



## Cubed Circle Newsletter 191: From Bad RAW booking to Ernie Ladd's Babyface Fire & The Tsuruta Wars

In our first post-study-break edition of the newsletter in weeks we present you with one of our more diverse issues of 2015, as Ben Carass looks at this week's terrible edition of RAW, we travel back in time 25 years to the site of one of All Japan's greatest battles, and Ben takes the time machine even further back to 1981 to admire some of Bill Watts' booking handiwork – plus this week's NXT and June's RAW ratings!

– *Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter, Editor*

### **Let's Start a War: The Tsuruta Wars 25 Years On**

*Ryan Clingman*

1990 was a pivotal year for pro-wrestling, the site of an intriguing meeting of many of the 80s styles and personalities that characterized that decade, as well as some of the fresh young talent and developing styles that would dominate the 1990s. The Japanese landscape was, in 1990, witnessing rapid change with the rise to prominence of some of the country's biggest stars of the ensuing 15 plus years, the genesis of several companies, and the collapse of others in the span of but a few years. Keiichi Yamada, in 1989, had become Jushin Liger; Toshiaki Kawada garnered footing in All Japan in the late 80s as a member of Tenryu Revolution, and former sumo star, Akira Taue, had made his debut in 1988 – as had Kenta Kobashi. Mutoh had made his return to Japan and within a year became one of the hottest stars in the country alongside Hashimoto and Chono. 1990 also saw a reshuffling of Japan's promotional scene with the formation of FMW a year prior and the death of the UWF only to be revived as UWFi in '91 – breakaway promotions such as Super World of Sport (Genichiro Tenryu) and RINGS (Akira Maeda) would also form in 1990 (SWS), or but a couple of years later in the case of RINGS..

All Japan though, unlike New Japan, was placed in a difficult position in 1990, as following the 1989 culmination of one of the most legendary career rivalries in the history of the company, Tsuruta versus Tenryu, with one of the better matches of that decade, Tenryu parted ways with the company. His departure took place under bizarre circumstances, as he was contracted to an optical technologies company, as an "ambassador" for their brand, which so happened to found a pro-wrestling promotion in Super World of Sports a few months later. All Japan, following the loss of one of its top stars still possessed major talent, but top calibre Japanese stars. Whilst Stan Hansen, Steve Williams, and Terry Gordy stood as star gaijin talent, and Fuyuki, Bam Bam Bigelow, Kikuchi, Yatsu, Kawada, Fuchi, Great Kabuki, Tiger Mask II and Saito composed the heart of a strong midcard, Jumbo stood as the only true native main event star in AJPW, and he had been a

member of the company's upper echelon for years. Perhaps in another era this lack of talent wouldn't have been an issue of the utmost importance, as prior to Fujinami/Choshu and many of the Japan versus Japan feuds that followed in NJPW, few if any in either company were Japan on Japan. In All Japan specifically, however, if this mentality hadn't changed before the Tenryu/Tsuruta feud, it certainly had after. With a distinct lack of native headliners, Baba was forced to create new stars – fan devotion, no matter how strong, could only last so long.

Tenryu's last match for Giant Baba's All Japan took place during the final night of the 1990 Champion Carnival, where Tsuruta defeated him on the way out in their final singles match. Baba didn't introduce his new singles star that night, but only a month later on the opening night of the May tour, Tiger Mask II, Mitsuharu Misawa, called for his partner, Toshiaki Kawada, to unmask him during a heated tag match against Fuyuki and Yatsu. The reaction was hot, without a doubt, but mild in comparison to the insanity that would befall Tokyo by early-June, as Misawa challenged his childhood hero, Jumbo Tsuruta, to a singles match in the post-match, after the pair had teamed sporadically earlier in the year.



Two matches into his post-Tiger Mask career, Misawa and Kobashi won the working man's All Asian Tag Titles off of Davey Boy Smith and Johnny Smith. For the remainder of that tour and the next Misawa was paired with fellow young stars in different combinations mostly in tag and trios matches opposite members of Tsuruta's stable, Jumbo's Army. The new generation won most of these six-mans, which called for the introduction of Jumbo himself into the fray, the company's biggest Japanese star, at which point matters escalated dramatically.

In the third trios match involving Tsuruta, a bout at Korakuen Hall on May 26<sup>th</sup> Misawa, Kobashi & Taue beat Fuchi, Great Kabuki, and Jumbo Tsuruta in a bout that changed the tone of the build to Budokan dramatically. Tsuruta attempted to bully the younger side mid-match, knocking Misawa's allies off of the apron unprovoked. This riled Misawa up, and in a masterful piece of storytelling, Misawa delivered a stiff elbow to Tsuruta minutes later after Jumbo tapped him on the shoulder, standing on the apron. Whilst this would have sufficed as far as story progression was concerned, they escalated the intensity considerably with Tsuruta selling the elbow on the floor as if he had

drifted into unconsciousness. So believable was Tsuruta's selling that the majority of those in attendance rose, ignoring the in-ring action completely, attempting to evaluate Jumbo's condition on the floor. When Tsuruta finally awoke minutes later, Misawa was the first thought on his mind. The pair brawled in-ring leading to a pull-apart from respective teammates whilst the match was still underway. Misawa inevitably pinned Fuchi with a bridging Tiger Suplex, which served to build to further trios matches of a similar ilk on the tour, as well as Baba's ultimate goal for the next tour – the Misawa/Tsuruta singles match at Budokan, the first show at that hallowed venue since the departure of Tenryu in April.

