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Dusty Rhodes, dead at 69

Dusty Rhodes, who lived “The American Dream,” died at age 69 last Thursday, June 11. The cause of death has not been disclosed, but a 911 call from his wife the previous morning said he fell and he was “very ill.” Jim Ross said in recent days he believed Dusty Rhodes was sick for a while, but Dusty denied it to him. Dusty’s family thanked Dr. Joseph Chiaromonte in Tampa, Fla. in his obituary for his “loving care and support.”

Dusty, born Virgil Riley Runnels Jr., is among the five or ten biggest names in the ring and among the five or ten biggest names behind the scenes in the last 50 years. He’s also among the five or ten best interviews. He was a big main event draw in many parts of the country at various times, including during Jim Crockett Jr.’s peak years in the mid-‘80s NWA, seen in national syndication and on TBS, where he was also head booker and creator of the Starrcade and Great American Bash supershows, copied by Vince McMahon with WrestleMania. Before that he was a top draw for years for Championship Wrestling from Florida.

In 1989, after Crockett sold to Ted Turner, Rhodes jumped to the WWF, where Vince McMahon dressed him in polka dots and paired him with an African-American valet, Sapphire. He later returned to WCW doing color commentary for WCW Saturday Night and being on air with the NWO, booked TNA for a stint in the 2000s, joined WWE’s creative staff, and eventually worked in Florida at WWE’s developmental territory tutoring young talent, including the fast-rising Kevin Owens.

WWE paid tribute to him at the start of Sunday’s PPV with a gathering on the entrance stage at the beginning of the show, with Vince McMahon, front and center, tearing up during the ten bell salute. During Raw the next night, several video packages aired highlighting his first NWA World Title win, other big in-ring moments, and his inimitable promos.

Rhodes, to those who only saw pictures, might seem an unlikely world champion or top star. He was overweight his entire career, more so near the end when he held on to the top spot too long as he was grooming Magnum T.A. to take his place. Rhodes, though, had an unmatched bravado, a way with words, and conveyed that he was a perpetually motivated, happy success story, a son of a plumber who aimed for the stars and succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Fans adored him because he was the common man who won the lottery ticket and cashed it in and had a blast spending every last cent. It wasn’t a gimmick. If anything, Dusty was as authentic an act as ever headlined pro wrestling. He was the son of a plumber. He did dig ditches. And he did defy the odds, given his lack of connections and lack of genetic gifts (which mattered less in the ‘70s).

He quipped in his 2005 autobiography that he earned enough money to buy Mars, admitted to “pissing it all away,” but guaranteed the readers no one had more fun pissing away that much money than he did. He lamented in his days behind the scenes in WWE not saving his money better. Although Vince McMahon attempted to humble him, both with the demeaning polka dot gimmick and mid-card placement, along with harsh dismissals of his booking ideas during his time on the WWE Creative team, Dusty landed in a great place for the final years of his life.

Dusty found a home in NXT, where he got to pass along his wisdom to young wrestlers in recent years. His older son Dustin Runnels wrote on Twitter: “He loved all of his NXT kids.”

The outpouring of praise for Dusty from those who worked with him over the decades, but especially recently in NXT, is perhaps unmatched. Steve Austin

TOP STORIES OF THE WEEK

(1) Dusty Rhodes dead at age 69, collapses in house, dies next day
(2) NXT wrestlers rave about Dusty’s wisdom and advice in recent years
(3) Authority grants Lesnar a title shot against Seth at Battleground
(4) Rollins retains WWE Title against Ambrose in ladder match at MITB PPV
(5) Cena gets win back against Owens at MITB, Owens attacks Cena afterward

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PPV ROUNDTABLE

Money in the Bank

Pat McNeill, columnist (6.5)

“I have seen the future of WWE, or at least the next six months, and it’s all about the spots. If you’re John Cena and Kevin Owens, you can work with that, and you’ve over enough to pull off that WWE/Japan/Indy Hybrid main event style. Fortunately, Cena and Owens are willing to sell out for each other. The underrated Mike Chioda added a great deal as the third man in the ring.

If you’re Seth Rollins and Dean Ambrose, you can do the spots, but you have waaaaay too much time to fill. Which is why the match consisted off Rollins coming back from offensive moves that should have killed off Jason Voorhees from the Friday the 13th films. In addition to Ambrose’s aping of Terry Funk’s style, the Unstable Lunatic has added Mick Foley’s masochistic bumping ability to his skill set. This was WWE’s fault for not pacing the show properly. You should never have a 35 minute ladder match in modern pro wrestling.

The Money In The Bank bout was good without being too dangerous. There were two interesting choices here. I don’t know who Reigns upset to get placed in a feud with the lukewarm Bray Wyatt. Plus, I’ve seen Reigns and Bray Wyatt do television matches, and they haven’t been anything to write home about. Then you have Sheamus winning Money In The Bank. The good news is, WWE has months to build Sheamus up for a main event feud.

This show became a tribute to the late Dusty Rhodes. It’s as good an explanation as any for the nonsensical Divas title finish and the lame disqualification finish in the Intercontinental Title match. Putting the tag belts on Young & O’Neil seemed like an afterthought, and that’s bad. It was too soon to take the titles off the happy heels, whose act is improving by the week.

Thumbs up, with reservations.

Greg Parks, columnist (6.5)

“I did it all by myself, mommy.” - A sarcastic Dr. House, to Dr. Cuddy, “House” episode “Alone.”

Seth Rollins could say the same thing to Stephanie McMahon after finally establishing some credibility by defeating Dean Ambrose in the main event of Money in the Bank, retaining his WWE World Title in a Ladder Match. For once, he didn’t use The Authority for help. Now, there will be something behind his grandiose grandstanding on the mic in the future. It was a much-needed legit win for Rollins.

The MITB Ladder Match, won by Sheamus, was a little different than other matches of its ilk. They couldn’t overuse the ladder as a weapon knowing that Ambrose and Rollins were going to utilize it as well in the main event. Still, it was a well-worked match. Roman Reigns really needed to win this; instead, he’ll now be fighting Bray Wyatt at Battleground in a match neither man can really afford to lose. I’m not sure why they didn’t have Reigns go over aside from the fact that he seemed to be the obvious choice.

I was impressed by Nikki Bella vs. Paige and
WWE MONEY IN THE BANK PPV
JUNE 14, 2015
COLUMBUS, OHIO

• The show opened with a large gathering of wrestlers and the McMahon family on the stage as a tribute to Dusty Rhodes. There was a ten bell salute. Then fans chanted “Dusty! Dusty!” Vince McMahon welled up with tears as various wrestlers who worked with him also teared up. Goldust and Cody Rhodes were not on the stage.

• A video package aired on the MITB match. Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, and JBL introduced the event.

(1) SHEAMUS won the Money in the Bank ladder match over NEVILLE, ROMAN REIGNS, SHEAMUS, KOFI KINGSTON, DOLPH ZIGGLER, and KANE at 20:50.

This was what you’d expect in terms of each of the wrestlers doing what you’d expect athletically involving the ladder, plus Reigns spent a stretch at ringside. Late in the match, a shadowy husky figure slipped under the ring. When Reigns returned to the match, he hit Kane with a Superman punch. Later, Reigns appeared ready to win, but Bray Wyatt showed up in the ring. He gave Reigns the Sister Abigail. Sheamus then was the last man standing, and he climbed the ladder to win. (***)

(2) NIKKI BELLA beat PAIGE to retain the Divas Title at 10:27. Solid action. When Paige got the advantage, Brie snuck into the ring in place of Nikki, but Paige managed to pin her with a reversal of a roll-up. Brie then confessed it was her, not Nikki, so the ref disregarded the pin and restarted the match. Nikki then won with her Rack Attack seconds later. (***)

(3) BIG SHOW beat RYBACK via DQ at 5:28. Miz, at ringside for commentary, attacked Big Show as it appeared Show was on the path to victory. The ref DQ’d Ryback for some reason. (***/4)

(4) JOHN CENA pinned KEVIN OWENS at 19:15. Fast-paced, hard-hitting action, including a lot of kickouts of signature moves and kickouts by both men, including Owens’ Pop-Up Powerbomb. Cena eventually went for a Springboard Stunner, which didn’t connect well, but he hit the AA immediately afterward for the win. (***/4)

Afterward, Cena wanted to congratulate Owens on his epic battle, but Owens kicked him in the gut, then gave him a powerbomb on the edge of the ring apron. A part of the crowd popped. Owens threw the U.S. Title belt at Cena, then left with it. XCT Title belt.

Renee Young interviewed Dean Ambrose.

(5) THE PRIME TIME PLAYERS (Titus O’Neil & Darren Young) beat NEW DAY (Big E. & Xavier Woods) to capture the WWE Tag Team Titles at 5:48. Titus pinned Xavier after a turning spinebuster.

(6) SETH ROLLINS beat DEAN AMBROSE at 35:40 in a ladder match to retain the WWE Title. Tons of ladder spots inside and outside the ring. In the end, they both fell clutching the belt, but Dean lost his grip when they landed. (***/2)

• The match outcome didn’t seem to be a reach given the Bellas’ previous switches, but yes, it should’ve resulted in a disqualification rather than the match continuing. Ryback vs. Big Show was a decent enough big-man match while it lasted. I can’t imagine the addition of Miz to the feud will set it afire.

John Cena vs. Kevin Owens was just as good, if not a tick better, than last month. Owens should be a made man at this point. Yeah, he lost, but at least he got his heat back at the end. The tag title switch was a surprise if only because WWE seemed to be enthralled with New Day as of late. Their reign seemed to end with a whimper rather than a bang. I didn’t think the main event had enough to fill the 35 minutes of the match, but it was still a good main event. The Dusty Rhodes tributes, from the ten-bell salute to the video package, were spot-on.

Todd Martin, columnist (6.0)

The way Money in the Bank started, I thought it was going to be basically impossible to redeem, in large part because of the nature of the finishes. However, the second half of the show greatly outperformed the first half and raised it to the level of an average or slightly below average event.

R-Truth beating Wade Barrett was an auspicious start to the show. Fans have been educated that anyone Truth beats is basically a jobber and Barrett ought to be above the jobber level. If I never see Truth’s 1910s “comedic” bumbling buffoon gimmick again, it will be too soon.

The Money in the Bank ladder match was okay, albeit a little bit of a letdown. Sheamus’ act isn’t working at all and he was a poor choice to win the match. Bray Wyatt’s motivations are so poorly defined and arbitrary that his interference just comes across as deus ex machina to redeem Roman Reigns’ s not winning.

Things actually deteriorated from there. Brie Bella pulling tissues out of her top to show the referee that she was not her twin sister was a silly visual, and Nikki getting the pin on Paige after that was just dumb. Big Show vs. Ryback was a terrible match with a terrible finish.

Luckily, things picked up from there. Kevin Owens losing clean to John Cena was the wrong finish this early on, but WWE went out of its way to try to ensure it wouldn’t hurt Owens too much. The match was terrific, even better than their last match. Cena put over Owens’ talent after the match and the nefarious heel Owens attacked him and powerbombed him on the apron anyway. I liked everything about the segment but the finish.

Some criticized the Prime Time Players’ win over New Day, but I thought it was the right finish. With Tyson Kidd injured, New Day is the only tag team act that’s over. They need good opponents in order to thrive and there are few options. Of course New Day isn’t going to be bypassed and pushed to the side. You’d have to be completely oblivious to not recognize how well they’re clicking. The Players were given some credibility to hopefully add interest in the feud before the New Day inevitably wins those titles back.

Seth Rollins–Dean Ambrose was exactly what it should have been. Ambrose showed great heart in fighting through adversity, while Rollins gained a big boost in credibility in the way he viciously laid into Ambrose and won the match on his own merits. It was a good setup for Rollins’s upcoming program with Brock Lesnar.

James Caldwell, assistant editor (5.5)

John Cena vs. Kevin Owens II was another classic battle positioned in a great spot on the PPV when the crowd was still fresh. Other than Money in the Bank was a mild disappointment.

The Cena vs. Owens feud is starting to slide into that Shawn Michaels vs. Chris Jericho territory where it feels like Cena-Owens is being written/produced/brainstormed by people completely separate from the rest of the show. It’s just on a different level right now and everyone else has to find a way to keep up.

The problem is there were fundamental issues with nearly every other match on the show, which I believe was the product of WWE over-extending themselves with three PPVs/specials over a five-week period. At that rate, it’s easy to lose track of sound writing and storytelling principles just trying to make each PPV, Raw, and Smackdown interesting.

For instance, the Seth Rollins vs. Dean Ambrose main event stunt ladder match was hurt by a tired crowd having seen everything, the lack of selling earlier in the show impacting the audience’s engagement in this match, and Rollins being turned into a joke champion on the Raw before the PPV. So, there was not a great desire to see Seth get his comeuppance when WWE squeezed some of that juice out on Raw, and not to Ambrose’s benefit.

On Raw, I believe WWE crossed the line from “undeserving heel champion” wanting to see Seth lose the WWE Title to a complete joke at the level of a champion by virtue of losing to his J&J security guards, who have been presented as if they’re nobody who were plucked from Cheesecake Factory. There was no bridge from joke champion on Monday to the unrelenting, vicious heel champion seen at Money in the Bank on Sunday night. The lack of follow-through to “make Rollins whole again” made me still see Rollins as the joke who lost to J&J on Monday. Sure, Triple H gave Seth a big pre-match pep talk to fire up Seth and try to convey the points about why Seth should be taken seriously, but it felt like it was more about Hunter doing one of his Tough Enough speeches to wannabes and nobodies. Whatever happened to Champions being Champions? And the “undeserving heel champion” card being played when two elite stars have a dispute over who the real champion is, and the crowd is upset because the heel thinks he is rightful champion when everyone knows he should not be? Instead, WWE presents Rollins as if he’s “undeserving” because he’s a minor-league scrub who Hunter and Stephanie plucked from the dregs of NXT and decided to make him their champion. That’s mid-card stuff that points back to
Bruce Mitchell, senior columnist (7.0)

WWE gave Dusty Rhodes their appropriate send-off.

The Money in the Bank opener was, like the last several of these, well constructed. It had enough risk/reward spots and built well. I like how they shifted Roman Reigns into the beginning of a personal feud with Bray Wyatt while making it clear he was the top guy in the match.

You’re going to hear that the Nikki Bella-Paige finish was another Dusty Finish. It wasn’t. It was just crap that made a fool out of the authority in the ring, the referee. You can’t get any more opposite of the Ronda Rousey phenomenon than Brie Bella pulling her falsies out.

Ryback needed to blast through a few IC Title competitors before he lifted up Big Show. Ryback shouldn’t be the more energetic performer in the ring. Miz played the DQ well, at least.

Steen vs. Cena II lived up to their classic first match and, in fact, with all the kick-outs of all the finishers, came across like the final blow-off of a multi-year top drawer main event feud. The aftermath was great heel/face work by the two.

New Day vs. The Primetime Players was Tag Team Wrestling 101, what with ND getting heat on Darren Young and Titus O’Neal cleaning house. I was surprised the PTPers won the titles. They don’t seem built up enough as an attraction for even that championship. I guess they slid into the Cesaro/Tyson Kidd spot.

Triple H gave away the finish of the main event with his babyface Knute Rockne pep talk for Seth Rollins.

Seth Rollins’s ladder match defense against Dean Ambrose was a good match, but his beat down destruction of Ambrose’s leg went on too long and fans began to lose faith in his ability to come back. The match could have used about five minutes of tightening up. Rollins launching Ambrose into the barricade twice was incredible, and I hope unique. There were too many dangerous back splats in this match.

Sean Radican, columnist (6.0)

WWE MITB was a chore to get through at times. The first three matches all involved flunky finishes and the overall quality of the card wasn’t great. WWE did do some good on this card in terms of some character progression for Roman Reigns and Seth Rollins in their respective matches, but the best moment of the night was John Cena vs. Kevin Owens, which was every bit as good if not better than their first match two weeks prior.

The opening MITB bank match was the second best match on the card. This was a very good, but not spectacular match. There were some fun sequences in the match, especially Orton hitting a series of RKOs to fire up the crowd. There didn’t seem to be many viable heel contenders to capture the MITB briefcase this year and Roman Reigns seemed to be the logical choice, but with Lesnar coming back, it was the right choice to pair him off with Bray Wyatt to have a program that will presumably last through SummerSlam or even beyond. Sheamus winning the match wasn’t a great result, but his character needs direction. I fear he will be a lame duck MITB winner given the way WWE has booked him recently.

After Reigns got screwed by Wyatt, the next two matches also featured screw job finishes. The matches weren’t particularly good, although Show-Ryback was better than I expected it to be leading into the Miz’s interference to end the match. The look on Ryback’s face when he was announced as still being the IC Champion was pretty funny. I also got a laugh out of the finish of Nikki vs. Paige, but that finish wasn’t very good either.

John Cena is doing a tremendous job of getting Owens respect only for Owens to turn the babyface pep talk before the match as he was about to face Ambrose without the help of the authority, it set the stage for Rollins to get a much needed credibility building win. The match itself really dragged in spots and the audience seemed to lose hope that Ambrose would win as Rollins put one heck of a beating on his leg. Ambrose showed a lot of heart coming back after taking a beating on his leg and multiple big moves, which included a sit-out powerbomb onto a bunch of chairs set up on a ladder.

These guys took some dangerous bumps, but they didn’t really get the reaction they were looking for given the length of the match. For a match to go this long, it definitely needs to be better than this one was. That being said, Rollins had retained his title on a fluke several times and this was a good way to boost his credibility after he lost to J&J Security on the go-home edition of Raw.

This show gets a mild thumbs up. I’m growing tired of all the stipulation matches that have taken place since WrestleMania. WWE has given fans a good wrestling fest with Cena-Owens, but a lot of the other wrestlers have been taxed with putting themselves at risk in Ladder matches, Chamber matches, and other gimmick matches in recent months. WWE PPVs have been enjoyable more often than not, but this show gets a minor thumbs up.

Wade Keller, editor (6.5)

This was a good show, especially John Cena vs. Kevin Owens. I am leery of the recent shift to kicking out of each other’s finishers because it seems as if there’s a potential for diminishing returns here. That said, Owens is a star and Cena is raising his career stature with these star-boosting matches he’s putting on with various younger names.

The ladder match left me a little numb. It was in some ways fantastic, but I also felt they did too much. They gave too much of themselves and paced themselves in a way that didn’t allow time to really let the big risks and high impact moves they absorbed play out the way they deserved to. It’s hard to take any of the finishing moves in a regular match seriously when dozens of bigger bumps off of and onto ladders during their 35 minute match didn’t lead to a finish.

The undercard was fine, if not forgettable. I’m fine with Sheamus winning. It gives him, as a heel, a sense of purpose driving him for however long it takes him to cash in.##
DETAILS ON DUSTY'S DEATH

TMZ has released a portion of the 911 call when Dusty Rhodes fell in his home early Wednesday morning, June 10. The call from a female voice identified as Dusty's wife, Michelle, sheds more light on Dusty's health condition at the time of his fall.

"I need help. My husband has fallen. He's very sick. I need help," Michelle says. The operator tells Michelle that paramedics were on the way, then asks a follow-up question on Dusty's age. "He's 69 and he's ill," she replies.

