for the Magnus/Styles TNA World Title match this week – 1.39 million viewers. This shows that they can in fact boost the rating if they have something that people want to see, unfortunately with Styles gone and creative in the state that it's in I don't know how much they really have.

Korakuen Hall saw two sellouts on the same day this week, as both NOAH and NJPW ran the building on January 5th. The NOAH show was headlined by KENTA's title defense against Takeshi Morishima in a match that he lost, ending his 343 day long reign on an afternoon show. It was an impressive sellout, and it was unfortunate that KENTA had to lose the title on what has been in many ways a reinvigorating run for the promotion, but due to the current NOAH scene he didn't have any major opponents left so the right move was to switch the title. The second show was a New Japan evening post-Dome show that I haven't had a chance to see yet, but there should be coverage in next week's issue.

TAKA Michinoku insinuated that he would be leaving New Japan by saying his goodbyes to fellow Suzuki-gun member, Taichi, on the January 5th show. His intention seems to be to focus on his own K-Dojo. Although he may seem like a limited veteran from the majority of matches that he has worked in New Japan over the past few years, he had some very good matches in the BOSJ last year with the likes of Alex Shelley that showed that when he wants to he can still work some of that 90s Michinoku Pro style. Unfortunately he has had very few opportunities to showcase that skill over the past few years.

New Japan released it's New Beginning tour details this week following the 2014 Tokyo Dome show. Please note that the card below is courtesy of the Keeping the Spirit Alive blog who do a great job of covering the latest in puro news.

NJPW Road to the New Beginning 2014/02/02 - Korakuen Hall, Tokyo

1. Sho Tanaka & Yohei Komatsu vs. TAKA Michinoku & Taichi
2. Jushun Thunder Liger, Tiger Mask IV & BUSHI vs. Yujiro Takahashi, YOSHI-HASHI & Jado
3. Tomoaki Honma & Captain New Japan vs. Toru Yano & Takashi Iizuka
4. Hiroyoshi Tenzan, Satoshi Kojima & El Desperado vs. Yuji Nagata, Manabu Nakanishi & Kota Ibushi
5. Minoru Suzuki, Lance Archer & Davey Smith Jr. vs. Karl Anderson, Doc Gallows & Tama Tonga
6. Ryusuke Taguchi's Return Match: Togi Makabe, Ryusuke Taguchi, KUSHIDA & Alex Shelley vs. Prince Devitt, Bad Luck Fale & the Young Bucks
7. Hirooki Goto, Hiroshi Tanahashi & Tetsuya Naito vs. Kazuchika Okada, Shinsuke Nakamura & Tomohiro Ishii

NJPW Road to the New Beginning 2014/02/03 - Fukushima National Sports Festival Memorial Gymnasium (Main Arena)

1. El Desperado & Sho Tanaka vs. BUSHI & Yohei Komatsu
2. Yuji Nagata & Jushin Thunder Liger vs. Tiger Mask IV & Captain New Japan
3. Hiroyoshi Tenzan, Satoshi Kojima & Manabu Nakanishi vs. Takashi Iizuka, YOSHI-HASHI & Jado
4. Minoru Suzuki & Taichi vs. Toru Yano & Gedo
5. Togi Makabe, Ryusuke Taguchi, KUSHIDA & Alex Shelley vs. Prince Devitt, Bad Luck Fale, Matt Jackson & Nick Jackson
6. Killer Elite Squad & TAKA Michinoku vs. Karl Anderson, Doc Gallows & Tama Tonga
7. Hirooki Goto, Hiroshi Tanahashi, Tetsuya Naito & Tomoaki Honma vs. Kazuchika Okada, Shinsuke Nakamura, Tomohiro Ishii & Yujiro Takahashi

NJPW Road to the New Beginning 2014/02/04 - Ibaraki Prefectural Sports Center

1. El Desperado & Yohei Komatsu vs. BUSHI & Sho Tanaka

2. Yuji Nagata & Jushin Thunder Liger vs. Tiger Mask IV & Tomoaki Honma
3. Hiroyoshi Tenzan, Satoshi Kojima & Manabu Nakanishi vs. Takashi Iizuka, Yujiro Takahashi & Gedo
4. Minoru Suzuki & TAKA Michinoku vs. Toru Yano & Jado
5. Togi Makabe, Ryusuke Taguchi & Time Splitters vs. Prince Devitt, Bad Luck Fale & Young Bucks
6. Lance Archer, Davey Boy Smith Jr. & Taichi vs. Karl Anderson, Doc Gallows & Tama Tonga
7. Hirooki Goto, Hiroshi Tanahashi, Tetsuya Naito & Captain New Japan vs. Kazuchika Okada, Shinsuke Nakamura, Tomohiro Ishii & YOSHI-HASHI

NJPW The New Beginning in Hiroshim 2014/02/09 - Hiroshima Sun Plaza Hall

1. Kota Ibushi & BUSHI vs. El Desperado & Jushin Thunder Liger
2. Minoru Suzuki vs. Tama Tonga
3. Yuji Nagata & Kazushi Sakuraba vs. Toru Yano & Takashi Iizuka
4. Hiroyoshi Tenzan vs. Michael Tarver (Yes, MICHAEL TARVER)
5. NWA World Heavyweight Championship Match: Satoshi Kojima vs. “BIG DADDY YUM-YUM” Byron Wilcott
6. Tetsuya Naito & Tomoaki Honma vs. Tomohiro Ishii & Yujiro Takahashi
7. Togi Makabe, Ryusuke Taguchi, KUSHIDA & Alex Shelley vs. Prince Devitt, Bad Luck Fale & Young Bucks
8. Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shibata vs. Kazuchika Okada & YOSHI-HASHI
9. IWGP Tag Championship Match: Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows vs. Killer Elite Squad
10. IWGP Intercontinental Championship Match: Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

