



## **Cubed Circle Newsletter 184 – Wrestling Dontaku 2015 & Rasslin**

We have quite the assortment of topics in this week's newsletter with coverage of the 2015 Wrestling Dontaku show, and the very interesting Dominion card subsequently announced, a RAW that was actually enjoyable, the horrendous rating it did, NXT, and the first in hopefully a long line of Mid-South television reviews as Ben travels back in time to December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1981 to update you on Terry Orndorff/JYD, Iron Sheik enhancement matches, cultural sensibilities of the time, and more!

– *Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor*

### **Wrestling Dontaku 2015: Hirooki Goto Gets His Big Win**

*Ryan Clingman*

Debuting in 2003, Hirooki Goto began his pro-wrestling career at a fairly inopportune time, too late to be considered a contemporary of Tanahashi and Nakamura, but too early for the likes of Okada and Naito. Combine this with Goto's lack of flair with respect to the aforementioned performers, and unfortunately, even following New Japan's "renaissance", Goto has remained several rungs below the likes of Tanahashi, Nakamura, Ishii, and Okada with respect to star power. Given Goto's immense working ability, and aptitude to perform and deliver in big matches better than most anyone else in the company, work is certainly by no means his problem. Rather, he has, for the majority of his career, been a victim of a cruel set of circumstances that ultimately capped a large portion of his career at the upper midcard level. Whilst Goto will remain at or near that position most probably for the remainder of his career, his hard work with the company for over a decade (including excursions) was rewarded with a victory of Shinsuke Nakamura to regain the IWGP Intercontinental Championship, a title he last held in 2012, before dropping it to Nakamura, who, during that and subsequent reigns, brought the championship to a status approaching that of the IWGP Heavyweight Championship.

One should be careful, however, when discussing the extent to which the IWGP Intercontinental Championship has been built, as only Nakamura and Tanahashi have held it since the beginning of its true, steep rise to prominence last year. With the championship not around the waist of a Tanahashi or Nakamura, I find it difficult to believe that Hirooki Goto will be able to maintain the level of prestige that the title has carried for quite some time now. However, to consider the opposite effect negligible would also be ignorant, as Goto will, undoubtedly, experience some kind of rub from not only defeating Nakamura clean, but also taking his championship, which has been strongly protected over recent months. Given the fact that most every other championship in the company has been switched in some form over the last few months it would be good to see Goto breathe some fresh life into the division, whilst building his singles legacy and creating an opening

for Nakamura to branch out into a more varied direction heading into the 2015 G1 Climax. There is little doubt that Goto's in-ring ability is such that he will be able to, in most cases, produce at the very least on par with Nakamura.

Not surprisingly, due to the imminent Best of the Super Juniors tournament a challenger did not emerge for Goto, nor could there have been, as Shinsuke Nakamura is set to rematch Goto at New Japan's next big show, 'Dominion' which is a return to the NJPW pay-per-view format of old, with, what looks to be at least preliminarily, a stacked card. Apart from Nakamura's rematch, which I suspect he will lose, not only due to all that was discussed of Goto above, but also due to the sheer number of potential challengers available for Goto over the next few months, as well as possible alternative paths for Nakamura. Kazuchika Okada will also challenge AJ Styles for the IWGP Heavyweight Championship, which is an interesting matchup, not due to any unique possibilities work wise, as we have seen numerous times what both men can deliver together, but rather from a booking standpoint.



Styles has just won the championship, and has only had a single defence thus far, that defence being against Ibushi last month at Invasion Attack. From this perspective, it wouldn't be all too great of a decision to switch the title, as Styles should be given time to produce a constructive run, one which wouldn't end in a fashion quick enough to turn the championship into a hot potato belt, which is a real possibility given the number of comparatively short reigns and few defences we have seen over the past year. On the other hand, however, the story of Okada reclaiming the title from Styles, a man who beat Tanahashi, who in turn Okada simply hasn't been able to put away in big matches, creates a natural match-up for down the line – at next year's Dome show, quite possibly. If they do decide to move in that direction, then Okada would most assuredly have to go over not only Styles, but also Tanahashi on a big show, perhaps even the G1 finals, in order for the story to reach some sort of conclusion. Although, conclusions are not always guaranteed, as can be seen with career rivals Kawada and Misawa for example.

Elsewhere on the upcoming card, Katsuyori Shibata will be facing off against Kazushi Sakuraba, which, in not the slightest of hyperbolic fashions, is the match I am most excited to see in all of pro-wrestling at present. The pair faced off briefly in a multi-man tag match on the Dontaku show, and



by all indications should have an outstanding match. Unfortunately for Sakuraba, as Shibata was quick to demonstrate in their tag, he is unwilling to hold back on any strikes, which is far from ideal for someone who has taken as much head trauma as Sakuraba. Still, the battle of Laughter7 teammates has been an obvious eventual destination since their comeback in late 2012.

