



### Cubed Circle Newsletter 219 – It's Time for...More Year in Review

We are back this week with another edition of the Cubed Circle Newsletter, detailing TNA's wacky talent claims, the Jim Ross AXS deal, the 2015 Wrestling Observer Newsletter Awards, RAW, and Mid-South from 1982 featuring some “Iron Mike Sharpe” action!

In last week's issue we listed a *NJPW New Year Dash Review* as an upcoming piece for issue 219. Unfortunately, this is not the case. However, we are introducing our first weekly column/review series, *The Mixed Bag (Working Title)*, which will debut on the site this week, and appear in next week's issue. It is in that section that we will not only cover *New Year Dash*, but also some overlooked matches from the past month or so, the Rumble, and more!

– Ryan Clingman, *Cubed Circle Newsletter Editor*

### **The Pro-Wres Digest for January 17<sup>th</sup> – January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016.**

*Ben Carass*

“Iron” Mike Sharpe sadly passed away in his home in Hamilton, Ontario this past weekend; he was 64 years-old. Sharpe had suffered serious health issues over the last years of his life and was wheelchair-bound after losing one of his legs, which was something I had no idea about and was shocked to learn. Sharpe's father (the original Mike Sharpe) and uncle (Ben) were one of the most important teams in the history of Japanese pro wrestling and were responsible for the sport's early boom in popularity with legendary matches against Rikidozan & Masahiko Kimura. Sharpe Jr got his start in Gene Kiniski's NWA All-Star Wrestling in 1973 after being trained by Dewey Robertson and had semi-successful runs in territories such as Georgia and Mid-South in the early 80s. He was most famous for his time as a prelim guy in the WWF, where he started in January 1983 and would remain as a regular until 1989, although Sharpe's last televised match for the WWF was on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1995 when he teamed with Duane Gill against the Smoking Guns.

If you ever wondered how petty TNA could be, we found out on 22/1 that the answer is “very petty indeed.” TNA ran a story on their website about having a handshake deal with AJ Styles, Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows before the three decided to go to WWE. “Start dates were determined, creative decided, merchandise designed and plane tickets purchased,” the pathetic story read. “These discussions culminated on December 14th in Nashville, Tenn., where all attended a meeting at Dixie Carter’s home.” So basically, from the sounds of it, Styles, Anderson & Gallows had talks with TNA and when WWE came in for them they decided, like any rational person would, to go with WWE instead. TNA claims that Nashville's finest trained monkeys with law degrees were working on drawing up the contracts when they were informed that the three Bullet Club guys were

not in fact coming to work for Dixie. TNA's story goes on to say that, "a handshake and written deal between AJ, Drew, Chad and TNA was agreed upon and signed by all. Over the Christmas holiday, and after the lawyers finalized the long form agreement, all communication with TNA stopped. AJ's lawyer contacted TNA and stated the wrestlers had changed their mind and would not be honoring their commitment to TNA." IF paperwork was actually signed then TNA might have a legitimate legal gripe here, but it sounds like Styles, Anderson & Gallows changed their minds before putting pen to paper, so I seriously doubt TNA would have a leg to stand on if this got litigious. It is certainly not a coincidence that TNA should try get sympathy on themselves before AJ makes his big debut for WWE, but all they have done is make the company, and Dixie, look like incompetent buffoons, who don't have enough appeal to bring in the big stars. So what Styles, Anderson & Gallows agreed verbally to come to your sad little promotion, if nothing was signed it is all meaningless. You know what it is called when an independent contractor decides to go work for a bigger company, with better career opportunities and the chance of making a lot more money? Capitalism. And not a single court in the US is going to rule against that. Maybe, if TNA can produce this so-called "signed written deal" they could maybe cause WWE a little hassle, but I'm pretty sure a napkin doesn't count as a legal document, although who knows in Tennessee. Jerry McDevitt must be laughing his ass off just waiting for these chuckle-heads to make a move.

The annual New Japan & CMLL "Fantastica Mania" tour kicked off in Kochi on 17/1 and they drew a sell-out of 1,214 people for the opening night. The final three nights (22/1, 23/1 & 24/1) from Korakuen Hall will all air on New Japan World and all but one of the shows are sell-outs too. The most notable thing from the 17/1 show in Kochi was that despite being publicly stripped of the Intercontinental Championship last week, Shinsuke Nakamura came out with the IC title belt for his tag match. Rysuke Taguchi & Volador Jr beat Nakamura & Mephisto in 10:26 when Volador pinned Mephisto with a Frankensteiner. On 22/1 at Korakuen Hall, Nakamura again came out with the IC title when he teamed up with Kazuchika Okada & Virus in a losing effort against Hiroshi Tanahashi, Rysuke Taguchi & Dragon Lee. So who knows what is going on with that.

