



Cubed Circle Newsletter 193 – A Busy Week in Japan, WWE in Sumo Hall and NJPW at Osaka Jo Hall!

In this week's newsletter Ben and I return for an issue published via slow Mauritian internet covering New Japan's Dominion 2015 show from Osaka Jo Hall, match of the year candidates, WWE 'Beat from the East' from Sumo Hall, RAW, SmackDown and NXT!

– *Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor*

WWE Mixes it Up at Sumo Hall

After weeks of relative calm on the Japanese wrestling scene, the country saw two of the bigger shows of July this past week, as Osaka hosted NJPW's 'Dominion' show, and Tokyo WWE's first broadcast from Japan in years. Osaka Jo Hall played host to New Japan, whilst WWE ran Sumo Hall a mere 20 or so hours prior.

As much as the two companies express diverging views on how to produce pro-wrestling these shows differed from one another. New Japan clearly had more invested in their show, as it was an event held in their primary market with the majority of their major championships being defended, whilst WWE's show was essentially a house show with the addition of a Finn Balor's NXT title challenge and Brock Lesnar versus Kofi Kingston. The features of Sumo Hall are so distinct due to the history of sumo that despite being basted with WWE's generic house show sheen, the venue still looked distinct. However, portions of the arena were covered in a black tarp, either due to a lack of sales, or more likely, production purposes. As a consequence, Sumo Hall looked far closer to a Manhattan Center than a major 12 or so thousand seat building.

The company's presentation, however, of what was for all intents and purposes, a Japanese house show, was different from most every company production of the last several years in that explicit reference was made to other companies, championships, and histories, not only for the likes of Chris Jericho, who appeared in the shows opener, but also for Finn Balor, Neville, and others. This isn't to say, however, that all of this information was correct, for as much information as Michael Cole (who called the show alongside Byron Saxton from Connecticut) had on hand, it was made obvious at numerous points that he had little concept of the context of any of the information he had gathered, nor of what any of it truly meant. As a consequence, he was left repeating several hyperbolic, and at times, blatantly

incorrect lines. For example, he pushed Sumo Hall as "the largest indoor sports arena in Tokyo", when but a few moments earlier he had spoken of the Tokyo Dome nearby. This of course isn't even considering Budokan Hall, which isn't used for wrestling anymore, but is still an incredibly significant historical venue, in some ways even more so than Sumo Hall. Then there are buildings such as Yokohama Arena and the Seibu Dome just outside of Tokyo, which are several times larger than the Sumo Hall.

Cole's inaccuracies didn't stop there however, as he stated that a WWE championship had only changed hands twice in Japan, something that is blatantly incorrect considering the existence of the WWE Junior Heavyweight Title, International Heavyweight Title, and World Martial Arts titles. This isn't even taking into account his mispronunciation of "Tatsumi Fujinami" as "Fujiyami" -- a man that is in the company's Hall of Fame and was only inducted this year.



There did exist, however, positives to Cole's announcing, as whilst he clearly only recorded and then regurgitated various facts and trivia notes, some of them did add some enjoyable context -- and, of course, there was a novelty in hearing 'Frontier Martial Arts', 'IWGP', and 'Best of the Super Juniors' mentioned on WWE. And there did seem to be an effort, at least by some, to make the show stand out amongst the company's patterned line of weekly content. A key example came in the semi-main when fans threw streamers into the ring for Balor. Clearly, this is something that wouldn't have been at all tolerated in the company only a couple of years ago. But, there is more to this observation than that, as it was clear that someone went out of their way to incite such a response from the crowd at Sumo Hall, as the fans who attend WWE shows such as this are different in their actions than those who attend NJPW and other events. This isn't meant to imply that there isn't a crossover between the two audiences, as there clearly is, but the fans at WWE events generally tend to gravitate more towards American trends than Japanese ones. They come wearing the Cena merchandise, begin "Let's go", "NXT" and "This is awesome" chants, and generally mimic much of what they see on the company's TV product.

But, a pivotal question to ask here is "why would fans, who presumably came to see a WWE house show, or support Fergal Devitt, throw streamers out of nowhere?". The honest answer is that they wouldn't. NJPW nothing in the way of streamers, nor does WWE. They wouldn't then throw streamers at a WWE house show, and were instead given or at least encouraged to buy streamers. This is particularly evident when those in the crowd, who perhaps didn't have much exposure to early 90s NJPW, or AJPW and NOAH, as they threw streamers off cue, before the announcer had announced Balor's name. Regardless, it made for a great visual, and is more importantly, a positive sign as far the company embracing wrestling and its history goes.

The match itself was far and away the best of the show, a **** 1/4 level affair with Balor taking the NXT title off of Owens, which will probably result in Owens capturing the US title at Battleground as a full time move to the main roster. Presumably, what this means is that it will still be several months at the very least before we see Balor called up to the main roster, which is fine for all parties. NXT, who is running lower than they were on high-calibre talent with Zayn and Itami injured, and Owens on the main roster, will have Balor to carry the brand. Balor will still be paid good money to work in a less creatively stifling environment, and WWE will have a lesser chance of squandering one of their most promising talents.



On the undercard Neville and Jericho put on a very good opener, which appealed strongly to Japanese wrestling sensibilities, even with a crowd who aimed to lean more towards American tendencies. Sumo Hall popped for matwork that wouldn't get so much as a passive applause in the United States, and built to several teased Red Arrows before Jericho ultimately submitted Neville. I wouldn't imagine Jericho having any problems putting someone like Neville over, and as a star who isn't set to imminently return, I would have expected him to do so. However, the match was good enough, and the stage (in terms of Network viewers), probably small enough that it won't affect Neville's career in any meaningful way -- and as much as he deserves better, realistically his position at present is

approximately equal to that of an Evan Bourne.