Paramedics then arrived at their home in Orlando, Florida and transported Dusty to a local hospital. Dusty died the next morning, June 11. According to colleagues, Dusty was regularly visiting a doctor to help improve his health. But, former WWE announcer Jim Ross talked about his concerns for Dusty's health in a blog at jrsbarq.com last week.

"The Dream and I talked about a week ago and he tried to convince me that he was 'just fine.'" Ross wrote on June 11. "I knew something was wrong when I saw him in San Jose at WrestleMania where I again questioned him about his health while sitting behind him at the WWE Hall of Fame induction ceremony. "Again, he declared himself fit and we talked of his significant weight loss. Then down in Orlando at a NXT taping the night before Mick Foley taped his comedy special for the WWE Network. Dusty and I talked and he insisted that he was fine. He was like John Wayne in his final movie 'The Shootist' who wanted no empathy from anyone and who wanted to go out on his own terms his own way."

REACTION TO DEATH OF DUSTY RHODES

Ric Flair issued a statement through his agent on Thursday remembering Dusty, who WWE says died Thursday morning at the age of 69:

"Today I lost one of my greatest opponents and greatest friends. He was the definition of heart and soul and I'm honored to have shared the ring with him countless times. He became the 'American Dream' because wrestling needed a hero they could respect, and he was the man for the job. Dusty Rhodes, I will miss you my mentor and friend."

"The Rock" Dwayne Johnson tweeted his reflections on Dusty Rhodes following Rhodes' reported death on Thursday. Johnson noted that he first met Dusty when he was five-years-old, Dusty became an "inspiration and mentor" to him, and Dusty's Bionic Elbow inspired The People's Elbow. Johnson also thanked Dusty for inspiring him to "centerfield wrestling fans around the world by becoming one of the greatest of all time."

"This Heavyweight World Champion personified the blue collar fighting spirit and his influence on the wrestling business is invaluable. I will be forever grateful for the tremendous influence he's had on me and my career in our beloved squared circle. Miss and love you Dusty. RIP brother," Johnson wrote.

Gerald Brisco told the Miami Herald:
"Dusty Rhodes was my brother who I've known since 1966. I've traveled throughout the world with him. Something I will always take form Dusty Rhodes is to believe in yourself and believe in what you are doing or don't do it at all. Dusty Rhodes took an idea that he had and became a globally famous man because he believed it. He was a giver. I love you Dusty and will see you on the other side."

TMZ released an on-camera interview Roddy Piper talking about Dusty Rhodes. Piper got emotional reflecting on Dusty being a “national treasure.” Piper followed with a Dusty Story about smuggling a donkey - or some other animal that he can’t recall - up to the 13th floor of an apartment.

The obituary for Dusty (Virgil Runnels) was published in the Tampa Tribune. The family is requesting donations in Dusty’s memory to Connor’s Cure and the Joe Torre Safe at Home organization.

Daniel Bryan on Dusty working with younger stars to the Asbury Park Press: "It happens a lot in wrestling and a lot of other things where the older generation looks down at the younger generation and picks him apart. Instead of that, he would say, ‘Ooh, look at this in this person.’ As opposed to looking at their negatives, he was looking at their positives. He wasn’t afraid to tell you what was wrong with something, but he was also quick to highlight the very good aspects of your nature or things about you that you should focus on. He touched a lot - a lot - of people.”

Bryan also talked about Cody Rhodes’ relationship with Dusty: “I have fond memories of Dusty, but I also have fond memories of being in the car with Cody while he was talking to his dad. You could hear the way they would banter back and forth and you can see how that vibrancy that Dusty had was passed on to Cody. And I don’t know Goldust (Dustin) as well as I know Cody, but you can see it in Dusty, too.”

Bret Hart on how Dusty influenced his career to The Missoulian newspaper: “When I think about just his impact on me, let alone wrestling, he was such a phenomenal talker. He was a class all by himself. He’s right up there with your best orators in the school of Martin Luther King, but he was talking about wrestling. A gift of the gab is a great skill and there was something you could learn from somebody who could talk like that and gather people around him.”

Bret Flair on idolizing and respecting Dusty Rhodes to Busted Open: “We made music for 30 years together. I started my career idolizing him and - the good thing about this, if there is a good thing to it, is that I spent about four hours with him on Tuesday at the Performance Center in Orlando when I was done there visiting my daughter and the last thing he said to me was - he was pissed off that I was going to see LeBron James and he wasn’t. He was like: ‘Get out of my office - go see LeBron man, I don’t care (laughs).’ I said, ‘I’ll wave to you from courtside - and then I got the call yesterday. We had so much fun together. He loved John Elway, I like Lawrence Taylor. He liked the Celtics, I liked the Lakers. He liked the University of Texas and I liked Oklahoma. We just went round and round on everything, it was tremendous. He loved sports and he loved life.”

Ric Flair on talking to Goldust (Dustin Runnels) to Busted Open: “Dustin sounded okay. He was there. He moved from Gainesville to Orlando several months ago. I thought that, down the road, Dustin will be an instructor at NXT, which is great for him. And I think that he and his dad had really gotten tight. He sounded OK, I mean, how do you ever sound? I went through something like this a couple of years ago with my son, I mean, how do you ever sound? And what do you ever say? You never know what’s the right thing to say, know what I mean? I’ll get a better feel of how they’re all doing when I see them in person.”

"Million Dollar Man” Ted DiBiase on the DiBiase/Rhodes Family connection to Brian Fritz for Sporting News: “When you work with guys like that, it makes you better. You learn things from them, things that are intangible, that are hard to explain. He was very good that way so when his boys came up, when Dustin came up, of course I never had the opportunity to get in the ring with Cody but Cody and my son Ted Jr. are very good friends and they were tag team partners for a while in WWE. There’s definitely a family connection there and right now my heart goes out to his wife and two boys. I know as a father that is very close to my sons and I know how close Dusty was to his boys. I just really hurt for those boys right now.”

Chris Jericho on Dusty’s charisma to Brian Fritz: “I think the biggest thing with Dusty Rhodes is that he broke the mold of what a pro wrestling is supposed to be. Not so much in the ‘70s, but in the ‘80s when it became very much a body business... He was all charisma and he was all mind. He had a great wrestling mind. He had a great mind to work matches, build angles and great finishes and also had charisma to where he could work an audience no matter what the situation was he was in. “That’s the real secret to the wrestling business. I even said that to the Tough Enough finalists last night - you have to connect with the crowd. It doesn’t matter how big you are. It doesn’t matter what kind of sports you played. All that matters is connecting with the crowd because this is an entertainment based business.”

Tully Blanchard on Dusty’s influence on wrestling to Brian Fritz: “Sometimes when you’re involved in something, you don’t necessarily know that you’re involved in something revolutionary. When he became the booker for (Jim) Crockett at the end of ‘84 and when Crockett got control of the Superstation (TBS) that became revolutionary and changed the wrestling business. And Dusty was a key part in that. To me, he was the key booker, TV producer of a revolutionary movement that changed a profession. That’s pretty legendary.”

Sean Waltman on watching Dusty growing up to Brian Fritz: “Dusty Rhodes made me fall in love at first sight with professional wrestling. At that very moment, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. From that moment on, I learned everything I could about professional wrestling. “When I first got to work around Dusty, he was so cool to me. Just to fast-forward to the WCW days and he was in the nWo. I was out for ten months with a broken neck. Every week in the nWo in-ring segment on TV, he was usually the stick man. And every week he said, ‘we miss you Syxx Pac, you’re too sweet’ or something to that effect and he was wearing my nWo Syxx-ball t-shirt. I’ll never forget that.”

Former NXT champion Neville to Scott Fishman for ChannelGuideMagBlog.com (interview conducted prior to news of Dusty’s
death): “It’s hard not to think of someone (in WWE) who is not part of NXT. Guys like Dusty and William (Regal) coach you a lot. Main roster superstars come down from NXT to wrestle matches. We are all part of it.”

- Neville to Brian Fritz for Sporting News (interview conducted prior to Dusty’s death): “Obviously I have a very strong accent that a lot of people can’t understand. I don’t think I’m naturally a promo guy but being in NXT and working with Dusty Rhodes who has really helped me tenfold with my promo work and my speaking and I feel like that really prepared me. In essence, doing that on Raw is no different that doing it at NXT or an NXT live event or wherever. It’s just about being prepared and working with Dusty really prepared me for that.”

- NXT star Charlotte Flair wrote about the connection between the Rhodes and Flair families, especially as it relates to her brother Reid, who died at the age of 25 two years ago. “When my brother passed away about two years ago I wanted to say a few words during his service. The only thing that I could think of in that moment because I didn’t have anything prepared was him ALWAYS quoting Dusty: ‘I’ve wined and dined with kings and queens, and I’ve slept in alleys and ate pork and beans.’ So that’s what I said about my brother. He would watch Rhodes vs. Flair over and over and over. I texted his wife Michelle later that day because I wanted Dusty to know my brother idolized him,” Charlotte wrote, reflecting on Dusty Rhodes on the day of his funeral. Charlotte added that when she joined NXT, Dusty pushed her, believed in her, and encouraged her to be strong, especially for Reid. “I know he means the world to so many people and changed so many lives.... I am where I am today because of your passion for NXT & how much you believed in all the kids. Dusty, thank you. you will forever be NXT’s angel,” Charlotte wrote.

CODY RHODES EULOGY
Cody Rhodes (Stardust on WWE TV) published on Twitter the eulogy he read at Wednesday’s funeral for his father, Dusty Rhodes.

It was Cody’s first tweet since last Tuesday - the day before Dusty fell in his home and two days before Dusty died.

Cody wrote about Dusty, the person, husband, father, coach, and family-man. Which all tied in with pro wrestling being Dusty’s means of providing security and a home for his family.

“You were a cowboy of the old-republic, the last bastion of Southern wrestling. A master orator who spit fire, but if the question was ever posed to you... what would you rather have, fame or family? Family. Always family. Getting over with your family and extended family trumped all. You were a world-class family man,” Cody wrote.

Cody also wrote about Dusty’s reputation for finding weaknesses in wrestlers and turning them into their strengths, a nod to himself as a pugdy, over-weight wrestler who didn’t “look the part” of a physically-fit pro wrestler.

“He liked to fix things,” Cody wrote. “A propensity for misfit toys...broken people. If you were over-weight, or covered in tattoos, or having just been through a divorce, he wanted to take your pain and make it your power. To arm you with weapons for your profession.”

Cody talked about Dusty’s love for the NXT roster and working at the Performance Center, plus additional topics related to pro wrestling. But, mainly, Cody wrote about Dusty’s love for family.

ROSS REFLECTS ON DUSTY RHODES
Jim Ross, the person who has nearly seen it all from inside the modern wrestling business, has been called upon to put Dusty Rhodes’s life, career, and legacy into perspective.

“He was arguably the most charismatic performer of all time,” Ross told the Associated Press. “His amazing unique verbal styling will never be duplicated or exceeded. He was exactly what he portrayed on TV: a blue-collar, common man, who rose from being son of farmer to being a part of American pop culture, whose memory will live forever. Therefore, for many he was truly the American dream.”

Ross noted at jsbarbq.com that he was filming an interview for WWE’s forthcoming Owen Hart DVD when he found out about Dusty’s death. “My friend of over 30 years Dusty Rhodes had died at age 69 in Orlando, Florida,” Ross wrote. “With his distinctive delivery his voice will never be forgotten. RIP my dear friend until we meet again.

According to TMZ, Dusty fell in his Florida home sometime Wednesday morning. Dusty was rushed to a hospital, where he experienced life-threatening complications overnight. Dusty was then pronounced dead at the age of 69 on Thursday morning.

Prior to his death, Dusty was starting to see a doctor to improve his health, according to Jerry Brisco speaking to TMZ. Ross wrote about Dusty brushing off questions about his health status as recently as last week.

“The Dream and I talked about a week ago and he tried to convince me that he was ‘just fine.’ I knew something was wrong when I saw him in San Jose at WrestleMania where I again questioned him about his health while sitting behind him at the WWE Hall of Fame induction ceremony,” Ross wrote at jsbarbq.com.

“Again, he declared himself fit and we talked of his significant weight loss. Then down in Orlando at a NXT taping the night before Mick Foley taped his comedy special for the WWE Network Dusty and I talked and he insisted that he was fine.”

Ross expanded on his relationship with Dusty in a formal column for Fox Sports, noting that who Dusty was in front of the camera was an extension of his larger-than-life personality.

“Hopefully today’s performers will understand how committed he was to his craft, how much he was in love with wrestling business and how much he as a natural extension of himself,” Ross told the AP. “If they are paying attention that is what they’ll do... No matter what you do - wrestlers or anybody else - you have to commit yourself to always be yourself. Dusty was always himself.”

Ross added at jsbarbq.com: “The young athletes at NXT lost a great teacher and mentor and we all lost a man who could talk fans into the seats and he sold tickets.”

Ross concluded at FoxSports.com: “Dusty Rhodes was an innovator, a creator, a mentor and a performer the likes we will never see again in his star-crossed profession. The spirit and the legacy of The American Dream will live forever in the hearts and minds of everyone who heard him speak and watched Big Dust get ‘funky like a monkey’ inside the squared circle.

Until we see each other again, may you rest in peace, my dear friend.”

SMACKDOWN SPOILERS
WWE Smackdown TV taping report
June 16, 2015
Buffalo, N.Y.
Report by Bryan Reinard, PW Torch reader

Dark Match: Zack Ryder beat Brad Maddox with the Rough Ryder.

Main Event SPOILERS
(1) WWE tag champions Prime Time Players beat The Ascension. Darren Young hit the Gut Check for the win.
(2) King Barrett beat Heath Slater with the Bullhammer. R-Truth cut a promo after the match.
(3) Naomi beat Summer Rae via submission.
(4) IC champion Ryback beat Adam Rose with Shellshock.
(5) Luke Harper & Erick Rowan beat Lucha Dragons with their version of the 3D.

Smackdown Spoilers 6/18
Mr. Money in the Bank Sheamus came out to cut a promo on winning the MITB contract. Dean Ambrose came out and challenged Sheamus, but Kane came out and announced a two-on-one handicap match.

(1) Sheamus & Kane beat Dean Ambrose in a handicap match when Roman Reigns came out to help Ambrose. This set up a tag main event...
(2) Brie Bella beat Paige.
(3) Dolph Ziggler beat Bo Dallas with the Zig-Zag.
(4) Neville beat Xavier woods with Red Arrow. WWE World Hvt. champion Seth Rollins came out and cut a promo on his match with Brock Lesnar at Battleground.
(5) NXT champion Kevin Owens beat Cesaro with the pop-up powerbomb.

They announced Raw coming to Buffalo on September 28.

(6) Sheamus & Kane beat Dean Ambrose & Roman Reigns. Bray Wyatt distracted Reigns, then Sheamus hit the Brogue Kick for the win.

After the taping, Seth Rollins came out and joined Bray attacking Reigns. Ambrose then came back in the ring and the heels double-teamed Ambrose. But, Reigns hit the Superman Punch on Rollins, Ambrose hit Dirty Deeds on Bray, and Reigns finished Bray with a spear.

WWE NOTEBOOK
After the June 15 Raw went off the air, WWE set up the bonus main event for Cleveland. Bray Wyatt and Roman Reigns were initially part of the match, but they left the ring and went backstage. So, it turned into a dark match as Dean Ambrose & Randy Orton & IC champion Ryback beat WWE World Hvt. champion Seth Rollins & Sheamus & Big Show in a six-man tag match. Orton pinned Sheamus for the win...

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and Steph and asked if they were just going to let the ring. Backstage Seth walked up to Triple H out of the building. JBL was conducting a Monday Night Raw sit-in. JBL sat mid-ring and said he isn’t leaving until Seth title literally slipped through his fingers last night. He sat mid-ring and said he wasn’t leaving until Seth title (pointing at Manziel). He said Lebron James his. He said he’s leaving the piece of crap town and only championship they should be celebrating is his. He said he’s leaving the piece of crap town and only championship they should be celebrating is. Triple H and Stephanie. The fans oohed at him doesn’t happen without a great team, and he’s a great team builder. He said first and foremost, he’d like to thank Seth Rollins. He then said there are others, of course, such as Seth Rollins and Seth Rollins and Seth Rollins and Seth Rollins and Seth Rollins and Seth Rollins. He repeated it several more times. Then he said he leaving someone out and added, “Oh, yeah. Seth Rollins. And last but certainly not least, Seth Rollins. Who else would I thank?” He said certainly not “Dumb and Dumber, J&J Security,” or “the Devil’s Favorite Dinosaur” or even Triple H and Stephanie. The fans oohed at that one. He said, “Because that’s how good I am!”

He told the crowd this is what a World Champion and a World Championship looks like. He said Johny Idiotface will never bring them a title (pointing at Manziel). He said Lebron James isn’t bringing a title back to Cleveland. He said the only championship they should be celebrating is his. He said he’s leaving the piece of crap town and taking his title with him. Dean Ambrose’s music played and he walked onto the stage. Saxton said he’s surprised Dean is even walking. Dean limped to the ring and then attacked Seth at ringside, then clotheslined him over the top rope to the floor. Seth went after Dean’s knee at the announce table seconds later. As soon as Dean fought back and hit Seth with a flying clothesline off the announce table, Seth retreated.

Dean stood in the ring and said winning the title literally slipped through his fingers last night. He said hearing Seth gloat reminded him how much he likes to beat him up and make his life miserable. He sat mid-ring and said he isn’t leaving until Seth gets his ass back in the ring. Cole asked if Dean was conducting a Monday Night Raw sit-in. JBL suggested a straight jacket for Dean and an escort out of the building.

After the break, Dean was still sitting inside the ring. Backstage Seth walked up to Triple H and Steph and asked if they were just going to let him sit out there. “We make the decisions, not him, right?” Seth said. Steph said they heard him earlier and he made it clear he doesn’t need them. Seth denied saying that. Triple H asked if he’s calling her a liar. Seth surrended and said he’d never suggest that. He just said they ought to get Dean out of the building so they can move on to what’s next for him. Hunter said Seth will find out his next challenger by the end of the night. Seth asked if he has a say in that. Hunter said no. He said they trusted Seth to beat Dean by himself and he did that, so he should trust them to decide his next opponent. Steph then suggested saying: “Thanks for stopping by.” Seth walked away concerned.

Back in the ring, Dean was sitting inside the ring playing to the crowd in a bit of a cartoonish fashion. Then Sheamus’s music played. Sheamus stepped out with the MITB briefcase in hand as his music played. Sheamus said they are both alike. They both like to fight and they both made bold predictions at MITB. But Sheamus said he’s a winner whereas Dean is a loser. He said he is one Brogue Kick away from becoming the next WWE World Heavyweight Champion anytime, anywhere, anywhere. He said it could happen tonight, but first he’s going to celebrate by kicking his head off of his body.

(1) DEAN AMBROSE vs. SHEAMUS

At 10:00 Dean went for Dirty Deeds. Sheamus slipped away and rolled to the floor. He grabbed his briefcase and said he didn’t need this match because he’s Mr. Money in the Bank. Randy Orton walked out to his music and distracted Sheamus. Dean jumped him from behind, threw him into the ring, and avoided a desperation Brogue Kick and学校boyed Sheamus for the win.

