

WWE developmental gets TV--well, at least they are taping

By Danny Rodriguez

07/17/08 Florida Championship Wrestling DEBUT TAPING Report

By Big D

This past Thursday, WWE's new developmental territory Florida Championship Wrestling, relieved from non-running water and broken restrooms, debuted in their new facilities in South Tampa, Florida and taped 2 hours of wrestling featuring WWE developmental talent and some of WWE's biggest names, as well as some legends from the past.

The show began with Derby City's TIMMY BALTIMORE coming out to be the time keeper. Great man that Timmy Baltimore. Justin Roberts then comes out to do the ring introductions. That's right, Smackdown's Justin Roberts. We begin with what I believe was a dark match.

Dark Match: DH Smith, Big Rob, and Lupe Martinez defeated Mike Krueh, Charles Evans, and Vic Adams in a six-man tag team match. Nice to see DH Smith actually working. Will we ever see him on WWE TV again? Big Rob is a freak. He's pure dynamite and has "the look" WWE likes so much. He's like Renee Dupree with a mullet. Screw it, he looks like Mike Awesome and Renee Dupree had a baby. Vic Adams and Charles Evans come off as heel versions of Cryme Tyme. Pretty solid six man tag team match, with no blown spots and lots of basics. DH Smith gets the duke with a belly-to-back suplex.

Justin Roberts introduces your FCW COMMENTARY TEAM: "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes and Todd Grisham. Dusty as a color commentator is BUYS! I believe this is where the TV Tapings actually began (although I am not sure if the Flair material will be on there).

Out comes the "Nature Boy" Ric Flair to an unbelievable amount of fanfare. Ric Flair is beloved everywhere he goes. The fans chanted "Thank You Ric", bowed to him, and gave him a standing ovation, and like the original Nature Boy Buddy Rodgers once said: "to a nicer guy it couldn't happen". Flair comes out and basically cuts a quasi-shoot promo about the evolution of WWE's developmental system and says the guys you see tonight will be the future stars of the business. He puts over the production team and WWE's willingness to help FCW succeed, naming people like Steve Keirn for his hard work, Johnny Ace (whom he called his "boss"), Kevin Dunn, and calls Dusty Rhodes the most "creative man in the business", basically telling us he's the booker. Flair says he is retired but his job now is WWE Ambassador. He thanks the fans for coming out and says the success of this company is in our hands. Awesome.

Match #1: "The Canadian Badboy" Shawn Spears vs. "The Stampede Kid" TJ Wilson. Two Canadians at war. I haven't seen TJ work in quite some time and I must say he has gotten much better at standing out. TJ Wilson has great athleticism and he displayed it. Spears played the cocky, arrogant heel, methodically breaking TJ down, with TJ making quick comebacks, but getting cut off. Old-school. At one point TJ was bleeding from the mouth. One of the sickest things in the match was a back suplex on the ropes where TJ's neck landed right on the ropes and he whiplashed out. Scary. Anyways, Shawn won with a neckbreaker. Decent match.

Match #2: Colt "Boom Boom" Cabana, Atlas de... .. Ricky Ortiz, and one of the Bella Twins defeated Alicia Fox, Jay Bradley, and Sinn Bowdee in a Mixed Six-Person Tag Match. Since WWE changed his name, Atlas DeBone is now called Ricky Ortiz officially in FCW as well. I don't want to beat a dead horse, but Colt Cabana is THE MAN. Colt was easily one of the most over acts in the building. He was crisp with everything he did and nothing he did looked overtly dangerous. Colt's charisma is on another plateau and I'm one of the few people who think he's vastly superior to CM Punk in overall value as a worker. On the other side of the coin, and I'm trying to stay professional: Ricky Ortiz sucks. He's sloppy as hell. I know seventeen year old backyard wrestlers with better looking irish whips than the ones he throws. He has some strange "slow down" periods in his matches where he seemingly has lost control. I'm sure he's a charismatic fellow, but he MUST work on the in-ring. Babyfaces won when the Bella Twin (unsure which) hit an X-Factor.

Match #3: "The Natural" Nick Nemeth defeated Greg Jackson. This was a 1980s TV match designed to get Nemeth over as a star. Greg was fodder for him, hitting one of two moves before being cut off and beaten. People were chanting "NICKY" at Nemeth, so I guess they all remember. I don't like him using the name "The Natural" because regardless of how good a worker he may become, Randy Couture will always be a greater man. Anyways, Nick wins with a flying downward spiral. Spectacular finisher.