The show's namesake was an appearance by 'The Best', Brock Lesnar, in a short, albeit highly entertaining squash of Kofi Kingston. The crowd was receptive towards Brock and his offence, however, the brief nature of the bout seemed to subdue them some, at least until he laid out the remainder of The New Day.

Unfortunately, the main event was neither Lesnar/Kingston, nor Balor/Owens, as a plodding, inconsequential, and thrown-together tag-match of John Cena & Dolph Ziggler versus Wade Barrett & Kane closed the show in numbingly boring fashion. One could attempt to frame this as a sign that the company simply refuses to change and withdraw Cena from the top position, but as has been made evident by the past four or so months worth of pay-per-view cards, John Cena in the main event picture isn't the company's primary focus, nor should it be at this point. But, I feel that they may have been reluctant to place Balor/Owens on a broadcast main event, even if the Cena tag main evented the actual house show card as a dark match. Why the match was so boring, I can't say. The tag can certainly be criticized for the clear lack of any forethought in its creation, although, inevitably it was patterned nature and lack of any real effort that made it such a failure of a main event.

With positive, albeit at times flawed, changes to WWE's standard presentation, it is difficult not to view 'Beast in the East' as a positive and constructive outing. Whether this progression filters through to any of the main televised shows is a different matter, and with Vince's full attention dedicated to RAW in particular it is doubtful that we will see similar tributes to other wrestling traditions and cultures on the main roster like we saw here. However, if the company pays tribute to local wrestling tradition and lore, even with its perverted historical lens, on Network house shows for the foreseeable future, at least that demonstrates a modicum of progress.

New Japan Returns to Form After Slow Month, Produces One of the Best Shows of 2015

'The Beast in the East' may have performed well as far as WWE house shows go, and was even a creative success in certain aspects, however, it was overtaken attendance and gate wise by NJPW's Dominion a rough twenty hours later, and eclipsed on every imaginable creative front. 'Dominion', was the final New Japan show before the 2015 G1 Climax tournament, which, in only mildly hyperbolic terms may very well turn out to be one of the greatest working tournaments of the last thirty or so years, perhaps ever. Instead of conserving the energy of much of the talent involved in that grueling tour, in an attempted to avoid injury, NJPW booked a card more reminiscent of a 2012/2013 card, where they would schedule one main event calibre match after another, as opposed to their more reserved and diluted dual-tour duel iPPVs of recent years -- and what followed may very well be one of the best shows of 2015.

Leading into the 2015 edition of one of the company's longest running annual show titles, alongside Wrestling Dontaku and the G1 Climax, I was heavily invested in but a single match on the 2015 Dontaku card from Osaka Jo Hall -- Katsuyori Shibata versus Kazushi Sakuraba in their first singles pairing since returning to New Japan in late 2012. The bout that transpired wasn't quite the classic I had anticipated, but still a candidate for first or second best match of the night, and a potential match of the year candidate. It was a brutal affair, and often times quite difficult to watch with Shibata clobbering at Sakuraba's head, which has already sustained a scary amount of punishment over the past decade or two. At the same time, the matwork and story, with Sakuraba stealing Shibata's knees, as well as the

Octopus Hold, which Shibata could only break by grabbing the ropes with his teeth. Shibata was by no means conservative with his slaps either, as he spat on his hands and slapped Sakuraba numerous times with great fury, which added even more heat to a battle between former team mates. Another side story of sorts was that Shibata could not get the better of Sakuraba on the ground, even being subjected to his own hold. Shibata ultimately put away his former team mate, but not before a series of characteristic calls for punishment from Shibata, which depending on the context can be mesmerising or grating. Thankfully, most everything in the match, including those spots was laid out in a logical fashion, and with a hot crowd it couldn't help but be a strong encounter.

In what was a more surprising outing, at least given my expectations, Kazuchika Okada defeated AJ Styles for the IWGP Heavyweight Championship. I can recall of few times in my time as a wrestling



fan that I began so overtly negative on a match, before, in the span of 15 minutes, going on to rate it a solid ***** 3/4. Their prior bouts entertained me less than most avid New Japan fans, and this match wasn't different -- uninteresting during the first 40 or so percent of the match as the Bullet Club interfered repeatedly. But, when Red Shoes told the Bucks to "suck it", and sent the stable to the back, the match rapidly ascended in quality -- as one would expect from Red Shoes losing it in such a manner. Subsequently, AJ performed his

standard springboard forearm off of the guard rail, as well as a variety of additional offence on the outside. Their performance increased only further in quantity when Okada landed one of his dropkicks to Styles in mid-air. The match's pace escalated dramatically from that point, and culminated in one of the best two or so minute closing stretches of the last few years. The sequence was so captivating that I jumped up, hands clasped against the sides of my head, before thrusting them victoriously into the air repeatedly, as the sequence intensified. Okada eventually pinned Styles with a variant of his double Rainmaker that he executed on Nakamura to close out last year's G1 Climax at the Seibu Dome. No matter what gripes one has on a booking, execution, or psychological level with this match, and there are various points you could make in each of those categories, very few closing stretches given the men involved, audience, and time frame could have been done better than what we saw from Okada and Styles on the fourth.