NJPW The New Beginning in Osaka 2014/02/11 - Osaka Bodymaker Coliseum

1. IWGP Jr. Tag Championship Match: The Young Bucks vs. KUSHIDA & Alex Shelley
2. Katsuyori Shibata vs. YOSHI-HASHI
3. Minoru Suzuki & Killer Elite Squad vs. Karl Anderson, Doc Gallows & Tama Tonga
4. Togi Makabe & Ryusuke Taguchi vs. Prince Devitt & Bad Luck Fale
5. NWA World Tag Contendership Match: Hiroyoshi Tenzan & Satoshi Kojima vs. Michael Tarver & “BIG DADDY YUM-YUM” Byron Wilcott
6. Yuji Nagata & Kazushi Sakuraba vs. Daniel & Rolles Gracie
7. Hiroshi Tanahashi & Jushin Thunder Liger vs. Shinsuke Nakamura & Yujiro Takahashi
8. IWGP Jr. Heavyweight Championship Match: Kota Ibushi vs. El Desperado
9. NEVER Openweight Championship Match: Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomohiro Ishii
10. IWGP Heavyweight Championship Match: Kazuchika Okada vs. Hirooki Goto

New Japan confirmed this week not only that they would be running their annual Fantastica Mania shows, but that they would also all be on iPPV. Full information is detailed below courtesy of puroresufan – another great site.

NJPW/CMLL, 1/14/14 (Samurai! TV)

Osaka Prefectural Gymnasium #2

1. Titan & BUSHIROAD vs. TAKA Michinoku Kaientai Dojo & Taichi
2. Stuka Jr., Rey Cometa & Fuego vs. Vangelis, OKUMURA & Niebla Roja
3. Jushin Thunder Liger & Maximo vs. Jado & Gedo
4. Tetsuya Naito & Volador Jr. vs. Mascara Dorada & KUSHIDA
5. Rush & La Sombra vs. Shinsuke Nakamura & Ultimo Guerrero
6. Special 6 Man Tag Match: Hiroshi Tanahashi, Mistico & El Desperado vs. Kazuchika Okada, Rey Escorpion & Mephisto

NJPW/CMLL, 1/15/14 (Samurai! TV)

Kyoto KBS Hall

1. Titan & BUSHIROAD vs. Jado & Gedo
2. Stuka Jr., Rey Cometa & Fuego vs. Rey Escorpion, Vangelis & OKUMURA
3. Jushin Thunder Liger & Maximo vs. TAKA Michinoku Kaientai Dojo & Taichi
4. Volador Jr. & KUSHIDA vs. Tetsuya Naito & Mascara Dorada
5. Special Tag Match: Mistico & Rush vs. Shinsuke Nakamura & Mephisto
6. Hiroshi Tanahashi, La Sombra & El Desperado vs. Kazuchika Okada, Ultimo Guerrero & Niebla Roja

NJPW/CMLL, 1/17/14 (Samurai! TV)

Shin-Kiba 1st RING

1. Stuka Jr., Rey Cometa & Fuego vs. OKUMURA, TAKA Michinoku Kaientai Dojo & Taichi
2. Mascara Dorada & Titan vs. Mephisto & Vangelis
3. CMLL World Light Heavyweight Title: Rey Escorpion (c) vs. Maximo
4. Special Tag Match – Brothers vs. Guerreros: Mistico & Rush vs. Ultimo Guerrero & Niebla Roja
5. MATCH RELAMPAGO VIP: La Sombra vs. Volador Jr.

NJPW/CMLL, 1/18/14 (Samurai! TV)

Tokyo Korakuen Hall

1. 3WAY Match: Maximo vs. Taichi vs. Jado
2. Stuka Jr. & Rey Cometa vs. OKUMURA & Yujiro Takahashi
3. Titan, Fuego, Tiger Mask & KUSHIDA vs. Rey Escorpion, Vangelis, Niebla Roja & YOSHIHASHI
4. Volador Jr. & BUSHIROAD vs. Mascara Dorada & El Desperado
5. Special Singles Match: Rush vs. Shinsuke Nakamura
6. Special 6 Man Tag Match: Hiroshi Tanahashi, Tetsuya Naito & La Sombra vs. Kazuchika Okada, Ultimo Guerrero & Tomohiro Ishii
7. National Light Heavyweight: Mephisto (c) vs. Mistico

NJPW/CMLL, 1/18/14 (TV Asahi ch2)
Tokyo Korakuen Hall

1. Maximo & Mascara Don vs. TAKA Michinoku Kaientai Dojo & Taichi
2. Stuka Jr. & Rey Cometa vs. OKUMURA & YOSHI-HASHI
3. Titan, Fuego, El Desperado, Tiger Mask & BUSHIROAD vs. Vangelis, Niebla Roja, Toru Yano, Jado & Gedo
4. Special Tag Match: Tetsuya Naito & Rush vs. Rey Escorpion & Tomohiro Ishii
5. Special Singles Match: La Sombra vs. Ultimo Guerrero
6. Special 6 Man Tag Match: Hiroshi Tanahashi, Mistico & Kota Ibushi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura, Mephisto & Yujiro Takahashi
7. Special Singles Match: Volador Jr. vs. Mascara Dorada

Next Week's Issue

Next week we will be covering more Network news, the New Japan show from 01/05, whatever else surfaces, the road to the Rumble and much more!

Next Week's Issue

Next week we cover the Tokyo Dome in depth as well as how the show stacks up to last year's, thoughts on New Japan business and heading into the North American market, Jeff Jarrett leaving TNA, the latest on the Network from CES, the Bryan heel turn, RAW, the ratings, Ben returns with NXT and SmackDown and so much more!

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