These three matches already put Dominion at a distinct advantage over this past week's Dontaku show, as Dontaku tended to drag during its later matches simply due to a large portion of decent, but far from blow-away, homogeneous matches, a problem for WWE that we discussed last week. Of course, this is a problem far smaller for New Japan than it is for the WWE, and one that can be remedied in but a few shows by building to special cards such as Dominion - a show that may supply an expecting audience a good four 4\*+ matches.

Additionally, the Best of the Super Juniors 2015 looks better than it has in years with Liger, Taguchi, Komatsu, Berreta, Gedo, Cavernario, 'O Reilly,

and Chase Owens in the A Block and Tiger Mask IV, KUSHIDA, Shelley, Dorada, Romero, Fish, Nick Jackson, and David Finlay III in the B. Whilst this year's tournament may not feature the Ricochet and Ibushis of the world, the possibility of seeing all but a couple of the men in the above list work with one another is interesting at the very least, and at times down right exciting.

Whilst Dontaku may not have been the greatest of shows, or featured the very best matches that New Japan has seen this year, the shows that look to proceed it introduce some interesting new directions for the product – namely Okada as IWGP Heavyweight champion once more, Goto as an interesting new secondary champion, Shibata/Sakuraba which could very well be the match of the year, and a daring, exciting and fun Best of the Super Juniors line-up.

## **NJPW Wrestling Dontaku May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015**

### **Fukuoka Kokusai Center, Fukuoka**

*Ryan Clingman*

1. Yuji Nagata, Jushin Thunder Liger, Tiger Mask IV & Mascara Dorada vs. KUSHIDA, Ryusuke Taguchi, Manabu Nakanishi & Captain New Japan

KUSHIDA and Dorada, two of the the three best men in the match, executed a slick sequence before transitioning into standard New Japan undercard fair -- although Liger and Nagata were admittedly entertaining working with KUSHIDA. Dorada landed a spectacular middle rope assisted tope, Nakanishi's pescado that followed was less so. Nagata pinned the Captain with a backdrop.

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2. Kota Ibushi & Yohei Komatsu vs. Tetsuya Naito & Sho Tanaka

Naito's skin was a strange shade of crimson tonight, and on the topic of aesthetics, Tanaka, who has hair remarkably similar to Ibushi's, started off with his hair-mentor. Ibushi pulled off the always effective Young Lion no sell . Komatsu, who was more over than Tanaka, went at it with Naito. Whilst Ibushi was very good at playing the bully, Naito was better, as he is a fantastic in-ring jerk when he wants/is forced to be. Komatsu tends to oversell at times, but is as over as any Young Lion in recent memory, and is technically very sound, so his work is most definitely effective. Komatsu and Naito had a wonderful strike battle before Naito and Ibushi went at it for the first time in the match. Naturally, Naito and Ibushi were great with one another and tagged their respective Young Lions in. Tanaka set Komatsu up for Tanaka's Boston crab, which looked to be the finish with Ibushi restrained on the floor, but Kota slipped back in with a kick on Tanaka for the break. Komatsu fired back, was dropped with an amateur slam, but was caught in a roll-up for two as Ibushi and Naito grappled for access to the ring on the floor. Tanaka was then forced to submit to a single leg Boston crab. This is what big show New Japan undercard matches should be, creative pairings that yield good matches. Komatsu and Tanaka are going to be something special. Naito and Ibushi stared each other down in the post match, with Ibushi back-flipping off of the ring apron to show Naito up.

\*\*\* 1/2

3. TenCozy & Tomoaki Honma vs. Tama Tonga, Bad Luck Fale & Cody Hall

This match kicked off like every single Bullet Club tag you have ever seen with Tonga and company jumping team Cozy before the bell. TenCozy recovered long enough to get some offence in, but were, of course, worn back down in short fashion. Tonga decided to utilise Mongolian Chops, a guaranteed heat-getter in Tenzan matches. This led to a comeback, as it most often does, with Honma tagged in before the match broke down. Honma landed the Kokeshi for a big pop and the victory in a match that didn't overstay its welcome, thankfully.