These heated trios matches, coupled with the Tiger Mask II unmasking itself catapulted Misawa from popular young star, to the precipice of super stardom. Misawa versus Tsuruta, a non-title match after Tsuruta dropped the Triple Crown to Gordy, was booked for June 8th of 1990. There is a now fairly well known story about the backstage happenings before the famed encounter and has been recounted a number of times by Dave Meltzer, who was in attendance that night. It is said that Baba made the decision to put Misawa over on the day of the show, after hearing chants of "Misawa" outside the venue, during the tour, as well as before the show, and witnessing an explosion in the sale of Misawa merchandise. When a messenger was sent from Baba to Jumbo notifying Tsuruta that he would be losing later on, a startled Jumbo sent the runner back asking if he could lose via disqualification – Baba response was a simple "no".



On the night of June 8<sup>th</sup> fans chanted Misawa's name during intermediary portions of the show, before his entrance, and most furiously during his encounter with childhood hero, Jumbo Tsuruta. Misawa's entrance in the show's main event ahead of a Gory/Hansen Triple Crown match, was the standard All Japan walk-out through the crowd, to an infectious theme music. It is then strange to think that more so than any entrance in ECW, Flair at WrestleMania 24, Kobashi at the Tokyo Dome, or even Punk at Money in the Bank 2011, Misawa's on this night in 1990 stands as the very best I have seen. The only entrance that approached this in my eyes was Kobashi's prior to his retirement match in 2013. At first this may seem a deliberately contrarian opinion, as Misawa had subsequent Tokyo Dome entrances that were in every way more extravagant. But, to a pre-teen popping in his first puro DVD – seeing Misawa's stoic face gazing off camera before being escorted through a rabid crowd by fellow young stars and future legends, Kawada and Kobashi, all

to go to war during the biggest moment of his career – no entrance could have been as grand, and few circumstances so emotive.

As rabid as Budokan was for Misawa, they still loved Tsuruta, yet despite this, Tsuruta as the veteran overdog imposing his will on the young, high-flying and hard-hitting Misawa was a magical dynamic. Although Misawa and Tsuruta, even at this early stage, had kindled a burning rivalry, the match with respect to the second was far less vitriolic. Misawa, only a month or so into his heavyweight run, and still very light and agile, utilised many of his Tiger Mask moves and standard dives whilst still engaging Tsuruta in tests of strength, and delivering hard elbows that would become a career staple. Whilst the animosity had been toned down several degrees from the incident at Korakuen, reference to the knockout spot in the initial six-man was made not only throughout the first match, but in the remainder of the pair's encounters. Tsuruta, in most future matches with Misawa in the 1990/1991 period sold damage to his head after the majority of the strong head-shots – in some instances he would even go as far as to slap himself in the face in an effort to preserve consciousness.

With a couple of months worth of build, Misawa went from junior heavyweight star, Tiger Mask II, to Budokan Hall main eventer and second biggest Japanese star in the company by a wide margin. The June 8th match itself, however, took him from that status, and with an counter to one of Jumbo's pin attempts, the finish, Misawa was set to become the company's hottest star, one who would lead All Japan to sellouts and phenomenal business throughout the 1990s. It was a near perfect performance on a magical night, and more than enough to ignite a passion in me for Japanese pro-wrestling. As Dave Meltzer recounted in his June 18<sup>th</sup> 1990 issue of the Wrestling Observer, shortly after arriving back from his trip to Japan wrote:

“I can't describe just how awesome this was as both a match and a spectacle. Misawa was far and away the most over wrestler on the card...[match description]...I can't begin to describe the post-match pandemonium but there were people in the crowd literally crying because the match was so good. Misawa was doing an interview in the dressing room after and cried. Anyway, I'd rate this as a better match then (sic) either Flair-Steamboat from Chicago or Nashville. \*\*\*\*\*+”

The first Tsuruta match is undoubtedly the most famous and widely praised of the rivalry, but it did not spell the end of the programme, but rather served as a catalyst for the generation of a catalogue of classic matches, each with its own unique merits. The war between the younger generation and Jumbo's Army only grew in intensity from the finish of the first Misawa-Tsuruta singles match, although escalated to a roaring climax once Akira Taue joined Tsuruta's stable ahead of Misawa and Tsuruta's anticipated rematch for the Triple Crown number one contendership. The match was held on September 1st of the same year, once again at Budokan Hall, and on a technical level matched and perhaps even exceeded the original. Both Misawa and Tsuruta were more aggressive digging into one another with slaps, as well as much of the same offence showcased in their first encounter. Budokan roared throughout, and whilst the first match has certain intangible assets that place it confidently ahead of the second, the September bout is a classic in its own right, one that several prefer over the first.

