Boiling Point Ring of Honor www.rohwrestling.com $19.99 Reviewed by Joe Babinsack
Over the past few days, I've seen and read about what pro wrestling is, was and could be. None of them are perfect examples, but all three are very representatives: this DVD shows what wrestling is for the now and near future. Paul O'Brien's
Blood Red Turns Dollar Green
is what wrestling was (at least in a fictional sense) for the past fifteen years, masquerading as the past fifty.

And Beyond Wrestling just might show what wrestling can be, if someone else wants to make it all a bit better.

What professional wrestling is – was once best represented by TNA. For most of its ten plus year history, TNA was the tangible connection between a modern professional wrestling promotion, and the intangible legacies of NWA and that interesting little promotion run out of a bingo hall in Philadelphia.

(Yeah, well, I'm tired of those initials, spelling them out and explaining the Nth iteration of the same).

Yet TNA was always three places removed from its potential fans, and two steps behind its current fans. TNA could bring in viable stars, but couldn't monetize its product to any realistic degree. When TNA was in the heart of the Southern based style, it hired a Connecticut Yankee. When it had the hardcore fans lined up (because they had nowhere else to go), they signed up Hulk Hogan (or promised the same). And when they had knowledgeable professional wrestling creativity on staff (Jerry Jarrett, Dutch Mantell, Jim Cornette), they were shown the door and bigger names got overpaid to do much, much worse.

Is ROH becoming TNA?

Well, no. There are so many differences, so many ways to be unable to compare the two, not the least of which is the fact that Jim Cornette went from TNA to ROH, and despite Cornette not ranking at the height of my wrestling pantheon, he's sufficiently respected enough that I can't fathom that he's part of any modern pro wrestling problem.

Unfortunately, there are some similarities…. ROH was poised to compete with TNA, to
possibly
position itself for the Number Two slot, to capture the dying embers of fans seeking a more pure professional wrestling product, to provide a true alternative to the mainstream gorilla.

Like TNA before it, ROH is pissing away the good will, the potential and the probability that it can create a viable professional wrestling product, despite itself, despite its intentions, despite having tangible assets and a potential foundation for establishing itself.

It's been way too long for ROH to be merely spinning its wheels. It's not been anywhere as long as Dixie Carter has spun her tales – about actually trying to become the number one promotion – and thankfully Joe Koff has been vastly more realistic and rational and reasoned about the

future plans of Ring of Honor.

It is frustrating, though. Very frustrating.

It's frustrating to realize that ROH cannot solve its technical issues, but worse, it's frustrating to watch a company burn through its reputation and spin tales about how it's making every effort to make things work, and ultimately turns off not only its paying customers, but those who may want to sample something different.

Technical issues, promises and quick responses to the same should be scrutinized on all levels, not just by ROH brass, but by wrestling fans and those who report on the industry. It's hard to understand how ROH pulled the plug on services provided by others, brought it in house, and then went from bad to worse.

Where's the standard now?

And what kind of operation relies upon established 'test' locations to show that the technology is working? Where's the random sampling? Where's the logging in with a username and seeing how the process works for the vast majority of the buying public?

There's a serious lack of logic there, almost as bad as mainstream professional wrestling.

Ring of Honor has a reputation that exists because of several guys that now plying their talents on the mainstream. (It is ironic to think where the WWE would be today without CM Punk and the man known to ROH as Bryan Danielson).

ROH has a reputation based on years of putting together great wrestling, fostering an atmosphere that allows great talent to work their craft, and for a relentless effort – in and out of the ring.

ROH simply was cutting edge through most of its history. It generated DVDs that were must-see, produced a product on various media that garnered it respect, and it touted significant claimants to the title "Best in the World" long before mainstream professional wrestling cared about that moniker.

Has the industry passed ROH by?

I really don't want to answer that question.

The promotion continues to put forth a large number of well-produced DVDs, but over-reliance on packaging former stars seems to be the trend. The promotional plans were to roll out iPPV's as the future of its profits, but those ongoing snafus are hard to ignore, and hopefully not as hard to recover from. And while the syndication package that has become ROH Wrestling is significant, the biggest problem with ROH remains that it is a very difficult product with which to attract new fans.

On the positive side, there's yet to be a ROH DVD that can be anything less than impressive, and it's rare that ROH puts forth an event or DVD or iPPV (ignoring, which is a bad word, the technical issues) that is less than "Very Good".

The track record of ROH is vastly impressive in terms of workrate, effort, passion, talent, professional wrestling product, adherence to a semblance of tradition and presenting something worthwhile, and worth coming back to see what happens next.

What ROH lacks is the 'wow' factor. It lacks the emotions and the moments and the big events. Far too much of what ROH Produces seems to be filling time, not building momentum. Far too many of ROH's potential breakout stars are mired in meaningless battles. There doesn't seem to be a game plan for the several interesting characters (Michael Bennett, Tommaso Ciampa, the Briscoes), prospective talent (Michael Elgin, Eddie Edwards, Adam Cole) or the mainstays that connect the future to the past (Roderick Strong, Davey Richards, Jay Lethal).

