

Dan Wahlers has complaints about WWE and Cyber Sunday predictions

Complaints From a Long-Time WWE Fan

Plus: Cyber Sunday Predictions

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I'm back after three weeks with a new column for you today, and there are a couple of reasons why I haven't written in a while. First of all, I was without my home computer for almost two weeks, due to a very destructive virus that got in my system, and destroyed my hard drive. Over \$300 later and my computer is finally back to normal. Just a word of advice, don't be stupid like me, and let whatever virus protection you have on your computer expire, leaving your system unprotected. It's really unbelievable how much crap there is out there, especially on certain pay wrestling sites, that can do such horrendous damage to your computer in only a matter of seconds. It costs a lot of time and money to fix. I found that out the hard way, and my wallet is a lot lighter because of it.

The other reason I haven't written lately is because, quite frankly, the WWE product has been so dull and listless lately, that I haven't been compelled to sit down and put the time and effort into doing a column. The past two weeks of Raw have been two of the most boring, uninspired, worthless wrestling shows I have had the misfortune of watching in a long time. When you sit down to watch Raw, or whatever the show might be, you don't like to have the feeling when the show is over like you just wasted two hours of your life. I've had that feeling the past two weeks. It's like no one put any time or effort into putting those shows together. It's like they had two hours of TV to fill, and they just decided to slop together whatever nonsense they felt like, with no rhyme or reason for anything. It was one bad segment after another, including a very rare bad Shawn Michaels match last week, a ridiculous Gauntlet Match concept that someone pulled out of their ass this week, and the phrase "WWE Universe" regurgitated about 150 times by carnival barkers Michael Cole and Jerry Lawler.

Seriously, a memo to the fine folks at WWE: The phrase "WWE Universe" is one of the most annoying, heavy handed marketing slogans in modern history. I can't stand it, and my body wants to break out in hives every time one of the announcers or wrestlers says it. You want to try a new drinking game? Take a shot every time a WWE announcer or wrestler says the words "WWE Universe." Of course, you'll be more hammered than Scott Hall at a wrestling convention when the show is over, but hell that's more fun than watching a lot of the garbage WWE has been putting on television lately. What does WWE Universe mean, anyway? Are they watching Raw on Mars? What's the Smackdown rating in the Jupiter market?

This whole idea goes back to Vince McMahon's grand design to make wrestling appeal to a more mainstream fan base, and slowly but surely every aspect of the actual art of professional wrestling is being taken away. It's not wrestling, it's sports entertainment. They're not wrestlers; they're not even sports entertainers anymore. They're just entertainers which is how Vince McMahon has told all of the announcers to refer to the wrestlers. The announcers don't call the moves and holds in the ring, they're storytellers. We're no longer wrestling fans, or fans, we're members of the WWE Universe. Why they don't they just go all the way, and get rid of those annoying things called wrestling matches altogether, and have every show be a series of comedy sketches and soap opera storylines? If Vince McMahon has his way that might not be too far off.

I have no problem with them trying to improve wrestling's image in the mainstream, and dressing up the product to make it more appealing to kids and families. I get that I'm 28 years old, and I'm not part of WWE's core demographic any despite the fact that the average age of a Raw or Smackdown viewer is usually somewhere in the mid to upper 30's. I get that I'm going to have to stomach kids favorite John Cena bring shoved down my throat, much like older fans had to stomach Hulk Hogan when I was growing up. I can live with that. But how do they square that away with the type of nonsensical bullshit like we saw last week with Johnny Knoxville on Raw? Firstly, Johnny Knoxville and Jackass were popular in like 2001. This is 2008 going on 2009, in case anyone hasn't informed Vince McMahon and the WWE writers.

So they're just a little late on the whole Jackass craze, like seven years too late. But what's seven years among friends?

