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Raw expands to three hours July 23

HEADLINE ANALYSIS

By Wade Keller, editor

If you follow an industry long enough, you're bound to see some bad decisions being made. Some are worse than others, but it's rare when you think you might be seeing the Worst Decision Ever.

Last week WWE announced they were expanding Raw from two to three hours permanently. It might be the McMahon family's worst programming decision ever. It might go down as much worse than the WBF and XFL, because those were supplementary products. Yes, they took a toll on WWE because it took time and resources away from the core WWE product, but they didn't cripple the actual centerpiece core product.

Of all of the decisions that destroyed WCW, expanding Nitro to three hours in tandem with the addition of two hours of Thunder later in the week is seen as perhaps the most self-destructive.

WWE and USA Network are now following the pattern of WCW and TNT, taking a highly rated cable show and expanding it. It's a pattern that can create short-term advertising increases, but burn out the audience and overexpose the product (see: Law & Order, CSI, Who Wants To Be A Millionaire, Deal or No Deal). It's not like WWE has a deep talent roster of big draws at this point. WCW had a deep talent roster at the time they expanded, yet the booking team just wasn't able to keep the product compelling for three hours straight on a weekly basis. Viewers noticed. Top wrestlers were overexposed, the show contained obvious filler, and in general viewership fatigue (live in the arenas and on television) worked the opposite of the tried and true "leave them wanting more" mantra.

It's not as if WWE shouldn't have learned from their own past mistakes. Expanding to two PPVs per month, one for Raw and for Smackdown, failed. Expanding the sheer number of PPVs a year drove away hundreds of thousands of "completists" who - on a monthly basis - were willing to order every PPV, but once they couldn't keep up because there were more often than not two per month, they just threw their hands up and began picking a choosing fewer and fewer to order than ever.

There are viewers who watch Raw as appointment television and always have. They sit through two hours (or so) of the good and bad. When the show is the bad, like last week's - just days before this announcement - it's only two

hours, and usually there's enough redeeming content to make it worth the investment. But three hours? Three hours of lousy content is enough that next time viewers might just tune in for a just an hour instead of the usual two and certainly not commit to all three. Or they might pick their segments, watching the predictably newsmaking segments at the start of each hour and at the very end. They can DVR the show and speed through it. Or they can watch highlights on WWE.com, YouTube, or elsewhere, or just read about it and wait for highlights the next week.

Let's boil this down to what it is: It is corporate greed. It's not creating or offering a product that there is demand for. It's expanding a product that even at two hours sometimes seems to drag. The third hour is being added merely because it can give them more TV ad revenue. There aren't wrestlers Vince McMahon wishes he could give TV time but runs out of time for each week. In fact, they've never been more reliant on one wrestler - John Cena - as evidenced by the quarter hour ratings decline two weeks ago when Cena wasn't at the building and viewers were told that early in the show.

WWE is trying to make up for declining ratings and thus declining ad revenue by adding a third hour of Raw. It'd be akin to the NBA or NFL expanding from 30 teams to 45 teams next year or expanding the season's number of games by 50 percent. It'd be too much even for hardcore fans of both sports.

WWE would counter by saying they are adding an interactive element to the show. That's their hook for this - that viewers get to vote for a match or a stipulation every week. It comes across as patronizing that giving fans a chance to influence parts of the show will cause them to watch an extra hour, as if choosing to see Santino vs. Cody Rhodes will make it more entertaining than it just being presented to viewers without the voting gimmick. It's also an attempt to make watching the show live seem more important since if you watch on delay, as more than 10 percent of viewers now do, you could lose out on your chance to vote. WWE might be grossly overestimating the value the majority of viewers place on putting decisions in the hands of fan. How many movie goers would want to spend three hours watching a movie better paced for two hours because ticket buyers in the theater got to vote on plot twists or character decisions?

On a detached corporate level, it might seem like a no-brainer to increase ad revenue up to 50 percent overnight. But in six months, if ratings are routinely under 2.5, then what?



RAW
PHOTO BY TRAVIS BEAVEN

Pat McNeill, columnist (6.5):

The main problem with WWE Over The Limit? The main event went over the limit of what we'll accept from WWE. You can argue that there was no reason to book John Cena against John Laurinaitis on a pay-per-view, and you'd be right. But on top of that, there was no reason to book Cena versus Laurinaitis to go as long as any other major pay-per-view match. And there was no reason for Cena to drag the match out. It didn't fit the storyline. And it made John Cena look like a chump, or like The Stinger, when Big Show turned heel for the umpteenth time and cost him the match.

On the other hand, you had a top-notch WWE title defense for C.M. Punk, as he took on longtime acquaintance Daniel Bryan. No, nothing could have followed the Cena-Laurinaitis match, because that sucked the air out of the building. But Punk vs. Bryan felt like a pay-per-view main event, and with that finish, WWE left the door open for a return match, probably at No Way Out in four weeks. Let's call it four and a quarter stars. There's a dichotomy between Daniel Bryan's weasel-esque character on Smackdown and the aggressive manner he has in the ring in the big matches. WWE Creative needs to find some way to bridge that gap.

A note for you aspiring indy bookers in the house: Given a choice between a four-way match and a three-way match, take the four-way match. In a four-way, you can keep wrestlers paired off. In a three-way, there always has to be a reason why the third man isn't involved and it messes up the flow. As a rule, you want to avoid multi-man matches in general. However, if you must do one, the Smackdown Title four-way match was a good template for how they're done, especially the bang-bang-bang Everybody Hits A Finisher sequence at the end. Good job.

Ryback's match was awful. The poor guy is John Heidenreich without the in-ring ability. If you've watched WWE consistently for the past year, you should have been able to call the Ryder vs. Kane match move for move. Christian's return, and his win over Cody Rhodes, was hurt by WWE not making it perfectly clear that Captain Charisma was the babyface. The battle royal was perfectly acceptable, and the sort of thing WWE should break out every so often. The ladies' match wasn't so hot, but Layla and Beth Phoenix aren't going to improve by working ninety second matches on Raw. The tag team title match was surprisingly good. Your WWE announce team didn't care much about this show and used it as an opportunity to cut up, but that can be solved by learning Spanish and using the SAP button on your remote control.

A qualified thumbs up.

Bruce Mitchell, columnist (6.0)

This was a solid meat-and-potatoes show, with a very good long match between C.M. Punk and Daniel Bryan at its center. WWE gave Daniel



Why Raw Expanding is a Bad Idea, How to Save It

If WWE Raw is not on USA Network in a few years, Thursday will be looked at as the day that set the course for disaster.

One of the issues here was highlighted by Stephanie McMahon in a media interview stating that Raw would be the first weekly year-round TV series scheduled for three hours each week. Let's set aside that she's wrong - WCW Nitro was three hours. Let's set aside that her lack of knowledge or memory of Nitro being three hours means it's no surprise WWE didn't learn from WCW's mistake. Let's instead focus on the fact that, other than Nitro, I think she's right. No other weekly year-round series is three hours. Why is that?

Because almost nothing good lasts three hours. Great movies rarely can get away with being three hours and still holding people's attention, and when they do, they're the exception to the rule. They're also a product of huge budgets and years of writing and production that add up to being worth people's three hours of attention.

Rarely are live sports games three hours, other than NFL games. People complain about football games being too long, but at least those who watch the games tend to have a rooting interest in a winner (or, fantasy players doing well), the outcomes have tangible ramifications (earning a spot in the playoffs), and there's a long off-season to build anticipation for the next season. Major league baseball games average about 2:42. People say the games are too long.

Even more poignant, though, is how awful WCW Nitro became when it stretched to three hours. The middle two hours - once you got past the first half hour and long before you got to the last half hour - felt interminable because the bookers just don't have the creative juices week after week to fill that much time in a meaningful way. If WWE doesn't know about Nitro (the McMahons can be a little WWE-centric in their knowledge of the pro wrestling industry), what about the lesson they should have learned when they expanded PPVs to two per month. What happened? PPV buyrates went down.

Also, even more than WCW when it expanded Nitro, WWE doesn't have enough wrestlers who fans are invested in to fill three hours each week. WWE doesn't have enough titles that mean enough for the matches that wrestlers engage in to feel important. WWE is, to use a popular saying, killing the goose that laid the golden egg. They're using up the nutrients in the soil, skipping the crop rotation. Pick the cliché or saying you like best. This has disaster written all over it!

Vince McMahon cannot continue with the same approach he's been taking and expect anything but a diminished ratings. Raw will no longer be in the running for the top rated show each week on cable. I predict, with the three hour format, ratings more often than not below 2.5. I think within six months, we will see a 2.2 rating.

Fans are going to start to pick and choose which weeks they watch Raw, which hours they watch, which segments they watch. They will flock to online highlight clips, saving themselves

hours of watching filler that Vince McMahon clearly has put no thought into and characters wrestling longer matches that fans have been conditioned to believe don't even matter that much anyway.

The idea of the show being "interactive" saving this from being a completely disaster is wishful thinking. Fans are used to controlling a lot of things in this era of technology. They can control how the home screen on their phone looks, the big picture on their Facebook home page, what their ring tone sounds like, which video game system they play, what shows from Netflix on-demand they watch and when. But at some point, it's up to the experts to decide what's best for them and to let viewers settle in for the ride.

WWE, by pitching that fans decide who wrestles whom or what the stip is, is essentially telling viewers "we don't know what we're doing." Imagine going to see "The Avengers" and people got to vote on their phone for which costumes the super heroes wore, what battles they would engage in, which bad guy to go after first, etc. That's not why people go to movies. That's why they play video games. People go to movies to be taken for a ride, not to sit in the driver's seat.

In a few years, this might be looked back on the same way historians who have studied WCW's demise look at the decision to expand Nitro to three hours while adding Thunder to the mix. Eric Bischoff, in his Torch Talk with me in 2010, said spreading the product so thin and adding Thunder to the schedule was the decision he most wishes he could take back.

It's not just what happens to Raw's ratings, but what about Smackdown?. Ratings for Smackdown began to rise around the time Superstars was dropped from WGN's schedule on Thursdays. I feel there are only so many hours a week of wrestling fans will watch, so even if someone does watch all three hours of Raw, I believe they become less likely to watch Smackdown (or Impact, for that matter).

The PWTorch.com Poll results are telling, too. People voting in our website poll are obviously wrestling fans who care enough about wrestling that they visit an insider pro wrestling news and commentary website. Yet 70 percent of those voting say expanding Raw to three hours is an "awful" move. Another 20 percent were taking a "wait and see" attitude. Only 10 percent liked the idea.

So what are some ideas for WWE to make the best of this potentially disastrous decision to expand Raw to three hours? These are not radical ideas. Most of them have worked historically in WWE or other wrestling promotions. Many of them have faded from the minds of long-term power-brokers in wrestling and some are foreign, unknown concepts to many people in WWE (wrestlers, creative team members, executives) to whom the Monday Night War was perhaps their first exposure to wrestling (or John Cena was the first big star they ever paid to see), and who haven't bothered to read any of the one or two dozen indispensable wrestling history books.

•Limit the Appearances of the Top Dozen Stars: This seems counter-intuitive, but it's perhaps the most vital move WWE could make, but the least likely move. WWE has to fill a lot of TV time now. Filling this extra hour with longer matches between PPV main event level wrestlers overexposes PPV level matches and top talent. WWE has to make appearances from the top half dozen stars feel special by pulling back now on how often they appear and putting a ton of effort into hyping anytime they do appear.

When Cena wrestles on TV, it should be talked about for a week or two ahead of time and hyped throughout the show, including other wrestlers talking on promos about their issue, but adding onto the end a quick thought on Cena's big TV match later. Dusty Rhodes employed this technique well to hype his rare TV appearances when he was booker. It felt self-aggrandizing then, but it was effective at psychologically making it seem that he was a very big deal and everyone should gather to see him grace our presence.

•Reinvigorate the Tag Division: Robert Gibson of the Rock & Roll Express, Dennis Condrey of the Midnight Express, Jim Neidhart of the Hart Foundation, Jacques Rougeau of the Rougeau Brothers, even Road Warrior Animal of the LOD wouldn't necessarily have been standout draws as singles wrestlers. Same goes for both member of Demolition, The Dream Team, The Dudleys, the early years of Edge & Christian, the early years of The Hardy Boys, and on and on. But putting them in tag teams and filling the tag division with four strong tag teams and another half dozen stepping stone teams (to do jobs to the top teams) and up-and-coming teams (whose matches against top tier teams have meaning because a win over them would elevate the newer younger team) made them valuable draws.

WWE filled a lot of valuable TV time with British Bulldogs vs. The Hart Foundation and Dream Team. It was as much a reason I watched the WWF in the mid-to-late-'80s as any other reason - in part because then top star Hulk Hogan wasn't on TV every week because Vince McMahon knew the perils of overexposing his top act just to boost TV ratings.

•Get Serious About Cruiserweights: They may be on this path with the potential signing of Alex Shelley. Viewers need reliable, substantial, consequential dazzling athleticism throughout these three hour shows.

•Stress the IC and/or US Titles again: Build storylines and even TV main events around title defenses. It should feature a mix of up-and-coming future world title contenders, bitter heels taking out frustration on younger wrestlers, and popular babyface mid-card veterans fans like but don't buy at world title levels.

I'm curious if McMahon, Kevin Dunn, and the entire team have some creative, exciting concepts that they're ready to implement and commit to. I still thinks odds are against this being anything but bad for ratings, so it's going to take a near perfect effort to save this idea.



Pros and Cons of doing more with sponsorships

has also, in the past, had sponsors on their ring skirt and on the ring mat, and Jeremy Borash has occasionally introduced the main event of the show with a sponsor (usually Direct Auto Insurance).

I'm all for embracing sponsorship on the shows, but of course, it takes two to tango. WWE has been able to successfully court higher-end sponsors since they've made their product more family-friendly. The days of them having to worry about L. Brent Bozell and Phil Mushnick driving away companies from associating with them are pretty much over.

But why stop at sponsoring the wrestling promotion itself? Why not allow the wrestlers to adorn their outfits with outside entities who want to do business with that specific Superstar? It's the one aspect of advertising that has yet to infiltrate most of the major sports in America. The WNBA does it, and the NBA is at least considering it.

