

Joe Babinsack reviews ROH Northern Navigation DVD

Northern Navigation DVD Ring of Honor rohwrestling.com \$20.00 Reviewed by Joe Babinsack Ok, let me get the negatives out of the way… or, rather, the big negative. I’m all for using Daisy Haze more on the show. I’m all for elevating new talent. I’m hesitant on more behind the scenes stuff, but I admit sometimes wrestling shows need to show more than wrestling. Of course, the problem with the behind the scenes stuff is that more of it almost invariably diminishes the purpose. When it comes to this Rhett Titus set of skits, it was certainly too much, and too much of a rather bad thing. As a positive, there was more creativity in it than what I’d have seen if it was produced on one of the other shows. Not only did they play it out slowly, they didn’t get graphic, and they used reputations and built up characters through the reactions to the cell phone video. So all told, why am I calling it a negative? Because it all turns out to be a backdrop, not for elevating Titus, nor for creating a dynamic for Daisy to get some revenge or link with someone who would take up her cause, but it ends up being some sort of throw-away. Because in the end, Rhett Titus gets punked by Larry Sweeney.. Now, that’s not a bad thing in and of itself, but it’s so TNAish to build up an angle, and then blow it up by the end of the night. That’s not solid programming, that’s wasting the time of the fans watching the DVD. ROH does great wrestling. What it needs is a slower build and skits and promos and introductions to accompany that great wrestling. When any wrestling promotion does skits that take away time and focus, it’s a bad thing. For ROH, it’s even worse than that, because it mixes in a level of disrespect shown to the fans that RING OF HONOR should never lower itself to doing. On with the show! Northern Navigation is the Canada debut of the promotion, and they do themselves well with the rabid Toronto crowd, the superlative announcing by Dave Przak and Lenny Leonard, and the typical, world level wrestling talent on display. Some behind the scenes stuff starts the show. First up is Larry Sweeney ranting about his main man, Adam Pearce, getting suspended for throwing a fireball. But it’s not all bad, since Brent Albright is still out of action. Nice way to set up some non-appearances. Somehow, there needs to be a better bolstering of an enforcement personality, but then again, James Cornette isn’t commish anymore, or is he? The next segment is the commencement of the aforementioned Rhett Titus/Daisy Haze (but not named as yet) skits. Mixed bag to me…. But it is a show-wide angle. Obviously, ROH is mixing in the skits. Problem is, one skit skates around two guys not being there (good, but not great) and the other ends up being tangential to anything on the card. Opening, we have Chris Hero (“That Knockout Kid”) against Ruckus. To me, this is the epitome of what’s wrong and what’s right with ROH. What’s wrong is that Ruckus shouldn’t be the jobber, and while wins and losses are important in ROH, and important in the sense that guys can be build up an moved up or down the card, respectively with wins and losses, there has to be a level where building up Chris Hero and his knockout power can be done at the expense of a no-name or guest or local guy.. I know the dynamics of that aren’t shared by all, but no matter how well Ruckus does, and well he does, he’s coming out of this opening match with a loss, isn’t he? What’s good about it is that Ruckus is a great talent, with a unique style, and in front of the hot, hot Toronto crowd, which appreciates talent and good matches, ROH gets to showcase its best assets: talent and crowd. Another skit with Rhet. He’s showing off to Bryan Danielson. Delirious is up next, wrestling Kenny Omega. Omega is a local talent, we are told. Excellent. He puts on a great performance, well appreciated by the fans (he is a local!) and does enough clever and interesting moves that should get him back for another look. In other words, that’s what I love to see in ROH. (Of course, you might say, they can’t do that for every match…. True.) So the next match has much of the same dynamic. This time it’s Sara Del Rey and Jennifer Blake. Del Rey is channeling Uncle Looie from Seinfeld, transforming into a Sweet & Sour Inc moneymaker, despite losing the SHIMMER Title. Blake channels Kenta Kobashi, firing chops in the corner like crazy. I love SHIMMER far more than the women wrestling in ROH. Time of matches is the first part, and the other part is how far in the background they put these gals. What is women wrestling in ROH the same as junior heavyweights in the WWE? I just don’t get it. Larry Sweeney places excellent heel, forcing Daisy Haze to make the save for Blake, and then roils up the crowd in an anti-Canada rant, wanting to get the show over for his charges. He calls out Go Shiozaki, and Shane Hagadorn plays the manservant. We’re subjected to a fifteen minute time limit here, and it plays out perfectly, except for the making sure we all know it’s a fifteen minute time limit at the outset. This feud is slated to blow up huge on the Full Impact Pro promotion, and this sneak peak is an awesome way to entice some cross promotional DVD buying. Believe me, Erick Stevens has been proving all year that he’s the real thing. Powerful, technical and gaining valuable experience. Not sure why the Mohawk had to go, but perhaps a red stripe down the head with longer hair? I do agree that Stevens without the ‘do doesn’t look the same. At the end, it’s the kind of vastly interesting, ECW inspired, run-in fest that actually begins with a surprise appearance of Lance Storm berating Larry Sweeney. Nice setup with the anti-Canada tirade, and again, the kind of slow build that makes things more meaningful, not less. Which is a lot of words that don’t say too much, but the point is that planning out the card feels much more important when something someone says before the match comes back at the end of the match, not fifteen seconds later. Back to Rhett Titus and his fun. And then on to an awesome display of pure technical wrestling. While I can understand why Bryan Danielson isn’t in the WWE, I continue to wonder how it possibly occurred that Claudio Castagnoli got a contract, and then didn’t get a contract. Visas be damned, CC is one talented wrestler. Lots of great stuff, and lots of reasons to watch. Danielson does awesome heel work, and Claudio is still with the “Hey!” gimmick. And if you like the phrase “trading European uppercuts” put into action, this is your match. Now Rhett is messing with Bobby Dempsey and Delirious gets cut out of the action. Kind of an interesting backdoor for Delirious, but at this point, one wonders if it’s getting too old, and at the same time, hoping that the payoff makes sense of it all. To which, the payoff occurs, and not so well. Del Ray attacks Daisy, and Stevens makes a proclamation, and Rhett …. Just walks away.. Meaning that any

