

CUBED CIRCLE NEWSLETTER



PRO-WRESTLING YEARBOOK 2014

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2014 was a unique year for pro-wrestling, one that will undoubtedly be viewed as historically significant in years to follow. Whether it is to be reflected upon positively or negatively is not only highly subjective, but also context-specific with major occurrences transpiring across the pro-wrestling world over the last 12 months, each with its own strong, and at times far reaching, consequences. The WWE launched its much awaited Network, New Japan continued to expand, CMLL booked lucha's biggest match in well over a decade, culminating in the country's first million dollar gate, TNA teetered more precariously on the brink of death than perhaps ever before, Daniel Bryan won the WWE's top prize, Dragon Gate and DDT saw continued success before their loyal niche audiences, Alberto Del Rio and CM Punk departed the WWE with one ending up in the most unexpected of places, a developing and divergent style produced some of the best indie matches of the year, the European scene flourished, the Shield disbanded, Batista returned, Daniel Bryan relinquished his championship, and the Undertaker's streak came to an unexpected and dramatic end. These are but some of the happenings, which made 2014 the year that it was, and it is in this year-book that we look to not only recap all of these events and more, but also contemplate their relevance to the greater pro-wrestling landscape, both for 2015 and beyond.

It should be stated that this year-book was inspired by the DKP Annuals that were released in 2011 and 2012, in fact, it was the absence of a 2013 annual that inspired us to produce a year-book for 2014. Whilst this is by no means a DKP Annual 2014, perhaps some may consider it a spiritual successor of sorts.

– *Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor, Ryan Clingman*

2014 WWE YEAR IN REVIEW WITH RYAN CLINGMAN

2014 was a tumultuous and eventful year for the WWE, both on financial and creative fronts. It was a year that saw the end of the Undertaker's undefeated streak at WrestleMania and the continued rise of Daniel Bryan, culminating in a World Heavyweight Champion victory at WrestleMania, only for him to relinquish it two months later due to injury. It was a year that witnessed the launch of the WWE Network and the subsequent creative collapse that came with it – CM Punk left the company, and waited ten months to shine a much needed light on the circumstances of his departure. Brock Lesnar claimed the company's top prize, the Shield disbanded, major indie and international names like Kevin Steen and Prince Devitt signed developmental deals, and the Ultimate Warrior passed away just a day after his first RAW appearance in close to 18 years. It was not a wholly positive year, with many of the above events resulting in overtly negative consequences for the product; and as has been the case for years, the company's lack of star-power served as a major creative detriment, especially with a three hour show to provide content for. Similarly, the company's creative direction has been an even greater detriment to the creation of new stars. The respective departure and injury of CM Punk and Daniel Bryan deeply affected the product, and as a result of faltering creative, the company didn't make much out of their NXT talent call-ups (apart from Rusev) like Bo Dallas, Adam Rose, Paige, and even former stable members like Luke Harper, Erick Rowan, and Dean Ambrose, who were left as singles stars following the destruction of both the Shield and Wyatt Family – two of the first quarter's most valuable acts.



Conversely, from a pure in-ring perspective the WWE, whilst by no means consistent, produced some of the best matches of the entire year, with the Shield, Bryan, Cesaro, Ziggler, and Wyatts all performing at optimum levels when given the opportunity. Pay-per-view events, or “special events” as was a WWE suggested name at one point, dropped markedly in overall quality, as many had predicted following the launch of the Network the day after Elimination Chamber. At first, with two of the company's best annual shows, WrestleMania and Extreme Rules, following the launch, notions of a pay-per-view show atrophy, due to little short-term incentive to produce compelling specials, seemed unfounded. However, as the months progressed with Extreme Rules and Payback to Money in the Bank, SummerSlam, Night of Champions, and ultimately the dismal Battleground, Survivor Series, and TLC shows, those who predicted such changes were ultimately crowned prognosticators.

The promotion's general creative state, as signified by the quality of Monday Night RAW each week, however, began its decline prior to the launch of the Network. They entered the year (as they have for the past few) on a low following the now annual fall creative slump. Daniel Bryan, the man who the core fan-base had chosen as “their guy”, one that they were going to push for harder all others, had been put down for months on end following his brief title victory at 2013's SummerSlam, defeating John Cena clean, as no talent is almost ever able to do. The returning Batista, his return announced on a late December 2013 edition of RAW, was set for a Royal Rumble victory and top WrestleMania position. The WWE's core fanbase, and perhaps even beyond that vocal minority, rejected Batista as the first quarter headliner, not only booing him when Daniel Bryan wasn't booked in the Royal Rumble, but actively booing every performer remaining in the match with the exception of CM Punk – even Rey Mysterio, a man seemingly beloved by all, was not impervious to the Pittsburgh crowd's vitriol.



This granted the Authority/Bryan feud a certain air of realism, with the man already scheduled to main event the company's biggest show, a physically impressive outsider in Dave Batista, seemingly bumping the most over full-time roster star out of the position core fans wanted to see him in for a long

time. It goes without saying that this was not Batista's doing, in fact he later acknowledged that it was a stupid idea to have him return as a babyface in the wake of Bryan's rise to prominence. As the weeks wore on, Batista went from pure babyface, to subtle heel, and ultimately full-blown corporate bad guy heading into the final promotional stretch to the biggest wrestling show of the year. Randy Orton, already aligned with the "Authority", was the other half of the pre-Royal Rumble Mania main event. With both Batista and Randy Orton as full-blown heels by the time March rolled around; the original projected main event of Batista/Randy Orton wasn't going to transpire.

What followed was quite easily the best television the company produced in 2014, as is very often true for the WrestleMania season. Triple H and Stephanie, whilst portraying the now cliché heel authority characters, did so very well, and with a babyface and natural underdog as beloved as Daniel Bryan, it was a pairing bound to produce memorable angles. In one of the more visually impressive moments for the company in 2014, Daniel Bryan led a group of plant fans in "yes" chants in the ring, to the dismay of a helpless Authority. From a different perspective, a power hungry Triple H beat a handcuffed Daniel Bryan, as Stephanie yelled "drown him" in a brutally effective heat drawer by 2014 standards.

It was in the weeks leading into WrestleMania that, after leading Bryan through hoops time and again, that Bryan, following the "Yes Movement" invasion of RAW, was able to secure himself a championship match – or at least was given a path through which to do so. It was as a result of Daniel Bryan outsmarting Triple H that the following stipulation was made for WrestleMania 30 in New Orleans, Louisiana on April 6th: the winner of a singles match between Hunter and Bryan in the Superdome would secure himself a position in the main event alongside Batista and Orton, in a three-way for the WWE World Heavyweight Championship. With this the stage was set for the most grandiose performance of Daniel Bryan's career.

Approximately twenty minutes into the WrestleMania 30 show, following a strange, albeit fairly enjoyable segment involving Rock, Hogan, and Austin, what may be remembered as the best video package the company has put on in years, the Daniel Bryan 'Monster' package made air. It focused on Daniel Bryan's rise to prominence from the indies, to NXT season one, to WWE, and ultimately the title picture. There was little doubt at that point that Daniel Bryan would be winning the championship in the main event, although after pinning Triple H clean in the middle of the ring, a series of interference spots in the main event three-way added the drama and suspense necessary for a good WrestleMania main event. When Bryan submitted the man who was originally promised a run with the championship, Dave Batista, in the main event, seemingly vanquished the Authority, beat the odds in both reality and kayfabe, and dropped to his knees with confetti raining in the Superdome, it felt like a momentous occasion on the scale of the Eddie Guerrero, or perhaps even Chris Benoit title victories.

Unfortunately, in the weeks that followed his career triumph at WrestleMania, Bryan faced many of the same hurdles that plagued Guerrero, Mysterio, and Benoit during their title reigns. Bryan's first post-Mania program was with the then comedically titled, "The Demon" Kane. Bryan was still the most over singles act in the promotion, and was positioned for the main event of Extreme Rules, but the choice to pair him with Kane at a time when he should have been dropped into a major title program did speak for how those within the company viewed his reign. Inevitably the Kane feud, whilst one of the more campy G-level movie programs of the year, ultimately failed to tarnish Bryan's reign as much as first anticipated, with Bryan forced to relinquish his championship due to a neck injury on the June 9th edition of RAW, which served to further escalate the already intensifying creative obstacles for the product.

The image of Daniel Bryan celebrating in the ring with the two world title belts in front of the company's biggest crowd of the year, on their most important show, will stand as a greatly memorable for the company, but the historically more significant picture took place two matches prior.

In the build to WrestleMania 30 only a minuscule portion of groups discussing the show would have predicted that Brock Lesnar on that night in New Orleans, Louisiana, would be the man to end the Undertaker's 21 Mania match undefeated streak – an idea that has been the most valuable prize in the company for the last five years, and arguably all of professional wrestling. Angles relating to the Undertaker leading into WrestleMania were, for the second consecutive year, uninspired. Rather than focusing on the notion of legitimate credentials, and the stare-down the two had following Lesnar's UFC heavyweight title loss to Cain Velasquez as UFC 121, the build's emphasis was far more supernatural than grounded in legitimate credentials or any history between the two. It is in this way, from the perspective of plausibility of an Undertaker Mania defeat heading into the show, that the Punk and Lesnar matches were fairly similar. However, the two matches were worlds apart in terms of in-ring quality. Where as in the Punk bout at WrestleMania 29, the pair was able to squeeze out a spot akin to HHH's tombstone at WrestleMania 27, where many believed it to be the finish – there was no such spot in the Lesnar match. This was even after a concussant Undertaker had taken several F5s, not a single one of which was bought as the finish. But, at the instant referee Chad Patton's (who was not told the finish) hand struck three at 25:12, the arena, who hadn't been all too loud for the match, went deathly silent – as awe-struck as any modern crowd will come to the Ivan Koloff/Bruno Sammartino WWF title change on January 18th of 1971.

The Shield, despite remaining one of the hottest acts in the company for their entire tenure as a stable, did not feature prominently on the WrestleMania card, simply besting Kane and The New Age Outlaws in what was essentially a squash match. However, their programs both leading into and heading out of WrestleMania were as worth while as anything that the WWE produced creatively in 2014. At Elimination Chamber, the WWE's final ever exclusively traditional pay-per-view, the Shield met the Wyatt Family, another one of the company's best acts at the time, in what was easily a contender for WWE match of the year. However, they were speeding towards a Shield break-up, perhaps even on the WrestleMania stage itself, with Rollins walking out on his team during the March 3rd edition of RAW in another barn burner of a trios match with the Wyatts. But, with the Shield positioned as top babyfaces as a consequence of the Wyatt program, and with the Wyatts broken off for a program with John Cena at WrestleMania and beyond, the Shield, thankfully for the short-term quality of the product, remained intact through June. In that time they had the main roster's best single feud of the entire year with the newly reformed Evolution of Orton, Hunter, and Batista, and ended up producing in my view the company's all around best match of 2014 at Extreme Rules, a hardcore trios match.

With Wyatt devalued due to idiotic booking in feuds with Cena, and the injury of Daniel Bryan, coupled with the departure of CM Punk, the main roster was significantly deficient of top-tier talent. This may have contributed to the company's decision to break the stable up, but their projected solo babyface run for Reigns, together with the quickly atrophying trios division led to the promotion's single most consistent act breaking up on June 2nd when Rollins turned on Reigns and joined the Authority. Of course, this, in hindsight, and arguably at the time, was very much a Russo-esque idea, with little logical incentive for Rollins to ally himself with Hunter and the Authority, when the night prior he had attempted to beat them senseless. What is more, is that the general quality of the product suffered as a result, with, on the average RAW, the Shield carrying a match, various promo segments

and angles.

The Shield members remained strong assets to the product even following the break-up, but with Reigns undergoing emergency hernia surgery (on September 20th, only making a return in-ring appearance at TLC in December), and all three former members of the stable handed incredulous dialogue, and placed in poorly booked programs, even when they had as much potential as Rollins/Ambrose, the three members of the group failed to garner the traction they had as a unit.

Whilst WrestleMania season is most often times hailed as the single most creatively productive time for the WWE of the year, and it most probably is, there exists another period, which often delivers, but almost always derails – the hot annual summer angle. Prime examples can be found of a refreshing new or returning act catching fire in the summer months in the Nexus in 2010, Punk in 2011, Bryan in 2013, and so on. Unfortunately though, the closest they ever came to a potential angle this sort in 2014 was the return of Brock Lesnar after defeating the Undertaker to win the WWE World Heavyweight championship. He won the title in the most one-sided destruction of a major champion, let alone John Cena, you may ever see on August 17th. However, whilst a Brock Lesnar championship reign may sound like a major positive at first glance, it was arguably a net negative for the product in its later months.

As we have seen in the past, even during the title unification saga between John Cena and Randy Orton in 2013, titles can't save a creatively cold product, but, what championships that mean something can do is elevate performers to the point where they can make a difference, and perhaps even more importantly in the short term, give the roster something to fight for. What can be said for Brock Lesnar, and the fact that he only appeared on big shows, is that it makes larger shows like SummerSlam or the Royal Rumble feel more important. But when those are the presumable times when business spikes due to innate interest in the show names regardless, then it becomes counter productive to place Lesnar on shows of that ilk exclusively. Not only does it inflate Lesnar's value as a performer by placing him on shows bound to see bumps in key performance metrics, but it is also, in a certain sense, akin to putting a championship on Andre the Giant. Would Andre have made a good or great champion in his time? Maybe. However, Andre the Giant, the champion, doesn't draw any better than Andre the Giant, which begs the question as to why the title wasn't used elsewhere.

There exists a very strong possibility that Brock Lesnar will be leaving the promotion in 2015 and return to MMA with either Bellator or UFC, which is a major long-term story for the WWE, as with Scott Coker steering Bellator in a more sports-entertainment-orientated direction, and being successful with it, UFC may be pressured into following suit to some extent. Not only does this enhance Lesnar's value for 2015, even if he re-signs with WWE, but also in relation to another key happening of 2014 – CM Punk's WWE departure and UFC signing.

CM Punk has been disgruntled with the WWE in the past, in fact, he came memorably close to walking out when his contract was set to expire in July 2011, leading to the now legendary Las Vegas promo building to Money in the Bank 2011. However, when Punk reportedly “walked out” on the January 27th edition of Monday Night RAW, the night after the Royal Rumble, with two way silence on the situation for months on end, it was quite apparent that something very different had transpired in Cleveland. The silence lasted 10 months before CM Punk finally spoke on the November 26th edition of the Art of Wrestling podcast with Colt Cabana. The stories told on the show were far-reaching and heavily damning, with Punk telling health -related tales on topics from staff infections to concussions that

painted the WWE's acclaimed medical staff as incompetent and lazy. Stories also touched on Vince McMahon and Triple H, both portrayed as out of touch, insincere, megalomaniacal, and highly vindictive, FedExing Punk his termination papers on June 13th, his wedding day to AJ Lee.

Now with CM Punk set to fight for the UFC in 2015 his pro-wrestling future is very much unknown. Before he had signed the deal it was unclear as to what exactly he would spend the remainder of his physically capable years doing, and it still very much is. For all of the hype surrounding the Punk signing, he has no fight experience. He has trained in jiu-jitsu for years, but not for prolonged periods of time, is far from a natural athlete, and has suffered a litany of injuries. What is more is that, unlike Dave Batista who competed in a bucket list MMA fight in 2013, Punk will be fighting on a main stage with a major ramifications depending on the circumstances surrounding the fight. And, with a three fight deal, the question of where Punk should move to next on the card win or lose is still an open one. The UFC deal for Punk is fairly positive however, as even if he does lose his first fight, or continues on only to lose his second or third, he is knowledgeable enough, and as much of a natural for the position that he may very well be able to fill an announcer or presenter role for the UFC leading forward.



With Punk seemingly, at least for the time being, firmly entrenched in MMA the likelihood of him partaking in any pro-wrestling activity for the next few years seems unlikely. However, judging from words spoken on the Colt Cabana podcast, which was admittedly released before news of the UFC deal broke, the probability of him rocking up on a Japanese or indie show is most definitely non-zero.

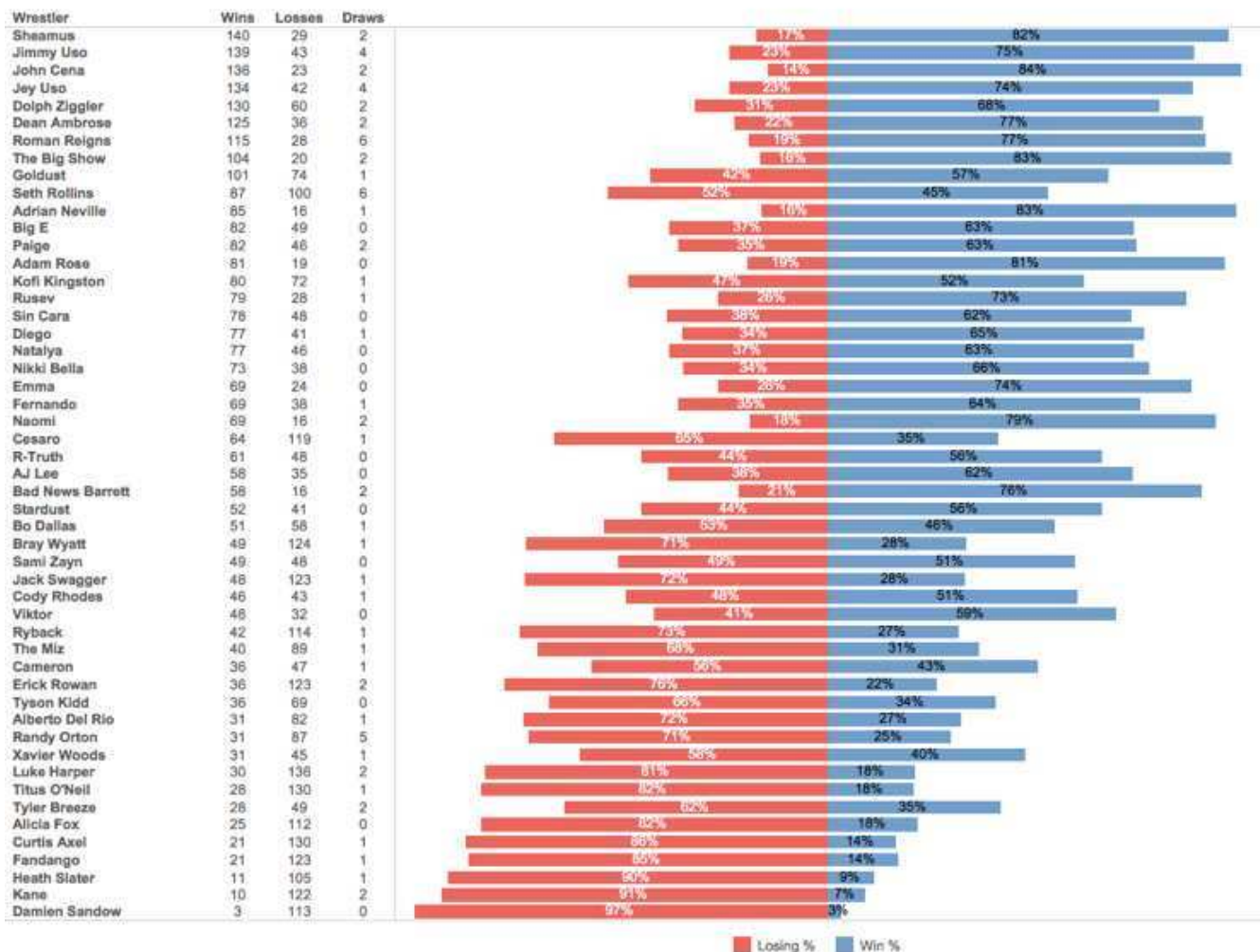
There is no question that the wounds cut by Punk's razor sharp tongue have effected the WWE in some way – upper management at the very least – and the very notion of WWE settling and Punk failing to sign a non-disparagement clause speaks a great deal for what Punk had on the company, and how well it would have held up in court. What cut even deeper however, was the remnants gaping hole that he left in the roster.

With both Daniel Bryan and CM Punk gone by June of 2014, Bryan at least short term, and the Shield disbanded, the creative merit of the product crumbled. In fact, not only did the company's product suffer, but so too did its business with both ratings, attendance, and the Network under-performing. And yet, as Bryan Rose later discusses, there existed an incredibly air of complacency in the product, whether it was the continued focus on heel authority figures, a pro-wrestling trope that ran its course one and a half decades ago, to their stifling of creative freedoms in an environment where quality scripted material is rare, even for skilled orators like Dean Ambrose. But, it is the promotion's main event roster puddle, comprised of a core two stars with the rest of the roster meaning very little at all, that bares the marks of not a single year's worth of creative mismanagement, but those of many.

Daniel Bryan announced his return on the final RAW of the year on December 29th, but the inevitable

reality is that without a strong core of supporting main eventers one star isn't going to salvage a deteriorating product, no matter how talented they may be – especially with the creative in its current state. This is a creative team that booked the Bella versus Bella feud, Wyatt/Cena, Wyatt/Jericho, Bryan/Kane, and many more of the worst programs of the year. Statistically speaking the product will pick up in the first quarter of 2015, but it is what follows that poses a more significant issue to the company's long term success each year. This is especially true when the Black Friday/Holiday Season retail analogy – where a store only has to break-even throughout the year before turning a profit or moving into the black during the holiday season – doesn't hold true, as in the past, with Mania profitability down significantly as a result of the Network. With the current crop of NXT stars on the main roster damaged from poor booking what stands as the company's greatest opportunity to rehabilitate its top brand is the surplus of word-class talent sitting down in Florida. However, even for talent as elite as Sami Zayn, Finn Balor, and Kevin Owens, an opportunity for them to make a viable year-round contribution to the main roster's current woes, will only come with creative change, and more over a shift in the mindsets or the people comprising upper management. Whether an amendment of this magnitude will transpire within the next few years will be decided by the events that have transpired in 2014, and perhaps even more importantly, those set to occur in 2015.

2014 WWE Win/Loss Records



Credit: Dean Knickerbocker

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS WITH "MOOKIE GHANA" CHRIS HARRINGTON

From an investor standpoint, it's been an enormous year for the WWE.

Television rights fees remain an integral revenue stream for the company. In recent years, almost a third of total revenue is derived from TV rights from domestic and international partners.

This year included numerous key content renewals. This was primarily concentrated on Raw and SmackDown TV rights.

In the end, WWE completed negotiations on all of their largest television agreements. That included the United Kingdom (BSkyB, [announced January 30](#)), United States (NBC Universal, [announced May 15](#)), Canada (Rogers Communications, [announced July 31](#)) and India (Ten Sports, [announced September 12](#)). In addition, WWE announced new deals in [Latin America](#), [France](#), [Middle East](#), [Austria](#), [Germany](#) and [Thailand](#).

These deals have set WWE up for firm, growing streams of revenue in the coming years. This is integral because the WWE embarked on a huge gamble when they launched their WWE Network.

In January 2014, [WWE announced](#) their huge initiative – a 24/7 streaming service called “the WWE Network”.

Beginning in February, WWE pay-per-views began distribution through their own over-the-top service. Subscribers paid a monthly fee of just \$9.99 for a service which included both live programming (pay-per-view events) and WWE's extensive back library of wrestling events and territorial footage. WWE Network was going to offer “groundbreaking original programming, reality shows, and documentaries”.

WWE decided to transform their distribution model radically. They moved from selling high-priced monthly pay-per-views through MVPDs (multi-channel video programming distributors such as cable television and satellite operators) to an OTT (over-the-top) monthly SVOD (subscription video-on-demand) service. And they made this transition at a breakneck speed.

Why? The lure of big money.

As chairman [Vince McMahon said](#), “WWE Network will provide transformative growth for our company and unprecedented value for our fans.” In particular, the company believed they could “potentially [be] doubling or tripling the company’s 2012 OIBDA results of \$63 million by 2015.”

It was a bold gamble.

Launching the WWE Network was supposed to be an enormous step forward for the company. It was going to usher in a new era of record profits. Instead, it’s been a complicated year filled with lowered expectations and accelerated cost-cutting.

It’s certainly been a bumpy ride. In the past twelve months, [WWE OIBDA have plunged](#) from positive \$44M (Q4 2012-Q3 2013) to negative \$25M (Q4 2013-Q3 2014). That’s an astounding drop.

If one was ranking wrestling companies according to the profits they were generating, it’s likely that TNA lost far less money in 2014 than WWE did.

Despite premature declarations that “Pay-per-view is dead”, in recent years WWE’s PPV revenue had leveled out to an \$80M stream which generated a healthy profit. The expensive WWE Network which has replaced it has been unprofitable.

Furthermore, WWE’s decision to “go it alone” with the \$9.99 WWE Network really upset the Cable and Satellite partners that used to carry pay-per-views at a much higher price.

WWE chose to discard a powerful partnership and left WWE with next-to-no options on how they could further monetize their biggest PPVs such as the Royal Rumble and WrestleMania. Furthermore, even Vince McMahon [admitted disappointment](#) with the new May NBCUniversal deal. He ceded that launching the WWE Network before completing the lucrative US television rights deal “definitely had a negative impact”.

So while fans have rejoiced at the cost-savings, WWE has not seen the enormous subscription predictions they originally imagined.

At first, WWE’s lowest break-even scenario included [one million subscribers](#) from the domestic service alone. Since then, the company has executed a series of cost-cutting measures ([shuttering the magazine division](#), laying off staff, delaying and cancelling new Network programming initiatives) aimed [at bringing down “break-even” point](#) to be in line with the current 600-800k steady-state subscribership.

It’s been an interesting year for WWE Leadership. The original team tasked with launching the WWE Network – [Executive Vice President of Programming Matthew Singerman](#) and [Executive Vice President of Digital Media Perkins Miller](#) – both left the company in the months following the announcement that WWE had only [attracted 667,287 WWE Network subscribers](#) as of April 7, 2014. The content selection and advertising strategy for the WWE Network languished throughout the summer until the appointment of [Lou Schwartz as the new WWE Chief Digital Officer in October](#).

It’s been a tough experience for the WWE as they try and fix the WWE Network ship. The company has switched from a [\\$9.99 six-month commitment](#) to [announcing a \\$19.99 month-at-a-time plan](#), to [launching a \\$12.99 one-month option](#), to [dropping “commitment” element all together](#). Plans to launch the WWE Network in a key “Phase I” country such as the United Kingdom (as listed in the [original](#)

[launch plans](#)) were [delayed at the very last moment](#) in October and November due to “ongoing negotiations”.

It’s important to emphasize that while WWE has not come close to their original predictions (including the repeated promise that they were “on track” to a million subscribers by the end of 2014), the sky is certainly not falling.

The guaranteed revenue from new TV rights contracts (\$180M+), decently strong licensing (\$40M+) and merchandising business (\$35M+) and the continued steady performance in live events (\$105M+) all contribute to offsetting the burgeoning costs from launching the WWE Network and continued decline in importance from the Home Entertainment segment. WWE has even managed to turn around the albatross that was the WWE Studios by adopting an investment and distribution strategy which is finally generating small profits. (For instance, direct-to-DVD *Scooby Doo! WrestleMania Mystery*, made-for-TV movie *Christmas Bounty* and theatrical release *The Call* all ended up as profitable investments for WWE.)

The largest impediments to growing WWE revenue in the near-term is the general attendance malaise (no significant house show draws beyond John Cena, no indication that another boom period is nearing), concern over superstar dissatisfaction (no more large PPV bonus checks, contract disputes with CM Punk/Alberto Del Rio/Rey Mysterio) and the inability to develop a meaningful strategy around how to increase WWE Network adoption. WWE has a huge opportunity with their digital media division, but they still need to figure out the key to translate their meteoric social media growth and engagement into meaningful revenue streams.

Ultimately, that will come down to creating stars and producing a product that is in demand. The McMahon family still firmly controls the company through their class B voting share. While the stock may shoot up (\$31.98/share in March as expectations for the new U.S. TV deal went sky-high) or plummet (\$10.55/share in May after the new U.S. TV deal was actually announced), the company’s ability to secure \$100M in incremental annual revenue by 2018 from the new television agreements was the critical win in 2014.

WWE sacrificed a lot of profitable revenue, industry relationships and internal harmony to launch their 24/7 OTT streaming service. In the end, WWE was successful in transforming the industry once again. Now it’s up to them to figure out how to become worthwhile.

2014 INDY YEAR IN REVIEW WITH DYLAN HALES

When all is said and done 2014 will go down as one of the strangest years for the wrestling business in recent memory. The year started with the audiences of the WWE and NJPW rejecting the chosen main events of each company's major show, forcing changes that on paper looked like they might radically alter the future of both promotions. Instead New Japan ended up in a place very similar to where it started, with Tanahashi, Okada and Nakamura on top, and no obvious new main event star emerging. Despite this somewhat status quo result, the journey for New Japan was anything but conventional with the top drawing card being the secondary title holder, and two of the most over guys in the promotion being the third tier title holder and a former death match worker who didn't win a single meaningful match all year.

Meanwhile in the WWE, the selfless leader of the NXT Revolution HHH, jobbed clean to Daniel Bryan at Wrestlemania - which somehow was followed up by Bryan working title matches opposite Kane, while HHH moved on to a much hotter and more heavily promoted feud teaming with Randy Orton and Batista against The Shield. By the time the smoke had cleared on that feud Bryan was out for the year with a career threatening injury, and The Shield - despite winning all the matches - was broken up so that Seth Rollins could align with HHH. From there WWE creative and match quality plummeted, and by the end of the year the shows were as stale as they have been in a decade.

In Mexico the landscape may not have been quite as strange, but the year was certainly fun to watch unfold. The Atlantis/Ultimo Guerrero and Rush/Negro Casas feuds finally had dramatic payoff moments, with the Atlantis v. Ultimo Guerrero mask bout emerging as the first lucha match in recent memory to have a reasonably decent chance of winning Match of the Year in the Wrestling Observer Newsletter Year End Awards (and possibly the VoicesOfWrestling.com MOTY balloting as well). The best workers in the world may have been two relative newcomers to CMLL, with lucha indie veteran Hechicero and 21-year old Cavernario coming out of the En Busca de un Idolo tournament looking like two of the most exciting and revolutionary in ring talents on the planet. For their part AAA had a rock solid business year, which included the return to Mexico of Dos Caras Jr. (as El Patron) and actually saw the long standing promise of a return to U.S. markets sort of come to fruition, with the late in the year debut of AAA star laden Lucha Underground on the El Ray Network.

Quasi-major league promotions TNA and Ring of Honor had fascinating years in their own right, with

Impact turning into a bizarre ECW tribute act/PWS hodge podge fusion and ROH having their best in ring year in six or seven years, due in large part to outstanding performances from former top TNA star AJ Styles, and The Briscoes.

But what about independent wrestling? Besides PWG's Battle of Los Angeles tournament which was widely praised as the most star packed indie dream weekend of all time, the U.S. independent scene seemed to have less of a buzz this year than any other in recent memory. In part this is probably due to the fact that many of independent wrestling's top names have been signed to major company contracts over the last few years, culminating in this year's improbable WWE signing of Kevin Steen. Another factor may be that there are a small number of legitimate indie draws - The Hardys, AJ Styles and The Young Bucks come to mind - who can pop houses anywhere they go, but are also difficult to build lasting storylines around, effectively making them useful for dream match feuds and matches but only limited storyline development. The end result of all of this is an independent wrestling landscape that consists of supershow promoted by companies like PWS, NEW and House of Hardcore, niche promotions like Chikara and the back sliding CZW, and Southern indies that rarely get serious attention regardless of their quality.

As someone who watches a wide variety of wrestling from all over the world, one of the more exciting under the radar developments on the indie scene in 2014 was the emergence of Timothy Thatcher, Biff Busick, Drew Gulak, Zack Sabre Jr., Jonathon Gresham and other matwork heavy workers, as strong talents capable of putting on incredible matches working a fresh style. While the style does not appeal to everyone, Evolve shows worked featuring these men, and buttressed by Chris Hero, Drew Galloway and the much improved Caleb Konley, were among the best wrestling shows of the year in 2014. For my money a half dozen of the top twenty-five matches of the year were matches involving one of the above named talents, and both Thatcher and Gulak would rate in my personal top ten in ring performers for the year.

On the Southeastern independent scene, the North Carolina based Pro Wrestling Xperience continues to impress and develop as a sort of hybrid of traditional Southern wrestling and the ROH-inspired workrate indies. Ring of Honor star Cedric Alexander had two of his better matches of the year in PWX opposite AJ Styles and rival Caleb Konley, and the promotion utilized a wide array of talent effectively. Georgia's Anarchy promotion had a solid year in large part due to the efforts of Slim J, Shaun Tempers, Ace Rockwell and other staples of that scene, but still came dangerously close to closing up shop when long time promoter Franklin Dove announced that the promotion was for sale late in the year. Thankfully Atlanta-area promoter Charles Anschutz stepped in, keeping Anarchy and the tradition of wrestling in Cornelia, Ga (which goes back to the cult favorite NWA Wildside) alive at least for the time being. The Chattanooga area continued to thrive with several local promotions dotting the landscape, most notably Empire Wrestling Entertainment, which drew some of the biggest houses in the history of the promotion, due to the hard work, promotional and in ring talents of people like Shaun Tempers (who was a great heel ace for both Anarchy and Empire for much of the year), Drew Delight, Andrew Alexander, former UTC football player Gunner Miller, and others. Empire looks to be growing at a rapid rate, has begun to flirt with the idea of producing and distributing more taped content, and may be poised to have the best year in the promotions history in 2015.

Circumstances and time have prohibited me from doing the detailed write-up on the independent wrestling scene I had hoped to do, but it would not be a Dylan Hales screed if I didn't deliver some lists for people to chew on. So without further ado, I close this brief rundown of 2014, with some "best of"

lists. Note that for the purposes of these lists I am not counting ROH as an independent promotion.

Top 10 Indie Workers of The Year:

1. Timothy Thatcher
2. Drew Gulak
3. Biff Busick
4. Shaun Tempers
5. AJ Styles
6. Chris Hero
7. Kongo Kong
8. Cedric Alexander
9. Caleb Konley
10. Vordell Walker

Top 10 Indie Matches of The Year:

1. Drew Gulak v. Biff Busick - CZW 4/27
2. The Brisoces v. The Hardys - OMEGA 4/26
3. Timothy Thatcher v. Drew Gulak - FIP 3/14
4. Timothy Thatcher v. Zack Sabre Jr. - Evolve 9/13
5. Timothy Thatcher v. Biff Busick - Evolve 8/9
6. Timothy Thatcher v. Jonathon Greshem - Beyond 8/31
7. Kongo Kong v. Danny Cannon - IWA-MS 5/1
8. Drew Gulak v. Timothy Thatcher - AWO 4/4
9. Andrew Alexander v. Shaun Tempers - Empire Wrestling Entertainment 1/4
10. Cedric Alexander v. Caleb Konley - PWX 5/24

2014 PRO-WRESTLING YEAR IN REVIEW WITH BRYAN ROSE

2014, one can easily say, was a year of change. But on the other front, it was also a year of complacency in some respects. While some business models changed, creatively things remained as stagnant as they ever were, at least in North America- some things were good, a lot of things were bad, and overall most of the year felt like going through the motions. In the end, now that 2014 is over, another question has to be asked: When are things, at least in North America, going to change? When is

someone going to think out of the box? When will new stars finally be pushed? And with New Japan trying to break into the North American market, how easy will it be for them to be the clear number two organization in the world, with TNA falling further and ROH not at all a threat to anyone?