WINNER: Ambrose at 10:50.

Orton then went after Sheamus at ringside. In the ring, Orton gave Sheamus his DDT off the second rope. He signaled for the RKO. Sheamus pushed Orton away and retreated.

-Backstage, Seth walked past Jamie Noble and Joey Mercury. Seth called them “Harry and Lloyd” and then said he hates to be the guy who says I told you so. Then he patted his belt over his shoulder and said, “I told you so.” He said he beat them without their help “because that’s how good I am.” He said he’d bring them back on board if they were to relay their help “because that’s how good I am.”

Dean, unfazed, said that was a不同的 Kane. He said he got a taste of the championship and he won’t stop until he gets another taste. He said he won’t stop until he gets another taste. “That’s what I live for,” he said. “What do you live for?” He then walked away and left Kane mulling over a deep reflective thought.

(KW Reax: They did a nice job with these segments continuing to set up the overrun main segment with The Authority revealing Seth’s challenger. They gave viewers reason to believe it could be Kane or Dean, and even dropped hints of Seth vs. Mercury for that matter. For those not aware and fixated on Brock Lesnar already, it set the stage nicely for a pleasant surprise at the end of the show.)

TOP OF THE SECOND HOUR SEGMENT

-Kevin Owens walked out, still with his NXT Title belt over his shoulder, as Cole ran down a list of injuries Cena suffered the night before. Owens said what he did to Cena was Cena’s fault because Cena said something offensive and disrespectful to him. He said Cena told him he proved he belonged.
He said he didn’t need Cena to tell him that, and Cena asking for a handshake was Cena trying to be the center of attention. He said Cena disregarded him, so he did what he had to do. He said he still holds a win over Cena, and he wants a rematch, and this time he wants the U.S. Title. He said this is usually the time Cena’s music would hit and he’d run to the ring, slide into the ring, and issue an open challenge. He said Cena isn’t doing that tonight, so he’ll issue an open challenge. He asked anyone in the back to come out who wants a piece of Kevin Owen.

(WK Reax: I really like the consistency of Owens lashing out at Cena and justifying it because he’s so disrespected by Cena acting like he’s some sort of veteran compared to him. Owens is tremendous on the mic and has such a clearly defined character that it’s likely he’ll be consistently good and always have a core character foundation to build his promos around in a believable, heelish way.)

After a few seconds, Dolph Ziggler answered. He walked out with Lana and they smooched on stage. The chemistry is not there. And the fact that Ziggler was obviously chewing gum made it kind of weird. He told Owens that he has a lot of guts talking about sacrifice. He said he has scratched and clawed for everything he has ever got in the business. He said Cleveland has scratched and clawed for a chance at a championship and he’s going to give them one right now. Owens with a smile clarified that he never offered the NXT Title as part of the Open Challenge. He said he’d fight, but not for the belt. Ziggler said he’s already there and he doesn’t care.

(3) KEVIN OWENS vs. DOLPH ZIGGLER

Late in the match, Owens was exhausted but stood up and avoided a corner splash by Ziggler, then launched Ziggler with a released German suplex and then a cannonball for a two count. They replayed the sequence in slo-mo. Owens went for a PopUp Powerbomb, but Ziggler countered with a Zig Zag. He crawled over and made a cover for a believable near fall. Saxton said you have to be impressed by Ziggler’s effort. That confirmed Ziggler was losing. Anytime an announcer starts being told by Vince to tout the “effort” a wrestler is putting forth, that requires that of them. Triple H said the next challenger will not be Mercury, Noble, Kane, or Dean. The crowd booed that one. Stephe noted that to Hunter. She asked, “Well then, who will it be?” And out walked Seth before the answer could be provided.

FINAL SEGMENT

-Triple H and Steph walked out with two minutes left in the third hour to announce Seth’s challenger at Battleground. Steph apologized for Owens’ attack on MKG. She said disciplinary action will be taken because it’s what’s best for business. She said they take that phrase very seriously because they run a global property that requires that of them. Triple H said the next challenger will not be Mercury, Noble, Kane, or Dean. The crowd booed that one. Stephe noted that to Hunter. She asked, “Well then, who will it be?”

TOP OF THE THIRD HOUR SEGMENT

-Roman Reigns walked through the crowd to the ring, looking little more grumpy than usual lately. He explained why. He said he got very little sleep last night because of what Bray Wyatt cost him the night before. He said he is pissed off. He said he’s not waiting for “Battleground,” he wanted to throw down tonight. He called out Bray Wyatt’s ass.

Bray appeared on the big screen and said in the morning two stars rise - one speaks the truth, the other tells a lie. Reigns told him to stop talking and get out there. Bray replied: “Hello to you, too, Roman. And what a fiery temper it is you have.” He said he wants answers, but he doesn’t have the capacity to comprehend their meaning. He said he should have been him last night ascending the ladder and achieving his destiny. He said he stole his opportunity. He said Reigns selfishly denied him. He blamed Reigns’ ego for causing him to do such a crazy thing. He said he reminds him of someone he knew a long time ago. He said he too was the chosen one and the people believed this chosen one would lead them to paradise. He said he was chosen while the other was cast aside, “and now we know they made the wrong choice.” He said all he needs to do is look outside his window and he’ll see this is no paradise. He said he is the yin to his yang and they balance this whole thing out and whether he’s willing to admit it or not, they need each other. He said that’s how he knew last night when he saw him climb the ladder that true justice meant “anyone but you.” He said he will tempt him and lie to him and destroy him, but not tonight because Father’s Day is right around the corner.

Bray then showed that he was looking at a picture of Reins playing with his daughter. Bray sang “Little Tea Pot.” Bray said, “Patience, Roman. Our fun is just getting started.”

(WK Reax: I didn’t fully understand everything Bray was referencing, but the gist of it is he is going to mess with Reigns in very personal ways to control him, and I’m interested in seeing that. It helped that in recent weeks Reigns has been more gregarious because this shift in mood due to Bray costing him the MITB match was more noticeable as a result. His grumpy mood this week wasn’t that different from how he looked all the time in his lead up to WrestleMania and for a while afterward.)

-Brock Lesnar’s music then played. Seth looks at Hunter like a stunned dog who just got pointlessly slapped or kicked by his owner who was just petting him seconds earlier. He tilted his head and soaked up the news, staring at Hunter with his back to Lesnar’s entrance Lesnar then bounds onto the stage with Paul Heyman behind him, wearing a “Suplex City” t-shirt. Cole noted that Seth never pinned Lesnar, who was the champion at WrestleMania. JBL said Lesnar has been reinstated. “Hell just opened up,” said JBL.

Cole stoically stressed that Lesnar was never pinned, without any acknowledgment of why Lesnar was suspended and what it could mean to have this crazy beast back.

Heyman shook hands with Hunter and then Steph, although he did so reaching out toward them with one leg up behind him to keep his balance, a clear gesture of not wanting to share space or fully trust The Authority. Nice touch. Lesnar stared at Seth, and Seth looked down and avoided eye contract. The fans chanted “Suplex City! Suplex City!” Seth began shaking, and then he got the gumption up to actually make eye contact with Lesnar, only to look away immediately. There may have been a stream of urine running down his leg based on his facial expressions. He stepped backward. Lesnar closed the gap immediately, methodically. Seth jumped to ringside where he looked over at Hunter and Steph, feeling betrayed. Cole said The Beast was staring a hole in Seth. Cole said Lesnar is back and he has his sights set on the WWE Championship. JBL called Lesnar the perfect fighting machine. Cole said that match takes place in five weeks at Battleground, and he wished him luck beating Lesnar on his own. JBL said he will own the WWE Title again, as the show ended.

(WK Reax: WWE is expecting everyone, it appears, to forget why Lesnar was indefinitely suspended in the first place. Michael Cole certain seemed to forget, as his tone didn’t suggest he had any memory of Lesnar’s recent past. That said, The Authority have an explanation for reinstating Lesnar - that Seth has gotten under their skin enough with his thankless arrogance that they want to “test” him and
teach him a lesson, even if it means perhaps shifting the WWE Title from Seth to a Heyman-led non-Authority member. The question always was going to be why The Authority would reinstate Lesnar, so they at least covered that somewhat. I hope WWE does more explaining on that in coming weeks. Seth was awesome here with is facial reactions aimed at Triple H as he gave him the pep talk and after Lesnar’s music started playing. Seth is as polished a heel of his type as I’ve seen in a long time. Triple H’s pep talk was also good. The downside is that The Authority are still utterly awful people, and just because Seth is so thanklessly arrogant and has a big head, it’s hard to root entirely for the hand-picked opponent for Seth, either. Cheering for Lesnar loses some of its fun when The Authority chose him and are possibly rooting for him to humble Seth.)

OTHER SEGMENTS

-Paige stood on a chair and addressed other Divas. She said they all need to stand together. Summer Rae asked if this was because she lost to Nikki last night. Paige said yes she lost to Nikki and that does suck, but it’s not about that. She said they need to stand together so they can have their moment. Alicia said Paige has turned against every partner she’s had. Naomi stood up and said she’s crazy if she thinks she’ll let her boss her around. Paige said she’s crazy, and she’ll prove it by taking on both Bellas at once because you have to fight them both at once anyway. The Bellas showed up and asked Paige if she was saying something. Nikki said ever since she helped Stephanie win at Summerslam last year, “no offense, Brie,” she’s been the Divas Champion. Brie somewhat bitterly said, “That’s okay.” So they finally acknowledged it. Nikki said it’s a free country, so if they want to side with Paige, they can. Each of the Divas left, one at a time, showing that Paige was all alone against the Bellas. The Bellas mocked Paige for how poorly her pitch went to the other women.

(WK Reax: I’m not a fan of the Divas being treated as some sort of united entity fighting for respect. It’s as flawed as the X Division in TNA at times over the years. Divas should be heels or faces based on their personality traits and ethics of how they conduct themselves, and those who share similar view on fair play and integrity should bond consistently over that. Those who cheat can bond over that. But putting them all together because they’re all female undercut the whole core heel-face dynamic that is needed for pro wrestling to work, at least 98 percent of the way I’ve ever seen it draw money. That said, I got a little satisfaction from seeing the Bellas acknowledge some tension between Nikki and Brie.)

-The biggest other segment of the show easily was Machine Gun Kelly performing live, after which Kevin Owens walked out and mock applauded. MGK offered a handshake, but Owens refused. MKG mouthed off and shoved him. Owens powerbombed him off of the stage. Cole went into his stutter-stammer mode. Owens looked down at MGK as if he had a bit of an out-of-body experience. MGK. After the break, Saxton massphere. MGK serves zero purpose throughout these shows with no particular insights, humor, or strong point of view - expressed disgust with Owens’ actions and tried to act like he was barely able to compose himself. (WK Reax: MGK shoving Kevin Owens, storyline-wise, was really dumb. What did that guy think would happen? So it made him less sympathetic. I’d rather he turned his back to walk away after an argument instigated by Owens, or perhaps showing Owens when Owens pie-faced someone in his band or something, so that when Owens did attack him, your first thought wasn’t “Well, that skinny hip-hop guy asked for it.” Still, all that said, and as flawed as it was - because it practically turned Owens babyface given what an outsider MGK is - it was a featured segment for Owens to be brutal and build his credibility as a badass who doesn’t take crap from anyone, and tends to overreact.)

-Throughout the show, they aired highlights of Dusty Rhodes’ career. First was a clip from Aug. 21, 1979 of Dusty winning the NWA World Hvt. Title over Harley Race. Another segment showed him at the Hall of Fame ceremony. (WK Reax: They did a very nice job on this show and at MITB the night before paying tribute to Dusty Rhodes’ contributions to the industry.)

-Late in the first hour, backstage Heath Slater, Zack Ryder, Fandango, Paige, Summer Rae, Emma, and Cameron were gathered around Michael Gun Kelly. Cole plugged that he’d perform later.

OTHER MATCHES

(2) R-TRUTH pinned WADE BARRETT at 0:22. Truth came out dressed up in a mock king outfit - a bedsheet and a cardboard crown. Before the match, Truth sat at ringside with the announcers. He called Byron “Coach.” JBL had to tell him he is actually in this match. When the bell rang, Barrett went after Truth aggressively with a boot to the face and a barrage of punches from a mount position. As Barrett postured for the Bullhammer, Truth recovered and surprised him with a schoolboy for the win. Afterward, Barrett beat down Truth and said he earned the right to be called a King by winning a tournament, so being King is prestigious and Truth was making a mockery of it. He said they will all hail King Barrett now.

(WK Reax: I don’t see a big downside here to Barrett losing this match. He lost only because he was grandstanding to set up his finisher, and he got his heat back with a post-match voices attack, and he got to cut an arrogant heel promo. So this was a segment that, given the reality of Barrett’s place on the roster, enhanced his character.)

(4) KANE beat RANDY ORTON at 4:22. A few minutes in, Orton set up a second rope DDT when Sheamus walked out. Kane declared the match No Holds Barred. Sheamus entered the ring and attacked Orton with a Brogue Kick. Kane scored a three count. Cole was upset that The Authority abuse their power like this, having Kane change rules to his liking mid-match.

(WK Reax: I’m really glad to see a strong shift in announcers decrying heel tactics and abuse of power by The Authority. That was not always or even often the case earlier this year, but it seems they’re being instructed to make sure viewers know why heels should be booted.)

(5) THE MIZ pinned THE BIG SHOW at 2:47 via countout. Before the match Ryback joined the announcers at ringside and thanked Dusty Rhodes for all he did for him. Show ended up throwing Miz right into Ryback’s lap. Ryback exclaimed, “I’ve got Miz all over me.” Ryback popped out of his chair and yelled at Show as Miz returned to the ring. That led to Show getting counted out. Miz celebrated like a mad man as the crowd chanted “Feed me more!” Ryback went after Show with a Meat Hook, but Show ducked and booted out to ringside.

(WK Reax: That line “I’ve got Miz all over me” had to be a dare from someone in the back. If WWE’s goal was to make us care even less about Big Show, this has done it. We like him against Miz, we dislike him against Ryback, and the result is offsetting resulting in the usual ambivalence. I liked Ryback thanking Dusty Rhodes for all he did for him. Miz’s new outfit is hilarious and appropriate. Ryback is more enjoyable now than I can remember. He seems to be a groove as far as how to portray his character.)

(6) THE BELLAS beat PAIGE at 5:35 in a handicapped match. The announcers spent the whole match talking about the finish of the match the night before where Brie confessed she wasn’t Nikki after she got pinned. It looked like Paige might win after a Ram-Paige on Brie, but Nikki made the save just in time, then finished Paige seconds later with a Rack Attack. The Bella stood over Paige and taunted her for losing.

(WK Reax: It’s amazing that the Bellas have gone back to being full-fledged heels - this week at least - after leaning babyface in recent months. This idea of characters shifting week to week indiscriminately is pretty lame. I did like the rationale for Paige wrestling them both - since she was resigned to having to deal with both of them anyway, even if it was a one-on-one match.)

(7) THE PRIME TIME PLAYERS (Darren Young & Titus O’Neil) & NEVILLE beat THE NEW DAY at 9:38. The New Day before the match cut a promo saying most think they’d be distraught and upset over losing the tag team titles, but it’s a New Day and they’re going to prove the power of positivity by taking it in stride. When JBL accused Saxton of stirring the pot by suggesting possibly New Day are pretending to be positive, Saxton replied: “I have no pot, no spoon.” Neville hot-tagged in late in the match and went on a flurry against Xavier. Chaos broke out including a sloppy sidewalk slam by Titus on Big E. Xavier face-planting Neville a second later, but Young made the save. Young then gave Kofi a gut-buster after which Neville landed the Red Arrow for the win.

(WK Reax: I do like the idea of New Day saying they’re just fine with losing the tag titles because they’re positive thinkers, but planting seeds that they really are seething inside and going to snap at any point. This feels like a tag title feud to replace Tyson Kidd & Cesaro, now that Kidd is injured, and they elevated the Players at least for now because of that.)

###
Don’t change the channel, it’s the X Division

This is a column about the X Division.

I know what you’re thinking: “The X Division, AGAIN? Can we just stop beating the dead horse already?” But see, here’s the deal: Some things I heard on the Destination X episode of TNA Impact really bothered me. I was all prepared to just sit through Destination X and roll my eyes as TNA once again paraded out X Division “stars” and pretended like they cared about the division. You know, the usual. But then I heard, amongst other things:

“The most extreme athletes the world has ever known will compete for a chance at the coveted X Division title.” – video package voice-over man

“The X Division is all about innovation, and nobody does it better than these competitors in the ring.” – The Pope.

“You’re only going to see these types of moves on a Wednesday night Impact.” – Josh Mathews

So, hyperbole is not new to the wrestling industry. I get that. But these quotes really stuck out to me as not only hyperbole, but really, insulting the intelligence of the fans. You don’t have to be an avid TNA Impact viewer to know that the X Division has not been presented as anywhere near prestigious in a long time. When TNA makes these sorts of claims as above, they seem to be taking their audience for suckers.

While the announcers were putting over the talent and giving lip service to the X Division, let’s take a closer look at just who was participating in the three allegedly prestigous X Division three-way matches. The first match was won by Low Ki, who has been positioned as a subordinate within the Beat Down Clan, headed by MVP.

The BDC had a streak there for a while of being booked as main event talents within TNA. However, as of late, they’ve been cycled out in favor of Kurt Angle and others. This may be due to the fact that the protagonists in the feud, the Drew McIntyre-led Rising, feature two other wrestlers who are new to TNA and don’t have the extensive WWE experience of a McIntyre or MVP. Nevertheless, Low Ki has the credibility and history within the X Division to be someone who the fans see as legitimate.

Also in that first three-way was Manik, a part of James Storm’s group, The Revolution. Manik is one of the more talented wrestlers on the TNA roster but his size will forever hold him back. He is overshadowed within the group by Storm, Abyss, and Khoya. Storm has been off doing his own thing with the Mickie James storyline, leaving The Revolution as an afterthought.

Rounding out the match was Crazy Steve. You see, he’s so crazy he spells the word with two “z’s.” In case you’ve forgotten, Crazy Steve was (get ready for it...) part of a stable, The Menagerie, with Knux and Rebel. Rebel has recently reappeared on TNA TV, but Knux has been MIA for a while now. The entire storyline surrounding The Menagerie seems to have been dropped, leaving Crazy Steve with nothing to do but show up on TV when TNA needs X Division bodies.

Next was a win by Tigre Uno over DJ Zema Ion and Mandrews. Tigre Uno hasn’t won a meaningful match in forever, and this win came out of nowhere. He’s been used as a TV jobber when someone needs a quick win, so of course they’d have him win here with zero build-up. DJZ was an entertaining third wheel in the Bro Mans group. Unfortunately, TNA recently broke up that pairing for some reason.

Jesse Godderz attacked DJZ after this match, perhaps setting something up between those two. Still, the break-up of that group doesn’t bode well for DJZ’s future. Mark Andrews, the erstwhile real name of Mandrews, had played second fiddle to Rockstar Spud, just to show how far down the totem pole he’s been. He won TNA’s British Boot Camp competition, which also produced Spud. I’m sensing a pattern there.