Former WWE Champion John Cena comes out to a huge ovation. Cena cuts a promo to the live crowd not unlike the Ric Flair promo earlier, essentially putting over the FCW talents as the new breed and the future. Small "Prototype" chants here and there. Shawn Spears comes out. Oh boy. Spears cuts a promo on John Cena, questioning Cena being there. He tells Cena that being at FCW is risky because so many guys in the back want their chance to succeed and they're very hungry and willing to take out the top dog. He says they want to make a name for themselves. Cena isn't intimidated. Cena wants to fight and is ready but Spears tells him that he's not there to hurt him, but rather be his friend! He tells him to watch his back and teases leaving, before attacking Cena and getting back body dropped. Cena picks him up and nails the FU and poses for the crowd. Fun segment.

Match #4: FCW Florida Champion Jake Hager defeated Heath Miller to retain the title. Heath Miller was very over in the building tonight, but he looks like a poor man's Johnny Devine mixed with Edge from 1998. Jake Hager has a very good build for wrestling. He's a tall kid, who's muscular, but not freakishly large, so he can still move quickly in the ring. Traditional wrestling match here with the babyface running wild and getting cut off. One thing a lot of these FCW guys need to learn how to do is play to the crowd, something people like Dusty can really help them with. They don't do it nearly enough. Hager retains his title with a reverse gutwrench suplex.

Justin Roberts tells us they will take a brief intermission and will return with another hour of FCW. Either they taped two, one hour shows or one two-hour show. That I am not sure about.

Match #5: Sheamus defeated Ricky Ortiz. Indeed this must be another episode because Ricky is back facing the big, irish, Sheamus. Both of these guys are big power wrestlers, but as I said before, Ricky, Atlas, or whatever you call him can be really sloppy at times. Seems kind of green to me. I wasn't sure who the heel or face was in this match but judging by crowd reactions, neither guy was over as a face. Sheamus ends up winning with a high spinebuster.

After the match, Miss Angela, FCW's interview girl, interviews Sheamus at ringside. Sheamus cuts a promo on, of all people, DAVE FINLAY~!. He says bringing the leprechaun Hornswoggle into wrestling has made Irish people a joke and issues a challenge to Finlay and says he is a joke too. So yes, judging by this and an angle that they are doing later in the show, they will be doing cross-branded storylines with WWE, at least focused in FCW.

Match #6: Afa Jr. defeated Evan Bourne. This... THIS was FUN. Evan Bourne got a huge pop coming out. Some light "Sydal" chants. Evan Bourne's ability to take bumps is phenomenal. Not since the late Curt Hennig have I seen a guy take bumps as nicely as he does and not get himself hurt. It's almost like his body is made of rubber. This match was the classic monster heel versus geeky high-flying babyface formula. Afa Jr has the exact same maneurisms, spots, transitions, and ring-gear as Umaga, minus the phony tattoos. It seems like all Samoans are generic in WWE. He beat on Bourne for most of this with the crowd getting behind him. He does a few nice punches and kicks and sets Afa up for the Shooting Sydal Press, but misses. Afa takes the advantage and hits a NASTY finisher which I can only describe as an "inverted F-5". Basically, he picked up in F-5 position and spun him until he dropped face first to the ground, facing AWAY from Afa. Tough to describe, but it was a nice move I hadn't seen before. He got the pin with it.

Chris Jericho comes out. In my head I'm thinking "please don't heel us", but of course, he does, which I'm fine with. Jericho says the fans in Tampa don't deserve to cheer him. They say everybody in the building is a bunch of liars and hypocrits. He then brings out a man who he feels has a bright future - Nick Nemeth, the Natural. He puts over Nick to the live crowd, then introduces JOE HENNIG. He tells Joe about what he could do for the business and asks Joe to choose a path. He wants Joe to choose between listening to him, or listening to the liars and hypocrits. Joe of course being the face, doesn't go with it. Jericho gets mad at Joe. Joe says that on SUNDAY, he's going to lose to Shawn Michaels. Sunday. On a show that is taped and won't air before Sunday???? Either this will not be on the FCW TV, or the HBK/Y2J feud is going to continue past this weekend's PPV and this will be in the can for the NEXT PPV match. I don't know. Anyways, Nemeth and Jericho beat Joe down and leave him laying. Jericho raises Nemeth's arm. More cross branded angles.

Match #7: Gabe Tuft, Kevin Kiley, and Johnny Curtis defeated John Gabriel, Tyrone Jones, and "Campus Legend" Brad Allen in a six-man tag. The match of the generic wrestling. Nothing against these guys personally, but they all look pretty much the same and it was tough to tell them apart other than their tights and skin pigmentation. They really did nothing to explain their characters to us other than Brad Allen, who is apparently a legend of the campus. Okay. It seems like this was put in there as filler. Not a long match at all here, with two hot tags the finish coming by way of a high spinning heel kick. Not much to say about this one.