HHH teased there would be a "major surprise" at the 22/1 NXT tapings and good 'ol Uncle Paul delivered by bringing in Austin Aries for their biggest ever show in Orlanda at the University of Central Florida. William Regal introduced Aries and said he had signed with NXT; Baron Corbin showed up and laid-out Aries and presumably told him to, "Go back to WCW." I guess Aries vs. Corbin the Indie-Slayer at the next Takeover is on the cards. We've got the full results of the 22/1 NXT tapings at the end of the Digest.

Three of the top names on the UK independent scene will be working TNA's annual Maximum Impact tour from January 29<sup>th</sup> -31<sup>st</sup>. Will Ospreay, Jimmy Havoc and Big Damo were announced by Dixie Carter on 17/1 for the three dates in Manchester, London and Birmingham at the end of the moth. The gimmick was that TNA were running a poll on their website and fans could vote for which of the three UK workers they would like to see as part of the tour. Carter claimed that the results of the poll were so close that she decided to bring all the guys on board for the shows. What a nice lady that Aunt D is. Each guy offers something different, which TNA would no doubt find a way to screw up if they end up giving any of them a contract. Ospreay, 22, at just over 3 years in the business, is a near prodigious talent and one of the smoothest high flyers in the entire world. Havoc, 31, a former Progress champion, can be a great heel and is able to draw real, old-school heat in a live setting. Big Damo, 30, is 6'4 and around 290lbs and was trained by Fergal Devitt, Paul Tracey and Robbie Brookside. He has rapidly become one of the top stars in the UK after outstanding matches with Tomohiro Ishii, Shinsuke Nakamura and Hiroshi Tanahashi in 2015 and due to his size can usually have a compelling match with just about anybody. We'll have to wait and see how TNA uses these three talented guys and whether they become regulars, however I find it hard to

believe that Ospreay, Havoc & Damo would give up their UK indie commitments just to work at the Impact Zone twice a month at the most.



Big Damo and Tomohiro Ishii face off at Rev Pro's Summer Sizzler, 2015.

Jim Ross will be taking over from Mauro Ranallo as the play-by-play voice of New Japan on AXS. The story was reported by MSL and Kevin Sullivan on their 15/1 MLW podcast, however Ross didn't confirm the news until 19/1 with an interview for the Fox Sports website. Ross will start as the voice of New Japan on AXS in March and noted that the New Japan product was akin to a by-gone era of North American pro wrestling. "For me, the New Japan Pro Wrestling business philosophy reminds me of my earlier years in wrestling. I've had numerous other offers, some serious and others just flirting to return to TV Wrestling broadcasting but none have had the appeal that AXS TV offered me. We think my style will fit the NJPW in-ring presentation well. We'll know that conclusively in early March. Plus, AXS TV and I discussed other potential projects outside NJPW." Former UFC World Heavyweight Champion and defender of the pro graps faith, Josh Barnett, will remain as the colour commentator and is looking forward to teaming up with Ross. "It's a dream to be able to sit next to the legendary Jim Ross and call the incredible wrestling action of New Japan Pro Wrestling," Barnett commented. "I've listened to his commentary throughout the years and I'm glad to have someone as distinguished as him to work with in the booth." Ross was pretty much universally praised for his performance calling the live Wrestle Kingdom 9 PPV on January 4<sup>th</sup> 2015. He got a few minor details and a couple of pronunciations wrong, but for the most part Ross' commentary style fit perfectly with the New Japan product. Ross will debut on the March 4<sup>th</sup> show and by that time Shinsuke Nakamura and AJ Styles could conceivably be on RAW, having their matches called by Michael Cole, JBL and Byron Saxton. It should also be noted that Ross will be working for AXS TV and not New Japan Pro Wrestling, whom for whatever reason decided that Kevin Kelly and Matt Striker would be the English announce team for this year's Dome show.

If being signed to a \$250,000 contract with zero experience whatsoever didn't get Tough Enough winner, Josh Bredl, enough heat from people in WWE, on 18/1 he showed his complete ignorance

when it comes to etiquette and is probably in for a rough few weeks. Bredl, who has been given the developmental name of Bronson Matthews, tweeted during RAW and called the Social Outcasts, “Social Jobbers.” The tweet was quickly deleted, however enough damage was done as Kevin Owens responded with a great line, “Look at the veteran here with the big fancy insider terms” then Owens blocked him and made it public. Josh, instead of just shutting up, replied with an “LOL”, so Owens came back with, “Let him LOL. People like him fizzle out by themselves, pretty quick anyway.” Cody Rhodes got involved and tweeted Josh, “Enjoy dressing in the hallway, d\*ck.” With the Royal Rumble in Orlando, all of the NXT talent will be in the building and the rumours are that some people in the company want to see Josh in the Rumble match so he can be given the Daniel Puder treatment.