The third three-way involved Kenny King, Grado, and Cruz. King seemed to be the ringer in this match, but ended up losing out. King, like Low Ki, would be one of the few guys in TNA the company could conceivably build a decent X Division around. Instead, King too is a part of the Beat Down Clan with MVP, Low Ki, and Homicide.

The winner of the match, Grado, has been portrayed as strictly a comedy wrestler and not at all like the stereotypical X Division wrestler. He too was a part of the British Boot Camp series, but did not win. His only win to theoretically earn him this spot came over the retired BBC trainer, Al Snow, on an episode of Impact earlier this year.

As someone who watches each episode of Impact, I know nothing about Cruz. Josh Mathews noted that he had competed on Impact before, but it must have been entirely forgettable. TNA made no attempt to give him a back-story or make him stand out in any way. He wore a mask.

That’s not exactly a star-studded roster, is it? Compare that to the heyday of the X Division, when they had guys like A.J. Styles, Samoa Joe, Christopher Daniels, Kazarian, Michael Shane, Jay Lethal, Petey Williams, and others vying for the championship. Really, there’s no comparison.

What’s worse is the lack of roster depth is how the X Division was portrayed on this Destination X episode of Impact. First, we had Rockstar Spud, the former X Division Champion, challenging Kurt Angle for the TNA Title. In order to do so, he gave up the X Division Championship.

The famed “Option C,” first utilized by Austin Aries a few years ago, guarantees the spotlight for the X Division on at least one night. It puts them on par with the TNA Champion, win or lose the cash-in. However, how prestigious does the X Division title look when champions are willing to ditch the belt because this may be their only shot at the TNA Title?

Look at Rockstar Spud. He acknowledged himself that he had virtually no chance of upsetting Kurt Angle. Wouldn’t he then want to stay X Division Champion, taking on all comers and being the best X Division champion he can be? No – even with the long, long odds, he felt it was more worth giving up the X Division title to face Angle. And he lost.

The X Division Title will never be equal to the TNA World Title, but they should be a lot closer than they are portrayed. In the early days of TNA, this was the case. Winning the X Division title was a big deal, not just a means to an end. Now, it means next to nothing unless you’re holding it the month of Destination X and can cash it in for a shot at the “real” title everyone desires.

Throughout the show, Grado was shown in backstage vignettes attempting to cut weight to make the weight limit of the X Division so that he could participate in one of the three-way matches. We saw three vignettes with him doing this until he was informed by Jeremy Borash just before his match that there are no weight limits in the X Division.

Now, we have a wrestler competing for a shot at the X Division title, who doesn’t even know the ONE RULE of the X Division – it’s not about weight limits, it’s about no limits. Of course, who can really blame him, because TNA has played fast and loose with that rule for a few years now, establishing weight limits and rescinding them at different times, almost at will. I’m sure many fans watching at home thought the X Division still did have a weight limit.

The comments at the beginning of this article, though, are so behind-the-times in addition to being straight-up hyperbole. At one time, TNA was ahead of the curve with the athleticism offered by the X Division, but now, they’re being lapped by Lucha Underground, ROH, and even WWE at times, all shows with national TV clearance just as TNA has.

It’s disingenuous to try to convince fans that they have cornered the market on athletic, high-flying types when Lucha Underground offers more of that in almost every match; ROH has the likes of ACH, Caprice Coleman, Cedric Alexander, the Jacksons, and Matt Sydal, amongst others; WWE has even come into the age of the smaller wrestler with guys like Neville, Kalisto, and even main eventers like Seth Rollins and Dolph Ziggler.

It’s really sad to see the state of the X Division when TNA trots it out once a year for Destination X. It could mean so much more and really set TNA apart, just like the announcers are always saying. Instead, it’ll likely be tucked away for another year, until another wrestler trades in his X Division Title for a shot at the big time.

(Pete Taylor has been covering WWE Smackdown every Friday night for PWTorCh.com since January of 2007. He hosts the “Moonlighting with Greg Parks” VIP Audio show every weekend. Follow him on Twitter @gregmparks for live Tweeting during Raw, Impact, and PPVs, as well as other bits of wisdom. Comments, questions and feedback are welcome, and can be sent to g_manc9784@yahoo.com.)
What was it about the “American Dream” Dusty Rhodes that was most responsible for making him one of pro wrestling’s all time most iconic figures?

There is no shortage of answers that can be offered up to respond to that question. First and most obviously, there was the extraordinary success that he had as a wrestler over the years. Rhodes was a star from very early on in his career and he remained one for decades. Success tends to build upon itself and Rhodes rode that train for as long as he could.

Many elite wrestlers of the territory days were attractions associated strongly with their local region, like Carlos Colon in Puerto Rico, Jackie Fargo in Memphis, and Bruno Sammartino in the Northeast. Many others toured around the world bringing in crowds near and far, like Andre the Giant, Bruiser Brody, and Ernie Ladd. Rhodes was both. He became synonymous with Championship Wrestling from Florida for a generation of wrestling fans while also traveling around the world as a premier attraction. He was both local king and international star.

It’s difficult to isolate the top few highlights of Rhodes’s career because he had such varied and widespread success. His rivalry with Ric Flair over the NWA World Heavyweight title is likely his most famous, but his battles with Terry Funk and Harley Race for that same title were some of the most famous of the day. In the WWWF, he was one of the wrestlers most responsible for getting “Superstar” Billy Graham over as champion and then was instrumental in providing support for Bob Backlund when Backlund became the promotion’s top titleholder.

One of wrestling’s most famous all time angles was built around Rhodes, when Ole & Gene Anderson betrayed him in what was supposed to be a tag team match against the Assassins. Wrestling promoters have been trying to duplicate the emotion of that epic double-cross ever since. His bloodbaths with the likes of Abdullah the Butcher and Kevin Sullivan were relatively early examples of a trend that developed towards blood and gore. He entered into the heated New Japan-All Japan rivalry as well, providing Antonio Inoki another famous gaijin when top foreigners were of paramount importance to a Japanese wrestling outfit’s success.

Perhaps Rhodes’s legacy is seen even more predominantly outside the ring than in it. Rhodes fundamentally shaped the course of the pro wrestling business behind the scenes. Rhodes was the single most important figure leading the charge against Vince McMahon in the 1980s, and so many important concepts originated or were popularized when he was booker.

Much of the early history of pro wrestling involved rival wrestlers generating income by traveling around to different cities in a given territory, like a touring band. When television came along, it was used to convince fans to come out to see the next event in their local market. Today, that model has changed. Touring still exists, but television is directed towards hyping up one specific supercard that everyone will watch at the same time. While WWE’s history has emphasized Vince McMahon’s role in that transition with the first WrestleMania, Rhodes led that charge as much as anyone.

It was Dusty Rhodes that in 1983 came up with the Starrcade name. He was then the leading force directing Jim Crockett towards annual supercards broadcast at that time through closed-circuit technology when he came on as booker in 1984. Additional supercards followed, most prominently the Great American Bash. Jim Crockett Promotions was the innovator of today’s familiar titled special events and WWE the copycat. As such, Rhodes’s fingerprints are in the very structure of today’s WWE.

The Four Horsemen were formed by Rhodes to provide him a formidable opposition force. Factionst have been a key part of American pro wrestling ever since. War Games was another Rhodes creation, the most high concept stipulation of its day and a forerunner to today’s Elimination Chamber and Hell in a Cell. The Horsemen and War Games certainly weren’t the first of their kind, but they were among the most influential if not the most influential. And without the Rapmaster P.N. News, there might have been no Jay-Z. Okay, that one may be a bit of a stretch. They can’t all be winners.

Rhodes’s critics have noted his importance in the financial woes of Jim Crockett that forced the sale of that promotion to Ted Turner. That’s a valid point. But were it not for Rhodes, it’s fair to question whether Turner would have even been interested in such a purchase. As powerful promotions like the AWA, Mid-South/UWF, and World Class fell by the wayside, JCP invested in talent with Rhodes as booker. Without that investment, there might have been no sale to Turner, no Monday Night War, and the wrestling landscape would have been radically different.

A third possibility for Rhodes’s impeccable stature is much more specific – his remarkable interview ability. This was unquestionably Rhodes’s greatest strength as a performer. Rhodes could cut a promo better than just about anyone to make you believe that’s who they really are. His delivery was never completely over the top and distinctive while being completely over the top and distinctive while making you believe that’s who they really are. That’s precisely what made Dusty Rhodes so great.

(Todd Martin is a new PW-Torch staff member. He contributed to the Wrestling Observer the last 13 years in print and audio. Wade Keller now hosts “The Fix with Todd Martin” every week at PW-Torch.com/members, a new weekly show covering top news items of the week plus featuring reviews of new books and DVDs. He writes an MMA blog for the L.A. Times, has contributed to Sheridan, and now contributes to MMA-Torch.com and the MMA-Torch Livecast.)
Dusty Rhodes
The American Dream
The Tower of Power
The Man of the Hour
Too Sweet To Be Sour
Make your knees freeze, your legs shake, and your liver quiver
Electrified Funk Personified
Living on the end of a lightning bolt
The Lord of the Rings
The Cold-Blooded Sausage Maker
A steel-toed boot can’t take me out!
Stardust
The Son of a Plumber From Austin, Texas
The Little Bully
The Assassin This Time
The Three-Time NWA World’s Heavyweight Champion
The Greatest Sports Attraction in the World Today
Unity
My hand is touching your hand
Taking Care of bizzness
Make it Good!
Payback!
Payback is hell, Daddy!
Funky Like a Monkey
Egg-sucking dog
The Bull of the Woods, if you weel
Knows Kate Smith personally
You got to deal with the dealer in public, if you weel
The baddest main in the world around today
The Midnight Rider
If you’re big star-bound, let me tell ya it’s a long hard ride.
Brothers in Paint
Brother of the Road
The Super Powers
The Texas Outlaws
America’s Team
The Family
Whiskey bent and hell-bound
Offering up my innocence
and I’ll pay you back in scorn if you mess with me
I am bad and they know I’m bad

The whipping you’re gonna get is going to be shameful
No steroids in this body
260 pounds of Sweet Soul

The foremost professional wrestler in this country today,
Bar none
While the rest are in the back laughing and joking
The Dream is out front a-cooking and a-smoking!
Go all over the world,
Life is a drag,
Life is a bust,
But we all got to do what we must,
Pay whoever you want to pay to walk beside you,
It boils down to limousines and silver screens
Nobody lives this way,
If there’s anybody anywhere better
I’d like to see ’em,
I’d like to know who they were.
This thing will never be over!
Virgil Riley Runnels

(Bruce Mitchell has been a PW Torch column
since 1990. He hosts the PW Torch Live cast every
Monday night in the hour before Raw with Travis
Bryant at www.PWTorchLivecast.com. The weekly
two-hour Bruce Mitchell Audio Show with host
Wade Keller is a VIP audio staple for years and is
part of over a dozen VIP exclusive audio shows that
run usually daily or weekly that online members
have access to with their VIP password. His column
archives dating back to 1990 are available in
the Bruce Mitchell Library at the PW Torch VIP
website.) ###

Questions? Email us at torchsubscriptions@gmail.com
I read about Dusty Rhodes before I saw him talk or wrestle. I wasn’t sure what to think. In the national wrestling magazines that were so prominent for so many wrestling fans around the country in the 1980s, I was able to follow Dusty’s peak years from a great distance before cable and national syndication brought him to my TV and my local arena.

I could tell, though, just from the still pictures that he was something special. I didn’t have YouTube or podcasts and hadn’t discovered tape trading, so it wasn’t until a grainy UHF station started carrying the syndicated NWA Worldwide WRESTLING show that I got to see Dusty regularly. A friend in school did have a tape and taped a live special for me on TBS that featured Dusty Rhodes. I must’ve watched that tape five times that night start to finish.

What jumped out to me about Dusty those first few times I saw him was the passion and energy of the crowd. It was different than what I experienced in the AWA for the most part, even different than the birth of Hulkamania in the AWA a few years earlier. There was a bond that Dusty had with the fans where he wasn’t a “bigsht superhero star gracing their presence,” but he was one of them - the lucky one of them who struck it big. Fans lived vicariously through him. It’s why he was us. He was one of us. He talked stories about the business.

The fact that in his final years he got to share his acquired wisdom with a great class of up-and-coming stars in WWE’s developmental system means his contributions to the industry will outlive him. There will be touches and glimmers of Dusty’s charisma and bravado on TV for years to come.

Final Note: I cannot recommend strongly enough the VIP Audio Shows I hosted last week with columnists Bruce Mitchell and Todd Martin covering Dusty’s career, including a lot on his rise in the 1970s.
NXT show results
June 11, 2015
Pittsburgh, Pa. at Stage AE

Report by Jay Rickabaugh, correspondent

William Regal came out and quickly silenced the crowd for a ten-bell salute to Dusty Rhodes. A new ring announcer and Greg Hamilton provided announcements and interstitials.

(1) Enzo Amore & Big Cass & Carmella beat NXT tag champions Blake & Murphy & Alexa Bliss in a mixed six-person tag match. Enzo referenced the famous Dusty Rhodes “hard times, daddy” promo and tied it to Pittsburgh’s previous hard times that got over well with the crowd. Per usual, Enzo took most of the beat down, Cass was very good off hot tags, and Carmella and Alexa didn’t have the timing quite right with each other or something. Cass and Enzo hit synchronized bionic elbows in tribute to Dusty.

(2) Jason Jordan beat Bull Dempsey. Jordan got very little fan reaction; Bull got some “Doritos” chants. It’s clear they’re trying to turn Dempsey face and make him sympathetic. Jordan and Dempsey were running the ropes cross-criss and Dempsey gave up when he got winded and laughed at Jordan along with the crowd as he kept going.

(3) Baron Corbin beat Rhyno. Corbin was boooed a lot; Rhyno had a lot of nostalgic appreciation. Corbin needs facial expressions that convey more intensity than what he showed tonight. He looked bored, but given the tenor of the locker room it may have been other factors.

(4) Charlotte & Bayley beat Dana Brooke & Emma via submission. Dana is really good at getting heat in-person in an improv manner – when the crowd started chanting “Cleveland Sucks!” because of her hometown (and the rivalry with Pittsburgh), she started pantomiming a basketball player because of the Cavs. The crowd went almost nuclear as they went all night for that. The introductions were weird - Charlotte came out first, then Emma and Dana. Emma talked about how awful it was that Charlotte’s partner didn’t show and that it looked like it was going to be a handicap match. Then Bayley showed up to interrupt Emma and even the sides. Bayley and Charlotte did synchronized figure-fours for the win. They also did bionic elbows that got a “Dusty” chant from the crowd.

[Intermission]

(5) Zack Ryder & Mojo Rawley beat The Vaudevillians. How about “Hype Riders” for the winning tag team? After intermission, Zack Ryder came out to a huge pop. Rawley was greeted with resounding boos. This was by far the most oddly booked match of the night. The VVs were booked as heels and it worked when Ryder was in the ring, but when Mojo came in, the crowd hated him. Rawley wasn’t bad in the ring, but he was put in a position to fail that whoever’s booking should know better than to do.

(6) NXT Women’s champion Sasha Banks beat Becky Lynch via submission to retain the NXT Women’s Title. This was an incredible match; the crowd was hot for it in all the right ways. The crowd was more 50/50 on this match than any other. Banks seemed to have a new “TitanTron” video that only referred to her as Sasha. (No! Keep her last name!)

(7) NXT champion Kevin Owens beat Samoa Joe, Finn Balor, and Tyler Breeze in a four-way match to retain the NXT Title. Owens was wearing his KO t-shirt with polka dots inside the letters in Dusty’s honor. The crowd was on their feet for nearly this entire match. Smart booking as it meant that Owens could lose the title without being pinned, so it kept the crowd thinking it was possible that they might see a title change. The match ended with everyone hitting their finishers on someone else, but Owens hit the pop-up powerbomb at the end. The crowd was split on favorites for this match as well. Breeze taking the pin bummered me out, but he still has a bright future.

I went to the NXT show in Cleveland in March and there was more excitement among fans then, but they also had a more developed line-up for that show (including Cesaro, Tyson Kidd, Sami Zayn, and Hideo Itami), and I think more people traveled from outside Cleveland to see that show. That said, Pittsburgh apparently has a reputation for being a quiet town (Royal Rumble 2014 excluded) and that was NOT the case tonight as far as I could tell.

Overall, it was a great show. The biggest areas for improvement are with the new talent, but it’s a developmental brand (regardless of what others might say). There were lots of Dusty Rhodes tributes tonight: bionic elbows, polka dots, and dancing that looks good on Dusty’s flabby body, but not on anyone else. It was definitely worth the purchase price to get reserved seats.

Global Force Wrestling Results
First-Ever Live Show
June 12, 2015
Jackson, Tenn. at The Ballpark at Jackson

Concerning crowd size, it was a “humbling beginnings” start with fans scattered behind home plate and along the baselines. The ring was set up behind home plate near the backstop.

Global Force refreshingly stuck to the advertised line-up, with Jim Cornette making as special appearance prior to the main event.

(1) Tate Twins (Brandon & Brent Tate) beat Best Friends (Chuck Taylor & Barreta), Opening tag match.

(2) Sonjay Dutt beat Jamin Olivencia. High-flying match.

(3) Thea Trinidad (Rosita in TNA) beat Lei’D Tapa. Women’s match.

(4) Moose beat Kevin Matthews (substituting for TNA wrestler Brodus Clay, who was pulled from the show), Powerhouse match.

(5) Masters (Chris Mordetzky) beat Dustin Starr with the Masterlock. Powerhouse match.

(6) Bullet Club (Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson w/Amber Gallows) beat New Heavenly Bodies (Dustin & Justin). Main Event tag match.

Revolution Pro Results
June 14, 2015
London, England

Report by Dave Green, PW Torch correspondent

I attended the RevPro show Sunday night at York Hall, Bethnal Green, in London.

In a pre-show match, Josh Bodom took on Tommy End.

(a) Josh Bodom beat Tommy End. Very nice match between the two, with plenty of loudmouth antics from Bodom and very stiff kicks from End. Tommy hit his double stomp but Bodom managed to avoid being pinned. End got caught low in the ropes and Bodom hit his beautiful rope-assisted piledriver for an impressive win. This match will eventually be seen on RPW’s YouTube show.

(1) The Revolutionists (James Castle & Sha Shamuels) beat Joel Redman (better known as Oliver Grey from NXT) & “Mr. Moonsault” Jake McCluskey, filling in for the unavailable Mark Haskins to win the Tag Titles. A fairly basic match ended quite surprisingly with Castle punting McCluskey in the family jewels and getting the title-winning pin. Redman was not happy with McCluskey losing the titles that weren’t officially his.

(2) Damo O’Connor beat New Japan’s Tomohiro Ishii in his U.K. debut. Though there was a large size difference (Damo is a huge man), this was a great hoss style match. Plenty of lariats and some great feats of strength from Ishii, including a suplex and another from the top rope. Damo hit a Van Terminator (yes, really!) and a running senton to get arguably the biggest win of his career so far.

