



Cubed Circle Newsletter 179 – WrestleMania Weekend 2015

We didn't have an issue last week due to WrestleMania Weekend, and our preparation for various events. However, we are back this week for what will be, behind the yearbook, most likely our biggest issue of the year covering not only WrestleMania 31, but also all the WWN Live shows (excluding Kaiju), the Hall of Fame, last week's RAW and NXT, Balor/Owens, the post-Mania RAW, terrific ratings, and more! It was the happiest time of the year – WrestleMania Weekend.

– Ryan Clingman, *Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor*

WrestleMania 31: A Classic Show? Not Really.

Ryan Clingman.

It seems strangely apropos that the most important piece of build on this year's Road to WrestleMania took place not in a medium governed by the pens of creative, or even exclusively by the whims of Vince McMahon, but rather through the contract negotiations between the aforementioned VKM and the WWE World Heavyweight Champion Brock Lesnar. With Mania excitement as low as it has been in years, perhaps decades the WrestleMania 31 outlook was far from positive – a reality further compounded by what seemed to be the inevitable departure of Brock Lesnar for a second run with the UFC.

Whilst Creative was not remedied during the final week's build, nor may it be recovering a week on from the year's biggest show, last week's breaking news of Lesnar re-signing with the company, soon heated, at least somewhat, a build that had been fast approaching absolute zero. No longer, as in WrestleManias over the past five years, was this show's closing image predictable – the opposite was the case, in fact, as many a possibility involving Lesnar, the heel who was over like a God, Reigns, who was hated by the majority, and Seth Rollins, the Money in the Bank briefcase holder with respect from the hardcore fanbase – were possible. For a second year in a row the company's hand was forced by the core fanbase to switch the finish, not from Reigns/Lesnar to Lesnar/Bryan as originally wished by that subsection of the audience, but to anyone but Reigns going over. In fact, even with the end of major pay-per-view business for the company, their mentality of closing the show out with a "happy (kayfabe) ending" was replaced with Seth Rollins cashing in on both Reigns and Lesnar in order to win his first WWE World Heavyweight Championship and singles title. This makes WrestleMania 31 the first since X-7 to feature a victorious heel as the closing image.

Those who followed the Shield from their inception as a stable to their breakup and beyond, know that the general consensus upon the breakup was that Reigns would be the most likely member to succeed based on his push, followed by Ambrose, who whilst disagreeing with their vision of a star, was talented enough, especially on the mic, to become a major star. In third place was Rollins, who whilst leading in the work department lacked some promo skills. Yet, it was Rollins, the man seemingly most incompatible with the WWE's top star template, babyface or heel, went over in the main event of the company's biggest show of the year and is now their WWE World Heavyweight Champion. One may perhaps be tempted to make comparisons to Daniel Bryan's victory of 2014, but Rollins victory is dissimilar in at least two major ways. The first is of course that Rollins was not built as a title contender like Bryan was in 2014, but on the other hand never endured the repeated attempted burials that Bryan faced for years before making it to the top at WrestleMania 30. This raises an interesting question, as with Rollins' quick ascent more or less to the top why do other former-indie/ROH stars like Cesaro, Ambrose, and Bryan, with (in varying degrees) equally good looks, speaking ability, and working ability not given similar opportunities? This is a question I have no answer to – Rollins is however, very much deserving of the championship.



With WrestleMania 31 closing strong after a well worked main event and a good opener in a similar vein to WrestleMania 30 at the SuperDome, the show has been subject to a great deal of hyperbole on the internet – I have seen comments ranging from "WrestleMania 31 was the best show ever" to the more common "WrestleMania 31 was the best WrestleMania in years"/"WrestleMania 30 was one of the best WrestleManias ever". I don't believe any of the above statements to be true. Whilst I incorrectly stated the following up on the site minutes before the show started, the lack of quality on the uppercard including Rusev/Cena and Wyatt/Undertaker coupled with copious amount of filler, took

this show down greatly in my estimation – “Unless they pull out sleeper after sleeper with an uber hot crowd, this may very well be the worst WrestleMania after the last 15+ years.”. Of course, the entrances were great, but no better than their WrestleMania 30 or 29 counterparts, with stars performing, generally speaking, better in their 30 matches than in 31. The booking of John Cena over Rusev, Hunter over Sting, and Big Show as the winner of the Battle Royal also did little to endear me to the show. Conversely, Ronda Rousey and the Rock did have a memorable moment laying out the Authority, presumably leading to a match at WrestleMania 32 in Dallas.

It should then be asked where this year's spectacle ranks in comparison to those of years past, specifically recent years, and due to the number of nothing matches on the show, together with the great opening and closing segments, I would place it in the class of WrestleMania 27 and WrestleMania 25 – although the respective Undertaker matches on those shows were better than anything on this year's card. For perspective, for my taste WrestleMania 30 would lie together with WrestleMania 21, 23, and shows of that ilk.

Even with the Undertaker deteriorating in physical working capacity over recent years, his match this year against Bray Wyatt made the mistake that was his loss last year all the more obvious. Undertaker's matches over recent years meant perhaps more to the Mania shows than anyone realised, and whilst Vince didn't quite know if Undertaker would return this year, nor did Mark Calaway himself, the finality that a loss would bring to the streak I don't believe was fully grasped. And as such, the Wyatt/Undertaker match became little more than the obligatory WrestleMania kick out sequence, with nothing much else in between.

Lesnar will be gone for the next several months, meaning that Rollins alongside Bryan, Intercontinental Champion, and John Cena, United States Champion, will carry the main event scene as they were all but forced to do in the pre-Mania months without those titles. Now that John Cena is champion they have practically forced themselves to push the US title as something meaningful, but from past experiences with Daniel Bryan as champion, I cannot say that I have devout confidence in their ability to book him strong too, especially when he has been marginalised to the extent he has in past months. Unfortunately, in what has become an ongoing rib on the audience, or an esoteric meme that I have no knowledge of, Kane and Big Show are still in main event positions, at least of this week's RAW mainevent. This over utilisation of the pair, coupled with poor creative direction in the months proceeding Extreme Rules last year do very little for my confidence in the company's ability to produce consistent weekly and monthly content.

There does exist a wealth of super talent that may very well revitalise the roster; stars like Finn Balor, who is from my understanding being paid main roster money, and Sami Zayn – who should be called up within the next few months at the very most. The Lucha Dragons and Adrian Neville (now just Neville, because the cool kids don't have first names) were called up on the RAW after WrestleMania, but the chances of Sin Cara & Kalisto progressing past the Los Matadores & New Day booking blockade is unfortunately quite low. Neville has a chance, but was given an unremarkable debut, has a strong accent and poor mic skills, which is a major problem for Kevin Dunn – he was also inexplicably given a purple cape. Zayn and Balor are both talents in the mould of a Daniel Bryan in that, should they be poorly positioned, which I don't strongly suspect, especially for Balor, they are of an overall talent level great enough to overcome. Even so, whilst Balor and Zayn will make it to the top somehow, what their talent cannot save them from is general creative incompetence, which has been plaguing everyone on the roster for months. And by "everyone", I mean main roster talent not named "Brock Lesnar".

Reviews

Last Week's WWE Programming

RAW Ramblings – March 23rd 2015

Staples Centre: Los Angeles, CA.

Ben Carass.

Well, it's WrestleMania week; are you excited? Yeah, me neither. Call me a complete dumbass but I really thought the WWE would go all out on the go-home episode of RAW and try to drum up at least a little bit of excitement for the biggest show of the year. They of course did not, and the show was typically underwhelming as has been for the entire build towards WrestleMania 31, oh excuse me, WrestleMania PLAY. I had a bunch of stuff to catch up on, so for me Monday consisted of watching the last 3 EVOLVE shows, iMPACT and New Japan on AXS; all of which were a million times better than RAW. Shocking, I know. It certainly doesn't feel like Mania week and this week's RAW came off more like a show a month out from the big day, not their last chance to get people to sign up for the Network or, heaven forbid, buy the PPV. They also didn't bother airing a tribute graphic for El Hilo de Perro Aguayo, despite him working on their TV in 1997. WWE, classy as ever. At least a fan managed to get a Perros Del Mal sign on TV.



They shot a couple of good angles, nothing blow-away, however the way they went off the air was a fittingly pathetic end to the amazing botch job of making **Roman Reigns** the top babyface. The main event segment consisted of **Paul Heyman** once again trying harder than the entire creative team to get **Reigns** over with a great promo. **Reigns** came out to confront **Lesnar** and was booed. They had a stare-

down; **Brock** held up the WWE title and **Reigns** yanked it off him. Then the two big bad ass-kickers proceeded to have a tug-of-war over the belt like two little girls fighting over their favourite dolly. It was an embarrassment and they deserve everything the Mania crowd dishes out during the main event.

Sting opened the show and it was hyped as an “historic moment”. He cut a two minute promo, because they don’t trust him, and said he wasn’t there to fight for WCW and wanted to take **HHH** down. **Stephanie** came out buried him and went for a slap. **Sting** blocked it and grabbed her wrist, which brought out **HHH** to defend his lovely wife’s honour. **Steph** got the sledgehammer from under the ring and did some amazing Seth McFarlane-esque cartoon facials. **Sting** pulled out his baseball bat and **HHH** backed off. The reveal of the bat could have been a bigger deal, but whatever, it was a good segment and **Sting** was full of energy and confidence. It was one of the best things on the entire show.

Instead of showing the awesome **Rusev** training video, they had **Rusev** beat **Jack Swagger** for the Googolplexian time in 4:35. **John Cena** came out afterwards and they had a wild brawl, which **Rusev** got the best of. He tossed **Cena** over the announcer’s table then put him in the accolade on the table. There was no **Lana** again, because they foolishly sent her off to shoot a movie during Mania season. It was nice they put some heat back on **Rusev** after getting his ass kicked by **Cena**, however it was blatantly obvious from this that **Cena** is tapping **Rusev** clean at Mania. – Something I take great offence to.

Bray Wyatt cut another rambling promo on the **Undertaker**. **Taker** didn’t show up and **Bray’s** promo consisted of him stealing **Taker’s** magic and saying “Rest in Peace” then doing the pose on one knee. The verbiage and claps of thunder were goofy, but this was one of **Wyatt’s** best performances ever. He was passionate and engaging, plus he didn’t let the idiot fans chanting, “What?” put him off. This program makes zero sense, as does **Taker** coming back after the streak being broken and it’s probably the least excited I’ve been for an **Undertaker** match since the Casket match with Mark Henry at Mania 22.

Fans got to vote on **Randy Orton’s** opponent. Options were, **Kane**, **Big Show & Seth Rollins & J&J Security**; **Rollins & J&J Security** won with 77% of the vote. Match consisted of **Orton** beating up the stooges and **Rollins** running away. It was a terrible build for their match, but that’s what happens when you have no clue what you are doing and had **Orton** destroy **Rollins** a couple of weeks ago.

Snoop Dogg made an appearance. **Curtis Axel** interrupted him, so **Snoop** brought out **Hulk Hogan** and **Hogan** asked **Snoop** what **Axel** was smoking. Seriously. **Hogan** ended up punching **Axel** and **Snoop** threw him over the top rope then **Snoop** ripped off his shirt to reveal a **Hogan** t-shirt and some 24mm pythons. **Snoop & Hogan** posed together; it was a fun little segment, however they completely wasted **Hogan** taking out **Axel** on RAW. I thought for sure he would come out during the Andre Battle Royal, however Hogan probably refused to be anywhere near that many geeks at one time.

Filler: Dean Ambrose & R-Truth beat **Stardust & Luke Harper** in 10:30; **Truth** pinned **Stardust**. Match was fine; **Barrett** was on commentary, although I was distracted by Paul Stanley and Zeus sitting behind the announcers. Post-match, **Ambrose** DANCED with **Truth** and looked like the biggest idiot in the world. Later, **Kane** told **Barrett** he was taking the IC title and hanging it above the ring. How this is different from just stripping him of the belt, I don’t know. Anyway, **Dolph Ziggler & Daniel Bryan** had a match with **Dean Ambrose** as the special referee for no reason. **Ziggler** won in 10:50 with the Zig-Zag then all the geeks in the Ladder match ran down for a mass brawl. They all

tried to climb a ladder to get the belt, nobody managed to grab it and it finished with everyone lying flat-out on the canvas. It was pretty dumb. – I imagine **Bryan** is winning the title, which will do him no good at all, but at least he can have some good singles matches with **Ziggler, Ambrose & Barrett** coming out of Mania. It's so sad that it has come to be acceptable that **Bryan** is just going to be another geek in the middle of the card. **Miz & Mizdow** were back together, because WWE booking. They interviewed **Will Ferrell & Kevin Hart** about their new movie; **Ferrell & Hart** put over **Mizdow**, so **Miz** sent him away to get some water. SUCKED. **Titus O'Neil, Darren Young, Ryback, Zack Ryder & Erick Rowan** beat **Miz, Mizdow, Adam Rose & The Ascension** in 5:50 in a match of super geeks that are in the Battle Royal. **Bill Simmons** was on commentary and made fun of the announcers for being horrible. **Nikki Bella** retained the Diva's over **Paige** at 10:45 of a shockingly decent match. Finish saw **AJ** get into it with **Brie**, but she accidentally hit **Paige** and **Nikki** won with the rack-attack. **Paige & AJ** fought afterwards, because all women hate each other. Fantastically stupid booking for the Mania tag match. **Los Matadores & El Torito** got their win back over **Tyson Kidd, Cesaro & Natalya** when **Torito** pinned **Nattie** at 4:15. **The Usos** were on commentary and said they would be at Mania, so I guess **Jey** will just stand on the apron for most of the match. Later, **Kidd & Nattie** did a lame product placement skit for Burger King Chicken Fries. **Nattie** was mad at **Kidd** for not paying attention to her, but she ate a fry and forgave him.