*Josh Bredl and Triple H, Tough Enough 2015.*

It was a big week on the UK scene last week. 5 Star Wrestling ran their overly ambitious arena tour and draw disappointing crowds in all three cities. 13/1 at the Metro Radio Arena in Newcastle drew about 750 fans in the 11,000 seat venue. They did a contract signing for the AJ Styles/Rey Mysterio Jr match the next night in Sheffield which was apparently booked very illogically. Mysterio beat Jay Lethal via DQ when Lethal hit him with the ROH World title; match was reportedly fine but nothing special. Match of the night was said to be Jimmy Havoc beating Zack Sabre Jr & Marty Scurll in a three-way. Main event Johnny Mundo beat AJ Styles for the 5 Star title when Mysterio got involved and cost Styles the match. The show started over an hour late and ended up going past 11pm so a lot of the fans had to leave early due to transport arrangements which left the building even emptier. 14/1 at the Sheffield Metropoint Arena, capacity 13,500, they drew roughly 700 fans for the first time ever “dream match” of AJ Styles vs. Rey Mysterio Jr. Reports say that the match was a solid house show affair but nowhere near “dream” quality. Inexplicably, they went on third and Styles got the win with the Styles Clash. Jay Lethal beat PJ Black with the Lethal Injection in a decent match and the main event was Johnny Mundo over Carlito. Match of the night was another



three-way, with Will Ospreay beating Marty Scurll & Jimmy Havoc. 15/1 was at the Liverpool Echo Arena and they drew the biggest crowd of around 1,500 in the 12,000 seat building. Johnny Mundo retained the 5 Star title over PJ Black. Rey Mysterio, Will Ospreay & Sabre Jr. beat Nick Aldis, Marty Scurll & Jimmy Havoc when Mysterio pinned Havoc. Everyone in the match attacked Mysterio afterwards, which didn't go down well with all the kids that came to see him. Jay Lethal pinned AJ Styles in the main event with a handful of tights. Aldis, Ospreay, Scurll, Sabre & Havoc stormed the ring and beat up Lethal & Styles then Havoc cut a promo about how they were all sick of Americans coming over and taking their spots. - The booking on these shows sounds utterly dismal and I'm so glad I didn't spend £60 on two tickets for the Sheffield show. Instead of just putting on three feel-good shows to send the fans home happy, 5 Star tried to shoot a bunch of wacky angles and ended up leaving fans disappointed, especially considering the WWE-level ticket prices.



In more positive British news, Revolution Pro once again sold-out the York Hall in Bethnal Green, London, on 16/1 for their “High Stakes” show, with 1,200 fans packing the historic combat sports venue to see AJ Styles' final UK date before starting with WWE. Styles lost the Undisputed British Heavyweight title to Zack Sabre Jr in the main event and received a great send-off from the fans, who were doing all the usual singing and such. Styles cut a promo and teased entering the Royal Rumble afterwards and the people went insane. People have also been raving about the Marty Scurll vs. Will Ospreay match, which Scurll won to earn a title shot at Sabre Jr, with early reports of it being close to \*\*\*\*\*. I watched the match last night (22/1) and it was absolutely tremendous. I'd probably go \*\*\*\*\* ½, but that's just me. Jay Lethal successfully defended the ROH World title over Matt Haskins in a match that had no chance of following Scurll/Ospreay. Also on the show, Big Damo beat “Speedball” Mike Bailey, which sounds like it could be awesome. Colt Cabana beat Doug Williams then Matt Classic attacked Cabana afterwards! Classic unmasked and was revealed to be Lord Gideon Grey. The Lost Souls (Jimmy Havoc, T-Bone & Bram) beat The Revolutionists (Sha Samuels, James Castle & Josh Bodom).

ROH's show on 22/1 in Fletcher, NC has been cancelled due to weather concerns. The main event was set to be The Bullet Club (Doc Gallows, Karl Anderson & The Young Bucks) vs. Jay Lethal, Roderick Strong & War Machine. The next night in Atlanta, GA sees Gallows & Anderson challenging War Machine for the ROH Tag titles and also the farewell of AJ Styles.

After joining Suzuki-Gun at Pro Wrestling NOAH's “Destiny” show on December 23<sup>rd</sup> last year, Takashi Sugiura will challenge Naomichi Marufuji for the GHC title on 31/1 in Yokohama. On 14/1 in Nagoya, Marufuji & Atsushi Kotoge beat Sugiura & Taka Michinoku in the main event and afterwards Marufuji declared that he wanted the match to be GHC title vs. Suzuki-Gun leaving NOAH forever. Also on the 14/1 Nagoya show, Minoru Suzuki & Taichi beat Go Shiozaki & Yoshinobu Kanemaru when Suzuki pinned Kanemaru with the Gotch piledriver. Suzuki & Shiozaki will face each other on 31/1 in Yokohama and they have been going back and forth in tags on this current tour. On 16/1 in Kumamoto, Shiozaki & Kanemaru beat Suzuki & Taka Michinoku when Shiozaki pinned Taka with the Go Arm Lariat. Shiozaki stated afterwards that he is only getting stronger and will take out Suzuki-Gun one-by-one.