(3) New Japan’s Shinsuke Nakamura beat Roderick Strong in his return to RPW. Roderick was a late replacement for Ricochet, who was unable to attend the show due to passport issues. A very entertaining match with the crowd all over Strong and his little boots. Really high impact match with a lot of close nearfalls. Nakamura eventually picked up the win after quite a few Boma-Ye’s.

After the match, Damo O’Connor came back out to challenge Nakamura to a match at the next York Hall show, to which Nakamura responded with a hearty “YEOW.”

(4) Cruiserweight champion Will Ospreay beat Matt Sydal in a 2/3 Falls match to retain the CW Title. This was a superb match, it was not just a spotfest as so many cruiserweight matches can be. Sydal scored the first fall with his Sydal Star Press and Ospreay tied it up with a cradle. Sydal hit the SSP again, but Ospreay kicked out. Ospreay then hit a corkscrew SSP for the title retaining pin.

Post-match, both men shook hands and left together. Promoter and MC for the evening Andy Quidian then put over Sydal for getting around his passport issues by going over and above the call of duty to make the show.

Next was a major change of pace as we saw The Legion of Lords, Lord Gideon Grey and Rishi Ghosh, take on the team of Colt Cabana and Matt Classic. Yes, AND Matt Classic. A quick history lesson. In February 2014, Grey upset Cabana in a match where Cabana put his RPW career on the line. A year later, Cabana returned to request to come back to RPW, but Grey’s legal team saw to it that he could come back. Later that night, Grey took on the open challenge of Matt Classic, who ended Grey winning streak. Grey claimed that Classic was Cabana in a mask, which led to this match being made. If Cabana and Classic showed up at the same time and won the match, then
Colt could officially be reinstated to RPW. After a delayed entrance, Classic and Cabana entered the ring together. Classic looked slightly tubbier that last we saw him and with more tattoos, with Grey claiming that it was in fact Grado. This was refuted and the match was on.

(5) Colt Cabana & Matt Classic beat Lord Gideon Grey & Rishi Ghosh. Good comedy tag, which was a refreshing change from the more intense action we’d had so far in the show. Cabana and “Classic” got their submissions on both Ghosh and Grey for the double tap-out.

In the main event, RPW British Heavyweight champion “The Villain” Marty Scurll put his title on the line against the IWGP champion A.J. Styles. It was stated that there must be a winner, so Scurll’s Revolutionist stablemates were banned from ringside.

(6) A.J. Styles beat Marty Scurll to win the RPW British Hvt. Title. What followed was a more than worthy main event, with Scurll looking every inch the equal of Styles. In a bit of shocker, Styles hit the Bloody Sunday and then the Styles Clash to pin Scurll and win the British title!

After the match, Styles offered Scurll his respect and his hand, which Scurll accepted. However Scurll then attacked A.J. until Styles’s previous York Hall opponent, Will Ospreay, made the save. After some interaction between all three men, the crowd chanted “Triple Threat.” The match was then made for the next York Hall show in October.

All in all, a really great show. It will be available very soon on the company’s VOD service and I would advise readers to watch the show. The four singles matches were epic in every way and the comic relief tag match was very entertaining.

To sum, this show was one of many great shows that showcases how good the U.K. scene is at the moment. RPW, along with Southside, Insane Championship Wrestling, and, in particular, Progress Wrestling are all companies I implore readers of PW Torch to check out, as the U.K. scene is a great Wrestling are all companies I implore readers of PW Torch to check out, as the U.K. scene is a great

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the entire night, starting with MGK rehearsing, the various entertainment news outlets. Included was musical guest Machine Gun Kelly.

Another wrestling tie-in is WWE sent an official parade for his hometown Chicago Blackhawks Brooks) is scheduled to lead the championship.

WWE not renewing Khali’s contract in November to the NXT family underscores WWE's global reach ranging from India, Mexico, Australia, United Kingdom, Serbia, Germany, Canada, and the United Centre in Florida. Lovepreet and Satender join a class of international recruits at the Performance Center ranging from India, Mexico, Australia, United Kingdom, Serbia, Germany, Canada, and the United States. "The addition of two elite athletes from India to the NXT family underscores WWE's global reach and popularity," said Triple H in the announcement. “Our talent roster is as diverse as our fan base, and we continue to build both at a rapid pace.” Triple H first announced on June 2 the signings of Indian wrestlers Singh and Satinder. According to the Times report, both trained under Great Khali, who opened a new wrestling academy in 2015. This followed WWE not renewing Khali’s contract in November.
great guy.”

RATINGS BIG PICTURE
For the Big Five cable TV shows of WWE Raw, TNA Impact, ROH TV, Lucha Underground, and WWE Smackdown...

• Total Live Viewership: 6.818 million viewers
down very slightly from 6.832 million viewers Week of June 1.

• DVR Added Viewership: 7.613 million
viewers (down 1.7 percent from 7.747 million viewers Week of June 1).

• WWE’s TV programming grabbed 91.7 percent of the live TV wrestling share, compared to 92.5 percent last week. The smaller pie and WWE grabbing a smaller share was the result of Raw viewership down significantly from June 1, combined with increases to TNA Impact and Lucha Underground. ROH TV was essentially flat trending downward compared to last week.

• June 8: WWE Raw’s three individual hours averaged 3.644 million first-run viewers (vs. 3.973 million viewers last week). Raw’s DVR viewership was up from June 1, but not enough to close the gap.

• June 1 - Live & 3-Day DVR averaged 4.404 million viewers.

• June 8 - Live & 3-Day DVR averaged 4.102 million viewers
Overall, the June 8 Raw grabbed 53.9 percent of the total viewership pie for the week, down from 56.9 percent last week.

• June 10: Ring of Honor’s first-run airing on Destination America drew 161,000 viewers, even with last week. DVR viewership was 21,000 viewers to bring the total to 182,000. (This is the first airing only and does not include the replay after Impact.)

• Overall, ROH’s combined viewership declined from 198,000 viewers on June 3 to 182,000 viewers on June 10.

• June 10: TNA Impact drew 330,000 first-run viewers. Impact added 83,000 viewers for a total of 413,000 viewers. (This is the first airing only and does not include the late-night replay after the ROH replay.)

• Overall, Impact improved from 364,000 total viewers on June 3 to 413,000 viewers on June 10.

• June 10: Lucha Underground on El Rey Network drew 72,000 first-run viewers, up from 50,000 last week. Lucha added 30,000 DVR viewers for a total of 102,000 viewers. Overall, Lucha improved dramatically from 68,000 total viewers on June 3 to 102,000 viewers on June 10.

• June 11: WWE Smackdown drew 2.611 million live viewers on Syfy. DVR viewing added 203,000 viewers for a total of 2.814 million viewers.
Overall, Smackdown improved 100,000 (3.7 percent) from 2.713 million total viewers on June 4 to 2.814 million viewers on June 11.

WWE YOU TUBE CHANNEL UPDATE
WWE announced a new YouTube channel focusing on video games titled “UpDownDown.” WWE is looking to tap into the popularity of their regular YouTube channel by creating a separate channel dedicated to video games, celebrities, and WWE stars who are serious gamers.

WWE star Xavier Woods will be the primary host of WWE’s new content, which will be broken down into five weekly shows...

• UpDownDown Plays’ (Mondays) - A “Let’s Play” style show featuring Woods and other personalities playing through today’s hottest titles.

• For the Lolz” (Wednesdays) – Woods and others explore the vast worlds of popular sandbox games like Grand Theft Auto V, where just about anything and everything can happen.

• Jump Scared” (Fridays) - Delving deep into the horror genre, players push their intestinal fortitude to the limit by creeping through the industry’s most bloodcurdling games.

• “Superstar Savepoint” (Saturdays) – Guests are tasked with jumping into a random game totally “cold,” and must help lead Woods to gaming glory in this unpredictable co-op experiment.

• Gamer Gauntlet” (Sundays) – Woods and friends challenge each other for more than gaming bragging rights, with losers suffering pre-determined penalties.

MARK HENRY REFLECTS
Mark Henry says he doesn’t consider the wild storylines he was involved in during the Attitude Era as controversial or too outrageous. Talking to The Mirror U.K. publication about the new “Attitude Era” book, Henry said he considers things like “Sexual Chocolate” or his relationship with Mae Young as helping him stand out on a crowded roster. “I was ready to do anything. But as far as being involved in wild and crazy storylines, that’s not quite the way that I saw it. I saw it as I came into an industry where there were a lot of big personalities and I had to come in and shine, or you would never see my light,” Henry told The Mirror.

Regarding his on-air role with Mae Young, Henry said, “I enjoyed my time working with Mae Young, she was one of the coolest, most respected people that I ever met in the industry. We both gave each other’s characters life and that is something that is hard for people to understand. “There are thousands of wrestlers and there are thousands of really good ones, but to be able to join somebody that kind of fell off the map and both of you rise to the top of the card because of chemistry, and that last for not a week or two, but for a year, and here we are 16 years later still talking about it, it’s impressive. It’s unbelievable.”

WWE NOTEBOOK
WWE’s NXT brand has been announced for another music festival in October. NXT is advertised for the “Louder Than Life” event in Louisville, Kentucky with dates of October 3 and 4. The venue is Champions Park near downtown Louisville. Monster Energy is a key sponsor of the festival, which ties in with NXT already set for the “Monster Energy Aftershock” event in Sacramento, California. Those dates are Oct. 24 and 25 at Gibson Ranch... 2K Sports announced Tuesday the first six roster members for the next WWE franchise video game. Included in “WWE 2K16” are WWE World Hvt. champion Seth Rollins, Daniel Bryan, Dean Ambrose, Bad News Barrett, Paige, and NXT star Finn Balor. 2K Sports is advertising “the largest playable roster in WWE video games history,” likely due to the inclusion of NXT roster members, such as Balor. The video game will also have a presence at the E3 video game convention this week in Los Angeles. 2K Sports say they will have roster artwork on display at the 2K booth, which is #1001 in the South Hall. “WWE 2K16” is scheduled for release on October 27 in North America and October 30 internationally. 2K is a publishing label of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc... Matches taped before Raw on Monday for Superstars: (1) Cesaro beat Bo Dallas via submission. Cesaro did the Big Swing into a submission finisher for the win. (2) Luke Harper & Erick Rowan beat Los Matadores and The Ascension in a three-tag match...

TNA NEWS
TNA vs. ROH: WEDNESDAY RATINGS 6/10
TNA’s first airing viewership number in its second week back on Wednesdays drew an increase of 33,000 viewers, but the West Coast feed dropped by 11,000. It was enough of a net increase to get TNA’s total viewership over 400,000. Impact was still down 27 percent from their Friday night average of 553,950 viewers on Dest. America. It appears it will take time for the audience to migrate over.

The first airing at 9:00 p.m. EST drew 330,000 viewers (live + same day DVR viewership), up from 297,000 in the same timeslot last week. The replay then drew 74,000, down from 85k last week in the midnight EST timeslot. Thus, Impact’s total combined viewership was 404,000, up from 382,000 viewers last week.

By comparison, ROH’s first airing on Destination America which preceded Impact drew 161,000 viewers (live + same day DVR viewership) at 8:00 p.m. EST, essentially even with 163,000 viewers in the same timeslot last week. The replay then drew 138,000 viewers at 11:00 p.m., up from 110k last week. Thus, ROH’s total combined viewership was 299,000, up from 273k last week.

The gap between viewership was 105,000 in favor of Impact this week, essentially the same as 109,000 last week. The meet of the Wednesday night programming block grew - the original Impact airing was up 33,000 from last week and the post- Impact ROH replay was up 28,000 from last week.
The other big aspect of the Wednesday night block is a very narrow, older audience. ROH checked in with a median age of 52.8 years-old, older than 50.2 last week. Their split was 96 percent males 18-49 (versus 75 percent last week). Female viewership barely registered. Impact checked in with a median age of 51.5 years-old, slightly younger than 52.2 years-old last week, but still outside of the desired 18-49 window. Their demo split was not much better - Impact was 85 percent m18-49 and 15 percent f18-49.

IMPACT WRESTLING TV SUMMARY 6/10
The episode carried the “Destination X” theme...

• Kurt Angle opened the show by defeating 148-pound Rockstar Spud in a TNA World Hvt.
Title match. Spud, who lost via submission to a grapevine anklelock, cashed in the X Division Title for the Hvt. Title shot.

Angle then beat Austin Aries in the TV main event to retain the TNA World Title. Aries, who lost via submission to a grapevine anklelock, cashed in his Feast or Fired briefcase for a title shot against the Angle-Spud winner.

After Angle retained the TNA Title for the second time, Ethan Carter III attacked Angle and declared himself the next contender to the TNA World Title. A preview for next week’s Impact then showed Angle and EC3 signing a contract for a TNA Title match.

A series of matches determined who will compete for the vacant X Division Title at a later time. Winners were Low Ki, Tigre Uno, and Grado. Although, Grado’s qualifying match against Kenny King and Cruz never officially started because TNA edited out the opening bell.

The Knockouts feud of the show centered on KO champion Taryn Terrell and Brooke Tessmacher, with Awesome Kong involved by taking out Dollhouse members Jade and Marti Belle.

Josh Mathews was joined by “The Pope” D’Angelo Dinero on studio commentary for the second consecutive week.

During the show, Mathews and Dinero attempted an on-camera explanation for Mickie James being bumped onto track by James Storm last week on Impact. Mathews said Mickie “was not physically harmed,” but she was emotionally hurt. Mathews advertised Magnus appearing on next week’s Impact to address the situation.

Match Results: (1) TNA World Hvt. champion Kurt Angle beat Rockstar Spud via submission to retain the TNA World Title. ... (2) Low Ki beat Manik and Crazzy Steve in a three-way X Division qualifying match by pinning Manik. ... (3) Tigre Uno beat Mandrews and D.J. Zema in a three-way X Division qualifying match by pinning Mandrews. ... (4) Grado beat Cruz and Kenny King in a three-way X Division qualifying match by pinning Cruz. ... (5) Braxton vs. Crimson. ... (6) TNA World Hvt. champion Kurt Angle beat Austin Aries via submission to retain the TNA World Title.

TOP ITEMS OF THE WEEK

Multiple TNA performers report that the company is roughly a week behind on payroll, according to a report by Jason Powell at ProWrestling.net. This issue was brought up in the conference call between TNA management and TNA wrestlers last month, and TNA president Dixie Carter denied it was a common issue and assured talent it wasn’t going to be an ongoing problem.

TNA Wrestling will make their next PPV available through the Flippapp. TNA’s Slammiversary PPV on Sunday, June 28 will be available for purchase through Flippapp, which includes access in the U.S. and Canada. The price point is $39.95. Earlier this week, Ring of Honor announced their “Best in the World” PPV will be available on Flippapp. The BITW event on Friday, June 19 is priced at $34.95. Slammiversary will be Flippapp’s third major wrestling PPV broadcast this year. On January 4, Flippapp offered Global Force Wrestling’s presentation of New Japan’s Tokyo Dome Show. Slammiversary and ROH’s Best in the World events will also be available on major cable providers, such as AT&T U-Verse and Comcast (through InDemand). Per the press release: “Flippapp delighted wrestling fans today by announcing that it has partnered with Impact Wrestling and Ring of Honor Wrestling to live stream two major summer events on mobile phones and connected TVs globally - Ring of Honor: Best in the World and Total Nonstop Action (TNA) Slammiversary. The Flippapp mobile app is the easiest way to discover and project amazing entertainment onto a TV using only a smartphone. Wrestling fans are now able to order both events directly from the mobile app and purchase the pay-per-view programs via the iTunes App Store or Google Play Store.”

TNA announced Tuesday the return of King of the Mountain match at Slammiversary on June 28, in addition to the previously announced James Storm vs. Magnus grudge match. It’s unclear if this will be the main event of the PPV. TNA did not disclose who will be in the match or what title will be on the line. In Tuesday’s announcement, TNA broke down the rules of the match, noting “the belt” will be hanging above the ring. TNA has already announced Kurt Angle vs. Ethan Carter III for the TNA World Title on the July 1 Impact after the PPV.

TNA announced Sunday that Slammiversary will air live in the U.K. The PPV will air on Monday morning, June 29 at 1:00 a.m. on Challenge TV, concurrent with the event airing live on pay-per-view and the Flippapp Sunday night in the U.S. TNA World Hvt. champion Kurt Angle is the centerpiece of TNA’s Slammiversary announcement. However, TNA has not announced Angle’s match for the PPV. Angle is advertised to defend the TNA World Title against Ethan Carter III on the Impact episode after the PPV on July 1. The only advertised match for the PPV is U.K. star Magnus vs. James Storm in a grudge match. TNA’s 30-second commercial spot advertised Angle, EC3, the Hardys (including injured star Jeff Hardy), The Beat Down Clan, The Rising, and Knockouts champion Taryn Terrell.

TNA star/MMA fighter Bobby Lashley has a new opponent for his next Bellator MMA fight. Lashley (12-2) will now face Dan Charles (9-2) in a televised fight on Spike TV next Friday, June 19 from St. Louis, Mo. Lashley’s original opponent, James Thompson, was forced to pull out of the fight due to a reported injury. Lashley was looking for redemption against Thompson, who beat Lashley in May 2012. That was Lashley’s most-recent loss before rattling off five consecutive wins. Lashley has not fought since October 2014 at the Bellator 130 event. Charles also has not fought since October 2014 at the Bellator event that preceded Bellator 130. Next Friday’s Bellator 138 fight card is headlined by Ken Shamrock vs. Kimbo Slice. Lashley vs. Charles is listed as a Heavyweight Division Feature Fight, which will be part of the card airing at 9:00 p.m. EST on Spike.

Independent wrestler “The Walking Weapon” Josh Alexander has announced that he is walking away from the wrestling business due to an accumulation of injuries. Alexander posted a lengthy blog on Monday detailing recent neck injuries, surgeries, doctor visits, re-injuries in the ring, and finally coming to the point where he says he received news on June 3 that forced him to stop wrestling. Alexander is advertising a farewell match on July 12 for the Alpha-1 promotion in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Alexander is scheduled to team with his long-time tag partner Ethan Page against The GymRats (Scotty O’Shea & Alessandro Del Bruno). The Walking Weapon says he wishes he got a major contract during his career, but he is thankful for runs in ROH and PWG, where he felt like he arrived as a wrestler. Now, he turns his attention to his family. “I’m terrified at the thought of life without wrestling. I don’t want to be thought of as a quitter; that must have never really wanted it that much. For the past decade it’s all I’ve wanted. Luckily I have found something I love even more than wrestling, I have a beautiful son. A gorgeous girl. Amazing friends. I love my family. I will need them,” Alexander wrote. “For the first time in 10 years, the path I’ve been walking is changing. The uncertainty is exhilarating.”

