

FRIDAY UPDATE: Smackdown tonight, another glowing Wrestler review, Vickie's great body, more

By Bryan Alvarez

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WWE has a packed weekend. Tonight Raw runs Fort Lauderdale, FL. Saturday has Raw in Lake Charles, LA (billed hometown of Buddy Wayne, who trained me to wrestle) and Smackdown in Tyler, TX. Sunday has Raw in Baton Rouge and Smackdown in Bossier City, LA. Monday has a Raw TV taping in New Orleans with the William Regal vs. CM Punk IC Title mach, and Smackdown has a house show in Alexandria, LA.

Sunday is also the annual New Japan Tokyo Dome show with tons of TNA wrestlers (preview later this weekend), and a Sengoku prime time special from the Saitama Super Arena.

Smackdown tonight has:

- * Hardy vs. Edge & Big show
- *Edge Heads vs. Fit Finlay & Great Khali (seriously)
- *Kendrick & Zeke vs. Jesse & Festus
- *Koslov vs. Hurricane
- *Kizarny debuts vs. MVP

With a feature on WWE booking leading to Wrestlemania, including current Smackdown plans for two of the key matches penciled in and looking at both sides of the arguments as to the title situation as well as coverage of UFC 92 and the Japanese New Year's Eve K-1 and Hustle shows are among the features in the two issues of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter that will be out next week.

The first issue is already available to web site premium subscribers today and the second will be available later this week.

We also have an update on Batista and questions regarding the booking when he is ready to return.

The story on the first house shows with Jeff Hardy as champion, how he's been received, what the current plans going forward are including the wrestler not yet under contract who is being considered for a major Wrestlemania match. We look at how the booking at Wrestlemania always changes and what the key arguments on the Smackdown main event side are.

We also talk about the realities of Darren Aronofsky's feeling that wrestlers should be part of the Screen Actors Guild and what steps would need to happen for that to be a reality. We also look at how the difference in the type of people in wrestling today as opposed to 20 years ago also affects this process.

We look at a newcomer who has been pushed on TV and is already being soured on, as well as future of MVP, and just how big John Cena is and why a heel turn isn't being considered. We also have a look at a wrestler not yet in WWE who has told people he will debut at the Royal Rumble as well as what crackdown has been privately complained about by many in WWE and looking at the arguments on that crackdown.

We also have full coverage of UFC 92, as well as what lessons and the long-term realities of MMA when it comes to generational stars. We look at what happened with Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira, including what may have been the cause for his poor performance. We look at what Frank Mir said to Brock Lesnar after his win and potential business of that match. We look at how the crowd reactions at weigh-ins differed from the live event. We look at plenty of other matches now being talked about coming off what happened at UFC 92. We look at future matches for Quinton Jackson and Chuck Liddell.

We also have business notes from UFC 92 including some early indications on how the show did overall. We look at both the positives and negatives of the show, match-by-match coverage, base pay, bonuses and more.

We also have a huge feature on the death of Justin Eilers, and the person that he was. We look at the circumstances, what led to the circumstances, and what charges are against the person who shot him.

We've also got full coverage of the K-1 New Year's Eve show as well as notes on the biggest event in ROH history with the Final Battle card, including eye witness accounts of the Austin Aries incident with a fan.

We've got a feature on the most popular performers in pro wrestling and MMA in 2008 based on web interest, which turned out to yield some very surprising results. We look at old guard like Hogan, Flair, Austin and Rock compared with the current stars like Cena, HHH and more, including a few major surprises on the list and being as high as they were. The story also looks at the differences in popularity level of wrestlers, boxers and MMA fighters in the U.S.

We also look at UFC vs. WWE, where each is more popular when it comes to states and major cities, and how its similarities and lack of similarities with pro wrestling affect UFC's attempt to go national. We also look at the value of network vs. cable in 2008, what three WWE stars are underpushed, and what major drawing cards are not near the top 25 when it comes to popularity.

We've also got a look at WWE house shows in what is traditionally the best week of the year to draw, the week after Christmas. In particular, we look at the Madison Square Garden show, and how it differed from other shows this past week.

The Wrestling Observer ranges from 25,000 to 40,000 words covering pro wrestling and MMA all over the world.