Okada recapturing the championship wasn't entirely unexpected, although many thought that Tanahashi would take the title, as it would have too made sense long-term story-line wise. This is as Okada still looks to avenge his many title loses to Tanahashi, who he has lost the IWGP title to a fair number of times. Of course, their long-term direction will still work with Okada as champion, but will lose some of the dynamic without Okada chasing. Whilst this may seem like overkill to some, I expect to see Tanahashi versus Okada once more at the 2016 Dome Show.

Elsewhere on the card was KUSHIDA's IWGP Junior Heavyweight title victory, which was preceded

by outstanding video work featuring home-video of a young KUSHIDA moonsaulting onto pillows and suplexing homemade dummies. KUSHIDA took his title with a Kimura, which he got to straight from the Katayoku no Tenshi , which was a terrific transition and finish to close one of the better matches of the show. In terms of junior talent, I believe KUSHIDA to be the most talented performer in the company, and there exists some fresh junior opponents for him such as Jushin Liger, Trent, and Dorada, if they choose to invest in the Jr. division, which they haven't been seemingly interested in for a good couple of years now.



Tomohiro Ishii must have been inspired by KUSHIDA's senton off of the apron, as he decided to implement the maneuver in his NEVER title challenge against Togi Makabe, the only difference being that Ishii almost never performs dives, and he pretty much missed Makabe completely landing on the outside before popping straight back up! Following a backdrop Ishii sold a "shoulder dislocation" to the extent that I thought he had shoot injured himself until reading about the match in this week's Observer. Ishii's selling was, as always, top notch. He and Makabe traded the usual strikes, and Ishii had a doctor check on him repeatedly before waring back, and eventually succumbing to a King Kong knee after taking a spider suplex onto his head. It was the best outing I have seen these to have, the most believable, but also the most grueling, and whilst Ishii shows few signs of wear in-ring, common sense would say that he must be hurting badly given the amount of physical strain he has taken for years.

The semi-main event saw Hirooki Goto defeat Shinsuke Nakamura for a second time, retaining his newly won Intercontinental Championship for the first time. This match, too, was preceded by a highly effective video package. Nakamura's

working ability is constantly praised, and rightfully so, but when ignoring charisma and star power and observing both men work this match, Goto is just as good of a pure worker, and doesn't get the same praise as Nakamura in that department. Regardless, they see something in Goto, as they gave him what was, at the time of Shinsuke's reign, the most important championship in the company, alongside the IWGP Heavyweight title. This wasn't their best match, and perhaps third or fourth best match on the show, but then again, this was one of the better shows of the year thus far, and on most other shows, specifically non-NJPW ones, this would have been a standout.

Below that we had an IWGP Tag title bout with Matt Taven & Michael Bennett dropping the belts back to Anderson & Gallows, in a match far more focused on Maria Kanellis than the tag team

championships. Maria was kicked off the apron by Gallows in full view of Bennett, which led to a some very good fire. However, the fact that Bennett didn't storm the ring at the match's onset, and instead worked calmly with the men who laid his wife out last month was incredulous, and removed much of the emotion from what could have been a good and unique match. Instead, what we got was a dull and predictable affair, one that did little else than further degrade the tag belts and serve as a buffer between matches, and an excuse to get Maria on camera. The IWGP Junior Tag title opener was also patterned with yet another three-way tag match with RPG Vice, ReDragon, and the Bucks doing the same sort of match that we first got with the Hooligans, Time Splitters, and Young Bucks a year or two ago. This isn't to say that the match was bad, but it is difficult to get excited for an inconsequential match you have seen a dozen times, even if it does involve some incredible talent.

The top matches for the 2015 G1 Climax were also announced, but given that we look to preview the G1 in full next week, we will analyse the crowd reactions and tour schedule next week!



Ninsuke!

RAW Ramblings – July 6th 2015.

Allstate Arena: Chicago, IL.

Ben Carass.

You know, I honestly can't remember the last time I actually enjoyed watching an entire episode of Monday Night RAW. There have been some good segments recently, **Kevin Owens** has been the shining light since his debut, **John Cena's** US title challenge almost always produces good matches and anything involving **Brock Lesnar** has an added level of importance, but for the most part the shows have been on the verge of unwatchable for a very long time. It shouldn't feel like a chore to sit through three hours of poorly scripted television for a couple of decent segments every week, nor should the majority of my evening's entertainment come from the live RAW thread on the BOARD~!. Sadly, this has been the situation for some time and there is seemingly no end in sight for the malaise of terrible booking, tedious re-tread feud after re-tread feud, not to mention atrocious scripting and acting

that makes adult entertainment industry look like the Royal Shakespeare Company. With last week's TERRIBLE rating, I expected **Vince McMahon** would do one of two things: rip everything up and come up with a bunch of hot-shot angles to try pop a rating, or book an entire show of train-wreck television out of sheer desperation. Well neither really happened and we didn't get an exciting show, nor did we get an all-time horrible show. It was just the usual nothing-going-on drivel with one great **Brock Lesnar** segment and an excellent main event with **Cena vs. Cesaro**.



