

Raw is Mark Henry with Todd Martin

WWE Raw Report

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The Big News: WWE has decided that the same old mix of main event talent just isn't cutting it any more. They're getting behind someone new, someone fresh, someone exciting, someone who can really carry the company, Mark Henry! Yes, seriously.

Show Analysis:

Vince McMahon came out to start the show and said he wouldn't be doing the commercial free gimmick or ticket refund gimmick. He added that Donald Trump before selling Raw executed a 15 person trade. It's so insulting to the audience's intelligence that just a couple months ago they were hard selling how big the draft was and how it would see these lasting changes, and already they're mixing the brands consistently and swapping around even more talent.

I don't care if they want to keep the brands separate, or if they want to just have one talent roster. Either way's fine with me. But I find it unbelievably irritating that they change their mind on this every few weeks, and worse that they think their audience is so brain dead that it doesn't notice.

On the plus side, I love how the trade makes Tiffany look like the most incompetent GM ever. She traded seven performers, including five of her six or seven best acts, for the Bella Twins, Goldust, Shelton Benjamin and William Regal. I don't know that I've ever seen such a lopsided trade where Kwame Brown wasn't involved. I understand that Goldust and Brie Bella told Tiffany that they'll never disappoint her.

Vince McMahon also mentioned Trump's idea of a guest host each week, and said that he would be instituting that. It wasn't really explained why, but Vince just liking the idea makes more sense than him somehow being forced to follow what Trump had planned. In any event, I like the idea. It's a fun way to bring in different people and make shows feel unique.

This week's guest host was Batista. Batista announced a four man tournament for a title shot at Night of Champions, with the first round matches being Miz (Jerry Lawler laughed when his name was announced) vs. John Cena and MVP vs. HHH. Randy Orton and Legacy came out, and Orton suggested he would come down and beat Batista up. Batista said that if he did, he would be fired because Batista had unlimited power. Batista announced Randy Orton in a gauntlet

match against three of the wrestlers traded to Raw. Batista's delivery here wasn't very good.

Triple H beat MVP in about five minutes with the pedigree. MVP went after the leg, applied a figure four, and hit balling. Triple H avoided the running yakuza kick but MVP then avoided a pedigree attempt. MVP hit the running yakuza kick for two, but his playmaker attempt was reversed into the pedigree for the pin. They booked MVP to look fine here, but given how unbelievably stale the main event picture is it's about time people like Triple H actually started to put over people like MVP.

Chris Jericho and Edge came out for a tag title match. Those titles feel so much more important on those two. Jericho said that despite his vow to never appear on Raw again ten shows ago that he finds himself on Raw again by virtue of his talent and ability. Umm, Chris, you wrestled on Raw last week and the week before as well. Edge said that they are together because he suggested they join in a united front to accomplish their goals.

Edge and Jericho beat the Colons. This was a very fun little match. The heels worked over Primo, who eventually got the tag to Carlito. Carlito came in with punches and a swinging neck breaker on Jericho. Jericho cut him off with an elbow but missed the lionsault. Carlito used a quebrada on the standing Jericho for two. Carlito followed with a springboard crossbody for two, but Jericho then tagged Edge.

Edge went for the spear but Primo pulled Carlito out of the way. Carlito hit the back stabber on Edge but Jericho made the save. Primo took out Jericho with a tope, but as Carlito went for a springboard a recovered Jericho pulled down the middle rope. Edge then hit the spear for the pin. Afterwards, Carlito and Primo argued for quite a while, teasing a split.

John Cena beat Miz. Miz got most of the offense in the match. He used punches and stomps. Cena came back with a back drop and vertical suplex. An angry Miz then took over with a knee lift, neck breaker, swinging neck breaker, lariat, mount with punches, electric chair and sleeper. Cena got out of that and then just made the straight comeback. He hit shoulder blocks, the Cena slam, the five knuckle, the top rope rocker dropper and applied the STF for the submission.

I'm sorry, but given WWE has elevated two or three guys in the last five years, losing clean in a competitive match does not help a young wrestler. It hurts him. Fans are conditioned to believe that nobody new will be given a chance to succeed at the top level, and you have to move heaven and earth to rebut that presumption.

WWE main events are staler right now than they have been at any point in the company's 45 plus year history, and they desperately need new main eventers. If they think this is the way to do it, they're morons. But more likely, I think the key people are in fact a lot smarter than that and are only interested in the *appearance* of giving new talent a chance. They have got down the art of giving young guys not enough to get over but just enough that they can be blamed for not getting themselves over.

Mickie James won a fatal four way match over Rosa Mendes, Beth Phoenix and Kelly Kelly to earn a women's title shot at Maryse. They worked hard and had some cool ideas laid out, but it was on the sloppy side. They did a spot where Mickie got a dragon sleeper on Beth, Rosa got a headlock on Mickie and Kelly got a sleeper on Rosa. They did a series of rollups with each woman coming in on the last. Beth hit the glam slam on Kelly but Mickie broke up the pin. Mickie dropkicked Beth off the apron, and Beth bounced off the steps and took a hard bump on the floor. In the ring Mickie hit the implant DDT on Rosa for the pin.

Kofi Kingston and Big Show battled to a double count out. Kofi hit a top rope dropkick and high double leg drop. Show did the power out of the pin spot. Kofi dove onto Show, but Show threw him to the outside. Show pressed Kofi over his head on the floor, but Kofi sent Show into the post and they were both counted out. They announced Ted DiBiase Sr. will

be next week's guest host.

The gauntlet started with Randy Orton beating Evan Bourne. Yes, this was not the night for young talent. Bourne looked really short next to Orton. Bourne went for a bunch of high flying moves. He hit a standing moonsault, baseball slide, and modified Thesz press off the top. He went for the shooting star press but Orton got up, crotched him and hit the RKO off the ropes for the pin. Again, they booked Bourne to look strong, but again, the young guy jobbed clean and in his first appearance on Raw to boot.

Jack Swagger was scheduled to be Orton's next opponent. However, when the referee called for the bell Swagger stepped outside the ring and was counted out. He said that he likes and respects Orton and that he wanted to leave a lasting impression. He shook hands with Orton and left. That's not exactly the way I would book Swagger's first Raw appearance, but it's certainly better than what they did with Bourne.

Mark Henry was the final opponent, and he pinned Orton clean in a minute or so. Yes, you read that right. Henry teased getting counted out, but then came in for Orton. This was an apparent face turn, and he was cheered. He hit a head butt and the world's strongest slam for the pin.

Isn't it funny how they have a bunch of younger, fresher talents with serious upside, and they're the ones doing clean jobs to the stars, then they decide to have one of the stars lose to someone different, and it's a guy who has been with the company for 13 years and has no upside as a main event talent? It's really interesting how that works.

Final Thoughts:

As far as entertainment goes, this was one of the best episodes of Raw in a while. There was good wrestling, some surprises and good overarching issues. But this show was also as emblematic as any you're going to find of WWE's problem elevating new talent.

It certainly raises questions about the true motives of WWE's creative team when young guys with upside are doing key jobs left and right and then they bring in Mark Henry of all people to basically squash the champion in a minute's time. Are they booking for the benefit of the company or are they booking to ensure that the same chosen few continue to headline for years to come regardless of how stale and played out they may be?