



Cubed Circle Newsletter 230 – Type Forever!

We are back with one of our biggest issues of the year covering all of the major matches happenings from the biggest weekend in wrestling of the entire year. Ben reviews and discusses WrestleMania 32, the post-Mania RAW, Takeover Dallas, and the Hall of Fame in-depth. Plus we have the largest and most extensive Mixed Bag segment yet with coverage of Shimmer, EVOLVE 58, EVOLVE 59, Mercury Rising, TakeOver, WrestleMania, and more!

– Ryan Clingman, Cubed Circle Newsletter, Editor

The Pro-Wres Digest for April 3rd – April 9th.

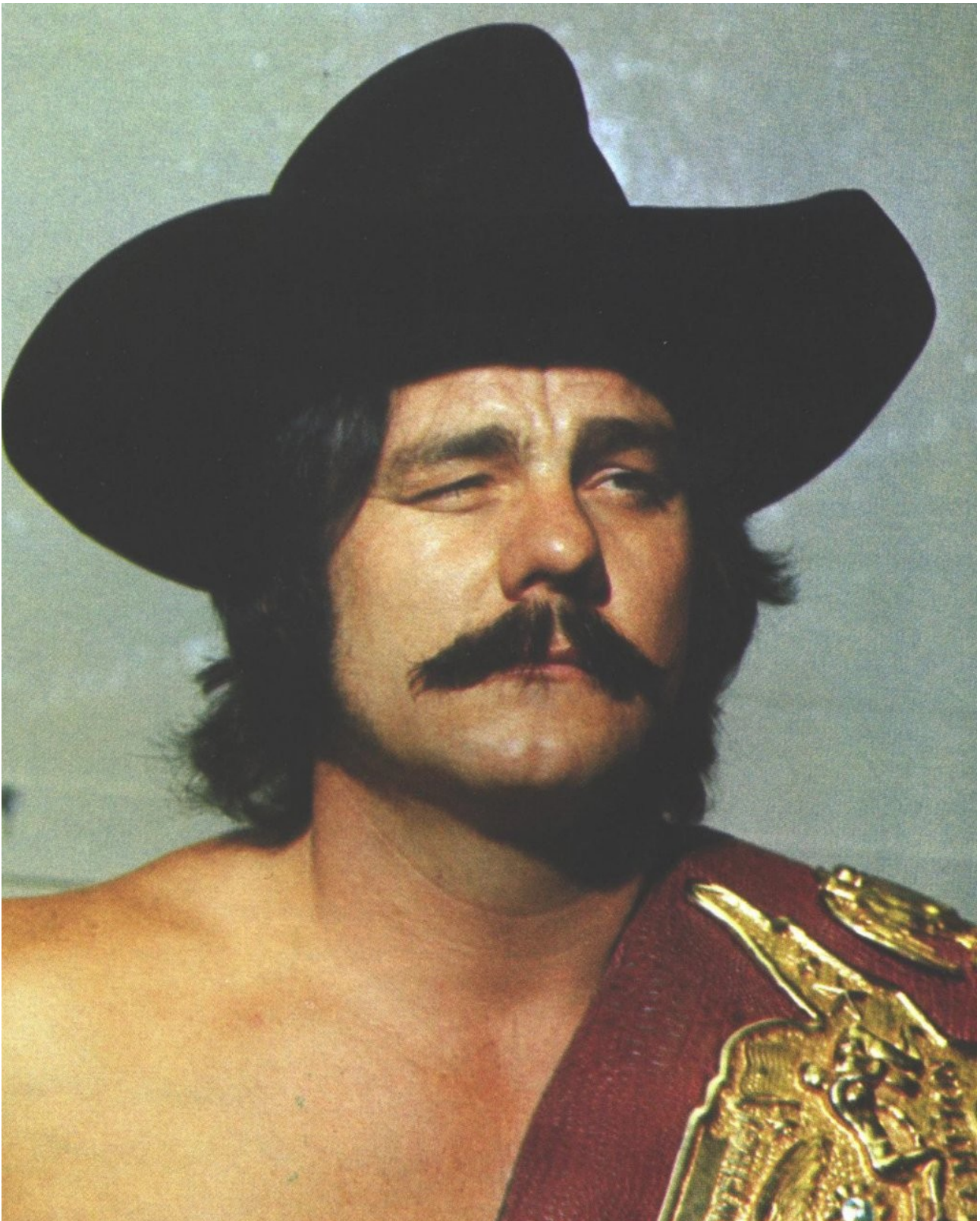
@BenCarass.

Top Stories:

The sad news of Blackjack Mulligan's death was reported by WWE.com on 7/4, although the article didn't mention a cause or date of death. Mulligan, 73, had been battling health issues for years and suffered a heart attack in June 2015, which at the time Mulligan attributed to suffering from the ill-effects of The Bends after a diving incident years earlier. He was hospitalised earlier this year in February and his grandsons, Windham Rotunda (Bryan Wyatt) & Taylor Rotunda (Bo Dallas), along with their father Mike Rotunda, left the Monday Night RAW show in Dallas, TX and flew to Florida to be with Mulligan. There was no update on Mulligan's condition at all until the WWE story about his passing on 7/4. The strange thing in all of this is that up until two weeks ago – when all the concussion cases were thrown out of court – the WWE were actually suing Mulligan as a pre-emptive strike to stop him from jumping on the concussion lawsuits. I'm sure Dave Meltzer will write one hell of a bio for Mulligan in the Observer next week, so make sure you give it a read and learn all about one of the biggest characters in pro wrestling during the 70's and 80's. Our condolences go out to Mulligan's family and friends.

Last week there was big speculation about Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows debuting at WrestleMania or, more likely, the next night on RAW. Mike Johnson of PWInsider even reported on 31/1 that Anderson & Gallows were scheduled to be at TV this week. Well, Johnson wasn't wrong as Scott Hall posted a picture on [Twitter](#) of himself with Anderson & Gallows backstage at RAW at the American Airlines Centre. The latest on the situation according to Bryan Alvarez on the F4W audio shows is that Anderson & Gallows actually flew in to Dallas on Sunday while WrestleMania was taking place and they had all their gear with them. They were at TV all day Monday but by the time the show had been finalised, Anderson & Gallows were not included and they ended up just hanging out before flying back home on Tuesday. Anderson & Gallows are still expected to debut

imminently, however it appears that they will have to wait until the crack team of Hollywood writers figures out what to do with them.



There was a breakdown of the early WrestleMania numbers in the [Observer](#) this week. On April 4th the WWE Network had 1,824,000 subscribers, with 1,454,000 paid and 370,000 free. The US number was 1,109,000 and 281,000 free, whereas outside the US did 345,000 paid and 89,000 free.

For comparison, last year the subscriber count was 1,315,000 worldwide with 1,123,000 in the US and 192,000 international. So the comparable numbers are, 1,454,000 paid for 2016 versus 1,315,000 in 2015 for worldwide subscribers and 1,109,000 for the US in 2016 compared to 1,123,000. Both of which are pretty terrible numbers in terms of growth, although we will have to wait until the next WWE earnings report in June to see how many of the 370,000 worldwide free subscribers they can turn into paying customers. The live attendance, which for some reason is always a hotly debated topic due to certain people not being able to fathom that the WWE actually lie about their attendance figures, will undoubtedly be an all-time record for a pro wrestling crowd in the US. The Observer lists the actual number of people in the building as 97,769, with 93,730 being the actual "attendance" number. This breaks both WWE's legitimate record of 79,127 set at SummerSlam 92 in Wembley Stadium and the fictitious 93,173 from the Pontiac Silverdome at WrestleMania III in 1987; despite what Hulk Hogan and Wikipedia may claim, the real number for WrestleMania III was around 78,000. The 101,763 that WWE announced during WrestleMania is obviously the worked number, however the [Dallas Cowboys website](#) has already run a story about WrestleMania 32 drawing the fifth biggest crowd in the history of AT&T Stadium. They of course used the worked, 101,763 number. The all-time record for AT&T Stadium was the NBA All-Star Game on February 14th 2010 which did 108,731 people. WWE announced a live gate of \$17.3, although Dave Meltzer noted that sources with access to the figures claim it was "almost" \$17 million. Either way, the gate smashed the previous record of \$12.6 million from WrestleMania 31 at Levi's Stadium last year. The merchandise figures have not been released yet, but "building sources" noted they broke the all-time concessions for food & drink, although with a 6 hour and 45 minute show, that isn't surprising. All of the real figures will likely be buried in WWE's earnings report in June, so we'll have a better idea of all the numbers in a couple of months. Regardless, WrestleMania 32, despite all the criticisms about the creative direction of the show, was a monumental money making success for the WWE.

There were also attendance figures for some of the other shows over WrestleMania weekend in the Observer. Evolve & WWN sold out Eddie Dean's Ranch for three shows, with 1,075 seats being filled. They apparently crammed a lot more people in as standing room only for Evolve 59 on 2/4, with more than 1,500 people in the building to see the Ricochet/Will Ospreay match. Evolve 58 on 1/4 and the WWN Supershow on 2/4 had around 1,200 people in the building. ROH sold out the 1,400 seat Hyatt Regency on two consecutive nights and the Wrestlecon Supershow also sold out the same building on 2/4 which went head-to-head with the WWE Hall of Fame.

If you wondered who the faceless zombie things were during HHH's WrestleMania entrance, [Pro Wrestling Sheet](#) posted a list of names who played Hunter's army of loyal subjects and fittingly some of the top names from NXT were reportedly part of the performance. The Revival, Chad Gable, Simon Gotch, Chris Girard, Blake, Murphy, Enzo Amore & Elias Samson all made their WrestleMania debuts during the entrance. Hideo Itami appeared at his second WrestleMania under one of the hoods and I honestly don't know if that is better or worse than his appearance in the Battle Royal last year. [WrestlingInc](#) also reported that Finn Balor was in one of the zombie costumes too, which will no doubt become a trivia note like CM Punk's first Mania appearance as part of John Cena's entrance in 2006.

Kota Ibushi not only worked the Kaiju Big Battel and WWN Supershow over WrestleMania weekend, he was at NXT TakeOver: Dallas and was brought in to be shown on camera in the crowd. Bobby Roode did the same thing, so it is pretty much a given that these two guys will be part of the Global Cruiserweight Series. On that note, Ricochet is apparently not taking any independent bookings after June. Dave Meltzer noted in the Observer that promoters have been informed he will be unavailable and even more interestingly that New Japan are already looking for a replacement

tag team partner for Matt Sydal. Ricochet has a unique deal with Lucha Underground which gives him the option of leaving after three years into the seven year deal. Prince Puma recently lost a Grave Consequences Casket match at the Lucha Underground tapings and when someone gets put in a casket on LU it usually means their character is dead. Technically, he wouldn't be able to work on TV for anyone else until season three of LU finishes airing in 2017, although I'm sure WWE could make things happen if they really want to bring Ricochet in.



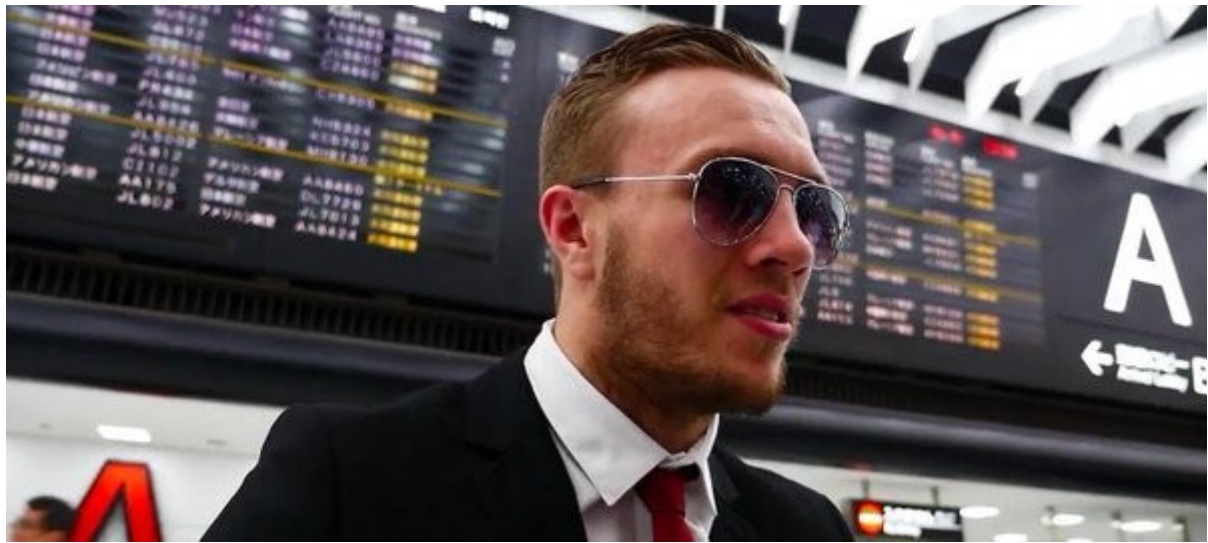
Faceless zombie things in question.