RAW did a disappointing number this week with no NFL competition. They were only up 158,000 viewers across the three hours, with a total of 3,478,000 viewers. Considering last week they were up against the monster college championship game, you would have thought that a lot more people would have come back to RAW, but that appears not to be the case. 8pm did 3,775,000, 9pm dropped to 3,591,00 and 10pm fell to 3,123,000, that's a drop of 17% overall. SmackDown on USA did a 1.68 rating with 2,332,000 viewers, roughly a 15% drop from the debut on USA. TNA iMPACT was up to 288,000 for the first-run 9pm timeslot and did 77,000 viewers for the replay at midnight.

#### **NXT Tapings 22/1 from the University of Central Florida.**

**Taped for 10/2:** 1. Baron Corbin beat Johnny Gargano. 2. Mojo Rawley and Zack Ryder over John Skylar & Corey Hollis. 3. Alexa Bliss (w/Blake & Murphy) defeated Cameron in a reportedly terrible match. 4. Elias Samson downed Jesse Sorensen. 5. Bayley retained the Women's title over Carmella. Eva Marie & Nia Jax attacked Carmella afterwards and Bayley tried to help, but she was taken out too. Asuka hit the ring and Nia & Eva ran away. Asuka & Bayley teased a match with a staredown.

**Taped for 17/2:** 1. Enzo Amore, Colin Cassady & American Alpha (Chad Gable & Jason Jordan)

over Blake, Murphy, Scott Dawson, & Dash Wilder. 2. Asuka beat Deonna Purrazzo. 3. Tye Dillinger downed Alex Riley. 4. Samoa Joe vs. Sami Zayn for the #1 contendership ended in a draw after a double pinfall.

**Taped for 24/2:** 1. American Alpha (Gable & Jordan) beat Blake & Murphy (w/Alexa Bliss). 2. Apollo Crews over Chris Girard (Biff Busick). 3. Tommaso Ciampa defeated Bull Dempsey. 4. Nia Jax & Eva Marie pver Bayley & Carmella.

**Taped for 2/3:** 1. The Vaudevillains over Hugo Knox & Tucker Knight. Regal booked Sami Zayn & Samoa Joe in a two out of three falls match on “Wednesday at Full Sail.” 2. Elias Samson beat Steve Cutler. 3. Emma downed Santana Garrett. Austin Aries debuted and was attacked by Baron Corbin. 4. NXT Champion Finn Balor pinned Neville with the Bloody Sunday to retain the title.

### **A Brief Look at the 2015 Wrestling Observer Newsletter Year-End Awards**

*Ryan Clingman*



The Wrestling Observer Year-End Awards, what began in the early 1980s as but a collection of a dozen or so awards decided upon by Meltzer and newsletter correspondents, evolved substantially in the ensuing decades – much like the newsletter itself – into an annual tradition, amongst the most well respected yearly wrestling awards in the world, voted upon by thousands of subscribers.

But with an Observer subscription standing as the sole requirement for voting eligibility, the existence of oversights and misrepresentations in some of the award categories is all but guaranteed. Some inclusions are more glaring than others – with Dana Brooke placing third in Rookie of the Year, Shinpei Nogami placing third in Best Television Announcer, or Connor McGregor winning Most Outstanding Fighter of Year – but oversights and erroneous inclusions are to be expected from all annual awards, let alone one with a voter base the size of the Observer's. And generally speaking, the winners of most every category remained within the realm of reason and expectations.

The Thesz/Flair award, the Observer's award for best overall wrestler, accounting for drawing power, in-ring performance, promotional impact, and mic work (if applicable), is arguably its most prestigious. The 2015 pool was deep in terms of potential winners, but paradoxically shallow as far as strong candidates were concerned.

Sasha Banks was my personal choice for the award, not because I found her work overly compelling, at least in comparison to Most Outstanding candidates Roderick Strong, Kota Ibushi, Timothy Thatcher, Katsuyori Shibata, Tomohiro Ishii, Chris Hero et al., but rather because her 2015 will likely bare more significant historical interest in years to follow than any other performer under consideration, particularly if the women's division continues to grow in the coming years, which I fully expect given Hunter's growing influence. Joe Lanza on the Voices of Wrestling podcast argued strongly against Sasha Banks as MVP, and raised some valid points, particularly relating to her slim match catalogue. It would appear that the majority of the Observer readership shared his sentiments, with Banks placing eighth with only 80 first place votes.