Following the defection of Taue and the September Misawa-Tsuruta match, was a series of tag team and trios matches pitting Taue against his former team mates, as a new member of the otherwise veteran-centric stable. One such match producing an interesting dynamic was a Tau & Tsuruta versus Kawada & Misawa tag from December 7th, once more at Budokan Hall. Their late 1990 tag match followed from a draw in September at Korakuen Hall, and was too worthy of classic status. A

dynamic that proved particularly interesting was that, despite taking place in a Misawa stronghold, Tokyo, the Budokan crowd on the night of the 7th was heavily pro-Tsuruta. Much like in the initial Misawa-Tsuruta singles encounter, the crowd cheered both teams, but any interference on the part of the Misawa side was met with heavy boos, whilst similar acts from the Tsuruta team were greeted with thunderous applause. Whether the match was laid out spot for spot, as many of Kobashi's legendary tags were in the coming years, or had elements that were called in the ring, I am not at all sure. However, the match itself was worked according to the heavy Tsuruta-bias, with well-timed break-ups from both sides. Even with their heavy Jumbo affinity, the victory of the Misawa team was met with resounding applause, such is the nature of Japanese pro-wrestling, and matches of an extraordinary high calibre.

In the months that followed Jumbo and Misawa's respective armies fought in tags, singles, and trios, although the battles that yielded the ripest fruit were the trios outings in late 1990 and early 1991. Of particular importance was the October 19th six-man, but, although it is highly regarded, and rightfully as brilliant example of trios wrestling – the April 20th variant from Korakuen, improved on its October predecessor in every conceivable way. Few other trios matches that I have seen have captured the same sense of comradery and mutual hate as the Misawa-Tsuruta gang-wars, and fewer still were of the calibre of the April 20th match. If the October outing was a shining example of trios wrestling then the April 20th match, by comparison alone, could be considered as pinnacle point. The bastion of the old guard with Taue at their side against the new generation at Korakuen is a complete, psychologically speaking, tag match in most every sense, and is thus a classic in much the same way as the latter Holy Demon Army matches were.



Tsuruta and Misawa never saw a definitive conclusion to their rivalry. They battled sporadically through to 1992, at which point Tsuruta fell from the main event picture due to a diagnosis of Hepatitis B. Misawa would go on, in that same year, to win his first Triple Crown, cementing his status as All Japan's ace, as he, along with Kawada and Kobashi, the so called "Holy Trinity", would produce some of the best matches in the history of Japan, often alongside contemporary, Akira Taue.

The real life interplay between the careers of Misawa and Tsuruta would feature a vital interaction

once more at the end of the decade when Tsuruta recommended to Giant Baba's widow, Motoko Baba, the Dragon Lady, that Misawa be made president of the company given the respect he had from the locker room, as well as his years of continued drawing success and in-ring delivery. Baba obliged before letting Tsuruta go as an office employee, a violation of traditional ethics that may have very well added to Misawa's desire to split from All Japan and form Pro-Wrestling NOAH, largely to escape the clutches of the Dragon Lady.

Regardless of Tsuruta's indirect contribution to the formation of Pro-Wrestling NOAH, his greatest achievement, as it relates to Misawa and the legacy of All Japan, is the fact that he was able to help Misawa get over to such a large degree. Misawa connected with the audience due to Baba's booking, extraordinary ability, and timing, but it was Tsuruta, through his legendary matches that helped solidify Misawa as the company's new top Japanese star – a vital contribution to All Japan's legacy.

What has me look back at this already monumental and historically significant feud in Japanese pro-wrestling history with further reverence, was the style in which it was worked in comparison to the even more widely regarded wars of later years. There is a certain implicit beauty in the absence of head-drops and no-selling that aided later All Japan matches reach their heights. The Misawa-Tsuruta Wars were built on firm puroresu logical foundations, and sound booking with little need for physical degradation to the degree of later series such as Misawa-Kawada, Misawa-Kobashi, and so on. It is in this way that the Misawa-Tsuruta Wars look even better in the eye of hindsight as apart from holding up from a pure wrestling and story-telling standpoint, this war, inevitably left a far lesser mark on its participants than the head-dropping spectacles that would follow in the coming years.

**RAW Ramblings – June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015.**

**Bankers Life Fieldhouse: Indianapolis, IN.**

*Ben Carass.*

With **Vince McMahon** and **Kevin Dunn** in Florida for Tough Enough, **Triple H** was running the ship this week; of course, I'm sure **Stephanie** had more than her fair share of input too. So with the old man and his chief lieutenant out of the picture, the successor to the throne had a chance to show everyone what kind of TV production he could run on his own. Unfortunately for **HHH**, he oversaw one of the most boring and pointless shows of the year. Virtually all of the wrestling was mind-numbingly tedious and other than the main event angle with **Brock Lesnar** being laid out by the **Authority**, yes you read that right, and a promo exchange between **Kevin Owens & John Cena**, every segment on this show was pure uninteresting drivel.