The problem with this scenario in WWE, of course, is that Vince McMahon treats his Superstars more like indentured servants than independent contractors. Wrestlers have famously been upset when they've been up for movie roles that Vince has nixed because they didn't get his permission, or he doesn't want them taking time off to film, or WWE wasn't getting a cut, or whatever the excuses have been. He'd surely want a piece of the advertising pie were a company to hook up with a specific wrestler.

And really, why not? Although the company would be advertising with a specific wrestler, those wrestlers would be on Vince's show. He'd be the one giving the okay for the wrestler to wear that attire. The problem would arise if someone was getting buried and a sponsor wanted to leave that wrestler for another – based on booking, a lot of vendettas can be played out behind the scenes and a wrestler could lose a lot of money if someone in power had it out for them.

It's happened with a lot less at stake, for sure. But if a company went to WWE and said, "Hey, here's \$5,000, we'd like to sponsor a wrestler. We don't care who, we'll let you choose, but we want our logo on his tights and we want him drinking our beverage in backstage segments he's featured in," what's to stop WWE from giving all those deals to the most-pushed wrestlers?

I could just imagine John Cena coming out with sponsors all over his new t-shirts. "Hustle, Loyalty, Respect...and Skippy Peanut Butter!" Then The Rock can come back and call Cena a sell-out, and Cena can call out Rock for leaving again, and...okay, scratch that idea. Either way, I wouldn't trust WWE being judicious with deciding what sponsors go to what wrestlers. It's a recipe for hurt feelings and disgruntled talent.

I like what TNA has done with allowing sponsors to buy spots on the ring during their shows, but they have to be careful about what verbiage the wrestlers use in the commercials. As I believe Wade Keller has noted before, the wrestlers shouldn't be portrayed as guys who are desperate to save money on their car insurance (or anything); they can get the same message across of it being a bargain without making them seem like lesser stars.

On another set of ads, heels and faces alike are

fighting in the ring and addressing the camera talking about the Insurance. It feels like a commercial that came from someone who doesn't watch the product, but thought it would be natural to have wrestlers wrestle in a commercial. TNA should've stepped in and at least made sure that heels wouldn't appear to have the same convictions as the faces, even if they are bigger stars (like Kurt Angle, a heel at the time the ad first aired).

Still, TNA has the right idea. WWE used to have companies sponsor their PPVs, but seemed that seemed to fall by the wayside once WWE products were actually sponsoring the shows. Can you imagine the extra ad revenue WWE could generate by allowing even more companies to come aboard for Wrestlemania?

Having 70,000 in the stadium and a million plus watching on pay per-view should be enough to convince some companies who may not normally do business with WWE to step in this one time and make a sponsorship pact for the Super Bowl of professional wrestling.

And hey, wouldn't it be nice if WWE used the extra revenue and profits from investing more heavily in advertising on their show to cancel the three-hour Raw idea? Maybe they'd make enough in ad sales and product placement where they wouldn't have to worry about the incremental increase in rights fees they'd get from going to three hours, since that appears to be the only advantage and only reason WWE is adding the extra hour.

I'm not saying this is the future reality of either WWE or TNA; I'm just suggesting it's something worth looking into. Other sports and entertainment properties have not shied away from making their sponsors quite visible. But it's not just something that needs to be agreed to on WWE's end; they have to find sponsors willing to go all the way with them.

It's one thing to be relatively hands-off and buy ad time during commercial breaks of Raw, it's another to get in bed with the company even further by allowing WWE to use and advertise your product during their show.

Given WWE's history, would you really trust your product to be treated with respect and dignity (if you so choose to brand your product in that way) on Raw? You'd be subjecting your company and your goods to McMahon's warped sense of humor and his mood swings.

It's something advertisers would certainly have to think about. Even with Raw's ratings slipping, it's still usually one of the most-watched shows on Monday nights. WWE can use all of their Twitter numbers and all the attention they pay to the various social media outlets as a plus for the advertisers to come aboard; not only will they be seen by millions of people watching the show, the product will also get tons of mentions in social media circles.

It's an intriguing possibility for down the line, but I'm not sure it's an idea Vince McMahon would go for. If WWE gets desperate to find a quick way to make a buck, who knows? You might soon be seeing C.M. Punk carrying around and shilling Pepsi products in addition to sporting the company's logo on his arm.

Last month, WWE made a rare exception for one of its wrestlers when the company allowed Brock Lesnar to compete on pay per-view wearing his MMA gear, which included sponsors that Lesnar himself had cultivated. They were also featured on t-shirts he had worn on Monday Night Raw. This was reportedly a contract demand of Lesnar's when negotiating the terms of his return to WWE.

In NAASCAR, drivers make sure to mention their sponsors in every interview they do. They take a swig of whatever soft drink, energy drink, or sports drink they have deals with, and they make sure they're on camera when they do so. The broadcast itself is packed to the gills with sponsor mentions. Every pit stop fills cars not just with gasoline, but with Sunoco race fuel. Every in-car camera is positioned to spot a sticker advertising a brand inside the automobile.

Even the lap down car that gets its lap back when there's a caution isn't just the "lucky dog"...it's the "Aaron's Lucky Dog." While watching WWE Over the Limit at a restaurant on Sunday, I noticed one of the TVs playing a UFC fight. The ring was covered in company logos, as were the fighters themselves. The Octagon, the most brutal six sides in all of sports, is just another vehicle to hawk your wares.

As wrestling fans, we laugh and at worst roll our eyes and complain when WWE inserts their anything-but-subtle attempts to appease the marketing Gods into their shows, whether it's the numerous appearances of Subway's Jared and having the announcers eat a sub on-air; or a match and segment being presented by Taco Bell's Doritos Locos Tacos.

Strangely, some fans have a problem with this blatant product placement. For some reason, what's good for legitimate sports like NASCAR and MMA (argue about the legitimacy of either, but they're both covered as sports by almost all media outlets) is just not good enough for something as high-brow as professional wrestling.

If WWE can make a few more greenbacks plugging a product while also (and this is the important part) staying true to the basic building-blocks of a pro wrestling (or sports entertainment...) storyline, then I'm totally fine with it.

But should anyone really trust WWE's creative team with not allowing the sponsors and products to overshadow the stories and the wrestlers? I could imagine the product placement being like a new toy for the writers and Vince McMahon to play with. Maybe that feud that Booker T and Edge had several years ago over the shampoo commercial could be revisited with two other wrestlers and an actual shampoo company!

Like WWE, TNA has dabbled in taking sponsorship of their show beyond just commercial air-time. Their wrestlers have been involved in filming Direct Auto Insurance ads, and Matt Morgan and Crimson have even discussed them during an episode of Impact. TNA



On the one year anniversary of the death of Randy "Macho Man" Savage, PWTorch presents a Torch Talk with his younger brother, "Leaping" Lanny Poffo. Part of this interview aired live on the PWTorch Livecast and the rest was recorded off-air afterward as a VIP Torch Talk. Poffo talks about his brother's death, the Hall of Fame, and a variety of other topics. This interview was conducted December 21, 2011 by Wade Keller and Bruce Mitchell, but has never been published in transcription format previously.

Wade Keller: This was a rough year for you and your family and the death of your brother Randy Savage. Can you talk about how that affected you personally?

Lanny Poffo: Well, it was a terrible loss. He is survived by myself and my mother and my daughter. It was May 20th and I was on my way to California. I turned on my cell phone at the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport and I got half of the news. Then I called the Largo Medical Center and learned the rest of it. I tell you what, then I called my very dear friend Jimmy Hart who did not know about it. I told him to please call the promoter and tell him I wasn't coming in. Then I got myself on the faster plane I could back to Tampa. I was able to see my mother at 7 p.m.

He was a tremendous, large part of my life and he was - I can say - not only was he a great man, but he was also a good man. Christopher Columbus I could call a great man but not a good man. My brother was as good a man as you can have and still be great. I'm holding in my hand an issue of Globe Magazine, it's like National Enquirer. It says "Farewell to the Stars We've Loved and Lost in 2011." You've got Peter Falk, Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Russell, Jack Lelane, Amy Winehouse, Joe Frasier, and there right next to Betty Ford and James Arness is Randy Savage.

Keller: The term "iconic" has been overused lately since WCW began using in the late 1990s, but Randy Savage was a true icon in the truest sense of the word at the highest level. Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, Randy Savage - those are the wrestlers who redefined and reshaped what people saw as pro wrestling after Vince McMahon took it national. He was just so memorable and he was a big part of the Monday Night War with WCW and a color commentator on Monday Night Raw even after the big early WrestleMania years.

Poffo: Don't forget he was also in the movie "Spiderman," which was one of the all-time greats.

Keller: What was the name of his character?

Poffo: Bonesaw McGraw. Some people didn't recognize him because they gave him hair extensions and he had his beard as long as a rabbi. As soon as he spoke, you know.

Keller: Have you gotten information on what you think was the cause of death or the reason

he died when he did at his age?

Poffo: Yes, it's ventricular fibrillation. The heart is divided into four chambers - left and right atria on top, and left and right ventricle on the bottom. The ventricles are shaped like a V. Now, fibrillation is a fancy word for quiver. So when the ventricle began to quiver, that means it wasn't getting his blood to the various parts of his body including his brain. If they were to have fibrulators there, which are those electric nodes they place on the chest, if they were able to bring him back, he would have still had brain damage because when the brain doesn't get enough oxygen through the hemoglobin of the blood... It sounds like I'm trying to be a genius, but I didn't know this until I Google'd it and became an expert ten minutes later. It happens to people when they reach the age of 60. He was 58 and a half, so that was close enough. I can say it's a beautiful death. It's very painless. He just told his wife, "I don't feel very well, I think I'm going to pass out." Then he did. Compare it to people who battle cancer or lupus or diabetes, this is a very easy death.

Caller: Would you like to go back to WWE as a manager?

Poffo: I just turned 57 the day before yesterday. I share the same birthday and year with actor Denzel Washington and between the two of us we've garnered two Academy Awards. The truth is, I wrestle on independents. Anybody who emails me or goes on my website, GeniusLannyPoffo.com or calls me up, any serious offer will be considered. I really enjoy it because it makes me feel young and I enjoy doing things like that. If WWE ever got ahold of me and offered me anything, I would certainly do it.

Keller: No bad-blood, no hard-feelings. If they called you up would absolutely participate if they wanted you do on their show.

Poffo: The only reason I haven't is they haven't asked.

Keller: Do you have other people in that company - wrestlers or otherwise - who you keep in touch with who would let WWE know you are interested?

Poffo: They know exactly where I live because four times a year I get a royalty check from whoever bought different DVDs and things that they still sell. So I'm not a hard guy to get ahold of. I haven't moved in all these years. They know me. Plus they give me tax forms I have to take from that.

Keller: Is there any reason WWE hasn't brought you back for anything?

Poffo: Well, everything is about supply and demand. Right now I'm in huge supply and very little demand.

Caller: I enjoyed your Torch Talk with Wade a couple of years ago. If Vince McMahon called you and asked you to induct Randy into the Hall of Fame, would you do that?

Poffo: Yes.

Keller: I had heard that you said there were stipulations that Randy wanted or that you wanted regarding the Hall of Fame?

Poffo: Yes, Randy wouldn't go in unless I went in and my father went in. He wanted to go in as the Poffo family. That was his stipulation.

Keller: Would you hold him to that?

Poffo: Yes. But let me also add that nobody has contacted me from the WWE, so we're just speculating. In other words, Randy got the idea to go in as the Poffos right after the Von Erichs went in. Then we went to Olive Garden to celebrate my father's birthday. It turned out to be his last. He said, "If anybody wants me in the Hall of Fame, I'm not going in without my father and my brother." As incoherent as he was at the time, he smiled and he enjoyed it and he understood. And he was very, very happy to hear that. However, let me reiterate. Nobody so far has contacted me for the Hall of Fame, but these are the stipulations I would hold to. We didn't cremate him against his wishes, so we certainly won't induct him into the Hall of Fame against his wishes. We'll do it exactly the way he wanted.

Caller: What is Lanny's memory of the best rib that Curt Hennig played on him? He ribbed everybody, so he had to get Lanny at least a couple of times. Two, does Lanny still have a problem with Kenny Bolin and their feud from two years ago? Or was that a work to get everyone stirred up.

Poffo: I can just tell you that, unbelievable as it sounds, nobody ever ribbed me in WWE. I think they were afraid of Randy. That's all I could surmise from that. When I got fired and returned about six months later to manage the Beverly Brothers, there were about eight wrestlers named who they thought it was funny to empty their bowels into people's suit cases. So I had heard about that I got really nervous about it. So my first match was in Rochester, New York. I had my cap and gown and my clothes and everything in my luggage. I hid them so well, I couldn't find them. So you could say the best rib every pulled on me was by me just out of fear of somebody ribbing me.

Keller: Do you know of anything else Curt Hennig did to rib others that stands out in your memory?

Poffo: I would say going to bathroom in people's suit cases has to be the tops. But in my opinion, that's not a rib, that's worse than a rib. That's vandalism.

Keller: Did you get along with Curt and like him despite that, or was it more cameras were on and you're next to each other, cameras were off and you went your separate ways?

Poffo: I don't know how he felt about me, but I certainly loved him. He was an excellent person. The truth is, a lot of people don't remember this, but I certainly do. Back when I was Leaping Lanny, a lot of my assignments, whatever heel would come in who had designed to eventually climb the ladder and work with Hulk Hogan, they had to wrestle me first. I

would put them over in every town. I wrestled Curt Hennig about 20 times. Randy came up to me and said, "Man, you're having a hell of a match with him. How is he to work with?" I said, "You couldn't believe it, he's fantastic." I loved working with him. He was excellent. He always made me look good, and then he would do his Perfect Plex. I used to lay there like I was dead. I loved wrestling him, I loved being with him, he certainly gave me the best four months I ever had in the business. So did Hulk Hogan. I just enjoyed every minute of it. What an excellent person and a great personality. Everybody loved him. It was a tremendous loss.

As for Kenny Bolin, I used to do a little thing called "Pop the Crowd" or what was the name of it? We had a little thing where we would go on the podcast and finally it wasn't fun anymore so I quit.

Keller: Was it a work or real?

Poffo: I didn't know what he thought it was, but I didn't like it. He said some things about my family that even though he was working, I took it as a shoot and decided this isn't fun anymore and I'm not playing it. So I hung up the phone and I don't listen to it anymore.

Caller: Where did they get the jobbers who wrestled on WWF Superstars? Also, his best poem was when he was gonna wrestle Hercules and he made fun of Jesse Ventura's wig. I laughed so hard at that.