A report from F4Wonline.com of the NXT house show in Columbia on 8/4 noted that Shinsuke Nakamura appeared to be hurt during a match with his old IWGP IC title rival, Manny Andrade – the former La Sombra. Andrade performed a Moonsault off the top rope to the floor and when he took the move, Nakamura stayed down and the match was stopped for two minutes. There are no further details on the situation at press time, although the report at F4Wonline stated that Nakamura suffered a “significant cut” during the move, so it could just be a case of WWE being careful when it comes to blood. Nakamura appeared to be fine after the doctors worked on him and he was able to finish the match.

Japan:

New Japan's biggest show since Wrestle Kingdom 10 on January 4th at the Tokyo Dome is this Sunday, as Invasion Attack will once again emanate from Sumo Hall on 10/4. (9) IWGP Heavyweight Championship: Kazuchika Okada (C) vs. Tetsuya Naito. (8) IWGP Tag Team Championship: Togi Makabe & Tomoaki Honma (C) vs. Tama Tonga & Tanga Roa. (7) NEVER Openweight Championship: Katsuyori Shibata (C) vs. Hiroyoshi Tenzan. (6) NEVER Trios Championship: The Elite (C) vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi, Michael Elgin & Yoshitatsu. (5) IWGP Jr Heavyweight Tag Team Championship: Matt Sydal & Ricochet (C) vs. Roppongi Vice. (4) IWGP Jr Heavyweight Championship: Kushida (C) vs. Will Ospreay. (3) Hirooki Goto & Tomohiro Ishii vs. Bushi & Evil. (2) Kazushi Sakuraba, Toru Yano & Yoshi-Hashi vs. Jushin “Thunder” Liger, Satoshi Kojima & Yuji Nagata. (1) Bad Luck Fale & Yujiro Takahashi vs. Juice Robsinson & Rysuke

Taguchi.



Will Ospreay arrives in Japan.

The main event is arguably the biggest match – outside of another Okada/Tanahashi outing – that the company can put on at this point and is an important match for both men. Okada needs to prove he can do good business and have great matches on top against someone other than Tanahashi and Naito could truly cement himself as a legitimate main eventer if he can deliver a memorable main event performance. I don't expect Naito to win the title, but there aren't really any other strong challengers for Okada and they certainly don't want to turn Naito into a perennial failure in title matches like Hirooki Goto, so it will be interesting to see how the book the finish. It's also a big night for the Guerrillas of Destiny; Tama Tonga has a chance to step out of the shadows and into a major role, while Tanga Loa needs to make a good impression in his first big title match. Believe it or not, I'm quite excited for Shibata vs. Tenzan, as the story of Shibata fighting the old guard has been a lot of fun and I'm sure Tenzan will do everything in his power to have a good match, which may or may not be a good thing. Ospreay & Kushida have an opportunity to steal the show if they get enough time and I have a lot more faith in Ospreay to deliver a star-making performance than Tanga Loa. One of the more intriguing things about the show is how well it will do in terms of business and just how much of a strong show the company can deliver now we are well and truly into the post-Nakamura/AJ Styles era.

Tatsumi Fujinami and Jun Akiyama squared off for the first time ever during a tag team main event of the Dradition show at Korakuen Hall on 29/3. The 880 fans they drew saw Fujinami & Hiro Saito beat Akiyama & Yuma Aoyagi in 8:57 when Fujinami put Aoyagi in the Dragon Sleeper. After the match they did an angle to set up an apparent singles match. Fujinami, 62, and Akiyama, 46, shook hands but Akiyama refused to shake Fujinami's son Leona's hand and threw him out of the ring. Akiyama challenged Fujinami to a singles match and Fujinami said they could have the match any time. Also on the show, Maskatsu Funaki downed Taka Kunoh in 11:50 with a running kick. Daisuke Sekimoto & Kengo Mashimo beat Super Tiger & Mitsuya Nagai when Mashimo pinned Nagai with a Brainbuster at 17:00. Fujinami's son Leona worked the undercard and lost in 12:25 to Seiya Sanada.

Satoru Sayama's Real Japan Pro Wrestling drew a sellout of 1,545 fans at Korakuen Hall on 24/3 for a card full of mostly legends. Main event saw Daisuke Sekimoto retain the Legends Championship over former RINGS star Mitsuya Nagai with his German Suplex Hold at 20:49. The

semi-final had Minoru Suzuki reuniting with fellow Pancrase founder Masakatsu Funaki to team with Ryo Kawamura against Super Tiger, Taka Kunoh & Hikaru Sato. Funaki pinned Sato with his Hybrid Blaster Piledriver at 17:40. Tatsumi Fujinami, Yuki Ishikawa & Alexander Otsuka beat Minoru Tanaka, Masato Shibata & Bear Fukuda in 11:46. The Great Sasuke & Masao Orihara over Ultimo Dragon & Kotaro Nasu when Orihara pinned Nasu with a Ligerbomb at 11:15. Gran Hamada won a 10-man Battle Royal and the opener saw Nobuyuki Kurashima down Hidehiko Hasegawa via pinfall in 6:12.

Mexico:

La Parka reportedly fainted during the main event of a Martinez Entertainment Lucha show on April 1st in Benbrook, TX. Parka was teaming with Ultimo Ninja against Pentagon Jr & Violento Jack and didn't get up off the mat after performing a Sunset Flip on Pentagon Jr. The rudos quickly won the match and an ambulance was called as Parka laid unconscious on the mat for several minutes. Apparently Parka refused to be treated by the medical team, however he ended up being taken to hospital where he was checked over and appeared to be fine. From the [video](#), it doesn't look like Parka landed awkwardly on the Sunset Flip at all, which leads one to believe that it wasn't spine or neck related.

MVP announced at WaleMania on 31/3 that he was joining Lucha Underground. He later clarified on [Twitter](#) that he had already been working with LU as an agent and it remains to be seen whether he will be used as a talent. [The Cubs Fan](#) noted that MVP has been working as an agent for about a month and [Dave Meltzer](#), who was at WaleMania, said MVP started in an agent role when the tapings for season two began.

Ratings:

The RAW after WrestleMania on 4/4 did a pathetic 2.93 rating with 4,093,000 viewers. The show is up from the 2.66 rating and 3.771 million viewers they did last week, but was actually down from the post-Royal Rumble show on 25/1 which did a 2.93 rating with 4,091,000 viewers. 8pm did 4,287,000 viewers. 9pm did 4,178,000 and 10pm was down to 3,816,000. Last year's show the day after WrestleMania did a 3.67 rating with 5.35 million viewers.

TNA iMPACT on 5/4 did 272,000 for the 9pm first run and 66,000 for the midnight replay, with a combined number of 338,000. Not good at all.

Lucha Underground on 6/4 set another record with 156,000 viewers for the first-run and 78,000 for the replay, making it the most watched episode ever with 234,000 viewers.

Total Divas on 5/4 did 649,000 on E!, which is up from 563,000 last week.

The SmackDown leading into WrestleMania on 31/3 did a 1.66 rating with 2,328,000 viewers; down from the 1.75 and 2,501,000 viewers the previous week with Brock Lesnar on the show.

Ben's WrestleMania Weekend:

The first thing I actually watched was the live **Steve Austin** podcast with **Mick Foley** from Axxess on Thursday night. It was perfectly fine, although **Noelle Foley's** appearance was pretty rough. If you've read any of his books (and I'm sure most of you have) you've pretty much heard all his stories before, but **Foley** is such a good storyteller it is easy to sit and listen to him go over the same

stuff. The highlight of the podcast came at the very end when **Steve Austin** was wrapping up and giving a plug for WrestleMania. **Austin**, who was clearly in DGAF mode, buried the free month of the Network gimmick and said he wasn't down with giving away Mania for free. This was pretty much the only live stuff we got from Axxess this year, which I was disappointed by since the daily live shows from Axxess the last couple of years were a fun way to give people at home a sense of the festivities. There was a live Facebook stream of **Stephanie & HHH** taking a tour around Axxess before the fans were let in, which was cool, although completely jarring to see **good 'ol Uncle Paul & jolly Auntie Steph** acting like regular human beings.



Thatcher selling his arm following the Riddle match.

Friday evening was the Evolve 58 show and once again during their biggest weekend of the year, WWNLive experienced buffering issues and everyone missed the finish of the opening match. The issues with the stream were much worse on Saturday for Evolve 59, when viewers missed half of the show due to the dreaded buffering and, as expected, **Gabe Sapolsky** received the usual abuse on Twitter. Maybe Eddie Dean's Ranch were not totally upfront with their bandwidth capacity, but surely something more could have been done to prevent such a disaster occurring. I know Evolve is a small promotion, but they really need to start sending people to their WrestleMania weekend venues early to do as many checks as possible before going live and hoping for the best. Undoubtedly WWN gets a lot more traffic during WrestleMania weekend, but that should also be legislated for and certainly somebody could be hired to crunch the numbers to see if the building's bandwidth can cope with all the extra traffic. **Gabe** could always go to his good pal **Paul** and ask to borrow a few grand to make sure that the shows with WWE contracted talent on go off without a hitch. As is standard practise, if you bought just the live streams you get the VOD free and if you purchased the VOD option for both of the maligned Evolve shows you get five free VODs as a make-good from WWN. I suppose there is not much else WWN can do besides giving refunds and

they are very canny about giving people their money back, so that is pretty much not an option. I will be redeeming my five free VODs, since I was foolish enough to by the VOD option for both Evolve shows, but like a said on Twitter at the time: I don't want a free VOD, I want what I paid for to work.

Anyway, back to Evolve 58. The show was pretty enjoyable, although some of the booking was highly suspect. For starters, they put on the Tag Team title match first, which everyone missed, then had the **Thatcher/Riddle** World title match go one second while the streaming issues were still going on. I saw most of the **Thatcher/Riddle** match and they worked well together, but just like their previous match there was a screwy finish and the fans were not happy at all. They booked themselves into a corner and to find a way out they had **Thatcher** do an injury angle and the match was stopped. This did lead to **Thatcher** doing a tremendous sell job the rest of the weekend on his arm, which was nice to see in 2016. **TJ Perkins & Ricochet** had a really good match. **TJP** worked heel and did a great job of telling a story in there, which often doesn't happen during **Ricochet** matches. **TJP** worked on the leg and kept the high-flyer grounded; **Ricochet** made his comeback but his leg gave out during the finish and **TJP** tapped him out with a heel hook at 14:15 (***) ¾). Afterwards, **Stokley Hathaway** showed up and told **HHH** to sign **TJP** for the Cruiserweight Series. **Zack Sabre Jr & Will Ospreay** had what may have been the best match of the entire weekend – the only match that even came close was **Nakamura/Zayn**. They had a great match in Progress last year, but this easily topped it; both men wore pink wrist tape in honour of **Kris Travis** and it certainly felt like these two went out there to do their friend, who passed away the day before, proud. They went back and forth early with some World of Sport on speed action. **Sabre** worked his crisp holds and **Ospreay** came back with a Space Flying Tiger Drop. They did some great near-falls; the best spot of the match saw **Ospreay** go for a standing Shooting Star Press and **Sabre** caught him in a beautiful Triangle, which probably should have been the finish. **Sabre** kicked out of the Essex Destroyer and a standing Spanish Fly then got the win at 16:29 after hitting a PK, a Ligerbomb and a sick Double-Arm Seated Stump-puller thing. (**** ¾). The main event couldn't really follow **Sabre & Ospreay**; **Drew Gulak & Tracy Williams** beat **Chris Hero & Tommy End** in a good (***) 27:41 match that went about 10 minutes too long.



Eddie Dean's Ranch panorama from Dave Prazak.

As noted, Evolve 59 on Saturday had the worst of the buffering issues and the show was almost half over by the time everything got sorted out. I still haven't gone back to check out the rest of the card, but the last three matches were at least very good. **Matt Riddle** submitted **Zack Sabre Jr** in 9:20. They almost told the opposite story to what you would have expected; **Sabre** got the better of the grappling and submissions early, while **Riddle** used more traditional pro wrestling techniques. They did a fighting spirit slap exchange and **Sabre** got a near-fall with the PK. Finish saw **Riddle** apply a Twister Lock to get the win (***) ¾). **Marty Scurll** submitted **Timothy Thatcher** at 9:39 of a non-title match. **Scurll** did his usual great douchey heel routine and went after **Thatcher's** injured arm from the night before. They told a basic story and **Scurll** caught **Thatcher** in the Chicken Wing and he had to tap-out (***) ¼). **Ricochet vs. Will Ospreay** was one of the more anticipated matches of

the weekend and the two delivered exactly the kind of crazy spot-filled video game-style match everyone expected. Tons of mirror spots early; the story was that **Ospreay** had come to usurp **Ricochet's** spot as the new king of the high flyers. Both guys hit a Reverse Rana for a double-down, which were surprisingly the only Reverse Ranas I saw all weekend; if this were PWG we would have had 10 of them on the undercard. They did a good job of building and escalating towards the finish with all kinds of big moves for near-falls. Finish saw **Ospreay** go for a handspring Ace Crusher but **Ricochet** countered into the Benadryller to get the win (**** ¼).