Story of the show was **Seth Rollins** trying to get **Kane** and **J&J** back on his side because he is scared of **Brock Lesnar**. **Heyman & Brock** opened the show; **Paul** didn't really get the chance to cut one of his epic promos because they were more concerned with showing a bunch of B-roll footage recapping why **Lesnar** was suspended. **Heyman** said **Brock** had to apologise for attacking **Michael Cole** or he would not get his title shot at BattleGround. **Brock** went over to the announce table and intimidated **Cole**, but he jovially grabbed **Cole** in a headlock and gave him a nuggie then patted him on the head. **Cole** said, "We're good" and that was pretty much the entire opening segment. It was completely stupid; why would you have your killer babyface monster apologise to the annoying announcer that everyone hates? We got a bunch of skits of **Rollins** trying to convince **Kane & J&J** to help him fight **Lesnar**, which culminated in **HHH & Steph** telling **Rollins** to go apologise in public. Main event segment saw **Rollins** kiss **Kane** and **J&J's** asses then **Brock** showed up to kill them all; **Kane** and **J&J** teased walking out on **Rollins**, but it was a swerve!

**Brock** tossed **Rollins** around with a few suplexes then **Kane** jumped him from behind and gave him a chokeslam. **Brock** fought back and suplexed **Kane**, but **Mercury** got involved and the heels beat down **Lesnar** 3-on-1. They wrapped his leg around the post and smashed it with a chair then **Rollins** finished **Brock** off with a pedigree. – It’s a rare thing for someone to get heat on **Lesnar** and lay him out completely, however it didn’t nearly feel like a big enough deal. Plus, how is getting the heat on **Kane & Joey frigging Mercury** supposed to help anyone? It has taken them exactly one week after **Brock** came back to start booking him like just any other geek on the roster. If you’re wondering what happened to **Jamie Noble**, well he reportedly suffered broken ribs when **Lesnar** threw him into the barricade and was treated by the doctors while the beatdown was taking place in the ring.



**John Cena** came out at the top of the third hour for his usual spiel; he called **Kevin Owens** a great wrestler but a “garbage” human being and a “dirtbag.” ZING! **Owens** showed up and said that he had been called many things: “Out of shape”, a “slob” then told **Cena** that the “out of shape, slob dirtbag” beat him at Elimination Chamber and laid him out at Money in the Bank. **Owens** said he wanted to take the US title because of how much it meant to **Cena** then spoke some words in French. **Cena** retorted in French then in Mandarin just because and told him he would kick his ass at BattleGround. – The segment wasn’t anything special, but it was two guys who are supremely confident on the mic going back and forth. And compared to all the other tripe on this show, this was pretty damn good.

**Insipid Nonsense:** **Kane** pinned **Dean Ambrose** at 11:20 of an ungodly boring match after a distraction from **Seth Rollins**. **The Prime Time Players** downed the **Ascension** in a 4 minute nothing non-title match; **New Day** watched on in the back and **Big E** was eating celery for some reason. Get this: **Roman Reigns & Sheamus** wrestled for 17 unexciting minutes then **Bray Wyatt** appeared on the screen and was having a tea party! **Reigns**, like a complete idiot, thought **Bray** had his daughter and ran to the back; there was no decision rendered after we all invested that much time in watching the match. **Reigns** found a room where **Wyatt** could be heard singing “I’m a little teapot” but he was nowhere to be seen. On the walls were a bunch of pictures of **Reigns** with the

words, “Anyone but you” painted in what I assume was meant to be blood. **THIS ABSOLUTELY SUCKED!** Neville beat **Kofi Kingston** with the Red Arrow in 4:25; **Xavier Woods** was the highlight of the match, shouting: “I’m gonna call Gravity, **Neville!**” King Barrett over **Zack Ryder** in 3:25; **R-Truth** did an inset promo and rambled about being the real king. Ugh. **The Bellas** beat **Naomi & Tamina** in 3:45 when **Nikki** pinned **Naomi**. **The Bellas** infuriatingly worked as faces and shockingly, no one cared. **Ryback** downed **Mark Henry** in 6:25; lucky 3 minutes of which was during the commercial break. **Big Show** was on commentary and cheered on **Henry**. **Ryback** won with an ugly splash off the top then afterwards **Show** and **Henry** yelled at each other. **Ryback** did an interview in the back and **Show** attacked him, however **Ryback** got the better of it and left **Show** lying. **Dolph Ziggler w/Lana** over **Adam Rose w/Rosa** in 3:05. **Rose** said he had a “master plan” or something then kissed **Rosa**. **Ziggler** won with a superkick then kissed **Lana**. **Rusev** was watching in the back and threw a fit and fell over; **Summer Rae** appeared and handed him his crutches and told him **Lana** wasn’t worth it. If they put **Rusev** with **Summer** they have completely lost the plot.



Jeez, I thought the show was bad just watching it but after writing all that stuff down it was even worse. Because RAW was so terrible, here’s a little treat from sleaze laden SPWC (Saitama Pro Wrestling Company). An epic battle between **A LADDER & A TABLE**, which was more exciting and a better spectacle than any of the matches on RAW this week.

### **RAW Ratings for June 2015**

*Ryan Clingman*

**06/01:** The June 1<sup>st</sup> edition of Monday Night RAW drew a 2.78 rating and averaged 3.973 million viewers over three hours (3.96 million viewers, according to the Observer, who weights the third hour according to overrun length). It didn't face any form of strong sporting competition, going up against the NCAA Women's Softball World Series. Whilst the June 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the program drew more viewers than the prior week's show, it is still arguably well below what they want to/should be doing, especially when they weren't going up against any strong sporting competition, and coming the night of pay-per-view, albeit one that appeared exclusively on the Network in the 2015 Elimination Chamber show. Once again, the third hour showcased a steep decline both in the 18-49 demographic, and overall.

