

Jeuron Dove talks TNA

By Jeuron Dove dove_jeuron0307@hotmail.com Hello fans. It's taken me a bit longer than usual to get back to writing. I suffered quite the illness shortly after my last article and then was debating on whether or not to go through with writing something on TNA. I promised that this would be a four-part series, so I might as well stick to my word. I would like to say thanks to all the fans that have provided me with their positive, negative and always insightful feedback. You all are the reason why I do this and I'm glad you've found my analysis of the state of Raw, Smackdown and ECW to be so captivating (for better or worse). Before I start, I would like to say something about the recent passing of inarguably the greatest music artist in history, Michael Jackson. It's an understatement to say that Jackson touched the lives of everyone who listened to his music. Being an African American, I can honestly say that his success made it far easier for those like Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, Venus and Serena Williams and even Barack Obama to be accepted by the mainstream for who they are. Watching his memorial service was the most emotional televised moment I will likely ever experience in my lifetime. The final two performances of his songs, We Are the World and Heal the World, brought his life around full circle for me. That is what he was all about. His life wasn't about the plastic surgeries, the child molestation charges (which he was acquitted of) or anything else negative. His lasting legacy is and should be that he was perhaps responsible for bringing more people of diverse ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds together through his musical and humanitarian efforts. From a performance standpoint, WWE announcer Jim Ross summed up his talents perfectly in the following comments from his blog: "Jackson was an impeccable showman with precision like timing and possessed amazing crowd psychology...which are all enviable traits of a great wrestler in any decade past, present or future." As far as TNA goes, I've been thinking long and hard about how to approach this subject. I don't want to take the standard internet stance of bashing them incessantly because there are many things about the product I enjoy. There are also a lot of things I hate. There are some weeks when I think they're better than Raw and some weeks when I feel like they deserve to go out of business for making the same mistakes that killed the company they apparently are trying their hardest to emulate (WCW). In many ways you could say that TNA is the spiritual successor to WCW, but that would be way too simple. It's hard to put a stamp on what exactly is the defining problem because I view them as a company in a constant state of flux. They are always shifting from one thing to the next and seem quite uncertain about their identity as a brand name. TNA is the alternative to WWE. That is what I think they would like to be best known for. If you're tired of the Vince McMahon version of wrestling, then TNA is the place for you. But what if you tune in and come to the realization that they are nothing but a second-rate ripoff with a roster full of guys who were never big stars in WWE to begin with? Do you stop watching, watch with reservations or come to grips with the fact that WWE is really where the big boys play (like the old WCW motto)? These are questions that I'm sure go through the minds of many TNA fans. I'm sure because for the increase in ratings that Impact has achieved, they cannot convert those viewers to buy their PPV shows nor attend live events. That is a huge problem. It shows there is an obvious disconnect somewhere between the fans and the product. You could blame it on economics, but shelling out \$30 for a PPV is hardly going to put someone in debt. WWE is suffering on the PPV front because of the fact they do so many and I think the average fan who loves the WWE product can't possibly get emotionally involved enough to order a show with only two weeks worth of build, regardless of how good the matches and angles may be leading up to a show. TNA has a direct advantage in that they normally have a full month to build up each show. Now that we're done with that aspect, let's get back to the identity issue. I think that TNA did its best job of defining itself from their inception in 2002 up until 2005-06. They were originally formed as a company to appeal to those who were not fans of the WWE product after WCW went out of business. They kind of appealed more to the southern WCW base that appreciated great wrestling matches over storylines and stars. They were known as the company to get into if you were a fan of actual wrestling. Their PPV shows up until 2007 were heavily-lauded by insiders for offering a great array of matches of diverse styles. From the groundbreaking X-Division to the heavyweight scene, the average TNA card featured solid workrate. Of course, there is more to wrestling than great matches. The name of the game is about making stars and that is where TNA has undoubtedly screwed up the most. TNA has a solid crew of guys that have superstar potential, but at some point from 2006-07, TNA management felt like the only guys who could carry the company were old washed-up WCW guys or WWE castoffs. Samoa Joe was the most obvious example of succumbing to this mentality. Joe was booked as the heavyweight monster of the X-Division when he arrived to TNA in 2005. He got over so well and had such a brutal style that people figured he was the heir apparent to the throne. That was until Kurt Angle came in. It's almost as if the company forgot about what they had in Joe as soon as Angle came aboard and Joe began to lose to Angle in seemingly every PPV match they had in 2007. As Joe lost more and more matches, he began to lose more of his luster. He eventually beat Angle for the title in 2008, but had an underwhelming reign where he was booked as a crybaby champion and was hardly the savage monster he was three years earlier. And this isn't the only time we've seen this scenario play out. Guys like Booker, Nash, Steiner, Sting, Team 3-D, Foley and countless others have come in and seemingly advance by leaps and bounds in the booking, whereas Joe, AJ Styles and countless others have gotten the shaft. This is mainly due to a creative team headed by Vince Russo who believes that the real stars of the promotion are those who were either huge 90s stars or previously worked for Vince. I could spend the rest of this article ragging on them, but there are some bright lights in the company. One is the Beautiful People. Angelina Love and Velvet Sky (plus the invisible Madison Rayne) are right up there with Maryse as being the most charismatic female performers in wrestling today. They aren't just pretty faces to look at, but they possess a depth of personality to their characters that is lacking from all but the elite male stars today. And that is a select category that includes Edge, Chris Jericho, Shawn Michaels, Rey Mysterio and Jeff Hardy. It's no coincidence that the BP's segments are routinely among the top-rated of the show. Their women's division was far

superior to that of WWE from late 2007 up until Gail Kim's departure last year. You had the ascension of the BP and ODB as great characters in addition to the best female feud in years in Kim-Awesome Kong. There were many occasions when their matches stole the show on some PPV cards. Once Gail left they tried to build the division around Taylor Wilde as the new face, but it just didn't pan out. They've recently brought in Tara (the former Victoria from WWE) in an attempt to be the new working face of the division, but I'm just not feeling her in that role yet. TNA needs a top-level working face to be the perfect foil to the BP and Kong as the heels. Hopefully their latest acquisition, Sarita, will be the answer. The company's emphasis on tag team wrestling is always a welcome sight in a world where the dominant national company is doing their best to eradicate its importance. Beer Money has really impressed me with their chemistry. I never thought much of James Storm and Robert Roode when they were single competitors, but they have proven to be the best team in the company for the better part of the last year. The latest twist in the Main Event Mafia angle has been surprising at best. Turning Joe heel was perhaps the smartest move the company could've made to inject some new life into his character. The only thing I'm questionable about is what purpose Tazz will serve. I think the Mafia is excellent with the cast they have now and I just can't see what Tazz will bring to the table since he can't do much in the ring. I hope they don't put him on commentary since I like the heel/face dynamic of Don West and Mike Tenay. There is plenty more both good and bad I could write, but I think I'll stop here. It's pretty hard to write about the future of TNA, but it's safe to say that they will still be in the same position a year or two from now that they are in today. They will continue to be the #2 company in North America that will never have a chance of being on par with WWE, but will suffice for the fan who longs for something different. Thanks for reading and glad you have stuck with me through this series. Take care and please send any feedback to the above address.