Well, Roddy Strong has been used rather well….

Con: Where's the Buildup?

Looking at Boiling Point, the biggest concern I have is how they are building up contenders. In a promotion that should be touting Bennett, Ciampa, Elgin and Lethal as a nucleus of talent to build around, Mike Mondo got a bit of a push (well, maybe not) and there's just something odd about the "feel" of how things are going.

Michael Bennett is getting an interesting push and could be mainstream with Maria, but despite all the positives of the approach, and how different he's being handled, there's so little direction involved.

Lethal and Ciampa have been all but mired in a feud that really hasn't done either of them any favors. I love Ciampa's look, but the disintegrating Embassy angle, and the misuse of R.D. Evans (who is one of the great talents of the past year, based on CHIKARA stuff alone) just scream miss after miss.

Now Lethal has to prove himself as being tough?

Yeah, I get it, but then again, ROH is built on great wrestlers, not violent ones (Homicide: notable exception).

And what's up with
Adam Cole vs Brutal Bob
? I get the backstory and I get the dynamic of an older guy getting a chance, but if Adam Cole is the future, why does it take him 10-15 minutes to put away a guy who's shown primarily as a manager?

Unsure: Steen's Heel Faction?

On many levels, I love the S.C.U.M. faction, and the trio of Steen/Steve Corino/Jimmy Jacobs is awesome. But – and you knew that was coming – there's just something missing when the World Champion is really more of a tweener and the feud with the Company seems more packaged than antagonistic. Now, there's room to move and possibilities galore, but ….

Con: Why do this Eddie Kingston story in one night?

Kingston vs. Steen screamed for a drawn-out series. It absolutely screamed for Eddie to be on TV for a month, talking up the opportunity. It screamed for Eddie to drop Larry Sweeney's name. It screamed for an inconclusive match to build up the belt, the credibility of Steen and the danger of Kingston as an outsider.

And yet….

And yet the announcement at the beginning of the match that this was to be No DQ blew up so much potential. How about having Steen DQ himself first, before ROH goes No DQ, for starters?

How about giving Eddie Kingston another month of emotional promos, and Steen another month of being devilish about it all?

How about building up the next match as a return, not just expecting everyone to be anxiously awaiting the named iPPV/event that ROH has decided is the best approach to selling its shows?

There was so much emotion here to develop, so many dynamics to mine, and in the end, ROH crammed three months of matches into one, and how is that supposed to make money?

Pro: DemBoys

ROH's most uniquely marketable wrestlers are The Briscoes. ROH, unlike most promotions (although someone seems to have suggested Tag Team wresting as a concept in Stamford), features Tag Teams, builds up Tag Teams as an alternative, and doesn't shy away from featuring Tag Teams.

Aside from the Kenny King deal, and the somewhat inexplicable title shot that S.C.U.M. gets here, I'm always entertained and impressed by ROH's approach to Tag Team wrestling. The promotion should be using the Tag Team Tournament to keep these Titles viable and at the top of the card.

The Briscoes…. Well, they are unique. As a combination of rednecks and punks and the Diaz brothers, and with their own take on storytelling and psychology, they are not old school in any way, shape or form. But they've developed their own style, and the combination of Gangsta (a watered down sort of violence) and Midnight Express (technical tag team expertise and creativity) puts them worlds above any other team, even the former World Greatest Tag Team.

Pro: Four Way Survival

Ok, the win a match for a contract is already old, but ROH bringing in a regional announcer (Caleb Seltzer from PWF Northeast) was awesome. It highlighted that wrestling exists on a local basis, allows greater insight into several guys that the ROH audience may not know, and if they maintain this approach they could be able to promote and hype appearances in various areas to generate more attention.

(hey, if you're doing 2000 buys (let's say), then adding a hundred is a big deal)

Logically, the contract deals need details and follow-through. If the focus is on a short term contract of three-months or a half-dozen appearances, the it provides a realistic and interesting entry into ROH, without overpromising and making it obvious that it's not believable from the get-go.

Con: All these special matches…

Why must ROH have all its matches labeled like it's meaningful?

Pro: 2/3 Falls and match length

Jay Lethal takes advantage of a Ciampa miscue and beats him in a few minutes, for the first fall. Now, imagine if a few matches on the card had this sort of ending, instead of filling time with 15 minute matches no matter who's involved or what place they are in the pecking order….

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Boiling Point: In many ways the typical ROH DVD that is very good, a card filled with guys who really are interested in wrestling, and a company that does a lot of things right, but that sense of good will is eroding on a lot of levels, and whose direction seems to be coming into question.

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. I've got
Blood Red Turns Dollar Green
, Beyond Wrestling's
About Time
, the oft mentioned SHIMMER DVD reviews, and much more than I cannot even begin to speak about.