For anyone that cares, here are the results of the SmackDown matches that they will air during the Axxess show on Thursday.

Jimmy Uso beat **Fernando, Big E & Cesaro** in a 4-way.

AJ Lee & Paige were friends again and cut a promo. **The Bellas** came out and **Nikki** said that **Brock Lesnar** worked more days than **AJ** in the last year. ZING!

John Cena, Mark Henry, Daniel Bryan & Roman Reigns beat **Bray Wyatt, Seth Rollins, Big Show & Kane**.

WWE NXT – March 25th 2015

Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL.

Ben Carass

NXT was a total one match show this week, as Kevin Owens retained the NXT championship over Finn Balor in an excellent main event. The only other match saw Sasha Banks successfully defend her NXT Women's title over Alexa Bliss and the rest of the show was made up of promos, skits and WrestleMania hype. Check out the main event, as it was the first of what should be many great matches this week, and give the rest of the show a miss.



NXT Women's Championship: Alexa Bliss vs. Sasha Banks (C). – Banks retained in 5:45. Basic stuff. Alexa's shine consisted of a bunch of sloppy pinning combos then Sasha got the heat. Bliss got another ugly rollup in for a hope spot then made a comeback; Sasha cut her off and won with the Banks Statement. – Bliss still looked awkward and green.

Kevin Owens cut a promo in the back about arriving in NXT at the same time as **Finn Balor**. Owens said he didn't have to paint himself up as a demon to make an impression and stated that **Balor** would not take the title away from him and his family. They aired a video package of **Owens** killing **Sami Zayn** and hyped the match with Balor. In 3 minutes they did a better job of building this match than anything on WrestleMania.

Emma was mean to **Bayley** in the locker room again. She told her the NXT fans won't get her where she wants to be; **Bayley** put over the fans and **Emma** slapped her then walked off. **Devin** interviewed **Tyler Breeze**. He said he wanted a shot at the NXT title but **Hideo Itami** showed up and told him he beat him and challenged **Breeze** to a 2-out-of-3 falls match next week. The **Dana Brooke** vignette

aired; she has an unbelievably annoying voice. They hyped WrestleMania week and noted the NXT house show on Friday in San Jose and talked about NXT alumni, **Roman Reigns, Seth Rollins, Bray Wyatt & Rusev** all being in big matches at Mania.

Devin interviewed **Finn Balor**. He said he didn't need the demon to beat **Owens** then they aired a hype package on **Balor. Enzo Amore, Big Cass & Carmella** were in the back. **Wesley Blake & Buddy Murphy** showed up and apologues to **Carmella** for being pigs and gave her a bracelet. **Enzo & Cass** buried it as a fake. ..– That's **NINE (!)**, non-wrestling segments in a row. It was like a Russo-booked Nitro.

NXT Championship: Finn Balor vs. Kevin Owens (C). – Owens retained in 21:40. Great match. Pace was slow early. Owens necked Balor on the rope 4 minutes in and got some preliminary heat with some chinlocks. Balor countered the powerbomb onto the apron at 8, but Owens cut him off with a modified Air Raid Crash and went back to the chinlocks. Balor landed a big tope-con-hilo at 13:10 and got a near-fall with the double stomp off the top. Balor hit the slingblade and the reverse Bloody Sunday for another near-fall, but he missed the shotgun dropkick and hung up his knee on the ropes. Owens worked over the knee and used the single-leg crab; Balor countered the powerbomb again and landed a desperation double-stomp for a double-down at 17. Owens hit a fisherman buster off the second rope for a great near-fall then delivered a chop-block and the cannonball to the injured knee. Balor avoided another cannonball and hit the shotgun dropkick then the double-stomp off the top. Story was that Balor's knee was too injured to capitalise and Owens won with the pop-up powerbomb.
(****)

WrestleMania Weekend 2015

EVOLVE 39 – March 26th 2015

Santa Clara Fairgrounds: San Jose, CA.

Ben Carass.

EVOLVE kicked off the biggest weekend of the year on Thursday night with nice little show that built and set up matches for the two other Gabe Sapolsky booked events over the next couple of nights. None of the matches were blow-away, but for the most part everything was good and the show overall was entertaining and enjoyable. The shift in format over the past year-or-so, from 3½/4 hour shows to running just under 2½ hours is a gigantic positive for the EVOLVE product. There's no downtime for an intermission, everything feels more streamlined and has a better flow, plus you don't ever really get the feeling like the shows are outstaying their welcome. A lot of other indie promotions would do well to take note of the fact that they don't need to run 4 hour iPPVs – I'm looking at you, CZW.

Drew Gulak vs. Timothy Thatcher. – Gulak via pinfall at 13:20. Very good technical match from two of the best New Wave of Catchers. Gulak did a pre-match promo about the "catch point" and ripped off the, "If it's real, you'll feel it" line from those old WWF desire videos. I've seen these guys work together a lot and it is always enjoyable, however I would have started the show off with a match that would have worked the crowd up a little more. Thatcher went after the arm while Gulak worked the leg. Gulak hit a nice German at 5:05 for the first bump of the match. Thatcher came back with a gut-wrench 11 minutes in then Gulak hit a diving lariat off the top for a near-fall at 12:06. They used and countered each other's finishing holds and Gulak got the win a crucifix pin. Lenny Leonard noted that Gulak was now 4-0 against Thatcher. (*** ¼)

Tommy End vs. Biff Busick. – Busick via submission at 9:40. I was looking forward to this match big time, as I expected these two guy’s styles to gel perfectly, and they did. Sadly, there were some issues with the stream and I had to go back and watch this match the next day. Still, it was a very good, hard hitting affair. End has some lethal kicks and a great presence about him and the story was that Chris Hero endorsed him to be in EVOLVE; Hero being Busick’s opponent the following night. Tons of stiff shots and exchanges; fans chanted, “this is awesome” and Busick got the win with the Saka Otoshi. – Busick cut a promo afterwards about doing the same thing to Hero the following night. (*** ½)

Chris Hero vs. Ethan Page. – Hero got the pin at 15:00. Page did a promo about Johnny Gargano endorsing him to enter EVOLVE. Match was fine, but dragged a little due to Page not really being over enough for the spirited youngster vs. the tough grizzled veteran story they tried to tell. Hero no-sold a lot of Page’s stuff and beat his ass for 10 minutes. Page made a comeback and got a near-fall with a sit-out spinebuster. Hero went for a moonsault and Page countered into an RKO, which could have been a really cool spot but it was timed rather poorly. Finish saw Hero win clean with the rolling elbow. – Post-match, Hero cut a promo on Busick, who showed up and offered Hero a free shot at him. Hero refused and said he’d kick Busick’s ass tomorrow night. Busick ended up getting Hero in a Rear Naked, but Hero managed to escape and scarpered out the front door. (**)

The Premier Athlete Brand: Caleb Konley, Brian Cage & T.J. Perkins w/So Cal Val & Andrea vs. Ricochet, Rich Swann & Uhaa Nation. – Swann, Ricochet & Uhaa over in 20:25. Really fun match. Swann & Co came out to “All Night Long” and were SUPER over; fans sang along like in PWG and the early part of the match also had a PWG vibe, with the babyfaces doing some wacky dancing and such. PAB got about 5 minutes of heat on Swann then Ricochet made the first comeback and cleaned house on everyone. Heels cut him off for another round of heat; Uhaa ran wild on Cage and the two big men did some impressive big-man mirroring spots. All three faces did simultaneous dives at 16:00: Uhaa & Swann landed moonsaults off the apron while Ricochet flew over the top with a tope-con-hilo. There was a super parade of big moves at 17:20 with everyone hitting a bunch of MOVES~! Finish saw Ricochet take out Cage with a twisting plancha then Swann hit Konley with the 450 and Uhaa got the pin with the Uhaa combination. – Post match, Andrea gave Swann & Uhaa low-blows then Konley nailed Swann with his Open the United Gate belt. So Cal Val yelled at TJP for screwing everything up and TJ walked out on the PAB. (*** ¾) – Like I said, a fun spot-fest, however Brian Cage, just 5 days after the Perro Aguayo Jr tragedy, with TJ Perkins in the same ring, decided it would be a good idea to use the 619.

DGUSA Open the Freedom Gate Championship: Johnny Gargano (C) w/ Ethan Page vs. AR Fox. – Gargano retained in 21:33. Match was OK for what it was; both guys worked very hard to try follow the 6-man, but there was a five minute or-so heat segment on Fox that didn’t really do them any favours and the match would have been much better if they would have shaved that time off. This being an AR Fox match, there was of course a million moves. They started the near-falls about 14 minutes in, with Fox hitting a senton bomb and Gargano using the Liger-bomb. At 15:20, there was a forearm battle and a big exchange of strikes for a double-down then Gargano took out Fox with a crazy tope that caused both men to crash through the guardrail. Fox came back with a Canadian Destroyer for another near-fall then Gargano kicked out of the Lo Mein Pain and 450 splash at 20:00. For the finish, Gargano delivered a Hurts Donut and used the Gargano Escape to get the submission. – Lacey came out an interviewed Gargano and he cut a promo about facing Drew Galloway at the WWN Super Show for the Open the Freedom Gate and EVOLVE titles. (*** ½)

EVOLVE Championship: Drew Galloway (C) vs. PJ Black. – Galloway retained in 19:10. For two ex-WWE guys, they didn't really have a match befitting of the big leagues. I've actually enjoyed Galloway's work recently and he's had some good matches during his EVOLVE title run, plus PJ Black always stood out in WWE as a super talented guy who was being criminally underutilised. Still for whatever reason, maybe going out there with the mentality of having something to prove instead of just working the correct match at the appropriate time, things just didn't click with the audience. They went outside early for some brawling; Drew posted PJ at 8:50 and got the heat. At 14:25 Drew used his Spider Belly-to-Belly for a double down. PJ got some near-falls with a tornado DDT and a superkick then Galloway got a couple of his own with a piledriver and an Air Raid Crash off the second rope at 18:30. Finish saw Galloway hit the Future Shock DDT. They could have built up to the finish a lot better; it felt like they never really got out of 3rd gear and just started hitting big moves at random points in the match. Drew also needs a set up for his DDT, because every time he uses it as the finish the crowd isn't expecting it and it more often than not comes off flat. – Post-match, Galloway cut his usual promo putting over EVOLVE then called out Gargano. They got into a brawl and a bunch of referees, Rich Swann and Ethan Page had to pull the two apart. Good angle setting up the big title vs. title match at the Super Show. (***)



Credit: @DaveDutra

EVOLVE 40 – March 27th 2015

Santa Clara Fairgrounds: San Jose, CA.

Ben Carass.

EVOLVE has been pushing itself as a new breed of wrestling lately, bringing in the New Wave of Catchers like Gulak and Thatcher and letting them work matches that are amalgamations of shoot-style and 1970's World of Sport. They of course still use all the regular indie talent, and the Spotty McSpotersons like AR Fox and Ricochet are still allowed to go out there and do as many flips and pointless moves as they want. The concept hasn't really taken off, as most EVOLVE shows, while providing solid wrestling, don't particularly stand out in one way or another from any other indie card. And when you've got a red hot PWG on the West Coast stacking their shows with blow-away match after blow-away match, it's almost impossible to compete with the quality all-star shows coming out of Reseda, CA. However, this show featured two excellent matches that managed to perfectly embody the new direction EVOLVE has been trying to achieve for the last year or-so. Whether you would want an entire card of matches like this in 2015 is debateable, but if the promotion can find the right balance and continue to put on fantastic pro wrestling matches that don't revolve around a million spots then it won't take long at all for them to achieve their goal of being defined as a new breed of wrestling.

Non-Title Match: Drew Galloway (EVOLVE Champion) vs. Uhaa Nation. – Galloway over in 11:10. Solid opener. They went outside 3 minutes in and Drew slammed Uhaa on the apron to take control. Uhaa came back and landed 3 Germans at 7:30 then Drew landed one of his own into the turnbuckle and a superkick for a nice near-fall at the 9 minute mark. Uhaa got a near-fall with a Liger-bomb then the finish came when Drew countered a backslide into the Future Shock DDT. – Drew cut his “rah-rah” promo again putting over EVOLVE as the best company in the world then put over Uhaa and sold the title vs. title match with Johnny Gargano for the WWN Supershow. – I believe this was Uhaa's final weekend of indie dates before heading for WWE developmental, where I expect him to excel. I'm just not looking forward to the goofy WWE name he will assuredly be given. “Nuhaa Continent,” anyone? (***)

Timothy Thatcher vs. Tommy End. – Thatcher via submission at 16:28. Outstanding match. My second favourite of the entire weekend next to Hero/Thatcher on the WWN show. It had a UWF/RINGS feel, as they spent a good 7 minutes on the mat with some tremendous grappling. End threw the first leg-kick at 7:20 then they went back to more grappling until End landed the first significant strike at 9:25 with a stiff kick. They turned it up 11 minutes in with Thatcher using some headbutts and End landing a vicious superkick which Thatcher sold like death and they teased a KO. End swept Thatcher on the apron at 12:10 and landed some more stiff kicks. End hit a German for a near-fall at 15:10 then went for some ground-n-pound, but Thatcher countered into a cross arm-breaker then transitioned into the Fujiwara to get the tap. – I am not doing this match justice, you just have to see it. It was the classic, grappler vs. striker and one of the best shoot-style matches I've seen in a long time. (**** ¼)

TJ Perkins vs. Drew Gulak. – Gulak via submission at 12:14. Decent match, but they worked a similar style to the Thatcher/End match, only nowhere near as good and had no chance of following it. AR Fox and his SPOTZ would have been better here just to change things up and give the crowd a break. Gulak had a whole team of geeks with him like an MMA fighter. TJP was meant to be a big part of EVOLVE along with Davey Richards and Brian Danielson when the company started but apparently there was a falling out. Lenny Leonard made sure to push on commentary that TJP was one of the

originators of the style of wrestling that EVOLVE is trying to define itself as. They traded submissions forever; TJ worked the arm and Gulak went after the leg. Finish saw Gulak get the tap with the ankle-lock. (** ¾)