Second, what part of trying to dress up WWE's image is having two guys wearing banana hammock ball bags gyrating around a wrestling ring (sorry, is it "entertainment ring" now?), and a man spitting worms into another man's mouth? anyone please explain to me why The Boogeyman is still employed? I thought we were rid of him for good. That was just an awful segment on so many levels, including the worst body slam in the history of professional wrestling with Beth Phoenix on Johnny Knoxville. I don't know if they thought they were going to get some sort of mainstream buzz out of doing that angle, but they predictably got none. The only buzz they got was the sound of crickets chirping in the arena, and televisions changing channels all across America.

I had two feelings watching that last Monday. The first was embarrassment. Unfortunately, we've all felt that before when watching WWE. It's that moment where you watch something so bad that it makes you embarrassed to be a wrestling fan. The other feeling was apathy. I realized I had sat there and watched an entire two hour wrestling show, and that I didn't enjoy one single segment on the entire show. Not one. I got the same feeling when I watched this past Monday's show from Corpus Christi, Texas. It's become an all too familiar feeling for me lately.

The usually awesome and reliable Chris Jericho was there rattling off the same promo he's been doing for the past few months. I loved it before; all of a sudden I didn't anymore. All of a sudden I wanted Chris Jericho off my TV screen. They ran the same segment they've been doing for the past few weeks. Jericho comes out, and blames "You people" his problems, and then he says he's the greatest champion in the business today. Then Batista comes out and does his weird, sarcastic Batista laugh, tells Jericho he's going to beat him at Cyber Sunday, and the segment ends in some kind of physicality. This week it was Jericho slapping Batista. It was just a rehash of something we've already seen a bunch of times; and it was very lazy and uncreative writing. Chris Jericho has been nothing short of brilliant since he turned heel, but he's been off the past few weeks, and a lot of it has to do with the fact that he cuts a variation of the same promo every week. Even something great can get stale if you repeat it over and over.

You can always usually count on Santino Marella for some good comedy. He came out dressed up as a combination of the three men you can spend 99 cents per text to vote on his opponent at Cyber Sunday, Roddy Piper, Goldust, and The Honky Tonk Man. Or Rodney The Piper, Goldendust, and The Honky Tonky Man (or is it Honky Donkey Man?) as Santino calls them. On paper, you would figure that would be a pretty hilarious segment. But it wasn't. The jokes weren't funny. The entire thing fell flat, and the fans in arena were not laughing. There was an eerie silence, actually. Then Hacksaw Jim Duggan came out in his blue gym shorts, and the segment felt like it lasted 45 minutes. I have no problems with Jim Duggan, but why someone thought it was a good idea to give him that much mic time is beyond me.

Another problem with Raw is something my colleague on this site, Todd Martin, brought up in his Raw Report this week. The announcing on Raw has been atrocious. Michael Cole couldn't be phoning it in anymore if he were announcing Raw from a pay phone in the back of the arena. Jerry Lawler has been hit or miss for a number of years now, but at least he always had his chemistry and relationship with Jim Ross to cover things up, and you always had a fairly entertaining and competent broadcast every week. These two are just painful to listen to now. I can't stand the way they guffaw and fake laugh at everything. You would have thought the Charlie Haas impersonation of Steve Austin was the funniest thing in the world the way those two clowns were carrying on. And the thing is, it wasn't funny. The Haas thing was funny the first few times when he impersonated John Cena, JBL, and Mr. Perfect. It's not funny anymore. The joke is over. Apparently the writers haven't gotten the message. But Cole and Lawler are downright embarrassing these days. I know some of it isn't their fault. Some of it is them just repeating the canned lines that Vince McMahon feeds them. For instance, I'm sure it was Vince's idea to have them ramble on and on about this Diva Halloween Costume Contest at Cyber Sunday, while there were wrestling matches going on. Way too much time was paid to something that will not produce one single PPV buy.