*Viewership (in millions):*

20:00 – 21:00 3.946 (1.65 in 18-49)

21:00 – 22:00 4.113 (1.75 in 18-49)

22:00 – 23:08 3.862 (1.59 in 18-49)

**06/08:** The June 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Monday Night RAW fell once more to a year, and near-record, low levels drawing a 2.59 rating and averaging 3.644 million viewers (3.64, weighted). It did go up against the Stanley Cup Finals on the NBS Sports Network, as well as the Women's Football World Cup coverage on FOX, which it just barely beat. Unlike in week's prior, however, the third hour was not the least watched of the night, as it improved on the second hour – viewership was fairly consistent across the three hours in comparison to weeks prior. The 18-49 viewership also grew across the three hours, which is an underplayed positive.

*Viewership (in millions):*

20:00 – 21:00 3.678 (1.628 in 18-49)

21:00 – 22:00 3.609 (1.546 in 18-49)

22:00 – 23:14 3.647 (1.544 in 18-49)

**06/15:** The June 16<sup>th</sup> edition of Monday Night RAW following the 2015 Money in the Bank pay-per-view drew better than the terrible lows of the week prior. The show did a 2.82 rating, but averaged 4.114 million viewers (4.10, weighted). This is the largest audience that the show has drawn since the night after WrestleMania, which could speak for a number of things. On the one hand, the show peaked in hour two, which could indicate that it was Kevin Owens and his long match with Dolf Ziggler that helped draw such good numbers, at the very least they must have performed well enough to retain the majority of the show's viewership during a strong hour. On the other, however, the Money in the Bank pay-per-view has always generated more interest than your standard WWE B-show over recent years, so perhaps it was simply general curiosity coming out of that show, as well as the Owens/Cena fall-out that drew the rating. Of course, I would like to believe that it was Owens who drew here, and certainly those within the company won't be able to use any ratings based arguments against him, at least for a few weeks. However, without detailed quarterly breakdowns, which haven't been available to those outside the company for years, it would be very difficult to make any of these statements with conviction.

*Viewership (in millions):*

20:00 – 21:00 4.095 (1.653 in 18-49)

21:00 – 22:00 4.249 (1.665 in 18-49)

22:00 – 23:10 3.997 (1.693 in 18-49)

**06/22:** The June 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of Monday Night RAW showed a steep decline from the 06/15 post-Money in the Bank show, which drew the best rating since the post-WrestleMania 31 show. This show drew a 2.64 rating and averaged 3.670 million viewers (3.68, weighted). It went up against a USA/Columbia Women's Football World Cup game on FS1, which drew an impressive 4.72 million viewers. For the first time in months, however, the show gained viewers throughout the show, closing on a high. The 18-49 demo, however, struggled up until the third hour, drawing well below average numbers for what is the key-demographic. Brock Lesnar also appeared on this week's show, although didn't appear to generate any significant boost in viewership.

Viewership (in millions):

20:00 – 21:00 3.594 (1.459 in 18-49)

21:00 – 22:00 3.606 (1.475 in 18-49)

22:00 – 23:17 3.812 (1.666 in 18-49)

Thanks as always to @Weffe for his 18-49 data.

**WWE NXT – June 24<sup>th</sup> 2015**

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

*Ben Carass.*

For the second week in a row the show opened with the tribute to **Dusty Rhodes** and all the NXT guys on the stage while **Triple H** talked about how much NXT meant to the **Dream**.



**Hideo Itami** came out with his arm in a sling and they showed the “fan cam” footage of him laid out in the parking lot before Takeover. Chumpstain **Greg** interviewed him and he said it would be 3 or 4 months before he would be back. **Itami** said NXT was very popular in Japan and added he would be at the July 4<sup>th</sup> show in Japan and he would challenge the winner of **Kevin Owens vs. Finn Balor**. **Kevin Owens** came out and stumbled over his words, so he paused

and said he “sounded like **Hideo** trying to speak English”. It was a really great adlib by **Owens** and the crowd loved it. He told **Itami** that there was no way he was leaving Tokyo without the NXT title then claimed he had nothing to do with **Itami’s** injury because if **Owens** had attacked him he wouldn’t be standing in the ring. **Owens** demanded an apology from **Itami** for calling him a “bad person” and **Itami** replied that he was a great champion but a terrible human being. **Owens** said if he was going to be blamed for **Itami’s** injury he might as well make it worth it and he headed down to the ring. **Finn Balor** ran down to make the save and he brawled with **Owens** at ringside. **Balor** went for a dive off the stage but **Rhyno** showed up and kicked him off the stage. – Pretty good little segment setting up a potential **Itami/Owens** match down the road and the **Owens/Balor** match in Tokyo.