\*\* 3/4

4. IWGP Junior Heavyweight Tag Team Championship Match

RPG Vice (Rocky Romero & Beretta) vs. reDragon vs. The Young Bucks

For whatever reason, RPG Vice feels like a star tag team on a level beyond that of Forever Hooligans. Nick, terrified of Romero, tagged Fish in - Romero responded with a windmill eye-poke and was then abandoned by everyone on the apron for some over comedy. There were dives everywhere with 'O Reilly at least attempting to add some semblance of story by landing an apron

armbreaker on Beretta, setting up for the armbreaker. There was a, comparatively long heat segment on Beretta, with RPG Vice targeted by reDragon and the Bucks. Matt Jackson parodied Romero's lariat barrage in the corner, but Romero quickly retaliated. 'O Reilly spiked poor Beretta, and then kicked him up into a Fish German. Romero took a knee drop guillotine. 'O Reilly locked an armbreaker in on Beretta in the ropes and Trent then superplexed Matt Jackson onto everyone else on the floor. That spot spectacular, as it was, required that the other four competitors and a couple of juniors stand in place for an incredulous 10-15 seconds. Romero kicked out of a rope-assisted Bucks swanton. They set up for More Bang For Your Buck, but Trent tagged in, Romero got the boots up, and Beretta did the Benjamin straight vertical leap into a belly to belly suplex. Trent hit his tombstone, but had Matt Jackson and 'O Reilly break the pin. 'O Reilly and Nick traded kicks, 'O Reilly went for the jawbreaker lariat, but was pulled to the floor for a an X-factor tombstone on the floor -- luckily Jim Cornette wasn't watching this, or he would have had an embolism. The Bucks then landed More Bang for Young Buck on Trent to become the new Hot Potato. IWGP Junior Heavyweight Champions.

\*\*\* 3/4

#### 5. IWGP Junior Heavyweight Championship Match

Kenny Omega w/ The Young Bucks vs. Alex Shelley w/ KUSHIDA

Shelley entered in a futuristic biker helmet. Omega looked for a "handshake", but was dealt a Shelly middle finger. I enjoyed the fact that all three men at ringside won their matches, and were thus fit to accompany Omega, and Shelly. Of the past 25 wrestlers to appear on the show, 12 were gaijin. Matt Jackson had a planned dive thwarted by the Bucks and had a garbage can thrown at his head upon a second attempt -- this begat the heat. Omega kicked the can into Shelley's head like a soccer ball off a distraction, but Shelley kicked out of the fisherman's buster that followed. Omega took a downward spiral into a chair mounted can on the floor and a DDT off of the apron to the outside. Shelley landed another in the ring. Omega got his knees up off of a Super Fly splash. Omega was dropped with a full nelson suplex. Shelley hit a belly to back piledriver, but the referee was pulled to the floor for the obligatory ref bump and Bullet Club chaos. Shelley laid the Bucks out with a dive, and Omega took sliced bread for a believable nearfall. Shelley was then drilled with a running knee and took the Katayoku no Tenshi for the pin. KUSHIDA kicked Kenny's cleaner broom, and said that he wouldn't be entering the Best of the Super Juniors in what felt like a bad anime dub of a generic super villain.

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#### 6. IWGP Tag Team Championship Match

Mike Bennett, Matt Taven & Maria Kanellis vs. Karl Anderson & Amber and Doc Gallows

There was the greatest video package of the month recounting Anderson's love for Maria Kanellis to opera. This was essentially the Maria Kanellis and Amber Gallows show featuring four men. Anderson chased over Maria, but took a right hand from Taven around the corner. Amber and Kanellis worked in the same fashion that you would expect from a mid-2000s gimmick women's match -- Maria was worlds better than Amber though. Maria was forced to dance hesitantly with Anderson, who she proceeded to kick in the crotch. She then rolled Amber Gallows up for the win. In the post match Amber did her best Stephanie McMahon impersonation and Anderson threw Kanellis into Doc's fist before landing their finish. Bennett and Taven cleared the ring as Anderson walked off with a cold look on his face.

\* 3/4

7. Katsuyori Shibata, Hiroshi Tanahashi & Togi Makabe vs. Tomohiro Ishii, Kazushi Sakuraba & Toru Yano



Replacing Yano with anyone in the CHAOS stable other than Jado would have produced a better trios combination. Ishii herding Sakuraba and Yano into the corner to go to battle with Makabe was highly amusing, though. Sakuraba and Shibata delivered some captivating matwork, making the proposition of an eventual singles match even more tantalising. Sakuraba pulled Tanahashi in for a sleeper from his corner, and Shibata did the same with Yano. Shibata, however, released, allowing Yano to undo the turnbuckle pad and engage in standard Yano antics on the floor. Fairly uninteresting heat on Tanahashi ensued. It dragged some and the tag was made to Makabe, who went at it once more with Ishii. The respective tags were made to Sakuraba and Shibata. Shibata landing his full force running dropkick on Sakuraba, who has taken copious amounts of head punishment in his life, made me cringe. Tanahashi and Yano were the legal pair once more. Tanahashi landed a couple of slingblades, CHAOS was taken out to the floor, but Yano got his knees up off of a high fly flow. Tanahashi then pinned Yano with a roll-up of all things. Unlike some of the earlier tags, this match went too long for my tastes.