The announcing switch experiment has been an abject failure. They would be really doing themselves, the fans, and the product as a whole a favor if they acknowledged what everyone knows. Michael Cole and Jerry Lawler aren't working on Raw, Jim Ross and Tazz are better on Smackdown, but there is a definite spark missing. Cole always worked better with Tazz, and no one has better chemistry than JR and The King. I don't care how they do it; I don't care if they don't

bother to explain it in storylines. But it's time to switch the announcing teams back, and stop screwing around with things that didn't need to be screwed around with in the first place. It can't fix the product, but at least it would make the show less painful to listen to.

Out of everything that happened on Raw, the only thing I even semi enjoyed was the tag match with CM Punk and Kofi Kingston against John Morrison and The Miz. Morrison and Miz are apparently facing DX in another one of their "one night only" reunions on the three hour Raw on 11/3. They can't even fill an entertaining two hours; I shudder to think of what they're going to do to fill three hours. Morrison and Miz are like Thanksgiving turkeys being fattened up, and built up, so DX can assuredly destroy them in two weeks. So that meant CM Punk got to do the designated job to Miz in this tag match. Talk about falling off a cliff fast, Punk has gone from being the World Heavyweight Champion to doing jobs for The Miz. It's like he's back on ECW again, and like the past few months never happened.

It's very frustrating to watch the WWE product right now. There are very few guys that I personally care about, and enjoy seeing anymore. Then you have guys like CM Punk that I like, but know that the company will never get fully behind, and you get that feeling of "Why bother?" Maybe I'm an idiot, but I thought the Punk title reign went well. He certainly shattered box office records, or become a huge ratings draw. But things were steady when he was champion. And while he didn't generate the huge crowd reactions of a John Cena or Batista, I thought the crowds got more and more into him as the weeks went by. He was always a work in progress, and someone that needed people with patience to get behind him.

It's awfully coincidental that the end of Punk's push seemed to come when the buyrate for The Great American Bash came in, and the show tanked at 195,000 buys worldwide and only 122,000 domestic, which is just above One Night Stand (194,000) for lowest buys of the year. Punk defending against Batista was one of the top matches on that show, although it was Triple H vs. Edge that was the main event, and most pushed match on the show. Three guesses who got blamed for the low buyrate, and the first two don't count. It's really a shame too. I'm not one of those people that the sun rises and sets with CM Punk, and he's the answer to everything. But this company has to invest time and money in creating new stars, and he is one of the people worth investing in. He shouldn't be demoted down to barely being on the midcard because he was a part of one bad PPV buyrate. But that's what happens when you have insecure people on top of the company, looking to cut the nuts off anyone that might remotely pose a threat to their spot.

Look what happened to Cody Rhodes and Ted Dibiase. The crowd chanted boring during their promo at No Mercy, and they've been barely seen since. What happened to forming the stable with Randy Orton? What happened to the cocky, brash young second generation stars that were taking their place in the business whether anyone liked it or not? They've become some of the most boring characters in wrestling, and that goes back to writing. And it goes back to not having patience. They gave Rhodes and Dibiase a great gimmick, and they started out hot when they first formed. Then the ball was dropped, and there was no follow-up, and they were left to flounder on their own. When you have new stars like that, you just can't throw them on TV with no rhyme or reason, and expect them to get over on their own. They need to be given quality material to work with on the mic, and good opponents to work with in the ring. Cryme Tyme were not good opponents for them. But working an angle with CM Punk and Kofi Kingston would be great, or even throw them in the ring with Morrison and The Miz, in a battle of the cocky, young heels. But no, one bad crowd reaction, and its backburner city.

This is just one of the many reasons why I'm frustrated in general with the WWE product right now. There is no direction in the writing and booking. No short-term planning, no long-term planning, no genuine efforts to create new stars. We get these half assed efforts, and if things don't work out exactly as planned, the guys don't get second chances. We have a product that on one hand they want to make more mainstream acceptable, and on the other hand they dumb down to the lowest common denominator. They don't plan from week to week. They give away potentially marquee PPV matches like The Undertaker vs. Triple H on free TV, just to try and pop a rating. They book to stroke the massive egos of the people in control of the company, rather than to satisfy what the paying customers want.