Planning a trip to Las Vegas this summer? If so, there are plenty of pro wrestling live events to plan around. They include the following: June 9: Paragon Pro Wrestling TV taping at Sam’s Town Live; June 20: WWE house show at the Thomas & Mack Center; June 28: Future Stars of Wrestling “Survival of the Fittest 3” at Sam’s Town Live; July 11: 3PW “Turbulence” at 2797 E. Tropicana; July 17: ROH Live at Sam’s Town Live; July 24: Global Force Wrestling TV taping at The Orleans Arena; Aug. 9: FSW “No Escape 3” at Sam’s Town Live; Aug. 21: GFW TV taping at The Orleans Arena; Sept. 12: FSW “When Stars Collide 3” in Mesquite, Nev. at the Casablanca Resort; Oct. 23: GFW TV taping at The Orleans Arena.

TRAGOS/THESS HOUSE OF FAME UPDATE

PW Torch reader can still take advantage of the Tragos/Thess House of Fame all-access ticket pricing to be part of PW Torch editor Wade Keller’s Hall of Fame induction on Saturday, July 10 in Waterloo, Iowa. Simply email the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum at dgstaff@nwhof.org or call (319) 233-0745. The following is the schedule Thursday, July 9: 5:30 p.m. – Reception at the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum for inductees and all-access pass holders. Includes food, beverage, unveiling of original Rob Schamberger artwork, and unveiling of Jim Ross audio tour. (All-access pass holders and hall of fame inductees only).

Friday, July 10: 9:00 a.m. – National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum opens to all-access pass holders. 11:30 a.m. – Impact Pro Wrestling evaluation with Gerald Brisco at Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center. (Free to all-access pass holders). Tickets available for $10 at the door. 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. – George Tragos and Lou Thesz scrapbooks available for viewing in the Dan Rockwell Library located inside the National Wrestling Hall Dan Gable Museum. First time ever on public display. (All-access pass holders only). 4:00 p.m. – Kurt Angle ring presentation and reception in the George Tragos/Lou Thesz Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame. (All-access pass holders and banquet ticket holders only). 6:00 p.m. – Doors open to the Impact Pro Wrestling show at Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center.

Saturday, July 10: 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon – Doors open at the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum for all-access pass holders. 11:00 a.m. – Professional Wrestling team trivia contest hosted with special guest host for all-access pass holders. Team champi on receives prize. (All-access pass holders only). 12:00 p.m. – Doors open at the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum to general public. 12:30 p.m. – Salute to the legacy of the Brisco brothers (includes panel discussion with professional wrestling legends) at the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum. 1:30 p.m. – Autograph signing with professional wrestling legends at the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum. (All-access pass holders allowed to enter first). 5:00 p.m. – Hall of Fame reception at Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center. 6:00 p.m. – Induction banquet at Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center. 7:00 p.m. – Induction ceremony at Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center with Jim Ross as master of ceremonies.

2015 Hall of Fame induction class:

• Lou Thesz Award: Brian Blair
• Frank Gotch Award: Beth Phoenix
• George Tragos Award: Matt Lindland
• Distinguished Member (living): Greg Wojciechowski
• Distinguished Member (posthumous): Jim Londos
• Special honoree: Kurt Angle
• Jim Melby journalism award: Wade Keller
• Also scheduled to appear during the weekend:
  Jim Ross, Gerald Brisco, Wes Brisco, J.J. Dillon, Baron Von Raschke, Dan Hodge, Jim Brunzell, Larry Hennig, Cabana, and Holly.

Send newstips and results to pwtorch@gmail.com. ###

We are LIVE from the PW Torch Control Center, where yours truly gets to review WWE’s Money In The Bank in the middle of the night. Please, no spoilers. Without time constraints, I can hopefully give the event the sort of thorough coverage it richly deserves.

We kick off the preshow with our all-star panel of Renee Young, Byron Saxton, Corey Graves and Conspiracy Brother. Would Dusty appreciate tonight’s show? Not sure. But I think he’d appreciate Renee Young’s pink tank top.

Stephanie tweeted “We never got to shoot our angle together.” I like that Stephanie hasn’t lost her sense of humor. In honor of Dusty, Renee talks about who’s going to the pay window.

Filthy Tom Phillips interviews Neville in the parking garage. Neville’s dressed like he’s reporting for second shift as an analyst at CTU.

Graves mentions that most MITB winners cash in and win the title. “I’m glad he emphasized the word “most.” You can win a commemorative Money In The Bank briefcase which contains a contract signed by Triple H.

Kevin Owens is a riddle wrapped in an enigma, and covered in poutine. Mmmm, poutine.

Tom Phillips is standing by in the Social Media Center. He may or may not be wearing pants. Kevin Owens will be dropping by later to ridicule your Twitter questions.

Money money money money. Moneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoney. Yeah, let’s fast forward through this a bit.

JoJo (remember her?) is backstage with Ryback.

Did You Know? This is Ryback’s first “official” title defense. Ryback hates bullies. They infringe on his turf.

WWEShop wants you to Get Busy, which is slang for “purchase T-shirts.”

Backstage, Dean & Roman are hanging out. Roman tells Dean he’ll be the first to know when he’ll cash in the briefcase. Well, you have to like his confidence.

Did You Know? Dean Ambrose is the longest reigning US champion in WWE history. And WWE history encompasses...about 13 weeks.

Stephanie McMahon tells Renee Young that The Authority is staying out of tonight’s main event. You know, like they should have been all along. Not even Booker is buying that one.

Byron says he’ll need some time to “digest” that promo. Yeah, wouldn’t want that coming back up.

King Barrett vs. R-Truth. There’s a sixty minute pregame show, and we STILL don’t have time to let R-Truth rap? On Smackdown, R-Truth declared himself King Wussap. Why not? It worked for Lawler.

Wade Barrett managed to take the traditional goofy WWE King costume and make it look even goofier. Nice work. Barrett explains he had to get rid of the old robe, because it was touched by a black man. Just kidding. Maybe.

JBL makes a reference to “Hammer Of The...
Gods.” That book’s only three decades old. He’s updating his material.

Ad for “Swerved.” Hopefully they’re saving the funny material for the actual show.

JBL is still outraged about R-Truth. “You can’t declare yourself King just by beating a King.” Evidently R-Truth isn’t the only one who hasn’t watched Games of the Thrones. Truth wins with a crucifix.

You know who would have loved this show? Dusty Rhodes. Mostly due to everyone talking about how great he was.

Let’s celebrate The Dream with a WWE music video. Actually, it’s a damn good video. It moves Renee Young to tears. Outstanding use of Phillip Phillips.

Tom Phillips is with Kevin Owens. Kevin, briefs or boxers? He wants to beat Cena, he doesn’t want to be Cena.

Let’s get predictions. Booker picks Kofi to win Money In The Bank. Good luck with that.

It’s showtime. We kick off with a ten bell salute for Dusty Rhodes. Hey, Daniel Bryan made the trip! Owens looks sad. Vince even looks misty.

Sign says “My Wife Sold Out To Rollins.” There’s a story there somewhere.

Let’s open up with a seven person ladder match. According to the TitanTron, there’s something in Randy Orton’s veins. Captain Capeman is out second.

You know what Dolph Ziggler really needs? A faded denim jacket with patches for all his paperwork. WWE needs to pony up so Dolph can use “Unskinny Bop” by Poison as his entrance music. It has to cost less than “Cult of Personality.”

Reigns is out last. Everyone paired off except Kofi, who set up the ladder. Kofi almost wins in th eopening seconds, but they catch him. I don’t know why Kingston has his hair done up like Kim Fields on “The Facts of Life.”

Reigns powerbombs Kofi onto a ladder, then powerbombs Neville onto Kingston. Orton welcomes everyone to RKO City.

Ziggler probably shouldn’t be headbutting anyone. Neville hits the Red Arrow on Sheamus.

Aubrey is out third. Sheamus and Big Show are the stirrups.


Dean Ambrose asks “What kind of animal do you take me for?” Don’t answer that, Renee. I have the same tie Cole does. That’s disturbing.

New Day vs. Primetime Players. I am still upset about New Day not getting a full gospel choir entrance for WrestleMania. Maybe we’ll get one at SummerSlam, now that these fellows are over.

Xavier tells us Kofi Kingston was robbed. Of his dignity? Absolutely. Big E has to calm Little Xavier down. The heels work over Darren. Titus gets the tag, cleans house and pins Xavier with the spinebuster. Okay, that was sudden.

Five weeks until Battleground, where Roman Reigns will fight Bray Wyatt.

Seth Rollins gets a pep talk from Stephanie and Triple H. Okay, mostly from Triple H. Lawler takes note of which side Hunter is on, and switches his pick to Rollins.

JBL thinks Ambrose isn’t a good choice for a champion because he wrestles in jeans and a T-shirt. Right. Now if Ambrose were wearing jean shorts, that’d be okay. JBL also thinks Rollins needs to “decapacitate” his opponent. That, and Ambrose dropping an elbow from off a ladder was a tribute to Dusty.

Rollins decides a ladder match is an ideal time to work Dean’s leg. And he’s right. He’s tyin’ him to the Tree of Woe, Tony!

The one legged man can’t win the butt-kicking contest. But he can stop Rollins from winning the ladder-climbing contest, by pushing over the ladder. Ambrose later runs the ropes, which doesn’t work so well on a bad knee.

Rollins wisely suckers Ambrose all the way down the aisle, but can’t quite capitalize. Hey, let’s brawl through the crowd. Rollins suckers Dean out into the crowd this time. Nope, Ambrose caught Rollins again.

Ambrose backdrops Rollins onto a ladder. That can’t be good. Then Dean attempts the slowest ladder climb since Jeff Hardy was trying to beat Undertaker, thirteen years ago.

Rollins bashes Dean’s leg with the TV monitor. Still going. Pedigree by Seth. Ambrose comes back. Barricade Bomb? Second barricade bomb. Liger Bomb on the ladder and two chairs, and Rollins hurts himself in the process.

Both men fall off the ladder with the belt, but Rollins pulls it away from Ambrose as they hit the match. Very physical battle. Not a great match, but a great finish. GREAT finish.

Time for Jojo to interview the champ. Seth doesn’t quite give us the Ricky Bobby victory speech from “Talladega Nights,” but he was close.

One great match, two good matches and a bunch of stuff. Let’s call that a mild thumbs up. ###

**PWTORCH POLL RESULTS**

**Rate the 6/15 episode of WWE Raw:**
- Excellent (8-10): 24%
- Above average (6-7): 36%
- Average (5): 25%
- Below Average (3-4): 10%
- Dreadful (0-2): 18%

**Rate the 6/15 WWE Money in the Bank PPV event:**
- Excellent (8-10): 14%
- Above average (6-7): 47%
- Average (5): 21%
- Below Average (3-4): 13%
- Dreadful (0-2): 18%

**Vote for the best match at WWE’s Money in the Bank PPV event:**
- John Cena vs. Kevin Owens (76%)
- Seth Rollins vs. Dean Ambrose (17%)
- Money in the Bank ladder match (3%)
- Nikki Bella vs. Paige (2%)
PPV Pre-Show on WWE Network

The show started with the screen displaying “In Memory of Dusty Rhodes,” who died on Thursday.

From the arena, Renee Young introduced the pre-show. Renee was joined by Booker T, Byron Saxton, and Corey Graves for some preliminary PPV thoughts.

Renee then got serious talking about Dusty. She said they will celebrate Dusty throughout the night. Booker shared a story, Saxton talked about working with Dusty in the NXT office sporting his Texas Longhorns cap, and Graves talked about Dusty seeing himself as a director making movies. Graves got choked up talking about missing Dusty.

Renee went through some tweets on Dusty, starting with Vince McMahon. Also, Triple H, Stephanie McMahon, and The Rock. Booker said Dusty will be missed most of all.

The pre-show panel switched gears to discussing top PPV matches, including John Cena vs. Kevin Owens.

Off to Tom Phillips at the social media lounge. Phillips hyped an interview with NXT champion Kevin Owens later in the pre-show.

Backstage, WWE ran a pre-taped interview with IC champion Ryback where the sound was about 10 seconds ahead of the video. Ryback called Big Show a big bully who doesn’t know who he is. Owens pie-faced Phillips on the way out. Phillips commented about how the wrestling business works.

Overall, it just seems odd to “turn the page” to a wrestling show while everyone is still in celebration and mourning after the loss of such a huge figure in the wrestling business. But, that’s just how the wrestling business works.

After a MITB video package aired, Lilian Garcia introduced the MITB ladder match starting the PPV. Michael Cole, JBL, and Jerry Lawler are on the call tonight.

In-ring: Randy Orton was introduced first for the MITB ladder match. Neville was out second, and Cole described him as the “darkhorse” to win the match. Kane was out third, followed by Dolph Ziggler, who was accompanied by Lana. New Day’s music then brought out WWE tag champion Kofi Kingston. Sheamus was out sixth, followed by Roman Reigns out last. Reigns emerged through the crowd and carefully made his way down the aisleway to the ringside area. Reigns posed in the corner, then entered the ring for the match to start.

I -- MITB LADDER MATCH -- RANDY ORTON vs. NEVILLE vs. ROMAN REIGNS vs. SHEAMUS vs. WWE tag champion KOFI KINGSTON vs. DOLPH ZIGGLER (w/Lana) vs. KANE -- Winner receives WWE Title shot briefcase

Ziggler quickly tried to win the match so he could go watch the Cavs’s NBA Finals game, but Sheamus cut him off and flung him out of the ring. Sheamus started swinging a ladder around the ring attacking opponents, but Orton cut him off. Reigns then entered the ring and flung around high-flyers Kofi and Neville like ragdolls with powerbombs into a ladder.

Reigns wanted the MITB briefcase, but Kane cut him off and delivered a chokeslam off the ladder. Kane then took an RKO from Orton, who climbed the ladder, but Kofi cut him off. So, Orton dropped Kofi with an RKO. Neville then tried to jump over Orton onto the ladder, but Orton yanked Neville off the ladder and dropped him with a mid-air RKO. The crowd exploded for the latest surprise RKO.

Orton scaled the ladder, but Sheamus met him and cut him off. Sheamus was left alone to climb the ladder, but Ziggler ran back into the ring and cut off Sheamus. Ziggler and Sheamus battled on top of the ladder. Sheamus got his hand on the briefcase, Ziggler cut him off, and Ziggler dropped into Sheamus onto his back to drop him with a modified Zig-Zag. Suddenly, Neville was on the top turnbuckle to nail the Red Arrow on Sheamus. Loud “NXT” chant as everyone sold in the ring.

Suddenly, Reigns returned to the ring and dropped Kane with a Superman Punch. Reigns did not have a ladder available to climb, so he saw a pile of bodies on the outside and decided to fly
over the top rope with a big splash. Reigns sold an injury after the move, then WWE tag champs Big E. and Xavier Woods came down to ringside to grab Kofi and roll him back into the ring. Kofi set up a ladder as his teammates encouraged him to hurry up the ladder. “New ... Day Sucks” chant as Kofi slowly climbed. But, Reigns suddenly took out Big E. and Xavier with a double foot dropkick. Reigns returned to the ring, grabbed Kofi, and eventually pulled him off the ladder into a powerbomb over the top rope onto another pile of bodies.

Reigns and Orton then found themselves in the ring. Reigns avoided an RKO, then dropped Orton with a spear. Reigns started to climb the ladder (to some boos), but the Bray Wyatt theme suddenly played. As Ben Tucker noted live at the building, a husky, shadowy figure went under the ring during pre-match intros. Back live, Bray was in the ring to cut off Reigns and drop Reigns with Sister Abigail to cheers from the vocal makes. Bray, sporting his butcher vest, left the ring. The only man standing was Sheamus, who set up a ladder in the ring. As the crowd boosed, Sheamus climbed the ladder and got his hands on the case, but Neville cut him off. Sheamus blocked Neville, though, and threw him down to the mat by the hair. Sheamus then reached up and unhooked the briefcase to win.

WINNER: Sheamus at 20:50 to win MITB. Well, if the plan was for Sheamus to win, they had to give the babyfaces some big spots and “outs.” Orton got the RKO spree, Neville got in Red Arrow, Reigns got the “out” with Bray Wyatt, and Ziggler had a few near-grabs. They really underplayed the big storyline aspect going into the show of what would happen if Kane wins MITB, setting up a title situation with his “boss,” Seth Rollins, which pointed to him just being an add-on for TV storyline purposes going into the PPV. Overall, pretty good MITB ladder match. Reigns vs. Wyatt should be an intriguing detour for Reigns while he’s not in the WWE Title picture. (**1/2)

Backstage: Paige talked about needing to follow up with a cover. Show rolled Ryback back into the ring. Reigns avoided an RKO, then dropped Orton with a spear. Show intercepted with a chokeslam for a two count. Or, so Paige thought. Brie identified herself as a cheater trying to pull the switch on Paige. So, instead of ignoring Brie’s admission and following through with the initial ruling for Paige or calling a DQ for blatant cheating, the ref decided to wave off his three count. So, the match continued. Nikki then blindsided Paige and hit the Rack Attack for the win.

WINNER: Paige initially at 10:27, Nikki official result at 11:18 to retain the Divas Title. Goofy booking to end a solid Divas match. At the very least, Paige should have been awarded a DQ win after the accomplice willingly turned herself in as a cheater. Weird logic, which is kind of fitting considering the poor state of the division.

Next out was The Miz, who was not dressed to wrestle. Or for regular activity. Miz, dressed in his goofy Hollywood get-up, did the big set-up by first shouting out to Ohio before saying he left this place. Miz said if you don’t live in Hollywood or New York, you don’t count. Miz then sat down at ringside for commentary on the Intercontinental Title match.

In-ring: Big Show was introduced first as the IC Title challenger. Ryback was out next to defend the title.

Live PPV Second Hour

3 -- IC champion RYBACK vs. BIG SHOW -- Intercontinental Title match

Before the match started, WWE replayed Ryback giving Big Show the Shell-Shock on Raw. Essentially, that’s the pay-off tonight, as well. As soon as the bell sounded, Ryback intercepted a charging Big Show with a big spear. Ryback wanted the meat-hook clothesline, and he connected. This is moving quickly. Ryback then wanted Shell-Shock, but Show blocked, only to take a clothesline over the top rope to the floor. Ryback followed up on the outside by tossing around Miz and chucking him over the announce table.

But, back in the ring, Show cut off Ryback to end his hot start. That was like a big five-run first inning answered by a grand slam. Show followed up with power offense and chops to the chest. Ryback came back with a big vertical suplex and then a running splash, but Show kicked out of a pin. Ryback wanted the Meathook clothesline again, but Show intercepted with a chokeslam for a two count.

Show wanted the KO Punch at 5:00, but Ryback ducked and tried Shell-Shock again, but Show landed a right hand to the mouth. It knocked Ryback out of the ring, though, so Show could not follow up with a cover. Show rolled Ryback back into the ring, then Miz suddenly attacked Big Show with a mic, causing the bell to sound. Miz also attacked Ryback on the way out of the ring. Cole said the match was thrown out via DQ. Show was then officially announced as the winner.

WINNER: Show via DQ at 5:28; Ryback retained the IC Title. Actually a pretty hot start to the match before things slowed down and ended on a flat note trying to avoid Ryback winning, but having Ryback retain the title. (**1/2)

Raw plug: Machine Gun Kelly guest-stars on Raw tomorrow night from Cleveland.

Tough Enough plug: Cole, Lawler, and JBL hyped the Final 13 contestants determined.

Video Package: John Cena vs. Kevin Owens II.