We might as well start with **Brock Lesnar**, because let's face it nobody else matters, or at least that is what I have gathered from the booking. **Brock & Paul Heyman** opened the show and **Heyman** cut yet another fine promo, calling **Brock** "the God of Retribution" who would sacrifice **Seth Rollins** on the "Alter of the Beast." – There are two death metal song titles if I have ever heard them. It was a smart move having **Brock & Heyman** start the show and tease the beating of **Rollins**, however all that good work would be undone when they followed the opening segment with a boring **Big Show/Ryback** match. Anyway, throughout the night we got wacky cartoon vignettes of **J&J Security's** ride across the country to Chicago in their new Cadillac and live-action skits with **Noble & Mercury** around Chicago in the car. **Kane** was "on vacation" in Hawaii which they proved with some not even amusingly bad Photoshopped pictures of **Kane** doing different "tropical" things: surfing, drinking a cocktail, you know. **Rollins** met with **HHH** in the back and **HHH** manipulated **Rollins** into believing that calling-out **Brock Lesnar** would be the only thing he could do to stop **Brock** from killing him. So at the top of the third hour, or a little before actually as they stalled forever until exactly 10pm to have **Lesnar** come out, **Rollins** and **J&J** came out with Axe-handles, which in pro-wrestling are way more deadly than axe-heads – who ever heard of a double axe-head? The Cadillac was conveniently parked at the top of the entrance way; there was no ramp so my idea of **Brock** F5ing the car went out the window. **Lesnar** showed up and walked down to the ring where **Rollins** and **J&J** waited with their deadly axe-handles, but **Brock** slowly backed up until he reached the car and gave his awesome **Brock Lesnar** grin.

Heyman appeared with a box full of tools and **Brock** pulled out two huge axes (with heads) and stood there looking like freaking Odin. **Brock** slammed one of the axes right through the driver-side door then proceeded to smash windows and pound the body of the Caddy into oblivion. **Lesnar** ripped off one of the doors and launched it like an Olympic Hammer all the way across the arena; a piece of the padded lining from inside the door flew apart from the actual doorframe and went into the crowd, knocking a child clear off his feet. From videos the kid seemed OK and he'll probably get to go to WrestleMania for free, so I'm sure he'll be fine. Things could have been much worse if the actual door went into the crowd and to be honest it wasn't too far away from doing so. **J&J** finally had enough and charged **Lesnar**, but **Noble** got his arm "broken" with the KIMURA-LOCK (Thanks, **Cole!**) and **Mercury** got dumped on his head and sent through the car windshield with an overhead belly-to-belly. **Lesnar** hit the ring and chased **Seth** into the crowd, but **Rollins** ran for his life up the arena steps and right out the exit. – **Brock vs. The Car** was at least *** and it went longer than his match with **Kofi**, although you could say the car didn't really sell enough for **Lesnar**. This was a really fun segment on an otherwise dreary show; they should have **Brock** just destroying things for three hours. I would advise checking this deal out.



The main event was an actual wrestling match which felt somewhat important. **Cena** issued his US open challenge and **Kevin Owens** showed up to accept the match. **Owens** did a fine job of burying **Cena** then said he needed to take the US title from him after losing the NXT belt to **Finn Balor**, which they actually showed. **Cesaro** appeared just before the match could start and he intimidated **Owens** into leaving the ring and took his spot in the match. **Cena** and **Cesaro** had another excellent match, to me last week's was better overall, however this week we actually got a finish so I wouldn't argue if you liked this more. **Cena** beat **Cesaro** clean after 30:10 of great action. They did tons of big spots and kicked out of a million moves. Finish saw **Cesaro** tease a Neutraliser off the ropes, but **Cena** countered into an AA from the second rope to get the pin. **Owens** hit the ring afterwards and went after **Cena**, but for the first time in the feud it was **Owens** who was left lying with an AA from **Cena**. – They need to strike quickly with **Cesaro** after the last couple of weeks, if he is allowed to slip back into obscurity after performances like this then **Vince McMahon** has officially lost it. **Cesaro's** promo wasn't great or

anything but he was perfectly acceptable at delivering his lines. If only they gave **Cesaro** a manger to talk for him; oh, never mind.

On a quick note, in-between the **Lesnar** segment and the main event was a **New Day vs. Lucha Dragons** match. **New Day** won in 10 minutes or so; it was fine, but the story here was **Titus O'Neil** absolutely going off and owning **JBL** on commentary. **JBL** said something about **Titus'** academic credentials and **Titus** fired up, stating that he in fact had TWO degrees while **JBL** had none. Later **Titus** was all over **JBL** for not calling the action in the match; it was pretty entertaining. I'm assuming it was a rib from **Vince** and he told **Titus** to rile up **JBL**, who at one point appeared to be either holding back laughter or was just dumbfounded that **Titus** was ripping into him. Either way, it ruled. – Sadly the first two hours of the show were, for the most part, mind-numbingly slow and predictable.



The Prior 2 Hours of Garbage: As noted, after the **Heyman** promo was **Big Show vs. Ryback**. **Miz** was at ringside and played the most annoying and unattractive cheerleader I've ever seen. After 9 and a half minutes of hideous action, **Miz** attacked them both for a no-contest. **Show & Ryback** gave **Miz** their finishes then **Ryback** took out **Show** with a clumsy clothesline. THIS SUCKED! **Brie Bella** downed **Paige** in 3:15 after **Nikki & Alicia Fox** distracted **Paige**. This feud will never end. **Roman Reigns** wrestled **Sheamus**; fans got bored and chanted "**CM Punk**". So after last week's wretched finish, they did an equally awful deal here. The lights went out and **Bray Wyatt** appeared on the stage with his lantern. **Reigns** left the ring and charged at **Wyatt**, only it wasn't **Bray Wyatt** after all and **Reigns** was counted out like a doofus. The real **Wyatt** appeared on the Tron and told **Reigns**, "Anyone but you." It was SO lame. That's 3 screwy finishes in a row if you're keep track. There was a **Rusev/Summer Rae** and **Dolph Ziggler/Lana** segment, which after the usual atrocious dialog didn't completely suck, although it positioned **Ziggler** as the heel and **Rusev** as the hero. **Lana & Summer** teased going at it again, but **Rusev** superkicked **Ziggler** with his medical boot, which he then removed and beat the hell out of **Dolph** with his crutch. **Rusev** finished him off by jamming the crutch into **Ziggler's** throat and **Dolph** was carted out on a stretcher. It would have been a great way for a babyface