Let's take a look at each major organization in the world, or at least the ones I paid attention to the most!

TNA

The promotion entered 2014 with the realization that things were bad, and were probably not going to get better under Dixie Carter's regime. AJ Styles left early in the year, a clear sign that things were going bad for the company. I mean, this was the guy that everyone saw as one of the few homegrown talents TNA had. And now, because of money issues, he left for New Japan to reinvent himself as one of the best wrestlers on the planet. You'd think this was something TNA knew Styles was capable of, but then again they had both Tetsuya Natio and Kazuchika Okada on their roster, and they did absolutely nothing with either. Funny how things work out in this crazy world of ours.

Creatively, the first half of the year was terrible, with inconsistent storylines, needless brawls, women calling other women skanks, and pretty much every other telltale sign that Vince Russo was back writing their shows. Everyone denied it, of course. He left in 2012 over some sort of issue, who knows what. But the show had his writing style all over it, and when the truth was revealed, boy did this promotion suffer the consequences.

So as it turns out, yes, Vince Russo was indeed sending ideas and notes to TNA creative. He was sending Mike Tenay notes on what to say on commentary via email when he accidentally sent the email to Mike Johnson of PWInsider. Sure, we make that mistake sometimes. But when you are Vince Russo sending TNA storyline information by accident to Mike Tenay when all of this was supposed to be a secret, this was a colossal failure. The smoking gun was published on the PWInsider website, and after Vince Russo being Vince Russo by pretending it was a work, he ultimately ended up admitting that yes, he was consulting with TNA still. Years after years of horrible storytelling, in the end, Dixie Carter was still letting Vince Russo on the writing team and have influence on their product. I'd say this was another case of people never learning from other people's mistakes, but when you think about it, WCW got rid of him after a year. A really, really horrible year, but still, TNA has had him employed for at least 9 or 10 years of their 12 year existence. They are STUPIDER than WCW at this point.

One would think this would just be an issue between mad wrestling fans who have had enough of Russo's antics and TNA themselves. Any other year, this would have been true. But guess what? TNA was in negotiations most of the year with Spike TV over renewing their deal. And guess who didn't like the fact that Russo was secretly rehired after leaving in 2012? That's right, Spike TV. Oops. They were pissed that Russo was back, and while it might not have been THE sole event that lead to it (it was probably a myriad of things, or just that Spike wanted to get out of wrestling) in July Spike TV officially canceled Impact Wrestling, but allowed them to remain on the air through the end of the year.

UH OH.

Everyone was predicting TNA's demise after this announcement. And can anyone blame them? All the

telltale signs were there. Budgets were cut dramatically, shows were taped a couple of months in advance. These shows took great effort to seat 200 people at some shows. House shows (which were drawing maybe 200-400 people at that point) were gone. More talent left. TNA aired their last full show in November. Aside from the UK tour coming in January, there was nothing left. When TNA aired Bound for Glory live in October, it seemed to be the final show ever for the promotion. And in a main event where James Storm and Sanada lost to Tajiri and the Great Muta, it didn't really seem like the greatest way to go out.

But there was a savior in TNA's struggle to find a new television deal. After negotiating with Velocity (a Discovery Network channel that I don't think anyone has) and WGN, they ultimately decided to go with another Discovery Network channel, Destination America. This is great news for TNA fans, except for a couple of things. One, the network airs in maybe half the homes that Spike TV airs in, so ratings are going to be minuscule, despite probably being the highest rated show on the network. Two, the network decided the best place for new episodes of TNA Impact was on Fridays. Yes, the lowest rated day in television. The slot that Smackdown has been filling for decades and will finally be leaving in 2015. No one can really look at this and say that it's a positive. But hey, if you look at it a different way, they still exist. It's more of that age old question if a tree falls and no one is around to hear it, did it really fall?

So while TNA continues to exist, the question is how long they'll be able to last. Without Spike TV money, there are going to be further cutbacks, and considering the cutbacks they made last year, that isn't exactly good news for them. They were in a bad situation leading into 2014 and entering 2015, they barely exist. Money will be even tighter and they will be less visible than any other time in their existence. I had Fox Sports when they were on there back in 2004; I don't have Destination America. Many people don't. But hey, at least for TNA, they managed to survive another year. Let's see if they survive 2015.

WWE

I want to say this was the year WWE completely nose dived in creative, but there have been signs of a creative fall coming for quite some time now.

The last couple of years have had some of the lamest programs in the fall. Who could forget the 2011 angle where the roster walked out on Triple H, leading to one of the worst Raws ever in which Vince McMahon (who was taken out of power months before) came back for no reason to let Triple H know he was out of power, only for Triple H to no sell it in the lamest manner possible. 2012 wasn't that bad, but nothing memorable as I had to look on Wikipedia to see what happened (mostly just CM Punk defending his title against Ryback and Cena, as well as the birth of the Shield angle). 2013 had Daniel Bryan, who was riding a big wave of momentum following his title win at SummerSlam, repeatedly losing and looking like a geek in front of the Authority, only to be shoved in the midcard in favor of THE BIG SHOW once his program ended with Orton (he lost). And all of this was a backdrop for the Authority, who constantly needed to get their heel heat by making everyone (and I mean EVERYONE) come off as inferior while they were the coolest and smartest people on the roster.

The start of 2014 wasn't that great either. Batista returned as a babyface to not much of a reaction. He had been pegged to face Randy Orton in the main event of WrestleMania 30. Vince McMahon, who by

the way is totally not out of touch, thought that this would be the biggest WrestleMania main event of all time. Seriously. That kind of tells you his mindset right then and there. While Vince McMahon thought this would be the biggest WrestleMania of all time, the fans weren't exactly in favor of it. The fans, I should mention, that Vince McMahons always hears, though not anymore since recently none of them react to anything on Raw. ZING!

The signs were there at the Royal Rumble, though. John Cena and Randy Orton had another one of their best of nine million series and the crowd HATED that match. Even though they had a decent match as always, they hated it. And they hated not seeing Daniel Bryan enter the Royal Rumble. They wanted him to enter and win, even though he was never announced for the match, but I guess the show had been such a letdown at that point that they wanted someone they liked to win. Actually, anyone but Batista was good for them. When number thirty came and it was Rey Mysterio, for the first time ever Mysterio was booed out of the building. When Roman Reigns and Batista were the last two men in the ring, people were chanting for ROMAN REIGNS. Keep in mind he was a heel and nowhere near the level they're pushing him now. When Batista won, the crowd was pissed. This was an audience who loved Daniel Bryan, and for the next few months the crowds heavily favored Bryan. Even when they did their best to kill his momentum, people still loved him. When he won the title at WrestleMania, the reaction was awesome. And maybe if the year ended on that note, the WWE's creative future might not have looked so bleak.

Unfortunately, there were nine months left, nine bad months.

Well, okay. Not all of it was bad, but, a lot of it was. Daniel Bryan's big feud post-title victory was with Kane. Yes, Kane, who is still a roadblock for anyone trying to gain momentum in 2014 and more than likely will be in 2015 as well. He was put in segments where he continually looked like a geek, just like before WrestleMania because he's not the guy they wanted as champion, they were just kinda forced into it. Then Bryan left to get neck surgery, and he ended up being out for the rest of the year. Daniel Bryan leaving left a HUGE gap in the roster, not only in star power but in workrate as well. With Bryan out of the picture, the next babyface to pick up the title was John Cena. Not the best choice, but it was the only choice. They can't build anyone else up without finding something wrong with them, then going back to Cena or Orton or Big Show or anyone who's been on the roster since 2002.

August was a pretty good month, at least. Lots of stuff was built toward SummerSlam, and the show itself was pretty damn good. In the main event, Brock Lesnar defeated John Cena in one of the most amazing matches of the year. John Cena was utterly destroyed at the show, getting massacred by this beast Brock Lesnar. As I watched it, I was kind of excited for how the rest of the fall would go, but then the next night on Raw occurred and were my hopes ever dashed fast.

Brock Lesnar left, taking the title with him, so suddenly there was nothing to fight for. The undercard itself wasn't much to write about either. Guys won. Guys lost. And most of the time they didn't even have that, as most matches ended in a DQ or countout. Hell in a Cell, which was supposed to be the big blow-off match between former Shield members, Seth Rollins and Dean Ambrose, ended when Bray Wyatt appeared, distracted Dean Ambrose with a spookytime lantern in the middle of the ring, and then proceeded to lay him out. All those months of buildup with that finish destroyed any kind of aspirations I had for WWE. They are creatively bankrupt. They have no idea what they're doing. They have no idea who to push. And all of this lies in one person, and that is Vince McMahon, his own worst enemy.

I didn't want to write this year in review and focus it on how Vince McMahon is a loony old man who has zero sense of reality, but the way he runs his show, and how he is able to just effortlessly make no one matter on his roster is simply amazing. And I can't go on without writing about how he appeared on Steve Austin's podcast and ranted about the millennials and how they haven't grabbed the brass ring and how they shouldn't step on peoples toes if they had concerns with their character. I can't see morale being very high in WWE right now, and despite the build towards Royal Rumble and WrestleMania I don't see it improving much. WWE can put on all the band aids in the world creatively, but eventually those band aids will wear out, and then what?

The bright spot in WWE is down in NXT, where some of the best talent of the last few years have been signed and have become major parts of the developmental league. Sami Zayn and Adrian Neville have been in the league for a good while now, and they have continually shown to be some of the brightest talent in the world. Zayn is one hell of a babyface and Neville's flying is amazing, not to mention he's improved some on promos. Finn Balor and Hideo Itami, formerly Prince Devitt and KENTA, made their debuts and have come off as future stars, especially Balor who I'm pretty sure those on the main roster can't mess up, but I've seen them go all out on making somebody a non-star (see: Cesaro) so we'll see. With the addition of Kevin Owens, as well as other big stars like Baron Corbin, The Lucha Dragons, the Vaudevillans and of course the Women's champion Charlotte and rival Sasha Banks, there's a bevy of talent here who do it better than most on the main roster. Of course, it's all about presentation. Triple H had done a fine job making these guys look like stars, and everything they do feels important. I get none of that on Raw. NXT is a fun hour to look at and their specials have been something else. Here's hoping more fresh talent come in as we ring in the New Year, and the ones that get called up don't get silly gimmicks that will kill them dead.

I guess beyond creative, I should mention the other aspects of the company. Financially, they've lost a ton of money this year. The WWE Network sounded great when it first launched. And there's aspects of it that I do like. I like the idea of watching any WWE PPV ever, and the documentaries they've aired are cool. The problem is, there's not much beyond that. They added World Class and ECW, but haven't updated them in months. Same goes for Nitro, Raw and SmackDown. And their original programming, which looked promising at the start, is pretty much just archival footage and talking heads, nothing substantial. Even in this regard, the WWE Network isn't doing much creatively. And maybe this isn't the primary reason, but numbers haven't been that good from the start, hence there have been drastic budget cuts, including outright releases for the first time in years, as well as a proposed series on the network getting canned, hence what we have now. Everyone had high hopes for the network when it launched in February, but here we are in January and a lot of our hopes haven't been realized yet.

So I wouldn't say this has been a great year for WWE. Their creative is probably at an all time low, they've lost money, and they have no real momentum to speak of going into 2014. Rob McCarron said it best in his last Raw report on the Wrestling Observer website for this year: Daniel Bryan's future is in question, Randy Orton and John Cena are pegged to be two of the top stars, The Authority are back as the top heels and coolest people on the show and Bray Wyatt is in a never ending feud with Dean Ambrose that we just wish would end already. The more things change in this company, the more they stubbornly stay the same. The real question is how long can things stay the same before they're forced to change.

New Japan Pro Wrestling

Capping off a great 2013, I questioned New Japan going into 2014. Well, there was one question for me at least. The G1 tournament the previous year was considered one of the greatest of all time by some people. And as a result, people were hurting. Would that take a hit in match quality as 2014 entered?

Well, the answer was no. In ring wise, to me, New Japan had the best year out of anyone.

Not to say people aren't banged up. Tanahashi obviously has been banged up for some time. Tomohiro Ishii still has his shoulder taped up from a dislocation during the G1 tournament in August. To be honest, everyone there is probably hurting right now. But the mentality is that unless you vitally need surgery, you're on the road and you're competing. There is a similar mentality in WWE and other pro wrestling companies as well, but when you work the kind of style New Japan has, well, you're gonna be hurting.

But we didn't see that affect match quality this year. Almost every show delivered in some way. WrestleKingdom 8 couldn't match the previous year's card, but was still a pretty damn good show, the presentation rivaling that of a WrestleMania. NJPW owner Takaaki Kidani's goal this year was to expand and make New Japan into the beast that it was in the mid 90s. It's not there completely yet, as it still doesn't have the mainstream popularity that it used to under Inoki and chances are, without TV, they probably won't. But numbers have grown this year, and they have even bigger plans for 2015.

Two big shows took place in new, bigger arenas. They weren't total successes, but they weren't complete flops either sales wise. The Yokohama Arena show in May was highlighted by AJ Styles defending the championship he had won earlier that month, as well as the Gracies losing to both Kazushi Sakuraba and Shinsuke Nakamura, respectively. The Gracie matches were not the best of all time, and in fact their entire angle largely bombed in front of people who really weren't interested in seeing it. But at least you can say Gedo and Jado, the bookers of the promotion, had an idea of where they were going, especially when it came to Kazuchika Okada, and that would pave the way to the other big arena show of the year. The G1 Climax 24 tournament finals, moving to the Seibu Dome and bringing 18,000 spectators to witness the main event, Okada taking on Shinsuke Nakamura in a match they had been saving for a good while. They didn't sell out the arena by any means, and there were notable empty seats up high, but it was still a large crowd who came to see those two have a great match – and they did!

I think everyone knows by now about how great the tournament itself was. I guess for historical purposes, I'll say this: it was one of the best tournaments I've ever seen, quality wise. Everyone looked awesome. Well, Yano didn't, but even then he had some good matches here and there. Even Hiroyoshi Tenzan, who I groaned about when he was announced, ended up having some kickass matches with the likes of AJ Styles and others during the tournament. Notable matches for me included AJ Styles taking on Minoru Suzuki (my personal match of the year), Shinsuke Nakamura facing off against Tomoaki Homma, Yuji Nagata battling Tomohiro Ishii, and Kazuchika Okada clinching his spot in the finals by beating Minoru Suzuki. And that's just the tip of the iceberg! So many styles and so many matches were represented in the tournament, and it was a sight to see.

We can't mention 2014 without the rise of the Bullet Club, the biggest stable in New Japan currently. Their gimmick has kind of polarized people. One side thinks that they're super cool, have great merch and them doing DX and nWo signs and sayings in 2014 is hip. Others think that their American finishes

and tomfoolery have no place in New Japan Pro Wrestling, where interference is pretty limited. Personally, I think it's brought more overseas interest to the product than anything. If the Bullet Club is able to bring in more eyes to New Japan, then it's something that is working. I can't verify that with numbers, but even compared to 2013 there's been more talk about New Japan in the United States this year than any other year in a good while.

2015 looks promising for New Japan as in the last few months they have really aimed towards expansion. For the first time ever, the Tokyo Dome is airing live on PPV on January 4. And not only that, AXS TV will be airing New Japan compilations starting later that month. Back home, they are preparing for more shows in more arenas, doing two New Beginning PPV events in February, with more double PPV shows in the pipeline. And all of this will be airing on their new streaming service, New Japan World, for 999 yen. More New Japan content will be available to the masses, and for fans of the promotion it's wonderful news. Ten years ago, without TV, New Japan was barely able to stay relevant. But with their iPPV business becoming successful, and having a string of great performances and shows, they are continually seeing signs of success as they continue to grow in 2015.

Of course, there's still questions. A lot of the top stars are approaching their mid thirties, including Tanahashi and Nakamura, and questions are starting to arise if new stars will be ready when the time comes. Sho Tanaka and Yohei Komatsu, the two current young lions of the promotion, are still waiting for more dojo graduates to be promoted to the main roster so they can leave for their excursion, and it's already been a year. And given the fact that more shows are coming, there's always a question of burnout, much like the UFC, who faces sagging ratings due to overexposure. New Japan hasn't reached that level yet, and maybe never will. But still, as we enter 2015, New Japan should realize the potential problems it faces because a few years down the road, it might bite them in the butt if it isn't taken care of now.

Other Promotions

I didn't watch a whole lot of these other promotions, but there was still some stuff from them I feel like I have to mention.

All Japan Pro Wrestling still exists. That's the good news. Even better news, the eccentric owner Nobuo Shiraishi, whose antics more than likely hurt All Japan's popularity even more, was gone, and the company was restructured to where Jun Akiyama would become company president. The bad news is that the promotion still doesn't seem as relevant as it used to be, and honestly there's not a whole lot of stuff going on there. Hopefully 2015 will be a big restructuring year, but much like TNA, I'm kind of amazed it still managed to exist another year. At least NOAH, who also had a lackluster year, especially with the departure of KENTA over the summer to WWE, has a new financial agreement with New Japan that might breathe life into that struggling promotion.

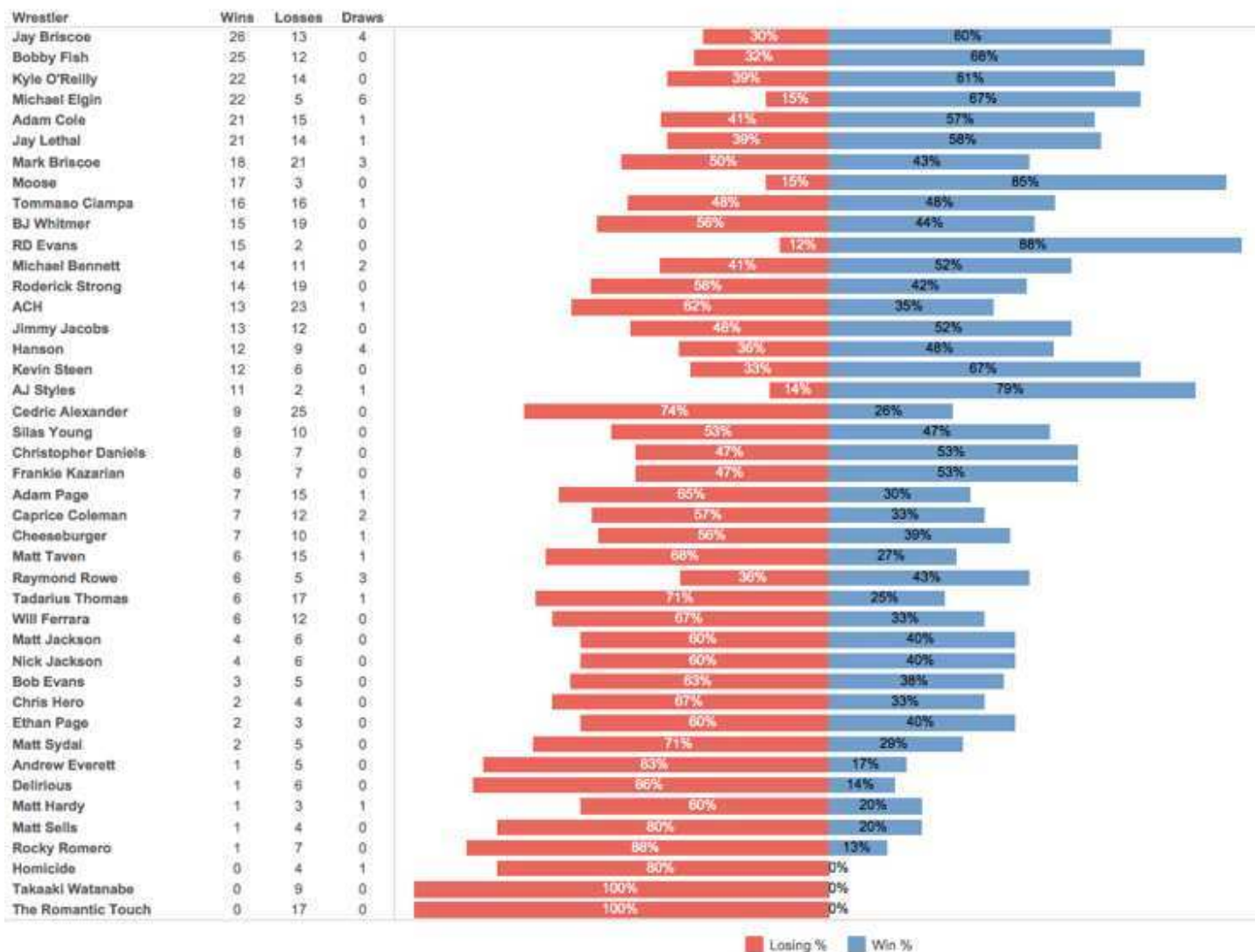
I'd write more about Dragon Gate, but honestly I haven't even watched a single show. My new year's resolution is to watch more Dragon Gate, I promise! They've been really on fire in 2014, and 2015 looks promising as well. They clearly seem to be the number two promotion in Japan, with hot matches and good attendances, not to mention consistently being on iPPV as well.

CMLL's biggest match of the year took place on September 19 when Ultimo Guerrero took on Atlantis

in a mask vs mask match. Yes, the match that had been talked about for years finally took place for reals on the CMLL 81st anniversary show. They didn't have a match of the year candidate in a pure technical sense. But the entire presentation of the match itself was amazing, something that everyone who watched it will remember for a long time. When Atlantis won the last fall and Ultimo Guerrero unmasked, people in the crowd were crying. CRYING. People believed in these two, and they gave it their all, and now that Ultimo Guerrero had to unmask, it was a somber situation for all. The two then complimented each other and hugged and celebrated, and it was awesome. There will probably not be a match like this for a long time, if ever, and it was pretty nice to see live on iPPV with zero problems.

Sticking with lucha (kinda), Lucha Underground premiered in the fall and it had a lot of people talking. It isn't a traditional wrestling show, but rather it was wrestling spliced between film scenes of Konnan, heel owner Dario Cuerto and others furthering angles and feuds. The good thing is, wrestlers are given time on the show to have great matches, and the show usually delivers. So you have a show that's trying something new while still ultimately being a wrestling show. That's what I think shows like

2014 ROH Win/Loss Records



Credit: Dean Knickerbocker

Wrestling Society X failed to do, and I hope Lucha Underground becomes successful as it returns in the new year. The network is small and ratings haven't grown substantially since the start, but let's hope this is the start of something new and cool in North America.

Ring of Honor I've been watching more of this year, and I like their product as well. They aligned themselves with New Japan Pro Wrestling and held two joint shows in North America that were pretty fun. Adam Cole, who ruled this year as ROH champion, had a very good match with Jushin Thunder Liger, who is still extremely popular in the United States after all these years. Cole has a presence as world champion that makes him stand out among pretty much everyone else on the roster, and time will tell if he will remain here or move on to a bigger stage as he seems primed to do that very soon. Ring of Honor probably has the best TV and the best shows out of anyone in North America right now, but the problem is that they're under the Sinclair Broadcasting banner. They can't grow without their backing, and Sinclair has no real interest in doing that for whatever reason. But as long as they continue to be part of them, they'll exist, and they'll probably continue to bring in fresh, new talent which is always a plus.

And I think that does it. I've covered every major promotion in some detail this year and as you can see, this was a year filled with both changes and complacency. More promotions took the steps to stream their shows online this year, and while some didn't work, others did. It's a new process that will more than likely continue to grow into the next year. WWE's booking is stagnant and TNA continues to hang on by a thread, but we could have said that last year as well. New Japan had another great year, but with the same guys, and one has to wonder how long their bodies will last before someone new can take their place. It was a transitional year, a year of change and a year of more things remaining the same. But with New Japan entering North America, as well as Lucha Underground starting to gain traction, one has to wonder what the wrestling scene will look like by the end of 2015.

-Bryan Rose

NXT THE FUTURE IS... WHEN EXACTLY? WITH BEN CARASS

The WWE has had developmental territories for well over two decades. When Jerry Lawler finally went to New York in 1993, Memphis became Vince McMahon's play toy and the earliest incarnation of the evil heel promoter, Mr. McMahon was born during a short, but fun, USWA/WWF feud which only really played out on Memphis TV. Even during the mid-late 90's Memphis was still used as a farm

system, with The Rock and Kurt Angle being just a couple of notables that passed through there on their way up to the main roster. While not being an official WWF farm system, even ECW played its part during the late 90's. Vince would send guys that either weren't ready for live TV or weren't in the creative plans to Philadelphia in order to prevent them from taking all that enticing Turner cheese that Eric Bischoff was throwing around like a yuppie business man on speed. Even though guys like Too Cold Scorpio, Al Snow and Brakkus were hardly going to be difference makers during the Attitude Era, Vince didn't want the negative connotations of more WWF talent showing up in WCW.

I'm sure nearly everyone reading this is familiar with OVW out of Louisville. Under the watchful eye of Jim Cornette some of the biggest stars of the last decade came out of the Danny Davis Arena: John Cena, Randy Orton, Batista and, of course, Brock Lesnar. Even when Cornette flipped his lid and all-but told Head of Talent Relations at the time, John Laurinaitis to go fornicate himself, OVW managed to produce one more diamond. Unlike the aforementioned guys, CM Punk was absolutely not a product of WWE's developmental system. However if anyone other than Paul Heyman got the book in Louisville after Cornette, CM Punk would almost certainly not have lasted to become the longest reigning WWE champion in a generation.

There were others: Deep-South, UPW, FCW – the genealogical ancestor to NXT. But not since the heyday of Cornette-booked OVW TV, which by the way also built to quarterly big shows that big name WWF talent would be brought in for, have we had a developmental territory that actually feels relevant and valuable to the success of the company as a whole. Whether the latter is actually the case with NXT, however is largely debatable.



There is no question that NXT is a great product and the best developmental system the WWE has ever had. Unlike previous breeding ground territories, everything was brought in-house and overseen by Triple H, who takes the success of NXT very seriously. International TV deals, a multi-million dollar

Performance Centre and higher production values are all luxuries that were simply not available to previous farm systems because none of them operated under the WWE umbrella. Still the goal of NXT, in theory, is more than to just produce a good weekly television show that builds to blow-away live specials on the Network. And the objective is certainly not to please the hardcores by signing all the best indie talent and pushing them on TV. NXT, when it comes right down to it, is designed to find and nurture the potential future stars of the company, one of whom will eventually have to replace John Cena as the #1 babyface, and to weed out the weak guys that, in WWE's mind, just don't have it to get over on the main stage.

All of that is fine and well, however there is one giant problem that slapped all of us in the face on the December 8th episode of Monday Night Raw and unfortunately it appears like anyone called up from NXT will come nose-to-nose with the same issue: WWE's sheer, absolute pig-headed incompetence. On that night, Charlotte, the reigning NXT Women's champion and last true hope for females in the WWE to be taken as serious athletes, was beaten in two minutes in her main roster debut by Natalya. The word is that Vince McMahon made the call, much to Triple H's dismay, and was adamant that Ric Flair's daughter would be beaten on her showcase first night in. Now you might be saying to yourself, "Nobody will remember that when Charlotte is brought up for real and they give her a real push". Perhaps nobody will remember, because WWE's product is so horrendous at the moment that it is hard to retain anything that goes on, however the belief that anyone from NXT will get a "real push" is optimistic to say the very least. As baffling as it may be, Vince McMahon and Kevin Dunn are still entrenched in the warped mentality that outsiders simply cannot and will not be portrayed as superior to the WWE Superstars. A mentality that single-handedly ruined what should have been the biggest and most lucrative storyline in the history of the business: the WCW invasion angle. It's insane I know, as now, just like with WCW, WWE exclusively owns all the rights to the NXT name and its talent. As if it needs to be spelled out: NXT guys are WWE guys!

Of course there is an exception to every rule and in this case we have to look no further than the Shield, who were the lucky recipients of arguably the greatest push of any faction since Evolution. At the time they were brought up (November 2012), the guys in the Shield, with the exception of Seth Rollins who was the reigning NXT Champion, were barely established as true "NXT guys". Mainly, because NXT had only been around for 6 months and yet to really establish itself as the cult product it would later become. Dean Ambrose didn't even appear on NXT TV before he was called up and Roman Reigns' NXT tenure consisted of three or four unimpressive squash matches. To be fair, it was clear they had big plans for Reigns as the announcers played up his family heritage and put him over like the second coming of John Cena, which funnily enough is how they want the fans to view him in 2015. Aside from freshening up a stale product and getting two indie darlings into top spots on the main roster, the real reason for the mega push the Shield received was to vindicate Triple H as Head of Developmental as his first big-time call-ups would simply not be allowed to fail, in the process exposing the casual fan to the existence of NXT, and perhaps most important of all, grooming Roman Reigns for a top spot – which would eventually become THE top spot. I'm not trying to denigrate the Shield's run, because for over a year they were consistently involved in the best segments on Raw and more often than not tore the house down with thrilling six-man tags. But if we look at where the three guys are at the end of 2014, it is clear that even the beneficiaries of the greatest push in a decade can be screwed up by the bumbling morons in Creative.

Seth Rollins, on the surface looks to be in a good spot. With Triple H and Stephanie off TV for the time being and Brock Lesnar's limited schedule, he's the de facto top heel and has the Money in the Bank

briefcase. Yet, his heel turn to join the Authority one night after facing Evolution at Payback was a Russo-riffic swerve that made no sense and he ended up as #4 heel behind Triple H, Stephanie and Randy Orton. So with the Authority gone, how do they book Rollins as the now #1 heel? Why, he bitches and moans about wanting Triple H and Stephanie back of course. Sure it's easy heat, but Rollins is still being overshadowed by characters that aren't even on TV and when the Authority comes back, who do you think will be booked as the top heel? It certainly won't be Seth Rollins. In the long run, Rollins should be fine. His in-ring is exceptional and he can just about deliver terribly scripted promos without it dying a death, but the scripted promos are another issue entirely. Barring an act of stupidity on either side, Rollins will no doubt be in and around the main event mix for a long time to come.

Dean Ambrose on the other hand may not be so lucky. Since the Shield split, he has not won a singles match on PPV and has come out the loser in two big feuds with Seth Rollins and Bray Wyatt. Ambrose has buckets of natural charisma and can cut a better promo than just about anyone, but he has already been established in the Tito Santana/Jake Roberts role of the second tier babyface who puts over the rising heel for a run with the true main eventers. Terrible booking, which you may have noticed is becoming a theme here, hasn't helped him either, as campy over-booked finishes to his main event blow-off matches and bizarre in-ring segments like the Seth Rollins mannequin debacle have plagued Ambrose's singles run. Still, he manages to connect with the audience better than 90% of the roster and will likely end up being in the Dolph Ziggler, cult favourite, role for years to come. I'll let you all decide whether that is a good thing or not.



Credit: Devin Chen

Even Roman Reigns can't escape terrible booking. The incumbent top babyface, who we have been hearing for months now is the company's choice to beat Brock Lesnar at WrestleMania for the WWE title, has constantly been put in positions that expose his weaknesses. When he went down with a hernia, Reigns was forced to recite insipid dialog during "via satellite" promos that made him come off like a complete tool and instantly diminished his "cool factor", which is one of the main reasons that John Cena gets booed out of most buildings in hotbed cities. From what I hear Reigns is a likeable guy with a ton of natural charisma but his natural persona is never going to be allowed to blossom when he is constantly suffocated with clichéd, hackneyed promos that are scripted by a bunch of wannabe Hollywood writers that have never been in a real fight. We've seen with John Cena that the company will stand by their choice for the top star and continue to smash him over no matter what, but we all know Vince McMahon's penchant for changing his mind on a whim. I suspect they will stick with Reigns, as if you look at the roster there really aren't many other choices to take the top spot, however 2015 might be a year or so too early to light the rocket and we all know the consequences of ramming the company's choice for top star down our throats; we've been living with it for over a decade now.

The Wyatt Family were the second major call up from NXT and at first, like the Shield, they too seemed somewhat protected by the booking. Things started to unravel this year, however with the strange Daniel Wyatt (Bryan) angle and the inevitable detrimental feud with John Cena. I wrote before WrestleMania XXX, fully expecting Mr Nikki Bella to go over: "this is the one match that John Cena cannot win." – Of course he did. Like countless others before him, the loss to Cena started a dilution of the Bray Wyatt character that, at the end of 2014, has seen him become almost a parody of himself. Then there was that garbage with this singing children and that abortion of a finish to Wyatt's cage match with Cena at Extreme Rules. How is going 1-2 with John Cena supposed to get anybody, never mind Bray Wyatt, over as a top heel? If that wasn't dumb enough, Wyatt went 1-1 on PPV with Chris Jericho then the phony supernatural bag of tricks was pulled out again when he made what I like to think was the ghost of Jack Tunney appear as a hologram during the Rollins/Ambrose Hell in a Cell match. They are currently trying to rehab Wyatt by having him beat Dean Ambrose like a cheap drum, which as previously noted seems to be the role Ambrose has been given, but there is no doubt they seriously damaged the Bray Wyatt character this year. As for Rowan and Harper, well their break up was right out of WCW 2000, in that one day, for no reason at all, they were just not partners anymore. Subsequently, they were thrown in a match against each other on Raw with zero build that went to a DQ in 2 minutes and was never mentioned again, Luke Harper won and lost the Intercontinental Championship and poor Erick Rowan was jobbed out to that young up-and-comer, the Big Show. With the right booking Bray Wyatt can still become one of the top heels, they just need to cut down on all the hocus-pocus and start making his promos more succinct. Harper, at 35, is about where he should be; they just need to get some more babyfaces over for him to work with. And poor Erick Rowan is completely doomed.

Need more evidence that Creative has no clue how to use talent from NXT? How about bringing Emma up and letting her die a death with her wacky dance which they never bothered to introduce to the audience before throwing her out there cold. Putting Xavier Woods on TV just because he has a PHD, realising they had no idea what to do with him and just sticking him with Tons of Funk. Big E was buried before being repackaged as a sweaty preacher with the shuckin' and jivin' Woods and Kofi Kingston then they were beaten on their second night in. A New Day it most certainly was not. Perhaps the biggest indictment of the clueless writers is the complete mishandling of Paige, who from the very beginning was one of the names frequently mentioned when discussions of NXT talent that should be

on the main roster came up. She squashed AJ Lee on her first night to win the Diva's title, with no build, and had nowhere to go but down afterwards. Her Anti-Diva gimmick and family heritage were barely mentioned, she just became another pretty face in the faceless WWE women's division. Then, for no logical reason at all, she turned into a crazy heel and her feud with AJ became an exercise in testing out how far they can push lesbian overtones in 2014.