sense of gaining momentum, exposure or a decent build up match for Mr. Titus is pissed away with his interaction with Sweeney. Bah! But Bawitdaba to the next match, as Roderick Strong takes on Naomichi Marufuji. (If I spelled 2/3 of those right, I stand a happy man.) Want a long, dramatic, technical match that isn't any way a repeat of Danielson/Castagnoli? Here's your chance; a few minutes later. Marufuji is off the charts, and Roderick Strong is, of course, the Messiah of the Backbreaker. Unlike the European stylistic smash, this one is about power moves and submissions, while the other guy is attempting to set up the Shiranui. I think you know who was who. Who wins? That, my friends, is why you pay the \$20, and why reading reviews whets the appetite, not spills the beans. And, just when you think two technical masterpieces are the reward for your purchase, we see Nigel McGuinness take on hometown boy Kevin Steen. Steen is the fish out of water in Dragon Gate. He's the pasty white, flubby and taller heel, who can work with the speed demons of said promotion. In ROH, he's 1/2 of the most visually uninspiring tag team to you WWE types, who sneer at tag team technicality, and sniffle at the potential dynamics of a skinny geek and a somewhat fat bully. But put the bully in Toronto, and have the Champion be the subtle heel that most champions aspire to be, and you'll get this crowd reaction that makes you filled with pride to be a professional wrestling fan. Even more, put on the kind of display these two guys put on, and watch it with your WWE fans, and let them see what being a professional wrestling fan is all about. Quite frankly, the essence of the platitudes isn't about the moves and the setups, nor even the transitions, playing off finishes or near falls. It's all about watching talented guys put it all together in front of a respectful and rabid fan base. Respectful and rabid being two adjectives that only apply to ROH crowds. Dramatic and hard-hitting are two adjectives better suited to the professional wrestling shown in ROH as well. And, you may be thinking that several technical classics, one awesome Championship match, and a rather nondescript show-long angle was all you were getting for your four fins. Not at all. Last up is the over the top Non-Title, No DQ match between Age of the Fall's Jimmy Jacobs and Tyler Black, and the makeshift team of Jay Briscoe and Austin Aries. However the Aries/Jacobs/Necro triangle began, and even if it is convenient to a Briscoe injury, it's a nifty little diversion. The match, however, is a series of hardcore spots. At first, Necro comes down, and Mark Briscoe joins the fray. Whether Mark actually or storylistically reinjures his hand, it's played out well, and again, diverts back into the give and take, fan participation, ECW inspired sort of angle that seems to have been lost to the industry since Vince reclaimed those three letters. Call it nostalgia, but I love that sort of psychological based, give and take, fan participation with the ring as the stage that ROH plays out with Necro Butcher. And no mention of Age of the Fall is complete with the complaint that they aren't over enough as a movement, and Tyler Black is going to be one major player in this sport. As always, ROH shines in styles, in passion and in support of a fan base that every indy, let alone major, promotion should be begging to cultivate. Of course, we all know that the impetus of a major promotion hasn't been about pleasing the fans for a long time now. Joe Babinsack can be reached at chaosonejoe@yahoo.com. I'm hoping to preview some ROH PPV's, and also hoping to come up with an appropriate response to a third rate sports talk host/DJ looking to play his heel shtick over and over again. What's wrong Mark, your ratings tanking on the X?