\*\*\* 1/4

8. Kazuchika Okada & YOSHI-HASHI w/ Gedo vs. AJ Styles & Yujiro Takahashi

Whilst I had previewed and read through this card before hand for the newsletter, I couldn't quite piece this match together before Styles and Takahashi came out. I recognised that there was another match on the show, and that it was non-title, but couldn't come up with a partner for Styles -- suffice to say the appearance of Yujiro was disappointing. Watching Takahashi and HASHI, as much as HASHI has improved, second from the top was somewhat disheartening. Okada and Styles were as good together as you would expect, however. Okada responded to a Styles pele with a dropkick. HASHI ran wild showcasing his recent improvement. Styles pulled off a new facebuster on HASHI for a nearfall. HASHI landed a lariat on Takahashi for a good pop and was taken to the top by Styles where he fought for, and then missed a Swanton bomb. Styles slipped out from under HASHI on a second attempt and landed the Bloody Sunday and Styles Clash for the win. Styles and Okada faced off in the post match, implying that they will be facing one another on the next big show. Styles went for the Styles clash on the belt, Okada reversed it and looked for the rainmaker, but Styles slid out. Okada then lifted the belt high before politely passing it over to Red Shoes for AJ. As much as

this match was dull the post match was exciting and very effective.

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#### 9. IWGP Intercontinental Championship Match Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Hirooki Goto

NJPW built to this match with a fantastic video package that got me excited using exclusively a language I don't understand. They started out with some matwork before Nakamura landed a cheeky kick, which led to Goto overpowering him to the floor. Nakamura was playing MANDGAMESMAGGLE and slid in and out of the ring making binocular eyes. Goto caught Nakamura on the floor, but was met with a guillotine knee drop on the guardrail, which, as always, can't be at all good for Nakamura's knees. Nakamura was in full control at this point, toying with Goto, and fooling around with his eyes, but was knocked straight down with a Goto lariat. The pair exchanged forearms. Nakamura looked for a Boma Ye following a front suplex. Goto executed a highly impressive leg lariat to a top rope mounted Nakamura, sending him to the floor. Goto looked for the over the knee neckbreaker, but had to lift Nakamura up thrice to get it. Nakamura ducked a lariat and landed a knee and reverse powerslam. Nakamura looked for the Boma Ye, but was met with a gigantic lariat for a double down. Yet another strike battle ensued, but Nakamura landed a flurry of body strikes and one of his flying face kicks sending Goto to the apron. They fought on the middle rope allowing Nakamura to land a middle rope Boma Ye and a running variant for two. Goto avoided a knee and landed a headbutt, which led to a trade of a couple of headbutts and a huge Goto lariat for two. Goto then landed his top rope over the knee neckbreaker for two! Nakamura took the Shouten Kai for a much deserved Goto victory. Goto, as one of the most talented members of the New Japan roster, and someone who unfortunately debuted between two generations, hasn't been able to advance to the same degree as a Nakamura or Okada, but still has an unbelievable degree of talent.

\*\*\*\* 1/4

Goto closed the show out with a promo and he then got the entire crowd to lift their hands at once a few times like a Mexican Wave?

#### RAW Ramblings – May 4<sup>th</sup> 2015 Bell Centre: Montreal, Quebec. *Ben Carass.*

The list of good episodes of RAW this year is at exactly one. That being the post-WrestleMania show on March 30<sup>th</sup> and even the last half-hour of that fell off a cliff. Well we can add May 4<sup>th</sup> from Montreal to that list and perhaps even put it at the top. For months RAW has been a terrible, at times, torturous 3 hours of television, but this past Monday was a veritable oasis in the barren wasteland of the post-WrestleMania wilderness.

**Sami Zayn** debuted during the top of the third hour segment and challenged **John Cena** for the US title. **Cena** cut a promo about how he'll never say "I quit" against **Rusev**, but that isn't the story here. **Bret Hart** made a surprise appearance to introduce **Zayn**, however **Heath Slater** kept up his running gag and tried to accept **Cena's** open challenge. **Bret** dropped **Slater** with one shot and brought out **Sami Zayn**, who naturally got an enormous reaction from his hometown crowd. Unfortunately for **Zayn**, he legitimately dislocated his shoulder during his ring entrance of all things. It appeared to happen when **Sami** climbed the steps and was throwing his arms up in the air; it looked completely innocuous and watching live I didn't even notice anything was wrong. Shortly into the match, **Zayn** took two of **Cena's** proto-plexes and the ref threw up the dreaded "X"; the