It certainly is not looking good for Triple H's pet project, however there is one act which, for now at least, they have miraculously managed not to screw up: Rusev and Lana. After his unspectacular debut in the 2014 Royal Rumble, it seemed calling Rusev up to the main roster was a peculiar decision. He went back to NXT for a couple of months, before re-emerging again by beating geeks like Sin Cara, R-Truth and Kofi Kingston on Raw. A couple of short, but intense PPV matches with Big E in June showed he had potential and had come a long way from squashing local guys in NXT. Then he transformed from the "Bulgarian Brute" into a fully-fledged flag waving Russian for the trite, but always effective, evil foreigner vs. American babyfaces routine. Jack Swagger, Mark Henry, Big Show and Jack Swagger again all fell to the mighty Russian; none of the matches were particularly thrilling, but Rusev has continued to grow in confidence and improved greatly with his selling, timing and all-round presence. The act though is completely dependent on his mouthpiece and valet, Lana. I was never blown away by her act in NXT, but on the main roster she has displayed better character depiction, facial expressions and the ability to draw heat with terrible dialog than just about anybody. Why Rusev has been protected better than anybody else is anybody's guess, but it just goes to show you that getting a guy over isn't rocket science: Have him kill people and never get pinned, throw in an attractive woman to deliver some emotive promos and you've got yourselves a legitimate player. What the future will hold when they run out of Americans to feed him and he is inevitably beaten by someone is another story, but if you would have told me back in January that Alexander Rusev would have such a strong presence on the main roster and go unpinned all year long, I probably would have laughed in your face.



So we've established that there is a disconnect between the NXT booking, overseen by Triple H, and Vince McMahon's creative team. The clowns in charge of writing Raw and SmackDown don't seem to have any clue as to why an act gets over in NXT, nor do they understand how to translate it to the main roster. Obviously, certain things that work in front of the 200 or so fans at Full Sail University are not going to play well in the big arenas: Enzo Amore and Colin Cassidy for example, would likely be greeted by crickets if they tried to do their same wacky shtick on Raw that blows the roof off at Full Sail. Still, there are a handful of guys currently in NXT that almost certainly would get over in front of any crowd and if they were brought up the correct way, with vignettes and personality pieces, they would be main roster mainstays for years to come. It would be pointless to go through everybody in the developmental system, as there is a group of talent that are clearly head and shoulders above the rest, so

here are the top prospects in NXT who, barring anything crazy happening, should become WWE Superstars over the next couple of years.

Finn Bálor has everything it takes to be a main eventer in WWE, except the freakish 1980's size which you would think by now should be irrelevant. Sadly it isn't, but Bálor should still make it to the top with his outstanding work and solid promo skills. As his awesome entrance at Takeover III showed, the company are clearly high on him and the body paint will certainly help him stand out on the main roster. No doubt the hardcores will be behind him right away, however if handled correctly it shouldn't take too long for the casuals to see what the rest of us have known for years, that is Fergal Devitt is one of the best workers in the entire business and should be given the opportunity to shine on the big stage. Of everyone currently in NXT, Bálor is the first name that should be called up in 2015.

Sami Zayn had a couple of solid matches on Main Event against Tyson Kidd in November and he teamed with Adrian Neville against Tyson Kidd and Tyler Breeze on the September 8th episode of Raw. Zayn managed to connect with the crowd during these brief main roster forays, especially during the matches with Kidd, and his best babyface in the company act seemed to play nicely in the big arenas. The fear I have for Sami is that the company will see him as too small to get behind right away and he will be beaten over and over again, because that's how they rationalised the fans getting behind fellow undersized internet favourite, Daniel Bryan. Sami is such a great babyface, something that the main roster is crying out for, but he is in real danger of becoming a victim of the, "this guy can't get over" push, when anybody that has a clue about the business knows that Zayn could get over in front of a crowd of sloths and slow lorises.



Charlotte is undoubtedly the future and potential saviour of the abysmal Diva's division. Her development over her two years of training is beyond phenomenal and her presence in less than 18 months on TV is even more astounding. We all know how unimaginably stupid it was beating her in two minutes on Raw, so there's no point going over it again. They might as well let Charlotte continue

to improve and develop in NXT for as long as possible. You could make a solid case for her match with Natalya in May was the best women's match in the history of the WWE, but until the women on the main roster are treated like athletes and taken out of the "popcorn match" role, Charlotte, as we have already seen, will be wasted on Raw. If Vince McMahon and Kevin Dunn are under the assumption that people don't want to see women fight and are just interested in eye-candy, I have three words for them: Ronda Freakin' Rousey.

Kevin Owens is an interesting case, as in any other era, and maybe still today, Vince McMahon would take one look at his body and say, "We're not putting this slob on TV, dammit!" Triple H seems high on him, as his first night in he was thrust into the NXT main event scene and will certainly be challenging his old pal, Sami Zayn for the NXT title in 2015. Like Zayn and Bálor, Owens can work almost any style of match, granted this doesn't mean much to the WWE as they don't care about that anymore, but more importantly he has consistently got over wherever he has gone. Give the guy a mic and he will deliver some of the best and most believable promos of anyone in the territory. However, again, on the main roster he will no doubt be neutered with over-scripted drivel, but like Dean Ambrose, Owens should be talented enough to recite from a script and still make it sound authentic. The main roster is heavily lopsided when it comes to the heel to face ratio, but I would certainly clear out the Mark Henrys, Kanes and Big Shows from regular semi-main event heel roles and find them something more productive, so fresh, hungry talent like Owens can bring some life to the product in 2015.

Adrian Neville is in a tough spot. His ring work is undoubtedly good enough for the big time, but on the stick, he is awkward and clunky. Plus his size, barring an absolute miracle, will prevent him from ever reaching the main event scene on the main roster. That doesn't mean they should never bring him up. Neville could easily fit into an Evan Bourne role and probably would do very well in a spot like that; the big issue is his talking. I just don't think that the writers could help themselves from giving Neville pages of dialog to recite, which would certainly expose him big time. If they choose to give Neville the call-up they need to be even more careful than with the other guys, who maybe higher in the pecking order like Bálor, Zayn and Owens, which by recent booking standards is a laughable proposition.

There are others with a lot of potential: Tyler Breeze, Sasha Banks, Kalisto, Bayley. Obviously if they just let Hideo Itami go out and wrestle he would be tremendous, but that simply isn't going to happen. Notice I didn't mention the Ascension, as I fully expect them to flounder with their LOD 3000 gimmick. As for talent on the indies that really should be given a developmental contract in 2015, Ricochet and Adam Cole are the obvious standouts. Uhaa Nation recently had a try-out which apparently went well and he will surely be snapped up due to his size and athleticism.

One could argue that nobody in NXT at the moment fits the WrestleMania main event mould, and of all the available choices, Finn Bálor would be the most likely, however if you would have told me five years ago that Bryan Danielson would headline WrestleMania XXX, I would have asked what you were smoking and asked where I could get some. Natural talent will always rise to the top, but Creative has to play their part too and until there is a major shakeup in terms of booking philosophy, even the most gifted talent they bring up from NXT will struggle to survive without the company giving them a real push.

The catchphrase, "the Future is Now" is a nice marketing gimmick and it is invigorating to see WWE produce such a refreshing, old-school pro wrestling show like NXT. Sadly, the future looks a million

miles away on the main roster and with a bunch of clowns writing the TV, overseen by soon-to-be septuagenarian, Vince McMahon, the WWE, and all of us, look destined for a future of despair.

2014 DRAGON GATE YEAR IN REVIEW WITH ANDREW PUGH

July 21st, 2013. Dragon Gate's biggest show of the year, Kobe World, took place on this day. Kobe World 2013 was a significant show that changed the landscape of Dragon Gate. When Shingo Takagi, the first graduate of the Dragon Gate dojo, ended the nineteen month Open the Dream Gate reign of the longtime Ace of Dragon Gate CIMA, the key to the new gate was opened. The days of the CIMAs, the Masaaki Mochizukis, the Dragon Kids, the Don Fujiis reigning supreme had come to an end. Kobe World saw all the aforementioned names losing on the biggest stage of the Dragon Gate year to go along with Shingo's victory over CIMA. Kobe signaled the end of the past generation and officially ushered in the era of the Big 6. The six being Shingo Takagi, Akira Tozawa, YAMATO, BxB Hulk, Masato Yoshino and Naruki Doi. Along with this, Kobe World also saw the debut of a new trio with generational principles. Tomahawk T.T., Eita Kobayashi and Yuta Tanaka appeared on screen and delivered a quick message from Mexico(where all three were training for their excursions) that took everyone's notice. They were now the Millenials and everyone born in the 1990s were their allies and everyone born outside the 1990s their enemy. This message was complete with name changes as well; Tomahawk T.T. was now T-Hawk, Eita Kobayashi was now Eita and Yuta Tanaka was now U-T. They were returning in one month's time to show Dragon Gate their new-found "strong lucha" skills.

The new generation was in full swing following the events of Kobe World. The final four months of 2013 planted the seeds for what would come the next year. Shingo, a month after ending the longest Open the Dream Gate reign in history, lost the championship in his first title defense against his former friend who betrayed him two months prior in YAMATO. YAMATO would go on to hold the title for two months until he lost to Masato Yoshino in October. The Millenials quickly made their impact by winning the Summer Adventure Tag League en route to winning the Open the Twin Gate title while instantly forming a conflict with the past generation. They also added fellow millenial mates Yosuke Santa Maria, a transgender wrestler(seriously) and an old sparring friend from Mexico; the high flying, teenage phenom Flamita to their ranks.

Speaking of the past generation, Team Veteran Returns; lead by CIMA, Mochizuki, Dragon Kid and Don Fujii formed a union with fellow veteran-based unit Windows; led by K-Ness, Super Shisa and Kenichiro Arai. Team Veteran Returns and Windows merged their efforts to create We Are Team Veterans in a press conference shortly after Kobe World. This move was a direct result of the

generational shift that transpired months earlier, so as a means to stay competitive against the new generation, they would be teaming up together.

Dragon Gate is an unit based promotion. Which means unit warfare is the name of the game. Almost everyone on the roster is slotted in a unit. Going into 2014, there were five units in the fray; MAD BLANKEY, MONSTER EXPRESS, Jimmyz, Millenials and We Are Team Veteran or VTR for short.

2014 saw The Big 6, the Millenials uprising, historic events and the past generation banding together to survive against the new era intertwine. As much as Dragon Gate is known for the non-stop, high octane, aerial showcases, it's the promotion's storytelling that gets overlooked most. And it was the storytelling that resulted in one of the most memorable years in Dragon Gate history.



Yoshino/Mochizuki from January

The big story of the year was BxB Hulk's defection from his villainous roots in MAD BLANKEY, returning to his heroic status, which he was known for previously, and finally winning the Open the Dream Gate championship. Hulk's rebellion against his fellow comrades started on January 11th, the first Dragon Gate show of the year. In what was thought to be a meaningless match between Naruki Doi and Jimmy Kanda, the match ended in a no contest when both Doi and Kanda refused to stop fighting to the dismay of the referee Yagi(who's also the Dragon Gate GM.) This quickly spiraled into all out war between the two that escalated over the course of five months. Naturally, Doi

leaned to his MAD BLANKEY allies for support, in particular BxB Hulk. Kanda did the same with his fellow Jimmyz, getting Mr. Quu Quu Tanizaki Naoki Tonoyaka Dolphin(this is his actual wrestling name) into the mix. Hulk quickly became annoyed with Doi for insisting to include him in Doi's business; creating tension between the two. Meanwhile Kanda grew angry at Quu Quu for taking pinfalls in matches with his rivals; something Quu Quu was not happy with.

As these four continued with their conflict with each other, CIMA(who occasionally acts as matchmaker for Dragon Gate) found himself added into the feud when an attempt to seize the fighting led to an attack by BxB Hulk and Mr. Quu Quu. And just when the turmoil was becoming crowded, Doi brought his former best friend and partner Masato Yoshino into the fold in March out of anger when Masato Yoshino lost the Open the Dream Gate title to fellow MONSTER EXPRESS member Ricochet; thus allowing the first gaijin to ever win the Open the Dream Gate championship.

With no end in sight to this ever evolving war, GM Yagi finally stepped in and decided to place the six inside the Survival Cage match at DEAD or ALIVE in May. Now the Survival Cage is one of the most unique matches in wrestling, because the match doesn't really have a winner. However there's always one definitive loser. The objective of the match is to escape the cage by climbing it to retrieve

one of the five flags on top of the cage. The person that is the last man standing in the cage either loses their hair or their mask. Due to the fact that the Jimmyz and MAD BLANKEY were going through internal problems because of the Doi/Hulk/Kanda/Quu Quu/Yoshino/CIMA war, the six involved in this match wouldn't put their mask or hair on the line but instead one of their unitmates. Yagi explained that the six in the match would be the proxy to one of their unitmates(which would be determined via a random drawing) and if they were the last person in the cage, the scapegoat would lose their mask or hair depending on the person. The scapegoats ended up being;

CIMA-Dragon Kid(mask)

Naruki Doi-Kzy(hair)

Mr. Quu Quu-Genki Horiguchi H.A.Gee.Mee!(what was left of his hair)

Jimmy Kanda- Jimmy Susumu(hair)

BxB Hulk-Cyber Kong(mask)

Masato Yoshino-Shachihoko BOY(mask)

Hulk's problems with Doi increased tenfold after the drawing. This was coupled with the escalated conflict between Kzy and Cyber Kong, due to Kzy begging both Doi and Hulk to work together to protect his hair; which drew the ire of Kong, who felt his mask was more important to protect than Kzy's hair. The tension Hulk had with his unit came to a head at DEAD or ALIVE. Even with moments of friendly fire, Doi and Hulk generally worked together inside the cage. The turning point came when Hulk had a clear breakaway to retrieve a flag however Naruki Doi pleaded for his friend to return as he was battling Masato Yoshino. Five years ago, BxB Hulk found himself in the same position as he had a chance to escape but in process of doing so, he would have left his then unitmate Mastao Yoshino to fend for himself. Faced with a sudden decision moment, Hulk chose to escape and ultimately Yoshino lost his hair. Five years later, with this past event weighing on his conscience, BxB Hulk opted to return and aid Doi instead of leaving him alone. However this resulted in Yoshino escaping. With Doi and Hulk now the final two men in the cage, for some reason, the rest of MAD BLANKEY(including Cyber Kong) outside the cage, aided Doi and chose to prevent Hulk from escaping. This led to thunderous support from the crowd in favor of Hulk. Hulk eventually escaped, resulting in Doi being the last man standing and Kzy losing his hair. After the match, YAMATO, who regained the Open the Dream Gate Championship in an incredible match against Ricochet, decided it was time for both Doi and Hulk to shake hands and settle their differences. Hulk responded by hitting both YAMATO and Doi with the First Flash. With all the problems that he had been through with MAD BLANKEY, Hulk was finished with them and was breaking free from the unit and his villainous persona. The reborn BxB Hulk stood proudly against his new former friends to overwhelming cheers from the fans.

Predictably, breaking up with his former unit wasn't easy for Hulk. Shortly after, MAD BLANKEY made Hulk's life a living hell, attacking him at every turn for Hulk continued to wear the MAD BLANKEY colors, despite leaving the unit. Hulk, having actually been the creator of the name, logo, colors and concept of MAD BLANKEY, claimed that it was the members of MAD BLANKEY not himself, that were unfit to wear the colors. To settle the matter, the June Korakuen show saw Hulk having to face the entire MAD BLANKEY unit(Naruki Doi, YAMATO, Cyber Kong and Mondai Ryu) in a Gauntlet match where the rights to MAD BLANKEY were at stake. While Hulk defeated Ryu in seconds, the constant inferring from MAD BLANKEY left Hulk unable to bypass Kzy and as a result, he lost the rights to his brainchild. Despite being outnumbered, Hulk continued to fight his former friends and luckily, started to receive help from several Dragon Gate competitors, but mainly Masaaki Mochizuki and Dragon Kid. Now no longer alone in battle, this allowed Hulk to challenge YAMATO for the Open the Dream Gate Championship at Kobe World 2014. After a record-setting six Dream

Gate attempts without a victory, Hulk finally captured the Open the Dream Gate Championship. His greatest moment, however, was quickly soured by an attack from Naruki Doi; who used this moment as a chance to challenge his former friend for the championship he had just won.

Originally, the August Korakuen was intended to be the stage for the title match. However Doi, taking issue to the fact that his title match was determined without his consent, refused to face Hulk under one condition. At the time, Doi was one third of the Open the Triangle Gate Champions and Hulk was currently in a tournament teaming up with Dragon Kid and Masaaki Mochizuki, where the winners would receive a Triangle Gate title shot. Because there was a chance Hulk's team could win, Doi boasted that he would deny Hulk's team a title shot, unless Doi was able to change their Dream Gate match from a one-on-one encounter into another four on one match where Hulk would have to beat four men in order to retain, while anyone on Doi's MAD BLANKEY team could win the Dream Gate. Doi further blackmailed Hulk by using his returned heroic demeanor against him; reminding him of the cities Hulk promised he would defend his championship in. With no other choice, Hulk was forced to accept Doi's challenge.

The unprecedented four on one Dream Gate match saw Hulk fare better this time around than the first handicap match as he eliminated two MAD BLANKEY members. But again, interference from MAD BLANKEY led to Doi pinning Hulk and seemingly winning the Dream Gate. Disgusted by Doi's treachery, GM Yagi wanted to strip Doi of the championship. However, because Hulk accepted the match, he couldn't exactly go forth with it. So what he decided to do was make Doi the interim champion and set up the grudge match at the PPV DANGEROUS GATE 2014. If Hulk managed to win, he would be able to erase the four on one match from the record books, and his match against Doi would count as a continuation of his reign while giving him his first defense. If Doi won, he would officially become the Dream Gate champion. The ever confident Doi was more than sure that he was going to get the revenge MAD BLANKEY was looking for after all these months by crushing Hulk's dreams. However BxB remained determined to fight off MAD BLANKEY.

DANGEROUS GATE set the stage for the final battle between Naruki Doi and the rest of MAD BLANKEY against BxB Hulk. Like encounters prior, Doi alongside MAD BLANKEY made their presence felt on the outside, pushing Hulk to the brink. But with his perseverance and help from Mochizuki and Dragon Kid, Hulk closed the book on his war with MAD BLANKEY by defeating Doi and retaining his championship. The match's aftermath saw Hulk form an union with Dragon Kid and Masaaki Mochizuki; a union that later became known as Dia.HEARTS(short for DIAMOND HEARTS.)

BxB Hulk's rise to the top of Dragon Gate wasn't the only story this year. The Millenials unit entered 2014 with a chip on their shoulders. After getting their feet wet in late 2013, unsurprisingly engaging themselves in a generational rivalry with We Are Team Veterans, the Millenials collectively made a huge splash in the Dragon Gate landscape, both in the Twin Gate division and the singles ranks. While in the midst of battling the likes of Mochizuki, Dragon Kid, CIMA and the other VTR competitors, Eita & T-Hawk were able to capture the Open the Twin Gate championships for the second time in an amazing 30 plus minute encounter with MONSTER EXPRESS' Akira Tozawa and Shingo Takagi. What made the feat even more impressive was that the title victory happened at Kobe World, one year after their debut video aired.

Upon winning the titles, their fellow Millenial, U-T, saw his jaw broken by VTR member Dragon

Kid. This not only intensified their long standing feud with VTR, but the Millenials declared that they were out for every other unit's blood. As a result, a new edge and aggression began to surface from the duo. They used their new found edge to defeat the team of Masaaki Mochizuki and Dragon Kid at DANGEROUS GATE in a hard hitting, fierce battle. With the first defense under their belts, their next aim was repeating as Summer Adventure League champions. To no surprise, they dominated and won their block; finishing with an almost perfect record. Key word being "almost", as their only defeat happened to come at the hands of VTR members CIMA and Gamma; collectively known as Osaka 06. At the September Korakuen show, the two teams engaged in a brilliant tag team match that saw the former standard barer of Dragon Gate, CIMA, submit Eita; adding another layer to the heated VTR/Millenials feud.

Still, Eita and T-Hawk found themselves in the finals of the Summer Adventure Tag League against a team they had actually defeated within their block; the Jimmyz team of Jimmy Kagetora and Jimmy Susumu. Although Eita & T-Hawk dominated the majority of the match in one of the best matches of the year, they were once again defeated, and thus were unable to repeat as Summer Adventure Tag League champions. With the pair stinging, the Millenials were slightly humbled, but had their sights of avenging the loss against Kagetora & Susumu while defending their Twin Gate titles. In Early October, the youngsters were once again pushed to their limits by the Jimmyz duo, but unlike last time, the Millenials prevailed in the end. Their celebration didn't last long, as Osaka 06 came out immediately, challenging Eita and T-Hawk for their championships at the November PPV, GATE of DESTINY. Still reeling over their previous lost to the Osaka natives, the Millenials accepted. The trash talking between the two teams increased leading up to the fateful encounter, including an announcement that the first show after GATE of DESTINY, the monthly Korakuen show, would see We Are Team Veteran square off against the Millenials in a four-on-four match. Eita, T-Hawk, Flamita and Yosuke Santa Maria on the Millenials side against CIMA, Gamma, Super Shisa and Don Fujii on the VTR side. If the Millenials won, We Are Team Veteran would disband however if We Are Team Veteran won, the Millenials would be deported to Mexico.

When GATE of DESTINY arrived, Osaka 06 and Eita & T-Hawk were chomping at the bit to face each other again. The Millenials were looking to prove that their past defeat to the Osaka team was a fluke, while the crafty Osaka 06 wanted to stick it to the duo by not only defeating them again, but by winning the Twin Gate for a third time. The stage was set for a competitive showdown. In another match of the year candidate, the two teams clashed and threw everything that they could at the other. The Millenials dominated yet again and valiantly hung on. However, Eita couldn't best CIMA, and fell, this time to the deadly Meteora, and the Millenials lost again to Osaka 06, but most importantly, they lost the Twin Gate champions. With two loses against Osaka 06, things didn't bode well for the Millenials unit going into their Unit Disbands contra Deportation match days later.

After months of feuding, the Millenials dug deep and defeated VTR in the main event of the November Korakuen, thus causing the end of We Are Team Veteran. With the veteran unit now finished, Eita and T-Hawk saw this as the chance to invoke their rematch clause against Osaka 06 at the first Korakuen in December. While their unit was no more, Osaka 06 accepted, confident that they could defeat the Millenials duo for a third time. Thankfully, for Eita and T-Hawk's sake, the cliché "third time's a charm" turned out to be true, as Eita and T-Hawk regained the Open the Twin Gate championships against Osaka – finally winning the overall battle between the Millenials and the past generation.

Eita and T-Hawk however, weren't the only Millenials that were golden this year. In March of this

year, Flamita made history with his Open the Brave Gate title victory against Genk Horiguchi H.A.Gee.Mee!, becoming the youngest singles champion in Dragon Gate history at age 19 years old. The Mexican high flyer, known for his flashy aerial prowess and smooth technique, Flamita proved rather quickly that he was a fighting champion. As of this writing, Flamita has defended his championship seven times. His defenses include an absolute jaw dropping sprint against Jimmy Susumu at DEAD or ALIVE, a defense against Jimmy Kagetora in June for CHAMPION GATE, one of the pillars of the Brave Gate division Dragon Kid at Kobe World, the scrappy Mr. Quu Quu Tanizaki Naoki Tonoyaka Dolphin at DANGEROUS GATE, the scheming Kzy at the September Korakuen, the rough and rugged Jimmy Kanda at GATE of DESTINY and finally the ever popular Ryo “Jimmy” Saito a few weeks ago in Sapporo.

These seven opponents, all with different styles, proved that Flamita was just more than a high flyer. The nineteen year was put in situations outside out of his comfort zone. He was in a fight against the likes of Quu Quu and Kanda. He was forced to be on his toes against a smooth competitor in Jimmy Kagetora or a crafty rulebreaker in Kzy. What was most surprising wasn’t necessary that Flamita could hang with them, but he was able to morph and adapt his style to combat his various opponents. However when you look at Flamita’s backstory, suddenly, it doesn’t become much of a surprise at all.



Flamita made his professional wrestling debut on December 12th, 2009; thirteen days after celebrating his 15th birthday. That’s right, Flamita has been wrestling since he was fifteen. An unfathomable feat considering that most fifteen years old are in high school. Most of Flamita’s teenage life has revolved around the wrestling ring. While teenagers were studying from books in order to pass their test, Flamita was studying the art form of wrestling; learning and creating his technique in order to become a great wrestler. And after one spectacular match after another, Flamita hasn’t just made his name

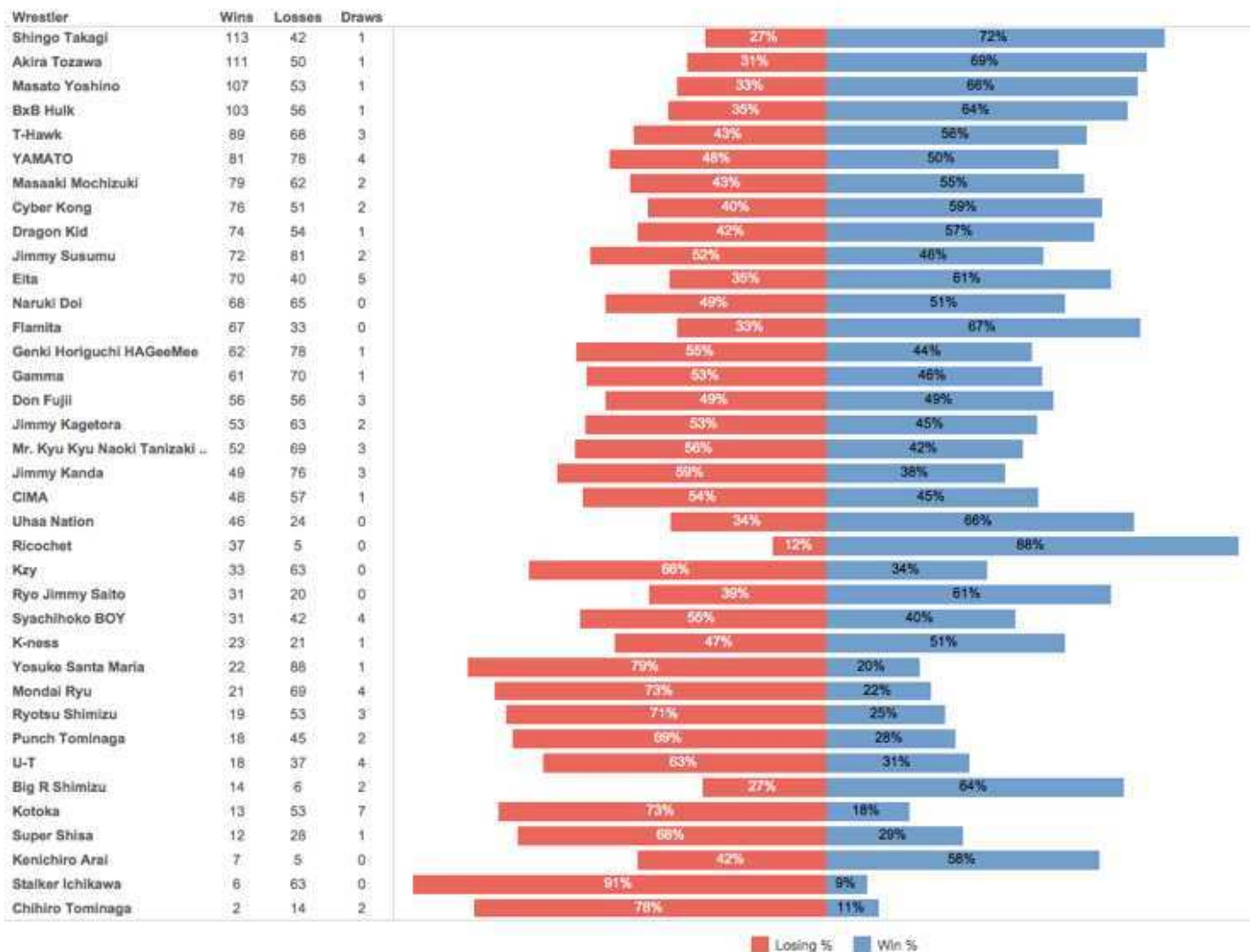
as the youngest champion in Dragon Gate history, but one of the greatest Brave Gate champions in history. On top of that, he’s shown time and again why he’s a top prospect, not just in Dragon Gate but in the entire world.

If there’s one thing the Millenials represent besides their youth and their energy, it’s the desire to prove that despite their age, on any given day they can beat the veterans of the ring and hold their own against anyone in the world. And the scary thing is that not only are these guys motivated to put on the best performances every night, but that not one Millenial is over the age of 24. T-Hawk, the oldest, is 24. Eita is 23. U-T is 21, Yosuke just celebrated her 23rd birthday and Flamita just celebrated his 20th. In a world where some believe that the millenials generation is lazy, Eita, T-Hawk, U-T, Flamita, and yes, even the elegant Yosuke Santa Maria, compete with the sole goal of leaving a mark. This massive chip on their shoulders is the core of the comradery that exists between these five competitors. In 2014, four of the five Millenials(minus Yosuke) won a championship. Yosuke Santa Maria came close to dethroning Horiguchi for the Brave Gate right before Flamita was able to.

2014 saw one of the most exciting years in Dragon Gate history. From BxB Hulk’s triumph, to the

Millenials' emergence, to the past generation not relenting easily to the new generation. Recently, Naruki Doi and Kzy of MAD BLANKEY suffered injuries that has seen them on the shelf indefinitely. In response to this, MAD BLANKEY has re-upped their reinforcements by adding to their ranks the remains of VTR; CIMA, Gamma, Don Fujii and K-Ness. Aiming their efforts towards the Millenials, Eita, T-Hawk, and the rest of the group now must deal with the black and yellow attack that is MAD BLANKEY at FINAL GATE when they defend their Twin Gate Championships against YAMAKong(YAMATO & Cyber Kong). Meanwhile, BxB Hulk continues his Dream gate reign as he defends his championship against his most hated rival Shingo Takagi at FINAL GATE. Regardless of the results that transpire at this show, 2015 promises to, once again, be a thrilling year for Dragon Gate.

2014 Dragon Gate Win/Loss Records



Credit: Dean Knickerbocker

2014 NJPW YEAR IN REVIEW WITH RYAN CLINGMAN

New Japan Pro-Wrestling and its developments in 2014 begat many major questions, pertinent not only to New Japan and the Japanese pro-wrestling scene, but to pro-wrestling as a whole. To what extent can a promotion grow without a major TV deal, specifically in Japan? How well can a Japanese product like NJPW translate to foreign audiences? Can an over the top streaming service prove viable within the next few years, when launched in conjunction with a hot and growing product? These are but some of the many questions that New Japan's continued growth spawned throughout 2014. Some have tried general “rules” for pro-wrestling, such as the necessity of television, or the ceiling placed on Japanese pro-wrestling following changes in television structure and decline in the economy post 1990s. Others inhabit uncharted ground, with no Japanese promotion in history attempting with as much tenacity, to emerge in the American market. Regardless of the rules that govern these questions, they all share in one common theme, and that is one of continued progress.

The promotion began the year with Kazuchika Okada, the man groomed to carry the company into the next decade, as its IWGP Heavyweight Champion – taking it off of Tanahashi at Invasion Attack 2013 on WrestleMania weekend. However, despite the IWGP Heavyweight title existing as the company's most prestigious singles championship dating back to its creation in 1987, it did not take center stage at the 2014 Tokyo Dome show, WrestleKingdom 8. Instead, Shinsuke Nakamura, IWGP Intercontinental Champion, holding a belt that he elevated to new heights in 2013 and 2014, was the man in the main event of the company's annual biggest show of the year. This came as a result of a TV Asahi poll held in December, where fans could vote on what double main event match would go on last – Kazuchika Okada versus G1 Climax 2013 winner Tetsuya for the IWGP Heavyweight Championship, or generational rivals Shinsuke Nakamura and Hiroshi Tanahashi for the IWGP Intercontinental Championship.

The poll was created originally, in all likelihood, due to underwhelming reactions to Tetsuya Naito leading out of the 2013 G1 – and the poll results were said to have swayed strongly in favour of the Intercontinental Championship match. Tanahashi defeated Nakamura beginning a reign that lasted only until April, where Nakamura won his championship back. The match itself was weaker than Okada and Naito's – a match that Okada won – although both may have been called “underwhelming” given expectations leading into the 4th. The immaculately produced show, alongside Nakamura/Tanahashi, however, would aid New Japan financially throughout the year via further elevation of the Intercontinental Championship to near equal status of the IWGP Heavyweight title.

The elevation of the IC title was by no means a single night occurrence, with the championship first beginning to rise in stature when Nakamura defeated Hirooki Goto for it in 2012; preceding that point it was purely a midcard championship. Through two years of growth and development in the hands of Shinsuke Nakamura, the title became worthy of headlining big New Japan shows, which proved financially valuable for the company, as they could run two major events per tour. And that is exactly what they did in 2014, with notable major tours such as 'Destruction' and 'New Beginning', headlined by two iPPVs run back to back in different regions, each show headlined by one of the main singles titles, with the other champion working a tag or trios match on the undercard of the opposite show. The concept worked fairly well, in the sense that, due to the resurgence in popularity of the product and its continued growth, both shows were generally able to draw well. However, this model did come with a major drawback, an overall decline in the quality of major shows on tours run in such a fashion, which may in fact be the reason that tours during the latter half of the year such as 'King of Pro-Wrestling' and 'Power Struggle' reverted back to the traditional single show format.

Unfortunately, even big shows from the later tour format saw quality dips on occasion, such as 'Back to Yokohama Arena' and 'Dominion', due to the single most polarizing act in the company throughout 2014 – the Bullet Club. The Bullet Club was by no means a new act, forming in early 2013 and remaining fairly dominant through the end of 2014. However, their American style antics of repeated interference and DX/nWo style catch phrases, whilst refreshing to a somewhat traditional Japanese product, became exceedingly overbearing as the months wore on. During the Prince Devitt era of the stable, from May of 2013 to April of 2014, the tactics were fairly similar to those used in 2014: ref bumps, interference, and foreign objects were still in common use. However, the general product began to only feel the effects of the repeated and unmetered use of these tools when Prince Devitt was annexed as leader of the stable following his departure from the company in April 2014.