Keller: Do you remember that poem?

Poffo: Hercules Hernandez is a mountain of a man, his body is impervious to pain... But all his big decisions, he is leaving up to Heenan. That indicates he doesn't have a brain... I know you think I'm crazy for facing such a man, I realize that he is awfully big, but I came here to beat the odds and score a victory. That ought to make Ventura flip his wig...

Ventura was wearing a wig that day. And then during the punchline I turned my direction away from Hercules and I pointed toward Ventura and he sold it like I had called him worse names than that. It really popped the crowd.

Keller: Also, what about jobbers at the syndicated tapings back in the 1980s and early 1990s. Where did they get those wrestlers who would do jobs to the bigger stars?

Poffo: Locally, there were a lot of talents in the locale and some of these guys would drive and drive many many miles. I had a few friends that got into the business and I advised them, I said, "Why don't you just go fine out when they're going to have Wrestling Challenge or Superstars and do the jobs?" Some of them took my advice, some of them did not. The thing is, if you have any talent at all, they will see it. Louie Spicolli started doing jobs on Superstars and finally he became successful in WCW. I mean, I know it's kind of a grim way to make a living, especially because some of the wrestlers would commit what I considered to be jobroni abuse. In other words, they would take the jobroni and drop him on their heads and hurt them. They don't work like that with other people. I don't even use the word jobroni because they're the ones who make you look good and you know better.

Keller: Were there specific wrestlers who were known to be stiff with the jobbers?

Poffo: It seemed like to a certain degree all of them who would mistreat certain people. I don't know if they're just bullies of what. There's quite a few of them. Let's put it this way, there are very few who didn't.

Keller: Yet you still recommended friends take this job? (laughs)

Poffo: Yes, it's between a rock and a hard place. You're either going to sit home and get another year older or you're going to go to the show and try your stuff. Now let's say you've got a million dollar body, that was highly prized back in the day - and it still is. They'll notice it if you take your shirt off and you look better than the guy who's beating you, somebody is going to pay attention to that. I'll tell you many, many years before he got his break, my brother did jobs for "Superstar" Billy Graham and talent like that. And also "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan many years ago before he was a Hacksaw, he did jobs right on TV for the top people of the WWF.

Keller: Rick Rude was one example of someone who did jobs in the NWA and went on to get a big push.

Poffo: It's called paying your dues. We've all done it. I've done it more than most, and I got to wrestle Hulk Hogan on NBC. Was it worth it? Absolutely yes. If you're afraid to lose, you'll never win.

Bruce Mitchell: Before you and Randy Savage went to the WWF, you had your promotion with your father, ICW in the Tennessee area. One of the wildest, crazy promotional wars I ever heard of was yours with the Jarrett Promotion. How dangerous did it get and how strange did it get competing against the Jarretts for the wrestling fans' dollar?

Poffo: I have a very good alibi when my brother had his little problem with Bill Dundee in the parking lot. I was with El Brezaro. My girlfriend who became my wife and not my ex-wife and I were with George Weingroff in Knoxville, Tennessee at the World Fair that very day. When I got home I realized I was very, very lucky that I wasn't there because I hate that type of thing. I always like to be somewhere else when that stuff happens; that's not my style. That's all water under the bridge now. The person who ended the feud, I bet you didn't know this - but I give credit and not blame to one person who took the olive branch to the Jarrett family and their dominion... It was Jimmy Hart. He got Randy Savage vs. Jerry Lawler to happen in Memphis and it sold out. There were more people outside the Mid-South Coliseum than were in. Then they went to Louisville, Rupp Arena, Evansville, and they drew nothing but money when the territory was previously on its butt. It was Jimmy Hart. Not only that, but it was Jimmy Hart that got Randy into the WWF. It was Jimmy Hart that got Randy into WCW. Three times, without him none of this would have happened. Jimmy Hart, all he does is try to help and lift and elevate, and all he gets is tired. I'm

sick of it. I want Jimmy Hart to get the credit he deserves. He's the man that got Randy where he got and Randy always took care of his little brother. You can't keep a man from drowning if you're drowning if you're drowning yourself, so only the strong can help the weak. Jimmy Hart was instrumental in every situation that Randy rose to power. If it weren't for Jimmy Hart, Randy could have been the greatest wrestler you never heard of. Instead of that, he's on the cover of Globe magazine right next to Elizabeth Taylor, Peter Falk. There were only ten on the cover of the Globe out of 93 stars who were gone but not forgotten. That's where he belongs. He's an icon

Mitchell: You had to really know wrestling to know that Randy Savage was doing such good work, but you guys were outlaws and had run against an established promotion. There was not a lot of coverage of Randy Savage and what you all did until you got to Memphis. Most fans had no idea who Randy Savage was, but because your brother was fully formed and such a good act at that point, he exploded on the WWF scene. The other thing I'd say is, I've seen it since then, but people talk about the WCW invasion of the WWF angle. The first one that was done was Randy Savage and Angelo Poffo and you invading the WMC Channel 5 studios in Memphis. You're right, it exploded the territory.

Poffo: You're 66 percent right. I was not there. As a matter of fact...

Mitchell: Wade will tell you I'm usually 66 percent right.

Poffo: The reason I know I was not there is I was in Shreveport, Louisiana working for Bill Watts at the time. My daughter was born in Shreveport on May 29th, 1984. When Randy and Bill Dundee were in the parking lot in Nashville, I was in Knoxville at the World Fair. The parking lot fight in Nashville as a shoot. Of course, the Channel 5 incident in Memphis was a work... Can't we just give Jimmy Hart some credit before we all die of old age and can't thank each other anymore. Every good thing that happened to our family from 1984 on, Jimmy Hart was right in the middle of it.

Mitchell: Jimmy Hart is one of the hardest workers I've ever heard about or seen in wrestling, hustling and making deals big and small. There's a lot of Jimmy Hart's finger printers big and small.

Caller: Was Randy Savage ever offended that Vince McMahon never brought him back in later years?

Poffo: I would say he had probably accomplished all he had set out to and he was very comfortable with his retirement. Naturally I suppose - I don't want to put words in his mouth, it'd be very wrong of me to do that ethically - I think the good times outweighed the and and he was very, very happy and satisfied in the last ten years of his life.

PWTorch VIP members can listen to this entire 104 minute interview at the VIP website.

By Wade Keller, PWTorch editor

They opened the PPV differently than usual, with a battle royal in progress with the announcers Michael Cole, Booker T, and Jerry Lawler quickly catching viewers up on the stip, which was the winner got to face either the U.S. Champion or IC Champion later.

(1) Christian won a battle royal in 12:00 to earn a title shot.

When they joined the match in progress, Jerry Lawler said the wrestlers were "literally packed in the ring." Titus O'Neill eliminated The Great Khali, but then he missed a flying kick and then got knocked over the top rope. U.S. Champ Santino and Cody Rhodes were watching at ringside. The final seven were William Regal, Christian, Alex Riley, Darren Young, The Miz, Tyson Kidd, David Otunga. In the end, Christian eliminated Miz, then appeared to choose Santino. It took 12 minutes of TV time.

A over the top comedic video aired hyping John Laurinaitis's "People Power." It showed a meter that indicated "100 Percent of People Like People Power."

(2) R-Truth & Kofi Kingston beat Jack Swagger & Dolph Ziggler (w/Vickie Guerrero) in 12:00 to retain the WWE Tag Team Titles.

Vickie said before the match she is on the short list to take over as G.M. in the "unfortunately event" Laurinaitis is fired later. She said first, though, she'll usher in a new era of tag team excellence. Truth hot-tagged in after several minutes and had a flurry of offense against Swagger. Vickie distracted the ref, then Ziggler distracted Truth, then Swagger threw Truth into the top turnbuckle. He followed with a swing splash out of the corner for a two count. The heels then beat up on Truth for another five minutes before he hot-tagged Kingston. Kingston showed great fire and played to the crowd. Swagger broke up a Kofi pin attempt after a top rope bodyblock. Kingston knocked Swagger out of the ring, but then Ziggler surprised Kofi with the Zig Zag. Truth broke up the pin. Kofi caught a charging Ziggler with Trouble in Paradise for the win. Vickie threw a fit afterward... A good tag match with a familiar formula. Ziggler and Kofi got to shine with their athleticism and bumps. (***)

Backstage Eve told Curt Hawkins and Tyler Reks that they were to confiscate any signs that were derogatory toward Laurinaitis. She checked with David Otunga who said it was perfectly legal.

(3) Layla pinned Beth Phoenix in 7:00 to retain the Divas Championship.

Phoenix dominated early including extended leg submission attempts. Layla came back around 5:00. She reversed a Phoenix press slam with a face-plant DDT that looked really solid. That led to a near fall for her. Layla finished Phoenix with a neckbreaker a minute later... Layla seems to have her timing and wind back. Good Divas match. (**)

Backstage Matt Striker sheepishly asked Randy Orton for his thoughts on what happened between him and Sheamus on Smackdown on Friday. After the clip aired, Orton said it was his way of telling him he can't beat him with the

World Title at stake. He said if the roles were reversed, he would have taken a brogue kick, so he's not sorry. Chris Jericho walked into the picture and said Orton was "over-exaggerating" by saying none of the four like one another. Jericho said he liked watching Orton and Sheamus wear each other down on Friday. He said he's been on a roll lately. He said he hasn't beat Alberto Del Rio, but that's because he was scared to face him. He said he'll win a WWE World Title for the seventh time tonight and prove again he's the best in the world at whatever he does. Orton said he'll be the best in the world at getting RKO'd and losing to him. Good segment. Where was it on Friday's show?

(4) Sheamus defeated Chris Jericho, Randy Orton, and Alberto Del Rio (w/Ricardo Rodriguez) in 16:00 to retain the World Hvt. Title.

Orton and Sheamus knocked Del Rio and Jericho out of the match early, then battled each other. The two fresh heels entered and went after Orton and Sheamus, but eventually turned on one another. Orton survived a cross-ambreaker thanks to Jericho breaking it up. The announcers explained the motivation for that move. Orton gave a double DDT to both Del Rio and Ricardo and then scored a near fall at 13:00. Jericho caught Orton with a Code Breaker, but Orton rolled to the floor. Del Rio then gave Jericho a cross armbreaker mid-ring. Jericho escaped and went for the Walls of Jericho. When he applied it, a part of the crowd popped for him. Sheamus broke it up with a Brogue Kick attempt. Cole said Jericho was fueled by a WWE.com article that questioned whether he should have even returned to WWE since he hasn't won a title yet. He said Jericho is livid about the article. Orton broke up a Walls of Jericho on Sheamus at 15:00. Orton hit the RKO to break it up. Cole ruined the near fall by saying, "We have a new champion!" even before the ref began his count. Of course, Del Rio broke up the count. Orton gave Del Rio the RKO, but Sheamus surprised Orton with a Brogue Kick. Jericho then rolled up Sheamus for a believable near fall with a hand full of tights. Sheamus then came right back and pinned Jericho with his White Noise finisher... Good four-way match, as you'd expect with this group. They did a great job the closing minutes with dramatic, believable near finishes. (***/4)

Backstage Cody Rhodes bragged to Eve that Christian made the right choice to face Santino since Christian is surely rusty and he would have destroyed him. Christian walked up to Miz and said he changed his mind.

(5) Brodus Clay pinned Miz in 5:00.

On his way to the ring, Miz complained that the fans didn't greet him with cheers because he was gracing their presence twice. He then ripped on Brodus Clay and the fans who cheer him. Miz then did a mock version of Brodus's dancing. Booker made a big deal out of Brodus using an overhead slam off the second rope. Brodus followed up with a splash, Earthquake-style, for the win... (*)

They aired a "Don't Try This At Home" video... In the crowd, Reks and Hawkins tore up signs from fans they didn't like. Lawler said fans

can spend hours making these signs. One fan was especially upset with Reks yanking his "Laurinaitis = Loser" sign away from him.

(6) Christian pinned Cody Rhodes in 7:00 to win the Intercontinental Title.

Before the match Cody did some anti-Carolinas mic work. A fast-paced back and forth match ended with Christian reversing Cody's attempt to throw him hard into the corner and then hit a Kill Switch for the win... Nothing bad about the match. Good pacing and action, but at less than eight minutes, hardly epic. (**1/4)

After airing a clip of C.M. Punk getting chokeslammed by Kane, Josh Mathews interviewed Punk backstage. He said he's not feeling great, but what makes him smile is knowing that Laurinaitis is soon out of a job. He said if you told Vince McMahon a few years ago that C.M. Punk and Daniel Bryan would be headlining a PPV in a World Title match, he'd have asked who they were. Punk imitated Vince's gravelly voice as he said it. As Punk said it's going to be not only a five-star match, A.J. interrupted and flirtatiously said it'll be a lot of fun to watch. She wished him luck. He didn't know how to react, and turned and walked away.

(7) C.M. Punk pinned Daniel Bryan in 23:00 to retain the WWE Title.

The crowd battled in chants of "Let's Go Punk! / Daniel Bryan." Lawler said he was amazed, but attributed it to the "Yes" chant. The Punk chants were louder. Punk dominated early with a lot of matwork. At 6:00 Bryan took over and he also went with submission attempts and mat work. At 15:00 Bryan threw some roundkicks to Punk's chest. Punk returned fire with a legwhip and then a figure-four. The crowd let out "whoos!" in response. More rapid-fire action and near falls back and forth. At 22:00 Punk hit a top rope flying elbow, but when he landed he couldn't make the cover, selling that his ribs were injured. A "Randy Savage!" chant broke out briefly. At 23:00 Bryan applied the Yes Lock. Bryan torqued backwards so far that his shoulders were down. The ref counted to three and immediately after Punk tapped... Excellent match. What you'd expect from these two, and nice to see them get nearly 25 minutes. (****)

Backstage Teddy Long was all smiles around Eve and Otunga. Eve and Otunga said he won't get his old job back of Laurinaitis loses.

(8) Rybak pinned Hunico (w/Camacho) in 2:00.

Total squash. Some "Goldberg" chants early. He kicked Hunico's bike at ringside afterward.

A commercial aired for the WCW Clash of the Champions DVD.

Cole said WWE's Board denied a last second appeal by Laurinaitis.

(9) John Laurinaitis pinned John Cena to keep his job in 17:00.