AR Fox vs. Ethan Page. – Fox over in 13:36. Typical AR Fox match. There was some comedy early, with Page stealing Fox's do-rag which led to Fox running wild with some dives. Page got the heat with a spinebuster on the apron and a hangman backbreaker at 4:30. Fox made his comeback and hit a springboard Ace crusher at 8:00 then landed a tope-con-hilo. Page used Gargano's lawn dart for a near-fall and Fox hit a springboard codebreaker for another at 10:50. Page delivered a Tower of London on the apron at 12:20 but Fox kicked out. Fox hit Lo Mein Pain and the 450 for the finish. – Post-match, Page apologised to Gargano for letting him down. Gargano came out and told him it was OK then he cut a promo on Drew Galloway and said he would win the EVOLVE title at the Supershow. (***)

Chris Hero vs. Biff Busick. – Hero over in 19:39. Excellent match, with a great build. Hero has been teasing a heel turn for months and Busick had been calling him out saying that he didn't fear Hero and could not be KO'd, only to be told by Hero he wasn't worth his time. Story of the match was Hero having no respect for Busick and he beat the hell out of him, but Biff wouldn't die and kept coming forward with buckets of fighting spirit. They went outside at 5:00 and Hero sent Busick through the guardrail. Biff fired up with some amazing facials and landed a German for a double-down at 6:38. Hero landed a big elbow and they teased a KO, but Biff got to his feet at the count of "9". Busick did a plancha into a rear naked choke, it wasn't particularly smooth but it still was an awesome spot. Hero delivered a piledriver for a near-fall at 14:01 then disrespected Biff with some slaps. Biff hit a half-and-half suplex and a big lariat then landed a half nelson superplex for a big near-fall at 17:28. At 19:12, Hero landed 4 rolling elbows but Busick kicked out at one (!). Finish saw Hero hit a 5th rolling elbow and a tombstone to get the pin. (****) – This was so great and the story they told was tremendous. They didn't need a million highspots to get the match over; just some basic psychology and a good worker like Busick being able to follow a fantastic ring general like Hero was enough.

The Premier Athlete Brand: Caleb Konley & Brian Cage w/So Cal Val & Andrea vs. Rich Swann & Johnny Gargano. – Konley & Cage via ref stoppage at 15:17. Match was going along just fine, until Swann suffered a rib injury late on. Gargano came in and they tried to give Swann time to recover; Gabe ran down to check on Swann on the outside. Gargano and Konley went to the finish and Konley tapped to the Gargano Escape, however the referee rang the bell and awarded PAB the victory because Swann could not continue. It was a bit of a mess, but nobody's fault really. It was just an unfortunate situation. (** ¾)

PJ Black vs. Ricochet. – Ricochet over in 14:26. Not a great main event, but a fun way to end the show. Lots of flips and fast paced counters early; Ricochet did the People's standing moonsault at 3:45. PJ went for some dives, but was cut off and Ricochet took him out with a big plancha. There was a superkick exchange at 9:45 for a double-down then they had a chop battle and Ricochet landed his deadlift suplex. PJ got a near-fall with a springboard 450 at 11:51 and Ricochet got one with a reverse rana off the top at 13:08. For the finish, Ricochet countered a Frankensteiner into a superbomb and hit the 630 to get the pin. – Afterwards, PJ cut a promo about why he left the WWE. He said he saw Ricochet vs. Johnny Gargano last year during Mania weekend and wanted to be able to work like they did. Ricochet saw Wade in the crowd and went over to him then sang one of his songs to ring announcer, Heather Lynn. (** ¼).

Overall, a much better show than the previous night with two excellent matches that you should go out of your way to see.

SHIMMER Volume 71: The ChickFight Tournament March 28th 2015

Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, San Jose, California, USA

Ryan Clingman.

The Shimmer 53 iPPV from last year's WrestleMania Weekend was one of my favourite non-NJPW shows not only of that weekend, but of the entire year, which is why I had such high hopes for this year's event. Unfortunately, this year's Shimmer iPPV didn't manage to capture the same magic as last year's card. Unlike Mania-weekend Shimmer shows of years past, the 2015 show was composed mainly of ChickFight tournament matches, a tournament coincidentally run by APW years ago. Much like the King of Indies, as a one night show Shimmer 71 may have delivered to a greater degree had the Havok/Melissa feud not played such a major role in the semi-final and final matches. Yim/Melissa stands as the prime example of a match that, whilst teasing what is probably their biggest viewership of the year with build to several major matches, including Melissa/Havok, this build did have a negative effect on Melissa's tournament, her semi-final match with Yim in particular, which ended in a lame, WWE-esque DQ finish. With six opening round matches the finals of the ChickFight tournament was a three-way, which for my tastes also detracted from the tournament as a whole.

Whilst there existed no inherently bad match or segment on the show, unlike last year there was no stand-out match either, which came as a result of booking and format. If you enjoy Shimmer, you will probably like this show, but with a company as consistent as Shimmer you may be better off ordering one of their latest DVDs instead.

1. ChickFight Tournament First Round Match

Portia Perez vs. Evie

Perez had an interesting altercation with WWE sign-guy in the crowd, surprisingly not wearing a red baseball cap, white vest, and blue jacket. Portia Perez, who has a tremendous Twitter account by the way, began the heat taking Evie to the outside. Evie unloaded with kicks on Perez, but was brought back down to the mat with a neckbreaker. Evie responded with a Yakuza kick for a double down. Nicole Matthews ran down for an awkward distraction spot with Perez knocking Matthews off of the apron, allowing Evie to land her Benadryller/GTS like move for the win.

**** ½**

2. ChickFight Tournament First Round Match

Candice LeRae vs. Nicole Savoy

Candice grabbed an early nearfall with a highkick. LeRae shot out with a tope DDT. Savoy landed a F5-neckbreaker for two in a good nearfall at the 15-minute warning. LeRae has come an exceedingly long way from the woman working matches comprised almost entirely of hurricanranas, as is evident from her Shimmer performance on last year's Mania weekend show, and OWG appearances. Candice hit the _-plex. Savoy pulled off a massive upset landing a tiger suplex, which she failed to bridge. LeRae had her nose busted open, which was cleaned up in the post match.

3. ChickFight Tournament First Round Match Nikki Storm vs. Cherry Bomb

Storm listed off her credentials including a Cheese Queen Ambassador, Scotland's National Treasure, and Queen of California. Cherry Bomb has adopted Rousey's walk-out music, 'Bad Reputation', which I would endorse under normal circumstances, but use of that theme is but a knock-off when anyone other than Rousey uses it. A screaming battle of death started the match off. Bomb used her superior size to overpower Storm early. Bomb slapped Storm in the chest, but only after screaming on the top of her voice following a nearfall. Storm followed a near-successful roll-up with a fisherman's neckbreaker for the victory.

** ¾

4. ChickFight Tournament First Round Match Kimber Lee vs. Kay Lee Ray

Lee plucked Ray out of the air and landed a backbreaker followed by a bodyslam, both for two. There was a preposterous repeated kick ducking spot from both women. Ray was met with a highkick on the second rope leading to a superplex. Lee landed a swanton bomb that had been discussed on commentary for the last several minutes, but Ray countered it into a crucifix for another upset victory.

** ¾

5. ChickFight Tournament First Round Match Athena vs. Mia Yim

The match started with an expectedly great athletic exchange. Athena executed the standard indie triple toe spot, which has been over-utilized to an incredible degree. Yim responded with a punt from the apron and some kicks to the torso in the ring, followed by a series of big back fists. Yim looked to work over Athena's legs, neutralizing her finish, but Athena caught Yim in her sharpshooter/crossface. Dave Prazak, one of my favourite commentators in the business behind Ranallo, exercised one of my announcing pet peeves, verbally chastised Athena for not hooking the leg on a strong pin. A furious elbow, headbutt and kick exchange followed. Yim avoided Athena's second rope back senton and delivered a beautiful German suplex in response to a release German from Athena. Yim went back up top, but was met with a slap. Athena landed the O-face, but Yim got her foot on the rope at what I believe was the ten minute warning. Yim went for a package piledriver, but unfortunately dropped Athena, before lifting her back up, hitting it, and landing a 450 splash for the win to conclude a great opening round match and match of the night.

*** ½

6. ChickFight Tournament First Round Match Cheerleader Melissa vs. Jessicka Havoc

Havoc has followed in the Omega tradition of dying her hair grey – an impossibility according to Bryan Alvarez. Havoc screamed unintelligibly at the crowd. Melissa carried Havoc early, who, for whatever reason, lost her superstar aura during her TNA run. Melissa executed three Super Dragon face-stomps and rolled Havoc up with her feet on the ropes, which was just as well for the sake of the tournament.

** ¾

7. ChickFight Tournament Second Round Match

Evie vs. Nicole Savoy

A brief kick exchange led directly into a super flapjack combo from Savoy, catching Evie in a leglock out of mid-air. Perez on her theoretical plan, had her and Matthews both progressed: "I am not going to divulge our plan...whether or not it was NWO influenced or not". Savoy grabbed a crossface, Evie attempted to follow with a PK, but had it caught with Savoy going back to the leglock. Evie landed a missile dropkick, falling right onto her knees. Evie landed an over the knee backbreaker and Yakuza kick, went for a second, but was met with a leg-capture suplex for a nearfall. Evie landed the highest arching German suplex I have seen in a quite some time for two. Both women fought on the top rope with headbutts and forearms respectively. Evie landed her double stomp to Savoy in the tree of woe for the win in an impressive showing. Savoy declined Evie's handshake offer in the post match.

*** ½

8. ChickFight Tournament Second Round Match

Nikki Storm vs. Kay Lee Ray

Nikki Storm cut a pre-match promo saying how she was from the palaces of Glasgow – how she was “The White Chocolate Cheesecake of Sports Entertainment”, “The Sexy Monkey of Professional Wrestling”, and the next Shimmer Champion. Portia Perez was doubtful. Given that Ray is also from Glasgow, Storm had to add that she was from the "nice part" of Glasgow. They had a fun exchange of roll-ups and counters. Someone yelled "shut up and wrestle!" to a bevy of boos from this otherwise respectful crowd. Storm locked in a leg scissors, but even in a simple hold such as that was delightfully entertaining whilst still remaining believable. Storm took an ace crusher for two, and Ray landed a Gory Bomb and Swanton Bomb for the win.

9. ChickFight Tournament Second Round Match

Cheerleader Melissa vs. Mia Yim

Yim looked to take Melissa out with a tope early, but was cut off with a forearm. Melissa took Yim down to the mat, working the legs over. Yim eventually broke free and locked a tarantula in. There was a referee bump during this perfectly fine context, caused intentionally by Melissa. Havoc ran down and began a beat down on Melissa, which led to a DQ finish in her favour. I understand their reasoning behind this finish, as they wished to progress this Melissa/Havoc feud, but in doing so they ruined what could have been the match of the night.

** ¾

10. Shimmer Championship Match

Nicole Matthews vs. Tomoka Nakagawa

Nakagawa only having but two weeks remaining in her career wishes to retire with all of the Shimmer Gold – as such, Nakagawa was showered with streamers during the ring introductions. Matthews rolled out to scream at fans on the floor. Matthews locked in a boring Orton-esque headlock and took Nakagawa out to the floor for some work. Matthews was finally sent out to the floor, but dragged Nakagawa out with her, pulling the apron over her head and unloading for some good heat. Matthews

dropped Nakagawa with a back suplex leading to double down. Matthews survived a northern lights suplex, and Nakagawa did the same for a brainbuster. Perez ran down and slid a chair into the ring, leading to two visual pins from Nakagawa. Nakagawa took a chairshot to the back and neckbreaker for the win.

Lenny Leonard popped up for a promo announcing that WWN would be across the road from Axxess next year and thanked everyone for coming out.

11. ChickFight Tournament Finals

Cheerleader Melissa vs. Kay Lee Ray vs. Evie

Ray and Evie went straight after Melissa, but were double suplexed in turn. Moments later Havoc's music hit because "MIND GAMES MAGGLE". The music stopped then started again, which brought Havoc out, for everyone's favourite spot/finish of a stupid distraction. Ray did a swanton onto Melissa held down by Evie, even if it was actually a swanton onto both women. Melissa was pinned off of that spot and ran off after Havoc leaving Ray and Evie. Evie delivered a punt on the apron after a cross-body (or at least that's what I think it was supposed to be) onto Evie. Ray shot out with a tope; as if it needs stating, there were MANY topes on this show. Ray avoided a Yakuza kick, was met with a dropkick, and then took the Yakuza kick on a rebound from Evie. Evie kicked out of Ray's gory bomb. Ray went to the top, but was met with a Yakuza kick and neckbreaker. Ray landed a missile dropkick with very good height before hitting her swanton bomb for the victory.

WWE Hall of Fame – March 28th 2015

SAP Centre: San Jose, CA.

Ben Carass.

The WWE Hall of Fame sure is a wacky deal. The company treats it as some kind of hoity-toity red carpet event, the people being inducted, for the most part, seem to take it very seriously indeed, they bring in legitimate celebrities to try and get some mainstream pub and they sell tickets to fans, some of whom even go to the ridiculous extreme of going black-tie to what is essentially a gigantic exercise in WWE propaganda. I get a kick out of listening to the old-timers telling stories and if going into a gimmick Hall of Fame legitimately means something to them then great. However it is so hard at this point to treat the WWE Hall of Fame as anything more than a compete work, because honestly it is. They wouldn't even induct **Ray Stevens** in the Bay Area, with **Pat Patterson** still around to accept and speak on his behalf. Why? Well, there was an Attitude Era mid-carder, the lowest drawing WWE Champion in history, **Tatsumi Fujinami** (don't get me wrong, I love **Fujinami**, but the WWE HOF, really?) and the **Bushwhackers** to induct. Plus they had to get one over on **Madusa** by bringing her back to pull the old Women's title out of a trash can.