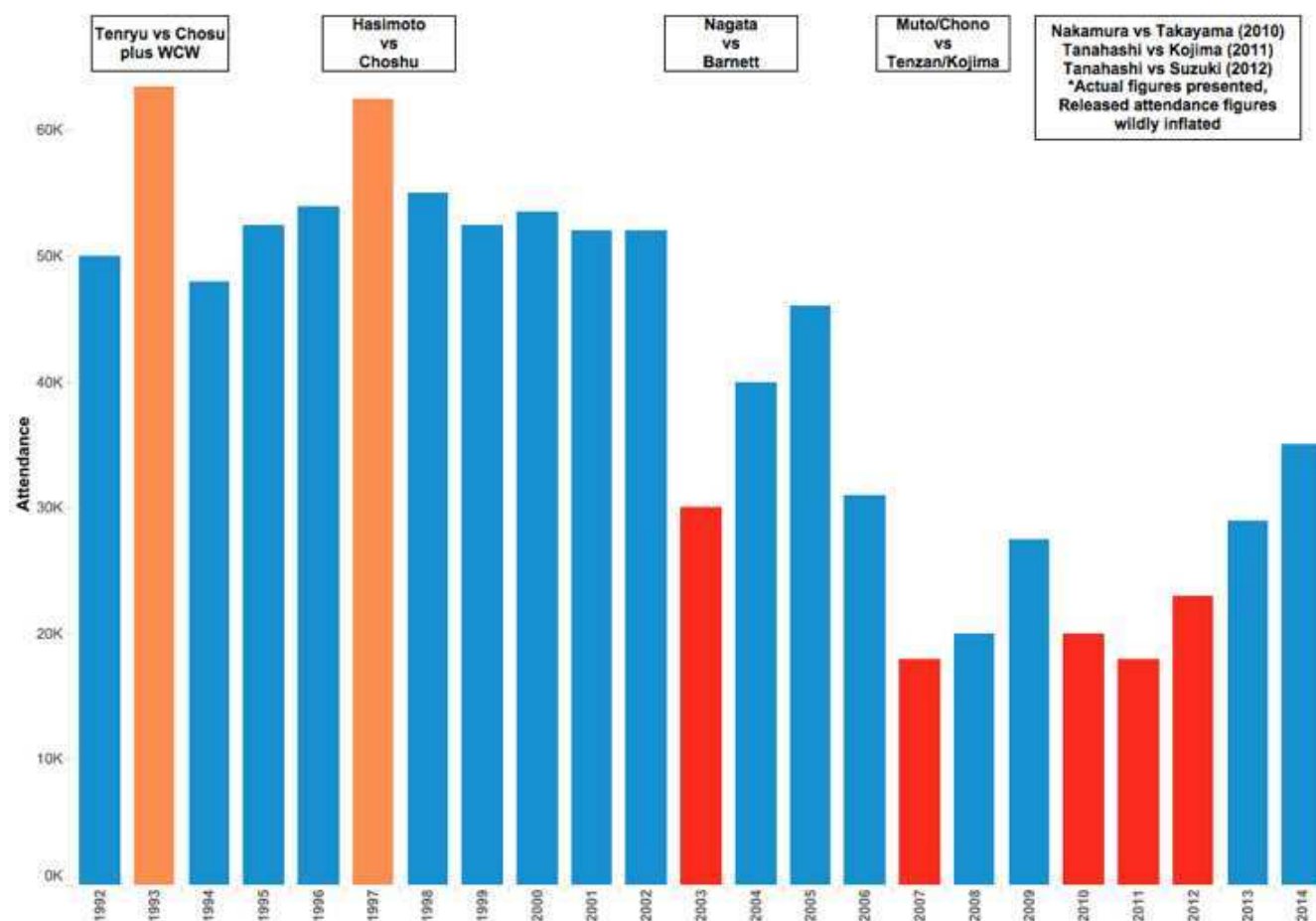
When Devitt resigned from NJPW, signing with the WWE where he would later become Finn Balor, the man to replace him as co-leader of the stable, alongside Karl Anderson, was none other than AJ Styles who had announced his departure from TNA in December of 2013. Styles was immediately slotted into a main event IWGP Heavyweight title program with Kazuchika Okada, attacking him upon his debut at Invasion Attack on April 6th.

Styles would grow to be an asset to the company, but it was not until the later portions of the year that this became at all apparent. Preceding Styles' assault on Okada at Invasion Attack, Okada had put on some of the very best title matches of the year against Hirooki Goto in February and Kota Ibushi in March. But, when Styles and Okada ultimately met in May, in Fukuoka of all places, the results were underwhelming. This being, for all intents and purposes, Styles debut with the company, having only wrestled for the promotion in accordance with TNA's former partnership with NJPW, the Fukuoka crowd seemed unsure of how to react to the match, leading to fairly sub-par results. Making matters worse was that AJ Styles won the championship by means of Bullet Club chicanery, something that the current New Japan fan base was by no means accustomed to.

Styles' less than satisfactory debut with the company, despite winning one of their top prizes, had much stronger consequences than one may have first anticipated, with ambitious New Japan owner, Takaaki Kidani, booking Yokohama Arena for the first time in 11 years on May 25th, but a few short weeks after Styles had first won the championship. In an arena capable of seating approximately 15,000 people for pro-wrestling, the Okada/Styles rematch, with yet more interference, was only able to draw 7,800 fans to the building. Styles' entire reign, spanning five months, only saw four championship matches, two of

which took place in the month of May, and one on a Ring of Honor show in New York. Following the return to Yokohama, which clearly drew lower than expected numbers, Styles had no July title defence. He participated in the G1 Climax, and in October lost the title to Hiroshi Tanahashi – 2014 was not the greatest of years for the IWGP Heavyweight Championship.

New Japan Jan 4th Attendance Figures The Rise, Fall and Rise(?) of an Annual Tradition



Credit: Dean Knickerbocker

Shinsuke Nakamura and the Intercontinental Championship, carried most of the title weight with Nakamura regaining the championship from Tanahashi in April, following an unsuccessful challenge at the 'New Beginning' show in February. Unfortunately, a couple of perhaps otherwise productive months were lost to Nakamura when he was positioned, alongside Kazushi Sakuraba in a feud with Rolles & Daniel Gracie producing a series of sub-par matches. New Japan, with the possible exception of the Dome poll, is incredibly reluctant, at least under current management, to go back on their pre-constructed plans. It can be an excellent mindset producing the likes of Okada, but at other points, as with the Gracies, who simply weren't adding substance to the product and showed no hope of doing so,

it can also be a detriment. Fortunately for the New Japan product their plans are generally well structured through effective booking strategy and audience understanding, making for far fewer deconstructive plans than constructive ones.

The Gracies program led to a singles match between Daniel Gracie and Nakamura for the championship in Yokohama, adding little if anything to the value of the show, which is another reason that attendance was so disappointingly low. The key miscalculation on New Japan's part was an expectation of the current fanbase to value the (somewhat) legitimate shoot presence of the Gracies, and the historical significance that the name holds in combat sports in the country. However, the post-Inoki audience is different from that of the old, and booking tactics that may have appealed then often times fail, especially when they rely on names such as the Gracies.



Nakamura dropped the championship once more, this time to Bad Luck Fale, who he earlier met in the finals of the New Japan Cup, the tournament Nakamura won to earn his second championship match against Tanahashi. Nakamura, once again, had to carry the Fale program, as Fale, whilst possessing an impressive look and presence, was still lumbering and green. Their New Japan Cup final was the most memorable match of their three match series, with Nakamura inadvertently busted open off of an accidental headbutt. With the entirety of August consumed by the G1, Nakamura only had two more Intercontinental Championship matches in

2014 – an unremarkable match with Fale to win back his title after Fale, much like Styles, did very little else in his run, and a disappointing match with Katsuyori Shibata in November. Despite a seemingly uninspiring title run throughout 2014, Nakamura was the promotion's greatest asset, carrying to passable (and at times good) matches, wrestlers who by all accounts had no right having them, and drawing better in headlining major shows than anyone else in the company. He may have under-delivered at points, such as the aforementioned Shibata matches, and some of the Tanahashi bouts, but this arose due to Nakamura's performances when at his zenith being so very spectacular.

With both the Intercontinental and Heavyweight title pictures lacking as compared to years prior there was one performer who managed to boost, at times quite substantially so, the quality of any card he was on, carrying just about anyone to a great match, and making the promotion's shows still feel as worthwhile as they did when Kazuchika Okada, Tanahashi and company were working constant main events in 2012 and 2013 with no interference – that man was Tomohiro Ishii. Ishii, over the past three years, has seen his career narrative change from that of a good, albeit unmemorable and unremarkable performer, to one of a hardworking and beloved underdog, an elite once in a generation worker. One of the hardest working and physically tough men on an entire roster of hardy, durable, and mentally strong wrestlers, Ishii and the NEVER Openweight title picture produced some of the very best matches of 2014.

Lacking a prominent role on the Tokyo Dome show, Ishii was positioned in a multi-man tag opposite Kota Ibushi, leading to an incredibly heated brawl. The pair would have to wait close to four months for a singles match, however, as once Naito, the then reigning NEVER champion, was vanquished by Kazuchika Okada, he was positioned with Tomohiro Ishii – a pairing, which yielded the best in ring feud of 2014.

Surrounding Tetsuya Naito's 2013 G1 Climax victory were queries into the absence of the tenacious spirit he had showcased in 2012 when the promotion teased a feud between he and Tanahashi at the time of the Best of the Super Juniors that year. He had lost a certain spark and star potential that looked to position him as a generational star alongside Kazuchika Okada. However, when feuding with Tomohiro Ishii in February through April, Ishii rekindled Naito's lost aggression and intensity, and the pair used it to full effect in their stellar three match series. Ishii, bested Naito in their first title encounter at 'New Beginning', retained the championship in a second, and worked opposite Tomoaki Honma and KUSHIDA (during the annual Taiwan tour), in two very good matches,. But, once the Yokohama Arena show came around four months had passed, and it was time for Gedo and Jado to book Tomohiro Ishii and Kota Ibushi for the NEVER Openweight Championship.

The promise shown in the memorable brawl between Ibushi and Ishii at the Tokyo Dome went unwasted, and the two had what would surprisingly be one of the most brutal Ishii matches of the year. Ibushi, hailed as a tremendous flyer for years, would most commonly be thought of as incredibly flashly and technically accurate, but not hyper realistic, stiff, or aggressive on a consistent basis. However, much like in his heavyweight coming-out match against Nakamura in the 2013 G1, Ibushi showed that despite being younger, lighter and flashier than Ishii, he could withstand everything Ishii threw retaliate with double the force. What was expected to be a styles clash was in reality just as much of a war as Goto/Ishii from later in the year, or Ishii/Honma from months prior, with Ishii by the end spitting blood with a hematoma atop his head. Generated in the match was also one of the more spectacular spots of 2014 NJPW, with Ibushi attempting a springboard frankensteiner, only to be caught with a Hansen-esque lariat from the top rope. The bout was hailed by some as match of the year caliber, whilst others criticized it for being too stiff, and for both men relying to heavily on hard strikes to get an otherwise underwhelming Yokohama crowd hot. Ishii retained the championship in what was easily the best match of 'Back to Yokohama Arena'.

The end of Ishii's four month long NEVER title reign came at the hands of an unlikely source in Yujiro Takahashi, whose own reign, much like that of fellow Bullet Club members, AJ Styles and Bad Luck Fale, proved uneventful. After holding the championship for just over 100 days, with his only successful defence being against YOSHI-HASHI in Okayama, Yujiro dropped the belt back to Ishii at 'King of Pro-Wrestling' in October – the first NEVER Openweight match following perhaps the single greatest workrate tournament of all-time, the 2014 G1 Climax.

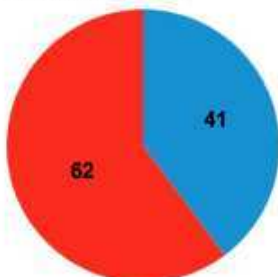
2013's G1 Climax was widely hailed by fans of the product as one of the greatest working tournaments in the history of pro-wrestling, or at the very least of the last couple decades. It was a tournament that housed such esteemed matches as Ishii/Shibata I, Ibushi/Nakamura, Ishii/Tanahashi, and Tanahashi/Naito in the finals, amongst many others. With a nine-show-long tournament spanning 11 days it seemed unlikely that New Japan would be able to reproduce, let alone supersede, such an event, especially when 2013's tournament led to numerous major injuries for the company's top stars, and two tournament casualties in Hirooyoshi Tenzan and Hirooki Goto. However, through a reworking of the now standard parody booking tournament model, in addition to providing the workers with greater time

to rest, running 12 shows in 20 days, New Japan put on what may be considered one of the best working tournaments of all time, one that overtook its predecessor.

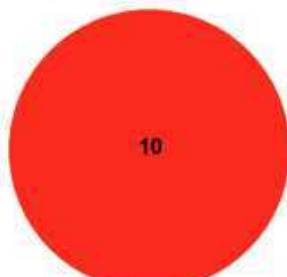
Tomoaki Honma

Another Year in the Life of Everyones Favorite Lovable Loser

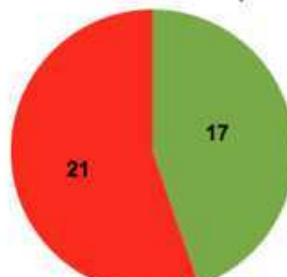
2014 Overall Won/Loss



2014 G1 Won/Loss



2014 G1 Kokeshi Attempts



Wins

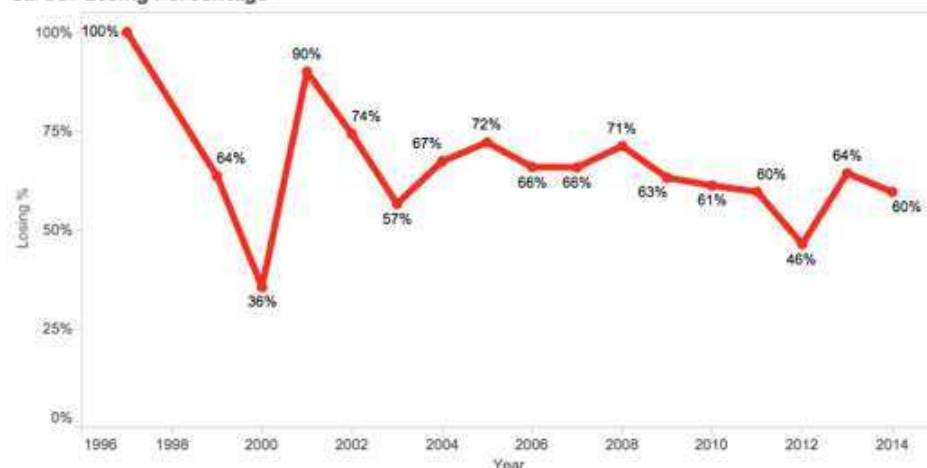
Losses

Kokeshis Hit

Kokeshis Missed



Career Losing Percentage



Not a single tournament-ending injury took place during the G1 itself, with Kota Ibushi standing as the only pre-booked star to miss his opportunity, due to a pre-existing concussion. It is arguable that a change in concussion mind-set may have come as a result of the WWE's reforms over recent years, however, with Tomohiro Ishii working three tournament matches with a dislocated shoulder (he injured it against Davey Boy Smith Jr on night eight, finished the match and still worked against Shibata, Nagata and Anderson) there still exists a “working hurt” mentality, at least with respect to non-head-injuries. Ishii's injury did little to impede his performance, however. Not only did he go on to work his final three matches with a dislocated shoulder, but also lifted, the significantly larger, Davey Boy Smith Jr. up moments after dislocating it in the first place. Acting as the most valuable workers of the tournament were Ishii and Honma (replacing Ibushi), who, through 11 nights, took perhaps unnecessary beatings and produced close to the best match on every show they were on. Tomoaki Honma, whilst failing to claim a single victory throughout the entire tournament, going 0-10, still became but increasingly over with each successive loss. However, to state that Honma became over strictly through his performance in the G1 would be a considerable overstatement, as despite his position on the card through most of his current tenure with the company, he has almost always been

more over than his push, often times considerably so. This was one of the most important factors in his pre-2012 release match on December 23rd 2011 against Masato Tanaka, one of the top matches of that year.

Even with discussion of the 2014 G1 Climax tournament prevailing over all others, and three of the best shows of the entire year (August 1st, 3rd, and July 26th), this year's tournament did not generate a better match than Ibushi/Nakamura or Ishii/Shibata from last year, nor did any one show from this year's tournament better night four from Osaka last year, which still stands as one of the single greatest



pro-wrestling shows I have seen. Still, it was during this tournament that AJ Styles began to demonstrate his true worth as a New Japan talent, putting on stellar matches, not only with renowned workers like Minoru Suzuki (August 1st), Kazuchika Okada (July 21st), and Tetsuya Naito (July 26th), but also alongside some of the weaker talents of the tournament Hiroyoshi Tenzan (July 31st) and Lance Archer (August 3rd) – two men who both had a better G1 than anyone could have hoped for. What separated Styles' performances here from those throughout the year, was a distinct lack of interference apart from in the Suzuki

match, and this allowed Styles to showcase himself as a world class performer. Unfortunately, this was an opportunity not awarded to Prince Devitt in 2013, who acted as one of the least entertaining entrants in the entire tournament, simply due to copious amounts of Bullet Club interference in each of his 2013 G1 matches.

In terms of attendance this year's G1 also stood as a resounding success, drawing well in non-traditional markets, such as Sapporo and Aomori, and selling out in usual strongholds, Korakuen and the Bodymaker in Tokyo and Osaka respectively. The finals of the tournament would have most likely sold out as well, just as it had last year in the traditional venue of Tokyo Sumo Hall. However, Takaaki Kidani, known to be highly ambitious, often times serving in the company's favour, announced at WrestleKingdom 8 that they would be running the G1 Finals, for the first time in history outside of Sumo Hall – the show would be held in a non-traditional venue, the Seibu Dome in Saitama. With a capacity of 30,000, the expectation was for the show to draw significantly under sell-out, as no none January 4th show is able to draw that high a number. However, with the Tokyo Dome that January drawing an encouragingly strong 35,000, (in only the second year in quite some time that the company has released non-kayfabe figures for the event) the G1 finals of 2014 drew 18,000 fans, out-drawing the maximum capacity of Sumo Hall by some 5,000 fans. The arena, only just over half full may have looked slightly awkward, with a large amount of visible seats throughout the arena, but in spite of this, the show drew the biggest attendance of the year for a non-WrestleMania (65,000), January 4th Tokyo Dome Show (35,000), or TripleMania (21,000). In this way Kidani's gamble payed off, although whether his other decisions leading into 2015 will is yet to be determined.

Kidani, from the time that Bushi Road bought New Japan in 2012, has made it abundantly clear that he wants the company to be more than the biggest puroresu promotion, and desires it to within a few years become a worldwide entity. His first step towards this goal was in partnering with Ustream to deliver

globally available internet-pay-per-views starting with 'King of Pro-Wrestling' in 2012, the best show of 2012. International numbers were reportedly low for most of New Japan iPPVs, even for major events such as WrestleKingdom. Still, the outlet proved a valuable revenue stream supplementing live attendance due to Japanese iPPV purchases made possible through the online Japanese language service, Nico Nico. Reports for the 2012 and 2013 Dome buy-rates were of 100,000 buys upwards, implying profits of over a million dollars for those events. But, on December 1st New Japan and television/library partner, TV Asahi, announced New Japan's own streaming service, 'New Japan World' priced at ¥999 , analogous and obviously influenced by the WWE Network priced at \$9.99.



Tanaka/Okada: Tokyo Dome 2018, book it New Japan!

New Japan World, despite its lack in a region block of any kind (which is fairly easy to circumvent, regardless), was aimed primarily at the existing Japanese audience at launch with the entire site in Japanese. However, New Japan also signed another influential deal this year, that being with Jeff Jarrett's Global Force Wrestling promotion to air the 2015 Tokyo Dome show on traditional North American pay-per-view with options for Japanese and English commentary. Comprising the English Team are Jim Ross and Matt Striker, an odd-couple, with the former admittedly having very little experience with the product before the announcement. Whilst NJPW will be undercutting their traditional pay-per-view option considerably, the average American pro-wrestling fan will have little,

if any, knowledge of, or inclination to purchase New Japan World. Therefore it may not be as hazardous to the relationship as it would seem upon first glance.

The pre-existing revenue stream that New Japan World will ultimately cannibalize is its blossoming internet-pay-per-view business in Japan. Pay-per-view, as a consequence of the manner in which television evolved in Japan, isn't remotely as culturally entrenched as in the United States, and so a very unlikely, albeit easy to manage and remarkably fruitful secondary revenue stream should have been kept healthy. The launch of New Japan World was meant as the promotion's answer to the WWE Network that much has been made obvious, and so has Kidani's desire to become Japan's Vince McMahon or Eric Bischoff; and it was a move of this sort that, much like the service it was based on, that didn't seem incredibly well thought out.

Existing in 2014 exclusively in Japanese, for an English user New Japan World is surprisingly intuitive, and functions well on a wide range of devices. But, the service isn't built off of the WWE's mistakes, as World's pricing structure and market size is such that, at the very best, they can hope to make up for the losses in pay-per-view revenue and come to equal prior iPPV profits. The one factor that has been ignored entirely in this conversation though is the aforementioned cultural differential, with mobile internet access spread thicker in Japan than a country like the United States. And with a seemingly hot product, and culture never truly rooted in pay-per-view, the above conclusion may be premature;

ultimately this is simply a rephrasing of one of our initial questions posed at the beginning of this year in review.

Another question relating to both the New Japan World service, GFW, and Kidani's leadership is to what extent a Japanese product like New Japan Pro-Wrestling could translate internationally, which is one of Kidani's most explicit aims. The Bullet Club, with some of its members performing on the independents, as well as Ring of Honor, has gained noticeable traction in North America. One doesn't need to look any further than a recent PWG show to see a number of audience members sporting Bullet Club t-shirts, which have caught on very well as a merchandise item. However, apart from the very fun and successful NJPW/ROH joint shows, *Global Wars* and *War of the Worlds*, in Toronto and New York respectively, the promotion hasn't been tested recently in any foreign market apart from Taiwan. In 2015 they will have television on AXS, the former HDnet with some of the promotion's best matches from 2012-2014 airing on each show starting January 16th with Josh Barnett and Mauro Ranallo on commentary. If the show catches on and performs well in the ratings then it may mean a better chance of successful American expansion in 2015 and beyond.

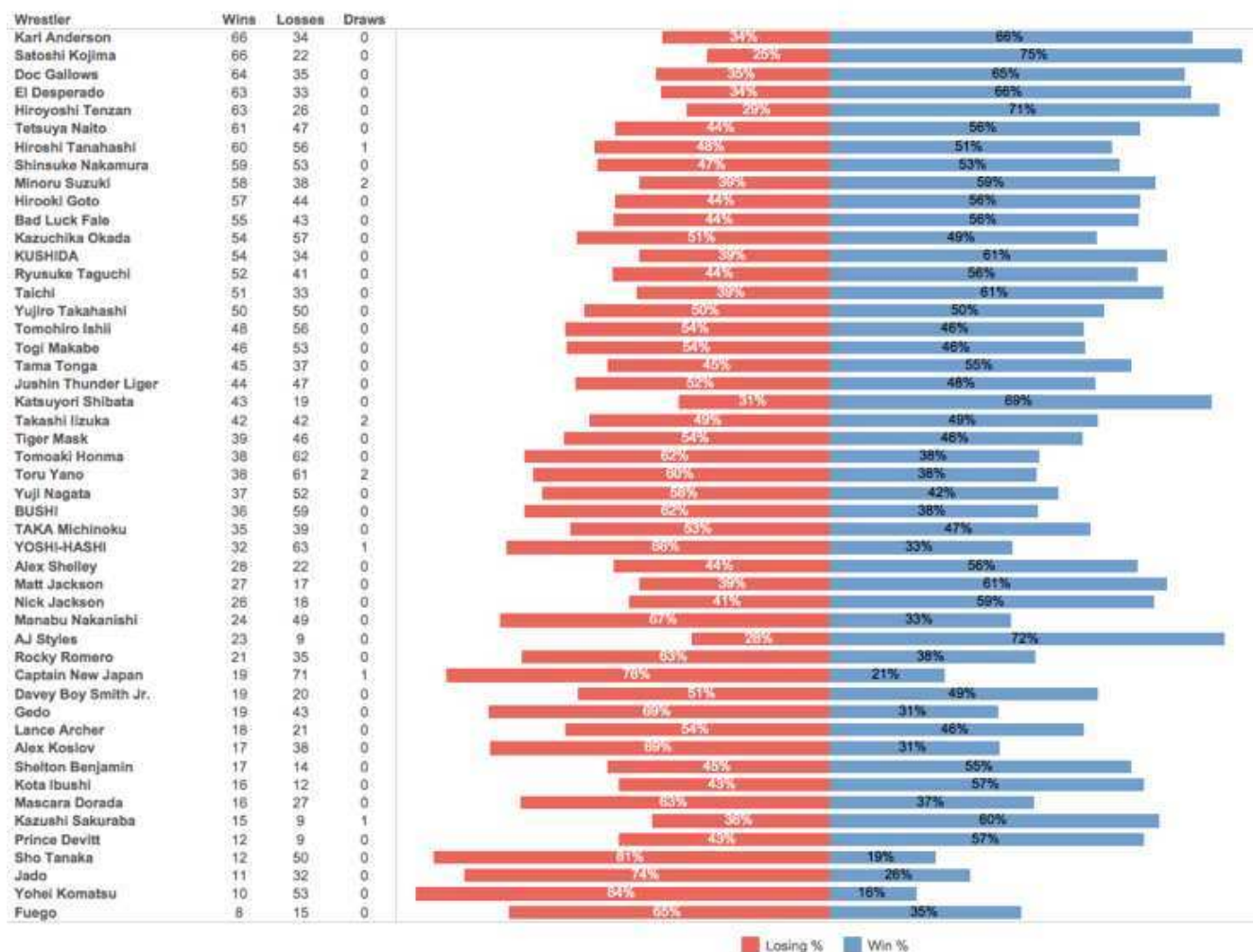
Whilst New Japan World and forays into new territories are important for the continued expansion of the product, which has shown little sign of deceleration over the past year, these are not aspects of their business on which their entire future lies, as inevitably, at least in the medium to long-term, the most important realm of their business is still live attendance. As much as the general strength of the roster means enough to draw strong, with an aging roster and few rising stars, the future of the talent pool is a concern. Kazuchika Okada, barring unforeseen circumstances, should carry the company into the next decade, but his current peers, Nakamura and Tanahashi, are broken down and approaching 35 and 40 respectively within the next couple of years – and consequently the amount of time they have left as top-level performers is unknown. Goto hasn't worked as long as the other two, but is still 35, and has never truly caught on as a major star like Tanahashi and Nakamura – the 32 year-old Naito, whilst extraordinarily talented, has yet to connect, and is similar to Goto in that way. This leaves, of the current main roster stars, Styles, Ishii, and Shibata. Styles, has expressed a desire to work another five years, but he is a gaijin star, and the portion of those years working a physical New Japan style is unknown. Shibata (35) has taken a lot of punishment, and is the same age as Goto with more in-ring experience. And Ishii (39), has taken excessive amounts of physical abuse over an 18 year career.

They have attempted to create new stars over the past five years or so, but Yujio Takahashi, YOSHIHASHI, and others simply haven't lived up to the standard established by the likes of Nakamura and Tanahashi.. Gedo and Jado secured themselves a future generational star in Okada, which has to be considered one of the larger successes of their entire booking run. The current set of young lions is by no means stagnant, however, with Yohei Komatsu and Sho Tanaka set for their learning excursions abroad once Takaaki Watanabe and Hiromu Takahashi return. Strangely though, Watanabe hasn't wrestled a single time since an ROH multi-man tag in September, although the junior, Takahashi (now working under a mask as Kamaitachi) has been working consistently for CMLL this year, even if it was almost entirely in trios matches. Komatsu as a junior seems to show a lot of promise, as does Tanaka, perhaps more so than the prior generation of Watanabe and Takahashi. However, as we have seen many times with young lions and excursions, Okada's being a prime example, it is very difficult to gauge star power during the formative years. I expect to see Watanabe and Takahashi back before Dominion.

New Japan's future on a star-power front may be uncertain, however, their current roster still has the ability to yield some fresh matches in Nakamura/Styles, Shibata/Ibushi, Ibushi/Styles, Okada/Ishii as

well as many others. And despite Okada and Nakamura maineventing the G1 Final in the Seibu Dome, that program stills offers some of the most promising work, both in and outside of the ring, as anything that the company has had since the dawn of Okada/Tanahashi. If any other promotion in the world were in the position of New Japan, I would be deeply concerned for their future, but with management as competent as Gedo and Jado at its helm, alongside a slightly unstable, but highly ambitious owner in Takaaki Kidani, the best course of action is to look to the future for yet another fruitful, productive, enthralling and immensely entertaining year for New Japan Pro-Wrestling – as they have shown, with 2014 a standard example, that they can take care of the rest (mostly).

2014 NJPW Win/Loss Records



Credit: Dean Knickerbocker

2014 LUCHA LIBRE YEAR IN REVIEW WITH THECUBSFAN

Lucha libre remained in transition in 2014. Neither CMLL nor AAA drew especially well on regular shows, but their major shows continued to be big attractions and produced great matches. Neither promotion came into the year with the level of star power of the last decade, but both are full of entertaining wrestlers, and added more throughout the year. The status quo of the last few years finally started to shift in the last third of the year, especially in AAA. Mistico/Sin Cara/Myzteziz debuted in the company as long expected, Alberto del Rio/El Patron Alberto returned to the promotion completely unexpectedly and AAA itself finally returned to the US in the form of Lucha Underground. AAA's 2014 felt like the beginning of a new era for the company, while CMLL transitioned to the end of one with the final chapter in the Atlantis versus Ultimo Guerrero feud.



AAA came into 2014 with big hopes and plans, then were as surprised as anyone when even better things happened for them. Myzteziz, the best known Mistico, was wildly expected to come to AAA as soon as he was released from his WWE deal. His brothers had previously joined AAA and

AAA wanted to add a Mexican star with a US profile. Sin Cara I's bad run in WWE hurt his profile a bit, but he was not beyond a careful image rehab portraying him as his old self, and it wasn't like the more successful Alberto del Rio was going to be available. Only, a poor attempt at a joke turned into a breaking point, and El Patron Alberto was gifted to AAA with the best possible story for leaving a promotion. AAA's number one wrestler changed twice in about six months, with Alberto becoming both new center of the promotion and the man destined to finally take long running rudo Perro Aguayo Jr.'s hair in the biggest possible match AAA has to offer. Myzteziz went from destroyed, to rebuilt, to side drained and a little forgotten in another strange 12 months for him. AAA's slow progression has made it hard to see exactly how this will all pan out – Alberto had only won the title and his first feud by the end of the year, and there were signs of a new emphasize on the tag team division primarily to give Myzteziz a bigger role – but AAA being handed two centerpiece stars shook up all of their plans.

The big additions of Alberto and Myzteziz had a rippling effect on everyone who was already around AAA and those who came aboard. AAA invested about ten months into building up Psycho Clown, the leader of perennial trios champions Psycho Circus, as a new young top face. Psycho Clown had a good feud with Texano Jr., ending in one of the best matches of the year on AAA's biggest show of the year, and yet Psycho appears to be in a lower position now than when he started with after the additions. Everyone did everything right, just the new people slotted in above Psycho Clown and it turned out he was better off being leader of a trio for the moment. Not all of the additions worked out well: Myzteziz's old rivals Black Warrior and Averno were brought in to face him again, only for Warrior to look washed up and vanish quickly, and for Averno to not really find his footing until he was moved into another role far away from Myzteziz. AAA headliners of previous generations were left adrift: Octagon acrimoniously left the company he helped found, La Parka won the Rey de Reyes tournament but pointedly did not get the same heavyweight title shot given to past winners, and Cibernético turned back rudo for lack of anything better to do.

The upheaval at the top of AAA's card was balanced by the steadier great years in the midcard. Angelico & Jack Evans won the tag team titles late in 2013 and were given free reign for exciting tag and trios matches all year against a variety of opponents. They also introduced frequent partner Australian Suicide, who fit in well with the other two and the promotion with some good high flying moments in his rookie year. Pentagon Jr., who often faced that trio, was recognized for his superior work and rewarded with one half of both of AAA's tag titles (men's with Joe Lider, mixed with Sexy Star) as well as a general higher position on the card and budding rivalry with Myzteziz. Hijo del Fantasma, who'd come to AAA late in 2013, completely revitalized his career this year, returning to the higher energy style from his first few years while also changing his look and adjusting to being a rudo for the first time. Fantasma's year peaked with the Cruiserweight title on TripleMania, a deserved win. Fan favorite Aerostar also rose to new heights in 2014, defeating long time rival Super Fly in a mask match to end the year. The match was encouraging both for Aerostar finally getting that win, and for AAA's new found dedication to resolving dangling midcard storylines. Overall, AAA had their deepest roster in many years, with talented youth taking away spots from aging and slowing veterans

The most encouraging event for AAA did not take place in México, but instead in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. AAA's Lucha Underground product debuted in October. It took years of failed alliances, changed concepts, and unexpected delays for AAA to just get back into the United States, and there were many more doubts even when the first few details started to come out. Lucha Underground largely silenced those doubts. It's an aesthetic success, delivering great matches featuring US-based talent (the Johnny Mundo/Prince Puma saga) and Mexican based ones (the

Fenix/Drago/Pentagon Jr. debut match.). The two types of wrestlers started to intermix more as the year came to an end. Chavo Guerrero Jr., a name few were excited to see when his involvement was announced, has produced some of the best work of his career in his Lucha Underground role. The show has taken another tired concept, the evil owner, and re-imagined it into the tense, callous, malevolent Dario Cueto as one of the best wrestling characters of the year. Lucha Underground's origin story vignettes and back stage cut scenes has helped give the show a unique identity in a crowd wrestling landscape, turning the "wrestling as a video game" complaint into a positive concept. Not everything is perfect, with the Matt Striker and Vampiro announce team getting most criticism, but the reaction to the show has definitely been positive. At the same time, Lucha Underground remains uncertain financial concept. The audience for both the El Rey and UniMAS airings have not grown despite the positive word of mouth and significant advertising. The ideas of running live events or PPVs are way off in the future. The secondary revenue sources – merchandise, digital sales of the shows, even the video game of the video game wrestling – haven't even been hinted at yet. 2015 will decide what Lucha Underground means as far as business, if it's something which can give AAA long term footing in the US or ultimately prove unsustainable on a small cable network in a country without much wrestling interest outside of WWE. Lucha Underground has already succeed on an influential basis: they've added enough new ideas and new wrestlers to the US vocabulary that it's bound to affect other promotions going forward.



There's no more defining characteristic between Mexico's two companies than the opposite way they affect things. AAA and Lucha Underground will influence the future, while CMLL's biggest event was about justifying the past. One of the most controversial wrestling moments in 2013 was CMLL's

decision to tease the long awaited Atlantis versus Ultimo Guerrero mask match and instead deliver a Volador Jr. versus Sombra final instead. The crowd that night turned on the show once the alternate mask match was made, chanting “Fraud!” and rejecting CMLL's top heroes in an act of defiance. It seemed certain that those bad feelings would carry over this year, when CMLL again announced Atlantis versus Ultimo Guerrero and inflated ticket prices even higher than last year's record amount. Against all predictions, CMLL sold out again, breaking the gate record for a wrestling show in México in the process and justifying last year's unpopular booking decision. Ultimo Guerrero defeated Atlantis in the most memorable match of the year in México. The match itself was the best for either man in many years, and the emotional unmasking of Guerrero concluded a ten year rivalry. That's not to say CMLL's postponement decision is an unquestioned success: the weeks leading up to the rivalry received no special attention from the fans, and an attempt to center the promotion around a newly unmasked Ultimo Guerrero did not find much success. It may have been about more than just the wrestler, as CMLL's increasingly heavy focus on a handful of shows have also taught its large casual audience that the rest of the year is not important enough to attend, but CMLL was ultimately left with one glorious night and many gloomy ones. The interest in Atlantis/Ultimo Guerrero match is also one unlikely to be repeated any time soon. There will always be good interest in Atlantis wagering his mask, but there's no masked top level star standing as Ultimo Guerrero had been, only much younger men who haven't “proven” themselves to the audience in the same way.