Cole said he was supporting Laurinaitis and held up his "People Power" sign that he printed out from WWE.com. Cole said Laurinaitis has been retired from in-ring action for 12 years. Laurinaitis, as soon as the bell rang, ran for it, trying to escape into the crowd. Cena caught him and threw him into the ring. He pulled his shirt up and chopped him. Then he gave him an

airplane spin. Laurinaitis tumbled to the floor through the ropes. The announcers laughed. Cena picked up the ringside bell and dinged it in Laurinaitis's ear. Cena put Laurinaitis in a chair at ringside at the announce desk, then sat next to him and put on a headset. Cena imitated Cole; Laurinaitis muttered, "Five time! Five time!" to imitate Booker. The announcers continued to cackle as if this was just funniest thing they had ever seen. Laurinaitis asked for a handshake. The crowd boomed. Cena slapped him and then body slammed him instead.

Cena grabbed a mic from ringside and told Laurinaitis that he's going to put him in an STF. He said he can tapout or if he lasts ten seconds, he'd let go. Laurinaitis lasted ten seconds. Cena said, "Wow, that was pretty good." He said it's a "good news/bad news scenario" for Laurinaitis. He said the good news is he made it, the bad news is he was going to do it again. Laurinaitis lasted ten seconds again. Cole was elated. "What a man! What a courageous, brave man." Cena went out to get a drink. There were some catcalls and boos as fans began to realize this was passing as their main event match. Cena grabbed several water bottles and brought them to Laurinaitis. He poured several bottles of water over him. He then poured a third bottle down Laurinaitis's pants. Booker said, "Shrinkage." Cena then pulled a fire extinguisher out from under the ring and sprayed him with it for 10 seconds or so. Then he poured trash over him. Laurinaitis tried to run away again through the crowd, but Cena caught him. Laurinaitis, though, yanked Cena's injured arm over the ring barrier. Cole cheered on Laurinaitis, saying that was the arm Brock Lesnar injured with the kimura lock last month.

Laurinaitis threw Cena into the ringside steps. Cole said Big Johnny was angry and Cena triggered the comeback by pouring garbage on him. Laurinaitis bashed Cena with a chair across the back twice for a two count. Cena blocked a chairshot and then chopped Laurinaitis with the chair across his leg. Laurinaitis went down. Cena signaled for "You Can't See Me" and dropped onto Laurinaitis with the chair. Laurinaitis fired back with a low blow. Laurinaitis began to escape into the crowd again. If Laurinaitis got counted out, would he be fired? If so, how did retreating help his cause? Cole said, "If it's a no contest, Johnny still has a job, right?" Since when is a countout interchangeable with a no contest? That makes no sense. Anyway, Big Show yanked Laurinaitis back to the ring by his ear. The crowd cheered, but didn't seem to pop huge, for Show's appearance. Show threw Laurinaitis into the ring, stepped on his fingers, and then teased a chokeslam. Instead, Show shoved Laurinaitis into Cena's arms. Cena lifted Laurinaitis for an Attitude Adjustment, but then Show KO punched him. "What the hell just happened?" asked Booker. Lawler asked, "Was that an accident or what?" Laurinaitis recovered after a minute just enough to roll Cena over and scored the three count. Cole yelled, "Big Johnny did it! Big Johnny's still the boss!" ... That went a long time, but was what you'd expect from this type of gimmicky match. The Show turn made storyline-sense. (NR)

KELLER PPV BLOG

By Wade Keller,
PWTorch editor



- The battle royal was a solid surprise bonus match in part because it featured the return of Christian. The fans reacted to Christian like a returning veteran star and popped for his win. It ended up seeming to be, more than anything, a bone thrown to the undercard wrestlers who normally don't get PPV exposure or PPV bonuses.

- The tag match showed what a good tag team division can feature in terms of a mix of personalities who have good athleticism who aren't in the singles title hunt, but collectively can fill 10-15 minutes with good action that feels meaningful because of the titles at stake.

- Lawler complained about Eve ordering Curt Hawkins and Tyler Reks to confiscate signs went against Freedom of Speech. Lawler missed the day in school when we were all taught Freedom of Speech applies to the government regulating speech, not private corporations who are holding live events where people gather.

- Layla and Phoenix went out there and packed a good match into seven minutes they were given. Layla seemed to have her timing and cardio back.

- Chris Jericho said Randy Orton was "over-exaggerating." It's one thing to use big words to act aloof, but it's another to add onto an already long word to create one that doesn't actually exist.

- That promo with Randy Orton and Jericho would have been a good addition to Smackdown on Friday to help sell the PPV. It was better than anything on Smackdown in terms of promos selling this PPV.

- Quotebook - Michael Cole: "Randy Orton, a nine-time World Champion; many call him the franchise of Friday Night Smackdown."

- I liked Lilian Garcia's in-ring pre-match introductions. It gave the World Title four-way a big match feel. She's very good at that job.

- It's not a WWE multi-person match without that ridiculous WWE math. In this instance, Lawler had the honors of saying Sheamus had a "one-in-four" chance of retaining his title. That's only true if every wrestler is exactly equal in skill.

- A good, three-star-plus Fatal Four-way match for the World Title. I liked seeing Sheamus retain the title. I'm all for long title reigns, especially when the duration of the reign against tough competition can be used to make a case for Sheamus being a true top tier star. It builds him up in the eyes of the fans as a major star. WWE needs to use everything they can to elevate current main eventers to real draws, and long title reigns can help in that regard.

- Orton was fuming after the loss. You wonder if they're thinking of turning Orton, and having his frustration with not winning the World Title by playing it fair being what causes him to snap. Would WWE be able to get Orton over as a heel, though, or would fans just cheer him as a heel like last time.

- Quotebook - Michael Cole to Booker T: "I do my research, Booker. I don't spend my week

worrying about stuff on the Internet."

- Miz continues to challenge King Kong Bundy for the worst career tailspin after main eventing a WrestleMania.

- Quotebook - The Miz: "The Rhodes family and the Carolinas go way back... You people are short-sighted and biased and I am a better man for not having grown up around you."

- I'd like to see Garcia do the formal ring introductions in the ring before IC Title matches, not just the World Title and WWE Title matches. It would give the secondary title matches a more prestigious feeling.

- Notice how, unlike when Orton appeared to have a pin earlier when Cole declared the match over even before the ref began his count (meaning, of course, it wasn't the finish), when Christian had Cody covered, Cole instead said, "Is he gonna do this? He does!" Vince McMahon's aggravating policy of having announcers give away finishes and kick-outs through predictable reverse psychology continues.

- It's smart to give Christian a big title win fresh back from his injury timeout. It gives him some momentum out of the gate and gets him right into the mix. Will they do anything, though, to explain his apparent transition from a heel to a babyface? Fans seemed willing, though, to greet him as a returning star they were glad to see. In a way, that's an indictment of WWE's booking that they don't hold anything against him for how he acted before his injury hiatus.

- When Daniel Bryan's ring entrance began, it sealed the match order. Indeed, John Cena would headline even though no title is on the line and despite facing a retired wrestler/executive. I was hoping they'd take this opportunity to put the World Title or WWE Title after Cena, but it wasn't realistic given the positioning of the Cena-Laurinaitis hype on Raw above all else last week.

- Quotebook - Michael Cole on the prospect of Laurinaitis being fired: "It'd be like Gandhi going away."

- Quotebook - Michael Cole after Punk-Bryan: "That one is going to be remembered for a long, long time."

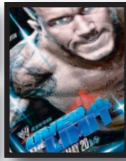
- Quotebook - Michael Cole: "I'd love to have a body like that." Booker in response: "Of course you would, look at you."

- Quotebook - Jerry Lawler: "Oh look, there's a string hanging off of Laurinaitis's sleeve. Oh wait, that's his arm."

- When the fans didn't exactly pop huge for Big Show dragging Laurinaitis to the ring by his ear, was that a sign that they figured he was going to turn heel and saw it coming a mile away, or did they lose all respect for him the way he cried and begged for his job and let himself be walked on.

- If Bobby Heenan were on commentary, he would have said as Big Show walked to the ring, "Who's side is he on?!"

- Quotebook - Jerry Lawler after John Laurinaitis's win: "This may be the darkest day in the history of this company." Not to be overly picky here, but he did preside over announcing the death of Owen Hart and was at the Raw after Chris Benoit killed his family and himself. Setting real life aside, it was still a crazy exaggeration given all of the big angles over the years. The effect of this finish was just status quo, hardly qualifying for the darkest day ever in WWE storyline history.



Bryan the time and opponent to show his best, and he (and Punk) did. That it finished with one of the classic strong babyface-challenger-came-just-this-close-to-winning-the-world-championship finish from the territory days made it even better, particularly since it goes completely counter to the cowardly weasel can't-beat-anybody character Bryan plays the rest of the time.

The four-way match for the other world title was about as good as those things get, well laid out – the guy that's leaving who can always get himself back over loses (Chris Jericho), the real star is kept strong but doesn't actually win (Randy Orton) and the new star who shouldn't lose his title wins (Sheamus).

I don't know why Layla beat Beth Phoenix, but if the idea is to build anticipation for the return of Karma I for one can't wait. I've been watching these "genetic freak" types for twenty-five years and Ryback doesn't have it. Most of them didn't. Christian beating Cody Rhodes for the IC belt was the epitome of mid-carders on a mid-card pay per view having a mid-card match mid-card. On the other hand Kofi Kingston & R. Truth successfully defending their championship against Jack Swagger & Dolph Ziggler was a WWE tag match.

What you thought of the comedy main event depended on what you thought of the old lady at ringside grabbing John Laurinitis's head and telling him to "wake up." That's two big matches out of three that our hero John Cena lost because he showed off and tried to humiliate his opponent instead of taken care of business and simply winning the match. Raligh certainly has seen its share of "Stupid Sting" finishes. That the commentators couldn't figure out why Big Show did it (to get his job back) didn't help. It does set up a new heel in Big Show for the guy, something they really need.

Greg Parks, columnist (5.5)

As much as the Over the Limit main event didn't appeal to my tastes of what the main event of a pay per-view should be, the crowd at the restaurant where I watched the show at it up - and I know it happened elsewhere too. So there is an audience for things like that.

This score usually represents a mild thumbs-up, but even that is an acknowledgment that this show surpassed expectations. It was anchored by a four-star performance from Daniel Bryan and C.M. Punk. Perhaps the best news coming out of the PPV is that the feud may last longer than many imagined.

The opening battle royal was a unique way to start the show. Like most battle royals, it didn't get good until it was down to the final few. Christian returning as a face was the right move, given the depth issues on that side of Smackdown. Unfortunately, that push comes at the expense of Cody Rhodes, whose downward spiral into mediocrity continues. Say hello to the Miz while you're there, Cody.

The tag title match was about what you'd expect from those four. It's clear that Kofi

Kingston and Dolph Ziggler have developed a chemistry from all their time wrestling each other. The Divas match picked up late and they worked hard, but the results weren't there early.

The World Title Fatal Four-Way was worlds better than the build-up. They get extra credit for making me think Chris Jericho had a chance to win. Brodus Clay's match against the Miz may have been his best singles match, which isn't saying much.

The Clay and Ryback matches though continue to dilute what constitutes a PPV-worthy or "special" set of matches, since we see the same thing for free every week. The main event went as most predicted as far as Big Show's involvement. It makes sense on one hand, but on the other, Show could've helped Cena and just been re-hired by the guy who'd replace Laurinitis. A mixed bag show for sure.

James Caldwell, assistant editor (5.0)

This was an example of WWE having too many PPVs on the schedule. PPVs should feel like an "event" and such "events" should be protected like big deals. This has been TNA's problem throughout company history. For WWE, when they ask people to spend \$45-55 on pay-per-view and when they ask live attendees to spend PPV prices for a ticket, there should be a sense that what they're paying for is an "event." Never during this three-hour-plus show (including the pre-show) did this feel like an "event" to me. At times, it felt like WWE brought the camera crew, announcers, stage, and pyro to a Sunday night Supershow and asked people to spend PPV-level prices to see a house show. It was a pretty good house show, but the totality of the "event" was not PPV-worthy.

C.M. Punk vs. Daniel Bryan was a solid four-star match, but I never got a sense that the title was in jeopardy and I wasn't blown away by the match. I had reasonable expectations, especially considering the pre-PPV build-up was virtually non-existent and A.J.'s presence was looming. But, there was a sense that once the match was over, it was time to move on. Almost like a really good house show main event that you know doesn't have consequences in the universe WWE has created.

The one match that seemed to have a sense of purpose was the Fatal Four-way World Title match because Randy Orton is on the upswing again, Sheamus got his mojo back at Extreme Rules three weeks ago, Chris Jericho's presence makes things feel important despite his multiple title match losses since returning to WWE, and the Orton-Sheamus issue seems to be going somewhere. The match was a solid bout - the tired four-way format notwithstanding - and gave Sheamus another credibility boost while continuing to build to an eventual Orton-Sheamus title match.

Elsewhere, there was a decent battle royal (again, setting the tone of this feeling like a house show with the standard "winner gets a title shot later in the show" gimmick), a pretty good Tag Title match, a decent Divas Title match, and a "feel good" IC Title change to Christian after the crowd was behind him during the battle royal. Clay and Ryback's squash wins filled gaps, but those felt like popcorn matches after intermission.

So, by the time the main event rolled around, this was an okay show. I didn't sense anything had been awful, but it still didn't feel like an event.

Then, Cena vs. Laurinitis dragged the audience through the mud, poured trash on the customer, yanked the customer's arm across the barricade, insulted the intelligence of the audience, and delivered a poor excuse for a "match." John Cena may be the worst babyface of all-time, having apparently not learned his lesson from WrestleMania when his character's cockiness cost him the "biggest match ever" attempting the People's Elbow on The Rock.

This time, Cena had five or six or 16 pinfall/submission opportunities, but opted to toy with Laurinitis instead of pinning the guy in the first minute to get Laurinitis fired. He didn't seem bothered by Laurinitis on the final Raw before the PPV when he cracked jokes and played games and made weird faces when he came face-to-face with Laurinitis in the ring for the first time since Laurinitis tried to break his arm and take away his livelihood. So, he obviously wasn't concerned about getting revenge in the PPV match, making it senseless for him to try to pick apart Laurinitis when the only goal for Cena should have been getting a quick pin, getting the guy fired, and everyone moves on. Every babyface on the WWE roster should be mad at Cena for screwing around instead of getting Laurinitis fired by finishing him early.