Each issue has coverage and analysis of all the major news, plus every issue breaks major news stories before the Internet sites and has the most complete look at the business as a whole anywhere. The Observer is now in its 27th year of being the leading insider pro wrestling publication in the world. The biggest and most influential names in the pro wrestling industry as well as the MMA industry, from bookers, to promoters to Hall of Fame wrestlers and fighters to the

biggest current names, both on camera, and behind the scenes, along with thousands of readers in all 50 states and 30 countries subscribe. Many have subscribed as long as 20 years or more straight. They get the most detailed and inside coverage of what is going on all over the world and an accuracy from having the most inside sources that can't be found on the web. Everyone from Wall Street to the major offices to the TV networks in U.S. and Japan turn to the Observer for what is going on in the business. If you are a new subscriber ordering 24 or more issues, you can get one free classic issue of your choice sent to you today. With a 40 issue subscription, you can get two free classic issues sent to you today. Just send your Visa or Master Card order with your name, address, phone number, Visa or Master Card number and an expiration date to dave@wrestlingobserver.com or you can order by faxing that information to 408-244-3402. You can also subscribe via paypal at www.paypal.com and using the dave@wrestlingobserver.com address or subscribe via check, cash or money order, as well as credit card, by mail, by sending to Wrestling Observer Newsletter, P.O. Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009-1228.

We also have more awards including the biggest fan voting awards in Japan, so you can see who the Japanese audience felt was its MVP this year, as well as a listing of winners in previous years, as well as match of the year and other major awards. We also have a look at MMA's biggest television show and its awards for this year.

We've got full coverage of the craziest promotion in wrestling, with Hustle Mania, a network prime time New Year's Eve special that went head-to-head with the K-1 show. We look at who were the key people on the network special, including how the two networks counter programmed their strong points against each other.

We also have our regular features including all the TV ratings from the past week, results from the major league house shows and major TV show reviews.

Also in this week's issues:

--Coverage of Dragon Gate's year-end show including a longtime unit breaking up and a new champion being crowned

--Winner of the Rikidozan award as Pro Wrestling NOAH's MVP

--Who is expected to get a major push in NOAH next year

--Update on Kenta Kobashi

--Death of a wrestler in training in Japan

--A look at the life of Rollin Hard

--The miracle experience of a member of one of wrestling's most famous families

--Update on trial of the doctor who treated Chris Benoit and which wrestlers he was said to be associated with

--Mick Foley complains to Sports Illustrated about what was written about him in the article on "The Wrestler"

--New match for Genesis

--TNA PPV schedule for 2009

--Update on the UFC 95 lineup

--Update on Matt Hughes vs. Matt Serra

--Update on UFC fundraising efforts coming from The Fight for the Troops show

--Update on the next season of Ultimate Fighter

--UFC headliner complains about fighter pay

--Update on WEC plans for 2009

--Interesting idea Dana White has talked about for Satoshi Ishii

--What market that UFC was planning on hitting in 2009 that looks to be out

--What top star just did a fight while needing knee surgery and when he's getting it

--Best selling MMA and pro wrestling DVDs

--A look back at Hulk Hogan vs. Terry Funk

--ECW getting a replay showing

--Regal talks about a WWE star who needs work in the ring

--Lance Storm talks about why C.M. Punk's matches are sometimes considered inconsistent and his thoughts

--WWE signs some wrestlers let go in the past

--A look at the movie "Behind Enemy Lines 3"

--Promotion making a major ticket price change that could be a big mistake

--NWA and CMLL talk about the longtime NWA titles that have been based in Mexico

--Former WWE star and U.S. indie guys get a look by an international promotion this past week

--Two wrestlers miss AAA Christmas party in protest and their issues

--Puerto Rico wrestling awards for 2008

--Note on Team 3-D in Japan

--One of biggest indie events of the year

--Promoter claims Hogan came to him for an idea of promoting Hogan led house shows

--Update on Dwayne Johnson and his next movies

--Update on Perry Saturn

--Lots more on the Wrestler including WWE private and public reaction

--Business notes on the movie "The Wrestler"

--Former tag champs open a wrestling school

--Looking back at "Wrestling with Shadows"

--Several wrestlers filming a movie in China including four ex-WWE performers

--80s star talks boxing match he's scheduled in

--Future of MMA on CBS and Showtime

--Current biggest drawing fighter in Japan and it's a name virtually unknown in wrestling or MMA circles

New subscribers ordering 24 or 40 issues have to let us know what major story (ies) of the past 11 years you are most interested in and we'll send the issue with the best coverage of that story. We've got coverage of every major PPV event and world wide spectacular, every major star switching promotions, histories of companies like FMW, Rings and New Japan, retirement and obit issues of every major star who fits into those descriptions over the past 11 years, as well as our biggest issue every year, the annual awards issue, and our most controversial issue of every year, the Hall of Fame issue. Our most requested issues in our history are:

*November 17, 1997 (full details of everything leading to the most famous wrestling match finish of modern times at the Survivor Series plus a history of in-ring double-crosses)