As is tradition, the show ran long. VERY long. 4 hours to be exact. Now, I'm not going to recap everything all the inductees said, because that would be crazy and you'd still be reading it by the time next year's Mania rolls around. Instead, I'll just talk about the vibe of the speeches and whether or not they were any good from an entertainment perspective.

First off, I have to mention **Maria Menounos**, who hosted the “Red Carpet” portion of the show with **Michael Cole**. When she was given nearly 7 minutes to work that tag match at WrestleMania 28 after **Bryan** and **Sheamus** had 18 seconds, I hated her beyond belief. “Look at this woman, who knows nothing about pro wrestling taking time away from the real workers”, I thought. Then she did a great job of inducting **Bob Backlund** in 2013, despite being heckled by the usual idiots that attend the HOF, and I realised there was more to this lady than meets the eye. So this year, there she was doing the fluffy inane E! Network banter with **Cole**, when **Dusty Rhodes** stepped up for an interview. **Maria** then proceeded to recite **Dusty’s** “Hard Times” promo almost perfectly, with the Dream standing right in front of her and he seemed dumbfounded at how well she cut this promo. She even gave **Dusty** the chance to join in, but even he couldn’t remember the lines, so she just continued on her own. The ever clueless **Michael Cole** tried to cut her off, but **Maria** kept on with the, “My belly’s just a little big, my heinie’s just a little big” part. It was truly remarkable and I fell in love with this woman immediately. Thumbs up to **Maria Menounos**, who cut a better promo than 95% of the geeks on the entire roster and came off as adorable doing so. I can’t wait for next year now, just to see **Maria** do her thing again.

Rikishi: Inducted by Jimmy & Jey Uso. – **The Usos** were fun and wacky, although **Jimmy** clearly got all the charisma. They talked about **Rikishi’s** ass putting them through college and **Jey** said his father used to breakdance outside the Cow Palace for loose change. **Rikishi** came out and seemed not to happy about the Cow Palace story and told **Jey** they would “have words” later. **Kish** spoke for about half an hour, most of which he spent putting over his family. He talked about being a trainer with **Gangrel**, who was in attendance, and he gave a shout out to “**Miro**” (**Rusev**) as one of the students he trained. Strangely, he didn’t thank **Scotty 2 Hottie** or **Grandmaster Sexay**, which **Scotty** took exception to on Twitter. The big finish was **Rikishi** doing the **Too Cool** dance with **Jimmy & Jey**; it was a nice way to end, but there was no way **Rikishi** needed 30 minutes to do his speech.



Larry Zbyszko: Inducted by Bruno Sammartino. – **Bruno** talked about **Larry** bugging him as a kid about wanting to become a wrestler and told the story of **Larry** turning on him to start their legendary feud. **Zbyszko** tried to deliver his speech without any notes or anything, and even though he got lost and overwrought at certain points, I thought this was a really good, heartfelt speech. **Larry** talked about sneaking into **Bruno's** backyard through some hedges and couldn't figure out why **Bruno** didn't just send him packing. It was clear that **Larry** idolised **Bruno** and was overwhelmed by the fact that his childhood hero was inducting him into the same Hall of Fame that he is a part of. He summed it up perfectly by explaining that "47 glorious years ago" he dove into a "rabbit hole" and **Bruno** was standing there to open the door to a "wrestling wonderland". **Larry** said he had just come out of the other side of that rabbit hole and **Bruno** was standing there again to open the door to finally let him out. **Zbyszko** didn't really go into "Larryland" mode, however he did mention the "secret government agencies" that were "spying" on the transmission, but it came off like a tongue-in-cheek line. – Really great speech.



Alundra Blaze: Inducted by Natalya. – **Nattie** claimed that throwing the belt in the trash was an "Act of defiance that changed the history of Sports Entertainment forever." I suppose it makes a nice story, but it is not even half-true. She then told a story about **Madusa** chasing **Arn Anderson** with a high heel shoe. **Madusa** had the speech of the night. She talked about starting out for **Eddie Sharky** and getting a call from **Wahoo McDaniel** to go work with **Sherri Martel** in the AWA. She mentioned **Bull Nakano**, **Chigusa Nagayo** and **Aja Kong** and put over All Japan Women then spoke a few words of thanks in Japanese; it was a really cool moment. **Madusa** said she was the first **Paul Heyman** Girl and gave **Paul E** a special thanks then thanked everyone in the **Dangerous Alliance**; she added that **Rick Rude** deserved to be in the HOF. Agreed. Finally she said that it was **Eric Bischoff's** goal to get the WWE's attention by throwing the belt in the trash and said she would be forever known as the "b*tch" that threw the belt in the garbage. **Nattie** came out with a trash can; **Madusa** pulled out some bra & panties and buried whoever came up with that concept. "I hated that crap", she said. She pulled out the old women's title and said the belt was finally back where it belonged. – Fantastic speech. She touched

on all parts of her career and had a perfect balance of humour and emotion. She even made **Paul Heyman** cry, which was something to behold.

Warrior Award: Presented by Dana Warrior. Connor Michalek Inducted by Daniel Bryan, Accepted by Steve Michalek. – Everyone was great here. **Dana Warrior** and **Steve Michalek** did a great job of speaking in front of a live audience and **Daniel Bryan** came off as the nicest guy in the word and told the fans to stop chanting “Yes”, because it wasn’t about him.

The Bushwhackers: Inducted by John Laurinaitis. – Boy was this a lot of fun and a smart booking decision after the tear-jerker of the **Warrior** Award. **Laurinaitis** was just there, but **Butch Miller** was the absolute star of the night. They tried to do a bit of their old “Right cousin...” shtick, but **Butch** seemed to get carried away and went off on tangents about being “Hardcore before it was bloody called Hardcore.” **Butch** told a story of being in **Vince’s** office and being told they were going to become babyfaces. He said he jumped up on **Vince’s** desk and asked how they were going to make good guys out of these ugly bloody heads. “And you know what, they bloody did!” he quipped. **Luke** told a story about being eliminated from the 1991 Royal Rumble and said **Butch** was hot because he spent “25” minutes in the match and got the same payoff. (It was actually only about 12 minutes, but again, it made for a good tale.) **Butch** got **Roddy Piper**, **Ted Dibiase**, **Bret Hart** of all people and **Jim Duggan**, to get up and do the Bushwhacker march and they all did; even **Bret**. **Luke** thanked **Butch** for being his partner for 35 years and they closed with **Butch** liking **Luke** which got a big pop from the crowd. – If **Madusa** had the best speech, this was the most fun by far.

Tatsumi Fujinami: Inducted by Ric Flair. – **Flair** was only given 3 minutes to talk. He called **Fujinami** the “greatest wrestler in the history of Japan”, which is a bit of a stretch. **Rikidozan**, **Baba** and **Inoki** are obviously the most influential. If we’re talking great workers then of that era, I guess it would be between **Jumbo**, **Fujinami**, **Tenryu**, **Choshu** and **Sayama** maybe. **Muta** and the **Three Musketeers** came later, as did the All Japan “**Big Four**” and I don’t expect **Flair** to be up to date on the current scene in Japan. **Flair** pointed out **Vader** and gave him a shout-out. **Fujinami** didn’t get much longer than **Flair** and spoke in extremely broken English. He thanked WWE for the “great honour” and said fighting was his mission. – Great Japanese mentality. **Fujinami** thanked his wife and family for supporting him and that was pretty much it.

Macho Man Randy Savage: Inducted by Hulk Hogan, Accepted by Lanny Poffo. – **Hogan** was full of it and played up that he and **Savage** were bosom-buddies from way back. In typical **Hogan** style, he made it all about him for the most part; I lost count of how many times he said “I” or “me”. He did claim that there would have been no HulkaMania without Macho Madness, which is hilariously inaccurate. **Lanny** was **Lanny** and read some of his goofy poems. He got choked up at one point when speaking about how the **Warrior** got the chance to make his speech before he passed away and noted that **Randy** never got that opportunity. **Lanny** mentioned that **Randy** didn’t have any biological children and did a lot of work for the Special Olympics and said he loved the athletes like “**Mr T** loves his mother.” Hilarious. **Lanny** finished off with another poem to close out his speech. – After all that time and outrage that **Savage** was never inducted, it didn’t really feel like the huge deal that many people were probably expecting. Of course it would have been very different if **Savage** was still alive, but who knows if **Vince** would have buried the hatchet if that were the case?

Celebrity Wing: Arnold Schwarzenegger: Inducted by Triple H. – **Trips** fawned over **Arnold** being king of the Roidy Magooos then cracked that **Arnie** would have made a great worker because millions

of people were killed in his movies and not a single one of them got hurt. – *What?! You mean Bennett wasn't really impaled by a giant steam pipe at the end of Commando? HHH killing kayfabe as ever.*

Trips said **Arnie** was the epitome of the American Dream and called him the “greatest box office attraction” in history. **Arnie** was in full worker mode and after a career in politics, he had it down to a tee. He told stories about going to watch **Otto Wanz** wrestle as a kid, despite only being 4 years younger than him and even said **Wanz** was an inspiration for getting into bodybuilding. For those who don't know, **Otto Wanz** was about 380lbs and built like **Brodus Clay**. He thanked **Bruno** for voting for him in some musclehead competition then closed by thanking America and said they had to keep it the number one country in the world. Ugh.

Kevin Nash: Inducted by Shawn Michaels. – **Shawn** was awesome and tore up his script, which he noted would get him in trouble in the back, but he was used to it. He told the story of seeing **Vinny Vegas** on TV and telling **Nash** to ask **Ole Anderson** for his release which he immediately faxed to Titan Tower. **Shawn** told a story about **Vince McMahon**, who he was not supposed to mention so he was definitely in trouble, seeing **Diesel** and **Shawn** working a tag match and thinking “My God, that big man is getting white hot.” Hysterical. **Shawn** said he brought the “big goon” in and **Vince** fell in love with him and wanted to put the strap on him. He talked about **Nash** starting the guaranteed contract era and said there would have been no **DX** without the **NWO**. When **Nash** came out he and **Shawn** did their old high-five spot, which the 7 year old inside me marked out for. **Nash** said he got into the business to make money in the most deadpan manner possible, which got a few laughs. He talked about **Oz** being **Dusty Rhodes'** idea and showed a photo of **Oz** on the big screen then said **DDP** talked him into sticking with pro wrestling even though he was given horrible gimmicks. **Nash** mentioned beating **Bob Backlund** for the WWE title in MSG in “8” seconds (it was about 15) then talked about the Superstars of today taking things to a whole different level. He thanked his wife of 27 years and noted that **Rick Rude** told him to keep her as far away from the business as possible, which he noted must have worked because they are still together. **Nash** closed by saying that **Ric Flair** told him earlier that the two most real moments in pro wrestling were when you won your first championship and when you are inducted into the Hall of Fame. **The Kliq** came out for another curtain call and **Nash, Hall, Michaels, HHH & Waltman** threw up the “Too Sweet” to bring down the house.

King of Indies 2015

Ryan Clingman.

To expect an emergence of future stars on the level of the 2001 King of Indies from this 2015 reboot would have been a misdirected, and frankly unfair expectation. The indies no longer harbour the same amount of young promising talent as they did in the early 2000s. This isn't to say that the indies were better than they are now, because I would in fact argue that the 2015 scene is far superior to the scene of 2000/1. However, with the 2001 King of Indies just over six months separated from the deaths of WCW, and coming at the beginning of a cooling period for the business as a whole, there was a wealth of quality rookie talent who entered wrestling in the late 90s.

Going in these were not my expectations, in fact, whilst I looked forward to the tournament as a source for some new names to follow, I by no means expected a great working tournament, nor was I anticipating an illumination of future stars at the level of Samoa Joe, Bryan Danielson, Low Ki, Brian Kendrick, Bison Smith, and so on, as seen in the 2001 tournament. What this tournament was, in actuality, was a very enjoyable, albeit at times indie-rific and perhaps poorly booked, two night outing.

Following the first round matches the three most over stars with the San Jose audience were, quite clearly, Timothy Thatcher, Jeff Cobb, and Willie Mack. However, whilst one of these men did in fact appear in the finals, Willie Mack, he was most probably the incorrect choice, as Cobb, a former Olympic free-style wrestler with a tremendous look, natural physical aura, and impressive working ability, was eliminated by Mack in the semi-finals leaving Thornstowe and Mack as the final competitors. The most popular scenario would have most likely been Cobb/Thatcher, but even Thornstowe/Cobb or Mack/Thatcher would have sufficed over the match-up that concluded the tournament. Still the Thornstowe/Mack final was one of the better matches of the entire tournament, even if Thornstowe is a fairly generic indie work-rate wrestler.

Coming out of the tournament, apart from Thatcher and Mack who most everyone was already high on heading in, Cobb was far and away the most impressive participant in this tournament – a name everyone will most assuredly be hearing more of in the coming years. Another impressive entrant was Shaun Ricker, who was eliminated in the first round by Thornstowe. He may have also been someone to watch if it wasn't for the fact that he has already been signed and cut by the WWE. He could still very well make a name for himself elsewhere as, from the small amount I saw from him, he's a good worker with a great look.

As shows, the 2015 King of Indies nights one and two are by no means required viewing from WrestleMania weekend, but are most certainly fun anecdotes with a few strong matches and a super showing from Jeff Cobb, and more expectedly, Timothy Thatcher and Willie Mack.