**Enzo Amore & Colin Cassady w/ Carmella vs. Jason Jordan & Sylvester LeFort.** – **Enzo & Cass** over in 2:39. They showed all the geeks in the crowd singing along word-for-word with **Enzo**; I’ve watched every single episode of NXT since the re-launch in 2012 and even I don’t know their spiel by heart. The faces beat up **LeFort** for a while then the idiot **Jordan**, who chose Frenchie as his partner instead of OLYMPIC WRESTLER **Chad Gable**, came in and tossed **Enzo** around. **Big Cass** didn’t even get to make his comeback, as **Enzo** dumped **LeFort** to the outside and rolled up **Jordan** as he was yelling at Frenchie. **Jordan** shouted at **LeFort** again after the match and the New Yorkers celebrated in the ring. – Since the story is supposed to be **Jordan** picking incompetent partners then surely **LeFort** should have taken the fall here. This storyline gets stupider every week. **Samoa Joe** was backstage after the pull-apart with **Kevin Owens** last week. Joe ranted and raved about not getting the fight he wanted because **Owens** was still walking around and he still owed

him a beating of a lifetime. It was better than his promo last week.

**Dana Brooke w/Emma vs. Cassie.** –**Brooke** in 3:40. **Brooke** necked **Cassie** on the ropes to get the heat then worked a tortuously long blow-and-arrow type hold. **Cassie** actually made a comeback but **Brooke** cut her off and won with her Cradle Shock move. – **Brooke** is getting better but she is still a long way off being a confident, polished performer.

**Charlotte** was with **Devin** in the back. She cut a short, but very believable promo about **Dana Brooke** and said she would kick her ass. The announcers hyped the “**Brock Lesnar**, Beast in the East” special on July 4<sup>th</sup> then threw to the second part of the special **Finn Balor** video.



It started with **Sami Zayn** coming over to **Balor's** apartment and they sat around playing with Lego! **Matt Bloom** talked about meeting **Balor** in 2006 then **Balor** talked about **Bloom** taking him under his wing. **Bloom** explained what “Young Boys” were expected to do while living in the Dojo and **Balor** said 6 weeks somehow turned into 8 years. They had a bunch of photos like **Devitt** with **Karl Anderson**, **Nagata**, **TAKA**, **Tanahashi**, **Okada** and the **RISE** stable with **Nakamura**, **Bernard**, **Milano**, **Goto** and **Minoru** then showed a few clips of **Devitt** working guys like **Taguchi** and **Ibushi**. There were also a few shots of **Devitt** with **Bullet Club** merch but they managed to never actually mention the group by name. **Bloom** and **Becky Lynch** talked about **Devitt** signing with WWE and **Devitt** said without the Japanese fans he wouldn't have lasted 8 years over there. It ended with **Devitt** saying he arrived in Japan a 24 year old kid and left a 33 year old man ready to face his next challenge. Part 3 next week! – They NEED to air this stuff on RAW when **Balor** is called up, but knowing WWE I suspect they won't.

We got some shots of **Bull Dempsey** being a fat slob with **Corey Graves** blatantly reading from a script, talking about how out of shape he is. Comedy!

**The Hype Bros (Zack Ryder & Mojo Rawley) vs. Sawyer Fulton & Angelo Dawkins.** – **Ryder & Rawley** over at 4:20. Very basic tag match. **Mojo & Ryder** dominated early then **Mojo** did his idiotic dance again, which drew “Mojo sucks” chants from the crowd. **Fulton & Dawkins** did the old WGTT leapfrog spot and got some heat on **Mojo**. **Ryder** ran wild and **Mojo** pinned **Dawkins** after a double team Ruff Ryder. – I hate this **Ryder & Rawley** team, or more specifically, **Rawley**. I have no idea why he is still even under contract other than he is friends with some NFL players that come to watch him wrestle.

**William Regal** was in his office and **Eva Marie** showed up to ask for a match in NXT. **Regal** told her she had to prove she belonged in the hottest women’s division in the world and **Eva** said that is exactly what she would do. – **Eva** showed ZERO personality here.



**Finn Balor vs. Rhino.** – **Balor** over in 8:40. **Kevin Owens** was on commentary and once again was a tremendous jerk. Match was fine, but very similar to their first encounter. **Balor** started off aggressive and landed a bunch of strikes then he flew over the top with a big tope-con-hilo. **Rhino** cut him off with a spinebuster and worked some bearhugs for the heat. **Rich Brennan** asked **Owens** about his time in Japan and **Owens** said, “I hated it! I never wanted to go back.” **Balor** sold some more and **Rhino** worked over the ribs he injured earlier with the boot off the stage. **Balor** landed the Pele then went up for the double stomp, but **Owens** walked down to ringside for the distraction. **Balor** gave **Owens** a dropkick off the apron but **Rhino** took advantage with a belly-to-belly and went for the gore. **Balor** countered and hit the slingblade then followed up with the double stomp for the win. **Owens** jumped **Balor** immediately after the bell and **Rhino** joined in the beat-down. **Samoa Joe** stormed the ring to make the save and the heels ran away.

Another solid, but unspectacular episode of NXT and of all the wrestling shows on Wednesday nights this was probably in third place behind Lucha Underground and an outstanding episode of ROH. Hey, at least they are still better than TNA. It may be a rough couple of weeks, what with this set of tapings being the first after the passing of **Dusty Rhodes** and considering how big a role **Dusty** had in NXT, you can’t really blame the guys and girls if they were not 100% mentally there during the tapings. The **Devitt** video was once again the highlight of a show that you don’t really need to go out of your way to see.