In-ring: NXT champion Kevin Owens was introduced to the ring to a loud ovation from the vocal males. Lots of KO signs and merchandise in the crowd, including WWE finding one kid in the John Cena Fan age range wearing Owens merch. Owens’s music stopped, then a loud “Fight Owens Fight” chant broke out. Dramatic Cena Pause, then John Cena’s music played to mainly boos. Cena bounced out on-stage to the “John Cena Suuuuuucks” sing-song from the Owens Fans. Cena shouted toward the on-stage camera that this has a “big-fight feel” to it, then he stormed the ring to square off with Owens. But first, each man raised his respective title to a mix of cheers and boos. The vocal males cheering for Owens were louder than the Cena Fans cheering the U.S. champion.

4 -- U.S. champion JOHN CENA vs. NXT champion KEVIN OWENS -- Champion vs. Champion non-title re-match from Elimination Chamber two weeks ago

Cena opened things up with a shoulder tackle, putting Owens on the mat for a second. Owens came back to his feet, circled the ring, and responded with a shoulder tackle. An “NXT” chant broke out, which is always funny to hear when The Big Company owns the Favored Little Brand. Lots of noise from the crowd, then Cena smashed Owens in the face with a clothesline. Cole pointed out Owens’s nasal issues, but Owens responded with a dropkick to take control of the match.

Owens settled on a reverse chinchlock, Cena came to his feet, and Cena suddenly broke free into a dropkick. Cena went for his usual offensive attack combination, but Owens countered the sit-out slam with a hip toss takeover, popping the crowd. Owens then did Cena’s offensive attack and hit the Five Knuckle Shuffle. But, Cena responded with the STF on a cocky Owens. Owens kicked away, then teased the AA, but Cena avoided and hit a reverse facelbuster for a two count. Deep breaths at 5:30.

Owens came to his feet first and teased a pop-up powerbomb, but Cena avoided and hit a sit-out slam into his own Five Knuckle Shuffle. Cena tried the AA, but Owens countered with a release German Suplex into the corner. So, Owens delivered a running cannonball splash,
but Cena kicked out of a pin. Owens thought about his next move, then dragged Cena to the corner. Red Arrow? Actually, a Swanton Bomb attempt, but Cena got his knees up to block. Owens sold immense back pain as Cena recovered across the ring.

Reset at 9:30 with Lawler pointed out that Cena appears to respect Owens. Cena then wanted the AA, and he connected. But, Owens kicked out of Cena’s finisher again. Cena got hot at ref Mike Chioda, saying he thought it was three. A very heated exchange uncharacteristic for Cena’s character. The crowd got on Cena, playing along with Cena losing his cool. The announcers talked about Owens being able to get under Cena’s skin two matches in.

Cena tried a top-rope move, but Owens blocked, then spun Cena around into a sit-out powerbomb. But, Cena kicked out of a pin. Both men sold on the mat as the crowd expressed their appreciation for the match. Owens was the first man to his feet looking to end Cena. He wanted the pop-up powerbomb, but Cena countered with a huracanarana, only to have Owens pop to his feet and smash him with a superkick. Another counter by Cena, but Owens kicked out again. The announcers continued to talk up Owens answering everything Cena has thrown at him in only his second PPV match.

Cena wanted a top-rope guillotine, but Owens avoided and hit a double-underhook modified Package Piledriver for another two count. Both men recovered as the “Let’s Go Cena / Fight Owens Fight” dueling chant broke out. Owens then went for his two-step top-rope moonsault, but Cena avoided. And, Cena scooped up Owens for another AA. And, Owens kicked out again. Cena could only sit on the mat, stunned by Owens kicking out again.

They came to the point in Match #1 where it seemed like a stalemate with neither man able to win. Cena then re-positioned Owens in the corner before hosting his body onto the top turnbuckle. Cena wanted a superplex, but Owens countered with a mid-air vertical suplex. Cole freaked out for the top-rope counter, then Cena kicked out again.

Reset at 16:30. Owens walked toward Cena, who suddenly sprang on him with the STF in the middle of the ring. But, Owens grabbed the rope for a break. Cena tried to hang on, nearly getting himself DQ’d. Cena suddenly found himself on Owens’s back, where he found his balance against the ropes and snapped off sort of a modified Styles Clash (without the neck tuck). But, Owens kicked out again. Owens then came right back with the pop-up powerbomb, but Cena kicked out, causing the crowd to lose their minds.

Both men tried to figure out what to do next as they came to their feet. Owens told Cena to give up and just stay down. But, Cena pushed off to the ropes, went for a springboard stunner, and didn’t quite get it, just moving Cena a little. But, Cena followed right up with the AA. And Cena covered Owens for the pin.

Post-match, the announcers put over both men as WWE went to crowd shots of happy Cena fans and frustrated Owens fans. Cena received his U.S. Title belt, then waited for Owens to get up. Cena approached Owens from behind with a look of respect on his face. Cena told Owens to look around the arena as the crowd applauded. He told Owens that he belongs right here in front of all this. Cena grabbed the NXT Title and handed it over to Owens. “Champion to real champion,” Cena said. He extended his hand. Owens shook.

Cena then raised Owens’s arm in the air, only to have Owens kick Cena in the gut. The vocal male pops kicked. Owens then scooped up Cena and gave him a powerbomb on the ring apron. Owens freaked out as drool spilled out of his mouth. “Yes!” shouts from the vocal male mixed with boos. Refs then sprung to check on Cena. Back in the ring, Owens picked up the U.S. Title belt and left with both titles. Owens laughed maniacally as he held both title belts, then he chuckled the U.S. Title toward Cena. Cole said they just witnessed one of the most incredible matches ever, then Owens threw away all of the respect from Cena. After a replay of the post-match attack, they returned to Owens laughing like a crazy-man and Cena selling an ankle injury, unable to put weight on his right ankle.

**WINNER:** Cena at 19:15 to even the series at 1-1. Amazing, amazing match with such energy in the building. The story played out perfectly for Owens Fans who were concerned about Owens losing, then falling down the ladder. Instead, Owens got the super-respect loss reinforcing him as a big deal to casual viewers, then he immediately got his heat back taking out Cena Sami-Zayn style after the match. That was solid booking to counter the first hour. (****1/2)

Total Divas plug.

Backstage: Renee Young said they will try to get a medical update on John Cena later in the show. She then brought in Dean Ambrose. Renee asked Dean about losing the title belt on Bourbon Street in New Orleans. What am, an animal? Okay, yeah he did lose the belt in New Orleans, but he found it. Dean said sometimes you just have to stand up for yourself and take what’s yours. He said he doesn’t live for paperwork and “official rulings,” so he has decided to stand up for himself and what’s right. And he is the people’s champion, at least tonight. He said it’s just him, Seth Rollins, the title, and a a ladder. Seth vowed to get the payday tonight.

Announcers: Cole, JBL, and Lawler went back to Owens vs. Cena. Cole said it was a classic match, despite the actions by Owens. He said they know Dusty Rhodes would be proud of that match. Lawler said there was no better talker than Dusty. Cole talked about Dusty helping “young talent” learn how to “cut a promo” at the Performance Center.

Cole fed to a video package on Dusty Rhodes that aired on the MITB pre-show. Back in the arena, the crowd was shown applauding and chanting “Dusty, Dusty.” Cole then announced a special on Dusty Rhodes airing Monday night after Raw on WWE Network.

**In-ring:** Big E’s voice welcomed out the New Day to defend the WWE Tag Titles. Big E. and Xavier Woods came to the ring, but first for a promo. Xavier said a travesty happened earlier tonight when Kofi Kingston was robbed of MITB. Big E. said cheaters should never win, just like the Ohio St. Buckeyes coming off probation. Big E. said winners win with dignity. And that’s how Kofi needs the power of positivity more than ever. He asked Clap Nation to come to their feet and give Kofi some positivity in the back. But, the “New ... Day Sucks” chant broke out instead of “New ... Day Rocks.” Xavier said a human being put his life on the line (not to win), but to entertain, and they have the audacity to chant that? Big E. calmed down Xavier, then smiled that Columbus, nor the Prime Time Players, will deter them. Because “New ... Day ... Rocks,” Xavier said through gritted teeth.

**Prime Time Players** then came out to challenge New Day for the Tag Titles. Cole noted that Titus played college football at Florida, where the current Ohio St. coach Urban Meyer coached and won National Titles. JBL followed up with a shout-out to John Laurinaitis, whose nephew, James Laurinaitis, played at Ohio State.

**Live PPV Third Hour**

5 -- WWE tag champions NEW DAY (BIG E. & XAVIER WOODS) vs. PRIME TIME PLAYERS (TITUS O’NEIL & DARREN YOUNG) -- WWE Tag Title match

New Day opened things up by stomping a mudhole in D-Young in the corner. Xavier with a casual pin using his boot to the chest for a one count. Big E. then tagged in to deliver a big running splash to Young for another nearfall. Just complete domination of D-Young through the first five minutes. Titus finally got a tag and ran over Xavier, then Big E., then Xavier again. Titus chuckled Xavier across the ring, then hit a big corner splash, and followed with the Monty Brown Pounce for a two count.

Chaos in the ring until Titus planted Xavier in the ring with an emphatic turnaround spinebuster. Titus covered and it was good for the pin and the win. The crowd was surprised, not thinking it would be the finish. The Players then celebrated with the belts in the crowd.

**WINNERS:** Prime Time Players at 5:48 to capture the WWE Tag Titles. Oddly-structured match not getting much juice from the Tag Title change squeeze. They tried a low beat down on D-Young to set up the tag to Titus, but it was almost too one-sided that it took the crowd out of the match and they did not re-engage for the tag, finishing sequence, and anti-climatic three count. (**1/4)

**Pre-Show Panel:** Renee and Co. tried to muster excitement for the Tag Title change, then talked up Owens vs. Cena before focusing on Rollins vs. Ambrose for the WWE Title. Renee then went back to the opening PPV match when Sheamus won the MITB briefcase. Also during
that match, Roman Reigns was poised to win, but Bray Wyatt cost Reigns the match and a future title shot.

Announcement: Cole said it will be Reigns vs. Bray Wyatt in five weeks at the Battleground PPV.

Video Package: Seth Rollins vs. Dean Ambrose title feud leading to tonight’s main event.

Backstage: WWE World Hvt. champion Seth Rollins took his final walk down the hallway. Jamie Noble and Joey Mercury, who beat Rollins on Raw, hung out in the background. Kane then walked in and laughed at Seth’s plight, saying he dug his own grave and now he has to lie in it. Seth walked up toward Stephanie McMahon and Triple H. Steph said no pressure but the entire fate of the company is on his shoulders. Okay boss. Hunter told Seth to forget all of this and just show them why he picked Seth to be WWE World champion. Hunter’s motivational speech fired up Seth, who took a deep breath and marched down the hallway.

In-ring: The WWE World Title belt was shown hanging above the ring as Lilian Garcia announced the rules. She said the first wrestler to climb the ladder and retrieve the title will be declared the winner and WWE World Hvt. champion. After a pause, Dean Ambrose’s music played to bring out Ambrose to a Superstar reaction. He has everyone on-board right now. Dean walked underneath a ladder in the middle of the entranceway, then entered the ring. Dean took a moment to pause and contemplate the match before Seth Rollins’s music played to bring out the WWE World champion by himself.

Once both men were in the ring, Lilian handled formal ring introductions as champion and challenger had a mid-ring stare down. Cue the bell at 10:19 p.m. EST, giving them tons of time for the match (and potential post-match).

6 -- WWE World Hvt. champion SETH ROLLINS vs. DEAN AMBROSE -- WWE World Title ladder match

As the match started, Cole commented that they might see “a bit more wrestling” in this match. Back and forth early on as the wrestlers felt each other out. “Let’s Go Ambrose” chant from the crowd as Dean took control of the match. Seth suddenly nailed Dean with a clothesline, then knocked him to the floor. Seth choked Dean into the ring steps, then a ladder got involved. Seth got the worst of it taking a blow to the face.

Back in the ring, Dean and Seth took turns climbing, then yanking the other man off the ladder. They eventually knocked down the ladder, then Dean gave Seth a butterfly overhead suplex into the ladder. Dean soaked in the pain experienced by Seth, then scooped him up for a bodyslam. He followed by climbing the ladder, doing the Dusty Signal, and delivering a flying bionic elbow to Seth. Dean clotheslined Seth to the outside, then positioned the ladder to start climbing. But, Seth returned to the ring with a chair, which he used to bash Dean in the left leg and knee.

Seth tried to take advantage by climbing the ladder, but Dean managed to kick out the ladder. So, Seth smashed Dean with the ladder and smiled to himself. Seth started working over the leg and knee, taking some time to taunt Dean as a one-legged man now. Dean started to fight back, so Seth angrily yanked Dean into the corner and wrapped his knee around the ringpost. Seth followed with a figure-four leglock around the ringpost, causing Dean to scream out in pain.

Back in the middle of the ring, Seth put the figure-four leglock on Dean again (as referee Charles Robinsonpeered over the ring mat from the outside). Seth taunted Dean again, so Dean responded by reversing the pressure onto Seth to get the crowd back into the match on Dean’s side. But, Seth escaped, then continued the attack. Seth went under the ring to grab a chair, which he bashed over Dean’s knee. Dean had a far-away look in his face as the announcers talked about Seth being able to win the match right now, but he wants to make a statement by punishing Dean.

Dean suddenly found energy to fight back and wanted the rebound lariat on one leg, but Seth lifted up a ladder at the last second to block Dean. The crowd chanted for tables, pointing to the issue of this match being at the end of a show where the crowd has seen everything and isn’t completely engaged in the match story. Back to Seth, who wanted a top-rope attack, but Dean chucked a chair at his face. Dean then tried a superplex onto a ladder, but Seth knocked him down to the mat. So, Ambrose crotched The Champ, then nailed a desperation lariat that rocked Seth to the mat.

The crowd tried to rally Ambrose, who came to his feet punching and slapping Seth like a madman. Ambrose shook off his knee pain, then charged the ropes to clothesline Seth and himself clear over the top rope to the floor. They returned to the ring, where Dean nailed a rebound lariat right in the middle of the ring. But, there was no ladder. So, Seth rolled out of the ring to recover. Seth thought about leaving through the crowd, but Dean caught up to him. And they brawled through the crowd toward a playground table.

Seth and Dean eventually made it back to the ringside area, where Dean hobbled across the Spanish announce table to splash Seth on the English table. They returned to the ring, where Seth teased a powerbomb over the top rope onto a ladder, but Dean blocked and back-dropped Seth over the top rope into the ladder. The ladder “buckled in half,” causing Seth to sell intense back pain.

While Seth sold on the outside at 25:00, Dean dragged another ladder into the ring. Dean, with his injured knee, started to climb the ladder, but Seth got back in the ring and pulled him down. Seth dragged Dean to the outside, where Dean clotheslined Seth over the Spanish announce table, clearing the announcers into the crowd looking for safety. Dean and Seth battled to their feet, where Seth teased a Pedigree on the table, but Dean blocked and nailed Dirty Deeds onto (but not through) the table. The crowd chanted One More Time, but Dean rolled away from ringside toward the ring.

Dean climbed into the ring, then started climbing the ladder, hobbling toward the belt, but Seth suddenly ran into the ring with a TV monitor to smash Dean’s knee and knock him off the ladder. Dean tried to fight back, but Seth gave him a textbook Pedigree in the corner of the ring. Seth tried climbing again, but Dean grabbed his feet and hung on for dear life. So, Seth came down the ladder to smash Dean some more. On the outside, Seth delivered a nasty bucklebomb right into the barricade. Seth had a crazy look in his eyes as he contemplated his next move.

Seth started scattering chairs around the ringside area, even going underneath the ring Hornswoggle-style to find more chairs. Seth delivered a running powerbomb into a combination of chairs and a ladder, prompting Lawler to declare “That’s it.” Seth buried Dean underneath a pile of chairs and ladders, then slid into the ring. Seth started climbing rung by rung toward the title belt. But, suddenly, Dean climbed out from under the pile of weapons and limped into the ring. Dean grabbed Seth, climbed to the top rung, and got his left hand on the title belt. Seth then grabbed hold of Dean’s arm, unstrapped the belt, and they kind of flung each other down to the mat with the belt hanging in the balance. They hit the mat and in the process, the belt left their dual grasp and landed in Seth’s hands, giving him the win, as Dean was left grasping air on the 50/50 ball.

Post-match, the announcers talked about how close Dean was to getting the belt and becoming legit champion. They also talked about Seth winning by himself. Seth then left the ring with his title belt and found Triple H waiting for him on the entranceramp. Meanwhile, Dean sat in the ring in a state of disbelief. JoJo came out on the stage to interview Seth, who boasted about being the Greatest Champion of All-Time. Seth cackled, Hunter smiled, Dean sat stunned in the ring, and Cole signed off right at the top of the hour.

WINNER: Seth at 35:40 to retain the WWE Tag Titles. The ending felt like a letdown after 36 minutes of drawn-out fighting. After all, WWE just turned Seth into a joke by having him lose clean to his security guards on Raw, and they didn’t tell the story of Seth being determined to rebound from that embarrassment, so why go that route on Raw? Sure, Triple H gave Seth the big pre-match motivational speech, but that was more about Hunter than Seth. The overall deal ended up hurting Dean in the end. Plus, there were the unintended consequences of Sheamus’s MITB briefcase hanging over the match since WWE set precedent at WM31 by bending their rules having the briefcase hanging over the match since WWE set precedent at WM31 by bending their rules having the
Whittle the last four minutes down to even just 30 seconds and that’s all it took for “Stone Cold” Steve Austin to sell a match for me.

Whether it’s confinements set by today’s WWE or by their own accord, most wrestlers today can’t do in three hours what Austin did in those final four minutes of his podcast interview with Paul Heyman last Monday night.

That look in his eye - that change of tone in his voice from “let’s talk road stories” podcaster to “you don’t put that cellphone down I’m going to forearm shiver it out of your hands” ass-kicker is all it took for me to temper the idea of searching for hotel arrogances in Dallas next April. That’s why there is always going to be that hierarchical separation of today’s “even-stevens, say what’s scripted” Superstar from yesteryear’s “match to the beat of their own drum” outlaw.

Stone Cold stomps mudholes in foes while Dean Ambrose posts pictures of it on Instagram. Austin interrupts Triple H’s five minute diatribe while Roman Reigns patiently waits for his cue. Kane remains lights out for a Stone Cold Stunner when he kicks out at two for a Zig Zag. From a storyline perspective, they just aren’t as good as the old guard.

Sure, most of these problems are on the shoulders of McMahon than they are on the wrestlers. If there was more outlining and less marching (what we seem to be seeing with Owens and maybe King Barrett could actually pull off that ridiculous cape of Zigler’s jokes may not come off as stale (well, maybe not that)

Either way, they all have a way to go before they make me lean forward in my seat like Steve Austin did.