King of Indies 2015 Night 1 March 27th 2015

Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, San Jose, California, USA

1. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match

Rey Horus vs. Lil Cholo

Lil Cholo is one of Big Rick's men from Lucha Underground, and Rey Horus a man that I know close to nothing about apart from the fact that he enters to seizure-inducing dubstep. They traded counters and pin attempts to some polite applause, which the announcers called a "standing ovation". Rey Horus is fun and all, but tends to push himself, quite apparently, off of his own pin attempts. More exchanges followed to mixed results. Horus put Cholo away with a top rope hurricanrana. Work wise, Cholo was quite clearly the better of these two.

** 1/2

2. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match

Rik Luxury vs. Jeff Cobb

Luxury looks like Johnny Hot Body from early 90s ECW. Cobb has a very impressive look, wears a singlet, and has a legitimate Olympic wrestling background. Luxury had the heat on Cobb before Cobb landed a belly to belly suplex at the five minute warning. The pair brawled some, but Luxury regained control with some JYD headbutts. Cobb landed a dead-lift German suplex, but Luxury responded, minutes later, with a German of his own for a brief double down. Cobb avoided a legdrop and rightfully pinned Luxury with a spinning power slam. Jeff Cobb shows a lot of promise.

** 3/4

3. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match Adam Thornstowe vs. Shaun Ricker

Both men here, Ricker in particular, had WWE-approved physiques. Ricker is a Les Thatcher/HWA trainee. Thornstowe shot out with a tope con giro with some good height. Both Ricker and Thornstowe had a polish and crispness unseen until this point in the show. Ricker, the clean cut man with the great physique, was the clear heel here, working over the tattooed favourite in Thornstowe. Thornstowe landed a double stomp, PK and running shooting starpress, but was caught in a spinning belly to back power slam. Thornstowe landed a double stomp to the back and a Superfly Splash for the win. This wouldn't have been out of place on a PWG undercard. Ricker was certainly the most impressive of the two here, which is why it's unfortunate that we didn't see more of him in-tournament this week. Not to take anything away from Thornstowe, but I would have expected Ricker to sign with WWE within the next few years, but according to rovert he was in developmental last year, angered management through an incident involving an electric organ amongst other things, and was released. He is now 32.

4. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match Vinny Massaro vs. El Mariachi

Massaro is the only man in this tournament to have participated in not only the famous 2001 tournament, but also the inaugural King of Indies in 2000. Mariachi landed a pair of topes and landed a belly to belly slam, standing double stomp and splash, but was met with a forearm and discus lariat. Massaro tapped Mariachi out with a side headlock.
** ¼

5. Battle Royal

JR Kratos vs. Dalton Frost vs. Big Ugly vs. Boyce Legrande vs. Idris Jackson vs. Marcus Lewis vs. Jinxx vs. Matt Carlos vs. Famous B vs. Rudy Juarez vs. Will Cuevas vs. Los Campesinos vs. Earl Cooter vs. Anarkia Jr. vs. Jonny Yen vs. Sione Finau vs. Big Duke vs. Peter Avalon vs. Mike Matthews vs. Truex vs. Joshua Roberts vs. Kid Anarchy vs. Daniel Torch vs. T-Lo The Insano

Some of the graphics for these introductions were blatantly incorrect. I knew of but one of these men coming in, Peter Avalon. Earl Cooter was first eliminated. That was the last elimination I took note of for a while as people were eliminated left and right. There was nothing all too memorable about this match even down to the final three. Kratos eliminated Famous B with a fall away slam onto a bunch of people out on the floor that ended up missing for the final elimination.
**

6. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match B-Boy vs. Brian Cage

Woah, I know these two guys. Cage, in the first spot of the match, pulled B-Boy in with a dead-lift superplex. Cage landed a powerbomb into the ring post. B-Boy landed a bottom rope swing DDT. B-Boy landed a Shibata-esque flying dropkick in the corner. Cage took a DDT on the apron and sold a double footstomp that missed him completely at which point an announcer called the match "a wrestling classic" – a blatant falsehood. B-Boy kicked out of an Alabama Slam powerbomb. B-Boy got a nearfall following a post-eye-poke cradle. Brian Cage went for some kind of wacky Gory Bomb type

move, but couldn't hold it and ended up pinning B-Boy with a side-slam from the Gory Special position.

**

7. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match

Willie Mack vs. Jody Kristofferson

Kristofferson was trained at the NXT Performance Center with Normal Smiley according to the announcers; his Cagematch profile lists his training school as the APW Boot Camp, however. Kristofferson looked to engage in a shoulder block battle, but Mack was having none of it and landed a leaping leg lariat. Kristofferson was continuously working over Mack at the five minute warning. Kristofferson missed a sitout senton, Mack looked for a roll-up or something of that sort, but seemed to have hurt himself, took a few moments to regroup, and then continued on as per usual. Kristofferson kicked out of the standing shooting star press and landed a torture rack bomb. Kristofferson looked for a spear, but was awkwardly met with a superkick and corkscrew splash for the win.

** 1/2

8. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match

Jeckles vs. Luster The Legend

Jeckles is some kind of strange mime jester, whilst Luster is an Arik Cannon lookalike fellow. Luster landed a tope. One of the announcers said that Jeckles had spent cumulative years in the ring - false. Luster landed an elbow drop for two. Luster grabbed a clover leaf, but Jeckles made it to the ropes. Luster won by TKO via camel clutch in a tremendously boring match.

* 3/4

9. King of Indies 2015 First Round Match

Timothy Thatcher vs. Dylan Drake

Dylan Drake walked out with a Flair rip-off robe that read "Wonder Boy" on the back. Drake worked a key-lock early. Thatcher worked out of the hold driving Drake to the outside. Thatcher looked to pull Drake in by the hair, but was pulled to the floor for some uncharacteristic brawling. Drake worked an Indian Deathlock. Drake had the hold on far from tight, at one point clutching at air following a counter. Drake complained to the referee. The pair exchanged strikes, they looked to be even, but Thatcher dropped him with a slap. Drake went back to work on the leg with a single-leg Boston crab. Drake followed with a back breaker on the rope top rope. Slaps were exchanged, which led Thatcher to the armbreaker victory.

*** 1/4

10. Joey Ryan vs. Matt Cross vs. Ricochet

What a strange assortment this is. Joe Ryan offered fans his lollipop, many hands were raised, strangely, and he ended up putting it in a front row women's mouth. Ryan landed a tope pulling Cross back into the ring for some work. Cross did an impressive cartwheel from the top rope before rolling Ryan up for two. Ricochet and Matt Cross did some expected flying. These announcers ended up rattling off PWI 500 stats for the three men in the ring. Matt Cross went straight from a double stomp on the back of Ricochet to a tope on Ryan. Ryan broke up a beautiful Matt Cross shooting star press on

Ricochet. Ricochet went for the Benadryll at the 10 minute warning. Ricochet connected with a pair of highkicks on Ryan and landed a fisherman's buster bomb for the win.

*** ¼

King of Indies 2015 Night 2 March 28th 2015

Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, San Jose, California, USA

1. King of Indies 2015 Second Round Match

Jeff Cobb vs. Brian Cage



Credit: @omar01

I missed the first 80% or so percent of this match, not because of technical issues or latency, but because I was in the midst of freaking out at the discovery of a spider in my tablet – yes, not "on", "in", my dear Asus Prime. Cobb rightfully pinned Cage with his flip powerslam.

2. King of Indies 2015 Second Round Match

Timothy Thatcher vs. Vinny Massaro

Thatcher took Massaro down to the mat early. Massaro then took Thatcher down for his first round ending choke. Thatcher submitted Massaro to move on to the semi-finals.

3. King of Indies 2015 Second Round Match

Adam Thornstowe vs. Luster The Legend

These two are reportedly a regular Northern Californian tag team. Legend overpowered the smaller Thornstowe early. Thornstowe kicked out of a big spinebuster and powerbomb. Thornstowe kicked

Legend's legs out from under him on the middle rope and landed a double footstomp right at the five minute morning. The referee was great here, executing a Red Shoes-esque false finish for a Legend sharpshooter. Legend kicked out of a Spicolli driver, but then took a superkick and tombstone moving Thornstowe to the next round.

*** 1/4

4. King of Indies 2015 Second Round Match

Rey Horus vs. Willie Mack

I may not have cared for Horus last night, however, he and Mack had a tremendous athletic exchange at the start of the match. Mack dragged Horus around in a headlock and landed a huge body drop into a monster lariat. For whatever reason Horus was umpteen times as smooth today, landing a perfectly timed hurricanrana on the outside. Mack sent Horus through the barricade. Horus then landed a crazy corkscrew moonsault to the floor! Horus followed with a big tornado DDT. Horus avoided a senton bomb, but Mack then pinned Horus with a jumping Bernard driver.

*** 1/2

5. Ultimo Dragon w/ Sonny Onoo vs. Juventud Guerrera



Credit: @JarrodOMurry

Juventud was wearing his mask. The pair had an expected athletic exchange for a standing ovation. This crowd was hot with early dueling chants. Sonny Onoo worked the crowd, yes, this is still 2015. Dragon landed a back bodydrop to "Ultimo" chants. Onoo attempted kicks on Juventud, which he completely no sold, pushing manager and client together. The pair exchanged pin attempts with Ultimo locking an ankle lock in. Ultimo kicked out of a Juvi driver. Ultimo unloaded with kicks and landed a shiranui for the win. This wasn't a classic, but was still a very fun outing. The pair hugged and Onoo lifted both their hands

*** 1/4

6. King of Indies 2015 Third Round Match

Adam Thornstowe vs. Timothy Thatcher

Thatcher pushed Thornstowe into a pin attempt with his head! They exchanged some elbows on the mat and had a slap strike battle on their heads! Thornstowe rushed to the pin off of a spontaneous high kick. Thatcher began some World of Sport type work at the five minute warning, but was met with some elbows on the mat. Thatcher landed a pair of European uppercuts, Thornstowe responded with a chop and superkick followed by a double footstomp. Thatcher went nuts with European uppercuts on Thornstowe's arm and looked for a Fujiwara armbar. Thatcher landed a butterfly suplex and went for the armbar once again. Thatcher went for his jawbreaker, but was met with a series of knees, a superkick, death valley driver and frog splash for the win. This made me sad.

*** 1/2

7. King of Indies 2015 Third Round Match
Jeff Cobb vs. Willie Mack

There were duelling chants of "Chocolate Thunder" and "Let's go Cobb". Cobb went after Mack's arm. Mack grabbed a very strange abdominal stretch type move. Cobb grabbed an STF, Mack stood up with Cobb on his back, and a very fun athletic exchange followed, culminating in a Cobb dropkick. Mack landed a busaiku knee and hangman corkscrew neckbreaker. Mack avoided a standing shooting star press and was met with one from Mack. A strike battle followed with Mack pinning Cobb with the most graceful roll-up you will see from a man his size in a counter to Cobb's finish that he had been using all weekend. Cobb was quite clearly the right guy to put over here.

*** 1/2

8. The Grappler III vs. Earl Cooter

The Grappler III looks approximately similar to the first two, only with a tattoo and long ponytail. Cooter landed a wacky tope con giro. I don't know what this was, but it was bad. Cooter pinned the Grappler with an unprettier.

DUD

9. Bobby Hart & Sir Samurai vs. RockNES Monsters vs. Famous B & Marcus Lewis vs. Buddy Royal & Levi Shapiro



Credit: @DylanDrake247

Apart from the RockNES monsters and Famous B I wasn't familiar with anyone in this match -- the ensuing chaos was of no assistance. Samurai and Hart attempted an electric-chair superplex; it didn't work out very well. Buddy Royal & Levi Shapiro, clear weekend warriors, won this mess which completely over-stood its welcome.

* 1/2

10. King of Indies 2015 Finals

Adam Thornstowe w/ Luster the Legend vs. Willie Mack w/ B-Boy

The announcers spoke of how the best thing is often times to keep quite -- this is not what they did. There were some "King of Indies" chants. A forearm battle followed. Mack landed a giro over the guard rail! Brawling on the floor ensued. Mack landed a body slam onto a chair on the floor. Thornstowe landed a senton back into the ring. Thornstowe was taken down with a lariat for two. Mack kicked out of a standing shooting star press for an outstanding nearfall. Mack landed the pounce for two and followed with a Samoan Drop. Mac went back up to the top with a moonsault for another nearfall.

Thornstowe landed the double stomp but Mack kicked out again. Mack hit an exploder into the corner, but missed his corkscrew splash and ate three superkicks and a death valley driver for one. Thornstowe then landed a double stomp once more for the win with Mack kicking out right at three.

Thornstowe donned an "I am a Roland Alexander guy" shirt and cut a short promo before being carried by those in the ring. The APW promoter running the tournament then cut a promo holding tears back when discussing Roland Alexander. He then led the crowd in a "thank you Roland" chant.

*** 1/2

WWN Live Supershow : Mercury Rising 2015 March 28th Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, San Jose, California, USA

Ryan Clingman

What was once 'Mercury Rising' and 'Open the Ultimate Gate' from Dragon Gate USA, is now the WWN Supershow known as 'Mercury Rising' as Gabe Sapolsky has all but dropped the DGUSA brand after the disappearance of Japanese talent during the weeks leading up to last year's set of shows in New Orleans. With 'Mercury Rising' existing as a supershow, women were brought in from SHINE, Tommy End from wXw, TJ Perkins as a free agent, as well as Austin Aries from TNA, although, apart from their inclusion, this was a show featuring the majority of the stars you would expect from a Gabe promoted WWN Live show -- and that's fine, as the WWN crew produced two great matches on this show, and the very best match of the entire weekend.