AJ Styles topped the list with 299 first place votes, followed by Hiroshi Tanahashi and Kazuchika Okada in second and third respectively. Styles had as strong a candidacy for MVP in 2015 as anyone, working at or near the top of most major NJPW cards and drawing major attention when touring with ROH and independent groups. He was a fantastic in-ring performer, which was the general consensus amongst a variety of pro-wrestling observers, writers, commentators, and wrestlers in 2015, many with differing philosophies on what constitutes good work .

In my view, Okada and Tanahashi were weaker candidates than Banks; Tanahashi particularly so, as he spent a large portion of the year feuding with Toru Yano whilst recovering from a recurring back injury – a programme that meant nothing for the company on any significant level. He had a fantastic G1, but wasn't necessarily the very best performer in that tournament, with Ibushi and Styles shining just as bright. Tanahashi's second place position is a strong example of a potential retroactive voting mentality in some of the more open categories. When there isn't a particularly obvious first place candidate, there appears to be a significant minority of balloters that vote for performers based entirely upon strong prior performances. I suspect a smaller, albeit still significant, portion of voters choose candidates highly touted in the Observer without granting substantial thought to the candidate's case.

Okada had a stronger year than Tanahashi. Whilst he too experienced dramatic slow-downs throughout 2015, his post-Dome programme with Fale was still semi-major, at least in comparison to Tanahashi's with Yano. After besting Fale, Okada stepped into what was New Japan's premier programme of 2015, his series with AJ Styles. Okada was placed in more main event positions, was a more central focus in the top picture, and was New Japan's 2015 ace; realistically, he should have placed ahead of Tanahashi.



AJ Styles also won the 'Most Outstanding Award', the Observer's top prize for in-ring performance. Styles didn't place in my top three, but I am clearly in the minority, and have no objections to Styles winning. Strangely, however, placing second was Shinsuke Nakamura, who by all accounts had an underwhelming 2015, with the majority of his year marred by inconsistency. He may have had the best matches on the two biggest New Japan shows of the year, against Ibushi and Tanahashi, but both of those men performed at a far higher level year-round, as did Tomohiro Ishii and Tomoaki Honma in their style. Inoffensively, Tanahashi placed third.

The Young Bucks claimed 'Tag Team of the Year' for the second consecutive year. They were at the top of my list surprisingly, not because I enjoyed their in-ring performances over the likes of Strong BJ or reDragon – although they were consistently good and at times great throughout 2015 – however, no other team was a more successful package than the Bucks. As far as self promotion was concerned, they did as good a job as any act on the indies. They were not only the independents' most successful team, but were easily one of its top five most successful overall acts. They come across as superstars wherever they worked, and whilst they may not have been my favourite team, or the greatest working tandem of the year, they were easily one of the most important.



*The Young Bucks, 2015 WON Tag Team of the Year, at a PWG event.*

'Best Technical Wrestler', a seemingly archaic award but a few years ago, has blossomed into one of the deepest of the niche categories in recent years, with the likes of Timothy Thatcher, Drew Gulak, Zack Sabre Jr., Biff Busick, and Kyle O' Reilly reviving the style on the American scene. Zack Sabre Jr. placed first, O' Reilly second, and Thatcher third. Unfortunately I didn't see as much 2015 O' Reilly as I would have liked; he has been at many points a top five American worker of mine. However, I am confident that Thatcher would have taken second place, had he worked a Ring of Honor or New Japan – he too would have assuredly placed higher in 'Most Outstanding'.

Ricochet took 'Best Flying Wrestler', which I would object to on a personal level, as utilization of

flying within the context of good wrestling matches is emphasized in the criteria for this award – and Ricochet, for all his athletic ability, consistently disappoints me as a worker. As great a year as 2015 was for Ibushi, he flew less in 2015 than in any year I can remember, and the same can be said for KUSHIDA. I would have chosen any one of Mike Bailey, Matt Sydal, or Dragon Lee over Ricochet as far as flyers are concerned.

Most of the remaining awards reflect the sentiments of my ballot: Kane as 'Most Overrated', Cesaro as 'Most Underrated', Ibushi/Nakamura as match of the year, WrestleKingdom as show of the year, and so on. There were some misses, and a couple of puzzlers, but for as noteworthy as some of those may be, and as fun as they are to discuss, on a large scale, much like the Observer itself, the 2015 WON Awards painted an accurate large scale picture of the 2015 pro-wrestling landscape – and realistically, that is what I hope and expect from it.

### **RAW Ramblings – January 18<sup>th</sup> 2016.**

**Nationwide Arena: Columbus, OH.**

*Ben Carass.*

What a pathetic excuse for a go-home show we got this week. There were embarrassing production gaffs, the most dead crowd this side of a TNA taping in Bethlehem, PA, perplexing and down right moronic booking decisions, plus, you could make an argument that they did a better job of promoting the new season of Total Divas than the Royal Rumble on Sunday.