No one's personified the struggles of proving merits to a cynical and heel-leaning CMLL audience more than Rush. Atlantis and Ultimo Guerrero are fully responsible for the CMLL's Anniversary reaching it's heights, but Rush was the man carrying the promotion on every other big day of the year. Rush's match with Shocker at March's Dos Leyendas drew a strong crowd and an equally strong performance by Shocker in his first ever hair loss. Rush's long term feud with Negro Casas was the best of the year, and finished with a memorably one sided beating in their hair match. Rush won both of those tentpole matches and was featured in the semimain event of the Anniversary show. Rush broke his leg in November, putting him out of action for a few months and killing all interest in the last show of the year (Infierno en el Ring), which had been hyped with rivals finally getting their hands on Rush. CMLL's malaise without Rush only strengthened his case as most valuable wrestler in the promotion and possibly the country. Still, all these wins in great matches and all his entertaining promos did not help Rush in getting over with the diehard CMLL fan base, who stubbornly viewed Rush as someone inflated/favored by the promotion. CMLL eventually went with the fans on this, to a degree, adding Rush to a trio of La Mascara & La Sombra (also rejected for being 'gifted' undeserved victories) called the Ingobernables – a group of cocky, sarcastic, confident wrestlers also ready to mock the fans for not recognizing their greatness. The concept might have worked, but CMLL only gave in a little, and would not actually turn those booed faces into booed heels, leaving them announced as representing the good side even as they antagonized the fans. The Ingoberables used heel tactics but spent most of their time opposing (other) heel teams, leaving the crowd with no one to root for. They also occasionally teamed with the sort of crowd supported faces the Ingobernables should have been facing, sometimes betraying their partners in a heel manner. It was an unsatisfying mess which didn't interest the casual fans, the beginning of an idea that wasn't carried through correctly.

Atlantis and Ultimo Guerrero was more a triumph of long term continuity than any specific angle or incident. Rush's big feuds were just about letting natural rivals face off a lot of times, and CMLL avoided the most obvious angle to do with him. CMLL's best booking decision of the year happened much lower on the card, and even it might be better chalked up as successes in talent acquisition. CMLL's annual En Busca de un Idolo tournament had previously been used to illuminate

interchangeable midcard wrestlers with a spotlight, giving them a flurry of singles matches to get over their skills and personalities. The concept changed in 2014, handing the keys of the tournament over to a bunch of rookies and newcomers who proceeded to floor the gas and race to the best tournament CMLL has ever held. Even the process of qualifying for the tournament produced one of the craziest matches CMLL held all year, concluding with the last two non-qualifiers more or less injuring each other and setting up a mask match of their own for later in the year. Two more wrestlers, Sobreano Jr. and Star Jr., didn't make it out of the first round proper of the tournament, but won over the fans and the judges enough to later be put together as a team for a big match in 2015. The four who actually made the finals immediately established themselves as future pillars of the promotion. Barbaro Cavernario, the ultimate winner of the contest, displayed reckless enthusiasm while fully embracing his caveman character. Cavernario was a great comedic foil who could also come off as a cruel threat, and yet also something of a sympathetic mad man who would do whatever it took to win. CMLL enthusiastically gave Cavernario a prime spot on the Anniversary show, beating Rey Cometa for his hair, and elevated him to main event level after his victory. Runner up Hechicero was a long time indy star deciding to finally join a major promotion, and proving his superior wrestling reputation was completely earned. The story of the indy guy making good at a top level is becoming increasingly common in the US, but it was a novel concept in México. The other two finalists, Dragon Lee and Cachorro, were more traditional high flyers, but also showed amazingly impressive technical ability and improved greatly through the course of the year. On paper, this should've been a tough year for CMLL developing new wrestlers – the new Místico lost half the year after being hit by car, and AAA's done as good a job at acquiring promising new talent as CMLL – but their out of character decision to let rookies and new wrestlers go all out from the start, paid off with a few former unknowns who will obviously be big pillars for the promotion down the road.

Mexicans independent scene lacked the sure fire future star, or even the old existing top star, to build major shows around. El Hijo del Santo's Todo x el Todo promotion quietly went on hiatus, with Santo himself in semi-retirement limbo. Santo remained a public figure, but appears to have only one more tour or even a singles show left in him, which all waits for the debut of his son El Nieto del Santo. Nieto continued occasional training excursions in NOAH's dojo, but his debut date is still a mystery. Indy vets Dr. Wagner Jr. and LA Park continued to find work, but not with the big two. Wagner had his seemingly annual dalliance with AAA, but his past antics made him completely not worth the trouble when Alberto came aboard. CMLL went as far as to allow LA Park to appear in an Arena México ring, but only to promote a related indy show appearance and absolutely not to wrestle on CMLL's own events. México City's most prominent indy promotion, IWRG, was trapped in a cyclical drain, with bad turnouts leading to fewer stars leading to even worse turnouts. The promotion was generally down to locals who had been around forever supplemented by young unproven trainees, and lacking the interesting build ups and guest appearances of prior years. The debut late in the year of four new Ninja Turtle wrestlers was probably the most successful decision of the IWRG year, with the colorful characters starting to bring in a kid's audience. Mexican indy promotions continued to include both traditional and niche hardcore/extreme shows, but action focused groups appeared to grow in strength in 2014. Promotions like ChilangaMask and CaraLuchas took advantage of access to CMLL wrestlers to create unique matches with indy wrestlers, and frequently had more creative idea for CMLL's wrestlers than their home promotion showed. Those groups followed the model of PWG, of simply putting together fun highlights matches diehard fans would be interested in, but lack the ability or interest to create revenue outside of ticket sales. They're likely to keep putting together fun shows, but it's unclear how far they can go or how long they'll survive.

The importance and influence of 2014 in lucha libre can not totally be in context until down the line. Alberto's 2014 return to México could easily be the start of a run which would have him as luchador of the decade, or it could be vastly diminished in importance if he's so in demand by other US promotion that he spends little time in México. This year could've been a stepping stone into turning Rush into the greatest idol (or villain) in CMLL since Místico, or his big wins could be isolated moments of success without a great rival or a better exposure. In 12 months time, we could be talking about changing the status quo of American wrestling with its first forays in to PPV and live events, or it could be a distant memory, something beloved that was canceled far too soon. A lot of threads started in 2014, but many will not resolve for a while longer. There may not be a singular match as important in 2015 as Ultimo Guerrero versus Atlantis, but there will definitely be a few important career and promotional changes next year that started with the events of 2014.

2014 EURO YEAR IN REVIEW WITH ALAN COUNIHAN

Slowly but surely the European wrestling scene has become really viable for both wrestlers looking for work, and also fans looking to see a great show without having to fly to a different continent. In 2014, the options for European fans grew almost overwhelming, and as we roll into 2015 things just seem to be getting bigger and better.

wXw (Westside Xtreme Wrestling)

Recently signing 45 wrestlers and staff to official contracts, wXw has continued their impressive growth in 2014. They now tour across a much wider span of Germany and have been doing well as a touring promotion with a very basic formula on their smaller shows which are generally attended by a casual audience of families. Their Hamburg shows have caught fire in that local market and the building they run there has become one of the hottest venues in all of wrestling.

Their biggest shows occur in Oberhausen in front of a largely hardcore fanbase. The annual 16 Carat weekend took place during March in front of record setting crowds totalling 2,000 over the three days. The tournament always features a collection of great imports and this year was won by one of their more regular visitors, Chris Hero (a man whose relationship with the company goes back to 2002 and he actually trained a lot of the wrestlers that would break through in Germany). The highlight of the weekend was an incredible World Title match pitting champion Tommy End against Jonathan Gresham. It was probably the best match of 2014 as far as pure wrestling technique goes, and many fans in

attendance were referring to it as “the perfect match”.

Oberhausen was also home to the World Triangle League in October, a four day event built around the relationship between wXw, Big Japan and CZW. It also featured guest appearances by Jushin Thunder Liger, Harry Smith and Hiroshi Tanahashi. Those shows were a great success also, and like Carat they were highlighted by the World Title as End set out to reclaim his belt from Big Daddy Walter who had dethroned him during the summer. Their 2/3 Falls clash was epic and acted as a shining example of what an underrated talent Walter is. He is very much the ace of the company now, and they have him at the forefront as they tour their territory. He is a great big man and a hard hitter, but what makes Walter so fantastic is just how smart a worker he is and how well he can pace a match. He can go 30-40 minutes no problem, and keep it intriguing from start to finish.

PROGRESS Wrestling

As we delve into the UK landscape, we can't start anywhere other than London's PROGRESS Wrestling. Without question the hottest English promotion since the peak of the FWA ten years ago, PROGRESS went from strength to strength in 2014. If you're not familiar with the company, they are about as cool as it gets in terms of knowing how to appeal to their fanbase from a marketing, merchandising and live event perspective. The shows are aimed at the most hardcore wrestling fans, but they've become such a hip thing that you'll get a lot of non-wrestling fans in attendance too. A big reason for this is that the shows are now emanating from the famous music venue, the Electric Ballroom in Camden (the trendiest part of London). They pack it for every show, with 700 fans in attendance – the majority of whom buy their tickets within minutes of them going on sale (the promoters hype the on-sale date as a big event in and of itself!)

2014 has been the year of Jimmy Havoc – the top heel and champion all year long. The storyline of the babyfaces doing every thing they can to conquer him, yet having him slip away with the belt every time, has been strong. The undercards have backed it up well with some great bouts, and an emphasis on serious hard hitting wrestling. Zack Sabre Jr vs Fergal Devitt in May was arguably the UK Match Of The Year, but there have been quite a few other candidates for that award inside the walls of The Electric Ballroom. Tag champs FSU (Mark Andrews & Eddie Dennis) have torn the house down on multiple occasions with their wild brawl against The London Riots in July being especially awesome.

With their Natural Progression series, PROGRESS are constantly introducing new acts into the mix and their crowd have become very receptive to anyone that is put in front of them - from trainees out of the “ProJo” to veterans of the UK scene like Martin Stone. Going into 2015 they have a strong core roster of guys who are both over and capable of having great matches. The future is certainly bright for them.

ICW

Scotland's offering to the European wrestling fan is perhaps the wildest and craziest product in the whole wrestling world. Insane Championship Wrestling lives up to it's name and then some. Their shows are built around characters, promos and a crazy live atmosphere. Actual in-ring quality sometimes takes a backseat in the way that it did with early ECW and Attitude Era WWF. However the formula works for ICW and they have developed a rather sizeable fanbase, aided by the *Insane Fight Club* documentary which aired on the BBC in the Spring.

The peak of their year was the huge show at The Barrowlands on November 2nd which saw nearly 2,000 fans in attendance for a main event of returning hero Drew Galloway (Drew McIntyre) going for the championship against Jack Jester. It was a wild brawl, which was arguably the best match of a hot show from top to bottom.

As big as Galloway is for the company, the face of ICW is arguably the man known simply as Grado. Perhaps the best comedy performer in all of wrestling, the man from “the tap end of Stevenson” has assembled a cult following with his hilarious antics and likeable personality. His humour (and accent) may be lost on many outside the UK, but those that do get it certainly love him!

Revolution Pro Wrestling UK

If you want to see the best talent the world has to offer all in one place, Rev Pro is a good bet. They run multiple big shows a year with the draw being the mix of imports with the best talent from the UK. Some of the names to pass through Rev Pro’s shows at York Hall include Hiroshi Tanahashi, Shinsuke Nakamura, Kazuchika Okada, Prince Devitt, Adam Cole, Kevin Steen, Ricochet, Rich Swann, The Young Buck\$, Karl Anderson, Jay Lethal, Austin Aries and Bad Luck Fale.



Promoter Andy Quildan has shown to be a great matchmaker when it comes to getting the most out of these talents, and the best example of that would be the June show “Summer Sizzler” which was the best card in Europe in 2014. The show delivered from top to bottom. The opener was a wild tag match

putting Joel Redman & Martin Stone against Sha Samuels & Terry Frazier. That was followed by a short but impactful HOSS BATTLE between Dave Mastiff & Bad Luck Fale. Then Steen took on British Heavyweight Champion Marty Scurll in a really entertaining bout to cap off the first half of the show. Nakamura was pushed to the limit by a fired up Zack Sabre Jr. in an outstanding match right after intermission. It was so great that it appeared the tag match featuring “Aerial Assassin” Will Ospreay & Jake McCluskey against debuting unknown Irish tandem 2 Unlimited would be a struggle in the spot directly after it. However the youngsters tore the house down with an amazing display of acrobatics. The show was capped off by a world class main event – Devitt vs. Cole.

Best Of The Rest

Preston City Wrestling have cultivated a loyal following for their shows which are really a mix of everything. You get comedy, big names, top workers and a real party atmosphere (they even have theme shows for certain holidays). The highlight of their 2014 was the huge weekend where they co-promoted with ROH for four shows featuring all kinds of names.

Southside Wrestling shows always get great reviews, and they’ve been home to some of the great matches which have seen Will Ospreay and Mark Andrews gain a lot of recognition.

OTT Wrestling are a relatively new start-up in the heart of Dublin’s city centre and their first couple of shows have been really fun to attend. They’ve got a good thing going heading into 2015.

ATTACK Pro Wrestling are run by a group of extremely creative young people on the British wrestling scene and have built their name on fantastic themed shows such as their “Press Start” event which featured characters from all your favourite video games and amazingly....ENERGY BARS for the performers.

Ease of Access

Getting into these feds couldn’t be easier. Here’s where to go:

wXw: <https://www.youtube.com/user/wXwGER/videos> (home of the weekly free Shotgun show. It’s in German for the most part but you get a full match in every episode)

<https://vimeo.com/westsidextremewrestling/videos> (On Demand content for a very reasonable price. The production quality is as good as it gets on the indies – particularly for the big shows like 16 Carat and World Triangle)

PROGRESS: Chapter 13 for FREE in full featuring the amazing Zack vs Devitt match
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=it2coTptmlM>

<http://www.progresswrestling.com/> is where you can order the DVDs or get the digital downloads to have the shows instantly on your computer in perfect HD quality.

ICW: <https://icwondemand.pivotshare.com/> is where you can sign up for a small monthly fee of a couple of bucks and have full access to the ICW back catalogue and new shows as they happen.

Rev Pro UK: <https://vimeo.com/revprouk>

PCW: <https://vimeo.com/prestoncitywrestling>

2014 DDT YEAR IN REVIEW WITH JAMIE O'DOHERTY

When it comes to DDT in 2014 there are three stories that immediately come to mind. There are many more, but including them would require a PowerPoint presentation and I currently cannot afford the services of Super Sasadango Machine.

Passing The Torch

Anyway, the first story is a new generation shift in the company. Over the last few years DDT has risen to the position it's in with HARASHIMA, Kota Ibushi, Kenny Omega, KUDO, Sanshiro Takagi and Danshoku Dino as its main headliners, with some help from outsiders like Daisuke Sekimoto and El Generico. 2013 started to change that a little when Shigehiro Irie had a long run with the KO-D Title. But this year is when the shift gathered pace and is starting to become necessary. Kenny Omega finished his relationship with DDT and jumped to New Japan. Kota Ibushi's double contract with DDT and NJPW has filled up his schedule to the point where DDT can't rely on him for everything. There is also Michael Nakazawa announcing he will be moving to Singapore in January although he may still be connected to the company in some form when that happens.

With some big names and long time members of the roster leaving or beginning to fade out of the picture it was time for DDT to push some new blood. And boy do they have someone. 19 year old Konosuke Takeshita has been on the radar as DDT's rookie supernova and 2014 was when he took a big leap up the card. The big singles match he had was against Hiroshi Tanahashi at the annual Peter Pan Sumo Hall show. But his other big moments of the year were as part of a tag team with another promising wrestler named Tetsuya Endo. They formed Happy Motel with Antonio Honda who is playing the mentor role for them. At the start of the year they fought the Golden Lovers to a 30 minute draw. They then met again 8 months later, but that time a lot more was at stake. The match was built for Ibushi and Omega to pass the torch to Takeshita and Endo, as the aftermath saw the younger team win the KO-D Tag Team Titles. DDT obviously sees Takeshita as their future ace of the company.

Another wrestler who was elevated strong this year is Akito. He is currently part of DDT's top babyface faction, Smile Squash, and has recently been rebuilding the DDT Extreme Title around a more serious style of wrestling, rather than the crazy and comedic stipulations the belt is usually known for. Akito has been with DDT for a few years, but has only been a full time wrestler for them since 2013.

Why do I win? Because I train!

The second big theme of the year is HARASHIMA's dominance of the main event position. Up until



this writing, HARASHIMA has held the KO-D Title for almost the entire year. The period from March 21st to May 25th is the only time HARASHIMA was not champion (KUDO won the title on March 21st and then lost it back to HARASHIMA on May 25th). As much as Ibushi and Omega flew the flag for DDT outside the company, HARASHIMA was the true ace. He is basically their John Cena. Pretty much the same hard working character, moveset and booking year after year. But it's building up to DDT's big plans for 2015. Speaking of which....

Saitama Super Arena And Beyond

The third big story for 2014 is DDT preparing its trip to Saitama Super Arena next February, running shows in and around Saitama to promote next year's big event. They also began doing tongue in cheek Infomercial Matches to advertise local products and raise money needed to run the show. Right now the plan looks like HARASHIMA defending the title against Kota Ibushi in the main event. It's the very same main event DDT booked for their first ever Sumo Hall show back in 2009. After that there has been some talk of expansion into other Asian countries such as Singapore. Will that actually happen? We can only wait and see.

More Spin-Offs Than Chikara

One thing that makes DDT unique in comparison to the rest of the wrestling scene is their family of spin-off promotions. While DDT is the main brand, there are several others that run shows during the year. Union Pro has grown to almost be completely independent from DDT, and is the home fed for Isami Kodaka and Shuji Ishikawa. Their main story this year was Hikaru Sato entering the company and acting like the big fish in a small pond. He won the Union MAX Title and held it for 7 months until he lost it to a promising young talent named FUMA. Meanwhile the rest of the Union roster got into a war with a new company formed by an old friend...

Ganbare☆Wrestling was created by former Union wrestler Ken Ohka in an attempt to create a brand new "major league" wrestling company. Ohka left Union in shame two years ago, but after creating GanPuro he was set to prove he and his new venture was the better company. GanPuro invaded Union throughout 2014 and it built up to a 1,000 Rose + α Death Match between Ohka and Shuji Ishikawa. Ohka lost the match but earned Ishikawa's respect. There are still some battles going on between the two promotions, but the war is largely considered to be over.



GanPuro 2014
stereotypes).

Rounding up the spin-offs are Hikaru Sato's shootfighting brand Hard Hit, a small scale women's company called Tokyo Joshi Pro and a series of shows exclusively for women called BOYZ. There is also a loose relationship with a Chinese company called New Beijing Pro Wrestling but they have been very quiet this year. Rumour is they thought the Evolve/WWN Live crew were literally invading China so they all settled in expecting to be under siege for a long time (In reality it's a parody show using gimmicks based on ancient Chinese legends and

And Now For What We All Came To See...

Right, now that the serious stuff is out of the way let's take a look at some of the nonsense DDT is infamous for that happened this year.

My favourite story of the year involved the fate of the Iron Man Heavyweight Title. Sanshiro Takagi became the 999th champion in March and wanted to retire the belt so a 1,000th champion would never be crowned. This prompted the creator of the title Poison Sawada JULIE to return and possess wrestlers with his snake magic to win back the title. He also convinced Takagi to keep the belt active because it contained a secret map for ancient treasure. The plan failed time after time, but when all seemed lost, Takagi was finally pinned, not by a wrestler, but by the Iron Man Title belt itself! And then Jun Akiyama pinned the belt by accident to become the next champion.

The DDT Extreme Title was defended in a New Year Wrestling Card Death Match, a Cliff Death Match, an Idol Lumberjack Match and a Nobody Knows Rules Match.

Super Sasadango Machine began holding PowerPoint presentations before his matches to explain how he prepared for his opponent. He also created a new finisher called the Vertical Drop Lehman Shock, a move that would wipe out 110% of the opponent's HP when done three times.

Kazuki Hirata became obsessed with Magnum TOKYO and now models himself after the retired

wrestler. Unfortunately, he developed Magnum Syndrome as a result and is now unable to enter a room without "Tokyo GO!" playing in the background.

Masa Takanashi got himself a KO-D Title shot when his friends Emi Sakura and Sayaka Obihiro got the DDT General Manager drunk and tricked him into signing the contract. Meanwhile Keisuke Ishii stalked Jun Akiyama in order to get an All Asia Tag Team Title shot with Shigehiro Irie.



In July Danshoku Dino and DJ Nira had a match that could only end when someone was thrown over the top rope and out of the ring. The two rolled under the ropes, brawled backstage for an hour and returned at the end of the show to finish the match. Dino won.

Makoto Oishi brought in his old tag team partner Shiori Asahi to go after the KO-D Tag Team Titles. The only problem is Shiori Asahi isn't over with the crowd. So DDT kept advertising Asahi's spot on the cards as a mystery wrestler and constantly asked the fans to give a big reaction whenever he came out.

In November Antonio Honda and Super Sasadango both had the flu so they wrestled a match where the first one to sneeze lost. Sasadango won when he plucked out one of Honda's nose hairs to make him sneeze.

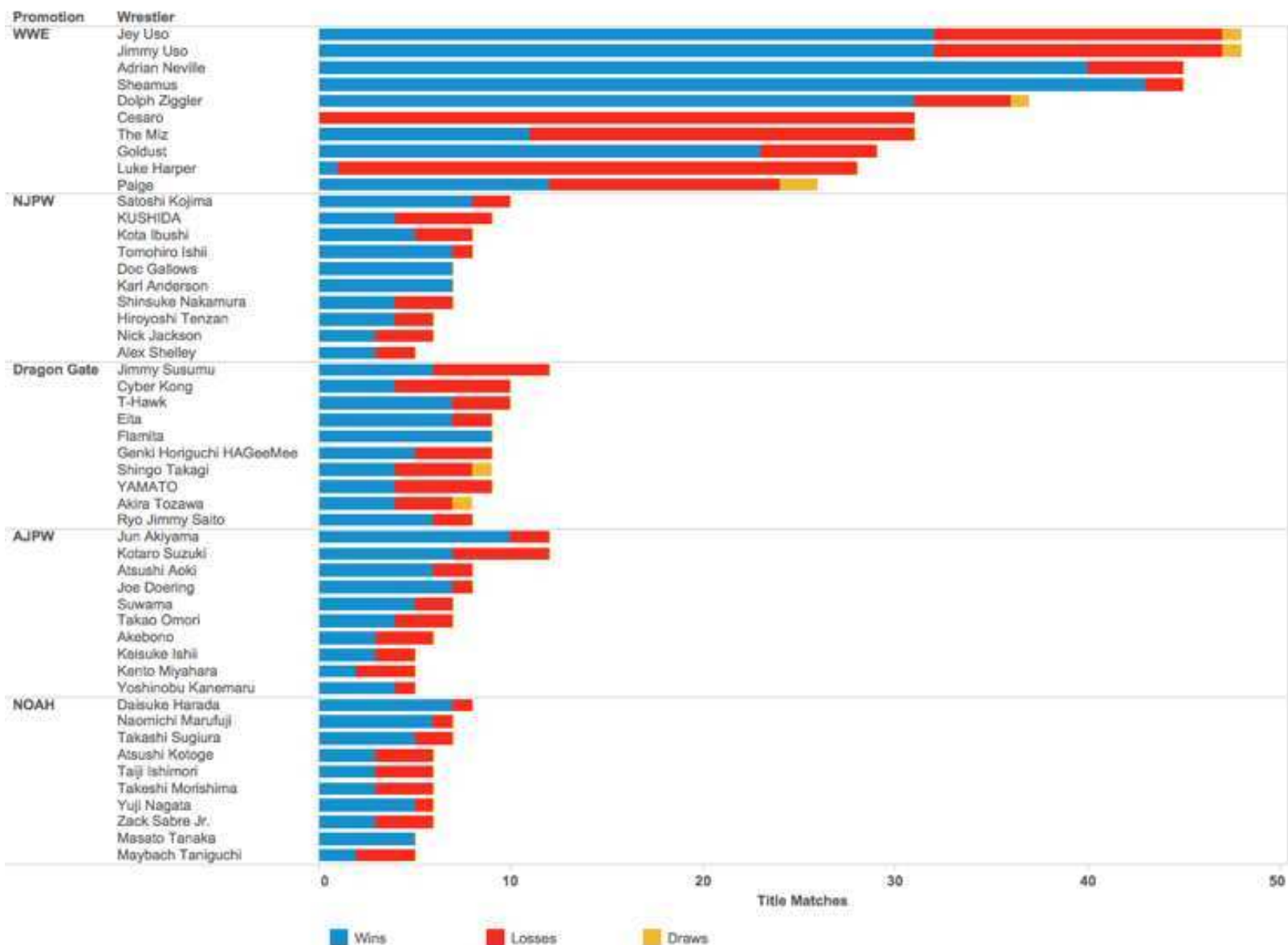
Union was introduced to a world traveling martial artist named Richard Burn. After a few matches Burn suddenly revealed he was actually a crossdresser named Ladybeard. He would go on to win the Union Fly To Everywhere Title, a championship for women wrestlers.

Over in Ganbare☆Wrestling Atsushi Maruyama (formerly Tigers Mask from Osaka Pro) wrestled as a different gimmick on every show. Everytime he was unmasked he apologised and swore never to return.

AWARDS & MISC.

2014 in Title Matches

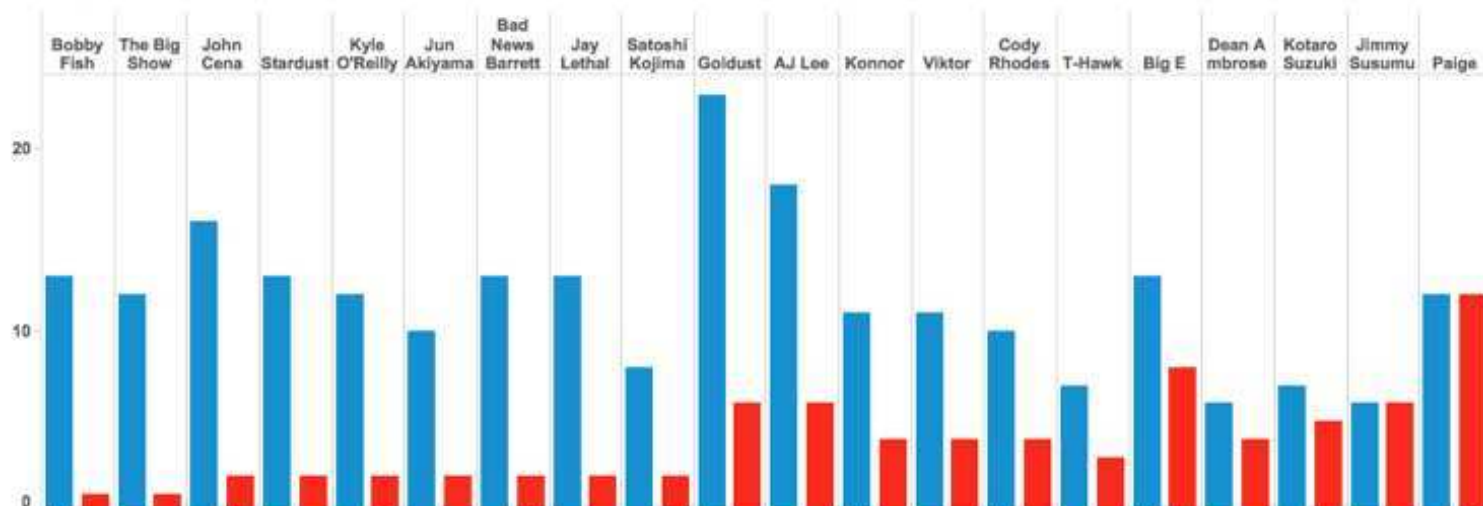
The Wrestlers with the most Title Matches in the Biggest Promotions



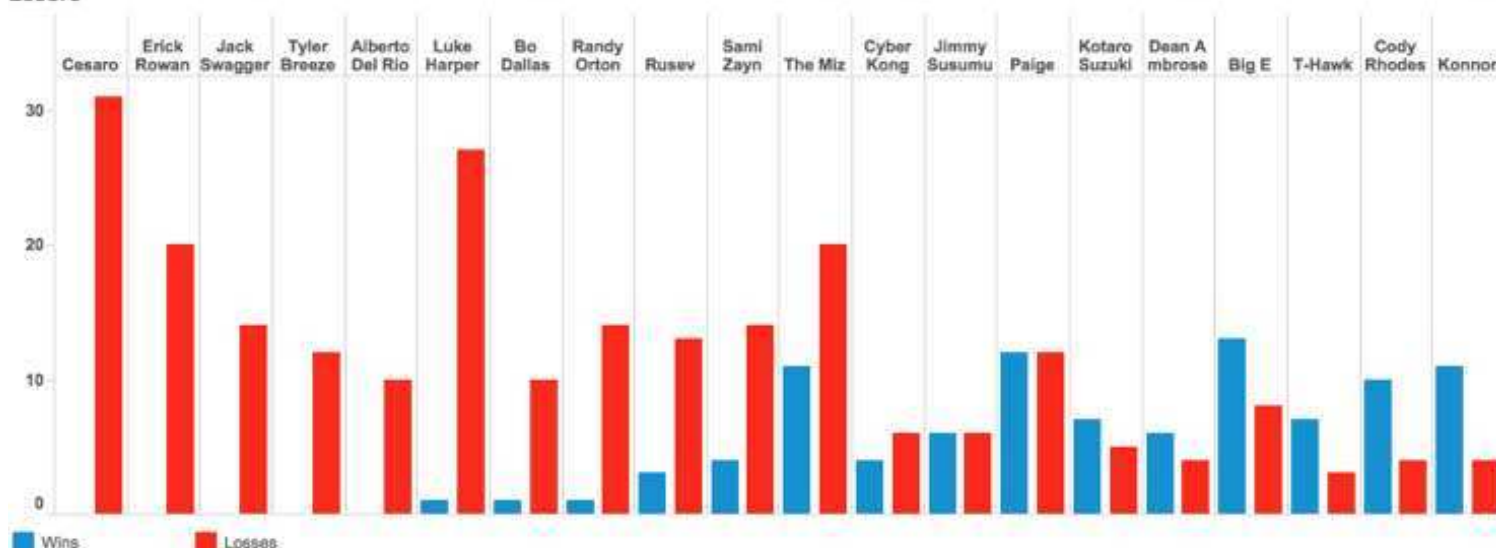
Credit Dean Knickerbocker

2014: The Year in Title Matches

Winners



Losers



ALAN'S PURORESU BEST OF NON-NJPW & DRAGON GATE

As has been thoroughly outlined by my cohorts over the course of this publication, Dragon Gate and New Japan were at the peak of their powers in 2014 and churned out a litany of incredible matches.

It's no secret that the rest of the Japanese landscape has fallen off (with the exception of DDT) to a degree in recent times with former powers like NOAH and All Japan struggling to get back even close to the level of their peaks. However the non-DG/NJPW feds are not to be ignored, as you still have a large crop of tremendous wrestlers who work so hard to entertain their fans. Thus, in 2014 there were a

plethora of matches outside of New Japan and Dragon Gate which deserve attention and plaudits. So let's give them exactly that!

Big Japan – May 31, Korakuen Hall

Twin Towers (Kohei Sato & Shuji Ishikawa) vs. Yankee Nichokenju (Yuko Miyamoto & Isami Kodaka)

A fantastic cat & mouse tag team match. Kodaka and Miyamoto prove once again that they have a ton to offer outside of a deathmatch environment, and unleash an array of tricks to keep their bruising opponents on their toes. The Towers are great at what they do, and bring a ton of physicality to their matches. This was their best showing of the year.

Big Japan - June 30, Korakuen Hall

Daisuke Sekimoto vs. Shinobu

One of Daisuke's finest performances. He played the role of King Kong to a tee. Every spot in the early going of the match was designed to showcase what a disadvantage Shinobu was at in terms of size and strength. Once they set that stage, they were able to tell a story of him gradually wearing down the monster, withstanding A TON of punishment, and eventually eeking out the win with one of the coolest finishes of the year.

DDT – September 28, Korakuen Hall

Golden Lovers (Kota Ibushi & Kenny Omega) vs. Happy Motel (Konosuke Takeshita & Tetsuya Endo)

The ultimate coming out party. Omega was on his way out of DDT and he was intent on making these two kids before he left. Kenny, along with Ibushi, put the young upstarts over like a million bucks but at the same time constructed a match which would challenge them to show how capable they were. Endo & Takeshita rose to the occasion. They matched their opponents step for step in a cracker of a match.

AJPW - September 28, Osaka

Suwama vs. Go Shiozaki

The final of the Royal Road Tournament, and an absolute war of attrition. These two just went at it and unleashed everything in their arsenal upon one another. They threw strikes with great force, dropped each other with terrific suplexes and Go even broke out the Undertaker Mania dive! The pacing and psychology complemented the intensity perfectly.

NOAH – November 4, Korakuen Hall

Daisuke Harada vs. Zack Sabre Jr.

A great showcase for one of the best wrestlers to ever emerge from Europe. Zack Sabre Jr. is a special talent, and a true student of the game. He was given a chance here to display his wares in a big title match against Daisuke Harada who was right in the middle of one hell of a damn run as champion. You get technical wrestling at it's finest, a couple of the coolest counters you'll ever see and a great finishing stretch.

NOAH – November 8, Korakuen Hall
Daisuke Sekimoto vs. Takashi Sugiura

Everything you'd expect from a collision of these two bulls. This match had lofty expectations and it more than delivered. It was probably the hottest NOAH match of the year in terms of crowd reaction. Sugiura, now amazingly at 44 years of age, is wrestling like a machine. Zack Sabre Jr. put it best: "I refuse to believe that Takashi Sugiura is anything other than an indestructible robot engineered by the Japanese government."

DDT – November 30, Korakuen Hall
HARASHIMA vs. Soma Takao

HARASHIMA was, in my opinion, the best singles champion of 2014. He's gone completely under the radar but if you've been watching him you know how good he's been. This was perhaps his best defense. He took Soma and brought him to a level he's never been to before. It was like the great "touring champion" matches of the 80s. He came off as so dominant and so impossible to beat, but at the same time had the fans thinking maybe this could be the night that he falls.

AJPW – December 6, Osaka
Wild Burning (Jun Akiyama & Takao Omori) vs. Exceed (Go Shiozaki & Kento Miyahara)

The Akiyama vs. Miyahara feud is a darkhorse candidate for feud of the year. They have so much chemistry as the veteran legend vs. the young up and comer. Here their rivalry comes to a head in an incredible match which also served as the final of the Real World Tag League. Omori and Go aren't just there for the ride either. They both put in great shifts over the course of this near 30 minute classic. It had the feel of some of the classic matches this tournament produced in the 90s.