Kelly Kelly comes out. She is a FINE woman, which is obvious, and much smaller than you'd think. Kelly says that she's heard Ric Flair and John Cena talk about the FCW wrestlers and what they will mean to the WWE someday, but what about the divas? So Kelly Kelly introduces all of the FCW Divas. So the Divas came out. A few of them I did not recognize. Kelly says that now they will have the first ever "Diva Twist". I immediately thought this segment was going to turn a disaster. So you had around seven or so girls doing the twist in the middle of the ring over music until one bumps another, and another, like dominos, and they have a big cat fight. It turns into a big rumble until Kelly and the Bella Twins clean house.

Match #8: Eddie Colon and Eric Perez "The Puerto Rican Nightmares" defeated FCW Florida Tag Team Champions Drew McKintyre and Stu Sanders "The Empire". Empire? No sir, these guys are NOT the EMPIRE! Still though, this was a fun match to cap off the evening. These guys had wrestled before in New Port Richey for the belts and Drew and Stu won them from the Ricans. Well this was the big rematch and I must say the rumors are true: Eddie Colon is SIGNIFICANTLY better than his brother Carlito when it comes to his in-ring work, but he really does lack in the charisma department. The heels jumped Eddie early until he tagged in Eric, who fought for a bit before getting cut off. They put all of the heat on Eric during the match. Eric finally makes the hot tag and in comes Eddie, who cleans house. Eddie is very crisp and athletic with his moves. He reminds me a lot of Shelton Benjamin from 2004. Anyways, the heels were in

trouble and Eddie hit what I believed to be a modified version of the Backcracker for the three-count. New Tag Team Champions. Huge pop for the title change.

So Justin Roberts thanked us for coming and plugged next week's shows, will are slated to feature special guests Batista, The Hardys, and Maria.

Live Notes:

- This show was almost as disorganized when it came to tickets as TNA. They sold out the tickets extremely fast and some people (like myself) had waited there, in the pouring rain, for hours to watch the product. Then they had reserved seating for the media, which is understandable, but if the media didn't show, they sold them. They also sold tickets for next week's shows. Apparently these will be weekly tapings, even though they apparently taped two shows tonight.
- Ric Flair, Kelly Kelly, Afa Jr., Rocky Johnson, John Cena, and Chris Jericho were signing autographs and taking pictures at a table. By the way, I took a good look and, Cena doesn't have a single scrape or bruise on him. That kid is a fast healer. John Cena took a picture with everybody who asked. He's awesome in that aspect. Problem is, everybody was rushed and you didn't have time to talk to any of the boys.
- The facilities themselves are freaking BEAUTIFUL. When you walk in, there is a giant sized Wrestlemania 24 poster on the wall and on the left there are concession stands selling soft drinks, nachos, and whatnot. Straight ahead there is a short hallway that takes you to the ring. Right before you hit the door to the soundstage, on your left, are FULLY WORKING restrooms. There are WWE PPV Posters EVERYWHERE dating back to some of the 2003 shows (only ones with current stars obviously, like Triple H), and there are even posters IN THE RESTROOMS. It really feels nice. Next to the ticket booth there are vintage pictures from the original Championship Wrestling from Florida of Dusty Rhodes, Gordon Solie, and others. It's really nice. The outside has a giant yellow FCW logo on the front of the building. Very well done.
- The ring area is fabulous. It feels like the Impact Zone, except minus the geeky fans and uncomfortable seating. The front row is composed of cushioned chairs from older PPVs and there are anywhere from three to eight rows around ringside. It seats about 250 or so people, perhaps LESS. There is tremendous lighting everywhere, a hard cam set up, and two gigantic LCDS with the new FCW logo flashing about. The announce booth is in one corner and the entrance ramp is in the other. The entrance ramp appears to resemble the old ECW on Sci-Fi entrance they used before the HD switch. Speaking of HD, I'm not sure if this show was filmed in HD, but those cameras were definitive WWE cameras. The show had a professional, yet intimate feel to it. It looked first class and it appeared WWE REALLY put money into this like Ric Flair implied during his opening promo. This is what OVW really needed to succeed - WWE's willingness to help it succeed.
- At the show I spotted: John Laurinatis, Shad Gaspard from Cryme Tyme, Steve and Terry Keirn (obviously), Nattie Neidhart, Kofi Kingston, Big John from Tough Enough, Dean Malenko, Kevin Dunn, and Florida indy worker Steve Madison, who used to wrestle for FCW, but I'm not sure anymore.
- Lots of media coverage from local outlets.
- As of the time of this writing, we are still unsure as to the TV status of the company. I spoke to a few officials there who said that they will either be in syndication on the local CW Network, the Sunshine Network, or MyNetworkTV. Not even management knows yet, but the shows are indeed being put in the can.
- Next week, Batista, Matt and Jeff Hardy, and Maria will be the special guests.
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