Dominic DeAngelo, 3-year VIP Member

WHY NOT CESARO & HARPER INSTEAD OF KANE & BIG SHOW

For years WWE has been criticized for having a stale roster, not creating new stars, and relying on names mostly established in the 1990s. While they had their attempts along the way, making a new and exciting top tier of stars seems like a lost art. When you had guys like Sheamus, Miz, Albert Del Rio, or even Mr. Kennedy and Bobby Lashley types - people the company got behind and high hopes for. But somehow, with increasing micromanaging and over-scripting along with adding more and more programming and even-steven-bookng, the end result was something less than a WrestleMania Main Event worthy act. Sure, Miz made his stint against Cena and Lashley had his big match in 2007. But neither is a made man nor a household name.

Then something happened. The American Indy-scene that had been bubbling under finally boiled over when the Straight Edge Superstar started making waves. C.M. Punk, whose road to stardom started with a feud against Jeff Hardy, started gathering a fan following and was much different to those around him. Punk had a body of work outside the WWE that people were aware of. He also had the experience and knowhow of what it took to sell tickets. Something that couldn’t be said about a Dolph Ziggler or Ted DiBiase Jr. And Punk had the advantage of already figuring out his character traits.

C.M. Punk was followed by Daniel Bryan, a man who, if possible, was even less likely to fit the Vince McMahon mold of a swimmer bodied Superstar. Bryan had, just like Punk, established himself outside the company and went on to prove on every level WWE put him that he was the top of the class, be it NXT where despite losing all his matches he was the most popular contestant, being brought back in a big angle to face the Nexus, or winning Money in the Bank and carrying Smackdown as pretty much the last champion of the dying brand split era. And then after surviving the 18 second WrestleMania 28 loss that was designed to elevate the company’s chosen Sheamus, Daniel Bryan, and his educated and passionate followers took on a mission - a mission started by C.M. Punk. A mission to get behind - and stay behind their hero no matter what obstacles the machine threw at them. This synergy between talent and audience shifted the direction of the whole wrestling business.

WWE was not blind to this shift. Sure, they made lots of mistakes along the way and the first crop of A-level independent stars found themselves playing second fiddle to established names and it’s pretty safe to say the higher ups did not understand the appeal of people like Punk, Bryan, or say Claudio Castagnoli (Cesaro) and Chris Hero (Short lived NXT star Kassius Ohno). But to WWE’s credit, they tried again.

Because in the system WWE had the duo of Seth Rollins and Dean Ambrose, two highly talked about talents who had made their names in well-revered promotions Ring of Honor and Dragon Gate and who had gone through learning how to sing for their supper. These two, paired up with Roman Reigns, had tag team wrestling cool and marketable again. They tore through everyone in their path and rose to the top of the card both on air and behind the scenes. All three have been successes as new acts that can headline a show. They are the first bonafide main eventers 30 years or younger since maybe Randy Orton and John Cena. While all have room to improve, there is no denying they have taken their spot on the upper echelon.

With the success of these people WWE has gotten more and more comfortable with not only using independent talent, but handing the reins to a new generation. Neville, Owens, Paige, Wyatt, they are already regular features. Balor, Zayn, Banks, Charlotte... plenty of people coming up. WWE feels young and fresh.

And then we have Kane and Big Show, the last two active roster members whose career started before the Attitude Era. Both have been prominently featured for years, even if they do take time off every now and then. Kane, since 2010, has been Heavyweight Champion, got his mask back and was heavily pushed as Cena’s opponent, was paired with a red hot Daniel Bryan, joined The Authority, and has been all over TV doing it. Big Show has signed an ironclad contract, worn a diaper, cried, punched out senior citizens, sold out, and had just as much screen time as The Big Red Monster.

I bring all this up to illustrate that they are taking a big spot away from a younger, fresher act. Looking at the latest Authority-run both men are on, there is really no reason why those same roles could not have been filled by someone else. Luke Harper could have essentially played the same role as the former giant/monster who sold out during a wrestling match that point should be moot.

Bray Wyatt is spinning his wheels, whereas he could right now be talking about climbing to the heavens and stealing it’s price - or claiming the IC
Title from the man he has already laid waste to once.

Kane is a phenomenal talent. Big Show has range like almost no other in the company. But their positioning is doing little to no favors to anyone — including themselves. Both men have tarnished their legacies as something special and have become predictable and stale. Maybe it’s time to move down the ladder for both. Let today’s stars be The Stars.

Vince Boncamper

WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

“Be selective when you take risks and the wear and tear on your body, Work smarter, not harder. Work smarter, not reckless. Slowing down and telling stories makes that happen.” - Triple H

With the untimely injuries of popular journeymen wrestlers Sami Zayn, Hideo Itami, and most notably, Daniel Bryan, the relationship of wrestling style and associated injuries has come to the forefront of wrestling conversation. The expression “work smarter, not harder” has become somewhat of a cliché echoed by wrestlers, wrestling journalists, and wrestling podcasters. Whenever a phrase such as this is used at excess, it becomes a natural temptation to separate the words and phrase from its meaning and its practical application. For example, many of the same journalists and podcasters who have referred to and promoted the idea of “work smarter, not harder” have also praised matches and stunts where wrestlers are obviously not working smart and in doing so, performing reckless moves and dangerous spots. As a fan, I often caught in this same dilemma, I promote good storytelling and smart wrestling, yet I cheer and awe at tremendous feats of athleticism, daring stunts, and excessive violence. What does working smart actually mean? Who is working smart? Who is working hard? Who is working reckless?

If asked to describe “working smart,” I would propose it is making every move and movement mean something and being selective in the number of bumps and the placement of high spots in a match within the context of the match story. Working smart does not always result in a celebrated five star classic. However, working smart does ensure the objective of the match as it relates to the story is fulfilled and achieved. When I think of a smart wrestler who was never accused of working hard, I think of Jake Roberts. Steve Austin refers to Jake as an economical worker. Moreover, on more than one occasion, I have heard Bruce Mitchell state that Jake is considered a really good wrestler, yet he never had a really good match. In modern day wrestling, I consider Randy Orton a smart worker. He knows what it takes to make a match successful even if the match is not especially memorable.

Working hard is more difficult to qualify and define. Is working hard hitting 15 highspots and taking 23 variations of a power bomb in a 25 minute match? Is it doing a one hour Broadway after kicking out of 30 finishers? I do not know if I have a correct answer, or if I am qualified to answer the question. If forced to provide a description, I would contend that working smart consists of both a physical component and a mental component. The physical component relates to pacing, highspots, and athleticism. The mental component consists of spot placement, match layout, creativity, and innovation. Ricky Steamboat was a guy who always worked both physically and mentally hard. Note, he worked hard and smart, yet not reckless.

When it comes to working hard, there are many examples to highlight from the wide array of promotions that cascade the current wrestling landscape. From NXT, the recent Women’s Title match. From WWE, Kevin Owens-John Cena. From ROH, the incredible 10 man tag match from night two of the Global Wars shows. And from Lucha Underground, the recent ladders match. Pulling from recent examples, which matches were wrestled hard and smart?

I would contend that the Women’s Title match from NXT Unstopable was wrestled hard and smart. The match was physical and competitive, but the pacing was steady and the selling was emphasized. Because of the emphasis on selling, the match told a compelling story. There were notable highspots in the match, but the spots were spaced out and placed to maximize effect and importance. Another example of a match I believe was wrestled smart was Cena vs. Owens from WWE Elimination Chamber. Some have complained that the match contained too many big moves, and consequently too many false finishes. I do not believe this critique is without merit, but the match built up to the bigger moves and sufficient time was allocated for selling and recovery. Because of these factors, every move and every sequence was memorable. Probably most importantly, the match layout and execution achieved the desired result for everyone involved.

This is where my opinion may spark the ire of some fans. I have not watched all of the episodes of Lucha Underground, but from the episodes I have seen, I have witnessed some examples of spots and moves I would contend are not smart and unquestionably reckless. The dives outside the ring and off the balcony are often awe-inspiring. The fact that they occur so often and are done so many wrestlers does cause them to lose impact and effect. Maybe I am not paying close enough attention, but it is difficult for me to remember who did what dive, at what time, against whom, in what match. To put it another way, the dive did not mean much within the context of the match or the show. Given the risk of some of the dives, if it was not of utmost importance, then it was not smart and probably should not have been done. On the last NXT special, I watched Finn Balor do a cross body off of a 7 foot platform. Where the spot was placed, the emphasis placed on the spot by the announcers, and the manner in which the dive was immediately followed by the finish, made it important and memorable in the context of the match. When you compare this spot alone to the dives we see on a weekly basis, it was not special. And, when you compare the importance of the spot to the match where it occurred, I would argue it was much more important and memorable than the vast majority of the spectacular dives I witness on Lucha Underground on a weekly basis.

Finally, there is the 10 man tag team match from the ROH Global Wars Show. Simply put, this match was awesome. How the Young Bucks are able to place so many moving parts into a match is beyong impressive. The fact that they are able to execute so many spots in a match such as this on a consistent basis is borderline inhumane. There is no doubt that these guys are working hard, yet they should be commended for the hard work and their incredible athleticism and ability. But, are so many spots necessary? Are they playing with fire? And, is this reckless wrestling? If anyone else attempted to wrestle a similar match, without hesitation, I would argue this is reckless wrestling. Given that these guys are world class professionals, I would argue that this is still borderline reckless. This is not an example of working smart. They hit so many spots and execute so many moves that the moves make the match and the story, if it exists, plays out in the background.

Looking back on the match, I can recall a number of awesome moves and sequences. Unfortunately, I can’t recall how the spots fit into the layout of the match, and in some cases I cannot even recall who took the move and who was involved in the spot. As for selling, I can’t recall any specifics, which means either the selling did not take place or it did not matter in the context of the match. Probably most concerning is the fact that I had to reread Sean Radican’s report to recall who went over and what the finish was. In summary, it was an entertaining match void of selling and lacking an apparent story. In other words, this was not an example of working smart and could be considered working reckless.

Derrick Hubbard

WE CAN DREAM, CAN’T WE?

WWE needs to establish a working relationship with other companies and it needs to do it now.

We consistently see the same Superstars on television week after week, both on Raw and Smackdown. As a result, the characters become stale, predictable. As a result, the fans begin to tune out and look for other outlets for entertainment, which results in declining ratings.

By establishing these working relationships, WWE can help themselves as well as other promotions, especially independent ones. John Cena is doing some nice work right now, but once the U.S. Open Challenge is completed, he could benefit from being off WWE TV for a significant period of time. What if WWE could loan him to New Japan for 3-6 months? What a boon this would be for both promotions! Cena could practice for his eventual WWE heel turn by being the ultimate “U.S. gaijin,” feuding with the Japanese babyfaces who try to repel the ultimate foreign invader! Throw in Randy Orton, Dolph Ziggler, and Antonio Cesaro, and you have a nice little faction to support “super Cena” or feud with.

Imagine the superstars of NXT or the underutilized stars of WWE (such as Damian Sandow or The Miz) hooked 1-2 times a month by PWG, EVOLVE, or Dragon Gate USA! This type of wrestling education would be invaluable and only help the “homegrown” talent to get better. Could you imagine a team of WWE Superstars in the AAA Trios tournament or other specialized Indy events with weeks of build-up? Again, this would be great for all parties involved and the name recognition of the WWE talent would drive ticket and merchandise sales for the independent promoters and talent.

Finally, this relationship could be reciprocal in nature. Don’t want to commit to the Briscoes full-time? Fine; borrow them for three months from ROH, educate the fans about ROH and greatness with clips from ROH, then use them to re-build the tag titles, eventually having them drop the titles to the team you plan to carry the division (perhaps Neville and Sami Zayn)? The possibilities are endless. This could work and really re-establish professional wrestling as a global force (pun intended) and allow the talent to refresh, revitalize, and reemerge in WWE as “characters” whose eventual return, much as the talent exchanges in the beloved territory days did. WWE will need to be the initiator for this to happen; we can dream, can’t we?

Brian Hamilton
Charlotte, N.C.

Submit a Letter to the Editor to kellerwade@gmail.com.
Email Question: I know Randy really didn’t want to go into the WWE Hall of Fame, but do you think he would have been happy with Hulk Hogan inducting him? Would he see it as a way to bury the hatchet?

Poffo: The last thing there I loved. If you go back to my speech, I said, “When the Mega-Powers exploded, the storyline was real. Life’s too short to hold a grudge, it’s time for us to heal.” Okay, I wrote that about ten minutes before I went out there because I felt that we needed something. I thought it was rude that Hulk was saying all of these wonderful things about Randy, and I don’t mention Hulk in the speech. I didn’t by name, but let me tell you, the feud between Randy and Hogan was nothing compared to how much they liked each other. Sometimes you look at a woman only to see the blemish and not to see the beauty. But step back a bit and you’re going to see the beauty. This is an imperfect world and I saw it as an opportunity for everybody to bury the stupid hatchets. You know something? There’s a reason I look so good at 60. It’s not just the greens, mushrooms, onions, beans, berries, and seeds. There’s more. I have negative thoughts, too. I have very, very negative thoughts just like anybody else, but when I do, I jump up and change channels immediately. Randy liked to get a box of popcorn and sit down and watch the whole movie. Why make a mountain out of a molehill? I’d rather make a molehill out of a mountain. Let’s accentuate the positive. I am now the older brother. I get to make all of the unpopular decisions. I have decided to err on the side of kindness and love.

Keller: Did Hogan and Randy truly, truly bury the hatchet while Randy was alive? Were they on really solid ground at any stretch before Randy’s deadly accident?

Poffo: Randy took my mom to the doctor, just like Hulk said on the DVD. The nurse said, “Hey, Hulk Hogan’s here.” Randy said, “Oh yeah, show me where he is.” So they bring Randy over to Hogan and Randy ran up and hugged him. They had a moment, a Kodak Moment. Randy, I think the last year of his life, he went around trying to replace his divot, to use a golf term, with everybody. The list was a mile long. Because with Randy, you’re either his friend or his lunch. But, yes, Randy reconciled with Hulk Hogan. I know that there has been some scuttlebutt. I’ll mention it because you had such class that you didn’t, about Scott Steiner and everything with that. First of all, the airport is the lousiest place to have a fight with anybody, you know that? The only place worse would be in the airplane in the air. Yes, there was reconciliation, I don’t say it was all healed. Can’t we start now, can’t we start with me. You know, there was a little backlash, people saying it was in bad taste that Hulk Hogan did it. I thought Hulk Hogan gave the greatest speech ever. Name me one thing that was wrong with that speech. It was only ten minutes long. He was telling all the good things about Randy - the good and the great. When I spoke on Randy, I tried to concentrate on the wonderful things about Randy, about how much he actually cared for these Special Olympians and the underdog in general. Before there was John Cena, there was Randy doing all of those Make-a-Wishes.

Keller: Was there anybody besides you and Hulk Hogan who would have been on Randy’s short list to give an induction speech for him, either introduce him if he were alive or accept on his behalf. Obviously you’re number one.

Poffo: The only time he ever mentioned the Hall of Fame is how much he didn’t want to be in it unless it was as the Poffo Family, but that is never going to happen. There are a lot of people who deserve to be in that Hall of Fame before I get in there. First of all, Johnny Valentine, it’s a travesty that he’s not in the Hall of Fame. That man changed the business.

Keller: Ray “The Crippler” Stevens, in the Bay Area, how did that not happen?

Poffo: That is incredibly dumb that he is not in there. Another guy, you’ve got to have Kamala, and you have to have him now before he overdoses on insulin or whatever. What’s wrong with King King Bundy? I have a question for you, Wade Keller. If you want to have the Hall of Fame represent the best in the business, where in the hell is Rick Martel? Enough said.

Keller: Do you think Rick Steamboat would have been on a short list of people to induct Randy?

Poffo: I wanted to involve Ricky Steamboat. As a matter of fact, if I had my druthers, you know what I’d want to do? I’d have wanted anybody who wanted to talk about Randy could stand up and give him a speech. Treat it like a funeral. Naturally you’d need to have Ricky Steamboat. Naturally, there were a lot of people you’d need to have like Ted DiBiase, Bret Hart, and I’d have loved to have seen Sheamus out there because of the wonderful things he said about Randy in the DVD - that the reason he became a wrestler was because of Randy. In other words, instead of letting all the pressure fall on me and Hogan, why not treat it as a funeral and let anybody with anything good to say come up.

Email Question: Why in the DVD did they just brush over his time as Macho King and his time with Sherri Martel, one of the best times of his career? And Lanny, do you have any stories about the Macho King and Queen era?

Poffo: Well, I guess it was because the whole thing ran an hour and a half and that would have made it go two hours. Maybe that was it. I don’t know. The thing is, when Kieran Bent came to my mother’s house, the first thing that he did was present my mother with a bouquet of flowers and said, “Oh behalf of WWE, I would like to express my condolences on the loss of your husband Angelo Poffo and you son Randy Poffo.” I said to myself it was so beautiful he did that. It was late, but it was not never. You’ve heard me complaining before about whatever extension of a feud was going on. He replaced his divot with me. He’s a great producer. The sound man, the grip man, the camera man, every man that came in, they were all polite and professional. I have absolutely nothing but good things to say. If you want to go into every little chapter of Randy’s career, it’s going to be too long. It’s going to be like “War & Peace.” It should more like “The Great Gatsby.” Randy had a long career, I honestly don’t think the Macho King thing was - it was great for me to induct him and read the poem, which I paraphrased it a little for the Hall of Fame induction. I believe in George Burns in that when you’re making a speech, you have a great beginning and you have a great ending and you keep the two as close together as possible.

Email Question: How come Bobby Heenan replaced you as Mr. Perfect’s manager after WrestleMania 6? What are your memories of managing Mr. Perfect during what was his and your biggest run in the WWF?

Poffo: They never told me why, but I knew that Bobby Heenan was a better manager than me. They probably wanted the best man for the job. That probably wasn’t me. Not that I thought I was dead weight. Having said that, is Bobby Heenan the greatest manager of all time? I’m going to say yes, but I would also like to say that the people who say yes have never seen Ernie Roth, the Grand Wizard. Just for argument’s sake, Bobby Heenan is the greatest manager I’ve ever seen.

I remember when we were just getting started managing Mr. Perfect. I got a phone call from Howard Finkle and he said, “We’re gonna do vignettes.” The theme is “Hulk Hogan, you can’t do that.” We’re going to show what a great athlete Curt Hennig is. He’s going to do ping pong and he’s going to do golf and he’s going to do diving and all these things perfectly. I was married at the time. I said, Oh my God, I’ve got to do a little poem for each vignette, but it’s got to be very short. I said, “I’ll go in the bedroom, you keep your daughter occupied, and I don’t know how long this is going to take. I came out ten minutes later with all four of them written. The two best ones were:

Personal Profession Plus Prolific Ping Pong
Paddles Positively Panics People’s Pointless Pride.

It’s just one of many things that Hulk Hogan cannot do and that just makes The Genius feel good inside.

Another one was:
On the diving board of life, we see the form of Mr. Perfect looking absolutely confident and cool

The Genius wants to see Hulk Hogan duplicate these dives, but first I’ll drain the water from this pool.

Email Question: Do you have favorite poets?

Poffo: I took a picture of myself in Baltimore at the grave of Edgar Allan Poe. My favorite poem by him was Anabel Lee.

More to come in this Lanny Poffo “Torch Talk” interview transcript in future editions of the PW Torch Newsletter.
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