JUST THIS CHICA'S OPINION WITH BEN'S GIRLFRIEND, BEV

When I first met Ben, he told me he liked wrestling but we didn't watch much together, until one day I suggested watching an Eddie Guerrero DVD as there was nothing on TV. This opened up my life to watching hours of wrestling a week. Now there isn't day that goes by when I don't watch wrestling, some of which I will end up falling asleep to, sorry 80's Mid-South, but other promotions I genuinely enjoy watching. I have racked up hours of listening to radio shows and watching pro-wrestling and this is my small review on wrestling this year. Note: this may turn into a slight rant at times, I will try my best to suppress my anger at some of the ridiculous things we as wrestling fans have had to endure.

Let us begin: I don't watch every wrestling promotion, I will tolerate WWE and enjoy ROH, Dragon Gate and especially adore New Japan. When I began writing this Ben suggested starting with what I liked. A good idea. – OK, what do I like about WWE? ...Huh. This proved harder than I imagined. Overall I find WWE insulting. It annoys me that they ignore the better workers and shove the likes of the Ryback down my throat because it's what they think I should like. I find this offensive. Speaking of offensive... Nikki Bella. If they are going to book Nikki on top then give the woman an acting coach, because her delivery of, "I wish you died in the womb" had about as much enthusiasm as if she was ordering a salad. It was an abomination. The shows are poorly written and the acting is even worse. I watch wrestling because I like, and appreciate good wrestling. This is what I want to see, it's what I pay for, not stupid storylines that make me want to gauge my eyes out. Each time they seem to have good direction they somehow manage to ruin it: Paige's debut, the Shield split and Cesaro's general existence, to name a few.

The major women's feud with Paige and AJ was based around needless lesbian overtones and hot-potatoing the belt. – Yet another example of the writers hindering talented workers. Luckily in NXT, the women are given time to work. The result was some exceptional matches like Natalya vs. Charlotte. Although, they had Nattie beat Charlotte in 2 minutes on Raw, why? These are future stars that they bury before they've even started; how is anyone expected to get behind them? The Total Divas "wrestlers" getting TV time just because of the 'E!' show is also annoying; I can wrestle better than Cameron, Rosa Mendes and Eva Marie! I must admit though, it's kind of funny watching Eva attempting to take bumps.

Things may not have been perfect during the, "We want puppies" era, but at least Molly, Trish, Lita, Ivory and Victoria had talent and could have decent matches. Nikki Bella, Cameron, Alicia Fox, Layla, Rosa Mendes and Eva Marie are terrible representations of female wrestlers and even worse role models for young girls. Nikki's desperate attempt to get over by showing off her boobs is insulting to me as a female fan and it's just a matter of time until her cookie shows up on TV as her hot pants are so obscenely small.

A last note: I love Vicki Guerrero, always have. Her final appearance on Raw was amazing and the line, "There is one name in this industry that people respect more than McMahon, and that is Guerrero!" nearly brought a tear to my eye. Thank you Vicki.



This may infuriate hardcore puro fans, which admittedly I am not, but when it comes to Dragon Gate there is one thing that holds my interest. Yoko Santa Maria ♥♥♥. I love her. She's a great entertainer, who knows her character and portrays it masterfully. My favourite spot is when she jumps off the ropes, makes a cute face, (◦ ^ _ ^ ◦) and an even cuter sound, just to get kicked in the face. (‘●^●’)

I love everything about New Japan. They have fun with Yano's matches and it was amusing to watch Iizuka spray paint Nogami as different manga characters like Doraemon. I wish he painted him as Totoro. The shows are well-rounded with good balance of comedy, entertainment and, of course, solid

wrestling. I just wish I had the time to learn Japanese, because the announcers are so much more enthusiastic than in WWE. Guys like Nakamura, Tanahashi and Suzuki (He's so mean _/_) are not only great workers but even with the language barrier they get every little nuance of their character over through body language.

Girls like wrestling as much as guys for the same exact reasons. Contrary to what WWE think women should like, poor female talent and 'pretty boy' wrestlers aren't things I am interested in. A wrestler's physique is irrelevant to my enjoyment of the product. I like wrestling for the guys and girls who have convincing characters that can tell a story with each match. I appreciate the art of the physical performance and the psychology in putting matches together. As a drama and theatre student for many years, one thing that resonates from theatre to wrestling is the concept of every action having a purpose. A wrestler shouldn't do anything that doesn't fit in with their character or how the audience is feeling, whether it's during a match, angle or promo. It doesn't matter if they are handed a terrible script from Creative, a true worker should have the ability and the freedom to make the words on the page their own and relevant to their character. Like any movie, play or TV show, the best characters are well defined with a set of unique idiosyncrasies which should never be contradicted and that the audience can relate to. However with pro wrestling the line between character and reality is blurred more than any other form of performance art, which is why characters and gimmicks in some way need to resemble the real personality of whoever is portraying them. If not, we are left with a horde of cartoon characters running around with no purpose, no direction and no investment from the fans.

Bev's Fun and Frivolous List of 2014:

Cuteness Award: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Yosuke Santa Maria 2) Pimpinela Escarlata 3) Yano face 	Josei Ichiban: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Candice LeRae 2) Paige 3) Charlotte
Dansei Ichiban: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Shinsuke Nakamura 2) Daniel Bryan 3) Minoru Suzuki 	Best Thespian: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul Heyman! 2) Dean Ambrose 3) Lana
Funniest tag team (that's a word right?) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Candice LeRae and Joey Ryan 2) Taichi and Taka Michinoku 3) Miz & Mizdow (purely for Sandow, Miz is less awful with him though) 	Worst Thing I Have Ever Seen: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Nikki Bella's Acting 2) Brie Bella's Acting 3) Eva Marie & Rosa Mendes Wrestling.

BEN'S END OF YEAR AWARDS:

It's time for everyone's favourite part about the Year-End issue: The exercise in frivolity that is the ubiquitous best and worst of the last 12 months in, what else, but list form! Please remember this is just meant to be a little bit of fun, so if you take exception to any of the following awards and try draw me into a flame war on Twitter I must warn you now: YOU WILL LOSE.

The Mid-South Wrestling Award for Promotion of the Year:	The Total Nonstop Action Award for Worst Promotion of the Year:
1) New Japan Pro Wrestling	1) TNA
2) PWG	2) WWE
3) Dragon Gate	3) CZW

The Kenta Kobashi Award for Wrestler of the Year:	The Raja Lion Award for Worst Wrestler of the Year:
1) Tomohiro Ishii	1) Rosa Mendes
2) Shinsuke Nakamura	2) Cameron
3) AJ Styles	3) Eva Marie

The Shinya Hashimoto/Masahiro Chono/Keiji Mutoh Award for G1 Climax Match of the Year:	The Kobashi/Misawa/Kawada/Taue Award for Non G1 Climax Match of the Year:
1) Minoru Suzuki vs. AJ Styles (Day 7)	1) Tomohiro Ishii vs. Hirooki Goto (Power Struggle)
2) Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Tomohiro Ishii (Day 7)	2) Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Katsuyori Shibata (Destruction in Kobe)
3) Katsuyori Shibata vs. Tomoaki Honma (Day 8)	3) Tomohiro Ishii vs. Kota Ibushi (Return to Yokohama Arena)

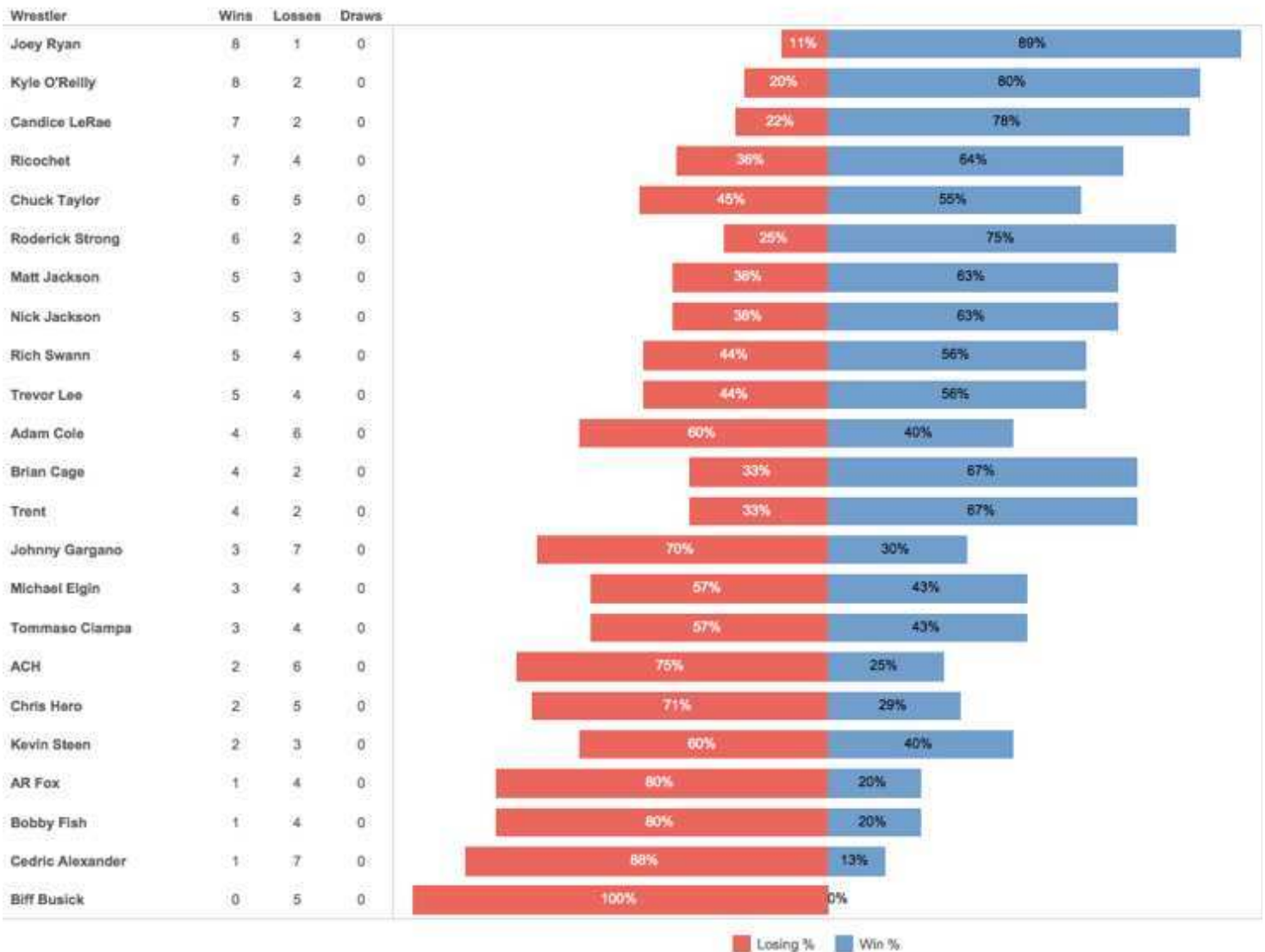
Iron Sheik & Nikolai Volkoff vs. The Bushwhackers Award for Worst Match of the Year:	The Claire Lynch Award for Worst Angle of the Year:
1) Rosa Mendes vs. Layla (Raw – Sep 29 th)	1) Bellas “Family Reconciliation” (“I wish you died in the womb”), (Raw, Aug 25 th)
2) Bayley vs. Eva Marie (NXT – Aug 7 th)	2) Jerry Springer/the Bellas (Raw, Sep 8 th)
3) Kazushi Sakuraba & Yuji Nagata vs. Daniel & Rolles Gracie (Wrestle Kingdom 8)	3) Brie Bella giving AJ Lee the Kiss of Death and re-joining Nikki. (Survivor Series, Nov 23 rd)

The Dick Murdoch Run-in & Brainbuster on the Floor Award for Best Angle of the Year:	The Steve Austin vs. Vince McMahon Award for Feud of the Year:
1) Ultimo Guerrero unmasking after losing to Atlantis. (CMLL 81 st Anniversary Show.)	1) Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura (New Japan)
2) Daniel Bryan “Occupy Raw.” (Raw, March 10 th)	2) BxB Hulk vs. Mad Blankey (Dragon Gate)
3) US “soliders” storming the ring and getting superkicked to death by Rusev. (Raw, Oct 20 th)	3) Mount Rushmore vs. World’s Cutest Tag Team (PWG)

The Kane vs. Gene Snitsky Award for Worst Feud of the Year:	The Conor McGregor Award for Best Promo of the Year:
1) Nikki Bella vs. Brie Bella	1) Paul Heyman
2) Kazushi Sakuraba vs. Daniel & Rolles Gracie	2) Dean Ambrose
3) John Cena vs. Randy Orton	3) Lana
The Matt Turner & Anthony Franco Award for Worst Promo of the Year:	The New Japan, “This is too Easy” Award for Show of the Year:
1) Nikki Bella	1) G1 Day 7 – Aug 1 st , Tokyo Korakuen Hall
2) Brie Bella	2) G1 Day 8 – Aug 3 rd , Osaka BODYMAKER COLOSSEUM.
3) John Cena	3) Dragon Gate, Dead or Alive – May 5 th , Aichi, Aichi Prefectural Gym.
The WrestleMania XVII Award for North American Show of the Year:	The Any WCW PPV from 2000 Award for Worst Show of the Year:
1) WWE WrestleMania XXX – Apr 6 th New Orleans, LA, Super Dome.	1) TNA Sacrifice – April 27 th , Orlando, FL, Impact Zone.
2) ROH Final Battle – Dec 7 th New York City, Terminal 5	2) WWE Survivor Series – Nov 23 rd , St. Louis, MO, Scottrade Centre.
3) PWG Eleven – July 26 th Reseda, CA	3) CZW 15 th Anniversary Show – Feb 8 th , Voorhees, NJ.
The Trish Stratus Award for Most Improved:	The Velvet Sky Award for Least Improved:
1) Charlotte	1) Rosa Mendes
2) Rusev	2) Cameron
3) Princess Kimber Lee	3) Ryback
The Ricky Morton Award for Babyface of the Year:	The Fred Blassie Award for Heel of the Year:
1) Sami Zayn	1) The Entire WWE Creative Team (Second Year in a Row!)
2) Daniel Bryan	2) Brock Lesnar
3) Hiroshi Tanahashi	3) Bruce Tharpe
The “NXT is Worth the Price of the WWE Network Alone” Award for Best TV Show:	The WCW Thunder/TNA iMPACT/Wrestlicious Award for Worst TV Show:
1) NXT	1) WWE Raw
2) Lucha Underground	2) TNA iMPACT
3) TNA British Boot Camp 2	3) WWE SmackDown

The Hansen & Brody Award for Tag Team of the Year:	The Vince Russo Award for Utter Stupidity and Blithering Incompetence.
1) The Young Bucks	1) Charlotte losing in 2 minutes on Raw.
2) Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shibata	2) Dixie Carter not selling TNA and stringing everyone along for months with the promise of an announcement that turned out to be, "we're moving to Destination America."
3) Time Splitters	3) Vince McMahon burying his entire roster of "Millennials."

2014 PWG Win/Loss Records



Credit: Dean Knickerbocker

RYAN CLINGMAN'S WON AWARDS COVERAGE

1. LOU THESZ/RIC FLAIR AWARD:

1. Shinsuke Nakamura
2. Kazuchika Okada
3. Hiroshi Tanahashi

I can't recall any year in recent memory where the WON's answer to MVP, the Thesz/Flair award, has had so few stand-out candidates. WWE, whilst having a newer top star in Daniel Bryan headline WrestleMania failed to capitalize in the wake of that show, and then Bryan got hurt anyway, putting him out for the rest of the year, and so too out of contention for the award. Neither John Cena, nor Randy Orton, nor even Brock Lesnar were able to do anything substantial in the months that follow, at least as far as in-ring and business is concerned, as the Network failed for a multitude of reasons. TNA was as hopeless as ever, and Ring of Honor was helped along by a number of talents, like Adam Cole and Jay Briscoe, with no individual acting as a viable candidate for this award. Dragon Gate, from what I've seen, heard, and read was very good, however I haven't seen enough of it to make a definitive call, and it would seem, at least from an outsiders perspective, that the promotion was also carried by a large group of people, and not even by a core group. NOAH stabilized somewhat, but like a slightly stronger version of the modern day All Japan, didn't progress to a point where anyone on its roster could be considered for the award.

This leaves, New Japan, who continued to grow financially, making pay-per-view inroads and strengthening attendance. As a draw, Shinsuke Nakamura led the company in 2014, and whilst not as consistent as Okada, put on enough great matches at an elite level that he is as strong of a choice as I could find this year. Okada in terms of positioning was down slightly from 2012/3, and that hurt him when making considerations for this award, even if he had a better in-ring 2014 than Nakamura. Okada remained face of the company though. Tanahashi, when not working well-drawing main events with the likes of Styles and Nakamura, was mainly positioned underneath most main events on major shows, although still helped strengthen the shows that he appeared on in those roles, and when placed in the position was able to show that he is still one of the best performers in the world.

Honourable Mentions: Jun Akiyama, Tomohiro Ishii

3. MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER:

1. Tomohiro Ishii
2. Kazuchika Okada
3. Katsuyori Shibata

I attempted to decide my picks for this award in the most systematic fashion that I thought possible tallying, for my top y matches of 2014 list on page z, the number of **** ¼ and over, and **** ½ and over matches for my top candidates. Before I had done this, my three choices, simply based on what I could recall from the year, were Tomohiro Ishii in first place, Shibata in

second, and Goto in third. Ishii came out in the first position even with the tallying, with 14 matches at or over **** ¼ an an astonishing 9 over **** ½, however, Shibata fell below not only Kazuchika Okada, but also Hiroshi Tanahashi in both matches at or over **** ¼ and **** ½, if only by a slight margin in the case of Hiroshi Tanahashi. However, I ended up taking Shibata over Tanahashi (10 at or over **** ¼ and 6 at over **** ½), with 9 matches over **** ¼ and 5 over **** ½, as Shibata, I felt, was far more consistent in his performances throughout the year, particularly in the G1 and in his partnership with Hirooki Goto. Nakamura, was surprisingly below Tanahashi and Shibata, although I thought that he under-delivered in some key performances this year – even if he was still one of the best performers in the entire world in my view.

Tomohiro Ishii, even when ignoring all of these metrics, was quite clearly the hardest working performer in New Japan this year, putting on better matches with a destroyed shoulder than many top level stars in other promotions couldn't when fully able. He also produced some of his finest in-ring work this year with a diverse group of opponents in Tetsuya Naito, Hirooki Goto, Kota Ibushi, Tomoaki Honma, Davey Boy Smith Jr., and Katsuyori Shibata – in fact, he at one point dragged an entertaining match out of Yujiro Takahashi of all people. He was, in my view, the best seller in all of professional wrestling – with the possible exception of Sami Zayn – and still, his selling this year was far more believable than Zayn, with all due respect to Zayn as an outstanding performer. In short, nobody could touch Tomohiro Ishii in-ring this year.

Kazuchika Okada, also had an sensational in-ring 2014, out performing his main event adversaries Shinsuke Nakamura and Hiroshi Tanahashi whenever he was given the chance. He may not have produced as great of a match catalogue as he did in 2013, but then again his 2013 catalogue featured three matches with Tanahashi, and those two have tremendous chemistry together. It is arguable that Okada has improved further still this year, with his G1 match against Suzuki perhaps playing out better than even their match last year for the IWGP Heavyweight Championship. Unfortunately, his main program this year against AJ Styles wasn't as fruitful as some would have anticipated, both from a financial and artistic perspective due to excessive Bullet Club interference. His match with Ibushi produced one of the single greatest five minute sequences of the year, and the same could be said for his match with Nakamura. Okada was perhaps the foremost big Japanese-style main event worker of the year.

Katsuyori Shibata is a different worker than Okada and even Ishii, in that almost all of his matches are wrestled in the same “bachi bachi” style, even in one of his better matches of the year against Tanahashi. However, much like Tomohiro Ishii and Okada he was able to bring the best out of pretty much whoever he worked with, with the only real exception being that of the Power Struggle Nakamura match.

Wrestler(s)	# of matches **** ¼+ 2013/12/01 – 2014/11/30	# of matches **** ½+ 2013/12/01 – 2014/11/30
Tomohiro Ishii	14	9
Kazuchika Okada	10	8
Hiroshi Tanahashi	10	6
Katsuyori Shibata	9	5

Shinsuke Nakamura	8	5
Tetsuya Naito	8	5
Hirooki Goto	7	5
Tomoaki Honma	5	4
AJ Styles	5	2
Luke Harper & Erick Rowan	3	3
Kota Ibushi	3	2
Minoru Suzuki	3	2
The Shield	3	2
Yuji Nagata	3	2
Takashi Sugiura	2	2

Honourable Mentions: Shinsuke Nakamura, Hiroshi Tanahashi, Tetsuya Naito, AJ Styles, Tomoaki Honma, Hirooki Goto, Timothy Thatcher, Sami Zayn, Kyle 'O Reilly

5. BEST BOX OFFICE DRAW:

1. Shinsuke Nakamura
2. Hiroshi Tanahashi
3. Kazuchika Okada

The pool of pro-wrestling draws in 2014 is in many ways profoundly different from that of years prior. For quite some time it has been apparent that the concept of an individual drawing card for the WWE, was becoming somewhat of an outdated concept, with the general momentum of the product carrying attendance, ratings, and pay-per-view buys. This has become an even greater truth this year, with the Rock, by far the biggest single draw of 2013, failing to appear on any pro-wrestling show as a performer. And had he appeared on WrestleMania for example, the metrics used to gauge drawing power for the company simply don't exist any more with the advent of the WWE Network, a service whose subscribership varies to a far lesser degree with the ebb and flow of the product than even recent pay-per-view buy-rates. What is more is that due to the bizarre disappearance of quarterly hour ratings late last year, it has become increasingly more difficult to assess television ratings draws, with any large spikes obscured by our limited data.

With this it becomes clear that a WWE performer, whether full or part time, would be unable to win this award, as even Cena means less than he perhaps ever has in terms of certain metrics. TNA, as has been seen with AJ Styles' success on the indies, is also seemingly unreliant on any one individual star, but more to its detriment in that they are unable to capitalize on any one star's drawing power, whether it was Styles in 2013, or Lashley and Hardy in 2014. Ring of Honor is a company who, conceivably, could have a couple of drawing stars, but for whatever reason has yet to find or hone them, and instead relies, much like the other two companies, on

its roster as a whole, together with brand identity to draw.

Ultimo Guerrero and Atlantis could be argued as the greatest single draws of the entire year, and I wouldn't see that as inaccurate, however, I do personally favour a year's worth of strong drawing over an astonishing single night out.

This leaves Japan, with both Dragon Gate and New Japan succeeding on a financial level in 2014. However, given New Japan's still active financial recovery, together with the fact that they are the second largest company in the world, one whose attendance fluctuates enough to evaluate to some extent individual drawing power, my top three choices had to come from that promotion. Seeing as how Kazuchika Okada is the future ace of the company, one may have expected that he would take home the first place prize, but looking at attendances throughout the year, particularly in the Bodymaker and Sumo Hall, it is fairly clear that Nakamura was the biggest draw for the company. In fact, the NJPW/TV Asai pol in December/January, which looked to determine the Tokyo Dome main event between Nakamura/Tanahashi for the IC title and Okada/Naito for the Heavyweight total was won by Tanahashi/Nakamura.

Tanahashi also outdrew Okada in his matches with AJ Styles, although it should be noted that in relation to Tanahashi and Nakamura Okada was often times set to draw in the lesser building when NJPW was running two major shows per tour. Still, it was quite clear by attendance and reaction that Tanahashi was, at the very least, the second biggest star in the company.

Still, this isn't to take anything away from Okada, who may very well, in 2015, should he reclaim the IWGP Heavyweight title from Tanahashi at the Dome, be, once again, the best single draw in the world, but for now that spot belongs to Nakamura.

Honourable Mentions: John Cena, AJ Styles

6. FEUD OF THE YEAR:

1. Adrian Neville vs. Sami Zayn
2. Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomohiro Ishii
3. The Shield vs. The Wyatts

There was no single stand-out feud this year like Hiroshi Tanahashi/Kazuchika Okada from 2013, in fact, had those two wrestled this year they may very well have been my top choice for the award – and this could possibly transpire in 2015. However, as far as pro-wrestling storytelling goes, as a standalone story arc Adrian Neville/Sami Zayn was kilometres ahead of just about every other feud I've seen this year. It had the good matches, the logical storytelling, and a climax that stands as one of the highlights of the brand. Granted, the Takeover III special lies outside of the voting period, transpiring in early December 2014. However, given that without that climax the feud wouldn't have nearly been viewed in as positive a light, in addition to the fact that the feud wouldn't be considered for 2015 voting, it was only logical to include that match in the consideration of that feud. The Shield and Wyatts could have been much more, had it been given a concrete logical progression to a conclusive climax. Still, the Wyatts and the Shield produced some of the best matches of the year together, and some very fun angles leading into those matches. Tetsuya Naito and Tomohiro Ishii had the best matches of any of the

feuds on the list, but it was more a series of matches than a feud when compared to Zayn/Neville, which is why I would have to give that feud the edge.

Honourable Mentions: Shield vs. Evolution, Jun Akiyama vs. Kento Miyahara

7. TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR:

1. Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shibata
2. reDragon
3. Luke Harper & Erick Rowan

Tag team wrestling in the major promotions did not see a resurgence into the main event picture this year. The IWGP Tag Titles mean less now than they have for many years, perhaps ever, and the WWE's tag team scene, whilst showing some signs of recovery earlier in the year, has atrophied back to lower midcard comedy and irrelevance. However, New Japan, although still housing a faltering title scene, begot the best tag team of the year in Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shibata, who not only had one of the best matches of the year opposite Nagata & Honma, but were also two of the most consistent and compelling tag acts in the world in 2014. Much of the same can be said about reDragon, with Fish and 'O Reilly both performing as two of the best indie talents of the entire year, functioning incredibly well in and out of the ring. Harper and Rowan, whilst not performing as well as singles, have only done so as a result of poor booking and lack of opportunities. As a team, however, they were arguably the best component of the Wyatt Family act, which is why Wyatt himself has been treading water during the later portions of the year – they took the Usos to their best match of the year, and were instrumental in Wyatt's best performances of 2014, as well as producing a number of compelling tag performances making them when of the best teams of 2014, which makes it all the more baffling that they were broken up so inexplicably.

Honourable Mentions: Young Bucks, Usos, Time Splitters, Eita & T-Hawk

8. MOST IMPROVED:

1. Charlotte
2. Rusev
3. Trevor Lee

I'll be honest that I haven't seen as much improvement in Charlotte and Rusev than others. That isn't to say that they haven't improved a great deal over the course of a year, as Charlotte has astonishingly become one of NXT's top stars, male or female, which is of course quite rare for the WWE. Not only that, but she has also put on some of the best women's matches that the promotion has seen in years during the quarterly NXT specials, and for that – even if I don't think she is quite as great as many believe – she gets my top spot. Much the same can be said for Rusev, who has improved particularly in the ring, becoming a very good performer over the course of a few short months. Trevor Lee takes my third spot as one of the indies' most unique performers, a strange amalgam of Sami Callihan, Kevin Steen and Dolf Ziggler he has exceeded my expectations as much as anyone this year.

Honourable Mentions: YOSHI-HASHI, Cedric Alexander, Erick Rowan: Kento Miyahara

9. BEST ON INTERVIEWS:

1. Paul Heyman
2. Connor McGregor
3. Dean Ambrose

2014 hasn't been the greatest of years for interviews with very few stand-out performances from any of the likely candidates, and no CM Punk or Chael Sonnen on the scene for various reasons. Connor McGregor was a promo in much the same mould as Chael Sonnen, albeit slightly less comedic, although he didn't produce enough content to warrant first place – he did however turn himself into a big star this year purely through mic work. Ambrose is arguably the best promo in the business, but over-scripting, particularly in the later stages of the year, brought many of his promos down. Had Ambrose been given greater creative freedom like some of the very top stars in the promotion, then perhaps he may very well have been in first place. Heyman tops the list as one of the most believable and captivating speakers in the business, as well as a very important one for Brock Lesnar who featured prominently this year. He didn't have any one performance at the calibre of some of his best work last year with CM Punk and company, however, this is in no way denying that he was still the best promo in the business in 2014.

10. MOST CHARISMATIC:

1. Shinsuke Nakamura
2. Kazuchika Okada
3. Hiroshi Tanahashi

Charisma is a highly subjective and culture specific quality. A stoic star like Mitsuharu Misawa, whilst able to connect nearly instantaneously with a Japanese audience, would have perhaps had a difficult time getting over in-front of an American audience, even if he had acquired English mic skills. Similarly, highly charismatic NOAH star, KENTA (now Hideo Itami), doesn't mean as much for NXT as he did for NOAH. This is most likely a direct result of the manner in which he has been booked, but the booking of Itami was fairly standard fair for the introduction of a new American wrestler (sans stupidity). This demonstrates that there are certain components of American charisma that aren't needed for a Japanese star, and vice versa. Even so, this idea may still be too restrictive, as the notion of “components” comprising charisma is most probably an inaccurate one, as there exist performers like Brock Lesnar who just “have it” despite not being particularly compelling talkers, a quality may be considered particularly important for an American star..

This year choosing a most charismatic performer of the year was fairly simple, seeing as how CM Punk was largely inactive, as was Daniel Bryan, at least for a large portion of the year. This left Shinsuke Nakamura, who turned his “Swagsuke” meter up so high in 2014 that had the Punks and Bryans of the world even been active this year, it is quite possible that Nakamura may still have been my top choice for the award. Not only that, but by channelling his charisma at the right times and in the correct ways he was able to draw better than arguably any other wrestler world-wide.

Kazuchika Okada from a purely American wrestling fan's perspective may seem to be a fairly bland performer, but in his context he may be considered one of the most charismatic stars in the company, with a very similar kind of stoic charisma to a Misawa or even Shinya Hashimoto. Hiroshi Tanahashi was right up there with Nakamura as one of the more flamboyant top stars of New Japan, and whilst not featuring as heavily at the top of the card as in prior years, he still kept close to an entire building full during his post-match guitar solos and subsequent encores, showcasing his enate star power.

Honourable Mentions: Brock Lesnar, Minoru Suzuki, Dean Ambrose, Prince Devitt, Tomohiro Ishii, Daniel Bryan

11. BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER:

1. Timothy Thatcher
2. Drew Gulak
3. Zack Sabre Jr.

Over the three years that I have been doing this column I have prefaced my thoughts on the “Best Technical Wrestler” award with two comments – “Daniel Bryan will probably win”, and “there weren't any stand-out candidates for the award, unfortunately”. One of these statements still holds true for 2014, in that Daniel Bryan will most probably still win the award, as many people simply vote for him out of habit. However, this year, thanks to a resurgence of the World of Sport style beyond the European scene, on the American independents, Zack Sabre Jr. isn't the only strong candidate for the award, nor should there be any consolation votes like Nakamura or Suzuki like there have been in past years. Instead, Timothy Thatcher, Drew Gulak, Biff Busick, and others have not only produced a great catalogue of matches this year, but also a healthy voting pool for this award in 2014. I had a tough time choosing my top pick between Thatcher and Gulak, and in any other year over the past five years ago it would have easily gone to Gulak, but Thatcher has been so technically proficient, and so believable this year that I, in the end, picked him as my number one choice for the award. This is not to discredit ZSJ and Gulak, who were both fantastic this year, and two of the best pure technical wrestlers in the world.

Honourable Mentions: Biff Busick, Kyle 'O Reilly, KUSHIDA

12. BRUISER BRODY MEMORIAL AWARD:

1. Tomohiro Ishii
2. Katsuyori Shibata
3. Dean Ambrose

My personal definition of what constitutes a brawler has changes significantly over the past four years or so. Where as I used to look at this award as one that should be given to the kind of wrestler who would work out on the floor, utilise weapons the best, and the like, my focus has now broadened to include “hass” and “bachi bachi” style candidates like a Sheamus/Cesaro type in the WWE, or Ishii, Honma, and Shibata in New Japan, in addition to the more traditional

candidates like Dean Ambrose.

With this in mind, not only was Tomohiro Ishii the best wrestler in 2014, but he used mainly tactics of the kind associated with the above to put on performances at the level of a performer of the year. Whether it was the, now admittedly overused, forearm exchange, or going head to head against Hirooki Goto in a war of lariats, Ishii was able to get the most out of the style of anyone I have seen in 2014 – and as a side note, there have been few names more fitting for a wrestler who works like Ishii does than “The Stone Pitbull”. The same may be said for Shibata, who limits himself even more to the style than Ishii, but still, when at his best, puts on matches just as great, whilst using similar if not, at times, more severe tactics.

Dean Ambrose, had I been confining myself to my original definition, would have been far and away my first pick for this award, and even with the newer definition I may have very well ranked him higher. However, whilst he was a key factor in some of the very best brawls of the year with the members of Evolution and the Wyatt Family earlier this year, the opportunities that he was given to showcase such skills declined as time passed following the Shield breakup. He had a number of memorable brawls with Seth Rollins, but it didn't result in anything truly tangible match wise. And this is a shame, as much like Ishii and Shibata, Ambrose is one of the most believable performers in the business when given the opportunity to perform at his optimum.

Honourable Mentions: Hirooki Goto, Togi Makabe, Minoru Suzuki, Cesaro, Jack Swagger, Tomoaki Honma, Kevin Steen, Luke Harper, Seth Rollins

13. BEST FLYING WRESTLER:

1. Ricochet
2. Kota Ibushi
3. KUSHIDA

Much like the Bruiser Brody Memorial award, the 'Best Flying Wrestler' award is meant less for the person who can perform the most spectacular flips and dives, but rather for the wrestler who is able to use tactics of that sort to build a pro-wrestling match. Kota Ibushi has, in his transition to heavyweight beginning last year, been able to do just that, although much of his move set, such as the grounded high-kick into a moonsault has become overly patterned. Being 'patterned'; is of course a criticism given to the likes of Ric Flair for example, and in that sense many great wrestlers are patterned. However, when you have a move set that often times relies on your opponent to also react in the exact same fashion each time, such as the moonsault example, or Shelton Benjamin's kick, it begins to become stale and detract from matches. This isn't to say that Ibushi isn't a great flying wrestler and a huge asset to both NJPW and DDT, but it does detract somewhat from his candidacy here. Ricochet is guilty of this very thing on occasion too, and he often does double the amount of crazy dives that he needs to. However, as he continues to evolve as a performer his matches are becoming progressively more coherent, whilst his move-set remains one of the most impressive of any major star. KUSHIDA has also had quite the in-ring year, although, hasn't had quite the number of opportunities as an Ibushi or Ricochet, simply due to his place on the card as a junior heavyweight in 2014 New Japan.