I expect WWE to come up with a half-brained explanation for why Big Show decided to "help" Laurinitis in order to curry favor to get his job back instead of helping Cena get Laurinitis fired, and then getting hired by a new GM. I guess it's the ol' story of being loyal to the "devil you know vs. the devil you don't know" that causes WWE wrestlers to remain blindly loyal to Vince McMahon instead of challenging his authority and fearing being stuck with a worse situation (someone besides McMahon running WWE or having to find another job). That's the entire basis of the Big Show story following that promo about Show's only line of work being a WWE wrestler, so I guess it's fitting. It just doesn't make it entertaining or worth the \$45 price tag for this PPV.

Wade Keller, editor (5.5)

A very good, borderline excellent Punk-Bryan match wasn't enough to make this a strong thumbs up.

I know Cena is the top star and this entire PPV was built around his match against Laurinitis, but this was an opportunity for WWE to given the World Title a boost in perception by positioning it last. In tandem with treating it the last three weeks as a bigger deal than Cena-Laurinitis, I think it could have definitely been a more appropriate way to close out the three hour show. Randy Orton is a big, big star. Jericho is a big star. Sheamus winning was a feel-good moment to close the PPV.

The Cena-Laurinitis was a logic-challenged overly long bad comedy fest. Cena is over enough and Laurinitis is good enough as the comedic foil that it worked on a certain level with the live crowd, but the forced laughter throughout by the announcers made it almost unbearable to watch on PPV.

There wasn't enough strength to the undercard to make this a strong thumbs up show even accounting for two strong world title matches.

**5/18 WWE SMACKDOWN SUMMARY**

John Laurinaitis complained about the restrictions the Board put on his match. C.M. Punk came out and said he hopes he loses. Laurinaitis booked him against Kane later... (1) Kofi Kingston & R-Truth beat Darren Young & Titus O'Neil in 3:00... The "B.A. Star" campaign spot aired with Alberto Del Rio and Mark Henry smiling with kids... Daniel Sandow beat up Yoshi Tatsu after declaring he wasn't a worthy opponent for an actual match... Matt Striker interviewed Randy Orton and Sheamus backstage who played up their tension... (2) Daniel Bryan beat Zach Ryder in 2:30... (3) Kane beat Daniel Bryan via DQ in 12:00 after Daniel Bryan, who did commentary, hit Kane with a chair to get Punk DQ'd. Kane attacked Punk as Bryan smiled from a distance... (4) Santino Marella pinned Cody Rhodes in 2:00 in a U.S. Champ vs. IC Champ match... (5) Sheamus beat Randy Orton with a roll-up in 24:00, after which Orton RKO'd Sheamus instead of shaking his hand...

RANDOM THOUGHTS & QUOTES

•Quotebook - John Laurinaitis: "I know I asked for this match with John Cena, but... this Sunday it's like leading a lamb to slaughter. That's not fair. I'm approaching 40 years old and I'm not as flexible as I used to be. I mean, I can still bench press 250 pounds and I can also run a mile in six minutes, and I'm still as tough as I used to be, but that does not qualify me to compete against John Cena."

•John Laurinaitis selling the strict stipulations was sorta funny. It accentuated the idea that Cena is going to destroy him on Sunday, which seemed to be the feeling they wanted viewers to have at the conclusion of Monday's show.

•Booker said that it was stupid to put himself in a match against Cena in the first place. Thankfully Josh Mathews was there to explain the obvious to him - that Laurinaitis had different plans for him until the Board eliminated his avenues to cheat. Did Booker really not grasp that?

•Quotebook - C.M. Punk to John Laurinaitis: "When it comes to Kane, I respect him, which is more than I can say for you." (After all the awful things Kane has done, including to Paul Bearer recently, Punk says he respects him? I guess there's a maximum of a three-week memory we're supposed to have as viewers, or else "respect" in WWE means something very different than in the non-WWE world.)

•We're ten minutes into the show and Laurinaitis is still talking. The infatuation with Laurinaitis at this point is going overboard, even with his being in the main event on Sunday.

•Michael Cole's character remains a completely contradictory mess. He passionately defended Laurinaitis after Laurinaitis's meltdown at the end of the 12 minute segment. I don't say it every single week because it just feels redundant, but Cole being a heel commentator

while also being the lead announcer for Raw is a stunningly bad decision by Vince McMahon. Pro wrestling absolutely needs a strong trusted moral straight man as the voice of the show setting the tone for how fans are expected to react to various personalities and angles, while also hard-selling viewers to buy PPVs. They need to pivot away from Cole's current character and slot, either by getting a new lead announcer or having Cole somehow shift back to what he used to be. I remain shocked at some of the decisions Vince McMahon, Kevin Dunn, and Co. have made in recent years, decisions that if WCW had done them in the mid 1990s he would have laughed at their self-destructive consequences.

•Speaking of which, WWE aired the charity appearance by Alberto Del Rio and Mark Henry getting cheered by kids after their inspirational speeches at a B.A. Star rally. I cannot express in words how counter-productive this is to the bottom line and how utterly unnecessary. WWE works so hard to make us believe certain things - including Brock Lesnar punching Cena in the face and drawing hard-way blood - yet they are flippant about this, showing two opponents two days before a PPV smiling for a photo opp together. I am vehemently against this on so many levels, but if this airs, what WWE should do is go back to Josh at ringside and have him say this: "It may look like Del Rio was a good corporate citizen, but we have obtained footage from a parent's cell phone that shows he was anything but a charitable good guy once he thought the cameras were off." Then air footage of a kid after the event approaching Del Rio for an autograph and Del Rio brushing him off rudely and ordering a body guard to get the kid and the parent out of his space. This would turn a huge negative for WWE - showing top heel Del Rio in a circumstance of his being a good guy being nice to kids - and flip it into a positive for selling tickets by portraying him as a jerk. How hard is that? The sad part is the corporate types who don't get wrestling wouldn't even think for a second this is necessary because, after all, "everyone knows it's fake," but how do you explain Triple H, Vince, Dunn, Laurinaitis, and anyone else with a long history in this industry who should "get it" from allowing this to air? This video would be the equivalent of WWE showing Cena being a jerk to fans at some charity event. In other words, it would so against how they portray him and market him that it would hurt ticket sales. It works both ways. Heels should be marketed as being actual pricks, not just nice people who play arrogant jerks on TV.

•You gotta love Damien Sandow dressing in hot pink drunks and purple kneepads. His putting Yoshi Tatsu in a full nelson and slamming his head into the turnbuckle was vicious looking.

•Quotebook - Randy Orton to Sheamus: "I can win the World Championship without even beating the current World Champion. At the same time, I can't think of anyone in that match I'd like to beat more." (How ridiculous does that sound? Orton saying he can become champion without beating the champion is just ludicrous sounding, yet WWE touts it like it's a selling point for the match as opposed to overwhelmingly being bad for the prestige of the title itself.)

•Quotebook - Randy Orton to Sheamus:

"Unlike me, you are a nice guy, and we all know where nice guys finish."

•There were some good believable near falls in those closing minutes of the Punk-Kane match. It was good to see some extra mic time and an angle given to the Punk-Bryan match, which got short-changed on Raw on Monday. Bryan setting up Punk for a post-match attack with a chair by Kane, then cheering on from a safe distance the beatdown and chokeslam was good basic Booking 101 to give fans a reason to want to see Punk get revenge against Bryan on Sunday.

•I haven't seen anyone talk affectionately to a title belt like Santino did here since early-ECW's "Jason - The World's Sexiest Man" practically did it with his ECW TV Title belt.

•What's with the U.S. Champion and IC Champion battling twice this week? Has the brand split ever been less apparent than it is now? At least Josh called it "a rare match" between the two champions. It was nice to hear Josh bring up the history of the IC Title, too, dating back to 1979. These titles should be an asset headed into the three-hour Raw format.

•WWE Fact: Smackdown last Friday was the most watched regularly scheduled program for the 85th week in a row.

•Why should we take seriously Big Show's reaction to being fired when it's fake? I mean, if Del Rio and Henry are really good guys who hang out at charity events for kids with "on-air rival" Sheamus, why should we even take what happened to Big Show the least bit seriously? This type of inconsistent narrative really undercuts a wrestling viewer's ability to get fully absorbed and lost in the universe WWE creates.

•Booker T cliché watch: "They've both been going toe to toe and they have a lot left in the tank."

•I question the decision to feature a long singles match between Orton and Sheamus. After the angle on Raw, I think one of the key selling points of the PPV was how those two would coexist or settle their score during the four-way. Now, they had a (good) long back and forth match, but the intrigue of seeing these two babyfaces who usually don't cross paths battle on Sunday has been removed, and if anything the novelty is gone and they've been overexposed against one another 48 hours before the match.

•If anyone thought Orton wasn't going to give Sheamus an RKO after their handshake, they should lose their status as a WWE fan.

•Are there any heels involved in that fatal four-way on Sunday? How could they do PPV hype and not have either heel in the four-way match on the show in any way? They barely talked about them. This was among the worst jobs hyping a World Title match for PPV I've ever seen. They overexpose Orton and Sheamus - the two babyfaces - and do zero to give fans any reason to believe Del Rio or Jericho are even in the hunt, much less put any heel on them. It's just astounding how off his game or distracted Vince McMahon seems sometimes, and how puzzling the writing team's booking is. I mean, this contradicts everything you'd learn on Day One of how to sell a wrestling match and make money in this industry. A token, predictable RKO by Orton on Sheamus at the end hardly makes up for everything else missing from hyping this match.

By Wade Keller, PWTorch editor

[Q1] -After highlights aired from the PPV, John Cena came out and complained about what happened the night before. He was despondent and frustrated over Big Show turning on him. He even addressed critics who said he should have beaten John Laurinaitis sooner in the match, saying that Show would have come to Laurinaitis's rescue at any point he seemed in jeopardy of losing. He said there was no explanation that justified Show's actions. He pointed out that the next general manager would have rehired Show, so there was no point in Show taking the route he took.

Eve introduced Laurinaitis who came out on an electric scooter and talked about his injuries. He said he went to the emergency room last night and he might have nerve damage. He then announced that he had reinstated Show and signed him on Saturday and booked him against Cena in three weeks at the next PPV, No Way Out.

[Q2] Show walked onto the stage and said he's sure everyone would like an explanation for his actions. He said none of them are entitled to his explanation, but he'd say last week he dropped to his knees and begged for his job, yet nobody gave him any sympathy. He said he now has an iron clad contract and doesn't regret what he did. He said he did what each and every fan would have done.

David Otunga walked out and challenged Cena to a match. Cena said if he faced him tonight, he'd hurt him. [c]

(1) John Cena beat David Otunga in 2:00 with an STF tapout.

The "Let's Go Cena!/Cena Sucks!" chants were back this week.

Afterward, Tyler Reks, Curt Hawkins, Darren Young, and Titus O'Neil attacked Cena. Sheamus ran out quickly, plowing through Laurinaitis on stage, and made the save. Laurinaitis scolded them and said he didn't give them permission to do that. He ordered them back to the locker room now. He said in the name of People Power, he was booking Cena & Sheamus in a tag team match later against three opponents in a lumberjack match. He bragged it was the first time ever for that type of match.

Cole and Lawler hyped Alberto Del Rio vs. Randy Orton plus Daniel Bryan calling out C.M. Punk later over the PPV finish controversy. [c]

WWE Fact: Last night, WWE Over the Limit was cable TV's most socially active show, beating HBO's "Game of Thrones," AMC's "Mad Men," and TNT's NBA Playoffs.

[Q3] Santino interrupted Ricardo's planned ring introduction of Del Rio. The two cult comedy figures argued over who could better roll their tongues. Santino KO'd Ricardo with the Cobra. He then introduced Del Rio himself, although Del Rio didn't come out.

At ringside Cole threw to a video package announcing that Raw was about to hit 1,000 episodes. It compared it to Lassie, The Simpsons, Law & Order, and Gunsmoke. Lawler then said starting with the 1,000th

episode on July 23, Raw will be three hours long every single week. Del Rio then drove out. [c]

Lawler said on Twitter people are wondering why Show wasn't fired for interfering considering earlier in the show Laurinaitis said he signed him to a new contract on Saturday. Cole said that's stupid because Laurinaitis and Show reached a verbal agreement on Saturday, but didn't sign the contract until late Sunday night, so Show couldn't be fired because he wasn't under contract at the time of his interference. WWE seemed to covering their tracks for a continuity logic error.

(2) Randy Orton fought Alberto Del Rio to a no contest in 7:00 after Chris Jericho interfered.

They cut to an early break. [c] Cole said Del Rio has one worker to care for each of his dozens of cars that he keeps in Mexico. A few minutes later, with Orton on the verge of hitting an RKO, Jericho interfered and dropped Orton with a Code Breaker. The crowd chanted "You suck!" at Jericho. Jericho intensely said over and over that he's the best at what he does. He gave Orton a second Code Breaker, teased leaving, and then returned and gave Orton a third Code Breaker. Orton had a trickle of blood on his forehead.

Cole hyped the mystery opponents for Cena and Sheamus later. They showed Daniel Bryan backstage heading toward the entrance tunnel. [c]

[Q5] Bryan entered the ring and then threw to a clip of Punk tapping out. He went through several questions with "Yes!" as the answer such as he will beat Punk if he's given a rematch. Punk came out and gave him credit for a classic battle, but then added that the one thing Bryan is brushing aside is that he actually pinned him to win before any tapping took place. Punk then threw to a clip from Smackdown of Bryan tricking Kane into attacking Punk with a chair. Punk then introduced Kane as his opponent tonight. It wasn't said explicitly, but apparently Kane wanted to get back at Bryan for hitting him last Friday.

(3) Daniel Bryan beat Kane via DQ in 2:00.

When Bryan and Kane were both down at ringside, Punk got up from color commentary and tried to hit Kane with a chair. Bryan took the chair away. Punk backed down, but when Bryan turned around, Kane saw him with a chair. Kane then kicked Bryan in the face. Cole said they were throwing out the match.