And when it comes down to it that is the biggest problem in WWE today, and the biggest reason why nothing will change until the backwards ideas about how the wrestling business should be run are changed. I've been a fan for 23 years, but

I'm reaching the point in my life, and the frustration level with the current product, that I don't know how much longer I'm going to be sticking around as a fan.

Cyber Sunday is this weekend on PPV from the US Airways Center in Phoenix, Arizona. This is the fifth PPV of its kind since the concept debuted in 2004 as "Taboo Tuesday." It's been a bomb every year they've done it, and I'm not sure that it's still on the PPV schedule. The voting for the matches used to happen on WWE.com, but this year, with the country in economic ruin, they have the audacity to charge fans 99 cents per text plus standard messaging rates to text in their votes. What incredible gall. Much like my feelings on the current WWE product as a whole, I have almost no interest in this show. But I'll give you my quick predictions on each match.

I think Steve Austin will win the voting as Special Guest Referee in the Chris Jericho vs. Batista match for the World Heavyweight Championship. They aren't delaying the filming of his movie, and flying him in from Vancouver so he can sit in the locker room and play cards. I think somehow Jericho will retain the title. I think the fans will vote for Jeff Hardy to face Triple H in a singles match for the WWE Championship, even though the booking on Smackdown has led people in the direction of a Triple Threat match with Vladimir Kozlov included. Triple H will keep the title. The fans will vote for a Last Man Standing Match for The Undertaker and Big Show, and Taker will pick up the win after losing at No Mercy. No Holds Barred Match will be the fans pick for Rey Mysterio and Kane, and I see Rey winning based on the way the storyline has gone thus far.

Even though I hope Evan Bourne wins, and he was presented as the favorite after winning the Triple Threat on ECW this past Tuesday, I have a feeling Finlay is going to win the voting to face Matt Hardy for the ECW Title. He's the better known name, and Bourne is still unknown to a lot of people, which is a crime since he's the most exciting wrestler in WWE today. Hardy/Finlay would be an entertaining match, but Hardy/Bourne would be the match of the night. Either way, Matt will retain. Even though the booking would lead to The Honky Tonk Man facing Santino Marella, I think Roddy Piper is going to win the fan voting. Plus HTM apparently has some kind of injury issue with his hand, or something, I believe it is and has said that he might not be able to work if he were selected. And I don't know anyone that has any desire to see Dustin Rhodes stuff his 300 pounds into the Goldust suit again. Piper is at least somewhat well known to this

generation of fans, sorry the "WWE Universe", since he's been on TV quite frequently over the past few years. Santino will retain in something that, no matter what, should be kept a very short comedy match.

Cryme Tyme vs. John Morrison and The Miz will win the voting as the extra tag team match on the card, because it's the one that's been pushed the most on TV. But CM Punk/Kofi Kingston vs. Cody Rhodes/Ted Dibiase or Jamie Noble/Mickie James vs. William Regal/Layla would both be much better matches. It would definitely send a message if the fans rejected the match that the company has basically told them to vote for over one of the other matches. There is the aforementioned Diva's Halloween Costume Contest with the usual suspects. And the fans voting during the PPV for who they think had the best costume. Mickie James won last year. Plus in a free match on WWE.com before the PPV at 7:45 PM ET., Shelton Benjamin defends the US Title against R-Truth, Festus, or MVP. Take R-Truth in your Cyber Sunday Office Pool, and this is the one match where I think there could be a title change.

If I end up watching the PPV, I'll be back early next week with my thoughts and analysis on the show. If not, I'm not sure when I'm going to write again. It's pretty much whenever the spirit moves me, as my grandmother used to say. And lately, it hasn't been moving me much.

Thanks for reading. Until next time, take care and be well.

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