doctor got in the ring and **Sami** could be seen mouthing the words, “just pop it back in.” I thought the whole thing was an elaborate work at the time and would play into the match, giving **Zayn** a solid out when he lost to **Cena**. In hindsight, it was not a work and **Sami** worked for 10+ minutes in what must have been excruciating pain. The match itself wasn’t the best **Sami Zayn** match you will ever see, nor was **John Cena** a very good opponent in terms of in-ring chemistry. Regardless, the fans were into **Zayn** big time and the match had a special feel because of it. **Zayn** got to do his tornado DDT through the post on the floor (with a bad shoulder) and, even more impressive, was given the approval to kick out of **Cena**’s AA. The finish could have been done better, as **Zayn** hit the Blue Thunder bomb for a near-fall then **Cena** came back instantly with the ugly springboard stunner and a second AA to get the pin at 10:40. The post-match made up for the abrupt finish, as **Cena** helped **Zayn** up, shook his hand and left **Sami** alone in the ring to receive a standing ovation from the crowd. You know, I complained about **Neville** losing to top guys when he debuted, and look at him now. He’s just a guy that does flips. **THIS** is how you make a star out of a new guy by having him lose to a main eventer; it was almost like **Cena**’s debut against **Angle** in 02, only this was arguably more effective since **Zayn** was already over with the fans and got to look strong by kicking out of **Cena**’s finish. Where the injury leaves **Zayn**’s main event against **Kevin Owens** on the NXT Takeover special on May 20<sup>th</sup> is not yet clear; we’ll have to see if he works any more shows in the meantime or is given some time to rest up.



The main story of the show set up the main event of Payback, which is now a Fatal Four-way for the WWE title. As usual, dudes talked during the opening segment: **New Day** interrupted **Randy Orton & Roman Reigns** which led to a 3-on-2 handicap match. Incredibly, the two top babyfaces DID NOT beat the three-man tag champs and **Kofi Kingston** pinned **Orton** clean after **Reigns** accidentally speared him at 13:40. The match was actually quite fun and it was the right finish for the story. **New Day** also continued to celebrate throughout the show in backstage skits, which was awesome. **Kane** then booked **Orton vs. Reigns** as the main event of the show then in a backstage segment booked **Seth Rollins vs. Dean Ambrose** and banned **J&J Security** from ringside. There was more pre-match talking; **Kane** made the stip that **Ambrose** would be added to the WWE title match at Payback if he won and **Seth** went crazy. Match was really good and the crowd were super-hot towards the finish. **Rollins** gave **Ambrose** a running powerbomb into the barricade; **Ambrose**



nailed the jawbreaker then survived a run-in from **J&J** and got the win with a roll-up at 16:30. The **Reigns/Orton** main event started 3 minutes into the overrun and it was a total nothing 5 minute match. **Jamie Noble** made the **Authority** members “special” participants outside the ring, circa Over the Edge 1998. Of course, it turned into a no-contest schmoz when the **Authority** attacked **Reigns & Orton**. **Ambrose** ran down to make the save and the three babyface sent the **Authority** packing. **Orton** then dropped **Reigns** with an RKO and **Ambrose** responded with a DDT to **Randy** and he stood tall to close the show. So the main event of Payback is **Rollins vs. Reigns vs. Ambrose vs. Orton**. The addition of **Ambrose** certainly freshens things up, although it would have been nice if they made the three former **Shield** members finally facing each other into a bigger deal with some more build. I guess they still have another week to do something.



**Good Filler:** **Tyson Kidd & Cesaro** beat **The Ascension** in 4:10. **Kidd & Cesaro** were great babyfaces and over huge in Montreal; it was fun, despite the involvement of the **Ascension**. **Nikki Bella** was scheduled to have a singles match, but **Naomi & Tamina Snuka** jumped both **Bellas** from behind in the aisle and left them lying. **Naomi** claimed she and **Tamina** were “family” – tremendous WWE logic there. **Sheamus & King Bad News Barrett** downed **Neville & Dolph Ziggler** in 8:45. **Barrett** did a typical heel King promo beforehand and called the fans “filthy commoners.” Match was good, although **Neville** ate the bullhammer for the clean win, so he’s officially just a mid-card guy forever now.

**Bad Filler:** **Ryback** was interviewed by **Renee** in the ring. Fans chanted “Goldberg” at him and he acknowledged it, which shut them up for a while. His promo was terrible and went on and on about nothing in particular. **Bray Wyatt** then appeared on the Tron for more talking and did his usual rambling about, you guessed it, nothing in particular. **Bryon Saxton** was with **Lana** in the back. He asked her how it felt to be over with the fans. **Fandango** showed up and told her to embrace it then **Rusev** appeared and chased him away. This led to a match, during which **Fandango** went outside and encouraged **Lana** to do his dance. She obliged and the crowd popped; **Rusev** sent her to the back and killed **Fandango** with the camel-clutch. **Lana’s** sudden change from ice queen to friendly, happy-go-lucky dancing girl is so jarring and makes absolutely zero sense. I hope this is all part of an elaborate swerve because, as I have said before, **BREAKING UP LANA & RUSEV IS A TERRIBLE IDEA!** **Stardust** beat **R-Truth** in 2:58 because he had a bag full of toy spiders and **Truth** was scared; it was an embarrassment.