This show was most assuredly fun the whole way through, but with a fair baseline Mercury Rising did have its major spikes in quality. The first came from Galloway and Gargano, who had a battle of the belts style match with both the EVOLVE and DGUSA titles on the line -- it wasn't a match of the year candidate, at least not in my view, but Galloway did look better here than I can recall him looking at any point in his career, in-ring and aesthetically. It had its stiff brawling segments and solid in-ring portions making it one of the standout matches of the weekend. However, that match, as great as it was, was overshadowed by Timothy Thatcher/Chris Hero, the best WrestleMania Weekend since 2013. Thatcher has for quite some time been one of my indie favourites, and Hero almost always works hard to put on what is most often times, at the very least, a good match. That was not Thatcher/Hero, with the pair drawing the best non-WWE heat of the entire weekend, and working a dramatic and creative affair with the best finish of just about any match this year. In short, if you see one thing from Mania Weekend, it should be that.

Everything else on Mercury Rising 2015 was solid to very good making arguably the best show of the weekend alongside Mania 31 and EVOLVE 40.

Rich Swann opened the show with his 'All Night Long' performance, which is always a great way to get the crowd going. Swann announced that he wasn't medically cleared to wrestle, and he screamed terribly into the mic to the point of unintelligibility. Swann requested a tag team title shot with Ronin. SoCal Val along with her Premier Athlete Brand crew came down beating Swann down leading to an Ethan Page/Gargano save, and our opening match.

1. Ethan Page vs. Caleb Conley w/ SoCal Val, Brian Cage & Andrea

Cage attempted to interfere, which allowed Conley to garner the early upper hand. Ethan Page got

some shine, teased a tope, but had it interrupted. Conley standing double stomped Page on the apron, which must have been no fun. Completely unspectacular heat followed. Page grabbed a big powerbomb for a nearfall. Conley landed a sloppy Quebrada for two. Page landed a boot to the face, but was then met with a series of strikes. Ethan kicked out of a Michinoku Driver and took Cage and Conley out with a tope. Val distracted the referee, but Cage accidentally caught Conley with a discus lariat and was sent out to the floor. Ethan then grabbed a roll-up for the win following a completely unremarkable opener.

Cage was laid out by Conley, Val & Andrea in the post match, annexing him from the stable.

**

2. Nikki Storm, Nicole Matthews & Portia Perez vs. Mia Yim, Cherry Bomb & Kimber Lee

Storm grabbed the mic and stated that they should have come out to the Backstreet Boys, which the crowd cheered – why? Because she's Nikki Storm. Andrea then ran down with Veda Scott and laid out, the most over woman in the ring, Nikki Storm. Acting as the Ninjas new tag partner was Andrea. Yim took the Ninjas out with a tope. There was a wacky spot where Portia Perez and Nicole Matthews did twin magic, when they look nothing like one another. Portia awkwardly sold Lee's forearms before tagging in Matthews. Things broke down with Lee Bombs and Yim laying Andrea out. The Ninjas double teamed Yim, who ended up pinning Perez with a school boy. In the post match Storm ran down and missile dropkicked Andrea to the floor before pie-facing and challenging her to a match at Shine 26.

** ½

3. EVOLVE & Dragon Gate Open the Freedom Gate Championship Match

Drew Galloway vs. Johnny Gargano w/ Ethan Page

Galloway laid into Gargano in the corner and delivered a pair of powerslams on the apron. Gargano dove over the barricade sending Galloway crashing into a row of chairs. Galloway either has some of the most believable strikes in the industry or is unbelievably stiff. Galloway, being the war machine that he is, swung Gargano into the arena wall. The pair fought in close to darkness, at for the camera, although Gargano landing a tornado DDT on Galloway off of a wall was visible. Back in the ring Gargano took brief control before being met with a reverse Alabama slam. Galloway was dropped out to the floor for an attempted tope, but was caught with an overhead forearm. Gargano landed a superkick, but then took the referee out with a tope. Galloway landed an exploder into the corner and went for the



DDT, Gargano countered, which led to Ethan page handing Gargano some ropes, which Gargano took, but threw back for a teased heel turn. Galloway scored a visual pin when a new referee slid in for a counted nearfall. There was another ref bump when the new referee collided with Gargano. The old referee was back in with Galloway escaping a Gargano escape. Gargano was pulled in for a tombstone, but countered it into a Gargano escape, mouth bloodied. Galloway countered it, however, landing a

Gotch piledriver for two. Galloway went for a second rope emerald flowsion, but Gargano countered with a DDT for two. Page told Gargano to finish Galloway, who took a quartet of superkicks after flipping Gargano off. Galloway flipped Gargano off again and landed two underhook DDTs for two! Gargano spat his blood in Drew's face and then took a jumping tombstone for the finish. This match could have retained the Page/Gargano angle with the first ref bump, but foregone the second and would have been umpteen times better. It was still very very good though, even discounting the superfluous nearfalls.

After the match Galloway cut a promo saying that he was wearing his Mania 26 gear, but as far as he was concerned this was his Mania moment. Galloway called it one of the best nights of his life and put Gargano over. After Galloway walked to the back Gargano grabbed the mic, but before he could say anything other than "Thank you" Page caught him with a rabbit lariat and delivered a very good beat down.

*** ¾

4. TJ Perkins vs. Drew Gulak vs. Biff Busick vs. Tommy End

Perkins did some creative three man spots early, breaking away from the WWE triple-threat model to mixed results. Tommy End killed Busick with an elbow, but Drew broke the pin up. There was some short-lived team work between Busick and Gulak. End laid Busick out with a superkick and Gulak with a double stomp. There was a simultaneously bizarre and awesome spot with Perkins locking in a calf killer on End, only to be kicked to the mat repeatedly by Gulak, essentially causing him to do the standard back bumps to add pressure. The obligatory quadruple down followed. Busick and Gulak went back and forth with forearms and Perkins submitted Gulak with an armbar.

*** ¼

5. PJ Black vs. AR Fox

Black attempted to roll out to the floor but was met with a pair of silky topes. Black back-flipped to his feet off of the apron, but took two knees to the face off of an out of place moonsault. AR Fox has awesome tights – an astronomical photograph. Black caught Fox off of a dive in the Koji Clutch. Like many Fox matches, there was a very strange spot where Fox was hung up on the top rope for a good ten seconds awaiting for a kick from Black. The lights went out unexpectedly with Fox landing a back-cracker from the middle rope, I think, and then a terrific senton bomb to ¾ across the ring. Fox hit his Spanish Fly, with things made visible due to shutter doors being opened in the front of the building. Fox rushed Black with a palm strike, and then took his obligatory self destructive bump on the apron, a Death Valley driver from the middle rope, followed by a 450 splash for the win.

There was a WWN Live spokesperson plugging stuff, announcing title versus title matches for Shine 26 and thanking the fans..

6. Timothy Thatcher vs. Chris Hero

Thatcher was Shibata here, completely unmoved during Hero's flamboyant entrance – duelling chants followed with Hero riling the crowd up on the outside. Thatcher didn't take his eyes off Hero from the moment he appeared through the curtain. Hero toyed with Thatcher during a handshake. "Thatcher's gonna kill you" chants – this felt like a mid-2000s ROH main event. Lenny Leonard brought up Dave Meltzer's praise of Timothy Thatcher on Observer Radio. Thatcher blocked an elbow with his forearm and locked in a surfboard. The crowd chanted and sang words that I couldn't quite make out. Thatcher no sold Hero's chops and and dropped him with a snap suplex. They exchanged holds on the mat. Hero chopped Thatcher off of a break, to which Thatcher responded with an uppercut. Hero caught Thatcher with a huge boot, which was sold like a decapitation. Hero smiled smugly at Thatcher, who he put back down with a dropkick to the face. Hero went to work on Thatcher's arm with Thatcher kicking out of a pin attempt at one. Thatcher took Hero down and began landing some ground and pound. He grabbed a



Credit: @DeathToAllMarks

Kimura, but Hero made it to the ropes before Thatcher could apply any torque. Hero dropped Thatcher with an elbow on the outside. Thatcher blocked a second elbow attempt and went back to work on Hero's arm. Another set of duelling chants ensued. Thatcher looked for up-kicks, but was unable to stand, which drove Hero to land a big back senton. Hero planted Thatcher with a Gotch piledriver for two! Thatcher landed a German suplex, Hero no sold. He followed with another, to the same result. Thatcher then hit a headbutt for a double down. Hero landed a bicycle kick to the face repeatedly followed by big boots; Thatcher refused to go down and unloaded with strikes. Hero landed his rolling elbow, but Thatcher kicked out immediately transitioning into a Fujiwara armbar (there were originally a dozen exclamation marks here) (!) or the win. Grown men were jumping up and down in jubilation. Thatcher and Hero slapped one another after the match before shaking hands. This was far and away the best match of the weekend.

**** 3/4

7. Roderick Strong & Austin Aries vs. Uhaa Nation & Ricochet

These four sure had something to follow. Aries and Ricochet started things off. Uhaa held Roddy up for quite some time in a delayed vertical suplex. Strong's head was rammed repeatedly into the middle buckle by Ricochet. The tag was made to Aries, at which point Strong and Aries started the heat. Aries and Strong were sent into one another by Ricochet, allowing for the tag to be made to Uhaa. Strong was dropped from a military press into a Ricochet ace crusher. Things broke down with everyone in the ring at once. Strong landed a superplex from the very top, but was rolled up by Ricochet for two. Ricochet looked for a hurricanrana, Strong looked for the strong hold, Ricochet kicked Strong in the face repeatedly, but Strong held on long enough to allow Aries to land the 450 splash. Aries landed a tope on Uhaa, Ricochet escaped the Strong hold, landed a Benadryller and went up top. Ricochet landed on his feet after Strong avoided the 450 splash, but Strong flipped Ricochet super high into what would be his usual back breaker, but Ricochet did a double rotation turning it into what was essentially a super code breaker for the win.

*** 1/4

In the post match Strong, the consummate heel, turned on Aries and attacked Uhaa Nation. Strong said that he was coming for Galloway's titles, but out came Thatcher to send Strong out the back door. Thatcher then said that the road to the title goes through him and thanked everyone for coming out to close the show.

WWE WrestleMania 31 March 29th 2015
Levi's Stadium, San Jose, California, USA
Ryan Clingman.

-1: Fourway Tag Team Title Match

Kidd and Cesaro retained following a very fun spotfest, which I managed to catch half of.

~*** 1/4

0. Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal

For all the discussion of the NXT Five, or whatever, Itami was placed in this throw-away battle royal. Then again, Bo Dallas appeared in a Rumble and that was promptly forgotten – oh, wait. Miz and Mizdow attempted to eliminate Riley, with Mizdow eventually tossing him to the floor. Bo Dallas eliminated Ryder and celebrated going under the bottom rope, which the announcers completely miscalculated. Big Show eliminated Itami, as Cole uttered the customary "welcome to the big leagues" – this company really sucks sometimes. Big Show and Ryback were running wild like it was 1986. "Let's go Mizdow" chants rang loud, as Big Show proceeded to eliminate man after man. The entire crowd chanted "feed me more" along with Ryback, which of course meant elimination from Big Show. This left Miz and Mizdow to take on the Big Show; with Mizdow finally refusing to follow Miz' orders. Miz freaked out with Show just standing there. Miz poked him in the chest over and over again, before he was eliminated by Mizdow! Mizdow tried with all his might to eliminate Show and almost got him over the top, but Show landed on the apron. They then teased the Benoit guillotine finish before Show eliminated Mizdow. I don't think they fully understood the magnitude of crowd reaction a Mizdow

victory would have received. Suffice is to say, the WrestleKingdom Battle Royal was better, but only just.

** 1/2

Aloe Blacc, a man I have never heard of, sang America the Beautiful a cappella. LL Cool J narrated a wacky video package supposedly analysing the "human condition" through a look at the evolution of entertainment media and a juxtaposition of Mania moments. He ended up cutting a super promo though.

1. Intercontinental Championship Ladder Match

Wade Barrett vs. Daniel Bryan vs. Dean Ambrose vs. Luke Harper vs. Dolf Ziggler vs. Stardust vs. R-Truth

There aired a ladder and IC title video package, with them putting the 2000/2001 ladder matches over when IC title matches clearly became irrelevant in the timeline – this package aired on the pre-show. Daniel Bryan came out to an enormous pop; he really should have been placed higher up on the card. Stardust had a really cool looking/cringe-worthy jacket. They got right to the highspots with R-Truth landing a tope, Stardust an Aerostar dive, Ziggler being tossed to the floor, Harper landing a tope, and Ambrose hitting an elbow from a ladder. Harper drove a ladder hard into the face of Bryan. Bryan landed some “yes” kicks on Barrett in the ladder, and Ambrose and Ziggler scrambled for the belt.



Stardust grabbed a, presumably WSX inspired sparkly ladder from under the ring, from which Barrett grabbed a rung and began beating people. Harper did the Terry Funk helicopter. Stardust killed himself and Barrett with a superplex from three quarters up a ladder. Ambrose landed his jawbreaker lariat on Harper. Ambrose was powerbombed through a ladder positioned between the ring and barricade. Ziggler was pulled off of a ladder and elbowed to death, the same for Stardust. Barrett looked to grab the title, Bryan looked for the victory himself, but Ziggler and Barrett interfered. Bryan, however

landed the busaiku knee to more yes chants, scaling the ladder only to be interrupted by Ziggler trading blows including headbutts! A headbutt war followed! Ziggler was then dropped to the mat and Bryan captured the belt following a great match.

*** ¾

2. Randy Orton vs. Seth Rollins w/ J & J Security

Orton landed a double DDT on J & J out on the floor before taking a high momentum tope from Rollins. Headlocks followed with Rollins yelling "this is my time" before punching Randy in the gut. Rollins landed an Asai moonsault. Orton landed a backdrop from the top and cross body for two. Orton went for the RKO, but was met with a superkick before landing an RKO anyway for two. Orton took out J & J with RKOs as they attempted to interfere. Orton kicked out of a curbstomp. Then came perhaps the single most spectacular spot of the weekend, with Orton lifting his head from a curbstomp propelling Rollins into the air for the most crazy video game RKO finish you will see.