*December 21, 1998 (the complete Vince McMahon-Bret Hart conversation right before the Survivor Series match so you'll know exactly what was said

--the conversation played in edited form both on the inaugural broadcast of Confidential as well as in Wrestling with Shadows, but everything that was said between the two about the match that was going to take place that same night)

*August 1, 1994 (the most detailed coverage anywhere of the Vince McMahon steroid trial, an issue praised in numerous newspaper article and Sex, Lies and Headlocks)

*March 26, 2001 (death of WCW and history of pro wrestling on the Turner networks)

*October 22, 2001 (why the adult audience has left pro wrestling in such great numbers and what needed to have been done to save them)

*July 8, 1991 (Ric Flair leaves WCW as world champion/Zahorian steroid trial)

*February 8, 1993 (the life and times of Andre the Giant)

*May 13, 2002 (the life story of the most incredible pro wrestling career ever, a look at Lou Thesz, in one of the largest issues of our history)

*January 27, 2003 (part one of the two-part series covering the career and life of The Sheik)

*February 3, 2003 (Part two on The Sheik including thoughts from people who worked with him and where he stands historically)

*March 24, 2003 (history of the WWWF title, inside behind the Sammartino, Backlund and Backlund era)

*April 21, 2003 (history of WWF continues with the expansion nationally, the death of the regional territories and the rise of Hulk Hogan)

*May 12, 2003 (The life and death of Elizabeth, and the rise of fall of Lex Luger)

*June 9, 2003 (Part 1 of history of WWF vs. WCW wars and what many say was the greatest year in U.S. wrestling; plus a look at Fred Blassie)

*June 16, 2003 (Freddie Blassie through the eyes of his biggest rivals and friends)

*July 28, 2003 (Part 2 of the history of the WWF vs. WCW war and the plans to make new superstars in the early 90s, what happened, and the night where the three biggest wrestling companies in the world combined for a joint show and what happened)

*August 25, 2003 (2003 Hall of Fame issue with huge profiles on the controversial career of Shawn Michaels, Chris Benoit as well as historical features on Earl Caddock and Francisco Flores)

*September 22, 2003 (Part 3 of the history of the WWF vs WCW war with the seeds that caused the collapse of the industry in the 90s, Zahorian trial, Gulf War controversy, Flair leaves WCW while holding world title and much more)

*October 27, 2003 (The fascinating life of Stu Hart plus the story of Road Warrior Hawk)

*January 19, 2004 (2003 Awards issue)

*February 2, 2004 (History of Toronto wrestling, Jack Tunney life story, Royal Rumble and Battle Royal history)

*February 23, 2004 (History of Guerrero family with Eddy's win over Brock Lesnar)

*March 1, 2004 (History of WWF continues with the period that brought the company down in early 1992, the mistakes, the real stories and how the business changed)

*March 8, 2004 (History of Wrestlemania, its greatest matches and best and worst shows as voted both by wrestlers and non-wrestlers and Wrestlemania history books)

*July 5, 2004 (A look behind the scenes and Ric Flair's book and his background with Eric Bischoff and Hulk Hogan)

*July 12, 2004 (A look at more on Ric Flair's book and his comments on Bruno Sammartino, Bret Hart and Mick Foley)

*August 16, 2004 (History of the Olympians in pro wrestling)

*August 23, 2004 (2004 Hall of Fame issue and biggest issue of the year with huge profiles on Kazushi Sakuraba, Undertaker, Bob Backlund, Masahiro Chono, Ultimo Dragon, Kurt Angle and Tarzan Lopez

--this counts as one issue if you are asking for a free issue, but ordered separately, due to size, is \$6 in North America and \$7 overseas)

*October 4, 2004 (the life and times of Big Bossman; as well as details of the life and times of one of the most influential men world wide in pro wrestling history, Jim Barnett)

*November 15, 2004 (the full story of what happened between Kurt Angle and Daniel Puder, plus coverage of the most important week in the history of TNA)

*January 24, 2005 (2004 Awards issue, Rock and WWE part company)

*March 14, 2005 (the 50 biggest money players in the history of WWF and a look at their Hall of Fame)

*May 9, 2005 (the life and times of Chris Candido)

*June 20, 2005 (The full story behind Paul Heyman and the death of ECW, as well as coverage of One Night Stand, Hardcore Homecoming and behind the scenes of both shows)

*July 18, 2005 (death of Shinya Hashimoto and his records with a look at the fall of New Japan, the Matt Hardy angle, tons of WWE firings, Cornette firing in detail as well as problems of a WWE developmental territory in our biggest news issue of the year which is a double-sized issue and would be \$6 on its own and \$7 overseas)