## **RAW Ratings for May 4<sup>th</sup> 2015**

*Ryan Clingman*

Monday's edition of RAW, going against the NBA Playoffs with LeBron James, drew the lowest non-holiday non-football season rating since 1997 – and the second lowest non-holiday rating since 1997. And this was for a show that was widely hailed as one of the best editions of the program in months. It drew a 2.55 rating and 3.57 million viewers. They once again remained unable to retain viewers with the first hour, which went against the NBA playoffs drawing an expected show low of 3.422 million viewers (1.31 million viewers and a 1.03 rating in the 18-49 demo), the second with no such competition rose to 3.709 million viewers (1.13 rating in the 18-49 demo and 1.44 million viewers), but then the third hour with an 11 minute overrun dropped to 3.588 million viewers (1.46 million viewers and a 1.15 rating). One week's rating doesn't mean much, but since WrestleMania RAW has been performing poorly in the ratings accelerating the year-on-year ratings decline, which is a long term worry given that television is now far and away their primary revenue stream and most profitable sector. However, the fact that they were able to retain viewers in what is far and away the most import demographic for advisors, the 18-49 demo, is a positive, if only a small one in comparison to the ratings trouble they have been facing over recent months.

*As always thanks to @Weffe on Twitter for his 18-49 demographic data.*

## **WWE NXT – May 6<sup>th</sup> 2015**

**Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL.**

*Ben Carass*

With only 3 weeks to build the Takeover special on May 20<sup>th</sup>, this was a promo, angle and vignette heavy show with only 16 minutes of the hour dedicated to actual wrestling. Still, the build was done well for the most part, and we got the first look at Uhaa Nation, who debuted in a backstage deal and had a fancy video package hyping his arrival. If you're looking for wrestling then give this show a miss, but if you like following the storylines heading into the Takeover specials this is the show for you.

**Charlotte vs. Emma.** – Charlotte over in 5:50. Decent NXT women's match; fans were into it, but it wasn't anything special. Still better than 99% of the main roster matches, however. Emma worked over the leg for the heat. Charlotte made her comeback and won with the Natural Selection. Generic Chumpstain Greg took over ring announcing duties since Jo-Jo has been called up to the main shows. He was completely generic and nondescript, so just what the WWE want. Emma wrestled in the Bayley t-shirt she stole last week. Bayley showed up post-match and Emma gave her an insincere hug, which Bayley turned into a belly-to-belly. Bayley ripped her shirt off Emma and retrieved her headband that Emma pilfered then threw it out to the crowd, so she can't have missed it that much.

A Becky Lynch vignette aired. You can tell they are really trying to make her into a big deal and she looks to be the one who will carry the NXT women's division when Charlotte and Sasha Banks are called up.

Michael Cole conducted a sit-down interview with Kevin Owens. Cole asked if the issue with Sami Zayn was about more than just the NXT title. Owens brushed him off a couple of times and said it was all about the title, because that's how he earns money to feed his family. Cole got on his high horse and asked how he could do what he did to his former best friend, Sami Zayn. Owens told Cole the only headline he could give was that he was a good father and husband that provides for

his family. Owens closed by sarcastically telling Cole that he enjoyed his work on Monday nights.

**Rhyno vs. Bull Dempsey.** – Total squash for Rhyno with the gore in 1:00. Rhyno cut a promo afterwards and challenged Baron Corbin to a match at Takeover.

Sasha Banks was backstage and cut a promo on Becky Lynch in front of a picture of the Fabulous Moolah and said she would retain the women's title at Takeover.

Uhaa Nation met with William Regal in his office to sign his NXT contract then a great promo package on Uhaa aired about wanting to become a legend and create history. They didn't bother giving us his new goofy WWE name.

**Enzo Amore & Colin Cassady w/ Carmella vs. Scott Dawson & Dash Wilder.** – Match never got started. They played the NYC boys music twice but they didn't show then cut to a scene in the back with Blake & Murphy laying out Enzo & Cass.



Michael Cole sit-down interview with Sami Zayn. Sami called Owens a liar and told Cole their issue was very personal. Cole talked about Sami being Owens' best man at his wedding and Zayn said he would call out Owens next week to demand an explanation for his actions. They showed clips of Zayn vs. Cena from RAW and referenced his dislocated shoulder, but never specified the injury and played it up like the status of his health was unknown.