Ronda Rousey was shown in the front row.

3. No Disqualification Match

Sting vs. Triple H



It's strange to note that Sting's first ever WWE match entrance took place in the blazing sun, but it did, with men in Sting masks playing Taiko drums. Hunter had a crazy Terminator-inspired entrance with terminators popping up on stage and Hunter rising up from the stage with a scouter and mechanized arms and helmet. Arnold showed up on screen saying "it's time for the game" – Hunter then lifted up some awesome terminator skulls. There were early "this is awesome chants" with Sting in the best

shape he has been in in years, no longer even looking like someone's grandmother, wearing a singlet. Sting landed a dropkick for a good pop and the dreaded "you still got it" chants. Hunter avoided the scorpion deathlock and rolled to the floor. Sting sent Hunter out to the floor, but was met with a vertical suplex. There was some obvious spot calling going on. Sting locked in the scorpion deathlock until, out ran DX, Road Dogg, Billy Gun and X-Pac. Sting landed a splash to the floor on all three men. Sting kicked out of a pedigree. Hunter grabbed his sledgehammer when the NWO music hit, and out came Nash, Hogan and Hall. DX are clearly in better shape than the NWO, and bumped all over the place for the WCW stable. Hunter kicked out of a scorpion death drop, Hunter reached for the sledgehammer, but Hogan grabbed the sledgehammer. X-Pac pushed Hogan over, thankfully not breaking him into pieces, Nash broke upon falling to the floor though. Scot Hall took a backdrop on the outside! Sting continued to hold onto the death lock until Hunter made it to the ropes. Michaels ran in with a superkick on Sting and gave him the crotch chop for two. Hunter was handed the sledgehammer again, Sting was given his bat. Sting used his bat to break the sledge hammer. Hunter landed a sledge hammer shot for the win. They had something going there. Sting and Hunter shook hands at the end of the match, which made even less sense than the NWO interfering on Sting's behalf.

** 1/2

There was a trailer for the new "adult animated comedy" 'CAMP WWE', 'Swerved', 'Jerry Springer's Too Hot for TV' as well as for the new Diva Search. Maria Menounos was with Daniel Bryan in the back congratulated by Pat Patterson. Piper came by and told Bryan he was changing the questions and kissed him on the head. Steamboat had to clearly lie saying that the ladder match was just as good as his Mania III match. Ric Flair came by too, but Bret Hart got the biggest pop. They all did "yes" chants together until Ron Simmons came by with a "Damn". There was a silly little concert with Skylar Grey, Travis Barker, and Kid Ink.

4. AJ & Paige vs. The Bella Twins

The crowd was expectedly dead for this. The Bellas had the heat on Paige with AJ knocked down to the floor. Paige landed a rolling senton off of the apron onto both Bellas. The room temperature tag was made to AJ who landed a unique implant DDT from an electric chair. Nikki was forced to tap to the Black Widow.

** 1/4

There was a "MyHeroIs" video package followed by a Hall of Fame recap with the inductees brought out on stage.

5. WWE United States Championship Match

Rusev w/ Lana vs. John Cena

Rusev had the greatest entrance ever with men marching with a Russian flag to the anthem, cannons going off and Rusev entering on a TANK. There was an "America, yay us" video package featuring not so universally beloved leaders George Bush Jr., Ronald Reagan, and Harry Truman – quite the controversial crew. The crowd still sang "John Cena sucks" to Cena's theme. Rusev overpowered Cena early and waved the Russian flag. Cena landed a leg slice and the crowd chanted for Lana. Cena landed a tornado DDT with Rusev kicking out at two. Rusev was being cheered over Cena in a strike battle, yes, Rusev, the evil Russian! Lana threw her high heel into the ring, which Cole called "one of the most bizarre things I've ever seen", Rusev then landed a diving headbutt for two! Cena landed a second rope

springboard ace crusher of all things! Cena grabbed a rollup for two and was met with a superkick. Rusev locked in the camel clutch, but Cena powered out. Lana got up on the apron, Rusev ran into her, and Cena landed the AA for the win. Rusev screamed at Lana to close the match off. Cena hugged Betty Skaland after the match, and shook hands with his dad.

** 1/2

There was a trailer for WrestleMania Dallas. Hunter and Stephanie were out for a promo announcing a new attendance record of 76,876 -- fascicle of course. She still cut a heel promo saying that it all wouldn't be possible without them. Hunter said that he feels as though he has beaten all those in the arena and those watching at home. This led to the return of the Rock. Rock rambled on for a while, which the people ate up, and he called Rock/HHH one of the biggest feuds of all time; another lie.



Rock told Hunter that he left his genitals in Stanford. Stephanie stepped in with her troll attempts saying that neither the Rock nor his family would be anything without the McMahons. Stephanie slapped Rock after a joke pertaining to her conception. They had a stare-down, Steph told him to get and he teased walking off. He then met eyes with Ronda for a gigantic pop and got Rousey to step over the barricade for a first bump. Stephanie tried to convince everyone that they were friends. Stephanie said that Rousey could destroy her in the octagon, but they were standing in her ring. Ronda said that any ring she steps into is hers. Ronda ordered Stephanie make her. Rock said that Ronda would play jump rope with Stephanie's Fallopian tubes. Rock said that it would be the last thing he said after Hunter stepped in, and Rock went after Triple H and Ronda tossed him. Ronda then blocked a slap and teased an armbar before Stephanie slip out.

6. Undertaker vs. Bray Wyatt

Bray made it down with a bunch of walking scarecrows, which was quite the interesting aesthetic, albeit gravely dampened by the afternoon light. Taker has switched back to his deadman pants attire from pre-2006, and has started to grow his hair back. Essentially, he was biker taker, but still playing the dead man gimmick. There were some loud "you still got it" chants. Undertaker landed the old

school. Wyatt was in control of Taker early. This was essentially Kane/Undertaker from WrestleMania 2004 with very little heat. Bray landed a choke slam for two with Taker rolling his eyes back in his head moments prior. Wyatt looked for the Sister Abigail, but was caught with a chokeslam before landing the tombstone for two and the match's first major pop. Undertaker kicked out of a Sister Abigail. Wyatt did his Exorcist gimmick, but Taker stood/sat up looking to trade. Undertaker countered the Sister Abigail into the tombstone for the win. To shamelessly steal a line from Rob McCarron of VoicesofWrestling.com and 'Shake Them Ropes', this was in fact the best Undertaker match all year.

There was an announcement trailer for a WWE Network podcast with Chris Jericho and John Cena.

7. WWE World Heavyweight Championship Match Brock Lesnar w/ Paul Heyman vs. Roman Reigns

The crowd HATED Roman Reigns to such an extent that they turned the crowd audio down during his entrance. The duo went straight after one another with Brock cutting his check and landing an F5 within the first minute. Lesnar no sold a strike from Reigns and landed a German to the delight of this crowd. Reigns smirked, which sure is the best way to win over a crowd after years of Cena smiles. Lesnar said "Suplex City, b***h" – a phrase that has, as expected, become a catchphrase in its own right. A destruction followed with knees in the ropes and suplex after suplex. Reigns attempted to fight back with a big knee, but was lariated to death on the floor. Lesnar's mouth was busted open too.



Reigns was caught with a belly to belly suplex and was pulled by the hair back into the ring. Lesnar landed another F5, but Reigns kicked out. Reigns continued to laugh whilst being suplexed to death, which just made Brock angry. Lesnar landed a third F5 for two. Lesnar was sent into the post and

busted open hardway. Lesnar just slid back into the ring at the count of nine, Reigns landed a superman punch and Lesnar remained standing; Lesnar still refused to fall even after a second. Reigns went for a third, but Lesnar looked to counter. Reigns landed a series of headbutts and two spears for two! Reigns went for another, but Lesnar landed another F5, but was unable to make the pin. This brought Rollins out! Rollins landed a curb-stomp, went for another, Lesnar caught him in the F5 position, was met with a spear, and Rollins made the cover for the win!

RAW Ramblings – March 30th 2015

SAP Centre: San Jose, CA.

Ben Carass.

For about 2 hours and 15 minutes, WWE put on a great post-Mania RAW and, for the most part, prevented the notoriously unruly crowd from completely hijacking the show. There was a hot angle with a super over **Brock Lesnar** killing fools, surprise NXT debuts and two very good championship matches with **Cena** and **Bryan** defending their newly won straps. Then things fell off a cliff during the third hour. They had **AJ, Paige & Naomi** beat **the Bellas & Natalya** in a match that went 13:10. The crowd didn't care at all and started chants about who the women may or may not be giving fellatio to. **Kevin Dunn** tried to dampen the audio, but you could still just about hear the tactless chants if you turned your TV up loud enough. **Rusev** then squashed **Goldust** in 2 minutes and there was a giant, "We want **Lana**" chant, because some imbecile seems to think that splitting **Rusev** and her up is a good idea. Finally we had the main event. **Randy Orton, Ryback & Roman Reigns vs. Seth Rollins, Big Show & Kane**; the crowd HATED this match and did their utmost to destroy it. **Reigns** was booed out of the building, **Ryback** wasn't over, **Orton** got hot at the fans for killing the match, **Big Show & Kane** were the target of "Please retire" chants and even **Vince McMahon & Kevin Dunn** gave up on the match when they decided to have the hard camera follow the wave as the people started to entertain themselves. Plus, throughout the ill-conceived main event there were a plethora of NXT chants, including the **Sami Zayn**, "Ole", "How you doin'", "**Breeze** is gorgeous", "Fight **Owens** Fight" and so on. **Reigns** pinned **Kane** at 13:02; nobody cared at all. After a fantastic WrestleMania and two-thirds of the best RAW all year, having **Big Show & Kane** in the main event, as well as mindlessly putting **Roman Reigns** into can't win situations just felt like a giant step backwards, or, as the crowd vociferously chanted during the main event, the "Same old Sh*t".

Now let's focus on the positives. **Brock Lesnar** is THE biggest babyface in the company right now and was booked tremendously. He came out at the top of the show, furious about what happened at Mania. **Paul Heyman** said he demanded his rematch right now, but **Stephanie** came out and told them that **Rollins** did an appearance on the Today show and hadn't arrived yet. So at the top of the second hour the match was set to take place, but **Rollins** played the chicken heel and tried to run away. **Brock** gave him a German but **Rollins** landed on his feet then hit **Lesnar** with an enzuigiri, which **Brock** no sold like a monster. **J&J** stopped **Lesnar** from hitting the F5 and **Rollins** escaped through the crowd. **Brock** then went on an unstoppable path of destruction, killing **J&J**, tipping the announce table over onto **Booker & JBL**, F5'ing **Michael Cole**, which got a huge reaction, and hoisting a "camera man" up for an F5. **Heyman** couldn't calm him down, so **Steph** came out and told **Brock** to stop. He didn't, and gave the "camera man" two F5's. **Stephanie** "indefinitely suspended" **Brock** and EMTs came out to check on everyone **Brock** had destroyed and **Cole** was stretchered out. With the exception of the **Ronda Rousey** deal at Mania, it was the best angle the company has shot all year and made **Brock** into an even bigger face than he was before. The only problems, and these are BIG problems, was that

Byron Saxton was thrown on TV to call the show ALONE for at least half-an-hour until **Jerry Lawler** was mercifully sent out to hold his hand. **Saxton** did the absolute worst job of an announcer I have ever heard and made **Striker** and **Coachman** calling WrestleMania main events seem like a good idea. The second, and most tone-deaf of all, was announcing that **Michael Cole** suffered “cervical spine damage” just 9 days after the death of **Perro Aguayo Jr.** **Cole** had better be off TV for at least a couple of weeks, even if it means listening to **Saxton** churning out WWE clichés in the most wooden manner possible.



As mentioned, **John Cena & Daniel Bryan** made the first defences of their respective championships. **Bryan** downed **Dolph Ziggler** with the running knee at 11:30 of a hot opener; crowd loved both guys and went crazy for everything. Match was very good. **Bad News Barrett** was on commentary and jumped **Bryan** after the match. **Sheamus** returned sporting a huge Mohawk and goofy braids in his beard and seemingly tuned heel by giving **Ziggler & Bryan** the Brogue kick. The fans chanted “You look stupid” at **Sheamus** and to be honest they weren’t entirely wrong. **Cena** issued an “open challenge”, which **Dean Ambrose** answered and the two arguably had an even better match than **Bryan & Ziggler**. **Cena** was obviously hated and won with the AA at 14:20; he slapped hands with **Ambrose** as a sign of respect afterwards, but the crowd even booed that because **John Cena** is Satan.

Of all the people to call up from NXT, the **Lucha Dragons** made their debut on RAW, teaming with **New Day** to beat **Tyson Kidd & Cesaro & the Ascension** in a 10 minute match. **Kalisto** looked very good and was super over with all his flips and such; **New Day** was hated and the crowd told them they sucked at every opportunity. **Kalisto** pinned **Viktor** with the shiranui. The stupid, “Lucha” chant was over with this crowd, however I suspect things will be very different in a week or two. **Adrian Neville** also made his debut for real and squashed **Curtis Axel** in 1:10 with the Red Arrow. Again, the hardcore crowd was into him big time and treated his debut like a huge deal. **Neville** wore a wacky purple cape and became the latest victim of guys in WWE being stripped of their first name. It’s just “**Neville**” now. I can’t explain why, but it is. Regardless, the debuts worked well in front of a receptive crowd, but I

have a feeling that both acts will face a struggle once we're back to the usual RAW crowd throughout the rest of the year.