## Mid-South Wrestling (TV #126)

February 4<sup>th</sup> 1982

Irish McNeil Boys Club: Shreveport, LA.

*Ben Carass.*

We've jumped ahead two weeks since our last trip down to Shreveport and here's the important stuff that we missed: **Skandor Akbar** announced that the **Iron Sheik** had gone back to Iran to aid **Ayatollah Khomeini!** – Sad times indeed, as **Sheikie** killing fools was one of my favourite parts of these shows. Of course, **Sheik** didn't really go back to Iran; he worked other Southern territories Georgia, South West, Memphis and Florida before heading for New York in 1983 to break the back of that no good jabroni, **Bob Backlund**. **Mr Olympia** defeated **Bob Orton Jr.** for the Mississippi Heavyweight Championship! **Olympia** only debuted a month earlier and has looked impressive since. **Ted Dibiase & Dick Murdoch vs. Paul Orndorff & Bob Roop** went to a no contest when **Bob Orton** interfered then the following week **Roop** challenged **Dibiase** for the North American Heavyweight title which ended in another schmoz when **Orndorff** ran in and **Murdoch** made the save. So the **Dibiase vs. Orndorff/Roop/Orton** crew feud is still running strong.



**Boyd Pierce & Bill Watts** opened the show; apparently Mid-South TV had expanded into some new markets in 1982 and **Boyd** gave a shout-out to Tulsa, Oklahoma and Little Rock, Arkansas, as well as the regular viewers in Louisiana, Mississippi and California. **Boyd** then hyped a big Tag Team Championship main event of the **Samoans vs. JYD & Mike George** and **Watts** noted that **Mr Olympia** was the new Mississippi Champ.

**Bob Orton Jr. vs. Ken Woodby.** – SQU-IZ-ASH for **Orton** in 3:48 Boyd & Watts spent most of the time hyping the big Tag Title match and they put over kayfabe “match maker” **Grizzly Smith** for booking a title match on TV. **Orton** killed **Woodby** with a running backbreaker and used his piledriver for the finish. – Basic enhancement match for Orton to get some heat back after losing the Mississippi belt.

Before the Tag Team Championship match, **Ernie Ladd**, manager of the **Samoans**, was at the announce desk and demanded some time to talk. **Ladd** was furious about **Dusty Rhodes** being

signed to a big lucrative contract with Mid-South and put himself over as the master negotiator of big contract dealings and said he had taken the **Samoans** along for the ride with him. **Ladd** buried **Watts** for being a horrible colour commentator and said he should be doing the colour every week, which I agree with 100%. **Watts** stood up and asked **Ladd** if **Skandor Akbar** was part of his entourage; **Ladd** said “no” and **Watts** questioned why **Akbar** was stood in the ring with the **Samoans**! **Ernie Ladd** then went all badass **Samuel L Jackson** and said: “Hold on just a minute. Nobody represent them **Samoans** but ME. NOBODY!” – His delivery was out of this world. **Ladd** got in the ring and asked **Akbar** what the hell was going on. **Akbar** blamed **Ladd** for the **Samoans** losing the Tag Titles and for their suspension last year then said that **Ladd** had embarrassed the **Samoans** enough. **Akbar** called **Ladd** a “BIG DUMMIE!” and declared himself the sole representative/financial advisor of the **Samoans**. **Ladd** fired up and yelled, “Nobody handle business but me!” then dropped **Akbar** with a big right hand. The **Samoans** jumped their former manager, but **Ladd** became a total ass-kicking babyface and ran wild on all three heels! **Ladd** was whooping all kinds of ass, however **Akbar** had a plan and waved out a very young **One Man Gang**, who **Boyd & Watts** said they had never seen before and were unable to identify. **Gang** and the **Samoans** beat down **Ladd** then **Afa & Sika** held **Ladd’s** legs across the bottom rope and **Gang** came down with a big splash off the top, presumably “breaking” **Ladd’s** leg! **Watts** put over that **Ladd** had suffered serious knee injuries during his NFL days and a couple of wrestlers and referees came out to help **Ladd** to the back. – FIVE STAR ANGLE!!! The turn of **Ladd** was masferful, **Akbar** became the new top heel manager in one segment and **One Man Gang** made a big impression on his debut. Masterful booking.



After the break, **Watts** explained that **Ladd** had been taken back to the “shower area” because **Grizzly Smith** didn’t know whether to take him to the heel or babyface locker room and was receiving medical attention. **Watts** teased a bait-and-switch and said that the Tag Team title match was not going to take place so we were going to the stand-by matches!

**Non-Title Match: Ted Dibiase (North American Heavyweight Champion) vs. Ron Cheatham.**  
– **Dibiase** over in 3:16. Total squash for **Dibiase**, who took the whole match. Women screamed for the white meat babyface and he won with his powerslam and Figure Four. – Keep that in mind.

Back at the desk with **Boyd & Watts**; **Skandor Akbar** stormed in and demanded that the Tag Title

match take place! **Boyd** told him he was just a commentator and he needed to go talk to **Grizzly Smith**. **Watts** asked who the “big man” was and **Akbar** told him it was none of his business and demanded to talk to **Grizzly**! After the break, **Watts** explained that the issue between **Ladd & Akbar** was personal and that the contract had been signed by **Afa & Sika**, so **Grizzly Smith** had no choice but to sanction the Tag Title match.