The WWN Supershow surprisingly went off without any buffering issues and was probably the second best show of the weekend behind NXT TakeOver. The only thing that hurt the show was a 45 minute period of downtime with no wrestling then they came back from intermission with three pretty dull matches that the crowd didn't really have much interest in. Thankfully, the main event of **Kota Ibushi, Johnny Gargano & TJ Perkins vs. Will Ospreay, Marty Scurll & Tommy End** was all kinds of insanely awesome. They did so much stuff it would be impossible to recap it all; the highlight was **Ibushi & Ospreay** doing Moonsaults off a balcony onto everybody. **Ibushi** pinned **Ospreay** with a Powerbomb at 22:58. The opener saw **Chris Hero & Zack Sabre Jr** go nearly thirty minutes and they had a hell of a match (****). It was a strange choice to put it on first, but I believe both **Hero & Sabre** were booked on the WrestleCon Supershow across town and had to leave early to make that show. **Drew Gulak** submitted **Fred Yehi** in a fun 9:27 match with the Dragon Sleeper (***). Afterwards, **Gulak** offered **Yehi** a spot in **Catch Point** and he accepted. This was only my third time seeing **Yehi** but he certainly impressed me and is a great fit for the stable of grapplers. Speaking of **Catch Point**, **Matt Riddle & Tracy Williams** had a match in the spirit of competition (and because **Riddle** had beaten **Williams** twice in the past). They probably had the second best match on the show and **Williams** handed **Riddle** his first real defeat when he tapped him out with the Crossface at 13:01 (**** ¼). We then got a slew of average/boring matches, from **Ethan Page** beating **Tony Nese** in the world's dullest No DQ match, to **Taylor Made & Caleb Konely** retaining the Shine & FIP titles in matches that nobody cared about then **Timothy Thatcher** retained the Evolve title over **Sami Callihan** in a 16:30 match that wasn't that great either (**). It was past 5am UK time when the main event started and I was starting to lag a little after the run of matches beforehand. Everyone in the main event was great and once it got going I emerged from my stupor and thoroughly enjoyed the match.

The Mixed Bag Volume 5: Fight Forever!

Ryan Clingman

What Is The Mixed Bag? A Twist on the Traditional Wrestling Review.

Welcome, everyone, to the fifth instalment of our 'Mixed Bag' series! For those unfamiliar, the 'Mixed Bag' is a slightly different take on the traditional title-recap-thoughts-rating review formula that is most often used in wrestling reviews from the Observer and Torch to Voices of Wrestling, and, yes, even the Cubed Circle Newsletter itself. Instead, the 'Mixed Bag' comprises very little recap, as a column that aims to provide worthwhile discussion of the matches in question, participants, and topics related to the match at hand, as well as pro-wrestling in general. Some weeks will feature more from specific shows and promotions than others, but generally speaking any bout from 2015/12/01-2016/11/31 is eligible for discussion. This is a segment dedicated to matches that I have personally seen and find worthy of prolonged discussion, and with only so much time, any match suggestions are always welcomed and appreciated. As always, thanks for reading, and I hope that you enjoy this week's discussion.

— *Ryan Clingman*

The grandest and greatest weekend of the year in pro-wrestling concluded less than a week ago after playing host to some of the best matches and shows of the entire year. The weekend's namesake drastically under-delivered, but even so, the weekend was one of the very best of its kind, perhaps the very best. This was thanks to an abundance of great wrestling, strong sense of community, rabid and feverous crowds, and mostly great shows from the likes of EVOLVE, Shimmer, and even WWE in the form of NXT TakeOver Dallas – an early show of the year contender.

The debut of Shinsuke Nakamura opposite Sami Zayn was monumental, Heidi Lovelace emerged as one of the better performers of the entire weekend, and Zack Sabre Jr., Will Ospreay, and company tore the house down day after day. Mania may have been poor, the main roster seemingly hopeless, at least with current management, but in spite of this, the WrestleMania 32 Weekend was in most every other way the ultimate cure for pro-wrestling pessimism – a joy to be a part of.

EVOLVE/WWN, April 1st 2016, EVOLVE 58, EVOLVE Title Match: Timothy Thatcher vs. Matt Riddle

Thatcher versus Riddle was in many ways the marquee program for the WWN team heading into the weekend with video packages, "documentaries", a variety of angles, and so on playing out between Thatcher and the Catch-Point stable in the weeks and months leading into the weekend. Whilst this match was an effective progression of that story, much like their last bout, it fell flat with another DQ finish, as Riddle refused to relinquish a hold on Thatcher's arm after a rope break leading to a disqualification.

Had this been the first finish of this kind in the program, or if the first hadn't been as poorly received as it was, this finish would have made sense. But, as it stands this iteration of Thatcher/Riddle on Mania Weekend 2016 was a sore missed opportunity – in a sense EVOLVE creative (there is ambiguity here with the possible involvement of Canyon Ceman, NXT creative director) was tone deaf to the wants and needs of their audience, and even the pros and cons of their premier realistic style itself. One could argue that this series of finishes was realistic, in that disqualifications of this sort could have, in theory, arisen in a legitimate sporting contest. On the other hand, to see finishes of this sort on two constructive major shows appears convoluted at best. What indie promoters need to understand, and most often times do, is that not only is Mania Weekend WWE's biggest weekend of the year, it is the biggest year for other participating promotions too.

This was a lesson that Shimmer learnt last year, as they booked a tournament whose quality was sacrificed for the purposes of building to upcoming local shows. This may be an effective strategy in hooking new fans for a television product, but for indie wrestling, where most events are offered exclusively À la carte, it is a foolish move.

After all, the majority of these niche wrestling audiences seek great wrestling. Certainly, those sampling the promotion for the first time are in it for the wrestling alone. So, unless a promoter wishes to showcase an incredible new signing, or have an idea so spectacular that it is almost certain to succeed, sacrificing match quality for the sake of angles is a poor idea for exhibition shows such as these. *** ¼

EVOLVE/WWN, April 1st 2016, EVOLVE 58, Sami Callihan vs. Ethan Page

Everything that I have said about Callihan in the past applies here. His spit spots are cheap,

overused, and reliably generate go-away heat with me, not only towards Sami, but EVOLVE as a whole. I love Mike Bailey, in fact he is one of my favourite wrestlers on the indies – I still didn't enjoy Callihan/Bailey from CZW's 'Seventeen' show in February. Given that I don't enjoy Page as a wrestler (although he would make a very good, if not great NXT talent), and you can imagine how painful this match was for me as a viewer. * ¾

EVOLVE/WWN, April 1st 2016, EVOLVE 58, Zack Sabre Jr. vs. Will Osprey

If Ricochet and TJP did one thing besides put on a match that many enjoyed, it was warm up the crowd for the semi-main-event of Sabre vs. Osprey. WrestleMania Weekend crowds are unique, with fans from all over the world converging in a small general area, and we saw a consequence of that uniqueness here, with the British contingent singing and chanting in much the same way that you would hear at a Rev-Pro or Progress show.

What followed was one of the better matches of the weekend, quite possibly the very the best, with Sabre and Osprey going back and forth in what was akin to a more controlled version of the best Osprey/Scurll matches. There was early neck work, which admittedly didn't play all too greatly into the latter stages of the match, apart from a dragon sleeper or two from Sabre. Much like the Scurll matches this was worked like the greatest “go-go-go” mid-2000s Ring of Honor matches, in front of a crowd incredibly receptive.

Osprey and Sabre are already indie stars, but with performances like these, with Sabre taking less punishment than many others of his stature on the indies and even in WWE and NJPW, and Osprey at only 22 year old, these two will be worldwide superstars in at most five years. As Osprey becomes more nuanced he may very well emerge as one of the better performers of the the next decade. ***** ¾

EVOLVE/WWN, April 1st 2016, EVOLVE 58, Tracey Williams & Drew Gulak vs. Chris Hero & Tommy End

These four men had a very tough act to follow with, a match prior, Zack Sabre Jr. and Will Osprey tearing the house down with one of the best matches of the weekend. However, they worked the right kind of match, in many ways a traditional Southern Style tag at points, only there was no clearly defined heel or face side – an important fact. There was a moderate degree of experimentation with layout and spots, as one would expect from a Hero or Gulak match, but despite the huge flurries in the later half of the match – as in their highly acclaimed tag match from earlier in the year – the sub-par crowd reactions simply didn't warrant the amount of offence that went into the final stretch. It was uneconomical in every sense.

This may seem hypocritical given the praise that we gave to Osprey/Sabre, but of course the response to those final spots were quite simply several levels above what we saw here, and so in that sense the million moves and no selling was well justified. Still, this was a very fun main event, the second best match of the show, and may be worth your time. *** ½

WWE, April 1st, NXT TakeOver: Dallas, Sami Zayn vs. Shinsuke Nakamura

There is a cliché, perhaps even a meme amongst match reviewers and analysts popularized by the Observer when stating that a match "started slow but ended strong" – but that was very much this match. To clarify, the work itself started slow, but from the onset the crowd was white hot. They knew that they were seeing something special. They knew that they were seeing something

monumental in the development of their brand, and they reacted as such. There was even an uber meta chant that didn't phase me in the least "fight forever", because that's what many of us felt in the moment.



This was a development in the Zayn/El Generico character, as much as it was one for NXT and Nakamura – in a match opposite a non-rival, in a "pure sporting context", Zayn was as vicious as we have ever seen him. He kicked Nakamura on the ground with an intensity and aggression we rarely see outside of the context of Owens/Zayn and Steen/Generico matches. It was a hallmark of Zayn's career as much as it was one of Nakamura's.

Coming in I expected to be disappointed, as I had been with Joe/Zayn, as I had been with many of Nakamura's non-major performances, but everything fell into place in Dallas – the crowd, the performers, the time the match was given – and it made for a special moment in the histories of NXT, Nakamura, and Zayn. If you enjoy pro-wrestling, and if you consider yourself a pro-wrestling fan, track this down. What a time to be alive!

**** ¾

WWE, April 1st, NXT TakeOver: Dallas, NXT Women's Championship: Bailey vs. Asuka

The fact that NXT management decided to place the title matches on second to last is admirable, and is something that the main roster has picked up on. However, there is little doubt that this match suffered reaction wise due to the match that preceded it. And this of course isn't a slant on Asuka or Bailey, two of the best all around performers in the entire company, but they had to follow something very special, the kind of match that happens only every so many years in a promotion.

Still, this isn't to say that the crowd wasn't hot for this, because there were, and whilst as I mentioned earlier that I don't generally enjoy meta chants, the switch from a light "both these girls" to a strong "both these women" chant filled me with great joy – progress.

*** ½



WWE, April 1st, NXT TakeOver: Dallas, Samoa Joe vs. Finn Balor

Miraculously, threw a demonstration of intensity unseen since his 2004-2006 peak, Samoa Joe (and Finn Balor) came close to following Zayn/Nakamura in the main event of what will undoubtedly finish as the “show of the year” for many. As much credit for bringing the match up should be given to a freak accident – one that inevitably took it down – than to Joe or Balor. Joe was busted open early, as was Nakamura to a much lesser extent two matches prior both due to forearms. However, the boiling intensity of the match and fire in both men was quelled with repeated blood stoppages, most of which served very little purpose other than to remove blood from site for but a few moments. Eventually the cut closed, after resounding “f**k PG chants” and numerous stoppages.



Of course, the stoppages had very little if anything to do with the PG label, and were due to the wellness policy and recent lawsuits more than anything else. Indeed, Hunter and Reigns used blood capsules one week and hard way the next but a few weeks ago. However, one can't help but observe a double standard here, with the likes of Triple H and Lesnar clearly aiming for hard way on several occasions throughout the last year (and admittedly Lesnar had to push officials away at Hell in a Cell, something that very few others in the company could get away with), when a superficial cut, one that can aid greatly in the storytelling of a match, must be attended to in the matches of other performers.

This bias isn't necessarily a negative, as it demonstrates an interest in the health of lower level performers unseen in many larger sporting and entertainment companies. However, if a cut isn't serious enough to warrant total stoppage, then applying repeated pressure at the detriment to a match and against the wills of both performers seems silly.

EVOLVE/WWN, April 2nd 2016, EVOLVE 59, Zack Sabre Jr. vs. Matt Riddle



Photo Credit: @TheRealChui

It should be stated that for many (probably the majority) of us viewing the show live on WWN Live, this was the first match that we were able to watch without flaw with 90 or so minutes of persistent buffering issues that led many to simply quit the stream outright.

This was, however, another showcase for Matt Riddle as one of the most talented naturals we have seen in years, perhaps the most naturally adept performer we will see in this era. He and Sabre, as

one would expect, grappled realistically together, with Sabre utilizing small joint manipulation and wacky submissions, catching Riddle off guard, allowing them to grapple as equals. It looked as though Sabre was bound to clinch another victory, but Riddle grabbed a last minute armlock for the submission concluding one of the best matches of Riddle's career thus far. *** ¾

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Nicole Savoy vs LuFisto

This was different than just about everything else on the show. A grimy, mean-spirited, mean guy/women/girl match that was very much welcome after the lighter, albeit well worked, matches that followed and preceded it. Lufisto probably isn't someone that you will see show up on NXT considering her age and style, but would be valuable to the Performance Centre and NXT as a whole in much the same way Kana .

Regardless, technical tragedy struck five or so minutes into this match, when my feed died, not due to any fault of WWN, but rather because the UPS on my PC, which was in turn streaming to my Chrome Cast, died a selfish death. I will track this match down at some point this year – this I promise.