Regal brought out Becky Lynch and Sasha Banks for a contact signing angle. Becky cut a total babyface promo about starting training at 15 and working all over the world and signed the contract. Sasha used her stamp to sign the deal which she used to sign autographs at meet and greets. Sasha attacked Becky and stood on the table with her foot on Lynch's head. Becky caught Sasha in the Nagata armbar and

Banks tapped out before some refs broke it up. – Good little angle.

They showed Kevin Owens powerbombing Alex Riley on the apron last week then Riley sent us an update on the status of his knee surgery. He talked about the fans chanting "thank you Owens" and said we wouldn't see him for a while because that is what the people wanted.

Devin interviewed Dana Brooke in the back. She said, "Whack" a lot like it was 1993 and said she wanted to run Charlotte out of NXT so she could take her place in those Tap Out commercials.

**Hideo Itami vs. Tyler Breeze.** – Itami over in 9:15. Finn Balor came down to watch from ringside. There wasn't much to this at all. Breeze stalled forever, Itami got some brief shine in, Breeze cut him off and worked a chinlock, Itami made his comeback. They ended up on the floor and Itami accidentally nailed Balor with a kick. Finish saw Itami hit the sick-kick to get the pin. Post-match, Breeze jumped Itami and Balor made the save and teased going after Itami but Breeze laid them both out with his supermodel kick and stood tall to close the show.

## Mid-South Wrestling (TV #117)

December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1981

Irish McNeil Boys Club: Shreveport, LA.

*Ben Carass.*

Welcome to the first step on what will hopefully be a long journey into the illustrious history of Bill Watts' Mid-South Wrestling, one of the most influential and, still to this day, most acclaimed promotions in the history of professional wrestling. While World Class and later Mid-Atlantic stood out as flashy territories at different times during the 1980's, with increased emphasis on production values and, in the case of the Dusty Rhodes booked Crockett territory, extravagant super-shows intended to rival those of the WWF, Mid-South was an unapologetically rugged and gritty promotion with a presentation so reliant on realism that would be almost incomprehensible to the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century wrestling fan. So say goodbye to boring 20 minute scripted promos, goofy comedy gimmicks, parity booking, main event matches given away for free on TV with no build, announcers that point out how stupid you are for watching their show and all the other senseless tropes of modern pro wrestling, and take a trip back in time when men were men, when babyfaces were beloved and heels were hated, and when wrestling was rasslin.



**Boyd Pierce** welcomed us to the “Mid-South Wrestling Television Network” 34 years before anyone had ever paid \$9.99 for a monthly subscription to an online wrestling streaming service. Pierce ran down the card for the evening, because you see matches were already booked for the show as opposed to matches being “spontaneously” booked by some authority figure after some goofy angle. **Bob Roop** was the guest colour commentator for the week and Pierce threw to a match from last week pitting Roop against the other Nature Boy, Buddy Landell.

**Bob Roop vs. Buddy Landell.** – Roop over in a 2:50 squash. Roop had recently turned heel and he demonstrated his new persona by refusing to go for the cover after such highspots as a verticle suplex and a Harley Race high knee. Roop got the win with a shoulder breaker which Landell sold tremendously, quivering leg and all.

Back to the announce table and **Roop** gloated about his victory before the first commercial break then ring announcer **Reeser Bowden** introduced the next match.

**Paul Orndorff vs. Tony Charles.** – Orndorff over in 3:40. This was pretty fast paced for the time, although they mostly grappled and traded armbars. Boyd Pierce called Charles, “the man of 1000 holds”. The heel, Orndorff used the hair to get the advantage and used some illegal closed fists. There was some miscommunication, as Orndorff took a bump for no reason whatsoever during Charles’ comeback. Finish saw Charles take a spill to the outside and Orndorff stomped his head against the apron before getting the pin with a vertical suplex.



**Non-Title Match: Ted Dibiase (North American Heavyweight Champion) vs. Ed Wiskowski.** – Dibiase over in 5:45. Roop talked trash about Dibiase and said he wanted to give him a beating. Wiskowski got the heat with a side headlock of doom; Diabiase got a backslide in for a hope spot but Wiskowski went right back to the headlock. Roop continued to bury Dibiase throughout the match in true 1980’s heel style and chastised him for using closed fists during his comeback. Dibiase hit a nice powerslam and went for the figure four but Wiskowski kicked him off into the turnbuckle. Roop insisted that he and Paul Orndorff had figured out a counter to the figure four, even though we just saw Wiskowski escape the hold. For the finish, Wiskowski came off the second rope with a crossbody but Dibiase rolled through to get the pin.