**Mid-South Tag Team Championship: JYD & Mike George (C) vs. The Samoans w/Skandor Akbar.** – The **Samoans** became the new champs at 5:30. Faces shone early then there was an hilariously horrible double down with **JYD & Sika** off a double clothesline which turned out to be



the heat spot. **JYD** sold briefly then **George** ran wild off the hot tag. Get this for a finishing sequence: The ref took a bump to the outside; **Sika** missed a headbutt off the ropes on **JYD** and **Afa** nailed **George** with a chair shot on the floor. **JYD** disarmed **Afa** and drilled him with the chair, but **Akbar** got in the ring and tried to throw a **FIREBALL** at the **Dog**! **JYD** blocked the fireball with the chair and **Akbar** took the fire to the face and rolled out. **Sika & JYD** spilled outside and **Afa** pinned **George** after a Samoan

Drop onto the chair. The **Samoans** left with the belts as **JYD** checked on **George** in the ring. – That finish was indescribably great. It may have looked a little goofy through 2015 eyes, but imagine seeing this stuff in 1982. It was also a perfect follow up to the **Akbar/Ladd** angle earlier, as the whole point of it was that the **Samoans** had lost the titles under **Ladd’s** watch and **Akbar** was determined to win them back by any means necessary, including throwing fire! Amazing stuff.

**Bob Roop vs. Frank Monte.** – **Roop** over at 3:43. This was our second stand-by match and it was a 70/30 squash for **Roop**. **Monte** sandbagged **Roop** on a hip-toss but **Roop** powered him over anyway. **Boyd** announced that **Roop** would challenge **JYD** for the Louisiana title next week. **Roop** won with his shoulder breaker.

**Non-Title Match: Mr Olympia (Mississippi Heavyweight Champion) vs. Paul Orndorff.** – **Olympia** via submission at 4:10. Compared to the rest of the show, this was like an X-Division match. Both guys were lightning fast. **Orndorff** got the heat with a clothesline off the ropes then did a **Ted Dibiase** powerslam and went for the Figure Four! **Olympia** escaped then countered a piledriver and made a comeback before applying a sleeper to get the win after the ref checked **Orndorff’s** arm three times. – Fun little match. **Orndorff** using **Dibiase’s** powerslam and going for the Figure Four was a nice touch and fit their program well. **Olympia** looked impressive yet again.

**Ed Wiskowski vs. Brian Blair.** – TV Time Limit Draw at 3:24. They did some stuff; **Blair** used his speed to out-manueverer the big man. **Wiskowski** cut him off with a hot shot then **Blair** made a comeback but the TV time expired. **Watts** hyped **JYD vs. Bob Roop** for the Louisiana title next week and he noted that the last 3 title matches to take place on TV had resulted in new champions being crowned.

**THIS SHOW RULED!!!** It was all about the **Akbar/Ladd** angle and the Tag Team title match, which was booked so perfectly it was honestly astounding. Even so, there was some great booking

elsewhere, with **Ted Dibiase** winning a squash match with his signature powerslam & Figure Four then **Paul Orndorff** trying the same later on in his match and **Bob Roop** looking strong before his title match with **JYD** next week. We've seen some great television during our look back at the Mid-South TV show, but this was by far my favourite episode to date. The whole Akbar/Ladd/Tag Title deal gave the show a real spontaneous, chaotic feel and a sense that anything could happen. Try hunt this show down if you want the full experience of the immensely fun hour of TV, or check out the **Akbar/Ladd** angle and the Tag Title match [here](#), which has been conveniently edited down into one 13 minute video of awesomeness.

### **Bits & Pieces**

*Ryan Clingman*

Star ratings didn't fit with the style of the cover article this week, and I don't take retroactive star ratings all too seriously, however, below are my star ratings for the matches mentioned in the feature:

1990/05/26: Mitsuharu Misawa, Kenta Kobashi & Akira Taue vs. Jumbo Tsuruta, Masanobu Fuchi & Great Kabuki \*\*\*\*\* ¾

1990/06/08: Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Mitsuharu Misawa \*\*\*\*\*

1990/09/01: Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Mitsuharu Misawa \*\*\*\*\*

1990/10/19: Mitsuharu Misawa, Kenta Kobashi & Toshiaki Kawada vs. Jumbo Tsuruta, Masanobu Fuchi & Akira Taue \*\*\*\*\* ¾

1990/12/07: Jumbo Tsuruta & Akira Taue vs. Mitsuharu Misawa & Toshiaki Kawada: \*\*\*\*\* ¾

1991/04/20: Mitsuharu Misawa, Kenta Kobashi & Toshiaki Kawada vs. Jumbo Tsuruta, Masanobu Fuchi & Akira Taue \*\*\*\*\*

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

*Ryan Clingman*

Initially, I planned to begin playing catch-up on much of the wrestling I have missed over the past couple of months, this week, however, the Jumbo Tsuruta article turned out to be a little more in-depth than I had anticipated. Never fear! As next week we will be covering PWG, ROH Best in the World, more Mid-South, further build and inevitably stupid booking on the road to Battleground, ratings, NXT, and more!

### **Contact**

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