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Heidi Lovelace vs. Veda Scott

Lovelace is someone who has been around for a few years, but has recently garnered a lot of cult hype due to consistently good in-ring performances, as well as her unique look. And despite getting hot and bothered to an immense degree at that wretched UPS ordeal of mine, I still managed to get into this, which is many ways a testament to just how good Lovelace is. I wish I had seen the end of the Lufisto match, I wish that I had seen the start of this one, but such is life. Then again, I do have some VOD credits lying about after this weekend. *** ¼ (estimated)

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Heart of SHIMMER Tournament Final, Nicole Savoy vs. Heidi Lovelace vs. Candice LeRae

I have a rule – take any good triple threat match, and no matter how good it may look on paper, a singles match between some combination of the three participants, generally speaking, will be better. There are exceptions, albeit very few, one of the most recent of which was the 2015 Royal Rumble triple-threat of Brock Lesnar versus Seth Rollins versus John Cena. However, the majority of the time singles matches will work out better, which is why I can't truly fathom the rationale behind the decisions from both PWG and Shimmer to have their biggest yearly tournaments end in triple threat matches – BOLA in particular.

This was my mind-set heading into this final, and whilst I may still affirm that a singles final featuring two of these women in any of the three possible combinations would have been better than this match, this was an outstanding match. With that, LeRae wasn't in for all too long, which helped the match. This is by no means a slant on LeRae as a performer, who I almost always enjoy, but rather a compliment to the match's booking. They got some good triple threat spots in early, even if they were forced to resort to the standard triple-threat fair of sending Lovelace out to the floor, reducing the elimination three-way to an approximate singles match between LeRae and Savoy for some time. However, with LeRae submitting Candice, we got a good 15 or so minutes of intense, and passionate combat between Savoy and Lovelace.

Some of the strikes were a little too loose, but on a macroscopic scale Lovelace and Savoy performed at a level at and beyond what was expected of them. Savoy came out of this tournament

as a Cheerleader Melissa-esque dominant champion, whilst Lovelace emerged in losing even more the lovable underdog than she had entered. In short, the final stages of this match witnessed a battle between two of the brightest prospects in women's pro-wrestling, both swiftly rising to elite status



Photo Credit: @angrymarks

in the US indie scene. Take note of Lovelace, take note of Savoy, because regardless of whether NXT is ready for them or not, they are ready to set the world on fire, and will do just that in the coming years. **** ¼

PREMIER, March 6th 2016, XII Kratos Vs. Graves, Shayna Baszler vs. Colleen Schneider (Thanks to @BohsJohnny for the suggestion)

This was the very first pro-wrestling match in Coleen Schneider's career, and not too far from the first in Baszler's. Despite this, the pair had a perfectly engaging and competent match. Sure, Schneider hesitated at times, and looked a little lost at points, but far less so than is to be expected from someone in their debut match, let alone when that person takes the majority of the match's offence.

There is something about MMA fighters, particularly MMA fighters that grew up as fans and admirers of pro-wrestling, that allows them to excel very early on in their careers. There is no doubt that Baszler has had somewhat of a head start due to her years of catch training with Josh Barnett and Billy Robinson, and the same can be said for Riddle, who did extensive training prior to his debut, but even so, the likes of Coleen Schneider are far too good this early on to ignore. Whether it is a sense of in-ring movement, body control, believability, presence in front of a crowd, or a combination of all of these factors, combat sports practitioners seem to debut better than most others.

Regardless of their backgrounds, Baszler and Schneider are both very good for their experience levels, and they put on a match that they can be proud of on this PREMIER show. ** ½

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, Zack Sabre Jr. vs. Chris Hero

Sabre and Hero after months of build were able to once again progress what, for my money, is the very best program going, not only on the indies, but in pro-wrestling as a whole. Was it their best encounter? No, at least not for my tastes. But, you could certainly make an argument that it was. They brought a higher degree of intensity than in any other match in their series, especially when you take away the freak luggage accident that cut Hero's finger open in their magical Mystery Vortex III match from last year. It was a 30 minute war, and an admittedly strange opener, but it worked, showcasing precisely why Hero and Sabre Jr. are two of the very best wrestlers in the world today. **** ½

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, Fred Yehi vs Drew Gulak

I love Fred Yehi. I love Drew Gulak. I love Mercury Rising. Four knees. One knee pad. This is self explanatory. *** ¾

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, Matt Riddle vs. Tracy Williams

In a year of constant, rapid, and in recent times at least, unprecedented improvement and accomplishment for Matthew Riddle, he turned in his third consecutive "best Riddle match ever" alongside his Catch Point partner, "Hot Sauce" Tracy Williams. This was as close to a match in the standard American indie/NXT style that I have thus far seen from Riddle and Williams, with dives, baseball slides, and brief work on the floor. At the same time they kept the elements of Catch Point that make the style so invigorating: beautiful transitions, believable submissions, and generally exceptional ring work.

Riddle tapped, suffering his second ever loss in EVOLVE, which is better for him than it seems, as he is very quickly becoming one of the fans' "own" in EVOLVE, something that would be very difficult as a rookie with a long win streak. ****

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, Kota Ibushi, Johnny Gargano & TJ Perkins vs. Marty Scurll, Tommy End & Will Ospreay



Photo Credit: @MichaelLangan2

As everyone wanted and expected this match was completely off the wall madness. Ospreay and Ibushi are clearly mad and the jury is still out on TJP and the rest of EURO TRASH. The spot that everyone will remember from this match is Ibushi and Ospreay stereo moonsaulting off of the saloon balcony at Eddie Dean's Ranch (someone had to do it) – it looked like Ospreay actually wanted to flip off of some mounted Texas long horns, but decided against it for what should be obvious reasons. The WrestleMania ladder match was very good and all, but this was far and away the best flippy match of the weekend.

**** 1/2

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, Intercontinental Championship Match: Kevin Owens vs. The Miz vs. Stardust vs. Sami Zayn vs. Dolf Ziggler vs. Sin Cara vs. Zack Ryder

People don't simply gravitate to the likes of Sami Zayn, Kevin Owens, AJ Styles, Daniel Bryan, and company because they are great in-ring performers although that is certainly what attracts many to them in the first place. No, what creates an intimate emotional connection is the observation of these performers, at the very top of their game, the finest artists of their kind in the world, toiling away at their craft. For years, Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens warred across the indies, putting themselves through more punishment than they likely should have, all for the sake of pro-wrestling and the betterment of their lives and careers. This is why witnessing both men garner their biggest reactions in front of the biggest North American wrestling crowds yet was so very special.

There are other performers of this sort, not necessarily indie stars; not necessarily having put their bodies through the hardship endure by the likes of Zayn and Owens for years on end, that are admired in a similar light. One such performer is Zack Ryder, who after being put down year on year, hustling like few others on social media, and remaining over when he should have faded into obscurity, received his career moment years too late in front of the continent's biggest crowd. And

whilst not as personally emotive for me as a fan as seeing Zayn and Owens get their time in the sun, Ryder's big Mania victory was well deserved.



Wrestling is a performance art, wrestling is scripted, but Ryder overcame like every great babyface in wrestling history. And so did Zayn and Owens in different ways. Sure, this match wasn't the ultimate revelation and historical moment of Daniel Bryan's title victory, but was still an admirable moment in a years' long battle against bullying and belittlement. **** ¼

Other Star Ratings:

PREMIER XII Kratos Vs. Graves, March 6th 2016, Joe Graves vs. JR Kratos ** ¾

WWE, April 1st, NXT TakeOver: Dallas, American Alpha vs. The Revival *** ½

WWE, April 1st, NXT TakeOver: Dallas, Austin Aries vs. Baron Corbin ** ¾

EVOLVE/WWN, April 1st 2016, EVOLVE 58, Ricochet vs. TJ Perkins *** ¼

EVOLVE/WWN, April 1st 2016, EVOLVE 58, Marty Scurll vs. Fred Yehi *** ¼

EVOLVE/WWN, April 2nd 2016, EVOLVE 59, Timothy Thatcher vs. Marty Scurll *** ¾

EVOLVE/WWN, April 2nd 2016, EVOLVE 59, Ricochet vs. Will Ospreay *** ¼

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Leva Bates vs. Cheerleader Melissa ** ¼

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Cherry Bomb vs. Cheerleader Melissa *** ¼

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Nicole Matthews vs. Crazy Mary Dobson ***

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Cheerleader Melissa vs. Candice LaRae *** ¼

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Nicole Savoy vs. Kimber Lee *** ¼

SHIMMER, April 2nd 2016, SHIMMER 80, Heidi Lovelace vs. Nicole Matthews *** ½

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising,, Ethan Page vs. Anthony Nese ** ½

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, Nicole Matthews vs. Taylor Made ** ¾

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, FIP World Title Match: Jason Cade vs. Caleb Konley vs. Maxwell Chicago vs. Gary Jay ***

WWN, April 2nd 2016, Mercury Rising, Timothy Thatcher vs. Sami Callihan *** ½

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, AJ Styles vs. Chris Jericho *** ¼

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, New Day vs. League of Nations ** ½

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, Brock Lesnar vs. Dean Ambrose ** ¾

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, Becky Lynch vs. Charlotte vs. Sasha Banks ***** ¼

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, Shane McMahon vs. The Undertaker DUD

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, Andre The Giant Memorial Battle Royal *

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, The Rock vs. Rowan N/A

WWE, WrestleMania 32, April 3rd 2016, Roman Reigns vs. Triple H **

WrestleMania Weekend Awards 2016

Ryan Clingman

Last year we began what will hopefully become an annual tradition in our WrestleMania Weekend Awards. The reasoning for the majority of the awards can be extrapolated from the rest of the issue, although the “Top Prospect” award does require some clarification.

The “Top Prospect” award is given to a wrestler on any one of the WrestleMania Weekend shows in the general WrestleMania area who hasn't worked any past Mania Weekend. The “Top Prospect” should be a performer with great potential as a future worker and star in the business – the Top Prospect must have had at least one good to great performance on the Weekend.

Weekend MVP: Shinsuke Nakamura

[Runners Up: Will Ospreay, Sami Zayn, Zack Sabre Jr.]

Match of the Weekend: Will Ospreay vs. Zack Sabre Jr., EVOLVE 58, April 1st

[Runners Up: Zack Sabre Jr. vs. Chris Hero, Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Sami Zayn]

Top Prospect: Heidi Lovelace

[Runners Up: Fred Yehi, Matt Riddle]

Show of the Weekend: NXT TakeOver Dallas

[Runners Up: Mercury Rising, SHIMMER 80]

WrestleMania Weekend Moment: “Fight Forever” chants and final stretch of the Shinsuke Nakamura/Sami Zayn match.

[Runners Up: Zayn & Owens' WrestleMania entrances, Ibushi & Ospreay moonsaults off of Eddie Dean's Balcony, Sasha Banks' WrestleMania entrance]

NXT TakeOver: Dallas – April 1st 2016

Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Centre: Dallas, TX.

Ben Carass

NXT TakeOver: Dallas was clearly the best show of WrestleMania weekend. Anyone that tells you otherwise is either being a contrarian for arguments sake or has a very warped perception of what a great pro wrestling show is. I suppose you could make a case for the WWN Supershow as being up there also, however there was a good 45 minutes of downtime on the Supershow followed by two pretty dull matches before a great main event. TakeOver: Dallas had no downtime whatsoever, which actually hurt the show ever so slightly as the women struggled to follow the magic that **Shinsuke Nakamura** and **Sami Zayn** created. The atmosphere was also hotter than on any other show I saw all weekend, including WrestleMania, and I can only imagine what it was like being in the building during the peak of **Nakamura/Zayn**.



As noted, the lack of downtime failed to give the audience a chance to catch their breath after one of the best matches in NXT history. **Apollo Crews vs. Elias Sampson** was bumped to a dark match and **Crews** beat the **Drifter** in about twelve minutes. If they would have just trimmed five minutes off the main show they could have had **Crews** squash the **Drifter** in three minutes as a buffer between **Nakamura/Zayn** and **Asuka/Bayley**. Regardless, from top to bottom, TakeOver: Dallas was easily the best NXT live special to-date and is unquestionably a contender for show of the year.

Obviously, the big news from the show was **Shinsuke Nakamura** winning his debut match against **Sami Zayn**. Not only did **Nakamura** get to keep his first name (for the time being), but he didn't change his style at all and even did all of his wacky Swag-suke mannerisms that got him over in Japan. The building was packed with hardcore fans and **Nakamura** was the most over guy on the show; people knew all of his signature spots and treated him like a legitimate mega-star. Even though he didn't change his wrestling style, **Nakamura** managed to put on a classic match while still keeping a lot of stuff in reserve for bigger matches in the future. He didn't work the match with **Zayn** like a huge Tokyo Dome or Sumo Hall main event; it was more like a big Korakuen Hall show main event, but that was more than enough for this crowd, who undoubtedly helped turn an

excellent match into an all-time classic. Of course WWE gave him new music; it took a couple of listens for me to get used to the new theme but it actually fits **Nakamura** quite well. Another small change was the renaming of the Bomaeye to the “Kinshasa” - the city that hosted the Rumble in the Jungle, so there is at least a connection there.