Honourable Mentions: Alex Shelley, Flamita, ACH, Adrian Neville

14. MOST OVERRATED:

1. Kane
2. Stephanie McMahon
3. Bad Luck Fale

Kane has been inexplicably placed in top spots for years when it has been quite apparent both from fan apathy and key business markers that he doesn't belong anywhere near the top of the card – this was true once more for 2014. In terms of pay-per-view main events Kane didn't feature in all too many, as when excluding multi-man matches such as the Royal Rumble, Elimination Chamber, Survivor Series, and Money in the Bank, he had only two, one at Extreme Rules and the other at Battleground in a fatal-four way opposite Cena, Reigns, and Orton. However, not only has his TV presence exceeded his value to the programs he has been on by quite a wide margin, but his program with Daniel Bryan following Bryan's career performance as WrestleMania 30 felt like as much as an attempt to derail Bryan's title run as anything. This holds especially true when factoring in Kane's lack of in-ring prowess from a fan's perspective (he is often times lauded by the those who have worked with him as incredibly safe, easy, and professional), and lack of compelling mic presence in comparison to others on the roster. Whilst I would never wish for someone to lose their livelihood, if Kane was placed in the lower mid-card or off of TV beyond special performances, not only would it improve the quality, if only by a slight margin, of some of the company's faltering television, but it would also keep potential stars away from what are, often times, the worst feuds of the year with Kane.

Given the praise handed to Stephanie for her believable heel mic work throughout the year, her often times suffocating presence alongside Triple H as the Authority, has proven itself a large detriment to the quality of the television product. McMahon should be commended for her vast improvement as a television personality, but her amount of talent and role as an Authority figure, much like Hunter's, does not warrant the degree of television time that she has received throughout the year. When then accounting for her program and involvement with the Bella Twins, she was an over-pushed personality, one that often times lowered the quality of the product as a result, and it is for that reason that she is quite clearly one of the most overrated performers of the year.

I have very little against Bad Luck Fale as a performer, and he does have the potential with a great look and good presence to be an asset for New Japan in the coming years. However, there is little disputing that, even more so than Yujiro Takahashi, his role at the top of New Japan pay-per-views and run with the IC title was unwarranted given his experience level, and far more importantly, the level to which he was able to get over with the New Japan fan base. Of all the opportunities he had, whether it was in the 2014 G1, the best work-rate tournament perhaps in the history of pro-wrestling, or in IC title main events, the only truly memorable performance he produced was earlier in the year with Nakamura – and the quality of that performance came more as a consequence of Nakamura busting his nose open than as Fale carrying himself as a worker or in-ring presence. Takahashi would have been my third place choice, but he wasn't featured high enough on the card, apart from being placed in the G1 and winning the NEVER title, to warrant inclusion.

Dishonourable mentions: Yujiro Takahashi, Big Show, Triple H

15. MOST UNDERRATED:

1. Cesaro
2. Tomoaki Honma
3. Dolf Ziggler

Not everyone on a roster can be a main eventer, this fact is obvious, and true for a number of reasons. The first, and perhaps most apparent, is that there is a much smaller finite number of spots open in the main event position than there are in the lower midcard and midcard position, or at least this should be true in theory. The other is that many performers simply aren't main event talent for whatever reason, whether it is a lack of charisma, working ability, fan disapproval and so on. However, there also exist performers who undoubtedly possess extraordinary ability, and may very well be cut out for a spot higher than their current position on the card, but, for whatever reason, aren't placed in those positions, and this is essentially the basis for the "Most Underrated" award.

Cesaro, is a wrestler with unique physical attributes, able to perform feats of strength with ease that very few other top level workers in the world could do. He is a tremendous worker able to work with a variety of opponents, and is often only limited by his creative direction, and associated spot on the card. He hasn't showcased any spectacular mic ability, but then again he has only been given short, overly scripted lines for most of his WWE tenure. However, even with this in mind, he was still one of the most over acts in the company given his spot on the card earlier this year. And yet, for whatever reason, his Swiss nationality, look, accent, or working style, Vince McMahon, by his own volition, has been a significant limiting factor for one of the best all around, and at times one of the more popular, performers on the entire roster, one that may very well have blossomed into a main, or at least semi-main, star given the chance.

Tomoaki Honma faces a different set of circumstances than Cesaro, in that he is over, and is clearly allowed to get over, and yet has been placed mainly in throw-away six-man tags this year, only making a major singles appearance, and a stellar one at that, in this year's G1, as a result of an injury suffered by Kota Ibushi leading into the tournament. And still he failed to win a single bout. This perhaps sounds worse than it actually was, as Honma became even more over based on the losses that he incurred at the hands of the A block. However, when the time came for Honma to win, in his final set of his matches when fans were most anticipating it, he didn't, and once the G1 was over, he was once again relegated to lowercard multi-man tags. This mishandling of Honma is a shame, as whilst he has been getting over through losing and could at this point be considered a veteran, he could, if allowed, play a strong role in the midcard and occasional role in the uppercard – much like a Goto or Ishii. Of course, the same may be said for honourable mentions, Suzuki and Nagata, who have also been severely underutilized, particularly in the case of Suzuki, who may still very well be one of the best and most unique wrestlers in the world.

Ziggler has been a strong candidate for this award for quite some time. A couple of years ago he had a good run with the mid-card World Heavyweight Championship, however, in 2014, when

the WWE ran so incredibly low on main event talent, with Ziggler still remaining one of their most popular (in terms of crowd reactions) performers, they didn't move him up the card into one of their many available slots, which stands as one of many missed opportunities.

Honourable Mentions: Tyson Kidd, Minoru Suzuki, Yuji Nagata, Bad News Barrett, Drew McIntyre, Cody Rhodes, Big E

16. PROMOTION OF THE YEAR:

1. New Japan Pro-Wrestling
2. Dragon Gate
3. Ring of Honor

One could have argued that simply on a profitability front that the WWE were the rightful winners of this award last year, clearly ignoring all creative and work-based components of a wrestling company. However, this year, there is little in the way of even financial metrics to place the WWE ahead of New Japan, who were perhaps the most successful pro-wrestling company in all the world. Of course, statements of this kind may be viewed as slightly suspect, but when considering that the largest pro-wrestling company was wholly less profitable this year than any year in quite some time, and actually lost money, and that New Japan made further inroads into rebuilding the company, it makes perfect sense to place NJPW ahead of WWE. Then when considering the in-ring product, booking, and roster, for my taste New Japan was very easily the best promotion on the planet this year. I am not an avid follower of the Dragon Gate product, however, it would be difficult to dispute the fact that they are very popular with their audience, and were perhaps more successful as a promotion than Ring of Honor. Ring of Honor had a solid product too, although are in many ways restricted by the Sinclair ownership and how much they choose to invest in the company. Their venture into traditional pay-per-view was, by all accounts a success, and they have been doing fairly well attendance wise.

Honourable Mentions: Pro-Wrestling Guerrilla

17. BEST WEEKLY TV SHOW:

1. WWE NXT
2. Ring of Honour Wrestling
3. *Blank*

Much like 2013, 2014 hasn't been the greatest of years for pro-wrestling television. RAW and Impact were both sub-par for large portions of the year, and Lucha Underground, a potential contender for this award next year, debuted too late in the year for it to be a credible candidate. There simply hasn't been enough programming generated by the new promotion to allow for a fair and accurate decision to be passed. It is for these reasons that the third position has been left blank. This does not, however, mean that no show was good enough to be considered for this award, as NXT, a now long time internet fan darling of a television program, was as good as ever this year, with Kidd, Zayn, Neville, and others all featured prominently on the show, in mostly logical and well booked storylines; something that couldn't be said for any of the main

roster shows for most of the year. Ring of Honor Wrestling on Sinclair was also entertaining from what I have seen of it this year, featuring one of the most consistent in-ring products on TV right now. Unfortunately, I haven't seen enough of the Ring of Honor television show to place it in the number one spot this year, which makes NXT my natural number one choice for television show of the year .

Honourable Mentions: Lucha Underground

18. PRO WRESTLING MATCH OF THE YEAR:

See page 83

20. ROOKIE OF THE YEAR:

1. Trevor Lee
2. Moose
3. *Blank*

This is perhaps the most difficult award to decide upon each year, as the criteria can be at times quite ambiguous – a rookie, in the Observer sense, is classified as someone who only began working for a “major” promotion post-September 2013. This definition has major loop-holes, however, as a veteran like Hechicero, who debuted in 2001, only entered a major promotion (CMLL) this year and would technically be eligible as a rookie. Lee is an overlooked candidate, as he only began appearing consistently for PWG and FIP this year, with all prior appearances being for promotions such as CWF and EVO. He is by no means incredibly polished, but is an exciting and at times quite odd amalgam of Sami Callihan, Kevin Steen and Jeff Hardy

21. BEST NON-WRESTLER PERFORMER:

1. Paul Heyman
2. Gedo
3. Lana

Most of the ballots I have seen for this award have placed Stephanie in the number one position, however, given that the Authority angle has had little positive influence on the product, and Stephanie has had few individual stand-out performances past the WrestleMania season, I couldn't justify placing on the list. Gedo would usually be number one on my list, but with Okada featured less prevalently in the main event picture than last year, and in no truly memorable feuds, Gedo's beneficial role as a manager has been more limited than in the past, although the importance of his role as not on the traditional mouth piece, but also as a ringside performer is unquestionable. Heyman may not have had one of his better years this year, but he is such a believable and captivating talker he still makes a strong number one choice. This is, of course, apart from the fact that he has played a vital role in the functioning of Brock Lesnar as a WWE talent, given Brock's limited available dates. He also had several memorable moments this year, perhaps the most important of which being his post-Streak-ending promo following WrestleMania 30. Given Lana's importance to the Rusev act, and as Ben said in his NXT review

“ The [Rusev] act though is completely dependent on his mouthpiece and valet, Lana”, it would be difficult to exclude her from this list. It should be noted, however, that, much like the best television award, had Lucha Underground begun earlier in the year, there is a strong possibility that Konnan would have been the non-performer to win this award – Dario Cueto may very well have been on the list as well.

Honourable Mentions: Konnan, Dario Cueto, William Regal, Bruce Tharpe, Stephanie McMahon

22. BEST TELEVISION ANNOUNCER:

1. Dave Przak
2. Lenny Leonard
3. Joe Rogan

Honourable Mentions: Excalibur

With the voting pool for best television announcer as shallow as it has perhaps ever been, I felt that I had to deepen the pool somewhat by voting for those I felt were the best pro-wrestling commentators of 2014 regardless of medium, and those two men would be Dave Przak and Lenny Leonard. A vote otherwise would have been a complete pass regardless.

23. WORST TELEVISION ANNOUNCER:

1. JBL
2. Michael Cole
3. Jerry Lawler

One of the most significant issues plaguing the current WWE product is the lack of a good, or even decent announce team. Where it is the job of the announcer to conceal the product's shortcomings and accentuate its positives, the current team of JBL, Michael Cole, and Jerry Lawler does largely the opposite: talking over segments, laughing at skits that no mentally stable human being would find even the least bit comedic, and adding little insight into otherwise good matches. JBL is a large detriment to the product, however, it is Michael Cole's job as lead announcer to cover-up for Lawler and Layfield, which is something he simply isn't capable or allowed to do.

Dishonourable Mentions: Tom Philips, Alex Riley, Steve Corino, Byron Saxton

24. BEST MAJOR SHOW:

1. NJPW G1 Climax Night 7, August 1st, Korakuen Hall, Tokyo Japan
2. NJPW G1 Climax Night 8, August 3rd, Bodymaker Colosseum, Osaka, Japan
3. NJPW G1 Climax Night 4, July 26th, Akita Prefectural Gymnasium, Akita, Japan

It has been stated time and time again, but the G1 Climax of 2014 was amongst the best work-rate pro-wrestling tournaments of all-time, improving on the tournament the year prior in a number of ways. And just as it produced some of the year's best matches, so too did it produce some of the best shows, in fact it produced the three best shows of the year and many of the

honourable mentions, with a show featuring featuring four matches above ***** ¼ stars, some far above, placing in third amongst the best major shows of the year the number one best show of the year becomes exceedingly difficult to topple.

Honourable Mentions: Shimmer 63, NJPW New Beginning, WWE WrestleMania 30, NJPW G1 Climax Night 1, NJPW G1 Climax Night 11

Category B – One Choice

1. WORST MAJOR SHOW OF THE YEAR:

- WWE Survivor Series, November 23rd, Scottrade Center, St Louis, Missouri, USA

When the concept of the WWE's Network as it would develop in 2014 was first made a reality, it produced many a worry, not only from a financial perspective, but also from a creative one. Without a monthly pay-per-view buy-rate hanging in the balance, the thought was that the company, despite needing to put on a great product to retain subscribers, would lose its incentive to put on meaningful monthly events. In the months following WrestleMania 30 this seemed to be a misconceived notion, with both Payback and Extreme Rules performing well, despite less than ideal main event singles attractions. However, from Payback onwards the sceptics had been proven correct, and the WWE's creative product was sinking. A particularly bad show was TLC 2014, but given that it fell outside of the voting time frame I had to choose the second worst show I have seen all year, that being WWE's Survivor Series show from St. Louis, which was easily one of the dullest and uninspired of the Network shows in 2014. The show was headlined by a creatively stunted team Cena versus Team Authority Survivor Series match, and other than that featured nothing of note, which helps it stand as the WWE's worst show of the year amongst a set of bad ones. I should note that what ended up saving Battleground was one of the company's best matches of the year in the Usos/Wyatts 2-out-of-3 falls match.

Dishonourable Mentions: WWE Battleground , July 20th 2014, Tampa Bay Times Forum, Tampa Bay, Florida, USA , WWE Night of Champions, September 21st Bridgestone Arena, Nashville Tennessee

2. BEST WRESTLING MANEUVER:

- Kazuchika Okada's Rainmaker

With moves like the Young Buck's 'Meltzer Driver' and Adrian Neville's 'Red Arrow' featuring heavy usage throughout 2014, it may be thought that a simply short-arm lariat would be too mundane to be chosen as the single best wrestling move of the year. However, the execution and flair of a move itself is not the only factor I would consider for this award, otherwise most certainly the 'Meltzer Driver', 'Red Arrow', or a litany of other crazy moves would get my vote. Instead, what made the Rainmaker so great throughout the year, and indeed for the past couple of years, was the fact that no one has kicked out of it up until this point. The closest anyone has come to kicking out of the move was Hiroshi Tanahashi, who only kicked out of the Rainmaker following a prolonged double-down. The Rainmaker has also been used rather creatively

throughout 2014, whether it was the double Rainmaker from the G1 finals against Nakamura, the Rainmaker from rolling German suplexes, or a number of different variants. And, with Okada looking to debut a new suplex variant at the 2015 Tokyo Dome, it is quite possible that another Kazuchika Okada move will get my vote in 2015.

Honourable Mentions: Meltzer Driver, Red Arrow, Figure 8

3. MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL TACTIC:

- WWE firing CM Punk on his Wedding Day

This “award” is often times a mixed bag as far as candidates go, some years people are doing heinous things to each other left and right to such an extent that it feels as if this should be a category A award, and yet, during others this “award” feels fairly out of place. 2014 looked to be leaning towards the later scenario, at least in terms of mainstream pro-wrestling (after all, there is always some devious indie promoter plotting something nefarious somewhere in the world). Luckily for the award, Colt Cabana's podcast with CM Punk was released a month or so ago, adding not only apparent fragrant medical malpractices to the WWE's medical staff, but also the more succinct matter of WWE refusing to cash Punk's royalty check for him, as well as attempting to prevent Punk from earning future royalties on merchandise, until lawyers settled on the matter (and with Punk being as outspoken as he has over the past months, it can be assumed that Punk's side could be said to have won), as well as, perhaps the most symbolic of all of them, firing Punk on his wedding day. Whilst I am sure that there was another promotion, indie or not, somewhere in the world that did something worse, this was the issue that epitomized many of Punk's concerns addressed in his initial interview, and given that one can not simply vote “RAW”, this seems like as fair a choice as any.

Dishonourable Mentions: WWE refusing to cash Punk's royalty check, WWE's numerous

4. WORST TELEVISION SHOW:

-WWE Monday Night RAW

By now most everyone, including Vince McMahon himself it would seem, realises that three hours is too long for a pro-wrestling television show, and whilst that may be so, with the current creative direction being as poor as it is, two hours would most probably be too long. The issues plaguing Monday Night RAW are numerous and go beyond the obvious three hour shackle, the lack of main event talent, nonsensical schizophrenic booking, overbearing authority figures, and reluctance to diverge from the status quo are all some of the interconnected problems affecting the product, ones that ultimately turn what should be three hours of entertainment, into an endurance battle between viewer and producer

Dishonourable Mentions: TNA Impact

5. WORST MATCH OF THE YEAR:

-Bray Wyatt vs. John Cena, Steel Cage Match, WWE Extreme Rules May 4th 2014, Izod Center, East

Rutherford, New Jersey, USA

The “Worst Match of the Year” award is a strange one, in that if you were to choose a winner/loser of the award purely based on how terrible the match was, then chances are, somewhere in the world, you would be able to find a match worse, albeit likely on a small indie. It is for this reason that I tend to choose, for this award, the worst match on a big stage, one where the match wasn't placed in a throw-away spot on the show, but was actually given time and intended to be somewhat passable. By my ratings the worst match I saw this year was AR Fox versus Mr A from DGUSA Open the Ultimate Gate show on WrestleMania Weekend – I gave it -1/2*. However, the bout that I actually chose as my single worst match of the year was not a Rosa Mendez match, nor was it a Divas match of any kind, or even the Fox/A match, but rather John Cena versus Bray Wyatt from Extreme Rules 2014, which was, much like the AR Fox/Mr A atrocity, one of the most overlooked messes of the year. What pushed it over the edge was of course the child appearing before John Cena as he was about to escape the cage with a pitch shifted creepy voice – the child wasn't even able to lip-sync. The match from a technical standpoint wasn't the greatest, but when Cena eventually came out on top, and then factoring in the damage that the program did to Wyatt, a man who was at the beginning of the year a potential top star for the company, it was my worst match of the year, even if I did award it a single star at the time. This does not, however, extinguish my undying hatred for Mr. A versus AR Fox, which was the pinnacle of indie stupidity.

Dishonourable Mentions: AR Fox vs. Mr A, DGUSA Open the Ultimate Gate, April 4th 2014, McAlister Auditorium, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA; Shinsuke Nakamura & Kazushi Sakuraba vs. Daniel & Rolles Gracie, NJPW May 3rd 2014, Fukuoka International Centre, Fukuoka, Japan; Daniel & Rolles Gracie vs. Toru Yano & Takashi Iizuka, NJPW April 6th 2014, Sumo Hall, Tokyo, Japan

6. WORST FEUD OF THE YEAR:

- Brie Bella vs. Nikki Bella

In earlier parts of the year it seemed as if Wyatt/Cena, Wyatt/Jericho, or Kane/Bryan were bound to win worst feud of the year. However, in the weeks and months following SummerSlam Bella vs Bella quickly overtook both those ill-fated feuds as my worst of 2014. Between the “I wish you have died in the womb” statement, poor explanation as to why the feud had ever begun, to the wasted servant stipulation, Jerry Springer segment, 'Growing Up Bella', and the reunion of the pair as a heel duo with no semblance of an explanation, this was not only the worst feud of the year, but one of the worst feuds the WWE has put on in years, which covers a lot of ground.

Dishonourable Mentions: Kane vs. Daniel Bryan, Bray Wyatt vs. John Cena, Bray Wyatt vs. Chris Jericho, Shinsuke Nakamura & Kazushi Sakuraba vs. The Gracies, Toru Yano vs. Minoru Suzuki, AJ Lee vs. Paige

7. WORST PROMOTION:

-TNA

Looking at the time-line of 2014, specifically since the launch of the Network, some may argue for WWE as the worst promotion of the year. After all, it was the WWE who took what was a profitable company and business model and company, and in the span of but a few months, managed to move themselves into the red. However, realistically, WWE through the use of cost-cutting measures will be profitable again, after all, it is a self-sufficient, publicly traded company, the same cannot be said for TNA.

TNA has, for years, had to resort to outside funding from Panda Energy to stay afloat, simply unable to turn a profit with the once strong backing of a publicly traded company, and national TV. This year we caught a bleak glimpse of what TNA has been for years underneath a layer of outside backing, and that is an astonishing company, one who managed to do so little with so much. Considering the aftermath of the Vince Russo story and you have what is clearly, on a business front, the worst of the major promotions of 2014 – at least Akiyama managed to somewhat salvage AJPW, which is, all but a glorified indie at this point.

From a creative standpoint the argument can most certainly be made, specifically throughout the later months of the year, that TNA was superior to the WWE, but when the company feels so sad and irrelevant that its product becomes difficult to enjoy, such is the depressing downwards spiral, than creative arguments largely become irrelevant.

Dishonourable Mentions: WWE

8. BEST BOOKER:

-Gedo & Jado

Creatively speaking, 2014 may not have been the greatest of years WWE creative was hit or miss, even approaching the WrestleMania season, and towards the end of the year, actively bad. TNA tripped over man of its usual hurdles, some at the hands of Vince Russo, others not. Ring of Honor was certainly strong at most points, but lacked enough emotional gravitas to pull me in. Even NJPW made some questionable creative decisions this year, as many would argue that the Bullet Club was too strong of a faction, one which relied far too heavily on interference, ref bumps, and generally dirty finishes. Additionally, there was little in the way of an iconic feud in the mould of a Tanahashi/Okada, which was the artistic centre piece of the promotion in 2012 and 2013. Even so, New Japan was, generally speaking, the most coherent and cohesive major pro-wrestling product of the entire year. We were given a slew of great matches in the form of various Naito/Ishii matches, Goto/Ishii, Ishii/Ibushi, Okada/Ibushi, the very much overlooked Goto & Shibata versus Nagata & Honma match, and of course a G1 Climax that did what so many, including myself, thought highly improbable, topping the already seminal G1 Climax of 2013. Of course, at certain times the creative direction probably was misdirected, such as, perhaps in hindsight, the finals of the G1 in Okada/Nakamura. However, Gedo and Jado did not simply luck into a collection of outstanding matches as a result of having one of the best rosters in the world, but instead logically built on their simple, yet highly-effective, booking of prior years, which ultimately resulted in a great pro-wrestling product, perhaps the best of 2014.

9. PROMOTER OF THE YEAR:

-Takaaki Kidani

Kidani's knowledge of the pro-wrestling business from a creative perspective may be debated, as even he seemed to admit by handing creative control over to Gedo, Jado, and company last year. However, it was responsible acts of this sort, coupled with brazen decisions such as those to run the Seibu Dome, or two major shows per tour, which led New Japan to its growth as a company for the third consecutive year. Of course Kidani does make his bad decisions, and at times appears overzealous, however Kidani is the sort of personality that the pro-wrestling business needs more of. He leaves the wrestling to the wrestlers and bookers for the most part, has ambition, and direction for the product, is willing to learn, for the most part, from the past successes and failures of others, and this is far more than can be said from most every other major figure in the business at present. Kidani onwards!

10. BEST GIMMICK:

-Tyson Kidd – Self Obsessed Crazy Cat Man

The title says it all. There was no overtly obvious gimmick that I thought bore fruit this year unfortunately, so Tyson Kidd was the closest I could find.

Honourable Mentions: Yosuke Santa Maria, Daniel Bryan's "Yes! Movement" (only because I didn't know how much of a gimmick you could really call it).

11. WORST GIMMICK:

-The Authority

It may be argued that through the performances of Stephanie McMahon and Triple H that the Authority should perhaps be receiving the "Best Gimmick" award, and not the worst. However, when reflecting back on the Authority in 2014 it is quite clear that their only real positive contributions to the creative direction of the product were made in the first few months of 2014 with the Daniel Bryan and Evolution angles. However, once the decision was made to break up the Shield the Authority has been the standard heel authority figure in the vein of the anonymous general manager or John Laurinaitis, one which has not only been quite overbearing, but has brought the quality of the product down significantly. It was clear years ago that the heel authority figure was overdone, and yet throughout 2014, not only WWE, but TNA as well have implemented the same tried gimmick in slight variations, and angles such as these, particularly for the WWE, have proven a great hindrance to the overall creative direction of the product.

Dishonourable Mentions: Dixie Carter Heel Authority Figure

RYAN'S TOP MATCHES OF 2014

1. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Hirooki Goto NJPW 11/08 ***** ¾

There is one sound that synonymous with 1990s All Japan, the mighty rumble of a crowd during the most heated moments of a stiff, all out war – and it is, quite unfortunately, a sound lost to modern day puroresu. However, it was not an IWGP Heavyweight Championship or Triple Crown match to finally capture what some of the most legendary matches of the 1980s and 1990s did on a monthly basis, but rather a NEVER Openweight championship between two of the most hard working, believable, and all-around most consistent workers in the business, Tomohiro Ishii and Hirooki Goto. Whilst there was no single match this year that stood above the rest as the single greatest match of the year like Okada/Tanahashi or Suzuki/Tanahashi in year's prior, Goto and Ishii drew the single most memorable in-ring crowd reaction of the year, couple that with a brutal lariat exchange, interplay that was captivating from start to finish, and a ferrous closing stretch, and you have a match of the year.

2. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Tomoaki Honma NJPW 08/03 ***** ¾

Shibata and Honma, much like Ishii and Shibata in last year's G1, wrestled as close as any pair is going to get to the perfect match in the “bachi bachi” style, as it has come to be known. In fact, I would go as far as to say that it was not only the very best match of the G1, but also that it would have been the absolute perfect match for what they were attempting to produce if Honma had gone over. Now of course, the entire story of Honma's G1 was that he lost all of his matches, and the simplest way to circumvent a rebooking of the entire A-block, after Ibushi was rendered unable to compete due to a concussion, was to book Honma as the G1's biggest loser; and he, as strange as it may seem, got progressively more over in losing. However, for the story that both men were attempting to tell within the confines of the style, Honma, the older and less physically tough babyface utilising his fighting spirit to battle Shibata on an equal level, called for Honma to win, and it is for that reason that it fell just shy of ***** and match of the year.

3. Kyle 'O Reilly vs. Zack Sabre Jr. PWG BOLA Night 3 08/31 ***** ¾

A major development for the indies in 2014 was the popularization of the Zack Sabre Jr./Timothy Thatcher/Drew Gulak mat-based, hyper-realistic and world of sport influenced style. With 'O Reilly's MMA influence his match with Zack Sabre Jr., whilst not worked entirely in the aforementioned style, was, on a technical front, one of, if not the very best match of the entire year, and most certainly the best match of the most star-studded tournament the 2014 indies had to offer, PWG's Battle of Los Angeles. The mat-work was believable and flaw-less, the striking spectacular, and the work cutting edge. It was not a match devoid of high-spots, with Sabre Jr. executing a cross-armbreaker from the top rope, as well as the expected slap

battle and the like. Had this match taken place in front of a hot and interested ROH crowd, it may have very well topped more match of the year lists as it most certainly deserved.

4. Kazuchika Okada vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 08/10 ***** ¾

As far as working the Japanese big heavyweight title match main event style goes, there were no two men better than Kazuchika Okada and Shinsuke Nakamura on the night of the 2014 G1 finals on August 10th in the Seibu Dome. It may have been a premature match up, with both men kept as far apart as possible for the past couple of years, but with a match this good transpiring as a result, with Okada landing three Rainmakers in one of the most outrageous finishing sequences of the entire year, very few could possibly complain about it transpiring.

5. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Kota Ibushi NJPW 05/25 ***** ¾

Ishii and Ibushi seems to be a pairing bound for great matches, however, even after a heated brawl between the pair at the 2014 Tokyo Dome show, the fact that Ibushi took Ishii to one of his more violent and brutal matches of the entire year came as a surprise. Worked, in structure, quite similarly to the stellar Nakamura/Ishii match of 2013, Ishii and Ibushi stole the show in Yokohama on May 25th. Ishii spat blood and boasted a forehead haematoma as a consequence of the unexpectedly stiff contest, and whilst one could argue that Ishii perhaps took too much abuse in the match, the results – from the Hansen-style lariat from Ishii on Ibushi from the top rope, to the forearm exchange – were no doubt spectacular.

6. AJ Styles vs. Minoru Suzuki NJPW 08/01 ***** ¾

Enough has been said about this match from people who liked it far more than me, in fact the Cubed Circle Newsletter's very own Bryan Rose gave this match the full *****, but I am only really writing about it to get to the match below.

7. Katsuyori Shibata & Hirooki Goto vs. Yuji Nagata & Tomoaki Honma NJPW 06/24 ***** ¾

Whilst blurbs were originally intended only for the top five matches as a consequence of our five-fingered-ness and all, glossing over perhaps the most over-looked match of the entire year would be a travesty. For many this wasn't even match of the show, but what Goto, Shibata, Nagata, and Honma brought to the table on June 24th was a unique match layout that worked with the fans in attendance, made sense, and kept me engaged throughout. Honma and Nagata got the heat with forearms, Nagata and Shibata had one of the most intense post-match brawls of the year, and above all else all four men made me feel their intensity more than most matches this year, and that was enough to earn them a top 10 spot.

8. The Shield vs. Evolution WWE Extreme Rules 05/05 ***** ¾

9. Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 08/01 ***** ¾

10. Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 02/11 ***** ¾

11. Kazuchika Okada vs. Minoru Suzuki NJPW 08/08 ***** ¾

12. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Tomoaki Honma NJPW 07/21 ***** ¾
13. Kazuchika Okada vs. Kota Ibushi NJPW 03/06 ***** ½
14. Daniel Bryan vs. Bray Wyatt WWE Royal Rumble ***** ½
15. The Shield vs. The Wyatt Family WWE RAW 03/03 ***** ½
16. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 07/21 ***** ½
17. Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 06/06 ***** ½
18. The Shield vs. The Wyatt Family WWE Elimination Chamber 02/23 ***** ½
19. Kazuchika Okada vs. Hirooki Goto NJPW 08/04 ***** ½
20. Kazuchika Okada vs. Tetsuya Naito NJPW 10/13 ***** ½
21. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Yuji Nagata NJPW 08/01 ***** ½
22. Daisuke Sekimoto vs. Takashi Sugiura NOAH 11/08 ***** ½
23. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Katsuyori Shibata NJPW 07/26 ***** ½
24. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Tomoaki Honma NJPW 07/26 ***** ½
25. Chris Hero vs. Masato Tanaka DGUSA 04/04 ***** ½
26. Usos vs. Luke Harper & Eric Rowan WWE Battleground 07/20 ***** ½
27. Drew Gulak vs. Timothy Thatcher Wrestling Odyssey 04/04 ***** ½
28. AJ Styles vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi NJPW 08/10 ***** ½
29. KENTA & Naomichi Marufuji vs. Takashi Sugiura & Katsuhiko Nakajima NOAH 05/17 ***** ½
30. Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 03/15 ***** ½
31. Kazuchika Okada vs. Hirooki Goto NJPW 02/11 ***** ½
32. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 08/06 ***** ½
33. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi NJPW 09/21 ***** ½
34. Katsuyori Shibata, Hiroshi Tanahashi & Hirooki Goto vs. Kazuchika Okada, Shinsuke Nakamura & Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 10/25 ***** ½
35. Kazuchika Okada & Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi & Tetsuya Naito NJPW 12/23 ***** ½
36. Tetsuya Naito vs. AJ Styles NJPW 07/26 ***** ¼
37. Tommy End vs. Jonathan Gresham wXw 03/15 ***** ¼
38. AJ Styles vs. Hirooki Goto NJPW 07/26 ***** ¼
39. AJ Styles vs. Togi Makabe NJPW 08/08 ***** ¼
40. Tetsuya Naito vs. Minoru Suzuki NJPW 08/04 ***** ¼
41. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Yuji Nagata NJPW 08/08 ***** ¼
42. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Davey Boy Smith Jr. NJPW 08/03 ***** ¼
43. Timothy Thatcher vs. Buff Busick EVOLVE 32 08/09 ***** ¼
44. Johnny Gargano vs. Trevor Lee PWG Battle of Los Angeles Night 3 08/31 ***** ¼
45. Johnny Gargano vs. Ricochet DGUSA 04/04 ***** ¼
46. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Tomohiro Ishii NJPW 07/31 ***** ¼
47. Antonio Cesaro vs. Sheamus WWE Night of Champions 09/21 ***** ¼
48. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Hirooki Goto NJPW 08/10 ***** ¼
49. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 02/09 ***** ¼
50. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 04/06 ***** ¼
51. Adrian Neville vs. Sami Zayn vs. Tyon Kidd vs. Tyler Breeze NXT Takeover II ***** ¼
52. John Cena vs. Antonio Cesaro WWE RAW 02/17 ***** ¼
53. Kazuchika Okada vs. Togi Makabe NJPW 07/25 ***** ¼
54. Jun Akiyama vs. Kento Miyahara AJPW 09/15 ***** ¼
55. Kota Ibushi vs. Ricochet NJPW 06/24 ***** ¼