Main story of the show was them teasing forever **Brock Lesnar's** appearance on **Chris Jericho's** Highlight Reel and when they finally delivered **Brock** was laid out by **Roman Reigns** AND the **Wyatt Family**. Imagine such a thing! Opening segment saw **Reigns** call out **Lesnar** but **Jericho** showed up instead and did all of his usual catchphrases that the crowd didn't really react to. **League of Nations** came out and they all had horrible lines about being in the Rumble, expect for **Rusev**, who claimed everyday on the streets of Bulgaria was like fighting in the Rumble. For reasons that nobody bothered to explain, **Jericho** booked **Reigns vs. Rusev** with himself as the guest referee. Match was fine; **Jericho** ended up throwing out all of the other **League of Nations** chumps. Finish saw **Reigns** win with the spear at 13:50. Backstage, **Stephanie** chewed out **Jericho** for hijacking



the show. Apparently it took her 30 minutes to realise because she didn't do anything about it while **Jericho** was actually out there. There was a funny line where **Steph** told **Jericho** "It's not 1999 anymore," which funnily enough is what she should be telling the Creative team. Finally, after the crowd had been put into a coma, we got the Highlight Reel in the main event segment. **Paul Heyman** came out and just went through the motions in delivering a promo about **Lesnar** winning the Rumble. WWE some how managed to put **Paul Heyman & Chris Jericho** together with microphones and still nobody cared whatsoever. **Lesnar** eventually showed up to a lukewarm reaction, like I said the crowd was positively narcoleptic all night. **Reigns** immediately speared **Brock** like a geek then the **League of Nations** stormed the ring and jumped **Reigns**. **Brock** came back and tossed them around briefly, but **Reigns** took **Lesnar** out with another spear. **The Wyatts** appeared and they attacked **Reigns**; **Luke Harper** gave **Lesnar** a big boot then, hilariously, **Rowan** put **Brock** down with horrible spin kick. **Bray** finished **Lesnar** off with Sister Abigail and declared that the Rumble was his. - This was something else. I have no problem with them having heels laying out **Brock** to get some heat, lord knows they need some strong heels, but watching the **Wyatts**, who have been feuding with the **Dudelys & Tommy Dreamer**, stand tall over **Lesnar** just felt so phony. If they bothered to put a little thought into their booking, they could have started to build the **Wyatts**, and **Bray** in particular, as strong heels for a few weeks and then shot this angle so people might actually have bought what WWE was trying to sell them. Instead, the crowd just sat there in deafly silence, probably wondering why they spent \$60 on tickets to see this abysmal product. Of course, there will now be a bunch of speculation about a **Brock Lesnar/Bray Wyatt** match at WrestleMania, which again would be laughably underwhelming. The booking pattern of **Bray Wyatt** seems to be, heat him up for WrestleMania season so he can lose a match to a guy nobody could possibly believe he could beat anyway, and just treat him like a mid-card heel for the rest of the year and have him beat a few geek babyfaces. At least they tried, I suppose, but still, wasting laying out **Brock Lesnar** on the **Wyatt Family** just felt like a giant exercise in futility.



We got an early contender for worst segment of 2016, as **Vince & Stephanie McMahon** drew names out of the old tumbler to see who would be #1 in the Royal Rumble. They blathered on and shilled the Rumble for a while then it was time for the drawing of the names. **Steph** spun the tumbler and **Vince** picked out a ball, however he couldn't open it and just picked out another

instead. “**Roman Reigns**” was the name inside the ball. **Vince** drew another ball just to prove this was legit and again he couldn't open the ball, so he picked a different one and it too said “**Roman Reigns**.” **Vince** did this a third time and again he looked like Mr Burns trying to crush a paper cup as he struggled to open the ball he selected. He gave up and selected another ball, which once again had Reigns' name in it. **Stephanie** realised the segment was dying and made a joke about how, “at least there's no phone like **McMahon's Millions**.” It was brutal television. I also don't get why the **Authority** would openly boast about the fact that the tumbler was rigged. It didn't draw any heat; it was just stupid.

The only other notable things on the show were **Dean Ambrose & Kalisto** losing to **Sheamus & Alberto Del Rio** in 13:25 when **Sheamus** pinned **Kalisto**, and some build to the **Charlotte/Becky Lynch** Diva's title match. So, **Kalisto**, who lost the US title after ONE DAY, was pinned here because the WWE are idiots and then they announced that he would get a rematch for the US title against **Del Rio** at the Rumble. What the hell happened to pro wrestling? **Becky Lynch** beat **Tamina** with her Disarmer in 4:15 of a wretched match. **Ric Flair & Charlotte** were sat at ringside and afterwards, **Becky** cut a solid fiery promo on **Charlotte** and challenged her to a title match. **Charlotte** refused at first, but **Becky** insulted **Ric** and he jumped up and went all **Ric Flair** then accepted the match on **Charlotte's** behalf. - It really should tell you how terrible this show was if these two segments are considered part of the highlights.