After Kane chokeslammed Bryan and left, Punk entered the ring to check on him, dripping with sarcasm as he told Cole and Lawler his intentions. Punk then put Bryan in the Anaconda Vice. Bryan frantically tapped. Punk released the hold and smiled. [c]

[Q6] Punk told A.J. backstage, "You know you're the one who's been acting like a fool this entire time." A.J. broke down and cried. Punk was uncomfortable as he considered how to console her. He finally sort of hugged her and rubbed her head, half-heartedly repeating that everything would be fine. She suddenly stopped crying. Punk said, "I sort of dig crazy chicks." He then walked away. The camera stayed on A.J. afterward as she appeared ready to have another breakdown.

-A clip aired of the Triple H-Paul Heyman confrontation last week. Then at ringside Cole

said Triple H was at WWE Headquarters in Stamford, Conn. meeting with WWE's legal team regarding what actions to take against Brock Lesnar and Heyman. Lawler said Triple H won't be scared by legal threats.

(4) Christian pinned Jinder Mahal in 3:00.

Not much here. Just a way to establish Christian is back and remind fans what his finishing move is. Mahal got in a fair amount of offense to keep this from being considered a squash. Cole and Lawler got to banter and even snortle a bit during this one. [c]

[Q7] **(5) Beth Phoenix pinned Kelly Kelly in 3:00.**

They played up Phoenix being upset with her loss on PPV the night before to Layla, taking it out on Kelly. They showed Layla watching with concern backstage. Phoenix won after nailing Kelly with a sledgehammer fist as Kelly did her signature handspring elbow toward her in the corner. [c]

Ring intros took place for Sheamus and then John Cena. They awaited word of whom they be facing next. Vickie Guerrero stepped out to announce their opponents - Dolph Ziggler, Jack Swagger, and Lord Tensai.

[Q8] (6) John Cena & Sheamus fought Jack Swagger & Dolph Ziggler & Lord Tensai to a no contest.

Lumberjacks surrounded the ring just as the match began. It looked like the discards from the battle royal that started Over the Limit the night before. Sheamus ended up tackling Otunga at ringside after they got in his business. Tensai took control of Sheamus seconds later in the ring. [c]

Sheamus took a long beatdown from the heels as Cena cheered him on from the apron. They really were working toward a big pop for the Cena hot tag here. Big Show came out at 12:00 to watch from the stage wearing his suit jacket tossed over his shoulder. Sheamus teased some comebacks, which the crowd cheered, but the heels kept beating him down.

[Q9] Cole reset the show at the top of the hour. Sheamus hot-tagged Cena just as Swagger also tagged in Ziggler. That meant Ziggler fed Cena and took an assortment of great bumps. Cena dove to the floor once he noticed they were ganging up on the exhausted, battered Sheamus on the floor. As soon as Cena returned to the ring, the lumberjacks followed him. Then the babyface locker room emptied as they charged to the ring. The WWE weekend went full circle, from the PPV that began with a battle royal to a star-studded, battle royalesque brawl to end Raw. Cena marched away from the brawl to try to track down Big Show.

Backstage Cena demanded to know where Show went. Laurinaitis told him he didn't know and if he touched him he would be fired. Laurinaitis walked away. Cole began what sounded like a wrap up for the show when Show came from off camera and KO'd Cena with a big piece of metal. Cena went down. Show clenched and unclenched his fist, then walked away as the show ended.



WWE ANNOUNCES RAW EXPANDING TO THREE HOURS

WWE Raw is permanently moving to three hours on USA Network starting with a three-hour Raw on July 23. The July 23 show will be recognized as Raw's 1,000th show (actual #999) to introduce the permanent timeslot change to 8:00 p.m. EST.

In an announcement Thursday, there was no indication that the additional first hour will be a pre-show or non-arena type show. Instead, Raw will essentially become Viewer's Choice Raw every week.

WWE announced Raw will have "new ways to get involved in the show through WWE.com and social media by deciding matches, stipulations, Superstar development, and more."

WWE CEO Vince McMahon added, "Our new three-hour Raw represents the next generation in interactive television where our fans won't just watch the show, they will help create it."

USA Network presidents Chris McCumber and Jeff Wachtel added, "The powerful three-hour block of live TV truly makes USA the year-round destination for young male viewers on Monday nights."

Caldwell's Analysis: I'm stunned by this news. With a lack of star power, over-stretched Creative team, and too much filler already on a two-hour Raw, I would argue WWE needs to go back to one hour before they think about expanding to three hours. Adding an "interactive element" for viewers to book matches shows a lack of Creative sense creating inorganic situations and matches that plagued the themed PPVs introduced over the past few years. Overall, this comes across like WWE's latest toy to "freshen up" Raw, e.g. adding Smackdown stars to Raw, which does not make a difference anymore because it's not treated like a special occurrence.

The business perspective WWE would take is it adds incremental revenue to their TV Rights Fees every quarter from USA Network. But, how much will PPVs suffer? Will Smackdown suffer on Friday nights? Will house show attendance drop when fans get enough of WWE on Monday nights? There are so many business implications that comes with adding an extra hour's worth of TV Rights Revenue.

RAW RATINGS

WWE Raw on Monday, May 21 following Over the Limit scored a 3.04 rating, up from from a dismal 2.94 rating last week.

The rating was even with two weeks ago in-between Extreme Rules and Over the Limit. However, the post-Extreme Rules episode three weeks ago scored a 3.33 rating.

-- Raw averaged 4.16 million viewers, down one percent compared to last week and the fewest viewers since February 13. Raw was down eight percent compared to the yearly average of 4.52 million viewers.

The first hour averaged 4.17 million viewers for the immediate Over the Limit fall-out. By

comparison, the first hour after Extreme Rules three weeks ago averaged 4.99 million viewers.

The second hour actually decreased slightly to an average of 4.14 million viewers, which was the fewest second hour viewers since January 9 against the BCS National Title game.

-- WWE will point to the NBA Playoffs affecting Raw viewership. The Thunder-Lakers game that began during Raw's first hour averaged 8.1 million viewers and more than doubled Raw's TV rating.

On cable TV Monday night, Raw ranked #5 on cable TV, #2 in males 18-34 behind the NBA, and #3 in males 18-49 and "Pawn Stars" on History Channel, which averaged 5.2 million viewers.

-- In the demo ratings, Raw scored its lowest m18-34 & m18-49 ratings of the year. M18-49 was down slightly compared to last week and m18-34 was down 12 percent compared to last week.

After hitting a year-low last week, Raw's teen males rating jumped 48 percent this week. The m12-34 rating was steady compared to last week, as was the adults 18-49 rating.

Caldwell's Analysis: Teen males was the only segment of the audience that showed any incremental interest in the Over the Limit fall-out. Otherwise, the demos were flat or down, average viewership was down, and Raw was barely able to hold its head above the 3.0-level for the PPV fall-out. With the core male audience dropping to the lowest ratings of the year (NBA helped out), it will be interesting to see how WWE responds the next few weeks before their next PPV in mid-June.

SMACKDOWN RATINGS

WWE Smackdown on Friday, May 18 scored a 1.8 rating, up one-tenth of a rating from a 1.7 the previous week, but still down one-tenth of a rating from May 4.

Smackdown averaged 2.80 million viewers, which was up 11 percent from the previous week's show. It was also the most viewers in nine weeks dating back to mid-March during WrestleMania hype season.

On cable TV Friday night, Smackdown ranked #2 in overall viewers and all key male demos behind the NBA Playoffs on ESPN. Smackdown took a hit among teen males, though, ranking #7.

In the week-to-week demos, Smackdown was up two-tenths of a rating in m18-34, m18-48, and m12-34 compared to the previous week, which restored the show to the same levels from two weeks ago. In teen males 12-17, Smackdown scored its highest rating in four weeks.

Caldwell's Analysis: Despite the overall rating not increasing to the level from two weeks ago, the demo ratings were virtually even and viewership was up an average of 100,000 viewers compared to two weeks ago. So, a relatively good week for Smackdown headlined by Randy Orton vs. Sheamus during the post-WrestleMania lull season. Smackdown is not close to late-January/early-February when the show was in the 2.1-2.2 ratings range, but the show is at least showing signs of recovery following the interruptions from poorly-rated live Tuesday specials.

STEPHANIE MCMAHON DEFENDS EXPANSION OF RAW

WWE executive Stephanie McMahon talked to IGN.com's Eric Goldman about Raw changing to three hours starting July 23. The following are highlights.

-- As part of the "interactive elements" added to Raw, Stephanie said the audience will vote on "different things every week" to affect the show.

-- Stephanie said the 1,000th Raw (actual #999) starting the three-hour Raws will feature old stars returning to mix with new stars on the roster. Asked if she will be returning to TV, Stephanie said, "Who knows? Maybe you've got to tune into the 1000th Raw on July 23!"

Asked when The Rock will return and/or have a return match, Stephanie said, "Hmm, I think I'm gonna have to let that one unfold!"

-- Stephanie gave the marketing department sales pitch for why Raw is moving to three hours: "It's going to be the first-ever regularly scheduled three-hour program on television and I think we've got a pretty good handle on it thus far! You know, we do a three-hour show called a Pay-Per-View almost every month and Monday Night Raw, we've done three hours before, so we feel great about it." She apparently has not heard of forgot about WCW Nitro being three hours every week.

Caldwell's Analysis: There are some really, really good reasons why executives in the TV industry have not scheduled three-hour, non-sporting event shows. (a) You lose the audience asking them to sit through a three-hour drama/comedy/variety show once-a-week. (b) It would burn out the audience very quickly by throwing everything at viewers and leaving them with nothing to anticipate.

As for Stephanie's comments on WWE already having practice with PPVs and three-hour specials, there's a reason why they're special events and not weekly-occurring events. Over the Limit Sunday night showed why WWE should cut back on PPV events - it didn't feel like a PPV-worthy special event and watered down the entire PPV concept - in order to re-establish the specialness of the events. With Raw, WWE is pushing forward with too much supply when the demand simply is not there for a three-hour Raw. Soon enough, having a three-hour Raw every week will water down the flagship show and WWE will eventually lose viewers asking them to sit through a three-hour show every Monday night when they were perfectly content watching a two-hour show.

JERICO EXPLAINS "CREEPY" VIGNETTES BEFORE HIS RETURN

WWE star Chris Jericho says the pre-return vignettes that aired at the end of 2011 were simply supposed to reintroduce him to the TV audience and not represent anything more.

"They (fans) were looking too deep into it - WAY too deep," Jericho told the U.K. Sun in an interview. "It was just supposed to be a creepy thing. My idea was that it was the Mayan calendar in 2012 saying it's the end of the world and I was going back and it's the 'end of the world as you know it.'"

Jericho says there was no change of plans after a girl was included in the vignettes. "The

girl we just put in because she was creepy looking,” Jericho said. “There was never supposed to be a girl coming in with me... It was exactly what it was intended to be - a cryptic little cool thing that led to me coming back and doing what I did.”

Jericho revealed that Vince McMahon suggested Jericho return to TV without saying a word to change up his standard return delivering a promo.

“That part was Vince’s idea. He was the one that suggested that and I thought it was great,” Jericho said. “I like to do something different that people don’t expect. That’s what I’ve always been about, in everything I do.”

JERICO TALKS ABOUT UPCOMING WWE DEPARTURE, FAN CRITICISM

WWE star Chris Jericho talked about his imminent WWE departure in an interview with the Daily Star. He also noted he signed on for longer than he originally planned prior to returning to full-time touring with “Fozzy.”

“I’m in the best shape ever, I’m not hurt, I can easily come back for as long as I want whenever I want, but people should understand that I’m not going to wrestle until I’m 85-years-old,” Jericho told Patrick Lennon of the Star. “I ended up signing for four months longer than I planned to do. And, yes, when it’s done I’ll devote myself 100 percent to Fozzy for our run.”

Jericho also spoke about wrestling fans. “(C.M.) Punk and I had some good thoughts on what we could do together and people were saying screw you, you’re only back for the payday at Mania,” Jericho said. He added later, “Sometimes I wonder what people want. Do they want us to wrestle forever? I’m a sell-out because I quit? Rock and Taker came back because they love wrestling, and the fans, yet still people bitch.”

Caldwell’s Analysis: I’m not sure where Jericho is finding a loud chorus of complaints about him coming back for a Mania payday or people wanting him to wrestle forever. It comes across like Jericho was exposed to a few comments and extrapolated that to the opinion of the masses, painting with a very wide brushstroke. The biggest concern we’ve heard on the LiveCast or from readers is that Jericho’s comeback in January (and before that with the vignettes) set certain expectations that have not been met. Presently, WWE has allowed Jericho to become just another wrestler on the roster; fans had higher expectations for something new and different featuring a top wrestler like Jericho.

Jericho taking time to tour with “Fozzy” should be commended, as he’s positioned himself to pursue work outside of WWE, he’s not over-extending himself on WWE’s road schedule when WWE isn’t featuring him like a top star, and he can refresh his character for a major program with a satisfying payoff once he returns again.

BELLAS EXPLAIN WHY THEY LEFT WWE

The Bella Twins are pointing to burn-out, exhaustion, too much time away from home, and “just knowing it was time to take a break” as the main reasons why they decided to let their WWE contracts expire last month.

“It was actually pretty recent,” Nikki told

Diva-Dirt.com on when they decided to leave WWE. “Brie and I just decided that we needed a little bit of a break. When you’ve been on the road for five years, haven’t seen your bed for five days straight, we kind of came to a point like, maybe we can rest our bodies for a little bit.”

Brie and Nikki said they still have the WWE bug in their system, and could return to WWE at some point soon. “It might not be permanent. You guys might see us soon, you may not. We just knew that we definitely needed to take a break,” Nikki said.

Nikki added, “Brie and I - when our contracts were coming to an end - we kind of both looked at each other one day and were like, ‘I’m exhausted’. And, she was like, ‘I’m exhausted.’ We were like, ‘Let’s take a break.’ ... We just looked at each other one day and we were just tired. We were really tired and sore. We were like, ‘Okay, let’s do this.’ It was scary.”

Link: The Bellas’s full interview can be heard at Diva-Dirt.com . URL: <http://bit.ly/JJjr9x> .

Caldwell’s Analysis: The Bellas leaving WWE is another example of why WWE needs some form of off-season or rotation of talent set up in a mandatory system where a guy like John Cena is forced to take time off to indicate to the rest of the locker room that it’s okay to take a break. There are plenty of burnt-out wrestlers on the current WWE roster, and this could be avoided if WWE established an off-season/talent rotation system (give it a name - TRS) years and years ago. TRS would also help improve the product by forcing WWE to establish more than two or three top stars, freshen up PPV matches with other stars rotated into top slots (so WWE isn’t stuck with a John Cena vs. John Laurinaitis main event tonight), and - now with Raw absurdly going to three hours - allow more stars to fill TV main events without sending a message to the audience that it’s a skippable show.