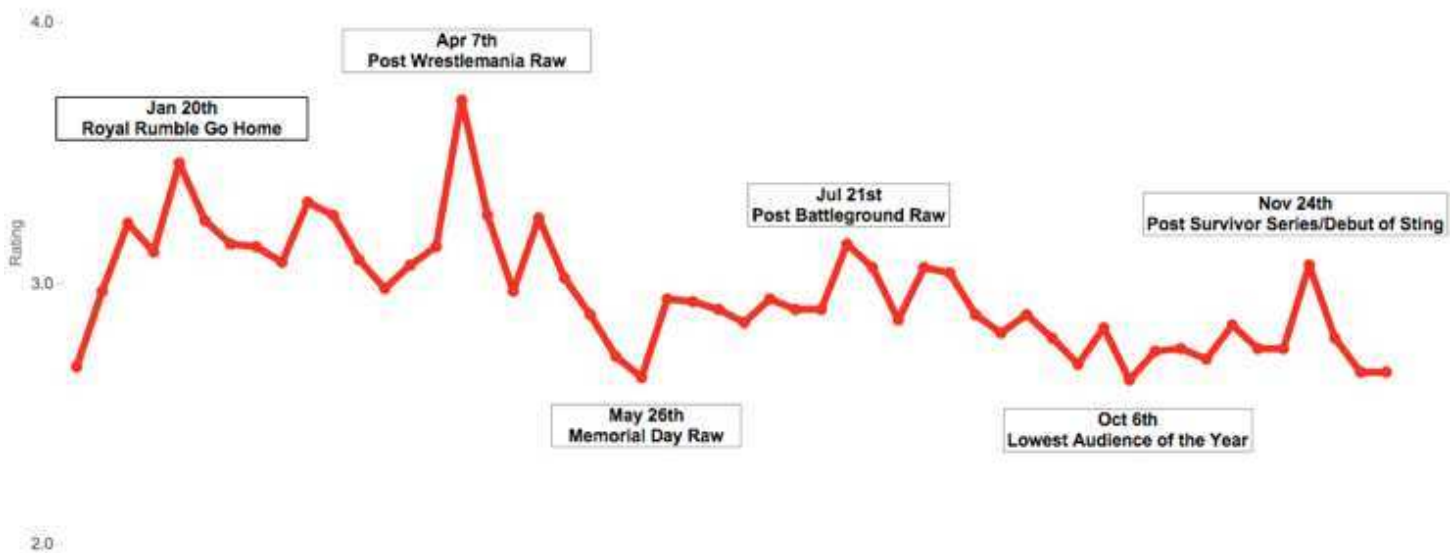
56. Kazuchika Okada vs. Tetsuya Naito NJPW 01/04 ***** ¼
57. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 08/03 ***** ¼
58. Candice LeRae vs. Athena Shimmer 04/05 ***** ¼
59. Ricochet vs. KUSHIDA NJPW 06/08 ***** ¼
60. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Tomoaki Honma NJPW 05/03 ***** ¼
61. Young Bucks vs. Time Splitters vs. Forever Hooligans ROH 05/10 ***** ¼
62. Drew Gulak vs. Roderick Strong FIP 03/15 ***** ¼
63. Antonio Cesaro vs. Sami Zayn 02/27 ***** ¼
64. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Satoshi Kojima NJPW 07/23 ***** ¼
65. Daisuke Harada vs. Taiji Ishimori NOAH 03/08 ***** ¼
66. Young Bucks vs. reDragon ROH 05/17 ***** ¼
67. Tetsuya Naito vs. Togi Makabe NJPW 08/01 *****
68. Young Bucks vs. Time Splitters NJPW 06/24 *****
69. AJ Styles vs. Kazuchika Okada NJPW 07/21 *****
70. Hirooki Goto vs. Hiroyoshi Tenzan NJPW 08/01 *****
71. Hirooki Goto vs. Togi Makabe NJPW 07/21 *****
72. Hirooki Goto vs. Katsuyori Shibata 01/04 *****
73. Daniel Bryan vs. Triple H WWE WrestleMania XXX *****
74. Kazuchika Okada vs. Tetsuya Naito NJPW 07/28 *****
75. Tetsuya Naito vs. Hirooki Goto NJPW 08/03 *****
76. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 11/08 *****
77. WWE Monday in the Bank Briefcase Match 06/24 *****
78. Minoru Suzuki vs. Togi Makabe NJPW 08/03 *****
79. Kevin Steen vs. Shinsuke Nakamura ROH 05/17 *****
80. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Karl Anderson NJPW 08/10 *****
81. Tomoaki Honma vs. Bad Luck Fale NJPW 08/01 *****
82. Daniel Bryan vs. Randy Orton vs. Batista WWE WrestleMania XXX *****
83. Tomohiro Ishii & Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi & Tetsuya Naito 03/06 *****
84. Adam Cole vs. Zack Sabre Jr. PWG BOLA Night 2 08/30 *****
85. Adam Cole vs. Michael Elgin ROH 06/22 *****
86. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Satoshi Kojima NJPW 07/25 *****
87. Daniel Bryan vs. Randy Orton WWE RAW 02/02 *****
88. Tetsuya Naito & Tomoaki Honma vs. Tomohiro Ishii & Yujiro Takahashi NJPW 02/09 *****
89. Masato Yoshino vs. Masaaki Mochizuki Dragon Gate 01/16 *****
90. Daniel Bryan vs. Randy Orton WWE RAW 12/16 *****
91. reDragon vs. Time Splitters NJPW 11/08 *****
92. Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Bad Luck Fale NJPW 08/08 *****
93. Kazuchika Okada, Shinsuke Nakamura & Tomohiro Ishii vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi, Tetsuya Naito & Hirooki Goto NJPW 02/02 *****
94. Hikaru Shida vs. Evie Shimmer 04/05 *****
95. Tetsuya Naito, Kota Ibushi & El Desperado vs. Tomohiro Ishii, Kazuchika Okada & Gedo NJPW 03/23 *****
96. AJ Styles vs. Karl Anderson NJPW 08/04 *****
97. Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Tomoaki Honma NJPW 07/28 *****
98. AJ Styles vs. Lance Archer NJPW 08/03 *****
99. Kazuchika Okada vs. Lance Archer NJPW 08/04 *****
100. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Shinsuke Nakamura NJPW 01/04 *****

101. Usos vs. Luke Harper & Eric Rowan WWE Money in the Bank 06/29 *** ¾
102. Hiroshi Tanahashi & Tetsuya Naito vs. Katsuyori Shibata & Hirooki Goto NJPW 06/29 *** ¾
103. AJ Styles vs. Hiroyoshi Tenzan NJPW 07/31 *** ¾
104. The Shield vs. Evolution WWE Payback 06/01 *** ¾
105. Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. AJ Styles NJPW 10/13 *** ¾
106. Tetsuya Naito vs. Tomoaki Honma NJPW 08/10 *** ¾
107. Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Yuji Nagata NJPW 07/26 *** ¾
108. Kenny Omega vs. ACH PWG BOLA Night 2 08/30 *** ¾
109. Kazuchika Okada vs. Karl Anderson NJPW 07/26 *** ¾
110. Daisuke Sekimoto vs. Shinobu *** ¾
111. Natalya vs. Charlotte NXT Takeover *** ¾
112. Zack Sabre Jr. vs. Daisuke Harada NOAH 11/04 *** ¾
113. WWE World Heavyweight Title Ladder Match 06/29 *** ¾
114. John Cena vs. Bray Wyatt WWE Payback 06/01 *** ¾
115. Team Cena vs. Team Authority WWE Survivor Series 11/13 *** ¾
116. Tomohiro Ishii vs. Doc Gallows NJPW 07/28 *** ¾
117. Big E. vs. Jack Swagger WWE Elimination Chamber 02/23 *** ¾
118. AJ Styles vs. Kazuchika Okada vs. Michael Elgin ROH 05/17 *** ¾
119. Ultimo Guerrero vs. Atlantis CMLL 09/19 *** ¾
120. Biff Busick vs. Zack Sabre Jr. EVOLVE 35 09/14 *** ¾
121. Kensuke Sasaki vs. Katsuhiko Nakajima 02/11 *** ¾
122. Flamita vs. Jimmy Susumu Dragon Gate 05/05 *** ¾
123. Yuji Nagata vs. KENTA NOAH 02/08 *** ¾
124. Seth Rollins & Dean Ambrose vs. Jack Swagger & Antonio Cesaro *** ¾
125. Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Satoshi Kojima NJPW 08/04 *** ¾
126. Cheerleader Melissa vs. LuFisto Shimmer 04/05 *** ¾
127. Kazushi Sakuraba vs. Rolles Gracie NJPW 05/25 *** ¾
128. Katsuyori Shibata vs. Satoshi Kojima NJPW 07/31 *** ¾
129. AJ Styles vs. Kazuchika Okada NJPW 05/25 *** ¾
130. Dolf Ziggler vs. Cesaro 2-out-of-3 Falls WWE 10/26 *** ¾
131. Sheamus vs. Antonio Cesaro WWE Payback 06/01 *** ¾
132. Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shibata vs. Kazuchika Okada & YOSHI-HASHI NJPW 02/09 *** ¾
133. Elimination Chamber Match WWE Elimination Chamber 02/23 *** ¾
134. Sho Tanaka vs. Yohei Komatsu NJPW 12/23 *** ¾
135. Dean Ambrose vs. Seth Rollins WWE Hell in a Cell *** ¾
136. Hiroshi Tanahashi & Togi Makabe vs. Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows NJPW 06/24 *** ¾
137. Rhodes Brothers vs. Rey Mysterio & Big Show vs. Ryback & Curtis Axel vs. The Real Americans WWE TLC *** ¾
138. KUSHIDA vs. Ryusuke Taguchi NJPW 09/21 *** ¾
139. Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shibata vs. Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows NJPW 12/07 *** ¾
140. Ivelisse vs. Kimber Lee Shimmer 04/05 *** ¾
141. Rey Cometa vs. El Cavernario CMLL 09/19 *** ¾
142. Adam Cole vs. Kevin Steen ROH 05/10 *** ¾

143. Takeshi Morishima vs. KENTA NOAH 01/05 2014 *** ¾
 144. Kenny Omega vs. ACH PWG 08/30 *** ½

WWE MONDAY NIGHT RAW RATINGS GUIDE WITH RYAN CLINGMAN

2014 The Year in Raw A Long Slow Steady Decline



Red text = Holiday show
 Blue text = Football competition
 Green text = Night after PPV
 Purple text = Major competition

The difference in the “Average Viewership” and “Overall Viewership” is that the overall number accounts for the greater length of the third hour and is sourced from the Observer, whilst the average viewership is found by taking the average of the three hourly viewership numbers, and is sourced from the PW Torch. Matches in the “Key Segments” column are generally timed at over seven minutes, unless they were followed by a strong angle, or involve the likes of Cena, Bryan, Orton, Reigns, Ambrose, Wyatt, or Rollins, in which case they will most likely appear. Football constituting “major competition” generally drew a viewership at or above 13 million viewers.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Rating/ Average Viewership (in millions of viewers)/Overall viewership (in millions of viewers)</u>	<u>Hourly viewership in millions/18-49 rating hour 1,2,3/18-49 viewership for hours 1,2 & 3 in million viewers</u>	<u>Key-Segments</u>	<u>Notes</u>
12/23	2.68/3.821/3.80	3.893, 3.959, 3.61/1.29,	-HHH/Steph/Kane open	-Annual Christmas

		1.40, 1.35/ 1.632, 1.688, 1.533	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Team Total Divas vs. Divas -Wyatts vs. Rhodes Brothers & Bryan -Henry vs. Sandow Santa match-up-Punk, Cena, Langston v Shield 	<p>episode. Went up against the 49ers' final game ever at Candlestick Park, which drew 13.23 million viewers.</p> <p>-No Lawler</p>
12/30	2.97/4.129/4.12	4.14, 4.2, 4.04/1.36, 1.40, 1.35/1.726, 1.774, 1.708	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Punk opening promo -Punk/Rollins -Stephanie promo -HHH promo -Brock Lesnar returns to destroy Mark Henry -Harper vs. Bryan; Bryan vs. Rowan with Bryan as part of the Wyatt Family 	<p>-First show to not go up against NFL competition in months. There was college football however, Texas vs. Oregon Alamo Bowl 7.55 million against first half of show.</p>
01/06	3.23/4.538/4.54	4.72, 4.43, 4.46/1.61, 1.56, 1.60/2.049, 1.981, 2.028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flair promo with Cena/Orton opens -Usos & Mysterio vs. Harper & Rowan -Pipers Pit with the Shield -Bryan promo with Harper & Rowan -Big Show attacks Lesnar -Legends nostalgia curtain call -CM Punk lays Ambrose out with GTS, Jake Roberts returns and lays snake on Ambrose 	<p>-Went up against the Auburn/Florida State football game, which drew 25.57 million viewers – one of the most watched cable shows in history.</p> <p>-This was old-school RAW.</p>
01/13	3.12/4.403/4.39	4.4,4.6,4.21/1.56, 1.65, 1.56/1.976, 2.090, 1.985	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Usos vs. Bryan/Wyatt -Cena/Sandow -Punk & New Age Outlaws vs. Shield -Kingston/Orton -Daniel Bryan face turn on Bray Wyatt in a steel cage following tag match against Usos 	<p>-First show to not go up against football in months.</p>
01/20	3.46/4.869/4.86	5.25 (highest single hour since at least RAW 1000), 5.00, 4.36/1.71, 1.65, 1.53/2.173, 2.097, 1.945	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authority opening promo with Batista return -Shield v Rhodes Brothers -Bryan explains Wyatt angle 	<p>Go-home show for the Royal Rumble</p> <p>-Highest rating since July 25th 2013, where Cena</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Kane/Punk promo -Punk vs Gunn -ADR/Mysterio -Lesnar/Big Show angle -Usos/Wyatts tag -Kofi Kingston vs Randy Orton with Cena/Orton angle 	called Bryan out for his title shot
01/27	3.24/4.719/4.70	4.849, 4.837, 4.470/1.7, 1.7, 1.6/2.150, 2.113, 2.034	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authority open show with Cena run-in -Maddox/Orton promo -ADR/Kingston -Outlaws/Rhodes with Lesnar destruction post-match -Lesnar/Orton/Batista face-off -Shield/Sheamus, Cena & Bryan trios match for EC qualification 24 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Post-Rumble show -Topped the 18-49 demo for the first time in months
02/03	3.15/4.210/4.20	4.428, 4.221, 3.983/1.54, 1.36, 1.39/1.952, 1.727, 1.756	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -HHH/Orton opening promo -Shield v Mysterio, Kingston & Langston -New Age Outlaws/Rhodes Brothers cage match -Batista/Del Rio Angle -Daniel Bryan vs. Randy Orton main event 27 minutes 	- No Punk, Cena, Lesnar, or Heyman on the show
02/10	3.14/4.313/4.32	4.449, 4.336, 4.153/1.57, 1.49, 1.45/ 1.993, 1.895, 1.844	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Betty White Appearance -Wyatts v Mysterio & Rhodes Brothers -Christian & Sheamus v Cesaro & Swagger -Cena promo -Henry/Ambrose -Shield/Wyatts stand-off -Bryan/Kane angle -Cena/Orton main event -Batista/Del Rio angle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Went up against the Winter Olympics, which drew 22.40 million viewers -Betty White Guest host
02/17	3.08/4.364/4.35	4.662, 4.296, 4.134/1.45, 1.3, 1.28/1.839,1.656,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cena/Colter opening -Bryan/Christian 	-Go-home show for Elimination

		1.627	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bryan/Kane -Shield Promo -Reigns/Henry with Wyatts/Shield stand-off -John Cena vs. Cesaro -Orton/Sheamus -Wyatts/Shield brawl + Elimination Chamber brawl and face-off 	Chamber
02/24	3.31/4.661/4.65	4.892, 4.778, 4.313/1.64, 1.63, 1.48/2.074, 2.074, 1.878	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Return of Hogan opens show -Del Rio/Batista -Big E/Cesaro -Cena/Wyatt promo -Sheamus/Christian -Bryan/Kane -Reigns vs. Wyatt -Return of the Undertaker with Lesnar/Heyman promo in final segment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Post-Elimination-Chamber show -Network launch day
03/03	3.26/4.575/4.55	4.672, 4.620, 4.438/1.56, 1.49, 1.59/1.978, 1.895, 2.013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Heyman comes out to Cult of Personality for opening promo with Lesnar/Henry brawl -Usos/Outlaws -Wyatts/Shield match with Rollins walks out on Shield -Sheamus/Christian -Bryan promo -Cena/Wyatt promo -Authority/Daniel Bryan beat-down after Bryan/Batista 	-In Chicago mere months following the Punk departure/Strong rumor of CM Punk return
03/10	3.09/4.368/4.35	4.165, 4.676, 4.265/1.26, 1.58, 1.56/1,594, 2.008, 1,976	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hogan appearance opens show -Authority promo -Undertaker/Heyman promo -Reigns & Rollins v Rhodes Brothers -Occupy RAW with fans in the ring -Bryan & Show v Batista 	-First daylight savings edition

			& Orton main event	
03/17	2.98/4.075/4.07	4.001, 4.174, 4.051/1.39, 1.45, 1.41/1.726, 1.84, 1.785	-HHH/Batista/Orton promo -Swagger & Cesaro v Usos -Cena/Wyatt promo- Rollins-Bryan/Orton no DQ -Heyman promo on Taker -Shield face-turn on Kane -HHH assaults a handcuffed Bryan to close show	-Went up against the season premier of Dancing with the Stars, which drew 15,.44 million viewers, the debut of the Voice, and an NBA game that drew 1.52 million viewers.
03/24	3.07/4.272/4.27	4.218, 4.393, 4.207/1.42, 1.52, 1.47/1.8, 1.933, 1.871	-Authority promo on Bryan - Christian/ADR/Ziggler/Sheamus four-way for IC title shot -Wyatt promo -HHH/Cole promo -Hogan/Miz segment announcing Andre the Giant Battle Royal -Harper/Cena with Wyatt beat down on Cena -Rollins & Ambrose v Cesaro/Swagger -Lesnar/Undertaker closer with Taker in a casket	-Daniel Bryan was not on the show.
03/31	3.14/4.391/4.38	4.231, 4.603, 4.338/1.4, 1.59, 1.57/1.78, 2.014, 1.987	Undertaker opens and is F5'd -ADR/Big E -HHH/Stephanie promo on the end of Bryan -Shield interview -Cena appears behind Wyatts in sheep mask -Kane/Reigns -Piper's Pit for Battle Royal -Batista/Orton with Bryan run-in standing tall	-Go-home RAW for WrestleMania 31
04/07	3.70/5.146/5.14	5.313, 5.094, 5.032/1.93, 1.82, 1.88/2.445, 2.305,	-Bryan promo opens -Wyatts v	-Highest rated edition of the show

		2.381	Cena/Sheamus/Big E -Heyman promo with Lesnar following win over the Undertaker (drew, as a segment a 4.2 rating and 5.9 million viewers) -Ultimate Warrior returns to RAW -Hogan out to present Andre the Giant trophy -Batista & Orton tag-title match against the Usos -Daniel Bryan/Authority beat-down with save from the Shield	since RAW 1000 -Went against the Connecticut/Kentucky game, which did 17.79 million viewers -The HOF following RAW drew 2.4 million viewers
04/14	3.26/4.770/4.76	4.811, 4.831, 4.669/1.68, 1.72, 1.73/2.132, 2.177, 2.190	-Ultimate Warrior Memorial opens -Batista & Orton v Usos -IC title tournament throughout night -Cena/Wyatt promo -11-on-3 Shield match	-No Daniel Bryan
04/21	2.97/4.139/4.12	4.224, 4/395, 3.799/1.38, 1.51, 1.35/1.755, 1.921, 1.711	-Bryan laid out by Kane -Barrett/Sheamus -Evolution promo -RVD/Cesaro -Cena/Wyatt angle; Cena laid out -Shield make save	-Went against the NBA playoffs, which drew 4.17 million viewers on TNT
04/28	3.25/4.610/4.61	4.512, 4.667, 4.652/1.68, 1.76, 1.85/ 2.126, 2.237, 2.345	-Cena promo + Bray Wyatt 'Whole World in His Hands' choir -Usos Tag Title defence -Heyman/Cesaro promo -Bryan/Stephanie apology -Reigns/Orton match; return of Flair -Reigns 3-on-1 beatdown from Evolution	-Two-month high-point
05/05	3.02/4.276/4.29	3.963, 4.414, 4.451/1.19, 1.51, 1.55/1.636, 1.921, 1.963	-Ambrose defends US title in 20 man battle royal -RVD/Cesaro -Wyatt promo -Ryback/Rhodes -ADR vs Bryan	-Post-Extreme Rules show -Went off against the NBA play-offs

			-Shield vs. Wyatts -Evolution lays Reigns out	
05/12	2.88/4.003/4.00	3.801, 4.251, 3.975/1.39, 1.54, 1.42/ 1.765, 1.955, 1.796	-Shield promo opening segment -Cena & Usos vs. Wyatts -Evolution promo -Daniel Bryan laid out by Kane -Reigns vs. Batista and Evolution/Shield post-match	-Went against Nets/Heat game, which drew 5.54 million viewers.
05/19	2.72/3.763/3.76	3.535, 3.903, 3.852.2.6, 1.27, 1.43, 1.41/1.617, 1.820, 1.790	-Bray Wyatt opening promo, Wyatt dropped by Cena -Heyman promo -Beat the clock challenge throughout the night -Stephanie demands Bryan vacate title next week -Stipulation announcement for Evolution/Shield at Payback -Shield/Evolution brawl -Cena destroyed by Wyatts after Cena/Harper	-Taped in London -One of the worst non-holiday ratings since 1997 -Went up against Spurs/Oklahoma NBA game 6.36 million viewers
05/26	2.64/3.602/3.59	3.538, 3,858, 3.411/1.2, 1.3, 1.2/1.503, 1.692, 1.556	-Authority promo on Bryan -Cesaro vs. RVD -Wyatt/Cena promo -Stephanie/Bryan segment, either Bryan relinquishes title or Brie is fired -Sheamus/ADR -Evolution/Shield promo spot, with Reigns triple-powerbombed through a table	-Memorial Day show -Year-low rating, lowest since New Year's Eve 2012 -Go-home show for WWE Payback 2014 -Went up against Heat/Pacers play-off game, which drew 7.04 million viewers
06/02	2.94/4.146/4.13	4.033. 4.482, 3.925/1.35, 1.61, 1.5/ 1.715, 2.038, 1.905	-HHH opens with promo on Shield -RVD & Sheamus v Cesaro/Barrett	-Post-Payback show -No major sports competition

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rusev awarded gold-star -Stephanie/Cena/Brie/Bryan segment with Bryan stripped of title -Seth Rollins turns on the Shield 	
06/09	2.93/4.119/4.12	3.893, 4.217, 4.247/1.34, 1.45, 1.46/1.702, 1.843, 1.857	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authority open with promo on Bryan being stripped of title -Sheamus vs. Barrett -Lana promo on Obama -Heyman promo -Seth Rollins explains his turn -Reigns, Ambrose & Cena vs. Wyatts in main event 	-Went up against the Stanley Cup final, which drew a 2.89 rating and Major Crimes, which drew 5.16 million
06/16	2.90/4.123/4.13	3.928, 4.197, 4.245/1.33, 1.50, 1.47/1.691, 1.905, 1.868	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authority open show announcing Battle Royal for final spot in title ladder match -Rollins/Ziggler -Barrett/Ambrose -Sheamus/Wyatt -Kevin Hart appearance -Reigns wins battle royal -Cena/Kane stretcher match 	-
06/23	2.85/4.031/4.04	3.72, 4.04, 4.33/1.25, 1.32, 1.48/ 1.591, 1.676, 1.833/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vickie Guerrero/Stephanie angle setting up match for later on -HHH announces remaining MITB participants -Rollins/RVD -Barrett/Ziggler -Vickie/Stephanie match with Stephanie thrown into pudding -Orton, ADR, Cesaro & Wyatt vs. Cena, Reigns & Sheamus main 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -9 minute overrun -MITB go-home show
06/30	2.94/4.332/4.34	4.158, 4.348, 4.490/1.41, 1.43, 1.59/1.785, 1.818,	-Authority run-down Bryan again	-Post MITB show

		2.024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -RVD vs Rollins -Colter promo on Lana & Rusev -Wyatt lays Jericho out -Vince McMahon appearance -Return of AJ Lee and Jericho -Rusev/Swagger -Reigns/Cena vs Orton/Kane ending in Reigns/Hunter stare-down 	
07/07	2.90/4.389/4.38	4.183, 4.514, 4.447/1.34, 1.34, 1.55/1.706, 1.954, 1.971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reigns promo -Orton/Ambrose -Jericho/Miz -Cesaro/Heyman promo -Cena/Seth Rollins main event with Cena & Reigns clearing house after the match 	-Montreal
07/14	2.90/4.123/4.15	3.928, 4.197, 4.245/1.26, 1.32, 1.39/ 1.599, 1.679, 1.762	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cena & Reigns opening promo -Rusev, Lana, Coulter detente -ADR vs RVD -Jericho promo -Flair return -John Cena/Reigns vs Rollins/Orton/Kane Reigns stands tall. 	-Battleground 2014 go-home show
07/21	3.15/4.432/4.43	4.254, 4.523, 4.521/1.45, 1.45, 1.5/1.835, 1.843, 1/901	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -HHH/Orton/Reigns opening segment -Reigns vs Kane/Orton match -Brie/Stephanie confrontation -Ziggler/Miz -Highlight Reel with Bray Wyatt -Flo Rida appearance -Steph arrest -Heyman and Lesnar appearance closes show 	-post-BattleGround
07/28	3.06/4.317/4.31	4.391, 4.511, 4.051/1.39, 1.42, 1.40/1.767, 1.799,	-Heyman/Cena/Cesaro opening promo	-

		1.779	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cena/Cesaro -Jailbird/Stephanie promo segment -Lana promo -Kane/Reign with Orton attacking Reigns before the match -Jericho/Rollins -Brie/Steph closing segment 	
08/04	2.86/4.048/4.03	4.075, 4.193, 3.877/1.40, 1.41, 1.35/1.645, 1.784, 1.708	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authority opening promo segment with Reigns -Kane/Reigns last man standing -Ambrose vs. ADR -Ziggler vs Cesaro -Stephanie/Brie contract signing 	-13 Minute overrun
08/11	3.06/4.300/4.31	4.082, 4.360, 4.458/1.4, 1.5, 1.54/ 1.775, 1.839, 1.949	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rybackel/Reigns match following opening promo spot -RVD/Rollins with Ambrose in a box -Stephanie brings out Bryan's therapist -3rd hour built on Hogan birthday celebration 	-SummerSlam go-home show
08/18	3.04/4.194/4.18	4.281, 4.330, 3.972/1.48, 1.52, 1.39/1.879, 1.923, 1.767	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stephanie mocks Daniel Bryan brings out Brie following Nikki heel turn -Show/Henry v /Harper/Rowan -Lesnar/Authority photo-op -Miz/Ziggler IC title match -Orton/Rybaxel vs. RVD/Reigns/Sheamus -Wyatt promo on Jericho -Rusev/Henry angle -Rollins/Ambrose falls count anywhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Night after SummerSlam -Went up against pre-season Browns/Redskins game, which drew 6.90 million viewers; 5th highest rated pre-season game in last 25 years
08/25	2.88/3.973 /3.97	3.859, 4.057, 4.005/1.24, 1.33, 1.37/1.570, 1.685, 1.736	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Michaels, Hogan, Flair legends discuss Cena/Lesnar III 	-Went against Emmy Awards drawing 2.88 rating

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rusev/Swagger match -Kane/Rollins eulogy for Ambrose -Tapes Heyman/Lesnar promo -Bella Twins segment -Reigns v. Kane/Rollins handicap match Cena/Wyatt match 	3.97 million viewers
09/01	2.81/3.920/3.91	4.009, 3.925, 3.827/1.32, 1.34, 1.36/1.676, 1.696, 1.724	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Highlight Reel with Authority/Cena to open -Show/Henry v. Wyatts -Heyman promo -Steph/AJ/Bellas segment -Cena/Reigns/Jericho v Orton/Kane/Rollins 	-Labour Day Edition
09/08	2.88/3.986/3.97	3.984, 4.162, 3.814/1.46, 1.52, 1.32/1.857, 1.930, 1.672	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wyatt/Jericho cage match opened the show -Heyman/Cena promo spot in hour two -Rollins/Sheamus match -Lana/Rusev segment -Jerry Springer/Bellas -Orton/Reigns -Reigns/Orton match 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Went up against two NFL games throughout the show Giants/Lions, which drew 13.73 million, and Cardinals/Chargers which did 11.52 million viewers -Jerry Springer advertised
09/15	2.79/3.826/3.82	3.900, 3.949, 3.629/1.30, 1.39, 1.30/1.645, 1.763, 1.646	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Heyman/Cena confrontation with Cena bringing up “half-time” -Khali holds Heyman captive -Jericho/Kane -Nikki Bella/Paige v Brie Bella/AJ -Bray Wyatt promoter- Heyman/Khali segments -Lesnar returns to save Heyman -Reigns vs Rollins -Henry/Rusev angle to close out the show. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Went up against Eagles/Colts game which drew 14.89 million viewers, and the Dancing with the Stars Premiere – 13.64 million viewers -Night of Champions go-home show
09/22	2.69/3.879/3.89	4.000, 3.790, 3.847/1.36, 1.28, 1.34/1.727, 1.619, 1.699	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ambrose/Authority segment to start the show -Ziggler/Miz for IC title 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Post-Night of Champions show -Went up against

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rusev vs. Henry -Nikki Bella interviewed -AJ/Nikki title match -Cena/Orton main event -Ambrose makes save and post-match with Rollins 	Bears/Jets game, which drew 13.27 million viewers
09/29	2.83/4.039/4.03	4.015, 4.222, 3.882/1.43, 1.46, 1.40/1.820, 1.859, 1.783	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rollins/Authority segment to open show -Ziggler IC title three-way with Miz/Cesaro -Rollins gets green mist sprayed in face-off- -Nikki/Brie segments -Hogan Susan G Komen segment -Cena/Ambrose v Orton/Kane -Cena curb stomped on briefcase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Went up against the Kansas City Chiefs game, which drew 14.43 million viewers -Chicago
10/06	2.63/3.826/3.80	3.577, 3.891, 3.924/1.14, 1.25, 1.34/1.452, 1.586, 1.703	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ambrose/Rollins/Cena opening brawl -Ambrose promo on Cena -Satellite interview with Reigns -Rock/Rusev segment -Cena v Rollins/Kane/Orton handicap match - Rollins/Ambrose/Cena/Authority brawl to close the show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lowest audience of the year to this point -Went up against NFL game (13.12 million viewers) -Baseball play-offs 2.89 million -Rock appears unadvertised
10/13	2.74/3.751/3.75	3.833, 3.756, 3.664/1.20, 1.25, 1.23/1.527, 1.591, 1.566	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ambrose/Cena promo opens the show -Cena & Ambrose three-way tag -Orton/Ziggler -Rollins/Swagger -Rusev/Big Show -Cena/Ambrose pole match for Rollins match at HIAC 	-NFL game does 12.71 million viewers
10/20	2.75/3.602/3.68	3.589, 3.864, 3.631/1.11, 1.28, 1.23/1.411, 1.625, 1.563	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -HHH, Kane, Orton, Rollins opening promo -Orton promo 	-NFL game does 13.28 million viewers

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rusev/Big E -Ambrose assaults Rollins mannequin -Orton, Kane, Rollins v Cena, Ambrose main event 	-HIAC go-home show
10/27	2.71/3.745/3.74	3.868, 3.839, 3.529/1.23, 1.28, 1.16/1.565, 1.631, 1.477	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authority opening promo with Orton/Rollins pull apart -Cena promo segment on his age -Hogan appearance for Susan G Komen -Cena/Rollins main event wrestled to DQ main event 	-Show after HIAC Redskins/Cowboys 18.80 million viewers
11/03	2.84/4.040/4.03	4.043, 4.203, 3.875/1.25, 1.34, 1.28/1.591, 1.705, 1.628	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vince opens up the show with HHH and Stephanie -Ambrose/Cesaro -Ziggler/Authority confrontation -Ziggler/Rollins title match -Show/Henry -Rollins/Orton with post match 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -16 minute overrun -Went up against Giants/Colts game which drew 12.36 million viewers
11/10	2.75/3.930/3.93	4.018, 3.943, 3.831/1.35, 1.36, 1.40/1.716, 1.724, 1.781	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cena reveals Swagger/Ziggler as teammates for Survivor Series with Authority promo -Rollins/Swagger -Rusev celebration -Cena/Ryback with post-match brawl 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NFL Eagles/Panthers 11.31 million viewers -Taped show from Liverpool
11/17	2.75/3.771/3.76	3.894, 3.780, 3.641/1.21, 1.23, 1.31/1.538, 1.564, 1.669	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Team Authority opens -Harper/Ziggler -Wyatt promo -Ryback/Cesaro -Rusev/Lana promo -Stephanie/Big Show promo -Survivor Series contract signing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Steelers/Titans NFL game drew 12.77 million viewers -Grumpy Cat hosts -Survivor Series go-home show

11/24	3.07/4.246/4.23	4.734, 3.992, 4.012/1.70, 1.43, 1.43/2.158, 1.819, 1.817	-Stephanie & HHH open the show -Daniel Bryan as GM cuts a 13 minute promo -Vince appears as Authority leave -Ambrose/Harper IC title -Lana/Swagger promo -Big Show post-turn promo -Mercury, Noble v Cena/Ziggler	-Post-Survivor Series show following Sting debut -Ravens/Saints game drew 10.87 million viewers -Larry the Cable Guy hosts
12/01	2.79/3.883/3.68	4.227, 3.952, 3.471/1.51, 1.39, 1.24/1.912, 1.763, 1.579	-Anonymous GM opens the show, Rollins attacks Cena -Rowan/Big Show -Lana/Rusev segment -Heyman promo from studio -Cena, Ryback, Ziggler v Kane, Harper, Rollins	-Jets/Dolphins drew 11.75 million viewers
12/08	2.66/3.700/3.68	3.761, 3.811, 3.530/1.27, 1.30, 1.17/1.613, 1.646, 1.489	-Seth Green guest hosts -Natalya/Charlotte -Wyatt promo -Rowan/Harper -Cena/Show with Rollins post-match beat down	-Slammy Awards -Falcons/Packers drew 13.96 million viewers -TLC go-home
12/15	2.66/3.521/3.51	3.703, 3.477, 3.385/1.17, 1.18, 1.1/1.491, 1.504, 1.402	-RAW is Jericho opens show -Jericho Highlight Reel with Rusev & Lana -Jericho/Heyman with Lesnar return and destruction of Jericho -Rollins/Cena cage match with Lesnar run-in	-Post-TLC show -Saints/Bears draws 11.07 million viewers

Unfortunately, for well over a year now the quarterly hours and segment by segment ratings have been largely unavailable, proving the analysis of individual segments very difficult. If there is some super secret Nielsen source reading this right now we would love to hear from you.

Sources:


Wrestling Observer Newsletter (overall viewership, notes)
PW Torch (Hourly viewership)

@STD_85 for all of the 18-49 data, follow him on Twitter for all of the latest ratings details.

CONTACT & ADDITIONAL CONTENT DETAILS

ALAN COUNIHAN:

 : @Alan41


: Alan hosts the Dr. Keith Presents (DKP) show over at WrestlingObserver.com for subscribers, which covers a wide variety of topics including puroresu, the indies, WWE, and yes, even the DKP alphabet. Perhaps the funnest pro-wrestling podcast on the planet!

ANDREW PUGH:

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BEN CARASS:

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: Ben co-authors the Cubed Circle Newsletter (cubedcirclewrestling.com) every week, covering NXT, SmackDown, and RAW – despite the consequences that the later two have on his long-term health.

BEV GARTH:

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BRYAN ROSE:

 : @Br26

: Bryan writes for the Cubed Circle Newsletter every week covering what he feels to be the most important or article-worthy topic in pro-wrestling.

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: Bryan also writes regular pieces for friends of the newsletter, Voicesofwrestling.com (@voicesofwrestling and voicesofwrestling.com for the latest pro-wrestling reviews, editorials, and

news), including his recent 'Depths of Mania' retrospectives, looking at past WrestleManias, New Japan and more!

Voices of Wrestling also has an active new forum at www.voicesofwrestling.com/forums.

CHRIS “MOOKIE GHANA” HARRINGTON:

: @MookieGhana (Mookie's pro-wrestling related Twitter)

: @ImprovMookie (Mookie's non-wrestling related Twitter)



: .blogtalkradio.com/indeedwrestling – Wrestlenomics Radio, the best and perhaps only pro-wrestling statistics podcast in the world.



: Indeed Wrestling, sites.google.com/site/chrisharrington – Incredibly useful pro-wrestling and mixed martial arts resource.



: Indeed Wrestling, indeedwrestling.blogspot.com.

THECUBSFAN:

: @Luchablog




: www.thecubsfan.com/cmll/ – Home of the Lucha Blog, the single most up-to-date and informative English lucha libre news and results website in all the land.



: luchawiki.com – For luchador bios, archival data, and much more!

DEAN KNICKERBOCKER:

: @dknick

DYLAN HALES:

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: The Wrestling Culture podcast with Dylan Hales and Dave Musgrave touching on just about every pro-wrestling topic imaginable stands as one of the most unique, informative, and entertaining pro-wrestling podcasts on the internet.

JAMIE O'DOHERTY:

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: Everything you ever have or haven't wanted to know about DDT – dramaticddt.wordpress.com

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You can subscribe to the Cubed Circle Newsletter via email at www.cubedcirclewrestling.com/subscribe-via-email/

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