**Further Nonsense:** **Natalya w/Paige** beat **Brie Bella w/Alicia Fox** in 1:20 with the Sharpshooter. I have no idea who was the babyface or who was the heel, nor do I know why **Natalya** is suddenly friends with **Paige**, who only a couple of months ago attacked her in the locker room. The hyped Total Divas also. The **Wyatt Family Classic (Bray, Harper & Rowan)** beat the **Dudley Boyz & Ryback** in 5:45. Match was nothing; **Harper** pinned **Bubba** with his discuss lariat. - This is how they got these men ready to take out **Brock Lesnar**. Laughable! **Big Show** KO'd **Heath Slater** in 0:55 then KO'd the rest of the **Social Outcasts**. I guess **Show** is a face again. The **New Day** held a funeral for **Xavier's** trombone, “**Francesca**”. They cried, it was goofy. **Big E** pinned **Jey Uso** in a boring 10 minute match with his move. Why the one half of the babyface team challenging for the Tag titles lost a singles match to one half of the heel champions is inexplicable to me. This is not how wrestling is booked, everyone! **Titus O'Neil, R-Truth, Mark Henry & Neville** beat **Stardust, Tyler Breeze & The Ascension** in a complete waste of time match in 6:20 when **Neville** pinned poor **Tyler** with the Red Arrow. - **Breeze** is officially finished. That was the show, it was no good at all. You'll probably be better off watching the season premier of Total Divas.

### **Mid-South Wrestling (TV #151)**

**July 31<sup>st</sup> 1982**

**Irish McNeil Boys Club: Shreveport, LA.**

*Ben Carass.*

It may be 2016 for the rest of us, but back at the Irish McNeil Boys Club it is the summer of 1982 and we're resuming our look at the run of the historic, “wild and woolly (!)”, Mid-South Wrestling television show. Unfortunately, episode #150 from July 24<sup>th</sup> has been lost to history so we're skipping a head one week, but luckily wrestling companies used to explain things every week so if you missed something it was never too hard to find out what happened. As always, **Boyd Pierce** opened the show with **Bill Watts** at the desk and that good ol' country boy, **Boyd**, ran down the card for the week. **Watts** went off on a completely irrelevant tangent about how his wife, who was from Estonia, had a bunch of her friends and family over at their house in Bixby, OK. **Watts** explained that his wife, who he didn't bother to name, had escaped from a post-WWII camp in Estonia as a child and mentioned that her father passed away at the camp. The point of **Watt's** story was that he



was so happy to see all these Estonians and other eastern Europeans who had escaped the tyranny of the Soviet Union and were now living in America. That's right, we got a promo from **Bill Watts** about the Cold freaking War! **Watts** went on to say that he, and everyone at Mid-South Sports for that matter, fully supported “**President Reagan**” in denouncing the Soviet Union and he declared that the USA would never be absorbed into the USSR like those poor unfortunate Estonians. - This was remarkable stuff. **Watts** finally got onto wrestling and explained that the **Junkyard Dog** was refusing to wrestle on television again unless it was against **Ted DiBiase**. **Watts** added that in return **DiBiase** was refusing to wrestle **JYD**, period. - If anyone is interested, **Ene Watts** (**Bill**'s wife at the time) used to run the advertising agency for Mid-South before divorcing the **Cowboy** in 1989.



*Bill Watts: He don't like Commies.*

**Non-Title Match: Mr Olympia (Mississippi Heavyweight Champion) vs. Billy Starr.** - **Olympia** over in 3:25. Fairly straight forward enhancement win for **Olympia**, who you could tell was working at about 60% as he basically walked through his comeback towards the end. Still, a 60% **Mr Olympia** was pretty great and he won with his vaunted Sleeper. There was one noteworthy spot, as they did the chase around ringside deal, however instead of being cut off like an idiot **Olympia** foiled the heel and hit a dropkick. - Wrestling used to make sense!

**“Dr Death” Steve Williams vs. Mike Bond.** - **Williams** over in 3:37. Match was pretty boring, although somebody figured out that **Doc** was way too green to be doing actual matches at this point and they spent most of the time doing a bunch of amateur spots. The first high spot was a BEAR HUG from **Doc**. Finish saw **Doc** hit some chop-blocks and win with **Watts'** old Oklahoma Stampede.

**Two-on-One Handicap Match: One Man Gang w/Skandor Akbar vs. Joe Stark & David Price.** - **Gang** over in 2:19. **Akbar** was wearing a neckbrace because “**Iron**” **Mike Sharpe** gave him a piledriver last week (more on that later). It may seem bizarre through modern eyes for a heel to be the underdog in a handicap match, but the way this was presented made it clear that these two poor tomato cans had no hope whatsoever against the **Gang**. It wasn't very eventful; **Gang** just beat them

up and pinned **Price** with a Piledriver.