Finn Balor retained the NXT Championship over **Samoa Joe** in a great main event that could have been even better if not for WWE's “strict” no blood policy. **Joe** got busted open within seconds after an inadvertent headbutt and was gushing blood from his eyebrow. The sight of the unstoppable monster continuing to fight while covered in blood tangibly changed the atmosphere and you could feel the energy of the crowd go up several notches as **Joe** pretty much no-sold being a bloody mess. The doctors stepped in to try and stop the flow of blood on at least five different occasions; each time the fans got more upset and eventually they chanted, “F**k PG.” I will continue to argue that there will always be a place in pro wrestling for a well-timed juicing. Even though this wasn't planned blood, it was so evident that the colour took the match, and the fans, to another level that you simply cannot achieve without it. It wasn't like **Joe** had a concussion, his eye didn't swell up and the blood was running down the side of his face so it didn't affect his vision. He was literally in no serious danger of any significant injuries, so in my view WWE went way overboard here in trying to clean him up. The match still turned out to be great, but it could have been so much better without all the unnecessary blood stoppages.

Asuka beat **Bayley** to win the NXT Women's title. They struggled to follow **Nakamura/Zayn**, as they were essentially telling the same story, but the women worked their asses off to deliver a very good match. The finish seemed to catch the fans off-guard, as **Bayley** passed out in the **Asuka** Lock and some people initially booed the title change. Taking the title off the **Bayley** character was always going to upset the happy millennials, but they couldn't have protected **Bayley** anymore in losing without turning **Asuka** heel, which definitely was not the plan.

American Alpha downed **The Revival** to win the NXT Tag Team Championship in the opener. **Gable & Jordan** were insanely over and the fans went nuts for the title change. There was one really badly blown spot with the **Revival** going for a Powerbomb/Clothesline combo, but **Gable**

didn't go up all the way and it looked like a mess. Still, it didn't take away from the match and **American Alpha** showed why they need to be on the main roster immediately.

Poor old **Austin Aries** made his WWE in-ring debut on this show too and beat **Baron Corbin**, however he was a total afterthought compared to **Nakamura** and unfortunately for him, he also had the worst match on the show. It wasn't terrible of anything, however whoever put it together decided to tell the basic big heel vs. small fighting babyface story and **Aries** hardly got to show anything other than his selling ability.

Mauro Ranallo was on the pre-show with **Renee Young** and **Lita**. **Mauro** was his usual encyclopaedic self with all kinds of awesome references and little factoids. **Renee** was solid as always, but **Lita** was no good at all and I have no idea why she is always on these NXT panels.

Match-by-Match:



NXT Tag Team Championship: The Revival (C) vs. American Alpha. – **American Alpha** became the new champs at 15:13. Great opener. They worked a traditional tag team formula and did it tremendously. **Gable & Jordan** got the mother of all babyface shine, which culminated in **Jordan** saving **Gable** from a Suplex then they sent **Dash & Dawson** flying with a pair of Germans and the crowd came unglued. **Revival** cut **Gable** off after some misdirection and a Clothesline on the floor for the heat. Here's where the botched double-team Powerbomb occurred and the fans chanted, “You f**ked up” and “Bothcamania.” There was also another funny chant of, “Which one's **Dawson**, which one's **Dash**?” **Jordan** got the hot tag at 11:00 and ran wild with a bunch of Suplexes. They did a bunch of near-falls, including a great series of pinning combos from **Gable & Dawson**. Finish saw **American Alpha** hit their awesome Grand Amplitude alley-oop Back Suplex on **Dawson** to get the clean win. (***) ¾)

Austin Aries vs. Baron Corbin. – **Aries** over in 10:45. **Aries** started off quick and hit a **Randy Savage** Axe-Handle off the post to the floor. **Corbin** cut him off with a Stungun and proceeded to get the heat in a very methodical and dull manner. He applied a Nerve Hold of doom for approximately an hour and killed the crowd. **Aries** came back briefly with a Missile Dropkick and his Heat-seeker Tope, but **Corbin** cut him off again with Deep Six on the outside. **Aries** beat the 10 count and **Corbin** worked him over some more. Finish saw **Corbin** go for the End of Days and

Aries countered into a roll-up for the flash pin. (**)



Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Sami Zayn. – **Nakamura** over in 20:11. Excellent, MOTY contender. **Zayn** was also over like a hero and **Nakamura** instantly became the most charismatic guy in the entire company just a couple of seconds into his entrance. The match was completely different from the usual WWE formula and the story was simply two babyfaces fighting to see who the better man was. They started off slow and kept it fairly even with back-and-forth exchanges. **Nakamura** hit his running knee and knee drop on the apron then did his vibration and running knee in the corner. **Zayn** countered the Reverse Powerslam and hit a big tope-con-hilo over the top at 9:00 then got a near-fall with a Crossbody off the top. **Nakamura** came back with some knees on the ground but **Zayn** hit a big **Michinoku** Driver for a double-down at 10:18. They had a fighting spirit forearm battle which last about 90 seconds and **Nakamura's** nose got busted up. **Shinsuke** wiped the blood from his nose and licked it off his fingers; what a guy. **Nakamura** got the better of the exchange and stomped **Sami's** head while he was in the ropes like the **Ibushi** match from the Tokyo Dome last year. **Zayn** fired back and turned **Nakamura** inside out with a big lariat at 13:25 but **Nakamura** caught him with his Flying Armbar a few seconds later. **Sami** fought out by stamping on **Nakamura's** head then returned the favour with some stomps to the head in the ropes. **Zayn** got the Koji Clutch at 15:20 but **Nakamura** fought out and hit an Enzuigiri for another double-down at 16:02. The fans lost their minds and chanted, “Fight forever,” which was pretty damn cool. They both avoided each other's finish; **Nakamura** hit the Reverse Powerslam, which **Todd Phillips** called a “Reverse Exploder” – close enough I guess. **Zayn** hit a Blue Thunder Bomb for a huge near-fall at 17:26 and the building erupted with a standing ovation. **Zayn** went for his diving DDT through the ring post and **Nakamura** countered with an Enzuigiri at 18:22. Finish saw them battle down from the top rope and **Nakamura** countered an Exploder into the corner then hit a big knee to the back of the head off the ropes at 19:50. **Nakamura** hit the Bomaye – **Corey Graves** made sure to yell “KINSHASA!” but wasn't as convincing as **Shimpei Nogami** – to get the pin. (**** ¾)

NXT Women's Championship: Bayley (C) vs. Asuka. – **Asuka** became the new champion at 15:25. Just like the previous match, the story here was two babyfaces fighting to see who was the best. Also, just like **Sami Zayn**, **Bayley** came into the match as the slight underdog in the story due to the hype surrounding the quality of their opponents. They was a stand-off early after some back-

and-forth; **Bayley** went for a Clothesline but **Asuka** turned it into a **Fujiwara Armbar**. **Bayley** used the Guillotine choke she used to beat **Nia Jax**, which was a nice touch and the announcers even pointed it out. **Bayley** hit a nice Hurricanrana through the ropes to the floor, but **Asuka** came back with a Shining Wizard and some stiff kicks. **Asuka** hit a **Saito Suplex** and went for a Dropkick, but **Bayley** caught her with a Flying Kneebar which was awesome. **Bayley** worked on the leg for a bit;



Asuka hit her Flying Arm but **Bayley** turned it into a pinning combo for a near-fall. **Bayley** used the modified Rings of **Saturn** that she applied to **Sasha Banks** for the finish of their Iron Man match. Finish saw **Asuka** hit a spinning kick, a Suplex then she locked in an Armbar. She transitioned into the **Asuka Lock** and **Bayley** fought for her life, but **Asuka** got the hooks in and took her to the ground. **Bayley** passed out and the referee stopped the match. (***) ¾)

NXT Championship: Finn Balor (C) vs. Samoa Joe. – **Balor** retained at 16:22. Great main event. **Joe** got busted open early after an accidental headbutt. He continued to wrestle and landed a big clothesline on the floor then screamed like a savage while the blood ran down his face. It was awesome. **Joe** was as intense and fired up as I've seen in years and it was such a shame that the referee and doctors kept disrupting the match for a cut which wasn't dangerous in anyway whatsoever. At the rate the match kicked-off at, **Joe & Balor** very well could have had a match on par with **Nakamura/Zayn**. **Joe**, just like the crowd, was clearly not happy with all the stoppages and rightfully so. If you want to look at it another way, all the stoppages added to the story of the match by **Joe's** momentum being halted which gave **Balor** the chance to recover. Still, the match would have been so much better if they just let the thing go. **Joe** launched **Balor** over the barricade, but **Balor** rose up like a demon and hit a Springboard forearm off the rail. **Joe** hit his monster Tope and the doctors attended to the cut some more. **Joe** landed his signature Chop, Kick, Kneedrop combo then delivered a big Overhead Belly-to-Belly. **Balor** got a Sling Blade in for a hope spot but **Joe** cut him off with the Powerbomb into the Boston Crab. **Balor** made his comeback but **Joe** hit the Muscle Buster and **Balor** kicked out! They traded shots and **Balor** landed a **Pele** kick for a double-down. **Balor** hit another Sling Blade, a Shotgun Dropkick and the Double Stomp off the top. He went for the Bloody Sunday but **Joe** countered and applied a standing Coquina Clutch. Finish was the **Roddy Piper/Bret Hart** WrestleMania VIII deal or **Steve Austin/Bret Hart** from Survivor Series 96, as **Balor** climbed the ropes and flipped over into a pinning combination; **Joe** refused to let go of the hold and **Balor** got the pin to retain the belt. (****)

WWE Hall of Fame Ceremony – April 2nd 2016
American Airlines Centre: Dallas, TX.
@BenCarass.

We all know by now that the WWE Hall of Fame isn't really a legitimate Hall of Fame, but the performers being inducted seem to still take it seriously so I guess the company recognising the hard work of some deserving individuals – and some not so deserving – is still worth discussing. Just don't get yourself worked up about who should or should not have been inducted, because it really doesn't matter.

As is tradition the Hall of Fame ceremony was a long-ass show, although there were plenty of fun moments this year to keep the mood of the event fairly jovial. The festivities began on the one hour Red Carpet special, presented by **Bryon Saxton** and my girl **Maria Menounos**. **Saxton** was his usual contemptible robotic self, while **Maria** livened things up with her enthusiastic fandom and the fact that she pretty much did whatever she wanted instead of acting like the rest of the WWE automaton presenters. New girl on the job, **Cathy Kelley**, was flubbing lines and getting facts wrong all night; for a “professional” television presenter, she had a bad first day at the office. **Renee Young** interviewed some wrestlers on the red carpet; the highlights were **Sami Zayn** talking about how he was still emotional 24 hours after his match with **Nakamura**, and **Dean Ambrose**, who seemed to try his best to mess with **Renee** during the interview. **Saxton & Maria** brought some stars in for a quick chat on their podium. They danced with the **Usos & Naomi** and bantered with **Steve Austin & Jerry Lawler**. **Roman Reigns** and his wife came in for an interview and **Roman's** wife looked as nervous as he does when an entire arena is booing him out of the building. All of the talent that spoke during the pre-show said they were most excited about seeing the **Freebirds** get inducted and couldn't wait to see what **Michael Hayes** was going to do.



The Godfather: Inducted by JBL & Ron Simmons. – The **APA** gave a really fun induction and talked about the **Godfather** not being a gimmick for **Charles Wright**. They did a bit that involved **JBL** telling road stories about riding with **Godfather** but **Simmons** interrupted him every time because it would have incriminated both of them. **JBL** said they used to help pick girls for the Ho

Train and **Simmons** apologised to his wife and said that **Layfield** was making it up, which got a big laugh. **Godfather** came out with some models and did his Ho Train catchphrase. He said that he wanted to keep it short and leave it to some of the other “long-winded guys” to do longer speeches. **Wright** noted it was his grandson's birthday and pointed this little kid out in the crowd, whom he referred to as a, “Little pimp.” **Godfather** said he couldn't tell any of the stories he wanted to, but fittingly pimped his gentleman's club, Cheetah's, in Vegas and said we would have to go there to hear them. He wrapped up with his catchphrase again and the women came back out to escort **Godfather** to the back. - This only went about five minutes and was an entertaining start to the ceremony. If only more inductees kept their speeches this short.



Stan Hansen: Inducted by Vader. – **Vader** rambled on forever. He talked about **Hansen** breaking **Bruno Sammartino's** neck and meeting **Stan** in a, “small regional promotion called the AWA.” **Vader** put over **Hansen's** power and conditioning then said he wasn't just a good big man, he was a great wrestler. He mentioned that numerous people asked him to tell the Tokyo Dome story and recounted his eye getting knocked out of its socket during his 1990 match with **Hansen**. **Vader** said they beat the hell out of each other for 30 minutes (it was more like 15) and he popped his eye back in and finished the match. The pay-off to **Vader's** lengthy set up was to pull out a pair of goofy joke-store glasses with one eye dangling out; he got a decent laugh, but took way too long in getting to the punchline.

