

By Jeuron Dove

dove_jeuron0307@hotmail.com

www.jeurondove.com

In a few weeks, the annual Hall of Fame issue of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter will be out. Since I'm writing this article for the readers of this website, I am not going into the details of the voting process. There are plenty of places on the internet where that information can be found. What I do want to talk about today is a man who by all means is already a HOF-caliber name in the industry. I'm talking about the leader of the Cenation, the master of the five-knuckle shuffle and the man who has literally carried the WWE on his back for nearly a decade. Of course, this man is John Cena.

Cena will be in the HOF. That much is certain. The only question is whether he'll be part of the elusive first ballot club or be forced to wait another year. I strongly sense he'll make it this year, but it wouldn't totally surprise me if he did not. If anything, Cena not making it in his first year would indicate a gross misunderstanding of his importance to the history of WWE.

I'm not writing this so much as to make a case for his induction. Anyone who has followed the business for the last several years should have no problem figuring that much out. I'm more or less, writing this in an attempt to illustrate how he stacks up against other WWE legends that ended up as first ballot selections. In doing so I'm going to take a look at the three guys he should be closely compared with (those who were part of the inaugural 1996 class won't be included). Those three would be Steve Austin, Kurt Angle and Rock.

Steve Austin- Austin was inducted in 2000 at the height of WWE's boom period, a period he was largely responsible for. He was a bonafide legend by the time of his induction. At his peak, no one in wrestling ever generated more revenue and set more business records. The fact he did so much in a short period of time, while in a much more competitive wrestling environment (in terms of rival promotions), made him a super strong candidate at the time. An interesting note in hindsight is that he actually garnered the second most votes of that year's class, trailing behind the late Shinya Hashimoto of New Japan fame.

Kurt Angle- I think Angle's real legacy was that he adapted to the business more quickly than anyone who didn't come in with any fundamental knowledge of the business whatsoever. His Olympic gold medal certainly helped his reputation. Great rookies as the late Owen Hart and current NOAH star Jun Akiyama were excellent from the moment they debuted, but Owen came from a wrestling family and while I don't completely know Akiyama's background, it's very well possible he grew up as a fan of All Japan or New Japan Pro Wrestling. It's highly unlikely Angle even knew who Ric Flair was before getting into wrestling. Angle was a true phenomenon when he burst onto the scene in 1999. While Bill Goldberg had one of the best rookie years ever in 1998, Angle did so while being universally regarded as the best worker of his time. During his first four years in the business, he engaged in classics with Austin, Rock, Lesnar, Mysterio, Benoit, and Edge and had an endless slew of great matches against nearly anyone he competed against that had some measure of talent. By the time he was on the ballot in 2004, there was little doubt he belonged.

Rock- For entertainment value alone, there was none greater than Rock. His run as a full-time performer was brief, but his influence is still being felt to this day. Just like Austin, he was the other guy most responsible for helping make WWE into the force it became at the tail end of the 90s into the early part of the last decade. He was involved in many of the most memorable moments in company history and there is almost no debating that he is among the top five talkers ever. To show the kind of legacy he established for himself when he was inducted in 2007, he received each of the 83 historian votes and set a record by receiving 86% of the overall vote.

Now let's take a look at Cena.

Since becoming the face of WWE in 2005, there has never been a more polarizing figure in terms of being able to elicit a passionate response from his supporters and detractors (males vs. kids and females). While never the best wrestler, he is pretty decent and typically shines in the big match situation when the time arises. He was involved in classics with the likes of Shawn Michaels, Orton, Umaga, Edge and C.M. Punk, and had one of the company's best matches of 2007 in a PPV main event against the limited Bobby Lashley. He has been the top merchandise seller and biggest draw of the seven year period he's been on top and has been in the headlining position, or right underneath, of every PPV show he's appeared on. Just as Austin and Rock were the torchbearers of the Attitude Era, Cena is the torchbearer for the current era in WWE. The fact that WWE is clearly the top promotion in the world makes him one of the most recognizable stars ever on an international basis. When one takes a look at the current roster (with the exception of special attractions as Lesnar, HHH and Undertaker) he clearly stands far above the rest. In looking at the key players in WWE since Vince McMahon

took his company national in 1984, the only one who carried the company for as long was Hulk Hogan. Comparing his candidacy to Angle is kind of tricky since Angle is in largely for his body of work. Cena by no means should ever be compared to Angle in terms of his in-ring ability.

As I wrote at the outset, I did not write this in order to build a case. Whether I wrote this or not, Cena has long since established his legacy as one of the all-time greats. He's still in the process of doing so which is no different than the position Austin was in at this point twelve years ago.

Voters can become so wrapped up in record book statistics (where Cena fares quite well since he's been on top for so long), and judging current performers by an impossible standard, that they tend to overlook the main reason as to why anyone deserves to be in the HOF: fame. I've always been of the belief that anyone who deserves to be in should be put in as soon as possible. At times, older voters may be inclined to not let a deserving candidate enter because they haven't fully stood the test of time or amassed a 20-year career, even after that candidate has clearly proven they belong. Call me crazy, but that just sounds plain stupid.

Any feedback is greatly appreciated and thanks for reading.