*August 24, 2005 (2005 Hall of Fame issue with career profiles of Paul Heyman, HHH and Freebirds plus debut of MMA Hall of Fame)

*September 12, 2005 (History of Mid South Wrestling)

*October 10, 2005 (Life and Times of the Ultimate Warrior)

*November 21, 2005 (Life and Times of Eddy Guerrero and Crusher, double issue \$6 on its own and \$7 overseas)

*December 5, 2005 (The Eddy Guerrero special issue, double issue \$6 on its own, \$7 overseas)

*January 9, 2006 (The life and times of Superstar Billy Graham, plus New Year's Eve 2005 coverage)

*January 16, 2006 (2005 Awards double issue, \$6 or \$7 overseas)

*April 3, 2006 (Story of Ann Calvella and the history of Roller Derby
--many called this the best issue of the Observer ever)

*April 10, 2006 (Behind the scenes at the 2006 Wrestlemania/Hall of Fame week)

*July 24, 2006 (The History of the Von Erichs and World Class Championship Wrestling
--the most unreal story ever in wrestling)

*September 4, 2006 (The Rise and Fall of Kurt Angle; 2006 Hall of Fame inductions of Eddie Guerrero, Paul Bowser,

Masakatsu Funaki, Aja Kong and Hiroshi Hase including tons of wrestling history around the world from the 20s through the 60s, the evolution of working to not working in Japan, and a look at Guerrero in hindsight, double issue \$6 or \$7 overseas)

*October 9, 2006 (A look back nine years later at the life and legacy of Brian Pillman with tons of inside information about what made him tick as his real objectives)

*November 15, 2006 (History of WCW part one, Eric Bischoff's book and how the industry was changed forever)

*November 20, 2006 (History of WCW part two, Why Jim Ross left WCW, How Bischoff changed the company, signing of Hulk Hogan, Beginning of Nitro, Jesse Ventura, Brian Pillman, Chris Jericho and signing Wrestlemania planned celebrity away)

*November 27, 2006 (History of WCW part three, When Bischoff challenged McMahon to fight; Truth and fiction around Bret Hart signing with WCW and why it didn't click)

*December 6, 2006 (details behind Pride's offers to sell promotion and Part four of History of WCW part four, Hogan-Goldberg match and why there was no rematch, WCW loses NBC network deal in 1999 and the real reasons the company fell apart)

*January 22, 2007 (2006 Awards issue, double issue \$7 on its own, \$8 overseas)

*February 14, 2007 (Life and Times of Bam Bam Bigelow)

*March 5, 2007 (WWE begins plans that will change the business)

*March 12, 2007 (Life and Times of Mike Awesome)

*March 19, 2007 (Life and Times of Ernie Ladd)

*April 4, 2007 (Life and Times of Badnews Allen Coage
--which many are calling one of the best issues in history)

*July 2, 2007 (Part one of the Benoit double murder-suicide)

*July 5, 2007 (Part two of the Benoit double murder-suicide)

*July 10, 2007 (Part three of the Benoit double murder-suicide)

*July 19, 2007 (Part four of the Benoit double murder-suicide)

*July 23, 2007 (Part five of Benoit double murder-suicide)

*July 25, 2007 (Part six of Benoit double murder-suicide)

*August 15, 2007 (The legend of the God of Japanese wrestling and his influence on MMA, Karl Gotch)

*October 15 (2007 Hall of Fame double issue, \$7 on its own, \$8 overseas including inductions of The Rock, Tom Packs and the original Strangler Lewis)

*November 12, 2007 (Life and times of Fabulous Moolah and history of U.S. women's wrestling) .

*December 31, 2007 (History of Ric Flair and the heyday of wrestling at the Greensboro Coliseum)

*January 21, 2008 (2007 Awards issue, double issue \$7 on its own, \$8 overseas)

*March 17, 2008 (Life and times of Johnny Weaver)

*March 24, 2008 (Life and times of Gary Hart)

*April 10, 2008 (Farewell to Ric Flair; My thoughts, Shawn Michaels talks of Flair's meaning to him; Hall of Fame; Wrestlemania double issue, \$7 on its own, \$8 overseas)

August 11, 2008 (Ric Flair leaves WWE; Updated history of pro wrestlers and MMA fighters who went to the Olympics)

September 8, 2008 (2008 Hall of Fame double issue, \$7 on its own, \$8 overseas; part one of Killer Kowalski bio)

September 15, 2008 (Life and Times of Evan Tanner)

September 22, 2008 (The amazing career of Killer Kowalski, one of our most in-depth bios)

You can also order any of these issues on their own for \$4 in North America or \$5 overseas.