to get revenge and send the evil heel packing from the territory in 1982, however I don't think that is what they were trying to achieve. Once again, **Dolph** came off like a complete douche and the crowd were totally into the evil foreigner killing the American. They also mentioned that **Ziggler** suffered the old, "Crushed Larynx", however **JBL** made sure to note that **Dolph's** "breathing" had "not been affected." – What complete and utter morons. **Dean Ambrose** beat **Bo Dallas** in 2:55 because Creative doesn't have anything planned for him. **King Barrett** pinned **R-Truth** after 8:50 and an unnecessary commercial break. It was mostly dull; **Truth** dove into a bullhammer off the ropes for the finish. If you're going to watch anything from this show make it the third hour and maybe the Rusev segment if you want to see him kill **Dolph Ziggler**. Everything else, as usual, was a giant waste of time.

WWE NXT – July 8th 2015

Full Sail University: Winter Park, FL.

Ben Carass.

Show opened with a recap of the Sumo Hall show; they showed Lesnar killing Kofi and the New Day. They didn't announce the NXT title change, because Rich Brennan announced that we'd get to see the Owens/Balor title match on the show.



Charlotte & Sasha Banks (NXT Women's Champion) vs. Emma & Dana Brooke. – Charlotte & Sasha over in 4:50. Sasha came out by herself and was super over; Dana made fun of her for not having a partner. Sasha called Dana "Little Miss Piggy" and said she would take both of them on; Charlotte showed up and offered to be Sasha's partner but told the champ she owed her one. The old "BFFs" double teamed Dana but the heels did the chase and cut off spot and got the heat on Charlotte. Sasha ran wild on Dana. Finish saw Sasha tap Dana with the Banks Statement while Charlotte had Emma in the Figure Eight. Afterwards, Charlotte challenged Sasha to a title match next week and Banks accepted. – Decent little women's match. Dana is getting better and more confident, but she was clearly

the weak link in the match and still seems awkward and clunky. It is getting to the point where seeing Sasha in developmental is just getting ridiculous. If she doesn't turn out to be one of the Divas Paige calls on to help fight the Bellas then I will be stunned. Charlotte is another option for that storyline, however Becky Lynch also has history with Paige and her mother from SHIMMER so I wouldn't be surprised if they chose Becky over Charlotte.

Bayley cut a pre-tape from an NXT house show. She said Emma broke her hand and talked about coming back from injury like HHH or Steve Austin and becoming the Women's champion. We got a recap of the Finn Balor/Kevin Owens feud; it was a really great video package and made both men, and the title match from Tokyo, seem like a huge deal. We were then inside Sumo Hall, which is not in fact the "largest indoor sports arena in Japan", despite what Michael Cole claimed, for the entirety of the NXT Championship match. Why they didn't close out the show with this match is beyond me, because nothing could follow the title match. They showed the full entrances, with Balor painted up like the Demon, and showed Hideo Itami in the crowd, plus Owens launching the ceremonial flowers out of the ring.

NXT Championship: Kevin Owens (C) vs. Finn Balor. – Balor became the new NXT Champion in 19:25 (Only about 6 minutes aired). Balor started off fast with a dropkick and went for the double stomp; Owens rolled outside and Balor landed a dive off the post. After a brief exchange, they ended up on the floor again and Balor hit a running dropkick into the barricade. They cut out a good portion of the match with a commercial break and came back to the near-falls. Owens landed a Finlay-roll off the ropes then Balor came back with the Bloody Sunday. Owens used a Sleeper Suplex and yelled at Balor that he couldn't beat him. Finish saw Balor countered the pop-up powerbomb, hit the running corner dropkick and get the pin as clean as a sheet with the double stomp. Balor celebrated with the belt and Cole did his best to put over what winning the title in Japan meant to him. Tatsumi Fujinami, whom called called "Fujiyami" came out to congratulate Balor and Owens refused to shake Balor's hand, which is exactly what he should have done. They showed Owens backstage after the loss; he refused to give any comments and went after the cameraman. – The match itself was excellent; I wouldn't call it a match of the year or anything, but it was a solid ***** and Balor winning in Tokyo was one of those rare moments when the WWE actually does something right.

Back at Full Sail, Chad Gable was with Devin backstage. He talked about Jason Jordan not picking him as his partner and him wanting remain a loser. Jordan showed up and told Gable he could be his partner next week. Solomon Crowe pre-tape: He was in a technical area and said he was ready to show the fans why he was the "resident little monster." – What a terrible nickname. They might as well just call Crowe a "Little Troll".

Solomon Crowe vs. Marcus Louis. – Crowe over in 3:30. Unlike most Crowe matches, he actually got some offence in before he started selling for a complete jobber. Louis used the CLAW, which was cool, but nobody really cared. Crowe came back and used a Twist of Fate then got the win with the Stretch Muffler. Corey Graves completely buried Crowe by pointing out that "Little Monsters" is what Lady GaGa calls her fans. Way to go, Graves! – Boy, is Crowe getting the fake push, push. Selling for geeks like Louis? Little Monster? The guy is already a mid-carder for life with this treatment.