**Mississippi Heavyweight Championship: Bob Orton Jr (C) vs. Jim Garvin.** – Orton retained in 3:20. This was a pre-Precious/Sunshine babyface Garvin, although he still has his sweet perm and moustache; Orton looked the same as ever. Roop continued to talk about how he and Orndorff found the counter to the figure four. “It will go the same way as the FLYING SQUEEGEE and the keylock” Roop asserted. Face Garvin out-wrestled Orton early with some tornado side headlock takeovers and Junior displayed some amazing 80’s selling and body language. Orton landed a dropkick at 3:20 to start the heat; Garvin made a comeback and went for another tornado side headlock but Orton countered into a belly-to-back suplex then used a nice piledriver for the finish.

**Special Challenge Match: Junkyard Dog vs. Terry Orndorff (If Orndorff loses he must leave Mid-South.)** – Orndorff via DQ at 3:20. This was the “main event” and boy what a wacky angle it was. Orndorff put on a yellow mask that he wore when he beat Mike George and told Reeser Bowden that it might help him beat the Dog too. JYD came out to his completely unlicensed Queen, “Another one bites the dust” song and was in great shape compared to his later years. **JYD** said he wasn’t going to wrestle unless the referee checked the mask and the ref checked Orndorff’s hood to make sure it wasn’t loaded. Awesome. Orndorff actually fought like his livelihood was on the line. He punched, scratched and clawed at the Dog. **Paul Orndorff** came out and gave Terry a gimmick then attacked JYD right in front of the ref; Roop said it was no DQ – keep that in mind. JYD slammed Paul Orndorff and went for the cover, which the ref actually tried to count for. Terry loaded up his mask with the gimmick and JYD landed a headbutt which laid them both out and saw the ref take a bump. **Bob Orton Jr** showed up in a yellow mask and tried to piledrive JYD, but the Dog countered and tossed Orton over the top rope. The referee saw the man in the yellow mask go over the top rope and disqualified JYD. – Even though the DQ finish made no sense since this was apparently a no DQ match, this angle had a lot of charm and was executed very well, plus the fans went absolutely crazy for all the run-ins.



**Iron Sheik w/ Skandor Akbar vs. King Cobra (Stand-by Match).** – Sheik over in 4:35. Pretty much an enhancement match for Sheik, who looked, and was booked, like a total badass. Sheiky jumped Cobra at the bell for the heat. Cobra landed a couple of dropkicks and Sheiky took a spill outside. Cobra tried to slam Sheik back inside over the top rope, but Sheik’s pointy boots hooked on the rope to prevent the slam. It was awesome. Roop said the pointy boots were used in the Arab world to kick the camels to make the go faster. 1981 everybody! **“COBRA AIN’T NO CAMEL, THEY IN A RASSLIN RING!”** Boyd furiously sniped back. Sheik racked the eyes and hit a nice German suplex and an elbow drop for the finish.

**Jerry Novak & The Monk vs. Brian Blair & Frank Monte (Stand-by Match).** Reeser Bowden announced this was “one fall or remaining television time” and he wasn’t lying. It was a basic 4:47 tag match and the bell rang to signal the end of the match and the hour of television time. Boyd

Pierce thanked Roop for sitting in on the call and hyped the, “POPULAR LITTLE MIDGET GALS” for next week, plus Paul Orndorff vs. Ted Dibiase; look at that, announcing a big match for next week’s show. How novel.



We’re off to a solid start with Mid-South TV. Bob Roop, Paul Orndorff and Bob Orton Jr are the top sneaky heels with a plan to take down the white meat babyface, Ted Dibiase and expose his finishing hold! They also screwed the top star in the territory, JYD, out of winning the TV main event. Plus, Iron Shiek was booked like a scary no-nonsense ass-kicker, sort of like an early Iranian Kurt Angle, which is indicative of the Bill Watts booking philosophy that we surely will see more of in the coming weeks and months. I can’t promise these reviews will be a weekly feature, as I barely have enough spare time to stay up on contemporary pro wrestling, but they will assuredly pop up every now and then.

### **Bits & Pieces**

*Ryan Clingman*

On June 6<sup>th</sup> Smash Wrestling will be running Chris Hero/Samoa Joe in the main event of an ALS fun raiser show alongside an all women's show entitled #GiveDivasAChance in Toronto. Confirmed for each of the shows respectively will be Johnny Gargano, Matt Cross, the Super Smash Brothers, and Pepper Parks, and Candice LeRae, Allysin Kay, Cherry Bomb, Portia Perez, Veda Scott and Jennifer Blake. Both will be available on internet pay-per-view at <http://smash-wrestling.com/ondemand/> for \$7.49.

### **Next Week's Issue**

In next week's issue we look at the final few weeks build to Payback, New Japan heading into the BOSJ, possible Mid-South reviews, and more!

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