Hansen came out and told everyone to take notice that **Leon** had left; he didn't have any notes and just spoke from the heart. He told a story about **Vader** having tickets to the **Mike Tyson/Buster Douglas** fight at the Tokyo Dome the night after their match and **Hansen** told him he was flying home because their wouldn't be a punch thrown in the fight harder than the ones they threw at each other. He thanked **JBL** for keeping his name alive then recounted the time **Bruiser Brody** told him it would be great if they both find women to love them. He thanked a bunch of old-timers: **Terry Funk** for breaking him in, **Karl Von Brauner**, **Moose Morowski**, **Bob Backlund**. **Hansen** put over **Jumbo Tsuruta** and **Giant Baba** like he was still amazed that such men existed. He mentioned that his career started about 15 blocks away at the Sportatorium then said, “God bless **Fritz Von Erich's** soul.” **Hansen** brought up that he put over **Rick Martel** in 9 seconds and stated,

“I want to put that out there so that everybody knows that **Stan Hansen’s** done a few jobs.” – A great line. He talked about feuding with **Bruno** and working at MSG when he was just 25 years-old. “I guess that night I was a little bit nervous,” **Hansen** noted as he told the tale of how he dropped **Bruno** on his head that night. He added that **Bruno** had always been friendly to him and never held anything against him, which he thanked **Bruno** for.



Hansen talked about wanting to emulate **Tiger Jeet Sing** and how British Junior-heavyweight wrestler **Pete Roberts** became his best friend. He mentioned getting caught up in the war between New Japan and All Japan then told the story of his legendary match **Andre the Giant** in 1981 and said he owed his career in Japan to **Andre**. **Hansen** said it was a pleasure to work for **Giant Baba** for 26 years on only a handshake deal and remarked that he and **Brody** ran rough-shot over All Japan in the 80's. He named dropped **Jumbo** and **Tenryu** and the “younger generation” of **Misawa**, **Kobashi & Kawada** and said they were all great opponents for him. Before he wrapped up, **Hansen** gave a special thank you to the carpenters in the business, who got guys like him ready for main events by putting them over every night. He closed with his signature horns and hollering war cry. – This was one of the most interesting speeches of the night. **Hansen** came off like such a nice friendly guy who was grateful and humbled to be there and it's a shame he had to gloss over a lot of the big moments of his career in the short time he had.

Jacqueline: Inducted by the Dudley Boyz. – **The Dudleys** brought a little bit of comedy to their induction, as **D-Von** tried to speak but **Bubba** told him he was only supposed to say, “Testify.” **D-Von** responded that **Bubba** could get his own damn tables from now on. **Bubba** said **Jackie** would always be, “one of the boys” and **D-Von** told a story about her pretending to be asleep in order to avoid paying a toll booth. **Jackie** kept her speech short and just did the basic, “thank yous.” She thanked **Skandor Akbar** for seeing something in her when she got started then thanked **Lita**, **Trish**, **Victoria**, **Sable**, **Molly Holly & Terri Runnels** and said it was a pleasure working with them. She closed by thanking WWE for the honour of being inducted.

Jerry Lawler threw to a really cool video package of the Legacy Award inductees. **Pat O'Connor**, **George Hackenschmidt**, **Frank Gotch**, **Mildred Burke**, **Lou Thesz**, “Sailor” **Art Thomas** & **Ed**

“**Strangler**” **Lewis** were the first class of the new award. I guess WWE are trying to plug the glaring holes in their lineage by adding guys like **Gotch, Hackenschmidt, Lewis, O' Conner & Thesz**. Not that it makes there Hall of Fame any more legitimate, but it was still a nice touch. They of course tried to tie in “Sports Entertainment” to the likes of **Frank Gotch**, which was downright hilarious.



The Fabulous Freebirds: Inducted by the New Day. – **New Day** were their usual wacky selves, especially **Big E**, who cracked about the **Freebirds** wearing red, white and blue face paint and being patriotic Americans. **Xavier** thanked the **Freebirds** for teaching the **New Day** how to be brothers (which wasn't a joke) then **Kofi** started a “**Freebirds rock**” chant. WWE actually forked out the money to get the rights to “Freebird” by Lynyrd Skynyrd so **Michaels Hayes & Jimmy Garvin** could run out and do their horrible dance from WCW in the early 90's. **Hayes** wore one of his ring jackets, a Badstreet USA t-shirt and the ubiquitous pro-wrestler fanny-pack. **Garvin** was blown up from dancing and made some jokes about nearly having a heart-attack. **Garvin** said 55 years ago **Chief Jay Strongbow** threw him in the ring when he was just nine years-old and 37 years ago he became brothers with **Michael Hayes**. He added that they set the all-time attendance record at Texas Stadium 32 years ago and said that record would be smashed by **WrestleMania 32** the following night. **Hayes** told a story about **Terry Gordy** kicking down the door of their first apartment when they couldn't find the key, which led to **Buddy Roberts** punching holes in the wall and taking a bump through the coffee table.

They brought out **Ray Gordy & Buddy Jack Roberts Jr** to say a few words. **Ray** joked that he would always find it weird when kids at school would ask who his favourite wrestler was. “Obviously it was **Kevin Von Erich**,” he quipped, which got a good laugh. **Roberts Jr** said his speech he prepared at rehearsal was out the window and he basically just thanked everyone on behalf of his father. Before he left, **Gordy** said he wanted to hear some more **Freebird** stories. **Garvin** said they can't tell most of their stories on a family show, but then cracked that the worst thing that could happen would only be **Hayes** getting fired. **Garvin** told a story about **Buddy Roberts** peeing on him in the shower and said he kept a close eye on **Buddy Jr** to make sure he didn't do the same.

The highlight of the speech was a story from **Hayes** about being in a bar and being accosted by some kind of motorcycle gang. **Terry Gordy** came to his rescue and took the guy down, however **Gordy** realised he had a wooden leg and didn't know what to do. **Hayes** said he was worried about getting stabbed or shot, while **Gordy** was worried about this guy's wooden leg. **Hayes & Gordy** went to leave through the back-door, but just like a bad dream the door was locked. **Hayes** said the guy reached into his jacket so they ran out into the street and noted that it was a good job he had a wooden leg because it took him a while to get out of the bar. **Hayes** explained that the guy unloaded his gun on them and **Terry Gordy** started laughing. When **Hayes** asked what he was laughing about, **Gordy** replied, "because he missed." - **Hayes** told the story really well and the crowd erupted for the pay-off.



They put over World Class then **Hayes** thanked the **McMahons, Paul & Stephanie**; he said **Stephanie** always had his back and was like the sister he never had. He also thanked the writers, which everybody booed. Finally, they brought out **Kevin Von Erich**, who gave a similar speech to his Hall of Fame induction in 2009 about being the luckiest man on earth for having the time he had with his brothers. **Kevin** said the **Von Erichs & the Freebirds** beat the hell out of each other but it made good TV and closed by declaring, "God bless Texas!" **Hayes** noted there was only one thing left to do and said, "Hit it!" **Hayes** proceeded to sing the entire Bad Street USA song and ran all around the building in doing so. – You just knew **Hayes** would make the most of his long overdue induction and he certainly delivered a memorable performance. It was a really long speech, but **Hayes'** charisma carried them through with ease and to be fair, **Jimmy Jam** held his own up there too.

Big Boss Man: Inducted by Slick. – **Slick** came out to "Jive Soul Bro" and did a bit where he asked for donations then apologised for thinking he was in church. He said he was lucky to be **Boss Man's** manager and that he had one of the biggest hearts of anyone he ever met. **Slick** talked about the run with **Akeem** as the "iconic" **Twin Towers** then said heaven gained a guardian angel when **Boss Man** passed away. He introduced **Boss Man's** wife and two daughters. His daughter **Lacy** did most of the talking and told stories about watching her dad wrestle as a kid. She mentioned that she

had to explain to kids at school that her dad didn't really eat **Al Snow's** dog **Pepper** and recalled the angle where **Boss Man** stole **Big Show's** father's casket from his funeral. **Boss Man's** widow **Angela** pulled out his old knight stick and got choked up reminiscing about her husband. She noted that **Boss Man** did a lot for his community and was out doing work for the community on the day he died. She said they would always remember **Ray** and the legacy he left behind.



Celebrity Wing Award: Snoop Dogg: Inducted by John Cena. – Cena got his usual mixed reaction and did some corny jokes about weed and Gin & Juice. He said **Snoop Dogg** was a member of the WWE family and that when ever he comes to a WWE show it is his home. **Cena** talked about **Snoop** supporting him during his Doctor of Thuganomics days and gave him the chance to work in the studio with him when other rappers would have laughed in his face. **Snoop** took a selfie on the stage with all of the crowd then thanked **Cena** for the intro. He noted that **Cena** had flown the “friendly skies” with him, “if you know what I’m saying.” **Snoop** named dropped **Randy Orton, Mark Henry, DX** and “HB Shizzle my Nizzle,” **Steve Austin & the Undertaker**. He gave a big shout-out to his little cousin **Sasha** and talked about taking her to WrestleMania 24 and how nervous she was about meeting the wrestlers. **Snoop** said it was crazy to see her face on the side of Cowboy Stadium and told **Sasha** he loved her. He said his grandfather used to take him to see “Rasslin” at the Olympic Auditorium, where he saw **Andre the Giant & Gorilla Monsoon**. **Snoop** closed with a special rap he composed, but didn't bother to remember as he read the lyrics off his phone. – After **Drew** “I don't watch wrestling” **Carey**, it is nice to see celebrities that are genuine fans and **Snoop** came off like he was hugely passionate about the business.

The Warrior Award: Joan Lunden: Inducted by Dana Warrior. – I'm going to be honest here, I skipped this induction. I don't have time for WWE using a prop named after a dead man, who actually wanted the award to be something completely different, to make themselves look good from a PR perspective. I'm also still baffled that nobody in the “legitimate” mainstream media has bothered to do a little research into all the horrible things Warrior said in the past either.

Sting: Inducted by Ric Flair. – **Flair**, as he is prone to do, took a long time over his induction speech. After mentioning **Dusty Rhodes & Roddy Piper** then pointing out how proud he is of

Charlotte, he called out **Stan Hansen** for putting over **Rick Martel** and noted **Stan** never laid down for him. “**Rick Martel**? Who'd he ever beat?” **Flair** quipped. He finally got around to talking about **Sting** and referenced the 1988 Clash of the Champions that went up against **WrestleMania 4**. **Flair** also talked about **Sting** coming to him and asking why they were doing the same spots in every match and **Flair** explained that it was working and didn't need changing. **Flair** got sidetracked again and talked about **Shawn Michaels** telling him to just keep his mouth shut before their match at **WrestleMania 24** then rambled about how he and **Steamboat** were 0-4 for marriages, while **Michael Hayes** was only 0-2. **Flair** mentioned **Sting** being in the rafters and doing the biggest PPV in WCW's history with **Hogan** at **Starrcade 97**. **Flair** noted they were trying to wrap him up and he quickly thanked **Linda McMahon** for some money she gave him in 1992 then introduced **Sting**.



Sting pointed out that **Flair** had left his notes then joked that **Flair** never stuck to his notes anyway and just winged everything then noted that they were in the same building where he made his RAW debut. He talked briefly about starting out with **Jim Hellwig** and **Sting** said he though he was a big guy but was nothing compared to how jacked the **Warrior** was. **Sting** brought up the injury during the match with **Seth Rollins** and recounted **Rollins** apologising while they were trying to load him into an ambulance. “**Sting**, I was you for Halloween,” **Rollins** told him, and **Sting** added that **Rollins** had a “shooting look on his face.” He joked, “I know a lot of you probably dressed up as me for Halloween.” **Sting** made fun of teaming with **Robocop** and told a great story about being in the ring with **Kevin Nash**. It was during an **NWO** beat-down angle and **Nash & Sting** ended up lying on the canvas next to each other. **Sting** said he felt a big arm and leg come over him and **Nash** said, “**Sting**, would you mind if I spoon with you for a minute?”

He talked about his God-stuff then said he had bragging rights because he had finally performed at **WrestleMania** and did it against a great opponent in **HHH**. **Sting** stated that he was officially a WWE Hall of Famer and some bozos in the crowd chanted, “One more match” and “**Undertaker**” - Morons. He thanked a bunch of people, from the **Warrior**, **Jim Ross**, to **Michael Hayes & Road Dogg** and gave a special thanks to **Ric Flair** for making him into a star when he didn't have to. **Sting** declared that he was officially retiring and stated that he was happy to do it underneath the

WWE umbrella. Everybody gave him a standing ovation and the fans chanted, “Thank you, **Sting**.” **Sting** closed by putting on some sunglasses and he held up his black baseball bat. “This isn't goodbye,” he noted. “It's an I'll see you later.” – It was a classy speech from **Sting**. The retirement announcement wasn't exactly a shock, as it has been known for weeks that he can pretty much never take another bump again, but the fans received the news well and didn't act like jerks. Hopefully this will end all the speculation about a damned **Undertaker/Sting** match.

WWE WrestleMania 32 – April 3rd 2016

AT&T Stadium: Dallas, TX.

Ben Carass.



Make no mistake about it, WrestleMania 32 was a gigantic success for the WWE. Undoubtedly the show will break every record imaginable; the early attendance seems to be around 93,000, which is funny since they announced 101,763 as the new mythological number to replace 93,173 in WWE folk-law. The gate and merchandise numbers will probably be through the roof and with the free month gimmick on the Network, it is completely conceivable that WrestleMania 32 could end up being the most watched WWE show in history.