A black and white Vaudevillains pre-tape rolled. They said they would become the new #1 contenders for the tag team titles. We cut back to Finn Balor after winning the NXT title backstage at Sumo Hall. Cesaro and Neville congratulated him then John Cena walked up and shook Balor's hand and told him

“Hell of a match.” Thankfully they cut the tape off before Cena went out to have the most boring 24 minute main event Sumo Hall may have ever seen.

#1 Contenders Match: Vaudevillains vs. Enzo Amore & Colin Cassady w/Carmella. – Vaudevillains over in 8:05. Usual spiel from Zo & Cass beforehand. Even though the Vaudevillains turned face, and by “turned” I mean one day they were just suddenly babyfaces, they worked as the heels here. Enzo & Cass shone early and cleaned house. Enzo sold for the heat and the ‘Villains worked him over in their corner. Big Cass made the comeback and ran wild on both guys. Finish saw Enzo & Cass go for the Rocket Launcher, however Gotch sent Cass to the outside. Enzo tried a crossbody off the top but English rolled through to get the pin. – Match was completely competent, but hardly enthralling. It’s weird that the Vaudevillains went over since the story all along has been Enzo & Cass going after Blake & Murphy. Maybe it will end up as a three way program, which could be decent I suppose.

This was an easy show to sit through, however if you took out the Owens/Balor match then it would have been a really weak episode. Next week’s show was also taped before the NXT title change, so I suspect we’ll just get a couple of pre-tapes and such and not much of an idea of the direction until after the next set of tapings. An update on Sami Zayn was promised for next week, so when Hideo Itami is ready to return and a possible rematch with Owens, there are plenty of options for which way to go with Balor as champion.

Brief thoughts on the Beast in the East Special:

Overall I’d have to say the show is deserving of thumbs up status, as there were three really fun matches. It kind of had the feel of a more upscale house show, although that was probably just the aesthetic of Sumo Hall. However, the main event was so terrible that it almost changed my opinion of the entire event. On the bright side, all you have to do is stop watching after the Kevin Owens/Finn Balor NXT Championship match and you’ve got yourself a hell of a little show. Jericho and Neville had a really fun opener which Jericho won in 16:25. I was a little surprised that Neville didn’t go over as he is the full-timer and Jericho isn’t shy about putting people over, although I suppose it really didn’t matter that much. They worked a high-paced match, with Jericho doing pretty much all of his old spots and Neville doing some dives. Jericho won with the Walls, which Cole called the “Lion tamer” because he was trying to show how much time he had spent on Wikipedia that morning. Throughout the show, Cole and, to a lesser extent, Byron Saxton spewed out erroneous “facts” about how Sumo Hall was the biggest arena in Japan and that only two WWE title had ever changed hands in Japan, completely disregarding the fact that New Japan & WWF worked together for years in the 70s and 80s. Brock Lesnar killing Kofi Kingston was exactly what it needed to be: A complete 2 and a half minute massacre.

And, as I already mentioned, Balor vs. Owens was excellent. I know John Cena is the biggest star and all that, but seriously, whoever decided that Cena & Ziggler vs. King Barrett & KANE should go on last, and go 24 minutes, is completely out of their minds. The match was hideously boring and unnecessarily long; 15 minutes in I completely gave up and started playing around on my laptop. I wouldn’t oppose a few more house show live specials on the Network, if there are a couple of big matches that feel special, otherwise it would be a complete waste of time and money. The two hour block was fine as I didn’t really need to see Cesaro vs. Diego, or New Day vs. Lucha Dragons, although in future, if they have a match deserving of going on last like Balor/Owens, they really need

to have it as the main event. Nobody is going to be disappointed or stop buying his merchandise if John Cena is not in the main event of a house show, especially if there is a match like Balor/Owens, or Brock Lesnar vs. Anyone, which were pushed as the real main events on TV.

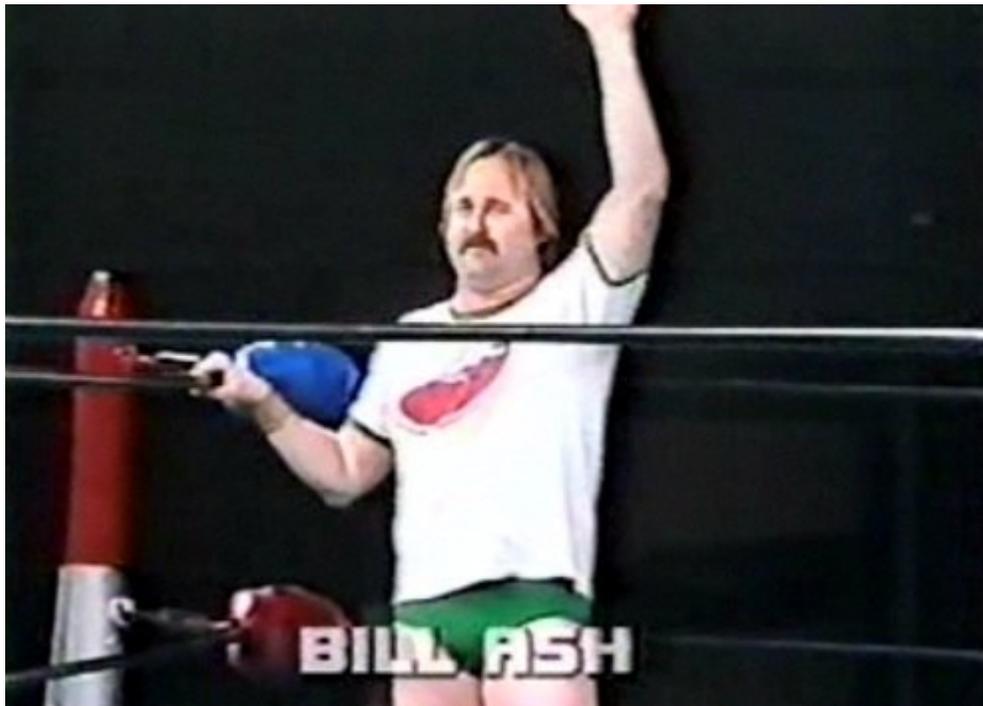
Mid-South Wrestling (TV #128)

February 18th 1982

Irish McNeil Boys Club: Shreveport, LA.