DANIEL BRYAN TALKS ABOUT “YES!” AND HIS MOM’S REACTION TO A.J.

Former World Hvt. champion Daniel Bryan says WWE changed plans on how to utilize him after the rise of “Yes!” following his 18-second loss to Sheamus at WrestleMania 28 last month.

“It was actually a very nice surprise and I think the people’s support of me is the reason why I’m in the position now with this match with C.M. Punk on Sunday. I don’t know what their plans were for me after I lost to Sheamus in 18 seconds, but I don’t think it was this. Because people have been so behind me both positively and negatively, it’s really pushed me to the next level,” Bryan said on the Busted Open radio show promoting Over the Limit on Sunday.

Bryan talked about the key to his run, including a PPV title match with Punk, has been the timing of his opportunities. He noted if he joined WWE in the mid-2000s, he may be at the bottom of the card. Or, be someone like Tyson Kidd who’s “never gotten a break.”

“It’s interesting because sometimes people will ask me my advice on how to get to the top. I tell them for me, one it was a lot of hard work, there is lots of people who work really hard,”

Bryan said. “You know who is awesome and never has gotten a break? Tyson Kidd. He is unreal. But, for me it’s been a lot of luck and being in the right place at the right time. If I had to come to the WWE in 2005, there would be a good chance I would be stuck at the bottom and never had gotten the opportunities that I have right now.”

Bryan added that he’s been able to capitalize on the opportunities given to him. “That’s very important in WWE. If you get an opportunity and you are not able to capitalize on it, then you won’t be able to get an opportunity for a while,” Bryan said.

Now that he’s playing a top heel in WWE,

Bryan says he gets a lot of “hate tweets” about his storyline with A.J. Plus, concern from his mom. “The dynamic between me and A.J. is interesting. She is such a sympathetic character to get behind. It’s funny because my mom watches it and she is like, ‘My son, why would you say that to that sweet young girl?’ (Bryan laughs) Then, my mom would say, ‘I did not raise you to treat women like that.’ I’m like, ‘Oh c’mon! (Bryan laughs)’”



CHRIS JERICO
ARTIST: GRANT GOULD

TV TAPING REPORT: NXT AT FULL FAIL UNIVERSITY

May 17 at Full Sail University in Florida, WWE taped a new format for NXT. The following report by Josh Parry gives an overview of the tapings...

Dark Match: Xavier Woods (formerly Consequences Creed in TNA) beat Dean Ambrose. Ambrose was very popular.

Triple H came out and cut a promo. Hunter thanked Full Sail for use of their facilities and said the first episode will air in more than 60 countries. (No date was given.)

EPISODE #1 TAPING

Jim Ross and William Regal were introduced on commentary. JR introduced the new GM of NXT, Dusty Rhodes.

(1) Bo Dallas (Rotundo) beat Rick Victor with a spear.

(2) The Ascension (Connor O’Brian & Kenneth Cameron) beat C.J. Parker & Mike Dalton in a squash tag match. Ascension had an epic entrance and were impressive.

Damien Sandow refused to fight Jason Jordan. It was the same promo from his Smackdown appearances. Damien was over as a heel; funny stuff.

(3) Tyson Kidd beat Michael McGillicutty via submission. Great match that captivated the crowd and had plenty of nearfalls. Kidd won with a leg choke.

After a brief intermission, a video aired and they shot the crowd to lead into what can be assumed to be the second episode.

EPISODE #2 TAPING

William Regal left commentary for this episode and was replaced by Byron Saxton.

(1) Seth Rollins (formerly Tyler Black) beat Jiro. This was essentially a squash. Rollins cut a

promo promising to take NXT, WWE, and the world by storm.

(2) Jinder Mahal beat Jason Jordan via submission with the Camel Clutch. Boring match as indicated by the crowd chants.

(3) Leo Kruger beat Aiden English. Quick and effective establishing Aiden as a face and Kruger as a heel. Post-match, Leo talked about himself on the mic, calling himself the LEO (Lion) of NXT. So, watch out.

(4) Richie Steamboat beat Rick Victor with a big lariat. Richie wrestles a lot like his dad, Ricky Steamboat, who was ringside watching. Richie gave him a shout-out after the match.

(5) Antonio Cesaro beat Dante Dash. Afterward, Aksana declared, "Antonio is my lover!"

(6) Derrick Bateman beat Johnny Curtis. Comedy match with lots of running around.

EPISODE #3 TAPING

Jim Ross remained on for this taping.

(1) WWE tag champion R-Truth beat Epico. Fun match. Truth won with the Little Jimmy.

(2) Sofia Cortez (Ivelise from Tough Enough) beat Paige.

(3) Seth Rollins beat Camacho (w/Hunico) after a standing foot stomp. Heels attacked Rollins post-match until Bo Davis made the save. Of note, Rollins did not use his FCW Hvt. Title at either taping.

(4) FCW tag champions Jake Carter & Corey Graves beat C.J. Parker & Nick Rogers. Again, the titles were not mentioned.

(5) Kassius Ohno (Chris Hero) beat Mike Dalton. Due to Hero's long beard, a "Let's Go Jesus" chant caught on loudly. Post-match, Ohno said he knocks people out and when people see him, they say, "Oh no!"

Leo Kruger came out again and the audience sighed. People were leaching at this point due to not knowing much of the talent. A whole section became spotty and empty. A "We Want Sheamus" chant broke out.

(6) Richie Steamboat beat Leo Kruger. The match ended abruptly after Richie hit a nasty gusher. Post-match, Kruger attacked Richie to good heat. Richie was carried out.

(7) Jinder Mahal beat Derrick Bateman via submission with the Camel Clutch. Jinder got really good shine tonight. He reapplied his finisher after the match until refs separated them.

Byron Saxton is off the booth and now Jack Russo and William Regal have joined Ross.

(8) Ascension beat The Usos. Wow, that's an upset. It's not clear how many episodes they're up to now, but this is dragging badly, and not because of the wrestling.

(9) Bray Wyatt beat Aiden English. Husky Harris's new act is fantastic.

(10) Hunico & Camacho & Michael McGillicutty beat Tyson Kidd & Seth Rollins & Bo Dallas in a six-man tag match. McG avenged his loss against Kidd from earlier in the taping.

(11) World Hvt. champion Sheamus beat Alberto Del Rio to retain the World Hvt. Title. Sheamus won with the Brogue Kick in a good house show-style title match.

That was the end of the taping. They announced they will return next month after taping a month's worth of NXT in one night.

MICHAELS EXPLAINS WHY HE'S RULED OUT RETURNING

In an interview with the Miami Herald promoting his new EyeBlack endorsement deal line, WWE Hall of Famer Shawn Michaels opened up about why he chose to retire from in-ring competition rather than shift to a part-time in-ring schedule.

"WWE would have allowed me to work any kind of way that I wanted. I could have very easily have said, 'Hey, I'd like to slow down over the next couple of years, do a few things here and there,' and I think everybody would have been fine with that, but for me, I think that would have probably been harder on me," Michaels said. "Personally, I think the job would be harder for me to do, personally, on a semi, here and there, in and out type basis."

Without a doubt, Michaels says he physically could have continued to wrestle. However, he did not want to deal with the phone ringing on a constant basis asking him to work a program to fill in. He says he felt it was easier on him and WWE to "walk away completely" when he wanted to focus on raising his children with his wife.

"You have to be careful because if you leave it as an open option, you're going to be getting calls on a regular basis. Every time somebody gets injured or every time somebody comes up with an idea, the phone is going to be ringing, and you're going to have to deal with 'should I or shouldn't I?' I didn't want to run into that. I didn't want to put myself through that, and I didn't want to put the company through that," Michaels said.

Michaels added he's "certainly not going to wrestle" again, but he's "more than happy to be there and help out any way I can." One way was special referee for The Undertaker vs. Triple H at WrestleMania. In the interview, Michaels reflected on it being the final time the three of them would be in the ring together.

Michaels also hinted at future WWE involvement related to his EyeBlack deal. "I'm very excited about this new relationship," Michaels said. "Beyond being a cool product in itself, it's functional, and I'm looking forward to using EyeBlack product in my hunting adventures and in some WWE related activities."

WWE NOTEBOOK

WWE will continue taping NXT Season 5 (Redemption season) at the Smackdown tapings to air online on Wednesdays. The start of a re-branded Season 6 was taped last week at Full Sail University. WWE will continue taping NXT5 at the weekly Smackdown tapings until finding a new TV home for NXT6.

WWE top star John Cena's wife, Elizabeth Cena, has filed legal documents in Florida seeking to cancel Cena's petition for divorce, according to TMZ. Liz claims Cena made an improper divorce petition based on Cena listing her maiden name (Huberdeau) and not attaching a copy of the prenuptial agreement referenced in the divorce filing. Liz is requesting a judge dismiss Cena's filing to force him to re-file or, as suggested in the report, re-consider the divorce. Cena did not respond to news of the latest development.

Smackdown Spoiler: Del Rio is the new no. 1 contender to face Sheamus at No Way Out...

ETC. BRIEFING

Sean Radican lists the top indy stories of the week and adds his analysis



(1) ROH set to air ROH World Champion Davey Richards vs. Kevin Steen match from "Border Wars" for free on television: This weekend in Sinclair markets, ROH will air the entire Richards-Steen match for free, along with highlights and unseen interviews from the "Border Wars" iPPV that aired earlier this month.

Radican's Analysis: I think this is another bad decision from ROH management. Although "Border Wars" couldn't be seen by many people due to technical difficulties, there's still money to be made on this match through DVD sales. Steen winning the ROH World Title is something many ROH fans have wanted to see for a long time.

With the DVD from "Border Wars" still unreleased, there are likely a large number of people willing to spend money to see this match. By showing the Steen-Richards match so soon, it will likely cut down on the number of people that buy the DVD.

Another message the company is sending to fans is that if they wait a couple of weeks, they will see the good stuff from iPPVs for free on television. ROH aired matches from both nights of the "Showdown in the Sun" iPPVs for two weeks recently. Now, just a couple of weeks after the Steen-Richards match aired, they are giving it away for free on television.

There's a reason that WWE and TNA don't give away PPV footage away for free on television. Both companies almost always use still shots from their PPVs when referencing them on television, but ROH is giving away entire matches for free on television from their iPPVs.

Although many fans were left without access to the iPPV a couple of weeks ago, there is no reason to air this match for free on television. I can see ROH airing some of their undercard matches from "Showdown in the Sun" on television after both nights didn't work at all on iPPV, but at least they were smart enough not to give away the incredible Richards vs. Steen match from day 2 for free on television. With the Steen-Richards match being given away for free, they're giving away one of their most anticipated matches and undercutting a lot of their ability to profit off that match.

(2) CHIKARA celebrates 10th Anniversary with two DVD tapings: Last weekend, CHIKARA ran two DVD tapings with "Anniversario: A Horse of Another Color" on May 19 and "Anniversario: The Ogg and I" on May 20. The May 20 event was headlined by Eddie Kingston defending the Grand Championship against Jigsaw.

Radican's Analysis: Congratulations to CHIKARA on their 10th anniversary. The promotion has managed to stay solvent using mostly homegrown talent for the past ten years, although they've used established names as well. The promotion has grown so much since I started watching it. The wrestling is better, the storylines are better, and it's just plain fun to watch a CHIKARA show on DVD.

Mike Quackenbush deserves a lot of credit for taking his concept for CHIKARA mixing zany characters with a Lucha influence and steadily shaping the promotion into what it is today. It seems fitting that Eddie Kingston and Jigsaw wrestled for the Grand Championship in the main event of the second show to cap the weekend, as both indicated on twitter the match was a tribute to Larry Sweeney.



2011 Avg - 1.17 rating
2009 Avg - 1.15 rating
2008 Avg - 1.06 rating
2007 Avg - 1.05 rating

IMPACT GOING LIVE THIS SUMMER

TNA announced last week that Impact Wrestling will be live during the summer. The first live episode will be May 31, which is also the start of a new timeslot at 8:00 p.m. EST on Thursday nights.

TNA says Impact will be live from Universal Studios in Orlando on May 31 and the live schedule will “continue through the summer.” TNA president Dixie Carter commented in a press release:

“We are excited to take Impact Wrestling Live! all summer long, and have our first Live! summer show launch our new 8:00 p.m. EST time slot. Summer of 2012 is going to be remembered as the most momentous time in our company’s history-to-date. Stay tuned.”

Keller’s Analysis: This is good news if it doesn’t break either TNA’s or Spike’s budget. Now TNA can concentrate on one show once a week, and the wrestlers can start fresh on Thursday rather than doing tapings after a busy weekend including a PPV on a Sunday. Will people watch a bad show just because it’s live? No. Will a small fraction of fans tune in because of the “anything can happen” aspect? Sure. Ultimately, the quality of the show is 95 percent of ratings.

IMPACT RATINGS

TNA Impact Wrestling on Thursday, May 17 scored a 1.08 rating following the Sacrifice PPV, essentially even with a 1.1 rating last week.

Impact scored right at the yearly average, which is one-tenth of a rating below the 2011 average.

-- Impact averaged 1.48 million viewers, down 3.7 percent from last week’s show. Impact dropped below the 1.5-million benchmark, which is where the show was during a 10-week slump from March 1 to May 3 prior to rebounding to 1.53 million viewers last week.

-- On cable TV Thursday night, Impact ranked #22 in overall viewers, #20 in males 18-34, and #11 in males 18-49. The m18-34 ranking was slightly below the yearly average and the m18-49 was slightly above the yearly average.

In the demographic ratings, Impact took a big hit among m18-34. The show dropped one-tenth of a rating compared to last week to the lowest point of the year and lowest since Thanksgiving 2011.

Impact was also down two-tenths of a rating in teen males. Other demos (m18-49 and adults 18-49) were even with last week.

Quarter hours: 1.10, 0.95, 1.01, 1.03; 1.23, 1.14, 1.10, 1.07. The low point was for the unannounced Bully Ray vs. RVD match. The peak was at the start of the second hour with an A.J. Styles promo after the battle royal.