The biggest WrestleMania of all-time turned out to be a decent show from an in-ring perspective, although not one of the matches managed to reach a level befitting of a record-breaking show. The two main issues that plagued the show, which have been eating away at the quality of RAW for years now, were the length – 6 hours and 45 minutes was just way too long – and inexplicable booking decisions. It almost seemed like **Vince McMahon** and his team of bumbling writers were determined to put on a show to troll the hardcore fans and carry on their usual path of ignorance while laughing in the faces of their most loyal fan-base.

Let's just mention all the illogical booking moves on this show: **Zack Ryder** won the IC title out of nowhere after literally being a complete no-hoper for years. **Chris Jericho** pinned **AJ Styles** clean in **Styles** biggest WWE match to date. **League of Nations** beat the super-over **New Day** because they had to be set up for some legends to come out and squash. **Brock Lesnar** obliterated **Dean**

Ambrose, who didn't even look like a strong fighting babyface in losing. **Undertaker & Shane McMahon** went over THIRTY minutes and **Shane** was booked stronger, and protected more, than **Dean Ambrose**. **Shaquille O'Neal & The Rock** both competed in unadvertised matches. Then **HHH** had a boring 27 minute wrestling match with **Roman Reigns** in the main event and, of course, senile old **Vince McMahon** put his chosen guy over and nobody really cared. I can see why casual fans that only buy WrestleMania and hardly ever watch RAW might have thought this was a great show, what with all the legends and **Shane's** big dive. However for the people like you and I, who watch every show all-year round, this was a complete booking disaster of a show which confirmed everything we have been saying for years: **Vince McMahon** is completely out of touch, the company are simply incapable of making new stars and the booking is quite possibly the worst it has ever been in the WWE.

This was not even close to being the worst WrestleMania of all-time – 2, 4, 9, 11 & 27 were all still much worse than this show – but I would not argue that it very well could have been the worst booked WrestleMania of all-time.



Pre-Show:

There was apparently a power issue that caused the doors to be opened late, so **Ryback** and **Kalisto** wrestled in front of an arena that was at least 80% empty. They had a decent big man vs. small man match; **Kalisto** retained the US title in 9:30 with the Salida del Sol. (**¼) On the USA Network portion of the pre-show, the **Total Divas (Brie Bella, Paige, Natalya, Alicia Fox & Eva Marie)** beat **Team BAD & Blonde (Naomi, Tamina, Lana, Summer Rae & Emma)** in 11:25. Match was nothing; **Eva** did very little and was hated. **Emma & Paige** looked pretty good. **Lana** threw a couple of wacky high kicks and took one bump. She did however look fantastic in her outfit. **Brie** tapped out **Naomi** with the Yes-lock and the **Total Divas** lifted **Brie** onto their shoulders afterwards. **Nikki Bella** came out with a neck brace on and wearing her gear; she looked totally ridiculous. (DUD) **Lita** unveiled the new WWE Women's Championship and said **Charlotte, Sasha & Becky** would fight to determine the "first ever" WWE Women's champ; **Lita** herself held the WWE Women's title, so I have no idea what she was talking about. Finally, **the Usos** beat the **Dudley**

Boyz in 5:20; they rushed through all their spots and **Jey** pinned **Devon** with a Superkick. Afterwards, the **Dudleys** tried to put the **Usos** through some tables, but the **Usos** countered and hit a double splash on the **Dudleys** through the tables. (DUD).

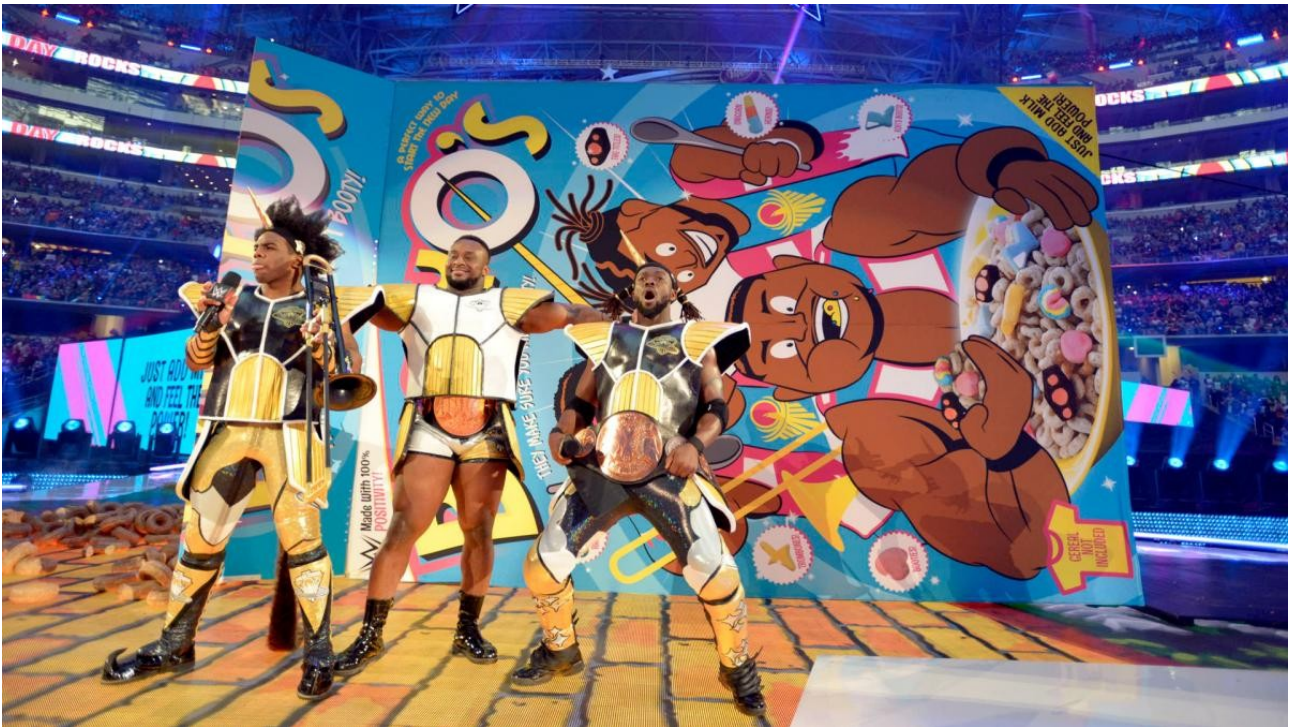
Main Show:



IC Championship Ladder Match: Kevin Owens (C) vs. Sami Zayn vs. Dolph Ziggler vs. Zack Ryder vs. Sin Cara vs. The Miz vs. Stardust. – **Zack Ryder** became the new IC champ at 15:23. So this is where the weird booking began on the show. The only reason I can imagine that **Ryder** won the title is because he is just in a transitional role and will likely drop the thing very shortly. For big ladder match standards this was pretty tame and couldn't touch the US title ladder match from TLC last year, although when it was all said and done it turned out to be one of the best matches on the show. Crowd were into everything, especially when **Zayn & Owens** were in there. The biggest spot saw **Owens** tip **Sin Cara** off a ladder over the top and through **Stardust**, who was lying on a ladder bridge between the apron and the barricade. Finish saw **Zayn** hit **Owens** with a great-looking Half-and-Half Suplex onto a ladder but **Miz** cut him off and it looked like he was going to take the belt down. **Ryder** came in to save the day and won the title and celebrated with his dad afterwards. It was nice to see **Ryder** have a moment like this after all these years, but how on earth they can justify having **Zack Ryder** win the IC title and disrupt the **Zayn/Owens** storyline is beyond me. (***)

AJ Styles vs. Chris Jericho. – **Jericho** over in 17:10. I would have been mad about **Jericho** going over, but this is **Vince McMahon** we are talking about here so I wasn't even a little surprised that the outsider, who is not an outsider anymore because he works for them, lost on the biggest stage. Clearly they will be coming back with a FIFTH, and probably even a sixth, match, but this **AJ/Jericho** feud has gone on long enough. Hell, they rushed through the first three matches in a month then did a tag team break up angle after two weeks. If the plan was to drag this feud out for five months then why on earth didn't they just take their time in telling the story? Maybe **AJ** will win the feud in the end, but WWE themselves have created the perception that what happens at WrestleMania is more important than everything else. And guess what; **AJ Styles** got pinned clean.

Match was good; you could argue it was the best **Styles/Jericho** match so far, although their SmackDown match may have been a little better. (**½).



New Day vs. League of Nations w/Wade Barrett. – **League of Nations** over in 9:50. **New Day's** big entrance was coming out of a large Booty-O's box. Match was a boring TV match; **Woods** sold for the heat forever. **Barrett** nailed him with a shot from the outside and **Sheamus** pinned him with the Brogue kick. There was a big post-match angle, as the **League of Nations** said there was no three-man team in the world that could beat them. **Shawn Michaels** came out in his wrestling gear then **Mick Foley** showed up in **Cactus Jack** attire and finally **Steve Austin** appeared in a t-shirt and jeans. **Austin** got the biggest pop of the night by a mile. The legends hit the ring and brawled with the **LON**. Ever the pro, **Austin** sold for **Rusev** and only got the better of him when he raked **Rusev's** eyes; what a guy. **Sheamus** ate Socko, **Del Rio** took Sweet Chin Music, **Austin** hit **Rusev** with the Stunner then **Barrett** took everybody's finisher. **New Day** celebrated with the legends and made them dance. **Woods** tried to get **Austin** to join in, but **Austin** gave him a Stunner instead and proceeded to drink beer. Seeing the legends was cool, but the match was very poor and the regular main roster guys looked like total chumps next to the real fifty year-old stars. (*¾).

No Holds Barred Street Fight: Brock Lesnar w/Paul Heyman vs. Dean Ambrose. - **Lesnar** over in 12:50. – I'm a huge **Lesnar** proponent, but this was totally anti-climatic and did nothing for **Ambrose**. **Brock** hit 13 Suplexes; **Dean** got a little offence in with a kendo stick and a chair. He pulled out **Terry Funk's** chainsaw and **Foley's** barbedwire bat, but failed to use either of them. **Ambrose** got a near-fall with a DDT onto a pile of chairs then **Lesnar** Suplexed him again and pinned him desively with an F5. Like most people, I was expecting a lot more out of this match and at least figured they would protect **Ambrose** in losing. But no, they just had **Brock** destroy him. Considering the lengths they went to in protecting **Shane McMahon**, the way they booked **Ambrose** here was utterly baffling. (**¾).

WWE Women's Championship: Sasha Banks vs. Becky Lynch vs. Charlotte (Diva's Champion) w/Ric Flair. - **Charlotte** unified the WWE Diva's & WWE Women's titles at 15:55. This was the best match on the show and easily the best women's main roster match in years. **Snoop**

Dogg performed **Sasha's** entrance and **Charlotte** had a special robe like **Ric's** at Mania 24. Match really picked up when **Sasha** hit a Frog Splash to break up a Figure Eight on **Becky**. **Sasha** did a Tope-con-Hilo and didn't rotate until the very last second; it could have been really nasty but **Charlotte** did a great job in catching her. **Charlotte** hit a huge Moonsault off the post to the floor on both women and the fans went nuts. They did some near-falls and finish saw **Charlotte** tapped **Becky** with the Figure Eight, while **Ric** stopped **Sasha** from getting in to break up the hold. (***/4).



Hell in a Cell Match for Control of Monday Night Raw vs. Undertaker's WrestleMania Career: Shane McMahon vs. The Undertaker. - **Undertaker** over in 30:05. **Shane** came out with his three sons and hugged **Linda** and his wife, who were at ringside to see him try and kill himself. There was no reason in the world this had to go thirty minutes and most of the match was completely uneventful. **Taker** beat up **Shane** forever; **Shane** kicked out of a Last Ride and a Chokeslam on the steps, because why not. Finally **Shane** cut one of the panels of the Cell with some bolt-cutters, but **Taker** ended up slamming him through it like an idiot. **Taker** went for a Tombstone on a conveniently positioned platform, but **Shane** turned it into a Sleeper then **Taker** threw himself and **Shane** down through the announce table. **Shane** came back and laid **Taker** out on the English announce table with a TV monitor shot. **Shane** climbed the Cell and, after psyching himself up, dove off the top of the Cell. **Taker** moved and **Shane** smashed through the table which had clearly been gimmicked with some kind of cushioning, but still, this was just moronic. Even more ridiculous was the fact that instead of playing dead, **Shane** had enough fighting spirit to motion to the **Undertaker** to bring it. I was uncomfortable watching the 47 year-old father of three diving off the twenty foot cage, however we all pretty much figured it was going to happen so the actual dive wasn't the major issue for me. It was the fact they gave **Shane** the "come on you SOB" spot after such a huge stunt that I found most ridiculous. Remember that **Dean Ambrose** didn't get anywhere near the same level of protection early in the show. **Taker** won with a Tombstone, so after everything. **HHH & Stephanie** are still in charge of RAW. (*)

Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal. – **Baron Corbin** won at 9:41. So, **Shaquille O'Neal** was a surprise entrant, completely unannounced and unadvertised. I guess that ruins **Kurt Angle's** WWE "only Olympic gold medallist in history" claim, which wasn't even true to begin with. **DDP** was a surprise too, as was **Tatanka** of all people. **Kane**, **Big Show**, **Mark Henry**, **the Social Outcasts**, **Darren Young**, **The Ascension**, **Damien Sandow**, **Tyler Breeze**, **Goludst & R-Truth**

were in there too. **Big Show & Shaq** has a stare-down before all the geeks eliminated both of them. **Corbin** eliminated **Kane** to win. Fans popped big for **Corbin** winning and chanted, “NXT” despite the fact that all the NXT fans hate him. (DUD).