Rates are:

For the United States, it is \$12 for 4 issues, \$29 for 12, \$55 for 24, \$91 for 40 and \$118 for 52. In Canada and Mexico, rates are \$13.50 for 4, \$33 for 12, \$61 for 24, \$101 for 40 and \$131 for 52. In Europe, you can get the fastest delivery and best rates by sending to moonsault@mediaplusint.com. For the rest of the world, rates are \$15.50 for 4, \$41 for 12, \$78 for 24, \$126 for 40 issues and \$163 for 52.

If you order by mail with a check, cash or money order (P.O. Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009-1228), you can get \$1 off in every price range.

We now have available personally autographed copies of Tributes II, our latest book, as well as a DVD that comes with it talking more about the subjects in the book. The book covers the life stories of Lou Thesz, Wahoo McDaniel, Elizabeth, Fred Blassie, Road Warrior Hawk, Andre the Giant, Curt Hennig, Johnny Valentine, Davey Boy Smith, Terry Gordy, Owen Hart, Stu Hart, Gorilla Monsoon, The Sheik and Tim Woods. To get all of those biographies as back issues of the Observer would be a \$60 value today. This is a collection of some of the best Observer articles of the past several years in a hardcover, full-color format that is 239 pages. There is also a foreword by Bret Hart. The book price is \$12.95 plus \$3.50 for shipping costs in the U.S., \$10 for shipping costs to Canada and \$12 for shipping costs outside North America. You can order the book the same way you order the newsletter.

-- The New Republic published their review of The Wrestler today and praised the movie big, particularly Mickie Rourke's performance.

-- Funny story about the Vickie Guerrero action figure that appears on Smackdown tonight. The figure's clothing has a ton of padding, but if you strip it all off the actual Guerrero doll looks like a supermodel. A friend of mine showed it to her husband and he concluded that they just use the same prototype body for all the Divas action figures -- but he was wrong. They stripped down some of the other Divas and Vickie actually has a better body than everyone else, including six pack abs. Has to be a rib of some sort.

-- Randy Couture was on Dan LeBatard's radio show today. He said the three baddest men in MMA were Fedor, Anderson Silva and GSP. He plugged the new movie he's doing with Sylvester Stallone (yes, at 45 he's still taking time of fighting to do movies), and also plugged "Fighter: A Documentary" which will be available on Comcast On Demand

soon. You can listen to the interview by clicking here. Thanks to Mark Coale.

-- Nick Bollea is trying to get permission to move to California. His legal issues may prevent it. Story is up here.

-- A look at Jenna and Tito's new house is up here.

-- Andre the Giant: A Legendary Life is shipping now.

-- Brock Lesnar is heading back to Ohio Valley for an autograph signing on January 7th, so anyone in Louisville who would like to attend should click here for more info.

-- It appears no CMLL on FSN for the next two weeks.

-- There is an interview with Jericho up here.

-- Brian Craig sent us this link to the Gentry's on It's a Bikini World, which we talked about in the Tuesday update. That is, in fact, Jimmy Hart singing back-up vocals.

-- Jim Duggan as part of Cryme Tyme is up here. So yes, they started the angle on TV and didn't bother telling us we could follow up on it on WWE.com. Thanks to Anchor.

-- JR has a look at Smackdown here.

-- Much More Music in Canada will be airing marathons of Hulk Hogan's Celebrity Championship Wrestling on January 3rd, 2009 from 6 to 9 PM (ET) and January 4th, 2009 from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM (ET). Thanks to Devin Cutting.

-- There is an interview with Kanyon up here talking a number of subjects including Shawn Michaels not being nice to his fans. He comes on about 30 minutes in.

-- Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling New Years Bash '09 on Saturday, January 10th, 2009 at Easley High School McKelvey Gymnasium in Easley, SC with an 8 PM Bell Time will feature an appearance by the one and only RIC FLAIR.

-- My mom alerted me that the first baby born in 2009 in Kern County, CA was young BRYAN ALVAREZ.

-- There is an interview with indy wrestler John Rodeo up here

-- Brent Albright will be on Ed in San Antonio's radio show tonight at 6:00 PM

-- Women's Superstars Uncensored runs a TV taping on January 10th, 2009 at The Darress Theatre, located at 615 Main Street in Boonton, NJ (Public transit available). First show 3PM, second show 5:15PM (One ticket gets you into both shows)

Tickets: \$15 at the door/\$12 in advance.