Recent & Long-Term Trends

5-Week - 1.02 rating
10-Week - 1.04 rating
2012 Avg - 1.07 rating

IMPACT TV HIGHLIGHTS

5/17: Roode will defend the TNA Title against the winner of a #1 contender four-way match on the same show. The four-way match will be Bully Ray vs. A.J. Styles vs. Jeff Hardy vs. Kurt Angle. The wrestlers in the #1 contender match were determined at Monday’s TV taping. Ray qualified by defeating Rob Van Dam, Styles won a battle royal, Hardy beat Mr. Anderson in a return match from Sacrifice, and Angle beat Samoa Joe.

A.J. Styles attempted to explain his “scandal” involving TNA president Dixie Carter, but new TNA tag champions Daniels and Kazarian interrupted with more “proof” of their allegations to advance the storyline.

Gail Kim retained the Knockouts Title over Velvet Sky and Brooke Tessmacher in a three-way match.

5/24: On Open Fight Night for next Thursday’s episode, TNA World Hvt. champion Bobby Roode retained the TNA World Title over A.J. Styles. Hulk Hogan selected Styles over Kurt Angle to face Roode.

The “big surprise” revealed for the May 31 episode when Impact moves up an hour to 8:00 p.m. EST on Spike TV is the return of Sting. Sting returned at Tuesday’s taping and will face Roode on the May 31 Impact.

SoCal wrestler Joey Ryan faced X Division champion Austin Aries in this month’s Gut Check Challenge. Aries beat Ryan, who has wrestled for TNA’s off-shoot “Ring Ka King” promotion in India.

Devon’s weekly TV Title defense was against Garrett Bischoff. The match went to a No Contest due to outside interference.

HOGAN AND SCOTT STEINER IN TWITTER WAR

The ongoing drama between Hulk Hogan and Scott Steiner is now involving attorneys and Hogan’s daughter, Brooke.

Steiner tweeted Tuesday night that he recently received a letter from Hogan’s attorneys telling him they are aware of his series of disparaging tweets aimed at Hogan and Eric Bischoff. Hogan replied that the attorneys were from TNA.

Steiner tweeted: “Havent tweeted lately bcuz I got a letter from a lawyer representing hogan n bitchoff basically saying they take my tweets seriously and if threats continue they will take to law enforcement....really hogan my tweets scare you, I’ve said worse in interviews on tv,LOL,I want to thank you bcuz your actions speak louder than any words that i could have spoken,sorry for scaring you maybe I will challenge you to a game of checkers.”

Without naming Steiner by name, Hogan replied on Twitter: “Tried to be cool,not only a clown but also a liar.those weren’t my lawyers they were TNA lawyers. Well I guess it’s time to call my guys in, I really hope he saved his money or is making tons from the independents he’s working because it’s gonna get expensive, maby

he’s smart enough to at least figure it out when it starts getting real,what a shame,what a waste of a great talent, but u can’t tell an idiot their an idiot. It’s really sad when you really thought someone was really cool. HH”

Steiner also claimed that TNA has signed Brooke Hogan, who was at Tuesday’s Impact TV tapings and has appeared several times during TNA broadcasts over the past few years. Steiner claimed the locker room is upset by Brooke signing. Brooke then posted a series of tweets Tuesday night that appeared to be directed toward Steiner.

Brooke tweeted: “A certain wrestler with a stupid mesh hat needs to #stfu. #1 stop overcompensating for your ‘little’ problem... #2 act like a damn gentleman #3 I’d ‘make more money on my back’ than you ever would in your whole career. Shut up. You look like a toddler. Ps: lol if he’s such a big scary man don’t block someone who’s never tweeted you. Mind you I’ve only been kind to this completely incoherent shell of a man. You really need to call ppl out to get noticed?? ... Well you did and now everyone can see how desperate you truly are. Stop talking crap about my family. #turclub”

TNA NOTEBOOK

Alex Shelley is reportedly parting ways with TNA when his contract expires, which is “imminent,” according to the Wrestling Observer. There are strong indications he could be WWE-bound, especially if WWE goes through a long-rumored Cruiserweight Division either on a separate show or integrated into the three-hour Raw format.

TNA has re-signed X Division champion Austin Aries. Aries, who re-joined TNA last year when X Division alumni were brought in, said on Twitter Saturday, “Amidst their recent signings, I’m happy to say I’ve also re-signed with TNA. I’m excited for this next year, and see #GREAT things ahead.” TNA president Dixie Carter tweeted that Aries “is having a stellar year.” She added, “Very proud to have just re-signed him. Very proud of him.”

MMA fighter “King Mo” Lawal revealed details on his TNA schedule when he debuts later this year in an interview with Sherdog.com. “MMA will come first, and pro wrestling will be second - a close second,” King Mo said. “I’ll do a few (pro wrestling) shows a month and then I’ll train. If I have a fight coming up, I won’t be doing shows or taping.” Without mentioning Brock Lesnar by name, King Mo suggested he will play a Lesnar role of an MMA fighter entering wrestling. “They (TNA) told me I’m going to be King Mo. Maybe we’ll refine some things at OVW, but as far as everything goes, from what I’ve understood, I’m going to be an MMA fighter that steps foot in the squared circle. I’m going to be me.”

TNA issued a press release Thursday announcing Brooke Hogan will make her Impact Wrestling TV debut on May 31 when Impact goes live and moves up an hour to 8:00 p.m. EST. TNA said Brooke’s official role will be “Executive in Charge of the Knockouts,” which is on TV and behind-the-scenes.

MITCHELL'S MEMO

By Bruce Mitchell
PWTorch Columnist



Ric Flair's Inevitable TNA Coda

Ric Flair and TNA have come to their inevitable parting of the ways, and as has been the case too often with both, it's gotten a little shabby.

Ric Flair, last seen on TV as miscast as any human being could be as a tough but ultimately soft-hearted Simon Cowell-type judge on an inane pro wrestling copy of "American Idol," spent a Saturday night recently at South Park Mall in Charlotte instead on tour with TNA in Louisiana. Something was up, but neither TNA nor Flair were talking.

TNA, though, spoke up first. A report this week on PWInsider by Mike Johnson detailed how Flair, in TNA management eyes, had become "more trouble than he was worth." The report went into more detail about the incident a couple of summers ago in Europe where Flair, furious that TNA wouldn't front him the money to cover a bar tab, temporarily left the tour. It also went into, with much less detail, the inappropriate behavior Flair had allegedly engaged in that had caused TNA embarrassment in their home Orlando area.

Clearly, TNA has had enough of Ric Flair and his shenanigans and were moving to cut ties with him.

You'd think they'd have done exactly that about 20 minutes after Flair made his latest WrestleMania Hall of Fame speech, when he expressed appreciation to the WWE for the chance to appear in front of a crowd that wasn't made up of "tourists and paid models." Here was TNA President Dixie Carter, nice enough to let Flair, a contracted TNA performer, appear for their biggest rival on their biggest weekend to receive that company's highest historical honor, and this is how he repays her. Hell, Flair might have generated more ticket sales for that show than he ever did for any TNA show.

The truth is, it wasn't TNA who made the move first to cut ties.

Sure, the money was decent, but, in the end, the work was degrading.

How bad was it? Ric Flair, who for close to 40 years worked for more different promotions over than anyone in wrestling today, never publicly ripped a company that paid him before that night.

Things weren't likely to work out well in the long run between TNA and Ric Flair, where Flair once again chose to put his career into the hands of Vince Russo, Hulk Hogan, and Eric Bischoff. Hogan, who has so much respect for the truth he uses it sparingly, never parsed it more than when he called Flair "the greatest wrestler of all-time."

It didn't help that Flair, in his early 60s, was allowed to give in to his worst instincts on-camera, bleeding at every opportunity, playing bad guy against the wishes of every fan watching, and ripping his clothes off to his underwear. TNA, with Flair's unenthusiastic consent, got

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little or nothing out of the money they were paying. TNA was paying for a wrestling legend, and they wanted... that.

In the end, there was the great Ric Flair, playing silent bobo to Eric Bischoff in his selfish quest to use TNA to make a star out of inexperienced son Garrett Bischoff.

And all along there was Dixie Carter, the President of TNA. Dorothy Livengood, Aileen Eaton, Lily Maivia, and Ann Gunkel all ran wrestling promotions to some success over the years, but Ric Flair, like many veterans, didn't think it was a woman's place to run a wrestling business, and in particular, like many more, wasn't impressed with Carter.

He wasn't always impressed with everyone else who worked in TNA either, and he didn't always keep that a secret.

Now, with WWE looking to monetize their extensive pro wrestling tape library as part of their proposed network, there is once again a place in WWE for Ric Flair, marketed not as he might want to be, or as the likes of Bischoff or Hogan might wish, but as the impressive ambassador to the sport he could again be. His daughter Ashley had signed with WWE, not TNA, to start her own pro wrestling career, too.

Despite what TNA sources asserted to Johnson, in an age of camera phones and 24 hour gossip, there actually haven't been reports of Flair acting out recently in Florida. More, at least one TNA major performer says privately that TNA is "lying" about Flair to better control the

damage they believe will come when Flair leaves.

Interestingly, though, at least one camera phone recently caught Flair at the Highspots training facility posing with veteran wrestler George South.

The most important factors in Flair's not-yet-public decision are the endorsement contracts he holds with Coca-Cola's energy drink and the state lotteries. He may not ever be what anyone would call solvent, but these deals mean Flair has steady money coming in for years to come. He can afford to return to WWE now, to a place he respects. He just can't return to their rings.

Ric Flair, the greatest wrestler in the sport's history, is big on respect. He has to be worried that these kinds of reports coming from his last pro wrestling employer could get back to Coca Cola. Endorsement deals like these weren't available to Flair in his prime.

The world has changed. What was (Nature) Boys Will Be Boys behavior for most of his career isn't much tolerated in today's litigious corporate culture. Flair should be certain, in a 24 hour gossip culture, that he protects those business relationships that, unlike TNA, are most important to him.

Bruce Mitchell of Greensboro, N.C. has been a PWTorch columnist since 1990. The majority of his current columns are available exclusively on the PWTorch VIP website.



RIC FLAIR
ARTIST GRANT GOULD

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EVENTS SCHEDULE

5/24 - *WWE Raw Rio De Janeiro, Brazil*
5/24 - *WWE Raw Hermosillo, Mexico*
5/25 - *WWE SD Aguascalientes, Mexico*
5/26 - *WWE SD Guadalajara, Mexico*
5/27 - *WWE SD Lake Charles, La.*
5/28 - *WWE Raw TV live New Orleans, La.*
5/28 - *TNA Impact TV tapings Orlando, Fla.*
5/29 - *WWE SD TV taping Baton Rouge, La.*
5/29 - *TNA Impact TV tapings Orlando, Fla.*
6/1 - *WWE Raw Alexandria, La.*
6/2 - *WWE Raw Mobile, Ala.*
6/2 - *WWE SD Augusta, Ga.*

END NOTES

By Wade Keller,
PWTorch editor



RANDOM RAW THOUGHTS & QUOTES

•They decided to include Jerry Lawler saying it may be the darkest day in WWE history as the closing words of the video recap of the PPV. The most annoying, least true, borderline offensive thing said on the PPV last night is what WWE editors felt was best thing said, worthy of it being the punctuation mark at the end of the video package. It says a lot.

•Quotebook - Michael Cole on John Cena: "He shouldn't be [embarrassed], he lost to a better man."

•When Cena lamented that Big Show, "a man I used to call a friend," knocked him out last week, my first thought was maybe Cena shouldn't be screwing around so much last week with the "loser" bit nor should he have messed around with him for 20 minutes last night because beating Laurinaitis quickly and decisively would have given Show the best chance at getting his job back. But Cena decided clowning around was more important.

•It was interesting to hear Cena acknowledge that people are saying he should have beaten Laurinaitis sooner. He said since Laurinaitis had Show paid off, anytime Laurinaitis was in trouble, Show would have saved him. That's just not even the least bit true because Cena twice applied the

STF and Laurinaitis easily could have tapped out there and Show wouldn't have had time to make the save. There were other instances like that. So his story just didn't ring true.

•He also acknowledged "the computer," formerly known as the mystery G.M. How many viewers had finally forgotten about the lack of storyline resolution there and now were reminded of WWE screwing over their time investing in wondering who the mystery G.M. was?

•Quotebook - John Cena: "Now we are stuck with this People Power garbage."

•If the WWE Board felt it was best to get rid of Laurinaitis as G.M. - so much so that they stacked the deck strongly against him at the PPV in a match against Cena - why not just fire him anyway?

•I have an idea... How about Cena propose a boycott of fans ordering PPVs and buying live event tickets until Laurinaitis is fired? Wouldn't the short-term damage to business be worth forcing the Board's hand (storyline-wise) in the interest of getting rid of Laurinaitis for good?

•Quotebook - The Big Show: "I got no sympathy from any of you. No sympathy. None. Eighteen years of my life, nothing. I did what I had to do! I did what each and every one of you would have done!"

•Show had good heel heat from the crowd, including loud "You're a Sellout!" chants during his promo.

•When Laurinaitis smugly ordered Cena and Sheamus to face three opponents, why not make it ten on two? I mean, is he only allowed to be so unfair, but not too unfair?

•Santino to Ricardo: "You're accent is almost as ridiculous as those eyebrows. They look like caterpillars."

•They pointed out that Raw has outlasted iconic long-lasting shows such as The Simpsons, Law & Order, Gunsmoke, and Lassie. You know what they all have in common? They all either have ended or will eventually run their course and be cancelled from the weekly schedule.

•When Cole said Del Rio has one worker per car taking care of his cars, I thought to myself that made sense since Del Rio - as evidenced by the video on Smackdown this week and Raw two weeks ago - is too busy doing charity appearances in the U.S. for the anti-bullying "B.A. Star" organization.

•Good to hear Punk say that there is no shame to tapping out in practice. "I'd rather have six seconds of recovery than six months of rehab," he said.

•They did a nice job building up a rematch between Punk and Bryan. There seems to be a reason for a rematch based on Bryan's bragging that he made Punk tap, ignoring that he was pinned first. What wasn't talked about was how lucky Punk's win was. Punk seemed to take credit for the pin, as if he initiated it, rather than being a beneficiary of dumb luck since Bryan torqued him own shoulders onto the mat as he had Punk in a submission.

•With WWE clearly invested in Sheamus at this point as one of their key top babyfaces, it's good to have Sheamus out there sharing ring space with Cena in this Raw main event spot.