Ben Carass.

Once again **Boyd Pierce** and **Bill Watts** were our hosts for the show; as usual **Boyd** ran down the card then **Watts** recapped the big **Ernie Ladd/Skandor Akbar** angle from two weeks ago. **Watts** said **Ladd** underwent surgery on his knee but there was no news on his condition and he also mentioned that **Mike George** suffered a back injury during the **Akbar/Ladd** deal and was also out of action.

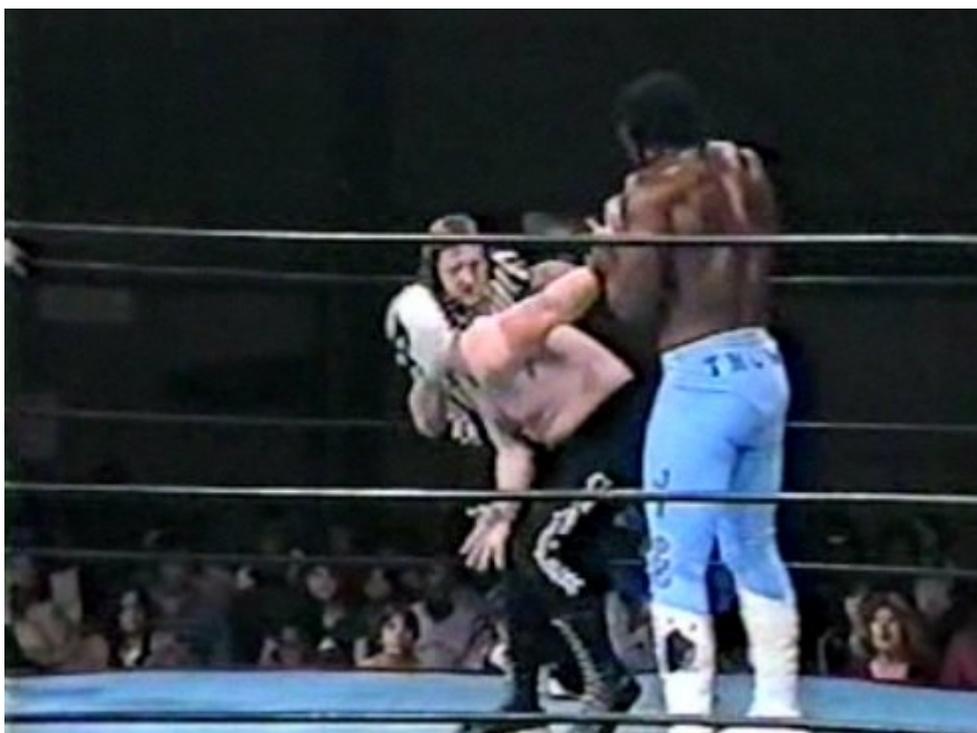


Cocoa Samoa vs. Bill Ash. – **Cocoa** over in 5:23. **Ash** was an amazing looking jobber. Picture a young **Miz's dad** wearing a watermelon t-shirt and you won't be far off at all. Basic enhancement match for **Cocoa**, who **Boyd** billed as the "South Pacific Champion" and **Watts** said **Cocoa** came from a different "tribe" than **Afa & Sika**, which was the explanation for **Cocoa** being a face I guess. **Watts** then talked about taking his kids to Mardi Gras, which explains a lot. **Cocoa** won with a splash off the second rope, because, as you know, moves off the top rope were illegal under **Watts'** reign.

Non-Title: The Samoans (Mid-South Tag Team Champions) w/Skandor Akbar vs. Brian Blair & Frank Monte. – Total squash for the **Samoans** in 3:14, although, **Blair** did get a couple of shine spots in before being sent into the post for the cut off. **Afa** pinned **Monte** with the Samoan drop. Before the match, ring announcer **Reeser Bowden** interviewed **Akbar**, who stated that **Ernie Ladd** got rid of the **Iron Sheik** so he took the **Samoans** from **Ladd**. **Akbar** called **Dusty Rhodes** the "American Nightmare" and promised to get rid of him for good because 1982 was "Career ending time."

Non-Title: Ted Dibiase (North American Heavyweight Champion) vs. Larry Higgins. – Dibiase over at 3:23 of a complete mess of a match. **Higgins** had his tights pulled up to his nipples and was utterly atrocious. He couldn't even take simple bumps or hit the ropes correctly. **Dibiase** completely outclassed him and won with the Figure Four. **Watts** put over the **Dibiase/Roop & Orndorff** feud and hyped the big Superdome show on May 1st.

Bob Roop vs. Rick Ferrara. – **Roop** over in 3:30. This was a total one-man show from **Roop**, who basically gave himself an armdrag and put himself in a bunch of holds to make it look like **Ferrara** was on his level as an amateur wrestler. **Roop** then schooled **Ferrara** with some mat-work and got the win with his shoulder breaker. – **Roop** was so great here. He wasn't the flashiest guy in the world, but my goodness could he have a credible wrestling match.