It was time for the main event of the show and at the desk, **Bill Watts** explained the story of “**Iron**” **Mike Sharpe**, **Skandor Akbar** and the Piledriver. The story goes that **Akbar** paid thousands of dollars to hire a bunch of attorneys to go after kayfabe Mid-South president, **Charlie Lay**, in order to get the Piledriver, which was an illegal hold, reinstated. - Just think about how awesome that is. So, during the **Mike Sharpe vs. One Man Gang** match from last week, **Gang** went to deliver the now legal Piledriver but **Sharpe** countered. **Sharpe** ended up giving **Skandor Akbar** a Piledriver, because, again, wrestling used to be awesome, and this week **Akbar** was bringing his monster, **Killer Khan**, for revenge on **Sharpe**. They showed the footage of all this from last week and the fans were literally jumping up and down with joy when **Sharpe** gave **Akbar** the Piledriver.



**Louisiana Heavyweight Championship: Killer Khan (C) w/Skandor Akbar vs. “Iron” Mike Sharpe.** - **Sharpe** over via DQ at 5:21. **Mike Sharpe** unfortunately passed away four days ago at the time of writing this, so it is quite the bitter-sweet coincidence that he should be the main focus of this particular episode of Mid-South TV. The match itself wasn't that good, they just did some mean-guy stuff and **Khan** got a little heat one **Sharpe**. Finish was awesome however, as **Sharpe** went for a Piledriver on **Khan**, but **Akbar** ran in to break it up and the referee ended up taking a bump. **Sharpe** beat the hell out of **Akbar** and sent **Khan** over the top rope then he gave **Akbar** another Piledriver and the fans once again soiled themselves with glee. The referee got back in the ring and declared **Sharpe** the winner via DQ. - This was the most over **Sharpe** has ever been during his run in Mid-South and it will be interesting to see how they follow up on the momentum he established after two hot angles.

**“Hangman” Harris vs. Rick McCord.** - **Harris** over in 2:43. **McCord**, who would go on to get small, short-lived push for Crockett in 1983, looked like an even younger **Buddy Landel** with the bleached hair and he moved pretty well compared to the other job guys. His selling however, was horrendous, as his range seemed to be, not selling at all to flopping around on the mat like a fish. **Harris** won with his goofy Hangman submission hold.

**Ted DiBiase (North American Heavyweight Champion) & “Hacksaw” Jim Duggan vs. Jesse Barr & Vinnie Romeo.** - Basic enhancement win for **Duggan & DiBiase** in . **Jesse Barr**, who was just above the level of a complete jobber, got the chance to shine on **Duggan** for a while, but everything went wrong when **Romeo** tagged in and the heels beat him up with ease. The finish was wacky, as **DiBiase**, instead of slamming **Romeo's** head into the turnbuckle, slammed it into **Duggan's** head then slapped on the Figure Four while **Duggan** took out **Barr** with a flying headbutt like he was **Mil Mascaras**. - This was essentially the genesis of the **Rat Pack**, but it will still take a few months before **Matt Bourne** joins the stable and they really get rolling.

Back with **Boyd & Watts** at the desk and they showed the finish of **Ted DiBiase vs. Buck Robley** from last week. **Mike Sharpe, Paul Ellering & Mr Olympia** were all in **Robley's** corner, because babyfaces used to be friends with each other. The time ran out and the match was declared a draw.



**Buck Robley vs. The Assassin.** - No Contest. They stalled for time until it was time for the craziness to end the show. **Robley** got the Sleeper but **Assassin** bumped the ref and broke the hold. **DiBiase** hit the ring and tried to hit **Robley** with his loaded glove; **Robley** avoided the shot and loaded up his forearm pad and swung it at **DiBiase**, but **Teddy** hid behind the **Assassin**, who ate the loaded pad. **DiBiase** ran away and **Robley** stood tall in the ring. **Boyd & Watts** signed off from the desk and they must have been pushed for time

because they didn't even hype anything for next week and just thanked all the fans for watching.

This was far from the best episode of Mid-South, but there were enough good things on the show to make it at least enjoyable. The JYD/DiBiase story is still a strong undercurrent, but we have to wait and see what happens as JYD is refusing to wrestle on TV unless it is against DiBiase and DiBiase is refusing to wrestle the Dog at all. Seeing DiBiase & Duggan forming their heel team was pretty noteworthy, as they would go on to be the top heel faction for the next year-or so. Plus, Watts & Ernie Ladd did a wonderful job of getting Mike Sharpe over to a level he had never been before by laying out the hated Skandor Akbar two weeks in a row. Overall, a solid show but nothing you need to go out of your way to see.



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

In next week's issue we cover what will most assuredly be a newsworthy Royal Rumble, the *Mixed Bag*, RAW, the news, and much more!

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