My personal highlight of the show – and I am being deadly serious here – was the introduction of the **Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders**. It was not the full 34-strong 2015/16 **DCC** squad, but rather the **Show Group** made up of the top 20 dancers on the team. **Lilian Garcia** did their trademark “America’s Sweetheart” intro and they came out on the stage and performed an abridged version of their signature entrance to **AC/DC**’s “Thunderstruck,” which they perform at every **Cowboys** home game. They only danced for about one minute and fifty seconds, compared to nearly four minutes the routine usually takes, and the girls ended on the iconic Kick-Line and Jump-Split. – In case you couldn’t tell, I know way too much about the **Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders**. I also went back and checked the Network and WWE have already edited out “Thunderstruck” with some hysterically bad generic knock-off.

After the **DCC**’s performance, they formed a pom-pom guard for the **Rock**, who came out with a flame thrower and set fire to a big “**ROCK**” sign on the stage. Sadly, the **Cheerleaders** left and **Rock** went to the ring to announce the new record of “101,763,” which we will no doubt hear until the end of time. Things then got really bizarre, as the **Wyatt Family** interrupted the **Rock**. After some of **Rock**’s usual comedy, he challenged one of the **Wyatts** to a match and **Erick Rowan** stepped forward. **The Rock** pinned **Erick Rowan** with a Rock Bottom in 0:06 then the **Wyatts** surrounded the ring. **John Cena** ran down to make the save and he **Rock** hit their finishes on the **Wyatts** then celebrated together. - The live fans were into the **Rock**, but to me not advertising **Rock** in a match – even a six second match against **Rowan** – is a pretty dumb marketing strategy. **Rock** also had his gear on under his clothes, so how on earth was anyone supposed to suspend their disbelief that this was a spontaneous match that came out of the blue? Also, once again, the mainstay guys on the roster were made to look like fools by the real stars that come and go as they please.

WWE World Heavyweight Championship: Triple H (C) w/Stephanie McMahon vs. Roman Reigns. - **Reigns** became the new champion in 27:05. **Stephanie** did this entrance dressed as some kind of leather-clad empress and stood above the entrance way. She gave a speech about all the fans bowing down – you know, the usual nonsense. **HHH** had an army of weird zombie things for some reason. **Reigns** was booed heavily during his entrance and throughout the match, although it was not as thunderous as I expected. So, after a 6 hour show, with a ladder match, a street fight, a Hell in a Cell with a man diving off the top of the cage, plus all the legends doing physical in-ring stuff, **HHH** thought it would be a good idea to have an “epic” 27 minute wrestling match with **Roman Reigns**. Just like at WrestleMania 25 in Houston with **Randy Orton**, the crowd were just not in the mood to sit through a long **HHH** wrestling match. They wrestled, it was boring. **HHH** did some armbars that looked horrible and wear almost as laughable as **Shane McMahon** pulling guard against the **Undertaker**. Fans amused themselves with chants for **Nakamura**, **Sami Zayn** and **NXT** amongst other things. They restored to **Stephanie** taking a spear to try and get **Reigns** over; it worked in the moment, but it certainly isn't going to help **Reigns** in the long run. **Reigns** kicked out of the Pedigree; **Hunter** kicked out of the spear. Match finally ended after **Steph** handed **HHH** a sledgehammer, but **Reigns** hit two Superman Punches and a Spear. Some fans cheered the title change, you could still hear some boos also, but the overall feeling came across as a very flat reaction to what should have been **Reigns'** big coronation. But hey, **Vince McMahon** will simply not listen to reason. There's nothing else to be said about **Reigns**: he's not the guy and the sooner he fails as the top babyface the sooner we can all move on with our lives. Maybe he'll turn heel on RAW tonight, but I doubt it. (**)



And that was the biggest WrestleMania of all-time, everybody. You would do yourselves a huge favour by never watching this show ever again and by checking out some episodes of **Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making the Team**, instead.

RAW Ramblings – April 4th 2016
American Airlines Centre: Dallas, TX.
Ben Carass.



Following an atrociously booked WrestleMania, what is usually the hottest and most fun RAW of the year was appropriately lacklustre with some booking decisions that were frankly insulting to one's intelligence. This was not the usual post-Mania RAW with fans hijacking the bad segments and chanting all kinds of wacky things all night long. The crowd were still unquestionably hot and it's not like they didn't make a ton of noise throughout the night, however after such a direction-less WrestleMania, I honestly expected more of a mutiny from the hardcore fans that stayed for this show. They had the perfect opportunity to vent the frustration of every hardcore fan when **Vince McMahon** came out to open the show, however instead of letting senile old **Vince** know that his television show has been abysmal for years, the crowd treated him like a hero and even did the stupid “we're not worthy” bow to the man who treats them like garbage. All things considered, this episode of RAW, for the most part, was an improvement over recent shows; although that is not exactly high praise.

If you want to know just how bad the booking on this show was then look no further than what they did at the start of the show. First, the announcers told all the viewers at home that the RAW after WrestleMania crowd was different from every other crowd and they would boo the guys who normally get cheered. It was so completely condescending and patronising that I found myself yelling, “F-you” at **JBL**'s robotic fake smile when he told the viewers to not pay attention to the crowd because they were, “just having fun, **Maggie!**” As noted, **Vince** came out and the fans sang his theme song; he said, “how about that WrestleMania?” and the fans booed, but that was the extent of their protest. **Shane McMahon** came out with a fake bruise on his face and hobbled out onto the stage – the fact that he was on the show at all bothered me to no end after taking a 20ft bump the night before. Even more insulting was the fact that **Vince** just willingly handed over control of RAW to **Shane** for the night. So essentially, the match with **Undertaker** meant absolutely nothing. I guess it's okay though, because **Vince** had a piece of paper and he mentioned in a throwaway line that he had procured the contents of the “lockbox” that was mentioned once and never brought up again. So with **Shane** in charge, **HHH & Stephanie** were not on the show at

all, and **Shane** promised to deliver a show that was completely different from the norm. He failed spectacularly.

Roman Reigns came out at the top of the second hour and the announcers again made sure to tell the viewers to ignore the crowd, who booed **Reigns** out of the building. **Reigns** tried to brush off the boos by saying, "I'm not a bad guy. I'm not a good guy. I'm THE guy." It was a good line, but that still doesn't make it true. He issued an open challenge for the WWE title and **Chris Jericho** came out to cut a promo. He called all the fans idiots – which lead to a, "We are idiots" chant – then said he "buried" **AJ Styles** at Mania and demanded a title shot. **Styles** showed up and got a decent



reaction, but **Kevin Owens** was out next and he got a huge pop. **Sami Zayn** was the last guy out and he immediately started brawling with **Owens**; **AJ & Jericho** began to fight as well while **Reigns** looked on. **Zayn** did a dive onto **Owens** over the top then **AJ** pointed at **Reigns'** WWE title before **Jericho** threw him out of the ring. **Reigns** hit **Jericho** with a spear and everybody booed as the new WWE champ stood tall. Later, **Shane** booked a Four-way main event to determine the #1 contender and **Reigns** was cool with that. **Owens** attacked **Zayn** during a backstage interview with **Renee** and Powerbombed him through a table, so **Cesaro** made his return and replaced **Zayn** in the main event. **Owens, Cesaro, Jericho & Styles** went 16:45 and they had a really good TV main event. **AJ** pinned **Jericho** with the Styles Clash to become the #1 contender and the show went off the air with the announcers hyping **Styles vs. Reigns** for the WWE title. – All I could do was shake

my head when **Styles** won. Sure he will almost certainly have a good match with **Reigns** and even though he will end up getting pinned, it could lead to some much needed character development for **AJ**. What really turned my stomach was the fact that **Styles** lost clean to **Jericho** at WrestleMania in a match everyone will remember then he became the #1 contender and got his win back on **Jericho** in a Four-way on RAW that no one will remember. It is just the worst kind of booking imaginable. Imagine if **Styles** had a series of matches with **Yuji Nagata** and lost the fourth match at the Tokyo Dome before he went on to challenge **Okada** for the IWGP title in 2014.

As is tradition, we got some debuts on this show. **Apollo Crews** has been called up for some reason, despite his promo ability being no where near ready; I guess **Vince** got a look at him at TakeOver: Dallas and fell in love with his physique. **Crews** squashed **Tyler Breeze** in 1:54 with his Spinning Powerbomb; poor **Breeze**. **Baron Corbin** made his RAW debut against **Dolph Ziggler** and they went to a double count-out in 8:34. **Corbin** laid out **Ziggler** with his finish on the floor, so I have no idea why he didn't just pin **Ziggler**. **Crews** got no build up whatsoever and was just thrown out there cold, but at least he looked good in a squash. **Corbin** didn't really come off like a big deal at all and he couldn't even beat **Dolph Ziggler**, who loses to everybody.

Shane's “big change” that he promised turned out to be the return of the tables match; what a let down. **The Dudley Boyz** beat the **Usos** in a nothing 8:45 match. The finish was right out of WCW, as the **Usos** went for double splashes but the **Dudleys** moved. **The Usos** went through the tables and the timekeeper rang the bell early, but per WWE rules a tables match can only end via an offensive move. **Bubba** was hot and **Devon** tossed one of the **Usos** through another table in the corner to officially end the match. **Bubba** yelled at the timekeeper and the announcers acted like nothing strange had happened at all. After this mess, **Enzo Amore & Colin Cassady** made their debut and got a great reaction. **Carmella** was no where to be seen and I guess she is staying in NXT. Everybody in the building sang along with **Enzo's** catchphrases then he started making fun of the **Dudleys**. **Cass** challenged the **Dudleys** to get back in the ring, but **Bubba & Devon** teased it then walked away. **Big Cass** called them “SAWFT” and **JBL** seemed confused by the whole thing. Remember when **JBL** was General Manager of NXT and hardly ever was on the shows? I guess he really didn't pay attention to what was going on in his short time as GM. - **Enzo & Cass** brought some much needed energy to the show and they certainly came off like stars in front of this audience. They need to never have **Byron Saxton** impersonate them ever again though, because that will kill them quicker than a bullet to the head.



Zack Ryder lost the IC title 24 hours after winning it in the Ladder match. He wrestled **Miz** in a boring match that went 10:30. Beforehand, **Ryder** cut a promo and hilariously claimed that winning the IC title was the greatest moment of his life. He showed a picture of himself with **Razor Ramon** and the IC title from when he was a kid then they put a picture of **Ryder & Scott Hall** from after he won the IC title at WrestleMania. **Ryder** thanked his dad, who was at ringside; **Miz** showed up and made fun of his **Pappa Ryder**. Finish of the match saw **Miz** jawing with **Ryder's** dad and **Pappa Ryder** shoved **Miz** to the ground. **Maryse** jumped the rail and slapped **Pappa Ryder**, which distracted **Zack** and **Miz** hit his finish to get the win. – Just as pretty much everyone expected, **Ryder** winning the IC title was completely meaningless. I imagine **Vince** just decided on the day to have **Ryder** win it simply for the surprise factor. A lot of good that did. Hopefully **Maryse** is only back as a manager/valet; we don't need her as part of the Women's division now that the company has finally decided to take it seriously.

Speaking of the Women, all the girls were out for the presentation ceremony of the new Women's Championship; **Eva Marie** was of course front and centre. **Lita** introduced **Charlotte**, who already had the new Women's belt so it wasn't much of a presentation ceremony. **Charlotte** tried to cut a sincere "thank you" promo and attempted to put over the new era of women's wrestling in the WWE. Fans didn't play along and they sang songs for **Bayley**. **Charlotte** eventually went heel and talked about being better than all the other women. **Sasha & Becky** were the first to leave then all the other girls followed, leaving **Charlotte** alone with **Natalya**, who challenged her to a match. **Charlotte** said her family would always be superior to **Nattie's** and **Nattie** put her in the Sharpshooter, but **Ric Flair** pulled **Charlotte** out of the ring. - Some people thought the crowd were being disrespectful during **Charlotte's** promo, but she is a heel who has done nothing but cheat to win her matches. What did they expect?



Other Stuff: **New Day (Big E & Kofi)** retained the Tag titles over **League of Nations (Sheamus & Barrett)** in 8:45. Afterwards, **Sheamus, Del Rio & Rusev** turned on **Barrett** and **Sheamus** sent him packing with a Brogue kick. It looks like **Barrett** is pretty much done with the company. **Sasha Banks** beat **Summer Rae** in 1:45 with the Banks Statement. **The Vaudevillains** were advertised for SmackDown; whoever made the decision to bring them up and not **American Alpha** are out of their minds. There was a vignette with the repackaged **Colons. Primo & Epico** were in Puerto Rico (I presume) and they talked about how beautiful it was and a much better place to live than everybody else. **Dr Phil**, who is apparently still a thing, will be a guest on next week's show for some reason.

Next Week's Issue

In next week's issue we return to some degree of normalcy with NJPW Invasion Attack, build to Reigns/Styles, the news, women's title follow up, and much more!



"God Dammit! What's he doing with his hands? Why is he shaking?"

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