JYD (Louisiana Heavyweight Champion) & Mr Olympia (Mississippi Heavyweight Champion) vs. The Grappler & Bob Sweetan. – **JYD & Olympia** over in 6:18. This was our first look at the **Grappler & Sweetan**, however **Len Denton** was no stranger to Mid-South as he beat **Ted Dibiase** for the North American title on September 19th 1980. **Watts** hyped a title rematch between **Dibiase & the Grappler** for next week. The heels bumped like bosses for **JYD** early on, especially the **Grappler** and **Watts** talked about the **Grappler's** “controversial, orthopaedic boot”. **Grappler** went after **Olympia's** mask, so **Olympia** returned the favour and went after **Denton's** mask. **Watts** buried other territories for booking “out of shape” guys and said Mid-South promoted “real rugged athletes!” **Olympia** did all the heavy lifting in the match to hide **JYD's** weaknesses. **Olympia** got **Sweetan** in the sleeper, so **Sweetan** tried to send **Olympia** into the **Grappler's** loaded boot, however it backfired on the heels and **JYD** pinned **Sweetan** with the Thump. – There was some good action here. Mostly with **Grappler & Sweetan** bumping all over the place for **JYD**, although **Olympia** was very good too and carried more than his fair share of the match, at least from the babyface side.

Dusty Rhodes vs. Ed Wiskowski. – **Dusty** over in 4:12. **Reeser Bowden** introduced **Dusty** as, “**Mr Stardust**”. Match wasn’t much at all and was a basic showcase for **Dusty**, although the crowd were super into the **Dream**. **Dusty** worked over the leg and dropped a bunch of elbows on the knee; **Wiskowski** raked **Dusty’s** eyes across the top rope and landed some fists for a little heat. **Dusty** got the flip, flop & fly in for a hope spot but **Wiskowski** cut him off with a bodyslam. Finish saw **Wiskowski** go for a splash but **Dusty** got his knees up and dropped an elbow to get the pin.

Paul Orndorff vs. Tony Torres. – **Orndorff** over in 2:57. **Watts** put **Orndorff** over as an “unscrupulous” heel, who sent his own brother back to Florida in disgrace! **Orndorff** utterly smoked the geek, **Torres** and beat him up for fun. **Orndorff** applied the Figure Four, which **Torres** had no idea how to take so it looked very awkward, and got the easy victory. **Watts** put over the feud with **Dibiase** again and said it had to be settled at some point down the line.



Boyd & Watts signed off from the desk and hyped **Ted Dibiase vs. The Grappler** for next week, plus **Dusty Rhodes** on colour commentary, which makes me very sad that episode #129 is lost to history.

An enjoyable show for the most part; **Dusty Rhodes** coming to town is always fun. However it did feel somewhat of a “maintenance” episode, with guys like **Roop & Orndorff** looking strong in squashes, while their rival **Dibiase** did the same ahead of his title defence against the **Grappler**, who by the way also looked great. **The Samoans** are **Skandor Akbar’s** new hired mercenaries, which is cool I guess but I still miss **Sheikie**, and got a decisive victory. The best match was the main event of **JYD & Mr Olympia vs. The Grappler & Sweetan**, although it isn’t really worth hunting down. Again, next week we’ll be skipping ahead to March 11th for episode #131 due to the unfortunate gaps in the tape library. As we get further into the year, the pesky missing episodes become far less frequent so other than the occasional blip we’ve got pretty much the entire run of Mid-South TV to delve into.

Bits & Pieces

Ryan's Ratings for NJPW Dominion 2015:

Yuji Nagata, Manabu Nakanishi, Ryusuke Taguchi & Mascara Dora vs. Satoshi Kojima, Tiger Mask IV, Yohei Komatsu, Jushin Thunder Liger & Hiro Yoshi Tenzan: ** ¾

IWGP Junior Tag Title Match – Young Bucks vs. RPG Vice vs. reDragon: *** ¼

Tomoaki Honma & Tetsuya Naito vs. Bad Luck Fale & Yujiro Takahashi: ** ½

Katsuyori Shibata vs. Kazushi Sakuraba: ** ½**

IWGP Jr. Heavyweight Title Match – Kenny Omega vs. KUSHIDA: ** ¼**

NEVER Openweight Title Match – Togi Makabe vs. Tomohiro Ishii: ** ¼**

IWGP Tag Team Title Match – Matt Taven & Mike Bennett vs. Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson: **

IWGP Intercontinental Championship Match – Hirooki Goto vs. Shinsuke Nakamura: ** ¼**

IWGP Heavyweight Championship Match – AJ Styles vs. Kazuchika Okada: ** ¾**

Ryan's Ratings for WWE 'Beast in the East'

Neville vs. Chris Jericho: *** ½

Divas Title Match – Nikki Bella vs. Paige vs. Tamina Snuka: **

Brock Lesnar vs. Kofi Kingston: ** ¾

NXT Championship Match – Kevin Owens vs. Finn Balor: ****

John Cena & Dolf Ziggler vs. King Barrett & Kane: * ½

Next Week's Issue

In next week's issue we return with two weeks worth of RAW ratings, a G1 Climax preview, WWE Battleground previews, RAW, NXT, and more!

Contact

[Subscribe Via Email](#)

General Questions/Feedback/Suggestions: ryan@cubedcirclewrestling.com

Ben Carass's Twitter: [@BenCarass](https://twitter.com/BenCarass)

Bryan Rose's Twitter: [@br26](https://twitter.com/br26)

Ryan Clingman's Twitter : [@RyanClingman](https://twitter.com/RyanClingman)