They had **Sting** appear on the post-show. At first I scoffed at the idea of not having him on TV, however he said virtually nothing other than he didn't know what the future held and would take any opportunity the WWE gave him. **Bo Dallas** interrupted him and buried him for losing his one and only WrestleMania match. **Sting** gave him the Scorpion Death Drop and posed to end a complete nothing of a segment.



The only other segment of any note on the show was **Damien Mizdow**, yes he's still called **Mizdow** and still comes out to **Miz's** music, beating **Stardust** in 2:55. Post-match, **Miz** attacked him and yelled at him. People were into **Mizdow**, but when the bell rang they didn't really care, which I suspect will be a pattern for the rest of the feud.

And that was the show. Again, the first 135 minutes or so were great (ignoring **Byron Saxton** being an insufferable automaton) but the last part of the show was no good at all. The worst part about it is that **Brock** is gone until who knows when and it looks like we are left with a main event scene of **Rollins, Reigns, Orton, Big Show & Kane**. So, don't expect RAW to be as good as this show for a very long time.

RAW Ratings for March 23rd 2015

Ryan Clingman

The March 23rd edition of Monday Night RAW, the go-home show for WrestleMania 31, drew a 3.03 rating and averaged 4.19 million viewers over three hours. It was the best number since February 2nd and up from the 2.73 rating of the week prior. Sting and Brock Lesnar were both advertised, a rarity as of late, Hulk Hogan was also advertised, and Undertaker was at the very least teased through Bray

Wyatt's promos the week prior. The first hour drew 4.178 million viewers (1.81 million viewers and a 1.43 rating in the 18-49 demo), the second 4.342 (1.88 million viewers and a 1.48 rating in the 18-49 demo) and the third and final hour with an 11 minute overrun 4.043 million viewers (1.86 million viewers and a 1.46 rating in the 18-49 demo). Historically, the rating of the go-home show has meant little if anything with respect to the WrestleMania itself, as the WrestleMania 28 number can attest.

RAW Ratings for March 30th 2015

Ryan Clingman

Whether it was Seth Rollin's title victory, Lesnar buzz, knowledge of the noteworthy nature of the post-Mania RAW, or general interest in the outcome of WrestleMania 31, the post-Mania RAW this year not only did the best rating and viewership of 2014/5, but also the best number since RAW 1000 in 2012! It drew a 3.68 rating and 5.35 million viewers, making it the first edition of RAW to break the 5.00 million barrier since last year's post-Mania show. The first hour drew 5.227 million viewers (2.31 million viewers and a 1.82 rating in the 18-49 demo), the second 5.597 (2.49 million viewers and a 1.96 rating in the 18-49 demo), and the third and final hour 5.267 million viewers (2.28 million viewers and a 1.79 rating in the 18-49 demo). The slight drop may be due to the dull main event, although other than Big Show and Kane's poor past performance in main event positions, there isn't all too much evidence to substantiate that suggestion – and regardless, this week's rating was so good that I highly doubt anyone was worrying about the slight third hour drop with respect to the second.

Thank you as always to @Weffe811, the former @STD_85 on Twitter for his 18-49 rating contributions.

WWE NXT – April 1st 2015

Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL.

Ben Carass

NXT wasn't much of a show this week. Hideo Itami and Tyler Breeze had a decent 2-out-of-3 falls main event, but it was nothing spectacular and not really worth going out of your way to see. Especially if you are like me and find the idea of Itami losing a feud to Tyler Breeze unbelievably stupid. It's not just the, "let's put our guy over the big star from Japan" mentality that bothers me, because Breeze is a very good hand, it's the fact they are fulfilling their own prophecy of Itami being a failure. If they told Itami to just go out there and be himself then he would almost certainly be putting on better matches and having stand-out performances. The way things are going Itami is going to be stuck in a upper-midcard role in NXT until his contract expires and he is eventually cut, which makes me very sad indeed.

Sami Zayn opened the show and cut his return promo. He talked about going on the Abu Dhabi tour and all he could think about while he was over there was Kevin Owens. Sami said Owens wasn't the same guy he knew for the past ten years then declared that he wanted his rematch for the NXT title and vowed to kick Owen's ass.

Rhyno vs. Unnamed Jobber – Total squash for Rhyno with the gore at 0:20. Rhyno cut a promo about wanting to become the NXT champion then called out Zayn, Balor and Ownes, and said they would all get ripped in half with a gore.

The Dana Brooke vignette aired then they recapped Finn Balor vs. Kevin Owens from last week. Owens was backstage after the Balor match and said that nobody would take his NXT title away from him.

Bayley vs. Emma. – Bayley via pinfall in 4:20. Emma still did her wacky dance even though she turned heel and buried all the fans last week. Story of the match was Emma patronising Bayley early then trying to get her to bring out some aggression. Emma hit her splash in the corner then sat on Bayley and did her goofy dance, but Bayley hooked her arms and got the pin. – This was no good. I thought Emma was fed up of being the crowd-pleasing babyface with the bubbles and stupid dance? So why on Earth would she still be using them if she supposedly turned heel? The story of trying to make Bayley more aggressive has also been done in the past plenty of times when she was challenging for the women's title. I'm not high on this feud, everyone.

Becky Lynch cut a promo in the back about how all the other women in the division can't touch her and how she deserved a one-on-one title shot, Said she came all the way from Ireland to become the women's champion and welcomed everyone to, "N-Bex-T". – Decent promo: N-Bex-T is almost as bad as Ax-stream Rules.



Non-Title Match: Lucha Dragons vs. Blake & Murphy (NXT Tag Team Champions.) – Blake & Murphy over in 6:30. Basic affair. Hoodies did some dives early: Sin Cara hit a tope and Kalisto did a moonsault off the post onto both Dubstep Cowboys. Short heat segment on Kalisto then Sin Cara made the comeback, at least they have figured out it should be the other way around on RAW. Finish saw Blake hit Cara with a cheap shot from the outside then Blake & Murphy hit their running supelex/frog splash combo.

Devin was with Sami Zayn for a backstage promo. Rhyno showed up and told him that the line for the NXT title started behind him. A Solomon Crowe vignette aired; he also wants to become the NXT champion.

Jason Jordan vs. Tye Dillinger. – Jordan over in 3:08. Complete nothing match that nobody cared about. Rich Brennan called this a “Grudge match”, which was funny because I couldn’t even remember that they shot a breakup angle. Jordan dominated; Dillinger landed a few shots but Jordan cut him off and won with a T-bone suplex. – A rare instance of an NXT match with neither guy being over.

They recapped the Hideo Itami/Tyler Breeze feud and they both made their entrance for the main event.

2-Out-Of-3 Falls: Hideo Itami vs. Tyler Breeze. – Breeze over 2-1 in 10:59 (TV Time). Decent match, although painful to watch because Itami is capable of SO much more. Itami landed a bunch of strikes and won the first fall in 2:16 with the sick-kick. Breeze stalled in the corner and the ref held Itami back; Breeze popped up and hit the beauty shot to take the second fall at 3:40. Third fall was very basic: Breeze got the heat with some chinlocks and cut off Itami with a couple of dropkicks. Itami made his comeback and got a near-fall with a lariat. They traded pinning a few combos then Breeze got a near-fall with a superkick. Itami absorbed some shots and fired up with a flurry of strikes then hit the running corner dropkick. Finish saw Itami go for the sick-kick again, but Breeze countered with the Beauty shot for the win.

WWE SmackDown – April 2nd 2015.

Save Mart Centre, Fresno, CA

Ben Carass.

If WWE want to prevent the post-WrestleMania crowd from hijacking RAW next year they should consider running RAW in a city at least 150 miles away, because that is approximately the distance from San Jose to Fresno and there was virtually no residual Mania crowd at this SmackDown show. Of course that throws up all sorts of logistical problems and it is no doubt easier to run in the same city as WrestleMania, however if the company gets fed up of having their TV show pillaged by the hardcores then it is something they might consider. Personally, I hope they don’t go that route because I don’t subscribe to Lance Storm’s view of “pay your money, shut up and watch the show”. The post Mania RAW is more often than not the best and most fun show of the year, so long may the hijackings continue. Unfortunately, SmackDown was nowhere near as enjoyable as RAW this week and it was more or less business as usual from the useless B show.

Seth Rollins opened the show and gloated about becoming the new WWE champion; He of course had **J&J Security**, **Big Show** and **Kane** with him. **Randy Orton** came out and said that he nearly ripped **Seth’s** head off with an RKO at Mania and noted he never had his one-on-one rematch for the title. **Kane** booked **Orton** against **Show** and said he would think about giving **Orton** a shot at **Rollins** if he could beat **Show**. Mercifully, the match only went 1:18 or-so because **Seth’s** goons attacked **Orton** for the DQ. **Ryback** ran down to help and he and **Orton** cleaned house on the **Authority** while **Rollins** escaped up the ramp. Later in the office, **Kane** said **Orton vs. Rollins** would be an “interesting match” at Extreme Rules and accused **Seth** of being scared of **Orton**. **Seth** said something smelled terrible and **Dean Ambrose** appeared with a newspaper after supposedly using **Kane’s** executive bathroom. **Kane** then booked him against **Luke Harper** as punishment for using the executive washroom. – I guess somebody must have used **Vince’s** personal bathroom or something, because there is no other explanation for making **Ambrose** look like an utter fool than the personal amusement of **Vince McMahon**. Also, they didn’t officially announce the **Orton/Rollins** match for Extreme Rules but it is clear that is the direction they are going.

Daniel Bryan faced **Sheamus** in the main event and they had a good, hard-hitting match. Maybe too hard-hitting, as **Bryan** was busted open hardway towards the end although it looked to me like he actually did it himself delivering headbutts to **Sheamus**. Finish was a lame count-out win for **Sheamus**, because **Bad News Barrett** was on commentary and he nailed **Bryan** with the bullhammer behind the ref's back on the floor to cause the count-out. What was that about not booking the IC champion like a geek? If they didn't want **Sheamus** or **Bryan** to lose then, and this is a novel idea I know, DON'T BOOK THEM IN A MATCH! From **Barrett's** commentary it seems like they are going with **Bryan vs. Barrett** at Extreme Rules, however that could change if they want to get **Sheamus** in the mix.



Roman Reigns did a sit-down interview with **Byron Saxton**. **Reigns** was fine, actually he was good in places, but to me his delivery is still way too forced and everything he says feels contrived. He talked about relishing the fight against **Lesnar** and being 30 seconds away from winning until **Rollins** cashed in. **Reigns** didn't really show enough emotion when talking about having the biggest moment of his life taken away from him. He just played the quite rage deal and said he had beat **Rollins** once and would do so again. – They had a chance to redefine **Reigns'** character here and try turn the tide of negativity towards him, however he was still the same old quite badass that nobody bought in the first place.

John Cena cut another “rah-rah” USA promo and said he would be holding open challenges for his US title every week. **Rusev** showed up with **Lana**, who had her ***** WrestleMania outfit on and her right ankle bandaged up. **Rusev** said he didn't lose at Mania and looked at **Lana** and called himself a “Russian Tank.” He told **Cena** to surrender the US title or he would be crushed at Extreme Rules then called for the Russian flag to drop. Instead, **Cena** had arranged for the Stars and Stripes to fall from the rafters and he pledged allegiance to kick **Rusev's** ass at Extreme Rules. – Just like **Bray Wyatt** last year, the monster heel is going to go 1-2 in a program with **John Cena**. **HOW IS THIS SUPPOSED TO HELP RUSEV?!** It just boggles my mind. Look what happened to **Wyatt** after losing the feud to

Cena. At least **Rusev** has been kept strong all year, so he might recover from going down 1-2 to **Cena**, however if they take **Lana** away from him then he is 100% dead in the water.



Miscellaneous: **Naomi** downed **Natalya** at 2:15. **Bellas** were on commentary; **Naomi** wants a Diva's title shot. Yippie! **Miz** beat **R-Truth** in 1:20; yawn. Hey, remember **Awesome Truth**? Yeah, me neither. **Dean Ambrose vs. Luke Harper** went to a DQ or a No Contest at 7:35; **Harper** powerbombed **Ambrose** through the announcer's table, however no announcement on the winner was made. **Harper** threw around some furniture and intimidated some refs and EMTs; it was a good follow up to the powerbomb through the ladder at Mania, but it did kind of come off like a cheap imitation of the **Brock Lesnar** deal from RAW. **Ambrose** and **Harper** will likely be having some kind of gimmick match at Extreme Rules. The **Prime Time Players** cut a pre-tape promo and buried the **New Day** for being geeks that aren't over. It was goofy and I have ZERO desire to see a **PTP/New Day** program.

Bits & Pieces

Ryan's Misc Star Ratings:

DDT:

Harishima vs. Kota Ibushi 2015/02/15 *** ¼

EVOLVE 39:

Drew Gulak vs. Timothy Thatcher *** ¾

Tommy End vs. Buff Busick *** ¼

Chris Hero vs. Ethan Page ** ½

PJ Black vs. Drew Galloway ***

EVOLVE 40:

Timothy Thatcher vs. Tommy End **** ¼

Drew Gulak vs. TJ Perkins *** ½
Chris Hero vs. Biff Busick *****
PJ Black vs. Ricochet *** ¼

WWE Monday Night RAW March 28th 2015:
Daniel Bryan vs. Dolf Ziggler *** ¾

WrestleMania Weekend Awards

MVP: Timothy Thatcher
Match of the Weekend: Chris Hero vs. Timothy Thatcher WWN Mercury Rising Supershow
Show of the Weekend: WWE WrestleMania 31
Top Prospect: Jeff Cobb
Mania Weekend Moment: Hero/Thatcher Closing Stretch

Next Week's Issue

In next week's issue we take a look at WWE's plans heading into Extreme Rules, Invasion Attack 2015, and much more!

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